

# A Nurse's Reply to What do you see when you look at me

<https://www.disabled-world.com/communication/poetry/crankyoldman.php>

## A Nurse's Reply

*What do we see, you ask, what do we see?  
Yes, we are thinking when looking at thee!*

*We may seem to be hard when we hurry and fuss,  
But there's many of you, and too few of us.*

*We would like far more time to sit by you and talk,  
To bath you and feed you and help you to walk.*

*To hear of your lives and the things you have done;  
Your childhood, your husband, your daughter, your son.*

*But time is against us,  
there's too much to do - Patients too many, and nurses too few.*

*We grieve when we see you so sad and alone  
With nobody near you, no friends of your own.*

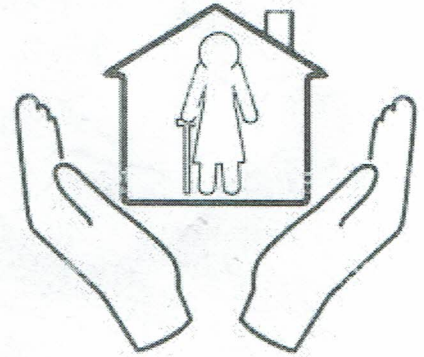
*We feel all your pain,  
and know of your fear That nobody cares now your end is so near  
But nurses are people with feelings as well,  
And when we're together you'll often hear tell Of the dearest old Gran in the very end bed,  
And the lovely old Dad, and the things that he said,*

*We speak with compassion and love,  
and feel sad When we think of your lives and the joy that you've had,  
When the time has arrived for you to depart,  
You leave us behind with an ache in our heart.*

*When you sleep the long sleep, no more worry or care,  
There are other old people, and we must be there.*

*So please understand if we hurry and fuss -  
There are many of you, And so few of us.*

- Said to have been written by Liz Hogben, although Bruni Abbott is sometimes cited as the author.





# What do you see when you look at me?



What do you see, nurse... what do you see?

Are you thinking - when you look at me:

"A crabbed 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, resisting or not, 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, nurse. 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, 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 love she'll meet;

- A bride 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 together with ties that should last.

- At forty, my young sons have grown up and  
gone,  
But my man's beside me to see I don't mourn;

- At fifty once more babies play 'round my  
knee  
Again we know children, my loved ones and  
me...

Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead.  
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.

For my young are all rearing 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 again my bittered heart swells;  
I remember the joys, I remember the pain  
and I'm loving and living life 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, nurse, open and see...  
not a crabbed old woman.

Look closer... see me!

[http://www.devlin-  
family.com/crabbittoldwoman.htm](http://www.devlin-family.com/crabbittoldwoman.htm)