

4 Quarters

Commentary, Conversation, Observation and Opinion
Volume 4, Issue 4

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“THE COACH-HORN: WHAT TO BLOW AND HOW TO BLOW IT.”

BY AN OLD GUARD

(SEVENTH EDITION.
LONDON: KÖHLER & SON,
Sole Proprietors SWAINE ADENEY
BRIGG & SONS LTD.
185 PICCADILLY, W.1.
BY APPOINTMENT 1801.
ESTABLISHED IN 1780.
*H.R.H. the Prince of Wales was pleased to
appoint Mr. Köhler a Juror at the Interna-
tional Inventions Exhibition, 1885, Mili-
tary Band Instrument Section, Jury R.)*

Some time ago I rather thoughtless-ly remarked to a subaltern in the Guards that I had a notion of writing some instructions about blowing a Coach-horn, together with a few proper sounds appropriate to the road. The said officer mentioned this to his friends, who in turn told theirs; and since then I have been besieged with inquiries as to when the work would appear; and therefore, although immersed in far more important

business, still from a desire to be as good as my word—to say nothing of promised subscriptions, and anticipated profits—I have at last made up my mind to “appear in print.”

A very worthy friend of mine, of no particular talent (although he can sound a Coach-horn right well, and drives his own four-in-hand), once asked me to play something on the violin, and when I had done so, he observed, “Ah, I learnt the fiddle when I was young, and should have played very nicely indeed, if I had taken the trouble.”

This sagacious remark applies not only to fiddle-playing, but to every other undertaking in this world, including even the proper sounding of a Coach-horn.

Some persons can sound a horn almost by instinct from early childhood, others experience an insurmountable difficulty; and fabulous sums have been offered to me by certain persons,

whose names I suppress for obvious reasons, if I could only make them blow as well as myself. The truth is, they won't take the trouble.

Now I could sound a Horn at the early age of seven, and so can my son at a similar time of life (much to the annoyance of his mother, by-the-bye); but this precocity of talent may, perhaps, be accounted for by the fact that my father, my grandfather, and even my grandfather's uncle were bona fide makers of Coach-horns, and I am, further, a practical disciple of Hiram of Tyre, who, I may remark, without incurring any penalties, was the first artificer in metals in the days of King Solomon (1 Kings vii. 14).

My principal object is to teach my readers—my gentle readers, I believe is the correct term—how to sound a Horn; but I have added a number of preludes in which I have been obliged to use musical notes, and I believe they will be found a useful addition to these remarks, inasmuch as they comprise easy calls, or soundings, familiar even to horses as well as to coachmen, and therefore especially appropriate to the road.

Before proceeding with my instructions, a description of a Coach-horn, and the difference between that and

a Post-horn, may not be out of place, the former being nowadays used exclusively for a four-in-hand; although it should be borne in mind that the latter was really the recognised signal Horn used by all the guards on the fast Coaches which carried the mails fifty years ago. Hence the name "Post-horn."

A Coach-horn should always be straight and made of copper, with German-silver or real silver mouthpiece and mountings, and the bell should be funnel-shaped, and not curved outwards like an ordinary trumpet-bell.

Although a strictly legitimate Coach-horn should be made in one entire piece of metal, still there has recently been introduced a "Telescope" Coach-horn, made with a joint ferrule in the middle, which allows the top half to slide inside the lower portion of the Horn, without actually falling out—something after the style of the portable metal drinking cups. From actual experience, I can safely say that the tone and ease in blowing are not in the least affected by this innovation—which, indeed, I consider an improvement—for Coach-horns when thus "telescoped" are not nearly so liable to get bent or injured, and are more easily packed and carried about.

A Coach-horn ought really not to exceed thirty-six inches in length, or else the peculiar ring or note (musicians would call it the timbre) of the true Coach-horn becomes lost, and merges into that more resembling the field-bugle used in the army.

I am, however, aware that in the present age, when so much is done for the sake of show and appearance, even to the sacrifice of utility and comfort, many fairly good Coach-horns are used measuring forty-six inches, and even more; and I can further account for such long Horns being adopted, not merely for show, but because more can be done upon them, as we say; that is, it is easier to blow, not the same notes, but the same number of notes upon them. There is no accounting for taste, and as some people like to hear the Coach-horn sounded as William Simmons played his little bugle in “Martin Chuzzlewit,” “who, whenever the conversation flagged, played the first half of a great many tunes, and regularly broke down in the second,” then I will admit that for playing “Buy a Broom” and other airs very imperfectly, a four-foot Coach-horn will answer the purpose; although for all the old-fashioned coaching calls, I still maintain that a shorter Horn is to be preferred.

