

WITHOUT FEATHERS

'Hope is the thing with feathers . . .' —Emily Dickinson

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Selections from the Allen Notebooks

Following are excerpts from the hitherto secret private journal of Woody Allen, which will be published posthumously or after his death, which ever comes first.

Getting through the night is becoming harder and harder. Last evening, I had the uneasy feeling that some men were trying to break into my room to shampoo me. But why? I kept imagining I saw shadowy forms, and at 3 **a.m.** the underwear I had draped over a chair resembled the Kaiser on roller skates. When I finally did fall asleep, I had that same hideous nightmare in which a woodchuck is trying to claim my prize at a raffle. Despair.

I believe my consumption has grown worse. Also my asthma. The wheezing comes and goes, and I get dizzy more and more frequently. I have taken to violent choking and fainting. My room is damp and I have perpetual chills and palpitations of the heart. I noticed, too, that I am out of napkins. Will it never stop?

Idea for a story: A man awakens to find his parrot has been made Secretary of Agriculture. He is consumed with

jealousy and shoots himself, but unfortunately the gun is the type with a little flag that pops out, with the word "Bang" on it. The flag pokes his eye out, and he lives—a chastened human being who, for the first time, enjoys the simple pleasures of life, like farming or sitting on an air hose.

Thought: Why does man kill? He kills for food. And not only food: frequently there must be a beverage.

Should I marry W.? Not if she won't tell me the other letters in her name. And what about her career? How can I ask a woman of her beauty to give up the Roller Derby? Decisions . . .

Once again I tried committing suicide—this time by wetting my nose and inserting it into the light socket. Unfortunately, there was a short in the wiring, and I merely caromed off the icebox. Still obsessed by thoughts of death, I brood constantly. I keep wondering if there is an afterlife, and if there is will they be able to break a twenty?

I ran into my brother today at a funeral. We had not seen one another for fifteen years, but as usual he produced a pig bladder from his pocket and began hitting me on the head with it. Time has helped me understand him better. I finally realized his remark that I am "some loathsome vermin fit only for extermination" was said more out of compassion than anger. Let's face it: he was always much brighter than me—wittier, more

cultured, better educated. Why he is still working at McDonald's is a mystery.

Idea for story: Some beavers take over Carnegie Hall and perform *Wozzeck*. (Strong theme. What will be the structure?)

Good Lord, why am I so guilty? Is it because I hated my father? Probably it was the veal-parmigian' incident. Well, what *was* it doing in his wallet? If I had listened to him, I would be blocking hats for a living. I can hear him now: "To block hats—that is everything." I remember his reaction when I told him I wanted to write. "The only writing you'll do is in collaboration with an owl." I still have no idea what he meant. What a sad man! When my first play, *A Cyst for Gus*, was produced at the Lyceum, he attended opening night in tails and a gas mask.

Today I saw a red-and-yellow sunset and thought, How insignificant I am! Of course, I thought that yesterday, too, and it rained. I was overcome with self-loathing and contemplated suicide again—this time by inhaling next to an insurance salesman.

Short story: A man awakens in the morning and finds himself transformed into his own arch supports. (This idea can work on many levels. Psychologically, it is the quintessence of Kruger, Freud's disciple who discovered sexuality in bacon.)

How wrong Emily Dickinson was! Hope is not "the thing with feathers." The thing with feathers has turned out to be my nephew. I must take him to a specialist in Zurich.

I have decided to break off my engagement with W. She doesn't understand my writing, and said last night that my *Critique of Metaphysical Reality* reminded her of *Airport*. We quarreled, and she brought up the subject of children again, but I convinced her they would be too young.

Do I believe in God? I did until Mother's accident. She fell on some meat loaf, and it penetrated her spleen. She lay in a coma for months, unable to do anything but sing "Granada" to an imaginary herring. Why was this woman in the prime of life so afflicted—because in her youth she dared to defy convention and got married with a brown paper bag on her head? And how can I believe in God when just last week I got my tongue

caught in the roller of an electric typewriter? I am plagued by doubts. What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists? In that case, I definitely overpaid for my carpet. If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank.

Had coffee with Melnick today. He talked to me about his idea of having all government officials dress like hens.

Play idea: A character based on my father, but without quite so prominent a big toe. He is sent to the Sorbonne to study the harmonica. In the end, he dies, never realizing his one dream—to sit up to his waist in gravy. (I see a brilliant second-act curtain, where two midgets come upon a severed head in a shipment of volleyballs.)

While taking my noon walk today, I had more morbid thoughts. What is it about death that bothers me so much? Probably the hours. Melnick says the soul is immortal and lives on after the body drops away, but if my soul exists without my body I am convinced all my clothes will be loose-fitting. Oh, well . . .

Did not have to break off with W. after all, for as luck would have it, she ran off to Finland with a professional circus geek. All for the best, I suppose, although I had another of those attacks where I start coughing out of my ears.

Last night, I burned all my plays and poetry. Ironically, as I was burning my masterpiece, *Dark Penguin*, the room caught fire, and I am now the object of a lawsuit by some men named Pinchuck and Schlosser. Kierkegaard was right.

Examining Psychic Phenomena

There is no question that there is an unseen world. The problem is, how far is it from midtown and how late is it open? Unexplainable events occur constantly. One man will see spirits. Another will hear voices. A third will wake up and find himself running in the Preakness. How many of us have not at one time or another felt an ice-cold hand on the back of our neck while we were home alone? (Not me, thank God, but some have.) What is behind these experiences? Or in front of them, for that

matter? Is it true that some men can foresee the future or communicate with ghosts? And after death is it still possible to take showers?

Fortunately, these questions about psychic phenomena are answered in a soon to be published book, *Boo!*, by Dr. Osgood Mulford Twelge, the noted parapsychologist and professor of ectoplasm at Columbia University. Dr. Twelge has assembled a remarkable history of supernatural incidents that covers the whole range of psychic phenomena,

from thought transference to the bizarre experience of two brothers on opposite parts of the globe, one of whom took a bath while the other suddenly got clean. What follows is but a sampling of Dr. Twelge's most celebrated cases, with his comments.

Apparitions

On March 16, 1882, Mr. J. C. Dubbs awoke in the middle of the night and saw his brother Amos, who had been dead for fourteen years, sitting at the foot of his bed flicking chickens. Dubbs asked his brother what he was doing there, and his brother said not to worry, he was dead and was only in town for the weekend. Dubbs asked his brother what it was like in "the other world," and his brother said it was not unlike Cleveland. He said he had returned to give Dubbs a message, which was that a dark-blue suit and Argyle socks are a big mistake.

At that point, Dubbs's servant girl entered and saw Dubbs talking to "a shapeless, milky haze," which she said reminded her of Amos Dubbs but was a little better-looking. Finally, the ghost asked Dubbs to join him in an aria from *Faust*, which the two sang with great fervor. As dawn rose, the ghost walked through the wall, and Dubbs, trying to follow, broke his nose.

This appears to be a classic case of the apparition phenomenon, and if Dubbs is to be believed, the ghost returned again and caused Mrs. Dubbs to rise out of a chair and hover over the dinner table for twenty minutes until she dropped into some gravy. It is interesting to note that spirits have a tendency to be mischievous, which A. F. Childe, the British mystic, attributes to a marked feeling of inferiority they have over being

dead. "Apparitions" are often associated with individuals who have suffered an unusual demise. Amos Dubbs, for instance, had died

under mysterious circumstances when a farmer accidentally planted him along with some turnips.

Spirit Departure

Mr. Albert Sykes reports the following experience: "I was sitting having biscuits with some friends when I felt my spirit leave my body and go make a telephone call. For some reason, it called the Moscowitz Fiber Glass Company. My spirit then returned to my body and sat for another twenty minutes or so, hoping nobody would suggest charades. When the conversation turned to mutual funds, it left again and began wandering around the city. I am convinced that it visited the Statue of Liberty and then saw the stage show at Radio City Music Hall. Following that, it went to Benny's Steak House and ran up a tab of sixty-eight dollars. My spirit then decided to return to my body, but it was impossible to get a cab. Finally, it walked up Fifth Avenue and rejoined me just in time to catch the late news. I could tell that it was reentering my body, because I felt a sudden chill, and a voice said, 'I'm back. You want to pass me those raisins?'

"This phenomenon has happened to me several times since. Once, my spirit went to Miami for a weekend, and once it was arrested for trying to leave Macy's without paying for a tie. The fourth time, it was actually my body that left my spirit, although all it did was get a rubdown and come right back."

Spirit departure was very common around 1910, when many "spirits" were reported wandering aimlessly around India searching for the American Consulate. The phenomenon is quite similar to transubstantiation, the process whereby a person will suddenly dematerialize and re-materialize somewhere else in the world. This is not a bad way to travel, although there is usually a half-hour wait for

luggage. The most astonishing case of transubstantiation was that of Sir Arthur Nurney, who vanished with an audible *pop* while he was taking a bath and suddenly appeared in the string section of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. He stayed on as the first violinist for twenty-seven

years, although he could only play "Three Blind Mice," and vanished abruptly one day during Mozart's Jupiter Symphony, turning up in bed with Winston Churchill.

Precognition

Mr. Fenton Allentuck describes the following precognitive dream: "I went to sleep at midnight and dreamed that I was playing whist with a plate of chives. Suddenly the dream shifted, and I saw my grandfather about to be run over by a truck in the middle of the street, where he was waltzing with a clothing dummy. I tried to scream, but when I opened my mouth the only sound that came out was chimes, and my grandfather was run over.

"I awoke in a sweat and ran to my grandfather's house and asked him if he had plans to go waltzing with a clothing dummy. He said of course not, although he had contemplated posing as a shepherd to fool his enemies. Relieved, I walked home, but learned later that the old man had slipped on a chicken-salad sandwich and fallen off the Chrysler Building."

Precognitive dreams are too common to be dismissed as pure coincidence. Here a man dreams of a relative's death, and it occurs. Not everyone is so lucky. J. Martinez, of Kennebunkport, Maine, dreamed he won the Irish Sweepstakes. When he awoke, his bed had floated out to sea.

Trances

Sir Hugh Swiggles, the skeptic, reports an interesting seance experience:

We attended the home of Madame Reynaud, the noted medium, where we were all told to sit around the table and join hands. Mr. Weeks couldn't stop giggling, and Madame Reynaud smashed him on the head with a Ouija board. The lights were turned out, and Madame Reynaud attempted to contact Mrs. Marple's husband, who had died at the opera when his beard caught fire. The following is an exact transcript:

mrs. marple: What do you see?

medium: I see a man with blue eyes and a pinwheel hat.

mrs. marple: That's my husband!

medium: His name is . . . Robert. No . . . Richard . . .

mrs. marple: Quincy.

medium: Quincy! Yes, that's it!

mrs. marple: What else about him?

medium: He is bald but usually keeps some leaves on his head so nobody will notice.

mrs. marple: Yes! Exactly!

medium: For some reason, he has an object ... a loin of pork.

mrs. marple: My anniversary present to him! Can you make him speak?

medium: Speak, spirit. Speak.

quincy: Claire, this is Quincy.

mrs. marple: Oh, Quincy! Quincy!

quincy: **How** long do you keep the chicken in when you're trying to broil it?

mrs. marple: That voice! It's him!

medium: Everybody concentrate.

mrs. marple: Quincy, are they treating you okay?

quincy: Not bad, except it takes four days to get your cleaning back.

mrs. marple: Quincy, do you miss me?

quincy: Huh? Oh, er, sure. Sure, kid. I got to be going. . . .

medium: I'm losing it. He's fading. . . .

I found this seance to pass the most stringent tests of credulity, with the minor exception of a phonograph, which was found under Madame Reynaud's dress.

There is no doubt that certain events recorded at seances are genuine. Who does not recall the famous incident at Sybil Seretsky's, when her goldfish sang "I Got Rhythm"—a favorite tune of her recently deceased nephew? But contacting the dead is at best difficult, since most deceased are reluctant to speak up, and those that do seem to hem and haw before getting to the point. The author has actually seen a table rise, and Dr. Joshua Fleagle, of Harvard, attended a seance in which a table not only rose but excused itself and went upstairs to sleep.

Clairvoyance

One of the most astounding cases of clairvoyance is that of the noted Greek psychic, Achille Londos. Londos realized he had "unusual powers" by the age of ten, when he could lie in bed and, by concentrating, make his father's false teeth jump out of his mouth. After a neighbor's husband had been missing for three weeks, Londos told them to

look in the stove, where the man was found knitting. Londos could concentrate on a person's face and force the image to come out on a roll of ordinary Kodak film, although he could never seem to get anybody to smile.

In 1964, he was called in to aid police in capturing the Diisseldorf Strangler, a fiend who always left a baked Alaska on the chests of his victims. Merely by sniffing a handkerchief, Londos led police to Siegfried Lenz, handyman at a school for deaf turkeys, who said he was the strangler and could he please have his handkerchief back.

Londos is just one of many people with psychic powers. C. N. Jerome, the psychic, of Newport, Rhode Island, claims he can guess any card being thought of by a squirrel.

Prognostication

Finally, we come to Aristonidis, the sixteenth-century count whose predictions continue to dazzle and perplex even the most skeptical. Typical examples are:

"Two nations will go to war, but only one will win."

(Experts feel this probably refers to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05—an astounding feat of prognostication, considering the fact that it was made in 1540.)

"A man in Istanbul will have his hat blocked, and it will be ruined."

(In 1860, Abu Hamid, Ottoman warrior, sent his cap out to be cleaned, and it came back with spots.)

