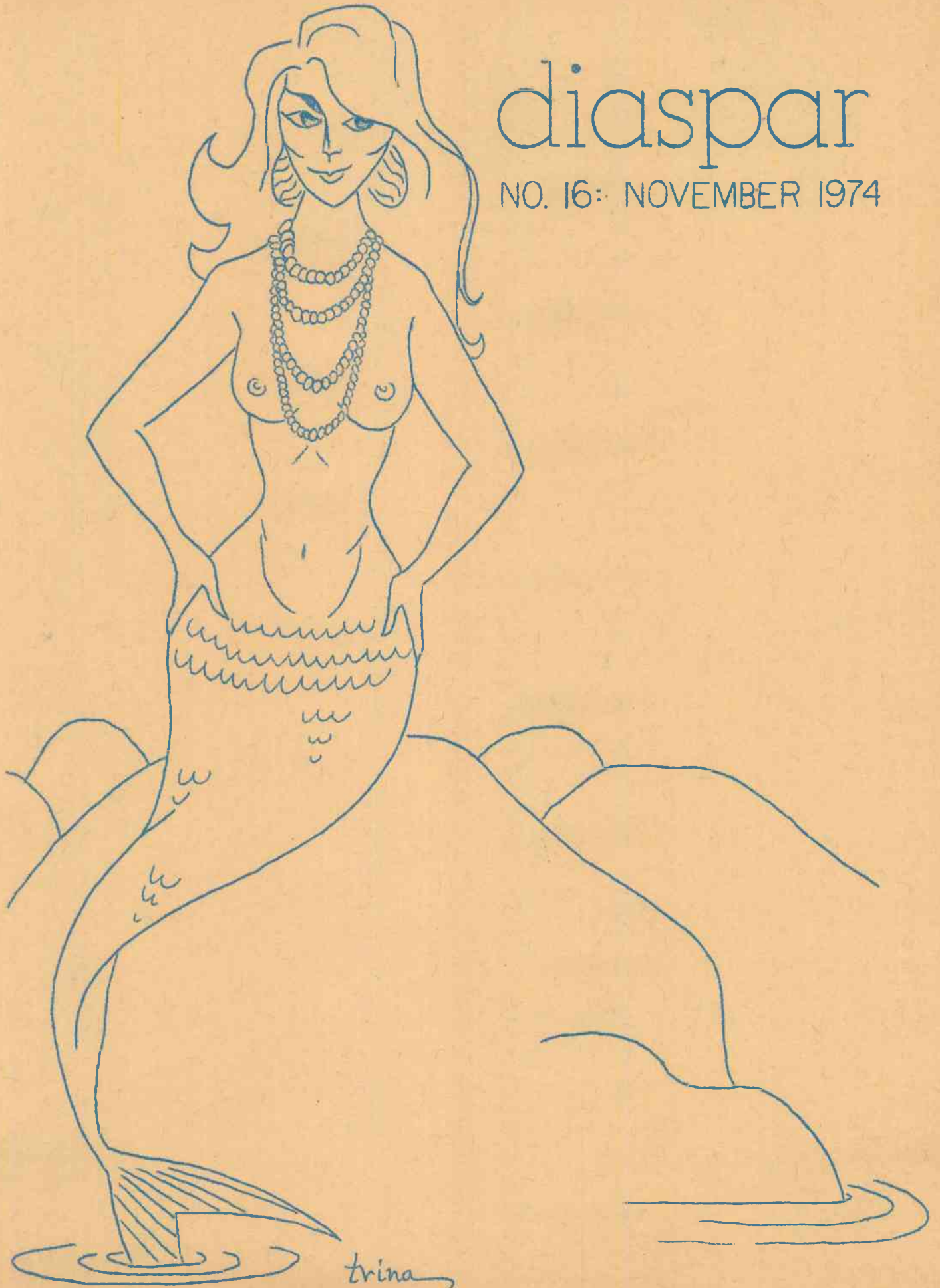
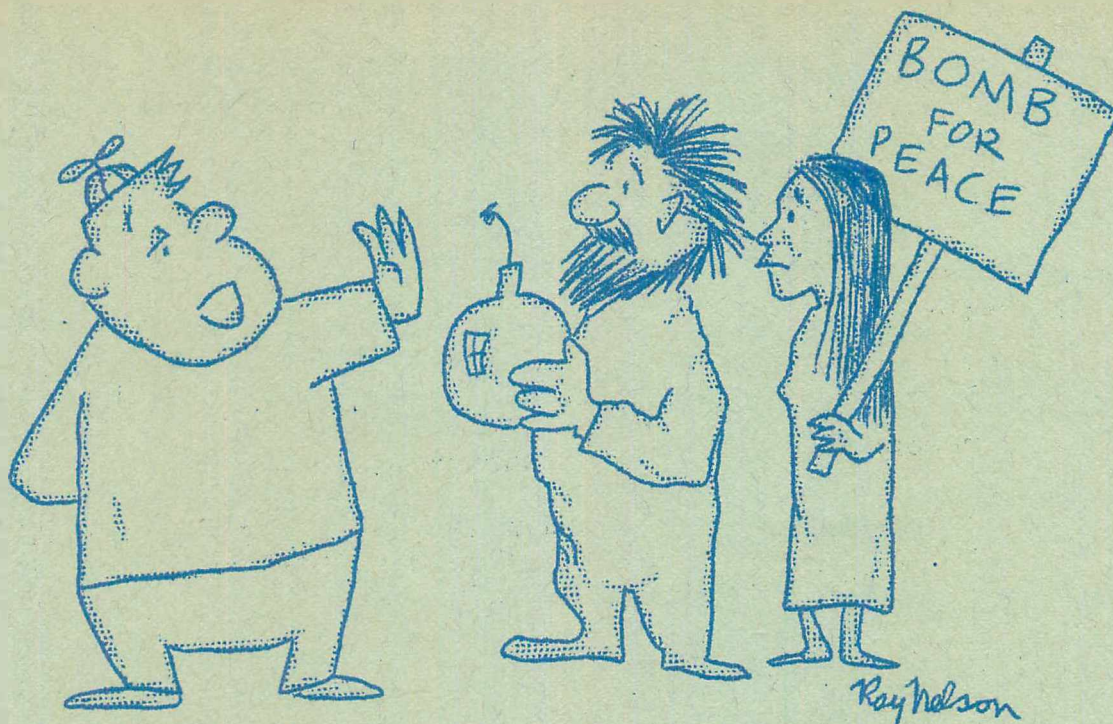


diaspar

NO. 16: NOVEMBER 1974





"Bombs are old stuff. You should of seen what the D.S.F.L. did to Art Rapp's lawn in 1947."

DIASPORA 16

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FANSPRACH

"YOU AND I ARE IN THE BACKWATERS OF TODAY'S FANDOM," Charlie Brown told me.

This was the same Charlie Brown who copublishes LOCUS, the indispensable newszine that is FANAC's successor on the material plane. (FANAC has no spiritual successor in today's soulless fandom, as you know.) It was the same Charlie Brown who just a year ago was undergoing querulous attacks from all fannish quarters because LOCUS had won so many Hugos.

