

Text 1

LETTERS IN THE MAIL

As a general rule, almost everybody likes to receive mail, and probably nobody in the whole town of Stillwater liked to get letters in the mail more than Ray Buffin. However, the fact was that Ray received fewer letters in his box at the post-office than anybody else.

"Dog bite it!" Ray would say with a sad expression on his long thin face when he took one more last look at his box and left the post-office. At a time like that his whole tall body sagged and dropped with disappointment. "No mail again this time, but I've got a good feeling deep down inside of me that one of these days I'm going to get some."

It had been like that with Ray Buffin almost all his life. He had no living relatives to write to him. But once a month he got a bill from the gas and electric company and sometimes there was a letter from some candidate who was running for a political office, and every September the county assessor mailed him a tax bill for the year. And, of course, since he had no friend to correspond with and did not know anybody outside Stillwater, he did not write letters himself. The only exception had been once many years before — he had been about thirty years old at the time — when he had written a letter to a young girl in town telling her that he loved her and saying how beautiful he thought she was. He had ended the letter by asking her to marry him, but he had not received a reply.

Like a great number of other small towns along the Gulf Coast and elsewhere, Stillwater had a population of about five hundred people and mail was received and dispatched only once a day.

Every afternoon, except Sundays, the bus from New Orleans stopped in the town square in front of the post-office and the driver opened the door and took out two or three mail bags with letters, magazines, and parcel-post packages. When the bus was running on time, it was usually about four o'clock when it arrived.

Text 2

PAINTING THE FENCE

My wife, Betsy, and I were on the Queen Elizabeth, coming back from our first trip to Europe. On the first day, we played our favourite game, trying to guess what the different people were. Betsy called my attention to one man with gray hair that stood up on his head, and with deep dark blue eyes. He was dressed in an old sweater and trousers, and had summer shoes on his feet. I immediately guessed that he was an artist, a French artist. Betsy laughed at me, because we had agreed that people seldom or never look like what they really are. She said he was probably a member of the British Parliament.

On the second day, I was walking around the deck when I saw the same man. He had pulled his chair into a corner where the wind wasn't so sharp and when I pushed my nose into his corner, he raised his head and gave me a very angry look. I began to move away, saying I was sorry, when suddenly his expression changed.

"Wait!" he called out. "You are an American?"

His English was good, and he asked me if I had a moment to help him with a small problem. He wanted to know if there was a United States senator named Boat or Ship. He showed me the ship's daily crossword puzzle. The question he could not answer was "A Senator who crosses a river". I thought for a minute and then remembered — Senator Bridges! I told him and he quickly wrote it in, and then flew away along the deck without saying good-bye.

I didn't see him again until the next day. He came to me and showed me a silver pen. "I won it!" he said. "The first prize! Come and have a cocktail with me!"

We went to his room and had a drink. He said his name was Roland and thanked me again and again for helping him with the puzzle. Then he asked me about myself. We talked for half an hour, and at last he asked me whether I could keep a secret. I told him I could, and then he told me that his real name was Lautisse.

I told Betsy all about it, so after lunch we went to the library and asked the librarian who Lautisse was. She told us that Lautisse was probably the most famous painter in the world. She found a book with a photograph of him and his biography. It said that Lautisse had suddenly stopped painting, saying he had decided never to paint again, and that he had not painted anything for the last ten years.

Text 3

It was night. Stillness reigned in the great old feudal castle of Klugenstein. The year 1222 was drawing to a close. Far away in the tallest of the castle's towers a single light glimmered. A secret council was being held there. The old lord of Klugenstein sat in a chair thinking. At last he said "My daughter."

A young man of noble presence, clad from head to heel in a knight's clothes answered: "Speak, father!"

"My daughter, the time has come to the mystery that has puzzled all your young life. Know, then, that it had its birth in the matters which I shall now reveal. My brother Ulrich is the great Duke of Brandenburg. Our father, on his deathbed, decided that if no son were born to Ulrich the succession should pass to my house, provided a son were born to me. And further, in case no son were born to either, but only daughters, then the succession should pass to Ulrich's or my daughter. And so I and my old wife here prayed for the birth of a son, but the prayer was vain. You were born to us. I was in despair. I saw the mighty prize slipping from my grasp.

"Five years had Ulrich been married and yet he had no children at all."

