

ARROWSMITH

BY
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MAIN STREET, BABBITT, ETC.

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To Dr. Paul H. DeKruif I am indebted not only for most of the bacteriological and medical material in this tale but equally for his help in the planning of the fable itself—for his realization of the characters as living people, for his philosophy as a scientist. With this acknowledgment I want to record our months of companionship while working on the book, in the United States, in the West Indies, in Panama, in London and Fontainebleau. I wish I could reproduce our talks along the way, and the laboratory afternoons, the restaurants at night, and the deck at dawn as we steamed into tropic ports.

SINCLAIR LEWIS

ARROWSMITH

CHAPTER I

I

THE driver of the wagon swaying through forest and swamp of the Ohio wilderness was a ragged girl of fourteen. Her mother they had buried near the Monongahela—the girl herself had heaped with torn sods the grave beside the river of the beautiful name. Her father lay shrinking with fever on the floor of the wagon-box, and about him played her brothers and sisters, dirty brats, tattered brats, hilarious brats.

She halted at the fork in the grassy road, and the sick man quavered, "Emmy, ye better turn down towards Cincinnati. If we could find your Uncle Ed, I guess he'd take us in."

"Nobody ain't going to take us in," she said. "We're going on jus' long as we can. Going West! They's a whole lot of new things I aim to be seeing!"

She cooked the supper, she put the children to bed, and sat by the fire, alone.

That was the great-grandmother of Martin Arrowsmith.

II

Cross-legged in the examining-chair in Doc Vickerson's office, a boy was reading "Gray's Anatomy." His name was Martin Arrowsmith, of Elk Mills, in the state of Winnemac.

There was a suspicion in Elk Mills—now, in 1897, a dowdy red-brick village, smelling of apples—that this brown-leather adjustable seat which Doc Vickerson used for minor operations, for the infrequent pulling of teeth and for highly frequent naps, had begun life as a barber's chair. There was also a belief that its proprietor must once have been called Doctor Vickerson, but for years he had been only The Doc, and he was scurfier and much less adjustable than the chair.

Martin was the son of J. J. Arrowsmith, who conducted the New York Clothing Bazaar. By sheer brass and obstinacy he had, at fourteen, become the unofficial, also decidedly unpaid, assistant to the Doc, and while the Doc was on a country call he took charge—though what there was to take charge of, no one could ever make out. He was a slender boy, not very tall; his hair and restless eyes were black, his skin unusually white, and the contrast gave him an air of passionate variability. The squareness of his head and a reasonable breadth of shoulders saved him from any appearance of effeminacy or of that querulous timidity which artistic young gentlemen call Sensitiveness. When he lifted his head to listen, his right eyebrow, slightly higher than the left, rose and quivered in his characteristic expression of energy, of independence, and a hint that he could fight, a look of impertinent inquiry which had been known to annoy his teachers and the Sunday School superintendent.

Martin was, like most inhabitants of Elk Mills before the Slavo-Italian immigration, a Typical Pure-bred Anglo-Saxon American, which means that he was a union of German, French, Scotch, Irish, perhaps a little Spanish, conceivably a little of the strains lumped together as "Jewish," and a great deal of English, which is itself a combination of Primitive Britain, Celt, Phœnician, Roman, German, Dane, and Swede.

It is not certain that, in attaching himself to Doc Vickerson, Martin was entirely and edifyingly controlled by a desire to become a Great Healer. He did awe his Gang by bandaging stone-bruises, dissecting squirrels, and explaining the astounding and secret matters to be discovered at the back of the physiology, but he was not completely free from an ambition to command such glory among them as was enjoyed by the son of the Episcopalian minister, who could smoke an entire cigar without becoming sick. Yet this afternoon he read steadily at the section on the lymphatic system, and he muttered the long and perfectly incomprehensible words in a hum which made drowsier the dusty room.

It was the central room of the three occupied by Doc Vickerson, facing on Main Street above the New York Clothing Bazaar. On one side of it was the foul waiting-room, on the other, the Doc's bedroom. He was an aged widower; for what he called "female fixings" he cared nothing; and the bedroom with its tottering bureau and its cot of frowsty blankets was

cleaned only by Martin, in not very frequent attacks of sanitation.

