

Darkness Visible

Frank Crowther
(FICTION)

Before this happened, I remember reading that you will get good at it, as you go along. Now there's a hilarious statement. Very funny. The smart guy who wrote that could never have been at the disadvantage. I suppose it was easier for him that way.

You do get good at some things, but they are no more than momentary placations. And it is not the hearing at first. It is merely a deluding hangover of your lost sight. You see colors, grossly conflagrated, suddenly distorted, kaleidoscopic, in such ephemeral spontaneity that the pictures disappear before you actually see... before you discern what they may have represented. Then you see—is that such an indispensable word? Do I see it or them or whatever it is or, possibly, has my mind so accustomed itself to perception that my thoughts have now acquired some non-existent tint? Can ideas be colored or memory truly retain them? I suppose that is a small matter but I shall allow myself the indulgence, since it will make it easier for you to digest these slight recordings of lost times. (I wonder why it is that I feel this obligation to apologize for the fact of my affliction?) And now I see (there it is again) that my situation should be related to you as something other than an affliction, for that word denotes pain, grief, vexation and distress. And these are the things we so shun, circumvent at every opportunity, for our world has too long been pregnant with such malignancies. Should I then, for my dear reader's benefit, be... determined? Must I convince you that I have a well-filled reserve of courage, that I bravely face some useful future, standing indomitably before my outhouses (for you are my betters in that you see), the shining paragon to be looked up or down to, depending upon your reference?

I'm getting bitter again, so let us talk of the beginning once more.

My fabricated sight was beautiful during those first weeks. The brilliance of those twisted thoughts stayed off, for a few seconds in time, the inevitable, irrevocable actuality of my loss. Strange devils, they were, producing their magical effects by some secret though natural means. The illusions were sweet salve on an injured breast which did not then know (or want to know) that it was no longer obdurate. Though the sword had penetrated, severing that tenuous nerve, I needed to be joyous in newly-found occupation.

Short-savored ambrosia, that. I wonder if you can possibly realize how nauseous your patronizing remarks sound to a blind man. Oh, the smug condescension and fetid compassion! Why can't you learn to listen to yourself before speaking? You would do better if you crossed to the other side of the street and said nothing. I know I'm blind, God damn it, and I don't need any one to remind me of the fact. It must be terrible, you say. I wish there were something I could do. Wouldn't you like to talk to some one about it? Oh, I know how you must feel. At least you haven't been deprived the use of your other senses. Disgusting bastards, all of you. The children are the only honest inquirers. They seem to be genuinely interested in the mechanics of blind-seeing. Don't you see anything, mister? How 'bout when you squeeze your knuckles against them? Can you really tell what's goin' by just listenin' to movies? Gee, I'd be awful scared 'bout blind, especially when nobody's around. So am I. I'm even scared when they are around.

After losing my first revision, I got used to being waited on. Maybe I shouldn't say used to it, but resigned to it. My cloistered time was all my own so there were games and projects to be devised. For a while I counted the number of cars that passed by the porch in an hour's time (which I could tell from the church bells). Then I listened closely to see (dammit) if I could determine what make of car it was. I thought I was getting good at it, but there was no way to tell.

Pedestrians were next. Man or woman, light-heavy-medium, tall or short. Soon I was making up personalities for the various styles of walks. Their clothes had sound, too, if the street was quiet. The people in my house were easy and ceased to interest me very quickly. It was the outsiders who were occupying. Several passed each day at almost given times. Some of them I got to know and expect. But the real strangers became the great challenge. It's a man, maybe 25 to 35, seems to have a suit on, possibly some kind of work clothes, looking for some one or an address, now he's stopped, did he turn around?, no, here he comes, in front and going on by. —I wonder what he was doing here or looking for? Children were very difficult to distinguish between, since many of them wore the same kind of shoes.

