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Handles With Care

An Open Letter

Dr. William Haddon, Jr.,
Administrator,
The National Traffic Agency

Dear Mr. Haddon:

As a taxpayer and motor vehicle driver I wish to thank you for your interest in the safety of my vehicle. It is nice of you to invite comment, and I have an idea which may help. It seems to me that you have neglected one of the most dangerous components of today's automobile. This single feature, fraught with deadly peril, has probably caused more highway deaths than all other faulty parts rolled into one. And unlike other booby traps concealed in the car's vitals, it is visible, highly publicized, and can be easily corrected at trifling expense.

I refer to the names of cars. What good are grim warnings about safety when you put a man behind the wheel of a Fury, a Sting Ray, a Tempest, a Thunderbird? Why bother with seat belts when you blast off at the controls of a Comet, a Polara, a Galaxie? We can double the State Police forces and they will be helpless before the wild zeal of the man who owns a Mustang, a Wildcat, a Spyder, or a Barracuda.

The wise men tell us that these names are chosen not only to stimulate man's urge for speed and power: they are also designed as aphrodisiacs to incite old men to act younger and to make children act older. In any case it is crystal-clear that drivers of all ages, most of them sane and sober before they turn the key in the switch, are automatically transformed into Monte Carlo maniacs with James Bond syndromes.

This grave situation can be corrected in thirty days flat. All you have to do is pass a law to make the manufacturers call back all the cars and rename them. To help you out, I have compiled lists of pre-tested names, all guaranteed not to increase the pulse rate, blood pressure, or amorous appetite. For example, a Mustang becomes a Dobbin, a Sting Ray becomes a Sand Flea, a Tempest becomes a Teapot, a Spyder becomes a Fly, a Wildcat becomes a Kitty-car.

For future models, I have pre-tested names according to the age brackets of potential drivers. For the late teens and early twenties I recommend the names of pleasant, unexciting but noble little beasts, like Lamb, Ant, Burro, Beaver, Tortoise, or Commuter.

For middle-aged marrieds, names sym-

bolizing domestic bliss, like Peace, Moderation, Meat Loaf, Rocker, Stroller, or PTA.

For the moneyed prestige-seekers, there are solid names: Cashier, Teller, Security, Debenture, Bookkeeper, and Dow-Jones.

For senior citizens the category could include: Medicaer, Myopia, Thrombosis, Mayo, Mt. Sinai, and Forest Lawn. I had included Sexagenarian in this category, but early testings indicated confusion in the potential market: teen-agers outnumber senior citizens ten to one.

It has been proved conclusively by computer trial runs that this single change in the American auto will reduce traffic fatalities by several per cent.

I certainly hope you get busy on this.

Respectfully yours,
HARLAND MANCHESTER.

The Creatures

HOW I got here I do not know or what these creatures are who seem to command me. They are not like me; for one thing, they are much larger, and differently formed. They are not beautiful. They are strong, but slow; they tower over me, yet I believe that I could do them harm. On the other hand, something tells me that they could do me an even greater harm. Instinct, perhaps? I have had no instruction. I think they could kill me. In the past, I have been beaten.

They communicate with one another in strange ways. They make meaningless sounds, but appear to understand one another. And they have strange powers: Walls fly open before them and close again; they cause objects to fly through the air.

And they change their skins; they take off one skin and put on another.

As I say, they are slow-moving; they seem to have a different time-span from us. I say "us" because there are in fact two of us, a young female and myself. I have no idea where she came from; one day she simply appeared. She was frightened at first and wept a great deal, but after a while she seemed to settle down and now she seems thoroughly at home. She is pretty, but I do not concern myself with such things. She accepts me and even teases me from time to time, which I do not like very much. They call her "Meghan" and they call me "Henry." I don't know why. I never think of myself as Henry.

These creatures, in whose power I

am, can create light and darkness. They are like gods; they can command fire, and sometimes they are wreathed in smoke which I find pungent and disagreeable. At other times, they have a flower-smell, which makes me sneeze.

There are two of them; I call them Rowwgh and Riigh. Rowwgh is the larger of the two. Their skins differ in texture-and design, and the sounds they make are different, too; Riigh makes a higher, more shrill sound. Perhaps, like Meghan, Riigh is a female, but I cannot tell.

They come and go at will; they travel with extraordinary speed on the backs—or in the laps—of other, larger creatures whose exact nature is uncertain. They do not appear to grow old. They bring sounds out of distant objects.

