

## HOSPITAL WEDDING

'Does that swing still creak?' the night nurse folded her apron up and peered down into the airing-court. 'My grandson now he's twenty and when I used to bring him up here as a kid to the hospital "do's", he used to get so moithered if he got the swing that squeaked. "Nan-Nan" he'd cry . . . And it still squeaks and he's married now. Oh well,' she came back to the grill where she was making toast for the junior houseman's breakfast. 'By the way, Dr Hayward, Reggie Dickens is still on about his discharge.' She made the tea and slid the cardboard box of ward case-notes across the polished lino to where the doctor sat reading and eating. 'He says he wants to go back to Claypits, but I keep telling him Claypits went for the clover-leaf overpass. It must be five years ago now.'

Dr Hayward yawned. He'd been called up twice in the night and again at six to check the insulin syringes, then he'd done a couple of hours' reading for his exams. He spread the jam thickly on his toast to wake himself up. The gas fire hissed and dragged him back again to sleep.

It was early June. The swifts screamed round the windows. The sky was a fragile eggshell white. The chestnut trees along the hospital frontier hung like black thunderbolts. The black office kettle shuddered on its ring and puffed. Day and night it sat there. Day and night the blue jets of the gas fire pushed hot thumbs up into the fuggy air. The doctor yawned again and spilt jam; the night nurse folded some newspaper into a spill and poked it through the green metal fireguard and lit her cigarette. The kettle stirred again. She smoked and pulled the clips from her cap and stared out into the white morning:

'Got your costume for this evening, Dr Hayward?'

Some of the patients were already out there wandering with chairs towards the trees or trailing fairy-lights over the old red sandstone walls or leaning on one leg beside the booths of the funfair that was being set up: bowls and shove-ha'penny, 'Let us help you Jubilate' the notices were already going up. It was the 200th anniversary of the hospital's foundation, and there was to be a fancy-dress after the stalls and raffle and sideshows.

'What are you going as, Doctor?' the night nurse winked and rubbed her button-nose and folded up her apron and put it away in her oilskin bag. Hayward turned his eyes away from that bag.

'Is that the patients' butter you've got tucked away down there beside your magazine?' he wanted to ask. But the hospital was older and stronger than he was, so he merely made a note in his mind to speak to the chief social worker again about ward food and stared out at the men slowly and painfully lifting the wires of the amplifiers up on to the chapel porch and dragging chairs down the field to the old torn elms that hung in cobwebs beyond the red walls.

'So who's for the chopper this time?' the nurse interrupted him. Her oilskin bag was closed now and she was grinning and executing herself with one of its long broken handles. He stared and she explained: 'I heard the surgeon might be coming down again soon.' She added it casually returning to the ward report. The doctor stared and went on leafing through case-notes till he came to the patient she had mentioned, 'Reggie Dickens', the name was written in faded copybook on the admission order of over fifty years ago, a speckled blue-lined foolscap with only the top four lines taken by the Justice-in-Lunacy's orderly vertical hand:

'This man fasts and says he has nowhere to go ... says the hay-trussers steal his blood.' Then with a shock Hayward came on his own unnourished Biro handwriting - a few lines further on but over half a century later:

'Mouth edentulous, tongue furry, abdomen obese'. And on to this the nurses had pencilled their own notes: 'Hospital coat and trousers. Hosp. cigs, birthday and Santa Claus. No next-of-kin'. The doctor could hear their loose hospital shoes against the wainscot outside the office as they queued for a light for their morning hospital Woodbine.

'I Hope I Hope I Hope It's Me'. Music burped abruptly from the amplifiers fixed on the chapel wall. The clock in the tower struck eight-thirty. The night nurse collapsed her starched cap:

'Well my girl, it's shanks for you.' Hayward watched her cross the walk to the chapel and go behind the graveyard and pack her bicycle and get into her blue nylon supermarket overall with its red shop initials on the lapels and cycle away to her next job. Then he went over to the female side and pulled the bell for admission. He had two hours to get round his patients before Dr Dulton, his Consultant, came to the ward.

This part of the hospital had been built a century earlier and the windows were so narrow that summer and autumn and winter were indicated by what stood on the table at meals and what stood in the big black grates at the ends of the ward. Plants or

flowers. fire or fir-cones. jam or lettuce. These recorded the passing of the seasons. The days were measured by sounds.

The sound of keys in locks. The food tins being bumped one by one up the stone steps. The counting of cutlery. Plates being stacked. Keys being slid along the lino strip that ran the length of the splintered ward floor, and the endless sound of newspaper being torn into spills and carried slowly and heavily over to the office for a light.

They must have heard the hard incisive sound of male feet on the lino strip because the hoover and polisher were switched off and soft drugged music came suddenly from the satin-fronted box in the wall above the breakfast tables in the corridor where the patients ate.

'There's your day's bread, ladies. And there's your week's marg,' the ward-maid called banging on the reassembled food cart at the top of the glittering steps. 'And there's your morning's sausage. One leg beef and one leg pork. Caught them myself this morning down by the canal. Sister, is it one sausage or two?' She put a chair at the satin box in the wall and hit it with a fish-slice till the music came loudly:

'I Hope I Hope I Hope it's Me'.

This time three weeks two days four hours and a bit I shall be away on the Costa Brava getting my sun-tan' she added. 'Sister, will you sign please?'

A fair-haired girl with a baby lit a cigarette and stubbed it out against her thigh. A girl with bulging eyes was praying at a small shrine she had opened on the window-sill. A Spanish nurse was trying to coax a teaspoonful of milk sideways into a grey-haired woman's mouth. 'Now come along please Mrs.' The patient's feet and legs parted under the table but her teeth remained locked together. The phone in the office rang and Dr Hayward heard the Sister say:

'Yes, he is Doctor. He's on the ward at the moment.' She came out smiling and fixing her cuffs: 'Good morning Doctor. Dr Dulton asks if you could spare him a moment in the MO's room at ten. I've made some tea in the office', she pressed her hands together.

When Hayward first came to Gledhull from a big London teaching hospital he had been shocked by the unplastered walls and unlagged pipes and mica-stone spiral staircases and the rows of uncleaned lavatories with stable half-doors and the hundreds of slow silent men and women who flattened themselves against the corridor walls as he passed and filed in wobbly queues at bedtime to the dormitory with their

big plastic issue bags of possessions under their arms while the nurses lifted back the lockers so that they could get through to the narrow aisles beside their beds. He was shocked by the humble way they lowered their teeth or their suspenders for electric shock treatment if they had been difficult as though they were worthy of nothing else. He was frightened of this meek republic. A few of the patients were aggressive, but most of them seemed to be only against themselves.

'Cheer up, Alex,' Miss Fletton the chief social worker had invited him into her office for a drink. 'Those old people have been here all their lives and they're institutionalized. That's how it takes you after thirty or forty years. But as they die off, those wards will come down. All the younger patients are being oriented back into the community. Watch Gledhull come down in the next two years.' He had been here nearly two years now and he hadn't noticed it. They just used more drugs, he thought as he watched the patients lifting their breakfast sausage heavily to their lips and trying to chew with dried-up mouths.

'I've made a cup of tea, Doctor' the Sister was saying. They went into the office. 'I hear the surgeon's coming down again soon?' she stood on the weighing scales tinkering with the weights and casually asking: 'Is it for anyone on this ward?'

The sunlight had spread in a white scar-tissue across the fields and as far as the grey staircase of the hills. 'It's going to be a lovely day for our do' she added. In the main staircase of the hospital the Matron was searching among old music stands, gasmasks, tin hats and clocking-off machines for sun-hats for this afternoon. She stacked them on a linseed varnished map of the asylum catchment area when they placed it here two hundred years ago in the rich green pasturelands of the river valley fifteen miles from the town. 'What a lovely day' she repeated.

'Got your gear ready for this evening?' the Consultant asked when Hayward went to the MO's room at ten. He sat under the electric-light bulb, reading and seizing mouthfuls of coffee from his cup with strong mobile lips. 'Hi, Alex!' he grinned over his thick jet glasses. His eyes were full and dark and though he was in his middle forties, flesh hadn't yet threatened their expressiveness. 'You've been on Sixteens today?' Hayward nodded. 'Has Miss Gold made up her mind yet?'

'Yes, she definitely doesn't want surgery' he replied as he had done for the last three weeks, each time Dulton had asked. 'She doesn't think lobotomy is for her.'

'Is it because of Di and Pauline? Does she think she'll end like that?'

Di and Pauline had been Hayward's first encounter with personality change. They had been treated by brain-surgery for anorexia and since their return from the Infirmary they had given up drawing and painting and sewing and sat together in a corner surrounded by pin-ups eating sweets.

