

THE WRONG MEDICINE



These stories are about real patients, their illnesses and the dedicated staff that looked after them. You may know some of the characters. They might even be your school friends. If you do recognise anybody, please don't say anything.

Inevitably, several of the stories are sad. Younger readers may find this upsetting. However, we have always tried to highlight any glimmers of hope, even in the most tragic circumstances.

We hope that you enjoy reading them.

Dr Desmond Dennis & Dr Patrick Pickerty

Contents.

1. The Appendix.
2. Ryan Jones.
3. The Wrong Medicine
4. My Sister.
5. Earache.
6. Pneumonia.
7. The Golden Medicine.

The Appendix.

Sister Rena sat down and started her breakfast. Breakfast was her favourite meal. She was always much too busy to have lunch and by tea-time she was usually so tired that she did not fancy anything to eat.

"We've got a student this week," Sister Romily said, casually.

Sister Rena paused, staring at Sister Romily. There was a look of dismay on her face.

"A student?"

"Yes, a medical student."

Sister Rena put down her toast. She felt slightly sick.

"A medical student!"

Rena and Romily despised medical students. Medical students were enthusiastic and inquisitive. They were forever asking questions. They wanted to see everything. There would have to be a tour of Casualty, a tour of the ward and a tour of the operating theatres.

You would be trying to get on with your work and a medical student would be peering over your shoulder. Give an injection: the student had to see that. Put in stitches, set a broken bone, dress a burn: the student had to see them all.

Bill Button, their last student, had a special interest in heart conditions. He was extremely bright and seemed to know everything about the heart. Even the consultants had asked him for help. He had been unbearable!

Sister Romily cleared her throat. "The student's name is Peter Perkin. Today is his first day in a Casualty department, his first day in a hospital and the first day of his medical course."

Sister Rena groaned. It couldn't be worse. There was nothing more enthusiastic than a brand new medical student. Nobody would be nicer or more polite to patients. He would help them get undressed. He would make sure that they did not fall over. He would help them get into bed. He would ask them a hundred times if they were alright. He would offer them a glass of water or a cup of tea. If they had to stay in hospital, the medical student would visit them every day. Sister Rena wanted to scream.

Sister Rena looked down at her breakfast, a grim expression on her face. She stood up and pushed her plate away.

"Let's go. I'm not hungry."

Sister Romily nodded in agreement and followed her friend.

Rena and Romily were two of the new breed of nurses that were gradually taking over the National Health Service. They worked in the Casualty department of Halloween Hospital, where they did almost everything themselves. They had little or no need for the help of doctors and did not think much of them.

Rena and Romily would see patients, examine them, arrange investigations and start treatment. They would take blood, book x-ray photographs and apply plaster of paris.

Rena might be removing a huge chunk of metal from someone's eye, while Romily treated a man who could not have a wee. When Romily gave an injection to an epileptic, Rena might be examining a small child with tonsillitis. On Saturday 27th of March they both treated twin brothers with boils on their bottoms. If Rena was attending to an asthma attack, Romily could be performing a lumbar puncture, stopping a nosebleed or fishing a peanut out of someone's ear. They even did small operations; removing children's toenails (their favourite), burning warts, bursting boils (their second favourite), pulling rotten teeth, pinning broken bones back together and sometimes, when the doctors could not be found, removing tonsils, adenoids or appendixes.

When Rena and Romily arrived on that Monday morning, Peter Perkin, the medical student, was already hard at work. He had seen two patients. He had arranged blood tests for the first and sent the second for an x-ray. He looked very pleased with himself. He said he was more than happy to see the third patient, the only one left, if Sister Rena would make him a cup of tea. Sister Rena bit her bottom lip so hard it bled. It was the only way she could stop herself strangling Master Perkin with the crepe bandage she kept in her pocket.

Peter went and sat at Sister Romily's desk in the nurse's station to write up the last patient's records. Rena and Romily watched him carefully. They were looking at him, not as a pupil or apprentice, but with the professional interest of expert diagnosticians.

"Peter doesn't look well." Rena sounded concerned.

"No," agreed Romily, "he doesn't. He looks quite pale."

"Yes, he is pale," Rena continued. "Look! He's sweating a little."

Romily nodded. "Are you alright Peter?"

"Yes, I'm fine," answered Peter, but he was beginning to feel slightly uneasy.

Sister Rena continued to look intently at him. "You look uncomfortable, Peter."

"Yes, he does," said Romily. "I think it's his tummy."

"Yes, that's it," agreed Rena excitedly. "He's got tummy ache. I knew there was something wrong."

"You should have told us, Peter." The two nurses looked sternly at him. "We better examine you."

Peter did feel a little sickly. He thought that it was because he had been up so early and not had breakfast. Now that they mentioned it, he could feel a very small pain in the bottom of his tummy.

"I do feel a bit sick," he said.

"I thought so," said Romily. "Come on. Come with us. We'll have a look at you. We'll have you right in no time." The nurses helped him up and took him to one of the patients' cubicles.

"You better get undressed and put this gown on." Rena gave him a clean, white hospital gown. "We'll go and get you a wrist band while you're getting changed."

By the time the nurses came back Peter was lying comfortably on the examination couch in his hospital gown. Sister Rena checked his pulse while Romily measured his temperature. He was asked to stick his tongue out and they both looked thoughtfully at it.

"I'll check your tummy, Peter." Sister Rena spoke quietly and reassuringly.

Sister Rena examined Peter's abdomen very carefully, pressing gently at first and, then, more firmly. In the bottom right hand corner, where the appendix is, she seemed to press down very hard and Peter winced.

"Mmmm . . ." she said, glancing up at Sister Romily. "You better check this yourself."

Sister Romily repeated the examination just as carefully as her colleague. She also seemed to press down very hard over Peter's appendix and, again, he winced.

The two nurses stood and looked down at him, their arms emphatically folded across their chests.

"I am afraid it's your appendix, Peter." Rena spoke while Romily nodded in agreement. "It will have to be operated on."

"We would do it ourselves, of course," continued Romily, "but it is very busy here, today. We will ask Miss Preece to operate. She is an excellent surgeon."

Rena glanced at Sister Romily. "The poor boy probably doesn't know what his appendix is. After all, it is his first day!" They looked inquiringly at Peter.

"No, I am not exactly certain," he admitted.

"Well," explained Sister Rena. "The appendix is in here," she pointed to the bottom, right hand corner of his tummy. "It is about the same size and shape as your little finger." She held her little finger up to demonstrate. "It is usually a nice, pink colour. It can be perfectly straight or curly, like a pig's tail."

"When you get appendicitis," Sister Romily added, "the appendix goes bad. It gets hot, red and swollen. If nothing is done, it could burst. That would make you very ill. It's called peritonitis."

"Nobody knows what the appendix is for. It doesn't seem to do anything, except go bad and that often happens at the most inconvenient time." Sister Rena raised her eyebrows as she explained this.

The two nurses smiled sympathetically at Peter. He thought that they seemed a little more cheerful than when they first arrived at work. Sister Rena squeezed his hand.

"We will let your parents know, Peter. They will want to come and see you, after the operation, of course. We must get you to the operating theatre as soon as possible. We don't want that appendix of yours to burst."

"No we don't," agreed Romily. "We would never forgive ourselves."

The thought of a burst appendix gave Peter quite a sharp pain.

As soon as the hospital porter arrived to take Peter to the operating theatre, Rena and Romily went back to work.

Peter was a brand new medical student. It was his first day in Casualty, his first day in hospital and the first day of his medical course. It was, thought both Rena and Romily, a wonderful opportunity for him to be involved in an operation at the very beginning of his career.

* * *

When Peter's parents arrived at the hospital about two hours later, Rena and Romily were waiting in reception to meet them.

"We will take you straight to see him," said Rena as she led them down the main corridor.

"I am afraid that things did not go exactly as planned," she explained. "We were all mistaken. It wasn't his appendix after all."

"It seemed to be a classic case," added Romily, "straight out of the text-books. Miss Preece, who is one of the best appendicetomists in the country, was very surprised. To be honest, she still can't believe it."

They stopped in front of a frosted glass door. Peter's name was on the door.

Sister Rena smiled consolingly at Mr and Mrs Perkin. "I have to say that it turned out to be much more serious than we thought," she explained.

Rena opened the door and showed them into the room. Peter's bed was neatly made and appeared to be empty.

"His appendix was fine," she continued. "It was completely healthy. In fact, it was the rest of him that was bad. We had to remove everything."

Sister Rena pulled back the bedclothes. There in the middle of the bed was a small, pink object. It was about the same size and shape as your little finger. It was perfectly straight.

