

CHAPTER IX

Time Is A Fool

Time is a fool. It seeds Time with folly and conceit, and nurtures them into creatures of stupidity and evil. And somewhere in Time, and because of the seeds that Time planted and nurtured, a young unblemished soul lies sick unto death.

Time is a fool.

Close to midnight Dr. Capen's office telephone rang. Dr. Capen jumped ~~up~~ to answer.

He and George had been ~~over~~ all evening on Cynthia's trail without success. A few places left to cover seemed rather hopeless. Two tired and dispirited men ~~and~~ faced each other - almost hopeless - when the call came.

"Dr. Capen?" the voice over the wire asked

"Yes, this is Dr. Capen speaking!"

"A very sick young girl repeating your name, here... Hotel Langdon..."

"Will be right over." To George: "In it that deep." And he measured with his hand up to his chin, as he hung up the receiver.

"How?"

 evidently
"The poor thing dreamed my name in the dreamland of her delirium, as if in sinking she clutched at it. And as if from the depths it came to the surface, to her lips. I am the shining hero of her dreams. And ~~now~~ I betrayed her! All right then, I take it all. My responsibility. Or should have been in the first place."

"What are you raving about?"

"Just that I should be ready to go to jail if anything happened to her."

"I still can't see what you have to do with it."

"My name was spoken by her. A maid by the name of Maud heard it. The night supervisor heard it. Seems this Maud befriended her, and watched over her, hoping she'd be all right by morning and return to school. But an hour ago she had taken a bad turn. The maid couldn't keep the secret any longer and gave out the whole thing. Well, it's for the best. May save her yet. If it's just another hemorrhage I hope to see her through....."

~~.....~~

"But you didn't..."

"Well, I should have. Only if that fool Monarch wouldn't blab his tongue."

"He wouldn't let you take the blame for something you didn't do."

"I gave her his name didn't I? And he did it because she came to him from me. He had given up this work long before.... I would enjoy it much more sitting in prison than in my office with him sitting there. But let's go."

"Where you going to take her?"

"A hospital would be the best bet?"

"But her name?"

"They don't know her name. At the hospital I'd have to give her right name."

"Couldn't it be done in a private home?"

"It could... In no time at all I could turn any kitchen into an operating room. Have all the equipment. But what home? She'd need rest for a few days. Of course - her home. But --"

"How about the Dreens?"

"Yes, the Dreens, but how can I approach them?"

"Just call them up."

"At this hour?"

"I know the Dreens."

"I know them too. But do you know what this involves? If she... if she... if anything happens to her they'll be in it..."

"The Dreens don't calculate. They do what they have to^{do}. In this case there is no one else to protect her name."

"It would be perfect."

"One more thing though: Her chances as compared to going to a hospital?"

"There is that risk in either case. If it's what I think it is, the difference is not great. At anyrate we could watch her and shift if it becom^{es} necessary."

"The minor risk ~~there~~ is worth it to protect her name."

"... Wait, wait," Dr. Capen^{is} was saying, "I must explain. She seems to be in a bad way. And if anything happened..." His voice was trailing, and the hand holding the receiver was shaking.

"That conscience," George said, "sometimes works over time." To himself, he still isn't over it. He can't take his presumed guilt. Where is that stoic nature of his? Always so calm and competent under the stress of adversity. And now. Is there such a thing as too much conscience? Or is ^a presumed wrong worse than real one?

George took the phone^{is} from Dr. Capen.

"Hello, hello, this George. Cynthia is in a bad way. Very sick... For obvious reasons, explain later, cannot take her to hospital. At least not yet. Will you take her?"

"Yes, yes," came loud over the wire. Dr. Capen^g heard it plain and strong.

"That settles it. Now let's hurry."

The forces of budding life are strong in the young, and often they pre-

vail, and triumph over the forces of destruction, going on of their own accord, sustaining and gaining strength from every source in cell and tissue, as if they were a complex and a complete being in themselves. A source of life independent of earthly complexes and earthly chemical reactions, but dependent on its sustenance on a power outside. When stresses send out the call for Creativeness to come to the aid of the stricken, and to prevent the total break-up of an organized being, or a simple organism, the aid does come. Sometimes it prevails. At other times it doesn't. The motion which is set at the well and source of life, wherever it may be, must not be denied. For the well contains the origins and live waters of life itself. And motion goes on, and must not stop. For motion is life. And the forces of motion, and hence life, are very strong in the young. In Cynthia the life and motion of the blood gained a new impetus and force with the lurking threat of bacterial invasion. It was the beginning, and only a threat, but already the fighting forces in the blood were marshaled and ready for the counter attack. And the blood was thundering and rushing at flood-tide, and destroying the enemy in the billions. But the enemy had also the power of resistance, and the inherent and inimitable quality of multiplying faster than their destruction. For the same blood that nourished the garrisons of the protecting army also nurtured and bred the enemy. Cynthia lay helpless and slightly delirious between the two contending forces.