Once someone had shown Pauline some of the paintings she had done before her operation - dream landscapes, hands with flowers growing out of them, good gates and bad gates:

'Wow-wowey!' she had giggled slowly drawing her hand across her mouth and leaving a black newsprint stain where her paper had brushed against sugar she had stolen from breakfast, 'I shall have to be careful with my past catching up on me like that. I can't even get into my panties now, Doctor.' Her thighs shook as she laughed. 'Just look at me fatties! Down to earth, that's me. Down to brass tacks I'm getting. Still, some men like them that way, don't they Doctor? Pass the humbugs, Di. Give one to the Doctor.'

Her friend Di was barely sixteen when they operated. She hadn't eaten for six months. For six months she had stood at the thick hospital window staring at the jam-jars on its deep brick sill.

'Darling' her mother would call at her when she came to visit, 'please do pay attention. I've bought you three clean sets, now where are your dirties and I'll wash them through tonight?' Di turned for a moment and looked straight through her mother with her big black eyes and smiled serenely at some fluff that drifted past and caught on a splinter of the board floor. 'Darling, please listen a moment. Mrs Norris says she will very kindly come over tomorrow when I can't come ... Darling, school fees are mounting . . . Darling, we do want to see you back again among,' she looked away from Pauline, 'your own special kind of friends. Our leave is so short and so precious and we do want to see you well before we go ... Darling, I'm taking you to the hairdresser soon. You do look such a little waif. Something the Salvation Army has picked up. Oh baddy! I shall soon be getting a persecution complex if you go on ignoring me like this, so do please try and pay attention and pull yourself together. And try not to be such a self-contained little island. No one is an island you know. And we must see you back at school before we go back to Rhodesia. We know it was our fault all along, darling. We thought that if we gave you love and freedom and a happy healthy environment . . . We thought that if you gave children love and freedom and happiness . . . But now we know. Anyone can be wrong, can't they? Our

experiments with freedom were just wrong, and you must try and forgive us. We should have behaved like other people and brought you up conventionally without good schools and pony-trekking and holidays abroad. We slipped up darling, and you must forgive us. And now we are going to let your nice Dr Dulton put your chemistry right again and get you balanced up along conventional lines.' They signed the form for her and Di was taken to the Infirmary and came back ten days later with her temples shaved and a white cap round her wounds. She stood in the ward doorway clutching the Sister's arm and staring round blindly, not recognizing the nurses or her locker or her bed, standing there disoriented till Pauline hooked a chair over with her leg and patted her lap and called:

'Here Di. Over here. You don't want to sit over there with a lot of depressive women. Have a toffee or a mint! Catch!'

They had plastered their corner with pictures of girls in bikinis and were sitting there arm in arm eating when Di's mother arrived again:

'Darling, I've arranged for Mrs Norris to take you to the hairdresser as soon as your mop begins to grow again. And darling do try to eat salad instead of all those mucky sweets. And your accent, darling. Would you like to go pony-trekking just on your own as you always used to do before they brought you in here? Do try and pull yourself together a bit darling, now that they've cured you and balanced you up. Try to choose salad at meals instead of all this carbohydrate. And do remember your accent. Will you write to one or two of your old school friends and tell them you're alive and kicking again?'

Di stared at her feet then looked at Pauline and slowly unwrapped a mint and moved it round her mouth: 'Pauline, when you went for "the op." did you have the end bed by the washbasin?'

'Slipped through their fingers she has' the older women on the ward would say, giving the two girls dusters or peas to shell or nominating them to help in the office or give out medicines. But Di and Pauline remained stubbornly in their corner, eating and waiting like brides, and talking softly to each other alone:

'Di, you know the tall doctor with the stoop ... Di, when you came round . . . did he say to you . . .'

'Pauline, look what I found at the back of the cupboard,' and they would spread old crusts with butter or sprinkle sugar on cake or unwrap a handkerchief of

sweet rice mould someone had hidden for the nurses' tea. Sometimes when they found nothing in the ward kitchen they would suck the curtains for the sweet.

'Early days yet' Dr Dulton would sigh. The two girls might have died of malnutrition, he defended himself. Now they would probably die of heart failure. They both weighed over twelve stone. Yesterday Di had eaten a tube of toothpaste.

'Is that why Miss Gold doesn't want to be "done"?'

'She calls it legalised rape.'

Dulton frowned then grinned. Then his elastic mouth worked at the rim of his cup again. 'You know, when I first came here, how they did leucotomy? They gave the patient ECT till his eyes rolled up, then they pushed the scalpel under the eyelids. He had a couple of black eyes for weeks and it was hit or miss whether they severed the lobe or just smashed the whole egg. Things have changed, what?' he pressed back the pages of the periodical he had been reading, ran his firm white fingers down its spine then examined his cuticles as Hayward read:

'A surgical knife which can cut without bleeding by means of a laser beam ... as easy for surgeons to use as a ball-point pen. . . The development was made by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston . . . The light beam seals as it cuts . . . Tests have already been completed on animals and the instrument seems worthy to be put alongside the surgeon's scalpel . . . and has already been used in Australia for brain-surgery

Then there was another article by a Sydney neurosurgeon who had used the 'knife' successfully for lobotomy on disturbed psychotics. The resulting personality loss had been found to be much less; the grossness and insensitivity much less than in cases performed in the traditional way. 'Especially' the surgeon had observed, 'where there was good initial personality and intelligence and no thought disorder. In these cases apparently personality-depth had not been impaired at all.'

'Try and make Miss Gold see herself as a space-age explorer. An ipsonaut' Dulton was saying as Hayward read. 'Butter her up a bit. Make her feel important. And if she still refuses, then get hold of her next-of-kin and we'll put her under a section and do it without her consent. Try and get it wrapped up this morning because Hennock and his team can come down on the 15th with the laser beam - if I can get the confirmation into the post today. Hennock's very keen to try out this new technique,' he folded his small firm fingers one by one round his coffee cup. 'More

coffee?' he held out his other hand. Its whiteness reminded Hayward of a carnivore lily.

'Miss Gold,' Hayward had crossed the ward to where she sat at least four times in the last few weeks, 'could I have a word with you? Have you thought any more about where we go from here? Do you think we are doing enough for you? Or do you think it's time we tried something more positive?' The whole ward seemed to watch for the rite each day. He tried to vary it. 'Sister, could you let us have a room or somewhere private for ten minutes? Sister, would it be all right if Miss Gold and I took a turn on the terrace?' Once he had taken her as far as the old broken fountain and had picked up bits of wood and paper on the way and when they got there had pulled out his matches and lit a small bonfire and watched the flames leap up and make the twigs hiss. Then he had got two flat stones and laid them by the fire and sat down: 'So you definitely don't want this operation? I'll tell Dr Dulton that.' He had sat by his fire watching it move here and there and feeling healed by it. Then Miss Gold had picked up two sides of a cardboard box like pincers, one in each hand and pinched his fire out:

'I think we ought to be returning to the ward.'

'Right.' As they walked back, he could see the patients laughing at him from the top windows. They were still laughing when they reached the ward. Hayward smiled self-consciously at the Sister: '. . . good blow of fresh air' he murmured and sat down at the ward piano and played 'Für Elise'. 'You didn't know I had hidden lights, did you?' There was silence in the room till a patient with a duster and broom eased him off the piano stool to sweep underneath. She shut the lid down and he saw them still laughing at him. 'What are you reading?' he went back to Miss Gold.

Four years of confinement had turned her face the colour of mushrooms and there was a brownish tide round her mouth and a wide white line of scalp where her dark coil of hair had thinned at the parting. She had tied it back with string and stuck the big buttons back on to her sleeves with Sellotape that had turned sick and left a cloudily mucous patch by each wrist. She wore, black patent-leather shoes that had splintered like mirrors and turned to grey membrane, and pads were tied on their backs because people trod on her heels, she complained. They knocked her and jostled her, and men tried to touch her genitals and whisper obscene insults. She had delusions of grandeur, ideas of greatness, but feelings of inferiority - never delusions of inferiority, Hayward thought as he read her case-notes. Those feelings were

genuine enough, so instead they wrote down 'delusions of persecution'. She had recently knocked a male porter down twenty stairs with an urn of boiling soup. But she didn't want surgery, and she was right enough. People did laugh at her. He had heard them in the nurses' office. And he laughed at her himself:

'What are you reading?' he would ask as he approached her on his ward round. She'd been on the same page for as long as he'd been here. The page was dirty and the book's spine was deformed with lying open there at the same place all the time. 'What are you reading?' She put her arm over the page but he leaned over and read:

' "The poet here finds in the visible world (i.e. of the red bus and the glowing windows of the street) a manifestation of that invisible unity and timeless radiance of the eternal moment".' Hayward had read it out loudly. 'Wow' he had said. 'How's that timeless moment going, Sister?'

