

# Top of My Head



## Take Another Letter

CUNARD STEAMSHIP CO., LTD.,  
25 BROADWAY,  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

DEAR SIR:

Well, I blew the *Queen Mary* deal. I didn't mind that my bid for the boat wasn't accepted. What hurt me was that you didn't answer my two letters. I had to read it in the papers. That upset me terribly. Or, as you fellows say, it shivered my timbers.

I had fantastic plans for the boat. I was going to retire from all the newspaper and TV headlines and spend my declining years reclining on the deck of the boat, just living off social security and welfare. Well, it's just as well I didn't get the boat. We had a strike in our Welfare Department in New York, you know. It was murder. Or, as you would put it, mutiny on the bounty.

Although I didn't get any letter from you, I did receive some sympathetic mail

from people who read my letters to you here. Some suggested that had you accepted my bid I wouldn't have been able to make the payment. If this is true you may be interested to know that all my life I have paid my bills promptly on the first. Not a month went by. No one ever called me a skipper. (Oops, that's an unfortunate choice of language!)

A LETTER from George Gilfillan of Monte Vista, Colorado, suggested that in my letter to you I left out the hyphen in "Steam-Ship." "All Cunard letterheads are imprinted 'Cunard Steam-Ship Co.,"' he wrote, omitting the hyphen from "letterheads." I called your New York office and asked the operator whether there was a hyphen, because the phone book spells it without the hyphen. She insisted there was no hyphen. Well, if you fellows can't make up your mind on that, no wonder.

And a letter from Wallace Kirkland of

Oak Park, Illinois, tells of the time, during the war, he was a photographer in Australia with MacArthur. "Your love, the *Queen Mary*," he writes, "was in Sydney harbor. The *Queen* was used then as a troop carrier. Her lovely interior was a mess. None of the fancy draperies, and with names of some of the military passengers carved in her woodwork." Am I glad I didn't get that second-hand boat!

But when you didn't notify me personally, it was like pouring salt on an open wound. Or the briny deep. However, I come now with a bid for the *Queen Elizabeth*, which I read now is for sale in 1968. My exuberance and anxiety to buy undid me in my first letter. I was too popeyed. The sailor man, you know. So I'm playing it cool this time.

In the first place, I think you ought to stop advertising the *Queen Elizabeth* as the "sister ship" of the *Queen Mary*. We all know they were the daughters of Henry VIII—Mary born of Catherine of Aragon, Elizabeth of Anne Boleyn. So let's play it straight. Or steer a true course. The *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Mary* are stepsister ships. I don't know whether you spell that with a hyphen or not. I don't.

WHERE in my first letters I didn't ask too many questions about the boat, I have time now to investigate this one more thoroughly. I want to go down on the bridge, to amble along the decks. Or, as you say, walk the plank. Does the boat have an outboard motor? Or an inboard motor? I want to inspect the kitchen. Also the galley. Little things like that.

So let's get down to brass tacks. Or down below, as you say. This is the bid of a solid citizen who wants a boat. I can imagine what your reaction was when you got the bid on the *Queen Mary* from Hugh Hefner, the *Playboy* publisher. "All those hatches full of hatches?" you shouted. And you're so right. And just think what "sea legs" would have meant to that gentleman.

I can understand why you turned down a bid of \$2,000,000 from New York City Mayor John Lindsay, who wanted to turn the *Queen* into a school off the East Coast. A worthy project. But he didn't fool you. "Two million dollars?" you asked. "Yeh? Where's he going to get it? He can't even sell those lottery tickets."

But if I had to lose the boat, I would have preferred losing it to our Mayor. In spite of the snide remark made by a dissident councilman who said: "It figures he could use the *Queen Mary*. He's been at sea around New York for a long time now."

Hope to hear from you. The least I deserve is an answer. This is not my first letter to you. Or maiden voyage, as you old salts put it. So how about it? Mother Sills sends her best. —GOODMAN ACE.



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# Trade Winds



In the linen department of Korvette's Fifth Avenue store in New York recently, signs designated WHITE MUSLIM bedsheets.

Almost twenty years ago, Charles Jackson's third novel was published. It was about mental deficiency, his first book having covered alcoholism, and his second, homosexuality. After twenty years of what Jackson describes as writer's block, he is back with his fourth novel, *A Second-Hand Life* [SR, Aug. 12], the subject of this one being nymphomania. (The *Boston Globe* nicknamed it "The Lust Weekend.")

During those twenty years things weren't too happy for Jackson, from the standpoint of a writer. There was a recurrence of tuberculosis, requiring surgery and a lot of time recuperating. ("They only took out one lung," he quips, puffing on a cigarette.) Except for a few short stories, he just couldn't work, being both physically and mentally exhausted, it seemed.

"I thought I was a failure, that I had been a writer merely by accident and that it was all in the past. It didn't help to have people asking me, 'Why don't you write more?'"

Then two years ago something happened: Macmillan advanced money for the new book, without even asking so much as what it would be about. They installed Jackson in an apartment in the Chelsea Hotel, where the atmosphere could hardly be more conducive to creative efforts, and he proceeded to unblock himself. The other day news came that New American Library would pay \$100,000 for paperback rights to *A Second-Hand Life*, and that the Literary Guild has made it an alternate selection.

Jackson, looking much younger than his sixty-four years, much healthier than his medical history would indicate, and much happier than his writer's block should have left him, smiles cheerfully and says:

"Oh, I'm not as broke as I sound, though I'm always in debt. *The Lost Weekend* is in twenty-four languages and sells regularly. There are two editions in this country right now. It's always taken care of me: \$24 from Greece here, and \$16 from Finland there. It adds up."

Some years ago, when Robert G. Ryan, now editor of *Hardware Consultant*, was with the Philadelphia In-

quirer, he was witness to this incident. A fellow reporter, upon completing his assignment, stopped in a convenient bar for his customary morning bracer and from there called his city editor.

CITY EDITOR: Where are you now?

REPORTER: At Penn Station.

CITY EDITOR: Well, get the hell out of there quick. It's on fire.

(And sure enough, Philadelphia's Penn Station did burn down.)

The two best-selling paperbacks are *Valley of the Dolls*, fiction, and *The Medium Is the Massage*, nonfiction. Jerome Agel, who produced the latter, was struck with the idea of getting the two authors together on television to discuss the secrets of best-sellerdom. But the idea fizzled when he approached them.

"Sorry," McLuhan said. "Don't know her work." And Jacqueline Susann asked, "Marshall who? The medium is the what?"

In the neat little town of Wellington, Kansas, Mrs. John W. Garland was a judge in the junior high school essay contest on keeping the city clean. One of the entries went as follows:

Why are we humans so sloppy? If we had to take a look around us then choose an animal to represent us, we would have to pick a pig rather than a clean, proud bird like the national eagle.

Maybe the birds have more sense, in this aspect. How many skies have you seen which were littered? Perhaps it is because humans are not up there walking around, leaving a trail of waste paper behind when up there. When we are riding in an airplane we do not open a window to throw out a candy wrapper.

This is our town, and I would very much prefer a beautiful bird over a pig. If this is not clearly evident to you, just look up in the sky and think how neat birds are, then look around you.

Did you hear about the psychiatrist who ran into a woman patient of his on the street? She was with her husband, and she introduced him by saying, "Doctor, this is one of the men I've been telling you about."

Several people have sent me this story, admitting that it's an old one, so I'll get it out of the way. A professor of

# Aruba?

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