

Stabbed in the back. Betrayed by a friend to the enemy.

Years ago, ~~at~~ ^{during my days,} Camp Parsons, I'd learned all I wanted to know about The Mountaineers. ~~Since the club was organized~~ ^{its founding} in 1906 ~~it had~~ ^{the club had} been the main show, practically the whole show, of Northwest climbing. In 1934 ~~they'd~~ ^{it began offering} ~~began~~ an annual Climbing Course that ~~regularly took~~ ^{enrolled} hikers ~~right off the trail~~ ^{right off the trail} and ~~after six~~ ^{in four} months had them running up and down cliffs and glaciers. Every Silver Marmot dreamed of taking the Course and climbing Rainier and maybe, someday, Everest. But in 1940 when I tried to join the club I discovered you had to have pull to get in. The damn snobs told me, in effect, "Get away, kid, you're bothering us." Well, after Lost Ridge, ~~it didn't matter,~~ ^{who cared?} Merely to hike again was all I asked. The hell with climbing.

Those were still my sentiments. And besides, though my early hiking was ~~with~~ ^{with} gang^s of Scouts, in the fullness of anarchist maturity I ~~understood~~ ^{realized} the hills were meant to be lonesome, that marching in mobs was for children and soldiers. There were, as Monie admitted, 1500 members of The Mountaineers, 1495 more people than ~~I~~ ^{ever} wanted to see together in the wilderness at any one time. And those I'd met on trails were swaggering blowhards, lording it over creation merely because they had ice axes to brandish.

I argued, wheedled, badgered, pled. Monie was deaf. What had happened to the witch? Was it Cruiser? Had I, in fact, forced her ~~to return to the~~ ^{unwillingly to face} ~~club?~~ her own deep fear? Had I scared her? Did she now look upon me as Frankenstein did his monster?

Christ, I was no monster. I wanted no more Cruisers, ~~even~~. My humble desire was to be a plain, ordinary super-hiker.

Monie grew defensive. The Mountaineers weren't so bad. I ^{was} ~~should feel~~ ^{fortunate} ~~to~~ to have the Climbing Course available -- there wasn't another such school in America. And if it proved more than I could stomach, well, it wasn't the Army, I could walk away ^{whenever I pleased} ~~anytime~~ and nobody would come ^{running to} ~~drag me back~~ ^{husband-wife} drag me back. The experiment would be ~~very~~ cheap -- \$7 for a year's club dues and ~~four~~ four bits apiece to register in the Course. If we hung on until May, or even April, we'd learn what we wanted to know about ax and rope -- and in the bargain bag several nice little peaks.

because the faculty consisted entirely of unpaid volunteers serving on the "each one teach one" principle

She left no choice. To become a super-hiker I must endure a degrading, humiliating, nauseating spring. But then we'd quit the Course and club and the summer would be free and beautiful, and all future summers.

On a February evening Betty and I glumly ascended the stairway from Pike Street, Seattle's "uptown skidroad," lined with ^{jukebox-jumping} taverns and crowded by sailors on shore leave, to the clubrooms of The Mountaineers. I remembered the shabby ~~old~~ building from when it housed the Socialist Workers Party, whose meetings I'd ^{occasionally} attended during my ^{evolution beyond} ~~progress from~~ Capitalism through communism to anarchism. Their headquarters had prominently displayed a portrait of Leon Trotsky. He'd been assassinated in Mexico with an ice ax. When climbers moved in next door the ~~Trotskyites~~ ^{decided} Trotskyites ^{rational} ~~realized~~ if ever there was a time to be paranoid this was it, and moved out.

At the top of the stairs our progress was halted by a crush of humanity. The Climbing Course had begun, for all the good it did us outsiders jamming the corridor. Singly and in bunches prospective climbers gave up, disgusted, and eventually we were near enough the door to catch scattered words from inside.

The following week we came early and were among the lucky hundred to get seats. Others squatted on the floor at the lecturer's feet and stood belly-to-back in the rear of the hall. The cloakroom was a solid mass of students who could hear but not see -- except those who'd climbed the enclosing half-wall to sit on the hat shelf and peer over the top.

The temperature shot to 90° and the humidity to 100 percent. The 200-odd sweating bodies and their coughing and wheezing and foot-shuffling and chair-rattling drowned the lecturer. He raised his voice. Windows were opened to prevent an epidemic of fainting. Horn honks and jukebox blare and ~~blare~~ ^{brawlings} of sailors and ~~blare~~ ^{barfings} of winos submerged his shouts. ^{from the street below}

So ~~this~~ was the legendary Climbing Course. The Trotskyites put on a better performance. If The Mountaineers couldn't stage a proper lecture, how could they conquer peaks?