"I see a great person, who one day will invent for mankind a garment to be worn over his trousers for protection while cooking. It will be called an 'abron' or 'aprone.' "

(Aristonidis meant the apron, of course.)

"A leader will emerge in France. He will be very short and will cause great calamity."

(This is a reference either to Napoleon or to Marcel

Lumet, an eighteenth-century midget who instigated a plot to rub bearnaise sauce on Voltaire.)

"In the New World, there will be a place named California, and a man named Joseph Cotten will become famous."

(No explanation necessary.)

A Guide to Some of the Lesser Ballets

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Dmitri

The ballet opens at a carnival. There are refreshments and rides. Many people in gaily colored costumes dance and laugh, to the accompaniment of flutes and woodwinds, while the trombones play in a minor key to suggest that soon the refreshments will run out and everybody will be dead.

Wandering around the fairgrounds is a beautiful girl named Natasha, who is sad because her father has been sent to fight in Khartoum, and there is no war there. Following her is Leonid, a young student, who is too shy to speak to Natasha but places a mixed-green salad on her doorstep every night. Natasha is moved by the gift and wishes she could meet the man who is sending it, particularly since she hates the house dressing and would prefer Roquefort.

The two strangers accidentally meet when Leonid,

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trying to compose a love note to Natasha, falls out of the Ferris wheel. She helps him up, and the two dance a pas de deux, after which Leonid tries to impress her by rolling his eyes until he has to be carried to the comfort station. Leonid offers profuse apologies and suggests that the two of them stroll to Tent No. 5 and watch a puppet show—an invitation that confirms in Natasha's mind the idea that she is dealing with an idiot.

The puppet show, however, is enchanting, and a large, amusing puppet named Dmitri falls in love with Natasha. She realizes that although he is only sawdust, he has a soul, and when he suggests checking into a hotel as Mr. and Mrs. John Doe, she is excited. The two dance a pas de deux, despite the fact that she just danced a pas de deux and is perspiring like an ox. Natasha confesses her love for Dmitri and swears that the two of

them will always be together, even though the man who works his strings will have to sleep on a cot in the parlor.

Leonid, outraged at being thrown over for a puppet, shoots Dmitri, who doesn't die but appears on the roof of the Merchants Bank, drinking haughtily from a bottle of Air Wick. The action becomes confused, and there is much rejoicing when Natasha fractures her skull.

The Sacrifice

A melodic prelude recounts man's relation to the earth and why he always seems to wind up buried in it. The curtain rises on a vast primitive wasteland, not unlike certain parts of New Jersey. Men and women sit in separate groups and then begin to dance, but they have no idea why and soon sit down again. Presently a young male in the prime of life enters and dances a hymn to fire. Suddenly it is discovered he is *on* fire, and after being put out he slinks off. Now the stage becomes dark, and Man challenges Nature—a stirring encounter during which Nature is bitten on the hip,

with the result that for the next six months the temperature never rises above thirteen degrees.

Scene 2 opens, and Spring still has not come, although it is late August and no one is quite sure when to set the clocks ahead. The elders of the tribe meet and decide to propitiate Nature by sacrificing a young girl. A maiden is selected. She is given three hours to report to the outskirts of town, where she is told they are having a weenie roast. When the girl appears that night, she asks where all the frankfurters are. She is ordered by the elders to dance herself to death. She pleads pathetically, telling them that she is not that good a dancer. The villagers insist, and, as the music builds relentlessly, the girl spins in a frenzy, achieving sufficient centrifugal force to hurl her silver fillings across a football field. Everyone rejoices, but too soon, for not only does Spring fail to come but two of the elders get subpoenaed in a mail-fraud charge.

The Spell

The overture begins with the brass in a joyous mood, while underneath, the double basses seem to be warning us, "Don't listen to the brass. What

the hell does brass know?" Presently, the curtain rises on Prince Sigmund's palace, magnificent in its splendor and rent-controlled. It is the Prince's twenty-first birthday, but he grows despondent as he opens his gifts because most of them turn out to be pajamas. One by one, his old friends pay their respects, and he greets them with a handshake or a slap on the back, depending on which way they are facing. He reminisces with his oldest friend, Wolfschmidt, and they vow that if either of them grows bald the other will wear a toupee.¹ The ensemble dances in preparation for the hunt until Sigmund says, "What hunt?" No one is quite sure, but the revelry has gone too far, and when the check comes there is much anger.

Bored with life, Sigmund dances his way down to the shore of the lake, where he stares at his perfect reflection for forty minutes, annoyed at not having brought his shaving equipment. Suddenly he hears the flutter of wings, and a group of wild swans flies across the moon; they take the first right and head back to the Prince. Sigmund is astounded to see that their leader is part swan and part woman—unfortunately, divided lengthwise. She enchants Sigmund, who is careful not to make any poultry jokes. The two dance a pas de deux that ends when Sigmund throws his back out. Yvette, the Swan Woman, tells Sigmund that she is under a spell cast by a magician named Von Epps, and that because of her appearance it is nearly impossible to get a bank loan. In an especially difficult solo, she explains, in dance language, that the only way to lift Von Epp's curse is for her lover to go to secretarial school and learn shorthand. This is odious to Sigmund, but he swears he will. Suddenly Von Epps appears, in the form of yesterday's laundry, and spirits Yvette away with him as the first act ends.

As Act II begins, it is a week later, and the Prince is about to be married to Justine, a woman he had completely forgotten about. Sigmund is torn by ambivalent feelings because he still loves the Swan Woman, but Justine is very beautiful, too, and has no major drawbacks like feathers or a beak. Justine dances seductively around Sigmund, who seems to be debating whether to go through with the marriage or find Yvette and see if the doctors can come up with anything. Cymbals crash and Von Epps, the Magician, enters. Actually, he was not invited to the wedding, but he promises not to eat much. Furious, Sigmund pulls his sword and stabs Von Epps through the heart. This casts a pall on the party, and Sigmund's

mother commands the chef to wait a few minutes before bringing out the roast beef.

Meanwhile, Wolfschmidt, acting on Sigmund's behalf,

has found the missing Yvette—not a difficult task, he explains, "because how many half women, half swans are there hanging around Hamburg?" Despite Justine's imploring, Sigmund rushes off to Yvette. Justine runs after him and kisses him, as the orchestra strikes a minor chord and we realize Sigmund has his leotards on inside out. Yvette weeps, explaining that the only way to lift the spell is for her to die. In one of the most moving and beautiful passages in any ballet, she runs headlong into a brick wall. Sigmund watches her body change from a dead swan to a dead woman and realizes how bittersweet life can be, particularly for fowl. Grief-stricken, he decides to join her, and after a delicate dance of mourning he swallows a barbell.

The Predators

This celebrated electronic ballet is perhaps the most dramatic of all modern dances. It begins with an overture of contemporary sounds—street noises, ticking clocks, a dwarf playing "Hora Staccato" on a comb and tissue paper. The curtain then rises on a blank stage. For several minutes, nothing happens; eventually, the curtain falls and there is an intermission.

Act II begins with a hush as some young men dance on, pretending to be insects. The leader is a common housefly, while the others resemble a variety of garden pests. They move sinuously to the dissonant music, in search of an immense buttered roll, which gradually appears in the background. They are about to eat it when they are interrupted by a procession of women who carry a large can of Raid. Panic-stricken, the males try to escape, but they are put into metal cages, with nothing to read. The women dance orgiastically around the cages, preparing to devour the males the minute they can find some soy sauce. As the females prepare to dine, one young girl notices a forlorn male, with drooping antennae. She is

drawn to him, and the two dance slowly to French horns as he whispers in her ear, "Don't eat me." The two fall in love, and make elaborate plans

for a nuptial flight, but the female changes her mind and devours the male, preferring instead to move in with a roommate.

A Day in the Life of a Doe

Unbearably lovely music is heard as the curtain rises, and we see the woods on a summer afternoon. A fawn dances on and nibbles slowly at some leaves. He drifts lazily through the soft foliage. Soon he starts coughing and drops dead.

The Scrolls

Scholars will recall that several years ago a shepherd, wandering in the Gulf of Aqaba, stumbled upon a cave containing several large clay jars and also two tickets to the ice show. Inside the jars were discovered six parchment scrolls with ancient incomprehensible writing which the shepherd, in his ignorance, sold to the museum for \$750,000 apiece. Two years later the jars turned up in a pawnshop in Philadelphia. One year later the shepherd turned up in a pawnshop in Philadelphia and neither was claimed.

Archaeologists originally set the date of the scrolls at 4000 b.c, or just after the massacre of the Israelites by their benefactors. The writing is a mixture of Sumerian, Aramaic, and Babylonian and seems to have been done by either one man over a long period of time, or several men who shared the same suit. The authenticity of the scrolls is currently in great doubt, particularly since the word "Oldsmobile" appears several times in the text, and the

few fragments that have finally been translated deal with familiar religious themes in a more than dubious way. Still, excavationist A. H. Bauer has noted that even though the fragments seem totally fraudulent, this is probably the greatest archeological find in history with the exception of the recovery of his cuff links from a tomb in Jerusalem. The following are the translated fragments.

One . . . And the Lord made an bet with Satan to test Job's loyalty and the Lord, for no apparent reason to Job, smote him on the head and again on the ear and pushed him into an thick sauce so as to make Job sticky

and vile and then He slew a tenth part of Job's kine and Job calleth out: "Why doth thou slay my kine? Kine are hard to come by. Now I am short kine and I'm not even sure what kine are." And the Lord produced two stone tablets and snapped them closed on Job's nose. And when Job's wife saw this she wept and the Lord sent an angel of mercy who anointed her head with a polo mallet and of the ten plagues, the Lord sent one through six, inclusive, and Job was sore and his wife angry and she rent her garment and then raised the rent but refused to paint.

And soon Job's pastures dried up and his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth so he could not pronounce the word "frankincense" without getting big laughs.

And once the Lord, while wreaking havoc upon his faithful servant, came too close and Job grabbed him around the neck and said, "Aha! Now I got you! Why art thou giving Job a hard time, eh? Eh? Speak up!"

And the Lord said, "Er, look—that's my neck you have . . . Could you let me go?"

But Job showed no mercy and said, "I was doing very well till you came along. I had myrrh and fig trees in abundance and a coat of many colors with two pairs of pants of many colors. Now look."

And the Lord spake and his voice thundered: "Must I

who created heaven and earth explain my ways to thee? What hath thou created that thou doth dare question me?"

"That's no answer," Job said. "And for someone who's supposed to be omnipotent, let me tell you, 'tabernacle' has only one /." Then Job fell to his knees and cried to the Lord, "Thine is the kingdom and the power and glory. Thou hast a good job. Don't blow it."

Two . . . And Abraham awoke in the middle of the night and said to his only son, Isaac, "I have had an dream where the voice of the Lord sayeth that I must sacrifice my ' only son, so put your pants on." And Isaac trembled and said, "So what did you say? I mean when He brought this whole thing up?"

"What am I going to say?" Abraham said. "I'm standing there at two **a.m.** in my underwear with the Creator of the Universe. Should I argue?"

"Well, did he say why he wants me sacrificed?" Isaac asked his father.

But Abraham said, "The faithful do not question. Now let's go because I have a heavy day tomorrow."

And Sarah who heard Abraham's plan grew vexed and said, "How doth thou know it was the Lord and not, say, thy friend who loveth practical jokes, for the Lord hateth practical jokes and whosoever shall pull one shall be delivered into the hands of his enemies whether they can pay the delivery charge or not." And Abraham answered, "Because I know it was the Lord. It was a deep, resonant voice, well modulated, and nobody in the desert can get a rumble in it like that."

And Sarah said, "And thou art willing to carry out this senseless act?" But Abraham told her, "Frankly yes, for to question the Lord's word is one of the worst things a person can do, particularly with the economy in the state it's in."

And so he took Isaac to a certain place and prepared to

sacrifice him but at the last minute the Lord stayed Abraham's hand and said, "How could thou doest such a thing?"

And Abraham said, "But thou said—"

"Never mind what I said," the Lord spake. "Doth thou listen to every crazy idea that comes thy way?" And Abraham grew ashamed. "Er—not really . . . no."

"I jokingly suggest thou sacrifice Isaac and thou immediately runs out to do it."

And Abraham fell to his knees, "See, I never know when you're kidding."

And the Lord thundered, "No sense of humor. I can't believe it."

"But doth this not prove I love thee, that I was willing to donate mine only son on thy whim?"

And the Lord said, "It proves that some men will follow any order no matter how asinine as long as it comes from a resonant, well-modulated voice."

And with that, the Lord bid Abraham get some rest and check with him tomorrow.

Three . . . And it came to pass that a man who sold shirts was smitten by hard times. Neither did any of his merchandise move nor did he prosper. And he prayed and said, "Lord, why hast thou left me to suffer thus? All mine enemies sell their goods except I. And it's the height of the season. My shirts are good shirts. Take a look at this rayon. I got button-downs, flare collars, nothing sells. Yet I have kept thy commandments. Why can I not earn a living when mine younger brother cleans up in children's ready-to-wear?"

And the Lord heard the man and said, "About thy shirts . . ."

"Yes, Lord," the man said, falling to his knees. "Put an alligator over the pocket." "Pardon me, Lord?"

"Just do what I'm telling you. You won't be sorry."

And the man sewed on to all his shirts a small alligator symbol and lo and behold, suddenly his merchandise moved like gangbusters, and there was much rejoicing while amongst his enemies there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, and one said, "The Lord is merciful. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. The problem is, I can't get up."

