

Double, Double, Toil and Trouble

Reprint, includes editorial comments by Communicating Vessels

Holley Cantine

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Contents

Double, Double, Toil and Trouble	4
The Life of Holley Cantine	14

Holley Cantine's short story Double, Double, Toil and Trouble was originally published in the early '60s in Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine. The story was then reproduced in the historical anarchist reprint series released by the publication of anarchist critique and thought known as The Match!. Their version was published in 1987. The message of the story remains relevant. That is why we decided to reproduce it.

Years have elapsed since Cantine wrote his story. But some things never seem to change. On the political left and among self-proclaimed anti-statists, there has been a rise of interest in violence-mongering groups like The Weathermen, Hamas and Hezbollah. It is like the '60s and '70s all over again.

Invoking black magic, Shakespeare's play Macbeth and his own imaginative skills, Cantine presents an engaging parable about what can happen when a sense of personal responsibility is severed from protest politics. He is cautioning us. Telling us that there are real dangers ahead if we lose who we are as a person to an abstract cause outside of ourselves.

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Double, Double, Toil and Trouble

The essential nature of my mind is more than ordinarily rational and scientific, but there has always been a wild strain in it — magic fascinated me from early childhood. I couldn't entirely bring myself to believe in it, but there were times when I could suspend my disbelief until I could almost feel the thrill of upsetting the laws of nature, and had there been a reputable sorcerer available during such moments, I might very well have asked to be taken on as an apprentice. For the most part, however, I laughed at such fancies, and applied myself earnestly to the study of science.

I never did get properly launched on a scientific career, but this had nothing to do with my curious penchant for witchcraft. During my student days, I became so deeply involved in radical activity that I presently abandoned all thought of seeking a berth in a university or research foundation — either of which would necessarily be subsidized and therefore, to my mind, controlled, by a status quo I had come to despise. Without waiting to graduate, I plunged myself completely into that complex world of intrigue and sectarian strife that passed for revolutionary politics in New York during the thirties and forties.

For some years I lived for the cause, working sporadically at poorly paid, part-time jobs to keep myself in food and a cheap furnished room, so I could spend most of my time at the exciting game of plotting and counter-plotting, drawing up manifestoes, polemics, and learned Marxist dissertations, and holding endless discussions with my comrades. "It all seemed terribly important and significant. We believed that the Revolution was: imminent, and that our minuscule, ill-trained, and badly informed groups — or one of them, at any rate — would shortly be wielding power over vast masses of people. It wasn't a bad life, in many ways — it was certainly stimulating, and enormously gratifying to the ego, as long as one could continue to believe that we were the true elect — but there came a time when it began to pall on me.

To be perfectly honest, I suppose what woke me up was the arrival of a small legacy — not really very much money, but more than I had ever possessed at one time before, I knew that if I remained in the movement, it would soon be dissipated on printers' bills and rent for meeting halls, and I would be back where I was before it came. I was selfish enough to resent this, and for the first time began to take stock of myself.

The group to which I then belonged — it was called the Ultra-Revolutionary Left Socialist Workers' Council, or something equally grandiose and pretentious — had been reduced by internal dissension to about fourteen members, and there were rumors of an impending faction fight which might well split it still further. My comrades were all either narrow fanatics or callow youths, and their intemperance and wordiness increasingly had been getting on my nerves. Furthermore, the status quo seemed as solidly entrenched as ever. All in all, it seemed like an excellent time to pull out, and retire to the country to think things through. I knew I could never achieve any sort of mental balance as long as I remained in the hectic, frenetic atmosphere of the movement. At least, these were my rationalizations — I guess

I'm still enough of a Marxist to believe that money was the real reason for my defection.

I bought a few acres of unimproved land on the side of a mountain, a hundred miles from the city, and at least two from the nearest neighbor; a secondhand jeep which was the only kind of car that could negotiate the rough wagon trail that led to my property, and enough building material and equipment for a small cabin. The cabin was pretty crude — I hadn't much skill at that sort of work, but I learned a lot as I went along, and it kept out the weather, after a fashion.

