

Davy gave the glass back to Ginny. Clinton said, "If he wants a drink let him go to the kitchen..."



A MASK FOR FEAR

By RUTH STERLING

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN WALTER

COLLIER'S SHORT SHORT

BREATHING hard, Davy climbed to the ledge where his clothes lay. He wrapped the large towel around his lanky, shivering body and rubbed his hands briskly. Now that it was over, he felt good. He'd made up his mind to dive and nothing had stopped him—not the dangerous rocks beneath the crashing sea, the chilly dawn or his father's roaring anger.

"You gone clear off your squash, Davy?" his father had said. "If you weren't already sixteen, I'd tan your hide. Got a mind to, all the same."

Davy still remembered the force of his father's slap against his ear. But he was here anyway, he thought, as he looked down the fifteen-foot rise of rocks that stretched seaward like a giant's bony finger. Davy knew the risk and he feared it. One badly angled dive and he could split his head wide open, like that loony kid had done six years ago. "Since then folks have stayed away," Davy's father had shouted, striking him again, "excepting this darn'-fool son of mine."

Maybe he was a darned fool, Davy thought, dressing in the privacy of the overhanging boulder, but he wouldn't stop now. He couldn't.

At the horizon, a glittering white radiance spread across the eastern sky. In another hour or two the cityfolk would begin to cover the beach below with their umbrellas, their canvas chairs and their oiled, white-skinned bodies. When they weren't swimming or resting, they drove around the countryside searching out antiques for the houses they bought. It hurt the villagers to give up a pine chest or a family rocker; but they thought of the food they needed, tightened their lips and took the money.

There was money for Davy and his father too, in repairing sagging doors, window sashes and floors. If someone asked, "What on earth do you natives do in the wintertime, young man?", Davy would hit a nail with extra force before replying, "We try to keep alive."

But Davy didn't mind talking to Mr. Anderton, the physics teacher from Boston who had bought the old Pucello cottage a few weeks before. Mrs. Anderton served Davy cookies and milk while he worked, and Mr. Anderton listened thoughtfully as Davy told him of his secret ambition to go to college and learn to be a pilot or an engineer. Davy wondered how he could tell all this to a stranger, but maybe it was because Mr. Anderton was Ginny's father, and Ginny was quick and bright as a flame with her silky golden hair and her sweet, perky face.