"I can't keep up with all these new fans," Charlie told me. "They're all named Mike, for one thing. Mike Glicksohn, Mike Glycer, Mike Gorra -- who can tell them apart? Their last names all start with G."

"Mike Glicksohn wears a hat and drinks IPA," I explained kindly.

"Mike Glyer is the only Mike G who lives on the west coast. Mike Gorra is a football player who makes a lot of typos in his fanzine. He's probably an offensive lineman."

"Who is Mike Gorra?" Bob Silverberg asked.

"Who is Gregory Kern?" Charlie countered.

"I think it's Brett Sterling under a penname," I said kindly. Turning to Bob, I said, "Mike Gorra published BANSHEE, the fanzine that had an article by Burbee in which he said you reminded him of a beer can."

Bob pondered this. He said, "That must be because Burbee regards beer cans as the source of truth and beauty."

"Yes, that was how he explained it," I said kindly.

"I mean," said Bob, "I'm not shaped like a beer can -- I'm smaller on top than I am in the middle."

"Well, maybe he meant you remind him of a crushed beer can," said I.

We were standing at the checkout counter of our local Lucky supermarket, the secret meetingplace of Fabulous Oakland Fandom. I often run into famous Oakland fans there.

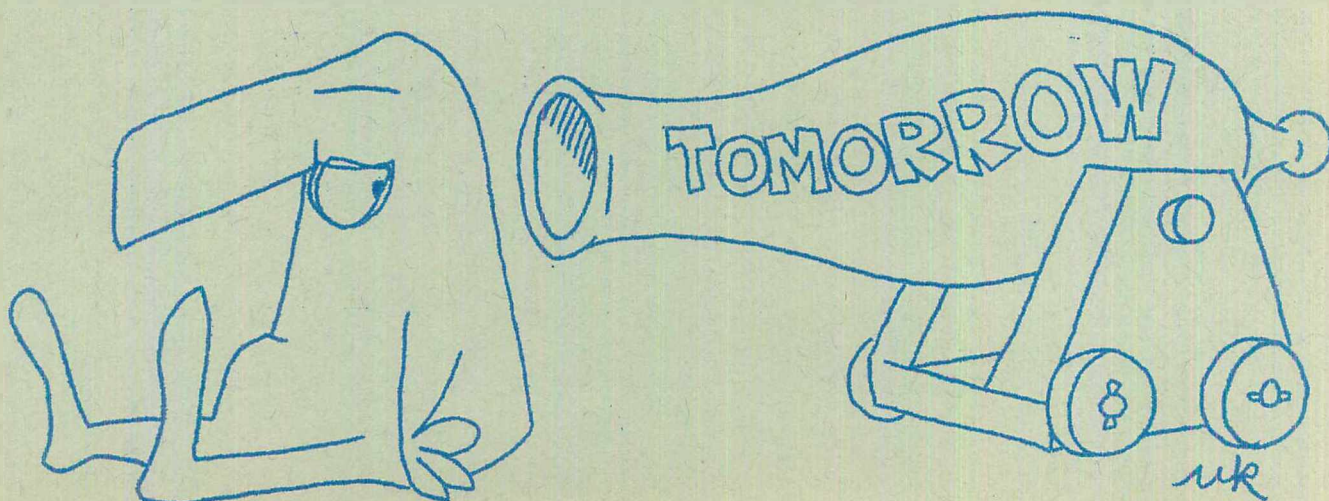
Sometimes they run into me. In fact, just then Dena Brown ran over my foot with her shopping cart. "Hi, Terry," she said kindly.

"I hope your shopping cart is insured," I said.

"Why? Did I hurt your foot?"

"No, but I have whiplash," I said. I writhed in semblance of agony.

"I can't keep up with these new fannish dances," said Charlie.



"You can't get whiplash from getting your foot run over," Dena told me reprovingly.

"It's possible," I said in my best Tatum O'Neil imitation. "Stranger things have happened. Didn't you sprain your foot just by walking around at the Westercon?"

Dena is always coming down with weird unexplained maladies. Last year she hobbled around on crutches for months because she'd damaged the cartilage in her knee. "I've been watching too much football on television," she explained. So I loaned her my copy of The Thinking Man's Guide to Pro Football, hoping that would enable her to get through at least the preseason without injury. But on the last day of the Westercon, distracted by thoughts of driving 350 miles home, she sprained her foot while walking to the car. I did most of the driving home.

"I should've gotten you a copy of The Thinking Woman's Guide to Pro Football," I said to her as we passed through King City, "but no one's ever written one."

"None of your sexist remarks," she said.

"I am not now nor have I ever been a sexist," I said (rather wistfully). "I've always felt that persons are as equal as men."

We passed a young person whose air of wholeness struck me as extremely manifest. "Wow," I said, "did you see the bazooms on that person?"

"I can't keep up with all these modern fannish terms," said Charlie.

"Neither can I," I said consolingly. "You're right, we're both in the backwaters of today's fandom. But it doesn't bother me. I think of myself as a bright flower blooming in the quiet backwaters of fandom while the hectic mainstream rushes by, bubbling and frothing on its way to the latest Planet of the Apes convention."

After a moment Dena said, "I think David Gerrold is funnier," cutting off the conversation and everything else.

THE COVERS OF THIS ISSUE continue this fanzine's delving into the moldering art-files of yesteryear. Trina drew the front cover in 1960 and ever since, I've been trying to work up my nerve to try to transcribe onto stencil the fine flowing lines of that drawing. In 1960, of course, Trina wasn't yet the fabulous underground comix cartoonist she's since become (she was then a fabulous fannish cartoonist), but she could draw then too.

On the back cover is an ancient drawing by Ray Nelson, one that he did God knows when; certainly it was dog-eared when he gave it to me nearly fifteen years ago. Oddly reminiscent of both Frank R. Paul and Rube Goldberg, the original was done in pencil on the opposite side of a sheet of paper that had a variety of smaller drawings, and those drawings on the back made it difficult to transfer the drawing

to stencil -- when I put it on a lightscope, the drawings on the back naturally showed through. I finally Xeroxed it, thereby eliminating the showthrough.

Ray did his interior drawings rather more recently -- last week. It's been awhile since I've published a fanzine illustrated by Ray Nelson (or since anyone else has, for that matter), and gosh, it seems just like old times. In fact, this whole issue seems a lot like Old Times, since I even used many of the same lettering guides and shading plates that I used to use in INNUENDO, KLEIN BOTTLE and so forth. When I left for New York in 1961 I bequeathed my stenciling equipment to whoever wanted it, and it's passed from hand to hand over the years, most of it coming back to me recently through the good offices of Miriam Knight and Alva Rogers. I'd say it certainly is a wondrous thing how fans hang onto such things for so many years, but come to think of it, to whom can you give lettering guides except another fan?

There's also a drawing in this issue by William Rotsler. See if you can guess which one it is!

-- Terry Carr

What does serendipity have to do with it?

