

arette. Her lover lay just a few beds away—a cot case if ever there was one—for months his temperature never below 101 but he was still a brave if passive lover. The girl, sick too, sometimes visited him. She sat very close, with her hand in his. Then in the night they would commune with messages of fire. To Colvin, it was pathetic and a little absurd.

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THE temperature was rising and the Doctor on his rounds was slow to appear. Colvin lay quietly thinking of the past. He viewed it with wistfulness and much self-reproach. These idiotic musings on what might have been . . . as if one could alter the irrevocable past. It seemed to him now that he needn't have been ill at all . . . if only he had known and hadn't been such a fool. And now it was too late.

He must have known there was something wrong; but he wouldn't admit it even to himself. He had always been so wonderfully fit. And how sweet life was then—too good to leave! But it was in that marvellous year that all the damage was done—football, tennis, dancing, and far too little sleep. For him, in reality it was almost suicide. How confidently deceptive the disease had been! Disquieting symptoms would appear and go. He was afraid for a time; then forgot about them. But back they would come and always a little worse than before. Then it seemed, they had come to stay . . . This ridiculous feeling of fatigue. It grew worse and worse until he simply had to give in. Even then it was inconceivable . . . he who had been living an athlete's life . . . and he looked so well nobody would believe it. He had been far too slow to believe it himself—just an obstinate refusal to look facts in the face.

He could recall everything so clearly. Too many late nights and too much work. What ridiculous ambition—no moderation—no sense of proportion. It was all so obvious now. He would develop his chest, strengthen his wind and harden his muscles. For a while his body responded. He felt fit—so fit that he derided his own fears . . . First thing in the morning deep-breathing and skipping. Then a leap into an icy bath; and those runs at night in football togs—alternate jogging and furious sprinting!

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YES, he was fit then—rather different from his condition now when a walk of a few yards would exhaust him. That last game of football; it was only a scratch game. He was fitter than any of the others. He felt as though he could have run all day. How he had laughed at fat old Jerry White with his spectacles tied on with tape, completely blown—too exhausted even to attempt to keep up . . . and now old Fatty, who never took a scrap of exercise if he could avoid it, was married with two children while he . . . Still, it had been a wonderful day. The festivities after the game, the speeches, the stories and the drinking: what energy he must have had to dance all the evening and arrive home at dawn. It was hard to realise now.

He had begun to study hard at nights—once again too ambitious. It was this lack of sleep that finished him. And he was having much fun in between times, too. One had to have some diversion. He

had thought this kind of thing could go on for ever.

He thought of the morning when the trouble really started, after a night of hard study. He awoke feeling dreadful, just as though he hadn't slept at all. It was hard to breathe and he wanted to cough . . . then there was blood. Heavens, how it frightened him! He dressed hardly knowing what he was doing. He found himself walking in the gardens, coughing and terrified—pacing up and down between the flower beds.

Even then he would not give in—would not face the bitterness of the truth. Next day he felt a little better. Though his appetite was gone he forced himself to eat. But this dreadful lassitude went on without a break. The days were growing warmer and the sun was bright. How simple it was to deceive the world! He lay on the beach in the sun. This "healthy tan" was terribly misleading. What a horror it concealed! So often was he told how well he was looking that he came near to believing it himself. But there was no doubt about it in the mornings now when he awoke in the dark damp with perspiration. Why, why didn't he go to a doctor? What imbecility! He lay naked in the broiling sun and walked miles. His muscles were still hard and he fought fatigue for all he was worth. But the limit was reached at length. He couldn't go on.

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HE still remembered it very clearly, that cursory examination by a general practitioner. The man was non-committal and promised a report. Colvin, a little reassured, returned to work.

Then the verdict was given. It was a dreadful shock even though he must have known it was coming . . . "I'm sorry to have to report . . . you must stop work for six months." . . . What an eternity that would be! Six months! Good Lord, and that was nearly three years ago!

And then he began the "cure." It was quite futile now to lament the fact that the family doctor was 20 years behind the times and that he should have been in bed. But there was no excuse for ignorance. Nature didn't hand out second chances—and this accursed vanity. He had sworn he felt well . . . the foolish advice tendered from all quarters . . . nothing more nor less than benevolent nonsense. As usual he believed just what he wanted to believe.

"You do look well! There's nothing wrong with you!"

"I shouldn't stay in bed if I were you, it's too weakening."

But he wasn't feeling any better. He knew it in his heart. Then the verdict of the specialist—brief and to the point . . . "Chest condition acute."

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YES, and he had been here ever since. He was to have been out in a year. The night he arrived, he talked to a fellow patient. He could see Jackman still, pale and thin, with the perpetual and cynical smile after repeated disappointment.

A year, eh? Listen. When the quack gives his estimate of the time, all you have to do is a simple sum. Multiply the

(Continued on next page)

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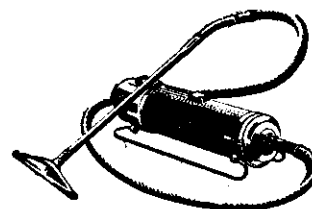
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