

## FROM A NOVEL

Others would do best to stay away from me. They would be ahead of the game, and I would be left to myself, undisturbed. Not in any way as I anti-social from psychopathic causes, no, rather I am losing patience with the world. To be plagued with an idiot is nerve rankling, but to be offset with two or three in a row on the same day . . . well I have had a bad day perhaps. PICTURE: Two sparrows in an unpaved alley. In a little valley where the wheels of autos carved a road on a muddier day now left hard in the sun . . . with plenty of loose sand in light yellow rivulets speckled with grease. . . . They are sitting in the softer sand. . . . They almost spin, and they squat down in the warm sand . . . they flutter their wings in exhausting efforts, pausing and resuming their sand shaking. They are shaking lice out of their wings. One peeps. The other returns with a great chatter and chirping. . . . The first one lets go. An outburst of chirping. In a nervous jittering and jabbering, they fly up on a telephone wire. They sit there surveying the back yards, the wash blowing in the gentle breeze. They cheep and chirp.

**PICTURE:** The happy and bright spring morning turning for as I walk into a store and talk to the woman behind the counter . . . unleashing one of my finest quips of the decade. . . . Jumping on something she has said and making a hilarious, cheery and delightful bit of warm humor, gently, without the remotest possibility of offending; to receive in return a dead red face, two large meaty hands on the counter holding her up, and a gaseous emanation like the fumes from a water soaked corpse that has been bent forward . . . a flat: Hah? I always feel like saying, "Never mind." but cannot quite.

**PICTURE:** Two men standing at a corner waiting for a Chicago bus. They have been standing in silence for several minutes. They notice each other slightly. One notices the other is taller than he. The other notices his adversary has on a tie. He flexes his knees, puts a hand in his pocket, jingles his change. I shall not describe their features in detail. For that matter imagine for a moment that their faces look like two uncut pies with fork-marks for eyes. One speaks:

"Looks like the Sox lost yesterday again."

"Yeah. They'll never win the pennant that way."

The first one became excited. He had found a member. He let go, "They shouldn't have traded Bylek off. They need old Cap Ticks for manager. You can't expect minor league players to play ball. What was the gate?"

"Must have been around fifty-thousand . . . dropping off."

"Can't get much of a gate losing three in a row, the FANS get disgusted."

**PICTURE:** A tall, blond, young gentleman with hard-shelled glasses smiles and steps into an elevator. He has a pink shirt with a peach-pink tie and a light beige suit. The elevator man presses some necessary buttons. The car door closes, and it rises with a quick yank. There are three in the car. The elevator man in a green uniform with a long row of gold buttons each bearing a large letter "H" in itaglio, after the name of the building . . . no doubt. Leaning in a corner on one leg, pretending as had as pos-

sible not to notice them, is me. I hear one of them speak. (They have already accepted me as a nonentity, a harmless meet-nose on my way up to somewhere.)

“I killed ’em yesterday . . . had two winners. One in the third and one in the fifth . . . always do good on three and five.”

“I’ll give you a horse in the sixth today.” This last remark was made by the operator, who of course gets on the IN. They looked around as if they were going to rob The First National Bank, and the operator of the plush carpeted car said:

“RED ANT in the sixth!!”

“Good deal!” the blond young gentleman replied as he jotted it down on his newspaper. Just to be nasty I could have yelled it all over the neighborhood as soon as I got home . . . but to you and to me; and whether they admit it or not, it means nothing.

There is a paper published which can be had for some thirty or forty cents that guarantees a winner in code. If the buyer of this sheet does not get a winner, they will **POSITIVELY** give him . . . no, not his money . . . **ANOTHER HORSE**. And if that one doesn’t come in or one of three on the cover in code, they will **POSITIVELY** give him another horse . . . and if . . . more of the same. I could sit and give out horses all day, and I have had no training in touting: Hold the form in the left hand and stab the pencil into it with the other hand while the eyes are clamped shut. And if the horse doesn’t come in, . . . same thing only harder.

**PICTURE:** A man and woman standing alone on the street. They are lonely; they would like to speak . . . a horse . . . the ball game . . . soon they are wrapped up in each other. In love. In an advanced age, several thousand years from now, men will be so scientific that they will have lost all this foolery, and for the sake of pre-symbolic usage, will **NOD** at each other. They will all be very happy, smiling creatures with big heads and little bodies . . . no hair, all baldies . . . and all nodding at each other on streets, in trams, at corners waiting for the Chicago bus, which by then will have arrived.

I refer to idiots quite often. I do not apologize for it; nor do I believe everybody but myself to be an idiot; but no idiot is complete without the BAD MEMORY. What is vital to life, . . . memory, . . . is provided in the cell structure. How many of us forget to eat? Edison was reputed to forget to eat. I doubt that story very much. Maybe he ate wire insulation or corks. Maybe, in the back of an old drawer, he had some interesting things with which to experiment that appealed to a rare gastronomical constitution; but he didn't forget to eat.

If man forgot, the vaginas of the world would be strolling about: empty. Civilization would cease. Or to borrow Benchley's famous euphemism, . . . man. Yet, I have seen rummy players forget the card just beneath the top one. I have seen dice rollers forget their point. This happens often among full grown men.

PICTURE: A week ago last Thursday I was sitting on a bus again. A woman was smiling at me. She looked excited. She was a rather obese person, and not the type I would have noticed. She was beaming at me. I was a little frightened, horrified because I might have to refuse her; and she might get sore and holler that I was abusing her. Fortunately that wasn't what she wanted. Holding her transfer up to me, she said: "They're all TWO's." The number on her transfer, for those who need remedial work on it, was 222 222. I suggested immediately that she save it. She replied, still smiling, "No, I'd have to pay another fare."

To which I remarked, "For twenty cents more you can keep it. Isn't it worth twenty cents?"

"No." she answered seriously and very quickly.

"Then you've made a fuss over something that isn't even worth twenty cents. It isn't worth very much then, is it?" She didn't see my brilliant play. I was hardly heard. She just sat there enjoying it a little more. On her face was the large smile, and an expression of peaceful ecstasy. You see, she has a bad memory. The appearance of even numbers relieve persons with poor memories so much that they *enjoy* them. No consternation with 222 222.

I relaxed when she got off, enjoying again the brilliant manner in

which I pointed out that her transfer wasn't worth any more than if it had read 4 444 444. I looked up to see a little round faced, sandy haired woman with her young son. She was explaining how they could have taken the elevated railroad or a suburban electric train to a better advantage. She was going through each move, each route carefully. Her packages were slipping about her. She had many, and the thin blond boy sat quite still, looking up at the pictures on the advertisements, dreaming of space guns, or boy scout knots, or something that boys lose their minds about, not listening to a word.

Undoubtedly cultivating another poor memory.