It was Peter Perkin's appendix and it looked completely healthy.

"I am very sorry to say that that's all that's left of him," said Sister Rena.

Ryan Jones.

Ben woke with a jolt. He felt sure that someone had shaken the bed. The ward was very dark. It must have been the middle of the night. A dull, green light glowed in the corner. "Hey!" The loud whisper startled him. It was coming from right underneath him.

"Who's that?" Ben sat up and moved over towards the edge of the bed to investigate.

"You can't see me. There's no point trying." Ben hesitated. He did not really want to look under the bed.

"They have forgotten your medicine, again." The voice continued. It sounded like a boy, probably around Ben's age.

"I don't have medicine at night." Ben whispered. He did not want to wake up any of the other patients.

"That's because the night nurse is too busy. She always forgets."

"No, I don't think I am supposed to have it then." Ben said.

"Yes, you are. You are supposed to have three doses a day. The last one is before you go to bed. Why do you think that you feel awful in the morning?"

He was right. Ben always felt rotten in the mornings. He felt sick. He was shivery. He did not want to get up. Ben's Mum had noticed too. She said that he looked very pale, first thing. By lunchtime, he felt better and in the evening he felt fine.

"Go and ask for it."

"I can't do that." Ben was too scared to go and ask the night nurse.

"Yes you can. Go and ask her. You won't get better will you, if you don't have your medicine?" The voice was insistent. "She is not doing anything important now."

Ben frowned. The voice had moved. His eyes adjusted to the darkness. He could make out the other three beds in the room. Their occupants appeared to be sleeping soundly. He looked around. He couldn't see anyone else.

"Go on! Go and ask for it!" The voice demanded. Now, Ben was sure that it coming from inside Mathew Matthews' bedside cabinet.

Ben slid cautiously off the bed and straightened slowly. His tummy was still painful after the operation and it was uncomfortable to move around.

"Hey!" The voice was beginning to annoy Ben. He looked suspiciously at the small cupboard next to Mathew's bed.

"Can you give Mathew a drink first?" Mathew moaned in his sleep and half turned over. He had broken his thigh and was in traction. There was an untouched plate of food on his tray. Beside it, were a full glass and a nearly full jug of water.

"What? Now? At this time of night!" Ben exclaimed.

"He hasn't had anything to drink all day. He will get dehydrated."

Ben went over. Mathew was only half asleep. Ben put his arm around Mathew's shoulders to help him up. He brought the glass of water to his lips. Mathew took an initial sip then drank the rest gratefully. Once he had finished, Ben let him lie back down.

* * *

"I think you have forgotten my medicine." Ben approached the nursing station nervously. Sister Sandra Salter looked up and frowned.

"I don't think so." She spoke confidently and quietly.

"I haven't had any tonight."

"No-one has medicine at this time in the morning." Sister Salter glanced at the clock. "Do you know that it is 3 o'clock?"

"I was supposed to have a dose before bed . . . my antibiotics."

"I don't think so." Sister Salter looked back down at the notes she was writing and waited for Ben to go back to bed.

Ben shivered. He was about to turn away. The fluorescent light flickered and there was a loud electrical crackle. He thought he heard an irritated whisper, from up near the light. Sister Salter looked up and muttered to herself.

"Will you just check my chart?" Ben asked.

"Can't you see I'm busy?" Sister Salter spoke with a hint of annoyance. She hated being interrupted while she was working.

"It won't take a minute. Just check it for me . . . please."

Sister Salter tut-tutted. She got up and went to get the folder of drug charts. She flicked quickly through them.

"Ben Brenfield . . . here we are . . . right, let me see . . . 10pm . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . oh, hang on . . . Cephalexin mixture 500 milligrams . . ." Sister Salter looked up

at Ben. "I'm very sorry. You are right . . . and look . . . you didn't have it on Tuesday night, either."

Sister Salter went through to the fridge and found Ben's medicine.

"Here we are . . . Cephalexin 500 milligrams . . . that's two teaspoons." She carefully measured out the medicine. Ben swallowed it.

"Right, back to bed then. We won't forget tomorrow night." Ben thanked Sister Salter and started on his way down the corridor.

* * *

"Hey!" The voice was overhead. Ben looked up impatiently. He was tired.

"Can you check on Nina Newington for me?"

"I want to go to bed. I'm exhausted." Ben started walking more quickly towards his own bay.

"It won't take a second. She is in a lot of pain."

Reluctantly, Ben went over to Nina's room and opened the door. She had left her night light on. Nina was awake. She was crying quietly and holding her tummy.

Ben sat down by the bed and took Nina's hand. She smiled briefly, then her body stiffened with another sharp spasm of pain. She started sobbing loudly.

"I'll get the nurse." Ben reached over to the call-button and pressed it.

"I've tried. It doesn't work." Nina was right. There was no sound when Ben pressed the button.

"Don't worry. I'll go and get Sister Salter." Ben hurried back to the nurses' station and explained that Nina was in a lot of pain. He was pleased to see that Sister Salter got up and came to see Nina straight away.

Ben sat with Nina until the doctor arrived and gave her a strong, painkilling injection. Shortly after that, she fell asleep.

* * *

"Hey . . . Hey!"

Ben groaned as he woke up. "I have had my medicine tonight."

"I know, but Colin Coleman has fallen in the toilet. He can't get up."

"Why don't you go and help him?" That seemed the obvious solution to Ben.

"I can't."

"What do you mean? You can't?" Ben raised his own voice slightly.

"I just can't. I don't know why."

"Listen . . . who are you . . . and what are you doing here?" Ben peered into the darkness but could see nothing.

"I am a boy like you, I suppose. I just keep an eye on things."

"Are you a patient? Are you ill?" Ben continued.

"No."

"Haven't you got anything better to do?" Ben could not understand why the boy was here, in the hospital.

"No, not really."

"Haven't you got any mates to hang around with?"

"Well, aren't you and I friends?"

"No." Ben answered the question very quickly. He frowned.

"Look, I'm sorry for bothering you. I thought you could help Colin get up."

"It's not my job to pick people up." Ben pulled the covers over his head and shut his eyes tightly.

"What is your job then?"

Ben was exasperated. "It's pointless trying to explain anything to you. I meant that picking patients up is the nurses' job. I don't have a job, obviously. I am too young."

"Everyone else is busy. Just go and have a look. He's stuck."

Colin had been injured in a car crash. He had been knocked out and had fractured his skull. He had also bruised his knee. He was quite unsteady and he limped badly. He kept falling over. He was supposed to get one of the nurses to take him to the toilet, but was usually in too much of a hurry and tried to go on his own.

Ben was annoyed that he had had to get out of bed for the second night in a row. He made his way slowly to the toilet.

Colin was lying on the floor laughing. "My flipping knee gave way again. I can't get up. Give us a hand."

"You should have called the nurse," said Ben abruptly.

"They're busy. They've got an emergency." Colin explained, cheerfully.

"Well, you're an emergency now!"

"Not really, I haven't hurt myself."

"Come on, then." Ben took Colin's hand and pulled him up. It was a bit of a struggle because Colin's foot kept sliding on the slippery floor. Eventually, he managed to stand up. He steadied himself against the door frame.

"One will say this dizziness will settle in. They only seem interested in my head . . . *are you still having headaches . . . do you feel sick . . . can you see double . . .* they ask every day, twice a day sometimes." He shrugged his shoulders.

"They are just checking for brain damage, that's the most important thing." Ben explained.

"If they sorted my knee out I wouldn't keep falling over," said Colin.

Ben helped Colin walk back to his bed.

"Thanks Ben," said Colin. "I'm sorry I got you up."

"That's alright. Look, let me know if you want to go again. I'll help you."

Ben walked around to Nina Newington's room and quietly opened the door. She was sleeping comfortably. On his way back to his own bed, Ben stopped by Mathew Matthews. Mathew had eaten some supper tonight and drunk half a jug of water. He was still awake and he grinned. Ben stuck his thumb up.

* * *

"You look better, today. Doesn't he Bernard?" It was visiting time, and Ben's Mum and Dad were sitting by his bed.

Bernard Brenfield nodded his head in agreement.

"I feel much better." Ben's colour had improved. The shivering had stopped. He was getting stronger.

"I have been very worried about him." Mrs Brenfield looked anxiously at her husband.

"You worry too much, Brenda." Bernard Brenfield had been very concerned himself but, in general, he preferred to hide his feelings. "Anyway, he is a lot better now. He should be able to come home soon."

"I was still worried, Bernard, and you never know with Halloween Hospital."

