

Hedge Trimmings

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The Alarmist

0. Preface

Life, they say, is a game. It's not a fancy game. It's just a pure game. And one of the rules of the game is that you have to play it. That's a given.

Every day, you have to wake up, get out of bed, and decide how well you're going to play the game. There are ups. There are downs. There are corners.

Throw in the environment. There are four seasons. We have to deal with those. Then someone decides to invent the car. There's traffic. You have to jump out of the way.

But you're not just playing other people. You're also playing yourself.

This is the story of one man playing the game. He tried to change the rules. He tried to change the game. In the end, the game changed him.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's meet that man.

1. Introductions

Mister Grimace, meet Mr. Gape. Mr. Gape, meet Mr. Grimace. You two should know each other. Really, you should. Really.

I'm rather surprised you two haven't already made each other's acquaintance. I am. You live in the same solid section of Libertyville. You frequent many of the self-same safe bodegas, cafes, diners, and bookstores.

Even your tastes run much the same. From choice of footwear — both of you prefer thick-

soled, Velcroed, almost therapeutic, geriatric black leather shoes — to headwear — if either of you leave your aging brownstone bachelor abodes without a pinch-brimmed hat or a dusty wool-lined ear-flapped cap, it's a rare day indeed. Indeed.

Head, shoulders, knees, and toes.

That is not the extent of your similarities. And therein lies my confusion — and the root of my disbelief — that you do not already know each other. Because both of you know the woman the Reader will eventually meet, and both of you love her madly. Madly! Yet she will never know, will she, Mr. Grimace? Mr. Gape?

All you can do in her presence, Mr. Grimace, is sit slack jawed and silent as she regales you with slightly spritely stories of her delightfully dainty day-to-day developments, hands flitting about like paper-winged moths in the air that surround her pristine and porcelain face.

And you, Mr. Gape! All *you* can do is frown sourly, brows knit like a stocking cap and dark eyes brooding with concern. It's a wonder she can stand spending time with either of you, even if it's just from here to there. Fact is, you *can't* get there from here. I wonder what she'd do with both of you.

Truth be told, I loved her, too. OK, I *still* love her. It's a rare man who doesn't. Or can't. Or won't. But this story isn't about them, or her, or you two, really. This story is about *me*.

It's a story worth the telling.

And I am the one to tell it.

So let's begin.

2. A Real Peach of a Newborn

Zechariah Hephzibah Peachpit Sebastian—later in life, Peach to his family and friends and Zac to his acquaintances and enemies—was born in the earliest of mornings. The sun was just peeking sneakily past the surface of the Hearth, and the birds were rousing to spout their drowsy song. Garbage trucks already filled to the gills rattled down Apollo Street, and the short-order cook working at the Luncheonette Diner on the corner slathered the grill with grease just this side of rancid, preparing for the daybreak's pending onslaught of orders for eggs, bacon, potatoes, and toast.

Head, shoulders, knees, and toes.

At the same time, Peach's mother sweated and strained achingly in the master bedroom on the top floor of a four-story walkup, her legs awkwardly aloft, clamped in hastily and amateurishly yet adequately constructed stirrups made of wire hangers, yard sticks, duct tape, and twine. Her husband, nervous, stood by her side. He'd called the doctor 15 minutes ago, when the breaking of his wife's water surprised the two of them to wakefulness and wonder. At first, he'd been concerned that one of them had wet the bed while sleeping. One of them, in fact, had.

That was OK. There was a birthing going on.

The man, Peach's father, no doubt about it, wondered when the doctor would arrive. He also wondered how long his wife's labor would last. He wondered whether his favorite baseball team would make it to the playoffs. And he wondered whether his child, the very fruit of his loins and a chip off his block, would grow up to be anyone important. Would he make a name for himself? Would the name they planned to inscribe on his birth certificate—a name weighty with aspirational circumstance, history, import, and pomp, at least as far as their families were concerned—weather his son's sure-to-come accomplishments, actions, and deeds?

