PDC

P.S.

a lively look at your past and promise

august 1966/sixty cents

P.S. eyes the private eye: a survey by Ron Goulart/an I Dunit by Ed Lacy/a satire by James Thurber/an interview with Rex Stout

also: Avram Davidson/Carlton Brown/Jean Shepherd

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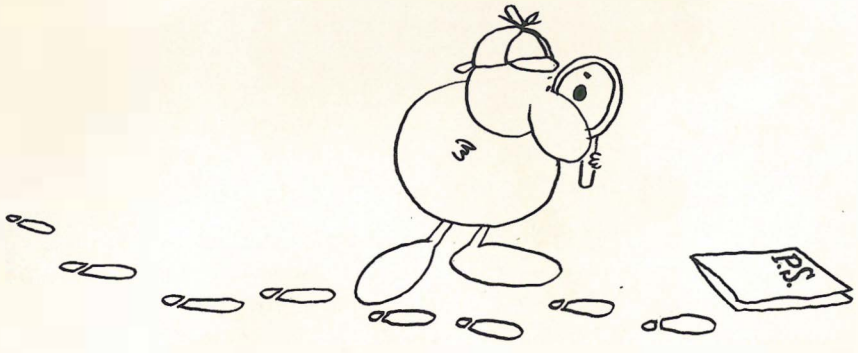
With this, the third issue of P. S., we have expanded our special section on a single subject, as we warned you we would. This issue investigates those investigators of fiction — the legendary private eyes.

Who has not peered with them through a London fog, or prowled knowingly by their sides in the intricate jungle of Manhattan? Who has not, Walter Mitty-like, felt the thrill of being a deductive genius or an invincible pulverizer of thugs? Whoever he is, he has missed a great deal of fun. We issue an open invitation, to buff and novice alike, to pick up your trusty magnifying glass, turn to page five, and enjoy, enjoy.



We have also instigated a couple of new regular features which we think will amuse, and possibly even edify. In "Addendum, With Straw Hat" Avram Davidson brings his odd-ball scholarship to bear on heretofore ignored nooks and crannies of our heritage, and in "Triviata Globus" the redoubtable and slightly magnificent Jean Shepherd calls your attention to various significant straws in the wind which he has culled from his prodigious reading of the world's press.

We have all the above, plus our usual widely assorted articles, essays and what nots by widely assorted people. We hope it adds up to your pleasure.

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PUBLISHER
Joseph W. Ferman

EDITOR
Edward L. Ferman

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Gahan Wilson

ASSITANT EDITOR
Ron Salzberg

ART DIRECTOR
Dick Clark

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In this issue:

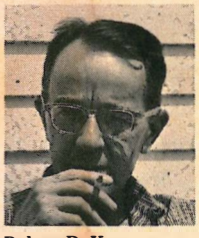
There are indications that the private eye is dusting himself off and beginning to make his way through the piles of last year's office copiers and out of the scrap heap. Paul Newman as "Harper" (the first good private-eye film in some time) is one such indication. If the "new" private eye is seriously to muscle in on the hero racket, an examination of the classics is in order. This is ably provided in our lead article by Ron Goulart, who starts with the first private eye, Race Williams ("You can't make hamburgers without grinding up a little meat.") and works up through Mike Hammer ("Show me a crutch and I'll kick it," etc.). In between are the greats, Marlowe, Spade & Company. Ron Goulart has edited THE HARDBOILED DICKS, a book collection of pulp detective stories which came out late last year and is well worth your attention.

Detective fiction is, of course, still being written — by the carload. One of the men who turns them out is named Ed Lacy. Lacy has hundreds of short stories to his credit as well as two dozen mystery novels (including ROOM TO SWING, winner of a Mystery Writers of America Edgar award). His most recent book, THE HOTEL DWELLERS, is not a mystery, but Mr. Lacy is so closely associated with the genre that at least one review, he tells us, firmly placed the novel in the mystery "category." Lacy's candid comments on his writing career begin on page 8.

Pete Schneider

There are two more views of the detective in this month's P. S. Little need be said here about these beyond dropping the names of the writers involved. The first is a Fred Fox detective story; a parody by the master of parody, James Thurber. The second is an interview with the current master of the classical detective story, Rex Stout.

Acting as a bridge of sorts from our consideration of the detective to the rest of this month's issue is Lou Myers' wild and wacky take-off on the famous Michelson-Morley experiment (in which the two scientists tried, in vain, to measure the variation in the velocity of light). Seems there was no variation, but we can guarantee a change of pace in the cartoons of Lou Myers, which have appeared in *Evergreen* and *Monocle* (among others) and have been collected in book form by Harper & Row.



Robert D. Kempner

Carlton Brown has written for many magazines (including *Esquire, The New Yorker, The Saturday Evening Post*). He says that he "has felt most at home with subjects that Harold Ross rated as 'lowlife' ones and allowed to be treated only occasionally in *The New Yorker*. Have studied Johnson Smith & Company's inventory of joke goods from time to time over the decades with the aim of learning as much as possible about the psychology of the practical joker without going so far as to *be* one." For your information and amusement, we have the results of his study on page 36.

Harvey Aronson lives on Long Island, where he is a staff writer for *Newsday*. "The reason I look grim," [in the photo] he writes, "is that it's a passport photo I had taken a few months ago while covering the Cuban Exodus. I was at Varadero Beach for two weeks and it was a bad scene. Not a pusho in the place." See page 44 for Mr. Aronson's funny appraisal of pushos and other home-made toys.

A radio actress for twenty-five years, Mary Jane Higby is now at work on her memoirs of the Golden Days of Radio. Miss Higby was the star of "When A Girl Marries" and played on most of the other soap operas and mystery shows. Some of the more humorous highlights of her radio recollections are set down for your enjoyment on page 52.

William Tenn's enchanted tale of sorcery among the stoops of Brooklyn appears on page 32, and Gerald Carson offers an informative and (er) spirited account of bourbon's fascinating background on page 57. And, for guaranteed hangover-free stimulation, we can recommend with confidence the first editions of two new P. S. features: "Addendum, With Straw Hat" by Avram Davidson, and "Triviata Globus" by Jean Shepherd. We think that both will be habit forming.

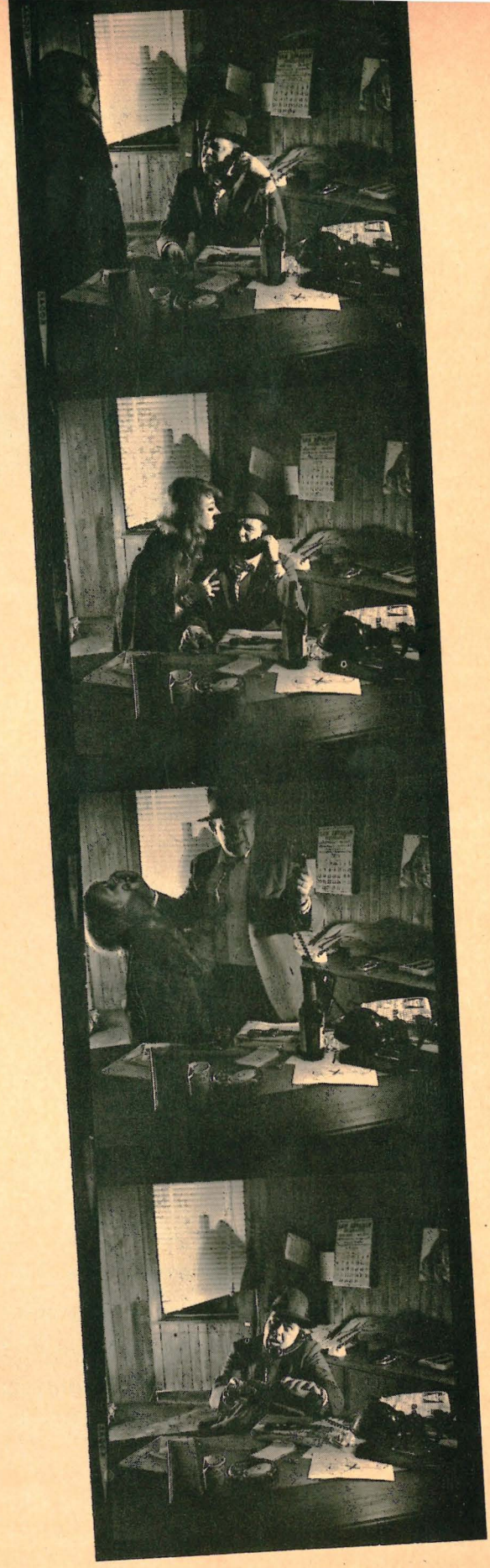
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MONTE CASAZZA

The Private Eye

by Ron Goulart

ON the screen the private eye says, "When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it." A few people in the audience laugh, but most of them don't. They want to believe in Humphrey Bogart, want to believe this calm, sardonic detective does have the motives he claims. Bogart's private eye, still to be seen in art theaters and on late shows, has influenced college boys, French actors and European existentialists. While Bogart will always be the best known of the private eyes, he didn't invent the type. That came earlier.

When he squeezed lead—the show was over.



The private eye was born in the early 1920s. To find him back then you had to look not in the movies or in books but in the pulp magazines. He first appeared in *Black Mask* and by the end of the decade he was in most of the other detective pulpwoods. The private eye could only have happened first in those years after World War I, the years of Prohibition. There had always been aggressive, straight shooting fiction heroes but it took the mood of the 1920s to add cynicism, detatchment, a kind of guarded romanticism and a compulsion toward action. The disillusionment that followed the War, the frustration over the mushrooming gangster control of cities effected the detective story as much as it did mainstream fiction. The same things that bothered the heroes of Hemingway, Dos Passos and Fitzgerald began to unsettle the private detectives. And the Twenties' preoccupation with the American language, the dissatisfaction with Victorian rhetoric and polite exposition began to hit detective story writers.

Black Mask had been started in 1920 with H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan as editors. They weren't with the magazine long and didn't have much to do with introducing the private eye. There were several editors before Joseph T. Shaw took over in 1926. By this time the two writers who had the most influence on the shaping and developing of the new detective were already contributors to the magazine. They were Carroll John Daly and Dashiell Hammett. Shaw had never read a pulp detective story before he took the editor's job but he had a hunch about which way the magazine should go. He kept featuring Daly and he began trying to get more stories like Hammett's. Shaw admired the way Hammett's stories grew out of the characters, how the characters were revealed in terms of action. Years later he was accused of having Hammettized *Black Mask* but in the middle 1920s his instincts were right.

In 1922 Carroll John Daly, a former theater operator, wrote a detective story for *Black Mask* called "The False Burton Combs." It introduced a private detective named Race Williams. Williams was no Sherlock Holmes, no Nick Carter. Here full blown, in fact over blown, was the first of the modern private eyes. Race Williams was a tough, straight shooting, wise talking, pragmatic urban cowboy. He was cynical, didn't trust anybody. He could be sentimental about a girl in trouble. There were no neat, timetable crimes in his world. Mostly he fought against gangsters, crooked politicians and the occasional master criminal Daly couldn't keep from throwing in.

Race Williams didn't get along with the police and they were edgy about him, continually warning him not to be so restless in his gunning down of crooks and sus-

pects. He was always a loner, a man above and outside the system. He arranged things so his idea of justice triumphed. There was nothing that couldn't be solved by action. "It's not what you should have done that counts in life," he said. "It's what you do." The world Race Williams operated in was a nightmare projection of the real world of the Twenties and Thirties. It was a night world, filled with speakeasies, gambling joints, penthouses, rundown hotels. Hoods kept their hat brims pulled low, packed a .45 in the armpit, drove long black cars. There was no safety. The people Williams was trying to help were continually shot at, kidnapped, tortured. Sometimes he'd have to rescue the same girl several times. Despite the dangers and the unpredictability of things, Race Williams tried to keep himself in control. "I don't allow the unexpected to happen, if I can prevent it."

Like many private detectives to follow, Race Williams was impatient and aggressive. In his nearly thirty years as a detective he kicked down innumerable doors, pushed countless bodyguards aside to get at the boss. And he loved shooting—shooting with a big .45 automatic. "I squeezed lead—and the show was over. No hero holding his chest and giving a last message to his surviving countrymen. He was dead five times before he hit the floor." Of another shoot-out he said, "I sent him crashing the gates of hell with my bullet in his brain." Race Williams had the habit of turning to the reader and justifying all this killing. "I closed my finger on the trigger and shot the gunman smack through the side of the head. Hard? Cold-blooded? Little respect for life? Maybe. But after all, it didn't seem to me to be the time to argue the point with the would-be killer." Sometimes he didn't even have to shoot. He just showed his guns. "I leaned slightly forward so for a moment he got the flash of two guns—one under each arm. . . I said simply, 'When you put Race Williams out of a rat trap like this, you'll have to put him out in a cloud of smoke.' "

The word simple appears often in the Carroll John Daly stories. "In that second I let him have it. Simple? Of course it was simple." To Race Williams there was no problem that couldn't be cleared up by simple, active means. In his adventures, as a blurb put it, you found "no long explanations, no discussions of evidence." This vigilante approach would reappear in private eye stories for decades. Carroll John Daly, working quietly in White Plains, New York, had invented a private detective who fitted in with the temperament of the years between the wars.

The private eye Dashiell Hammett created for *Black Mask* in the early Twenties was different. He had none of the swagger or the flash of Race Williams. He didn't even have a name. He worked as an operative for the Continental Detective Agency in San Francisco and his first person adventures were told in a terse, detached style. The Continental Op never bragged about his prowess with his fists or his guns. He quietly, realistically showed you. The cops didn't look on him as a messianic madman. They knew he was a competent professional, and they co-operated with him on cases. Using a restrained vernacular style, using the foggy San Francisco of the 1920s as a setting, Hammett built detective stories with real people, real motives and real murders. Sometimes, though, he did get away with as much improbability and gunplay as Daly.

The short, heavy set Continental Op was both sardonic and sentimental. He, too, would shoot a man if he had to and help a girl who needed protecting. He was quiet about it all. When a client becomes overly dramatic in explaining a problem, the Op tells him, "What's the use of getting poetic about it? If you've got an honest job to be done, and want to pay an honest price for it, maybe I'll take it." Despite the fact that he gets involved at times with sinister Orientals, family curses and religious cults, Hammett's operative has a realistic conception of detective work. "Ninety-nine percent of detective work is a patient collecting of details." This is something Hammett himself must have learned while he worked as a Pinkerton operative. The Op gets drunk now and then. smokes Fatima cigarettes, but when he is on a case he doesn't get involved with women. Most of the early private eyes were celibate. Race Williams was too preoccupied with aggression; the Continental Op didn't think it was professional. When he did feel strongly about a girl, the Op would talk himself and the girl out of it. "Well, good God, sister! I'm only a hired man with a hired man's interest in your troubles."

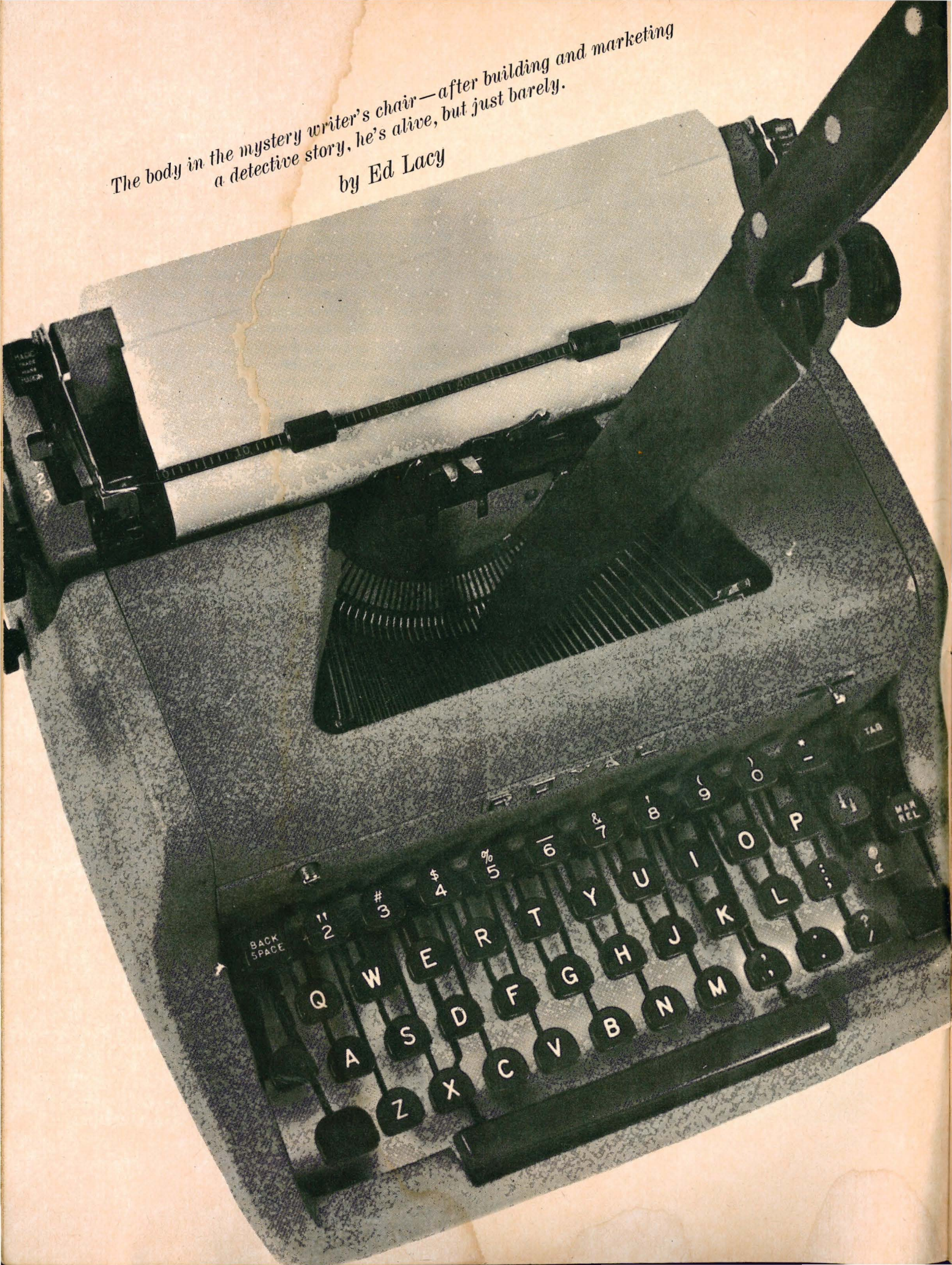
In 1929, in a *Black Mask* serial, Hammett introduced another private detective. Samuel Spade, who undertook the hunt for the Maltese falcon. Spade was a little less detached than the Op, a little less restrained. He had apparently been sleeping with his partner's wife and was not reluctant about doing the same thing with female clients. Still he had his personal code and when his partner is killed, he sets out to avenge him. Spade didn't get along with the law as well as the Op. He puts his own interests ahead of theirs. But he is about as honest as a man can be in the complicated world he has to function in. The Samuel Spade novel introduced a few more of the standard private eye props, particularly the loyal girl secretary who guards the outer office.

After Sam Spade came the deluge, and the Depression

(*continued on page 62*)

The body in the mystery writer's chair—after building and marketing a detective story, he's alive, but just barely.

by Ed Lacy



I dunit. For the past two decades I've lived by my wits, a rough and brash joker, never taking the smallest backward step or crap from anybody. I'm often nasty, arrogant and a stupid-brave SOB. My steel trap brains have

almost been as sharp as my nimble feet, while my hands —man, they are the greatest and fastest! With a snub nosed .38 I can pot a running man a block away (which is damn near impossible), and I've flattened more slobs with a single punch than Dempsey or Louis. (A one punch kayo is such a ring rarity they can be counted on your fingers.)

I've earned a lot of quiet money but never seem to enjoy it—I rarely have a home, a vacation, a family or any responsibilities. I'm never ill or even tired, and I can belt down booze faster than you can pour it with only a mild (if any) hangover. A pistol whipping or beating which would hospitalize a normal man doesn't bother me in the least—I bounce to my big feet and back into action immediately. And the broads! The most beautiful and passionate gals eagerly romp in the hay or on the nearest back seat with me, babes whose sexual capabilities are only surpassed by my own rabbit agility.

Fortunately (the beatings) or unfortunately (all those sexy dames), all this has been done on my typewriter. I've published some two dozen suspense novels in hard and soft cover, plus hundreds of short stories, mostly of the hardboiled dick variety dealing with the "private eye" or the official detective. I've never had a "series" character, like Mike Shayne, Sam Spade, etc., mainly because I find using the same hero over and over boring—for me.

In reality I'm a most gentle fellow, the kind-to-animals-type, who hasn't been in a fist fight since school days, nor have I ever been arrested—not even a traffic ticket. I've never known a real thug, although I know some petty hustlers. I can't solve a real crime, haven't been a cop and I'm a pathetic four beer drunk.

Should you attend one of the monthly meetings of the Mystery Writers of America (Our slogan: Crime doesn't pay—enough), you'd find our members look no different from a gathering of the Village Improvement Society. We are all gentle souls at heart, which might be one reason why we pound such a tough typewriter.

I know of only one real cop who writes mysteries and two retired police officers. There are a few ex-FBI men in the trade, while one of the better suspense writers did his homework the hard way—he actually did time.

Dashiell Hammett, who once was a Pinkerton man, looked like a gaunt clergyman. The one time I met Raymond Chandler he reminded me of a retired bank manager. Jean Potts and Dorothy Salisbury Davis could be school teachers. Cornell Woolrich is a shy and slight man, while John Creasy could be mistaken for a jolly grocer.

I imagine most suspense writers stumbled into the field the way I did, by chance—I found I could make a buck at it. If, for example, I'd found the confession market as profitable—and I sometimes write confession yarns—perhaps I would have turned out sin and repent yarns all these years.

I'm a full time, working, freelance writer, and if you want to call me a hack, I won't be terribly upset. Every person who makes his pork chops from the sale of words is a hack, whether he realizes it or not. I also believe *all* fiction writers, including us honest hacks, are creative writers. You'd be astonished at the creative drive and skill needed to turn out formula stories.

There is a cliche that writing is a "lonely" job, which is part of the mystic halo writers themselves cleverly place around the trade, all a hangover from the not too distant past when few people could read or write. Lonely? Sheer nonsense. Is working in an office or factory a social deal? I work with characters of my own choosing and they'd better be interesting people (to me) or I'm not going to turn out a successful yarn.

Freelance writing is a precarious way to make a dollar, and although I sometimes, but not often, glance upon salaried folk with a tinge of envy, by and large I've found it an interesting trade with ideal working conditions. I do at least 5 pages of rough or finished copy a day, six days a week. This takes about two or three hours, but for the balance of the day or night the back of my mind can be mulling over the plot or other story ideas.

I work at home, rarely wear a tie, and shave only when I feel like it. (Small items, for sure, but sort of important.) This results in too much togetherness at times, and my wife often takes a part time job to escape the house. I've done my daily stint on boats, at the sea shore, in the West Indies and in various European cities. I've never been a big name writer (I know, you never heard of me) nor made the "big money." My income has ranged between five and ten grand a year, and we've lived in modest comfort.

Money has always been an "iffy" deal, as compared to the wage earner who can expect, with reasonable certainty, his Friday check. I approach my mail box each day as if entering a gambling casino. But I've had my happy financial moments, if comparative small ones. A sudden phone call regarding an old *Esquire* story ended with a $3000 check from "Hollywood," although as far as I know the story has never been used. My agent phoned one afternoon to say a paperback company was reprinting some of my old softcover novels and paying $5000. It's a most delightful moment to hear you've made a year's salary in a few seconds. (On the other hand it's frightening to start a novel and know this *has* to pay the rent damn soon.)

We were spending the summer at the sea shore when unexpected royalties of $1700 from paperbacks came in. (Another summer, when I *was* expecting money and dick-

(*continued*)

"Why, Alexi! You can still fit into your spy suit!"

ering to buy a small boat, the bottom fell out of the paperback market and we didn't get a dime.) We returned to the city at the end of September and immediately sailed for France. A 1000-word (three typed pages) short-short I wrote on the boat brought $800 from a now deceased slick, a welcome shock to find waiting for us in the Nice American Express office. (But if I had a dollar for every short-short I've sold for about $25, I'd be back in Nice this second!)

For some reason unknown to me, the U.S. hardboiled mystery novel is widely translated; my own books have seen the light of reprint in Japan (stunning covers, too), South America and almost every European country, including Yugoslavia. (I have thousands of dinars waiting for me in Belgrade, if I can ever get there. This amounts to about fifty bucks, I think.) The advance in most foreign countries isn't much, around $125. The French used to pay as high as $1500, the price changing with their economy. During the Suez crisis it was down to $1000 and Algeria lowered it to about $600. The French now have their own hardboiled mystery writers and good ones. Time marches on and on.

A novel of mine, *Room to Swing* (which won an Edgar as the best mystery novel of 1957), featured a Negro private detective and was concerned in part with the Jim Crow he meets while solving the case, a murder connected with a TV network. This sold very well in Italy, a relatively small and poor country with a fairly high illiteracy rate—and where there isn't any color question nor, at the time, were there TV sets.

I happened to see the book on sale, with a lurid cover, in Viareggio. When an Italian friend told the storekeeper I'd written the book, he gave me a bow and shook my hand as if talking to Hemingway. When I asked, via my Italian buddy, if he had read the novel, the storekeeper said he hadn't, as yet, but was delighted to meet an *author*. In the States being a writer is on a par with being some kind of nut.

Writing a suspense novel is a somewhat odd experience. You put in several months writing it. (Forget those clowns who claim they can bat out a book in a week, a day, or the next second. I'm not calling them liars but it takes me three months, or longer, and I'm a fast typist.) And finally the book is sold. You sign the contract, start eating the advance—and then your novel *vanishes*, as if it was published on Mars.

Six months or a year later you receive a neat parcel post package (not from CARE) with the ten free copies of your book. If it's an original paperback, the cover and title may shock you, but still, there it is, your brainchild, etc. And that can be the last you'll ever hear about or see of the book! Suspense novels are rarely reviewed by our press. This is due to several factors. First, about 90% of our newspapers and magazines never review *any* kind of book. Among those papers which manage to squeeze in a book section, the suspense (mystery, spy, adventure) novel is considered a stepchild and not on a level with contemporary fiction. This is pure snob garbage; in fact I object to the "suspense" label—what novel doesn't have suspense? ("Whodunit" makes me grit my teeth.) By and large I believe "suspense" novels are as well or badly written and as high or low in content as any other modern novel. An easy example: *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* is the best anti-cold war book in years. Granted, mystery novels are not always Literature with a large L, but offhand I can't think of *any* novel published in the last dozen years which fits that handle.

