

## THE MORRISTOWN FABLES: PART 2

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When Ross Begorrah's cuckoo clock developed laryngitis, he asked Mary, his shepherdess friend, to recommend an equally reliable replacement timekeeper. Mary was feeling drowsy from taking stock of her charges - she kept counting her pet lamb over and over again - so she did not pay Ross the full attention his problem demanded. With her mind on caviar and the scarlet colour of her new bonnet, she mumbled a garbled reply to Ross's question. "Roe, dial and red," was what she actually said, but it was on the basis of this that Begorrah purchased an originally dumb bird.

Wishing to please her husband, Faith taught the hen to speak various terms attuned to its own body clock. But, being a stupid fowl, it never told the actual time; it merely repeated the words that Faith had taught it. It was hearing the expression "foul play" that inspired Faith's hen to become a devotee of show biz, as illustrated by the following anecdote.

Only the tediously dull plump Italian-American, Isaac Meo, is more boring than Faith Begorrah's talking hen, so when the guests at a shotgun wedding of a quarrelsome pair of dairy workers saw Meo and the hen in conversation, they gave both of them an extremely wide berth. Faith's hen had learned a new word, noon, which she constantly repeated to her new acquaintance, so denying herself the chance to discover his opinion of himself. Ike Meo had a curious Cockney-style accent; he pronounced Ike as "ache". He considered himself a ladies' man, and although he attempted to promote himself as "Ro" Meo, all females, apart from his mother, referred to him as "Belly" Ike instead. The wedding was taking place at the house adjacent to the Begorrah residence, the hen having made her way there by flying over the garden fence.

Needing to know the time, Ross persuaded Faith to join him in a search for the bird he normally perched on the mantelpiece, and, as Faith wanted to make an omelette, she readily agreed. Recognizing the hen's voice, they peered over the fence and discovered it in the company of the least engaging man in New Jersey.

"Hi," said Faith to the bird. "Noon," rejoined the domestic fowl. Ross, meanwhile, immediately set about the task of capturing the hen, much to his wife's consternation at the prospect of releasing the boring fat man to attend the marriage of the quarrelsome pair. To the accompaniment of the celebrated Fabled Phrase hidden orchestra, Faith sang the following:

"Do not force 'Ache' Meo,  
My darling,  
On the sour wedding day..."

## WAR SLANG

This is the title of Paul Dickson's latest book, published by Pocket Books for \$25 in 1994. It contains approximately ten thousand words and phrases, conventionally arranged by war from the Civil War to the Gulf War. Columnist Robert Ruark observed at the start of the Korean War that one of the nicer things about war is its ability to enrich the language. Indeed, Dickson's book ought to be useful to linguists and sociologists, providing insight into what was on the military mind - and how it changed over the decades. Though one might conjecture that sex was most on the mind of the fighting man, this is not borne out by Dickson's book; there are far more terms, many very colorful, relating to food. What officer rank seems to bug the dogface the most? Not the sergeant, to judge from the number of terms, but the (first or second) lieutenant - starting with shavetail in the Spanish-American War, and continuing with youngster, loogie, loot, half-loot, loto, brass, (first and second) john, jeeter, missing link, jack shit, rail, twink, butter bar and el-tee. For some reason, the Vietnam War seems to have produced the most euphemisms for the verb kill: bring the max, blow away, dust, waste, wax, grease and zap. (By the Gulf War, only waste, grease and pop are noted.) The book includes mini-essays on especially well-known slang such as *Kilroy was here*, *doughboy* and *jeep*. Finally, Dickson sheds further light on *rackensack*, mentioned by Darryl Francis in the Feb 1994 *Word Ways*. During the Civil War, a *rackensacker* was a hard-bitten outdoorsman on the Confederate side.