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Chapter 7

TOUJOURS GAI, TOUJOURS GAI

Acceptance of limits, that's wisdom. Contentment with the possible, that's happiness. No more would I beard the Old Ones. I'd stay home

And as my wealth increaseth, so inclose
Infinite riches in a little room.

Little? Home was large, home was virtually the whole wild world. Only were excluded (lesson of Camp Marion in June) the night alone and (lesson of the Graywolf) steep rock and snow.

Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green Earth.

The Green Woman welcomed me home from the wars -- and at Deer Park where I'd first consciously known her. Actually, I went this time not for my own therapy but that of a girl I'd ~~been~~ been in love with -- until recently -- to a degree varying between a half and a tenth. A summer ago such a night on Blue Mountain amid the heaven of stars must inevitably have led to complications; now, however, we'd both been inoculated against passion by soured affairs. I saw, not felt, the lushness of her tits. Introducing a city-bound soul to highlands was a brotherly kindness, repayment for sisterly lowland suppers.

Though my purpose was to show another the way to peace, I refound it for myself. I saw headwaters of the Graywolf and shuddered. And saw

dips and swells of Grand Ridge and Lillian Ridge walked last summer and smiled. No terror there. Unmixed bliss.

Emerald meadows of the High Divide, in the western Olympics where I'd never been before, re-proved that variations on old themes could be as stirring as new ones. Why suffer the cacophony of ~~the~~ Schoenberg when there were quartets of Mozart and symphonies of Mahler not yet heard? Why endure the scribbles of Picasso when Renoir and Van Gogh were as yet ~~a~~ merely skimmed?

Dad and Bob and I climbed the trail to the top of Bogachiel Peak and looked down down down to the Hoh River, flowing through the rain forest at an elevation of 1000 feet, and across the broad emptiness of the valley up up up the 7000-foot rise of green mountainside to sprawling glaciers of Olympus. Well, I never would put boots on that Alaska-cold mass but from a safe trail could admire the remnant of the Ice Age it nourished. We looked westward over 35 miles of wooded foothills to the ocean. Well, I'd never sail a ketch on the sea but from a safe beach could view the far edge of infinity, feel the rhythm of eternity.

Home was expanding. Last winter I'd first seen the Pacific Ocean and now recurrently itched to hear its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar. In July demon-pursued Don ^{the other preacher,} reappeared ~~constantly~~ in the District and he with the gas money and I with the car drove the Oregon coast halfway to California. Each noon we'd find an empty beach, strip off clothes, and tumble about in the breakers -- thundering operas after Puget Sound songs. Each night we'd carry ~~sleeping~~ bags into sand dunes, ghostly moonlight white, and ~~the~~ ~~sleep~~ sleep with surf in our dreams.

Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

Columbus was an idiot, damfool lucky not to fall off the edge of the world, not to be caught at night by the myriad lurking Its and Whats -- which, however, would not come ashore so long as the full moon shone.

Someday home might even encompass the Cascades. Since seeing the ~~white~~ ^{faraway} white mound from Surprise Mountain in 1942 I'd been curious about "the volcano nobody knows," Glacier Peak. Now, on a trip with my folks, I made a close approach. From our camp by the Suiattle River Dad and I switchbacked and sweated up the Sulphur Mountain trail. After lunch in a very Cascade-like nook of ~~granite~~ granite blocks slowly being ^{encroached on by} ~~converted to~~ ^{and converted to green} heather knolls, we climbed to the 6000-foot ridge crest for scenery -- mainly clouds. Enough of Glacier could be seen, though, to prove it a fit companion for Baker and Rainier and Adams and St. Helens. I knew the Cascade Crest Trail, the famous path extending from Canada to the Columbia River, traversed the slopes of the volcano. Something to be kept in mind.

More exciting because unexpected was the view across the Sulphur Creek valley. The Glacier Peak ~~quadrangle~~ quadrangle, surveyed in 1897-99, showed no trails there and only two named peaks, Spire and Dome, 8220 and 8860 feet -- devoutly to be avoided if the glacier ^{snouts} ~~bars~~ and cliff footings were faithful evidence of what was hidden by clouds. But also partly visible and safely removed from fearsome ice and precipice was Green Mountain, a sweep of meadows not the least Cascade-like, ^{instead} ~~but~~ exceedingly Olympic-like, the very

embodiment of the Green Woman. Keep that, too, in mind because ~~down~~^{on} the
Suiattle road we'd passed a ~~sign~~^{sign}, "Green Mountain Trail."