The net result is your novel *may* receive a short review in Anthony Boucher's "Criminals At Large" column in the Sunday *New York Times* or in a similar column Dorothy Hughes runs every few weeks in the *New York Herald Tribune*. It can also get a one line review by Sergeant Cuff in the *Saturday Review* or a one *word* review in the weekend *New York Post*. And that's about it.

Should your novel come out in paperback it may never be reviewed at all. Aside from the hard fact that the paperback publisher rarely advertises in the book pages, which often determines whether a book is reviewed or not, very often they don't bother sending out copies for review, although they swear they do. But as one such publisher once told me, "What's the point? By the time the book might get a review, it will be off the stands anyway. Don't worry, it's the cover that sells the book." Of course this is bunk and if you think writers are mixed-up, you should see the publishing industry.

So your novel, now an original paperback, may not be reviewed, and should the publisher have a poor distribution set-up in your home town, you probably won't even see it on sale! A year later you receive a statement saying it has only sold 65,231 copies and hasn't passed the advance. (Ha-ha!) But you wonder how in hell so many people were able even to see the darn book.

Now, all this results in a pleasant anonymity. I've lived in the same apartment building for years, and most of my neighbors, seeing me walk my dog during the day, wonder how I get time off from my night shift job in some factory to take trips. Even my best friends will ask, "Are you still writing?" although I can have two books on somebody's stand, someplace, at the moment.

Naturally, there are exceptions. When a suspense novel has already sold to the movies, book clubs, etc., and is backed by high powered publicity, it will receive full page reviews, even on the front page of a book section. *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* made a big splash. A recent fact crime book, *In Cold Blood*—you talk your way, Capote, and I'll talk mine; it still is a fact crime book—

had nine out of the 48 pages in the *New York Times Book Review* devoted to it.

This looking down the nose at the suspense novel can also be found in many editorial offices. A sweet kid, just out of college and working as editor in a short-lived paperback house, told me a novel was several thousand words too long. I volunteered to cut it, but she said she had already taken care of the matter and everything was fine. She simply cut out the first chapter.

One of the larger paperback concerns, which has printed many of my novels, once published one with the cover showing a man looking under a bed holding a dead and (of course) nude woman. On seeing the book I casually asked the editor what the cover picture meant, as there wasn't any such incident in the story. He answered quite as casually, "This is a great cover we had for another book but didn't use it. By the by, I wrote in a couple of paragraphs to cover the scene."

You can bet they never would have done that with the so-called "regular" novel.

The changing of titles by publishers bugs me. Some houses believe certain words like *murder, death, sin,* etc., have a magic sales value. A book of mine had a tough detective who suffers a heart attack and when he recovers, like most cardiacs, he has a hard time regaining confidence in himself. I thought *Time Running In* was a dandy title. It was published as *Bugged for Murder*. I've been astonished to see my name on books with titles like: *Woman Aroused, Shakedown for Murder, Harlem Underground* and *Sin in Your Blood*. Rarely does the title have any connection with the plot.

Where does one find ideas for mysteries? Everywhere. I read the newspapers carefully, usually skipping the major crime stories (too many others will try using these), but cut out odd crime items. Some plots are composites of these news items, as my characters are montages of people I've known, seen or heard about. A straight bull fighting documentary on TV started a novel about a series of crimes, in Mexico, the motive being that a famous and daring matador was actually poisoning his bulls when he stuck them with his *banderillas*.

A snatch of street conversation may give me a story idea. I overheard a man complaining about somebody who picked up a rider each morning by blowing his horn at six a.m. The man said, "I could kill that bastard for awakening me every morning." Yes indeed, that became a short-short in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*.

I travel as often as financially possible. Being a stranger gives one a fresh approach; you learn things the natives take for granted. The fact that U.S. passports sold on the European black market for $5000 after World War II formed the basis of a novel. That Americans (without a police record) returning to the States have been approached to bring in *one* shipment of dope made another book. A taxi driver showing me around a West Indian island pointed to the only gambling casino there and said, "This is to attract the U.S. tourist. Many islanders, including the church, were against it, but the government takes a percentage, off the top, which amounts to $100,000 a year, and this has built many schools. The talk is that the casino makes much more and hides the money in their safe, as the government watches their bank deposits." This ended as a novelette in the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, under the title, *The Juicy Mango Caper*.

Whenever somebody tells me, "Have I got a whale of a story for you!" I listen politely but never use it, even though it may sometimes sound like a wonderful plot. The danger is that Joe Blow heard it from Harry Jones, who, in turn, heard it from Tom Smith, who said it was a true incident. Too often it turns out Tom Smith read it as a story in some magazine or in a book, a fact which was lost in the retelling, and you can risk plagiarism by using it.

A mystery writer should be on buddy-buddy terms with a lawyer, a cop and a doctor. If you don't know any, ask around—it's amazing the way people react to a fiction writer. Tell a police officer you're doing a straight article on police work and he'll clam up. Mention that you're doing research for a mystery novel and he reacts as if you'd asked for his autograph and usually will talk all over his mouth. For police details my cop friend doesn't know or isn't positive about, I go to the public relations office of the police department. They've always been most helpful. In asking a lawyer friend about certain court procedures, he illustrated a point by mentioning a case where a bank was being sued because the plaintiff claimed his safe deposit box in the bank had been robbed. Further questioning brought out the fact that these vaults are not quite as safe as we think—needless to add, that became the plot of another book. I met a retired tax employee at a party, and a luncheon with him gave me a dozen plots based on some facts unknown to most people on how folks try to rook Uncle Sam, and often succeed.

Saying I'm a hack doesn't mean I'm a fink. The creative writer, with his deep curiosity about his fellow beings, must care about people, which is rapidly becoming a rare trait in our cynical world. I have never written anything I considered anti-human, jingoistic or bigoted. True, my stories often deal with violence and sex, but neither were invented by writers. (Although there are attempts to shoulder blame on us!) You'll find more real violence and brutality in the daily headlines than any fiction writer could dream up. We live in an age where the screams of a girl being stabbed to death aroused a dozen or so average citizens, sitting in their homes, and not one even bothered to call the police, where Civil Rights workers are mur-

dered and the killers rarely brought to trial or found guilty. At best books can only reflect our way of life, as the use of four letter words in modern novels isn't realism but a mirroring of our peep-hole sex attitude.

I am aware that my writing generally agrees with the publisher's concept of the world. Certainly self-censorship, whether known or not, always sits beside the typewriter. Publishing is big business, the Establishment, the status quo, etc., and any writer who fancies he's pulling the wool over an editor's weary eyes is an idiot. Granted, on rare occasions, in the interests of a fast buck, a publisher may put out a book goosing the Establishment, but these are so infrequent we can forget them. A fast example: most books dealing with the murder of President Kennedy which *disagreed* with the Warren Commission findings, have either been published by the authors themselves or first printed abroad—where they fitted the views of the Establishment there.

There hasn't been a realistic book portrait of the average policeman—the impossible job facing him, his frustration at having to close his eyes to certain crimes, the fact that we have far too many useless and hypocritical laws to enforce. The corruption—which doesn't always touch the average cop but involves his superiors, i.e. dope and numbers couldn't survive a week in any city without the consent of some police and political brass. The fact that the average citizen is a cop-hater—some with good reason. Such a book would have to hit at the status quo.

Nor am I chickening out when I say I *don't* think the average publisher is a moron, or that he doesn't care about the problems we face daily. In my own fashion (I've been true to myself?), I have written about discrimination, the problems of the aged, the ill, corruption, war, brutality, violence, etc. But I have said this in sub-plots, having never been under the illusion I wasn't writing under wraps. For many years characters in commercial fiction have been a nebulous blur. They've always been young, healthy and handsome and despite America being a melting pot, white or Anglo-Saxon. I've made my characters refugees, Negroes, Indians, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, old people and sometimes sickly. I think this not only helps reader identification but makes for a more interesting story—it's obvious that a Negro and a white accused of the same crime will make different stories.

Ten years ago I sometimes wondered why more people didn't turn to writing; it's one of the few trades where you really can earn while learning, requires almost no overhead and can be operated (not too successfully) on a part-time basis. Today the fiction market has shrunk to the point of vanishing. I think TV is the dastard. One sees enough fiction and news on TV every day to make reading old fashioned. (Why should Johnny read? He can see it all on the idiot box.) TV is slowly strangling magazines, books and newspapers. In a frantic effort to combat this, and since mostly "stories" are shown on TV, many magazines have dropped fiction. The competition to hit the remaining markets is fantastic. In the mystery field one has but to glance at the low paying English mystery magazines to find them filled with U.S. authors. The mystery novel is presently at such a low tide that some publishers flatly refuse even to read a suspense manuscript today, except for spy yarns or Gothic tales.

In the light of cold war tensions I can understand the interest in spy novels, but why readers are attracted to a dumb heroine stumbling around in an old Gothic mansion full of ghosts and dull loons puzzles me. But that doesn't mean I'm not writing one.

A glance at the stands shows the squeeze the paperback (a large part of any writer's income) is caught in: with the saturation of a few big name writers on the top and the cheap, and actually sexless "sex" books on the lower end. If the writing trade is uncertain, the publishing business is even more so. Musical chairs is the favorite editorial game: let sales dip and the first joker blamed and sacked is the editor, despite the fact that most publishers usually put a personal okay on any book an editor wishes to buy. So one isn't surprised at a publisher flooding the stands with a dozen different Ian Fleming paperbacks (Did he write that many?) on the theory that if one sells for 50¢ and you have a buck, you'll buy two instead of asking for change. (The recent 5% sales tax in NYC has knocked the hell out of this addition.) I guess all this must end, sometime, when readers will have read *every* Fleming, Gardner, Rex Stout, etc., book. But in the meantime, for the run of the mill writer, like myself, it's tough going.

I've tried a non-mystery novel, a contemporary book called *The Hotel Dwellers*, which Harpers published this past January. This deals with the people living in a fourth-rate Times Square hotel and is probably the first novel with a belly dancer as one of the main characters. (Will it win a G string award?) It is also about a middle-aged man whose fear of death gives him the guts to make a few financial and personal moves which . . . well, no point in giving out the plot. *The Library Journal* has called *The Hotel Dwellers* "A sharp, rude, sometimes vulgar book that is one of the better novels of recent years." I'm waiting to see how this sells before trying another contemporary novel.

In the periodical (the what?) field there are some six magazines devoted to the mystery story. They publish monthly and carry about eight stories per issue. There're another dozen magazines which will run occasional crime fiction. Roughly, if my math is correct, this comes to 720 mystery yarns purchased per year by *all* U.S. magazines,

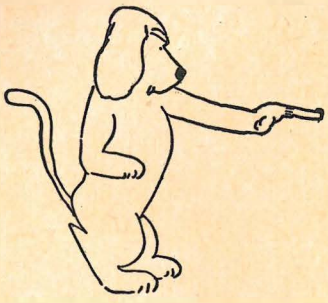
and there are easily several times that many suspense writers. In recent years the magazine racks have become crowded with "breast" rags—generally dull imitations of the old *Esquire*, *Playboy* and a charming London magazine, *Lilliput*—and a ratty type of hustler turned publisher has appeared. If most publishers merely *tolerate* the writer, this slob completely ignores us. Oh, he'll buy mystery stories, but inquiries about your stories are rarely answered, and he often keeps a story for six months or a year before returning it, or never returns it. Generally it is only when the writer, by sheer chance, sees his story in print (between shots of meaty nudes) that he learns he's made a "sale." A few dunning letters later, the "publisher" may drop the writer a check for $25 or $50. Never a letter bothering to ask if the amount is agreeable nor any mention of the rights purchased: all of which should have been settled long before the yarn was sent to the printers.

Some years ago a fishing buddy-advertising man-would-be writer and I hit upon an idea for a corking short-short. I typed it up and sent it out under both our names. (A mistake; most magazines dislike, for some reason, a double by-line.) It was a swell, tight, action yarn, combining bull fighting and fishing. Really! It almost hit some of the top magazines and I finally mailed it to a then new men's mag, which promptly bought the 1000 words for a hundred bucks. Your first story sale always produces a big emotional charge, and as we split the money, my friend proudly told me how he could hardly wait to see his name in print and show the story to his kids. He had a boy and a girl of 11. (Sure, twins.) When the story finally appeared, it ran on two pages with big-breasted nude photos on both pages, although there wasn't a single woman in the story. To his sorrow, my pal couldn't show his literary effort to his kids. That was about five years ago. I imagine they've seen it by now.

I have no idea what the fiction future holds, especially for the mystery novel. It hardly looks sunny. There can be an upsurge in the demand for suspense novels tomorrow. (Remember when they said radio had killed the record industry?) Who knows, perhaps folks will even become bored with TV. I still pound my typewriter each day and I'm still selling, but it's rough. How I long for the "old days" of a dozen or so years ago when you could earn about ten grand a year by leisurely turning out a mystery for the paperbacks every six months.

As the boys who turn out the mystery programs on the air might write a story for children

THE WHITE RABBIT CAPER



by James Thurber

FRED Fox was pouring himself a slug of rye when the door of his office opened and in hopped old Mrs. Rabbit. She was a white rabbit with pink eyes, and she wore a shawl on her head, and gold-rimmed spectacles.

"I want you to find Daphne," she said tearfully, and she handed Fred Fox a snapshot of a white rabbit with pink eyes that looked to him like a picture of every other white rabbit with pink eyes.

"When did she hop the hutch?" asked Fred Fox.

"Yesterday," said old Mrs. Rabbit. "She is only eighteen months old, and I am afraid that some superstitious creature has killed her for one of her feet."

Fred Fox turned the snapshot over and put it in his pocket. "Has this bunny got a throb?" he asked.

"Yes," said old Mrs. Rabbit. "Franz Frog, repulsive owner of the notorious Lily Pad Night Club."

Fred Fox leaped to his feet. "Come on, Grandma," he said, "and don't step on your ears. We got to move fast."

On the way to the Lily Pad Night Club, old Mrs. Rabbit scampered so fast that Fred Fox had all he could do to keep up with her. "Daphne is my great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter, if my memory serves," said old Mrs. Rabbit. "I have thirty-nine thousand descendants."

"This isn't going to be easy," said Fred Fox. "Maybe you should have gone to a magician with a hat."

"But she is the only one named Daphne," said old Mrs. Rabbit, "and she lived alone with me on my great carrot farm."

They came to a broad brook. "Skip it!" said Fred Fox.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, young man," snapped old Mrs. Rabbit.

Just as they got to the Lily Pad, a dandelion clock struck twelve noon. Fred Fox pushed the button on the great green door, on which was painted a white water lily. The door opened an eighth of an inch, and Ben Rat peered out. "Beat it," he said, but Fred Fox shoved the door open, and old Mrs. Rabbit followed him into a cool green hallway, softly but restlessly lighted by thousands of fireflies imprisoned in the hollow crystal pendants of an enormous chandelier. At the right there was a flight of green-carpeted stairs, and at the bottom of the steps the door to the cloakroom. Straight ahead, at the end of the long hallway, was the cool green door to Franz Frog's office.

"Beat it," said Ben Rat again.

"Talk nice," said Fred Fox, "or I'll seal your house up with tin. Where's the Croaker?"

"Once a gumpaw, always a gumpaw," grumbled Ben Rat. "He's in his office."

"With Daphne?"

"Who's Daphne?" asked Ben Rat.

"My great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter," said old Mrs. Rabbit.

"Nobody's that great," snarled Ben Rat.

Fred Fox opened the cool green door and went into Franz Frog's office, followed by old Mrs. Rabbit and Ben Rat. The owner of the Lily Pad sat behind his desk, wearing a green suit, green shirt, green tie, green socks, and green shoes. He had an emerald tiepin and seven emerald rings. "Whong you wong, Fonnxx?" he rumbled in a cold, green, cavernous voice. His eyes bulged and his throat began to swell ominously.

"He's going to croak," explained Ben Rat.

"Nuts," said Fred Fox. "He'll outlive all of us."

"Glunk," croaked Franz Frog.

Ben Rat glared at Fred Fox. "You oughta go on the stage," he snarled.

"Where's Daphne?" demanded Fred Fox.

"Hoong Dagneng?" asked Franz Frog.

"Your bunny friend," said Fred Fox.

"Nawng," said Franz Frog.

Fred Fox picked up a cello in a corner and put it down. It was too light to contain a rabbit. The front doorbell

rang. "I'll get it," said Fred Fox. It was Oliver (Hoot) Owl, a notorious fly-by-night. "What're you doing up at this hour, Hoot?" asked Fred Fox.

"I'm trying to blind myself, so I'll confess," said Hoot Owl testily.

"Confess to what?" snapped Fred Fox.

"What can't you solve?" asked Hoot Owl.

"The disappearance of Daphne," said Fred Fox.

"Who's Daphne?" asked Hoot Owl.

Franz Frog hopped out of his office into the hall. Ben Rat and old Mrs. Rabbit followed him.

Down the steps from the second floor came Sherman Stork, carrying a white muffler or something and grinning foolishly.

"Well, bless my soul!" said Fred Fox. "If it isn't old midhusband himself! What did you do with Daphne?"

"Who's Daphne?" asked Sherman Stork.

"Fox thinks somebody killed Daphne Rabbit," said Ben Rat.

"I *could* be wrong," said Fred Fox, "but I'm not." He pulled open the cloakroom door at the bottom of the steps, and the dead body of a female white rabbit toppled furrily onto the cool green carpet. Her head had been bashed in by a heavy blunt instrument.

"Daphne!" screamed old Mrs. Rabbit, bursting into tears.

"I can't see a thing;" said Hoot Owl.

"It's a dead white rabbit," said Ben Rat. "Anybody can see that. You're dumb."

"I'm wise!" said Hoot Owl indignantly. "I know everything."

"Jeeng Crine," moaned Franz Frog. He stared up at the chandelier, his eyes bulging and his mammoth mouth gaping open. All the fireflies were frightened and went out.

The cool green hallway became pitch dark. There was a shriek in the black, and a feathery "plump." The fireflies lighted up to see what had happened. Hoot Owl lay dead on the cool green carpet, his head bashed in by a heavy blunt instrument. Ben Rat, Franz Frog, Sherman Stork, old Mrs. Rabbit, and Fred Fox stared at Hoot Owl. Over the cool green carpet crawled a warm red stain, whose source was the body of Hoot Owl. He lay like a feather duster.

"Murder!" squealed old Mrs. Rabbit.

"Nobody leaves this hallway!" snapped Fred Fox. "There's a killer loose in this club!"

"I am not used to death," said Sherman Stork.

"Roong!" groaned Franz Frog.

"He says he's ruined," said Ben Rat, but Fred Fox wasn't listening. He was looking for a heavy blunt instrument. There's wasn't any.

"Search them!" cried old Mrs. Rabbit. "Somebody has a sap, or a sock full of sand, or something!"

"Yeh," said Fred Fox. "Ben Rat is a sap—maybe someone swung him by his tail."

"You oughta go on the stage," snarled Ben Rat.

Fred Fox searched the suspects, but he found no concealed weapon. "You could have strangled them with that muffler," Fred Fox told Sherman Stork.

"But they were not strangled," said Sherman Stork.

Fred Fox stared at Franz Frog. "You could have scared them to death with your ugly face," he said.

"Bung wung screng ta deng," said Franz Frog.

"You're right," admitted Fred Fox. "They weren't. Where's old Mrs. Rabbit?" he asked suddenly.

"I'm hiding in here," called old Mrs. Rabbit from the cloakroom. "I'm frightened."

Fred Fox got her out of the cool green sanctuary and went in himself. It was dark. He groped around on the cool green carpet. He didn't know what he was looking for, but he found it, a small object lying in a far corner. He put it in his pocket and came out of the cloakroom.

"What'd you find, shamus?" asked Ben Rat apprehensively.

"Exhibit A," said Fred Fox casually.

"Sahng plang keeng," moaned Franz Frog.

"He says somebody's playing for keeps," said Ben Rat.

"He can say that again," said Fred Fox as the front door was flung open and Inspector Mastiff trotted in, followed by Sergeant Dachshund.

"Well, well, look who's muzzling in," said Fred Fox.

"What have we got here?" barked Inspector Mastiff.

"I hate a private nose," said Sergeant Dachshund.

Fred Fox grinned at him. "What happened to your legs from the knees down, sport?" he asked.

"Drop dead," snarled Inspector Mastiff. "I know Ollie Owl, but who's the twenty-dollar Easter present from Schrafft's?" He turned on Fred Fox. "If this bunny's head comes off and she's filled with candy, I'll have your badge, Fox," he growled.

"She's real, Inspector," said Fred Fox. "Real dead, too. How did you pick up the scent?"

Inspector Mastiff howled. "The Sergeant thought he smelled a rat at the Lily Club," he said. "Wrong again, as usual. Who's this dead rabbit?"

"She's my great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter," sobbed old Mrs. Rabbit.

Fred Fox lighted a cigarette. "Oh, no, she isn't, sweetheart," he said coolly. "You are *her* great-great-great great-great-granddaughter." Pink lightning flared in the live white rabbit's eyes. "You killed the old lady, so you could take over her carrot farm," continued Fred Fox, "and then you killed Hoot Owl."

"I'll kill you, too, shamus!" shrieked Daphne Rabbit.

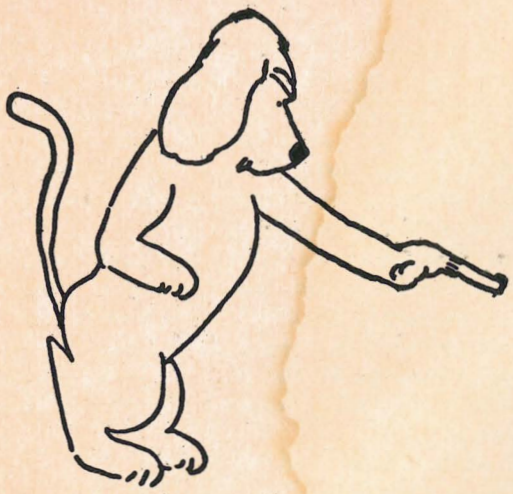
"Put the cuffs on her, Sergeant," barked Inspector Mastiff. Sergeant Dachshund put a pair of handcuffs on the front legs of the dead rabbit. "Not *her*, you dumb kraut!" yelped Inspector Mastiff. It was too late. Daphne Rabbit had jumped through a windowpane and run away, with the Sergeant in hot pursuit.

"All white rabbits look alike to me," growled Inspector Mastiff. "How could you tell them apart—from their ears?"

"No," said Fred Fox. "From their years. The white rabbit that called on me darn near beat me to the Lily Pad, and no old woman can do that."

"Don't brag," said Inspector Mastiff. "Spryness isn't enough. What else?"

"She understood expressions an old rabbit doesn't



know," said Fred Fox, "like 'hop the hutch' and 'throb' and 'skip it' and 'snap.' "

"You can't hang a rabbit for her vocabulary," said Inspector Mastiff. "Come again."

Fred Fox pulled the snapshot out of his pocket. "The white rabbit who called on me told me Daphne was eighteen months old," he said, "but read what it says on the back of this picture."

Inspector Mastiff took the snapshot, turned it over, and read, " 'Daphne on her second birthday.' "

"Yes," said Fred Fox. "Daphne knocked six months off her age. You see, Inspector, she couldn't read the writing on the snapshot, because those weren't her spectacles she was wearing."

"Now wait a minute," growled Inspector Mastiff. "Why did she kill Hoot Owl?"

"Elementary, my dear Mastiff," said Fred Fox. "Hoot Owl lived in an oak tree, and she was afraid he saw her burrowing into the club last night, dragging Grandma. She heard Hoot Owl say, 'I'm wise. I know everything,' and so she killed him."

"What with?" demanded the Inspector.

"Her right hind foot," said Fred Fox. "I was looking for a concealed weapon, and all the time she was carrying her heavy blunt instrument openly."

"Well, what do you know!" exclaimed Inspector Mastiff. "Do you think Hoot Owl really saw her?"

"Could be," said Fred Fox. "I happen to think he was bragging about his wisdom in general and not about a particular piece of information, but your guess is as good as mine."

"What did you pick up in the cloakroom?" squeaked Ben Rat.

"The final strand in the rope that will hang Daphne," said Fred Fox. "I knew she didn't go in there to hide. She went in there to look for something she lost last night. If she'd been frightened, she would have hidden when the flies went out, but she went in there after the flies lighted up again."

"That adds up," said Inspector Mastiff grudgingly. "What was it she was looking for?"

"Well," said Fred Fox, "she heard something drop in the dark when she dragged Grandma in there last night and she thought it was a button, or a buckle, or a bead, or a bangle, or a brooch that would incriminate her. That's why she rang me in on the case. She couldn't come here alone to look for it."

"Well, what was it, Fox?" snapped Inspector Mastiff.

"A carrot," said Fred Fox, and he took it out of his pocket, "probably fell out of old Mrs. Rabbit's reticule, if you like irony."

"One more question," said Inspector Mastiff. "Why plant the body in the Lily Pad?"

"Easy," said Fred Fox. "She wanted to throw suspicion on the Croaker, a well-known lady-killer."

"Nawng," rumbled Franz Frog.

"Well, there it is, Inspector," said Fred Fox, "all wrapped up for you and tied with ribbons."

Ben Rat disappeared into a wall. Franz Frog hopped back to his office.

"Mercy!" cried Sherman Stork. "I'm late for an appointment!" He flew to the front door and opened it.

There stood Daphne Rabbit, holding the unconscious form of Sergeant Dachshund. "I give up," she said. "I surrender."

"Is he dead?" asked Inspector Mastiff hopefully.

"No," said Daphne Rabbit. "He fainted."

"I never have any luck," growled Inspector Mastiff.

Fred Fox leaned over and pointed to Daphne's right hind foot. "Owl feathers," he said. "She's all yours, Inspector."

"Thanks, Fox," said Inspector Mastiff. "I'll throw something your way some day."

"Make it a nice, plump Plymouth Rock pullet," said Fred Fox, and he sauntered out of the Lily Pad.

Back in his office, Fred Fox dictated his report on the White Rabbit Caper to his secretary, Lura Fox. "Period. End of report," he said finally, toying with the emerald stickpin he had taken from Franz Frog's green necktie when the fireflies went out.

"Is she pretty?" asked Lura Fox.

"Daphne? Quite a dish," said Fred Fox, "but I like my rabbits stewed, and I'm afraid little Daphne is going to fry."

"But she's so young, Fred!" cried Lura Fox. "Only eighteen months!"

"You weren't listening," said Fred Fox.

"How did you know she wasn't interested in Franz Frog?" asked Lura Fox.

"Simple," said Fred Fox. "Wrong species."

