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MESSENGER

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A YOUNG TREE

I planted a young tree today,
A pliant, slender sapling, not as tall
As you or I.
I've watched it since a gust of summer bore
A whirling seed to the old wall
Across the way,
Where sprang a new life, all its own.
I shielded it when but inch-high;—
How sturdy it has grown,
With promise of a strong maturity
When its progenitors are seen no more.
For these great maples, stalwart friends of mine,
And of my father, and his father too,
Must pass ere long—tho' haply not so soon
As he who loves them.

Never friends more true,

Or wiser, who so readily divine
My mood, my need, and so attune
Their voices, and their quiet ministries.
Hail, gallant trees,
Whose leaves in summer murmuring good will—
Thro' whom the winds in autumn whistling shrill—
Have soothed, or stirred me!
How many winter mornings I have read
Against the sky your story there
Inscribed in lacing boughs—your ideographs
As old as China's own—perhaps as rare
Records of men and manners long since dead.
Yet not alone of these;—
Yours is the deathless epic of the trees.
Tho' for a while it dwell on glories past,
Soon its recurrent strain
Changes again;
The slow and sombre measure may not last.
For April writes new cantos, and her brush
Touches the characters with red and gold.
Thro' the new motif sounds an eager rush
Of soaring wings.
The tracings 'gainst the sky
Grow dim and blurred with blossoms deitly drawn,
Fresh fragrant things
Imposed upon the old.
Until in one warm glowing golden dawn
I find the poem hid in leafy secrecy.
I planted a young tree today—
A tree to trace against a fadeless blue,
With growing branches, more of the brave lay
Which blends the old and new.
I shall not read its lines,
But I have set it here that there may be
In the great epic neither pause nor break,
While the wind blows, while the sun shines,—
That for my maples' sake
The strain may last throughout another century.

John Mills Gilbert

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SNOWFALL

There was dread on the face of the sun as it struck the sharp edge of the Sierras. A bright red flood spread along the ridge, glutting it. Then the sun fell dead on the other side and shadows began to mourn in the deep canyons. A chill wind frightened the aspen trees in the creek bottom and the more timid leaves dropped into the easy oblivion of the first to fall. The strong of twig laughed at fear of winter, saying, "Is not this just another sunset? You weak-hearted ones will be sorry when the sun smiles on the mists crouching in the long meadows. He will, in the morning, and not a cloud will dare to face him at noon-day." Quite suddenly the whispers ceased. Silence crept in on the padded feet of the winter snow-creatures. No living thing escaped the feeling of impending disaster.

Over the roof-tree of the mountains crept a thin line of cloud. North to south, the reach of the eye found only clouds. And they grew, rapidly. A squirrel somewhere on the left chattered and scolded at the sudden coldness of the blue shadows. I smelled snow that had not yet fallen.

My knees were loose hinges, were water, and my heart shook my whole body with its pounding, but I thrust harder into the head-strap and began to trot. The pace was terrific and the trail steep, but less than a mile beyond was the stand of tamarack at the foot of Crabtree Meadows. There was shelter if the storm broke during the night and there was wood for a roaring fire that would keep me warm through the worst blizzard that the upper reaches had to offer. I was tense with excitement and my nostrils flared with more than labored breathing. I felt the imminence of combat.

A little less than a half-mile from my camping place I smelled the smoke of dry tamarack, laden with the odor of a cooking fire and frying bacon. There was some regret at this, for I had not been long enough away from towns to feel the need of companions. But my legs did not seem to mind the prospect of meeting people and were hurrying of themselves. In a moment I smelled broiling venison or sheep, and four hundred paces later, coffee. This last odor was pungent. I began

to anticipate the pleasure of my evening meal. Through the gathering dark, high up on the abruptly tapering trunks of the tamaracks I could see the flickering glow of a fire. Then I heard an axe, ringing sharply against dead, pitch-hard wood. There were eight heavy thuds of my heart to each blow of the axe. The man was not chopping slowly.

To the left of the cooking fire and about twenty paces away, hock-deep in the grass of the high elevation meadows, were seven horses. Sitting on his heels beside the coals of the fire was a lean little man, who, even as I looked, reached into a sack at his side and threw a handful of salt at the rolled flank of meat spitted on a broiling rod. The horses were lean, the man was lean and he was free with the salt. These things spelled out 'home bound.' A ringing axe stroke commanded my attention still farther to the right. There stood a great man, like a redwood in the flickering glow of the mounting campfire. Legs wide apart allowed a wedge of light to fall on the log at his feet, and his bright blade was rapidly opening a gaping mouth of white wood. I noticed that his hands were so large that the heavy, two-bitted axe haft looked frail in their grasp. A blister would be of no importance on that great area. I envied him his hands.

I had stood for what seemed a long time, tasting and relishing each perfect impression. I was plunged instantly into the true atmosphere of the hills. There would be tales of the cruelty of the steep trails, a cruelty that seems the lot of the tenderfoot. These men would sound me out. I would have to prove myself at the campfire after supper. Good enough, I wanted combat of any sort.

