day. What about the debts and currency of the United States? Might the country itself go the way of, say, the state of California—that is, become stuck in political deadlock—and, because the nation possesses the sovereign power that California lacks, begin to inflate away the burden of its debt? Or see the value of the dollar plummet in a classic currency crisis? Such collapses of confidence often have their roots in government’s unwillingness to adopt consistent fiscal and monetary measures. Just how deep is the debt hole from which the United States must climb in the coming years, when off-balance-sheet liabilities including unfunded pension and medical liabilities are taken into account? Reinhart and Rogoff write, “[T]hat basic data on domestic debt are so opaque and difficult to obtain is proof that governments will go to great lengths to hide their books when things are going wrong, just as financial institutions have done in the contemporary crisis.” The price of stability is vigilance.

Reinhart and Rogoff began their collaboration at the International Monetary Fund: he was its chief economist from 2001 to 2003; she was his deputy. Both are well-qualified by temperament for the job of professional skeptic. Reinhart left Cuba with her parents in 1966, when she was 10, carrying what was permitted in those days: three changes of clothes, no more. Today, she is a professor at the University of Maryland, a veteran of many crises and probably the most widely cited woman in the profession. Rogoff, a son of liberal parents, attended high school in Rochester, New York, where the dropout rate was greater than 50 percent (and included him). A U.S. grandmaster in chess at 14, he moved to Europe after his sophomore year to compete in tournaments. At 18 he

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Chapter & Verse
Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

Marty Mazzone writes: “My mother used to say, as fast as she could, ‘The high uffum buffum and the compound presser and squeezer and the beer dog trim.’ At least, that’s what we think she used to say. She would never repeat it for us on the spot. Can anyone identify the origin of this very strange, unGoogle-able phrase?”

John Sundquist requests the origin of the assertion, “Love is the determined caring for the good of another.”

Alejandro Jenkins writes: “In his autobiography, Witness, Whittaker Chambers refers twice to a ‘print [by] a nineteenth-century Italian painter’ showing ‘a hooded skeleton, beckoning to its embrace a line of proletarian figures with bundles—rather like a scene in an Ellis Island waiting room.’ The caption was Il Conforto—Death, the Comforter. What is the work in question, and who made it?”

“Love and war” (November-December 2009), Paul Reid, coauthor with the late William Manchester of the forthcoming third volume of The Last Lion: Defender of the Realm, writes: “It is doubtful that Churchill said this. The expression does not appear in Richard Langworth’s definitive collection of Churchill quotations, Churchill by Himself, the index of which contains more than 60 entries under ‘war’ (‘love’ does not appear in the index, Churchill not being one to declare on matters of the heart). Likewise, the expression is not to be found in Kay Halle’s classic, Irrepressible Churchill. As well, a word-search of Churchill’s speeches (edited by Robert Rhodes James) spanning 1935-1963 fails to yield the phrase. Nor is it mentioned by any of the numerous diarists who recorded Churchill’s remarks, including Jack Colville, Anthony Eden, Alexander Cadogan, Harold Macmillan, Harold Nicolson, and Alan Brooke. A web search also yielded no results. I believe the quotation Mr. Ehrenreich seeks to verify cannot be traced to Churchill. It lacks the snap and crackle of Churchill not being one to declare on matters of the heart.”

Send inquiries and answers to “Chapter and Verse,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to chapterandverse@harvardmag.com.