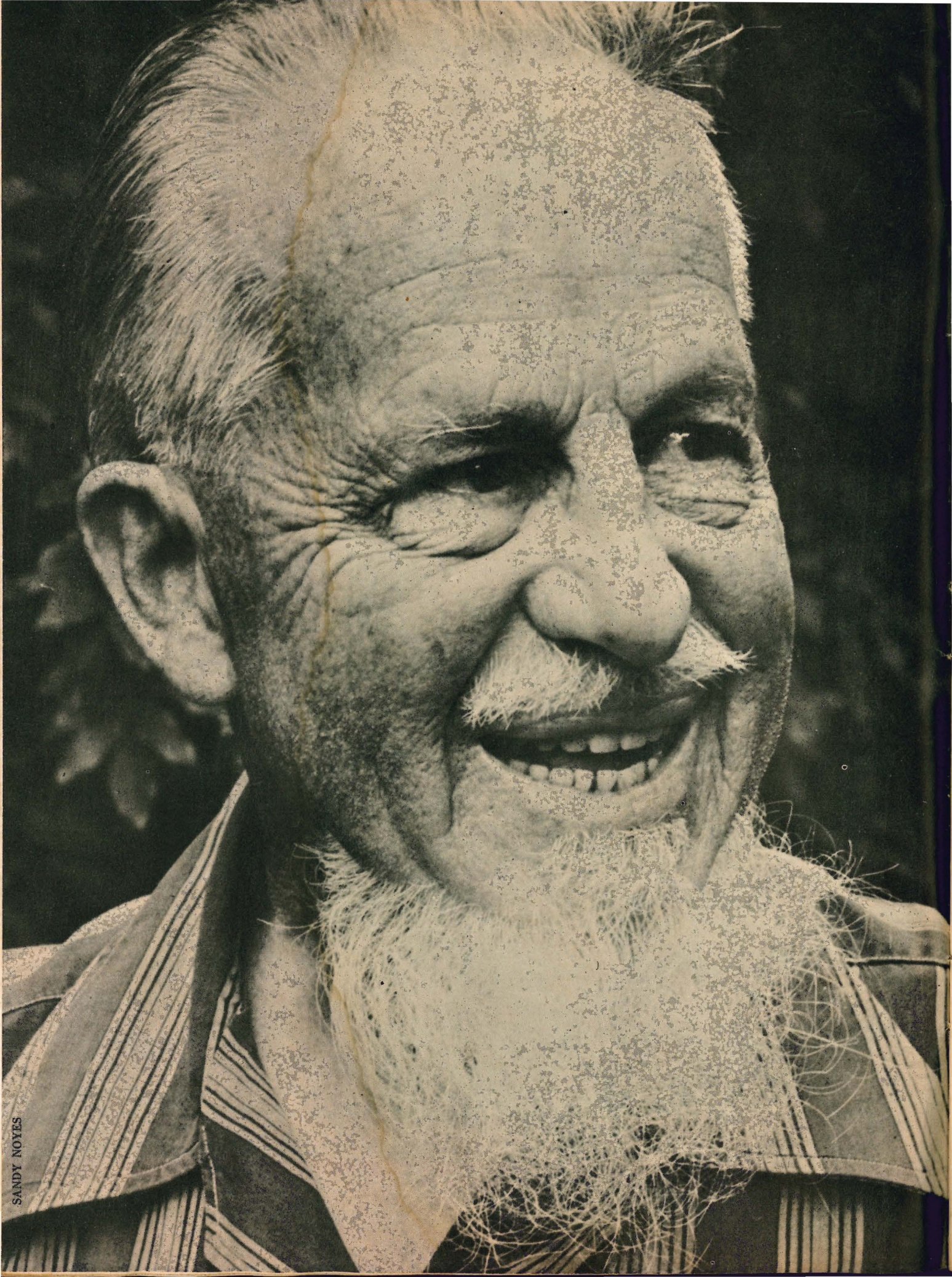
"What became of the candy, Fred?" asked Lura Fox.

Fred Fox stared at her. "What candy?" he asked blankly.

Lura Fox suddenly burst into tears. "She was so soft, and warm, and cuddly, Fred," she wailed.

Fred Fox filled a glass with rye, drank it slowly, set down the glass, and sighed grimly. "Sour racket," he said.

"Boy—this really takes me back—the very first issue of P. S.!"



SANDY NOYES

Rex Stout, the creator of that formidable genius of detective fiction, Nero Wolfe, is a formidable man himself. A child prodigy, he had read the bible through twice by the age of three, and completed some twelve hundred other volumes before achieving ten. He also developed the knack of adding figures as quickly as a computer and, probably in passing, won the spelling championship of Kansas, his home state.

After graduating from high school, Stout began to cast around for a steady line of work. It took him four years, and some thirty jobs, before he hit on the idea of writing fiction. He easily sold slews of the stuff, but then it occurred to him that he might be able to create in a more relaxed state of mind if he had a little money to fall back on. Say four hundred thousand dollars. He proceeded to invent a banking system which speedily produced this buffer, and then he settled down to the serious production of books.

It was, and continues to be, typically prodigious. Stout has written no less, and doubtless more than fifty-three separate volumes. The figure is a little vague because no one can honestly claim to have kept up with him. Of these books, thirty are full length Wolfian novels, and nine are collections of shorter adventures. For the true fan, this is still far from enough. However, more are on the way. Stout, who will be 80 in December, has just finished a new Nero Wolfe novel, DEATH OF A DOXIE. *We are confident that many more will follow.*

Stout lives in a house designed and built, naturally, by himself. It sits on a hill that divides itself between New York and Connecticut and commands a magnificent view. When we arrived, Stout invited us in via the garage, which has a dozen or so twenty-five-year-old gourds hanging from its ceiling, ushered us through a glassed-in hall, which is pleasantly crowded with absurdly healthy plants, and then sat us down in the spacious living room.

Only after he had provided us with well built drinks and made absolutely sure that we were comfortable would he proceed with the following interview. It mercilessly exposes him, we believe, to be one of the most charming, kindly and warmly brilliant humans we've ever met.

An interview with Rex Stout

P.S.: Your creation, Nero Wolfe, is one of the most convincing, and certainly the most lovable, fictional detective since Sherlock Holmes. As with Holmes, the reader feels he knows Wolfe personally, and as with 221 B Baker Street, he only has to close his eyes to see the office in Wolfe's brownstone house. Doyle is said to have based Holmes roughly on the person of Doctor Joseph Bell of Edinburgh, and many say this helped him to make his character convincing. Did you have a Bell in mind when you created Nero?

STOUT: No. Although Alex Woolcott once claimed that he was the model. I have never included a

character in a story either major or minor, where I had any individual in mind. I don't say that's not a good idea. It's just that I don't do it.

P.S.: If there was no real-life prototype of Nero Wolfe, then how did you build this character?

STOUT: In all fiction, both dramatic and narrative, there are two kinds of characters, and this has nothing to do with literary levels. Hamlet is a creative character. Tarzan of the Apes is a creative character. That is, a character which, like Topsy, just grows. Then there is the synthetic character. In Dickens you'll find a couple of dozen creative characters, and the rest of them are synthetic. Scrooge, obviously, was synthetic, just as Goethe's Faust is a synthetic character. He isn't a man at all, he is an idea, a symbol. All I can say about Nero Wolfe is that he, like Topsy in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and like Tarzan and like Hamlet and like many of Balzac's characters, is what I call a creative character; that is, he isn't copied after anyone or anything. When you're writing stories and when you're lucky enough to have a character like that, you never have the faintest idea where he or she came from, it's just that there he is. And then a funny thing happens. After he's appeared in a story, or even half a story, there are no longer any questions about him. If some new situation comes up, you know automatically how he's going to react to it. You don't decide . . . It's just in the guy.

P.S.: Artists have tried to picture Nero. What does his nose look like?

STOUT: His nose is a good deal like yours. It isn't a beak nose, it isn't a pug nose—but his nose is bigger than yours.

P.S.: How tall is he?

STOUT: Six feet.

P.S.: *Life Magazine* had Nero Wolfe at 273 lbs. in the 1940's. The *N.Y. Post* had him at 283 lbs. recently. Is he getting fatter?

STOUT: It's simply that they don't know how to divide 7 into 2,000. The only time his weight is mentioned in the stories is when Archie says it's 1/7th of a ton. Of course, Jacques Barzun once said in a piece that I'd never said whether it was a long ton or a short ton.

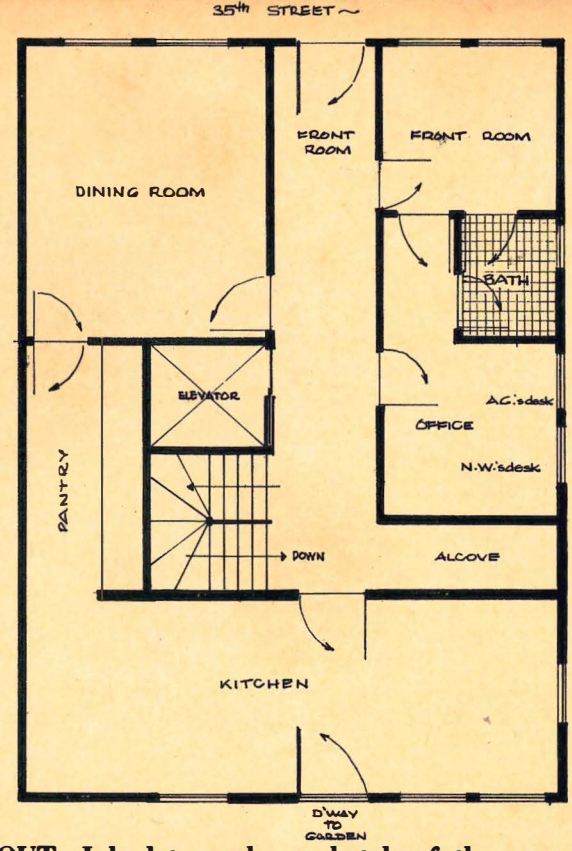
P.S.: I've often wondered what kind of beer Nero drinks.

STOUT: He ought to drink keg beer. Draft beer is the best, as you know, but if you live in an apartment or a house in New York, you'd have a hell of a job drinking draft beer unless you go out to drink it. He drinks bottled beer and goddamn it, I think he drinks Prague beer, though I hate to say it because it's behind the Iron Curtain. However, I've never mentioned the brand of beer.

P.S.: Nero lives in a brownstone on West 35th Street. Did you have a particular brownstone in mind?

STOUT: No. At the time I wrote the first story there were no brownstones left on West 35th Street.

P.S.: Have you ever made a sketch of Nero's house?



STOUT: I had to make a sketch of the ground floor because I got so many requests from people who asked exactly what the make-up of that ground floor was. I made up that sketch not for myself, but so I could have a lot of copies made. When anybody writes and asks me about the layout, instead of writing them a letter I can just send them one of these things.

P.S.: What about Rusterman's, where Wolfe frequently dines. Was there ever a Rusterman's?

STOUT: No. It was just a made-up name.

P.S.: Then it's not based on any particular restaurant?

STOUT: Perhaps, subconsciously . . . Your subconscious does everything anyway. What the hell, what you actually do is put the trimmings on what your subconscious has decided, that's all. Probably I had Louis Martain's, a restaurant you've never heard of, in mind. Louis Martain's used to be right at Times Square, just across 42nd Street from what was the Times Building and is now the Allied Chemical Building—where Broadway and Seventh Avenue come to an apex. There used to be a restaurant there in the 20's, and probably because I was fairly young and for the first time had enough money to buy whatever food I wanted, I had a helluva lot of good meals at Louis Martain's. Probably I had Louis Martain's in mind.

P.S.: I just came across an old edition of the Nero Wolfe novel, TOO MANY COOKS. There were some recipes in the back, and I tried a couple of them, and they were good, especially the brook trout with capers.

STOUT: Yes. All the recipes in that book were cooked at least twice. Does the name Sheila Hibben mean anything to you? She was food writer for *The New Yorker* magazine for 25 years. Sheila and I are old friends, and we cooked all of those things two or three times.

P.S.: Are there any plans for a Nero Wolfe Cook Book?
STOUT: They're doing one now. I've had hundreds of letters asking me to do one, but I've refused because it's too goddamn much hard work to do a good cook book. Three food editors and one professional food expert are now working at Viking Press on a Nero Wolfe Cook Book. The only work I'll do is to write a brief introduction and to okay the text.
P.S.: Will they base the recipes on the stuff Nero was served?
STOUT: Yes, every recipe in there is based on a dish mentioned in one of the stories.
P.S.: There are clues in the stories about Nero Wolfe's personal life, for instance, that he was married and that perhaps his wife stabbed him?
STOUT: No, it is thought that *he* murdered his wife. It's never been recorded, but, as I say, it's *thought* that he murdered his wife.
P.S.: Did you ever work out a history for Nero Wolfe?
STOUT: No. I've never written down anything about any of the characters in the story except for the stories themselves. I write only one thing before I actually start writing a story. On a 5½ by 8 sheet of paper, I write the names of the characters, their ages and what they do, and that's all I ever write, except the story. Then I decide how it starts and I get the typewriter and I go ahead and write it as I did yesterday. When it's done I wrap it up and send it to the publisher. And that's all. I never revise or rewrite or even reread.
P.S.: You never even reread it?
STOUT: No. Well, each day I read what I wrote the day before. I do that much rereading.
P.S.: You don't even work out a plot skeleton?
STOUT: Oh no—no—no.
P.S.: Well, you must know what's going to happen.
STOUT: I don't know a helluva lot about what's going to happen. There's one character in the story I just finished who I think is quite a successful character, and at the time I started the story—the first forty pages of it—I didn't know there was going to be such a character at all. But then she came into the story and then, by God, she just kind of took it over.
P.S.: But how can you build such complex plots, with so many things going on?
STOUT: Do you know how many different ways there are in which the first ten moves of a chess game can be made—that is, on both sides, white and black?
P.S.: No.
STOUT: Write 127,243 and 21 ciphers and you have it. Well it's the same with a detective story. By page 40 you have seven or nine people in your story and, what the hell, any number of millions of things can happen. You just go along and don't let anything happen that contradicts something that happened before.
P.S.: In the course of some 30-odd books about Nero Wolfe—have you ever become tired of him in any way?
STOUT: No. To me he's still an interesting person. Well, hell, all any writer knows about any character—and I don't care what literary level it's on—all any writer knows about any character is what the character is to him. He can't possibly know how important or unimportant or interesting or dull any character he has made up is going to be to anyone else. That's all up to the reader. There is one thing I believe, which may or may not be true—I don't believe that any character who is not exciting or interesting to the writer himself can possibly be exciting or interesting to any reader. I think you have to be excited and interested yourself or you're a goddamn fool to expect anyone else to be.
P.S.: Then you've never had Doyle's hangup? Where he became sick of Holmes and tried to kill him off?
STOUT: What do you mean? He did kill him off. And then the public demand and also his own desire for some more dough made him bring him back to life. Luckily, he killed him in such a way that it was possible for him to bring him back to life. If he'd actually had his funeral, he'd have had a hell of a job.
P.S.: The most recent Nero Wolfe novel, THE DOORBELL RANG, caused quite a stir because of its unfavorable picture of the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover. What kind of reaction to it have you been receiving in the mail?
STOUT: Over the last ten years I've had an average of about sixty fan letters a week, but since THE DOORBELL RANG it's been about three times that. But curiously, only about one in ten had any objections. I had supposed, on account of the John Birch Society and so on, that it would be close to half and half.
P.S.: Has Hoover said anything about this book?
STOUT: Not to me.
P.S.: I imagine Hoover's not been too pleased by it.
STOUT: Well, that megalomaniac, of course he isn't pleased.
P.S.: Henri Soule recently willed J. Edgar Hoover a gold watch, apparently because Hoover was a gourmet and a valued customer. Did it flabbergast you that Hoover was considered a gourmet?
STOUT: There's never been any indication as far as I know that Soule was a man of judgment or taste or intelligence or anything else. He was just a great cook, just as Bobby Fisher is a great chess player, and God knows he's absolutely nothing else on earth.
P.S.: It surprised me to learn that Hoover, like old Nero, was considered a food lover. I can see him eating copiously, but . . .
STOUT: Of course, whenever you have reason to strongly dislike somebody, it's awfully hard to think anything well of him at all, and therefore quite naturally, I suspect that Hoover didn't really know a goddamn thing about food, but that he

knew Le Pavillon was the place to go in New York. I would hate to think that J. Edgar Hoover has a really discriminating palate. What an awful thought!

P.S.: In your stories you've given Nero all sorts of challenges and placed him in any number of uncomfortable spots. Do his reactions to these situations ever surprise you?

STOUT: Yes, he sometimes says and does things which surprise me. So does Archie Goodwin say and do things which surprise me. Just a couple of weeks ago, in this story that I've just finished, Nero Wolfe says, "But a blackmailer is not ipso-facto a murderer." and Archie says, two paragraphs later. "He may not be ipso-facto a murderer, but ipso Archie Goodwin he is." That was all typed and then I thought, wait a minute, would Archie Goodwin say that? And then I had to admit that by God, he would say that. You have to watch it when you've got characters who are accustomed to taking the bit in their teeth and going ahead and doing what they want to do. I suspected that Archie wouldn't say that, then after thinking about it for a couple of minutes I realized that it was alright. He would say that. He is, ipso Archie, a murderer.

P.S.: You called DOUBLE FOR DEATH "the best detective story I've written." What particularly pleased you about the story?

STOUT: Just the way everything seemed to fit so nicely. Of course, you can make everything fit in a story by just forcing things to fit, but the reader always knows when you've done that. When everything in a story seems to go ahead and fit without any contriving—well, that's the way DOUBLE FOR DEATH worked out. But, of course, the opinion of any writer—whether he's a writer of rondos or sonnets—the opinion of any writer as to which of the things he wrote is the best job isn't worth a damn. John Milton, as you know, always thought that PARADISE REGAINED was a better poem than PARADISE LOST.

P.S.: Dashiell Hammett, for one, thought that the detective story should be considered art with a capital A. Do you think that's valid?

STOUT: It doesn't seem to me to make any sense because I don't think there's any truth in such categorizing at all. The serious critics of literature have values of their own which actually are valid only for themselves. For instance, the last dozen books that I've seen which deal with literature in the English language in the last century almost never even mention the book that I would rather have written than any other one book in our language in the last century—ALICE IN WONDERLAND. In order to get mentioned by serious critics of literature the one thing that you have to have is pretentiousness. You have to be at least pretending to make a profound comment on human beings and human conduct. In my opinion that's why a quite inferior writer, Thomas Mann, has had so many thousands of pages of treatment by serious critics. He was so goddamn pretentious.

P.S.: It seems to me that recently Thomas Mann has been fading and that ALICE IN WONDERLAND has been gaining the attention of even serious critics.

STOUT: Only with condescension.

P.S.: Don't you think that recently there has been any breaking down of this sort of categorization?

STOUT: Not as far as the critics are concerned. My Lord, no. As far as detective stories are concerned that attitude is more pronounced in this country than, for instance, it is in England. The *Atlantic Monthly* or *Harper's* or the *New Republic* wouldn't dream of reviewing a detective story. But in England, *The New Statesman* and *The Observer* regularly review detective stories.

P.S.: What do you think of Friedrich Duerrenmatt?

STOUT: I think he's a highly talented writer. Not only do I think he would never write what I call a good detective story technically, but I don't think he wants to.

P.S.: You emphasize the triumph of the intellect in your stories, whereas Duerrenmatt will emphasize logic and reason only to demonstrate that an illogical accident can make everything go wrong.

STOUT: Well, that's it you see. He hasn't got the instinct for it. He doesn't want a man to conquer somebody's emotions and to conquer a situation purely intellectually. He doesn't want that to happen, but in a detective story that's what ought to happen. It's what happened with Poe, it's what

(continued)

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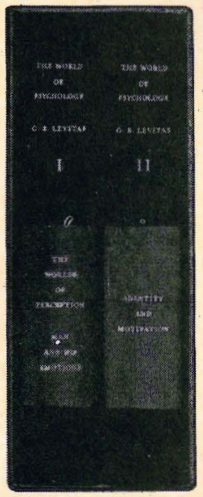

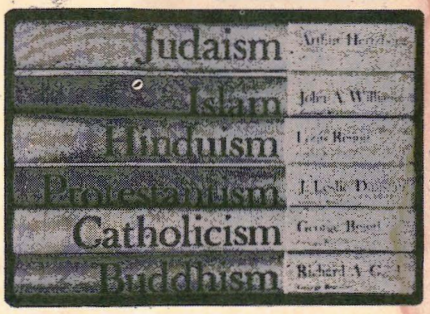

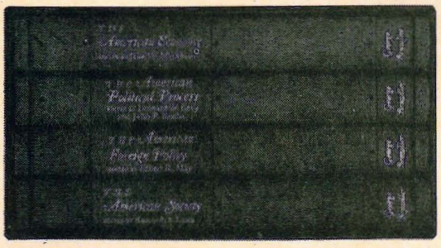

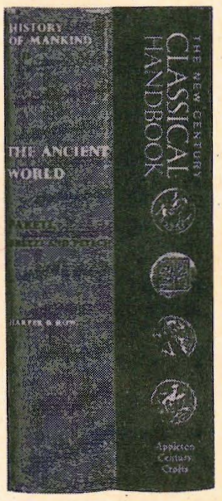

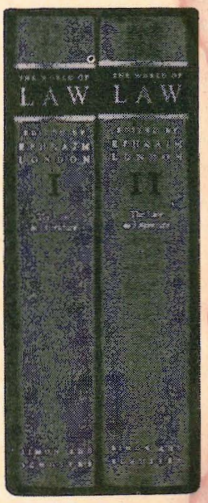

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happened with Doyle, it's what happened in what I think is the best detective story ever written in this country, THE MALTESE FALCON.

P.S.: Is that why Nero doesn't like women? Because they're irrational?

STOUT: I haven't the faintest idea why Nero doesn't like women.

P.S.: Has Archie really ever fallen in love with anybody?

STOUT: In the sense that the poets and most story tellers mean when they say "fallen in love," no. He has, during the course of these stories, probably screwed somewhere between 15 and 20 girls. I suppose he has. But he has sense enough to know that the most boring thing you could possibly write about is an act of sexual intercourse.

P.S.: Yes, he's very discreet about that.

STOUT: Hell, you might as well write about a guy blowing his nose. I just don't believe that the poets have put a false veneer of romanticism on what leads up to or surrounds the sexual act. I don't think that it's phony at all. I think it's the most interesting thing to us, at least in the Western World. It's the most interesting aspect of sex, the most varied, the most flexible, the one that can take thousands of different courses. But the sexual act itself, there's no flexibility or different aspects to it at all. When I said blowing his nose, I wasn't sneering at the sexual act, but you might as well try to describe the actual performance of the action of food on the palate and the feeling as food goes down your gullet and into your belly. That isn't the interesting part about food. The interesting things about food are the thousands of things that lead up to it, and I think these are the most interesting things about sex, the thousands of things that lead up to it, and the things that come after it.

P.S.: What does Archie look like?

STOUT: It's foolish and ineffective to try to describe him or anyone by what his chin looks like or his nose looks like, but he looks quite a little like Humphrey Bogart. He's that type.

P.S.: How does he comb his hair?

STOUT: Is this being recorded?

P.S.: Yes.

STOUT: Then I don't think I'll tell you how he combs his hair.

P.S.: As a detective story writer, would you put down spy thrillers?

STOUT: No, I don't sneer at them at all. I wouldn't say you can compare what is now called the suspense story—I never heard of a sillier word being applied to a kind of story. Every story ever written has suspense in it. It has to have it, or it isn't a story. —Anyway, all I'm saying is to put the Had-I-But-Known type of story or what is called the suspense or the spy thriller in the same category as the detective story is silly. To sneer at them, my God, no. A couple of Graham Greene's, THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD, and at least half a dozen other spy stories are just about as good story telling as you'll find anywhere. But they aren't detective stories.

P.S.: THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD did have several surprises in it, didn't it?

STOUT: Yes, but the mystery, the unknown thing in THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD is never who did it or even why did they do it—the point you're always looking forward to in that story is what's going to happen next. Who is really who.

P.S.: Do you think the straight detective story will survive?

STOUT: Whether the private detective survives or not depends entirely on whether in the future there are any talented writers who want to write that kind of story. One hundred and sixty years ago everybody was saying that the Petrarchan sonnet was dead, and then Edna St. Vincent Millay came along and proved that the Petrarchan sonnet wasn't dead. Any kind of writing, any form of story-telling can and will survive if talented writers want to use that form.

P.S.: You once said that "The writer of a detective story must be content to have written a fairy story and one about man's best loved fairy, the one whose wand bestows upon him not power or love or health or wealth, but the sweet assurance 'you are the reasoning animal'." You also thought that the detective story derived its enormous audience by appealing to man's greatest pride, his reason. In view of the fantastic popularity now of the super-spy, the man who excells in sex and karate but who can't think his way out of a paper bag, do you still say that Reason is man's best-loved fairy?

STOUT: Why sure, certainly. That probably is the only thing that everybody on earth would like to believe is true of themselves, and many do believe it is true of themselves. The one thing on earth that every man and woman would like to believe is that he makes his decisions up here in his head, and that he has a reason for what he decides to do.

P.S.: Do you believe that? That man makes rational decisions?

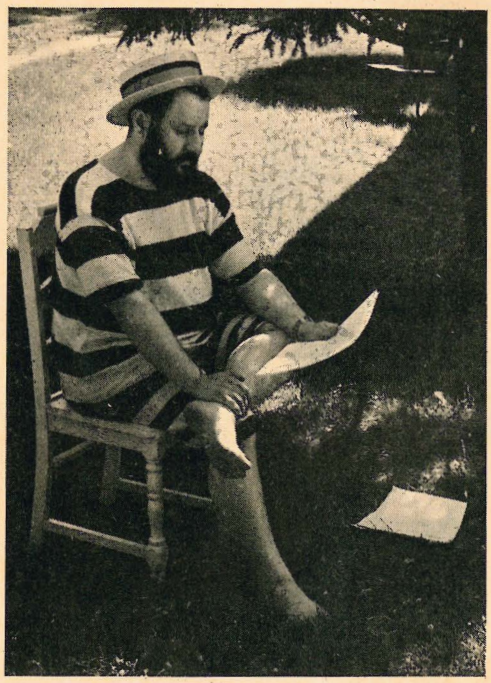
STOUT: I don't think man is a rational animal.

P.S.: Do you think that Nero believes that man is a rational animal?

STOUT: He knows goddamn well he isn't.