By the time I had the cabin ready to live in, my money was all gone, but I was able to pick up enough odd jobs in the neighborhood to satisfy my simple needs and still have plenty of free time. I found that by leaving the city I had shed the radical movement like a bad dream. While I still believed vaguely in the desirability of socialism, once I had the chance to achieve some perspective, it became perfectly obvious that the wrangling little sects that had consumed so large a part of my life would never amount to anything, and I was well quit of them.

To fill the void in my life left by the cessation of political activity, I began to revive my old interest in magic. I had acquired, over the years, a fair collection of books on magical lore — like all radicals I was an inveterate browser of secondhand bookstores — which I had not previously found time to look into seriously.

My only other hobby was early New Orleans jazz, an interest I had shared with several of my younger comrades in the city. I had a number of worn, but still playable phonograph records — chiefly marching band music of the Bunk Johnson-George Lewis school — and with part of my legacy I had bought a beat-up old slide trombone. When I wasn't poring over my books on magic, I spent my free time listening to records and teaching myself to play the horn. I made very few acquaintances in the area — the extreme gregariousness of the movement had surfeited my desire for social life, and at the same time its prevailing attitude of suspicion, according to which every stranger was a potential police spy, had so entered my system that I was very wary about letting anyone getting to know me intimately. I imagine my reserve might have broken down had there been an amateur brass band somewhere around, for once I had mastered the rudiments of the trombone, I longed for an opportunity to play with others; but the local town band had been disbanded some forty years earlier, and no one but myself seemed at all interested in reviving it.

The lonely hermit-like existence I was leading, so much resembling that of a medieval alchemist, made it easier for me to take magic seriously, or perhaps the accumulated frustrations of my thwarted scientific and revolutionary careers had reduced my mind to an approximation of the pre-logical stage. In any case, I found myself more and more receptive to the spells and incantations in my books, and soon began to try some of them, still half-believingly, but with scrupulous attention to the details of the formulae. At first I had no more success than I had expected, but it amused me to continue, and I became obsessed with the idea that if only I could get everything exactly right for once, it might really work.

Magic is a tricky subject: there are so many factors involved that are next to impossible to control — so much depends on chance. One can never be sure of finding the right quantity and quality of a certain herb or root when the moon is exactly at the right phase and angle, and many of the ingredients were so loosely described that I could go by guesswork only. A lot depends on mood, too, and I could seldom count on keeping myself in the proper frame of mind long enough to complete all the preparations. I suspect that this has always been true, and that is why so few really potent spells have been cast through the ages, and why magic has fallen into such disrepute.

However, I did eventually succeed, if only once. At some point in my investigations, I worked the formula for doubling correctly, and while I was never able to get any other formula to go right, it convinced me that with sufficient perseverance I could accomplish almost anything. However, something kept me from persevering. I think I was chiefly frightened at the realization that I was dealing with something entirely serious, instead of idly amusing myself with a rather eccentric hobby. There was no telling where it might lead me. As it was, the one gift I had acquired was enough to change my whole life, and I don't know how many others. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

My way of life did not change much immediately. After so many years of skepticism, it was difficult for me to assimilate my new acquisition, and I used it sparingly. I continued to go out to work, but less frequently, since by doubling my provisions — at least those that didn't spoil: canned goods, bottled beer, salt fish, and flour, which constituted the bulk of my diet — I could make them last indefinitely. For a comparatively small initial outlay, I could have lived on champagne, caviar, and truffles, but I preferred beer, and beans.

I avoided the doubling of money. I figured that a large number of bills with identical serial numbers would inevitably give rise to suspicions of counterfeiting, and if I paid all my bills with coins, that would look peculiar too. Occasionally, when I felt too lazy to go out and look for work, and, was down to my last fifty cents — I kept a half dollar in permanent reserve — I'd double it a few times as a delaying action, but never enough to be conspicuous. I didn't want to make trouble for myself with the locals. Anyhow, a few hours of work every week sufficed to provide all the cash I needed, and that was no hardship for me.

As a matter of fact, once I stopped my magical researches, I had more time than I knew what to do with. Two hours of daily practice on the horn was about all I could sustain, without any outside stimulation, and there wasn't much of anything else I could find to occupy me. I considered resuming my interrupted scientific studies, but so many years had elapsed since I left the university that I dreaded to find out how much I had forgotten. Besides, I felt uncomfortable about going back to science after having trafficked in the black arts, rather as a whore must feel at the prospect of associating with respectable married women. I could probably have carried it off all right, but I couldn't help feeling a curious mixture of scorn for the innocence of my potential colleagues and shame for having violated their code. I did quite a lot of desultory reading, to help pass the time, but I had never had much interest in literature, and it soon palled.

