

THE POSTMAN RINGS AND RINGS

A Story

BY JOHN FANTE

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
Jan. 25, 1936

Mr. Louis Hirnak,
c/o The American Monthly,
999 9th Avenue,
New York City
Dear Mr. Hirnak:

In my humble opinion all fan letters are idiotic and writers of fan letters are such silly people, but after reading "Pass The Passion" in the January issue of the *American Monthly* I made the reckless resolve that, silly or not, screamingly stupid or not, I was going to write you that I consider you the *ultima thule* of the English tongue since Dickens, and that includes Europeans like Thomas Mann and Marie Corelli. (You see, I read omnivorously.) Your delicious style and the unearthly rhythm of your eerie whimsicality in the name of masterful prose is the most unique and delightfully captivating *élan* I have ever read in my life, and, as my rather perfunc-

tory and unbookish and (need I say it?) Babbitt-like friends will attest, I am an extremely voracious and diversified peruser with an unappeasable appetite for man's noblest Art. Need I say that I am speaking of Literature? After reading "Pass The Passion" I stand tiptoe on a hill with my hair to the wind (blonde, if you please!) and hail you as the new Gogol of the timeless Future, a post-Joycean who belongs to the delectable isolation of the cold blue Nietzscheanism. But allow me, O Genius, to sing of your fabulous gifts in the harsh Present!

With admiration,
(Miss) SHELIA CROTCHETT

5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.,
Feb. 5, 1936

Dear Miss Crotchett,

The editor of the *American Monthly* has kindly forwarded me your letter of January 25. I am certainly glad you liked "Pass The

Passion", and I thank you for your generous remarks about my work.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS HIRNAK



114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
Feb. 10, 1936

My Dear Mr. Hirnak:

Not being in the habit of writing fan letters to authors, you can imagine my unappeasable thrill when your delightful answer arrived all the way from California. But you're far too humble, too modest! Such unrequited humility borders on sheer ambiguity, and when a *bona fide* blonde, nineteen years old, five feet two, weight 112, and considered ultra-modern and streamlined by her rather Babbitish contemporaries — when that blonde forgets the gayety of cocktails and swing music long enough to read and extol to heaven the wonders of "Pass The Passion", then it is a *fait accompli*, a really bright feather in your hat — yes — very very bright! But I starve! I tremble! I am ravenous! I must know! What else is there of yours? Any novels, articles, biographies? And where can I find other short stories? For you see, you have a disciple! Mad? Yes, yes! A trifle!

With admiration,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.,
Feb. 20, 1936

Dear Miss Crotchett,

With regard to your questions, I have never published any articles or biographies, and so far I have not published a novel. If you are interested in my short stories, you will find all my published material listed in *The Readers' Guide To Periodical Literature*.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS HIRNAK



114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
Feb. 28, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

Only this moment I returned from the public library where I spent an ecstatic afternoon reading your marvelous short stories. What a genius you are! How your passionate blood flashes through the prose! Your road to immemorial fame and deathlessness in the Future is like unto Dante and Marie Corelli and the fiery travail of William Dean Howells and Charles Swinburne. Your story, "Inches To Love", shows a rare understanding of that delicate spot which is the soul of woman, and your masterful description of the mountains in "God Makes A Tree" proves your unappeasable

appreciation of life and nature. Your ungovernable sense of humor was brilliantly exploited in "Love Isn't Asparagus"; I loved the philosophical implications, the anguish and strife, the lilting phraseology of "A Piece For The Poet", and the tragic quality of "Springtime For Helen" had me aburst with nostalgic tears such as I have never known.

But what of *you!* O fiery one, tell me more! What are your views on marriage? That is—if you *are* married! And please! Are you tall or short, fat or thin? You write so beautifully, your descriptions are so insidiously captivating, your presentation is so incomparably ingenious, so filled with that aromatic zestfulness known as genius, and in conclusion, your facility with words is simply marvelous.

Always,
SHELIA CROTCHETT

~
114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
March 30, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

Did you receive my letter of February 28th? Not having heard from you I thought the letter might have been lost.

Sincerely yours,
SHELIA CROTCHETT

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
April 30, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

I am so humiliated, so ashamed of my letter of February 28th! What unappeasable presumption! What unrelenting adolescence! Will you ever forgive me for being so idiotically inane and asking such banal questions about your personal life? You write so beautifully, with such distinguished poise, and to think I had to ask such silly questions! I know you resented every one of them, and I just know you think me such a silly little idiot. Please forgive me, Mr. Hirnak! Please tell me I haven't offended you.