The man had to wait until the end of summer, scant weeks away, to learn the fate of his league favorite. But he didn't need to wait very long to learn how important their child was going to be. Or to how many people.

The doctor arrived with the squealing of steaming tires streaking stripes in the street four stories below. The newly formed and now formal father walked to the door of the flat to await the physician's arrival. Opening the door in antsy anticipation, the man could hear the belabored ascent of the man of medicine. While the doctor was a veritable master mechanic of the human body, he did tend to neglect his own, largely in the name of heavy sauces and port wine. But that's neither here nor there, and soon enough, stairway be damned, the doctor arrived from there to here, much to the man—and his wife's—relief.

So it was that Peach was born. Before bacon. Before eggs. Before toast. First head. Then shoulders, knees, and toes. In the presence of two loving parents and a wheezing MD with grimy spectacles and hammy hands. As soon as Peach breached his mother's cervix, traveled the length of her vagina, and crested beyond the vulva, he took note of his new surroundings in his newborn baby way.

He deemed them unfit.

And he began to voice his displeasure.

3. Lecture Notes

Good morning, class. Please find your seats and get out your notebooks. Today I'm going to talk about glass and the effects of high-pitched sounds. Ready? OK. Let's begin.

It's a stereotypical image: A bovine and perhaps hirsute opera singer wearing a strong, sturdy, metal helmet, adorned with horns—just for the sake of argument and, perhaps, local color—sings a high note. You know she's got braids. Throat quivers. Jowls quake. And,

somewhere, *somewhere*, maybe in the lobby, a crystal goblet shatters.

Or, a supersonic jet flies directly overhead. Faster, ever faster, until the very speed of sound itself—roughly the square root of the universal gas constant multiplied by the adiabatic index multiplied in turn by the absolute temperature of air, measured in kelvins—is broken. Windows shatter. Curio cabinets concatenate.

Is it real? Is it Memorex?

Every kind of glass has what we physicists call a resonant frequency. That is the natural frequency of vibration possessed by a particular object. Now, if a given object encounters sound waves with the same frequency as its resonant frequency, that object could—should—indeed break. Explode. Splinter into bits. To quote the Rolling Stones—and to repeat myself—"shatter."

How can we find the resonant frequency of glass, or any specific item, for that matter? Were we working with, say, a stereo speaker, we could use a resistor, a sine wave generator, and a true RMS meter. By finding the frequency at which the voltage across the resistor is lowest, we could identify the resonant frequency. And maybe even blow the mother out.

Hold on. OK. That sounds like a fire alarm. You know the drill, class. Pack up your things, and exit the auditorium in a single file line. We'll gather by the old oak tree for a headcount, and once we hear from the physical plant staff, you'll be dismissed.

For Thursday's class, please read Steinberg's paper, "Avoiding Vibration in Odd-Shaped Printed-Circuit Boards." There will be a quiz.

Single file, now! Has anyone seen Zac?

To be continued...

Curated Movies

Other than Netflix (for movies) and Rentanime (for Japanese animation), I depend on three sources for my movie viewing. They're subscription services, and they're worth considering if you want guided watching.

The first is Film Movement, which offers a monthly subscription of international films. The most recent, "The Trap," is a German film that was well worth watching. The second, the Iron Weed Film club, offers more political fare, including my friend Bari Pearlman's movie about Tibetan nuns, "Daughters of Wisdom." And then there's the Earth Cinema Circle—there's also a Spiritual Cinema Circle—which focuses on environmental movies (or spiritual ones, depending).

Each costs money—there's a subscription fee for each—but I've enjoyed the guided viewing beyond my usual Netflix queue. What movies are *you* watching? I'd love to learn your viewings.

