

UTSIDE

"C HE'LL have to go to hospital." The doctor's tone was brisk, definite. Something inside me turned over heavily. I spoke but made no sound.

"Best place for her, you know," said the doctor cheerfully. "Got a bit beyond you and me, eh? Oh, no danger. Needs experts, though. She'll love it, of course. My kids would break their necks to get back. Look after them marvellously.

"When -

"Oh, as soon as possible. Doesn't need anything with her. This afternoon, say.

Give this note to the ambulance man. see to everything. Good

And he went. note was sealed.

I sat down and tried to think. She seemed to She be getting better. didn't look so ill. Why couldn't 'he have told me something? I jerked my mind back. I must tell Elizabeth.

"Darling, the doctor thinks you'll get better more quickly in hospital. In the children's hospital. You'll we with a whole lot of other little girls and boys. you like to go?" Would

"Oh, I'd love that, Mummy. Could I stay a week?" She was weakly thrilled and full of importance. Won't Ann be surprised when she comes home from school? You'll tell them at school that I'm in hospital, won't you, Mummy?"

Ring the ambulance. Get her dressing gown. Brush. Comb. Sponge-bag. Keep doing little things. Keep on the surface.

THE ambulance man was kind. He brought beautiful red blankets and he made little jokes for Elizabeth. At the hospital he took charge. There were forms to fill in, a young doctor who muttered over the note and gave Elizabeth a few tests. Then up the hill to the children's hospital.

This time the ambulance man lifted Elizabeth out and carried her into a bright clean ward that looked empty and unlived in in spite of the beds. Children were sitting outside in dressing gowns. Out on the sun-porch a baby was

A plump fair little nurse took off Elizabeth's pyjamas and put on hospital ones. They were too small and her arms stuck out of the sleeves.

Then another nurse came in briskly to take particulars. I tried to make myself be calm and efficient too, but I kept stammering and repeating myself.

"When can I find out" I began, and she said brightly, "Perhaps you'd like to talk to Sister. Come out to the office when you're ready."

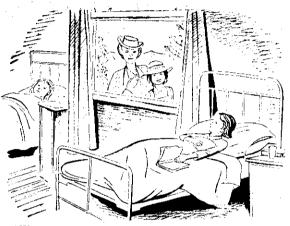
Now I had to say good-bye. "We'll come on Sunday, darling. We'll all come on Sunday.'

"Good-bye, Mummy. Tell them at school."

Written for "The Listener" by ALLONA PRIESTLEY

In a queer way she seemed to be just accepting things as they happened to her. It was a blessing, but it worried me, somehow.

I knocked on Sister's open door. A blue starched voice said "Yes?" I asked my questions humbly and got crisp, courteous, adequate replies. Then she, said, "You realise that this will be a matter of months. While she is here you won't be able to see her."



"We took to the illicit pastime of window visiting."

"But it says . . ."

"I'm sorry."

take . . . months?"

"Not at all. You may write, but please don't send expensive presents. If you would like to walk back in the open, the door to the garden is on the left."

I was left looking at the door in the long brown passage.

"Proper bitches, some of them," said a rather battered homely little woman sitting on the seat by the door. "But they look after the kids something wonderful. Don't you worry."

To the left and in to the garden, Don't you dare cry, you fool. Think of something to do. In the tram, Keep thinking. I'll write letters with pictures. I'll send a little parcel every day. Friday she said I could see the doctor. Why don't they tell you something.

At home she was gone, the bed all scrambled and the picture she had been trying to draw lying on the mat.

THAT night a friend discovered that she knew a nurse in the children's hospital. She rang and the kind nurse went over to see how she was. came back with the news that Elizabeth was quite settled and happy.

"I'll look in in the morning and take her some fruit, and I'll ask if there's anything she wants," she said.

You wouldn't believe what a differ-

ence that made. Just to know something. Not to be cut off completely.

After that we settled down to the letters and little parcels. Rings every few days from the kind nurse and her friends, trips to the hospital with baskets





ANKORIA

contented

baby ---

