

I realized that Hamlet was faced with an entirely different problem, but his agony could have been no greater. The most that was accomplished was adding Mrs & Beige's tray to the dish pile, and by means of repeated threats, on an ascending scale, seeing that the girls dressed themselves, after a fashion. I was saved from making the decision as the phone rang, and the girls were upon me instantly. Here's a household hint: if you can't find your children, and get tired of calling them, pick up the phone. No matter if your children are at the movies, in school, visiting their grandmother, or on a field trip in some distant city, they will be upon you magically within seconds after you pick up the phone. Jennie and Miranda twined themselves around me, murmuring endearments. Louise climbed onto a stool and clutched the hand with which I was trying to hold the phone, claiming my immediate attention on grounds of extreme emergency. Somehow managing to get out a cool, poised, "Won't you hold on a second, please", I covered up the mouthpiece, and with more warmth and less poise, gave a quick lecture on crime and punishment, mostly the latter, including Devil's Island and the remoter reaches of Siberia. I promised to illustrate the lecture, if they so much as <breathed> till after the call was completed. Speaking into the phone again and recognizing the caller, I resumed my everyday voice. Soon we were deep in a conversation that was interrupted many times by little things like Jennie's holding her breath and pretending to black out, Miranda's dumping the contents of the sugar bowl on the table, and various screeches, thuds, and giggles. Under the circumstances, I had difficulty keeping up with the conversation on the phone, but when I hung up I was reasonably certain that Francesca had wanted to remind me of our town meeting the next evening, and how important it was that Hank and I be there. I discovered that the girls had shrewdly vacated the kitchen, and were playing quietly in the living room. It seemed that I would be the gainer if I accepted the peace and quiet, instead of carrying out my threats. Resolving to get something done, I started in on the dishes. No. I'm not saying it right. What I meant to say was that I started to start in on the dishes by gathering them all together in the kitchen sink. They looked so formidable, however, so <demanding>, that I found myself staring at them in dismay and starting to woolgather again, this time about Francesca and her husband. How about them, I thought. Francesca and Herbert were among the few people we knew in Catatonia. We didn't even know them till about a month after we moved- at that time, they had called on us, after I met Fran at a ~PTA meeting, and had taken us in hand socially. They had been kind to us and we were indebted to them for one or two pleasant dinners, and for information as to where to shop, which dentist, doctor, plumber, and sitter to call (not that there was much of a choice, since Catatonia was just a village; the yellow pages of the telephone book were amazingly thin). They were "personalities". Herb, an expert on narrow ties, thin lapels, and swatches, was men's fashion editor of <Parvenu>, the weekly magazine with the tremendous circulation. Fran and he had met about two years after she had arrived in Manhattan from Nebraska, or was it Wyoming? She was the daughter and sole heiress

of either a cattle baron or an oil millionaire and, having arrived in New York with a big bank roll, became a dabbler in various fields. She patronized Greenwich Village artists for awhile, then put some money into a Broadway show which was successful (terrible, but successful). It was during her "writing" period that she and Herb met and decided that they were in love. They were married at a lavish ceremony which was duly recorded in <Parvenu> and all other magazines and newspapers, and then they honeymooned in Bermuda. No, not Bermuda. Bermuda was not in style that year. They had honeymooned in Rome; everyone was very high on Rome that year. They had bought their house in Catatonia after investigating all the regions of suburbia surrounding New York; they had chosen Catatonia because of its reputation for excellent schools, beaches, and abundance of names.

"You are bound to get involved with people when you have children", Fran had told me at our first meeting, "so it is good to know that those with whom you get involved are not just dreary little housewives and dull husbands, but People Who Do Things".

I admired their easy way of doing things but I couldn't escape an uneasiness at their way of <always> doing the <right> things. Their house was a centuries-old Colonial which they had had restored (guided by an eminent architect) and updated, and added on to. It had a gourmet's corner (instead of a kitchen), a breakfast room, a luncheon room, a dining room, a sitting room, a room for standing up, a party room, dressing rooms for everybody, even a room for mud. It was all set up so there would be no dust anywhere and so that their children would color in the coloring room, paint in the painting room, play with blocks in the block house, and do all the other things in the proper rooms at exactly the right time. Their two boys were "well adjusted" and, like their parents, always did the right thing at the right time and damn the consequences. Francesca and Herbert considered themselves violently nonconformist and showed the world they were by filling their Colonial house with contemporary furniture and paintings and other art objects (expensive, but not necessarily valuable, contemporary things). Fran flaunted her independence by rebelling against the Catatonia uniform of Bermuda shorts and knee-length socks by wearing Bermuda shorts and knee-length socks in <color>; bright pinks and plaids and vivid stripes. Sometimes she even wore the uniform in solid, unrelieved black, and with her blonde hair cut so closely, wearing this uniform, she strongly resembled a member of the SS&.

No one could dislike them, I thought. Sometimes, though, they did not seem quite human. It seemed, indeed, that their house was not so much a home, but rather a perfect stage set, and that they were actors who had been handed fat roles in a successful play, and had talent enough to fill the roles competently, with nice understatement. Practically the only enthusiasm they showed was when they were discussing "names"; even brand names. You should hear the reverence in

Fran's voice when she said "Baccarat" or "Steuben" or "Madame Alexander". She always let it be known that there was wine in the pot roast or that the chicken had been marinated in brandy, and that Koussevitzky's second cousin was an intimate of theirs.

I wouldn't have wasted time puzzling over this couple were it not for my fear that all the other inhabitants of Catatonia were equally unreal. I couldn't feel at home among them. Besides Francesca, there was Blanche. Francesca was pleasant and charming, but Blanche was sweet. Yes, Blanche was very, very sweet- being in her company was like being drowned in warm, melted marshmallows. I had once been a witness when Blanche had smiled and said with only minimum ruefulness, "Oh, my souffle has collapsed". <Anyone> knows how a real, red-blooded woman would react to such a catastrophe! If Blanche had been honest, she would have yelled, slammed at least a couple of doors, and thrown a few little, valueless things. But dear me, no; not Blanche. After five minutes with Blanche, one might welcome the astringency

of Grazie, who was a sort of Gwen Cafritz to Francesca's Perle Mesta. Francesca and Grazie were habitual committee chairmen and they usually managed to be elected co-chairmen, equal bosses, of whatever ~PTA or civic project was being launched. They were inseparable, not because they were fond of each other, but because they wanted to keep an eye on each other, as they were keen rivals for social leadership. Grazie was mean: quietly mean, and bitterly, unfunnily sarcastic. She it was who had looked to see if I was wearing shoes upon learning that I couldn't drive. Grazie had a small, slick head and her hair and skin were the color of golden toast.

She lived in an ultra-modern house whose decoration, appointments, paint, and even pets were chosen to complement her coloring; the pets were a couple of Siamese cats. Her uniform was of rich, raw silk, in a shade which matched her hair, skin, housepaint, and cats, and since she was so thin as to be almost shapeless, she rather resembled a frozen fish stick. The husbands of these women and others I had met in Catatonia were distinguished only in that they were, to me at least, indistinguishable. I couldn't tell one from the other. Like Herbert, they were all in communications: radio, television, magazines, and advertising. One or two were writers of books; all were fellows of finite charm. Each had developed a hair-trigger chuckle and the habit of saying "zounds"! in deference to country-squirehood. I never thought I'd live to hear people chuckle and say "zounds"! in real life. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. They were "sincere"- men of the too-hearty handclasp and the urgent smile. These boys acknowledged an introduction to anybody by gently pressing one of his hands in both of theirs, while they gazed, misty-eyed with care, into the eyes of the person they were meeting. Could such unadulterated love, for a total stranger, be credited? They were always leaping to light cigarettes, open car doors, fill plates or glasses, and I mistrusted the whole lot of them to the same degree that I mistrusted bake shops that called themselves "Sanitary Bake Shops".

"<O Pioneers!>" I thought, and wondered what kind of homesteads such odd pioneers would establish in this suburban frontier; pioneers who looked like off-duty gardeners even at parent-teacher conferences and who never called the school principal "Mister". I sighed, thinking that among other things, people here seemed to be those who would have to cut down if they earned less than \$85,000 yearly; people who would give their teeth for a chance to get on "Person to Person"; people who thought it was nice to be important, but not important to be nice; who were more ingratiating than gracious, more personalities than persons. In my estimation, they were people who read Daphne du Maurier, and discussed Kafka; well, not <discussed> him exactly, but said, "Kafka"! reverently and raised their eyes, as if they were at a loss to describe how they felt about Kafka, which they were, because they had no opinions about Kafka, not having read Kafka. They were, I felt, people invariably trying to prove not who, but what they were, and trying to determine what, not who, others were. Becoming aware that it was nearly lunchtime, I brought myself back to the tasks at hand. I made plans for the afternoon- doing the breakfast and luncheon dishes all at once, making the beds, and then maybe painting the kitchen. Then, I remembered that the girls had had a banana for dessert every day for the last week. "BANANAS"! Jennie had shouted each time. "They're not dessert! They're not even food. They're just something you're supposed to put on cereal for breakfast". I dug around and found a mix, and was able to surprise them with a devil's-food cake with chocolate icing. (Sometimes I think you need only one rule for cooking: if you can't put garlic in it, put chocolate in it.) The cake was received in a stunned silence that was evidence in itself of the dearth of taste thrills Mama had been providing. Then Jennie closed her eyes, stretched forth her arms, and said: "Take my hand, Louise; I'm a stranger in paradise".