If ever in a long life of ridge-running I exhausted the Olympics, there
was an entire second mountain range awaiting.

Never was a summer so perfectly footloose. I was free of school for the
first time in 4 years, free of work for the first time since I was old
enough to split wood and hoe corn and feed chickens, free of foreign
entanglements for the first time in months beyond remembering and, better
than that, free of the urgent ~~long~~ longing for the first time since the onset
of puberty. Nothing to do and the whole summer to do it.

'Tis better to have loafed and lost
Than never to have loafed at all.

I was free to gorge myself on mountains. How could I have been so dull,
as recently as last summer, to think I'd be like a child given free run of
a candy store, soon glutted and sick? The more I hiked the more ravenous
my appetite, the healthier my body and mind.

Still, I found it desirable to separate highland rambles with short
spaces of lowland days. The city was merely a place to wash socks and
grease boots and patch pants and reload Trapper Nelson with food and draw
lines on maps and recruit partners. However, wilderness gave all the more
sustenance ~~for intervals of~~^{if one took time out for} digestion, for ~~moments~~^{intervals} of close-up study of
civilization.

During the Perseid Meteor Shower I sat on the roof of Parrington Hall
~~gazing~~^{sheering} at electric glare of vacant-eyed Seattle -- how unaware and trivial

and impotent it was under the bombardment from outer space. ~~I watched~~
 While mankind slept in sealevel night, I watched dawn pinken summit snows
 of 14,408-foot Rainier, 65 miles southeast, and then the nuclear fireball
 explode from the Cascades, the Sunrise Mountains, 35 miles east -- how
 incredible, with freedom ^{close} at hand, that all these people ~~had~~ should tamely
 submit to life imprisonment in the city, that they should not arise ~~in~~
~~in~~ morning and escape.

My basecamp was on Northlake Avenue. Last winter, driven from the
 University District by the first wave ~~of the exodus~~ of vets, G.I.-Bill
 wealthy and bidding the rents of basements and attics and garages and
 houseboats beyond reach of the sub-proletariat, I'd migrated down the hill
 and over the railroad tracks to the shore of Lake Union and a pocket slum
 as sordid as any in Seattle outside the Skidroad.

A year earlier during our ~~Houseboys'~~ Houseboys' Exodus we'd scouted
 Northlake and before finding the shack on Pasadena Place, a couple blocks
 uphill from the railroad tracks in a ^{rundown} ~~shabby~~ but respectable working-class
 neighborhood, innocently had tried (amid amused consternation of kimono-clad
 women) to rent rooms in what we belatedly realized was a ~~stark~~ whorehouse.
 (Some months later the establishment gained newspaper attention by burning
 down and very nearly inflicting heavy casualties on our Armed Forces.)

Alone now I returned and surveyed the wretched scene. East along the
 lakeshore, toward the University, were marinas and boat-repair yards. West
 were a concrete plant, furnace-oil depot, and the city gasworks. In a

several-block gap between workaday world of 1946 east and west rotted a dead but unburied scrap of the 19th century. On the shore were ruins of a lumber mill, faced across Northlake Avenue by a false-front ^{commercial} row bearing faded signs of businesses decades gone. One lingered, the foul and filthy Northlake Tavern, reeking with piss of drooling Social-Security winos. In the half-block between lake and railroad embankment ^{the jumble of} ~~the~~ one-time shops and warehouses, ~~the~~ decrepit shanties, all the garbage buildings, were squalid dens of garbage people, several dozen aged, shabby men and a scattering of women tottering about ~~the~~ avenue and side-streets sodden drunk or on the trembling ^{edge} ~~edge~~ ^{brink} of delirium.

Lacking comrades I quailed, I fled. But at the edge of the dungheap, paused. In a tumbledown three-story frame building was a ground-floor shop, windows hung with cedar birdhouses and feeding trays, announced by letters neatly burned in a cedar plank over the door as the headquarters of "Tinker Tim."

