

July 1948

Chapter 22

THE THIRD MILE

The mid-July in-a-row trinity of great and famous anniversaries: Bastille Day, St. Swithin's Day, my birthday. Feeling no more than a ~~Lincoln High 16, even a Camp Person 16~~ ^{Marmot Pass 13} just-like-that I'm 23. Over the hill and ~~toboggan-sliding~~ ^{Graywolf-glissading} down to 30. So recently young, now nearly middle-aged. And naught accomplished with my life, nor plans to accomplish aught, no goals but peaks -- and one peak blocking the way to freedom.

To make matters worse, my assigned passenger for the drive to Paradise was the absolute nadir of the Mountaineers, the most nerve-grating ~~ass-paining~~ ass-paining of the Boy Scouts, a chattering-giggling lout of a high-school idiot named Richard. Hours in the V-8 I suffered in nauseated silence his bubble-gum popping, his muscle-twitching, his incessant infantile comments on the passing scene, spewings of a minute, malformed brain. When we left Seattle the July 16 ^{Friday} afternoon (I having taken off early from the stockroom and the All-American Boy gladly sprung from padded cell by tormented mother) I was deep in the gloom of the a-year-older-than-Thursday syndrome; on the highway I was battered by ~~infantile~~ babbling into senility. Christ, I never was that young. Nobody ever was that young.

Compounding my ~~own~~ depression were the miles of skinned hills, clearcut from horizon to horizon, millions of bleached stumps where in my childhood were serene green seas of tall old firs. The bastards were going to scalp the whole bloody world.

Like diving into a snow-cold alpine tarn after staggering up a sun-scorched trail was entering forest shadows of Mount Rainier National Park. This, at least, was unchanged. This was precisely as it was on camping trips with my folks far back in misted beginnings of my consciousness. You can go home again in a National Park. But noplacel else.

We drove by Longmire Inn (remember the Thanksgiving dinner of 1931) and proceeded along the narrow, twisting road to the Nisqually River bridge (look up the canyon to the moraine-buried glacier snout), ~~and~~ steeply up the canyon wall to the ridge, and through subalpine forest to snowy, sun-bright parklands of Paradise, 5500 feet high. In the ranger station I told the man ^{we'd come} ~~we were there~~ to climb The Mountain. (Spine tingled to hear utter ^{announcement} myself ~~say~~ the preposterous ~~words!~~)

He was jovial but not stunned by my audacity. "Mountaineers, aren't you? Been expecting you guys. Your advance guard started up this morning." (That actually was a separate though allied party, Monie, Huckleberry Bill, and three others recruited by Old Faithful Lloyd for an incredible adventure -- staying overnight in the crater!) "You're the first of the main bunch to show. Well, fill out these forms here, then dump your gear in the parking lot and I'll ~~come~~ give it the eye."

The official Summit Climber Registration form. Space for my alpine exploits -- ~~too much space~~, I wrote large not to leave an embarrassing

expanse of white. Phone number of next of kin. Next of kin! The landlady would yell up the stairwell, "Phone for Mannings!", and Betty would run down from the garret and hear some total stranger say...

Spread on asphalt by the V-8 the equipment double-checked last night ~~in the garret~~ against what's become my every-weekend lest-thee-forget list: Clothing -- fresh-greased Bone-Dry boots with full set of tricouni nails, two pairs of wool socks to wear and one pair in the pack, wool downhill ski pants, wool shirt, wool sweater, war-surplus ^{canvas-stiff} Navy foulweather parka, wool watch cap, wool mittens. The Seven Essentials required on Mountaineer climbs -- map, compass, flashlight and two extra batteries, surplus Army Air Corps "mook" goggles, Boy Scout knife, emergency matches in waterproof vial, first aid kit. Camping gear -- Trapper Nelson, surplus down-and-feather ^{and eating} mummy sleeping bag, surplus liferaft sail. Cooking/gear -- spoon, stainless-steel ~~and~~ Ome Daiber cup for both eating and cooking, surplus fuel rations for the simple ^{food-heating} ~~cooking~~ I planned, not yet having bought a Primus stove. Food -- mostly ~~crab~~ carbohydrates for easy digestion, largely candy bars and jars of ~~big~~ baby food, the rule being not to overburden the alimentary canal, which on high is in enough trouble as it is. Miscellaneous gear -- toilet paper, handkerchief, sunburn cream, chapstick, surplus canteen, camera and film, cigarettes and matches, junkbag containing spare flashlight bulb and repair kit of needle and thread and ~~string~~ cord and wire. Climbing gear -- Co-op cotton-canvas rucksack, Bhend ice ax (guide model), 10-point Eckenstein crampons, 120 feet of 7/16-inch manila (not mine, a Climbing Course rope, picked up at clubrooms as part of my driver's responsibility).

Chilling to be Government-Inspected for a climb, to require approval by a deputy of the President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. I winced as the jolly ranger pounded the pavement with my 2-month-old \$12 ice ax, chuckling, "Last summer I busted three axes in one party. They should've thanked me -- better to ~~discover~~^{find} dry rot here than on the mountain -- but somehow they didn't get around to it. Well heck, they didn't lose their climb, they rented axes at the Guide Hut."

As we repacked he rambled on. "Sure been a bitch of a season for climbing. God~~awful~~ weather up to now, but I guess you guys know that. Snow so soft up high all June you sank in to your belly-button. The first party to make the top was last Sunday, doing a ski ascent over on the Emmons." (That was Kermit the Hermit!) "Nobody's been up this side yet. Two of our staff are headed out this afternoon -- trying for a first ascent of the God~~awful~~ Nisqually Icefall, if you'll believe it! You'll be the first up the Kautz."

