

May 1948

Chapter 16

CRUEL SCHOOL

No rebirth of Earth was promised by this vernal equinox, no sun-stirring of seeds ~~set~~ by this Sunday. Sane Seattleites snuggled in sacks, shrinking from the gray gloom of gale-chased clouds and the rattle of rain bullets battering windows. Only abroad in the non-dawn were the flesh-punishing, the sin-expiating, the death-dreading. Cleanly-godly ~~in the finery of Pear,~~ ^{were} Christers scurried to churches. Shabby-crummy ~~in hairshirts,~~ ^{were} Old Believers congregated on bleak greensward of a city park.

Monitor Rock. Baffling as Stonehenge. A phallus of boulders and concrete erected by the inscrutable WPA in a decade when there weren't more than a couple hundred ^{honest-to-gosh} climbers in the whole Northwest.

Today nearly that many Mountaineers huddled at the base ~~of Monitor~~ in an amorphous clot of parkas buffeted by the sideways-blasting torrent. Atop the rock, 15 feet above wind-whipped grass, flapped several faceless parkas presumably containing instructors. Harrying edges of the student flock below was a tall, skinny parka snarling and barking. It broke off from the numb mass of drenched sheep to attack -- what, the Mannings? No, a short, burly parka standing ^{paralyzed} ~~inertly~~ beside us.

"Why the hell don't you get things going?" demanded the tall parka, Chairman Cam.

"We got practically no instructors," whined the burly parka, leader of the practice trip. "Almost everybody except the damn students had sense enough to stay home."

"Well, let's do what we can with what we've got."

"Can't teach these poor shits nothing today. Look at 'em! They hardly can stand up in this blow, their faces are blue, they can't move their fingers. Right in front of our eyes they're dying of exposure!"

"We can teach 'em not to be quitters. Gawdamit, that's what it's all about. If they can't take a little rain and wind, how the hell will they ever get up a peak?"

"For crysake!" wailed the trip leader. "It's the next thing to snowing! It's gusting 50 or 60! We're not supposed to kill ~~the~~ 'em in the city! There'll be plenty of time for that when we get 'em in the mountains!"

Not the compassionate general but cowardly captains resolved the debate. In convulsive unison the ~~quitting~~ handful of instructors fled to the parking lot, pursued by the student horde, ~~xxx~~ rearguarded by the tall parka ~~frantically~~ bellowing insults.

At the subsequent lecture Chairman Cam scornfully announced that though everyone who'd gone to Monitor would receive Course credit in ~~xxx~~ recognition of having the bravery to get out of bed, he personally

would lead a second trip next Sunday in case any of us were interested in learning to climb.

To go or not to go? That was the question. The Chairman's snake-icy eyes forced the decision, picking me out of the audience, accusing me specifically of ~~the general~~ betrayal.

Warm sun and soft spring breezes. Athletes as torpid last week as Bettys now pranced and gamboled, showing off. I shouldn't have come. I'd pushed my luck. Damn Cam! Particularly depressing were the Boy Scouts, jiggling gibbering children unaware bones can break, blood can spurt. My ~~my~~ Haystack heroics were no defense ^{against} ~~against~~ them -- they'd have scampered up and down the white wall unafraid, giggling at the trembling of the clumsy old man.

Hell, even when young I'd been clumsy, coordination so poor my bat rarely connected with softball, balance so precarious I was bruised and abraded for months while doggedly, ~~patiently~~ mastering the bicycle. Maybe that's what attracted me to Betty -- a lightning rod to draw the mockery,

~~and from me.~~

But luck held. My assigned instructor was a decrepit woman of at least 35 and her ^{five} ~~four~~ other pupils ^{all were} wives and ~~sweethearts~~ taking the Course purely to keep hooks in their men, ~~were~~ ^{there.} No competition. Quickly they succumbed to one ^{female} ~~female~~ complaint or another and slunk off to ~~go~~ guard their catches from predatory ^{S:} ~~Amosons.~~

Her attention undivided, Teacher reviewed my textbook-studied, home-practiced techniques of tying single bowline, butterfly, and bowline-on-a-bight, of setting up shoulder belay and standing and sitting hip belays, of

hauling in and paying out slack, of coiling and uncoiling the rope. Then she had me climb and descend and traverse walls and ledges and slabs using cling holds and ~~some~~ ^{pressure holds and} friction holds, observing the rules of "balance climbing": stay vertical (don't hug the mountain); always retain three-point suspension (two feet and a hand or two hands and a foot); test every hold before trusting; move smoothly and rhythmically; "climb with the eyes" (continuously inspect the route ~~ahead~~ and plan several moves ahead). Finally she tutored me in the gravity-defying "non-balance" techniques: the bearhug on a rib, pressing inward with arms and knees; the layback up a crack, tennis shoes pushing against one side, hands pulling on the other; the stemming of various-size chimneys by pushing various combinations of feet, hands, knees, and butt against opposite walls.