But they did, routinely, no doubt about that. They'd perfected some mysterious formula. A dark suspicion: were these city hardships deliberately planned as a preliminary test of fortitude? Far worse rigors awaited when school moved to the mountains. I knew from Monie that few of us beginners would last the spring. I sized up my classmates, the enemies. There were teenagers, fresh from the Scouts, as full of beans as ~~I was~~ at Parsons. And sturdy youths in their 20s who'd no doubt been all-conference in football ~~or track~~ ^{or track}. And men in their 30s whose eyes showed they'd been tested by fire and proved fearless. And grizzled veterans of the hills in their 40s who looked down upon the youngsters with the ~~smile~~ ^{tolerant, confident} smile of experience. ~~and~~ ^{the} ~~women~~ ^{females}, who constituted a ~~quarter~~ ^{quarter or} third of the enrollment, ~~they~~ were obviously Amazons. Athletes all -- not a one (except Betty) I could whip in a fair fight.

The leaders! Climbing Committee Chairman Cam was close to 7 feet tall, lean and agile as a spider, and took the clubroom confusion in easy unsweating stride, as he surely had countless Toths and Cruisers, though he ~~apparently~~ was only ~~about~~ 30 or so. Among the lecturers were the stars of Monie's epics, the men who'd created the Climbing Course and during the previous dozen ^{-odd} years brought Northwest alpinism from ^{the level of} bushwacking and ^{snow-plodding and} scrambling to international respectability, ^{conquering} ~~conquering~~ virgin summits in the ~~North~~ Cascades and ~~the~~ pioneering in other ranges of western America and Canada -- Lloyd of Howser Spire, Burge of Sir Donald, ~~the~~ George of the Grand Teton, Jack of Challenger, Ome of Liberty Ridge on Rainier, Bill of Inspiration, Jim of Forbidden, Wolf of Ptarmigan Ridge on Rainier, and a dozen more. To be in the same room was to feel the chill of bleak glaciers and windy crags. I could no more keep pace with such heroes than follow Mallory into a cloud on Everest.

The first practice trip was set for Sunday, March 21. Then must I demonstrate other prowess than sitting in a chair without fainting. Among the throng of ~~many~~ athletes, naked to the cold gaze of demigods, I'd again suffer humiliations of childhood, when I'd been the slowest runner, the lowest jumper, the most ball-dropping outfielder and basket-missing guard, I'd be revealed as the lousiest climber (but one) in the world. And no matter I didn't want to be a climber.

On schedule the mob gathered at Camp Long in West Seattle to

ascend Monitor Rock, a "mountain" designed and built by Clark Schurman, ~~he~~ ^{over the} chief guide on Rainier. ^{Puget Sound} A hurricane was blowing and in minutes everyone was soaked to the skin and frailer students were collapsing from exposure. To avoid wiping out the whole school before ever leaving the city the leaders called off the practice.

The following Sunday a diminished crowd returned in sunshine. We learned to tie the bowline-on-a-bight and the butterfly, to set up sitting-hip and standing-shoulder belays, to use three-point suspension, move rhythmically in balance, climb with the eyes, test holds. We traversed a ledge and stemmed a chimney and laybacked a crack and bearhugged a buttress.

My instructor shocked me by saying I showed promise. How was this possible, my 22-year-old body wasted by disease and bad habits and nothing to brag about to start with? Well, she wasn't any great shakes as a climber and her compliments meant little. Yet it was true that in steamy lecture hall and stormy city park I'd outlasted a quarter of the original contestants. But then, so had Betty.

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The next weekend we left the city, if not the lowlands, for the natural rock of Little Si, a miniature peak ~~plucked steep on one side by the Puget Glacier~~. Most of the expected volunteer faculty had looked out bedroom windows that morning to blustering winds and driving rain and gone back to sleep; I was roped to two cowering girls, Betty to two chattering boys, the six of us with a single instructor who devoted himself solely to preventing our destruction. All 150-odd students and teachers

500 feet above the Snoqualmie River a mile from the town of North Bend, on the Snoqualmie Pass highway.

were swarming up muddy, rubbly gullies and water-streaming walls held together by moss. Warning cries were continuous: "ROCK! ROCK! ROCK!" Bullets and grapeshot and cannonballs whirred and whined and thudded. We learned nothing about climbing, lots about dodging.