Idiot Richard giggle-asked if he was giving us a moneyback guarantee.

"Oh golly, you Mountaineers always bag it. Last year nearly 300 people of all kinds started out and only about half made it, but 50 or so of those were your Climbing Course outfit, and then there were some private parties from the club too, so better than half the successes were Mountaineers. Most of the rest were with the guides. This is the big weekend of the season for the hill. Unless the weather ~~is~~^{'s} a lot better from now on, chances are that because of you there'll be as many people in the crater Sunday as ~~will~~^{||} get there the whole rest of the summer. I've figured out a rule of thumb,

watching how things go over the years. If you're not a ranger or guide or Mountaineer, you've got about one chance in four of reaching the crater. If you're one of our folks or a Mountaineer, and you're on the Kautz or Emmons, and a storm doesn't blast your tail off, you're ^{a shoo-in} practically a cinch."

A nice man. He'd noted from our registration forms we were new to Rainier and was offering reassurance. Some kindness! If the success rate of Mountaineers was virtually 100 percent, the more glaringly memorable my failure. ("Yeah, everybody made the top but some ^{poor cut} guy named Manning, Husband of the gal that got stabbed in the Lundin avalanche.")

The Idiot and I walked over to Paradise Inn to buy ice cream cones and wander through the interior; from the long ago I remembered the magnificent rustic structure, a giant chalet with beams and pillars of ~~huge~~ cedar logs. We went out on the porch and watched tourists click Brownies and stuff nickels in pay telescopes for close looks at glaciers; back home in the tall corn of Iowa they'd spend the winter boring friends and neighbors and church socials with photos and anecdotes of their Grand Tour of the National Parks of the West.

Whispered one awed old lady to another, "Do you suppose anybody has ever been all the way to the top?"

Grouched one old harridan to her husband, "There certainly isn't much to do in this Park. We've fed the bears and seen a glacier and bought all their postcards and decals. Well, I guess we should walk up to the summit before supper just so we can say we did it."

Dumb tourists. As dumb as I was in 1931, thinking that on our meadow hike we conquered Rainier. Now, 17 years later, I was here again, dumb ~~as~~ as ever. Déjà vu, déjà vu.

It looks infinitely huge, it looks ridiculously small. From Paradise one can't grasp the size ~~because~~ ^{at} there's nothing for comparison, no way to determine the scale. Even high on the slopes, as on the Nisqually last month, one only vaguely begins to sense the immensity because after a several-hour ascent the summit icecap appears as far away as ever. Or farther.

One must intellectualize. Realize that the several mountains viewed on the drive from Seattle to Paradise are ~~all one~~ ^{a single} mountain. The Mountain of the North, with the mile-high ice-and-lava precipice of Willis Wall in the center and on the northeast side the Emmons-Winthrop Glaciers, the largest ice mass in the 48 states. The Mountain of the West, dominated by the ^{falling from 14,000 feet to 5000.} 3-mile-wide frozen torrent of the Puyallup-Tahoma Glaciers. And finally the Mountain of the South, with the monstrous bluff of volcanic garbage called Gibraltar up to the right, the terrific Nisqually Icefall directly above, and the long lava ridge of Success Cleaver up to the left.

Realize that The Mountain feeds 30 glaciers with names and a dozen-odd without, that ^{all by itself} this ~~one~~ peak bears more ice than exists in the 47 states outside Washington.

Realize that if all The Mountain above 5500 feet, the elevation of Paradise, were sliced off there'd be a ^{round plateau ringed by an} ~~continent~~ ^{of mesas, together} and archipelago forming a circle with a diameter of 20 miles; that a slice at 8000 feet would leave a ^{solitary plateau} ~~island~~ with a diameter of 6 miles; at 10,000 feet, the elevation of Glacier, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles; at 12,000 feet, the elevation of Adams, 2 miles;

and even at 14,000 feet ^a ~~the~~ ^{mesa (the newest, or} 1/2-mile-wide ~~island~~ ^{culminating in} Columbia Crest, ~~on the rim of the newest~~ ^{crater}) ^{two} plus ~~to~~ ^{islet} remnants of older craters, (Point Success and Liberty Cap).

Realize how crushingly high it is. But ~~there~~ the intellect fails, the body quails. How many steps to Columbia Crest? As many bucketfuls as to bail the oceans ~~are~~ dry.

Terrifyingly high. I breathed ^{easy} ~~easily~~ at 10,430 feet -- but perhaps because I was too scared by the black squall to notice illness. Anyway, none of Monie's grisly anecdotes are from 10,000 feet. Somewhere around 11,000 climbers ^{grow listless and} lose appetite, at 12,000 ^{choke} ~~strangle~~ on vomit, at 13,000 ^{drift} ~~grow~~ ^{into fugue} ~~listless and dizzy~~, at 14,000 hear voices in the wind, see visions in the snow, fall asleep on their feet ~~and can't be woke.~~

In Colorado they run up trails and drive cars to 14,000 feet and aren't impressed. But they live at 5000 feet and we live at sea level, our blood ~~is~~ thin from breathing thick air. Even healthy Puget Sounders ascending on a weekend to Rainier's high air, no time to acclimatize, get violently sick. What of those who aren't healthy? Who've been told by doctors to ~~go~~ ^{up} ~~take it~~ slow ^{on} stairs?

How dare I presume?

True, I've climbed high on Earth. But Rainier is not of Earth, belongs to the Moon, the stars, the infinite sky...

We drove back down (retreated down) to Longmire Campground, where amid tourist campers were mingled Mountaineers. Idiot Richard spotted Boy Scout

buddies and ran off to giggle and chatter. I was alone, my only Mountaineer friends, Monie and Bill, already on high.

