THE VINEGAR WORM
(Formerly The American Journal of Oculenteratology)
Vol.I, No.2. Published at 2701 So. Vine St., Denver 10, Colo., by Bob Leman. Free.

OUT OF THE CRUET

If any of you noticed, the previous issue of this irregular publication was entitled The American Journal of Oculenteratology. "Oculenteratology" was an etymologically imperfect coinage of mine, meaning (or intended to mean) "the study of bug-eyed monsters." This little joke was ill-received in some quarters, and was the occasion, I have gathered, for a number of copies having been thrown away unread--the recipients having been under the impression that it was some sort of crank publicity, on the order of scientology or dianetics. Furthermore, The American Journal of Oculenteratology is an unwieldy kind of title, and takes a long time to type--and to say.

So, The Journal passes into history, after a brief but uneventful life, and its place is taken by THE VINEGAR WORM. The vinegar worm is an ugly small creature that lives in an acid environment; it absorbs acid with relish, and secretes acid constantly. THE VINEGAR WORM's title stands as its policy statement.

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You must admit that THE VINEGAR WORM is nothing if not solicitous of its readers' wishes; this issue has been tailored according to the specifications outlined in your cards and letters. ("This is your magazine!") You asked for fiction; below is Fred Haggard's "A Game of Jacks." You asked for poetry; there are three poems in this issue. A few tasteless clotpolls made the suggestion that I simply discontinue publication, as a public service, but I treat them with the lofty disdain they deserve.

A small number asked for a letter column. I find this a bit puzzling--I've never cared to read other people's mail, myself--but if you want it, you'll get it. Space limitations preclude an extensive letter department in this issue, but just so no one will feel slighted, I set out below the two letters I received last week. (I know you wouldn't be interested in old letters.)

> Dear Bob, Autumn has come to Illinois, and the maples were never more beautiful. Your Uncle Herbert and I have been taking long walks, just soaking up all that beauty--and Pepper scampers along with us, making many a side-trip in pursuit of squirrels.
>
> Herbert's arthritis is much improved, thanks to Dr. Veblen. I, however, have been unable to obtain relief from my asthma. I understand that the winters are very cold in the mountains, so don't neglect to wear your muffler on bitter days.
>
> Love, Aunt Martha

> Dear Sir: Thank you for your letter of Dec. 12. We regret that we are unable to refund your money, but the damage was clearly caused by your mishandling of the apparatus. We trust that we will not hear from you further in this connection.
>
> Yours very truly, The Atlas Products Corporation.

Well, so much for letters.

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A gratifying number of those upon whom I inflicted my first issue have been good

enough to comment on the zine in some detail. Generally speaking, these commentators can be divided into two categories. One group enjoyed the part of the issue that was intended to be humorous, but was lukewarm about the editorializing, while the other group hated the risible matter, but found some merit in the sercon. There were also, of course, many who hated the whole thing, and a few (bless them!) who liked it all. But in the main, the two categories held.

Now the last thing I want to do is to take myself or my little publishing enterprise too seriously. The faned--with a few avaricious exceptions--is in business for the fun of it, and if it gives him pleasure to bombard the faithful with sloppily hektographed reproductions of the multiplication table, why, that's his privilege. My first issue may very well have been incomprehensible driveling, and an attempt to find a generality in the adverse comment on it probably seems a little pretentious. Still, the neat division along the line separating humor from serious matter almost forces the drawing of certain inferences.

My first observation in this connection is that the membership of the NFFF comprises a remarkably sober group. With but a single exception, those letters from NFFFans which took a position plumped for the serious stuff. This makes an interesting contrast with the reactions of fans outside the NFFF who expressed a preference: 87% of them preferred the humor--or "humor" to you NFFFans. My sample, admittedly, is not large; but in each case the figures are so one-sided that I'm convinced that they're indicative of something. Maybe it's that NFFFans require subtler matter to tickle their risibilities that I'm capable of producing. On the other hand, perhaps the remark of a correspondent of mine--who, it should be noted, loses no opportunity to deride the NFFF--is true. He says that everybody with a sense of humor left the NFFF long ago.

