

[Windology]

Herbert Harris Well, that was the longest winter I spent in the mountains. Jefferson county it was. Wouldn't have been so bad if we didn't have to tunnel through the drifts to the peak to get our bearings. [?] it was, come [Monday?], regular as a clock, there we would be, in the edge of the wind, digging away. Funny thing that. Made us laugh, though we were so miserable. Cold enough to freeze the marrow in the bone, yet we were burning up, specially our faces. But [only?] in certain places. At the proper angle, she was a right smart [gale?]. But it wasn't the wind that bothered us [such?]. Matter of fact, that's what we were after — wind.

No, it wasn't the wind. It was them pesky wood ticks. Sure misery, they are. First off, you had to find them; then, di dig 'em out. Nicked our axes plumb to hell. We honed them till there was nothing left of our hones. [Wore?] 'em to [slivers?]. Couldn't shave then. See?

That was all virgin country. Fertile soil. Things just shot up. [Came?] with our whiskers. And when our hones gave out . . . Got so, a fellow couldn't even scratch. Not to do any good, that is. Tangle got so thick. You couldn't see the swellings on our faces, but you knew they were there, a-burning away . . . just burning and burning. . . .

We had one lad, smart as they came. Hailed from Omaha, Nebraska. "Looka, here," he said. "Where [I?] came from, folk have an old Indian custom."

"And what might that be," said I.

"Well," he said, "when whiskers in Omaha get to be real unmanageable, the menfolk stick their faces round a street corner and let the northers burn 'em off. 'Course, the Indians had an easier time than white folks. They just went out a piece from camp, caught the edge of a norther and let 2 it singe off their whiskers merely by turning about to accomodate the blade, as it were. Now things are different back home. More houses than people; more

Library of Congress

street corners than a wind knows what to do with. If you went a complete [singe?], you got to catch the norther at the right angle. Well, gents, I heard tell some men, special the older ones, get plumb wore out chasing [from?] one corner to another to get a proper singeing.”

“Well, that's so,” I said. 'It ain't in Nebraska only people get their whiskers singed off by the northers. My dad used to get a pretty good shave in Chicago, just by standing on the shore of a lake there. What's on your mind, boy?”

“I was thinking,” he said, “suppose now we gets the North Wind to do 'at little chore for us.”

Well, that got us. Here we were, getting feverisher and feverisher every minute with all that poison from the woodtickes 'cause we had no hones to sharpen our axes with and cut through the underbrush and get at 'em. And if that North Wind would do that little job for us, why, we figured, we had no call not to take advantage of his offer, in a manner of speaking. That's where all the [researching in?] the science of Windology we had been doing would come in right handy, I thought. So we headed for the peak of Mount Olympus. You'd never believe what that North Wind could do when he set himself to raise hell. Once he tore up a whole mountainside. But that was before my time, long before even Omaha, Nebraska, was settled, [long?] before any Indian ever thought of getting a free [singe?], I guess.

Well, so we tunnels our way to the peak. On the summit, it blows so hard we have to lash ourselves to a boulder to keep from being blown away. “Take it easy, gents,,” yells the Nebraskan. “Its hitting straight on, wait till it starts climbing to lift its tail over the peak.” 3 So we huddles there watching old North Wind lifting his tail over the peak. Most fearsome sight you ever saw. To get that peak he had to circle and circle, easing up to the stars, now backing a bit to let the tail clear a ledge, now flicking it to straighten it out. That tail must have been as long as from here to Alaska. It was bright up there on the peak. If you looked close, you could see a million nicks in that tail.

Library of Congress

“That's where the Omahaans had rasped it,” said the Nebraskan in a kind of an awe. “My God! Never knew bristles could be so tough!”

Well, when it got so cold we couldn't stand it any more, we took a chance sticking our faces over the boulder to get our whiskers singed. Nearly took our heads off, I can tell you. Blowed particularly bad when he was swishing his tail. And the cold froze the woodticks stiff.

But as I was saying, it was virgin country then, everything grew overnight. Next [morning, sure enough?], our [whiskers were an inch?] long. And a week later they were a foot long. And [then?] woodticks had thawed out and were making up for lost time. Well, we kept singeing them. But it was hard work, I can tell you.

One night, when we got to the peak, there was this Nebraskan [putting?] the finishing touches to the [finest?] board walk you ever [did?] see. We hadn't missed 'im because we were each so miserable with all that woodtick poison in us, we couldn't see [straight?]. [But?] there he was, hammering away at the braces, pulling and hauling to test the strength of his boardwalk. Ran it clear around the peak, with cable rails, a-curving in and out like them derbies they make for the kids in playlands.

[We?] were so astounded, we just stood there. Up north we could hear Old North Wind commencing on his nightly rounds. Was due to hit the peak any moment. 'Cause on straight ground North Wind was faster than greased 4 lightning. Well, the Nebraskan threw off his clothes — everything but his wool socks, weighted 'em down with a boulder and got on his board walk. Maybe I should call it a balcony. If you saw one side — or curve, I should say, it looked just like a wooden platform sticking from a rock tower. Them curves were built according to the laws of Higher Windology. Perfect. Just an eighteenth of an inch into [the known inner stream?] — path, that is — of North Wind's tail. It had to be so. If you built that platform a seventeenth of an inch out, the edge would take your skin off; on

Library of Congress

the other hand, if you'd get no better than a singe you would have to do it over again next week.

Well, sir, that wind was coming a-whooping. We lashed ourselves to a boulder. I saw the Nebraskan fasten his High Rigger's belt to the cable railing just in time. The blow was at first terrific. Then Northwind started to spiral to the stars, to lift his tail over the peak. We heard a funny [sputtering?] sound. Sure enough, when we looked over the boulder, there was sparks flying just above the [cable rail?]. The Nebraskan was so coated with frost he looked a frozen [ghost?]. [?] [walking ghost?]. Cause he was moving around, now one way now the other, leaning a bit into the edge, then jumping back, like it was getting too hot. From [time to time?] he would lean back hard against the cliff to shatter the frost off him, and then you could see bits of him as clean and pink as if he'd been just sandpapered.

After a while it got warmer. Felt like heat was coming from the wind's tail. [We got up on?] the boardwalk [and?] started to undress, figuring that as soon as the Nebraskan had got his shave, another one of us would step up and the rest wait in line for their turn.

The Nebraskan waved us away. [Sweat was pouring from him and he was?] red all over like a beet. Clean shaved! Everywhere! Even under the [arm?] pits! 5 Then came the most goshawful scream you ever did hear. Sounded like the world was being torn apart in one rip. The North Wind's tail dropped so fast, the head was in sight before you could yell "Timber." Blood ran from the cable rail about the board walk and splashed all over the planking. Down below, in the canyon, the snow was turning red. We looked to the east. Narry a sign of the dawn. It was blood that was turning the canyon crimson. The North Wind was bleeding from all those woodticks that had dug into it as soon as its cutting edge had warmed up on the Nebraskan's beard. That's why. Those ticks dug in so deep they gave the wind a fever. Only he's a sluggish creature, is the North [Wind?]. That's why it took him so long to realize what was happening to him. That wind is so long it takes hours for its nervous system to click. But once it does

Library of Congress

Well, sir, the Nebraskan got the cleanest shave [all?] over any man could want. The best part was, his hair never grew again. [Wind?] froze the roots. Now if I had thought of rigging [?] that platform, I might be the cleanest permanent shaved man in the State of Washington now.