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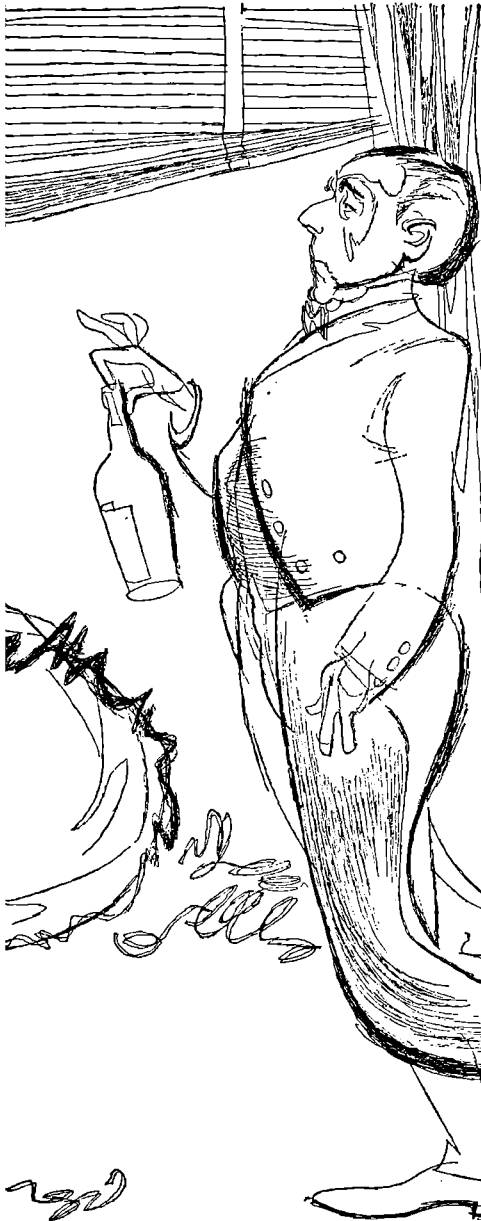
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The DISENCHANTED

BY WALLACE WEST
AND JOHN HILLYARD

We are told that during the reign of Louis, in France — and there were several different Louis — more went on there than the historians could write about because the historians had to keep the copy fairly clean. The writing team who turned out this yarn wondered what would happen if a gal from Louis' time came to New York to see if she'd missed anything by leaving the party too soon — a couple of hundred years too soon. We think they wrote as sharp a tale as you'll find anywhere.





JACKSON admired the set of his white jacket in the hall mirror. He noted, with mixed approval and regret, that the sprinkling of white in his sideburns was increasing. Working for a mad publisher had drawbacks as well as compensation.

He reached for the handle of the study door but drew back with a twinge. Come, Jackson! Qualms would never do. Settling his pointed chin between the wings of his collar, the butler advanced in good and faintly disapproving order.

He surveyed the study in romantic dimness. The lights of upper Broadway twinkled through its vast picture window. A lone fixture above the fireplace softly illuminated a Boucher portrait of Madame Pompadour. Chauncey de Witt had taste, Jackson thought — excellent taste — for a New Yorker.

He switched on the overhead lights and shuddered. The study

was, of course, a shambles. He turned instinctively toward the Chickering. On its shining top reposed the inevitable Martini glass.

He wiped away the ring and pivoted in search of smouldering cigarette butts. The other pieces of furniture seemed undamaged. The overstuffed chairs had been dragged across the floor he had so carefully polished. They were lined up, two by two, facing the window like animals ready to enter the Ark. He would rearrange them presently. But first . . . He stepped about primly, collecting half-empty glasses and other party debris. Once he found a full glass and salvaged its contents. After that he hummed appropriate snatches from "Buttons and Bows."

"What time is it, Jackson?" Disturbed by the glaring lights, an apparition had risen from one of the high-backed chairs facing the picture window. It yawned, stretched, burped and touched its head gingerly.

"Ten-twenty, Mr. De Witt." The butler carried on with increased briskness.

"Only ten-twenty? Did the liquor run out?"

"Oh no, sir." Jackson righted a toppled magazine rack. "But Miss Farrington did, sir. Out like a light."

"That's no disgrace. So did I. Oh — where is Miss Farrington now?" Chauncey navigated him-

self around the chair and stood blinking. A pity, thought the butler. Seen at his best, the publisher was truly distinguished . . . prematurely white hair, a smile that made authors want to roll on the floor, just the slightest touch of business man's paunch. Forty-five-ish. But now! Tut! No disloyalty, he told himself. Aloud he said:

"She's in the bathroom, I believe, sir. At least I've been hearing . . ."

"That will do, Jackson!"

"Yes sir." The butler departed hastily with a tray full of glasses. Chauncey collapsed on the divan and tested his knee reflexes until the factotum returned.

"Where's Williams," he asked then.