A second conclusion forced by this dichotomy of preference is that there exist among the faithful two types of mind, mutually exclusive in their tastes. I can think of no reason why this should be so; we're all dreadfully earnest about one subject or another, but to lose one's sense of humor on that account --assuming that the reason for the NFFF objections to my levity was, as I suppose, my being facetious about something as deadly serious as fandom--is to approach a mental imbalance. I'm not trying to assert that the stuff was in fact funny--W. C. Fields himself once said, "Who knows what is funny?"--but I am in a state of puzzlement about that split. If you're a serconfan, does that mean you can't laugh any more? If you like Fred Chapell, must you hate Dave Foley?

Whatever the answers to these questions, we all write as we must, and I fear that I am incorrigibly frivolous. For as long as THE VINEGAR WORM appears, it will contain a substantial proportion of what I hope is funny. It will also have some sercon. What I'd like, of course, is to please everybody with both types of content, but as things stand, this appears to be beyond my capacities. The best solution for you fans out there (those of you who are still with me) is simply to select the parts you find agreeable. And if this reduces your perusal of the thing to a thankful glance at the ultimate period, why, think of the time you save.

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Mention should be made of the way in which the poems by Oval Rheen and Craloteen Arliss which are published in this issue came into being. At a recent meeting of the Denver Denebians, the following competition was set: "In plot

112-B of Mouldy Knolls cemetery, at midnight, a sepulchral voice is heard singing. Write the words of the song." These two poems were voted best at the subsequent meeting, and while T. S. Eliot isn't going to lose any sleep over them, they do fill up an agreeable amount of awkward blank space.

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I quote from The New Yorker of November 2, 1957:

"MOST FASCINATING NEWS STORY OF THE WEEK

(The following item, reprinted in its entirety, is from the Bridgetown (B.W.I.) Barbados Advocate)

MULE TRAPPED
IN CHIMNEY

> An electrician who found a buzzard's egg in the ear of sleeping elephant has opened a tobacconist's shop on the river bank at Marlow. 'I hope to play some cricket in the summer,' he told a coachload of tourists from Guilford."

Now I submit that that (unintentional though it certainly was) is lunacy beyond the fondest dreams of even such inspired lunatics as Benchley and Perelman. Only consider the gorgeous non sequiturs and the impossible dramatis personae: a mule and an electrician--a combination as exotic as Carroll's walrus and carpenter; an elephant and a coachload of tourists from Guilford--rare and outré creatures, when taken in conjunction. Consider the sublime irrelevance of the headline, and the interesting peculiarity of the finding of a buzzard's egg in an elephant's ear--by an electrician!

How did this electrician happen to encounter the coachload of tourists? Why did he volunteer the information about his desire for athletic competition in the summer? What had his commercial enterprise (one visualizes a counter on a slippery river-bank) to do with his pachydermatous bird's-nesting?

These, I take it, are questions that will never be answered.

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Fred Haggard and I recently spent an afternoon grailing, and when we got back to my house, chilled to the bone and worn out by our handling of the heavy trookers we use out here, we poured ourselves a soupcon or two of Old Stepfather. As is invariably the case when Fred and I and the grape get together, an argument ensued. The point at issue is no longer of any consequence; suffice it to say that for the first time since 1936 Fred was right about something. Unfortunately, we had laid a wager--how was I to know that lightning was going to strike? (Do you suppose the Britannica has a misprint in Vol. 11?)

As a result of losing this bet, I am compelled to publish the following Feghootisms. Haggard has treasured these things for years, convinced, despite all evidence to the contrary, that they are funny. It may be that publication in THE WORM will accomplish the necessary catharsis, and Fred will be freed of this albatross. If so, by reading the following, you will be suffering in a good cause.

> King Cole of Poictesme was inordinately fond of cabbage shredded and combined with mayonnaise sauce. He learned, however, that his subjects were lovers of sauerkraut, and this seemed to the good monarch to verge on blasphemy--to be a barbarous use of good

cabbage. He forthwith decreed that cabbage might be served only in the fashion he preferred. This was known as Cole's Law.

An early explorer of the western part of this country undertook, accompanied by his wife, to climb a mountain in Colorado. The Rev. Mr. Pike and Mrs. Pike were near the summit when Mr. Pike was overcome by the rarified air, and fell unconscious. Mrs. Pike, highly unstrung, chafed his hands, and futilely pleaded, "Pike, Speak!" Thus was the name of our famous western landmark born.

