

There...hanging from the chandelier, dripping green slime on the Bokhara...chitinous wings draped shroudlike about its unspeakable withered body...why, it looks like...why, it IZZZ!:



Pour le FAPA de Mai '66

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"Every Mailing, Josephine!"

AN OPEN LETTER TO A WAITING LISTER

20th April, 1966

Dear Walter & Madeleine:

I am strongly tempted to say that it is all your fault; thus allowing Eney to stand fully exonerated. Things had been going along in a cheerfully humdrum fashion until I wrote you that letter just before Christmas. As you recall I started from that moment back in 1962, as you stood at 402 Maple Avenue in faroff, exotic Fond du Lac --once a minor crossroad of the faanish universe--when we last laid eyes upon each the other, considerately repressing our respective shudders (or, if we didn't, we shudder done it); you with ^{hands} your doom-ensorcell'd suitcases clutched in your trusting (at that time), me with my equally doom-ensorcell'd furnace orderbook clutched under my armpit. Since it was warm for a Wisconsin September, we will not apply an adjective to the armpit in the interest of the good taste for which this publication is a byword on seven major planets. The letter took you by aforesaid hands, now less trusting since the suitcases had been from them untimely ripp'd, and led you step by step through approximately 8 pages of 12-pt Book Face IBM right up to the moment it was signed and dropped into the mail. My fatal error lay in assuming that I might hopefully look forward to another three years or so before I had a sufficiently tumescent hopper-full of events to chronicle again.

As you will shortly see, this wistful hope proved to be deathly ill-founded. In the four months since that last letter, enough events have transpired that it will be a squeezy thing to get them all onto another 8 pages.

Moreover, since I am finkily fobbing this off upon FAPA at the same time, it will be necessary to edit the coverage a bit more closely than if it were For Your Eyes Only. The prudent fapan, these days, circulates nothing through the club that he wouldn't show to anyone in the whole world. However, I can give you the unclassified gen here and fill you in later as to the details which were elided in the interests of security, if any.

For a week or so after writing, things continued much as before. I had had an approach to go to work for a midwest mag publisher and had

gone to talk it over with them but -- like the time it had been 1549 for a whole year -- nothing much ever came of it. Another midwest publisher had signed me on to be associate editor of a new title about to be published, but this involved remaining in G'town and shipping in mss by mail. I did not fully realise it at the time, but I had become somewhat satiated with tech-writing; not painfully so, but detectably so. Writing is fun if not carried to excess, but it is more fun with words than with part-numbers, if you know what I mean.

So, on the 29th of December, a letter came in from a westcoast publisher for whom I'd been doing minor work since 1963. A good friend of mine on their staff was retiring because his father had passed away, leaving him sole heir and executor of a large estate. Therefore, they had this vacancy on their staff and the friend had suggested me as his replacement; would I be interested? I replied that I would be. We hashed out basic details in a couple of longdistance phone calls and they asked if I could fly out to discuss final details. I replied that I could, so they sent me a ticket. Then things began peeling loose for fair. The day after the ticket arrived, we got a call from Fond du Lac that Jean's father had passed away. The funeral was to be held Sunday afternoon at 1:15. It would have been possible to phone again and make another appointment and cancel out the tickets and attend to the FdL situation. As it was to turn out, almost any other weekend would have been nearly as difficult so we ended up being glad that I didn't ring in a change of plans. Came Friday night, I drove to the Milwaukee airport and flew Central to Chicago, thence United to LA, touching down at 10-ish local time. It was the first time I had set foot on California terrain since early in 1946 and it was a feel for sore feet. One of the publishers picked me up at the airport, hauled me out through the bustling freeways and installed me in a motel near the office. We trudged to a nearby refreshment dispensary and inhaled heather-squeezings and nattered about old unhappy faroff times and battles long ago, discovering to our mutually pleased surprise that we had both taken aerial gunnery training at Harlingen, Texas. This was good for a whole spate of nostalgic and esoteric reminiscing which I won't dwell upon here since it would be meaningless to anyone not a Harlingen alumnus. We put the joint to bed by 2:00 AM (4:00 CST) and I toddled off to the motel room and called Bill Rotsler. The details begin to look a shade dim in my mind's eye; I may have called him upon my arrival shortly after 10:00. At any rate, we talked for a bit and made arrangements to get together the following evening and agreed that it certainly was a wonderful thing and all that.

Around 5-ish (according to my built-in clock, which was still on Central Standard Time), I finally called it a day, after some 24 hours and 2000+ miles; some days come in that size. A couple hundred yards outside my window -- open to the balmy 78-degree breezes, hustling traffic on the San Berdoo Freeway finally negotiated peace between Morpheus and me; it had a soothing, soporific sound, that traffic.

I had left a call for 8:00 AM but I was awake by seven and finished with a long, gloriously high-pressure shower (the domestic water system at G'town worked off its own well at about 30 psi and the gentle spray from the G-town shower was never enough to get my corpuscles rushing about properly) by the time the room clerk rang the phone at 8:00. I finished dressing and ambled over to the motel restaurant and began to stoke the inner man. Shortly thereafter, the other publisher walked in, accompanied by the ad manager, and we adjourned to a booth to talk turkey.

