

A Little Advice
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Mrs. Tremblay's hand skimmed the surface of the bedside table, landing on her glasses. She pulled them to her face, looked around the room and with a huge sigh broke the early morning silence.

"Not much good anymore." she blurted, dropping her hands and the glasses into her lap. She was there with a broken hip and had occupied one half of a tiny double room on the top floor of the hospital for several weeks. A new roommate, Betty Johnstone had arrived yesterday, but Mrs. Tremblay couldn't remember her name. There she was already up and reading in a chair beside her bed.

Breakfast was coming; Mrs. Tremblay could hear the rustling of trays and footsteps in the corridor. Not that she was hungry. Lost in her thoughts, she didn't notice a young man enter the room and set the breakfast tray beside her bed. Only when he turned to leave did she speak.

"Doctor, oh Doctor" she called out, "I am very worried about my stomach. I have no appetite. What can be the problem?"

The young man stopped, retraced his steps and placed his hand lightly on hers, "Ah dear, a loss of appetite sometimes indicates a loss of desire for life. You need to have a project, something exciting that would give you a reason to live."

Mrs. Tremblay stared at the young man. The look of anticipation on her face began a slow dissolve, shifting first to surprise then to confusion. The orderly glanced around and with the sweep of his arm, continued, "It's almost Christmas; why, you could... decorate your room, or, you could send some Christmas cards. A sudden ringing in the corridor stopped him abruptly, "I have to go. Here's your breakfast dear. Now, I'll be back later to pick up your tray, and I want to see it empty! Empty, you hear?"

Mrs. Tremblay's roommate, Betty woke suddenly. It was still the middle of the night, and Mrs. Tremblay was making a commotion again. She had been extremely agitated the entire day and more so all night. She had called the night nurse several times, but this time, something was different. This time, Mrs. Tremblay was loud and was frantically screaming, "Police, Police." Betty rang the buzzer for the night nurse. She rang the buzzer again and this time she did not let go until she heard the nurse enter the room.

"You called?" the nurse spoke sharply, looking Betty. She flicked on the light and before Betty was able to respond, a tiny moan came from across the room. The light now filled the room, but did nothing to help Betty and the nurse understand the shapeless white and red speckled heap that gently swayed back and forth in the middle of the bed. As Betty and the nurse moved closer, they noticed a disconnected I.V. tube dangling off the side of Mrs. Tremblay's bed and the formless white mass began to reveal its strange composition. Anything soft and white that Mrs. Tremblay had been able to pull from her night table was piled onto her body. A facecloth and a pair of socks hung from her head. Underclothing draped her shoulders. Squares of tissue and tiny swabs of cotton clung here and there on her arms and face, glued with dabs of blood. An open mouth, a

whimpering sing-song and gentle swaying movement was all that revealed a human presence behind the dangling bits of white and red.

“She looks like a giant shaving accident,” the nurse thought as she approached, but her urge to laugh was stifled by the look on Mrs. Tremblay’s face. Blank eyes focused far into the distance, then widened. Mrs. Tremblay arms reached out rattling the sidebars of the bed, then suddenly wailed like a child, "Mama come. Come quick. Help me out of here!"

Although her morning tray was already beside her, it was not the smell of breakfast that pulled Betty from her deep sleep - the tiny bit of sleep she had finally been able to secure after such a disturbed night. It was a sound, the sound of cutlery and the sound of eating that finally woke her. Betty pulled back the curtain that separated the room. It was Mrs. Tremblay. She was sitting upright in her bed smacking her lips and chewing loudly. Between each bite, she scraped the bottom of the bowl with her spoon. Her eyes rose from her food, she turned towards Betty and spoke, “Mama, why don’t you eat something?”

Before Betty was able to pull herself up into a full sitting position, the orderly breezed into the room.

"Good morning ladies. Well, look at that! Mrs. Tremblay, you've licked your plate clean, no problem with appetite this morning, is there?"

“And you Mrs. Johnstone, Why so sleepy? You haven't eaten a drop."

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