-- Carol Carr

"The amazing affair of the Elastic Sided Eggwhisk," said the Great Detective, "would no doubt have remained unsolved to this very day, if by great misfortune it had ever occurred. The fact that it didn't I count as one of my luckiest escapes."

Those of us who possessed heads nodded in agreement.

He paused to drain the sump of his hookah, then continued.

"But even that fades into insignificance before the horrible tragedy that occurred in the House Where the Aspidistra Ran Amok. Fortunately I was not born at the time: otherwise I should certainly have been one of the victims."

We shuddered in assent. Some of us had been there. Some of us were still there.

"Weren't you connected with the curious case of the Camphorated Kipper?"

He coughed deprecatingly.

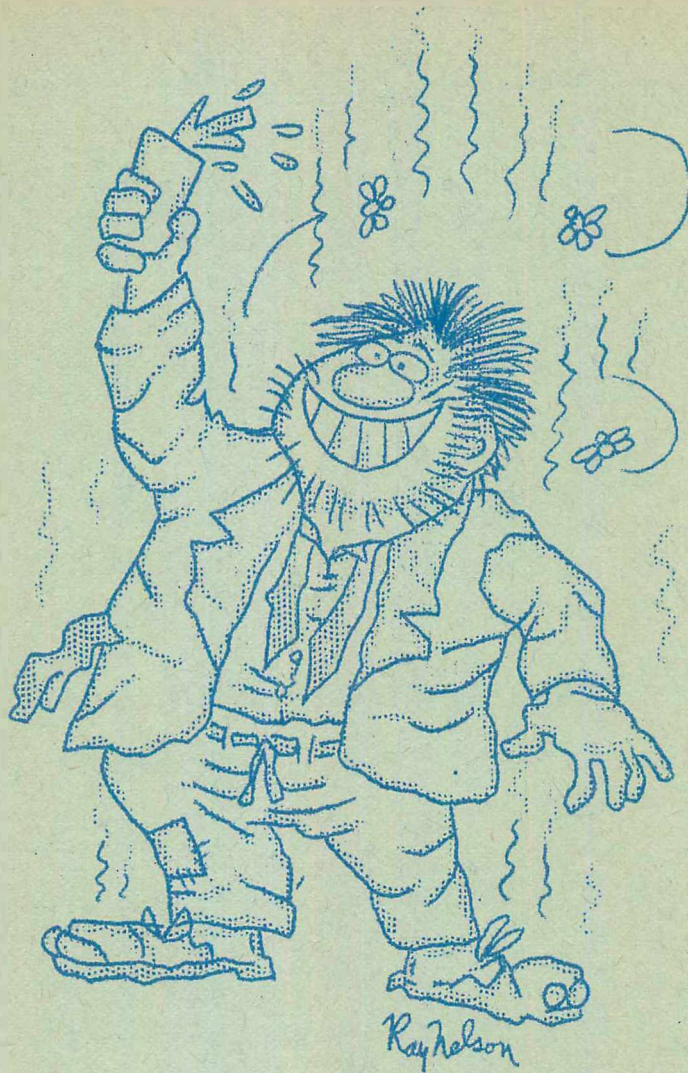
"Intimately. I was the Camphorated Kipper."

At this point two men arrived to carry me back to the taxidermist's, so I cannot tell you any more.

-- Arthur C. Clarke, in THE FANTAST,
July 1942

But the thing that no one seems to recognize these days is that fandom is no longer the way it used to be -- it has grown so complex that any sort of activity interests only a certain portion of fandom, and the percentage interested in any given item grows smaller and smaller annually.

-- Harry Warner, in SHANGRI-L'AFFAIRES
#20, November 1944



REPLACEMENT FOR WILMER

A GHOST STORY
BY FRITZ LEIBER

As the holes on the tape stopped jumping up and down and took long, solemn, longitudinally rectilinear paces, and as the carillon over the bank three blocks away consequently finished its melodious jangling and tolled four o'clock, a cab stopped in front of the Amity Liquor Store and three men, conspicuous in this neighborhood by their coats and neckties, silently crossed the sidewalk. The fourth, who also wore a hat, paused to pay the driver with a handful of half dollars and quarters he had collected from his comrades a block back. He tipped a big four quarters, which made the cabbie shake his head at his sanity.

Once inside the store the four men, after a look at each other, simultaneously removed their neckties and carried them to a hatrack in the carton-crammed rear of the store next to the toilet. One of the men exchanged his coat for a bulky sweater that buttoned up the front, while the man with the hat replaced it with a faded blue cap that

Replacement for Wilmer:

covered all of his thinning, mouse-colored hair but made his butterfly ears even more prominent.

Still not saying anything, they trooped back to the front of the store, collecting on the way from the short length of dented counter denominated as bar the four drinks the store owner, acting as barman and clerk, had uncapped or poured for them.

The man in the sweater, a grizzle-topped hulk with misanthropic, watchful pale eyes, raised his brown beer bottle for a toast.

"Wilmer," he said.

They drank.

As he lowered his gin and lemon soda, the second man briefly quirked his full lips in a satyrlike smile.

"You know, Cappy," he said reflectively to the man in the sweater, "I believe that was the cleanest I ever saw Wilmer's face."

There was a tentative general snort of laughter, followed by a somewhat uncomfortable pause.

Then the third man slowly nodded his big head. "That's only the truth, George," he assured the second man. "It was also the best shave Wilmer ever had in his life. Those guys at the mortuary sure put a gloss on him."

"Bet they had quite a job, though," George shot back. "Probably had to sand-blast."

At the same time the man with the butterfly ears reminded the third man, "Hey, Driscoll, Wilmer's dead. We ought to show more respect, at least the first day, or don't you think?" The objection was even more tentative than the snort of laughter had been. Then Butterfly Ears continued, getting onto firmer ground, at least for a butterfly, "You guys made me wear a hat to the funeral. You said this cap wouldn't look right."

"Now, you're being stupid, Skeeter," Cappy informed him, pointing a gray-sweatered arm. "I hate a stupid man." Then Cappy proceeded to lay down the law. "Look here, we paid our respects to the dead when we went to the funeral. A hat's part of being respectful. But that's over. Now we pay our respects to truth. Even Wilmer had some respect for truth, you know. He'd have never let himself be argued into wearing a hat. Well, I say Wilmer was just about the dirtiest man who ever lived. I don't believe he ever took a genuine bath in his whole life. Anyone care to dispute me?"

There was a chorus of relieved "No's." A happy recollective light came into George's eyes and he said, "Remember the time Wilmer tried to come in here after cleaning catchbasins without even changing to his drinking coat? Ed told him to stay out." (The owner of the Amity Liquor Store, who was leaning forward with spread elbows on the bar, nodded confirmation.) "Wilmer offered to stay in the back room and do his drinking there, but Ed wouldn't agree even to that. Said it would

stink up the can. It ended with Wilmer in the alley and Otto taking his shots and beers back to him."

"I remember!" Skeeter put in eagerly. His wide smile seemed almost to link his ears. "I took turns with Otto rushing them. We'd just open the door a crack and stretch out two long arms. Wilmer got stinking too."