My opinion has been confirmed by all

the authorities whom I have consulted upon the subject; gentlemen, I may remark, belonging to a generation now almost gone by, who remember the days before the iron-horse made its appearance and wrought such changes amongst us; when nothing longer than the “yard of tin” was used on a Mail Coach, although the old key-bugle was reserved, by such few guards as could play it, for occasionally playing the simple and popular airs of the day.

Now the Post, or, as it is now so often called, the Tandem-horn, differs from the above, inasmuch as it is of a much smaller calibre or bore, being only twenty-eight or thirty-two inches in length, and made always of brass instead of copper. The bell, unlike that of the Coach-horn, should be trumpet-shaped, for the tone is materially affected thereby; and a well-curved bell will yield a sound far more appropriate to a pair of horses, tandem fashion, than a funnel-shaped bell.

A proper Post-horn ought also to be made with a slide, to elongate it if necessary, for tuning purposes; for it is often effectively used in the orchestra as a musical instrument; for instance, in Kœnig’s unrivalled “Post-horn” gallop, also in the more modern “Down the Road” and the “New Derby” gallops, etc. It need not necessarily be straight,

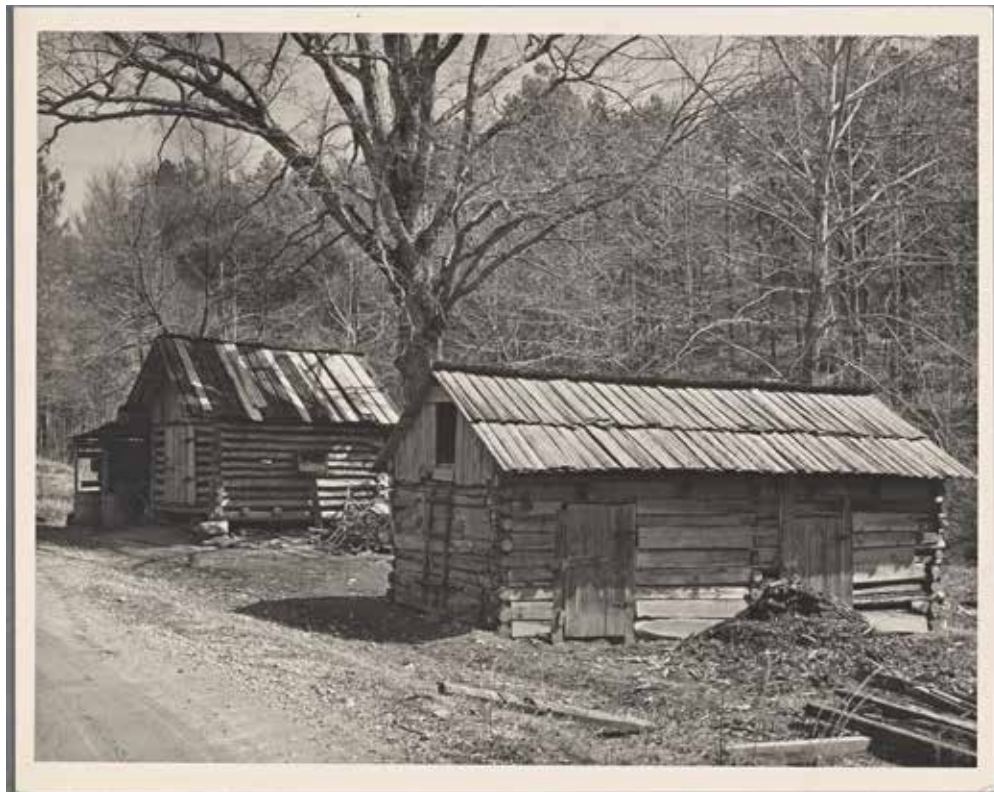
but may be coiled up so as to be carried in the pocket, in which shape it is handier for use in a dog-cart or gig.

Having thus described the two kinds of Horns used for coaching purposes, I will now proceed with my

INSTRUCTIONS TO LEARNERS.

