

I am a good typist

by Joel Redon

If you let yourself go too far it's very hard to pull it together again. I know this because it's happened to me a lot. There's this feeling people get about you — you've been laying in bed for two days now, not doing much, maybe reading a little or watching television, and people can sense this about you and that's all right, all right that is, as long as you're not looking for a job. I was lucky last time I was like this because I had a lot of books and I sold them to a book buyer who liked me. (He liked me, I think, because I tried to make him like me. I hoped it would bring me a better

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price on the books — and I'm almost sure it did.) Now, this year, the books are all gone and I don't have anything to eat. When you get really hungry you can feel it in your neck, or at least I can, my neck seems to stick out of my shoulders and there's a rigidness to my body. I'm almost sure that people can tell I'm hungry when I ride the subways (I've always felt that my body was like glass — that people could just look at me and tell what I am thinking. The way to conquer this is to be "professional." Professional means that you act one way, regardless of how you feel or what you think.) Needless to say, a potential employer senses it like a hawk.

Now I am a good typist. I want everyone to know that from the beginning. That is my asset to the world. I can type, depending on how nervous I am, 70 to 95 words a minute. Once I typed a whole lot more than 95 because I pretended the typing test wasn't a test at all but a typewriter in my own room and

nobody was around. I am also a very pleasant person, really. Sometimes I am even almost too pleasing and that makes people uneasy. But no one ever complains about that, it's just a feeling they get. But they are suspicious. It's just that I'm so grateful at that point to have a job and to be able to pay my bill at the hotel. (The hotel I live in does have a certain name but people who know it always call it "Suicide Hotel" because so many old people have jumped out of windows. There's old people everywhere in this place and if you're not careful you wake up one morning and you think you're too old too and you go downstairs to the donut shop and order one egg and a tiny glass of orange juice that's so small it's like the kind of cups doctors give you to take medication in. I suppose that's the idea — but it's only enough orange juice to get your throat wet. But it is very cheap.) and that's why I go there when I do. You try not to notice too much about living in Suicide Hotel, because if the oldness and sickness gets to you it'll start to show and then your chances of getting a job are even harder.

But I want you to know that yesterday I pulled it together. I put on my tie, took my white shirt out from under the mattress where I put it to keep it from being too wrinkled, and put on my black pants. Then I went out. I was glad I was out of cigarettes (when you wake up it feels great if you can keep from having one — but sometimes you feel so great a cigarette seems like the best thing to top it all off and then you ruin it when you light one.) I was also glad that the cookies were all gone (they made me feel sick eating too many of them the night before. Too much sugar is never good.)

The temporary agency I went to is located on 42nd Street. And the first thing they told me to do was fill out an application which I did, adding only the most minimal amount of errors to my past work experience. (Do any of us really remember what the truth is anyway?) "Sir?"

I knew from her tone of voice and her condescending manner that she was not on my side. It's humiliating enough to be out of work and then have some secretary who's only one step from a life like yours should she ever lose her job, talk down to you.

"You forgot to check which kinds of typewriters you're able to type on."

"On all of them," I answered. "And besides,

the worker always asks you anyway when you sit down. They go over the whole form then."

"Have a seat," she said curtly. And then she took her time.

I waited and looked at a book.

"You may take your typing test now," she informed me leading me into a small room.

Immediately I looked at all the typewriters and I was just deciding which one I wanted to use when she sat me down at a certain one.

"Now you may begin typing when I turn on the electricity."

I waited for her to come over and do this. But she did not. Presently she appeared in the doorway, asking me what was the matter with me. "I thought," I told her, "that you were going to turn it on."

"It is turned on, Sir," she said.

And then I looked at her. These people, it came to me, are going to try and make me feel small. But I'm not going to let them. With that I stood up and walked to the door.

"Sir! Where are you going? You're not going to take your typing test?"

"That's right," I said and out I went.