This central room was at once business office, consultation-room, operating-theater, living-room, poker den, and warehouse for guns and fishing-tackle. Against a brown plaster wall was a cabinet of zoölogical collections and medical curiosities, and beside it the most dreadful and fascinating object known to the boy-world of Elk Mills—a skeleton with one gaunt gold tooth. On evenings when the Doc was away, Martin would acquire prestige among the trembling Gang by leading them into the unutterable darkness and scratching a sulfur match on the skeleton's jaw.

On the wall was a home-stuffed pickerel on a home-varnished board. Beside the rusty stove, a sawdust-box cuspidor rested on a slimy oilcloth worn through to the threads. On the senile table was a pile of memoranda of debts which the Doc was always swearing he would "collect from those dead-beats right now," and which he would never, by any chance, at any time, collect from any of them. A year or two—a decade or two—a century or two—they were all the same to the plodding doctor in the bee-murmuring town.

The most unsanitary corner was devoted to the cast-iron sink, which was oftener used for washing eggy breakfast plates than for sterilizing instruments. On its ledge were a broken test-tube, a broken fishhook, an unlabeled and forgotten bottle of pills, a nail-bristling heel, a frayed cigar-butt, and a rusty lancet stuck in a potato.

The wild raggedness of the room was the soul and symbol of Doc Vickerson; it was more exciting than the flat-faced stack of shoe-boxes in the New York Bazaar: it was the lure to questioning and adventure for Martin Arrowsmith.

III

The boy raised his head, cocked his inquisitive brow. On the stairway was the cumbersome step of Doc Vickerson. The Doc was sober! Martin would not have to help him into bed.

But it was a bad sign that the Doc should first go down the hall to his bedroom. The boy listened sharply. He heard the Doc open the lower part of the washstand, where he kept his bottle of Jamaica rum. After a long gurgle the invisible

Doc put away the bottle and decisively kicked the doors shut. Still good. Only one drink. If he came into the consultation-room at once, he would be safe. But he was still standing in the bedroom. Martin sighed as the washstand doors were hastily opened again, as he heard another gurgle and a third.

The Doc's step was much livelier when he loomed into the office, a gray mass of a man with a gray mass of mustache, a form vast and unreal and undefined, like a cloud taking for the moment a likeness of humanity. With the brisk attack of one who wishes to escape the discussion of his guilt, the Doc rumbled while he waddled toward his desk-chair:

"What you doing here, young fella? What you doing here? I knew the cat would drag in something if I left the door unlocked." He gulped slightly; he smiled to show that he was being humorous—people had been known to misconstrue the Doc's humor.

He spoke more seriously, occasionally forgetting what he was talking about:

"Reading old Gray? That's right. Physician's library just three books: 'Gray's Anatomy' and Bible and Shakespeare. Study. You may become great doctor. Locate in Zenith and make five thousand dollars year—much as United States Senator! Set a high goal. Don't let things slide. Get training. Go college before go medical school. Study. Chemistry. Latin. Knowledge! I'm plug doc—got chick nor child—nobody—old drunk. But you—leadin' physician. Make five thousand dollars year.

"Murray woman's got endocarditis. Not thing I can do for her. Wants somebody hold her hand. Road's damn' disgrace. Culvert's out, beyond the grove. 'Sgrace.

"Endocarditis and—

"Training, that's what you got t' get. Fundamentals. Know chemistry. Biology. I nev' did. Mrs. Reverend Jones thinks she's got gastric ulcer. Wants to go city for operation. Ulcer, hell! She and the Reverend both eat too much.

"Why they don't repair that culvert— And don't be a booze-hoister like me, either. And get your basic science. I'll splain."

The boy, normal village youngster though he was, given to stoning cats and to playing pom-pom-pullaway, gained some-

thing of the intoxication of treasure-hunting as the Doc struggled to convey his vision of the pride of learning, the universality of biology, the triumphant exactness of chemistry. A fat old man and dirty and unvirtuous was the Doc; his grammar was doubtful, his vocabulary alarming, and his references to his rival, good Dr. Needham, were scandalous; yet he invoked in Martin a vision of making chemicals explode with much noise and stink and of seeing animalcules that no boy in Elk Mills had ever beheld.

