

47
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Redd Boggs'
SPIROOCHES

A MATTER OF BEANS AND NUTS

Just like Wolfe Wolf I glanced at the note. It said, "R U one of the Bean Boys!!?!!?" I glanced over at the girl in the second row of the junior high classroom. She was grinning at me. She never signed her notes, but I knew her name was Sally and I knew she had written the note. She was always sending me notes. There was nothing I could do about it.

But that wasn't what concerned me now. She had asked if I was one of the Bean Boys. For the briefest moment I couldn't imagine what she meant. Then I realized that she was referring to an incident that happened in school the previous Friday. I was amazed that she knew about it. If she knew about it, probably all the school did. That was embarrassing. Apparently I was a celebrity of sorts.

Friday morning in home room the teacher, Mr Cheka, had passed around a sheet of paper. He told us that the school was sponsoring a food drive to benefit people less fortunate than ourselves. (The 1980s are not the first time in our history when people were in want. Those were the days of "One Third of a Nation.") On the paper he wanted us to write our names and tell him what sort of canned goods we would donate to the drive. He handed the paper to one of the boys in the front row. In those days home rooms were segregated according to sex, and there weren't any girls present. If there had been, things might have turned out different. Girls, at least all the girls, would not have gone along with what happened.

The first boy chewed his pencil a while in deep thought, then scrawled his name and the nature of his intended donation on the paper, and passed it to the next boy in the row. The second boy noted that the first boy planned to contribute a can of beans. He considered the matter, and decided this was a good idea. He too would bring a can of beans. He wrote "a can of beans" on the second line of the page, and handed it along. The third boy as well decided a can of beans was just the thing. By the time I received the paper it was already half-filled with the names of my classmates, each of whom announced with exquisite simplicity that they would provide a can of beans to the food drive. By now the room was full of happy snickers. Suppressing a chuckle I added my own scribble, "A can of beans," and passed the paper along. When returned to the teacher the page contained around 40 offers of cans of beans, nothing else.

Mr Cheka read the names and notations on the list and suddenly he was furious. He jumped up and waved the paper so angrily that it began to tatter. "A can of beans!" he raged, glaring at us with flushed face. "These people are penniless and starving and you guys want to give them 40 cans of beans! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" He went on and on, pouring a torrent of abuse upon us till the bell rang for the first class. He dwelt on the plight of the people we were supposed to be helping, and how we were making a grisly joke of it. After he had shouted at us for a while it didn't seem so funny. Many of us weren't far from poverty ourselves.

I wanted to remind the teacher that in health and nutrition class we had learned that beans were a high protein food and therefore hardly a mean offering to

the hungry. But I wisely said nothing. Mr Cheka warned us as we left the room that we had better think again and bring something else instead of cans of beans to the food drive next week. (I think I contributed a can of stewed tomatoes, hardly as nourishing as beans.)

We left the room feeling rather abashed. But evidently the story was too good to keep. Someone in the home room must have told the story around the school, or perhaps Mr Cheka had communicated his outrage to the Principal. It had gotten around somehow. We students in our home room were known, it seemed, as the Bean Boys!

I don't remember what I wrote in reply to the note from the girl in the second row. Maybe I wrote nothing at all. I hated to pass notes anyway because it imposed upon the good nature of the students sitting between us who had surreptitiously to hand the notes along. It also distracted me from the study to hand, which was geometry. Once Sally had sent me a note asking, "If your as smart as Enstien -- how come your so dum in geometry??!" I don't know why she thought I was so smart. But at least I was smart enough to answer her note by pointing out that Einstein himself was a poor student of arithmetic and moreover had had help with his math while concocting his theories. He might have had trouble with geometry just as I did.