With apologies,
SHELIA CROTCHETT

~
5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.,
May 5, 1936

My Dear Miss Crotchett,

You haven't offended me at all! On the contrary, I shall be very glad to give you an account of myself. I have been married and divorced six times. I have a bigamy charge now pending here in Los Angeles—my last two divorces having been illegally procured in Mexico. I am four feet nine inches tall, and I weigh 205 pounds. I am

sixty-five years old, and the father of seven children. My nose was broken during a youthful pugilistic career, and I lost a leg and an arm in the World War. Most of my life has been spent in box cars, except a period in adolescence when I resided at a reformatory for a vicious stunt us guys pulled on a little girl. My mother, I never saw alive; she died of drink a week after my birth. Whether my father and mother were legally married I am unable to say. My father is still alive: twenty years ago he was convicted of rape and is now serving a life-term at Leavenworth. I saw him five years ago, and we had a long talk. I was paroled in 1932.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS HIRNAK

~

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
May 10, 1936

My Dear Louis Hirnak:

O lovely liar! O scoffer supreme! O beautiful cynic! Shades of Cellini! Shades of Baron Munchausen! Of course I believe you! You poor, poor, unappeasable mortal!

Did you know you are my inspiration? Well, you are! Ever since our correspondence began I have been writing a short story and at last it is done, finished,

complete! But what to do with it? Tell, O Genius, tell me! I, an unknown, without a "name" and without the courage to let another see my work; my words, my poor, feeble, little-girl words. Can you chide me for my silence, I, this small voice in the wilderness, this still small voice of conscience? But you! Your heart is deep and tender, for I have read your words and I know the vast reaches of your unappeasable sympathy. Tell me that you will read my story! Tell me that my ideal of you shall not be smirched, that indeed you are human; nay the very humanities, the kindness and goodness of immortal genius!

Hopefully,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

~

5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.,
May 20, 1936

Dear Miss Crotchett,

I was afraid of this. But send the story along. I can't undertake to rewrite it, but I will read it.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS HIRNAK

~

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
May 25, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

I cringe! I tremble like a leaf

and await breathlessly your commentary. Spare me not, O Genius! I welcome your brutality and my desire for your praises cannot be appeased. Truth alone, I seek — Truth. And like one at the feet of Socrates I beg piteously, a voice in the wilderness, seeking the beauty of words, a direction to Paradise, a path to the fruits of expression. . . .

While I was at it, Mr. Hirnak, I thought I would send you a few other things I have written. They include three novels and fifteen short stories. I just feel in my heart they are good, but I just can't seem to sell them. I can readily understand what you mean when you say you cannot undertake to rewrite them, but if you will reconsider I will give you twenty per cent (20%) of the sale price, and you can sign your name to them too with mine.

But above all — the truth! I await your words, for you are my Gospel, my Pentateuch. The truth! I seek the truth!

Gratefully yours,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.,
June 3, 1936

Dear Miss Crotchett,

Your complete works arrived

this morning, express collect. I am greatly surprised at such volume. Had I known there was so much to read, I am afraid I would have declined the opportunity. However, the stuff has crossed the country and now lies on my desk; under the circumstances it is best I read it, I suppose. But I must formally decline your offer of collaboration. My own stuff keeps me too busy to consider any sort of partnership. It may be some time before I complete the reading of your pieces, since there are so many.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS HIRNAK

~

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
June 7, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

You cannot collaborate? Ah, that is my tragedy! I had hoped, I had dreamed, I had even prayed . . . but need I speak more? I accept your dictate with unappeasable gratitude. Eagerly I await your instructions; eagerly I anticipate the truth, however painful, however replete with pain and sadness, for I seek the truth, and you shall lead me to its *sanctum sanctorum*.

Gratefully ever yours,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
July 10, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

I am loath to being impatient, I am humiliated by my incandescent eagerness. Forgive me! And yet — have you read any of my pitiful offerings as yet?

Eagerly,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

~

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
Oct. 18, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

More than three months have passed and I have had no word from you. Far be it from me to make accusations, but it does seem a long time since I sent you my stories.

