

Short Stories By The World's Greatest Writers.

PATIENT NO. 20

By THEODORE RAUDAHL.

The hospital surgeon had finished his last round through the hospital and I turned the gas low and fixed the patients up for the night. Suddenly I heard hurried steps in the hall outside and Dr. Fuller came in, accompanied by Sister Cecilia and the patient for the only empty bed in the ward.

"This is Mrs. Thomas," she explained, and I looked astonished at an elegantly dressed young lady, who did not seem to be very sick.

"Just give her a little bromide, Sister Iris, nothing else, and I will examine her thoroughly in the morning. Good night."

The surgeon left and Sister Cecilia and I began to undress the new patient. Her clothes and underwear were exceedingly expensive and marked with the name "Lillian" embroidered in white silk.

While we were undressing her she remained perfectly still, but when I attempted to take down her pompadour she took hold of my hand and stared at me.

As I knew it was important not to excite the patient, I let her hair remain as it was and put her to bed.

"Poor young woman," said Sister Cecilia. "She suddenly became insane while in the hospital where she was living and did considerable damage to the furniture in her room."

Persons could get near her. She may have another attack during the night and if you need any assistance just ring the bell; I shall not undress."

Sister Cecilia left me and I went over to Mrs. Thomas's bed and handed her the bromide. She took it willingly, looking at me with her brown eyes, but she turned away from her again I saw her spit the bromide in the cuspidor on the other side of the bed. I went back to her bed but found that she was already quiet and had closed her eyes. So I left her alone.

Everything was quiet for a while, and I sat down at the end of the ward to take a little rest. I was very tired and felt that unless I made a strong effort I would be very apt to fall asleep, but suddenly I heard somebody whisper my name. I sat up straight and listened. I sat up straight and listened. I sat up straight and listened.

"Sister Iris," she said distinctly. "The voice came from No. 20."

I hurried to her bed. Mrs. Thomas set up and again looked at me with a peculiar expression in her dark eyes.

"Please come a little nearer, Sister Iris," she said in a perfectly natural tone. "I have something to tell you."

I thought that she was about to reach the button of the electric bell. "You do not need to be afraid, Sister," the patient said; "you will not need the electric bell, I am not going to do you any harm."

I did not let go, however, but waited for her to tell me what she wanted.

"Sister Iris," she said softly, "can I trust you?"

"Yes, you can trust me entirely," I replied.

She seemed to think for a moment, then she took hold of my hand and said: "I do trust you and thank you with all my heart. Now, do you know, Sister, I am really not sick at all and there is no reason why I should be here."

"I smiled a little, because hundreds of patients had told me that same story before."

"The whole thing is only a trick. I am being persecuted by relatives to get rid of me that they may get possession of my money. When I perceived that they were after me, I simulated this attack that I might be arrested and brought to an asylum, and in this manner I escaped from those who are after me. I see in your face, Sister, that you do not believe me, but as sure as there is a God in Heaven, I am telling you the truth."

I began to believe her.

"But what do you intend to do now?" I asked.

"While I am under observation here," she said, "I will play my part that I am insane, so as to be allowed to stay here, because I am safe here and after while I will make my escape with your assistance."

"Impossible," I replied coldly. "I dare not keep the matter a secret, it will be my duty to tell the chief physician to-morrow morning."

"That you will never do," she said determinedly, and her dark eyes were full of fire. "I mean," she added softly, "you will not have the heart to do it. Remember, Sister, that by doing so you will expose a poor defenseless woman to a thousand dangers."

"But we have police, law and justice here and we have to do is to apply for protection."

"That is true enough, but I have always had a dread of police. Besides we can keep silent and what can I hurt you to help me? I only ask you to keep silent and I shall pay you well for it."

She put her hand to her pompadour and pulled out a hundred kronor bill and pressed it into my hand.

This was a great temptation for poor ones who had never in their lives possessed that much money at once, especially as she had a cripple brother whom she must support.

I took the bill and promised to remain silent as long as my conscience would allow me to do so. She then

ked me and then lay down and a few minutes afterward fell asleep.

During the next days she played her part as an insane person very well. The physicians declared her to be incurable, and arrangements were made to have her sent to the special ward for this class of patients within a few days.

One evening, shortly before I began my work for the night I came into the office to report. The professor who was there in charge of the asylum showed me a telegram which had just been sent from London and only contained the words, "It is burning."

It was meant for Mrs. Thomas.

I immediately guessed that these words contained the secret warning for my patient.

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