

Letter from GF

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Dear Mrs. M.,

I think, on the whole, I would try out §7 first (except §7.4) and then go back to §3 and work through §11 in course, including §7.4, and omitting §9 completely. I assume you will come to the same conclusion yourself once you read the following clip from my automatic recording machine.

GF: What was that? It sounded like...oh, a little girl has fallen through the roof.

pause

Well, she'll be out for a while, I think. Pretty hard fall, broke her left leg. I wonder what happened to her other foot, though? Now, let's see, where did I put that...

Voice: I hope this is where she went; I seem to feel—Oh! Hello.

GF: Greetings, visitor. What is your name?

Voice: I am Mr. Graves, sir, illithid of the Keep. Do your words always appear written in the air like that?

GF: No, only in my study. Elsewhere they do not appear at all.

Graves: Oh.

Say, you didn't happen to see a little girl come by here, did you?

GF: If by "come by" you mean "fall without warning through the roof" I think you'll find her on the settee over there. But before I let you at her, you aren't planning on eating her mind, are you?

Graves: Goodness no! She's a friend of mine, a miss Cordelia Mulgrave. Do you mind if I wake her?

GF: By all means, if you can. I confess she is out cold at the moment, but if your spellcraft is sufficient to rouse her, I think I would like to speak with her myself.

Graves: My magic is altogether inept, but my race has certain—ah—influence, over minds.

sound of footsteps, groaning

GF: Well, you seem to have worked your little "influence" quite well. Is she alright?

Graves: Not exactly...Cor, can you stand up?

Mulgrave: Ouch! No, now my left leg hurts worse than my right. Ouch!

Where am I?

GF: In my study, child.

Mulgrave: Who are...Oh! Are you a mute giant?

GF: I thought that would be obvious to anyone.

Mulgrave: Mr. Graves! He's the one! He's the guy I was looking for! I'm so—OW!

GF: Looking for me, were you? You'll have to tell me all about it; but, with your permission, I'll just set your broken bone and patch you up first.

Mulgrave: You mean my leg is broken?

GF: It is, though it's a simple fracture; it's your foot that is more problematic. The scabbing has attached to the leather of your boot, and you've got the beginning of an infection. I'll have to cut away some of the affected region and clean it.

Graves: Should I put her out for the operation?

GF: I think that's her decision. Cordelia, would you rather be awake or unconscious when I start cutting away the infection?

Mulgrave: I think I'd rather be unconscious.

brief silence

GF: Now, Mr. Graves (hand me that roll of cotton, would you?), how did you come to be in my study?

Graves: Well, I was helping Cor to walk when she suddenly dropped out of sight through a crack in the ground. The hole was too small for me, but I suspected we must be on top of an old ruined building so I looked around for another way down and found the staircase just through that doorway.

GF: Yes yes, I saw you come in and all that, but why were you walking through the ruins at all?

Graves: She was well enough to try, and it seemed better to give it a go. Besides, we wanted to look for her flying rod and lazer handle

GF: Flying rod? Lazer handle?

Graves: The rod was a... what did she call it? A "letter eight," I think?

GF: A letter-8 stick? Isn't she a little young for so dangerous a toy?

Graves: I didn't know it was a toy. It was her primary means of transportation the whole time I knew her.

Ew. Is it supposed to bleed like that?

GF: Um...that's what happens when you cut someone. Where did she get such a wound?

Graves: I don't know. She had it before I met her.

GF: Before you met her? But it can't be more than a few days old!

Graves: I've only known her for two.

GF: Oh.

pause

Well, then, I guess I'll have to ask most of my questions to her. But tell me, what is the lazer handle? Do you mean a lazer slug?

Graves: No; it's like one, but more like a sword hilt than a javelin sheath. Quite the impressive weapon, too. She saved my life with it two nights back.

GF: You mean to tell me that this child (she can't be more than six or seven years old) flies about with a letter eight stick and, in her lame condition, uses some special weapon of her own design to such effect she can actually help a full-grown illithid?

Graves: Seven? Come on, she's not an infant. I'd say fifteen at least.