On the summit the leaders rigged lines for that traditional symbol of mountain-climbing, the free flight down the rope. Most students chose the 15-foot chicken rappel, belayed from the top. ~~Good enough for the hills~~

~~of Betty, [unclear]~~ ^{Not brave enough to be a coward} I lined up with aspiring heroes for the 40-foot cliff. I watched two kids go ^{yelling and laughing} ~~gleefully~~ over the brink unbelayed. Their ~~silent,~~ ^{silent,} white-faced buddy wrapped himself in the rope, took a timid step down, braced boots against the wall, leaned slowly-slowly back-back-back into space — and lost his nerve, let go of the rope, clutched the edge, and was barely saved from death by helping hands. ~~He~~ ^{He} ~~humbly~~ ^{humbly} requested a belay and securely if ignobly dulfersitized down, and ~~passed the initiation~~

The hell with heroism. I wouldn't be playing this game long anyway. Stealing myself against sneers

Attending lectures became quite comfortable, many students having ended their careers on Monitor Rock, more on Little Si. The Elementary Course concluded with the final exam and Chairman Cam personally congratulated me for scoring the highest grade. Gratifying, to be sure, yet I'd have preferred to remain obscure; book-learning made a good bluff in the classroom but not on the cliffs and I'd seen enough of the competition to know I was a certain loser. Still, the Intermediate Course lectures started and Betty and I had left in our wake better than half the February multitude. Perhaps persistence was a fair substitute for skill.

The Elementary Course had progressed from confusion to chaos. The Intermediate deteriorated from there. Lecturers who were supposed to

talk an hour delivered perfunctory 10-minute statements. Those allotted a half-hour filibustered to midnight. ~~Some, perhaps, continuing to overstay their welcome,~~
~~Others didn't show up at all;~~ embarrassed Cam grimly filled the gaps as best he could.

Never mind, at last we were headed for a real mountain, ^{and snowy} McClellan's Butte, ^{rising a vertical mile} ~~rising steeply~~ above the Snoqualmie Pass highway. There we'd master the ice ^{then} ax and Betty and I could flee the madhouse. But at the lecture session two days short of the scheduled departure Cam announced the practice was postponed because of avalanche danger. Next week a second postponement, and next week the trip was canceled. Nobody could recall ^{spring} snows as heavy as those ~~of the~~ ~~of~~ 1948. We'd have to stick around a bit longer.

While waiting we spent a Sunday on concrete walls of Duwamish Piers, ^{in south Seattle} relic of an old bridge over the Duwamish River, practicing rappelling, ascending a free-hanging rope on prusik knots, being rescued from a "crevasse" by bilgeri technique, holding falls with the newfangled dynamic belay which Limber Jim and other Mountain Troopers had brought home from the war.

Another suburban practice, ~~known as~~ tennis-shoe climbing on Glacier Boulder, also called Big Rock, was canceled when subdividers, now swarming all over the outskirts of Seattle ~~and halfway to Everett and Tacoma~~, invaded the fields and forests and surrounded the granite erratic with boxes; the homeowner who inherited the boulder, renamed Wedgewood Rock, landscaped the base and objected to hooligans trampling his flowers.

Impatient and frustrated, on Sunday, May 16, no Course trip scheduled, Betty and I skied from Snoqualmie Pass up Commonwealth Basin to the foot of Red. We viewed nearby Lundin, where in seven days we'd finally get into

the ax business -- if that practice wasn't canceled too, as seemed possible; from throughout the white basin came ominous rumbles.

Chairman Cam, however, fed up with the way his school was disintegrating, defiantly declared at the next lecture that the trip was on come hell or high water, and the faint of heart had better head for the ~~the~~ bunkers.

At 6:30 in the dark morning of May 23 Betty and I arrived at Snoqualmie Pass and looked around for Mountaineers. None ~~was~~ to be seen. ~~There were~~ We knew the route from ~~the previous trip~~ ^{last Sunday} and climbed the 10-foot snow wall beside the highway ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~There was~~ found the start of ~~the~~ ^{the} mob-tromped trench ~~and~~ ^{which we} followed ~~it~~ up the spur ridge of Guya ^{and} around the corner beneath cliffs into Commonwealth Basin. ~~At~~ ^{At} 7:30 -- exactly the announced hour of assembly -- ~~we~~ reached the city of tents and tarps where most of the 100-odd students and instructors had camped overnight.

The place was deserted. Betty and I were alone. The Mountaineers at last manage to get into real mountains and they ditch us! Bastards! Angrily we continued along the ~~the~~ trench, hurrying, and near the base of the Lundin Chute broke out of forest and saw the ant-mass above.

Atop a steep rise Chairman Cam waited -- for a friendly hello, I supposed, perhaps even to apologize to his star examination writer. No. I couldn't recognize the noble Leader of Leaders in this glowering fiend. He sternly commanded us to slide right back down the slope, and when going fast enough, to roll onto stomach, dig in toes and ax pick, and thus perform a self-arrest. We obeyed meekly, again climbed the slope -- and he acidly dissected our mistakes and ordered us down again. Once more wearily to the top and now

^{unmasked}
 the ~~beast~~ beast forced us to slide headfirst on our backs, tumbling and rolling and eating bushels of snow. How long he would have entertained himself with us I'll never know; a straggler trying to evade the roadblock diverted his attention and we stole away and joined the main group.