Then one night I woke up after dreaming of being a member of a band — a perennial wish-fulfillment dream of mine — and it suddenly dawned on me that I could employ my gift to satisfy that desire. I got right out of bed — I knew if I waited for morning, I'd probably lack the nerve to try it; I was scared enough half-asleep — and doubled myself. I hadn't tried to double anything more complicated than a salt herring until then, and while I had never failed at anything I had attempted, I had no way of knowing if I'd come out of the experience alive. I was just desperate enough to take the chance, though, and the result was, or seemed to be, perfect. The two of us looked at each other, laughed, sort of hysterically, then we shook hands, and both of us doubled and redoubled. We all decided that eight was plenty for a start, and set about doubling enough food and drink to feed us. We had a feast, with plenty of beer, after which we doubled the mattress and bedclothes into enough for all — they pretty nearly filled the cabin — and tried to get back to sleep. But we were too excited and overstimulated; we kept giggling and skylarking like a bunch of schoolboys in a dormitory when the proctor was away.

Next day, we started right away to provide ourselves with adequate living quarters. Eight semi-skilled men can accomplish a lot more than eight times as much as one green hand, and to our surprise, by quitting time we had a site cleared of brush and largely leveled.

After we had knocked off work, one of us drove the jeep over to the workshop of a young Italian, who lived not far away, and who earned his living by providing and servicing band instruments for a number of high schools within a twenty-five mile radius. Instruments that the schools had discarded — and public schools have gotten very particular about such things — he sold to the general public at very moderate prices. I had had occasion to take my trombone to him for repairs a couple of times, and found him both sympathetic to impoverished amateur musicians, and a conscientious craftsman. He loved his work — he had learned the trade as a boy, most of his family being involved with musical instruments in some capacity — but the rough treatment the instruments received from the school children caused him endless pain, however good it was for his business.

Our man picked out a fairly new clarinet, made a down-payment — I had been working fairly regularly and had accumulated a small cash reserve — and brought it back to our cabin. It was doubled, and about a week later — we didn't want to give the instrument dealer an impression of hopeless frivolity — the original was returned and traded in on a cornet.

Meanwhile, our new building was progressing rapidly. In a few days we finished leveling the site, dug it out to a depth of about two feet, and filled the hole with broken stone, this operation being vastly simplified by doubling. Then one of us went to the local lumber yard, and bought one each of all the materials we needed; a small bag of cement, a two-by-six, a two-by-four, a few different kinds of board, roofing, insulation, nails, a window, and so forth. I don't know what the lumber dealer made of the order, but he certainly couldn't have suspected we were going to build a house with it, so there was no danger of gossip from that source revealing our plans.

We all felt that complete secrecy was vital. Now that we had each other, we had no further need of even the small amount of social life I had maintained, and we didn't want outsiders coming around and perhaps asking awkward questions. For all we knew, magic was still illegal: they used to burn and hang witches in the old days, and laws have a way of staying on the books long after they cease to be enforced. We all looked exactly alike, but as long as we took care to go out singly, no one could tell that there were more than one of us.

We mixed a bucket of cement, poured it into the hole we had dug, and by a rapid doubling filled the hole with a solid block of concrete. When it was hard, we built the wall frames on it, and raised them as units — like an old-fashioned barn-raising. We only had to cut one master rafter to double from, but even so, inexperienced as we were, putting up the roof was a big job.

Once the rafters were set, the rest of the work on the building went quickly. It was a large barnlike structure, with a high ceiling and good acoustics. There were plenty of double windows, and a big wood stove, the kind they used to have in the Elevated stations, which we picked up cheap in a junk shop. For illumination, we had a whole lot of big hanging kerosene lamps and a few small ones, we were too far from the power line to make electrification feasible, and anyhow, we didn't see how we could double electricity.