The birdhouses were palaces compared to those I'd made for my merit badge. I admired the craftsmanship, wondered where the hell I could put a birdhouse. A wrinkled-old but brightly-alive relic looked up from his workbench and waved a greeting.

Here was one human being recognizably human. With a last burst of courage I entered the shop and asked if there happened to be a room for rent. ~~Tinker Tim~~ ^{doubtless} ~~was~~ dumfounded, ~~he~~ was too polite to show it. He ~~continued~~ continued nailing together a birdhouse, explaining he had a big order to get out for the Audubon ladies. After a half-hour of seemingly idle conversation about birds he apparently was satisfied, allowed as how nobody was using Old Red's room.

Tim led the way up creaking, ~~dingy~~^{grimy} staircases to the top floor. The bathroom was shared with the one other top-floor occupant, Cousin Johnny. That was his firewood stacked in the hall. Old Red's room was barely large enough for the bed (where they found Old Red a while back), table and chair, cardboard wardrobe in a corner, and ~~a~~^{tiny} wood-coal stove; ~~was~~^{was} ~~enough~~^{space} was left to squeeze in my recordplayer and albums and some orange-crate bookcases. The view from the single window was ^{southward} over Lake Union to downtown Seattle.

Had it not been for Tim I couldn't have stomached a move to Northlake, where I was the only resident younger -- at a guess -- than 70 ~~years~~. But he was ~~so~~ sprightly as ^a ~~the~~ bird ^{while he worked} and I often sat on a cedar butt in his shop and listened to stories of his youth, ~~which as he talked was not far in~~
~~the past.~~

He'd come from Cornwall as a boy and grown up in this building, erected by his father as a combination of family home, shops, and rooms to let. ^{Tim} ~~was~~ kept a sailboat a halfmile east on Lake Washington and on after-school and Sunday voyages explored the lake from ^{end to} ~~one~~ end. ~~to~~ Out of school he'd become a gypsy mechanic roving the ~~Northwest~~ Northwest, working at one lumber mill until he'd seen enough of that part of the country, then moving to another. Eventually he'd settled into a job repairing machinery for the city street department, married, built a house, raised a family. Ten years ago, ~~retired~~ pensioned off, children grown, wife newly dead, he'd sold the house and returned to his childhood home and become a birdhouse carpenter. But a decade had been enough. Northlake was a place of death. Tim wasn't ready. He was in the midst of plans to buy a pickup truck, build a

workshop-cabin on the back, and resume his gypsying where he'd left off 40-odd years ago.

My second friend was Cousin Johnny, a chipmunk-spry gnome several inches under 5 feet and like Tim ever-sober, ever-cheerful, ever-busy. ~~He~~ to visit his cousins He'd come over in the '90s/and never gone home. But also like Tim he wasn't long for Northlake. When legal loose ends of his recent inheritance were tied up he'd be returning to his native village ^{as} ~~to become~~ a man of substance, ~~the proprietor~~ proprietor of three houses and a grocery shop, ^{Moreover,} ~~once home he'd marry his~~ ~~widowed childhood sweetheart,~~ after 70 bachelor years, ~~not seen in all these years,~~ ^{the match arranged by mail.} I'd miss his tales of Cornwall, told on our joint excursions to the railroad tracks to gather coal jounced from gondolas. But I was glad ~~to see~~ Johnny was leaving. He belonged in Cornwall with the other elves.

The fourth occupant of the building, Tim's ~~brother~~ brother, I ~~had~~ ^{never adventured,} ~~never~~ shunned. Cobbler Fred had never roamed, ^{as eldest son had learned his} father's trade here and never left. ^{Yet in long-past years} ~~Once, though,~~ ^{an indispensable and} ~~part of~~ ^{respected citizen of the forest} ~~making~~ ^{logger world, building} and repairing and caulking loggers' boots; Now his ancient machines stood idle except when he was ~~in~~ half-soling wornout Northlake shoes. Crippled from 60 years of standing all day on a concrete floor, he rarely stirred from the rocking chair by the pot-bellied stove, rarely emerged from ~~his~~ boozy torpor. I avoided his shop, next to Tim's, stopping in only to pay rent and pick up mail.