When was I first in this campground? Before I can really remember, ~~clearly~~, sometime in 1927-28. Rainier National Park then was but several years older than I am now. The road to Paradise had been open just a dozen years. Lord I'm ancient. Would I ~~could be~~ ^{were} a child again, letting that big slobbering bear eat a Hershey bar from my hand, then looking up (and my horrified folks too!) to see a ranger with a rifle trained on the bear's skull, lest I panic and try to pull my fingers away before they're licked clean.

On a gas burner in the kitchen hut I heated a can of beef stew. Until twilight I sat by the cold loud Nisqually River, brown with rock flour milled by ice, and thought of the ice rising 11,647 feet above. I crawled in bag and slept -- or tried, and failed.

Perhaps my last night. In our farewell this afternoon Betty knew. As before Cruiser. I told her not to worry, if things got too tough I'd quit. But of course I ~~xxx~~ won't, can't. She sleeps in our safe garret bed. Was that our last kiss?

July 17, 6 a.m. Up. Heat cocoa water on ~~z~~ gas burner, dry-masticate part of a butterhorn, throw away the rest. Again drive to Paradise, not hearing words in the buzz-buzz-buzz of the Idiot.

It begins.

Around Leader Ed, former Rainier summit guide and Mountain Trooper, and Chairman Cam, whom I've not seen since Adams and whose ~~visage is as~~ scowl ~~is~~ now as then, we gather, 39 in number. Ed explains that six others, ~~all~~ veterans all, left at dawn. We'll have their track to follow, as well as route markers left yesterday by ~~Ed~~ Lloyd -- "willow wands," so called because that's what climbers used for the purpose ~~was~~ before the adoption of green-dyed bamboo garden stakes with red flags tied on for added visibility.

We'll climb to high camp as individuals rather than teams, each at his own pace, unroped because though we cross two glaciers we do so in ^{ARCAS} ~~zones~~ never in human memory crevassed. If by chance they now are -- well, we've a dozen comrades ahead who'll ~~discover~~ discover that, in which case we'll ^{become} ~~turn into~~ a rescue party! Just be sure to stick to the established track, don't wander off.

I survey the crowd. Recognize a dozen faces from the beginner multitude of February. A dozen ^{others} ~~more~~ who were instructors, ~~this spring~~. The rest are strangers -- presumably the second-year ^{or more} climbers who didn't come out in the ^{spring} ~~storms~~ to do their "each one teach one" duty. Since the Climbing Course alternates between routes, one year climbing the Emmons Glacier, the next the Kautz, for ~~these~~ second-year students as for ~~the~~ beginners today's way ~~into~~ enters foreign country.

"Okay!" yells Leader Ed. "Whenever you're ready!"

7:15 in sunny morning. Hoist Trapper Nelson. Climb the white wall still bounding, though not so formidably as a month ago, the parking lot. Crunch night-frozen snow under ^{trikes} ~~trikes~~. Step carefully not to crush avalanche lilies in melting-out ~~to~~ islands of meadow.

It can't be done. Even this soon the legs wobble, this low the lungs heave. Impossible to attain 11,500-foot Camp Hazard, 6000 feet above Paradise, higher than all but two peaks in the state. ^{Due to} ~~Because of~~ a dip along the way the total elevation gain is 6500 feet. With a heavy pack. Into the zone of queer air. Monie said the traditional rule is that if you make Hazard on your feet, not your knees, the summit is a breeze. By no means everybody makes Hazard. It may not be tomorrow I die, but today. ~~Probably~~ ~~5 minutes from the U-8 the death is upon me.~~

How does it happen? Do you feel a sudden attack, go ~~down~~ down like a falling tree, and die on the spot? Or slowly weaken, then ~~abruptly~~ collapse, to be ~~stretcher-carried~~ stretcher-rescued like Betty from Lundin? Or warned by early symptoms do you quit, descend alone, unnoticed by companions? Certainly ^{none} ~~one~~ will notice me. My wife, my friends are elsewhere.

The mob has separated in twos and threes and fours of boisterous buddies; loudest, of course, are Idiot Richard and the Boy Scouts. Grim silent loner, I. The pack breaks into a half-mile string. The heck with trying to keep up with frontrunners, the athletes. This is not a day for competing but for surviving. When to finish is unlikely, to finish last would be a victory.

The knoll of Alta Vista, a clump of alpine trees amid snowcovered meadows. Nostalgia. I was here a month ago, I was here in 1931. Nearly 6000 feet. 7:35. Sweat beginning to flow, lungs finding a rhythm, tight legs loosening, sloppy guts hardening.

Upward to Glacier Vista, also familiar from a month ago. 6500 feet, 8 o'clock. Glissade and plunge-step to the edge of the Nisqually Glacier,

losing 500 vertical feet, precious altitude that must be gained all over again.

Now the new. Last month we turned right, ^{ascending} to crevasses and icefall for practice. Today we cross ~~the~~ smooth-snow glacier flat to the far bank.

Done. So far so good. 6000 feet, 8:45. An hour and a half on the hoof. I've not rested yet and won't rest here, nerves wouldn't tolerate a pause, must get on with it. See how high I can go. See how long I can live. Somberly rest-step, nibbling by inches at the 5500 feet to Hazard.

First plug steps up the Nisqually Snowfinger, a narrow gully breaching cliffs of volcanic rock and morainal till walling the side of the Nisqually Glacier. Exit from Snowfinger on steep snows of the Wilson Glacier, crevassed below to the right but unbroken here. Ascend straight up to trashy lava crest. 8000 feet, 10:15. I've not rested yet, ~~am going strong~~. Only the second time I've been this high, the first time hauling an overnight load, but legs are marching to the metronome. A thrill of tentative elation.

