THE BIG DRAG

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Books by MEL HEIMER

THE WORLD ENDS AT HOBOKEN

THE BIG DRAG


HOTEL
ASTOR
TIMES
CHOCOLA
SOLDIER
NELSO
ASTOR
OUT-OF-TOWN NEWS
F. B.

The BIG DRAG

by

MEL HEIMER

Illustrations by

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WHITTLESEY HOUSE

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The quality of the materials used in the manufacture of this book is governed by continued postwar shortages.

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For Scott

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CHAPTER ONE

Beautiful Lady with Scars

It is a slow, somehow macabre series of events that begins each morning at a certain unearthly hour in many parts of this land.

Roosters waddle obscenely out of the henhouse and scream their ugly, marrow-chilling reveille. Alarm clocks cut out sleepers' hearts with hot knives. Cold showers, the rainstorms of the devil, beat men's souls into jelly. Eyes are opened, shoelaces are tied, coffee is drunk and busses are caught. Financial pages are read, small talk dribbles across the landscape like the retchings of a drunk, and men who have grappled through the night with the problem of whether to murder their brothers now behave to each other as if they were genuinely glad the sky was blue and the sun bright.

In one form or another, this unholy ritual takes place in downtown Chicago with the damp lake air blowing in like a wet kiss, in Boston's Beacon Hill with the milk horses clattering and skidding on the dewy cobblestones, along Route 1 winding its gray way through Maryland and in a thousand other cities, villages and allegedly civilized places where men and women live. If you get right down to it, it even takes place in New York. In the far reaches of the Bronx, an accountant inspects his tongue gloomily by the bathroom mirror. Somewhere in Greenwich Village, a nurse stares at a strange ceiling, wonders how in God's name she got there and tries to figure swiftly how long it will take her to taxi up to

Bellevue for the early trick. Over by Sutton Place, a willowy blonde struggles into her jodhpurs and out in the wilderness of Queens, an office boy listens sleepily to his old man giving him hell for having the car out so late.

All these things occur everywhere—except in Broadway.

Notice I say "in" Broadway, rather than "along" or "on." I say it this way because Broadway no longer is just a street, although there *is* still a winding path full of shooting galleries, movie houses, shirt shops, pineapple juice stands and cafeterias; Broadway now is a section—the whole rococo, garish, hoopla midtown Manhattan area is Broadway, and to say you are "of" Broadway could mean that you live in the Waldorf, or write songs in the Brill Building or peddle reefers along Fifty-second Street. More than that, Broadway is a state of mind—a rarified, refined attitude that may seem simple and harsh to the outlander but which actually is a complex and involved thing that could and will take a book to explain.

But morning for Broadway? No roosters, no alarm clocks, no cold showers and, especially, no pleasant morning chit-chat. Is it five o'clock that the first rooster crows in the outlands? At five o'clock, most of Broadway is in that first hour of deep sleep that the wise men tell us is the best. The effects of the last midnight benzedrine tablet have worn off and the effects of the first sleeping tablet are beginning. Paper and cardboard and trash lie sprinkled for blocks on end on sidewalks and in gutters, like the trail of a gigantic hare-and-hounds chase. The movie-house marquees have blinked out, and the dawn is cold—oh, so cold . . . even in hot August—and gray. Maybe a sailor beats his lonely way up the street, uncertainly, waveringly. A cop yawns. A taxi bumps slowly over the trolley tracks. A drunk shivers and draws his legs

closer to his chest in a doorway. This is Broadway asleep—fitful, frowning, grinding its teeth in a bad dream; waiting for the next day, waiting for the hundred-dollar parlay, the break at Loew's State, the blonde who's going to come around the corner of Lindy's; waiting for the big, wonderful surprise of tomorrow.

By nine, the outlanders are on hand. The street is as dead and flat as old champagne, and so are all its sidestreet tributaries—out cold, from the one drink too many. But the drones are beginning to spill out of the subways and bus terminals and trolleys and train stations. They walk through the streets of Broadway like the shapeless figures that float, red and misty, through a bad dream. Past the Paramount movie house they shuffle, past the cheap little dance halls with the 30–GIRLS–30 signs, past the pigeons spread out like a dirty deck of cards before the statue of Father Duffy, past the big gin mills like the Latin Quarter and the Zanzibar, which are tighter than a drum, through the long, hard streets of crosstown . . . all headed for a desk and a typewriter, or a cage and an adding machine. The Broadwayite sleeps.

But by eleven, life along the Big Drag has begun to quicken, like an unborn babe kicking at his mother's stomach. The bartenders and the waiters wander into their cool, beery places of employment, the very earliest of Broadway birds appear on the sidewalks in front of the raffish little hotels in the Forties, and maybe from an upstairs *academie de musique* we hear the first, tortured scales of the Manhattan morning lark—a trumpet stumbling over the latest broken-hearted ballad. The streets have emptied themselves of the alien element of commuters, and only in front of the movie

houses do we see the Jackson Heights and Brooklyn wanderers, eyeing the latest Hollywood masterpieces.

Now the real Broadwayite begins to pop up along the main stem, as if up through the sidewalks. The dark shirt and light tie appears. The pegged trousers and the draped jacket. No hat, natch. The long hair and the thick, Actors' Equity sideburns and, since it is the beginning of the day, the "rogue" sport shirt with no tie. The open-toed sandal, if it is summer; the brown suede brogue, if it is winter. The deep tan right out of the barber shop, and the cigarette—ever-present, smoldering, sinister—the final touch that makes our man another Humphrey Bogart, as he wishes.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of 12:30 P.M., Broadway makes its first move. Existence in Broadway is a series of moves; the idea of a day just falling into place according to the laws of God and nature just never is considered by the Broadwayite. You always think, swiftly, smoothly, thoroughly, before you make your move. The lengths to which this elementary philosophy is carried are remarkable; it extends to the tying of neckties, the buying of newspapers, the decision of whether to take the taxicab to Columbus Circle or ride the bus . . . as well as to the more solemn problems involving ethics, morals, character.

Each move, big or little, gets an equal amount of thought; to the Broadwayite, the question of whether to invest a quarter to spend a quick morning hour in a newsreel movie house is studied as carefully as the plan to sink thirty thousand dollars in a new club along Fifty-second Street. There is no thought about which is more important; it is just that the citizen of Broadway has come up the hard, rough, tough way

and must forever be circling around in the tall grass and trampling it down lest there be snakes hidden there.

But the first move—the first move is lunch. It is breakfast, of course, and there is no question of its being just a pleasant meal. Lunch is eaten in two ways, in Broadway. If the day is dull and the calendar empty, lunch is a chocolate malted in Walgreen's, or a fried egg on rye and a glass of tea in one of the delicatessens that dot Sixth Avenue—now Avenue of the Americas—like kosher oases. But that is an unusual state of affairs. Ordinarily, the Broadwayite lunches in a showcase—Dinty Moore's or Lindy's or Toots Shor's, or wherever midtown fashion decrees lunch shall be eaten. Lunch is the first move, then, but it is also a series of moves within a move. Our boy drifts into the bar, first, where most of the stools already are full of other bull moose come down to the watering hole. Here and there, bromo-seltzer dots the bar, but chiefly, of course, the glasses hold Scotch. Even during the war years, you got Scotch in Broadway—if you were of Broadway.

"Joe," our Broadwayite says, slapping one drinker easily on the back. The slapped one nods. "Max," he replies. There is a pause, while Max studies the room in search of a more important character than Joe. Momentarily, he finds none, so he turns back to Joe and begins to ask him what's on the fire, or what looks good in the first at Jamaica. Joe has been wishing to God that Max wouldn't stop and bother him, because Harry is at his left and he has been trying to get Harry to plug one of his songs on his next broadcast—but Max is here, heaven forfend, so Joe sighs and is reasonably cordial. "A goat named Five Pennies is going in the third up at Suffix

Downs (that would be the New England racecourse, Suffolk Downs)," he says, patiently, "and I have heard that—" but he gets no further. Now Max *has* spotted someone more important than Joe. "Par'n me just a minute, Joe," he says . . . and is off across the room to slap Frank on the back. Joe doesn't even take time to breathe heavily with relief; he has swung back to Harry without breaking stride and is talking about my God, but that Max is a wearisome bastard.

Max goes through the routine time and again; finally, he meets "my appointment" and goes in to dine. Not too soon, not too late. A couple of stray celebrities dot the dining room, but mostly they arrive late. Ah, now they trickle in—maybe Frank Fay, the star sapphire glittering on one finger, the immaculate white shirt, the rusty tie . . . or Tallulah Bankhead, pleasantly exchanging insults with one and all . . . Ray Bolger, thin as a stalk of corn and much more sober than any judge . . . a visiting Hollywood actor, expecting the moon and the stars on his first visit to Broadway and finding just an eating joint with too many celebrities for him to overshadow . . . and over all, the clatter of dishes and silverware, the constant popping up and down and straining of necks to see just who is where, the table-hopping, the cries of "For Chrissake, Bill!" the swift, hurried sips of coffee and mercurial stabs at food so as not to miss anything. Broadway is eating. Quiet, please. You both can't talk at once.

Around three, roughly, lunch has come and gone and Broadway has scattered again into a million jigsaw pieces. Some of the pieces have taxied up to the Polo Grounds or the Yankee Stadium, and there they sit behind third or first base watching the men of muscle. Here a pleasant afternoon is spent betting on whether Mel Ott will break his bat on the

next pitch, or whether Joe DiMaggio will strike out, the only rules of behavior being the cardinal one never to show any emotion. The Broadwayite may smoke or chew gum or swig down cokes, but when a ballplayer belts a 440-foot home run out of the park or strikes out three men on nine pitched balls, he must not rise from his seat or applaud or scream and yell, like the *moujiks* in the bleachers. A deed of derring-do is merely his signal to fish for his billfold, slowly, and extract a couple of bills to pass to his more fortunate companion.

Some of the other pieces of the fabulous jig-saw puzzle are out on Long Island improving the breed; here, you find them wandering around the clubhouse, hunting the Hot Tip, or impassively watching the parade to the post, or taking the field glasses slowly away from their eyes and muttering, "For God's sakes." Sometimes it seems that half of Broadway is out at the track during the week. Except on Wednesdays and Thursdays, which customarily are matinee days, you see them in their trumpeting jackets and long hairdos, faces to the sun in a desperate effort to augment the barbershop broil, still twisting their heads from side to side every few minutes to see Who's Here. That is the big game, anywhere in Broadway or wherever the Broadwayite gathers. Who's here? Anybody I should see? I heard that. . . .

By six, Broadway has slipped wearily into its gown of sequins. Now you can't take it from her; the old harlot's feet may hurt and there may be long lines under the eyes and ugly scars under the ears where the face was lifted, but under the lights and the dark night she is beautiful. Give the old girl a cocktail and watch the life course into her.

Over by the Times Building, the tourists stand and stretch their necks at the electric sign that rolls around the cornices,

spilling its story of rape, arson, pillage and politics. There is no question of the movie-house marquees suddenly lighting up as if in a fairyland; they have been singing their jazzy song all afternoon, even in the bright sunlight that fingers its way desperately over the mainstem. Under the clock at the Astor, by now so celebrated that one passable movie used it as a theme, young love and old lust stand side by side, waiting for their respective rendezvous and assignation. The crowds begin to knot along the long, curving street, filling the sidewalks to overflowing, and giving a new cadence to the noise of Broadway, a shuffling, over-and-over, eight-to-the-bar rhythm. The cabs, which have cruised in more or less comfort through the afternoon, now snarl and blast each other as they jockey for position in streets that are much too thin, much too antiquated for Manhattan today. The commuters trudge tiredly back to their subway kiosks and their Grand Central and Penn stations, and in the Forties the busses load up for the long, uninspired trip to Jersey. A handful of lost souls queue up in front of the out-of-town newspaper stand at Forty-third Street, hunting desperately for the *Peoria Tribune* or some other familiar home-town gazette.

This is the dinner hour, and the *cognoscenti* are tucking away ham and eggs in Lindy's or a steak in Gallagher's or have wandered down to the wilds of Twenty-third Street for a session with a mutton chop at Cavanagh's, but it is not too soon for the dance halls. So we find the seedy, stringy doormen standing in front of the little yellow or red doorways with their faded photos of Blonde Beauties by Murray Korman and muttering an occasional seductive comment at a passing yokel, but mostly just watching the crowds mill by, with jaundiced and watery eye. Upstairs, the terribly, terribly

corny little bands, all saxophones and drums, are beginning to beat out rumbas or swing or whatever the dancing pleasure of the hour might be, and the hostesses, beloved in song and story, are sitting in their pen—neither bitter nor morose, as the learned and literary would have us believe, but rather amiable and vacant—marking time to the end of their youth in the most pleasant way they know.

The three-for-a-quarter photo shops begin to bustle with activity, and from the used-record stores loud speakers spew their tales of love and June and moon. The orange- and pineapple-juice stands, sloppy and wet and dirty, are doing big business, and in the several Child's restaurants, Helen Hokinson ladies ogle their creamed chicken with one dubious eye and their wristwatches with the other, because, my dear, the curtain goes up at eight-forty sharp, which it never, never does. In Duffy Square, a few stoical pigeons linger under the glare of the lights, and up and down the Big Drag and all along the little side streets, the unattached males and the unattached females have begun their tawdry, garish game of you-can't-catch-me.

Over it all, there are the never-ending lights, selling everything from bananas to stove polish—glittering, shimmering, bursting red, yellow, blue, pink, screaming their messages, casting a jerky and eerie glow over the turbulence below. This is some kind of cool, noisy, affable Hell, where the pitchforks are the nightsticks of dumb cops and where the flames are raucous, amazing neon signs that tell you where to go, what to wear and how many buttons your underwear should carry. You stand on the fringe and watch it, stunned and yet nervous, baffled and yet caught up in it as if by an undertow.

By nine, the legitimate showhouses have lured their quota,

and the coughers are busy destroying Shakespeare's lines, while Broadway settles down to its nightly dose of make-believe. Now the world begins and ends in the wings of a theater, and God help you if you are an actor and found in a public place at this time, for it means that you are at liberty and thus a bust, especially if the season is busy. In the little gin mills like the Paddock and Conway's and Mickey Walker's or in every bar and grill that dots Eighth Avenue, a block to the left of the Big Drag, the ball games are replayed and the races rerun. Maybe a couple of thugs are fighting for the world's fleaweight title in Madison Square Garden, and a few thousand of the faithful are clustered there, their cigarettes making idiotic red needlepoint patterns in the dark building—the canvas and sweat and resin and screams sifting together like a Hogarth painting. In the nightclubs, the comics are walking through the first shows, giving just three dollars' worth of themselves, for the dinner crowd goes sparing on liquor.

Now Broadway is in the groove, winding up and exploding with a ceaseless bang. Somewhere in the night, colts are being foaled and knives thrown, safes are being blown and Presidents are being born, wheat is waving softly under a clear and starry sky, and waves are smashing furiously against rocky coasts. Bridge is being played and deathless prose is being written, a car is skidding on two wheels around a corner and kittens are drowning in a well. Yet all these things are happening far from Broadway, and so they don't count, to the Broadwayite. God damn it, man, how're you gonna keep up with everything along the street if you're gonna go poking around with what happens Out There?

By midnight, the drunks have begun to dot the crowds mushing along, and the seductions are at least half along the road to consummation. "Oh, *Harry,*" a little blonde says to a sailor, "I dowanna go *there.* I wanna—" but they are gone, love and lust, before we can find out where they do end up. There are screams in the air, and giggles and the jackass brayings of executives Enjoying Themselves, but they are muffled and then swallowed up in the incessant din that pounds along through the jagged canyons. Along Fifty-second Street, the strange music that is jazz seeps out of the tinny, dog-eared, rundown little joints, where the war goes on between customer and proprietor over finances more openly than in the plush joints like the Stork. And in places like the Stork and El Morocco, the singularly uninspired are lifting their pinkies like mad and getting drunk not so quietly.

By three, the Big Drag is unwinding, running down like a gaudy little mechanical doll. In hallways, sailors lie asleep, and the cops are beginning the task of sweeping up the human trash that is scattered, out to the world, through the area. The one las' drink is being savored in the bars, which still have an hour to go, and in a standard-size, double-bed hotel room a showgirl is looking about her dubiously and saying sharply to the character that this isn't a suite, not by a long shot, you little jerk. Some of the lights blink out along Broadway, and the movie marquees finally go dark.

By five . . . ah, but this is where we came in. By five, a cop yawns, a taxi rumbles over the trolley tracks, the streets lay littered and reasonably still, like a living room after a party. In the hotels, in the apartments, in the flop houses, Broadway pulls the bedclothes a little tighter around its neck and sleeps.

CHAPTER TWO

Lissen, I Got a Great Story

THERE ARE some among us to whom the garish wonders of Broadway are beyond compare; there is no sight to us more beautiful than the hokey signs blinking and the beggars begging and Broadway Rose hurling a defiant curse at the receding back of a minor celebrity who has refused her piquant pleas for *gelt*. And to us, the use of superlatives or the employment of drum-beaters to sing its praises publicly, in the call of the birds, is completely unnecessary. And yet one of the most important, indeed one of the most representative of the street's characters, is the Press Agent.

There is nothing quite like him anywhere in the world today; he would be ill at ease in the Raffles bar in Singapore or the Savoy Grill in London, but in the throbbing heart of Broadway he is at home. There are times when he *is* Broadway, for, like Brooklyn, that marvelous area sometimes is nothing more than a state of mind . . . and the creator of that state of mind is the press agent.

God knows how many of them there are. To a practicing newspaperman, they seem in the hundreds of thousands. They represent everything from a psalm-singing evangelist to a society glamour girl, and I believe there have even been cases on record of a press agent representing another press agent. This is not so wierd or so incongruous as it sounds; Russell Birdwell, for instance, is virtually internationally known as a tub-thumper; so is Steve Hannagan, so was the

matchless Dexter Fellowes. Birdwell is a going concern, with a volume of business that is tremendously impressive and with offices from one coast to another. Why *shouldn't* he have a press agent of his own?

But the Broadway press agent is of a wilder, fiercer strain than his uptown or downtown contemporaries; there is the look of a slightly shoddy eagle in his eye. Nothing is too stiff for him to tackle; no client is too big for him to address with the familiar opening salvo, "Now, look, kid, we gotta first get an angle. . . ." And more than any other of these enchanting phony-balonies, he dedicates himself completely to his work.

The Big Drag public-relations counsel—a designation, incidentally, at which our heroes hoot and sneer—is living and breathing his job twenty-five hours a day. From the time he opens a bilious eye until the time he crawls under the covers, slightly plastered from having drunk heartily with a newspaperman to whom he is trying to sell a "spread," he is all eyes and ears to the matter at hand.

Roughly, the Broadway press agent is cut into four different sections of apple. The hottest and foremost piece, likely, is the guy who represents personalities—strip-teasers, chanteuses, song publishers, ham actors, aging soubrettes, ambitious models and the like. He might be a newcomer, struggling along with a couple of accounts—for whom he may have offered to work for free unless he gets them some space—or he might be like one of my particular favorites, Eddie Jaffe, who is cast in the mold of Puck and has to fight off customers. A small, quizzical young man with eyeglasses, myopia, a hatful of neuroses and any number of odd assistants, Eddie has the two important requisites of any success-

ful Broadway press agent—an engaging personality and a sane outlook on life.

New York newspapermen and columnists are many things —cynical, embittered, drunken, naïve, shrewd, grasping thugs (among whom are a goodly sprinkling of Grade-A, God-fearing souls)—but they are never impressed, except perhaps, by a horse that can go a mile in 1.34 and a fifth. So, when a press agent swoops down on them with a toothpaste smile and the breathless information that, my God, they have the most beautiful or the most talented or the most something client in tow, he customarily receives for his trouble a yawn that isn't even stifled. These energetic young men, unless they learn early in life and turn to the field of industrial public relations—financial editors are not genuine newspapermen and are rather easily impressed—are the failures in life among the press agents.

But Eddie Jaffe and his sane outlook—ah, there is something else again. "I have on my list," he will tell an editor or columnist, "the worst bitch who ever hit this town. I do not know why I took the account. On second thought, I certainly do know; she pays me plenty of potatoes. However—leaving personalities out of this, I think there might be some interest to the poor public in the fact that she collects old Ivory Soap wrappers and has the greatest collection of old Ivory Soap wrappers in the United States today."

The newspaperman, thus assured that Eddie is not sleeping with his fair client and is therefore not unduly prejudiced, is enabled to weigh the story's merits fairly and decide whether the soap-wrapper collection is worth a piece. If not, he lights a cigarette and says "No. What else?"

Without breaking stride, Eddie will resume, "Well, I gotta

baritone who sang last season at the Savoy Plaza and is trying to break into the Met this year, and—" "No baritones," the newspaperman may break in. "The boss hates baritones."

Eddie continues, with refreshing candor, "How about LaVerne LaVere, who does grinds and bumps over at Leon and Eddie's?" This routine continues, sometimes endlessly, while the newspaperman answers his mail, ogles the copy girls, sweats over the lead of a story and finally, more likely than not, tells Eddie that one of his clients has a certain appeal and why doesn't he set up a luncheon date for next Tuesday?

There are no thanks—except financially, which really is the only manner in which he'd appreciate thanks—for the press agent who embarks on the career of representing personalities. His clients are never satisfied. People in show business, who form the great bulk of these clients, are fascinating, humorous and highly entertaining, but they are also, of course, the most egotistical souls in the world and count that day lost in which their names aren't mentioned in the public prints at least fourteen times. The average press agent, like Eddie, learns after some time to disregard their beefs, although the more harassed and uncertain drum-beaters occasionally develop ulcers and nervous stomachs from being bedeviled by unsatisfied clients—all clients, that is. Eddie, on the other hand, doesn't care. He knows that he is a good press agent; his reputation has been made and he realizes that like streetcars, there'll be another client along any minute.

Eddie's only uncertainty is on the subject of his charm over women, in which he has no great faith and which he swears has led him regularly to the psychoanalyst. I have not made

up my mind, over the years, whether this is part of Eddie's routine—the sending-out of Christmas cards, for instance, depicting his dullness as a Romeo, or the self-designation as the ugliest man in the world, which he is not—or whether he honestly has this amorous inferiority complex. I do not care. To me, Eddie is a good press agent, which is a rarity, like a good cabinetmaker, and that is enough.

Eddie, of course, is vastly more engrossing than any of his clients. In the first place, he lives in Tub-Thumpers' Row, a cluster of small apartments over the late Billy LaHiff's restaurant, now known simply as the Tavern. Like drones to the queen bee, other press agents have engaged apartments in the same building so that now the place is full of bellowing, scheming, brooding, sinister children of the tortured adjective. Eddie's place is a two-room affair, notable for its generally disheveled look and for the location of the telephone. It is on a very, very short cord and is right next to the foot of Eddie's bed. The logical conclusion is that Eddie wanted it there so he could awaken in the morning and start telephoning, as is the wont of the good press agent, and it is true that this condition, as Durante says, does prevail.

But actually, the telephone is in that awkwardly-reached spot as a half-cure against phone spongers. The average Broadwayite, especially if he has unloaded his bankroll the day before on a horse that proved to have only three legs in the struggle down the homestretch, is forever storing up phone calls to be made—to be made for free—whenever our hero arrives at a place where they can be sponged.

"My God, Joe," he will suddenly say, in the middle of trying to sell a fellow Broadwayite on some scheme, "I just

remember, I gotta call Max Goldbaum about some tickets to —— you don' min' if I just use your phone, do you?"

There are some who will coldly say, "Get the hell away from that phone, you cheap bastard," or will skillfully beat the visitor to the draw and pick up the receiver first to make a call of their own. Eddie prefers the polite brush. The only way you can use his telephone is to sit on the floor and bend over at a forty-five degree angle or to lie on the bed and lean over the edge, and this latter method is impossible because Eddie is always in the bed, day or night. Well, occasionally he does come out into the light, but it is likely that the great majority of his hours are spent in that rumpled bed, thinking about angles for stories, or worrying about his latest dream.

It was Eddie who introduced what I can only regard as a remarkable improvement over the downstairs apartment phone—you know, the kind where you press your friend's buzzer and then speak into a little hole in the wall. What Eddie does is lower a microphone out the window into Forty-eighth Street, for the convenience of the visitor. He listens meditatively while the citizen below outlines the worth and cause of his visit, his voice mingling with the din of the street scene below, and then Eddie either signals "come ahead" or "stay the hell out."

Getting back to that phone, incidentally, you would be startled at the number of guys who prefer to crouch down on the floor and use it, rather than spend a nickel at the corner drugstore.

Like many other citizens of the main stem, Eddie is an utter hypochondriac, and it is virtually impossible to find him without a thermometer secreted on his person somewhere. Bottles

of pills abound, and many long hours are spent by the master himself in discussing his latest symptoms with a sympathetic soul. The promise of a new, moneyed and newsworthy client is about the only thing that can cut short Eddie's soliloquies on his illnesses. It is likely, furthermore, that all of these ailments are imaginary and that Eddie suffers from nothing more than an upset stomach induced by the occupational vice of the practicing Broadwayite, that is the eating of fried foods.

The press agents who sweat the most and labor the hardest are the movie tub-thumpers. These are the unhappy ladies and gentlemen who are engaged by the major studios' Eastern offices, and whose lives are dedicated to the publicizing of the visiting movie stars, of whom more later. One of the basic reasons for their unhappiness is that the movie business is shot full of back-slashers, knifers, angle boys and cosmopolitan thugs, and the turnover in personnel is tremendous. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the publicity department, for no matter how much space the New York office grabs in the newspapers, the Gods that be in California decide regularly every seven or eight months that those goddamn Eastern press agents are doing a lousy job, and they fire the whole office.

Thus, we find that movie press agents in the Broadway area are forever moving from one office to another; they may be with Gilt-Edge Pictures in November and Blotz Productions in February. They take with them their most valuable asset—the contact. It is amazing how many movie press agents are hired because they have entry into a movie reviewer's office or because they might know where the body

is buried, by the simple method of having stumbled across the reviewer registering at a midtown hotel with a blonde to whom he is not married. "Sure," the head of a movie office publicity squadron might say, "let's hire Sammy Jacobs. At least he'll keep Screech of the *Globe* from slamming our pictures too hard, anyway."

On the other hand, of course, there are respectable ones in this field, too—men like Felix Greenfield of Warner's, or Ross Doyle at M.G.M. or talented Ralph Ober of Universal, and an occasional good woman press agent, like Rosellen Callahan of United Artists. They sweat and slave and bark back at the temperamental heroes and heroines whom they are shepherding around the main stem, but they manage to keep morals and standards at a reasonably high level. They have one attitude in common; they forever are going to quit this business of whoring, as they refer to it, and go back to honest journalism, but somehow the combination of good pay and eccentric colleagues and clients generally proves irresistible, and they remain "prostitutes" to the death. They generally die young, too. Press-agentry is not for the sedate or the ones hopeful of longevity.

Blood relatives of the movie flacks, as the trade describes these sellers of their souls, are the theatrical press agents. These gentlemen, given to wearing clean linen and shooting their cuffs nonchalantly, are the cream of the bottle and, more than any other press agents, consider themselves professional men. I suppose the citizen who has given this touch of class to these assorted thugs is an amiable Irish space-stealer named Richard Maney, who came out of Montana fifteen or twenty years ago to become the editor of a trade paper on

fishing at thirty-five dollars a week—and to take tickets at night as a doorman at the theater.

Maney, who is one of the fixtures at Bleeck's Artists' and Writers' Restaurant, is that extreme oddity, a press agent who can write. Of course, his prose is exceptionally florid and a good editor would wear out a couple of blue pencils over it, but you must remember that our man is plying his art in a field where literature is, usually, a complete stranger. Maney's way with the printed word always impresses producers, and it occasionally titillates drama editors who are customarily weighed down by great batches of ungrammatical handouts from flacks.

At any rate, during any given theatrical season, Richard usually has ten or twelve shows lined up to publicize; he is the favorite tub-thumper of Herman Shumlin and George Abbott, and Lillian Hellmann insists on him for any play she writes. Russel Crouse, whose shows Maney has publicized, was so impressed by Maney that he did a piece in *Life* on him, which began something like, "Maney should be writing this story about *me.*"

Tallulah Bankhead, who occasionally ties her turbulent career in with that of the Theatre Guild, used to have two standing demands: (1) that Pete Davis be named company manager (the Theatre Guild found ultimately that it, too, liked Pete, and named him its general manager), and (2) that Maney be her publicity man for any Guild show. All this adulation has left Maney singularly unaffected; he is a tolerant, serene Celt with a pixieish sense of humor that remains full-bodied and strong. He once beat the drums for a show called *The Squall,* which left Robert Benchley, then reviewing drama for *The New Yorker,* limp and ill with disgust and

sent him out into the street early in the night for fresh air. Maney rose to the occasion superbly. The ads for the show the next day ran: "See the play that made Benchley a street-walker!"

On the whole, the theatrical press agents are a prosaic if elegant lot, who rarely stoop to dodges and stunts (well, to palpable ones, anyway) for space. However, there is among them a gent named Sam Friedman, who is probably the most efficient of the group and who every now and then ducks away from the dignified realms of The Theater to publicize accounts where his gleefully vulgar taste can run riot. A while back he contracted to do publicity for Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe, and during this prison term he sweated long and hard to stage a fine, old-style stunt—only to have it backfire.

Sam wanted to get one of the Horseshoe showgirls arrested for one reason or another, because editors pay attention to arrests, so he arranged to have one appear in Central Park in a bathing suit, which is against the rules. The cop on duty in that section of the park, however, was curiously uninterested, so finally Sam sent over a stooge to call the law's attention to the misdemeanor and demand that he do his duty. The cop grudgingly hauled out his summons pad and was about to write a ticket when he suddenly snorted. "Why should I let that son of a bitch tell me who to arrest?" he exclaimed, and promptly tore up the ticket and strode off indignantly.

Undaunted, Sam tried another day—with *four* girls in bathing suits. He got them over to the horseshoe-pitching pits, and with joy in his heart spotted a cop who watched the procedure. "You know," Sam said, quietly but determinedly to the policeman, "I guess what we're doing here isn't legal,

is it?" The cop grinned. "Go ahead," he replied cheerfully, "I'll look the other way." Sam wheedled and cajoled and finally persuaded the cop to give the girls summonses. Then, tired but happy, he herded them into a cab and drove down to Rose's offices in the Ziegfeld Theatre to report his success.

You know what happened after that? Rose, to whom the whole stunt was a complete surprise, decided he didn't like it anyway—so he ordered Sam to get after a lawyer and try to have the summonses quashed. That didn't work, and the girls had to pay two dollar fines—"but nothing got into the papers, fortunately for Billy," Sam says. He does not sound very enthusiastic when he says it, however.

I suppose the one characteristic that really marks the press agent is resourcefulness. He must be ready to do everything from shoving a client under a shower with his clothes on to offset a hangover, to wet-nursing another client's baby while she is out helling around the town. There comes to mind a story involving the Eastern publicity department of one of the big Hollywood studios. Its executive was planning a screening of an Army-made technical short, and he made elaborate plans to invite all and sundry members of the press to the screening. "You'll never get them there," an associate said, gloomily. "The only thing that'll bring out newspapermen is free liquor. Give a cocktail party along with the screening and they'll come."

The executive said no; that there would just be the screening. "Besides," he added indignantly, "we're going to have General Blotz and his entire staff flown in from Washington for the showing. *That* certainly should be enough induce-

ment." The associate just shook his head and retired. Came S or Screening Day, and General Blotz and company arrived from the capital—but five minutes before the screening was scheduled, there was just *one* newspaperman in the projection room. And he'd only come because he'd been lunching with one of the studio's press agents, who had asked him desperately if he couldn't come up and kill another fifteen minutes.

To follow along with this story, one must remember that *Variety,* the trade paper of show business, refers to press agents as flacks. Don't ask why. Well—the executive, showing a remarkable burst of imagination, rounded up his entire publicity staff, including secretaries and clerks, and excitedly shooed them up to the projection room to play at being newspapermen.

There they sat, in the first five rows or so, with cigarettes in the corners of their mouths, clothes rumpled, cynical looks on their faces—trying hard, in other words, to appear like gentlemen of the press. In walked General Blotz, with practically a fanfare. He looked them over approvingly; the turnout of the press was in keeping, of course, with his high rank. But just as he was about to pick out an empty seat in the first row or two and sit down, one of the press agents couldn't keep it in any longer.

"I wouldn't sit there if I were you, General," he warned. "There's an awful lot of flack in that area!"

I find radio press agents the least appealing, and I am not at all sure this isn't because of the medium in which they deal. It is an abortive art, to be sure, and has very little of the enchanting about it. Therefore, publicizing it calls for a kind of

Superman, who can interest editors who look on it with jaundiced eye.

Suppose, for example, you are hired to get some space in the papers for the new comedy show starring Benny Benedict. In the first place, every radio columnist and practicing newspaperman knows that Benny, even if he has a 27.3 Hooper rating and is heard by 45,000,000 persons nightly, is a colossal bore, a righteous nincompoop and beats his mother with monotonous regularity, and the minute you mention Benny's name to them they tell you for God's sake, take that thug out and shoot him.

In the second place, as George Jean Nathan once proved devastatingly by quoting long passages from one of the allegedly inimitable Fred Allen broadcasts, nothing funny *ever* is said on the radio—and if Allen's stuff falls flat in the light of cold type, you and your Benny Benedict are really going to be up Slush Creek without a paddle.

As a result—here, too, I must make an occasional exception—radio draws the least desirable of the press agents. Either they are the ones who are in the business solely for the money—and a good, fat livelihood can be made in it—or the ones who have failed in more legitimate press-agentry and are reduced to radio. As a class, they more than any other drum-beaters go in for exaggeration, untruths and boring over-use of adjectives. If a man is known by the company he keeps, radio press agents are instantly damned, for they are in a field where to be personable and entertaining is to be out of step.

