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Claus onder
'International
Party' p43

Who is THE TALK OF THE TOWN? → Bibi

Notes and Comment

A RECENTLY issued map of the Engadine, a beautiful valley in the Swiss Alps, has been littered with the following symbols:

- ← Particularly Fine View
- ◇ Best Spot from Which to Take a Photograph
- Best Time of the Day to Be There

We suggest, since this map still allows the Alp lover a few opportunities for personal discovery, that the following symbols be added in the next edition:

- ✿ Best Place to Pick Edelweiss
- ! Good Spot in Which to Exclaim "Oh!" or "Ah!"
- ☺ Secluded Spot Where Couples Who Desire May Kiss
- ☠ Ledge of Precipice Suitable for Suicide
- Area of Glacier Offering Superior Snowball Material
- ☹ Whoops! You Slipped, Didn't You?

Indeed, a map sufficiently complete will offer the traveller such a comprehensive array of vicarious experiences that he need not bother going to the Engadine at all, and the valley can be safely abandoned to its native population of goatherds, wild hares, and chamois-clad yodellers.

HARDLY a month goes by that fails to present us with a crisis, national at the very least, more usually international, and always enormous. We welcome, therefore, any reminder that small problems are being solved by small nations. News of a minuscule and amicable summit meeting that took place last month was what first engaged our attention. The meeting was held in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, and was attended by representatives from the six modest nations—Andorra, Monaco, Luxembourg, San Marino, Vatican City, and, of course, Liechtenstein it-

self—that make up the Little Six. The host country (sixty-two square miles) stood in awe of the giant Luxembourg (nine hundred and ninety-nine square miles), but although Baron Eduard Alexander von Falz-Fein—who, as the operator of three souvenir shops and a tourist agency, had been chosen as Liechtenstein's representative—complained that Luxembourg "dwarfs the rest of us together," he did not refuse to sit down at a U-shaped conference table



with its representative. The four other representatives sat down, too, and the Little Six peacefully went about the business of the conference, which was "to advance the cause of peace by working for more tourism." The six nations decided to attract more Americans to their lands by offering a special six-nation tour, and agreed to issue a special postcard commemorating each of their future gatherings.

Cheered as we were by that faint murmur of international unison, we were even more delighted to see, just the other day, that swords were being beaten into ploughshares in our own backyard. To be more precise, Costa Rica's President Mario Echandi Jiménez had announced that Costa Rica was planning to sell "an extraordinary assortment" of machine guns, sub-machine guns, and just plain guns in return for as many tractors as it could get. The Costa Ricans' attitude toward weapons these days is similar to our personal one. It is good to be rid of them whenever you safely can, because, as President Jiménez said, "anything might happen to them." Sub-machine guns are undoubtedly easier to control than the super-weapons that super-nations have

developed, but they are still deadlier tools than the Costa Ricans care to have around.

Angel

UPON being told that amid the rubble and racket of the construction of the Union Carbide skyscraper, on Park Avenue, a female registered nurse, called Angel by her charges, could be seen ascending and descending, we hurried over to interview this celestial creature, this more-than-Nightingale. We first saw Mary Sheehan (for that is the seraph's name) as a mere fleck against the blue autumn sky; she gradually enlarged until she stood beside us, mortal size—five feet six and weighing a hundred and twenty pounds, not counting a fifteen-ounce crash helmet. Her crash helmet was white, her eyes were green, her hair was dark brown and gray, her jacket was red and corduroy and the sort that housewives drive to the A. & P. in, her slacks were black and tight, and her shoes were tennis. She toted a black medical bag and had just plunged to earth from inspecting a broken hand. After sending the injured man on his way to a doctor's office across the street for X-rays, she led us up a



plank ramp to her own office, a small white room filled with ominous cabinets and that pink-edged smell we associate with pain, germicide, and childhood.

