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Redd Boggs, editor

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"Improve every opportunity to express yourself in writing, as if it were your last." -- Thoreau, Journal, 17 December 1851.

Cheer up! Things could be worse: You could be a Republican.

Dear Abyss Department

Germantown, Wis.

Dear Sir or Madame (as the case may be):

If the armies of the future travel through space on their stomachs, would it be correct to refer to them as "Gastro-nauts"?

Puzzled

Dear Puzzled: The answer is yes, for all except the Cuban army, who will of course be referred to as "Castronauts."

Friendless, and too poor to buy a cigar.

You Know Me, Al

Diana had been keeping a lamp lighted for Al Lewis in the front window of Duplicator Supply for more than a month. She is the girl Friday down there where the LASFS has an account, and she told me that weeks ago Al had dropped by to order, and pay for, a new silk screen for the LASFS Rex, but had never returned to pick it up. She was anxious to get the silk screen out to Al at 1825 Greenfield, she said, and would I please take it with me and see to it that Al got it promptly?

I explained that I wasn't going out that way very soon, but she looked at me so beseechingly that I found myself accepting the parcel

containing the silk screen and promising her that I'd see to it that it was delivered immediately into Al's hands. One of the cardinal flaws of my factory-reject character is that I cannot refuse a woman.

At the LASFS meeting a few days later I turned the parcel over to Dave Hulan, a paid-up member of the LASFS Duplicator association and the most dependable man since Abe Lincoln and Dick Rover, and received his assurance that he'd take it to 1825 Greenfield when he went over there to run off his sapszine. He did, too, only he didn't get there before Al, as luck would have it, called at last at Duplicator Supply and asked for the silk screen he had ordered so many weeks ago.

Diana explained matters: She'd given it to a LASFS member who would deliver it, she said. Al scratched his crewcut perplexedly. "Who did you give it to?" he asked. Well, Diana didn't know my name, but she began to describe me in rich and glowing detail, and

"Bill Blackbeard!" said Al, his frown disappearing.

Diana looked at me carefully when I went into Duplicator Supply a few days after this. "You don't look like Bill Blackbeard," she said.

"No, but neither does Bill Blackbeard," I said. "What's up?"

So she told me about "somebody from 1825 Greenfield" showing up and telling her he hadn't received the silk screen yet. I calmed her fears by conjuring up a picture of Dave Hulan ("tall, ungainly, squinty from years of studying by firelight, a man who looks like Bill Blackbeard"), and then I asked her who from 1825 Greenfield had come in.

"Well, he's the short one. Short, husky, handsome," she said.

"Ah yes," I said, my frown disappearing. "Ron Ellick!"

"The surest way to make a monkey of a man is to quote him." -- Benchley

Gutter Gold: 2

The following is a letter I found in the street between Westlake and Bonnie Brae on Third, 30 April 1964. It is scribbled on school notebook paper and is probably a first draft:

Frankie,

I am very sorry that I told Betty. She is a damn fink and I'll tell her to her face. I told her in the utmost confidence. In fact she almost swore on a stack of bibles. I guess everyone can't keep a secret like Susy and myself. Even though it wasn't a real secret. You've spoiled my plans but I'll remember that when you want me to do a favor. I'm sorry that I mentioned it. I could go with other boys who want to go with me but I didn't. I chose you and you weren't will-

ing. I built you up a whole lot. I wanted someone who wasn't going to be too difficult. I mean to build up, that is. I hate you. I don't know if I like you or not any more and I'm sorry for a lot of things.

Cora

"Love demands infinitely less than friendship." -- G. J. N.

The Morning I Was Debonair with Belair

Belair Light Menthol Filter Tip Cigarettes. There were originally 20 Class A cigarets in this pack (according to the label), manufactured by Brown & Williamson Tobacco corporation in Petersburg, Va., U.S.A. They came in a neat blue and white pack with a photo on it of a mackerel sky, or at least a blue sky with fleecy white clouds sailing in it.

Under the cellophane wrapper in back is one (1) one Raleigh coupon, entitling the holder to redeem it for "nationally advertised merchandise as stated on reverse side."

Anybody who recognizes hiser own property from the above description may retrieve the cigarets at my place any day except Sunday (which with me is a day of prayer and fasting). There were nine cigarets in the pack when I glommed onto it. Now there are only eight. I smoked one cigaret. I hope you don't mind.

