

1984

Oh, Henry

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Recommended Citation

Elliott, Tom (1984) "Oh, Henry," *Exile*: Vol. 31 : No. 2 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol31/iss2/11>

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Oh Henry

"Okay, Hen, let's go with the one about the kid that gets locked in the elevator who eats his foot. And then we still need one more. What else have you got?"

"I guess the one about the garbage disposal isn't going to work. So how about the fallout skiers?"

"I haven't seen that one."

"It's about this group of guys in Utah who are gearing up to go skiing when the big balloon goes up. They figure that since fallout ash is close to the texture of fresh powder, and since Utah has a high concentration of missile silos, the skiing during a nuclear exchange should be about the best in the country. So they've got a shelter with gas masks and lead suits and they plan to get in as many runs as they can before the skin falls off the lift operators. I guess I started to think it made a lot of sense so I've been sitting on it."

"Sounds fine to me. Let's go with it. Send it to the desk and go home. It'll be a good issue. Have a nice weekend. And do everything I wouldn't do."

"I'll do the best I can, but with Beth gone it promises to be pretty dull." Phil grinned as he left. With a couple of practiced taps on his keyboard, Henry called up the story he had headed "Ash Wipe," and zapped it over the wires to Arnie at the copy desk. Henry looked across the newsroom at Arnie whose terminal flashed and beeped, indicating he'd been sent a story to edit. He watched as Arnie called up the story. When Arnie smirked, rolled his eyes and shook his head in disbelief, Henry knew he'd read his title. He was a bit surprised by the smirk; most of what he wrote was met with a frown of disdain. Arnie hated Henry's stories, especially his titles. The old man must be coming around, Henry thought, loosening up a bit; he'd finally gotten to him. But Henry knew he wouldn't use the title. Arnie hadn't used one of his titles in going on over a year. Of course Henry hadn't been giving him much to work with since their feud began.

It all started when Arnie had watered down one of Henry's favorite titles. On a story about a woman candy factory worker who had a couple of fingers accidentally sliced off, dipped in chocolate, wrapped in colored foil and shipped out before anyone could stop them, Henry's title had been "Ladyfingers Lost By Careless Fudgepacker." But when Henry came in the following Monday the headline read "Woman Loses Fingers in Factory Mishap."

Henry was furious with Arnie. He screamed across the newsroom at him; Arnie screamed right back. They stood toe-to-toe and spat invective at each other for several minutes, but when Henry hurled Emily-The-Name-Checker's Exec-U-Mag paper clip dispenser at Arnie's feet, Phil hauled them both in his office and laid down the law. "Now listen here you clowns. We've got a paper to get out here, and the last thing we need is you two jokers ego-jockeying in the newsroom and disturbing everyone. Arnie, you're not at goddamned *U.S. News and World Report* anymore so lighten up."

"Yeh!"

"Shut up, Henry! We aren't the *Lampoon* either."

"Yeh!"

"Shut up, Arnie. Now you two fly straight. Henry, you know Arnie has the last say on what gets said around here — next to me — so keep them simple and clean. And for chrissake, Henry, this is the eighties; even old Arnie here knows fudgepacker has two meanings."

"It does?"

"Arnie! Now keep it clean, Henry, and if you get edited, suck it up and keep writing. Those are the rules."

From then on every title Henry used was a subtle, or not so subtle, cut on Arnie. He figured if the old geezer was going to edit his best stuff he might as well have some fun. So the story about the woman giving birth to the amphibian baby was headed "Arnie is Born," and the story about the ape woman in a coma read "Bedtime For Arnie's Mom." It gave him something to do; it kept Arnie pissed off; and it tickled him that Gary-The-Sports-Writer, who he otherwise despised, kept a running list and posted them on the staff-board at the end of every month. It was a little cruel. But Henry figured it served the old codger right for being such a humorless grump.