Breathing deeply and regularly once more, I looked around for the best way to cross the stream that flowed from the meadow. I had not moved however, when, out of the tail of my eye, I saw the chopper move to the end of the log to lop off a branch. Then I saw a third man. He had been sitting in the shadow of the big man, on the ground. On a rock before him was one of his shoes. When the firelight fell once more, full upon his work, he began what must have been an interrupted pounding down of a nail in the heel. I wondered at the patience of a man, who could sit in

silence, waiting for the course of events to include light that he might see. I wondered too, what this third man looked like, for I could see nothing of his face nor of his stature. His position, cross-legged on the ground, made him more like a stump than anything else. This was perhaps the reason that I had overlooked him at the first inspection of the camp. Well, then there were three. I found my bearings, crossed the stream, and walked on into the circle of ruddy light.

"Evening, Stranger", said the little man by the cook-fire.

I nodded and smiled, "It's a damn fine evening."

The giant drove his axe into the log-end and picking up an arm load of split wood, strode toward me.

"How do, Stranger. Stopping here tonight? You better. I guess the snow's coming down right heavy afore long."

I nodded again and agreed on the matter of the snow.

The man at the fire said "Drop the pack and cool off. It looks as if it might get heavy on you."

Both men were voluble as packers go, and I surmised that they were lonely and tired of the sound of each others' voices. It was likely that I would be asked to sit in with them on a meal of their fresh meat. As I let my pack slip to the ground at my feet I noticed that the third man, who had been fixing his shoe, had not moved at the sound of voices raised in welcome. I bent over and began to dig into the sack for food.

"Better count on eating with us. We could use company."

I grinned at the speaker, the little man by the fire, and said, "Thanks,—and I could use some hot meat."

"Well, don't go far away. It'll be soon now." And he gave the browned flank another turn over the coals. The odor would have broken the resolve of a fasting priest. I walked over to the stream and washed my sweat-streaked face and dusty hands, and as I dried my face I heard "Come and stow it away!" The slightly rasping voice of the little cook sounded as sweet as any sound I can remember.

We ate as do all men who are truly hungry, without a word other than the necessary monosyllables of simple foodstuffs, followed by a purely vestigial 'please'.

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The coffee had been around three times before the eating pace began to slacken, and the fourth time the pot came to me seemed to be the signal for the talk to begin. I sensed this and asked, "How long have you boys been in?"

"We're going out to the valley for the winter. We work out of the Kern with fishing parties, but we always come on through this way to make winter in Big Pine. You see, Jum and me have our families in the valley." It was the big man who spoke, and he indicated the cook with a wave of his coffee cup when he said 'Jum'.

"I see", said I, "How was the fishing this year? I hear that the Kings was dry as the devil by the middle of August."

"No, hell no. The Kings was all right. So was the Kern. Our parties got all the fish they could carry." Again the big man spoke, but Jum contested the point.

"Well now, Walt, I guess maybe the Kings was lower this year than last. You know we was only over to the Junction once, early in the summer, and even then the banks was showing drying mud."

"Aw, you're drunk. That was year afore last we was at the Junction."

Through all of this argument the third man, whom Walt had addressed as Gab, during the meal, had not opened his mouth. Nor had he lifted his eyes from his plate from the time we had seated ourselves on the ground near the big fire. I wondered a little at his silence. He did not look stupid, yet I noticed that now he glanced up at the two who seemed about to come to blows over a trivial detail, and there was a look of dullness, almost idiocy, in the eyes.

"Well, Gab, which was it, this year or last?" I asked in a jesting tone. For answer, he turned his head to stare at me, we were sitting side by side, and in a voice that seemed to come from a throat as loose as the hair on an old, old, horse he said,—

"This."

Walt looked at Gab a moment and then said, "Don't mind him."

That broke the tension and we all laughed, forcedly, it was true, but we laughed, and that makes all the difference between a fight and a cheerful evening. I felt

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the strain go and decided to dispell it for good. Reaching into my shirt pocket, I felt a package of cigarette and brought them out into the light of the dying fire.

"Smoke, boys?" A nod passed around, followed quickly by the package of tailor-mades. I knew that these cigarettes would be welcomed by the men who had spent ten days on the trail to cross the Sierras.

"First white-paper smoke I've had for a week", came from the little cloud of grey before the face of Jum. Walt nodded agreement.

"Who's got a good yarn tonight? It's been a long time since I heard a real packer tell a story."

"All right, Red," said Walt, "we'll, have a story. And what's more you'll get a story that no one ever heard before."

"Is it a true story, Walt?" I asked.

"Did you ever hear a packer's story that wasn't true, Red? You know that we wouldn't lie to you." There was banter in Walt's voice.

"What one are you going to tell?" This came from Jum.

"The one about the Professor we took for a lion hunt six years ago. You know about that. You was along on that trip."