Inside, we left the walls unfinished and put up no partitions. There was a wide shelf at one end, where we set all our mattresses side by side; a big table built out of heavy lumber, with benches on either side of it, sat in the middle of the room, and a sort of bar was placed near it, against the wall. On the bar was a three-burner alcohol stove — on which pots of soup, beans, and coffee were constantly simmering — a number of platters loaded with cold cuts, cheese, pickles, sauerkraut,

and sliced bread, and a tub of bottled beer — imported German beer: since we had to buy only one bottle, we felt we might as well have the best — and a box of good cigars. At the other end of the room from the bed shelf, we arranged eight chairs in a semicircle, for our band practice.

We had returned the original of the cornet and traded it in on a baritone horn, but our building was so nearly finished that we decided against using any more trickery on the instrument dealer — we had been feeling pretty shabby about it anyhow, he was such a nice guy — and pay cash for whatever other instruments we wanted. We had used up all our cash reserve, what with down payments at the instrument store, buying building materials and food, but we had a fine oak on our property, tall, straight, and free of branches for at least thirty feet. We felled it, cut it into saw logs, snaked them out to the road with the jeep, and there doubled them into a substantial pile, which we sold to a sawmill for considerably more than all the instruments we wanted would cost — the markdown of second-hand band instruments being approximately as large as that on cars. The sawmill man had his own woodlot, and didn't like to lay out money for other people's logs, but when he found we were willing to take an absurdly low price, he bought readily enough. We weren't commercially minded — had we been, we could have easily made a fortune in almost any manufacturing or merchandising business — and the price we asked was more than adequate compensation for the relatively trifling amount of actual labor we had done. Unfortunately, in our enthusiasm we unthinkingly let him take every last log in the pile, thus preventing us from doubling any more lumber out of it to meet future contingencies. Timber was our only natural resource, and apart from that one tree, all we had was second-growth stuff, useful only for firewood.

We wanted the same instrumentation as the traditional New Orleans marching bands, lacking only the second cornet — all of us were determined to play different instruments, it was our only claim to individuality. We already had the trombone, cornet, clarinet, and baritone horn, so we needed an alto, a tuba, and bass and snare drums. The alto cost only two dollars — the instrument dealer had an old one, that he said would require at least twenty dollars' worth of his labor to take out the dents, and was willing to let us have it for what it cost him, since used alto horns are slow sellers. We didn't mind the dents, and were well satisfied with the horn, which was otherwise in good working order. An E-flat tuba was twenty dollars, and the two drums came to thirty, complete with sticks.

It took us a while to get the feel of playing together, but we enjoyed it right from the beginning. The cornet and clarinet, although they had gotten their instruments first, and had a slight head start on the rest of us, had trouble mastering the unfamiliar instruments — the three saxhorns were enough like trombones, for which we all had a pretty good embouchure, that we could play them fluently right away. The cornet got his lip into shape in a couple of weeks, and this gave the band a tremendous lift. The clarinet took longer, the instrument being completely different from any of the brasses. He was able to provide an accompaniment of sorts in a month or so, but the solo from "High Society" continued to elude him for the better part of a year. The two drummers had, in a way, the hardest time, since my sense of rhythm was the weakest side of my musical ability, but they persevered, and in time got pretty good, at least by our not exacting standards.

I'm sure the ensemble would have sounded terrible to an expert, even at its best, but there is an exhilaration to playing in a group, even one composed entirely of dubs, and we were playing only for ourselves. Our tastes were identical, and our enthusiasm keen, so our technical shortcomings didn't bother us. Then too, there was an unlimited supply of beer, and that helped keep us from being too critical.

By conventional standards, our life was impossibly disorderly. We ate and drank when we felt like it, slept when we had to, and spent the rest of the time playing, or loafing around, reading and talking. We didn't even bother to wash the dishes — we kept a master set in a cupboard, and doubled from it when we needed any. Dirty dishes were tossed on the dump, which gradually reached monumental proportions. We solved the laundry problem the same way. Sometimes, when one of us came back from a trip to the dump, there would be talk of the advisability of working up the spell for making things vanish, but nothing came of it. We just couldn't be bothered.