"I have always thought that it was an entirely proficient hospital." Bernard Brenfield reassured his wife. Several of his relatives had been patients in the hospital over the last few years. "I have seen nothing wrong with the children's department since Ben has been here."

Ben hadn't told them about the missing doses of medicine.

"What about that little boy who died last year?" Brenda Brenfield said this very quietly. She looked over her shoulder to make sure none of the staff were nearby.

"I am sure that was a few years ago, Brenda." Bernard spoke in his normal loud voice. He had no qualms about being overheard.

"Maybe it was the year before last."

"What happened to him?" Ben asked, looking up from his magazine.

"I don't think we should tell him, Bernard. It is too upsetting, especially while he is in hospital." Brenda was ready to change the subject.

"Don't be silly, Brenda. Ben is a young man now. You can't keep treating him like a child."

"I can't remember the details, myself" Brenda spoke quickly. "What would you like to do when you come home, Ben? We thought we might go out for a nice meal."

"I remember reading the story in the local paper," Bernard continued, ignoring Brenda's attempt to distract Ben. "It even reached the nationals. What was his name?" He paused to think and rubbed his chin. "I think he was a Welsh lad . . . yes . . . Ryan . . . Jones . . . that's right. He was twelve years old: a year younger than you, Ben." Bernard looked up at his son. "Ryan had been in Halloween for a week before he died. He was in this very ward."

"What happened to him?" Ben asked. "Why did he die?"

"I am not sure what was actually wrong with him," said Bernard, "but I think it was his kidneys. Apparently, he wasn't being monitored properly and they let his drip run too quickly. He was overloaded with fluid. By the time they realised, it was too late. It said in the paper that they had "drowned him" in saline: that's salt and water."

"Didn't they sack some of the staff, Bernard?" Mrs Brenfield interrupted anxiously.

"Yes they did, Brenda. They sacked one of the consultants and suspended a nurse."

"Oh Bernard, what a terrible tragedy!" Mrs Brenfield gasped. "What would we have done if Ben had died?"

"Mum, don't be stupid!"

"Brenda, these things happen from time to time in every hospital. It does not mean that Halloween is worse than any other hospital. I remember Dr Dennis saying to me that,

if there was one thing that he had learnt in all his years as a general practitioner, it was that diseases are there to catch us out. Illnesses are not straightforward, Brenda."

"That was because he completely missed your gallstones, Bernard. Didn't he say you had wind?"

"Yes, but the symptoms are often very similar."

"I said you had gallstones from the very beginning, Bernard. It stated that quite clearly in our Atlas of Family Health. But, you wouldn't listen to me and neither would Dr Dennis."

"You know how much he hates it if relatives interfere." Bernard knew from experience that it was one of those things that particularly irritated Dr Desmond Dennis.

"Why don't you tell Ben what else he said?"

"Yes, he said I came to see him too quickly after the symptoms started. I had not given the illness time to develop properly."

"Bernard, that is ridiculous, completely ridiculous." Brenda Brenfield was shocked every time she heard this story. "The sooner you see the doctor the better. That seems obvious to me."

"My feelings exactly, Brenda." Bernard Brenfield seemed resigned to agreeing with his wife on this particular point.

"I am sure that you would not have had half as much trouble with those little gallstones if Dr Dennis had sorted them out straight away."

Bernard Brenfield looked offended by this comment. "Two of them were quite large, Brenda."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Bernard. I think I am getting your gallstones muddled up with Mrs Lewis'. All of hers were small. They disappeared on their own."

* * *

The last two days of Ben's stay in hospital were uneventful. There were no more night-time disturbances. Nina Newington improved quickly and was discharged home the day before Ben. Colin Coleman remained unsteady, but made good progress. Mathew Matthews was moved to the orthopaedic ward. A new boy, Barry Barrat, was admitted to Mathew's bed. He was suffering from pneumonia.

* * *

"Right, have you got everything?" Brenda Brenfield had come to the hospital to pick Ben up.

Ben felt strange about going home. He had hardly been off the ward for two weeks. He felt apprehensive.

"Yes, I have got all my things ready." He tried not to let his anxiety show.

"Your spectacles?" Ben's Mum liked to double-check.

"Yes!"

"Your watch?"

"Yes, I said I have got everything!" Ben was beginning to get impatient.

"Have you said goodbye to all your friends?" Brenda asked.

"Yes."

"What about the new boy?"

Ben looked over at Barry Barrat. "No, he's been asleep all morning. I don't really know him, anyway. He only came in yesterday."

"He looks very ill."

"Yes, he has got a serious case of pneumonia. I heard the doctors discussing him this morning."

Barry was sleeping heavily. He looked hot and flushed. His forehead was wet and shiny with sweat. He was breathing quickly. He had been restless and his oxygen mask had slipped down

Ben went over to the sink and rinsed the flannel. He moistened Barry's forehead and cheeks with the damp cloth. He lifted the oxygen mask up so that it covered Barry's nose and mouth correctly. He tightened the strap slightly. He switched the fan back on and adjusted it so that it blew a refreshing stream of cool air in Barry's direction.

"He seems boiling hot." Ben went to the bottom of the bed and picked up Barry's temperature chart. He looked at it carefully.

"His temperature was 38°C, first thing this morning. I am sure he is much hotter now." Ben looked at his Mum. "I think I will tell the nurses?"

"Yes, they better have a look at him," said Mrs Brenfield. "Go and have a word with them and then we'll go home."

The Wrong Medicine.

Dwynwen Gwilym was a good witch. Well, that's what she said. The only good witch I've ever heard of was in the Wizard of Oz, and that's just a story. I don't suppose that you know of any others, but Dwynwen Gwilym insisted, and who are we to argue?

Dwynwen was courting Dr. Pickerty. Dr. Pickerty was older than her. He was a tall, slightly stooped family doctor who wore a dark grey suit. He was slow, but he was thorough, and there were always lots of patients who wanted to see him. He was very pleased that this youngish woman had taken such an interest in him.

They had been going together for a year when Dwynwen decided to tell him how she felt about him. She was not one to skirt around such matters, and so she approached him directly.

"I've got two things to say to you, Patrick," she said. "First of all, and most importantly, I've fallen in love with you." She did not go down on one knee when she said this, nor was she in the middle of preparing a candle-lit dinner. He was sitting in his armchair reading Emergency Weekly. She had just finished Hoovering downstairs.

"Secondly," she continued, "I'm a witch."

"A witch!" Dr. Pickerty had suspected that she had fallen in love with him, but he had never dreamt that she might be a witch. She did not look like a witch. Her face was round and kind with a neat bob of black hair. She smiled a lot. Her teeth were perfectly straight and very white. She had no warts or hairy moles that he had noticed. She was the sort of person that you would love to have as an aunt. She was homely, motherly and comforting.

"A good witch," she emphasised, "a white witch."

"I didn't know good witches really existed," he said. "I'm not sure that I believe you."

But, Dwynwen Gwilym was stubborn. Eventually, she managed to persuade Dr Pickerty that she might be telling the truth. He agreed to get married but, first, they would wait a further twelve months. During that time, she would have to convince him that she was, indeed, a white witch.

* * *

The time passed quickly and many good things happened. The summer was long and hot. The winter was brief and hardly noticeable. Dr. Pickerty's garden was full of beautiful, rare butterflies. His tulips blossomed like never before. Good fortune befell many members of his family. Somehow, he was always the first to know when these things happened. Four seriously ill patients became miraculously well. Even though he had done very little and, in one case, only prescribed paracetamol, they gave him all the credit.

Like his tulips, his reputation flourished.

Dwynwen Gwilym cleverly never claimed to be responsible for any of these things. Dr. Pickerty was gradually and completely convinced that her magic was, as she said, good magic. They set a date for the wedding.

* * *

Their first few years of married life passed happily. They had two bouncing boys, Will and Rhys. It would be no exaggeration to say that Dr. Pickerty doted on his new family.

Unfortunately, those blissful years were soon to be over: the family was beset by problems and tragedy.

Dr. Pickerty now had more than twice as many patients. He took on two young doctors to help him. To start with, they worked well with him and respected his age and experience. However, after a while, they began to call him slow and old-fashioned. They told the patients that his treatments were of no use, and that their ideas were newer and better. In the end, they asked him to leave the surgery. His pride was so badly hurt that he agreed to do so.

Luckily, a few of his patients stuck with him, so he was still able to earn a little bit of money.

