

A CHRONICLE OF THE REVIVAL OF MOLEHILL

THE VISITATION OF ATILINA

Not content to be a small fish in a little pond, our Penny Cloud, former editor of the Madison-Molehill Mentor and ex-Snapper, withdrew several weeks ago to the big city to the south – where she promises to become an exotic morsel for the big fish in a larger pond. This retreat was effected shortly after a skirmish with her archrival the editor of The Business Flyer. In the aforementioned interview Penny accused that gentleman of being no less than a ‘word whore who would sell [his] least opinion to [his] paper’s advertising clients’; at which he responded sorely, but silently, less to the damage of the assault than to the ingratitude of Penny, a mere propagandist in his eyes, who had had the audacity to arrange an audience with a ranking colleague and invincible adversary for the sole purpose of showing him disrespect. In a business-like manner he kept astraddle the corner of his desk and sustained the blow. However, neither is Penny one to be content with being tolerated: she added to insult by way of calling his sipping whiskey ‘harsh and affected’. At that, the long-patient editor of The Flyer rose from his superior position and knocked her to the floor by tossing her a special unabridged single-volumed desk edition of ‘The Decline and Fall’. As reports of the office melee and its concomitant gems of gallantry began circulating in literary circles, Penny hastily retired from Molehill.

Immediately upon her departure, Issac Pinpoint made a stab at the editorship of the Mentor, a position which he had always coveted and which it was generally conceded later he obtained by default only. Eager to stew Molehill’s dominant political figures and institutions in their own muck, he raked it into the pages of the Mentor, preserving it for all posterity – what his opponents call ‘litterature’. Issac is, indeed, adept at paraphrasing the top stories from The Flyer and Reiterator, simply omitting the bottom portion of the iceberg where details are concerned. And his wit – Issac’s wit sings with the fervor of a day-old cigarette butt.

No sooner had Issac published a couple of issues of the Mentor than Penny countermarched on Molehill for a weekend visitation to the provinces, bearing a few journalistic pointers and a carpetbag of bad manners with which to bombard Issac, in whose house she had decided to pitch her tent for the duration. As is a customary tactic of



Illustrations by Brad McMillan

hers, Penny's postcard announcing her arrival was delivered one day after she showed up. Soon Issac, as host and successor, fell beneath her hacking criticism, held like a battle-ax above his head and wielded whenever a lull lay momentarily upon his household.

After refusing to eat dinner with the Pinpoints because the food was either 'too heavy' or not prepared in the French tradition, she proceeded to sit at the table deprecating the Pinpoints' taste in furnishings and the 'disgustingly comfortable' style in which they lived. Then, smoking battalions of her home-rolled cigarettes as the Pinpoints ate,

she mounted a flank engagement while thumbing through Issac's rarest books — anthologies for the most part. As Issac looked on, trying to swallow his meal and his tongue, Penny flipped through as many as she could in the time allotted; nibbling from the serving plate as she browsed, she randomly left tomato sauce smudges on the pages to mark her mastery and the extensiveness of her campaign.



If that was not enough — you see what a spineless fellow Issac can be — she then commenced scratching his favorite classical albums in the process of selecting the 'best cuts' from a 'rather limited collection', and he still did not imitate the spontaneous good judgement of the editor of *The Flyer* and repeat the memorable heaving of the big book scene but remained seated, though visibly shaken, mumbling.

The first and last evening of her stopover at Issac's, Penny could hardly abide spending much more time with the Pinpoints than it took to ruin their Friday night; so she borrowed their vehicle and made a sortie on Molehill. She drove round to 'my' bar for a night of toasting and boasting of her exploits in the new city with her old cronies, contrasting with vindictiveness, as she rallied to drink, the grand opportunities and the superb selection of goods available in that place as opposed to those inferior offerings of Molehill — much to the delight and stimulation of her company, who soon left her.

Abandoned deep into the next morning, Penny returned to the Pinpoints with her usual delicacy and regard for others and rushed to deliver the dinner that she would hardly be served onto the freshly spread linens of Issac's guest bed — an accident which the Pinpoints failed to be made aware of until their discovery of the facts after she had gone. Not before leaving Issac's did she cease the maneuver so typical of her by which she avoids her own ignominy by taking the offensive, persecuting everyone with the least disposition to allow it.

Fewer were sad at her second parting than were unsettled by her original departure. Happiest yet was Issac Pinpoint, who suffered much by her mouth and who has so little else to fall back on in life but his tremendous self-esteem. During her raid on Molehill, Penny gave her all toward depriving him of even that fragile asset.

A SHAHDY SHOWING

The current topic of whispers and gasps in Molehill stems from events which had their beginning two weeks ago Thursday. (Even though my darling wife demands that they began Friday, this is my journal and that which is committed to writing is always the last word – historically that is. Anyone aspiring to detect the movers of history, or find humor for that matter, must have some firsthand experience of the marital state; otherwise, one can not fully appreciate the vacillations of human history, the vulnerability of its named figures, or the sagaciousness of its unnamed movers.)