The Doc's voice was thickening; he was sunk in his chair, blurry of eye and lax of mouth. Martin begged him to go to bed, but the Doc insisted:

"Don't need nap. No. Now you lissen. You don't appreciate but— Old man now. Giving you all I've learned. Show you collection. Only museum in whole county. Scientific pioneer."

A hundred times had Martin obediently looked at the specimens in the brown, crackly-varnished bookcase: the beetles and chunks of mica; the embryo of a two-headed calf, the gallstones removed from a respectable lady whom the Doc enthusiastically named to all visitors. The Doc stood before the case, waving an enormous but shaky forefinger.

"Looka that butterfly. Name is *porthesia chrysorrhœa*. Doc Needham couldn't tell you that! He don't know what butterflies are called! He don't care if you get trained. Remember that name now?" He turned on Martin. "You payin' attention? You interested? *Huh?* Oh, the devil! Nobody wants to know about my museum—not a person. Only one in county but— I'm an old failure."

Martin asserted, "Honest, it's slick!"

"Look here! Look here! See that? In the bottle? It's an appendix. First one ever took out 'round here. I did it! Old Doc Vickerson, he did the first 'pendectomy in *this* neck of the woods, you bet! And first museum. It ain't—so big—but it's start. I haven't put away money like Doc Needham, but I started first c'lection—I started it!"

He collapsed in a chair, groaning, "You're right. Got to sleep. All in." But as Martin helped him to his feet he broke away, scrabbled about on his desk, and looked back doubtfully. "Want to give you something—start your training. And remember the old man. Will anybody remember the old man?"

He was holding out the beloved magnifying glass which for years he had used in botanizing. He watched Martin slip the lens into his pocket, he sighed, he struggled for something else to say, and silently he lumbered into his bedroom.

CHAPTER II

I

THE state of Winnemac is bounded by Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana, and like them it is half Eastern, half Mid-western. There is a feeling of New England in its brick and sycamore villages, its stable industries, and a tradition which goes back to the Revolutionary War. Zenith, the largest city in the state, was founded in 1792. But Winnemac is Mid-western in its fields of corn and wheat, its red barns and silos, and, despite the immense antiquity of Zenith, many counties were not settled till 1860.

The University of Winnemac is at Mohalis, fifteen miles from Zenith. There are twelve thousand students; beside this prodigy Oxford is a tiny theological school and Harvard a select college for young gentlemen. The University has a baseball field under glass; its buildings are measured by the mile; it hires hundreds of young Doctors of Philosophy to give rapid instruction in Sanskrit, navigation, accountancy, spectacle-fitting, sanitary engineering, Provençal poetry, tariff schedules, rutabaga-growing, motor-car designing, the history of Voronezh, the style of Matthew Arnold, the diagnosis of *myohypertrophica kymoparalytica*, and department-store advertising. Its president is the best money-raiser and the best after-dinner speaker in the United States; and Winnemac was the first school in the world to conduct its extension courses by radio.

It is not a snobbish rich-man's college, devoted to leisurely nonsense. It is the property of the people of the state, and what they want—or what they are told they want—is a mill to turn out men and women who will lead moral lives, play bridge, drive good cars, be enterprising in business, and occasionally mention books, though they are not expected to have time to read them. It is a Ford Motor Factory, and if its products rattle a little, they are beautifully standardized, with perfectly interchangeable parts. Hourly the University of Winnemac grows in numbers and influence, and by 1950 one

may expect it to have created an entirely new world-civilization, a civilization larger and brisker and purer.

II

In 1904, when Martin Arrowsmith was an Arts and Science Junior preparing for medical school, Winnemac had but five thousand students yet it was already brisk.

Martin was twenty-one. He still seemed pale, in contrast to his black smooth hair, but he was a respectable runner, a fair basket-ball center, and a savage hockey-player. The co-eds murmured that he "looked so romantic," but as this was before the invention of sex and the era of petting-parties, they merely talked about him at a distance, and he did not know that he could have been a hero of amours. For all his stubbornness he was shy. He was not entirely ignorant of caresses but he did not make an occupation of them. He consoled with men whose virile pride it was to smoke filthy corn-cob pipes and to wear filthy sweaters.

