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CHAPTER ONE

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THE patients who came from the ends of the earth to consult Dr. Leonard Gillespie had been drawn to him by his fame as a miracle-worker or sent by baffled physicians of every country. Now, for three days, they had been brought by old Conover, the negro who presided over the waiting-room, not into the stormy presence of the great man, but to the young intern, James Kildare. He was neither very big nor very noisy, and as a rule he failed to impress the people who had been drawn by a famous name; only a small minority saw in him that penetrating flash, that swiftly working instinct which seems almost foreknowledge and is characteristic of the born diagnostician. Kildare, accepting the great post almost guiltily, like a thief on a throne, nevertheless worked three days before he was completely stumped. Many a time when he had reached the end of his own trail of knowledge, he looked up in despair at the closely printed tomes which filled the walls of Gillespie's library, and as he stared, some page flickered in his memory, or the voice of Gillespie came back to hint at the clue to the mystery. So for three days he had not been guilty of a single gross error while the continued stream of feet came in over the blurred pattern of the rug where tens of thousands had stood before them. Instinct helped him through many a pinch. The great Gillespie himself used to say: "The mind comprises nine-tenths of our being, and therefore a doctor who isn't part faith-healer is no damned good. A doctor who lacks human understanding is like a coal

miner without a lamp on his hat or a pick in his hand." Beyond a natural gift and the teaching of Gillespie, that human understanding helped Kildare through the first three days. Gillespie, in the meantime, was giving himself up to the work on his laboratory experiment. On the fourth day Kildare at last reached his impasse.

He sat with the laboratory reports in his hand, sweating a little as he stared at the boy, but what he really saw was the mother in the background. The lad was twelve, neatly turned out from the shine of his shoes to the gloves in his hand. In spite of his worn, sallow face there was still a fire in him, gradually dying. When his courage failed, he would fail also. In comparison the mother was like a kitchen slavey sent out with the young master. Rain had shrunk her cheap jacket until the sleeves were inches above the wrists and the bottom of it flared out before it reached her hips. She had a round, common face. The pain she had endured gave her the only distinction. Long-continued trouble had tumbled in shadowy lines and hollows of anxiety. The silence of Kildare as he stared at her boy frightened her to the heart, but she tried to wheedle the bad moment away.

"It's God's mercy that we've got *big* hospitals, doctor," she said. "Young or old, there ain't a chance that you could go wrong on a case with all them wheels turning and turning to set you right; not when you got a whole army to lend you a hand."

Kildare tasted the bitter truth for a moment in his throat before he spoke it.

"I'm afraid that I can't help you," he said.

Something stirred, like a whisper of wind, in the corner of the room behind him. That would be Mary Lamont. She was an excellent nurse and steady as a clock in emergencies, but the hopeless cases broke her down. He could feel her now like an extra burden on his mind. Then something struck the floor with a soft shock. Mrs. Casey had dropped her handbag. The boy, stooping quickly, picked it up. He touched her with his hand.

"Steady, dear!" he said, and his concern for himself was so much less than his trouble for her that the heart of Kildare gave a great stroke of pain. Mrs. Casey had created a masterpiece that was now about to be stolen from her and from the world.

"He can't help me! He can't help me!" she said over and over two or three times, looking into the future and finding it a black emptiness.

The boy put an arm around her and turned apologetically toward Kildare.

"Shall we go now, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Kildare crisply.

Mary Lamont opened the exit door. She tried to make herself professionally matter-of-fact, but her voice was wobbly as she murmured: "This way, please." A girl as young as that was no good for this work, he decided. He liked having her around. She freshened the day, and she had a bedrock, honest faith in him that gave Kildare strength, but he would have to ask Gillespie for an older nurse.

"Thank you, Doctor Kildare," the boy was saying as he went out.

"Wait a minute," commanded Kildare.

They turned back suddenly. It was still the woman who seemed to stand under the death sentence, not the boy. Mary Lamont watched her doctor with a foolish brightness of expectancy. He scowled at the three of them.

"The other doctors—you mean that they're right?" Mrs. Casey was asking.

"No. I think they're not right," said Kildare. He watched the hope spring up in their faces. "But I don't know where they're wrong." They were struck blank again. "Will you ask Doctor Gillespie if he'll make a special exception and see this patient?" he added to the nurse.

She blessed him with her eyes and her smile as she hurried across the room, but when she came to the door of the great internist's inner office, she hesitated a moment to gather her courage before she went in. Kildare could hear the pleasant murmur of her voice, not the words; then came the roar of Gillespie, hoarse as the barking of a sea-lion.

"I've told him before and I tell him again: I'll see *no*body! There's one last thing I can give medicine, and I've got it now in the tips of my fingers. It's almost in my hand if I'm let alone to work at it. What do I care about one patient, when I'm thinking of the lives of ten thousand? Get out!"