In assigning rope teams Tripleader Lloyd separated husbands ~~and~~ ^{and} wives -- a club policy, he explained, designed to save marriages. Betty was startled ~~but~~ ^{but} I didn't mind -- somebody would look after her and for once it wouldn't have to be me. As on Little Si, instructors were scarce and I was one of six students, on two teams, with a single teacher.

He was no ~~vicious~~ vicious Cam. Other instructors set to work on team arrests and ax belays and tedious rope-handling but he didn't bother with ~~any~~ ^{any} portion of the curriculum that hindered upward progress. Practicing ~~repeatedly~~ stepkicking and rest step exclusively, we quickly neared the uppermost rocks of 6057-foot Lundin.

"The summit's easy," said our benign boss. "Just go on up there and wait." And he glissaded down to join the ^{mass} ascent of the West Ridge, a special treat reserved for instructors.

I had to laugh. The Course was spread all over the mountain and here were we six novices, no leader in sight or sound. Well, what more could an anarchist ask? We'd escaped the mob, that was for sure. Since at the moment of abandonment I was tied to a rope-end and standing uphill from the other five, the initiative was my responsibility. Okay, what The Mountaineers have asked, through the chain of command, they'll get.

I led up the ^{final steep} snow and scrambled ^{a rock staircase} to the crest of the East Ridge. Here was one of the cheap thrills Monie had promised — the Boiler Plate, a ^{high in the sky} smooth slab ^{vast} between the ~~great~~ gulf of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River and the lesser but quite respectable gulf of Commonwealth Creek. Though the slab was comfortably wide and only moderately steep, and in tennis shoes on a dry summer day would have been a stroll, snowpatches and meltwater dribbles and tricouni-nailed boots gave the passage something of the character of ice-skating. But the exposure was nothing compared to The Tooth, much less Cruiser, and I had my orders and the Climbing Code says "Always obey the leader." Nails found niches in the slab and the final 10-foot pitch to the summit was all buckets.

Thus I completed my very first lead. That was good, very good. Better, though, was starting at the rear of the pack and despite an unjust handicap forging through to beat 100-odd athletes and heroes to the top. Best of all was having escaped the last chance of humiliation — this was freedom day for Betty and me, ^{tonight in the garret we'd be}

~~The second team~~ chickened out, ~~and~~ ^{non-Mountaineers,} we three had the summit to ourselves for a quiet hour, eating a late lunch in windless warm air, ^{of the La Bohm Gap and Dutch Miller Gap} admiring sun-rays flashing through boiling clouds, wintry-white peaks ^{area} floating on the gray sea of the fog-filled Middle Fork.

Lundin was my first — and last — alpine ascent with The Mountaineers.

I'd carried my own ice ax, ^a bought at the Coop the past week for \$12, had learned the self-arrest. I owned the tool and the technique that would have made the Graywolf Ramble a fearless romp and needed nothing more

Nobody on the second team ever had experienced exposures as they had I

a classy example of Swiss craftsmanship

scarily thin and ice-plastered

from this bunch. I was content, smug, watching the ~~big boys~~ follow Limber Jim up the West Ridge.

big boys

A solitary leader arrived via the East Ridge, saw us, and howled, "What are you doing here?"

He wouldn't listen to my explanation and cussed me out as a suicidal fool. Well, damn him and all of them! They tell you to be at camp at 7:30 and you get there at 7:30 and they've pulled a sneak. Split your ass catching up and a sadist erects a roadblock. Obey your instructor and get chewed out for following orders. They could take their high and mighty Climbing Course and shove it.

With alienated satisfaction I observed the growing confusion.

Leaders from West Ridge and East yammered back and forth, trying to maneuver the mob onto the summit. They strung a handline along the Boiler Plate and one by one ~~students~~ crept up the slab, belay ropes tangling with fixed rope. Belatedly the ~~mob~~ ^{chiefs} realized the summit couldn't hold 100-odd people and rigged a rappel down a 20-foot cliff to an avenue-ledge bypassing the Boiler Plate. Tripleleader Lloyd, Mobmaster Burge, Chairman Cam, Limber Jim, and a dozen more bigshots shouted encouragement and threats and conflicting orders in all directions and clambered around untangling ropes and grabbing distraught students about to fall to their deaths.

