

"Nonsense! You can't cure a half-decayed apple with any such imaginary dope as that," he replied with stubborn pessimism.

Pressure called Mary off, and Bill watched her as she threaded her agile way among the tables with this and that service. And notwithstanding the mental and physical stagnation, there was a strange joy in his heart that he had not experienced since before the war.

Mary's "cold" didn't appear to mend, notwithstanding her own prescription, any more than William's did. And Bill noted that her complexion did not improve in color as the days and weeks went by. He began to suspect that the young lady's ailment was something that went far beyond the diagnosis of a mere cold. He became interested—even alarmed—which was unique with Bill since Armistice Day.

The girl's apparent optimism; her sweet, unconcerned smile, rare good humor and pleasing manner, seemed to give the lie to such a dismal conclusion; but then, it appeared to be the young lady's diplomacy—her religion—to maintain a cheerful exterior. This seemed to be her policy on the basis that, what the mind ignored, the body would not know.

William's "cold" apparently annoyed Mary more than her own did. She continued to introduce the subject of it to him, and to persist that he was on the road to recovery. If he would only swim!

The optimism over his health at last annoyed Bill and he became ill-tempered with the girl over it.

One bright Sunday afternoon they met on the beach by accident or by private arrangement. The tide was in and the water lapped away at their very feet as they lay chatting. The sun was hot, the sand was warm and the air was still.

"I feel so tired," said William at last.

"And I so sleepy," complained Mary.

So they stretched themselves out at full length and slept together side by side for more than an hour lulled to sleep by the gentle lullaby of the wave-song on the shore.

They woke up at about the same time in the throes of a violent lung convulsion.

When it had passed off, Mary laughed and Bill growled.

"Do you ever swear at it?" Mary inquired, mischievously.

"No, indeed," he replied, which may or may not have been the truth.

Mary's face lit up again.

"I often think of Hamlet's soliloquy, however," groaned William.

"What has that to do with it?" asked Mary, looking at him curiously.

"To be or not to be, you know," he replied, without looking at his companion.

"Oh, forget it!" exclaimed Mary, with no attempt to conceal her disgust, "We'll soon get better. We're all right. We're young yet."

"Say!" broke in the pessimist blankly, "I believe you have T. B. as badly as I have."

"Don't you ever think it," she replied, heatedly. "What makes you think so?"

"I know it."

"Nonsense. You make a mountain out of a mole hill. If I have, I will cure myself. I will laugh it out of existence. What's the use of getting the dumps?" And she burst forth into a wild peel of health-giving laughter that embarrassed Bill and attracted the attention of some bathers, who were lounging near by.

Bill began to recognize the girl's

strength as opposed to his weakness.

"The more you nurse a snake the better and quicker it will grow," she told him, after she had stopped laughing.

Bill looked at Mary more or less sheepishly. Had this fragile girl more will-power than he, a man? Had she got the matter of disease down to a science? Man that he was, William could find no weapon with which to combat the theory.

"Have you ever been in love, Mr. William?" inquired the girl breaking into a more savory subject.

"I once was," William confessed, as though mesmerized by the girl's strange power over him.

"Was it real, honest-to-goodness love and no fooling?"

"It certainly was. It broke my heart."

"What?"

"It broke my heart."

"You have been so unfortunate in all things, it seems?"

"I have."

"But your heart still beats or you could not live," she persisted with the usual nourishing food.

"Yes, it does in a kind of a way."

"Tell me all about it." Eagerly.

"No, it would be too long. Then it would recall past agony. The present is bad enough—all I can bear."

"You poor thing!" she sympathized with him wickedly.

"Yes, indeed." Seriously.

"Do you know what I would do if I were you?" Mary said after a few moments' pause.

"I don't."

"I would laugh at it—now. She wasn't worth one hair of your head."

"Mary! Miss!"

She looked at him fixedly.

"Laugh!" she commanded.

"Does a dying man laugh?" he cried out bitterly.

"Had he laughed more, he would not have died," she philosophized.

Bill studied the girl in amazement for a few seconds.

"I think you have laughing on the brain," he complimented her.

"Well, it's better than water on the brain. I'll make you laugh too," she threatened, "before I am done with you."

In silence they studied each other's features, Mary's beaming a blaze of healthy sunshine, Bill's dimly lighted with a sickly smile.

"Have you ever been in love," inquired William as an avenue of escape.

"Yes, oodles of times. I'm in love now," Mary confessed through her human warmth.

"Indeed, who is the lucky dog?" With a note of disappointment.

"Oh, that's a secret. I mustn't tell you," the girl replied with an overflow of mischief.

A new agony seemed to take possession of Bill's soul.

There was another silence interrupted only at intervals by a cough from one or the other.

"Oh, well, it really doesn't matter," Bill broke in at last interrupting the stillness.

"What doesn't matter?" smiled Mary.

"Whether we loved or not; whether we live or not. It will be all the same in one hundred years," he growled in reply.

"You don't catch me dying until I have to," said Mary, cheerily. "When I do, I'll die laughing."

"Yes, I'm sure it will kill you one day," was Bill's gloomy prophecy.

"Gee, but you're hopeless!" chided Mary. "I'm going for a swim."

She vanished from his side as an apparition might, and in about fifteen minutes returned arrayed in the little navy mermaid suit that revealed so much of her physical defects, ran past the dour pessimist with a wild little human-heart cry of glee and plunged into the ocean without any ado as to preliminary initiation.

"Gosh!" commented William. "I believe a woman looks fifty per cent. better dressed up."

William's bedroom window faced the ocean; and, when the doctor had retired, the sick man stood at this window trance-like, looking bleakly out across an appealing expanse of water.

"In five minutes it would be over," he muttered beneath his breath with diabolical contemplation.

But he changed his tactics. Instead, he left the room and went direct, magnetic-like, to the usual rendezvous.

Mary was there as usual.

"I'll have plain ice cream," he ordered.

Mary smiled her usual sweetness, and brought the service.

"I'm going away," William told her when she returned.

"Going away!" And she gave a slight tremor of her body.

"Yes, to a Sanatorium to die," he added.

Mary gasped. It was an eventuality that was possible, but one from which the girl shrank as one might shrink from a rattlesnake.

"No!" she exclaimed.

"His Nobs ordered it," continued William.

"Then, say rather that you are going there to seek certain cure," Mary attempted to cheer.

"No such luck!"

Other customers demanded Mary's attention, and she disappeared to serve them.

"Good-by," said William a few moments later, extending a hand to meet her's.

"Good-by, I hope you get well," was Mary's reply.

Bill disappeared hurriedly and failed to notice the little arms reaching out a moment, timidly but impulsively, towards him as he vanished through the doorway.

"She is in love now; has been in love oodles of times," muttered William, with a strange pain tearing at his heart strings. "Who is the lucky dog?"

Streamers of artificial light poured from the numerous windows of the mountain Sanatorium when William arrived late one evening, as though the building were broadcasting pure beams of its vast knowledge and cleanliness into the outside darkness of the world.

There seemed encouragement and hope for the sick there in the silent appeal of welcome. There was health in every window, and in every room disease was being mastered by the most efficient scientific methods known to man, and through the accumulated knowledge of centuries.

Bill's bedroom window faced a wide and carefully groomed lawn which circled the building, and whose breath purified and glorified the atmosphere in the environs of the Sanatorium. On the lawn, during the day and early evenings, when the weather was friendly, groups of convalescing patients lounged or wandered about seeking that invigoration which was contained in the pure mountain air.

This lawn became William's daily rendezvous; and there he drank in the life-