

the while looking as if he were caring for a baby.

"Even if I did give re-tests," he continued, "why should I give one to you? Mister...?" "William."

"Mister William, why should I let you have a re-test when the other students are satisfied with their marks?" He puffed on his pipe, and smog billowed in my direction. "What was your mark, anyway? Low 'teens, I'd say, by the looks of you."

"Well, actually, that's part of the reason I came to speak to you. I didn't understand the mark you gave me."

"You didn't understand," he deadpanned. "I am rarely surprised at anything, anymore, Mister William. Let's start at the beginning. Those squiggly lines on your test paper? Those are called numbers. Numbers represent amounts of items we find in the world. Surely some of this must sound familiar to you? Perhaps from *Captain Kangaroo* or *Sesame Street*?"

I was beyond anger at this point. "What I meant was that I didn't understand how I could get... the particular mark I got."

He sighed, heavily. "Either you did not have the intelligence or the studied knowledge to pass this test. Then, when

you wrote the test, you did not write a satisfactory answer, because of that reason. *Quod erat demonstratum.*" he tilted his head in logical triumph. "that is to say, *therefore*, you have failed."

"Yeah, yeah, I know all that. What I mean is, well..." I handed him the paper.

He glanced down. "William O. Cameron. You're Mr. Cameron, not Mr. William!" He looked down a bit. "Ah. Yes. Minus twenty-five. Yes, I admit that negative grades are just a bit unorthodox, but in this case, your essay was such an affront that the only thing more fitting than this type of mark would be corporal punishment." His forehead rolled back, feskkin-like. "Which I *still* consider." He sucked on his pipe, and smoke ejaculated from his nostrils as he exhaled.

I pointed to one of the corrections he'd made. "And, like, I couldn't even read some of your notes. Like this one, here."

"It says your handwriting is illegible."

Nothing I had tried, like sincerity, had worked so far. It was time to use the ultimate weapon for dealing with arrogant sons of bitches like this. The ass-kissing BS-Bomb.

"Well, golly, Professor Fostes, I thought,

seeing as how you're so smart, I mean, like, probably one of the most brilliant profs I've ever had, that you'd probably know a way to teach a guy even as dumb as me." That wasn't an appeal to his compassion, since I knew that he had none. But I thought he might get to like me if we had something in common, like insulting me.

"Well... when I was an undergraduate, I *did* do behavioral studies of mice and simians in lab science requirements. I suppose that my thirst for experimentation has not yet been quenched." He paused to suck in some more smoke, which he expelled in my direction. It was getting difficult to breathe. "Although I'm not sure that you should be in this course in the first place. After all, we can teach a mouse to hit the correct lever for cheese, but we can't teach a stone to type."

"Well, I'd work real hard, and I sure do love logic, Doctor Fostes, sir." The taste of bullshit in your mouth wasn't so bad, really, when you knew that someone else was eating it, too. "And besides, I'm sure that I can do the work. I'm taking Math and English courses, and I'm doing fine in those."

"Well..." He seemed to be considering it. I began to get my hopes up. He puffed a bit more, and I had to stifle a cough, so as not to offend him. He seemed to notice me doing this.

"Do you smoke, Mr. Cameron?"

"Well, you know, I used to, but, uh..."

