

Azaza and Nome

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Her English name was Jeannie; her Eskimo name was Azaza, pronounced in a somewhat breathless whisper: Ah'-zha-zha, with emphasis on the first syllable. She was as cute as the proverbial bug's ear, and she was my steady girlfriend for almost three years.

Eskimos don't really rub noses. Before the arrival of the white man, they expressed affection towards one another by sort of sniffing each others' cheeks in a half-open mouth kind of way. Sort of an olfactory buzz.

Eskimos don't live in igloos - at least, not all the time. In the old days, an igloo was the name for any dwelling during both summer and winter. The sod igloo in summer was more permanent, of course; in the winter, it was the temporary ice shelter. These winter shelters are just that: temporary lodging during the winter hunt, although 'temporary' was as long as the temperatures allowed. A well-constructed igloo can last a surprisingly long time. It is constructed by cutting blocks of frozen snow, usually about two cubic feet, and placing them in a desired-sized circle on the ground. A second tier is placed on top of these, and so on, being sure the ends are staggered from row to row. Somewhere around waist height, one or two helpers climb inside and help place the blocks so that they gradually begin to lean inward several inches in each tier. Here is where it becomes desirable to begin packing them harder together so they will stick to each other. A spray of water on these leaning upper rows, both inside and outside, will help to cement them.

Finally, with careful shaping and cutting the blocks at angles so they jam against each other, a domed room is formed. A keystone block is finally placed on top, sealing and supporting the whole thing, much as a keystone is used in an archway. A small doorway is cut to open across the prevailing wind (ensuring neither a direct breeze blowing into the interior nor a partial vacuum from the opposite direction), and skins are placed over the opening on the inside. The traditional tunnel is optional, but is usually included as a storage area for things needed to be kept cold or dry. The opening from the inner end of the tunnel into the igloo proper is also hung heavy skins, thus ensuring the tunnel remains

colder than the warm, moist interior. Snow is a good insulator and, given enough people and a modest heat source, igloos can become quite cozy (and smelly) during even the coldest spells.

Eskimos don't loan wives. At least, not anymore, and then not even in that sense. In the old days an Eskimo village chief was wealthy and had many wives. It was not uncommon for a solitary hunter to appear in the village. Naturally, he would be invited to rest and visit for a time (Eskimos are gregarious, sociable and generous). Before he continued his wandering, the chief or another well-off man would offer him the use of a woman to accompany him to the next village. She would cook his food, mend his clothing, and otherwise perform essential tasks he could not do while concentrating on his hunting. Upon their arrival in the next village, the woman would usually be left behind with friends or kin; the "lending" cycle would be repeated, and the first woman involved would eventually make her way back home in the same manner.

Eskimos don't always wear furs. Furs are heavy and hold heat, and Eskimos perspire. Only tourists ("Cheechakos," derisively pronounced "Chee-chalkers") wear furs in the summer so they can take pictures of each other to show the folks back home. Eskimo summer clothing consists of colorfully printed yard goods for ankle-length dresses (for the older women) and black or blue denims and cotton shirts for the men. Eskimo girls wear much the same as girls their age Outside wear, and the various mail order catalogs are a source of up-to-date fashion examples.

I must explain the term "Outside." It is the Alaskan's term for the Lower 48 (or 49) states. It's as natural as breathing for a person who has been in Alaska for any length of time to say Outside. The phrase "I'm going Outside" or "I've been Outside" invariably refers to going to or having been out of Alaska. When the Alaskan refers to going out of doors, the action is usually described as "I'm going out."

Eskimos speak different dialects, much as do people from New England, the deep South, and West Texans. People from Kotzebue (180 miles north of Nome) speak differently from King Island, Little Diomed, Barrow, and other geographically separated areas. To the non-Eskimo ear, however, it all sounds the same. The Eskimo language is a soft, sibilant tongue full of "sh" and curving "ng" and glottal-stop "rr" and "ook" sounds. Rapidly spoken Eskimo sounds much like a leaking water faucet.

The Eskimos I knew lived in Nome. Most came from King Island, which lies off the coast and northward of Nome, but there was generous representation from Kotzebue, Little Diomed Island, and

other Seward Peninsula and Norton Sound areas. Examination of a map of Northwestern Alaska will show the natural boundaries of the region.