Needless to say, I was furious at this unparalleled intrusion upon free enterprise. How dared they demand to "snoop" in private financial records, disbursements, confidential contracts and agreements? "It is as though", I said on the historic three-hour, coast-to-coast radio broadcast which I bought (following Father Coughlin and pre-empting the Eddie Cantor, Manhattan Merry-go-round and Major Bowes shows) "That Man in the White House, like some despot of yore, insisted on reading my diary, raiding my larder and ransacking my <lingerie!>" My impassioned plea for civil rights created a landslide of correspondence and one sponsor even asked me to consider replacing the Eddie Cantor comedy hour on a permanent basis. But what quarter could a poor defenseless woman expect from a dictator who would even make so bold as to close all of the banks in our great nation? The savage barbarian hordes of red Russian Communism descended on the Athens that was mighty Metronome, sacking and despoiling with their Bolshevistic battle cry of "Soak the rich"! After an unspeakable siege, lasting the better part of two months, it was announced that the studio "owed" the government a tax debt in excess of eight million dollars while I, who had always remained aloof from

such iniquitous practices as paying taxes on the salary I had earned and the little I legally inherited as Morris' helpless relict, was "stung" with a personal bill of such astronomical proportions as to "wipe out" all but a fraction of my poor, hard-come-by savings. I was also publicly reprimanded, dragged through the mud by the radical press and made a figure of fun by such leftist publications as <The New Republic, The New Yorker, Time> and the <Christian Science Monitor>. It was then that I availed myself of the rights of a citizen and declared the income tax unconstitutional. The litigation was costly and seemingly endless. I fought like a tigress but by the time I appealed my case to the Supreme Court (1937), Mr& Roosevelt and his "henchmen" had done their "dirty work" all too well, even going so far as to attempt to "pack" the highest tribunal in the land in order to defeat little me. Presidential coercion had succeeded not only in poisoning the courtiers, "toadies" and sycophants of the "bench" against me, but it had been so far-reaching as to discourage any lawyer in the nation from representing me! I was ready, like Portia, to present my own brief. But the Supreme Court wouldn't even <hear> my case! My plea was unanimously voted down and "thrown out". Again, my name was on all the front pages. I was, it seemed, <persona non grata> in every quarter, but not entirely without a staunch following of noted political thinkers and students of jurisprudence. As Charles Evans Hughes said, "Miss Poitrine's limitations as an actress are exceeded only by her logic as a litigant". Albert Einstein was quoted as saying: "The workings of the woman's mind amaze me". Henry Ford spoke of me as "utterly astounding". Heywood Broun wrote: "Belle Poitrine is the most original thinker since Caligula", and even F&D&R& had to concede that "if the rest of this nation showed the foresight and patriotism of Miss Poitrine, America would rapidly resemble ancient Babylon and Nineveh". Not only were the court costs prohibitive, but I was subjected to crippling fines, in addition to usurious interest on the unpaid "debts" which the government claimed that Metronome and I owed- a severe financial blow. Nor, as Manny said, had the notoriety done my career "any good". My enemies were only too anxious to level against me such charges as "reactionary", "robber baroness", and even "traitor"! Traitor indeed! I point now with pride to the fact that, long ere the Committee on Un-American Activities, the Minute Women, the Economic Council and other such notable "watchdog" organizations were so much as heard of, I was Hollywood's leading bulwark against communism, fighting single-handedly "creeping socialism" against such insuperable odds as the Fascio-Communist troops of the ~NRA, ~PWA, ~WPA, ~CCC and an army of more than twenty-two million mercenaries whom F&D&R& employed secretly, through the transparent ruse of regular "relief" checks. Needless to say, my art suffered drastically during this turbulent period. Could it do otherwise? Even though I have always had a genius for "throwing myself" into every role and "playing it for all it's worth", no actress can be expected to do her best work when her fortune, her reputation, her livelihood, her home and her nation itself are

all imperilled. Such sweeping distractions are hardly conducive to "Oscar" winning performances. I tried my hardest, with little help, may I say, from my husband and leading man, but somehow the outside pressures were too severe. Having (through <my> unflagging effort and devotion) achieved stardom, a fortune and a world-renowned wife at an age when most young men are casting their first vote, Letch proceeded to neglect them all. Never a "quick study", he now made no attempt to learn his "lines" and many a mile of film was wasted, many a scene- sometimes involving as many as a thousand fellow thespians- was taken thirty, forty, fifty times because Miss Poitrine's co-star and "helpmate" had never learned his part. Each time Letch "went up" in his "lines", <I> was the one to be patient, helpful and apologetic while <he> indulged in outbursts of temperament, profanity and abuse, blaming others, going into "sulks" and, on more occasions than I care to count, storming off the "set" for the rest of the day. As for his finances, I was never privileged to know exactly how much money Letch had "salted away". It was I who paid for our little home, the food, the liquor, the servants- even Letch's bills at his tailor and the Los Angeles Athletic Club. Never once did he buy me a single gift and for our third anniversary he gave me a dislocated jaw. (But that is another story.) As for his private monies, they were rapidly dissipated in drinking, gaming and carousing. More than once I was confronted by professional gamblers, "bookies", loan "sharks", gangsters, "thugs" and "finger men"- people of a class I did not even know existed- to repay my husband's staggering losses, "or else **h" I shuddered to think that someone so dear to me could even associate with such a sinister <milieu>. And at three different times during our turbulent marriage strange girls, with the commonest of accents, telephoned to announce to me that Letch had sired their unborn children! Having the deepest of maternal instincts, my heart fairly bled when I thought of the darling pink and white "bundles from heaven" I would have proudly given my husband. "Ah, you're too old", was invariably his ungallant and untrue retort whenever I suggested "starting a family". Letch had made it abundantly clear that he did not care for the company of my own precious daughter. I now felt it wiser to keep Baby-dear in school and- during the summers- at a camp run by the Society of Friends all year around. Her presence only made Letch more distant and irritable and, in the hurry of buying Chateau Belletch, I had neglected to consider a room for Baby-dear, so there was no place to put her, anyhow. (I sometimes feel that God, in His infinite wisdom, <wants> us to have these inexplicable little lapses of memory. It almost always works out for the best.)

Yet I adored this man, Letch Feeley, why, I cannot say. With faint

heart and a brave smile, I endured his long absences from Chateau Belletch, his coldness, his indifference, his slights and his abuse. The times I can recall when I was publicly humiliated by him- lovely dinner parties in our Trianon Suite where the collation was postponed and postponed and postponed, only to be served dry and overcooked

at a table where the host's chair was vacant; a "splash party" at the new pool, which I had built in the hope of keeping Letch away from public beaches, when Letch and a certain Aquacutie stayed underwater together for the better part of an hour; a lovely Epiphany party at Errol Flynn's, on which sacred occasion Letch stole away with an unknown "starlet", leaving me "high and dry" to get home as best I could. These are but a sampling of the insults I endured. As Mrs. Letch Feeley, was it any wonder that I, once <the> social arbiter of Filmdom, was excluded from the smart entertainments given by the Astaires, the Coopers, the Gables, the Colmans, the Rathbones, the Taylors, the Thalbergs and such devout, closely knit families as the Barrymores and the Crosbys? As Letch's antisocial conduct increased, our invitations decreased and my heart was in my mouth whenever I played hostess at a fashionable "screenland" gathering. Between 1935 and 1939 Letch and I made ten films together, each less successful, both artistically and commercially, than the one before it. Our last joint venture, <Sainted Lady>, a deeply religious film based on the life of Mother Cabrini, and timed so that its release date would coincide with the beatification of America's first saint in November, 1938, was a fiasco from start to finish. As I was playing Mother Cabrini, the picture was actually "all mine", with nearly every scene built around me. But in order to keep Letch in the public eye and out of trouble, I wrote in a part especially for him- that of a dashing ruffian who "sees the light" and is saved by the inspiring example of Mother Cabrini. And did he appreciate my efforts on his behalf? Did he trouble to memorize the very small part which I had "tailor-made" to his specifications, a role eventually cut down to three short speeches? Did he show the rest of the cast- numbering four thousand- the consideration of arriving at the studio punctually- or even at all? <He did not!> The "shooting" went on for eight months! Most of our working days were spent on the telephone calling "bookies", illegal gambling dens, a certain "residential club for young actresses", more than a hundred different bars or the steam room of the athletic club. Whenever he deigned to appear at the studio he was "hung over", uncooperative, rude and insulting. He made many tasteless, irreverent and <un>funny remarks, not only about me in the title role, but about religion in general. By the time the film was released we were three million dollars over-spent, war was imminent and the public apparently had forgotten all about Mother Cabrini. Thanks to Letch Feeley and the terrible strain he imposed on me, the notices were few and unfavorable. Only George Santayana seemed to understand and appreciate the film when he wrote: "Miss Poitrine has perpetrated the most eloquent argument for the Protestant faith yet unleashed by Hollywood". But it was small consolation. In a rare fit of anger and spite, I "farmed out" my own husband to a small and most undistinguished studio to make one picture as a form of punishment. (An actor must have discipline.) The film was called <The Diet of Worms>, which I felt was just what Letch deserved. It turned out to be a life of Martin Luther, of all things! It was a disaster! In clothes, Letch simply did not project. He was laughed

off the screen. At the same time, however, I availed myself of the services of that great English actor and master of make-up, Sir Gauntley Pratt, to do a "quickie" called <The Mystery of the Mad Marquess>, in which I played a young American girl who inherits a haunted castle on the English moors which is filled with secret passages and sliding panels and, unbeknownst to anyone, is still occupied by an eccentric maniac. It was a "potboiler" made on a "shoestring" and not the sort of film I like, as all I had to do was look blank and scream a great deal. My heart was not in it, but, oddly enough, it remains the most financially successful picture of my career. (I watched it on television late one night last week and it "stands up" remarkably well, even twenty years later.) Letch had returned from his <debacle> unrepentant and more badly behaved than before. I really loved that boy, and, in a feverish attempt to preserve our marriage and to try to revive the wonderful, wonderful person Letch had once been, I took my troubles to Momma, hoping that her earthy advice would help me. "If I could only think of something at the studio, near me, to absorb his boundless energy", I said. "What is Letch interested in"? "Bookies, booze and babes", Momma said bluntly. Her reply stung me, but this was too important to let my hurt make any difference. "I can't turn the studio into a gambling hell or a saloon", I said.