GF: She's a human, not an illithid. See the Sock Manifesto, sections.... But of course, I can see you've never read it. Humans grow much more quickly than your kind. Besides, I rather fancy she might be the daughter of a friend of mine, and if so she can't be more than six, tops.

Graves: Oh. Well, whatever her age, she's a regular hero.

GF: Could you grab that sewing kit over there? We'll be done with this foot in a moment...

Okay, so lets skip the speculation on her age and all that. Tell me how you came to be in the ruins at all.

Graves: Well, I guess that begins with the vulture attack. She was flying beside me as I dragged along on my broom—

GF: Your what?

Graves: My broom. A witch taught me to ride one once, but I'm too heavy for it to fly so it just sort of drags along on the ground.

Anyway, she was bobbing in the air beside me as I was sweeping along, and just as we were crossing that ridge over to the—let's see, what direction was it? South-southeast, I guess—a bunch of huge vultures swarmed down on us.

GF: They aren't actually vultures, but go on.

Graves: So, anyway, Cor tried to evade them as best she could, but they seemed intent on chewing on her. After a number of failed efforts to shake them off she took off at a frightful pace, shooting upward and away towards this ruin. I thought she had shaken them for good when I suddenly saw her flash and then drop like a rock, a thin wisp of smoke following her as she plummeted toward this ruin.

Well, I was horrified for I was certain she must die in the fall, and in my fear I cried out, which (unfortunately) attracted the vultures' attention. I had to find cover, and even when I was tucked away below a huge boulder I had to beat them off with my broom. Finally my broom broke and the energy blast from the break scared them off, so I began making my way, cautiously, toward the ruin.

Sometime after nightfall I finally reached the city wall and, stepping through a breach, found Cor lying in a heap of litter and mould. She wasn't dead, though she was unconscious and badly bruised. I placed my tentacles on her forehead and pulled her mind into wakefulness, same as I did just now, and then nursed her as best I could all night long.

GF: Nursed her? With what?

Graves: Well, she has this spoon that creates its own soup...

GF: She has Myrtle's spoon? My word, she *must* be her daughter then, though I can't see Emily Mulgrave giving up her spoon willingly...but I diverge. Finish your tale. Do I assume this all happened last night?

Graves: Yes, and then this morning we began to walk about, looking for her rod and handle, during which walk she fell, and here we are.

May I be so bold as to ask who you are?

GF: Hm? Oh, I'm just a friend of her mother's; would you rouse her, Mr. Graves? She should be set for the time being.

brief silence, then a scream which quickly subsides

Mulgrave: Oh! I just had the most *awful* dream—or, on second thoughts, I guess it wasn't a dream after all. Are my bones all set then?

GF: Yes, though I wouldn't do too much walking on them for a few days.

Mulgrave: Did you find my things, Mr. Graves?

GF: No, he did not, and I'll not have you cavorting about on a letter-8 stick until you're healed even if he did. Nor brandishing any foolish lazer sword.

Mulgrave: You know about letter-8 sticks?

GF: Yes, child, I do. I invented them.

Mulgrave: (in awed voice) Are you Ignatius Smoot?

GF: No, he's been dead for many a year by now. You know he's your uncle, don't you?

Mulgrave: He is not! My only uncles are Skyler Mulgrave and Ferdie Polk.

GF: Ferdie Polk? Not the old bard of Keebles Hall, surely!

Mulgrave: Well, he's from Keebles, but he's not all that old. He married Aunty Tiora last year. I think his father might be named Ferdie too, though, and he's *really* old! He sang some weird song at the wedding about love and things, and his voice was so raspy Em had to reprimand me for giggling at him. She said he's impressive and its not his fault he's old.

GF: I assume Em is Emily Mulgrave?

Mulgrave: Yep. She's my mother.

GF: How's Tin Mulgrave?

Mulgrave: You mean Tummy? Well, he got married too, and now he lives over in Kevorlaud, which is a new slo next to Keebles. Em says that was why we got to go to Aunty's wedding, because it was basically the same place, and the two weddings were only a week apart. But Tummy's wedding was real boring and the food wasn't as good as at Aunty's. He did have this really wild guy there, though, who was dressed up like an elephant and kept making strange groaning noises during the ceremony. I didn't understand that part.