Continue plugging upward, sidehill-gouging the margin of Wilson snows just below the ridge crest -- which abruptly leaps up in crumbling towers of The Castle. I'm at 9500 feet! And it's only 11:30! And not once have I stopped and I feel swell! I've gained 4500 feet and only 2000 remain, I could gambol on at this pace and reach camp by 1 o'clock!

Why hurry? I've got the whole afternoon. I'm not going to die!

Enjoy!

Dump Trapper Nelson in lava ~~like~~ blocks under The Castle and sit ~~down~~ superbly content. Eat a peanut-butter-and-honey sandwich (very tasty) carried from home and drink a cup of icy water (delicious) from a dribble at snowfield edge.

See where I am! Less than a thousand feet lower than Glacier, high in Whiteness of glaciers, Brownness of volcano. The last Greenness was Alta Vista, hours ago.

On a broad, gentle ridge beyond the deep Nisqually Glacier trough, far down at the uppermost promontory of the Green world, Paradise. And beyond the cluster of minute buildings and the sunflashes from tourists' windshields, the Tatoosh Range, peaks 6000 and 7000 feet high, bold summits ~~to~~ as viewed from Paradise, exciting goals for a superhiker, but to a 9500-foot climber pitiful as Little Si.

Gaze around the high country, climber's ~~not~~ country, my country. Across dazzling glaciers east to the avalanche-thundering Nisqually Icefall and gargantuan ~~lava~~ buttress of Gibraltar. Across brilliant glaciers west to the long layered-lava ridge of Success Cleaver. Up to Blueness of sky decorated by pretty fluffs of amiable cumulus and here-and-there ^{cathedrals} ~~fantasies~~ of cumulonimbus billowing majestically high -- but not so high as The Mountain.

Yet from here it appears not impossibly high. Though the icecap is a vertical mile above me, I'm almost 2 vertical miles above the sea, above those ~~faraway~~ ^{faraway} Green valleys, those/lowland dwellings of the dwarfs. Small is the word for the Green world -- small trees, small people. Large is the word for the White-Brown-Blue world -- large glaciers, large lava cliffs, large clouds, large sky, large men.

Soft cool breezes and sun-warm rocks. I could sink in happy sleep. But I'll save my nap for camp. 12 o'clock noon. Complete the simple

task. "If you make Hazard you've got the summit." I've as much as made Hazard. Last February in the clubrooms, last Sunday by Fresh Pond, this morning at Paradise, who could've dreamed...

Hoist pack. Up and away. The Castle was the final thrust of lava. The ridge now is round-crested, bearing on its back the snowfield called The Turtle. Not steep, not flat, perfect for efficient but relaxed climbing.

Resume the machine-like rest step. Pause to ~~paus~~ puff. Pace is a bit too fast -- I'm over-eager is the problem, slow down, after all I've hauled this pack and this body 4500 feet up the hill and have a right to feel ~~a little~~ ^{somewhat} less than morning-fresh. Naturally the pack seems heavier than before lunch, ^{is} slicing shoulders and ^{bowing} ~~handing~~ spine, and cooled muscles ~~are~~ ^{must} struggling ^{fully} to loosen, and drowsiness isn't dispelled by exercise.

Dammit, pace is still too fast. It's the fucking lunch. I ate too much, rested ^{too little} ~~not-enough~~, didn't allow the peanut-butter-honey sandwich to digest. Must go slower. But first a rest. Not far from The Castle but hell, this is only my second rest of the day, I deserve it.

Okay, now onward. Shit! Still too fast. Shift into compound low. It's not going to be as quick and ~~simple~~ easy as it seemed at The Castle. The 2000 feet will require maybe 5000 steps and I can take only a dozen before complaining legs and wheezing lungs force a halt. The rest step isn't doing the job it's supposed to, any pace ~~at all~~ is too fast. That damn lump in my gut is the trouble -- those churning blobs of pesnut butter

and gluey-chewed bread and oily butter. Should've just carried a jar of honey and lived on that.

Not to worry. Climbers are far above but they're mostly of the advance group that set out at dawn. Far below, just emerging from the Snowfinger, are climbers who started with me -- doubtless nonchalant athletes ~~xxxxxxxx~~ unconcerned by the day's chore and having a running picnic.

But not everyone is romping. Slow as I am, I'm not the slowest. I'm passing people. Some of these guys raced ahead to Alta Vista, Glacier Vista. Now I've caught them. Now they're standing humped over to relieve backs from burdens of Trapper Nelsons, they're studying their boots and apparently finding them very depressing.

Stop to wipe sweat from ~~inside of~~ mook goggles. Beside me a climber topples face down in the snow.

Splendid idea, that, stuffing face in snow. I keep smearing sunburn cream on face but it instantly ~~fries~~ fries off. Sun is blistering. The glaring Turtle is an oven. Strength is oozing from pores.

A hurricane blast! And a darkness! A towering cloud has ^{swallowed} ~~blocked off~~ the sun, the ~~skinning~~ blinding snows go dull-cold. The wailing wind from the poles congeals my blood. I was broiling on a spit and now drip icicles of quick-frozen sweat.

Wind quits and cloud floats off and sun sizzles away ice and thawed meat spoils.

Sweat, asphyxiated by furnace air. Shiver, frosted teeth chattering. Sweat. Shiver. Sweat. Shiver. Rest-step, rest-step, rest. No -- rest, rest, rest-step. Rest more than step. High under overhanging wall of the Ice Cliff of the Kautz Glacier above is the final heap of brown rock,

Camp Hazard -- as far away as when I sacked out at The Castle. No, farther. They're moving it, They're stretching the elastic mountain, making it ~~ix~~ taller.