The contrast in hiring technique was noteworthy. The midwest publisher had screened me over the course of three days, one of which was taken up from 8AM till 3PM by an exhaustive course of professional brainpickery administered at a local university. Two months later, he was still undecided if he should hire anybody for the job in question, and, if so, if he should hire me. Here, by comparison, things moved more briskly. We touched upon salary: I mentioned a figure, he said okay and we went on to other details. It was slightly higher than the figure which had been promised to me for the second year after leaving Fond du Lac --in case this reaches certain eternally hostile eyes, as I can only presume it will

We discussed a few other details, briefly and he said, "How old are you?" I told him and he said, "You're hired. Now I won't be the oldest guy in the place any more." He's about six months younger than I am but of course it's not obvious on account of the clean life I have always led. From then on, it was merely a matter of combing out petty details and I was hugely relieved. It is a miserable situation to know that you may be moving but not know for sure and to have this go on for months at a time. Countless things come up that would be handled one way or the other if you only knew what was going to happen.

We went to the office and talked some more, thence to the ad man's pad for lunch. My retiring chum showed up on his motorcycle, a hopped-up Triumph and I was treated to a spin on that formidable vehicle. It was not until we were blasting off at an estimated 9 Gs of acceleration that I realized that my beloved ripple-sole shoes didn't have any notch in front of the heel and my 180 pounds of personal mass was engaged at foot level by a precariously thin coefficient of friction indeed. I clung like a burr to a spaniel's ear, however, and miraculously retain my perch. Within the recent past, Snordt (as I call him) offered some young lady a ride in downtown LA and traveled about two blocks after she was lost off the tumblehome before he missed her. He then applied the brakes and she came sliding up to rejoin him. When I heard about this, I shed a sympathetic tear, thinking that there, but for the grace of Ghod, went Grennell, lousing up his only suit within 2000+ miles.

Back then, to the adman's pad; he was going to see me to the airport. I called my sister in an LA suburb. I hadn't seen her for 10 years and she was impressively astonished at my presence. I called the United reservation desk and earmarked a seat for the eastbound flight in the small hours of Sunday AM and the ad man hauled me to the place where I had arranged to meet Willie Rotsler.

Thus it came to pass that I shortly shook the hand of that worthy, with whom I had corresponded for approximately 14 years. It knocked a hell of a hole in the roster of friends I had never met but launched to.

We bought a couple of parting libations for the ad man and bade him farewell for a bit. He is a nice guy and he is nameless in this narrative solely for his own protection. Same for the rest of the westcoast publishing personnel.

We climbed into Willie's ragtop Corvette and motored to LAX, as Los Angeles International Airport is commonly abbreviated. There, I checked in with the ticket desk and, with loose time for a change, we found a restaurant and ordered coffee. I had thoughtfully planted Bill on my right, or listening side, and we were yakking up a storm when

someone tugged at my coatsleeve and mumbled something futilely into my left ear, which is non-functional and decorative only in the most charitable definition of the term. I swiveled my head and examined the importunate soul who felt justified in breaking into a gabfest with 14 years of catching-up to be taken care of. He was a small, balding, upper-fortyish chap, five feet four or five, unslender without being stocky, broad of cheekbone and beady of eye, also glazed. His frontal reek was painfully detectable to my nicotine-numbed nostrils and must have been almost so to Rotsler's inoperative olfactory system. It was immediately identifiable as that harsh chemical tang exuded by people who have been deluded into thinking that vodka leaves you breathless. This pathetic bit of naiveté is on a par with believing in wash-and-wear shirts. I withheld my habitual "Huh?" because I didn't give a friendly freckleface damn what he had said in the first place. Uninvited and scarcely daunted, he repeated the question, "Do you wanna' know who's the smottest guy'n the wuuhld?" I am trying to phonetically reproduce the sound of the eastcoast dialect whose devotees believe that if they ignore the letter r long enough, it will eventually be forced to secede from the alphabet.

We looked at him, stoney-faced. I couldn't see Rotsler's face but I was gazing fixedly at an imaginary point about four feet behind the back of his head. I have found that this disconcerts most people. After a few seconds, he decided that we were not going to ask for enlightenment. His hand darted into a pocket and came out cupped around a coiled and tattered amulet-like device which he displayed to us, furtively. In the center was a picture of a man with a beard and long hair. It may have been Eden Ahbez, or whatever the name was who wrote the song, "Nature Boy" of several years ago. It may have been a picture of someone else. We didn't look that closely.

We sat there and examined him, without hostility and without detectable warmth. Impaled in a withering crossfire by two off-fandom's ablest practitioners of the basilisk stare, he shriveled inward like a moth meeting Nirvana in the flame of a candle. After a time, he gave a couple of palsied jerks of the hand holding the picture, then drew up his shoulders, straightened his back, shrugged laborately, muttered, "Oh well, you can't winnem all" to nobody in particular and retreated. Later I saw him on the plane being convoyed up and down the aisle to the washroom by a pair of stewardesses whose alert and watchful attitude suggested that he had also shown them the picture of the smottest man in the wuuhld. I am still waiting to read about it in Kteic.