Laws and Proverbs

Doing abominations is against the law, particularly if the abominations are done while wearing a lobster bib.

The lion and the calf shall lie down together but the calf won't get much sleep.

Whosoever shall not fall by the sword or by famine, shall fall by pestilence so why bother shaving?

The wicked at heart probably know something.

Whosoever loveth wisdom is righteous but he that keepeth company with fowl is weird.

My Lord, my Lord! What hast Thou done, lately?

Lovborg's Women Considered

Perhaps no writer has created more fascinating and complex females than the great Scandinavian playwright Jorgen Lovborg, known to his contemporaries as Jorgen Lovborg. Tortured and embittered by his agonizing relationships with the opposite sex, he gave the world such diverse and unforgettable characters as Jenny Angstrom in *Geese Aplenty* and Mrs. Spearing in *A Mother's Gums*. Born in Stockholm in 1836, Lovborg (originally Lovborg, until, in later years he removed the two dots from above the *o* and placed them over his eyebrows) began writing plays at the age of fourteen. His first produced work, brought to the stage when he was sixty-one, was *Those Who Squirm*, which drew mixed notices from the critics, although the frankness of the subject matter (cheese fondling) caused conservative audiences to blush. Lovborg's work can be divided into three periods. First came the series of plays dealing with anguish, despair, dread, fear, and loneliness (the comedies); the second

group focused on social change (Lovborg was instrumental in bringing about safer methods of weighing herring); finally, there were the six great tragedies written just before his death, in Stockholm, in 1902, when his nose fell off, owing to tension.

Lovborg's first outstanding female character was Hedvig Moldau in *J Prefer to Yodel*, the playwright's ironic indictment of penmanship among the upper classes. Hedvig is aware that Greger Norstad has used substandard mortar to roof the henhouse, and when it collapses on Klavar Akdal, causing him to go blind and bald on the same night, she is racked with remorse. The obligatory scene follows:

hedvig: So—it collapsed.

dr. rorlund (*after a long pause*): Yes. It fell down on Akdal's face.

hedvig: (*ironically*): What was he doing in the henhouse?

dr. rorlund: He liked the hens. Oh, not all the hens, I'll grant you. But certain ones. (*Significantly*) He had his favorites.

hedvig: And Norstad? Where was he during the . . . accident?

dr. rorlund: He smeared his body with chives and jumped into the reservoir.

hedvig (*to herself*): I'll never marry.

dr. rorlund: What's that?

hedvig: Nothing. Come, Doctor. It's time to launder your shorts ... to launder everybody's shorts. . . .

Hedvig, one of the first really "modern" women, can only sneer when Dr. Rorlund suggests she run up and down in place until Norstad consents to have his hat blocked. She bears close resemblance to Lovborg's own sister Hilda, a neurotic, domineering woman married to a

quick-tempered Finnish seaman, who eventually harpooned her. Lovborg worshiped Hilda, and it was her influence that broke him of the habit of speaking to his cane.

The second great "heroine" in Lovborg's work appears in his drama of lust and jealousy *While We Three Hemorrhage*. Moltvick Dorf, the anchovy trainer, learns that his father's unmentionable disease has been inherited by his brother Eyeowulf. Dorf goes to court, claiming the disease is rightfully his, but Judge Manders upholds Eyeowulf's claim. Netta Holmquist, the beautiful and arrogant actress, tries to persuade Dorf to blackmail Eyeowulf by threatening to tell authorities that he once forged a penguin's signature on some insurance policies. Then, in Act II, Scene 4: **dorf:** Oh, Netta. All is lost! Lost! **netta:** For a weak man, perhaps, but not if one had—courage. **dorf:** Courage?

netta: To tell Parson Smathers he can never hope to walk again and that for the rest of his life he must skip everywhere.

dorf: Netta! I couldn't!

netta: Ha! Of course not! I should have known.

dorf: Parson Smathers trusts Eyeowulf. They shared a piece of chewing gum once. Yes, before I was born. Oh, Netta . . .

netta: Stop whining. The bank will never extend the mortgage on Eyeowulf's pretzel. And he's already eaten half of it.

dorf: Netta, what are you suggesting?

netta: Nothing a thousand wives would not do for their husbands. I mean to soak Eyeowulf in brine.

dorf: Pickle my own brother?

netta: Why not? What do you owe him?

dorf: But such drastic measures! Netta, why not let him keep Father's unmentionable disease? Perhaps we could compromise. Perhaps he would let me have the symptoms.

netta: Compromise, ha! Your middle-class mentality makes me sick! Oh, Moltvick, I'm so bored by this marriage! Bored by your ideas, your ways, your conversations. And your habit of wearing feathers to dinner.

dorf: Oh! Not my feathers, too!

netta (*contemptuously*): I am going to tell you something now that only I and your mother know. You are a dwarf.

dorf: *What?*

netta: Everything in the house has been made to scale. You are only forty-eight inches tall.

dorf: Don't, don't! The pains are returning!

netta: Yes, Moltvick!

dorf: My kneecaps—they're throbbing!

netta: What a weakling.

dorf: Netta, Netta, open the shutters . . .

netta: I'll close them.

dorf: Light! Moltvick needs light . . . To Lovborg, Moltvick represented the old, decadent, dying Europe. Netta, on the other hand, was the new—the vibrant, cruel Darwinian force of nature, which was to blow through Europe for the next fifty years and find its deepest expression in the songs of Maurice Chevalier. The relationship between Netta and Moltvick mirrored Lovborg's marriage to Siri Brackman, an actress who served as a constant inspiration to him throughout the eight hours their marriage lasted. Lovborg remarried several times after that, but always to department-store mannequins.

Clearly, the most fully realized woman in all of Lovborg's plays was Mrs. Sanstad in *Mellow Pears*, Lovborg's last naturalistic drama. (After *Pears*, he experimented with an Expressionist play in which all the characters were named Lovborg, but it failed to win approval, and for the remaining three years of his life he could not be coaxed out of the hamper.) *Mellow Pears* ranks with his greatest works, and the final exchange between Mrs. Sanstad and her son's wife, Berte, is perhaps more pertinent today than ever:

berte: Do say you like the way we furnished

the house! It was so hard, on a ventriloquist's

salary.

mrs. sanstad: The house is—serviceable. **berte:** What! Only serviceable? **mrs. sanstad:** Whose idea was the red satin elk? **berte:** Why, your son's. Henrick is a born decorator.

mrs. sanstad (suddenly): Henrick is a fool! **berte:** No!

mrs. sanstad: Did you know that he did not know what snow was until last week? **berte:** You're lying!

mrs. sanstad: My precious son. Yes, Henrick—the same man who went to prison for mispronouncing the word "diphthong."

berte: No!

mrs. sanstad: Yes. And with an Eskimo in the room at the time!

berte: I don't want to hear about it!

mrs. sanstad: But you will, my little nightingale! Isn't that what Henrick calls you?

berte (*crying*): He calls me nightingale! Yes, and sometimes thrush! And hippo!

(Both women weep unashamedly.)

mrs. sanstad: Berte, dear Berte! . . . Henrick's earmuffs are not his own! They are owned by a corporation.

berte: We must help him. He must be told he can never fly by flapping his arms.

mrs. sanstad (*suddenly laughing*): Henrick knows everything. I told him your feelings about his arch supports.

berte: So! You tricked me!

mrs. sanstad: Call it what you will. He's in Oslo now.

berte: Oslo!

mrs. sanstad: With his geranium . . .

berte: I see. I . . . see. (*She wanders through the French doors upstage.*)

mrs. sanstad: Yes, my little nightingale, he is out of your clutches at last. By this time next month, he will realize his lifelong dream—to fill his hat with cinders. And you thought you'd keep him cooped up here! No! Henrick is a wild creature, a thing of nature! Like some wonderful mouse—or a tick. (*A shot is heard. Mrs. Sanstad runs into the next room. We hear a scream. She returns, pale and shaken.*) Dead . . . She's lucky. I . . . must go on. Yes, night is falling . . . falling rapidly. So rapidly, and I still have all those chickpeas to rearrange.

Mrs. Sanstad was Lovborg's revenge on his mother. Also a critical woman, she began life as a trapeze artist with the circus; his father, Nils Lovborg, was the human cannonball. The two met in midair and were married before touching ground. Bitterness slowly crept into the marriage, and by the time Lovborg was six years old his parents exchanged gunfire daily. This atmosphere took its toll on a sensitive youngster like Jorgen, and soon he began to suffer the first of his famous

"moods" and "anxieties," rendering him for some years unable to pass a roast chicken without tipping his hat. In later years, he told friends that he was tense all during the writing of *Mellow Pears* and on several occasions believed he heard his mother's voice asking him directions to Staten Island.

The Whore of Mensa

One thing about being a private investigator, you've got to learn to go with your hunches. That's why when a quivering pat of butter named Word Bab-cock walked into my office and laid his cards on the table, I should have trusted the cold chill that shot up my spine. "Kaiser?" he said, "Kaiser Lupowitz?" "That's what it says on my license," I owned up. "You've got to help me. I'm being blackmailed. Please!"

He was shaking like the lead singer in a rumba band. I pushed a glass across the desk top and a bottle of rye I keep handy for nonmedicinal purposes. "Suppose you relax and tell me all about it."

"You . . . you won't tell my wife?"

"Level with me, Word. I can't make any promises."

He tried pouring a drink, but you could hear the clicking sound across the street, and most of the stuff wound up in his shoes.

"I'm a working guy," he said. "Mechanical maintenance. I build and service joy buzzers. You know—those little fun gimmicks that give people a shock when they shake hands?"

"So?"

"A lot of your executives like 'em. Particularly down on Wall Street."

"Get to the point."

"I'm on the road a lot. You know how it is—lonely. Oh, not what you're thinking. See, Kaiser, I'm basically an intellectual. Sure, a guy can meet all the bimbos he wants. But the really brainy women—they're not so easy to find on short notice."

"Keep talking."

"Well, I heard of this young girl. Eighteen years old. A Yassar student. For a price, she'll come over and discuss any subject—Proust, Yeats, anthropology. Exchange of ideas. You see what I'm driving at?"

"Not exactly."

"I mean, my wife is great, don't get me wrong. But she won't discuss Pound with me. Or Eliot. I didn't know that when I married her. See, I need a woman who's mentally stimulating, Kaiser. And I'm willing to pay for it. I don't want an involvement—I want a quick intellectual experience, then I want the girl to leave. Christ, Kaiser, I'm a happily married man."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Six months. Whenever I have that craving, I call Flossie. She's a madam, with a master's in comparative lit. She sends me over an intellectual, see?"

So he was one of those guys whose weakness was really bright women. I felt sorry for the poor sap. I figured there must be a lot of jokers in his position, who were starved for a little intellectual communication with the opposite sex and would pay through the nose for it.

"Now she's threatening to tell my wife," he said.

"Who is?"

"Flossie. They bugged the motel room. They got tapes of me discussing *The Waste Land* and *Styles of Radical Will*, and, well, really getting into

some issues. They want ten grand or they go to Carla. Kaiser, you've got to help me! Carla would die if she knew she didn't turn me on up here."

The old call-girl racket. I had heard rumors that the boys at headquarters were on to something involving a group of educated women, but so far they were stymied.

"Get Flossie on the phone for me."

"What?"

"I'll take your case, Word. But I get fifty dollars a day, plus expenses. You'll have to repair a lot of joy buzzers."

"It won't be ten Gs' worth, I'm sure of that," he said with a grin, and picked up the phone and dialed a number. I took it from him and winked. I was beginning to like him.

Seconds later, a silky voice answered, and I told her what was on my mind. "I understand you can help me set up an hour of good chat," I said.

"Sure, honey. What do you have in mind?"

"I'd like to discuss Melville."

"*Moby Dick* or the shorter novels?"

"What's the difference?"

"The price. That's all. Symbolism's extra."

"What'll it run me?"

"Fifty, maybe a hundred for *Moby Dick*. You want a comparative discussion—Melville and Hawthorne? That could be arranged for a hundred."

"The dough's fine," I told her and gave her the number of a room at the Plaza.

"You want a blonde or a brunette?"

"Surprise me," I said, and hung up.

I shaved and grabbed some black coffee while I checked over the Monarch College Outline series. Hardly an hour had passed before there was a knock on my door. I

opened it, and standing there was a young redhead who was packed into her slacks like two big scoops of vanilla ice cream.

"Hi, I'm Sherry."

They really knew how to appeal to your fantasies. Long straight hair, leather bag, silver earrings, no makeup.

"I'm surprised you weren't stopped, walking into the hotel dressed like that," I said. "The house dick can usually spot an intellectual."

"A five-spot cools him."

"Shall we begin?" I said, motioning her to the couch.

She lit a cigarette and got right to it. "I think we could start by approaching *Billy Budd* as Melville's justification of the ways of God to man, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Interestingly, though, not in a Miltonian sense." I was bluffing. I wanted to see if she'd go for it.

"No. *Paradise Lost* lacked the substructure of pessimism." She did.

"Right, right. God, you're right," I murmured.

"I think Melville reaffirmed the virtues of innocence in a naive yet sophisticated sense—don't you agree?"

I let her go on. She was barely nineteen years old, but already she had developed the hardened facility of the pseudo-intellectual. She rattled off her ideas glibly, but it was all mechanical. Whenever I offered an insight, she faked a response: "Oh, yes, Kaiser. Yes, baby, that's deep. A platonic comprehension of Christianity—why didn't I see it before?"

We talked for about an hour and then she said she had to go. She stood up and I laid a C-note on her.

"Thanks, honey."

