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The Authorix

E. E. Farley

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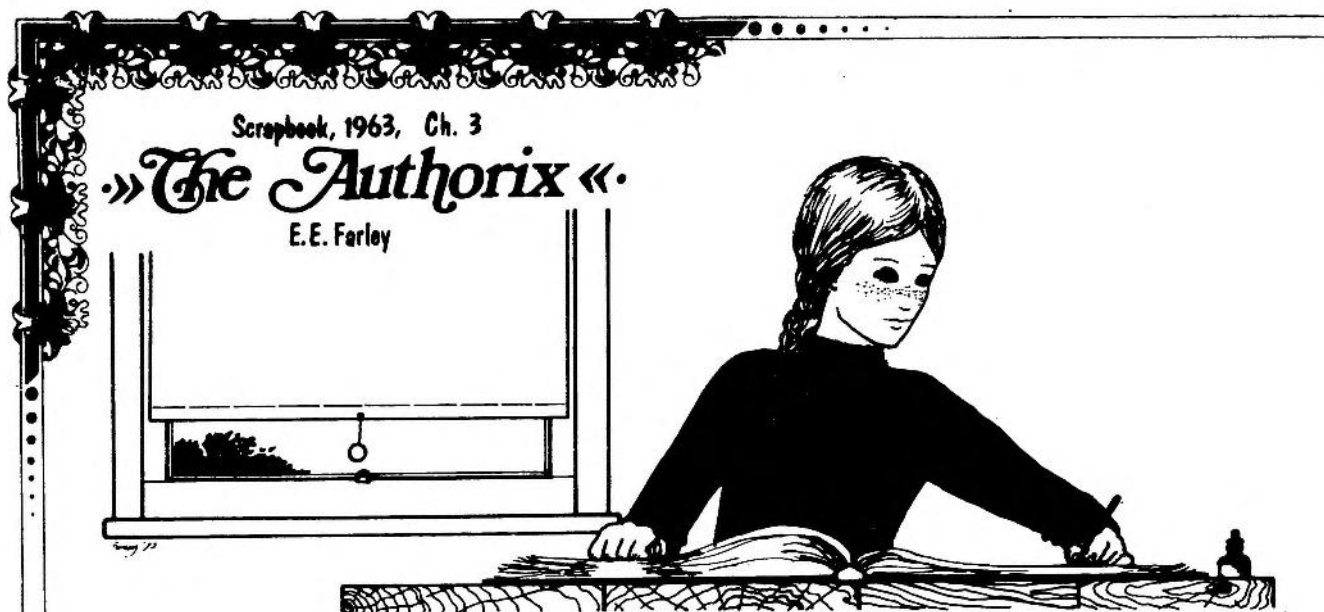
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Abstract

Boy! Am I ever glad to be out of this one. Wait a minute, that's a lousy way to start anything.

Keywords

Mythril; Mythopoeic; Fiction; The Authorix; E. E. Farley



Boy! Am I ever glad to be out of this one.

Wait a minute, that's a lousy way to start anything. Now everyone's all curious about what this "this" is I'm talking about. I'll explain. You see, I'm out of the doghouse with my mother.

Hold it again, that wasn't very good either. Actually, I'm not exactly out of the doghouse, but I sure pulled my sister in with me. To be completely accurate, I have never been really out of the doghouse since I first got in, which was at the tender age of five.

Until then, I was actually treated like a human being. In fact, I was mother's little darling. The reason for this was that, somewhere along the line, she got the idea that being left-handed was some terrible handicap. Like any other red-blooded kid with any amount of brains in her head, I exploited this theory until I finally went too far.

We were on the docks at the time. I think we were waiting for someone to come in on a boat, but I don't really remember; five is a pretty young age. All I do remember is that I got very tired of just standing there, so I went exploring. After a while I got acquainted with an old fisherman who owned a talking parrot. When I finally went back to the dock where my parents were (and you may imagine that they were pretty frantic by that time), I had acquired a swagger, a tattoo which later came off in soap and water, and a greatly enriched vocabulary. I think the person they were waiting for was a clergyman. Funny how a little thing like that can completely upset the applecart.

