

St Jo's Hospital



Desperate Measures

Sue Welford

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Desperate Measures

The news was on.

'Mum...?' Emma could tell something was wrong.

Mrs Taylor waved her hands. 'Sh...'

They were showing pictures of a train crash... carriages were piled up on each other like toys. Ambulances and fire engines lined up, their lights flashing.

Mrs Taylor turned to Emma, her face white and stricken.

'It's just outside Ashton,' she said, her voice breaking. 'And I think it's the train your dad's on!'

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Sue Welford



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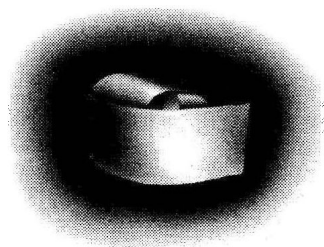
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‘Emma, do this.’

‘Emma, do that.’

‘Can you please help me, Nurse?’

‘Emma... cubicle 4, quickly please...!’

Hurry, hurry... it had been like that all day long in the Accident and Emergency department of St Josephine’s Hospital Trust where Emma Taylor worked as a junior staff nurse.

Sister Rosemary Page, the triage nurse, had been tearing her hair out. It was

Rosemary's job to sort out patients in order of priority and today had been a complete nightmare. Charge Nurse, Mark Hunter, was in one of his foul moods and even Jean Baker, one of the receptionists, usually cool, calm and collected, had lost her temper with a woman who'd turned up with nothing but a bad cold.

Emma was beginning to wish she'd chosen another career.

The hospital, known as St Jo's for short, was in the town of Ashton and Emma had started there after leaving nursing college a few months previously.

By the time she came off duty that evening, though, things had quietened down. Nevertheless, she handed over to the night staff with a sigh of relief.

'It's been absolute murder,' she told her friends Sue Jenkins and Penny Brown when she met them walking together across the hospital grounds towards the nurses' block.

Emma had been at college with Sue and Penny and when the chance came for them to share a flat they jumped at it. Sue worked on Buttercup, St Jo's children's ward and Penny had a job on Primrose,

one of the hospital's busy surgical wards.

'Mark had a fit because someone brought their dog in with them,' Emma told them. 'Then the dog had a fit because it had to be tied up outside.' She giggled. 'It's been more like a day at the zoo than a day in Casualty.'

'It's always like a zoo on Buttercup if you ask me.' Sue went up the stairs first. 'We had four admissions today. The whole place was going barmy. Sister Kapoor threw a wobbly because I was five minutes late off break, Nurse Roberts fell over a plastic bike one of the kids had left in the middle of the floor and Julia went off sick with a migraine headache.'

Julia Findlay was the consultant paediatrician for the children's ward.

'I wasn't really surprised,' Sue chuckled. 'That place is enough to give anyone a headache.'

She had to step over a pile of cardboard boxes, and black bin sacks to put her key in the front door.

'Looks as if someone's moving in,' Penny said eyeing the stuff curiously. The flat next door had been empty for some time.

Inside, Penny yanked off her cap and

took the clips from her long, dark hair. It fell down around her shoulders.

‘Wow, that feels better. Now all I need is to get these wretched shoes off.’

‘I wonder who the new neighbour’s going to be?’ Emma followed them in.

‘Whoever it is, they’ve got a lot of stuff,’ Penny remarked.

‘It’s probably a woman then,’ Emma chuckled. ‘Guys never have that much clobber.’

‘Yeah, sports bags, stereos and smelly socks,’ Penny said with a grin.

Inside, Emma went into her room, took off her cap and threw it on her bed.

Each of them had their own bedroom and they shared a kitchen and bathroom. There was a communal lounge downstairs but they preferred to gather round the kitchen table.

Emma stripped off her uniform and hung it up behind the door. It sounded as if someone in hobnail boots was jumping up and down in the flat next door. She felt like thumping on the wall but thought better of it. Definitely not a good way to start a relationship with a new neighbour.

She dragged on her jeans and T-shirt,

then sat in front of the mirror raking a comb through her short, strawberry blonde hair. Her room was in a state as usual. Clothes everywhere. Books, magazines, a stack of CDs on the dressing table. She did *try* to keep it tidy. Thank goodness her mum didn't visit very often. She'd be absolutely horrified.

She sighed. Maybe on Friday she'd give her room a good going over, although she could think of a lot more interesting things to do on her first day off for a week.

Emma went through into the kitchen to make them all a cup of coffee. As usual the sink was full of dirty dishes left over from the night before.

Sue came in full of apologies. 'Sorry,' she said, 'I meant to do it this morning, but I got up late.' She began filling the bowl with hot water.

'Yeah, yeah, I know,' Emma grinned. 'Did you cook one of your gran's famous Caribbean recipes?' She fished three mugs from the pile and rinsed them.

'No,' Sue said. 'Egg and chips.'

