

: Charles Yao, Kansas City, Mo

: The Seattle Crew, Seattle, WA

To: Charles Yao, Kansas City, Mo
 From: The Seattle Crew, Seattle, WA

June 8, 2018

Hey Church! It's Dianne, Nick & Nicole from Ballard!

We got your previous letter, dated March 10th, just two weeks ago. Those cogboys sure seem to take their time. There can only be, what, like 2 or 3 mountain ranges between here & K.C. - right? Buncha lazybodies. Ha.

It was so wonderful to hear that you've finally found some work. None of us had any idea you'd done woodworking before. It's probably nowhere near doing IT work for Schwab, but we're sure you're a real asset to them + hope that you're happy there. What we mean, is ... we're sure you get what we mean.

Also great to hear you're now engaged to Jean. She's a ~~the~~ very lucky lady, indeed. Dianne says you're ^avery lucky son of a bitch. We REALLY did not imagine that we'd learn that you're expecting, too. Congratulations are in order (see enclosed bottle - homemade, of course Jean probably shouldn't have any for another six months ... then again, it may take that long to get to you)! Things are really on the upswing for you both.

We were very sorry to ~~hear~~ learn about Snapdragon. Thirteen years is pretty damn good for a tabby these days, though, and we know she led a full life - for at least the five years we were around her anyway. Still remember you bringing her home from the shelter, just a little tricolor fuzzball. When she chose one of Nick's Bean boots as her living room - and the other as her litter box - we knew you'd picked a winner. Such a sweetie. We're sure she's in a better place now. (Nick just made a disgusting joke that I will not repeat here, or ever for that matter. Yeesh.)

To get you up to speed on our doings here. Deanne is still w/ the Mayor's ⁽²⁾ office, trying to find new ways to make life in town less shitty. I (Nicole) have been doing most of the housework, the gardening, mending, cooking + other day-to-day stuff. Never pegged me for a housewife, did you? Nick has been staying w/ us, happily, and working four full-time jobs - as a gardener + freelance ~~fisherman~~ fisherman by day, a minstrel at dusk and our love slave at night. ("Haw, haw" says Nick.) The powers that be are trying to get the locks working again by retrofitting it to work manually, + recently got a kick in the ass about it, as there's rumored to be a pod of orca just outside the bay. Most folks think the orca are OK, but would rather not have them near their boats or eating fish in the bay. Nick's been assured that if/when the locks come back online, he'll be brought back on fulltime. With it being manually operated, he'll get some exercise to boot (HA!).

He seems kind of ambivalent about going back to work after so many years, + for good reason. He's turned out to be quite the fisherman. No, really. Keeps us pretty full up with fish - more than we can eat, most days. Living near the locks + (recently converted) botanical garden has quite a few advantages. Not only are we able to get down to the garden early to work + earn our ~~portion~~ share of the produce, but if we get there around first light, we can usually snare or shoot a coney. Fish is great, but it's nice to have a bit of red(dish) meat every now and then. Plus, I have figured out how to tan hides (Nick's really laughing, now) and have made us some seriously comfy slippers, vests and even a blanket. Deanne ~~is~~ still ~~is~~ wears whitefolk (read: cotton) clothing and Red Wings to her workplace at the Mayor's, but Nick + I have almost completely switched ~~over~~ ^{over} to all animal-based dress. Wool and leather, baby!

It was pretty fortunate that I'd been doing this, as Nick actually had a brush with death a month or so ago. Which is part of the reason we're writing you.

Deanne left first thing to ride over to the Mayor's. Nick + I ~~stayed~~ slept in a bit that morning, shared a pot of coffee, a bowl of leftover potato and leek soup and a nice slice of salmon jerkey and rode down to the garden. I got to working and Nick strode off to fish. It couldn't have been an hour or two later when I heard yelling coming from the pier. (Everything's so wonderfully

quiet these days, we can actually hear conversations coming from houseboats across the bay.) Well, after a minute finishing weeding the squash patch, I headed down towards the noise. Of all the things I expected to see, Nick doing the sidestroke towards the shoreline towing what appeared to be a bag of laundry with him, wasn't one of them.

The tide was rolling out, and Nick was struggling to make it back with whatever he had stupidly gone in the water for. Finally, it seemed, he got to the shallows and started dragging the thing along w/ all his might. That's when I realized the thing was a pale wisp of a man.

