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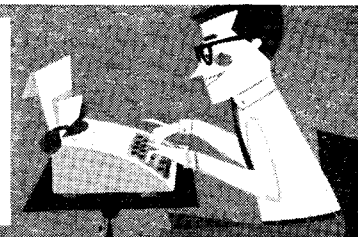
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Top of My Head



The Curtain Slowly Descends

IT HAS just begun to sink in. Judy Holliday is dead. At a time like this what good is it being a writer? Here I sit before a machine with a handful of alphabet staring up at me and the only words that seem to form are *sorry*, *loss*, *solace*, and all those futile clichés that go with messages of condolence.

My acquaintance with this finest and most sensitive of the theater's comedien-nes began some fifteen years ago when I was writing the *Big Show*, starring Tallulah Bankhead, radio's last gasp before the onslaught of television. This hour-and-a-half big-name presentation was a weekly series on NBC, and each show found its guest list peopled with six or seven of the most glamorous names in entertainment.

So it was only natural that Judy should have been one of our earliest guests after her triumph as Billie Dawn in *Born Yesterday*. She did a scene from Carson Kanin's comedy hit and of course she was perfection. But it was in the dialogue that followed, attendant to some chatting our guests always did with Miss Bankhead, that I began to realize that this dumb blonde, Billie Dawn, was the very antithesis of this brilliant woman, Judy Holliday.

Judy was a worrisome girl. She read each line we wrote for her on that first show, and for the many subsequent shows to which she was invited back, with a keen and searching mind, arguing whether a line fit the character she played, whether the comedic line was properly motivated by the straight line. She gave us hours of rewrite and re-write, until she was contented with what she had to speak.

But with Judy it was for me always a labor of love. We knew we would always get a bright and shining performance—an understanding reading filled with shaded nuances and a delivery that was timed to the split second for the audience response we were seeking.

The character we developed for her on the show was in the mold of Billie Dawn. She was to be a little suspicious of the glamorous Miss Bankhead—a little timid yet still ready to grapple with this formidable and unpredictable figure.

"A superb characterization, Judy," Miss Bankhead said when the scene from the play had ended. "Come on over and let's chat."

And Judy, looking her over carefully, said: "About what?"

"Why Judy, whenever an actress comes on our show we always have to talk."

"Why?"

"People expect it. This is the *Big Show*."

"No wonder you're here for an hour and a half. If you didn't talk so much you could be home in a half-hour like everybody else."

And so on.

The Judy Holliday trademark was on every line. Just as it was in the excerpt from *Born Yesterday*, which she performed for us that night. It was the scene with the newspaperman who has been hired by Judy's gauche husband to make a soft and well-spoken lady of her. This was their first meeting, and he said, "Billie—that's a sort of an odd name, isn't it?"

"What are you talkin'? Half the kids I know are named it. Anyway, it's not my real name."

"What is?"

"Holy smoke! Emma."

"What's the matter?"

"Do I look like an Emma?"

"No, you don't look like a Billie, either."

"So what do I look like?"

"You look like a delightful girl."

(Pause.)

"Lemme ask you, are you one of them talkers or would you be innarested in a little action?"

A line still quoted fifteen years later.

AND yet—and when I say this I genuflect admiringly in the direction of the brilliant Carson Kanin and the genius of his playwriting from title to final curtain—and yet, even in print these lines hold the magic of Judy; one still hears her voice, her inflections, her own personal idiom.

Three years ago I was writing an hour special for her on television. From the start she was intrigued with the concept. She laughed aloud at the comedy lines when she first read the script. Then one day she phoned me. Her agile mind had been at work picking out little things here and there, phrasing, reconstructing, timing, wondering if the character's reactions were true. I said, "Judy, the trouble with you is you ask too many

logical questions." She asked if we could meet later in the day to discuss it. I agreed.

While I waited for her in the lobby of my hotel, I thought we'd go to a quiet spot in some elegant restaurant and over a cup of coffee come to some sort of compromise. She showed up in the lobby wearing some tight-fitting jeans, sneakers, her hair in disarray, and wearing a catcher's mitt. She had been playing ball with her son in the park. The restaurant bit was out. We went to my office, where we made some minor changes. The next day the show went on the air.

The morning after the show the reviews came out. They were divided. But two of the local critics had said, "Too bad Miss Holliday couldn't rise above the material." That evening I

found in the box at the hotel a note delivered by hand by Miss Holliday. I've never disclosed this before. I've never shown it to the critics or to anyone else. This is the note:

Dear Goody:

I had to tell you that I thought the reviews with the exception of the *Times* and *Telegram* were most unfair. I know it's traditional to blame the writing. It's almost a reflex action. But in this case it was unwarranted and unjust. I thought the material was excellent. The fault, I'm sorry to say, lay with the performance. I just didn't go that extra step to mastery. Love, Judy.

Suddenly, midway through life, she's gone. And from the depth of our loss we, like Judy, ask one logical question. Why?
—GOODMAN ACE.

Drawing the Cat

By May Swenson

MAKES a platform for himself:
forepaws bent under his chest,
slot-eyes shut in a corniced head,
haunches high like a wing chair,
hindlegs parallel, a sled.

As if on water, low afloat
like a wooden duck: a bundle not
apt to be tipped, so symmetrized
on hidden keel of tail he rides
squat, arrested, glazed.

