

SIX PIOUS PIECES

One

You've had it up to here? You wanna run away? Do this then: think of the last place on earth you'd want to go, and then go there. That way, when they set out to find you they won't stand a chance. (If your wife knows you well enough to know that you'd pick the place you hated most, then do the opposite: go to the first place you'd think of. If she'd know that, try a number in the middle. If she'd know that, give up. There's no way of escaping her, unless she wants you to. In which case, stay where you are.)

Two

This is it, he said. I'm on my way. Send a slice of the 'Happy Suicide' cake to all the orphanages in the city and frame the photo of me blowing out the candles. Open the window, and stand clear. Stand clear, and wash the crumbs from your cheeks, my darling. At the other side of the window is a new world. Take down the flower pot and remove the insect screen. At the first bounce precisely the time will be eternity.

Three

And what was left I wonder when the scourging had to stop. Everybody had a lovely time, and a first-class view of the atrocities. Much of the scene was recorded on Chromacolor and the rest is indelibly engraved on the minds of all who were there. The blood part was unfortunate but edifying. Everybody had an orgasm, and some people had two. And what was left? Well, for starters, there was still an awful lot of noise of people arguing about what they'd seen and still disputing the odds. Then there was the auction. And then there were negotiations for the site and the exact structure of the edifice to arise on the spot, the first of many, as it turned out. And then there was the noise of the people and reporters rushing home to write down their memoirs of what happened, each with the true version, each the sole witness. The whole thing was most worthwhile, and the whippee must at bottom have felt gratified too.

Four

Do you know that the last road to come through here was 10 minutes late? I think I'll up and get me a footpath that'll always be on time. It's all very well them superhighways running up to you and whizzing by, but easy come easy go, and a man don't know where he is with them cause when they ain't late they're way ahead. Them flash roads ain't but light-weight when it comes to accuracy. The smaller the more accurate I always say. If you ain't got it you can't be held responsible, I always say that too. Now a little thing ain't but got a little responsibility, and nobody cares too much about it, and the little thing knows that too. So it has no expectations to live up to and consequently surpasses them all, so it ain't no strain for it always to perform A-100. I'm aiming to get the government to cover this country with footpaths, and then we'll get the roads all back on time again, and maybe we'll be able to shame them superhighways into some kind of performance.

Five

An old man in a fedora, draped in a long black coat trimmed with velvet. He swings a cane. Accompanying him are two old ladies -- wife and cousin? Snow is falling, and one old lady has a pekinese under one arm. They come to a house in a high-class tenement area. They run into a boy with a large dog and are told not to worry because the dog won't bite them. The old lady with the peke inquires if the boy is feeding his dog properly. Now, what is the point of this story? Well first off, the house they knock at is the wrong number. Why then would the lady inside accept their designation of her as sister and accept the fact that it is her birthday, and their statement that they've come to celebrate with her? By accepting the role did she create it? What is the explanation of the fact that each gets what he or she wants? Because nobody had anything? (There is a very logical answer to this.)

Six

Why did the chicken cross the street? I for one am sick of smart-alecky answers to this from smart-ass adults playing with a child's good faith (my good faith, damn it), so try this approach instead. Suppose there was no other side to cross to. What now? Well, to start with, doesn't that make the whole situation more intriguing? The interest now is not in putting somebody down with a

mock-riddle, and we find ourselves shifting our attention from the chicken to the street. Why was there no other side to this street? We can reinstate the chicken, but surely this question must come first, for, in order that the chicken should cross the street, and thus set up the situation which is central to true riddle (i.e., a situation transformed by intelligence), then all the terms necessary to convince the person questioned that there is in fact a question worth answering must be present. If you take away half a street from a time-honored locale you've destroyed the trust of the person questioned and placed in jeopardy the probity of the questioner. So there must be nothing arbitrary about having half the street missing. Still, there can be no revelation if there is no mystery, and by saying that there is no other half to the street one does begin to create the enigmatic through the impossible (let us not, by the way, be banal and say that the street only had one side, that there was a field or something across the way. This is merely playing with words. I am attempting to be metaphysical). (Just to clear up this last parenthesis, let me rephrase the original question thus: why did the chicken cross the street that had only one side? Now we're setting somewhere. Now things are really hotting up. You give up? Do you, do you give up?)

COMPLAINT

Ten floors up, and the elevator doesn't work. When I call down to the elevator girl I get a saucy answer: "Why don't you walk down?"

Simple. I'm afraid of heights. "Too many cases," I reply, but she has already hung up.

So I walk down, under four steel lockers. At the foyer I collect my mail. It consists solely of an insulting letter from a woman. At least, I assumed the letter was insulting because the envelope was covered with titles for me, such as Mr. Horseshit Bleedabout, and The Honorable Makeshit-Turdition-Weep.

I go to telephone. But to whom? The dial is all knobs and bumps, and my dialling finger keeps slipping off. When I want 0900 I can only manage 0000.