

BIG DEAL

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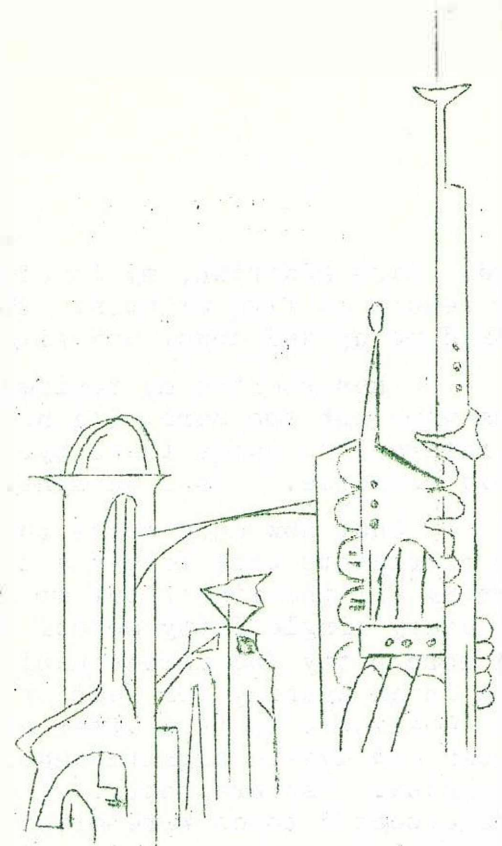
** 34th OMPA Mailing Dec 1962 **

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HALLO



Cold does things to men. Some it makes curl up and die, others are stimulated to a creative burst which may live for centuries. While I've not yet quite reached the stage of Scott painfully writing his journal as he lay half dead from starvation and cold in the midst of the Antarctic waste, I can, at least, feel a certain empathy with him.

You see, it snowed last night. The first snow of winter here in Manchester, and it had come far, far earlier than back in the village. I woke up with my feet cold, screwed myself into a foetal ball, and thought no more about them. Eventually I had to get up and look at the weather. Grrr! It was a case of going three miles to a cold gothic lecture theatre and learning all about the private lives of weedie little animacules, (who at least were safe in nice warm ponds or hosts), or staying here and trying to make 'out some sense for the OMPA mailing. Being a true scholar and devoted to my subject I stayed here, playing a waiting game with the electricity meter in the corner. In fact it's so cold that every other line or so I have to thaw out my fingers by the fire before proceeding. There's devotion for you.

Well you may wonder how I arrived at this awful predicament. And even if you don't I'm going to tell you.

* * *

Once upon a time, in a little village in Worcestershire, there was an innocent, if somewhat brash, young schoolboy. One day this lad was stolen from his parents and flung callously into the grips of a wicked witch....

* * *

My father drove me to Manchester, please no cracks about family unrest, the first sunday in October. He remarked that as we went North everything became dirtier, and objectively even this was true. Certainly it was around the dingy back streets, and even more so at the "Coronation Street" row of houses, cramped and grime ridden, which comprised Hornbeam

Road. Miss Anderton, my landlady to be, had kindly left a note promising her return in five minutes. Three quarters of an hour later she arrived, looked me up and down, and with a grimace of resignation led me indoors.

Thus started my residence at 17 Hornbeam Road. My first impressions were not too sure, I'd had no experience of digs before and so had no referent to judge these by. It certainly wasn't like home, but it could be worse. So I thought.

Just how much worse took me three weeks to find out. At first her complaints were merely a minor nuisance to be stoically borne. Like turning all the lights out at eleven o'clock each night, or having to eat every single fatty morsel of bacon. But after a time they became more and more petty and unreasonable. We were not to go upstairs more than once in an evening for fear of wearing out her new stair carpet. We were not allowed to talk after eleven o'clock. That hour assumed a very solemn and mystic significance. We were not allowed to bring chips into the house. We were not.....I could carry on all night. The things we were expected to do were almost as bad, if not worse in another way. Such as being expected to work on two rickety old card tables that swayed through an angle of thirty degrees (honest) when you tried to write on them. To put all our books on one shelf three feet long or keep them piled on the floor. All this in the blinding glare of a forty watt light bulb.

These probably seem little things taken individually, and no doubt they are. But collectively they added to an entirely oppressive atmosphere which seemed to say, "You're paying me to keep you damn well how I like...so shut up". Which is not a pleasant atmosphere to live in. Things came to a head one memorable night when the bloke I was in digs with started doing a Tarzan act at one minute past eleven, banging his stomach (his horrible fat stomach..haah). Freda unpressed her ear from the wall, dashed out of her bedroom and said we'd have to go. Joy.

