

By Alice L. Price, R.N.

Do you know what an incinerator is? I've been trying all night to find out, and I can't. I don't know whether it's something comfortable and pleasant or something as cramped and stuffy as this old cupboard. Anyway, tomorrow I'm to be put in one. The Superintendent of nurses said so, and what she says goes.

I'm glad I'm going to have a change, I've been here twenty years and my life hasn't been an easy one. I feel old and tired and useless. Maybe an incinerator is the place for old-worn-out Sally Chase dolls just as a pasture is the place for old, worn-out race horses like Man O'War who was in his prime when I first came here, twenty years ago.

I remember the day when I was finished at the factory and placed on a rack with eight hundred other hospital dolls. We were all five feet three inches tall, all our faces presenting the same expression of indifference, and our hair combed in the same slick and simple style. Every sawdust heart was eager to be on the way to some hospital classroom. All of us were named Sally Chase.

I had been on the rack only an hour when they selected me to fill an order from a hospital in Indiana. With pleasurable anticipation I learned that I was to leave the factory very soon and the other Sallys were plainly envious of me. None of them voiced a protest but Sally number 627 glared at me formidably as I was swept past her by a packer who was to prepare me for the journey.

I was lifted from the rack, wrapped in tissue paper, and packed in a large wooden box with excelsior all around to keep me from bumping against the sides. The top of the box was labeled "Sally Chase. Handle with care. This side up". Even so, I rode most of the way face down and stood on my head for three hours in a freight station.

I arrived at my destination on September first, nineteen eighteen, and was promptly delivered to the hospital, where the janitor unboxed me and carried me down to the classroom. He may have been a good janitor but I didn't like him. He was grimy, and rough, and he smelled of tobacco. He evidently didn't know the first thing about how to treat a lady, for he carried me all the way downstairs by my neck, which he grasped in one dirty fist. He put me in a chair and didn't even bother to lift me when I slumped to one side in a most awkward and uncomfortable position. About an hour later the instructor came in and put me to bed in one of those abbreviated, tied-in-the-back, hospital gowns which the patients dislike so heartily, and not without reason.

I was very tired and the bed was more comfortable than the box had been, so I soon fell asleep. Later that evening I was wakened and subjected to a thorough examination by various members of the staff, most of whom seemed to approve of me.

The next morning I met the first class of student nurses who were to be taught how to care for patients by first taking care of me. I had to remain in the classroom so I heard all the lectures and learned a great deal about the patients--and about the nurses, too! The first class was a demonstration of the proper method of bathing a patient. The instructor lectured on the subject and then gave me a bath to demonstrate the correct method of procedure. The students asked a lot of questions. I felt delightfully clean and refreshed, and decided that my life was going to be one of ease and comfort but not for long. That teacher had given me a most adequate bath, but she

asked one of the students to give me another. I concealed my disgust and submitted to a second bath, and then a third! Within the next two days I had Twelve baths! I should have guessed then how unbearable my life would be, but it took me several days to comprehend just how much I would be called upon to endure.

From that time on, everything that happened to me happened in twelves. The morning the teacher demonstrated the method of giving a retention enema, I had twelve of them in three hours. I had my right leg put in a splint twelve times in one morning. Another morning I had twelve hypodermic injections. I had my hair shampooed twelve times and then, the next day, my stomach was pumped twelve times.

That was the morning that Skel came to the classroom---and into my life. He came in a box as I had and was unpacked by the same janitor, who handled him rather hesitantly and seemed to be relieved when he had hung him, by the top of his skull, to a hook in the wooden cabinet made especially for skeletons.

Skel immensely enjoyed that first morning at my expense. He was delighted when they pumped my stomach again and again, and after class remarked that "they pumped all day but didn't strike oil." I didn't mind if my suffering amused him, but I hated to hear him laugh. Every time he so much as chuckled all 206 bones rattled.

My first year in the classroom was rather difficult for me, but even though Skel was unsympathetic he kept me from being lonely. We became very friendly and, if circumstances had been different, might in time have felt "that way" about each other.

One evening a mischievous student came down and dressed him in a suit that belonged to one of the interns. Skel really looked handsome in that suit, especially after she placed a cigar in his mouth. I was proud of him and told him so. I shouldn't have, because his chest swelled so that he popped four coat buttons.

The student then dressed me in a formal gown that belonged to her roommate and, with the aid of rouge and lipstick, made me look years younger. Skel had asked me to go out with him several times, but I had always refused. He was so boney. On this particular evening I would have gone with him but he was so busy admiring himself that he didn't ask me. Next day our lovely clothes were taken away from us, so once again Skel became a mere frame of a man, rattling around in his cabinet, and I was just a dummy that had her face washed.

Sometime later, Skel again became enamored of me after I received my annual oversupply of baths from the beginning students. I did feel fresh and lovely after the dust of the summer had been removed from my well-worn leather skin although with each layer of dust that I lost went part of my original schoolgirl complexion. But Skel pouted and sulked in his cabinet when I consistently ignored his advances, and after Baby Chase was brought into the classroom, he lavished all his affections on the new-comer. Men are like that. I accepted the loss of his attentions in a philosophical manner and turned to other interests.

The year of 1925 was especially trying. Some of the students, who were always up to pranks, dressed me in a student's uniform, put me in a chair in the library, and dropped red ink down the front of my white apron. I didn't object to that, but when they plunged a large butcher knife into my chest, I felt that they had gone too far, I'm sure the girls meant no actual harm, but from that day my health failed. I had a severe sawdust hemorrhage, and I never fully recovered.

During the next ten years I felt my charm waning as I gradually deteriorated into an old, worn doll. The sawdust was all gone from my left leg, four fingers had been torn from my right hand, the leather on my face and neck was rough and spotted. My arms and legs were full of holes made by the hundreds of hypodermic and hypodermoclysis injections. My abdomen was seared and burned by the application of hot turpentine stupes. My back was warped from many alcohol rubs. I had been prepared for so many different operations, and treated for so many ailments that my resistance was lowered to practically zero.

When not long ago, a radiant new "Sally Chase" was brought to the hospital and I was folded up and bundled back on a shelf in this dark cupboard. I'm in a very uncomfortable position. My right arm is asleep, and my left leg has a cramp in it. My back hurts too. And I don't like being alone here in the dark.

But tomorrow I'm being taken out. This morning I heard the superintendent of nurses say, "tomorrow we'll put old Sally Chase in the incinerator." I distinctly heard her say incinerator.

If I were back in the classroom, I'd look that word up in the dictionary-- or maybe ask Skel what it meant. I wonder if he hasr ever been in one. I wonder what an incinerator is.

A PATIENT PATIENT

I think that I shall never see
a patient who so patiently
lets strangers wash her feet and face,
as our phlegmatic Mrs. Chase.
A patient who in calm repose,
Lets "probies" irrigate her nose,
Or when they give her a hot pack,
And happen to expose her back,
She never murmurs nor complains,
But in her state of calm remains,
A credit to the human race,
A blessing on thee Mrs. Chase!

*Lea Smith

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THE M. J. CHASE CO. INC. HELPED WITH THE WRITING OF THIS POEM*

YOU WILL NOTICE IN ONE OF THEIR LETTERS WHERE THEY STATE SO.