

HANDS OF GOLD, FEET OF CLAY – THE HARVEY CUSHING STORY

FADE IN:

INT. YALE DORMITORY ROOM -- NIGHT

STEVE, a 22 year-old bookworm, sits at his desk reading an anatomy textbook. His leg shakes. He glances at the clock on the wall which reads 1:15 a.m. A KNOCK on the door startles him.

JOHN (O.S.)
You ready Steve?

STEVE
I've been ready.

Steve opens the door to greet JOHN, a lanky lad and NANCY, a short brunette, all in their early 20's. Together they tiptoe down the hallway to the stairwell.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Are you sure we won't get into trouble for this?

NANCY
Look... if this is going to bother you maybe you should consider Psychiatry... or Radiology

They tiptoe down the stairs.

JOHN
Aw give him a break. It's his first semester.

They reach the basement level. They creep down a dimly lit hallway. John wields a flashlight and a large iron door is upon them. He pulls a wire from his pocket.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Here Steve, make yourself useful.

He shoves the flashlight in Steve's hand and begins to pick the padlock. The flashlight beam trained on the lock quivers as Steve tries to contain his anxiety.

NANCY
You'd better work on that tremor if you want to be a Neurosurgeon.

Nancy takes the flashlight as John coaxes the lock.

JOHN
Got it!

He grabs the flashlight from Nancy and they push open the creaky door. They see a jar on a dusty shelf in the foreground of the room's musty interior. It reads: PATIENT DOROTHY R., GROSS SPECIMEN, MENINGIOMA. Huddled together they peer through the jar and they see...

JOHN (CONT'D)

The human brain!

They gawk at the grayish, wrinkled mass hovering in liquid. A large purplish growth sprouts from the side of the specimen.

NANCY

There's the tumor.

STEVE

Can we go now?

JOHN

It's amazing that he could perform these surgeries so long ago. He started it all. The father of modern neurosurgery.

NANCY

A great pioneer. Nominated for the Nobel prize in medicine thirty-three times. Look.

He points to another jar with what looks like a piece of meat with an illegible word ending with LOV carved on the smooth surface. He points to the shadows. As the flashlight scans the room they view dozens..., hundreds..., indeed thousands of labelled jars with brain tumor specimens.

INT. GYMNASIUM -- DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: Cleveland, 1886

A group of three teenagers are watching HARVEY, a handsome 17 year-old, on the uneven bars. His lithe frame rotates around the upper bar. A STOCKY GYMNAST, 18, eggs him on.

STOCKY GYMNAST

Come on Harvey! Watch your form!

He releases from the upper bar, lunges for the lower bar, and misses. He crashes down to the floor, arm extended to break his fall.

HARVEY

Ow!

STOCKY GYMNAST
Jesus! Are you all right?

HARVEY
I... think I broke my arm.

INT. GYMNASIUM -- DAY (LATER)

Harvey is laying on a mat in the corner of the gymnasium. Concerned friends hover. The stocky gymnast presses a bag of ice to his swollen forearm.

HARVEY
You didn't call for him, did you?
Please tell me you didn't call for
him?

The stocky gymnast shrugs, sheepish. Quick decisive FOOTSTEPS echo through the cavernous gym. A tall dour-faced man, 60, with a black doctor's bag approaches. He kneels, examines Harvey's forearm and tenderly begins to set the arm with a splint pulled from his bag. Harvey watches in awe.

HARVEY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I really am.

Silence.

FATHER
Harvey, I've told you a thousand times. You need to stop this foolishness. You have a great future ahead of you. You'll need your hands if you're to someday--

HARVEY
--continue our family tradition.
Yes, I know, Pa. I've heard it before.

His father completes the splint and stands up.

FATHER
Well, it think it'll heal just fine. Maybe now you'll slow down enough to get your college applications in.

STOCKY GYMNAST
(to Harvey)
Does this mean you can't make the competition next week?

Harvey's father glares at him and walks off.

INT. GRADUATION BALL -- NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: Four years later.

Wine glasses collide. Harvey's parents and brother NED, 29, with a receding hairline, toast in the Hall filled with dozens of tables at which are seated proud parents and their progeny. A banner reads: CONGRATULATIONS YALE CLASS OF 1891.

FATHER

To Harvey, who would have studied
baseball and tennis if he could.

Harvey laughs good-naturedly with his family. The band begins to play. He looks over at a neighboring table where KATE, an attractive young woman, sits with her family. Their eyes meet. His parents exchange knowing glances.