Teams no longer existed. It was every man for himself and to hell with ^{the} women and children. ~~There~~ ^{I feared for Betty's life but} there was nothing I could do ~~for her~~ ^{off the summit} even if I knew where she was. I saw an opening and rappelled and from below watched the amazing spectacle — athletes inching up the fixed line and inching down the rappel, whimpering and whining, hero-leaders screaming and waving

the whole Climbing Course coming
apart at the seams.

arms, Clouds darkened and a ~~bitter~~ squall of rain and freezing slush swept the mountain. I huddled in the lee of a rock with a gang of hysterical instructors.

A splendid joke, ^{a classic,} but drawn out hours past ^{happy} laughter. Not until 5 o'clock did a ^{distant} bellow announce the removal of the last ^{body} quivering ~~man~~ from the summit. That was the signal releasing a cluster of shivering instructors and students impatiently waiting to begin the 1200-foot sitting glissade of Lundin Chute, famed as among the finest cheap thrills in the Course.

When my turn came the track was deep-gouged by dozens of butts. ~~With~~ ^{through} a whoop I jumped and instantly was swiftly riding a snow cushion down dense fog, wind roaring by my ears. Faster and faster I blindly rode the groove, hollering away frustrations of the long spring and angers of the crummy day. I rocketed by faces white as snow — students (and some instructors!) who'd been too much thrilled, had arrested and crawled from the groove, and now were wondering how they ever would reach the bottom of the Chute this side of eternity. Faster! What did they know, never having slid into the Graywolf without an ax?

Down, down, down almost to the valley flat. Suddenly I was leading the pack again and stopped to see why.

Yells from far above. Yells closer down. A yell nearby, "There a Manning here?"

Suspiciously I confessed.

"They say your wife wants you."

Gone, gone, gone the exaltation of the wild ride. Naturally she

wanted me. As on Silvertip, as on the retreat from La Bohn Gap when I had to return a half-mile up the talus in the storm to pry loose the boot she'd stupidly wedged in the rocks. I hadn't seen her close-up since morning and had reverted to the freedom of Camp Parsons boyhood and now she'd spitefully ruined my glissade and shamed my name before 100-odd idiots who in years to come would guffaw whenever they remembered Manning.

Angrily I stomped back up, elbowed through drooling gawkers to the center of attention, flat on her back in pink snow, giggling and smirking, the life of the party. A leader was bandaging her side. As was perfectly normal for her at the end of a mountain day, she looked terrible.

"Where's your ax?" I asked.

She apologized with no words, merely a frightened smile.

Faces in the mob expressed an opinion of me. What the crap did they know?

I climbed to the jumbled avalanche from which she'd been excavated and fruitlessly kicked blocks of snow. No ax. Just this week I'd laid out a day-and-a-half's wages, ~~and a half day's wages~~ for that ax. Blood is cheap but axes cost \$12.

Bystanders told the story. Together with other incompetents terrified by the Chute she'd traversed to gentler slopes and slid through the fog in fits and starts. A dozen incompetents above her simultaneously gathered courage and glissaded in a bunch. Each ~~accumulated~~ ^{set in motion a snow} ~~slide~~ cushion, the cushions amalgamated, and Betty was engulfed by thundering tons of snow containing a dozen tumbling dummies and a dozen loose axes,

the entire unstable slope came loose,

one of which stabbed her in the ribs.

The ax was hopelessly lost so I went down to see about salvaging the wife.

Exclaimed a leader, "She's in shock!" (I didn't say out loud what I was thinking, "She's been in shock since she was born.")

Declared another hero, "She can't walk in this condition!" (I didn't say, "She can barely walk in any condition.")

Never consulting me, the Betty expert, they tied her to a "human toboggan," a student volunteer; his body would absorb the bumps and protect the casualty, who was blooming like she'd been elected Queen of the May. (I didn't say, "You're spoiling her. Now she'll expect a free ride down every mountain.")

I trotted along with the fast-moving mob of ghouls, hoping nobody connected me to that strange girl who in a single stroke had assured herself lasting fame, ~~as one more symbol of Mountaineer incompetence.~~

At camp they transferred her to a stretcher and at the highway into Limber Jim's notoriously hot ~~car~~ ^{Nash sedan} with a back seat that notoriously folded to make a bed. He was said by Monie to be the best rock-climber in the club. He was also a pure crazy, as was Chairman Cam, who rode along to get every possible kick from the affair. They hurtled toward the nearest hospital, in Seattle, stopping only twice — the first time for ice cream cones in North Bend (they didn't buy one for Betty), the second at the insistence of a highway cop. He, however, snapped to attention on viewing my wounded

wife and led the rest of the way, siren ~~wailing~~^{waiting}, to the delirium of Jim and Cam, who never before had legally driven ~~70~~⁷⁵ miles per hour through Sunday traffic.