Phyllis, the beautiful waitress at Kal's, handed them to me the other night after some of us had abandoned one table to sit with the last stragglers at another table. Somebody had forgotten them, but not me, and nobody still there. (I think they might have belonged to Ingrid Fritzs.) Since nobody was interested in them, I stuck them absent-mindedly into my pocket and brought them home with me.

Some days later I happened to find the pack -- you can see how often I rummage around in my pockets -- when searching for something else: a pint of Torrido chili peppers, or a bag of Swee-Touch-Nee pekoe I had used only twice and mislaid, or something of the sort. I immediately realized the foolishness of my first impulse: to make a special trip to return the pack. Even Abe Lincoln wouldn't go to the bother for a mere nine filter tip cigarets, not even for a beautiful woman like Ingrid -- presuming the cigarets were really hers.

My second impulse was to light up and flirt with lung cancer while sipping my second cup of breakfast coffee. After considerable looking high and low, I discovered a book of paper matches from the Mirror Room, 1600 West Sixth street, that had fallen behind the gas heater several months ago. After considerable fumbling, which strained my non-existent resources of manual dexterity to the utmost, I managed to scratch a match into flame -- miraculously without setting the whole book afire or even singeing my fingers too painfully.

Hastily inserting one of the cigarets in my mouth, I held the flame in the general area of its far tip and found myself blistering my nose.

Closing one eye, I managed to orient cigaret end and match flame. A tiny conflagration further warmed my nose and smoke curled back through the white cylinder and filter as I puffed madly.

I pulled one hefty puff into my lungs and immediately expelled it violently in a series of seismic seizures unmatched since Krakatoa. Pale clouds of smoke burst from my ears traveling at a speed of recession I would estimate at 670,455,000 mph. While all this was going on, I crashed to the floor, kicking and flailing out in all directions, but my frantic gyrations did not blow out the flame of the match in my hand, and I burned my fingers.

Stamping out the fire in the carpet, I sat down on the sofa with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigaret in the other. This seemed to me unutterably debonair, the acme of sybaritic pleasure, equalled but not surpassed only by an evening of quaffing Pepsi-Cola and munching potato chips and Guacamole. What luxury! What decadence!

I put down the cigaret as soon as I discovered the ashtray of this apartment, which had gotten buried under a stack of New Republics and let smoke dribble up in a straight little string while I sipped coffee and read Charles Sanders Peirce.

By the time I thought to pick it up again, having become immersed in Peirce's ethical principle (to the effect that the limited duration of all finite things requires one's identification with those of an unlimited community of persons and things), there was a long white ash wobbling on the end, but I did not notice. I let the cigaret droop from the corner of my lips, slanted a cold glance across the room, and rasped at an imaginary clot of gun-lumpy hardcases, "Now listen here, youse guys!" The only trouble was, the smoke looped up into my eyes, causing me to blink like a bereaved rabbit, and the movement of my lips shook the ash loose. About an inch of ashes and tiny red coals cascaded down my shirtfront.

By the time I had put the cigaret down in the ashtray and beaten out the coals which were smoldering happily in the acetate folds of my drip-dry, I noticed that the cigaret had already consumed itself down to the point on the white cylinder where it had the Belair name and monogram printed in pale blue. I took one more puff, further blistering my nose and stirring up incipient cancer cells in my lungs, then hurriedly snuffed out the cigaret. The cigaret died hard, leaving behind it a foul stench that lasted for three weeks despite gallons of Airwick.

Well, I guess I never had quite so much fun before, and I had to lie down for a while (two days) to recover from such a mad carnival of pleasure. When I finally climbed to my feet again, I staggered over to my desk and tore up the coupon I had clipped from a magazine to send for one hundred "starter" coupons for Alpine cigarets. Like Raleigh and Belair, Alpine is giving a free coupon with each and every pack, and these are good for more than 500 items of merchandise, from screw drivers to cigar store Indian plaques. It sounded like a wonderful idea, merrily flirting with lung cancer while accumulating coupons to get all sorts of wonderful free gifts, but not now.

The trouble was, you see, that I had already settled on the free gift I wanted: the Emba Autumn Haze Mink Stole By Renoir, described as "A natural wrap mink stole with opulent bolster collar, of sumptuous deep furred, fully let-out pelt. Soft shirring at elbow." You may be surprised at the astounding coincidence, but it happens that I know more than one young lady who has expressed interest in receiving such a gift for her birthday. Perhaps that soft shirring at elbow especially fascinates them. I don't know. At any rate, I was seriously intending to take up smoking in order to collect Alpine coupons to be redeemed for that mink stole.