HARVEY

Excuse me.

He gets up from the table and walks over to Kate.

HARVEY (CONT'D)

May I have this dance, Kate?

She sparkles and offers her hand. He claims it and leads her to the dance floor which is already filling with couples. Harvey and Kate glide about the floor.

KATE

Have you decided yet?

HARVEY

I start in September. I wish I
could be sure I'm making the right
choice.

KATE

Your father and Ned are tickled
pink.

HARVEY

The problem with following in their
footsteps is that my feet are a bit
smaller.

KATE

But undoubtedly more agile. I'm
sure you'll do us all proud.

He SPINS her like a top as she giggles.

EXT. BOSTON STREET -- DAY

The SPINNING WHEELS of a horse-drawn carriage slow as it passes a stately edifice with huge white pillars at the front. The elderly CARRIAGE DRIVER points a finger.

CARRIAGE DRIVER
There's Ha'vard Medical School

Harvey peers out the window. A few blocks later the carriage stops in front of a dilapidated boarding house.

CARRIAGE DRIVER (CONT'D)
And here's your mansion. Good luck
Doc.

Harvey nods to the driver, pays him his fare and exits the carriage with his two suitcases. He knocks at the door and a rotund middle-aged LANDLADY opens it.

LANDLADY
Well come along now I haven't got
all day.

She ambles up the narrow flight of stairs in the foyer. Harvey struggles after her as he drags his suitcases.

LANDLADY (CONT'D)
Here's your room.

She flings open a door to reveal a small room with a bed, a desk and an EMPTY BOOKCASE. A prison cell would look more lavish.

LANDLADY (CONT'D)
The bathroom is across the hall.
I've got three rules: no parties,
no women... and pay your rent on
time.

She bustles out. Harvey places his suitcases on the bed and slumps at the desk. He wipes a layer of dust away with his hand. He stares into space, sighs, then lights a cigarette.

EXT/INT. HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL -- DAY

Harvey hesitates, then climbs the stairs with the crowd of new students to enter the main building. They file into the "ether dome", a large surgical amphitheater. A slightly balding, heavily-moustached PROFESSOR WARREN, 50, addresses the students.

PROFESSOR WARREN
Welcome to Harvard Medical School
founded over a century ago. Many
of you will go on to distinguished

careers and become leaders in
medicine. Your first instruction
will be of a historical bent.

AMORY, a classmate with piercing eyes sitting next to
Harvey pretends to yawn. He extends his hand which Harvey
shakes.

AMORY
(whispering)
Amory Codman.

HARVEY
Harvey Cushing.

PROFESSOR WARREN
Ether. An unpredictable,
volatile, dangerous gas. Like
fire, it can be harnessed for great
good, or it can destroy life. In
1844, less than 50 years ago, my
grandfather Dr. John Warren
successfully removed a tumor from
the neck of a patient. The patient
felt no pain. Why? Because Dr.
William T. G. Morton, a dentist
administered ether, to the patient.
And thus the field of surgical
anesthesia was born in this very
theater, no less.

He waves his hand expansively. From the back of the room a
Southern drawl is barely heard.

DISSENTING STUDENT (O.S.)
Now that's a load of horse crap if
I've ever heard one.

A ripple of LAUGHTER.

PROFESSOR WARREN
What was that?

The DISSENTING STUDENT raises his hand.

DISSENTING STUDENT
Pardon me Professor Warren, but
isn't it true that Dr. Crawford
Long successfully performed surgery
with ether 2 years before that?

Professor Warren fiddles with his tie. The students are
all ears.

PROFESSOR WARREN

Well, er, there are some vague
unsubstantiated reports of
experimentation with various gases-

DISSENTING STUDENT
Dr. Long removed a neck tumor from
a James Venable of Jefferson,
Georgia.

PROFESSOR WARREN
Even if that were true, the fact
remains that his work has not been
published and that Dr. Morton and
my grandfather performed the first
public demonstration of the use of
ether.

He pauses, irritation giving way to curiosity.

PROFESSOR WARREN (CONT'D)
Where do you get this rumor anyway?

DISSENTING STUDENT
Sir, my grandfather was the patient
Dr. Long operated on.

EXT. HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL -- DAY

Harvey runs up the stairs to the Medical school. Amory
greeted him at the top of the stairs.

AMORY
Harvey, Dr. Porter is down a
student for the next week. He
wants you to fill in.

HARVEY
But I've never given ether before.

