

"All right." Turning to Jenkins, after Foster left, as if needing some one to lean on himself: "What do you make of it?"

"Make of what?"

"Listen, you Shakespearean hound, you heard."

"So I did."

"It isn't like Cynthia to vanish like that?"

"You want me say yes or no?"

"Don't be so stupid.... I am sorry. Getting jumpy too."

"Don't mind me. I understand. Want to quit now?"

"No, we'll be through in no time," He paused. "You'll come with me when I go to Foster?"

"Yes, George, I will."

## CHAPTER VII

### The Absolute Pact

She was her complete compact self when she left Dr. Capen's office. That complex instrument, the brain, had played its trick well. It gave her that bravado, that stiffened attitude in her mental and physical make-up she had been seeking. It gave her the courage to go on, to live. A bold front. A soberness of countenance and mind that might have even given her a measure of happiness. Extracted from life by main force of her will. She had labored hard, and she was tired. But one finds surcease, even peace in fatigue. It's just that the mind can work so much, go that far and no more. And that's a blessing. The mind goes into hibernation. No torture of body. The body hibernates with the brain.

How much Dr. Capen believed in her sudden change of attitude, how

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much trust in her arbitrary decision, how much he took for granted in a girl as spirited as Cynthia to breast the treacherous tide; how much pity for her as he let her go, how much consolation in her display of spiritual courage! He was, after all <sup>(se)</sup> the considerations, a confused and contrite man. Had he handled the situation with clumsy approach? Had he said words that drove her away, sensitive soul that she is? Was his indecisiveness a result of approaching middle-age? How much must he reproach himself - if, if things should go wrong? And there is plenty of reason they could. He stood at the window a perplexed, condemned man, watching her disappear up the street. What was it, what fate pushed his hand, distorted his words! And she the most deserving of all. He had betrayed her. He <sup>had</sup> acted like an idiot, not appreciating her sensibilities... maybe he did... still the idiot, not knowing how to hold her. If she dies... his whole career a futile gesture. A false prophet, a peasant!

How long he stood there? The doorbell and the telephone finally called him back. The nurse was there to usher in the patients <sup>waiting</sup> in the outer room. Then his chore in surgery. And then the release - from work, but not his soul-searching.

He called her home, the Dreens, but the answer was the same. Not there. She had not been home since morning. And what did Dr. Capen know? Why had he called? What does he know? Is she in trouble? Had she come to him for help? And all the other frantic questions from the parents. He'd better not call them. And then he thought of Dr. Monarch. Just a chance. He had mentioned his name. Had she heard him, or was her mind shut to him?

Why hadn't he thought of Dr. Monarch... would it have made a difference?

*The* Find a shivering, unfeathered, unnested fledgeling in the wide waste of a jungle! Distances multiplied by dangers of uncertain terrain, and fraught with fear that was sure to lurk in the calamitous future.

Cynthia's mind played her another trick after she had left Dr. Ca-

pen's office. In a sudden flash Dr. Capen's words came back to her. She hadn't heard a thing at the time she had left him. But now it came back like an echo: Dr. Monarch, Dr. Monarch. And the street. Yes, it's there too. And what's more, Dr. Monarch seemed like an old friend out of the hoary past. She was sure she <sup>had</sup> heard the name before. The memory was acute. It was in connection with that classmate of hers, <sup>in high school,</sup> junior year. She had been absent two or three weeks. She came back to class a little thinner, a little paler. And the whispering rumor.... After a while the whispering died down and her color came back, and everything was as before. But Dr. Monarch was held up as the good Samaritan. And it was good that the mind played her that trick at that time. For soon after she had left the doctor all the impulsive strength of her courage <sup>had</sup> left her, vanished, evaporated. The aggressiveness of the frontal drive, the high moral tone of self-assertiveness that comes to a gentle soul when sudden danger threatens were gone. And the darkness of despair was creeping upon her.