"Let 'er go, Walt. We're waiting." There was banter in Jum's voice too. I could not understand, but I was sure that there was some hidden significance in the way in which both introduced the yarn. I have heard hundreds of stories, told by the men of the Sierras, and I have never heard one that was true all the way to the end. There is always a great measure of the most outlandish fabrication, but it seems to be a part of all stories told near the campfire after dinner. I was ready.

Walt began as soon as he had moved to a more comfortable position away from the fire, which would quickly burst into hot flame. Jum was throwing more wood, big chunks they were, on the mound of glowing embers. A stream of sparks climbed into the maze of cloud masses above us, and died as though falling into water. I knew before we started that I was not going to like Walt's voice as he told this tale. It was hard.

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"It was six years ago this late spring that we were working out of Pinecrest on the Strawberry Lake, taking parties up to Belle Meadows and Burst Rock. Along about the middle of June a party of young and middle aged folks came out to the stable and said that they wanted to go up the South fork on a fishing trip. We don't take no parties up the River, because the way is plain and even a school teacher couldn't get lost. But this party wanted to go real bad. Finally we had to explain that there wouldn't be nothing in it for us, seeing as how there wasn't no use for a pack and saddle string. It ain't far enough to make horses worth the while.

"Well, we finally talked them out of using us for guides, that is, Jum and me. We was just two in the guide business then. Gab hadn't come on with us.

"But there was one bull-headed fellow in the party, and he just had to have a trip somewhere with guides and all the fixings. So we put up the idea of making a big trip to the thousand lake valley for lion. Now there ain't no lion in the valley, but we reckoned he would be satisfied if he got to ride a horse for a week or so each way. We could catch him plenty of fish if he got to feeling gypped.

"Well, sir, that damned professor or whatever he was nearly ruined us. He went around the hotel telling people that he was going on a big lion hunt up in the thousand lake country. The manager tried to take our skins off us for digging one of his patrons. But he hadn't no hold over us so we told him where to get off, and the next morning we got started.

"This poor gutless gent couldn't ride a stock saddle any more than I can fly, or less. And he was in misery all the way up to the rim of the valley. Well, we showed him some scenery there and hoped that it would make him forget his grouching. But not him! He fussed like Hell about the horses gait, as he called it, and about the saddle not being what he was used to.

"By this time we knew we had a real tenderfoot in the flesh. He didn't know a stinking thing about the mountains or the mountain people. But did it dawn on him that he was being tried and found not there? Not a bit. He was just perfect and nothing was right enough to suit him. Well, Jum and me decided to give him a real treat. So when we wandered into the clear-

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ing at Jim Diamond's cabin, still a day's ride from the camping place we had planned to make the turn around place, and found about five thousand sheep and six herders there for the night, we said, 'Here it shall come to be'. And it did.

"Around campfire that night we started telling stories, and as we had the herders already primed to what was up, the evening promised to be a great success if judged from the look-see of being a glory-hole of bloodthirsty lion yarns. The herders told their tales, but you know, a herder ain't got no mind, and they left a lot to be desired in the way of frightful stuff. So Jum started in.

"While he was talking. I steals away from the fire side and drags one of the herders who was nearest human, with me. We tie a couple of pack-saddles together and wrap a blanket and a sheepskin around the whole bundle. I spent about fifteen minutes of my time taking the leads out of six shells for my forty-five, and filling the ends in with wads of paper. Then he went back to the fire, to find Jum still going.

"I gave him the high-sign and he wound up in about another ten minutes of concentrated horror and bloodshed. It was awful. But how that dumb sow of a professor kept from tumbling I don't know.

"It being my turn, I tell him the old standby about the party of young girls being slayed and devoured right on this spot, in fact, right over there under that little stand of alder. Which, by the way was where the professor had laid his bed-roll. But of course we didn't know that, oh, no!

"Well, by the time I had got through a nice gentle windup, in my best style, and with appropriate uneasy looks and restlessness from the wised-up herders, the professor had his wind up. I got real serious and asked him if he had remembered to bring a revolver with him. He said oh, my yes, and trots out a little gold-plated device for stupifying flies. Somebody interrupted with the observation that it wasn't quite big enough to stop an infuriated lion. We held court and decided that he had better give it up to me in favor of my forty-five.

"Then we went to bed. That is the professor went to bed. The job was easier owing to the modesty of

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the man, who carried pyjamas to sleep in, and so had to be out of sight in the shadows beyond the range of the glow from the fire when he got into bedding. Well he finally got in and was so tired and saddle-sore that he went to sleep. Then we went to work, and laid a long pack rope across his bed, right across him. We tied the big lump of saddles and blankets that had already been fixed onto one end of the rope and Jum and me got ahold of the other end, right up close to his bed. Then I pops off the professors little gun, and it being the signal for the herders to yell like lions, the night begins to get hideous. Jum and me start running like mad and along behind us comes the 'lion'. Ker-bump! It hits the professor just as he sits up in sudden fright at the roars of a couple of hundred lions. That sets him off. And we hear the forty-five boom in the dark, and see its flash up in the air. Then it booms again, only about a hundred yards away, off in the trees in the opposite direction taken by the lion. The gun booms again, still farther away, and at the rate he was running he would be out of hearing by the time he pulled the trigger the sixth time.

