

1984

by George, Orwell

The Saga of a Struggling Writer and his Search for a Story

Wholly Burdened Press
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Early 1983.

Only six weeks until Hedgehog Day.

R. Cuddlesock, CoTHB Historical Custodian, was seated at his old-fashioned roll-top desk. In true custodial fashion, important papers were strewn about everywhere. Scribbled notes were stashed in all the cubbyholes and empty beer bottles seemed to be flowing from the open drawers. The musty air of ancient works hung in layers throughout the room, as though neatly cataloged for easy reference. Lastly, as if it was an interior decorator's final touch, a fine layer of dust covered everything except the antique typewriter and the cold beer sitting next to it.

At that particular moment, Cuddlesock was thumbing through his favorite reference work: a dog-eared copy of the "The Collected Works." Widely acclaimed in custodial circles, the "Collected Works" stood out as a classic piece of non-fiction. Cuddlesock always turned to it to help put his current work into the proper context. He had hopes of adding to the "Collected Works" someday and he wanted to be sure that what he wrote now would fit later. Satisfied he was on the right track, he sat down the "Works" and grabbed his beer. Between sips, he busily recorded the latest bits of historical trivia; carefully checking each paragraph, each phrase, for accuracy and dangling participles.

Just as he took the last sip of his beer, a knock at the door interrupted his train of thought.

"It's time for a break anyway," he thought to himself as he set down the empty bottle. Fortunately the refrigerator was not far from the front door.

After a quick detour to grab a beer, he opened the door to find a postman crumbling up an empty cigarette pack.

"Got a cigarette?" the postman asked.

"Nope. But I'll take that empty wrapper for you," Cuddlesock replied. Like a true historical custodian, he took the wrapper and tossed it over his shoulder toward the wastepaper

basket near his desk.

“You R. Cuddlesock?”

“That’s me.”

“I’ve got a registered letter for you. Sign here.”

Handing the postman his beer, he signed the letter, and, seeing it was from the “The Holey Net,” excitedly tore it open. A quick glance at the letter, however, left Cuddlesock flabbergasted. Bewildered, he turned back inside and closed the door behind him, leaving the postman to decide what to do with the beer.

The letter read:

“Dear R. Need your help. Please write fiction piece for ‘Net.’ Thanks, Horace”

“Fiction! Me? I deal with facts, figures. I’m not a fiction writer,” Cuddlesock said as he collapsed on the sofa. “I’m a custodian. What do I know about fiction?”

He sat there for quite awhile, deep in thought, slowly shaking his head. Finally, he wadded up the letter, tossed it toward his desk, and got up to look for his beer.

* * *

Mid 1983.

It was a day like any other, more or less.

R. Cuddlesock was seated at his desk, his typewriter before him. Crumpled sheets of paper were piled everywhere. Empty beer bottles almost outnumbered the wads of paper.

Diligently, Cuddlesock inserted a fresh sheet of paper into the typewriter, typed a few sentences, then stopped to read what he’d just written. Shaking his head, he pulled the paper from the typewriter, crumpled it up, tossed it over his shoulder, and chugged the rest of his beer.

“Fiction,” he said disgustedly. “How’d I let Greeley talk me into this? ‘Go into fiction, young man,’ he said. Sheez...”

Noticing the bottle was empty, he went for another beer.

* * *

Late 1983.

Only two days until New Year’s.

As usual, R. Cuddlesock was on his way to the refrigerator.

“Fiction!” he said as he kicked an empty beer bottle across the room. “Sheez...”

Upon reaching the fridge, he hesitated. He knew that the only beer in there was Lucky Lager. He opened the door and grabbed a beer anyway.

He usually drank Heineken. At least that’s what he drank up until about three weeks ago. That’s when the money began to run out.

Each year Cuddlesock received a grant from the CoHb Foundation. As Historical Custodian he was supposed to keep track of all the group’s facts and figures; and anything else that might be pertinent.

And, except for getting involved with Greeley and his fiction business, that’s what he did.

Cuddlesock also drank a lot of beer. But that's a story that'll just lead you out to the ol' cabbage patch.

Anyway, each year he got some grant money and each year about this time it began to run out. Usually he would have had his facts and figures sorted and recorded by now; but not this year. This year the facts and figures were buried under wads of fiction. No facts, no grant. No grant, no beer.