Up to date, however, his garden was still more or less of a mess, he hadn't even started his workshop and if there was a meadow pond in the neighborhood he hadn't found it. It wasn't his fault that these things were so. The difficulty was that each day seemed to produce its quota of details which must be cleaned up immediately.

As a result, life had become a kind of continuous make-ready. Once he disposed of these items which screamed so harshly for attention, he could undertake the things which really counted. Then, at last, his day would fall into an ordered pattern and he would be free to read, or garden or just wander through the woods in the late afternoon, accompanied by his dogs. His dogs? He had almost forgotten them, although they had played such an important part in his early dreams. Then they had always been romping around him on these walks, yelping with delight, dashing off into the bushes on fruitless hunting expeditions, returning to jump up on him triumphantly with muddy paws. Dogs did something to one's ego. They were constantly assuring you that you were one of the world's great guys. Regardless of how much of a slob you knew yourself to be, you could be certain they would never find out- and even if they did it would make no difference.

Now it became increasingly apparent that there were to be no dogs in the picture. What in the world were you going to do with a lot of dogs when you left for town on Monday afternoons? You certainly couldn't take them into the little apartment and if you tried to farm them out for two or three days every week they would become so confused that they would have nervous breakdowns. Why in the world couldn't he live in one place the way everyone else seemed to? It

worried him, this inability to get the simplest things done in the course of a day. He would wake up in the middle of the night and fret about it. How in the world had he formerly found time to build up a business, raise a family, be on half a dozen boards, work actively on committees and either go out in the evening or plow through the contents of a bulging brief case? Was it possible that as people grow older the nature of time changed? Could it be that it speeded up for the aged in some mysterious way, as if a bored universe were skipping through the end of the chapter just to get it over with? Or was the answer less metaphysical? Did older people work more slowly? Did it take a man of sixty-five longer to write a letter, shave, clean out a barn, read a newspaper, than a man of thirty? Did men become perfectionists as they grew older, polishing, polishing, reluctant to let go? It might be that certain people were born with a compulsion to complicate their lives, while others could live blissfully motionless almost indefinitely, like lizards in the sun, too indolent to blink their eyes. Perhaps it was his misfortune, or good fortune, whichever way one looked at it, to belong to the former group, and he was struggling unconsciously to build up pressure in a world which demanded none, which was positively antagonistic to it. And then again perhaps the reason why he couldn't find time to do any of the things he had planned to do after retirement: reading, roaming, gardening, lying on his back and watching the clouds go by, was because he didn't want to do them. There was no compulsion behind them. They could be done or left undone and nobody really gave a damn. During all his busy life he had only done things which had to be done. This habit had become so fixed over the years that it seemed futile to do anything for which no one was waiting. He looked at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. It was five minutes after four. On some distant farm a rooster crowed and, far down the valley, an associate answered. He turned over impatiently and pulled the sheet over his head against the treacherous encroachment of the dawn.

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AT LEAST

HE COULD BUY THE equipment for his workshop. Thus committed, action might follow. He went down to Mills and Bradley's Hardware Store and bought a full set of carpenter's tools, including a rotary power saw and several other pieces of power machinery that Mr& Mills said were essential for babbiting and doweling, whatever <they> were. He also bought a huge square of pegboard for hanging up his tools, and lumber for his workbench, sandpaper and glue and assorted nails, levels and ~T squares and plumb lines and several gadgets that he had no idea how to use or what they were for. "There", said Mr& Mills. "That'll get you started. Best not to get everything at once. Add things as you find you need 'em". He didn't even ask the cost of this collection. After all, if you were going to set up a workshop you had to have the proper equipment and that was that. When he returned home, the station wagon loaded with tools,

Jinny had gone with a friend to some meeting in the village, using the recently purchased second car. He was glad. It gave him a chance to unload the stuff and get it down to the cellar without a barrage of acid comments. He had made such a fuss about buying that second car that he knew he was vulnerable. He piled everything neatly in a corner of the cellar and turned to stare at the blank stone wall. That was where the pegboard would go on which he would hang his hand tools. In front of it would be his workbench. The old nightmare which had caused him so many wakeful hours came charging in on him once more, only this time he couldn't pacify it with a sleeping pill and send it away. How in the world did one attach a pegboard to a stone wall? How did one attach anything to a stone wall, for that matter? After the pegboard there would be the paneling. He sat down on an old box and focused on the problem. Perhaps one bored holes in the stone with some kind of an electric gadget. But then, when you stuck things into the holes, why didn't they come right out again? It all seemed rather hopeless. He turned his attention to the workbench. Perhaps that was the first thing to do. A workbench had a heavy top and sturdy legs, but how did you attach sturdy legs to a heavy top so that the whole thing didn't wobble like a newborn calf and ultimately collapse when you leaned on it? Mr& Mills had done some figuring on a scrap of paper and given him the various kinds of boards and two-by-fours which, properly handled, would, he had assured him, turn into a workbench. They lay on the cellar floor in a disorderly pile. Mr& Crombie poked at it gingerly with his foot. How could anyone know what to do with an assortment like that? Perhaps he had better have someone help him put up the pegboard and build the workbench- someone who knew what he was about. Then at least he would have a place to hang his tools and something to work on. After that everything should be simpler. He went upstairs to phone Crumb. To his amazement he reached him. Mr& Crumb was laid up with a bad cold. He didn't seem to think that attaching a pegboard to a stone wall was much of a problem and he tossed off the building of the worktable equally lightly. The only trouble was that he himself was tied up on the school job. That was why he hadn't been able to finish the porch. No, he didn't know of any handyman-carpenter. There wasn't any such thing any more. Carpenters all wanted steady work and at the moment every mother's son for twenty miles around that could hammer nails for twenty-five dollars a day was working on the school job. There was a fellow named Blatz over Smithtown way. Nobody liked to hire him because you never could tell when he was going to be taken drunk. Mr& Crumb would probably see him at Lodge Meeting the next night. If he was sober, which was doubtful, he'd have him get in touch with Mr& Crombie. Mr& Blatz had been at least sober enough to remember to telephone and he turned out to be the greatest boon that had come into Mr& Crombie's life since he moved to Highfield, in spite of the fact that he didn't work very fast or very long at a time, and he didn't like to work at all unless Mr& Crombie hung around and talked to him. He said he was the lonely type and working in a cellar you saw funny things coming out of

the cracks in the wall if they wasn't nobody with you. So Mr& Crombie sat on a wooden box and talked in order to keep Mr& Blatz's mind from funny things. At the same time he watched carefully to see how one attached pegboards to stone walls, but Mr& Blatz was usually standing in his line of vision and it all seemed so simple that he didn't like to disclose his ignorance. While Mr& Blatz was putting up the pegboards and starting the workbench, Mr& Crombie told him of this idea about paneling the whole end of the cellar. Mr& Blatz agreed that this would be pretty. Without further discussion he appeared the next morning with a pile of boards sticking over the end of his light truck and proceeded with the paneling, which he then stained and waxed according to his taste. "Now", he said, "we got to put in some outlets for them power tools; then a couple of fluorescent lamps over the workbench an' I guess we're about through down here". It all did look very efficient and shipshape. There was no question of that. "By the way", said Mr& Blatz, packing his tools into a battered carrier, "them power tools needs extra voltage. I guess you know about that. Before you use 'em the light company's got to run in a heavy line and you'll need a new fuse box for the extra circuits. That ain't too bad 'ceptin' the light company's so busy you can't ever get 'em to do nothin'". Instead of being depressed by this news, Mr& Crombie was actually relieved. At least the moment was postponed when he had to face the mystery of the power tools. He followed Mr& Blatz up the cellar stairs. As usual, Mrs& Crombie was standing in the midst of a confusion of cooking utensils. Mr& Blatz sat down in the only unoccupied kitchen chair. "Well", he said, "got your man fixed up nice down there. He oughta be able to build a new house with all them contraptions". Mr& Crombie watched his wife with an anxious expression. "I was just sayin' to him that I'm all ready now for anything else you want done". Mr& Crombie couldn't remember his saying any such thing. "Oh, that's wonderful", cried Mrs& Crombie. "I have a thousand things for you to do. Doors that won't open, and doors that won't close and shelves and broken **h" "But those are the things I built the <workshop> for", protested Mr& Crombie. "Those are the things <I> can do, now that I'm set up". "I've been waiting to get these things done for months", she said. "We won't live long enough if I wait for you, besides which you don't need to worry- there'll be plenty more". But the discussion was academic. Mr& Blatz was already taking measurements for a shelf above the kitchen sink.

