

CHAPTER III

Harold Impresses

Harold Brandt was a practical fellow for whom the sun always shone east and the moon west, and he realized that his chances to win the class presidency in this his last year at Portgrave High were almost next to nihil. He had held minor offices during the past three years, but his short tenure of them neither impressed Blanca, nor even himself. He campaigned hard, throwing in a whole shopful of bicycles in lieu of votes, but the receivers of this persuasive largess of his were few, and even of these, as the election morning dawned (October 27, 1911), he couldn't be sure of their votes.

But on that very morning when his chances seemed at their lowest ebb lady luck came to his rescue, prancing on a white steed. That very morning when the seniors were assembling at Mr. Bibbly's classroom, in the hour between eight and nine, to hold their elections, the newspapers came out with the startling announcement of a suit by the Taft administration against the United States Steel Corporation. It charged among other things: that it was a monopoly, that it had achieved its monopoly in part by purchasing the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company four years before, and that in acquiring the Tennessee Company The Steel Corporation had misled Roosevelt, who had been President at that time.

This was the hour when Augustus Bibbly taught American History and Government, and he had given it over to the government of the Senior Class; but he had thought it proper that he make a few general comments on the morning's shocking news. His remarks though general had a slight pro-Rooseveltian tinge. He had not failed to refer to the integrity of the

man, and the famous Rooseveltian toothed-smile: "the ruggedness of Teddy's face, like Mount Etna, and as silent - for the time being." And that was to be all.

But not to Harold Brandt it was to be all. Teddy was too long a time hero to him to let go with a few well chosen phrases of Mr. Bibbly's. And wasn't he the best on the school's debating team, well, one of the best! He'll show them. He was buoyed up by the urgency of his righteous cause, and the flair for justice. Did he have a campaign speech in mind, just before the election? To Harold's credit it must be said that at the first hot moments of his utterances he was not moved by anything else but the cause of the great man, at least not consciously. Later on in his argumentation and in the fire of his oratory the possibility of a reflected glory on himself might have occurred to him, which he embraced heartily for the good of Teddy and himself. For it might swing more than a few votes to him.

"It was casting aspersion on the integrity and honor of the man who had only the people's interest at heart," he shouted. "And above all he, Taft, whom Roosevelt had elevated to the Presidency, solely by his own efforts! It's like biting the hand that feeds you."

There was no denying the rightness of his words. And the class, to the last member, was with him. And when Harold looked into their earnest faces he knew he had them with him all the way.

Now for the peroration, the clinching climax! And for that he took the story of his favorite subject - "the Big Stick." The Big Stick was the Damoclesian Sword hanging over the heads of the pirates and would-be raiders of the poor man's pocket. No other single factor in modern history had its parallel in its influence for the public welfare as Teddy's Big Stick.

Then the last follow-through, and the capping of the climax. He paused to catch his breath, but more so to look into as many faces of the voters as he could do so safely. O, yes, every face was turned to him.

And there was a deadly silence. He gave them a last baleful look, as if to tell them they can all go to hell if they didn't elect him to a high office, and then a last trumpet on the wide caverns of his broad proboscis, and the last blast of his words: "And what has become of the good Big Stick, pray, in the hands of Taft, but a puny tooth-pick!" There was a burst of applause which drowned out the ripple of laughter that came with it.

Harold sat down, but soon rose again, bowing, celebrity-like, to acknowledge the applause. Even Mr. Bibbly was smiling down on him. Mr. Bibbly was particularly happy, for Harold had said the words that were in his mind, but couldn't say them because of his position as a public man.

His name was put in nomination for class-president, which he lost in the final count to Foster Forrest. The majority could not forget Foster's great feats on the gridiron. But they gave him the office of next importance - the vice-presidency - - - by unanimous vote.

Harold was quite pleased with second place on the "ticket", for he knew that under Foster he'd wield the powers of the presidency in all but the name. Putting the prestige of his office to the test he proposed and succeeded in electing Blanca to the office of secretary over the objection of the president himself, who had ambitions for Cynthia in that direction.

For the Yearbook it was George, Editor-in-chief; and Cynthia, Associate Editor. For the school magazine it was again George and Cynthia.

Now Foster was befuddled and thinking in a vacuum. He glanced at George and wondered if his friend had something to do with it. "Nah," he almost spoke out aloud to himself, "nah, George isn't like that, to go behind a fellow's back. If he had wanted Cynthia with him on the Yearbook he would have come to me and told me. But that doesn't prevent George," he thought bitterly, "from relishing the idea of having her at his beck-and-call at all times. Why couldn't it have been the other way: Cynthia with the harmless Harold and Blanca with George." But immediately he had

to admit to himself with a smile that Blanca would make a poor editor even under George. Perhaps things are not as topsy-turvy as they seemed. He was proud of his Cynthia, acknowledging to himself that after all she was the best for that spot. He gave George a smile of approval. A little bland, but a smile nevertheless. A smile of confusion and also regret that he should have had any resentment, and also astonishment at the idea that he had had any thoughts of priority over Cynthia's intentions and wishes.

PART IX

CHAPTER I

And It Is Spring Again

The Face the Facade the Epic,
The Look the Glory (if any) of it.

What is it to graduate? You toil, you sweat, you pray and hope, and you live in a certain stratum in a certain land; you see a light far away, suddenly it is close to you - and you take flight into another stratum, of another land. The Land of the Graduate! A new land with more light and less darkness? The new Land. . . ., "unto the land I will show thee."

You toil, you sweat, you pray, and suddenly it's finished. You are glad. You are sad. The old grooves, the old track, the old roadbed. A straight line. And you moved along easily softly and cozily. Then suddenly you have to tear up the old roadbed, track and all, and skip to a new one.

You are sad, you are glad.

In twos you march in the central aisle to be gawked at by the