One day, his children disappeared. It had been snowing heavily. They both went to the park to build a snowman, but never returned. He and Dwynwen and, of course, the police and all their neighbours searched everywhere. No sign of the boys was ever found. This was a terrible blow. Dr. Pickerty became very sad. Dwynwen took the loss a little better than he did.

A few weeks later, two statues were delivered. Dwynwen had asked for them to be made. They were exact likenesses of the children. They were as smiling and happy as the boys must have been when they were playing in the snow. When he saw them, Dr. Pickerty began to feel a bit better. He and Dwynwen put them in the garden on either side of the rabbit hutch. He would often go out and sit with them. When he did, he would usually come

back to the house with tears in his eyes.

Although a small number of his patients had stayed with him, Dr. Pickerty looked after them so well that they were never ill. Because of this, he had very little to do, and he hardly earned any money. He and Dwynwen could not even afford proper food or new clothes. They would have to move into a small house. They put theirs up for sale.

Dwynwen Gwilym felt sorry for her husband. He was getting more and more fed up. Sometimes, he stayed in bed all day. She wondered if she should help: she might try a tiny spell.

* * *

It was a Wednesday morning, just after breakfast. "I'm going up stairs," Dwynwen Gwilym said. "I won't be long." Dr Pickerty thought that this was unusual. She always read the paper after breakfast. As soon as she came back down, the phone rang.

"Hallo, it's Dr. Pickerty," he answered.

"Oh, Dr. Pickerty. Can you come and see my husband straight away? He's got terrible tummy pain. I'm really worried about him."

"Alright, Mrs Milton, don't panic! I'll be there in five minutes."

As he was leaving the house, Dwynwen handed him a bottle of bright green medicine.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Take it with you. I think that you might find it useful. It's a very special medicine."

Dr. Pickerty went to see Mr Milton. He asked Mr Milton lots of questions. Then, he asked Mrs Milton. Mr Milton had been perfectly all right yesterday. Today, he was perfectly awful. Dr. Pickerty gave him a thorough examination. He could not work out what was wrong with Mr Milton, and so he examined him again. He did a blood test. He tested Mr Milton's wee.

He sat down beside Mr Milton, on the edge of his bed. "Look, Mr Milton," he said, "I can see you are having a terrible pain. I've asked you everything I can think of asking. I have examined you more thoroughly than I've ever examined anyone. I still don't know what's wrong. I don't know what to give you. I'm sorry."

"You must be able to give me something, Dr. Pickerty," said Mr Milton. Mrs Milton agreed.

"I don't know." Dr. Pickerty was frowning.

"You'll have to. I'm in agony." Mr Milton pleaded.

Dr. Pickerty handed him the bottle of bright green medicine. "You could try this. My wife recommended it."

Mr Milton took a large gulp of the medicine.

When Dr. Pickerty went back to see his patient an hour later, the pain had gone and the delighted man was munching his way through a large jar of pickled onions. Both Mr and Mrs Milton thanked Dr. Pickerty over and over again. Mr Milton gave him £50. Dr. Pickerty felt quite pleased.

Next Wednesday, a very similar thing happened. This time, it was Joan Fishly who was ill. She had suddenly become very dizzy. She couldn't even manage to walk across her bedroom. This time, Dwynwen had given Dr. Pickerty a bottle of dull, purple medicine. Like before, Dr. Pickerty could not work out what was wrong with his patient. He tried the medicine; again, it worked. By the afternoon, Mrs Fishly was up a ladder cleaning the windows at the top of her three-storey house. Mr and Mrs Fishly were very grateful.

On the third Wednesday, Dr. Pickerty had to go and see a small boy. His name was Danny. He had a very bad headache. Dr. Pickerty rushed round to the house but, just before he went, Dwynwen gave him a bottle of yellow medicine.

Dr. Pickerty was very worried about young Danny. He looked really ill. Dr. Pickerty asked Danny's mum and dad lots of questions. He asked Danny, himself, lots of questions. He even asked Danny's babysitter lots of questions. He examined him three times. He did all this, and he still did not know what was wrong.

Danny was getting worse by the minute. He could hardly talk. Dr. Pickerty decided to try the yellow medicine. He gave Danny two large spoonfuls. As he gave Danny the last spoonful, the 'phone rang. It was Dwynwen Gwilym. Danny's dad passed the phone to Dr. Pickerty.

"Patrick, how's Danny?" Dwynwen Gwilym sounded very worried.

"He isn't at all well," replied Dr. Pickerty.

"Have you given him the medicine?" Dwynwen Gwilym sounded even more concerned.

"Yes, he's just had it."

"Patrick, it's the wrong one! I should have given you the orange one. The yellow one will make him worse."

Dr Pickerty slammed the phone down, and ran back to Danny. But, there was nothing he

could do. Danny's headache got worse and worse. His crying got louder and louder. His mum and dad were wringing their hands as they waited.

Suddenly, Danny stopped crying. His parents looked at him. He was completely still and silent. They couldn't even hear him breathing. They rushed over to him. They called his name. They shook him. There was no response. The poor, little boy was dead.

* * *

Dr. Pickerty was furious when he got home. He started shouting at Dwynwen.

"What have you done? It was you that made them ill, wasn't it? It was your magic. That's why your medicines worked for Mr Milton and Joan Fishley. How could you do that to my patients? Danny's dead. It's your fault. You're an evil witch."

As he shouted, Dr. Pickerty watched Dwynwen's face intently. She did not look at all sorry. Then, he had a terrible thought.

He ran out into the garden, to the statues. He looked closely at them. They were perfect replicas of Will and Rhys. They were too perfect. Why hadn't he realised before? He had looked at them every day. He was a fool. He ran back into the house. He was in tears when he spoke to Dwynwen Gwilym. He was so angry that he was shaking. His fists were clenched.

"Turn yourself into stone, now. Go on. That's what you've done to my sons. I hate you. I really do."

Dwynwen Gwilym was so frightened of him that she did as he said. She turned herself into stone.

* * *

Dr. Pickerty is retired now, although some of his old patients still come to see him and ask him for advice. He has moved into a small flat. You might see him walking slowly around the town. However, most of the time, you will find him sitting in his garden on a red, plastic chair watching his three unmoving, stone statues.

My Sister.

It wasn't the first time that my sister behaved strangely at breakfast.

I had noticed a change in her a few months ago. There was nothing specific to start with. Nothing, as my mother always said, that you could put your finger on. Usually, she would come down and start talking straight away. She was very inquisitive. She would want to know what everyone's plans were for the day and what news we had if she had not seen us on the previous evening. Lately, she had not been saying much. She was vague and distracted. She did not seem interested in what we were doing. If mum or dad said something, she did not pay attention. She had always wanted to know how I was getting on at school. Now, I don't think she would have noticed if I had left school and started work, and I was only twelve years old! She often had a funny smile on her face, as if she had some little secret. That annoyed me.

She was not like it every day. Sometimes, she was back to her normal self or, at least, almost her normal self. On other days, she would be quiet again, dwelling on her thoughts. I don't know if anyone else noticed. No one said anything if they did.

I remember one particular day. She was already in trouble. She had come back at three o'clock that morning and had not 'phoned or anything. My mum and dad had gone to bed, but they would not have been sleeping, not until she got back. When she did arrive (I was still awake myself and had checked the time on my watch), she did not say a word to them. She just went to bed. I suppose that she thought that they were already asleep.

She was late for breakfast. She sat down and poured herself a cup of tea. She did not say a thing. I thought that she must be feeling nervous and guilty.

My dad started. "Who do you think you are? . . . Where the hell were you? . . . Do you think your sister wants to be woken up at that time of night? . . . Don't you dare do it again!"

Then my mum joined in and said some of the same things in a 'so that's how you've turned out' tone of voice. I thought that I might add something. In the end, I just kept quiet.

After all that, my sister laughed. It was as if she couldn't care less, as if the whole thing had nothing to do with her. I couldn't believe it. My dad was fuming. He started to say something when she picked up the Wheatabix and threw it at him: the whole box. No one who knew my dad would dare to do that. He jumped up and went to hit her. My mum

shouted and he stopped at the last minute. My sister had a stupid grin on her face. My dad stormed out of the kitchen. We finished our breakfast in silence.

That was the day my dad came out in the rash. It was all over his chest and arms. He was itching like mad. In some places, he scratched so hard that his skin started to bleed. I thought that we would all catch it. I did feel a bit itchy, but nothing developed. My sister seemed to think that my dad deserved it.

* * *

Then, today . . . she looked wretched and worn out. She looked as if she hadn't been to bed all night. Her face was pale, her cheeks sunken. Yet, there was a hungry look in her eyes and her hair was wild. I could sense a terrible energy burning inside her. There was a scratch on her neck, just above the top of her collar. It was new.