Nome in 1956, when I arrived, was a small, isolated and drab settlement of about 1,500 on the southern edge of the Seward Peninsula. (My wife, upon seeing it for the first time during a three-day visit in the early 1980s, said it was still ugly and wondered how I could have stood it for almost ten years much less one day.) The Nome that was the sprawling, brawling gold camp of 1900 as portrayed in old postcards is no more. It was larger in those days, but several disastrous fires over the years wiped out most of that. When I was there, all the sidewalks were made of wood since concrete cracked and crumbled in the extremes of temperature. The boardwalks actually sang in winter. Wood freezes in extreme low temperature and becomes brittle. Strike any suspended piece of wood, hard-frozen wood with a hammer and you will hear a resonant tone. Literally, to bastardize a well-known song title, the streets were alive with the sound of music. Main Street sang with xylophone-like sounds as people walked: high notes, low notes, and in-between notes.

In early spring, around March or April, when it was beginning to warm up to -20 or -15, temperature inversions were common. The air near the ground would begin to warm up (relatively speaking), but 20 or 30 feet up it remained cold. Smoke from chimneys rose in the still air and spread out horizontally against the bottom of this invisible ceiling. The just-appearing sun turned this blanket of smoke a rosy pink that almost glowed with its own inner fire.

Another kind of fire was the aurora borealis, or northern lights. To have seen color photographs and movies or videos of the northern lights is to have seen but a dull, unfocused reflection in a cloudy mirror. To have been on the Arctic tundra in the dead of winter, away from all light pollution, and experienced the full play of the northern lights is to have been part of something impossible to describe. The lights surround you completely, from edge to edge of the black bowl of the sky. They are, at their best, all colors: green, red, blue, yellow, and all mixtures of these, and they shift, dance, shimmer and move, both slowly and quickly. They stay still and ripple within themselves, as if testing your sense of sight; they coyly stretch out thin fingers and intertwine themselves into spiral ribbons. Then, in a blink, they have repositioned themselves into great clusters of rolling, inside-out turning balls, spouting fat streamers that lazily roll over and over as they twist over the snow. Huge, shifting draperies of purple and red rise and fall within themselves, stretching from the horizon to the top of the sky, rippling sinuously all the while. And the show goes on and on and on, and you are unaware of the frozen hours passing. People have said they've actually heard the lights in

the incomparable stillness of the northern world. For a fact, I believe I have too. Walk out a hundred yards from the edge of town and the absolute silence presses in all around you. The North is, literally, frozen and there is no noise but your own breathing and heartbeat. Lie down on the frozen snow, share into the sky, and listen. The brain will hear the deep, far-away 'shusssh' and high-low wavering, like distant asthmatic breathing, of the lights.

You really have to see them to appreciate them.

Most of the ground is frozen, with permafrost beginning about a foot below the surface and extending thousands of feet downward. Permafrost is a mixture of ice and soil congealed together, and it remains frozen and stable until heat is placed over it. Thus, a house with a poured foundation cannot be built on it, nor can asphalt roads, or any heat generating or retaining surface or structure placed on the ground. The warmth works its way downward, melting the stuff, and the result is unstable mud. The house or road sinks and shifts. The half-frozen mush refreezes and thaws in a vicious cycle as the temperatures change, and soon the road is impassable and the house uninhabitable. Doors which opened and closed easily the evening before are jammed shut the next morning. Refrigerators have rolled overnight from one wall to the other. Window glass cracks in the warped frames. Almost all buildings in Nome are crooked.

There are exceptions, and three methods are used to maintain livable buildings.

One is to build houses on piers, or posts. Power pole-like logs are sharpened on one end, like a pencil, and driven point-down into the permafrost to a depth of eight or ten feet. A 6x6 or 8x8 frame, or foundation, is then built on the exposed butt-ends of these piers that rise about two or three feet above surface of the ground, and the house is constructed on this. The sharpened ends offer a small area to the permafrost, and little heat from the house is transmitted down through the piers. Any "heaving" of the permafrost first meets the sharp ends and, finding no flat, horizontal surface against which to act, is diverted vertically up the pier. The open crawl space between the ground and the bottom of the house is open to the relatively constant summer temperatures. In the fall, winter and spring, snow is packed against the sides of the house, sealing up the open crawl space and ensuring a constant deep-freeze temperature under the house.

