



Snavely J. Philpott — on raising the deads

On New Year's Day a few years ago, I went up to see my friend, Noel. He lived in a small house in a part of town known as Creekside, with his wife and family. We sat in the kitchen and drank a bottle of rye that I brought along and talked about his life and my life.

Noel worked for the town and did part-time work for the undertaker and filled in (not quite the exact word) as a grave digger. At Christmas time he sold trees which leaned in a solid green mass against the side of his house.

He was also available for odd jobs, like mowing lawns, cutting trees or taking away excess livestock. We had some bantam chickens and the rooster made a habit of sounding off every morning under the window where my wife was trying to sleep. She decided the rooster must go. She decided while we were about it, the other six must go, too.

I should explain that I bought the chickens in the hardware store in this wise. I was in 'Toulouse' barber shop getting a

haircut when my daughter appeared in the doorway and announced there was a chicken in the window of the hardware store next door.

I went to look and sure enough, there was not one, but two bantams in the window. The hardware man said they were for sale for a dollar each. I bought one and because my daughter said the other would be lonely, I bought the other. As we went out, I notice a large rabbit and it turned out he was for-sale, too.

When I got home, my wife, captivated by the novelty, sent me back for the rabbit and when I got there, there were five more bantams in the window, so I bought them, too, ending up with seven bantams and one large rabbit. My first effort was to build an enclosure for the bantams with chicken wire which I purchased from the proprietor of the hardware store, showing that in his madness there was a modicum of method. The bantams promptly flew out of the enclosure and stayed in the yard until sunset when they promptly

flew back in, showing that they were a great deal more intelligent than I was.

When it came time to get rid of the bantams, my wife called Noel, extracting from him a solemn promise that the bantams would not be eaten and that they would be given a comfortable refuge on his brother's farm. Noel arrived with six men. Including himself this made one man for each chicken. They immediately took up a frenzied pursuit of the bantams, finally removing them in Noel's truck. When I asked him a few weeks later how the bantams were getting along on his brother's farm, he gave a guilty start and assured me they were enjoying every minute. I had the strongest impression that they had already gone into Noel's cooking pot.

I thought none the less of him for that. I didn't have my wife's finicky notions about these things. As far as I was concerned, chickens were put on this earth by the good Lord to be eaten. I asked Noel about his job in the funeral parlour. "What do you do there?"

"I paint up the deads." From which I gathered that he assisted the undertaker with makeup.

"I hope you never get your hands on me, Noel. What else do you do?"

"I stay there at night, sometimes."

"Doesn't it bother you?"

"Why should it? I do my work. A Protestant dead on one side, Catholic dead on the other. They don't bother me none."

In his capacity as grave digger, he was also called on to officiate at interments; that is, to cover up the coffin after the mourners withdrew. He took all these engagements seriously, explaining each in careful detail with an air of un-self-conscious decorum.

One day he got a call from the widow of a prominent local notary, whose deceased husband he had confided to the earth's bosom some little time previously.

"Noel, they have put my husband in the wrong grave. He must be taken up immediately." The situation was that the

deceased man had been buried twice and Noel, through some inadvertence, had gone against the widow's express wishes in burying the husband next to his first wife, rather than leaving a space so that the newly-made widow could be slipped in between the husband and wife number one.

"What did you do, Noel?"

"What could I do, me? The lady was right. After all, she was paying for everything. I got the front-end loader from the town and went to the graveyard and began digging. It seemed I went on digging for a long time. Finally, there was a loud crash. I ran over and looked down. The digger had ripped off the top of the coffin and that old man was staring up at me. "He shook his head reflectively at the horror of the moment.

"It's a funny thing about those deads. When I buried him, he was clean shaven. I shaved him myself. And when I dug him up, his whiskers were four inches long. Their beard grows, those deads."

Answers to Sports Quiz

1. Detroit Red Wings.
2. Baseball's Boston Red Sox; Chicago White Sox and Basketball's New Orleans Jazz.

Annual meeting

The annual meeting of the Russell Agricultural Society will be held January 30, at 7:30 in the Arena Hall. There will be a pot luck supper before the meeting. Guest speaker will be Pierre Benson from the Wintario office in Ottawa.

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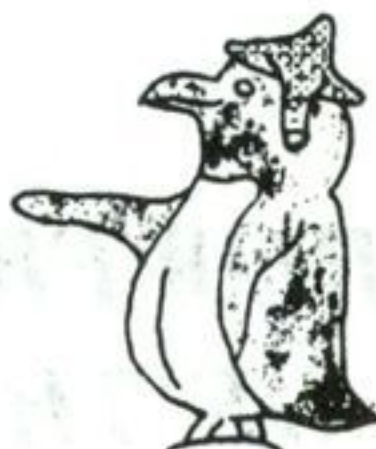
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Russell Lions Club

WINTER CARNIVAL



February,
21-26



ANNOUNCEMENT

All groups, organizations or individuals wishing to participate in the Winter Carnival are asked to contact George Eastman, Carnival chairman, 445-2107, with an outline of their activity, event or project proposals by January 28.

The Winter Carnival is your Carnival — get involved.

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