Next morning she recanted a little and told us that we would have to be utterly subservient to her or she'd report us to the dread Lodgings Warden. Rather than stay we found a flat. Freda didn't even want the weeks notice she was entitled to so we left early the next day. A large taxi carried us and our junk away from Levenshulme, away from Hornbeam Road, and away from Freda Anderton. Within a few hours we were settled comfortably in our new home. And this time it feels like home.

In fact the change has been fantastic. I came to MC with the idea of eventually getting a flat, but never dreamed it would come about so soon. I've complete control (hah) over cooking and meals, cleaning, bed making and the multitude of other minor skills that I've had to learn in the past five weeks. For the first week we lived like kings practicing our newly aquired skills on each other. Several weeks and many urgent applications of the stomach pump have changed all this. For a week we lived on porage. Breakfast, tea and supper, the monotony only broken by dinner at Refec. Lately the climate has changed in favour of royalty with vast feasts consisting of chips, mashed potatoes and tinned stew. Oh, where we be without Australian Irish Stew, complete with kangaroo meat.

Aside from all these domestic trials I've had a little fannish social life. Several Manchester fans have played host to me, all being unselfishly generous in making me feel at home.

I interrupted Sid Birchby one monday night when he was feverishly pouring virtually raw alcohol into bottles, to "mature" as Sid puts it. A couple of glasses later and I was wondering what the goddamn hell the matured stuff would do to you if this supposedly low potency brew made you feel as if an army of ants were drilling oil at the back of your cranium. Haha..I should have known. An hour later Sid's wife gave me the choice of their cocktail cabinet. She knelt there reading out all these exotic names, knowing full well that I'd pick the most exotic sounding. "Cummell" it was, or was it, I can't be all that sure. But afterwards I felt even more stupified. The drinks I'd had there mixed around with the couple of pints I had with a friend before coming and just about put me out of action for the evening. Somehow I got back to Hornbeam Road, but I'm fairly certain it wasn't by the route I took there. One thing that sticks in my mind, if only to prove that I wasn't completely insensible, was the Birchby's little dog. "lulu" was the animals name and only the day before it'd had to go to the vets for some sort of treatment or other, consequently though it played cheerfully enough it bore a mournful expression. It was a small pert creature, scruffy and vivaceous.

In direct contrast is Bert Hogson's Dobberman, a large sleek show groomed animal. A magnificent beast, with a large cup to his (and Bert's) credit. While it's not quite true to say that life in the Hogson household revolves round Fritz entirely, a goodly part of the day has to be spent in the dogs upkeep. Walks, obedience training, and a lot of grooming each and every day if the dog is to be kept up to standard. Apart from all this Bert still manages to read sf and fantasy, and keep up with some specialized fantasy fanzines. On top of all this he's a devoted philanthrope, inviting starving students to his house and fatening them up. And as I was the starving student it wasn't a case of philanthropy being forced down my throat..or was it? Bert's wife cooked me a fabulous meal...the thought of it makes me feel like a conditioned dog salivating away like mad.

Harry Douthewaite, before his retirement from fandom, also entertained me. More important he did some superb artwork which'll be around in LS in the near future. Yes I did mention retirement. This time it seems Harry is serious. Other artistic commitments are more demending than fandom and promise greater experience for a career as a profesional artist. Fandom will miss you Harry, but not as much as LS. Pity and all that...

Shortly after I arrived in Manchester, Dave Hall, one of the pillars of the Labour Exchange, left. Wended his way to London and is now gainfully employed or hoping to achieve this happy state. I saw Dave once or twice, he came to my place once, and I saw him at the Union, with a cronie. But apparently living in Manchester for two decades and then having to face living within fifteen miles of me was just too much for him. Poor lad.

Well, time certainly flies. It's now after Christmas, Boxing Day in fact, and the preceeding months seem to have flown past with narry a pause for breath or O.P.A. The result is a sinful type pmg, in the good company of Brian Jordan and Dick Eney...it's obvious whose fault it is. Brian butchered his duplicating first try and Dick's parcel didn't arrive at Ken's till several weeks after the deadline.

As term drew to a close it became apparent that something was missing. Christmas was missing in fact. There was not the slightest trace of any "Christmas Spirit" or anything resembling it. True, there were three red balloons hanging over the stage in LDH, and there was a performance of carols by various groups, but apart from this nothing outward. Under the surface there was little either. A dismal few so called Christmas parties and the end of term ball, all these no different from the monotonous repetition of the same throughout the term. Maybe people were subdued by the thought of terminals in the new year, or of having to leave this paradise of freedom and student fabulous times that is University. Maybe the thought of work over the Christmas vac, either the post or for the terminals. It's very possibly wrong to expect any display for Christmas at an academic institution, but, nevertheless, I couldn't help but be the tiniest bit dissappointed.