Miss Sheehan plumped down in a chair, jauntily pushed her helmet to the back of her head, and lighted, appropriately enough, a Marlboro cigarette. There was, however, no tattoo on the back of her hand. "I got into this kind of nursing because I like the hours," she

described by its menu as being on the suburban level.

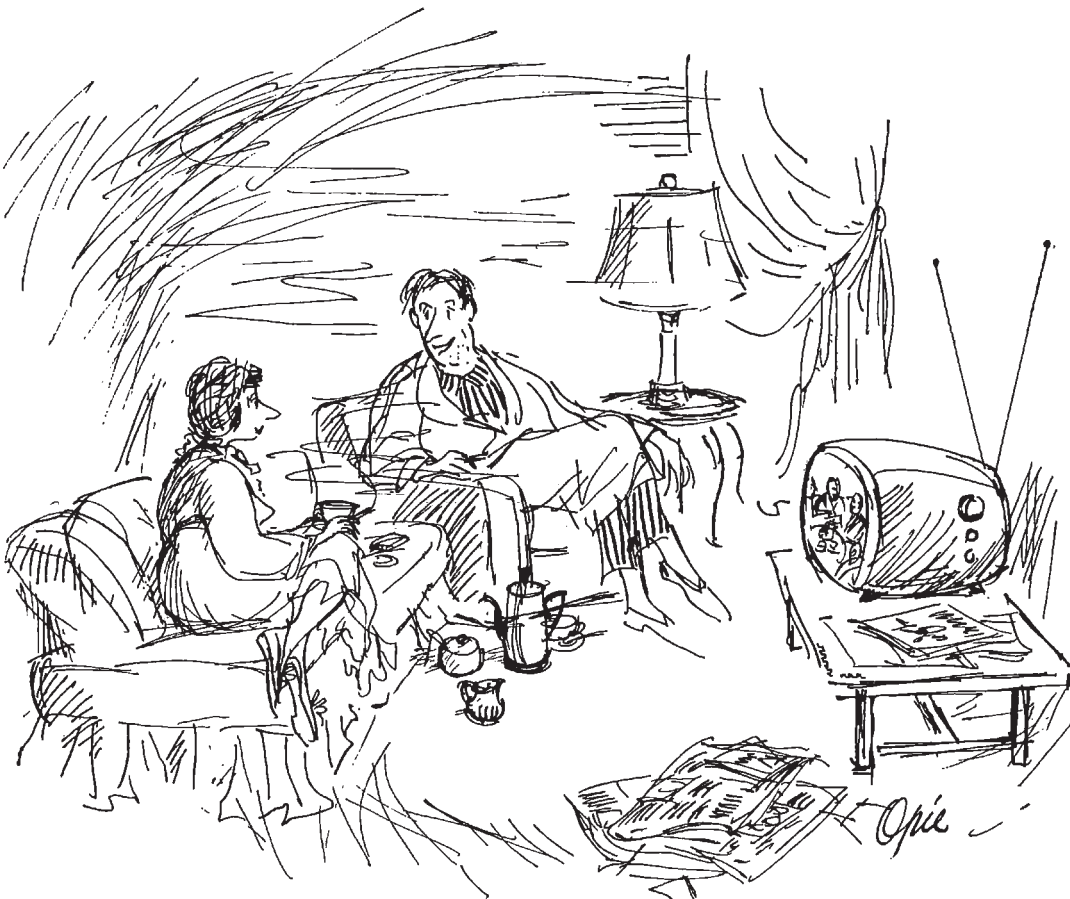
International Party

KYRILL SCHABERT, the president of Pantheon Books, publishers of "Doctor Zhivago," "Mushrooms, Russia and History," and other weighty compendiums, invited us to "a small cocktail party for seven outstanding young foreign writers," recipients of a grant from the Institute of International Education, so down we went to his apartment, in one of those fine old red houses on Washington Square North, where Mrs. Schabert, in a fine but far from old red dress, introduced us to Mr. Mateo Lettunich, head of the Arts Division of the Institute. "The idea of the project, which was financed largely by the Ford Foundation, was to bring over young writers who are known at home but not—or at least not necessarily—known here," he said. "We've given them a living allowance and a trav-

elling allowance for six months. They can go where they please and do as they please. They don't have to produce anything; they don't have to go back and write a novel about Idaho. Most of them are making a trip to the West Coast and back. Fernando Arrabal, a Spanish playwright who lives in France, is interested in the absurdity of human beings, so he plans to spend a good deal of time in Las Vegas and Miami."