The fourth and final big field for press agents is nightclubs, and here again the boys are often the sounding-board for the

trade they ply. A nightclub owner ordinarily tries as hard as he possibly can to get away with something—*anything.* He tries to clip the customers on the food, the liquor, the hatcheck stall and the service, and no matter whether he does it openly and harshly, as so many of them do, or with the gloved hand under the pretense of honest business.

Indeed, there seems something infinitely more appealing in the rowdydow, rough-and-tumble joints of Fifty-second Street, for instance, where the proprietor waits for you at the sidewalk entrance with his hatchet drawn, than in the plushier spots where the meals are à la carte, the headwaiters' bows are low, the carpets are deep *and* the check at the end of the evening is staggering.

So it is with the press agents who hawk these wares; a great many of them will do everything but murder their great-aunts, if it will get the names of their clubs into the paper. However, if you are a newspaperman and if you deal with these citizens, after a while you become used to the arrangement and you regard them with a pleased smirk, for they are lovable, if sinister clowns.

To the out-of-towner, it is astounding how large a stature the columnist has in New York, but it *is* understandable. For these erratic gentlemen of the press represent many things to the natives. To the quieter residents, they serve as the normal medicinal dose of nightlife and glamour that everyone requires and that so many New Yorkers never get except in this long-range fashion. To the ladies and gentlemen who are in the midst of the whirl, to whom dining at the Stork or ginning at the Onyx are regular things, they are the barometers and the guideposts; if Winchell or Sullivan says the new show at the Latin Quarter is worth seeing, there is at least

a fifty per cent chance that it has a certain amount of merit, anyway. And to the people in show business, an orchid from Winchell or a gold star from Sobol—or is it Kilgallen who gives out gold stars? I forget—are fine, lusty talking-points when the time is ripe for a salary raise.

So the nightclub press agent not only is clamoring at the door of the columnist's office continually; he also does everything short of shine that worthy's shoes. He sets up front-row tables for the modern Pepys, sees to it that Countess Mara ties or Haig and Haig pinch-bottles arrive in carloads, procures women for the more sinful of the columnists and, to name his most sizeable task, he even sometimes writes the columnist's column—if he is talented, that is, and if he can duplicate the columnist's style with grace and ease. I have, while resting my old bones in some press agent's office, seen him turn out sheaf after sheaf of copy which tomorrow will appear word for word in one of the more prominent columns while the nominal author is home sleeping off a hangover. This isn't done, of course, because the press agent just likes the columnist. It is done because somewhere in the contributed column are planted plugs for the press agent's clients. Columnists seem to operate on the theory that a fair exchange is no robbery, and for every six or seven newsworthy bits of gossip, they concede one free plug.

Ot least seventy-five per cent of the time, the press agent is a better writer than the columnist, anyway, so the columns are more readable when sent in from outside sources. The only catch is that the press agent has a complete and sincere disregard for facts, and while many columnists insist that they drop a press agent like a hot coal if he serves them up a wrong item, generally speaking the tub-thumpers get away

with their absorbing inaccuracies because of (1) their skill in relating them, and (2) the columnist's lack of time for checking them thoroughly.

It was Igor Cassini, who does the "Cholly Knickerbocker" column for the Hearst papers, who pointed out recently that during the recent war Huntington Hartford III, the A. & P. heir, turned up in New York nightclubs, by way of press agents' reports, no less than twenty-seven times, and always with a different girl.

"He took it rather philosophically," Cassini chuckled in print, "though the Navy Department is still checking their files to try and find out how he managed to be in Okinawa one evening and munching a *crêpe suzette* the following evening in one of our smarter clubs." Cassini stated correctly that Hartford is what is known as "Old Faithful" among the press agents; if ever one of the tribe is caught with his items down, he simply "takes Huntington and sits him at a ringside table in his place, or makes him wink slyly at a pretty model, or perhaps even forces a rumba or two out of him with some new playgirl. The day is saved."

In recent years, there have been only a handful of press agents who deal in the glamorizing of society girls or girls from bordellos who want to become society girls, but there was a time when this was a thriving enterprise. More than one sweet young thing, observing the years over her shoulder and seeking the quiet and security of a little shack in Newport or Tuxedo Park for her more mature years, has hired a press agent to spread to the world the news of her charms.

On the other hand, of course, there are a few shy ones who honestly believe that such fame is not too desirable, and they have gone to the extreme of hiring press agents who keep

their names *out* of the papers. Chic Farmer, the good-looking gent who has specialized in beating the drums for such high-toned spots as El Morocco, the Stork and the Embassy, has had several such assignments and has done beautifully by them, although sooner or later he cracks under the strain, because he is so good a press agent and has such a high reputation that it's considerably easier for him to get items into a column than to keep them out.

On the whole, the Broadway press agent is a necessary evil, I suppose—yet never dull, and almost always entertaining. He is really the Boswell to the Big Drag's Johnson, and more than any newspaperman or author, he is its biographer. On the gaudy sheets of stationery which he inserts into his bedraggled typewriter and heads arrestingly "Exclusive to Walter Winchell" are captured the heartbeat of the big artery. And when his "exclusive releases" end up in the wastebasket, as they so often do, they are one with so much of Broadway anyway, for that is how it is in this weird man-made jungle—fresh and shiny and raucous one day, full of the breath of life and screaming and howling at the world, and in the junk heap the next night. Take any corny simile you want about Broadway butterflies, and being at the top of the ladder one day and the bottom tomorrow and so on—and they're all true.

When I think of press agents, I invariably come back to the genius of Jack Tirman, a man of many cylinders and many inspired moments, and to the story they tell of honest Jack. Young in flesh but old and shrewd in mind, Jack was handling a nightclub one winter, at a time when business wasn't too heavy and it took sheer talent and hard work to crack a column. It was a time when the ballet was beginning to boom

in Manhattan, and such as Dolin and Markova were beginning to acquire some rightful fame among the peasants. Jack, dreamily staring at the rain sweeping across the big town one afternoon and wondering by what device he could bring his clients to the attention of the reading public, poked through a review of the ballet in one afternoon paper and decided that here was the gimmick, the angle. He hurriedly prepared some publicity about a ballet team, a wonderful Russian ballerina and her equally unbelievable hunk of beautiful man, who were thrilling the customers nightly at the Club La Plush.

To honest Jack, it did not matter that there was no such dance team. He was in there fighting on the side of his boss, and his main job was to get customers into the place. Happy at his inspiration, he sent news of his mythical but marvelous dancing duo to the columns.

Inside of three days, he was made. In one column, there was bestowed on the non-existent dancers an orchid. In another, there was placed a proud gold star. And the pinnacle was reached when an especially inaccurate columnist carried a tart item that began:

"The dance team of Grabitoff and Garchinka, now at Club La Plush, is by no means as good as it is cracked up to be. . . ."

CHAPTER THREE

Reefer Street

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald has gone to his reward, rest his troubled soul, and the beautiful and damned of whom he wrote with the bewitching unevenness of a runaway drop of mercury are no longer on the town making whoopee. Clara Bow has long since retired to the ranch life, and the Central Park Casino is a wistful dream. The gin has improved, although there is a kind fresh from Cuba that makes the old bathtub brand seem like nectar, and Connie's Inn in Harlem is a bawdy, dusty memory. The jazz age is gone these many years.

The jazz age is gone—but off Broadway, its music remains, like the echo of a shout, like incense fumes the morning after an orgy. For scattered along Fifty-second Street, like shabby, flea-bitten temples to a decadent religion, are the jazz joints, wherein resounds with the fury of a blast furnace the melody of yesterday. In a couple of dozen nightclubs from Seventh Avenue to Fifth, the five- and six-piece bands play doggedly night after night through the smoke and rumble of voices. They don't play "I'll Be Seeing You," or "I Surrender, Dear." They play "Dinah," than whom there is no one finer in the state of Carolina. They play "Ida," whom they idolize. They play "The Man I Love," who some day will come along, and they play "China Boy," "Tiger Rag," "Muskat Ramble," "Squeeze Me," "Tin Roof Blues," "Dead Man Blues," "Royal

Garden Blues"—all of them right out of the gin-soaked, nostalgic top drawer of yesterday.

"Guts," a cornetist once told me. "The songs had guts in them days. How are you supposed to do anything with the slush that passes for popular music now?"

To these down-at-the-heel dumps, dedicated by their proprietors to the fleecing of anyone who comes within vacuuming range and by their performers to the resurrection and tender worship of a music with the ring of truth to its lines, come the most talented contemporary musicians of our day—men like dapper Roy Eldridge, the trumpeter; Coleman Hawkins of the morbidly soulful tenor saxophone; Zutty Singleton with his insinuating drums; Buster Bailey and his witchy clarinet—men who every now and then get tired of this bedraggled existence and get themselves seated with a big swing or sweet band and try dutifully to play the slush, and then find it too stifling, and drift back to the joints, where they sit and fool around with the melodies night after night, playing sadly if they are sad, playing gladly if they are glad.

The customers who gather in these sinful spots are an odd mixture—suburbanites from New Jersey and Connecticut who have just seen *Life with Father* and are determinedly out to see the seamier side of Broadway's night life; the crewcut children from the schools and universities who have discovered the marvels of jazz and come regularly to make obeisance, until they reach, say, the age of twenty-four and begin to feel their Kid Days are behind them; the meager handful of honest jazz *afficionados,* who sit around silently and happily with their beer and glow inwardly when somebody like Max Kaminsky cuts loose on his trumpet with a blistering, get-the-hell-out-of-here chorus; and finally, the

Broadwayite himself, who knows and likes this music they play—but can't waste too much time on it because, my God, these dummy reefer-smokers never had a dime in their lives and how the hell can ya make a buck sittin' around listenin' to *them?*

The names, the façades, the marquees, the personnel in these places are ever changing, but the personality of Fifty-second Street itself never does. Of course, it's not exactly inexpensive to operate one of these joints—it takes, roughly, from ten to twenty-five thousand dollars to set one up in business; but as everyone knows, money grows on trees along Broadway, and fat, fresh bankrolls are always springing up from the hot sidewalks.

So Joe Glotz, nightclub proprietor, bursts upon the scene with the Flashlight Club, some brisk fall night, spends the next six months paying coolie wages to the hired help and raking in the long green, and then shuts up shop for the hot months, while the old signs still sit wearily in front of the shuttered joint and inside the only sound is the steady rustle of the cockroaches clambering idly along the floor and up the walls. These are night-bloomers, these caverns of jazz, and they come in the long winter night and die off in the long summer day.

Here are Jimmy Ryan's, a long, stuffy bar and cabaret run by a lean, good-looking Irishman who has unfortunately shown signs recently of wanting to get away from the old life, by opening a swankier branch on the upper East Side; the Keyboard, a symphony in leatherette, which at this writing was spanking new and which in a year may have a different name or not exist at all; the Three Deuces, brassy and

bellowing; the Spotlite, a hole in the wall with drinks; the Onyx; the Hickory House; Kelly's Stables; the Club Samoa and a handful of others—every one different; yet every one the same.

Brave and cheap and gaudy and nervy they are on the outside; sad and blue and noisy on the inside. And at 5:00 A.M., when it is long and empty of people and cluttered only with signs, Fifty-second is the most pitiful street in the world—collapsed like a rag doll; like a tired lady of the evening, it has slipped off to a shivering, shapeless sleep.

Fifty-second is no better, no worse than it has been painted. Every now and then, one of these shops is shut down by the law because the reefer has been peddled in too plain sight, and there is nothing fictitious to this. Let the righteous musician protest that the tales of widespread use of marijuana are poppycock. He lies. The musician—and the jazz musician most particularly—has little or no regard for the fleshly marvel that is his torso, and he kicks it around thoroughly with liquor, no sleep, too many cigarettes, little food, and frequently, many reefers. It is melodramatic but true that musicians are disillusioned idealists; they are sad men who are on personal speaking terms with Beauty and yet find her so rarely in their fellow-man that they use every means at their disposal to bury their disappointment. At thirty, many of them are dead. Maybe earlier. Charlie Christian, a young Negro guitarist with a talent that even Vicente Gomez would give his right eyetooth for, was dead at nineteen from tuberculosis—a constant companion and handmaiden to the jazz musician. Bix Beiderbecke, the young man with a horn, was gone in his early thirties, from the hard life.

They go that way. Some of them, like toothless Bunk Johnson or round old Sidney Bechet, stick around for a long time, but it's not something on which to put your bankroll.

There was a time late in her career when Helen Morgan, the girl with the tear in her voice, was the reigning queen of Fifty-second, but now the honor goes to a sexy-looking, imperious, sultry-voiced dusky girl with flowers in her hair, named Billie Holiday. The quality of this Baltimorean's voice cannot be argued about, for it has no great quality; customarily, she sounds when in full flight as if her voice is flatting off the bathroom wall. "But she says something," a trombone-playing friend of mine once told me doggedly, and I suppose that's as good an explanation as any for the charm that the Holiday exercises. There is a tired sadness in her voice as she throws back her head, hunches her shoulders a little and sings "The Man I Love" (which only a few years ago you heard in ragtime in a place called The Silver Slipper. . . . Ted Lewis and "Is everybody happy?" Texas Guinan and "Hello sucker!" "Look under the table, Joe; the stuff is here and it's mellow." . . . Remember? . . . Remember?). And there is a wrench to the flat voice and real anguish to the whole thing as she sings the lynching song, "Strange Fruit," which she can't sing too much because it takes too much out of her.

Swing Street, as it has been wrongly named, deserves a niche in the hall of fame if only because it has offered haven to the Negro musician. These are the days of democracy and freedom of opportunity; yet, you can count on one toe the number of Negro musicians playing the big hotels, where the money is to be made in the field of popular music. New York

is full of pseudo-liberals who live in these hotels and write, preach and scream about the freedoms, but the pianists and clarinetists and bassists who play for dancing there are white.

So to Fifty-second Street comes the talented Negro musician, a grotesque thing in view of the fact that most of the better white men, like Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Buddy Rich, and so forth, pilgrimage regularly to the little joints to listen to them. At this stage in civilized living, it seems unnecessary to point out that Negroes are better musicians than white men; it is true, it is accepted, and the music they make is something for which we can be thankful.

The manner in which Fifty-second Street tries to beat your money out of you borders on the hilarious. The doorman, who many times isn't even in uniform, but wears perhaps an old sweater and carries a patched umbrella, has two tasks: (1) to lure you into the place first of all, which he attempts to do by bearing down on you as you progress along the street and trying to block your passage, and (2) to assure you loudly that the next show is just about to go on—even if it is only 9:30 P.M., and most of the musicians involved haven't even gotten out of bed up in Harlem yet. Wherever Billie Holiday is playing, there is a standard routine that goes on between the old, cagy patrons who know Miss Holiday's penchant for appearing late or some nights never at all. "How soon does she go on?" the shrewd customer asks the doorman. "In just a few minutes," the doorman answers, or, "In a little while." The cagy one turns to his companion. "Let's go over to a newsreel," he says. "We got at least an hour and a half to wait."

Once inside, you are subject to the hatcheck girl, who will

spit on any tip less than a quarter and fling it back in your face. Indeed, Fifty-second Street is perhaps the only sector in Broadway where a stony-faced individual is apt to tell you, "The hatcheck charge is two bits, buddy, not a dime." The hatcheck racket, of course, is one of the most thriving and prosperous in New York, and it thrives best in Fifty-second, where no bones are made about the necessity of the payment.

Past the hatcheck stall, there is the inevitable headwaiter, who, basically, is just like the headwaiter in the plushier joints around town in that he is looking for his rakeoff, but who differs from most in that he, too, has little subtlety in his approach. "A nice table down front?" he asks a customer. The customer nods. The headwaiter doesn't move; he looks hard at the customer. This impasse remains until the customer, reluctantly or embarrassedly, fishes a half-buck or a buck out of his pocket and turns it over to the headwaiter. The gratuity here isn't as high, perhaps, as it is in the Stork or El Morocco, but at least the headwaiter is sure of getting it. If he doesn't, you don't get your good table—your one-foot square piece of planking with a tablecloth, that is. In the better joints, every now and then the headwaiter is fooled by an out-of-towner who is led to a nicely located table, and just oddly enough forgets to tip the suave clip artist.

From there on, it's every man for himself. There are rarely cover charges in the jazz joints, merely minimums of three dollars or so, which you can drink up in three bottles of beer. The liquor almost always is cut, except that it is cut in a skillful manner—i.e., graduated down from a slight cut in the first drink until by the sixth you are drinking what can only be described as water with Scotch flavoring. The owners figure, and rightly, that by the sixth drink you haven't the faintest

idea of what you're drinking, and there's no sense in wasting full portions of liquor on you when you're in no state to appreciate it. What with the price of liquor the way it is today.

You *can* get food in these places, but it seems a hard way to die; razors or acid would be better. The kitchens are inevitably tattered and inadequate, although there is a certain coziness to them because the jazzmen like to sojourn there between sets and drink tumblers-full of gin, and the spirit of camaraderie abounds. On the whole, the joints stop just short of what were known in prohibition as cab or clip clubs. They don't give you knockout drops and take your bank roll while you're out, but I have noted a certain wistful nostalgia on the part of some of the owners when they talk of those days.

If you are loose in Broadway of a night and your purse won't quite hold up under the pressure of Swing Street's violence, there is no need to fret. For the two requisites of a giddy night along the main stem, liquor and entertainment, are to be found everywhere on a graduated scale, until you drop down finally to the places where highballs are a quarter and the performers work for the bills and coins flung at them. There is a Stork Club for every pocketbook on the Big Drag. It might be a place, for example, like the Metropole, situated right in the heart of Broadway at Seventh Avenue and Forty-eighth Street.

Until a few years ago, the Metropole was just a big, gaudy restaurant and bar, which was redolent of that roast-beef aroma that fills such places and which served big shots of liquor and bigger glasses of beer. There are a thousand places like it in New York; a place to drop by to on a hot day for

a beer, a place to duck into out of the rain, a place to get into an argument over the Giants if you wanted. Actually, the Metropole a few years back was more of a Chicago or Philadelphia or Los Angeles bar; rough and ready without the seediness of a Bowery establishment, presentable without the glitter of the average Broadway chrome-and-leather joint. Then owner Ben Harriman, perhaps with an eye to the success of Billy Rose over at his Diamond Horseshoe in the Paramount Hotel, installed a collection of old-time vaudeville performers, most of whom had played down the street at the old Palace, now nothing but a movie house.

The idea clicked; today the Metropole is one of Broadway's most curious and thriving businesses—curious because its doors are never shut and the antics of its hoary performers can be observed just as easily from the street as from a place at the big circular bar behind which they go through their gaudy paces. And it is thriving because these old ones—fat bleached blondes or grizzled men in garish clothes and cigars in their mouths—know show business, and while their material may be old-hat, they have the split-second timing that vaudeville has taught them, the ability to catch the mood of the mob and to turn it to their advantage, like a counter-puncher in the ring blocking a jab and turning it into an opening for his own right cross.

To the sentimental, watching these old mastiffs of yesteryear can bring a tear to the eye, because it makes you remember things like the Ziegfeld Follies or Gus Edwards' revues or George White's Scandals. If you *really* want to cry in your beer over memories, slip into the Metropole some night when Helen MacArdle is at work with her songs—for here is the original "strawberry blonde" famous a decade and more ago.

Or take a look at her pianist, Frank Ross; he was with Ted Lewis for ten years, and he was on the Palace bill as accompanist for Fannie Brice when the others included a red-nosed comedian named Fields and an act named Edgar Bergen & Co. that was just breaking in.

Some nights, there may be blackface Eddie Nelson, who was famous as Eddie Cantor's replacement in *Kid Boots,* many cold nights ago—but is more celebrated in the show world as the guy who practically every Wednesday lent five dollars to the fellow playing the menace in *Boom Boom*—one Archie Leach, who changed his name to Cary Grant. Then there's Annie Kent, who played with the Gish sisters when Lillian was six and Dorothy four, and who wrote songs for Eva Tanguay and Nora Bayes.

Shed no tears for these headliners of old who are operating out of a glorified bar and grill; after all, they're packing them in, and no matter where an old vaudevillian plays, if the house is full he's happy.

Still drifting around the main stem, there's Jimmy Dwyer's Sawdust Trail over there in the Forties, or Diamond Jim Brady's, specializing in the big beer and the fat sandwich, the Paddock Bar and Grill in the heart of the movie-house district, where the talk is of horses—not of their breeding, as you might get in the oases in Lexington or Saratoga, but of the prices they paid and whether they were good things. The Pink Elephant on Sixth Avenue, spilling over with sailors, and a hundred others. There is no need to run short of places to while away the long, lonely night in Broadway. The painkiller is there, ready and waiting, and there is always the companionship of other lost souls, drawn to the mob so they can rub elbows and get into arguments and feel they belong

somewhere, if just for the night. In and out of doors they troop while Broadway sizzles and bubbles around them, hunting the forgetfulness that lies for sure in a glass, looking for the spangles and song that will make them forget the desk, the typewriter, the drill, the crane, the shovel.

CHAPTER FOUR

L.A. to N.Y.

I DON'T KNOW why, but every now and then, the lily must be gilded, or, to be technical, the lily painted and the rose gilded. As if the Big Drag wasn't tinselly enough, as if it weren't jam-packed with hoopla and razzmatazz, it is forever being embellished by the appearance of the Movie Star. "Mamie Vere de Vere is in town!" the columnists cry ecstatically—just as if all Broadway won't know it soon enough anyway, when Mamie is seen staggering out of Twenty-One after a drunken, diasppointing effort to pick up a couple of lieutenant commanders.

There is a definite reason, of course, for regular appearance on Broadway of the Movie Star, and that reason is publicity. In the enchanted land of the cinema, film celebrities are the proverbial dime a dozen, and for one certain performer to win himself any sizeable amount of newspaper space requires virtually that he shoot his wife and then poison himself at Hollywood and Vine around high noon. In Manhattan, however, things are different; here the newspapermen have only such old hams as Lunt and Fontanne or Ray Bolger or Katharine Cornell to work on, and as a result they welcome with open arms the appearance of a talented genius like Maria Montez or Esther Williams, whose fame is predicated on an ability to smile becomingly for four seconds on the sixteenth take of a movie scene.

The movie people are many things but they are not stupid;

their publicity agents realize that Broadway is a goldmine of free news. So, regularly we along the main stem are treated to the spectacle of Joan Crawford or Clark Gable in the flesh. In fairness to the star involved, we must admit that it isn't a snap job, and that the task of being polite to wise-cracking and lecherous newspapermen and magazine writers all day, before being able to sneak off to a secluded night spot somewhere, is not an easy one.

The general impression among the public both in Manhattan and Hollywood is that when Mamie Vere de Vere waves good-by from the window of The Superchief and that glittering monster slides away from the fairyland through the orange-filled backyards of Los Angeles toward the desert that stretches East, she is through with movies for two weeks and is going to make luxurious, grand whoopee. "*Lucky* Mamie Vere de Vere!" the Hollywood columnists write wistfully. "Off to N.Y. for a holiday, the grand girl. Enjoy yourself, Mamie—and don't forget your fellow movie slaves, getting up at seven every morning to be on the set by nine. *Bon voyage!*"

It was blonde Janis Carter, a rising young actress, who really put me wise. Miss Carter was involved in one of these publicity junkets not so long ago, and when I caught up with her one afternoon at Lynne Gilmore's Steak House in Forty-eighth Street, she had a fine lusty set of circles under her blue eyes. Miss Carter was a trifle bitter as she explained that the bags were caused by "guys like you."

"I have been in New York for one week," she said, wanly, "and I do not believe I ever have met so many newspapermen in my life. They are all fine, all gentlemanly like you, but they are all newspapermen, and I must be on my toes every min-

ute. I must be charming and gracious and mustn't swear too much, and if the soup is cold at luncheon, I must just smile pleasantly and say I really didn't want any, anyway."

Janis went on to explain that the interviews took place at the convenience of the journalists, who would decide perhaps that they could talk and drink with Miss Carter between the 5:00 P.M. poker game and the 8:00 P.M. date. A typical day for her began about 9:00 A.M. By ten, she was supposed to be bright and chipper and ready for the cooking-page editor of a movie magazine. Mostly, she would be wanted merely to pose for pictures for this editor, but the latter naturally chats with her about food and exotic dishes and "I have to show that at least I would know a *crêpe suzette* if I fell over one."

At eleven, Janis was bundled into a cab and rushed off to one of the tabloid newspapers, the *News* or the *Mirror,* to have her photograph taken in color—"when the circles under my eyes haven't even begun to fade." And here Janis had to be careful not to duplicate the celebrated stunt of another young actress who went over to the *News* and blandly cut loose to the photographers with her opinion of "this lousy sheet"—while Cissy Patterson, the late publisher's sister, watched with obvious interest. That was *one* color picture that never saw the newsstands.

By twelve-thirty, Janis was in another studio being snapped in a sweater, for she was the Motion Picture Sweater Girl of the year and at 1:00 P.M. she lunched with a newspaperman from the town's biggest syndicate. At two-thirty, she was in a department store for a "movie quiz" conducted by a fan magazine. Here she had to be especially alert, for all her fans were out in full force. Janis has two degrees from Western

Reserve University, a startling accomplishment for the average movie queen, but, "If I can't tell the fans how Gable kisses, I'm doomed as a dumb biddy." As a matter of fact, at department store gatherings like this, a number of those present aren't precisely fans. They drift in, say, "Who's that up there?" and then, when somebody replies "Janis Carter," they say, "Never heard of her" and drift out.

An hour later, breathing hard, Janis moved in on a broadcasting studio to record an interview in Spanish for Latin-America. Miss Carter had a whole raft of Spanish during her high school days in Cleveland, but knowledge like that fades away faster than the juice in a radio that's just been snapped off, and she went crazy trying to make sure she wasn't calling the Latin-Americans blue pigs.

At four-thirty, she was in the office of one of the big picture magazines, being interviewed—usually a waste of time for the movie star, because *Life,* for instance, has a habit of disregarding ninety-nine out of a hundred stories with which it tinkers. By this time, Janis was beginning to chain smoke.

By five-thirty, she was buttonholed by Ida Jean Kain, the syndicated beauty columnist, who suggested reducing a trifle, the charming Miss Kain feeling that you can even reduce your way into a seven the hard way when the dice are running against you, as they say at Broadway and Forty-second.

At six-thirty, Miss Carter was permitted to dine elegantly in her hotel room, lying on one elbow on a sofa, occasionally rubbing her tired feet, smoking an after-dinner cigarette and contemplating the joys of a vacation in New York. By eight-thirty, she had to be ready for the theater. This was a stiff chore, because she had to smile and show her teeth all night

long and she had to applaud the show vigorously no matter how it stank, to guard against being called high-hat within the profession. As another professional task, if she was at the theater escorted by a male movie star, she had to guard continually all evening to see that he wasn't scene-stealing, or, as the trade puts it, fly-catching.

By midnight, the publicity office, always on the ball, had arranged for Janis to visit the night editor of one of the big newspapers, since she had just finished a picture called *Night Editor*. This was close to fatal, since all night editors have ulcers and vile dispositions and have been trying for years to get on the day side, and generally are unimpressed by movie stars. They are impressed usually only by sufficient whisky and a raise in pay.

At 2:00 A.M., stunned and dazed, Miss Carter was ready for bed. She lay in the dark, smoking a cigarette and listening to the Big Drag, many floors below, still whizzing and sliding and banging. There seemed to be a tic in her right cheek, and her stomach twitched occasionally. However, by four she managed to fall off to sleep, when—wham!—the telephone. And the whole flapdoodle and merry-go-round ready to begin again.

Then, in two weeks, The Superchief is pulling back into the Los Angeles station and Miss Carter, in dark glasses and hangover, is getting off the train. Columnists' stooges, planted in the depot, eye her dubiously, shake their heads and sidle over to the nearest telephone. "Hello, Queenie?" they say to their bosses. "Just saw Janis Carter stepping off The Superchief. Boy, she really must have raised cain in New York; it'll take her a month to get over *this* katzenjammer. She must

have been soused every minute she was there. Those stars certinny go hog wild when they vacation in New York, don't they?"

In justice to the stooge, we must admit that frequently, he is right. One of the greater nuisances along Broadway—not Miss Carter, incidentally—is the drunken movie actor or actress, who, after sliding through the daily schedule of interviews and luncheons, really settles down to tearing up the peapatch at night. The legitimate Broadway stars, most of whom have been cradled in show business and have done everything short of sleep in a trunk, always seem to be wary of their actions in public, and never stop the portrayal of the *grande dame* until they reach the seclusion of their apartment, where they can, and frequently do, get crocked to the ears nightly.

But the Hollywood visitor too often has had no background in the profession and doesn't realize how swiftly her reputation can be punctured by a couple of drunken scenes in nightclubs. Besides, Hollywood itself doesn't seem to bother too much with the morals or manners of its children. When I first visited there, the easiness and informality of life, *including* the disregard of the misbehaving movie actress or actor, seemed to wither and reduce to a shambles my memories of a lusty early life in Greenwich Village. Having done many interviews of these visiting movie queens, I must note that at least half of them have been suffering terrific hangovers when I caught up with them at lunch.

It was John Maynard, who does such excellent movie reviews for the *Journal-American* in New York, who startled me with the tale of the bewitchingly delicate and very blonde Hollywood star whom he met for cocktails one day when

he worked in Washington. "Lishen, Naylor," the gossamer creature said to him, plucking at his elbow, "thish town stinks. Put tha' in your paper. Tell everyone I shaid Washington stinks." Whereupon she practically fell out of her chair onto the floor. Of course, there is nothing extraordinary about that scene; it happens frequently and daily along the Big Drag, which is the reason why most of the Broadwayites sigh with relief when their Hollywood cousins climb aboard the Twentieth Century at five-thirty one afternoon and head back to fairyland.

The executives in the movie industry, who are reasonably smart cookies, if not exactly the kind of gentlemen with whom you'd care to dine or play golf, are forever holding their breath when one of their valuable pieces of bric-a-brac travels to Broadway, because the actors and actresses aren't very bright, and despite all the press agents in the world who may be hovering around, they come out with some remarks that border on the classical. I recall meeting one young thing in the Sherry-Netherland one day, and being startled by finding her knitting, an idea which, her press agent told me later with a shudder, she had thought up herself as a means of impressing me with her homey qualities. This child of fortune had been queen of several rodeos out West, and she said she had a real affection for cowboys. "Why," she remarked, her eyes as big as half-dollars, "I just love them—they remind me so much of young *bulls!*"

Then there was Samuel Goldwyn, one-time English blacksmith's helper, who greeted me in a gray pinpoint checked bathrobe, blue socks, red slippers and a fringe of Foxy Grandpa gray hair. "Well," he said, "what can I do for you?" I told him I thought we might talk about the famous Goldwyn

touch in his movies. Just what was it—without disclosing any trade secrets, of course—that enabled him to get the quality and good taste in his productions that had so frequently been remarked upon?

"Well," my solemn Foxy Grandpa said, looking down at his manicured hands, "consider taste. After all—what is it but the man himself? You can't manufacture quality. Either the producer has quality and good taste, or he doesn't. If he has it, his movies have it." I left shortly after, a little shaken and trembling.

They are all kinds, these visiting ladies and gentlemen, some of them boring, many of them drunks, a few of them genuinely interesting. More than the Broadway performers, possibly, they have the habit of being frank, which unfortunately often lands them in trouble. I remember meeting Lauren Bacall one day and lounging around her hotel room with her as she, dressed in a black jersey blouse, black slacks and a pink scarf around her dirty blonde hair, talked freely and intelligently about love. "I've had my share, I suppose. I guess none of them lasted a year, but every time I really dived into it. It would be 'Oh baby, this is the real thing; I'll never be able to *live* without this one!' " I remember little Arline Judge, drinking orangeade and recalling wistfully how there was a time when "sooner or later of an evening I would be in every nice saloon in New York."

There was lovely Helen Walker, telling me how she worked as a secretary for a businessman in New York and how he chased her around the room every night, "which I didn't mind personally, but I figured the poor guy was paying me twenty-four dollars a week and not getting his money's worth, so I quit."

I remember standing in a dingy Ninth Avenue bar with Mike Mazurki, the wrestler turned menace, and listening to Mike tell me how *hypothetically* a lot of money could be made in the grappling racket by taking a dive and how he was sick one night and decided to lose early to Dick Shikat at Madison Square Garden, "but mind you, this was not really a dive, because on the best day of my life I could not beat Shikat, anyway."

Once at Twenty-One, there was a four-hour luncheon with Carole Landis at which she tried to enlist a little sympathy for the actress whose marriages end in divorce, as four of hers had. "It might be the husband's fault, you know," she said, "but the public always blames the girl." There was Betty Hutton, beautiful in a white blouse and powder blue suit, sipping a milk punch painfully as she recovered from a bad night, and suggesting to the Lord that she would be better off dead and why didn't he strike her down.

There is a certain set social routine along Broadway, for show people, and these visiting movie performers soon get into the swing of it. There is always just one or two places to go for lunch—last season, for example, it was either Twenty-One or Toots Shor's—and unless they are abnormal, the stars head for them to indulge in the traditional didoes of table-hopping and screaming "hel-lo!" across the room at someone they've met only once or would like to meet. If they are free for cocktails, you will find them always in the Stork Club, where they begin in low key, for the long afternoon without a drink has worn them a bit thin, but where after awhile they are right in squawling stride.