My brother was up early for once, and was talking about 'one of his girlfriends'.

Apparently, he had several although this one was his favourite at the moment. He was being very big-headed about his love life, and my sister was getting more and more irritated. I could see some of my dad's temper in her.

"God," she said, "if you weren't my brother . . ."

"What's that scratch on your neck?" He asked suddenly.

At first, she did not know what to say. She hesitated for a second, then pulled herself together.

"I fell over yesterday afternoon." She explained.

"Fell over!" My brother sounded incredulous.

My sister looked very uncomfortable. Her face was flushed. Even the scratch looked redder and more obvious. I am sure she could feel it throbbing. She was fiddling aimlessly with her breakfast.

"You don't look as if you went to bed at all last night," said my brother. My sister stared angrily at him.

"Yes, she did," I said. My sister had been sleeping in the same bed as me since she came back home to live. I remembered her getting into bed last night. I am sure she would have woken me if she had got up again. Mind you, my brother was right; she looked exhausted.

"You shouldn't be staying out late, anyway," said my mum. "Haven't you heard that another young doctor has gone missing?"

"Of course, but I'm not a doctor, am I?"

"Well, who's to say it won't be a student nurse next?" My mum raised her eyebrows. "Isn't it Carl who has gone missing, Melanie's boyfriend?"

"Melanie's ex-boyfriend!"

"I didn't know that they had split up. He seemed such a nice, young man." My mum seemed to think all doctors were 'nice, young men'.

"He cheated on her. I am glad he's missing. I hope he doesn't come back."

My dad stood up and started moving towards my sister. "I can't understand how you got that scratch," he said. "Here, let me have a look."

My sister got up quickly. "I have to go. I'll be late for work." She turned to me. "Come on. Are you ready?" I knew we were early, but I did not say anything. I had made up my mind that, when we were on our own, I would find out what she was up to.

We got into the car. My sister used to give me a lift to school on some mornings. She was a student nurse in Halloween Hospital. She had to drive past my school to get there.

She started the engine and put the car into gear.

There was another scratch on her wrist. It was protruding just below her cuff. It was new, like the scratch on her neck. I knew that neither of those scratches had been there yesterday. The car began moving forwards.

"What were you doing last night?" I asked.

My sister glanced quickly over at me. The car shuddered, then, stalled. I think she must have pressed the accelerator and the brake at the same time.

"What do you mean?" she continued. "I was in bed with you."

"No you weren't," I said. I wasn't absolutely certain, but I sounded definite.

"Of course I was." It was easy to tell when she wasn't telling the truth.

"You have been acting funny for a while now," I continued. "What's going on?"

There was a long pause. She started to say something, but thought better of it. She smiled at me. It was her old smile. For a second, she looked as if she would be relieved to share her secret with me.

My brother broke his leg playing rugby that afternoon.

We got used to her behaviour, but she was never her old self and that made me miserable. She hardly had time for me. There was a lot of tension between her, my dad and my brother. They argued continuously. My mum accepted it all. I think she realised that it was just a phase my sister was going through.

* * *

I woke with a start. Someone was breaking in. I could hear them trying to open the window. I held my breath. I did not dare move. I tried to sink down into the bed. There was a bang and a muffled grunt. The blanket was partly covering my face. I could not bring myself to lift my head and look. My stomach was churning. I thought about running, but I knew I wouldn't get to the door in time.

There was more noise. Someone was breathing quickly and heavily. There was a creak. I froze. The window was being opened. I tried to shout but nothing came out. I heard a gasp. I knew the voice. I pulled the blanket down and looked over. My sister was up on the window ledge. The window was open. She was half-way out.

"Lizzy!" I cried. She looked around. She was surprised. She looked worried and then she laughed.

"So now you know!" she said.

Her face was a deathly white. She had painted dark, striking lines around her eyes and her lips were thick and shiny with crimson lipstick. She was wearing a black jacket that I had not seen for ages. It had velvet trimming on the collar. It was torn in several places and the sleeves were frayed. Underneath, she wore a white dress with sequins on the bodice.

They glimmered and glistened in the moonlight. She had brought the dress for a summer ball. Her feet were in those well worn, leather boots that she claimed she had lost last year.

She looked so pleased with herself. There was a delighted, mischievous twinkle in her eyes. My mother always said she brought out the best in old clothes. I could see why. She laughed and winked at me.

That was when I realised that my sister was a witch.

"Come on," she said. "Come with me." I did not know what to do. I was dying to go, but I was scared. I thought for a minute. Then, I decided and got out of bed.

I climbed up beside her and took her hand. We stepped out of the window. We plunged downwards. I thought that we were going to hit the ground. At the last moment, we soared upwards. Fences, trees, houses rushed past. I could feel the cold air blowing against my face. It was exhilarating. It was the best thing I have ever done.

"I thought we needed broomsticks!" I shouted. My sister laughed again. I suppose broomsticks were the sort of things our grandmothers would have used.

Suddenly, we dived down at a group of sheep: like a mad, black crow. They looked up in disbelief, then scattered. She saw a dog. She chased after it, screeching, out of the field and down the road. It yelped and whined as it ran. It leapt into someone's front garden. We shot passed.

The bins were out. She tipped them over. Rubbish went everywhere. She knocked over a garden gnome. She pulled down clothes lines. She smashed a dozen beer bottles. Lights came on down the street behind us. I heard doors bang, but we were gone, up into the sky. Her shrill laugh echoed behind us.

We flew upwards until the fields were small squares below us and the houses tiny boxes in between.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Halloween Hospital," she replied. I followed her line of sight into the distance and could see the hospital on the top of the hill. The dual carriageway snaked past it, and then disappeared towards the coast.

We landed behind the hospital in a small car park that was empty apart from a broken down, grey mini-bus. My sister adjusted her jacket, straightened her dress and looked around with a perplexed expression.

"Oh no," she said. "I've done it again. The children's department and the maternity unit look exactly the same from up there."

She led me over to the mini-bus. She tugged twice on the back door and it swung open. She helped me up the step and inside.

"You will have to wait here," she said.

"Where are you going?"

"I've got to meet someone." She started to turn away.

"Who?" She could tell from the tone of my voice that I wasn't going to co-operate unless she told me.

"Just a friend," she explained. "His name is Llewelyn Lewis. He's a doctor."

I smiled secretly to myself. My sister had always wanted to marry a doctor. I think that's why she became a nurse, although she would never admit it.

"A boyfriend?"

"No, I would never go out with him. He got Sally pregnant and now he doesn't want anything to do with her."

"I didn't know Sally was pregnant!" I was shocked. She was my sister's best friend.

"No one does. Don't you dare tell anyone!" She looked angrily at me.

"Why are you meeting Dr Lewis?" I asked.

"We've got one or two things to iron out."

"Well, don't be too long," I said, unconvincingly. I snuggled into the seat. It was quite warm in the mini-bus.

I was waiting beside the bus when my sister arrived back.

I was shocked when I saw her. Her eyes burned. Her face glistened with sweat and her hair was soaked. There was a strange, intense expression on her face. She looked like a naughty, insolent child. Her dress was torn open at the front. There was a long, raw scratch across her chest. I looked down at her hands. She looked back at me and laughed. They were covered with blood.

"Dr Lewis and I could not agree," she said. She was grinning.

I tried to wipe the blood from my sister's hands off onto the grass. I felt sick. I could feel the acid coming up into the back of my throat.

"Let's go home," she said. "I'm tired."

"We'll have to walk," I said. "You can't fly back."

* * *

The next thing I remember was being in our bathroom, in front of the mirror. I looked at my own hands. They were sticky and red. I held my right hand up and examined it closely. The top of my fingers were covered with congealed blood. It had got under the nails. It must have come from my sister. Cautiously I brought my hand nearer to my face.

Before I knew it, my fingers were touching my lips. I licked them. My scalp tingled. I felt a rush of warmth pass through me. I felt full of energy; full of power. I felt as if I could fly. I brought my other hand up to my mouth.

* * *

I was in a daze the next morning when I got up. I struggled downstairs. My parents seemed distant, unrelated to me. My mum said something but it did not seem to make sense. I sat down. I stared hard at my father. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

That was the first time that I behaved strangely at breakfast.

Earache.

"He's got another ear infection, Doctor." Mrs Morris bustled into the room with Michael and two full shopping bags. She squeezed into one chair and Michael sat down in the other.

Mrs Morris was grossly overweight and the exertion of walking from the waiting room had made her red-faced and sweaty.