We pressed through a knot of publishers—Alfred Knopf, Victor Weybright, Hiram Haydn, Denver Lindley, Storer Lunt—to Mr. Arrabal, a short, bearded, tieless, merry-looking man who was wearing a big black zippered sweater. He spoke no English, but when we said "Las Vegas," he nodded.

"You must read what he's written," said Miss Anita Warburg, Mr. Lettunich's assistant. "He tries to shock. He wants to see Nevada, where hell is let loose. Matityahu Meged, the Israeli novelist here, wants to meet Archibald MacLeish. He is a teacher, and he wants to meet teachers. The Arts Division of the Institute had consultants in fifteen countries for this project, and they made recommendations to its Selection Committee, which is headed by James Laughlin."



"Well, honey, we've done it. We've seen 'Open End' end!"

said, dragging intensely. "There's nothing especially dangerous about it. In fact, my closest calls have been right here in the office, with some of the more out-directed of the workers—wolves, they used to be called. Most of the gang, though, are perfect gentlemen—a wonderful group to work with. There are about a thousand men on this job, and I handle an average of fifteen accident cases a day, which is darn low for such dangerous work. We've been on this job for a year and a half, and so far, thank goodness, we've had no fatalities. Before I came here, I worked on the Seagram Building two and a half years, and up there we had four deaths. Only one was the result of an accident, though; the others were coronaries. We've had two coronaries on this baby, but they've both recovered nicely."

We asked when nurses started being built into construction jobs. "As far as I know," she said, "the first time they were used was when the United Nations Building went up, in the late forties. Right now the Fuller Company has three registered nurses working for it—me here, Amy Quackenbush at Time & Life, and Marilyn Hughes at the First National City Building. I think the Turner Construc-

tion Company has four more. They say a nurse on the job has a good psychological effect. We're often with a job for years, and become a kind of mascot. I guess we improve their language a little. The real problem is to convince men who receive minor injuries to come down; often as not, they just wrap a handkerchief around a cut and keep working. But now, when they know I'm here to wash their faces and give them a little sympathy, they come down all the time. Most accidents, of course, aren't so serious that I have to go up. This week, I've only been up three times. We don't actually 'walk steel,' by the way; when I go up, the men put planks across the girders for me to walk on. I only mind going up in the winter, when it can be dreadfully cold forty stories off the ground. I've never been afraid of heights, and, in fact, I enjoy the view, although"—she tamped out the cigarette and reached for a pen, to begin her report on the man with the broken hand—"there isn't usually much time for sightseeing."

EUPHEMISTIC INTELLIGENCE: The newly renovated Oyster Bar, on Grand Central's lower level, is now

"We had nearly seventy recommendations from leading literary figures abroad," said Mr. Laughlin, who was standing nearby. "We had no fixed age requirement, but most of the grantees are in their thirties. The German novelist Günter Grass couldn't come at the last minute, because of illness, which is too bad; he's a real stemwinder."

Miss Warburg introduced us to the Belgian guest of honor, a novelist, poet, and dramatist named Hugo Claus, and said, "He's supposed to be a beatnik, but he knows the real values. He refuses to write in French; he wants to write only in Flemish."