The University had become his world. For him Elk Mills did not exist. Doc Vickerson was dead and buried and forgotten; Martin's father and mother were dead, leaving him only enough money for his arts and medical courses. The purpose of life was chemistry and physics and the prospect of biology next year.

His idol was Professor Edward Edwards, head of the department of chemistry, who was universally known as "Encore." Edwards' knowledge of the history of chemistry was immense. He could read Arabic, and he infuriated his fellow chemists by asserting that the Arabs had anticipated all their researches. Himself, Professor Edwards never did researches. He sat before fires and stroked his collie and chuckled in his beard.

This evening Encore was giving one of his small and popular At Home's. He lolled in a brown-corduroy Morris chair, being quietly humorous for the benefit of Martin and half a dozen other fanatical young chemists, and baiting Dr. Norman Brumfit, the instructor in English. The room was full of heartiness and beer and Brumfit.

Every university faculty must have a Wild Man to provide thrills and to shock crowded lecture-rooms. Even in so energetically virtuous an institution as Winnemac there was one Wild Man, and he was Norman Brumfit. He was permitted,

without restriction, to speak of himself as immoral, agnostic, and socialistic, so long as it was universally known that he remained pure, Presbyterian, and Republican. Dr. Brumfit was in form, to-night. He asserted that whenever a man showed genius, it could be proved that he had Jewish blood. Like all discussions of Judaism at Winnemac, this led to the mention of Max Gottlieb, professor of bacteriology in the medical school.

Professor Gottlieb was the mystery of the university. It was known that he was a Jew, born and educated in Germany, and that his work on immunology had given him fame in the East and in Europe. He rarely left his small brown weedy house except to return to his laboratory, and few students outside of his classes had ever identified him, but every one had heard of his tall, lean, dark aloofness. A thousand fables fluttered about him. It was believed that he was the son of a German prince, that he had immense wealth, that he lived as sparsely as the other professors only because he was doing terrifying and costly experiments which probably had something to do with human sacrifice. It was said that he could create life in the laboratory, that he could talk to the monkeys which he inoculated, that he had been driven out of Germany as a devil-worshiper or an anarchist, and that he secretly drank real champagne every evening at dinner.

It was the tradition that faculty-members did not discuss their colleagues with students, but Max Gottlieb could not be regarded as anybody's colleague. He was impersonal as the chill northeast wind. Dr. Brumfit rattled:

"I'm sufficiently liberal, I should assume, toward the claims of science, but with a man like Gottlieb— I'm prepared to believe that he knows all about material forces, but what astounds me is that such a man can be blind to the vital force that creates all others. He says that knowledge is worthless unless it is proven by rows of figures. Well, when one of you scientific sharks can take the genius of a Ben Jonson and measure it with a yardstick, then I'll admit that we literary chaps, with our doubtless absurd belief in beauty and loyalty and the world o' dreams, are off on the wrong track!"

Martin Arrowsmith was not exactly certain what this meant and he enthusiastically did not care. He was relieved when Professor Edwards from the midst of his beardedness and smokiness made a sound curiously like "Oh, hell!" and took

the conversation away from Brumfit. Ordinarily Encore would have suggested, with amiable malice, that Gottlieb was a "crapehanger" who wasted time destroying the theories of other men instead of making new ones of his own. But tonight, in detestation of such literary playboys as Brumfit, he exalted Gottlieb's long, lonely, failure-burdened effort to synthesize antitoxin, and his diabolic pleasure in disproving his own contentions as he would those of Ehrlich or Sir Almroth Wright. He spoke of Gottlieb's great book, "Immunology," which had been read by seven-ninths of all the men in the world who could possibly understand it—the number of these being nine.

The party ended with Mrs. Edwards' celebrated doughnuts. Martin tramped toward his boarding-house through a veiled spring night. The discussion of Gottlieb had roused him to a reasonless excitement. He thought of working in a laboratory at night, alone, absorbed, contemptuous of academic success and of popular classes. Himself, he believed, he had never seen the man, but he knew that Gottlieb's laboratory was in the Main Medical Building. He drifted toward the distant medical campus. The few people whom he met were hurrying with midnight timidity. He entered the shadow of the Anatomy Building, grim as a barracks, still as the dead men lying up there in the dissecting-room. Beyond him was the turreted bulk of the Main Medical Building, a harsh and blurry mass, high up in its dark wall a single light. He started. The light had gone out abruptly, as though an agitated watcher were trying to hide from him.

