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The Transformative Mixture

There was the blender, the tobacconist, and the friend. Together, the three worked as a wonderful trio, producing not music, but instead, fine pipe tobaccos. The harmonizing of flavor and texture through this glorious plant was no simple chore. Each designate was responsible for his portion of the task which brought nuanced blends to the pipe smoking public. Usually, their work was the source of joy, not only for themselves, but for all who realized the pipe for what it was, a tool for transcendence, a vehicle of peace.

Most often, the blender began the process by working with his hands, raw materials and years of experience to find the right components and balances within his tobaccos to shape something different and new, with a taste, feel and smell that would leave the pipe smoking community with great happiness and a feeling of being content.

Other times, the tobacconist would compile the requests, hints and overheard commentary of his patrons to surmise what the pipe smoking community was in need of. The tobacconist would bundle all of this information together expertly, then compose a graceful suggestion which would float through the mail service as a gentle bird and land lovingly on the desk of the blender, full of ideas and insight privy only to the likes of a tobacconist.

Once and again, the friend would offer up bold conjecture as to what the next project should be for the blender. This was always based on the specific tastes of the friend and the friend alone. Always, these ideas involved latakia. The friend's main duty was not to offer up anything, however, other than his deciphering of new blends as they became available from the blender and before they reached the tobacconist. The friend was one of the best, at least in the blender's mind, at deciphering what else could be adjusted to a final blend. In many ways, he was the main tester for the blender, and therefore, had a very important role in the trio.

No matter how an idea sparked, the blender, the tobacconist and the friend worked together in various dynamic ways to come about with fantastic delights that would stir the imagination and help one grasp the

tools for contemplation. Often, these new blends became old standards once the recipe settled into the public over the course of years, not unlike the ritual circle-walk a dog will perform before retreating to the bed beneath its paws.

It was a cool January morning that found a strange kink in this finely formed chain. The tobacconist felt the chill in the air when he opened his storefront door. The tinkle of a little brass bell marked his entrance, as it would mark nearly everyone's entrance that day. On a normal day, his patrons came and went as freely as the breeze. Most bought tobacco, some purchased fire lighting mechanisms while others came in search of a new pipe. Some patrons were such regulars that the tobacconist could tally the required items on a list prior to the guest stepping foot inside the store. After the tobacconist turned on the lights, he adorned himself with his aged apron.

Across town the friend was enjoying an old favorite blend in one of his beloved billiards while watching some light snow fall outside his window. He was deep in daydream while rocking in his creaking black rocker, built by a good friend many years prior. Once he finished the bowl, his plan was to head across the way to visit the blender to see what his days work looked like, and offer any help while there.

The blender worked best while listening to classical music. It played now as he worked. Seemingly in a trance, his hands moved in one direction, while his eyes another. Something akin to a dance was happening as he moved and poured and blended and worked. Then his liquid movements came to an abrupt halt with a knock at his door. Expecting the friend, the blender unlocked and opened his door with a cheerful, "Please come in!" before realizing it was not the friend, but a new person, whom he had never seen before.

Crossing his threshold now was a beautiful creature with a wonderful smile. The new friend came in and immediately began to speak. The words slithered around the blenders ears in a comfortable exciting way. The new friend looked quite unique, unlike anyone the blender had ever seen before. Something about the new friend reminded the blender of a unique and strange bird. While he was unsure why, he nearly expected the new friend to have a beak, or fly away at any moment. Instead, and to the delight of the blender, the new friend kept talking.

The blender's mind worked diligently to compile all of the words together into a comprehensive batch. Tobacco blends of old seemed to be the topic. A call to the past was missing in today's blends, so said the new

birdlike friend, in words that were as eloquent as they were quick. The blender found himself agreeing with nods almost immediately. The palpable charm that infused the air was undeniable. The blender was breathing it in now.

The bird friend produced a small leather pouch from the pocket of a topcoat of sorts and untied it with a single finger in such a way that the background music might have been conducted, just for a moment, by the movements. Once open, the bird friend sprinkled a very small pinch of the contents over the tobacco laid out on the blender's mixing table. The question had to be asked, what was this stuff? The blender inhaled and began to rally his questions, but they were much slower to answer his call than was normal. Some call this phenomena a daze, while others call it a haze. Either word was very close to the name of the land the blender was now visiting. Everything he tried to do was slow and difficult.