Grasp the Horn firmly with the right hand about six inches from the mouthpiece, holding it out straight and in a

line with the mouth, so as not to cause the body to assume a stooping position. Then press the mouthpiece about the centre of the mouth, a shade more on the top lip than on the lower. Then almost close the lips, but draw them tightly across the teeth as if in the act of spitting something unpleasant out of the mouth. Then, as it were, spit into the mouthpiece, but without discharging more saliva than can possibly be helped; thus blowing sharply into the Horn, being, at the same time, care-



ful not to puff out the cheeks. Try to produce the sound “tpff” with the tip of the tongue, drawing it back again quickly, so as to be ready, as it were, for another note.

The sound at first will probably be but a short one, but after a little practice it can be prolonged by degrees. After doing this repeatedly, try then to hold or prolong the note, and not let it break or involuntarily subside into another sound. ❖

“RANT”

by Richard Van Ingram

Your president “made” \$2.2 BILLION DOLLARS last year. Mostly off his cryptocurrency and stock purchases in high tech companies he regulates. Who do you suppose bribed - uh, I mean bought that cryptocurrency to drive up the price or pass money along to the Scam Man? How did the president know repeatedly which stocks to buy just before their value rose? Remember, the regulatory agencies are in the executive branch and, no matter what the laws say, if the regulators don’t regulate the tech and crypto bros, maybe in return for a small “investment” in Scam Man - hey, they can all do as they please. As they are. Scam Man’s sons and son in laws are raking it in as well.

Today, your president is flying to North Dakota for a campaign rally in a luxury jet “given” to him by the Qataris. You’re paying for the fuel and over a billion dollars to fix the thing so a president can use it as Air Force One. What is Qatar getting in return? If you had a functioning Congress using its oversight, you might know. As is,

Congress is run by Trumpist “Republicans” who worship their braying Golden Ass, (to mix mythologies) - in return for his occasional favor.

Meanwhile, inflation is at 4.1%, outstripping any wage increases - meaning y’all who work for a living took a pay cut this year. And you pay taxes and get next to nothing in return except increased prices from tariffs, oil supply disruption, an ongoing Iran War that Trump started... for no reason. Or 18 mutually exclusive excuses, each made up as we’ve gone along, depending on what you believe. He’s wasted billions of your taxes on that and continues to each day.

We’ve lost 13 service members so far, 13 American lives, and the president shrugs and says at least it isn’t as many as we lost in Vietnam. How many service members have to die before one of them is important?!

Are you surprised Americans are

turning to extremist politicians for some sort of relief from this insanity? They offer what people need - often mixed with things we absolutely DO NOT NEED: more hatred of others, more antisemitism (Jew hatred); xenophobia; purity tests; identitarianism; “performative” but not real, active morality; white “Christian” Nationalism.

We are not going to overcome this movement to use government to suck the economic value out of the United States and put it in the bank accounts of a few billionaires by fragmenting ourselves along lines that accentuate our differences and by demonizing one another. Presently, too many people who ought to be cooperating to save our right to vote without unneeded federal government interference are at one another’s throats about foolishness and internet lies and misinformation.

All so they can monetize the chaos. Cash in on the misery and fear and hate.

When supposed “reporters” on television say that there are “thousands of people” at the “Great American State Fair” in D. C. while, behind them, you

can count no more than twelve people or so at any time, you are not watching a news report; you are watching liars, propagandists, who will tell you a happy story to believe in the face of the wreckage you see with your own eyes.

Every story those people tell you is a similar sort of lie - and why in the world would you trust proven liars? They’re selling you a story, not showing you relevant facts. And so is Trump because all those “reporters” are doing is repeating a happy story he wants told to avoid his wrath or so their employer benefits from deregulation and maybe money passed around under the tables by the media company owners. The Trump FCC seems blind to their propagandizing while it punishes comedians and actual news organizations like “60 Minutes.”

I just watched a Republican congressman on television say he’s going to enjoy steaks and lobster tails in his backyard with his neighbors this 4th of July because America is in “great shape.” The reporter asked why 60% of Americans can’t afford to do anything like that this year and he said, “Maybe they don’t work as hard as I do.”

Maybe shmucks like that ought not be in congress.

Maybe they ought to be sent back home where they “worked” so hard to inherit their daddy’s money and live off investing in stocks and scams.

I don’t believe for one second any of that is what the Founders fought the Revolution to create and I don’t believe for a moment the Constitution and laws exist to prop up the corrupt and hateful. They are not “We the People.” They’re ticks and leeches living off our work and our taxes - just like they get in office claiming poor people are thieves.

