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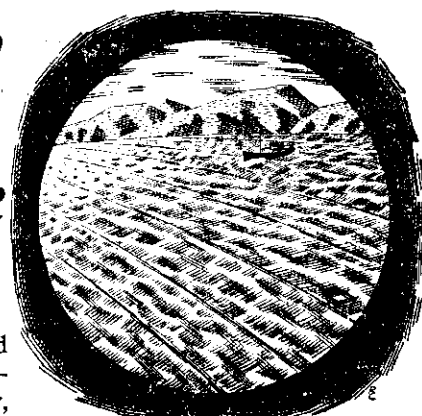
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A product of E. C. De Witt & Co. (N.Z.) Ltd.,  
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## Mail Day on a Lighthouse

(Written for "The Listener" by  
G. R. GILBERT)



"We get our first glimpse of the supply-boat through the telescope"

OUR mail-day comes around once each fortnight here—on every other Wednesday, weather conditions permitting. On that day, usually a little after ten in the morning, we get our first sight of the supply-boat through the telescope up in the look-out. It is only a little dot of white then—just a bow-wave. But we can pick it out from a dozen other boats which may be coming our way. Only then can we be certain that the mail will arrive according to schedule, and then we harness up Tommy the horse ready to take the konake down to the little wharf.

But although the arrival of the supply-boat is the core of mail-day—the hard centre—mail-day in the broad sense has begun the night before at least, for then, the eddies and counter-currents that attend this mild fortnightly crisis in our human affairs begin to swirl about us. Pleasurable anticipation of what we *might* receive mingle with desperation at the thought of the letters which we *have* to write—for to both Joy and me writing letters is difficult and painful; we would much rather receive them.

Therefore, on Tuesday evening all is scatter and confusion with the scene resembling a chapter from Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*—everywhere the subconscious is triumphant. Usually, Joy and I begin the session by recalling—with some relish—the great number of letters which the other has to write. We remind each other cattily not to forget so-and-so as we did last fortnight, or that a particularly difficult letter has been lying around for months—and with a mail only once in 14 days that can happen quickly enough.

WHEN it becomes obvious that this topic is exhausted we prepare for the actual writing. There is a search for the tools of trade—here the influence of the subconscious is markedly felt. First the fountain pen which we share cannot be found. Suspicion is fastened first on the children, and then as we warm up we accuse each other—usually not without reason—of having misplaced it. Slyly we hint that this is a deliberate attempt to embarrass the other. When it is found it is always dry of ink. The ink being dug from its hiding place and the pen filled, we discover that we forgot to order any writing paper last fortnight and a search begins for any oddments left lying around. I offer Joy typing paper, but she screams at me *that for the hundredth time she must have paper with lines on it.*

I wilt and retreat to the typewriter and begin my own correspondence, but I cannot be deaf to the mutter of accusation that comes from the kitchen as Joy

finds everything going wrong. By this time the neglected fire has gone out and the few tattered sheets of paper she has unearthed have hidden themselves again—the implication is that I am the spirit behind this. Furthermore, on these nights the lights appear to deliberately dim so that she can hardly see what she writes. A hint is thrown out that I have omitted to charge the batteries on purpose. But I bear all this silently and wade through my own letters with flying but inaccurate fingers.

Filled with self-satisfaction and virtue when they are finished I go into the kitchen and announce the fact.

"Ha! Ha!" I say, rubbing my hands. "All done. Three letters all finished. What d'you think of that, eh?"

But there is no welcoming smile. Only a look filled with bitterness and even animosity.

"You and that typewriter of yours," she says. "All you do is go 'tap-tap-tappity-tappity-tappity' and it's all done. Look at me—that's *all* I've done and there's *dozens* more to get through. I'll be up all night, and I can't write a word while you're pounding away on that wretched thing in the other room. It's easy for you to come in and tell me how much you've done. . . ."

I let all this pass, but I admit she does look a little miserable sitting huddled up by the stove with the paper perched awkwardly on one knee, wearing a trapped look on her face.

Tactfully I decide that it's time I went up to the look-out and sent the weather report.

THAT is the first phase of mail-day.

Except that later there is always some trouble over the stamps. If we haven't lost the lot of them, then there aren't enough to go around.

The second phase begins after the supply-boat has arrived and the mail has been sorted by the Principal Keeper. I take our share down to the house, and although neither of us would admit it we are on tip-toe with excitement. *Has it arrived?* For there is always one special thing that we are looking forward to. The letters and parcels are stacked on the sofa in the living room. Each fortnight we say, "Well—we definitely won't open any until after lunch." There is good reason for this, because if we start on the mail then the process continues for most of the afternoon while the fire goes out and the meal congeals and finally we have a little something tossed hurriedly together about

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