Elijah Journal, M.D., had a serious problem: he idolized his mother, and permitted her to control every segment of his life, but Mrs. Journal's insistence that he emulate in every way his father, old Dr. Journal, created many problems. For example, his mother insisted that he make his calls in a buggy, as his father had; she would not countenance his using an automobile. Dr. Journal, however, found the horse too slow, and purchased an auto, the existence of which he concealed from his mother. The villagers called this car Dr. Journal's Secret Hudson.

And that, praise be, is that. It seems clear that only a mind weakened by an intemperate use of Oh, Henry!s could produce such horrors. Haggard, I think I should tell you, has a criminal record: possession of marine shales, Chicago, 1950; aggravated necrosis, Cleveland, 1954; and corporate defenestration, Louisville, 1956. Knowing this, I am sure you will make allowances for the foregoing. In any case, I want you to absolve me from blame.

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You remember Brown's Shortest Horror Story: "The last man on earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door."

Ron Smith, the faned's faned, sold to Boucher a variation on this theme, entitled "A Horror Story Shorter by One Letter Than The Shortest Horror Story." It went like this. "The last man on earth sat alone in a room. There was a lock on the door."

Boucher, not to be outdone, came back in INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION # 52 (the fanzine's fanzine) with the following: "The Shortest Story of The End of All Things Nautical and Irish: The last sailor on earth sat at his mooring-place in Kilkenny. It was a dock on the Nore."

This kind of foolery opens endless vistas to spoonerists and punsters, and in the pious hope of nipping a pernicious fad in the bud, I submit the following, which may drive the thing into the ground before it becomes really dangerous:

--The last major-general on earth made a loan to his groom; it was a shock to the corps.

--A man sat eating the last pickled pig's-foot on earth. It was the hock of a boar.

--The last man on earth stumbled in his room; there was a rock on the floor.

--The last vampire on earth sat drinking his dinner; it was a crock full of gore.

--A man saw a timepiece in the last house of ill-fame on earth. It was the clock of a demi-mondaine.

A GAME OF JACKS
by
Fred Haggard

"Is this your mommy's and daddy's room?" asked Olive.

"It's my daddy's," said Lucy. "Why don't we play jacks?"

"Your daddy's?" asked Olive. "Where does your mommy sleep?"

"That room over there."

"My mommy and daddy sleep in the same room," said Olive righteously.

Lucy was a little offended. "Well, mine used to, but daddy said he just couldn't stand it to watch the change any more, so he moved to this room. Let's play jacks."

They were on threesies when Olive asked, "Why can't your daddy stand it to watch your mommy change her clothes? My daddy likes to watch."

Lucy's tone was superior. "Not change her clothes, silly. The change. She changes."

Olive didn't want to expose her ignorance, but curiosity won. "What's the change, Lucy?"

Lucy said, loftily, "Well, if you've never seen it, I can't explain it to you. Start your foursies."

Olive concentrated on the jacks, but Lucy's train of thought appeared to have been diverted from the game. Finally she asked, "Did you ever see a grex, Olive?"

Feeling that she was being bested at every turn, Olive ventured a doubtful guess. "A foreigner?"

"I knew you never saw one! I have, lots of times. Golly!"

Olive succumbed. "What's a grex, Lucy?"

Lucy moved a conspiratorial inch closer. "It's a--well, it's big, and sort of round and squashy, and it's purple and white--and it's got three mouths!"

"Oh, a 'maginary monster."

"It's not imaginary--it's just as real as you are. It eats with two of its mouths and talks with the other. The eating mouths have about a million teeth in them, and the talking mouth hasn't got any teeth at all. It's just kind of a round red hole."

"What does it eat, Lucy?"

"People. A little girl is just about the right amount for one meal."

Olive felt relieved. For a moment she'd almost believed in the grex, but the last statement put it safely in the "imaginary" category. She fell in with the game. "Where does it live, Lucy?"

"That's a secret. But I'll tell you part of the secret. You'd never find the grex in a million years, because most of the time it's a person. It only changes into a grex when it has to eat, and the rest of the time it's just a plain, ordinary person."

