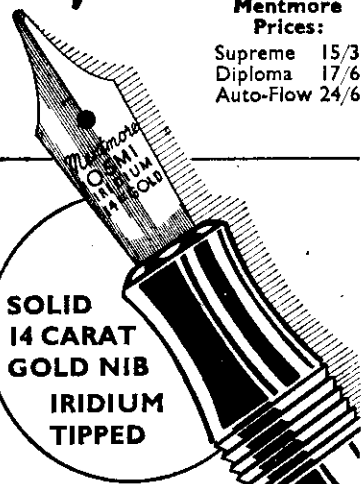


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VJ DAY IN THE MATERNITY WING

Written for "The Listener"
by M.B.

THE nurse darts in. "Important announcement at 11 a.m.!" she hisses, then on down the corridor with her clanking tray.

"I don't believe it," says the Latest Admission. Her soul is bitter. She was admitted on Sunday, August 12, and hounded through the day with exhortations to produce her baby on VJ Day, only to learn on Monday that she had merely produced him on August 12.

The nurse is in again. "It's official," she shouts. "It's over!"

"Huh," grunts the Latest Admission.

"Hurrah!" shrieks the Youngest Inhabitant, bouncing from prone lying to an upright position.

"Don't do that, Mrs. Todd," agonises Nurse D—, her official training reasserting itself. "The correct way is to bring up one knee at a time, *slowly*."

Mrs. Todd is temporarily abashed. The nurse departs.

"Do you think," asks the Youngest Inhabitant, "they might give us something special for dinner?"



The Senior Patient and the Latest Admission spring to attention.

"Chicken?" breathes the Latest Admission.

The Senior Patient counts back on her fingers. "Last Wednesday was Boiled Mutton. Probably get that to-day."

All three sigh.

"Never mind," says the Youngest Inhabitant. "They might think up something special for tea." She has a naturally cheerful disposition.

"Huh," grunts the Latest Admission. Outside sirens wail, horns blare.

"It's true," says the Latest Admission incredulously.

The normally hushed corridors are filled with riotous noise. Nurses gather in shrieking groups. "Rule Britannia" wars amicably with "The Stars and Stripes For Ever," and a solitary contralto remarkable for volume rather than tone, bravely breasts the surges of "The Red Flag."

"I want to sing," shouts the Youngest Inhabitant, giving a double bounce.

"Nobody's stopping you," says the Senior Patient encouragingly.

The Youngest Inhabitant gets through four bars of "Roll Out the Barrel," and quavers to a standstill.

PEALS of laughter echo along the corridor and burst into the room with the arrival of Nurse A—, Union Jack at cap and belt. She proceeds to hurl screens round and distribute wash basins, with a gay abandon which the Senior Patient hopes is all Natural High Spirits.

"What's up, nurse?" asks the Youngest Inhabitant.

"Haven't you heard?" giggles Nurse. "The war's over."

The Latest Admission moans and turns her face to the wall. She is not altogether to blame for her third-day depression.

Nurse relents. "Well," she says, "it's the husband of No. 13—she had twins an hour ago. I rang him to say it was all over bar the shouting, and when Sister met him on the doorstep just now, he had four bottles of sherry and said, 'That's for the shouting!' With a neat flick of one wrist she deploys another screen.

Perhaps *not* all natural high spirits, thinks the Senior Patient. But after all it is VJ Day.

12.30. Dinner consists of boiled mutton, cabbage and potato, followed by steamed date pudding.

"Ugh," says the Latest Admission, and turns her face to the wall.

3.0. Visiting Hour. Frantic last-minute room tidying is being undertaken by Nurse A—.

"They're all waiting to be let in," she wails. "Four deep, and at least half of them Men!" The three patients sit up, reach eagerly for mirrors and powder puffs.

"Ted may be here!" shrieks the Latest Admission. She looks positively animated. From outside there is a steady buzz and murmur. The doors are opened, and down the corridors comes the surge of tramping feet, laughter, and bursts of song. The visitors have been celebrating.

The Youngest Inhabitant has no visitors. She sits behind her screen attempting to read what has been, up till now, an absorbing whodunit. She amuses herself pouring water from her jug into her glass from a height to see if it will get froth on, but it doesn't. Not the right sort of froth.

Four o'clock. The gong. The visitors trickle reluctantly out. A burst of loud laughter in the corridor, a scuffle and a round of applause. Nurse J— pops her head round the door. "Nurse B— has been kissed by a visitor!"

"A husband?" asks the Senior Patient hopefully, but Nurse has departed to add her voice to the welter of congratulations and the cries of "encore."

6 p.m. Tea. Scrambled egg, and scones instead of bread and butter. "So Cook did make a special effort!" exults that nice child, the Youngest Inhabitant.

9.30 and Lights Out. Each of our three patients sinks thankfully into the privacy

(continued on next page)

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