The lucidness of the last drowning moment, the last glimpse in the sun? Maybe so, but at least it is a bright hope. The crystal-clear depths of the water. You can look into the depths of the soul and see the stretches and endlessness of time. All the events in it - your life.

A voice, a whisper lost in time and space long ago, now shines like a jewel. Hope, your hope! You are frantic with fear that you'll lose that one hope, and you reach out with your mind's tentacles <sup>to</sup> ~~and~~ grasp it.

You are confused no more. Your brain is talking to you in definite terms. And you listen. Oh, God, how you listen! You realize now that your feet are cold, that you have been sloshing the cold slush. The brain neurons are sending the little impulses of awareness again, the wires are humming with life again.

To be sure, there is the street. To be sure, to be sure! This is not an illusion. His name is on the door. Tiny letters. No flourishes. A

tiny plate tacked onto an ancient mahogany door. Nothing in the window, but a brief "Dr. Monarch". Why should he need amplifications. A monarch is a monarch and he is known for generations in the vast stretches around him. He is monarch of human fate. He holds the fate of many humans. And he tips the balance in their favor. The book of life and death before him. He inscribes the living on the right, and... well, the others on the left. He can't help put some on the left. He is only human. But mostly he puts <sup>them</sup> on the roster of the living. The true monarch. The monarch of your own fate.

You pull the handle and a light tinkling comes from inside. You snatch your hand away as if shocked by electricity. You want to run. Run where? Sheer madness. Madness! Yonder, where you want to run is destitution and nothingness, the dark void of nothingness. Above all you fear nothingness, which is cold and dead. You are young - there must be something in your life. The very Something is life. And you want life, not the cold void of Nothing. You want to hang on to the Something which means sun, spring, spring streamlets and brooks, spring flowers and birds, spring meadows, the soft spring turf. But you want to step aside and think. Not run, just step aside and walk a bit. And think. But what is there to think about? Then before your eyes stands a tallish man in a slightly crumpled suit of non-descript shade ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> color, but well made. The whole shape and aspect of the man seems to be of roundness. The gray-haired head, the gray stubble cheeks, the small Van-dyke under the rounded chin, the rounded belly protuberant under the slightly uplifted waistcoat, the rounded well-shaped legs, hugged tightly in creased trousers, somewhat baggy at the knees and crikled at the crotch, where the bulge of the belly begins. The eyes are small and smiling under bushy eyebrows.

With one glance he takes her in and her whole story, as he holds the door open. She ~~only~~ <sup>only</sup> saw ~~only~~ his exterior first, now she reads a kindly soul in the smiling eyes.

"Won't you come in, please," he says in a calm soft voice. A young

voice, hardly befitting his age. Maybe he isn't as old as he looks. And she remembers a recent discovery that gray hair is not always a sign of old age. When she was young, very young, gray-templed men belonged to a hoary past of an incalculable age, but no more. This man may have the mellowness that comes with age, but he has the softness of youth about him, the quick alertness and active movements.

"Won't you come in, my dear," he repeated.

"Thank you," she said timidly, "thank you."

An unpretentious room it was he led her into. The furnishings, not decrepit, were of ancient vintage, smelling a bit of mustiness and dust. The heavy draperies gave the room the appearance of twilight. A warm twilight. But for an examining table at the wall opposite her one would hardly tell that this was a professional office. On getting accustomed to the lighting, however, she noticed a tall instrument cabinet, not far from the table, of the same hue as the table,-- of mahogany veneer.

He sat down in a heavy leather chair facing her.

He didn't begin with the usual: "What can I do for you, young-lady?" but sat there waiting for her to speak. From her frightened, pale appearance he knew quite well what she wanted of him. But he wanted her to speak her mind. To ease her burden, and sort of become acclimated to him.

"I came here because I am in trouble," she began. Her voice was sharp and crisp as it came abruptly, as if she were angry. And maybe she was,-- at herself -- for getting into this mess. But it wasn't bitterness.

"You live here?"

"I suppose it makes a difference?" she said as she were making a simple inquiry.

"To some degree, yes."

"Portgrave is my home. I was away to college."

