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To date the zany concoctions of John Novotny have chiefly graced the pages of Esquire. Here is the first of, I hope, many Novotny improbabilia to appear in F&SF; and I think you'll have as much fun as I did in discovering the work of this noble madman whose cockeyed view of things as they are (and might be) is expressed in a style refreshingly his own.

The Angry Peter Brindle

by JOHN NOVOTNY

PRINCIPAL MALLOY shook the homework papers in front of Mr. Peter Brindle's face.

"I repeat, sir," he said sternly. "This is utterly ridiculous."

"I agree," Mr. Brindle snapped. "That my daughter, or any other child, should be handed that amount of homework is completely ridiculous."

"The amount happens to be trifling," Principal Malloy stated. "I refer to the contents."

"They too are ridiculous. A child of eleven should not have to cope with slide rules," Peter Brindle said.

Principal Malloy drew a deep breath.

"The problems can be solved by substitution, long division, and simple addition. These answers were arrived at by a nincompoop."

Mr. Brindle pushed the papers aside and extended his neck.

"Are you calling my Dorothy a nincompoop?"

"Your Dorothy does her work excellently in class; particularly geography. Hoboken is not the capital of New Jersey. Your Dorothy did not do that homework!" Mr. Malloy said tapping Mr. Brindle's breastbone.

"I am calling you a nincompoop!"

Mr. Brindle's eyebrows shot up and his neck became a lively red. He extended a quivering forefinger almost to Malloy's nose.

"You are a dirty —"

The principal closed his eyes and waited. After a long silent second he opened them. The office was empty.

Peter Brindle looked at his finger and then at Officer Mulvaney's nose which the finger almost touched.

"Well?" Officer Mulvaney inquired.

Peter Brindle swallowed.

“With your kind permission,” Mulvaney went on, “I’m for letting the cross-town traffic move along.”

“Yes — indeed, yes,” Mr. Brindle stuttered.

“Then would you be removing your finger?” Mulvaney smiled sweetly. “It blocks me vision.”

Peter Brindle examined the finger and then placed it at his side. He frowned at the officer as the automobiles sped by on each side.

“What have you done with Malloy?” he demanded. Mulvaney cocked his head to one side and fingered his chin.

“If it’s the Burlesque you’re wanting you’re in the wrong town,” he said. “But I’m inclined to think you’re in the right spot. Hoboken has all the bars a man could ask.”

Mr. Brindle began to shift his feet nervously. He looked around at Hoboken.

“I hadn’t finished speaking to Malloy,” he murmured unhappily. The policeman suddenly slapped his own forehead.

“Malloy’s Harbor!” he smiled. “Two blocks toward the piers and one block to the right. Only once was I there and that on business.”

“I’ll hurry along,” Mr. Brindle said quickly. “Thank you.”

“ ’Twas a raid,” Mulvaney called after him. “I had no time to sample his stock.”

“It’s quite good,” Peter Brindle called back. “Thank you.”

Mr. Brindle tried not to think as he walked along the street toward the bar. The fact that he had been transported, with the speed of light, from Public School 74 to the Hoboken business district did not lend itself to reasonable thought. Mr. Brindle turned into Malloy’s Harbor and sought out the telephone. He dialed the school number and waited.

“Principal Malloy?” he asked.

“Speaking.”

“ — a dirty no-good martinet,” he concluded. “I wonder what the school board would say if they heard your joint had been raided. Eh?” He clamped the receiver back in place and brushed off his hands triumphantly. He stopped at the bar.

“I’ll have a triple scotch.”

“I can’t explain it, Margaret. One moment I was speaking to that jackass Malloy and the next moment I was in Hoboken.”

Margaret Brindle sat down across from him at the kitchen table and took one of his hands.

“Look, Pete,” she said quietly. “I know you’ve been drinking. I can

smell it, and that's unusual for you. Maybe you just thought you were in Hoboken."

"I certainly would know the capital of Jersey, wouldn't I?" Peter asked indignantly.

"I don't know," his wife shrugged. "Didn't you and Dorothy have an argument about that last week? I guess I should have gone to the school."

"I'm sure you would have enjoyed meeting that Irish cop," Peter said drily. "There I stood with my finger an inch from his nose."

"Let's go to bed, Pete," Margaret suggested. "A good night's sleep will fix you up."

"I've got to help Dorothy with her math homework."

Margaret shook her head.

"She's in bed. I helped her earlier. Guess she didn't have much tonight. It only took about fifteen minutes."

