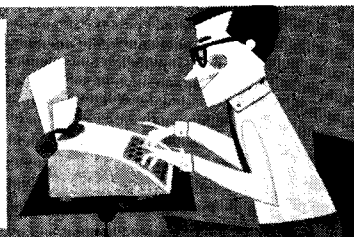


Top of My Head



AS IT MUST to all men, I suppose, a chain letter came to me in the mail. The mistake I made was reading it:

THINK A PRAYER

"TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT AND ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AND HE ALWAYS LIGHTS THE WAY."

This prayer has been sent to you for good luck. The original copy came from the Netherlands. It has been around the world nine times. The luck has been sent to you. You are to receive good luck within the next four days after receiving this copy. Please do not send money. Do not keep this copy; it must leave in ninety-six hours after receiving it. A U.S.A. officer received \$7,000; a general received \$60,000, but lost it because he broke the chain. While in the Philippines a

Luck Be a Prayer Tonight

general lost his life six days after receiving his copy. He failed to circulate the copy. However, before his death he received \$75,000 he had won. Please send twenty copies and see what happens on the fourth day.

This rather obvious and tasteless admixture of Faith and Greed—faith in Him, and trust in Lady Luck (presumably in equal ratio)—is in direct contrast to the tenets I was always taught: The reward for faith is an eternal one—the Kingdom of Heaven. Now, according to this letter, I can preserve my soul and simultaneously build up my bank account.

But then I ask myself, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the world, and lose his own soul?"

I threw the letter into the wastebasket. Then I picked it up and reread it. I said to myself, "And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Charity." But accord-

ing to this prayerful letter it is now: "And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Charity, and Luck. And the greatest of these is Luck."

I threw the letter away and went about my work. But only briefly. Again the letter came out and I decided to write the sender and ask if the \$75,000 would be tax free. Also there was a question as to whether the \$75,000 was considered earned income, or could it be entered as "manna from heaven," for which the tax would be only a tithe? But the letter was anonymous. I said to myself, "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

And speaking of Satan, why in hell was I one of the chosen few to whom one of twenty copies was sent that I might receive all this good luck for a mere prayer? True, this very morning I pointed a little old lady toward the subway to Flushing. And once, I recall, I did cast some soggy crumbs of bread upon the waters of a rain-swept gutter to feed a starving pigeon, and now am I to find it returned 75,000-fold in only ninety-six hours if I make twenty copies of a letter to be sent to twenty friends?

Now as to the matter of twenty friends. How do I go about making seventeen more friends in ninety-six hours? Since it has taken me so many years to make the few I have, I wondered what the odds would be in Las Vegas to make the balance in that allotted time. The odds on throwing snake eyes or boxcars are about ten to one. Luck would really have to be a lady tonight.

Forget it. I crumpled the letter and threw it away again and decided to stick with our state lottery and hope—not pray—for the best. Rubbish! Forget it! One happy thing about me—I'm not superstitious. Knock wood. As I got ready to leave the office that evening, I noticed the letter had missed the wastebasket. I reread it.

They put all that scary stuff in the letter to grab you. The general who died after receiving \$75,000 just because he didn't send twenty copies. Nonsense! No intelligent human would be stampeded into such a stupid venture.

Twenty copies. Do you know how long it would take to make twenty copies? I can tell you. It takes forty-two minutes and thirty-eight seconds. And I'm a pretty fast typist. Especially when I'm nervous.

Now I have to rush around and find airmail and special-delivery stamps. You see, we are all brave knights in shining armor, spun of the finest invisible threads of Fear and Dread, which drape our shoulders like the old emperor's clothes.

But this is no time to philosophize. I have only a ninety-six-hour deadline to get in on this bonanza, for heaven's sake!
—GOODMAN ACE.

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And we installed an air-conditioning system that kept people from feeling stuffy, on the ground or in the air.

What we had, as a result was the most advanced commercial jet of its time.