Everything would have been alright if he could have written the story that Greeley needed. Cuddlesock considered himself a good Historical Custodian, but, try as he might, he was just unable to write fiction. Everything he wrote turned out like it was straight out of "Trivial Pursuit".

After taking a sip of his beer, he stooped down and picked up a crumpled sheet of typing paper. Flattening it out on the desk, he began to read it:

"Once upon a time there was a badminton tournament.

'How many feet of dental floss does it take to re-string a badminton racquet?' said the hedgehog to the birdie."

He quickly crumpled up the paper and let it fall to the floor.

"Sheez!" he cried out in desperation. "At his rate I'll never get my grant."

Things were beginning to look pretty bleak. It'd been three weeks since he'd given up the Heinekens. Not counting the beer he'd just opened, there was only half a twelve-pack of Lucky left in the fridge.

There was some change in the beer mug on his desk, but he didn't bother with counting it. Nothing in it but copper, and it was less than a quarter full at that.

It was always like that. First the money ran out, then the beer.

After taking a long look at the pennies in the beer mug, he decided he couldn't hold out any longer. Either he wrote something or he went on the wagon.

With that in mind, Cuddlesock made his decision in less time than it would have taken a normal person to twist the cap off of a bottle of Lucky. Fortunately for him, he had developed a contingency plan for just this occasion. He decided now was the perfect time to implement it.

Cuddlesock went over to his desk and began searching for a stack of unopened letters. His mail had to be there someplace, he reckoned. Everything else was.

Throughout the search he was secretly hoping to find a six-pack of beer. But no such luck. After searching for hours, though, he managed to find the letters, still unopened.

At this point most people would probably just look at the unopened envelopes and then look at Cuddlesock and say, "That's your contingency plan?"

And they'd be right in saying that.

But Cuddlesock, totally out of character, would just reply: "Hey, I'm making this up as I go."

And he'd be right in saying that.

Cuddlesock's backup plan, as far as it went, had its genesis several weeks earlier while he

was doing his weekly shopping at Grove Liquor. While standing in the check-out line he happened to notice an advertisement on the back of a package of cigarette papers.

It went something like this:

“Historical Custodians, are you having a tough time writing fiction? If so, you may be suffering from Fictional Phobia, a syndrome common to non-fiction writers. To find out if you are indeed suffering from this dreaded condition just take this short test:

Question Number One:

Have you ever imagined there was a tree in your living room and just to prove it you kicked it and hurt your foot?

Question Number Two:

Have you switched from a word processor to a food processor and your writing is just as fulfilling?

Question Number Three:

Have you begun drinking Lucky Lager again?

Well, if so, you can now write, yes write, your troubles away. Just write me, Pat Pituitary, at my Famous Writers School and I’ll send you, absolutely free, the first lesson in my Famous Writers’ ‘How to conquer Fictional Phobia and become a Famous Writer’ series.

Try it out in the privacy of your own home. If you’re not completely satisfied with your first lesson, keep it. I’ve got plenty of others. If you are satisfied, let me know, and, for a mere pittance, I’ll send you a new lesson every week or so.

This offer void where prohibited, taxed, or taken to court.”

Cuddlesock wasn’t sure he was suffering from Fictional Phobia (he didn’t know what Fictional Phobia was, to begin with, and he didn’t think scoring one out of three on the test was very conclusive anyway), but he did think that the lessons might prove to be a good idea.

“There’s always the chance that they could prove to be inspirational,” he reasoned.

So he went ahead and sent away for the free lesson and then paid slightly more than a mere pittance for the rest of the series.

Here they were, the first four lessons on “How to conquer Fictional Phobia and become a Famous Writer” from Pat Pituitary’s Famous Writer’s School. They were Cuddlesock’s contingency plan; his last chance.

Discovering his beer was empty again he grabbed another one before finally settling down to start the lessons.

As he sat down on the sofa, Cuddlesock found himself a little nervous. After all, here he was, a custodial historian, on the verge of becoming a fiction writer. A FAMOUS fiction writer.