"Came home for this?"

"Came home for this", she echoed his words.

"I am the first one you come to?"

"I went to Dr. Capen on a mad impulse."

"Know him?"

"Yes."

"And he refused."

"No, I left on a mad impulse. I don't know whether he'd have refused or not."

"Your name and address?"

"That's necessary I suppose."

"Quite."

"But I could give the wrong information."

"You wouldn't. I trust you, and you must trust me. Your name is safe with me."

"Fair enough."

"If I hadn't wished to help you I wouldn't ask for the information. As you see I am not young. I had given up this work. But you are one of those... well, one....."

"I want to pay."

"Well..." He twirled the beard and smiled. "I imagine you'd insist. And perhaps just as well. You work and <sup>you</sup> get paid. But my fee is rather steep."

"What is your fee?"

"At least fifty."

"I have twenty-five in my possession. Two dollars for a room, and the rest for train-fare back tomorrow."

"A room!"

"I am not going home after... after this."

"I see."

"Wouldn't be safe to travel distance today."

"Perhaps not. One can take a chance if all goes well. But how is one going to know? Even this small operation has its dangers. Rare, but the

chance is always there."

"I understand perfectly. The chance to die. But so was birth a chance."

"You have spirit and intelligence. Want you to keep your money. You need it more than I."

"No, you take the twenty."

"Suppose I refuse."

"Then I go."

"I believe you would. But where to?"

"It could hardly make any difference. The result would be the same."

"I believe that too." He looked straight in her eyes. "I saw that <sup>(at the)</sup> first glance in you."

"Then you'll take the twenty?"

"I'd like to bargain for less."

"No."

"What about food?"

"I'll manage."

They sat in silence for a moment. The pact was absolute. More binding than if it were signed and sealed.

"All right" he said, "but there are a few things you must know. If ~~any~~ things go wrong with you, and they are apt to, don't come back to me. After I have done my job I am a forgotten <sup>one</sup> man- to you. Wiped off your memory as if I had never existed. Never pronounce my name. Agreed?"

She nodded her head: "Yes." Her lips were dry and her face drained of all color.

"Now, if you get into trouble call for Dr. Capen.. He is a very able man. It's quite legal to save life after the damage had been done. A flow like regular menses is all right. That's what I'll try to bring about. I very seldom do a curettage here in the office. It's either in the patient's home or at ~~the~~ certain designated houses. But the price of the latter is prohibitive - for you. In your case though a complete job is not important, since the pregnancy is of short duration. We'll just start nature on

its way and let her do the rest. If the flow should come in a gush or two.... One gush may still turn out all right. But don't take a second gush for granted. Fever is a danger signal. In either case run to Dr. Capen."

"I understand!"

"When should you be ready?"

"I get a room. Go home and tell them I am going back to school. Pack my things, go to my room. Then come here."

"That shouldn't take more than an hour."

"I'll be back then."

Shy, nervous, prudish? None of those. She came back before the hour was up. At last she'd know freedom. At last she'll look into the sun and smile. When she comes out of here, in a few short minutes, she'll be as she has always been. No stigma, no pointing the finger.... Suddenly she was a grown woman. A woman with an experience. Hadn't thought of it that way before. No time. Too worried. But now. She feels <sup>a</sup> sense of release. She could think kindly of Foster now. She had no attitude toward him before, neither hate nor love. He was hidden in the background of her mind, in some secret recess, and automatically ignored. She just couldn't afford to have him before her. Not before. She was occupied with her own self. And that self ~~which~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~stranger~~ <sup>was</sup> stranger to her ~~self~~. That is the self she had known all along, before this thing.... That new self was a peculiar self, and catastrophic, threatening that other self she had known all her life. That strange self was a convulsion that had come over her, had turned her into a monstrous thing: a tide of bilge that <sup>had</sup> swept over her and had washed everything clean and sweet out of her. She was a monster, and <sup>a</sup> monster was growing <sup>within</sup> her.