The great tide of blood that rushed over and washed her brain stimulated the individual brain neurons, or units - the ones that, by synapse, or contact with one another, convey thought, memory, and all the other impulses necessary to conduct the processes of living. A flux of memories, a mosaic of events swept over her brain. Of the pattern of the crazyquilt, but crystal clear nevertheless. As if each memory of the past had a setting of its own. Set in the clear-blueness of a morning sky. The sun causing a glitter of brilliance around each memory, each event. The memories have familiar faces that come from great distances. But they are crystal clear. And she

soared up to those distant points in time ^{with} of her memories, of her past, and maybe of her future. Is it confusion that brings the past and future together at a point of distance in time, where there is no past or future, but only a present? At such distances the consciousness becomes subcon-
sciousness, even unconsciousness. There could be no significance. Then she was recalled to ^{the} immediate present, and to consciousness, by a familiar face, a face that ^y always had power over her mind and feelings. Realization was full in her as she recognized George's face; and then, and then - Dr. Capen's face came out of the shadows.

Her eyelids fluttered, and a faint smile hovered over her wan face as by the pure magic of a miracle the name, George, came to her lips. And then Dr. Capen. As if contingent on the first, his name ^{must} too come into clear focus.

The flood was at its ebb, and left her quite cool, though weak. Maybe the defending forces had gained a temporary victory in these first and opening skirmishes. There was a moment of awareness in her, and lucidity; and Dr. Capen who had examined her briefly, took it that the racing pulse was due to loss of blood - which is frequent in incomplete abortion - and which he could well remedy.

"We are taking you away from here," he said quite cheerily. Having plumbed the depths and come to grips with the enemy he was more confident. For the moment he was even happy, as he already smelled victory in the air.

"Where am I going?" She was quite strong now, as if her delirium had been a refreshing sleep. And the friendly presence of the two--- It revived her spirits. She felt quite smug and comfortable in her bed. "I am quite all right now. I shall be on my way back in the morning."

George: "No, darling, not yet. First a few days' rest."

"I'll be all right, doctor?" A startled plea. Her eyes darkening.

"Of course you'll be all right."

"Why can't I stay here?"

Then ~~the~~ weakness overtook her again.

They threw some warm clothing over her and were carrying her through the lobby when they were stopped by a sandy-haired little man, who evidently carried the hotel's night authority on his narrow shoulders.

"Wait!" he piped in his squeaky voice, "sit there ~~an~~ the bench. Few things to check. Let's see," he screwed ^{up} his eyebrow. "Let's see," he repeated, licking his upper lip with a malicious note in his voice. "Let's see what's all about - this goings on here." There was something mysterious here, which not only aroused his suspicion, but his greed for the big catch. Big fish. Turning to the night clerk at the desk: "Is the bill paid in full?"

"Not quite."

"Well, is it, or is it not?"

"It is not. But Maud said that the money was there to be paid. That she had simply ~~be~~ neglected...."

"The rules, don't you know the rules? Money in advance... for such... You should have sent her packing long ago." To Dr. Capen: "You are the Dr. Capen, the one... Well, never mind, you better take this your... before I call the police... Maybe I should anyway. It's pure and simple a case of..." There was a light crack on his face, and he reeled but did not fall. In his hot resentment against the little fellow George had enough presence of mind not to loose the full force behind his fist.

"Now look here, little man," George stood over him, "one more word out of you and you won't call the police for a long time. But I shall call them and tell them what I did for you. Also remember to keep that mouth..." What's the use! He won't ^{or can't} keep his mouth shut, and he ^{himself} can't brawl. The whole thing maybe was a mistake. He shouldn't have encountered him. But... his blood boiled up in him. He was in a state of fatigue himself, and an easy prey to anger.

"I shall remember not to forget," the other said as he slipped through

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quietly a side exit, slamming the door behind him.

Dr. Capen: "It would have been wiser not to stir up the stench in that cesspool, but I am glad you did, ^{it} One more hound on our tail won't matter."

The young man at the desk, coming over: "I am ashamed of myself, Mr. Sheraton. Should have done what you have done."

George looked up to him in surprise: "You know me?"

Young man: "You were sophomore at the High while I was senior."

George: "About that meddling fool. It's best you didn't. It's our affair."

