

and coward - covering their folly, inscribing zero for their effort on Time's Tomb!"

CHAPTER V

A Dedicated Hour

~~Later, that afternoon~~

Dr. Capen's reception room was full to capacity, as if patients from far and near had gotten together and made a concerted effort to overwhelm him with work in this hour he had dedicated to his friends of his lean years. And today of all days! And his hobo-friend, turning up in time to hold his work of the hour in abeyance. ^{And} Mrs. Forrest who had to see him privately before the "hour"! His ~~friend~~ hobo, now Bob Black, had come just after she had left through that special exit, the unobtrusive, almost invisible door, in the rear of the office. He wondered if he had seen her come out. But ^{friend} his was tight lipped, never saying a word about it. And he hadn't asked.

He looks at the clock. Half past four. Every time he opens the door to let one in into the treatment room he is horrified at the horde in the waiting room.

The evening paper is spread out on a chair; the black letters of a headline telling of George's triumph play tricks on his eyes, leaping at him. But he must keep at his task.

Next!

Come, come, come! Step faster. Faster!

If they'd only hurry. But they take their time.

You may leave your hat there. No need going back for it. And you, my dear lady, your handbag is quite safe in the waiting room. Why come in with your topcoat? All right, let it be.

Will he be through by the time George gets here?

He is sure George will come before he goes home.

Where is George? The paper has been out over an hour. He looks at his watch.

He opens the door a crack. No, he isn't in the waiting room. He'll watch out for him. Can't tell what George'd do to make himself invisible. How can one be sure? Can't see behind people.

It's a routine hour, the basin-and-irrigation hour. His hand almost works automatically, on familiar ground, with no extra cerebation required; but this afternoon it were as if his mind was screened off, working through a haze. His aim was poor and his work sloppy, which aggravated him and slowed him down.

He was worried, he was tired, and he was alone. Alone in this confining cubicle.

But where is George? Not at the Eventide, not at home!

He works on doggedly.

Another patient leaves, and Dr. Capen smiles as he opens the door for the next.

The next and the next.

George is next after "the next". His face is hidden behind the morning paper. He came ahead of a few of the "nexts", but he wants to be the last. Just sit and wait.

No, not wait. Waiting is for a task to do or be done to you. You just sit. It's good - to just sit. Can his brain just sit. It cannot. It has to ruminate and wander. The story in the paper, His story. So!

It was the last patient that Dr. Capen saw to the door. His eyes met the patient's as he wished good health. He turned around and saw George standing. "George!" He almost shouted with ~~him~~ ^{George}, but he held his office.

George's was an incisive mind, and even though stubborn he was proud of him, ^{if} as he were his own. Had his father intended George so while with the polio and the young brain sensitive to his preaching? But at the present ^{be} may he could divert his mind into other channels. Pumping vigorously George's hand he said: "This calls for a celebration - nature's triumph. The triumph and miracle of spring. The wonder of the soft night, and the moonlight to show the way of the opening buds, the vistas of the new fresh green of the meadows; and the bowed heads, as in prayer, of the young pliant striplings; and the tender flower bowing over the cool blushing petals."

"I bow in reverence and homage to the sentimentality of the non-sensical sense of the art and witchcraft of poesy." There was a perturbed and an unwilling smile of irony on George's lips. He continued with mock-seriousness: "I bow to 'the triumph and miracle of spring' and the tender blushings of the flower while bending its head over the cool bedewed petals in its bosom. Quite the poet, I admit, but hardly becoming a toughened surgeon and a down-to-earth physician."

