

FEAST IN THE MIDST OF FAMINE or
Passtime of the Local Freight Agent

Regularly, the village kids were entertained by Jimba with banquets at my expense and without my knowledge until it was almost too late to launch an effective protest.

These events were held under the loading platform which was elevated to facilitate loading and unloading freight from the railroad cars, on the outskirts of town, about half-way along the path to the " 'Ol swimmin hole. . . "

The freight agent had established a listening post in his office above and kept well and approvingly abreast of Jimba's doings. He justified his stand when confronted with criticism by saying: "boys will be boys. . . and some are just more boy than others, and they grow up to be more man than others, I think, and I am a close observer of such matters. . . "

When I protested excessive grocery bills when I hadn't been near the store to make a purchase, and said to my friend, the grocer, "Now you know better than to extend credit when it has never been my habit to seek it. "

"But, " he would say, grinning. . . "must I become the town's bad guy? The guy who was NOT a boy, once? "

And I would respond: "By no means. . 'Tis only that I respectfully suggest that I could refuse to honor these bills, oh, thou who regardeth not the heavy chains of my enslavement, or careth -- a fig about it!" . . .

The debt was always promptly paid and the incident as promptly forgotten, to be repeated: again and again. . .

The freight depot agent entertained his friends with the narratives of these forays : the 'ol swimmin hole and the feasting, the guest list of which also included the village dogs that habitually attended Jimba and the canine guests of his friends, as well. . .

And, quoting the agent. . . said he, "I would look down upon this spread of food and salivate at the sight. 'Twould not have been difficult to maneuver an invitation for myself, I'm sure, except that it would have revealed my invasion of their privacy and would have deprived me of enlightenment I never ceased to enjoy. . . not to speak of the opportunity to relive my own boyhood and experience the lifting of the intervening years. . . for a space. . of time. "

He would sigh at remembrance of those days and continue, "When the feast was over someone always remarked on the difficulty of carrying dirty dishes on the bikes and the more it was discussed, the more difficult it seemed to resolve it. Without entering the debate at any point, young Jim smashed the china, piece by piece against a huge rock, in all probability planted there during the great ice melt of thousands of years ago, and who knows but what it might have been arranged for this specific purpose.

Anyway, Mrs. Jones china became more unmatched as the years advanced, and the spoon handles took on strange patterns. It is said that second hand merchants have known her by her first name for quite a while now: "While Mrs. Jones does not have the appearance of the second-hand-store type, 'tis said the addiction grew until it has become her only passtime apart from writing, of course. It cannot be denied that value exists mostly in the eyes of the beholder. A shoddy, mediocre thing cast on a pile of discards has no value until someone bothers to salvage it and endow it with advantages. I understand Mrs. Jones has become quite intrigued by the mismatched handles of pewter spoons."

A listener spoke up: "Why are all the plates, utensils and stuff to serve the feast always taken from Jrs. Jones' household? I'd like to know, since the initial cash is borne by her?"

The narrator thought this over for a space, and then replied: "She is always away at work and 'tis likely has not yet paused to devise a cure for this particular practice on the part of the kids."

The town loafer spoke up: "She did yesterday -- and it was a killer-diller! She haunted her own house, I'm told, and little George Fudge said if anybody thinks THAT was Mrs. Jones chasing him, that person is nuts for sure, for whatever was chasing him was bleeding all over... and... had teeth a half a foot long."

This rocked the building with laughter for a spell, and I snuck out of the phone booth... making like 40 years older than I was. It is not easy to make like bleeding all over without considerable advance preparation, and considerable mess attached.