It was, in most respects, a thoroughly satisfying life. The food was good, better than I'd ever had before. The soup and beans, from constant simmering, acquired a flavor that was unbeatable; the coffee, by the same token, was usually terrible — we were usually too lazy to start a fresh pot — but we didn't drink much coffee, and the beer was excellent. The only serious lack was sex. We kidded around about finding the most beautiful girl in the world and doubling her up for all of us, but we didn't really mean it. We were much too nervous about letting outsiders into our little world, and anyhow, we felt that the presence of women would probably take away more than it added. I had become accustomed to abstinence over the years, so I don't believe we suffered too intensely on that score. We had no particular ambition about our music. We periodically discussed the possibility of going on the road if we ever got good enough, but that seemed a long way off, and wasn't important. We were having enough fun playing for ourselves not to need an audience.

We had little occasion to go out. Each of us took a turn doing a day's work every week, to maintain our cash reserve for replenishing food that had gotten too stale to be worth doubling, and paying the land taxes and repair bills on the jeep. None of these expenses was heavy. The tax assessors had not been around since I'd completed my original cabin, and the day they had come, in the early spring, the trail had been like a creek, and they gave me a very low assessment. The new building was sufficiently concealed by trees and brush to be invisible from the road, so they never knew it was there. By judicious doubling of spare parts, tires, and fuel, we managed to keep the expense of operating the jeep down to a minimum. On various trips to local garages, we had succeeded in doubling ourselves a rather impressive collection of tools, when the garage men weren't looking, and a couple of us had become pretty good at using them. Occasionally we had to resort to expert help, when something major broke down, but we didn't use the jeep very much, and it had been in good condition when I bought it.

The necessity of going to work at all got irksome after a while, but this problem was eventually solved for us by the cornet player. When his turn came around one time, instead of making the rounds of prospective employers, as we ordinarily did, he drove to New York, where he pawned duplicates of his horn — which was by far the best instrument we owned — all along Third Avenue. He returned the next day, his pockets bulging with enough money to provide all our needs for several years, at the rate we were spending it. And when that was gone, we could always repeat the operation.

Just because I was able to work one spell successfully, I don't pretend to be an expert on magic, but I do know that the results one achieves are no more precise than those from any other form of reproduction. Whenever we doubled anything, the double seemed exactly the same as the original, although there were probably subtle differences we couldn't notice, even in the simplest objects. When it came to highly complicated organisms like ourselves, however, the differences were easily discernible.

In appearance, we were identical enough to fool anybody, but our personalities showed marked dissimilarities. The cornetist and the clarinetist were by far the most accomplished musicians — I believe they must have acquired the largest share of my magical streak, but they poured it into their horns, and kept the band jumping. I guess I got most of my early scientific temperament, and the bass drummer clearly got the heaviest dose of whatever it was that kept me so long in the radical movement. He seemed almost like a throwback to my most ardent revolutionary phase.

For some time, these differences served to make our life together more interesting: our reactions were far from uniform, and this made our discussions livelier. But by degrees the bass drummer became more and more antagonistic to the rest of us. At first we thought that perhaps his instrument wasn't giving him enough scope, and several of us offered to spell him on the drum, and let him take a turn playing a horn, but this wasn't what he wanted at all. He had soured on our whole way of life, and this set up an unbearable tension.

He stopped playing with us, almost entirely, and one of the horn men had to take his place on the drum, while he sat around moodily, reading books on guerrilla warfare, or went out and did target practice with an old .22 he'd picked up somewhere. When the rest of us weren't playing, he'd almost invariably start an argument about the folly of wasting our priceless gift. We tried kidding him along, pointing out that we weren't harming or exploiting anybody, and the world would probably make a mess of the gift if we offered it, but this merely enraged him. "You're just a bunch of lousy renegades," he'd shout. "Bourgeois decadents. You could be out saving the world, and here you sit, fiddling while it burns." The only way we could shut him up was to take up our instruments and drown him out.

We were neither surprised nor disappointed when he left, early one morning, before anyone else was awake. We couldn't be entirely sure he was really gone, at first, since the jeep was still there. Then one of us recalled being awakened briefly by the sound of the jeep's motor starting, and we decided he must have doubled it — none of us had ever dared attempt anything so ambitious before, but presumably it had worked. We waited for a few days to make sure he wasn't coming back, then the snare drummer doubled himself, bringing the band back to full strength again. The new bass drummer was fine, and we were all relieved to be rid of the old one, who had turned out to be such a drag.

