

CHAPTER III

The Day After Tomorrow

The young, the old, and those between - of middle age; and those who are old when they are young, and those who are young when they are old! How much difference are years? The spirit can be juvenile at eighty, and hoary with age at eighteen.

Bob, the hobo, remains the same exuberant sparkling youth as when he entered on his third year at Bocly College. Add ~~more~~ years, take off years, and he'll be the same - ageless. The contrast between two brothers: One massive with years and possessions, the other light in both attributes. One in the grasp of the world, in the midst of its vortex, swimming and swarming with the current; the other, the ageless one, holding the world by its tail, twitting it to his own whim and pleasure. He is not an actor in ^a play, but the playwright and the master. His will is his decree. He may let go the tail and let it go to hell, or he may embrace it to his bosom with abandon - all depending on time and mood.

In his late thirties, he had lost much of the sense of sensual pleasure with woman. It had been an affliction to him! His mortified flesh had cleared his mind, and gave new vision to his eyes, and marched him into another world. He could see the trader in the oldest profession and not condemn her. Much more he blamed the mood of an outmoded and false chivalry which saw nothing in the connivings of the young minx behind the screen of matrimony, offering her body to the cadaverous old codger for the privilege of suing him later for all his worth, or for the privilege of his name and fame. He couldn't forgive a condoning society which takes to its bosom the scheming female, flaunting her abject state of habitual indigence as her prime right to the life of a parasite on body-opulence.

He thought of his brother's young bride, whom the people stigmatized as the typical gold-digger. On the wrong side again. Where there is real merit, people are often blind or too stupid to see. She came from a poor environment, true, but has a heart of gold. She has true admiration for his brother. Jerome's gentlemanly behavior, his commanding manner, his fabulous name, were legend to her - the hero of her young dreams, and the longing for the dramatic. There was loyalty, undeniable, in her heart as she lifted her eyes to Jerome.

It was not entirely cynicism that made him think of the powerful instinct of the adhesion and cohesion of the sexes as Nature's tricky formula for the preservation of the species. Sure, the sexes are ^{how} to fulfill their biological destiny, for how else could life continue on its vagrant course? But his gambit in the game, the game of survival, was the play of the free-man, the spectator, who stood-by and scoffed. ~~But~~ forgetting for the moment the sneaky play of "life-creating" he could play with aforethought and serenity the game "of-nuggets-of-memory" - to play the game of likes and dislikes on the long road of memory of the past. Those who had gone, but worth remembering, and those who are still with him - in presence as well as in memory, important and not so important. A game worth while playing.

Dr. Elias Capen came up from the mysterious recesses of recent memory. A pleasant memory and a timely one, and right behind him was the image of Clara, now Mrs. Foster Forrest Sr. He'd rather remember her from the golden days when she was sweet and fragrant, with the ^{glint of} love of youth for him ^{in her eyes.} He'd remember her for her own sake rather than the exigency of time and circumstance, because she had justified a special niche in his memory. Had he loved her? What is that fine distinction between the emotion of passion and that of love? Is it the delicate sensitiveness of constancy, and a welling of the feeling of warmth in one's heart at the mere closeness of the opposite partner? He was sure she had responded to his love-making in a way that had they been given the chance of time he would have irrevocably fallen in love with her. It was, his own diffidence, perhaps indif-

ference, that estranged her from him, and later drove her into the arms of old Forrest. Had she sought the filth and squalor of the sailor's bed as a form of penance? One of nature's piques, to find the balance! She had a dream and it lay shattered at her feet!

Compensation and urgency; compensation and its complement - the sailor's bed. What the hell!

His nasty little self embroiled in the after-thought of a period long forgotten, or should have been forgotten. He ^{do}condemned his conniving self now that he had made up his mind to meet Clara, now that he had need of her for other reasons than love.

Dr. Capen's office was dim and restful with the oncoming dusk of a warm summer's day. Dr. Capen rose from the obscurity of the room to grasp the hand of an old and dear friend. A mute expression, a statement of friendship that needed no statement. A friendship that had begun long ago. Yet as he looked at the smiling friendly face, a face more round, yet more lined with the tracks of time, but still with the same twinkle in the understanding eye - he felt that the half generation and more since their first meeting was but an instant. Or that time stood still, or had never been. The same hand as ^{when} he was standing by the examining table in the treatment room that had offered, then, friendship and help to a lost soul, a soul lost in the vicissitudes and sins of living. Time didn't matter as far as the two of them were concerned.

