

# HOPE

THERE was a disciplined if somewhat indifferent air about Ward No. 1 as it awaited the Doctor's visit. Its bare stained floors were brown and burnished and every bed immaculately smooth and white. The patients lay very still as though dreading the prospect of another sweltering day.

Colvin was watching the haze of heat already visible on the bitumen road and the iron roofs of the distant town. Beyond the lawns outside the windows, the gardeners were going to work. Every day since his arrival, he had envied them with all his heart. But to-day he was sleepy and did not care.

This drowsiness was increasing lately. It was heavy and persistent like the effect of a drug. Even when he awoke in the morning he was tired—so tired that he resented the necessary disturbances of routine.

If only they'd leave him alone in the morning . . . the inevitableness of this



confounded basin of water and the absurd pretence of having a wash. He agreed heartily with old Highley now—old Highley who had been in pain for weeks. It seemed a long time now since his groans and complaints had ceased for good. Old Highley sitting up in bed as he scrubbed resentfully at his plate mumbled through his gums.

"Half-past-four in the morning, damn them! Just when a man's got to sleep.

But oh, to hell with the patients! It suits the staff. That's all that matters."

This was the way he felt himself now. After breakfast, this sleepiness was worse than ever. Once he had felt that he must not give way to it; but now it didn't matter. He remembered the words of another patient, uttered with the dogmatism of an old campaigner.

"I've seen a good few patients get sleepy like that and they all died."

A SHORT STORY  
Written for "The Listener" by  
STEWART WALTON

Colvin was wondering vaguely why the recollection of this did not disturb him.

THE gardeners were hoeing potatoes. There must be some heat out there now. Very soon, when the sun's rays were striking the roof of the building, they would know all about it in the ward. Then patients would be no longer still. Clothes would be flung off and clammy feet thrust from beneath the sheets as each man moved restlessly in a futile quest for coolness. It was the intolerable length of these summer days . . . but the evenings were the worst . . . tea over at five o'clock and it wasn't dark till well after nine. It was then, when the official time for sleep had begun, that Colvin's mind remained obstinately awake. There was no beauty for him in the oppressive twilight. He would lie and watch the green walls of the women's wards grow dim and slowly fade. Sometimes from the darkened building a patient waved a lighted cig-

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