After that, you can be quite sure there was no more, "Just a minute, Janey, I'll help you with that." Rather, all I got was likely to be, "Jane! For goodness' sake brush your hair. And tuck that shirt in!"

It does the essence of nothing to tell her that I have brushed my hair; it just grows that way. And that the shirt I am wearing is not made to be tucked in.

Of course, Mary can do no wrong. Like, that incident with the eye makeup was a coincidence (she got caught at it).

And Tommy? Well, you can't tell much about him. He's never around. But with me, everything's clear as crystal. She hates me. Well, I won't go that far. She just doesn't trust me.

My best friend Joanie has been packed off to Vermont to stay with her grandparents because her mother is very sick. Of course I'm sorry that her mother is sick, but what am I supposed to do when my only real friend is on the other side of the country?

So here I am. It's the end of January and, all of a sudden, I'm left with nothing to do but mope around and exasperate my sister. I don't like the situation, naturally. And my sister certainly doesn't like it, even more naturally. Little stuff like dumping extra soap in the sink when she is running the dishwasher is one thing, but sooner or later it builds up.

We were visiting at the time. Which makes it about twice as bad as it would be if we were anywhere else. Mom was in the front room talking with the grown-ups, and Tommy hadn't come. Mary and I were out in the back yard with the hostess' kids, who were all primary school age, and the whole thing was a crashing bore. Anyhow, one of the kids was tagging along after me, chattering a blue streak and, in general, making a pest of himself, when, all of a sudden, he looks up at me and asks:

"My mommy and daddy won't tell me, will you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" I asked, although I had a pretty good hunch.

"Where do babies come from?"

I was tempted to say the stork brings them. But the kid was already into grade school, and by that time most kids know that there aren't any storks in the Western Hemisphere. Of course, it would be perfectly simple to say that they come from inside the mother, but then the kid might start asking how they get there and, if you say that the father puts them there, he'd ask how he does that. When you get to that point, it's awfully easy to say the wrong thing.

And then, I had a real brainstorm. Why not send the little man with the slippery questions over to Miss Prunes and Prisms,

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over on the back porch talking to the rest of the little monsters? Oh, that would be gorgeous. Her, with her ladylike manners. Let's see how she gets out of it.

"Well now," I said thoughtfully, "I'm not so sure. You see, I'm not very good in school. I don't learn much. But now, that girl gets straight 'A's' in almost everything. If anybody knows, she does."

The kid grinned at me and ran over to the porch. "Hey?" he piped up, "Where do babies come from?"

Mary looked over at me and asked, "Did she tell you to ask me that?" There was a dangerous tone in her voice.

The kid nodded. "She said that if anybody knew, you would."

"Oh, she did, did she?" She stood up and started after me. "Just wait till I get hold of you, Jane Quarren, you'll be sorry!"

I ran to the nearest tree and, skirt or no skirt, I climbed as high as I could, and started pelting her with twigs. I didn't come down till Mom was ready to leave.

Mary probably won't speak to me for a month.

I hope.

I think I'd better take this opportunity to tell you that Quarren is not our real name. Our real name is quite common, so I'm making up the name of Quarren, so you won't get us mixed up with anybody.

Well, after that little affair, I didn't dare step out of line again, so I got very respectable, and got acquainted with a new girl in school, who is in the other class. Peg has lived in our town for about a month now. I had been thinking of getting acquainted for a couple of weeks, since she is one of those people who holds you in awe. No one can figure out what makes her tick. When she first came, nobody paid any more attention to her than they would to any other new kid, but, in a couple of weeks she had quite a fan club. Because of her personality, no doubt, which is outstanding, to say the least.

We hit it off fine. The second day we had lunch over in the same corner of the playground, with the football team and her fan club, which is mainly boys. It was a blast, although it probably did look a little odd. Two girls and about fifteen or sixteen fellows.

There's just one thing that I find a little odd. Like I said, after about two weeks Peg had acquired a fan club; however, this fan club consisted mainly of boys and people who had the reputation of being more than a little unconventional. The point is this, Peg's friends were not "soashes". Nothing wrong with that, I'm just saying that Peg didn't go over too big with the "upper crust", as her sort seldom do. But I could see that certain types, like my sister and her goofy friends, began avoiding her at almost the same time that people like me were getting to know her. At least they seemed to be avoiding her. At times I saw them talking to her quite normally. In private. Like, in corners of the school yard after nearly everyone had gone home. It was like an old spy movie on T.V. But it wasn't any of my business, so I kept quiet about it.

