

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

Franklin. A big black cat, with immense power hidden within. Soemething in the ownership of such a thing! He reads pride in his friend's face.

This is another world; a purple world, and the sun hanging like a moon at the ridge of a globe which is the earth; the air soft, with the smell and crispness of young spring. And his first ride in this thing, which is swift as wings and more glorious than a magic carpet.

He gets a glimpse at his mother's face ^{framed} in the window. All smiles and confidence.

Dr. Capen slides in behind the wheel. He guns the throttle and the motor is flooded with multitudinous minute explosions, a shower of impulses that give rise to gentle rocking movements of the Franklin.

George closed his eyes to feel with greater keenness the sensation of smooth gliding motion. For a brief moment he imagined the swing and sway of the smooth brown rump of a mare, the flash and shine of her well-curried flanks, the clip-clop of the piston-like strokes of her hooves. Suddenly he was aroused to a jolting ^{halt} stop, Dr. Capen swearing mildly at the snail's pace of a horse-drawn vehicle in front of them. George stared hard at the black hood of the Franklin, and wondered at the thing under it that was full of shuddering eagerness to go.

Out in the country, where the meadows are wide and freshly green, the breezes scented and the air light and soft and the flowers nodding! Like sitting on a swift moving throne, with the limitless power of the hauling stars. Yet it is docile as a kitten, just purring along. Floating on swift wings. Swifter than the wind, and more violent than the storm, The stars and the moon roll over your head, and the lights ^{in the valley} wink at you in their own motion.

Dr. Capen hunched over the wheel as he pushed the throttle to the limit. They were on the open highway, and he wanted to see how much she'd take. She was taking her full measure of gas all right, and she was leaping forward on wheels of flame.

Elijah's Chariot!

The blue of twilight was as yet waiting out the creeping darkness in the east. There was yet a purple phosphorescence with deep orange in the inside edge of a fading corona of light in the west, that said that night had not yet descended on that part of the world. The approaching golden dusk threw a blanket of silence over all. The purr of the motor and the bending and swishing of the young twigs before the onrushing violence of the car deepened the hush. Lights popping from hidden places deepened the mystery of the lambent night. The impassioned power and might of creativeness in the solemn usurrant silence, the giving out of scents in the woods; the orchards pouring out the essence of their full and ripened blooms, fecund and burgeoning with new life - were a heady wine that made one dizzy.

The headlights cut a swath of white far ahead in the dark road. A moth, attracted by the lights, swooped across and splattered its guts flush on the windshield.

"The war of the moths against the threat of the mechanical brutes," laconically observed Dr. Capen, gripping the wheel tightly not to lose control. "Fortunately their numbers are small."

"Nothing like a nice cloud of locusts of the good old Egypt brand to stop us quick," quipped George.

The moon crept out from under a white cloud and the sky was a fulminating yellow, reflecting greenish-yellow streaks in short luminescent wavelets. The road was long and clear ahead, clusters of trees and bushes hedging the sides.

"The road to paradise," George murmured ensconced cosily in the dream of night.

"Or the road to hell if you make the wrong turn at this speed," Dr. Capen whispered from the right side of the mouth, his eyes straining on the road. Automatically he let up on the throttle, reining

in the Franklin into an easy roll. "They are building new roads to accomodate the new vehicle," he said with his ^{head} now turned slightly toward George. "Macadamized, smooth and broad. This one was but recently finished. Building a new one to Old Orchard, and we are taking part in a new highway to Boston. A new world, new frontiers to conquer. We are smoothing out the rough corners, and leveling the hills."

"The automobile age, peeking out from under ground like a tender shoot. But coming up fast." Then George clammed up in silence again.

"I stop here for a moment," Dr. Capen said, as he pulled up before a lonely house on the road, "a child with scarlet. I aim to be a surgeon only, but they call and I come. Old faithfuls."

"What's so great about being a surgeon?" George demanded. "Seems to prepare for your butchery you still come to the medical man."

"Not for long. More and more the surgeon is becoming a medicine man, making his own decisions. Still, consultation between Sugeon and Physician will always be good practice."

"I like the drama and poetry of the medical man alone in the wee hours of the morning, in a lonely cabin out of reach of laboratory and hospital, trying to make up his mind in a serious case."

"No poetry, I must say," Dr. Capen retorted, "in a surgeon sweating his brains out to save a pustulous appendix from going wild with peritonitis; or an old bag of a woman, fat belly, short neck, foul heart and kidneys, with a question of acute obstruction. No poetry, but plenty of drama. In the case of the old woman, the medics threw her into our lap. They were so plump sure that it was an acute obstruction. Maybe they chortled at our dilemma: Operate and you kill her for sure, don't operate and she'll die, maybe, anyway--- if it's an obstruction. Well, we told the medicos to keep her to themselves. Just an old fart, who hadn't farted - excuse the expression - for maybe a week, and had forgotten to take care of her bowels in her indolence..."

