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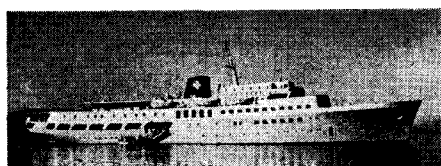
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Top of My Head

Goodman Ace

The Puny Express

I WAS busily pounding out a hot letter to the U.S. Post Office Department in Washington, D.C., complaining about the slow delivery of my mail and suggesting that the department consider delivering alphabetically, when it suddenly occurred to me heaven knows when the letter would get there.

All that stuff about "neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds" was OK back in the stagecoach days, but it says nothing about Hong Kong flu, bunions, slipped discs, ferocious dogs, or the franking privileges of Congressional mail.

When he took office, the new Postmaster General, Winton M. Blount, said that he placed top priority on quicker, better mail service. But he also said he had no quick, better solutions. I think I can help him there.

Everyone knows about the franking privilege that members of Congress enjoy. But what is not generally known is how much they enjoy it. I have some figures here which may demonstrate what has been clogging up the delivery of our mail lately.

In 1963, there were 9,300,000 pieces of franked mail sent by Congress. In 1967, the number had risen to 19,300,000 pieces. And Congress had appropriated \$9,700,000 for that enjoyable privilege. Who said there was a communication gap?

We all know that the Post Office Department is not one of your best money-making propositions. I mean if it were on the Big Board I doubt there would be any great demand for any of its stock, unless you could use it as tax loss.

So Timothy J. May, the former Post Office general counsel, started looking around for some loopholes to plug some of the losses of the department. He sent a hot letter to Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, which indicated that although Counsel May was in favor of keeping those letters and postcards coming in, he believed that when the Senator had franked a newsletter to his constituents that contained a picture of the Senator's wife, the Senator had over-enjoyed the franking privilege and he owed the Government \$25,000, and would the Senator please remit?

Well, the Senator wrote back saying he would not only not please remit, but

he submitted that the newsletter with the picture of his wife was "no more political than those sent by other Senators."

So Mr. May sent the Senator another letter, not as hot as the first letter; in fact, it was rather warm. He said he was withdrawing the department's request for the Senator to repay the Government for mailing that newsletter, and that in the future the Post Office Department would treat postal franking privileges as "a matter strictly between a member of Congress and his conscience."

With that guideline, no matter what your zip code is, you are still not going to buy any stock in a corporation like that. I keep referring to a corporation because there have been suggestions that the Post Office Department be turned over to big business and operated as a private enterprise. The new Postmaster General has taken no stand on this, but it has several advantages worth considering.

Competition being the lifeblood of business, it will soon become apparent to management that one post office corporation can not deliver all the mail to 200 million, any more than General Motors can deliver all the cars we need, or Alcoa all the aluminum we need, or Dow Chemical all the napalm we need. So there will develop several post office corporations operating competitively.

Competition thrives on advertising, an item in which our Post Office Department has been less than imaginative. Urging us to write a zip code on an envelope hasn't necessarily guaranteed expeditious delivery. The big business post offices will be vying with each other in hard-sell TV commercials. Fast delivery will be the big selling point.

"We deliver" will be an early slogan, until another company comes up with "Same day delivery" or "Guaranteed fast delivery or your stamp money back." And as competition gets hotter, there will be "Green stamps given if your envelope has a zip code." And when business drops off after the Christmas rush, "Storewide clearance on all stamps."

Sound good? It'll never happen, because Congress will have to pass on it. And when some smart-alecky corporation efficiency expert testifies that when private business takes over there will be no more franking privileges, we'll be right back to franking privileges being "a matter strictly between a member of Congress and his conscience."

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A year ago at the opening reception for critics, authors, publishers, and others who were attending the National Book Awards in New York, they sipped and gossiped, mainly about who might be the winners. The judges had picked them, but the information was to be top secret until the big affair at Philharmonic Hall two days hence. "The envelope, please" sort of thing. Each winner was to emerge from the wings and accept his prize.

But the secret was not kept. The reception was interrupted by a voice from the loudspeaker. Cocktails were poised in mid-air as the publishing world heard that *The New York Times* would, as it had done in the past, prematurely reveal the 1968 NBA winners in the next morning's paper.

However, this year the National Book Committee got around the problem by not having the judges meet till Monday, March 10. The decisions were announced shortly after they had been reached. Everybody got the news at once, and for once the *Times* was almost last. Now, for those of you who wait to read *TRADE WINDS* to find out what is really happening, here are the authors who won the 1969 National Book Awards for "the most distinguished" work in each category.

ARTS AND LETTERS: *The Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer (New American Library).

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: *Journey from Peppermint Street* by Meindert De Jong (Harper & Row).

FICTION: *Steps* by Jerzy Kosinski (Random House).

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY: *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* by Winthrop D. Jordan (University of North Carolina Press).

POETRY: *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* by John Berryman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

SCIENCES: *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* by Robert Jay Lifton (Random House).

TRANSLATION: *Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino, translated by William Weaver (Harcourt, Brace & World).

The ceremony itself, when the awards are presented and the winners make short speeches, has for a couple of years produced fireworks in addition to its regular function. Two years ago, a body of protesters walked out to signify their objection to the keynote speaker, Vice

President Humphrey. Last year, poet Robert Blye, an award-winner, made an impassioned speech against the war and turned over his check then and there to a member of a draft resistance organization. This year, at least three of the winners—Kosinski, Mailer, and Jordan—had written books which indicated their deep involvement with and compassion for humanity. But there were no demonstrations. Their acceptance speeches were merely beautifully phrased appeals to the intellectual community and to the world for some sort of salvation before it is too late.

"We are a savagely mechanical society poised upon the lip, no, the main of a spiritual revolution which will wash the psychic roots of every national institution out to sea," Mailer said. "We are on the brink of dreams and disasters."

Jerzy (pronounced something like Yer-esh) Kosinski is an amazing young man. Ten years ago he came to this country and learned English. Now he has written two novels (*The Painted Bird* was the first) which show what a beautiful language it is indeed in the hands of someone who knows how to use it. (He makes one think of Conrad.) His view of his adopted America is that it has changed in the ten years since he first came. "Americans wrest freedom from each other," he said direly.

Dr. Lifton's study of Hiroshima survivors probably gives him a more vivid image of impending doom than most anyone could acquire. He made it clear where he stands. The weapons, he said, "become grotesque technological deities for a debased religion of nuclearism—gods sought by everybody as part of an all-too-human tendency to confuse the power of apocalyptic destruction with the capacity to protect, or even create, life."

Maybe you are familiar with the case of the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes. He was on a ship that happened to stop in Puerto Rico. When he attempted to get off and tour San Juan, he was detained by our immigration officials. It seems that he is on a blacklist because several years ago he interviewed some Mexicans who, our State Department judged, were Communists. Our guilt-by-association policy thus affected Señor Fuentes.

The National Book Awards was a good chance, then, for the passing around of a petition calling on the new Administration to do away with the immigration regulation which makes use of this black-