But now, I took a closer squint at the proposal in the ad. The Emba Autumn Haze Mink Stole required exactly 47,185 coupons, I discovered. Once that had seemed a mere nothing. I could almost stroke the deep furred, fully let-out pelt. I could almost behold, with bugging eyes, the soft shirring at elbow. I could almost taste the happy kisses of the recipient of this glorious gift, the passionate...

47,185 coupons. What!!! Hell, I wanted to obtain the mink stole by next January. To make certain I'd get it in time, I'd have to send my order by mid-December, at the latest. That was about eight months off. Say around 34 weeks. 238 days. Subtracting the hundred "starter" coupons I could get free, I needed 47,085 coupons, and would receive one with each pack I smoked. I began to figure.

I'd have to smoke a matter of only 1387 packs per week, only 27,740 cigarets in all, to hit my goal in time. Figure it at 200 packs per day to be safe. If I industriously chainsmoked all my waking hours, I'd need to burn up only 12½ packs or 250 cigarets per hour for the next 34 weeks or 238 days. That would give me nearly 15 seconds to spend enjoying each and every cigaret!

But wait, what about all the time I'd waste trying to strike my matches or flick my lighter into flame? What about all the time I'd waste coughing my lungs free of noxious fumes? What about all the time in the doctor's office being treated for heart palpitations, and in the hospital recovering from lung surgery?

No, damn it. I nearly killed myself smoking one cigaret, let alone 941,700. Somehow, I don't think I'd manage to survive.

So I won't have a mink stole to give her for her birthday, but they have some awfully pretty greeting cards for 5¢ at the Outlet store.

It is a proud and lovely thing to be a woman.

"I am a boy of 46, partly white, and stand in my stocking feet. I haven't had a drink since Repeal, as I believe in the Constitution. (I did have something made from potatoes, a white liquid which my old Russian nurse called wodka, but it didn't seem to have any effect. A-ha-ha-ha-hee!)"

-- Robert Benchley,
My Ten Years in a Quandary

Transient Thoughts from Tendril Towers

Apropos of the discussion in this fapazine lately of Tendril Towers and its denizens, I am reprinting this poem from Shangri-LA #28, which carries no date but was published circa June 1951. Eph Konigsberg was the publisher for the LASFS, and William D. Cox was the editor for that issue. The poem was intended as the first of a series of depictions of life at 628 South Bixel street, but was the only one ever written and published. In the lines below, "the elder Cox" refers to Arthur Jean Cox, "the younger Cox" to Bill Cox, his brother, and "Gordon" to Paul Gordon, a somewhat more obscure fan, now almost forgotten. -- R.B.

Hst! the harsh, the heavy pulse of the stairs
Beats: Nemesis descends, lowering mastodonic mass
In calculated balance from step to step,
A soured Gamp, possessed not by a mythic Harris,
But by a mythic Marx -- the horseplay in Seventy
Simmery Axe, halts: has she heard? the thought
Reigns paramount and ears strain, expecting
Momentarily the fleshy thunk of the aged knuckle.
It comes not; the weighty tread surges past
Our tense door and the slippered threnody dims,
The corpulent Stalinist Caliban reaching now
Her dusty, paper-strewn Kremlin deep-sunk
In the sagging timber ribs and cracked-plaster
Flesh of this archaic corpse-house in L. A.'s
Architectural St Lazaire, this Bixel street.
We, the deviationist, Trotskyite, intellectual sprites,
Tolerated in this realm of Caliban, but ever alert,
Breathe easily once more. Gordon whips again the
Antique gun from his narrow hip to get the drop
On the slower, younger Cox, who chuckles and
Claims regardless the speedier draw. Again
The two draw their weapons, spin and maneuver
About my book-hung chamber, growling "Gotcha, Cox!"
And "The hell you did -- got you that time!" The
Others, the elder Cox and myself, encircled
But not ensorcelled by this exuberant gunplay,
Attempt aloofness, hovering intellectually
Above this gamboling brainlessness, chiding
Snidely the participants. Ultimately they stop
Beaming at us with mindless, animal eyes. "How
About going out for some tea, you guys, huh?" asks
The younger Cox. The elder, pondering the phallic
Significance of the guns and remembering that he,
In other instances, has not been innocent of this
Juvenile frolicking (from which only I have remained wholly
And lonesomely apart), assents. But Gordon,
Replacing his gun upon its nailhead perch
Against the wall, has noted the clock, and observes
That it is ten, already that flagged hour
Which this erupting volcano of youth with
The marionette limbs and carved Pinocchio face
Has dismally proclaimed in the at once piping

