

[G. O. Dunnell]

Name: Robert Wilder

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Northfield

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“Don't catch me ever going south again if I can help it,” said Mr. Dunnell, moving a bit closer to his glowing coal stove in the little office by the railroad track. “I didn't want to go this time. And I tried to get my daughter-in-law to take my place. But she wouldn't. And the folks said that they wouldn't go unless I did. For a vacation, I'd like to a-had the folks go on away and leave me home to chop wood. I like to chop wood. But they don't believe it. I had to go. And, now, honest I'm all in. My legs are weak and I don't feel any too peart. First we went to Floridy, and then to Mississippie, Louisana and Tennysee. When you've seen them states once you've seen 'em enough. And when you've seen one you've seen 'em all. Except part of Alabama and Tennysee. Nothin' to look at - all level swampy land. Sometimes you go miles and miles not seeing a house. Not even one of them nigger shanties. 'Course they's state roads running through the swamps. And the swamps full of high grass 'bout as high as yer head. Once in a while yer'd see a drove of razor back hogs, or peaked cattle. Nothin' to them cattle but horns, by G-! Never see such a mess. Wouldn't give ten cents for the lot. Only place they and the hogs has to graze is alongside the state roads and railroad tracks where they's some grass. Can't go in the swamps or they'd founder. Couldn't eat the swamp grass anyway unless they might a bit when it was young. All [inbred]?. Every [dum?] color they 2 is. But not up in Alabama and Tennysee, though. They's plenty of good looking herfords there - cattle with white faces you know. And the land seems to be better and folks know how to farm. I noticed the barns they have

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down there real special. Good mind to build one in my back lot. I can't keep cattle now for my old barn's all made over into garages for our cars and trucks. The barns they have there are nothin' but shacks made of poles set in the ground just big enough for the stock. They pile the hay all around the outside of the shack, leaving a hole in front where the door is, and cock it up over the roof to shed rain. Don't have to shake down the hay to the cows. They eat it right out of the wall. And I s'p'ose it caves in when they've eaten enough. They let the cattle outside to eat around the barn there, too. But they have to look out that they don't eat too far in, or the roof would slide, so they cut it off, or rake it, or something.

“Well, I made the trip. But it ain't no way to go - by car. It's all right if you are going to stay all winter and need the car after you get there. But just for a couple of weeks it's better to go on the train. I get so [dummed?] cramped up riding in a car that my legs are weak when I get out. Funny thing, we had a bit of zero weather in December, and that's all, 'til this spell come. But way south of us they've had zero weather right along - in 3 places that ain't usually very cold. When we started I had on my heavy underwear for the first time this season. I thought I might be cold in the car. And I was until we got way down into Georgia. Down there it was about ninety-five in the shade. I never was so hot in my life - couldn't figger it out. Had an idea that a man had no business to come south when he was all tuned up to winter. But my wife fixed that one for me. She made us stop at some store and bought me some light weight underwear. Up here I go days at a time without a drink of water between meals. But down there where I knew I had no business to drink the water, I was thirsty all the time. Maybe the heavy underwear had something to do with it at the start. But we'd fetched along sandwiches to eat if we didn't see a good stopping place noons. And I s'p'ose I should have et somethin' besides ham. Anyway, I was tired and thirsty, so I et a couple of tangerines, and they did for me. When we got to Miami I was jest about able to crawl. They was Leon, who drove, my wife's cousin, my wife and I. Leon new his way around perfect. He drove us right up to the place where we'd stopped before - [touris?] home 't was. We left our stuff and started right with the women folks who wanted to do a little shopping. Leon said I ought to see a little of the city, so they took me

