

Arthur Guy Funkhouser, Portrait of a Doctor

Dave Berry

The wind blew across the glazed surface of the frozen lake, intent upon entering a small cabin on the northern shore. After circling through the trees, glistening from the clean, white snow, the howling messenger of Aeolus descended, sending a wintry blast of air through a slightly opened window.

The tall, thin figure in the bed opened one eye cautiously, as if half expecting to see the wall torn away from the cabin. Seeing it still intact, he opened the other eye and blinked rapidly, wondering if the wind was always that strong at eight o'clock in the morning. He struggled to a sitting position, fumbled on the chair near his bed for a cigarette, lit it, and, disregarding all rules for fire prevention, slid cozily back under the purple down quilt. As he watched the smoke curl lazily around the room and vanish through an unplugged knot-hole, his mind was full of many thoughts—varied, and all unimportant. However, this morning had been the first in three months that he had not been compelled to hop out of bed, literally “throw” on his clothes, gulp down his black coffee (accompanied by two vitamin pills), crank up his blue Ford, and head toward the office. He was surely entitled to a few moments of complete reverie and relaxation!

“Daddy, get up and make some pancakes; I’m half frozen and completely starved!” This unexpected order jerked him back to the realm of reality and to the figure of his daughter, Sally, clomping noisily through the doorway. She sat down upon the edge of the bed, and said excitedly, “Tom and I skated all the way down to the point, and I didn’t fall once!”

Guy smiled and said that he would start breakfast as soon as he dressed. It seemed strange to him that his “little girl” was now a junior in college, and was “dating” a boy whose intentions seemed quite serious. He shook his head, as though making sure he was awake, then rose from his bed to fulfill his promise. Sally always liked his pancakes; even his wife admitted that they were much better than her “soggy tire patches.”

Before entering the kitchen, he stopped by the fireplace to pour the few remaining lumps of coal onto the smouldering embers. As the yellow tongues of flame started to devour the black mineral, he held his hands over the replenished source of heat. Suddenly he thought of the fun he had last summer when he had built the fireplace. It wasn’t a bad job, he thought, except for the chimney, which he had finished after drinking a little too much beer. The top rows

of bricks leaned slightly to the north-west, but this really didn't make much difference!

"Guy, you've a wife to feed now too; so you'll have to make a double batch of pancakes!" The cheerful order of his daughter was now echoed by his wife, Betty, who came over to his side and gently slipped her arm around his waist.

Soon the skillet was sizzling hot, and the golden batter was poured little by little into the hot grease to form four medium-sized circles. The amateur cook smiled happily as tiny bubbles of air rose quickly and evenly to the top of the pancakes; he hadn't made his specialties for so long he hadn't been sure how they would turn out. Soon they were done, and he quickly took them to the table where they disappeared "like hot cakes."

He repeated this process six times, humming to himself and wondering how many more that glutton Tom could eat. There, he thought, sits a boy whose appetite is actually as big as he says it is. He always kidded Tom about his big appetite, and was always rewarded by a sheepish grin from the human stoker.

"Those were super, Daddy. Will we have time to go skating again before we leave for home?" quizzed his daughter, pushing her chair back from the table with an air of complete satisfaction.

"Well if you hurry. We're going to leave in an hour or so," the pancaker maker replied.

Guy watched the two as they walked down to the lake, Tom with his arm around Sally. His wife noticed a far-away look in his eyes, but said nothing.

"Betty, next summer we're going to rebuild the dock. Dave didn't cross-nail those two-by-fours the way I told him, and the ice has ripped the whole south side off the guides," complained the chef.

"Don't blame him too much, Guy. He worked for three days building it," soothed his wife, hiding a smile, for she knew as well as he did that no one could be held responsible for the damaged pier. "Besides, didn't he put in all the plumbing?"

Her husband winced comically at this, for he had put in half of the plumbing backwards, and his nephew had been obliged to tear it out and start the job from the beginning.

"All right, rub it in, rub it in!" laughed Guy, throwing a pillow at his wife, who ducked expertly. "Let's get things moving around here; we leave in a half-hour!"

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"The doctor will see you now, Mrs. Simpson." The voice of the receptionist floated in from the outer office. The chef (emeritus) put out his cigarette and rose to meet his patient.