"He'll be back soon. He had to take Mrs. Morris home. She was quite — ah, unsober, sir. Insisted that your publicity director was the only person at the party who could keep her from getting publicity, in that condition. Made quite a scene about it."

"The old witch! Taxi-riding with Williams again. That must be where she gets her teen-age love backgrounds. But she sells, damn it. She sells!" He studied the slight tremor in his cigarette-stained fingers for a moment. "Jackson —?"

"Yes, Mr. De Witt?" The butler stopped enroute to straighten

out those suggestive chairs.

"Do you honestly think these things pay off?"

"Things, sir?"

"Oh come off it. You've seen at least 20 author-meets-the-critics bats up here. Are they worth the wear and tear?"

"I should think so, sir . . . if only because they, ah, feed the egos of all concerned."

"Um. And if you were one of the critics invited, you'd dash right out and write a rave notice afterward?"

"That, sir, would depend on when I dashed, I'm afraid."

"Meaning?"

"Well, take tonight. Miss Farrington was superb in that topless evening gown with the sequins. Her accent worked like butter . . ."

"Ah! You fell, too!" Chauncey expanded.

"I was going on to say, sir," the butler mopped at the sticky top of a side table, "that Miss Farrington was superb — up to her fifth cocktail. That's when Sterling North left. I'd say the Tely will be all right tomorrow. The trouble is that most of the critics stayed longer."

"What happened? I got a bit hazy around then."

"I hate to cast aspersions, sir, particularly when you are so fond of Miss Farrington. But five is the lady's limit. It would seem she has had little experience in, shall we say, the fleshpots."

"She actually hasn't, you know." Chauncey managed to fish out a cigarette which Jackson saved him the embarrassment of trying to light.

"That's what I gathered, sir. Nevertheless, having read the lady's book, one would think —"

"Fiction, my dear Jackson, pure fiction! But built on a solid foundation of historical fact, you understand."

"Of course. Yet the episodes of her book seem so vivid. As if they had been lived. That scene with the Duke de Choiseul in the boudoir of Madame de Pompadour . . ."

"That is a stopper, isn't it?" Chauncey was beginning to return to life.

"Oh yes sir. That scene! The suspense. The excitement. You could feel it in your, ah, bones. Lust, sir!"

"Jackson!" Chauncey threw up both hands in mock horror.

"Sorry, sir. It was there! In such glowing detail that . . . Tell me, Mr. De Witt. Can Frenchmen actually do things that way? I would be inclined to think that . . ."

"Remember your position, Jackson!"

"Oh, I never forget *that*, sir." He started cleaning the ashtrays. "And that scene in the forest, after the hunt, when Pompy first meets the king. You remember: Their carriages lock wheels and

are overturned. And then . . . Oh, sir, Louis must have been quite a king!"

"Well, for my money," Chauncey was up now and pacing the cluttered room, "the best chapter is the one in which Pompy comes to the palace for the first time and challenges Louis' mistress to prove which of them is the, shall we say, better woman."

"Quite right, sir. I couldn't get to sleep the night after I read that. And the magnums of champagne those three drank out of slippers." The butler sighed and his narrow shoulders slumped. "And then to see Miss Farrington after her sixth. It was a shock, sir, I can assure you."

"Disillusion is always a shock, Jackson. You'll get over it. Meanwhile, bring me a drink. This quiet is ruining my nerves. And leave the door open. Some dame must have been using musk. I abominate the stuff."

As the butler catfooted out, Chauncey struck a pose in front of the fireplace and stared moodily at Pompadour's portrait.

"Well, Pompy," he said, "at least you can't be disillusioned by the doings of Miss Fern Farrington, either in print or in the flesh. And *what* flesh, six cocktails notwithstanding! You'll lose no sleep, Madame, because of the filth I'm publishing about you next week. Thank the stars you're dead,

woman, and gone to play dainty shepherdesses in some heavenly theater. You're not forced to be a literary pimp in order to pay last year's income tax. Pompy, I envy you. I sincerely do. And I take this *tete-a-tete* as an occasion to apologize for the grievous wrong I am about to do your memory. We, who are about to lie, salute you." He bowed from the waist and immediately regretted the action.

"Those sentiments, Monsieur De Witt," said a soft contralto voice, "are the first decent ones I ever heard you express."

Chauncey spun around tipsily and gulped. A woman had risen from one of the chairs before the window where she had been concealed. She was approaching him slowly behind a solid barrier of that musky perfume.

The publisher shook his head savagely, closed his eyes, opened them and squinted to get in focus. The belated guest; she must be a holdover from the party, he told himself, although he could not remember having met her. She was wearing a heavy brocade crinoline in a raw electric blue that clashed with the room's warm pastel shades. Her pale eyes had crow's feet at their corners. Her face was made up crudely; dead white with blue-red circles on the cheekbones and no lipstick. Her head looked tiny as a doll's under a high, powdered wig bedecked

with ruffled silk ribbons.

"My God, who are you?" he demanded.