A plethora of words for very little matter. Most of the techniques I'd learned as a tree-climbing kid and the rest from Monie. And where was the terror? A fall of 15 feet onto soft grass can hurt but not kill, 15 feet isn't exposure, boulder-scrambling is no more a blood sport than ~~yo-yo~~ ~~skiing~~ skiing. Exposure is the forests of Source Creek or the Hamma Hamma River so far beneath feet the trees look like weeds. ^{Lacking} ~~without~~ exposure Monitor Rock was dull as a gymnasium.

Who was complaining? Not me. I'd had enough terror, my aim was negative -- the avoidance of humiliation -- and on two trips with the club I'd succeeded. Not Betty, of course. I was too busy all day to notice

how she was getting along and on the drive home she refused to talk about it.

Clubroom lectures had done no permanent damage to dignity, nor ^{had} city park in storm and sun. Now to be confronted was ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ sterner stuff -- natural non-WPA rock, the materia of mountains.

Monie claimed Little Si proved God loved Mountaineers. Though making the Seattle vicinity a glacial garbage dump ^{devoid of} useless ^{terrain} for climbing and giving Olympic and Cascade highlands a 9-month winter of rock-swamping snow, He also provided, a half-hour drive from the city, this splendid pimple of a roche moutonnee rising a mere 1000 feet above sealevel and thus snowfree most of the year. Little it was, dwarfed by 4000-foot Big Si, but plucked steep (partly into a monstrous overhang) on the downstream side by ancient ice. Said Monie, obviously our Father which art in Heaven intended from the beginning there ultimately should be a Climbing Course.

To satisfy the Elementary Course requirement of camping overnight on at least one practice trip, the afternoon of Saturday, April 3, Betty and I carried packs the scant half-mile from trailhead to dark dank ~~xxx~~ rain-dripping alder grove.

Were newspapers still censored? Were we still being lied to by our generals? Had we lost the war? Surely this miserable rabble of a hundred-odd human wrecks was no encampment of victors, rather was a remnant of the ~~xxxxx~~ routed, retreating Tenth Mountain Division. Blending into forest

floor of dead alder leaves and bones of last year's bracken fern was a dreary drabness of khaki wool pants and shirts, khaki cotton parkas, khaki rubberized ponchos, ~~the~~ khaki sleeping bags and tents and shelter-halves, ~~the~~ khaki knapsacks and Bergans, khaki canteens and mess kits. As usual in such ⁵ disasters, demoralized troopers were accompanied by scavenging, corpse-robbing, civilian refugees, partly in khaki and partly (as were Betty and I) in somber blacks and blues and greens of ski parkas and downhill ski pants and miscellaneous garments too threadbare for city wear. The sole gleams of cheer were the scattered orange-and-blue liferaft sails -- including ours, my months of prowling surplus stores having been rewarded.

I enjoyed the dismal dusk, smirking to see so many funereal faces, so few fires blazing like mine, no other Ten-Can-hung dinglesticks so ^{expertly} ~~neatly~~ engineered. Athletes ~~they~~ my fellow students might be on cliffs but in camp they were rank tenderfeet. I enjoyed the tarp-patter of night rain which last year would've been coldly bathing my skin. I even enjoyed the tarp-flapping-cracking in the windy-vicious Sunday dawn. Not until 7 a.m. did I stop enjoying the trip.

Into the silent camp burst a band of teachers, including the trip leader and Chairman Cam. They'd slept in the city but already were ~~half-soaked~~ half-soaked and totally resentful at having let duty drive them from ~~ex~~ warm dry beds. Vindictively they shouted, they screamed, they harassed the soggy khaki mob out of tents and tarps onto ^{black-mucky} ~~the~~ trail, ^{going through woods,} ~~dark~~ ^{deep} in black-
~~mucky~~ ^{around} ~~beside~~ a marsh, to a rockslide.