'Nearly time for a nice cup of tea, Doctor,' the Sister had smiled back, and he had felt ashamed then when he saw them laughing and had added hypocritically:

'Which poet is it, Miss Gold?' But she had merely set her teeth so that there were two deep lines running from her nostrils round the sides of her mouth to the base of her jaw. She crossed her legs and folded her arms over her chest protectively. On the soles of her shoes he could see Elastoplast name-tapes:

'Jean Gold, Ward 16. Toilet and Day-room parole'. The protective pads swung behind. She was right to feel paranoid. She was right not to want a transfer to the pin-up corner.

'Di, when they "did" you, did you have the Doctor with the... here, catch!' Pauline broke chocolate into pieces and stuffed it into rock cakes and threw them round the room. 'Catch Nurse! Catch Doctor!

Catch Miss Gold!' Hayward caught his. Miss Gold had hiccups.

'Have you tried twelve quick sips?' he asked her.

'I've asked the nurses several times for something for it, but they won't give me anything.'

'Try my twelve quick sips. Or the back of the cup.' But she sat there hiccupping. There was a field of brown downy silk on her upper lip and he could see the nurses holding her down while they shaved her and harvested it, spun her upper lip into the finest silk for weaving. He could see the hospital 'carding' her away, yard by yard, into degradation. The sky had suddenly clouded over and liquid oozed through a white blister and fell noisily on some shining rabbit hutches outside the

window and an old bicycle and pram, and sank into the earth for coal and oil. He remembered he had dreamed last night - a sallow soiled-looking nurse chased him with a teapot out of a house and said it was a home for the dying. And he had gone bathing and the water was so blue he could see the grass at the bottom. It was flood water and he was swimming over the level-crossing and diving down to see if he'd left the city yet and reached the sea. But each time he dived down it was still level-crossing and trains and a notice saying 'Only Street', and he was standing in his bathing trunks by a shitty privet hedge. The clock struck midday.

'Is it one bit of haddock each or two? someone was calling the Sister. 'Switch that fan on.' The fan started to hum. Miss Gold stared at it and pulled the hem of her skirt and clutched at the big handbag full of her four years' possessions that she carried with her wherever she went because of theft.

'Does that fan worry you?' Hayward asked. 'It's not a tape-recorder - just a fan,' he touched it with his Biro to make it whirr faster. 'You don't still think people are tape-recording your thoughts, do you? Tape-recording them?'

'No' she hiccupped. It was simply time for her to be discharged. Hayward decided to find Miss Fletton, the social worker, and get her involved against this social rape.

'Ken,' Miss Fletton would cross her long white arms behind her chestnut hair and lean back in her chair, 'Mrs Hussy doesn't want «» be discharged to the old people's home and I'm not taking her there . . . Ken,' she would pour out sherry or coffee for Dr Dulton, 'isn't it time we closed that ward at the end ? All those men could be out at work . . . Ken,' she would retie the red ribbons that made up her shoes, 'what if Mrs Deeds is dangerous ? She's not half as dangerous as you and me when we get out on to that motorway out there ... Ken, those old ladies aren't getting that late supper the kitchen promised them . . . Well, if she won't be admitted without her sister, why don't we admit the sister as well ?' Miss Fletton was always the inconvenient intrusion of the outside world into this closed community, and the junior doctors expected every time she went on holiday that there would be a Palace Revolution. But it was they, not she who went each time. She returned sun-tanned and humming with new ideas: 'Ken, why don't we close this whole show down altogether or turn it into a boiled-sweets factory? Ken, half those drugs you prescribe for them get spat down the loo . . . !'

'Fay,' Hayward stood in the doorway of the social workers' room. He had never called Miss Fletton by her Christian name before though she called him Alex. He didn't like the carefully manipulated femininity of this part of the hospital. She was sitting there making an enormous satin bow the size of the table while music blurted on and off in the tree outside her window:

'I'm a Little Bit Tired of Saying It'.

'Fay, Miss Gold doesn't want that lobotomy. She doesn't want to be turned into a fat middle-aged bunny playmate any more than you or I would.' Fay lifted the big satin bow and pretended to mount and ride it. The amplifier outside the window gave a sudden high-pitched scream that sent the birds from the trees and the voice came out again:

'One. Two. Three. Can you hear me?' An old man in a tweed suit that covered his hands and feet stood with his head jerked forward beside a trolley of felt hats and flowered sun-bonnets with wired brims and crowns lifting his hands up and down inside his big dogtooth sleeves.

'This fancy-dress is obscene, Fay. Some of them are already in compulsory fancy-dress for life. Ever since Di and Pauline had their lobotomies I've had this picture in my mind of people who've learned to despise themselves; to see themselves as physical mechanisms; to see themselves as things. And they've even grown forgiving and made friends with the aggression, and what you do to them you do with their connivance. They'll adapt themselves to anything. Those girls go into the kitchens at night and get the night staff to tell them all the crazy things they used to do and think before they were turned into things. They have a ball there every night. I could write an obscene book without mentioning genitalia. It would simply be about giving people what they "really" want as opposed to what they only think they want. Miss Gold doesn't want to be "cured" but it's my job to persuade her she only thinks she doesn't want to be turned into the submissive female. But they'll come out at the end together, she and Dulton, cooperative and dancing. She'll adapt to her fancy-dress.'

Miss Fletton was trimming her eyelashes, sending their fine shredded tips down from a pair of sharp scissors with a crunching sound. Di and Pauline sat on the swing outside. Di's wounds had healed and she'd been taken into Severnbridge to a hairdresser and a cosmetic advisory clinic and she had come back with the world's welcome recorded on her tight sausage curls, sky-blue eyelids and red cupid's bow.

'Let's have a look at you' the staff called to this woman they had made.

'All dressed up and nowhere to go, eh?' Pauline had laughed. 'Come along Di, let's get away from all these depressives.' Hayward and Miss Fletton could hear them outside now on the swing together making rude remarks about the mute old men who wandered up and down, and see them tossing sticks at a defective boy in jeans and a T-shirt with 'I Love You' written on it, and feeling each other's thighs.

'I was mad with Ken about those two girls' Miss Fletton said slowly. 'But with Jean Gold, she's older and . . .'. . . unattractive.'

'No, it's not that. She's been here four years after all. And she's no better. How many stitches did that poor bastard chalk up on the stairs when she thought he said he wanted to lay her? She's very paranoid.'

'So would I be if I were forty and non-male and so plain.' 'And she's a nursing problem. She doesn't co-operate.' 'She doesn't connive, you mean. Why should she?' 'That operation Hennock wants to do - it might be a success.' 'The word "success" has a terrible ring these days. Like "adapt".' Miss Fletton was feeding milk from a bottle on to some doeskin shoes on her table.

Til have it out with Ken I agree. He's a bit keen to "lend" her to the surgeon. I'm having a working lunch with him today,' she squeezed adhesive on her eyelids, tested her lashes and put the adhesive bottle back on the shelf between case-histories and hard boots and soft boots and sherry. Outside chairs and benches were being laid round the bright green hide of the lawn with a judge's dais in the middle, and patients were carrying out flowers to tie in the shape of letters and spell out 'Welcome' along the backs of the chairs for the Bishop and the Mayor, and to make a wreath for the winning costume.

Why had the hospital chosen its bi-centenary to mock its patients, Hayward wondered as an aghast white face passed the window in a Tsarist brocade tunic and cap. What would the old lady wear tonight who thought she was the Matron? And the chemist who received communiqués from General de Gaulle? And the headmaster who had become a woman since his wife died? What kind of reality was expected of them tonight? Hayward himself was forced into one kind of make-believe every morning when he got up and went on to the wards. Today's was a game within a game for all of them. What would Dulton wear, and Miss Gold? Perhaps unauthorised costume would be allowed, but he didn't think so. Survival meant Cleopatra, Hitler, Hell's Angels or Samson and Delilah. The hospital was full of home-made

lampshades and rugs patterned with sailing ships or crinolined ladies. The paintings on the walls all came from the Red Cross. They waited for a costume or a language.

A shimmer of haze stood on the heads of the barley in the fields beyond the hospital frontier. The sky seemed to have two layers like his last night's dream. He looked through the midday blue to a heavy twilight, and a distant wind came obstinately like the voices of those who remained persistently alive after destruction, clapping their hands and rolling round and calling for flowers and other symbols of survival.

