

April 1947

Chapter 10

AT SIXES AND SEVENS

A funny thing happened. Emerging from my Long-Vacation cocoon, I found the world turned upside down. Peace, they called it.

Well, ~~grand~~ <sup>letter say</sup> Having old friends home was wonderful. Sox too~~x~~ was buying all the gas I wanted without skulking around the black market, all the cigarettes I wanted without scurrying hither and yon to stores reported by Avenue telegraph to be putting weekly allotments on sale, all the beer I wanted (~~or rather~~ could afford) without gulping it down lest the tavern run dry before closing time.

Yet I missed the war. Newspapers were dull. No more excitement of watching chessmen march across Russia to the Caucasus and back again, hop island by island southward from Japan and then northward from New Guinea.

But was not the peace to be even <sup>more thrilling</sup> ~~better, what with~~ our energies released <sup>from ~~the~~ war games</sup> to build a New Jerusalem in this green and pleasant land? Surely, having stomped the Nazis and Japs we'd ~~now~~ pick up 1930s cudgels and ~~stomach~~ give what for to native fascists, the hate-mongering racists and the capitalists who spawned depressions and wars and profiteered from both.

The hell you say. Read the fucking papers. America had blown its idealism wad, wanted only to wallow in butter and steaks and fat-assed

Detroit automobiles. There wasn't going to be any damn revolution. Come the next presidential election and the Democrats would wail and beat their breasts but in the end offer us the Missouri hack who took his bourbon straight and his New Deal watered down to a Fair Deal. The bubblehead ~~bubblehead~~ <sup>dupes</sup> of Uncle Joe might attempt a feat of gallantry, a la Don Quixote. None of ~~that~~ that mattered because the Republicans were ~~sure~~ <sup>certain</sup> to ~~serve up~~ <sup>trot out</sup> the Little Man on the Wedding Cake and win in a breeze. <sup>Serve Americans right.</sup> A pox on 'em all. Given a prayer of achieving international amity, economic rationality, and social justice, I'd join the rabble, exercise my ~~new~~ brandnew franchise. As it was I'd cast the blank ballot of the anarchist. Crap on America.

Fie on't! oh fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.

The one unmixed blessing of the peace, the gathering in of friends, was gone in a flash. The ~~reunion~~ reunion, then the scattering.

1942 sat on a wall,  
1942 ~~took~~ <sup>had</sup> a great fall,  
All the king's horses, all the king's men,  
Couldn't put 1942 together again.

A few beers in Seattle and Bill was off to Cal Tech. Hal and Al ~~earned~~ <sup>received</sup> engineering degrees and the accompanying "Greetings!" Ironically, after years of sweating out quarter-by-quarter student deferments, Al was tagged 4-F; Hal was drafted to fight the peace. We'd taken our last hikes together. They'd put away boots and Trapper Nelsons, Al for transit and drawing board, Hal for Navy blues.

#5-a-pair

I didn't dream in ~~December~~<sup>November</sup>, when Bob and I bought Army beavertails ~~for \$5-a-pair~~ at a surplus store and snowshoed high on the side of Mt. Rainier, that would be our last hike. It was. Army-dormant so long, in the University he grew like a hothouse weed, in mere weeks grew away from me toward his own kind, that exotic new species of 22-year-old freshmen.

Nor did I dream when Arild and I trenched snowdrifts to the summit of Home Peak, close under the ~~massive~~ avalanche-swept east face of Mt. Constance, that would be our last hike. It was. The College of Forestry swallowed him up.

Symbolism. Returning from Home Peak we took a <sup>sentimental</sup> side-trip to ~~visit~~ <sup>the place was infested with children. Had I ever been so frenetic a little monk</sup> Camp Parsons. <sup>Lord,</sup> Still on the boathouse rafter was the shell I nailed there in 1938, my insignia of membership in the Royal Order of the Oyster.

