

July 1948

Chapter 21

IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE

Two miles tall I swaggered on Tuesday along Avenue and over campus, looking down in pity to sealevel dwarfs, and at Bagley bragging ~~of my volcano~~ as full equal of the bergsteiger bunch -- indeed briefly more than equal since only we returned to lowlands victorious, all the other heroes stormed or fogged out of the hills in bedraggled defeat.

Kermit enjoyed my ^{glee} ~~joke~~, shouting, "Now you're set for Der Meisterberg!"

A joke in poor taste. The Red Death ^{mocking} moking me at the masque. Two miles tall I was. Why ruin it by mentioning the third mile?

That evening Monie dropped by the garret, applauded the triumph of her protege, and asked, "You called the clubrooms yet to sign up?"

Sign up! I hadn't thought about it. I hadn't thought about The Mountain, not that way, ever. Or at least not since 1941.

"You graduated from the Elementary Course, that's one requirement. You went on Nisqually, that's another. You did a Major, and maybe you're the only Elementary student who has. The only other requirement is getting approval of the Climbing Committee and I'll be at the meeting to tell them what a peakbagger you are."

They were pushing. The way Grant did in 1940 at the Ranger Lodge, enrolling me in the Lifesaving Course because he demanded that I make Eagle Scout and never mind that I could hardly swim a lick and might damn well drown. Kermit and Bagleyites, Monio and Mountaineers, were forcing me to accept the logic of my life, my doom. Master of my fate, captain of my soul -- what a pile of crap! When the wise-guy sailor from Massachusetts met the sprightly lass on the Puget Sound beach, when barbarian Faust descended from the north to stomp the bones of fellah Apollo, when a fish flopped out on the shore of the soupy-warm sea and breathed air, when Earth materialized from ~~cosmic~~ chaos, all this was implicit. In the Beginning was the End.

Had the Climbing Committee known I was a sick man and abject coward they surely would've spared me, given a reprieve if not a full pardon. But the wicked witch called cackling from the clubrooms. Just concluded was the "ax session" to sort out certain losers from possible winners. She'd pled my cause -- and why not? Her last and best jest.

I couldn't blame Glacier. Because of the Adams fiasco the Committee had waived the requirement for a Major and a few other first-year students also were among ~~the Chosen~~ the Chosen. But no rapture remained in Glacier, that merely 2-mile-high volcano.

Yet it was too soon to gloom. Much could happen in the 10 days before the scheduled ascent, July 18. Earthquake. Typhoon. Pestilence. World War III. Yes, and don't forget the qualification, "scheduled." So too

were McClellan, Constance, Adams, and Eldorado. Against these ^{grandiose} failures stack the piddling successes of Lundin, Chair, and Sluiskin. Whether or not I could climb Rainier the odds certainly were against the snakebit 1948 Climbing Course doing so.

And before ~~then~~ Then was the weekend of the lovers' reunion. Aside from wanting to be together again in ~~the~~ the hills, as we'd not been for a month, we both could use a rest. Gregarious Betty had had a good garrulous Sunday with the mob on Eldorado, standing around shivering while the leaders wandered in fog trying to find the mountain, ~~which~~ and ~~fix~~ failing. As the star of Lundin she was a celebrity, a mascot; I'd no doubt everybody thought her ^{machine-gun} ~~mile-a-minute~~ chatter very cute. However, there'd been hard labor hiking to and from camp and considerable misery on steep heather swept by flurries of sleet and snow. As for me, at midnight Monday I'd really wondered if I'd make it up the steps to the garret and looked forward to a relaxed romp in the flowers with the nut-brown maid.

Saturday we'd loiter along the trail from the Snoqualmie Pass highway to Melakwa Lakes, lounge around the campfire, and Sunday stroll gardens and scramble rocks to the top of Kaleetan. With no Experience Climb scheduled ~~&~~ it wasn't as if I were giving up anything, letting fellow students get a jump on me. And a Pin Peak was a Pin Peak. I'd be better than a third through the ~~Twenty~~ 20.

But Saturday wheedling sweetie-face wife asked if we couldn't do the climb in a single day, leaving town next morning. Yes, if she wanted.

And
^ Sunday she awoke in a 3-Day Mad. What the hell had I done? It wasn't what I'd done but what I intended to do -- pry her out of her cozy garret.

