

## Chapter XV

### A MODEL GERIATRICS AND PSYCHIATRICS "The lake path"



Geriatric Ward Doctor Coordinator. Job compelled by some Health Systems to guarantee a constant control of the medical efficiency. Thanks to that I've got a new job, that I promise to myself to perform in a "loyal and patriotic way".

The reception isn't too good. The atmosphere of the place is neither cheerful nor peaceful. The smell of urine and wet clothing saturates everything, avoiding you may forget the place where you are. In the following weeks, I learn when there's smell of pine-tree in aerosol, it means that inspectors are coming.

The oldest dwellers of the house are practically always quiet. Cemetery of Elephants, wounded by life. Pathetic pictures of past time family glories.

Relics of households that grew up by force of sweat and labour and their progeny, in a mad race towards the future, forgot where they came from.

The admission of patientes is by the score. Old and young people are admitted. Psychiatric and healthy patients are admitted. Any age, clinical description or mental disease, is good as long as they pay. The basic and principal reason is "Mr. Money". The Geriatric Psychiatry is just another strip in the market.

Everything is an awful mixture, a stew of difficult digestion. An old man who tries to keep himself active, sleeps besides a bedridden irretentive man who drenches the stuffy room with nauseating stink; yonder, the endless blasphemies of a paralytic, victim of a car accident, hardly allows to sleep those who are around him.

The Alzheimer havocs drives a woman to pull a vesicular catherer from another one, saying she has to take her dog for a walk. Four beds are stored where there must be only two. Atmosphere thermometer tricked at 20°C. sharp, and an incredible amount of calendars on all the walls. I'm told they were hanged to improve cheatingly the average of credit of the clinic at the mutual societies.

If clinically things get complicated, it depends on "the day of the month", the patient can or can't be sent to Intensive Therapy or Emergency Ward.

If they remain at the Geriatrics and Psychiatrics until the 7th. day of the month, the Retired Mutual Society pays for the whole month. If they leave or are sent away, then they don't, and that's bad business.

Now, I understand why there are so many requests of ambulances from the Geriatrics on the 8th. day of each month. Including those who died on the 7th. are registered at 2

o'clock AM of the 8th. day. Of course, they try the families not to be informed and even, they have a lot of prepared "reasons" in case the families complain for not having been informed about their beloved relation's death.

- *"We tried to telephone, but nobody answered".*
- *"We didn't have certain document for the decease certificate".*

The diet is very cheap: bread, potatoes, "pasta", corn porridge... Stale bread bought wholesale at the latest hours of the day from any bakery of the zone.

Unsavory boiled or baked potatoes, grubby pasta and corn porridge slightly coloured with rotten tomatoes. For drinking: lots and lots of fresh water from the bathroom faucet.

Scurvy epidemic. Proteins, fruit, vegetables are too expensive and they don't get profit margin enough. If there are "ravioli" at the menu, it's due there were leftovers or the patients didn't or couldn't eat them. Nothing is thrown away. Everything is recycled.

Two brothers are the owners of this hovel; one of them is affiliated to the Party A and the other one to the Party B. Evident philosophic antinomy.

Whoever wins in politics, there's always a contact with the Government. To be settled down and get a lot of money are the main objective of their lives.

A "Ward doctor" "catches" one of the owners. She disappears from the ward for hours, while nurses and servants look after the patients. Manicure, chiropodist and hairdresser come quickly to the Clinic when she has a "date".

I can't blame her and don't even try to.

She doesn't visit the patients or give out medicines. She's the "untouchable" to everybody. Although her piercing problem is the secretary "former lover" whose place she took, the only one fitted enough to stop her impudence, whims and laziness. Wonders in the ecological balance...

Some Ward doctors carry out their jobs without great control, badly paid and indolent. They share their duty with sexual practices with some patients, some accepting them, others under sedatives...

Those patients who watch these no-professional relations: doctor-patient, and have the unfortunate idea of gossiping with maids or nurses, immediately and with any excuse are electroshocked, trying desperately they may forget what they had seen...

There are severe orders from the Manager that shamelessly interferes in the medical sphere. To disobey them means to give up the job or dismissal. One of them is: when there isn't budget enough to buy food, only fifteen patients out of fifty will be able to eat...