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,  
 "And your hair has become very white,  
 And yet you incessantly stand on your head --  
 Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

It takes two to say goodbye. Friends drifted from me. I ran away and hid from them. Too busy with Another.

Damned if I saw it coming. What was Betty to me, or me to Betty? Little sister with the flapping lips. Big brother who kicked her around. Until a December afternoon. <sup>All unnoticed</sup> ~~Suddenly~~ <sup>had occurred</sup> some mysterious fermentation. <sup>Suddenly</sup> we couldn't be brother-sister anymore, must become strangers or lovers. If I'd been clever enough to suspect the clown had a warm body fit to <sup>wreck</sup> ~~ruin~~ a monk, would I have fled into strangerhood? In view of <sup>the</sup> my recent disaster, very likely.

But I wasn't and didn't and once past the shock of committing incest was in love. Love at <sup>first clutch.</sup> ~~the second night.~~

A last <sup>fling</sup> ~~gasp~~ of freedom -- a Christmas walk on ocean beaches -- and we returned to the University, Betty to finish her senior year (English lit, what else?) <sup>and</sup> I to resume the plod to the doctorate.

I damn well knew what I was in for. That's why, having attended school continuously from October 1942 to February 1946, I'd taken the Long Vacation. To steel my resolve.

For openers, to earn a survival \$42 a month rather than a starving \$21, I'd applied for and been granted a double readership, which meant grading a double load of brain-fuddling bluebooks.

That was just to make me ~~awfully~~ punchy. <sup>crusher was that</sup> ~~That~~ The ~~only formidable~~ <sup>WAS</sup> characteristic of Graduate School ~~by its very being~~ specifically designed to prevent an oversupply of professors. Grim enough that after undergraduate years communing with major poets one must submerge in drivel of minor poets unread for centuries -- except by aspiring scholars. ~~was~~ The ultimate <sup>obstacle</sup> ~~barrier to the Union Cause~~ was that graduate courses were taught by the most senile members of the faculty, reputations <sup>earned</sup> ~~built~~ in 1910, now hardly able to stay awake through a 2-hour seminar, much less <sup>emit</sup> ~~utter~~ two ~~consecutive~~ consecutive intelligible sentences.

Not that my fellow grad students minded. A <sup>sturdy</sup> ~~tough~~ bunch they were, <sup>for all their pasty faces and vacant eyes.</sup> indeed, <sup>^</sup> Most were in their 30s or 40s, had been plugging away 5 to 25 years, doggedly enduring the same seminars over and over again. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

Only in Graduate School did men have periods. I'd been wrong about him, and therefore solemnly

~~Even~~ Even those in their 20s were old, burned out in ~~the~~ kindergarten and thus with ~~an infinite~~ <sup>corpse-like</sup> capacity to withstand boredom. I once was discussing ~~academic life~~ <sup>academic life</sup> with a newcomer to the University, a guy my own age and striking me as ~~not a total loser~~ <sup>an utter fool.</sup>

moderately promising

"What's your period?" he asked. ~~My only~~ <sup>three</sup> ~~period~~ <sup>^</sup> said my chief interest was America's distinctive art forms -- the movies and the automobile and the funny papers. Not being in the School of Drama or the College of Architecture, the third of these necessarily was my game. <sup>As a "new critic"</sup> ~~that~~ I was going to ~~do~~ <sup>apply</sup> "new criticism" ~~to the~~ <sup>^</sup> explication of ~~Li'l Abner.~~

He nodded sagely and said his thesis would be on kissing. Or that's what he seemed to say, to my delight. <sup>I'd been right about him after all. Eagerly</sup> <sup>^</sup> I asked if he planned to focus on garden-variety kissing or explore French kissing, ass kissing, and the like. Did he think there'd been any really significant advances in <sup>the perversity of literary</sup> <sup>^</sup> ~~perverse~~ kissing since Chaucer? ~~Especially looking into anthropological aspects, such as,~~ ~~say, the comparative study of kissing in the various modes of human behavior.~~