The thoughts of limitless checking accounts, armfuls of attractive women, and endless quantities of beer bounced from his left brain to his right brain and back again. Maybe fiction writing wasn’t so bad after all.

Absentmindedly, he opened the first envelope.

“Lesson Number One – by Sal E. Vate.

Writing can be dangerous work. A good pseudonym can guarantee anonymity and

preserve your peace of mind.”

“A pseudonym. Sure why not,” Cuddlesock thought to himself. “That’s a great idea.”
The next envelope contained Lesson Number Two.

“A bird in the hand is worth two on the roof. Borrow freely from classic themes. –
Horace H. Greeley, Esquire.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Cuddlesock said as he went for another beer.

“Lesson Number Three – by B. Wright.
Play with words,
it’ll lead you to fame.
Fly with the birds.
... just watch where in the heck you’re goin’, already.”

“Hmmm,” Cuddlesock hummed to himself.

Cuddlesock was sure the lessons up to this point would prove to be beneficial, but Lesson
Number Four made him just a wee bit edgy.

It simply said:

“Set and meet deadlines.”

It was signed: “Kid Vicious.”

The thought of deadlines sent Cuddlesock after another beer.

Remembering “The Kid’s” infamous slam-to-the-forehead, he decided to make it two.

Cuddlesock tried to force the thought of Kid Vicious from his mind as he returned to the
sofa with the cold beers. But it was no use. The terrifying image persisted as though it was stuck
there.

“I’m beginning to see the wisdom of inventing a pseudonym,” he thought to himself.
“Coming up with a good one shouldn’t be that difficult, especially for a future Famous Fiction
Writer.”

Looking around for something inspirational, he spied the postman’s discarded cigarette
pack on the floor, exactly where it had landed, months before.

“Winston... cigarettes... smoke... smoke... Smith... Winston Smith... No... No...
Marlboro’s a tougher brand. How about Marlboro Smith? Naw... It has to be something else.
What about Jones...”

“Marlboro Jones... that’s got a nice ring to it,” Cuddlesock said with a satisfied air.
“Marlboro Jones, Fiction Writer.”

Pleased with himself, he headed off to the refrigerator, merrily whistling the theme from
“The Pink Panther.”

“So much for Lesson Number One,” he said as he plopped back down on the sofa, beer in hand.

After a few sips of beer, Cuddlesock began to daydream about the story he was supposed to write. A short while later he noticed that his beer was not quite a full as it had been before.

“Come on, get yourself back to work,” he prodded himself. “This story was supposed to be finished months ago....”

He thought about it for a little while and decided against it. Instead he grabbed a cushion, lay back on the couch, and kicked his feet up.

“Forget this stuff. Tomorrow Marlboro Jones enters the world of fiction,” he whispered as he slowly slipped into unconsciousness. “Marlboro Jones... Fiction Writer... Tomorrow....”

With a deep sigh, R. Cuddlesock passed gently into the fantasy world of the fiction writer and the bottle of beer fell to the floor, quietly emptying its contents onto the carpet....

* * *

“Jones, wake-up! Get your act together. Rise and shine! Let’s be snappy.”

Marlboro Jones rolled over and yawned, “Huh? Oh, yeh. Sure.”

Drowsily, Jones got up from the couch and walked over to the counter, absent-mindedly kicking several empty beer bottles across the room.

“Geez, Folgers, it must be three o’clock in the morning,” he said, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

“It’s seven fifty-nine. Didn’t want you to be late.”

“Thanks.”

“Hope you don’t expect overtime just because you spent the night on the company couch.”

“...never occurred to me.”

“...and you’d better pick up these beer bottles...”

“Geez, Folgers,” said Jones as he plugged in the hot plate and picked up an empty kettle, “you could have at least made some hot water...”

Jones used to drink coffee every morning until Folgers took over as Morning Editor. He drank tea now.

Early in the morning, before he was awake enough to know better, Jones would allow his mind to wander. This morning he focused the few cells that were left in his as yet hung-over brain on Folgers. Not the man, for there really wasn’t much there to focus on. But the name. Folgers. That was his brand name. Jones had heard that years ago people didn’t have brand names, just first and last. Ivory had told him. Ivory White.

Ivory worked in the same office. She was also a fiction writer. Ivory was very, very beautiful. And she was...