"Well, we all gathered around the fire and waited for the big lion hunter to come back. But he didn't show. Finally we went to bed to sleep off the laugh.

"Next morning he was nowhere to be found. So, since it began to look as if he might have got lost, or fallen down somewhere, we started to look for him. At noon we found him. He was hard to catch, because he was plumb crazy. Wild eyed and clean out of his head. Just scared to a how-de-do lunacy. We tried all ways, but couldn't bring him out of it.

"Well, you can guess we was some scared ourselves. We had to get up some story, and it had to be good. So I went back to the resort and told them that Mr. Andrews was going to stay up in the valley for a couple of months.

"That went over all right at the hotel. So I went back. But I was held up a little and it was a good three weeks before I hit the camp again. I guess I'll let Jum tell what happened while I was gone."

Jum cleared his throat and began to speak in the perfect drawl of the story teller who is conscious of the effect of his words. He was a relief, and in sharp contrast to the clumsy Walt.

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"After Walt left, we kind of tied the crazy professor down, and made him drink a pint of whiskey, neat. Then when he passed out, we took the pyjamas off him and bundled him up in a blanket. The herders had to be moving on, but before they went I traded on one of them the professor's pretty boots and britches for the herders, shire, jeans and boots. I let the poor sap sleep where he was until morning. Then I woke him up and told him to dress in the new clothes. He looked kind of disgusted at first, then he went blank, and did everything that I told him to. For three weeks I gave him pretty hard lessons in the ways of the mountains, and I must say that he learned mighty fast, as fast as any I ever seen. Then Walt came back, and we started on up to the valley proper. We stayed there two months. In the meantime, of course, we didn't meet any barbers.

"The first thing that Walt said when he hit camp was, where's the loon? And you know, the professor was standing right in front of him, taking the grub off the horses that Walt brought back up with him. You see, Walt didn't ever expect to see Mr. Andrews, the professor, slinging the pack off a horse. But I had taught him that while he was alone together. Walt said that he wouldn't know Mr. Andrews as the same man we had taken up the trail with us.

"By the time we had been gone over two months the professor had got used to his new name. We called him Gab. Short for Gabby. It was just our little joke, because he never said anything unless it just had to be said. You see our plan had been kind of forming, to pass the professor, Gab, off as a new helper in our pack outfit. We knew we could do it so far as Gab was concerned, and so far as anyone recognizing him was concerned. But what worried us was that he might come back all of a sudden, remember who he was and everything, and get us into trouble. We weren't pleased at the idea of being present when he got his memory and brain back, but Walt said he didn't think he ever would. So we decided we had to run that one long risk.

"You see, he was making himself useful already. He got along fine with the horses from the start, and he learned to throw as good a pack rig as any packer

I ever saw. It was a mighty useful pack hand that we took back to Pinecrest that fall, and we would have been sorry to see him go.

"There were some folks waiting to see Mr. Andrews when we got back, but we said that he had left our party and gone on into the Eagle meadow country a month before. So the folks, some relatives of his, asked us about how he was, and we said he was looking fine. He was too, looking so fine and bronze-like that they didn't recognize him at a distance of six feet. He didn't seem to see them. They went on talking about how they wished he would hurry back, because they were afraid that he would be late in getting back to college and New York, where he was an instructor in archery—arcy—some damn thing. We said we were sorry that he was causing them worry, but that we thought he might have gone out the other side and down the Owens Valley.

"You know, those folks tumbled straight for that, leastwise they went away and never came back. A newspaper came to the hotel from New York, and in it was a mark around the place where it said about the tragic disappearance of the very promising new man in the field of ancient history. It went on to tell a lot of lies about the dangers of the country.

"That's about all there is to that story, ain't it Walt?"

"Well, I reckon I'll be rolling into the blankets. Yep, that's all there is to that story. The crazy professor made one of the best packers I ever saw. I didn't expect to see another like him. Why, he plans all our trips now, and organizes the parties. I don't know how he makes it cause he is dumb and dopey looking all the time I ever see him."

"That's about so. Gets so we are doing what we says, while he just stays at the resort and makes up more parties for us. All good people too. Rich, and not such awful greenhorns. Well, g'night, stranger, and g'night, Walt."

The two men suddenly appeared to be sleepy, after the fashion of men who work hard and then expect to drop into deep oblivion until daybreak. They ambled off toward the bedrolls near the other fire, Gab had not moved. Or was this Gab? What the hell was in

that yarn anyway? A lot of ridiculous stuff to amuse a middling mountaineer, the sort of tale that they knew I would like. Well damn it! I did not like it. Still they had not said this Gab was the Professor.

