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11/24/04

I fear Viagra is wreaking havoc with Mr. Alphonso's social life; no sooner has he recovered his manly urges, spending an extra half-hour in front of the mirror every morning, puffing out his chest like a Christmas card robin, and humming a Carlos Gardel classic under his breath, than he is throwing over the steady affections of Anita, his housekeeper, and taking up with Alexandra "Sandy" Briggs, a serial adulteress from around the corner on Hope Street. Colonel Briggs (retired), the cuckolded spouse, is away for a month on a golfing tour of Europe. Meanwhile, Anita has resorted to guerilla tactics; unexpected loud noises from behind, which would test the heart of the healthiest; the occasional hard-to-identify ingredient in the fajitas; and a light sprinkling of sand on the bottom sheet of the bed. Mr. A takes all this with a shrug of the shoulders and a grin, and feels that these minor outbreaks are well worth tolerating for a bit of hanky panky with a well proven and willing senior sex-bomb of the suburbs. For my part, I am a little put out, as Mr. A's diary currently leaves few gaps in which to squeeze a game of Canasta.

This morning, on my ritual passage from the bathroom to the bedroom, I paused in the doorway, reminding myself that it was time to move the painting of 'Diogenes In His Barrel' to a less prominent position, like the attic; as I stood there abstractedly for a moment, my eye roamed, soft-focused, onto the bed, where Witherstock had laid out my smalls and socks, sorted into piles prior to stowage in drawers and cupboards various. Everything in the piles was either black or white – black underwear to hide the skid marks, white to avoid the occasional VPL, for instance under one's cricket flannels; and black socks for normal use, white for sporting and with shorts, etc. – all in all, the laundry making a pleasing

chequerboard pattern. But my eyes were telling my brain something more – that encoded in the pattern, there were symbols, letters; was it a trick of the light, or did the piles spell out the letters D-O-O-M, if viewed from the right angle, perhaps just there on the threshold? I squeezed my eyes shut for all of 10 seconds, to shake the illusion, and when I opened them again, I could not seem to relax my focus enough to even come close to seeing things in the same way again. So perhaps it was all imagination, like Jesus seen in clouds, ogres glimpsed from the child's cot in the pattern of the wallpaper, faces imagined in the gnarled stumps of trees. I think Witherstock's grave demeanour is beginning to have an effect on me, and I'm imagining evidence of her disturbed personality in everyday things.

Wanda Lee Trewell popped over the other day – she is a charitable soul, and is again fundraising for the Misplaced Daughters Of The Confederacy. This time, they are collecting the bits of string that the newspaper comes tied up in every morning. These two-foot sections of nylon can be woven into tablecloths, fashionable cardigans, and bathmats, and those that are not distributed to the poor, can be purchased at the MISDOC outlet shop in the High Street. I had been assiduously saving my string for months, and Wanda Lee seemed quite excited by my contribution, becoming a little flushed, and fanning herself in that charming Southern way. "Ah believe," she said, "some homeless souls will be only too glad to get a beautiful table runner, thanks to your generosity." I was flattered, and as I showed her out, was surprised to also be showing out Mr. Trewell, who had been motionless and silent in a corner of the room, and had escaped my notice, as usual.

It is with sadness (tinged with delight) that I report our soccer team's loss in the playoff final last week. It was tough for the boys, but sweet for me to witness Arnold, our Governor and assistant coach, having to accept second place; indeed, the selfish play of his own son was there for all to see, and we could have walked in three or four more goals if Wolfgang had passed the ball now and then. Much as I have grown fond of Arnie over these last few months, I was also looking forward to a little peace and quiet, away from the circus that he drags around with him. Alas, that very evening, a small motorcade of three HUMVs pulled up outside our house, and the Governor came knocking. He informed me