But now the monster will be torn from her, and the tide of bilge will be swept away, ~~from her~~, and she'll be redeemed. She'll be clean again.

Clean! Will she ever be clean? That would depend on whether she can think



of Foster again. But she can. Foster, Foster..... No, no, not Foster..... George! Something sharp and sweetish in her nostrils, as if a burden is falling on her, and yet at the same time she feels lighter... A little short of breath but she is not panicky. A confusion and a relaxation have come over her. There was George... alone... and with her. Swift changing scenes, at school at the fire and on the tower. But always George was there. George, George, come to me! But Foster you are my partner. Partner in this our sin. Our common sin. But that's all, Foster. You, George, are mine - for always.

Out of the fog she hears the calm comforting voice: "Few drops to lull your sensibilities." George, Foster, George..... "Not really an anesthetic... Take the edge off," she hears the <sup>soothing</sup> voice again. Now there is no more the feeling of chill air biting into her exposed belly and legs. She isn't naked anymore. "You are a brave girl," the voice again. "Another minute or two." And the voice warms her. The voice now trailed off in the loneliness of the dusk that was falling around her. Now the cone is off her face and she gulps sharp fresh air into her lungs. Something cold on the mound of Venus, a sharp stinging inside. Not exactly pain. It slid between the labiae, then inside. Her buttocks lifted, and the cone went onto her face again. The same sweetish odor, the same numbing effect, but she felt the meticulous scrubbing and the cold ether in the tender areas between her legs. Then she went off into that illusion of darkness. Deeper than before.

A voice from a distance, hardly audible. Then a roaring in her ears. Now the brain is awakened and is translating the voice in its true quality. It's pleasant and calm. Not roaring at all. She understands the voice:

"You may get up now...."

A momentary unrecognition of her state as she looks about her. Then she recognizes Dr. Monarch. His round kindly eyes are looking out at her from under bushy eyebrows. His rotund pudginess comes into focus and she smiles happily. He puts out a hand to help her off the examining

table.

Her eyelids fluttered with the sting of saltiness in the eyes. A bitter taste was in her mouth, and her heart was hammering with emotion. All the stoicism with which she had steeled herself for this ordeal seemed to melt away, and she was completely helpless before this invading weakness. As if she sat down in the deep leather chair she felt as if the flood of tears would overwhelm her any moment. It had long been dammed up within her. But she forced them back, and fought them. Only a trickle came down over her pale cheeks and ~~came~~ into her mouth. And she was smiling again.

"You are a brave girl," he patted her head.

"I am quite all right," she said, her voice trembling, "I am ready to leave."

"Fifteen minutes more."

"Why fifteen minutes?" she smiled a wan smile.

"Enough to bemuse the four humours of the ancients. And the fifth - the emotional humor."

"Your sense of humour is quite appropriate." She was her old self. "In addition to your human..."

"Not that, not that. No credits. I did what I did because I couldn't do otherwise. But I must warn you again. When you walk through this door I am a faceless, nameless entity."

"I shall carry you in my heart if not in my mind. My lips shall never speak your name."

It could have been a coincidence that the trolley in which Cynthia was riding to her room passed another one in the opposite direction in which George and Foster were coming home, but not an unusual occurrence. Their train arrived at the station about the same time she was leaving Dr. Monarch's office. Now, allow time for disembarking, as much time probably as it would take Cynthia to clear her mind and finally take a car, and you'll

have the cars meet at some point on Portgraves main street. Neither is it unusual for the riders of one not to see those of the other. As for Cynthia, having at that time decided that the extra five dollar bill in her purse might have come (and probably did) from Dr. Monarch's pocket, she was still wondering what to do: to turn back or not. Evidently she hadn't, for she never showed up at Dr. Monarch's office. But her mind was taken up for a while. As to Foster and George, the windows in their car might have been encrusted with frost, or the mist forming on the cold panes from human exhalations. Solemnly they went severally to their destinations. Cynthia to her room, Foster to Cynthia's house, and George to his mother.

