

BACK TO LONDON AGAIN

Private nursing was fun as you could do a case or two and then hare around the country seeing places, and when you ran out of money do it all over again. Sometimes if we had easy cases we would meet at the Serpentine in Hyde Park, eat some breakfast at the café there, and swim and go to sleep under a tree until time to go back to work, eat again and off we would go. Also there is the attraction of looking after only one person which means that you can really do it properly. Both Lamorna and I had some interesting cases. All this fun and games beat hollow the idea of going to Perth and becoming a student again so we never did! With private nursing you lose out on practising to run a ward, but because only the very difficult or unusual cases had 'specials' which was the, then, equivalent of the intensive care units of today, you learned quite a lot of unusual stuff.

I nursed in a Jewish house or two. In one family the lady had something to do with picture houses, and would give me her vouchers so Lamorna and I saw film previews aplenty. In another house I informed the family that my patient the Matriarch was by far too sick to preside over the Friday night session that week. Next thing I knew her sons were talking about how much they had paid for a consignment of sardines and that revived her, she just about hit the roof and was shocked into comparative health for another week or two.

The Jewish patients were quite able to integrate a nurse into their households but this seemed difficult for other families. Sometimes one was put into the kitchens with the largely foul-mouthed servants, or sat at the family table where the conversation was of the South of France, yachts, race horses and the like; some simply put a table outside for nurses – by far the best.

Once or twice Doc and my mum came to London to stay with me for a holiday.

I had a Swiss patient, Victor, with head injuries who when he came back to see his specialist a few months later took me out a couple of times, I never really liked him though. I also got to know a male nurse quite well – can not have been that well as I can't remember his name now. Lamorna had an Indian friend for a while. Mrs Nash, when I visited them – fancying me as a daughter-in-law – would do her best to get her oldest son Michael and I off somewhere, but it never really worked. We did, however, dutifully go to a few places together, notably 'My Fair Lady'. Michael had a motorbike and I quite liked the motorbike.

Then Lamorna took herself off to France to do an au pair job teaching a little'un to speak English. By this time I was almost a permanent fixture at the London Clinic specialising cases there. There was Amin, and his interpreter Jimmy. These two were Arab, pure Arab. They looked the part, hooked noses and brownish skins. Old Amin was a hajji, and wore the white and black headscarf with the black circlet that I had to put back on after I had washed him. I was always scared that I would put the thing back wrong and create an international incident! Amin, who was, as I saw him, a lovely, lovely old gentleman, learned a little cockney English. He would walk the Clinic corridors with my help and to each soul that he passed he would say 'Salaam Ali Cum', and nearly topple over in his depth of bow. Then to make sure that they knew they were being greeted he would add 'allow 'allow 'allow'.

The only previous knowledge I had of Arabs was from P C Wren's books and Rudolph Valentino prancing around with a white scarf draped around his head and some daft woman singing "oh Shiek of Arabeee, your love belongs to meeee." So I found Ali, his cousin, and Jimmy, Mahamoud was his correct name, quite fascinating. I went out with Jimmy a couple of times I think largely so that I could tell my mum I had been out with a genuine Arab. No wonder she was scared to ask what colour the South African was when Dad arrived on the scene! I don't think Jimmy was a very good example of traditional Arab anyway, I had always thought that they were 'hot stuff' with horses. One time when I came back from Devon after a weekend or something I