GF: Did Mr. Mulgrave go with you?

Mulgrave: Yep. It was his wedding after all.

GF: I mean your father, not your brother.

Mulgrave: No, he died a long time ago. Before I was born, I think.

GF: How long ago was that?

Mulgrave: I don't remember, and Em says not to worry about it. She says years are just an illusion, and that time is our servant, not our master, and if someone asks how old I am I'm to say "this many" and hold up some fingers, but keep on looking at them and putting more up and then pulling them down again, as if I can't get them to behave. She says that way people will think I'm just a little girl and I'll have the advantage of surprise later on.

GF: She may be right. Of course, she always is, isn't she?

Mulgrave: Yes sir.

GF: Tell me something, Cordelia—

Mulgrave: Just Cor.

GF: —Cor, then—Mr. Graves here was telling me about what happened after you met up with the vultures—

Mulgrave: I don't think they were vultures. They had faces.

GF: No, they weren't. But what I was asking you was, how did you come to be flying there at all?

Mulgrave: Oh, that was Mr. Grave's fault. I told him it was a bad idea.

Graves: You know as well as I do that you couldn't go on dragging like you were. It was absolutely thrashing your remaining foot.

Mulgrave: Yes, but I can't fly very level with the letter-8. It's almost impossible not to either rise or fall, so I went bobbing about like a marionette! I'm certain if I hadn't been jerking up and down so much the bird things wouldn't have seen us so soon.

GF: Perhaps not, but they would have seen you sooner or later. They are especially adept at picking out passing strangers. That's the reason they exist, truth be known; an entire species bred solely to molest the innocent and unsuspecting. I'm still not sure I understand how Mr. Graves made it past them unharmed.

Graves: I did get hurt in the broom...

GF: That's not what I meant.

Mulgrave: Did you breed them to attack us?

GF: No, they were here when I arrived.

But tell me—for you still haven't—why you were crossing the south ridge at all.

Mulgrave: Well, we would have crossed further north and east, but the badlands on the other side of the ridge are a mess! We made lots of bad turns and explored dead ends all morning. The only track we could find

kept going south and east, so we came at last to the south ridge, instead of the east one where we fought the cyclops the night before.

GF: I know the terrain, and possibly the beast as well; was it the old blue one?

Mulgrave: I don't know, it was dark...

Graves: It wasn't very old. A young, inexperienced mind it had.

GF: They aren't smart even old age...

Graves: Trust me, I can tell the taste of a young mind over an old, no matter how doltish or witty.

GF: Ah. You ate its mind, then?

Graves: It nearly ate me instead! If it wasn't for Cor, I'd be no more than a few bones littering the valley floor by now.

GF: Probably not. Cyclops eat the bones too. But (pardon my doubting) I still don't see how a—how Cor here managed to defeat so considerable a foe unaided.

Mulgrave: I didn't, really. I mean, I got flashed too.

Well, Okay, so sometime in the middle of the night—we were both asleep—Mr. Graves wakes me and says he senses the mind of a cyclops not far away, and we had better try to get out of his path. We do our best at sneaking away, but it sees us anyway, so we open up and flee. Unfortunately, the land is all rugged and difficult, and it's dark, and the cyclops starts throwing rocks at us.

It was quite hopeless; we had no way to dodge or fight back, and we weren't making any progress against its pursuit. Seeing no alternative, I wheeled around and charged the monster, Mr. Graves a few seconds to my rear. I knew I couldn't flash it, it was way too big, so I decided to distract it and hope Mr. Graves could figure out a way past it or kill it himself.

Graves: I might add she did a marvelous job of it, too. She sort of darted in and out of reach, staying mostly behind it, yelling taunts and kicking it with her one good foot so that it bellowed and lunged and spun around trying to face her until it was quite dizzy. Finally I thought I saw an opening and jumped for its head, but my timing was off and all I got was its chest. That was nearly the end of me right there, but I managed to dodge its first blow and get to the ground relatively unhurt.

Mulgrave: I thought you lost a tentacle.

Graves: I did, but it didn't hurt that much, and they always grow back.

GF: I thought it was odd to see an illithid with only three tentacles, but I didn't like to say anything.