So, with "Ash Wipe" sent and acknowledged, Henry packed up his backpack, donned his L.L. Bean Baxter State Parka, retracted the lead in his Berol Cassette CA5. .5mm mechanical pencil and stuck it neatly into his red plastic pencil holder with the sliding metric conversion rings on the side. He reached behind his VDT screen and flicked it off, watching the green letters "File Sent" break into crosshairs for a split second before crashing into a bright, centered pinspot and shrinking into blankness. Almost forgetting, he kicked off his loafers, slid into his Stan Smith tennis shoes and backed out the door, closing it behind him. "Good night, gang."

"Good night, Henry," mumbled a scattered few of the less preoccupied desk editors. Waiting for the elevator, he fished half of a crumpled movie ticket and a lint-covered lemonhead out of his pocket and casually dropped them inside a ceramic vase sitting on a pedestal in the tiny alcove opposite the elevator. It was new. He recalled an inter-office memo he'd seen which explained how someone from Customer Services had won an "Innovator of the Month" award for having recommended the installation of these pedestals, on which sculptures and artifacts would be displayed on a rotating basis. He hated the clay cluster in the main lobby that reminded him of a crippled ironing board; but this vase wasn't bad, and besides, it was functional.

A tone sounded. A green arrow lit up and the elevator doors hissed open. Instinctively, Henry walked to the back of the empty elevator and turned around to face the front. He saw his reflection in the polished chrome of the elevator doors and automatically ran his fingers through his unkempt curls. He grinned at his own vanity. Much better, he thought sarcastically as it sprang back to its pre-programmed form. When he started working for the *Gazette* they were still in their old building across the street and the elevators broke down so frequently that no one used them unless they absolutely had to. He personally stopped the day the elevator jammed and he was forced to spend twenty minutes listening to three-hundred pound Vera-The-Customer-Services-Operator recite the life histories of all fifteen of her grandchildren, all the while reeking like she had just been rolling around on the Cosmetics and Beauty Aids counter at Garfinkle's.

The doors on these new elevators had presented their own problems. For some reason, the architect had chosen reflective chrome instead of the usual brushed steel for the insides of the elevator doors. People didn't quite know what to make of the floor-length mirrors they formed. Years of social conditioning had taught them to walk in and turn around to face the front. And now, when they did, their own image stared back, or worse yet, someone else's. Consequently, the tops of their shoes suddenly became incredibly fascinating. Henry loved it. Big City people were supposed to be able handle anything. They were supposed to be unflappable, sophisticated and able to adapt to new situations. But the fact was, if you threw them a little curve, like putting a mirror in the front of their elevator, they'll just stare at the tops of their shoes like everybody else.

At the metro stop he inserted his fare card in a slot in one of the automatic gates. The card was sucked from his grasp; the gate hesitated for a moment pondering the card's validity and then stuck half

of it out of a second slot on the top of the gate along with the green letters "Please Take Card." When Henry pulled out the card the gate opened and he passed through. It was always a smooth, effortless transaction, no fumbling for coins or busting a nut on a stubborn turnstyle. As he escalated down to platform B he wondered at the station's sterility. The vaulted ceilings and walls were completely free of graffiti and the floors were immaculate. He'd only heard of one mugging in the subway in all the time he'd been in the city — and even that one had occurred down in the South East quadrant late at night, outside the station.

An authoritative yet mild voice came over the loudspeaker, "Smoking is not permitted in the metro station." The young woman in a navy-blue wool overcoat, for whom the announcement was intended, dropped her freshly lit Merit Light to the ground, casually scrunched on it with the toe of her right Tretorn, flipped her middle finger in the direction of the glass booth where her tormentor sat, and angrily threw her lighter and cigarette pack into her hemp shoulder bag. Henry thought he heard her mumble something about Big Brother. He'd seen her quite a few times in the metro. She always took the train going the other way. "Glad you gave that guy the finger," he offered.

"Yeh, why? He's just doing his job."

