

"Yeah," I said, "I'll bet you would."

"Y'know," he said as if thinking aloud, "the feed mill's kinda short on help. They got more fish meal and tankage than they can handle — too many college boys quit during the hot weather." As quickly as it had disappeared, the pseudo-smile returned. He turned around quickly and lumbered out of the room.

"Thank God, it's Friday," I sighed. "I'm going to need the whole week-end to recuperate."

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At four-thirty, I punched out. I didn't have to look up as I turned away from the time clock. I knew that he was there — watching me. His eyes didn't look through me any more. Now they looked *at* me — analyzed me — took me apart. The smile was still on his face.

★ ★ ★

Monday morning, I punched in at seven o'clock. At seven-ten, I was sent to the feed mill.

—B. J. Cohen, *Ex.* '57



Mrs. Porter

THE pink cheerfulness of the room hit me with a shock. It was all wrong. This room wasn't supposed to be cheerful. But there it was. The whole ward was full of beds, and each one was occupied by a child. The right side was filled with cots, and the left side had the cribs. Both were covered with pink sheets, and the children were all wearing pink nightgowns, and there were pink curtains at the windows.

"Come right in," said Mrs. Porter. "We're just eating our dinner. But the children won't mind eating with company."

I tried not to stare at the first bed. This was the chil-

dren's ward of a home for the retarded. These children were sick, but sick in a way that I had never seen before. And it was frightening, almost revolting to come upon this for the first time.

"This is Jeannie." Mrs. Porter stopped at the first bed. "She is hydrocephalic, which means that the spinal cord is broken and the fluid is draining into the brain. This makes her head grow larger and larger."

"How old is she?" asked a girl with an eager, expectant face.

"Jeannie is about six years old now." Mrs. Porter pushed a lock of hair back from the girl's face off her huge forehead. "Eat now, Jeannie. You must eat."

The attendant pushed another spoonful of a pasty-looking mixture toward the girl's mouth.

"Jeannie only has a few more months to live. But she is a happy child. She never cries."

We followed Mrs. Porter on to the next bed. The form in it gave a little muffled sound, not quite a cry.

"Tommy is mongoloid, and also feeble-minded. He's been quite sick lately, and that's why we have this tube in his nose." She gave a firm pull and removed the tube from his nose.

Kathrine," she spoke to the attendant at the next bed. "Will you clean up Tommy's bed? He's had a little trouble keeping his supper down."

"Is he in pain?" asked the same expectant-faced girl.

"Yes, I imagine he is." Mrs. Porter stopped and looked down at the boy for just a second before going on.

"Sally is also hydrocephalic. But her head is now dormant. You can see from looking at her how the head has gotten very hard." She stroked the child's forehead gently. "Her head will never grow any larger, but since she is also feeble-minded, there isn't much chance for complete recovery. As you can see her body has stopped growing, and she hasn't grown any in the last six months."

"What do you suppose is going on in their minds?" someone asked.

Mrs. Porter didn't answer directly. "We try to make things as happy as possible," was all she said.

"Kathy is our little spastic girl. But there is good possibility that she will be able to go home soon. Eat your dinner, Kathy. Eat your dinner so you will grow strong and then you can go home."

The little dark-haired girl was pitifully thin, as if she had undergone forced starvation. Her right hand was supported by a pulley from the top of the bed, and she was using it to feed herself.

"These are our babies." We crossed to the other side of the room and stopped at the first crib.

"Here's our little mite. This is Petey."

Petey was the tiniest bit of humanity I had ever seen. He was standing up in his crib, looking between the bars at us, his tiny face set in solemnity.

"He had a huge lump as large as his head at the base of his spine, but they operated last month, and now he's almost recovered, except for gaining a little weight. His mother is over in the women's section, so he'll be staying here with us for quite a while I imagine, unless a foster home can be found for him. His mind is perfectly good. I taught him to say his name the other night. Wave to them, Petey."

As he waved the expression on his face never changed. But his eyes were the seeing kind of eyes, not the empty eyes of some of the beds before.

The next two cribs both held small children, babies.

"These are brother and sister," said Mrs. Porter. "Both are blind, and developing hydrocephalic tendencies. Their mother is an x-ray technician, and there has been some thought that this may have had something to do with it. But they're not sure. The little girl goes to Iowa City in the morning for an exploratory operation. It may not be successful but we're hopeful."

She picked up the baby and smoothed down the pink wrapper around its back, and then laid it back on its stomach.

Mrs. Porter led us to the door. We had made the complete circuit. Our trip was over.

"Thank you for coming to visit us." Mrs. Porter

smiled. "We all enjoyed it very much. And come again if you can."

Half way down the corridor I turned and looked back through the open door. Mrs. Porter was standing bent over the crib that contained Petey.

"Say hello, Petey. Can you say hello?"

—Anne Burnett, *Ex.* '57



Six to Nothing

THE RED SUNSET forecast a cool, clear night. The blue of the sky overhead darkened slowly from east to west as if a giant shade were being pulled, a shade with many thin spots pierced by slivers of light. The field lay in the cover of darkness awaiting the hour for which it had been so carefully prepared in the afternoon, awaiting the same grinding and trampling it had endured twice this fall and many falls before. The yardline stripes were freshly mowed and re-marked, the ten yard strips had been alternately rolled in opposite directions, each sideline had been limed twice and showed no wave. The hash marks seventeen yards and twenty-eight inches in from the sidelines were exactly eighteen inches long. The two yard line markers in front of the goal posts were precise and the end zone was striped with chalk markings. The goal posts had been wrapped spirally with red and black crepe paper at one end, red and white at the other. It was a field that had been marked by cleats of boys fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen — high school boys who were fast, slow, big, small, strong, weak, brave, and cowardly. It had absorbed blood from noses, had felt wrenched knees and sprained ankles, even broken shoulders and broken legs. It was not a new field.