Young man: "He is a bad man, sneaky and vengeful. All evening he has been snooping and sniffing, as if on the hunt... Hope she comes out all right."

The Dreen house was ablaze with light, and stood out as a shining jewel amid the drooping and somnolent abodes in the ~~night~~ ^{night} darkness. It was not long after midnight, and long before the wee hours of the morning.

The Dreens were wide awake, and ready, as if ^{they} hadn't been to bed at all.

"Her room ready?" Dr. Capen snapped. And without waiting for an answer, "all right, put her to bed. And you Mrs. Dreen," he continued, without looking up from his bags, "you take these." And he handed her two shining long sterilizers. "You got ³ four burner stove. Take these, fill them with water, just enough to cover the instruments, and put them, each one across two burners. Full flame. You, Mr. Dreen, stay with the patient until we come for her. George, come with me, We'll make the kitchen as good an ^o operating room as you'll find anywhere. Aseptic to the nth degree."

"This is a different Dr. Capen," George thought. "The sudden change in the man!" (But) yet it wasn't too surprising. He has become the efficient, unthinking machine, throwing all ~~the~~ remorse, regret, and the indolence that goes with it, to ~~the~~ the four winds. Steeped in the lore and glory of

his ~~secret~~ profession! Secretly he envied him, openly he admired him. He was imbued with awe and inspiration watching him go about his ~~rites~~ like a priest, performing his holy duties of saving a life. A prayer broke out on his lips: "O, mighty God, in Thy infinity, hath a man ever performed more sacred rites in Thy Holy Temple, and burnt the essence of incense more pleasant in Thy nostrils! Mayest Thou, O, Holy One, look down with compassion upon this man, who serves in Thy Temple, in Thy Holy of Holies, Thy Temple of Truth, and on his work. And mayest Thou be merciful to Thy creature he is so valiantly struggling to save and succor."

The good doctor took George's silent meditation as an attitude of hesitation.

"If you'd rather not, George...." Then he observed what he thought were tears trembling in George's eyes. "Why, George...! Well, can't blame you being unnerved. The last two days... But me - I am an old soldier."

"You are doing things. All I can do is pray."

"In the hour of darkness..., who knows!"

Time was rushing on. Time was the slow pace of a turtle. But after ten minutes or more, which seemed like ages, the kitchen was white and aseptic, and glistening like the instruments ranged on a small side-table covered with a sterile sheet. A big table was in the center of the kitchen. Covered with blankets for softness, sterile sheets spread over them with tautness, as if they had always belonged there, the table now was in appearance and efficiency like any other operating table. After a last glance Dr. Capen seemed satisfied. "George, help Mr. Dreen to bring Cynthia in." After Cynthia was brought in, the two men left. Mrs. Dreen ~~was~~ remained to assist him.

to wait,
They went to Solomon's den, and sat down at the desk which was littered with typed sheets, loose-leaf note books, a volume or two of Encyclopedia Britannica, and other reference books.

"Digging away as usual," George said. His voice was flat, and matter-of-fact, as if nothing else was on his mind but the business of Solomon's desk. It was a reaction, an outlet, a relief to talk of everyday things.

To Solomon the moment was a reprieve too. And he gladly grabbed at the promise of the shining thing, that bright moment. "Yes, digging away," he says simply, "what else is there to do?" The scattered volumes, the litter of typed manuscript never before had the meaning and importance as at the moment. The heap of them is a shining plateau on which to alight and look into the blue sky and upon the sunlit ^{earth}, if only for one bright moment. For the pressure was great. And soon one would have to go back to the matter at hand which is the real present, the tragic time: The Time in the present which is Tragedy. It's so near, that it's overwhelming. They have snatched that moment of respite, and they are the better for it.

The moment is over, and they must go back to the pressing thought that's uppermost in their mind. And so Solomon says, "Just about got to bed when you people called..."

And George on his own track, his own train of thoughts: "It needn't have happened if Foster..." He stopped short. What and how much does Solomon know? And who was he to blame Foster! He was the tool, the agent in Time's Trap. Time eating its own progeny. Time that will destroy itself in time. Time's fool! TIME IS A FOOL!

"Don't be harsh on the boy," Solomon says, "he isn't grown up like you."

"Yes, he is younger. Much younger."

"In a hundred years Foster would never grow up to be like you. Maybe he"

never grow up. The element of Time for growth perhaps is not on his side. But isn't it better so? Sometimes I think a little underdevelopment is better. I love him as he is - yes, his wholesome self, even his stupid self, if you will, but the perfect specimen of his species."

"The aberration and cult of the image-adoration, of the cold marble, interdicted by your Scriptures."