"You don't recognize me?" asked that haunting voice.

"Can't say I do." He fished out a cigarette and had trouble with his lighter again. "Sorry. Perhaps if you'd refresh my memory . . . There's something familiar . . . But no." He shook his head, gently this time. "I'm afraid . . ."

"Monsieur, you have the honor to address Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson le Normant D'Etioles, la Marquise de Pompadour."

"Pleased to meet you." He did a slow take. "La Marquise de . . ." Suddenly he was yelling: "Jackson. Jackson. Quick!"

"Monsieur seems *étonnée*," she smiled coldly.

"Yes. It's the pink elephant effect. I never seem to get used to it. Jackson! *A moi!*"

"Here you are sir." The butler returned, bearing two highballs. "And Madame!" He presented the tray with a low bow.

"Did you know she was here?"

"Not exactly, sir. But in this apartment —"

"*A votre sale sante*," said the woman, lifting her glass.

"*Prosit*." Chauncey was fighting to regain his poise. "And I remember enough French to know that was a dirty crack." He drank. "Ah. That's better. Now let's start all over again. I'm afraid

I didn't catch the name."

"The name is Pompadour," she snapped. "You may kiss my hand."

Just drunk enough to fall into the spirit of the thing, Chauncey knelt to kiss her long, cool fingers. "Charmed, I'm sure," he said, rising and taking another long drink. "And what brings you out of — er, retirement, Madame?"

"Defamations," she answered grimly. "Lies. Sly insinuations. Your Miss Farrington has *calomnie* the character of the First Lady of France!"

"Miss Farrington? Now who's defaming? Jackson, do you hear what I hear?"

"Am I supposed to, sir?"

"You certainly are. Now look here, Madame Whoever-You-Are," Chauncey glared down at his unwelcome guest, "I've had a hard day. I've been acting De Witt before a pack of literary wolves, as well as playing papa to a budding authoress. I'm in no mood for games. I've — in short, may I call you a taxi?"

"I have my own means of transportation, thank you." Was that a ghost of a smile on her pale but beautifully formed lips? "In the meantime, let us discuss the business, as you colonists so quaintly put it."

"Business? Then we need another drink. Jackson!"

"Certainly sir. A sulphur cock-tail, sir?" He faded out of the door.

"You were saying, Miss—?" the publisher began.

"Not Miss! Madame Pompadour, *maîtresse déclarée* to His Glorious Majesty, King Louis Quinze of France and —"

"Look here!" Chauncey was losing patience. "I don't know whether you're an escapee from the loony bin or whether this is a gag cooked up by Simon and Schuster. But go away now. I'm not laughing!"

"I am not here to make you laugh, Monsieur de Witt, but to demand my rights as a woman."

"Go talk to Dr. Kinsey, then.

I have my hands full with Miss Farrington."

"That wench! She should be in the Bastille instead of in your bathroom."

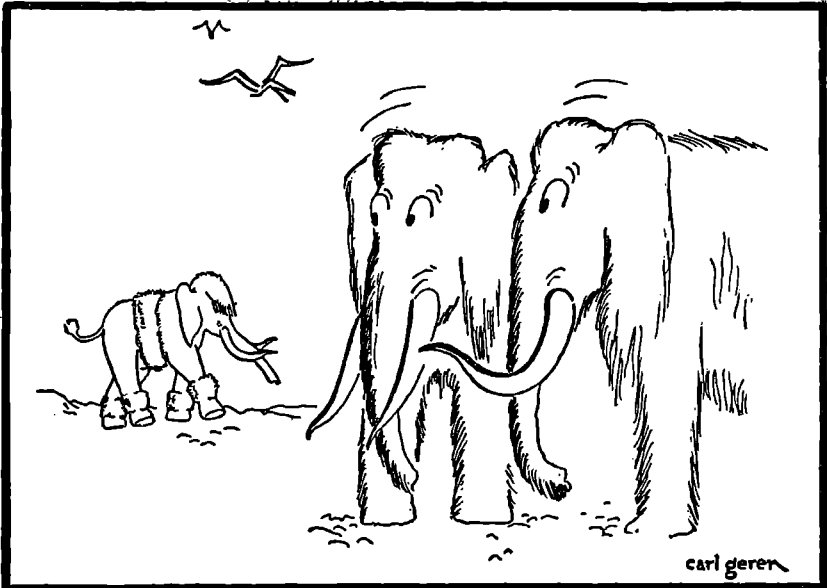
"Indeed!" He found himself shouting. "This begins to sound like a shakedown. Just what is your little game, Madame? What's the racket?"

"Game? Racket?" She lifted eyebrows.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

"Justice, you insufferable *chou!*" she snarled right back.

"By God, that's an idea! Jackson!" As that long-suffering individual scampered in with drinks he commanded, "Please get



"A trifle daring, don't you think?"

me the Department of Justice."