One winter morning I woke to see snowflakes drifting by my window, to hear horn-honking of stalled traffic high above Lake Union on the University Bridge. I must go wandering! Must exult in this revenge of wilderness ^{slut} on civilization, this sudden white purity of ~~the~~ metropolis. But as

I was passing Fred's shop he beckoned me in. The Northlake Tavern hadn't opened, the bartender presumably ^{was} stuck someplace, and poor old Fred was in shaking distress, out of booze. He gave me money and I hiked through deepening snow up the hill and across the bridge to the Eastlake Gardens, the only tavern to which I had entry, and fetched a case of stubbies. I then ^{sought} ~~wanted only~~ to escape; so pitiable was his gratitude, however, I couldn't refuse the beer he insisted I drink as payment. And thus that morning, the storm cleansing even Northlake, the beer softening my dread, I met the Others I'd ^{also} ~~met~~ ^{and} ~~feared~~ ~~and~~ ~~loathed~~ ~~and~~ ~~loathed~~ ~~and~~ ~~loathed~~.

Singly they drifted in and clustered around the stove, until were assembled all the half-dozen cronies I'd often seen there. A few beers or snorts of wine steadied hands, brightened eyes, loosened tongues. Surely, though, it was less the alcohol than the ^{holiday of storm} ~~snow~~ that revived embers of life in ~~these~~ numb old heads. They were put in mind of the Big Snow (no year given, all but me knew it), when every streetcar in the city was dead on the tracks and the drifts were up to your mackinaw and relief parties were sent out to ^{pack} ~~carry~~ food to remote neighborhoods, and of the Big Freeze (again no year), when Lake Union froze solid and one ^{star-bright} ~~moonlight~~ night the entire population of Northlake spontaneously took off in a hooting-hollering ^{mob} ~~rush~~ to skate over to Seattle.

Probably my open fascination stimulated the story-telling competition, the ~~can-you-top-this~~ can-you-top-this anecdotes of hair-raising ^{perils} ~~adventures~~ ~~escapes~~ in mills and logging camps from Bellingham to Hoquiam, of escapades on ~~every~~ timber-country skidroad^s -- ~~and especially~~ especially on the nation's most notorious-glorious, the Seattle Skidroad, where a man could get anything he'd ^{the} belly for, and a bellyful if he didn't keep his wits.

An hour they were ~~gone~~ again a bunch of the boys a-whooping it up. Then, the stamina for roaring benders of youth ~~gone~~^{decades} gone, tongues thickened, eyes glazed, and I left. Frequently thereafter, though, when I saw the group was in the brief moment of animation between morning horrors and ~~the~~ afternoon stupor, I joined the circle to hear the history of old Puget Sound.

One spring ~~one~~ morning I noticed in my comings and goings there was no gathering by the stove, saw an unusual back-and-forth shuffling on streets. Even Tim ~~was~~^{was} unsmiling and untalkative; ~~and~~ Johnny scurried around with the look of a scared mouse. That evening I stopped in Fred's shop ~~to~~ for my mail. Now the group was assembled, silent. I didn't dare ask what was wrong, merely paused to say hello. Fred ~~looked up~~ struggled to bring me in focus, ~~and~~ said they'd found Meg.

For some days I'd not seen the gay old crone with the red-dyed hair, the sole female of the stove circle but a full member, having known ^{as well} as the men -- in what capacity I never ~~asked~~^{learned} ~~every Puget Sound~~ skidroad^{The}. I'd not wondered at her absence; Northlake folk were given to periodic alcoholic hibernations. ~~Only when they weren't on the street for a week did~~ Only when they weren't on the street for a week did friends invade privacy. As with Old Red last fall, as this morning with Meg.

Averted eyes said "The Student," my Northlake moniker, wasn't wanted by the stove. I was welcome to share their youth, not their death. I walked to the ruined mill, out to the end of the collapsing dock, and sat in twilight looking over Lake Union, an industrial sewer ~~but~~ once ~~fresh~~ as ~~fresh~~^{fresh} and lovely amid forested hills as Hidden Lake.