The ~~stuttering~~, smoking V-8 carried me more sedately to Harborview Hospital, where Betty was being sewed up. I found Jim and Cam in the waiting room. They didn't notice my existence, were totally ~~immersed~~^{absorbed} in analyzing the day-long series of leadership errors.

Maybe they were in shock themselves, maybe that's why they broke up at every added detail of their bungling.

Cam said, "Another thing we forgot to do was count the party afterward. How do we know somebody isn't still up there in the avalanche?"

"We don't," said Jim, "But if they are we'll probably hear about it, sooner or later."

They almost fell off their chairs.

God!

24 March 1974

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Chapter ⁶/₈

A HUCKLEBERRY HERO

It was high time to quit according to plan. The lesson of Lundin was plain enough, ~~for my food~~. However, the objective of the Course's first "experience climb" was none other than the climax of the Olympic horizon I'd grown up with, the center of my Camp Parsons boyhood. For ~~the goal~~ Constance I was willing to postpone our exit a week.

No need to bother. The long cold winter was abruptly ended by a gigantic hot-air mass rolling over the Northwest and shriveling the snowpack. ^{monstrously - swollen} The Columbia River destroyed the city of Vanport, Oregon, and everywhere in the mountains rampaging streams tore out highways and forest roads. By Sunday, May 30, the only summits accessible from Seattle were around ^{these} Snoqualmie Pass. One, Chair, was chosen for a last-minute substitute experience climb.

Monie had a better idea. With four others (not including Betty, licking wounds in the garret), she and I climbed easy rock and airy snow up the east rib of Guye. She let me lead the whole way. Then we unroped to romp along the ridge to 6278-foot Snoqualmie and there sacked out ^{in bright sun} for hours, looking north to the volcanoes of Glacier and Baker, east to Chimney

Rock and Stuart, south to Rainier, and west ^{over Puget Sound lowlands} to Constance, lost forever.

Well, Snoqualmie was joy enough — and the countless Snoqualmies of the Cascades and Olympics barred to ordinary hikers but wide-open to my boots and ax, and even Betty's.

Only when heading down did we see dots of motion across Source Creek, approaching the base of Chair. Later we learned the hundred suffering souls who started hiking at dawn, hours before our smart bunch left town, straggled to the highway at midnight. So much for the mob.

Still, the next experience climb was Sluiskin, which as a hiker ^{in Rainier National Park} I'd admired from the trail; one more Mountaineer weekend would retroactively enrich my youth. Betty pooped out at Windy Gap but I made both ^{summits $\frac{1}{m}$} The Chief, a one-pitch scramble on warm rock, and The Squaw, a snow ^{plod $\frac{1}{m}$} and watched avalanches from Rainier's ice cap flow in slow clouds down mile-high Willis Wall. For once the club ran a clean, neat operation. No mob, either, just a dozen decent, jolly folk.

Over the years I'd several times ventured onto glaciers and occasionally might want to do so again; the Nisqually ^{Glacier high on slopes of Rainier} Ice Practice was worth another week. We stamped rented crampons into blue ice and hacked seracs with axes and were lowered into a genuine crevasse and "rescued" by bilgeri technique.

Now they were offering an experience climb of Adams. A cheap and easy volcano would make a fun farewell. A gale blasted the mob of 80-odd from Mountaineer Camp on the northwest shoulder. Who needs a volcano anyhow?

So, exit time absolutely had arrived — and also the ~~time~~^{moment} to ~~sole on~~
~~try~~ new super-hiker wings. I asked Monie for ideas and she suggested
 Huckleberry. Really? From Snoqualmie the peak had seemed a Cruiser-like
 tower. Pure deception, she said — the route was on the other side and
 the short scramble at the top was simpler than the Boiler Plate.

Betty wouldn't leave the garret. Several days earlier she'd returned
 alone in midweek to the Lundin Chute, catching the bus to and from
 Snoqualmie Pass — not motivated by ~~my~~ eagerness to hike but by my
 insistence she retrieve the \$12 ax she'd stupidly lost. No luck. News of
 the "ice ax mine" had gotten around the Mountaineer circle of thieves and
 not a one was left.

Saturday morning, June 26. Betty was sulking, an attempt to recruit
 Monie failed, and Huckleberry country was too ~~rough~~^{tricky} in this season to hike
 alone. Newly free — and ~~trapped~~^{stuck} in the garret.

On a desperate last chance I called the only other Mountaineer I
~~knew~~^{at all well, a guy about my age who'd been} our passenger in the V-8 on the ride to Nisqually. No club trip was
 scheduled and Bill was hot to walk.

