

line of demarcation between life and death. The primaeval miasmic fauna and flora from which life was reborn from multitudinous deaths. The ever recurring progression into stillness and death, and the re-birth into motion and life. In the wharf, in the sea, life is predominant always! A vibrant pulsation of living that swells the tides of life, and spills over and engulfs the dead and the rotting - stimulating and tingling! Death which is decay coming into its own, renewing its energies inherited through the ages. Death but a necessary hiatus, wherein the forces of creating are reborn and marshaled.

The egg, the sperm, the fish, the embryo. The man!

The man, the offal, and the many eggs and sperms, and the infinite other embryos! The reverse of the cycle.

And the other Cycles. And the end Cycle, and Man!

Kinships!

## CHAPTER X

### A Tribute to Pacific Street

Across the street from where ~~where~~ George was sitting in the Franklin was the Brandt Appliance and Bicycle Shop. Originally the old man had dealt with old stuff, odds and ends, but with Harold's mechanical bent and enterprising spirit he was persuaded to open the new establishment. Remnants of the old trade were still scattered through the place, but mostly it shone forth in its new merchandise. Harold had always boasted of his wizardry with tools and gadgets and of his business

acumen, and George looking at the place realized that at least part of Harold's pretensions had foundation. The shop had the best looking front on the street. The bright window, brilliant<sup>ly</sup> illuminated and handsomely exhibited, could well take its place among the better stores uptown. There was a new briskness about the place. Even at this late hour there were people there. Now the last customer had left and Harold was putting a new bicycle into the window for display. Only Foster and another fellow in his class had identical machines. How it glitters under the lights! It had all the latest gadgets, and shone with its chrome and nickle fittings. What a poor showing his would make, compared to this one! Old and rusty. Yet it was in perfect running order, thanks to Harold's ingenuity. Funny though that neither Harold nor his father would accept pay from him for repairs.

"Nothing to it," they'd brush him off, "a few minutes work. Nothing at all."

He had learned later what the job was really worth, and had never showed up for repairs again.

Why had they refused to take money from him?

With his new job maybe he'll soon afford one like in the window.

But a Franklin...!

His mother fears the monsters, but only when he is on his bike.

To this day he has to wheedle the privilege of a ride on his bike.

"Mother let me get the fish, it's fresher and cheaper at the wharf."

"Just an excuse to ride your bike."

The bike had been good for her son. It had helped to bring strength to his wasted legs - mauled by the polio. But now she has to figure the hazard of the automobile. They had the power and speed of demons. And anyway her son's legs are fully developed and strong. "Last time you scraped your knee," she worried.

"Aw, Ma, only a scratch."

"And the bloody nose before that, what was that from?"

How she remembers details from years back! Now what was the time he had a bloody nose last? It couldn't be less than five years. She remembers every blood-nose he ever had, and could recount the circumstances. In his younger days the merest provocation to his nose would start it on its gory way. Yet, the more often it happened the more punctilious his mother as to <sup>the</sup> "how" and "why" of it.

"Oh, that?" But he wasn't sure which bloody nose she <sup>had</sup> referred to. It's such old history. He remembers a fight he had with a fellow. He hoped she was thinking of the same incident. "That was nothing," he reassured her, "you should have seen the other fellow's nose."

She smiled to him. She wasn't angry at all, he thought. It was all a game. She knew all along what had happened, and only wanted to hear it again. For that other fellow's nose had become the sign and symbol to her of her son's full recovery, and of his courage.

"Hi, George!"

"Harold!"

"Thought was you in the car. Swell job, isn't it? One of the best. Maybe the best." He spoke like an expert.

"Came along with Doc on his calls," George informed him.

"Hope to have one someday," Harold said with a nostalgic look in his eyes.

"I am sure you will," George said. To himself: "And Blanca too."

"You can bet on it. And not long after High."

George completely agreed with him. Harold was quite capable of calculating his future far ahead. And he was cut out for a business career. Blanca was business too. Already her father was boasting of the great asset she was to him in his store. He pointed at the window. "Isn't it a beaut!"

Harold turned to follow George's eyes: "Just put it there."

"Saw you."

"Got it this afternoon. Good as new."

"It is new."

"Nah."

"Bluffing again."

"What do you mean, 'again'?"

"You damn well know."

"Still harping on that two-cents worth of repair. Next time you can pay...."

"There won't be a next time."

"All right, all right... Now listen. I told the folks it was you in the car. A good guess, huh?"

"So you did."

"Don't be so clammed. Come over and take a look at the machine. The folks would be delighted."

"Why?"

"Old admirers of your father. His sermon was a ritual to them."

"That was long ago."

"The paper this afternoon. Your name... It all came back."

"That again!" George stiffened in his seat.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"That damn story! But never mind. Can't go. Dr. Capen may be here anytime."

"I know the time of his visits by the minute. Seen him often enough. I'll watch out for him."

Mr. Brandt welcomed George with a beaming face. Mrs. Brandt shuffled out from the back recesses, and offered George refreshments.

"Coffee still hot," she smiled all over her broad good-natured face, "would you care to join us?"

Harold frowned. "Just like mother, coming in with food, no matter the time or place."

Mr. Brandt, taking in the situation, glossed it over with an offer of a light drink. "Cold ginger ale in a warm night," he advocated almost inaudibly, as if afraid to take the plunge, "and maybe a drop or two..."

"Really," George hesitated. A stranger in a strange environment, he hardly knew what to say. He looked at Harold in somewhat of an embarrassment. Meanwhile, Mr. Brandt had returned with a large green bottle of ginger ale - the icy dew invitingly still on it - in one hand and a brown flask in the other.