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along. I kicked, but it didn't do no good. Seemed to me that all I wanted to do was to go to bed and die, or somethin'. Leon knew his way around so I just followed him - didn't pay no attention to nothin' except to put one foot 4 before the other. "t was dark then. Ain't no twilight to speak of down that way. When the sun sets it gets dark right away. Damned if all the shopping they wanted to do wa'n't in the five and ten cent store. If they's anything I hate to do, it's to hang around a store when I don't want to buy nothin'. We walked up and down every aisle. And I bet them women picked up and looked over and talked about, half the gol [dummed?] things they was in that store. And if was a big one, too. Finally we started back. We got about half way back and I was figuring on a good rest in bed, and wondering if I could hold out long enough to make it without spoiling the party, for them tangerines was churning about pretty good, and I was getting real chilly, when I'm damned if them women didn't stop and say that they was going back for somethin' they forgot. I'd tried to be pleasant all the evening, but I lost my temper then. "Maybe you are", I says, "but I'm not. I've got enough. I'm goin' to bed." Leon said they was nothin' to it. All I had to do was to go to a blue sign, the way I was headed, and turn right. So I set off without asking any more particulars, as I might have done if I hadn't been riled.

"When I got to the blue sign it said, 'Public Parking Space,' and a feller couldn't turn right, nor left either, for the space was all filled up with automobiles. "T wan't no street. But I see another blue sign farther on. 'maybe that's the one he meant', 5 I says to myself. I got there and turned right, and it lead me through a grove. And first thing I knew they was nothin' ahead of me but the ocean. 'I didn't pay much attention, but I don't think we swum anything like that,' I says. 'Guess Leon must a-said 'left' at the sign. So I went back, my feet draggin' awful. Well, off to the left they wan't one street, they was a whole bunch of streets laid out like pieces of pie. All running in to where I was. I took the leftest one, but it didn't take me nowhere. Just around among a lot of theatres and restaurants and things. I went back to the blue sign and waited. And I was [dum?] good and mad. I figgered they'd be along sometime and find me. But nobody come that I knew. A cop stopped, though. He was a nice, young feller. "" What's the matter? Lost?[""?] he asked. "" No, mister, " I

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says, " I know right where I am, but I got seperated from my folks, and I'm waiting for 'em to come along. " " All right " , he says, " And if I see anybody looking for you I'll tell right where your are. Where you stopping? " " Mister " , I said, " If I knew, I'd be right there this minute sleeping. "

"That struck him as kinder funny. And he pumped it out of me that all I knew about the place was that we'd stopped there before. And that it had a sleeping porch on the north side. That didn't seem to help much. He says, "Why don't you go down to the station and take it easy 'til your folks 'phone for you?"

"What station?' says I. "The police station," says he. "Mister," I says, "I may have to go sometime. But I ain't going 'til I have to. For I ain't lost", I says, "I know right where I am." Then I says, "Can't you find somebody to go with me up one street and down another 'til I get it located?" He said he didn't want to send anybody with me he didn't know, but to come along with him and he'd find somebody.

"First he tackled some newsboys, but they had to stay with their papers 'til two o'clock and couldn't go. Then he sees a feller with an old hack. "Just the thing," he says. "I know that feller. He's all right. And you can ride."

"I got in and explained to the feller what I wanted him to do. Well sir, we started off up one street fur's I wanted, then down another. Covered most the whole section. The driver asked me once or twice if I didn't come over a bridge - same as the cop done. But I shut him up. Finally, I see a house with a sleeping porch on the north side - or what I though was the north side. 't was a tourist home, too. I got out and went in. 't was pretty late then. 'You looking for a room?' the lady wanted to know. 'Yes, I am, ma'am,' I says. 'I've got a room in some house like this, but I don't know where the house is, so I'm lookin' for a house as well as a room.' The women laughed, and said she guessed 't the house I was lookin' for was on the other side of the bridge. She said somethin' about how easy 't was to be turned around that got my goat.

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"I told the feller to drive me back where he found me. That I'd wait there. "Why don't you let me drive you to the police station' he wanted to know. 'mister,' I says, 'I ain't no maniac that has to be confined - to be shut up - I says. 'And, I ain't lost nuther! I ain't panicky, and I ain't a going to bawl,' I says. 'What I want to do is to find that G-D- house,' I says 'And I can't do that sitting in no police station!'

"I made him let me out by the blue sign. And I hung around there about a half hour longer when I see the car coming and the folks looking out right and left. They see me and stopped. I went out and got in. Believe me they'd a heard somethin' if my wife's cousin hadn't a been along. I didn't want to say anything that would a spoiled the party.