Addendum, With Straw Hat

by Avram Davidson



Is it really and was it ever "against the law to hit someone wearing eyeglasses"? This was devoutly believed when I was a boy, and its loud proclamation by parties of the third part often saved some bespectacled kid from being walloped more than once or twice by another kid. It sounds not totally unreasonable that it be so, but I don't recall, now that I am long graduated from Tootsie Rolls and knickers, ever having heard of any actual indictments to the effect that: "Defendant did then and there strike, smite, smash, mash, clout, club, wallop and otherwise maim and manhandle Plaintiff, Plaintiff then wearing eyeglasses, spectacles and/or giglamps (including monocles, lorgnons, lorgnettes, quizzing-glasses, contact lenses and bioscopes), in violation of the Assault Act of 1875"—or words to that effect. Have *you?*

That was one of the Nonexistent Laws of whose existence we were so sure. Another was that, "If They try to execute a man and the execution fails, They can't try to hang him again." This may have been a faint echo of the law of double jeopardy; it may also have some reference to one or two famous or infamous cases where condemned men *were* pardoned after unsuccessful attempts at jerking them to Jesus. It ignored the more numerous instances when They just went ahead and hanged, burned, gassed, and shot the guy at Their subsequent leisure, anyway. It also demonstrates a popular semantic error. It is the sentence of death which is "executed." The word for what happens to the condemned man is "killed."

Another Nonexistent Law whose existence was as firmly believed in as that of the Hudson River was, "If you run away and won't come home, the cops can shoot you dead. They can! They can! Crossmyheartandhopetadie!" This, of course, was only partially true. It was first necessary to *run and not stop* on policial demand—*then* they could have shot you dead. You. Me. Her. Them. Anybody. They still can. In fact, they still do. For any offense or none. You don't believe me? Try it.

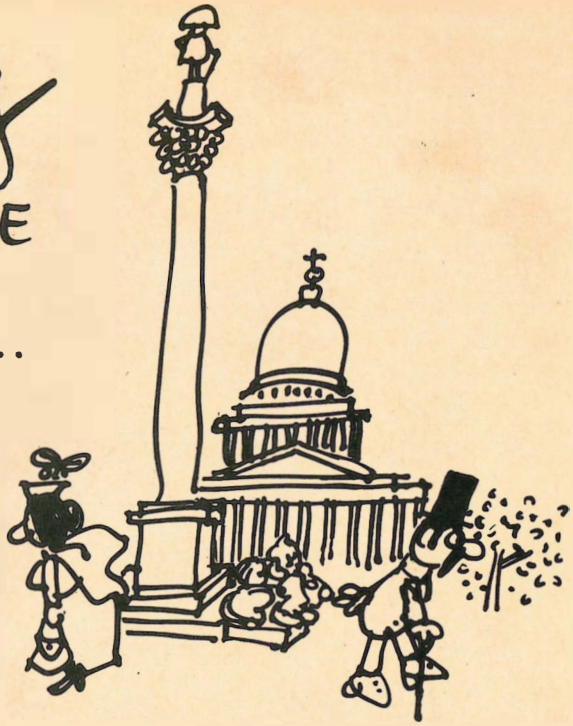
Robert Benchley suggested that the decline of Parental Prestige began when fathers "stopped wearing fathers' uniforms and looking like fathers"; an accompanying illustration by—was it Rea Irving? or Gluyas Williams? —showing Father in high crowned derby, well filled vest crossed by watch-chain, and mutton-chop whiskers. Mr. Benchley and I belonged to different generations by a few: my *grand*father looked a little like that. But his comments (Benchley's, not my grandfather's) might with some merit be applied to policemen.

In the era I'm speaking of (Early Middle Herbert Hoover, say), cops *looked* like cops. There was no nonsense in them days about Improving The Image. Officers of the law ran to large feet and large bellies, with ample ovoid faces descending into several chins—all of a rich, ripe, red color—and noses resembling Tyrian purple dip't in the wine-dark sea. These warm autumnal colors were popularly attributed to a concern on the part of the police that malt beverages, being as they then were sold without any governmental inspection, must be sampled to guarantee their wholesomeness. Enforcement of the Prohibition laws, which were after all *Federal*, they, with a fine consideration for the Constitution, left entirely unto other hands, if at all. The proto-fuzz, in other words, were highly visible, and figured largely in the mythopoeic minds of the young. Nobody hardly ever saw a Congressman or a Senator; the legislative process was misty and remote . . . but like Javert, we knew that *The Law* is *the law* . . . and like Grover Whalen, we knew just where a lot of it was located, videlicet at the end of a nightstick. It is perhaps small cause for surprise if some of it was located nowhere else.

You will have suspected two things by this time. (1) The Nonexistent Laws all dealt with violence—a subject which interests the childish mentality more than, say, fiduciary trust legislation. And (2) that this column seems to have turned, for the time being, into a complaint against The Forces of Law And Order. How right you are.

THE Michelson–Morley CASE

Michelson and his wife Morley were inseparable...



... until ..... they Quarrelled

Morley came right home but what happened to Michelson?

Inspectors Einstein, Newton and Hershel arrive from Scotland Yard

Michelson's not in London. There's nothing out there.

Wrong Newton! Hershel here has seen Michelson in different time-space all over London

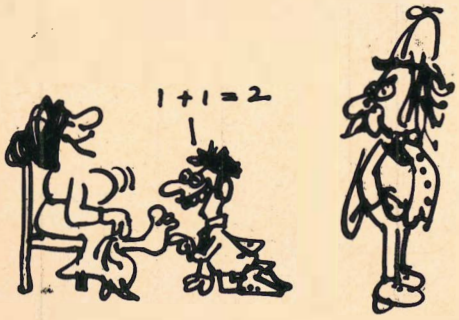
I've seen Michelson many times.....

He's not!..London is empty and so is space...empty... empty...

...but I can only see where he's been not where he is now!

I suppose 1+1 are still 2

1+1 was never 2, Newton. Michelson has many aspects to his nature but basically he's a split personality. So when you add his wife 1+1 may equal 3 or 4 or 5...

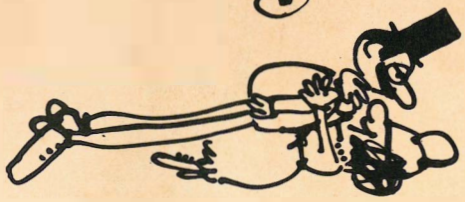


Meanwhile Inspector Hershel is tracking Michelson on his telescope

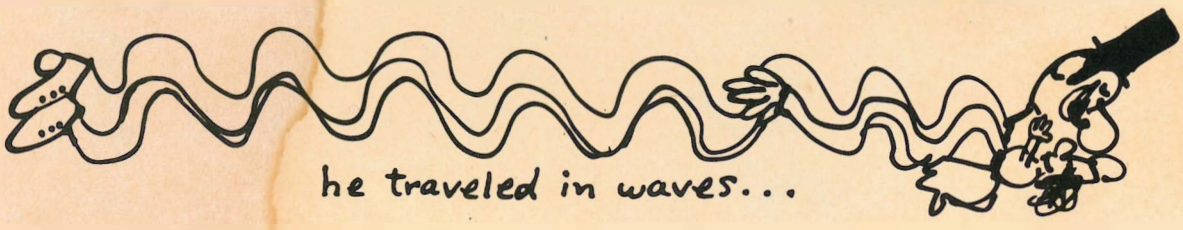
Inspector Hershel has time-space reports on your husband up till one hour ago...

After he left you he entered the magnetic field of a pub off Hyde Park corner and was bent out of his homeward path....

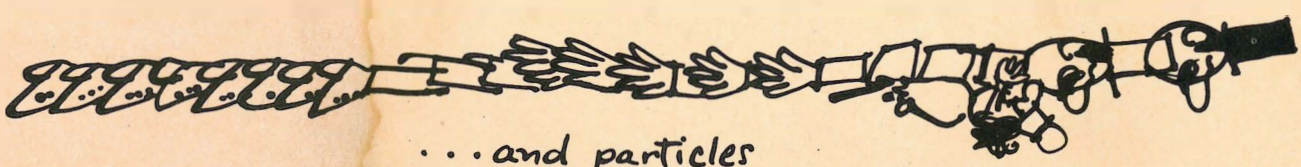
Michelson sat in the pub for a long time absorbing energy with his bitters. Then he met Beryle. He stopped absorbing energy and began to radiate and expand.....



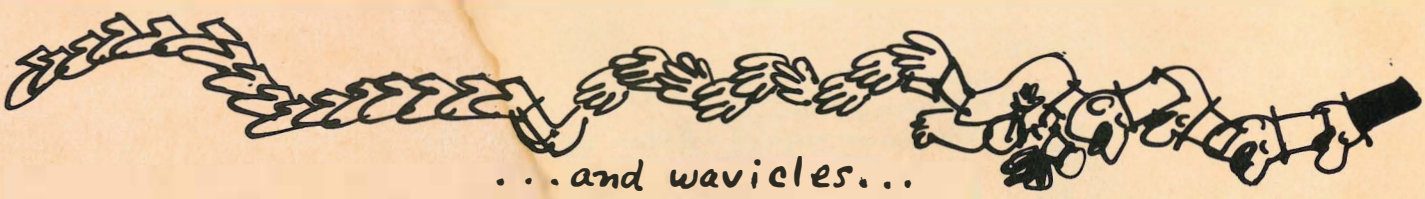
He traveled with the speed of light extending himself so much that he became a beam of light proving Mass = Velocity



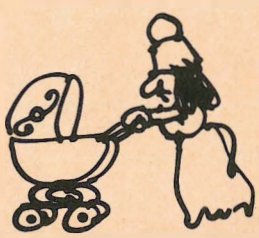
he traveled in waves...



...and particles



...and wavicles...

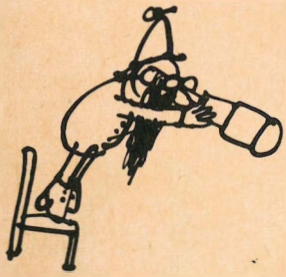


Beryle left Michelson to orbit by himself...

...Michelson's loosing heat and speed...

Michelson's shrinking fast now...

Michelson's falling...



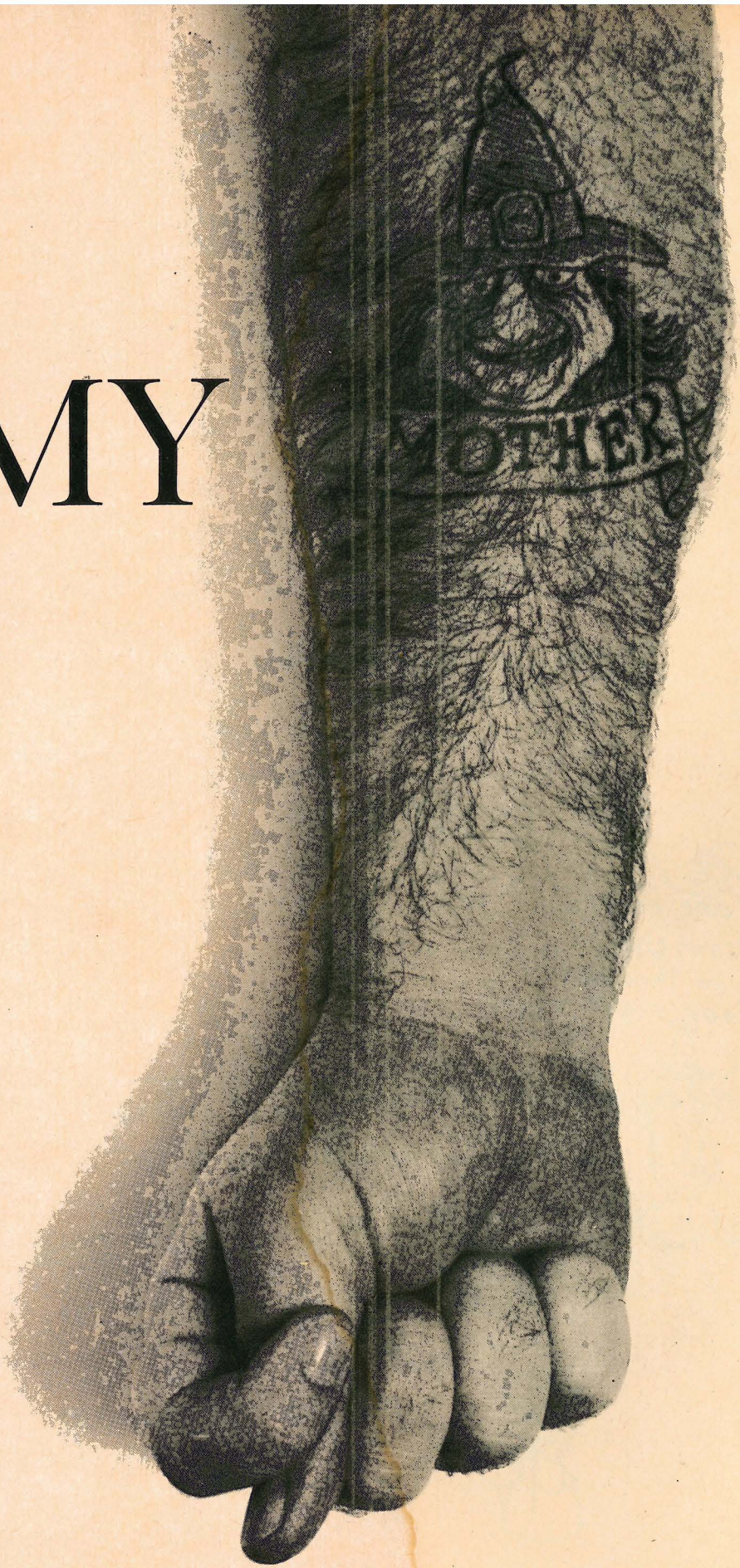
...Michelson's bumped into Big Ben... now he's running up Oxford street....
Michelson's @*%-*
I've lost him somewhere near Selfridge...

If we are correct Michelson should come in through that door right now!

They were inseperable once more, closing the Michelson-Morley case for Scotland Yard.

Lou Myers

MY WAS



Black art in Brooklyn.

A WITCH

by William Tenn

I spent most of my boyhood utterly convinced that my mother was a witch. No psychological trauma was involved; instead, this belief made me feel like a thoroughly loved and protected child.

My memory begins in the ragged worst of Brooklyn's Brownsville—also known as East New York—where I was surrounded by witches. Every adult woman I knew was one. Shawled conventions of them buzzed and glowered constantly at our games from nearby "stoops." Whenever my playmates swirled too boisterously close, the air turned black with angry magic: immense and complicated curses were thrown.

"May you never live to grow up," was one of the simpler, cheerier incantations. "But if you do grow up, may it be like a radish, with your head in the ground and your feet in the air." Another went: "May you itch from head to foot with scabs that drive you crazy—but only after your fingernails have broken off so you can't scratch."

These remarks were not directed at me: my mother's counter-magic was too widely feared, and I myself had been schooled in every block and parry applicable to little boys. At bed-time, my mother spat thrice, forcing the Powers with whom she was in constant familiar correspondence to reverse curses aimed at me that day back on their authors' heads three-fold, as many times as she had spit.

A witch in the family was indeed a rod and a staff of comfort.

My mother was a Yiddish witch, conducting her operations in that compote of German, Hebrew and Slavic. This was a serious handicap: she had been born a Jewish cockney and spoke little Yiddish until she met my father, an ex-rabbinical student and fervent Socialist from Lithuania. Having bagged him in London's East End on his way to America, she set herself with immediate, wifely devotion to unlearn her useless English in place of what seemed to be the prevailing tongue of the New World.

While my father trained her to speak Yiddish fluently, he cannot have been of much help to her and their first-born in that superstitious Brooklyn slum. He held science and sweet reason to be the hope of the world; her casual, workaday necromancy horrified him. Nary a spell would he teach her: idioms, literary phrases and fine Yiddish poetry, by all means, but no spells, absolutely no spells.

She needed them. A small boy, she noted, was a prime

target for malice and envy, and her new neighbors had at their disposal whole libraries of protective cantrips. Cantrips, at first, had she none. Her rank on the block was determined by the potency of her invocations and her ability—when invoked upon—to knock aside or deftly neutralize. But she sorely lacked a cursing tradition passed for generations from mother to daughter; she alone had brought no such village lore to the United States wrapped in the thick bedspreads and sewed into goosedown-stuffed pillows. My mother's only weapons were imagination and ingenuity.

Fortunately, her imagination and ingenuity never failed her—once she had gotten the hang of the thing. She was a quick study too, learning instruments of the occult as fast as she saw them used.

"*Mach a feig*!" she would whisper in the grocers as a beaming housewife commented on my health and good looks. Up came my fist, the thumb protruding between forefinger and middle finger in ancient male gesture against the female evil eye. *Feigs* were my reserve equipment when alone: I could make them at any cursers and continue playing in the serene confidence that all unpleasant wishes had been safely pasteurized. If an errand took me past threatening witch faces in tenement doorways, I shot *feigs* left and right, all the way down the street.

Still, my mother's best would hardly have been worth its weight in used pentagrams if she had not stood up worthily to Old Mrs. *Mokkeh*. *Mokkeh* was the lady's nickname (it is Yiddish for plague or pestilence) and suggested the blood-chilling imprecations she could toss off with spectacular fluency.

This woman made such an impression on me that I have never been able to read any of the fiercer fairy tales without thinking of her. A tiny, square female with four daughters, each as ugly and short as she, Mrs. *Mokkeh* walked as if every firmly planted step left desolated territory forever and contemptuously behind. The hairy wart on the right side of her nose was so large that behind her back—only behind her back; who knew what she'd wish on you if she heard you?—people giggled and said, "Her nose has a nose."

But that was humor's limit; everything else was sheer fright. She would squint at you, squeezing first one eye shut, then the other, her nose wart vibrating as she rooted about in her soul for an appropriately crippling curse. If you were sensible, you scuttled away before the plague that might darken your future could be fully fashioned and slung. Not only children ran, but brave and learned witches.

Old Mrs. *Mokkeh* was a kind of witch-in-chief. She knew curses and spells that went back to antiquity, to the crumbled ghettoes of Babylon and Thebes, and she reconstructed them in the most novel and terrible forms.

When we moved into the apartment directly above her, my mother tried hard to avoid a clash. Balls must not be bounced in the kitchen; indoor running and jumping were strictly prohibited. My mother was still learning her trade at this time and had to be cautious. She would frequently scowl at the floor and bite her lips worriedly. "The *mokkehs* that woman can think up!" she would say.

There came a day when the two of us prepared to visit cousins in the farthest arctic regions of the Bronx. Washed and scrubbed until my skin smarted all over, I was dressed in the good blue serge suit bought for the High Holy Days recently celebrated. My feet were shod in glossy black leather, my neck encircled by a white collar that had been ultimately alloyed with starch. Under this collar ran a tie of brightest red, the intense shade our neighborhood favored for burning the sensitive retina of the Evil Eye.

As we emerged from the building entrance upon the stone stoop, Mrs. *Mokkeh* and her eldest, ugliest daughter, Pearl, began climbing it from the bottom. We passed them and stopped in a knot of women chatting on the sidewalk. While my mother sought advice from her friends on express stops and train changes, I sniffed like a fretful puppy at the bulging market bags of heavy oilcloth hanging from their wrists. There was onion reek, and garlic, and the fresh miscellany of "soup greens."

The casual, barely noticing glances I drew did not surprise me: a prolonged stare at someone's well-turned-out child invited rapid and murderous retaliation. Staring was like complimenting—it only attracted the attention of the Angel of Death to a choice specimen.

I grew bored; I yawned and wriggled in my mother's grasp. Twisting around, I beheld the witch-in-chief examining me squintily from the top of the stoop. She smiled a rare and awesomely gentle smile.

"That little boy, Pearlie," she muttered to her daughter. "A darling, a sweet one, a golden one. How nice he looks!"

My mother heard her and stiffened, but she failed to whirl, as everyone expected and deliver a brutal riposte. She had no desire to tangle with Mrs. *Mokkeh*. Our whole group listened anxiously for the Yiddish phrase customarily added to such a compliment if good will had been at all behind it—*a leben uff em*, a long life upon him.

Once it was apparent that no such qualifying phrase was forthcoming, I showed I had been well-educated. I pointed my free right hand in a spell-nullifying *feig* at my admirer.

Old Mrs. *Mokkeh* studied the *feig* with her narrow little eyes. "May that hand drop off," she intoned in the

same warm, low voice. "May the fingers rot one by one and wither to the wrist. May the hand drop off, but the rot remain. May you wither to the elbow and then to the shoulder. May the whole arm rot with which you made a *feig* at me, and may it fall off and lie festering at your feet, so you will remember for the rest of your life not to make a *feig* at me."

Every woman within range of her lilting Yiddish malediction gasped and gave a mighty head-shake. Then stepping back, they cleared a space in the center of which my mother stood alone.

She turned slowly to face Old Mrs. *Mokkeh*. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she pleaded. "He's only a little boy—not even five years old. Take it back."

Mrs. *Mokkeh* spat calmly on the stoop. "May it happen ten times over. Ten and twenty and a hundred times over. May he wither, may he rot. His arms, his legs, his lungs, his belly. May he vomit green gall and no doctor should be able to save him."

This was battle irrevocably joined. My mother dropped her eyes; estimating the resources of her arsenal. She must have found them painfully slender against such an opponent.

When she raised her eyes again, the women waiting for action leaned forward. My mother was known to be clever and had many well-wishers, but her youth made her a welterweight or at most a lightweight. Mrs. *Mokkeh* was an experienced heavy, a pro who had trained in the old country under famous champions. If these women had been in the habit of making book, the consensus would have been: even money she lasts one or two rounds; five to three she doesn't go the distance.

"Your daughter, Pearlie—" my mother began at last. gan at last.

"Oh, momma, no!" shrieked the girl, suddenly dragged from non-combatant status into the very eye of the fight.

"Shush! Be calm," her mother commanded. After all, only green campaigners expected a frontal attack. My mother had been hit on her vulnerable flank—me—and was replying in kind. Pearl whimpered and stamped her feet, but her elders ignored this: matters of high professional moment were claiming their attention.

"Your daughter, Pearlie," the chant developed. "Now she is fourteen—may she live to a hundred and fourteen! May she marry in five years a wonderful man, a brilliant man, a doctor, a lawyer, a dentist, who will wait on her hand and foot and give her everything her heart desires."

There was a stir of tremendous interest as the kind of curse my mother was kneading became recognizable. It is one of the most difficult forms in the entire Yiddish thaumaturgical repertoire, building the subject up and up and ending with an annihilating crash. A well-known buildup curse goes, "May you have a bank account in every bank, and a fortune in each bank account, and may you spend every penny of it going from doctor to doctor, and no doctor should know what's the matter with you." Or: "May you own a hundred mansions, and in each mansion a hundred richly furnished bedrooms, and may you spend your life tossing from bed to bed, unable to get a single night's sleep on one of them."

To reach a peak and then explode it into an avalanche — that is the buildup curse. It requires perfect detail and even more perfect timing.

"May you give your daughter Pearlie a wedding to this wonderful husband of hers, such a wedding that the whole world will talk about it for years." Pearlie's head began a slow submergence into the collar of her dress. Her mother grunted like a boxer who has been jabbed lightly and is now dancing away.

"This wedding, may it be in all the papers, may they write about it even in books, and may you enjoy yourself at it like never before in your whole life. And one year later, may Pearlie, Pearlie and her wonderful, her rich, her considerate husband—may they present you with your first grandchild. And, *masel tov*, may it be a boy."

Old Mrs. *Mokkeh* shook unbelievingly and came down a step, her nose wart twitching and sensitive as an insect's antenna.

"And this baby boy," my mother sang, pausing to kiss her fingers before extending them to Mrs. *Mokkeh*, "what a glorious child may he be! Glorious. No. Magnificent! Such a wonderful baby boy no one will ever have seen before. The greatest rabbis coming from all over the world only to look upon him at the *bris*, so they'll be able to say in later years they were among those present at his circumcision ceremony eight days after birth. So beautiful and clever he'll be that people will expect him to say the prayers at his own *bris*. And this magnificent first grandson of yours, just one day afterwards, when you are gathering happiness on every side, may he suddenly, in the middle of the night—"

"Hold!" Mrs. *Mokkeh* screamed, raising both her hands. "Stop!"

My mother took a deep breath. "And why should I stop?"

"Because I take it back! What I wished on the boy, let it be on my own head, everything I wished on him. Does that satisfy you?"

"That satisfies me," my mother said. Then she pulled my left arm up and began dragging me down the street. She walked proudly, no longer a junior among seniors, but a full and accredited sorceress.

Your best friend stealing your girl? Slip him a loaded cigar, or, better, some garlic chewing gum (5 sticks, 15¢).

MAIN CURRENTS IN APPLIED COMEDY

by Carlton Brown

THE new edition of Johnson Smith & Company's catalog, which will serve through 1966 and perhaps longer, is a slim shadow of the luxuriant annuals that catered to millions of fun-loving Americans from the early 1920s into the '50s. Paul Smith, one of the founder's two heirs to the business, observes that the catalog attained its all-time maximum of 768 pages in 1929, so that "it held its own when on the shelf alongside *Gone with the Wind* or Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*." (It had to wait until 1936 to gain Margaret Mitchell's wordy romance as a shelfmate.) The current edition, like its last few predecessors, is down to a mere 96 pages—one-eighth the magnitude of the '29 nonpareil. Its diminution— necessitated by diminishing profit margins and rising costs of overhead, printing and paper—does not reflect a falling off of the company's volume of business, which is almost exactly what it was twenty and thirty years ago—between twenty and thirty thousand orders per week, accounting for a daily outflow of some sixty to eighty mailbags full of packages, as many of them addressed to residents of large cities as to people in small towns and rural areas.

The slimming of the catalog corresponds, though not in direct ratio, to a reduction of the total inventory from previous highs of above seven thousand items to a present level of around two thousand. That many are packed in by means of condensations of text and illustrations which leave more to the mail-order shopper's imagination than was left in earlier years. Many notable pieces of equipment for the practical joker, always a specialty of the house, have fallen out—some of them perhaps having been retired from production by mellowing and repentant manufacturers—but enough of them have survived to hearten those who might be inclined to mourn the passing of traditional values in this sphere.

Throughout its first three decades, Johnson Smith & Company attracted new customers by means of one unvarying advertisement which must have been noticed by almost everyone who read magazines in that period. The ad was illustrated with a cartoon of a man carrying a trunk on his back, from which issued cries of "LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT! LET ME OUT!" Near him stood a lad wearing knickers and cap, whose part in the scene the accompanying headlines and copy explained:

BOYS! BOYS! BOYS!

THROW YOUR VOICE

Into a trunk, under the bed, under a table, back of the door, into a desk at school, or anywhere. You get lots of fun fooling the teacher, policemen, peddlers, and surprise and fool all your friends besides.