A Conversation with the Bundle

Unfortunately, I sent my first contribution to the bundle on the very day that Mr. Scott affixed the last label for the mailing. I hope to get this to Mr. Scott in better time this go 'round. I'll get the schedule down yet! § I was delighted to receive my first issue of the *American Amateur Journalist*. Not only was it the first edition in which I'm listed as a member (Proud!), but it made for valuable contextual reading. Per Mr. Hawes's Presidential Message, I'm going to make a point of including commentary in each edition of my contribution, because part of why I joined the AAPA was to explore a more participatory, collective form of small-press journalism offline. I wish I'd seen Mr. O'Connor's proposal to merge the NAPA and

AAPA. I'm a new member of both but have yet to receive a bundle from the former. The AAPA welcomes its new members in style (and promptly)! If anyone feels like sending me that edition of *Spare Time*, I'd appreciate it. I was subtly surprised that the historian, membership, and financial reports also made for interesting reading. So few new members come in through the Web site—and so many do so through referrals. And finally, I'm impressed that the AAPA's financials seem so sustainable. Kudos. § My copy of *Carpe Diem* #70 arrived unfolded, and I debated folding it before reading. In the end, I decided not to do so. Mr. and Mrs. Prowell: Did you write "Life Before the Computer"? I modeled this issue's colophon after yours. Thank you for the role model. § Holy cow, Sheryl Nelms! Not only did you inspire me to look up "timpanitate" in my *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (still two volumes)—it wasn't there; does it mean to drum, or drum-like?—but I really dug "CBS Weatherman Harold Taft." I have to learn how to use the Manuscript Bureau! I shall write Mr. Liddle to inquire. § To be honest, *The Gator Growl* is more like the zines I'm used to in terms of length and format. I've been surprised how short form most contributions are! Charlie Robins's "Economic View" made me glad I'm only 35. I still have time for my investments and mutual funds to grow (back) before I retire. I can't imagine watching my nest egg dwindle just when I need it most. Married-couple friends of my parents experienced that upon retiring during the last bust; they both went back to work. For which paper does Mr. Hutchison review books? He might enjoy the Hard Case Crime line of paperbacks, as well as these two bookstores in New York City, should he visit: Otto Penzler's The Mysterious Bookshop and Partners & Crime Mystery Booksellers. In Cambridge, Mass., I recommend Kate's Mystery Books (which may have relocated last fall or so). And in Milwaukee, The Mystery Bookstore is worth checking out. Did all of the items in this hobby journal come via the Manuscript Bureau? § Mr. Spence's thought exercise on the United States's net worth in *Independence Way* #53 is

worth further exploration. According to a Sept. 18, 2008, Dow Jones Commodity News item, the U.S. household net worth fell 0.8% to \$55.99 trillion in the second quarter of this year. I haven't seen any Q3 numbers yet, but my uneducated guess is that it fell again, perhaps moreso. Our country is becoming less wealthy, not more. Maybe it comes down to the definition of wealth—and power. § Mr. Carrick, keep the public works project reportage coming! If you ever get to Jemez Springs, New Mexico, be sure to visit the Soda Dam, a naturally occurring corollary to the same at Shasta. § Given *SpareTime* #40, I'm curious how Mr. O'Connor voted. He might enjoy reading the book *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* by Bryan Caplan. Rick Shenkman's *Just How Stupid Are We?* might make for an interesting parallel read, as well. I've read neither, but my wife shared a review of the latter with me, and it seems up Mr. O'Connor's alley. On the issue of, well, issue count, I think this: I'm not sure that more, shorter issues are any better than fewer, longer issues, but to each their own! I'm going to aim for an issue—whatever its length—per bundle (or so) rather than aim for a two-page issue or multiples regardless. That approach might ensure you get an issue in every packet, however. One more thing: Who did the illustrations? Does the Manuscript Bureau also handle illos? § And to Mr. McComas: Poor froggy! § Almost to a one, everyone in last month's bundle justified their type. Do you find that makes things easier to read? Personally, I'm going to run ragged for awhile. Until next issue...

Colophon

Flag is Optima. Heads, subheads, and text are Palatino. Composed in Microsoft Word 2004 for Mac version 11.5.0, printed and photocopied on a Canon Color ImageRunner C5185i for members of the American Amateur Press Association. All errors are my own. For those, I am sorry. So very sorry. ###

