

Girls in white

RKO PATHE, INC. PRESENTS
THIS IS AMERICA

GIRLS IN WHITE

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Here is the house where Mercy dwells and walks in white shoes softly down the corridors of Pain. Only yesterday, those corridors were thronged like this, with nurses, whole platoons of nurses, graduate and practical, paid and volunteer aides, bringing their confidence and sympathy to the suffering and the sick. But that was yesterday. Today, with more people than ever before seeking medical attention, with more patients than beds in hospitals, only 300,000 registered graduate nurses are on active service. Our own nation faces a grave and immediate crisis.

The lights on the hospital call board flash faster today than they can be answered. Each one is a distress signal sent to thousands of nurses who aren't there, who don't exist.

But here are three who will answer. Three out of the 43,000 American girls who, very determined and probably a little frightened, are entering nursing school this year. Let's follow one of them, Betty Burns, as she starts out on the climb that will take her across the threshold of a new and exciting life, a profession and the privilege of serving Humanity.

NURSES HOME

Now, for a nervous neophyte like Betty, there is pleasure and relief at the warmth of her greeting. This is more than simple kindness: much of it is in the appreciation of graduates and other students that their ranks must be kept filled, that today at least, there cannot be too many new nurses. After the handshakes and the smiles though, Betty has to go through registration, must get her copy of the schedule, her first reminder of the work she will complete before she can serve those who may someday need her.

FUNDAMENTALS OF CHEMISTRY

There are books and supplies to crown her first exciting day, such basic studies as chemistry and others essential to an understanding of medicine. And Betty learns that there are emotions in almost every beaker. And no sooner is one class ended that it's time for the next.

This one: Anatomy, without which you cannot understand or make yourself understood in medicine.

There are the precise instruments of microbiology. An introduction to crime detection and the underworld of man's almost invisible enemy. Betty learns that taking a census of deadly organisms could scarcely be learnt at home, and that cooking becomes a potent tool of healing, under the names "nutrition and diet therapy".

And soon, she'll have a student nurse uniform. You'll look so much like a nurse that you'll almost feel like one.

See? Now she's the pride of her nursing arts class, even though her patient, Mary Jane, shows slight appreciation of her attention. Here again, Betty finds that scores of simple things she did at home must be practiced with proper hospital precision. All this concentration however is destined to make instinctive the hundreds of details of the work she is preparing for. That habit of care and exactness may someday ease a suffering patient.

After months of preclinical work comes a great occasion: the capping ceremony, when Betty and her successful classmates will be rewarded with the distinctive cap of their hospital. Once she has the cap, she knows she's passed the strict requirements. The emotional satisfaction is deep, for this milestone is marked by ceremonial flames commemorating nursing's great mentor, Florence Nightingale, the Lady with a Lamp. Veneration of a great tradition means much to these young student nurses, and perhaps the cap means more. Men may not understand this, women will.

Betty starts clinical training by preparing a medication. Her exactness and her careful check of each detail in the delicate matter of dosage are more important than mere steps in a severe routine. Precision here is an absolutely necessary factor in the successful treatment of the patient who will soon receive this medicine. And the correct performance of Betty's job is watched by an experienced graduate nurse instructor. A human life may someday depend on her precision.

Treatment trays and those everlasting forceps. You'd almost think they'd find a simpler way to keep instruments sterile, but you learn Miss Burns, you learn by doing. And you'll get so that it's second nature to baffle the bacteria. And here as everywhere: accuracy, forethought and speed. No time to waste, but no excuse for error. The doctor who will use this tray cannot take the time to hunt for any items you might forget. By knowing that they are all in order and by getting them to him promptly you have helped him in his vital work.

Getting the right things to the right places on time is of prime importance in any organized activity, especially in the work of caring for the sick. Unless you had been accompanied by a graduate nurse, you could not have left that tray of medicine to help move this patient. Your skills make this an easy task.

Now that medicine, remember? Well, here is a third check, this one in two steps: first ask the patient her name, then compare the card with this official one to make doubly sure. You learn

which patient likes which kind of bedside manner, and you find that knowing how to keep on pleasant, easy terms with the sick makes your task simpler, and help speed their cure as well. Often they reward you with a smile of thanks which makes this work worthwhile.

Many faces of hospital work are so highly technical that nurses must be ready to help their doctors in an almost endless variety of complex treatments. The Balkan frame, often seen in orthopedic ward, is a challenge to those charged with speeding a patient's recovery.

