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THE FINER THE FILTER, THE MILDER THE TASTE

Frail Conqueror

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When the atomic bomb fell at Hiroshima, she regarded it as her particular challenge and took up the study of atomic energy with the help of a young physicist, who was also a patient at the sanitarium. Impressed by the importance of bringing to the people of Saranac Lake a greater understanding of this new force and the problems that it raised, she organized a meeting in the town hall and arranged for the speakers.

During the same year, to the consternation of Dr. Trudeau and his associates, Isabel fell in love with a gentle, kindly man who had himself been through the sanitarium. The apprehensive doctors finally concluded that since, quite obviously, she could never marry, she was at least fortunate to know love. But they underestimated the inner drive of their patient.

Even at her lowest ebb, penniless and helpless, Isabel had talked to me about the day when she would marry Courtney and have a little house of her own "under the mountains." At the time, I had put this down to wish-dreaming. Now I was not so sure.

Whether it was love or the appearance of the new "wonder drugs" or a combination of both, Isabel suddenly began to improve, and on July 2, 1948, on the arm of her anxious but ever-loyal Dr. Trudeau, she walked slowly but with radiant confidence down the aisle of the tiny sanitarium chapel to be wed.

If one has lived a long and full life, it is usually difficult to say with certainty what the most inspiring moment has been, but I am very sure that in my case this was it.

Pursuing the Impossible

Isabel Smith had not only met challenges which would have swamped most people, but she had deliberately created new ones: the determination to marry, to have a home, and to live as a member of the normal world. "Impossible," they had said, and now she had done it.

Perhaps that is where her story should end, but her goals had not been reached. There was still the little house "under the mountains." Neither of them had a cent, and Courtney, because of his long illness, was earning only enough to cover their day-to-day expenses in a Saranac Lake boardinghouse. Isabel was obliged to rest a good part of each day. The "little house" seemed very far away.

It was at that point that she decided to write her autobiography. "That's something I can do, lying down or sitting up," she said. "For years I've been wanting to say thanks for all the good things life has brought me."

Her book, *Wish I Might*, was published in 1955, and from its royalties the "little house under the mountains" materialized. How rightfully proud she was of that house! On two sides were the evergreen forests which she had watched so long from her sanitarium bed. Framed in its picture window were the mountains, gray-green, majestic.

Courtney had built feeding stations for birds all around the house. Two years later, on Jan. 19, 1958, Isabel fed her birds, re-entered her house, and died.

Tragic? Yes, in a way, and yet in a way not, for Isabel Smith had achieved everything she had set out to achieve 30 years before when the odds were 1,000 to 1 against her.

An editorial which appeared the following day in the *Adirondack Enterprise* contained this paragraph:

"Isabel Smith's life was a series of triumphs; the triumph of victory, however temporary, over a dreadful disease; the triumph of belated love and marriage; the triumph of building that house in the woods which she had so long cherished."

And it might have added: the triumph of giving so bounteously when, to all outward appearances, she had so little to give.