"I thought: All is not lost. A saving plan had shot through my brain. You were born at midnight. Only the doctor, the nurse, and six waiting-women knew your sex. I hanged them all before an hour passed. Next morning all the barony went mad with happiness because a son was born to Klugenstein — an heir to Brandenburg! And well the secret has been kept.

Your mother's own sister nursed you and from that time forward we feared nothing."

"When you were ten years old a daughter was born to Ulrich. We grieved, but hoped for good results from measles, or physicians, or other natural enemies of infancy, but were always disappointed. She lived, she grew strong. But it is nothing. We are safe. For, ha! ha! have we not a son? And is not our son, well-beloved Conrad, the future duke?"

"Now time has come to go to my brother Ulrich. The cares of state do tire him, therefore he wills that you shall come to him and be already duke in act, though not yet in name. Your servants are ready — you must journey tonight."

"Now listen well. Remember every word I say. There is a law as old as Germany, that if any woman sit for a single instant in the great ducal chair before she has been absolutely crowned in presence of the people — she shall die! So remember my words. Pronounce your judgments from the Premier's chair, which stands at the foot of the throne. Do this until you are crowned and safe."

Text 4

LETTERS IN THE MAIL

Two of the young men in town, Guy Hodge and Ralph Barnhill, who were always thinking up pranks to play on people, decided that they would send Ray a letter and sign it with a fictitious name. Their jokes were always good-natured and they did not hurt anybody.

The way they planned the joke on Ray, they would tell everybody in the post-office to watch Ray when he received a letter in his box, and then somebody would ask him in a loud voice if he had received a love letter from a girl. After that somebody would snatch the letter out of his hand and read it out loud for everybody to hear.

Guy and Ralph went around the corner to the telephone exchange, where Gracie Brooks was the night switchboard operator.

Gracie was an elderly girl who had worked for the telephone company since she graduated from high school. She had remained single all those years, and because she lived such a lonely life, operated the switchboard all night and slept during the day, she realized that there was little opportunity now for her to meet somebody who would marry her.

At first, after Guy Hodge and Ralph Barnhill had told her what they were planning to do and had asked her to write the letter to Ray, because they wanted it to be in feminine handwriting, Gracie said that she would have nothing to do with their plan.

"That's cruel," she told them. "I could never do such a cruel thing. Besides, I wish you wouldn't get anybody else to write it, either — not to Ray Buffin."

Suddenly Gracie turned round and hid her face as she was unable to keep her eyes from filling with tears. It seemed like a lifetime since she had received a letter from Ray Buffin saying he loved her and wanted to marry her. She had just graduated from high school then and had started to work for the telephone company, and since she was young and had no thoughts about marriage, she did not answer the letter. During all those years they had seen each other occasionally, but seldom more than a polite greeting had passed between them, and each time she saw Ray he looked sadder and more lonely. In recent years there had been times when she wanted to run to Ray, throw her arms around his neck, and beg him to forgive her for not answering his letter. If she had answered his letter, they probably would have been married all those years and neither of them would be lonely now.

"Please, Gracie," Guy Hodge begged her. "Come on and write the letter for us. If you don't we'll have to find somebody else to write it."

Text 5

THE ADVENTURE OF MY AUNT

My aunt was a big woman, very tall, with a strong mind and will. She was what you may call a very manly woman. My uncle was a thin, small man, very weak, with no will at all. He was no match for my aunt. From the day of their marriage he began to grow smaller and weaker. His wife's powerful mind was too much for him; it weakened his health. My aunt took all possible care of him; half the doctors in town visited him and prescribed medicine for him enough to cure a whole hospital. She made him take all the medicines prescribed by the doctors, but it didn't help him. My uncle grew worse and worse, and one day she found him dead.

My aunt was very sorry by the death of her poor dear husband. Now she was sorry that she had made him take so much medicine and felt, that he was the victim of her kindness. Anyhow, she did all that a widow could do to honour his memory.

She spent very much money on her mourning dress, she wore a miniature of him about her neck as large as a small clock; and she had a full-length portrait of him always hanging in her bedroom. All the world praised her conduct. "A woman who did so much to honour the memory of one husband, deserves soon to get another," said my aunt's friends.

Some time passed, and my aunt decided to move to Derbyshire where she had a big country-house. The house stood in a lonely, wild part of the country among the gray Derbyshire hills.

The servants, most of whom came with my aunt from town, did not like the sad-looking old place. They were afraid to walk alone about its black-looking rooms. My aunt herself seemed to be struck with the lonely appearance of her house. Before she went to bed, therefore, she herself examined the doors and windows and locked them with her own hands. Then she carried the keys from the house together with a little box of money and jewels, to her own room. She always saw to all things herself.