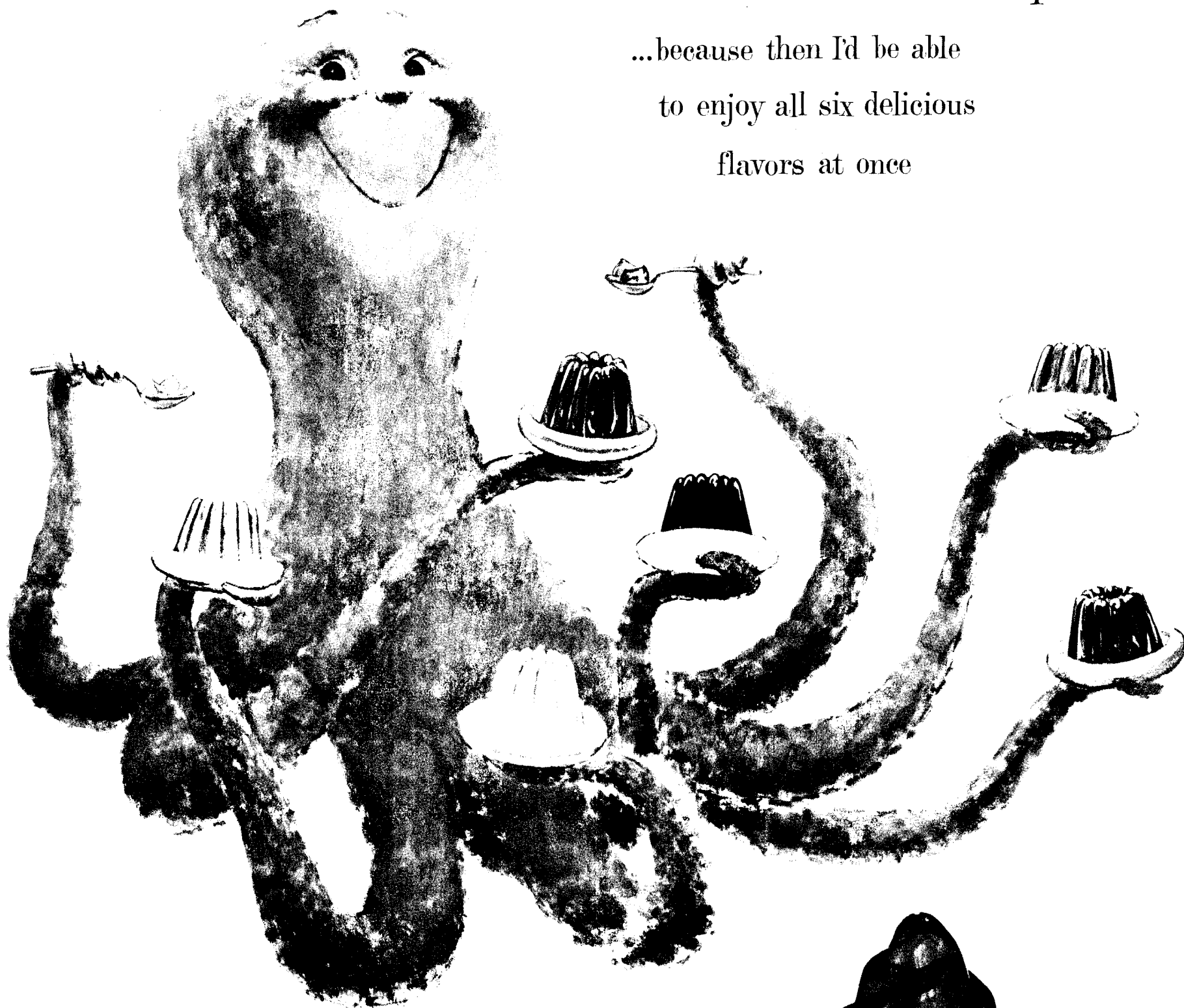
Davy sighed and thought: I'm mooning again. He wrapped his wet trunks in the towel and hurried toward the road, breaking into a run, hoping his father hadn't wakened yet. But his father was waiting for him—a tough, solid figure in the doorway. His eyes were dark in his lined face; his hands were large, the hands of a man who could hammer and saw—and wallop, too. Davy shrank back, but his father said quietly, "Come in, son, and eat your breakfast. I'm not going to hit you—that don't work. I just want to know why you're doing this loony stunt."

Davy walked past him into the kitchen. Don't ask me, Pa, he thought. How could he explain that it had begun one evening two weeks ago, when he had stood in the darkness outside the private pavilion, watching couples

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COLLIER'S SHORT SHORT continued

dancing on the lantern-lighted portico? A girl in a white dress, with hair pale as moonlight, had leaned forward and laughed a silvery, happy laugh; and Davy had felt a chill go through him.

The morning afterward, while Davy was measuring the Anderton porch for new lumber, the screen door slammed and a girl rushed past him and then stopped. Davy's heart beat more rapidly; she was real, after all. "Golly," she said, "did I step on your hand?" She looked so pretty in the sunlight that Davy shook his head dumbly, wishing she had hurt him so he could remember the touch of her foot. Just then a red convertible pulled up and a boy with a crew haircut and a white polo shirt honked and called, "Ready, Ginny?" And she was off, hurrying across the lawn.

GINNY spent a lot of time with Clinton Eberley, who owned the red convertible and lived in one of the gambrel-roofed summer mansions built long ago by sea captains. At night, Clinton in his creamy white jacket looked big and masterful as he guided Ginny around the dance floor; and in the afternoons, when he dived off the wharf, Ginny would stand on the beach and applaud.

"You used to be a steady boy," Davy's father was saying now. "Reckon it's your age. But those rocks are dangerous. Use the wharf."

Davy sneered. "The wharf's for city boys."

His father grinned. "Maybe so," he said. "Well—be careful, son."

"I will, Pa. I promise."

The city boys knew about the rocks. Late in the afternoon a week ago, while Davy was nailing down the last porch step and Ginny was serving cake and lemonade to friends on the lawn, Clinton had said, "Nobody's tried the rocks ever since that kid got himself killed."

"Who'd want to?" Ginny asked, pouring lemonade.