Finally, a word came from the blender, "What" then another, "was" then the last in the group "that?" It seemed like such a simply constructed sentence, but in his mind it took immense building effort and even more to launch the little ship of words from his mouth. His eyes moved from his blending table to the bird friend who was no longer there. The blender's door was shut and locked, his classical music still played in the background and everything seemed to be quite normal.

Suddenly, his head was very clear and the thought of someone having been there, just a few moments prior, felt like a dream he may have had in the past. This new blend he was working on was suddenly very important. His idea of bringing back an old blend from days gone by was genius and he had to share this with the friend.

Not far away...

It isn't often that a bird flies into your window as you're staring out of it. It can be startling. For the friend, it was startling, very much so. He leapt from his old rocking chair only to watch the bird fly in an awkward circle and do it again. Unsure of what to do, he opened the door. As he did he felt the bird fly past him, barely brushing his arm. All of this happened very quickly. About as quickly as it took him to jump up and say, "Get in here!" when opening, then slamming the door.

The friend turned on his heels and looked upward toward the bare rafters expecting to catch a glimpse of the fluttering guest. Instead, standing quite on the ground before him, was a person, or at least, some

thing that seemed like a person. Somehow, it had beautiful, bird like qualities. He caught himself staring at its features, but as he did, the information he was receiving was not clear. He saw feathers, which, upon closer examination, were actually just hound's-tooth patterned material. He saw a wonderful little pale reddish beak, which somehow, was really only a nicely smiling mouth, now that he looked more closely.

He needed his pipe to sort all of this out. There it was, sitting in wait upon the cold window sill, a steady plume of smoke rising from it and floating upwards. Slowly and deliberately, he walked to his perched companion and picked it up. Only after clenching it in his teeth did he turn to see his new guest was not a bird, nor was it completely human. The term bird friend came to mind.

The bird friend began to speak and as it did, the friend's ears heard something more like music than speech. The words curled into his ears and nestled in his heart. He hoped the bird friend would never stop talking. Somehow quick and flitting, while remaining absolutely elegant, the bird friend's prose wove a story of age old tobaccos now missing from the world. Exotic tastes that were once the mainstays of pipe smokers around the world, were now out of reach. This was a travesty, explained the bird friend.

The friend was nodding in agreement so soon, that, for a moment, he inwardly debated whether he began nodding with the very first word uttered by the bird friend, or not. Soon this debate in his head dissipated, leaving no trail that it ever was there. Now the friend was simply filled with warmth and goodness and a feeling that he and the bird friend were very much on the same page about these concerns. He couldn't agree with the bird friend more about the lost loves of those old tobaccos.

No one would ever do something as outlandish as pluck the pipe from another's clench. It would be a most jarring, awkward and brash thing for anyone to do. However, this is exactly what the bird friend did next. The bird friend's shapely hand made a fluttering advance which reminded the friend of a fish swimming in water that was slightly too shallow. Then there was a strange pulse of warmth accompanied by an absence of sound as the pipe was pruned from the friend. Normally, this action would be followed by fist-to-cuffs, but violence was very far from the friend's mind right now.

The bird friend pulled a small sack, possibly made of leather, from the pocket of a very odd kind of topcoat. The bird friend then loosened the sack with a fluid motion, as if writing in the air. The bird friend then sprinkled a

very small pinch of the sack's contents into the pipe. The new ingredient was tamped with a claw, or maybe it was the smallest finger of the bird friend's right hand. Suddenly, and almost without notice, the favored pipe was back home, in the clenched teeth of the friend.

The friend called upon his wits to ask the obvious questions of the origin and make of this introduced ingredient. It seemed his wits were needed elsewhere and could not heed his call. He wanted to use only a few words for the question. The birth of the sentence became desperate, but it would never pass his teeth. Soon, those needed words vanished from his thoughts and there were no words at all to pick or choose from.