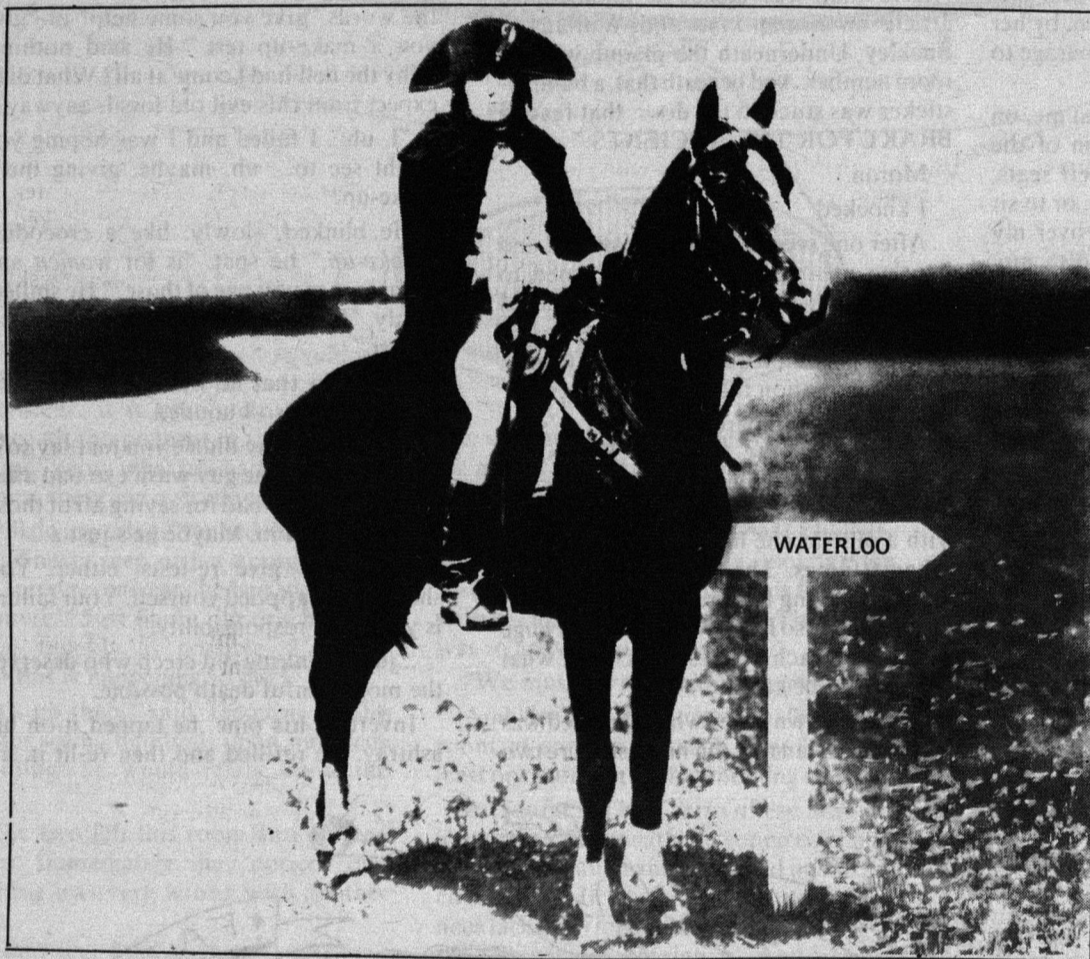
"Yes, yes. Spit it out," he said, almost patiently.

"Well, my uncle had a heart attack, and he was a smoker. And he's my favourite uncle, so I promised him I'd give up smoking if he did. Now he jogs every day."

He *laughed*. Then he sucked in some more fumes, and let them settle in his lungs for what seemed like two minutes before he expelled them. As if her were proving a point.

"Let me tell you something, Mister Cameron. I've been smoking for longer than you've been alive. In all that time I haven't missed one day of work nor have I had to go to the hospital for one day. I'm going to be sixty-four in two weeks and my physician says I'm in the peak of health." He paused for a drag.

"All those people who try to tell you that smoking is bad for you are full of hogwash. Hogwash! There is no conclusive



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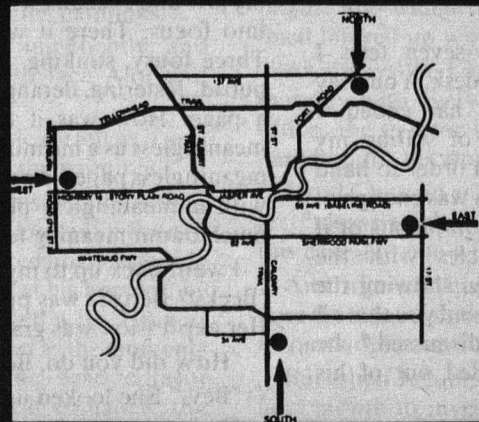
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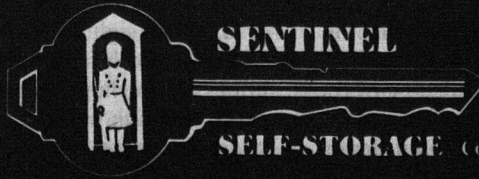


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