With a ~~quicker~~ <sup>^</sup> frown he corrected me. "Not kissing, gissing." Pray, what ~~sort of~~ <sup>^</sup> debauchery is "gissing"? Not a debauchery, a novelist, a Gissing. Dead and unread long enough to be ~~the~~ <sup>suitable</sup> <sup>^</sup> carrion for dissection. ~~by~~

Prior to the Long Vacation I could dissect with the best, patiently <sup>analyzing</sup> <sup>to decide if it</sup> ~~pondering out whether~~ Macbeth <sup>^</sup> was a tragedy of character or circumstance  $\times \frac{1}{M}$

His heroes <sup>never</sup> were fatally flawed, <sup>were</sup> and ~~what~~ done in by getting run over by ~~a~~ trucks.

a question to be answered, of course, by determining his precise relationship with the weird sisters, and whether or not Banquo's ~~is~~ ghost was real. ~~■~~ I could swing a cutlass, too, and ~~once~~ severely wounded a professor of the Lost Generation by ~~arguing~~ <sup>arguing tough-guy</sup> Poppa Hemingway was ~~about~~ as <sup>weepy</sup> ~~tough~~ as Mary Pickford, ~~■~~ He didn't write tragedies, he told sad stories. ✓

But after so many months out of the rut, what the hell did any of it matter?

My heart's in the highlands,  
My heart is not here,  
My heart's in the highlands,  
A-chasing the deer.

✱ I knew wilderness summer well, wilderness spring a little, at Gladys Pass had tasted wilderness autumn. Wilderness winter? <sup>I'd owned my first skis in 1932.</sup> Sporadically over the years ~~had~~ <sup>had</sup> yo-yoed up and down tow hills at Snoqualmie Pass and Stevens Pass, <sup>round out</sup> But that wasn't wilderness. Now I yearned to ~~complete~~ <sup>complete</sup> my knowledge of the cycle, ~~of seasons,~~ to finish what I'd begun with the spring of Kena Lakes and Lost Pass, the summer of Sulphur Mountain and ~~the Gray~~ Graywolf and Deer Park and High Divide and Mt. Townsend and Red Mountain, the fall of <sup>Flapjack Lakes.</sup> ~~Gladys Pass.~~

✱ I went snowshoeing with Bob on Rainier. And snow-plowing with Arild up Home Peak. And snowshoeing with Betty to Chinook Pass. Then, Winter Quarter bitter-ended, she and I ~~strapped~~ <sup>lashed</sup> snowshoes atop <sup>Bergans</sup> ~~Trepper Nelsons~~ and set out for the Olympics, hiked 10 miles up the Graywolf River. The trail was a succession of blowdowns <sup>and washouts</sup> to be crawled over and ~~washouts to~~ ~~be~~ detoured around; we didn't get near ~~the~~ snowline, attained a top elevation of merely 2200 feet. Rarely did the rain quit, never did the

dank and dripping forest brighten to more than twilight. But we traversed  
 very the base of Graywolf Ridge, came within ~~a day's~~ <sup>an afternoon's</sup> distance ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> Graywolf  
 Basin, of Deer Park. Far far from mankind, deep deep in winter wildland,  
~~soft~~ soft soft was the moss bed at Three Forks Shelter.

and The ivory tower imposes its <sup>bloodless Apollonian</sup> order on your mind, ~~but once you step outside~~  
 seminar room and library; once hear trumpets of the real world, <sup>Dionysiac though,</sup> and the walls  
 come tumbling down.

<sup>winter</sup> The Graywolf was my final ruination. I heard the trumpets loud. Spring  
 Quarter was pure ~~an~~ epilogue. <sup>¶</sup> Whatever energies I might have mustered to  
 cope with Cowper and Crabbe were exhausted by the ~~unending~~ torrent of  
 bluebooks <sup>vomited</sup> ~~spewed~~ by the horde of vets.