Mulgrave: You knew about these things? When I first saw them I thought they were just men wearing octopuses on their heads.

Graves: You did *what*?

Mulgrave: Sorry. I had never heard of your sort before.

GF: Be that as it may. What happened after Mr. Graves lost his tentacle and dropped to the ground?

Mulgrave: Oh, well that was the worst part. It was all I could do to get the least glimmer of reaction out of the cyclops after that; it seemed bent on destroying poor Mr. Graves. Finally I pulled out my lazer handle and gave it several doses. It was glowing pretty bright and smoking a good deal, and still it was ignoring me. I swung in to give it a forth dose, but it swung its arm and hit me just as my lazer made contact, and we both flashed.

Graves: That they did, but it was alright. Cor fell on top of the cyclops as it collapsed, not the other way around, and while it was out I used my remaining tentacles to absorb what little mind such beasts possess.

GF: Impressive. Did you just wait there with the corpse the rest of the night?

Graves: Most of it, yes, but a bit before dawn another adult cyclops and two young ones approached, so we bolted into the maze of a landscape Cor just described. They didn't follow us; I assume they were after the corpse of their kindred, not looking for breakfast.

pause

Mulgrave: What? I missed something.

GF: It's nothing. Don't worry. Instead, tell me what brought you to be sleeping in the cyclops' neighborhood at all. Surely you were not unaware they were there?

Graves: I did have some notion they lived there, yes.

Mulgrave: You did? Then why didn't you tell me?

Graves: Because Lord Oberon already had. He told you that the shortest way here was through an area infested with cyclops, and you said, "Oh, what's a cyclops compared to the other dangers of the outlands? I'll take that way." Or have you forgotten that conversation?

Mulgrave: Of course I remember it, but you didn't tell me we were camping on their back porch!

Graves: Forgive my oversight.

GF: Pardon my interrupting, but who is Lord Oberon?

Graves: Lord of the Illithid of the Keep and senator in the Western Illithid Conference. He leads the community I belong to.

GF: I had no idea you were so civil and organized a people. I had always pictured you as essentially predatory mind flayers.

Graves: So we are. Does a predatory lifestyle preclude civilization?

GF: Well, slodoop seems to think so.

Graves: What the slo dwellers think is their own business. They have no monopoly on civilization or brains, no matter what they may think.

Mulgrave: I'll say! My teacher doesn't even believe in gubhorbles!

Graves: She doesn't? How can you not believe in gubhorbles? And how did the subject come up at all, for that matter?

Mulgrave: Its kind of a long story—

GF: Then it will have to wait. First I want to know how Cor came to be chatting with and taking advice from Lord Oberon. If I have followed things correctly, you couldn't have met Mr. Graves more than the morning of your meeting Lord Oberon, so I assume he was not your source of introduction, or am I mistaken?

Graves: Perfectly correct. I saw her no sooner than the rest of my community.

GF: Well then...

Mulgrave: Mr. Graves had better tell this. I'm not really clear on some of the details myself.

Graves: It was near noon, a little before it I think, when one of our guards came and said there was something small hovering over the river throwing little glowing bolts down onto the bank. This apparently continued for a minute or two, then there was a little puff of smoke from the trees and whatever it was in the air fell in jerky drops, like a bob being lowered on a string. The guards lost sight of it among the trees and came to inform Lord Oberon.

Lord Oberon instructed all the available illithid out to try and discover what this thing was. We spread out and made our way through the forest toward the location specified. Soon I reached the river bank and saw, down a turn, this girl, skipping across the surface of the river like a well-tossed stone. She was going upstream, so I cut across country to the foot of Boror falls, where I found most of my fellows already gathered.

Scarcely a minute after I had arrived Cor came skipping around the bend into view. She had only one leg, the other apparently terminating at the knee—

Mulgrave: —It was just tied up to my thigh to keep it from getting banged—

Graves: —and showed no sign of stopping at the falls, rising easily from the river and swinging toward the upper river.

As she rose, Lord Oberon showed himself and accosted her, and we all emerged as well. She danced about in the air for a while, then moved to a bank and landed with a bit of a thud.