"What happened?"

"The pompous fools were stubborn. So we gave her the enema and invited them to whiff to their heart's content the good old smell of old feces."

"They take her?"

"We literally threw her at them. She had vomited before, now she was going both ways. No poetry here, unless it was stinking poetry."

"You don't have to be so nasty about it. As if it were the poor woman's fault?"

"Sorry to assault your sensibilities. Complain to the medics."

"Aw, shucks."

The moon was high now, and was playing tricks with them, now following behind and now looking in on them from the side. Smiling its pale smile on them. George would turn his head now and then, sideways or backwards, to look upon the pale landscape under the moon. He listened to the stillness that deepened with the night. Not a new born leaf or petal daring move - in the holy hour.

They were leaving South Portgrave and nearing the bridge that led to promontory of Western Heights.

They were climbing now the incline of the promontory, and the doctor was listening intently to the laboring engine as if it were a patient's heart.

"Dr. Capen, who was the girl in the office next to the last patient?" The question came suddenly, as if the proximity of home brought to the surface something he had on his mind a long time.

"What?" Dr. Capen turned on him a questioning eye. "Yes, the girl. What makes you ask?"

"She looks, she looks..."

"Bothering you," he smiled mischievously. "Well, she wasn't Cynthia."

"I could have sworn..." He gave the doctor a quizzical look.

"Well, she wouldn't know me anyway, if it were Cynthia. My face was hidden."

"Why?"

"Not to embarrass her, of course."

"Or yourself maybe. You being in the same 'situation' - that is your presence in my office at that particular hour."

"Never thought of that angle."

"Oh, no, not for you! But you thought of her 'angle'. But why should there be an angle for one coming for treatment of the genital parts, any more than for any other part of the body?"

"But..."

"I know, I know. Just coming to my office - and at that particular hour - makes a 'situation'. The old monicker 'the-clap-doctor' still sticks to me. And so my office serves only the phallic god of the fallible penis. The general belief. Even so, I was, and still am, one of the best and honest in the business. I pride myself on the complete cures I have effected in the shortest possible time, and at the smallest outlay to the patient."

"But!" George tried to interject, wondering why the eminent doctor was trying to justify himself to him.

But the doctor went on: "I could have them in droves if I kept the doors open longer. Frankly, qualms of regret assail me at calmer moments: Why don't I keep longer office hours for those poor afflicted! It's the ambition bug, 'Be a surgeon, be a surgeon!!' Doubts besiege me. Going in circles. When I operate I think of the unfortunates I could have habilitated. Well, don't look so mortified. I did mean 'habilitated'. You'll never know how a neglected case of gonorrhoea can stink up areas around it, discounting the demoralizing effect it has on the victim. Like the plague. A chain reaction, the spread of the infection going the rounds by leaps and bounds. Even more deadly is the syphilitic. If you save one you save hundreds of others. On the other hand when I am doing the latter, it's surgery that pulls me and eggs

me on. The roar of platitudes that's in the hush of the operating room. The give and take, the team in white which is yours. You play with your finger tips, and speak with your eyes. You just look and they anticipate your command. How they know? They just know. Training and the acute tension of the moment, sharpening the line of communication between mind and mind. A hero? I don't know. But the moment is all yours. The significant moment! The tension mounts with the seconds. You pause for a last survey to see if everything and everybody is ready. A moment of trance and suspension. Your eyes glint from above the mask, you slant them down and at the same time you plunge the scalpel into the narrow quadrangle of the bared skin. You quickly stanch the little spurts of blood with the snaps thrust into your hand. You are fast and you smile inwardly with satisfaction. A game, and you play it well. A game for a man 's life! And you know all the ins and outs. You know exactly where you come ⁱⁿ and where you'll come out. But you are not looking around for admiring eyes, for the case before you is serious. An old man. Still debating, perhaps, the method to follow. Maybe do a bit of pioneering in surgical technique. All the methods were pioneered. You play a game. And you are clever, you know it all. Old man anyway. Sacrifice to..... No! Age has nothing to do with it. The old have as much right to live as the young. And maybe more useful. Who is the arbiter? A ward case is as important as a private one. But how are you going to improve on procedure if you don't try? Not this case. You are a coward. Better be a coward than.... Better clear up a few more steps of that new method, and proceed with the old proven one. Poor devil! In the doldrums of ether. He put himself in your hands, and you are the master of his body. The old method it is. You invade the steaming privacy of his insides through the gaping hole in his belly. First time the glistening gray of his intestines saw the light. You slip your gloved hand in and feel and scrutinize every part and organ, to the very core of his inner life, sacred and inviolate, known only to the eyes and hand of his

Maker. OK! Just like that. No infallibility in the human flesh any more than the ox's before the butcher's axe. The inner core of life - the very soul - and you touched it with a vulgar hand! It's at such moments I want to go back to the office, and treat the visible and exposed parts, and leave the sanctity of the hidden and secret alone."