But as I was saying, with masculine determination, it was two weeks ago last Friday that the Shah of Pshaw came to Molehill on the invitation of the Lots-to-Lose Club. There to meet him at the city's portals were Bric Boogle, Mayor Wylie, several aldermen, and a few bureaucrats, notably Stanley Plumbait and Leslie Catchal. The Shah, having come to Molehill to inspect the numerous investment possibilities, was greeted with a valuable gift, described in the Reiterator as 'a two-inch guitar-shaped ring studded with polished, multi-colored stones from the bed of the Goawin River.' The objet d'art evoked only a slight questioning grimace from the Shah, who seemed to have difficulty bending the finger on which the ring was placed, for the ring's slim guitar neck extended up past his knuckle, acting like a split, leaving that single finger erect at all times – making for many a snicker from the galleries as he passed along the procession route through Molehill.

After many parties in his honor, and tours guided by Bric Boogle and Mr Plumbait, it was announced in The Flyer that the Shah had contracted to put a sizeable amount of his country's money into a restoration project on our river bluff. The Lots-to-Lose Club was much elated at the prospects, especially Mr Boogle, and the city, too, in the person of Stanley Plumbait, was equally conspicuous in its gaiety and relief at the forthcoming influx of capital into the city and the conversion of useless warehouses into taxable luxury apartments.

However, it was at the point of greatest happiness that Issac Pinpoint, having done hours of investigative leg-work in the pages of The Flyer and the Reiterator, disclosed that Bric Boogle and Stanley Plumbait were, in his opinion, overly appreciative of the Shah's business dealings in Molehill and that they, strangely enough, were the only signatories to the contract with Pshaw. And thus ensued one of Pinpoint's notorious bottomline headlines: 'Could this fact conceal improprieties in the handling of the Pshaw Agreement? Huh?'

While Issac was asking these questions of his readers, The Flyer was asking Mayor Wylie how it was that Messrs Boogle and Plumbait had been allowed to persuade the Shah to invest in property that they had purchased during his visit to Molehill. It seemed to The Flyer that Boogle and Plumbait had been developing their real estate interests on the Loser organization's and city's time respectively, or irrespectively, and at the expense of private enterprise. As The Flyer tells it, the Mayor replied: 'Well, this certainly opens my eyes. I'll watch those two in the future and won't be left out next time.'

In an attempt to sort out the predicament, Plumbait made a credible case for resting the blame on Catchal, who, he said, was instructed to issue a notice to the public prior to the purchase so as to give anyone else interested a chance to buy in on the Pshaw bonanza. And besides, added Plumbait, 'Bric and I reimbursed our employers for the time we spent on these negotiations by entertaining the Shah on our off hours.'

On Boogle's side of the muddle, in addition to seconding Plumbait's story, he bit back: 'Wasn't I commissioned by the business community and asked by Mayor Wylie's staff to help revive Molehill's tax base? Wasn't I given a certain budget and the latitude by both organizations with which to effect these ends? I have succeeded in fulfilling the requisitions of both and have in the act retained in my care close oversight of the development at substantial savings, without loss, to the Molehill community. The developers of Molehill understand this arrangement and you don't hear them squawking – and if any of them feel inclined to, they'd better think twice about it first.'

Many in Molehill have been left scratching their heads over these answers. Issac is still researching the accounts in The Flyer and the Reiterator, apparently convinced that in lieu of anything else this controversy is good for a few more issues. More than likely there will be no other reprimand of either participant to exceed the one given by Mayor Wylie to Stanley that the likes of the situation should not be exposed again. Too, there will certainly be no prosecution of these men in the courts: under our system of law, a system predicated on the protection of and non-interference with private enterprise, there are no such animals as public prosecutors. In other words, we have laws but their enforcement depends on the voluntary pursuit of and dedication to principle by unpaid persons in the law business – unpaid by the taxpayers directly that is. So just as our reformers refuse to serve principle when there is no salary or retainer involved, our lawyers will not press the law in protracted litigation with prominent citizens when there is no chance of finding a pot of gold at the end of the process.

We in Molehill do not generally disdain the smooth making of a buck. In fact, those who are adroit at spending other people's money for the enrichment of themselves and incidentally to the indirect benefit of the community are something of heroes. Those who protest loudly are usually thought to do so because they regret that the money was not thrown in their direction.

At any rate, the land targeted for the development is being eroded into the river and the warehouses burned down Saturday night while some inebriated Snappers were frying catfish two miles up river. Nevertheless, not a cent of Pshaw's money appears to have been lost to Molehill: what the Shah had contracted to do at the burned out location he will now do up river toward Goawin peninsula on some land owned by The Flyer.

— Gibbin Nash

Notice to the descendants of Molehill:

In the next installment of his journal, Mr Nash addresses himself to the religious aspects of Molehill life. Included in that entry is an introduction to the Reverend Titcomb Butley and his wife Ophelia.

— Hastings Merthmill Eaton