The talk about eating had reminded Olive of something. She said, "I think I'd better go home now, Lucy. My mommy doesn't know where I am, and it's almost suppertime."

Lucy jumped up. "I'll tell my mother." She rapped on the bedroom door. "Mother, Olive has to go home now. Her mother doesn't know where she is."

There was a short silence, and then a series of unidentifiable noises. At length a voice came from behind the closed door: "Lucy, darling, bring your little friend in. I'll like to meet her before she goes." The voice had a slight lisp, as though it came from a toothless mouth.

"Come on, Olive," Lucy said. "I want you to meet my mother."

-The End-

THE OCULENTERATOLOGIST'S BOOKSHELF

As a usual thing, this column will review only new books, or new editions of old books, but this month I find myself entirely unable to restrain my enthusiasm for Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan, which I have just read, although it was published in this country as long ago as 1946. It may be that you missed it, too; there was only one American edition (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946) and, if memory serves, it received only faintly puzzled and non-committal back-of-the-book reviews in the regular media, while SF circles appeared to take no notice of it at all. (I could be wrong about this last--if so, tell me about it.) The book has been out of print for some time.

Reviews of Ballantine's recent Sometime, Never, in which Peake's "Boy in Darkness" appeared, called my attention to the fact that Peake had previously been published here, and I immediately began to hunt for Titus Groan. A few weeks ago I found it in a second-hand-book shop, and I made it mine for a quarter. I never put two bits to better use.

This--to be brief--is the most fascinating novel to come along since the war. I except just three books from this judgment, and none of them is of particular interest to fans as such. Is it SF? No. Is it fantasy? Perhaps. It is subtitled "A Gothic Novel", and that descriptive perhaps comes as close to classifying the book as is possible. But, classifiable or not, I'm pretty sure you'll enjoy it. It simply puzzled most of the reading public, of course; but the SFantasist has a mind pre-conditioned to accept and enjoy things that are wildly out of the ordinary, and I don't quite understand why there isn't already a Titus Groan cult in existence among the faithful. Or perhaps there is.

The time of the book is--well--"sometime, never"; the place is Gormenghast castle. And where is Gormenghast? We are not told.

It is a fascinating exercise to try to deduce from its content the time and place of Titus Groan. The society is feudal, apparently, for the only people we hear about are those in the castle or those who live under its walls; but it is a feudalism without point or purpose, since there is no evidence that either war or the need to organize for protection has existed within the history of Gormenghast. It is, evidently, a feudalism with ancient custom as its only raison d'etre, practised by a people fanatically devoted to resisting change. Or perhaps "fanatically devoted" implies too much of active resistance; it is simply that this is a people to whom the idea of change does not occur.

The House of Groan--Titus is the seventy-seventh earl in the succession--has ruled Gormenghast for two millennia. Neither those within the castle nor those under the walls, one gathers, have changed their ways of living in all that time. But how is a feudal society two thousand years old--or even fifteen hundred, if we give only twenty years to a generation--possible? Feudalism was instituted too recently to permit seventy-seven generations of Groans. The temporal location of Titus Groan must remain an enigma.

What about its geographical location, then? An immense castle with mud huts clustered under its walls immediately says "Europe" to most of us, and on the whole, there is a closer resemblance to feudal Europe than to any other milieu. And yet, there is something strongly oriental about the ritualistic life lived in the castle, and something wildly outlandish about the painted carvings whose sculpture provides the occupation of the people in the mud huts.

On the other hand, the names of the characters have an English--almost a Dickensian

--flavor: Groan, Rottcodd, Flay, Swelter, Steerpike, Sourdust, Prunesquallor; and their speech, while unmarked by archaisms or demonstrable deviations from contemporary English, has in places an Elizabethan ring. We are left to conclude that Titus Groan can be placed only as, "Somewhere, sometime." Peake may have been thinking of something like Tolkien's "Middle Earth", or perhaps of some remote future; but it is my own opinion that he created Gormenghast without reference to time or place, and that to think of it in terms of anno domini or latitude and longitude is otiose.