"An ambition, perhaps, rusty with moss," Dr. Capen blushed furiously at the receding hairline on his forehead, "but not a tough surgeon, not even a down-to-earth physician. Often I wish I had chosen a different course, and curse the day I had decided to hold in my hands the destiny of life and death of human beings. It seems as if the curse is always with me, lurks behind me, and forestalls ⁱⁿ my eyes with the bitterness of a pillar of smoke - condemning ^{me} for the deaths that passed and will pass in the future under my hand. One death lingers to harrass and poison the days the rest of my life." He paused and looked up to George. "Yes, it is your father's death. The years that pass seem to make no difference. It's always fresh ^{with} me. I try to tell myself that I have no guilt, that I was only a poor witness to the act. Indeed, am I the keeper of my brother-surgeon, physician! Well, I am. And the blood of one victim stains us all - white robed or not. Too soon I had

acquiesced to the idea of surgery and ceased to protest, even though Portgrave's best surgeon was to do it. Frustration is more overwhelming now to know the things that could have been done to save his life. Simple things, compared to what will be warranted us in the future. My ambition has denied and defied me. My friend, the hobo, long before me had discovered the seamy side of life. You'll say that Solomon was long before him, but it took Solomon a thousand wives and a lot of treasure, while my hobo knew it at the tender age of nineteen - his first experience with woman...

"The scene of your father's death is as vivid as if it were happening now. It's well to bring that up now because he made his dying moments as purposeful to you as his living years in your memory; that the heritage he ^hbequeathed to you might have culminated in your triumph today. I can see the short, well-trimmed beard clinging to the finely molded longish face. The face graying like the beard - an earthy shade. The eyes burning with the old fire - the sharp brilliance of the last spark of a dying ember. His voice a little choked with huskiness, was yet perfectly distinct. The scene was terrible in its tragic magnificence. One departing soul reaching and flaming out to another of the same affinity and kinship, to imbue it with its last message. The unspoken word, the unspoken ^{disillusionment} that had long been with him, but had remained unuttered and unsaid.

"He spoke of the death of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain in the name of Jehovah, to be followed in bloody trail of brother slaying brother, as if they had special dispensation from Him. 'The great sin of humanity is making abject slaves of the very ones who gave it spirituality. Is it because we resent their spiritual conquest of us?'

"He spoke of the pogrom in the little town in Lithuania he had visited on his Sabbatical leave, to 'sit at the feet' of a renowned

Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Nechemiah. Versed in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, ^{your father} felt grimly about being completely shut off from its great commentary, the Talmud.

"What had long rankled in his mind was now to be said with his last breath, so that his son would hear and understand: 'It happened on Passover day which ~~was~~ was also the sacred day of the Sabbath. There was a pogrom. One of the first victims was the rabbi's wife. She had stayed behind in the house, to oversee a few details of the Sabbath meal, after her husband and ten-year old son had left for the morning service at the synagogue. There the hooligans ^{had} found her and ravished her. To purge her body from pollution, she committed her soul to the Eternal by throwing herself off the roof. The massacre over, rabbi and son and your father sat down at the table for the Sabbath meal. On the holy Sabbath one must not mourn - even the death of wife and mother. The rabbi made a brave attempt, a pretense at least, at the proper joyousness of the day. The boy choked on his first mouthful and left the table in tears. This was a deliberate flouting of the sanctity of the day, but his father, stern in his piety, did not call him back to the table. He did not push to the limit the agony in the boy. He was a wise man.

"The boy's name was Solomon, just about ten years your senior. I hope your paths cross in the future. You are still tender in years. Remember him, my son. Remember the kinships of all men. And remember that in elemental form we are all brothers, and all present when Yahveh's word thundered across Sinai's peaks. Present before cosmic dust settled to give origin to worlds. Remember our common origin, even so the common swamp of decaying and living matter, the common pool which contains life and death these long ages. The true brotherhood of man! For out of this fetor of decay comes life which is clean, for it is washed by the cleansing tides of life which has its origin in the soul, which is divine. The soul it is that dominates all - the seed of the ultimate. And the soul it is that comes to rest in the Godhead after its

roots are torn from the earth.

"We are brothers in and out of the skin.