Goddamn females! If she'd pooped out Friday I could've hooked up with a Bagley party -- Kermit, ~~among others~~, had invited me. Too late now. Shit! I give up chances for a worthwhile climb to be husband-lover and the ungrateful bitch leaves me high and dry. Taking a solo hike would ~~be~~ be a flat zero. I was no damn hiker.

Eat breakfast. Read the funny papers. Look through window to sunlight dappling maple trees. Nerves scream at the inaction, at the thoughts of...

I stormed out of the garret, stalked the Avenue. No pleasure anymore in puniness of dwarfs. Blue sky scornfully asked, "Why are you in the city, little man?" Feet led me unthinking onto campus, up this path and down that. And without noticing, to the ~~xx~~ architectural ~~xxxx~~ axis of the campus, the wide airway between rows of buildings called Rainier Vista.

There it is. My God, there it is.

Days and weeks at a time, winter and summer, Seattle squats beneath low gray clouds, sees neither sun nor stars nor horizons. Natives go grayly about gray business, immigrants from California despondently inspect armpits for moss, those from the Great Plains develop acute claustrophobia. Then the north wind blows the sky clean and blue and The Mountain appears, the biggest damn thing in America.

Except for these moments of miracle, lowlanders ignore Rainier, treating it as a banality, no more awesome than the Sun. To hikers, though, who sweat and pant to a summit a mile above the sea and are dazzled by the stupendous white heap rising nearly 2 miles higher, the shining crest perfectly symbolized the unattainable. I'd long been used to the taunting mass, had gotten over being bothered. So it was there, so what? So was the Moon. If you can't hike it, screw it.

But now they tell me it is attainable. I've been roped to people who've been to the crest. They say I can go there. They say I must.

No, don't flinch, don't slink into sheltering campus woods. Face it.

Sit by Frosh Pond. The exact same spot I sat that winter night in 1943 after the doctor told me always to wear a hat in the hot sun and be careful to go slow up steps, that night I ~~looked~~ stared in ~~the~~ black water and saw grinning Death. Since that night I've never gone to a doctor except to get new glasses or have a tooth fixed. Doctors tell you things you don't want to hear.

How far away is it? About 60 miles. Impossible to feel from here how big it is. Willis Wall might be only a thousand feet tall. But a month ago on Sluiskin I saw slow-motion avalanches flow cloud-like down the vertical mile to the Carbon Glacier -- saw them flow silently and long moments later heard the rumble.

The satellite crag of Little Tahoma sticking up on the left flank, barely poking through the blue blanket of lowland haze. Looks to be maybe as high as Constance. But it's 11,117 feet. Climb it and you're higher than Glacier. And The Mountain is mounded above -- to 14,408 feet.

Horrible.

I know what to do. Call the clubrooms tomorrow and cancel. No, not tomorrow. Wait to the end of the week to make the story more credible. I got hold of a batch of bad oysters, I'm sick as a dog, scratch me from the list. They'll never know.

But remember Monie cackling about the uniquely virulent mountain sickness of The Mountain that strikes people before ever they leave sea level. Each year somebody gets hold of a batch of bad oysters. They'll know. Even if I fall down the garret steps or smash up the V-8 and bust my back and skull and both legs they'll suspect. Crap out and it's the end of me with the Mountaineers.

Why should an anarchist care? Good grief, leave philosophy out of it, why should a connoisseur of decently-proportioned ^{human} souls care? Needless to ~~say~~ say that mankind in the general stinks. But this bunch grossly offends in the particular.

To call them freaks is too bland. Stand by a trail and watch the circus parade: Equipment nuts hauling sacksful of toys and perpetually devising Rube Goldberg contraptions. Transvestite clowns competing to see who can wear the most darling hat and who with sunburn cream and lipstick can paint his face to most nearly resemble a 2-dollar whore. Food faddists gobbling wheat germ and yogurt and blackstrap molasses and swilling celery juice. Physical-culture fanatics running in place at rest stops and chinning on tree branches. Sun-worshipping exhibitionists stripping to

jockstraps at first bright beam. Lechers and nymphomaniacs creeping in and out of each others' tents. Communists ~~striking~~^{plotting} to overthrow the government and Nazis ~~plotting~~^{awaiting} the return of Hitler from his hideout in Argentina. Prophets of the New Faith in Outer Space who consider themselves to have a special divine mission due to the first observation anywhere in the world of flying saucers having been made last summer in the vicinity of Rainier. By ~~comparison~~^{comparison} the cranky old brush-apes and the yelping Boy Scouts and the several reputed escaped inmates of mental hospitals seem normal.

