

The Sap Rises

Tom Abrams

“GET UP, HAROLD.”

It was a pledge—the grumpy one. Harold always got the grumpy one, with the nervous, jabbing fingers.

“Time to get up, Harold. You left a call for seven-fifteen.” The fingers jabbed at his ribs again, probed and jabbed again. “I’ve already called you twice. You’ll be late for class!”

“I’m up,” Harold groaned. “I’m up, I’m up!”

The pledge clomped heavily across the wooden floor, swung the door open with such force it banged against the wall, slammed it shut, and clomped down the dormitory stairs.

“Get up, Harold.” He was back. “It’s eight o’clock.” Eight o’clock! Good God! Harold opened his sore eyes and tried to glare, but they blinked shut again before he had a chance. These damn pledges could never be depended on, had to be prodded like so many construction workers. Now he’d be late to class! He sat up abruptly and wrenched off the covers.

“I’m up!”

The pledge clomped out again. Painfully, Harold focused on the adjoining bunk. This was too much! He reached over and shook a cozy bundle of blankets and tousled hair. A weak voice rolled out of the covers. “What time did you wanna get up?” Harold asked.

“Ten o’clock.” The weak voice rolled back in and covered itself up with a mumble.

“Just thought I’d check,” Harold said cheerfully. He felt better.

He stumbled down the stairs to his second-floor room, wondering why in the world anybody would build a fraternity house with rooms on one story and beds on another. In his room, he turned on the lights and the radio, and with great stretching and yawning began to pull off his pajamas.

It was Monday morning, he had a nine-o’clock class, and—he was hungry. And as if that weren’t enough, his roommate walked in looking happy. The latter breezed by and opened the window as far as it would go.

“Close the damn window! Can’t you see I’m undressed?”

“I didn’t make a special point of noticing.” His roommate glowered back. “But you are, aren’t you?” He flounced out angrily and slammed the door. The window was still open. Harold thought, Just my luck: out of twenty possible roommates, I have to get the temperamental one!

He dressed hurriedly. The radio was getting excited about a record warm day for the first of March. Harold slammed the bureau drawer shut and walked over to close the window.

Beneath, cars were pouring into the campus and swarms of eight-o'clock students converged on a distant cluster of buildings. Directly below, a bus groaned to a stop, released another swarm and moved on. Harold cracked his face, yet stiff from shaving, with the first grin of the day. Professor Hardy separated from the swarm and headed across campus to the nearest building. Can't afford a car on his salary, Harold thought. He glanced at his watch, shook his wrist vehemently, and glanced again. Then he rushed downstairs for a hasty breakfast, slamming the door on Professor Hardy, noisy buses, temperamental roommates, and unreliable pledges.

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Professor Hardy attacked the March wind. Undaunted by a backward pull on the billowing hem of his overcoat and the chafing flutter of his trouser legs, he churned forward. There was something epic in the tight lips and narrowed eyes. Yes, a garrulous wife, the weak tea she made for breakfast—anyone who served tea for breakfast should be examined—an overdue bus, and the wind had all conspired to make him late for his nine-o'clock class. But they had failed; his punctuality record would go unchallenged.

Nevertheless, tilting his left shoulder into the blast, he shifted a balky brief case to the right hand and studied his wrist watch—all without breaking pace. Sure enough, he'd arrive in time to examine a certain young lady's record before class.

Face averted from the wind's rawness, he squinted over his coat collar. The grass, rusted by winter snows, made the campus grounds dun-colored and hard-looking, and a row of trees on either side of the walk were so many upturned roots. The words "bleak" and "desolate" occurred to him. He put them together and thought, What a bleak and desolate day! Goes well with tea for breakfast. That was it: it was a weak-tea day! He must remember to write that down when he got to the office; sounds like T. S. Eliot.

He overcame the door and, awarding an official "good morning" to passing students whose names had escaped him, entered the English office at exactly seventeen minutes before nine.

Just as he'd suspected, "Anderson, Drucilla, age nineteen," had a very poor record indeed. "C's," "D's," and what's this?—a "B" in Contemporary Poetry! Something must be done about Professor Jackson! Hardy replaced the record in its filing case and sat down at his desk. Yesterday evening, a Mrs. Anderson had called his home to inquire about her daughter, who, she confidently asserted, was really quite capable but for some reason seemed vague about Eighteenth Century poetry. The implication had rankled, but certainly Miss Anderson's record justified him—not that he was really worried.

Hardy looked up at the clock, then down at his watch. Hurriedly, he leaned over and burrowed into the brief case beside his chair. When he entered Room 330, his pace was leisurely.

"Anderson, Drucilla, age nineteen," skipped out of the house and into the first real day of spring. Oh, there had been a hint of it throughout the preceding weeks, a certain shyness in the wind, but today it was really here. She wanted to pin a note on the trunks of trees: "It's all right now, you can bring out your leaves," and sign it "Drucilla Anderson" for all the campus to see.

She left the cement walk and, pressing her small feet into the maternal softness of the ground, halted, statue still and with a listening look in her eyes. A little disappointed, she walked on parallel to the sidewalk. She had thought perhaps she could have felt the pulse and tingle of thaw beneath the ground or hear the gurgling of some underground spring let loose by softening earth. But, she guessed, it was all in her, the tingle and the gurgle and the softening as well.

She felt impish and wanted to do something funny. A bundled-up student, who had been walking in front of her for several blocks now, turned off and slunk into the college chapel. She wanted to dash in ahead of him and pin a note to the altar, reading, "Sorry, God is out today."

The campus grounds seemed quilted with fluffy-soft patches of spring grass, wide spaces of grey bristle, and scattered spots of mud that glistened in the sun.