“Jones, don’t you know you’re supposed to take the kettle off the stove when it starts whistling like that?”

It was Folgers again.

“Huh? Oh, yeh. Sure.”

“Oh, I’m afraid you’ll have to take over the biography section for Ivory until a replacement comes. Big Birdie sent for her this morning.”

“Ivory? Big Birdie? You sure?”

“Got the news from a very reliable source,” replied Folgers, with just a hint of a smile and a slight gleam in his eye.

Jones had an uneasy feeling about this. Big Birdie had never sent for anyone from “The Net” before. At least not as far as he knew, anyway.

“Why now?” he wondered. “Why Ivory?”

Jones wandered over to his desk and sat down. He stared at the stacks of paper that had almost made his desk impossible to work at.

“What did Big Birdie want? What would Big Birdie do?” Jones asked himself. Unfortunately those were questions for which he had no answers.

Like Folgers and Ivory, Jones had his place in the scheme of things. They were part of the writing staff for “The Net,” the official newspaper for the Big Birdie Party. Like Ivory, Jones was a fiction writer. She wrote biographies; he kept track of sports.

As jobs go, his was relatively easy. Big Birdie had developed a special language, called “Netspeak,” that had been installed as the communication standard. It was Big Birdie’s hope that Netspeak would make communication more efficient between party members. All Jones had to do was replace Oldspeak terms with Netspeak terms. What a job. He didn’t even have to make up the terms. Sometimes he hesitated to call himself a fiction writer, there was so little work to it.

Jones glanced around the room. Usually there were five other people working on “The Net,” counting Ivory but not counting Folgers. Everyone was gone. Only he and Folgers were in the office. Something was going on. But what? Why?

Jones looked at all the junk piled on his desk. Maybe his job was getting to him. He was supposed to be writing a special announcement for the Big Birdie Party, but he had been having a difficult time. He normally wrote fiction, but for this assignment he was supposed to stick to the facts. He’d been working on it for so long that he had forgotten when it was supposed to be finished.

“Maybe working with facts is getting to me?” thought Jones.

Just then Folgers got up from his desk and started over toward Jones. Nervously, Jones reached for something to do. Grabbing the nearest press release and the latest edition of the Netspeak dictionary, Jones started working.

The story was about the VIIIth CoTHB Summer Games. Jones glanced at it quickly and then began thumbing through the dictionary.

As Folgers reached Jones’ desk and began to speak the phone rang and he turned back to answer it.

Struggling to keep his mind on his work, Jones scanned through the book for appropriate Netspeak terms. He made a note of several that might apply:

Doubledink – An extremely subtle shuttlecock exchange.

Earlybirdie – A score on the first return after the serve.

Forehead - An exclamation by badminton players after the slam the shuttlecock.

Nethead – A badminton fanatic.

Slamdink - An extremely powerful dink. Usually performed by players over 6'2" tall.
Rare.

It was no use. Jones knew he wouldn't be able to do any writing. He was beginning to get a headache and there seemed to be no way he could escape the thought of Big Birdie. He tossed the dictionary back onto the desk and crumpled up the list of definitions and tossed it over his shoulder toward the wastepaper basket.

"What in the world is going on?" he wondered, half aloud.

"Jones."

It was Folgers.

"Big Birdie wants to see you."

Jones had a feeling he was about to find out what is going on, like it or not.

Jones noted that the two guards who had lead him away from his office were part of the "Wolff Patrol," so named because every piece of clothing they wore was embroidered with the name "Bob Wolff." He cautiously eyed their weapons, the handles of which protruded from the "Bob Wolff" equipment bags the guards carried from their shoulders. The Wolff Patrol served as Big Birdie's Palace Guard. Very few willingly played games with the Wolff Patrol; and most of those that did returned with scars they would never be able to hide.

The trio reached the entrance to Big Birdie's Palace much too soon as far as Jones was concerned.

Just as they arrived a bell rang. "That's the signal," one of the patrolman said. "You must enter alone."

The other patrolman opened a little door and Jones walked boldly through and, surprisingly, found himself in a wonderful place. It was a big, cone-shaped room. The walls resembled an intricate oriental screen. The floor was actually a soft green lawn. Potted trees and bushes were place around the perimeter of the room. In the center of the roof was a great hole through which light, as bright as the sun, entered the giant chamber.