Then suddenly, all was quite clear. He was sitting in his rocking chair, enjoying his pipe on a very normal winter's morning. Something about his tobacco reminded him of one of his old favorite blends. The flavor swelled until it was exactly like days gone by. Then as quickly as it came, like a finicky humming bird, the taste and smell of that old tobacco was gone. The memory lingered until it fused with an idea and prompted the friend out of his home and towards the blender's hovel.

Only blocks away...

The tobacconist was having a slow morning. He supposed the cold was keeping away most of his patrons. He imagined them in their homes, weighing out the good and bad of venturing out to find solace in his shop. It was certainly warm in his quaint little spot, and few would attempt to dispute how wonderful the atmosphere felt with so many pipes and tobaccos nearby amidst jovial conversation and good friends. Hopefully soon, his patrons would trickle in and the day would feel more normal. Then came a thud. It was the kind of thud you hear when something smallish, but with weight, collides with something largish like a door. This thud sends shopkeepers like the tobacconist into a heightened sense of speculation: was the thud a product of some neighborhood kid throwing snowballs, or was it possibly something else that needed investigation?

The tobacconist advanced towards his front door. As he did, his door flew open and snow, wind, cold, and a patron all hurried in at once. The patron immediately said, "Crazy bird!" To this the tobacconist replied, "What?" "Some crazy bird flying into your door when I came in. It may have flown inside." said the patron. Immediately they began scanning the shop for the bird that may have flown in. "Well I never said that bird could come in here!" exclaimed the Tobacconist with a grin. Soon the men spotted the

flitting little bird above the shelves of bulk tobacco towards the back of the store. "I'm not going to bother with it now. I'll find a way to get it out later." said the Tobacconist to the patron. With that they cozied into some well worn chairs and commenced upon the rituals of pipe lighting. Soon, waves of lovely smoke, laden with complexions of interesting aromas, danced around the room and mingled with the warm conversation, also now adrift about them. The bird watched.

The blender and the friend, each on their way to see the other, met in the cold outdoors nearly exactly halfway between their abodes. "I have an idea!" exclaimed the blender. "You have an idea? Well you'll have to wait, I have an idea, and you're going to love it!" decried the friend and began unloading his secret immediately. "You need to make a blend that harkens back to the age old blend that we all miss so much. It can live again, through you! It will be a great success and make us all very happy!" The blender's smile was telling as he said, "But that was my idea I was just bringing to you! How much we think alike, it's nearly hard to believe! I have already begun blending and am ready for you to help test this new/old blend dear friend. Come back to my place and we shall both test this blend and discuss it's needs."

Upon arriving at the blender's quarters, the men filled their pipes with a test bowl, full of the new/old blend that would change the world. A change occurred indeed. Every pore on them began sprouting hair. Each tooth in their mouths pushed out, away from the gum. Their noses grew small and dark and all the while during this transformation, they noticed not one thing of themselves or each other. Within moments, they grew into well dressed beasts of some sort, but knew it not. Finishing the smoke before telling the world was not an option. With pipes clenched in their newly fanged mouths, they set out together, towards the tobacconist's shop.

The few townsfolk they passed on their way to the tobacconist were, for some reason, in some sort of hurry. One woman even screamed, but when they tried to fun and help her, she ran much faster, away from them both. It was very strange. The friend beast caught site of a squirrel on a nearby tree and pondered on it's plumpness. Something he had never done before. The blender beast thought of how very mild it felt, even though snow was falling. He had a strange urge to relieve himself on an upcoming tree, but he fought the urge and continued on.

As they arrived they threw the door open with excitement. The blender beast called out to the previously relaxed tobacconist and patron, "We have a secret! It is a plan like none other and will change the world of

pipe smoking!" The bird, still near the bulk tobaccos in the back of the store, flitted wildly. The tobacconist and patron sat bolt upright in great surprise. While still looking at the beasts now standing in his shop, he muttered from the side of his mouth to the patron in low tones, "Be calm and act casual, if you do not, we may be dead men." Then the tobacconist remarked, "Great blender and good friend, I see something has changed you indeed. Tell me all about your inspiration, but first, sit down and allow me to pull a special mixture of mine for you both."