"The Department of —?" The butler's literal mind struggled with this concept as he headed for the telephone. "Justice. Very well, sir."

"You needn't bother, *garçon*," said the self-professed Pompadour. "It won't work."

"What won't work?" Chauncey goggled at her.

"That abomination called the telephone."

"Now, Madame," he soothed, "won't you sit down in this comfortable chair," he pushed one forward, "while we talk this matter over like old friends. I am sure there has been a misunderstanding, but in the meantime . . ."

"The lady is right," said Jackson, jiggling the hook. "It won't work, sir. The phone is dead."

"Now will you believe, Mr. De Witt?" She smiled quizzically.

"Because you cut my phone cord?" he began. Then his voice dripped honey. "Why certainly I believe . . . Jackson, use the phone in the lobby."

"That won't work, either," she murmured. "No telephone will work. My good friend, Alec Bell, has just uninvented the telephone."

"Alec Bell?" wailed Chauncey. "Great grief, I've had enough of this blither. Jackson, go down and get the cop on the corner."

"A policeman, sir? But . . ."

"You heard me. Tell him I want this dame thrown out."

"Yes sir." The butler slid out of the room, thoroughly disturbed.

"I knew, of course, that you were an unprincipled liar, *Monsieur*," said the visitor, finally seating herself, "but I had not expected you to prove yourself a stupid ass as well. Now, shall we get down to the business?"

"Too much business already. Funny business," moaned Chauncey, sitting down too and holding his head. "It *must* be Simon and Schuster."

"Your wit is so acute. So like dear Voltaire's."

"If you'd stop those historical allusions maybe you could get around to telling me why you really came here and what the hell you want."

"Historical delusions brought me here." She sipped the highball and swung a slim foot. "When you stop yelling I shall tell you what I want."

"All right, lady." He did his best to relax. "I submit."

"Naturally." She adjusted that outrageous wig before she continued: "*Bien, Monsieur*. I, la Marquise de Pompadour, have materialized to stop a present injustice and abominations to come. I speak in my own behalf and in that of a great number of illustrious people whom I have the honor to represent."

"You talk like an agent . . .
But why come to me?"

"Because of Miss Farrington's novel." Her eyes became glittering slits. "It is our wish that you stop publication."

"Fat chance," Chauncey mocked her. "It isn't every day that I have a best seller on my hands. *Pompy for Short* will out-sell *Amber*, *Anthony Adverse* and *Gone with the Wind* put together."

"*Pompy for Short*" she spat. "Even when Louis was in his cups he daren't have called me by such a ridiculous name. Print that title and you'll curse the day you ever laid eyes on Fern Farrington and her, shall we say, mistresspiece?"

"Who's talkin' about po' li'l me?" quavered a plaintive voice behind them. "Did somebody remember po' li'l Fern?"

Chauncey twisted around in his chair, then clapped his hand to his forehead like the hero of one of the De Witt line of romantic novels. The girl who stood behind them was dressed in a pair of men's awning-striped pajamas which showed each of her blond curves to lavish advantage.

"For God's sake, Fern," he choked. "Where did you find that rig?"

"In youall's dressuh drawuh." She fluffed her short curls. "Spoiled mah dress. Too damn much vermouth in th' Manhattans." She sensed his disapproval.

"Have to weah somethin', doan' I? It's cold up heah in th' No'th."

"Shameless hussy," the other woman sniffed. "To forget your hoops!"

"Haven't forgotten 'em." Fern hiccoughed shamelessly. "Who're youall?"

The intruder rose with regal grace.

"You recognize me now, n'est-ce pas?"

"If I were drunk," Fern answered judiciously, "I'd say youall were a moth-eaten copy of Madame Pompadour. Bein' cold sober, I don't know youall from a madam!"

"Pull yourself together, Fern. This lady says she *is* Pompadour and that you have traduced her." Chauncey was beginning to enjoy himself.

"Tsk!" The girl opened her blue eyes to their roundest. "I'd have thought that was more in *yoah* line." Those eyes filled with tears. "Or are youall makin' fun of po' li'l me?"

"I am la Pompadour." The other woman sat down after much adjusting of hoops. "Your maliciously slanderous book will remain unpublished."

"But it ain't malislanderous." Sniffle. "'Snothin' but the truth. 'S historical. Like Stonewall Jackson." Suddenly Fern fired up. "Too damn disgustin' historical. An' where th' hell youall get that Pompadour stuff? Pompy died

in, let's see, seventeen-six-hic-ty-four, 'cordin' to John the Walden."

"Every school child knows that!"

"Tha's where youall are wrong. Nobody knows it . . . 'till they read my book. Walden had to dig up th' dates in an ol' library."

"Who is this Walden?"

"He's Fern's researcher," Chauncey cut in.

"Nice ol' John," cooed the well-budded authoress. "Knows everythin' 'bout ol' Pompy. Gave po' li'l me th' stinkin' facts an' I made 'em sing . . . Chauncey, honey, how's about a drink fo' po' li'l . . ."

