

37. *Little Chapter*

DR. HORACE DORMODY hated night calls, like everybody else, but Doc was his friend and he responded to the frenzied voice on the telephone. In the lab he looked at Doc's white face and then at his right arm.

"It's broken all right. I don't know how badly. Think you could get to my car? I want to X-ray."

And later he said, "Well, that's that. It's clean and it will take time. Now, tell me your cock-and-bull story again."

"I was asleep," said Doc. "Only thing I can think is that I must have turned over and it was caught between the cot and the wall."

"You mean you weren't in a fight?"

"I tell you I was asleep. What are you grinning about? What's so funny?"

Dr. Horace said, "Have it your own way. It's none of my business—unless the other fellow shows up. The tissue over the break is smashed. It looks as though it's been hit with a club."

"I can't have it!" Doc cried. "I've got to go to La Jolla tomorrow for the spring tides!"

"And turn over rocks?"

"Sure."

"Try and do it," said Dr. Horace. "Is the cast getting hot?"

"Yes," said Doc despondently.

38. *Hooptedoodle (2), or The Pacific Grove Butterfly Festival*

WHEN things get really bad there are some who seek out others who have it worse, for consolation. It is hard to see how this works but it seems to. You balance your trouble against another's, and if yours is lighter you feel better.

FROM *Sweet Thursday*, in *John Steinbeck: Travels with Charley and Later Novels 1947–1962*, edited by Robert DeMott and Brian Railsback (The Library of America, 2007), pages 488–491.

You would say the situation in Cannery Row was just about hopeless. Consider, then, the plight of the town of Pacific Grove, and you will understand why the lights burned all night in the Masonic Hall and why there was talk of getting rid of the city government. It wasn't a small thing. The whole town was involved. The butterflies had not arrived.

Pacific Grove benefits by one of those happy accidents of nature that gladden the heart, excite the imagination, and instruct the young.

On a certain day in the shouting springtime great clouds of orangy Monarch butterflies, like twinkling aery fields of flowers, sail high in the air on a majestic pilgrimage across Monterey Bay and land in the outskirts of Pacific Grove in the pine woods. The butterflies know exactly where they are going. In their millions they land on several pine trees—always the same trees. There they suck the thick, resinous juice which oozes from the twigs, and they get cockeyed. The first comers suck their fill and then fall drunken to the ground, where they lie like a golden carpet, waving their inebriate legs in the air and giving off butterfly shouts of celebration, while their places on the twigs are taken by new, thirsty millions. After about a week of binge the butterflies sober up and fly away, but not in clouds: they face their Monday morning singly or in pairs.

For a long time Pacific Grove didn't know what it had. Then gradually it was remarked that an increasing number of tourists were drawn to see the butterflies. Where there are tourists there is money, and it is a sin to let it drift away. Pacific Grove had a gravy train right in its lap. And the butterflies came free. It is only natural that the Great Butterfly Festival evolved, and where there is a festival there is bound to be a pageant.

There was ointment trouble at first. Pacific Grove is not only a dry town, but ardently dry. The sale of various tonics of good alcoholic content is the highest in the state, but there is no liquor. The fact that the visiting butterflies came to the dry oasis to get drunk seemed a little unfair, but the town solved this, first, by ignoring it, and then, by hotly denying it. The Butterfly Pageant explains the whole thing: There was once a butterfly princess (sung by Miss Graves), and she wandered away and was lost. Somehow a bunch of Indians (citizens in

long brown underwear) got in it. I forget how. Anyway, the loyal subjects searched and searched and at last they found their princess and in their millions came to rescue her. (When they lie flat on their backs their legs are waving greetings to their queen.) It all works out very nicely. The pageant is in the ball park and tourists can buy butterflies made out of every conceivable material from pine cones to platinum. The town makes a very nice thing of it. Why, the symbol of Pacific Grove on its advertising is the Monarch butterfly.

In all history there has been only one slip up. In 1924, I think it was, the butterflies did not come, and the frantic town was forced to print hundreds of thousands of paper butterflies in two colors and spread them all over. Today a wise city government keeps a huge supply of paper Monarchs on hand in case tragedy should strike again.

Now the time of the arrival is set, give one or two days in either direction. The pageant has been practicing for months, the Indians are trained, the prince has his tights out of mothballs, and the princess flowers toward coloratura luxury.

Perhaps it was an omen. Two days before the insects were due, Miss Graves lost her voice. She was a nice young woman, rather pretty and rather tired. She taught fourth grade, which is enough to tire anyone. Sprays and injections had no effect. Perhaps it was psychosomatic pressure that closed her throat and bottled up all but a dry squawk. Her eyes were feverish with despondency.

And then the days went by and the butterflies did not arrive. At first there was panic in Pacific Grove, and then a blind anger set in and the citizens looked about for someone to blame. The city government was a pushover. It was time for a change. Storekeepers whose bookkeeping was shaky blamed it on the mayor. Moving-picture attendance had fallen off. The city council took the rap for that. The matter became a growl, and the growl a roar: "Turn the rascals out!"

Then there was a hotel fire in King City, sixty miles away, and guess who came boiling out with an overcoat and a blonde? Mayor Cristy of Pacific Grove didn't even trouble to resign. He left town, and just as well. There was talk of tar and feathers. He must have heard. The town hadn't been so upset since the Great Roque War.

The religious block blamed the whole thing on sin without going into details. The cynics wanted to throw the whole council out, together with the chief of police and the water commissioner. More solid citizens placed the blame where it belonged, on Roosevelt-Truman socialism. And the butterflies did not come.

Then the first grade had its scandal. William Taylor 4th brought his crayons home wrapped in the dust cover of the Kinsey report. On being confronted, he panicked and said he got it from the teacher, Miss Bucke. She was questioned, and it developed that her father had signed a petition for the release of Eugene V. Debs in 1918. It had got so nobody could trust anybody.

And Miss Graves went on croaking.

And the butterflies did not come.

So you see, the trouble on Cannery Row wasn't as horrible as you thought.

39. Sweet Thursday Revisited

AGAIN it was a Sweet Thursday in the spring. The sun took a leap toward summer and loosed the furred petals of the golden poppies. Before noon you could smell the spice of blue lupines from the fields around Fort Ord.

It was a sweet day for all manner of rattlesnakes. On the parade ground a jack rabbit, crazy with spring, strolled in March Hare madness across the rifle range and drew joyous fire from two companies before he skidded to safety behind a sand dune. That jack rabbit's moment of grandeur cost the government eight hundred and ninety dollars and gladdened the hearts of one hell of a lot of soldiers.

Miss Graves awakened breathless with expectancy. She sang a scale in half-tones and found that her voice was back and all was well with the world. And she was right. At eleven o'clock the Monarch butterflies came boiling in from across the bay