there was a kind of virtue in toil and weari-
ness."
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

R. HANCOCK

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 wil-
low; 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 strate-
gically in our too-small front yard. On one
of the margins of the photo was inked the
date "1929". Perhaps it was a gay coinci-
dence, 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 my-
self to them again, I found, to my utter con-
sternation, 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 over-
active 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
blo w . . . . 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, Washing-
ton 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 for-
ery and/or lumberjacking and learn the
latest methods to dispatch thick-trunked
willow trees. Thinking better of this, how-
ever, I scampered off to several discourag-
ing, 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.