So Childe Harvey to the Dark Tower came. Little Si. Often viewed from highway and once from ~~the~~ heights of Big Si. Harmless-seeming then.

Now neither harmless nor little, baleful battlements dimming ~~out~~ far above in the blur of sheeting rain.

Bedraggled mob paused to be broken by the leader into ~~rows~~ teams, to uncoil ropes and tie in, ~~bravely~~ cursed by instructors for numb-fumbling knot incompetence. Then all teams regathered in a ~~warrior~~^{herd} mass and stumbled up the rockslide, dividing to funnel into the two gullies breaching the cliffs. Excelsior. Not ours to reason why.

Once we were ~~are~~ trapped in the ~~g~~ gullies the Powers of the Tower attacked. Three hundred ~~feet~~^{boots} slipped and slid in the trash, dislodging ounces pounds tons of mud pebbles boulders. ~~Individual~~^{Scores of} voices blended in a continuous shrieking chorus: "ROCK! ROCK! ROCK!" Bullets whined, grapeshot rattled, cannonballs wailed, shrapnel exploded. Not on Iwo Jima, not on the Somme, did infantry face so scathing a barrage.

No prudent bugle sounded retreat. Victory or death! Casualties were bandaged, shell-shocked evacuated for brief r-and-r on the rockslide, then sent back into the lines. The walking wounded pressed upward, surged out of the gullies, rushed the second line of defense, a series of brush-tangled, moss-slippery, mud-filthy, water-streaming walls. Instructors reefed on ropes, dragging spastic students up the pitches. Now and then a student pulled off an instructor and the body ~~slithered~~ and bounced down brown-and-green ~~slabs~~ and crashed in ~~the~~ trees. A final banzai dash up gentle slopes and the Tower was ours.

Some veterans. A molehill with no glory. A school with no teaching.
The summit of Little Si. We'd not practiced any alpine arts whatsoever except rope-encumbered rock-dodging and garbage-crawling. Who

A. said the past-loving, present-hating Henry Wimbush, "If all these people were dead, this festivity would be extremely agreeable."

cared? Not me. I had survived, and with only minor flesh wounds. I was pleased to note, spotting her in the distance, that Betty~~x~~ took~~x~~ was alive and apparently as well as could be expected.

Teams unroped. The last semblance of discipline disintegrated. Individually we sought refuge from the hurricane in the lee of stunted firs, crawled into ~~tree-branch~~-thickets to rub bruises and wipe off mud and blood and replace soaked band-aids. I was content. In a battle offering no opportunity for heroism there was no chance of shame. ↙

From beyond a screen of branches came voices I recognized.

"How many you think we'll get back down the ~~hxxxx~~ gullies?" (Wry chuckle of Limber Jim.)

"Does it matter?" (Bitter laugh of Chairman Cam.) "Can you imagine what it'll be like when we get this crowd in the real mountains? Might as well finish 'em off here. At least it's ^{just} a short stretcher-carry to the ambulances. Maybe some of the damn instructors who promised to show up today will pry themselves out of bed to help with that."

"Want me to run out to North Bend and alert the Rescue Committee now? Looks like our dauntless leader is going the whole route -- setting up the good old traditional Little Si rappels."

"Rappel? Today? The bonehead! We better get over there. Wouldn't put it past him to send 'em down the damn overhang."

The voices were gone. And so was my ease. Learning naught about rock climbing had been no loss -- I already knew plenty for a superhiker. The important thing was that between me and garret lay nothing worse than

~~the strong possibility of~~ being killed by falling rock, that between me and release from the Course, from the club, lay only one more practice trip, on snow. Again I'd been spared humiliation. But no. Not spared.

Rappel!

Ropes were being tied to trees and loose ends thrown over cliffs. Athletes were dancing with excitement at the impending initiation into the fabled birdman stunt, Everyman's notion of what mountain-climbing is. I didn't need it, it was no technique for a superhiker. But except for the basket cases everyone was creeping out of storm refuges to join the queues. It had to be done.

I approached the longest of the lines and peered over the cliff edge. Hah! The rope dropped a simple dozen feet to a broad ledge. And Chairman Cam was there, loudly insisting on belays. Home free.

But. (Dammit, always a "but.") On the fringe of the crowd I heard two Boy Scouts haranguing a silent, blank-faced third: "Heck, you don't want to do the chicken rappel! All the other guys are trying the big one."