A few weeks previous to coming down Maggie and myself had visited Brian Jordan in Sheffield. Brian had been complaining that they'd got into a bit of a rut on weekends and would we come and knock them out of it. Ham. Needless to say we didn't, but rather sank down into the same very pleasant rut. One thing I did do though was to wait up till it was light so that I could get some sleep. Brian has an infallible type alarm system made out of a surplus time switch, a box of relays and condensers, two batteries and a bell screwed to the head of the bed. Once this thing is switched on it can't be switched off and when it rings it carries on ringing. Unless, and this is the cunning bit, you run across the room and hold down a switch for two minutes. Needless to say this gets you up.

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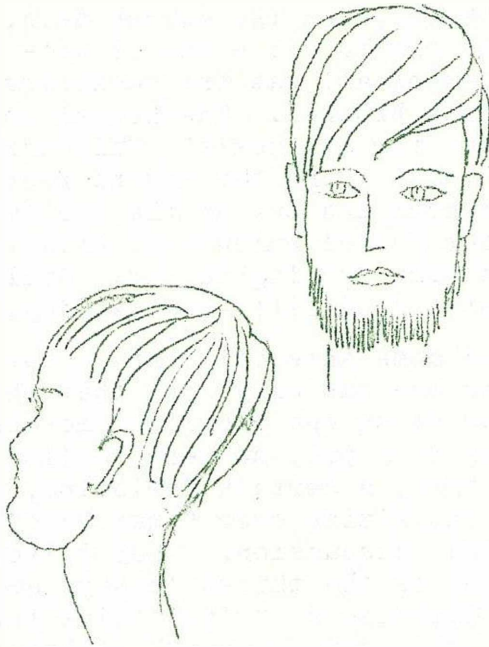
After a little thought and the realisation that there were good stencils being unused I decided to run the "Experimental Investigation" thing thru' OMPA. This was the experiment that Honours Psychology Students are expected to do in their first term at Manchester. We were expected to devise, plan and perform some experimental trial off our own bat, and then write the thing up. The six of us who ganged together went one better than these requirements and published our findings in the form of the paper you've now got. One thing we can gloat about, is that I hold the copyright for the thing and if the Prof or any of the lecturers try quoting from it we've got them for infringement! We've decided not to sue provided we all get firsts!

For the March Mailing I'll have probably got myself sorted out sufficiently to attempt some mcs, and from what I've seen of the 34th Mailing there'll be plenty to comment on and disagree with.

Best wishes for the New Year.....

LAKELAND

AHOY



by

Margaret Thompson

A boggy green hill and two man-made lakes - such was my first impression of the Lake District. However, after a couple of weeks and too many miles, my ideas were somewhat changed.

For weeks before we went, whenever I mentioned the Lake District, I heard sadistic laughter, and such words as: "You're fond of rain, then?" But actually we did quite well for weather. We left home in rain but by the time we reached the Lakes the sun was out. We got there in three lifts the final one being an elderly couple who weren't quite sure where to go. We suggested that they were bound to find accommodation in Kendal, so they obligingly took us just where we wanted to go. They were about the only tripper-types who gave us a lift during the whole holiday - usually we'd see the husband turn to the wife, the wife shake her head, the husband make some gesture, and the car go by. Not that there were many of them anyway. The Lake District A-Roads must be the only A-Roads in the country with no traffic. On one memorable occasion we had to walk ten miles before getting a lift. Admittedly we were ostensibly on a walking holiday, but there are limits. Mostly we were picked up by lorry-drivers, one of whom whipped out a bag of cakes, lovely cream cakes, even before Dave was half-way into the cab. This position did not, however, prevent him from reaching out and grabbing the biggest and best cake.

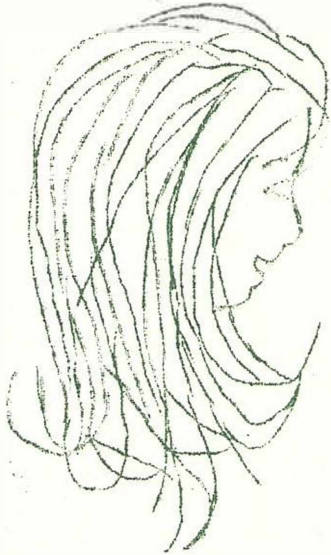
Lorry drivers weren't the only interesting characters we met. Youth Hostel wardens seem to be a race apart, and mostly slightly mad. We had our first indication of this at Ulterwater, the warden there came from Dudley. He pointed us out to people as coming from one of the worst areas in the country, and when a plate of food was missing at supper time, he seemed to suspect Dave of hiding it under his beard. Then there was the old lady at Nether Wasdale, and her pet sheep. This mangey looking

creature wandered into the kitchen one evening, and the warden said, "Oh, that's Tissy, come for her chocolate," and ran to get a bar of Kit-Kat for it. Perhaps the most interesting character of all was the Cockermouth warden, who appeared to be running a beatnik brothel. The hostel looked like a bachelor flat, and the diet was stew for all meals. This warden was choosy over who stayed in his hostel, and if he saw anyone respectable walking down the path, he rushed to the window and put up the "No Vacancies" sign. He had a blatant disregard for hostel rules - he himself gambled, and wasn't even in the hostel in time for lights out. Still, he did tell Dave and me where we could get a good lift the next day.....

