

FROU-FROU, OR THE FUTURE OF VERTIGO

JUST in case anybody here missed me at the Mermaid Tavern this afternoon when the bowl of sack was being passed, I spent most of it reclining on my chaise longue in a negligee trimmed with marabou, reading trashy bonbons and eating French yellow-backed novels. What between amnesia (inability to find my rubbers) and total recall (ability to remember all the cunning things I did last night), you might think I'd have sense enough to sit still and mind my own business. But oh no—not I. I had to start looking through *Harper's Bazaar* yet.

If a perfectly strange lady came up to you on the street and demanded, "Why don't you travel with a little raspberry-colored cashmere blanket to throw over yourself in hotels and trains?" the chances are that you would turn on your heel with dignity and hit her with a bottle. Yet that is exactly what has been happening for the past twenty months in the pages of a little raspberry-colored magazine called *Harper's Bazaar*. And don't think it does any good to pretend there is no magazine called *Harper's Bazaar*. I've tried that, too, and all I get is something called "circular insanity." Imagine having both circular insanity and *Harper's Bazaar*!

The first time I noticed this "Why Don't You" department was a year ago last August while hungrily devouring news of the midsummer Paris openings. Without any preamble came the stinging query "Why don't you rinse your blond child's hair in dead champagne, as they do in France? Or pat her face gently with cream before she goes to bed, as they do in England?" After a quick look into the nursery, I decided to let my blond child go to hell her own way, as they do in America, and read on. "Why don't you," continued the author, spitting on her hands, "twist her pigtailed around her ears like macaroons?" I reread this several times to make sure I wasn't dreaming and then turned to the statement of ownership in the back of the magazine. Just because the Marquis de Sade wasn't mentioned didn't fool me; you know as well as I do who must have controlled fifty-one per cent of the stock. I slept across the foot of the crib with a loaded horse pistol until the next issue appeared.

It appeared, all right, all right, and after a quick gander at the activities of Nicky de Gunzburg, Lady Abdy, and

the Vicomtesse de Noailles, which left me right back where I started, I sought out my "Why Don't You?" column. "Why don't you try the effect of diamond roses and ribbons flat on your head, as Garbo wears them when she says goodbye to Armand in their country retreat?" asked Miss Sly Boots in a low, thrilling voice. I was living in my own country retreat at the time, and as it happened to be my day to go to the post office (ordinarily the post office comes to me), I welcomed this chance to vary the monotony. Piling my head high with diamond roses and ribbons, I pulled on a pair of my stoutest espadrilles and set off, my cat frisking ahead of me with many a warning cry of "Here comes my master, the Marquis of Carabas!" We reached the post office without incident, except for the elderly Amish woman hoeing cabbages in her garden. As I threw her a cheery greeting, Goody Two-shoes looked up, gave a rapid exhibition of Cheyne-Stokes breathing, and immediately turned to stone. In case you ever get down that way, she is still standing there, slightly chipped but otherwise in very good condition, which is more than I can say for the postmaster. When I walked in, he was in process of spitting into the top drawer, where he keeps the money-order blanks. One look at Boxholder 14 and he went out the window without bothering to raise the sash. A second later I heard a frightened voice directing a small boy to run for the hex doctor next door to the Riegels'. I spent the night behind some willows near the Delaware and managed to work my way back to the farm without being detected, but it was a matter of months before I was able to convince the countryside that I had a twin brother, enormously wealthy but quite mad, who had eluded his guards and paid me a visit.

FOR a time I went on a sort of *Harper's Bazaar* wagon, tapering myself off on *Pictorial Review* and *Good Housekeeping*, but deep down I knew I was a gone goose. Whenever I got too near a newsstand bearing a current issue of the *Bazaar* and my head started to swim, I would rush home and bury myself in dress patterns. And then, one inevitable day, the dam burst. Lingered in Brentano's basement over *L'Illustration* and *Blanco y Negro*, I felt the delicious, shuddery, half-swooning sensation of being drawn into the orbit again. On a table behind me lay

a huge stack of the very latest issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, smoking hot from the presses. "Ah, come on," I heard my evil genius whisper, "one little peek can't hurt you. Nobody's looking." With trembling fingers I fumbled through the advertisements for Afghan hounds, foundation garments, and bath foams to the "Why Don't You?" section. Tiny beads of perspiration stood out on my even tinner forehead as I began to read, "Why don't you build beside the sea, or in the center of your garden, a white summer dining-room shaped like a tent, draped with wooden swags, with walls of screen and Venetian blinds, so you will be safe from bugs and drafts?" I recoiled, clawing the air. "No, no!" I screamed. "I won't! I can't! Help!" But already the column was coiling around me, its hot breath on my neck. "Why don't you concentrate on fur jackets of marvelous workmanship and cut, made of inexpensive furs with incomprehensible names? Why don't you bring back from Central Europe a huge white baroque porcelain stove to stand in your front hall, reflected in the parquet? Why don't you buy in a hardware store a plain pine knife-basket with two compartments and a handle—mount this on four legs and you will have the ideal little table to sort letters and bills on, and to carry from your bedside to the garden or wherever you happen to be?" Unfortunately I had only the two legs God gave me, but I mounted those basement stairs like a cheetah, fought off the restraining hands of voluptuous salesladies, and hurtled out into the cool, sweet air of West Forty-seventh Street. I'm sorry I snatched the paper knife out of that desk set, Mr. Brentano, but you can send around a boy for it at my expense. And by the way, do you ever have any call for back numbers of fashion magazines?

—S. J. PERELMAN

