Edith

Lola Chadwick*

*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1949 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
Edith

Lola Chadwick

Abstract

SHE TURNED on her stomach, on her back, on her left side, on her stomach again. The pain did not go away. But it did not get worse. Perhaps later, she thought. Perhaps later it would go away...
dates and who pinned who for God's sake. I just can't do it. These other guys just let their mouths run, but I can't even remember their lines, let alone make up a line of my own."

"Well," I say, "you can always learn bridge."

"Hell, that's out too. You can't have bridge without small talk, unless you are playing with guys. And it ain't with guys that I want to make out."


Edith

SHE TURNED on her stomach, on her back, on her left side, on her stomach again. The pain did not go away. But it did not get worse. Perhaps later, she thought. Perhaps later it would go away.

If she had to have an operation now all her nice little plans were doomed to destruction. She couldn't have that new dress, and she needed new shoes and all those other things. Harvey would be back this fall, and she wouldn't be there. And how could you go back to school without decent clothes? She rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes.

She turned on her left side and then quickly to her back. Perhaps if she got up it would go away. She pushed the covers back and sat on the edge of the bed. It was better while she sat there, but as she dressed it came back. Thank God, Mama was at church. She could throw away her breakfast without eating any. In the kitchen she took her fruit juice and poured it in the sink. She put the cereal in a bowl and carried it outside where she emptied it into the garbage can. She left the dishes on the table and went out the backdoor again. She sat on the steps and looked at the roses and the grass. When she sat like this the pain almost went away. It was only when she moved.

"Edith."

"Here, Mama."

Her mother sat down on the step beside Edith and removed her hat. "That old car won't go many more miles. What we are going to do when the thing falls apart I don't know. We can't have it fixed, I know that much."
“Oh Charles will get it fixed for you and pay for it. I don’t see what you are worrying about.”

“Now don’t be mercenary, Edith. You know I could not and would not take any money from Charles to get our car fixed. He has a family of his own you know.”

“Yes, I know he has a family of his own. He also has money of his own.” Her mother fanned herself with a pair of spotlessly white gloves. “We’re going to Charles and Martha’s for dinner today.”

“Oh.”

“He’s going to pick us up in about 15 minutes.”

“I’m all ready.”

Her mother stood up and went back into the house. “I’ll call you when he comes,” she said as the screen door slammed. “Yeah.” Edith chewed her thumbnail and thought about the pain in her stomach. It was much worse than last time.

She stood up and then put both hands on the porch railing and held on so she would not sway. After a minute the pain receded and she could see again and feel the porch railing in her hands again. She took her hands away and went into the house.

* * *

When she came home at six o’clock that evening her uncle Charles and her aunt Martha and her mother were sitting in the living room drinking iced tea. Her little cousin Karen sat cross-legged in front of a pile of paper dolls. Gracious living, Edith thought and sat down in a chair.

“Iced tea, Edith?” her mother asked.

“No, Mama, I’m sick.”

“Edith! What is it dear?”

“I hurt from here to here,” (and she marked off the middle third of her anatomy.)

“Do you feel nauseated?” asked Martha.

“No. I hurt from here to here.”

“Do you want to double up?” asked Martha.

“No. I just hurt. Mother.”

Her mother went to the telephone. “I’ll call the doctor.”

“Well, it’s not appendicitis Gertrude. You can just breathe a sigh of relief for that. If she had appendicitis she would be nauseated and doubled up. All she needs is a good laxative.
When I had it I was so sick I couldn’t stand up and I couldn’t straighten up."

"I think I’ll call the doctor anyway, Martha. Just to make sure. ’ Edith put her head back and stopped listening to them. A laxative. She heard her mother dial and then she heard her mother’s voice, but she made no effort to understand the words. Then she heard the receiver being placed back in the cradle. Karen was staring at her.

"He said to bring her right down. Did you hear me, Edith?"

"Yes."

Charles said, "Now we’ll take my car Gertrude. If Edie is sick now she would be dead by the time we got down to Johnson’s office in that old car of yours."

"Oh, Charles, there no need of that. I can get there all right."