It is well known that while the great tobacco blenders create the magical wonders that delight the palate of all pipe smokers, tobacconists also concoct their own varieties in order to further adjust those great tobaccos on the whim and whimsy of the patron. This can be a great service when you find a tobacconist who can understand and read your choices and influences. This is why blenders tend to be of the genius inventor variety, while tobacconists tend to have powers of clairvoyance which seemingly come from beyond this mortal coil.

As the tobacconist left his comfortable seat to fetch the special mixture he mentioned, he whispered "Offer them a seat." to the patron. "Why don't you two take a seat?" the patron said, as calmly as he was able, which was not very calmly at all. The snarling beasts looked strange standing up as straight as the men they once were. They gave one another a quick glance and a nod of their very hairy heads before sitting down.

When one becomes a beast, as these two men, things change. The way one breathes and moves and thinks, among other things, changes dramatically. Their breathing was heavy and audible, their speech was rough and slurred. Their gate was drunken, however, they kept their pipes lit without problem. The friend beast called out to the tobacconist, "We don't need your mixture now, that is why we're here! We have something new for you to introduce. It has changed us dramatically and will do the same to you!" An approving kind of snort came from the blender beast. The patron was shaking visibly. The bird refused to stop flying and flitting wildly. "We have brought some for you to try. We have enough for many of your patrons to try as well." growled the blender beast. And then he produced a fairly large pouch from a coat pocket.

The tobacconist was now standing on a small step ladder and unlocking an old wooden box. "I don't think that will be necessary." said the tobacconist. "Surely, good blender, you bring the finest gems for our tastes into this world, however, I will have to pass this time." "Wait!" piped up the patron. "I want to try some!" he said. The bird stopped moving and stared

at the scene. The tobacconist remained focused and calm, bringing an old brown bag down from the lock box.

The blender beast and friend beast rocked back and forth with this news of a soon to be convert. "Will it change me, I mean, will I look and act like you?" asked the patron to the two beasts. "What do you mean?" snarled the friend beast. The blender beast looked equally confused. "How do I look to you?" growled the friend beast to the patron. The tobacconist was now at the patron's quivering side with the old brown bag in hand. A quick nudge from tobacconist to patron was followed by the words, "He's being silly, you are the same person today as you were yesterday." "Yes, that's right, just a joke." the patron said, voice wavering.

The blender beast put his pouch of new/old blend on the small round table in front of him. Next to it, the tobacconist put his own special mixture, the old brown bag. "The choice is yours good patron. There are no wrong decisions here." the tobacconist said gently to the patron. Pulling a fresh pipe from a pocket, the patron put down his previous pipe and deliberated over the pouches while occasionally glancing back and forth between the beasts and the tobacconist. The patron filled his bowl with the old/new blend to the delight of the blender beast and friend beast. The tobacconist sighed and slowly returned his brown bag to its locked home, but not before filling his own pipe with some of his special mix.

As the patron lit his newly packed pipe, the tobacconist took the large sample brought by the blender beast and readied it for sale in a very large ornate humidor jar. He placed the large ornate jar in a prominent place on the old wooden counter, then began to write something on a small card. The patron, as suspected, quickly turned into a beast as well. His change went unnoticed by all except the tobacconist and the bird. The bird was now hopping from side to side in a gleeful kind of way. The tobacconist walked slowly and calmly toward the door. He opened the door and said to the air, "My door is always open. I bid no one entry nor do I ask them leave." with these words the bird flew immediately out of the little shop, apparently seen only by the tobacconist.

The three beasts puffed quite contently on their pipes and spoke loudly of the remarkable nuances that made this new/old blend not only close to the old beloved mixture, but embodied it totally and completely with nary a miss in texture, taste or room note. The blender looked to the tobacconist and spoke in his rough way, "I'm still not sure what to call it." The tobacconist affixed the hand written card in front of the large ornate humidor which held the much desired new/old blend and said, "How's this?"

All three beasts turned and read as quickly as beasts can, which is none too quickly. The two words on the placard read, "Transformative Mixture."

Howls erupted in the little shop, a sign of joy and agreement. "My how everything changes, while everything stays the same." said the tobacconist. He then joined the small group and lit his pipe.

~ Olie Sylvester, Baron

International Oom Paul Society of Non-Typicals