"Not quite the same. There is a bond of love, blood and warmth in this handsome statue, and impulses, even if they are the wrong impulses. Not his fault if they were handed him - by Time, according to you, George. I love his palpable and sincere honesty. Yes, his innocence."

"Like a cow at pasture!" a sardonic hint in George's voice, "come what may, flood or lightning - it squats."

"Let's not be bitter about it."

"If I am it's because I am bitter at myself. I am more guilty than he. I had her close to me, in the park, sitting on the soft turf in The Oaks, in the forest, in the boat, on the beach. Where not? And I loved her. I am telling you I loved her...! I know it now. But dilettante that I am I must always remain the outsider. On the other side of the wall. Not ready for love. Bigger and better things in the offing... Contemptible fool! What's greater than the love of one like Cynthia! She truly loved me, and I cast her away. She went to Foster... And it happened. O, Cynthia, how I betrayed you!"

"Stop!"

"Never will. And why should I? Dr. Capen takes the blame because he thinks he shouldn't have let her run out on him. He'll cover for Dr. Monarch because he believes she went to him because of him. And so will you and Lena go to jail, if she dies. But I, I go Scot-free, I, the arch criminal."

"Better go and get some sleep. You need it."

"While she goes to her eternal sleep...! I know..."

"Don't go on torturing yourself."

Solomon went to George, took him by the shoulders. "Those treacherous hours of watching and waiting! Haven't you had enough? Even I, with the thing fresh in me, am all dammed up within. Don't press it too hard. Let go a bit - even if it has to come by tears. It's no shame. After all you are only a mere boy. Even an older man." He paused. "Maybe we both could benefit by it." They face each other in silence.

They raised their heads when they heard the soft footsteps of Dr. Capen. What world has he come from? The world of darkness and death, or the world of light and the living. Or the world of twilight?

The world of Twilight, which is between the living and the dead, between light and darkness, between the born and unborn.

In the World of Twilight there is still hope. Have you performed the task, doctor, that will send her on the trail back to the living? Or wasn't it in your power to alter the course of Fate?

Why the skin so taut on the cheekbones, the eyes starting from their sockets, the compressed pale lips.

The silence. The long stare.

Come tell us what's the score!

A shadow in the dim light near the door. You stand like the Grim Reaper. Your hands still bloody? Did you rid her of that unpure blood (blood of sin?) that was choking her to death? Did you alter the flood that's carrying her away from us?

And now Lena stands in the place of the doctor. She is white and flimsy

like an angel. She has a message - for Foster to come home at once. Cynthia's fate still in the balance... Complicating sepsis, from... George knows the score. He also knows there is no trail back from where she is going. Ah, Foster, stupid but innocent tool of brutal Time! You George are more implicated than he for not having warned him... So, Cynthia, I am at your deathbed of love, who from now on can love you in death... And maybe that's good, for death lasts forever.....!

Meanwhile two angels of mercy will watch over ^{her} until the dawn, when there may be a change for the better - or for the worse. The doctor will be back by then.

Solomon and Lena had each their turn to watch over Cynthia, but it soon became mostly Solomon's task. Solomon had quickly learned the signs and symptoms to look for, Dr. Capen had found him an apt pupil. In her turn Lena became quickly alarmed when alone with her patient. She wouldn't admit it to herself, but to her fear and anxiety was added an augury which she had tried to cudgel from her brain with no success. The slightest movement on her part, the ticking of the clock, Cynthia's breathing - deep or not deep - rang with the profoundest of clamors when alone. She was afraid! She was afraid for the tenuous thread of life of the pallid, almost livid, frail form lying in bed. Suppose she passes out while alone with her. Could she tell death, or the approach of death? She was dwelling with death, or the threat of death - alone! When she felt for the pulse, her fingers were cold and numb with apprehension. And when the delicate thread of life didn't register at once to the sensories of her finger tips, she went into a coma of cold sweat. Then the weak wriggle would finally come through and she would breathe deeply and resume her vigil. But soon again she would run to her husband.

"Lost again?" he'd tease her. She'd cry within herself with the uncertainty of the thing, until finally Solomon told her to take a rest, that he

would take over. He was brave in the presence of his wife, but now he is consumed with fear and doubt. How is her breathing? He counts her breathing. An increase of three from an hour ago. The sighing respiration? It wasn't there an hour ago. What were Dr. Capen's instructions? Dr. Capen come. Let someone come. This stillness, this solitude of the night! Now dawn was breaking and Solomon still sitting with his burden. He was bent over his charge, haggard, tormented with doubt, his eyes burning, when Foster came in.