A second solution is to build the house on a large skid, or sled, built of 10x10 or 12x12 beams. The skid sits flat on the ground and the house sits on the skid. When the ground heaves, the entire skid

moves, but the house, moving with the skid, doesn't suffer jammed doors or runaway appliances or furniture. A side benefit of such a house is that it is movable. It was not at all uncommon to see a Caterpillar pulling such houses along a street during both summer and winter, from one lot to another. One result of such activity was that one was forced to keep track of where people lived by means other than house numbers (which were not used) or street names. By simply "moving away," many neighborhood squabbles were resolved. The third solution, which is elegant but expensive, is to thaw the ground.

Nome is still gold country, and large, floating dredges are used to extract gold commercially. To float, a dredge must have water, and a pond is made to hold the water. Long hollow, sharp-pointed pipes with perforations along their entire length are driven into the permafrost. Hoses are connected to the top ends of the pipes and steam is forced through them into the ground. When the pipes begin to tilt and sink, they are pulled out and the melted soil is bulldozed away. The pipes (called steam points) are then reinserted into the newly-exposed frozen layer, and cycle by cycle a deeper and deeper depression, or pond, is created. The gold dredges are massive: as large as a city block and as high as a five-story building, they require a good-sized pond.

A hull, much like a river boat's, is built on a sloping edge of the pond. This is "launched," and the rest of the dredge constructed on the floating hull. When completed, the dredge looks (and sounds, during operation) like some prehistoric, dinosaur-like monster. A long, vertically-movable boom extends from the front end. An endless chain of toothed buckets, like scoops of a power shovel, runs under-and-over the boom, nibbling away at the edge of the pond. The earth (and hopefully) gold is carried inside the dredge and processed through riffles and screens, and the residue or "tailings" is carried out the rear of the dredge in over-and-under buckets hung from another boom to be deposited in heaps. During operation, the entire dredge is winched from side to side in its pond as it nibbles at the front and deposits at the rear. Thus, it constantly moves its pond with it as it proceeds cross-country, eating at one end and filling up at the other. Some of the tailings are miles long, and from the air they resemble frosting decorations on the rim of a cake.

Houses can be built directly on the thawed deposit areas, which remain ice-free and stable for some 60 to 70 years. Thawed soil is also transported to fill thawed and scraped areas, some six or eight feet in depth, specifically for house and building construction. Such ground remains stable for 30 or 40 years. Usually the thawed ground far outlasts the house. The climate in Nome is harsh.

Nome seems to attract more than its share of characters. The name itself has, to me, a magic end-of-the-world sound, like Timbuktu. In my childhood days Santa Claus, for some reason, lived in Nome. He wasn't there when I finally arrived, though, but other luminaries have more than made up for him. Nome regularly attracted 'ladies of the night' from Outside who thought they could become wealthy off the mass of love-starved miners and gold seekers. Their lack of knowledge of present-day Nome invariably forced them to become welfare cases who had to be flown back home at public expense. I met people such as Dr. Edward H. Teller, the Father of the H-Bomb; Secretary of the Army Wilbur Brucker; Senator Ernest Gruening, one-time governor of the Territory of Alaska, and Shel Silverstein, the artist who gained fame in *Playboy* magazine. I partied with Commander (later Vice Admiral) Strong, the skipper of the ballistic missile submarine *Sea Dragon* and through whom I spoke on the phone with Admiral Hyman G. Rickover. I met many other famous and near-famous people, some of whom were known only in the murky world of intelligence.

Nome, like any civilized place, has stores. The Glue Pot, an Eskimo ice cream, card-playing and ivory-carving parlor); Alaska Cab and Q-Cab that charged a dollar to go anywhere in "Greater Nome," and the seven bars (The Golden Goose and Anchor Tavern from one end of town to the Bering Sea Club and Polaris Bar on the other end). In between were the usual mercantile endeavors of a small town. The Northern Commercial Company ("NC Store") that was the Sears of Alaska for many years. One drug store (where I actually once purchased a bottle of genuine Pluto Water). Several assorted cafes and clothing shops; one or two barber shops (it varied); two hardware stores, and a grocery store competing with the NC Store. The vast majority of the taxi cab customers were, with the exception of runs to the airport, folks who called them to go from bar to bar. In style. Warm. So they wouldn't get lost and freeze to death in the winter. Yes, I actually have had to feel my way through blinding snow storms in the middle of town.

Q-Cab, incidentally, got its name from one of the owner's former holdings - an enterprise known as the Curly-Q Railroad. In the early teens of this century, a narrow gauge railroad extended for several hundred miles over the tundra to provide transportation for the scattered gold camps. Many miles of track were still intact when I was there, and now and again tourists were treated to a short, bumpy (and expensive) ride behind an automobile engine-powered "locomotive." I, as well as many other residents, had a Jeep with wheel adapters to fit the track, and frequent summer time runs over the tundra and across wobbly bridges, rotten grades along deep valleys, and stretches of bad track are among my favorite memories. Conjure up a mental image of Cap in the old Toonerville Trolley comic strip.

