

Virgo: Service

Barbara guided the patient to a chair on the sun-porch, gently fluffed up the pillow behind her head, and smiled. "Now, Mrs. Simmons, if you need anything else, just press the buzzer."

"Bless you, my dear," said Mrs. Simmons, squeezing Barbara's hand. "You Junior Volunteers are all such sweet girls, I don't know what this hospital would do without you."

Barbara cast a quick glance around the room, picked up some magazines from the floor, turned another patient's wheelchair so he would not look directly into the Sun, and hurried down the hall with a vase of wilting flowers. She was putting the vase away when the head nurse came up. "Could you read to Mr. Wilkins for a while?" she asked. "He's very restless today."

"Sure," said Barbara, and went to the room where old Mr. Wilkins, whose eyes would be bandaged for another week, was lying. "How about some more 'Oliver Twist'?" she asked. "I can't wait to see what happens next."

"Is that my favorite young lady?" Mr. Wilkins smiled for the first time that day. "When I get these bandages off the first person I want to see is you, especially if you are as pretty as your voice."

Barbara giggled, and was glad Mr. Wilkins could not see her blush. She sat down and began to read, glancing up every now and then to smile at the look of contentment on the old man's face. After 20 minutes he quietly fell asleep, and she put down the book and tiptoed out of the room.

A harassed-looking student nurse bustled along the

corridor, pushing a cart full of instruments. "Oh, Barb, are you free? Could you put these away for me? I'm going to miss class if I don't go right now and I can't just leave this stuff."

"Gimme," laughed Barbara, "and relax!" The student nurse thrust the cart at her gratefully and hurried away. Barbara continued down the corridor, stopping to adjust a patient's bed, fill another patient's water pitcher, and direct some visitors to the right room, before arriving at the storeroom. She had just finished putting the instruments away when a doctor came in and said, "Ah, there you are, Miss Peters."

Barbara, still not used to being called "Miss," tried not to show her surprise, and said, "Can I do something for you, Doctor?"

"Yes," he answered. "I have a new patient in 115 — Mrs. Gabriel. She's being operated on tomorrow and is very nervous and worried about her children, and besides that she doesn't speak too much English. If you could hold her hand a while and try to calm her down it would be a big help."

As Barbara entered 115, she saw Mrs. Gabriel, hands tightly clenched and almost in tears, sitting on the edge of her bed. "Oh, you don't look very comfortable at all, Mrs. Gabriel," she said. "I think we can do better than that. Let me fix this bed and then you can sit up in it."

Before Mrs. Gabriel could say a word, she found herself propped up in a raised bed, the picture of her family on the nightstand turned so that she could see it, and a glass of water in her hand. "What darling children!" exclaimed Barbara, admiring the picture. "How old are they?" Soon Mrs. Gabriel, in broken English, was talking enthusiastically about her children, and when the Intern came in 15 minutes later, he found the patient and Barbara laughing heartily about

a prank that the youngest little boy had played on his brother.

After that, Barbara helped deliver supper trays, straightened up the visitors' lounge, and cleared trays away when the patients finished eating. She was amazed to hear the head nurse say, "Barb, isn't it time for you to go now?" and looked at the clock to see that it was after 6. "Gosh, yes," she said, "Mom must be waiting!" She grabbed her coat, said good-bye to the nurse, and ran outside to see her mother's car parked near the door. "Whew," she sighed, as she sank down into the seat and turned to smile at her mother.

"Busy afternoon, dear?" her mother asked, easing the car out into traffic.

"I'll say! I didn't stop once. Sorry I'm late but I guess I wasn't watching the clock. Don't know where the time went."

"That must mean you were working hard," Mother laughed. "What did you do today?"

Barbara began to tell of her afternoon's work, and the more she thought about all the things she had done, the more enthusiastic she became, and the more details she recounted. They were almost home when she stopped and thought for a minute.

"Mom," she said, "remember that time in church when the minister said that service was *satisfying*? I didn't know what he meant, but I think I do now. I really *enjoyed* this afternoon, and I think it was because I was helping people. It was *fun-work*, not real work."

Mother laughed. "Oh, it was real work, all right, but real work, and real service, *can* be fun. If you always remember what you learned today, dear, you will have a very satisfying, and a very useful life."