To accomplish these rascally deceptions, and to "imitate all kinds of birds, animals, etc.," one had only to purchase the Ventrilo, "a little instrument that fits in the mouth out of sight," and use it as instructed in a booklet offered with it, "complete postpaid," for 10 cents, by Johnson Smith & Company of Racine, Wisconsin. The firm moved to Detroit in 1935, and the price of the Ventrilo and booklet has since risen to 15 cents, but the device still figures prominently in the firm's catalog, where its uses are set forth with the same cartoon (reduced) and copy (abbreviated) that have been doing service for some forty years. (A small change in the headlines, undoubtedly dictated by the Federal Trade Commission's mandates on literality in advertising, makes the lines now urge boys to "learn ventriloquism and *apparently* throw your voice." [My italics.]

I have often wondered at the heroic part this picayune contrivance has played in Johnson Smith's growth and long-held tenure of its title of "Only Concern of Its Kind in America." For of the firm's myriad offerings, the Ventrilo is not the one that I would ever have chosen as best exemplifying the character and appeal of the whole varied inventory. Indeed, on the basis of my experience with one of the little instruments at the age of twelve or thirteen, I would rate them low in the sort of sure-fire, built-in capacity to please that turns one-shot purchasers of a product into eager customers for a firm's other wares.

Time and again, I held the nickel-sized disk of metal, leather and reed in my mouth and exercised my vocal apparatus on it as the booklet instructed. Some whistles, squeaks and variants of the rude noise known as the raspberry came out, but all of them as apparently as could be from my lips. No more gratifying results were achieved by any of the three or four of my companions who sent their dimes to Racine for Ventrilos of their own. A continuous parade of men with trunks on their backs might have trooped past us day after day without any of them once supposing, by our doing, that he heard so much as a peep out of his burden. But none of us blamed Johnson Smith & Company. We concluded that we were lacking in a natural aptitude that must separate the virtuosos from the failures in the art of ventriloquism, or else that developing skill in it called for longer and harder practice than we were prepared to give to it.

For my part, what little disappointment I felt over that first purchase was more than compensated by the catalog that came with it. I lived in a rural area in which the twice-yearly catalogs of Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward were eagerly awaited in every household and esteemed and consulted frequently by everyone in it. The Johnson Smith annual usually had no more than a third as many pages as either of those two, of about half their size, but it easily out-weighed both of them together in my estimation. It held a world of things entirely outside the province of the sober-sided giants of the mail-order business and the ordinary outlets of retail trade—a world of tricks and curiosities whose descriptions and illustrations alone gave me hours of diversion and instruction. During the next few years I was never without a copy of the latest edition, and either by purchase or the medium of print, became fondly familiar with a great many of the firm's wares. They contributed so much to a special part of my education that I have since thought of Johnson Smith in the way a satisfied graduate of a correspondence course might think of his postal alma mater—with gratitude, loyalty and warm feelings of affinity for my unseen teachers and classmates of those formative years from around 1925 to '29.

On occasion since then, I have learned a good deal about the institution from its founder, Alfred Johnson Smith, who died in 1948, and one or the other of his sons, Paul and Arthur, who have succeeded him at its helm. I had not kept myself posted on its progress for a long while, though, until recently, when I realized that from the end of my active pupilage, more than a generation—commonly reckoned as thirty years—had passed. If I could now look through a selection of Johnson Smith catalogs spanning that time and compare the contents of one issue and another, I thought, I could gauge the dimensions and durability of certain interests and impulses that have not been catered to so thoroughly and knowingly through any other channel of trade. Paul Smith has made such a set of study materials available to me and answered my questions about points in them which I have not found self-explanatory.

The earliest edition in my loan collection, a brittle relic of 1928, confirms my recollection that Johnson Smith was never so exclusively dedicated to gratifying the whims of mischievous boys as its steadfast advocacy of the Ventrilo would suggest. Its founder made his main advertising pitch to them, I surmise, because boys were the readiest of all people to send for the free samples of products that used to be offered by many firms; for information about prize contests, lonely-hearts clubs and courses in taxidermy, detective work and muscle building; and for intriguing items to be had in exchange for small coins. He may well have centered his campaign on the Ventrilo, rather than on one of the many other devices for little foolers in his stock, because it was much less likely than most of them to offend, discomfort or outrage the objects of the pranksters' attentions, and

so perhaps cause parental vetoing of orders, or arouse adult feelings of ill will toward the company. Grown-ups might even have approved of the instrument because of the promise it held of encouraging youngsters to develop skill in bird imitation and ventriloquism, which were popular forms of entertainment in vaudeville and amateur performances. At any rate, the campaign evidently produced a high yield of first-time customers, many of whom might have been expected to pass their copies of the Johnson Smith catalog around in their circle of family and friends, and thus bring widespread attention to its manifold enticements for people of either sex, assorted ages and sundry inclinations. (It was sent free to anyone who ordered an item from the ads, or requested it, until 1932; since then it has been priced at 10 cents a copy.)

It was the very diversity of its contents, I am reminded by the 1928 edition, which made the catalog so absorbing to me in that year and succeeding ones. Its front cover and its 446 pages present a scattering of playthings intended for the youngest of male customers, as well as many "Surprising Novelties, Puzzles, Tricks Joke Goods, Useful Articles, Etc.," as the cover proclaims, designed to interest older boys. But these entries are only occasionally grouped together by categories. For the most part they appear at random, so that a boy looking through the volume for instruments of deviltry would have found his better instincts being appealed to by many a useful article and aid to self-improvement, while a serious-minded applicant would have had his search deflected by numerous temptations to foolery along the way.

One of the revelations my early copies of the catalog made to me was that the urge to play practical jokes extended beyond my own age into manhood. I had seen cigars explode in the faces of actors in slapstick movies, but I hadn't supposed they did so to any extent in real life. I would have learned otherwise from Johnson Smith, *circa* 1928, when its exploding cigars were billed as "the biggest sell of the season." They could be ordered only in boxes of fifty, at $3.50 per box, which put them out of the range of any but the most zealous and affluent of devotees.

The Exploding Cigar, for many the epitome of all prefabricated pranks, is still going strong, and is now available to occasional as well as habitual users, at 20c apiece, three for 50c, or $6.95 for the box of fifty—an increase no greater than the rise in price of conventional tobacco products over the same period. The vintage catalog offers a score of other deceptive items for smokers, few of them applicable by or to the youngest of customers, and making up among them the largest single genus of goods (in terms of ostensible use) designed primarily for adult jesters. About half as many such items appear in the current catalog. By their diverse operating principles and effects on victims, however, they fit into various categories of equipment for kidders of assorted ages and it is by these categories that the whole line may be analyzed most fruitfully.

Johnson Smith's singularity in American merchandising rests largely on the unrivalled extent of its stock of this sort; the basic subdivisions of that stock were firmly established in the '20s, and have since changed only in superficial content, not in essential scope. Hence in the categories of joke goods that have found a continuous market among the firm's far-flung customers, we may find a telling index of tendencies in popular ideas of fun, and through it gain insight into a little-considered aspect of the psychology of comedy.

Every form of comedy involves some sort of surprise, ranging from unexpected absurdities of a genial nature to upsets of dignity, composure and comfort of varying degrees of violence. In the implemented or applied form of comedy, the most innocuous way of startling one's audience is to play the fool oneself. This impulse was accommodated by more than a dozen devices in each of the early catalogs, and continues to be served by an even greater number in the latest one.

"Surprise your friends," the current announcement for one of these contrivances suggests, exactly as a larger notice did from the '20s through the '50s, with one or more Imitation Gold Teeth, which "fit over your regular teeth" (10c each; three for 25c). The same aim may be achieved even more spectacularly with the newer, protruding Goofy Teeth (20c the set) or, for after-dark occasions, the Luminous Glow Fangs (15c). Some engaging ocular novelties of yesteryear are gone, among them the Monocle with Vibrating Eye (15c; two for 25c), which made the wearer's eye or eyes appear to "vibrate or roll and quiver with every movement of the face or body. . . . They will make such an alternation [*sic*] in your usual style of beauty that you can make love to your mother-in-law without fear of detection." But in their place we have the arresting Bloodshot Pop Eyes (29c a pair); the Fallout Eyeballs, mounted in frames (75c); and the Extra Eye (50c each; two for 98c), a "full size, natural looking" model which "sticks anywhere. As a 3-eyed monster or 4-eyed comic drunk, you're a scream." Among other purely visual fool-playing devices, a relative newcomer and a "great laugh producer" is the Jumping Hat (50c), which "Works with any hat," making it "slowly rise & fall, or bounce up & down" on the wearer's head. For sonic-minded buffoons, the irrepressible old Trumpet in Handkerchief, renamed the Noisy Nose Blower, remains available at the same old reasonable price of 10c.

An interesting sub-category of fool-playing aids was typified in the catalogs of earlier decades by Joke Warts, at 10c per package—"quite natural looking, with two or more hairs sticking out of each to make the illusion more perfect"—which, when affixed to the face or hands, were said to make one "the object of sympathising inquiries." Such expressions might have been elicited even more readily—from people who would have hesitated to comment on an apparent blemish of that sort—by any of several simulations of bodily injuries, such as the Sore Toe (15c), which created the illusion that "a badly bruised and inflamed big toe" projected through the tip of one's shoe, or the Sore Finger Joke (10c), a slip-on bandage with spots of sanguinary coloring. These generators of misplaced condolences were evidently valued by those in the sunnier phases of masochism or hypochondria. The need they filled has apparently undergone a change, for the related appliances of today, in keeping with a trend of the times, are of a sicker cast, more likely to produce shock or revulsion than to arouse sympathy. Among them we now have the "Scarface" Fake Cut or Gash (25c), the Ugly Boils (20c the pack), the Horrible Mangled Finger, of flesh-and-bruise-colored latex (25c), the Cut-Off Finger, nestled in a box of cotton

BOYS! LEARN VENTRILOQUISM AND APPARENTLY

THROW YOUR VOICE

Into a trunk, under the bed, under a table, back of the door, into a desk at school, or anywhere. You get lots of fun fooling the teacher, policeman, peddlers, and surprise and fool all your friends besides.

THE VENTRILO

is a little instrument that fits in the mouth out of sight. Cannot be detected. It is used in connection with the above, and with the aid of this wonderful **DOUBLE THROAT or VENTRILO**, you can imitate many kinds of birds, animals, etc. Remember you get everything for **ONLY TWELVE CENTS**—the book which gives you instructions on how to become a ventriloquist and the Double Throat, or Ventrilo, besides.

No. 3461. Price of Complete Outfit..... 12c

BLACK EYE JOKE

This is an imitation of a fine Kaleidoscope. Your victim cannot understand why everybody laughs when he takes the 'scope away from his eye. He looks as though he had taken part in a prize fight, and rubbing makes it worse. It isn't a bad joke if your friend isn't hot tempered.

No. 2115. BLACK EYE JOKE.. 19c

LIFE-LIKE SPRING SNAKES

Sensational Joke Novelty You Can Use Over and Over Again In Many Ways!

Spring Snake Compresses Into Small Space, Ready to Pop OUT Whenever Released. Put it in Candy Box, Drawer, Jam Jar, Medicine Jar, Etc., Etc.

Loads of fun with this **LARGE LIFE-LIKE SPRING SNAKE.** Use it over and over again in a hundred different ways. The **SPRING SNAKE** is easily compressed into the small space, ready to pop out on anyone as soon as it is released. Imagine the shock and horror that comes over the victim when he sees this ugly thing lunging out at him. The powerful action startles even the most iron nerved.

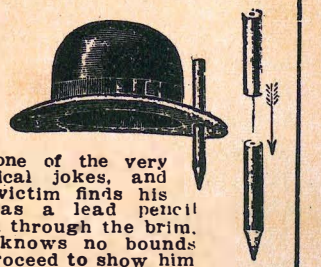
"My Gosh, What a Wicked Thing!"

There are many ways to use it, and you can probably think of a lot more which people in their right mind (like us) wouldn't dream of telling you, but to mention a few: put it in an old jam jar or mayonnaise jar at the dinner table, in a candy box for your best (?) girl, in a drawer where nosy people aren't supposed to go, wrap it in a gift box for that "special" person, etc., etc. In fact, it can be squeezed into a very small space, but it shoots out like a rocket when released. Over a foot long.

No. 2828. LIFE-LIKE SPRING SNAKE. Price Postpaid..... 25c

AMAZING

Try This on Your Friend's New Hat



This is one of the very best practical jokes, and when the victim finds his new lid has a lead pencil poked right through the brim, his anger knows no bounds until you proceed to show him that it was only a trick pencil and hand him back his hat undamaged. A practical joker with a few of these surprise pencils in a hat or cloak room could cause quite a sensation.

No. 2932. Surprise Pencil..... 10c

Girls Can't Resist this KISS ME NECKTIE as it GLOWS in the DARK!

A Beautiful Tie . . Day and Night

Be different and the life of the party in any crowd! Here's the most amazing spectacular necktie that you ever wore, smart, wrinkle-proof, tailored cravat, which at night is a thrilling sensation! It's smart, superb class by day, and just imagine in the dark it seems like a necktie of compelling allure, sheer magic! Like a miracle of light there comes a pulsing, glowing question —**Will You Kiss Me in the Dark, Baby?** Think of he surprise, the awe you will cause! There's no trick, no hidden batteries, no switches or foolish horseplay, but a thing of loveliness as the question emerges gradually to life, touched by the wand of darkness, and your girl will gasp with wonder as it takes form so amazingly. A Hollywood riot wherever you go.

No. 4082. Kiss Me Tie. Postpaid $1.69

Makes Drinkers "Slobber"

DRIBBLE GLASS

A Harmless, Though Very Funny Joke.

This looks like an ordinary cut glass tumbler with a grape design. The leaves are cut all the way through the glass and make small holes through which the contents will flow when the glass is tipped. No matter how a person drinks out of the Dribble Glass, they will get the contents in a small stream down their chin or shirt front. Great amusement may be had by serving these glasses to several persons in a party—they'll all "slobber" and each will be wondering why they all do the same. Each sent carefully packed in a strong carton.

No. 2764. DRIBBLE GLASS. Each 35c

Flashy Red Celluloid

Long Tongue

Just slip this tongue into your mouth and then let it hang out. It protrudes no less than five inches giving you quite a comical look. Wiggle it around and do some of the most amazing things.

No. 4351. Long Tongue. Price Postpaid..... 12c

(35c), and Bloody Tooth on Toothpick (19c), a "Big, ugly, realistic" number which the joker extracts from is mouth with effects that are said to be "Horrifying while eating, etc."

The lighter sort of fool-playing equipment overlaps into the fields of self-adornment and acquaintance-making. The confusion or blending of the three aims used to be particularly evident in an assortment of jocular Inspector Badges and Stars, at 10c each (e.g., GARTER INSPECTOR); an extensive line of Comic Celluloid Buttons, at two for 10c (OUT FOR A GOOD TIME, etc.); a series of Comical Hat Bands, at 15c each (CATCH ME GIRLS—I'M EASY MONEY); some Comical Feathers, at 10c each (TICKLED TO MEET YOU); and a half-dozen Comical Motto Rings, at 25c each (KISS ME AGAIN I'M STILL CONSCIOUS, and the like). Presumably all of these were intended, like the Comic Celluloid Buttons, to "provide subjects for pleasant jokes and amusing conversations, and thus smooth the way to a more familiar acquaintance and cordial friendship." Their wearers might also have been motivated by a desire that was catered to more forthrightly and earnestly by a line of Electric Scarf Pins in fifteen "pretty and charming" models, at 50c each; when one of them was connected by its cord to a flashlight in the pocket, at the touch of the button the pin lit up with a "dazzling effulgence that attracts INSTANT ATTENTION," making the wearer " 'the cynosure of wondering eyes,' the admiration of the ladies and the envy of the men."

Of this lot, only the Comic Motto Rings and the Comic Celluloid Buttons survive, the first now up a dime to 35c each, the second holding firm at two for 10c, or thirty for $1, and both so sparsely represented in illustrations and copy as to leave their appeal obscure to many present-day browsers in the catalog. The Electric Scarf Pins are a casualty of fashion's fickleness, but their dazzle and capacity to startle are matched by some current accessories whose genesis merits a paragraph to itself.

The dual aim of attracting attention and making romantic overtures has probably not been so spectacularly served by any other item as it was by an entry which met with enthusiastic acceptance from the mid-'40s through the early '50s. This was a piece of haberdashery which appeared in the light to be a "smart, wrinkle-proof, tailored cravat," but in the darkness became—by means of phosphorescent lettering—"a necktie of compelling allure, sheer magic," adorned with "a pulsing, glowing question," WILL YOU KISS ME IN THE DARK, BABY? The original Kiss Me Tie sold briskly, first at $1.69, later at $1.49, but by 1950 it met with stiff competition from the battery-operated Bow-Lite Tie, in three models ($1.99 each) "to suit every occasion. If you haven't met her yet, the 'HI TOOTS' should get you acquainted. If she is the bashful type, get her in the theatre (or any dark place) and flash the 'KISS ME' signal. You may be bashful, but the light never is, and the girl will be delighted, too, at the wonderful idea and your originality. Or, if some lousy crumb is always hanging around, then you need the 'DROP DEAD' tie." Though it cannot be said of these, as it was of the four-in-hand prototype, that their use involves "no switches or foolish horseplay," the wider expressive range of the Bow-Lite Ties, and the fact that their messages may be flashed on and off at will, has apparently given them the edge, for they are the only simultaneously luminous and communicative wearables to appear in the current catalog (now $2.50 each). Their description, however, has been so severely compressed that nothing is said of the messages of the three models, or of their range of applicability, beyond "Various comic mottos," and the only one illustrated is KISS ME.

Because of similar condensations throughout its pages, the new catalog does not offer the insights into the motivations of the practical joker that could be found in the more explicit blurbs of the earlier issues. In these, for example, it was customary to find the words "friends" and "victims" used interchangeably, and to find "the ladies" identified as an often-favored segment of the prankster's circle of friends/victims—clear indications that the joker tends to think of his japes as amicable or amorous overtures and verification of the psychological tenet that teasing and cutting up are bids for notice and affection. One could learn from the lavish descriptions and illustrations in the old catalogs, too, that practical joking is almost exclusively a male activity, and largely

Sneezing Powder

NOT Mailable SENT Express ONLY

Place a very small amount of this powder on the back of your hand and blow it into the air, and watch the people in the room or car begin to sneeze without knowing the reason why. It is most amusing to hear their remarks, as they never suspect the real source, but think they have caught it one from the other. Between the laughing and sneezing you yourself will be having the time of your life. For PARTIES, POLITICAL MEETINGS, CAR RIDES, or any place at all where there is a gathering of people, it is the GREATEST JOKE OUT.

NOT MAILABLE. SHIPPED BY EXPRESS ONLY. EXPRESS CHARGES ARE PREPAID BY US.

No. 6258. SNEEZING POWDER
6 Packages for (None Less Sold) 90c
12 for $1.50; 24 for $2.35; 50 for $4.00; 100 for $7.50

Itching Powder

This is another good practical joke, the intense discomfiture of your victims to everyone but themselves, is thoroughly enjoyable. All that is necessary to start the ball rolling is to deposit a little of the powder on a person's hand and the powder can be relied upon to do the rest. The result is a vigorous scratch, then some more scratch, and still some more.

NOT MAILABLE. SHIPPED BY EXPRESS ONLY. EXPRESS CHARGES ARE PREPAID BY US.

No. 6257. ITCHING POWDER.
6 Packages for (None Less Sold) 90c
12 for $1.50; 24 for $2.35; 50 for $4.00; 100 for $7.50

Great Practical Joke

Plate Lifter Or Heart Palpitator

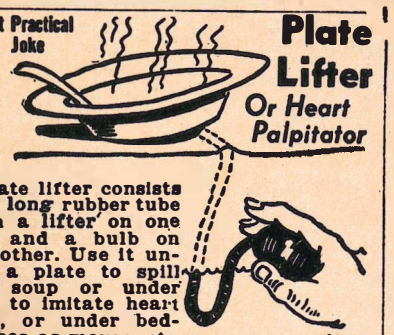


Plate lifter consists of a long rubber tube with a lifter on one end and a bulb on the other. Use it under a plate to spill the soup or under vest to imitate heart beat, or under bedclothes as mouse, etc.

No. 2164. Plate Lifter. Postpaid.. 50c

an adult one. Grown men greatly outnumber boys in the role of perpetrators in the pictures and text. Not a single item of foolery in any of the old lots was recommended for the use of girls, and only three—all relatively inoffensive—were depicted in use by women. One has to look hard in the new edition to find an instance of the suggestion that you "Shock your friend!" with one of its entries and for another that an item may be used to "scare the pants off the ladies." In the main, the prankster is now identified only as "you," and his butt as "them" (or even more space-saving "'em"), with both parties indeterminate as to sex and interpersonal relationship. Armed with the insights provided by the old catalogs, however, we may detect the persistence of the several basic motivations of the practical joker in the contents of the new, and see in what respects his behavior patterns have changed over the last few decades, and in what respects they have remained the same.

He who would play the fool or adorn himself for attention-getting purposes, as we have noted, is offered more equipment for doing so than ever before. Since supply is geared to demand, this circumstance may be taken to indicate an increased adherence to the principles of non-aggression among members of the jesting fraternity as a whole.

But not by all of them, or course, and perhaps not by any of them all of the time, since joking is not an essentially passive activity. At the first step beyond the self-centered or inner-directed jest, we find the other-directed taunt. Its delivery was implemented by only a few items in the old Johnson Smith catalogs and by even fewer in the new. The Liar's License survives, at 10c the copy, and may now be augmented with the impressive Medal for Lying, complete with silk ribbon (20c), or the Bull Shooter's Medal, with "Plastic bull head, plaque & ribbon" (35c). The vintage catalog gave prominent billing to more than one "Effectual Check on Cadgers." To rebuke "the inveterate cigarette borrower whose 'Why don't you smoke better cigarettes,' becomes so insatiable," the joker could offer him one labeled IF YOU DON'T LIKE THIS GO TO HELL AND BUY YOUR OWN, from a box of ten of them, at 35c. The cigarettes were said to be of such high quality that they "never fail to give satisfaction to the particular smoker." No such paradoxical combination of insult and treat was incorporated in the Joker Cigar Case (35c), from which "cigars peep temptingly forth" only to be replaced at the touch of a button by a little figure thumbing its nose. The GO TO HELL cigarettes are no longer stocked, but an adaptation of the Joker Cigar Case (also 35c) enables the joker to deliver the same impertinence to "cigarette moochers."

The wish to disappoint or frustrate one's friends/victims, without necessarily insulting them at the same time, could formerly be gratified by a variety of instruments which made up the most plentiful category (in terms of emotional effect) of joke goods in the catalog. They still do, though their total has been reduced and the composition of the category altered. Of a number of inoperable or inedible imitations of useful articles and tidbits designed to fill this need, there remain the Rubber Pointed Joke Pencil (15c); some Rubber Chocolates (10c each), now, as not formerly, realistically flavored and scented; a Comic Rubber Hot Dog (15c); a Bending Knife (65c) and Fork (50c) and a Mystery Spoon (35c) which "Won't pick up anything."

As irritating elements are added, the foiling possibilities expand. Today's dispenser of deceptive treats is offered a larger-than-ever choice of repulsive and alarming effects in Awful Tasting Beer (15c), Awful Tasting Cola Drink (10c), Extra Salty Taffy ("Pleasant at first—but soon—WOW!"), Garlic Gum ("Ruins breath for hours"), Onion Flavored Gum, Pucker the Lips Gum, Hot Pepper Candy, a fly-apart package of Surprise Candy (15c each), Red Hot Gum (12c), Exploding Gum (39c) and Snapping Gum (25c), the last two of which, mercifully, deliver their reprimands to the taker's fingers, not his mouth. Two venerable favorites are also still present—Surprise Pop-Out Snake Items in the Nut Can (65c) and Candy Jar ($2) models. With the after-dinner coffee, guests may be served Foaming Sugar which "overflows onto table: clouds of foam" (35c), and if that hasn't done it, the host may "Spoil their big meal by giving 'em one of these—a Hot Toothpick (10c a package) which "almost burns their mouth out" but is "harmless."

As part of the evening's entertainment, the joker might elect to play on the peeping impulse of a male guest by tendering him the long-established Black Eye Joke (19c), a little viewing instrument which purports to let one's dupe "See naughty lady!" and deposits a ring of soot around his eye; or the modern Pee Wee Tricky Viewer (50c), by means of which

> *They see gorgeous picture of pin-up girl in full color which excites them. Tell 'em to turn crank for better ones. When crank is turned, powerful squirt of water catches them in the face!*

Devices which both disappoint and deliver drastic surprises are not quite so plentiful as they once were, but they remain well represented by some of the above items as well as by a Joke Gift Box which, when opened, ejects "a life-like rat" (35c), an Exploding Fountain Pen, an Exploding Deck of Cards (50c each), Exploding Matches (15c), an Electric Shocking Cigarette Case and an Electric Shocking Book ($2.95 each). The explosive ones of these are loaded with percussive caps, and so is the persistently popular Bingo Shooting Device (25c)—once billed as "the means of creating more amusement than any article ever invented"—with which the joker can custom-build the same pow into a wide variety of articles of everyday use.

What used to be said of a number of such funmakers still applies to a good many of the surviving ones: the joker needn't hand them to his friends/victims but can "Just lay one on the table and they CATCH THEMSELVES." A few such booby traps have also been devised which by their nature, more or less rule out the presence of the joker at the time of their springing, and so limit him to relishing his dupes' immediate reactions *in absentia.* A durable one of this line is Dirty Soap (15c), which dyes the user's skin green in the privacy of the lavatory. Two relatively new attractions for the absentee joker are the Exploding Toilet Seat (95c) and the Squirt Seat (59c). A related innovation of the '30s, the Whoopee Cushion (35c), which "gives forth noises better imagined than described" when sat upon, has remained among the most favored of prankster's implements of all time.

Such contrivances as these do not, of course, automatically identify the fooler to his dupes. That is the case, too, with a number of joke items which do not exactly qualify as instruments of disapointment and frustration. One imperishable classic, the Dribble Glass (65c), actually holds whatever beverage it apparently holds, and nothing prevents the victim from drinking of its contents. Whenever he tips it to his lips, though, some of the liquid leaks out through small slits, cut all the way through the glass in a design incised on its outside surface, and runs down his chin and front. "Great amusement may be had by serving these glasses to several persons in a party," the old, uncondensed blurbs suggested. "They'll all 'slobber' and each will be wondering why they all do the same."

