

there was a kind of virtue in toil and weariness."

The problem is not solved in the play.

Karel Capek merely presents it for your consideration and thought.

The Wistful Fable Of The Willows Of Willow Lane

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Although willow trees, weeping willow trees, genus *Salix babylonica* (in case any botanist is listening), spring from the earth, there is something unearthly about them. This was the first profound observation in an exhaustive and exhausted one-man study made recently. It was discovered also that they provide atmosphere. Many writers have made good use of a stout willow; some use them as trapezes for school-skipping farm boys in blue jeans, characters like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn; several use them as an aid or receptacle for hiding passionate love letters, lockets, charms; many, for background in murder mysteries, and still others as property of ye ole Southe'n mansions, mansions that figure largely in the winning of the Civil War, Scarlet's last stand, etc.

We have had willow trees on our street ever so long, as far back as I can remember and farther. I recall seeing a photograph of our then new white bungalow with two skinny, scrawny willows implanted strategically in our too-small front yard. On one of the margins of the photo was inked the date "1929". Perhaps it was a gay coincidence, or just a sundry fancy, but I too, was a skinny stripling then, although a trifle more human. Being born in '29, a "depression baby," I felt akin to those willows and measured myself to them. As they grew, so I grew; as they gained stature and venerability, so I gained childhood and adolescence.

One day, having time to measure myself to them again, I found, to my utter consternation, that they had grown much taller and decidedly broader. I had lost out! What had happened, I was at my wit's end to know. I thought perhaps I had an overactive pituitary gland, or that the trees had lost theirs entirely. Soon, however, I was informed that a tree's life span was of shorter length than mine. I was, as you may or may not have guessed, astonished. What could I do? Perhaps I could chop them down to my size—Washington did it, why couldn't I?

Taking my little wooden tomahawk from the wall of my bedroom, I raced out of the house with the defiling instrument in hand and gave one mighty, crushing blow. . . . After wiping the dirt from my eyes and picking myself off the ground, I looked down—one splintered tomahawk was distributed throughout the epidermis of my hand. I surmised I should conceive a better plan next time; besides, Washington didn't tell a lie and got whipped for it.

Then after thinking an afterthought, I gave the whole plan up. After all, most of the neighbors' willows were at the same growth; I would be chopping for the rest of my life. Of course I could take up forestry and/or lumberjacking and learn the latest methods to dispatch thick-trunked willow trees. Thinking better of this, however, I scampered off to several discouraging, if not disastrously confining years, in

various institutions of higher education.

But soon, I was avenged. Ha! what insidious revenge! The neighbor on the corner was having sewer trouble. All caused by two little, modestly unpretentious ninety-foot willow trees. The men in black suits carrying nasty-toothed saws, arrived with a disconcerting gory-lust in their eyes.

It was all very undramatic—they didn't even yell timber. Still, I derived some pleasure from the sawdust being strewn to the four winds — five really, the occupant on the corner was a breezy old windbag. Glancing at his pitiful eyes, I thought I saw a tear drip from his cheek. The very idea! Why should he weep? You'd have thought he was a second leaf-eating G. B. Shaw.

Cutting two notches in my Indian belt, I went home speculating on when the men in black would call next door, or even at home.

Things went along smoothly at home. After several trips from the roto-rooter men, they gave up in disgust, despair and five broken knife blades. They then came—the men with the nasty-toothed saws. To hell with the trees next door, I would finally have my true revenge . . . could death be sweeter?

But wait! They're cutting off too much. "Down to my size, down to my size," I pleaded. I was thwarted again. They were cutting all right, but past my size, or the size of an ant for that matter. "All, or nothing at all," was their cry. Gad! What had I wished? Oh well, it's all for the best, I thought; the ones next door were left. I could persuade the next men in black to cut them down to my size, not any lower.

Since that time, I've forgotten all thought of revenge. Next door the two weeping willows still stand, unearthly as ever. I can almost say I'm sorry our trees are gone, they did give good shade.

EPILOGUE

The street outside is bathed in warm sunlight. The two trees stand next door, and as people go by on sidewalk and in automobile they stare ecstatically at the two monsters on our street, Paxton Place. Yes, Paxton Place. Long ago when the willows were intact, the neighbors got together to name the street Willow Lane, but their wish was not granted by the city, since there already was a Willow Lane. Perhaps it turned out for the best. Willow Lane wouldn't have fitted now, and anyhow Paxton Place is a nice name for a street—kinda.