By the time the plane was due to take off, some alert groundcrewman had noticed that the fuselage or some similarly useful component was missing. Accordingly, there was a brief delay of several hours while they bolted a new one in place. I sat there and watched the clock while the departure time for an ETA in Chicago that would permit catching the Central shuttle to Milwaukee came and went. Takeoff had been scheduled for 12:30; came 1:00 AM, followed by 2:00 AM and both dropped unwhimpering into the bottomless wastebasket with all the other dead hours since time was first invented. Out on the ramp, some canny mech decided that a proper aircraft should have a tall rudder to steer her by and they rummaged about until they found one about the right size, plus a tube of Testor's Quick-Drying with which to cement it in place. Inside the terminal, Rotsler -- game to the bitter end -- kept me company until, out on the flight line, it was decided that they didn't need the brace of

synchronized Vickers after all because G-2 had reported that von Bülow had his Albatross in Maintenance for a 1000-hour check. So somebody else said, "Okay, then. Let's get ready and get this big moth off the ground." And, after a time, it was done. I'm not complaining; it got to Chicago late, but it got to Chicago. Somewhere above Tucumcari, a stewardess, with the insufferably chirky air of a person who has slept within the previous 48 hours, asked me if she could bring me a cocktail or a highball. I hoisted the nictating membrane from an orb which must have resembled a buffalo chip floating on a pool of tomato juice. The thought of a martini, at that hour, in the artificial altitude of the pressurised cabin, coagulated my very soul. I could visualise the cold stare of the drowned olive, with its red pimento pupil and was smote with a sick fear that, at a crucial moment, it might wink at me. It was an experience I contemplated without enthusiasm. "Bring me a 7 Up on the rocks," I requested. "Straight," I added. She did.

I suppose I could have slept for part of the time on the flight back to Chicago but it's been my experience on similar occasions that a little sleep is worse than none. We met the dawn somewhere over Iowa or maybe Nebraska -- they look a lot alike from upward of Angels 30. We taxied in at O'Hare and, as they say, deplaned. I thought for the umpteenth time that some day someone is going to invent an indoor helicopter, providing point-to-point shuttle service throughout the miles of corridors at O'Hare and hoped that so valuable a service would make the profits it deserved. LAX, by the way, has Heinlein-type rolling roads...or at least moving sidewalks; it saves effort but you can make better time if you walk the stationary strip of floor between them.

With the late start out of LAX, the Central flight to MKE was long gone and a bit of finagling secured a seat on a later TWA flight to the same place. I arrived at the Beertown airport and, after a bit of inquiry, established that my luggage had been held for a later Central flight. I waited and, eventually corraled the bag and went out to the parking lot and stowed it aboard the Blue Beetle-II. This is the same vehicle which conveyed the Willises back to Fond du Lac from the Chicon in '62...a white-over-light-blue '62 Oldsmobile 9-passenger station wagon, about which more in just a bit plus other bits passim throughout the rest of the text.

It was still highly desirable that I should reach FdL by 1:30PM or, preferably, sooner. Mitchell Field lies athwart the nethermost boon-dock on the south edge of Milwaukee and it is an hour's bitter battle, under ideal conditions, to get from there to the north edge of Milwaukee whereat lies Germantown and the road to Fond du Lac. After an interlude of travel by public carrier, it is always a spot of soulbalm to get back into the driver's seat and carve my own timetable. This was my general thought as I paid the man at the parking lot booth and toed the gas pedal as the Beetle's broad muzzle swung northward. Alas, my triumph was short-lived. Within a few blocks I could sense an unaccustomed sluggishness in the Beetle's response. I had just previously had a bit of trouble with some intimate bit of gizzardry in the brake assembly. The brakes have some sort of little bleedhole or something that could and had become plugged up. With time running very short, I crossed my fingers and hoped that the brakes would release, meanwhile refraining from pressing the brake pedal as much as possible. But Milwaukee is a city with a billion stoplights ("shtopleitz," to use the native term) and by the time I had gained the lower end of the

7th Street freeway, with no more stops ahead, the brakeshoes were hung up for fair. It took about 75mph worth of toe pressure to hold a true ground speed of 40 but the freeway is no place to stop if it can be avoided so I coaxed it north to the cutoff at Brown Deer Road and, with a place to park, pulled off to check the situation and let the drums cool a bit. That was a tactical error; I should have made it for a filling station while it was still mobile because the brakes --once stopped--locked up firmly so that it was totally impossible to make it move. In low gear or reverse, 289 fairly spirited horses strained their hearts out in vain. With a few pungent remarks, I removed the key (with a bitterly ironic twist of the mouth as I reflected that no car thief was going to make off with 100 pounds of stubbornly inert Blue Beetle unless he had a large hoist and a flatbed trailer) and I ruefully hoofed it to the nearest filling station, about 3/4 of a mile up the road. Cognizant of the LA climate, I had worn light slacks and a sport coat and had carried a black, lightweight Burberry --I nearly wrote "light black Burberry," but refrained for the sake of Jack Speer's pained grimace, which I could clearly visualise--which useful garment is fine for keeping out the rain, but it is not the best garb for strolling in a Wisconsin January. The east wind was coming across 80 miles of supercooled Lake Michigan at about 28mph and the temperature was around 5 above. In the local idiom, it was a "raw wind off the east." My thoughts were such that Hemingway would have quailed before the task of setting them onto paper. I quail too.