"Stinking both ways," Ed said, walking forward behind the counter to wait on a package customer.

George said, "If we had an absolutely clean world -- I mean if science had conquered crapping and there were just one turd to be found once a year in one place, Wilmer would buy a ticket a sufficient time ahead and go get it."

"My wife would never let Wilmer set foot in our apartment," Driscoll put in with another of his deliberate nods. "Not even when he'd bring me home drunk. I think she could smell Wilmer in her sleep, and it would wake her up when I couldn't even when I'd fall down."

The happy light was really sparkling now in George's eyes and his satyr grin was at its wickedest as he launched out in the dreamy chant suitable for a big-city pastoral. "Wilmer would come to me and he'd say, 'How do I get a woman, George?' and I'd inhale and make a disgusted face -- no, the face of a connoisseur -- and say to him, 'First off, take a bath, Wilmer. Take a long, long bath with lots of hot water and soap,' and he'd listen to me and then he'd give me the hurtest look...."

"Maybe Wilmer finally did take a bath," Skeeter burst in excitedly. "Maybe that's what gave him the pneumonia." And he laughed alone in thin high peals.

"Wilmer once did shack up with a woman," Driscoll stated soberly. "It happened a long while ago. She was as dirty as he was. I know it's hard to believe, but it's true."

George was frowning thoughtfully now. "I get a funny feeling," he said, "thinking of Wilmer standing back there in the alley, covered with sewage, having his drinks, refusing to make even the smallest concession to popular opinion. It's as if he'd created his own little world and were being true to it. I think the key to his character's there, if I could just put it into words."

"You have," Driscoll said heavily.

"Enough of that now," Cappy said with the air of an orchestra leader dropping his baton to bring a movement to a close. "We're agreed Wilmer was the dirtiest man going. I often told him so myself. Now I want to say -- "

"I've got it!" George interrupted. "The key to Wilmer's character was ambition. He knew he could never reach the top in any other line, so he decided to become the dirtiest man in the world."

"We've closed that topic," Cappy said impatiently, collecting his

brown bottle of beer from the new round of drinks Ed was preparing. "Now I want to make the statement that Wilmer was also the most disgusting drunk I ever knew. We all get a little glassy-eyed from time to time, but Wilmer would get as polluted as a pig day after day. He really craved his liquor."

"That's right, Cappy, that's right," George agreed, easily taking fire again. "Remember how every day at four-thirty, regular as clock-work, we'd watch him come through that back door in his green drinking coat with that oh-so-eager look in his eyes?"

The bank carillon jangled out the quarter hour and for a bit no one said anything. The floor creaked as Driscoll reached for his second bourbon and water.

"Otto would generally be with him," George went on, "because he quit work at the same time. But we'd hardly notice Otto. All we could see would be Wilmer's face as he stuck it ahead of him through the door -- Wilmer's face and that longing in it."

"Otto wasn't at the funeral," Driscoll remarked.

"He's having to janitor Wilmer's buildings along with his own until they get a replacement," Ed explained. The owner of the Amity had drawn himself a small glass of beer along with Skeeter's large one and was temporarily part of the group.

"I noticed Otto's drinking coat back on the hatrack," Skeeter put in. "Not Wilmer's green one, though. I wonder what became of it?"

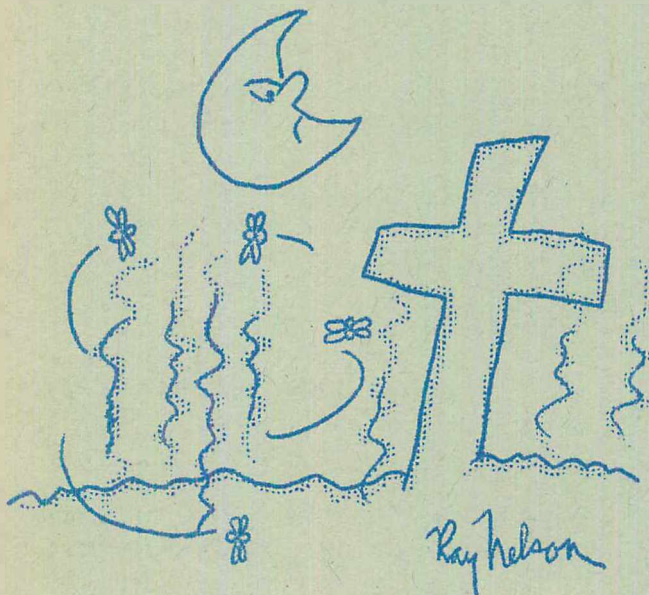
"Stop all that useless chatter," Cappy commanded. "George was describing something I want to hear."

With a quick smile and nod to Cappy, George continued, "That look of longing on Wilmer's face would be so powerful and so touching that time and again we'd all offer to buy him a drink."

"Yes, and he'd take them, too," Cappy said curtly. "Wilmer cadged more drinks than most men. He'd accept them and he'd drink them, sometimes two or three at a time, and pretty soon he'd be so polluted I'd get disgusted with him."

"I bet Wilmer left a pretty big tab behind," George said with an inquiring look at Ed. The latter shook his head. "Just three eighty-five," he said. "His mother came in and paid it this morning."

"It's strange to think of a big dirty souse like Wilmer still



having a mother," George said, puckering his forehead. "I know he roomed with Otto and the old lady would hardly let him in her house, but he depended on her a lot just the same. You could tell."

"You're out of order," Cappy reproved him. "We haven't got to Wilmer's psychology yet. We're still on his drinking."

"Wilmer cadged drinks, all right," Skeeter said. "I bought him a glass of muscatel not two weeks ago. Maybe it was the last drink he ever had. No, I guess not."

"Wilmer was getting to be a wino the last two years," Driscoll said. "He was shifting over. I suppose it was the easiest thing to drink on the job."

"Oh, but there was nothing in the world like Wilmer polluted," George launched out again, the faraway twinkle back in his eyes. "He'd grow a bigger moon face, he'd get stupid-sillier, and he'd even fall on his face with more finality than another man. Remember how he'd always want to pass out and sleep in the back room here and you wouldn't let him, Ed? You'd say 'No' and chase him out front and ten minutes later he'd be back there and we'd hear empty cartons crunch as he flopped on them."

"I couldn't let him sleep in here by himself," Ed said with a grin. "Imagine what would have happened if he'd waked up alone at four a.m."

Skeeter chortled. "Many's the time," he said, "I helped drag Wilmer out in the alley on a summer night when you'd closed up and we'd leave him snoozing there. Or help Otto get him home, though that didn't happen so often."

"Wilmer's drinking always heavied up in the summer," Driscoll observed, "which isn't the way of a normal man who shifts from whiskey to beer then. I suppose he knew he didn't have to worry about freezing to death."

George said, "Right now I can hear Wilmer's snores. I can visualize the dirty green glow of his drinking coat when he was sleeping in the alley with the moon coming over the water tower."