My position here is ambivalent. I do not know what they want of me. I am not a slave; I am not asked to do anything, except to go away when they tell me to—or to come when they call. There are pleasant times, when we walk together, all four of us, in the air outside. Other creatures like our own stop to admire Meghan and me; the air is filled with flying things and with agreeable smells. Rowwgh and Riigh do not fear the larger flying things, only the smaller. I do not understand this.

On the whole, however, they are fearless; loud noises do not distract them. Yet they cry out sometimes in their sleep. They are mercurial; they caress me at one moment, only to turn away the next, as though bored or irritated. I watch them constantly; if only I could communicate with them: I am sure that they would have much to tell me. But they have never answered the simplest question.

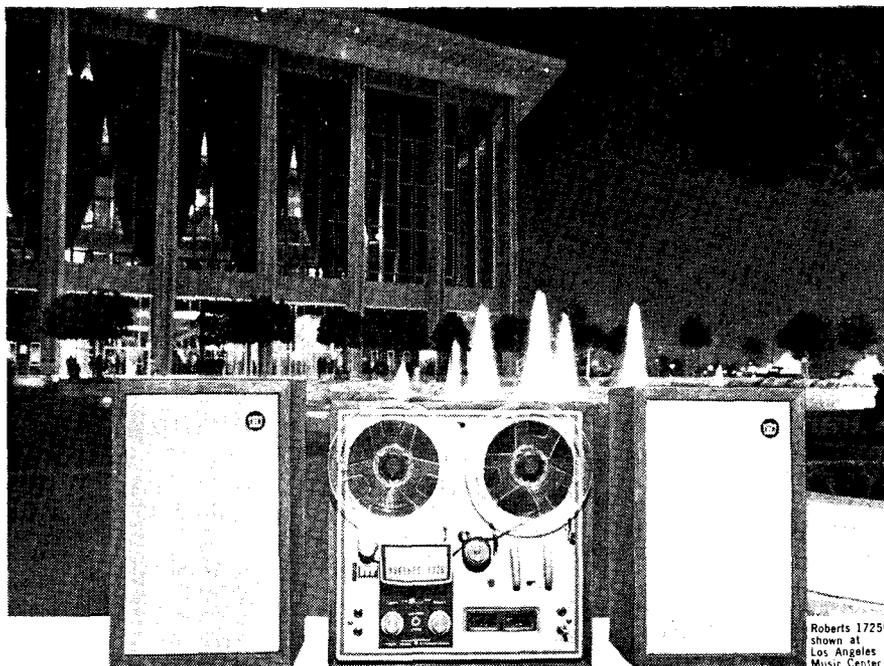
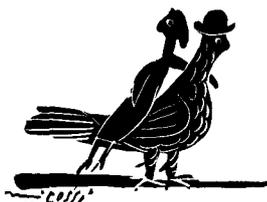
They do not show affection as we do; they do not kiss delicately as we do. Instead, they place their open mouths together and suck. Their breeding habits—if they do breed—are unimaginable.

Are they, like us, some sort of accident of nature? Or did some Power, superior to their own, bring them into being? And is that Power dead? And are these creatures His descendants?

When they quarrel, which is often, they always make the same bird-like sounds: Rowwgh exclaims “shetep, shetep”; and Riigh cries “dmai, dmai,” over and over.

They have no way of showing pleasure. After all, when I am given a bone, I wag my tail.

—ROBERT NATHAN.