Poor people work like dogs and do what they have to do with all odds against them *by design.* This place ought to help working people’s lives be less hard, maintain a safety net so one major illness or chronic illness doesn’t bankrupt anyone, and student loans - at least ones to state public schools - need to be discharged and forgiven. That’s not socialism; that’s just a good idea, economically.

And it allows people, normal people,

to live their lives in more stability. Maybe you won’t eat steaks and lobster tails but you might afford some chicken and vegetables.

What we have now is constant instability and constant crisis and fragmentation by a party that has utter disdain for its voters and for most citizens - citizens quietly living off credit and hope at the grocery store and bill time. That party is not listening to you unless you have a billion dollars and are willing to pay them in one way or another in return for tax breaks and having the law look the other way when you do immoral and extralegal things for money. That party is what is left of the Republican Party - and that party is now a cult of personality and a scam machine. It is not Republican in any meaningful sense any more; that’s just a slogan. a bumper sticker, advertising. This has to go. ❖

1 July 2026

“CHANGE IS NOT GOOD. NOT GOOD AT ALL.”

by Garrison Somers

July 2026

My neighbor, Jerry and his wife, whose name I now know to be Molly because I've paid enough attention to such things, are moving. They've had quite enough of modern suburban home living and are moving to a post-modern suburban apartment. Smaller is, if not better, something different, I never say. Downsizing, however, is a difficult task. There's so much stuff to dispose of, like thieves trying to fence their ill-gotten loot. Not my neighbors, to be clear. Their loot is well-gotten. They've sold or donated off all the collected memories of their life together. It's kind of a bummer to watch. I know it's coming for me, too. Right around some corner I am not yet aware of.

None of which is germane to my story. They will be no longer here. I mean, they'll be alive and all, but just not across the street, where I can come out on my front porch with a cup of coffee and see them and wave and maybe go over and sit on their porch and drink said coffee and talk to my

friend, Jerry. You see, between that time I wrote about Jerry coming out to the mailbox and yelling my name but not at me and now, we have become good friends. A lot in common we have; in particular our laziness and how we like to entertain ourselves just looking out at the world going by from a seat on the front porch. Commenting about said world. Excoriating that world. Solving none of its problems, despite our good intentions, wild imaginations and standing offer of free advice.

I will miss Jerry. And Molly, but in the interest of unvarnished honesty not as much as I will miss Jerry. It took us a long time to find each other, and to realize that we see eye-to-eye on mostly important stuff. I don't like raw oysters, but he doesn't mind. He isn't a follower of the Dodgers. Yeah, well, they're an acquired taste. But he and I agree on a lot of things, but he is not my echo-chamber. Nor am I his. He is very concerned with the nation's debt. It's real, but life is not linear and there are many problems that will immediately affect our

lives in more catastrophic ways before national debt rears its ugly head (or vice versa) and takes us all down the drain in a swirl of dirty water. Want to argue with me about it? Get in line. I think of it as being a sort of side-show problem, compared to science denial and anti-vaccination. In other words, we disagree on how the world will end. Fire, Ice, what have you.

So what's the problem?

They will live in an apartment not terribly far away. It will be much smaller. They won't have a couch in that space they will call a living room. They will have a smaller refrigerator, I bet. I'll bet they won't stock Frosty Root Beer, not that I ever snuck a bottle out and quaffed it on the front porch. It will not have a front porch to sit on. It may or may not have a balcony. Which is not the same thing at all as a porch. Balconies aren't something you can sit on and view the world. I mean, you can see the world, but not from the same perspective, literally nor figuratively. A porch gives you play-by-play of the passing minutiae. A balcony, I fear, offers only a demigod-like overview. An unsatisfying synopsis, if you will, of our human crapola: Here is traffic. Here are clouds, I wonder if it will rain. Here is someone we don't know from Adam's off ox, heading out in

their green Ford Bronco. Probably to the supermarket. Boy, is the price of Cheerios going to give them pause. And a balcony doesn't let you suddenly end a conversation and just walk off. It takes away that immediacy, that freedom. You have to navigate back through the apartment, wish everyone therein a good day, answer a few questions about what you're doing this afternoon and only then skedaddle. No Irish Goodbye, like you can have from a porch. Many's the time Jerry has just exorcised himself from his rocking chair in the afternoon sun and gone inside to take a nap, not giving a good goddamn if I stay or leave. I go, of course, no further words necessary. That is how we like it. In my opinion, balconies are for individuals who imagine themselves authority figures, and who can take a flying leap, as far as I'm concerned. Yes, I've said this to Jerry, and he concurs with the *boujee* suckishness of the home balcony.