I stole a glance at the stupid man beside the falling fire. Even as I looked a chill breeze crept down between the fire and our faces. I felt the skin of my face draw tight in the cold of the night air. Gab looked up, full at me. There was a strange light in his eyes, his face glowed with eagerness and life. It had been stripped of its look of walking death and paralysis of spirit that had been till now. I spoke. I had to. "So it was archeology, in New York. That would be Columbia. Six years ago. Tell me why!"

"Well sir, the things I studied seemed dead beyond all recall. I knew that I needed something that these men have. I found it out that night of the lion tale. I was genuinely frightened at first, and the cold unwound me a little perhaps. But in the morning, I knew that I was to stay. How long, I do not know. It is possible that this winter is to be the last."

"Why are you going out so late in the season? It is dangerous when you have horses." I felt myself reproving him.

"I must stay for first snowfall. It is of great significance to me. That is all I can tell. Did you see the sunset this evening?"

His voice had been so low and so well modulated that I had not noticed its diminishing. Quite suddenly I felt that he was no longer looking at me. I looked at him. He was foolishly playing with his fingers! I became conscious of the nearness of someone. Then a voice came from the great bulk of Walt towering over us.

"Come on to bed, Gab. You'll catch cold. I reckon it'll snow pretty soon." This last was directed to me and with it came an air of apology for having to take care of the almost infantile Gabby.

The two left me. I sat for a time, then I rose and walked to my sleeping bag. The night, and clouds, and sleep shut down one by one.

I did not wake up of my own accord. I was dimly conscious of some little, sharp noise. It was daylight,

but no sun shone. The trees held the clouds off with weary, tortured arms. They would soon fail.

There! I heard it again. Then I knew, it was the crack and scrape of a horse shoe on a stone. The packers had pulled out.

I got up hastily and walked over to the campfire of the night before. Yes, we had been there. It was not a dream, for on the trunk of the tamarack which had served as a back rest for Walt as he told his part of the story, cut deep into the stiff winter sap, was the letter W. The tree bled. It was this wounded one that would break first and let the clouds bear down in a rush of winter. On the other side of the fire scratched on the soft dirt, was the single scrawled initial J. It would be gone after the spring freshets. It would be covered up by the first snowfall. I looked but could find no trace of the place that had borne Gab. Even as I searched the barren earth, something crossed my vision and yet left no trace on the ground. Ah, a cold deft finger touched my cheek. Another. Again—two. I looked up. Far down canyon a horse nickered. They were all right, it was a victorious sound.

I stood, face upturned. I remembered his words as I battled the chill flakes with my eyelids. I sensed the fear in the things about me. There was dead silence,—worse than silence, you knew that a stray sound would be muffled out of existence. Snowfall.

R. Frayne Chapin

TO A YOUNG POET

You with the poet's heart, and the boy's eyes,
You are a search for Beauty! Everywhere
She beckons and eludes, yet grows more fair;
Remote now as white cloud in summer skies;
Close as you rose whence spiced odours rise;
Warm as the sun-rays; vibrant as the air
Song-stirred, song-laden; leaving you aware
But of her passing in some sweet disguise.

Shall you pursue? Yes, youth's feet must be flying!
Swift to the chase bend all your crescent powers,
Yet think not to trap Beauty mid her flowers,—
Too soon, too soon, are tint and fragrance dying.

Lo, as you press to your transcendent goal,
God shall find Beauty in your climbing soul!

John Mills Gilbert

VARIATIONS UPON A NECKTIE

"Gaudy but not Neat" was what Harry had written upon the card he sent with it. A thoughtful fellow, Harry. A whole year of honeymoon spread before him, with symphonies and Alpine sports in prospect; yet there he was, sending me a necktie from Milan.

To be sure, I had had to go to the general post office and submit to scrutiny before they would deliver the package. "A dutiable parcel is held in your name. A birth certificate, passport, or record of discharge from the Army or Navy will serve for identification." What about the Marine Corps? I had asked the clerk, but he had been unresponsive. His instructions were on the printed form. And my business was my business, but he had his living to make.

Well, here was I caught in town this fine Saturday afternoon in late autumn with my own time to kill before a dinner engagement. And there was that tie, the very thing to liven up a sombre costume. Green, shot through with little orange flames: the Latin touch. At least the design was not hand painted, like the purple pansies upon plush that Professor Fuddle used to wear to his lectures on dramatics; and he had been over fifty in those days. He must have been nearer sixty, for now he was to retire. The papers said he had been granted an indefinite leave of absence so perhaps they had fired him, after all. Poor old Fuddle!

I started out toward the Avenue on my way to the Park. The recollection of Fuddle reminded me that I did need a haircut. The shop in the Murray Hill basement would be a good place to go. No crowds were ever there, even on Saturday afternoons. I found that I was next and, while the taciturn Scottish barber snipped and combed and snipped again, I succumbed to the atmosphere which has made the Murray Hill a metropolitan curiosity.