Miss Fletton put a pin carefully between each of her pruned eyelashes and separated them:

'I'll have it out with Ken Dulton at lunch.'

'Thanks.' Hayward went to do his next ward round.

'The gentleman's here again about his mother's putty-coloured drawers' the duty-nurse was giggling in the office. 'That's three times he's called in about those putty-coloured drawers. And Mrs Hitts is on again about her discharge, doctor.'

'And is it on the cards?' Hayward asked. 'I'll go and see her - if you'll tell me - which - she is', he stared at the rows of faces and coloured aprons and chairs and legs that were set along the corridor walls outside. Their midday meal was over and the big food tins were being banged back down the stone steps one by one to the trolley below, but the smell of haddock and sweet tea lingered with the smell from hot parched rubber bed-rings, cast skin and sebaceousness. He lit a cigarette for a moment to correct the smell of hot wet bedding being scorch-dried and scorched dust from the heaters, and that closed glandular institutional smell that they said had hung over this ward for fifty years - of undischarged burdens.

'I'll call Mrs Hitts,' the nurse was filling her handkerchief with sodium amyral bombs for emergencies and pulling at a hairclip on her teeth while Hayward picked the familiar ancient document out of the case-note box:

'Connie Hitts' he read in the Justice-in-Lunacy's dapper hand: '. . . This woman says her husband is unfaithful to her . . . She broods and says the neighbours steal her washing . . .' And again, over half a century later he came on his own formless Biro scrawl: 'Mouth edentulous . . . Breasts nulliparous . . .' then the pencilled notes: 'Hospital frock and coat. Hosp. birthday and cigs'. Then Mrs Hitts was coming over to the office door, lifting the lockers back one by one to get across the dormitory. She didn't look seventy-five. Her face was smooth and clear and moonlike and she had a

shock of thick white hair that grew on her neck and shoulders like a hedge. 'No relatives' the notes had said. 'Nobody'. 'And no mind either', someone had added. But Mrs Hitts had borne her life here with dignity. She worked in the bakery and there was still flour on her cheek and sleeve, and a folded apron lay on her arm with a hot loaf inside.

'Please have a seat, Mrs Hitts.' But she went on standing. 'Have a cup of tea. So you want to be off? Where are you thinking of going?'

'Back to Severnbridge sir, to St James, where we come from,'

'St James went a year ago, Connie' the nurse interrupted, giving her a cup of tea that she put away from her. 'Yes, it went for a shopping precinct they wanted round the Abbey. You wouldn't recognise the place, Connie, if you was to go back. And all your friends and relatives have been decanted - out on to the Bendy Lane Estate I think. And who'd get me that nice cup of tea in the mornings before I clock on if Connie went, eh? And what would they do in the bakery, eh? That dough would catch a chill if Connie wasn't there.'

'Very good, nurse. Very good, doctor.' Mrs Hitts turned, bowed slightly, moved towards the gas-jets and poked her trembling spill through the guard for a light. They watched it falter then advance to the flame. It gave the flame a light touch and came out burning. Mrs Hitts saluted them and returned to the room she had lived in since 1915.

'Poor Connie. Her relatives did a bunk years ago. I don't think we'll even get anyone to bury her. Sometimes you don't get anyone in the chapel but the parson and one of the nurses maybe. That street of hers - it's the ladies' toilets now, and the biggest advertisement for cigarettes I've ever seen. There's pink gravel underneath the hoarding, and blue gravel and what-have-you round the sides, and it's got spotlights and floodlighting and barbed wire and notices saying "Keep Off"! It's a big problem, clearance is, isn't it? Poor Connie.'

Hay ward left the ward and came out into the sunshine again. Beyond the fair-booths the grass fields had been cut and laid out in hot grey ashes. Beyond them the barley heaved up and down on one long shivering spine, and the bulbous green of the chestnuts seemed suddenly pumped up there and congealed into clots the birds retreated behind. He went to dress a patient's wound and that too seemed to occupy a central cloying position in the universe. The bootlaces he had stitched so neatly across the wrist four days ago had been cut by the nurse and from the eyelets of the stitches

red poppies grew. Fields of red poppies with grey sides when the wind shushed. He saw Miss Fletton standing there talking to the Matron. She waved to him and went on talking. He could see her by the great eighteenth-century canopy entrance-hall in a fencing jacket and mask. He went over, but she had gone and was sitting among the poppies with her group-therapy patients, their heads black spikes among the red and grey. Then a boy in a prep-school blazer and grey flannel shorts and cap was dropping a matchbox in front of him, picking it up and dropping it again and again and appealing to the doctor and the group, standing by the coconut shies; beside the notice that said:

'Effort and Endeavour Must Precede Reward' dropping the matchbox like a yo-yo and saying desperately:

'The trouble is I don't know whether I really drop this box each time, or whether I only think I do. Maybe it's all a dream. Or maybe it's only the catch-end of a dream gaze gone bad . . . ' and the Hayward clown was saying:

'Never mind, Nigel. Try not to speculate too much about it. A lot has to come out in the wash . . . Fay, did you speak to Dulton?'

But when he went over to where she was standing on the front steps beside the big plaster urns full of daisies and stinging-nettles, she had gone. She was upstairs leaning against one of the cottage windows of a ward, her long chestnut hair shifting beside the red gladioli someone was arranging in a vase. Then Hayward's buzzer went. There was a patient to be admitted, and a psychopath on a court order asking for his discharge, and three women had beaten up one of the outside workers in the laundry. When he came back, Miss Fletton was helping three old ladies into her car for a spin and a hair-do for tonight.

'Fay, did you see Ken Dulton?' But they were waving back at him and smiling as they turned into the drive, and the quivering arrow of hot sound came again from the amplifiers in the trees and shot the birds with a clap out of their dark tree holes:

'I Hope I Hope I Hope It's Me'.

It was time for him to go and do out-patient ECT.

On Tuesdays they put screens across the lofty recreation hall with faded crepe Christmas chains and bells still swinging from its rafters, and rows of chairs with a supermarket wire basket beside each for the patient to put his shoes and belt and rings and bags and teeth in. Then they were called one by one from behind the screen:

'Hullo, Mr Weekes. How are you this week? Do you still have the same feeling of worthlessness? Taking your tablets all right? . . . Hullo, Mrs Hull. How is she today? Has she co-operated at all in the house this week? Has she spoken at all? Good afternoon, Mr Lapp. How's your head this week? Does it feel your own yet? Do you still think it's been taken over by someone else?' There was never time to ask more than this, and by the time the patient had given his simple reply, the Sister was standing there with the needle and the patient was counting and he was out and the electric tiara was on his temples. His toes turned up in his stockinged feet like a baby's. Then he lay still and was wheeled away. Half an hour later he would be sitting up on the bed drinking tea and asking:

'Have I had the treatment yet?' An hour later he would be in the hospital bus going home, while Hayward with his kindly performer's voice would be asking the last patient:

'You see, unless I know what drugs you're on, I don't know what kind of an anaesthetic to give you.'

'The tablets are black and green I think' the slow slurred voice replied. 'But I can't remember the name. My memory's not what it was.'

'Never mind. It happens to all of us. Just let me have your own doctor's name and we'll get on to him on the blower.'

'I'm sorry. I ought to know. But my memory's shocking these days.'

'Not to worry. We all have our lapses. Where does he live?'

The patient sat there shaking her head and apologizing. Her stockings were down. Her roll-on was in the basket under the bed with her shoes and bag. The needle and the black case were ready.

'I'm sorry,' she tried to beat her head only the drugs had taken her drive away. Hayward's buzzer went again. It was the Mental Welfare Officer. The Miss Dennys wanted to see him again and the Welfare Officer wasn't happy about Mrs Bassey and thought she ought to be brought into hospital under Section 25.

'Right. I'll go and see her. See them all. When I've finished this clinic.'

The Miss Dennys lived on the Bendy Lane Estate. The fields seemed to hum with green as Hayward set out. The sandy red banks of the river had heaped up over the centuries into red-stone walls and red-brick barns and red farms with huge staring windows as arrogant and proprietary as the farmers' wives who met him on their drives:

'Do I know you, Dr Hayward? Ought I to know you? Is your family from this part of the world? You aren't one of the Civil War Haywards?'

The Miss Dennys had been farm servants till they grew too old for heavy work and had moved into one room in an old timber and thatch cottage clayed on to the old city wall by the Abbey. But Cross Friary in the Parish of St James had been needed for the ladies' toilet and the cigarette advertisement so the two old ladies had been decanted to the Bendy Lane Estate. The younger one was waiting for him on the landing with her ingratiating smile:

'All we want is to get back into Severnbridge. We liked Severn-bridge, and we don't know anyone here.' Hayward could hear the shouts of the older Miss Denny echoing round the empty four-bedroomed flat they had been given. They had been servants all their life and had no furniture except the parting gifts of their mistress, a walnut veneered sideboard lined with velvet and two deckchairs. The elder Miss Denny had complained of worms in her head ever since the move.