Will I go over to their apartment to visit, if they invite me? That is a very good question. It's like graduating from high-school and going off to college. You promise in your yearbook scrawl that you'll be BFFs forever. You know that you'll be back for homecoming in November. And you are, and still you feel changed, more grown up. You measure that against your friend's new maturity, and file that data point

away. But then you stop seeing each other on the front porch. No more “it looks like rain” idle chit-chat. Fewer things in common. He won’t care that the fiber-optics guys dug up my front lawn. I won’t understand...hell, I don’t know what I won’t understand.

Truth? I’ve never been the best of neighbors.

Let me explain. A good neighbor is above all things, caring and reciprocal. If you’re mowing your lawn, you might also mow your neighbors adjoining lawn, if you have spare gas in the tank, literally and figuratively. Even if they don’t want you to. You tell their kids to get out of the street before they get run over. You try and be friendly with their dogs when they’re out there in the fenced in backyard, barking at the moon like lunatics. You listen to the shouting inside their house, and wait with a baseball bat in hand in case the shouting turns into screaming.

The best I’ve done is to lend a book, or bring over a Tupperware of homemade chili. It may not sound like much, and it isn’t. I’m somewhat better than when we first moved here and I just sat in my chair and made rash judgments about everyone and everything. So there’s that. But I can see a future where I have to climb

back inside my shell and not be even remotely pleasant. At least not until I know the new lay of the land. Which is always too late, naturally.

I could be wrong, of course. This won’t be the first time. A lot of that neighbor stuff sounds like Hollywood script bullshit. I’ve no actual idea how good neighbors behave. Like I said, I haven’t been one. I assume that most folks enjoy every moment of connection with others. They share. They agree and disagree out loud with each other. They sit on rocking chairs and don’t care that it is silent. We did do some of that, Jerry and I. But there was still a solid amount of boundary between us, and I’m happy with that as well. I assumed he was, too. We’ll have to figure out this new arrangement – distant neighbor. It will not be as important, obviously, as him figuring out his own situation. That’s a real head-scratcher.

Still, none of which is germane to my story. It’s that new neighbors will be moving in, and they will be right across the street from me, and I will have to get used to them all over again, sitting on my own front porch and eventually waving and saying hi, or worse, howdy, and holding up my cup of coffee or glass of iced tea in a sort of toast to them and what will I do if they are quicker than I am at

breaking the invisible boundary between strangers and come over and want to get to know me. What if Jerry, or worse, Molly, have mentioned their neighbors in conversation during the closing on the house? What if they've told about me? Nothing good can come of that.

It's not that I won't like them. Or that they won't like me. What's not to like, after all? I'm adorable. A big scruffy sixty-eight-year-old man who hangs around all day and takes short walks wearing old baseball jerseys, (my god, is that the New York Mets?) and a straw porkpie hat, or is awake late into the night tapping away at his keyboard with the light on in his office. What can he be thinking? What is all of that nocturnal stuff? He must be...a writer! Heavenly Father forbend! And why doesn't he take normal, long exercise walks? It's like he can't actually be permitted to go very far or he might get lost or something. And when is he going to get a haircut? Or a shave? He better not be going to the neighborhood pool with all that hair.

What a wacko.

Yeah, it's a bit like having parents living upstairs while you plan for the end of civilization as we know it from your ratty old couch in the basement. Not that I would know the first

thing about that.

Once again, this is not really why we're here today.

The point, and I apologize for taking so long to arrive at it, is that Molly has reported to Jerry, and therefore to me, that the incoming neighbor wife is a Democrat and the new-neighbor husband a Republican. What? How can they be what have become polar opposites? Is he addled, and only believes he is a rock-ribbed Republican, imagining this is sometime in the late 1970s and we're going to Whip Inflation Now? Does she sprinkle his breakfast kibble with some tasteless, odorless concoction, in the hopes that when he goes, she can collect his social security in lieu of her own? Or does she ignore the horror-show that is the White House in some sort of tradwife folderol? Does he subsume his hatred of...whatever second-quarter, twenty-first-century so-called Republicans hate and eat that kibble anyway out of love for her determined faithfulness? Do they imagine that it's OK to be silently pro-this and anti-that, because they really enjoy jointly binge-watching Law & Order on their big screen TV?