"An ear infection?" Dr Desmond Dennis raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"It's agony!" Michael rubbed his painful ear.

Dr Dennis sat back in his chair. He took a deep breath and looked first at Michael and then at Mrs Morris as he carefully considered the situation. He drummed his fingers loudly on his desk.

"Have you thought about the tonsil, Mrs Morris, or one of the back teeth, perhaps?"

"It's his ear that's hurting, doctor."

"My ear is killing me!" Michael added. "My teeth are fine."

"They can all cause an earache, Michael," Dr Dennis explained, "an ear infection, tonsillitis or a tooth abscess. It's all to do with the nerve supply."

Michael fidgeted uncomfortably in his chair and looked at the floor.

"It is his ear, Doctor. He has had it before, lots of times." The diagnosis seemed obvious to Mrs Morris.

Dr Dennis chuckled. "Goodness me, it would make my job a lot easier, Mrs Morris, if things were as simple as that. *Michael Morris has a terrible earache, so Michael Morris has a terrible ear infection.* What could be more straightforward? I wouldn't even have to examine Michael. We could do the whole thing over the 'phone."

Michael winced. Dr Dennis's protracted explanation appeared to be making the pain worse.

"I am afraid the human body is far more complicated than that, Mrs Morris, far more complicated." Dr Dennis glanced at his watch.

"Well, time is getting on, Michael. We better have a look at you."

Michael sat up and managed a smile. He was relieved that Dr Dennis was going to look at his ear at last.

"No fever, Mrs Morris?" Mrs Morris's look of puzzlement seemed enough to establish the answer to Dr Dennis's first question.

"No cold?" Dr Dennis continued quickly. Mrs Morris shook her head.

"A cold would make an ear infection more likely." He added. "No headache? No vomiting? No tummy pain? No diarrhoea?" He paused momentarily.

"So we've got an earache but no toothache and just a slight sore throat." Dr Dennis smiled. Mrs Morris spluttered. Michael glared at the doctor.

"My throat's not sore." He stated emphatically.

Dr Dennis ignored this comment.

"Right, open wide." Dr Dennis's torch shone into Michael's eyes. The bright light made him blink. He turned his ear towards Dr Dennis.

"No, I want to look at your throat first, Michael." Michael clenched his jaw tightly.

"Michael, I have to carry out a complete examination," Dr Dennis explained.

Reluctantly, Michael opened his mouth. Dr Dennis examined his throat, tapped Michael's back teeth firmly with his wooden tongue depressor and, finally, looked in Michael's painful left ear.

"Well," he said as he sat back down. "that's very interesting. I am afraid we have a bit of a predicament with the diagnosis."

Mrs Morris nodded. Michael was rubbing his ear again.

"First, I will say, Michael's teeth are fine. We can be quite sure of that." Dr Dennis looked rather pleased with himself as he explained this.

"Good news there, then," Dr Dennis continued. "Now, Michael's left tonsil is slightly red and swollen. Not a severe tonsillitis, but by no means normal. His ear . . ." Both Michael and Mrs Morris were looking up expectantly as Dr Dennis paused.

"Are you sure you haven't had a sore throat, Michael?"

"No, I told you, I haven't." Michael answered grumpily.

"I am just making sure," Dr Dennis explained. "Right, your left ear is similar to your throat. The ear drum is slightly red and swollen. Again, it is not a severe infection, but it isn't normal. So, the diagnosis is not clear."

Michael and Mrs Morris were disappointed.

"If I had to make a choice," continued Dr Dennis, "I would suggest it was your throat, Michael. I don't know why. I suppose it's years of experience, but I think your left tonsil is the problem."

Michael looked angrily out of the consulting room window. Mrs Morris sighed.

"But," Dr Dennis laughed, "don't worry. The beauty of the situation is that the exact diagnosis doesn't matter." He looked very pleased as he explained this. "We can treat both conditions in the same way." Dr Dennis paused to allow the information to sink in.

The mention of treatment made Mrs Morris smile. Michael turned back towards Dr Dennis.

"In fact," Dr Dennis continued, "both conditions usually get better on their own. I generally recommend paracetamol and plenty of fluids."

"What a waste of time!" Michael shrugged and started to get up.

"Doesn't he need antibiotics, Dr Dennis?" Mrs Morris asked anxiously.

"That's the alternative, Mrs Morris. I could prescribe an antibiotic that will treat both his throat and his ear."

"That would be ideal, Doctor," said Mrs Morris. Michael stood by his chair.

Dr Dennis looked at them both thoughtfully. He raised his hands as he spoke. "Now, let's not rush into things. Michael is a strong, young man. He will almost certainly get over this, on his own, and in no time. When did you say that the symptoms started?"

"On Sunday, Doctor."

"Saturday." Michael stated matter-of-factly.

"I am sorry, Michael. It was Saturday, Doctor."

"Saturday. Right." Dr Dennis carried out a quick mental calculation. "So he should be better by Thursday, say Friday at the latest." He looked sympathetically at Michael. "Just two or three more days. That's not too bad is it?"

Mrs Morris considered this. Michael did not look happy.

"With antibiotics his symptoms would get better a little bit quicker, that's all. But, he might get side-effects."

"It is very painful, Doctor. I am sure antibiotics would help a lot." Mrs Morris was still very worried. "He's never had side-effects."

"That's fine, Mrs Morris," Dr Dennis reassured her. "Michael, I will give you a prescription for some antibiotics. I will do my best to help you."

"Oh, thank you, Doctor. Thank you very much." Mrs Morris smiled again. "What do you say, Michael?"

Michael said nothing. He looked bored.

Dr Dennis wrote out the prescription then looked at his watch again.

"Ah, look, it's time for my next patient." He said, and he ushered them quickly out of the room.

Pneumonia.

The high street was deserted. It was cold and dark. Bernice, Brian and Barry Barrat waited in the bus shelter. The wind blew in, around the glass panel, and sprayed them with rain. Bernice huddled up next to her husband, Brian, trying to keep warm. Barry stood opposite them.

"He seems so hot, Brian." Bernice Barrat stared anxiously at her son. Despite the cold weather, Barry did look hot and flushed. His hands were trembling.

"The doctor seemed very good." Brian tried to reassure his wife.

"She was so young. I wish they had kept him in hospital."

"She explained everything very clearly." Brian continued. "I'm sure she is right. He has one of those flu viruses. He'll soon be better. He is a strong lad."

But Bernice wasn't convinced. She knew her own son, after all. This was definitely worse than flu.

"Look, I could not help overhearing you." A tall, heavily built man approached them.

Bernice looked around, startled. She hadn't noticed anyone else nearby. The man walked with a slight limp and supported himself with a wooden stick. He had a large, flat forehead topped with a few strands of wet hair. He had a pale, greyish-blue complexion, but smiled kindly.

"My name is Dr Huw Davies. I am a family doctor here, in the town." Dr Davies rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I can see you are worried about Barry. He doesn't look well."

"Yes, I am very worried." Bernice Barrat nodded her head anxiously as she spoke. "He is not himself, at all. He has been like this for days."

"I would be more than happy to have a look at him, if you like; for a second opinion."

The doctor had an air of confidence that Barry's parents immediately felt at ease with.

"Are you sure you don't mind?" Bernice was clearly very pleased by his suggestion.

"Not at all! Not at all! Follow me. My surgery is just around the corner. It's five minutes from here."

* * *

The surgery was on the ground floor of a narrow, terrace house. The blue paint on the front door was blistered and peeling. Dr Davies had to push the door firmly with his shoulder to get in. They walked along a short hallway into an old fashioned, dilapidated waiting room. Some wooden chairs were positioned untidily around the edge of the room.

Two were lying on their backs. A lopsided coffee table held a pile of tattered magazines and some broken toys. A single, stained light bulb hung in the middle of the room and illuminated it with a dull, yellow glow.

"Come straight through."

The small, dark consulting room did not look as if it had been used for some time. The curtains were hung halfway across the grimy window. A reflex hammer lay on the floor. Two rubber tubes hung from Dr Davies' blood pressure machine, their connections missing.

"I am sorry we are a little disorganised," said Dr Davies. "I have not been to work for a while. Still, I think we have everything we need." He found a thermometer on his desk, picked it up, wiped the dust off and shook it twice.

"Let's sit you up here, Barry." Doctor Davies lifted the boy up onto the edge of his examination couch. He popped the thermometer into Barry's mouth. "He looks very hot, doesn't he?" he continued, looking at Mr and Mrs Barrat. "Has he been shivering?"

Barry's worried parents both nodded.

"Is he off his food?"

