

For Julio, who taught me the expression

## NO POSTAGE NECESSARY

Yesterday was a good day because the break finally came through and I discovered a little FORTRAN bug related to hardware/software interaction that had been bogging down my usual two papers for the last three months. Funny how when your one and only contribution to economic theory depends on a few lines of code which you have run a zillion times in twenty different systems, and in that code, which you know by heart, front to back, back to front, upside down and ambidextrously, there is this one and only routine that you have filched from Numerical Recipes: the unavoidable random number generator, and the program starts going weird on you just when you are writing up the latest revisions that will hopefully get the goddamned paper published, and you know that the problem has to be there, in precisely that routine which, up front, should be the least suspect, but somehow you sense it's there, and it's elusive as hell, and, of course, you are moonlighting, and writing a book, and in charge of the Department's computers, plus a loving husband, and housewife, and father of three, so the weeks and the months go by, and the bug remains, and you know that you are the only person in the whole goddamned world that is ever going to know or care about it, and making up a bunch of numbers is so easy, and, after all, even good old Milt himself made numbers up all the time, and succeeded in getting away with it, but somehow you resist to cheat, more out of stubbornness (too many b's and n's and s's) than out of honesty, after all code is code, and you consider yourself to be a FORTRAN whizz, and there cannot be all that many bugs that can prove to be that resilient, after all these years of going at them, and then when you are about to give up, you hit on the stupid thing, of course ex-post every bug is stupid, so you are quite elated, even though having found it might not be quite enough to take care of all your code-related problems. And you go home, ready to watch the soccer game, and then to write a bunch of letters that you have been postponing for far too long now, but first of all you have to peel some peppers, they are piquillos, a special variety that ripens at precisely this time of the year, and you have lucked out and the timing of the roasting was just perfect, so they are bound to be delicious, and while you are peeling them, of course your thoughts turn to sex, just as they always do when you are peeling peppers, and just as most probably do everybody else's, but then again that is yet another conjectured regularity of human behavior that you have never tested, and it is Saturday, and you ramble down memory lane and you remember a girl that you dated ages ago, when you were twenty and a prude and she was eighteen and another prude, but you still managed to find out that she had a pair of tits that were simply perfect, with exactly the right size and weight and consistency, and you wonder how are those tits doing twelve-odd years later, and you consider calling her, but you think it twice, maybe it is not such a good idea after all, it is bound to involve wasting time and once again postponing those letters, and, given that she now is a rather good looking and a successful career woman, the chances that she is home and planless are almost nil anyway, so why bother calling, but then again what is the harm in taking the gamble, so you search through an ancient phone book until you find her number, and it so happens that she is home and has no plans and would be happy to see you, but she doesn't think that the candle-lit dinner for two at your place is such a good idea, and why not go to a restaurant instead, so she makes two or three lousy suggestions, and then you remember a baroque Russian place that you patronize once in a while, and you make reservations at ten for two, and you give in and drive to her place to pick her up, even though you had said that no way you were going to do it, parking in the old part of town is hard, but eventually you get there, during the ride you have lied that you are now free-lancing as a food critic, so she naturally raises no objections when you order salmon-roe blinis and lemon-flavored vodka with beer chasers, of course she does not offer too much resistance either when you say that you called, so it is your turn to pay, then she suggests the Berlin Cabaret, a small place close by, and then, hell Stephen, what then?, then we order vodka-tonics, and slowly, as the time for the show gets closer, the place starts getting crowded, so after a while and another round of vodka-tonics, you suggest changing bars, and now it is your turn to choose so you propose one of your secret hangouts, a run-down little place where a blind old man plays ageless tunes in an ancient piano, and where they give you sunflower seeds to wash down your drinks. It takes you a while to find the place, and then you have to wait some more for one of the little tables to open, but eventually you settle down, César is playing his rickety tunes with his tired stance, the drinks arrive, and the place is kind of dark and cozy, so you hug her a little and she does not seem to mind, and

you kiss her a little and she kisses you back, so far so good, and the conversation is going great with little kisses in the pauses, but at some point you sense the same strangeness that you remember from the past, and you realize that in spite of all those years, she is still the same prude, forget it pal, and anyway she is thinner now, so her tits are bound to have shrunk into commonness, and it is almost five a.m. so you lets call it a night, and while you are driving her home she says, let's stay Platonic, it's better that way, and you answer, let's, if that's what you want, but it is definitely worse, and you get her home and you drive yourself back, and it's blue balls again, just as in junior high, a zillion years ago, and you check your watch and you find out that it is five thirty in the morning, and teaching starts on Monday, and all the work that you had planned to do tomorrow is bound to go down the drain, and what's even worse: her tits had indeed shrunk, as you managed to find out in the good night hug that got kind of steamy.

You sigh as you drag in the last puff of smoke from your pipe: the first letter is almost finished, one down, two to go, it is only nine thirty and the half-time pause must be over.

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