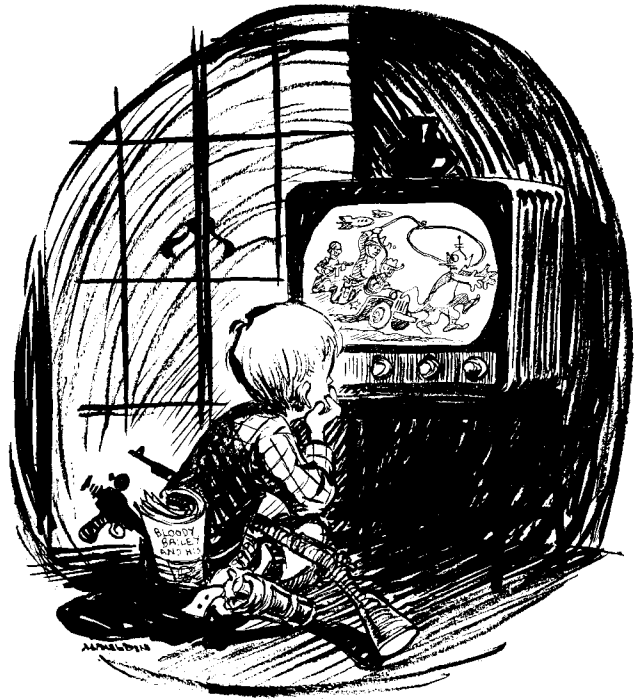


Bill Mauldin

Writes

To Joe



MY KID ANDY got a lot of toy guns for Christmas. They sure are making them realistic now. If we get into another big war, all that Ordnance will have to do is ask the young fry to turn in their small arms, then chamber the weapons for standard ammunition, put in real firing pins, and the Singer Company can go right on making sewing machines. We'll have plenty of guns.

Anyway, the other day Andy was sitting in front of the television set with a gold-plated Colt .44 in a holster, a rocket pistol in his belt, a rifle on his lap, and a comic book in his hip pocket. Man, you should have seen the cover on that book. It would have scared you to death. A bunch of wild men wearing U.S. Army uniforms and using knives, fists, and what looked like broken beer bottles were tangling hand to hand with some unidentified villains, who were naturally getting the worst of it. A flying saucer hovered over their heads.

THE TELEVISION show took up where the book jacket left off. It was a space-man moon-shooting program that must have been trying to keep its hold on the lollipop lickers who are still loyal to cowboy stuff, because cattle rustlers in a jeep kept coming in and out of the picture. There was some military stuff from time to time, too.

"I don't wanna be President any more," Andy told me. "I wanna join the Army and be a sojer all my life."

"Don't worry, you can do both," I assured him. "There's no limit to the opportunities open for an ambitious soldier."

"A space cadet can kill a cowboy, but a sojer can kill cowboys *and* space cadets," he said. "I can kill you, too. *Kerspcheouwwwww!*" He can't even whistle yet, but he can purse his mouth and imitate perfectly the sound a ricocheted rifle shot makes on a sound track.

UNDERSTAND, Joe, I didn't give him those weapons. They came from grown-up friends of Andy's who watch television or who notice on drugstore magazine shelves that instead of the innocent, old-fashioned comics with horrible, warty ghouls dragging half-naked ladies around, now there's the steady drip, drip, drip of gore and the gleam of an occasional flying tooth with a bit of jawbone attached when the leading character doesn't want to get his bayonet wet and so uses the horizontal butt stroke instead. These friends assumed, more or less accurately, that this is the trend with the younger set, and so for presents they gave the kid an arsenal.

All *our* parents had to worry about was explaining sex to us. Our parents could answer straight or they could

duck the questions and let us get our misinformation elsewhere. Today with our own kids there's this added problem. "Daddy, did you get to kill anybody in the war?" "Are people dead when they're killed?" "I want to kill somebody." "Why do they lie down when they're dead?"

It won't do any good to take the books and the guns away and throw out the television. They'll just go over to a little pal's house and feel that much more adventuresome about it. And you can't duck it and say it's all a lot of make-believe when they'll find out soon enough that there's real shooting going on in the world and more of it brewing.