"A vintage brand," he said, showing off the flask, "reserved for honored guests only."

"Thank you, Mr. Brandt," George said, "no liquor for me."

George was completely taken in by the sincere and warm hospitality of this simple honest couple. It were as though because of their humble origin they were reaching out for things outside their ken of daily ordinary living. Out of the glow of those things so much above them, and the simple goodness of their hearts, they wanted to pour out their feelings to him, who was the apostle of those incomprehensibles. A wantonness born of deviltry, one of the peculiar facets of George's character, almost caused him to burst into laughter as he regarded the three of them. He barely stifled a smile. He wondered how nature could have contrived the desperate feat of creating such a disturbing likeness between them: Father, mother and son! Discounting age and the greater girth of the woman, they were alike paunchy and belabored with blubber, and so typically of one oneness as could be fashioned in one and the same mold. Maybe it was sheer malice, maybe nature was in one of its more puckish moods, when it kneaded them out of the common clay. The mother's increased waist-line gave her the proportions and symmetry.

of a spinning top. Taking the umbilicus as a center-point of greatest prominence, the even tapering downward of the belly into the spread of the buttocks and the pillar-like massiveness of the thighs, down the legs and into the smallness of the feet, was <sup>of</sup> identical symmetry and measurement going upward from the same center-point - the voluminous breasts, the ballooned thorax narrowing into shoulders and small head.

"Heavenly nectar," Mr. Brandt was saying as he added a little from the brown flask to George's ginger ale, "it's good for the night air, and for the soul. It makes the heart merry."

"My father would hardly speak of heaven if he knew of your profanities," Harold trumpeted in glee.

"He talks like a scamp," his father scolded. "His humor is like a garment inside out. Wrong and misplaced."

"Don't take it so seriously, Dad," Harold cried, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "I haven't desecrated the sanctity of the Sheraton tradition. They are a clan of radicals. Even the old man spoke what some people thought were heresies."

The older Brandt stood in shocked silence.

George smiled. "Don't mind him, Mr. Brandt," he said, "your son is quite harmless."

"Of course I was only kidding, George," Harold was serious, "we are happy to have you visit us."

Mr. Brandt beamed: "True privilege to hear your father. True Gospel in every word. Straight from the shoulder."

"My father knows his onions when it comes to service, and sermon."

"My son's way of ridiculing me."

"I mean it." To George, "Father is the only idealist in the family. Mother and I are the practical ones. If you left it to Father..."

"Not a good reputation my son is giving me," Mrs. Brandt interrupted as she put a tray of coffee and cake on a counter. "It's not as bad as that. Had to show my husband what side the bread the butter is on, but

I never was so practical I couldn't follow your father, blessed be his memory. He was so tall and handsome. And your mother, god bless her, always dressed in the latest mode, wearing the nicest hats. She looked so pretty in her pew. Never took her eyes off him."

"That's why he spoke the truth, with his dear wife watching him," Mr. Brandt ventured.

"Yeh," Harold grinned at George, "with the old lady looking right into his mouth he couldn't help but speak the truth."

George clapped his back with approval. He was beginning to feel the effect of the liquor. After the day's tension it was good for him. He accepted another drink of ginger ale. "It's a bit too spiked," he remarked as he sipped, "but I like it. A bit chilly out there in the car."

Mr. Brandt took his second drink plain.

Mrs. Brandt said, "My husband seldom takes any. Only in company..."

"In good company only," Harold jested.

Mrs. Brandt cast a grim eye at her son. "He is just showing off," she said.

George thought she wasn't as indolent as she looked.

Harold brought the machine in from the window.

The elder Brandt's face lit up with the pleasure of its gleaming beauty. "Pretty as a picture," Mrs. Brandt said.

"From us to you, George," Harold smiled, "it's all yours."

"Why, it is new, as I said..."

"So it is," from Harold.

"Of course it's new," Mr. Brandt said. "We wouldn't think..." He glared at his son. "Another one of your tricks?"

Harold said he'd go and see what's with the doctor.

"Come back!" his father called. But Harold was already out of hearing. "Wonder what he was up to telling you that it - that it wasn't

new.... I believe I can see. He meant it for the best. He has a stubborn streak, but also a fondness for you." He paused as if to brace himself. "We'd be happy, Mr. Sheraton," he stammered, "we'd be happy if you accept it. You have been good to our son, when he needed help in school. We know. From us to you people," he rambled on. "To your sainted father. When he was alive we were poor. But now thank god..."

George flushed furiously. It was anger as well as embarrassment. "Thank you," he said, "I am quite satisfied with mine."

Take it, George, take it. A gift from Pacific Street to the memory of your father. You could see the face of the sun in the revolving chrome of the wheel; and other faces in the glint of the nickle spokes. And images in the halo of the handlebars, as you ride in the saddle!

A tribute, a gift from Pacific Street - all Pacific Streets!

Where they trade in second-hand goods, and second-rate human beings. Where old things are glozed over with the body-varnish of the grave.

Pacific Street, where the ill smelling rickety stalls are burgeoning with the decay of their cargo. Where the animal and human abominations are in the street and in the walk. The retchings, the emissions of the besotted and toddling total inebriate! Where is the confusion, the bickering, the harangueing, the brawling, the lewdness, the whoring, the assault, the baring of nakedness, the sham, the infamy; the rape of the tender heart; the silent prayer of the young maiden. The market place for desire and passion, of unreasoned lust and avarice!

But yet, also the throbbing thumping heart of the young and old - of the discreet and scrupulous; whose muscles bulge and strain, whose blood boils in this inferno!

A tribute from and to Pacific Street!