He never wrote, but we picked up a few hints about his activities. One day our tuba player was idly glancing through a New York newspaper at the store — we didn't read the newspapers with any regularity, but from time to time one of us would feel an urge to catch up on the news — and found an item about someone being arrested for soap-boxing without a permit and giving away samples of merchandise without a peddler's license.

It could only be our ex-drummer: who else would combine those activities? He must have been distributing a foretaste of the abundance to come. It surprised us all that he could be naive enough to believe the police would let him get away with it. Of course, he hadn't given his right name, but the name mentioned in the item was one that I had once used as a pseudonym in my politically active days.

The item didn't mention what kind of a sentence he had received and although we looked in the papers for the next few days, we couldn't find any further mention of the incident. But a month or so later, a local gun dealer, with whom I had been fairly intimate for a time when I first came to live in the country, ran into our clarinetist in town and upbraided him with mock indignation.

“What are you, a buyer or a creamer?” he had shouted. “You rush into the shop, demand that I bring out all my rare goodies, and the minute I turn my back, you’re gone like a turkey in the corn.”

Translated from our friend’s jargon, this meant that our drummer, having presumably served his time, had come back, doubled himself a supply of weapons when the dealer was out of the room, and left with them for an unknown destination. We didn’t at all like the implications of that, but did our best to put it out of our minds.

After that we stopped looking at the papers, and almost entirely stopped going out. I guess we were all afraid of what might be happening, and concentrated on our music with what was close to desperation, avoiding any mention of the probable whereabouts and activities of our former colleague.

Then one day, when we were taking a break between sessions and were scattered around the room, eating, drinking, tuning our instruments, or just resting, we heard the sound of a jeep coming up the trail. The cornet man peeked out of a window cautiously — we were more apprehensive than ever about visitors — and the rest of us gathered in a worried crowd behind him, taking care to keep out of sight.

The sound of the motor came closer, and our lookout shouted: “Hey, dig this. Big Skin has doubled himself some playmates, and they’re coming in like gangbusters.”

We all rushed to the windows and watched the jeep drive up to the house and stop. It wasn’t the double of our battered civilian jeep — it was fairly new-looking Army model — but the four men in it were unmistakably the ex-drummer’s doubles. They were dressed in semi-military fashion, with steel helmets of some foreign type, and were heavily armed. Their faces, though familiar enough in their general outlines, were considerably altered, when we got a closer look. They seemed misshapen, coarser somehow; their mouths were tight and cruel, and their eyes had an expression of almost animal malignancy.

As they got out of their jeep and advanced towards the house, all the others piled out of the door to greet them, with, I thought, rather forced joviality. I hung back a little; I didn’t at all like their looks and doubted their mission was friendly.

Sure enough, as soon as the seventh man was outside the house, the four of them opened fire with some kind of machine pistol. At that range they couldn’t miss, but they continued to pour bullets into the bodies for a long time. I cowered in a corner, expecting that they would presently hunt me out and shoot me too. Instead, they intoned, in a strange, harsh voice — in unison, so help me — “Thus perish traitors to the revolution,” turned on their heels and marched back to the jeep, which left immediately.

It was then that it occurred to me that they had no way of knowing about the substitute bass drummer, and must have believed they had finished us all.

I spent the next couple of days in a state of shock, digging a mass grave and burying the rest of the band without ceremony. Then I packed a small bundle of provisions, and left. I was perhaps foolish to leave the one place where I was reasonably safe from reprisals, but I couldn’t stand it there any more, and the thought that I could double myself another band and start all over again positively sickened me. I left everything as it was — even abandoning the jeep. I don’t think I had any special motive. I was still pretty dazed.

The first few miles of my hike, everything looked about the same as it always had, but once I reached the center of the village, I realized that the violence against us had not been an isolated

phenomenon. Most of the houses were scarred by gunfire, several had been burned to the ground, and there were no people around at all.