"There's plenty more where that came from." "What are you trying to say?" I had piqued her curiosity. She sat down again. "Suppose I wanted to—have a party?" I said.

"Like, what kind of party?"

"Suppose I wanted Noam Chomsky explained to me by two girls?" "Oh, wow."

"If you'd rather forget it . . ."

"You'd have to speak with Flossie," she said. "It'd cost you."

Now was the time to tighten the screws. I flashed my private-investigator's badge and informed her it was a bust.

"What!"

"I'm fuzz, sugar, and discussing Melville for money is an 802. You can do time." "You louse!"

"Better come clean, baby. Unless you want to tell your story down at Alfred Kazin's office, and I don't think he'd be too happy to hear it."

She began to cry. "Don't turn me in, Kaiser," she said. "I needed the money to complete my master's. I've been turned down for a grant. *Twice*. Oh, Christ."

It all poured out—the whole story. Central Park West upbringing, Socialist summer camps, Brandeis. She was every dame you saw waiting in line at the Elgin or the Thalia, or penciling the words "Yes, very true" into the margin of some book on Kant. Only somewhere along the line she had made a wrong turn.

"I needed cash. A girl friend said she knew a married guy whose wife wasn't very profound. He was into Blake. She couldn't hack it. I said sure, for a price I'd talk Blake with him. I was nervous at first. I faked a

lot of it. He didn't care. My friend said there were others. Oh, I've been busted before. I got caught reading *Commentary* in a parked car, and I was once stopped and frisked at Tan-glewood. Once more and I'm a three-time loser."

"Then take me to Flossie."

She bit her lip and said, "The Hunter College Book Store is a front."
"Yes?"

"Like those bookie joints that have barbershops outside for show. You'll see."

I made a quick call to headquarters and then said to her, "Okay, sugar. You're off the hook. But don't leave town."

She tilted her face up toward mine gratefully. "I can get you photographs of Dwight Macdonald reading," she said.

"Some other time."

I walked into the Hunter College Book Store. The salesman, a young man with sensitive eyes, came up to me. "Can I help you?" he said.

"I'm looking for a special edition of *Advertisements for Myself. 1* understand the author had several thousand gold-leaf copies printed up for friends."

"I'll have to check," he said. "We have a WATS line to Mailer's house."

I fixed him with a look. "Sherry sent me," I said.

"Oh, in that case, go on back," he said. He pressed a button. A wall of books opened, and I walked like a lamb into that bustling pleasure palace known as Flossie's.

Red flocked wallpaper and a Victorian decor set the tone. Pale, nervous girls with black-rimmed glasses and blunt-cut hair lolled around on sofas, riffling Penguin Classics provocatively. A blonde with a big smile winked at me, nodded toward a room upstairs, and said, "Wallace Stevens, eh?" But it wasn't just intellectual experiences—they were peddling emotional ones, too. For fifty bucks, I learned, you could

"relate without getting close." For a hundred, a girl would lend you her Bartok records, have dinner, and then let you watch while she had an anxiety attack. For one-fifty, you could listen to FM radio with twins. For three bills, you got the works: A thin Jewish

brunette would pretend to pick you up at the Museum of Modern Art, let you read her master's, get you involved in a screaming quarrel at Elaine's over Freud's conception of women, and then fake a suicide of your choosing—the perfect evening, for some guys. Nice racket. Great town, New York.

"Like what you see?" a voice said behind me. I turned and suddenly found myself standing face to face with the business end of a .38. I'm a guy with a strong stomach, but this time it did a back flip. It was Flossie, all right. The voice was the same, but Flossie was a man. His face was hidden by a mask.

"You'll never believe this," he said, "but I don't even have a college degree. I was thrown out for low grades."

"Is that why you wear that mask?"

"I devised a complicated scheme to take over *The New York Review of Books*, but it meant I had to pass for Lionel Trilling. I went to Mexico for an operation. There's a doctor in Juarez who gives people Trilling's features—for a price. Something went wrong. I came out looking like Auden, with Mary McCarthy's voice. That's when I started working the other side of the law."

Quickly, before he could tighten his finger on the trigger, I went into action. Heaving forward, I snapped my elbow across his jaw and grabbed the gun as he fell back. He hit the ground like a ton of bricks. He was still whimpering when the police showed up.

"Nice work, Kaiser," Sergeant Holmes said. "When we're through with this guy, the F.B.I. wants to have a talk with him. A little matter involving some gamblers and an annotated copy of Dante's *Inferno*. Take him away, boys."

Later that night, I looked up an old account of mine named Gloria. She was blond. She had graduated *cum laude*. The difference was she

majored in physical education. It felt good.

The Early Essays

Following are a few of the early essays of Woody Allen. There are no late essays, because he ran out of observations. Perhaps as Allen grows older he will understand more of life and will set it down, and then retire to his bedroom and remain there indefinitely. Like the essays of Bacon, Allen's are brief and full of practical wisdom, although space does not permit the inclusion of his most profound statement, "Looking at the Bright Side."

On Seeing a Tree in Summer

Of all the wonders of nature, a tree in summer is perhaps the most remarkable, with the possible exception of a moose singing "Embraceable You" in spats. Consider the leaves, so green and leafy (if not, something is wrong). Behold how the branches reach up to heaven as if to say, "Though I am only a branch, still I would love to collect Social Security." And the varieties! Is this tree a spruce or poplar? Or a giant redwood? No, I'm afraid it's a stately elm, and once again you've made an ass of yourself. Of course, you'd know all the trees in a minute if you were nature's creature the woodpecker, but then it would be too late and you'd never get your car started.

But why is a tree so much more delightful than, say, a babbling brook? Or anything that babbles, for that matter? Because its glorious presence is mute testimony to an intelligence far greater than any on earth, certainly in the

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present Administration. As the poet said, "Only God can make a tree"—probably because it's so hard to figure out how to get the bark on.

Once a lumberjack was about to chop down a tree, when he noticed a heart carved on it, with two names inside. Putting away his axe, he sawed down the tree instead. The point of that story escapes me, although six months later the lumberjack was fined for teaching a dwarf Roman numerals.

On Youth and Age

The true test of maturity is not how old a person is but how he reacts to awakening in the midtown area in his shorts. What do years matter, particularly if your apartment is rent-controlled? The thing to remember is that each time of life has its appropriate rewards, whereas when you're dead it's hard to find the light switch. The chief problem about death, incidentally, is the fear that there may be no afterlife—a depressing thought, particularly for those who have bothered to shave. Also, there is the fear that there is an afterlife but no one will know where it's being held. On the plus side, death is one of the few things that can be done as easily lying down.

Consider, then: Is old age really so terrible? Not if you've brushed your teeth faithfully! And why is there no buffer to the onslaught of the years? Or a good hotel in downtown Indianapolis? Oh, well.

In short, the best thing to do is behave in a manner befitting one's age. If you are sixteen or under, try not to go bald. On the other hand, if you are over eighty, it is extremely good form to shuffle down the street clutching a brown paper bag and muttering, "The Kaiser will steal my string." Remember, everything is relative—or should be. If it's not, we must begin again.

On Frugality

As one goes through life, it is extremely important to conserve funds, and one should never spend money on anything foolish, like pear nectar or a solid-gold hat. Money is not everything, but it is better than having one's health. After all, one cannot go into a butcher shop and tell the butcher, "Look at my great suntan, and besides I never catch colds," and expect him to hand over any merchandise. (Unless, of course, the butcher is an idiot.) Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons. Not that it can buy happiness. Take the case of the ant and the grasshopper: The grasshopper played all summer, while the ant worked and saved. When winter came, the grasshopper had nothing, but the ant complained of chest pains. Life is hard for insects. And don't think mice are having any fun, either. The point is, we all need a nest egg to fall back on, but not while wearing a good suit.

Finally, let us bear in mind that it is easier to spend two dollars than to save one. And for God's sake don't invest money in any brokerage firm

in which one of the partners is named Frenchy.

On Love

Is it better to be the lover or the loved one? Neither, if your cholesterol is over six hundred. By love, of course, I refer to romantic love—the love between man and woman, rather than between mother and child, or a boy and his dog, or two headwaiters.

The marvelous thing is that when one is in love there is an impulse to sing. This must be resisted at all costs, and care must also be taken to see that the ardent male doesn't "talk" the lyrics of songs. To be loved, certainly, is different from being admired, as one can be admired from afar

but to really love someone it is essential to be in the same room with the person, crouching behind the drapes.

To be a really good lover, then, one must be strong and yet tender. How strong? I suppose being able to lift fifty pounds should do it. Bear in mind also that to the lover the loved one is always the most beautiful thing imaginable, even though to a stranger she may be indistinguishable from an order of smelts. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Should the beholder have poor eyesight, he can ask the nearest person which girls look good. (Actually, the prettiest ones are almost always the most boring, and that is why some people feel there is no God.)

"The joys of love are but a moment long," sang the troubadour, "but the pain of love endures forever." This was almost a hit song, but the melody was too close to "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy."

On Tripping Through a Copse and Picking Violets

This is no fun at all, and I would recommend almost any other activity. Try visiting a sick friend. If this is impossible, see a show or get into a nice warm tub and read. Anything is better than turning up in a copse with one of those vacuous smiles and accumulating flowers in a basket. Next thing you know, you'll be skipping to and fro. What are you going to do with the violets once you get them, anyhow? "Why, put them in a vase," you say. What a stupid answer. Nowadays you call the florist and

order by phone. Let *him* trip through the copse, he's getting paid for it. That way, if an electrical storm comes up or a beehive is chanced upon, it will be the florist who is rushed to Mount Sinai.

Do not conclude from this, incidentally, that I am

insensitive to the joys of nature, although I have come to the conclusion that for sheer fun it is hard to beat forty-eight hours at Foam Rubber City during the high holidays. But that is another story.

A Brief, Yet Helpful, Guide to Civil Disobedience

In perpetrating a revolution, there are two requirements: someone or something to revolt against and someone to actually show up and do the revolting. Dress is usually casual and both parties may be flexible about time and place but if either faction fails to attend, the whole enterprise is likely to come off badly. In the Chinese Revolution of 1650 neither party showed up and the deposit on the hall was forfeited.

The people or parties revolted against are called the "oppressors" and are easily recognized as they seem to be the ones having all the fun. The "oppressors" generally get to wear suits, own land, and play their radios late at night without being yelled at. Their job is to maintain the "status quo," a condition where everything remains the same although they may be willing to paint every two years.

When the "oppressors" become too strict, we have what is known as a police state, wherein all dissent is forbidden, as is chuckling, showing up in a bow tie, or

referring to the mayor as "Fats." Civil liberties are greatly curtailed in a police state, and freedom of speech is unheard of, although one is allowed to mime to a record. Opinions critical of the government are not tolerated, particularly about their dancing. Freedom of the press is also curtailed and the ruling party "manages" the news, permitting the citizens to hear only acceptable political ideas and ball scores that will not cause unrest.

The groups who revolt are called the "oppressed" and can generally be seen milling about and grumbling or claiming to have headaches. (It should be noted that the oppressors never revolt and attempt to become the oppressed as that would entail a change of underwear.)

Some famous examples of revolutions are:

The French Revolution, in which the peasants seized power by force and quickly changed all locks on the palace doors so the nobles could not get back in. Then they had a large party and gorged themselves. When the nobles finally recaptured the palace they were forced to clean up and found many stains and cigarette burns.

The Russian Revolution, which simmered for years and suddenly erupted when the serfs finally realized that the Czar and the Tsar were the same person.

It should be noted that after a revolution is over, the "oppressed" frequently take over and begin acting like the "oppressors." Of course by then it is very hard to get them on the phone and money lent for cigarettes and gum during the fighting may as well be forgotten about.

Methods of Civil disobedience:

Hunger Strike. Here the oppressed goes without food until his demands are met. Insidious politicians will often leave biscuits within easy reach or perhaps some cheddar cheese, but they must be resisted. If the party in power can

get the striker to eat, they usually have little trouble putting down the insurrection. If they can get him to eat and also lift the check, they have won for sure. In Pakistan, a hunger strike was broken when the government produced an exceptionally fine veal cordon bleu which the masses found was too appealing to turn down, but such gourmet dishes are rare.

The problem with the hunger strike is that after several days one can get quite hungry, particularly since sound trucks are paid to go through the street saying, "Um . . . what nice chicken—umm . . . some peas . . . umm . . ."

A modified form of the Hunger Strike for those whose political convictions are not quite so radical is giving up chives. This small gesture, when used properly, can greatly influence a government, and it is well known that Mahatma Gandhi's insistence on eating his salads un-tossed shamed the British government into many concessions. Other things besides food one can give up are: whist, smiling, and standing on one foot and imitating a crane.

Sit-down Strike. Proceed to a designated spot and then sit down, but sit all the way down. Otherwise you are squatting, a position that makes no political point unless the government is also squatting. (This is rare, although a government will occasionally crouch in cold weather.) The trick is to remain seated until concessions are made, but as in the Hunger Strike, the government will try subtle means of making the striker rise. They may say, "Okay, everybody up, we're closing." Or, "Can you get up for a minute, we'd just like to see how tall you are?"

Demonstration and Marches. The key point about a demonstration is that it must be seen. Hence the term "demonstration." If a person demonstrates privately in his own

home, this is not technically a demonstration but merely "acting silly" or "behaving like an ass."

A fine example of a demonstration was the Boston Tea Party, where outraged Americans disguised as Indians dumped British tea into the harbor. Later, Indians disguised as outraged Americans dumped actual British into the harbor. Following that, the British disguised as tea, dumped each other into the harbor. Finally, German mercenaries clad only in costumes from *The Trojan Women* leapt into the harbor for no apparent reason.