"Cocotte! You beslimed the facts for your own petty gains!"

"What youall mean, *petty*? With a first edition of half a million."

"Impudent wench!"

"Lissen to whoall's talkin' . . . A dressed-up wreck callin' herself Pompadour. Look at that face. Look at that wig . . . Look at that dress. Just *smell* her. Pfui!" Even as she raged Fern began to crumple. "Aw, get th' hell out!" she wailed. "I'm sick o' listenin' to your nonsense. Sick! My God, *how* I'm sick!" She threw herself on the sofa, weeping hysterically.

"Stop it," Chauncey commanded, bending over her. "Stop it, I say. You're tired. You're upset. It's been a tough day. I'll take care of this impostor.

Go in and lie down and rest."

"An' leave youall alone with Pompy's ghost?" Fern gripped the upholstery. "After all, they did call her 'un morceau de roi'. John tol' me that meant 'a piece fit for a king.' Lemme be or I'll . . ."

A crisis was averted when the hall door burst open and a chunky little man in a loud vest charged into the study. He stopped dead as he took in the tableau and rolled the dead stump of a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"More woman trouble, Chaunce?" he inquired politely.

"'Bout time you got here to help me out of this mess, Bob." The publisher stopped trying to sooth Fern by patting prominent parts of her anatomy. "*Live* women are bad enough."

"Got stuck with that Morris dame," explained his publicity man. "Is *she* a lush. Tried to reach you from I don't know how many phones. They either were out of order or the booth was full of some guy jiggling the hook."

"Out of order?" The publisher's eyes were wild.

"Yeah . . . What's the matter, boss? Did I say something I shouldn't?"

"Haven't you heard? Alexander Graham Bell uninvented the telephone."

"Huh?" Bob's thick eyebrows

went up. "A gag? I don't get it."

"That's what the woman said." Chauncey pointed. "She said: 'It won't work. Alec Bell just uninvented the telephone.'"

"Looney, huh?" His employee appraised the woman in crinoline who sat smiling secretly, little foot swinging. "Who is she?"

"Says she's Madame Pompadour."

"And I suppose you want me to take *her* home," Bob groaned just as the door opened again to admit a dejected Jackson.

"Well?" Chauncey yelled at him. "Where's that cop?"

"I had not even a modicum of success, sir." The butler bowed his head.

"And why not? Didn't you tell him what was going on?"

"That was just the trouble, sir. I did tell him."

"Then what?"

"When I explained that my master wanted him to evict Madame Pompadour he just grunted. Most embarrassing, sir! When I persisted, he threatened to take me to what he called the hoosegow. It seemed he had read about Pompy in the eighth grade." With skill born of long experience Jackson ducked through the door in time to avoid the highball glass that Chauncey hurled at his greying head.

"I told you that every school-boy knows about me," said the

cause of all this turmoil. "You are mad to publish that book. It will be to laugh."

"You're Pompy?" Bob studied her, rolling his head and his cigar from side to side in unison. "And you don't want Fern's book published? Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, what a publicity stunt. We'll even get the jump on the Legion of Decency." His heavy face fell. "But we can't use it. It's necrophilism. The women's clubs would crack down on us."

"I'm sleepy, Bob," the publisher yawned. "And Fern has a crying jag on. Won't you get rid of *her*?"

"Come, ma'am," said the publicity man. "I'll run you home."

"It would serve you right if I allowed you to, Monsieur Bob. But I stay here. You conniving robbers must change the title of your book. You must re-write it. And you must make the Publishers' Association swear that, a la *avenir*, historical characters will be treated with *honneur* in books, plays, motion pictures, radio and the TV."

"Go on. Go on." Bob cried, dragging pencil and paper out of a breast pocket. "This is rich."

"Making me a strumpet," she stormed, "who hops from bed to bed like a cricket! I *never* had the enjoyment in bed. It was a chore. Louis called me his little sea gull."

"Why, that's just what John

Walden said," Fern murmured. "But of course I couldn't use it. Imagine, Chauncey! Not having fun in bed. After all, though, Pompey's real name was Poisson. That means fish in French."

"Have you no shame, Fern?" sighed Chauncey.

"Not when I'm in New York, honey." She eased her lissome body into a more seductive position and nestled her bright head among the cushions.