Yet it was such freaks who made the first ascent of Olympus in 1907, pioneered the Snoqualmie Pass peaks in the 20 years following, and in the 1930s explored the North Cascades and forced new routes up volcano ice walls and raised their technique and ~~and~~ audacity to a level matching any in America. Reading old issues of The Mountaineer annual at the clubrooms I've shared astounding adventures with these ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ authentic heroes (and yes, heroines) -- these men and women who've been my teachers and politics in the Climbing Course. If economics/have prevented them from traveling to Alps and Himalaya, still they are fit to walk in the company of Whymper and Mallory.

I know virtually nothing about my companions except what I see in the hills, read in the annuals. If they're employed I don't know what at, if they're students I don't know what of. From and to a void they come and go -- fresh-created each weekend, living the mountain hours, and evaporating at trip's end.

That's not entirely true. Weekdays I see a few at the Co-op and clubrooms. Somehow I've begun finding it necessary to drop in the Co-op every week -- for ^{One-Seal} boot grease or ^{Sailor Boy} pilot bread, ^{manila} sling rope or ⁶⁻¹² bug juice, or just to fondle the pitons and snap the carabiners and admire the new nylon rope that wealthy climbers are starting to use ^{instead} ~~in place~~ of manila. One can't help chumming with other customers, the establishment being a slightly-oversized closet with a capacity limited to three or four shoppers at a time. The quarters, though, are spacious enough; our membership card number is 1102, so allowing for members who've quit climbing since the Co-op was organized by Mountaineers in 1938 the active customers total maybe several hundred. No regular staff exists. The closet is in the office of Adam the Accountant and Notary Public. You pick out what you want, carry it to a counter and ring a bell to signal you're ready, and he or his secretary come and take your money.

After visiting the Co-op I go across the hall to the Mountaineer clubrooms to check out books from the library -- my stockroom reading is less and less history of the West and more and more ~~of~~ alpine tragedies and triumphs. I study the sign-up list to see ~~what's~~ who's going on the ~~next~~ next trip and chat with the part-time secretary, who knows all the climbers by first name and also many other of the 2000 club members, the non-climbing skiers and hikers and campers. Usually some acquaintance from practice or climb is there and we shoot the breeze.

When a Scout I invariably on my after-school jaunts downtown stopped in the Seattle Area Council headquarters, supposedly to pick up the Troop 324 mail but actually because it was the city hangout of Camp Parsons hands.

as in the Dark Ages the cenobites of Ireland fled to the Shetland Islands, the Orkneys, and Iceland, and those of the continent to the dark forests and steep mountains.

The Scouts then. The Mountaineers now. The first group I've belonged to since disintegration of the Lincoln High gang.

I didn't think I needed a group anymore. But we're inescapably apes after all, afraid to be alone. Anarchism has been necessary because I was expelled from America -- or vice versa, no matter which. I didn't know that ~~was~~ within the Empire that offers only pan et circens, that can no longer enlist our spirit and command our allegiance, in the a-borning medieval age there were fellaheen I could call brothers, with whom I ~~could~~ ^{could} ~~retreat~~ to a monastery to jointly confront the Old Ones, (And if the ~~barbarian hordes~~ ^{mercenaries} in service of corrupt Byzantium are violating our forest sanctuary, we are safe still on cliffs and glaciers where trees don't grow, in the City of God beyond avarice of Civitas Romanum.) Having discovered the group, I don't want to perch on a stylus like St. Simeon. I want to belong.

Yes, freaks. Peter Pans and Wendys playing ~~games~~ ^{games} with Captain Hook. Refusing to grow up, substituting peaks for "adult" goals, defying old age by flirting with sudden death. Superbly-childish, grandly-improvident mountain bums.

Freaks? These recent weeks, becoming myself freakier by the ~~week~~ Sunday, I've begun thinking the ~~was~~ real freaks are the non-climbers. The goggling gaping lowlanders who listen to your exploits and then ask why you climb mountains.

Why indeed? ~~Though new at it~~ I've already learned to amuse myself at their expense. In solemn whisper I reveal that for sheer self-torturing

ecstasy the sport surpasses anything tried by early Christian martyrs or fans of the Marquis de Sade. They're not surprised, they've always suspected Mallory was covering up some ghastly perversion with his cryptic "Because it is there."

