

## News From Home 22

Text Copyright © 2006 Richard Thompson

<http://www.richardthompson-music.com>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any forms or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any other information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.

3/24/06

Whenever the little things go wrong here at the Trellises, we call on our good friend Mc Sweeney - Odd Job Man, Philosopher, Irish Rover, Raconteur, and general all-round Presence. Thus, the call went out Thursday last, as our ancient (1937) drain work again shuddered to a halt, and backed up into the bath. McSweeney turned up promptly, rubber boots, ancient corduroy trousers and jacket, wispy hair peering from under a threadbare Donegal cap, and, as ever, about seven days growth of beard. He walked around a bit and took in the situation, nodded professionally several times, but could not resist a small sucking of the teeth, and a tiny tut-tut. I reminded him that it was a mere three months since the last blockage. He paused to consider the options.

“It is a terrible and strange thing”, said McSweeney.

“How so?” I ventured to ask.

“It is as if all the giants of the old mythology had somehow wedged themselves into a four-inch waste pipe. Truly, it is a problem, and it will need some thought.” At this, he sat upon an upturned bucket, took out an ancient pipe that looked as if it had been found on some Mesopotamian archaeological site, and proceeded to stuff it with shag. “Would you happen to have a bottle of porter about you, in which I could join you for a sup?”

I thanked him for his inverted hospitality, but reminded him for the umpteenth time that I no longer partook. He shook his head.

“It’s only beer, now, and hardly alcohol at all – why, it is virtually a Soft Drink!”

I informed him, with regret, that there was no booze in the house, not even of the soft variety. He took it philosophically.

“Did I tell you of the time that I once found a goat down the bath waste? How the creature got there was a mystery...the owner, a farmer called Foden (this is back in the Old Country) was bathing the wretched beast prior to the County Show, and some freak vacuum of enormous pressure had sucked it down into the bowels of the earth like so much toothpaste. I dug down to the pipe and cut it open longitudinally, releasing the goat with an enormous ‘GLOP!’ The creature seemed none the worse for wear, shook itself free of some obstinate slurry, and

ran off to graze on some thistles.”

As with many of McSweeney’s tales, I thought I detected a hint of exaggeration. I asked if he was considering using the snake.

“The snake is a worthy weapon in the armoury of the plumber, but as its name implies, it is a slippery customer, and must be handled with care to avoid any unwanted backlash. Did I tell you of the time I was in India, and I witnessed a local plumber hypnotize (for thus it seemed) forty feet of stainless steel tape, and convince it to go of its own accord down into the sewage system?”

As it happened, I had heard this story on at least three other occasions. I asked him what the other possibilities were, with regard to unblocking the drain.

“Dynamite”, he said. “It may come to that. Or the acid is an old friend, but like old friends, sometimes they’re there for you, and sometimes they’re round at the betting shop, or drunk at their sister-in-law’s. Have you tried the plunger, at all?”

I said it was the first recourse, before any outgoing call.

“I hope you didn’t push instead of suck”, said McSweeney. “sometimes those things are the devil itself in the wrong hands. Always call your professional first.”

I was regretting calling him at all at this point, but I left him sitting on his bucket, smoking up a storm, and wandered into the kitchen for a snack, and found Mrs. RT and Witherstock glaring at each other. The atmosphere was charged. Apparently there had been words exchanged on the subject of fitted bottom sheets, and the folding thereof. Mrs. RT was wondering why it took so long to fold the laundry, and Witherstock was petulantly demonstrating her patented 17-fold method of taming the untamable; the problem, of course, with the bottom fitted sheet, is that it has no real shape when off the bed – with the elastic stretched, it achieves a fine rectangle, but with the elastic slack, it is but an unwieldy blob. Enter Witherstock, with her origami like approach - fold after fold after fold until – presto! A small and perfect square. She further claimed that title-bearing former employers had been very satisfied with her technique – personally, I doubted the fitted sheet had been around that long. I do sneak back to Witherstock’s quarters occasionally, when I know she’s out, just to check on any lunacy she might be up to. On my last reconnaissance, I did find some dolls of Governor Swarzeneger, the Action Man kind readily available at Puzzle Zoo, featuring Arnie in some of his most beloved roles; there were pins in various limbs, but nothing through the head or heart. I took this as a sign that she might be softening a wee bit. I must ask him if he’s been feeling any twinges lately.

Speaking of the Governor, he was in a pessimistic mood for his elocution lesson this week.

“In China, they love me!” he said, “I could do no wrong. Thousands followed me down the street. I am like a god over there! But back in California, everything goes wrong...my special election is a disaster, organized labour hates me, my war chest is empty. Why can't I just be leader of the Chinese people?”