"Pardon me, sir." I started awake. "You still have a good head of hair, sir, I might say a very good head of hair. But if I may make a suggestion, I should not like to give you a drying tonic. Something with just a little oil would be advisable."

So that was how it was to be, from now on. Just a little oil. Before thirty you were too young to trust, and after thirty you were all out of touch. At thirty

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you ought to stand on top of the world. However, a little oil would be a good idea. A Scotchman ought to know.

When finally I had left the Forties, and was about to sight General Sherman's guardian angel, I encountered instead Elise, of all people. Harry's sister Elise who always asks some little favor. Elise, who unerringly picks the flaw in your armor; two flaws, if you have dressed in a hurry.

"Why hello, solitary man! Wouldn't anyone send him football tickets, either? But how you do keep in touch with the old college spirit is wonderful to me. Wherever did you get it? Let me smell."

"Nothing dry," I assured her, "just a little oily tonic."

"Now don't try fibbing to Elise. Not this near the Roaring Forties. But there was something I wanted to ask, the next time we met. There! I have it. You remember Maggie, don't you? Father's little old aunt Margaret? Of course you do. Well, she's come to stay with us until after Thanksgiving, and we're all nearly frantic trying to find things for her to do. Would you believe it, right up to last spring she was as spry as we are, and it was all your life was worth even to take her out to dinner, because after that you simply had to go on to a theatre. And one time, when Harry was with us, she began right in the middle of the last act to ask about night clubs, and how did people get into them and how late could they keep open."

"Shall we walk?" I interrupted. "I think I'll turn back your way. The Park is a bit chilly this late in the afternoon."

"So it is, and you out with no topcoat. You need someone to look after you. But where was I? Oh, yes. Last spring they said it was double pneumonia she had, though how it could have been I never did see because there she was with four doctors on her eightieth birthday, and I've heard of simply dozens and scores of young fellows no older than you who just went out cold with it, whether or no. Don't make such faces! The clock might strike and you would have to stay that way. But anyhow, since then she's had to be quiet, making hooked rugs and things, and now we've started her on a silk crazy quilt. And what

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I wanted to ask you is, will you be an angel and let her have some of your old neckties to cut up? What a pretty one that is you have on now. Did you buy it, or was it a gift? Oh, you needn't tell if you don't want to. But seriously, aunt Margaret would be so pleased. She always liked you. I'll send Jonson around for them, so you won't even have to bundle them up. Now please remember to have them ready. Bye-bye. Jonson will come for them at six."

Evidently I had agreed: what else could I do? What would you have done, smarty? And it is hard to get rid of old neckties. They stay so fresh and unfaded in spots that it seems shameful to throw them out, even after no amount of steaming will smooth them any more and the knot has grown threadbare and discolored. I was sure that some of the ties in my drawer dated back to the end of my freshman year. When the rules had gone off before the spring dance, one weekend of frenzied shopping had set me up again in life. And ever since then, birthday after Christmas and wedding upon reunion, they had gone on accumulating,

*"Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
In Vallombrosa"**

Even old razor blades present less of a problem. Usually there is a crack in the floor wide enough to swallow them. Or they can be wrapped in paper and slipped into a old tobacco tin. If the janitor's boy goes snooping that far and cuts his fingers, he has only himself to blame. Let him apply for disability compensation.

Yes, way in the bottom of the drawer would still be smouldering the tie that I used to wear on May Days as a gesture of social protest. Red neckties had been bought by the whole class in Social Science XXX. Pure and Applied Diabolism. Full of diffused sympathy with the Masses, we used to push into the very centre of things wherever a crowd was jostling about some leather-lunged liberator upon a soap box. To be sure, few of us had understood Yiddish. But at least it had always been a pleasure to flaunt the colors of revolt before agitated policemen. However, May Day in the spring after the Armistice had been a chastening

*PARADISE LOST, I, 302-3.

experience for most of us. The entire North Atlantic fleet was in harbor at the time, and the blue jackets helped us then to get back our perspective.

How long ago that all seemed.

Well, I told myself, Elise had shown me the easiest way out of one more problem in economy. Jonson would come at six. At last they were all to go away, Spitalfield and twill and seedy Mogador, draped over the arm of a Swede in livery. *Deus ex machina*, as old Fuddle would have put it.

G. Libaire

A SHORT ONE

In fashion, of course. One must always be in fashion. So that, if you're young enough not to have had time to gather mossy anecdotes, you must write an autobiography. What is there more interesting to write about than oneself? And so I sat down and remembered my childhood soul, pink and white, with a lavender smell. I suddenly remembered that I had another soul then too. It was the kind that rolls down a hill, climbs a great big rock, almost a cliff on one side. I stained it with red ink once, to be able to better pretend (yes, I know that I have split an infinitive) that it was stained with blood. Big bottles filled with water, poured from one bottle to another, to a pan.