Davy stood up and pushing back a lock of dark blond hair said, "I ain't afraid to try them." Then he realized what he had said, and sweat broke out on his forehead.

Ginny looked up quickly and Clinton peered at him as he lighted a cigarette. "Ever do it?" Clinton said.

"No," Davy said slowly, "but I'm not afraid to try."

Clinton flung the dead match away and looked at the others. "He talks big," he said.

Davy wiped his moist hands on his dungarees and knelt to finish his work. Something soft brushed against his arm and he looked up to see Ginny holding a glass of lemonade. "You must get awfully thirsty working in the sun. Here."

Davy gulped down the cool drink and handed her the glass. "Thanks—Ginny."

Clinton said loudly, "If he wants a drink he can always go around to the kitchen."

Ginny lifted her chin defiantly and looked at Davy. "You want another?" she asked.

Davy shook his head and, gripping the handle of his hammer, swung it down hard. I'll show him, he thought; I'll show them all. . . .

It was mid-July now and work had slowed down; but Davy still practiced before sunup, sharing his solitude with

the gulls. He increased his diving height gradually. At each new springing base, Davy scratched the stone with a nail. Once he got careless and scraped his shoulder so badly it bled; and so he worked harder until his dive was straight and sure and he could gauge the safe spaces between the underwater rocks. He was bronzed and muscular and ready, at last. The next day he brought his lunch to the beach and waited.

When Ginny appeared in her yellow bathing suit he called to her and waved. She looked up and waved back, and suddenly Davy lost his head. A wild hammering started in his chest, and he scrambled to the uppermost jutting boulder. Here there were no nail marks from practice dives to guide him, and the water tossed about, thirty feet below. But he would make it—he had to make it.

A crowd had gathered, and the city boys on the wharf were watching too. Davy tensed his muscles, ready for the dive.

Then he heard a girl cry: "Don't—don't do it, Davy!" He looked down and saw Ginny holding out her arms to him, begging him to stop. Davy stared at her. "Come down," she cried, "please, Davy, come down!"

The anguish in her voice caused him to hesitate and then step back. But when Clinton shouted, "What's the matter—you chicken out?" he clenched his fists and stepped into diving position again. He couldn't back out now. He didn't want to. He *knew* he could make the dive.

"Davy . . ." There was fear in Ginny's voice. "Davy, please don't dive," she called.

He sat down to keep from diving, his head in his hands. From below came the laughter of the city boys, the strident hoot of Clinton louder than the rest. He tried to squeeze back the tears but his palms were wet as he fought back the impulse to leap up and dive, no matter what Ginny wanted.

WHEN he looked up, the crowd was gone. Only Clinton and Ginny stood watching as he came down the rocks—slowly, for he was suddenly exhausted. They walked toward him—Ginny pale and close to tears. Clinton smiling condescendingly.

"You looked like a champ on that one," Clinton taunted.

Davy clenched his fists but Ginny laid her hand on his arm and he slowly relaxed.

"Thank you for not diving, Davy," she said softly.

He wished he could tell her how it was—that it was harder to let Clinton think he was yellow than it would have been to dive. But he couldn't explain it exactly, the different kind of courage it had taken. Any kid could have taken the dare and dived off the cliff, but it took—well—a man to let himself be ridiculed for something no one would understand.

"I wasn't afraid," Davy said. "I wasn't scared of diving."