#AMBIGUITY#

Nothing in English has been ridiculed as much as the ambiguous use of words, unless it be the ambiguous use of sentences. Ben Franklin said, "Clearly spoken, Mr& Fogg. You explain English by Greek". Richard Brinsley Sheridan said, "I think the interpreter is the hardest to be understood of the two". And a witty American journalist remarked over a century ago what is even more

true today, "Many a writer seems to think he is never profound except when he can't understand his own meaning". There are many types of ambiguity and many of them have been described by rhetoricians under such names as amphibology, parisology, and other ologies. In common parlance they would be described as misses- misinterpreters, misunderstanders, misdirectors and kindred misdeeds. One species of ambiguity tries to baffle by interweaving repetition. "Did you or did you not say what I said you said, because Jane said you never said what I said"? Another woman, addressing Christmas cards, said to her husband: "We sent them one last year but they didn't send us one, so they probably won't send us one this year because they'll think we won't send them one because they didn't last year, don't you think, or shall we"? Such ambiguous exercises compound confusion by making it worse compounded, and they are sometimes expanded until the cream of the jest sours. Ambiguity of a non-repetitious kind describes the dilemma one girl found herself in. "I'm terribly upset", she told a girl-friend. "I wrote Bill in my last letter to forget that I had told him that I didn't mean to reconsider my decision not to change my mind- and he seems to have misunderstood me". Evidently Bill was another of those men who simply don't understand women. Another case involves a newspaper reporter who tripped up a politician. "Mr& Jones, you may recall that we printed last week your denial of having retracted the contradiction of your original statement. Now would you care to have us say that you were misquoted in regard to it"? Questions like this, framed in verbal fog, are perhaps the only kind that have ever stumped an experienced politician. They recall Byron's classic comment: "I wish he would explain his explanation". Similarly, when a reporter once questioned Lincoln in cryptic fashion, Lincoln refused to make any further statement. "I fear explanations explanatory of things explained", he said, leaving the biter bit- and bitter. The obscurity of politicians may not always be as innocent as it looks. "Senator", said an interviewer, "your constituents can't understand from your speech last night just how you stand on the question". "Good"! replied the Senator. "It took me five hours to write it that way". The <misplaced modifier> is another species more honored in the observance of obscurity than in the breach. This creates an amusing effect because its position in a sentence seems to make it apply to the wrong word. A verse familiar to all grammarians is the quatrain: "I saw a man once beat his wife When on a drunken spree. Now can you tell me who was drunk- The man, his wife, or me"? The "wooden-leg" gag of vaudeville, another standby of this sort, had endless variations.

""There's a man outside with a wooden leg named Smith". "What's the name of his other leg""? Another stock vaudeville gag ran: "Mother is home sick in bed with the doctor". When radio came in, it continued the misplaced modifier in its routines as a standard device. ""Do you see that pretty girl standing next to the car with slacks on"? "I see

the girl but I don't see the car with slacks on"". In recent years gagwriters have discovered this brand of blunder and thus the misplaced modifier has acquired a new habitat in the gagline. In one cartoon a family is shown outside a theater with the head of the family addressing the doorman: "Excuse me, but when we came out we found that we had left my daughter's handbag and my wife's behind".

Journalism supplies us with an endless run of such slips. Not long ago a newspaper advised those taking part in a contest that "snapshots must be of a person not larger than **f inches".

Classified ads are also chockfull of <misrelated constructions>. Readers of the <Reader's Digest> are familiar with such items which often appear in its lists of verbal slips, like the ad in a California paper that advertised "House for rent. View takes in five counties, two bedrooms". Since brevity is the soul of ambiguity as well as wit, newspaper <headlines> continually provide us with amusing samples. "Officials Meet on Rubbish. Many Shapes in Bathtubs. Son and Daughter of Local Couple Married".

Apart from misplaced modifiers and headlines, journalism contributes a wide variety of comic ambiguities in both editorial and advertising matter. A weekly newspaper reported a local romance: "**h and the couple were married last Saturday, thus ending a friendship which began in their schooldays". An item in the letters column of a newspaper renewed a subscription, adding: "I personally enjoy your newspaper as much as my husband". Then there was the caterer's ad which read: "ARE YOU GETTING MARRIED OR HAVING AN AFFAIR? We have complete facilities to accommodate 200 people". The newspaper too is the favorite habitat of the <anatomical>. This slip is so-called because its semi-ambiguous English always seems to refer to a person's anatomy but never quite means what it seems to say. Samples: He walked in upon her invitation. She kissed him passionately upon his reappearance. He kissed her back. Not without good reason has the anatomical been called jocular journalese. In news items a man is less often shot in the body or head than in the suburbs. "While Henry Morgan was escorting Miss Vera Green from the church social last Saturday night, a savage dog attacked them and bit Mr& Morgan on the public square".

Such items recall the California journalist who reported an accident involving a movie star: "The area in which Miss N- was injured is spectacularly scenic". The double meaning in the anatomical made it a familiar vaudeville device, as in the gags of Weber and Fields. When a witness at court was asked if he had been kicked in the ensuing rumpus, he replied, "No, it was in the stomach". Strangely enough, this always brought the house down. Apart from journalese and vaudeville gags, the anatomical is also found in jocular literature. A conscientious girl became the secretary of a doctor. Her first day at work she was puzzled by an entry in the doctor's notes on an emergency case. It read: "Shot in the lumbar

region". After a moment of thought, her mind cleared and, in the interest of clarity, she typed into the record: "Shot in the woods".

There are many grammatical misconstructions other than dangling modifiers and anatomicals which permit two different interpretations. At the home of a gourmet the new maid was instructed in the fine points of serving. "I want the fish served whole, with head and tail", the epicure explained, "and serve it with lemon in mouth". The maid demurred. "That's silly- lemon in mouth", she said. But since the gourmet insisted that it is done that way at the most fashionable dinners, the girl reluctantly agreed. So she brought the fish in whole, and she carried a lemon in her mouth. Another specimen of such double-entendre is illustrated by a woman in a department store. She said to the saleslady, "I want a dress to put on around the house". The puzzled saleslady inquired, "How large is your house, Madam"? This saleslady was a failure in the dress department and was transferred to the shoe department. When a customer asked for alligator shoes, she said, "What size is your alligator"?

The <comic indefinite> comprises an extensive class of comedy. One species is restricted to statements which are neither explicit nor precise regarding a particular person, place, time or thing. A woman met a famous author at a literary tea. "Oh, I'm so delighted to meet you", she gushed. "It was only the other day that I saw something of yours, about something or other, in some magazine". This baffling lack of distinct details recalls the secretary whose employer was leaving the office and told her what to answer if anyone called in his absence. "I may be back", he explained, "and then again, I may not". The girl nodded understandingly. "Yes, sir", she said, "is that definite"? An old-fashioned mother said to her modern daughter, "You must have gotten in quite late last night, dear. Where were you"? The daughter replied, "Oh, I had dinner with- well, you don't know him but he's awfully nice- and we went to a couple of places- I don't suppose you've heard of them- and we finished up at a cute little night club- I forget the name of it. Why, it's all right, isn't it, Mother"? Her woolly-minded parent agreed. "Of course, dear", she said. "It's only that I like to know where you go".

No less ambiguous was the indefiniteness of a certain clergyman's sermon. "Dearly beloved", he preached, "unless you repent of your sins in a measure, and become converted to a degree, you will, I regret to say, be damned to a more or less extent". This clergyman should have referred to Shakespeare's dictum: "So-so is a good, very good, very excellent maxim. And yet it is not. It is but so-so".

<Indefinite reference> also carries double-meaning where an allusion to one person or thing seems to refer to another. A news item described the launching of a ship: "Completing the ceremony, the beautiful movie star smashed a bottle of champagne over her

stern as she slid gracefully down the ways into the sea". This is not unlike the order received by the sergeant of an army motor pool: "Four trucks to Fort Mason gym, 7:30 tonight, for hauling girls to dance. The bodies must be cleaned and seats wiped off".

A politician was approached by a man seeking the office of a minor public official who had just died. "What are my chances for taking Joe's place"? he asked. "If you can fix it up with the undertaker", returned the politician, "it's all right with me".

The manager of a movie theater received a telephone call from a woman who was equally indefinite. "What have you got on today"? she inquired. "A blue suit", he answered. "Who's in it"? she continued. "I am", he said. There was a short pause for reflection. "Oh", said the woman, "I've seen that picture already".

Another brand of indefinite reference arises out of the use of the <double verb>. When a question contains two verbs, the response does not make clear which of them is being answered.

The moonlit night was made for romance, and he had been looking at her soulfully for some time. Finally he asked, "Do you object to petting"? "That's one thing I've never done", she said promptly. He thought a moment, then inquired, "You mean petted"? "No", she smiled, "objected". Replies to requests for character reference are notorious for their evasive double-entendre. It would be hard to find anything more equivocal than: "I cannot recommend him too highly". Another less ambiguous case read as follows: "The bearer of this letter has served me for two years to his complete satisfaction. If you are thinking of giving him a berth, be sure to make it a wide one". In the comedy of indefinite reference, <it-wit> occupies a prominent place because of its frequent occurrence. Ambiguity arises when the pronoun <it> carries a twofold reference. Two friends were talking. One said, "When I get a cold I buy a bottle of whiskey for it, and within a few hours it's gone". The speaker referred to the whiskey but his friend thought he meant the cold. It-wit is a misnomer because it covers slips as well as wit. An excited woman was making an emergency call over the phone: "Doctor, please come over right away. My husband is in great pain."