It was about this time that I became aware of something else, which got me rather interested. It also got the authorities rather interested. It was, to be exact, a two page magazine, which became increasingly popular, until it swamped the campus. The reason for the authorities being so interested was that this particular magazine was, in a word, risqué. They were also interested because it was being written by someone in the eighth grade, and, so far, they were at a loss as to who it could be.

The fact that I became aware of the existence of the magazine and that I got to know Peg at about the same time had nothing to do with each other. At least not as far as I was concerned. Yet.

I'll admit that I was not above looking through a copy. As a matter of fact, I even subscribe to it. It's called the "Daily Roach" and it comes out twice weekly. A kid on the football team gets my copies for me, so I guess if the authorities started asking me questions, I wouldn't be of much help.

After I read my copies I pass them on to Whitey. I don't dare take a chance on bringing one home. As I said, my mother doesn't trust me.

About this time, certain types, like my sister and her bunch, suddenly started avoiding me and looking down their noses at me. Even more than usual. I had my suspicions, but I kept them to myself. A few days later I was over at Peg's house and we were talking about fifty thousand, four hundred and eighty-three different subjects, when, suddenly, she said:

"Hey, before I forget. Here's your copy; hot off the press." She tossed me a brand new copy of the "Daily Roach".

And now I saw everything crystal clear.

Now I was faced with a decision. I could tell my mother all about my friend Peg, be forbidden to see her, and see her anyway. Or, I could let my mother find out about Peg however she might, be forbidden to see Peg, and see her anyway. I had a choice.

For a couple of weeks nothing at all happened, so I won't bother telling you about it. Needless to say, Peg and I got to be darned good friends.

And then, "Jinx," Peg said to me, "I think you have a dirty mind."

"Aren't you glad?" I said. We both laughed. We were at Peg's house at the time.

"Hey, read this. How's it go?" she said, handing me a rough draft of a new article. It was about some girl who had an illegitimate child by her brother, or something like that. Now you see why the authorities are after the "Daily Roach"; that sort of stuff is typical of the things my friend Peg writes. She'll take a downright sordid plot, and then she'll dope it up until it's hilarious. Of course, what it does to your psyche can only be imagined.

Here is this one feature which she calls "Our Town." It's all about things that happen in school. Usually, it's stories about the faculty (now you see another reason why the authorities are after it); but she also likes to

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get hold of things about the "soashes" too.

For anyone who doesn't know what a "soash" is, it is another name for the smug, smart-alecky snobs who go around acting like they think they are the reason that the sun rises each morning. Peg and I have a good laugh at these creeps and squares who, in public, treat us like we were something that the sanitation department found lurking behind a garbage pail; and the minute they think no one is looking, will come running to Peg to buy a copy of her mag.

"Hey, Peg, what's the word on the 'Our Town', this time?"

"I haven't got one yet. You know of anything I can work on?"

I suddenly started snickering. "Could you use one on my sister?" I asked.

"Oh, you mean little miss fancy-pants? Shoot."

"Well, we were over at this place visiting, y'know, and we were out in the back yard with all the little kids. Well..."

I'll spare you the details; you've already heard them. Peg asked me if she could use it. I told her I'd even help her write it if she wanted me to. And by the time I left her house that afternoon I was a co-author. The article was written in Peg's style (vile), but it had a certain flavor and expressions which could have only come from me.

Thus starteth a pretty wild team. And then someone came along and upset the applecart. I'll give you three guesses who. The first two don't count.

I was wrong in supposing that my sister would give me the old angry silence. But then, she hasn't said anything, either. She speaks when I speak to her, she's polite, cooperative, and agreeable. Now, if it were Joanie, I would say that she was heaping coals of fire upon my head; but I know my sister, she's just waiting.

Now that I'm looking backward, I remember that the first time I had Peg over to my house, Mary got a very strange look in her eye. You know what kind of a look. "And her eyes had all the seeming of a demon that was dreaming," if I may be allowed to misquote something. Anyhow, you've got the idea. And I'm the one who should have gotten the idea in the first place. However, I slipped up that time and let it pass.