Sincerely yours,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

~

114 Shady Lane,
Columbus, Ohio,
Nov. 2, 1936

Dear Mr. Hirnak:

Please return my stories immediately. After all, it has been too long and there is no excuse for this intolerable delay.

Yours truly,

SHELIA CROTCHETT

OHIO SEWER PIPE CO.
SEWERS MEAN CIVILIZATION
Columbus Ohio USA

Dec. 1, 1936

Mr. Louis Hirnak,
5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.

Dear Sir:

My wife, Mrs. Shelia Crotchett, informs me that you have in your possession certain valuable manuscripts of stories and books belonging to her, and that you positively refuse to return these valuable properties. I have undertaken to act for Mrs. Crotchett in this matter, and unless we have action at once in the return of these properties, I shall be forced to take the matter to the courts.

Yours truly,

J. V. CROTCHETT

JVC:k

~

5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.,
Dec. 15, 1936

J. V. Crotchett, Esq.,
Ohio Sewer Pipe Co.,
Columbus, Ohio.

Dear Mr. Crotchett:

At odd moments for the past months I have gone through the writings of your wife, (Miss) Shelia Crotchett. There were at least thirty hours of reading to the job, and I had no opportunity to

give myself without interruption to the tedious task. Frankly, and as man to man, I don't hesitate to tell you the stuff is so hopelessly bad that I am at a loss to suggest any correction.

The fact that you have intervened for your wife makes the situation less difficult; for my opinion is that your wife can't write and never will write intelligently. Out of some 800,000 words sent me, I cannot remember one paragraph, or even one sentence, worth the time spent writing it. I should certainly hate to encourage Mrs. Crotchett even slightly to try for publication. Of course she will continue to write anyhow, but my advice is that she abandon any idea of selling her stuff. I could be wrong here, but I don't think I am. Under separate cover I am forwarding the manuscripts to you in care of the Ohio Sewer Pipe Company.

Sincerely yours,

LOUIS HIRNAK

OHIO SEWER PIPE CO.

SEWERS MEAN CIVILIZATION

Columbus Ohio USA

Dec. 22, 1936

Mr. Louis Hirnak,
5436 Venice Blvd.,
Santa Monica, Calif.

Sir:

The manuscripts have been received. I consider your letter a scurrilous insult, not only to me but to Mrs. Crotchett as well. Despite your sarcastic remarks, my wife has countless friends who consider her literary writings much superior to recognized authors, and certainly much superior to the writings of an unknown upstart like yourself.

Mrs. Crotchett and I happen to be decent Americans, while you have a very foreign-sounding name. If there is so much about the United States that you aliens don't like, why the hell don't you go back where you came from?

Yours truly,

J. V. CROTCHETT

JVC:k



THE FAD OF DEVIL-BAITING

BY DUNCAN AIKMAN

THE ancient art of labeling political adversaries as demons appears to have reached a new high in these ferocious times. The heretic hunters, the spysers-out of perverted opinions, and the unmaskers of religious, political, and class enemies are inheriting the earth again. In the present instance, the instigators of the uproar are the Red-baiters and Fascist-baiters, the New and Old Deal-baiters, the Socialist- and Reactionary-baiters — rather than the witch-burners, the persecutors of the Anabaptist heresies, or the Crusaders against the Protocols of Zion. The net result, however, is the same. The air above the American veldt is throbbing with the incoherent epithets of a bewildering demonology.

When, in the middle of an evening of cheery 1937 tabletalk, a fellow citizen is called a “dirty Red”, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine whether he is a whirling Leninist or merely a Young Republican whom the D.A.R. suspects of favoring an eight-hour day. When the Com-

munists describe some newly exposed Class Enemy as a Hitlerite, only a profound study of the context will establish whether they are exposing a Nazi agitator or expressing their opinion of a fellow-cellmate who prefers to carry out the Revolution by decimating, rather than exterminating, the Old Guard Socialists.

The situation is, of course, by no means unprecedented. Even in the best of times, an enormous fraction of the race imagines itself making way heroically against the play of diabolic forces, and gives the adversaries such infernal names as are necessary to keep the melodrama going. In hard and furious times, the tendency to wallow in the belief that the heterodoxies of the enemy imply devil-possession attains psychotic ecstasy. To indicate the current stage of devil-labeling, I cite three instances.

The other evening, at what had started out to be a cheerful dinner party on the fringe of New York’s Little Moscow, one of the guests reported progress in negotiations