

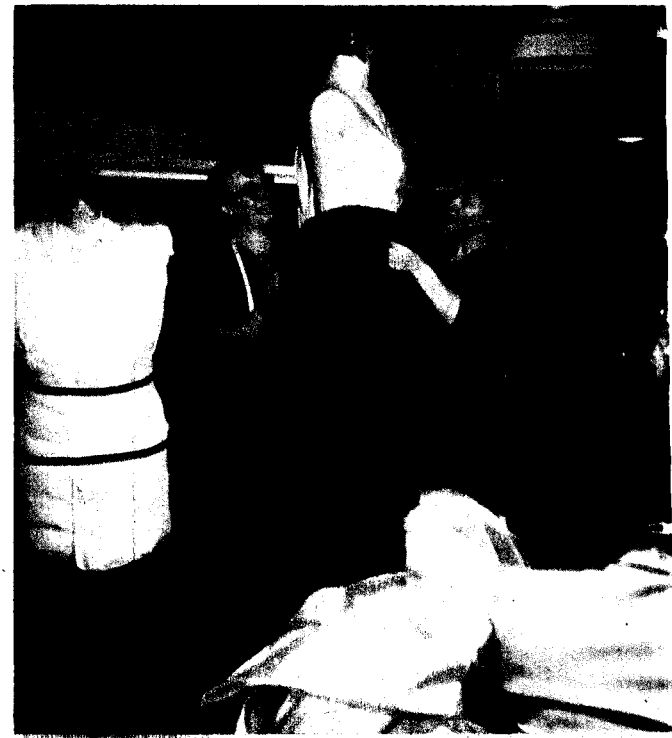
"Oh, to Be Naked in Bergdorf's"



Bergdorf's models wearing gowns created by its designers for store's 50th anniversary ball last month. Proceeds went to a cancer fund

Bergdorf sells merchandise for men, too. The men's corner of the Five-in-One Shop, on the main floor, however, is patronized chiefly by women, who buy for their husbands and friends

Miss Esther (l.), who uses no last name, and Adele Landsberg, fitters in custom department



-with a Checkbook!"

That's the deep-down dream of many a fashion-minded woman, dazzled by the sight of \$295 nighties and \$40,000 furs. In this swank New York store there is no high sales pressure, but lots of elegance and pampering

By **BOOTON HERNDON**

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY RICHARD BEATTIE



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IN THE square at Fifty-eighth Street and Fifth Avenue, New York City's plushiest corner, stands one of the most self-conscious statues in the world. Situated right by the imposing nine-story marble edifice which houses Bergdorf Goodman, the famed women's specialty store, it is indeed a forlorn-looking figure of a female.

You can see why immediately: the poor creature, though titled the Fountain of Abundance, is cowering without a stitch on—and within a mink-stole's throw of one of the ritziest operations in the world of fashion.

Daily, the subway-riding little girls in Bergdorf's credit department on the fifth floor shuffle cards marked Astor, Du Pont, Ford, Hutton, Rockefeller and Vanderbilt; and the names of the Duchess of Windsor, Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the former Queen of Spain are also no strangers to them.

On October 16th just past, the store celebrated its fiftieth birthday with a Golden Anniversary ball at the swank Hotel Plaza. The list of customers invited read like a cross between the Social Register and an income tax collector's dream, and the place was jammed with people who paid \$50 per plate (turned over *in toto* to the New York City Cancer Committee, a division of the American Cancer Society) to help a worthy charity and, perhaps incidentally, to prove to the world that they had a charge account at Bergdorf's.

Unless you happen to be up to your neck in ru-

bies at the moment, you may have difficulty imagining just how much money some ladies manage to drop per annum at Bergdorf Goodman. Several individual accounts have hit \$100,000 a year; dozens exceed \$50,000. One of the really big accounts is a lady who raises poodles. The only social functions she attends—garbed from skin to mink and tip to toe in Bergdorf Goodman exclusives—are dog shows. Well doused in a Bergdorf-exclusive perfume, her approach can be detected by the least keen-scented canine in the show while she is still far away—and upwind, too. Another lady had an ensemble dyed to match her dog; and another had her car repainted to match her ensemble.

