

Brent Holt

Material Support Hose

My Dear A:

Finally, I can forward this package with confidence that the contraband contained within will transit the frontier unsuspected and arrive to you without the postal authorities ever realizing they've played a hand in the occupation's undoing. Score one for the resistance. As much as I have complained of its members' reprehensible habit of procrastinating – for if we weren't so laissez-faire we wouldn't be in the position of having to resist – it seems that in this case at least the habit will prove to have paid off. Within the week you should have this supply in your possession. I trust you know what you are doing.

I cannot fully express the difficulty I had in procuring the items contained herein. Our contact, C, was an artful dodger, slippery enough to elude his own scent. Yes, a good insurgent should be skilled, but considerate enough too to keep appointments. And D, our so-called middleman – “so-called,” I say, because of his complete disavowal of medians – had the gall to take his bloated cut only in beans. Doesn't he realize how dangerous it is to be out and about with a 70-pound sack of dried legumes slung over one's back when every fork in the road's a lair for beanless rogues? Of course I was stopped by the police! I dare not ponder how believable was my excuse that the soup cannery at the edge of town had acquired an unexpected windfall of bacon. And then F, our supplier (oh, what an appropriately acronymed Fool), delivered the wrong items. What are we to do with silk stockings? Arouse the occupation? For his blunder I demanded he surrender to me a pair of the damned things. They're enclosed herein; I trust you can find a use for them.

If my handwriting appears a bit uncertain it is not because I quiver over the security of the shipment, but because my hands are weak from wringing laundry. I've no chair to sit in and no table to write at; all the furniture is holding clothes and linens to dry. So I write standing with one knee upraised as a board to write upon, with shirts and long underwear like so much shroud draped all around - M herself is no stranger to procrastination.

Speaking of my wife, she and our little P are just fine, drawing water and retrieving cheese from the well for our meal as I write. I considered offering the stockings to M, but then questions may have been asked.

Vigilantly,
B



A:

This letter follows too soon on the heels for you to have received the package. Another matter compels me to write.

Did I not mention previously that M and little P were at the well? Alas, poor P fell in. There I was, carefully sealing the package you are soon to receive, when I heard a shout from the yard. Stowing the box into the oven for safekeeping, I ran from the house to see what was about and found M bent over the lip of the well with tears flowing at a rate that should fill the pit. Dear P was there below, clinging to the rock walls with the cheese for which she'd been sent clenched between her teeth. What a heroine, that little lass! A trickle of blood marked her temple, but she appeared to be in command of her senses. I withdrew the belt from my breeches' loops and dangled it toward her. "Release the cheese," I exclaimed, "and grasp the leather." Which she did, with her teeth, and like a fish I pulled her up and out from what would otherwise have been her damp demise. She would have no doubt tainted the well as well. Do not worry, upon P's retrieval M managed to scoop up the floating quarter-round of cheese with a single drop of the bucket – how precious and rare is a quarter-round in these times. Blessed M, she's worth her weight in cheese.

I later became concerned that P, in the course of her fall, might have dislodged the items – those little metal thingies that you and I had so carefully stowed in the dry crooks of the well – and sent them to ruin in the water. Rest assured, the items are secure and remain at our retrieval for when the time comes to use them against the occupation. P is fine too. She stutters since the fall, but it is a small, even endearing effect.

The real reason for my writing to you so soon is to relate a dream that I believe may be, if I may presume, prophetic. I saw that officious puppet of a Minister standing at his podium, chest puffed up like a pigeon's, while the desecrated horns of our national anthem sustained through the final bar. Before the clarion had died the Minister opened wide his mouth, but not a word could he speak for from between those insipid lips emerged a great, roasted boneless rump bound in twine and dripping grease down the chin of that charlatan and on over the podium. Below, the populace danced and leaped with knives and plates upheld, ready to slice and dine. It makes my mouth water to think of the dream now, and in fact my pillow was moist when I awoke. I am heartened by the vision, and feel compelled to pass it on to you so you might not feel disheartened at... oh, I don't know... at times.