"Written Flemish is really the same as Dutch," Mr. Claus said. "It's pronounced differently; you speak it in dialect. I was born in Bruges, and I hate it. It's a museum. It's dead. It's a postcard. Now I live in Ghent, which is also a postcard, but you can live in it. I was born in Bruges against my will, thirty years ago, when my mother went there for a Caesarean. My parents sent me to a convent from my eighteenth month until I was eleven. I was educated by nuns. I rejoined my family for a few years, in Courtrai, and at fourteen I ran away from home, as everyone does. I wrote my first book at sixteen, and another at nineteen, which Random House published here four or five years ago. It's very bad. It's about incest. Incest is generally a good theme for a book, but this was really a *very* bad novel. I'm going to Chicago, because I'm told it has the best burlesque; to Seattle, to speak to Theodore Roethke, the American poet I admire most; to New Orleans, for the Mardi Gras; and to the Southwest, to see Indian art. I like primitive painting, and I do some painting myself, though not in a primitive way. I'm also going to Las Vegas, to see Frankie Sinatra. He and chewing gum are the great American influences on Europeans of my age. Your G.I.s gave me chewing gum during the war. It's a big thing to chew gum for the first time at fourteen."

Mr. Meged and Mr. Claude Ollier, a French-novelist grantee, had left the party early, and, after brief chats with Charles Tomlinson, an English poet who said he had brought

his wife and baby with him, and Italo Calvino, the Italian author of "Baron in the Trees," recently published here, we turned to Vassilis Vassilikos, a twenty-six-year-old Greek novelist. "I'm really a ringer," he said. "I'm here on a one-year Rotary International scholarship, but the I.I.E. has sort of adopted me. I'm here to study TV. We don't have TV in Greece, but TV will arrive in Greece next year, so somebody must know something about it. I'm attending the School of Radio Technique, on Fifty-seventh Street; it has an excellent television course. I'm disappointed in American girls, I heard they were very free, but they aren't, even when they are wearing shorts and are in a dark room looking at television. I was especially disappointed in New Haven girls; I spent a month there, studying television at the Yale Theatre. Maybe it's the religious influence. Temple Street! Church Street! Chapel Street! I almost died of spleen. But I love New York."

Care and Feeding

THE father of a ten-year-old Stamford lad who has been hiring himself out as a dog-sitter weekends has sent us the following schedule, which was

presented to the enterprising youth by one of his customers:

9:00—Walk dog for 20 minutes. When back on porch, give him water from garage hose and 3 dog biscuits.

4:30—Walk ½ hour.