My living in Nome in the first place was a set of fortunate circumstances. I joined the Army in 1955 because I was bored with working at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington. I visited the Army recruiter in Bremerton one day and he tried to interest me in something called ASA (Army Security Agency) that, he promised, was an interesting, challenging and rewarding job. (I later learned ASA was primarily comprised of people sitting around intercepting voice and code communications.) I broached the idea of joining the Army to one of my equally-bored friends, Vernon Herrick (who still lives in my hometown of Poulsbo, Washington). He agreed to join the Army with me but proposed we join the Alaska Communication System, or ACS. I'd never heard of it, but later at the county fair we visited an ACS exhibit. They had Teletype machines hooked up for people to play with; photographs and posters of huge salmon being caught, Eskimos in kayaks, gold being panned, totem poles, and other enticements of far-off romance and adventure. I was hooked. Vernon and I drove to Bremerton, roused out the recruiter, and eventually we were in the Army.

A word about ACS. Originally the "WAMCATS" (Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System), it was conceived and placed into being in 1900 to provide communications between the Military Department of Alaska and Washington, D.C. My ramblings here cannot begin to cover the story of ACS, but the first commercial communication station in the United States was established at Fort Safety, near Nome, via undersea cable across Norton Sound to Fort St. Michael. The winter ice took out the cable, and in 1903 they sent a message via wireless code, then in its infancy. It was the first commercial wireless message ever sent. The Army Air Corps' Billy Mitchell, as a lieutenant, was once in WAMCATS to oversee the installation of a pole line in the Fairbanks area. Through its life from 1900 to 1962, ACS was a separate operating entity directly under control of the Chief Signal Officer of the Army. At the time I joined (and presumably for many years prior), assignments were restricted to people living within a 75-mile radius of Seattle. No integration; they wanted people of similar outlook and upbringing. No assignments to ACS from other Army units other than returns by former ACSers. You could be assigned *out* of ACS at your request or if you really screwed up, be threatened with transfer to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. We were all aghast at that possibility.

ACS paid its own way. It was the Western Union and AT&T of Alaska; it collected revenues and tolls for its services and it connected with commercial systems such as RCA, Western Union, Mackay Radio, etc. worldwide. Telegraphic money order fees, telephone and radio feed tolls, messages and telegrams over the counter and via radio, both voice and code, from commercial and government ships, all pulled in money.

The history of ACS has been printed somewhat sporadically, and I've never seen a definitive work detailing its official history and myriad vignettes, events, characters and adventures. It was unique, with its own shoulder patch, command structure, operating conditions, and the very best reputation and relationship with whatever village, town or city it served.

At any rate, Vernon and I raised our hands in Seattle, flew to Fort Ord, California, for basic training (where I turned down "opportunities" to transfer to other assignments and declined Officers Candidate School); back to Seattle for two weeks leave; to (then) Camp Gordon, Georgia, for more training, then back to Seattle for commercial school at ACS headquarters - 550 Federal Building in Seattle). The commercial school was located in the Federal Building's basement and garage area, and was known as Monoxide Alley.

Assignments from the school to Alaska were supposedly made randomly, but my harping continuously that I had an aunt living in Nome at the time must have been the deciding factor.

I arrived in Nome on March 28, 1956. The station commander (StaCom), MSgt James W. Blanning, met me at the airport. Snow was piled everywhere to an average height of 10 to 12 feet. I told him my aunt worked at a place called the Wallace Hotel. He seemed to know all about it, and that was where we stopped. We entered the restaurant and sat at the counter. Sure enough, Aunt Edith was working. She had her back turned and didn't see me come in. When she turned, she stared at me for a moment, then said, in her inimitable way, "Well, I'll be a gawdamned son of a bitch!" I had been welcomed home.

I started as a rookie but soon learned the mysteries of international code, climbing ice-covered 300-foot towers, pushing snow with a D-8 Caterpillar, maintaining and repairing radio transmitters and receivers, and a myriad other Arctic chores too numerous to mention. Winter work was not always dull, and the thrill of chasing foxes and other wildlife along the frozen tundra in a weasel (a tracked vehicle) took the edge off our chores. I eventually wound up being chief operator ("CHOP"). I took over the ACS station at Kotzebue, north of both Nome and the Arctic Circle, as StaCom whenever MSgt David W. Johnson and his wife, who was a civilian employee, went on leave. And truly, I had many adventures and experiences that are far beyond the scope of these scribblings.