Oh yes, one other thing. D, our middle-man, came to the house this morning with a troubling concern; namely, that questions had been raised by the authorities about the amounts of bacon rumored to be held by the local soup cannery. I surrendered to him a suckling pig – too young, I know, but it was the only one I could spare. What else was I to do? I advised him to make bacon of it all. I thought you should know, information being the glue of our effort. I suppose, in the spirit of that last line, I should also mention that he – D, I mean, and not the pig – was wearing a pair of the very same stockings that F tried to peddle onto me. I will remain alert to any further signs of collusion between them.

Oh, and again one last matter, and no small item this. I may be able to recommend an inductee to the cause, the man to be our G – a real go-getter he. Lots of ambition. He's a carrier for the postal service too – What luck! – and considers himself a brother of the resistance.

Vive la résistance,

B



A:

I can't take it. You will have received the package by now and found it in sad condition, singed and collapsed. I know I should have made mention of this in my previous letter, but shame had found a pliant conspirator in procrastination and the two coerced me into telling that silly lie about a prophetic dream instead. I did dream, that much was true, but not of a boneless rump. It was of the postmaster general, and he along with a detachment of the gendarme, all gussied up in hosiery, were sniffing about my well for a cache of bacon. Dreadful, not just the vision but my betrayal too, and now I have only this simpering letter to offer in apology.

I am wracked with guilt, but it is guilt born of the noblest intentions, I swear, for its procreator was my own fatherly instinct. I'd carried P that evening, wet, afraid and shivering from her fall into the well, to the sitting room of the cottage and before the hearth's fire I warmed her and helped her shed her soaked smock. I set to toweling her dry with my handkerchief, the only dry cloth at my disposal for as I had mentioned everything else was that very day laundered and wet. Meanwhile M, as if to refute any acquaintance to procrastination, had promptly lit the oven to warm the cheese, never bothering to look into the appliance first, the foolish woman. The box! Yes, damn it all, the writhing supplies now in your hands were then in the oven. I heard the hiss of the gas and should have run immediately to the kitchen, but no, I was swabbing the armpits of my dear P. Several minutes passed before the true meaning of that signature gasp of gas struck me. I left my handkerchief in a crevice of P and dashed to the kitchen, pushed M aside, threw open the oven door and yanked the package from its sweltering belly. With sunken heart I stood there in the heat of the oven, box in hands, desperately clinging to what comfort I derived from its being only slightly charred. M must have thought me crazed when I shook it and brought it to my ear, listening, listening. Shh! I shushed her. Then I

ran out into the night and threw the box into the snow, thinking in my panic that the cold would reverse any harm to the box's contents. Wrong! I snatched it up and brought it again to my ear and – please believe me – I heard a movement within. “Live!” I insisted. I stowed it safely that night in a temperate corner of the cottage, and with the first light of morning, before my wife and daughter would awake, I sped it to the post office.

So you see, A, I did what I could under the circumstances to salvage the plan. Please, forgive me if all has been ruined.

Ruefully,
B



A:

Ah! Hasps. Ha ha. I blushed upon reading your letter, blushed with a mix of embarrassment and relief. Now, yes, in retrospect, I can hear clearly when at that boisterous pub where we last met you leaned in close to my ear with a roaring belch for cover – I'll never cease marveling at your cleverness – and you whispered beneath the din of the revelers, “Send the hasps.” Now I know what those metal thingies in the well are called. And there I was dizzy with the diabolics of what I'd heard.

Silly me, a case of asps. Nasty things those vipers, when they are alive. But now I must ponder at how a case of hasps might further the resistance? Yes, I know: “Ours is not to question why; ours is but to do or die.”

I've sent P to the well to retrieve the hasps. She stammered a bit, tried to run past me, but I blocked her with a reassuring kiss upon the forehead and sent her on. It's for her own good after all, for the good of the resistance, no? And on the morrow I will be in touch with C to coordinate an additional delivery of stockings as well. I'm glad they pleased you.

Wait... There's a knock at the door. I see through the window that it is G, my letter carrier. And.. oh my... he's accompanied. Well, I suppose we'll have guests tonight.

Bonsoir,
B

End