Because Gormenghast, regardless of its time or place, is a monumental creation--and I do not speak of an abstraction, I mean the castle itself. With a touch here and a stroke there, Peake manages to erect in the reader's mind a structure of fantastic proportions, a building so immense and varied, so incredibly involved in towers, parapets, acres of roof, labyrinths of corridors, winding staircases, echoing halls, tiers, temples and cellars, that the reader can only blink in awe. And the creation of this marvelous pile is accomplished with the brush of an Hieronymous Bosch: ". . . he saw spread out before him in mountainous facades a crumbling panorama, a roofscape of Gormenghast, its crags and its stark walls of cliff pocked with nameless windows."

The castle towers over the story; it is always there, dominating with its ancient vastness the Gothic incredibility of the tale. At every turn a concept that increments the enormous strangeness of the castle is added: the room of roots; the tower of flints; the forty traps; the stone lane; the forest of pillars; the room of spiders. And all of this, mind you, without a hint of Howard-deCamp romanticism; it all seems as real as your breakfast egg.

And that is Peake's most remarkable achievement: he has made believable a wildly improbable--indeed, an impossible--setting. The reader finds himself accepting as the natural order of things a parade of bizarre sights which appear only once, and then but for a moment, as a flash of lightning exposes a scene for a millisecond before darkness again closes in: a lake atop a distant tower of the castle, in which a white mare and her foal swim side by side; a mad poet declaiming his verses from an unexpected window in the "stark walls of cliff"; a wall that is "emerald with lizards"; an immense tree growing horizontally out of the castle wall, hundreds of feet above the ground; and so on for 430 pages, in a virtuoso performance by an unbelievably fecund imagination.

There is one quality in Titus Groan that belies its subtitle: humor. The Gothic novel was about as humorless a genre as has ever existed, and the inclusion of humorous matter in Titus Groan was perhaps a miscalculation on Peake's part. Still, the frivolous content comes in homeopathic doses, and is somewhat set apart by being contained in a pair of poems. This verse has a demented quality worthy of Carroll; but there is also (and this may excuse its presence in a "Gothic novel") an indefinable sadness faintly piping beneath the lunacy. And, in any case, the poems are quite as strange as the rest of the book, and when read in context they jar not at all; so doubtless Peake knew what he was doing, and to protest their humorous nature is only pedantic carping.

Humor, in any event, is certainly the element in Titus Groan that is of least consequence. This is a story of madness in a castle; of villainy gross and villainy subtle; of derring-do on rooftops and duels among spiderwebs; of terror by night and grotesquerie by day; and of horror unparalleled.

I say "horror unparalleled" advisedly; I submit that the last ten lines of chapter sixty-one, read in context, are the most shocking to be found in any writing extant. These paragraphs, together with the following chapter, comprise a passage that contains a greater quantity of genuine, soul-wrenching horror than a carload of the contrived and tedious fabrications of that extraordinary bore, Lovecraft. The form taken by the madness of the seventy-sixth earl, the manner of

his death, and the rooftop Odyssey with Swelter's body, are matters which at least one reader will always remember with gooseflesh.

And yet, there is in all of this no hint of the supernatural; everything--given Peake's setting--is hard, factual and realistic. There are no ghosts, vampires, brownies, elementals, were-animals, fairies, ghouls, sprites, psi-adepts, telepaths, elves or djinn. There are not even any psychopaths--lunatics, yes, but no psychopaths. Every character is a solid, flesh-and-blood human being. And this is why, in feeling my way toward categorizing Titus Groan, I cavilled a bit at the subtitle: the supernatural is an intrinsic element of the Gothic novel, and Titus Groan has no more of the supernatural in it than has The World Almanac. The strangeness, the horror, the gooseflesh--all are evoked in terms as matter-of-fact and concrete as a rivet. As I said before, this book fits no category; it is sui generis.

You are by now, I am sure, aware--perhaps exasperatedly aware--that I have deliberately withheld any hint of the plot of Titus Groan. What I'm trying to do is to make you want to read the book, if you haven't already done so. I'm out beating the drum for Titus Groan, and I'd like to induce a few people to read it. I'm convinced that anyone who does will introduce it to a few others, and the thing could conceivably snowball to the point where a paperback will be brought out. That would be a beginning in giving Titus Groan a portion of the circulation it deserves.