"Well, you know, these stations are spotless. One cigarette here or there isn't going to hurt anything."

"It all adds up. He was right; I shouldn't have done it. I know better. It's just that I had a bad day. I couldn't help myself."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that . . . That you had a bad day I mean." He was floundering miserably and he knew it. Just his luck picking a liberated bitch with a social conscience. Why had he even tried? He should have minded his own business.

"Thanks for the concern, but it's really none of your business." She turned around at the screeching approach of her train sparing Henry a reply. He flipped her the bird as she stepped aboard. She never turned around.

What a bore. They do a lot of things right around here. It's clean. There isn't much crime. But the people are not to be believed. I should have stayed in Akron; at least we have Devo and the soapbox derby championship. I came here for a little excitement — something different. Why couldn't some young, neglected senator's wife who's heavily into mink whips and vats of oatmeal pick me up, take me back to her palacial estate and have wild sex with me all weekend? His fantasy was interrupted by the din of his train pulling into the station. A tone sounded, the doors opened and he walked and took a seat. "Red Line to Silver Spring," said the P.A. system in a muffle that only a trained ear could decipher.

Henry had been in the city long enough to have it pretty well figured out. The newness had worn off and he felt like he was on top of the game. He thought he was ready for something new. He had a hankering for some excitement. Maybe this would be the weekend the FBI would come busting into his apartment and take him in for questioning on fluorescent sock smuggling charges. Or maybe someone's pet boa constrictor would swallow Mrs. Warner down the hall so he wouldn't have to take out her trash all the time. All day he wrote about the wildest things happening to people, but the craziest thing he'd ever seen was "Bucket-Head" Binkowski smashing bottles over his head at college fraternity parties.

The train pulled into station "Faragutt North." Henry got off the train and escalated up to street level. He walked two blocks of well-lit city street and waited for an S2 bus to take him up 16th to the Woodley apartments. The bus let him off right outside the huge apartment complex. He opened the main security door with his room key and walked past Leon-The-Security-Guard, asleep as usual behind a row of panning television monitors. There were three letters in his box: "Henry Jacobs, You may already have won \$500,000," "Are **you** tough enough for the Marines?" and a bill from Pepe's Drycleaning.

He walked past the soaped windows of the "Under Construction Drugstore/Newsstand," then the Grocery Nook. The Rocker was in his usual spot on a cement bench between two scraggly palm-like plants in the lobby, head bobbing up and down like one of those glass birds with colored liquid in its neck. And just before the elevator, the Now Open Anaton's Italian Ristorante. It occurred to Henry that he should eat there tonight. Beth, his girlfriend, left for Atlanta that morning to visit her parents, and besides, he had to use up that introductory offer coupon. The Woodley had seen better days. Entrophy was way ahead of the restoration effort. The plaster walls were buckling and falling on the carpet in the hallways. The trash chute on his floor was nothing more than a bunch of bricks smashed out of a wall inside a tiny room. Evidently, the chute door had pulled loose and fallen down with the trash, leaving a hole big enough for Henry to step inside if he wanted. He liked to tell his friends that Jimmy Hoffa had been thrown down his chute. A sign above the hole read, "Items which cannot fit in the chute go in the container." Only a mid-sized station wagon would be too large for that chute.

At his door, Henry kicked off one of his sneakers and grasped it firmly around the heel with his right hand. With his left hand he quietly unlocked his door. Next, with the practiced prowess and lightning speed of a panther, he opened the door, flicked on the light, and lunged at

the sink, bringing his sneaker down with a mighty crash on the chopping board. "Finally got you — you bastard!" With the sadistic grin of a killer, he lifted his shoe, revealing the pureed remains of a cockroach.

His next door neighbor, Bill, heard the crash and poked his head in the door, "Hey, big white hunter, how many did ya get tonight?"

"Hi, Bill. Just one this time. But I've been gunning for this one for almost a week now. Look at the size of that mush."

"And all over the walls too — must have been a real monster."