The fact is, as an Old Faithful said in a Climbing Course lecture, "If you have to ask the question you wouldn't understand the answer."

Which is to say that after you've climbed a while you quit asking yourself the question. You realize that even if there were a simple answer it wouldn't explain anything. So the human body consists of 97% worth of chemicals -- does that explain King Lear? The Marriage of Figaro? The cathedral at Rheims? It doesn't even explain Mickey Mouse.

But be candid. I've not climbed long enough, ^I continue to ~~ask~~ ask myself the "why." Know thyself? I do and I don't.

I do know why I've hiked. Though other events of my 13th year have blurred in memory and whole months utterly faded out, I can remember as yesterday ~~walking into~~ the Marmot Pass sunset. I have total recall of the fairy-tale entry ~~into~~ Deception Basin, the whistling-marmot symphony of Hayden Pass, the attempt on Anderson, ~~xxxxxxx~~ the 3-Day Blow on Lost Ridge. Each hour of my mountain past has expanded to obliterate entire weeks of the surrounding city past. The hikes are islands of shining wilderness sanity amid oceans of muddled city nonsense.

It was the green sickness of youth that caused me, after 1942, to ~~foolishly~~ foolishly imagine I could be content with several highland days a summer. Here on campus today, amid college-Gothic towers of that ill era when I

was intoxicated by Truth and Beauty (and broads and booze) those years now seem a dream (and at the end a nightmare) from which I awoke at Lost Pass these 2 years and 2 weeks ago, awoke to see that time was flying and in the city I was dying, that only in the mountains did I live, that I must crack on full sail and hit the trail.

Lost Pass was a rebirth, the Second Coming of the vision of Marmot Pass, and the vision newly vivid for the shadowy existence before. My photo albums show the passion and the glory since. With the camera given by my folks for Christmas of 1938 I've snapped pictures helter skelter, the snapping stimulated not by cool artistry but hot emotion. From 1939 through 1945 I pasted in albums an average of some 30 mountain ~~shots~~ shots a year. Since Lost Pass I've added some 600, an average of 300 a year -- I've lived 10 times more intensely.

Or better say, from Lost Pass to last August I made each year into 10. And now? ~~The~~ Completely off the photo-album scale are Tooth, Cruiser, Haystack, Huckleberry, Glacier. Not from snapshots could one know that whereas hiking stretches out time, climbing shatters the temporal prison altogether. Climbing is nothing less than the secret of eternal life! Or it is until it kills you. As say up there in the sky 60 miles south of where I sit this moment...

Why?

First ask "when?"

For Western Man (and not Apollinian nor Magian nor Egyptian nor Chinese nor Indian nor any other Man has felt the urge) climbing commenced in earnest in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when Culture was ripening toward the rot of Civilization. Climbing was and is the renunciation of Civilization, the last best impulse of the yearning-striving that in pure holy youth erected cathedrals and in sick ~~sick~~ decadence sticks up skyscrapers. Seek Faust nowadays not among towers of City but of Wilderness.

Was it coincidence that for me the desire arose simultaneously with the dummy? Perhaps ^{the lust for} ~~that blighted dream of~~ Everest was the sublimation of nascent manhood. And perhaps that first longing to climb, after being thwarted by a failure of my flesh, was submerged in the flesh of woman. The Green Woman-nut-brown maid.

Why the revival of the longing? Certainly not from an ending of our garret honeymoon, as idyllic now as a year ago. Perhaps because for me Earthly passion is not enough, I seek the Heavenly orgasm that cannot be achieved through Green Woman alone, I need also the White Goddess.

Yet perhaps I'm falling into the D.H. Lawrence-S. Freud fallacy, viewing life narrowly through the eye of the cock. Baffling though it is, woman also climbs. Perhaps because man and woman share common ground (morbid pun). Perhaps the "when" has more ~~to~~ to do with fear than love. Perhaps the ~~banana~~ banana peel-gallows humor of climbers is a deep symptom. Perhaps for each man/woman climbing begins with the frenzied determination to force a confrontation, to abjure defensive cowering, to take the offensive, risk the unnecessary death and thus triumph over Death.

Triumph? Of course not. But at least find a way of life in the presence of death. In the wilderness where They live make peace with the Old Ones. Bend to Them as Lords of the Realm and receive as benefice what a friend of Mallory's called "the freedom of the hills."