And stentorian tones of adolescence as that
At which he has promised his parents to be returned
To his Pasadena demense (I visualize these parents
As he has depicted them: gaunt, terrible figures of
Stony countenance and bearing, their minds tiny
Inquisition chambers, with working racks and foot
Screws, sitting in wait for their errant prodigal
Like the Theban kings of Egypt's bleak plains)
And that he must be on his way. I reach,
Toe-tips tall, to douse the glim and we
Exeunt into the hall. From depths beyond
We hear our landlady (I can see her, heavy-sunk
In the strained, spreading armchair, like
An elephant's foot descending on a baby's
Potty-seat) and the ebullient Mel Brown
(Frisco fan come lately among us at Tendril
Towers like a Lucifer cast out of Heaven)
Rapt in dialectic discourse. The younger Cox
Pulls open the thick portal to the porch
And we clatter out and down the concrete steps
To the street. It is warm out and there is
A moon, a broken, white-hot stove-lid just visible
Above the Paris-suburb hotel across the street.
Conversation babbles: the younger Cox and Gordon
Must needs discuss the technics of galactic
Space-drive; Cox the elder and myself speak
In self-conscious asides of the errors in the others'
Expostulated data. At Gordon's car now, bulking
Squarely in the street shadows, we continue dis-
Jointed gab as the gangling fan mounts the cab
Of his infernal chariot. Then, "So long, Gordon,"
And, "See you guys Thursday," and he has meshed
Scraping gears and motored away into the eve.
We three
Go on to tea.

-- William Blackbeard

Symphony for Negotiable Instruments (The Cheque Philharmonic)

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"We'll sit whilst this shower falls so gently upon the teeming earth and gives yet a sweeter smell to the lovely flowers that adorn these verdant meadows. Look! under that broad beech-tree I sate down when I was last this way a-fishing; and the birds in the adjoining grove seemed to have a friendly contention with an echo whose dead voice seemed to live in a hollow tree near to the brow of that primrose hill. There I sat viewing the silver streams glide silently toward their centre, the tempestuous sea, yet sometimes opposed by rugged roots and pebblestones, which broke their waves and turned them to foam. And sometimes I beguiled time by viewing the harmless lambs, some leaping securely in the cool shade, whilst others sported themselves in the cheerful sun; and saw others craving comfort from the swollen udders of their bleating dams. As I thus sate these and other sights had so fully possessed my soul with content that I thought as the poet has happily expressed it, 'I was for that time lifted above earth, / And possessed joys not promised in my birth.'"

-- Izaak Walton,
The Compleat Angler

"Live blindly and upon the hour. The Lord
Who was the Future, died full long ago.
Knowledge which is the Past is folly. Go,
Poor child, and be not to thyself abhorred.
Around thine earth sun-winged winds do blow
And planets roll; a meteor draws his sword;
The rainbow breaks his seven-coloured chord
And the long strips of river-silver flow:
Awake! Give thyself to the lovely hours.
Drinking their lips, catch thou the dream in flight
About their fragile hairs' aerial gold.
Thou art divine, thou livest, -- as of old
Apollo springing naked to the light,
And all his island shivered into flowers.

-- Trumbull Stickney,
"Live Blindly"

"What is the hardest task in the world? To think. I would put myself in the attitude to look in the eyes an abstract truth, and I cannot. I blench and withdraw on this side and on that. I seem to know what he meant who said, No man can see God face to face and live."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson,
"Intellect"

"When we try to estimate the power of literature, we must not be misled by the fancy pictures of history. Now and then periods do occur when the best literature overflows its usual narrow bounds and reaches a large mass of the people. Athens had such a period and we honor it for that. The nineteenth century also had this kind of overflowing. It is what we must always hope for and work for. But in actual fact the occasions are rare when the best literature becomes, as it were, the folk literature, and generally speaking literature has always been carried on within small limits and under great difficulties. Most people do not like the loneliness and the physical quiescence of the activity of contemplation, and many do not have the time or the spirit left for it. But whenever it becomes a question of measuring the power of literature, Shelley's old comment recurs, and 'it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world' if literature did not continue in existence with its appeal to limited groups, keeping the road open."

-- Lionel Trilling,
"The Little Magazine"