I learned to fly while in Nome. Strictly CAVU (Ceiling And Visibility Unlimited). My instructor was an almost-throwback human named Charlie Hubbs, a true soldier of fortune. He flew as an American volunteer with the Royal Air Force during the dark days of 1939-40 and the Battle for Britain, and he had the log books to prove it. (If they were fake, they were the most messed up, dog-eared, stained and blotted fakes ever made.) Charlie drifted into Nome one day (as so many did) and stayed (as so few did). He worked whatever odd jobs he could find, and he lived in a shack representative of his income. His longest-lasting job was as a night operator at the city power house. Here was where Nome obtained its electric power, and Charlie's job was to make sure the dynamos, powered by diesel engines whose fuel was carried in by Standard Oil ships from Seattle, ran at a more or less constant speed. Charlie was medium-sized, compact, and sported a sandy handlebar mustache and a spontaneous and cheery crinkly kind of smile. He usually wore a wool shirt (as most of us did), dirty jeans and scuffed half-boots. He did own one fine suit of clothes, and on the two occasions I ever saw him bathed, shaved and dressed up, cut a very fine figure indeed.

I've always regretted that I didn't follow through on a grand idea I conceived regarding Charlie. *Playboy* magazine at that time was running a series of full-page color advertisements entitled "What Kind of Man Reads *Playboy*?" It always showed a debonair, impeccably-dressed man, relaxing in a book-filled, dark wood-and-leather furnished- library fit for a millionaire. Behind him, near a blazing fireplace, lounged a gorgeous and curvaceous woman, running her fingers adoringly through his hair or pining away for him from a distance. And, of course, the man would be smoking a fine briar pipe and reading *Playboy*.

Well, Charlie loved *Mad* magazine which, of course, is as far from *Playboy* in cultural content as anything can be. Charlie's dirty working attire fit in perfectly with his oily, dungeon-like power house surroundings strewn with greasy tools and rags, overflowing ash trays and crusted coffee cups. Now, picture Charlie, unshaven and rumpled, leaning back in an old kitchen chair, feet propped up on a bashed-in desk, blearily reading a copy of *Mad*. Picture also a wrinkled and toothless old Eskimo woman standing over him, broom or mop in hand, drooling adoringly into his face. Ah, yes. "What kind of man reads *Mad*?" I wonder how much *Mad* would have paid me for such a photograph...

Anyhow, one of my early flying lessons with Charlie had been disastrous. I had been driving him in a single-engine Aeronca Chieftain puddle-jumper over the hills back of Nome one day when I casually mentioned to Charlie that I didn't get airsick. Charlie, who had been in the right seat making sarcastic remarks about my inability to "keep my damn wings level," grew suddenly silent. He nudged the

controls, indicating that I should release the wheel. I did. Without increasing the airplane's speed, Charlie began putting the plane through maneuvers he later told me were called chandelles, and I suddenly, lacking any other suitable container, filled up both his leather gloves.

Let me here borrow a page from a journal entry from my college literature classes. It tells something more specific about Charlie.

I had been waiting near the red hangar at the airfield around 10 minutes that morning when Charlie Hubbs drove into sight on the road from town. "How does he do it?" I wondered. Charlie worked nights at the power house, and he still had the energy and enthusiasm (apparently) to give flying lessons after work.

He parked his battered Jeep beside the hangar and strolled toward me. "Feelin' better?" he asked. I nodded. He stopped and studied me. "Uh huh. Got my gloves?" I silently handed over the new leather gloves. "Good. Ready to go? I wanna get back as soon as I can. Gotta take a bath today. Boy, do I smell."

I could tell this just might be the continuation of what was not one of my better lessons. I normally didn't give new leather gloves to Charlie or to anyone else, but the previous day's lesson had ended abruptly when Charlie demonstrated that, yes, a small plane, expertly handled, didn't need to undergo aerobatic maneuvering to cause an unsettled feeling in one's stomach and, yes, gloves were a reasonable emergency substitute for a motion sickness bag.