I CALLED the other afternoon on my old friend, Graves Moreland, the Anglo-American literary critic- his mother was born in Ohio- who lives alone in a fairy-tale cottage on the Upson Downs, raising hell and peacocks, the former only when the venerable gentleman becomes an angry old man about the state of literature or something else that is dwindling and diminishing, such as human stature, hope, and humor. My unscientific friend does not believe that human stature is measurable in terms of speed, momentum, weightlessness, or distance from earth, but is a matter of the development of the human

mind. After Gagarin became the Greatest Man in the World, for a nation that does not believe in the cult of personality or in careerism, Moreland wrote me a letter in which he said: "I am not interested in how long a bee can live in a vacuum, or how far it can fly. A bee's place is in the hive". "I have come to talk with you about the future of humor and comedy", I told him, at which he started slightly, and then made us each a stiff drink, with a trembling hand. "I seem to remember", he said, "that in an interview ten years ago you gave humor and comedy five years to live. Did you go to their funeral"? "I was wrong", I admitted. "Comedy didn't die, it just went crazy. It has identified itself with the very tension and terror it once did so much to alleviate. We now have not only what has been called over here the comedy of menace but we also have horror jokes, magazines known as Horror Comics, and sick comedians. There are even publications called <Sick> and <Mad>. The <Zeitgeist> is not crazy as a loon or mad as a March hare; it is manic as a man". "I woke up this morning", Moreland said, "paraphrasing Lewis Carroll. Do you want to hear the paraphrase"? "Can I bear it"? I asked, taking a final gulp of my drink, and handing him the empty glass. "Just barely", he said, and repeated his paraphrase: "The time has come", the walrus said, "To speak of manic things, Of shots and shouts, and sealing dooms Of commoners and kings".

Moreland fixed us each another drink, and said, "For God's sake, tell me something truly amusing". "I'll try", I said, and sat for a moment thinking. "Oh yes, the other day I reread some of Emerson's <English Traits,> and there was an anecdote about a group of English and Americans visiting Germany, more than a hundred years ago. In the railway station at Berlin, a uniformed attendant was chanting, 'Foreigners this way! Foreigners this way!' One woman- she could have been either English or American- went up to him and said, 'But <you> are the foreigners'". I took a deep breath and an even deeper swallow of my drink, and said, "I admit that going back to Ralph Waldo Emerson for humor is like going to a modern musical comedy for music and comedy".

"What's the matter with the music"? Moreland asked. "It doesn't drown out the dialogue", I explained.

"Let's talk about books", Moreland said. "I am told that in America you have non-books by non-writers, brought out by non-publishers for non-readers. Is it all non-fiction"? "There is non-fiction and non non-fiction", I said. "Speaking of nonism: the other day, in a story about a sit-down demonstration, the Paris <Herald Tribune> wrote, 'The non-violence became noisier'. And then Eichmann was quoted as saying, in non-English, that Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jews was nonsense". "If we cannot tell evil, horror, and insanity from nonsense, what is the future of humor and comedy"? Moreland asked, grimly. "Cryptic", I said. "They require, for existence, a brave spirit

and a high heart, and where do you find these? In our present era of Science and <Angst,> the heart has been downgraded, to use one of our popular retrogressive verbs". "I know what you mean", Moreland sighed. "Last year your Tennessee Williams told our Dilys Powell, in a television program, that it is the task of the playwright to throw light into the dark corners of the human heart. Like almost everybody else, he confused the heart, both as organ and as symbol, with the disturbed psyche, the deranged glands, and the jumpy central nervous system. I'm not pleading for the heart that leaps up when it beholds a rainbow in the sky, or for the heart that with rapture fills and dances with the daffodils. The sentimental pure heart of Galahad is gone with the knightly years, but I still believe in the heart of the George Meredith character that was not made of the stuff that breaks". "We no longer have Tom Moore's and Longfellow's 'heart for any fate', either", I said.

"Moore and Longfellow didn't have the fate that faces us", Moreland said. "One day our species promises co-existence, and the next day it threatens co-extinction". We sat for a while drinking in silence. "The heart", I said finally, "is now either in the throat or the mouth or the stomach or the shoes. When it was worn in the breast, or even on the sleeve, we at least knew where it was". There was a long silence. "You have visited England five times in the past quarter-century, I believe", my host said. "What has impressed you most on your present visit"? "I would say depressed, not impressed", I told him. "I should say it is the turning of courts of law into veritable theatres for sex dramas, involving clergymen and parishioners, psychiatrists and patients. It is becoming harder and harder to tell law courts and political arenas from the modern theatre". "Do you think we need a new Henry James to re-explore the Anglo-American scene"? he asked. "Or perhaps a new Noe^l Coward"? "But you must have heard it said that the drawing-room disappeared forever with the somnolent years of James and the antic heyday of Coward. I myself hear it said constantly- in drawing-rooms. In them, there is usually a group of Anglo-Americans with tragicomic problems, worthy of being explored either in the novel or in the play or in comedy and satire". I stood up and began pacing. "If you are trying to get us out of the brothel, the dustbin, the kitchen sink, and the tawdry living-room, you are probably wasting your time", Moreland told me. "Too many of our writers seem to be interested only in creatures that crawl out of the woodwork or from under the rock". "Furiouser and furiouser", I said. "I am worried about the current meanings of the word 'funny'. It now means ominous, as when one speaks of a funny sound in the motor; disturbing, as when one says that a friend is acting funny; and frightening, as when a wife tells the police that it is funny, but her husband hasn't been home for two days and nights". Moreland sat brooding for a full minute, during which I made each of us a new drink. He took his glass, clinked it against mine, and said, <"Toujours gai,> what the hell"! borrowing a line from Don Marquis' Mehitabel. "Be careful

of the word 'gay', for it, too, has undergone a change. It now means, in my country, homosexual", I said. "Oh, I forgot to say that if one is taken to the funny house in the funny wagon, he is removed to a mental institution in an ambulance. Recently, by the way, I received a questionnaire in which I was asked whether or not I was non-institutionalized". ##

MY HOST went over and stared out the window at his peacocks; then he turned to me. "Is it true that you believe the other animals are saner than the human species"?

"Oh, that is demonstrable", I told him. "Do you remember the woman in the French Alps who was all alone with her sheep one day when the sun darkened ominously? She told the sheep, 'The world is coming to an end'! And the sheep said- all in unison, I have no doubt- 'Ba-a-a'! The sound mockery of sheep is like the salubrious horse laugh". "That is only partly non-nonsense", he began. "If you saw the drama called <Rhinoceros>", I said, "think of the effect it would have on an audience of rhinos when the actor on stage suddenly begins turning into a rhinoceros. The rhinos would panic, screaming 'Help'!- if that can be screamed in their language". "You think the Russians are getting ahead of us in comedy"? Moreland demanded.

"Non-God, no", I said. "The political and intellectual Left began fighting humor and comedy years ago, because they fear things they do not understand and cannot manage, such as satire and irony, such as humor and comedy. Nevertheless, like any other human being upon whom the spotlight of the world plays continually, Khrushchev, the anti-personality cultist, has become a comic actor, or thinks he has. In his famous meeting with Nixon a couple of years ago he seemed to believe that he was as funny as Ed Wynn. But, like Caesar, he has only one joke, so far as I can find out. It consists in saying, 'That would be sending the goat to look after the cabbage'. Why in the name of his non-God doesn't he vary it a bit"?

"Such as"? Moreland asked. "Such as 'sending the cat to guard the mice', or 'the falcon to protect the dove', or most terribly sharp of all, 'the human being to save humanity'".

"You and I have fallen out of literature into politics", Moreland observed. "What a nasty fall was there"! I said. Moreland went over to stare at his peacocks again, and then came back and sat down, restively. "The world that was once foot-loose and fancy-free", he said, "has now become screw-loose and frenzy-free. In our age of Science and <Angst> it seems to me more brave to stay on Earth and explore inner man than to fly far from the sphere of our sorrow and explore outer space". "The human ego being what it is", I put in, "science fiction has always assumed that the creatures on the planets of a thousand larger solar systems

than ours must look like gigantic tube-nosed fruit bats. It seems to me that the first human being to reach one of these planets may well learn what it is to be a truly great and noble species".

"Now we are leaving humor and comedy behind again", Moreland protested.

"Not in the largest sense of the words", I said.

"The other day Arnold Toynbee spoke against the inveterate tendency of our species to believe in the uniqueness of its religions, its ideologies, and its virtually everything else. Why do we not realize that no ideology believes so much in itself as it disbelieves in something else? Forty years ago an English writer, W& L& George, dealt with this subject in <Eddies of the Day,> and said, as an example, that 'Saint George for Merry England' would not start a spirit half so quickly as 'Strike frog-eating Frenchmen dead'!"

"There was also <Gott strafe Angleterre">, Moreland reminded me, "and <Carthago delenda est,> or if you will, <Deus strafe Carthage>. It isn't what the ideologist believes in, but what he hates, that puts the world in jeopardy. This is the force, in our time and in every other time, that urges the paranoiac and the manic-depressive to become head of a state. Complete power not only corrupts but it also attracts the mad. There is a bitter satire for a future writer in that". "Great satire has always been clearly written and readily understandable", I said. "But we now find writers obsessed by the nooks and crannies of their ivory towers, and curiously devoted to the growing obscurity and complexity of poetry and non-poetry. I wrote a few years ago that one of the cardinal rules of writing is that the reader should be able to get some idea of what the story is about.

One day, the children had wanted to get up onto General Burnside's horse. They wanted to see what his back felt like- the General's. He looked so comfortable being straight. They wanted to touch the mystery. Arlene was boosting them up when the policeman came by. He was very rude. Arlene had a hard voice, too, this time. The policeman's eyes rather popped for a second; but then Arlene got another tone in a hurry, and she said, "If it wasn't for these dear children"- The policeman got a confused, funny look on his face, and he had answered kind of politely, "Now, look here, lady: I know you got to entertain these kids and all. But this is a public park and it's a city ordinance that the statues cannot be crawled on". Arlene was so ashamed that she hung her head when she said, "Yes, sir". The policeman walked on, but he looked back once. That had happened on the day when two other unusual things had occurred. Arlene had taught them a new way to have fun in their little private area; and they had told their mother about the tumbles. In matters of exact information, that kept her one step behind developments; and so they were consistently true to their principles. "Never mind", Arlene had said, after the policeman had left, having pursued the usual unco-operative course

of grownups. "Never mind. I know something that is much more fun that we can do on our little lawn". "What is it"? asked the children, whose reflexes and replies were invariably so admirably normal and predictable. Maybe that was why they were cordial and loyal towards the unpredictability of Arlene. "Just you wait", advised Arlene, echoing the dialogue in a recent British movie.