MAKE YOURSELF FIT TO SKI

Of course all work and no play will make Betty a dull girl, but here, fun, like work, is strictly conditioned by that old devil time. It made you almost as quick in putting on your party clothes as you are with your uniform. But because the heavy date must be impressed, you take extra special care. He's just starting out on his career too, and any economies are helpful. So those flowers you got from that generous patient in maternity this afternoon will help out in this evening serious financial problem. But you kept them fresh in the tray room icebox.

This is one occasion, Miss Burns, when you could indulge in the luxury of making someone wait. Here, for a few blissful moments, you are privileged to play a commanding role. You can, if you want, even forget tomorrow's assignment in the clinic.

But you can't forget for long, and you've learnt that there's a clock in every good nurse's subconscious mind. So make the goodbyes short and sweet, and hurry back. Tomorrow is another day. A day with outpatients, and the versatile hospital personnel which care for them. Only experienced students are qualified here, and the black stripe on Betty's cap shows that she has over two years of work behind her. Her cases are so varied that she'll find use for everything she's learned. Her hospital moved out into her community, expanding its service to every citizen. This work gives scope for almost all the knowledge a nurse can get. Luckily Betty's background is now wide and since her tastes run toward pediatric nursing, caring for this young patient is a gratifying experience.

Training is like the job itself. An accumulation of habits and skills learned from each one. Accuracy in time and temperature, deftness in every movement of the hands, a constant determination that no bacterial invaders can be allowed. It takes all these skills and more to qualify for surgery, where technical perfection is idolized. So highly trained and coordinated are the hands and mind of this member of the surgical team, she is aptly termed the "scrub nurse", that they provide as a matter of course the right instrument at the right instant. It's as if there were a link between her hands and the surgeon's brain. If there were not, if these lightning fingers faltered, their failure might spell death beneath that sterile sheet.

The strain of an operation is almost overpowering, but the patient is ok, and Betty knows that she did well. Even so, she's glad her supervisor thinks so too.

The human touch is everywhere when you serve Humanity. And perhaps this is more keenly felt in the obstetrical nursery. Here a stern aseptic discipline keeps even parents off. But Mr. Clarke, the father, can present his card and Betty, all swathed in sterile clothes, will see if girl Clarke cares to interview the gentleman through the window.

Well Miss Burns, it looks as if you hit the jackpot. You've reached pediatric training at last. And what a thrill to be among these appreciative youngsters! It's the kind of work you've always wanted.

You've come to the end of the beginning: graduation, that goal through years of stern studies and patient practice. You're thinking of the oath first sworn by that immortal of your sisterhood, Florence Nightingale. "I solemnly pledge myself before God to practice my profession faithfully, to elevate the standard of my profession and hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keep. With loyalty will I endeavor to aid the physician in his work and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care." This is it, Betty. Now you're one of this year's 34,000 new graduate nurses.

What lies ahead for these girls in white?

HENRY J. VIER M.D.

Well here's your classmate, Mary Ballard, typical of thousands who help doctors and office nurses. Her counseling and placement service told her she'd be well suited to this work. And Mary's boss and hundreds of patients are glad they did.

Then there's Jane Gillespie. She chose a public health career. She's bringing nursing to people who cannot get to hospitals.

Each will go where she is needed most, no matter where. Like Lieutenant Katy More, on duty at an army hospital here, awaiting orders to Yokohama.

And you Miss Burns, you are in a hospital, at night, you and your little patients. And this is Saturday. No date, just you and... What's that noise?

You're lucky for your training, Betty Burns. You know that this is not the major emergency in this [...] room. This is. You, like thousands of your sister nurses on hospital staff assignment, have learned to gauge an emergency. It's well you have, you may have saved a life because you know your job. The gentle craft of nursing has come a long way down the corridors of time since this nurse assisted at her first operation. She has seen a hundred changes in practice and procedure, but Nightingale's lamp burned brightly in her heart way back when she graduated, starched and proud and inspired by the ideal of service. That flame is still bright and clear, and rekindles itself in each succeeding class of incoming students.

Yes, look well at Betty Burns, registered nurse, handmaiden to the noblest art of man: healing. With skill and stamina, with courage and compassion, she is dedicated to the service of suffering Humanity. Hers is a profession and a privilege. Yes, say it proudly, and you need no further definition: she is a nurse.

THE END

THIS IS AMERICA

Transcript: Timothée Lainé