Peter frowned and headed for bed.

It was three weeks later on a Saturday morning that Peter Brindle's anger became kindled again. He was playing golf at Merrybrier. Normally Peter enjoyed a placid round of golf, accepting the bad shots and exulting in the few good ones. He had never broken a hundred.

As they approached the tee for the short seventeenth, Eddie Lake glanced down the column of figures on the card and nodded.

"Hey there, Pete. You have eighty-nine and only two to go. Looks like this is your day."

Peter Brindle smiled deprecatingly.

"My honor?"

"Fire away," Eddie said.

Mr. Brindle teed up his ball and threatened it with his five iron.

"Hundred and forty-five yards," he murmured, setting his feet. He swung. They watched the long high rise of the ball.

The ball faded to the right as it fell.

"Whoops!"

Peter glared at the puff of sand that rose as the ball disappeared.

"Happens to the best," Eddie consoled. He wound up, beat his ball into the ground, and nodded approvingly as it jackrabbited along, finally rolling up to the edge of the green.

"I use my three iron on this hole," Eddie explained. "Always get a beautiful roll."

"Hmmm."

They pulled the caddy carts behind them and Peter descended into the sand trap.

"I'll blast," he announced.

Eddie winced as a cloud of sand showered the green. He squinted around and then turned inquiringly toward the trap.

"I hit too far back of the ball," Peter called. "Hold the flag, will you?"

Eddie held the flag and hid his face behind his arm as more sand came out.

"Getting to look like Jones Beach up here," he said. "Why don't you just sort of flick it out?"

Peter forced a strong grin.

"The books say you must blast," he announced.

Eddie huddled and waited. A sharp click came from the trap and the ball shot out. It sailed over the green, over another trap, over the fence, and was heading down a paved street when Eddie turned back.

"Might just about reach Peekskill," he observed. "That's good for a nine iron. Guess you didn't hit back of the ball that time." He retreated from the flag as Peter strode from the trap.

"And the eighteenth is four hundred and fifty yards long," Peter ground out. He drew back his arm and aimed the nine iron after the ball. Eddie was suddenly alone.

Max Grogowski was tying the laces of his hunting boots when his eye caught the expensive golf shoes and argyle socks. He looked up slowly and then brought up his arms to cover his head. Peter stared at him and slowly lowered the golf club. Max peered out from between his fingers.

"Sam! Harry! Come out the tent. We got company."

Sam crawled out and whistled.

"Geez, Mac. You really must have clouted one."

"You don't yell, 'Fore'?" Harry asked. "We could be killed."

Peter studied the hunters, their tent, and their very wild-looking surroundings.

"Hunting?" he asked. Max snorted.

"Nah. Badminting. We're building a court."

"Is the hunting good on . . . Long Island?" Peter tried hopefully, disregarding the sarcasm.

"Sure," Max said. Peter sighed with relief.

"But it's better here in Peekskill," Sam said. Peter closed his eyes.

"Peekskill," he repeated.

"Two miles down the road," Sam said.

"Thank you," Peter said, heading slowly for the indicated road. "Oh, if you happen to find the ball I lost you may keep it."

"Thanks," Max called after him. "Next time yell, 'Fore.'"

Peter plodded along and thought. He plodded almost to the Peekskill

railroad station before deciding that his anger and his sudden trips were allied. With that Peter stopped thinking.

"You're markin' up my car," Conductor Ehlein told him.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Them shoes," Conductor Ehlein explained. "Markin' up my car. And don't go clankin' that cane around."

"It's a golf club," Peter said.

"No golf playin' allowed in my car."

"I must not get angry," Peter murmured.

"Dang right you mustn't," Conductor Ehlein said. "T'ain't your car that's gettin' marked up."

"And I don't imagine that it's your car either," Peter retorted. "I assume it belongs to the New York Central."

"Oh you do? Well now, suppose I tell you I bought this car direct from the New York Central?"

"Did you?" Peter asked.

"Nope. But that's the way I feel about it. I don't like it marked up." Conductor Ehlein nodded once to enforce his remarks and walked on down the aisle. He returned in a minute and looked suspiciously at Peter Brindle.

"Almost talked me out of the fare, didn't you?"

Peter remained silent and took out his money. He extended it and then drew it back as the conductor reached forward.

"I want to be sure the New York Central gets this," Peter warned. "It's still their car." He considered it a moral victory as Conductor Ehlein fumed his way down the car.