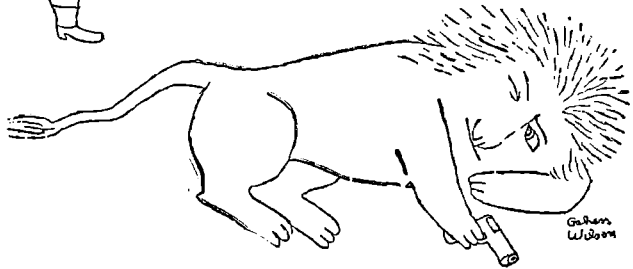
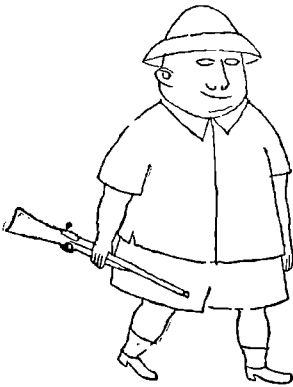
"And is there a word about my statesmanship in your pornographic portrayal?" the alleged Pompadour continued her harangue. "No! Not one! Was it pointed out that, if my plans to unite Austria and France

against Frederick the Great had succeeded, Germany would have been crushed forever and Hitler never would have emerged to bedevil you moderns? No! Instead, she has me doing a strip, what you call it, tease, in my so lovely theater. Me, la Pompadour, who played demure shepherdesses but always. Bah!"

"Baaaah!" echoed Fern.

"You throw a good line, Madame." Chauncey was at the end of his patience. "But I stand to make a pile of dough on 'Pompey'. Even if you *were* she, I wouldn't change a word in the book. Now what are you going to do? Sue me?"

"More than that," she answered



imperturbably. "I shall haunt you."

"There's an angle we *can* use," Bob yelled as he shredded the last of his cigar. "Quote: Prominent Publisher Haunted by Ghost of Pompadour. Unquote. With pix! But we'll have to get some decent clothes on you, old girl. Those rags must hail from Cain's theatrical warehouse. And how about a short course at the Du Barry Success School?"

"Du Barry! That creature!" He flinched at the words as though she had raked his face with her fingernails.

"Tout le monde who have been lied about by literary ghouls shall haunt you," she raved on. "Poor little Lucrezia Borgia, who never poisoned even a mouse; who asked only that her lovely hair be shampooed once a week. Nell Gwynn — Cleopatra — Napoleon. All are up in arms. This folie must end. History, it is becoming a sideshow for freaks."

"For God's sake get this mad-woman out of here," Chauncey pleaded.

"Gee, boss, she's going good." Bob saw despair in the publisher's eyes and relented. "All right." He gripped her arm. "Come along, my good woman. This has gone far enough."

She shook him off. Drawing herself to her full height, she stared out of the window into

far distances. A quivering metallic tone, such as heralds the supernatural on radio and TV, rose and was sustained in the room.

"What do I do now, Ben?" she cried. "They have me cornered, moi."

"A corner in spooks!" Fern marvelled from the divan.

"Quiet. Do not interrupt my friend Ben Franklin." A smile crossed that clownlike makeup. Then it became serious again. As the quivering sound died the woman turned haughtily to face her enemies. "Messieurs and, ah, mademoiselle?" she purred, "we have come to history's turning point. Henceforth truth alone shall prevail . . . in literature a moins."

"Atta baby!" Bob whispered, completely under her spell.

"'And the truth shall make you free!'" she quoted.

"John, VIII, 32," exclaimed Bob, and received her smile like a rare gift.

"Admitting, for the sake of argument," said Chauncey, "that truth is better, as well as stranger than fiction, what can we do about it at this late date?"

"Start by withdrawing or changing that awful book."

"On the say of a loony who calls herself Madame Pompadour?"

"But I *am!*"

"Prove it," he challenged.

"I can tell you plenty of in-

timate gossip about Versailles —”

“I made up a lot of that hooey, too,” Fern sneered.

“I can show you my likeness in the paintings of Boucher.”

“You sure don’t look like *that* Boucher.” Bob pointed toward the fireplace.

“I can bring to my aid other great ones whom the likes of you have maligned.”

“Swell.” Fern stretched lazily, showing a stretch of creamy midriff. “Bring on your mildewed boy friends.”

“Very well, if you insist.” Their nemesis hesitated for the first time. “Let us start with . . . with that great American, Thomas Edison —”

“What’s *he* bellyaching about?” grumbled Chauncey.

“About those movies, with their sentimentalism . . . those biographies, with their commercialism. Tom has suffered much. Now he will prove that I speak truth by un inventing the incandescent lamp!”

At her last word the study lights went out without even a preliminary flicker. For a moment longer those of Broadway shimmered up through the window. Then they faded, too.

“Jackson!” shouted the publisher. “Light some candles!”

They sat, then, in stunned silence, until the hall door opened with a crash. “Who’s that?”

Chauncey’s voice shook. “Jackson or King Louis?”

“It’s Walden,” a voice replied. “And did I do plenty of research locating your apartment in this blackout. What’s up?”

“Plenty!” Bob lit a cigar and puffed it until it illuminated his scared, pudgy face. “Madame Pompadour is up and haunting us for libel.”

“Can’t say I blame her after what Fern did with the facts I gave her.”

“We’re not kidding, John,” Chauncey said as Jackson entered with a tray of candles. “We have a loose screw in our midst. She — there she is by the window — she insists she’s Pompadour. Wants us to stop publication. Maybe you can make her understand that *you’re* Pompadour.”