"Mother, let's go now. You heard him," said the boy.

"Hush yourself, Michael," said Mrs. Casey. "We'll go when we're sent. Wait for the word!"

Her fierce eyes dwelt upon Kildare as Mary Lamont came back into the room with her head bent so that they might not see the tears in her eyes.

"Doctor Gillespie finds himself too occupied," she reported.

Kildare sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and crossed the room in his turn. "I'll speak to him..." he said.

The inner office was stacked with cages of white mice that looked like filing cabinets, each with a white label and a glittering little water-tube. The odour of small animal life in the cages tainted the air as a drop of slime taints drinking water. The diagnostician, who had turned his private sanctum into a menagerie, had two of the cages on the arms of his wheel chair. In triumph he laughed aloud to Kildare: "We're getting it, Jimmy! It's almost here! Look at this, will you?"

Six little white mice lay dead in one cage; in the other five were full of scamper and haste and only one was lifeless.

"Change the dosage a little and I think we've got it," said Gillespie. "There's the six of the control as dead as pins; and here's five out of six that the injection saved. Five out of six! What d'you think of it?"

"I want to talk to you..." began Kildare.

"I don't want chatter from you. I want work!" declared Gillespie. "If you'll talk mice and meningitis, all right. Otherwise I have no time. We're going to whip meningitis into a corner, young Doctor Kildare. We're going to make it afraid to show its face. D'you hear me? We might even wangle a mangy little bit of a half-baked reputation for *you* out of this experiment. What are you hanging your head about now?"

His savage impatience made him jerk back his head. Brittle old muscles which failed to cushion the shock allowed a violent tremor to run down through his body. Kildare winced at the sight of it.

"I want you to see a patient. I want five minutes of your time," said Kildare.

Old Gillespie banged the top of a mouse cage with the flat of his hand, and the mice began to weave a white pattern on the floor of the cage as they raced around it in terror.

"You don't want my time; you want my brain!" he shouted. "And you can't have it!"

"He's a twelve-year-old boy," said Kildare steadily.

"I don't give a damn if he's the prince of Siam or the emperor of Cochin-China!" cried Gillespie. "I won't see him."

"His mother's a washwoman," said Kildare.

"Let her keep to her tubs and her suds then."

"And she's making the boy a gentleman."

"We don't want gentlemen; we want hard men who can take a chisel edge."

"They call it pernicious anaemia—the other doctors—and they're wrong."

"I don't give a damn about anaemia and other doctors and their errors; a lot of ignorant fools. I'm going on with this experiment and nothing else. You hear me?..."

"They call it anaemia, and they're wrong," repeated Kildare.

"What do *you* think it is?"

"I don't know. Here's the case history and the laboratory reports."

"I'm not interested," said Gillespie, snatching the papers. "I'll have nothing to do with it...Why don't you think it's anaemia?"

"The blood picture showed no macrocytes," said Kildare.

"Then why the devil are you wasting my time?" demanded Gillespie. "Why don't you get him in here where I can lay eyes and hands on him?"

Kildare hurried back to the other room. With a handkerchief he rubbed the wet from his forehead as he beckoned to the boy. "Doctor Gillespie *will* see you," he said. This new accession of hope was too much for Mrs. Casey. She sank into a chair and stared at the floor. Mary Lamont hurried toward her as Kildare ushered the boy into the presence of Gillespie, who was glowering at the laboratory reports.

Without lifting his head he snapped: "Palpable spleen, Doctor Kildare?"

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

"Make a fragility test?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"The fragility test isn't one of the regular routine."

"That's one of the damnations of the world—routine, routine, routine. People want to live by instinct, not by brains. Is the human race going to become a lot of damned insects? Use the mind more and routine less. Have a fragility test made at once."

"Yes, sir," said Kildare.

"Young man," continued the internist, lifting his head and gathering the shag of his brows together, "do you ever have

pains here—up on your left side?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

"You didn't tell me that," said Kildare.

"I only have them now and then," declared young Casey.

"When you have those pains, your skin is turning yellow, eh?" asked Gillespie.

"Yes, sir," agreed the boy.

"It's the dilating spleen," stated Gillespie. "I think this boy has haemolytic icterus, Jimmy. Have them get the spleen out of him and he'll be as fit as a fiddle again." He pointed a sudden finger at the Casey boy. "You hear me? You're going to be as right as a trivet inside two weeks. Get out of my sight and tell your mother the news...Stay here, Jimmy!"

"Thank you, sir...thank you, Doctor Kildare," the boy was saying as he left the room. He hurried his thanks in his eagerness to bring the great news to his mother; Kildare closed the door slowly after him.