Nick hauled the guy up to the shoreline and then collapsed on top of him. I finally got up to them, and Nick rolled and looked up to see me. He coughed ~~out~~ out a bit of water and said something like "Maybe more," and pointed west. I looked up and gasped. Through the mist I could see a barge drifting south through the sound.

One of my fellow community gardeners, Todd - nice guy - helped me wrap up Nick + the man overboard as best we could, then we hauled them back to the house. I stoked up the fire to a probably too-hot level, but it was all I could really think to do. →

Nick was cold to the touch, but the other guy simply felt like he was already dead. We tore the clothes off them both and threw them on the bed. Todd stripped down and jumped into the bed as I tossed blanket after blanket on top of all three of them. (The rabbit fur blanket went on first, as I thought it'd hold the heat in best.) I undressed quick as I could and then we both linked arms together and huddled around Nick and the sailor.

The worst part was, the sailor was no longer breathing. Todd and I looked at each other — we both could just ... tell. Nick seemed to be getting worse. We couldn't both try to resuscitate the sailor and keep Nick from freezing to death at the same time. So, God help us Charles, we shoved the sailor out of the bed and huddled around Nick.

It was a few hours later when Deanne came home. She let out a little yelp when she saw us all together in ~~the~~ the bed, not to mention the body on the floor.

In spite of himself — he's not the brightest guy — Todd laughed and said, "Betcha wish she was in here with you instead of me, huh?" Nick turned his head just enough to catch Todd's eye, then purred and smiled at him. At that point, I knew he'd recover just fine.

Cont'd...

We buried the sailor two days later at the botanical garden entrance. Nick was still weak at the time, but wanted us to give him a pencil + paper. When we got back from the burial, he showed us a shakily written note + said the sailor had been yelling something at him, then talking to him, then whispering, + that he was trying to listen to what he was saying after he'd dragged the guy onto the shore. Nick says he wrote down the words phonetically so they'd make sense to him. He says he remembered it perfectly, well... I don't think Nick really knows what he's talking about when he says phonetically, but regardless, we think the language is Mandarin.

This is borne out by the evidence recovered from the vessel itself. A couple sailors decided to tail the barge, which kept drifting south through the Sound. Eventually it washed ashore on Bambridge Island. It was empty, except for some paperwork on the bridge(?).

We don't mean to pressure you into doing translation work for us, but we paid quite a bit to get this missive + its accompanying bottle of cheer into your hot little hands. Two whole smoked salmon + a pint jar of roe. Steep, but totally worth it all the same. We think the carriers are upset that folks are giving them more to deliver in the early spring + late fall, when it

really sucks to ride across country. (We're not saying⁶ you shouldn't send us more mail wherever you want, though!)

Anyway, we wouldn't have mailed this to you, but we can't get any Chinese folks to talk to us. A whole lot of people around here bought into the rumors that the Chinese were to blame for the lights going out, the cars stopping working, etc. Deanne said that she overheard a member of the mayor's staff passing on the latest rumor - that he knew for a fact that "the Yellows" had seeded the clouds + somehow caused this year's late hard frost (ruined the apple crop). Deanne apparently confronted him about it, asked how they could do ~~this~~ that when no plane's flown here or anywhere else for almost a decade. She swears he mouthed the word "gliders".

Well, ~~I~~ with idiotic ideas like that in abundance around here (even amongst some of the most progressive, decent folks in town), a bit of violence seemed very likely. And, sure enough, after word of the "saboteurs' barge" got out, a pretty nasty mob took it to the international district. Thankfully, nobody got killed or anything, but some eyes were blackened and a few storefronts - previously abandoned, most of them - got damaged. The end result was that lines were drawn + pretty much everyone of Asian ~~descent~~ descent has sealed themselves up in the international

district. It really does suck. The mayor, at Deanne's urging, is making peaceful overtures to the leaders in the district. And, despite Nick's honest-to-Christ heroic efforts to save the barge's last survivor, it doesn't seem that they're coming around. There's some old adage that goes like, "A million attaboys don't equal one gotcha," and it has certainly rang true in this instance. But, we're not done trying. The pages attached are copies of Nick's — we kept the originals, just in case the mayor's efforts pay off. Regardless, if you can figure it out we'd really love to know what it says, if only to honor the memory of the men who died on the barge. Given, of course, that you can actually ~~figure it out~~ decipher Nick's handwriting (you should have seen the original one he scribbled out when he was just coming out of his hypothermia). Hee!

All our love to you and Jean (I little Jean or Charlie).

Signed,

The Ballard Posse

Deanne

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