Text 6

WHO LAUGHS LAST

Teo applied for a post in Camford University. It was a very good post and there were a lot of candidates who applied for it, and about fifteen Teo included, were asked for an interview.

Camford is a very small town; there is only one hotel in it, and the hotel was so full that many of the candidates had to share the rooms. It just happened so that Teo shared a room with another fellow, called Adams. Adams was a self-confident man, about twenty years younger than Teo, with a loud voice and a laugh that one could hear all over the hotel.

The Committee interviewed all the candidates, and, as a result, two were left, Teo and Adams. The Committee couldn't decide which of the two men to take. So they suggested that each of the candidates should make a lecture in the college lecture-hall in three days' time.

Well, for three days Teo never left his room. He worked day and night at the lecture, writing it out and memorising it. Adams didn't seem to do any preparations at all. He came to his room late at night and told Teo about his adventures. He ate like a horse and slept like a log"; and Teo sat up working at his lecture.

The day of the lecture arrived. They all went into the lecture-hall and Teo and Adams took their seats on the platform. And then, Teo found that his lecture-notes were gone. Adams spoke first. With despair in his heart, he listened to Adam's speech. Adam read the stolen speech brilliantly. When Adams finished his speech, there was a loud applause.

Now it was Teo's turn. He was so upset that his heart beat fast and his face burnt. He could do nothing but repeat, word for word, his lecture from memory. There was hardly any applause when he sat down.

The Committee went out to make their decision, but everybody was sure what their decision would be. When the Committee came back, the Dean said, "Gentlemen, the candidate we have chosen is Mr Teo Hodbell." And then he added, "I think, I ought to tell you how we arrived at this decision. We all admired Mr Adam's lecture. But Mr Adams read this lecture to us. Mr Hodbell repeated that speech, word by word from memory. Now, a fine memory is absolutely necessary for this post. That's why we decided that Mr Hodbell was exactly the man we wanted."

As they walked out of the room, the Dean came up to Teo, shook his hand and said, "Congratulations, Mr Hodbell! But my dear fellow, you must be more careful and not leave your papers lying about."

Text 7

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

The New Year is a time for resolutions. Most of us make up lists of "do's" and "don'ts". We resolve to get up earlier each morning, never be late, work more and do one thousand and one jobs about the house. Most of us fail in our efforts at self-improvement because we never have time to carry them out. We also make a great error when we announce about our resolutions to everybody and then we look foolish when we slip back into our bad old ways.

This year I attempted to keep my resolutions to myself. I decided to do physical exercises every morning and to read more of an evening. The all-night party on New Year's Eve was a good excuse for not carrying out either of these resolutions on the first day of the year, but on the second I applied myself to the task.

The daily exercises lasted only eleven minutes and I intended to do them early in the morning before anyone had got up. So I had to drag myself out of bed eleven minutes earlier than usual. After jumping about on the carpet I sat down at the breakfast table quite exhausted. It was this that betrayed me. The next morning the whole family trooped in to watch the performance.

Soon everybody got used to the idea. However, my enthusiasm waned. Little by little the eleven minutes fell to zero. By January 10-th, I was back to where I had started from. I argued that if I spent less time on exercises in the morning I would keep my mind fresh for reading when I got home from work. I didn't watch television and sat in my room for a few evenings with my eyes glued to a book. One night, however, feeling cold and lonely, I went downstairs and sat in front of the television pretending to read. I soon got to my old habit of dozing off in front of the screen. I still haven't given up my resolutions to do more reading. In fact, I have just bought a book entitled 'How to Read a Thousand Words a Minute.' Perhaps it will solve my problem, but I just haven't had time to read it!

Text 8

AN IDEAL HOLIDAY

When I was a boy every holiday I had seemed ideal. All day, I seem to remember, I played on the sands with my friends. We made sandcastles with huge yellow walls, and watched the incoming tide destroy them; we played football, we splashed each other in the water and shrieked with excitement. When the tide was out, we climbed over the slippery rocks and stared down at the fish and the seaweeds in the rock-pools.

In those far-off days the sun seemed to shine constantly and the water was always warm. Sometimes we left the beach and walked in the country, exploring ruined houses and dark woods and climbing trees that overhung streams.