And when they had got to their little lawn, they had had a most twirlingly magnificent time. First, Arlene had put them through some rapid somersaults. They had protested that <that> wasn't any surprise. "Just you wait", said Arlene again, as though she were discovering the pleasantly tingling insinuations of that handy little sturdy statement. "This is a warm-up". "Is it anything like cooked-over oatmeal"? asked one of the children.

"Not the least bit", Arlene snapped. One of the many things that was so nice about her was that she always took your questions seriously, particularly your very, very serious questions. Those were especially the ones that all other grownups laughed at loudest. She would sometimes even get a little hard on you, she took you so seriously. But not hard for very long. Just long enough to make you feel important.

"Now", said Arlene, eventually, making them both sit in formation on a big root of a live oak, the sort of root that divided itself and made their bottoms sag down and feel comfortable. "Now, we're going to be like what General Burnside and his horse make us think of". The children looked at each other and sagged their bottoms down even more comfortably than ever. Their curiosity went happily out of bounds. Then, Arlene threw herself backwards and wiggled in a way that was just wonderful. She held herself that way and turned her head towards them and laughed and winked. "Imagine being able to laugh and wink when you're like the top part of that picture frame at home", one of them said. They both laughed and winked back. "I'm General Burnside's horse, upside down", Arlene said, sort of gaspingly, for her: even she had to breathe kind of funny when she was in that position. She made General Burnside's horse's belly do so funny when it was upside down. Then, she was back on her feet, winking and smiling that enormous smile (she had lots of wonderful big teeth that you never would have suspected she had when she was not smiling). And she would wink and throw kisses. They both tried to keep smiling and winking for a long time, but it made <their> lips and eyelids tremble. But they kept on clapping for a long, long time. "This time", Arlene said, and she even kept on wiggling a little bit while she was just talking, "<you're> going to tell me what I am and what I'm doing. It all has something to do with General Burnside and his horse".

This time, it was so grand; they could tell exactly what it was. It was General Burnside's horse running in a circle. His legs shook, and the shaking went right on up his body through his hips to his shoulders. "That's the General's horse", one of them cried

out. The other remarked, in a happy laughter, "That's a funny old horse". The first one said, "He sure does shake. <He's old>". Then there was the General kissing his wife. They had to be told that one. But it was even funnier after they had been told. Their father, when he came back from those many business trips, just bumped their mother on the forehead with his lips and asked if anybody had thought to mix the martinis and put them in the electric icebox. But not General Burnside. He was the funniest man. He never could keep still, even when he didn't move his feet.

Then, <they> had to get up and be General Burnside. Or his horse. All they could think of was to run around in circles, kicking their legs out. It wasn't very funny. Then, they said General Burnside was going to jump over his horse's head; and they did some somersaults. But that wasn't very funny, either. "You ought to shake", Arlene advised them. And Arlene showed them how to begin. She also taught them to sing "I wish I could shimmy like my sister Kate". That helped a lot. They were clumsy, but they were beginning to catch on. They also caught on a little bit on how to smile a lot without your lips trembling. "Imagine you won't get your allowance if you're caught not smiling- or smiling with your lips trembling too much", Arlene suggested. That helped a great deal. ##

They were a little late in getting home. "I'm sorry, Mrs& Minks", Arlene said in a tone so low you could hardly hear it. My mother constituted herself the voice of all of us. "It's perfectly understandable, Arlene", my mother said in a friendly way. "I suppose you all were playing and forgot"?

"Yes, ma'am", the children chorused heartily.

We couldn't help laughing. The children rushed off to get rid of their sweaters; and Arlene began tapping the kitchen door open. "Arlene's a good girl", my uncle remarked to us; but he said it too soon, for it came out just before the tap to which the door responded. That tap had a slight bangish quality. "She really is a dear little thing", my mother agreed. Her upper lip lifted slightly. She was biting into a small red radish; and that action always caused her to lift her lip from the sting of the thing. Also, she lived in continual fear of finding a white worm curled up in a neat, mean little heap at the white center of the radish. She would try to see over the bulge of her cheeks and somewhat under her teeth to the place where she was biting. It never worked, naturally; but it made her look unusual. Also, when she had bitten off half of the small radish, she found the suspense unbearable; and she would snatch the finger-held half of the radish out to where she could inspect it. One could hear a very faint, ladylike sigh of relief. Actually, it was inaudible to anyone not expecting it. But the warm joy of her brown eyes was open to the general public. Later on, the children

told her further about somersaulting. "It must be <awfully> good for them. And <awfully> kind of Arlene", she told us later. "But do you know something curious"? she added. "I reached into that funny little pocket that is high up on my dress. I have no notion why I reached. And I found a <radish>. Was it an omen? I thought for a second. But I would not pamper myself in that silly way. I opened the window and threw the radish out". Then, my mother blushed at this small lie; for she knew and we knew that it was cowardice that had made one more radish that night just too impossible a strain. ##

Arlene became indispensable; nobody could have told why. But she was. It was in the air. A friend of my father's came to dinner. He was passing through town and phoned to say hello. As a result, he was persuaded out to dinner. As a matter of fact, this happened every four or five months. Sometimes, he coincided with my father's being at home. Sometimes, as at this juncture, he did not. But he was always persuaded out. he liked children, in a loathsome kind of way; the two youngest in our family always had to be brought in and put through tricks for his entertainment. When he had left, I could never remember whether he had poked them in their middles, laughingly, with a thick index finger or whether he was merely so much the sort of person who did this that one assumed the action, not bothering to look. The children loathed him, too. This evening, they were pushed in from the breakfast room, with odds and ends of dessert distributed over them. There had been some coconut in it, for I remember my mother's taking a quick glance at a stringy bit of this nut on the cheek of one of them and then putting down her radish with a shiver. They were pushed gently into the room by Arlene- whose only part appearing were hands that crept quickly back around to the kitchen side of the door. We had just sat down. "Tell Mr& Gorboduc what you're doing these days", my mother advised the children, ceremonially. There was an air of revolt about the children- even irreverence for their own principles. This could be told chiefly from a sort of head-tossing and prancing, a horselike balkiness of demeanor. Possibly, the coconut-containing dessert had brought up bitter problems of administration. But, at the beginning, this stayed just in the air. "We go to the park with this nice lady", one of them said. "We have good times".

This happy bulletin convulsed Mr& Gorboduc. "You <do>"? he asked, between wheezes of laughter. He was forced to wipe his eyes. "You don't step on the flowers, do you? Eh"? One of the children maneuvered out of range of the poking index finger.

"No", he said. "We don't". Mr& Gorboduc took a swig of his sherry. He was so long thinking that my mother had time to inspect her sherry for dregs. Usually, this was done when attention was diverted by someone else's long, boring story. But this time she was nervous: she was open. Mr& Gorboduc was finally

in command of his mind again. "Tell me- what do you do at the park"? he asked. This was delivered in a forthright way, without coyness and over-pretended interest- an admirable way with children. Only, unfortunately, he could not remove from his voice a nagging insinuation of the direct command. This nettled the children into the revelation of exact truth, a sacrifice of their secret superiority over grown people, but a victory in the wide fields of perpetration and illegitimate accomplishment. "We bump", one said; and the other went on to development of the idea. "We grind, too", he said. My mother was beside herself with curiosity. "Say that again", she pleaded. She laughed a little and tossed the dregs rakishly around in her glass. "You what"? She could see that Mr& Gorboduc was intrigued; the hostess in her took over. She was rollickingly happy. "You what"? My uncle looked at Mr& Gorboduc. He read Henry James and used to pretend profundity through eye-beamings at people. Mr& Gorboduc looked down. He would not look up. He was very funny about the whole thing. #@#

{PUERI AQUAM DE SILVAS AD AGRICOLAS PORTANT}, a delightful vignette set in the unforgettable epoch of pre-Punic War Rome. Marcellus, the hero, is beset from all sides by the problems of approaching manhood. The story opens on the eve of his fifty-third birthday, as he prepares for the two weeks of festivities that are to follow. Suddenly, a messenger arrives and, just before collapsing dead at his feet, informs him that the Saracens have invaded Silesia, the home province of his affianced. He at once cancels the celebrations and, buckling on his scimitar, stumbles blindly from the house, where he is hit and killed by a passing oxcart. #@#

{THE ALBANY CIVIC OPERA's} presentation of Spumoni's immortal <Il Sevigli del Spegititgninino>, with guest contralto Hattie Sforzt. An unusual, if not extraordinary, rendering of the classic myth that involves the rescue of Prometheus from the rock by the U&S& Cavalry was given last week in the warehouse of the Albany Leather Conduit Company amid cheers of "Hubba hubba" and "Yalagaloo pip pip"!

