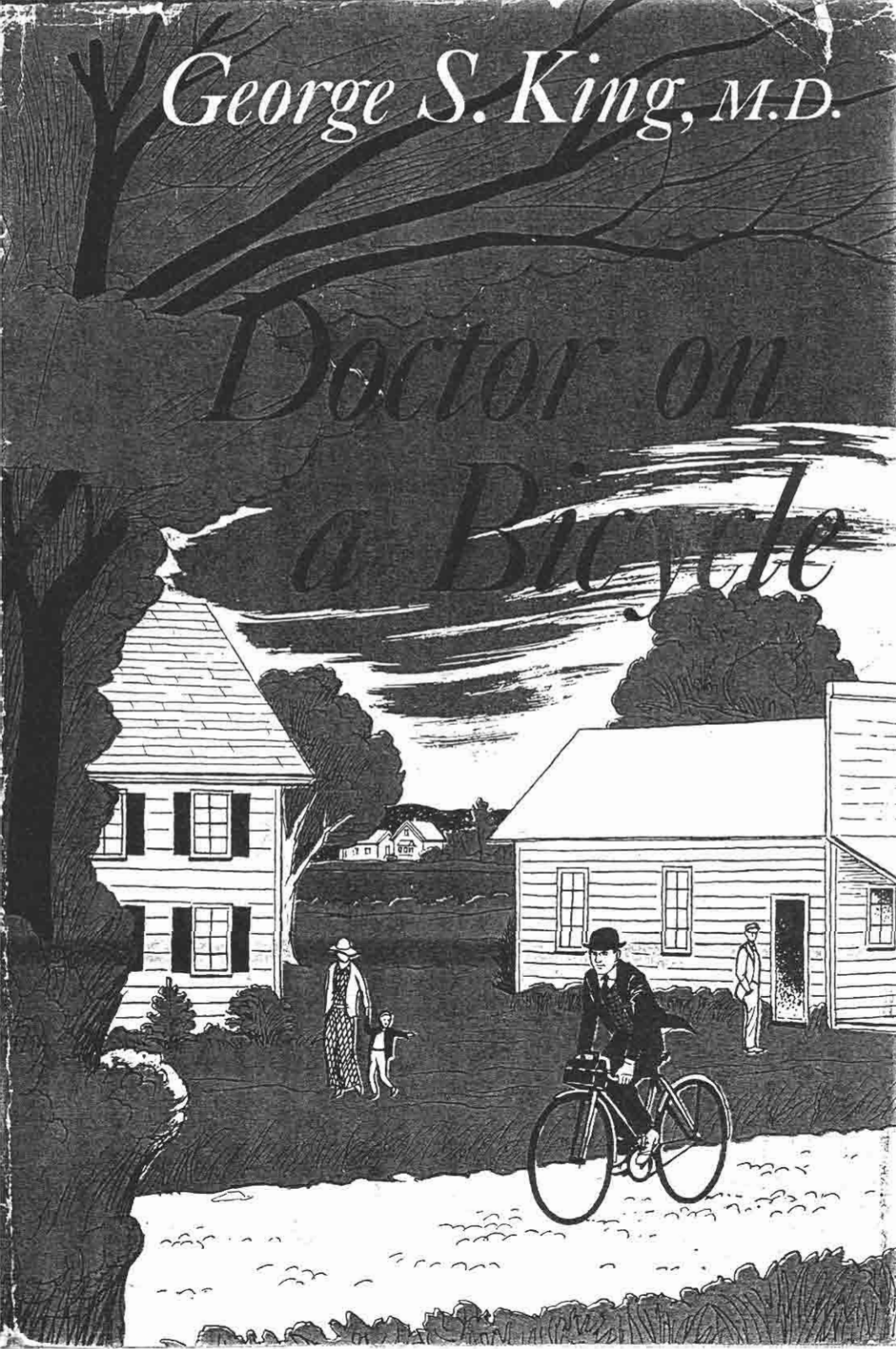


George S. King, M.D.

*Doctor on
a Bicycle*



It occurs to me as I write that the combination of Captain Les Wicks, the Great South Bay, and I formed an Unholy Trinity, for let the three but get together and, by some mysterious alchemy, we managed to touch off an unexpected chain of events, usually with serio-comic overtones.

During the winter months I used to maintain a shack for duck shooting on Little Fire Island, now West Island, and this we had to reach by boat when the bay was free of ice, or by ice scooter when it was frozen over.

One beautiful moonlight night in December when the thermometer was way below zero, Captain Wicks and I set out by scooter for the five-mile sail to our shack, so as to be on hand for the early morning flight. Incidentally, Captain Wicks was one of the best scooter men and duck hunters in the area. Normally, we would have started earlier, but I had been kept busy with patients until a late hour.

