



The bloom of youth still appears on the Benny cheeks. You just have to look a bit harder

THE day started like any other in Beverly Hills. The sun forced its way through the early morning smog, the birds in the trees began to cough and I tumbled out of bed, happy, carefree and ready for the next 24 hours—like any healthy young animal.

Early rising is a ritual with me. Unlike my nocturnal brethren in show business, I am matutinal by nature. (I have always been matutinal, but never knew how to say it until I made an appearance on the Omnibus television program with Alistair Cooke. He slipped me the word, as he put it, "as a lagniappe." I don't know what lagniappe means, but the next time I see him I intend to ask.)

Anyway, the morning to which I refer began normally enough. I flung open the bedroom windows and started my daily dozen. I had just gotten around to the knee-bending exercises when I heard the stairs creaking and I knew that Rochester was on his way up with orange juice and coffee. Then I remembered that this was Rochester's day off. Suddenly I realized it wasn't the stairs that were creaking. It was my knees.

The shock straightened me up. I tried the knee-bending exercise again to make sure I had heard right. There was the same creaking—only this time louder, like somebody scraping a fiddle string. I winced. I can't stand bad violin playing.

I've always expected that sooner or later I'd start showing signs of wear. But I never expected the signs to be audible. I stood there, listening, and my eyes settled on the wall calendar, as they frequently do: it was a gift from Marilyn Monroe. After a moment or two, I glanced down at the date. It was February 1, 1954! In less than two weeks, on February 14th, I, Jack Benny, would be forty!

Forty! I shuddered, and my eyes fogged. The clock on the dresser seemed to be ticking faster, in a deliberate effort to hasten the fateful date. Cold chills and hot flashes coursed intermittently through my body. In a sort of hazy stupor, I could visualize myself sitting on a park bench with Barney Baruch, feeding the pigeons.

As reason slowly returned, I realized that Father Time had been waving his scythe under my nose, and I had been too comfortably ensconced in the sage and durable age of thirty-nine to heed the closeness of the blade. Trifling occurrences that I had dismissed as unimportant came back now to plague me with their full significance.

Lately, I had noticed that the Martinis were getting stronger, the hills on the golf course steeper, flirtations scarcer. Perhaps I had been cutting too fast a pace for a man on the brink of forty. I would have to change my habits. No more carousing with the boys. From now on, Charlie Coburn, Guy

After 39 Years—

The old man with the scythe has finally gained ground on the

Kibbee and Lionel Barrymore would have to fun around without me.

In the following days, I underwent a transformation. I brooded and fretted, found fault with everything. I changed from a bright, lovable young man to a bitter, churlish, middle-aged curmudgeon. Rochester was on the verge of quitting. Polly, my parrot, wouldn't talk to me. I insulted the people on my radio and television shows. I even began to hate myself—and I was the last person in the world I thought I'd ever hate.

Finally I decided I would have to adjust. After all, it isn't a crime to be forty. A pity, maybe, but not a crime. I got a grip on myself and went to see my doctor. That is, I didn't exactly go to see him. I invited him over to my house for dinner. It was friendlier than going to his office . . . and much less expensive.

After a modest meal, I led the conversation around to the state of my health and my impending birthday. The doctor was reluctant to talk business at first, but a couple of quick ponies of brandy loosened his tongue.

"When most men reach forty," the doctor said, "they find themselves up against a psychological block. Forty is considered the gateway to middle age and nobody wants to make the trip."

I refilled his glass and he continued his dissertation: "A man seems to feel, and with some reason, that while he's in his thirties he's within shooting distance of his youth, but when he hits forty he's all shot."

He helped himself to some more cognac.

"That all depends on the health of the individual," he went on. "Now, I'm forty-eight and

I'm far from shot. Why, I can outdrink two twenty-four-year-olds put together."

I hastily put away the cognac bottle.

I had drawn some cheer from the doctor's observations. But I still was not satisfied. I yawned in his face a couple of times so he could get a look at my tongue. I saw his quick professional glance, and his lack of comment was reassuring.

I took the little wooden hammer out of the nut bowl and casually put it down on the table within easy reach of his hand. Then I crossed my legs and waited. Sure enough, he took the bait. He picked up the hammer and tapped me on the knee. I hadn't realized my reflexes were so fast. If he hadn't pulled his head back just in time, I would have punted his teeth into the kitchen.