'If only you could get us back to Severnbridge' the younger sister giggled and touched Hayward's wrist. The Abbey had been left and the shire hall scrubbed and refaced and railed round from the traffic. They looked like something from a child's Toy-Town cut-out set; two glossy dummies in a cage beside the girl's thighs advertising cigarettes. Hayward made out another prescription for Miss Denny's head and promised to get in touch with the housing department and take them for a drive one day. Then he went on to Hewitts where Mr and Mrs Basseby lived.

The thick teak gates at the bottom of the drive were wider and taller than their chalet home itself. A studded leather dog's collar was fixed across them and a 'Keep Off' notice nailed beside it: 'Alsations patrolling. This means you.' In the bungalow window behind stood a gin bottle in a white crochet-work basket. Mr Basseby came to the door and offered Hayward a drink. He was about forty with receding ginger hair. He dressed immaculately in a starched white shirt and a blazer with a crest on the pocket. She'd been a kid during the war and lost everything, he explained. 'I think that upset her. That's the cause of it all. And her father was in the death camps. That's enough to set anyone off, isn't it?' His Adam's apple moved up and down. Hayward looked at his blazer badge:

'Were you in the RAF?' Mr Basseby shook his head. He hadn't been passed as fit for military service. He'd had a bad chest and gone into the Parks and Gardens Department of the local borough. He filled a glass with water and opened a Nembutal

capsule and sprinkled it on and took it through to his wife. She was sitting up in their big satin-upholstered bed biting the inside of her cheek. Her cheekbones stuck out under her eyes. Her collar-bone bulged through her nightdress. There were grains of Nembutal scum round her mouth when she had swallowed her husband's draught. Mr Bassey sat down and waited.

'Do you mind if we talk alone?'

'Her father was in the camps.'

'I see.'

'People say, don't they Doreen, that I've got a private army down there' he pointed over the fields towards the Bendy Lane Estate. 'A private army to topple the state over when I couldn't even get a bit of my own private property down' he laughed and slapped his pigskin gloves against his grey-flannel trousers. I think they say it to frighten Doreen. They know her father was in the camps.'

'I see. Do you mind if I have a word with her alone?' Mr Bassey said nothing but he lifted his gloves off his knee and got up.

'I'll be down the garden at the cages if you want me,'

'Does your husband still work in the Parks and Gardens Department?'

'No' Mrs Bassey said softly. Her throat heaved when she spoke as though every word hurt her. 'He breeds the pups.'

'The Alsatians?' She nodded. 'What for?'

'It's a popular man's dog now. And he's a certificated bailiff so he needs them. He never cared much working in the parks. Even when the council issued gloves for cleaning round the bushes, and got showers fitted, it was nasty work and he got bad dreams from what was behind those bushes. He used to come home and have another bath then clean out the fridge and throw away anything left over from yesterday. He couldn't stand the cheese near the sausage, or anything shut up. Even the beds had to be kept open all day. He used to think the sheets would fester if there wasn't a through draught. And he'd get up in the night and have another bath and wipe the water off the window-sills in case that festered too. They tried him in the Japanese Gardens, but people were just as filthy there he said. What he really liked doing was crazy-paving and laying grass. And trimming and pruning. And demolishing. So when he'd saved a bit of money of his own he got himself this bulldozer-thing, and then I think he was really happy. He's always been a careful punctual man, and if he said he'd be along at nine to have the old tree down or the coach-house or the old cottage, along he'd be.

And he'd come home different - not mothered any more if you see what I mean. Instead of going straight to the bath or coming up to me and whispering: "Something rotting in that fridge. Something festering on that wall . . . By-the-by, Doreen, did you wash your hands after you paid your 'brief respects' just now in the Taj Mahal ?" he'd get out the car and we'd go for a drive.

' "They'll fine you I expect" he would warn his client when we went out to see some chap who wanted something brought down. "Fifty or a hundred quid for knocking down your old squint-eyed chateau. Do you mind?" And then one day he saw this old house with a black thatch full of dead birds, and he wasn't happy till that came down. "Filthy spider's web" he would say when we went past. We'd never lived in a second-hand home. The thought upset him. He got bad dreams again and went to the dentist and had all his teeth out. But those thatched cottages in Severnbridge still upset him. "This is a great historic city" he would say, "and we want to keep it that way." Then he'd put rubber gloves on and tip caustic soda down the drain. "I don't like to think what the pipes are like in those Cross Friars crotchty old properties. Fungus. Cancer. It will all spread and spread, that thatch, till we're back in the world of apes again." There was a bad fire here in the seventeenth century I think it was, and these cottages had somehow survived. He started reading about this fire. Everything he could lay his hands on. "The Great Fire of Severn-Ill bridge" - he used to talk about nothing else. You could almost see the flames coming out of his own mouth when he said it: "Huh. Huh! Doreen, did you happen to notice if Rodney washed his hands after that toilet visit just now? I know he had a brief 'hallo' in the Taj just now. I saw him." Then he helped run a club for these kids, and they helped him with the dogs. They still do. They're out there now I think. They said the old ladies in Cross Friars were careless with the heaters, that's what caused the fire. You should hear him going on about the thatch. "It's so dirty" he says, "and full of mice and birds." You'd think the niggers were after him the way he goes on about it.'

Just then Mr Bassey came back. He'd got his yellow pigskin gloves on and was carrying a pigskin brief-case:

'Duty calls' he said. 'I've done my check on the dogs. We keep the dogs because Doreen gets scared. Her father was in the camps as I told you, and she gets nervy at night. Well I must be off, doctor. My small organisation is running a holiday scheme for autistic children with ice-cream and the lot. And incidentally, Doreen, you can count me out of any Christmas fun you may be plotting up for us this year

because I'm organizing Christmas cheer for the old people. I shall be on duty throughout the festive season carrying good fayre and seasonal chicken and pud round to folks worse off than ourselves. . . She represses it all, doctor. She represses the camps' he said as they went down the drive. 'I think she may do herself some harm if we don't get her into treatment by hook-or-by-crook.' The boys were sitting in Mr Bassey's car. They went off together.

'Do you think we ought to have her in for observation?' the Medical Welfare Officer was sitting in his car waiting for Hayward, arranging the things on the shelf under his steering wheel into three neat piles: metal, paper and cloth, the categories seemed to be.

'No. Him.'

The Welfare Officer burst out laughing: 'I see. Just as he's about to be given the freedom of the city, we whip him away to Gledhull under Section 25.'

'Why is he to be given the freedom of the city?'

'They wouldn't get far with their clearance and replanning programmes without him. He demolishes. He prevents squatters and hippies from moving into old houses waiting for the axe and sterilising the land. There was a group - a sort of commune - moved into Cross Friars not long ago, and the Planning Committee were in a tizzy because the houses were to come down in a few years. But Mr Bassey got them out.'

'How?'

'I dunno. The City Council kept pretty quiet. They never put contracts into writing when it's a case of wrecking or demolishing.'

'How did he get the Miss Dennys out?'

'The two old sisters on the Bendy Lane Estate? Well, it was one of those old timber and thatch cottages and -there was no proper facilities. It was a slum. Well, so there's no action to be taken about Mrs Bassey?'

'No. I don't think so. Not unless we can get him in.' The Welfare Officer's laughter was still in Hayward's ears as he passed Cross Friars, Parish of St James. The few remaining buildings stood like ventriloquists' dummies behind the traffic railings. The people of Severnbridge had voted for roads and hypermarkets and against homes and free public transport. The long-stay wards at Gledhull had always had mattresses on the corridors and eating places between the beds, but people voted as though they thought of themselves as the long-stay patients. Miss Fletton was always trying to get

Severnbridge to visit Gledhull. Instead it seemed to Hayward as he drove through the city, that Gledhull had taken over there.

The green hummed in the fields and hills as he went back to the hospital. Green swelled in the hedges and broke from the beaks of birds and burst from walls and gutters and thatches; the great clots of green that had seemed mysterious and half-threatening this morning were merely mocking now. A booby green, mobbing him as he drove along. Jokers bleeding to death, and clowns on the fields. He went straight to Miss Fletton's room when he got back and she was there.

'Fay, did you have it out with Dr Dulton about Jean Gold? What about Hennock's date down here? Is he really going to try it on?'