Although I am now an adult, my idea of a good holiday is much the same as it was. I still like the sun and the warm sand and the sound of waves breaking on the beach. I no longer wish to build sandcastles, but I love sunbathing and the feel of sand running through my fingers, and I look forward to sitting down to a good meal in the evening. I think too, that I prefer travelling. I want to smell different smells; I want to see different kinds of trees, flowers and plants; and I also want to see people wearing different kinds of clothes. Above all, I want to listen to different musical rhythms from those I am used to.

But I still need my companions - not, of course, to play on the sands and eat ices with, but to talk on the warm moonlight nights.

Sometimes I wonder what my ideal holiday will be when I am old. All I shall want to do then, I expect, will be to lie in bed, reading books about children who make sandcastles with huge yellow walls, who watch the incoming tide, who make themselves sick on too many ices...

Text 9

CINCINNATUS

Cincinnatus was a Roman consul. When he was about sixty years old, he decided to leave Rome and become a farmer. Not far from Rome he had a small piece of land on which he worked, and his wife was busy with the household.

Though Cincinnatus did not live in Rome any longer, the Roman people did not forget that he loved his country and was always ready to help it, that he was a clever and experienced person.

One day a soldier came to his house and asked for him. He told him that the country was in danger and the people asked him to come to Rome at once.

The same day Cincinnatus came to Rome. The City Fathers were already waiting for him. One of them said, "Oh, Cincinnatus, you know that Rome is at war with the people of the mountains. They came down from their mountain homes and killed our men. We sent out an army of our strongest soldiers. Five of them returned yesterday. They told us that the enemy had attacked our army on a narrow road. Our soldiers tried to go forward but found that the road was closed by a great stone wall, behind which there were enemy soldiers. When they tried to turn back, they found that behind them the enemy had built another wall. Suddenly the enemy attacked our soldiers from the mountain sides above the road. From those high places they threw big stones on the men and horses. Many of our men were killed. Ten soldiers were told to go to Rome and ask for help. Of those men five came to Rome. We sent for you," he continued, "to ask you to take several hundred soldiers and to lead them against the enemy."

Cincinnatus began at once to prepare for the fight. He told the five soldiers to make a careful plan of the mountains, the narrow road, and the stone walls across the road. Then he took his men by some secret way to a place which was higher than the mountain sides where the enemy was.

When the mountain men saw the Roman soldiers above them they tried to run away. The Roman soldiers killed many of them and saved the Roman army and Rome. Some days later the Roman army returned to Rome with Cincinnatus at the head of it. The City Fathers and the people of Rome asked Cincinnatus to be the ruler of Rome. But he said he wanted to return to his farm and he went there alone.

Some time later Cincinnatus was again called from his farm when the country was in danger and the people wanted him to help them to save Rome. And again, after the war, he returned to his farm.

Text 10

SPRING CLEANING

In England and in some other countries it is the custom to give the house a special clean in the spring. It is not that the housewives neglect their work at other times during the year, but that there are some things which it is difficult to do daily or even weekly. For example, heavy cupboards, which need two men to lift them, are often never moved except at the spring cleaning, and naturally the narrow space behind them, and the floor on which they stand, become dusty and dirty. Every effort is made to clean the house thoroughly from top to bottom. Sometimes the room is entirely cleared of furniture so that the ceiling, walls, and floors can be dealt with; small repairs are done, and, if possible, a certain amount of repainting.

For women, it is a specially busy time; for men, it is a time to keep out of the way, except for the help they can give with moving furniture before they go off to the office, and putting it back when they return in the evening. While they are absent, the cleaning and dusting, the beating of carpets, the mats, and rugs, the polishing of brass and woodwork go on, and after some days of this extra housework the house itself looks almost new. The opportunity is taken to get rid of unwanted or valueless objects, and to buy things that may be needed. Often something that has been given up for lost comes to light behind the cupboard or a drawer where it has fallen.

Although we consider that the year begins on January 1st, the natural beginning of the year is spring. Perhaps that is why this is the season usually chosen to make our homes specially fresh-looking and clean. Just as nature brings out the new green leaves and bright flowers, and even the birds build themselves new nests, so we ourselves make an effort after winter to start a new year with the self-respect that cleanliness always gives.

Text 11

BY HEART

Some plays are so successful that they run for years on end. In many ways, this is unfortunate for the poor actors who are required to go on repeating the same lines night after night. One would expect them to know their parts by heart and never have cause to falter. Yet this is not always the case.