You wouldn't think there were so many sounds unless they made up your world. Cars, starting-stopping-turning-passing, car doors shutting, emergency brakes being released and windows being rolled up, the clinky sound of a Zippo lighter or the sharp snap of a Ronson, water dripping-running-flushing, rain (sickly sweet, soothing, lonesome and sated with some unknowable fear), wind or breeze or gentle rustle, birds fluttering together or alone (they watch while you listen), the many sounds of wood, and, most difficult and perplexing of all, the sudden noises which too quickly die or are muffled and you sometimes sit for long periods trying to place and identify them. So many sounds that it might take you the rest of your life to list them, if you wanted to. There are also those particular things which you feel and hear at the same time, especially people. The most silent of animals makes a great deal of noise and has distinct odors. But there is something else. I feel people when they are near. They're true, you know, those stories about the blind sensing

some one's presence. I imagined too many things at first (probably because I wished some thing or some one were there), but now I rarely mistake another being's nearness. It's one of the few things you brag about. To yourself.

In the summers, I never have difficulty telling what time of day it is. Each part of the day has its own sounds. I can wake from a dead sleep and within two or three minutes tell almost to the hour what time it is. This is more difficult at night when there are fewer distinctive sounds, other than the night animals and insects. (I hear bats immediately.) The winters are less delineated, though the sounds are more naked as they pierce the cold air. My first winter, I remember, was much more frightening than my first summer. I suppose it was the bleakness of the exterior that seemed to reflect within me, the barren state of nature penetrating my sight-blind security. Then, too, I was taken by those empty fears more often and my temper grew short until I became crabbed and crochety, more so than usual (for most of us blind are ill-tempered, if you'll notice). Actually, spring—deep-breathing, stretching, premeditatedly exciting—and fall—light, relaxing though somewhat portentous of its successor, casual with well-being—are the best seasons.

The best week of the year is Christmas week, but not for the reasons you may think. There are warm, filling sounds of burgling laughter, the people raising their pitch and the music moving constantly within and without. This is the saving break of winter. Don't mistake my sentiments, however. Charity and belief and hope have not a thing to do with it. Charity is ill-founded and too often scheming. Your beliefs are your own, having little or nothing to do with anybody else. And I find no hope save in children, not for them but in them so long as they remain young, so long as they are child-like in the very being of children. They will learn soon enough. I sometimes think they provide and enjoy the only happiness on this earth. Possibly you have to be blind to understand that.

If it is on your mind, I never think of suicide. I did, at first, quite often. But suicide has become more terrifying to me now than it ever could be to you. No longer are there thoughts of ending my obvious futility. The self-pity and deep-sobbing sorrow wear themselves out, become boring. Anxiety arises periodically, but even that is not relentless. It passes, eventually. Then, only anguish remains as my constant companion.

So I must try to keep what little I have, what there is, for me, not for any one else. It shouldn't shock you when I say that there is no one more ruthlessly (though necessarily) egotistical and purely selfish than a blind man. To tell the truth, we have but the slightest care for others. Those whom we need are bound to us, trapped by our blindness, and we more often than not despise them in their forced dedication. But we are somewhat within sensible bounds, for it would be a tragic mistake for us to become attached to some one. To any one, I'm sure you must understand that.

My blindness and my solitude have become synonymous. I find that I am forever moving away into some strange and boundless jungle of a world within, from which I fear, some day, I may not return.

I would like to meet that fellow who said you will get good at it, as you go along. I haven't. I haven't at all.

What About This?

1. The nation is at war.
2. The nation is losing the war, badly.
3. The nation must exert a vastly greater effort.

The Daily Tar Heel

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More Letters

Dear Editor:

Griping is a universal hobby. Every day is full of too many "quizzes," "busy phones," and more books to read. It seems as though we cannot ever find satisfaction. Expressing our opinions is important. Although some complaints are small, it makes us feel better to have them in the open.

My particular peeve is Monday morning. Perhaps this day is owned by many as a "blues" time, but my reason isn't the usual one. The sociology classrooms on this day have some semblance of a junk yard. Empty and half-filled cake bottles, cups, papers, the stale, sickly odor of food and beverages (there is a law forbidding consumption of certain beverages in state owned buildings, isn't there?) are not pleasant to face at any time.

What is the reason? Is it indifference to property or an intense dislike of sociology? We asked for more study space and the sociology department answered our need. It is one of a few buildings which students are allowed to use and it remains open all night for our convenience. I think it is only fair for us to recognize the responsibilities which accompany this right.

We said need places to study. But how can we expect more when present advantages have been misused? Can this privilege remain ours under these circumstances?