The doctor remarked that he hadn't seen such knee action since Nijinsky. If I took care of myself, he said, I could live to be a hundred and forty.

Keeping the doctor's visit on a social basis, I said, "Doc, if you had a patient like me, what kind of diet would you put him on?"

He told me everything I wanted to know and it didn't cost me a quarter (including the price of the cognac). However, the diet he prescribed was disquieting. I was limited to expensive steaks and chops, lean cuts of meat, fowl and a few green vegetables. Bread and gravy, potatoes and rice, the old standbys that regularly graced my table, were taboo. Under my tutelage, Rochester had become proficient at preparing some wonderfully economical dishes . . . braised beef hearts, fried pork livers and country gravy, breaded fishcakes and the hundred different kinds of hash that help the housewife stay within her budget. I was loath to discontinue this fare, especially since my freezer was full of beef hearts and fishcakes. Besides, Rochester was now so expert at preparing this type of food it would be a pity to make him stop.

Rochester Offers an Ideal Solution

After turning the problem over in my mind, I finally found a way out of the dilemma. Rochester was not on a diet. There was no reason why he couldn't go on eating beef hearts and fishcakes, even though I was stuck with steaks and chops.

As I walked the doctor to the door, I felt reassured. Still, I had been unable to think of a way for him to take my basal metabolism. I began toying with the idea of inviting him to dinner again. I could make the invitation for two and ask him to bring his machine with him.

As we shook hands, I held the grip, and fed the doctor one more leading question.

"So you think I'm in good shape, eh, Doc?"

"Yes," he said, struggling vainly to get his hand loose, "but I think you ought to drop by the office for a checkup in a week or so."

"Another checkup?" I asked, taken off guard. "But you just gave me one."

"Well, you can't be too safe," he grunted, tugging at his hand. "Besides, a man of your age can change overnight."

All my old fears overwhelmed me again. In fact, I was so staggered that my grip turned to mush, and the doctor, released suddenly, went flying out the door.

The doctor's pessimistic remark left me frus-

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The first sign of advancing years: Jack met Marilyn Monroe—she looked the other way

I'm Turning 40

By JACK BENNY

young fellow with the fiddle—but it was some race while it lasted. They're both winded

trated and disappointed. But I was able to find consolation in the fact that even though the body was beginning to sag a little as birthday number forty crept closer, mentally my faculties were never sharper. I still retained all my old cunning and guile. Besides, I decided, even though I might change by tomorrow, I was still in good shape tonight, so the money expended on food and drink for the doctor had not been entirely wasted.

When the Plumber Comes to Dinner

Feeling a little better, I checked my supply of cognac and was pleased to find there were still a few pints left. Not that I drink myself, but I like to keep some in the house for my guests. Next week, I'm having my plumber over for dinner. There's an annoying leak in the kitchen drainpipe, and I'm sure that after Herman imbibes a few samples of the grape, he'll be under that sink like an old firehorse. I'm counting on quite a saving, because the plumber's fee is usually higher than the doctor's.

The next morning I could find no perceptible change in my health, in spite of the doctor's dour warning. Nevertheless, I bathed and dressed carefully to avoid taxing my strength, and, wary of my protesting knees, I had Rochester help me with my socks and my shoelaces. Then, after a cautious breakfast of orange juice and hot vitamin-fortified milk, I set out on my program of readjustment.

First I dropped in to see my old friend and colleague, Eddie Cantor. Eddie had long since endured the experience I was now undergoing, and I hoped to acquire a few tips on how a man should dress, behave and adapt his philosophy when he reaches forty. Eddie proved to be a disappointment. He beat around the bush and seemed reluctant to discuss the subject.

Finally, I put it to him point-blank. "Eddie," I said, "did you feel that your whole psychological structure changed when you became forty?"

Cantor answered that he wouldn't know; he never had been forty and he never intended to be.

You see, Eddie went from thirty-nine to sixty overnight, and the only one who ever suspected it was Ida.

After lunch, I left Cantor's house, still groping for a panacea to restore my confidence and bolster my shattered morale. As I walked down Sunset Boulevard, I felt that everyone was staring at me. I could almost hear people saying to themselves, "Look at him. He must be forty if he's a day."

I decided a few holes of golf might help my frayed nerves. I was going to take a taxi out to my club, but it was such a pleasant day I chose to walk. It was only seven miles and I knew a short cut, most of it paved. The only bad stretch was a half mile through a beanfield, but I knew the terrain like the back of my hand.