There is never anything but the theater at night, and always sixth row center, and always three minutes after the

curtain is up, and *never* the same gown two nights handrunning. On the late shift, it is El Morocco, of course, and here they take up the long vigil, waiting grimly to be seen by the right producers and the right newspapermen, and distinguishable from the El Morocco regulars only because they are forever beaming and showing their teeth, where the steadies are concentrating on out-frowning and out-staring each other. Then, still later in the night, or earlier in the morning, there is the nightcap of six or eight more drinks in someone's apartment, and more likely than not the fistfight that doesn't get into the papers, or the furtive, childish little assignation, or the passing-out on the sofa.

Hollywoodians have been criticized for their frequent marriages and divorces; it is the one phase of their lives, perhaps, for which they should be forgiven, because whereas the average big-town dweller can live his own existence and experiment as wolfishly as he or she likes, the movie people live in Macy's window, so to speak, and any amorous peccadilloes in which they engage must be legitimate ones. It seems odd, but because of the white-hot publicity glare that is forever on him, the movie star virtually has to marry any girl he kisses for more than two seconds. Many Hollywood marriages have no roots in love at all, but are the natural result of a normal craving for companionship. The movie star lives in a glass house from the time he gets up until he goes to bed; it is a logical thing that he wants someone with whom he can let down his hair and become again Joe Doakes, garage mechanic, as he once was.

To the movie star come to Broadway for the first time, the reception must be a trifle disappointing. For while the press claps its hands and clicks its heels at the sight of new material

for the printed page, the Big Drag takes the visitors in stride. Perhaps this is because a great portion of the Broadwayites are important in show business themselves.

What is more likely, however, is that along the main stem, the big shot comes three for a quarter, and even the boot blacks and newsboys have become inured to the dazzling—for a small-towner—sight of Bing Crosby coming out of a neighborhood restaurant minus his toupee. Even the autograph fiends who crowd around the movie star are something less than adoring. To them it is a business deal. Either the star's press agent has contracted for their services, in the hope that some columnist will comment on the hordes of "fans" following Miss Vere de Vere around, or else they are after her signature merely for the good American coin of the realm it may bring on the open market.

There are, naturally, a number of sycophants to whom the appearance in town of a movie star is the signal for a concerted campaign of boot-licking. Broadway is nothing if not crowded with opportunists, and the less desirable of these are the ones without talent of their own who figure on hitching their wagon to a star. What makes it all sad and cheap, however, is their willingness to be satisfied with crumbs. Maybe they know the star's press agent and use that as an "in," or perhaps they just bother the Hollywoodian herself so much that soon she is too numb to care whether her retinue contains the boot-licker or not. Whatever the manner of tying in with the star, the Broadway character can be seen tagging after her as she leaves her hotel, or sweeping into a restaurant with her, on the fringe of her large escort, or telling some newspaperman that "Gloria told me this morning, that when . . ." etc.

When the queen's visit is all over and she has returned to the Coast with her bad dreams and puffy eyes, the character has squeezed nothing out of the arrangement but a few scattered seeds of prestige that exist only in his own mind. Yet he goes on and on with each new star to hit town. Where he ends up ultimately, God knows. In Hollywood, I guess. That would seem natural, for he is, if possible, even phonier than that phony town.

But sometimes, the visit to New York is accomplished by a star to whom the town is home, and then there is usually more fanfare, for the natives were sorry to see him go and glad to have him back.

This would be someone like Jimmy Durante, and if you are old and tired and beaten by life, there is no greater stimulant—not even the Broadwayite's old faithful, benzedrine—than to wander up to his suite in the Astor, right in the middle of Times Square, and watch the great man tearing around the rooms in his bathrobe, answering the telephone, looking out in delight at the Big Drag below, slapping anyone and everyone on the back and holding separate conversations with songwriters, agents, moochers, fighters and assorted characters who have gathered at his feet. To a guy like Jimmy, Broadway is home, and when he is in the center of its whizbang, he is a happy man. He lies when he mutters his famous song about "I kin do widout Broadway—but kin Broadway do widout me?" He could no more do without the place than he could do without his nose.

Bing Crosby fits in, roughly, along these lines, too. He spent many happy and carefree hours in Broadway before his hairline receded, and when he makes one of his visits these days,

he dodges personal appearances and publicity and spends his hours listening to Eddie Condon play jazz, or talking with a bookie he once knew, or just ambling around the main stem happily.

And to see a really blissful man is to see someone like Frank Fay come back after a sojourn in the movie capital. Mr. Fay of the impeccable clothes and the starched collars, is always bewildered by the cheapness and gaudiness of movieland and desperate to return to the Lambs Club, where actors wear ties and are reasonably cordial to each other and talk about something other than movies—the horses, say, or politics, or whether DiMaggio is going to hit .350 this year.

The Broadwayite who is tapped for the movies cannot honestly turn down the chance, because money is money wherever you earn it. But every time he can wangle it, he piles a couple of suitcases aboard one of those Santa Fe streamliners and heads back to home. It is weird to imagine someone relaxing within the confines of Broadway, with its fluttery pulse and its crashing of pots and pans, but relax they do when they come home from the wars of the West.

There are those, of course, to whom Broadway and Hollywood both are home. You will see someone like George S. Kaufman dining one night in the Copacabana and eyeing the glittering crowd in the Mocambo in Hollywood the next. These transcontinental travelers are forever climbing in and out of planes and Pullmans, and they live in a kind of purgatory, children without a country. Their names are forever being listed in *Variety* under the "L.A. to N.Y." columns, and their typewriters and secretaries are forever at their side. They are the ones who look hungrily at the California menu for the magical words "New York cut" opposite the steak

listing, and when they are sitting in their little bungalows at work—for mostly they are writers or independent producers or designers or show people of some anonymous kind—their thoughts usually are on such faraway wonders as Roseland Ballroom or the shooting galleries on Sixth Avenue. Behold the expatriate, God pity him—or, in Broadwayese, "the poor guy."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Great Emancipation

THERE IS, of course, nothing like Broadway anywhere. No combination of streets and smells and lights and people is quite the same; no unholy atmosphere with quite the seductive glow, no amalgamation of phoniness with quite the scope exists. However, this remarkable area is hewn roughly at least after the fashion of other, more sedate communities, and so it has its normal complement of women.

In a way, it is almost unnecesary to speak of Broadway's women. They are so renowned in song and story that their glory is familiar to us all. Although many of the boys along Tin Pan Alley have homes in Jackson Heights and three children each to add to their own woman, who most likely is beaproned, stringy-haired and fat, they are forever writing with a sob in their throat of the butterfly who nightly stalks the street with heartbreak in her eyes. Every one of these mainstem females, if we are to believe the song pluggers, has a dreadful run in the stocking of her heart, and you can read the fine print in the *Times* by the light of the torch she carries. She has been used up like a tube of toothpaste and thrown away like an old banana skin, and now there is nothing for her to do but walk sorrowfully past the Paramount Building each night, swinging her red pocketbook and smiling gamely, while a tear trickles through her mascara.

This would make a touching picture, if true, and God knows there have been and are a number of Broadway

women who made the mistake of saying "Uh, huh" when they should have said "Not tonight, brother." But on the whole, the Broadway girl is neither destitute nor drunk, penniless nor heartbroken. It is still possible, of course, for a man to make a fool of a woman, but don't forget that these are the days of emancipation for the tender sex, and it is an unlikely woman indeed who doesn't learn swiftly, from books and street-corner discussions at the age of twelve, the lesson that Broadway girls used to learn at the age of eighteen or twenty, in lonely hall bedrooms or one-night stands at the Ritz-Plaza. Today, the girl who comes to Broadway knows exactly where each mine is laid, where each booby trap hangs, and exactly what is going to happen to her if she blunders into one—usually nothing except a dose of chagrin, followed by the determination never to be made a sucker of again.

If you cut away the hard-rubber casings of their hearts, they aren't a bad lot, many of these Broadway women, and I suppose the worst that can be said of them is that they're out for all they can get. Since the average Broadway man is out for the same objective, our butterfly can hardly be blamed. Although I do think that she ought to give the male sex a small handicap when the game begins, because when it comes to bartering passion, the man doesn't live who can bat in the same league with a woman.

If you are loose on Broadway some night without dinner to get home to or a lodge meeting, drop into one of the better joints, like the Stork or the Copa, and watch a Broadway man try to get a Broadway woman to come home to his bed and board with him at the least possible cost. Quite possibly, the butterfly would enjoy a tumble in the hay as much as the hard-working wolf, but it's a matter of principle with her

never to look up shyly and nod yes until she's taken the gentleman for most of his bank roll, the next three months' rent and a promise to marry her.

I know that to out-of-towners, this attitude seems sordid. It is hard, for example, for a citizen of Vermont, whose life is pure and wholesome, to reconcile himself to the seeming promiscuity of the whole thing. But always remember that life along the Big Drag is a pinwheel, a rollercoaster, a fast-motion movie; everything is stepped up twenty times in tempo, and the Broadwayite, whether for better or worse, has at thirty-five lived four times as many lives as the Kansan at seventy.

We speak not of a quiet, elm-lined community of God-fearing citizens when we speak of Broadway; we speak of an incredible, needled, jazzed-up area that is a world apart from the world of Kiwanis clubs, Wednesday night bridges and Saturday night movies. No one has changed Broadway in a hundred years, and it is unlikely that anyone will in the near future. We must consider the phenomenon dispassionately, like a cricket under a microscope.

On the other hand, we do an injustice to a certain share of Broadway's females if we classify them all as hard-boiled babies. Some aren't and some are, just as some are black and some are white, some full of that mystical quality that the Broadwayite calls class and others full of nothing but the ninety-two cents' worth of chemicals of the average street-walker. Broadway has all kinds of women—tough, beautiful showgirls; stenographers naïve and stenographers wise; ushers and cashiers; models; artists; prostitutes and semi-pros; salesgirls and Salvation Army lassies—everything.

It has girls who wear Bendel black or Bergdorf forest

green, at four hundred dollars a throw, and it has girls who wear S. Klein pink at $6.75. It has girls who live only for the dressing-table mirror, and others who clump along the main stem with their lifts run over and their slips showing. All the wonder and beauty and seaminess and spite that can be found in the female is paraded before us nightly, and there is something a little frightening about it all.

The one female above all others to whom Broadway should be more than a spit and a smile is the career girl, because perhaps nowhere in the world can she cut loose to better advantage and make something of herself than in this nervous belly of the big town. It is not quite true that Broadway first asks you "What can you do?" and then "What sex are you" as an afterthought, because if anything, a girl with good legs *and* talent, whether it be a talent for designing stage scenery or cooking a good cup of coffee, has the edge on a man whose legs are not quite so exciting.

But there are a thousand women in New York whose fresh ideas and whose drive and skill have today made them comfortably independent, a situation that quite possibly would not exist in the hinterlands. Whenever I think along these lines, I contemplate the life and times of Pat Allen, a little red-haired girl with blue eyeglasses who, in a town full of thieves, touts, fanatics, pigeon-lovers, pigeon-haters, dreamers, schemers, professional bums, dancers, refugees and knife-throwers, stands unique.

To Pat Allen's disordered office just off the Drag come daily the handsomest men in the world—Greek gods, platinum-haired Adonises from the North country, swarthy romantics, neatly-shaved and crew-haircutted specimens of collegiana.

Fifty a day they drift into her place, slipping quietly through the front door and sitting patiently in the ante-room for hours at a time. Once in a while Pat comes out briskly, smiles her contagious little smile, crooks her finger, and one of these chesty, gorgeous ones jumps as though through a flaming hoop. Then when night drops its raucous mantle on the main stem, she comes out and smiles sadly at the remainder and they sigh and drift into the city outside.

For Miss Allen's fascination to these beautiful gentlemen is a financial one—she has what amounts to a monopoly on the male modeling market in New York. Just as Conover, Powers and Thornton have cornered most of the charm among the girl models, Pat has in her files the name and photo of every would-be Hollywood star, every ham Broadway actor, every eager young Narcissus in town. When there is a call for a toothy, clean-cut young chap to be photographed with a certain brand of cigarette sticking out of his jaw, the call goes to Pat; when the wet beer that dissatisfies wants a serious young junior-executive type, Miss Allen is the one to see.

And Pat's is a story of the main stem that could have come about, maybe, nowhere else. Born at Eighty-seventh and Madison, she acquired the poise of the Broadway young at the age of four, at which time she was taken by her father, a city official, to christen some new lions at Central Park's zoo and a few days later was thrown out of a movie house when she insisted on pointing to herself in the newsreel and howling delightedly, "That's *me!*" She grew up in Asbury Park, New Jersey and went to a half-dozen institutions along the lines of the Scoville School for Young Ladies, after which she

tried acting, and ended up as a "high-class office girl" in a theatrical agency at five dollars a week.

There, Pat became the middleman in a supply-and-demand situation. Commercial photographers were always on the prowl for "new types" of men, and struggling young actors were always on the prowl for ways to make money that would sustain their Barrymore souls and bodies. Pat got the gents together, and soon—in the famous basement lunchroom of Walgreen's Times Square drugstore, where the young of the theater go to brood and plot their dramatic futures—she was doing a land-office business. "Mine was the phone on the right, in the back," Pat recalls. "The waitresses took my calls when I was out."

And here is where the Broadway touch comes in. Pat could have continued like that indefinitely, just getting her acting and photographing friends together for the hell of it, doing each one a good turn—if she hadn't been of Broadway. The Broadwayite, and I say this because I consider it to his credit and as a tribute to his alertness, is always hunting for the angle that will make him a success. He knows that the world won't particularly beat a path to your door if you build a better mousetrap—but that it will if you build something that has never been built before. What's the angle, he asks. Where's the gimmick? What's new?

Pat Allen sat back and realized the whole thing was new. Why shouldn't there be a models' agency exclusively for men? She snapped her fingers, shook her head determinedly, and lo and behold . . . there was. With eight or ten reliable Adonises in her files, Pat bravely opened an office in 1942 and set out to buck Powers and Conover, who had also gone in extensively for the male trade. The gorgeous ones came to her

like flies to honey, and today she has to fight them off with a baseball bat.

Dozens of young gents who later ended up with fat Hollywood contracts have spent the formative years sitting in Pat's ante-room—guys like Eddie Price, who became John Shelton; Buddy Alderdice, who turned into juvenile Tom Drake; Jess Barker, who kept his name; Guy Madison, and Hurd Hatfield, the elegant bounder who played Dorian Gray in the picturization of Wilde's novel. As a matter of fact, that photograph of an esthetic young gent in fedora and raincoat, marked on the back: "Hurd Hatfield; eyes, brown; hair, brown; height, 6 feet; weight, 145; age, 24; hat, 7 1/8; shoe, 8 1/2; tux, sports," is still in Pat's files.

Outside of the fact that her boys "have a little ham in them," Pat says that they are the nicest fellows in the world. "Lots of my guys only use modeling as a stopgap," she says, "and I don't mind at all. After all—what kind of a lifetime work for a man is modeling? The boys have their eyes on Hollywood, many of them, and this kind of labor serves two purposes—it pays the rent and it gets their faces plastered all over billboards, magazines, newspapers and subway ads, where some movie Shylock might spot them."

I recall another Broadway girl who used to hang out in that Walgreen's basement . . . the "Half-million-dollar Baby," they used to call her. Her name was Peggy Conrad, and she had blue eyes and a mountain of brown curls, and her whole life was wrapped up in the raffish world of show business. Maybe you remember Peggy—the girl who just a few years ago bankrolled the children of the theater, tomorrow's Hepburns and Lunts, to cakes and coffee? She used

to sit in Walgreen's and pick up the kids' soda checks, and if they needed two or five or ten bucks to pay their room rent, that was all right, too.

The money meant nothing to her, for she was due to inherit half a million dollars when she reached twenty-one, and the friendship of these stage-struck kids really mattered. The young hams sipped their cokes, rubbed their hands, grinned engagingly at Peggy and waited. Peggy got herself a chorus job, ultimately, but the young hams didn't care too much for that, because she had been financing *Actors' Cues,* the little help-wanted paper for show people, and her thousand-dollar monthly allowance was cut off when she went on the stage. For all this philanthropy was taking place to the accompaniment of a cacophony of roars and offstage shouts and murmurs by Peg's family.

You learn the hard way on Broadway, so many times, and Peggy was startled to find the Walgreen's children cutting her dead after she no longer was the bank roll she had been. Then, when she hurt her back while dancing, Broadway decided, as is its macabre custom, that her usefulness was at an end and washed its grimy hands of her. Peggy blew town.

She drifted South to visit some relatives, and soon she was cashiering in a Gulfport, Mississippi bar and grill. It didn't sound very ladylike, but Peggy always liked to make her own way. She did it so well this time, that she was promoted to manager of the bar, with the privilege of arguing with drunks, but she got homesick, came back North and patched up her feud with her mother.

Show business still intrigued her, but she was wary now, and she was letting other suckers subsidize her erstwhile good companions' rendezvous with Art. She ran across Buddy

Boylan, a young Third Army corporal from her home town of Rockville Centre, Long Island. Buddy, knowing Peggy was wise in the ways of Broadway, asked her to manage him—so back to the Big Drag she breezed, as a ten per center. Broadway, she found, hadn't changed. If you had something it wanted, it unrolled the rug; if you didn't, it spat in your eye.

But one day Peg walked into the offices of an outfit called G.I. Music, started by Ray Rand, a Bronx boy who had stepped on a land mine in Salerno on *D*-Day plus ten and finally had survived about fifteen transfusions. He told Peg he couldn't do anything for her singer, since he just ran a song-publishing outfit. Then, he paused. "Come to think of it," he said slowly, "why don't we add a branch to the firm and call it G.I. Entertainment? We could try to place night-club and theater acts for professional performers who've been in the Army. And you"—he clapped Peggy on the back—"are just the one to run it. Take off your hat. There's a desk for you."

That is the story of Peggy Conrad, once the darling of the Walgreen strugglers. Oh, there is a little more; she got interested in one of Ray's partners, a good-looking young guy named Jack Watson, a former first lieutenant who had won the D.F.C. after twenty-five missions over Europe with the Eighth Air Corps, and finally ended up marrying him. She called me up breathlessly one day to let me know that, and I haven't seen nor heard of her or G.I. Music since. But everything seemed to be ending happily, which at times can be a novelty for Broadway.

I clearly remember something she once told me about Walgreen's. "Back in those days," she said, grinning, "one of the kids whose checks I used to pick up all the time was

a blonde named Betty Fenske. She walked past me in Lindy's one night recently, wearing her new name—Lauren Bacall. She didn't give me a tumble. I thought it was funny. Show people are funny, anyway."

I don't know who else *you* might have in mind as a Broadway girl, but I couldn't seal up my personal list without including Dainty June and Rose Louise the Doll Girl—that would be June Havoc, and Gypsy Rose Lee. These days, they are forever shuttling off to Hollywood for one good cause or another, but they are Broadway to the bone, and the Big Drag is brighter for them. The last time I heard, they had patched up a sisterly feud of many years' standing and were living together in a 24-room house on East Sixty-third Street, with cigarettes in bed and long discussions of life, love and the pursuit of happiness over a drink and a roaring log fire. Nobody would ever mistake Gypsy for a Smith girl, and nobody would ever take June for the queen of Vassar's daisy chain. They are too trim, too fast with a wisecrack, too swift and steel-trapped of mind to be saddled with those dubious compliments, but they make excellent specimens of the better side of Broadway.

Gypsy's talents are well known; it was Lee Wright, her Simon and Schuster editor who said she was a natural as a writer because "she knows instinctively where paragraphs start."

June's assets, on the other hand, include a remarkable shape, a grand comedy sense, a hand-painted spittoon and the ability to do the front and back bumps and a special sidewise bump as well. "Me," she says dreamily, "me—I guess I'm just a big slob."

There was a distinct flavor of Broadway about the sisters Hovick, when I first met them. June's movie bosses had just given a party celebrating the removal of a plaster cast from her right leg—such things go on *all* the time in the half-world that is the movies—and most of the guests finally had staggered into the night. Gypsy started upstairs to rest—she was going to have a baby in a few months—and she tossed back a parting shot to June. "See how much of the liquor and cigarettes you can save," she said with a grin. "It's all gravy. The studio paid for the whole party." June gave her the double-o handy. "Okay, kid," she said.

I wonder, though, if when you are hunting the typical Broadway girl, you wouldn't pause for a moment at Fifty-first Street and the main stem, and then climb the thick-carpeted, mirror-lined staircase to Roseland?

Times have changed in the quarter-century that Roseland has been catering to Broadway's fidgety-footed and its lonely, to its jittery ones who must dance away the rhythm within them and to its sad ones who must hold a woman in their arms to fight off the blues. Dance halls in the old days were rough and tough, and it was accepted that the girls who worked in them were no better than they should be. There used to be fifty hostesses, and many of the more down-at-heel places were nothing more than glorified houses of call. Today, however, they are the joints to which the boy comes and brings his girl of a Wednesday or Saturday night, for the prices are reasonable and the orchestras good, and Lord knows he is tired of rolling back the living-room rug every day in the week.

The result of this turn of events is that in dancehalls like

Roseland, the number of hostesses has dropped sharply. At last count, there were twelve or fifteen at that illustrious daddy of the joints, and with their low-cut evening gowns and mascara, they furnished a sharp contrast to the working girls who came in with their boy friends after a quick dinner in Child's. The halls are honorable and circumspect, we are told, and the little ladies are little ladies.

Let's drift upstairs, into the glittering hall with its black modern decor and its indirect lighting, past 6-foot-7-inch Ben Morosz, the bouncer, who once was the idol of the fight crowds at Madison Square Garden, a block to the west. Our visit is during the late War. We set our glass down on the red card that says, "We earnestly request the co-operation of all our guests in seeing that no liquors are brought into or consumed upon these premises," and we ask for Betty to be sent over. Betty is slim and peach-colored and her black hair is piled high; she wears a light blue evening dress.

"I was born in New York," Betty says. "I live here, I used to model and I came here because it was a nice way to make money." Does Betty still like dancing? Yes, she does. Does she keep busy all four hours—nine to one—nightly? Yes, she does. How are the customers? The customers are nice. Any trouble with any of them? Oh no, never. Married? No. Engaged? Yes. Ambitions? Marry and have kids. So you're happy, Betty? Yes, I'm happy. No quarrel with Betty. We pat Betty good-by paternally and Florrie slides into her chair. Florrie is in white satin, has yellow hair and talks enchantingly out of the corner of her mout'.

"Buy me a beer," Florrie commands, almost menacingly. The waiter puts the beer in front of her and effortlessly, beautifully, she drains half a glassful. "God, I hate dancing," she

says, morosely. We ask her what she prefers. "Sit," Florrie says. "I like to sit. I just love guys who buy a string of tickets and then ask me to sit and talk. I don't care what kind of dopes they are. How I love to sit." Florrie says she lives in Queens with another girl, who models. Florrie has been at Roseland off and on for seven years. She has been married, but now is separated. "If I ever get married again," she says; "it'll be to him again. You know how it is?"

We are afraid Florrie may cry, so we say we know how it is and ask Florrie what she does after quitting-time. "Me and a couple of other girls here, we go out and hoist a couple, maybe," she says, smiling. "Not many men around now and so the three of us women go out and get some food and drinks. Then we go home to Queens and go to bed. It ain't bad and we have fun."

We thank Florrie and bend down to light a cigarette and when we look up we see Maxine, who is like Florrie—only bustier and generally bigger. "Has that dame been telling you about me?" she begins with a giggle. "She drinks more than all of us put together." We are startled, and ask if she is kidding. "Sure, I'm kidding," she says. "I'm a great kidder." We ask if she can dance all the different dances. "Hell, no," she says. "I can't rumba. Drives me nuts." Does Maxine still get a kick out of dancing?

"Brother," she says wearily, "my idea of a good time is to go somewhere and eat and rest and say 'No, thank you,' when a guy asks me to dance. I like to sit."

"You, too?" we murmur.

"Huh?" she says.

Maxine tells us that sailors are a good crowd but that they kill you with "all the jitterbug stuff. Although," she continues,

smiling to herself, "sometimes they buy the whole five hours' worth of tickets and just sit and talk to you. They just like to look at a dame. That's kinda nice."

Soon Maxine is trudging her way around the floor with a bald-spotted, tired businessman, and Jackie is studying us from behind black coffee. Jackie wears a black dress with what they call a sweetheart front, and she wears a red jacket and has hair like Gypsy Rose Lee's. She smiles easily and her eyes are blue and she says "Hell, talk all you want, I'm not losing any money with this slim crowd tonight."

Jackie, it seems, ran away from home in Connecticut at fourteen, and when she came back with her hair bleached, a couple of years later, "My father wanted to put me in jail." After a while, she got married, but after five years, she was separated, and sooner or later she figures on getting a divorce.

"They tell us you're not allowed to date the customers," we say, trying hard not to look arch. "No, we're not," she says, looking at us.

Later, going downstairs to Broadway, we look at the slip of paper with "Jackie—Murray Hill 8-3314" on it, and we reflect philosophically that after all, we aren't a customer. Then we scratch around in our pockets for the other slip of paper, on which, earlier, we had scribbled down the Roseland requirements for a dance hostess, as outlined by blonde, blue-eyed Florence Forder, the chief hostess. "A girl," our notes read, "should be quietly business-like, neat in appearance. She must be able to handle herself, and . . ."

CHAPTER SIX

The Gin-Mill Blues

One of the full-blown mysteries of Broadway is the ease with which the average citizen of the Big Drag slips from his daytime attitude of anti-sociability to his after-dark pose of gregariousness. For during the ghastly (to him) hours of sunshine, our Broadwayite is morose, gloomy and given to hiding in dark corners of bars, or up over third base at the Polo Grounds, or in general telling any prospective companions to "blow, I got a headache." Come the owl hours, however, and he promptly turns up in a nightclub—drinking heartily, telling dirty jokes with lusty abandon, watching with calm eye the latest act to hit town, and generally behaving as if he were having a hell of a time. Part of the time, I suppose, he is; the other part of the time, it is likely, he is doing business. For while the Wall Streeter or the midtown businessman is given to closing deals over luncheon in the Cloud Club or the Waldorf Men's Bar, the Broadway boy has a penchant for carrying on his various enterprises over a blintzeh in Lindy's or a rye highball in the Stork.

Of all the eating and drinking joints in a Broadway that sometimes seems to be given over entirely to eating and drinking joints, it is likely that Lindy's, situated right on the main stem itself, just down from the Capitol Theatre, is the most famous. There are a number of reasons for this notoriety. Damon Runyon, of course, gave the place a certain stature in the sun with his popular short stories of

horse players and thugs and safeblowers, all of whom are regular inmates of what he coyly called Mindy's. Another sound reason is the food.

Lindy's does an exceptional job on such traditional Jewish dishes as blintzehs, lox, bagels, smoked herring, and so forth, and Broadway, of course, has a great Jewish population. However, the restaurant also has a slew of fine non-kosher dishes, including a spectacularly tasty arrangement of ham and eggs, a brand of strawberry cheesecake that is known from the Battery to Two Hundred and Forty-second Street, and, as the waiters would put it, "all kinds sandwiches."

Most likely, however, Lindy's is what it is merely because a couple of the Broadway crowd just picked on it as the place to go. There is no rhyme or reason for the way in which a Lindy's or a Toots Shor's or a Dinty Moore's mushrooms into popularity. True, the place has to have what it takes to keep the hold it gains, but usually the hold in the first place just pops up. Now, at any rate, Lindy's is the place for all good Broadwayites to go when they (1) want cheesecake, and (2) desire to hold a business conference to the soothing accompaniment of rattling dishes, screams of "Hello, Max!" and the motley sounds of a torrent of people streaming in and out and around the tables. The man behind this establishment is an amiable restaurateur given to wearing bright ties and boasting of his blintzehs. The blintzeh—a cheese pancake—is to the Jew what corn beef and cabbage is to Jiggs or roast beef to John Bull. Made by the right hands, it is out of this tired world, and Leo Lindy's are the right hands.

The regulars here are to a large extent show people, bookies and those many souls on the Street who have bank rolls and no visible occupation. Lindy himself is an engaging performer; he wanders through his place with jokes, gags and funny sayings at his fingertips, and he is always welcome at the stalls occupied by such celebrities as Willie Howard, Milton Berle and Al Jolson. He will bunk into their tables, sit down with the regulars over a piece of cheesecake and tell of some amusing episode.

There are two Lindy's, incidentally; the older restaurant is across the street and down the block from the new, brassier place, and it is in the older one that Runyon used to sit by the hour and consume his forty cups of coffee per day.

Next to Lindy's, the best-known spot of the moment on Broadway is Toots Shor's, a sedate-looking, red-brick-front establishment on Fifty-first Street off Sixth Avenue. Bernard Shor is the complete floor show here, with his hearty if monotonous insults of the cash customers. But like Lindy's, Shor's blossomed into the huge success it is just because some Broadway Pied Piper went there in the first place and lured the rest of the Big Drag along. The terrible Toots used to be the bouncer and later the manager at Billy LaHiff's Tavern, and he did carry a certain clientele with him when he opened his own business, but this alone is never enough to assure the success of an establishment. A restaurant or nightclub simply becomes *the* place to go to, and that's that.

Like Lindy's, Shor's specializes in good food, with simple,

excellently prepared dishes of the kind that most men and all Broadwayites like—steaks, stews, good chowders, thick slabs of tasty pie and fine coffee.

In addition, the liquor served at the tables and at the little horseshoe bar is of the best and served in good-sized glasses. And, since it would be a poor kind of Broadway hangout if the bartender only tended bar, one of Shor's barkeeps for a while was Frank Saunders, a good-looking, dark-haired Irishman who used to hang up his apron every so often and go off for a singing audition. He finally hooked up with radio.

The customers at Shor's are any show business personality you can think of—Bert Lahr, Joe E. Lewis, Bert Wheeler, Frank Fay, Brod Crawford, Tallulah Bankhead—a hundred million of Broadway's home guard, augmented daily by the latest Hollywood character to hit town. Frank Sinatra and his retinue make Shor's their headquarters when in town.

It is in Shor's, perhaps, that the art of table-hopping reaches its worst heights; no one ever sits through an entire meal without waving at least a dozen times, getting up and yelling three or four times and wandering off to at least two other tables to say hello—and try to sell a song or an act or a short story. I remember lunching there with Milton Berle once, and the stream of callers to the genial comic's table reminded me of the throne room at Buckingham Palace and the peasants being presented to the king. Milton had no illusions; he knew they were there to impress someone or to get something, but he was too polite to brush them off. Later that afternoon, at least three-quarters of the

callers, I have little doubt, boasted "Well, I was lunchin' at Toots' with Milton Berle t'day, and I said to Miltie, I said . . ."

Twenty-One, which draws a little more on the movie and the *nouveau-riche* mob than on the true strain of Broadwayite, is another important part of the Big Drag. Operated by a couple of outwardly haphazard but inwardly shrewd gentlemen named Jack and Charlie, one of whom has devoted a great part of his life to the collection and use of cowboy apparel, Twenty-One stems from a speakeasy background. It was one of the more elegant deadfalls in prohibition days, just as the Stork used to be one of those illegal joints. Today, however, Twenty-One wears fine linen and has a shiny face and combed hair.

It is beyond respectability, indeed; it has reached the rarified point where it can—and does—very often spit in the eye of any customer whose fame, it decides, is too limited for serious consideration.

As a practicing journalist, I have made frequent appearances in this lifted-pinky bar with various beautiful Hollywood maidens on my arm and have been buttered up extravagantly. "Ah!" the headwaiter will exclaim in obvious delight, "Miss Colbert!" And then, ever so politely, "And Mr. *Harumph!*" The presence of these queens will assure me either an excellent table in the coolness of the downstairs grill or the favored corner spot in the upstairs dining room, and my hungry knife will never want for pats of butter.

Let me visit this joint without Veronica Lake or Hedy

Lamarr, however, and I am greeted in somewhat different fashion by the headman. "Yes?" he begins, coldly. "Heimer? Heimer? Ummmm. No. No tables right now." Then he looks me up and down with obvious pity and disgust and, turning his broad back, dismisses me from his mind completely. I stand there like the poor little match girl for a while and then disappear, crushed, into the glare of Fifty-second Street outside.

Twenty-One, however, has the two requisites for a successful Broadway restaurant—good food and good liquor. It matters little that their prices are somewhat outlandish or their service a bit incoherent. This place, incidentally, carries its incongruous snobbishness to something of an extreme by having no signs to announce to the hungry or thirsty traveler that he is at an oasis. Only a handful of old coachmen hitching posts clutter up the front of an old brownstone cellar, and only the magic numerals "21" over the door give you a clew.

Other eating spots around the main stem where clusters of the initiate are apt to gather include Dinty Moore's, an old-fashioned, tiled-floor establishment on Forty-sixth Street that offers remarkable food and an occasional glimpse of George (Bringing Up Father) McManus at a corner table as its attractions; the Barberry Room, a swank, starred-ceiling, gloomy place on Fifty-second Street that is delightfully restful and boasts the best peach melba in town; Chambord, the French restaurant over on Third Avenue with the highest prices and the most courteous service; and Gilmore's Steak House on Forty-eighth Street off Third Avenue.

Gilmore's, incidentally, is one of the most unusual places catering to the Broadway mob. The last word in extravagant fittings—it was decorated by Franklyn Hughes—it is managed by Lynne Gilmore, whose trouble during the years she was a Powers model was that she had brains. The spectacularly beautiful Lynne, a symphony in red-gold hair who is addicted to wearing black dresses that she fills out handsomely, got tired of sitting around posing for photographers and artists. So she pestered husband Lou Levin, whose firm specializes in setting up and launching nightclubs, into giving her a restaurant to manage.

It is true, also, that one of the other reasons Lynne wanted to quit modeling was because she was gaining a dismaying reputation as the girdle girl. "I was just the type, it seems," she says. "I posed in every kind of girdle ever made—panty girdle, two-way stretch, lace girdle, flowered girdle, even a couple of choice corsets."

