

12.18.1975

Set the first scene in a doctor's office in San Angelo. Patients overflow from the waiting room out into the hall. Sick folks and chauffers for the disabled sit comparing symptoms and rating the town's doctors. Vivid accounts of past illnesses rule the floor. Scatterings of young people stare at magazines, disdainful of the infirmities of the old.

I am at the clinic to donate my body to medical science. This morning before daylight I made the final diagnosis: hopeless undulant fever complicated by chronic heart disease.

Page 4 of the morning paper described every symptom. The difference in my case was that my chills were colder and my fever in the range of volcano core. I'd have called the medical columnist long distance, but his writing had already convinced me that dialing would take too much strength.

Scene two: the examining room. The good doctor speaks, "We are not getting any younger, are we Noelke old boy? Take off your shirt."

Yes, take off my shirt. Take off my shirt and put on a shroud. Not getting any younger, Noelke old boy. You cranberry headed substitute for a doctor, act fast before I'm gone.

"Noelke, you just have the flu. Go home and take the pills that I'm going to prescribe. If you aren't better in three days, give us a call. What did the old cow market do yesterday?"

Oh Sweet One who made us all, excuse me for asking, but why didn't you write a dialogue to be used by doctors to comfort the sick? Why couldn't the government make capital offense by the phrase "just have the flu?" Cow markets be damned, from the auctioneer's throat down to the flunkies of alleyways and out onto the parking lots that harbor the traders. I won't be well in three years or I'd have the strength to put my shirt back on.

Scene three: schools of fuzzy images float through the light from the window. I'm too cold to lie without cover and too weak to stand the weight of the blankets. Town dogs fight outside the bedroom; a construction crew breaks hard Mertzson rock with an air hammer.

Child Who Sit in the Sun, get away from my bed with those heathen rattling gourds. Confound you, red woman, stop sprinkling that witch powder on my forehead. It's bad enough to pass on from the fever without a wild woman administering the potions of her people. Were there one ounce of strength left, I'd flee to the ranch.

Bigger schools of fuzzy images float into the light. Blankets are piled on to ward the chill. The dogs retreat a block to bark at the air hammer operator.

Child Who Sits in the Sun starts a wailing chant. "Keeper of the hunting ground remove the white eyed man's fright. Cool his fever and drive away the blight."

Stop that howling, you untamed wife. Please go away dogs and air hammer.