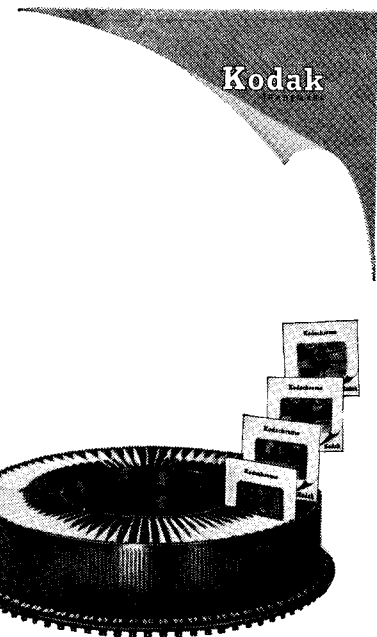
Lying flat, a violin:
hips are splayed, head and chin
sunk on paws, stem straight out
from the arched root
at the clef-curve of the thighs.

Wakes: the head ball rises.
Claws sprawl. Wires
go taut, make a wicket of his spine.
He humps erect, with scimitar yawn
of hooks and needles porcupine.

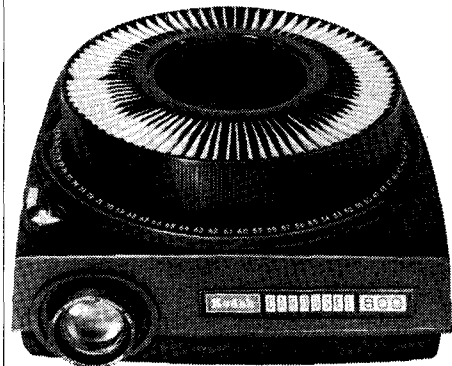
Sits, solid as a doorstop,
tail-encircled, tip laid on his toes,
ear-tabs stiff, gooseberry eyes
full, unblinking, sourly wise.
In outline: a demijohn with a pewter look.

Swivels, bends a muscled neck:
petal-of-tulip-tongue slicks
the brushpoint of his tail to black,
then smooths each glossy epaulette
with assiduous sponge.

Whistle him into a canter
into the kitchen: tail hooked aside,
ears at the ready. Elegant copy
of carousel pony—
eyes bright as money.



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LEARNING TO LIVE WITH SCIENCE

Is man finally outgrowing his fear of technology and coming to accept the probability that one day he may be able to do almost anything he wants?

By EMMANUEL G. MESTHENE,
*executive director of the Harvard
University Program on Technology
and Society.*

IT WAS Gilbert Murray who first used the celebrated phrase "the failure of nerve." Writing about ancient Greek religions, Murray characterized as a failure of nerve the change of temper that occurred in Hellenistic civilization around the turn of the era. The Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. believed in the ultimate intelligibility of the universe. There was nothing in the nature of existence or of man that was inherently unknowable. They accordingly believed also in the power of the human intelligence to know all there was to know about the world, and to guide man's career in it.

The wars, increased commerce, and infiltration of Oriental cultures that marked the subsequent period brought with them vicissitude and uncertainty that shook this classic faith in the intelligibility of the world and in the capacity of men to know and to do. There was henceforth to be a realm of knowledge available only to God, not achievable by human reason. Men, in other words, more and more turned to God to do for them what they no longer felt confident to do for themselves. That was the failure of nerve.

I think things are changing. I doubt that there are many men today who would question that life will be produced in the laboratory, that psychologists and their personality drugs will soon reveal what really makes men tick,

that scientific prediction is a far more promising guide to the future than divination, and that the heavens cannot long remain mysterious in the face of our ability to hit the moon today and the stars tomorrow. In a recent article, Daniel Bell characterized this new-found faith as follows: "Today we feel that there are no inherent secrets in the universe . . . and this is one of the significant changes in the modern moral temper." I would say, indeed, that this is a major implication of our new world of science and technology. We are witnessing a widespread recovery of nerve.

Paradoxically, this taking on of new courage is tending at the same time to produce an opposite reaction, vague but disturbingly widespread. At the same time that we admire the new machines we build—the ones that play chess, and translate Russian, and catch and correct their own mistakes, and tend each other—we also begin to fear them. We fear them in two ways—one that we talk about, and one that we joke about.

WE talk quite openly about our fear that machines may take away jobs, deprive people of work. But we dare only to joke about our fear that machines will replace people, not only as workers, but as people. Already they do arithmetic better than any of us. How much longer can it be before they make people obsolete? This fear is part of our technological world, but I see it only as derivative. I think it has its roots in a deeper, moral implication.

Some who have seen farthest and most clearly in recent decades have warned of a growing imbalance between

man's capabilities in the physical and in the social realms. John Dewey, for example, said: "We have displayed enough intelligence in the physical field to create the new and powerful instrument of science and technology. We have not as yet had enough intelligence to use this instrument deliberately and systematically to control its social operations and consequences." Dewey said this more than thirty years ago, before television, before atomic power, before electronic computers, before space satellites. He had been saying it, moreover, for at least thirty years before that. He saw early the problems that would arise when man learned to do anything he wanted before he learned what he wanted.

I think the time Dewey warned about is here. My more thoughtful scientific friends tell me that we now have, or know how to acquire, the technical capability to do very nearly anything we want. Can we transplant human hearts, control personality, order the weather that suits us, travel to Mars or to Venus? Of course we can, if not now or in five or ten years, then certainly in twenty-five, or in fifty or a hundred. If each of us examined the extent of his own restored faith in the essential intelligibility of the world, we might find that we have recovered our nerve to the point that we are becoming almost nervy. (I think, incidentally, that this recovery of nerve largely explains the current crisis of the churches. After twenty centuries of doing man's work, they are now having to learn how to do God's. The Ecumenical Council is evidence that the long but false war between religion and science is ended, and that we are once more