She and Lou did it up right when she entered the restaurant business; Gilmore's is so lush it makes most of the other swank East Side spots look like hotdog wagons. The walls are done in green lizard; the draperies are of a flowered material costing twenty dollars a yard; the entire place is soundproofed and the powder room is the only one in the world that looks like a powder room in the movies.

Its waiters are almost entirely graduates of the Pullman runs from New York to Washington, which may be one reason why the service is several cuts above average, and its clientele includes people like Gloria Vanderbilt Stokowski when she is in town—for little Gloria, my dears, is of Broadway and not of Park Avenue, no matter how much she

might insist—George S. Kaufman, Russel Crouse, Norman Krasna, Maggi McNellis and Wesley Ruggles.

Moving from the places more noted for eating than drinking, over to those where the reverse is true, we come first to John Perona's El Morocco, which, though more social than Broadway, still attracts a great many of the Big Drag crowd. El Morocco—or as *The New Yorker* once labeled it so brilliantly, the "splendid old goldfish bowl, full of some very ornate specimens"—is the place to spend the last part of your evening. By midnight or 1:00 A.M., the suburbanites and college children have usually cleared out, and Broadway and Park Avenue gather in equal parts to sit and stare.

The exceedingly respectable atmosphere of this East Side nightclub makes even the transaction of business seem a cardinal sin, and Broadwayites usually carry on their affairs in normal voices, which for them amounts to whispering. But the average socialite is unawed by this splendor, and very frequently goes in for fist-swinging and nose-bloodying. There have been some good, lusty battles in El Morocco, but the number of Broadwayites involved have been comparatively few, which might prove—that on the whole their behavior is somewhat better than that of their brothers from Groton and Andover.

Newspapermen on the prowl for stories are wont to pay an occasional visit to El Morocco—it was the favorite stamping-ground of the late Maury H. B. Paul when that rotund eccentric was setting the nation on its ear in his capacity as "Cholly Knickerbocker." However, if it is columnists you are after, Sherman Billingsley's Stork Club, on Fifty-third off Fifth Avenue, is the place to which to carry

your old bones. For Mr. Billingsley, perhaps more than any other café owner in New York, has a gift for and an appreciation of publicity.

It is in the Stork, sandwiched between giggling and overmellow debutantes and all the motley characters who make up the Broadway nightlife crowd, that you will find Winchell, telephone in hand and determined look of eagles on his face; or amiable Earl Wilson, the celebrated saloon editor who asks nothing more of life than the right to occasionally see Carole Landis in a bathing suit; or gray-haired, harassed-looking Lee Mortimer, every nightclub owner's friend; or bluff, good-looking Ed Sullivan; or small, intense Leonard Lyons, searching, ever searching for the O. Henry-formula anecdotes that won for Mark Hellinger a certain amount of journalistic notoriety.

The Stork is tastefully appointed and serves good enough food and liquor, but here again is a prime example of a spot that became the place to go just because a handful of citizens so decreed. Mr. Billingsley's stature as a nightclub owner is somewhat of a surprise, because he is neither suave, as is John Perona of El Morocco, nor crudely interesting, after the fashion of Toots Shor. Billingsley is a smart businessman, but exceedingly colorless. Perhaps the bubbling manner in which he treats newspapermen, which extends even to storing their shaving mugs in his private barbershop at the Stork, has more than made up for this outward lack of vivacity.

Many of the main-stem denizens spend all or some part of their evenings at the big, gaudy Monte Carlo, on Madison at Fifty-fourth which has obvious—but to date, unsuccessful—aspirations on the Stork-El Morocco clientele. There

is an orchestra here, augmented by that necessity of modern-day life, a rumba band, and the drinks are good. But Monte Carlo to date has fallen just a bit short. Tomorrow, next week, next month—perhaps by the time you open these pages—someone will have made it The Place to Go, and the great gray rats will have tumbled away from the other joints and over to this East Side rendezvous.

The Versailles is another spot to which Broadway occasionally foots it across town. Its habit of presenting an elaborate floor show and its policy of aiming at the suburban trade, in town for a night, have made it one of the goldmines of the Broadway gold coast. Here, incidentally, is one of the few bars in town where an authentic, Grade-A French .75, the drink of the devil, can be procured, if anyone cares.

There are dozens of others where you will find the Broadway mob scattered at night—the Carnival at Eighth Avenue and Fifty-first Street, where a slight, quiet man named Nicky Blair, an old hand at the nightclub profession, runs the works; the Zanzibar, a glittering, hoopla joint on Broadway at Forty-ninth that is a showcase for the best of the Negro show talent; the Copacabana, the East-sixtieth Street café operated by one-time press-agent Monte Proser, that is an authentic gathering spot for the Big Drag mob; the Latin Quarter, a cavernous, dreary place at Broadway and Forty-eighth where the patrons are invited to hit on the tables with hammers and that's about enough of that, and Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe in Forty-eighth Street, generally fitted out with stenographers and their boy friends from Weehawken and Union City who are in town for a

big time, but occasionally studded with Broadwayites who feel nostalgic and want to listen to Joe Howard sing "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," or hear Fritzi Scheff warble in her elderly tremulo, "Kiss Me Again."

In visiting a majority of these establishments, one oddity may strike you. Generally speaking, the manners on exhibition are those of pigs at the trough, with the screaming and yelling, the table-hopping, the brawling and the incomparable rudeness, but there usually is one man around who is dressed immaculately, mannered exquisitely and who is soft-spoken and courteous. You decide that he makes a grotesque addition to the goings on and you wonder how he ever became involved with this crowd—until you discover that he *has* to be there. He owns the joint.

A little research into the lives of these peculiar citizens, who tell the moneyed, the famous and the social how and when to behave, unearthed to me the fact that these ringmasters are none of them to the manner born. Not one can put after his name a "III," nor has his family had a box at the opera for a hundred years. As a matter of fact, I found on cursory inspection that their numbers include a former fruit and vegetable peddler, a Russian soldier, a shoe salesman, a pharmacist, a press agent, a deckhand and—God forbid—an editor.

Tony Mele is a classic example. Tall, slim, elegant, balding, Tony has the appearance of an earl or a count; in reality he runs the restaurant Theodore's and its upstairs nightclub, Le Ruban Bleu. Tony was born in a small Italian village, full of colorful atmosphere but with hardly any social standing, and as a boy he peddled fruits and vegetables from door to door. At eighteen, Tony worked for

an uncle in a Naples department store and then worked his way to Venice, where he and a cousin took photographs of tourists in St. Mark's Square—a forerunner, perhaps, of the sinister nightclub photography business that flourishes now along the main stem. From there, Tony became a wine-bottler in the cellar of a Parisian restaurant, was a bellboy in Bermuda and South America, came to New York to work in the Waldorf and Ritz-Carlton as a bellhop . . . and finally, a decade ago, opened Le Ruban Bleu and Theodore's. He is now a long way from dealing in vegetables, although an occasional customer *might* seem like an overripe tomato.

Then there is Barney Josephson, the owner of the two Café Societies, one downtown in Greenwich Village and one uptown. Barney was a shoe dealer in Trenton, New Jersey, who used to take business contacts over to Broadway to show them a good time. He claims he got so tired of being bored by the average nightclub that he opened his first Café Society as "the right place for the wrong people." Jack Gilford, an early master of ceremonies there, once described it as "just a little place for a few of us boys trying to escape from Brenda Frazier."

However, that degenerated a bit into the present-day clientele, which comprises equal parts of the Newport and Piping Rock crowd and a few of the more affluent cloak-and-suiters and a broken-down newspaperman or two. Barney, who might be a little arch in saying this, insists he doesn't know why people go to nightclubs. "You know how noisy and stuffy a nightclub can be," he declares. "Walking in the park is so much nicer, weather permitting."

John Perona, whose El Morocco is the rich man's Stork

Club, comes from a little town in Italy called Ivrea. He served as a deckhand on a small trans-Atlantic tub before he got together enough of the long green to come to this country and open his first unpretentious place in West Forty-sixth Street. His present plushy palace saw the light of night in 1932. Mr. Perona's own career reached a dizzy pinnacle in 1943, however, when he sat in Jack Topping's box—Number 21—at the opening of the season in the Metropolitan Opera House . . . the first saloon-keeper in history ever to sit in the Diamond Horseshoe at the Met.

The best of the uptown Russian places is the Casino Russe. Its manager, Peter Ligoff, is a one-time pharmacist from the old country. Its owner is short, dynamic Sasha Maeef, who fled the Russian Army in 1922. It is likely that the most unusual background of a saloon owner is that belonging to Herbert Jacoby, who runs the Blue Angel.

Jacoby once was secretary to Leon Blum, leader of the Popular Front in France, and at another time was editor of the leftist paper, *Le Populaire,* until the time of Blum's resignation as Premier. Jacoby, a native of Paris, wrote books on economics, was a diplomatic courier for the French War Department and also was a press agent for the Paris café, *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*—which he later bought out and used as a background for the heinous sin of introducing to the public the incomparable ("Oh, you *love-ly* people!") Hildegarde, the All-American What-is-it.

Then there is the former ham—debonair, graying Nicky Quattrociocchi—who runs El Borracho, the saloon with the coyly named Kiss Room, the ceiling of which is coated with the autographed lip prints of hundreds of feminine celebrities. Nicky was graduated in 1917 from the Royal Nautical

Institute of Palermo in Italy, which is comparable to our Annapolis, and early in the Twenties he turned up in Hollywood as an actor named Lucio Fiamma and played opposite Pola Negri, Baclanova and other assorted sirens.

These days, there aren't many rackets that are tied in with the nightclub business. Law and order seem to be rampant, and an honest thug has a hard time scratching out a living. However, one method of making an easy buck still prevails. This is the hatcheck racket, which until recently was more or less incomprehensible and a black art insofar as the paying customer was concerned. When Henry Lustig was sentenced to a long stretch in U.S. District Court for evading income taxes, the testimony at his trial included a comment by his former office manager that the rococo Longchamps restaurants, owned by Lustig, picked up around eight thousand dollars monthly in hatcheck tips.

I don't know what if any effect the publication of that information will have on the hatcheck racket, but eight thousand bucks per month means that every thirty days thirty-two thousand assorted gents flipped quarters into the plates at the assorted Longchamps merely to see a girl's face light up and hear her say, "Oh, thank you sir," or more especially not to hear her say sharply, "Thanks—sport!"

The girls' salaries didn't come out at the Lustig trial, but if they rate with those of other restaurants, they didn't top fifty dollars a week. In other words, your quarter didn't go toward little Mamie's first fur coat. It went into the coffers of a hatcheck concessionaire, who by organizing and systematizing a service that should be provided free by a restaurant or nightclub to its customers, struck a gold mine of

easy money. A good restaurant, like the Stork should be worth twenty thousand dollars a year or more on the hatcheck concession. There is nothing illegal about the profession. It is just part of the price you pay for that hilarious nebulousness called "exclusiveness." In Joe's Bar and Grill, the management provides hatracks for free; in the Stork, a charming wench takes your straw and returns it to you later on receipt of anything from a quarter up. I wouldn't want to say they wouldn't let you out of the Stork without tipping the girl, but it *might* be your last appearance in that establishment.

If anyone ever barks about the racket, the concessionaires inevitably come back with the crack that if you let the check girl keep the money she makes, who'd pay the people behind the counter who hang up and sort the coats and hats? And if you suggest that, well, they could split the tips between them, they cough politely and say "well, damn if it doesn't look like rain again and right after that rainy spell, too."

In a few scattered places along the Big Drag, the girls do keep their tips—after they pay the management for the concession rights. This situation, I understand, exists in Cavanagh's celebrated steak house down at Twenty-third Street, and a few other places. A unique distinction is enjoyed by Renee Carroll, who has been checking hats at Sardi's celebrated theatrical hangout for all of the two decades that that restaurant has been open. Renee pays nobody anything for her concession; the Sardis figure that her personality, her talent for knowing nearly everyone's name and her national fame as a celebrity of sorts are payment enough.

Allegedly, in the better spots the contract between proprietor and the hatcheck concessionaire specifies that the patron is not to be embarrassed if he neglects to leave a tip,

but less than one per cent of all customers fail to tip. Surely there must be more tight-fisted skinflints like myself than that.

Most of the girls in the business are union members and lead pretty regular hours. While they don't make fortunes out of the business, a smart checker can knock down or steal one out of every ten tips. The concessionaire even expects it, just as the saloon owner who knows his bartender dips into the till.

Generally, the Broadwayite knows where his quarter goes. There are many reasons why he doesn't do anything about it. He doesn't want to be embarrassed. He figures he might throw the hatcheck girl out of a job if he doesn't tip. He may be a union man, and the girls are solidly unionized. Or most likely, he hates to create a scene. Your true Broadway Joe will run a block rather than make a fuss.

So he goes on paying for Henry Lustig's racehorses—all except me, that is. I don't wear a hat any more.

CHAPTER SEVEN

City Slicker

If you were padding idly along the hot streets of Hollywood, dubiously eyeing the gaudy shirts and generally amusing yourself, and a blue fairy suddenly appeared in smoke and fire and commanded you to go all over town and find the typical American girl, you would be hard-pressed. For Hollywood seems to be full of tall, leggy, white-toothed, wind-blown young females, any one of whom could qualify as Miss America. The reason I drag this simile in by the heels is that you would have just as hard a time making a selection if that same blue fairy ordered you to produce one single character from the Big Drag who might be called Mr. Broadway.

Maybe you might end your search with "Broadway Sam" Roth, who sells all kinds of tickets but is more given to holding court, his white sombrero bobbing energetically as he gets over a point, along the main stem at night. Maybe your choice would be Billy Rose, the bantam Barnum, who, clad in a bathrobe, wanders idly through Flo Ziegfeld's elegant suite atop the theater where once the Follies were performed. Perhaps your Mr. Broadway might have been Damon Runyon, who forsook the Buckingham each night when the stars came out and wandered down into the sinful Big Drag with a happy smile.

On the other hand, it might be that your choice would be someone less known—a bass fiddler standing hopefully outside the Brill Building day by day, a song plugger drifting past *Variety's* offices, the doorman of the Paramount or a press

agent sitting moodily in the cavernous recesses of a nightclub in the afternoon when the chairs are piled on the tables. All of these citizens are Broadway, to an extent, and you couldn't describe the place without them. Pick any one of them, call him Mr. Broadway, and you wouldn't be far off the track.

But my own choice is a quizzical, sharply dressed, dark-haired (with Franchot Tone bald spot), gaudily cravated nightclub comedian named Joe E. Lewis. Those adjectives are unnecessary for citified readers, for wherever there is a metropolis with a passably respectable café and a horse room to take bets, there Mr. Lewis has been. He is a city man, whose moony face wreathes in smiles at the clatter and honk of traffic, and who sleeps contentedly and best when the noonday sun is trying desperately to sneak into his hotel room around the corner of a Venetian blind. I don't know whether Mr. Lewis ever has spent any considerable time in the country, but somehow it is a terrifying picture to me; I can see him, shivering and cursing, at the dead silence of a farm-country night, with the bullfrogs gurgling and the crickets whistling and the strange fumes of pure fresh air filtering into his bedroom.

And of all the cities in which Mr. Lewis has spent his time so amiably, none seems to fit him so well as the city of Broadway.

I remember it was bright and early in the Broadway day when I first met Joe; that would be about 5:00 P.M., when the late papers were beginning to flop from the trucks onto the stands in the Forties, and the natives had retired in haste to the bars, to sit over a quick one before dinner and to glare balefully at the commuters hurrying for the busses and subways.

The door to Joe's suite in the Warwick Hotel was open, so I walked in, and pretty soon the gentleman himself came wandering out from the bathroom, razor in hand and lather over his face, clad in a gaudy set of blue shorts. He was enthusiastic. "I hit the first at Gulfstream," he said, motioning to me to sit down and have a cigarette. But then, like the true scratch-sheet hotshot, his face lengthened. "$17.30 he paid," Joe said, glumly, "and he is twice that price on the morning odds line. He must have been a good thing."

Nothing, no other introduction, could have been more typical of the Broadwayite or more typical of Joe. Sing of Heloïse and Isolde in the calls of the morning birds, but talk of Mr. Broadway in terms of *Racing Forms*, coffee in Shor's, the fifty-buck window at Jamaica, Lindy's, the Automat, phony-bottom shot glasses in Fifty-second Street and ringside at Madison Square Garden.

Some sheet music lay on a battered blue piano that afternoon, and a steamer trunk full of scrapbooks and coat hangers stood half open in a corner of the room. Breakfast dishes, cold and weary with egg-wrinkles, cluttered a table, and by the half-eaten toast lay a copy of the day's *Journal-American,* folded open to Ed Curley's predictions for the day's racing. There would have been something unnatural about talking with Joe alone, for any Mr. Broadway always has a couple of odd citizens at his elbow, so it wasn't long before Joe's brother Murray, a haberdasher, stalked in, and a little later in came Danny Shapiro, who writes Joe's songs. They lounged around swinging their legs over the edge of a sofa and listening to the race results on a portable radio. Everything we talked about was punctuated by the announcer's breaking in with, "And now the sixth at Hialeah, off at 4:31 . . ."

All through that meeting, Joe kept reaching, sometimes effortlessly and at other times grinning and struggling hard, for gags, in the true Broadway tradition, which believes that there is a crack for every situation. Of course, with Lewis, it generally comes so easily that other comics hear him and then go home to bat their heads against the bathroom wall.

There was the time in Chicago fifteen years ago, for instance, when he was razored up and slugged so badly that for three years he couldn't talk and couldn't write. "I sent all three of the mugs who did it a nasty letter in the morning," Joe cracked about that one—and the next time he played Chicago, furthermore, he drove around in a car hilariously labeled, "Deputy Sheriff."

There is much waving of hands and half-smiles and vague comments of "Oh, *you* know," when you try to pin Mr. Broadway down to facts, for it is a job comparable to pasting mercury to a wall. But it does seem likely that he was raised on the East Side of Manhattan and was a Western Union messenger as a kid. At fifteen, he took to the road, ending up in a Michigan lumber mill—which must make him grin to himself these days, since so many lumber magnates, like the one in the play *Stage Door*, are steady cash customers at the high-class joints where Joe toils. During the first World War, Joe was underage for the draft but did get into the Merchant Marine and made one trip from Hoboken to Brest and back as an officer's messman.

His show career began with a couple of weeks in burlesque—a couple of rehearsal weeks, at that—and almost ended there, because he still was pretty tender in years and his mother didn't think too much of show business. She shipped him off to his brother's general store in a little Penn-

sylvania town, but that was no place for a good, lusty exhibitionist. So at nights, Joe managed to get away and do a blackface act for an outfit called the Honeyboy Jazz Band. Came vacation time, he wandered down to Atlantic City—and, you know, never did get back to the general store. He got himself a job singing in a beer garden, and after kicking around for a little while, perfecting his timing and expanding his natural comedy into a professional turn, he came to New York.

Around the same time, the prominent New Yorkers of the day included Larry Fay, who did quite well in the milk racket; Dutch Schultz, who was an excellent Prohibition beer baron until he ended up punctured with a half-dozen slugs over in New Jersey, and Vincent Coll, who never *could* keep his trigger finger quiet.

Joe worked in a lot of booby traps operated by gentlemen of this general caliber, for they had the nightclub business by the short hair, as well as everything else. However, until Chicago, Joe kept his nose clean. The Chicago story has six versions now, and I never could get Joe to talk about it, but it would seem to have happened like this:

There was a place called the Green Mill, where Joe, as its star, picked up five hundred dollars a week, which was paid out to him regularly by one Machine Gun Jack McGurn, who had graduated from gunman to impresario. Then there was another place called The Rendezvous, which offered Joe a grand, or two five-hundred-dollar bills, a week. Even in those days, Joe had a good working knowledge of the horses, and he figured out reasonably that a thousand simoleons would take care of a good many more bets than five hundred. He took the offer—and riled McGurn.

"You better quit that place," McGurn said.

"Nah," Joe said. He opened at The Rendezvous under police protection and knocked the customers into the aisles. Nothing happened opening night, and Joe just grinned and settled back to working, collecting all that dough and playing the horses.

It was about two nights later that three guys, none of them qualifying as collar ads, walked into his dressing room. "We hate to do this, Joe," they said—and then beat him over the head with the butt ends of forty-fives, slit his cheek wide open and almost severed his vocal cords.

It was a rough deal, and there wasn't much talking, breathing or walking for Joe for the next several years. But he came out of it, and before long was right back at the old stand, gagging, betting, grinning and, quite possibly, winning so much respect from the underworld that nobody has taken a poke at him since. Since those days, of course, the musclemen have pretty much drifted out of the clubs and into more modern methods of graft, like the labor field, but it is likely that Joe misses them just a bit, for they lent an authentic, if dirty, color to the tinselly life of which he is a part.

Joe got into a couple of movies after he recovered, and of these he talks nonchalantly. "I made two," he says, "one grossed four hundred dollars and the other was a flop." He also turned up in occasional vaudeville shows masquerading as musical comedy, "but the seats were bad—they faced the stage." He did one called *Right This Way* that lasted eight days and another called *The Lady Comes Across,* which drew him from critic Brooks Atkinson the affectionate label of "vaudeville mountebank." Burns Mantle merely called him a genius and let it go at that, which is perhaps the best way.

But these were only extracurricular jaunts for Joe; his soul

lay in the smoky, clattery, gilded halls of the nightclubs, and there was where he ultimately returned, as if to home. Now his is a set schedule; all fall and early winter he is in some place like Monte Proser's Copacabana, and then in January it's off to the Copa in Florida—and the first at Hialeah. By the end of March, he is performing in Ciro's in California, and then there are stretches in the Mounds in Cleveland and the Chez Paree in Chicago. Oddly enough, while most of Broadway looks on Joe as it most representative and greatest native son, he has a fondness for Chicago. "I get to see more races there," he says, logically. "They got a later post time for the first."

Along Broadway, as perhaps nowhere else, the entertainers delight in insulting the cash customers. The late Jack White had a genius for it, aiming his barbs at celebrities, while Toots Shor flails about him with a sledgehammer. Joe E. is a bit kindlier and picks only on drunks and hecklers who insist on breaking up his routine. Like Joe Louis' counterpunching, he turns their obvious remarks into great good gags. "Look," he will say to a drunk, "I don't know what I'd do without you, and I'd rather." Or to some whiffled matron, "Now madam—I don't go over to your counter at Macy's and annoy you when you're working, do I?" One drunk, after needling Joe for an extra long time, finally took one too many and slid out of his chair to the floor, whereupon Joe walked over, looked down and shook his head. "That's the first time I ever saw three heels in one pair of shoes," he commented.

Most of these gags are original with Joe, although they have appeared in watered-down form elsewhere in the local hot spots. While he may not have the tremendous stock of prepared ad libs with which Milton Berle dazzles the cash

customers, he has enough to win for himself a weekly salary that lies between three and four thousand dollars a week—about three times as much as the President of the United States makes, and considerably more than the salaries of the fabulously paid movie stars.

Many of Joe's best gags have been coined in the rowdy-dow cafés of Chicago. It was at College Inn, for example, that Joe, fellow-comic Jerry Bergen and a newspaperman went one night to tear a herring. The waiter, falling over backwards to please Lewis, listened attentively to the dinner orders, whereupon Joe ordered his entire meal in doubletalk, that strange tongue of which he is a complete master. The waiter, diplomatic to the end, padded off and soon came back—with the wrong food, naturally. Joe tried again, and again in doubletalk. And again, the "wrong" food. This time the waiter brought the manager—to whom Joe gave his order in straight English, with a pained look on his face because the waiter hadn't understood. There might have been overtones of unkindness to this, except that Joe grinned and slipped five dollars to the waiter.

Joe makes no bones of the fact that he once had a deep and abiding thirst, and many were the nights when he would weave onto the floor, fix his audience with a smirk and comment that he was "up here with my two partners, Haig and Haig."

He tells another story of inebriation, however, in which he wasn't the dominant figure. This involved John Black, the author of the tune "Dardanella," who once was Joe's partner. "One night," Joe says, "John was celebrating his birthday or something, and when he went on, he was drunk as a hoot owl. That was all right, for most of the act, because

he just sat in the shadows playing the piano while I sang. He was a helluva pianist, tight or sober. But I was afraid of our smash finish, in which I moseyed to the piano, John went into a duet with me and we walked off the stage together. He started off swell, until it came to the part of the song where I was supposed to laugh and slap John on the back. Fearfully, I just gave him a gentle slap—and poor John went head first into the orchestra pit. And that was how I decided to work solo the rest of my life."

As a respected member of the exclusive set that rides to hounds in camel's-hair coats with crops made of rolled-up *Racing Forms*, and indulges in hunt breakfasts of lox and bagels at Lindy's, Joe for a long while had the orthodox Broadway outlook on women. A dame was a dame. A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar—you know. Girls were broads, tomatoes, onions and bags, and some of them were good kids—but just for laughs. Never take a dame seriously. And Joe was the most cynical of all . . . so you can imagine how stunned the boys were when he fell in love with a dimpled, creamy-faced little nightclub singer and movie starlet named Martha Stewart. The citizens of the Big Drag even looked up from their scratch sheets for five minutes to discuss the atomic news.

The love life of a Broadwayite always has intrigued me, because I am never quite sure where he fits it in among the omnipresent business deals, the hours in the gin mills and the horses. So I went to Martha to find out about her love affair with Joe, and she told me quite cheerfully one morning while polishing off breakfast in her hotel room and looking the way every woman should across the table.

"To begin with," she said, "in the days when I was kicking

around the country singing with bands or in clubs, I always used to hear of Joe E. Lewis, the wonderful nightclub entertainer. Boston, Chicago, Hollywood—always the same story. 'Go see Joe E. Lewis—funniest man in the world,' friends would tell me. So I would duck off, instead, to a movie. 'Nobody is that good,' I said. 'Phooey.'

"Then one night I went into the show at the Copa in New York and Joe turned out to be the star—except that we rehearsed for three weeks before the opening and he never appeared once. He didn't even turn up for dress rehearsal, the afternoon of the night opening, so I had my mind definitely made up about him. I couldn't stand him—'already yet,' as they say. Came the first show, and I did my number, got off the floor and went up in the back of the club where they work the spotlights, folded my arms grimly and waited to watch his act. You know—go ahead, show me.

"And then . . . well, then, he walked on, kind of quiet, the way he does, and started to make with all his wonderful business—and I just stood there with my mouth open. I think that with the first joke he told, I fell madly in love with him."

But if Martha was madly in love with Joe, Joe didn't know she existed, and he didn't love "nobody." The Cupid to fix the deal turned up in the person of a mournful-looking, colorless multi-millionaire from Cuba, whose name is Jorge Sanchez and whose business is sugar. I recall spending a sad, empty little night doing the town with Sanchez and a party of poor, dizzy little dolls and hangers-on, but that is not, as they say, here nor there. It seems that Sanchez and Joe are like Damon and Pythias, and Martha soon found that wherever one was, the other was, too.

This information came in the natural course of events, be-

cause Sanchez liked her company and kept taking her out to dinner and showering her with gold bracelets, as is his wont. Sanchez' amiable wife, Brownie, gave him an annual two-month's "holiday" in New York and used to just grin at his largesse with the nightclub beauties because he kept it strictly platonic. "But I can't take bracelets from you," Martha would say to Sanchez when he produced his nightly bangle, and Joe, on the other side of the table, would sigh wearily. "Go on, take it," he would insist, cynically. "I'll take it down to the hock shop for you and we can split it fifty-fifty."

"You could just see him," Martha continued, smiling at the recollection, "saying to himself, 'Boy, this is some gold-digger!' "

That went on for about a month and a half, with Sanchez taking Martha out and Joe coming along for the ride. One night they dined in Jim Moriarity's Barberry Room and as they were leaving, two girls near the hatcheck room eyed Martha. "Who's that?" one whispered. "Oh," said the other, "that's Joe E. Lewis' girl." Both Joe and Martha had overheard, and she turned to him and laughed wistfully. "Isn't that a joke?" she said, but to Joe, the whole thing suddenly dawned, like a *B* movie.

"You know," he said, looking at Martha as if he'd seen her for the first time, "that isn't a bad idea at that." Whereupon, Lewis and Stewart became inseparable. He gave her a platinum ring with thirty diamonds on it, and before he married her, gifted her with a gold ankle bracelet set with rubies, diamonds and sapphires spelling out "MRS." on it. The stuff was typically Broadway and gaudy as the Coca Cola sign in Times Square, but the sentiment was fine and true and there could be none to quarrel with the intentions. Love along the

Big Drag, it seems, may be carried on more garishly than love on Park Avenue, but it can be just as sincere. Probably more so.

The only thing that may ever spoil their idyll is Joe's penchant for playing the horses, which Martha tries to understand but never quite does. Most women, of course, die a thousand deaths when they see their men's money fly out the two-dollar win window. "I don't mind his playing them," she told me, before their marriage, "but if he'd only limit his betting to one bet a week—on a twelve to one shot, for instance, that couldn't lose—think how much better it would be."

Another little thing that annoys Martha is the fact that whenever she sits down to dinner with Joe, every waiter in the room comes over and whispers hot tips to him. "I feel like I'm in a stable," she protests. "I feel like I'm a new two-year-old filly being paraded around the paddock. Sometimes when I'm out with Joe, I swear I can smell that damned racetrack, even if it's more than thirty miles away."

Joe, on the other hand, was worried about only one thing before he married Martha—that she was on her way to becoming a great movie star, "and while I'm still knocking my brains out, entertaining the butter-and-egg men in gin mills, you'll be one of the Hollywood élite and you'll brush me off."

"How could I do that?" she asked me. "Even if I ever fell out of love with him, I'd still stay married to him because I'd be sure of laughs for all my life."

Jack Entratter, who's head man at the Copa in Broadway, says Joe is the greatest nightclub entertainer of all time, but he has one weakness. "He gets carried away while he's doing his act," Entratter says. "The musicians have to blow a whistle to get him off the floor. Once he finished his number and ran

into his dressing room to change, but the applause was so great that he trotted back on again—wearing his dinner jacket and gym shorts."

He also is a little difficult for the average newspaper interviewer. There was one poor young man to whom he told this one: "It was at the Trocadero, that I gave Judy Garland, George Raft, Deanna Durbin and the Martins—Tony and Mary—their first chance. Mary came to me, poor kid, and begged for a tryout. She was about to be dispossessed. No one wanted to listen to her, but I told the mob to pipe down and give the youngster a chance."

Pause. Then: "And that, so help me God, is the biggest lie I can think up to tell you at the moment."

Westbrook Pegler tells of the time he and Joe were wandering across the street from a bank in Chicago and Joe stuffed his hand into his overcoat pocket and rammed it into a policeman's back. "Get in there," Joe barked, "and grab us a hunnert grand, and be quick about it." The cop just turned, smiled and said, "Mr. Lewis, you are so comical."

As an entertainer, he is blessed twice: he has a Groucho Marx attitude toward life, in which everything is slightly ridiculous, and he works hard and polishes his material endlessly, between bets on the horses. His songs can be recognized instantaneously—"Humdrum She and Monotonous Me," "Twenty-five Thousand Dollars a Year," "Sam, You Made the Pants Too Long," and his plaintive one about poor little February, which has only twenty-eight days when the other months have thirty and even thirty-one.

During the Second World War, he toured through thirty thousand miles of South Pacific, as he puts it, "showing off for the boys." "I saw some real talent," he recalled. "I 'member

I was doing a show in the rain, outdoors, on Guam or some place like that, and right in the middle of my act, a rat walked across the stage. 'Hey, bud, where ya think ya goin'?' I said—and would you believe it, the rat stopped, turned and looked, with more perfect timing than Crosby. He was the hit of the show."

Mr. Broadway is usually up and about at three-thirty, at which hour he promptly turns on the radio for the early horse results and then calls up room service to "ask for the four freedoms," breakfast, newspaper, mail and a scratch sheet. Then he "lays around" until it's time to go to work, unless he gets out to the track for the last few races, and he listens to the radio, paying particular attention to programs like Superman. About eight, he walks over to the Copa, has a quick cup of coffee and strolls out on the floor with his "H. V. Kaltenborn Blues" or something—and to his credit, he gives the dinner customers the same full show as the 2:00 A.M. crowd. After that, he gets over to Shor's about nine-thirty and joins "the boys"—who may be Bert Wheeler or Brod Crawford or orchestra leader Eddy Duchin and "other jerks like them and me," and "we lie to each other for an hour or so." After that, he patronizes one of the two newsreel houses in the neighborhood and finally returns to the club for the midnight show.

"When that's over," Joe says, "I do my hostess work. You know, I drift around the tables for an hour with the 'Hello, pal' business, and slapping backs and such." If Sanchez is around, Joe ends up at Jorge's table, or when Runyon was in the house, he squared off with the columnist for a game of gin rummy. About three-thirty or four the Copa shuts down and Joe and any accumulated friends will drift over to Marian's

little restaurant on Fifty-fourth Street, where you can get six slices of French toast for a nickel. Here, according to Joe, "I lie some more, with cab drivers and assorted thugs I know," and ultimately he returns to his hotel, reads the morning papers and by seven is back in the hay for his day's sleep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Pour le Sport

If you were to give the average citizen of Broadway a baseball bat and ball, he probably would fumble around for a little while and then turn to you and complain that "this cue is awfully thick and how in God's name do you think a ball this size is going to fit into the corner pocket?" For there is nothing even remotely athletic about the average Broadwayite. No unsightly muscles wrinkle his neatly-draped jackets, and the closest thing to tragedy in his life is an elevator strike, when he is forced to call on all his reserve to walk up five flights of stairs in the Park Central. There are times when it does seem probable that Broadway's population is composed almost entirely of the kids who always finished last in the obstacle race back in school.