When demonstrating, it is good to carry a placard stating one's position. Some suggested positions are: (1) lower taxes, (2) raise taxes, and (3) stop grinning at Persians.

Miscellaneous methods of Civil Disobedience:

Standing in front of City Hall and chanting the word "pudding" until one's demands are met.

Tying up traffic by leading a flock of sheep into the shopping area.

Phoning members of "the establishment" and singing "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" into the phone.

Dressing as a policeman and then skipping.

Pretending to be an artichoke but punching people as they pass.

Match Wits with Inspector Ford

The Case of the Murdered Socialite

Inspector Ford burst into the study. On the floor was the body of Clifford Wheel, who apparently had been struck from behind with a croquet mallet. The position of the body indicated that the victim had been surprised in the act of singing "Sorrento" to his goldfish. Evidence showed there had been a terrible struggle that had twice been interrupted by phone calls, one a wrong number and one asking if the victim was interested in dance lessons.

Before Wheel had died, he had dipped his finger into the inkwell and scrawled out a message: "Fall Sale Prices Drastically Reduced—Everything Must Go!"

"A businessman to the end," mused Ives, his manservant, whose elevator shoes, curiously enough, made him two inches shorter.

The door to the terrace was open and footprints led from there, down the hall and into a drawer.

"Where were you when it happened, Ives?" "In the kitchen. Doing the dishes." Ives produced some suds from his wallet to corroborate his story. "Did you hear anything?"

"He was in there with some men. They were arguing over who was the tallest. I thought I heard Mr. Wheel start yodeling and Mosley, his business partner, began yelling, 'My God, I'm going bald!' Next thing I knew, there was a harp glissando and Mr. Wheel's head came rolling out onto the lawn. I heard Mr. Mosley threaten him. He said if Mr. Wheel touched his grapefruit again, he would not co-sign a bank loan for him. I think he killed him."

"Does the terrace door open from the inside or from the outside?"
Inspector Ford asked Ives.

"From the outside. Why?"

"Exactly as I suspected. I now realize it was you, not Mosley, who killed Clifford Wheel."

How Did Inspector Ford Know?

Because of the layout of the house, Ives could not have sneaked up behind his employer. He would have had to sneak up in front of him, at which time Mr. Wheel would have stopped singing "Sorrento" and used the mallet on Ives, a ritual they had gone through many times.

A Curious Riddle

Apparently, Walker was a suicide. Overdose of sleeping pills. Still, something seemed amiss to Inspector Ford. Perhaps it was the position of the body. Inside the TV set, looking out. On the floor was a cryptic suicide note. "Dear Edna, My woolen suit itches me, and so I have decided to take my own life. See that our son finishes all his push-ups. I leave you my entire fortune, with the exception of my porkpie hat, which I hereby donate to the planetarium.

Please don't feel sorry for me, as I enjoy being dead and much prefer it to paying rent. Goodbye, Henry. P.S. This may not be the time to bring it up, but I have every reason to believe that your brother is dating a Cornish hen."

Edna Walker bit her lower lip nervously. "What do you make of it, Inspector?"

Inspector Ford looked at the bottle of sleeping pills on the night table.
"How long had your husband been an insomniac?"

"For years. It was psychological. He was afraid that if he closed his eyes, the city would paint a white line down him."

"I see. Did he have any enemies?"

"Not really. Except for some gypsies who ran a tearoom on the outskirts of town. He insulted them once by putting on a pair of earmuffs and hopping up and down in place on their sabbath."

Inspector Ford noticed a half-finished glass of milk on the desk. It was still warm. "Mrs. Walker, is your son away at college?"

"I'm afraid not. He was expelled last week for immoral conduct. It came as quite a surprise. They caught him trying to immerse a dwarf in tartar sauce. That's one thing they won't tolerate at an Ivy League school."

"And one thing I won't tolerate is murder. Your son is under arrest."

Why Did Inspector Ford Suspect Walker's Son Had Killed Him?

Mr. Walker's body was found with cash in his pockets. A man who was going to commit suicide would be sure to take a credit card and sign for everything.

The Stolen Gem

The glass case was shattered and the Bellini Sapphire was missing. The only clues left behind at the museum were a blond hair and a dozen fingerprints, all pinkies. The guard explained that he had been standing there when a black-clad figure crept up behind him and struck him over the head with some notes for a speech. Just before losing consciousness, he thought he had heard a man's voice say, "Jerry, call your mother," but he could not be sure. Apparently, the thief had entered through the skylight and walked down the wall with suction shoes, like a human fly. The museum guards always kept an enormous fly swatter for just such occasions, but this time they had been fooled.

"Why would anyone want the Bellini Sapphire?" the museum curator asked. "Don't they know it's cursed?"

"What's this about a curse?" Inspector Ford was quick to ask.

"The sapphire was originally owned by a sultan who died under mysterious circumstances when a hand reached out of a bowl of soup he was eating and strangled him. The next owner was an English lord who was found one day by his wife growing upside down in a window box. Nothing was heard of the stone for a while; then it turned up years later in the possession of a Texas millionaire, who was brushing his teeth when he suddenly caught fire. We purchased the sapphire only last month, but the curse seemed to be working still, because shortly after we obtained it, the entire board of trustees at the museum formed a conga line and danced off a cliff."

"Well," Inspector Ford said, "it may be an unlucky jewel, but it's valuable, and if you want it back, go to Handleman's Delicatessen and arrest Leonard Handleman. You'll find that the sapphire is in his pocket."

How Did Inspector Ford Know Who the Jewel Thief Was?

The previous day, Leonard Handleman had remarked, "Boy, if I had a large sapphire, I could get out of the delicatessen business."

The Macabre Accident

"I just shot my husband," wept Cynthia Freem as she stood over the body of the burly man in the snow.

"How did it happen?" asked Inspector Ford, getting right to the point.

"We were hunting. Quincy loved to hunt, as did I. We got separated momentarily. The bushes were overgrown. I guess I thought he was a woodchuck. I blasted away. It was too late. As I was removing his pelt, I realized we were married."

"Hmm," mused Inspector Ford, glancing at the footprints in the snow. "You must be a very good shot. You managed to plug him right between the eyebrows."

"Oh, no, it was lucky. I'm really quite an amateur at that sort of thing."

"I see." Inspector Ford examined the dead man's possessions. In his pocket there was some string, also an apple from 1904 and instructions on what to do if you wake up next to an Armenian.

"Mrs. Freem, was this your husband's first hunting accident?"

"His first fatal one, yes. Although once in the Canadian Rockies, an eagle carried off his birth certificate."

"Did your husband wear a toupee?"

"Not really. He would usually carry it with him and produce it if challenged in an argument. Why?"

"He sounds eccentric."

"He was."

"Is that why you killed him?"

How Did Inspector Ford Know It Was No Accident?

An experienced hunter like Quincy Freem would never have stalked deer in his underwear. Actually, Mrs. Freem had bludgeoned him to death at home while he was playing the spoons and had tried to make it look like a hunting accident by dragging his body to the woods and leaving a copy of *Field & Stream* nearby. In her haste, she had forgotten to dress him. Why he had been playing the spoons in his underwear remains a mystery.

The Bizarre Kidnapping

Half-starved, Kermit Kroll staggered into the living room of his parents' home, where they waited anxiously with Inspector Ford.

"Thanks for paying the ransom, folks," Kermit said. "I never thought I'd get out of there alive."

"Tell me about it," the inspector said.

"I was on my way downtown to have my hat blocked when a sedan pulled up and two men asked me if I wanted to see a horse that could recite the Gettysburg Address. I said sure and got in. Next thing, I'm chloroformed and wake up somewhere tied to a chair and blindfolded."

Inspector Ford examined the ransom note. "Dear Mom and Dad, Leave \$50,000 in a bag under the bridge on Decatur Street. If there is no bridge on Decatur Street, please build one. I am being treated well, given shelter and good food, although last night the clams casino were overcooked. Send the money quickly, because if they don't hear from you within several days, the man who now

makes up my bed will strangle me. Yours, Kermit. P.S. This is no joke. I am enclosing a joke so you will be able to tell the difference."

"Do you have any idea at all as to where you were being held?"

"No, I just kept hearing an odd noise outside the window."

"Odd?"

"Yes. You know the sound a herring makes when you lie to it?"

"Hmm," reflected Inspector Ford. "And how did you finally escape?"

"I told them I wanted to go to the football game but I only had a single ticket. They said okay, as long as I kept the blindfold on and promised to return by midnight. I complied, but during the third quarter, the Bears had a big lead, so I left and made my way back here."

"Very interesting," Inspector Ford said. "Now I know this kidnapping was a put-up job. I believe you're in on it and are splitting the money."

How Did Inspector Ford Know?

Although Kermit Kroll did still live with his parents, they were eighty and he was sixty. Actual kidnapers would never abduct a sixty-year-old child, as it makes no sense.

The Irish Genius

Viscous **and Sons** had announced publication of *The Annotated Poems of Sean O'Shawn*, the great Irish poet, considered by many to be the most incomprehensible and hence the finest poet of his time. Abounding in highly personal references, an understanding of O'Shawn's work requires an intimate knowledge of his life, which, according to scholars, not even he had.

Following is a sample from this fine book.

Beyond Ichor

Let us sail. Sail with Fogarty's chin to Alexandria, While the Beamish Brothers Hurry giggling to the tower, Proud of their gums. A thousand years passed since Agamemnon said, "Don't open The gates, who the hell needs A wooden horse that size?"

What is the connection? Only That Shaunnesy, with dying Breath, refused to order an Appetizer with his meal although He was entitled to it. And brave Bixby, despite his Resemblance to a woodpecker, Could not retrieve his underwear From Socrates without a ticket. Parnell had the answer, but no One would ask him the question. No one but old Lafferty, whose Lapis lazuli practical joke caused A whole generation to take Samba lessons.

True, Homer was blind and that Accounted for why he dated those Particular women. But Aegnus and the Druids bear Mute testimony to man's quest For free alterations. Blake dreamed of it too, and O'Higgins who had his suit Stolen while he was still in it. Civilization is shaped like a Circle and repeats itself, while O'Leary's head is shaped like A trapezoid.

Rejoice! Rejoice! And call your Mother once in a while.

Let us sail. O'Shawn was fond of sailing, although he had never done it on the sea. As a boy he dreamed of becoming a ship's captain but gave it up when someone explained to him what sharks were. His older brother James, however, did go off and join the British Navy,

though he was dishonorably discharged for selling coleslaw to a bosun.

Fogarty's chin. Undoubtedly a reference to George Fogarty, who convinced O'Shawn to become a poet and assured him he would still be invited to parties. Fogarty published a magazine for new poets and although its circulation was limited to his mother, its impact was international.

Fogarty was a fun-loving, rubicund Irishman whose idea of a good time was to lie down in the public square and imitate a tweezers. Eventually he suffered a nervous breakdown and was arrested for eating a pair of pants on Good Friday.

Fogarty's chin was an object of great ridicule because it was tiny to the point of nonexistence, and at Jim Kelly's wake, he told O'Shawn, "I'd give anything for a larger chin. If I don't find one soon I'm liable to do something rash." Fogarty, incidentally, was a friend of Bernard Shaw's and was once permitted to touch Shaw's beard, provided he would go away.

Alexandria. References to the Middle East appear throughout O'Shawn's work, and his poem that begins "To Bethlehem with suds . . ." deals caustically with the hotel business seen through the eyes of a mummy.

The Beamish Brothers. Two half-wit brothers who tried to get from Belfast to Scotland by mailing each other.

Liam Beamish went to Jesuit school with O'Shawn but was thrown out for dressing like a beaver. Quincy Beamish was the more introverted of the two and kept a furniture pad on his head till he was forty-one.

The Beamish Brothers used to pick on O'Shawn and usually ate his lunch just before he did. Still, O'Shawn remembers them fondly and in his best sonnet, "My love is like a great, great yak," they appear symbolically as end tables.

The tower. When O'Shawn moved out of his parent's

home, he lived in a tower just south of Dublin. It was a very low tower, standing about six feet, or two inches shorter than O'Shawn. He shared this residence with Harry O'Connell, a friend with literary pretension, whose verse play *The Musk Ox*, closed abruptly when the cast was chloroformed.

O'Connell was a great influence on O'Shawn's style and ultimately convinced him that every poem need not begin, "Roses are red, violets are blue."

Proud of their gums. The Beamish Brothers had unusually fine gums. Liam Beamish could remove his false teeth and eat peanut brittle, which he did every day for sixteen years until someone told him there was no such profession.

Agamemnon. O'Shawn was obsessed with the Trojan War. He could not believe an army could be so stupid as to accept a gift from its enemy during wartime. Particularly when they got close to the wooden horse and heard giggling inside. This episode seems to have traumatized the young O'Shawn and throughout his entire life he examined every gift given him very carefully, going so far as to shine a flashlight into a pair of shoes he received on his birthday and calling out, "Anybody in there? Eh? Come on out!"

Shaunnesy. Michael Shaunnesy, an occult writer and mystic, who convinced O'Shawn there would be a life after death for those who saved string.

Shaunnesy also believed the moon influenced actions and that to take a haircut during a total eclipse caused sterility. O'Shawn was very much taken with Shaunnesy and devoted much of his life to occult studies, although he never achieved his final goal of being able to enter a room through the keyhole.

The moon figures heavily in O'Shawn's later poems, and he told James Joyce that one of his greatest pleasures was to immerse his arm in custard on a moonlit night.