On the stone steps of the Main Medical, two minutes after, appeared beneath the arc-light a tall figure, ascetic, self-contained, apart. His swart cheeks were gaunt, his nose high-bridged and thin. He did not hurry, like the belated homebodies. He was unconscious of the world. He looked at Martin and through him; he moved away, muttering to himself, his shoulders stooped, his long hands clasped behind him. He was lost in the shadows, himself a shadow.

He had worn the threadbare top-coat of a poor professor yet Martin remembered him as wrapped in a black velvet cape with a silver star arrogant on his breast.

III

On his first day in medical school, Martin Arrowsmith was in a high state of superiority. As a medic he was more picturesque than other students, for medics are reputed to know secrets, horrors, exhilarating wickednesses. Men from the other departments go to their rooms to peer into their books. But also as an academic graduate, with a training in the basic sciences, he felt superior to his fellow medics, most of whom had but a high-school diploma, with perhaps one year in a ten-room Lutheran college among the cornfields.

For all his pride, Martin was nervous. He thought of operating, of making a murderous wrong incision; and with a more immediate, macabre fear, he thought of the dissecting-room and the stony, steely Anatomy Building. He had heard older medics mutter of its horrors: of corpses hanging by hooks, like rows of ghastly fruit, in an abominable tank of brine in the dark basement; of Henry the janitor, who was said to haul the cadavers out of the brine, to inject red lead into their veins, and to scold them as he stuffed them on the dumb-waiter.

There was prairie freshness in the autumn day but Martin did not heed. He hurried into the slate-colored hall of the Main Medical, up the wide stairs to the office of Max Gottlieb. He did not look at passing students, and when he bumped into them he grunted in confused apology. It was a portentous hour. He was going to specialize in bacteriology; he was going to discover enchanting new germs; Professor Gottlieb was going to recognize him as a genius, make him an assistant, predict for him— He halted in Gottlieb's private laboratory, a small, tidy apartment with racks of cotton-corked test-tubes on the bench, a place unimpressive and unmagical save for the constant-temperature bath with its tricky thermometer and electric bulbs. He waited till another student, a stuttering gawk of a student, had finished talking to Gottlieb, dark, lean, impassive at his desk in a cubbyhole of an office, then he plunged.

If in the misty April night Gottlieb had been romantic as a cloaked horseman, he was now testy and middle-aged. Near at hand, Martin could see wrinkles beside the hawk eyes. Gottlieb had turned back to his desk, which was heaped with shabby note-books, sheets of calculations, and a marvelously precise chart with red and green curves descending to vanish

at zero. The calculations were delicate, minute, exquisitely clear; and delicate were the scientist's thin hands among the papers. He looked up, spoke with a hint of German accent. His words were not so much mispronounced as colored with a warm unfamiliar tint.

"Vell? Yes?"

"Oh, Professor Gottlieb, my name is Arrowsmith. I'm a medic freshman, Winnemac B. A. I'd like awfully to take bacteriology this fall instead of next year. I've had a lot of chemistry—"

"No. It is not time for you."

"Honest, I know I could do it now."

"There are two kinds of students that the gods give me. One kind they dump on me like a bushel of potatoes. I do not like potatoes, and the potatoes they do not ever seem to have great affection for me, but I take them and teach them to kill patients. The other kind—they are very few!—they seem for some reason that is not at all clear to me to wish a liddle bit to become scientists, to work with bugs and make mistakes. Those, ah, those, I seize them, I denounce them, I teach them right away the ultimate lesson of science, which is to wait and doubt. Of the potatoes, I demand nothing; of the foolish ones like you, who think I could teach them something, I demand everything. No. You are too young. Come back next year."

"But honestly, with my chemistry—"

"Have you taken physical chemistry?"

"No, sir, but I did pretty well in organic."

"Organic chemistry! Puzzle chemistry! Stink chemistry! Drug-store chemistry! Physical chemistry is power, it is exactness, it is life. But organic chemistry—that is a trade for pot-washers. No. You are too young. Come back in a year."