It was a Mobilgas station, newly opened and the proprietor was running it solo. He boggled at leaving it to go give succor to my foundered Beetle and I drew heavily upon my persuasive charms and the irresistible eloquence passed along by a great-grandmother from County Cork. He agreed to go, just as soon as a lull came along in his post-church run of customers. I fidgeted there, as car after car came lolloping into the station as though some supernal director was station-up the road, dispatching them on signal from a hidden scout with a walkie-talkie. I sweated them out, one by one, and tried to keep my gaze averted from the madly-swirling hands of my wristwatch. At last the moment came and the guy climbed into his truck and prepared to go see what he could do. Just then a stout, cigar-smoking Milwaukee burgher came driving in with a rapidly deflating tire (excuse me, tyre) on his Ford. The dispenser of petrol started to dismount from his vehicle and I bade him forbear, saying that I would change the tyre. And I did, with skill and precision acquired in an interesting career which, one time or another, has included half a dozen stints as a filling station attendant. I had the operation nicely finished by the time the man returned from fixing the Olds, and paid him and quick-marched back to the usually-faithful azure steed to resume my mad dash. This time I had the wind in my back and it was not quite as bad. It was, however, sufficiently bad.

The auto world's answer to Rex Morgan, MD, had solved the problem by bleeding off a quantity of hydraulic fluid from the brake system. He had performed this cupping so enthusiastically that if you pumped the pedal as if you were treading water, you could detect a gradual diminution of velocity although had to concentrate to notice. From an embarrassment of riches in the matter of brakes, I had pendulumed to a haunting paucity of this useful component. Undaunted, I wended my way toward Germantown at a velocity just a thin hair above that which would besafe under the circumstances. I swooped into the empty house and

made a whirlwind change of apparel into something more suitable for attending a funeral, then back into the Beetle and blasted it westward up the 3-mile straight expanse of Mequon Road to its intersection with Highway 41. On one hectic occasion during my career as a minion of the law, I had pursued a squad car up that stretch of road in the Beetle and had, at one point indicated 117mph (the world is not yet ready for the details of that story, Watson). This time, I went more slowly; maybe 10mph more slowly. Madeleine can thank her lucky stars that she was not riding in the Beetle that trip. I right-turned onto the superb autobahn that is Hwy. 41 and drew heavily on my coppish background for the challenging task of pushing a moderately agile vehicle through traffic at the highest possible pace without, at the same time, running afoul of the state cops who patrol that stretch of road. It's 41 miles from the house in G'town to the south edge of Fond du Lac. I made it in 38 minutes and 14 seconds and that included an agonizing interval when I had spotted a state copper in an unmarked car microseconds before he had spotted me and dropped to a halo-crowned and legal 65mph until he turned off 41 onto a side road.

It's about two and a half miles from the south city limits to the Candlish Funeral Parlour, Walt; it's on East Division just off Main, if you recall any of your FdL geography...or about three blocks from the postoffice famed for the glowing footprints mythos. I cut through town at about L+10 or 15, by a route that hadn't been heavily patrolled or radar-guarded in the days when I had been associated with the FdL police. It still wasn't that day because I swung into the parking lot with precisely 15 minutes to spare before things got under way.

One could point out that the occasion did not justify going that fast in a car with defective brakes and, in the calm viewpoint of retrospect, I cannot help but agree. I can only plead temporary derangement brought on by my infuriation with the culminating concatenation of catastrophe which had plagued me up to that point. As more obstacles were thrown in my path, I became more determined to make it in spite of them. I am not at all sure if this is a good trait but it is a trait I have.

It will be a long while before I forget the first two months of 1966. I've seldom encountered such a thick sleet of tragedies and complexities and just plain foul luck. A short time later, during a school holiday, our oldest son's best friend was killed in an accident and I had to call him to break the news since he was spending the holiday in FdL. Just after the accident, a young lady from Mexico came to stay with us under a thing called the Teacher's Aide Program. We had agreed to provide her with food and lodging during that brief hiatus when the deal with the midwestern publisher had fallen through and before we had any faint inkling that something would come up in California. So she, poor muchacha, dropped into a confused situation as No. 1 son was preparing to serve his first stint as a pall-bearer and, later, as we went through the myriad complexities of "Operation Bugout," as I privately referred to the mechanics of disengaging and transplanting. Given the choice again, she would still have been invited; she is a very nice young lady and the entire family enjoyed her visit very much.

My operations at the G'town site had functioned under a considerable head of pressure, even during the quieter interludes. There had been a fairly demanding primary job taking a minimum of 40 hours per week and, at times there had been a secondary job taking between 30 and 50 hours per week and, in between, I punched out articles to keep my various edi-

tors quiet. In one memorable month --October, 1964 -- I had put in 183 hours as a tech writer, 83 hours as a cop and had produced five full length articles plus a color cover photo...plus, of course, all of the black-and-white photo's to illustrate the various articles and, in the midst of all this, I was slowly putting together a book...a technical sort of treatise which involved vast amounts of research and client conferences and general hazafazookery. This may shed a bit of explanatory light upon my relatively inactive role in fandom these past few years.