The reference to Shaunnesy's refusing an appetizer

probably refers to the time the two men dined together in Innesfree and Shaunnesy blew chickpeas through a straw at a fat lady when she disagreed with his views on embalming.

Bixby. Eamon Bixby. A political fanatic who preached ventriloquism as a cure for the world's ills. He was a great student of Socrates but differed

from the Greek philosopher in his idea of the "good life," which Bixby felt was impossible unless everybody weighed the same.

Parnell had the answer. The answer O'Shawn refers to is "Tin," and the question is "What is the chief export of Bolivia?" That no one asked Parnell the question is understandable, although he was challenged once to name the largest fur-bearing quadruped extant and he said, "Chicken," for which he was severely criticized.

Lafferty. John Millington Synge's podiatrist. A fascinating character who had a passionate affair with Molly Bloom until he realized she was a fictional character.

Lafferty was fond of practical jokes and once with some corn meal and egg, he breaded Synge's arch supports. Synge walked peculiarly as a result, and his followers imitated him, hoping that by duplicating his gait, they too would write fine plays. Hence the lines: "caused/A whole generation to take/Samba lessons."

Homer was blind. Homer was a symbol for T. S. Eliot, whom O'Shawn considered a poet of "immense scope but very little breadth."

The two men met in London at rehearsals of *Murder in the Cathedral* (at that time entitled *Million Dollar Legs*). O'Shawn persuaded Eliot to abandon his sideburns and give up any notion he might have of becoming a Spanish dancer. Both writers then composed a manifesto stating the aims of the "new poetry," one of which was to write fewer poems that dealt with rabbits.

Aegnus and the Druids. O'Shawn was influenced by Celtic mythology, and his poem that begins, "Clooth na

bare, na bare, na bare . . ." tells how the gods of ancient Ireland transformed two lovers into a set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Free alterations. Probably refers to O'Shawn's wish to "alter the human race," whom he felt were basically depraved, especially jockeys. O'Shawn was definitely a pessimist, and felt that no good could come to mankind until they agreed to lower their body temperature from 98.6, which he felt was unreasonable.

Blake. O'Shawn was a mystic and, like Blake, believed in unseen forces. This was confirmed for him when his brother Ben was struck by lightning while licking a postage stamp. The lightning failed to kill Ben, which O'Shawn attributed to Providence, although it took his brother seventeen years before he could get his tongue back in his mouth.

O'Higgins. Patrick O'Higgins introduced O'Shawn to Polly Flaherty, who was to become O'Shawn's wife after a courtship of ten years in which the two did nothing more than meet secretly and wheeze at each other. Polly never realized the extent of her husband's genius and told intimates she thought he would be most remembered not for his poetry but for his habit of emitting a piercing shriek just before eating apples.

O'Leary's head. Mount O'Leary, where O'Shawn proposed to Polly just before she rolled off. O'Shawn visited her in the hospital and won her heart with his poem "On the Decomposing of Flesh."

Call your mother. On her deathbed, O'Shawn's mother Bridget, begged her son to abandon poetry and become a vacuum-cleaner salesman. O'Shawn couldn't promise and suffered from anxiety and guilt the rest of his life, although at the International Poetry Conference in Geneva, he sold W. H. Auden and Wallace Stevens each a Hoover.

Fabulous Tales and Mythical Beasts

(The following is a sample of some of world literature's more imaginative creations that I am anthologizing in a four-volume set that Remainder and Sons plans to publish pending the outcome of the Norwegian shepherds' strike.)

The Nurk

The nurk is a bird two inches long that has the power of speech but keeps referring to itself in the third person, such as, "He's a great little bird, isn't he?"

Persian mythology holds that if a nurk appears on the window sill in the morning a relative will either come into money or break both legs at a raffle.

Zoroaster was said to have received a nurk as a gift on his birthday, although what he really needed was some gray **slacks**. The nurk also appears in Babylonian mythology, but here he is much more sarcastic and is always saying, "Ah, come off it."

Some readers may be acquainted with a lesser-known opera by Holstein called *Taffelspitz*, in which a mute girl falls in love with a nurk, kisses it, and they both fly around the room till the curtain falls.

The Flying Snoll

A lizard with four hundred eyes, two hundred for distance and two hundred for reading. According to legend, if a man gazes directly into the face of the snoll he immediately loses his right to drive in New Jersey.

Also legendary is the snoll's graveyard, the location of which is unknown even to snolls, and should a snoll drop dead he must remain where he is until picked up.

In Norse mythology, Loki attempts to find the snoll's graveyard but chances upon some Rhine maidens bathing instead and somehow winds up with trichinosis.

The Emperor Ho Sin had a dream in which he beheld a palace greater than his for half the rent. Stepping through the portals of the edifice, Ho Sin suddenly found that his body became young again, although his head remained somewhere between sixty-five and seventy. Opening a door, he found another door, which led to another; soon he realized he had entered a hundred doors and was now out in the backyard.

Just when Ho Sin was on the verge of despair, a nightingale perched on his shoulder and sang the most beautiful song he'd ever heard and then bit him on the nose.

Chastened, Ho Sin looked into a mirror and instead of seeing his own reflection, he saw a man named Mendel Goldblatt who worked for the Wasserman Plumbing Company and who accused him of taking his overcoat.

From this Ho Sin learned the secret of life, and it was "Never to yodel."

When the emperor awoke he was in a cold sweat and couldn't recall if he dreamed the dream or was now in a dream being dreamt by his bail bondsman.

The Frean

The frean is a sea monster with the body of a crab and the head of a certified public accountant.

Freans are said to possess fine singing voices which drive sailors mad when they hear them, particularly on Cole Porter tunes.

Killing a frean is bad luck: in a poem by Sir Herbert Figg, a sailor shoots one and his boat suddenly founders in a storm, causing the crew to seize the captain and jettison his false teeth in hopes of staying afloat.

The Great Roe

The great roe is a mythological beast with the head of a lion and the body of a lion, though not the same lion. The roe is reputed to sleep for a thousand years and then suddenly rise in flames, particularly if it was smoking when it dozed off.

Odysseus was said to have awakened a roe after six hundred years but found it listless and grouchy, and it begged to remain in bed just two hundred more years.

The appearance of a Roe is generally considered unlucky and usually precedes a famine or news of a cocktail party.

A **wise man** in **India** bet a **magician** that he could not fool him, whereupon the magician tapped the wise man on the head and changed him into a dove. The dove then flew out the window to Madagascar and had his luggage forwarded.

The wise man's wife, who had witnessed this, asked the magician if he could also change things to gold, and if

so, could he change her brother to three dollars in cash so the whole day shouldn't be a total loss.

The magician said that in order to learn that trick one must journey to the four corners of the earth, but that one should go in the off-season, as three of the corners are usually booked.

The woman thought a moment and then set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca, forgetting to turn off her stove. Seventeen years later she returned, having spoken with the High Lama, and immediately went on welfare.

(The above is one of a series of Hindu myths that explain why we have wheat. Author.)

The Weal

A large white mouse with the lyrics to "Am I Blue?" printed on its stomach.

The weal is unique amongst rodents in that it can be picked up and played like an accordion. Similar to the weal is the lunette, a small squirrel that can whistle and knows the mayor of Detroit personally.

Astronomers talk of an inhabited planet named Quelm, so distant from earth that a man traveling at the speed of light would take six million years to get there, although they are planning a new express route that will cut two hours off the trip.

Since the temperature on Quelm is thirteen hundred below, bathing is not permitted and the resorts have either closed down or now feature live entertainment.

Because of its remoteness from the center of the solar system, gravity is nonexistent on Quelm and having a large sit-down dinner takes a great deal of planning.

In addition to all these obstacles on Quelm, there is no oxygen to support life as we know it, and what creatures

do exist find it hard to earn a living without holding down two jobs.

Legend has it, however, that many billions of years ago the environment was not quite so horrible—or at least no worse than Pittsburgh—and that

human life existed. These humans—resembling men in every way except perhaps for a large head of lettuce where the nose normally is—were to a man philosophers. As philosophers they relied heavily on logic and felt that if life existed, somebody must have caused it, and they went looking for a dark-haired man with a tattoo who was wearing a Navy pea jacket.

When nothing materialized, they abandoned philosophy and went into the mail-order business, but postal rates went up and they perished.

But Soft • • • Real Soft

Ask the average man who wrote the plays entitled *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*, and in most cases he'll snap confidently back with, "The Immortal Bard of Stratford on Avon." Ask him about the authorship of the Shakespearean sonnets and see if you don't get the same illogical reply. Now put these questions to certain literary detectives who seem to crop up every now and again over the years, and don't be surprised if you get answers like Sir Francis Bacon, Ben Jonson, Queen Elizabeth and possibly even the Homestead Act.

The most recent of these theories is to be found in a book I have just read that attempts to prove conclusively that the real author of Shakespeare's works was Christopher Marlowe. The book makes a very convincing case, and when I got through reading it I was not sure if Shakespeare was Marlowe or Marlowe was Shakespeare or what. I know this, I would not have cashed checks for either one of them—and I like their work.

Now, in trying to keep the above mentioned theory in perspective, my first question is: if Marlowe wrote Shakespeare's works, who wrote Marlowe's? The answer to this lies in the fact that Shakespeare was married to a woman named Anne Hathaway. This we know to be factual. However, under the new theory, it is actually Marlowe who was married to Anne Hathaway, a match which caused Shakespeare no end of grief, as they would not let him in the house.

One fateful day, in a jealous rage over who held the lower number in a bakery, Marlowe was slain—slain or whisked away in disguise to avoid charges of heresy, a most serious crime punishable by slaying or whisking away or both.

It was at this point that Marlowe's young wife took up the pen and continued to write the plays and sonnets we all know and avoid today. But allow me to clarify.

We all realize Shakespeare (Marlowe) borrowed his plots from the ancients (moderns); however, when the time came to return the plots to the ancients he had used them up and was forced to flee the country under the assumed name of William Bard (hence the term "immortal bard") in an effort to avoid debtor's prison (hence the term "debtor's prison"). Here Sir Francis Bacon enters into the picture. Bacon was an innovator of the times who was working on advanced concepts of refrigeration. Legend has it he died attempting to refrigerate a chicken. Apparently the chicken pushed first. In an effort to conceal Marlowe from Shakespeare, should they prove to be the same person, Bacon had adopted the fictitious name Alexander Pope, who in reality was Pope Alexander, head of the Roman Catholic Church and currently in exile owing to the invasion of Italy by the Bards, last of the nomadic hordes (the Bards give us the term "immortal bard"), and years before had galloped off to London, where Raleigh awaited death in the tower.

The mystery deepens for, as this goes on, Ben Jonson stages a mock funeral for Marlowe, convincing a minor poet to take his place for the burial. Ben Jonson is not to be confused with Samuel Johnson. He was Samuel Johnson. Samuel Johnson was not. Samuel Johnson was Samuel Pepys. Pepys was actually Raleigh, who had escaped from the tower to write *Paradise Lost* under the name of John Milton, a poet who because of blindness accidentally escaped to the tower and was hanged under the name of Jonathan Swift. This all becomes clearer when we realize that George Eliot was a woman.

Proceeding from this then, King Lear is not a play by Shakespeare but a satirical revue by Chaucer, originally titled "Nobody's Parfit," which contains in it a clue to the man who killed Marlowe, a man known around Elizabethan times (Elizabeth Barret Browning) as Old Vic. Old Vic became more familiar to us later as Victor Hugo, who wrote *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which most students of literature feel is merely *Coriolanus* with a few obvious changes. (Say them both fast.)

We wonder then, was not Lewis Carroll caricaturing the whole situation when he wrote *Alice in Wonderland*? The March Hare was Shakespeare,

the Mad Hatter, Marlowe, and the Dormouse, Bacon—or the Mad Hatter, Bacon, and the March Hare, Marlowe—or Carroll, Bacon, and the Dormouse, Marlowe—or Alice was Shakespeare—or Bacon—or Carroll was the Mad Hatter. A pity Carroll is not alive today to settle it. Or Bacon. Or Marlowe. Or Shakespeare. The point is, if you're going to move, notify your post office. **Unless** you don't give a hoot about posterity.

If the Impressionists Had Been Dentists

(A fantasy exploring the transposition of temperament)

Dear Theo,

Will life never treat me decently? I am wracked by despair! My head is pounding! Mrs. Sol Schwimmer is suing me because I made her bridge as I felt it and not to fit her ridiculous mouth! That's right! I can't work to order like a common tradesman! I decided her bridge should be enormous and billowing, with wild, explosive teeth flaring up in every direction like fire! Now she is upset because it won't fit in her mouth! She is so bourgeois and stupid, I want to smash her! I tried forcing the false plate in but it sticks out like a star burst chandelier. Still, I find it beautiful. She claims she can't chew! What do I care whether she can chew or not! Theo, I can't go on like this much longer! I asked Cezanne if he would share an office with me, but he is old and infirm and unable to hold the instruments and they must be tied to his wrists but then he lacks accuracy and once inside a mouth, he knocks out more teeth than he saves. What to do?

Dear Theo,

I took some dental X-rays this week that I thought were good. Degas saw them and was critical. He said the composition was bad. All the cavities were bunched in the lower left corner. I explained to him that's how Mrs. Slot-kin's mouth looks, but he wouldn't listen! He said he hated the frames and mahogany was too heavy. When he left, I tore them to shreds! As if that was not enough, I attempted some root-canal work on

Mrs. Wilma Zardis, but halfway through I became despondent. I realized suddenly that root-canal work is not what I want to do! I grew flushed and dizzy. I ran from the office into the air where I could breathe! I blacked out for several days and woke up at the seashore. When I returned, she was still in the chair. I completed her mouth out of obligation but I couldn't bring myself to sign it.