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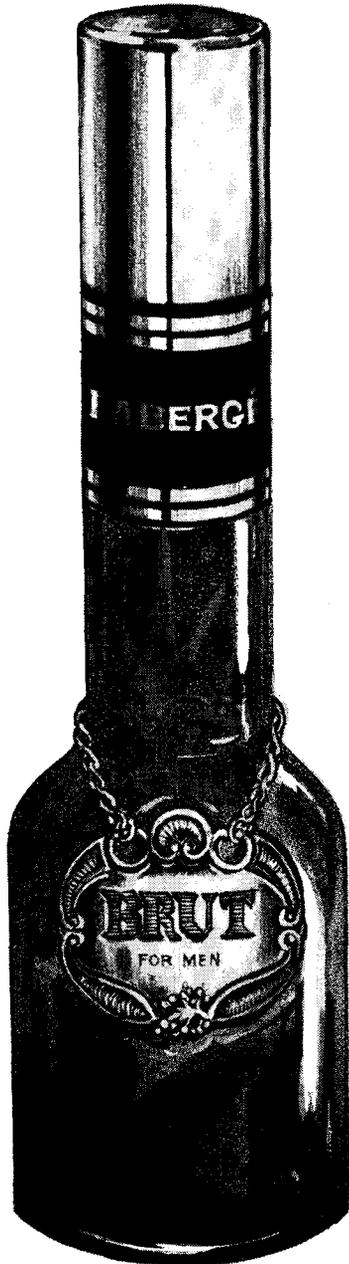
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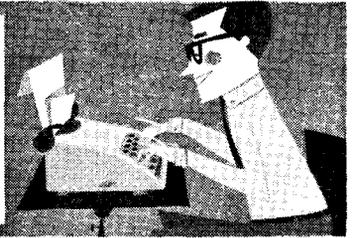
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Top of My Head



Scrooge Comes Down the Chimney

IN THE SPIRIT of the season here I come with a Ho Ho Ho and a sackful of cheer for the Hundred *Really* Neediest Cases. Every one of them is a TV star, living in upholstered squalor in a vast depressed area known as Fool's Paradise.

My bag is stuffed with something these needy cases covet most and are desperately in need of: thousands of rating points to be distributed among these children who toil week in and week out in the cobalt fields.

The other Santa Claus has taken care of the good little boys and good little girls. The rest are left to me. As far as I'm concerned there are no bad boys or bad girls. There are only bad scripts and bad concepts with which the tots keep company. To them I bring these Goodies. And who is to say who is the real Santa Claus and who isn't?

I fly low over the home of Lucille Ball and drop my first little packet of Goodies—5.2 points. These she may add to her rating if she will abandon this thing she has about scrubwomen. Almost every special in which she appears shows her with mop and pail, swathed in a tattered garment, her crown of red hair in disarray.

This attraction which attractive TV women have to making themselves appear slovenly also bedevils Carol Burnett. And to her goes another Goody—5.2 rating points—if she will but forgo the little old lady who scrubs offices after hours and sings a mopey little song into the stringy yarns of an upended mop.

In the hushed dawn of a Christmas morn I fly low over the homes of Dean Martin, Phil Harris, Jackie Gleason, and Frank Sinatra. I find them coming home, weaving their ways up their walks, trying futilely to fit their keys into the doors, and wondering if this is the place.

This thing about public TV confessions of over-indulgence in alcohol has so beset these stars that it is difficult to tell one from the other without a balloon test.

Mr. Harris has been publicly describing his intake since the days of early Jack Benny programs. His TV career lately has been confined to guest shots. So he has more time to load up for his appearances.

Mr. Martin seems not to drink before

or after his show. It's during his hour that he seems to be supplied with potions so potent that one wonders if he will make it to the top of his piano, where he sits and talks to Ken Lane about a lady named Jeannie to whom he vaguely remembers he's married.

Mr. Sinatra is the latest who has added wine to his women and songs. On a recent appearance on *What's My Line?* this most talented of entertainers pounded the dais where he sat to play the game and asked, "Where is the bar?"

Mr. Gleason, who for years sipped from his cup of TNT and said "Wow," has given up this hilarious bit and shown himself to be the performer he really is in the Honeymooners' trips around the world. Having gone on the wagon for TV, he has lessened his alcohol percentage by at least 3.2, and this has been added to his rating.

So to each of these convivial gentlemen of the AA—although it's hardly anonymous—I drop a Goody—3.2 rating



—Vic Volk.

points if they will swear off. Man cannot live by whiskey alone. It's one thing to be high in the ratings, but another just to be high.

It's getting colder now and there's no heat in ye olde sleigh, so before I head home where Janie is waiting for me with the nip that warms, I fly low over the homes of those bad little boys who put that whole cluster of commercials in those old movies—before, after, in between, and sideways.

I drop a Goody of at least 6.5 if you will find a way to reduce the number of commercials between segments of a movie. It is one thing to integrate commercials. It's another to impregnate them. So numerous are they that after four or five commercials are bunched at a station break, when the movie returns the viewer is certain the girl and fellow can never get together; her hands are rough, his hair is sticky, and they both have bad breath.

And a merry Christmas to both of them. And to you. —GOODMAN ACE.

SR/December 24, 1966