I swear I have no idea how something like this works. Personally, I have a difficult enough time with my

own wife, when she plays John Denver on the blue-tooth speaker in our living room. (I really do struggle with this, fervently wishing I could temporarily poke my eardrums out with a number two Berol Black Warrior. I'd like to tell you there's a story there, but there isn't. Sorry, folks.) It will be interesting to see what their deal is when they arrive, kind of like seeing someone bitten by a rabid bat and side-betting on when they'll begin foaming at the mouth. Interesting like perusing the news to see if a bus has driven over a cliff somewhere in the world. And drilling down to find out how many people were on board. And idly wondering why anyone would ever get on a bus that has a route which goes near a cliff.

I'm not saying I'm worried about it, but I've been thinking what if he flies a flag seven by twenty-four. And, yes, I mean that figuratively. Or maybe literally, you decide. He could dig up the front lawn and replace it with those little white stones like a beach-house. I would then struggle with whether or not to report him to the homeowner's association immediately, or just wait until they notice this flagrant violation. Maybe he golfs. Or perhaps he just owns a seven-iron and swings it in his front yard like he's trying to accomplish something of value. We could go to war immediately,

he and I, because of making poor first impressions. That's my specialty, by the way.

Or maybe he's really nice. It could happen. He might like forty-year-old scotch and Fig Newtons. As we all know, it's great when you dunk 'em. He might have an empty rocking chair on the front porch and see me across the street and hold up his tumbler and toast me, then wave me over for a wee dram. It's a lot to ask, but he might like baseball. On the other hand, what if he's a Red Sox fan. I don't know what I would say to a Red Sox fan, but I hear they can be ok, if you don't respond to any of their questions. Probably, however, he's as adamantly psycho as someone living in an old shack in the woods, writing screeds against...whatever they're against: Blue Jello – what the in living hell flavor is Blue? The three-second violation in basketball. All-over body deodorant. That scene with Brad Pitt looking in the box - what was it?

To some of you it will seem like I'm making light of a serious situation. And, you'd be correct. I know there are people out there for whom our national political situation is a travesty. I agree. The world is a mess, there's a lot of hatred going about. Me and my to-be neighbors probably aren't much of a part of the problem, other than

the fact that we live here in the US and the US feels like ground zero of disorganized-religio-nationalist crazyville. Maybe this new guy is a simple fellow who just thinks he's Republican but still likes frosted cinnamon Pop Tarts, doesn't quite understand generative AI, and carefully picks up after his dog poops. Hopefully not at the same time. Here's the thing: I'm not going to stab him the day before election day with a letter opener. No good could come from that. Anyhow, they're coming. Soon. Yes, I mean both my neighbors and election day.

I guess we'll see, and then we'll know. ❖

“FIFTY PERFECTLY SOLID REASONS WE DON’T LIKE EACH OTHER”

Your mom and my mom don’t get along. It’s probably a church thing. You made deviled eggs and used my recipe without my permission. Made deviled eggs and used my recipe and I forgot I gave you permission. Made deviled eggs without using my recipe, even though I gave you permission. That’s not how you spell “deviled.” Dill pickles suck. It’s my yard! I like football and you don’t. We went to different schools. Your school is the enemy, for goodness sake. You say for god’s sake when you should be saying for goodness sake, and that’s a sin. You sin (more than I do) and goodness doesn’t strike you down, goodness damn it. One day of the week we cannot be friends, and no one knows why, so.... Your hair is too _____. Play the music louder so I can hear it. No, play it softer, so I can’t hear it. When you talk, you make sense, but I cannot let you have that little win. Some factor I don’t even know about, but it’s

real and I am constantly reminded of it every time I think about you, even though I cannot tell you what it is. My dad has a bum knee or else he’d kick your dad’s butt. I do too know. Because he said so. No, you’re a liar. I prefer it this way. If I cannot have it this way, no one gets to have it. You didn’t notice I was sad. No, it’s too late. Our sisters get along, and I’m mad at her right now. And right now. And now. Where is my ball? Did you steal my ball? Yes you did. Oh, there it is. I said I was sorry already! We both can’t wear that at the same time. No, *you* wear it next Thursday. I don’t care if we never talk to each other again. I remember when you did that thing you did, and I’m going to bring it up once more. I did say blue. Blue! What is wrong with you? You smell like _____. No one will notice. I promise. I told you I promise. It’s coffee, isn’t it. Did you get coffee? Did you get me coffee? You’re a jerk.

If you have something to say, say it. Be heard.

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