Vincent

Dear Theo,

Once again I am in need of funds. I know what a burden I must be to you, but who can I turn to? I need money for materials! I am working almost exclusively with dental floss now, improvising as I go along, and the results are exciting! God! I have not even a penny left for Novocaine! Today I pulled a tooth and had to anesthetize the patient by reading him some Dreiser. Help.

Vincent

Dear Theo,

Have decided to share offices with Gauguin. He is a fine dentist who specializes in bridgework, and he seems to like me. He was very complimentary about my work on Mr. Jay Greenglass. If you recall, I filled his lower seven, then despised the filling and tried to remove it. Greenglass was adamant and we went to court. There was a legal question of ownership, and on my lawyer's advice, I

cleverly sued for the whole tooth and settled for the filling. Well, someone saw it lying in the corner of my office and he wants to put it in a show! They are already talking about a retrospective!

Vincent

Dear Theo,

I think it is a mistake to share offices with Gauguin. He is a disturbed man. He drinks Lavioris in large quantities. When I accused him, he flew into a rage and pulled my D.D.S. off the wall. In a calmer moment, I convinced him to try filling teeth outdoors and we worked in a meadow

surrounded by greens and gold. He put caps on a Miss Angela Tonnato and I gave a temporary filling to Mr. Louis Kaufman. There we were, working together in the open air! Rows of blinding white teeth in the sunlight! Then a wind came up and blew Mr. Kaufman's toupee into the bushes. He darted for it and knocked Gauguin's instruments to the ground. Gauguin blamed me and tried to strike out but pushed Mr. Kaufman by mistake, causing him to sit down on the high-speed drill. Mr. Kaufman rocketed past me on a fly, taking Miss Tonnato with him. The upshot, Theo, is that Rifkin, Rifkin, Rifkin and Meltzer have attached my earnings. Send whatever you can.

Vincent

Dear Theo,

Toulouse-Lautrec is the saddest man in the world. He longs more than anything to be a great dentist, and he has real talent, but he's too short to reach his patients' mouths and too proud to stand on anything. Arms over his head, he gropes around their lips blindly, and yesterday, instead of putting caps on Mrs. Fitelson's teeth, he capped her chin. Meanwhile, my old friend Monet refuses to work on

anything but very, very large mouths and Seurat, who is quite moody, has developed a method of cleaning one tooth at a time until he builds up what he calls "a full, fresh mouth." It has an architectural solidity to it, but is it dental work?

Vincent

Dear Theo,

I am in love. Claire Memling came in last week for an oral prophylaxis. (I had sent her a postcard telling her it had been six months since her last cleaning even though it had been only four days.) Theo, she drives me mad! Wild with desire! Her bite! I've never seen such a bite! Her teeth come together perfectly! Not like Mrs. Itkin's, whose lower teeth are forward of her uppers by an inch, giving her an underbite that resembles that of a werewolf! No! Claire's teeth close and meet! When this happens you know there is a God! And yet she's not too perfect. Not so flawless as to be uninteresting. She has a space between lower nine and eleven. Ten was lost during her adolescence. Suddenly and without warning it

developed a cavity. It was removed rather easily (actually it fell out while she was talking) and was never replaced. "Nothing could replace lower ten," she told me. "It was more than a tooth, it had been my life to that point." The tooth was rarely discussed as she got older and I think she was only willing to speak of it to me because she trusts me. Oh, Theo, I love her. I was looking down into her mouth today and I was like a nervous young dental student again, dropping swabs and mirrors in there. Later I had my arms around her, showing her the proper way to brush. The sweet little fool was used to holding the brush still and moving her head from side to side. Next Thursday I will give her gas and ask her to marry me.

Dear Theo,

Gauguin and I had another fight and he has left for Tahiti! He was in the midst of an extraction when I disturbed him. He had his knee on Mr. Nat Feldman's chest with the pliers around the man's upper right molar. There was the usual struggle and I had the misfortune to enter and ask Gauguin if he had seen my felt hat. Distracted, Gauguin lost his grip on the tooth and Feldman took advantage of the lapse to bolt from the chair and race out of the office. Gauguin flew into a frenzy! He held my head under the X-ray machine for ten straight minutes and for several hours after I could not blink my eyes in unison. Now I am lonely.

Vincent

Dear Theo,

All is lost! Today being the day I planned to ask Claire to marry me, I was a bit tense. She was magnificent in her white organdy dress, straw hat, and receding gums. As she sat in the chair, the draining hook in her mouth, my heart thundered. I tried to be romantic. I lowered the lights and tried to move the conversation to gay topics. We both took a little gas. When the moment seemed correct, I looked her directly in the eye and said, "Please rinse." And she laughed! Yes, Theo! She laughed at me and then grew angry! "Do you think I could rinse for a man like you!? What a joke!" I said, "Please, you don't understand." She said, "I understand quite well! I could never rinse with anyone but a licensed orthodontist! Why, the thought I would rinse here! Get away from me!" And with that she ran out weeping. Theo! I want to die! I see my face in the mirror and I want to smash it! Smash it! Hope you are well.

Dear Theo,

Yes, it's true. The ear on sale at Fleishman Brothers Novelty Shop is mine. I guess it was a foolish thing to do but I wanted to send Claire a birthday present last Sunday and every place was closed. Oh, well. Sometimes I wish I had listened to father and become a painter. It's not exciting but the life is regular.

Vincent

No Kaddish for Weinstein

Weinstein lay under the covers, staring at the ceiling in a depressed torpor. Outside, sheets of humid air rose from the pavement in stifling waves. The sound of traffic was deafening at this hour, and in addition to all this his bed was on fire. Look at me, he thought. Fifty years old. Half a century. Next year, I will be fifty-one. Then fifty-two. Using this same reasoning, he could figure out his age as much as five years in the future. So little time left, he thought, and so much to accomplish. For one thing, he wanted to learn to drive a car. Adelman, his friend who used to play dreidel with him on Rush Street, had studied driving at the Sorbonne. He could handle a car beautifully and had already driven many places by himself. Weinstein had made a few attempts to steer his father's Chevy but kept winding up on the sidewalk.

He had been a precocious child. An intellectual. At twelve, he had translated the poems of T. S. Eliot into English, after some vandals had broken into the library

and translated them into French. And as if his I.Q. did not isolate him enough, he suffered untold injustices and persecutions because of his religion, mostly from his parents. True, the old man was a member of the synagogue, and his mother, too, but they could never accept the fact that their son was Jewish. "How did it happen?" his father asked, bewildered. My face looks Semitic, Weinstein thought every morning as he shaved. He had been mistaken several times for Robert Redford, but on each occasion it was by a blind person. Then there was Feinglass, his other boyhood friend: A Phi Beta Kappa. A labor spy, ratting on the workers. Then a convert to Marxism. A Communist agitator. Betrayed by the

Party, he went to Hollywood and became the offscreen voice of a famous cartoon mouse. Ironic.

Weinstein had toyed with the Communists, too. To impress a girl at Rutgers, he had moved to Moscow and joined the Red Army. When he called her for a second date, she was pinned to someone else. Still, his rank of sergeant in the Russian infantry would hurt him later when he needed a security clearance in order to get the free appetizer with his dinner at Longchamps. Also, while at school he had organized some laboratory mice and led them in a strike over work conditions. Actually, it was not so much the politics as the poetry of Marxist theory that got him. He was positive that collectivization could work if everyone would learn the lyrics to "Rag Mop." "The withering away of the state" was a phrase that had stayed with him, ever since his uncle's nose had withered away in Saks Fifth Avenue one day. What, he wondered, can be learned about the true essence of social revolution? Only that it should never be attempted after eating Mexican food.

The Depression shattered Weinstein's Uncle Meyer, who kept his fortune under the mattress. When the market crashed, the government called in all mattresses, and Meyer became a pauper overnight. All that was left for

him was to jump out the window, but he lacked the nerve and sat on a window sill of the Flatiron Building from 1930 to 1937.

"These kids with their pot and their sex," Uncle Meyer was fond of saying. "Do they know what it is to sit on a window sill for seven years? There you see life! Of course, everybody looks like ants. But each year Tessie—may she rest in peace—made the Seder right out there on the ledge. The family gathered round for Passover. Oy, nephew! What's the world coming to when they have a bomb that can kill more people than one look at Max Rifkin's daughter?"

Weinstein's so-called friends had all knuckled under to the House Un-American Activities Committee. Blotnick was turned in by his own mother. Sharpstein was turned in by his answering service. Weinstein had been called by the committee and admitted he had given money to the Russian War Relief, and then added, "Oh, yes, I bought Stalin a dining-room set." He refused to name names but said if the committee insisted he would give the heights of the people he had met at meetings.

In the end he panicked and instead of taking the Fifth Amendment, took the Third, which enabled him to buy beer in Philadelphia on Sunday.

Weinstein finished shaving and got into the shower. He lathered himself, while steaming water splashed down his bulky back. He thought, Here I am at some fixed point in time and space, taking a shower. I, Isaac Weinstein. One of God's creatures. And then, stepping on the soap, he slid across the floor and rammed his head into the towel rack. It had been a bad week. The previous day, he had got a bad haircut and was still not over the anxiety it caused him. At first the barber had snipped judiciously, but soon Weinstein realized he had gone too far. "Put some back!" he screamed unreasonably.

"I can't," the barber said. "It won't stick." "Well, then give it to me, Dominic! I want to take it with me!"

"Once it's on the floor of the shop it's mine, Mr. Wein-stein."

"Like hell! I want my hair!"

He blustered and raged, and finally felt guilty and left. Goyim, he thought. One way or another, they get you.

Now he emerged from the hotel and walked up Eighth Avenue. Two men were mugging an elderly lady. My God, thought Weinstein, time was when one person could handle that job. Some city. Chaos everywhere. Kant was right: The mind imposes order. It also tells you how much to tip. What a wonderful thing, to be conscious! I wonder what the people in New Jersey do.

He was on his way to see Harriet about the alimony payments. He still loved Harriet, even though while they were married she had systematically attempted to commit adultery with all the R's in the Manhattan telephone directory. He forgave her. But he should have suspected something when his best friend and Harriet took a house in Maine together for three years, without telling him where they were. He didn't *want* to see it—that was it. His sex life with Harriet had stopped early. He slept with her once on the night they first met, once on the evening of the first moon landing, and once to test if his back was all right after a slipped disc. "It's no damn good with you, Harriet," he used to complain. "You're too pure. Every time I have an urge for you I

sublimate it by planting a tree in Israel. You remind me of my mother." (Molly Weinstein, may she rest in peace, who slaved for him and made the best stuffed derma in Chicago—a secret recipe until everyone realized she was putting in hashish.)

For lovemaking, Weinstein needed someone quite opposite. Like LuAnne, who made sex an art. The only trouble was she couldn't count to twenty without taking

her shoes off. He once tried giving her a book on existentialism, but she ate it. Sexually, Weinstein had always felt inadequate. For one thing, he felt short. He was five-four in his stocking feet, although in someone else's stocking feet he could be as tall as five-six. Dr. Klein, his analyst, got him to see that jumping in front of a moving train was more hostile than self-destructive but in either case would ruin the crease in his pants. Klein was his third analyst. His first was a Jungian, who suggested they try a Ouija board. Before that, he attended "group," but when it came time for him to speak he got dizzy and could only recite the names of all the planets. His problem was women, and he knew it. He was impotent with any woman who finished college with higher than a B-minus average. He felt most at home with graduates of typing school, although if the woman did over sixty words a minute he panicked and could not perform.

Weinstein rang the bell to Harriet's apartment, and suddenly she was standing before him. Swelling to maculate giraffe, as usual, thought Weinstein. It was a private joke that neither of them understood.

"Hello, Harriet," he said.

"Oh, Ike," she said. "You needn't be so damn self-righteous."

She was right. What a tactless thing to have said. He hated himself for it.

"How are the kids, Harriet?" "We never had any kids, Ike."

"That's why I thought four hundred dollars a week was a lot for child support."

She bit her lip, Weinstein bit his lip. Then he bit her lip. "Harriet," he said, "I . . . I'm broke. Egg futures are down."

"I see. And can't you get help from your *shiksa*?" "To you, any girl who's not Jewish is a *shiksa*."

"Can we forget it?" Her voice was choked with recrimination. Weinstein had a sudden urge to kiss her, or if not her, somebody.

"Harriet, where did we go wrong?"

"We never faced reality."

"It wasn't my fault. You said it was north."

"Reality is north, Ike."

"No, Harriet. Empty dreams are north. Reality is west. False hopes are east, and I think Louisiana is south."

She still had the power to arouse him. He reached out for her, but she moved away and his hand came to rest in some sour cream.

"Is that why you slept with your analyst?" he finally blurted out. His face was knotted with rage. He felt like fainting but couldn't remember the proper way to fall.

"That was therapy," she said coldly. "According to Freud, sex is the royal road to the unconscious."

"Freud said *dreams* are the road to the unconscious."

"Sex, dreams—you're going to nit-pick?"

"Goodbye, Harriet."

It was no use. *Rien a dire, rien a faire*. Weinstein left and walked over to Union Square. Suddenly hot tears burst forth, as if from a broken dam. Hot, salty tears pent up for ages rushed out in an unabashed wave of emotion. The problem was, they were coming out of his ears. Look at this, he thought; I can't even cry properly. He dabbed his ear with Kleenex and went home.