"Are you going to break your fool heart because you missed one case in two hundred?" asked Gillespie, already at work on some Petri dishes that contained a reddish agar.

"No, sir," said Kildare.

"You are, though. Or why do you stand there with that dumb look on your face like a wet hen?"

Kildare looked from the white hair of Gillespie, as wild as a windstorm, to the purple-blue beneath his wrinkled eyes. "I'll never learn half what you know," he said. "I'll get used to seeing that. But what I see right now is that you're burning yourself up with this experiment."

"That's a lie and a loud one," answered Gillespie, dragging a loop of wire over the agar and commencing to

transfer the colony of bacteria to three other dishes. "I never felt better in my life."

"Why does your hand shake then?" asked Kildare.

"None of your damned business. Leave me alone...till I need you, Jimmy. Will you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Kildare, and went unwillingly from the room.

CHAPTER TWO

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HOURS later, and every hour like the weighty length of a day, Kildare was saying: "Next, please!" when Mary Lamont answered: "That's the end of the line for today."

He shook his head at her impatiently. "There are twenty more people out there!" he declared.

"I've sent them away," she said.

"*You* sent them away?" exclaimed Kildare.

"I had orders from Doctor Gillespie."

"But a Gillespie day never stops—it's from noon to noon," protested Kildare.

"He won't let you keep those hours," said the girl. "He gave me express orders that the line is not to keep pressing in at you day and night."

Kildare dropped into a chair, unbuttoned his white jacket at the throat, and wiped away perspiration from around his eyes. Hospitals are always too hot. He merely said: "I suppose he's right. He's always right. I'd be a fool to try to imitate him. He goes in seven-league boots, and I'm only a measuring worm...I suppose he wants me in the laboratory."

"No. You're to take some time off," said Mary Lamont, watching his face. It was a familiar page to her now.

"Time off?" he repeated. "That's right. Light work for the young horse. I'm damned tired of being young, aren't you?"

She turned hastily to pick up a fallen report and hide her smile. Kildare was plucking off the long white coat in which he worked. He always managed to get it as wrinkled and stained as a butcher's apron before the day's end.

"Little Michael Casey would be happy if you'd drop in to see him," she suggested. "The operation was perfect; and he's already two-thirds well. He's asking for you."

"Tell him to save his wind; or let him thank Gillespie. But I'm glad he's doing well. Give them hope, and they're all giants. You notice that? Perhaps Gillespie will give him a word."

"He wouldn't know how to talk to Doctor Gillespie; but they all know how to talk to you," she pointed out. "No matter how rough you are, they don't mind." She waited for an answer, curiously.

"I'm one of them, and they know it," he said.

"But they're out of the slums, and you're out of the country."

"I'm born poor, and I'll die poor. They see that, and it's what matters."

"Some day you may be a consultant at a thousand dollars a case," she suggested.

"May I?" He smiled at this impossible future.

"Well, anyway, money can't buy the big things. It can't buy happiness and things like that."

"It can keep them all in damned bright repair, though."

"You're feeling down."

"Haven't I reasons for being down?"

"Of course you haven't. There's not a man—there's hardly a man in the *world* who has your chance."

"Good!" said Kildare, smiling wearily at her. "Go on and be all lighted up. It's easy on my eyes."

"You're not really unhappy. You're only blue. And that will go away like a cold in the head. What could you complain

of?"

"Being broke—I'm tired of it. I'm sick of it. The kind of sickness that can't be cured except by a good third act—and I'm not able even to ask a girl to go to a show with me. Money? I'd like to bed myself down in the long green."

"That's simply not true."

"Don't act like a mother-in-law. Try to believe what I'm saying. I get twenty dollars a month. That's sixty-seven cents a day. If I go to Sullivan's Saloon and buy two or three beers, a pack of cigarettes, and a sandwich, I've burned up my whole income. Wait a minute."

Under the troubled eyes of the nurse he took out a shallow handful of silver and of dollar bills.

"Here's six bucks and a half. Mary, will you go to a show with me tonight?"

"No. You see me every day. You need somebody new."

"I don't want your advice. I want *you*. Come along, will you?"

"Of course I will. I'd love it."

"That's right. Pretend a little. Nine-tenths of any party is the pretending that goes into it."

"Jimmy, don't be difficult. I really *want* to go."

"You know what you're being?"

"What?"

"Bighearted," he said, and walked away from her. Over his shoulder he called: "See you in a half hour?"

She had not moved from the spot where he left her. She was looking after him with worried eyes and forgot to answer his last question.

When he got to his room, he found Tom Collins stretched out on one of the iron beds. He was so thin that he looked like a vacant suit of clothes with a head and hands stuck in the apertures.

"How about a beer at Mike's?" asked Collins.

"No."

"How about two beers at Mike's?"