I never understood why Sally pestered me with her notes. Why did she choose to pick on me? So far as I could tell she didn't write notes to anyone else, at least in this class. She wasn't in any of my other classes and I didn't know her at all. Only rarely did I encounter her in the hallway and she gave me a noncommittal "Ah there!" whenever we brushed by one another. She wasn't beautiful. She had a small sharp profile with a perky beaky nose that gave her a bold look, strange and (I always thought) fierce. With a ruffled mop of chestnut hair and big brown eyes she was vivid and alive as only a self-assured 15-year-old girl can be. Remembering her in later years I thought, My god, what a finely chiseled skull she must have had. I could imagine an anthropologist, 50,000 years from now, admiring it as I did. But except for her appearance, which comes back to me like the image in an old photograph, I knew nothing about her and had no idea where she lived. I don't believe I even knew her last name. Not till long afterward did I figure out that she passed notes to me mostly because she knew it flustered me.

Actually I enjoyed the notes even while being embarrassed by them. They were melodious with girlish charm, scribbled in purple ink in a toppling backslanting but very feminine hand, with little curlicues at the ends of words. Like Emily Dickinson's poems they were punctuated mostly with dashes except for gently vibrating exclamation marks at every opportunity. She had her own style of abbreviation, and misspelled with a bold artlessness that charmed me at the same time it pained me. These little notes so gracefully enscribed on little shreds of paper had a lacy attraction of their own, like an artfully dropped handkerchief.

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The next day she sent me a note addressed to "Bean Dean" with one dry navy bean neatly taped to the paper. I thought that was pretty funny and preserved the note for months or years as a memento of my school days. She ragged me about the Bean Boys incident long after everybody else had forgotten it. She also pestered me about many other matters. Things went on till nearly the end of the term. Then one day, apropos of something I had written in a note to her, she replied with a purple-ink accusation that really shook me. It said, "Your nuts!!!"

I gritted my teeth and tried to avoid sending the response that instantly occurred to me. But I was possessed of demons. The opportunity was too golden to ignore. If I didn't seize the chance, I knew, I would regret it for the rest of my life. Brimming with a terrible rascality I wrote my answer in the space beneath her comment and passed it back to her. Reading it she jerked around and sent a shocked glance in my direction, then bent to her desk in what I suppose was innocent girlish confusion. I felt a sudden stab of horror and dismay, but it was far too late. I hope she forgave me in after years, but she never sent me another note. My last note to her read, "What about them?"

THE CAPTURED CROSS-SECTION

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I very much doubt that I will quit FAPA. Those were exasperated words written on a sweaty summer afternoon [ref. *Snickersnee*, FAPA mailing #204, August 1988] after I'd been toiling over a balky photocopier, which felt very much like toiling over a lousy Speed-O-Print circa 1951. The idea of recycling my adolescence in that way is very unappealing to me and I fell victim to a sudden to-hell-with-this impulse. As you point out, it wouldn't be a big deal to get the whole thing done at Krishna Copy on Telegraph avenue, but I have tried to do my own modest pubbing in recent years as a way of keeping in touch with my fannish roots.

I'm glad you found something of interest in my travel stuff. It was written in a great hurry, for I have been under some unusual and unpleasant financial pressures lately and it wasn't possible to take much time for free writing such as we do for FAPA. This one was minac indeed.

I do try to brush up on languages to some degree when I travel, if possible -- no sense trying to master Turkish or Japanese, but I did pick up the elementary courtesies in Greek for the 1986 trip, and refurbished my Spanish a little for this year's. I do feel very awkward about trying to speak French, since (although I can read it to some degree, thanks to my acquaintance with cognate languages) I've never formally been taught how to pronounce it or how to construct intelligible grammatical modulations, and the beauty and delicacy of the language are such that I quail at butchering it. I've never studied Spanish, either, but I understand the rules of its pronunciation and am willing to bluff my way: we had no linguistic difficulties in Spain. An earnest "por favor" can get you a long way, and I had an "ayudame" ready just in case. Italy, next year, ought to be simpler.