Foster had ridden over the road at full throttle through the winter night. His ^{head} still awlirl and eyes blinded from the night-light flashes when he entered the dim silence of the house.

He had passed his mother's outstretched form in the living^{room} and had come into the bedroom in a blur of emotion, still not fully awake to the real ^a meaning and consequence of the scene before him. This man, this Solomon, his father by proxy, was sitting in the semi-darkness, humbled and bent over Cynthia. As immobile as a marble statue. His face gray and shrunken with corrugations, his eyes dry and staring and hardly breathing. And there before him she is lying, of livid face, but still breathing.

Then as he watched, her face flushed, as with new life. Was it the oncoming of fever? But life it is no matter what the cause or origin. The new life brought the impulse of impetus to her frozen limbs, thawing them out with the heat in them. She moved an arm as if to ward off something, as one would a fly in sleep. A smile curled her lips. Breathing^h came harder and deeper, as if by command of her awakened brain she had been ordered to get more air in the lungs to be able to form the words that were being borne on the

waves of thought. A faint formation of words. A two syllable word. A name. ~~Whom~~ was she seeing, ~~whom~~ was she calling?

She treshed about, and opened her eyes. She was looking straight up to him. A smile hovered over her features; ^{"George..."} Then she closed her eyes and went into her deep breathing and unconscius sleep again. All the time Solomon sat there in stony immobility.

Was Solomon unconscious of his presence, or was it that he didn't want to ^{see} him? Well, hadn't he rejected this man's reachings-out, his tenderness and love for him? Hadn't he caused him much pain? Hadn't he paid him evil for kindness?

He put a hand on the man's shoulder. The man turned, looked up to him and grasped his hand. The young man sank to his knees and rested his head on the older man's knee: "Father forgive me, for I didn't know what I was doing."

"True words spoken in the anguish of the soul. Pronounced first by Him." He clutched the young man's shoulder, kissed him on the head. "But who shall forgive and who shall be forgiven? Somewhere there must ^{be} an area of forgiveness ^{in the earth and} reaching to the end of the earth and beyond. We are all made of the same earth. It exists ^W somewhere in Time. And Time is a fool for hiding it from us, for denying that great salvation. But Time will have to yield its secret, then there'll be no need to ask for forgiveness, for it'll be granted before it's asked."

Like a tidal wave it swept over Foster. He found peace in this strange man's strength. Never was strange, except that he had ^e never really knew the man. Now he is the man of iron in his humility and kindness. All great men are mild with humility until their strength is called for. And only great men have the power and intensity to conceal their strength deep within them, to remain dormant, until the emergency arises.

"Was George here?" Foster asked.

"Yes, son... All through this, ^{harrowing}

when they found her in a small room..."

A wild cry, more of a groan, wrenched itself from Foster's throat as he threw himself at the foot of Cynthia's bed and buried his head there. "O, my Cynthia, what have I done to you!" he sobbed desperately, as if all conscious feeling went into that phrase, as if his whole life was bound up in it. Solomon stood in silence over him patting his head, trying to assuage the storm that broke in him. He had wondered when the storm would break, for it must come, and he was glad that it came while they were alone. Then Solomon heard footsteps, and there was George entering the room.

Solomon's voice: "It's you, George! Didn't expect you back so soon."

George spoke to the darkness in general, as if under a magical influence, a compulsion, directing him unseeing into the room: "There was a restlessness in me ^{while} falling asleep. A shaft of light coming from somewhere beyond blinded my eyes and burned into my brain. I was shivering with a terrible chill to the very marrow of my bones. A voice came to me. I recognized it as the voice of my childhood days when I was dying with the dread paralysis. This time there was an ethereal quality in it, as if coming from a great distance. 'Go to her,' the voice was stern and pleading at the same time, 'and speak to her. Though life hangs by a tenuous thread it may still be revived through the spirit which is strong in her and has so much love for you. The forces of life haven't yet given up the struggle, and you may prove the necessary stimulus to tip the delicate balance. I'll be with you and speak to her through you, my son!'"

Then Solomon spoke: "Who may deny the divine power residing in the

spirit of man, commanding the elements to reverse their course ----"

A prevalence of silence as George bent over Cynthia. Foster kneeling at her feet. Solomon standing spellbound.

A heaving of breath by Cynthia. And another. Her eyes opened wide and clear: "Where ^{has} is your father gone, George? We were at a fountain in a Forest of Magic. You held my hand and your Father spoke to me. He gave me of the clear cool water of the Fountain to drink. And I was refreshed as I had never been before. And then he was gone. But thank God you are with me."

And she smiled as she closed her eyes.