

Especially if it's early evening, and the light in the maples starts massaging your eyes, and the squirrels are sitting in pairs on their porch, and the kids are tired enough to be blown away by a peace so addictive George should think about outlawing it.

I have no idea why George pitches horseshoes, but I'd like to think it relaxes him. As a fellow human, I hope so. Fishing on his scillion dollar cigarette boat doesn't seem get him any less wired than golf. In the national interest, I'd like to see George pitching horseshoes every day. All day, preferably surrounded by a sturdy net.

I'm no rocket psychiatrist, but I know this. When you're pitching horseshoes, it's hard to plan surgical air strikes on someone on the other side of the planet. I'll bet if you looked it up, not one serial killer pitched horseshoes with any regularity.

But we were talking about George.

Say the worst happens. Say the special committee follows the trail of cocaine and rocket launchers all the way to the White House. Say, just for the heck of it, the crowds come for George and Ronnie with torches and drag them shrieking and thrashing to a large pit inhabited by large stinging insects and puff adders.

As long as George brings his horseshoes, there's hope for rehabilitation.

Simple pleasures, George, you poor jerk. It's the one thing you've got in common with the peasants.

You know, the ones who survive?

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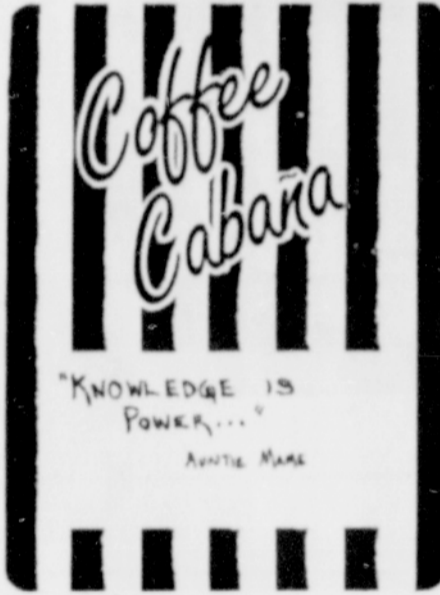
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MEANWHILE,
IN NEWPORT

It's probably apocryphal, possibly made up from whole cloth. Yet it is precisely the kind of tale you're bound to hear if you hang about deadfalls where seafaring folk congregate.

It was told by a senior gentleman with a voice calculated to be heard above a 40 knot breeze at sea. An instrument he rarely modulated just because he was in a quiet bar. We had been talking of someone relatively new in town whose history was a mystery.

"I learned years ago," foghorned the voice, "there's some folks' past that's better not known." He knocked back his drink and motioned to the bartender for another.

"How's that Cap?" asked "Nice" Bill, sitting on his other side.

"Well, there's some folks, once you know who they are, it can dry up the conversational possibilities something fierce.

"I recollect an old fella, he was really old, used to come in for a shave at my dad's barber shop in Portland every Saturday.

"Nobody knew too much about him, nothing really personal, but over the years we'd learned that he used to own a hermaphrodite brig which he sailed in the Australian grain trade back in the 1800's. We also knew that he'd lost his ship in a storm. That she got caught on a lee shore and wrecked on one of them desert islands south of Hawaii and that he was the only survivor. That's all we knew. He'd never talk about it further than that.

"Well, one Saturday my father was shaving him and he gave an awful twitch when a guy walked into the shop, looked at the people waiting and asked how long it would be to get a haircut. My father told him about an hour and the guy said he'd come back. When he walked out the door the old Captain took a deep breath and let it out almost like a sigh.

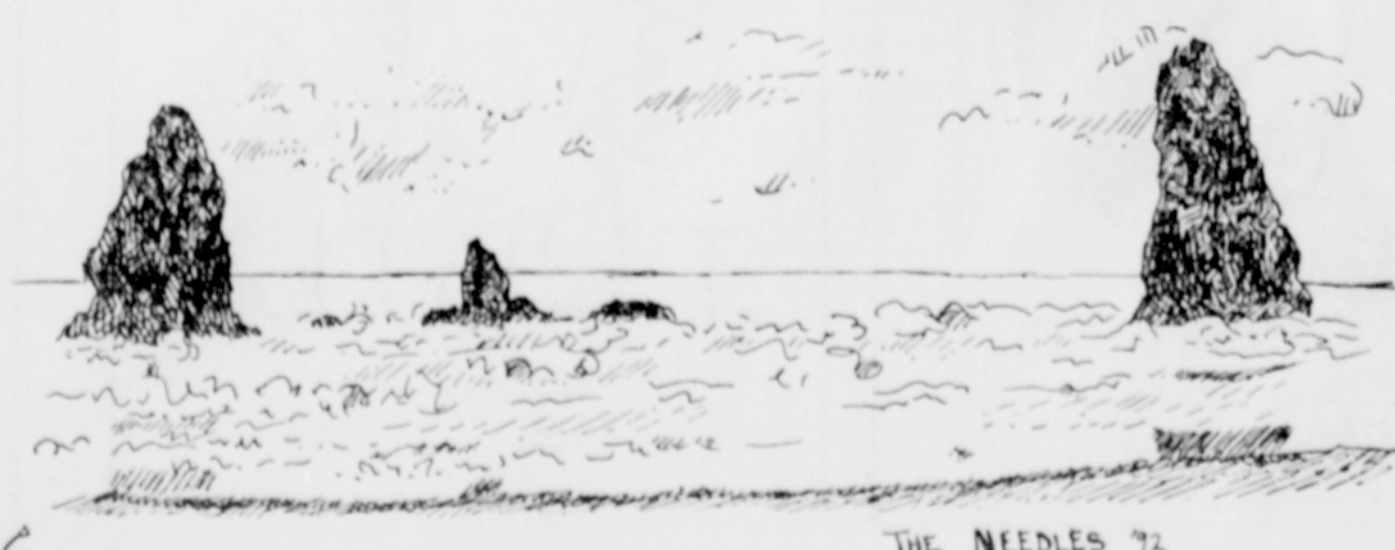
"Say Cap'n," my father said, "you acted like you know that man."

"Know him, I guess so, you might say I'm almost a relative of his, partly at least."

"Well, if that's the case, why didn't you speak to him?"

"Speak to him? Not likely. You see, I et that man's uncle."

By Alex LaFollette




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