A busted fan belt held us up and it was long past noon when we
 turned off the highway east of Snoqualmie Pass onto the Gold Creek road.
 In a couple hundred yards, chaos — a beautiful old forest freshly hacked to
 pieces and the trail obliterated. After an hour of scouting, fighting
 jackstraw and slash and cussing loggers, I found tread in unmolested timber.
 At 2 o'clock, very late for the planned day's hike, we hoisted packs.

Hurrying to make some fast miles we pressed through brush, windfalls, and snowpatches. Then the path ran into the meltwater flood of Gold Creek. Bill, recently arrived from the Midwest, never had confronted such a torrent and thought the trip was over. I suspected he was right but as the wilderness veteran took off boots and pants (stowing them in pack) and tentatively stepped into white water, gripping dim-seen boulders with bare toes. Foam boiled to knees, the hypnotizing rush close under eyes unsettled balance. Another step and roaring turmoil engulfed bare ass. This was more than I'd bargained for — the roughest wade I'd ever tried. But I now learned another value of the ice ax, jammed among shifting rocks to resist the push of the flood. Feet numb, legs and private parts tingling, I emerged triumphant on the far bank.

Lowering clouds brought premature twilight. The trail vanished in solid snow and we plugged through forest gloom following blazes. At 6 o'clock I realized we'd been guided more than an hour solely by scars on trunks made not by a pathfinder's hatchet but by falling trees — "lost man's blazes." God knew where we were. I didn't. The sketchy old map was no help, especially with peaks invisible.

The map showed a single tributary stream in our presumed vicinity — Joe Creek, flowing from Joe Lake at the foot of Huckleberry. Yet we crossed torrent after torrent, any of which might be Joe. Finally I chose one by intuition ~~and intuition~~ and in dusk we kicked steps steeply upward along its course, detouring around waterfalls and cliffs. If this wasn't

Joe Creek, pretty soon we'd be tying ourselves to trees for a grim night. But at 8 o'clock the valley wall rounded over and the forest opened and we entered the basin of 4624-foot Joe Lake.

A day to remember. We had fixed the busted V-8, found the logger-wrecked trail, forded the fright of Gold Creek, beaten a track up 10 miles of virgin snow, solved the puzzle of blazes, identified Joe Creek from a ^{half-}dozen candidates, won the race against night, and achieved our ^{desired}~~planned~~ basecamp, and all in the 10 hours since I dialed Bill's number.

Clouds hid 6240-foot Huckleberry, our happy tomorrow scramble — assuming the weather cleared. If not, the camp was sufficient reward. A clump of subalpine trees beside the frozen lake provided snowfree ground for sleeping under my brandnew orange-and-blue liferaft sail. A hole in the ice at the outlet supplied water. A snag gave dry bark for a blaze that dried clothes and warmed bones and erupted light and cheer in the foggy night. Bill and I were strangers, yet comrades. When he stupidly salted the ~~Ten~~ Can of noodles, already plenty salty from chipped beef, gagging down the briny mess was our shared joke, no recriminations.

At 8 o'clock in the morning our ~~serene~~ serene sleep was broken by brightness, warmth. The sun! Quickly from bags and tarp and trees, out in blinding snow for a look around.

And we saw Huckleberry and my jaw dropped. A peak named for a fruit ought to be soft. If this screeching splinter was a scramble I was George Leigh Mallory.

We cooked a pot of oatmeal but I had no appetite. The wicked witch had ~~tricked~~ ^{snared} me again. Couldn't she get it through her skull I didn't need any more Tooths or Cruisers? I wanted to chicken out right now so I could enjoy breakfast. How would Bill take it? He was stuffing down gruel, gulping cocoa, gobbling figbars. I didn't recall ever seeing him in action amid the springtime mobs; the way he was eating he must be a nerveless athlete, the enemy.

He'd be astounded by the announcement I was quitting. Perhaps from respect for comradeship, now ended, he'd be embarrassed. Or would he get huffy about my wasting his time? Or laugh his head off?

I couldn't spit out the words. As he routinely packed rucksack, I assembled mine. We tramped across the white lake and switchbacked up the couloir ^{SNOW.} Atop the ridge, beneath the violent leap of rock, we rested in heather and ate grapes. He praised the view, ignored the cliff. How would I tell him?

At length he flipped a cigarette away and began uncoiling the rope and still I couldn't speak and time was running out. He tossed me a rope-end and mechanically I started tying in with a bowline-on-a-bight. He stopped me, demonstrating a new and better knot, the bowline-on-a-coil, he'd learned on Nisqually from a Mountain Trooper. I was impressed — and tranquilized. He was a cool athlete, no mistake. I'd sure never invite him on another hike; meanwhile, though, I'd follow Bill on Huckleberry exactly as I'd followed Monie on Tooth and Cruiser and he'd never know the truth.