I'm not moving, ^{only} just now and then shuffling a boot. Weirdly, though, I'm still passing people. Standing, staring at boots. Or sitting in snow gazing at the sky. Doleful faces. Pitiabke wrecks mourning the loss of dear friends -- themselves.

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

I cannot help them. Each must wend a solitary way through this melancholy world to high camp. Soon I too will mourn.

A slag jumble. But some of the slag is human. ~~and~~ Bodies of second-year students, instructors last spring. Topple among them. Here it ends. The esophagus is a two-way street. Blobs of peanut butter and bread and butter are boiling. Spread knees and hang head between. Don't go out messy, befouled by vomit.

A body is ~~is~~ groaning, "Why do we have to go there? Why can't we stop here? Some people call this Hazard."

A moaned answer, "Lower Hazard. We got to go to Upper Hazard."

"Don't see why. A camp at 11,000 would be plenty high."

The body said 11,000. What -- 11,000 what? Feet. Ah God, somewhere down there, never knowing, I overtopped Glacier, entered the Third Mile.

Third Mile, 11,000, Third Mile, 11,000...

Wake up! What was that? A ~~skipping~~ flapping of wings! Giant wings, and hanging below, talons!

A dream, I fell asleep. ~~Or did I?~~ Or did I? Am I awake now? Nor sleeping nor waking, floating in foggy inbetween. The ~~sharp~~ edges of Reality fuzzed. A Strangeness felt ~~here~~. Ghastly Presences sensed ~~there~~. Nightmares lurking in broad day.

It's happening. This is it. The Clock is steady but that's not where it strikes. It hits the gut, it hits the head. Peanut butter is seething, brain is clouding.

If I die nobody will notice. I won't return to the garret so Betty will call the survivors to ask where I am and they'll say they never heard of me.

Can't blame them. That's how it is up here. I've passed dying climbers and didn't care. What's Hecuba to me, or me to Hecuba?

No safety among these dying bodies, bones soon to be picked clean by talons and beaks. Must climb to that beetling rampart of ice, that tantalizing wall of White.

This morning in low valley I breathed rich air, this afternoon I'm ~~at~~ higher than Glacier, in the Third Mile, and the tenuous ~~atmosphere~~ ^{stratosphere} lacks oxygen to clean ~~the fuz~~ ^{murk} from brain and above are 3500 more feet of mountain with less sustenance at each step.

The top is lost, I don't want the top, want only to crawl to ~~hazard~~ ^{Camp} on my knees, to sleep, perchance to live...

The Ice Cliff! How did it get down here? Didn't. I got up. Yes, yes, ~~I think~~ I recall rising to my feet. Thought it was a dream. Maybe

it was. And still is. What difference up here between waking and sleeping, dreaming and hallucinating?

Watch says 3 o'clock. Of what day? Are there days up here? Or one unending trance?

Where are the people? If this is Camp Hazard there should be people. Inspect the rubble-heap ridge crest, the sloping half-acre of bare Brown between White of snows on ridge below, glaciers steeply ^{under} ~~below~~ left and right, and wall of ice rising hundreds of feet above.

Bodies littering the disorder of rocks, cold and silent ^{cadavers} ~~bodies~~ lying where ~~for~~ felled by the plague. Some haven't yet expired, are tottering in the gale, parka hoods riding ~~on~~ faces contorted ^{by} ~~in~~ the agony of contagion. Who are they? Perhaps not dying companions at all, maybe hooded Creatures that live in blue-dark depths of crevasses and when we mortals invade their domain creep out to eat our souls.

I fall down forever at 11,500 feet, farthest I've ever climbed from the ^{fecund} ~~fecund~~ sea that gave birth to life, to me, ~~the~~ closest I've ever approached the sterile sky that is the enemy of mankind, of me. Let them eat my soul.

Awake? Asleep? Both ^{and} neither in ^{this terminal illness.} ~~the fatal sickness.~~ Here in the realm more of Sky than Earth, looking down on clouds floating over peaks high to lowlanders but low to us, waking-sleeping are all one, dreams are reality and reality is a dream, all one, all one. We're poor players strutting and fretting an hour in some Imagination, ~~no more~~ ^{as} ~~substantial~~ ^{materialize} than the phantoms that creep from crevasses and ~~drift~~ ^{clouds} from ~~floods~~, we're tales told by an idiot.

The wind is real, fierce, I must get out of the ~~rock~~ unrelenting wind. There's a low rock wall erected by some previous sky-pioneer. His grave? No corpse. Spirited away by the Creatures. Or simply evaporated, become a Creature himself. Perhaps I ^{too will} soon be a Creature of the crevasses. Lie behind the wall on soft bed of pebbles and sand.

Look down ^{white} the ridge to sullen cloud wisps dimming ^{Brown} The Castle, and down down ~~ice and snow~~ to Green meadows and forests. Ah sweet Green! Ah horrid White and Brown! Look out to the Goat Rocks, roots of an ancient volcano, and to massy Adams and graceful St. Helens, and cloudsea covering Oregon and the Pacific Ocean, where the sun is sliding.

Other parkas behind other walls. Does a parka have a sex? In the parking lot this morning were many obvious males, several evident females. No satyrs or nymphs, monks or nuns here. Only distinguishing the parka-phantoms is that most of us go down one side of the ridge to piss (urine dark as concentrated orange juice) and a few go down the other side. How cursed the daughters of Eve! And the most cruel punishment for their Sin is not ~~the pain of~~ childbirth but ~~the agony of~~ dropping pants and hanging bare ass out in this chill gale. Certainly I'll not take a crap this side of Paradise.

