

plex called "The Dancing Elephant." Once the Japanese are killed or driven off, the bone-weary soldiers press forward to another group of hills known as "The Giant Boiled Shrimp." This reviewer would like to state that no soldier anywhere, ever, under any circumstances, used such fanciful names as the Dancing Elephant or the Giant Boiled Shrimp for a bunch of hills. Hills were known by number, or, if the action on

one was especially tough, it was called The Meatgrinder. It is the novelist, and not the G.I.s, who has named the hills in "The Thin Red Line."

But to press on with the book. Jones deploys over this terrain an infantry company of seventy-one men, plus thirteen others. Fully half of this number receive considerably more than passing mention, and perhaps a dozen play major parts. One of the great merits of this novel is that we are able to keep the men in this oversized cast clearly in mind, so sharply individualized are their roles. There is no plot, nor even a story line, aside from the progress of the fighting which becomes the testing block for the men's characters; the fighting itself, along with the command decisions that support it, is largely random and adventitious. Jones has deliberately avoided playing heroes and

villains with his characters; in each man good and bad are mixed. War is presented as a state of flux, unified by its own confusion.

The book's achievement, it seems to me, is that of patiently fitting together an elaborate picture puzzle of men in combat; the enjoyment comes from watching the author bring the puzzle to completion.

However, when the reader looks for some design in the finished work, it is missing, and what emerges is a sense that the meaning of war is its absence of meaning. No doubt such is the novel's intention; but this kind of naturalism can be a negative virtue, and in the end "The Thin Red Line" leaves us impressed with Jones's ability to report and document rather than to create in the very highest sense that art—and his own material—demand.

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Catcher in the Corn



Pati Hill—"beHolden to someone."

"One Thing I Know—," by Pati Hill (Houghton, Mifflin. 93 pp. \$3), has for heroine an unsaccharine sixteen-year-old who, soured on society, gets scorched by amour. Joan Bostwick is a free-lance writer.

By JOAN BOSTWICK

ONE THING I want to say right now is that this Francesca Hollins, who is the heroine of this book called "One Thing I Know—," is not exactly what you might call an original. Being sixteen and disillusioned with Adults and Love and the Phony World, she sort of stepped out of this other book I read. If you really want to hear what I think, I think that old Pati Hill, who wrote the book, is beHolden to some-

one for this Francesca character because she is an awful lot like old Jane Gallagher who was aces with "Mad-man" Caulfield. I also think that being strictly for the girls it might outsell false eyelashes. Even though I'm around a thousand years old, I can understand that girls aren't too crazy about Amy, Beth, and Jo any more. I'm not exactly Granville Hicks or anything but I think I can draw a Literary Conclusion once in a while.

To get back to Francesca, she lives in Washington, D.C., and she has this lazy old stepfather who takes naked sunbaths and gripes about American women, he being Italian and all. He also sort of propositioned Francesca once, which was a crumbly idea even for a pea-brain, so nothing came of that.

Anyway, I wouldn't want you to get sick or anything, so I'll skip over the vomity parts like how she fell in love with this Graham von Liddle, for Lord's sake, the minute she laid eyes on him. He called her *Ninotchka* or something equally pukey and was always delivering these monotonous sermons about Honor and Loyalty and Fighting the Good Fight. He was clever as hell.

So old Francesca was doing about as well as you can do if you happen to be in love with a clown, until Gloria attached herself to them. Gloria was this modest plump girl who blushed, for God's sake, and wore a brave little smile and mittens, and she was always improving them by hauling them to things like lectures on The Life History of the Water Rat. Pretty soon Graham



began to think of *this* royal pain as a safe harbor and all and then he took her someplace without old Francesca, which good old Gloria couldn't keep to herself. What with all the long boring letters on Pride and Jealousy and The Gentle Art of Understanding which Graham absolutely poured on Francesca, the whole thing sort of fell apart.

Anyway, after this and a lot of other depressing stuff, Francesca wrote in her diary, "One thing I know, I'll never be in love again." Now she has only this very sensitive platonic friend who sometimes acts about seven years old, but is very nice to his little brother. But you'll have to catch that part of the story on your own.