On her left and directly above her, she heard a window slam and, looking up, saw a boy gaze contemptuously down at the campus grounds. She followed his gaze and saw Professor Hardy sweeping, head down, toward the English building. She wanted to grab a stone and throw it up at the window. But then she wanted to throw one at Professor Hardy, too, and she knew she wouldn't do that either.

The exciting rush of March wind made her sorry she'd had her hair cut short.

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Harold was late to class. That was bad on two counts: it had happened several times before, and it was Professor Hardy's class. Stealing himself, he opened the door and backed in, taking a seat beside a rather plain-looking girl with short black hair. The droning lecture voice seemed to take on a punishing hardness, and Harold thought to himself, Well, it'll never happen again!

The exertion of running to class made his heart beat loud and his breath come in embarrassingly audible gasps, and the rustle he made opening his notebook only intensified his self-consciousness. Though most of the lecture was addressed with machine-gun rapidity to a far corner in the back of the room, Harold managed to get the most important points down in his notebook. The voice droned on.

Harold's mouth tasted like eggs and tobacco, his seat was sore, his hand ached, and the side of his face itched. Why didn't she stop

staring at him? What was wrong with him? He jerked his face angrily into hers. She wasn't looking at him at all. She was staring beyond him, out of the window. Well, it's her grade, dammit! He re-buried himself in his notebook. What time was it getting to be? The voice droned on.

The bell would ring any minute now, any second. Harold continued to write, the silly girl to stare, and the voice droned on. In the back of the room, chairs began to creak, and there was a rustling of papers and zipping of notebooks. Though he'd been awaiting it with some anticipation, the sound of the bell made Harold start forward and rouse the dreaming girl from her trance. She looked around the room a little bemusedly and, to his profound annoyance, smiled at him. He rose and slipped on his coat. It would be necessary to inform Hardy of his attendance—not that his entrance wasn't obvious enough, thought Harold—or be marked absent. It was a ridiculous and embarrassing formality. This done, Harold left Room 330 and stalked down the hall.

He had not gone far, however, when he discovered he'd left his notebook behind. He turned with a sigh and stalked back up the hall. The room was empty and the notebook, still open, prominently displayed on his desk. What the . . . ! His eyes goggled and then screwed up as he bent over for a closer look. His first glance was confirmed, for on the open page of his notebook was inscribed, in a rather unsteady hand, "I love you." What the . . . , indeed! Who wrote this? Harold slammed the notebook shut and looked quickly over his shoulder. Only when he reached the main floor did he pause and, groping thoughtfully for that much-needed cigarette, begin to consider the problem with a cool mind. It was a plot! It was a joke! He mustn't let it throw him! Of all the—

Outside, he recalled the radio forecast and, unbuttoning his heavy overcoat, received the wind—not really cold at all and with a strangely pleasant smell to it. It must have been a joke, he thought. He glanced up at the weaving tree limbs—not really expecting any green sprouts there—and met the sky. Or was it? he thought. That sky was an ocean of warm robin's-egg blue. After all, who would play a joke like that?—on anybody? He breathed deeply of that good-smelling air; there was something about its cleanness that made him feel dirty, that made him want to open his mouth and gulp it in like a surfacing fish. What a crazy thing for anybody to write!—to him! With sudden decision he shed his overcoat and draped it casually over his right shoulder. Something in that unconventional way of carrying his coat satisfied a newborn impulse to waggishness.

Professor Hardy was standing at the bus stop. Harold wanted to laugh at the expression of grim intensity on the good doctor's face. Where was his brief case? Harold wondered if the old boy had forgotten it. Impossible!

Professor Hardy was fighting a losing battle with his memory. That morning—not an hour ago—he had thought of a metaphor. It had been something worthy of T. S. Eliot, he remembered that much, but the metaphor itself, no less than the context that had inspired it, he could not remember to save his life.

The Fever

Robert Petty

WERE this the winter of another century, a homely gent in lace cuffs and knee pants, with lantern and bell might well proclaim, "Hail all ye citizens of sound mind, beware, for a fever approaches which shall befall many of those among us. Take heed, for it strikes without warning, and hope of cure is at least two months away."

What is this affliction that lies beyond the scope of modern medical science? Can it be cured? The answer is no, for one of its identifying characteristics is that it becomes part of your blood. It can, however, (in medical terminology) be arrested, be made to lie dormant for two, three, perhaps even four months out of the year, those usually being from late October to mid-winter. From there, it starts gradually as a faint burning in the mind, which advances slowly at first, then more pronouncedly with every passing day, pounding, surging, burning, invariably reaching a crisis with the first or second warm spring breeze that blows from the south. From here, if all fares well for the patient and conditions are right, the fever will retreat, eventually subsiding with the passing of the summer, thus completing its cycle. In most cases, infection dates back to childhood. The important thing to remember, however, is that it is chronic, reoccurring every year.

There have been great advances made in the treatment of this ailment. Treatment consists mostly of physical therapy. Tools and implements have been supplied by such famous concerns as Shakespear, South Bend, and Heddon. Literature on improvement of methods may be found in such publications as *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Sports Afield*. Diagnosticians and technical advisors date from Isaac Walton to Ray Bergman, Jason Lucas, and Ted Trueblood.

Laugh as you will, but look about you. That chap over there with the vacant stare in his eyes, whose wrist jerks intermittently; that professor at the pencil sharpener, turning the crank over and over as though he were waiting for it to lunge from his hand; that man you saw staring at the goldfish in the pet store's window, are all victims of the fever. Being a victim of long standing, let me offer a suggestion. It is one of the best I have found to date. Mind you, it