"They asked me why I didn't go to the police station, that they had telephoned there. I asked what I wanted to go the police station for, that I was seeing the city and having a fine time. Leon said, 'Well, you've put us to a lot of trouble, we've been driving for hours looking for you.' That set me off. I told 'em I didn't give a damn if they'd driven a couple of hundred miles. I hoped they had. That they knew I was all in. And didn't want to go to the 8 G-D- store anyway. And asked 'em why the hell they had to take the car. Why didn't they come back to where they left me, or to the blue sign they'd sent me to. Leon said he though he'd sent me where I could find the bridge all right. And hearing about the bridge again I shut up.

"I didn't see anything that night. But the next mornin' when I got up for my walk, I'm [dummed?] if the house wasn't right next to a bridge. And the bridge wasn't the kind that you'd think a feller could miss. I don't know what went under it for they was high walls all around and they was a hump in the middle that was the most prominent thing anywheres around. I dunno how I ever got across it without seeing it. But I did.?) [?] [?]

["?"]Dog-gone, let me live up in the country where things are laid out so's you can find your way around. Believe me mister, us old Yankees know our way around the country, even if the city stumps us.["?"]

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["Outside of getting lost, did you have a good time in Florida."]

"Well, no, can't say I did. Kinda silly to be down there sweltering in the sun when you know it's so [dum?] cold in north. I was born a northerner and guess I'll always be one. I like the snow and the cold, damned if I don't. [?]

["?] Funny people down there to. I had a talk with a feller I almost punched. It might have been a street fight if I'd been feeling?] 9 better. [Or maybe it was feeling the way I did that started the fight. ?] He got to talking about how the government should pay compensation to its employees that got injured in its service. That if they got laid up serious, that they should pay all the rest of their lives. I wanted to know why fellers that worked for the government was better than anyone else. I know they think that because they are working for the government that they can throw their chests out. But who the hell is the government. Isn't it you? And isn't it me? Ain't we a bit of the government. And ain't them fellers working for us? Who pays us if we get laid up? Why should we tax ourselves to pay people that's working for us - compensation for something that, maybe, was their own damned fault? [?] " I told him how I had to join this social security, and pay so much for everybody I hired. That some fellers didn't have numbers, nor they wouldn't have numbers. But I sent in what I was supposed to at the time I was supposed to. Then I didn't need any help and laid 'em off - same's we always do. We hire extra men to help us through rushes and then when the rush is over do the work ourselves. Naturally, I didn't send in any money for ourselves. I got a letter calling my attention to the " oversight, " but I didn't pay no attention to it, 'cause they didn't enclose no envelope, nor ask me 10 anything. It was just a dun. And, finally, they said if I didn't " remit " by a certain date they'd arrest me. Well, thinks I, if they want to arrest me, I guess I'll let 'em do it. If they put me in jail, at least they'll pay my expenses. And, if they're going to show me how to run my business, I guess I'll give it to 'em. I'm eligible for an old age pension, and by [G ?] [God ?] , I guess that's more than I'm making here. If it ain't I'll holler for welfare. But, shucks, they never done nothing about it. I sent the money in again as soon as I hired someone else. But

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what's the idea of that? Threatening to arrest a feller that's doing as he's told. "That "That's something like the row I had with the State over a number plate on one of my trucks. 't was an extry plate in case I wanted to do some outside work. I paid 'em what they asked and got the plate about five weeks after I asked for it. Hadn't much more than got the plate when I get a letter saying that the price had gone up on the plates, and I was to send 'em five dollars more. I paid no attention. Next I hear that they were going to cancel my plates and to send 'em in. I paid no attention, 'cept to look and see that I have the receipt for the price, where I can lay my hands on it. Next, I'm to be arrested and the plates taken from em. I told the cop that come, that he could read the receipt, but that if he touched those plates I'd light into him. He started to swell up, but he changed his mind. And it's good he did, or I'd a-been the 11 death of both of us. He went off and I never heard nothing more. The State lied to me, too. I found I didn't need them plates to do town work anyway. But they said I did. But none of their friends bought any - I guess not. Yes sir, with things going like that, everything hitting me like it done, I think it's time for a change in government - let's have some respectable crooks for awhile!"