This compulsory fast is justified with sessions of electroshock, because they must have the stomach empty to avoid vomiting. The doctors who try to object it, are already part of the Clinic History...

Even the electroshock is performed in its most economical version. There's no anaesthetist or "Curare" to avoid bone fractures. The nurse gives an injection of "Atropine" half an hour before, to lessen the secretions from the lungs. Later the doctor gives Pentotal and Valium by intravenous way, while two pieces of cotton wool soaked with salt are placed on both temples.

The electrodes with high voltage and low power are placed on them and it's shot. The body twists backwards, until the set stops, (if it works properly) Convulsions start and the shaky bed shares with it rhythmical squacking this pathetic witch's dance.

Finally the patient falls in a deep sleep. On waking up at the following day, he remembers nothing what had happened in the latest few months. It's the perfect excuse to convince him he's mad and so extend his hospitalization.

There's an evil character moving shrewdly in middle of the Clinic. She's the overseer Matron Angelica. She started as a servant and little by little she was promoting until she learnt how to take blood pressure, pulse, and temperature. She knew how to read and write, therefore she easily learnt how to distribute medicines and so she improved in her career. Nowadays, she even prescribes the patients allowed by the owners.

Her informants are the patients themselves, who tell her everything that is happening so they can receive special favours...When a scabies epidemic broke out at the Geriatrics, only her friends received expensive antiparasitic...

A very old man, who suffers the Hakim Adam disease, without recovery, walked slowly along the Wards and corridors. His insanity hadn't been able to erase the aspect of tenderness from his face. He used to sit down everywhere: on the beds, on the chairs and even on the bidet beside anyone who was using the loo.

Everyday his face or body had new ecchymosis due to blows, bangs, kicks from other patients. By chance, he tried to lie into the bed of the Matron's principal gossip. A week end he was found in pharmacological coma and died by bonquoio-aspiration...

An old woman who spoke with French accent, liked to hum the Marseillaise in the afternoons. She used to swear having been married to a blue-blooded noble. With her Canadian walking stick she strolled along the garden and the corridors with a naughty little face, and stood near the dust-bins. Her main treasure were pieces of cotton-wool soaked with alcohol used for the injections. When she gathered a few, put them in a glass of water and drank happily the "cocktail" she had prepared...

Once, when I didn't even know her well, she snatched from me a piece of cotton-wool "for earache". Another time, she asked me if I let her have a fizzy drink, showing me the bottle a friend had brought. A maid warned me it was red wine.

That friend used to visit her in the afternoons with a thermos to have a nice hot coffee together. As they used to walk wobbly and miss the door frames, I made up my mind to

analyze what was there inside the thermos, finding out it was a popular coffee liquor: Jamaican origin....

One day I found her in coma in her bed. I smelt strong fumes of whisky. What caught my eye that a woman could get such a binge. She was nearly full of drink...

It was the beginning of the month and the Health insurance hadn't paid yet. Medicines for Clinic diseases weren't distributed, saying there was no money.

The Clinic, fifty per cent occupied with patients, was an infuriating matter for the manager and the owners who realized the sudden decreasing of the invoicing.

On my morning visit three hypertensioned old men with acute lung oedema.

Another one in convulsions that impressed like a cerebral haemorrhage. An old woman with hip fracture.

I ask to send them urgently to their own hospitals. Angelica rushed to ask me if I know what day it is:

- *"3rd. December", I answer, "doctor's day".*

Five ambulances at the door. The owners, who have just arrived and before their upset eyes, the spectacle looked like a whole evacuation...

Nobody speaks to me. Half an hour later, the Directors and the Manager send for me. Their scheme is very simple. Either I resign or they'll discharge me.

It's December, the month when everybody gives or receives presents, but I've only got one job: a part time one. I don't pay the School of Medicine Registration and I buy a small electric train for my son who bursts happily.

I can look at him face and he's very proud of his father. He puts his small arms round my neck and says:

- *"Daddy, I will always take good care of you".*

If I don't get another job, perhaps a friend may lend me a tent and in these holidays he'll be able to know the sea...