ANKUS 18

FAPA 114

90 Percent of Parody Dept.

A new spate of parodying is upon us -- a cause for rejoicing among the few and groaning among the many. One result of this was the Mutated Mouse Song (called, for lack of a better title and since the original was merely called "Tit-Willow," "Umbraak'm.") (APA L D69, 10 February 1966). Another, slightly previous, result is herewith appended. The tune is that of "If Ever I Should Leave You," from "Camelot":

SIR FANALOT'S LAMENT

If ever I should publish,
     It wouldn't be in OMPA --
Reading what's in OMPA
     Would bore me to tears!
Reluctant officials;
     Ghod-awful AE's;
Turnover so rapid
     It creates a breeze!

But if I'd ever publish,
     It couldn't be in FAPA --
Getting into FAPA
     Takes nine or ten years!
I've seen waiting listers
     Grow old and expire
Ere they won to FAPA --
     "Brilliant Deadwood"'s mire.

And could I publish reams of in-group-type SAPS MC's?
Or could I do whole fanzines full of trivialities?

If ever I should publish,
     How could I publish genzines;
Knowing that from fen zines
     Like this just get sneers?
To hell, then, with genzines,
     FAPA, OMPA and SAPS --
There's nothing left but GAFIA --
     Or TAPS....

- - - Bruce Pelz, 2/66

THE BRIGHT LAND PART A5

by Walt Willis

THURSDAY, 13th SEPTEMBER 1962

Obviously it was sensible to try and get some sleep before dawn, so we told ourselves there was nothing all that exciting about setting out for San Francisco along a thousand miles of the Pacific Coast. We found this difficult to believe, but our bodies accepted it willingly, and after a couple of hours I awoke to find it was true. We were becalmed in a depot somewhere, about six inches from a high featureless concrete wall. There was no sound of movement anywhere, as if we had drifted into some backwater and been forgotten. It was like being in the Marie Celeste. All the other passengers were asleep -- or dead. I had the impression we had been here for a very long time.

I drifted uneasily back to sleep, and when I awoke again it was broad daylight and we were bowling past signs for Vancouver. Vancouver? How did we get here? Of course, I thought, it was while we were asleep at that sinister depot. The other passengers had been transferred to a southbound bus and we had been transported unconscious to Canada. But I had scarcely adjusted to this concept when the signs began to proclaim Portlant. Looking blearily at the map I found there was indeed a place called Vancouver near Portland. But it was 7am and we should have passed Portland long ago. I fumbled for the time table in the rack above. Yes, Portland, Ore. ar. 5.35. I had found that most of the riddles of the universe that present themselves during bus travel have their answers somewhere in the timetable's cryptic footnotes, but there were no notes for this timetable at all. I ran them to earth at the feet of another timetable altogether, and was rewarded with a new and strange shaft of illumination: "All service operates on Local Time; except in the state of Oregon where all times are shown in Pacific Standard Time."

So we were in the right place after all, but an hour backwards in time. To be abruptly transported 300 miles in minus one hour is a harrowing experience at the best of times, and unbearable before breakfast. I lit a cigarette. With uncanny timing the driver made his first announcement of the day: We were now entering Portland, Oregon. Because of the delay in the depot at Olympia only fifteen minutes would be allowed for breakfast. Smoking was not permitted on buses passing through Oregon and all cigarettes should be immediately extinguished.

I was even more put out than my cigarette. Consulting the timetable again, I found the next stop was Eugene, Oregon, two hours and ten minutes from Portland. Over two hours without a cigarette. I realised I was faced with a crisis that would call on all my resources of will power, and that I had an immediate and vital decision to make. Should I face this great trial physically weakened by lack of food, or psychologically handicapped by being dirty and unshaved? I decided to use the fifteen minutes to wash and shave. The sort of breakfast I wanted I couldn't get in that time, and I would have to have a cigarette afterwards, should the entire state of Oregon vanish in a cloud of flame. Besides, I could shave around a cigarette.

It was a long dismal journey from Portland to Eugene, and I be-

gan to dislike the state of Oregon. It had started to rain, and there was nothing to be seen but a vast number of wet trees, obviously invulnerable to a flame thrower, let alone a cigarette smoked in a sealed bus. There was one bright moment, a sign outside a tailor's shop reading "LOW PRICES. TIMID SALESMEN," but apart from that the state seemed to consist entirely of coniferous trees and no-smoking signs. On this interminable journey to the next cugarette I realized fully for the first time the significance of the phrase "the Oregon pine."