Most of Bergdorf's top-bracket customers shop in a well-bred, unspectacular way, and the store co-operates by avoiding any suggestion of "pressuring" its patrons. Take Mrs. William E. and Mrs. Edward F. Hutton, socialite wives of the Wall Street brokers, and the latter's daughter, Mrs. Edward Patterson. During the seasonal showings of exclusives in the custom *salon* on the fourth floor, where prices range upward from a minimum of \$395 for a simple dress, all three come in unobtrusively to see the showings, make a little list of what they want and order them, as simply as that.

One day recently Miss Ethel Frankau, the cool and confident director of the made-to-order department and a lady who can *out-grande-dame* nine tenths of her customers, had to drop every-

thing and dash to the rescue of Mrs. Patterson. Andrew Goodman, son of the owner and president of the firm, had struck up a conversation with the young lady. Fortunately, before he had a chance to commit the indescribable blunder of trying to sell a customer something, Miss Frankau arrived on the scene and sent the boss packing.

As taxes have bitten deeply into the incomes of Bergdorf's customers in recent years, the number of big spenders has dropped. Joseph Rothenberg, the store's bustling financial manager, figures that many of the ladies who spend \$60,000 or so a year on clothes must be dipping into their capital to do so. These people can't go on like that forever, and Bergdorf is making a deliberate effort to get people of what it calls moderate incomes (\$10,000 a year and up) into the store.

The real characters of years gone by have mostly disappeared from the B-G customer roster. There was the germ-conscious lady who was always accompanied by a footman bearing a spray gun loaded with germicide, which he squirted vigorously on friend and foe alike. There was the motoring multimillionaire who had installed solid gold fixtures on his limousine; he had Bergdorf make up his lap robes in fine mink. There was the dowager who kept one entire group—the head fitter and a dozen girls—busy the year around making hats for her, and her alone. And there was the heiress who once bought (Continued on page 65)

Standing, l. to r.: Sally Freed, cosmetics; Dorothy Bank, lingerie; Ann Farber, consultant; Helen Walker, custom manager; Dorothy Abbott, sports buyer; James Feldman, furs; Mae Griffin, mail order; and Murray Singer, furs. Seated: Ethel Frankau, custom directress; Mae Miller, accessories; Edwin Goodman, board chairman; Joe Rothenberg, financial manager

Doorman Frank Frizell helps a customer into her car. Frizell's duties include fetching a floor manager to wait on a woman who does her shopping while sitting in her limousine



RECLINING FIGURE

Blaise had never seen the painting, but he knew it was a forgery. He was building up a theory from bits and pieces—speculation, not facts—and he was way out on a limb

The Story: When ELLIS BLAISE, a young art dealer, was hired by Los Angeles millionaire LUCAS EDGERTON to sell some paintings from his fabulous collection, he found himself caught in a web of intrigue. A lot of people seemed to be desperately anxious to learn which paintings were to be sold: Lucas' son, SIMON, who was suspected of having stolen and sold paintings from the collection; JONAS ASTORG, unscrupulous art dealer; and KENNETH LURIE, who owned a Los Angeles gallery and was engaged in selling art forgeries made by a drunken painter named PAUL WELDON.

When Blaise got from MIRIAM WAYNE, Edgerton's secretary, the index cards listing the paintings to be sold, Simon stole them and took them to Astorg and Lurie, who seemed reassured. Astorg, however, was still uneasy. Blaise searched Simon's room in the Edgerton house, looking for the cards, and was found there by Edgerton's pretty niece, CASSY, who told him Simon had once sold a stolen painting to a crooked dealer named HUGH NORDEN. Blaise talked to Norden, but Norden denied being involved in any recent thefts. That night, Simon was murdered.