In a nearby nook is a parka. Even lying down it's a Tall Parka. Eyes (not seen but guessed) within the hood stare over thousands of square miles of Earth diminished to a relief map.

From depths of Tall Parka a voice (speaking to me, to itself, to whatever gods may be?): "Why do I keep coming up here? Why can't I learn? I'm always sick on the way to high camp, sick at high camp, sick all the way to the top, sick all the way down, sick sick sick."

Weary of myself and sick of asking...

Another parka, no phantom, an indisputable healthy human being (How comes such an alien up here among us?) approaches, sits by Chairman Cam.

"Well," says robust, cheerful Leader Ed, "Guess we better arrange the rope teams. You know these people and I don't."

Cam groans, sits up.

Rope teams. Futile gesture. Some names on the ^{wind-whipped} slip of paper in Ed's hand are motionless specks far below, never will climb this high. Others are in death throes here, their violent retching piercing the loud wind. Anywhere else in our civilized nation such agony would bring the Red Cross scurrying, and the National Guard, ^{marching} and reporters and priests and the governor. At Hazard, though, everybody is sick, nobody is rushing anywhere. Saving only Leader Ed, when the phantoms stir at all they move ^{as} deliberately, ^{as} ~~like~~ aged folk with brittle bones, or corpses arisen from the grave after putrefying a month.

How could this legion of the damned climb 3000 more feet? The summit is a fantasy. For me, for everyone. But Ed insists. Though Cam in his torpor knows it's pointless. They draw up a list of three-man teams, agreeing to let ropeleaders worry in the morning, if morning ever comes, about who died alone on the ridge below and who died here in the bag.

Fourteen ropeleaders are selected. One more needed. The effort of thinking is making Cam sicker, he wants Ed to go away. Despairingly he casts eye around the rockpile, focuses on me. He says, "Oh hell, give Manning a team."

He's gone mad. To think I can crawl out of the bag tomorrow to follow, much less lead. Should I live I'll go only down. No matter. Doubtless

I'll die in the night. If I somehow don't, so many assuredly will that I can lie unnoticed among the corpses.

Yet it is an honor. ~~To be sure,~~ ^{Yes,} awarded solely because Cam's ~~unappetizingly~~ sick and I'm handy. Still, of ~~all~~ the hundreds who started the Course in February only a dozen are at high camp (or struggling toward it) and only one has been chosen to lead a rope. If I don't die I'll have beaten out all those haughty athletes.

Just in case, try to cram a supper down throat to fuel the tomorrow, if any. What malignant deceiver seduced me into believing baby food pampers a delicate ~~palate~~ appetite? Who else? Monie, ^{cackling} ~~wicked~~ witch to the end, ~~cackling, at my certain misery.~~ Up there somewhere above the Ice Cliff, may vultures be gnawing her vitals. Open a jar of chopped beef -- the stench flips my stomach. A jar of strained peas -- God, have I already thrown up without noticing? Impossible to swallow that shit. But the chocolate custard is just barely possible, helped down by a can of pineapple juice.

Enough food. Peanut butter is riled by the new arrival.

Gaze out to everywhere sky -- who would've thought the old world had so much air in it? Forests and rivers are disconnected absolutely from my bed on the shore of outer space.

'Tis cold, 'tis cold, 'tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.

Crawl into bag and wrap up in ~~the~~ liferaft sail. Morbidly watch neighbor Cam, moaning, stuff as much long body in bag as will fit and wrap leftover shoulders and head in sweater and parka and tarp. Forgive him for Lundin, he's paying for his sins.

Tiny orange ball falls into red cloudsea lying blanketlike on the ocean. Summit flame of Adams snuffs out. Pink skyglow lingers above, reflecting brilliance of high snows -- Rainier always is the last of the Northwest to go dark. The close-looming, skull-white Ice Cliff leans out over camp. Faint lights of blissful Paradise sparkle in meadowland night.

Paradise is not for ~~the likes of~~ us. Our fate lies elsewhere. Skyglow fades. Stars race through ominous swift mist. Wind assaults foundations of the mountain. Camp Hazard hath neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help from pain.

Boom! I ~~snap~~^{SNAP} awake as the flare fades. Flash-boom! Dear God, the Russians have ~~pounded~~^{pounced} on Seattle, they also have the Bomb and the garret is gone and the last war has begun. FLASH-BOOM! Not the Bomb. Worse. Creep deeper in bag. Hailstones batter liferaft sail. Insane to venture to ~~the planet's~~^{penetration of ferocious} ~~this farthestmost thrust of the planet into the ferocity of~~ space. Roaring wind soon will rip boulders from ridge and roll them around the sky like billiard balls, snatch dreamers ~~off~~ off Earth to fly ~~xxx~~ through lightning and thunder. Press cells of flesh into minerals of rock, grip Earth with toes and belly and nose, long to be in a silent cave-womb far underground, secure from sky.

A frightful noise! Snap awake in terror! Shriek of a lost soul staring into the pit of Hell! Flick flashlight on watch -- 3:30. That was the rising call.

Someone has blundered. Not mine to reason why, not mine to make reply. Loving peace, I never should've left the land of flowers, for storm

is not ~~a disturbance~~, ^{an interlude, war} is the normal condition of the sky. Lightning flashes in ~~and~~ roiling thunderheads, revealing doom-wild clouds swirling over Ice Cliff above. Almost down upon us is the cloudcap storm, which must by now have killed Monie and Bill and Lloyd, unless they've managed to escape ribbons of torn tents and crawl ~~down~~ into sheltering steam caves melted in the crater snowfield.