Miss Fletton was leaning over her neat legs painting her toenails and stroking the chamois bows that made up the tops of her sandals with a child's toothbrush.

'Cheer up, Alex.' She was sniffing slightly as she bent over.' Cheer up, Alex. Gledhull will soon be down,' she spoke through her nose and at her feet and the floor. 'It'll soon be turned over to the hard-garment industry as I always said it should. The oldsters will all have died off, and the young ones will be repatriated back to the community. The patient's place is in the home' she said, dreamily re-bunching the bows across her toes.

'What a hideous idea! Their homes are the last places I'd like to treat my patients in. Di's mother fixed that lobotomy out of revenge. And when Miss Gold's mother came down last time she brought her daughter see-through undies and a wig. Families are more destructive than hospitals.'

'Well, let's say then that the patient's place is back in the community.'

'Back on the Bendy Lane Estate with one shop and one bus an hour to the city centre four miles away, and knowing all the time that Claypits and St James went to make way for an advertisement for cigarettes, and that the city centres are too good for you. That community is an institutionalised invalid already. Yes, I suppose it's safe to pull the asylums down now. Now that there are all these higher drugs and advanced branches of surgery and clearance, and manipulation.'

'Now don't you hold me responsible for the Bendy Lane Estate. The trouble with you Alex is that you are one-hundred-per-cent feeling. What branch of medicine would you really like to be in? Ken Dulton asked me at lunch, but I couldn't honestly say.'

'So you did see him about this latest bit of slum clearance?'

Fay kicked the record player on with her toes. She had instructed her assistants to buy French bread and beer and salami, and to stay away from their office for at least two hours. Then she had laid the table and waited for Dulton.

'Four leucs! Four fees!' she pushed her chin out at him when he came dancing in. 'The surgeon won't come for less than a quartet. That's why Di and Pauline were done. But you're not going to try it again on Miss Gold, are you, Ken? Miss Gold's just institutionalised. Her only other trouble is that she's anti-male and there I thoroughly sympathise. She should be discharged to a women's lib group with plenty of psychodrama to get it all out of her.' Fay opened the beer and they sat down to their working lunch. She meant first of all to tick the Consultant off about his flippant attitude to social case work and getting his patients community-oriented, and only later to bring up the subject of the surgeon's date down here. But Dulton took a large bite out of his French bread and a sip of beer and tipped his chair back and grinned and forestalled her:

'Fay' he munched happily, wrapping his fingers one by one round his dark crust of bread, and pretending to sigh, 'if only mankind hadn't got up off all fours.'

'You'd be pretty uninfectious Ken, pardon my saying so, if you hadn't never got up off them four plates of meat.'

'I was thinking more of you than of me,' he grinned back innocently picking with his strong separate fingers at some surplus meat and prising two slices of it apart with his hard red tongue as he chewed. He'd take her out for a drive after this evening's do, and give her a meal somewhere smart and then take her home and screw her. His hands shook slightly as he lifted his beer. He pushed his glass back and opened his lips slightly and ran one finger down her wrist. 'Miss Crowe's been admitted again. Ugh! Poor Hayward. How I used to hate examining old ladies. Their breasts are so clammy to touch - like raw lamb's liver - Have you got nice little gay lemon-shaped breasts?' His face ripened shyly. 'Fay, come and play with me,' he screwed his face up and grinned. His glasses misted over. He took them off, but the skin round his eyes was mauve and tracked with pimples.

'You look better with them on.' He grinned sheepishly and dropped them back on.

'Fay,' he put his hand on her knee, 'I want those pants down and that bra off and those breasts liberated.'

'What a rush-job you medics are,' she dropped her hands limply down beside her doeskin bag. 'Could we get down to business, Ken?'

'Yes, if only women hadn't taken to getting up off all fours and hiding their genitalia! Fay, in the MO's room we can never decide whether this girly footwork and your polka-dotted tits are meant to tell us that you are an easy lay or a hard one. Still, it adds up to the same thing, doesn't it?' He was surprised to see her stiffen. 'So I want those pants off and those breasts as free as birds. How easily your nipples come!' Fay's grin was back on her face, but her neck was red and there was sweat beside her nose as she folded her arms and said with a kind of croak:

'And me a parson's daughter and all! But I'd take on ten of you, Ken, and make you turn over in your graves.' Her grin was frightened though, and hideous, but he didn't see what it meant and went on:

'So there's no need to bring out the high-minded artillery any more, or the heavy sociology plant, because we've taken the point. I'm going to have you somewhere tonight.'

She yawned. 'Thanks, but fat and forty doesn't interest me all that much.' But her foot was moving up and down very quickly under the chair as she spoke and sweat stood on her forehead and in her hair. 'The older medics round here don't seem to have read a book or netted in an idea since they qualified. Driven any good cars lately?' she jerked her face out at Dulton and they both sat there stiffly, both flushed, both hurt, but neither daring to make the next move or discover exactly how far they were wounded. Then Fay began:

'I see now why you're so keen to experiment on Miss Gold. Men never feel safe with women until they've reduced them to flesh and things. So many Paulines. So many Di's with their legs apart waiting. That's how you like your women - willing vessels for anything. Then you feel safe and good. And they are so conniving and so forgiving afterwards! You'd never get a man to be your willing victim. And other men wouldn't stand for it either.' The last words came out as a scream. But the scream became a laugh and Dulton joined in. 'A thing!' Fay poured beer on his hair and he laughed sheepishly as he watched it drip down through his fingers, still not knowing whether it were war or play. He had planned such a happy evening for himself while his wife and family were away, and Fay had won each round of her daily battle against bureaucracy and inhumanity with her woman's commonsense and moral nerve till now when she suddenly saw herself as the doctors saw her: a mere hysteric they

tried to placate; an ageing virgin they felt sorry for, making her last bid. They sat there in silence while beer dripped off the table, both waiting for the other to make the first move and indicate whether it was war or play. Then they carefully extricated themselves.

'Incidentally' Miss Fletton began in a hard amiable voice, 'talking of hysteria, Alex Hayward's been having kittens about Miss Gold and Hennock's date down here. When's it fixed for? Alex got in quite a tizzy. Soon he'll be talking about his Good Gates and his Bad Ones.' They laughed, slightly but together. The breach began to close. 'So do you really think it would help her?'

'It was just an idea, that's all.' Dulton always liked to get his patients' consent for brain-surgery, and he wasn't even all that certain that it would be appropriate in this particular case. The patient didn't want it and would never forgive him and it would go bad on him. He already had two millstones round his neck every time he went on that ward.

But Fay's accusation about his motives had upset him, and the only way he could prove their integrity was to carry the business right through. He wasn't a sadist. He was a scientist and a healer. And Fay too, he noticed, suddenly seemed less anxious to pursue her traditional crusader's role. She hadn't apologised, but her silence was the expression of apology, or concession, and having the initiative suddenly allowed Dulton's anger to grow. She had roused him and then rebuffed him. His appetite grew as well.

'Last time I let you sit in on a pre-frontal assault' he said, 'you passed out.'

'True. I was out for the count,' she dropped her soft chamois hands beside her doeskin bag and leaned over and spoke as though she had a cold in her nose, 'oud for the coud.'

'It is rather grisly and traumatic the first time round' Dulton smiled. 'Perhaps you'd better try again. Hennock will probably use a "local", and there are some pretty interesting data sometimes when you pass an electric current over the speech and visual centres.'

'But will it be gory, Ken?'

'Not with this new laser method. Catch!' Dulton tossed his journal over. 'You can do your homework first. And now I must be off. Bye-bye Fay, and thanks for the nice lunch.'

'Bye Ken,' she flapped her hand at him and repeated in a small nasal voice: 'dice dunch.'

'Any chance of seeing you tonight after the fancy-dress?' he swung back casually on the door knob. For a moment they looked at each other dispassionately, then Fay took out her eyelash mirror and tested her upper lids:

'Bay-be.' She sat down when Dulton had gone and held her handkerchief at her nostrils and cried silently. She had told her assistants to stay away on conferences, case-reviews, 'caesarian sections, or whatever you like'. She had told them to clear the room first though, but they had not, and it was littered with the things she had trained them to have - lip-mirrors still propped against the filed case-histories, gloves for handling nylons pinned by tiny pink-and-chocolate pegs from the desk lamps, and everywhere silver sandals, atomizers, discarded swabs, washed eyelashes and abandoned fingernails. When Hayward came in, she was throwing them about:

'You and your Things!' she shouted at him, cursing.

