



The New Arrival: The Heartwarming True Story of a 1970s Trainee Nurse

Sarah Beeson

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'I hadn't been in Hackney for 24 hours but I knew that the way I saw life and people had changed forever. There was such goodness here but there was a sadness I had never imagined before, and it wasn't even lunchtime yet ...'

On a hot summer's day in 1969, fresh-faced 17 year old Nurse Sarah Hill arrives at Hackney General Hospital in London's East End.

Battered suitcase in hand, she takes eager steps in her white calf-length Mary Quant boots towards the towering sandy-grey building of the Nurses' Home. Looking up at the rows and rows of little windows, full of nervous excitement, she couldn't have guessed just what she was getting herself into ...

It's the end of the swinging sixties, Britain is changing and the everyday life of the nurses and patients plays out against a backdrop of a failing government, strikes, immigration and women's lib. Nurse Sarah Hill, together with her companions; the serious minded, politicised Maddox, the quick witted Lynch, who falls in love with an upper crust young doctor, golden girl Nursery Nurse Appleton, and ex-musical hall star turned midwife Wade are thrown in straight at the deep end, working long hours with few days off under the watchful eye of the stern matron.

More than just a hospital, Hackney General was part of the community just as much as the Adam & Eve pub the staff frequent. A place where the poorly children of Hackney were nursed to health, a place where young nurses would discover just what they wanted from life, fall in love with shy photographers and grow into women. But it's not all smooth sailing in Hackney: for every baby that goes home to its loving family another is abandoned, unloved, or never gets to go home at all.

Funny, warm and deeply moving, Sarah Beeson's poignant memoir captures both the heartache and happiness of hospital life and 1970s London through the eyes of a gentle but determined young nurse.

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