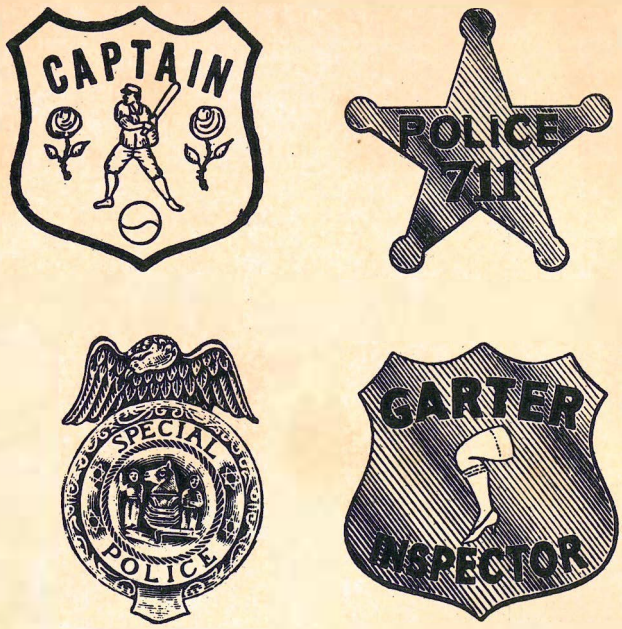
Another table prank of deathless appeal, the Plate Lifter (35c), requires direct activation by the jester and exposes him to the risk of detection. He places a deflated rubber bulb under the tablecloth or place mat at his victim's place, and by squeezing another bulb which he holds under the table, forces air through a connecting tube and "causes the victim's plate to move most mysteriously, and tilt up, until the man imagines he is bewitched. . . . It is very amusing."

Various other sight-gag props again allow the joker to preserve his anonymity if he wishes to. A fairly recent mutant in a long line of ersatz fauna, the "hideously real" Rubber Bat (25c), "Seldom fails to create excitement" when secured by its suction cup to a window or wall and left for someone to discover. Imitation Cockroaches (10c per packet), once recommended for floating in a companion's drink, are no longer available, but some more-than-adequate substitutes are at hand in the Plastic Ice Cube with Real Bug Inside (25c) and the molded styrene plastic Eye Balls (40c), "with natural eye appearance" and "weighted so pupil always looks up, out of drink."

Some distressing household disasters may be effectively simulated with the time-tested Joke Ink Blot (10c) and Dummy Nail Joke (20c)—a "Mammoth nail head mounted on a pin," handy for the mock defacement of furniture. Another antique of the same genre, with an extra charge of ominous portent for the superstitious housewife, is the Broken Mirror Joke; proclaimed "a new idea" in 1928, it persists under its original title and serial number and—at the same moderately advanced price (15c)—fulfills a contemporary function under the updated designation of Broken TV Tube Joke. In either application, it marks the glass so that it appears extensively fractured, "Brings instant anguished reaction," but may then be "Harmlessly removed in seconds."

These inanimate artifices, it will be seen, are intended for gratuitous application. The *farceur* can't pretend he is employing any of them as an Effectual Check on Cadgers, nor obtain with any of them the peculiar gratification of frustrating a friend by putting commodities and services before him which prove deceptive. Their effects are entirely uncalled for by their victims. This is true also of some jesters' tools and provisions which embody a principle of active assault or irritation. Care must be taken in choosing one's targets for the perennial buttonhole favorite, the Squirt Flower (19c); for the equally durable Squirt Cigar (15c), Squirt Police Badge and Squirt Ring (25c each), and for the newer and, for some tastes, rather more gauche Squirt Hearing Aid (25c). For what was traditionally said of one of them continues to apply to all: "Squeeze the bulb at the right moment and the spectator receives a stream of water in the face. It isn't a bad joke if your friend isn't hot tempered." Selective application may also be made of the somewhat less discommoding Joy Buzzer (35c), a small wind-up mechanism that fits in the palm and, when the joker's hand is shaken, gives the victim a simulated electric shock. Its principle of delivering a jolt by way of an amicable gesture is evidently powerfully appealing to jokers, for it is also operative in two later creations, the cap-percussing Exploding Hand Shaker (35c), and the Electric Hand Shaker ($2.98), operated by a small battery, which deals out charges of genuine voltage at an "Adjustable" rate, presumably to be altered according to the degree of cordiality the jester wishes to express.

Assaults and irritations of less discriminating sorts are facilitated by three old standbys, Itching Powder, Sneezing Powder (25c the package; five for $1) and Stink Bombs (three for 25c; 85c per dozen; $5.95 per—whew!—hundred). The first is currently called "Our best funmaker," and the other two also show persistent



strength, in spite of competition from the more timely Smoke Bomb (15c each; $1.20 a dozen), from which "Thick white smoke rises to ceiling mushrooming like an A-bomb, filling room."

The years since 1928 have seen the addition of no further basic categories of joke goods to Johnson Smith & Company's wares, but all of the ones then established continue to be represented in the current catalog by such items as we have surveyed. Beginning with the issues of the late '30s, the hand of one or the other of the founder's sons, who had joined him in the business by then, could occasionally be suspected in announcements of additions to the stock—in such locutions of a younger generation, it might be supposed, as "lousy crumb," in reference to the uses of the DROP DEAD model of the Bow-Lite Tie. But the parent style remained dominant throughout the whole series, as it still does in blurbs excerpted from vintage editions for use in the latest one.

Alfred Johnson Smith wrote all of the advertising copy and catalog text for his firm from its beginning until his retirement and in it showed widely ranging interests, lively enthusiasms and a fertile imagination which endowed many a humble article with previously unperceived attractions. Probably his masterwork in this line of elevation was achieved with the Ventrilo, which his son Paul says was "an old item even fifty years ago," having been developed in Germany for the use of ventriloquists and magicians in imitating bird calls and animal sounds and of no essential help in creating the illusion of projecting the voice. In envisioning its potentialities in the mouths of rascally schoolboys, he revealed a fanciful turn of mind which has charmed many more people, for a much longer time, than it might have if he had applied it to another form of semi-fictional composition.

The Smith who forged this and many a comparable bit of dross into the precious coin of folkstuff was born in England in 1885 and taken to Australia at an early age. Following a contemporary formula for getting ahead, he learned stenography with a view to getting a job in which he could learn principles of business management. His precocity was such that by the time he was sixteen he had his own business of selling rubber stamps by mail order, which he conducted nights while employed as secretary for a milk company. He expanded his line with novelties and useful items imported from the United States and Europe and then moved to this country in search of a larger market, setting up shop in Chicago in 1914 and moving to Racine in 1921. From then until 1935, that city figured as the Athens of the practical joker's world, and many of those who served their novitiate in those years must since have found it difficult to adjust themselves to the firm's resettlement in Detroit.

Alfred Johnson Smith did not invent any of the pranksters' equipment which he assembled from far and wide and presented in unparalleled profusion, but, his son Paul says, "he suggested many items to manufacturers which ultimately were very profitable. Primarily, he liked to write, and get excited about something new, to watch the flow of new items, write his enthusiasms, and see them sell." His enthusiasms were by no means confined to joke goods, which have been vastly outnumbered, in every catalog the firm has issued from its earliest years to its latest, by useful articles and aids to mental and bodily improvement. But the founder's fun-loving side kept turning up, even on pages devoted to no-nonsense merchandise, at the bottom of which he was inclined to print jokes on the order of:

G. "Did you take a bath?"

Y. "No. Is there one missing?"

Perhaps that inclination subtly colored his descriptions of his stock, putting an extra charge of zest and persuasiveness into his endorsements of instruments of buffoonery. Perhaps his advertisements in periodicals for the Ventrilo and similar trivia attracted a footling type of clientele which resisted the inducements to constructive effort in which the catalog always abounded. Whatever the reason, a dream he cherished of "uplifting people," in his son Paul's words, "never seemed to get any response." People went on, and go on, identifying Johnson Smith with jokes and tricks.

For the most part practical jokers' supplies appear in the dozen or so backmost pages of the current catalog, which is better classified than the earlier ones were. The covers and foremost pages are crammed with hundreds of articles intended to afford wholesome recreation, education and improvement to clients of all ages—a storehouse of radio and electronic equipment; kits for all manner of scientific experiment and observation; cameras, photographic and optical gear; tools and supplies for the craftsman, artisan and technician; bicycle and auto accessories; musical instruments, seeds, books, stamps and coins; and what, indeed, not. The majority of these entries sell well enough to justify their continued presentation, and the higher-priced of them naturally return the firm better profits than the low-priced novelties, which "dollarwise are just so-so," as Paul Smith puts it. But despite the long campaign to uplift people by means of constructive merchandise and literature, which the Smiths, father and sons, have waged, the firm's average order still totals about $2 and is for goods which some observers might rate even lower culturewise than the company executives do dollarwise. After reviewing the pros and cons of this circumstance not long ago, Paul Smith summed up affirmatively, or at any rate philosophically, "Fortunately we have a hard core of incorrigible pranksters, and we try to service them."


Graham
Wilson

Harvey Aronson

The most unforgettable toys I've ever met

A lament for do-it-yourself toys—with instructions

As a kid, I reached an apex of ego-gratification during my "pusho" period. The thing was that my father owned a wrecking yard, and as a natural consequence I had the best pusho on the block. I daresay that by today's standards it would have been a work of art. It was a rolling junk pile.

Pushoes were popular back before split-level developments—in the days when there were not only streets but sidewalks, too. They were the halcyon days when Buck Rogers dominated outer space, Ken Maynard and Tex Ritter appeared on ice-cream-cup covers, and kids made their own toys. Basically, pushoes—or pushmobiles, as they were known in fancier neighborhoods—were scooters on roller skates. (Not, however, to be confused with today's factory-made "skate-boards," which compare to pushoes the way frozen blintzes compare to my mother's.) Pushoes were homemade, depending primarily on an anachronistic container known as an orange crate. You affixed roller-skate halves to both ends of a two-by-four or any other suitable long board. Then you nailed an upright orange crate atop the board, and presto—a pusho. You simply held on to the top of the crate and pushed yourself along scooter fashion. You could brake either with your foot or with a wooden stick nailed to the board.

For real class, you decorated the orange crate—you

festooned it with soda bottle caps, automobile accessories, and the kid next door if he got in the way. Thanks to the fact that my father owned a wrecking yard, I had the most festooned pusho in the borough of Queens. My pusho was a marvel of old license plates, headlights, horns, tail lights, and hood emblems. I even had a simulated dashboard that was a glorious dangle of speedometers and gas and oil gauges. As pushoes go, it was nonpareil. There wasn't a kid in the neighborhood who didn't envy me.

There's no question about it; that pusho was one helluva toy. I don't have a Citizen-Kane-sled-hangup about it, but I do remember it emotionally. The point is that I made it all myself. And it was only one such toy. In those primordial days before the invention of plastic and Sandy Becker, there were dozens of playthings that children could and did make for themselves. They put together everything from guns and scooters to dolls and flowers, and they did it without precut kits and numbered instruction sheets. All they needed was a kid on the block who already knew how and such basic materials as old inner tubes, orange crates, rubber bands, broomsticks and string. The cost was minimal and the toys lasted. And if they didn't, replacement parts were no problem.

For example, take a toy parachute. Nowadays, a child spots a plastic parachute at the toy counter and immediately suffers a seizure of the galloping gimmies. "Buy me that!" he hollers. "Waaah! Gimme!" His parents snap it up because it only costs a dollar and that's a cheap price to pay for his silence. But if you remember the good old toys, you should recall that all you needed for a parachute was a man's handkerchief, four equal lengths of string and a small rock. You simply punched tiny holes through each corner of the handkerchief, attached a length of string through each hole, and tied the ends of the string together around the rock. And that was it. You just crumpled the parachute and tossed it high into the air. It billowed to the ground like the real thing.

In our affluent society, of course, such toys as pushoes and handkerchief parachutes are as extinct as the Dodo Bird and Tom Mix. This is due to the gradual disappearance of such building materials as inner tubes and orange crates, to the law of supply and demand, and to the importance of owning that which is new, shiny and breakable. Modern toys are ready-made, mass-produced, motivationally-researched and hard-sold. They are guaranteed to hold a child's interest for as long as a week and to hold together for as long as two weeks. And they are educational. Listen, for $12.98, you can get your kid a listening device that will teach him all he needs to know about the neighborhood, and for a little less you can buy him a spy-case that comes equipped with a hidden camera. And what better way could there be to prepare a little girl for womanhood than to buy her a Barbie Doll (Barbie is built like a Playboy bunny) or a Misty Doll (Misty's hair color can be changed just like Mommy's).

There is, however, one missing ingredient—the satisfaction of making-it-yourself, the inner glow that today's children get little more than a mere glimmer of in construction-paper collages and fingerpainting projects. By way of illustration, take kites. Sure, you can buy regular kites and box-kites, and even plastic swooper-dupers that are practically lethal. But in the old days, you could make a kite. Honest injun! First you took strips of light wood, the best kind came from macaroni crates (now even more extinct than orange crates), and you tied the strips together for crosspieces. You ran string around the frame, and you glued tissue paper onto the frame. You could even make your own glue by combining flour and water. The pasting was delicate work, but the finished product was worth it. When you flew a homemade kite, you got an inkling of what it was like for Orville Wright at Kitty Hawk or how Icarus felt before the wax melted.

And guns! We shot each other to pieces without benefit of any of the advantages available to today's children—without silencers, telescopic sights or bullet-firing

attache cases. Sometimes, we didn't have a thing in our hands. In such cases, you just pointed your index finger at somebody, yelled "bang" or "bang, bang" or "bang, bang, bang," depending upon the number of shots, followed this up with "I gotcha!" and then argued for 20 minutes over whether the other kid was dead or not.

It verges on sacrilege to say this in the context of latter-day television spiels, but a boy could live without Mattel or Marx as long as he had rubber bands and orange crates. The primary weapon in those times was the simple homemade rubber-band gun. To make a proper rubber-band gun, you needed a right-angled section of orange-crate framing. The shorter part was the stock, and the longer part was the barrel. The key thing here was that orange crates were framed at both ends with three-layered pieces of wood. In fashioning your gun, you made diagonal cuts down the exterior layers at the stock end of the barrel. This enabled you to slip one end of a rubber band over the emergent middle layer. Then you stretched the rubber band—and it is important to remember here that the stronger the rubber band, the better the gun—over the muzzle end of the barrel. The gun was now ready to fire. All you had to do was push the rubber band off of the stock end. Whish! "I gotcha!"

That, back in the days of Ralston straight-shooters, was the fundamental weapon, but by no means the ultimate one. The innovations were first-rate, in their own way as clever as any of the gimmicks devised for James Bond or Napoleon Solo. For example, you could tack the rubber band to the muzzle end of the barrel. Then you could insert cardboard squares through the rubber band on the top of the barrel and fire them off. That was a cardboard-square gun. In my neighborhood—and in retrospect, this is a little frightening—we sometimes used linoleum squares instead of cardboard. That was a linoleum-square gun.

Or you could make what one adult of my acquaintance fondly remembers as a "machine gun." This weapon followed the rubber-band principle—with the difference being that a two-foot long barrel was required for firing off strips of inner tubing that were triggered with clothes pins. Another man I know—it may be pertinent that he grew up in Montana, where a certain frontier spirit prevailed— recalls making a multiple-shot special that would have been the toast of any street. He provides the following description: "You would get a long piece of wood for the barrel and cut, say seven notches along the top. Next you would tie a piece of string to the end of the barrel and fold it into each notch, and let the other end dangle loose on the stock. Then you would stretch separate pieces of inner tube from the stock into each notch. When you pulled the string, you could get off seven shots—bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!—just like that, one for each piece of inner tube. Or you could attach, say, three barrels to one stock and get off 21 shots. It was fantastic!"

Inner tubing attached to the prongs of a forked stick made an excellent slingshot, and, of course, there was a varied array of medieval-style weaponry waiting to be made. Saw a triangular point at the end of a length of wood, nail a short cross-piece at the other end, and what ho! you had a sword. Tie a piece of twine into notches at either end of a supple tree branch or a strong hunk of hedge-wood, and you had a bow. Smaller sticks made arrows, and longer ones made quarter-staffs. Such weapons of the hack-and-parry school of combat usually made their appearance on Saturdays—after youngsters had watched the movie-matinee exploits of such idols of derring-do as Errol Flynn and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Shields were necessary, but they required no work at all; they were garbage-can covers, which, in wintertime, doubled as excellent sleds. Nowadays, toy stores feature saucer-shaped, plastic snow-coasters that actually are nothing more than simulated garbage-can covers. The sale of such items may seem a little silly, but imagine trying to tell a modern kid to go slide down a hill on his garbage-can cover!

As has already been indicated, the production of homemade toys was influenced to some degree by geography and environment. For instance, a friend of mine who was reared in rural Florida remembers making popguns out of such native materials as chinaberries and bamboo stalks. At the least, the popgun sounds as exciting as the multiple-shot inner-tube gun from Montana. He explains its manufacture this way: "To start off, you got a piece of bamboo about eight inches long, with a hollow diameter of one-quarter to one-half an inch. Then you stuffed a chinaberry of not quite the same diameter into the far end of the bamboo tube, and another chinaberry into the near end. When you pushed on the first chinaberry it produced pressure; you could feel it. But you needed a plunger to push with, and that was the hard part. You took a piece of soft wood a little longer than the tube, maybe you used a piece of broom handle, and you started narrowing it. Maybe you narrowed it for a length of about seven-and-a-half inches. I can remember working for a half-hour on a plunger; you had to get that narrow part down just right. It had to be flexible, and it had to be airtight when you pushed it in. Sometimes, you could use a pencil. Anyway, when you did it right, there was this terrific 'pop!' and the chinaberry at the far end of the tube shot right out!"

This same Floridian also recalls making long forked sticks that he used for trapping water moccasins in swamps. We didn't have any water moccasins in Queens, but I remember twisting the ends of wire hangers into small circles and affixing the hangers onto broomsticks. We used these for trapping and retrieving tennis balls from sewers. For that matter, the broomsticks were toys all by themselves. We used them as bats for the stickball games we played daily in the streets.

Nor was it strictly a boy's world. Girls made toys, too. For example, all a girl had to do was nail two orange crates together, and she had a four-room doll house. It was literally child's play. Today, naturally, it's more advanced. There are cardboard doll houses and metal doll houses; they come in a few dozen pieces and only take a grown-up three weeks to assemble. But that's what we call progress.

And dolls. Back in those days when Shirley Temple was Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and Jane Withers didn't know the first thing about plumbing, little girls made their own dolls. Ginger-peachy! All a girl had to do was get one of her father's white socks. She stuffed it, tied it at the neck, and embroidered features into it above the string. Then she tied it again in the middle, cut the bottom of the sock to make legs, and she had a doll. And she could call it anything she wanted—Abretha or Rover, or even Stanley. She didn't have to call it Tammy or Barbie or Misty or Tressy.

Or cleansing-tissue carnations. A girl could make them by the hundreds. She took a tissue and folded it lengthwise. Then she accordion-pleated it in vertical pleats. Then she clipped it in the middle with a bobby pin to hold the pleats together. Next, she either cut the edges off with pinking shears or shredded them with her fingers. Then she fanned out and separated each layer of the tissue. Finally, she removed the bobby pin and tied the flower. If she wanted a stem, she could use a pipe cleaner.

And on and on. A kid could make a toy out of almost anything. Hang an old tire from a stout tree-branch and you had a swing. Blow up an inner tube and you had a beach float. Cut up a clothesline and you had a jump-rope or a lasso. Tie tin cans to the ends of a long piece of string and you had a tree-house telephone. Imagine that—a toy telephone without batteries. You ran it on lung-power. Or you could turn out a paddle boat that ran on rubber-band power. Again, no batteries. You sawed the bow into a triangular point. Then you cut a rectangular block out of the stern, leaving a U-shape. You attached a rubber band around the sides of the U. Then you attached the middle of the rubber band to the rectangular cut-out, which became your paddle. You just wound up the paddle and let it go. And the boat moved across the bathtub.

Toys you made yourself; they were all over in those innocent days of Bungalow Bar cockamanies and movie-house yo-yo contests, those bygone times when boys wore knickers and girls wore pigtails. Those were the days before organized play and the cathode tube, the days when Soupy Sales probably listened to Uncle Don, and anthracite blue coal sponsored the Shadow. Times that have disappeared in a welter of material comforts and electronic aids. Yessir, time marches on, and so nowadays, kids play with toy dinosaurs.

Today's kids have no time to make toys; they're too busy buying and operating them. They're pushing buttons, turning switches, pressing levers. They're playing with walkie-talkies, transitor radios and miniature rockets. They're learning about life from plastic monsters and paint-by-number sets and talking puppets that are equipped with recorded speeches. They can buy toy guillotines that chop off dolls' heads and war toys that are getting escalated to the point where kids will be able to obliterate their parents with them. Let's face it, these kids are spending money like adults. They're really living.

But they may never play stickball, and it's sad to think of a generation growing up without pushoes. Even worse, growing up without orange crates. I'll tell you, I hate to say it, but I suspect that today's kids don't even throw spitballs.

"The rubber band's snapped!"

TRIVIATA GLOBUS

by JEAN SHEPHERD

For the past eight or nine years (I have no idea under what circumstances I began) I have accumulated around me an enormous, flowing collection of published Straws In The Wind. Almost from the beginning I fell into the habit of calling this ramshackle and growing mountain of crumpled, torn, dog-eared bits of paper my Vast File of Dynamic Trivia. Somewhere behind it all I had a vague idea that one day, when I pass on to my just reward, I would leave this enormous heterogeneous mess to, say, the Smithsonian Institute, or maybe the Rotary Clubs of America, to be preserved for future generations so that one day they will know How It Really Was.

I have never been able to understand those poor unfortunates who turn to Literature, The Theater, The Cinema for universal truths or insights into contemporary life. How can this poor synthetic rubbish ever compare with even the mid-week edition of the average American newspaper, or a typical sampling of Junk Mail that arrives in our mailbox daily for a genuinely accurate reflection of the gullimawfry, the hilarious High Camp comedy that is Life itself?

H.L. Mencken, back in the Twenties, conducted a monthly column in his magazine *The American Mercury* that he called "Americana." It consisted of newspaper clippings, etc., gathered from the then 48 states of the Union. Re-reading these collections today is like suddenly, magically opening a window offering a clear vision of an earlier age. It is far more meaningful than any of the novels, the plays, the movies turned out during the same era. It is difficult to read two paragraphs of these columns without breaking out into genuine old-fashioned belly laughs.

It is my thesis that our time also should be preserved in like manner. Too many authors are spending too much time writing about their bruised psyches, their unending search for a beautiful Identity, the eternal, undying, unselfish love of a Good Woman or whatever, and not enough bothering to even recognize that something is going on out there.

Commencing with this issue, I propose to dip at random into my Vast File of Trivia and to pass samples along to the reader for whatever value they might have. Most of them require no comment; others do. I am not intending, however, to limit my exhibits to the U. S., as Mencken did. We live in a time when it is almost universally thought among many highly respected savants that the American and the American way of life are the chief creator and the repository of Idiocy of all forms. This is questionable.

We begin with a little-reported incident that occurred at that great beehive of fantasy, dream, intrigue and connivery —the United Nations:

> *Taipei, Formosa, October 12 (Reuters)*
> *Nationalist Chinese legislator Wong Kai-hau today demanded the recall of one of his country's delegates to the UN. The delegate reportedly fell asleep during an October 9th speech by an Algerian delegate recommending the admission of Communist China. Wong said Wen Yuan-ning was awakened by the applause of the Communist block and joined in the cheering.*

Somehow I feel a peculiar sympathy for Wen, as I have had similar occurrences at Sales meetings and other Inspirational gatherings. As for Inspiration, here is an Educational note received by one of our Spies:

> *As a graduate of International Correspondence Schools, you will receive Ambition four times a year. So that we may keep our mailing list up to date, please notify the editor of Ambition whenever you have a change of address.*

Speaking of the wide world of opportunity, here is a recent advertisement clipped from that venerable grey old lady just off Times Square, *The New York Times*:

> *Wanted. Professional flagpole sitter. STATE PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE. Box 438 Times.*

From the same journal, a Religious note for good Christians everywhere:

> *An exceptional LP. 2547 — CHRISTMAS WITH ED SULLIVAN, featuring Ed's own Christmas stories including reminiscences of his many Show Business friends; among others Jack Benny, Moss Hart and Cardinal Spellman. A perfect gift.*

Which reminds me, speaking of Showbiz, of a frighteningly symbolic note from a recent *TV Guide* movie listing:

> *The Giant Gila Monster (TV debut)*
> *After Teenagers disappear from an isolated Midwestern town, a giant Gila Monster invades the local Record Hop.*

And dammit, I missed it!

But there is no doubt that we are living in the age of the Monster, in more ways than one. Monster wars, monster politicians, monster people, Showbiz monsters and just plain Monsters. Here is a flash from the esteemed Paterson (N.J.) *Morning Call*:

> *Mrs. Jane Arnoldi sued for divorce on grounds her husband thought more of Frankenstein and other monsters than he did of her. Mrs. Arnoldi said her*

husband Charles continuously read horror stories instead of talking to her, and kept dozens of models of monsters such as Frankenstein around the house. The thing that finally drove her out of the house, she said, was her husband's insistence on describing surgical operations in detail at mealtime and becoming angry when she failed to enjoy them as much as he did.

They'll want to know about Charles in the 25th Century.

Although some things are eternal, I'm sure that in that far away future a few of our Literary efforts will survive. For example, a Cultural bulletin as released by the Associated Press from Zrenjanin, Yugoslavia:

Radivoje Mominski won an important International prize in 1938 for writing the world's shortest book. The title was WHO RULES THE WORLD? The answer, in the book, is just one word — 'Money.' The book was printed in English, German, French, and Serbo-Croat, and recently in Urdu. All four previous editions are sold out. Mominski has decided to print a fifth edition, with the one word text unchanged.

The truth will always have a market.

Perhaps just as unchanging are the great, swelling tides of human passion. Tennessee Williams has never written anything as searingly revealing as this brief, enigmatic cable from Tokyo, via AP:

Arrested for breaking into the home of movie starlet Sayuri Yoshinaga and shooting a pursuing policeman, Kenji Watanabe said he only wanted to tattoo his name on the actress. "I'm a great admirer of Miss Yoshinaga. I've seen every movie she's made and I wanted to tattoo my name on her arm or leg," said the 26-year-old factory worker. Police say Watanabe was caught carrying a home-made pistol and a tattoo set.

The Silver Screen has alway attracted crawling hordes of autograph hunters, but damn few autograph *givers.*

But then, who can explain the inscrutable Oriental? For example:

Yokohama (AP)

The Cosmic Brotherhood Association of Yokohama has declared June 24th Flying Saucer Sighting Day. Boys and girls out on dates on that evening are urged to watch for space ships and send out "A friendly telepathic invitation."