When I read "my" article in the next issue, I passed it on to Whitey, proudly. That was on a Thursday, January 31st. And how well I remember that day.

I remember it because that was the day of the perfume. I don't wear perfume, no matter what; but when I went to my room after school, I could smell it. I asked my mother if she had been in my room, but she said no. Mary wasn't at home at the minute, so I quietly went into her room and smelled her different kinds of perfume, but it wasn't any of them. Mom soon left the house and I went in her room and smelled hers. Not that I don't trust my mother, but Mary has a habit of borrowing things. It wasn't any of Mom's either. Perhaps it was someone's idea to quietly drive me out of my mind. Of course, I could have easily been mistaken about the scent, it was pretty faint. Besides, after smelling ten or eleven different kinds of perfume, one is apt to get a little confused.

Nothing else came up till the following Wednesday. I was coming home from football practice at the park. When I opened the front door I knew I was in for it. It's a feeling that you sometimes get at times like that; I can't describe it. I went into the front room, where the rest of the family were arranged. I guess they had been watching for me and, when they saw me coming, they all took their places. Dad was sitting in his chair, looking uncomfortable; Mom and Mary were over by the piano. Mom was looking stern, Mary was looking smug. Even Tommy, by the fireplace, was trying to look solemn.

"Is something wrong?" I asked, although it was quite obvious that something was. And the worst part was that I hadn't the slightest idea what.

"Yes, you might say that something is wrong," my mother said, almost sarcastically. "I believe you know what."

"I don't know," I said, and I'm sure that I must have looked blank enough to please anyone. But they weren't buying.

"Has there, or has there not, been a magazine going around your school?" she said.

"Yeah," I admitted. So that was it; Mary had blabbed.

"And what do you think of it?" Mom continued.

"Well... It's very...interesting." "The authorities think so too," she said sharply. "Do they know who is writing it?"

"No ma'am."

"But we know, don't we?" asked my sister nastily. The way she said it implied that I was the author. The heck with the innocent act. The look I gave her was the kind that, if looks could kill, I'd be attending a funeral.

"We are very disappointed in you, Jane," said my mother, in a most convincing manner.

"But what makes you think I have anything to do with it!"

"These," she said, holding out two of Peg's latest. One of them was the one with the facts and expressions which she knew only too well. I stared at them stupidly.

"I found them in your room," she said.

"In my room!"

"In your room."

This had to be some sort of a nightmare. I looked at Mary. She smirked.

"Jane," said my mother, "tomorrow you are going to the office and admit to writing this trash, and, if I ever find another one..."

"But I don't write it!" I insisted.

"In that case you are going to tell who does."

That is when I saw red. I may have more than my share of faults, but I would never fink out on a pal. I headed for the door.

"Where do you think you're going?" Mary snipped at me.

"I DON'T KNOW!" I bellowed. "And if I did, I certainly wouldn't tell you!" I charged out the door, slamming it after me.

It was long after dark when I came home, probably at least ten-thirty. I climbed in the window. I was seriously thinking of getting some stuff together and leaving for good, but that wouldn't have

helped anything. I didn't turn on any lights, since my eyes were used to the dark, and I didn't make any noise, because I didn't particularly want anyone to know that I was back.

When I went to my closet to get my pajamas, I remembered that Mom had made me put them in the dirty clothes when I dumped half a bottle of cola all over myself the night before. Oh well, no trouble in that, just get a clean pair out of the drawer. But, when I opened the bottom drawer and started plowing through for a clean pair of pajamas, all of a sudden I could smell that perfume again! By now I knew that it tied in somehow, but how can I find that out if I don't even know what it is! That perfume is driving me out of my ever-loving mind!

Finally I gave up and went to bed. It took a while, but I dozed off after a bit...

Suddenly, I was wide awake. "Darnit," I thought, "now's a fine time to get insomnia." I was just about to get up, when I saw that my door was half open. At first I thought I just hadn't closed it well when I came in, but then I remembered that I hadn't come in the door; I had come in through the window. Then I realized that I had come awake too quickly to have waked up just by myself; something had waked me, and the something was in the room. The perfume was stronger than ever.