'Oh my word!' the Sister stood in the day-room of Sixteens, 'you are all busy in here. What are you making, Miss Gold?' Miss Gold, usually so unco-operative, was tearing sheets of coloured paper up and folding them roughly into hats and caps and aprons and skirts and dropping them on to the floor. 'Is this your mother's address dear?' she whispered to her. 'Is she your closest relative? Your next-of-kin?' Miss Gold stepped back with chemical green paper against her grey face. The Sister stepped back with her: 'What are you making for me to wear tonight, eh? Tell us. There's a dear! We're going to have such a lovely evening, aren't we? You won't get out of there you know. You know you won't, don't you? Come and sit in the office with me while I get my bits and bobs together and tell me all about it.'

The phone went and the Sister disappeared into the office and came out again smiling:

'That was your mother, dear. She's glad they're going to balance you up again and get you right. She sends her love and asks me to tell you that the hairdresser she works for is going to give you a free hairdo and a facial afterwards. I expect your mother's really looking forward to having you home again when the grey matter's been sorted out, and getting you back into circulation. My daughter says there are some nice little jobs going in the new Ministry that's moved down to this part of the world. Jean . . .' Miss Gold stood there bent forwards with her hands crossed over her genitals. 'Jean my duck, you'll feel ever so much better afterwards. Jean, if you don't

sign, they'll do it over your head . . . Put you under a section and then where will you be? Jean, please, we're going to have a lovely party tonight, and my daughter's waiting for me at the end of the lane. She wants me to help her match some of those new sling-back shoes for her annual leave, and I don't want to disappoint her. Do you fancy a pair? In mole or lemon? When you're well again we could go out together on the razzle eh, and buy you a pair. So be a good girl,' the Sister stooped down and looked up into Jean's face and tried to make her smile. Then she cleared the hair-dryer off a chair and carried the chair out to the tea tables on the corridor where a few patients still sat over their chopped sausage and chips and little pink and yellow cupcakes. Hot yellow custard steamed up from them, sprinkled with hundreds and thousands. The Sister placed the chair at the cakes and tried to make Jean sit down at them, at the same time calling: 'There's a dear! Tell me all about it,' and 'Someone! Relief! I'm supposed to be off duty and there's no one to relieve me ... So what are you going to wear, Jean ? Tell us. Let us into the secret? Relief! Someone . . .'

The Sister went back into her office and sat at her desk trying to write up the ward report with a blunt pencil and at the same time find something to sharpen it with and see what was wrong with the hair-dryer and slip the little coloured cakes into her shopping bag and stare down the hospital lane to see if she could see her daughter.

'Someone! Relief! Jean, they have them in midnight and albatross as well, the sling-back shoes. Someone!'

Dr Dulton stood there. 'All right, Sister. You can take yourself off' he smiled. 'I've got my keys, and I'd like to have a chat with Miss Gold.' He made a pot of coffee on the ring beside the gas-fire and laid out two cups and invited Jean in.

By six o'clock almost all the patients were out on the lawns. The nurses had launched coloured-paper streamers and bows up the walls and into the trees. The fairy lights were on, and music came out of the amplifier by the chapel:

'Rainy Days Don't Worry Me,  
There's a Rainbow that I Can See . . .'

A group of women with a nurse were watching a puppet show. Some boys were fishing for ducks at another booth. There was a trampoline. There was a display by local girl gymnasts; some Rotarians in blazers were playing 'It's a Hap-Hap-Happy Day' on jerky erratic hand bells. At the edge of the fair there was an aquarium. The patients stood round watching the fat fish hanging peacefully in the water.

'It's not really an aquarium' the owner confided to Hayward. 'It's a fish farm.' He spread a tablecloth over his stall and thrust out a bundle of filthy leaflets. 'Ladies and gentlemen ... here is the answer to our river-pollution problem. You know what the rivers are like round here. Filth,' he held up a ball of detergent froth like candyfloss. 'Feel! You're not married are you, so why are you having a good feel?' he asked Di. She giggled. 'In ten years' time there'll be no more fish in the rivers. They'll all be in tanks like this. Adaptation. That's the law of survival.' Di and Pauline wandered on. No fish in the rivers. No birds in the sky. No people on the streets. 'You can adapt yourself to almost anything, they say.' Hayward got out his car. He would take Miss Gold away.

Patients at Gledhull were interviewed weekly for the first month after their admission, then monthly, then yearly.

Jean Gold had been admitted two years before Hayward came to the hospital. She had assaulted her mother, a widow, and had been brought in as a voluntary patient:

'She's always trying to read my thoughts' she had complained.

'She tried to get inside my head.' The houseman had written this down and asked her about her sex-life, masturbation, drugs, etc. Then he had leaned over and asked softly:

'Do you ever have thoughts . . . Do you ever want to ... do anything?' She hadn't replied. He had shut up her case-book and smiled again: 'Well now, I have to take this away.' He had taken the history to Dr Dulton who was sitting at the round table under the electric light in the MO's room. Dulton had read the report and written underneath 'paranoid schizophrenia . . . ECT . . . Insulin . . . Tophranil . . . Imipramine?' then handed the book back. When Hayward looked at the book four years later he found only reports on her fits of anger, reports on various EEGs, her responses to shock treatment and the various drugs they had tried. It was always hard to find a room free to talk to patients in. There was the Sister's office, but after a few minutes the phone would go and the Sister would come in to answer it, or the door-knob would rotate slowly backwards and forwards and a nurse or a patient would be standing there waiting to catch the doctor as he came out. Now for the first time the ward was empty and quiet. The music struck up outside. The patients were all out there shaking hands with the Bishop and the Mayor and queuing for gifts from a bran-

tub organised by a priest in a food-stained cassock and sash. For the first time, Hayward had privacy with his patient:

'Jean, shall I take you away?' He knew nothing about her really except for these treatment reports and an account of an interview with her mother:

'She was a lovely child . . . No trouble at all. But just when she should have started getting interested in boys and having a good time, she let herself go and lost interest in life. I did my best. Took her out. Took her dancing. Had her weight seen to. Took her to a specialist about her periods. Got her thoroughly examined. Invited people in. Took her to Paris. But no. That wasn't good enough for her. Then some young people came to the flat next door. So I went over and explained how it was to them. Told them that she didn't get out enough. Didn't get enough fun. They promised to give me a hand with her. Then Jean just let herself go. "My affairs are quite under control" she shouted at me and tore all her clothes off her and put them on the gas stove with all the burners lit and stood there naked . . . you know ... you know what she was doing ... It was then she got a milk bottle and broke it over my head ...'

Jean stood there by the window in a paper crown and paper skirt she had made. Below, the patients in their costumes were being knit into a long chain by the social workers, one in front of the other, hands on the hips of the one in front. 'Horsie Horsie Don't You Stop' the music started. The long human caterpillar shuffled across the lawns in front of the fancy-dress judges: 'Just Let Your Feet Go Clippety-Clop.'

'Jean, shall I take you away? I think I could get you some proper psychiatric help. I'm having a partial analysis as part of my training and the Institute where I go is often willing to take disturbed people like you for a very small fee. I'm not earning much, but my sister might be willing to look after you, and later we could find you a job . . .'

'It would be very noisy though' she replied. She lifted one leg and stood there poised. He watched her.

'Yes, I see. After four years in an institution, choices are very hard to take for yourself. Even I feel that sometimes.'

'And I get such a poor night's sleep even here with my nightly tippie.'

'I'd see to that. And later on you'd be able to get a job. You were a secretary weren't you, before ?'

'Yes, but they do everything on dictaphones and tapes these days.'

'Still, once you'd got your shorthand speeds back . . .'

'But you must have a good salary' she frowned and blurted out almost angrily, 'in a high-up job like this.'

'I'm only a student, Jean. I earn less than some of the nurses here and even that is docked for food and a room next to a refractory ward where the patients prevent me from getting a bit of sleep when I've been up all night.' But she wasn't interested in his room or the meals he took at week-ends at the far corner of the overcrowded long-stay ward while at the other end the women he distinguished from patients only by their white overalls formed the old men into long lines for food, toileting, washroom, food, toileting, and more food from hot metal food cars full of steaming bruised potatoes with pilchard laid on top.

'Will you come with me?'

'Isn't Dr Dulton coming back to see me?'

'Has he been to see you? When?'

'He came this evening with another high-up specialist who is interested in my case. He is my doctor after all' she frowned and reproached him.

'And what did they say?'

'I'd rather discuss that with him when he comes back.' They both stared down at the party below. Dulton stood in a chef's apron and cap by the ox-roast waiting to carve.

'I'll take you away before the party is over. I'll find you a reputable therapist. An anti-psychiatrist, if you know what I mean. I've rung my sister incidentally, and she says . . .'

'But people are so noisy these days. So inconsiderate and dirty. So I do and I don't.'