The appearance of each building is a reflection of the entire student body. Therefore, I challenge you as responsible citizens of this community. Will you uphold the high standards which we have set for ourselves?

Toni Brady

Dear Sir:

I thoroughly resent the publishing of the article Thirteen Steps to Christianity. It seems to me that the author is comparing Christianity to alcoholism. This is a grave injustice. I, being a Christian and, more specifically, a Catholic, believe that Christianity is something to be held sacred. It is not something to be degraded and scoffed at by comparing it to alcoholism. In Step No. 3, he speaks of "sneaking prayers." No true Christian has to "sneak" his prayers. He is not ashamed of his religion because he has no need to be. This also deals with Step No. 11. A Christian is proud of his religion. He has no reason to hide it from others. He has no reason to be ashamed to visit his Church whenever he wants to. In fact, it is his credit to visit his Church when he is not compelled to do so.

I sincerely hope that the offending article has not given non-Christians a false idea of the high standards of Christianity and the moral and material good it has accomplished.

Perhaps I have mistakenly interpreted the article. If I have, and if someone will be so kind to give me the correct interpretation, I will willingly apologize. But the manner in which this article is written is certainly misleading.

Edmund C. De Vito, Jr.

The editor should remember when urging the nation to "a vastly greater effort," that one should never start vast projects with half-baked ideas.

Harve Harris

Editor:

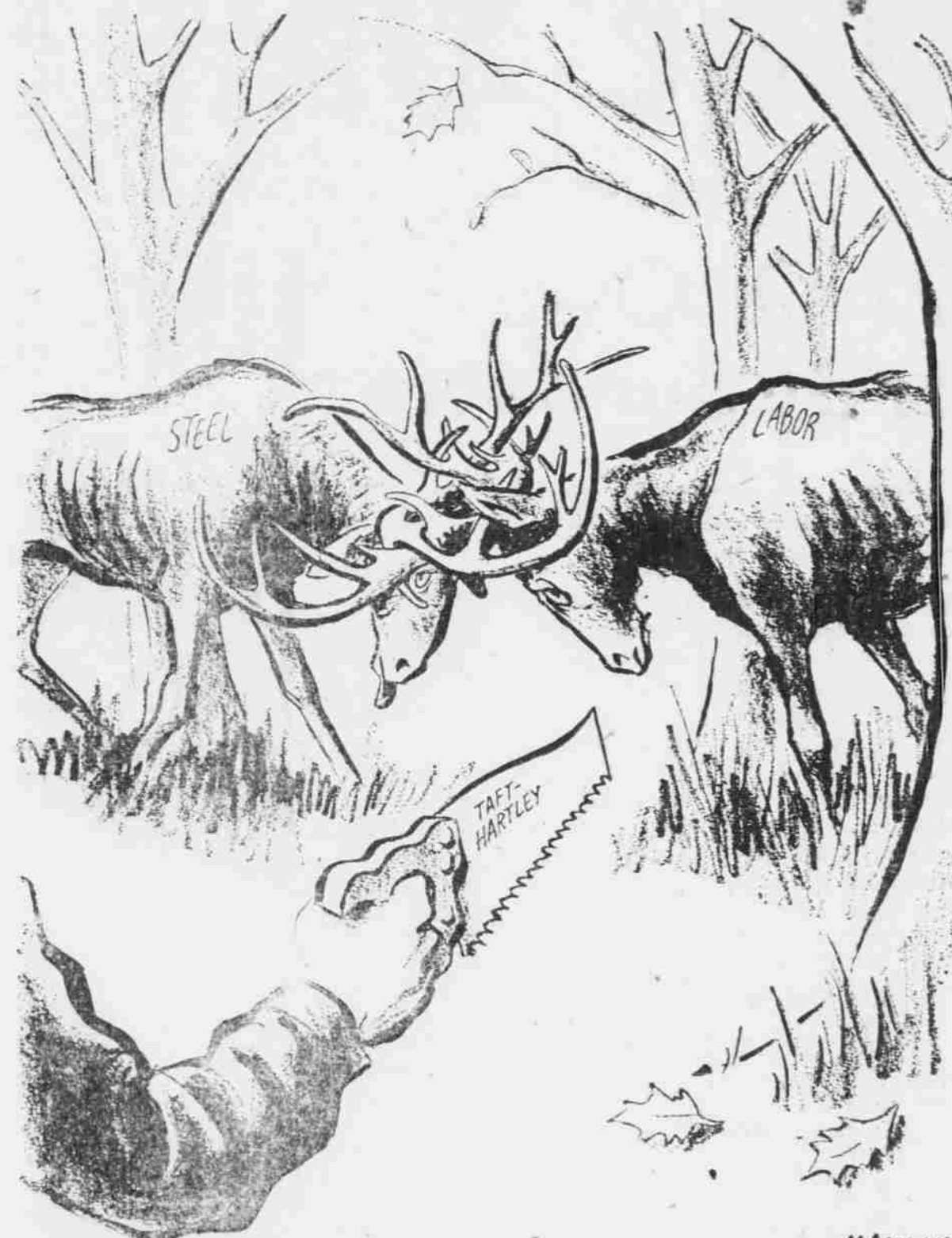
We who are desperately concerned about the future of Africa and more specifically of Southern Africa, were happy to have Archbishop de Blank tell the University of North Carolina something of the present picture of Africa. I am sorry that the account of the talk written by Mr. Richard Burrows in today's issue of the Daily Tar Heel does not report correctly many of the things that his Grace told us.