Just before we left, Les's mother gave us a red-hot pan of baked beans wrapped in many layers of newspaper. This we placed under the stern sheets, hoisted our sail, and, with our ice hooks as steering gear, started for the

were swelling, my face was bloated, and I itched like mad. I began to scratch too.

Somehow we managed to tie up at the dock, call for transportation, and get to my office for treatment. Then we went to bed for two days.

All the diphtheria patients recovered, and so, for that matter, did we. But diphtheria antitoxin being the unrefined stuff it was in those days, many a time after that I took my chances rather than dose myself again and risk ending up the gruesome mess I had been that day.

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island. The wind was sharp, hard northwest. Each of us wore a greatcoat and hip boots over two pairs of trousers and several pairs of socks. We thought that with the wind we could make the five miles in about seven minutes.

We were skimming along at a mile-a-minute clip when suddenly dead ahead we sighted a patch of black ice. We hadn't a chance to spill our sail, to turn, or to reduce speed. Les yelled, "Hang on!" and the scooter crashed into the black ice, which was really only skim ice over a hole.

Les had stuttered dreadfully all his life. Now, as we struck the ice and the scooter dove in headfirst, he shouted, "Ju-ju-jump over!" and we both plunged into the icy hole, clinging to the cockpit, combing out the scooter with one hand and threshing at the ice with our ice picks.

It was a matter of seconds: minutes would have meant death. Les leaped to the nose of the scooter, reached for a hold on the solid ice with pick and roared, "Give her a shove!" as he braced his feet against the scooter. Then he pulled on his ice pick, slid to the strong ice, yelled to me to hang on, and heaved the nose of the scooter onto the ice. Giving me a hand, he yanked me up with him.

Together we hauled on the scooter's painter and slid it up on the ice, allowing the water to run over her stern. Then we turned the scooter on edge to rid her of all the water. Les warned me to look out for the beans, and I grabbed the pan covered with wet paper as we righted the scooter.

We shed our outer coats, frozen so stiff we could not use our arms, and they immediately froze to the surface of the ice. We left them, jumped into the scooter, trimmed in the frozen, board-like sail, and were off as if shot from

a cannon. We ran the scooter on the beach, raced to the cabin, lighted a wood fire in the stove. The stovepipe was red hot in almost no time. Then we stripped to the skin. When I looked at my watch, I saw that just twenty minutes had elapsed since our start.

Naked as two savages, and sweating from every pore, we placed a huge pot of coffee on the stove to boil. Then Les unwrapped the beans, which, incredible though it may seem, were untouched by water and still too hot to eat from the pan. When the coffee was ready, we ate beans and swilled coffee for about an hour, then turned into our bunks wrapped only in our horse blankets, and slept until daylight when we went out to our blinds and had a good morning's shoot.

On our return trip to the mainland, we stopped at the thin ice hole, which by daylight made us wonder how we had been able to escape. Our outer coats that we had left on the ice were so tightly frozen that we had to chop them loose. We solemnly agreed that we had had a close call.

At home, other duck hunters who heard our experience merely grunted: "A wonder you two damn fools didn't drown. No one with a grain of sense would have crossed the bay last night. God takes care of the ignorant."

God looks after the valiant, too.

This fact was amply demonstrated to me one black winter night when Captain Harry Smith of Fire Island station telephoned me that his wife, Minnie, was having a hemorrhage, and asked what he must do. Inquiry disclosed that she was actually having a miscarriage.

That night the bay was only partially frozen over, with wide areas of open water broken by jagged sheets of ice—a condition not only hazardous but impossible for cross-

ing. I had no way of getting over to the beach that night: no scooter at hand, if indeed a scooter could effect such a trip with menacing stretches of open water between the solid ice sheets, and no one to man a boat if I had had one. Nor was there any way to bring the patient to the mainland before daylight. In view of these conditions, I instructed the captain to tampon his wife: that is, to fill the vagina with cotton packed in as hard as possible.

Minnie Smith, who was a practical nurse, knew about tampons. As there was no cotton on the beach, she ripped up a quilted cotton comforter and tamponed herself with wadding that was far from sterile, afterward applying ice packs to her abdomen. At daylight, her husband and the Coast Guardsmen placed her in a scooter and with the aid of men in other scooters they steered the loose ice floes in the open water until they reached solid ice, where they set sail and were soon across the bay. I met them at the dock.

We had already prepared her sister's home for an emergency operation, a curettage. After placing her under an anesthetic, we removed the packing and the debris causing the hemorrhage. Why she did not become septic, I shall never understand.

Shakespeare wrote:

*"Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once."*

I'm confident God reasoned that Minnie Smith was just too valiant for death this time.

The isolation that might have brought death to the Captain's wife that grim night drew a panicky father from the mainland during the polio epidemic of 1916, and