So getting out of G'town was not a simple matter of deciding which shirts to pack in the suitcase. I was, at that time, midway through a thriller at the tech publishers which revealed all the sordid lowdown on turbochargers for big diesel engines. It was a 200-hour job on the assignment sheet and I had expended 30 hours up to that point and only about 120 normal working hours remained before T-day. I drew upon resources I hardly knew I had and finished that book. Then there was the matter of the world's largest producer of a highly complex gadget. They had tried vainly for two years to find someone who could produce successful operator's manuals for their gizmo before I took the project in hand and, during the following three years, had come to rely implicitly upon yours ever so truly to bash out the fascinating little 92 to 114-page manuals. I once toyed idly with the thought of putting 68 copies of, for example, Manual Part No. 750-64 into FAPA since it would have been, most indisputably, "substantially the work of the member contributing." But I didn't think the gag was worth investing 340 dollars to perpetrate so I didn't. At any rate, I was faced with the task of selecting some other member of the writing department and patch-cording enough of my specialised know-how into the poor guy's think-tank so that he could push forward staunchly in my footsteps (rotsa' ruck, Rog-baby!). This had to be accomplished simultaneously with knocking off 170 scheduled hours of work on the turbocharger book in the remaining 120...and it was, I hope. Tech writing is a snap if you can crib from something. When I had the job dropped in my lap, the first book was nearly³ year unprinted in the future and it had to be assembled comma by agonising semi-colon. My successor had four completed books from which future books can be extracted with a modest amount of skull-sweat. You may well wonder why I was pulling out of Milwaukee if I was all that indispensable. The answer was that the indispensibility didn't show up on the paycheck. I bank more bread for two weeks of work in sunny California than I drew for three weeks at the tech publishers and the work is incomparably more fun. In my book, that's reason enough by itself and there is the added dividend of improved milieu. I had plenty of time to compare Wisconsin with California during that walk from the brake-locked Beetle to the filling station! Like my fellow transplantees from the upper midwest, the Messrs. Bloch and Boggs, I would return only with the greatest reluctance, if at all. I have had Wisconsin winters...and Wisconsin summers.

One of my ex-colleagues in the writing department, just prior to that time, had thoughtfully given two week's notice and had been told to clean out his desk and get gone, right then. True, he had been moving to a competitive operation, but... It did not fit my plans to be thus suddenly parted but, at the same time, I felt I had to give them a bit of advance warning that my smiling features would shortly be conspicuous by their absence. The disengaging maneuver called for the utmost amount of suave and delicate diplomacy but, somehow, I brought it off. That particular bit was sub-titled "Operation Crumble" and thank Foo it's over.

Then there was Operation Dixie, or OpDix, which had progressed by fits and lurches for two years. It had to be quickly capped off and it was. The client, bless his noble heart, anted up a handsome advance on future royalties and this helped immeasurably when all I could see in any direction was a receding cloud of departing funds.

Further, there was the matter of clearing up all of the various connexions and commitments with the other magazine publishers for whom I had been writing. This involved squirting forth five full-length articles under forced-draft (excuse me, draught) plus additional diplomatic maneuvering. And there was still another small complexity as my eastern attorney laboured to extract final payment from two eastern publishers for whom I had long since stopped writing but whose reluctance to part with money is a legend in the field. And, in the midst of all this, there were petty details like arranging to sell the house plus all the countless small details involved with transferring operations to a distant point.

The field with which I'm now involved has an annual convention in Chicago which is quite important. This was slated for the end of January and it was planned that my first duties with the new employer would consist of helping to show the flag at this affair. My confreres would be flying in from the coast and I thought that it would be handy to have a car at the thing. Once you flounder your way out of the glutinous Milwaukee traffic, it is only a hoot and a hustle to Chicago so I elected to go by Beetle. This, again, was a tactical error. January of 1966 saw the midwest gripped in a long period of sub-sub-zero temperatures. I mean like 20 below, 25 below, 28 below and occasional balmy interludes of only 8 or 10 below. We commuted between the con site and our hotel by cab and at the end of the first day I put the Beetle in a parking lot. More specifically, I turned it over to the attendant at the lot and that proved to be another tactical error (is anyone keeping count of these?). Two days later I slipped out of the con in midafternoon, intending to check out of the hotel and hightail for G'town because all of the meteorological signs indicated that we were due for a real snozzler of a blizzard. I came out with my bags, paid the lot attendant (a different one) and inserted the key in the rear door to run down the window so that I could stow the bags. The window did not budge. I presumed that it was still frozen shut so went up and unlocked the driver's door, reached in and unlocked the rear door, put the bags in the back seat and got behind the wheel. I then twisted the key to energise the starter. Normally, the engine of the Beetle has always started with a reliability that borders upon the supernatural, even after sitting outdoors for many hours of sub-zero temperatures. This time, it didn't emit so much as the faintest grunt. I thought the starterswitch had gone bad and, as a routine, pulled the light switch to check the battery (accumulator?). The knob of the light switch was already out one notch...and therein lay the crux of the problem: the attendant who had parked the car had left the parking lights on for upward of 48 hours and the battery was at least as dead as any specific anatomical component of the legendary Kelsey. If there is any slightest efficacy in curses, that attendant must have suffered.