Still deep in bag open a can of fruit cocktail and shudder as an icy grape slithers down throat. It sticks halfway. Study a peach slice. With such reinforcement the grape surely will rise in rebellion. Abandon breakfast. Stretch watch cap farther over ears, shiver from bag and tarp, bones ~~rattling~~ ^{clattering} in frigid gale. Pull on stiff-as-a-board Navy parka and frozen boots. Lash crampons and don mittens and stand, bracing against brutal gusts.

Bully ropemates from sacks, tie up and report to Leader Ed. Other teams ~~are still~~ ^{remain} partly or entirely moribund, so ~~stand~~ ^{stand} shaking from cold and fear while Ed and Cam perform the miracle of raising from the dead climbers fit only for burial. Incredibly, all 45 are on their feet, including Boy Scout Tom, ~~slipping~~ ^{slipping} only less odious than Idiot Richard but forgiven at dusk yesterday as he reeled ~~and~~ barfing into Hazard and by unexpectedly-compassionate pals was helped into sleeping bag and tenderly nursed.

Mingling in bellow of gale are howls and curses and whines and moans and whimpers and retches. Ropes tangle, rocks rattle, flashlight beams aimlessly probe blackness.

4:30. Night thinning. Eastern horizon pinkening. Ed descends loose rubble to the snow gully under the Kautz Ice Cliff. Cam follows with his team and I with mine. We pause to breathe deep, then dash crampon-awkward

across the gully; when Monie climbed this route ~~2~~ 2 years ago the whole party missed by seconds being wiped out here by an avalanche of ice blocks as big as box cars.

From the gully we skirt the base of a lava cliff and enter the Kautz Chute, a narrow channel of the glacier plunging between enclosing ice walls. As we rhythmically punch ~~crampers~~ crampon spikes/^{upward} in crisp snow toward the fearful cloud cap, suddenly it ^{dissolves in} ~~thins to rainbows, and vanishes~~. And the rising sun tames the gale, warms white mounds of Adams and St. Helens riding above swells of the lowland-concealing sea of gleaming clouds.

Oh what a beautiful morning, oh what a wonderful day!

The head of the Chute tilts too steeply for cramponing, requires stepcutting. Ed strikes up the right side into a jungle of ice towers, swinging ax with old guide's easy skill, each blow erupting a sun-glittering spray of ice chips. But slow is his progress, we'll be hours funneling through the bottleneck. Therefore Cam commences a second stepline up the smooth-steep center of the Chute, aiming for a closed crevasse offering an upward-angling ramp. On attaining the ramp he pauses, looks down to the 13 teams standing in line, waiting.

"Manning!" he barks. "Chop a route between me and Ed!"

Yesterday I was promoted prematurely from the ranks to ropeleader and this morning I'm promoted again, to routemaker! How the athletes must envy!

Where to go? Into the white jungle, up that obvious ice gully. Do as I practiced on Nisqually -- with ~~h~~ both hands grasp ax shaft at the bottom, swing just like chopping a tree. First several sideways ^{blows} ~~swings~~ of the pick to undercut the slope, then several downward strokes to chip out ice and complete a ~~cut~~ boot-size step. Stamp in 10 crampon daggers and repeat.

Cut a ladderway up the gully to its end under a serac, cut a traversing line across the serac face to another gully. But as I enter, ice rubble batters my head. Cam is crossing above me and every ^{swing} ~~stroke~~ of his ax looses a volley. Retreat. Wait until the gully is quiet, chop chop chop to the top, chop chop over another serac face to another gully -- and another assault by Cam's garbage. Retreat. Wait. Advance. Again. Again.

Emerge at last from gullies and seracs and volleys onto smooth upper ~~slopes~~ slopes of the Kautz Glacier. Dismay. Cam's route was so fast he was followed by most of the party, all but Ed's fans. From third rope, a position earned at Hazard by eager efficient ^{o'clock} ~~4~~ promptness, I've fallen near the rear. And after I expended so much energy and creativity crafting my lovely staircase, not a single other team ^{has} followed me. None to praise my art, none to give thanks for sacrificial labor. It's not fair, it makes me sick.

Sick.

I was so busy chopping I wasn't paying attention, but we're at 12,500 feet! Dear God, higher than Adams. I was so busy routefinding-routemaking I didn't notice ^{that} ~~but~~ all through the icefall I was getting sick.

^{The} That grape is rising in my esophagus. And behind it the chocolate custard. And the peanut butter.

Slow the pace. Hear breathing close behind. Damn Number Two! Disrespectful Number Two! Walking faster than his Leader! Getting even with me for ~~my~~ being chosen Leader. He's been climbing for years, should've been the leader but was camped too far from sick Cam to be remembered. Yell at the old bastard (at least 30) ^{we can't see any crevasses but} to keep the rope stretched out -- don't you know there could be hidden crevasses? I've no breath ~~to spare~~ for yelling. It makes me sick.

I hate Number Two but loathe Number Three, who by sickening chance is none other than Idiot Richard, who among other crimes is a genuine athlete, with so much breath to spare he ^{incessantly} carries on a running exchange ^s of adolescent inanities with Boy Scouts on other teams. Every giggle-shout makes me sicker. Call a halt.

This is it. Shortly I'm going to do as ^{poor} Boy Scout Tom is doing, and barf my giblets all over the glacier. Death up here doesn't come by the ~~stark~~ Clock stopping or the brain spinning off in madness but by the deranged body turning itself inside out.