But what interested Jones most was the big net which stretched across the middle of the room. In the center of the net was an enormous Head, without a body to support it or any arms or legs whatever. There was no hair upon this head, and it didn't have eyes or a nose or a mouth either, but it was much bigger than the head of the biggest giant. To Jones it appeared to be nothing more than half of a giant rubber ball.

"Well, holey weenies and such! You must be Jones," said a very deep voice.

"Yes," replied Jones, a bit startled.

"Do you know why you're here?" the voice asked.

"No, but I'll gladly come back later if you're busy..."

"Actually I've got a tournament to go to, but no hurry. They can't start without me. You don't

happen to know what day it is, do you, Jones?"

"Uh, no. I've been pretty busy lately."

"I see. Do you remember that announcement you were supposed to be working on..."

"Oh, geez," said Jones as he slapped himself on the forehead, "the tourney announcement. I've been working on it. I'll have it ready this week..."

"That's good, except that the Tournament is today. No problem, though. People in the Party like to party, even on a minute's notice. It's really a great group. In fact your friends from "The Net," White, Gray, Black, Smith and Wojohowitz, are already to party, hardy. Heh, heh. Just love my little jokes. Just love 'em." Said the voice from the rubber ball. "So, anyway, Jones, we really don't need the announcement now, after all. Everything worked out just fine."

"That's great," said Jones. "Mind if I head back to my office now?"

"Well, actually, that kind of touches on the reason you're here. You see, by not finishing the Tournament announcement on time you violated one of the 'Domesticated Wild Rules.' Something about deadlines, I think it is. I'm really sorry about this, Jones, but I'm afraid you'll have to visit one of our special facilities..."

"Look, my vacation is coming up soon. Maybe we could get together then..." Jones interjected, using what little wit he had left.

Ignoring Jones' last-ditch attempt at humor, Big Birdie continued, "You don't happen to suffer from Lobotophobia, do you Jones?"

Jones said nothing, but his eyes widened, oh, so very slightly.

"Just as I thought," said Big Birdie. "Have you ever seen the inside of a 'Lob Chamber'?"

Jones shook his head.

"Well, you will now, Mr. Jones. I'm really sorry, but it's in the rulebook, you know. Toodle-oo," said the voice, which then proceeded to break out into song: "I'm off to play in the Tourney..."

Things were beginning to sound pretty bleak for Jones.

"This is another fine mess you've gotten me into," Jones joked to the guards as they hauled him through the door of the Lob Chamber. They didn't laugh even though that was one of his best jokes of the day.

Jones was beginning to feel worried. He sensed that he wasn't going to like whatever happened next. He was right.

Even though he had never seen the inside of a Lob Chamber before, this one was not at all what Jones had expected. It was almost like a gymnasium. High ceiling. Polished wood floor. Red and green lines painted here and there in regular geometric patterns. There was a chair in the center. And a net.

A chair and a net? For the first time, Jones noticed that his pinky was trembling and tiny beads of sweat were beginning to appear on his upper brow.

Jones could look no longer. His eyes hurt. The chamber was bright. Very bright.

The guards led him to the chair and fastened him in. At that moment, a door opened. An attendant dressed in a black and white jogging suit pushed a squeaky cart toward the net. Dozens of red and white cylinders were stacked upon the cart. Jones was dripping with sweat, but he

could have sworn that it was a minus 50 degrees inside that room right about then.

Jones eyed the cart and his heart skipped a beat then began pumping faster than it ever had before. Much faster. He saw that those red and white cylinders stacked on the cart contained Carlton SUPERS!

Like everyone else he had believed Carlton Supers to be part of the popular lore. Mythology. You know, something that would scare the kids around the campfire, but, other than that, nothing to take too seriously.

And yet, here they were.

He remembered the stories he had heard about the goings on inside rooms like this. He realized now that they couldn't have been true. Nothing was like this.... Carlton Supers.... Indoors!

It had to be a nightmare, Jones thought to himself. Nothing like this happened in real life. Nothing.