There was a soft creak. Mary was trying to get the dresser drawer open with-

out making any noise. I didn't know whether she had seen me or not, but I would have to catch her now.

I was closer to the door, but she was just kneeling on the rug and I was on my stomach under the covers. I braced myself, then darted up and out the door, slamming it after me.

Mary let out a blood-curdling shriek. Tommy came running from his room, and the folks were upstairs in record time. Mom, first of all, started yelling at me for the way I had acted in the afternoon, but I finally got her calmed down enough to tell her that I had cleared up the mystery of where the magazines came from, then opened my door. When I flipped the light on, Mary started whining and crying to Mother about how awful I was, and what terrible people I go around with, until Mom completely forgot what the issue at hand was, which is just as well, and I hope it stays that way.

On the floor was a magazine. It was one of the very first issues, a collector's item I guess you could say. Mary must have every issue. I picked it up, then realized what the perfume was, since the mag was positively reeking with it. It was sachet, for which Mary had spent her Christmas money. It had been expensive, and was very long lasting. The other two copies would probably still carry the scent. Mary always has been a sucker for things of "quality."

MYTHRIL LOOKS AT THE 'ZINES

Reviews of amateur fantasy magazines: Part egoboo for editors, part prospect list for writers and artists, the review col mostly puts fans in touch with faneds. I'll just list by sort of market and alphabetically, briefly mentioning standout features in the issue. SSS means Suggested Sight unSeen, a magazine I know of only by letter, report or flier.

CARALDAITH seven, Alpajpuri, Ed. For this last Cdth, an "ace-double" format. Thoughtful article by George Barr about Tim Kirk (both Artists in the emphatic sense of the word), sercon (serious & constructive) lettercol, artwork extraordinary. You won't lack for depth here. \$1.00 from Alpajpuri, Box 28, Vashon, WA 98070

Fantasy and Terror, Amos Salmonson, Ed. SSS First issue scheduled for mid-'73. He says, "a fantasy magazine to serve as a showcase for new, talented authors. Submit your best effort, enclose S.A.S.E., we'll reply in 30 days." 50¢ from Amos Salmonson, Box 89517, Zenith, WA 98188.

HOLME LOND #2, Don Keller, Ed. 40 pages mimeo and offset, nineteen pages of fiction. Impressive first story, "Sigler" by Francis Whitcome. Darrell Schweitzer's "Hing Huian" appears. Good-looking offset front cover. 50¢ from Don Keller, 1702 Meadow Court, Baltimore, MD 21207

It Comes in the Mails #2, Ned Brooks, Ed. If you're looking for markets, leads on magazines, mentions of names, Ned's journal type listing makes them easy to find. No price, tho, that I could find. From Ned

Brooks, 713 Paul Street, Newport News, VA 23605

NO #13, Ruth Berman, Ed. A news and genzine, currently running the "Olaf Loudsnore" series by Ned Brooks. Has a Harlan Ellison letter on how to tell amateur writers from pros who just haven't sold. May use one short fiction piece per issue, which could be humorous. 25¢ from Ruth Berman, 5620 Edgewater Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55417

ORCRIST 6, Richard C. West, Ed. Special C.S. Lewis issue, neat, crisp, sercon. Worth having just for the Lewis letters, the Kilby article, and Karen Rockow's piece of original research. \$1.00 from Richard West, 614 Langdon Street, Madison, Wisc. 53703. (Quote from masthead: "we look for scholarly or critical articles that are thoughtful and well-written and for worthwhile jeux d'esprit, dealing with Tolkien in particular, science-fiction and fantasy generally, or with "the medieval tradition in modern literature")

SPACE AND TIME #17, Gordon Linzner, Ed. Cover-to-cover, a superior 'zine. Art effective, keyed well to content. 4Opp, digest format. An all-sf issue. Lead story, "The Smartest Man in Town" by William Rupp, wins on style, idea, character and twist. Next place: Darrell Schweitzer's "Wrecking Crew" for horror mood tied with Janet Fox's "The Lord Loved Little People," an excellent "What-if?" story. 50¢, 5/12 from Gordon Linzner, 83-10 118th St., Apt. 4-M, Kew Gardens, N.Y. 11415

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