"That's enough about Wilmer's drinking," Cappy said decisively. "I've got one more thing to say about him and then we'll quit. Wilmer was undoubtedly the stupidest man I ever knew in my life."

"Oh, but that's right," George said swiftly. "'How do I get a woman, George?' 'George, how do I get a white-collar job?' 'Why do they hold elections, George, on the days when the bars are closed?' 'George, how do people know if their kids are left-handed?'"

Skeeter boasted, "Once I actually got Wilmer to ask for a left-handed monkey-wrench at Tanner's hardware."

"Wilmer couldn't even do simple arithmetic," Driscoll asserted. "I don't believe he could count on his fingers."

Ed nodded at that. "Sometimes he'd question his tab," he said, "and I'd add it over for him very slowly. It was pitiful how he'd pretend to follow me."

George said, "Remember how for two whole months he thought I was a Communist, because I came in here carrying a book? He even got Otto believing it."

"Yes," Skeeter pressed, "and remember the day you brought a girl in here who was a model -- a dress model -- and Wilmer asked her how much she'd charge to undress in the back room?"

"That wasn't stupidity," George contradicted, "that was tactlessness. Wilmer never knew how to go about anything."

"All right, all right, we've talked enough about Wilmer now," Cappy commanded loudly, getting his next bottle of beer.

"I guess you're right, Cappy," Skeeter said in a hushed voice. "I forgot we'd just been to his funeral."

"That's not the point," Cappy told him disgustedly. "You're being stupid again, Skeeter. We haven't said anything but the truth and Wilmer can't hear us anyhow. It's just that we've heard enough about him for today. I'm sick of the subject. Somebody talk about something else. Go ahead."

There was a long silence.

George was the first to look around at the others. An odd smile began to switch at his lips.

"You know," he said, "we're going to have a hard time finding something to talk about, now that Wilmer's gone. Something real juicy we can all get together on, I mean."

Driscoll nodded slowly and said, "I guess we talked about him more than we realized."

"Oh, we can keep coming back to Wilmer for a while," George went on, "but there'll be nothing new to add and after a bit the whole topic will be so dead we won't want to touch it at all. You know what? We're going to have to find a replacement for Wilmer."

"How do you mean, a replacement?" Driscoll asked.

"You know," George said, "somebody to talk about, somebody to be the stupidest and dirtiest and drunkenest. If we don't find a replacement, Wilmer will...well, haunt us, you might say."

"Now you're talking like a superstitious lunkhead, George," Cappy said sharply. "Wilmer's dead and a dead man can't affect anybody."

George looked at him quizzically.

Cappy continued, "But you may have something in that replacement idea." The gray-sweatered man began to look thoughtfully at Skeeter.

Replacement for Wilmer -- 7

"Hey, quit that, Cappy," Skeeter said uneasily, almost knocking his glass off the shelf as he reached for it. "I'm not going to be any replacement for Wilmer."

Cappy frowned. "I wouldn't be too sure of that, Skeeter," he said. "You're stupid enough sometimes -- I've told you so twice today -- and I've seen you rubber-legged drunk pretty often and I know you don't wash behind those ears more than once a month."

"Better watch out, Skeeter," Ed warned with a chuckle.

"Hey, quit it, you guys," Skeeter protested. "Quit looking at me, Cappy."

Skeeter was watching Cappy apprehensively. All the others were grinning at Skeeter delightedly except George, who was smiling at the ceiling abstractedly and saying, "You know, it's a very funny thing how we really need Wilmer. Here we've been talking for half an hour as if we were glad to be rid of him, when actually nothing would please us more than if he'd push through the door right now."

A sudden gust of wind in the street outside raised thin swirls of dust, momentarily plastered a sheet of newspaper against the water-marked display window, and since it blew from the direction of the bank, it swelled the volume of the computerized carrillon jangling out four-thirty.

A man with his head ducked low against the dust and wearing a dirty green coat with stains down the front pushed in through the door.

The five men in the Amity saw him and turned pale. Skeeter's beer glass crashed on the floor. Then the newcomer looked up.

George was the first to recover.

"Otto, you old son-of-a-gun!" he cried. "What are you doing wearing Wilmer's drinking coat?"

"Mein Gott, I didn't know it," the newcomer protested, looking down again and then raising his eyes guiltily. "The two coats always hung each other beside. I thought I was putting on mine. Here, I take it off."

"That's all right, Otto, forget it," George said heartily, stopping him with an arm around the shoulders. "Here, have a shot of gin."

"Have a drink on me, too, you crazy Dutchman," Cappy bellowed, getting two of his brown bottles and uncapping them.

"And on me," Skeeter squeaked, darting behind the counter to get a washed glass and draw the beer himself.

"A drink on each one of us," Driscoll put in, reaching for the whiskey bottle. "Finish that gin and I'll pour you a snort of real liquor."

"And when you're ready for it, a peppermint brandy on the house,"

Replacement for Wilmer -- 8

Ed finished, smiling broadly.

"Shee, fellows, thanks," Otto said a little wonderingly, "but first I better -- "

Cappy thrust a hairy finger at him. "You forget that coat for now," he commanded, "and drink your drinks."

"Okay, Cappity, you win," Otto surrendered. "Shee, fellows, I'm sorry not to be at the funeral, but it went against my heart. That Wilmer, I liked him. Nobody's ever going to take his place."

"Forget funerals," George directed. "How's life been treating you, Otto?"

"Shee, Gay-org, I wouldn't know. Say, not too many drinks, fellows."

About ten minutes later they let Otto go back to exchange the green coat for his own. The loud boil of conversation simmered down.

Cappy said in a gruff undertone, wrinkling his big nose, "You know, that Otto stinks. I never noticed it before because he was always with Wilmer."

"He sure snatched at those drinks when he got going," Skeeter put in, a little ruefully.

"And he's stupid," Cappy said decisively. "Only a very stupid man would accidently put on a dead man's coat."

"What do you think is happening, Driscoll?" George asked lightly.

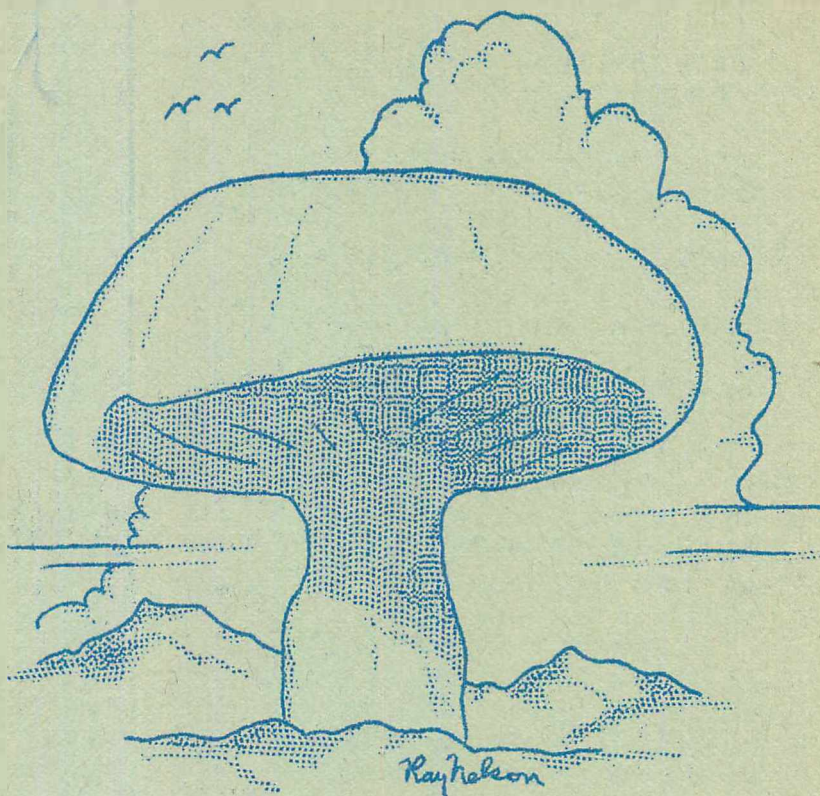
"How do you mean?" Driscoll asked, frowning. Then his brow cleared and he nodded. "I get you."