One item in particular needs correction. It is stated that "In the Dutch Colonies there are three million whites and two billion blacks." There are, in fact, no Dutch (Netherlands) colonies in Africa at all. What his Grace did say was: "In the Union of South Africa there are three million whites, nine million Africans, two million coloreds and half a million Indians."

The Press has a duty in the enlightenment of people of goodwill concerned with the welfare of Africa and my country in particular, to be accurate in reporting.

J. J. Frankel

Pruning Season



Herblock is away due to...

MAULDIN
COPY 1959, The Pulitzer Publishing Co., St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Neither Black Nor White; Mostly Shades Of Gray

Norman B. Smith

"Now the two primal spirits, who revealed themselves in vision as Twins are the Better and the Bad in thought, word and action... I will speak of the Spirits twain at the first beginning of the world, of whom the holier thus spake to the enemy: 'Neither thought nor teaching, nor wills nor beliefs nor words nor deeds, nor selves nor souls of us twain agree'." —writings of Zoroaster

"... saw the God of the World as altogether evil, which sought only to escape by the utmost abstinences and evasions and perversions from the black wickedness of being." —H. G. Wells, Mr. Britling Sees It Through "The sea unites, and the land divides." —James Conrad, The Nigger of the "Narcissus"

Some children were playing with an object that had washed into the shallow water of a bay near Laguna Beach; innocently and curiously they swished the object around in the murky, near-shore-dispersed waves that curled over the sand. The spirit of the waters is ancient and, like all things that have existed long enough to become ancient, possesses boundless patience, knowing that liquidly, lightly it can eventually destroy the lands that it eternally rubs against (in caresses, jabs, burrows, slaps, or in halings) as it did Atlantis long ago, knowing that in the duration of only a few billion years it has by some 70% completed its task—the winning of the battle against the fire spirit, which counteracts with volcanic upthrusts of molten new lands from its flame chambers below and of evaporating rays that it sends down from its outpost in the heavens—the sun—above.

Occasionally it (the water spirit) takes some possession dear to the fire spirit's continents and islands, destroys this possession, and casts it or part of it back in ridicule and defiance of its enemy as a token that the battle is being lost. Thus there are parts of ships off Cape Hatteras, and once in a particularly frivolous moment the entire crew of a ship was spirited away while the ship itself was completely intact (even with the crew's cat aboard) gracefully sitting upright in the sand; thus there are whitened, twisted, as lifeless-as-anything-can-be pieces of driftwood guided to the shore at night; thus there are cans and bottles found some of which contain the scribbled sou-chillole scrawlings of a man who knows suddenly that he is one of those possessive that the water spirit has chosen to take.

And thus near Laguna Beach that day there was this destroyed and returned possession with which the children played. It was a human leg.