Lord Oberon said to her, "I am Lord Oberon, lord of the Illithid of the Keep, some of whom you see around you. We have come to enquire into your nature and your business in our land!"

She replied, "I am just a young girl, seeking guidance to a ruined city I hear is near here."

"How come you to skip upon the waters and fly above the falls?"

"Oh, it's just this ordinary little letter-8 stick," she replied, holding out the rod she held in her left hand. "Its a pretty simple tool, but it is a real bother to use. I stick to the river because it's softer to bang into than the land is."

Mulgrave: I really don't think I put it like that...

Graves: I'm pretty sure you did.

GF: Well, why don't you just summarize and leave off the quoting for now.

Graves: Yeah, okay. So, she told us that she was looking for this ruined city, which she described with its ancient name of Greenton. Lord Oberon knew about it and told us what she meant, and after some discussion we decided she was too small to make a meal and too interesting to simply ignore.

Lord Oberon invited her to the Keep, and as she fluttered about our heads he began to explain the path to her. She was obviously not understanding all of what he said—

Mulgrave: —Hey!—

Graves: —so I decided to volunteer to guide her. Lord Oberon pointed out that it was a rather dangerous trail, but I reminded him that I had a magic broom and I'd be alright. So he gave me permission.

After that, Cor showed little interest in remaining with us, even when we offered her some fresh meat (which

we always have in abundance). Once our polite insistence gave way to her less-polite urgency, I collected my broom and we started out.

Nothing else of note happened until the encounter with the cyclops, which you asked about earlier.

GF: I see. Anything to add to that portion of the tale, Cor?

Mulgrave: Well... I really thought that when Oberon invited me in for dinner, he meant I would be the dinner. I mean, when he said "We'd like to have you for dinner. A little fresh meat, perhaps?" the idea that he *meant* "We'd like to have you *over* for dinner; we could offer you some fresh meat to eat" never crossed my mind.

Also, it took me a while to figure out what was going on after I stopped. A rather thick cypher, illithid is. The dripping and sloshing sounds just didn't seem like speech, at first, but it did make the afternoon more enjoyable. Mr. Graves is a keen joke teller. You should hear his one about the old mentor Folgo and his second white kitten!

GF: A voice pun, I presume?

Graves: Yes, and a very good one, if I do say so myself. A perennial favorite.

GF: I have no doubt it is. But first I would like to find out what was going on when you said there was... now how did you put it?... "something small hovering over the river throwing little glowing bolts down." I presume that you were the hovering thing, Cor?

Mulgrave: Yes, I was trying to flash a cha'thrang.

GF: Um...

Mulgrave: Ok, so that morning I decided my foot was too damaged to be used anymore, so I tied it up to my thigh. Then I swung down to the river and started upstream. I got tired of all the switchbacks and u-bends, so I started hopping over them whenever I could. Well, that did pretty well for the first dozen or so, but then as I was hopping one the air around me filled with cha'thrang needles.

Graves: Cha'thrang?

GF: Yeah, they're like giant turtles with hollow tubes in their shell, and they shoot out these barbed needles on long threads to harpoon birds and things.

Graves: Hm. I've never heard the 'cha' part before.

Mulgrave: Anyway, one of the needles stuck me in the sole of my boot. I couldn't get loose, so I pulled out

my lazer handle and filled the beast with as much lazer as I could.

GF: I thought Mr. Graves said the lazer handle was like a sword, not a javelin.

Mulgrave: Well, yes, but it can shoot its blades.

GF: Quite the weapon; you'll have to show me how it works sometime.

Mulgrave: I can't. I lost it.

GF: Of course. It might show up in a bit, but then again... How did you come to have the thing in the first place?

Mulgrave: Em gave it to me last year. She taught me how to use it in the basement, and then we went out into the outlands and fought ogrelons and—

GF: Is that how your trip here began?

Mulgrave: No, that was a long time ago. I didn't have a letter-8 stick that trip, and Em came with me. It was a ton of fun; the—

GF: I am certain it was, but first let's get the telling of the present expedition finished. How exactly did you hurt your foot?