"You know it. Fast as a cheetah, too." Bill was a Capitol Hill security officer. "Listen, Bill, I was wondering . . . You've lived in this city for a long time haven't you?"

"Thirty-three years last August."

"And you've been working on the Hill that long?"

"Got a gold watch to prove it."

"I guess in all those years you must have seen some pretty incredible things — haven't you?"

"Yeh, you could say that."

"Well, like what? What were a few of the highlights?"

"Oh, let's see . . . I suppose when that guy King spoke and there were over a million nuts on the Mall — that was something else. Or when those farmers drove their tractors all over the place and stopped traffic for a couple of days . . . ?"

"No, I mean something really amazing. Have you ever seen somebody jump off the Washington monument, have his fall broken by hitting the umbrella of a hotdog vendor and survive — or something like that?"

"Hey, if you're looking for stories for that column of yours forget it. I've never seen any little green men; I've never seen any ghosts, or women lifting cars off their babies — or anything like that. Aside from clubbing a few out-of-control hippies, yuppies, yuppies — or whatever kind of yahoos are protesting at the time — my life's been pretty ordinary. Does that stuff you write about really happen? I thought you guys just made it up."

"Yeh, it happens, I guess — just not around here. Mostly in places like New Jersey and Shanghai."

"You and Beth going out tonight?"

"Naw, she's down visiting her parents for the weekend. I'm afraid I'm alone for a few days."

"Join the club. Actually, make it fifteen years — then join the club. Well you take it easy this weekend you hear."

"Yeh, thanks, Bill, you too. See you around." Henry closed the door, dampened a sponge and wiped cockroach guts off the walls. Then he hung up his parka and exchanged his tennis shoes for a pair of dirty

bucks. He never wore socks — a habit he picked up in prepschool. He pulled his Anatonì's 35% Off Introductory Offer Coupon out from under the rubber Snickers magnet on his refrigerator and went down the elevator to the ground floor.

"How many tonight, Sir?"

"Solo tonight."

"All right, fine, please follow me." Long black hair and plump red lips led him to a far corner. The ristorante was lit only by the light coming from candles in red glass globes covered with white plastic netting that were on every table. "Would you care for anything from our bar?"

"Yeh, I'd like a Heineken please."

"Light or dark?"

"Regular."

"You mean **light**."

"No, I mean **regular**; Heineken doesn't make a light beer."

"Fine. Regular it is. Your waitress will be with you in a minute."

"Thank you." He knew when she said "light" she only meant "as opposed to dark," but he loved trapping people in little technicalities like that.

A teenage boy sporting a dark virgin mustache poured water in his orange, lump-textured glass. Henry watched as an ice cube caught in the pitcher's spout and hung there precariously as water and more ice backed up behind it. Just as the water reached the top of his glass, the suspended cube broke free and fell into the glass, followed by tons of crushed ice and water. Ken stood up just in time to escape a slush waterfall as it gushed off the table onto his red vinyl seat cushion. The startled busboy whipped a towel out of his back pocket and lunged across the table to stop the water, but in his haste he knocked over the full glass with his sleeve, sending even more water cascading over the table. Flustered, he threw up his hands and ran for more towels.

Meanwhile, Hair & Lips, who had seen the trouble, moved Henry over to the next table and filled another glass with water. "I am awfully sorry, Sir, we've only been open for a little over a week now and everyone is still a little jumpy."

"No sweat; I enjoy living on the cutting edge. It's good for the reflexes. The walls were painted with water-color murals of Venice. Drips from a sweaty overhead pipe made the colors run together in long streaks through a gondola on the panel directly behind him.

"Good evening, Sir, are you ready to order now?" inquired a beefy woman with hair about like his and at least as many male hormones.

"Serious acid rain problem here, huh?" said Henry, pointing to the mural. She flashed him a courtesy smile and rolled her eyes.