"I am going to drive you down. Pick those things up, Karen." Charles was being authoritative. He dearly loved being authoritative.

Edith stood up. Charles took her arm.

"Let go. I can still walk." Edith bit her lip. Shut up and be nice to Charles or you will have to pay for this from your own bank account, she told herself. That money subtracted from Charles’ bank account won’t look like it will subtracted from yours. She smiled bravely into Charles’ face. He smiled back and understood. Karen put the lid on the box of dolls and they all went out to Charles’ car.

* * *

Edith zipped the zipper on her dress and sat down. Her mother looked worried. "Do you feel any better, dear?"

Edith shook her head. Martha patted Edith’s hand and then walked over to Gertrude and patted her hand.

Dr. Johnson came out of a back room and sat down beside Edith. He patted her hand. "Well Edie, it looks pretty bad."

"Is it appendicitis?"

"Yep, afraid it is. Guess we’ll have to do the job tonight."

Oh, God no, Edith thought. I won’t work any longer. Why should Charles and Martha have everything? I want new clothes. I want to go back to school. I don’t want to
work. Charles has the money to pay for this. If I can get Martha's sympathy I know Charles will come across. They're dumb but they have money. And they're kind.

"No, I can't," she said. "I'll just die. I don't have any money."

"Oh, Edith." Her mother was crying now. She fumbled for a handkerchief.

Dr. Johnson looked confused. "But don't you have any insurance, Gertrude?" Gertrude shook her head.

Edith said, "We couldn't pay the premiums so we had to drop it." She put her hands over her face and bowed her head slightly. "Oh what will I do?" The tears were starting now. "I won't be able to go back to school."

Edith took her hands from her face and whimpered. "What will I do, what will I do, what will I do?" She put the back of one hand against her mouth and let the tears stream frankly down her face.

Dr. Johnson patted her hand again. "Don't worry, Edie. Don't worry about it. We can make arrangements for you to pay in installments."

"Oh no. I couldn't. Mother and I never pay anything in installments. It's bad b-b," Edith's voice caught, "business."

"I'm sorry Edith, but there's nothing else we can do. The risk is too great."

"I know. May I have some Kleenex?" Dr. Johnson handed her four tissues and she wiped the tears away as they came.

"That's the stuff." Dr. Johnson beamed on her. He patted her head and thought, "there's a brave girl." Edith's tears were well controlled and she twisted the Kleenex. Martha was staring at her. "I'll go out and tell Charles you have to go to the hospital," she said.

Martha patted Gertrude's hand and went out. Dr. Johnson gave Edith two more Kleenex. "Don't worry about it now. We'll fix things up," he said.

* * *

When they came out Charles helped Edith into the car and slammed the door. Karen was snivelling as she stared at Edith. Charles got in the driver's seat and started hurriedly. Edith twisted her Kleenex and occasionally wiped her eyes with it. Charles reached across Karen and patted Edith's
knee. "Now don't worry Edith, we'll see you through this,
Martha and I." Edith wanted to giggle. She sniffed instead.

"Edith," Karen said timidly. She sniffed too.

"What?"

"I get 60 cents allowance every week and I can give you
half of it." Edith was startled. When she was ten she received
80 cents a week. She wouldn't have given anyone half of that
80 cents. Well, I'll be damned she thought. And then before
she had time to really think about it she was crying again.


---

THERE was a narrow road through the forest, a road
that turned and climbed laboriously between dark walls
of sugar pine and spruce. In some of the rougher parts
of the road grew grass and small shrubs, but it was a road
that would have being for many years, for vegetation was
hesitant to fill it; at this altitude the king was wind and
cold, and seldom life. Although the trees here were very large
and old, the forest was not thick, and there were many
clearings and patches of bare rock. There was little grass
here, and something in the form and stature of the trees
told of conflict, for the air was thin and hard, and beneath
the largest trees there was always old snow that never melted.

The road led to a clearing at the summit that was a
single sheet of rock, and from here spread the world. . . the
south was fold after fold of heavily forested valleys and
slopes which swept into the great ranges just beyond the
clearing. It was very high, too high even for most birds. . .
the only things above this place were the sun, white peaks