

PART THREE

Emotional Glow and Darkness of Adolescence

Chapter I

The year 1911

"In the year of destiny, of 1911, forces were already at work - and new omens were being forged - that were to wrench the old world from its moorings and throw it upon the uncharted course in stormy seas.

"It was a time when the old was bowing out to the new, a time of endings and beginnings... 1911 was the treshold of change. What took place before and after. The change that took place within a single lifetime (during the epoch) spanned centuries in terms of culture; the number and importance of changes in the material world that took place during the life of Theodore Roosevelt were greater than the sum of those that had taken place during two thousand years preceding.

"When in 1909, at the end of Roosevelt's administration, his successor William H. Taft, went to the Capitol to be inaugurated, the horse-drawn vehicle did not differ essentially, except that it had four wheels instead of two, from the carriage (carruca) in which the Caesars rode out to the Roman baths during the first century of the Christian era. In principle the American Presidential victoria of 1909 and the Roman chariot of the year I were identical. Both depended on motion on horses, on horsepower in the ancient and literal sense; both were creations largely of wood and leather and a few pounds of metal..... Four years after Taft's inauguration, his successor in the Presidency, Woodrow Wilson, rode to the Capitol in a complicated product of physics and chemistry, compounded of gears, levers, pedals, rubber, cloth, wire,

glass; and powered by an engine which generated motion as a result of electrically induced explosions of gasoline in expansion cylinders....

"The distance between the Wilson automobile and the Taft carriage was, in time, four years; in material change, it was fully twenty centuries. The distance between the Taft carriage and the Roman chariot had been, in time, twenty centuries; in material change practically nothing.

".... A world in which the officially sanctified virtue of contentment with lowly station had not become a virtue at all but, especially in America, almost a sin." \* Our Times — Mark Sullivan.

A time when the waltz and the two-step gave way to ragtime music, the birth of Alexander's Rag Time Band, and Everybody's "Doin' It Now:

Honey, honey, can't you hear, funny, funny, music, dear?...  
Can't you see them all, swinging up the hall?  
Ev'rybody is doin' it, doin' it, doin' it.....

And in 1911, about the time he retired from the presidency of Harvard University, Dr. Charles Eliot said that the public schools ought to teach physiology frankly: "We have got rid of the idea which has been taught for thousands of years, that man is born in sin. The transmission of life is the sacrest and holiest thing in life. We must get rid of those monstrous things brought down to us from Leviticus."

The influence in art, mode of thinking, and human behaviour on the rest of the country of its polyglot and greatest city, New York!

The life and tranquility of peace, when man clung with happiness to the constitutional tradition of liberty, equality, etc..., with sincerity and goodwill. When the immigrant was incorporated in the body-politic as an important and integral part of the sinews that contributed so mightily to the growth and ever increasing power of the young Giant, America. When he was not looked upon with suspicion, and even hatred.

When the forces which <sup>would</sup> disturb the world in ever widening whirlpools

were being forged: The growing rift between Roosevelt and him, whom he made President, Taft, which gave birth to the Bull-Moose Progressive Party, which split the Republican Party, which in turn made possible the election of Woodrow Wilson to the Presidency. Which in turn might have set up the cycle of events, such as World War One, with its consequences. When the furies were released.

In the meanwhile life was easy and pleasant.

The state of the world, national and local ~~affairs~~ " were running with the cheerful burble of a babbling brook, unturbulent and unperturbed"\* People still basked in the spring and fall sunlight with the greatest of pleasure, and derived great benefit from it. And in the heat of the summer they plunged whole heartedly in the cooling surf without thought of a cloud on the horizon. Always the skies were blue and brilliant. As if nature in all its glory of rainment had nothing on its mind except the glorification and pampering of its most precious offspring, man.

The Nickelodeon of the near horizon was still of the immediate present and more than just a blessed memory. What could be more conducive to pleasant day dreaming of the semi-somnolent type than the translucent gaze at the world through the celluloid in the half-darkened, cozy, small movie house, where you could get your fill of entertainment for a lone nickel?

Cigarette smoking was beginning to make its appearance among the fair sex, and the hems were receding higher and higher from their virgin soil; yet there was still a great premium on traditional virtue and morality. In that regard the world was still coy, young and innocent. And docile. With less hatred and venom.

In 1911 the refurbishing of Portgrave was complete, with its new million dollar <sup>marble</sup> Hall of Justice, and the <sup>cur</sup>adrangular, two-winged glory of City Hall squatting in the heart of the town. The premium set upon the

\* (Our Times - Mark Sullivan)

new face was the three-hundred thousand dollar (or so it was reputed) organ, set in the mahogany auditorium of the new city hall. It boomed forth in thunderous yet mellow tones the great compositions of the old masters for the edification and pleasure of the music loving citizenry; and in the special summer concerts for the benefit of the visitors who had come from all parts of the land to admire the new marvel.