Bearing this in mind, it is a little startling to observe the relish and frenzy with which Broadway goes in for spectator sports. Drift down and around the main stem early of an afternoon. Along the street corners and in the bar and grills and the lobbies of buildings, so much of the talk is about the fourth at Belmont, or whether Vandermeer will shut out the Giants that afternoon, or if Louis will take more than five rounds to knock out his latest setup, or what Dempsey would have done to Louis had they both been in their prime together. And by midafternoon, many of the little knots of sharpies have evaporated, and you will find the component parts only by taking a cab up to the Stadium or the Polo

Grounds, or a Long Island Railroad train out to Belmont, or on Saturdays by wandering off to the nearest college football game, involving such New York teams as the Fordhams, the Columbias, or even, imagine, the Manhattans. On Sundays, of course, he is watching the pro footballers destroy themselves.

Perhaps wishful thinking is at the root of this mass interest in the doings of those with strong backs and weak minds; undoubtedly it *does* have something to do with it, as the Broadwayite identifies himself with the ballplayer who has just belted one out of the lot, or the jockey who has handridden a long one home under the wire. A more realistic viewpoint, however, is the understanding of the gambling possibilities involved.

Nine out of every ten guys along Broadway are betting men; they were when they came to the main stem, and if they weren't, they soon were converted. They will bet on everything and anything—on the respective speed of two raindrops skidding down a restaurant window, on the poker hands involved in automobile license-plate numbers, on which horse will finish last in a given race, on whether the next batter will walk or strike out. And the possibilities for engaging in this sinful but pleasant pastime are endless in sport. They reach their zenith in the one sport that above all others has been identified with the Broadway crowd—horseracing.

Even in the years before the war years, those incredible seasons at the track when fantastic betting was engaged in, and the rickety old New York ovals bulged dangerously with crowds of fifty and sixty thousand, Broadway was enamored of the sport. Any afternoon from one to five, you would find

the citizens of the Big Drag, their blinding clothes taking on a more natural look when mingled with the rococo garb of the track regulars, wandering around the paddock or clubhouse at whichever park they were off and running. There would forever be Al Jolson, for instance, amiably doping out each race and then unloading thick bank rolls with *sang-froid* and aplomb.

The gentleman with the patent-leather hair studying the *Morning Telegraph* would be George Raft, and the big, pale-looking man with the grin and the six stooges would be Milton Berle. Bathed in his Miami tan and snapping his fingers once as the horses thundered across the finish line would be Joe E. Lewis, and if you went through the house carefully, you could count a thousand more Broadway personalities who were engaged in the engrossing but always fatal war with the pari-mutuel machines.

Many of Broadway's first citizens have gone in even more completely for the sport by buying and racing horses—or, as Winchell likes to describe this gesture, the Beginning of the End Department. Fred Astaire, once of the Big Drag but more recently of Hollywood and Vine, has raced galloping gluepots for nearly a quarter of a century. It was only last summer that his Triplicate pulled down a hundred-thousand-dollar jackpot at Hollywood Park. Don Ameche, another one-time Broadway boy in the films, is a big racing man all over the country and sends his horses from California to Chicago and New York on many occasions for big stakes events.

In the summer of 1946, Louis Prima, the trumpeter, was the idol of the main stem—he raced a stable of horses that automatically were played heavily by Broadwayites because *he* is a Broadwayite, and they turned out to be fairly good

horses and occasionally came in at long prices. Mr. Prima's colors were red with a white trumpet, and when they bobbed home in front, his band played with extra zest that night. There were even tales, as I recall, of his band's buying a horse to race, too. And then, of course, there was Bing Crosby, before he turned "honest" and went in for baseball. His horses may have lost money at the track, but they paid handsomely for their keep by becoming the butt of many radio jokes on the Groaner's program.

The men in racing themselves usually don't have too much time to spend on Broadway, for the sport is an exacting one and demands that they rise with the sun, or even before—which doesn't leave many hours for the bright lights. But some of the more successful jockeys manage to combine the two reasonably well. Lean, mournful-looking Eddie Arcaro, the dean of the riders, is a familiar figure in the better night-clubs in town, and he also in recent years has taken an active interest in show business and has backed several plays with coin that he has amassed by whipping home Whirlaway and Devil Diver.

Arcaro is, however, what the Big Drag people call a very smart apple. They do not sweep him out from under the tables of the joints at closing time. A good dinner, with no potatoes—for he has to watch his weight—a drink or two and a good floor show—offer these to Edward and he is happy.

Don Meade, never to be labeled anything but the stormy petrel of racing, is another to whom the bright lights are no mystery. Conn McCreary is to be found frequently along the main stem, and in his day, the great Earl Sande liked night-clubs so much that he even tried singing in one, after his riding days were done.

Wherever the races are, there will always be found at least a part of Broadway. In the cold months they are at lovely Hialeah in Florida. Come August, when the Big Drag is an empty, humid barnyard, the Forty-second Street riding and marching society is to be found in gladed old Saratoga, rubbing elbows with Whitneys and Wideners and doing card tricks for the delighted natives.

Any night in August along Saratoga's own Broadway is like a night on Broadway, for the same faces are there, the same dark shirts and wide-shouldered jackets, the same skeptical faces from which the same cracks are made, via the same mouth-corners. The Saratoga nightclubs, the Piping Rock, Arrowhead Inn and the Lakeside, are stuffed with acts that might have been at La Martinique or the Copa the week before. Only the crickets and the weird-tasting water and the roosters crowing at dawn on the outskirts of town bring you back to reality.

If there is one night of the week that may safely be said to be set aside *pour le sport,* that night is Friday—fight night at the Garden. The Garden, of course, is Madison Square Garden, moved uptown from Madison Square, more than a score of blocks, since that memorable night when Harry K. Thaw pumped Stanford White full of lead. Each Friday in this gloomy cavern, one Michael Strauss Jacobs, his store-teeth clacking merrily, offers a couple of plug-ugly pugs in the squared circle at outlandish prices. Fight night at the Garden is an engagement that must be kept, and if you cannot put your finger on a particular Broadway character that evening, it is six, two and even, in the language of the rabid, that he will be at ringside in the Garden.


HOTEL NOTRE
ACME

Stretching east to Broadway from the Garden, along Forty-ninth Street, is famous Jacobs Beach—no more a beach than U.S. Route 1 is, but given that now-celebrated name by some sports writer who observed the driftwood tossed up on that block—fighters, managers, agents, referees, hangers-on, bums and just characters in general. It is along Jacobs Beach, as columnist Dan Parker has pointed out amiably, that many of the famous and unconscious *bon mots* have been spoken, for the Broadway boys who hole out here are not given to an exact command of the English language.

Parker cites Maxie Rosenbloom's instruction to Leo Lindy to furnish him with a "well-to-do" sirloin steak, and Hymie Caplin's remark about his fighter who had "high blood pleasure" and later had to have a "blood confusion." Mike Jacobs hisself, the noble promoter, once reportedly contemplated suing a sports writer for "definition of character" and fight manager Al (The Built) Weill balked at driving down Broadway during a light rain or "grizzle" because there were too many "intersexual" streets.

The real genius in this department, however, is fight announcer Harry Balogh, a dapper soul who succeeded the late Joe Humphreys as master of ceremonies at the garden, and whose remarkable remarks include his introduction of Barney Ross as "a former native of New York."

There is a sadness about the Garden area, however, for along its busy streets are forever drifting mugs who once were young, hard, strong and headliners inside the joint, and now are cauliflower-eared, fat, seedy, and given to walking with the herky-jerky gait that is the mark of the punchdrunk. Up and down Eighth Avenue they wander, uncertainly, grinning foolishly, touching their caps hesitantly if someone slips them

a quarter, or halting some impatient young mauler and boring him with the story of how they knocked out Kid Snatch in three heats just fourteen years ago today.

Cabs pull up in front of the Garden in the early evening of fight night and discharge their brawny young fares at the doors of this palace of swat, and as they hurry to their dressing rooms they grin or chuckle at the looney antics of some slap-happy old fighter on the sidewalk. But will they end up on their heels like that? "Who—me? Don't be silly. When I get a hundred grand, I'm going to quit this racket and open a nice little bar and grill over in Orange, and . . ." It has a familiar ring.

Running bars seems to be about the only occupation for which the average fighter is suited, once he has hung up his gloves, and there are many of them around town. Mickey Walker, the old middleweight champ, used to have a place—it still bears his name—right across the street from the Garden, but he sold it to give all his attention to painting in oils, in which he developed a startling proficiency.

Jim Braddock, whose defeat of Max Baer for the heavyweight title in the Thirties was one of the all-time upsets in the fight business, was another who once ran a tavern in the Garden area. And up in Seventy-second Street, twenty or thirty blocks north of the main stem, Benny Leonard fronted for a joint for awhile.

Most of the saloons in the Garden area, however, are tawdry, sawdust-on-the-floor institutions, where, if they have a waiter, he slaps drinks down on your table and then directs you to pay him seventy-fi' cents right away. They are sandwiched in, too, by dingy little delicatessens and liquor stores and second-hand men's shops and newsstands, and with their

clientele of mugs and pugs, they have a strange, musty air of yesterday about them.

The fighters themselves are familiar ones along the Big Drag when their long weeks of training are done with and the big bout is behind them, they cut loose, generally, in every booby trap on the stem. There is a dogged, pitiful determination about them as they go out to Have a Good Time, and at their heels, like coyotes out on a scavenger hunt, are the customary hangers-on and the babes, fighting for the free drinks and the loose money. No matter who the mug is, whether a hell-for-leather genius like Dempsey or a big clunk like genial Primo Carnera, he is always "The Champ" to the bums who are out for the contents of his purse.

It is a lonely, misbegotten life that a fighter leads, and when one occasionally comes along like Max Baer, who could counterpunch the grifters and spongers into submission with one hand, because he was essentially of Broadway himself, it is a delightful occasion. Joe Louis, most notable of all latter-day fighters, usually limits his nightclub appearances to infrequent visits to Fifty-second Street jazz joints to hear some good colored saxophonist or to ponder the torch songs of Billie Holiday.

Besides fights and racing the other big sport to draw the Broadway trade is baseball, and come two or three in the afternoon of a summer day, many of the citizens are to be found up in the ballyards. Ray Bolger's afternoons, for instance, melt into a sort of ritual; he rises around noon after his show of the night before, breakfasts in the Waldorf Men's Bar and then heads for the Polo Grounds or the Stadium, where he is such a regular that on special occasions, like bene-

fit games or festive days, he is called on as master of ceremonies. Milton Berle is another who goes for baseball, and George Raft will be found on the days when he is in New York, sitting in a box at Ebbets Field watching approvingly the managerial antics of his pal, Leo Durocher.

Not many of the ballplayers themselves return the trade, and spend their nights along Broadway, for this is a project calling for the expenditure of funds, and since time began, the ballplayer has rather deservingly carried a reputation as a skinflint. However, there are exceptions; Joe DiMaggio and Hank Greenberg are nightclubbers in a mild way.

Horace Stoneham, whose family owns the Giants, and who is their president, is a nightly habitué of joints like the Stork and Toots Shor's, and there have been sharp complaints from many sports writers and private citizens that he is given to transacting and announcing his deals for ballplayers in the hallowed halls of saloons of that sort. Larry MacPhail, head of the Yankees, is only once in a while to be spotted along the main stem, but not half so often as you might expect, in view of his general similarity in appearance and actions to the average Broadwayite.

The other sports draw some, but not too much of Broadway's business. Hockey is for the out and out gamblers, and football only lately has come to absorb the interest of the Broadwayite, with the rise in popularity of the professional games. Ordinarily, the native of the Big Drag looks on the gridiron sport as the "collitch boys' " dish, and he shuns it.

Tennis and golf attract an occasional Broadway fan, but on the whole these sports are Greek to the average sharpie,

probably because there is no fighting, no tearing limb from limb and no screaming and yelling involved. Mr. Broadway, of course, is an extrovert, given to voicing his feelings, and he is a flounder out of the ocean at a spectacle where he cannot say in loud terms whether it is good, bad or lousy.

The sport that used to really move the Broadway mob was six-day bikeracing, but that lovely and raffish sport disappeared during the war years and has yet, at this writing, to put in a return appearance. Its memories of jamming and customers sleeping peacefully in their seats, and cigarettes glowing cozily in the Garden murk and the crazy cyclists sweating their heads off remain just that, memories.

Once a sports hero has had his taste of Broadway, he finds it hard to live without it, like a dope addict deprived of his morphine. They are forever turning up in one capacity or another, like the late Jack Johnson, the old colored heavyweight champion, and Grover Cleveland Alexander, the great Cub and Cardinal pitcher of another day, who were longtime feature attractions at Hubert's Flea Museum along Forty-second Street. We have mentioned big Ben Morosz, the one-time giant boxer who now is a bouncer at Roseland, and then there is Frank Hunter, the portly ex-tennis star now connected with the liquor firm run by the owners of Twenty-One, who is no stranger to the Big Drag.

Max Baer and Maxie Rosenbloom, a couple of the most engaging hams ever to pull on mitts, returned in style as a comedy nightclub team recently, and had the patrons of the Club 18 rolling in the aisles, while Jack Dempsey runs the Great Northern Hotel just off the main stem and in addition

has a finger in the restaurant on Broadway that bears his name. Even the elegant Gene Tunney occasionally forsakes his well-bred Connecticut friends to put in an appearance along the rattle-de-bang Big Drag.

CHAPTER NINE

Characters Studied

In the end, of course, the people are Broadway. The lights tick and click and blink and shimmer, and the cab horns burp and the smell of popcorn and orange juice lies over the throngs like a cloud of gas, and all these help to make up the image of the Big Drag. But the people of Broadway count most of all, for these are citizens who once might have been farm boys or shoe salesmen in Duluth or college kids in California, but who now have been molded in the eccentric, weird form of the Broadwayite. And the people are, roughly, split into two sides. Some, like Joe E. Lewis, are the core and cogs of the mainstem, the machinery that makes it go. And others are the people who press the starter and pull the switches—like Billy Rose.

Billy Rose has a five-story house on Beekman Place that cost $300,000 when it was new; it has fourteen rooms, six baths and a wine vault. On week ends he kicks around a fifty-seven-acre farm up in Westchester County, so just how true is the label Broadwayite for this bantum Barnum? Very true, I think. For while you can make a country squire out of a man, nominally, you can't beat the Broadway out of him. And Billy Rose has soaked up Broadway too long ever to be anything but a part of it. He's been around more than twenty years, sleeves rolled up and fists flying, and whenever I think of him I think back to 1925, the year of raccoon coats and bell-bottom trousers.

The crowds were humming bits of "The Prisoner's Song" and "Alabamy Bound," as they shuffled along the Big Drag, and something about who stole their hearts away. It was the year of Flying Ebony's Derby in the snail's time of 2.07 and three fifths. The Pirates won the World Series, Jack Dempsey was in court all the time and the dirigible Shenandoah broke up and scattered itself all over Ohio farm country. It was a nervous, hysterical, silly year, and nowhere was it jumpier or more hysterical than along Broadway. The two young men, one dark-haired and tiny and the other dark-haired and stocky, looked out at the big stem dubiously.

"I'm only twenty-five years old," the tiny young man said, "and I think you'll admit I'm not doing badly. When I'm thirty-one, I'll have enough saved to get away from Broadway. If I have to go to a South Sea island, I'll get away just the same. And I'll never come back."

His name was Billy Rose. The stocky young man, who also was not doing badly, just grinned and suggested they go get a drink. His name was Mark Hellinger. They set off up Broadway, sifting through the mushrooming crowd, and just to watch the tiny young man gave you the shakes. He was intense and nervous, and he moved with quick, jerky motions and grabbed at his companion's arm whenever they came to a street intersection. He was scared to death of traffic, and impatient with it at the same time. He had a lot of things to do, and there was little enough time in which to do them. It was like the way he drank coffee; he couldn't wait for the damn lump sugar to melt, and he worried it and mashed at it impatiently with his spoon. You had to get a move on; this is a fast world, you know. Snap it up. The race, my boy, is to the swift.

Twenty years make a difference. The tiny young man never

did get away from Broadway, of course. Just a few months ago I sat down with him in his elaborate offices in the Ziegfeld Theater—the same offices where Flo Ziegfeld stomped around in his bathrobe waiting for inspiration from the muse—and studied him. His eye was clear and his hand steady, and he lazed back in his chair comfortably and moved and spoke with deliberation. He was, maybe, ten pounds overweight, and there was an easiness to his manner. He didn't care whether school kept or not. He had won the race.

"I wonder what I was trying to prove," Billy said philosophically. "Did I knock myself out! I never got to bed before six in the morning, and I drank too much coffee and smoked too many cigarettes. Broadway couldn't make a move without I had to know just what went on. It's a wonder I didn't end up with ulcers." He grinned. "I guess I was trying to prove I was Billy Rose," he said.

Merely to New Yorkers once, but now to the whole country, the name Billy Rose means crowds, excitement, razzmatazz, a thousand chorus girls, four thousand swimmers. Therefore it is startling to see how he lives these days. He doesn't drift over to his office until two in the afternoon, is home by six and in between he does as little as possible. When I saw him, his business that day had consisted of writing a letter to General Eisenhower.

He doesn't see song pluggers or playwrights, and by his own admission, he has dedicated his life in recent years to the removal of annoyances and irritations from his existence. He has carried this so far that the elevator in the Ziegfeld will not stop at the seventh floor, on which his offices are situated, for anyone but Billy himself or Eleanor Holm, his almost equally celebrated wife.

During the summer of 1946, however, Billy *did* develop one

new interest in life—his career as a columnist. He started fiddling around with odds and ends in his paid ads for the Diamond Horseshoe, and then reportedly received such great reader interest that a syndicate took him under its wing and started selling the pieces that he formerly paid to have appear in print.

Billy called the column "Pitching Horseshoes," and it was offered as a potpourri of philosophy, old jokes and wisecracks, some of which were good and some of which were not so good. Billy did almost all of the work himself; a young advertising-agency account executive polished the crude gems but they were mined originally by Rose.

The way our hero looks at it, there isn't any reason for him to knock himself out any more. At the time I interviewed him he had three ventures going—the operetta, *Carmen Jones,* his nightclub, the Diamond Horseshoe and the Ziegfeld Theater, which he had rented to the smash musical *Show Boat.* The latter, he told me flatly, would gross five million dollars. Would gross Billy Rose five million dollars, that is; no one has any slice of Monsoor Rose, no cut, no graft.

From 1923 to 1936, according to Billy, he never got to bed once before six in the morning and in the last three years he was married to Fannie Brice, he didn't see her all told for more than fifteen weeks. When things really got rolling in the early Thirties, he used to send fifty wires a day on the teletype, and he had a battery of phones like in the movies. He still has a battery, but it doesn't work now. He used to sign seven or eight hundred checks a week. What changed all this? He is inclined to charge it up to two items—his marriage to Miss Holm and the success of his *Aquacade.* Eleanor got him interested in home life, and in 1939 he bought their Beekman

Place house and spent the next several years furnishing it.

"The *Aquacade,*" he said, "ended my financial worries, so I just staffed my various enterprises with good men and let them handle their end of things by themselves. Actually, I guess, I retired at forty." He smiled. "But I was bored at forty-two—so I got back into the swing of show business on a modified scale."

It has been a long road since, at eighteen, William S. Rosenberg was the amateur shorthand champion of the world. Remember the days when he ran the Backstage Club and suggested one night to a teary-voiced brunette named Morgan that she sit on the piano when she sing? Or when he operated the Fifth Avenue Club across the street from John D. Rockefeller's home, and a beautiful girl named Betty Compton sang *for* Billy but *to* a dapper, sharp gentleman named Jimmy Walker whose avocation was being Mayor of New York? Or when the Shuberts allegedly lifted one of his songs for their musical, *Great Temptations,* at the Winter Garden, and he hired thugs to scatter six thousand handbills over the audience with the comment, "Shame on you, Jake Shubert!"? Or when *Sweet and Low* opened in Philly in 1931 and he winced under the jab of one newspaper headline, "THE ROSE THAT DID NOT SMELL SO SWEET"? Or the days when Forty-ninth Street—Tin Pan Alley—was his beat and he was writing "Barney Google," "Me and My Shadow" and "I Found a Million Dollar Baby"?

Billy never was actually what the Broadway boys call a *tummler*—a guy who always lands on his feet and can take the public in a hundred different ways—because his ventures always had a touch of quality to them, and he never was as interested in milking the citizens as he was in finding some

legitimate attraction for which they would pay their good money. However, like many another New York kid, he knew all the angles—right from the time, he says, when he learned how to beat the gun by two yards in the fifty-yard dash, back in P.S. 44, a trick that won him a half-dozen medals. He once said that the big thing in his life was that he never admitted to himself the possibility he might be a failure.

Five years after that first memorable conversation with Hellinger (who *did* get away from Broadway, to become a movie producer, but who comes wandering forlornly back to the Big Drag a couple of times every year), Billy met Mark again. "It was forty-one," he said. "Forty-one, I meant. You can bet your last cent I'll be away from Broadway when I'm forty-one." And a little later, in 1939, when the Rose was thirty-seven, he said, "I've made all the money I need out of show business. I've gone about as far as I care to go in it."

The Beekman Place house is run by Eleanor, who is continually astounding her man with the efficiency with which she does it. He also is amazed at the way she charms those friends of his whom he calls the "bitter Bills"—intellectual, cynical people like George S. Kaufman, the late Beatrice Kaufman and such. "At seventy-six, Bernard Baruch—my boss when I was a secretary—is her most devoted beau," Billy told me. "She can certainly win people over."

In the big house are canvasses by Mallord, Turner, El Greco, Rubens, Titian, Holbein and Rouault. Just a couple of years ago, Billy bought Rembrandt's "A Pilgrim at Prayer" for seventy-five thousand dollars, but while he has become an art patron with a vengeance, he has never lost his shrewd outlook. "The things on which I've been most extravagant," he says, logically, "always have proven the best investments."

He paid $630,000 for the Ziegfeld Theater, incidentally, and just recently refused two million for it.

The Roses' friends are such people as the Quentin Reynoldses, the Bennett Cerfs, Moss Hart and his charming wife, Kitty Carlisle, and they are in frequently for dinner or a party. Several nights a week, Billy and Eleanor stay home, to read, listen to the radio or records (*Pelléas et Mélisande*, already yet), play gin rummy (she always wins) or just gab. When they go out, they dine at the Colony or the Caviar or Luchow's, usually managing to end up in the Cub Room of the Stork. They see all the shows and a lot of the movies, and once in a while they wander over to the opera, a habit Billy picked up after first staging *Carmen Jones*. He likes the melodic, lighter pieces but still can't see eye to eye with Wagner.

The word "phenomenon," of course, is all that can be used to describe his Diamond Horseshoe. In its first eight years of existence it had only seven shows, all expertly staged by John Murray Anderson, and it remains the great mecca for the out-of-towner. Billy capitalized on nostalgia in preparing its motif; it has presented many stars of yesteryear, such as Fritzi Scheff, Joe Howard, Harriet Hoctor and others. Like all Rose ventures, there is nothing of the clip joint about it. "We caught a waiter adding two bucks to a bill one night," he told me, "and I suspended him for thirty days—and also reminded him what a sucker he was to do something like that, just for two bucks."

And now—now didn't he miss the tin-panniness, the hurrying, the rush and bang of those years before he made his mint? He slid another cigarette out of the deck and lighted it before he answered. "Sure I do," he said. Then he fell silent

and I left him there in the big office, with the dark green walls and the carpet as thick as a radio script writer's head and the paneled desk and the overstuffed furniture.

When I got out on Broadway, I fell in step behind a couple of songwriters, one of whom was saying, "Maxie, I just finished the biggest hit since 'Three Little Words.' Why, after the first four bars . . ." He looked as if he hadn't a nickel to his name. I wondered if he was saving to get away from Broadway.

There always seems to be one person who has Broadway talking about him for a season or two, and currently the choice is Bernard (Toots) Shor, the restaurateur, sports enthusiast and confidant of celebrities. While I am a member of a reasonably substantial group that has never been able to quite understand either Shor's humor or the grasp he has on the affections of so many, it would be virtually sacrilege to dismiss him from our discussion of the Big Drag, for he is certainly a part of it. Whether or not the omnipresent Mr. Shor and his eternal greeting, "Hi, ya, crumb bum," are appreciated by all, he still seems to be here to stay.

Certainly, no man makes a more natural saloon owner than the burly Toots. It was George Frazier who recently brought to light the crack that sportswriter James Cannon made about Shor when a friend asked him if Toots was much of a street fighter. "I don't think he's ever been out on the street," Cannon said, weighing the question carefully. "He's been in those saloons all his life."

Shor is a Philadelphia native, son of a shirtmaker, and worked first as an office boy in a cigar factory, later switching over to the selling of shirts and finally coming into his own

as the manager-bouncer of a Prohibition deadfall called the Five O'Clock Club. In time he became manager of Leon and Eddie's, a raucous, tinny, monotonous Fifty-second Street gin mill for the suburbanites. After that he went to Billy La-Hiff's Tavern on West Forty-eighth Street, which has a rightful place in New York history as the joint that is situated under Eddie Jaffe's apartment.

It was at the Tavern, undoubtedly, that Toots really began to spread his wings and go in for the wholesale insulting of customers, and this paid off in such remarkable good will that when his own place was opened in 1940—backed financially by a syndicate of gentlemen, chief among them a New Jersey movie-house operator called Leo Justin—it was almost instantly a success. There is a suspicion of coyness about Shor when he says "I've been lucky," for actually the good food, the fine liquor and the inexplicable fact that his place has become The Place to Go are responsible for its high position in the sun among the Broadway spots.

It has been operating smoothly ever since its inception, although in the spring of 1944 the O.P.A. leaped on the place with both feet when it announced that Shor had overdrawn his food rations by 103,193 points. Shor was cleared after an embarrassing period during which no meat was sold at the place, but oddly enough, his predicament just seemed to make the joint more of a magnet than ever. I recall how, whereas ordinarily it is merely tough to get a table in Shor's during luncheon hour, it was next to impossible in those trying days.

Toots has been credited with some fine, lusty insults that have the Jack White flavor about them, but I have yet to hear them.

The first time I ever saw this rapier wit at work was when I was lunching there one day with comedian Phil Silvers and his beautiful wife, and Toots greeted Phil by spitting on his almost bald head. Now, I do not set myself up as a prig, but it is merely that the humor of that bit of business escaped me; it reminded me a little too much of the Ritz brothers' routine with its flavor of "Hey, look, I'm bein' funny."

Of course, my allergy to the Shor humor may be based on what I call my Twenty-One Complex; being merely a writer, without a .370 batting average or a Congressman's seal on my stationery, I have been introduced to Toots over and over again and have never drawn even the remotest hint of an insult. I *do* know that if he ever spat on my head, I would make an earnest, if feeble attempt, to kick over every table in the place.

It was no contest when I was in Shor's one day with Milton Berle, the great ad libber of our day, and Toots came over to bandy words with Mrs. Berle's boy. Milton had been trying to explain humor to me when he spotted Shor threading his way through the tables toward us. "Now this big clunk," he said, morosely, "is going to come over and say 'Hi, ya, crumb bum,' and if that's funny, I'm in the wrong business." The prediction came to pass, and Milton then spent the next five minutes lathering Toots once over lightly and sending him on his way with a bit of a sheepish air.

Berle, of course, is standard equipment for any discussion of Broadway. In his late thirties, he has the Actors' Equity haircut, the wisecrack, the bright tie, the beautiful wife—Joyce Matthews—and all the other accoutrements. However, he is most famous along Broadway as the great ad libber—

the kiss of death to nightclub drunks. Every drunk, of course, reaches the point at one stage of his evening along Broadway—after the circuit of El Stinko, La Bunko, Club Clowno, etc.—where he decides to stop babbling with his pals and pay attention to the entertainment. Most drunks cannot watch a show without commenting loudly on its merits, and when, in the midst of Berle's routine, they cut loose with a loud crack about "Ahhh—whash sho' funny abou' that?"—they sign their death warrants.

Mr. Berle, blue eyes glinting like a rattler's on spying a field mouse, stops short his gag and peers at his heckler as if he smelled something bad. Then, to the audience: "I at least get paid for making a fool of myself." The drunk winces. "Waaaaaah," he begins, for by this time the cut rye has reduced his vocabulary considerably, but that's as far as he gets. "Look, bud," Berle says, "come on over to my house and we'll open a gas jet." The drunk murmurs. Berle sighs. "O.K., bud," he says, "keep on heckling—but tomorrow while I'm sleeping, you'll be delivering ice." Cut and bleeding, the drunk is led from the arena.

This razor-sharp Berle wit, honed so keenly in the last few years that it is doubtful if any comedian in the country could keep pace with him in an ad libbing duel, has paid off; only recently his nightclub appearance at Nicky Blair's Carnival brought him ten thousand dollars a week plus a percentage. "Whether you're rich or poor," Milton says, "it's always nice to have money"—a line that is regularly thefted from him by other comics, just as he once was accused of stealing gags.

A master of ceremonies once said that Berle, fifteen years ago, always stole the show—one gag at a time, and it was forever being stated by comics that the perennial Fanny

Ward wanted to meet him so she could have her face lifted for nothing. He was even sued for fifty thousand dollars in 1936 by a couple of playwrights named Harry Ross and Ed Edwards, who claimed he stole a gesture denoting exasperation from their play.

Berle himself went along with this theft routine, even originating the line, "I went to see such-and-such a comedian the other night and laughed so hard I dropped my pencil," but actually, he insists, the whole thing was a gag. The late Richy Craig, Jr., a fellow vaudevillian, dreamed it up with him in Dave's Blue Room one night in the late Twenties and after a while people believed it.

Of course, there is nothing exactly impromptu about the ad lib, and Berle admits it freely. "Every time a joker steps in front of an audience," he says, "he has at least fifty or sixty flexible gags for use as ad libs. Lots of times they don't come as swiftly as they should, so you start talking seriously—and then if you have the right kind of comic sense, pretty soon a weird mental picture comes to you and you tell it to the audience, and you've got your gag."

He recalls the time that he and a heckler fired away at each other for a few minutes in the Carnival one night, after which the drunk cooled down and apologized. "I guess I just lost my head," he said. Berle saw only one clear picture in his fine, distorted mind—the heckler running around without a head. "You know something," he said dreamily, "—you look better that way."

Generally, he hates hecklers. Only one in a hundred, he claims, has a real sense of humor; the others are wise guys, exhibitionists, parlor comics and drunks. They don't even

make good stooges. "A drunk," Berle grouses, "shouts at you, 'Ah, ya bum, ya'—which is certainly an inspiring remark, isn't it? You can do wonders with that. Yeah."

Broadway is full of ad libbers who have brightened the life and times of the Big Drag. One of the best was the late Jackie Osterman of the nightclubs, who, while in the doldrums near the end of his career, was told by a friend to "Snap out of it, boy—look up, look up!" "What?" Osterman said, dourly, "and see Berle's name in lights?" Groucho Marx is another master of this black art. So is radio's Fred Allen, who ran into Milton on Broadway one afternoon during the early weeks of Berle's ten-thousand-a-week engagement, and remarked, darkly, "Hey—how much does it cost to see you on the street?"

Bob Ripley, in "Believe It or Not," once described how Milton has memorized sixty thousand jokes; actually, memorized and written, his joke library totals 2,500,000. Yet, while he doesn't go to the extremes that many comics do, of being gloomy and morbid offstage—Bert Lahr, for instance, is the complete pessimist in person—Berle has his serious side and can be soft-spoken, seriously intelligent and exceptionally humane. It is a jolt to find that this hokey-pokey lad, who only a few years ago was a brash kid wandering around on the Palace stage, talking a mile a minute and waving frequently to his faithful mother in the front row, is the driving force behind Mending Heart, the Florida cardiac institution for children.

So these are some of the citizens of Broadway. Maybe the typical Broadwayite is someone less famous than these, somebody, let's say, like Colorado-born Ray Cook, a curly-haired

young chorus boy who grins at you nightly across the footlights as he taps along in the line, and gives singing, dancing and piano lessons in his spare time to pick up extra change. Maybe it's Dan Eisenberg, the stocky, balding, bespectacled man who walks and talks like a well-oiled Gatling gun, and as the head of Skip Tracers is a familiar figure along the Big Drag as he tracks down amnesia victims, bill dodgers, errant husbands and, in his own words, "everything from missing cigar store Indians to valuable art treasures."

Maybe it's skinny Ray Bolger, in his one-button jacket and spats, turning back the clock a couple of decades as he nods to the professor in the pit and slowly begins his little soft-shoe dance—the shuffle of feet, the prop smile, the delicate gestures of the hands. Maybe it's Tallulah Bankhead, pulling up her stockings, snapping her white garters, storming across the living-room floor and saying "God damn it, my drinking is my own business and I never had a pick-up shot in the morning in my life."

I don't know. Of them all, I like as much as any a little cab driver named Irving Gottlieb, a one-time baker and insurance salesman who in fifteen years of hacking has had his jaw broken, his nose fractured and his eyes blackened, although he insists he walks away from fights. "I have it all down in my diary," Irving told me one day as he deposited me in front of Lindy's and waited, with outstretched palm. "Any story that any other taxicab driver tells you, I can duplicate, not to say double. I could keep you all day. I talk to my customers. I find I make considerable more money when I talk to them than when—" but his words were lost in the exhaust's roar, as he skidded off to the far corner of the block, where waited the unsuspecting next customer.

Another time Irving almost ran me down in front of Roseland one night. "Mr. Heimer!" he called sharply, as I brushed his fender dust from my suit, "I am a student of life. When I write that book . . ."

CHAPTER TEN

Night Life of the Gods

When I was a stripling, that delightfully earnest stage that comes before being a sapling, I wanted to become a newspaperman and I did. But this unnatural desire was achieved in spite of, and not with any help from, public opinion.

