

TYPHOID FEVER

A pall hung over the village. Without warning the dreaded typhoid fever had struck a dozen homes, and all the rest were in an agony of apprehension lest they be the next. Two patients had died--an old man and a young child--in spite of bleeding, starving, such meager drugs as were then known, and the devoted nursing of a mother or wife.

In my grandmother Benedict's home, windows were darkened and voices hushed as the daily household tasks were reduced to a minimum. All thoughts were centered around the "spare parlor" where Sara, my mother, lay in a semi-coma. Her bed had been brought down stairs to save steps and make nursing easier. No one had ever dreamed that Sara could be so ill--Sara, the wiry, indefatigable young girl who played, worked, rode horseback, walked, taught the younger element with undiminished zeal whether it was day or night. She could weed the vegetable garden, paint a few pictures or sew a fine seam with the best. Sara now lay gaunt and pale, dark curly hair spread over the pillow no whiter than her face, moaning occasionally as she tossed restlessly from side to side.

Sara's mother had not been too concerned when Sara commenced to lose weight; young girls were "notional" and thought it stylish to be thin. But when the process of thinning seemed too far prolonged and Sara became listless and at times in pain, the doctor was called.

"Typhoid," he pronounced quickly, "It's all over the village." He gave instructions for nursing, snapped his bag shut and went cherrily off. It was just another routine call to him.

Day after day passed with no apparent change except that cheek bones became more prominent and ears more waxen. Twice Sara's eyes flew open and she spoke: "Nellie died; she was buried yesterday," and again "Lavinia won't be buried till Friday." The watchers by the bed were speechless with shock and incredulity. Nellie had been buried yesterday; but at the Benedict family's request no bells were tolled in the near-by chapel, and the family was positive that great care had been taken to not mention Nellie's name. Lavinia was dying when Sara spoke of her. She was buried on Friday as foretold.

These unexplainable and amazing predictions could only be accounted for by Sara's approach to the "Pearly Gates" through which she must already be peering.

Still deeper gloom pervaded the Benedict residence; the Reverend William spent more and more time in prayer and devotions; the women huddled crying in corners. The Grim Reaper was hourly expected.

But Sara--always a little original, often ready to turn the end of a familiar tale into another channel--Sara made her own story. One day she opened her eyes--the big brown-grey eyes closed so long in their hollow sockets, and announced feebly: "I'm hungry."

To say that a shout of rejoicing was heard would not be quite true. The watchers were so accustomed to whispered tones, it took time to come back to normal. But hearts danced and hopes leaped: "The crisis is over, Sara will live!"