The sight of a cart full of Carlton Supers standing not more than nine feet away was too much for Jones. He began to weaken. He thought he could see a pair of Bob Wolff's on the floor beyond the net. Growing fainter by the second, Jones managed one last look. He thought he could make out the face of P..., but his mind wasn't sure of anything now. His mind was beginning to wander bizarrely. Lightbulb.... Stew.... Doodads....

The attendant had obviously done this before. He was very professional. He paid no mind to Jones.

The executioner was waiting by the net. The attendant presented him with a special flossed/ titanium racket. The executioner examined the racket, tested the strings, swung it a few times, then positioned himself behind a red line not too far from the net. As he was doing that the attendant propped up Jones and stenciled a cute little target onto his forehead. Returning to the cart, the attendant popped open one of the cylinders and knelt down in front of the net. As the executioner nodded he tossed up the first Carlton Super.

A perfect serve.

A perfect swing.

A perfect hit.

After marking the score on a large portable chalkboard, the attendant knelt down and tossed up another Super. Then another. And another.

Still a perfect score.

And getting better.

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

* * *

“Anybody in there?”

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“Official business!”

Cuddlesock stirred to life and clumsily rolled off the couch, landing on the beer-soaked

carpet. His head was aching. He reached for the nearest beer bottle, but found it empty.

“Registered letter for R. Cuddlesock,” a voice from outside yelled.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” Cuddlesock weakly replied as he wobbled toward the door.

Fortunately the front door wasn’t too far from the refrigerator. After grabbing the last beer, he opened the door to find a postman holding three envelopes.

“You Cuddlesock?” asked the postman.

“I was yesterday,” said Cuddlesock, rubbing his forehead, then taking a sip of his beer.

“Oh, geez. A regular Mr. Witty. O.K. Sign here.”

Cuddlesock handed the postman the beer and signed for the mail.

“That’s good enough. Thanks. Happy New Year to you,” said the postman as he took back the pencil and paper.

“Happy New Year,” Cuddlesock mumbled in reply as he headed back inside. “Oh,” he said, turning around. “I do believe that’s my beer.”

Seated back at his desk, Cuddlesock took a long sip from his beer and began rubbing his forehead again. “What a headache. And that nightmare. That was incredible.”

Looking at the letters, he saw that one was from “The Holey Net,” another was from the CotHB Foundation, and the last one was from Pat Pituitary’s Writing School. Cuddlesock decided to open the one from the Writer’s School first. It said:

“Lesson Number Five – by Pat Pituitary.

If you’re having trouble coming up with ideas, write about your experiences. If you haven’t done anything, I’m afraid you’ll just have to make something up.”

“That’s no good. I haven’t done anything and I’m no good at making anything up,” he said, still massaging his forehead.

The letter from the CotHB Foundation could only be bad news. Cuddlesock didn’t want to open it, but, what the heck.

It said:

“Dear R. Cuddlesock,

We have been waiting patiently for your facts and figures to arrive. We need them desperately. If you’re not finished, send us what you have. Make up the rest if you have to. Your grant will be mailed as soon as we hear from you.

Sincerely,
The Foundation”

“Yeeeeeee, haw!!! I’m in the money, I’m in the money,” he sang as he danced around the room, being careful not to spill his beer.

Needless to say, Cuddlescock was very happy. But then it occurred to him that he had to FIND the facts and figures before he could get the money.

Fortunately that wasn't very difficult. The facts and figures had to be at the bottom of his trash heap, and they were the only papers that hadn't been crumbled up.

Though it took a few minutes, he managed to find all of the facts and figures that he had recorded months and months before. Grabbing the valuable papers, he ran to the phone and ordered five cases of ice cold Heineken from Grove Liquor; on credit.

Returning to his desk feeling much better, he sat down and opened the last letter. It was from Horace Greeley.

“Dear R.

Hope you're enjoying the life of a fiction writer, but, needless to say, it has been quite a nightmare around here without....”

“That's it! That's it! The nightmare! The nightmare! That'll do the trick,” cried out Cuddlesock.

He quickly put a fresh piece of paper into the typewriter and then chugged the rest of his beer. He was finally ready to become a fiction writer.

Without hesitating he began typing:

“The Adventures of Marlboro Jones, Fiction Writer.

Episode One.

‘Marlboro Jones and the Temple of Doom.’”