"He has hardly eaten for three days. It's not like him at all." Bernice Barrat felt that Dr Davies ought to know what a good appetite Barry usually had.

Doctor Davies took the thermometer from Barry and held it up into the light from the window. He squinted as he tried to read the temperature.

"Mmm . . . quite high, quite high indeed." He stood and watched Barry carefully.

"You will notice that he is breathing slightly quicker than normal." The doctor explained. "He's not taking much notice of what's going on," he continued. "That's because he's concentrating on his breathing."

Mrs Barrat smiled.

"Has he had a cough?"

"Yes, he's had a cough, doctor." Mrs Barrat answered. "Not a bad one, though."

"A cough can be quite deceiving, Mrs Barrat. Those awful coughs, where you cough and cough and cough day after day, will often get better on their own. On the other hand, one of those quiet coughs that hardly troubles you can be a sign of something much more serious."

Mrs Barrat looked horrified.

"Hang on! Hang on, Bernice!" Brian Barrat stepped in. "Dr Davies is just giving you an example. I don't think he is suggesting that Barry has anything like that wrong with him."

"Right, let's listen to your chest, Barry." As Barry undid his shirt, Dr Davies rummaged through his worn, leather medical bag to find his stethoscope. He muttered to himself as he brought it out. One of the earpieces had fallen off.

He chuckled. "My left ear is not too good these days anyway."

Mr and Mrs Barrat smiled nervously at each other.

Dr Davies watched Barry's chest closely as he breathed.

"Now that Barry's shirt is off, you can see that, when he breathes in and out, the right side of his chest is not moving as much as the left." Mr and Mrs Barrat looked puzzled. "It is a very slight difference," the doctor continued. "It's not easy to see." He nodded his head as he thought.

Dr Davies listened to Barry's breathing, moving his stethoscope slowly over the back and front of the boy's chest. He paused, straightened up, thought for a moment and listened to Barry's right lung again.

"There we are . . . just as I thought." Dr Davies turned towards Mr and Mrs Barrat. "I am afraid that this young man has pneumonia."

Bernice gasped. She looked terrified. Brian Barrat put his hand on his wife's shoulder. He swallowed uncomfortably.

"Pneumonia?" They both asked, simultaneously.

"I am sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you." Dr Davies calmly reassured them.

"Pneumonia is just a scientific word that we doctors use for a chest infection. It sounds worse than it is. Pneumonia can be easily treated, in most cases, once the diagnosis is made." He smiled. "Barry should be as right as rain in no time."

Mr and Mrs Barrat looked relieved.

"He will need to go into hospital, though." He needs antibiotic injections, and I think he will need oxygen."

"We have just come from the hospital."

"Don't worry. I will write a letter to take back to them. It will explain everything."

* * *

Bernice, Brian and Barry Barrat found themselves standing on the pavement again, in the cold. Brian looked around. There was no sign of Dr Davies. The surgery was dark. The front door was firmly closed. The street was completely empty. Bernice trembled. In her hand, she clutched a white envelope.

"Come on, Brian," she said. "Let's get Barry back to the hospital as soon as possible."

* * *

"I am sure that this is the place." Brian Barrat stood in front of the blue door. He peered through a small, glass window. "Yes, I can see the waiting room."

"It's very old," said Bernice. "I don't remember it being like this."

"It's definitely the surgery," continued Brian Barrat. "There is a sign in the hallway - Dr Huw Davies. Let's see if anyone is in." He knocked loudly on the door.

"I don't think anyone is here, Brian. All the lights are off."

Brian ignored his wife and knocked again. He waited.

He stepped backwards and looked at the upper floor of the building. All the windows were dark. There was no sign of any movement.

He shouted out: "Hallo! Hallo!"

He knocked on the door once more.

"Can I help you?" A thin, elderly lady appeared from the gate of the house next door. She was wore a flowery dress and a crisp, white apron. Her silver hair was short and precisely set.

"We are looking for Dr Huw Davies." Brian explained.

"No one's worked in the surgery for years."

"That can't be right!" Bernice Barrat looked perturbed. "We saw Dr Davies a few weeks ago."

"It couldn't have been Dr Davies."

"Yes, it was here: in this very building. It was a Monday evening. He examined our son, Barry. He saved his life." Bernice Barrat's voice had become quite emotional as she remembered that night.

"We wanted to thank him," Brian Barrat added.

"It couldn't have been him." The lady repeated. "Dr Davies died five years ago."

"That's impossible!" said Brian Barrat. "I spoke to him, myself. I shook his hand."

"He arranged for Barry to go into hospital." Bernice added.

"He introduced himself to us," said Brian Barrat. "Is there another Dr Huw Davies here, in the town?"

"No," replied the lady. "There has only ever been one Dr Davies here. Listen . . . why don't you come next door, to my house? I will make you both a cup of tea."

* * *

"I am Mrs Coleman, Connie Coleman. I used to clean the surgery for Dr Davies." Mrs Coleman switched the kettle on. She picked up a photograph from the sideboard and handed it to Bernice Barrat. "This is Dr Davies. It was taken about ten years ago."

Bernice's face turned bright red. She spoke very quietly. "Look Brian, it's the same man who saw Barry. He can't be dead. We both saw him. We both spoke to him." Brian Barrat looked at the picture. He did not know what to say.

"It was a terrible, terrible tragedy." Mrs Coleman said as she poured hot water into the teapot and put it down in the middle of the table. She got some cups and saucers out. "Come on, sit down."

"Dr Davies was a very hardworking man," she continued. "Like the majority of doctors, he worked too hard. That was his problem, really. I usually arrived at the surgery early, to get my work done before they opened. He was always there before me. He worked right through, until late in the evening. He hardly ever stopped for food. Now and again, but not often, he would pop upstairs for a quick bit of lunch."

"I don't think our doctor works as hard as that." Mrs Barrat looked over at her husband.

"No, he certainly doesn't." Brian Barrat dismissed his wife's suggestion. "Dr Dennis always makes sure he gets a good, long lunch break. I should think it helps him concentrate."

Mrs Coleman raised her eyebrows. She stirred the tea and poured it into the cups. She got out a packet of biscuits.

"Dr Davies worked every weekend. Weekends were supposed to be for emergencies only." Mrs Coleman laughed. "Emergencies! Our patients had some funny ideas about emergencies, but Dr Davies never complained."

"We have never called the doctor out at the weekend." Bernice Barrat looked pleased to be able to say this.

"We did, Bernice, in 1968. It was for my lumbago. It was a Sunday."

"Oh, yes." Bernice continued. "Didn't Dr Parry come? She told you to lie on a hard floor for a week and not to call her out for a bad back again."

"Yes, she upset me," said Brian Barrat. "It was the first time I had seen a doctor since I had had my appendix out when I was 15 years old."

"I thought she was quite rude, Brian."

"Dr Davies was never rude to his patients. Never!" Mrs Coleman sat down and took a sip of tea. Bernice and Brian Barrat picked their cups up.

"He hardly saw his family," she continued. "He had a devoted wife and one son, Rhodri. Rhodri was a well behaved boy. He was quiet and polite. If his Mum went out, he would sit in the waiting room and read." Mrs Coleman took another sip of her tea and picked up a biscuit. Brian Barrat took a biscuit. Bernice did not feel like eating.

"I don't know if you remember the influenza outbreak five years ago. It swept the country. All our patients seemed to catch it. Dr Davies was busier than ever."

"Yes, we both had it. Didn't we, Bernice? You were very ill." Brian Barrat reached over and squeezed his wife's hand. An involuntary shiver ran through her as she remembered that dreadful winter.

"I didn't catch it, of course," continued Mrs Coleman. "I had had the Spanish Flu in 1919 and was immune. Dr Davies caught it. He was very poorly, but carried on working. Mrs Davies spent a week in bed. After that, she was called away to look after her sister in London." Mrs Coleman paused and looked at them both. "Rhodri got an awful cough. He coughed and coughed, day after day. It sounded to me as if he had whooping cough." Mr and Mrs Barrat looked anxiously at each other.

"Dr Davies was so busy! He was having to work until 10 o'clock most nights. He would come in, eat a sandwich, drink half a cup of tea and go straight to bed. He hardly saw Rhodri."

"Rhodri was coming round to me for his tea every evening. He wasn't eating much. He was tired. I think that that cough was keeping him awake. He started to lose weight. I could see him getting weaker. Dr Davies was kiping too. He was often called out in the middle of the night. He was impatient and quick tempered. I think he missed his wife." Mrs Coleman sighed.