A Zen flying saucer nut is almost as exotic a bird as a Hollywood TV Writer Karate Kook. Both are highly symbolic of our day. Here is a meaningful report of a devilish incident that occurred in Los Angeles (where else?):

Fight —

A TV writer who has been studying Karate for six years and has been awarded all the belts that certify him Expert last week had his first chance to try Karate in actual battle. While leaving the freeway in Los Angeles, another driver cut across his path twice. They exchanged insults and challenges, and both pulled up. The other man leaped from his car and rushed toward the Karate expert. Before the Karate expert could unsnap his seat belt and wreak his devastating fatal blows, the other man, who was considerably smaller, hit him, knocked out three teeth, and drove off.

It isn't always enough to remember Pearl Harbor and to have the right diploma or the proper degrees. More often than not, quick footwork and a hit in the mouth will settle everything.

These are unsettled days and it is hard to know which side you're on, particularly among the New Wave of unbridled young, as nicely illustrated by this dispatch from N.A.N.A.

According to THIS WEEK IN TOKYO, the latest game sweeping Japan is "Demo." Youngsters particularly play this game. This is how it is played. Two sides are chosen. One side is the Police and the other side the Demonstrators. They push and shout, oftentimes becoming violent and causing severe injuries. One of the most popular slogans is: "We Oppose Homework." The children do not like to take the side of the Police, so they toss and the losers become the "Police."

People are playing "Demo" everywhere:

St. Louis, Mo. (UPI)

Street Commissioner J. E. Gibbler of suburban Pagedale complained yesterday that just as he finished posting a NO LITTERING sign, a passing motorist "Threw a sack full of beer cans, coffee grounds and lettuce leaves at me, laughed loudly and drove away."

Well, at least somewhere, someplace people are still living the simple, honest, basic life. We wish to report at this time a tragic incident which recently occurred in a simple peasant Village in Portugal.

Branganci, Portugal (UPI)

Jose Antonio, a 78-year-old farmer was trampling grapes barefooted in a barrel yesterday to make wine. He was overcome by the fumes, fell into the juice and drowned.

The hectic pace of modern life, the age of the emerging Machine, of rampant Automation, of mind-boggling Space Shots, of brain-numbing Traffic Jams, not only takes its toll of us, the hapless human beings who created the monster of Technology but also those simple innocents who have the bad luck to inhabit a planet also populated by Man. We are in the midst of a giant struggle that goes on day and night all over the world. One day the battle will be over, the machines will have won, and few will remember the early days when the victims were falling.

Fort Worth, Texas (AP)

The telephone rang as Mrs. F. A. Farnum was vacuuming her canary's cage. She wheeled to pick up the phone and — whoosh — up the vacuum cleaner nozzle went Joey Boy with one desperate "cheep!" Mrs. Farnum jerked the bag open, grabbed out her canary and desperately shook off a little dust. Joey Boy was still unrecognizable, so she put him under the faucet. Then, to be sure the bird didn't catch cold, she put him under her electric hair dryer. "He hasn't been singing since then," Mrs. Farnum said, "he just sits hunched over and stares a lot. But he's eating well."

Ah, how like us all, hunched over, sitting, staring. But eating well. Not much singing, but a lot of staring.

WHEN RADIO RULED THE WAVES

How does it feel to be married to Young Dr. Malone, to be hated by Helen Trent and to be represented by Perry Mason? It feels confusing, that's how it feels.

In the great days of radio drama, the actors were invisible, versatile, and—alas—expendable. They could replace one another with ease. So there were, over the years, six different Shadows, two Supermen, five Jack Armstrongs, and five Big Sisters.

The recent illness of a TV serial star on the Coast sent flights of network VPs winging westward like the swallows to Capistrano. Such a crisis in the radio days would have been met by a phone call. At least it was on the two occasions when I took over for ailing serial stars. In each case slipping into the new part was easier than getting into a new girdle. It was the old plot that hurt. Stepping into a story which has been ramifying boundlessly for years can be tricky. When I filled in for Elizabeth Reller in "Young Doctor Malone" and again when I replaced Jan Miner in "Hilltop House," the directors gave me rapid verbal rundowns of the previous decade of plot. Time has mercifully dimmed details, but what I heard sounded something like this: "You see, Adam Collingwood has been trying to wrest control of Fred's company from the overseer, Mr. Thrust, who disappeared before Fred had his accident—"

"If he disappeared, how can—"

"Oh, he was found half dead in the reservoir near Mortonville, and—"

"Where?"

"Oh, that's the town you lived in before your marriage—after you left the hospital. Now, you got a phone call from Pascal Collingwood—"

"I thought you said Adam."

"Oh, Pascal is Adam Collingwood's brother. He's been living in the secret passages of Rosewood House. Now, he phoned, disguising his voice as that of Dawson Herkimer, and . . ."

About there, I would resolve just to say every word clearly and with conviction, trusting the long-term listener to fathom what I could not.

Ignorance inevitably betrayed itself. As Ann, the wife of "Young Doctor Malone" and herself a nurse, I was discussing the case of a young girl. Years of saturation in the cliches of soap opera equipped me, I thought, to spot a typical kilocycle pregnancy. That was tougher in those days than it would be now. The networks, so widely attacked for the salaciousness of their present day serials, were then not only prudish but downright prissy. They forbade the use of such words as "pregnant" and "diaper" and substituted pale euphemisms—"bundle from heaven" and "three cornered pants." The writers of "Malone," I figured, were once again pussy-footing around the more amusing facts of life. So I played the scene with a warm chuckle, hoping to lighten the gloom of an otherwise torpid plot. Picture my confusion a few days later when what I had been treating with such elbow-to-rib jocularity, turned out to be a brain tumor!

Confusion of another kind resulted from a last minute replacement on a Western serial broadcast from Chicago. Because of a sudden emergency, an elderly character actor, who usually played soft-spoken, fatherly types, was called in to replace the hard riding, fast shooting sheriff.

"Halt!" he shouted, as the desperadoes approached.

by Mary Jane Higby

Bret Morrison, who played "The Shadow"

The vigorous, aspirate "H" whistled its way up and over the upper plate of his denture and shot it out of his mouth. The resourceful old man fielded it deftly with his left hand about a foot in front of his face.

"Who are you?" gasped the outlaw.

"Shrfshrfshushunny," was the stern reply. Then, as he clicked the false teeth back into place, "Sheriff Sedgewick of Shoshone County."

Many replacements in radio programs were caused, not by illness, but by forgetfulness. Memory lapses struck the actors about as often as amnesia (a favored soap opera malady) struck the characters they portrayed. I had done what I thought was a full day's work (I was the star of "When A Girl Marries," the menace in "Helen Trent," and the persecuted ingenue in "Perry Mason"), so I boarded the steamer for a two hour trip to Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey. Hardly had we pulled away from the dock, when I clutched the arm of the startled man next to me.

"Linda's First Love!" I shouted. He recoiled in panic. I sprang to the ship's rail. I suppose the first mate who plucked me down still thinks he prevented a suicide. Two facts emerged from the conversation that followed: they were not going to turn around and go back, as I urged them to, and if I moved one inch from my deck chair I would be locked in a cabin till we reached New Jersey's shore. The producer of "Linda" did not take it lightly, either. My replacement that time was a permanent one.

My first experience as a last minute substitute took place in the Thirties, when I was working in Hollywood. I had settled down one evening to listen to a weekly variety program, "The Shell Show," when my telephone rang.

"Can you do "Shell" for us?" the program's producer asked.

"But it's on the air!"

"We know that. Get over here as fast as you can."

I scrambled into an evening dress and made for the RKO studios. At that time NBC had no space of its own in Hollywood but had rented a sound stage on the movie lot. I sprinted into the entrance hall. From behind a closed door came the sound of an orchestra and a singer. A frowzled figure staggered up from a stool and accosted me. It was the guest star scheduled for that night's program—a famous stage actress, who had made an equal success in films, although she was known to have bouts with the bottle.

"Whosis?" she demanded. "Another singer? Too many goddam singers. When d' I go on?"

A young man, who was standing by with a cup of black coffee, took her elbow with his free hand and tried to lead her back to the stool.

"Now, now, *now*," he said nervously.

"Now, now, *now*," she mimicked, as I slipped past and through the studio door.

The producer's hand was shaking as he gave me the script, muttered, "Penelope," and pushed me out on the stage.

The dramatic spot, I now saw, was a snippet cut from Maxwell Anderson's play, *Elizabeth, The Queen.* The co-star was the well known actor, Irving Pichel. Another radio actress, Margaret Brayton, gave me a quick briefing as we stood in full view of the audience.

"You're playing my part," she whispered. "I'm doing hers. She passed out."

The announcer was already introducing the sketch.

"—One of our most brilliant young radio artists, Miss Margaret Brayton, will play opposite Mr. Pichel. The scene—"

"What do I do?" I gasped.

"Keep her sweet and young," said Margaret, and went to join Mr. Pichel at the microphone. I followed, my stomach taking rapid transit from my tonsils to my toes. The scene went surprisingly well, considering the fact that I had no idea, from one line to the next, of what I was going to say. When it was over, I settled down in the wings and listened to Margaret and Irving Pichel play out the last tragic moments before the death of Essex.

"Life in prison is very quiet," Pichel was saying. "It leads to thinking. If we had met some other way how happy we might have been. But there has been an empire between us—"

An off-stage door rattled violently and a female voice rose in hooting laughter. The producer went white and jumped to his feet, his eye roving wildly around the studio. It lit on the drummer in the orchestra, and with a

look of agonized appeal, the producer threw a cue. There was a roll of drums, and without so much as goodby, the Earl of Essex went abruptly to his doom.

Most crises in the radio world, as elsewhere, were brought on by human weakness but, of course, there were also "acts of God." In the great New York blizzard of 1947 I made it to the National Broadcasting Company and "When A Girl Marries," by hitching a ride on a truck. Suburbanites were not so lucky. At the first sign of a heavy snowfall, every radio actor in Manhattan would rush to the networks. They would there wander from studio to studio picking up the work of their less fortunate fellows floundering in the drifts of Connecticut and Westchester. Brett Morrison, when he was "The First Nighter" of the Chicago program of that name, once hired a horsedrawn sleigh to take him to the radio station during a record breaking Illinois snowfall. He was one of a handful who turned up and by three p.m. his enterprise had netted him two hundred dollars.

The same midwestern blizzard brought out a tour de force that made radio history. Bernadine Flynn (Sade of "Vic and Sade") managed to get to the studio just a few minutes before air time. But she was the lone member of the cast who did. With only the help of a sound man, she put on a complete "Vic and Sade" show, rewording the script as she went along to make the lines of the other characters fit into her own. Her exact words are, of course, lost forever in what radio columnists used to refer to as the "ether," but it went something like this: (Sound of window opening and lawn mower running.) "What's that you say, Vic? . . . I can't hear you over that dratted lawn mower . . . Oh, you say Uncle Fletcher's going on a trip? That's a surprise. Where's he going? . . . Denver, huh? There's a little patch of grass you missed on this side, Vic. What did Uncle Fletcher say he was going to do? . . ." etc. That sure footed actress kept it up for the full twelve and half minutes that separated the opening and closing commercials on a fifteen minute show.

It was probably not an "act of God" that once kept Joe Latham from his chores as the hired man of "When A Girl Marries." When it became evident that he was not going to appear, we called in one of the actors from the third floor. (We were at NBC and even in the best of weather a small group of actors always hovered—like birds of prey—on the third floor, hoping for just such a disaster.) After the broadcast, the door flew open and Joe stumbled in.

"What happened, Joe?"

His usually cheerful round face crumpled and I thought he was going to cry.

"I got caught in the peanut machine!" he said. On his way to the studio he had put a penny in a subway vending machine. The lever snapped back and caught his signet ring. A subway attendant and a policeman finally managed to wrench him free but alas, fifteen minutes too late.

In that old, blind medium of radio a clever substitute, as often as not, slipped by unnoticed. I can think of only one occasion when a stop-gap performance caused any real dismay. J. Walter Thompson, the advertising agency, was handling the Republican campaign that year and had bought time on NBC late at night for a lady who aspired to Congress. A young producer, named O'Connor, was assigned to the broadcast. He met his charge in the studio a few minutes before air time. She handed the announcer a two page panegyric to be read as a preamble to her speech. The announcer declined. Network personnel, he explained, were forbidden to give any form of political endorsement.

"In that case," said the lady tartly, "I refuse to go on the air."

"It's too late to get an outside announcer now," said O'Connor.

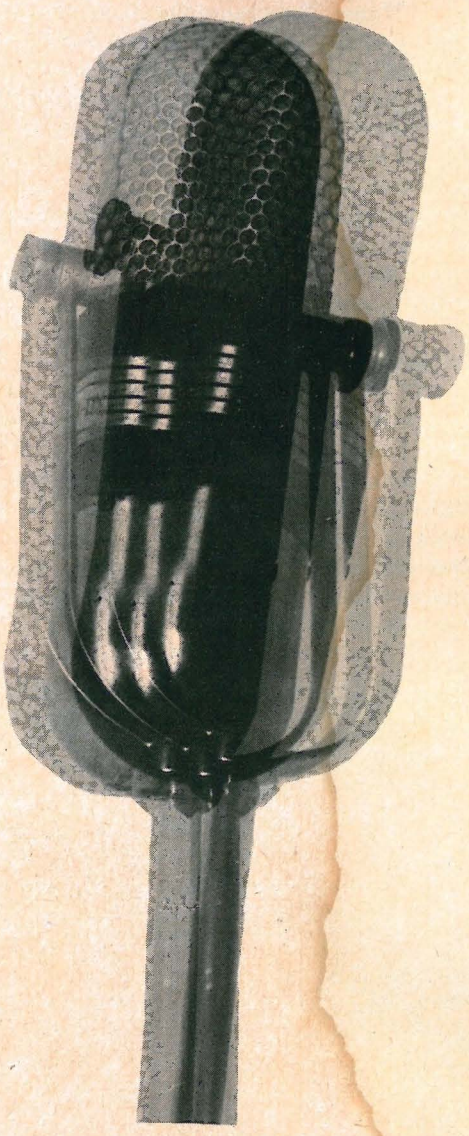
"No introduction—no speech," said the woman, fishing in her bag for some knitting.

The producer insisted that NBC wouldn't permit it, the FCC wouldn't like it, and the Republican Committee wouldn't want it.

"Knit one, purl two," murmured the candidate.

Ten minutes later O'Connor was on his knees, pleading over the click of the needles that his job—his

The stars of "When A Girl Marries" — Mary Jane Higby and John Raby



whole future depended on getting the show on the air.

"Nothing doing," was the reply.

He left the adamant lady and rushed out into the hall. The cast of a late mystery show was filing out of the studio next door. He hailed one of the actors.

"Ray! Can you read an announcement for me?"

"Sure thing!" said the actor, lighting up at the thought of an unexpected fee.

O'Connor handed over the copy. The actor put on his glasses and started toward the studio, reading as he went. Suddenly he stopped.

"Just a minute," he said. "Just one goddam minute! This is *Republican*, isn't it?"

"What of it?"

"I can't do it." He folded his glasses.

The producer looked at his watch. Three minutes to air time.

"Double fee!" he bribed.

"Sorry, old man." The actor rang for the elevator.

"A hundred dollars!" shouted O'Connor. He could pay it out of his own salary if Thompson or the Republican party balked.

"My conscience wouldn't permit it."

"I'm no Republican!" yelled the producer, "I'm an Irishman! From Brooklyn! But I gotta get this dame on the air!"

"Your conscience is your own," said the Democrat and the elevator door slid shut.

The hall was deserted now. The rest of the mystery cast had already left. The door of the men's room creaked open and O'Connor whirled around to see Arthur come out. Arthur was an ex-child actor who had recently progressed to playing moronic adolescents. His high nasal whine would frequently break in the most unexpected and amusing way.

"Arthur," said the worn producer. "Are you a Democrat?"

"I can't vote yet, Mr. O'Connor," quavered the hideous little voice.

"Will you read a political announcement for me?"

"Political announcement? Me—ee?!"

O'Connor pushed him into the studio, the NBC announcer gave his permitted laconic introduction, and Arthur launched into what sounded like political tirade from a drunken gremlin.

All the telephones in the control booth started ringing at once. The candidate's husband was sputtering on the long distance wire; the man from J. Walter Thompson came through loud and clear. But from Republican Headquarters came only an inarticulate roar.

The next morning, after a stormy interview at the agency, O'Connor slipped quietly out of his office and joined the Marines.

Only bourbon can be truly called the traditional American drink. It is a medicine whose efficacy has seldom been underestimated, the comforter of the pioneer, the favorite spiked beverage, in its frosted, mint-scented silver cup, for important and ceremonial occasions. Bourbon, the frock-coated Kentucky colonel who created the beneficent Old Taylor once declared, was originated in the year of the Declaration of Independence and will endure as long as the liberties set forth in that precious document.

Pronounced "ber-bun" in Kentucky (rhyming with "urban"), the word describes a whiskey of rich color and fruity bouquet which first appeared in the continental United States and has long been recognized as a classic among the spiritous beverages of the world. Today there

is more bourbon being sipped than any other distilled spirit in the world, about 74,000,000 gallons a year. And this figure will rise to above 100,000,000 gallons by 1970, predicts Vice Admiral William J. Marshall, U.S.N., ret., president of the Bourbon Institute.

Among the leaders in various walks of life who have been reported as enjoying in moderation the generous juices of our native maize are Edward Ball, who has built up the $27,000,000 Florida interests of the Alfred Irénée du Pont estate to a whopping $300,000,000; Eugene R. Black, who recently stepped down from the presidency of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; Frank Sinatra and Don Ameche, who incline toward a Tennessee bourbon; J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI; and the late Lucius Beebe, famous author and *arbiter elegantiae* of good living. In the world of politics, where bourbon has become an institution, senator and President Harry Truman liked his bourbon along with poker, piano music and the study of history. The late Alben W. Barkley, majority leader in the Senate and later the "Veep" and "Mr. Sam" Rayburn, political mentor of President Johnson, found that bourbon often quickened the political processes when men of goodwill got together at "the children's hour." Other devotees are representatives Carl Albert of Oklahoma, Hale Boggs of Louisiana, Richard Bolling of Missouri, Homer Thornberry of Texas and his venerable fellow-Texan and fellow-appreciator of a well-finished sour mash, John Nance (Cactus Jack) Garner.

Going back into history, one finds bourbon associated with a long line of patriots, statesmen and stalwarts. Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison had a preference for Old Jordan. When Colonel William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was offered a ewer of bourbon he replied, "Sir, you speak the language of my tribe," and told once more the thrilling tale of his duel with Yellow Hand. Mayors of New York, governors, generals, statesmen and the nabobs of Wall Street took their bourbon-and-branch at the bar of the famous old Hoffman House in New York—the same, ruddy, able-bodied liquor which was charioted by wagon train west of the hundredth meridian to sustain the Indian fighter and bring solace to the hard rock miner working the California lodes. Bourbon today is being exported to distant lands, including, believe it or not, Scotland. The Federation Internationale de Vins et Spiriteaux, composed of the vintners and distilling interests of fourteen European nations, have extended to bourbon the same standing and protection accorded Scotch whisky and the Cognac of France: that is, the name can be properly applied only to a U.S.-made distillate meeting the definition which is legally in force here.

The whole thing is a Horatio Alger story. Bourbon's origins are humble and obscured by the passing of almost two hundred years. Our first colonial ancestors distilled ardent spirits out of whatever was handy—apples and pears, small fruits like currants and elderberries, even parsnips and persimmons. Supplanting the native fruit brandies in the eighteenth century came rum, distilled from the molasses of the West Indies. Rum lubricated the wheels of colonial commerce, penetrated deeply into the social life of Americans. It was a necessity when there was hard work to be done. It inspired the preacher, made the mourners at a funeral more sincere, and up at Hanover, New Hampshire, as every loyal son of Dartmouth College knows:

Eleazar was the faculty, and the whole curriculum was five hundred gallons of New England rum.

The popularity of rum was challenged, in turn, by a new product from the west — American whiskey. Partly because rum was hard to get during the Revolutionary War, partly because of the massive arrival of the Scotch-Irish who were grain distillers from 'way back, partly because whiskey was cheap and abundant, the new native beverage was riding high in the 1790's.

By no stretch of the imagination could this searing tiger-spit be compared with gracious, "breedy" bourbon. It was water-white corn "likker." Or it was distilled from rye, the principal grain of the seaboard states. After the backwoods elixer dripped from the condensing coil, the raw "high wines" were colored with caramel or prune juice to imitate brandy, which had the prestige of foreign origin. When Charles Farrar Browne, the popular humorist of the 1860's, better known by his pen name, "Artemus Ward," was in demand as a "moral lecturer," a San Francisco theater manager telegraphed to him, "What will you take for forty nights in California?" To which Ward wired back, "Brandy and Water." Artemus Ward did have a Pacific tour which was a hilarious success. What his drinking habits were, deponent knoweth not; but whatever "brandy" he took to moisten the clay was undoubtedly bourbon or something built on a bourbon base.

With the settlement of Kentucky, a land better adapted to raising corn than the small grains, corn whiskey forged ahead as peddlers picked up the raw distillate on the farms and moved it to the East by pack horse, or sent it down-river to New Orleans. Aging was discovered by sheer accident. The hot sun, the motion of the flatboats and the effects of the stout oak barrels all helped to improve the whiskey. A pleasing aroma developed. A depth of flavor was noticed, with subtle overtones and undertones — what knowledgeable Kentuckians came to call the "farewell." Because much of this whiskey came out of Bourbon County — so named in gratitude to the royal family of France for their assistance in the War of Independence — bourbon became a generic name. It meant the whiskey of Kentucky. It is one of the curiosities of time and changed circumstances that not a drop

of whiskey — well, legal whiskey — is made today in this celebrated county, with its air still filled with yeasts ready to work magic in a slurry of fermenting corn grits, its delightful rolling surface underlaid by the famous Silurian limestone which, according to the old master distillers, made the cold spring water milky with lime and peculiarly adapted for making great whiskeys.

"Limestone water keeps bourbon on the alkaline side," explains Jim O'Rear, Schenley executive and bourbon authority. "Limestone in bourbon lets you wake up the next morning feeling like a gentleman."

Although corn became the dominant grain for making American whiskey, it was discovered by trial and error in the course of a long evolution that the addition of a small percentage of chopped rye to the mash tubs had a smoothing and mellowing effect upon the end product. This mingling of the virtues of the two grains, plus the addition of about ten per cent barley malt, and aging in charred oak barrels, gives bourbon its unique personality.

Many legends and anecdotes are told to explain the origin of the charred barrel. None have ever been authenticated. One of the most reasonable conjectures is that demand increased so fast that the distillers ran short of cooperage, burned out the insides of used barrels so the whiskey would not pick up off-flavors, and found that their whiskey had even more finesse and aroma than before.

The whiskey is older than the name used to describe it. The first appearance of the word "bourbon" in American literature, so far as this chronicler knows, is in 1846. The earliest bourbon label known to Mr. Gordon Bass, celebrated collector of flasks and close student of the ana of whiskey, is dated 1848. The date is comparatively late because marketing whiskey was a bulk business and there was no contact between the distiller and the consumer. Very little bourbon found its way into bottles until after the Civil War, and much of it was scarcely potable. The distillate was deliberately made with a very heavy body because it was used for the most part for "covering"; i.e., compounding with grain neutral spirits to make spirit blends. Then, as now, blended whiskey sold in higher volume and at a lower price than the straights.

Until late in the last century, whiskey-making involved much hand work. Distillation was by the batch method. A man stirred the mash with a mash-rake, boiled the fermented "distiller's beer" in copper stills over open, wood fires. There was a good deal of guess-work and heavy emphasis upon family recipes, ancient yeast strains and technical mysteries handed down from father to son. Today, distillation is continuous and, in the big plants, completely controlled by instrumentation.

"Proof," the term indicating alcoholic strength, has an interesting background. After "doubling" (all whiskey was

distilled twice to remove toxic substances and raise the alcoholic content) distillers poured a sample on a pile of gunpowder and applied a flame. If the powder failed to burn, the whiskey was too weak. If it burned brightly, it was too strong. If it burned slowly, evenly, with a blue flame, it was said to be "one hundred per cent perfect" or "proved." This became shortened to the now-familiar term one hundred proof. It is often erroneously assumed to mean one hundred per cent alcohol. Actually what it describes is a half-and-half mixture of alcohol and water, which is about the limit that the human system can tolerate in an alcoholic beverage. The proof gallon still provides the standard for determining the tax which Uncle Sam has been collecting, usually at rising rates, for over a hundred years.

Bourbon can be made on either a sweet mash or a sour mash fermentation. Sweet mash whiskey requires freshly-prepared yeast for each run. Sour mash involves scalding the meal with spent stillage from the previous run. The spent beer has a slightly acid taste; hence the phrase sour mash. This method is credited with producing a bourbon of more pronounced flavor and greater uniformity. All Kentucky distillers now use this method, though some are coy about saying so. Presumably they fear that the consumer will think the whiskey is sour. Others, such as Old Fitzgerald and Beam's Choice do not hesitate to place the words on their labels.

Most bourbon reaches maturity after spending four to eight years on the wood, though "There is no such thing as senile whiskey . . ." according to the late Ralph T. Heymsfeld, Vice President of Schenley Industries, Inc. "The taste is different in older whiskey . . . it is smoother going down." Age is not an absolute indication of quality, though it helps. But there are always other factors — the grade of grain used, characteristics of the yeast strain and sanitation. Once whiskey is bottled there is no further change.

In the early days of federal taxation it was easy to cheat the Revenue. But if human nature didn't improve, enforcement methods did, and the illegal business passed to the moonshiners, who did their "making" in the seclusion of the hills on highly portable equipment, skipped the aging period and made good money selling white mule at a jugful for a quarter — bring your own jug. A sojourn at the state penitentiary weaving chair bottoms was regarded philosophically as an occupational hazard. Moonshining continues to be a thorny problem for both the government and the legal distilling industry. Wildcatting is done both as a small handicraft and a large-scale commercial operation with the corn squeezings often distributed by airplane to gas stations, after-hours clubs and nip joints. The involvement of the United States Government is suggested by the following statistic: an illegal outfit of average size can make eighty-eight gallons of moon in a week. Tax loss: $924.00. Today the man may well be regarded as an American patriot who lifts a glass of tax-paid whiskey ($10.50 per proof gallon for the federal tax alone) for he is making a voluntary and substantial contribution to the support of his government. This tax is not likely to be reduced, not only because it is productive as a revenue measure, but also because it is a form of social control over liquor consumption which has the approval of an influential segment of the voters. The drys and the bootleggers, strange bedfellows, see eye-to-eye upon the subject of stiff liquor taxes, although for quite different reasons.