I found at the age of twelve that the average citizen of the world has a kind of scornful, jesting regard of one who puts pen to paper; the fact that I wrote an excellent sonnet about an oak tree at that time could never half compensate for the unfortunate fact that my curve wouldn't break two inches in a high wind and the Green Street Terrors once made fourteen straight hits off me. "Hah—the scribe!" was the manner in which I, and all others of my ilk, was greeted, and this refusal on the world's part to recognize the seriousness of my chosen profession continued on through young manhood.

As a young sports writer and police reporter, I was tolerated by third basemen and managers as if I were some poor Mongolian idiot of a child that had to be protected, and disregarded by desk lieutenants as if I were the corner spittoon, to which they never *did* pay any attention. When I sold my first magazine article, my neighbors seemed to become ashamed of me for not being in honest work, like hammering nails or selling groceries. My credit at the corner saloons was never robust, and grubby little small-town politicians kept me waiting hours while they prepared statements that never

parsed. I was a writer and a newspaperman; thus, I was a bum.

All this adds up to one reason why I will never quite fathom the astounding place in the Broadway sun that is occupied by the newspaperman.

Along the Big Drag, God, of course, is Winchell. Lesser gods include Ed Sullivan, Danton Walker, Leonard Lyons, Dorothy Kilgallen, Earl Wilson, Bob Dana, all the drama critics, the whole herd of movie critics and any stray reporters who may have stumbled into the orbit from the faraway reaches of Criminal Court. Press agents butter up these ladies and gentlemen in an incredible fashion. Nightclub owners consult them on matters of policy, honor them at celebrity nights and openly consort with them in public. Playwrights frequently write about them, and once in a while commit suicide because of what they have written. Policemen lend them squad cars and, Lord preserve us, even address them as "sir." Their aisle seats, ringside tables and guinea hen are all free. Their advice is solicited, their sayings repeated, their pictures taken, and their word is law.

Outlanders, who read Winchell's syndicated column and consider it amiable trivia that brings Manhattan a little closer before they stuff the paper into the garbage can and turn with a sigh to the morning's work or the breakfast dishes, would be jolted to their heels if they knew of the influence this one-time song-and-dance-man wields. As a matter of fact, as a frequent working visitor to the Big Drag and a commentator thereof, I have come in for a part of this buttering-up myself. While I have found myself drinking free champagne cocktails and telling some producer just what the hell was wrong with his show, I have cried softly to myself because somewhere

across our broad land, at that same time, a suburban society matriarch undoubtedly was telling a desperate young reporter to use the servants' entrance.

Publicity, of course, is the answer. The great mass of people who come to Broadway to spend their money on food or liquor or entertainment have one thin lifeline of truth—or, to be more candid, half-truth—that stretches from themselves to Broadway, and that link is the newspaperman. The place is so gigantic, and has so many wheels turning and bells clanging and lights flashing, that absolutely the only reliable method of knowing where to waste your money the least painfully is to read the writings of those whose business it is to know the main stem from root to petals.

John Jones' business is insurance. He has no time to spend going to opening nights to find out the merits of a show, and whether it is worth the $8.80 it will cost Myrtle and him to see it. There is no way he can preview the new show at the Copacabana, and we are a far distance from that Utopian day when the kitchens of the best restaurants will be thrown open to the public so John Jones can hover over the chef's shoulder and see that he merely rubs the salad bowl gently with garlic.

Advertisements and billboards, of course, have no stature at all; indeed, I am inclined to think that the more adjectives are hurled at the public in paid announcements, the more sullen the public becomes, retreating further into its shell and muttering suspiciously, "I don't believe ya."

So John Jones leans heavily and hopefully on the newspaperman for his perspective, and it is a painful duty to report to him that frequently it is a cockeyed, prejudiced, crooked perspective. Let's study the Broadway columnist.

Broadway writers drift into their bizarre occupation for many reasons; some of them can't make the grade as working newspapermen, others find that covering police is interesting but doesn't provide the free drinks necessary for a man to keep going; others stumble into the profession from the vaudeville stage or the advertising racket. But mainly, I imagine, the lure is money. Columnists are peasants by comparison with wealthy utilities executives or movie magnates, but they are Rockefellers when placed next to their harder-working cousins, the "real" newspapermen. Winchell's annual income may be a month's bank interest for Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, but it is a fabulous sum to Joe Blow of the *Morning Globe,* whose hundred-dollar paycheck is gambled, mortgaged, spent or lent away before he collects it each Friday. Joe Blow may have a sane outlook on life and recognize the average celebrity for what he is worth, which is nothing, but he says to himself that a columnist's salary will buy a lot of drinks and a comfortable apartment, and by God, why can't I write about that silly Broadway business and still keep my integrity? His theory is excellent. Rarely does it work out.

In the first place, the average Broadway writer can say nothing about the phoniness or double-dealing that goes on in so many legitimate man-traps along the Big Drag, because advertising still makes the wheels of a newspaper go around, and the columnist who heckles a nightclub because its liquor is cut, its entertainment is shoddy and its service sporadic, soon finds on his desk a memorandum from the advertising manager telling him for God's sake to lay off. If he doesn't, he may end up back on the police beat.

In the second place, you can't slam Broadway, because if

you do, your readers won't believe you. It is a known fact, of course, that the average moronic movie fan hates to hear anything detrimental about his favorite star; if you tell him that Mamie Vere de Vere is a lesbian or that Richard Strongheart beats his mother with a cat-o'-ninetails regularly each night at seven, he snarls at you to mind your own goddamn business and stop spreading lies about fine, decent people. So it is with those who read religiously about the Big Drag. Honesty and candor bores them. Superlatives and lush writing enable them to make breakfast-table conversation with Mabel, enable them to comment, "Say, I see where Blotz of the *Express* says the new show at El Stinko is a killer. Why don't we . . ."

In the third, and perhaps most important place, Broadway column writing is an easy comfortable rut into which to slip—and sooner or later, most of us do. A case of liquor in return for a plug for a new show. A whole column written for you by a press agent, thus giving you a day at the beach with the wife and kids or your latest girl friend, in return for one itsy-bitsy mention of the press agent's client. Your name spread across a twenty-four-sheet poster in big red type, announcing that you have seen this newest presentation and consider it absolutely tops—oh, your name laid before the public in that magnificent fashion is a fascinating lure, childish as it may seem.

And when headwaiters bow reverently to you and lead you to the best table in the house, at which you stuff yourself with fine free food and finer liquor—and on which the master of ceremonies occasionally has the spotlight turned, while you get up and bow ridiculously—why, what a small favor it is to pat the owner of the joint on the back and assure him

that he has a smash floor show on his hands and that by God, you're certainly going to tell your Public about it.

There is only one catch, of course, and it's a peanut-sized one. Every now and then, John Jones, after sitting hopefully at some joint's table and watching a mediocre show for half an hour or so, turns to his wife and whispers, "I don't understand this; Blotz of the *Express* says this show is the best buy for your money in town." John, in the language of the Big Drag, has been had. His wallet is financing your case of liquor, your day at the beach, your guinea hen under glass, your moment in the spotlight.

However, his disappointment is invariably short-lived, and since you are his idol and his guide, he finds himself making excuses for you—"You know, we just hit this place an off-night, I bet, Mabel . . ." Barnum, of course, was unerringly right, and it is no time—a day or two at the most—before John Jones is back devouring your column at the breakfast table and smiling happily as he thinks of the new musical comedy for which he is going to buy $6.60 tickets because you have just assured him that it makes *Pal Joey* or *The Gay Divorcee* look sick by comparison.

About the only manner in which this comfortably-ruttish life backfires for a columnist has to do with his place in the eyes of his poor country cousin, the working newspaperman. The reporter may be no better morally or spiritually than the Broadway columnist, but because of one circumstance or another, he is leading a considerably more honest life. He chooses his adjectives sparingly and considers everyone a bastard until proven otherwise, and except for an occasional policy story, he writes with truth and objectivity. *His* hands are clean—and thus, more frequently than not, he reads half

of your column, then crumples it in disgust and flings it at the nearest copy boy with the comment that you certainly are a Judas among newspapermen.

As the columnist, you may have a sneaky feeling that he is right, but of course, you adopt only one attitude—the tolerant, pitying one. "Ah, don't blame that poor guy," you say, generously. "You'd grouse just as much, too, if you were sweating out your life as a lousy little legman in Brooklyn."

The Broadway mob itself, of course—the show producers, the saloon owners, the restaurateurs, the pitchmen and the shills—has no such code of honesty with which to contend, and if your comfortable little rut is paying off, it has nothing but admiration for you. "That Blotz," they say, shaking their head reverently. "He is a smart cookie. Why, do you know, he gets fifty grand a year for that column—and he don't even write it no more? Sure, sure. He has a kid he pays fifty a week, who does the whole thing, while he gives his time to that new radio show of his, Blotz's Breakfast Bugle." You are a smart cookie. You are a hot apple. The latest saying, I think, is "fabulous," so you are fabulous. You have wrung a handsome living out of the witchy old street; you have produced blood from the turnip. You have arrived.

The average Broadway columnist is so tied up with the people about whom he writes, that he cannot conscientiously say wrong of them. In that way, he is true to himself, of course, for he would be a low character indeed if he knifed companions who have broken bread with him, gotten drunk with him, lent him money and advised him on what stocks to grab, or what horses to play. The columnist, of course, is being unfaithful to his public, but he has learned long ago that, like a back-street mistress, he can kick his public in the

stomach or spit in its eye, and it always will come back for more.

Of them all, it is likely that Earl Wilson, once a skilled and respected rewrite man for the *New York Post* and now renowned in song and story as the Booze Who editor, does the most attractive day-in-and-day-out job. Earl is a short, solemn little man given to the wearing of dark suits and white shirts and the drinking of good Scotch, and while his "It Happened Last Night" column often has the monotony that is inevitable in any column devoted more to applauding than to criticizing, he struggles desperately and frequently successfully to maintain a sort of Groucho Marx attitude about the whole thing—sort of, "Well, kids, this is a lot of rot, and I only wish I could really tell you what goes on here, but since I can't, here is an angle that might strike you as on the hilarious side."

Press agents have told me that Earl's column is a tough nut to crack, which is always a good sign. And he has not yet completely lost the desire to go out and interview people himself—and ask them insolent questions, a wonderful trait. The drawback to Wilson, it would appear, is that he has mislaid much of that skepticism with which he first approached Broadway, and more and more, he, too, has been raving about the magnificent show at El Stinko or the exquisite beauty of the chorus line at Club Clowno. To him, I can only say wistfully: come back, Earl, come back, all is forgiven. You are not too far down the road of sin.

Winchell is not strictly a Broadway columnist any more, of course, for he has been reforming the world for the better part of the last ten years, and it is undoubtedly he to whom

Stanley Walker referred when he announced forlornly that he was clearing out of Manhattan, partly because he was unable to even mildly question the qualifications of a Broadway columnist as an expert on world affairs, without being beaten with baseball bats by everyone within listening distance.

But within the Big Drag, Winchell is a law unto himself, and he holds court nightly at the Stork Club, as the rich and the poor, but mostly the publicity-conscious, come to make their obeisance. His influence is enormous and his circle of acquaintances is wider than the girth of this tired old world whose fate he sometimes seems to hold in his energetic hands. There is no getting away from it, men; Winchell is here to stay.

Ed Sullivan, the pride of the *News* and its accompanying syndicate, is a rugged-looking Irishman who has a kind heart to recommend him. If his column is an innocuous thing, at least his benefit performances are countless and he has retained a startling enthusiasm for sports and the colorful life that is a cheerful thing. If you don't take his writing seriously, you may find him entertaining.

So let it be with Dorothy Kilgallen, the dark-haired, one-time crack reporter who, incidentally, did excellent work on the Lindbergh kidnaping story, years ago. Miss Kilgallen's column is a Broadway column, no more and no less, and if you skip the plugs and turn the page on the day she is devoting her space to the glories of some nightclub proprietor, she can be amusing and informative on the important points of just who is sleeping with whom. Next to Earl Wilson, perhaps, Miss Kilgallen is the most literate of the columnists,

and it is a pleasant surprise to come across a deft phrase here or a three-syllable word there.

Perhaps the most gentlemanly and the quietest of the menagerie is dark little Leonard Lyons of the *New York Post,* which at last count had some thirty-seven columns in addition to Lyons'. Lyons seems to have taken up where Mark Hellinger left off, in the telling of brief O. Henry-type stories, and he does a competent and reasonably accurate job of it. Like Winchell, he has rated a *New Yorker* profile, which is perhaps Manhattan's accolade, and undoubtedly he knows more of the great and near-great than any of the other columnists.

His favorite haunt is Sardi's, and you will see him there at all hours, hovering wraithfully over tables with pad in hand, conscientiously taking down notes, and beaming to one and all. Mr. Lyons never has disgraced the profession, and indeed he seems to have lifted it up a little.

There is no O. O. McIntyre among any of them, of course. This is not so much because none has his gift for melodrama or colorful, hokey presentation, but rather because they all have made the mistake of coming to know the old strumpet, Broadway, too well. Her wonders are commonplace to them, her charms are old hat. They know the inside story of the bartender at Moore's or the doorman at Lindy's or the cashier at the Rialto, and find it, perhaps, a bit of a bore.

Not so with the Ohio gentleman called "Odd." He preferred to be wheeled through the Big Drag with his wife in his limousine, peering out at the razzle-dazzle but never becoming a part of it, never wasting his time in conversation about it, but putting all his fanciful thoughts down on paper.

To Sullivan or Winchell, the tall, saturnine individual in burnoose and slippers outside El Stinko is a Brooklyn gent named Fred Rabinowitz, who used to paint houses before he broke his elbow, but to Odd, eyeing the housepainter through the polished glass of his town car, he could very well have been a one-time Arab chieftain who had fourteen hundred blooded horses and who killed sixteen men before some violent incident brought him to our shores. So he philosophized in print, and if you were sitting in the quiet living room of a Texas ranchhouse or a Cape Cod cottage, with the oil lamp burning steadily and the wind whistling outside, you read him and believed him and the wonder and glory of Broadway mounted within you.

A couple of the three-minute wonders who write about Broadway are out-and-out professional prostitutes; their columns are yours for a price, and day by day, someone always seems to have the price. The remarkable thing about these gentlemen is that they manage to get away with it, year after year, but they do, and one must only surmise that they know where the body is buried. They come to their work as mechanically as a black marketeer approaching his warehouse full of butter or automobiles, and they mince no words when they barter their wares.

"What's in it for me?" is a trite phrase and an ugly one, but these characters don't cringe from saying it, and those along Broadway who deal with them have come to accept it as the orthodox opening salvo in the start of relations. There is a nightclub columnist, for instance, who in the last six months has yet to print one bad review of a ginmill show.

I know, too, of a movie critic who by straining to the point of rupture can find something good in any film that comes along.

It would be nice to say their careers are short-lived and that justice, as the saying goes, triumphs ultimately. However, such is rarely the case, and the renegades go stolidly along, eating and drinking well, living nicely and loving everyone. They may set journalism back fifty years, but who is there among us to say that that's bad?

Some of the Broadway columnists graduate. Mark Hellinger is one. Today he is a thriving movie producer, who in a land where money is printed fresh every morning, managed to create some kind of record by paying Hemingway seventy-five thousand dollars for the film rights to one of that once-brilliant writer's short stories. Sidney Skolsky, the mouse, was a familiar one among the Broadway boys until he departed many years ago for Hollywood and today he, too, I understand, makes movies. Russel Crouse and George S. Kaufman once wrote about the shows along Broadway before they successfully stepped backstage.

I defy anyone to rightly say whether Broadway as it is today, whooptedo and hoopla, cheap and glittery, is the cause or result of the Broadway columnist. Certainly she must have been there in the first place, for them to cut their eyeteeth on, and yet today they wield such a huge stick and are listened to so intently by the citizens, that it does seem as if this Broadway is of their making.

There are times, especially in the dark days when I look up and down the Big Drag and see nothing but orange-juice stands and men's haberdasheries, with a sprinkling of

phonograph-record shops, that I do ponder the advisability of outlawing the Broadway column as it now stands. As Victor Moore used to say in the days of the old Palace, "Why don't you boys change your act or go back to the woods?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hothouse Flower

WHERE DO they come from—and why?

A casual stroll in and around the eventful alleys that make up Broadway, at any hour from three in the afternoon on, can be a jolting, dazing affair, as the parade of faces and figures streams past you. The Left Bank of Paris, the extremes of Soho and the West End of London, the Côte d'Azur—none of these can quite match this Joseph's coat, nor in any of them can there be found a more motley crew. Everyone in the world, they say in story and fable, sooner or later comes across the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, and there are times when this impossible situation almost seems to exist. Bankers and touts and ranees and porters and bums—all of them at one time or another seem to be hung out on the Big Drag's line to dry.

The bulk of them are visitors, who are in Broadway tonight but won't be back until next Saturday or next July or five years from now or perhaps not until their reincarnation comes to pass. As people, of course, they have a certain amount of interest, but to be truthful we do not have to come to Broadway to study them; we can find them on the farm, in their palaces, running their department store in Milwaukee or waiting tables in a Pullman diner. There *is,* however, a species to be found here and nowhere else, a species that would be like a lost sheep on a farm, or a stunned and forlorn

minstrel in a palace. Let us take up our microscope tenderly to examine the Broadwayite.

In the first place, most of them are men. Broadway is a men's town. The women come, and some of them stay, but to most of them it is an evil thing. This, it would seem, has its roots in a peculiar situation: the fact that on Broadway, women are treated as nowhere else—sharply, realistically, brusquely and with a minimum of false chivalry. However melodramatic it may sound, the Big Drag really is full of brokenhearted—and reformed—idealists, who happen to have turned to the main stem in time of trouble rather than to the more logical Bowery.

And there is nothing more irritating or detestable to the average woman than a man who has been led up the wrong alley by a female and has come back again from the alley into the daylight with chin set and mind made up that no goddamn woman will ever make a sucker of him again. The woman doesn't live who can crack that armor. And there is no fullness to a woman's life when a man won't take her seriously. She throws herself completely into her life of romance—whether or not it has any logical foundation—and then to run up against the stonewall of a man who yawns and turns to the *Racing Form,* or gives her the key to his room and tells her he'll be up a little later when he finishes the poker game with the boys—such things send her fleeing to the suburbs or the farm or some other city where men are more practical and thus more easily chipped away at.

I am generalizing, I realize; there are, of course, a thousand happy marriages along the main stem, and more than a thousand happy affairs being carried on. But in the main, Broad-

way is a tough spot for a girl. Unless she trades sex for achievement, she finds the going rough.

The women who do come to Broadway, and the few who thereafter become part of the scene, are usually of two kinds —either they are fresh out of high school in Jackson, Michigan or Fall River, Massachusetts and have seen too many movies in which the undeniable glamour of the Big Drag has been polished a hundredfold, or they are those who come along because only in Broadway can they find the opportunity for the kind of life they want. Maybe they are would-be actresses. For them, only among the magic caverns of the Forties can producers' offices be found. Maybe they are potential nightclub performers. Batting in any other nightclub league but the big one that is Broadway's is a sad state of affairs.

Maybe they are sexed wrongly. Nowhere else can a lesbian bury herself in anonymity and avoid the outraged looks and snide mutterings of the populace. Or maybe they are cut and dried in their approach to life; they *are* going to trade sex for achievement, and have found that the Big Drag, which asks not of your morals but only of your bank roll, is the place to shop for customers.

There never is room, of course, for them all—even the ones who stay. You see the actresses ushering or cashiering, and the nightclub singers waiting on table in Child's. Some of the lesbians cut out places for themselves in the world of the theater, but the others ultimately melt away to the Village and after that, God knows what. The amateur whores, if they have looks and legs, are usually more successful than the rest, because Broadway *is* a bit short in its complement of ladies

of easy virtue. And sooner or later, you will find many of them in the big apartment houses or the better hotels with mink on their backs and charge accounts at Bonwit's and Saks.

If they don't make that grade, they turn professional, and furnish us with the party girl, who will do anything within reason and a number of things out of it, for a price. And if they are too pockmarked or dumpy for even that, you will find them any night in the side streets or up the Avenue of the Americas or on the subway platforms, their heels run over at the sides, their slips showing but the smile and the side-winder walk always present.

Columnists, press agents and defenders of the faith have campaigned in recent years against the feeling of long ago that there are no morals among the women of Broadway. "Heaven forbid!" they exclaim, and they go on to point out that today's chorus girl, for example, rooms with three other chorines, and they all are in bed a half-hour after the last show and go to church on Sundays. This is an honorable and admirable campaign, but the facts really are that Broadway girls' morals are no better or worse than Boston girls' morals or New Orleans' girls morals—*except* that they are given more rein.

The most high-minded girl, when cut loose in a place where nobody gives a damn whether you sleep with no men or with two or twenty, is hard put not to relax just a little. Let us say it this way: Broadway women are rarely chaste, which of itself is a technical and unimportant thing—but so, too, are they rarely promiscuous, which is a most important thing.

The Big Drag is the one place where a woman can earn a salary commensurate with her ability. It is a sad fact that on the whole businesswomen throughout the country and

even in the business world of New York, are infrequently paid men's salaries even though they may be doing men's jobs. A woman editor will get two-thirds of a man editor's salary, or a personnel director will be told she can have the job of hiring six thousand people in a department store, "although of course, you realize, we can't pay you quite what we would pay a man."

But on Broadway, money runs a poor second always in importance to fame and glory; indeed, sometimes it is tossed around so lavishly, as in the case of Milton Berle's ten thousand dollars weekly nightclub salary, that it takes on the aspects of racetrack money, as contrasted with "real" money. If a girl can sing or dance or shake her hips, Broadway will hire her and pay her well. There is large and vast swindling ever present along Broadway, but of niggardliness, no impressive amount.

No matter what kind of girl you were, nor in what kind of business you are, if you have been in Broadway for, say, five years, you are of a type.

You dress well, and as expensively as your purse allows. You have poise and you wear high heels, and you spend more time on your hair than on any other of your attributes. You smile easily and you tip well, and more often than not your dress is black—although you haven't a worry in the world about dressing strikingly and very frequently do. You don't have any stomach, unless you are over forty, and then it's only a little one. Your hands are white and carefully kept, and it's been some time since you turned around at a corner whistle.

You drink a bit, but not too much, and you smoke at least a pack of cigarettes a day, the kind that the men smoke, like Luckies or Chesterfields. Your apartment is comfortable and

you pay more for it than you can afford, unless you are married, in which case your husband pays more than you both can afford. You know what streets the different legitimate theaters are situated on, and you know in which restaurants the steaks are good and the service impressive.

If you honestly like Broadway, as you do, or you wouldn't have stayed, most of your out-of-town friends bore you, and you not only hate to put up with them for a night, but you candidly duck them and don't answer your letters or your doorbell. Once upon a time, you had great dreams about Broadway and what you would do to it when you got it by the scruff of the neck, but somehow things seem to have gotten a little out of hand and passed you by, but what the hell, it's a good life. You get drunk once a year and mutter about leaving the main stem for a place out on Long Island, but you never do, you never do.

The men—ah, the men. Take all the similes you've ever heard, and there you are. They're the moths around the flame, the flies to the honey, the bees at the rose. To some, the flame is money and to the others the rose is power and fame, but whatever the lure—and it is one of the two—it hauls in the starry-eyed ones like a giant magnet. The East Side kid who can imitate Jackie Miles or Bing Crosby—he's going to be a big one some day, you can bet your bottom dollar, and you know where he has to go to be big.

The Pennsylvania pool shark, with the fast hands and the talented eye for the horses—you know where he's going to end up, following the floating crap game from one hotel to another. The serious-minded youth from Raleigh, North Carolina, who is grimly determined to make a success in the

restaurant business—there's only one place for a really serious restaurateur, and that's the big time, where the tips are bigger, the prices higher and the profits bigger. All of them—all of them who want to make the world sit up and notice, they come to the greatest arena of them all, to try it.

So when they tell you that Broadway is only a big little town at heart, and that all of its assorted men are only townies in their soul—laugh at them. The ordinary kids don't come to Broadway. The ordinary kids stay home and follow Pop in the insurance business, or farm the land in the good old-fashioned way, or sell autos to the kids with whom they went to school. What's wrong with it? Nothing. Only let's get it straight about Broadway.

Broadway gets the ones who are out of line. The ones who were twisted under the desk during schooldays, paying no heed to teacher; the ones who sang and danced and cut up so worthlessly that everyone predicted a dark end for them; the extremists; the great phonies and the greatly talented. These are the boys who grow up to be Broadwayites, fast with a dollar and bright with a tie, and if one of the other kind gets caught in the wheels occasionally, he is a pitiful, bewildered, baffled sight. It's a rat race we run nightly along the Big Drag, and it takes those who are slightly crazy to get through the maze without dropping a stitch.

If you want to spot the Broadwayite in embryo, a good idea is to take a spin down through the lower East Side some Sunday afternoon. For it is there, in the welter of dirt and noise and curses, that the opportunist is born. Maybe he's the tough kid who licks everybody else in sight and gets the biggest cut of any good grocery-store theft that is maneuvered. He ends up in Madison Square Garden in the main stem, scowling and

shuffling and throwing punches in the smoky dark of night.

Maybe he's the kid you see running along lower Houston Street at one o'clock in the morning, dirty and ragged, with a big stack of morning papers under his arm. He grows up to run theaters, or manage actors, or do something along the White Way that pays his rent and keeps forever from his door the wolf that walked side by side with him as a boy.

Maybe he's the kid who sings or dances, desperately, frantically. He becomes the mournful nightclub star, whose tired face brightens into an unbelievable white smile the minute the spotlight's hard finger touches it. These, in large part, are those aggressive ones who later in life will take over the Big Drag. For that fairyland is not, like the earth, to be inherited by the meek.

In one way, Broadway is like politics. You can't very well make out in either one if you're going to keep your fingers clean. Life along the main stem is a deadly, vicious, dog-eat-dog affair, and you wear your armor not across your chest but along your back as protection against the inevitable stab. The double-cross is the rule rather than the exception, and underneath the wit and the banter and the geniality that bubbles along the surface, the air is sinister.

It is the first unwritten law that you look out for yourself and nobody else. Around every corner, there are friends and citizens honing their razors, whetting their knives; and it isn't long before you recognize the fact and come to accept it matter-of-factly, just as you realize that all cab drivers, waiters, porters and doormen are out to clip you for whatever they can.

Maybe *you* don't have to be a crook to make the grade in Broadway, but you certainly have to be on the watch for the

other crooks twenty-four hours a day. To midtown Mannie, the greatest sin in life is to be a sucker. How your stature drops, how you descend the scale in the eyes of the Lindy's crowd, when you're "taken"!

Once he has become part and parcel of Broadway, the citizen is easily recognized. He dresses the part. There is nothing startling about this, of course; you can spot a Princeton undergraduate or a junior executive fresh out of Yale just as easily by his peculiarities of uniform. What sets the Times Square tempo in clothing is the sharp touch.

Broadwayites don't wear bright horseblankets of coats, or racetrack trousers on which you can play checkers. More often than not, you will find them in blue or gray suits—the sharp touch being the Harlem cut of the suits. The drape is a little more pronounced, the shoulders a little wider, the lapels more flared. Tweeds are out; tweeds are for the East Side or for butlers on their day off. Besides, you can't get a razor crease in tweeds, and a gentleman of the main stem would sooner be found at Forty-eighth Street and Seventh Avenue in his underwear than in a pair of unpressed pants. There is a reason for the plain blue and gray suits, incidentally, they serve as beautiful backgrounds for the major item of dress, the tie.

The Broadwayite, from learned Doc Mischel, the big street's favorite physician, down to Broadway Sam Roth, probably has a wider variety of neckties and undoubtedly spends more time on research and investigation of necktie counters than any other character in the book. A couple of years ago, at the height of the war, Florida stores were charging—and getting—the outrageous price of a hundred dollars per handpainted tie. And most of the customers were Broad-

wayites, on hand for the races. Riotous colors, weird designs, lush batik prints, paintings of horses or ducks or geese—the Broadway boy goes for them all.

Most of Broadway lives in hotels—the Park Central, the Victoria, the Abbey, the Waldorf, the Essex House, the Astor, the Ritz-Carlton and the like—the two-buck flophouses in the Forties and the ten-buck joints along Central Park South. Whatever its price or its reputation, it remains simply a place in which to sleep. For when the Big Drag character leaves the reservation in the afternoon, he doesn't return until early or late the next morning, and then only to peel off his sharp costume and crawl under the covers for four or five hours' sleep.

His home life is an existence made up of equal parts of lobbies, cigar stands, bellhops, the maid who cleans up, floor clerks and elevator girls. He claims that he has never washed or dried a dish in his life and if anyone so much as suggested the pipe-and-slippers-routine after dinner for him, he'd become apoplectic and scream "for God's sake just how old do you think I am, anyway?" He read a book once, but it was long ago and it bored him; and besides, man, the only dough in those things is movie rights, so why not concentrate right on the film people themselves. There is no photograph on his dresser, nor any photo album in the closet, because you never get rich thinking about yesterday.

He has eaten in restaurants all his life, and when he is trapped into a homecooked meal, doesn't think too much of it. He never, never eats his meals in the dining room of his hotel, for some strange reason. His food is steak and pie, and green vegetables were meant to be shoved to one side of the plate and ignored. He should drink milk, because he has an

ulcer, of course—as common a complaint along Broadway as hangnail, and thus no useful topic for conversation—but instead he drinks countless cups of coffee. He has a dry martini in the afternoon and Scotch with a water chaser is his regular drink, but he doesn't get drunk.

He might have a regular occupation, he might be a song plugger or a prize fighter or a band leader or a ticket broker. But it's six, two and even, as the bookies put it, that he does a couple of other things on the side to keep body and soul together. Maybe he has a piece of a concern that manufactures juke boxes, or he knows how to get you a new car in wartime, or he does a Broadway column by night and writes songs by day.

He knows everybody, of course; the last time Bing Crosby was in town, he and good old Bingo got drunk together and had a hilarious time. Because he reads *Variety* religiously, he knows a week ahead of time, from the out-of-town reviews, whether Max Gordon's new show will be a flop or not, and if it won't be, it just so happens he has a couple for opening night, sixth row center.

He's good for a touch, if you're down and out, but for God's sake, take the money and beat it, because it don't do nobody no good to be seen talking to a has-been.

He has a standing hate on for at least one restaurateur and after he has given the latter the smile and the big hello, curses him viciously on the walk to the table and tells you to watch out for cockroaches in a joint like this.

He'd rather be dead than out of the know. If Errol Flynn slugged Tommy Dorsey in El Morocco last night, he just *has* to know about it no less than three hours later, and by noon of the next day he *has* to know the real why behind the fight.

Nothing gives him a more vicarious thrill than to be able to say, "Yeah, yeah, a' course I heard. Who di'n't? You know why Flynn did it, a' course? No? Oh, my country cousin. Well, you see this Flynn has been . . ."

He never gets into fights himself. Fights are for suckers. He might be getting a pot belly and probably is, but would no more go near a gymnasium or a tennis court than he would take poison. A Turkish bath; that's the ticket. Every now and then he cuts down on cigarettes, but that only lasts for a day. He might use benzedrine to stay awake or sleeping tablets to go to sleep, but he tries not to; those are for suckers, too, like trumpet players or Park Avenue debutramps. To be a sucker—you might just as well be dead.

In a way, there is something poignant, God forgive us, about all this, because it isn't as if there never had been any other kind of world for our hero. Long ago he—how was it Rupert Brooke put it?— . . . *felt, breathed, came aware* . . . of skies that were blue and dreams that were full and exciting. But somewhere along the track something happened. Maybe the taste for dash and thrill and hoopla was so strong and so seductive that it would not be denied. Maybe he fell in love and had his heart broken; God knows such things happen even beyond the bounds of the *B* movies. Maybe it was just a break; maybe one day he was running a gas station in Allentown, Pennsylvania and the next day he was at Forty-second and Broadway watching the electric sign running around the Times Building, not quite sure how he got there.

Maybe he had a fight with his father and wanted to put a thousand miles between them, or maybe he had an itch to ship to Mexico on a freighter and had headed for the docks before the Big Drag blinded him, on the way. Whatever it

was, he now has skidded down the drain into the whirlpool and is a part of the spinning, splashing, muddy waters, which occasionally glint with gold or silver or greasy sky blue under the searching eye of a spotlight.

But if he was sensitive once, he is not now; he can't afford to be. Broadway is a rowdy place and a tough one. Skulls are cracked and crosses doubled with frightening regularity, and there is no niche in the place for the squeamish. A beggar with no legs wheels himself wistfully—professionally wistfully—along the main stem. A sailor swings on a pansy. Two drunks stumble out of a dance hall, and a hackie delightedly spots the bulge of their wallets on their hips and steers them politely to his cab. Under the clock at the Astor, a thousand stand-ups are in progress; if you are to weep for young love, you must weep a thousand times. In front of the cheap hotels in the side streets, there are always tired blondes, their eyes thick with mascara and bright with Murine, but seeing nothing. Fat old men get out of long new cars with slim young girls, and what the night or the gray morning will hold for them is a shuddery bit of conjecture.

How can you cry for all this? You can't. You pull your coat a little closer around your shoulders and you light a cigarette and you look out at it, because that's all you can do. You look out at it and it's like a movie. And you know that shaky feeling you get once in a while at a particularly effective play or movie, when you say to yourself, oh my God, if this thing were real, how awful it would be? Well, you get it here along Broadway once in a while—and there is no second act to walk out on, no intermission, no Bugs Bunny cartoon to follow. This is it, and sometimes it *is* awful.