I started out briskly enough, but after a few blocks the pace began to tell. My strides were slower and my breathing was faster. I thought a cup

For Benny, the voice of Time was soprano. It said, "I'm awfully sorry, Jack, but I have a date for that night. Unless you'd like to go along as chaperon?" Note stunned expression

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GENE TRINOL

"For a time, I considered fibbing about my age. But no, it went against the grain"

of coffee might pick me up, so I dropped into Romanoff's. Not Mike Romanoff's. This place is owned by a man named Joseph Romanoff. Joseph claims he is the real prince, and Mike is a phony. But Joseph is a very sweet fellow and doesn't want to make trouble, so he doesn't even use the name Romanoff's for his restaurant. He calls it Joe's Place.

As I sat on the stool sipping my coffee, the thought occurred to me that Joe was about forty, and his views on the subject of middle age might be worth hearing. "Joe," I said, "would you credit a man of thirty-nine with having a lot more stamina than a man of forty?"

"Mr. Benny," Joe answered, "in my place, I give credit to nobody and I don't care how old he is. Besides, we got no stamina here. If he don't want a hamburger, let him go someplace else."

Naturally, this answer was of no help to me, although I couldn't dispute the soundness of Joe's business acumen.

I left Romanoff's considerably refreshed, but I decided against walking the rest of the way to my club. There was no point in expending my waning energy just to save a few cents. I took a bus.

All my life, I meditated as the bus weaved its way through the traffic, I'd been saving my money for my old age. Well, there was no point in saving for it any more. It was here.

I almost changed my mind when I looked up and saw an attractive young girl smiling at me. I smiled back, my spirits soaring at this evidence that I had not lost my great appeal for the other sex. Then, as she moved closer, my world collapsed again: she was merely after my seat! I settled back, and her smile changed to a dirty look. But a man of forty is obliged to conserve his strength, even at the expense of his manners.

Youthful Comic Worried Too

I was very much depressed as I entered the club. A lot of the boys were there, and I sat down and chatted with Jerry Lewis, hoping that he would cheer me up with some of his usual zany antics. But it turned out that Jerry, too, was in a somber mood. He confided that he was going to be thirty soon and he was worried about it. I found that I was unable to summon up any sympathy for this kid. There he was, a full 10 years younger than I; what did he have to worry about?

I was about to give up and go home when George Burns walked in and pointed his cigar at me. I broke up with laughter. George has a way of pointing a cigar that nobody else can top. At least, it seems that way to me. As everyone in Hollywood knows, I am George Burns's best audience. As a matter of fact, there's a rumor around the club that if George Burns were playing a date, I'd even pay to see him. Well, anyway, that's the rumor.

I invited George to join me for a little golf. By the time we teed off, I was in much better spirits. All during the game, George kept me in stitches. He really has the greatest sense of humor in the world.

George was wearing a big diamond ring and he called the caddy over and showed it to him. As the caddy looked

at the stone admiringly, a stream of water shot out of the ring and hit him in the eye.

I had seen the trick work before, but the way George did it was so funny I became hysterical. The caddy didn't appreciate the humor until George gave him a dollar. Then the boy laughed louder than I did.

Make-Up Caused Healthy Look

After the game, I had a steam bath and a massage, and, thanks to George Burns, I set out for CBS in a much better frame of mind. We were rehearsing a TV show, and everyone in the cast remarked how healthy I looked. I didn't bother telling them that I had just spent an hour with the make-up man. It was a few days before the show went on, but I always like to look my best. You can never tell who might drop in to watch the rehearsal.

I apologized to Mary Livingstone for my petty griping of the past several days. She tried to be kind and said she hadn't noticed any difference. Then I explained that the cause of my mental stress was the sudden realization that I would shortly be forty.

Mary burst into that infectious laugh of hers. She said she just couldn't believe that was my right age. I wasn't surprised. No matter how often I tell people I'm thirty-nine, some of them refuse to believe I'm that old.

It was Mary who finally straightened me out, by reminding me of others in my age bracket who were carrying on with the vim and vigor of teen-agers. Georgie Jessel, for one, was never concerned about age, either his own

or that of whoever happened to be his date.