I called a garage to come get the car started but by that time the home-bound rush hour was just starting and the man on the phone held little hope that they would be there inside of an hour. I fumed and fretted and, after a bit, promoted a set of jumper cables from another attendant in a nearby garage and persuaded another attendant at the parking lot to

drive a lordly Lincoln Continental alongside the stricken Beetle so that we could administer terminal-to-terminal resuscitation. With understandable reluctance, he did so and it was then but the work of a moment to get all 289 horses wide awake and faunching at the bit. He offered to return the cables to the garage attendant but I weighted down the pedal of the Beetle with my camera kit so that it wouldn't strangle before I got back and personally returned the cables along with a handsome honorarium to demonstrate my deep appreciation. When I got back to the roaring Beetle and prepared to depart, the attendant at the lot said, "What'll I tell that man from the garage when he gets here?"

"Tell him to..." My detailed instructions were drowned out by a blast of traffic noise as the nearby stoplight changed to green. It is probably a very good thing.

The outbound Chicago freeways were hopelessly clogged and it was a matter of drive fifty feet, then wait five minutes and drive a little farther, all the way out to the Lake Forest Oasis. You remember the LFO, Walt. It is where we stopped for lunch in '62 and I remarked that the pattern of the ceiling beams always reminded me of the descending upper portion of a brobdignagian waffle griddle and you looked up and said, "Yes, closing down on us syruptitiously." It was touch-and-go by the time I got there since the tank was almost totally empty of petrol and the poor thing was stretching its glide on the fumes. It was equally touchy if it would have built up enough of a charge to restart itself after filling but, with the warm engine, it managed to get going. It was then merely a matter of driving 100+ miles through a screaming blizzard to get back to G'town. It was pure routine and without noteworthy incident.

The next week was, to understate, hectic. I had not heard the last of the business with the battery. I had various mss. to hastily complete and ship to their anxious publishers. Each time I finished one, I'd run it in to the postoffice and ship it off, airmail, special delivery. One of the first of such trips saw a fresh recurrence of the dead battery routine. I checked the level of the water and found it considerably out of sight in most of the cells. I stopped at a nearby shop where they repaired power lawnmowers and borrowed a little water which I added to one of the cells and coaxed enough power from it to get the engine turning again. When I got home, I filled the rest of the cells with distilled water and thought that took care of matters. It didn't. Next afternoon I finished another mss. and tore through the garage door from the basement to drive this one to the postoffice. Again the battery was dead. I should have driven the car after adding all that battery water but, being stupid, had not. There was nothing for it but to call the local filling station to come get it started. I went back into the basement through the connecting door from the garage and flicked on the light switch (since the basement had hardboard nailed over all the windows because it was also the darkroom). The lightbulb gave a fierce blue flash and went out, leaving me in darkness and a gloom too deep to measure.

I tell you, Walt, that instant represented the absolute nadir of the whole dreadful epoch. I take a normal ration of foul luck and misfortune in stride because I get it all the time and I am used to it. But the sheer diabolical insufferability of the light globe picking that precise instant for its final blaze of glory was too sanguinary much. It was all I could do to keep a taut checkrein on myself so that I did not fall to the floor with the howling hysterics.

Well, to expedite the narrative a bit, the man came and started the engine and I drove to the postoffice and mailed the package off and a bit of sunshine trickled through. There was a letter in the box from my New York attorney, enclosing a cheque for 225 dollars, same being a bad debt that he had collected from a former publisher who is a byword in the field when it comes to reluctance in paying. Shortly before this, I had shaken loose the final cheque from the other eastern publisher so that end of things was in fair shape.

Eventually, the outgoing mss. were all completed and shipped. The 14 by 6 foot covered trailer was ordered from the U-Haul people and was picked up with all the paperwork involved in a point-to-point rental of one of the things. I had eleven days as of that moment to turn it over to a U-Haul rental agency in the Los Angeles area with an alternative of being charged extra rental, per day. Numerous tactical errors were made at this point.

At the con in Chicago, my new employer had requested me to stop off en route to the coast to interview an airplane manufacturer. Their plant was in Wisconsin and I had understood that it was in the western part of the state. I finally got around to locating the town in question and found that some fool had put it on the map in the far northern end of the state. This put a good seven or eight hundred miles onto the tour and after a short run with the empty trailer behind the car, I had no delusions as to its terminal velocity when loaded. By this time, a warm front had covered Wisconsin and it was very warm for February--like nearly fifty (above!), clear, bright and sunny. I called Los Angeles and Little Flower--the indispensable Girl Friday--answered the phone. I identified myself and said I was still in G'town. "We thought you'd be halfway here by now," she said. "How's the weather back there?" I told her and she noted wistfully that it was raining pumas and poodles in sunny southern California. I got the publisher on the line and explained about the mislaid aircraft factory. He said, "Well, we need the story," so I agreed to make the detour and pick it up. I hung up and commenced shoveling stuff aboard the U-Haul. This was no quick process. You have seen my basement, Walt...at least the way it looked four years ago. The problem was to take along everything that I would be needing in the pursuit of my usual duties after arrival, at the same time, discarding some things and leaving other things to be hauled out later by the mover's lorry. Loading the trailer involved about 100,000 decisions and a great deal of fetch-and-carry. Days raced past and at long length I got as much of the necessities aboard as I could possibly find room for. It was about 10:30 PM and Little Flower's pumæ and poodles had been falling all over Wisconsin for the past two days and still were; with great enthusiasm. I decided that the thing to do was to weigh the anchor and shove off, and did so.