At that moment Otto came from in back wearing his own coat and they all fell silent. The off-duty janitor was staggering a little, but as he surveyed them a momentary flicker of distrust crossed his eyes.

"Say, fellows, what were you all talking about?" he asked.

Cappy answered for them.

"Why, Otto," he said innocently, "we were just all wondering who ever would take the place of poor old Wilmer."



IN SEARCH OF LA MAMA WITH LINGAM AND YONI BY GRANIA DAVIS

We've been quite aware of the cycle of the seasons lately. Spring got us very high. We went up to the Sierra to meditate among the first green ferns in a snowy mountain meadow.

We drove down to Death Valley to view the mosaics of wild flowers: fields of reds, purples, yellow and white decorating the Martian landscape.

But our most profound springtime rebirth took place in Mexico. In the tiny mountain village, Hautla, where we took part in the ancient Indian mushroom ceremony.

The search for the mushrooms is always a highly individual matter. It is not mentioned in any of the standard tourist guides. Yet like all pilgrimages, it partakes of the qualities of myth.

Thus we had to overcome three fearsome obstacles. The first was the fear of the journey. Five hours by (rented) car up an isolated desert/mountain trail.

In Search of La Mama -- 2

"What if we break down?" my panic button kept singing. "What if we break down and can't get help?"

The second barrier was the fear of the police. My husband, Steve, had traveled to Hautla five years ago when the place was swarming with hippies and federales, police armed with rifles and grenades. They were arresting all Americans who tried to visit Hautla, and only good fortune had kept him out of prison. We had heard rumors of helicopter pursuits of innocent gringos who had recently dared to make the attempt. With a family and a respectable job waiting for us back home, did we really want to tangle with the Mexican police?

The final fear was of the mushrooms themselves. We had heard reports of "bad" mushrooms being sold to unwary foreigners. This was the most frightening possibility of all, being poisoned for a few lousy pesos. And even if the mushrooms were "good," wouldn't our fear of poisoning cause us to have a bad trip?

The whole thing sounded far too risky, and we had decided to forget it. We dawdled away most of our vacation visiting ruins, buying cheap pottery, basking in the sunshine, enjoying tequila and tropical fruit salads, getting diarrhea. The usual tourist stuff. Three days before the end of our vacation we found ourselves in a delightful spa at the foot of the mountain where Hautla is located.

There were orange trees in blossom, birds, spring-fed pools, great food. "Let's spend the rest of our time here!" we burred enthusiastically.

The next morning we both awoke spontaneously at dawn and looked at each other.

"Let's go," we said.

The road outside of our oasis was hot and dusty. A foretaste of the journey to come. We realized that we hadn't brought any extra gas or water, but it was already too late. The last sizable town was behind us.

In all of the archetypal quest legends, the three obstacles are resolved through three miraculous helpers.

Our first small miracle occurred in a tiny town at the very base of the mountain, where we met up with two sturdy, long-haired Mexican students who were hitching to Hautla with guitars, books and backpacks. We offered them a ride and they accepted. Now we had help in case of a breakdown. Two strong lads to help clear fallen rocks, change tires, fetch water, ask directions, summon assistance. We felt very relieved.

Our relief was short-lived. No sooner had we left the town than they began to produce innumerable joints of good Mexican grass. They had joints everywhere! Stashed in their guitars, taped in their books, concealed in their pockets and backpacks. How would we ever explain that to the dreaded Mexican police?

There was nothing to do, however, except relax and enjoy the ride.

We climbed up into the mountains on a narrow dirt road, perched along the edge of a cliff. There was no longer any sign of human habitation. Just scrub desert, cactus, dust and heat and the narrow road that grew ever rougher. Now and then a large rock would hit the underside of the car with a sickening clang, and we prayed that the oil pan wouldn't break. The engine was becoming dangerously overheated. Soft music and cannabis fumes drifted from the back seat.

We finally reached the top of the first range and descended into a narrow valley. Here we were in an entirely different ecological zone. The desert landscape gave way to a moist, eerie region. Warm mists hung in the air and the trees were draped with Spanish moss, white orchids, and fleshy parasitic cactus with large red flowers. In several places waterfalls splashed down the mossy cliff faces and ran across the road. Now there was too much water! Thrills and chills as Steve skillfully forded the streams.

We finally traversed the valley and began to ascend the second range of mountains where Hautla was located. Now we began to see the first signs of human habitation. Thatched huts with almost Oriental peaked roofs. Children, dogs, pigs, turkeys and meager terraced fields of corn. The town of Hautla could occasionally be seen, shrouded in mist at the top of the mountain.

It was late in the afternoon when we finally arrived. We said friendly but hasty goodbyes to our companions and parked our car near the town plaza, which had the only road wide enough for a motor vehicle.

The town itself looked deserted and shabby. There was a small, tin roofed market place, a government building which contained the mayor's office, the jail and the school. There was a small colonial church, a rickety hotel, a couple of tiny restaurants and shops and a maze of steep dirt pathways leading out of the center, up into the barrios where the villagers reside in adobe haciendas. But the view was magnificent. Stretching away from the town was an endless vista of mist shrouded mountain ranges. Well worth the journey, even if we shouldn't manage to find any mushrooms.

We booked a room in the little hotel, shabby but clean, with outdoor privies and one public cold water faucet for bathing. It was the best room in the house, with a window overlooking that fantastic view and an unbeatable price -- \$1.60 for two.

We washed and rested up for a few minutes, then decided to take a stroll in the purplish dusk.

There was no sign of any o-her North Americans and no sign of the police. Nobody but a few townspeople going about their evening chores. One very drunken Indian stumbled out of a doorway and offered to sell us mushrooms, but we didn't trust him and declined the offer.

"When I was here five years ago," Steve related, "I met a very nice English-speaking fellow named Manuel. His family has a bakery here. He helped us arrange for the mushrooms and the ceremony. I knew right away that he could be trusted."

"Let's go find him."