A famous actor in a highly successful play was once cast in the role of an aristocrat who had been imprisoned in the Bastille for twenty years. In the last act, a jailer would always come on to the stage with a letter which he would hand to the prisoner. Even though the noble was expected to read the letter at each performance, he always insisted that it should be written out in full.

One night, the gaoler decided to play a joke on his colleague to find out if, after so many performances, he had managed to learn the contents of the letter by heart. The curtain went up on the final act of the play and revealed the aristocrat sitting alone behind bars in his dark cell. Just then, the gaoler appeared with the precious letter in his hands. He entered the cell and presented the letter with the aristocrat. But the copy he gave him had not been written out in full as usual. It was simply a blank sheet of paper. The gaoler looked on eagerly, anxious to see if his fellow actor had at last learned his lines. The noble stared at the blank sheet of paper for a few seconds. Then, squinting his eyes, he said: "The light is dim. Read the letter to me." And he promptly handed the sheet of paper to the gaoler. Finding that he could not remember a word of the letter either, the gaoler replied: "The light is indeed dim, sir. I must get my glasses."

With this, he hurried off the stage. Much to the aristocrat's amusement, the gaoler returned a few minutes later with a pair of glasses and the usual copy of the letter which he proceeded to read to the prisoner.

TEXT 12

When the man saw that Robin was looking for a new garland, he put an arrow to his string, and shouted, "You're the mark I'm looking for!" and let his arrow fly.

Robin fell into the bush as if struck, and with a cruel laugh the man stepped nearer to make sure that he had really killed the outlaw on whom he had been spying for so long. He could see the legs striking out stiffly from the bush, and smiled happily to himself.

Then he put his victim. But suddenly, with a cry the "dead man" got up, holding in one hand the arrow which the murderer had shot at him.

The arrow had missed Robin, who had, however, pretended to be struck. The man turned in panic and ran away quickly, crossing from one side of the path to the other, so as to confuse Robin's aim.

Robin drew his bow, and waited a moment before he let his arrow fly. The man gave a yell, jumped three feet up into the air and then fell flat on the ground with the arrow sticking out of his back.

At the same time, Robin heard the sound of breaking branches beside him, and out of the bush leapt a strange figure. It looked like a brown horse running towards him on its hind legs.

Then Robin laughed. The horse's skin contained a man; in one hand he held a naked sword. It was Sir Guy of Gisborne who now dashed towards the outlaw, his eyes burning with hatred.

"Ha! Guy of Gisborne!" cried Robin. "At last you've come yourself! For years you've sent spies and secret murderers to kill me, and now you've come to do it yourself — if you can!"

Guy of Gisborne said nothing in reply. With the fury of a wolf he fell upon his victim. For some time nothing was heard but the clashing of sword against sword. Round and round the two men moved in this fierce dance that would end in death for one of them. Suddenly Robin's sword pierced the horse's hide and cut into Guy's shoulder.

"Your luck is finished. Guy of Gisborne!" said Robin. "You escaped with your life once from the burning house in that horse's hide, and you thought it would bring you luck and protect you against my sword a second time".

TEXT 13

Robert Bruce was the most famous of the Kings of Scotland. For many years he fought against the English invaders trying to drive them out of Scotland. But the English defeated him and he was almost deserted by his countrymen.

One morning after receiving the last unpleasing information from Scotland, Bruce was lying on his wretched bed. He did not know what to do. While he was thinking of what he should do, he looked upward to the roof of the cabin in which he lay. His eye was attracted by a spider, which, hanging at the end of a long thread was trying to swing itself from one beam in the roof to another. The spider wanted to fix the line on which it meant to stretch its web.

The spider made the attempt again and again but without any success. Bruce counted that the spider had tried to swing itself to another beam six times but with no result. Then Bruce remembered that he had himself fought just six battles against the English invaders and their allies but also without any success. The poor spider was exactly in the same situation as he himself. It had made as many attempts and had been as often disappointed in what it aimed at.

"Now," thought Bruce, "as I don't know what is the best to be done, I'll be guided by spider's luck. If it makes another attempt to fix its thread and is successful, I'll make the seventh attempt to drive out the invaders".

While Bruce was forming his resolution, the spider made another, beam. Bruce, seeing the success of the spider, resolved to try his own fortune. He gathered his countrymen and attacked the invaders. And though he had never before won a victory, he never afterwards had any considerable or decisive defeat.