

Look Closer

WHAT do you see, nurses, what do you see?
Are you thinking, when you are looking at me,
A crabbit old woman, not very wise,
 Uncertain of habit, with far away eyes,
Who dribbles her food, and makes no reply,
When you say In a loud voice: 'I do wish you'd try,'
Who seems not to notice the things that you do,
 And forever is losing a stocking or shoe,
Who, quite unresisting, lets you do as you will
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking, is that what you see?
 Then open your eyes, you're not looking at me.
I'll tell you who I am, as I sit here so still,
As I move at your bidding, as I eat at your will,
I'm a small child of ten, with a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters, who love one another,
 A young girl of sixteen with wings on her feet,
Dreaming that soon a true lover she'll meet;
Bride now at twenty — my heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep,
 At twenty-five now I have young of my own,
Who need me to build a secure happy home;
A woman of thirty, my young now grow fast,
Bound to each other with ties that should last:
 At forty my sons will soon all be gone,
But my man stays besides me to see I don't mourn
 At fifty once more babies play round my knee,
Again we know children, my loved one and me.
Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead.
I look to the future, I shudder with dread,
For my young are all busy, with young of their own,
And I think of the years and the love that I've known.
 I'm an old woman now and nature is cruel,
'Tis her jest to make old age look like a fool.
The body it crumbles, grace and vigour depart,
There is a stone where I once had a heart.
 But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,
And now and again my battered heart swells.
I remember the joys, I remember the pain.
And I'm loving and living all over again.
 I think of the years. all too few — gone too fast,
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, nurses, open and see,
Not a crabbit old woman, look closer — see ME!

By Phyllis McCormack