I continued through the devastated countryside, passing, to my utter astonishment, wrecked Army vehicles of various kinds, and numerous corpses, both military and civilian. A good many looked as though they might have been my doubles, and were dressed roughly the same as the four who had visited us, but the majority seemed to be either regular Army men or local residents. Obviously a running battle of some proportions had been fought over this terrain, and it seemed incredible that we hadn't been aware of it. However, our house was isolated, and most of the time we were making so much noise ourselves that we wouldn't be likely to hear anything else.

After some days of aimless wandering, I finally encountered a small group of ragged survivors. But they took one look at me, screamed, "There's another one!" and ran off in terror. Since the next people I met might well be armed, I decided I had better lie low for a while, and holed up in an abandoned house. In the cellar I found a pile of newspapers for the past few months, and, to pass the time, began to read through them. They told me all I needed to know about the situation, and confirmed my worst fears. Inasmuch as I am probably the only person in a position to read between the lines and explain what really happened, I am writing all this down and plan to double it into millions of copies. It may be too late to save the country, but if not, surely an accurate understanding of the nature of the enemy ought to be more useful than the wild conjectures and speculations I find in the press.

I won't bother to reproduce the newspaper's version of events, since anyone who gets to see this will undoubtedly be already familiar with it, but here, as nearly as I can work it out, is a rough account of my double's actions to date.

After his visit to the gun shop, he appears to have driven to Washington — the dates check to the best of my recollection. Once there, he must have doubled himself a few times, and made his way, armed with pistols, into the visitors' galleries of the House of Representatives and the Senate. There he did a lot of rapid doubling, and proceeded to clear out both chambers. I guess he sustained heavy casualties from the Secret Service men, but continued to double reinforcements until he was master of the Capitol. He must have been quite an army by the time he moved on the White House and took possession. To judge from the text of the manifesto he issued at this time — "The Bourgeois Government is No More: The New Regime of Freedom and Plenty is Now Beginning" — I would surmise that his mind had already begun to deteriorate as the result of excessive doubling.

During the next week or so, he was occupied pacifying the city of Washington and trying to establish an emergency distribution system. This was his most benevolent phase; I believe he was completely in good faith when he offered free food and clothing to anyone who came to his distribution centers — it wouldn't have been any trick at all for him to produce unlimited quantities of merchandise. However, the population of the city didn't know that, and it is hardly surprising that they suspected a trap, and left the city rather than take a chance on his generosity. This, I am sure, so infuriated him, that his already weakened mind broke down altogether.

Those congressmen who had escaped the massacre in the Capitol, together with those who had been absent that day, set up a provisional government in Virginia, and launched the Army against the usurper — they apparently thought he was an invasion from Russia. I hope they didn't retaliate on the Russians with atomic weapons as the newspaper suggests they intended to do. This counter-revolutionary attack, as he calls it in his second manifesto, caught him in a grim

mood; he doubled himself into a vast horde, which seems to call itself the People's Volunteers for National Liberation, and fought back furiously.

To judge by the newspaper reports on the early battles in the campaign, he must have depended entirely on force of numbers to overrun the regular Army's position, and his losses were enormous. Subsequently, having captured and undoubtedly doubled, heavier weapons, he began to fight more conservatively, but the prodigious amount of doubling that went on during the first few weeks of fighting had presumably reduced his forces to the brutal automatons that wiped out my comrades, and seem to be advancing steadily along the eastern seaboard. I don't know where they are now, the last paper in my collection being several days old.

This is an army that puts the ancient Mongols to shame. Not only is it able to do without any service of supply — since each man can carry all his own provisions and ammunition, doubling more as needed — but the supply of troops is inexhaustible, as long as just one of them remains alive; and they fight with a blind, savage fanaticism which has long since lost every trace of the idealism with which he started.

After reading some of the reports of wanton massacre, I have been strongly tempted to double myself into an army, and go out to try to destroy these monsters, but am deterred by one consideration. What is to prevent me from degenerating into their likeness, if I follow their example? Were not these fiends — and not so very long ago — myself?