At one point, in Barcelona, lost in Gaudi's Parque Guell and overhearing a conversation in mingled German and Italian, I asked for directions in somewhat garbled Italian, to the surprise and delight of my interlocutors, and got the help I needed. Two weeks later, trying to find the Royal Chapel in Seville, I approached the leader of a French tour group, and asked him where it was in what must have been comprehensible French, for I got a polite and useful answer, also in French. Thus doth travel make polyglots of us all, willy-nilly.

"I couldn't help but think that it was lucky that your wife accompanied you," you say, "for it would have been a little difficult to seduce a woman you might've met there with the help of your interpreter." Another story there, too. Of course I live quite chastely now, but the one time some years back that I did attempt the seduction, so to speak, of a French woman, it all went quite swimmingly, with no

simultaneous translations required. She happened to be fluent in English, which made things easier, but I don't think that was essential. However, at the banquet which I was discussing, some very bedraggled drugged-out zombie of a woman tried to seduce ME, right in front of wife, interpreter, and an assortment of friends. "I want to interview you," she said huskily. "I want to have dinnair wiz you." And so on, interminably, while I politely told her to get lost, and everybody looked on in wonder. When she started to get annoying I asked my friend Jacques Chambon of Editions Denoel to explain more forcefully that I didn't wish to be interviewed, and away she went to work her wiles on John Brunnair. But M. Brunnair, though he was there alone and obviously lonely, did not wish to be interviewed eithair.

ANDY HOOPER

Rummaging around in the leaning heap that constitutes 315 North Ingersoll st. this year's collection of zines, I came upon Spirochetes Madison, Wisconsin 53703 #44 and #45 again, and sat down to read them once more. Somehow, in four pages, each issue gives me a profound measure of pleasure, something which many groaning 100-page omnizines fail to do.

While I am a comparative spratling, I experienced a rush of sympathetic panic at the list of authors that you've outlived. As an aspiring writer myself, I am sensitive to that sort of idea. A friend of mine is fond of pointing out to me that by the time Robert Burns and Arthur Rimbaud had reached my age, they had written 98 percent of all the material they were ever to write, and had moved on to a new career in gun-running or tuberculosis. Remembering Bernard Shaw is indeed a fine tonic for such feelings. By the time Shaw was my age (26) he had yet to move out of his parent's house.

I also enjoyed your memory of Cliff Simak. While I never had the pleasure of meeting him, Simak was also one of the first authors I developed a fondness for, and at one time I must have had 20 titles by him in my collection. In later years I have been struck by what I perceived as a pronounced variation in his writings from the early to the later parts of his career. The early works, while highly imaginative, were severely lacking in polish. The works from the '50s onward seem highly practiced in comparison. I find this profoundly encouraging in a number of ways. In the same way I look at early stories by Phil Dick and find it amazing that this was the same writer who created some of the most arresting novels I've read.

None of that, of course, comments on the central irony of your memory of the man, the fact that nothing in his person nor his demeanor acted as a clue that he was capable of flights of genius. I imagine it is only a small minority of artists and writers that do display any hint of their talent in their outward personality. Two similar experiences of mine come to mind, also with writers that have left us in recent years. The first, a reading by Jorge Luis Borges back in 1982, was remarkable mainly for the informal kindness with which he regarded his audience, despite the abominable weather conditions which he had to face to get to Madison and the fact that he had gone blind since his previous visit to the city. And the second was one of the more amazing evenings I've ever spent, with the late poet, Richard Hugo, who gave a reading of his work at the University's English department, and then proceeded to regale the assembled cringing masses of aspiring poets with tales of derring-do in the skies over Ploesti and on the demented economics of poetry in the American literary community. There was no hint whatever of the grim, bitter voice that spoke in his brilliant verse; that was a different Dick Hugo, one accessible only through reading his work.

As for your stories of the bear in the woods, the confused and temblor-abused computer, the snippets of fiction, each is a delight in and of itself. I am most grateful to you for placing me on your mailing list.

Egoboo was invented for the purpose of praising women.