The legal industry moans over the tax burden, but it is their best shield against the Carry Nations and Billy Sundays and all the fanatics who might rise again to enforce their conception of Right Living upon their fellow citizens. The United States Government is a partner (some say a senior partner) in the distilling industry, and it is not likely to give up so profitable a source of income.

In the 1890's the cutting and adulteration of the bulk goods became so notorious that a consumer package which could not be tampered with appeared to be necessary to save the industry from chaos and protect the buyer against fraud. After lengthy Congressional hearings, a bottled-in-bond bill was passed by Congress in 1897 and signed into law by President Cleveland. It is still in effect. Bonding, whose original purpose was purely fiscal, to protect the government's lien for its tax while giving the producer more time to mature and market his production, was almost forty years old at the time. The new feature was distillery *bottling*.

The green strip stamp over the top of the bottle stated, and still does, the year and the season of distillation and of bottling. It is a guarantee that the proof is one hundred and that the age is at least four years. It is evidence that the liquor is the product of one distillery, that it has been continuously under the supervision of the government and that the package is full measure and that nothing has been added after distillation but water. The green stamp immediately acquired enormous prestige as the sign of whiskey quality, though the government and the manufacturers of unbonded whiskeys have often been at great pains to point out that the presence of the stamp is not an indication of the quality of the grain used, the cleanliness of the plant or the skill of the distiller.

A topic good for endless argument is the question of how the bourbon of "the old days" would stack up against the best in our market today. First of all, there was a genuine difference in character. Old-time, pre-Prohibiton whiskeys like Happy Hollow, Chickencock, L. W. Weller and H. McKenna, were heavy and pungent. The public taste was robust and so was the whiskey. The conditions of life were different, too; liquor was a form of central heating. Now

the trend is to lightness, in proof and in whiskey character. Most nationally known bonds have companion items bottled under the famous old names but at lower proofs, names such as Old Grandad, Kentucky Gentleman, Glenmore, Old Forester. A recent surrender to the trend of the times was that of the sentimental defender of tradition, Old Fitz'.

There is a wide consensus that the art of the master distiller, who tested temperatures, for an example, by the way the warm mash in the fermenters felt to his hand, has been vastly improved upon by advances in technology and chemistry. But this opinion is not held unanimously.

"We believe in staying behind the times, so to speak, and sticking to the rule-of-thumb which produced the great sour mash bourbons of the past," declares Mr. Julian P. Pappy Van Winkle, Sr. Pappy, the oldest active distillery executive in the country, has a sign outside his premises which belligerently announces "No Chemists Allowed." And Colonel Frank B. Thompson, Chairman of the Board of Glenmore Distilleries, Inc., insists that his Old Kentucky Tavern and Yellowstone Kentucky Straight Bourbon are not loafing but busily improving themselves when they rest in open rick warehouses without the benefit of artificial temperature controls.

What this country really needs is a discriminating consumer; one who can tell the difference between "rye," which for some odd reason has become the colloquial term for blends, and straight bourbon. And, happily, some day consumers may learn to distinguish one brand of bourbon from another. Seagram Distillers Co. switched Four Roses and the Paul Jones brands from straights to blends without any slackening in demand. Schenley's Cream of Kentucky has been on the best seller list both as a straight bourbon and later as blended whiskey. Guckenheimer, once a rye whiskey, is now a spirit blend; maybe that is where the confusion over "rye" began. In these and many other well-authenticated instances, the consumer remained loyal to a label when the contents of the bottle were radically changed.

What then do brand preferences amount to? One suspects that they are often just rationalizations of imagined differences. No two whiskies are ever exactly alike, but the differences are often less than the similarities. In actual practice, the industry seems to worship the Great God Uniformity. The government, too, bears a responsibility, because of technical requirements that tend to create sameness. How many consumers would like to develop the discrimination and enjoy the pleasure which wine connoisseurs find in their wine "libraries"? No one knows for sure. But has anyone ever more than half tried to find out?

Meanwhile, until the millennium arrives, here is a suggestion: join those drinkers who prefer nuances and subtleties rather than a hard belt. Follow the estimable lady who ordered a "B & B" and explained to the waiter that she meant "bourbon and bourbon." And as you experiment, pass up the ginger ale and other barbarisms of mixed drinks. Sip your sour mash with no other adornment than ice, and very little of that. Look around and you will observe that most good judges of whiskey follow another recommendation made more than fifty years ago by an expert. When Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, the great crusader for purity in American food and drink, enthralled a Congressional committee with an eloquent disquisition on whiskey quality, he closed his remarks with this counsel:

"Always drink good whiskey, and put a little water in it."

No better advice can be given, or followed, today.

ANSWERS TO DETECTIVE QUIZ (PAGE 66)

1. In "A Study In Scarlet" Watson and Holmes meet through a colleague of Watson's, a young man named Stamford. 2. C. Auguste Dupin. 3. J. P. Marquand's Mr. Moto and Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan. 4. Ellery Queen. 5. a. Sherlock Holmes; b. Nero Wolfe; c. Inspector Richard Queen; d. Philo Vance. 6. Captain Jacobi (the guy who stumbles into Spade's office, delivers the falcon and then dies of gunshot wounds) was played by Walter Huston. 7. a. Nero Wolfe; b. Philo Vance. c. Ellery Queen. 8. a. Rex Stout; b. Craig Rice; c. Francis and Richard Lockridge; d. Agatha Christie; e. A.A. Fair (Erle Stanley Gardner). 9. a. Sam Spade; b. Ellery Queen; c. Perry Mason. 10. Chester Morris played Bulldog Drummond, William Gargan was Martin Kane and Dick Kollmar was Boston Blackie. 11. Tess Truehart. 12. Not Nick Charles, as popularly believed, although he was the detective in Hammett's novel *The Thin Man*. The title actually referred to the girth of the victim—an item of some importance in solving the case.

THE PRIVATE EYE

(continued from page 7)

years saw the private eyes and the pulp detective magazines multiply. The new private detectives, while influenced by the Carroll John Daly and Hammett patterns, were varied individuals. They usually stayed away from small towns, most of them working for detective agencies or on their own in the large cities. New York, Chicago, Detroit, Miami and Los Angeles, which *Black Mask* called the new Wild West. They shared, many of them, a distrust of the police and politicians. They could patiently collect evidence, but they could also cut corners the way the law couldn't. They were sometimes drunks, oftentimes broke. A private eye would always help somebody in trouble, though he would play down his compassion. "I could have walked away. I started to walk away and then the sucker instinct got the best of me and I went back." Taking action was important, even if it wasn't well planned. "He knew that it was foolish to see the gangster, but he had to do something, and he couldn't think of anything else better." The private eye was usually not hopeful, though he stuck to his word. "It wasn't worth it, but then it was a deal."

A forty-five year old business man who'd been hurt by the Depression decided, in 1933, to see if he could write the kind of private eye stories he'd been enjoying in the pulps. It took Raymond Chandler five months to turn out his first story, "Blackmailers Don't Shoot." *Black Mask* bought it and Chandler gave himself over to writing pulp novelettes. Chandler, though educated in England, was fascinated by the American language. The first-person private eye he developed had several names but he always talked in a controlled, vernacular, and at the same time poetic, style.

Chandler's private eye was a dedicated man, an honest man. He wasn't in it just for the money. Usually he was driven by a stubborn sense of justice. He got along with the police if they were straight. If crooked, he had contempt for them. Most of the stories were set in Southern California, a shabby wonderland Chandler loved to explore and expose. His private eyes always operated out of small rundown offices and lived in small rundown apartments. The offices of many later private eyes, not to mention the attitudes, were lifted from the Chandler vision.

Raymond Chandler was fully aware of what he was up to, of what he was doing with the private eye and what the detective stood for. Of his detective hero he said, "He is a failure and he knows it. He is a failure because he hasn't any money . . . But he is a creature of fantasy. He is in a false position because I put him there . . . Your private detective in real life is usually either an ex-policeman with a lot of hard practical experience and the brains of a turtle or else a shabby little hack who runs

around trying to find out where people have moved to." In the grim, realistic fantasy the Chandler private eye moved in he was often a man with a quest. He was, as one critic has pointed out, something like a knight. Again, like many knights and many early private eyes, he was chaste. Some of the pioneer private detectives might have refrained from going to bed with the girl in the case only because of the postal regulations but with the Chandler character it was part of the code. "He is neither a eunuch or a satyr," Chandler explained. "I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin." Of his general purpose in writing of private eyes Chandler summed up, "It is not a very fragrant world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make very interesting and even amusing patterns out of it."

Lending libraries and bookstores got to know the private eye a few years after his appearance in pulp magazines. Race Williams showed up between hard covers in 1926, and in 1929 two Hammet Op books, *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse*, were issued by Knopf. All these books were really samplers of what had been going on in the pulps, each one was made up of novelettes which had originally appeared in *Black Mask*. *The Maltese Falcon* followed in 1930. Finally in 1939 Chandler spliced together some of his pulp stories—he called it cannibalizing—and got his first book, *The Big Sleep*. His private eye was named Philip Marlowe now, at the suggestion of Chandler's wife.

In the Forties there was a secondhand quality to many of the private eye novels. The story always seemed to start with the private eye sitting in his office waiting for a client and drinking rye. A clout over the head became mandatory, and writers felt obliged to imitate Chandler's use of simile. In England, an author produced a hard-boiled detective novel by simply putting together pieces of books by Chandler and other Americans and changing the names. He became one of the most successful mystery writers in Great Britain.

The private eye didn't remain stereotyped in all instances. Sometimes he developed quirks and exaggerated traits. Cleve F. Adams created a pretty disturbed sleuth in the early 1940s. The detective had different names in different books, such as McBride or Shannon, but he is the same disassociated storm trooper in them all. Adams, originally a pulp writer, had an odd and personal view of the world. His idea of realism was to call people kikes and hunkies. His detective is given to moments of rage, to strange seizures. An Adams detective suspects a vast conspiracy against himself, therefore suspects all law and authority. The ideal group for detective McBride is the Gestapo, and after he has ordered the torture of a suspect, he justifies it by saying, "The only way you can lick these guys is to fight as dirty as they do."

The ultimate in crazed private eyes came in the late 1940s. Then former comic book writer, creator of "The Human Torch," Mickey Spillane thought up Mike Hammer. Giving his detective his own first name, Spillane also gave him every neurotic symptom possible. Hammer's delusions are expressed even in the titles of the early books, *I, the Jury; Vengeance Is Mine. Time* summed Mike Hammer up well in a recent review. "The forces of law, order and decency prove no match for Spillane's private eye, whose impatience with these virtues amounts to a crusade." Spillane, the best selling detective writer in the world, scorns most other writers. He does admit to one idol. That pioneer loud mouth door buster, Race Williams. And Hammer can be seen as a sort of bloated caricature of Williams, even though he lacks Williams' inadequate attempts to explain himself.

Fortunately, rational private eyes kept appearing. William Campbell Gault created several strong, believable operatives in hardcover and paperback originals. John D. MacDonald usually avoided the formal private eye, but his first person narrators in many paperbacks have the virtues and capabilities of the private eye. Kenneth Millar, writing as Ross MacDonald, patterned his detective, Lew Archer, after Chandler's Marlowe. In recent books, Ross MacDonald has become preoccupied with the effects of the past on the present, and there's a sort of Proustian overtone. Still the novels are good examples of what can be done with private eye in the 1960s.

The private eye got into the movies early in the 1930s, though it took several years for him to become what he already was in books and pulps. The ultimate screen private eye developed out of a cross-breeding of several types of film; the mystery, the gangster picture and the screwball comedy. In 1930 Hammett sold all rights to *The Maltese Falcon* to Warner Brothers for $8500. Although Warners was already turning out tough, realistic gangster films, they didn't choose to treat the Hammett book in a tough, realistic way. It was apparently planned as a vehicle for the star, Ricardo Cortez. In 1931 Cortez, who later became a good heavy, was still a sleepy eyed Latin lover with Valentino hair and Ramon Navarro postures. His Sam Spade is a strange hybrid, half tough, half sultry. In some scenes he is terse and cynical, in others he looks like he's about to carry the heroine off across the desert. When Spade talks to the girl in his apartment he wears a silk lounging robe and sits before a giant roaring fireplace. No self-respecting private eye would ever live in a place like that. The picture was a failure.

By the time this first version of *The Maltese Falcon* was

released, there was a popular new genre going in this country. The gangster film. The hardboiled, violent, fast moving approach later to be used in private eye movies was worked out here. There had been a few silent gangster films, like Von Sternberg's *Underworld,* but it took the talkies and the Depression to produce a cycle of them. *Little Caesar, Public Enemy, Scarface*—these films, and nearly a hundred like them, showed the crooked politics, the bootlegger rule that filled America in the Twenties and Thirties. Real gangsters—Al Capone, Legs Diamond, Dutch Schultz— were famous, and movies based on their activities fascinated the disenchanted Depression public. Many of the mannerisms of later private eyes showed up first in the actions of James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, George Raft and Spencer Tracy.

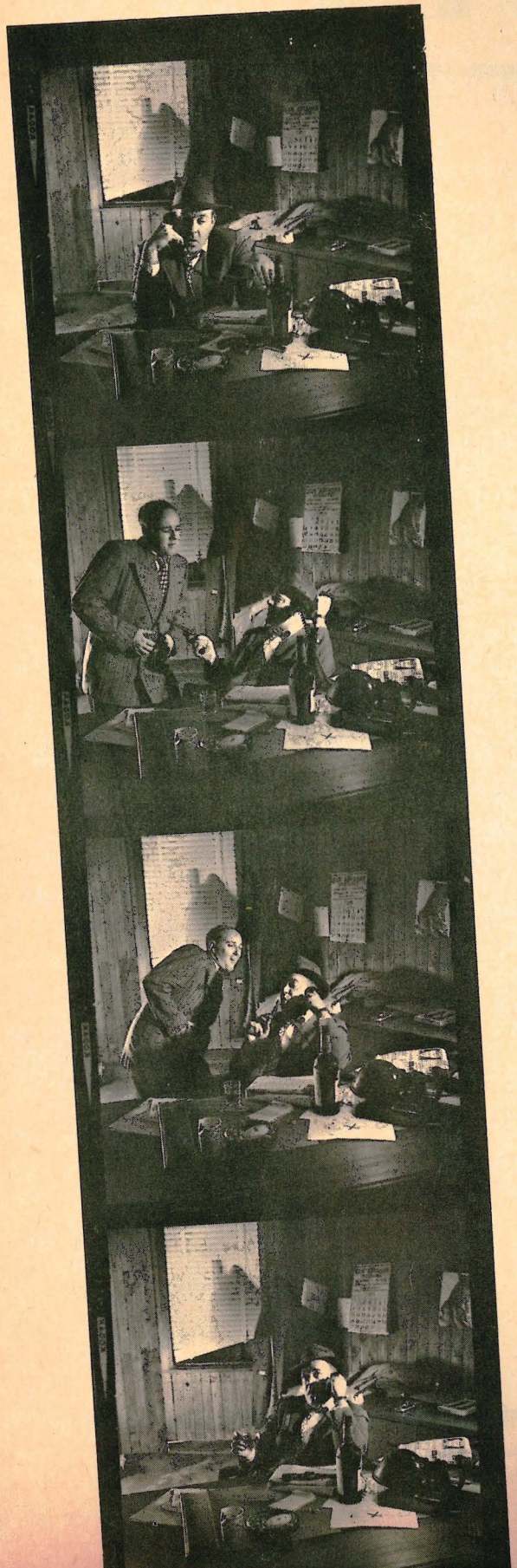
Most Hollywood cycles draw protest, and the gangster pictures were soon attacked by various virtuous groups. The number of them dwindled. Machine guns and low slung cars might have vanished from the screen if Hollywood hadn't made another discovery. The G man. In 1933 and 1934 desperadoes like John Dillinger and Machine Gun Kelly were shooting up the Southwest and Midwest. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was given power to go after them. J. Edgar Hoover became a celebrity, and the public was ready for G man movies. Most of the same actors, writers and directors were involved. Only now Cagney and Robinson were on the side of the law. The wise cracking, fast shooting gangster now became a Federal man. Eventually he would turn into a private eye.

While all those machine guns were blazing in the crook-and-G man movies, the private eye was developing in a new area. The most popular private detectives in the mid-Thirties were the married ones. The husband and wife detective format, mixing the hardboiled with the domestic, began with another Dashiell Hammett story, "The Thin Man." MGM had purchased the screen rights shortly after the novel ran in *Cosmopolitan.* A director named Woody Van Dyke asked L. B. Mayer if he could do a film version. There wasn't much studio enthusiasm until Van Dyke, who'd directed comedies, mysteries, Westerns and Tarzan, promised a quick, low budget production. To play Nick and Nora Charles he picked William Powell and Myrna Loy. Powell had been in pictures since the early Twenties, starting out as a villain in the silents and branching into leading man roles in the talkies. He'd already played several detectives on the screen, including the suave, cerebral Philo Vance. Myrna Loy was just emerging from a long spell as a sinister Oriental, having recently been the daughter of Fu Manchu. Van Dyke shot *The Thin Man* in a little over two weeks. The cockeyed, semi-alcoholic Charles marriage had an immediate appeal. A whole new kind of private detective emerged. Every marriageable actor in town was quickly wed, and Mr. and Mrs. detective films flourished. Robert Montgomery paired with Rosalind Russell; Franchot Tone got Ann Sothern for his bride. Even marriage without the detective work became saleable, and the screwball comedies with Carole Lombard, Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant and Melvyn Douglas got going.

Sam Spade came back again. This time Warners tried to fit Hammett's detective into the screwball class. The second version of the book was called *Satan Met A Lady* and featured Warren William. Bette Davis was the girl. William was a dapper Shakespearean type and had already been Perry Mason and Philo Vance. His Spade has a strange, ad-libbed quality and once again the story was a failure.

In the middle Thirties, Humphrey Bogart returned to Hollywood. He'd been there in the early talkie days and nothing much had happened. Going back to Broadway he acted in Maxwell Anderson's *The Petrified Forest.* In the play he was Duke Mantee, a Dillinger sort of gangster on the run. Bogart did the Mantee part in the Warners movie and for several years after that was a gangster in almost every Warner Brothers crime film. In 1941 Bogart played Sam Spade, and all the characteristics he'd been building up as a crook were shifted over to the private eye. Bogart was curt, detached, cynical and he had a sense of humor. This final version of the Spade story was written and directed by John Huston. He gave the film a foggy, cramped, hemmed in feeling. Every role was well cast. The picture was a success and was nominated for an Academy Award as the best picture of 1941. *The Maltese Falcon,* along with *High Sierra,* pushed Bogart into the top star class. Originally the leads in both pictures had been offered to slick, stiff George Raft.

Raymond Chandler became a screen writer in 1943. He worked with Billy Wilder on the screen play of *Double Indemnity.* This picture, with Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck, was a great success and helped reestablish a market for hardboiled, violent pictures. Nobody ever asked Chandler to adapt his own books for the screen. Because of his growing reputation as a screen writer and novelist, though, four of them were made into pictures in the Forties. The first was Edward Dmytryk's adaption of *Farewell, My Lovely,* called *Murder, My Sweet.* It introduced Dick Powell to tough guy parts. Powell had been rolling his eyes and crooning in Busby Berkeley movies since the early Thirties. Impressed by the popularity of Bogart, MacMurray and



newcomers like Alan Ladd in aggressive parts, he made up his mind to switch before he collapsed along with the old-style musicals. Actually Powell brought off Philip Marlowe pretty well. He got a new haircut, stopped batting his eyelashes and was effective as Chandler's cynical crusader. He continued playing cops, gamblers and secret agents for the rest of his life.

Two more actors tried Marlowe next. George Montgomery, with a moustache, was awful in *The Brasher Doubloon.* It was difficult to tell if Robert Montgomery was convincing as Marlowe in *The Lady In The Lake,* since you only saw him once throughout the picture. Obsessed with technique, Montgomery caused the whole picture to be filmed with the camera playing Marlowe. This attempt at approximating the first person produced some interesting effects when Marlowe got kissed or punched in the nose. Unfortunately, it also produced a precious, clumsy movie. Finally somebody decided to get the original. So in 1946 Bogart took his turn as Philip Marlowe. Whether Bogart became Marlowe or Marlowe became Bogart is hard to decide. *The Big Sleep* is a shadowy, hectic film. Howard Hawks directed it and one of the writers was William Faulkner. Their film play followed the complex Chandler plot, and it's likely that no one who saw the picture ever quite figured out who did what to whom. Still, it is the best of the attempts to put Chandler's private eye on the screen.

The private eye film continued to be a popular top budget genre in the 1940s. All sorts of improbable actors started wearing snap brim hats, trench coats and shoulder holsters. One of the most unconvincing was Franchot Tone, usually the tuxedoed playboy, who faked his way through something called *I Love Trouble.* The private eye has remained a staple character. The Fifties had various talentless actors trying to be Spillane's psychopathic Mick Hammer. Currently Paul Newman is playing in a screen adaption of Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer.

From the movies the private eye spread out into radio, where he was an important figure in the 1940s. In the late Fifties, after the pulp magazines had folded, the freelance operative and the Western hero shared the television screen. "All they want is cowboys and detectives," Hollywood agents said in those years. Today the secret agent, borrowing attitudes and actions from the private eye, is saturating the mass media and trying to solve nuclear problems with the same pragmatic approach the private detective used on beer barons and crooked mayors. Our problems and preoccupations have grown from the alleys and the mean streets of the 1920s. The dedicated private eye, waiting in his office with the bottle in the drawer next to his right foot, doesn't seem big enough to solve them any more. It's too bad.

DETECTIVE QUIZ

1. We should be eternally grateful to the fellow who introduced Dr. Watson to Sherlock Holmes — but does anyone remember his name?
2. The great Sherlock Holmes was predated by "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (generally considered the world's first detective story) and by "The Purloined Letter" both, of course, the work of Edgar Allan Poe. Can you give us the name of Poe's detective?
3. The reams of sinister Orientals in crime fiction are at least partially balanced by the existence of two very well known Oriental detectives — one Japanese, the other Chinese-American. Can you name them and their creators?
4. One of the most famous American detectives has the same name as his pseudonymous author. Who is he?
5. What detectives are notable for their addiction to (or penchant for, if you will):
   a. cocaine
   b: beer
   c. snuff
   d. Regie cigarettes
6. Who played Captain Jacobi (of the good ship *La Paloma*) in the film version of *The Maltese Falcon?*
7. London's 221B Baker Street was the familiar address of Sherlock Holmes. What well known (and more contemporary) New York detectives would you expect to run into at:
   a. West 35 Street b. East 38 Street c. West 87 Street
8. Perhaps because the deductive processes of women are a mystery in themselves, the woman detective has received her fair share of attention. Can you identify the creators of these women detectives?
   a. Theodolinda (Dol) Bonner
   b. Helene Brand
   c. Mrs. Pamela North
   d. Miss Marple
   e. Bertha Cool
9. A more reasonable fictional role for the ladies is that of a sleuth's secretary or assistant. You're fresh out of Vassar and you've successfully answered that help-wanted ad reading: *GAL FRI — Interesting trainee position with consulting/investigating firm. Must have good legs.* Who will be your boss if you're replacing:
   a. Effie Perine b. Nikki Porter c. Della Street
10. Do you remember who played radio's Bulldog Drummond? Martin Kane? Boston Blackie?
11. What was Dick Tracy's wife's maiden name?
12. Who was "the thin man"?

Answers on page *61.*

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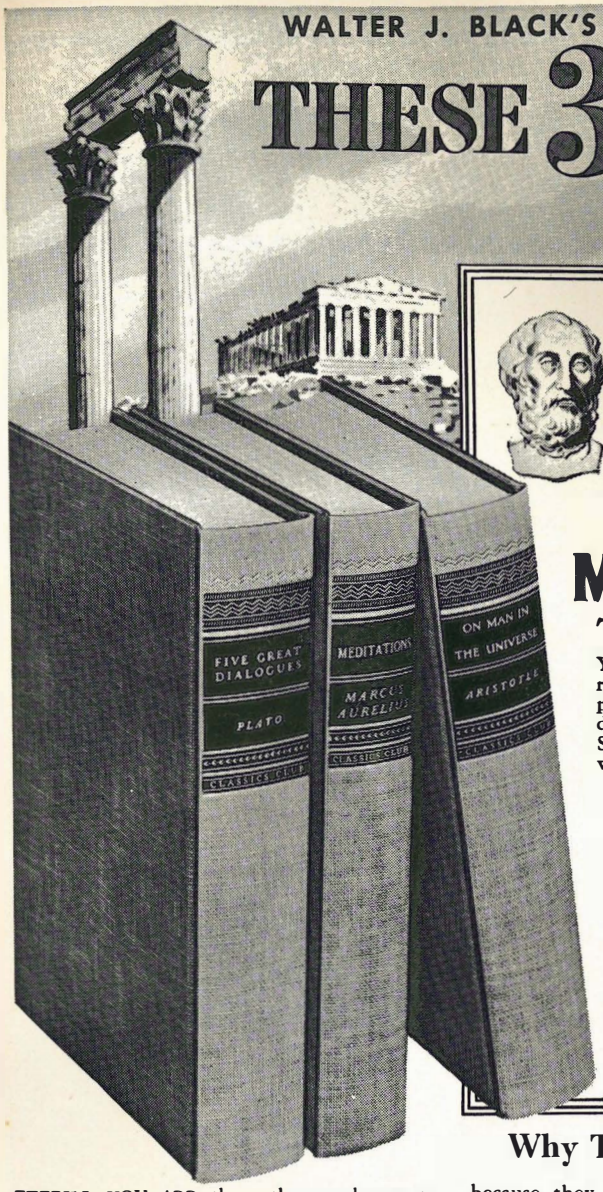

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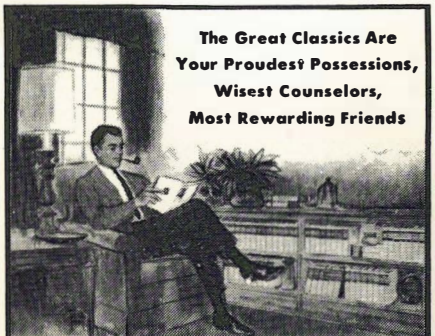

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P.S.

Coming up:
Max Brand, The King of the Pulps / Dame Fashion, You're A Fink! / All About Snuff / A Long, Hard Look at Tarzan and Edgar Rice Burroughs, including an instructive report on How To Talk Ape / and much, much more.