After a "busy" overture, the curtain rises on a farm scene- the Ranavan Valley in northern Maine. A dead armadillo, the sole occupant of the stage, symbolizes the crisis and destruction of the Old Order. Old Order, acted and atonally sung by Grunnfeu Arapacis, the lovely Serbantian import, then entered and delivered the well-known invocation to the god Phineoppus, whereupon the stage is quite unexpectedly visited by a company of wandering Gorshek priests, symbolizing Love, Lust, Prudence and General Motors, respectively. According to the myth, Old Order then vanishes at stage left and reappears at extreme stage right, but director Shuz skillfully sidesteps the rather gooshey problem of stage effects by simply having Miss Arapacis walk across the stage. The night <we> saw it, a rather unpleasant situation arose when the soloist refused to approach the

armadillo, complaining- in ad-lib- that "it smelled". We caught the early train to New York. #@#

{THE DHARMA DICTIONARY},

a list of highly unusual terms used in connection with Eurasian proto-senility cults. It's somewhat off the beaten track, to be sure, but therein lies its variety and charm. For example, probably very few people know that the word "visrhanik" that is bantered about so much today stems from the verb "bouanahsha": to salivate. Likewise, and equally fascinating, is the news that such unlikely synonyms as "pratakku", "sweathruna", and the tongue-twister "nnuolapertar-it-vuh-karti-biri-pitknoumen"

all originated in the same

village in Bathar-on-Walli

Province and are all used to express

sentiments concerning British "imperialism". The terms are fairly safe to use on this side of the ocean, but before you start spouting them to your date, it might be best to find out if he was a member of Major Pockmanster's Delhi Regiment, since resentment toward the natives was reportedly very high in that outfit. #@#

{THE

BREEZE AND CHANCELLOR NEITZBOHR}, a movie melodrama that concerns the attempts of a West German politician to woo a plaster cast of the Apollo Belvedere. As you have doubtless guessed already, the plot is plastered with Freudian, Jungian, and Meinckian theory. For example, when the film is only four minutes old, Neitzbohr refers to a small, Victorian piano stool as "Wilhelmina", and we are thereupon subjected to a flashback that informs us that this very piano stool was once used by an epileptic governess whose name, of course, was Doris (the English equivalent, when passed through middle-Gaelic derivations, of Wilhelmina). For the remainder of the movie, Chancellor Neitzbohr proceeds to lash the piano stool with a slat from a Venetian blind that used to hang in the pre-war Reichstag. In this manner, he seeks to expunge from his own soul the guilt pangs caused by his personal assaults against the English at Dunkirk. As we find out at the end, it is not the stool (symbolizing Doris, therefore the English) that he is punishing but the piece of Venetian blind. And, when the slat finally shatters, we see him count the fragments, all the while muttering, "He loves me, he loves me not". After a few tortuous moments of wondering who "he" is, the camera pans across the room to the plaster statue, and we realize that Neitzbohr is trying to redeem himself in the eyes of a mute piece of sculpture. The effect, needless to say, is almost terrifying, and though at times a bit obscure, the film is certainly a much-needed catharsis for the "repressed" movie-goer. #@#

{THE MUSIC OF BINI SALFININISTAS,

CAPITAL ~LP @63711-R}, one of the rare recordings of this

titanic,

yet unsung, composer. Those persons who were lucky enough to see

and hear the performance of his work at the Brest-Silevnirov Festival in August, 1916, will certainly welcome his return to public notice; and it is not unlikely that, even as the great Bach lay dormant for so many years, so has the erudite, ingenious SalFininistas passed through his "purgatory" of neglect. But now, under the guidance of the contemporary composer Marc Schlek, Jr., a major revival is under way. As he leads the Neurenschatz Skolkau Orchestra, Schlek gives a tremendously inspired performance of both the Baslot and Rattzhenfuut concertos, including the controversial Tschilwyk cadenza, which was included at the conductor's insistence. A major portion of the credit should also go to flautist Haumd for his rendering of the almost impossible "Indianapolis" movement in the Baslot. Not only was Haumd's intonation and phrasing without flaw, but he seemed to take every tonal eccentricity in stride. For example, to move (as the score requires) from the lowest ~F-major register up to a barely audible ~N minor in four seconds, not skipping, at the same time, even <one> of the 407 fingerings, seems a feat too absurd to consider, and it is to the flautist's credit that he remained silent throughout the passage. We would have preferred, however, to have had the rest of the orchestra refrain from laughing at this and other spots on the recording, since it mars an otherwise sober, if not lofty, performance.

As Broadway itself becomes increasingly weighted down by trite, heavy-handed, commercially successful musicals and inspirational problem dramas, the American theatre is going through an inexorable renaissance in that nebulous area known as "off-Broadway". For the last two years, this frontier of the arts has produced a number of so-called "non-dramas" which have left indelible, bittersweet impressions on the psyche of this veteran theatregoer. The latest and, significantly, greatest fruit of this theatrical vine is <The>, an adaptation of Basho's classic frog-haiku by Roger Entwhistle, a former University of Maryland chemistry instructor. Although the play does show a certain structural amateurishness (there are eleven acts varying in length from twenty-five seconds to an hour and a half), the statement it makes concerning the ceaseless yearning and searching of youth is profound and worthy of our attention. The action centers about a group of outspoken and offbeat students sitting around a table in a cafeteria and their collective and ultimately fruitless search for a cup of hot coffee. They are relentlessly rebuffed on all sides by a waitress, the police, and an intruding government tutor. The innocence that they tried to conceal at the beginning is clearly destroyed forever when one of them, asking for a piece of lemon-meringue pie, gets a plate of English muffins instead. Leaving the theatre after the performance, I had a flash of intuition that life, after all (as Rilke said), is just a search for the nonexistent cup of hot coffee, and that this unpretentious, moving, clever, bitter slice of life was the greatest thing to happen to the American theatre since Brooks Atkinson retired.

Aging but still precocious, French feline <enfant terrible> Francoisette Lagoon has succeeded in shocking jaded old Paris again, this time with a sexy ballet scenario called <The Lascivious

Interlude>, the story of a nymphomaniac trip-hammer operator who falls hopelessly in love with a middle-aged steam shovel. A biting, pithy parable of the all-pervading hollowness of modern life, the piece has been set by ~Mlle

Lagoon to a sumptuous score (a single motif played over and over by four thousand French horns) by existentialist hot-shot Jean-Paul Sartre. Petite, lovely Yvette Chadroe plays the nymphomaniac engagingly. Ever since <Bambi>, and, more recently, <Born Free>, there have been a lot of books about animals, but few compare with Max Fink's wry, understated, charming, and immensely readable <My Friend, the Quizzical Salamander>. Done in the modern style of a "confession", Fink tells in exquisite detail how he came to know, and, more important, love his mother's pet salamander, Alicia. It is not an entirely happy book, as Mrs& Fink soon becomes jealous of Alicia and, in retaliation, refuses to continue to scrape the algae off her glass. Max, in a fit of despair, takes Alicia and runs off for two marvelous weeks in Burbank (Fink calls it "the most wonderful and lovely fourteen days in my whole life"), at the end of which Alicia tragically contracts Parkinson's disease and dies. This brief resume hardly does the book justice, but I heartily recommend it to all those who are <engages> with the major problems of our time. Opera in the Grand Tradition, along with mah-jongg, seems to be staging a well-deserved comeback. In this country, the two guiding lights are, without doubt, Felix Fing and Anna Pulova. Fing, a lean, chiseled, impeccable gentleman of the old school who was once mistaken on the street for Sir Cedric Hardwicke, is responsible for the rediscovery of Verdi's earliest, most raucous opera, <Nabisco>,

a sumptuous <bout-de-souffle> with a haunting leitmotiv that struck me as being highly reminiscent of the Mudugno version of "Volare". Miss Pulova has a voice that Maria Callas once described as "like chipping teeth with a screw driver", and her round, opalescent face becomes fascinatingly reflective of the emotions demanded by the role of Rosalie. The Champs Elysees is literally littered this summer with the prostrate bodies of France's beat-up beatnik <jeunes filles>. Cause of all this commotion: squat, pug-nosed, balding, hopelessly ugly Jean-Pierre Bravado, a Bogartian figure, who plays a sadistic, amoral, philosophic Tasti-Freeze salesman in old New-Waver Fredrico de Mille Rossilini's endlessly provocative film, <A Sour Sponge>. Bravado has been alternately described as "a symbol of the new grandeur of France and myself" (De Gaulle) and "a decadent, disgusting slob"! (Norman Mailer), but no one can deny that the screen crackles with electricity whenever he is on it. Soaring to stardom along with him, Margo Felicity Brighetti, a luscious and curvaceously beguiling Italian starlet, turns in a creditable performance as an airplane mechanic.

The battle of the drib-drool continues, but most of New York's knowing sophisticates of Abstract Expressionism are stamping their feet impatiently in expectation of ~V (for Vindication) Day,

September first, when Augustus Quasimodo's first one-man show opens at the Guggenheim. We have heard that after seeing Mr. Quasimodo's work it will be virtually impossible to deny the artistic validity and importance of the whole abstract movement. And it is thought by many who think about such things that Quasimodo is the logical culmination of a school that started with Monet, progressed through Kandinsky and the cubist Picasso, and blossomed just recently in Pollock and De Kooning. Quasimodo defines his own art as "the search for what is not there". "I paint the nothing", he said once to Franz Kline and myself, "the nothing that is behind the something, the inexpressible, unpaintable 'tick' in the unconscious, the 'spirit' of the moment resting forever, suspended like a huge balloon, in non-time". It is his relentless and unwavering adherence to this revolutionary artistic philosophy that has enabled him to paint such pictures as "The Invasion of Cuba". In this work, his use of non-color is startling and skillful. The sweep of space, the delicate counterbalance of the white masses, the over-all completeness and unity, the originality and imagination, all entitle it to be called an authentic masterpiece. I asked Quasimodo recently how he accomplished this, and he replied that he had painted his model "a beautiful shade of red and then had her breathe on the canvas", which was his typical tongue-in-cheek way of chiding me for my lack of sensitivity.