Must force back down my gullet that goddam pushy grape. Dig from rucksack the bottle of grapejuice. Tentatively sip. Grape ^{drops} descends. Stomach doesn't convulse, indeed seems grateful for the thought. Spots clear from eyes. Grapejuice races through arteries, feeding sugar and oxygen to muscles.

Onward and upward. Now I find the proper rhythm, one deep breath for each deliberate step. Ignore insolent Number Two, ignore Idiot Richard, concentrate on breathing, stepping. We're barely moving but we are moving, and no teams are passing us and we're passing some.

Brisk wind is cool-delicious, sun is life and hope. The cloudsea is rising below us, submerging all but the highest Tatoosh peaks, islets poking through cloudwaves. The Goat Rocks stand higher, to 8000 feet, and to 9677 feet the symmetrical cone of St. Helens, often compared in beauty ~~to~~ to Fujiyama, and to 12,202 feet the ~~hulk~~ hulking Adams. Beyond the unseen ^{2-mile-tall volcanoes,} Columbia River ~~in Oregon~~ boldly rise Hood and Jefferson and, haze-dimmed [^] 175 miles south, the Three ~~is~~ Sisters. With seven-league boots one could

giant-walk through the sky, down the stepping stones of fire-mountains-ice-mountains from Washington through Oregon to Shasta and Lassen in California.

Someone descending. Quitters! No -- Monie and Bill and Lloyd and the other three, refugees from the crater night, the cloudcap storm, plunging down with scarcely a hallo-^{in their haste to flee} ~~to escape~~ the sky. Something of their suffering I can guess from the white pillars along our route -- the wands they placed on their ascent, during the night plastered thick with hoarfrost.

Near the top of the Kautz Glacier, under the dome of Point Success, we turn right to cross the uppermost rocks of Wapowety Cleaver. ~~There~~ We rest in boulders feathered with hoarfrost, fragile faery sculptures. Tatoosh and Goat Rocks have been drowned and St. Helens is engulfed as we watch. Only Adams and Hood are left.

We're at 13,000 feet! How could it ~~be~~ be? What's happening? Grapejuice is keeping stomach calm, brain free of fuzz. The Idiot opens a can of sardines and offers them around, smirking at the ^{anguish} ~~horror~~ on faces ~~confronted~~ confronted by stinking dead fish, but my gorge holds firm. [↓] I'm alive -- and well. A coward dies a thousand deaths, a hero but one.

Hero!

Excelsior!

^{the side of Point Success}
As we traverse onto the Nisqually Glacier, above the gigantic icefall that ~~appals~~ appalls far-below Paradise, I at last see Columbia Crest, a sharp edge dividing brightest of White from truest of Blue, and ~~we~~ feel a sudden ~~unEarthly~~ unEarthly loftiness, as if The Mountain afloat on cloudsea has bobbed up on a wave toward the sky, has broken ^{away} ~~moorings~~ from ^{rocks in} hidden lowlands and is adrift in infinity.

I've not
~~yet~~ barfed
yet - and
won't.

We detour around a frightening-huge bergschrund whose interior blue twilight deepens toward full black night of the unguessable bottom and slowly plod upward toward the saddle between Point Success, ^{left} and Columbia Crest. ^{right} Now I'm breathing not once for each step but twice. Lungs are weary of pumping worthless air in and out, in and out.

Alone I walk, ~~The~~ rope behind me perhaps is ~~still~~ connected to two other bodies but they are not with me, the solitary hero.

The saddle, 14,000 feet! One final White rise of glittering sugar-candy hoarfrost. The sky grows. Once it was above us, then below, now it's all around, we're walking through the sky.

Slower, slower. Three breaths for each step. The ~~White~~ Crest is, after all, unattainable. So near, so far.

But ^{now} no White above! Only Blue denser and cleaner than Plato dreamt of in his philosophy!

If I die this moment in the middle of the sky, leaning against the purifying cold gale sweeping the Crest, here in space where centrifugal force of Earth's rotation easily could fling a mote of humanity over the continents, what cause for complaint?

It is 10 o'clock in the grandest morning of the history of the world and legs are solid, heart steady, mind whirling not in fear but from the ~~joy~~ ^{ecstasy} of belonging to the wild sky.

From the ^{circle of the} snow-filled crater ^{rimmed} ~~ringed~~ by ~~brown~~ volcanic gravel the cloudsea reaches out to every horizon, the colors of Reality are White snow and White cloud and Blue sky and Brown lava, all Green utterly drowned. All Earth, all humankind, are gone. Rainier remains, and I.

Steam leaks from rocks of the crater rim -- the volcano lives.

And so do I!

A coward dies a thousand deaths, a hero lives forever!

I'm 14,408 feet (plus 5 feet 11 inches) above Puget Sound where I was born, that tall am I!

Death-fearing I left Paradise yesterday, but today I'll descend there immortal, for Faust never dies. Within me is the power of the volcano ~~who~~ whose hot guts might burst forth any moment in City-destroying eruption, and the power of glaciers whose coldness might soon sweep down to ^{overwhelm} ~~bulldoze~~ ~~down~~ the lowland Civilization, and the power of the most enormous sky anyone lower than ~~the~~ ~~angels~~ the angels ever will know. Henceforth when doubt-weakened ~~by~~ ~~instillations-of-mortality~~ I've only to look south from Seattle to see The Mountain, to see Me!

Beware, Seattle! For when I return it will be with the dreadful strength of Tamburlaine the Great, who, from a Scythian Shepheard, by his rare and woonderfull Conquefts, became a moft puiffant and mightye Monarque, And (for his tyranny, and terrour in Warre) was tearmed, THE SCOURGE OF GOD.