The candles were distributed now, two on the piano and two on the mantel. They revealed the intruder standing serenely beneath the Boucher. Their soft light was just made for the garishness of her makeup. Instead of an ageing, rumped masquerader, she had taken on the look of youth and cool authority. Fern buried her head in the cushions and howled in helpless fury.

“Well, Monsieur Walden?” The creature looked serenely at the pale, stooped young man who had just entered.

He paced slowly forward, as though bewitched.

"That dimple," he husked. "The poise of her head. Those hands. That mocking smile — Of course I've gone crazy — but —" He dropped to one knee and kissed her hand reverently. "Madame, your humble servant!"

"My God," Chauncey breathed. "She's beautiful in this light!"

"Beautiful!" Fern bounced off the couch. "Beautiful? That animated bag of graveyard bones? That — that muskox? You dopes can stand around with your jaws hanging down but I won't let her get away with that tripe." Fighting drunk, she crept toward the other woman. "Get out of here this instant, you bitch, before I scratch your bleary eyes out. These men are mine!"

"Oh la, la." Pompadour stood her ground. "Polyandrous, too, Mme. Farrington? And you have perdu your southern accent somewhere."

"Why you — you —"

"Oui. Moi! When I to Versailles came, numerous felines prowled the palace. They did not stay."

"Doan' youall go insultin' po' li'l me. Th' Farringtons o' Virginia —"

"Relax, Fern," John cut her off. "Can't you understand —"

"I can understand there's mayhem to be done. One side!" Fern sprang, long fingernails clawed.

Two steps and she struck a wall. Straining forward from lithe hips, she scabbled at invisibility.

"Dévil!" The fight drained out of her. "Hex!" She dashed for the bedroom in a storm of hysterics.

"What did you do to her?" Chauncey was intrigued. "I'd like to learn that trick."

"*Nous avons de*, what you call, resources." Pompy arranged her hoops and sat down. "Another drink *s'il vous plait*. Je suis un . . . I am a bit *fatigué*."

"Allow me to bring it, Madame." Gallant John followed Jackson from the room.

"You spoke of resources, ma'am," Bob eased forward in a cloud of smoke. "That's what bothers me. You've got too many of them for an authentic eighteenth century spook. You're a time traveller, past tense, aren't you?"

"I don't believe I understand!" Those long hands flew to her throat.

"Oh yes you do," he persisted. "You arrive at the psychological moment, when we're all a bit off-center. You spot Fern's phony accent after we had sweated blood for six months to make it sound right and had fooled every critic in town. You understand telephones and electric lights. Even I know that Pompadour died hundreds of years ago."

"Hundred and ninety, come next April," John amended as he returned with drinks.

"All right. All right. What

I'm driving at is that Franklin was 'way ahead of his time. He *could* have invented a time machine, I'll bet. Besides, folks don't crawl out of graves."

"Who said anything about graves?" Pompey's laughter tinkled like brook water. "Of course small souls do die and that's an end of them. In fact, many people die years and years before they are buried. You, Monsieur Bob, stand in grave danger of that if you remain a press agent, despite your refreshing knowledge of the Scriptures. But great souls never die."

"You do fancy yourself, don't you?" Chauncey managed a grin.

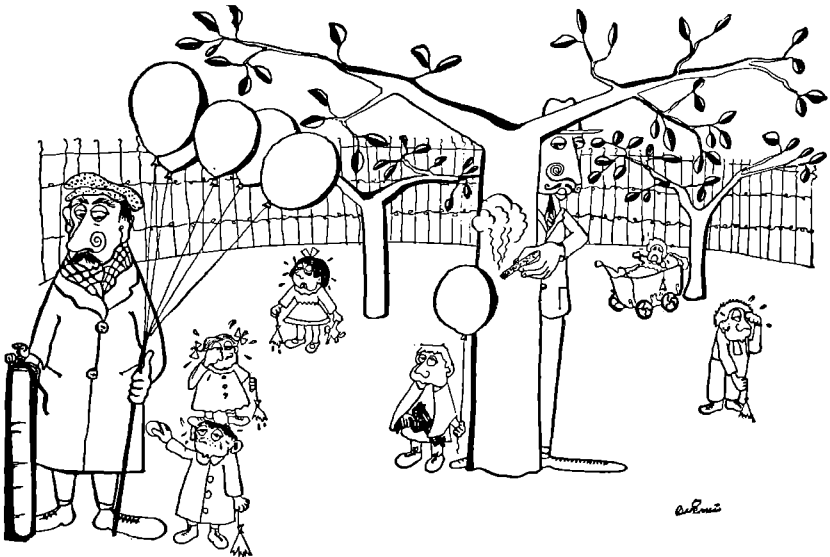
"What does death mean to souls like mine, and Franklin's

and Shakespeare's? Poof! Nothing! We go on. We learn. If we have been wicked we suffer. My friend Kit summed it all up by having Mephisto say: 'Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it' when he visited the earth."

