

Ladino Spoken Here? *Ave Maria!*

Started on: 10/15/21 Updates: 10/18/21 10/20/21 10/22/21

It began with my call to AFJ Investment, my landlord, requesting a visit to fix a small leak from the kitchen water heater and repair a back door which no longer closed properly. A brief examination led the handyman who came Thursday afternoon to announce he would make a report. He left, however, without fixing anything. Later that evening, I found the leak had grown to the point where I was forced, every half hour, to empty a bowl I was forced to place under the leaking pipe. This throughout the entire night. Calls were made to AFJ (I got answering machines), to the DWP (not useful as I do not pay for water), even an emergency email sent to the City inspectors who had visited in previous weeks, an email in which I complained of the situation with pictures attached, at 2AM. None of it availed. At ten the next morning I, after more fruitless calls to the City and AFJ on my malfunctioning cell phone (I was forced to borrow a neighbor's) and somewhat in protest at the inexplicable behavior on the part of AFJ's Tiffany Anderson recently, dropped everything and betook myself to the beach for a much-needed respite. *¡Ya basta!*

And, as to my landlady, poor Tiffany (what *can* be the matter?), I think I'll send her a stiff note.

That morning, on the way to the beach by bus, two passengers boarded the #33, sitting nearby. The couple spoke a language I had never before heard. Listening closely, I finally settled on Ladino, a language related to Portuguese, with roots going back to the Middle Ages, a dialect spoken by Sephardic Jews. With the man talking all the while, the couple got off the bus as I did and, as there apparently was "unfinished business," followed me on the next leg of my ride. After briefly sharing the bus bench with me, we all got on the other #33, the one to Santa Monica beach. As we ride, I hear the name Dixie mentioned, as in "Did you sleep with Dixie?" (Saaaay, I once knew a Dixie, personnel manager at Teledyne Controls in the late seventies). *Forspeise, ja?* Then, moments later, the *pièce de résistance*, "Maria." Again moments later, "Maria," possibly followed by another mention of the name. Maria was the first name of an aunt of mine, Maria Stein, sister of my mother, a beauty who married well; she's briefly mentioned in the book. A bit gamey, this gambit.

On to the beach, my usual spot near Bicknell Avenue, where I was met by dueling madmen, among other bits of "entertainment." The first near the sand where I had set up my folding chair. Several monologues of at least 15 minutes, uninterrupted, with many buttons pushed. The second, later, I had by then withdrawn to the bluffs to avoid the sun; he loudly, furiously, vociferously, speculating about a coming civil war as he sped by and *charged* the beach. Was the word "Jew" shouted near the end of this particular monologue or did I mishear? One wonders, is fear (the usual solvent) at work here or are we talking "payment in kind" for these two gentlemen?

(Regarding all of the above) Poor F**k**s. Suffering Humanity.

Bref, une journée chargée. But how will normal people find it in themselves to believe this, my latest farrago of elucubrations?

(10-16-21) Out on errands; waiting on Adams Boulevard, the third bus, by the grace of God, stopped for me. A-and, for the second day in a row, my luck held; that is to say, no bus driver gave me the finger. Although, I will let you in, Gentle Reader™, on a trick. Waiting for my very last bus, tired and hoping for a minimum of complications, I hit on an expedient: as the bus approached, within sight of the driver, I got down on my knees, joined my hands together, and sent up a prayer. And, as I boarded,

apologized to the driver for my cheekiness, saying I had had a long day. Worked like a charm! Though I'm not sure the driver took it that well. Another bit of street theater to add to my armamentarium. Yay! And, while I'm at it, thought up another bit of provocation, variant on what I now routinely do with the mailman from our Serene Republic's Postal Service. I have resolved to occasionally begin waving a dollar bill as the bus approaches. Hey, as you may have noticed from today's stunt, I'm not proud, and a little of that lagniappe might do the trick, as it seems to have done with the aforementioned Post Office. With the added benefit of not risking indictment on Federal charges of attempted bribery of a government employee (always a plus, I imagine). ¡Coño!

An occasional pattern, recently noticed. Possible heard more often lately. Faint refrains, barely audible (is a certain party become chary of saying "Jew" out loud?). A refrain accusing me of being Jewish. It's peculiar that *that* lot (these gentlemen of the *Securitate*) would think someone of my estate could be insulted by being called a "Jew." I mean, get real here...

An ugly story, the last fifty years of my life, no? The very saddest, ugliest part of which may have been perceptively touched on some years ago in a moment of anguish by my poor Colette Walczak. "Are your friends any better than my friends?" Quite so, quite so.

Over the weekend, a visit by Robby's Rooter, 323-255-2346, the people who had contacted me during my afternoon at the beach, the previous Friday. People presumably sent for by the landlord, AFJ. The van pulled up to me as I was visiting my car, a surprise as I had no foreknowledge of the visit. The plumber eventually made his way to our complex, and after a curious *manège* involving shutting off the water, fruitlessly knocking on the manager's door, walking this way and that and asking questions of me; when I asked if he had anything to do with me, curtly replied: "Never!" There was further meandering about the complex before he left, my leak still not fixed. Weird.

(10-20-21) On the bus. I change seats as someone gets off. Then, minutes later, slim, attractive (as far as I could tell, both were wearing masks) and heavily, heavily made up, the two of them boarded together. They sat nearby, perpendicular to me as we sped down Venice Boulevard, keeping up, all the while, a nearly uninterrupted patter. Both speaking an excellent English with a possible slight Iranian and/or French accent. A curious spectacle, somehow. Neither of these poor creatures could have been older than her twenties. Could they have both come direct from central casting? *Ora pro nobis*.

(10-21-21) Update to my kitchen flood. The handyman from AFJ, after a visit this Tuesday, pointed out that 1) The entire heater needs replacement and 2) That the water temperature was set too high, causing the safety relief valve to operate (as it should have). As to the thermostat having been incorrectly set: "it's nufink to do wiv' me, Guv," I can assure you.

(10-22-21) It started around 3:30AM this morning. A certain *remue-ménage* (bustle, in English), emanating from the bungalow across from mine. The one occupied by the woman I have nicknamed "Lurk" in honor of the sitcom featuring the (West ?) Addams Family and that well-known, door-opening, very tall, *peculiar* fellow: "Lurch." A fixture of the show, he never said much. At first, she made the standard, mostly faint noises, opening and closing the door and the like, sounds I have come to associate with that party. This time, though, a dialog soon began, eventually rising to what sounded like an argument. Words were exchanged. Words like "House." "Don't drive." "Bitch," etc. Capped off by a peremptory "Go!" from elsewhere, down the street. It all ended abruptly as I reluctantly got up at five. I am tempted to call this the "Five O'Clock Follies"? (Obscure but suggestive reference to the Vietnam war, here). Mebbe I'll give Miss "Lurk" an additional nickname. How about Miss "*Remue-Ménage*," a double-barreled name; promotion of sorts, wot?

And now, if you'll excuse me, I've probably got a bus to catch somewhere, i.e., *mon public m'attend*.

Finally, to my (remaining) sister, Irene: "May our tears eventually prove invincible."

Thank you for your attention,