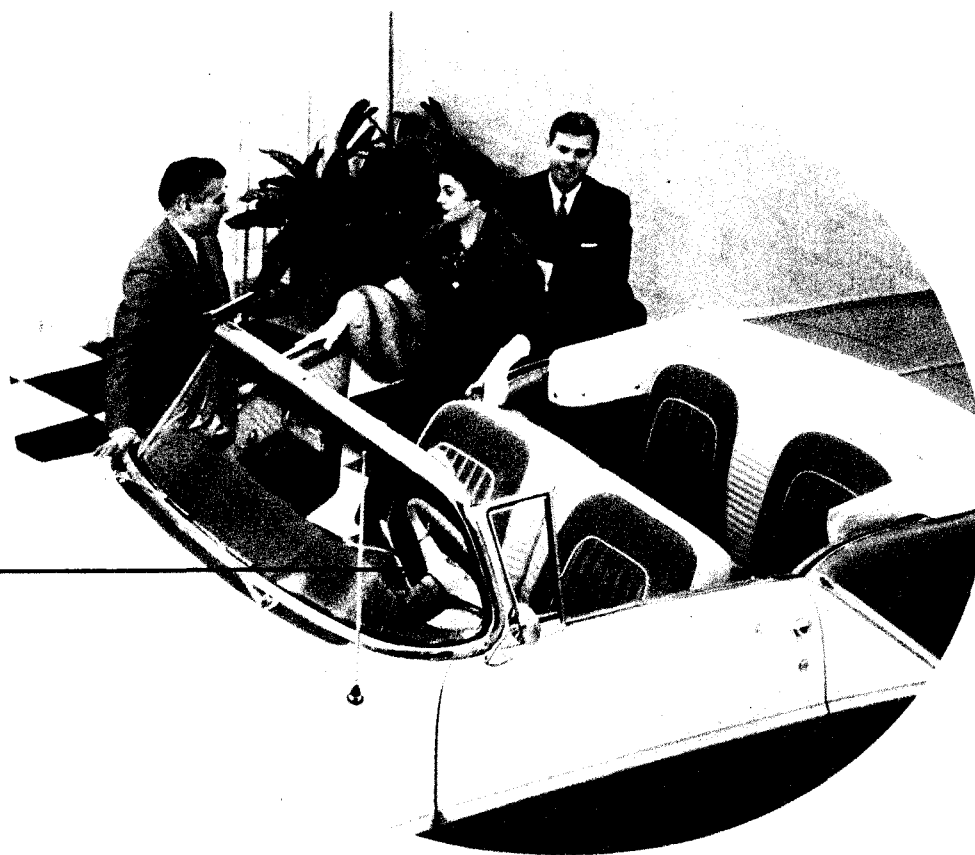
"I know," she said, and slipped her arm through his. "But what you did was braver."

They were walking away from Clinton, but Davy wasn't really aware of it. All he could think was: She knows; she understands. He had always wondered what love meant.

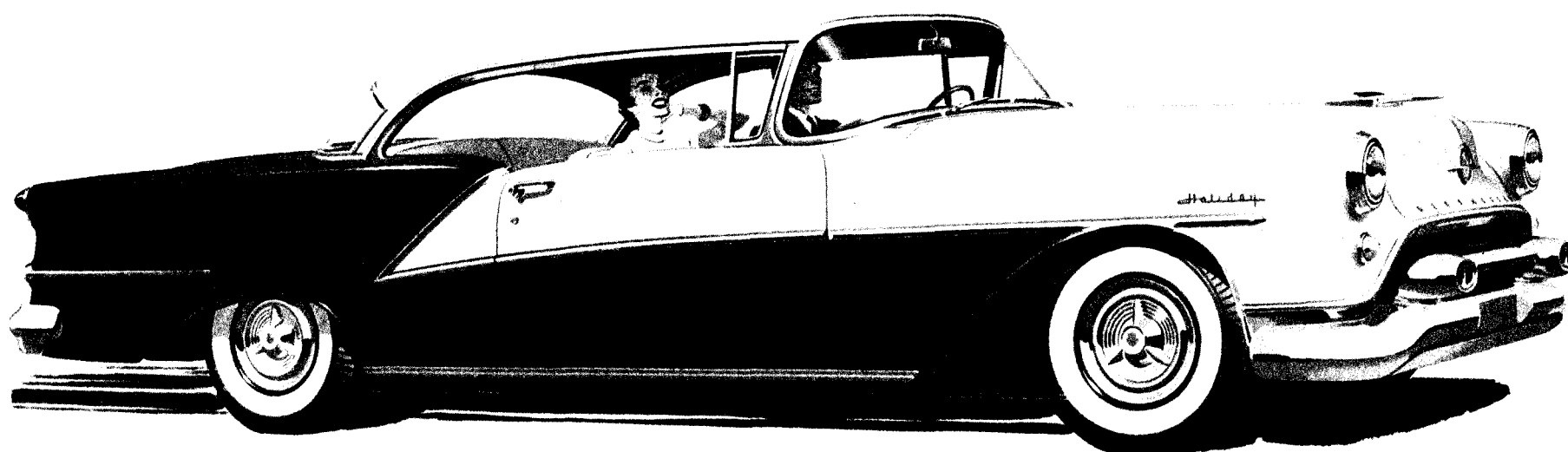
—RUTH STERLING

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TAKE
THE
WHEEL



this dream is real!