→ Scarcely necessary was the coup de grace, <sup>delivered by a</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>revision of</sup> ~~University~~ <sup>English</sup> Department policy.

long-rumored and now-confirmed Suppose I stayed awake through the eternity  
 of seminars, escaped drowning in the ocean of bluebooks, what would it get  
 me? The ~~price~~ <sup>Union Card.</sup> Plus a one-way ticket out of Seattle. Formerly an entire  
 academic career, from B.A. to Ph.D. to lectureship to full professorship,  
 could be spent at the University of Washington. No more. The English  
 Department, too <sup>much</sup> ~~thoroughly imbued with the views of~~ <sup>haunted by</sup> the late great and ~~obsolete~~  
 J. Vernon Parrington, Pulitzer Prizewinner of the 1930s, henceforth  
 would recruit new faculty not from its inbred own but from the Outside.

There I was, the horns of the ~~old~~ dilemma rammed right up my ~~ear~~ <sup>rectum.</sup>  
 To stay home for the Ph.D. was to be, <sup>one fine Commencement Day</sup> ~~at the end of the line,~~ permanently  
 banished. To gain eventual academic lodgment at home, the sole place

I ever wanted to teach, I must accept a several-years exile to some Godforsaken spot like California or Michigan.

Impossible. ~~Out of the question~~ Other people apparently could survive ~~elsewhere~~ <sup>in lands beyond the Cascades.</sup> In fact, I'd met students from big-sky country who got claustrophobia in mountain-walled Puget Sound, and ~~PR~~ professors from the East who felt oppressed by ~~the~~ <sup>barbaric masses of</sup> the trees on campus, by the absence of civilized skyscraper horizons.

As for me, I'd ~~lived~~ <sup>lived an interminable</sup> year in New England and ~~driven~~ <sup>driven twice</sup> ~~across~~ <sup>the width of</sup> America, <sup>had seen the cities and the plains.</sup> Nice places to visit, ~~but~~ <sup>But</sup> ~~without~~ <sup>without</sup> ~~support~~ <sup>east west,</sup> the Sunrise Mountains and Sunset Mountains I'd lean ~~the way~~ or ~~west~~, and find nothing to hold me up, and fall down ~~in~~ raving mad~~ness~~.

One afternoon I couldn't face the seminar, couldn't face the bluebooks, couldn't face the future. Betty and I drove in the Model A along winding roads through <sup>Cascade foothills</sup> ~~hills of the old coal mining district~~ southeast of Seattle. At Green River Gorge we stopped, descended the ~~cliff~~ <sup>into</sup> trail ~~deep within the~~ canyon ~~in~~ <sup>crept</sup> gloom, ~~climbed~~ <sup>climbed</sup> over mossy boulders under fern-draped cliffs ~~wade~~, sat by the snowmelt-boiling stream.

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Green River Gorge did it. We drove back to the District, straight to the Red Robin, and this time Truth was in the beer.



Confront the bugaboo. Demand its worst. Loss of security? Is that all? Shit, man, security is for Depression-castrated engineers, Graduate School sissies, <sup>(double-rubber men)</sup> souls so timid they begin thinking of retirement the day they are denied mamma's nipple. For me it's adventure -- which means risks. Good Gods ~~if~~ if a guy is too spooked to take chances at 21, when will he ever? Never.

Oh, 'tis jesting, dancing, drinking  
 Spins the heavy world around.  
 If young hearts were not so clever,  
 Oh, they would be young forever.  
 Think no more; 'tis only thinking  
 Lays lads underground.

Fact was, all this ~~was~~ pomp and circumstance about becoming a scholar-professor was a fraud. I lacked the self-discipline, could no more gag down fossil poets than fossil worms. I was no intellectual, I was a dilettante. I was no Apollonian, I was a Dionysiac. Face it, lad!

Of all the sixes born in Heaven  
 Never one shall equal seven.