The Champs

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Abstract

"Jeannie!" A figure clad in overalls stood half-way up the alley by Miss Budd’s big tree...
Sunday II
Terrance Hallagan

The lazy sunshine
Shivers in queer lines
Above the earth,
Knowing it is Sunday.
The breeze lies quiet,
Not even teasing the leaves.
I'm stretched out
In a little circle of shade
Looking at the polished sky—
Watching the hawk
Pause, resting on the air,
Wheel lazily back
And slide easily across the sky,
Back and forth,
Aimlessly drifting
Here and there,
Sailing on his great wings,
Smooth as the ice in winter,
Silent as the dew.

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"JEANIE!" A figure clad in overalls stood half-way up the alley by Miss Budd's big tree. His eight and one-half year old voice, trained for almost this many years by managing the lives of his four younger brothers and sisters, was again demanding. "Jeanie, hurry up." And Dick kicked at the big roots spreading away from the bottom of the tree, watching closely the back door of Jeanie's house on Eighth street.

"Okay, I'm coming." A figure in overalls and a starched white shirt with a red bandana tied cowboyish around her neck slammed the back door and ran up the alley, her pigtails flop-
ping. "I've got a pillow to sit on; and a bag of raisins and you can have some. Mother made me bring this sweater and I'm . . . ."

"You said you'd meet me here early, so we could get a good start. I've been waiting about ten hours."

"Oh, Mother had to braid my hair, but now let's go. Whatcha got?" Jeanie pulled a crumpled paper sack from Dick's back pocket and peered into it. "Um, graham crackers." The broken pieces of cracker made a nice smell and she wrinkled her nose to catch it all. It was right after breakfast and Jeanie was hungry. She wished that they weren't being quite so much like Frank Buck, saving their food until lunch time. But then she supposed all professional tree-sitters did that.

"I'll go up first, then you hand me your pillow." Dick matter-of-factly climbed up the huge trunk of the tree using the wobbly board steps that George Underwood had nailed on last year. A rubber shooter with a long wooden barrel and a pinch clothespin on the end was tucked into his leather belt, cut down from one of his dad's. "Okay, come on." He stood in the flat place at the top of the trunk where the branches began to stretch out. Jeanie scrambled happily up. She loved this tree. It was like the places in the stories she made up when she was alone, places where she could go and watch people and they couldn't see her at all . . .

This year it was Dick's tree and sometimes, like today, he let her climb up into it, but not very often. Last year it had been George Underwood's tree and he didn't want her up there ever. She was too little. She was glad it was this year and Dick's tree now. Today he let her up because he had heard his father tell his mother about someone who had made a world's record at tree sitting.

When she reached the hollow place, Dick was sitting on the biggest branch that stretched out toward the telephone pole. She chose the other almost sittable one and put her pillow down.

"Boy, I bet we break the world's record easy. That man sat in his tree for a couple of days, we can stay a week at least." He leaned back against the bark and watched a squirrel run along the telephone wire, toward Jeanie's house. "I'll bet we get our pictures in the papers 'n everything."

"Oh, boy, we won't have to go to school next week. Maybe they'll think we're dead." She got so excited that she almost opened her bag of raisins, but then she remembered that they had to last a long time.
The man from the coal company came to fix the stoker in Miss Burr's basement and his truck made the leaves shake, probably like an earthquake, Jeanie thought. At this signal Dick and Jeanie knelt down in the flat place, behind Jeanie's branch and waited for the man to come out. Just as he opened the truck door, Dick shot the rubber shooter. The piece of inner tube didn't hit the man, but it came close. He looked around surprised, but when he didn't see anything he got into the truck and drove away, shaking the leaves again. They sat back on their branches satisfied. "I'd like to be a monkey and throw coconuts on people when they walk through my jungle." Jeanie's eyes were bright. "And I'd hide so that the people'd never know who'd dropped them."

"Aw, that's sissy stuff." Dick tried to think of something better. "I'm going to be an Indian fighter, but I won't hide; I'll just let 'em shoot at me and when their arrows just bounce off my bullet-proof vest they'll get so scared they'll run off the cliffs and kill themselves."

"There aren't that kind of Indians any more, so there."

"Well, I'll do it anyway." Dick decided girls were dumb. "Let's be quiet for a while so no one will know we are here. They might try to break the record, too."

And they were quiet. Jeanie thought of how nice it was that it was spring already and school would be out in twenty days, and then they all would go up to the lake, where she would pick blueberries for her mother to make pie out of. Blueberries . . . raisins.

"Say, Dick, isn't it about lunch time?"

Dick, aroused from his dreams of Indian fighting, looked at the sun through the branches. "Yah, the sun's about right. Let's eat." He pulled out the crumpled sack, reached in and retrieved his hand clutching four large pieces of cracker. "Here, don't take too many, they've got to last us. How about some raisins?" They exchanged food, munching crackers noisily. Jeanie was so hungry, she wished she could have more.

"Boy, I hope I do get my picture in the paper. Then my mother'll let me have a chemistry set, I'll bet." Dick could see his younger brother afraid enough of being blown up that he'd give up his dessert every night.

"Don't I get my picture in the paper, too?" Jeanie thought she would like that. Her second grade teacher would tell the
class about it.

“Oh, I guess so, but remember, I'm the one that breaks the world's record. It's going to be my name that they put in the history books.”

“Okay, I remember,” Jeanie thought it was going to be wonderful to get her picture in the paper. She didn't want her name in any old history books. “Say, don't you think it's almost dark?”

The garbage man drove in under the tree and emptied Miss Budd's garbage can into the back of his truck. A funny smell came up into the tree. “I think he comes just before it gets dark.” Of course, this wasn't the garbage man that came to Dick's house, but he thought he came about that time anyway. He began to think about what it would be like up here in the tree when it was dark. There might even be an owl living up here in one of those branches. “I wonder if that tree sitting champion stayed up in his tree all night. I bet he didn't. I bet he just sat up there during the day time, and went home at night. I bet if I didn't tell and you didn't either, no one would know that we didn't sit up there all night.” Dick looked at Jeanie hopefully, and Jeanie looked back hopefully. The place where she sat down was so tired, and she was getting hungry again.

“I won't tell, I promise.”

“Cross your heart and hope to die?”

“Cross my heart and hope to die.” She made an X sign over the place where she supposed her heart was and then pointed upward with her right hand. Dick did the same thing, stuck his gun in his belt, stuffed the sack in his pocket and climbed backwards down the tree, jumping from the third board. Jeanie threw her pillow to him and followed, clutching her box of raisins. She jumped from the second board and scraped her knee on a root.

“Okay, now, we'll meet here tomorrow after Sunday School. Don't forget. And don't be so slow!”

“I'll be here.”

“Shake on it?”

“Okay, shake.” She stuck out her small dirty hand and they shook. He ran up the alley toward his big yellow house. “See you tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Jeanie walked toward home slowly, “and I'll get my picture in the paper. . . . Gee, I'm hungry.” She began to run.