

Pole Capping

How many times have you challenged this bare tree,
Determined to climb?
Its bark is stripped.
No branch offers a foothold.
There is just a knotted rope to grab
And haul the apex of the tree toward you
With a grab and a leap, you begin the ascent.
A cheer rises from hundreds of onlookers.
You might ride their gusty shout upwards,
But the wind of their lungs doesn't reach you.
You are already meters above them.
Alone but for your legs gripping,
Your shoulders shuddering,
Your hands cramping –
Clench your fists again over the fibers that burn your palms.
You have just one more burst in you.
Heave yourself – heave yourself to the crown!
It is your prize alone.
Yet, another sound reaches you.
It is the murmuring of phantoms:
Boys learning the fife, hoping to lead the march to war.
Women pouring powder into twisted paper cartridges.
Men molding musket balls. “Conquer or die!”
Balance a moment more:
Listen! the people are gathering --
Declaring Independence --
Demanding “Liberty, and Justice, for all” --
“And a home for the brave and the free.”
And from the mountains, and the prairies,
And the white-capped seas,
The old Earth rumbles
“Liberty! – Yes! – Justice!
And for all my people, Peace.”
It's time.
Flourish your red knitted cap and thrust it atop the pole.
“Liberty!”
The excited crowd replies
“Liberty!” “Huzzah!”
“No taxation without representation!”
Before the shouts fade, you descend,
Quick with pride. With triumph. With relief.
Scripted soldiers are waiting on the ground to arrest you.
The patriots will boo them until you're out of sight.
Then they will move on to the next item on the program.
It was a pageant. Make-believe.
But not for you.
Not for you.
For you, it was a climb to the sky.
Liberty. Justice. Peace.

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