"They were now in front of Lena's former residence. Dr. Capen let the motor idle for a while, not sure whether to stop here or not. Then he shut off the motor. "Well," he went on, "here we are. Back to the old place I started from. Or one of the first. The house Lena lived in. Pacific street, if you don't know."

"You wouldn't possibly be indulging in a bit of cynicism?" George said not without evidence of sarcasm in his voice.

"Why do you say that?"

"It's that holier-than-thou attitude. Hush, hush, and don't even whisper the name in my ears. My pure innocent ears! Wrap it in a shroud. But white and clean. Let me tell you, I know this street as well as you do. And let me tell you some more. This street - like the waterfront muck and slime - covers a lot of good and healthy life underneath."

"Nevertheless you think yourself a paragon of virtue, since you probably are still virgin."

"I am not a lout, but the fact that I am what you call a virgin doesn't mean I am virtuous. It's just that..."

"You are a coward."

"Maybe so. I couldn't tell. I never ask myself, Why? Perhaps it's a bit of several things. A bit of cowardice, a bit of aversion to a running sore and the attending filth, the attendance on a cure, the waste of time. And the indulgence, and the plunging into something unknown. Like wanderin^g in darkest^{Africa}, and being bitten by a tse-tse fly, or stung by a cobra. For a minute's pleasure throwing yourself into a black pit."

"But a lot has been accomplished by those one minute impulses, my

boy. A world left with you would be a calculated world, a sterile world."

"Neither. But a cleaner world. Believe it or not I am not suffering because I don't indulge. I play around, but in a sort of easy harmless way. I force my mind into other channels than the flood of adolescent urge. I am no pedant either. But what brought this on?"

"Just this: The girl you saw in the office looks like Cynthia because she is her cousin. She has a dose and she got it from Foster. He met her through Cynthia."

"So, while courting Cynthia he sleeps with her cousin and gives her a dose in the bargain! But why tell me?"

"I felt I should."

"So you go about it by knocking me around a bit."

"So you wouldn't get on a white horse and proclaim yourself a paragon of virtue. You are older brother and friend to him. It's good for Foster that relationship. He is a very fine boy. The base and moral fibre sound. But the background. From Pacific Street into the stern and forbidding atmosphere of his grandfather. Torn from his mother. We don't and can't know the suffering the boy has gone through. He found an outlet. Let's say it's a foul one. Let's say he visited the old haunts of his childhood. Shall he be condemned? I for one don't think so. We are all in it more or less. And those that are less are not so out of vituosity, or because of virtue. Just happened that way. The base and core of him as sound as ever. Incidentally -- they are both quite all right now."

"Cured!" George grimaced. There was mockery and a hint of contempt in his voice.

"I see I haven't succeeded in bringing you down from your white horse."

"I have never been on one," George retorted, "you have wasted a lot of rhetoric. I knew about Foster, but not about her..."

"And all the time I, I..."

"Best preaching since Father," George grinned.

"You go to h-l---

"If I oblige, I shan't come to tell you of my experiences."

Dr. Capen scowled: "You can be irritatingly complacent. Like one on the John — after..." He smiled, "And all the time making a fool of me. All right, I may be delayed here half an hour or so. Do as you damn please with your time, since you seem to know the Street so well."

"I'll saunter a bit," George said with good-natured irony, "or watch the stars. Toot the horn if I am not around. I shall appear..... cavorting with the stars."

"Better be pronto, Gigolo of the stars, or I shall blast the neighborhood awake," Dr. Capen mocked a warning as he disappeared in a dark alley.

CHAPTER VIII

Shadow and Substance of Sex Act

I'll bet he grabs himself a piece everytime he gets here, George thought. Why not, he knows what's clean and what isn't. Can't blame the guy too much, Old Bache and all.

If Doc had invited him in... the old connoisseur! Leading a blind horse to the trough.... He felt his heart race up a bit. Na, he probably wouldn't go anyway. Not prudishness, but- but --- What the h- did he take me here for! Could have taken me home first. Could walk home! He'd be looking for me. Let him look. Leave a note? Probably wouldn't notice it in the dark. Sit. Sit where you are. Vicarious pleasure sitting in front of the "House". He thinks of the tenderness and sweet agony of the nuptial night. The pure whiteness and dewy freshness of young clear innocent womanhood. It's an act of blessed holiness. Nat-