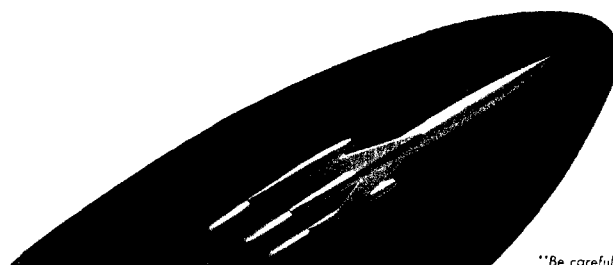


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48 STATES OF MIND

By WALTER DAVENPORT

Hysterical lady in Little Rock, Arkansas, telephoned the police at 10:00 P.M. Her son had not come home. The cops were most sympathetic, advising her not to worry and that they'd get out the old dragnet at once. The distracted mother said the boy had never been out so late before. Finally the

Moslum, of Fort Smith, goes a little further. He's for granting the boost only to members who vote for the above public benefits, thus, he thinks, assuring unanimous adoption.

★ ★ ★

That beautiful new hotel you may see rising in west Los Angeles this summer is strictly for the cats. For cats only, we mean. Initial capacity 200 felines. Individual rooms with bath. No cat race, color or religious discrimination. Charming landscaped grounds and gardens. Luxuriously furnished reception halls for callers. Playgrounds with catnip borders for the children. Despite—or because of—the luxury, we can't help wondering if the pampered guests don't sometimes consider it a dog's life.

★ ★ ★

We hear from Cairo, Illinois, that a couple of farmers were engaged in a bit of deploring. One said he didn't know what he was going to do because there wasn't any money in milk and eggs any more. The other agreed, adding that he had been lying awake nights trying to figure out something else for his cows and chickens to do.

★ ★ ★

We see by the University of Kansas campus newspaper, the University Daily Kansan, that most of the coeds who went to see the movie How to Marry a Millionaire took their notebooks and several pencils with them.

★ ★ ★

Hearing that Mr. Stu Bohacek, of the Wilber (Nebraska) Republican, had made his own survey of our ailing public-school system, we immediately got in touch with him. Mr. Bohacek says: "The trouble is the teachers are afraid of the principals, the principals



IRWIN CAPLAN

are afraid of the superintendents, the superintendents are afraid of the school boards, the school boards are afraid of the parents, the parents are afraid of the kids, and the kids know it."

★ ★ ★

Somebody has sent us the invaluable information that 40,000 barns could be painted red with the lipstick used each year by American women. This intelligence should interest anybody with 40,000 barns.

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interrogating cop got to the question of the kid's age. "Fifty-five," she wept. The cop said, "He oughta be spanked," and hung up.

★ ★ ★

In Pasadena, California, Mr. Oscar Broderick ran into an old friend, a letter carrier making his rounds, and they got to talking. As they parted, having given the international situation a good mauling, the postman drew a letter from his pocket, handed it to Mr. Broderick. "My, my, Oscar," said he, "my wife gave me this to mail a couple of days ago. Forgot it. Drop it in the next box you see, will you? I'm busy." Mr. Broderick did so. "Later," he says, "I thought this rather odd and that it would be an unusual item for your column."

★ ★ ★

Silver-lining gentleman in Burlington, Vermont, tells us he can't pay his bills. But he thinks things could be worse. "It makes my blood run cold," he said, "to think how terrible I'd feel if I were one of my creditors."

★ ★ ★

Cross-firing candidates (sometimes known as cross-filing) in California are complaining that the political racket is so loud these days that it is frequently impossible to hear the band wagon.

★ ★ ★

Colonel Dudley (Silent) Haddock, of Sarasota, Florida, has been interviewing naturalists. He wants to know how birds find out so quickly that he has just had his car washed.

★ ★ ★

Just as you might increase Junior's allowance for being a good boy, the monthly bulletin of Harding College, Searcy, Arkansas, suggests that Congress be permitted to raise members' salaries if (1) they balance the budget and (2) adopt a lasting program of tax reduction and reform. Mr. Sid