The receptionist had long gone, for on Saturday the hour devoted to the healing of the waterfront-brotherhood had been upped a few hours earlier. On Saturdays the patrons of that hour had been far less numerous than on ordinary weekdays; as if, in conforming to a pattern, they had run out of their particular ailments during the long week and had gone out with passion and a new zest to accumulate ^{new ones} during the weekend.

Though the last patient had left sometime before, the doctor had lingered behind to taste a delectable hour of rest and quiet after the week's

weariness; to feel the lassitude of exhaustion pass from brain and bone in the luxury of forgetfulness. He would resent intrusion from any other source but that from his friend the hobo. Just to look upon him ~~friend~~ brings into focus the inexhaustible capacity of the human to live and enjoy life - life under any circumstances.

But after a moment it came to him as a shock that this was not the old hobo he knew and loved, who denied any sense of urgency and specificity of purpose, but a different individual. One like many another he knew, who brings the daily problems of living with him. There was a seriousness of purpose and ^{li}so_fitude underlying his apparent heartiness and jollity, which now seemed only an imitation of his old self. There still was that old arrogance of manner, but that also seemed to have specific meaning. And he didn't like anything meaningful and significant - things in the balance. Not now.

"Sorry," Bob said, "I shoudn't have come at this hour, and in this outfit. You are vexed with me." The doctor waved a denial with his hand. "No, you are quite right, my coming here has a definite pupose, and not for the general good of existence."

"My hobo gone practical," Dr. Capen smiled, "now I wish I had that coin you offered me in payment for your first visit."

"I well remember," Bob said, "I still keep the coin as a reminder of that ostentatious occasion." Fumbling in his trouser pocket he produced a shining silver coin. He held it up, as if to get a better look at it. "Like newly minted. The symbol and covenant of our mutual friendship. Like the bow in the sky - the covenant between heaven and earth. It's yours."

"A precious gift," Dr. Capen said, clasping Bob's hand, "the memory of years written in it. The memory of a hobo who showed me that simple goodness and honesty are still with us. A grateful memory." The doctor's eyes were brilliant with emotion.

"Gratefulness is an embarrassment," Bob said . "to the one grateful,

but more so for whom it was intended. Mostly it's an unworthy emotion, a selfish feeling, a feeling of self-pity. The one who supposedly performs the benevolent act is the one who benefits the most. I should be grateful. You gave me the break, the boon, the legerdemain, the motive force that opened new direction and purpose to a squandered life. You have cured me of a curse that was eating away and invalidating the vitality of one who once had had determined ambitions. So that in the swarm of the mud-puddle, submerged and hidden from the world's eye, I had caused the light to shine, and the cool refreshing water from the pure well to enter into the murky stream. I prospered. Like a spasm of convulsion that brought me up standing and independent! I soon became the important fish in the stream. I sent them trooping to your office, and the waters were not stagnant anymore. They came, they were healed, they were happy; and they paid. The greatest show on earth, watching nature play her tricks on them to perpetuate the species, and they in turn befouling her by begetting a dose of the putrid bugs instead of their own kind. Man shall not live by instinct alone! Wouldn't ^{it} be natural then for man to revolt against nature's compelling edit^c to propogate^{and promote} an unworthy and useless race? But that instinc^t-gag still rules us, and is millions of years older than man's conscious will; and it'll take more millions of years before man wills his will to control that absurd urge of flesh to flesh, skin to skin etc... It'll be then that another formula will have to be engendered for the continuation of conscious life."

Dr. Capen was sprawled out in his chair. "Why continue life at all?" he asked lazily.

"Life as preconceived by the Greater must go on to the very end."

"To what end?"

"The end which is change; or eventually nothingness to our present understanding."

"A very optimistic view of creativeness," Dr. Capen was ironical.

as we know it

"It's not exactly pessimistic to think to think that Creation will eventually create itself out of existence, to make room for a different creativeness.

"By what process?" Dr. Capen pursued.