Emma chuckled. She had been out with Simon, Penny and Pete, Penny's boyfriend, the previous evening. They'd gone to the

local Chinese restaurant for a meal because it had a special offer on that night. Sue had wanted to stay in.

Simon Young was one of the Casualty unit's senior house officers. He was tall, fair haired and blue eyed and had the kind of skin that always looked healthy even in the depths of winter. In fact he was so good looking that when Emma first saw him she hadn't been able to help her heart doing a complete somersault.

Simon had proved to be more than just another good looking guy, though. He'd been a good friend to Emma. Especially in the early days when Mark seemed to be on at her all the time. In fact, by the time she had known Simon for a few months most of their friends thought of them as a definite item. Emma wasn't sure, though. She was too keen on her career to get involved in a serious relationship, although she would be the first to admit she couldn't imagine life at St Jo's without Simon.

Emma sat and waited for the kettle to boil. 'Did you have someone round last night, then?' she asked Sue. Then she went on before Sue could get a word in. 'Hey, not that gorgeous Atul Desai, the

new SHO on Lavender ward? You said you were going to ask...'

'No,' Sue interrupted. 'My mum.'

'Your mum! What's the big occasion? She doesn't usually come here.'

Louise, Sue's mum, ran a dancing school and rarely had time for social visits. Emma had met her a couple of times. She was shorter than Sue but just as athletic looking. She also had a sense of humour just as wicked as Sue's.

'No, she had something to tell me.'

Emma noticed a slight catch in Sue's voice. She was usually so bubbly and full of laughs that Emma felt sure something must be wrong.

Instead of answering, Sue banged a casserole dish on the draining board so hard it almost cracked. When she looked at Emma, her eyes were wet with tears.

'Hey, what's wrong?' exclaimed Emma. 'You haven't fallen out, have you?'

Sue brushed her nose with the back of her hand, leaving soapsuds on her cheek.

'No, not yet,' she said flatly. 'Although it looks as if we might.'

'Why?' Sue and her mum usually got along like a house on fire.

'She's getting married again,' Sue said in a dull voice.

'But, surely...?' Emma started to say.

'Who's getting married again?' Penny came into the kitchen wearing one trainer and carrying the other. She had changed into her track suit.

Sue told her.

'Ach, that's great!' Penny sat down at the table and put on her other shoe.

'No, it's not. It's a disaster,' Sue said in a high, strained voice.

Emma had never really liked to ask Sue about her dad. All she knew was that he had left Sue's mother when Sue and her sister were very young and that they had got divorced a few years later. Sue never talked about him.

'Why is it a disaster?' Penny was asking in her usual straightforward manner. 'I'd have thought you'd be pleased. Your mum's been on her own for years, hasn't she?'

'If you must know, I think it stinks,' Sue said. 'She's making a fool of herself. The guy's ten years younger than she is.'

'That doesn't matter if they love each other,' Emma said.

Sue snorted. 'Doesn't it? Well I'm glad

you think so.'

Emma frowned but went on. 'Where did your mum meet him?'

'At dance classes.'

'Was he one of her pupils, then?' Penny asked.

'Yeah.' Sue looked embarrassed. 'Have you ever heard anything so awful?'

'I don't see why you think that,' Penny said. 'In fact I think it's quite romantic.'

Sue made a sound of disgust. 'How would you like it if your mum announced she was going to marry a toy-boy?'

Penny did her best not to grin. 'I wouldn't mind but I don't think my dad would be very pleased.'

'Well I'm glad you both think it's funny!' Sue wrenched off her rubber gloves. 'That's the last time I tell you my troubles!' She tossed back her black curls, stormed off to her room and slammed the door.

The other two looked sheepish.

'Er... I think she's really upset,' Emma said in a small voice.

Suddenly a loud crash came from the flat next door. Then came the sound of people arguing and a door slamming.

'What on earth...?' Penny said.

‘World War Three by the sound of it,’ Emma said. Then, suddenly, there came a burst of loud music. She laughed. ‘It looks as if we’ve got a rival.’

All three loved playing pop music at full volume. It was lucky that, up until now, the flat next door had been empty.

But the sound from next door wasn’t pop music. It was opera... Pavarotti or someone, his voice rising and falling with the background of a full-blown orchestra.

Sue came storming back out of her room. ‘What the hell’s going on?’

They all looked at one another, then burst into fits of laughter.

‘Oh, God!’ Sue spluttered. ‘Are we going to have to put up with *this*?’

‘I think a bit of diplomacy is called for.’ Penny got up and quickly made another mug of coffee. ‘I think I’ll go and introduce myself.’

Emma snorted. ‘Pen, you are definitely *not* known for being tactful.’

Penny ignored her. ‘A welcome drink and a small hint that perhaps our new neighbour might turn his or her music down a fraction is all that’s needed. You wait and see.’