May Dan Beard roast in Hell. I now saw the long line was composed entirely of old men and ^{covering} ~~blinking~~ females. Some distance off a ~~very~~ short line contained all the Boy Scouts, all the athletes, including the phys-ed-teacher Amazons. I'd no choice.

Weary of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be...

Sick to my stomach I followed the three Scouts to the Big One. I didn't investigate the cliff edge, didn't want to know how big was Big. Very big judging from the long-continuing idiot whoops of the two brave buddies. Very very big said the white face and quivering jaw of Third Buddy

as he reluctantly refused the belay his pals had disdained and started down, then lost his nerve, let go of the rope, clutched the brink, and barely was saved from certain splattering death by quick-helping hands of an instructor. He slunk off in the trees, his life saved but ruined.

"Who's next?" That would be me. Blurt it out: "Guess I'll take a belay." Instructor nods, says "Sensible." (Synonym for "gutless.") Screw 'em. Screw 'em all. Like ~~my~~ Dad ^{said} ~~told me~~ when I was a little kid with a bursting bladder and he made me take my piss by the side of a ^{crowded} highway, "You'll never see any of these people ever again in your life.")

Belay rope bowline-tied to waist I turn my back on the gulf of gale-rushing cloud between Little Si and Big Si and stand a-straddle the rappel rope.

Now. Mechanically assume the dulfersitz position ^{drilled into mind by} remembered from textbook illustration and lecture demonstration: Reach behind me and lift rappel rope from ground, bring it from crotch up left buttock, across chest, over right shoulder, down back. Hold it at below-hip level with mittened right hand. Pussyfoot slowly backward to the brink. Look down.

OH GOD! OH SHIT! OH BIG! At least 50 feet to the landing ledge! Instructor in sitting-hip belay stance is watching my eyes widen, sweat dilute rain in my face. Is that a scarcely-concealed smile? Sadist bastard. I'll not give him the satisfaction. Death before dishonor. Kneel. Lower a boot to a narrow ledge below the brink. The other boot. Stand. Stiffen the goddam jittering knees.

Now. Do the unthinkable. Lean backward into space, lean against empty air! (Oh God, dear God. If I die before I wake I ~~am~~ ^{the} pray ~~my~~ Lord

my soul to take.) Flush that stuff from brain. Obey the Book, have faith in manila. Place tricouni-nailed boot soles against vertical rock wall. Keep left hand loosely on the rappel rope above chest for balance. Keep right hand tightly on the rappel rope below -- by friction of hand on rope and rope around body am I held to Earth.

Now. Do the unimaginable. Bend knees, straighten ~~knobs~~ ^{then jerk them} ~~knobs~~, kick the wall away and simultaneously loosen right-hand grip on rope. ^{remove left hand from rope and} JUMP! ~~FALL!~~ Rope slides through mitten, ^{lets plumbets into space} ~~warms the mitt~~, rock wall rushes forward to meet boots, kick it away again. BY JESUS ~~XXXX~~ I'M FLYING!

kick meat
flesh away
from ~~hand~~
solid hand
kick ~~foot~~
out into
~~soft~~
sky.

Just-like-that boots hit bottom ledge. "Belay off!" I joyously-hysterically yell. (What was I yelling-howling as I fell, I flew?) Untie belay rope, traverse ledge to gully, scramble up, stride hero-cool past females and old men ~~swaying~~ trembling in the chicken queue.

No chicken I, sir! Well, only half, ma'am. I did not disdain a belay, ^{in the moment of truth} ~~so~~ it was a de-horned bull I faced. I didn't really win. But didn't lose either. ^{damn corrida} Crap on the ~~Mountaineers~~ --- a draw was good enough for a superhiker.

Had it not been for the Course, for the looming disgrace sure to haunt me years after I'd run far from every witness but myself (still blushing ^{at} ~~from~~ memory of that public piss ^{some} 20 ~~years~~ years ago), the winter-spring would've ranked among the best times of my life. Love in the garret was no less sweet for gradually losing the aura of the illicit. After years of counting nickels and dimes there still was a kick in free-spending from a bottomless pocket ever-replenished by paychecks. And the first summer of superhiker romps was nearing, compensation for cruelties of the Mountaineers.