"And do *you* suffer, Madame?" John asked.

"*Mon Dieu, non!* Whatever made you think . . . ? Oh, because I was *maitresse* to a king? But I made him happy, poor thing." She stared at the candle flame for long moments, lost in thought, before adding softly: "I've always wondered whatever became of poor, sad, floundering Louis."

"You stinker, Walden!" Chauncey exploded. "She's talk-



ing your brand of theosophical mumbo-jumbo. You put her up to this!"

"I wish I had, old fellow," answered the researcher, "but she thought it up all by herself. I did three years of research on Pompadour, so I should know her when I see her."

"*Merci, mon ami.*" Pompy curtsied to him. "One person here has the soul. And now . . ." She sat again and folded her hands primly, ". . . about the book . . ."

"No!" Chauncey pleaded. "This has been fun, in a back-handed way, but I refuse to be coerced, even if you are a genuine, eighteen-karat ghost. The show must go on. Our clamoring public must be fed with dreams, even though the heavens fall."

"I'm not much good at making heavens fall," she said brightly, "but, if you insist . . ."

"Nuts," said Chauncey.

"She did jinx the phones, boss," warned Bob.

"And don't forget the lights." This from John.

"Crazy coincidences. They'll go on any minute now." As Pompy chuckled he added fiercely. "What the hell are you snickering about?"

"Monsier is upset?" She winked at him over her glass. "Un peu . . . ? Non?"

"Of course I'm upset. I have a splitting headache . . ."

"And a split personality, n'est-ce pas?"

"But your shenanigans have nothing to do with it. If you'll all clear out of here and let me have some peace, then maybe . . . Tomorrow . . ."

"This is the time for decision!" Her voice tolled like a bell.

"You are crazy. You are hopped up. If you don't beat it right now, I'll have you arrested." He was on the verge of following Fern into hysteria.

"Hold on, boss." Bob grabbed the publisher's arm. "What if there is something to it? If the phones and lights conked out . . ."

"And you a press agent!" fumed the other. "Can't you see how phony the whole thing is? Let's say those old snorts did want to suppress 'Pompy for Short'. Why, then, get Bell and Edison to uninvent things? Why don't they go to the person most directly involved? Why don't they get old man Gutenberg to uninvent printing?"

"We thought of that," said Pompy.

"You what?"

"Ben had the same idea."

"That makes *me* a great soul, too, I suppose. Well . . . ?"

"Gutenberg . . ." She shook her wig sadly, ". . . wouldn't hear of it."

"Naturally," John chimed in. "If you knew Gutenberg . . ."

"A very religious soul," she agreed. "If he uninvented printing, there wouldn't be any Bibles."

He refused to upset the world's belief."

"Nice of the old boy," Chauncey sniffed.

"Very. As Samuel Pepys says . . ."

"'And so to bed'", the publisher exploded. "That's your exit line, Madame. Scram!" He jumped to his feet, held out his hands.

"Un moment, *s'il vous plait!*" She bent her ungainly wig. A rapt look came over her face and then a smile as the quivering tone rose and fell.

"It's long distance." Bob tossed off his drink.

"*Oui?*" said Pompy to someone unseen. "You are? He has? . . . He will? . . . Magnifique! . . . Adieu."

"That was quick," grinned the press agent. "Rates must be high. What'd he say?"

"*Voici* my ultimatum." She rose, every inch a king's mistress. "Withdraw or rewrite that book. Refuse and I play another card . . . one that will trump all of your aces."

"They play bridge!" Bob sounded awed for the first time.

"Mr. Mergenthaler has just agreed to uninvent his linotype." She paused for effect.

"Is *that* all?" Chauncey roared with nervous laughter.

"Holy cats, boss! Don't you get it?" Bob whooped. "If the linotypes go out there won't be

a line in the papers tomorrow about Fern's party."

"There won't be any papers," John added in a low, shocked whisper.

"Do proceed." Their torturer was in her element.

"There won't be any 'Pompy'", Bob raved. "The De Witt Press will be stuck with half a million bound volumes full of blank pages. My hat! There won't be any books at all if the thing is retro-active."

"I withdraw my remarks about the magnitude of your soul, Monsciur Bob." Pompy rose and set her wig at a roughish angle. "You are of the intelligence. But your boss, he is hopeless. And so, bonsoir, messieurs. After us, the deluge."

She tripped to the door, half opened it, and smiled back at them over her slim shoulder as the butler tumbled into the study, ear foremost.

"Stop her, Jackson," cried Chauncey, at last realizing the enormity of his predicament.

"Sorry, sir." Jackson swept the door wide and bowed deeply. "I also am a great soul . . . Your servant, Madame."

The publisher fished blindly in his vest pocket. He dragged out a white handkerchief. He waved it with both hands.

"Pompy," he implored. "I surrender. Pompy, come back!"