The End

The Life of Holley Cantine

The influence and significance of an author or artist is hard to weigh. Society tends to confine the most expressive and uncompromising individuals to the margins. Then, suddenly, years after the person has died, someone will bring that person back to life, for better or worse. If it is an academic reviving the dead, the result will frequently reflect all the pitfalls of that world: treating the subject as a mere relic from history and failing to connect how that individual and his or her body of work relates to our own contemporary situation. On the other hand, an unaffiliated scholar or enthusiast might try to revive interest in a dead author or artist. The intention of the enthusiast or independent scholar is often quite different than that of the person whiling away their time trying to advance their niche in the academic world. The enthusiast does it for the love of the subject matter. No financial reward or compensation is expected. And so it is. We decided to reprint this story by Holley Cantine because his message and words run the risk of fading into obscurity.

Holley Cantine's influence on American culture and society is difficult to measure. On the face of it, he had no easily noticeable impact on society at large. Even so, the way he lived his life, and the set of principles he upheld throughout his life were, in many ways, a continuation of the ennobling aspects of American history: the back to the land and communalist movements; the enduring legacy of opposition to war; independence of thought and a certain pioneering spirit; the power of owning the means of production to allow for self-expression.

Indeed, Holley grew up in Woodstock, New York. The town of Woodstock was founded by libertarian socialist-anarchists, influenced by the utopian writings of William Morris. This fact, I am sure, played a large role in the way his life developed.

In the story reprinted here, Cantine mixes his own life experiences and enthusiasms with fantasy. His fascination with New Orleans jazz and brass instruments was a huge part of the existence he led. Equally as real was the log cabin he built in rural Bearsville, New York. A separate building housed his Gordon Upright Footpedal Letterpress. This press had apparently at one point belonged to the anarchist Carlo Tresca. The idea of doubling in the story was probably, in part, as much of a result of his interest in alchemy as it was in having to set type by hand for every page of the journal and newspaper he worked on.

Setting gigantic blocks of text by hand with type is not a simple task; it can occupy huge chunks of your existence on earth. So the idea of being able to magically "double" your output was perhaps another source of dreamy inspiration for the story Holley wrote.

Retort, the anarchist art and politics publication Cantine produced with Dachine Rainer, is a superb example of what an independent and radical publication could be. Mixing book reviews with long essays and thoughtful editorials, poetry and personal experiences, Retort is still a great read. Specific social conditions may have undergone significant changes and transformations, but the message of the publication remains relevant. What is that message? The primary message seems to be that the ethically motivated individual would oppose and actively resist the everyday encroachment of the state on his or her life. To Holley, this meant being imprisoned during the

Second World War. Why? Because Cantine rightly saw the war as being a conflict between nation-states, and he was wholly opposed to their existence. Why fight for an entity that could detain you for not having the appropriate papers and identification? Why fight for an entity that could beat you up and throw you in the slammer for questioning and opposing their role in the slaughter of humans who happen to live in a different region on earth?

The other publication Holley printed and wrote pieces for was *The Wasp*. I have never seen a copy of this. its focus was on music and art of the Woodstock, New York area. There was also a sort of eccentric radical, bohemian edge to it.

Cantine's enthusiasm in the story for Dixieland jazz parallels his true to life practice on the trombone. In fact, every May Day Holley insisted on attending the annual celebration of this neglected holiday. The event he went to was organized by the Libertarian Book Club in New York City. At the event Cantine busted out his trombone and serenaded other attendees with solo renditions of favorites like "The Internationale" and "Solidarity Forever". He also played in a band called The Woodchuck Hollow Brass and Woodwind Choir. As strange as it might sound, this group was quite particular in what it chose to rehearse and perform: German hunting calls and American patriotic music. That was their specialty.

Cantine's life reads like a story — one seldom told and rarely heard. The story of his life is fascinating. It is also quite surprising in places. What is not surprising is the fact that barely anyone has heard of Holley Cantine. Living a life of principle based on a sense of ethical responsibility is :a tough pill to swallow. Humans are humans. Official histories parade the long catalog of the "great men who made history", while leaving out those everyday people who refuse to be a cog in the machine. And the majority of the population tends to accept their own exclusion.

The piece of fiction reproduced here speaks for itself. He is cautioning us. Telling us to look out. Be careful.

We are only human. And if we fail to act with wisdom and ethical integrity, we drift more and more into the realm of what we abhor. We morph into "great men who made history" — a despicable category of men whose exploits also happen to include mass murder, torture, execution, colonization. It's the same shit all over again.

Will we ever learn?

— Communicating Vessels, January 2010

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