

Needer

Once upon the time an old man walked into a post. He saw stars, real stars, and planets too. Some of the stars were mean, they wanted to sting him. Others were singing softly and he wanted to stay with them forever. But slowly they disappeared and he found himself crumpled on the sidewalk with an aching head. Then he went to the bus stop and asked for a vanilla.

Buses don't come in vanilla old man, they only have rocky road.

Okay then, take me to your Reader.

The Reader was crumpled up in a cozy heap at the back of the bus, with stacks of disorderly books on the long back seat. He was reading. Every bus line had a Reader, always in the back. The Reader could only stop reading for emergencies or spilled noodle soup. The old man asked him for a book to keep away head mice.

There isn't such a book, that's why we all have head mice.

Oh. Is it the same for smelting terriers?

Yeah, that subject has never had a book.

How about a book on finding parking places downtown?

Nope, never been writ.

Hmmmm.

The old man went to bed that night thinking about what the Reader had said. There are still things with no book about them. There's probably no book on horny toad religions, nor one on the sexual effect of using convex toenail clippers. Hmmmm. Double hmmmm-mmmm. these were all subjects the old man knew as well as anyone on earth, he was sure of it. Why not fill this crying need? Why, there was one right now – a book on what makes a need become a *crying* need. There could even be a book on how to discover topics that have never become books yet. This thing could telescope itself to the world's biggest industry. It could be a life's work for an enterprising young Old Man. Which is just what *he* was, and just what he planned to do with his life as soon as he could get his creaky old limbs to get him out of bed.

That day he walked into another post. He saw stars again too, but this time they were all mean ones – dart throwers, wasps, pinchers. When they finally sank into the sea of his mind he groped his way into the light again, pulling himself up by a handy tree. A street tree. How lovely! Who had planted it he wondered? How very useful is a tree like this when citizens walk into posts! He went directly to the City Hall and asked to be taken to their Street Tree Seeder. He found him out back feeding seedlings.

Very discreet, said the old man.

Yes, but they don't appreciate us here, we're thinking of seceding.

You don't say, I was thinking of that too.

Oh I thought I said receding. Or retreating.

But why can't we get these street trees on every street and alley?

Account of the Weeders. They're overly zealous.

How can that be, I thought zealous was as far as you could go?

Nope, the Weeders exceed it.

That night on the way home, the old man walked into a palm tree and fell to the sidewalk. He saw no stars, only the sun, blazing through his forehead as it seemed, like a trombone. When he came to, he was far from home and it was getting dark. *How will I get there in time — & for what?* and just as he thought that, a jitney whizzed up. Just in Time? Hmm. Just take me to your Reader.