But a man can grow to love a rattlesnake in time, especially

when the rattlesnake has a beauty of movement and a shiny skin. So it is with the Big Drag; Lord only knows why or how many of its citizens get there in the first place, but after a few years there is no other place on the face of the earth that can keep them content. There is the sound of a lullabye in its subway rumble and its harsh rattle of taxicabs, and its incessant din, washing back and forth like tinny breakers. There is the soothing prick of the dope needle in its violence and its startling happenings of the gaudy night. We each of us must have our anchor, and to the Broadwayite, a weird hothouse flower, the Big Drag is home.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Is Everybody Happy?

Was it Amanda in Noel Coward's *Private Lives* who remarked so tritely but truthfully, "Strange how potent cheap music is"? It comes to mind now because there is a part of Broadway of which I am thinking, and somehow through my head there keeps drifting the melody of a ha'-penny tune called "Lonely Town," which a couple of years back studded the score of a musical called *On the Town.*

It's a gin-soaked, jukeboxy little song and it's full of lines that have been written a hundred times before, like, *A town's a lonely town when you pass through, And there is no one waiting there for you,* and *Still it's a lonely town unless there is love— A love that's shining like a harbor light.* There is nothing memorable in it, and unless your mind is given over to the collection of weird, raggletaggle data as mine is, you undoubtedly long since have forgotten it.

But we must sing the biography of a civilization in the patois of its people, and if we are to talk of the blues along Broadway, we can't very well dip into Wagner or Debussy for the incidental music. Perhaps "Lonely Town" *is* the right overture for us, so into the pit, professor. A little sawing on the violins, a little muted wahwah from the cornets, a few stray forlorn notes in the upper register on the piano, a gradual dimming of the lights. . . .

It will be conceded, of course, that there is loneliness and the deep ache of the blues in New York, but somehow when

we talk like that we think of the dark halls of the Bowery, with the El creaking and rattling by, or the hot, smelly streets of the East Side on an August night. Loneliness is a disease that you pick up when you are broke and hungry and thirsty —so how can anyone be lonely in Broadway? Everybody on Broadway has a hundred million dollars, or a reasonable facsimile thereof; the food is piled high and the drinks, watered or legitimate, flow from a spigot that is forever open. There are so many lights and so much noise and—why, how can anyone possibly be lonely along the Big Drag?

Did you ever go to one of those New Year's Eve parties where everybody sits down grimly at 8:00 P.M. with the determination to be soundly and roundly drunk by midnight, or, as they are apt to describe it more euphemistically, to "have a helluva good time!"? Work has been hard and taxes high and the year has been long, but by God, this night all that's going to be forgotten, in the interests of a Good Time. The lid is off, school is out; but somehow the liquor takes longer than usual to act, and somebody makes the mistake of turning on the radio just as a torch singer is offering "What Is This Thing Called Love?", and pretty soon everyone is slumped down in a chair, fingering the drinks with their melting ice, and a maudlin tear is skidding down a cheek.

A big part of Broadway is like that—New Year's Eve every night. It is not the Broadwayite himself who is lonely, because he has long since learned to steel his heart against emotion, and if loneliness ever chips at its edges, no one but himself will ever know. No, the lonely ones are the visitors, for they have heard of the Gay White Way and they make a beeline for it with the avowed intention of checking their sadness at the front door. Into the main stem from all corners they pour,

dressed to the nines, their pockets crammed with folding money. They are going to Make Whoopee. That is the earnest desire they throw into the grinder, anyway. What comes out is a different kind of hamburger.

The loneliest man I ever saw in Broadway was tall, balding Jorge Sanchez, and how I know he was lonely is that I spent a whole evening along the Big Drag with him. The night on the town with him was all the lonely nights of Making Whoopee rolled into one.

I came across Jorge one cold spring afternoon in the performance of my duty as a newspaperman. For years he had been wandering up to Broadway for a couple of months at a clip, and scattering money from Times Square to Columbus Circle with an abandon that took one back to the days of the dear, departed butter-and-egg man and his heyday at Texas Guinan's. Jorge was an honest-to-God sugar daddy. He owned a plantation in Cuba whereon grew cane sugar, and for ten months of the year he stayed on that plantation and drove himself to work hard around the clock. He was a smart and educated man—schooled first in Cornwall, New York and later at Tulane University—and he ran his sugar business efficiently and profitably.

When he hit the big town, however, it was Katie bar the door. But the only stories of his fabulous largesse that ever got into print were lines in gossip columns about the latest gold bracelet he had handed out—he once gifted Joe E. Lewis with a five-thousand-dollar sapphire ring (I saw it and can vouch for it) because he liked the comedian—and no one ever seemed to have written a full story about him and what he was like. I buttonholed him in his luxurious suite in the Hotel Gotham, where he was wandering around fretfully in

a dressing gown and pouring himself small beers, and he welcomed me with that mournful expression that I was to learn was a permanent fixture.

"The best way to find out anything about me," Jorge said, "is to make the rounds with me. Meet me for dinner tonight at La Martinique and we'll do the town up right." Then he patted his temples worriedly, sucked in his stomach a little and measured out another small beer. I said sure and backed out. I walked down the hotel corridor mentally patting myself on the back; I was going to tour the bright spots with a famous figure, the tosser of thousand-dollar champagne parties, the distributor of bracelets as if they were mint wafers. No newspaperman ever had done this story before. I was in great good luck.

Come nightfall, when Broadway slips off its dressing gown with a sigh and climbs into a clean shirt, and I found myself in that garish nightclub known as La Martinique—a place hitherto distinguished in my memory book because an heiress who was launching a professional career approached me there in the dead of evening once and asked me point-blank if she could take me to luncheon the next day. *This* time, however, I found myself with about a dozen people, including assorted redheads—one dark and one with hair the color of rusty water—brunettes, colonels and a girl who looked intelligent and worked for *Time,* but who was there, it turned out, on pleasure and not business, being the date of an army officer Sanchez knew.

A couple of quarts of good Scotch sat on the table and a bucket of champagne leered at us from one side of the banquet-style board. Jorge sat opposite me—sadder-faced, if possible, than when I had seen him earlier in the day. He

clapped me on the back and pointed me at the Scotch, but it wasn't five minutes later, before I was halfway through my first drink, that he was plucking at my cuff, across the table.

"Are you having fun?" he said, earnestly. I assured him everything was fine. He smiled faintly. Then he looked gloomily out at Pancho's orchestra and the dancers. Then he took out a scrap of paper and wrote on it. Then he took a swallow of his highball and made a wry face. Finally, as if he were casting about for a conversation piece, he pointed out to me an owl-faced man with thick spectacles and a straggly mustache, who sat at the end of the table. "That's Swifty Morgan," he said. "Swifty is a character. Hi'ya, Swifty." The owl-faced man beamed, barked something rudely at a waiter—I think he wanted more food—and came over to me, putting his finger on my forearm.

"The greatest guy in the world, Jorge is," Swifty said solemnly. "When he works, down in Cuba, he works hard. When he plays, he plays hard. Has sixty-one hundred employees and they all love him. Got cold there once, and they had no sweaters to wear. Jorge had sweaters for himself, but wouldn't wear them because they had none. Great guy."

Swifty paused for breath, took a big bite out of a roll and gestured at me. "Me," he resumed, "I'm a character. Lived in Europe twenty years. I been living off Jorge for fifteen years, haven't I, Jorge? Was down at the racetrack today. All the big-shot newspapermen came to talk to me. It'll be all over the columns tomorrow. Nice stories, all about me."

And that did for me, as far as Swifty was concerned; I turned back in alarm to the sad-faced sugar daddy. He looked up from the note he was scribbling. "You having fun?" he said, intently. "Everything O.K.?"

The pretty dark red-haired girl at the table, who was sitting kitty-corner from me, shoved her hand at me. "Isn't that ring lovely?" she said, waving a grotesque band that was studded with what apparently were rubies and diamonds spelling out "I LOVE YOU." I bravely allowed that it was gorgeous, and she slumped back against her mink coat, smiling happily, and resumed her wide-eyed telling of dirty jokes to the man at her right. "But is *that* funny?" she would say, in professed innocence that was worse acting than any I've seen since silent movies came to their end. Jorge looked over at her moodily. "Hello, baby," he said, halfheartedly. She gave him the Pepsodent smile.

I turned to the girl on my left, the intelligent-looking one. "How did *you* ever end up here?" I asked. She just smiled sweetly.

"I haven't the faintest idea," she replied. "I never met Jorge in my life. I had a date, that's all. But you know what burns me up? I ate meatballs at home before I came here, and if I'd held off I could have had the best and most expensive meal of my life." I shook my head sympathetically, and she just grinned and took a slug of Scotch, something I wasn't sure *Time* employees did.

The girl who takes the inevitable nightclub photographs at a buck a throw snapped some of the gay party and came back in a few minutes with the prints, which she dropped into Jorge's lap. He passed them around solemnly and had everyone sign each one. After watching their progress around the table like a mother hen, he finally gave two to everyone. "Everybody got two?" he demanded. "Sure, now?"

The dinner dragged on. Jorge at one stage pulled out his gold Louisiana colonel badge and showed it to me proudly.

He rubbed his eyes a little tiredly. "I got in at eight this morning," he said. "Got up at one." Sadly, he poked around at his stringbeans. Then at last, while the remains of the coffee were cooling and the ice cream was melting in the little plates amid the residue of cigarette stubs, he got up. "C'mon," he said, "everybody goes now. We have to catch the Latin Quarter show at twelve-thirty."

Outside La Martinique, Jorge bundled the party into two cabs and we whisked over to the Latin Quarter, which I avoid skillfully on ordinary evenings but which now called me in the performance of my chores. There, we had more Scotch and more champagne, sitting at a ringside table right under the heels of the dancers on the raised floor. There was a slim brunette in our party and Jorge got up and danced with her. His face seemed to light up a bit, as if he got a little kick out of it. He was a pretty good dancer. Then he came back to the table and sat there again, glumly.

Somewhere along here I must have dozed off, because the next thing I remember, Jorge was playfully hugging a midget. She was a real midget, small and pert-looking and blonde and the star of the floor show. The redhead picked up the midget's right foot and looked at her shoe. "Oh, how cute!" she said. Then the midget disappeared and Jorge sat back and looked around, darkly. Then he pulled out a checkbook, borrowed a pen from Swifty Morgan, who was still omnipresent, and wrote out a check for two hundred dollars. "There's a girl backstage I want to have this for a little present," he said, to no one in particular. He gave the check to Morgan, who beamed, said "Thanks, pal" and put it into his pocket. Jorge shifted from Scotch to Coca Cola. "I'm thirsty now," he said. He drank the coke swiftly. Then he eyed me, a little wearily.

"Years ago," he said, in a flat voice, "I used to do this every night for six months. Now I can only spare two months for it. Too much to do on the plantation. I've been coming to New York since 1895, you know. I'm fifty-four. I saw the parade for Admiral Dewey."

Then suddenly everyone at the table seemed to be talking to someone else, and over the gabble of the talk, I looked at Jorge, the host. He was staring disconsolately at the dancers on the floor. He caught me looking at him. "We've got lots to do yet," he said determinedly. "After here, we'll go over to the Copacabana and then to the Blue Angel. You won't be in bed before dawn, I can tell you that." He made it sound more like a threat than a thrilling promise. I took the bull by the horns.

"Why," I asked, "do you look so sad, Jorge?"

"I always look like that in these places," he said. "Don't worry. I'm having a lot of fun, really."

It was about this point that the dark redhead began a dirty story that was a little too much even for me. Everybody chuckled politely except the girl from *Time*, who just looked bored and as if she were caught with a Royal Coachman and was just waiting to be reeled in and flung into the bottom of the boat. But nobody had hooked me yet, so I said I had to wash my hands and I got up and excused myself. I threaded my way through the tables, hurried downstairs and went out into Forty-eighth Street. I walked over to Broadway, and a couple of sailors were stomping their way south with a couple of cheap but happy little girls. All of them were roaring with laughter; I watched them and shook my head. "The poor guy," I said to myself. "The poor guy." Then I got into a cab and went home.

It was about 1:00 A.M. and all the lights in my apartment house were dark. Back in the Latin Quarter, I guess, the show was about over and the greatest guy in the world was husbanding his redheads and brunettes and colonels into taxicabs and heading for the Copacabana. I imagine they never *did* get to bed before dawn. I was asleep by 1:05, myself.

The patron saint of the lonely in Broadway is a tall, slender young man with good taste in clothes, who sometimes wears a mustache and sometimes does not. His name is Art Ford, but to hundreds of thousands in darkened hotel rooms, or hall bedrooms, or gilded boudoirs that have everything in them to make sleeping a pleasure except a marriage certificate, framed and hanging over the bed, he is the milkman. Promptly at midnight every night, Art peels off his tailored jacket, loosens his tie, eyes a sleepy radio engineer and then spins a phonograph record. The Milkman's Matinee, companion to the insomniac and pal to the forlorn, is on the air.

I wonder if anyone is so well versed in the loneliness of Broadway as young Ford. Every night he gets from fifty to two hundred and fifty telephone calls, from every kind of person in the city. Drunks in barrooms call him up; they say they want to settle a bet, but more often than not they just want to talk. Girls—two-thirds of all the calls he gets must be from girls, alone in their hot or cold bedrooms, their heads next to their little radios—tell him that although they never have seen him, his voice thrills them to the socks and they are madly in love with him. Women who are feeling good at parties, and who perhaps remember how the milkman's soothing voice and music have carried them through more

than one sad, empty night, will stumble into a bedroom and telephone him to tell him how the party is going.

Sitting there by his battery of telephones, Art talks to them all. He calms down the impassioned small fry, settles the bets as well as he can and thanks the exuberant females for the party gossip. He is a "disc jockey" in the language of *Variety*, but he is more; he is father confessor, big brother, old pal, mystic lover.

The Milkman's Matinee might mean romance and vicarious thrills to some, but we must state candidly that Mr. Ford has a realistic approach to it. He doesn't like to work in the daytime, having a solid share of that unspeakable scorn that all night owls have for persons who labor by day, and his favorite phonograph record is Artie Shaw's "Concerto for Clarinet" because it takes approximately four minutes to play and therefore, each time he plays it, Art can get two minutes' sleep, allowing himself a minute to get to sleep and a minute to awaken in time to make the next announcement. He has been doing this kind of thing for years, and once even used to broadcast while reclining luxuriously on a couch.

At 3:00 A.M., he drags out a little stove and brews himself some soup, whereupon hundreds of listeners decide that it's a good time to raid the icebox. He doesn't drink coffee or smoke during the show, for fear of becoming too dependent on those means to stay awake.

He has become acquainted with a stripteaser who baked and sent him pies because she liked his voice, and he has met —over the telephone—pretzel benders, morticians, bakers, housewives, film cutters and writers. One night, he remembers, Duke Ellington called up. It was just before the Duke was to open with his band in a high-class spot, and he asked

Art to play his old record of "Frankie and Johnny," because he wanted to do the number that night and couldn't remember how he did it first.

Another night, Art was playing Fats Waller's "The Joint Is Jumpin'" when the phone rang and an indignant voice told him, "The joint certainly is jumping. Pictures are falling off my walls." Another drunk, Art thought—until a news bulletin five minutes later informed him New York had just pulled through an earthquake.

All night, for six and a half hours, the milkman sits there by his turntables and murmurs and chuckles and tells stories, and soothes the jumpy nerves of Broadway's lonely ones in the dark hours. Then he puts on his jacket, buttons his shirt collar again and goes home. "It is," he says, "the greatest feeling in the world—coming home at 7:00 A.M., in the dead of winter, say, and watching the suckers go to work . . . while I'm going to sleep all day." In a way, you might describe it as the Broadway feeling.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Ham What Am

You will find them in other cities and other lands, of course —you might turn over a rock in Liverpool, for instance, and a juvenile would crawl out, or open a dark closet door in Bombay and flush an ingénue into the daylight—but in the main, virtually every actor and actress in the world is to be found, in season, along Broadway. Whether this is a healthy state of affairs, I do not know, but it certainly gives an aroma to the Big Drag, like a curiously attractive bit of incense from the five-and-dime store. The people of the theater are the maraschino cherry atop the parfait, the olive in the martini.

Whatever their faults, and they are many, actors have considerable stature in Broadway—much more so than movie performers, for instance. Even the most intense of movie critics, who, as S. J. Perelman so fittingly says, can quote from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* not once but four or five times, rarely take movie performers seriously, realizing that their art, after all, is one of being placed in a certain light at a certain spot on the set and being told to smile for ten seconds. But Broadway holds the legitimate actor in some esteem—not only because he has mastered a reasonably difficult profession, but what is more important, because he has the ability, if he is good, to touch on one's emotions. This talent should be good, the Broadwayite figures, for at least fifty thousand a year. The good actor has something saleable, something for

which there is a market, and the Broadwayite envies and respects him for that.

This is no place, Lord knows, to take a Broadway actor apart to find out What Makes Him Tick. Many books have been written along those lines, all of them unsatisfactory, and many more will be written. I think the best description of an actor on the Big Drag is to call him a wonderfully insane peacock. His ego is boundless, and unless the conversation revolves around him and his activities, he is utterly bored; but at the same time his charm is so lush and his personality so overpowering that pretty soon you find yourself talking about him and liking it. It was a celebrated British movie actor who remarked about Noel Coward. "Noel is the most enchanting person to meet I ever encountered," he said, "but after five minutes, the conversation inevitably turns to Noel Coward, and if it doesn't, he loses all interest." Mr. Coward is typical of his Broadway cousins of the boards.

Any time from the afternoon on until eight, and then from, say, eleven on for a couple of hours, you can meet almost any working actor in town by sitting at the tiny bar in Sardi's, up Forty-fourth Street on the West Side, across from Shubert Alley. Started a couple of decades ago by Vincent Sardi and now carried on by his enterprising son, young Vincent; this establishment is the Stork Club of the theatrical world. Just as everyone in the café society set must come sooner or later to Mr. Billingsley's joint on Fifty-third Street, so must all of the mummers ultimately end up at a corner table in Sardi's.

The food is excellent and the drinks are good, but on the whole it must be said that Sardi's charm springs from the fact that most actors and actresses have played in at least one

English drawing-room comedy and know which fork to use and how low to keep their voices pitched. Good manners are something of a novelty in any joint along Broadway, but they are gaudily on display in Sardi's. Sometimes, to be sure, the graciousness is a trifle exaggerated, but it is, thank God, one place where one can be fairly sure of avoiding the lifted pinky around the coffee cup.

Sardi's has several coincidental features. Chief among them is the aforementioned Renee Carroll, likely the world's most famous hatcheck girl. Stories have been written and movies filmed around the life of Renee, who has the shrewd knack of remembering customers' names and who also has achieved some prominence in the past as a backer of shows herself. It is customary, on entering Sardi's, to rouse Miss Carroll from the reading of a play manuscript, and it would not be too startling to find her rehearsing some matinee idol in his lines. Another interesting item at Sardi's are the caricatures by Alex Gard of stage celebrities which line the walls. These drawings, which Gard did for the hell of it at first, were really the springboard that launched him to the mild sort of fame he enjoys as one of the best-known book illustrators in the country. Gard's *Ballet Laughs* is one of the best books done about that weird medium of entertainment.

It is in Sardi's that the noted exhibitionism and affectation of the children of the theater are on display. Gloria LaSwitch, mink-coated and mascaraed to the hilt, will stride into the place at high noon or in the early evening, and spot Valerie Flipbottom, whose guts she hates because she ousted her from the leading feminine role in last season's smash hit. "*Valerie!*" Gloria will screech. "Gloria, *darling!*" Valerie will fire back, and will get up from her table and trip halfway

across the room for the inevitable clinch and wet, lipsticky kiss on the cheek.

Men actors also will use this approach at luncheon in Sardi's; indeed, if you see a male actor and female actor approach each other rather conservatively and shake hands or bow, you can assume that they are carrying on a fierce, tempestuous love affair in private. Displays of affection are taken for granted, of course, but sometimes it does seem as if a ravenous leading man is taking advantage of tradition and holding his chance acquaintance a bit overlong.

The nadir of an actor's life is to be caught in Sardi's at night between the hours of eight-thirty and eleven. Unless he is big enough—a Lunt or a Fontanne—so that people will know he is idle at the moment because he chooses to be, an appearance at the gilded watering-place during those hours is a blunt admission that he is down on his luck. He is in that distressing fog known as At Liberty. All over town, curtains are going up, and if the actor is a smart one, he steers clear of Sardi's during theater-going hours. He buries himself in his hotel room or takes in a movie, or swills coffee at some Eighth Avenue joint until the witching hours are past. Then, gloves in hand and shoulders squared bravely, he sallies forth among the living once more.

Like all Broadwayites actors are inveterate horse players. The casual intruder backstage at the Empire, for example, would be startled to find Macbeth, his royal robes dragging on the floor, intently studying the fifth at Belmont between acts of the matinee performance. There is always an electrician or property man somewhere in the building whose real vocation is booking bets, and to him in a never-ending stream come the Ophelias, the Amandas, the King Lears and the

Elizabeth Brownings of our day. Actors have a tremendous capacity for talking shop (mostly in withering criticisms of contemporaries), but they will abandon that tack occasionally to talk of the horses.

Besides Sardi's, there are several other gathering spots for the theatrical set in town. One is Louie Bergen's Theater Tavern on West Forty-fifth Street, a little joint with the cuisine of a Village spaghetti joint and an Actors' Equity clientele. Business and pleasure mingle in this establishment; it was in Louie's place, I believe, that Saroyan met Betsy Blair, then being wooed by Gene Kelly, and five minutes later had signed her for the lead in his *The Beautiful People,* although she never had spoken a line onstage in her life. The big shots and the little shots of the stage mix freely in the Theater Tavern, although most of its customers are second leads and bit players, walk-ons and chorus boys or girls who some day, by God, are going to become Bernhardts and Booths. Occasionally an ordinary civilian, a sailor or a street-cleaner, perhaps, drops in for a beer, but the conversation about upstaging and fly-catching, and so forth soon drives him back out into the street, pale and shaken.

For some reason, the stage door of the Winter Garden is a rendezvous for thespians, especially if there is a show whirling around inside. Wandering down Seventh Avenue, you are apt to fall across all manner of juveniles and heavies, some of them made up and ready to go, others pallid and forlorn. This situation, of course, applies in a minor way to other stage doors around town. As a matter of cold fact, during the evening hours, all Broadway is flecked with heavily made-up citizens, ducking out for a swift beer or hurrying over to Lindy's for a plate of borscht before the second-act curtain

goes up. Since the average tourist figures that anybody in theatrical makeup is a star, there is much neck-craning and ogling at even the stoutest and bleariest burlesque queen who may be skipping off for a fast couple of shots at the Pink Elephant before the next show.

Along Broadway and just down Forty-fourth Street from Sardi's is the real hotbed of the theater—Walgreen's drugstore. Here is the breeding-place of tomorrow's performers; here the star-kissed speeches of Juliet are tossed off earnestly between lettuce and tomato sandwiches. For Walgreen's is the poor man's Sardi's. There was a time when its famous basement lunchroom contained so much budding talent per square inch that they even spilled over to the upstairs luncheonette, where they occasionally baffled the more sedate customers by going through scenes from *Winterset* or *Elizabeth the Queen*. Since those happy days in the Thirties, however, Walgreen's management has cracked down a trifle on its complement of would-be geniuses and today the ranks are fewer. But the place still has its full share of young actors and actresses; indeed, in the last five or ten years, nearly all of those who have come upon sudden fame in films or on the stage—girls like Bacall or Lizabeth Scott, for example—spent their customary apprenticeship in Walgreen's, mulling over Leo Shull's *Actors' Cues*.

There is, of course, no profession anywhere that affords the sheer kick, the shot in the arm, that the theater does—which is why, I suppose, that backstage in any of Broadway's legit houses often resembles a full-blown opium den. In the expressions on the children's faces, that is. Chorus boys or bit players or even stars drift through the wings and step over

wires or in and out of dressing rooms as if they were in a starry, narcotic fog. The world of make-believe is a heady one. I remember a day when some of the flash and glitter rubbed off on me and sent me out in the street day-dreaming.

It was an afternoon that I talked with young Joan McCracken, the ballerina-comedienne, during her performance in the musical *Bloomer Girl* at the Shubert, and it was just like in the movies, with heads sticking themselves into her dressing room every so often and muttering hoarsely, "Five minutes, Miss McCracken."

Out front, the clarinetist was eyeing the overture with one eye and counting the house with the other while the East Tuckahoe Sewing Circle, bosoms high and bird hats jaunty on their graying heads, swarmed into sixth row center. I kept getting out of Joan's dressing room while Clara, her Negro maid, changed her costumes, and lovely tanned chorus boys were looking me over as if I were a sirloin steak, and . . . well, it was much more interesting than cleaning streets or changing twenties in a bank.

Miss McCracken, incidentally, is perhaps typical of a new kind of actress on Broadway today. She reads. She thinks. She talks. She does everything but, as the carnival barker used to put it, crawl on her belly like a snake. I will not say whether this armament of intellect is for the better or not, but the fact remains that it's different. I came across Miss McCracken later in her career, when she was acting in *Billion Dollar Baby,* and this time we were sitting in the kitchen of her Greenwich Village apartment and discussing Schopenhauer and Freud. She had just been raking the back yard and didn't have any makeup on and looked like hell, and I couldn't help but contrast the whole setting with the cus-

tomary one of years ago when actresses would be lying on chaises longues when interviewers came in, and would smile seductively and wave a long cigarette-holder at a near-by love seat.

I suppose the real zip-the-what-is-it of the theater is the chorus boy, whose life begins with the magical words, "Places! Places everyone . . ." with the swift last-minute grimace into the dressing-room mirror, the final pat to the tilted hat, the skittering into the wings . . . the overture, and then the mechanical smile and the sea of faces and lights and the sing-song melody, *"Oh, we are the boys of this town . . ."* A lot of them, of course, are of the third sex, and with the penchant of their kind for emotional storms and ham dramatics, they keep the backstage life revolving merrily.

I have known some chorus boys, however, who are attempting to use the job as a stepping-stone, and they are all grimness and earnestness. There was Ray Cook, for instance; a native of Fort Collins, Colorado. He has studied for the theater all his life, and after running a dance studio in Boise, Idaho, he blew into the Big Drag in 1941—promptly becoming a secretary for the War Production Board. He began his Broadway career in the accepted manner—with a flop. This was called *The Time, the Place and the Girl* and lasted a week and a half. However, Ray began getting jobs—the *Follies, Dream with Music, Jackpot,* etc.—and the last I heard of him, he was working steadily in a line and giving singing, dancing and piano lessons on the side to augment his sixty dollars a week. But when it's all over, when he's hit his early thirties and his joints creak and his crows' feet show, if he hasn't hit the top, then what?

"Well," he once told me reflectively, "some chorus boys turn straight and go in for legitimate acting. But not many of them ever have gotten far. They just drift along and pretty soon one day they're not around any more and that's the last you hear of them."

An odd kind of actor along the main stem is Ralph Bellamy, the one-time movie yokel and later star of *State of the Union,* the Pulitzer Prize play. Most of the weird citizens who trod the boards, of course, have appetites just as weird. You will find them eating at stray hours, stuffing themselves with not one but four of Reuben's specials, wallowing in plates full of fried food and generally doing everything but patting the inevitable ulcer on the back and inviting it in for a short beer. Not Mr. Bellamy. He is a home man. And in his home the kitchen is the throne room.

"Just call me a talented amateur cook," Mr. Bellamy says, casually. Talented amateur—hah. The big stiff all his life has been one of those guys who not only knows what sauce goes with asparagus but can make it. On stray Sundays, he is apt to wander over to Henri's restaurant, operated by the brothers Gorini, Silvio and Pierre, and just take over the whole kitchen. I remember one Sunday he walked into Henri's, eyed the forty or so customers idly and then said reflectively to Silvio, "You know, I could make a stew for all these people that would melt in . . ." And he did.

The last I heard of the Bellamys, they were not under the same roof, but while they were, Mrs. Bellamy, who is the former Ethel Smith, the celebrated organist, had an interesting time of it. The petite Miss Smith was the original hotel girl before wedding Mr. Bellamy. She lived in trunks, ate in

restaurants, and, as Mr. Bellamy put it enthusiastically, "never really knew the thrill of putting together leftovers in the icebox to make an exciting new dish." After the marriage, however, she gamely tried to acquire this art, but, she said to me sadly, "Every now and then I come up with a recipe that I think is pretty good, and he just looks at me sadly and says reproachfully, 'Now, Ethel, you don't *really* . . .'"

Those Bellamy meals—wahoo. Breakfast wasn't exactly haphazard, but dinner—dinner was right out of a Mary Petty drawing. It was at 6:00 P.M., not one minute before or one minute after. While the rest of the cast of *State of the Union* undoubtedly was bolting hamburgers or propping racing sheets in front of blintzehs, Ralph and Ethel were sitting elegantly down to a table full of snowy linen and the correct forks. Supper used to be at exactly 11:45 P.M., when Ralph had scrubbed off his greasepaint and taxied like mad up to the apartment. In between times, Ralph would address any living soul on the subject of starting out with a quarter of a box of stale macaroni and making *crêpes suzette* out of it.

Mr. Bellamy, of course, is a prime example of the fact that the theater contains more bizarre and unusual characters than any other given profession except perhaps procuring. However, he is not my favorite along Broadway. Every now and then, tired of taking movie money and a little beaten around the edges from presenting Shakespeare to unappreciative audiences, my favorite blows into town to rest. This would be Richmond Reed Carradine, grandson of Dr. Beverly Carradine, founder of the Holiness Methodist Church—the Holy Rollers—and the only person I ever met in my life who was *born* in Greenwich Village. He is, of course, more familiarly known to one and all as John Carradine, the orig-

inal barbers' itch. They itch to shear off that hair which he wears down to his shoulders. I would say offhand that Carradine is the biggest ham I ever met—mercurial, charming, a breath of fresh air in a commonplace world—and the last of the theater's great hams.

There is no slight intended in the use of the word; I think every great actor has a streak of ham in him and John Barrymore, for instance, was the greatest and hammiest. Exhibitionism is another word for it. The fine actors are those who strutted like peacocks as soon as they quit the cradle. Katharine Hepburn, for instance, is a ham and Helen Hayes is not; so I storm the theaters where Kate is playing and avoid those where Hayes performs. Of course, maybe you're the other way around.

Speaking of Barrymore—Carradine dresses like Barrymore, talks like Barrymore, wears shirts with Barrymore collars, plays and adores the Shakespearean roles that made Barrymore famous, and even does *My Dear Children*, Barrymore's last play, in summer stock. In other words, he might be suspected of trying to present himself as a latter-day Barrymore. "Barrymore!" he will comment, bitterly. "*Always* Barrymore! Why never Carradine? Was there only one Shakespearean actor? Am I to go through life with that accursed stigma—'Tell me about Barrymore, Mr. Carradine?' "

This, of course, is merely a preamble to a long and studious discussion of Barrymore's art. John of Gaunt believes that Barrymore was a great man, "because of his God-given spark." What he means is that Barrymore was a ham. The last time I saw Carradine, however, he was on a Mantell tack; he was raving about what a great actor Robert Mantell had

been. "Oh, he was a wonderful bastard!" John said, rhapsodically. "What a voice! What poise! He was the great link between the old school and the modern school." Later, I asked a gray-bearded editor friend of mine about Mantell, who was before my time. He snorted. "The biggest ham who ever trod the boards," he replied derisively.

God, to a struggling young Broadway actress, is any producer—and sometimes one gets the impression of going to church when one visits a producer's office. I have been closeted for business reasons several times with John Golden (he's the one who doesn't produce dirty shows, if you will remember), and I never was quite sure whether to genuflect or give Golden a big red apple. There is nothing backward about this gray-haired impresario, and he will tell you at the drop of a hat about his experiences in the theater and what he is doing for the betterment of The Profession. But over all he conveys that impression of being impatient to get rid of you and on to bigger things. I couldn't help wondering what a mere actor felt like in the presence of this great man; I imagine hundreds have fainted dead away in the magnificence of his office.

Betty Smith, who wrote *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,* told me one day that in her struggling days as a young dramatist, she almost won a prize being awarded by Golden, and she had to go and see him. She made the mistake of having her Phi Beta Kappa key dangling in sight, whereupon—she says—Golden swept his arm at a barber chair in his office and said, "Look—I have a barber come in and shave me every morning—and *I* never went to college! Can you say that?"

However, Golden later told me that Betty was talking through her hat, and that not only did he *go* to college, but that he never made the crack about the barber. The story is yours for the asking.

A much more amiable producer, who seems like a genial bookmaker or press agent with money, is Lee Sabinson, who makes a practice of putting on good plays that never make him much money. He did *Trio* and *Home of the Brave*, for example, and these efforts seem a bit incongruous, because there is nothing of the altruist or esthete in Sabinson outwardly; he looks as if he were out to make an honest buck. However, he has that Eddie Dowling idea, of striking out continually for good, intelligent theater, and I suppose we had just better accept it gratefully and make no cracks about what Lee looks like.

He is a real Broadway boy, though; only a little while ago we both acted as judges in a dance contest up at Roseland, and every time I looked over at him, surrounded on all sides by the lusty, rowdy-de-dow atmosphere of the Big Drag, he was beaming happily.

Then, of course, there are the lifted-pinky producers, like John C. Wilson, who does anything that Noel Coward produces, or Brock Pemberton or Alfred di Liagre, Jr., and the inevitable, precocious Theatre Guildsmen like Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn. But citizens of this stripe aren't seen or known too much by the Broadway mob. They stay around the main stem long enough to get their plays into production and safely past an $8.80 opening night, and then they vanish into the wilds of Connecticut or Bucks County to live the squire's life and read articles in *Theatre Arts* on the role of the theater in our modern scheme of existence. As for

their relationship to the Big Drag itself—I guess they must be considered necessary evils.