At six I fell in love with the prettiest little girl in the village. She had an Irish name. I used to walk home with her after school. She wore pink ribbons, one little cluster of bows on each side of her hair. There was another little girl who wanted to have possession of me, but, really, even then I had some aesthetic feeling, and there was something about the perpetual drip of her skinny nose that I could not stand. After all, one cannot be possessed by everyone.

And so to bed, where we sleep for several years, 'till we wake up with some pain to find that our little soul is no longer pink and white, nor even mud (healthy mud, mind you) coloured. What was its colour? I have been trying to find out ever since. It changes so, from one day to the next. Once in a while it is washed. I have a feeling that it is growing steadily to some definite color. I wonder if destination was properly tagged in youth.

"Yes, please, another cup of tea. Three lumps please." I wonder what makes me take such quantities of sugar. "Have you ever read Beaudelaire?" I wonder what makes me talk of Beaudelaire. "Yes, his drawingroom was done in yellow." Mine is done in yellow. It is a neutral tone against which one might place any color one wished. One might place a band of scarlet. One might place grey dots and spots on it. One might paint a figure in blue on it. One might place a prayer rug against it, or an illustration cut from "La Vie Parisienne."

Have you ever eaten cheese? Of course you have. How stupid of me to ask you, but I was just considering cheeses. There's American cheese, quite sanitary, and quite without character. There's Swiss cheese, with great holes in it, through which the ghosts of the past might rush like a wind in a bad boarding house. There's Stilton cheese, compact, leaving, after one has tasted it, a strong and pleasant taste for several seconds. There's all sorts of cheeses.

Yes, after all, that's the only use in a young person writing an autobiography. Its not interesting. Most young souls are pink and white. Most young things play in the mud. "Pay your money and take your choice", says the master. He really has the laugh, for they're all pretty much alike. And all young-but-a-little-older things have chameleon souls. The interesting thing, after all, is a yellow wall that is yet to be decorated, and cheese. What kind of cheese? My dear sir, have you, after reading thus far, missed the point of the thing? I reply, what kind of cheese?

E. W. Wilcock

A CITY STREET IN SPRING

Sunbeams making ladders
All along the street,
Where there's treading, treading, treading,
Of many tired feet.

Tall the misty ladders,
High walls must be spanned;
Where their slender lines are leading
Few can understand.

Those who climb the ladders
See, beyond the street,
Paths thro' daisied meadows winding,
Waiting for their feet.

Yet few use the ladders,—
Most trudge in the dust,
Who can think but of their trudging,
Since it's trudge they must.

John Mills Gilbert

"MAD" MURDIN

"If he isn't dead, he'll wish he was when he comes to. I could take on a dozen mutts like that bozo." "Mad" Murdin spat a stream of tobacco juice on the blood-covered, broken face, and gave a final kick which shattered the ear of the unconscious man who had dared dispute his rule over the dock gang.

The dock gang had automatically stopped working and formed a ring around the two men as soon as the argument started; for nobody could give lip to the boss and get away with it. Some newcomer was always breaking up the monotony of the job by clashing with "Mad" Murdin, and the excitement thus provided was eagerly lapped up by the men; but this case was different, somehow. The boss did the job too deadly, with too much savagery; too brutally even for his sense-deadened laborers.

The stranger had as much chance with Murdin as the gang had of getting a raise; for the boss's fighting style was new to the man. He started off well, but in the first clinch, "Mad" Murdin grabbed him by the shoulders and butted him into unconsciousness. The first smash of Murdin's rock-like forehead against the face of the stranger was enough for victory, and the five that followed unnecessarily added broken bones and crushed flesh to insensibility.

"Mad" Murdin hitched up his trousers and glared his challenge to the rest of the gang. No one came to him or spoke in protest, so his triumph was complete; but the boss missed the admiration which the gang always showered on such performances. Faces were glum as the men looked down on the quiet, blood-covered figure. After all, the poor sucker was just like themselves; and who in hell was Murdin? Boss? Slave-driver? Maybe so. But licensed murderer? Hell no! Fists tightened, jaws clamped, but no action was taken; they even feared to help the injured man, for they remembered too vividly what had happened to other men who had interfered with Murdin's murderous efforts.

"Get the hell back to work, you dumb bastards! Don't stand about gaping so god-damn long! Scatter, before I give you a dose of the same!" The gang drifted slowly to the end of the dock where welders

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and chippers were ripping out the guts of an oil tanker.

"Mad" Murdin stood on a pile of lumber with his arms folded, carefully watching his gang clear the dock of the scrapped material dumped from the tanker. His anger had left him, but he was annoyed and puzzled at the peculiar attitude of his men. Murdin wasn't over-blessed with brains, and he knew it. But, then, his job didn't require brains; a lashing vocabulary, and strength and courage enough to back it were the main essentials. He was intelligent enough, however to recognize the antagonism that his last fight had raised in his men, and he cursed them for idiots.