Mulgrave: Hm, that was, let's see, four night ago? Is that right? Ruin, cyclops, eagle, jaguar. Yes, four nights ago. I was running away from a village, trying to keep as low profile as I could, when a young jaguar jumped out at me. I kicked at it and it chomped on my foot, then I lit my lazer handle and it turned tail and ran.

My foot was pretty mangled but I was still way too close to the village to stop, so I used my letter-8 to skim off as close to the ground as I could. Unfortunately, I was pretty tired and I dozed off and slammed into the ground and tumbled head over heals a few times before falling into a huge conical sand pit. At the bottom there was this giant insert thing that kept snapping at me and spraying this gickie stuff from its abdomen, but eventually I flashed it and, after finishing it off, fell asleep in the bottom of the pit.

Near daybreak I awoke to the sound of a whimpering dog. I looked up and a coyote was slipping into the pit, and no amount of scrambling seemed to make it go up. It looked so pitiful and helpless that I used my letter-8 to help me scramble up to it and I pushed it out of the pit.

The other coyotes on the rim of the pit didn't seem to think much of me (I guess they were trying to execute the one that fell in the pit, that's why they were mad

when I helped it out) and they jumped on me as soon as I was clear of the trap. I didn't feel like fighting, so I shot up on my letter-8, but one of the coyotes latched onto my leg and I got pretty high up before I managed to shake it off.

GF: I assume that was the same leg the jaguar bit?

Mulgrave: Yes, and a good thing too. If it had got my other foot I wouldn't have been able to kick it off.

Anyway, once it fell I was pretty faint with pain, and before I realized what I was doing I had fallen almost to the tops of the trees below. Well, when I saw them coming I pulled up on the stick pretty hard, but it was too late and I fell crashing through the branches into the forest below. I was almost to the ground when the pull of the letter-8 sent me falling back up, and then I let go and fell back down again and I don't really remember much else for a while.

Graves: You mean you just lay there, unconscious, right in the middle of the woods, out in plain sight?

Mulgrave: Well, I wasn't really unconscious all the way. I do kind of remember an ogre bending over to sniff me and as soon as his face was close enough I filled him with enough lazer that he flashed and fell right on top of me. I thought I was going to be crushed to death when I heard a couple other ogre voices and the body was pulled off of me. I let one of the new ogres have a decent dose of lazer too, as a warning, but not enough to flash him.

After that I really did pass out until after noon. I pulled out my spoon and had a meal, then used my letter-8 to glide/stumble/hop along. I made my way downhill, like Em taught me to do when lost, and pretty soon I came to a river. I had been told there was a keep up the river where I could get directions to these ruins, so I started up the river. I was attacked a few times, but nothing serious, and then I found an eagles' nest and spent the night.

The next morning I inspected my foot but I couldn't get the boot off, as it was mangled along with my foot, so I tied it to my thigh and went hopping along the river course, which brings us back to the cha'thrang and illithids.

GF: So... I guess I ought to ask how this all started, but first I have to ask about the village. A village in the outlands?

Mulgrave: Yep, a village of *real* giants. I came up to about the ankle-bone of the adults.

GF: Giants? You're certain about this?

Mulgrave: Pretty certain. Why?

GF: Mr. Graves, have you heard of this settlement?

Graves: Actually yes, though we only discovered them a few weeks ago. Their village is a little out of our normal territory, but one of the scouts bumped into their trail and found the place.

GF: They have a trail too? Is there another settlement down that road as well?

Graves: I don't know. Like I said, it's a little out of our normal grounds.

Mulgrave: I'm pretty sure there is, though its a long way off. Gar Thoris, the only giant I really chatted with, said he had just walked for two days and he was carrying a sack full of goods he bought wherever he came from. He was very nice, too; he was the one who told me that if I went down to the river and headed upstream I would find a tribe that should probably know about this ruin.

GF: My word! This is sensational, absolutely sensational! Nothing like this has happened in centuries!

Mulgrave: What—

GF: Just a minute, just a minute....

silence, except for sound of heavy feet pacing

Yes, I think I will have to go visit the little empress. But I can't go anywhere until your foot heals, and that will be a week at least. Mr. Graves, could you—no, on seconds thoughts, never mind.

Graves: Could I what?