I'd always considered the 40-hour week the definition of peonage -- that was the appeal of the scholar-professor's priest-lazy sinecure. Bagley Hall, however, was the very promised land. Not while chained to degree curricula and badgered by bluebooks could I have luxuriated in leisurely explorations of history, ~~exercising~~ confirming my ^{rabid} ~~rapid~~ Spenglerianism (no fanatic like a new convert). Gibbon became the second chief deity in my pantheon, his ~~the~~ Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire the second core book of my scriptures. Bitterness of the disappointed patriot-revolutionary dissolved in chuckles and guffaws of the sardonic post-history philosopher, my chronic newspaper-triggered nausea was permanently cured by the parallel between antics of Appolinian-fellaheen Constantinop~~le~~ and Faustian-fellaheen America.

When a fellow fellah speculated on the fall elections, whether Democrats conceivably could escape obliteration by Republicans, I asked, "What does it matter? What's the difference between them?"

When he seriously settled into minute analysis of fine distinctions my mind drifted back to the ^{reign} time of Justinian, to the Hippodrome politics, to the races between the four chariots carrying the ^{traditional} four colors of the factions. Snorted I to fellah, "The Blues and the Greens!" Even more ludicrous were the posturings of the Reds (Students for Wallace) and Whites (Dixie Uber Alles), both entered in the ^{circens} ~~spectacle~~ purely for extra gaudiness.

Bagley provided other entertainment as well. One day Crazy Art brought to the stockroom window a ~~beaker~~ beaker of water, bought a bit of sodium metal, and dropped it in. The metal sliver sizzled ~~and~~ in a fury of bubbles until heat of the reaction permitted hydrogen bubbles and ambient oxygen to ~~combine~~ combine -- explosively.

Toad lost his heart to
 As the motorcar captured Toad's heart, so ~~did~~ I ^{lost} mine to the
^{sharp}
 little blue flame and/little "pop!" I went on a binge of "pops!" and,
 advancing to larger chunks of sodium, to "poops!" and even small "bangs!"
^{As}
~~When~~ other Bombers found New Mexico confining they sailed ^{and} into the ^{over}
 Pacific to blow up Bikini, ^{did} so my ambition outgrew stockroom walls. I devoted
[^]
 an entire afternoon to filling a large glass jar with finely-diced sodium and
 that evening carried it to the front of Bagley Hall and flung it in Frosh
 Pond. No "bang!" Nor even a "boom!" A ~~star~~ horrifying "KA-POW!" A hundred
 feet high in the night left a pillar of flame, down upon pathsfull of
 students showered blobs of fire, off into darkness quacked the resident
 mallards, throughout the University District wailed sirens of police cars, and
 I plunged into shrubbery to escape prison and abandoned forever my career
 as a mad bomber, leaving that sport to the alumni of Alamogordo.

When glass-bead cannon palled and sodium bombs scared, Art introduced
 the pistolero
 me to the cork pistol. To fashion this weapon ~~xxx~~ appropriates from lab
 gear two cork-hole borers of sequential sizes -- say, a #7 and a #8. The
 smaller of the two hollow brass cylinders fitting ~~xxx~~ snugly-loosely inside
 the larger, when a cork is ^{jammed} ~~stuffed~~ in the mouth of the #8 and another in
 the mouth of the #7, the #7 ^{is} inserted in the rear end of the #8, ^{and} handles of
^{arc} both cylinders ^{are} grasped in one hand and squeezed, the #7 thrusts/through
^{compresses air which}
 the #8 and ~~compresses air~~ violently ejects the cork from the mouth of the
 #8.

I'd be sitting on my stool absorbed in the campaigns of Belisarius
 incomprehensible
 or the/theological quarrels of the Magian Christians, Art's maniac grin

would materialize in the window, a "pop!" would startle me into the 20th century, and a cork would sting my cheek. He'd dash off toward his lab and I'd grab my pistol and vault out the window in hot pursuit; noncombatants learned to swing wide when passing the window ~~to~~ lest they be knocked flat by a hurtling stockroom boy.

On occasion, restless, I'd leave my post and go John-Wayne-walking the basement, pistol in belt, seeking Art or a member of his ^{gang} ~~mob~~ for a fast-draw contest. Eventually nobody was bothered by a cork in the face and one day when I caught ~~Art~~ Art weaponless and backed him in a corner he giggled defiantly -- until suddenly he was blinking and coughing, clown-white from chest to ^{nose} ~~eyeballs~~ to hair roots. In secrecy of stockroom-arsenal ~~weapons~~ r-and-d I'd escalated the arms race by inserting a charge of talcum powder behind the projectile cork.