As Mary spoke, I thought of Bob Hope, whose case was so similar to my own. Maybe he was even a year or two older. But Bob was as frisky as a two-year-old colt, and covered a lot more ground. And what's more, the ground he covered had oil in it.

Then I thought of Bing Crosby. Bing had hurdled the forty-year barrier without drawing a long breath or a wrong note. His popularity had increased with the years, both here and abroad. In Germany, I understand, they still call him Der Bingle. I remember talking to my press agent once about giving me a build-up in Germany, finding a nickname for me comparable to Bing's. He started publicizing me as "Der Jackal." For reasons I don't remember, we were forced to abandon the campaign.

At home that night, I reflected on Mary's words and decided she was right. Aside from a pair of noisy knees, I had never felt or looked better. Oh, there were a few tiny signs of age. The brown hair that used to tumble over my forehead now tumbles all the way to the floor. And of course, there's the pitter patter of little crow's-feet around my eyes. But I'm lucky they're little; some crows have bigger feet than others. Anyhow, I don't mind having a few lines in my face. I think it gives me character.

I walked over and looked into the mirror. My eyes were just as blue as they ever were. And no matter what anyone says, I've never dyed them. I smiled, and noted with satisfaction that they were my own teeth smiling back at me. I tried to look at myself objec-

tively, and after a few minutes I came to the conclusion that it was not by accident or camera trick that I projected so handsomely on the television screen.

I was now reconciled to the idea of being forty, although I knew it would be quite a while before I got really used to it. It seemed, in retrospect, that all my life I'd been thirty-nine. I suppose it's because so many things happened in that one year.

When Rochester called me downstairs for dinner, I was the old Jack Benny once more: gay, carefree, and bubbling over with the joy of living. I had shed my gloomy cocoon and emerged as a radiant caterpillar . . . fuzzy, but free.

Rochester had noticed the change in me and by way of celebration he had whipped up an elaborate dinner. He presented the menu to me with a flourish. I had decided to wait until my freezer was depleted before embarking on my new diet of steaks and chops, so there was a fishcake cocktail, pork liver *de foie gras*, *salade de la plain* lettuce, and for the entree, braised hearts of beef, with a new invention of Rochester's which he called city gravy.

As I attacked the savory fare, I contemplated the new pattern of behavior I was to adopt as a man of forty.

A Generous Gift for Rochester

I would have to be a trifle more conservative in my dress. I called Rochester in to make him a present of my green plaid suit, but found he was already wearing it. I told him he could keep it without charge, but that the alterations would have to come out of his salary. I was in good shape for the transition so far as the rest of my wardrobe was concerned. True, I had two or three ties that were a little on the loud side, but I could have them dyed.

Rochester then suggested a birthday party. At first I was against the idea. The fuss and bother didn't appeal to me; besides, real friends should give presents whether they're invited to a party or not.

But then I reconsidered. The best way to handle an unpleasant situation is to face it squarely. Why not have a party? Why not announce to the world that Jack Benny, star of stage, screen, radio and television, was forty?

Secretly, I had been entertaining the thought of fibbing a little. I could always say I was thirty-nine and get away with it. Yes, I actually considered that. But fibbing goes against my grain. And so I made my decision: a party it would be.

Rochester volunteered to contribute the cake, provided I paid for the forty candles. I told him that was satisfactory. I knew I wouldn't have to buy forty candles. I could get ten and cut them in quarters.

As I pen these words, the invitations to the party in celebration of my birthday are already in the mail, and I stand exposed to the world as a man of forty. I hope the revelation will not come as too great a shock to my millions of fans who, as fans will do, have cloaked their idol with the mantle of perennial youth.

Today I face the future fearlessly, convinced that, after thirty-nine years of the best fruits of life, my next thirty-nine years will be just as fruitful—and will last just as long. ▲▲▲

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Benny on How to Avoid Being 40

- 1. Before your fortieth birthday keep circulating the story that you're thirty-nine. If people hear it often enough they'll believe it for years.**
- 2. When in the company of younger people, ask their advice on everything. Pretty soon they'll begin to believe they're older than you are.**
- 3. Stay slim. Thin people always look younger. Connie Mack is ninety-one, but he's so slender nobody figures him to be more than eighty-eight.**
- 4. If you have to spend any money, do it grudgingly. People will think you're saving up for your old age instead of entering it. This rule won't cost you anything except a few friends, but you'll have so much money you'd be ducking them anyway.**
- 5. Avoid reminiscing about the past. If the name Lincoln should come up in your conversation, be sure that it's the car you're talking about and not the President.**
- 6. Lastly, don't worry about your fortieth birthday. Remember, it will soon be over, and it will never happen again.**

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The

Wife Who Lived Twice

By JAMES ATLEE PHILLIPS

To the American husband the idea was shocking;

WHEN the doorman in the gold-brocaded coat swung the door open, Paul Anglin walked out into the bright sunlight on the Avenida Juárez. Two lottery-ticket vendors approached him and he motioned them away. The people walking along the sidewalk glanced at his armful of flowers.