"Now, mother, aren't you surprised to see me again so soon?" George said as he kissed her a second time.

"You always are a surprise to me," she said banteringly. "Happiest of surprises." Then enigmatically: "I was expecting you."

George thought she looked quite well. Her eyes were smiling coquettishly, and that worried him. She is hiding something. Maybe she is sick and is just putting on airs. The same doubts the same questions whenever I see mother, he thought. I tremble over her when I see her, and fear for her when I don't see her. Then he caught on to what she was saying. "Expecting me? But why?"

"Dr. Capen called to ask if you were home." Her voice was troubled.

"But why should he call for me?"

"Maybe you know. But that you are all right is all I want to know.

Nothing wrong... I mean...."

"Nothing with me, mother..." The phone rang. "OK, mother, I'll answer the phone. Hello! Yes, Foster... She <sup>has</sup> left home... back to school? Yes, there was a train back not long after our arrival. Yes, yes, quite possible... Her mother was worried about her? No, no, ~~not~~ ~~at all~~ ~~nothing~~ You go and see your people and leave. ~~Don't worry~~



all the evils upon the surface of the Earth.)

"Dr. Capen, I am here."

"So I see."

"I was watching you, to see if you'd notice me."

"All right watch a while longer."

"You called my house, don't you want to see me?"

"That was a long time ago."

"You are in one of your moods, doctor."

"You really here? And I ~~was~~ dreaming! First Cynthia and now you. A dream, a <sup>a</sup> ~~hallucination~~ and a pink elephant."

"What about Cynthia?"

"How come you are here?"

"O, come, come, doctor! How come anything? How come the rock of the pre-ancients that split the head and drew ~~the~~ blood, to the cunning sword of the ancients who did the same thing with more delicacy but with more cruelty, because of the refinement of their blood letting, and for no good reason at all, for they gorged themselves on their mutton carcasses; to the even more refined gunpowder of the modern that blasts the soul of them, to the more realistic future when they'll be dead before they possibly could know what struck them. (Could it possibly be, George, that from the deductions of man's genius for killing you have deduced the H Bomb. The ultimate in destruction, and the quickest in Death Dealing!) Sure, sure, why not? There is <sup>assessment or</sup> no measurement in time. The past is the future, and vice versa. And I may be crazy like you. So the unborn of the future may be dead before they are born, if we have our way. We planned it so."

"Off on one of your tirades."

"Had to, my dear doctor."

"Or go crazy, eh?"

"Thanks for the sympathy. Or is it the company?"

"But to be half insane is worse than ~~any~~."

"Where the medicine, doctor, to take us all the way? Over the border, in the land of the brave and the free, where no responsibility resides."

"Where is your responsibility?"

"In me. Since the day after the holidays I saw the change in her. I ignored the symptoms..."

"And what if you knew?"

"Talk to her - at least. Bet she never said a word to him. She bore it all within her. That's what made her so desperate - and who knows, maybe irrational. What could she have done... with herself? I don't, I can't believe she did away with herself."

"If not directly, she may have done so indirectly," Dr. Capen said.

"What do you mean?"

"If she went to one of those quacks. If only she went to Dr. Monarch, as I told her. But I am sure she didn't hear my last words to her. She wouldn't have been conscious of it <sup>she</sup> had ~~even~~ the house ~~had~~ collapsed on her. She was that stupefied."

"You refused her, didn't you? Her last hope!" George was defiant.

"I don't know whether I did or not. It's all so mixed up. I was hesitating..."

"She has pride. Your hesitating was refusal..."

"She said she had no right to burden me. That I was not to be involved. That she came to me on an impulse. Like a sleep-walker, in a dream. And she walked out like one."

"Couldn't you have stopped her?"

"She was gone before my mind grasped the situation. Not long after, I called her home, and they told me she had packed and gone back to school. It was hard to make out that procedure. But I wanted to believe. At least that she hadn't done anything rash. I felt as if <sup>we</sup> were reprieved. ~~When I called your house.~~ I called your house. Don't know why I did, or what you could do!"