"That man will disappear one of these days," Peter observed thoughtfully.

Margaret laid her book on the night-table and leaned over to smell his breath as he sank down on the bed.

"Where have you been, Pete? I've been worried."

"Peekskill."

"You went to Peekskill for golf?" Margaret asked in amazement.

"I went to Merrybrier for golf with Eddie Lake," Peter said, wearily placing his nine iron against the dresser.

"Where are the rest of your clubs?"

"I suspect that Eddie Lake has sold them by now. He is very cold-blooded."

"Pete! What's going on?" Margaret demanded. Peter Brindle looked at his wife.

"A phenomenon for which I have no explanation, Margaret. I lost my temper in a sand trap at the seventeenth hole. In a split second I was in Peekskill. Only missed it by two miles. When I got angry in Malloy's office I landed in Hoboken."

"When you get angry you — Oh Pete. Are you sure?"

"Good heavens, Margaret . . . !"

"All right, Pete. Stay calm," Margaret cautioned. "Tell me what happened."

Peter began with his par on the sixteenth hole and then the trouble on the seventeenth. Margaret listened intently as he repeated Eddie Lake's remark.

"Could the ball have reached Peekskill, Pete?" she asked. He stared.

"He was being facetious," Peter said. "A very annoying trait of which he is quite proud."

"I didn't know," Margaret said. "I thought maybe you decided the ball had gone to Peekskill and you subconsciously wanted to go after it."

"I knew it couldn't reach Peekskill," Peter said loudly, "and I am not that close with a buck."

"Take it easy, honey," Margaret urged.

"By all means," Peter agreed. "I could possibly end up in darkest Africa. Then I'd really have a trip back."

Margaret considered matters while Peter showered and got ready for bed. She leaned over and kissed him.

"Vacation is coming soon, Pete. Maybe two weeks rest will fix everything."

Peter smiled and snapped off the light.

"Good girl," he said. "Most other women would have become hysterical over something like this."

"I'd like to," Margaret confessed, "but I'm afraid you'd get mad."

Peter laughed softly and kissed her again.

Tuesday evening they were driving into town to catch an early movie when Peter found himself following a long yellow convertible.

"Drives like an old lady," he observed as the yellow car slowed down to twenty miles an hour for a curve.

"It is an old lady," Margaret said, "and she's just being careful."

"Well, she has California plates," Peter said. "If she drove across the country at this speed she must have started last August."

"Oh, Peter, just pass her if you must. I think she drives very well."

Mr. Brindle pulled out to go by and the yellow convertible cruised over into the left lane ahead of him. Peter glared.

"She was just being careful," Margaret explained hurriedly. "There were some red lanterns back there."

"They were up on the sidewalk," Peter said angrily, following the old lady back to the right as the road narrowed. "California drivers should stay in California. Look, there are some pigeons on the road up ahead. I'll bet —"

The red tail lights on the convertible flashed as the old lady stopped. The Brindle car squealed behind her.

"I knew it!" Peter roared, reaching for the door handle. Margaret looked at the license plate on the offending car and had a horrible thought.

"Coney Island!" she screamed. Peter was gone. Margaret crossed her fingers and eased into the driver's seat as the old lady pulled away after the pigeons had departed.

The sailor and the blonde were quite surprised as Peter Brindle came crowding into the seat beside them.

"Hey, mister!" the sailor protested. "Only two supposed to be in a seat."

"I'll get out," Peter moaned unhappily. "Where am I now?"

"You're on the Cyclone," the blonde said, "and it's too late to get out. We just started."

"The Cyclone?" Peter asked wonderingly.

"A roller coaster," the sailor said. "You didn't know?"

"I wasn't looking," Peter explained.

"You're a brave one," the blonde said admiringly. "Just step into any old ride, eh?"

"It amounts to that," Peter sighed.

"Well, we're stuck with you," the sailor said. "Let's get comfortable."

They nudged into place on the crowded seat and Peter looked around. The chain of cars was climbing a very steep hill.

"A roller coaster!" he said in sudden understanding. "We're going up!"

"Yeah," whispered the blonde grasping the rail.

"Yeah," gulped the sailor, looking straight ahead. Peter followed his gaze to the summit.

"To that?" he asked unbelievably. His companions nodded woodenly.

"And then down," the blonde added.

"I'll put my arm around you," the sailor offered.

"If you don't mind you could put one around me too," Mr. Brindle suggested.

"What'll I hold on with?" the sailor asked.