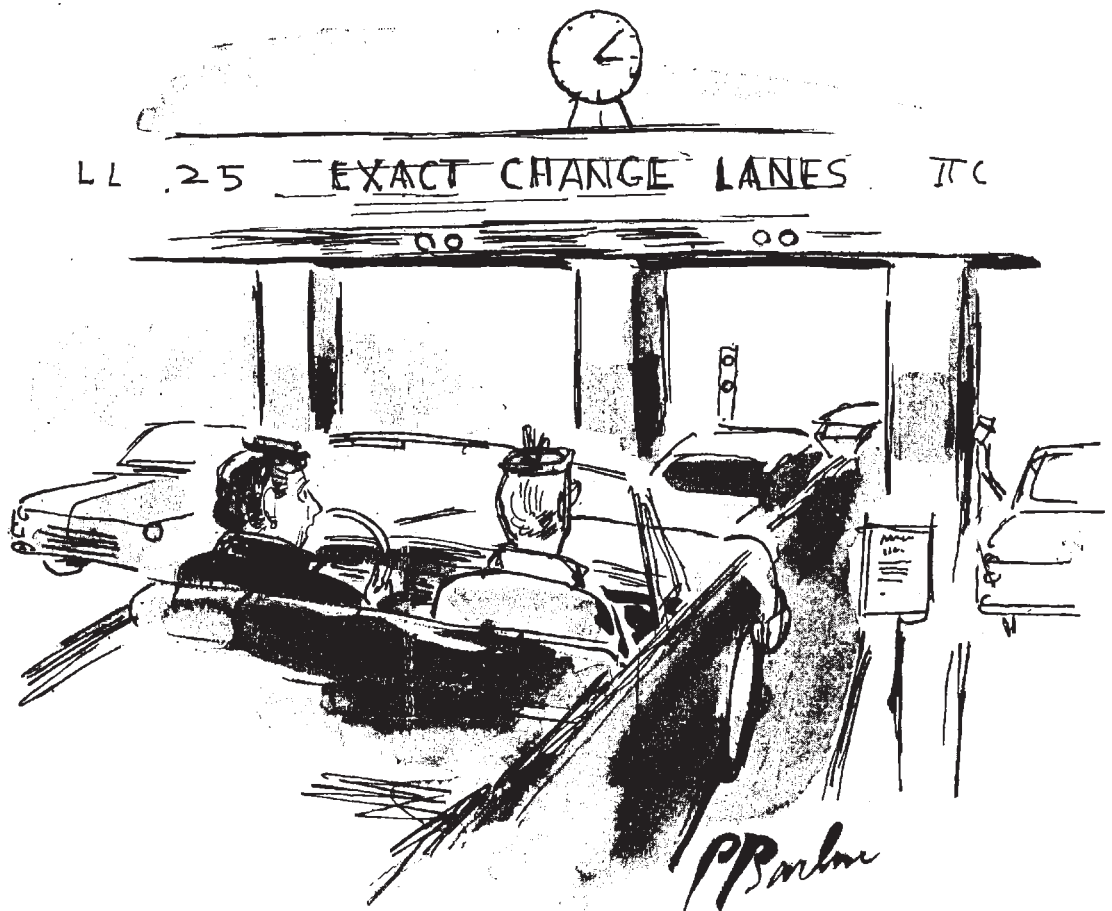
5:00—Feed supper. After dog has eaten, give fresh water.

8:45 (a quarter of nine)—Take him for a short 15-minute walk.

9:00—Shake out and arrange his bed. Show dog his bed. Talk to him and praise him. Leave garage and shut door behind you. Be sure it is shut all the way.

Dynamic Conversation

YOU never know where glad tidings will crop up. Strolling past the Waldorf Towers the other lunchtime; we ran into Colonel Henry Crown, of Chicago, who is not only the second-biggest stockholder in the Hilton Hotels Corporation, which operates the Waldorf, Towers and all, but the controlling stockholder in the Empire State Building and the board chairman and, through his family, a controlling stockholder of the Material Service Corporation, which deals in building materials and coal mines. We knew all this because we had interviewed Mr. Crown more than once—the last time in 1956. Seizing opportunity by the forelock, and the Colonel by his lapel,



"Oh dear, we're in the throw-it line!"

we asked him how things were going.

"Nicely," he said. "Material Service, whose annual sales were eighty million dollars when last we met, is doing materially better—a hundred and ten million dollars last year. We're about to merge with General Dynamics; we're exchanging our stock for two million shares of General Dynamics preferred, convertible into common. You can gather how well the Waldorf is doing by the fact that I haven't been able to get my usual suite here, 35-A, because the President of Guinea has it. I'm in 35-F, which is full of Chinese decoration. And I've been having a fine time, on visits here, showing distinguished guests through the Empire State Building. At the end of the tour, I give them little models of the building. 'Do me one favor, will you?' Castro said when I gave him his. 'If Batista comes, don't let him in.' When I gave Khrushchev his replica, I said, 'Mr. Chairman, the building itself has mortgages, but since you now own this model, which is entirely unencumbered, that makes you a capitalist.' His interpreter was standing by, but without waiting for a translation Khrushchev laughed and said, in English, 'I'm with you. I join you.' I'd kidded with Koslov earlier in the year—I told him the Hilton Hotels Corporation was owned by Conrad Hilton and that we planned to open a hotel in Moscow, the Comrade Hilton—but he waited for the interpreter before he laughed. It looks as though the Empire State will be visited by a total of a million six hundred thousand people in 1959, just at the Observatory—a record in any language."