The hostellers themselves provided some entertainment. Most of them appeared to come from Manchester, and one can only hope that they do not typify that city. The girls seemed to be on one glorified man-hunt. One particular Saturday night they'd been to a pub, so were feeling very talkative when they came to bed. One of them, a certain Christine, kept murmuring: "Eh, I think I'm in luv," and exclaiming over "that Pete!" and "Is 'airy legs" which came in for prolonged discussion. They talked about another boy who was "dead sexy. Some of the things 'e says are right cheeky", but the final words were Christine's: "D'you think that Pete's lying in bed thinking about me, at this very moment?" I later heard that Pete was saying, at approximately the same time, "Eh, that Christine, 'ow much d'you think I could get out of 'er, I mean really get out of 'er?" The man hunt type girls brought fantastic numbers of clothes with them - a different dress for each evening, and also nylons and nail varnish. At least jeans are practical....I can't imagine them walking far with all the extra weight they loaded themselves with. However you could find some amusement in listening to this type of hosteller, unlike the Boaster - 30 miles in one day, on foot of course, and every county in England visited at some time or other. He had to go to bed early, because he wanted to make an early start in the morning. Actually he was the last one up. Admittedly the poor fellow couldn't have had a very good night's sleep, as that was the night that someone was sick in the mens dormitory. He lay motionless in bed, yet managed to throw up all over the room.

We didn't only talk to other hostellers while we were in the Lakes. Everyone talks to everyone else up there, and our most inspiring conversation was with a Derbyshire idealist. I think he liked us because we weren't carrying the inevitable transistor radio. He explained to us why there are sex problems today, why we should never bear malice, ("It's a disease, like cancer. It spreads all through your system and destroys you."), and generally what was wrong with the world. His parting advice to us was to "stick together. I married the first woman I courted, and I've never regretted it since." I wonder why he was taking a holiday alone.

As entertaining as the hostellers were the hostel buildings themselves. These ranged from converted hotels with hot and cold in all rooms, to unconverted farmhouses, with no hot, and cold in the stream for girls and a bucket in a shed for men. There was an old world charm about many of the sanitary arrangements - I became quite expert at negotiating muddy yards in pitch-dark. At, Nether Wasdale, where the girls had a bucket and the men had two holes in a wooden bench affair, at least there was electricity in the hostel, in spite of the fact that it was situated half way up a mountain, miles from anyone or anywhere. Real desolate.



Actually it might have been preferable without electricity, because then we wouldn't have seen the mould on the bread..... Gillerthwaite also had electricity, generated on the farm itself. The generator provided a candle-like effect, dim and flickering, and whenever another light was turned on in the house, all the others went one degree dimmer. I'm almost inclined to think that gas-lighting, such as we had at Duddon and Cockermouth, was more efficient. However Duddon only had lighting downstairs and the warden refused to give us candles to light us to bed. In spite of the inconveniences though, I think these

smaller hostels are preferable to the larger, more impersonal, ones. In fact it had quite a marked effect on us when we emerged from the wilds and actually found rows of shops, and pavements. Even taps and flush toilets seemed quite a novelty. Keswick was quite pleasant as a large hostel because it was situated next to a dance-hall, and I fell asleep to strains of "Let's Twish Again", which made a change from the usual lullaby of grunts, snores and squeaking bedsprings.

I seem to have said little about the actual point of our holiday, which was walking. At times, what with Dave's feet playing him up, and too many miles between hostels, this part of the holiday got a bit much. On the first day, when we weren't really used to walking, we thought we could have a kip by Windermere. It's a long lake, and nearly all of the bank seems to be private. We did eventually manage to find a small bit of field which no-one had yet claimed, but it was some walk. We climbed a few mountains here and there during our stay, as well as walking a good many miles. Even when we were staying at the same hostel for two nights we contrived to walk fourteen miles on the day given over to resting.

Looking back on the holiday, if a holiday it was with all that exercise, I am left with the leading question - was it all worth it? And I'm pleased to be able to say that it was. I met people I'd never otherwise have met, stayed at places I'd never otherwise have been to, and had a tripper-type motor-boat trip on Lake Windermere. Not to mention the fact that I proved that I've got good feet.

Maggie Thompson