Meg. Old Red. Cobbler Fred. Tinker Tim. Cousin Johnny. The ~~members~~
~~of the~~ stove circle. The dozens of other Northlakers I knew only to nod to
 in passing.

~~This is the way the world ends
 Not with a bang but a whimper.~~

They came when Indians still lived in cedar longhouses ^{amid virgin forests by} ~~along~~ the beaches.
 They rode the mosquito fleet ~~stratagem~~ up and down the water road to and
 from the new towns, ~~being built~~. They cut the Douglas fir and red cedar and
 hemlock ^{next to} ~~above~~ the beaches, skidded logs ~~down~~ to tidewater for rafting to
 mills. They followed the bull teams and logging railways inland ~~from~~
~~suburbs~~ over the lowlands. They worked in the ^{dozen} mills ringing Lake Union
 and in the hundred other mills around the Sound that loaded lumber schooners
 waiting to carry the ~~virgin~~ forests to far cities, far continents.

The summer of 1889, the year Washington entered the Union, they read
 the Governor's speech calling the Olympic Mountains, 35 miles away on the
 sunset horizon, America's last unknown wilderness. The spring of 1890 they
 read in the Seattle Press the journals of the Press Expedition of the ^{previous} winter,
 the first party to cross the Olympics. Before the "ton of gold" ship docked
 in Elliott Bay in 1897, ~~and~~ alert entrepreneurs advertised Seattle as the
 gateway to the Yukon, and the rush to the North emptied local mining camps,
 they read extravagant (and false) reports of the wealth of Monte Cristo,
 deep in the Cascades.

There'd been wilderness ^{extending} then, wilderness ^{from town outskirts to}
^{SCARPS} mountains ^{west and east}, a vast wilderness of which I'd known a tiny
 remnant at Hidden Lake -- now also raped tame.

It was all so long, long ago, the 19th century, when the Northlakers were young.

If I lived to their age, what memories would I have of 1946? Looking back from the 21st century, what transformations would I see ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ city? and ⁱⁿ the wilderness, now pushed ^{far up mountain valleys?} ~~back into the mountains?~~

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper

I was in but not of Northlake and the ends of those around me, sad as they were, strengthened gladness that (given luck and no more Graywolves) ^{own} my ^{end} was so distant.
^{Between hikes}
I awoke each summer morning utterly free of responsibility or goal or plan and set out aimlessly wandering, wondering what surprises the day might bring.

All's well in the ~~the~~ whirl
For a fast-footed squirrel.

I'd walk up the hill to the Avenue and browse in bookstores or hole up in a music-shop listening booth with a stack of records, or maybe run into school friends and drink a gallon of coffee in whichever newly-opened restaurant hadn't yet learned giving students unlimited free refills was a ~~fast~~ quick road to bankruptcy.

I had enough bucks left in the sock from my springtime job at the mill to hold out (with the aid of an occasional unrequested but appreciated fin slipped me by my folks) until I returned to the University payroll, and meanwhile made myself rich by making my wants small. Rent was \$6 a month

and stove coal free. I ate on four bits a day, with an unvarying menu of a bowl of bread and milk for breakfast, no lunch, and two ham sandwiches and a pint of milk for supper.

Aside from mountains my biggest expense was beer. Arild would blast down Northlake Avenue in his brilliant yellow De Soto, ordered when he joined the Navy and thus one of the earliest off the postwar assembly line, and we'd tavern-hop through the countryside of our childhood, accumulating a carful of old Ronaldites. Inevitably our rounds included the Highlands Golf Course, where as a kid Arild had caddied ~~for~~ for the rich bastards, and where now the crooked Norwegian would climb the treacherous damn Cyclone Fence like it had an invisible stile and steal the flag from the 13th hole.

Once or twice a week Bob and I took in several pitchers at the Eastlake Gardens. We'd

Sit bousing at the nappy,
An' getting fou and unco happy,

until the 1 o'clock closing, then storm up to the Avenue for hamburgers at the Robin Hood Grill; honoring the name, we ~~invariably~~ walked out without paying the check. For further adventure we ~~raided~~ ^{ravaged} the city night like a barbarian horde, climbing graveyard monuments and tipping over headstones, stealing warning lanterns from streets under repair, or prowling the dark campus breaking into buildings, not for plunder and pillage but simply because they were there.