He walked up heather to the cliff, calmly inspected the terrain, and said, "I can belay you from here."

WHAT?

He was busy snuggling into his stance and didn't notice my daze. How come? The rope had two ends. How come I was stuck with the leader end? Couldn't we at least talk about it? Why not? The explanation was obvious. The trip was my idea, it was my car, and he considered himself ^a guest and was too nice a guy ~~to try~~ to steal my glory. Glory!

"Belay on," he declared and I lept upward like I'd been goosed, the 60-foot cliff as blurred by terror as the wall of Cruiser, except no taut rope from above held me securely to life. Social pressure by a bunch of crummy athletes was pushing me to an undeserved grave on a Sunday I'd allotted for fun.

No climbing with the eyes, no three-point suspension, no testing holds, no balance, no rhythm. No memory of how I got up. For Bill the pitch was child's play and he climbed slowly and smoothly. He was too gracious to criticize my hectic rush — in fact, he pretended to envy my speed.

Nerves steadied as we clambered along a series of gendarmes. We passed the hidden gully, a staircase, we should have ascended instead of my mad cliff; the descent would be painless. Athlete Bill would have no tales of my yellow streak to feed into the gossip mill of The Mountaineers, because ahead was the final pile of rock, Huckleberry's summit.

Only it wasn't. Beyond a gap rose the true and horrid Huckleberry.

Bill blithely pointed down and said, that nice guy, "I can belay you from the notch. "

Never trust a nice guy, or a witch, or a fruit.

I was struck too dumb by the injustice (why me, always?) to argue. No trembling of guts — I was hollow inside. Helpless as when chased by the Thing, numbly I scrambled up easy ledges from the notch, crept along a wide, smooth, tilted slab ~~to the top~~, and met the cliff with my nose.

Monie had told a funny story about the two Mountaineers who made the first ascent of Huckleberry. On the summit, before attempting to get down, they wrote their wills on their shirtcuffs. Poor duffers of olden times! Everybody is better nowadays, that's progress. In 30 years Huckleberry had been progressively downgraded from "impossible" to "for experts only" to "an easy day for a lady. "

But I was no lady. Above rose a sequence of big flower pots, strands of goat hair clinging to the plants — a veritable garden path for mountain goats. But I was no goat, either, and the hellfire void was below and no rope hung from Heaven.

Convulsively I flung up into flowers — and the rope tightened around my waist and I tottered backward into emptiness.

"SLACK!" I screamed with dying breath.

Answered calm Bill from the secure notch, "Sorry!"

I wiggled along the goat highway onto the broad summit, lay face down for minutes sniffing heather bells, then belayed Bill.

Throughout an endless hour he ate lunch, exclaiming at rich and

bewildering horizons, the huge delicious ice cream cone of Rainier. Under the glaring sun I laboriously masticated a raisin, hardly managed to swallow it, and snapped photos for the pleasure of a later day — if any. I was on the verge of fainting, from sunstroke or fear.

Because there was the descent waiting. I looked for a solid rock or shrub to anchor a rappel. Naught but blossoms. I'd have written my will on ~~my~~ cuff except my shirt was wool, ~~and there was nothing~~ and there was *a few hundred books and* nothing ~~to~~ leave my widow besides *the* V-8.

Carefree Bill was down in a minute. I sat on the edge of the flower plateau, lowered legs over the brink, and was about to take a cautious step ~~when~~ *when* ~~with~~ the rope drew taut and I spread wings to fly into the infinity of insubstantial air.

"SLACK!" I sobbed. "Dear God, SLACK!"

"Sorry!" cried Bill. The truth was out. Bill was no athlete. I'd realized earlier he never could have found the trail or pioneered the ford or identified Joe Creek. Now I knew he never could have made the lead. He was almost as incompetent as Betty. *If he didn't kill me, I could learn to like him.* ~~I liked him better all the time.~~

That was the only nervous step and soon we were sprawled in the ~~meadow~~ meadow at the top of the couloir, swilling a jug of grape juice left cooling in a snowbank in case we lived. We flashed down the white chute in standing glissade, riding boots like short skis, and from Joe Lake boldly took an alternate return route across the unknown slopes of Alaska, and rambled loose-legged down the valley, exulting in the icy ford, and bulled

through the loggers' mess to the V-8.

I'd led the Boiler Plate of Lundin and the east rib of Guye, but one was in school and the other with teacher always near. Huckleberry was my first independent lead.

~~_____~~

~~_____~~

Best beware. This way lay madness. I'd have to be damn careful never again to be lured + into such a trap. Yet in super-hiker years to come it would be grand to recall Huckleberry. My last fling as a climber was the best.