Fine Times: An Oral Memoir

The following are excerpts from the soon-to-be-published memoirs of Flo Guinness. Certainly the most colorful of all speakeasy owners during Prohibition, Big Flo, as her friends called her (many enemies called her that, too, mostly for convenience), emerges in these taped interviews as a woman with a lusty appetite for living, as well as a disappointed artist who had to give up her lifetime ambition to become a classical violinist, when she realized it would mean studying the violin. Here, for the first time, Big Flo speaks for herself.

Originally I danced at the Jewel Club in Chicago, for Ned Small. Ned was a shrewd businessman who made all his money by what we would now call "stealing." Of course, in those days it was quite different. Yes, sir, Ned had great charm—the kind you don't see today. He was famous for breaking both your legs if you disagreed with him. And he could do it, too, boys. He broke *more* legs! I'd

say fifteen or sixteen a week was his average. But Ned was sweet on me, maybe 'cause I always told him straight to his face what I thought of him. "Ned," I told him over dinner once, "you're a mealy-mouth grifter with the morals of an alley cat." He laughed, but later that night I saw him looking up "mealy-mouth" in a dictionary. Anyhow, like I said, I danced at Ned Small's Jewel Club. I was his best dancer, boys—a *dancer-actress*. The other girls just hoofed, but I danced a little story. Like Venus emerging from her bath, only on Broadway and Forty-second Street, and she goes night-clubbing and dances till dawn and then has a massive coronary and loses control of the facial muscles on her left side. Sad stuff, boys. That's why I got respect.

One day, Ned Small calls me into his office and says, "Flo." (He always called me Flo, except when he got real mad at me. Then he'd call me Albert Schneiderman—I never knew why. Let's say the heart has strange ways.) So Ned says, "Flo, I want you to marry me." Well, you could've knocked me over with a feather. I started crying like a baby. "I mean it, Flo," he said. "I love you very deeply. It's not easy for me to say these things, but I want you to be the mother of my children. And if you don't I'll break both your legs." Two days later, to the minute, Ned Small and I

tied the knot. Three days later, Ned was machine-gunned to death by the mob for spilling raisins on Al Capone's hat.

After that, of course, I was rich. First thing I did was buy my mother and father that farm they'd always talked about. They claimed they had never talked about a farm and actually wanted a car and some furs, but they gave it a try. Liked the rural life, too, although Dad got struck by lightning in the north forty and for six years afterward when asked his name could only say the word "Kleenex." As for me, three months later I was broke. Bad investments. I backed a whaling expedition in Cincinnati, on the advice of friends.

I danced for Big Ed Wheeler, who made bootleg hooch that was so strong it could only be sipped through a gas mask. Ed paid me three hundred dollars a week to do ten shows, which in those days was big money. Hell, with tips I made more than President Hoover. And he had to do twelve shows. I went on at nine and eleven, and Hoover went on at ten and two. Hoover was a good President, but he was always sitting in his dressing room humming. It drove me crazy. Then one day the owner of the Apex Club saw my act and offered me five hundred dollars a week to dance there. I put it squarely to Big Ed: "Ed, I got an offer of five hundred bucks from Bill Hallorhan's Apex Club."

"Flo," he said, "if you can get five hundred a week, I won't stand in your way." We shook hands and I went to tell Bill Hallorhan the good news, but several of Big Ed's friends had gotten there first and when I saw Bill Hallorhan his physical condition had undergone a change and he was now only a high-pitched voice that came from inside a cigar box. He said he had decided to get out of show business, leave Chicago, and settle down somewhere closer to the equator. I went on dancing for Big Ed Wheeler till the Capone mob bought him out. I say, "bought him out," boys, but the truth of it was Scarface Al offered him a tidy sum but Wheeler said no. Later that day, he was having lunch at the Rib and Chop House when his head burst into flames. No one knew why.

I bought the Three Deuces with money I'd saved, and in no time it was the hot spot in town. They all came— Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Jolson, Man o' War. Man o' War was there every night. My God, how that horse could drink! I remember once Babe Ruth had this crush on a showgirl named Kelly Swain. He was so crazy about her he couldn't keep his

mind on baseball and twice greased his body, thinking he was a famous channel swimmer.

"Flo," he said to me, "I'm nuts about this redhead, Kelly Swain. But she hates sports. I lied and told her I give a course on Wittgenstein, but I think she suspects something."

"Can you live without her, Babe," I asked him.

"No, Flo. And it's affecting my concentration. Yesterday, I got four hits and stole two bases, but this is January and there are no games scheduled. I did it in my hotel room. Can you help me?"

I promised him I'd speak to Kelly, and the next day I stopped by the Golden Abattoir, where she was dancing. I said, "Kelly, the Bambino is nuts about you. He knows you like culture and he says if you date him he'll give up baseball and join the Martha Graham troupe."

Kelly looked me squarely in the eye and said, "Tell that palooka I didn't come all the way from Chippewa Falls to wind up with some overstuffed right fielder. I got big plans." Two years later, she married Lord Osgood Wellington Turtle and became Lady Turtle. Her husband gave up an ambassadorship to play shortstop for the Tigers. Jumpin' Joe Turtle. He holds the record for most times beamed in the first inning.

Gambling? Boys, I was present when Nick the Greek got his name. There was a small-time gambler named Jake the Greek, and Nick called me and said, "Flo, I'd like to be The Greek." And I said, "I'm sorry, Nick, you're not Greek. And under New York State gambling laws it's forbidden." And he said, "I know, Flo, but my parents always wanted me to be called The Greek. You think you could arrange a lunch meeting with Jake?" I said, "Sure, but if he knows what it's for he won't show." And Nick said, "Try, Flo. It would mean a lot to me."

So the two met at the Grill Room of Monty's Steak House, which did not allow women but I could go there because Monty was a great friend of mine and didn't

regard me as either male or female but, in his own words, "undefined protoplasm." We ordered the specialty of the house, ribs, which Monty had a way of preparing so they tasted like human fingers. Finally, Nick

said, "Jake, I'd like to be called The Greek." And Jake turned pale and said, "Look, Nick, if that's what you got me here for—" Well, boys, it got ugly. The two squared off. Then Nick said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll cut you. High card gets to be called The Greek."

"But what if I win?" Jake said. "I'm *already* called The Greek."

"If you win, Jake, you can go through the phone book and pick any name you like. My compliments." "No kidding?" "Flo's the witness."

Well, you could feel the tension in that room. A deck of cards was brought out and they cut. Nick cut a queen, and Jake's hand was shaking. Then Jake cut an ace! Everybody let out a cheer, and Jake went through the phone book and selected the name Grover Lembeck. Everybody was happy, and from that day on women were allowed into Monty's, provided they could read hieroglyphics.

I remember once there was a big musical review at the Winter Garden, *Star-Spangled Vermin*. Jolson was the lead, but he quit because they wanted him to sing a song called "Kasha for Two," and he hated it. It had the line in it "Love is all, like a horse in a stall." Anyway, eventually it was sung by a young unknown named Felix Brompton, who was later arrested in a hotel room with a one-inch cardboard cutout of Helen Morgan. It was in all the papers. Well, Jolson come into the Three Deuces one night with Eddie Cantor, and he says to me, "Flo, I hear George Raft did his tap dance here last week." And I said, "George has never been here." And he said, "If you let him do his tap dance, I'd like to sing." And I said, "Al, he was never

here." And Al said, "Did he have any accompaniment on piano?" And I said, "Al, if you sing one note I'll personally throw you out." And with that Jolie got down on one knee and started on "Toot-Toot Tootsie." While he was singing, I sold the place, and by the time he was finished it was the Wing Ho Hand Laundry. Jolson never got over that or forgave me for it. On the way out, he tripped over a pile of shirts.

Slang Origins

How many of you have ever wondered where certain slang expressions come from? Like "She's the cat's pajamas," or to "take it on the lam." Neither have I. And yet for those who are interested in this sort of thing I have provided a brief guide to a few of the more interesting origins.

Unfortunately, time did not permit consulting any of the established works on the subject, and I was forced to either obtain the information from friends or fill in certain gaps by using my own common sense.

Take, for instance, the expression "to eat humble pie." During the reign of Louis the Fat, the culinary arts flourished in France to a degree unequalled anywhere. So obese was the French monarch that he had to be lowered onto the throne with a winch and packed into the seat itself with a large spatula. A typical dinner (according to DeRochet) consisted of a thin crepe appetizer, some parsley, an ox, and custard. Food became the court obsession,

and no other subject could be discussed under penalty of death. Members of a decadent aristocracy consumed incredible meals and even dressed as foods. DeRochet tells us that M. Monsant showed up at the coronation as a weiner, and Etienne Tisserant received papal dispensation to wed his favorite codfish. Desserts grew more and more elaborate and pies grew larger and larger until the minister of justice suffocated trying to eat a seven-foot "Jumbo Pie." *Jumbo* pie soon became *jumble* pie and "to eat a jumble pie" referred to any kind of humiliating act. When the Spanish seamen heard the word *jumble*, they pronounced it "humble," although many preferred to say nothing and simply grin.

Now, while "humble pie" goes back to the French, "take it on the lam" is English in origin. Years ago, in England, "lamming" was a game played with dice and a large tube of ointment. Each player in turn threw dice and then skipped around the room until he hemorrhaged. If a person threw seven or under he would say the word "quintz" and proceed to twirl in a frenzy. If he threw over seven, he was forced to give every player a portion of his feathers and was given a good "lamming." Three "lam-mings" and a player was "kwirled" or declared a moral bankrupt. Gradually any game with feathers was called "lamming" and feathers became "lams." To "take it on the lam" meant to put on feathers and later, to escape, although the transition is unclear.

Incidentally, if two of the players disagreed on the rules, we might say they "got into a beef." This term goes back to the Renaissance when a man would court a woman by stroking the side of her head with a slab of meat. If she pulled away, it meant she was spoken for. If, however, she assisted by clamping the meat to her face and pushing it all over her head, it meant she would marry him. The meat was kept by the bride's parents and worn as a hat on special occasions. If, however, the husband took another lover,

the wife could dissolve the marriage by running with the meat to the town square and yelling, "With thine own beef, I do reject thee. Aroo! Aroo!" If a couple "took to the beef" or "had a beef" it meant they were quarreling.

Another marital custom gives us that eloquent and colorful expression of disdain, "to look down one's nose." In Persia it was considered a mark of great beauty for a woman to have a long nose. In fact, the longer the nose, the more desirable the female, up to a certain point. Then it became funny. When a man proposed to a beautiful woman he awaited her decision on bended knee as she "looked down her nose at him." If her nostrils twitched, he was accepted, but if she sharpened her nose with pumice and began pecking him on the neck and shoulders, it meant she loved another.

Now, we all know when someone is very dressed up, we say he looks "spiffy." The term owes its origin to Sir Oswald Spiffy, perhaps the most renowned fop of Victorian England. Heir to treacle millions, Spiffy squandered his money on clothes. It was said that at one time he owned enough handkerchiefs for all the men, women and children in Asia to blow their noses for seven years without stopping. Spiffy's sartorial innovations were legend, and he was the first man ever to wear gloves on his head. Because of extra-sensitive skin, Spiffy's underwear had to be made of the finest Nova Scotia salmon, carefully sliced by one particular tailor. His libertine attitudes involved him in several notorious scandals, and he eventually sued the government over the right to wear earmuffs while fondling a dwarf. In the end, Spiffy died a broken man in Chichester, his total wardrobe reduced to kneepads and a sombrero.

Looking "spiffy," then, is quite a compliment, and one who does is liable to be dressed "to beat the band," a turn-of-the-century expression that

originated from the custom of attacking with clubs any symphony orchestra whose

conductor smiled during Berlioz. "Beating the band" soon became a popular evening out, and people dressed up in their finest clothes, carrying with them sticks and rocks. The practice was finally abandoned during a performance of the *Symphonie Fantastique* in New York when the entire string section suddenly stopped playing and exchanged gunfire with the first ten rows. Police ended the melee but not before a relative of J. P. Morgan's was wounded in the soft palate. After that, for a while at least, nobody dressed "to beat the band."

If you think some of the above derivations questionable, you might throw up your hands and say, "Fiddlesticks." This marvelous expression originated in Austria many years ago. Whenever a man in the banking profession announced his marriage to a circus pinhead, it was the custom for friends to present him with a bellows and a three-year supply of wax fruit. Legend has it that when Leo Rothschild made known his betrothal, a box of cello bows was delivered to him by mistake. When it was opened and found not to contain the traditional gift, he exclaimed, "What are these? Where are my bellows and fruit? Eh? All I rate is fiddlesticks!" The term "fiddlesticks" became a joke overnight in the taverns amongst the lower classes, who hated Leo Rothschild for never removing the comb from his hair after combing it. Eventually "fiddlesticks" meant any foolishness.

Well, I hope you've enjoyed some of these slang origins and that they stimulate you to investigate some on your own. And in case you were wondering about the term used to open this study, "the cat's pajamas," it goes back to an old burlesque routine of Chase and Rowe's, the two nutsy German professors. Dressed in oversized tails, Bill Rowe stole some poor victim's pajamas. Dave Chase, who got great mileage out of his "hard of hearing" specialty, would ask him:

chase: Ach, Herr Professor. Vot is dot bulge under your pocket?

rowe: Dot? Dot's de chap's pajamas.

chase: The cat's pajamas? Ut mein Gott?

Audiences were convulsed by this sort of repartee and only a premature death of the team by strangulation kept them from stardom.