But some of the theatrical stars are the real idols of Broadway. Not Katharine Cornell or Helen Hayes or Gertrude Lawrence or Lynn Fontanne—not these *grandes dames* of the theater, who summer on the Cape or revive Chekhov or give out long interviews to the press on the importance of being earnest, or who Live Their Roles. No, the heroines along the Big Drag are earthier, lustier characters, whose acting is broad and vital; more than likely they are musical comedy actresses.

If one were to pick out one lady of them all who can most easily bring Broadway to its knees, that one undoubtedly would be a one-time Long Island stenographer named Ethel Zimmerman, a German-American girl who cut the "Zim" out of her handle and became brassy, bouncy Ethel Merman, for more than a decade the queen of the main stem.

Miss Merman is a purely local idol; she has had her fling at movies with indifferent success, and since movies are the only thing resembling the theater that the rest of the nation has to enjoy, her name doesn't mean too much outside of New York. But in town, a Merman opening is one of *the* events of the season. Perhaps it is because there is so much of Broadway about Ethel; she is a great deal like the parts she plays, warm and generous and extrovertive, never one to mince words or hold back an oath that suits the occasion. In a way, you might say she *is* Broadway—wise in the ways of the world, garish and noisy, full of talent and with a good heart to boot.

Mary Martin is right behind Miss Merman in the affections

of the Broadwayites; while this wonderful redhead has a Connecticut home, she is and has been a familiar figure along the Big Drag, and she never has made any pretensions about her Art. She claims to be nothing more than a song-and-dance girl, but at that entertaining profession she is a top kick.

Among the menfolk, Broadway admires and applauds such as Willie Howard, Lew Parker, Jim Barton—professional performers whose efforts at entertaining can best be described as putting on a show. Their careers have never been affected by Russian "schools" of acting; indeed, the rough spots have usually been polished off in burlesque or six-a-day vaudeville.

Of the ladies who go in for the deep dray-ma, it is likely that Tallulah Bankhead is the closest to the Big Drag's heart. I know I have found her the most enchanting of all, personally, right from the very moment I walked into her hotel suite, found her sultry and glamorous in a black dress topped by a choker of pearls—and was promptly asked, to the accompaniment of the snapping of white garters, to help her move the bed around closer to the telephone. I got the impression you checked your pomposity at the door—that if you didn't move beds, you at least washed dishes or recited or played charades before you got out. That particular day, she sang, chain-smoked, imitated radio announcers, talked endlessly, bawled out her secretary and asked me to, damn it, cut out some of the damns when I wrote about her. John Mason Brown has described Tallu as "the world's only volcano dressed by Mainbocher" and he has hit the brad on the pate.

There is something nostalgic about watching and listening

to Bankhead. When you see her sitting framed against a bowl full of daffodils, or restlessly pacing the floor, or waving her hands excitedly or playing stories on that wonderful piano of a voice that has only a lower register—when you see all this, it is like seeing the great people again from the fabulous era. It is like seeing the young Jack Dempsey at Toledo or Barrymore in *Hamlet* or Helen Morgan keening exquisitely from a piano top. They do not make people like that any more; Tallulah is one of the last.

She was once troubled, as we have already noted, by the stories along Broadway concerning her drinking. "Damn it," she said, "my drinking is my own business. I'm getting tired of everybody watching me like a trained seal. I've been off the wagon for months; I drank hot bourbon all the time I had pneumonia last summer. I'm not a drunk. I can handle it, so I've never given it a second thought. I've never had a pick-up drink in my life; the thought horrifies me. I once had a stomach ulcer as big as a half-dollar and I was on the wagon at the time, so what the hell?"

Then we talked of John Barrymore. "I saw him on that *Hamlet* opening night," she said, her voice a thrilling, reverent whisper. "Nobody can ever play Hamlet again for me. I saw him and Lionel in *The Jest;* I saw it thirteen times, so help me. Do you know he was the most wonderful farceur in the world? And comedy is the test of great acting, to my mind. Anyone can make people cry. Do you know what John Barrymore was? He was an actor. They make damn few these days."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Last Night, Ah Yesternight . . .

As *Time* would intone, nostalgia has come often, as it must to every man, to Broadway. Billy Rose has made one of his several fortunes out of nothing but *heimweh,* and one has only to drift past the Palace movie house these days to spot an occasional old hoofer explaining to a patient listener, between glowering over-the-shoulder glances at the posters for the latest Orson Welles movie, just how he had them in the aisles twenty years ago. We all of us are addicted to floundering lovingly around in the past, as if reveling in a bubble bath, and the older we become, the more lustrous the past's sheen.

So, it is difficult in the face of this natural penchant for painting the dead lily, to assess Broadway of last night for a comparison with Broadway of tonight. Last night, of course, is many things to many persons; to the eighty-year-old, it could mean the day of Sherry's lovely café-bar on Forty-fourth Street, or the time when you could step into the Knickerbocker bar and order not one but *two* Manhattans for a quarter. But the majority of any civilization always seems to be those of us who are slightly potbellied, possessed of about thirteen hairs which we comb hopefully from one side of our gleaming pate to the other, given to the relentless use of Serutan and involved somewhere in the fourth chapter of something like *Forever Amber,* rather than *The Sun Also Rises,* because, hell, we're getting too old to have to *think* while we read.

And to those forlorn ones among us, Broadway last night is the Broadway of the Twenties and early Thirties—the gilded age, the age of champagne baths and fresh gin every hour, the age of needled beer and Imogene Wilson and whoopee and a chicken on every sugar daddy's lap. *Was* it so wonderful? Or, in the vernacular of the hallroom houri, what did it have that we ain't got now?

Well, maybe it was the speakeasy. After all, it was against the rules, and where else but in America, and more particularly along the Big Drag, do the citizens like so well to spit in the eye of authority? Broadway has nothing now that is comparable to the blind pig, lest it be the horseroom, and it takes a great combination of world-weariness, abnormal gambling desire and allergy for fresh air to reach the point where one becomes a regular patron of these establishments.

Besides, in the horseroom you can lose only money; in the average speak, you were laying your eyesight, your health, your reputation and your stomach on the line every time you told the man behind the slot that Jack sent you. You walked closer to the rim of death, in other words, and man has always had an itch to see how far out he could stick his neck without having it razored. The urge to see "what'll happen if I do this" is without a doubt one of the oldest in the world.

But let's face it—on the whole, the average speak was a two-for-a-nickel affair, with uncomfortable chairs, shaky tables and liquor that today wouldn't even be used to season the hogs' corn. There were all kinds of these deadfalls, but the average one was the basement in the brownstone: a couple of murky, stuffy rooms, usually, with greasy wallpaper and indifferent waiters. The silence of the grave prevailed, because everyone had a hilariously silly fear of John Law,

who usually strolled by the joint thinking only of payday at the back door next Thursday.

Even in boob traps like this, cocktails brought a dollar a clip and if you wanted to chance their champagne, you uncorked the top of the twenty-five-dollar section of your billfold. The fraternity spirit of the whole thing was intriguing for a while; when Benny opened the door after a peek at your "membership" card, you felt as if you were on the inside, as if you belonged. Of course, after a while the speak proprietors did everything but ring a bell and use a giant magnet to get you into their places, but that came later.

Of the legitimate clubs that flecked Broadway like a thousand beads of sweat on a colt's neck, few had anything to offer that you cannot find today, if that is your pleasure. A couple of the saloons had female impersonators, of course—the late Jean Malin was a standby at The Argonaut on West Fifty-fourth Street, and there were rougher, less skilled pseudo-pansies at the Club Calais on Fifty-first—but aside from that doubtful entertainment, everything was the same as today. Oh, maybe you saw more navels and bare chests, but there's little difference in a couple of inches covering one way or another.

The El Morocco of its day was El Patio, which was anchored on, of all places, West Fifty-second Street, now the home of the hot trumpet. Nothing was different there. Emil Coleman's orchestra played for dancing, dinner jackets and tails were seen more often than not, and the Broadway mob itself paid little attention to the place, leaving it to the Four Hundred. Then there was the Hollywood, the Latin Quarter of its day, where N. T. Granlund was the master of cere-

monies and the specialty of the house was a line of good-looking, if empty-faced wenches, with long legs. Three shows a night, a familiar story, and the ads told you that each was "better than the one before." What they meant, of course, was that each seemed better than the one before, as you got drunker and drunker and fancied that the redhead in the second row was smiling at you.

One or two of the places had the real sordid glamour that the others struggled for; in the Three Hundred Club on Fifty-fourth Street, for instance, if you looked past the entertainment and the dance band, you could see that the brand new shellacking and painting of the walls had not completely covered up the bullet holes that had been placed there lovingly by gorillas when the joint was known as the Club Abbey. There was a place called the Silver Slipper on Forty-eighth Street, where three honorable gentlemen named Clayton, Jackson and Durante killed each other for laughs every night in a spirit of joy that does seem to have departed these motley shores. But on the whole—Will Oakland's Terrace, Sloppy Joe's, the Salon Royal, the New Lido, Club Richman—there was nothing to be found in the nightlife of last night that you cannot uncover tonight.

Broadway spent many of its evenings up in Harlem, a state of affairs that does not now exist. Harlem has been undergoing a nightlife renaissance in recent years, but there has been little or no attempt made to woo the sensation-seeking whites, which is a mighty good thing. We do not have to be told at this late date (except, of course, in Washington and everywhere south) that Negroes are people, not tigers and lions behind bars to be stared at. But last night, ah yesternight—

then, Harlem was a frenzied, nervous, mad arena, that came alive only after the lights had begun blinking out, one by one, along Broadway.

The main stem of the place was Jungle Alley, or One Hundred and Thirty-third Street between Seventh and Lenox Avenues, wherein reposed such amiable dens of sin as Tillie's, the Clam House, the Nest and the Catagonia Club. Everyone drank gin, and for the out-of-town trade, there were such razz-ma-tazz spots as Connie's Inn and the Cotton Club, featuring what the press agents always frantically called fast-stepping revues.

One place unique to those days, was the fairyland called the Central Park Casino. Decorated by Joseph Urban, who was the Dorothy Draper of his day, the Casino was a monument to grandeur, with its Pine Room, its Silver and Black-and-Gold salons and its Pavillon, cluttered up beautifully with baskets of flowers. They took your eyeteeth at the Casino, but this was an infinitesimal detail. Because to squire your woman to the Casino was the great gesture—and where else, of course, could you get to see Jimmy Walker so close up?

When this unbelievable place, with its five-buck *couvert*, was torn down to make room for another of those damned playgrounds that Bob Moses has spread so insidiously around the city, there was open crying in the streets, and Broadwayites were sad at their play. There were a couple of other traps with Casino pretensions—the Embassy, the Seaglade, the Villa Venice—but they were like movie sets by comparison.

The gaming along the Big Drag was pretty much as it is today, possibly a little heavier and a little flashier. The difference now is that the dice throwers and stud players are

cagier, and don't turn up in the newspapers the way they did then. For every Arnold Rothstein and Nick the Greek of last night, there is an Arnold Rothstein and Nick the Greek today; but they are careful not to pose for photographers, and the government has a hard time pinning income-tax raps on them.

There still are steerers all over the Big Drag, however—cabbies, waiters, bartenders and bellhops just pining to tell you, for a small fee, where the big game is progressing. Dice, stud, stuss, roulette, faro—whatever your pleasure, you are entirely likely to find it on the main stem tonight. There is no guarantee that the game is on the square or that you won't run into "shapes" or "dynamite" (loaded with quicksilver) dice, but it's a game, anyway, which is all the average gambler asks for. The games still "float"; you still will find them one night in a tumble-down, tattered hotel in the Forties, and the next night in a loft building in the Bronx.

The food is no worse tonight than it was last night. If you can fight your way through the celebrities and hand-wavers at Twenty-One, for example, you will come upon a chopped sirloin steak that is a specialty of the house and is a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Where there was the Caviar of yesterday, today Sasha Maeef's Casino Russe serves Russian food that is out of this world. The Colony, of course, was and is. Say no more. Reuben's was yesterday's eating-place for Broadway; while it still has a hold on the night owls, its place in the stomachs of its countrymen seems to have been usurped by Leo Lindy's herring house. No, nothing has happened to the Big Drag's kitchens overnight.

Last night, the chorus girls were a little different. They were Ziegfeld girls, then, if you will remember, and *Scandals* girls, and no matter how you slice it, a good many of them

could be labeled by no other name than gold-digger. A mink coat was dream's end, and while the respectable married ones now will deny it, for quite a batch of those babes the world consisted of champagne, gold bracelets, a five-minute look at the newspapers, hangovers and the boring task of parading around a stage at night.

Today, it seems to me, the average showgirl is considerably more earnest about her work, much tighter with her passion—and, I should say offhand, not quite so successful in the overall search for a millionaire because of the grimness and intensity with which she pursues him. In the old days, Broadway's showgirls were hazy-daisy types, in love with frivolity and free and easy in the boudoir, with the result that many a rich citizen of the Four Hundred, raised in a atmosphere of stuffy and priggish women, fell for them wholeheartedly and, after a few months in the hay, married them.

Today, the wealthy citizens are frequently frightened off by the chastity-belt atmosphere that surrounds the front-line cuties, with the inevitable result that the girls marry musicians, who are notorious suckers for a fast line and a dropped shoulderstrap.

The showgirl in recent years has been glorified by a shrewd, enterprising nightclub owner named Monte Proser, who once was a press agent and now is magnificently aware of the benefits of being nice to newspapermen. What the Ziegfeld Girl was twenty years ago, the Copacabana Girl seems to be today. Inside of five years, Proser made the Copa gal an institution, and had sixty of them snatched from him in that time by the movies. These lucky—if that is the word—wenches included June Allyson, Lucille Bremer, Martha Stewart, Adele Jergens and Jane Ball, Miss Ball adding a fillip to the

success story by marrying Mr. Proser in addition to getting into the movies. Proser's girls are unique in that they have never worked in other nightclubs. He figures that if they have been around the circuit—La Martinique, Latin Quarter, Folies Bergere, etc.—they probably have lost a good deal of their youthful charm, "and besides, they've become too wise." What he wants is a girl who doesn't look like a showgirl, if you follow me.

Not only do the girls themselves exercise a fastidious control over the men they date, but Proser and Jack Entratter, who manages the Copa, guard them from the cash customers —a far cry from the happy, lovely days of the stagedoor John. This, according to the Copa's press agents, "discourages the unwanted type of patronage that one finds at some nightclubs where the girls are 'good mixers.' "

Personally I think they have the wrong attitude here, because most showgirls are after a rich man for a husband, and if the manager and owner of the club in which they work are going to make things harder for them, why, there's no percentage. If I were the Copa boss, I would have no compunctions about letting my girls loose to fend for themselves; their methods of self-defense, I should think, are considerably more skilled and effective than any that mere man could devise.

Certainly the showgirl of today is more lavishly outfitted, professionally, then her predecessors—even more than the Ziegfeld girl. Proser, for example, spends a great deal more on his individual costumes than any showman of the Twenties did, and remember, he has a new set of them four times a year, with the changing revues. Papier-mâché has no place in the wardrobe of tonight's chorus girl, and if she is more thor-

oughly clad than last night's filly, that is all for either the better or worse, depending on your emotional maturity.

Broadway of yesternight had no Broadway Rose, of course, and I suppose that is one count on which mother and father had the best of us. This tattered and disheveled wench, real name Anna Dym, delivered into our midst from the wilds of Brooklyn, reached in the late Thirties the status of the world's most exclusive and most obnoxious panhandler. She begged from no one but celebrities, usually, and accepted nothing but folding money. It has been reliably estimated that her income was between ten and twelve thousand dollars a year. God knows who began the practice of giving her money, but he should be drawn and quartered and hanged by his thumbs. In her heyday, during the late Thirties, Broadway Rose was the scourge of the Big Drag, using longshoremen's language, spitting in the eyes of those who refused her honeyed pleas, and generally behaving like a zombie. It was said that the cops of the West Fifty-fourth Street station, who once nerved themselves and pulled her in for creating a disturbance outside of Lindy's, were "terrified" of her.

Rose's technique was to devour her victims with hugs and kisses. This frightening method of operation brought her into contact with the law first on December 20, 1939, when she was arrested during the premiere of *Gone With the Wind* by a Bronx cop on special Broadway duty, who obviously was ignorant of the tiger he had by the tail. She screamed so much that the West Fifty-fourth Street cops let her go the next morning. On another occasion, she was sent to Kings Park State Hospital for a stretch, but was released after several weeks—through, she said, a columnist's pull.

She made a weird figure when she was at work along the

main stem—covered with cheap jewelry, shod in tattered galoshes, topped with a skating hat and more often than not with an extra pair of shoes hung around her neck. Since 1944, when she did a few days' penance in the psychopathic ward of Bellevue Hospital—for climbing into parked cars, honking their horns and leaving only after being gifted with money—Broadway Rose has dropped out of sight, and there are stories that she has been cleaned up and is leading a quiet, normal life. However, the specter that was Rose during the late Thirties still hangs over the Big Drag, like Morley's ghost.

Another lovely thing that is gone is the grind and bump, the revolving hips, the quivering bosom, the shake-it-and-break-it routine—i.e., burlesque. There are two schools of thought on this art; mine is the one that considers it, God forgive the expression, a fine and lusty slice of Americana. It seems distressing that the campaign for a cleaner and brighter world (which began in New York, blast 'em, with the destruction of the aforementioned Central Park Casino) should have extended to the flea-ridden, crumbly old burlesque houses of Broadway. The Gaiety, the Eltinge, the Republic—these are names that will live forever in the hearts of those old ones among us who spent our time watching Stinky and Shorty or the incredible Carrie Finnell when our more refeened playmates were sighing over Katharine Cornell and Brian Aherne.

Many of Broadway's most honored citizens, of course, had their roots in burleycue. I remember Phil Silvers, the movie and café comic, telling me what a magnificent life it had been—how you slept every day until noon and then did four shows and afterward you drank gin and sauerkraut juice in somebody's dumpy hotel room until five or six in the morning,

when the bellboy blew a whistle and you all went back to your own rooms. Well, *almost* all of you. You never made more than $150 a week and the troupe manager always was trying to slit you up the back, but $150 went a long ways in those days and it was great good fun getting rid of it between the horses, the bad gin and the cards. You never gave a damn whether school kept or not. That was burlesque—and, as Silvers told it, "It's a wonder I didn't die."

He had four years of it—sleeping in dressing-room chairs, eating the wrong food at the wrong time, betting on the wrong horses all the time, never seeing the sun and living like a mole. He contrasted it with his life today in the California movie colony, full of sunshine, vitamins and sleep. I asked him what the healthy life had done for him. "I lost my hair," he said.

To Silvers, Broadway without burlesque looks as if it had a tooth missing. It was a low business and he loved it. In his heydey, he was teamed with the late Rags Ragland, and they became as famous as Stinky and Shorty, the highest accolade I can offer. Improvisations were the breath of life for them, and I remember Phil explaining to me the intricate business of preparing a new routine. Strike out that "new," come to think of it—there hasn't been a new burlesque routine in fifty years. Everybody would sit around after the 1:00 A.M. show, yawning and eating hamburgers and reading the pink editions of the *News*, and the manager would ask Phil and Rags what was ya first scene.

"Fun in the park," Phil would answer.

"What's that?"

"Oh, that's the funniest skit you ever saw. Always goes big."

"Oh. Well, what's ya next scene?"

"The wrong husband."

"What's that?"

"Oh, a great scene. Knock ya dead."

And that was a burlesque rehearsal. Later, in a hotel room, Phil would say to Rags, "Maybe we better dream a couple of routines for the new show, like we said we had." "Ah," Rags would say philosophically, "we'll take the saloon scene and put it inna park." "Okay."

Sometimes the preparations were a bit more elaborate, if they had time between drinking and selecting the galloping glue-pots. "I'd say to Rags," Phil told me, reverently, " 'Well, you gimme a Sims Dempsey and I'll come back with a skull and that oughta be good for a couple yochs.' "

Breaking that down—a Sims Dempsey is a kind of double-talk made famous by the burlesque comic for whom it is named—not the made-up words kind of doubletalk that has become popular in recent years, but the kind in which the sentence veers off in all directions. Example: "Well, you see, I said to him but then on the other hand, now that is, there were three of them, of course. . . ." A skull is a double-take or a "God, am I *seeing* things?" reaction, and a yoch is a laugh.

On the whole, it seems to me that Broadway still packs the punch it did twenty or fifty years ago. The street itself, of course, is a shambles in comparison with what it once was, but the Broadway atmosphere, the Broadway look, the Broadway life still remain in one part or another of the big town. And even wandering up the main stem these nights, studded as it is with Nedick's stands and Childs' restaurants,

you can't help but feel a kind of nervous vitality and lift—although, of course, you also can feel a thorough irritation when some shuffling gawker jams his elbow into your eye rounding the corner into Forty-seventh Street.

If you will permit a tiny thimble full of philosophy—why, Broadway is what you make it. Like Brooklyn, it's pretty much a state of mind, and when someone like Stanley Walker shudders, wraps his cloak around him and disappears into the night because he feels that the Big Drag has lost its charm, the natural conclusion, to me, is that poor Stanley is aging. Every now and then I catch myself ready to take a swing at someone along the main stem whose behavior has been exceptionally annoying to me, and then I bring myself up short and remember that ten years ago I wouldn't have noticed the irksome one but would have been looking up at the signs and breathing in the flash and rattle and bang of Broadway and loving every minute of it. It might be, naturally, that the Big Drag is for the young in heart.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Once Seen, Never Forgotten

ONCE UPON a time, there was a street called Broadway.

It was quite a street. Get your father's face out of the sports page some night and beg him to tell you about it.

He'll remember. When I think of how he'll remember it—of how he will recall the white ties and ermine, the carriages, the roof gardens, the glitter and crackle and sunburst—there comes to mind a passage from the Hecht-Fowler play, *The Great Magoo.* It was a play about carnival life, some of you may remember, and there was a first-scene curtain speech by the hero, a talented barker, in which he began his spiel about the sad-eyed little sideshow tart with whom he was in love. It went something like this: "Hidden under these black veils is beauty—a white body made to torment the dreams of men. When I tell you this is the most beautiful woman in the whole world, I do not lie. That's facts! When you have seen her drop the last veil, and stand writhing in the final movements of her dance, ladies and gentlemen, your money back if she isn't the girl of your dreams—and more! (*He whangs the gong.*) Come on inside, everybody, and see all the veils come off. Seven of 'em . . . Salome . . . she'll make your heart beat faster and your arteries boil . . . here you are, folks—the one and only Salome—once seen never forgotten! Once heard always remembered. . . ."

What in God's name became of it? What became of the

girl of our dreams, the most beautiful woman in the world, the white body made to torment the dreams of men? Who turned it into an ashcan; who touched his dark wand to the coach and four and turned them back into a pumpkin and mice? Who did this awful thing to Broadway?

The movies, maybe. Count the highclass nickelodeons as you shuffle up the long street. The Paramount, the Strand, the Hollywood, the Palace, the Winter Garden; the little joints like the New York and the Rialto and the Mayfair. It used to be that a buck was a reasonable tip for the gents' room attendant in any place along Broadway; now it gets you in to see some gripping melodrama, a two-hour stage show, a dozen grinning tootsies kicking their way across a stage, a limp baritone singing "Night and Day" and any given orchestra that puts on funny hats.

The way Broadway runs is this—first a movie house, then a shirt shop, then an orange-juice stand, then another movie house, then another shirt shop. . . .

Maybe it was the class revolution that has been mushrooming across Manhattan. Maybe it was the depression. God knows, maybe the bad gin had something to do with it. Whatever it was, Broadway has a dirty collar and a tattered cuff, now. The locusts have swept through it, as they did to Park Row, a rum-soaked, flea-bitten shell of a once-great newspaper street. Fourteenth Street was the same way; now only Luchow's sits, surrounded by Russian movie houses and bargain basements, to remind us of its holy past. They all have their little day; West End Avenue was a snooty, nose-in-the-air residential area once; now it is a dingy, rundown boulevard full of dentists and drugstores and cavernous,

passé apartments that are dusty in the corners and remind you of an old Clara Bow set. The locusts come to them all, as they have come now to Broadway.

The apologists have a few talking points, to be sure. Whatever it is now—a baggy, powdered and painted, syphilis-ridden old whore stumbling along, tugging at your coat sleeve and calling you dearie, perhaps—it is like nothing else in the world. You can tramp Michigan Boulevard in Chicago and not be sure you aren't on some Philadelphia street; you can walk along Walnut Street in Philly and, if you forget a moment, think you're in Albany or Cleveland. But the *Magoo* spiel holds good in one respect: once seen, Broadway still is never forgotten; once heard, always remembered. Come on along, come along . . . the night is dark and the wind is up.

A thousand of them to a block, there are. Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Scrape, scrape, scrape. Drunk, sober, sad, glad, giggling, tearful—pouring out of the cornucopias of subways, taxis and busses. "Hello, baby, how about a coke?" "Only a short wait for seats." Shuffle, shuffle. What are they looking for? They all have that fierce look of expectancy . . . looking past the Astor to Duffy Square and past Duffy Square to the Brass Rail and past the Brass Rail . . . only to realize that Broadway has petered out. That's all there is; there isn't any more. What are they looking for?

Probably what they always have looked for—the pot of gold; the rainbow, Ultima Thule, Prince Charming, the fairy princess, all the things that they were told in the books they could have for the asking, but never seemed to come true.

Jackson Heights is neat and orderly, and they fold up the sidewalks at 10:00 P.M. in New Rochelle, so the suburbanites have come to the main stem for their adventure.

During the second war, out-of-towners came, too, from New Zealand, India, Ireland and the Orkneys; where they had come in the thousands before, they came in the hundreds of thousands. They made wartime Broadway a fabulous, incredible sight—a pinwheel of browns and blues and grays. There were soldiers everywhere; soldiers being sick on corners, or soldiers swaggering six abreast and running afoul of other soldiers going the other way. Soldiers standing on the steps of the Astor with the traveling salesmen, and soldiers playing football at the corner of Forty-sixth Street with a bag of doughnuts. They spilled over into the sidestreets; they ran out of Broadway's ears, and the lame, the halt and the blind among us who had not gone to war watched them, grinning and envious. They who were about to die saluted us in their peculiar way.

Everybody's looking for the brass ring, so let's hop on the carousel. We plunge in at Forty-fifth Street; the first thing we see is the big Bond's store advertising two-pants suits. Wait a minute—are we on the right street? Broadway—two-pants suits on Broadway?—gee. A couple of sailors are looking at the two-pants suits, wistful enough to cut your heart to bits.

"*. . . ask a taxi-driver, Joe; taxi-drivers know everything. Hey, buddy, d'ya know where . . .*"

You look over Forty-sixth Street carefully, and on one pole there are eight signs—One-way, Quiet-School, No-Parking, No-U-Turn—and leaning against it are a couple of


P.B.

corporals. A big movie sign, with Marlene Dietrich's legs in gold paint sprawled its length, has their undivided attention.

Dance palaces—every block and a half you stumble across them—the Orpheum, Honeymoon Lane with its sign, "If you aim to dance with a charming girl, shoot in here," right next to Klein's Internationally Famous Gymnasium. Ah, an excellent photograph of Siegmund Klein boldly gripping his wrists, as if he is about to break them in two, but another body beautiful has drawn the wide eyes of a couple of zoot-suiters—a faded blonde with 39 hips, one of the charming girls with whom you might aim to dance.

". . . so I said, gee, Maxie, we oney went to Lindy's for one drink and you can't expect a girl to stay home all the . . ."

And then, like a fire in a wastebasket suddenly flaring up, there is a raised voice and a "Who ya pushin', anyway?" and for a second the mob stops cold to watch a possible fight. . . . But it wanes and the treadmill begins again. "DISHWASHER WANTED." There it is again, this time in Romeo's spaghetti house. What's the matter; doesn't anyone want to become a dishwasher any more? Everybody wants dishwashers, and there are none. You muse on the state of affairs—but then you spot the oddest note of all—a young mother doggedly pulling a trailer-kiddie car behind her with a sleepy small man sitting wearily in it. The crowd opens deferentially. Broadway is a sucker for babies, expectant mothers and small dogs.

Black lace panties, all sizes, in a window—a photo studio with a phony "Blitzkrieg Bar" and a voice recording ma-

chine, forty-nine cents plus one cent tax, come on in and make a lit-tle souven-eer for the folks at home.

". . . and this lowlife Arcaro, he is coming in along the rail with Nebraska when . . ."

Poor men's Stork Clubs; they line Broadway endlessly, with their quivering, shimmering, blinking neon signs. Here's one called Iceland. Downstairs, mirrors, red walls. The orchestra beats industriously; perspiring men dance doggedly around with either very young girls or equally red-faced old bags who could be no one but their wives. A big smorgasbord table. Two soldiers a bit under the weather; the management carefully guides them into the night. A couple of magicians do their stuff and the crowd laughs, a little too loudly, a little too long. They want so badly to have a good time. "Don't let me take more than one drink, Edward," you hear a fifty-ish woman whisper at the next table.

Ah, Broadway was for the big bank roll once, the roll that could choke a horse; now the lure is something for nothing. You stop in front of a restaurant called the Aquarium—NO MINIMUM, NO COVER a big sign says, almost reaching out and grabbing you by the shirttails as you drift slowly by. And there—over there is the Latin Quarter—the FAMOUS Latin Quarter. The sign says, "Nowhere in America can you spend so glorious an evening at so moderate a cost," that's what the sign says. Shades of Churchill's. Wouldn't Texas Guinan twist and spin in her uneasy grave—old Texas, who kicked you in the teeth and made you love every minute, even while your poor billfold was bleeding to death in your hip pocket?

The Tango Palace over there, "Always beautiful girls to

dance with," and the little leather shop called Chic de Paris at Forty-eighth Street, and the Paddock Bar and Grill with the photo of the triple dead heat, the day Brownie and Wait a Bit and Bossuet finished all together and Broadway talked of nothing else for a week. The drugstore with the cheap, wearying little dirty Zito dog pictures in the window. Over the Capitol Theater, two lonely windows anounce that "Dr. Grimm, Dentist," is sweating it out this night, dreaming up an inlay or a bridge, perhaps, while the main stem shivers and screams and grinds its teeth below him.

". . . look, Florence, you know how much we need for the rest of the week. Arright, so if you think we can afford this place, why let's . . ."

We peer into the window of McGinnis of Sheepshead Bay, a hot and noisy restaurant, and we watch the double-entendre cartoons unwind on a sort of spool around the top of the bar, like the penny-arcade movies of *A Night in Tillie's Bedroom.* Two Canadian soldiers, their big shoes shined like the top of a stove, sit on stools and eye the humor uncertainly. Lindy's—blue tile and brass and pictures in the window and Leo Lindy worrying around inside somewhere, hovering tenderly over the race of man.

A soldier asks a cheap little blonde on the corner if she wantsa go rolla-skatin', but we are past before she stops pouting to answer. Little red turtles in the window of a novelty shop, slipping and skidding around on the wet stones of their glass prison and trying desperately to escape from this forsaken hellhole of noise and light. Whelan's drugstore at Fiftieth Street—"Wanted, soda girls and men." Lots of men outside, all sizes and shapes, but they don't seem to want the job. Everybody's an executive now; every-

body has a million dollars, every night is Saturday along Broadway.

". . . just a little longer, sweetheart. One more block, honey baby. How do you feel? Do you think you can . . ."

Here we are back at Duffy Square, gray and quiet and studded with hangers-on and bums, and now it all seems melted together like the sherbet and the ice cream, like the closet that McGee always is going to fix. Over there, an orange-juice stand which advertises that "ZIGZAG OPERATORS ARE WANTED," and you speculate on that uncertainly for a while. Then a book-and-record store; a couple of fat little girls—sixteen, maybe—step away from the crowd and come close to the window, where they eye, a little uncertainly, *Ideal Marriage, The Sex Technique in Marriage* and *The Marriage Manual.* Dubiously, dubiously—then they look in the adjacent window and see squirt cigarettes and snake jam and buttons with "HELLO, MISTER" on them in big red letters. Big grins. Wah-hoo.

The crowd thickens, like molasses, and you know from the density of the turgid mass that you are in front of the Paramount movie house. Over a sailor's shoulder you see the writing on the garish poster that advertises the film . . . in lipstick, scrawled childishly, "Whitey, I left for the Capitol." . . . "F.S. (that would be Mr. Sinatra, doubtless without a doubt), I love you." And, simply, brilliantly: "I was here."

The Paris Danceland offers 50 Charming Partners 50, and four soldiers accept the offer somewhat indifferently, and clump upstairs. Men with slack jaws and empty eyes stand in front of the latest horror movie at the Rialto and lose themselves momentarily in the announcements of the ghoul-meets-

vampire film. A pansy gives a passing bit-part actor the eye, is wearily ignored, shrugs his shoulders. . . .

". . . now Fred, you know my feet hurt, and if we hurry we can get the 11:36 and what do you want to go there for when . . ."

And there it is—the main stem stretching and yawning and screaming and howling and pitching rocks and dancing in rage, winding itself up and exploding with a bang, finger-snapping and signs, signs, signs and the children, from fifteen to fifty, stunned and gaping and looking for what they do not know. You see an old man in a green sweater, right there on the edge of Times Square, grinning and sitting in a cardboard box. What the hell? Let him sit there, brother. He likes to sit in a cardboard box.

All night it goes on—a two-penny, raffish thing, a poor, forlorn thing, groping and finding not, and then suddenly the clock strikes four and . . . how was it Oscar Wilde put it?

Then suddenly the tune went false,
The dancers wearied of the waltz,
The shadows ceased to wheel and whirl.
And down the long and silent street,
The dawn, with silver-sandalled feet,
Crept like a frightened girl.