The next day, LIEUTENANT IVES of the Homicide Bureau started an investigation. The police searched for Norden, who was known to have been with Simon on the night of the murder, but he had disappeared. Edgerton ordered an inventory of his collection, to see if any paintings were missing. And Blaise started to snoop around on his own, and went to see MOLLY DANN, a model who posed for Weldon and had been Simon's girl. Molly gave him a Renoir drawing which Simon had given her, and asked him to sell it; she thought Simon had stolen it from his father's collection. But Blaise realized it was a fake, done on modern paper. He showed it to Astorg and Lurie, who evinced considerable interest in buying it. He also showed it at Edgerton's house—to DR. WESLEY CORUM, an art critic; to VICTOR GRANDI, the custodian of the collection; to Miriam and Edgerton. Blaise told them it was probably a practice drawing for a forgery of a Renoir painting. He intended to turn the sketch over to Lieutenant Ives, but before he could, he was slugged and robbed of it. The man who slugged him was Lurie's chauffeur, SULLY, who later delivered the sketch to Lurie.

Lurie himself was in trouble. Blaise knew

little about him and had no cause to suspect him; but Weldon, who had made the "Renoir" drawing, got scared when Blaise got hold of it and wanted to pull out of the conspiracy and run away with Molly; and Astorg, who had been collaborating with Lurie in disposing of paintings he thought were stolen, was beginning to be suspicious of his partner, and was pressing Lurie to buy back a painting he had sold to a collector named NATHAN ORDMANN, and even threatened to tell the police that Lurie had been with Simon on the night of the murder. And Blaise, who was a menace to the whole conspiracy, had now concluded that forgery, not theft, was the crime that would lead to the discovery of Simon's murderer.

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THE scene in the Edgerton library, when Blaise arrived the next day, resembled a council of war. Records and files were spread on the big desk and grouped around it were Edgerton himself, Wesley Corum, Miriam Wayne and Lieutenant Ives. Victor Grandi was leaning against the index cabinets, watching the group with what seemed to be amusement.

"Come in, Blaise," Edgerton snapped. "Close the door." He seemed very much his old self. "Well, we counted the stock," he said grimly.

"Bad?" Blaise asked.

"Nine paintings are missing," Miriam Wayne said.

"Including a Turner," Corum put in. "A particularly fine example, one that I personally—"

Edgerton interrupted him brutally. "Shut up, Wesley. Dammit, man, put away your lecture slides."

"Blaise, what made you so sure that no paintings had been stolen?" Lieutenant Ives asked.

Blaise returned his look uncomfortably. "I wish I knew. I told you what was in my mind, Lieutenant."

"Yes," Ives said, "you told me."

"Stop bickering," Edgerton said coldly. "Ives, you're supposed to know your own business. If you're shaky enough to listen to outsiders, that's your fault."

Ives blushed. "Thanks, Mr. Edgerton, I'll bear it in mind." Then, in his

accustomed, mild manner, he asked, "Were all the paintings insured?"

"Doesn't matter," Edgerton said. "I'm not going to file a claim and have the insurance company tell me the paintings were stolen by my son."

Another spell of silence fell over the group at the table, this one broken by Victor Grandi. Very quietly, almost in a whisper, he said, "The Turner was reproduced." He smiled as Blaise whirled around in his chair. "I see that Mr. Blaise knows what I mean by that. It is a pointless, unprofitable theft. It cannot conceivably be sold."

"Why not?" demanded Ives.

"Because the painting was reproduced—there are prints all over the country—and accredited to this collection. Everybody would recognize it and know where it came from. No dealer or collector would touch it," Blaise said.

"Exactly," Grandi said, nodding. "The others, being unknown or forgotten, might readily be sold. The Turner, however, would lead to the immediate arrest of anyone who offered it for sale."

"That's true," Edgerton said. He seemed puzzled. "Silly damn' thing to steal—it doesn't make any sense."

Ives pushed back his chair, and, as he stood up, Miriam handed him a sheet of paper. The strain of recent days, it seemed to Blaise, had told on her. Her pale face seemed tense, and her eyes were bright and alert.

"This the missing lot?" Ives asked, and, when she nodded, he folded the paper and put it away and left. Grandi waited in the doorway, as if to allow Ives a good start. Then, as he went out, Blaise walked with him.

"I understand, Mr. Blaise," Grandi said, with what was almost a roguish glance, "that you had an interesting and fruitful day. I'm glad I didn't underestimate you."

"I was lucky. Then I got careless. All told, I didn't cover myself with glory."

"What a pity that you no longer have the drawing," Grandi murmured.

"There isn't very much I can prove without it," Blaise said.

(Continued on page 78)

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