"Watchman of the long night that comes before our birth, Watchman of the distant long past, Beholder of the centuries, clear and concrete, what has been written in rock and reef, give us, thou Watchman, through the Word the strength to see, to overcome our weaknesses.

The everlasting Word which has long been written in the majesty of the mountains, in the serene verdure of the green valley, in the sign of the Zodiac: In the suns and the moons, in the leaping violence of lightning, the fury and echo of the thunderbolt reverberating over the mountain top: The Word that has been there since Time began. The one Word the all embracing Word....The Word that embraces my soul, and oh, Lord, speaks only truth. Thou, Who spoke the Word, take me with Thee into eternity. Amen!

"You had just come through your polio, George, but you remember!"

"The Word..... my father's words.....Yes, like an eternity..."

Chapter VI

A Moment Dedicated to a Mother

Why hadn't he gone home first? The hour and more spent at the doctor's office, and not a word to his mother! Since early morning she hadn't heard from him. By now she had seen the paper, and wondering about her son's "Triumph". Her triumph, a mother's triumph! But how could he? She would read confusion and frustration in his face. She with her mother's discerning eye.

What's so unusual about staying away a day?

How many mornings had stretched into afternoons, afternoons approaching the depth of twilight and evening, before he had seen her face. Was this the longest day? A vast number of mornings and noons separa-

ting this earliest of mornings from the approaching evening. Their number is endless, stretching before him and behind him. Where do they come from and where do they go - this endless link of Todays and Yesterdays of Time? George sees himself in the middle of the vastness and endlessness of Time. And Today's Time of the day, which is the Now - the longest Now! But again this may be an illusion of the mind. The mind sees - and even when the mind sees not, or ceases to see, even so the illusion may linger on. For thinking is as illusive as seeing. The world of Has Been. The world of shades and hobgoblins; the mind thinks it, sees it, revels in it. The world of happiness, of Has Been. Maybe it's the real world, the real world of happiness. The Happiness of Illusion! The lines of sadness, sorrow and suffering smoothed away, replaced by a glow of hope...

Kinships, ~~Kinships, kinships~~

A long day, Mother, and the events give you hope. Father's word (Was it prophetic?), his bequest to me, is coming true at last. I have become a striver and defender of truth - cause of human unhappiness! Superhuman! Isn't that what the polio and his preaching made of me? So be it. It was there in black and white. By word of mouth and pen, as he had hoped. Father's power of word was there, as if he were present at my elbow speaking and dictating to me. And that's no illusion.

Kinship of mind.

Your face is shining and young again, Mother.

The long, painful nightmarish day you waited for me. And you wouldn't eat without me. A long day, and the darkening purple is coming up from the east.

Over the table he reaches for her hand. The hand can't pretend, or presume. It's a hard working hand, with the soft delicacy gone out of it. I'll take care of you, mother.

I'll take the Eventide in stride - the answer to your worked out hands, your tired spirit. I'll go along with Barton, Doaks and Jack, and become a big wheel in the world of writing. You'd like it, Dr. Capen. You spurn the tardiness, the ineffectiveness, the complacency of your fellow professionals. No medical school for me. Write, write! "The world will be yours, George Sheraton. George who, He Who... He who what? Who cares. But you do. You are the only son of a widowed mother, the only soul left in her life. You are He who remembers the murturing warmth of her young body as you lay cold and helpless in your polio night.

Smile, mother, and let's be happy for the day that is coming.

CHAPTER VII

Virgin or Coward

The blast of the Franklin's horn came up from below.

"Go, son, go with him. The fresh air will do you good after a hard day.

"And you, mother?"

"I'll sit here and wait; relaxed that you are safer than riding your bicycle." She looks at him and smiles happily.

"All right, mother, I won't be long."

Once outside you break with the events of the day that enclosed you like a cocoon.

The red balloon of the sun hangs low on the horizon, touching with gold the tree tops. Dr. Capen is standing by the sleek hood of the