Peter nodded sadly. "That's true."

"Here we go," the blonde announced. They grabbed the rail, gritted their teeth, and plunged. On the way up the next hill Peter started for

the bottom of the car. The sailor was already there.

“What are you doing down there?” Peter demanded.

“You think I’m crazy?” the sailor asked. “I was never on this thing before.”

They screamed around a turn and dropped again.

“Who is gonna put their arm around me?” the blonde squealed.

“Him,” the sailor said, pointing to Peter. Peter shut his eyes and did just that. When they finally glided down the last incline and came to a stop at the platform Peter and the sailor drew deep breaths. They helped each other out and then turned to the blonde.

“I’m going again,” she smiled.

“Alone?” Peter asked unbelievably. The blonde smiled at a passing soldier.

“I guess not,” Peter muttered. He and the sailor shook hands and walked away.

When Peter arrived home Margaret was waiting.

“Where were you?” she asked.

“Coney Island,” Peter said.

“I’m glad,” Margaret sighed. “I was afraid it would be California.”

“California?” Peter asked. “Why would —? Say, how about that yellow convertible? I just remembered now why I got mad.”

“Nothing happened,” Margaret said. “The pigeons left and she drove on. I went to the movie.”

“Oh? How was it?”

“Silly,” Margaret said. “One of those improbable plots. It started out —”

“Mother has explained it to you, Dorothy?”

“Yes, father. She told me all about it.”

Peter patted his daughter’s head approvingly.

“It is unusual but we have to live with it,” he said. “The last few weeks have gone very smoothly. I’m sorry you and Mother wanted to go to the beach but I just need the mountains. Hunting, you know.”

“Yes, father.”

The taxi driver leaned out the door.

“If you expect to catch the 10:12 we better get moving,” he said.

“Margaret,” Peter called impatiently. He turned to Dorothy. “What can she be doing? There’s hardly any luggage. She sent everything ahead except these two small bags. Didn’t she?”

“Yes, daddy. We sent them Tuesday.”

“Here I am,” Margaret called, closing the front door behind her. “Is the oil burner —”

"Off," Peter called. "Hurry up."

They arrived at the station in record time and Peter rushed them in, glancing at his watch.

"We'll make it," he said. Dorothy stopped.

"There's gum on my shoe," she stated.

"I'll get it off on the train," Peter said.

"Let me see," Margaret said, setting down one bag. She bent over her daughter's shoe. Peter tapped his foot.

"That reminds me, Pete. I don't have gum. I'll get sick on the train without gum," Margaret said apologetically.

"Margaret!" Peter moaned. "The train!"

"Oh, we'll make it. Run and get the gum."

Peter dashed away toward the candy stand. Margaret bent down and conferred with Dorothy.

"Now remember. Hang on tight."

Dorothy nodded emphatically as Peter ran back to them.

"Let's go," he said breathlessly. "Track seven."

"Oh no," Margaret said. "Track eleven."

Peter smote his forehead. "Seven," he cried. "I'm sure it's seven."

Margaret eased close to him on one side and took his arm as Dorothy grabbed his other hand.

"I think I forgot my doll," Dorothy said.

Peter turned white. He looked around wildly and spotted a station attendant.

"The Mountain King?" he called.

"Just left on track seven," the man answered.

"Hang on," Margaret whispered hoarsely to her daughter as Peter's neck grew redder.

"On track seven!" he shouted.

"Lavallette!" Margaret yelled. People in the station looked around quickly but there was nothing to see.

Margaret breathed the salt air deeply as Dorothy studied the stores along the street.

"Look, mom! There's the grocery. It worked."

"Where are we?" Peter asked haltingly.

"Lavallette," she smiled. "Can you imagine that?"

"But I wanted to go to the mountains," Peter explained mildly.

"You'll love the swimming, Pete. C'mon. There's a little place for rent on the next block."

Margaret and Dorothy led Peter Brindle along the main street of Lavallette on the Jersey Highlands.

“What if Daddy gets angry again?” the girl asked softly. Margaret shrugged.

“Maybe we’ll visit the mountains, too.”

She glanced at her dazed husband.

“But I think we have a few days here,” she said. “Daddy needs help to get real angry. You and I just won’t give him any.”

“Mother,” Dorothy mused. “Why does this happen to Daddy?”

“Your father always wanted to travel,” Margaret explained.

It was a lovely morning in Lavallette. Peter Brindle shook his head, shrugged, and walked on.