BUT I finally hit on the right thing to say. It occurred to me that what puts a lot of the glamour in this battle stuff is that the television and comic-book projectiles travel a more or less one-way street and the badmen always drop dead first. I told Andy that *this* part is sure enough make-believe.

"You mean when I'm a sojer and shoot, he kills me back?" he asked. He thought about it for a while. He decided it didn't seem fair to him. Damned if he was going to play that kind of game. He laid down his guns and I hope he won't pick them up again until he's drafted.

Regards,
BILL

CHANNELS:

Comments on TV

MARYA MANNES

SUBURBAN ladies war veterans stuff snakes back into peanut jars." Thus a scribbled but reasonably accurate reminder of what went on one day on "Ladies' Date," a daily feature on Channel 5 at one o'clock (E.S.T.), when a bursting M.C. named Bruce Mayer excites middle-aged ladies by a series of jinks or ding-dongs. It is only one of a dozen such shows designed to make life tolerable for the woman over forty, who seems to need certain attentions denied her elsewhere.

The form this attention takes varies, but the formula is the same. Make her laugh, flatter her, give her presents. Invariable also is the purveyor of this attention: a man of inane garrulity, glandular energy, and no shame. I can only believe that he succeeds because of the taciturnity, the fatigue, and the frustration of American husbands—qualities only too understandable when their wives appear on the screen.

It may be funny to see ladies stuffing foam-rubber snakes back into peanut jars, but it is less funny when a young man moves from woman to woman singing a love song as he sits on their laps, strokes their hands, kneels before them, and gazes deep into their eyes. In this instance a few had the sense to giggle at the obvious hamming, but many—homely, portly, old enough to be his mother—looked at him with an expression that betrayed a lifetime of unanswered girlish dreams, and that was nearer tragedy.

KINDER perhaps is a Mr. Richard Willis, who has a daily show called "Here's Looking at You" on Channel 4 a little later in the afternoon, in which he counsels women about their appearance. One by one these not-young ladies sit by him

and ask him what to do about sagging necks, small eyes, and big noses. They are mostly shy and hesitant, and Mr. Willis soothes them with the gentlest of criticisms and advice. "I don't see a thing the matter with your nose, dear . . . you're just conscious of it." Or "Not quite so long in the back, dear . . . it ages you." His most recurrent comment—and it is easy to see why—is, "This hat is not for you, dear."

THEY take this humbly and gratefully, accept a few gifts, and retreat from sight, leaving Mr. Willis rather more haggard than usual. He is the only tired M.C. on view, and one must be grateful for that. What is sad about his program is the almost desperate absorption of these women in externals which, at their age, should count least among their assets. And when Mr. Willis makes up the face of a prospective bride of seventy-four to show her how to look on her wedding day, one can only shudder, wishing that somewhere there were a Mr. Willis who would say: "This youth is not for you, dear. You will not keep either its illusion or your husband by the foundation you use, the color of your rouge, or the shape of your nose. The real beauty of age has nothing to do with these; it springs from the light in your eye and the warmth in your heart."

But then—how would the creams be sold, and how would Mr. Willis

live? Is it possible that illusion, however pitiful and transitory, is worth its weight in commercials?

WONDERFUL—NO CHARM." This cryptic note concerned an hour of cooking on Channel 7 by Mrs. Dione Lucas, a master of the art. There are four or five cooking programs daily in which pleasant or pretty women smile relentlessly as they toss up dainty dishes in immaculate kitchens and show you embroidered mats made by mountain people and serrated cake knives which can also be used for fish. Mrs. Lucas smiles hardly at all and does nothing but cook. She is English-born, and her clipped speech, her stern intelligent face, her brisk movements—even the heavy coil of hair at her nape—make no concessions to what is currently known as "charm." She is showing you how to cook magnificent food, and she doesn't care what you think of her. There is even a slight show of irritability when she reaches off-camera for some ingredient and it is a second slow in coming. Good cooks are notoriously short-tempered.

My only grievance against her program can be applied to all: These women work with flawless equipment and invisible help. There they are, with never a dented pot, a darkened pan, or a chipped bowl, stirring in a cupful of onions which some tear-soaked minion has already chopped offstage.