With Art and his cronies I played war games. With a larger group I developed a relationship on another foundation. Not chemistry, which bored me. Not history or literature, which mystified them. Mountains.

After any sunny weekend (there were a few) of winter or spring Bagley glowed with puffy-blistered faces. In asking "Where did you get your sunburn?" I discovered the building was infested with climbers and soon was spending a good part of the workday swapping exploits -- diffidently describing my few modest ventures (Tooth, Cruiser, Big Si, plus mentions of Anderson, Graywolf Pup, Silvertip, and the like), listening chilled to their many impressive triumphs (everybody in Bagley but me seemed to have been up Rainier).

One engineer was especially conspicuous. I first became aware of his notoriety through the foot-high letters chalked by some fan on ^{the brick wall of} his thesis-lab: wall: "KERMIT THE HERMIT -- FRIEND OF THE LAND." Inquiry revealed the tribute had been earned the previous fall when he and a friend ~~(Crabby Dick,~~ also a climber but so cantankerous I kept our dealings strictly to business) hitchhiked to Lake Crescent on the Olympic Peninsula to testify before a Congressional committee considering a tree-butchers' proposal to reduce the size of Olympic National Park. Miraculously ~~the~~ plot was foiled, and ~~partly~~ partly by the testimony of the two Bagleyites.

Amazing to hear the ^{Northwest-owning} ~~omnipotent~~ loggers had been thwarted, temporarily. Startling to meet in ^{the} flesh a real-life conservationist, a species I'd thought as extinct as the dodo. I admired (and ~~of course~~ pitied) his quixotic fervor, his innocent dedication to a noble, ~~but~~ hopeless cause. It was good to know there was somebody willing to stand up to the bulldozers and let them run their tracks up and down his back. As for me, and every other ^{realistic} ~~same~~ child of the wilds, I recognized the invincibility of ~~the~~ Paul Bunyan, ~~and~~ and though mourning the loss of Hidden Lake, Silver Creek, and so much else of my past, had adopted the wise ~~the~~ ^{not denying the rights of} strategy of ^{retreating} deeper into the ^{pristine, unmolested} wilderness, ^{out} immense enough to last my life.

If Kermit's ^{idealistic} ~~naivete~~ amused me, his juggernaut ~~peak-conquering~~ vitality dazzled me. Bagley was just a basecamp. The high hills were his home, never out of mind. Constantly "keeping in shape," in the midst of a conversation ~~and talking all the while~~ he was likely at any moment to do deep knee bends or toe-touching. His voice always was turned to top volume, as if out-shouting a ^{typhoon} ~~blizzard~~. He incessantly and loudly played

Swiss yodeling records in his lab, giving an Alpine air to the entire Bagley basement, whether it wanted it or not. Enamored of everything Nordic except Nazis, he wore his blond Scandinavian hair Prussian-cut and in discussing mountains never used an English word when he knew a German, substituting "bergshteiger" for mountain-climber, "gletscher" for glacier, "gipfel" for peak, "schneefeld" for "snowfield." His favorite expletive was "scheiss!"

In the single climbing season of 1947 he'd climbed all six "major peaks" of Washington -- the five Cascade volcanoes plus Olympus. His goal for 1948 was a feat never before accomplished -- climbing all Six Majors on skis. (Rock bored him. If a mountain wasn't abundantly white he wasn't interested. When other Bagleyites told of piton-pounding on iceless granite spires he dismissed their foolery with a sneering, "Nein gletscher, nein gipfel.") His Faustian ambition filled me with awe, it was like personally knowing Whymper or Mallory. He even dared talk of someday "doing ~~McKinley~~ der meisterberg, ~~McKinley~~ McKinley," and boldly declared he almost wished he was an Englishman so he'd have a chance for a crack at Everest. Not since Camp Parsons had I known anyone who spoke of Everest as if it were on the same planet as mere Seattle mortals.

After Little Si the threat ~~taxxy~~ of the Course ~~to my ego~~ subsided. Indeed, the peril was nearly over. April 18, on McClellan Butte, a minor mountain between North Bend and Snoqualmie Pass, we'd master the ice ax and flee the Mountaineers, skipping the second snow practice, the final practice of the Elementary Course.

My resolve was not weakened by getting the top grade on the written exam concluding the Elementary Course and being personally congratulated by Chairman Cam. That the athletes were dummies was no surprise. I'd never been scared of their brains, if any, only their muscles and guts.