Gottlieb was absolute. His talon fingers waved Martin to the door, and the boy hastened out, not daring to argue. He slunk off in misery. On the campus he met that jovial historian of chemistry, Encore Edwards, and begged, "Say, Professor, tell me, is there any value for a doctor in organic chemistry?"

"Value? Why, it seeks the drugs that allay pain! It produces the paint that slicks up your house, it dyes your sweetheart's dress—and maybe, in these degenerate days, her cherry

lips! Who the dickens has been talking scandal about my organic chemistry?"

"Nobody. I was just wondering," Martin complained, and he drifted to the College Inn where, in an injured and melancholy manner, he devoured an enormous banana-split and a bar of almond chocolate, as he meditated:

"I want to take bacteriology. I want to get down to the bottom of this disease stuff. I'll learn some physical chemistry. I'll show old Gottlieb, damn him! Some day I'll discover the germ of cancer or something, and then he'll look foolish in the face! . . . Oh, Lord, I hope I won't take sick, first time I go into the dissecting-room. . . . I want to take bacteriology—now!"

He recalled Gottlieb's sardonic face; he felt and feared his quality of dynamic hatred. Then he remembered the wrinkles, and he saw Max Gottlieb not as a genius but as a man who had headaches, who became agonizingly tired, who could be loved.

"I wonder if Encore Edwards knows as much as I thought he did? What is Truth?" he puzzled.

IV

Martin was jumpy on his first day of dissecting. He could not look at the inhumanly stiff faces of the starveling gray men lying on the wooden tables. But they were so impersonal, these lost old men, that in two days he was, like the other medics, calling them "Billy" and "Ike" and "the Parson," and regarding them as he had regarded animals in biology. The dissecting-room itself was impersonal: hard cement floor, walls of hard plaster between wire-glass windows. Martin detested the reek of formaldehyde; that and some dreadful subtle other odor seemed to cling about him outside the dissecting-room; but he smoked cigarettes to forget it, and in a week he was exploring arteries with youthful and altogether unholy joy.

His dissecting partner was the Reverend Ira Hinkley, known to the class by a similar but different name.

Ira was going to be a medical missionary. He was a man of twenty-nine, a graduate of Pottsburg Christian College and of the Sanctification Bible and Missions School. He had played football; he was as strong and nearly as large as a

steer, and no steer ever bellowed more enormously. He was a bright and happy Christian, a romping optimist who laughed away sin and doubt, a joyful Puritan who with annoying virility preached the doctrine of his tiny sect, the Sanctification Brotherhood, that to have a beautiful church was almost as damnable as the debaucheries of card-playing.

Martin found himself viewing "Billy," their cadaver—an undersized, blotchy old man with a horrible little red beard on his petrified, vealy face—as a machine, fascinating, complex, beautiful, but a machine. It damaged his already feeble belief in man's divinity and immortality. He might have kept his doubts to himself, revolving them slowly as he dissected out the nerves of the mangled upper arm, but Ira Hinkley would not let him alone. Ira believed that he could bring even medical students to bliss, which, to Ira, meant singing extraordinarily long and unlovely hymns in a chapel of the Sanctification Brotherhood.

"Mart, my son," he roared, "do you realize that in this, what some might call a sordid task, we are learning things that will enable us to heal the bodies and comfort the souls of countless lost unhappy folks?"

"Huh! Souls. I haven't found one yet in old Billy. Honest, do you believe that junk?"

Ira clenched his fist and scowled, then belched with laughter, slapped Martin distressingly on the back, and clamored, "Brother, you've got to do better than that to get Ira's goat! You think you've got a lot of these fancy Modern Doubts. You haven't—you've only got indigestion. What you need is exercise and faith. Come on over to the Y. M. C. A. and I'll take you for a swim and pray with you. Why, you poor skinny little agnostic, here you have a chance to see the Almighty's handiwork, and all you grab out of it is a feeling that you're real smart. Buck up, young Arrowsmith. You don't know how funny you are, to a fellow that's got a serene faith!"

To the delight of Clif Clawson, the class jester, who worked at the next table, Ira chucked Martin in the ribs, patted him, very painfully, upon the head, and amiably resumed work, while Martin danced with irritation.