After elaborately examining the plane's interior for cleanliness, Charlie stood by and watched me do the pre-flight inspection. I swung the prop, the engine coughed into life, and I climbed in beside Charlie. I had filled both wing tanks the previous evening, and the small plane lumbered somewhat heavily over the dirt runway as I taxied toward the end of the field.

"Awright," announced Charlie after I had taken off and leveled off at 1,200 feet. "Here's where we really get those S-turns down cold. Head up the Kougarok Road and we'll. . . KEEP YOUR DAMNED WINGS LEVEL!"

I guiltily jerked the controls back to level flight.

"Whassa matter - still shaky from that little ride I gave you yesterday?" He snorted and twisted his mustache. "Okay. Just keep your mind on what you're supposed to be doing. And keep your head moving."

The last comment referred to looking around in a pattern for nearby traffic. Or an enemy. Charlie had flown as a volunteer in the British Royal Air Force in 1940, and he placed great store in swiveling one's head constantly in search of enemy aircraft.

We arrived over the dirt road stretching almost chalk line straight toward the distant Kougarak Mountains, and I lined up on it to show my expertise.

S-Turns. The following of a compass heading or straight line while weaving back and forth across it in namesake configurations. My bane. My Achilles Heel. Charlie did this maneuver with almost invisible twitches of the controls while staring about everywhere except ahead and down. I, on the other hand, staggered all over the sky like a snake being chased on slick ice.

"Don't you remember anything?" Charlie would gently encourage. "Look - keep us at 1,200 feet. That isn't so hard, is it? Look at this little round thing with the pointer. Right here, on the panel. See the numbers on it? There - that's it. Now, keep your nose up. Keep your wings level. Okay, make your turn back to the right. Give me the heading in degrees. . . that's right. . . ten degrees. . . cross the road and when you've got the rhythm of the turn, reverse your controls and maintain your...KEEP YOUR DAMNED WINGS LEVEL!"

For some reason, Charlie raised his voice a little when it came to keeping the damned wings

After the lesson, I made a reasonably uneventful landing. Charlie lit a cigar, climbed out of the plane, and turned and stared at me. "Why the hell haven't you soloed yet? How long do you think I'm gonna nursemaid you all over the sky? How many hours you got? Lemme see your log.

He snatched the book from my pocket. "Ten hours! Ten HOURS! Gawd! With ten hours I could put a propeller on a dogsled and fly excursions to Seattle for money!" Before my unbelieving eyes, he threw my logbook back inside the plane, slammed the right-hand door closed, and strode angrily toward his Jeep. I felt resentment and anger as I watched him throw gravel on the road to town.

An hour later, Charlie was smiling broadly as he signed off my solo in my logbook. "I sure as hell had to do something to kick your butt out of the nest," he said. "You were just like a damned fledgling - always looking over the edge but too scared to try your wings on your own. Yeah, and lazy, too. And you thought you really blew it yesterday with the gloves, huh?" He poked a filthy finger in my face. "I stopped just over the hill and waited until I heard the engine rev up, and I sat and watched you take off. Didn't you see my Jeep? Damn! Where do you keep your eyes? Well, I sure as hell hoped you'd cooled off before you took off. Damn!" He spat his cigar out - which, I noticed, was now a chewed-up mess - and grabbed my elbow. "Let's go get breakfast. By the way, I noticed when you flared out, you weren't quite..."

You, the reader, may well ask why I'm writing this stuff. Well, I may answer that I really don't know why, except that it keeps pouring from my fingers, and I sure don't want to kill this particular muse. Besides, maybe it'll remind me of ideas for future stories. So, onward.

Incidentally, I enjoyed that college literature class I mentioned earlier. I was one of the older students and always inflicted my vast (comparatively speaking) life's experience on the poor instructor, who was considerably my junior in years. I even wrote her a bit of doggerel to show off.

Could Edgar Allen Poe ever forgive me?

Many sessions after midnight, staring at my glassy screen,
With my spectacles reflecting endless words in phosphor green.

Leaden fingers on my keyboard, tapping out assignments,
While I yawn and try to finish scholarly requirements.
(God! My printer, small and noisy, gobbles paper by the ream!)

Wearily my mind repeated, heard while in some classroom seated,
Words encouraging and goading toward the goal of excellence. (But
tonight they make no sense!)

Gripping hard my cup of coffee, seeking to ignore my daze –
Suddenly I see a pattern form before my weary gaze!
'Tis sense and logic both conforming! After many hours a-borning,
Here's a story sure to prove to all the bettering of my ways!
(A story worthy to be honored now with one of those rare "A's?")