Not that the student body was as uniformly impressive as it seemed in February. Though their numbers diminished drastically after the Monitor Tempest and the Battle of Little Si, many Bettys besides mine were hanging on. Just as inexplicably, many a brawny football player and phys-ed-teacher Amazon had disappeared. There was no ~~guessing~~ ^{guessing} from clubroom appearance how a person would behave on a cliff, in a storm. I'd seen Greek gods pale with fright at Monitor and All-American Boys whimpering at Little Si. And flabby old men and mousey ~~males~~ ^{females} face gales unflinching and perform daring acrobatics with a grace unflawed by tremors.

The lesson was you couldn't tell the athletes from the Bettys by the way they sat ~~their~~ lecture-hall chairs. But there were true athletes in that motley mob and the smaller the mob, the fewer the Bettys, the harder for the Harveys to ~~conceal~~ conceal their clumsiness. Thus I was glad to be escaping while still unexposed.

But I was not escaping, not yet. At the April 14 lecture Cam glumly announced it was snowing ferociously in the high country, avalanches were thundering, and the McClellan Butte practice was postponed. And at the next week's lecture he grimly announced snow was piling deeper, slides running wilder, and the trip was canceled.

Damn! Three more weeks, until the second, now only, snow practice, we were prison-pent. Since we had to stick around anyway, Monie convinced us to sign up for the Intermediate Course, ~~which ~~was~~ followed the Elementary~~ ^{Though} ~~without a pause.~~ Designed for second-year students and largely devoted to advanced rock and ice technique and other matters of no conceivable interest to a superhiker, such subjects were treated as avalanche evasion and glacier travel. ("You go hiking in winter when the snow is unstable, don't you? You've tromped around on glaciers, haven't you? Wouldn't hurt to know stuff like ~~that~~ that.")

Few beginners agreed. Attendance at Intermediate lectures was a third that of our initial Elementary ordeals ~~and~~ and many of the students were new if not unfamiliar, ¹ second-year climbers I'd seen serving as instructors on practices. As one of ~~the handful~~ ^{only several dozen} of surviving novices I felt a bit smug.

Sunday, May 2, encouraged by a brief surcease from incessant storms, we even attended a non-threatening Intermediate rope-handling practice at Duwamish Piers, a ~~pair~~ pair of abandoned concrete pillars of unknown original utility but now, conveniently located beside the Duwamish River just south of Seattle, ^{gratefully exploited} ~~highly-esteemed~~ by climbers.

We practiced rappelling, which I found ~~rather fun~~ ^{tame sport} on a ~~some~~ 20-foot ^{concrete} wall. Betty, ~~then~~ after a suitable amount of preliminary weeping, flew glee-squealing down the rope and pronounced it almost as ^{much fun} ~~good~~ as a sitting glissade. With us both knowing the stunt, the following week Monie, ~~from~~ ^{long} the ~~start~~ worried by our firetrap garret, brought us an old climbing rope to tie to the bedstead and coil by the window. Thereafter I halfheartedly hoped the building would burn so that while other tenants fried, Betty and I could jump blithely out the window and to the cheers of the street crowd slide dramatically to safety.

The remainder of the Duwamish curriculum was ^{mildly} entertaining but useless. ~~Though~~ one of my schemes for summer was to settle 1939 accounts with Mt. Anderson, and that involved crossing two glaciers, ^{but} neither had a crevasse large enough to hold a human body accidentally or on purpose; the ingenious prusik ~~xxx~~ and bilgeri methods of rescuing a climber from a crevasse thus were purely of academic interest. So was the technique brought home from the war by Limber Jim and other Mountain Troopers, the "dynamic belay" for ~~holding leader falls~~ ^{stopping falls by a rope-leader's on our superbiker scrambler} ~~as I saw it~~, Betty never would be leading and I'd never be falling.

Duwamish was such a breeze I also intended to take in, as spectator if not participant, ~~the next~~ ^{the next} ~~Rock~~ Intermediate practice, devoted to small-hold and friction climbing ~~with some~~ ^{in the woods} on an exceptionally-large granite erratic/a couple miles northeast of the University District. However, the trip didn't happen. Belatedly Course leaders discovered that since the previous year Glacier Boulder, ^{or Big Rock} as it was called, ~~was~~ beloved of Mountaineers since 1934, had been surrounded by rows of the apple-crate houses ~~now~~ ^{tacked together all through} being ~~infesting~~ ^{home-owner} the outskirts of Seattle. The ~~guy~~ ^{guy} who inherited the legacy of the Puget Glacier, renamed Wedgewood Rock in honor of the crummy ^{subdivision} ~~instant-clim~~, landscaped the base and objected to hooligans trampling his petunias.