The furrows were painfully and visibly deepening on the ample brow of the Eventide's Editor-in-Chief. His stony face became stonier and darker. Mr. Barton was a worried man. He was a loyal republican, and a "faithful", and the previous fall's calamity, in which the Republican Party lost the House to the Democrats, was weighing heavily on him. The obvious "Damon and Pythias shambles of a once holy and sanctimonious affection between the two party leaders, the past and the present Presidents,"\* further added to his gloom. He feared and rightly prognosticated the ~~part~~ calamity that would befall his party. Of course, he couldn't <sup>fore</sup> see all the dire consequences in its wake, but what he could see was bitter and dark enough. There wouldn't be the sweetness of having proved right, only the bitterness of defeat.

But most of the Citizenry of Portgrave, confined within the confines of their own confidence, could see nothing beyond their ramparts.

For them it was business as usual.

On the trolley line that ran through the heart of the town, they introduced a new brand of cars; longer, more substantial, and of a newer and handsomer design. They ran more smoothly, both because of their heavier construction, and the new type of silencers on the trucks of the wheels. But on the spur-line that ran from Congress through Middle and India Streets to the Grand Trunk station, the same old dinky cars rattled on, as a reminder to the people of the Company's graciousness in granting them <sup>e</sup> these new comfortable cars on the main line.

\* Mark Sullivan

The neglected spur-line, with its declivities of unevenly jutting cobblestones - like snags of old decaying protruding teeth - took the lightweight bodies of the old dilapidated cars to its very bosom, rumbling and tumbling ~~and tumbling~~ them, so that the rider experienced the same sinking feeling as a ride on the Thunderbolt Roller Coaster at Old Orchard, on which only the sound of heart and limb would dare go.

Upper Congress Street was brilliant by day with its glitter of new shops, and glimmered by night with its facade of massive white light.

A white Broadway in miniature;

They primped and smirked in the White Way,  
To them it was the great midnight Broadway.  
Why not, why not, and again why not?  
For never, never again should it be forgot,  
That big or mighty, puny, as well as small,  
The same desire and urge are in us ~~is us~~ all!

Stoukas was a bright jewel in the scintillating crown that was upper Congress. It was a new ice-cream "parlor" of many splendors: with <sup>ra</sup> carra, tables, private booths, and a subdued system of fans that made the hottest summer evening seem cool, yet without feeling a chilling breeze on one's perspiring neck. A Mecca that drew everybody to that point in town. One of its greatest boons was the pewter pitcher of ice-water provided with every "College" ice ordered.

Stoukas was very popular with the young people that warm spring evening.

George who had taken his first ride on his new bicycle (that evening) accompanied by Harold, made the first stop on the return trip at Stoukas.

Impulsively he and Harold halted at the entrance, taken by surprise at the large gathering of their classmates at the place. Sitting in one group at a long arrangement of small tables, with ices and pitchers of water - the droplets of frosty dew on their rounded bellies

glistening in the light - before them, they<sup>were</sup> earnestly engaged in important discussion.

Harold's eyes narrowed as they roved about the place.

"Looking for someone?" George teased.

Harold made believe he didn't hear. He said, "Look at the array of pitchers. like soldiers at muster."

"At least they<sup>s</sup>erve a good purpose - yielding a palatable cool drink."

"And a bellyache."

"If you take too much." As Harold's gaze was wandering again, "There she sits almost in the exact center, on the right, ponderous as a queen."

"Who?"

"The one you are looking for, Blanca."

"Oh!" And inspite of himself his little pig-eyes crinkled into a happy smile.

Someone yelled: "There's Sir Walter Raleigh!" pointing in the direction of George.

"And there is pompous Nero, the fool," from another.

There was a snickering all around.

"Now you know what it is like to come upon your classmates smirking and ogling at you," George said. "Remember the morning of the fire?"

"Well, at least I have company."

"Not quite, for you are Nero the fool."

"Come on, sit down you two. Don't stand there like dummies."

"That's what they are, aren't they? Stand-ins for worthy personages of the long past!"

"Quite the humorist, aren't you?" was George's retort, as he recognized one unfriendly spirit among his classmates. Then as he moved towards where Cynthia and Foster were sitting, "What's all about - all this hilarity on a hot night?"

"It just happened," Cynthia told him.