'Don't what?'

The dark elms along their frontier brought the first drifts of night. Jean stared out, then opened her big handbag very slowly. He saw they had drugged her quite recently. Her voice was slurred. She opened and shut her mouth to try and get some saliva to speak: 'It's all very complicated,' she gazed out at the elms. 'I don't want people to read anything into this.'

'Into what?'

'You and me. You see Dr Dulton is like a father to me. He understands my peculiar personality and - my gifts.' She slowly opened her bag again. 'He knows my individual set-up.' She stood there with her mouth open trying to get enough saliva to

explain: 'I've got a date with Dr D. Dr D.'s the man for me.' Hayward pictured Dulton sitting there with his strong smooth hands; dark, authoritative, charismatic; leaning back as Jean talked, nodding, listening attentively, head held back, eyes shut:

'Go on. Let it come. Can you remember anything before that, Jean? Your father, what was he like? How did he die? Did he touch you, tickle you, as fathers sometimes do with their small daughters?'

She shook her head and thought. 'I was six when he died. He was very small, much smaller than my mother, and he always said if there were another world war, he would kill us all. We were standing alone in a field by some bushes and an aeroplane was being towed past on the back of a lorry. And the hawthorn was blackened. The foxgloves were all blackened and scorched as though the sun had come down with black rays, instead of white.'

Dulton had looked at her and nodded, 'Try to go on. What do you associate with those black rays? Have a fag, and take your time.'

'It was my birthday, and they gave me some doll's clothes and let me chime the clock and invite a friend to tea. But my father bit a piece out of the side of his glass and the friend was sent away, and my parents' bed was empty next day. Smooth and flat and cold. And the woman next door put her face through a hole in the fence and I could see the wart on her lip moving in the hole, and she put her hand over the fence and lifted me over and gave me a doll as big as myself. Its arms kept flopping on to me and I hid it behind a bush and when I went back to see if it was safe, my father was lying there with a gramophone. He was lying on his side with his back to me and the gramophone was playing:

'Ninety-nine out of a hundred want to be killed.'

'Kissed or killed, Jean?'

'And the man turned round and it wasn't my father.'

'What did he look like?'

'He looked like my father.'

'And what did he do to you?' But she could only remember a hot crackling Macintosh, a hot tarred road, and the black hot tentacles of the sun shrivelling the flowers on the bushes and making them sicken and steam.

'Do you think your father touched you that day? . . .' Dulton had put his head on one side. 'Mmm?' he smiled shyly at her. 'Mmm?' he asked gently and patiently. 'Mmm?' he gave her all the time and attentiveness that there was. 'Do you think your

father did anything to you that hot day?' But she could only remember that the lilac screwed itself up thin and black. Dulton looked at her and nodded 'Mmm?' again, his head still tilted slightly. Then he looked surreptitiously at the watch strapped on the inside of his wrist and took the Biro from his breast-pocket and wrote one word on her case-notes. One fine Biro-stroke on the page, then he closed the book and put his Biro back. There were black Biro strokes above his white coat pocket:

'I think we're beginning to get somewhere at last, Jean. But I think that for the moment, until you're less sensitised, until we've got your hyper-reactivity reduced to manageable levels, we should leave it there. This little bit of engineering might help us to help you walk slowly through that childhood experience again. It's such a tiny and subtle bit of elision that we would probably only use a 'local' so it wouldn't be all that different from the time you had those stitches put in your hand. OK?' He put his head slightly to one side and looked at her again and gave her all the time he had, all the time there was, all the space round. 'We wouldn't bother about refined and expensive techniques like this unless we thought you were a person with a strong texture and a firm hold on your imaginative experience and the ability to go through the complete complex.'

'Will you come with me then, Jean?' Dr Hayward took his keys out. But she stood there with her *presque vue*.

'Dr Dulton has started to untangle me at last' she said in a soft hoarse voice. 'I think we've almost got there.' Outside the music started up and they were dancing.

'Jean please come with me while they're all out there.' He took her hand. She withdrew it sharply.

'How rough your hands are! Like a cactus. Like a prickly pear. Dr Dulton's are rather smooth and soft. Like petals. We had a long talk and he's beginning to untangle me . . .' The blackened hawthorn; the sickened lilac; the tinkling gramophone, all three coming from behind the man's back; the man turning; was it your father? Do you think he touched you? Did he suddenly stand up? . . . Hayward looked at the case-notes lying on the Sister's desk. The one word the consultant had written down was 'florid'; stuck in the pocket at the back of the folder was the surgeon's form, and Jean had signed it. Tomorrow she would be drugged and put to bed till medical examinations, physical measurements, intelligence tests and personality assessments had been taken, filed and programmed.

Then they would shave her head. Hayward could see her standing there leaning forward while her cable of brown hair fell to the floor. When she saw, she would cross her hands over her stomach and want to change her mind.

'Never mind, Jean. It will grow again' Dulton would reassure her.' 'Sister, have you got a bit of tissue paper and a box? We'll look after it carefully Jean, I assure you. We'll keep it safe till the awkward corners have been rubbed off.' He was wrapping the warm brown hair up with his small carnivore fingers.

'No please. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I've changed my mind after all. I'm sorry to be such an awkward customer' she was laughing huskily, then bending over. 'Very well Doctor. Very good. Yes, that's comfortable. Lovely. Right. Lovely. Love-ly' the voice growing more drowsy and institutionalised. 'Very good. You must know, Doctor.'

'Jean, will you come? Please! Now.' But she stood very upright and walked away from Hayward in her paper skirt and crown like a queen to the fire-escape door and banged on it till a nurse came up and let her out and down the steps to the dance. On the way she passed a stall of streamers and took one pink roll circuitously round to where Dr Dulton stood carving the roast and unfurled it at him. It touched his shoulder. He turned and smiled:

'Right. Will you have this next dance with me, Jean ?'

'Get Off My Cloud' the singer's voice huffed saucily out off the chapel wall. Jean and Dulton were dancing together like conspirators and laughing at Hayward up there. King and Queen, Man and Woman, in a conspiracy he didn't understand. He had only been at Gledhull two years. She had been there for four, waiting for the Consultant to come.

'One Paddle Two Paddle' the music came again. The nurses began to dance with the patients. More and more of them were drawn into the dance in the republic of the meek. Jean was still dancing with the Consultant. She would win first prize as his bride. Hayward ran down the fire-escape. In the crowd he lost sight of Dulton and Jean Gold.

'Excuse me, Doctor,' a man tapped his arm, 'you won't remember me but I was the Terror of Tens' he winked. 'Five times they "did" me till they got me right . . . I'm right as rain now and I work in the supermarket down the road, and when that's closed there's always a jumble-sale to go to where they give you tea and a fag maybe. The tricks I got up to' he grinned and touched his head. 'Soon they say there won't be a

hospital here at all, because you'll have put all that grey matter right, eh ? You can still see my scars, look!' he pulled at a soft down of reddish hair that was beginning to haze over his recently shaved scalp. 'Do they provide the wigs on the National Health when you've had the "op"?'

Hayward excused himself and pushed on. Beyond the booths and the lawn laid out for dancing the grass stood rough and defiant in prickly stubble. The birds were beginning to creep heavily over it, round and round then launching themselves over the hay-bales to the brims of the hedges. A flat veil of mist hung beyond, then the black portcullis of the elms that were their frontier, then the first lights of Severnbridge.

It seemed to come nearer and nearer each week, the silver and blue dish of its motorway signs hung in the air suddenly with the words 'Gledhull' written up as prominently as Newcastle or Cardiff.

'Mind you' the ex-patient was saying, following him along, 'the doctors still take a great interest in my case. And they let me come to all the socials and bingo's. I won a quarter of tea again last week. Mind you, I've had my downfalls, many of them, but the doctors and nurses here have never let me down.' Night slumped down suddenly between the arms of the trees. The city clicked up another pan of lights. 'It may seem a bit of a downfall at the time, but in the long run it's the whole community benefits' the man went on, 'and they say, they do say, you can live without almost anything these days. Your liver, your kidney, even your heart, eh?' he ran his fingers through his downy juvenile new hair.

Hayward would get in touch with the press and publicize the recent advances in neuro-surgery. But his voice sounded infantile and unconvincing as he pushed his way calling to Dr Dulton through the crowd. His anger he saw had been institutionalized and put to bed, and Dulton and Jean Gold were still dancing. It wasn't rape after all.. Human dignity was after all an adventitious thing, and it was after all a hospital wedding. The patients of Jean's ward were laughing and clapping as the Consultant paraded his bride down the passage they made - lining the route for the prize-winning couple's triumph.

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