AMORY
That's why they call it medical
school. Besides, you're the only
one free on the schedule.

HARVEY
When do I start?

AMORY
He has a case right now!

A bead of sweat glistens on Harvey's furrowed brow.

INT. HARVARD SURGICAL THEATER -- DAY

Amory grabs Harvey by the arm and pushes him into an anteroom adjoining the amphitheater. He points to an unkempt woman writhing in pain on a stretcher. Bent over the patient is DR. PORTER, rugged, with graying hair. He points to a prominent mass protruding from the site of her belly button.

DR. PORTER

She has a herniated segment of gut that is now strangulated.

He turns to whisper to Harvey.

DR. PORTER (CONT'D)

If we don't operate now her bowels will die... and so will she.

As an ASSISTANT wheels the patient into the large auditorium, Dr. Porter scrubs his hands at a nearby sink. Amory pulls Harvey aside.

AMORY

It's as easy as pie. If she moves during the operation give her more ether. If her breathing slows down too much you hold the gas. Good luck. I'm late to the clinic.

Harvey walks to the center of the theater where the patient lies bathed in the sunlight from the skylight in the dome. The assistant douses a sponge with ether and hands it to him. Harvey hesitantly places it over the woman's face. Her breathing slows. Dr. Porter approaches the students gaping in the seats.

He takes the scalpel from the assistant with his bare hands. Cuts open abdomen. Black, gangrenous intestines floating in pus pop out. A moment later the patient suddenly raises her head, sputtering. Vomit spews everywhere, including Harvey's face. Students in the front row cover their noses to shield from the putrid blend of gangrene and bile.

DR. PORTER

More ether! More ether!

Harvey tightens his grip on the sponge. And the patient. The assistant rushes to help. The patient slumps back to the table. The assistant feels for a pulse in the neck.

ASSISTANT

Pulse is fading fast Dr. Porter.

The patient exhales one last, long breath.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
She's... she's gone.

DR. PORTER
Damn it! Damn it. DAMN IT!

Harvey takes a step back, aghast. He stares at the woman's lifeless face. Up at the silent onlookers in the stands. A frowning onlooker slowly SHAKES HIS HEAD. Harvey glances at the dead woman again. He swivels and flees from the theater. And from the building.

EXT. BOSTON STREET -- NIGHT

Harvey is slumped on a bench overcome with guilt and shame. Raindrops, like his world, fall around him. Dried vomit washes from his face. A few couples strolling arm in arm rush for cover. Harvey rises and slouches down the deserted Boston streets.

EXT. DR. PORTER'S HOME -- NIGHT

Harvey hesitates in front a door of a large brick home. He knocks on the door. An immaculate BUTLER opens the door and scrutinizes the sodden Harvey. He frowns disapprovingly.

INT. STUDY OF DR. PORTER'S HOME -- NIGHT

Dr. Porter sits in his dressing gown as he chats with Harvey.

DR. PORTER
Well you're a sight for sore eyes.
After you bolted like a rabbit--

HARVEY
Sir, I've decided to quit medicine.
I... just don't think I'm cut out.

DR. PORTER
Nonsense Harvey, you are a talented student. Your great-grandfather, grandfather, father, and brother all practiced medicine. It's in your blood.

HARVEY
The patient today--

DR. PORTER
Look, patients die under ether all the time. But we can relieve much suffering with surgery which just was not possible 50 years ago.

HARVEY

How do you deal with it?

Dr. Porter lights a cigar and leans back in his chair.

DR. PORTER

Losing a patient never gets any easier, but we've got a great responsibility, a duty, to strive to relieve human suffering. And we should use our mistakes to... make us better.

Harvey nods. Dr. Porter puffs.

DR. PORTER (CONT'D)

Now go get some rest. I have three cases tomorrow and expect you there bright and early.

HARVEY

Thank you Dr. Porter.

Harvey rises to leave. The butler ushers him out.

DR. PORTER

By the way Harvey, if it makes you feel any better, your brother Ned had the same doubts when he came to my office several years ago.

EXT. BOSTON TENNIS COURT -- DAY

Harvey and Amory are playing a heated game of tennis.

AMORY

So how was your week?

Harvey has a look of disgust on his face.

HARVEY

Well, I had four ether deaths... the gallbladder died of sepsis... and the tumor last week from who knows what.

He punctuates each disaster with a WHACK of the ball.

AMORY

I beat you. I had five ether deaths.

HARVEY

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For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at
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