

## IS THERE AN OSTEOSYNCHRONOITRICIAN IN THE HOUSE?

LOOKING back at it now, I see that every afternoon at 4:30 for the past five months I had fallen into an exact routine. First off, I'd tap the dottle from my pipe by knocking it against the hob. I never smoke a pipe, but I like to keep one with a little dottle in it, and an inexpensive hob to tap it against; when you're in the writing game, there are these little accessories you need. Then I'd slip off my worn old green smoking jacket, which I loathe, and start down Lexington Avenue for home. Sometimes, finding myself in my shirtsleeves, I'd have to run back to my atelier for my jacket and overcoat, but as I say, when you're in the writing game, it's strictly head-in-the-clouds. Now, Lexington Avenue is Lexington Avenue—when you've once seen Bloomingdale's and the Wil-Low Cafeteria, you don't go nostalgic all over as you might for the Avenue de l'Observatoire and the Closerie des Lilas.

Anyway, I'd be head down and scudding along under bare poles by the time I reached the block between Fifty-eighth and Fifty-seventh Streets, and my glance into those three shop windows would be purely automatic. First, the highly varnished *Schnecken* in the bakery; then the bones of a human foot shimmying slowly on a near-mahogany pedestal in the shoestore; and finally the clock set in the heel of a congress gaiter at the bootblack's. By now my shabby old reflexes would tell me it was time to buy an evening paper and bury my head in it. A little whim of my wife's; she liked to dig it up, as a puppy does a bone, while I was sipping my cock-tail. Later on I taught her to frisk with a ball of yarn, but to get back to what happened Washington's Birthday:

I was hurrying homeward that holiday afternoon pretty much in the groove, humming an aria from "Runnin' Wild" and wishing I could play the clarinet like a man named Goodman. Just as it occurred to me that I might drug this individual and torture his secret out of him, I came abreast the window of the shoestore containing the bones of the human foot. My mouth suddenly developed that curious dry

feeling when I saw that they were vibrating, as usual, from north to south, every little metatarsal working with the blandest contempt for all I hold dear. I pressed my ear against the window and heard the faint clicking of the motor housed in the box beneath. A little scratch, here and there on the shellac surface showed where one of the more enterprising toes had tried to do a solo but had quickly rejoined the band. Not only was the entire arch rolling forward and backward in an oily fashion, but it had evolved an obscene side sway at the same time, a good deal like the *danse à ventre*. Maybe the foot had belonged to an Ouled-Nail girl, but I felt I didn't care to find out. I was aware immediately of an active desire to rush home and lie down attended by my loved ones. The only trouble was that when I started to leave that place, I could feel my arches acting according to all the proper orthopedic laws, and I swear people turned to look at me as if they heard a clicking sound.

The full devilry of the thing only became apparent as I lay on my couch a bit later, a vinegar poultice on my forehead, drinking a cup of lime-flower tea. That little bevy of bones had been oscillating back and forth all through the siege of Toledo, the Moscow trials, and the Presidential inaugural; this very minute it was undulating turgidly, heedless of the fact the store had been closed two hours. Furthermore, if its progress were not impeded by the two

wires snaffled to the toes (I'll give you that thought to thrash around with some sleepless night), it might by now have encircled the world five times, with a stopover at the Eucharistic Congress in Manila. For a moment the implications were so surrealist that I started up alarmed. But since my loved ones had

gone off to the movies and there was nobody to impress, I turned over and slept like a top, with no assistance except three and a half grains of barbital.

I COULD have reached my atelier the next morning by walking up Third Avenue, taking a cab up Lexington, or even crawling on my hands and

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knees past the shoestore to avoid that indecent window display, but my feet won their unequal struggle with my brain and carried me straight to the spot. Staring hypnotized at the macabre shuffle (halfway between a rumba and a soft-shoe step), I realized that I was hearing a sign from above to take the matter in hand. I spent the morning shopping lower Third Avenue, and at noon, dressed as an attaché of the Department of Sanitation, began to lounge nonchalantly before the store. My broom was getting nearer and nearer the window when the manager came out noiselessly. My ducks must have been too snowy, for he gave one of his clerks a signal and a moment later a policeman turned the corner. Fortunately, I had stashed my civvies in the lobby of Proctor's Fifty-eighth Street Theatre, and by the time the breathless policeman rushed in, I had approached the wicket as cool as a cucumber, asked for two cucumbers in the balcony, and signed my name for Bank Nite. I flatter myself that I brought off the affair rather well.

My second attempt, however, was as fruitless as the first. I padded my stomach with a pillow, grayed my hair at the temples, and entered the shop fiercely. Pointing to the white piping on my vest, I represented myself as a portly banker from Portland, Maine, and asked the manager what he would take for the assets and good will, spot cash. I was about to make him a firm offer when I found myself being escorted out across the sidewalk, the manager's foot serving as fulcrum.

And there, precisely, the matter rests. I have given plenty of thought to the problem, and there is only one solution. Are there three young men in this city, with stout hearts and no dependents, who know what I mean? We can clean out that window with two well-directed grenades and get away over the rooftops. Given half a break, we'll stop that grisly *pas seul* ten seconds after we pull out the pins with our teeth. If we're caught, there's always the cyanide in our belts. First meeting tonight at nine in front of the Railroad Men's Y.M.C.A., and wear a blue cornflower. *Up the rebels!* —S. J. PERELMAN

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S.S. "Ciss".....April 25.  
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—Nova Scotia paper.

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