One afternoon, walking down the Avenue to meet Bob for an experiment in new sensations -- drinking at a different tavern, the Red Robin, and getting swacked in broad daylight -- I ran into Betty. Or better say she ran into (literally) me.

A couple years before, when we were introduced in Parrington, I'd briefly fallen a quarter or half in love with her, attracted by a loose eye that gave an intriguing air of elusiveness -- I never was sure she was looking at me, over my shoulder at a passerby, or both at once. To divert attention from the ~~wandering~~ eye she kept her mouth going a mile a minute; even while I was talking her lips were twitching.

A second engaging ~~attractive~~ quality was clumsiness. Due to the errant eye she lacked depth perception and stumbled on staircases and fell off sidewalks and bumped into things; even when not stumbling she had the look of being about to, or being afraid she might.

Mentally she was as blundering as physically. Having just transferred from Reed College in Portland, with typical Reedy snobbishness she made it clear nothing but poverty could have driven her from the "Harvard of the Northwest" to mingle with the rabble of a public school. However, it was a false front, and crumbled at our first encounter. It being well-known among Reedies that state-university slob^s never read Great Books, she thought to put me down with a glib reference to Lucretius. ~~Lucretius was a poet.~~

By happenstance I was studying Lucretius, as she learned when I quoted:

The birds in the sky
And the waves in the ocean
And you, love, and I
Are ~~all~~ matter in motion.

mere

A few deft probes revealed she hadn't read Lucretius, knew nothing of him except what she'd heard in ~~the course of~~ a lecture covering Stoics and Cynics and Epicureans in one swift hour. *She began our acquaintance with a* ~~Beginning with this~~ pratfall *and* ~~she~~ never regained balance, not with me shoving her around.

Much as I enjoyed our occasional fencing matches (ludicrous mismatches), matters had not progressed, mainly because with ~~another girl~~ ^{the girl - no girl} I took up ~~the sport~~ wrestling. Only now, staggered into by Betty on the Avenue, did I realize I hadn't seen her ~~in~~ ^{for} months. The explanation? She'd been home in Portland recuperating from the operation that anchored her eye. That was what was bothering me. The eye was all wrong. She was too proud of "being like everybody else" for me to say so, but the operation was a mistake, ¹/_M not improving her vision, as it turned out, and destroying a good part of her ~~charm~~ charm.

However, ~~the~~ the surgeon hadn't cured the quivering lip or accident-on-the-way-awkwardness for the fun of it to-happen ~~efficiency~~ and I invited her along to the Robin. ^{A single} ~~The first~~ beer disintegrated what passed for her mind and she began erupting words so fast half were lost. Bob and I couldn't drink for laughing. She was delighted to be the star of the show but after a while ran out of routines and asked for a cigarette -- a transparent ploy to occupy her mouth and thus get ~~momentarily~~ offstage. Unfortunately, when I offered a lighted match she misjudged the distance and scorched her eyebrows.

Bob and I began taking her boozing regularly, which we could easily afford because ~~she~~ she was a really cheap drunk. Aside from the comedy what I ^{liked} ~~enjoyed~~ about her was the total absence of threat. The coltish clown lacked the slightest ~~hint~~ ^{grown up with} whiff of sexiness. ~~Having~~ ^{two/older brothers} ~~whom~~ ^{expected from} she ~~was~~ ^{kid} every male more of the same. She was precisely what I wanted in a female -- an amusing ^{monkish} ^{even} sister.

I'd taken my ^{monkish} ^{even} vows in June and couldn't now be tempted ^{by} Lana Turner, in sweater or out. Content in ~~my~~ celibacy, henceforth I'd screw

around solely in the mountains, with the Green Woman, and nevermore in
bed, risking the trap of premature adulthood.

do you think that i would change
my present freedom to range
for a castle or moated grange
wotthehell wotthehell
cage me and i d go frantic
my life is so romantic
capricious and corybantic
and i m toujours gai toujours gai