"Our special tonight is tongue with a thick brown mushroom sauce. The veal parmesean is also very good—with plenty of stringy mozerella."

"I think I'll just have a small pepperoni pizza, please."

"Okay, fine, would you like that sliced in four pieces or eight?"

"Oh, better make that eight—I'm really hungry." This time she just rolled her eyes, spun on her heel and left. As he panned the dark room, he imagined the setting for a story he worked on earlier that week in which one side of a set of Siamese twins shot and killed a man in a restaurant. It seemed the other twin had tried but failed to prevent the murder, and despite his protests, the murdering twin was sentenced to death. And neither of them survived the firing squad. It happened in Punjab, India or someplace like that. The prosecuting attorney must have had a field day in court. "Your Honor, distinguished members of the jury, I submit to you that this man is a schizophrenic, two-faced liar." The possibilities were endless. The pizza finally came. "Ah, excuse me, Miss. I ordered pepperonis—these are peppers."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry; I must have grabbed the other waitress's pizza by mistake. I'll go get yours."

Five minutes later, the waitress returned with his pizza. It was the same one; he knew it would be. He was the only person in the restaurant who hadn't been served. Just to be sure, he lifted an uncooked pepperoni, and there, just as he suspected, was a green pepper fragment. He ate the pizza anyway, failing to see the use in prolonging his agony by sticking around any longer.

"You can't eat anymore? Was there something wrong?" asked the waitress when he signaled for her to bring the check.

"Frankly, I didn't like it at all. The pepperonis weren't cooked, there was no cheese, and the crust was too doughy."

"Well, the cheese goes on right next to the dough to form a kind of seal and the sauce goes on top. That's why you don't see any cheese—it's in there. Obviously you don't appreciate real Italian-style pizza."

"Obviously," Henry paid his bill and drifted back to his room, depressed. He thought, I'll have to recommend that restaurant to Arnie. He deserves to be served there. That damned restaurant is just like the rest of this roach motel. I've got to get out of this hole. This was supposed to be temporary—until I found something better. It's time to get the hell out. Next month I'm going to start getting serious about looking for an apartment.

Weary and troubled by another busy, but rather ordinary day, unable to turn to his girlfriend for consolation, Henry went to the fridge and popped a couple of slimy smoked clams in his mouth. He didn't care much for the taste, but there was something about the oil and salt and the way they slid down the ol' gullet without putting up a fight that appealed to him. Plus they grossed out Beth; he liked to do that now and then. He needed a swig of something to wash them down so he grabbed a two-liter bottle of Pepsi out of the fridge. The gas hissed out when he twisted off the cap, causing the plastic bottle to buckle under the unequal pressure of his hand. The bottle slipped from his oily grasp and dropped to the floor, sending a plume of fizzing soda straight up into his face. He blindly grabbed for the sponge in the sink and wiped his face. But only when he saw the lumpy brown smear appear when he wiped the door of the refrigerator, did he realize that he had neglected to rinse the cockroach out of the sponge. He fired the sponge into the sink, smashing a still-dirty wine glass, and wiped furiously at the Pepsi and cockroach on his face with the sleeve of his blazer, all the while spitting madly into the sink in revulsion.

He stripped off his sticky coat and shirt and hurled them into his laundry basket on the floor of his bedroom closet. His pants came off and were draped neatly over a chair so they could be worn again. Stripped to his boxers, Henry resignedly crawled into bed with his trusty 60-channel remote-control television clicker. He wasn't in the mood for the National Symphony Orchestra. Naturally anything in black and white was out. He'd seen *The Big Chill* seven times, and *Amityville—The Demon* was a definite click. He couldn't even identify the two NBA teams that were playing; and all country and western songs sounded alike to him, so the Nashville Network's offering was out. He didn't think Billy was much of an idol, so MTV was history. And he grew up knowing that Larry Hagman was a bungling astronaut who kept a genie in a fancy bottle full of modular furniture, so he never bought his bad-guy image on *Dallas*. Son of Flubber was a contender of a while, but in the end, Regis Philbin's Lifestyles won out. Within only an hour, he saw Hugh Downs discuss how to cope with stress; Alan Birbaum explain how he lost 300 pounds; a man balance a bicycle-built-for-two, a step ladder, and a french horn on his nose; and hand model Pat Tilly show how to care for hands. At eleven-thirty he switched over to ESPN. After watching only ten minutes of full-contact karate he gave up on Friday night television and with a commanding click of his remote control, silenced the cheering ringside fans, rolled over and attempted to fall asleep.