I suggested that once he was President of the United States, he could achieve the position of Chinese leader by one of two means: simple conquest; or having learned how to run one country, it was a doddle to run another – it was rather like being a coach of a football team. Once you had the basic grasp of tactics and man-management, you could get fired every three or four years and move to the team in the next town...or even like working for a record company. But one step at a time...first the Governorship. The main reason Californians were cooling to his charms, I proposed, was the way he said the word, California. He pronounced every syllable with Teutonic rigor, but this was not music to the ears of the local surfers, massage therapists and scriptwriters. I suggested more of a slur, completely swallowing the middle 'l', and falling off dramatically at the end, making it essentially a two syllable word. I suggested he watch a steady diet of cowboy films from the 30s, 40s and 50s, and repeat the lazy drawls of Alan Ladd, John Wayne, and heck, even Ronald Reagan. He agreed to the regimen, but still seemed limp and dejected. I took him out the back to see my Japanese lantern converted into a minigolf hole, and he immediately brightened, insisting on playing the hole a couple of times, and finally scoring a par three. I asked Arnold if he would like to design a hole? Perhaps something thematic based on his Hollywood past? His rather beady eyes got as large as they ever get, and he said he would be thrilled, and would work on plans right away.

Hashimoto's topiary on the front hedge, is growing in size slowly, but is still inconclusive; on the left could be a giant hedgehog, and on the right the Clintons wrestling – but I doubt Hashimoto would be getting off on that kind of subject matter. When I asked him for a small clue, he simply chuckled to himself and kept on clipping. I should mention here that he never uses an electric clipper – he considers that far too crude. He works only with decreasing sizes of hand shears. Indeed, I have seen him use a nail file.

Went to the races with Mr. Alphonso, and I can think of no-one better to have around in the proximity of horseflesh. Anita, his housekeeper, nurse, and apparent love interest (for this week anyway), was with us, and was very excited by the atmosphere, and her first experience of betting on the horses. Mr. A ran down the card with her, took her into the paddock before every race, and before Anita risked her five big ones (dollars) on a bet, he gave her The Word from the horse's mouth – whatever the buzz was from jockeys, trainers, bookies – all of Mr. A's innumerable acquaintances at the track gave their opinions, and Mr. A's unerring eye for the good points of a horse, plus his lifetime's experience, added up to near certainty about the outcome of every race. The day went something like this:

First Race – 1PM - 3 furlongs – 3-year-olds and up.

Mr. A hears from the stable manager that Frisky Boy, out of Golden Boy, out of Southern Boy, out of the famous Bad Boy, winner of the Arc de Triomphe, nearly broke the stopwatch in training, and has been under- handicapped. His jockey likes this course, and won twice here last month. Mr. A says to Anita, Frisky Boy, no question, to win. The odds are short, but your money is safe. Anita says, but what about number 11, Che Guevara? I used to have a poster of him up on my wall – I have a little nephew called Chico, and sometimes we call him Che. A horse called Che Guevara, that's so funny. And look, it's 50-1. If I put on five bucks, let' see that's – that's two hundred and fifty dollars! That's way more money!

Mr. A smiled, shrugged, and said, well, it's your money, go ahead, you may get lucky, but not to win, to place, OK?

The race is run. Result: Che Guevara by a short head, 50-1. Third place, Frisky Boy. Anita shrieks with delight. Mr. A frowns for a moment, but then smiles philosophically.

Second Race 1:30PM – 1 mile – 2-year-olds

Mr.A hears that the favourite, Zeugma, was lame last week, and missed two days of training. The smart money is going on Rat-tat-tat-tat, the third favourite, who ran a bad race last time out, when she was off her feed, but has real potential on soft going. Mr. A says to Anita, Rat-tat-tat-tat, 5-1, will definitely finish in the top 3, you were lucky last race, don't push it...Anita says, I hate those colours the jockey's wearing. How can I bet on something that's brown and purple? Now what was that one I liked? Oh yes, number 8, Fried Breakfast, 25-1. Just the most beautiful shade of teal, with black and white stripes. I thought, that's so tasteful...Mr. A shakes his head, and says, it's your funeral, waste your money.

Result: Fried Breakfast by 2 lengths. Rat-tat-tat-tat, 4th. Mr. A looking slightly flushed.

This basically, with only one exception, was the pattern for the day. Anita won about a week's wages, and was deliriously happy. Mr. A lost about the same, and was miserable. Anita sang all the way home. Mr. A pretended to be interested in scraping the mud off his shoes.

Restaurant watch: At last!! Someone has finally introduced a new food group to the gourmets of Southern California – although, unwittingly, they have probably been eating it all along. A new establishment called Lovely Grub caters for the adventurous and ethnically inclined among us, serving dishes based upon ingredients from the Class Insecta. The menu writers seem to have a sense of humour:-

## Marmite de Termite

A balsamic vinegar reduction poured over lightly grilled queen termites, on a bed of rocket and mixed spring greens.

## Grubs Up!

Witchettygrubs from Australia, seared and skewered, and served sunny-side-up with vegetables, over wild rice

## Waiter, there's a spider in my soup!

Fresh rainforest spiders, boiled and strained, and aromatically seasoned with saffron and herbs, served as a consommé –recipe based on the SAS survival handbook.

## Come Fly With Me!

Honey-coated locusts, hand selected and dipped,

## LarvaBurger

As served at the Deux Magots in Paris?

## Antz

You've seen the movie – now eat the cast!

Coated in finest Belgian chocolate.

## Sashimi!

Today's selection from the Raw Bar.