The picnickers and beach ball tossers left their occupations to come down to the water's edge and look at this limb which has been torn from its body, masticated by some agent of the water spirit, sucked of its blood by the hungry waters themselves, and sent ashore to remind the elder ones of the aims it (the water spirit) patiently projected for the lands belonging to the fire spirit, knowing that the elder ones would later impart to their children, who were as yet innocent of the meaning of this discovery, that indelible fear that all people are aware of, it only subliminally because of the sophistication which seems to be so popular these days in contrast to the time when sea serpents and other manifestations of their ater spirit were openly acknowledged.

In this last of the ages be ye aware of this battle of the parts of the all and know that your creator and protector is losing, that which sowed the living things on the face of the lands as a carpet protective against the corrosive waters, that spirit is losing... fresh waters that the fire spirit ardently purified of poisons to use in feeding the carpet of living things—these fresh waters are diminishing; "New York City Limits Water Consumption; Geological Report Cites Failing Water Tables"... the poisoned waters are coming ever inland—useless is the Caspian, Dead Sea, Great Salt Lake, other bodies of water—what is next to be dried or made saline?... drought! crop failure! dust bowl! aye, the rainfalls come more seldom for less water can be captured from the seas... erosion & fire & covering with concrete cities, taking the source of feed away from the hungry carpet of living things... the gradual melting of polar icecaps to flood... absence for countless millennia of subterranean pushings powerful enough to form new mountains.

Verily, the last age has come and is being expended, as when a heavy log rocks back and forth a few times before you begin to make it roll, so have the waters advanced and retreated in preparation for the final conquest. Hope that you live a short enough life so that yours is not among the hands that will clutch empty at the air as the fluids of the water spirit close around the wrist; hope that your life span will be contained within the times when there are only symbols, hints, foreshadowings—rejoice while you can when you see but wreckage and bleached-boughs and legs.

An Editorial

Davis B. Young

On the front page of today's paper is a story concerning the rights of students to vote in the coming Bond Issue Election. Throughout the past few years there has been a constant controversy raging as to whether students at this University should be allowed to participate in elections as if they were residents of Chapel Hill.

It is the considered opinion of this paper that students who attend this University should be considered residents of Chapel Hill, Orange County and the State of North Carolina. Certainly, if you spend a minimum of nine months a year in one spot, that is your home. You spend a majority of your time here, a majority of your money here, and have a majority of your friends in the Chapel Hill area. Therefore, it is clear that you are residents of this town, county and state.

The State of North Carolina states that in order to vote you must have been a resident of this state for one year and of your county for thirty days. Certainly there are a number of students who qualify under this statute. Yet, they have in effect been denied the precious right of voting, largely because they cannot honestly say that they will live here after graduation.

There are over 4,000 students on this campus of legal age. They have left their homes and come here to spend four years. They are currently better acquainted with this town and its functioning than the towns from which they came. They are ready to assume the responsibilities of citizenship in this community.

The only possible reason for denying students the right to vote in this town other than the minimum residence requirements and age, would be if they are already registered to vote in another area.

And so with this as a brief explanation we cannot urge you strongly enough to at least make an attempt to register for the Bond Issue Election. This bond issue is of such importance to the student body that indeed a great deal of the future of this University will be settled when the results are in.

If we are successful in passing the \$4.4 million dollar measure, we will have gone a long way towards fulfilling the needs of a growing academic community. The ten benefits which will come to Chapel Hill out of this Bond Issue will total more than five million dollars.

Isn't five million dollars worth a few minutes of time to register? In the age of American complacency, when the rights of citizenship are taken for granted by our people, we find a situation in our own back yard which can only be termed disenfranchisement. This day we will find out just how much the right to vote means to the students of this University.

TARTAN TALE

Old George is a Scot and an ex-miner. Not long ago, when I called on him in Glasgow, the conversation turned to the death of one of his cronies. "I'm told that Harry left 5,000 pounds," I remarked admiringly. "That he didn't" George said. I expressed surprise. "Harry left no money," he went on. "He was taken from it."—The Reader's Digest

COSTLY TASTE

Government is like cars or houses—nobody would be satisfied with the kind they could afford.—Columbia State



POGO

PEANUTS

BY KELLY

BY SCHULZ