The apartment walls were paper thin. In the quiet of his bedroom he heard the door to Mrs. Warner's apartment open, and then what

sounded like someone dragging something heavy down the hall. Next, he heard the thick door of the trash room open and slam shut. A minute later he heard the same series of noises. And then again. And again. Five times in all, someone dragged something heavy from Mrs. Warner's apartment to the trash room. And then silence. Must be all the trash from her party last night, thought Henry. Wouldn't you know, the one time she decides to take out her own trash she wakes me up anyway.

Just as he was about to doze off, the heat went on. **Bang! Bang!** He counted to himself . . . 1-2-3-4-**Bang!** 1-2-3-4-**Bang!** 1-2-3-4-(wince) 5-6-7-(relax)-8-9-**Bang!** Old steam radiators. The guy who engineered the annoyance factor into steam heating was a genius. The banging was brilliant — a coup in itself — but the unpredictable intervals made it the ultimate in unnerving noise. Only when the pipes ceased banging around 3 A.M. did Henry finally fall asleep. He woke up late that morning — ten-ish. Usually when he woke up he was sprawled out on his stomach, covers barely on his body. This morning he was in a tight, fetal position clinging firmly to his blankets. He exhaled through his mouth. His breath formed a cloud in the frigid air. The heat had shut off completely.

He remembered a story he'd done when he first arrived about an elderly couple up in New Hampshire who had frozen to death when their furnace ran out of oil. By the time the neighbors suspected something was wrong and called the police, their seven cats had almost completely devoured their bodies. Henry threw off his blankets, jumped out of bed, showered, and dressed.

I've got to get out of here. This place will be the end of me. Everybody who lives here either belongs to the Geritol generation or the gene defect team. Oh this is rich. Listen to me. Every month or so something gets me all worked up for a few hours. I make a whole bunch of pledges about how I'm going to move out, and then I go to bed, wake up in the morning, and forget it ever happened. Well, not this time, dammit. I'm getting out of here once and for all.

So he called up a real estate guy he'd met while networking at a bar on the Hill. The guy said he was going to show a couple of people a few places in Georgetown and that Henry was welcome to join them. Henry arranged to meet them at the first apartment. As he was putting on his coat, he heard a familiar knocking at his door, very faint, hardly perceptible, accompanied by an even softer, "Henry. Henry." What does she want now? He opened the door.

"Hi, Mrs. Warner, what's news?"

"Oh, Henry, would you be a sweetheart and help me with a couple of bags of trash?"

"But Mrs. Warner, I heard you take down five bags by yourself last night. Do you have **more** trash?"

"No, dear, it's those same bags. I couldn't lift them into the chute, don't-cha-know. Would you be so kind as to help an old lady almost a hundred?"

"Sure, where are they, down here?"

"Yes, yes right down there in the trash room. Just throw them down for me would you, dear." Inside the trash room were five large Hefty Cinch Sacs. He grabbed the handle on the first sack and when he lifted, the plastic gave way in his hand. He bent down with both hands and lifted the bag over the lip of the trash hole and listened to it thud against the sides of the chute on the way down. The others were equally heavy and their contents gushed around in the bag and felt weird against his body.

"Mrs. Warner, those bags weighed a ton. How in the world did you carry them down the hall?"

"Oh, I didn't; I dragged them."

"What's in them?"