"Unfortunately, he lives in Oaxaca. He happened to be visiting his family here when I met him."

"It wouldn't hurt to inquire."

So we went in search of the tiny bakery which was located on a side street. The proprietor was inside and we began to inquire about his son, Manuel.

"I have no son named Manuel," said the proprietor with a puzzled smile.

We were about to leave when a young man entered the shop.

"This is my son Miguel," said the proprietor, helpfully.

Steve and Miguel recognized each other at once, even though they hadn't recalled each other's names. They embraced warmly.

"How did you know I was here today?" demanded Miguel, effusively. "I haven't been to visit my family in months, and I am here for only one day! How did you know when to find me?"

We all exclaimed over this fortunate coincidence and Miguel's family was summoned for introductions. It was our second miracle.

"You want mushrooms?" exclaimed Miguel. "I can arrange it. It's late in the season, there are many bad mushrooms, but I can arrange it."

"We'd like to take them tomorrow," I said.

"No, that's not possible. I'm only here for one night. I can only arrange it tonight."

It had been a long, tiring day, but we were now in the hands of fate and had no other choice.

"Come with me," said Miguel; "it is a long walk to my friend's house to get the mushrooms."

"We have a car."

"A car!" His eyes lit up. There were only three other motor vehicles in Hautla, none of them new and shiny like our powder blue, rented Detroit monster. Miguel stroked the car as though it were a beautiful woman, and asked to drive. With some misgivings we agreed. But it was love at first sight.

Miguel handled the car tenderly and we made our way along the narrowest, darkest, roughest, rockiest, steepest trails, with Miguel chattering happily and honking and waving to various friends.

First we drove out to a tiny farm hut to procure the mushrooms. Then to the houses of various curanderas until we found one willing

to perform the ceremony on short notice. Then to another friend for incense and candles.

Finally everything was ready. It was 10:00 p.m. and I was exhausted. We supped lightly on orange juice, scrambled eggs and tortillas and tried to refresh ourselves with a brief period of meditation.

Then we set off again, on foot.

"I want my best friend to come with us," said Miguel, "someone I can tell my troubles to."

"Fine."

So we detoured to the home of his best friend, with the mushrooms tenderly wrapped in newspaper in my purse.

"My best friend is the Generale of the Policia," remarked Miguel casually, leading us up to a fortress-like building that was swarming with heavily armed Mexican police.

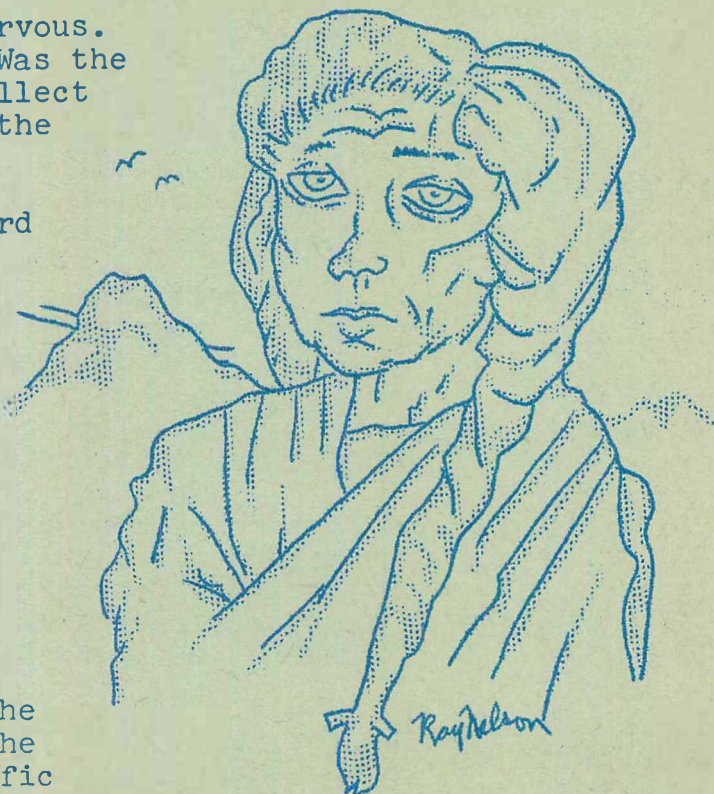
My god, there they were, the dreaded federales! And here I was with a bag of mushrooms in my purse. I tried to hide in the doorway.

"Don't worry," laughed Miguel; "I tell you the Generale is my best friend."

But I still felt pretty nervous. Was this some sort of set-up? Was the charming Miguel intending to collect a reward by turning us over to the police?

No. It was merely our third miracle. The Generale was a clean-cut young man with a gracious manner. Any friend of Miguel's, he assured us, was a friend of his. He glanced briefly at our passports, introduced us to his family, then still armed with rifle and grenade belt (in case of emergencies) he accompanied us to the curandera's house. We felt very well protected indeed.

There are various kinds of healers in Mexico. There are the herb doctors that one sees in the market places, dispensing specific nostrums for specific complaints. Powdered sea-horse for heart troubles, herb teas for stomach aches, etc. There are the brujos, the underground sorcerers who have never accepted Christianity. Finally there are the curanderas who use a bit of everything, herbs, chants, magic and Christian prayers as part of



their healing rites.

Our curandera was of the latter sort. We arrived at her one-room hut nearly at midnight. By this time I felt almost giddy from exhaustion and the strenuousness of the situation.

She was a gentle old woman with a round wrinkled face, long grey braids and a very shabby, worn hand-embroidered ceremonial dress. She was the same woman who had performed the ceremony for Steve five years ago, and they recognized one another and embraced.

She led us through the small, mud-walled courtyard, the abode of a few straggly chickens, a couple of pigs and dogs and the potted flowering plants that decorate even the most humble Mexican dwellings. It is outdoors that most of the daily activities take place: cooking, washing, tending the few animals and kitchen crops. The indoor area is primarily for sleeping and was dominated by two large, sagging beds.

On the beds sat the old woman's entire family. Daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren. It was late at night and they were all ready for bed. Some little wooden chairs were brought in for the guests and placed in a stiff row. Introductions were made and we attempted some chit-chat in halting Spanish.

There was a knock at the door and a neighbor woman arrived, carrying a sick child wrapped in a blanket to participate in the ceremony.

The old woman took the mushrooms and sorted through them, carefully discarding any that did not look right. This alleviated our final fear, and it was time to begin.

At one end of the hut, away from the beds, was an altar, with a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, incense pots and three candles. The old woman handed us each a small plate of about fifteen mushrooms and indicated that we were to begin eating them while she busied herself about the altar and began a low, humming chant.

I felt a knot of nervous anticipation in my stomach, but obediently began to consume the mushrooms, some tiny and fragile, some large and woody, and all still covered with earth. "Eating Mexican Dirt!" cried my panic button, but I ignored it.) A thin straw mat was laid on the floor for us -- the guest bed. And the single light bulb was extinguished. The rest of the family retired to sleep.