GF: Nothing, really. I wasn't thinking clearly.

Cor, I want to know everything you can tell me about the giants, but this time let's back up all the way to the beginning of the journey.

Mulgrave: Well, so Em sent me out with a thyrian, a letter-8, and a lazer slug, plus the spoon. She gave me directions and the thyrian heard them, so the first day and night were pretty non-eventful. I slept on and off and we made good time, but that night the thyrian decided the way was too dangerous and backtracked to try a different route.

Graves: What's a thyrian?

GF: They're very intelligent and comfortable steeds who posses a number of remarkable qualities, not the least of which is the flat-out refusal to approach danger.

Graves: Oh, you mean trogs?

GF: The same type of beast, but larger and wiser.

Go on, Cor.

Mulgrave: So, the second day was not as pleasant, because the thyrian became increasingly hesitant to move onward. Finally it just refused to go another step, so I dismounted, walked for an hour or so, and then found a hollow log in which I took my rest.

I wasn't asleep long, though, because at some point that night a giant picked up the log and threw it at another giant. Scared out of my mind, I managed to wriggle out and letter-8'ed away mere seconds before impact. The giants saw me pop out, though, and for the next little while they chased me through the woods. After a while I lost them and dozed on and off the rest of the night.

In the morning I realized that I had no clear conception where I was. I knew my thyrian had taken me somewhat south of the path Em had outlined, but I didn't know how far we had gotten, so I didn't know what landmarks to look for. After a bit I decided to see if the giants could give me directions, so I made my way back toward their village, which I knew to be fairly close from what the group I had met that night had said to each other.

GF: Giants speak the same language as everyone else?

Mulgrave: Yep. Doesn't everything?

GF: I guess so.

Mulgrave: Are you shamming me? You don't sound like you think they do. Em said they do—

GF: And Em is perfectly correct in that as in all things. But there are some things—turbo-pinks, motens, cranium rats, others—that have a different way of communicating between themselves.

Mulgrave: Well, the giants just talk like anybody else. Anyway, I found their road and waited by the side until a solo giant passed who seemed friendly, and I talked with him. He kept asking who/what/where I was, but I kept out of sight as best as I could and eventually he figured out from the landmarks I remembered from Em that I needed to go “to the other side of town, down the downs, through the woods, and then up the river;” there he said I'd find another tribe that should know the rest of the way.

So I waited till he moved on, then started sneaking around the village wall to the other side. Unfortunately, a young giant found me and caught me and did retched things—

Graves: Like what?

Mulgrave: You don't want to know.

Graves: Yes, actually, I do. Did he beat you or feed you to his dog or what?

Mulgrave: No, he carried me around in his arms and sang to me. “♪ Oo-itsi is a beedle wum, oo es so-oo its vewy swee! . . .”

Graves: You were right. I didn't want to know.

Mulgrave: I told you. He also sang “Oo! bitum batam batum wattum—CHOO!” and—

GF: Yes, that's enough, I think.

Mulgrave: You did tell me you wanted to know everything I could tell you about the giants...

GF: And I'm glad you have told me what you have. The fact that they sing baby-songs—was that second one the “itty bitty fishy”? I thought so—that they sing baby songs that originated a long time ago is a matter of great portent. However, the exact songs are not important and, if I may say so, unpleasant.

Mulgrave: Ok, ok. So then I managed to escape the ‘jiwant baybee’ and met the jaguar and I think that concludes the story.

GF: Yes, I think it does, except for one point.

Mulgrave: What's that?

GF: Why did Em send you here?

Mulgrave: To give you a... I say! I almost forgot! It was to give you this letter.

a paper-ripping sound, then silence

Mulgrave: So, what does it say?

GF:

GF—

She turns seven this summer. Any suggestions?

—Mrs. M.

Graves: That's it? She sent her daughter out alone to deliver you that?

GF: But of course. I couldn't have given an informed answer any other way. I shall have to compose a suitable reply before you leave; but since Cor isn't going anywhere until her foot heals, I suppose you who are cursed with stomachs might what a bit to eat?

You see what I mean?

I trust you understand the significance of the giant village. We may be seeing each other shortly.

—GF