The doorman had hurried around him and was waiting beside a cab. "Your wife is better now, *Señor Anglin*?" he asked.

Paul nodded and got into the taxi. "Thanks," he said. "Can't reach my loot now, *compañero*. When I return—"

"*Por nada, señor.*" The doorman stood back and saluted, and Paul turned to the driver.

"International Hospital," he said, and the driver pushed down his meter flag. The cab moved into the bedlam of Mexico City traffic.

Paul sat in the back seat and held the flowers. Vehicles were roaring by on both sides; they swerved in and out of their proper lanes with no warning. These people fly a tight pattern, he thought, and wondered again, in mixed annoyance and admiration, how they managed it without more accidents.

Putting the bouquet on the seat beside him, he lighted a cigarette. The flowers were called red-hot pokers. Fran had seen them growing wild in Toluca, and had been crazy about them; that was why he had ordered two dozen.

This is a hell of a vacation, Paul thought. We save up for a year, and then Fran has to fall down a set of stairs and break a leg. That had been night before last. But it had been a simple fracture, and she would be able to leave the hospital soon. He smiled ruefully as he remembered Fran, all the radiance knocked out of her as she watched the polite doctors fit the cast.

Paul was private pilot for an Oklahoma oilman, and he and Fran had come down to Mexico in the boss's plane. That had automatically qualified them as billionaires in everybody's eyes, and the Anglins had not minded; it was nice to have maître de's bowing them in ahead of the mob. Then, when ten days of their two weeks were gone, Fran's high heel had broken at the wrong time, just when she was parading regally down the stairs...

Smiling, Paul thought about his wife—about her wide-set eyes and her freckled nose and her boyish, short-cropped hair. He remembered her trick of laughing so

hard when she was really amused, that her eyes nearly closed.

The cab was barreling into the suburbs now, going faster as the traffic thinned. Paul Anglin did not notice; he was thinking how empty yesterday had seemed without Fran, how he missed her. They had been apart two nights now.

The cabdriver made a sweeping U turn and stopped before the walled entrance to the International Hospital. Paul picked up the flowers, handed the driver a five-peso note and told him to keep the change. It was raining now, and he ran toward the hospital entrance.

The nun behind the desk looked up as he came into the dim, quiet hallway; she smiled at his armful of flamboyant flowers. After glancing at her records she said, "*Momentito, señor,*" and went rustling down the hall.

Paul shifted the bouquet irritably. Everything took such a long time in Mexico. There were people sitting on the benches along the wall, and he glanced at them. His eyes, trained to take in all the information on an instrument panel, sorted them quickly: a middle-aged Englishman in patchy tweeds; his wife; and eleven others, all Mexican, all waiting patiently.

"This way, please." The nun was back, and Paul turned to follow her. His anger was mounting because she was going the wrong way. Maybe they had changed Fran to another room, he thought, but probably not. Probably more forms to fill out.

THE nun stopped at an office doorway and motioned him inside. A doctor in a white jacket was sitting behind the desk. "Yes?" Paul said abruptly.

"I am Dr. Villareal," the doctor said. "Will you sit down, please?"

The doctor was not at ease; he picked up a paperweight from his desk, looked at it and put it back again. There were signed portraits of other doctors on the wall behind his head, and two diplomas—Tulane and the University of Madrid. Dr. Villareal looked up, finally, into Paul's eyes.

Paul felt his anger suddenly fade, because he knew then that something was wrong. The doctor was trying to prepare him. Paul got up from the chair, and the scarlet flowers slipped to the floor. "Okay," he said.

Villareal stood up. "Your wife is dead, Mr. Anglin." "Dead?" It was a gasp; Paul could not recognize his



ILLUSTRATED BY TOM LOVELL