We congratulated him, and went on east to a Chinese restaurant.

OVERHEARD last week outside Saks Fifth Avenue, under its annual display of organ pipes, matron to adolescent girl: "Now turn around and look. Doesn't it make you feel religious?"

Ten Minutes

WE present herewith the results of a survey for which there has long been a felt need and in the carrying out of which we have spared neither time, money, nor shoe leather. In the public interest, we have tried to learn as much as possible about the nature and habits of the theatregoers one sees darting pell-mell into nearby bars between the acts. Are their

drinking habits affected by the shows they see? Do tragedies lead to a greater or smaller amount of drinking than comedies? On an opening night, can an experienced bartender distinguish a hit from a flop simply by what his patrons order? Fascinating questions all, and to get the answers we started tramping the West Side shortly after eight the other evening, in the post-cocktail, pre-first-act-curtain lull. Working at random, in the best surveying tradition, we stopped in at Absinthe House, on West Forty-eighth Street, where we had the good luck to encounter a bartender named Philip Bruno, who took up his present post last spring after ten years at Sardi's and a total of thirty-two years behind bars, and who was therefore well qualified to speak on the subject.

"In my opinion, a musical is best for drinkers," Bruno told us, measuring his words as if they were cognac. "By that I mean it's best for our bar business." We were just jotting this down when Bruno confused matters by adding, "A comedy is even better. By that I mean that tragedy is the worst. Here we get a pretty good crowd from the Cort, a few doors down the street. They had a so-called comedy, 'Moonbirds,' there a while ago. A big crowd rushed in during the first-act intermission, and, brother, they stayed! I remember at Sardi's there were plenty of shows that nobody went back to, including 'Happy Hunting' and 'Bells Are Ringing.' 'The Miracle Worker' is at the Playhouse, across the street, but we don't

get much business from there. For one thing, a man hates to bother crossing a street when he's only got eight or ten minutes to do his drinking in. Another thing, the show's no good. By that I mean it's no good from our point of view. Between the acts, people stand around on the sidewalk and concentrate on themselves."

Crossing Times Square, we caught sight of a sign—"Fast Service During Intermission"—in a place called The Everglades, just east of the Longacre Theatre. We stepped inside and addressed ourself to a lady bartender, Peggy Keithline, who proved to have a theory linking geography, alcohol, and the theatre. "It's natural for people to want a drink during a show, and it's natural for them to turn right when they come out of a theatre," she said. "Bars like this, to the right of a theatre, do much better business than bars to the left of a theatre. 'The Tender Trap' and 'Tea and Sympathy' were both good plays for drinkers. I knew on opening night they'd both be hits. When a play's going to be a hit, there's more talk and less drink, and when it's going to be a flop, there's more drink and less talk."

Heading south to Forty-fifth Street, we arrived at the bar of the Hotel Piccadilly as the last of the first-act-intermission drinkers was turning left out the door and scooting back to his show. Bartender Michael Scrippens, looking slightly winded, said that he didn't need *Variety* to tell him what the season had been like so far. "Lukewarm is what it is," he said. "Not the excitement you might expect this time of year. Even the Jackie Gleason crowd is only so-so—nothing like as hopped up as the crowd at 'La Plume' last year."

Our last stop was at Sardi's, the citadel of theatre drinking, where we found one of the bartenders, Ray Tornato, working with dazzling speed behind the bar. "I was timed here once by an interested customer," he said. "My record that night was six whiskey sours in eleven seconds. I'll get a call for a Drambuie and a Martini-on-the-rocks, say, and turn 'em both out at practically the same second, using both hands. What slows things up is when a party of four or six comes in and starts ordering mixed drinks one at a time, all different; then somebody changes his mind, and that makes somebody else change his mind, and pretty soon they're starting all over. One person in a party should take charge and call the shots." Frank Randazzo, the

