

DECEMBER 16, 1976

The main part of this story took place in a large medical clinic in San Angelo. Prescription pads and blank laboratory reports were used to make notes. Fortitude to withstand the long waits in stalls and closets was developed by reciting prayers from my childhood. Financial backing for the experience was still in the negotiation period. I suppose a team from the American Medical Assn. would have to meet with court referees to settle my tab.

Two ladies handicapped by four kids were the only holdovers from the morning appointments as I started the doctor visit stage. High in one corner of the waiting room, a soap opera was playing. Higher than the television set was the drama of the soap opera. Down deep underneath the sea, a diver was hunting a haunted treasure. Above on the ship, a villain was holding the captain up with a six shooter. On shore, the prettiest actress you ever saw was gulping martinis to gain the courage to tell the captain that the diver was her illegitimate son and the treasure was part of a dowry from a long ended romance with the villain. I followed the action between intermittent outbreaks of stall fever by the kids. My mind drifted from the dry euphoria of gin and vermouth to the closing scenes of Westerns where a bullet wound in the chest had sent the hero to the beyond in a moment of glorious relief.

What is the record for a patient to wait in a 12X12 room without his shirt? I clocked 43 minutes. On the doctor's work bench are two sizes of scissors, 28 cotton swabs, approximately two dozen chrome instruments and packs of thrillers like rubber tubes, and two kinds of thermometers.

Ah, the view from the window. A laundry and electric shop. I remember years ago that the electric shop sold tombstones. Yes, about 20 years ago, the sick and the lame hobbled down to the south end of the hall. After they grew tired of watching the pigeons, they could focus their fevered eyes to the left of the small brick building, and there were a dozen or so blank granite stones. Memories or images like that do not fade in 20 years.

"Go for a cardiogram," the starched one orders.

"No liquids after supper tonight," they all chorus.

"Take off your clothes, put on a gown."

"Have you been here, before? Sit on that slab until a freeze brand sets up on your posterior. Breathe deep... no, don't wheeze. Breathe deeper."

Ninety-six minutes is the record to sit in a 3X6 closet. Man's dignity dissolves in eight minutes in a hospital gown. Sovereignty rests in a white cap or a white coat. Biggest single loss ever made in Las Vegas is a short stepper here.

Freedom. Asphalt and the pickup. Out on the throughway, Volkswagens and trucks interpret the law. There is a bank I owe. I've never seen prettier granite pillars. Listen to the Christmas bells. Remember that the 14th amendment was dear to the slaves; but think what an amendment it would take to be free of the healers.