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"The ambulance arrived at 3 o'clock in the morning. The siren woke me. The light was flashing, right outside my window. The ambulance men had gone into Dr Davies' house. I had known that something would happen, the way he was working. It had to be a heart attack or a stroke. His blood pressure must have been through the roof." Mrs Coleman took a deep breath. Mr and Mrs Barrat watched her intently. They had put their cups down.

"I ran over, just as they brought him out on the stretcher. But, it wasn't Dr Davies, it was Rhodri. He was unconscious. He looked so small and weak. His father followed. He was an exhausted, broken man. I wanted to go to the hospital with them, but Dr Davies wouldn't let me." Mrs Coleman wiped away a tear that ran down her cheek. "I felt awful, after. I felt so guilty. If only Mrs Davies had stayed at home. If only her sister hadn't been ill."

Mrs Barrat felt sick. She couldn't help thinking about Barry's first day in hospital. He had looked so fragile.

"Rhodri died the following afternoon." Mrs Coleman continued. "They tried everything. They said it was too late. He had pneumonia, and it was too far advanced. I couldn't believe it. When I arrived on the ward, a sheet had been drawn up his face. His father sat next to him on the bed. His head hung down in despair. He was devastated." Connie Coleman blushed and tears welled up in her eyes. Bernice Barrat started to cry. Even Brian's eyes were moist.

"Dr Davies was severely criticised. The coroner acknowledged the difficult circumstances, but said that he should have taken Rhodri to a doctor or, at the very least, examined him himself." Connie Coleman shook her head as she spoke. "Can you believe it? He did not even have time to listen to his own son's chest. I don't know how many patients he examined in those few weeks. Surely, one more would not have been too much." Mr and Mrs Barrat shook their heads.

"The coroner did not punish Dr Davies. He said that the loss of his son was punishment enough."

"Dr Davies hardly spoke during the inquest. He said nothing to excuse or defend himself. His wife stood quietly beside him. They held hands."

Mrs Barrat glanced at her husband.

"Then," Connie Coleman continued, "three days after the inquest Dr Davies was found dead in his surgery. He had hung himself."

Brian and Bernice Barrat stared at Connie Coleman.

"So, it could not have been Dr Davies that examined your son. It must have been someone else."

The Golden Medicine.

Sophie Williams came cautiously into the makeshift consulting room. She negotiated several piles of books and sat down on a wooden, kitchen chair. She glanced around. She was obviously in the doctor's front room. His desk had been awkwardly positioned in one corner with hardly enough space for either his chair or his patient's. The remainder of the room made up his living area: a sofa, a small coffee table, a television and a tall lamp. His dinner plate and tea cup were still on the coffee table. Sophie frowned.

Sophie looked directly at Dr Pickerty. She kept her back very straight and her head perfectly still. She crossed her right leg carefully over her left, put her handbag onto her knee and placed her hands on top so that her brightly painted nails were properly displayed. She smiled a small, quick smile.

"And how can I help you?" The doctor asked.

Sophie hesitated, not sure what to say. She lowered her eyes.

Dr Pickerty waited for the young lady to compose herself.

"Something's not right," explained Sophie. She looked nervously at Dr Pickerty. He was very old. He had retired years ago. She wondered why she had asked to see him.

Dr Pickerty nodded.

Sophie took a deep breath. "I think I've got something wrong with my heart."

"Right, I see," said Dr Pickerty. He paused to allow her to continue her story.

Sophie said nothing. She sat quietly. She gently rubbed the polished clasp of her handbag. She looked distinctly uncomfortable.

"Let me see . . . your heart . . ." Dr Pickerty cleared his throat. "Have you felt out of breath?"

"No," Sophie gave a very slight shake of her head.

"Have you had any pain, here, in the chest?" Dr Pickerty brought his hand up to his own chest to demonstrate.

"No".

"Have your ankles been swollen?"

"No."

"Have you been feeling dizzy?"

"No."

"Have you ever fainted?" He raised his eyebrows.

"No."

"Mmm . . ." Dr Pickerty peered down at Sophie through his spectacles. "Have you had palpitations?"

"No." Sophie wasn't certain what palpitations were.

"Right," said Dr Pickerty again. "No difficulty breathing, no chest pain and no ankle swelling?" He looked at Sophie for confirmation.

"No, none of those symptoms."

"Mmm . . . no dizziness, no faints and no palpitations?" He continued.

"No." Sophie shook her head once more.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure." Sophie sounded a little bit irritated. She did not have time for the doctor's double checking procedures.

Dr Pickerty looked puzzled. "Well, if you haven't got any of those symptoms, why are you worried about your heart?"

Sophie paused. Her face flushed a deep red. Her top lip quivered.

"Yes . . ." Dr Pickerty tried to encourage her.

"I just am."

"You must have some symptoms."

Sophie looked down at the desk. She seemed to be thinking hard. She was frowning. She clenched her hands.

"I've never been able to fall in love." Sophie eventually managed to blurt it out. Dr Pickerty nodded and smiled. Sophie did not think he looked at all concerned. She folded her arms tightly across her chest.

"I'm 18 years old," Sophie continued forcefully. "I'm 18 years old and I've never been in love."

"You are still young," Dr Pickerty reassured her. "You've got plenty of time."

"My friends have all been in love. It's happened to Mary Blake six times."

Dr Pickerty chuckled. "Why are all you young people in such a hurry to do everything? I don't understand it."

"I just wanted you to check my heart," Sophie protested. "I thought it might be too small or maybe damaged."

"I don't think so," said Dr Pickerty. "But, I will check it for you." He stood up, picked up his stethoscope and went to examine Sophie. He listened to her heart, moving his stethoscope to several different points on her chest.

"It sounds fine to me," he said.

"Well, if my heart is fine, why can't I fall in love?" Sophie wasn't satisfied. "I have tried as hard as I can. I have been out with loads of boys. They fall in love with me, straight away, but I have never fallen in love with any of them."

"Look," said Dr Pickerty, "love is not just about your heart."

"Most of them were really good looking." Sophie could not help looking a little pleased with herself as she said this.

"Maybe you are trying too hard," Dr Pickerty suggested. "People fall in love when they least expect it. You just need to be patient."

"I don't want to be patient. Everybody falls in love. There must be something seriously wrong with me." She blinked once as she spoke and a single tear rolled down her cheek.

Dr Pickerty sighed. He felt sorry for this unhappy girl. He reached down into the cupboard under his desk, and took out a small bottle. He put it onto the desk in front of Sophie. The bottle was old and dusty. It contained a thick, golden syrup that glistened when it caught the light. The bottle was one third full.

Sophie sniffed disdainfully.

Dr Pickerty raised his eyebrows. "I could prescribe this for you. It might do the trick."

"It looks old."

"It is very old. I've had it for 30 years. As far as I know, it's the last remaining bottle."

Dr Pickerty picked the bottle up and turned it in his hand. "It looks fine to me."

"Will it work?"

"I can't make any promises, but I think so." Dr Pickerty actually sounded very confident.

"I'll try it, then," said Sophie. She looked relieved at last. She sighed, relaxed her shoulders and leant back against the chair.

"Now," explained Dr Pickerty. "It will not work immediately. You take one teaspoon every morning for a week: not a drop more. There should be just enough left in the bottle. It could take up to 12 months to have an effect. You must still be patient."

Sophie nodded obediently.

"You must promise me one thing," continued Dr Pickerty. "This is very important."

"Yes." Sophie agreed quickly.

"Whatever you do, you must not try to fall in love. In fact, I would suggest you do exactly the opposite. Be determined not to fall in love. I know that sounds strange, but it's that sort of medicine. That is my recommendation. Can you do that?"

Sophie nodded.

"Oh . . . and don't come back to see me after you have taken it, not ever."

Sophie looked puzzled but agreed.

As soon as Dr Pickerty had finished speaking, she stood up and took the bottle. She looked closely at it, turning it in the same way that Dr Pickerty had. She put it into her bag and thanked the doctor.

Dr Pickerty smiled. "If you do exactly as I have said, I am certain you will fall in love."

Dr Pickerty chuckled quietly to himself as Sophie left the room. He was quite sure that she would soon fall in love. He knew this because the medicine was the same one that he had given to his wife, Dwynwen Gwilym, when they first met. It had worked immediately. Then, more recently, he had tried it on the pretty, young girl who had been cleaning for him for the last three months. On Friday, after only three doses, she had grabbed him and kissed him passionately. This morning, she kissed him again and agreed to marry him. She was nineteen years old and Dr Patrick Pickerty was seventy eight. He had no doubt that it was a wonderful medicine.