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"The Garbage Men Are Friendly"

"JUST let me sit down," she said. "A chair or a table or anything, just as long as I can sit down."

"You certainly look exhausted," I remarked. "But why? You a teacher with three or four weeks' holiday before you! You should be glowing with exuberance and springing with energy."

"I've been manpowered into a hospital," she said. "I'm now a wardsmaid. I start work at 7.0 a.m. and work till 2.30; then I start again at 5 and work till 7.0 p.m., and most of that time I wash dishes."

I covered the tea dishes with a tea-towel and led her quickly into another room.

"Do you find you can apply the principles of child psychology as a wardsmaid," I asked her, "or do you need a different perspective? Perhaps this experience will give you a clearer grasp of the problems of mathematics?"

"It gives me a clearer grasp of the problems of wardsmaids," she corrected. "The work is strenuous, the atmosphere depressing. Of course one does get acclimatised, but a wardsmaid's job couldn't be called a soft occupation. But it has its bright patches—it's interesting. The young doctors are a study. The



No, it was not like this!

wardsmaids must never step into a ward while the doctor is in attendance. They must never on any account speak to a doctor. A doctor never on any account speaks to a wardsmaid. In the passages they seem to draw their coats to one side when they pass us. The nurses are so busy they have no time to talk, but quite often they are pleasant. The woman in charge of wardsmaids is very helpful, and the garbage men are friendly. It's Christian names all round for the wardsmaids with them."

"But never speak of dishes again," she went on. "Our ward is very big, and every bed is taken by a patient on a diet. Each patient is served at each meal with a dozen different foods, and each food is served on a different little dish. This happens three times a day, and these dishes are only a proportion of the things we have to wash. And of course there are the polishing and the cleaning. And the cups of tea. This woman wants hers weak, that woman wants hers strong. 'Empty half this out (continued on next page)