Why?

First ask "what?"

The technique of climbing, I've learned, is not much different from that of ridge-running and talus-hopping and ~~felsenmeer~~ felsenmeer-scrambling, is little more complicated than clambering about in trees. The basic tools are hands and feet. The ice ax essentially is a device for converting an arm (or both arms in coordination) into a third leg. The rope brings together a number of hands and feet for mutual support.

The critical added ingredient -- and what divides climbing from hiking -- is exposure. But I've found that tolerance for air grows quickly. In fact, once hands and feet are trusted to maintain secure attachment to Earth, exposure becomes exhilarating. The likes of Icarus, Leonardo, Wright Brothers, and Lucky Lindy may envy the birds and build noisy machines to war against gravity. Climbers don't require unnatural wings, they walk through the air, and quietly.

Also ~~is~~ separating climbing from hiking is relentless exploitation of the body. As a hiker I thought 8 hours on the hoof a respectable day and 10 hours strenuous. But for a climber 12 hours is light exercise and

14 routine. On Glacier we did in a day what as a hiker I'd have considered a proper 3-day ~~xxx~~ task -- and on the Tuesday sensed in depths of punished flesh a terrible new strength growing. As climbers test the nerve and thus build nerve, so they push the body to its limits and thus extend limits.

A related difference. As a hiker I stoically endured the crummy weather of my ocean-exposed home hills, frankly preferring sunshine and starlight, whenever feasible avoiding storms. But the rule of the climber is to leave town even if the world is ending, to set out from camp except during a simultaneous hurricane and earthquake, and never to retreat until the next step upward can only be into the grave. Chairman Cam was in the right on Adams, the rules required that we ascend ~~into~~ that gale to just short of the point of no return. ~~xxxxx~~ On Glacier we proved a lover of the sky can survive its harsh embrace.

What is climbing? It's pure brute drive.

What?

The larky Climbing Course lecturer scared Christer students when he wisecracked, "For climbers the mountains are a religion. That's why you'll always find us there on Sunday."

No ~~jest~~. Plain fact. I long ago learned I'm exceptionally, hopelessly religious. Thus as a child I couldn't swallow the cant of organized superstition nor as a youth the positivism of materialist-mechanists. Thus I sought in Truth and Beauty the union with the One. Hearing my first

live symphony concert, reading Adonais, I felt myself approaching the verge.

But close only counts in horseshoes. Not in music or poetry, science or history, nor any other confection of the intellect have I trembled on the verge. Solely in wilderness have those moments come. The Marmot Pass sunset. The glissade into the Graywolf. (For not all ecstasy is bliss.)

If among pagans I pretend to joke about it, the self-flagellation is vital to the rite. Toppling to the ground at the end of the Whitechuck trail, so exhausted by 14 galloping hours I was beyond weariness, there came not through sense organs of destroyed body but flowing directly into freed spirit the softness of forest duff, the coolness of river breeze, the greenness of ferns and moss, the roar of waterfall.

And if destruction of the body frees the spirit, when the spirit too nears destruction it prepares to mingle with the Many. On the South Face of The Tooth I was the valleyful of air, on Cruiser I was the sky-rending fang of basalt, on the Haystack I was the cloud-mingling wall of snow, on Huckleberry I was the red bells, white bells, yellow bells of heather, on Glacier I was the black-hearted squall. And the Many led to the One. The One that may be separated into a pantheon of various manifestations -- Nightmare, Old Ones, Green Woman, White Goddess. Or for convenience, despite the term's having been so mucked up by merchants of mumbo-jumbo, God.

In climbing I've penetrated God.

Or ~~XXXXX~~ almost.

What?

A comedy. A very low comedy.

That's why climbers are crudely ~~and~~ puerile, as in descending from the Nisqually practice we capered and leapt and hooted, openly mocking tourists whose only crime was gaping at the majesty of Rainier, as on the drive home from Glacier we barged into a restaurant and by revolting table manners ruined the ~~the~~ digestion of the lowlander customers.

We're like garlic fanatics, deliberately making ourselves obnoxious to all lacking a gutful of garlic.

We're as rude and rowdy as precipice and glacier, avalanche and blizzard, ~~as~~ we have the social grace of a lightning storm. But then, with the entire active climbing citizenry of Puget Sound numbering a mere several hundred, and with fewer than one in 10 of the ~~February~~ Climbing Course ^{of February} multitude surviving to July, we hardly can help being elitists, fascists. It's not our fault we're so damn superior, ~~that only we can see the joke.~~

Climbing is a comedy because life is a comedy, the cosmos is a comedy. Climbing is our laughter.