At Eugene we made straight for the Posthouse, where I assembled a breakfast of scrambled egg, toast, hash brown potatoes and coffee. Madeleine had the same, but with orange juice instead of potatoes. The egg proved to be rubbery, the toast leathery, and the potatoes even colder than the coffee. Examining my change, I found I had been charged $2.90 for these bounteous repasts. I am normally a mild-mannered person, but suffering had made me all bitter and twisted inside. Breathing cigarette smoke like a diffident dragon, I looked for someone to complain to. For the first time, but not the last, it was impressed on me how cunningly bus stations are designed: they are more like packing and grading depots for vegetables, processing passengers rather than attending to them, and the process if sullf automated, controlled by a row of push buttons in Chicago. The posthouse, for instance, was run on a cafeteria system, rather like a soup kitchen without the sympathy, and there was nobody in charge.

Well, at least I could check my facts. I went back to the cashier and asked her the price of eggs, toast, potatoes and coffee. She said $1.45, studiously refraining from asking why. But I told her anyway, figuring that if anyone had any authority it would be the one who took the money. "I just wanted to check how much I had paid for the worst meal I've had in the United States," I said experimentally. She bridled. I had never really understood until then what bridling was exactly, but I knew it when I saw it. I realised I had been bridled at by a professional. It was truly a virtuoso performance, and if there is ever a bridling event introduced in the Olympic Games, the Greyhound team will win hands down. Hands down and shoulders hunched, the cashier said simply, "It's nothing to do with me," I looked around the rest of the bus station for someone it would have something to do with, apart from me, but the only vestige of higher authority was a notice on the Posthouse door proclaiming it to be a member of the National Restaurant Association. And even this fitted perfectly into the Posthouse pattern: it was for last year.

Anyhow, now it was time to leave, and with a great grinding of gears by the driver and gnashing of teeth by the passengers we set off again. It was southwest we were heading now, for the Pengra Pass, 5128 feet. The rain was still pouring down, but what we could still see of the scenery was becoming more interesting. There were steep, tree-clad slopes, the pines remaining obstinately perpendicular at fantastic angles to the ground, digging their heels in to stop themselves sliding onto the road. They were getting sparser, and between them were occasional patches of bare sandy soil. It looked eerie country, where one might die in exhaustion and terror a mile from the highway. And maybe there were some worse things in this place than loneliness. Looking at the map I saw with a faint frisson that we were close to "Windigo Pass," and I remembered the Algernon Blackwood story about the fearful elemental of the North American forests which moves through the trees like a whirlwind. It is called the Wendigo.

After the Pengra Pass, from which there was frustratingly nothing to be seen but a slightly wider vista of cloud, we stopped at a place called The Halfway House. It was in a clearing in the forest, and nothing much had been done with the felled trees but nail them together to make this rustic diner. Everything about it was of an engagingly rustic simplicity, right down to the inscriptions on the walls of the men's rest room. These were strongly reminiscent of those I had seen a long time ago in Europe, and coming on them again here in the Far West made me quietly proud of our common cultural heritage. "Please do not put cigarette butts in the urinal," said one notice, "It makes them soggy and hard to light." Another appeal for fair play on slightly different grounds was made on the opposite wall: "We do not piss in your ashtray." And that was all. It was enough, though, to convey the simple homespun character of Oregon. None of the preverted assignations of the East Coast sophistocates, nor the tortured mysticism of the Irish which I saw once revealed so starkly in an inscription in a public convenience in Belfast. "If you want real relief," it said, "Come to Jesus." No, the Oregonians were not frustrated about sex or religion. It was those smoking restrictions that were getting them down.

Outside again, we thought of going into the main building for something to eat, it now being 11 am, but were momentarily deterred by a striking advertisement we had not noticed before. "SUDDEN SERVICE," it proclaimed. Sudden? It had an ominous ring. I had a momentary vision of walking into the place and being served instantly with a custard pie, in the face. However, we braved the prospect...after all, we had already survived a buffet in Oregon, the slap on the face we got in Eugene... and were rewarded with nothing worse than a slightly greasy hamburger on the hand. Afterwards, we walked in the thin drizzle in a semi-circle around the bus, looking for wildlife. But there was nothing to be seen any wilder than a middle-aged lady passenger complaining to the driver about the scenery. Where was the Pacific, she wanted to know? This seemed a little unjust, but the driver explained quite patiently that she was on the wrong bus. It was the "Redwood Empire Route" that ran along the coast. She accepted this resentfully, for some reason failing to ask the obvious question as to why this was called the Pacific Highway Route when it was over 100 miles from the sea.