DEAR SIR: LET ME BEGIN by clearing up any possible misconception in your minds, wherever you are. The collective by which I address you in the title above is neither patronizing nor jocose but an exact industrial term in use among professional thieves. It is, I am reliably given to understand, the technical argot for those who engage in your particular branch of the boost; i.e., burglars who rob while the tenants are absent, in contrast to hot-slough prowlers, those who work while the occupants are home. Since the latter obviously require an audacity you do not possess, you may perhaps suppose that I am taunting you as socially inferior. Far from it; I merely draw an etymological distinction, hoping that specialists and busy people like you will welcome such precision in a layman. Above all, disabuse yourselves of any thought that I propose to vent moral indignation at your rifling my residence, to whimper over the loss of a few objets d'art, or to shame you into rectitude. My object, rather, is to alert you to an aspect or two of the affair that could have the gravest implications for you, far beyond the legal sanctions society might inflict. You have unwittingly set in motion forces so malign, so vindictive, that it would be downright inhumane of me not to warn you about them. Quite candidly, fellows, I wouldn't be in your shoes for all the rice in China. As you've doubtless forgotten the circumstances in the press of more recent depredations, permit me to recapitulate them briefly. Sometime on Saturday evening, August 22nd, while my family and I were dining at the Hostaria dell' Orso, in Rome, you jimmied a window of our home in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and let yourselves into the premises. Hastening to the attic, the temperature of which was easily hotter than the Gold Coast, you proceeded to mask the windows with a fancy wool coverlet, some khaki pants,

and the like, and to ransack the innumerable boxes and barrels stored there. What you were looking for (unless you make a hobby of collecting old tennis rackets and fly screens) eludes me, but to judge from phonograph records scattered about a fumed-oak Victrola, you danced two tangos and a <paso doble,> which must have been fairly enervating in that milieu. You then descended one story, glommed a television set from the music room- the only constructive feature of your visit, by the way- and, returning to the ground floor, entered the master bedroom. From the curio cabinet on its south wall and the bureaus beneath, you abstracted seventeen ivory, metal, wood, and stone sculptures of Oriental and African origin, two snuffboxes, and a jade-handled magnifying glass. Rummaging through a stack of drawers nearby, you unearthed an antique French chess set in ivory and sandalwood, which, along with two box Kodaks, you added to your haul. Then, having wrapped the lot in an afghan my dog customarily slept on, you lammed out the front door, considerately leaving it open for neighbors to discover.

So much for the tiresome facts, as familiar to you, I'm sure, as to the constables and state troopers who followed in your wake. The foregoing, aided by several clues I'll withhold to keep you on your toes, will pursue you with a tenacity worthy of Inspector Javert, but before they close in, gird yourselves, I repeat, for a vengeance infinitely more pitiless. Fourteen of the sculptures you took posses properties of a most curious and terrifying nature, as you will observe when your limbs begin to wither and your hair falls out in patches. In time, these minor manifestations will multiply and effloresce, riddling you with frambesia, the king's evil, sheep rot, and clonic spasm, until your very existence becomes a burden and you cry out for release. All this, though, is simply a prelude, a curtain-raiser, for what ensues, and I doubt whether any Occidental could accurately forecast it. If, however, it would help to intensify your anguish, I can delimit the powers of a few of the divinities you've affronted and describe the punishment they meted out in one analogous instance. Hold on tight. First of all, the six figures of the Buddha you heisted- four Siamese heads, a black obsidian statuette in the earth-touching position, and a large brass figure of the Dying Buddha on a teakwood base. Now, you probably share the widespread Western belief that the Lord Buddha is the most compassionate of the gods, much more so than Jehovah and Allah and the rest. 'Fess up- don't you? Well, ordinarily he is, <except> (as the Wheel of the Law specifies) toward impious folk who steal, disturb, or maltreat the Presence. Very peculiar retribution indeed seems to overtake such jokers. Eight or ten years ago, a couple of French hoods stole a priceless Khmer head from the Musee Guimet, in Paris, and a week later crawled into the Salpetriere with unmistakable symptoms of leprosy. Hell's own amount of chaulmoogra oil did nothing to alleviate their torment; they expired amid indescribable fantods, imploring the Blessed One to forgive their desecration. Any reputable French interne can supply you with a dozen similar instances, and I'll presently

recount a case out of my own personal experience, but, for the moment, let's resume our catalogue. Whether the pair of Sudanese ivory carvings you lifted really possess the juju to turn your livers to lead, as a dealer in Khartoum assured me, I am not competent to say. Likewise the ivory Chinese female figure known as a "doctor lady" (provenance Honan); a friend of mine removing her from the curio cabinet for inspection was felled as if by a hammer, but he had previously drunk a quantity of applejack. The three Indian brass deities, though- Ganessa, Siva, and Krishna- are an altogether different cup of tea. They hail from Travancore, a state in the subcontinent where Kali, the goddess of death, is worshiped. Have you ever heard of thuggee? Nuf sed **h. But it is the wooden sculpture from Bali, the one representing two men with their heads bent backward and their bodies interlaced by a fish, that I particularly call to your attention. Oddly enough, this is an amulet against housebreakers, presented to the <mem> and me by a local rajah in 1949. Inscribed around its base is a charm in Balinese, a dialect I take it you don't comprehend. Neither do I, but the Tjokorda Agoeng was good enough to translate, and I'll do as much for you. Whosoever violates our roof-tree, the legend states, can expect maximal sorrow. The teeth will rain from his mouth like pebbles, his wife will make him <cocu> with fishmongers, and a trolley car will grow in his stomach. Furthermore- and this, to me, strikes an especially warming note- it shall avail the vandals naught to throw away or dispose of their loot. The cycle of disaster starts the moment they touch any belonging of ours, and dogs them unto the forty-fifth generation. Sort of remorseless, isn't it? Still, there it is. Now, you no doubt regard the preceding as pap; you're tooling around full of gage in your hot rods, gorging yourselves on pizza and playing pinball in the taverns and generally behaving like <U^bermenschen>. In that case, listen to what befell another wisenheimer who tangled with our joss. A couple of years back, I occupied a Village apartment whose outer staircase contained the type of niche called a "coffin turn". In it was a stone Tibetan Buddha I had picked up in Bombay, and occasionally, to make merit, my wife and I garlanded it with flowers or laid a few pennies in its lap. After a while, we became aware that the money was disappearing as fast as we replenished it. Our suspicions eventually centered, by the process of elimination, on a grocer's boy, a thoroughly bad hat, who delivered cartons to the people overhead. The more I probed into this young man's activities and character, the less savory I found him. I learned, for example, that he made a practice of yapping at dogs he encountered and, in winter, of sprinkling salt on the icy pavement to scarify their feet. His energy was prodigious; sometimes he would be up before dawn, clad as a garbage collector and hurling pails into areaways to exasperate us, and thereafter would hurry to the Bronx Zoo to grimace at the lions and press cigar butts against their paws. Evenings, he was frequently to be seen at restaurants like Enrico + Paglieri's or Peter's Backyard drunkenly donning ladies' hats and singing "O Sole Mio". In short, and to borrow an arboreal phrase, slash timber. Well, the odious little toad went along chivying animals and humans who couldn't retaliate,

and in due course, as was inevitable, overreached himself. One morning, we discovered not only that the pennies were missing from the idol but that a cigarette had been stubbed out in its lap. "Now he's bought it", said my wife contentedly. "No divinity will hold still for that. He's really asking for it". And how right she was. The next time we saw him, he was a changed person; he had aged thirty years, and his face, the color of tallow, was crisscrossed with wrinkles, as though it had been wrapped in chicken wire. Some sort of nemesis was haunting his footsteps, he told us in a quavering voice- either an ape specter or Abe Spector, a process-server, we couldn't determine which. His eyes had the same dreadful rigid stare as Dr& Grimesby Roylott's when he was found before his open safe wearing the speckled band. The grocery the youth worked for soon tired of his depressing effect on customers, most of whom were sufficiently neurotic without the threat of incubi, and let him go. The beautiful, the satisfying part of his disintegration, however, was the masterly way the Buddha polished him off. Reduced to beggary, he at last got a job as office boy to a television producer. His <hubris,> deficiency of taste, and sadism carried him straightaway to the top. He evolved programs that plumbed new depths of bathos and besmirched whole networks, and quickly superseded his boss. Not long ago, I rode down with him in an elevator in Radio City; he was talking to himself thirteen to the dozen and smoking two cigars at once, clearly a man <in extremis>. "See that guy"? the operator asked pityingly. "I wouldn't be in his shoes for all the rice in China. There's some kind of a nemesis haunting his footsteps". However one looks at it, therefore, I'd say that your horoscope for this autumn is the reverse of rosy. The inventory you acquired from me isn't going to be easy to move; you can't very well sidle up to people on the street and ask if they want to buy a hot Bodhisattva. Additionally, since you're going to be <hors de combat> pretty soon with sprue, yaws, Delhi boil, the Granville wilt, liver fluke, bilharziasis, and a host of other complications of the hex you've aroused, you mustn't expect to be lionized socially. My advice, if you live long enough to continue your vocation, is that the next time you're attracted by the exotic, pass it up- it's nothing but a headache. As you can count on me to do the same. compassionately yours,

S& J& PERELMAN

#REVULSION IN THE DESERT#

THE DOORS

of the ~D train slid shut, and as I dropped into a seat and, exhaling, looked up across the aisle, the whole aviary in my head burst into song. She was a living doll and no mistake- the blue-black bang, the wide cheekbones, olive-flushed, that betrayed the Cherokee strain in her Midwestern lineage, and the mouth whose only fault, in the novelist's carping phrase, was that the lower lip was a trifle too voluptuous. From what I was able to gauge in a swift, greedy glance,

the figure inside the coral-colored boucle dress was stupefying.