Glacier Boulder canceled. Duwamish Piers as vapid (to me if not new-rappeller Betty) as a Boy Scout knot-tying contest. McClellan Butte canceled. Little Si, except for the Big Rappel and the barrage ~~dodging~~, as challenging as any other mucky trudge in a cold storm. Monitor Rock a rehash of childhood tree-climbing.

As our sentence in the Course drew to an end, a single day in the snow posing the last threat, my dread evaporated. And my respect. This was the Harvard of Northwest mountaineering, the Silver Marmot's Valhalla? A fraud. Had it not been for Tooth and Cruiser I'd have suspected even Monie of being a charlatan. ~~As it was, over pitchers of beer,~~ ^{In} ~~revenge myself on her for her compelling us to join the Mountaineers, over a pitcher of beer I conscripting us by systematically dismantling her revered alma mater.~~

The lectures, I realized once the audience thinned sufficiently so we could hear what was being said, were mostly lousy, rarely evidencing any prior thought. Often a demigod who was supposed to enlighten us for an hour mumbled for 10 minutes and sat down. Cam would unsmilingly thank him and then "offer a few supplementary remarks" -- ^{which is to say that} ~~meaning~~ he, obviously disgruntled, would give the lecture the hero hadn't. Other times the speaker never arrived and after we sat shuffling feet a half-hour Cam would cover the subject off the cuff, so disgusted he barely could unclench ~~his~~ teeth. Still others, presuming us illiterate, simply ^{recited} ~~read about the relevant~~ chapters from The Climbers' Notebook. ~~Why attend the lectures? Why not stay home and read the textbook?~~

As for the practices, even when the sun shone each instructor had five or six students, and on rainy days up to nine or a dozen. With such a ratio the most brilliant and dedicated teacher had small ^{chance} opportunity to teach; on our sole venture in mountainous terrain, Little Si, their efforts went entirely into striving to minimize casualties. What on earth would happen when ~~we~~ began the third and climactic stage of the Course, the "experience climbs," the ascents of genuine mountains? I'd been sort of ~~sure~~ considering going on two of these to satisfy requirements for Elementary Course graduation, to get (just for neatness) a diploma. Now I was having second thoughts.

As any fool could ~~see~~ plainly see, so was Chairman Cam. No more was he the serene unsweating Maximum Leader of February. ~~He~~ He ~~lost control of~~ ^{visibly} the school and was seething with ~~anger and~~ frustration, steadily less able to hide his contempt for unprepared lecturers and absent instructors and incompetent trip leaders.

Monie attempted a defense. The weather certainly wasn't the fault of the Mountaineers. Old-timers couldn't recall so crummy a spring, such ⁺ persistent heavy snowfalls; there was muttering ^{that} ~~about~~ maybe the Ice Age was returning.

Blame the faculty shortage on the war. Enrollment and thus production of new climbers -- which meant new faculty -- naturally had been low for 5 years. Understandably ^{ab} the "each one teach one" system had cracked under mounting postwar pressures, with the enrollment of 1948 double that of 1947, ^{quadruple} quintuple that of 1946. As a member of the Climbing ~~Review~~ Committee, meeting weekly to review the latest disaster, she knew better than I how bad things were, what desperate efforts by a ~~hand~~ handful of old-faithful faculty were required to hold the school tenuously together. What the heck, maybe I wanted my money back? What had we spent -- \$7 for club dues and \$4 for Course registration fees and maybe a total of \$3 for trip fees?

"Yeah, it's cheap. A bargain? Hah!"

"Well, like the telephone company says ~~when you gripe~~ -- if you're not satisfied with us, try the competition."

I granted the Course had once been great -- Monie herself was sufficient ^{proof} ~~evidence~~. However, here as everywhere the clock of the West was running down, Faust becoming a fellah. I'd been hanging around the outfit 2½ months

and what had I learned I really needed to know? Not much except to
~~not~~ avoid mobs, avoid joining clubs -- and except for Monie, avoid climbers.

"Well, okay. It's been a mess so far. Give it one more chance.
You'll enjoy Commonwealth Basin. We always have a terrific time at
Commonwealth."