What?

Sanity, Flagrant sanity.

Lowlanders say we are mad, they are sane. Oh, sure. So sane they progress from World War I to Depression to World War II to preparations for World War III, so sane they build the City and then drop the Bomb on it.

It's not climbing that's crazy, it's all the not climbing ~~that~~ that's ~~maxxing~~ going on ~~the~~ in the world.

What?

Adventure.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson said, "An adventure is a sign of incompetence."
 A competent man is ever prepared for any exigency, never must be a hero,
 leads an uneventful, welfare-state-placid existence.

A pox on it. Incompetence is the meaning of living, ~~the essence of~~
~~climbing.~~ Whether in lowlands or mountains, the odds are against us, in the
 long run our luck will run out. We'd prefer it to happen in the mountains.
 We remember (and honor ^{and envy}) that on the descent from the first climb of the
 Matterhorn half of Whimper's companions fell to their deaths, that on
 Everest Mallory disappeared in the cloud to be seen no more. Clean ends.

It's not the end we dread but drowning in a sewer of stinking nonsense.
 Therefore we run from the City, we renounce the fellaheen drudging, the
 imperialist strutting, the technocrat tinkering, the Green-and-~~the~~-Blue
 politicking, all the petty frivolities of history's ~~a~~ conclusion, we
 abandon perpetual questioning, "Does Man (or can Man, or should Man)
 actually ~~a~~ exist on Earth?" We fly to the Wilderness to celebrate
 incompetence, to partake in the supreme clean adventure. Climbing is
 the trumpeting by the individual that "I BLUNDER THEREFORE I AM."

Because of Tooth and Cruiser, Haystack and Huckleberry and Glacier,
 I exist. This Sunday I do.

Out beyond Frosh Pond and campus, beyond Seattle, beyond green-forested
 foothills ~~lost in~~ ^{blued by} summer haze, The Mountain exists. The greatness of
 Earth embodied, the vastness of the Unknown symbolized, the visible
 White Goddess, the ever-reminding temple of the Old Ones.

Rainier and me. The showdown. The shootout.

Even if it's certain death, not to be shunned. For if I run, how can I live in Seattle? With eyes averted from sky the rest of my miserable ^{days} ~~life~~?

But if I ~~sp~~ ^{attack}, and if I live? Then I'll have won permanent membership in the Group, then I can be a climber forever.

Get past the obstacle of Rainier and ~~take a one-man barbarian horde~~ ^{as a young Faust} I can plunder the Cascades and Olympics. Two weeks from today the University Climbing Club, to which as an employee I technically belong, is headed for Constance; I might, after all, win the Girl of the Golden West. The ^{next} ~~weekend~~ ^{after} there's an Experience Climb of Shuksan, the 9127-foot neighbor of Baker, the most-photographed mountain in America, for years staring at me from calendars. On Labor Day there's an Experience Climb of Baker. Easy ^{our northernmost volcano,} then would be the path to Adams and St. Helens and Olympus, completing the Six Majors. And there are the Snoqualmie Pin Peaks, the Monte Cristo summits around Silvertip, the ~~max~~ ^{marveled at} maze of the North Cascades ~~seen~~ from Glacier. Not to forget my first home, the Olympics, for which in addition to Constance I have solid plans. With climber's eyes I've seen in 1939 photos that Flypaper Pass, ^{walkup} is a ~~climb~~; during my vacation week in August I'll settle scores with Anderson, and LaCrosse too. To rub salt in the mountains' wounds, I'll take Betty to the tops! (Conscience does nag, I ~~do~~ have neglected her, I do want to walk green meadows with the nut-brown maid and re-pledge vows.)

But everything depends on Rainier. Fail ^{there} and shame will drive me from the Group, probably from ~~my job at~~ Bagley. And once the retreat

the crux
of Anderson,

starts, where can it stop? I'll be lucky to salvage a skulking life as a superhiker, to have the nerve for Anderson. I might even be driven from the hills, or entirely out of Puget Sound to the White Spaces on the map not haunted by Sunrise Mountains east and Sunset Mountains west. To nullity.

There it is, waiting. My life. Possibly my death. Just 7 days off.