To make a very long story short, I went to another agency once I was no longer angry and there, after doing remarkably well on my typing test, I was given a job. Every morning they call the hotel to ask if I've left yet. Then I am to call them the first thing when I get to my job. "How are you dressed?" she asks me. "Are you just now coming in or have you been there for five minutes already?" I answer the questions. Why she ever put me on a job in a bank in the first place I can't figure out because they told me I did not look professional enough to work in a bank. "I couldn't agree with you more," I said, but this is where they put me and I do need a job. I could have told them to put me in publishing where it doesn't matter so much what you look like. But no, they put me in a bank of all places. You should have seen my friend's reactions: "A Bank? Oh, God. They put him in a bank." "But I'm just typing," I tell them. "Yes, just don't you go typing on any of that money."

The way the temp agencies work in New York is that they take half your salary. On the other half you're expected to dress expensively, eat and pay your rent. At the hotel you cannot cook, you must buy all your meals out.

If it weren't for the fact that I'm such a good typist, I don't know what I'd do.



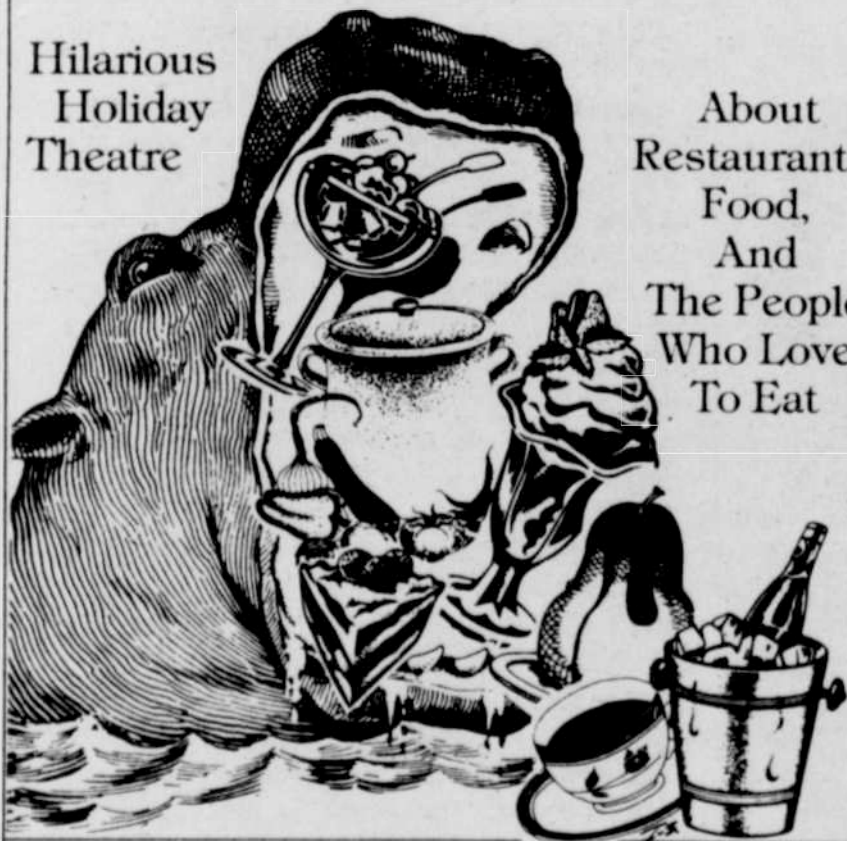
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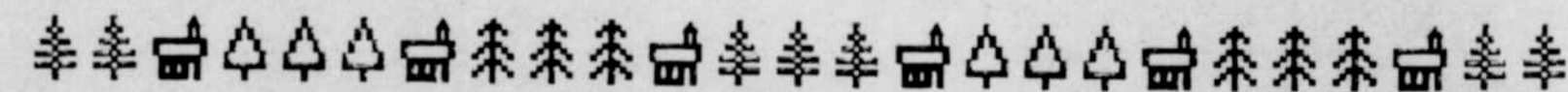


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