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We're sending the VC 10 to Britain, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Barbados*, Antigua*, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Orient these days.

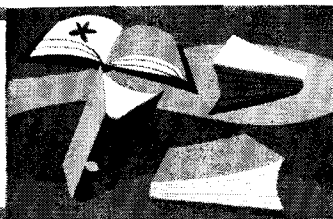
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Trade Winds



A fellow in New York tells me he answered his telephone the other day and heard the following: "This is a recording. You have answered an incorrect phone call. Please hang up and make sure the next time to answer a correct call. Thank you."

Last month Joe and Janet Bell, who live near Los Angeles, heard a radio advertisement sponsored by American Airlines which announced a half-fare flight each midnight to Chicago. The general idea was: Nobody flies at midnight, and here's this half-empty plane going out, so if you're willing to come and stand by, you can make the flight for \$50. As the Bells were on their way east, they decided to take advantage of the offer. They were cautious enough to phone the airport several times during the day, and were told that everything was favorable, but to get there a couple of hours before takeoff, just to be on the safe side.

They arrived about 9 o'clock and found the waiting room crowded. It's always crowded, they reminded themselves. But as time went on, and as planes left, the crowd seemed to grow. The truth dawned when, at fifteen minutes before midnight, the public address system called for "all adult standbys for the midnight Chicago flight—leave tickets at American Airlines counter." Suddenly the waiting room was empty, as the approximately 200 people in it converged on the counter, where confusion reigned as clerks attempted to sort out the tickets according to who arrived first.

Now the plane was loading, and the full-paying passengers went on, to be followed by the military standbys. Then a crowd of youth standbys boarded. At last came the turn of the adult standbys on half-fare. Four names were called. That was all the space left on the plane. The Bells didn't make it, nor did the other 190-odd customers.

Now, you might think such a situation would be only slightly inconvenient and that you would be able to handle it with your usual aplomb. Maybe. But there were no more planes till morning, and the airline had already sent everyone's baggage to Chicago!

The man who knows more than anyone else about the New York theater is someone you've never heard of. His name is Herman Pepper, and the reason he knows so much is that his job is to make sure that when you attend the theater you get a *Playbill*. The proud boast of Herman Pepper, circulation director of the magazine, is that "no one has ever walked into a show and not gotten a *Playbill*."

Now the way he manages this is to visit every day every Broadway house where a stage show is playing—and that means that at the peak of the season, in October, for instance, he covers up to thirty-four houses, including the Palace. He does this by foot, starting his rounds early in the evening and finishing late. He checks attendance, and decides what the next morning's truck should deliver to each theater. Every month, 1,500,000 *Playbills* are published for most of the legitimate theaters in the country, from Los Angeles to Boston. Each issue contains articles, features, fashions, and, of course, the cast of characters and biographies for the show in question. *Playbill* is free to all (except to the advertisers).

Herman Pepper has been to the theater more than anyone else alive, but he has seen only three shows from beginning to end: *Pajama Game*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He doesn't smoke, he eats carefully, and he walks lightly, he believes, because his shoes last a long time. He has been riding herd on *Playbill* for twenty-one years. A few years ago he spent six weeks in a hospital in Philadelphia. Some friends came to pick him up and drive him to his Staten Island home. As they neared New York, Mr. Pepper got fidgety and finally said, "Let's stop and check the Winter Garden. I'm worried." Which he did.

Incidentally, some old *Playbills* are items for collectors. The publishers themselves wouldn't mind having copies of a few missing ones, such as that for *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* (1925). The price at a back-issue magazine store for *Whoopee* is \$5, and for *Strange Interlude*, \$4.

Sharps and Flats: You can find all sorts of interesting news in the *Time Capsules* that *Time* magazine is compiling from back issues of the magazine. *Time Capsule* 1941 reports that King George VI has cut his cigarette smoking because of wartime rationing of tobacco. (*Time*

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