"Erosion of Time," came Bob's quick reply. "Time is pregnant with creativeness, and eats its own progeny. It seems to enjoy nothing more than to deflate the great by pricking the balloon of their greatness. It's true, that the bigger they are the harder they fall. The Little to the Big, and the Big back to the Little. Then to nothingness. Time's eternal game, on Time's chess-board. Nothing stands still on Time's Time-Table. Only change never changes. In my own little way I have contributed to the general change. Only a drop in the ocean of of General Change, but thus are oceans made and General Change. Solomon was much older when he said these painful words: Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity. You see in our modern world we live faster and quicker, and before forty I came to mimick Solomon. I have long been in the ^{shadow of the} sough and sump of sex - the mainstay and enthusiasm of ebullient youth (and of the stagnant old) - that I can take it or leave it. And as Solomon, who was tiring of the mockery of a thousand wives, I say, all is vanity. In the Day After Tomorrow, in the far reaches of the universe where constant change is going on, lies the permanence which is Change, and Time which never changes plays a dominant and permanent role. Time indestructible destroys everything else, and then creates anew. We are born from something which was before, and go to nothing of the same Before. Change to Death begins after birth. (Before) middle life I have reached the bar, where the tide turns and flows anew."

"Life and Death, interchangeable! Are you echoing George's words?" the doctor said laconically.

"George may well have had the same thoughts. And so may have you. In George it couldn't have been more than an anticipation, in one so young, without the actual knowledge that comes with experience. An example of the

astuteness of the modern mind in some of us. Rare, but by no means the exception. George's part in the battle or feud between Forrest and Dreen is a good example, and the reason of my being here at this odd time."

"Your skill in the blending of the metaphysical with the physical!"

"Nature's brat that I am I try to mock nature in its own game. Often I wonder who is the more confused between the two of us."

"The answer should be obvious."

"Not quite when happenings are precipitous."

"Mostly things are round about with you."

"However, this was sudden. I heard about it only this afternoon, and took myself to the Eventide to warn George. And that's quite sudden."

"Yes? And what was it that you warned George about?"

"About danger threatening his second installment..."

"I am sure it changed nothing."

"He said, 'it alters nothing', but I could see where it knocked the wind out of the sail of his enthusiasm."

"Perhaps it would have been better if George were left in ignorance."

"Not if I know George. And especially if I have the remedy. The reason I am here."

"I think I can guess the trouble, but damn if I can guess the remedy."

"So you know?"

"Well, give me some credit to know what's going on in this burg, especially when it concerns George."

"You kept mum while I was sounding off. Effusive oratory, diffusive prattle."

"Very amusing, coming from you."

"I am old stuff, and anything old is threadbarish."

As Dr. Capen surveyed him, "Maybe an old friend, but hardly threadbare."

Bob looked down at the length of his body and grinned, as he caught the jibe. "Oh where," he chuckled, "oh, where are the baggy knees, the shiny seat and the threadbare elbows. But my dear doctor," he went on,

"even at the risk of being out of character, I had ^{to} dress my best for I am to meet Clara, the new Mrs. Forrest, here." As Dr. Capen looked at him in surprise, "It's all in good order. I am not just jabbering."

"Your remedy, Bob!"

"You got it right."

"How do you know she'll come here - or see you?"

"Use your good offices and the charm of your persuasion."

"Blackmail that is," Dr. Capen shrugged his shoulders with annoyance.

"A little blackmail never hurt anybody, if it's for a good cause."

"Saturday night, in my office," Dr. Capen muttered in disbelief.

"Why not?" With mock seriousness: "I wouldn't attempt to seduce here even on Saturday night, even in your office alone."

"I wouldn't give a damn if you did. But in my office Saturday night!"

"A doctor's office is always open, even on Saturday night: An Emergency, you know. And this is an emergency. This thing must be settled tonight."

"How do you propose making her come, by holding my professional whip over her? No matter how important the cause, it's still a hold up."

"Don't show your maidenly virginity," Bob was in his most ingratiating manner. "It's impractical and precocious. Rather I'd call it the art of insinuation through persuasion. You know how, and how to use your influence. She dare not refuse you. I'll see to it that she changes the old man's mind."