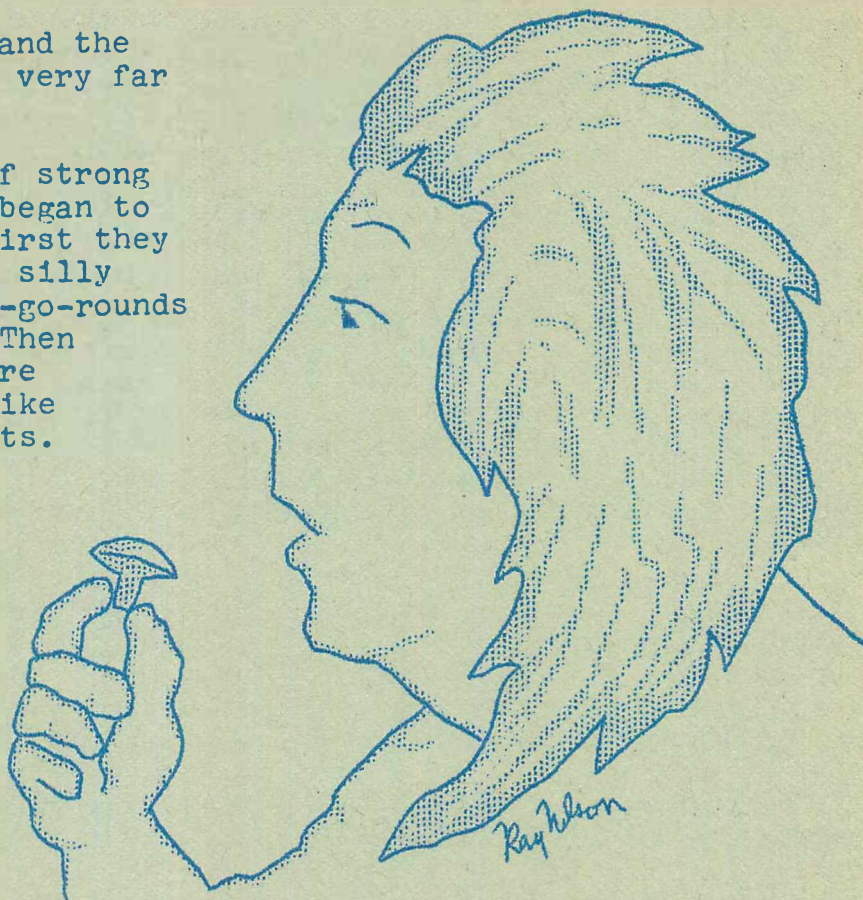
The old woman took some ashes and dirt, mixed with water, and made the signs of crosses on the insides of our elbows, then she squatted down on a low stool near the altar and began to chant, invoking the saints and the virgin (who is called by the name of the old Indian mother goddess) to protect her children, Stephen and Grania and Miguel.

At first nothing happened. It was extremely cold, it was dark and I was tired. The little wooden chair was uncomfortable and we sank down onto the straw mat. It was all beginning to seem very unreal. Here we were in the middle of the night, on the hard floor of a chilly, cave-like hut on top of a mountain in the middle of Mexico.

The delights of our spa and the amenities of home seemed very far away.

Then, like a gust of strong wind, shimmering colors began to pour into my head. At first they resolved themselves into silly things, clowns and merry-go-rounds and Disney characters. Then they began to take on more ominous forms. Serpentlike birds, birds like serpents. The figures of the Indian embroideries, the creatures of the ruined pyramids. The gods of the Indians. The gods of the mushrooms.

I watched the writhing figures, fascinated. Then, just as suddenly, the colors and visions vanished. "All right," I mumbled to no one in particular, "I've climbed your magic mountain, taken your sacrament and seen your gods. Is that all?"



Then suddenly I became quite empty and clear. No thoughts, no feelings. I was like an infant lying cold and helpless on the mat, but entirely aware of my surroundings.

Miguel was weeping and pouring out his marital troubles to the Generale. The old woman was continuing her soft, humming chant. From the beds came occasional grunts and snores and the soft whimpers of the sick child.

For the first time I really saw how it was with these people. The poverty, the continual hard work, the constant fear of famine and disease. The people in the hut were no longer quaint, picturesque postcards, they were real. And I saw that our modern civilization of abundance is an eggshell-thin veneer that attempts to conceal these archaic human experiences: the sufferings of birth, the sufferings of life, the sufferings of death.

And I understood that this wasn't merely a "trip" -- this was a healing ceremony. An opportunity to open up one's heart and soul, to pour one's troubles into the receptive earth, to be soothed and healed by the ancient Indian goddess of the night.

The last candle had flickered out and the old woman, our mother, had stopped chanting. I realized that she was too old and tired to continue all night. But Miguel was still pouring out his troubles to

on
drugs

his friend, and I felt that more chanting was needed to complete the purging process. So I began to chant a mantra and Steve joined me. We lay there on the mat hugging one another and chanting. I felt wave upon wave of tension leaving me, all of my sorrows and troubles being absorbed into the great bosom of the mountain. From time to time the old woman filled her mouth with water and blew it on our faces, which gave us the power to continue chanting.

Then suddenly I had to pee. I almost laughed. Here I was in the middle of this profound experience and I had to pee -- and I had no idea where people went to relieve themselves in this culture!

I sat up. The old woman, understanding my discomfort, led me outside by the arm. She lifted up her voluminous skirts and squatted down on the bare ground. I did likewise, but still felt restrained, worried about wetting my clothes, no toilet paper, etc.

I looked out at the sky. It was fantastic. A perfect crescent moon, myriad swirling stars and ranges of dark mountains stretching across the horizon.

Finally I let go and felt hot urine gushing down my leg. But I was no longer merely urinating, I was giving birth. Totally and completely giving birth to all of my past sufferings, there on the side of the mountain with the old woman acting as guide and midwife, initiating me into the mysteries of the mother goddess.

This happened twice. I have given birth twice, in sterile hospital settings -- how much more real this seemed. We went back inside. Steve was sitting up, Miguel was collecting his belongings. I felt completely clean, empty and relieved of many burdens.

We drank some coke and ate some oranges, embraced the old woman and slipped some money in her hand. It was over. The first dogs and roosters were beginning to awaken. We walked back down the steep trail to the hotel in the first lavender light of dawn and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The next day we said our goodbyes and drove back down the mountain to the spa for a bath, good meal and the scent of orange blossoms. Then back to Mexico City and the flight home.

Spring was over. The tender wildflowers had been replaced by more ostentatious greenery and the time of rebirth gave way to the high-energy days of the long summer sun.

Now it is autumn. Green is transformed to gold and we feel calm and balanced. The newspapers tell us of scandals and corruption, of shortages and environmental despoliation. We aren't surprised. A Tibetan Lama once cheerfully taught us that everything is hopeless.

Then the newspapers bring a greater shock. A great earthquake has hit southeastern Mexico and destroyed 80% of the town of Hautla. We wonder if our friends are all right. We wonder if the fragile old culture of the mushroom ceremony can withstand such a catastrophe.

We prepare our cocoons for winter and wonder what the next rebirth will bring.