By the time we reached Chemult, the rain had stopped, but the clouds were still low, and all we could see of the Oregon scenery was direction signs to National Parks and a tantalizing glimpse of Klamath Lake through the trees. We were getting tired of trees. They were still getting sparser, and the sandy patches more frequent, but the change was very gradual, and as a spectacle had about the same dramatic impact as grass growing. To anyone from Ireland, the most striking single feature of American scenery is the way it keeps going on and on after it has made its point.

But on thinking it over, I began to realize that this is a peculiarity of Ireland rather than of America. The European continent is a wedge projecting into the Atlantic, and the apex of the wedge is Ireland. Everything in Europe focusses on this little island. In North Donegal, in the latitude of Labrador, you can stand on the shore of a fjord at midnight and still see clearly the breakers roll in from the Arctic. While in Kerry, only 300 miles to the south, palms wave in the tropical air of the Gulf Stream. In between are recapitulated in miniature nearly all the European landscapes. The Sierras of Spain in the Galtee Mount-

ains; the central European plains in the Great Bog of Allen; the Massif Central in the granite Mournes; the alluvial lands of the Rhine Valley in Meath and Down; and the Scandinavian Highlands in Antrim and Donegal. Ethnically, too, we have people from all these places -- Norsemen, Saxons, Normans, Flemish, and the Milesians from Spain. Our Celtic language is half-brother to both the Teutonic and Romantic tongues. Our religions range from Calvinism to Catholocism. We are the outpost of the Old World, its standard-bearer in the Atlantic, and we hold the essence of Europe. We kept its learning alive once as the land of saints and scholars, and we may do the same again, if the Old World cannot be saved by the President we gave the New.

All this in the space between two Greyhound rest stops. So maybe it's not surprising if American scenery seemed at times somewhat persistent. What we really wanted to see was mountains. Our own are only about 3000 feet high, and we had already climbed to nearly twice that height in the bus. We were now only 100 miles from Mount Shasta, all of 14, 162 feet, a great mountain by any standards, a fantastic one by ours, and the reason we had come by this route instead of the coastal one. We have the Atlantic at home, and while it may not be as large as the Pacific, there's not all that much difference from our front door.

We spent a meal stop at Klamath Falls without seeing anything more reminiscent of waterfalls than a soda fountain, but when we came out again eating an exotic form of ice cream, the sun had come out. The mountains shone all around, and the prospect looked brighter. But these mountains were only about 8000 feet; would the clouds lift another 6000 feet in 100 miles?

Twenty minutes out of Klamath Falls there was a further lightening of the atmosphere as we entered the free air of California and I lit a cigarette. The feeling of daring which accompanied this act was accentuated by the fact that we were now boarded by some sort of customs Inspector. He made some unintelligible announcement, walked smartly to the rear of the bus and back again, and retired into his shed. It looked like the sort of job that would suit me down to the ground. I don't know what he was looking for, but I could have had a ton of it. Maybe he was just making sure that everyone was smoking.

One of the items it was forbidden to import into California must have been clouds, for now the sky was clear. We stared due south eagerly. The road turned. A new vista opened up. And I remembered ruefully an old saying: mountains make their own weather. Far in front and slightly to the left a huge column of cloud piled into the air. Into it rose a great mass that could only be the base of Mount Shasta.

We watched it despairingly, and then with renewed hope. The cloud was rising and thinning. Minute by minute as we sped towards it the mass shrank, boiling off into space, becoming a fleecy cap, a plume, a wisp, until Mount Shasta itself shone proudly in a clear sky, majestic in black and white over the pale green and brown of California.

Like all solitary mountains, it gives the impression of being in a valley. The ground seems to slope down to it, a wilderness of trees and scrub becoming vaguer in the distance, until, with a perfunctory flourish of foothills, the great black mountain thrusts proudly into the blue air. It seems to be all black rock, with great expanses of snow

clinging to the slopes, until they fall away in defeat.

It was a beautiful mountain from any angle, and we watched it in its changing shapes until we lost sight of it on entering the town of Weed. There cannot be a place in the world more aptly named, consisting as it does of a pretentious and tasteless triumphal arch heralding as miserable a collection of hovels as you could hope to avoid in a day's journey. It occurred to me there were unexpected advantages in having scenery on the lavish American scale. Anywhere else a place like this so near to a beautiful mountain would have been an intolerable eyesore. But here nature was so vast that nothing man could do seemed to matter much. America can absorb a lot of ugliness.