# # #

THE DIRGE OF THE HUNGRY GHOUL

I'm a ghoul--
And my pickings have been very slim of late.
As a rule
I prefer a young cadaver, yet tonight I simply slaver
For the skinny crone who's buried by the gate.
How I hate
This borderline starvation; it has been my observation
That each time I miss my ration, I start acting like a fool.
I must keep cool!
But it'd irritate a druid, finding sour embalming fluid
Soaking each and every morsel, each and every time he ate.
How I drool
For a feast of bone and muscle, for the food ingested thus'll
Give me strength enough to hustle up a corpse that's really great.
If its weight
Is a hundred pounds or greater, I will spice and marinate 'er.
(I can save a bit for later, if I store it in the pool.)
I have a tool:
I have bribed the town mortician, who will make me a submission
Of each extra-fine edition that he's striving to create.
Now it's late
And my hunger-pangs are growing very cruel;
I'll abate
My digestion's angry pleading for a truly ample feeding
With the carcass of a horse or cow or mule.

--Oval Rheen

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AGRICULTURAL NOTES

Manure Corner, Colo., Dec. 28--AP--County agent Armentrout Bugge has reported the discovery of greetles in the fall plantings again this year. This will be the third year in a row, Bugge said, that the Cloaca Valley area has had greetled crops.

SCAVENGINGS

This will institute a new department, in which I will quote from the more distinguished among my contemporaries. Most of you have probably already read the matter quoted, but it bears repeating.

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From a critical article by Fred Church, in AIRHANGER, ed. by Fredd Hoggs, Missoula, Minn.:

A minute and meticulous explication of the entire Shaver canon is long overdue, but, given the announced limitations of the instant inquiry, it will here be necessary to subsume exegesis in analysis, through submitting the body of the work to a rigorous application of classical critical dicta. The comparisons that immediately spring to mind (the interesting parallels of language with the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section of Finnegans Wake, for example) must be excluded, as must any examination of the multifarious levels of meaning with which Shaver, going beyond Melville, has invested his work. Nor will space be available for such fascinating by-paths as comparing the judgments of the "new critics" on Shaver with those of, say, Edmund Wilson. Our sole purpose here is to determine whether Shaver's seminal innovations will have a benign or a withering effect on world literature.

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From a fanzine review in BANJO, ed. by Buck & Doe Olson, New Mownhay, Ind.:

Pages three, five, and the top half of six in this thirteen-pager (there may have been more pages than that--one sheet felt rather thick, and could have been two sheets pasted together) are legible. The rest of the zine is entirely illegible. It's better that way.

The boys need a new hektograph, but if their town is anything like New Mownhay, they have a problem. Last week I went downtown for a new new spivvle, and the only kind they had was the six-dollar model, with lusks. I have this trouble all the time. Rating: 1/4

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From the editorial comment on a letter to BEMZINE, ed. by B. M. Tarr, Puget Sound:

You say, "As Benchley once remarked, I was born of mixed parents--a man and a woman." I believe you must be misquoting, since the remark, as it stands, is rather pointless. Everyone, of course, is born of a man and a woman. The term "mixed parentage" actually refers to a situation where the mother and father are of different races, as for example, White and Negro, or sometimes to parents of different religions, as, for example, Protestant and Catholic. The Benchley you quote is, I suppose, Robert Benchley, the "humorist." I have noted that his work never appears in The Saturday Evening Post.

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The following excerpt from a report on the Econ is from either GRUNT, FAFOO, XRLNY or ECH!--as nearly as I could tell, all the reports were identical:

. . . got up the next morning and had two eggs over easy, bacon, toast and coffee for breakfast. Saw Bloch, Tucker, Asimov and Heffelfinger having breakfast together. They were arguing vociferously about wire staples. The eggs were overdone and the bacon underdone, and later I had a touch of heartburn. I went to the drugstore for a bromo, and saw Grennell, Silverberg, Wilson and Vetch having an alka together. They were arguing vociferously about nostrils. The bromo helped my heartburn. For lunch I had a hamburger, very greasy. Saw Moskowitz, Mahaffey, Boucher and Ghoti having lunch together. They were arguing vociferously. . . .

