


Instant Care

 Mama wasn't feeling too good. She had a little fever, and she said her bones ached. I talked her into going to her doctor. Dr. Perkins is as old as she is, and he was not in his office. He was sick, too.

The nurse suggested we go out to the new Instant Care Facility at the shopping center. It's out there between the grocery store and the ten-minute oil change and lube station. You just walk in and within minutes a teenaged nurse weighs you, measures you, takes your blood pressure, pricks your finger, gets you into a tissue-paper gown, and sets you up on the padded table still warm from the last wretched soul. Then a generic doctor bustles in and prescribes medicine, which you can pick up at Quick Drugs across the street.

I let Mama out at the curb and pointed her to the entrance of the Instant Care Facility. Then I parked the car and went to do some grocery shopping. When I came out, there she was, standing on the sidewalk talking to three butchers from the grocery store who were taking a cigarette break.

"That didn't take long," I said.

"No," she said, "and such very nice young doctors."

I was surprised. She hadn't been too keen on Instant Care when Dr. Perkins's nurse had suggested it. "I just know it will be all those flashes of light where no light ought to be, and invisible probes nosing into Lord-knows-where," she had complained.

But no, she said now, they had been very patient, had listened to her describe her symptoms, and had told her to pick up some Thomas's Cold Tablets at the old drugstore downtown. "Quick Drugs doesn't carry them," Mama said.

We went downtown for the medicine, then home. Mama took two of the Thomas's Cold Tablets and went to bed. The next day she was well.

"I highly recommend that Instant Care Facility," she said. "And do you know, I didn't even have to get undressed? Why, I didn't even have to go inside!"

"What?" I said.

"Sidewalk diagnosis," she declared. "And free! Didn't cost me a dime. And three doctors all at once."

"Wait a minute," I said, "you mean those three men I saw you talking to outside Safeway? You mean those three men smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes in those white coats with blood smeared all around the pockets? Those were your doctors?"

"Yes," she said, "vigorous doctors—the old-fashioned kind. Surgeons, I'd say, from the amount of blood and brains on those white coats."