"You mean I just happen to be Sir Walter Raleigh?" George quipped.

"The gathering just happened," Foster explained. "The same as you and Harold happened in."

"Must be the warm night," Cynthia hazarded a guess.

"Still doesn't tell me how I happen to be a Raleigh, and Harold a Nero."

"Well, it's simply that we found ourselves quite a gathering, and decided to act on the entertainment..."

"That was supposed to be all over with since the school burned."

"Not quite, George. Not the regular play we had planned..." Foster tried to be helpful, but stopped <sup>short</sup> when he saw Blanca approaching from the right.

Cynthia: "Sort of episodic affair." She looked up to Foster wondering, "That's how you happen to be Raleigh and I your lady."

"Wasn't it prime to pair Blanca and Harold!" Foster tittered. "You are not jealous, are you?"

"And you Foster?" Then George was looking straight into Blanca's eyes. And what he saw he didn't like.

"And how is Raleigh and his lady?" she mocked, as she dug a sharp finger in his ribs. "My dear cousin..."

The witch, George thought. Her eyes glaring and glossed over, nostrils quivering. A Blanca he had hitherto not seen. The witch! Prim, prim, poomba! Her nose, blanched at the tip, assumed almost the color and shape of a goose's beak. Her face was strained and elongated and not very pretty at the moment. But the eyes, the same snapping black eyes.

Then the future Nero tumbled along and hove into sight, sounding a warning blast through his trumpeting nose.

"Your hero at hand, Blanca," George heard himself say. Trifling with his own emotions he added, "Thy noble Nero come to fetch thee."

"Noble of you to say 'noble' instead of 'fool'! 'Nero the Fool'! Isn't it what they called him? But sarcasm hardly becomes you." Her

nostrils flaring she took Harold's arm and marched off.

It must not be assumed that the fractured relations between Blanca and George (if fractured they were) would be long in healing, for time is the very essence in the rising force of spring when in the heart of maiden and youth the glorious mystery that is their body rises to floodtide in the agony of yearning; when the horizon is open to them, and peopled with magical creatures of their own making; when the sun and the moon and the stars smile over them, and lull them into the sweet dreams of youth.

At times the journey through Life's Highway, to George, seems a dubious one. To him the spectre of time perches in all its ugly shapes and forms, and he sees nothing but their tenuous shadows. Ghosts of time that are neither of the past nor the future - and of a doubtful present. Because even though in the superficial physical aspect of your self you seem completely recovered, that malady of the past had made you more sensitive, even clairvoyant, and your inner self demure and shadowy-like. Yet, because you have become also one of those of full blood and strong sinew, you cannot deny that Life's Highway is broad and clear to you; even radiant with the accumulated light of the centuries; that it runs endless in time and space, beyond man's encompassing vision - that you were born a part of time and space, a minute one though it be. And so you see yourself as a whole, as an entity, at times; while at others your <sup>own</sup> identity is wiped out, becomes shadowy and hazy, before the Whole of which you are a small insignificant part. And so those Protean moods of yours are hard to live with, and they startle Blanca. And she cannot reach you. She desperately wants to love you and hold on to you, but she loses you in the maze of your "ins" and "outs", the pathways, the dark alleys of Life's Highway. In the



inlets, the streamlets, the pools, the whirlpools, she finds you cannot be separated from the main stream - that by love you are unpossessed. At such times you are a mystery to her. Untouchable.

You, George, however, are the epitome, the root, the fuzz of the root - the ultimate - in the soil; more so the tender filament, the bud and the bloom, the branch on the trunk looking upward into the sky; the last quintessence of your predecessors, the end of the line, the fruit of culmination, the last, the finite, the infinite; the distillate of man's thinking mind. Is it inbred in you that aversion and inversion of the common and accepted? In 1911 are you older than your generation? Older than Mthuselah! Was it in the shadow of one of your moods that you had tried to foist upon your unsuspecting and suspicious classmates the idea of your untenable and contrary syllogism that Something and Nothing are both on equal terms to you? They were suspicious because suddenly you became a stranger to them. You tried to make logic where there was none - that either can be the other, or both. And who knows maybe you are the fool, the puffed-up idiot! No, no, you say: Maybe an idiot, but not a puffed-up idiot. For your generations never belonged to the Joshuans - the practical ones - the glib of tongue, the soldier-heroes, the "goodboys", the mixers, the politicians, the suave diplomats, the slave-leaders, the landowners, the earth-owners, the adored-ones, the worshipful-ones, the worshipped-ones! To your generations belonged the humble, the meek - but the mighty in spirit. Who climbed the mountain-tops and heard the voice of the heavens!