REUNION IN SPRINGTIME
by
Arvadel Smute

Monica awoke to find the sunlight lying full upon the crisp whitness of her pillow, and the lacy curtains at her window dancing merrily in a fresh June breeze. The moment she opened her eyes she felt a small shiver of happiness run from the titian top of her saucy head down to the tips of her pert little toes. It was a happiness that was somehow special--a happiness that was more than the natural happiness of being young and beautiful on a glorious summer morning, more than the happiness Monica customarily felt because she was the second-richest girl in Cleveland. Then she remembered: Geoffrey was coming home today!

She bounded from her bed in a flurry of silken coverlets, and, having pressed a button to summon her breakfast, disappeared into a cloud of perfumed steam in her gold-fixtured bathroom. When she emerged, clad in fragrant rosiness, it was to discover that old Uncle Ben, the butler, had arrived with the breakfast tray. Uncle Ben was accustomed to seeing her clad only in fragrant rosiness, and didn't bat an eye. He was an old family retainer. Very old.

"Oh, Uncle Ben," lilted Monica, "Geoffrey is coming home today!"

Uncle Ben bobbed his snowy poll, and chuckled, "Yas mam, Miz Monica, he sho' is," and deftly poured French chocolate from a chased silver pot into a Haviland cup that stood on the Heppelwhite table.

A few hours later, at the front door, Uncle Ben helped her into her ermine cape and bowed her out through the great oaken portal. There the Rolls-Royce was waiting, with Masterson, the impassive chauffeur, standing at attention at the door. In a moment, they were speeding toward the depot. (Or at any rate, so the policeman said; Masterson claimed they hadn't been.)

In her eagerness, Monica had arrived a little early, and to pass the time until the train's arrival, she stepped into Mickey's, a small, exclusive bar much frequented by cafe society. Mickey's famous ultra-dry martinis (his secret was a dash of sardine oil) were delicious and stingingly cold, and the three hours passed quickly. It seemed no time at all until Masterson was helping her to walk to the platform. Only a few minutes now until the reunion! Her joy became vocal, and she burst into the old folk song, "O'Reilly's Daughter." Passers-by were caught in the contagion of her happiness, and smiled in sympathy, or even laughed.

Suddenly Monica caught sight of a curly head and broad, tweedy shoulders in the crowd. "Geoff, Geoff!" she trilled, and in a moment her nose was buried in the rough tweed of his jacket, while strong arms squeezed her until she thought her ribs would crack.

"Oh, Geoff, Geoff," she sniffled. Then she blew her nose furiously, and held him at arm's length. "But let me look at you, darling. Oh, how pasty your complexion is--what an ordeal you've been through!"

"Hell, babe," he husked--and oh, how dear was the gruff, familiar, cultivated voice--"Three years in Sing Sing I can do standing on my head."

And as they sped homeward through the golden October streets, a tear of joy stood in Monica's eye. Geoffrey was home!

(This story is reprinted from Ladies' Home Beautiful)

PANTOUM DE PROFUNDIS

Here it's forever dark;
Ravenous ghouls abound,
Hungry as any shark
--Here, down under the ground.

Ravenous ghouls abound;
They tunnel from grave to grave.
Here, down under the ground
They act remarkably brave.

They tunnel from grave to grave;
We view their approach with dread.
They act remarkably brave,
Since all of us here are dead.

We view their approach with dread;
We know they are coming to feed.
Since all of us here are dead
We cannot oppose their greed.

We know they are coming to feed;
They will crunch our flesh and bone.
We cannot oppose their greed;
We cannot so much as moan.

They will crunch our flesh and bone
Here, down under the ground.
We cannot so much as moan,
Though ravenous ghouls abound.

--Craloteen Arliss

THIS MONTH'S CONTEST

Three last lines are set out below. Write a short story of more than 5000 words ending in one of these lines. First prize is a mint copy of The American Needlewoman for June, 1956.

1. And in that instant the very blood froze in my veins. The shrunken head was that of professor Fathersill!

2. And in that instant my very bones turned to water. The face of the hooded spirit was the face of Oliver Talliaferro!

3. And in that instant the very water froze in my bones. The shrunken head was that of the hooded spirit!

Editorial postscriptum: The third poem mentioned in "Out of the Cruet" is too long to fit this issue. It will appear next time. It is entitled, "Cthngghlugn", and it is by Robert Croch.

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