"I'm taking a girl to a show."

"You're what? What sort of a girl?" asked Collins.

"One that likes to relax; that's why she puts up with me. Nobody tries, and so nobody gets tired."

"Maybe you've got something—for an internist," said Collins. "Look out for that box on the floor..."

But he had given the warning too late and Kildare caught his shoe on the rough edge of a flat packing box that projected from beneath his bed. The old leather tore like paper. The whole toe of the right shoe was left in tatters. Kildare, looking solemnly down, wriggled his stockinged toes.

"Is that your only pair of shoes?" asked Collins.

"It is," said Kildare, "and there goes my party for this evening."

"Don't be a dope," said Collins. "I've got more cash here than I can use, and..."

"Quit it, Tom," said Kildare. "But who brought this damned box?"

"Old Creighton, the carpenter. He said that he couldn't pay you in cash so he brought you that."

Kildare tore off the top layer of composition board, lifted the paper packing, and exposed a small model of the

World's Fair, done with a cabinet-maker's most delicate miniature touch, from the needle-sharp trylon and perisphere to the amphitheatre on a blue sea of glass.

"A waste of time," said Collins.

"Of course," answered Kildare. "But that's why my family will like it."

Heavy tape was holding his shoe together when he went down to Mary Lamont with the big, flat box under his arm. She looked like somebody's sister, not the probation nurse who had been working with him. It was the first time he had seen her out of uniform, and she took his breath. She had on a wine-coloured coat of a material as soft as camel's-hair, and a hat to match with a quill of yellow and orange stuck in a brim that furled up or down by surprise. Also she wore a scarf the colour of sunlight.

"You're too expensive," said Kildare. "I couldn't take you even on trial. Put yourself back on the shelf, Mary...I mean, seriously: Look what's happened to my shoes, and now the only show I can take you to is a secondhand shop."

She refused to stay behind in the hospital, however. The best of any party was simply to get out in the open, she said. So she walked over with him to the express office, where he sent off the Fair model to his mother in Dartford. Then they were in a cellar store buying for two dollars and eighty-five cents a pair of half-soled shoes that once had cost ten or twelve.

"Now what? A moving picture?" he asked.

"No. We can't talk in a moving picture."

"We'll pick up a beer in Sullivan's Saloon then," suggested Kildare. But when he had her there in the back

room he was worried. There were three mugs talking loudly at a corner table, and for the first time in all his hours at the old saloon, he noticed the sawdust on the floor.

"Is it all right for you to be in this sort of a place?" he asked.

"Of course it's all right," she said. "Men like to talk in dark corners."

"There's no giggle and jitter about you," said Kildare. "That's one of the ways you're different...What'll you drink?"

"Beer," said Mary Lamont.

"You don't want beer. I can be a little more expensive than that."

"I want beer," she insisted, "if it's on draught."

"I'm going to hate the blighter who marries you and takes you away," said Kildare. "Hello, Mike. Two beers when you get a chance."

"Okay," said Mike. He went over to the corner table and said grimly: "Why don't you guys pipe down and give the doc a chance to hear himself think?"

"What doc?" one of them asked.

"It's Kildare," said Mike. "Don't you know nothing?"

"Is that him? I thought he'd be twice that size. Let's take these into the bar..."

They went out. "Hi, doc. How's things?" they said.

"Stay where you are," urged Kildare.

"Ah-h-h, we know when a guy wants elbow room," said one of them, and winked at the intern. This remark tickled them all, and they went into the bar on a great blast of laughter.

Mike came back with two wet glasses of beer.

"You shouldn't have troubled those fellows," said Kildare.

"Yeah, and why not?" asked Mike. "Why shouldn't you have your beer in peace, like usual?"

He was rubbing off the table with a painful thoroughness, throwing side glances at the girl.

"We used to see a lot more of you, doc," he complained. "But maybe you got better things to do with your time."

"No, Mike. But I'm standing double duty now in the hospital."

"He doesn't like me," said the girl as Mike left the room. "He thinks I'm a bad influence."

"Mike? He likes everyone," said Kildare.

Big Weyman, the ambulance driver, entered the room and lounged back toward the table of Kildare.

"Mind if I ask you something, doc?" he was saying.

"It's all right," broke in Mary Lamont. "It's only I, Weyman."

The ambulance driver stopped short.

"Yeah, what d'you think of that dumb Mike telling me the doc was in here with a—Excuse me, Miss Lamont." Weyman went out in haste.

"Was he trying to take care of me?" asked Kildare. "Did Mike send for that gorilla of a Weyman because he thought..."

He sat up straight in his chair and looked angrily at nothing in particular.

"People are always going to try to take care of you," stated Mary Lamont.

"Do you mind telling me why?" he asked politely.