The balloon almost went up inside of the first mile. It was painfully obvious that I now commanded one unghodly great lump of pounds and after the Beetle groaned its way to the crest of a hill, I gave it a bit of gas down the far slope to gather unto us a little flying speed so as to ascend the next slope. That was when several tons of vehicle and cargo commenced to do a spectacularly abandoned samba and I brought it back under control within microns of disaster. It was a grim and chastened driver at the wheel after that. The roads were bare of snow but the ditches were slippery goo and it wasn't for several miles that I had a chance to pull over and check the condition of the rig. When I did so, I saw that

one of the tyres on the trailer had bought it somewhere along the way. The trailer had tandem axles, with two tyres on each side and they were six-ply heavy duty jobs inflated to 45 psi. The other tyre on that side had carried the burden but it was obviously not the way to go to California--with detours, yet.

I stood there in the pelting downpour and emitted a harsh and bitter laugh and gazed sombrely at the ravaged tyre. Once again, for the countlessth time, it was time to take the bull by where the hair was short and, by opposing, end the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune. Or sure as hell something. I pawed a handful of dimes from my pocket and slogged squishily to a nearby phone booth.

By two in the morning, I was on my way. In the interim, two very accomodating gentlemen in a nearby filling station had helped me to get the U-Haul loose from the Beetle and I had reveled in the bittersweet delight of driving a few miles uncumbered by tons of dead weight as I went to another U-Haul station whose proprietor (may his years be long and blessed!) had gotten out of bed and promoted another tyre for me. As the miles seeped rearward, I sang an outrageously unbowdlerised version of "Bless 'em All," and essayed to master the handling qualities of the burdened Beetle.

It was sickeningly apparent that any speed in excess of 35 mph was like unto balancing an open pieplate full of nitroglycerine on the end of a broom. While dancing barefoot across broken beer bottles. I had whiled away the fuming hours as I waited for the tyre by studying the informative little booklet provided by the U-Haul people for instant indoctrination of neofen at the trailer towing business. One of the things about which the book was very firm was that any tendency of the trailer to fishtail was a cause for great alarm. I agreed. They said that if this happened, the thing to do was to unload the trailer and restow the cargo. The condition, if it persisted, could only be remedied by stopping at a U-Haul agency and requesting a different trailer. "Thanks," I muttered, "but no thanks, thank you." The thought of unshipping all that slok in a pelting rain was something I did nott choose to contemplate. "Damn the Full Speed," I snarled. "Torpedoes ahead!"

By then I was westering on Interstate 94, which is a fine autobahn running between Milwaukee and Madison after which it wends north and a bit west for St Paul and Minneapolis. In the days to come, I was to become the world's most rabid fan of four-lane divided highways and a very bitter foe of two-lane roads. At the gouty snail's pace forced upon the poor Beetle by the cruel Fates, 99.99999% of all vehicular traffic passed me. Between G'town and The Promised Land, I passed exactly two vehicles. One of those was a mail carrier filling post boxes and the other was a semi trailer clawing his precarious way up a steep grade in the mountains.

Everything went relatively well until I got as far as Mauston and found that I-94 had not been completed between there and Eau Claire, Wis. Between Mauston and Eau Claire lay 41 mind-rotting miles of the worst trip in my entire life. By contrast, that adventure in a foundering B-17 over the Florida Everglades in '43 had been a real fun cruise. The two-lane road was narrow as the outlook of a Tennessee preacher and crooked as the track of a sidewinder with athlete's foot, and clogged with traffic like you couldn't possibly believe. The bulky bulk of the traffic consisted of semi-trailer trucks: huge, thundering juggernauts carrying a sidewash of displaced air that would nearly knock the trailer off the road when I met them. Meeting wasn't so bad; the warst was the ones that

came up from behind, impatiently blaring their fierce great air-horns in your ear. You couldn't pull to one side and let them past because the road had no shoulder, or berm or whatever. You couldn't speed up, for disaster lurked hopefully in that direction. All you could do was to hold your speed and sweat. After countless miles would come a brief straight and level stretch and then the accumulated caravan would go roaring past, tootling their hooters in savage fury. In hardly any time at all, the rear view mirrors would show a new comet tail of fury-choked truckdrivers and dudgeon-laden autoists building up behind me and I'd have the whole bit to go through all over again. At every tiny hamlet that came down the road, I would stop at a filling station, nominally to buy petrol but actually to wait whilst my kneecaps stopped oscillating. At one such stop, I boosted the air pressure in the tyres to 65 psi on the trailer and 45 psi in the tyres on the Beetle's rear wheels. It really seemed to help.

