

# CON

by Ambrose Fierce

"Dear Ambrose,  
I hereby appoint you my literary executor — today I reread my life's work, and I'm going to kill myself just as soon as I can remember where I put the Drano.

So long, buddy,  
Lee Bob Fike"

That came last month.

Now, Lee Bob and I were close friends, but, having by now riffled through all his manuscripts, I am forced to admit that he did the right thing. Still, it seems a shame that Lee Bob, who so fiercely wanted to be a writer, should live and die unwept, unhonored, and especially, unpublished. Accordingly, as a tribute to the memory of Lee Bob Fike, below appears the first installment of his best story (although this work must surely rank as one of the three or four most putrid stories ever produced in North America). Lee Bob, rest in peace.

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*The Legend of Egon Pfardenhasseler,  
Part I*

"I admire Spenser's *je ne sais quoi*," said their department chairman, and the group chuckled, Dr. Egon Pfardenhasseler with them. But then Pfardenhasseler frowned and set down his drink. He had forgotten what *je ne sais quoi* meant, and he stood beetling his brow at the carpet. Forgetting the meaning of the phrase had caused him to become preoccupied, his preoccupation had caused him to drop out of the conversation, and this was too bad: he had already made one witty, and three perceptive, remarks.

His chairman had smiled at him and asked if he wanted another drink.

And now this.

Of course he couldn't come right out and ask what *je ne sais quoi* meant, and he could kick himself because at one time he had known what it meant as well as he knew his own name. But he had forgotten. This sort of forgetfulness had plagued him since around the time he had taken his Ph.D.; it seemed to have gotten worse in the past three or four years, and had this year been especially bad. Egon gnawed at his lower lip, then quickly ate several canapes, trying to remember. He had used the phrase himself, just the other day, but now its meaning eluded him.

Egon looked at his shiny black shoes. His gaze travelled up his tasteful grey trousers, to his vest, which very nearly hid his youthful pot, to his tie, which was all right, the part supposed to be underneath staying there. He strained to see the knot but could only glimpse a bit of chin cover it. "Why are you showing us the top of your head, Egon?" Egon looked up, his face still twisted with the effort of remembering. "Are you

suffering from some sort of *angst*, Egon?" his chairman enquired. Egon winced. He couldn't tell them, of course.

"No," he said, and chewed on his upper lip. "No *angst*." *Angst*? It was right on the tip of his tongue. It was German for, for — it would come to him, as would *je ne sais quoi*, then he would get back into the conversation. *Angst*. No problem. *Angst* is German and the English equivalent is —

"And that was poor old Willie Loman's *hamartia*," said a colleague. A junior colleague. Everyone laughed. It was apparently quite a witty remark, or at least perceptive, but Egon had missed it through the strenuousness of his concentration, catching only the tail end of it with its scorpion sting of a last word: *hamartia*! He had looked that one up once. He had looked it up, and now he hadn't a clue. Not a clue! What should he say — excuse me, old boy, but damned if I haven't forgotten what that ridiculous Greek word means? Hardly. If it was Greek. God, what if it wasn't? But it was Greek, he was almost sure — strange sounding and without handles your mind could get hold of, drenched and slippery with olive oil.

"Yeah," said his chairman, "b.p. nichol, that consummate, sempiternal ass."

Egon groaned aloud. Sempiternal was English! And it sounded almost like what it meant. Sempiternal, diurnal...

"Egon, are you ill?"

"No, no."

"Sure?"

"Little tired is all. Maybe I'll go home."

Egon got his quite acceptable camel's hair topcoat from the hall closet, said good-bye to his colleagues and thanked the chairman's wife for a pleasant evening, then left. Everyone was puzzled. They stood around shrugging and looking quizzical. Egon had them all stumped. A creature — slave — of habit, his behavior even at parties was — had been — predictable to the microsecond: x many sips from his glass, y many puffs on his mentholated True cigarettes, z many quips and anecdotes, attempted or accomplished.

"Egon's gone!" Dr. Gordon Ortolan exclaimed, voicing the general astonishment.

"So?" countered a callow new T.A. of no importance.

"Just this," Ortolan grated out, and his voice carried an undertone of menace which caused the hapless T.A. to pop open a Blue in a futile effort to cover his embarrassment. "Egon Pfardenhasseler *always* has three drinks and he *always* stays three hours. I mean, good Christ, kid, take a look out the window — it's barely *crepuscular*."

To be continued...



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## Feminist group

SAN FRANCISCO (NS-CUP) — Women academics in the U.S. have formed a National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) to unify and strengthen the various women's studies programs and courses which have sprung up at almost 300 colleges over the past seven years.

About 500 women met in San Francisco recently for the organization's founding conference.

Women's studies has been one of the fastest growing academic subjects in recent years with more than 100 campuses now offering majors or minors in the field and about 15 offering graduate degrees.

NWSA says it will back feminist causes and lobby for the support of women's studies at all levels in education.

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