that Wolfie had tried his hardest, but he couldn't carry the whole team to glory, and he didn't hold me responsible for our loss.... comforting words indeed. He then said that he wanted to keep in touch – although he knew we held different political beliefs, he felt that I was a good 'sounding board' for him – helping him to keep current with the needs and dreams of the electorate. I said that I thought he was doing a fair job for a Republican, and it was a shame an accident of birth would prevent him from ever running for President. At this, he looked crestfallen, and said that his dream from boyhood was to lead the greatest country in the world to success and glory. I pointed out that New Zealand already had a pretty good Premier, and I doubted they'd fall for that old showbiz schmaltz over there...I said that, on the other hand, if he wanted to run in the US, I was sure they could bend the rules a bit for him, and now was the time to get away with almost anything in the rule-bending department. New light shone in his eyes at that remark, and he shook my hand with real passion. "You are alright guy" he said, in an accent that did nothing detrimental to the career of Henry Kissinger, "You will help me keep my hand in, keep abreast of things!" I said I'd heard stories about him keeping his hand in a breast, but he looked a little blank at that one. I said if he wanted to have real presidential swagger, he would have to learn to face up to the party machine, and a stand on stem-cell research would show everybody who was boss. He promised to look into it.

I ran into Hashimoto this morning, as he was on his knees measuring the grass (he uses metric scale). He said that to understand grass, you had to get down to grass level – indeed, sometimes he spent hours on end lying there, empathizing, feeling the mighty pounding of a dog's feet, seeing the sprinkler water arcing down from a distant heaven. He is genuinely appalled at the loss of the lantern – this time, he truly believes it is gone, not merely residing in a parallel dimension. I told him I intend to purchase another, perhaps a wooden one as something of a change. He said he knew of a man who carved them down in Japantown, beautiful craftsmanship, best cedar materials. He would be honoured to take on the project himself, and would get the ball rolling without delay.

This Eighteenth Century fad may have gone too far – merely getting dolled up in the styles of times past, with a few Hawaiian patterns thrown in, was not enough for three High

School students last week. Not content with dressing like Thomas De Quincey, and talking like Thomas De Quincey, they decided to throw a laudanum party, so that they could get out of their brains like Thomas De Quincey. Arrests were made, ugliness ensued, and I hope this won't put the dampers on a sociological phenomenon.

Mavis' brother's candle business, My Old Flame, is going great guns, and is currently expanding in the area of television. Instead of just watching and hearing your favourite programme, why not smell it too? Current best sellers are:

Friends – those girls wear expensive perfume – out of all proportion to the rent they are supposed to be paying. That New York smell of dead cockroaches behind the sink panelling, and old take-aways in the fridge.

The Office – warm electrical smell of photocopier, ancient coffee, bad aftershave, rubber-backed industrial carpet.

Big Brother – unwashed feet, month-old bed sheets, stale pizza crust.

Restaurant lovers will be glad to hear of something a little out of the ordinary opening on a piece of derelict ground behind the hairdresser's. Called 'The Bottom Of The World', this is an authentic reproduction of Ernest Shackleton's base camp in Antarctica – a humble and weather-beaten shack, with the supplies from 1914 - tinned goods, snowshoes, etc. - still stacked around the walls. The clientele are fed at crude trestle tables, while a soundtrack of howling wind plays incessantly. The menu is surely for the adventurous, but having taken the plunge, penguin is a lot better than it sounds, especially fricasseed as goujons with a lichen and squid ink sauce. And better not complain to a hard-of-hearing waiter that the Pilot Whale tastes blubbery, lest he thinks you are paying a compliment. Seal en Croute, Pickled Seagull, Tern Eggs Benedict – all uncharted waters for most diners, but there are culinary treasures to be discovered here. Iceberg lettuce seems to come with everything; did I mention the ambient temperature is a steady 2 degrees Celsius?

Appropriate dress is provided. Only the most hardy ask for ice in their drinks here, and when they do, it comes in a block a foot square, with an ice pick. All in all, a popular destination on an intolerably hot day.