One thing I'll bet is that around a million P-TAs and Oldguard School Superintendents and Assorted Anxious Parents are going to go absolutely mad with joy over it because it has been sort of soaked in Lestoil. I can just picture them around these bonfires singing "School Days," and ordering rounds of very dry Kool-Aid to toast old Decency and Purity.

I forgot to mention that there is this one sexy part sort of wedged in between the words, and this "Afterwards . . ." jazz. But you'd hardly notice it at all unless you had an evil mind or something. Evil minds. They kill me.

NO ROOM FOR TRAGEDY: Less a novel than a series of sketches of American family life in a small town, as seen through the eyes of a woman now about thirty, "*The Inconstant Season*," by Sally Daniels (Atheneum, \$4.50), opens with Peggy thinking about the tennis court made by her grandfather for her mother as a welcoming gift to a bride. We never get the full story, nor do subsequent episodes show the older generations clearly; for the author's point is that "even if we knew them they would not be very real to us." They will, in fact, always be—however beloved and important—part of the confusing world in which the young must learn to find their own way at last.

Peggy's attitude is clearly shown in her memories of herself at ten, learning to ride but hating it and only enduring it to please her father. Her inner resentment is always concealed by surface jollity and participation, for in the clan there is no room for tragedy; everything turns out for the best, or

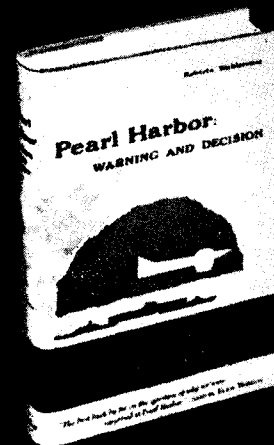
is a great joke. She is naturally rebellious and critical, but forces herself to conform to the standards of her friends and the traditions of her family.

The story is told in the first person and there is a strong suggestion of autobiography in this subtle and subtly disturbing book. This gives authenticity to the background, but Peggy herself is lost in the swarm of brothers, friends, cousins, and sweethearts growing up with her at school and college and sharing her struggle to establish an identity and understand as well as satisfy their estimable elders. The reason for her inherent melancholy is not revealed, but we feel the oppression of high ideals and hearty living on an individual who would prefer more relaxation and privacy.

In spite of the deliberate vagueness of the self-portraiture and the sparsity of exact details, one is quite relieved to gather in the last chapter of this atmospheric and haunting story, written with intelligence and a suitably graceless style, that the introspective and elusive Peggy is married and has two children, no doubt adorable and difficult and in the long run fated, as we all are, to find the older generation "not very real to us." We love them, we have to leave them, we shall laugh at them; that is the most to be hoped for.

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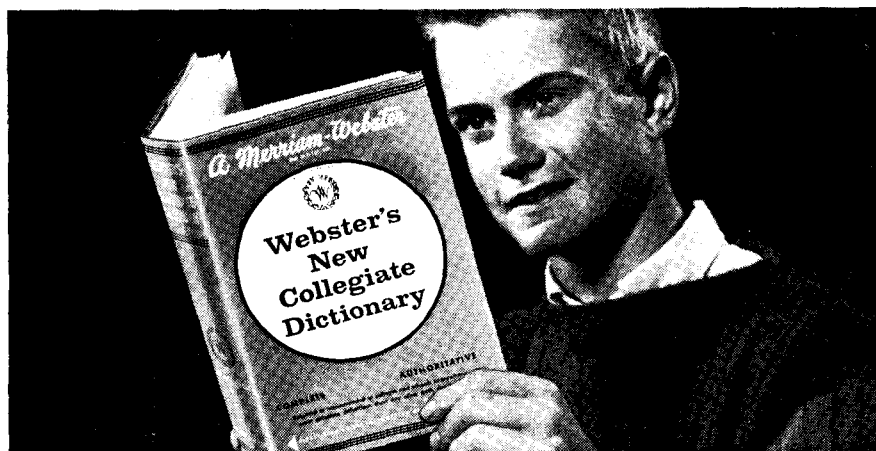


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