The signs of desert were now becoming more obvious. There were great patches of bare earth, an extraordinary phenomenon to one from a country where it requires constant and unremitting effort to stop things from growing. Already we felt the need of this land for water. Dried creeks and riverbeds lay pleading mutely for rain. In this country any lake would have been a fine sight, but what we came to was more than that. It was Lake Shasta, the most beautiful piece of landscaping man has ever done. It has a beautiful situation among mountains and trees, but for some reason the trees do not come down to the water...there is this broad golden belt around it, like sand. But it can't be sand, because the slope is too steep. Nor can it be ordinary earth, or plants would have grown on it. Presumably it's clay or some specially treated border to preserve the purity of the water. But whatever it is, it looks wonderful, like a band of gold round a great sapphire.

Now we were in the Shasta Lake recreation area, steep-sided wooded valleys in which perched vacation villages. Little winding sideroads turned off at unexpected angles to find their devious way down to luxurious homes. It looked like Utopia.

We were beginning to fall in love with California, and even the Posthouse at Redding failed to disenchant us. Madeleine had seen an interesting shop on the way through the town to the bus station, and daringly gone to look for it, with the result that she had no time left to eat anything. So she bought some fish "to go," as they say in the States. Unfortunately it was so far gone already she had to throw it away at the next stop.

This was a place called Orland, where we had ten minutes and two hamburgers. The scenery was still pleasant, but more muted -- great brown vistas with distant purple mountain ranges. Getting back in the bus we overheard another conversation between the driver and the middle-aged lady who had been complaining at the Halfway House about the absence of the Pacific from the middle of Oregon. She was now apologising, and congratulating him on the mountains. She may have been unreasonable, but you couldn't say she was unfair.

At Corning we saw for the first time the things we thought of as really Californian -- Spanish architecture and palm trees. I think these impressed Madeleine more than anything she had seen so far, but outside the town the yellow grass appalled her. Grass should not be yellow, it was wrong. It had, of course, been getting less green for hundreds of miles, but south of Corning it seemed suddenly to have given up trying.

Madeleine kept eagerly pointing out palm trees and exotic architecture and identifying olive groves for me until darkness fell with subtropical suddenness. There were no more rest stops, and incredibly we dozed off. Just after ten we awoke to find ourselves on a great bridge, and almost before I could work out that it couldn't be the Golden Gate, we were in San Francisco bus station, ten minutes early. I went to get cups of coffee, leaving Madeleine to guard the luggage, and came back to find her surrounded by people, all talking excitedly. There was Bill Donaho, beaming good will like some great welcoming lighthouse on a st strange shore. And, why, who was this but Ethel, delighted to be surprising us. How nice to come all that distance in a strange country and find ourselves among not only new friends but old ones. I had a sudden vision of fandom stretching across the Northern Hemisphere like a lifeline.

There were two other friendly people, but since I hadn't been there when they were introduced I didn't know who they were and I didn't like to ask. Bill said we were staying with Jerry and Miriam and for a while I thought this must be them. Miriam Dyches-Carr, I supposed, but it looked even less like her than Krasner's silent blonde. How many Miriams was I going to have to sort through, I wondered? And who was this little girl who seemed to be accompanying us? But as we started for the car someone called her Poopsie and everything fell into place. Of course: Dick and Pat Ellington. I felt like saying hello all over again.

Bill led the way to a low-slung blue car, one of our heavy suitcases hanging from each hand as if he'd forgotten he'd picked them up. He put one down and pulled up on the handle of the trunk. Nothing happened, except that the wheels left the ground. So we piled into the car, suitcases and all. This uncouth invasion was superciliously witnessed by a self-posessed white cat which had come along for the ride, having been kitnapped on the way. All in all it was a very Berkeley welcome.

I had half expected to be taken to some Bohemian basement, but if this was a pad it was one straight out of Good Padkeeping. It was a pleasant little semi-detached house in a sort of mews, very European, and inside it was full of books and drinks and unfussy thoughtfulness. Somewhere, sometime that evening, we must have had a meal, but I was so exhilerated and there was so much to take in that I can't remember a thing about it...and indeed can quite believe I didn't even notice it at the time. All I remember is that we talked until everyone had left but us and Jerry and Miriam. We were at home. Eventually, to everyone's reluctance, Jerry and Miriam did something telekinetic to convert the sofa into a bed...a clear case of mind over mattress...and left us to get some sleep, very happy to be in San Francisco.

- -

This has been ANKUS 18, published for the 114th mailing of the FAPA by Bruce Pelz, Box 100, 308 Westwood Plaza, Los Angeles, Calif 90024.

It is IncuNebulous Publication 442, February 1966.

Cover by Dian Pelz.

Cover last issue -- the blind nude girl tied onto the tortoise -- was a representation:

"Truth, like time, marches on."