"Well, I had a little socializer in my apartment Thursday night, don't-cha-know. It's just trash from my party and some old things that have been around too long. You look like you're dressed to go out; where are you going?"

"I'm going to look at apartments. I'm planning on moving out soon."

"Oh dear, that is too bad. You're such a big help to me."

"Listen, anyone who can drag bags like those down the hall by herself can manage just fine without me around. Bye, Mrs. Warner."

"Bye, Henry, dear."

Henry spent the afternoon storming through Georgetown townhouses with twenty-eight other people and the real estate guy. It was as if they were buying new cars, only instead of slamming the doors and kicking the tires, they pounded on walls and stomped on floors; they flicked on lights and they flushed toilets; they opened curtains, smelled carpeting, and measured closets. By the end of the day twelve apartments had weathered inspections that would have made the Gestapo proud. And Henry closed a deal on a small efficiency that needed a lot of work. He spent Sunday packing. On Monday he went to work with more of a bounce in his step than usual. Beth was coming back that afternoon, and with his new apartment all ready to go he was confident that his life would begin to pick up.

As usual, the elevator was crowded with people all staring at their shoes. Henry caught Gary-the-sports-writer looking at his own reflection in the door and said, "Excuse me, Gary, I couldn't help noticing you have a piece of orange Froot Loop stuck between your teeth." Gary blushed and nervously picked and sucked at his teeth. The rest of the people were still laughing as they exited the elevator.

When the doors opened on his floor Henry pulled a gum wrapper out of his coat pocket, crumpled it up, and as he tried to nonchalantly drop it into the vase on the pedestal without looking, he smashed his hand on a Lucite cube covering the vase. Another "Innovator of the Month", no doubt, he thought.

He barely had time to hang up his coat before Phil and Arnie came charging into his office looking very excited. "Big weekend at the Woodley, huh?"

"Tell us about it."

"What was she like?"

"Did you know her?"

"Did you see her do it?"

"Whoa, hold it. One at a time, what the hell are you two babbling about?"

"You don't know about the big bust on Saturday?"

"You dog, you."

"Trying to keep the story for yourself, huh?"

"Don't play dumb with us, Henry."

"C'mon, you can tell us."

"No, really; What are you guys talking about? I was out most of the day Saturday."

"It's right here on this UPI wire," explained Phil. "The cops think some old lady that lives in the Woodley poisoned five of her old friends after inviting them over to a party. Then she posed as a gourmet food salesperson and sold her victims' tongues to some restaurant downstairs. Anatoli, or whatever thought he was getting a good deal on lamb tongue. They never would have suspected anything if it wasn't for an oral surgeon who identified the tongue his wife ordered as human. They fit the Missing Persons reports filed on behalf of the five party guests with the description of the woman who sold the tongues to the restaurant and arrested a Mrs. Warner on suspicion of murder. But they still can't find the bodies. They suspect she may have had a accomplice — since she's far too frail to have carried them out herself. The police made the bust on Saturday afternoon. You must have been out."

Arnie added, "A Mr. LaChance from homicide has been trying to reach you. He says he wants to ask you a few questions. Here's his number. You'd better get right on it." They both left.

Henry wanted to say, "No, it can't be." But he had done enough bizarre stories to know that it **could** be. And **he** was the accomplice they were looking for. He was paralyzed. For an hour he couldn't move. He reviewed the events over and over again in his mind: the weight of those five bags and the odd feeling of their contents, the "tongue special" at Anaton's, and Mrs. Warner saying, "Just some old things that have been around too long." He could explain to officer LaChance that he didn't know what was in the bags... but he would never believe him. Why had this happened to him?

Just then, his terminal flashed and beeped, indicating he'd been sent a message. He typed "R-E-A-D." The screen rolled up and he read:

Dear Henry,

GOTCHA!

Arnie Simpson (With a little help from Phil and my sister Margery Simpson Warner.)

P.S.: I owed you one.