Murdin tried to be fair; he hated injustice. And wasn't it proper to smash a man who crossed you? So the gang didn't approve of his actions! He'd show the bastards! His last opponent outweighed him by at least thirty pounds, and the gang wasn't pleased with his polishing him off! Murdin barked out sharp orders and cursed violently in an attempt to cool off his righteous indignation and sooth his damaged pride.

The boss only weighed one hundred and sixty pounds, tough as steel, and made a human dynamo by an almost maniacal fury, had ruled the yard for ten years. Temper, a blind, red, seething, killing passion was what enabled Murdin to fight his way to the leadership of the gang, and was what gave him his nickname.

A yard messenger handed Murdin a slip of paper. "Hey, youse guys," the boss yelled, "get the hell up on into the boat and clean out the holds. Make it snappy; she goes to the other side of the yard to-morrow." The men pulled on their stiff oilskins which were supposed to keep them from being soaked with the oil, which clung to the sides of the tanks and dripped steadily to the bottoms, and then they swarmed up the gangplank. Most of the men climbed down into the empty holds, and the rest stood by the hatch-ways, rope in hand, ready to pull up the muck scoured from the bottom. The boss remained on deck, leaning against the port side railing.

The chipper and welders had just finished their work, so the banterings and yells of the dock gang

(Continued on page 26)

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"Mad Murdin" (Continued from page 21)

did not have to compete with the chattering chisels and hissing gases. Bucket after bucket of gritty oil and chipped steel was hauled up and thrown into barrels or heaved to the dock below.

The gang started to work at a fast clip, glad of the change; but their pace was slowing up, at first imperceptibly, but now clearly noticeable. Murdin slouched over to the hatching to stir them up a bit, when somebody yelled, "Gas! God-damn those welders! The boys below are goners!"

The facts of the situation immediately paraded themselves in Murdin's mind. The hold of an oil tanker—welders eating up the oxygen all morning—no ventilation, not even a canvas pipe—and twelve of his men were below. "Hell!" "Mad" Murdin let out a roar of anger and challenge to the danger which threatened his gang.

"Listen, youse guys," "Mad" Murdin snapped to the six men on deck, "double up! Two men to a rope! Haul up when you get the regular signal!" One jerk on the rope meant to pull; two jerkes was an order for more slack.

Murdin tied the end of a rope around his waist, and two men rapidly played out the rope as he went down into the hold. The sight of twelve of his men sprawled out, face-down in the cold, slimy muck made him tremble with rage. To get hurt and not to be able to slash back was a new experience for the boss. If he could only grab hold of the trouble, and butt, strain, and lash out with his fists. Instead, he had to take it on the chin as though he were handcuffed.

As soon as Murdin's feet touched bottom, he seized one of the ropes which dangled from above and tied it about the middle of the nearest man. Murdin's lungs were bursting, but he knew the penalty of breathing in that hole. The men on deck were already pulling up the first man when the boss tied on the second. Then he tugged on his own rope, and he felt it tighten. Up he went, but so damned slowly! He wouldn't breath, damned if he would! But he'd have to; no; yes; oh Christ! He had to!

Our burst his pent up breath, and in poured the gas-soaked air. Murdin's lungs felt on fire, his eyes

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were wet and bulging, and his mouth dry and gritty. Fortunately, he was half way up to deck before he breathed, and the air at that level was not so poisonous. Strong hands grabbed him when he reached deck level, and his men helped him to his feet.

The fresh air revived Murdin quickly, but his chest and head felt as though flaming oil had taken the place of his blood. But this was no time for self-pity. Ten more of the gang were below, dead most likely, but what little chance they had depended on how soon they were brought up to fresh air and pullmotor assistance.

"Mad" Murdin made four more trips down the hold, each one worse than the last. The struggle had become more personal now, for Murdin's delirious mind imagined the gas to be personified in the darkness below, and he was fighting it. His mad temper lashed his tortured body into obedience. Now for the last two.

The boss was bleeding from the nose and mouth as he stumbled over the edge of the hatchway for the last trip below. He was clearly out of his head now, and he raved insanely, gushing out a continuous stream of curses against his opponent. "Huh! Lick me?" Murdin laughed foolishly. "Why, you sneaking, filthy, black bastard! Lick me? Hell! You fool! Ain't never been licked yet, 'n never will be. I'll get you this time, god-damn you!"

Down the hold he went again. A few seconds later, a feeble tug on the rope, and another man was pulled up. The other rope remained dangling slackly. A minute passed, then a minute and a half, and still no response from below. Something was wrong; Murdin was done for at last. Vainly the men pulled at his rope, but the load seemed doubled. "Hey there," one of the men at the rope called to the others, "give us a lift; the rope's caught or somethin's happened." As the men hauled up the rope, a dangling object slowly came into sight. It was "Mad" Murdin, no longer raving, his arms and legs, strained and stiff, wrapped around the body of the last man.

Matthew H. Imrie

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The author of "Penance," Gene Cullum. His name was accidentally omitted from the end of the story.