I shall harrow you no further with gruesome details. Suffice to say, I finally got to Eau Claire and back onto divided roads again so that my fleeter footed fellow road users could go sailing past with no more than a contemptuous sneer in my direction. I stopped to call the airplane maker on the phone and set up an appointment for the next morning and continued onward. That night I made it to a motel at which he had reserved a room for me. That night I slept in a real bed for the first time since two days before in G-town and the last time until three days later in Elk City, Oklahoma. It felt as good as I'd remembered. But I had become so saturated with the tail wagging motion of the trailer that the bed seemed to have the same motion as I lay there. After a while, I sighed, to nobody in particular, "Boy, talk about adventure," and blonked out like a switched-off light bulb.

I awoke early and was off to the aircraft plant. By three in the afternoon, I was off and running again, with no further duties except to shepherd my lurching charge to southern California, some 2400 miles to the west and to the blessed south. After the preceding few weeks, it looked like a real piece of cake and it more or less turned out to be exactly that. The only flea in the peanut butter was the fact that the various demonstration rides in the aircraft had included a protracted series of aerobatics and my thoroughly confused inner ear was now superimposing the aircraft motion upon the feint-and-weave pattern of the trailer. It was an experience.

I crossed the Mississippi above St Paul and headed for Boggs Country (formerly) and struck southward on a broad reach for KC, Mo. I recalled how, on the previous trip to LA, KC was about where the trim hostess had come ankling up the aisle with a tray of martinis as we leveled off out of Chicago. It would take a little longer this time.

The hours marched past on blistered feet. I kept track on the odometer of the ground put to the rear with each. Any hour that spanned 30 miles was a good hour. I carry a Shell credit card and tried to buy most of my petrol from Shell stations to conserve my dwindling store of liquid assets against some unforeseen emergency. Thus, every time I came to a Shell station, I stopped to top-off the fuel bunkers, whether it was needed or not. This further held down the mph average. The Iowa border loomed in the headlight beam, then slipped slowly astern. Saturday's dawn caught me in southern Iowa and we--the Beetle, its road barge and thin-lipped driver chugged majestically over the line into Missouri by late that morning. "Columbus," I reminded myself, "would have been damned glad to make 30 miles an hour."

There were frequent stretches of two-lane highway to negotiate but they weren't all that grim after our baptism of fire on the Mauston to Eau Claire stretch. We made KC about sundown Saturday and bored westward into my native state of Kansas and onto a glorious expanse of autobahn called the Kansas Turnpike. It stretches flat and wide from KC to Oklahoma City and in the small hours of Saturday night and Sunday morning, it was nearly deserted. With the radio weather reports speaking forebodingly of snowflurries and blizzards, sleep was something I wanted but not nearly as bad as getting gone. The Beetle's broad muzzle bored steadily southwest and, with the road practically to ourselves, I conducted some research into the phenomenon of the pendular fits which developed at about 40 mph. Unless there was some way to break out of these things, the oscillations would build on an exponential scale and it would snap out reluctantly under applied brakes. I discovered that an adroit twitch of the wheel at a precise point in the cycle would damp the motion out of existence...till next time it started. Armed with this data, I was able to raise the cruising speed by a notch or so when road conditions permitted. Sunday's dawn found us just north of the Oklahoma line and clipping off anywhere up to 38 miles each and every hour, provided we didn't stop for gas, which we usually did.

Somewhere around noon, we made Big O, as they call it--Oklahoma City--and right-turned onto Route 66. Darkness caught us at Elk City, Okla., and so did a flurry of snow. The handling qualities of the rig were not such that I cared to try it on snow. We weathered in at a convenient motel and I looked longingly at its ancient shower, and shuddered in the 42 degree room against which a tiny gas-fired wall furnace made no inroads at all. I have rarely seen the temperature so ambient. I sacked in beneath all of my blankets plus all of the motel blankets (two thin ones) plus assorted jackets and topcoats. By 11:00 next morning, Monday's sun had cut through the snow to bare paving and we pushed westward, still goaded by radio reports of blizzards sweeping down the midwest. The Texas panhandle came and went, carrying Amarillo with it and sunset found us nosing across the line into New Mexico. Albuquerque and Tucumcari slipped out of sight in the rear view mirrors--possibly, but not necessarily in that order. The cutoff for Santa Fé came down the road at 3:00AM, Juffus, and I sort of figured you'd sooner not be bothered right then. Besides, it had long since reached the point where every mile was like a bamboo splinter under the fingernail and if Belfast, Northern Ireland, had turned up five miles off the highway, I would probably have pushed straight forward. Tuesday morning appeared along with the Arizona border and Tuesday night brought Kingman, Arizona, on the state's western edge. Wednesday brought an injudicious detour over a road that looked good on the map and proved to be a burro trail over the Nevada mountains. I got back onto Route 66 and made Covina, California by a few hours after dark on Wednesday...almost exactly 168 hours out of Germantown and 2,648.4 miles for an average speed of 15.5 mph without hardly ever going over 40.

I called friend Snordt and he put me up for the night and next morning he helped me find a plain but adequate furnished duplex and I got the stuff out of the U-Haul and turned it in. The pure shining joy of the moment when the Beetle and I blasted off with no trailer behind us is one that I shall cherish for so long as I am in the business of being a people. Friday I reported for work. Saturday I moved the office stuff to the present room. Sunday, I flew to Washington DC, returning Tuesday night. I've been here ever since and outside of that, nothing much is new. How's it with you?

All the usual best,

--dag *[Signature]*