

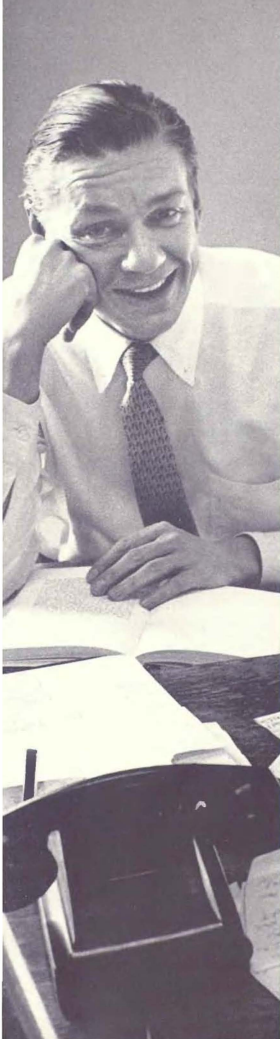
GETTING THIS MAY issue off to a flying start is an inviting *Invitation to Flying*. PLAYBOY's primer on private planes for fun and travel. From swift, sporty two-seaters on up through superbly-appointed sky yachts (including a personal jet and helicopter), these planes can whisk the urban gentleman and his party from the turmoil of the city to an idyllic weekend hideaway or a shimmering, palm-lined strand quick as you can say "Caribbean." Conveniently and comfortably, you can wing from city to city on ice, then be off for a weekend of carefree abandon, ziping through an azure sky or moonlit clouds to your choice of playgrounds—for skiing, swimming, sunning or delightfully various combinations of whatever your pick of pleasures might be.

We're pleased to be the publisher of John Crosby's first work of fiction, *A Star of the First Magnitude*, the sardonic account of a ten-pence-per-cent macabre play in the world of film-and-TV lunatics. Crosby is the *New York Herald Tribune* columnist (syndicated to ninety odd papers) who thumbed his nose at scripting TV criticism late last year, turned his candid gaze and acid pen on worthier topics. In fleeing the cathode tube, he wrote: "There are a lot of races on television—for ratings, for residuals, for gimmicks to give away money, for Westerns, for violence—but not any race to educate us. The possibilities are boundless, but the realization is infinitesimal." John is currently writing a Broadway play in addition to his daily column. Joining Crosby on the fiction scene this May are Contributing Editor Ken Purdy, Gerald Kersh, and Fredric Brown. Purdy's *Speak to Me of Immortality* is a Latin-flavored book of meticulously planned vengeance. Kersh's *The Laughingstock* is a tightly-turned character study with an O. Henryish revelation. Brown, a crack chronicler of the science-fiction and horror genres, spins a tale of a friendly neighborhood drugist—the sort you might meet in any nightmare—in *The Hobbyist*.

In the stuff-of-dreams category is our eight-page ocular delight, *The Girls of Sweden*—a pictorial tipped the hat to those sensational Swedes uncovered by our lensmen during a recent jaunt to that splendid Scandinavian land. On the trail, too, is our peripatetic Beard That Walks Like A Man—Shel Silverstein—in this mouthfully bearding the lout-ninth state with pen, ink and brandy.

More? Try *On the Right Track*, a sage selection of correct attire for a gentleman's day at the races. Or *Olds Man Out*, by T. K. Brown III, a deft debunking of those "sure fire" gambling systems that leave the gambler off richer, sadder, sometimes wiser and invariably poorer. Or *The Legend of Time Street*, by Collic Small, an appraisal of venerable Lloyd's of London. Or Thomas Mario's *Chop Talk*, a culinary invitation to sample the kindest cuts of all.

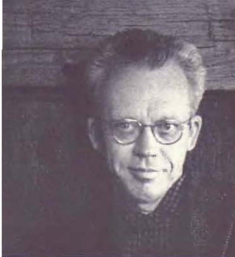
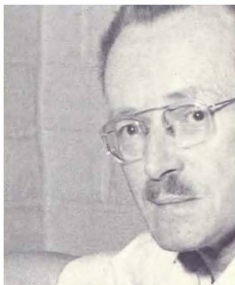
"Let all thy joys be as the mouth of May," wrote Seventeenth Century poet Francis Quarles, and we quarrel not with Francis. Proceed further into the issue at hand, and discover all the joys that await you.



CROSBY

PLAYBILL

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Immortality P. 42



Swedish Girls P. 84



Private Planes P. 48



Silverstein P. 74

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*"please help spread the word,"
said
the
friendly
druggist*

fiction By FREDRIC BROWN

THE HOBBYIST



"I HEARD A RUMOR," Sangstrom said, "to the effect that you —" He turned his head and looked about him to make absolutely sure that he and the druggist were alone in the tiny prescription pharmacy. The druggist was a gnome-like gnarled little man who could have been any age from fifty to a hundred. They were alone, but Sangstrom dropped his voice just the same. — to the effect that you have a completely undetectable poison."

The druggist nodded. He came around the counter and locked the front door of the shop, then walked toward a doorway behind the counter. "I was about to take a coffee break," he said. "Come with me and have a cup."

Sangstrom followed him around the counter and through the doorway to a back room ringed by shelves of bottles from floor to ceiling. The druggist plugged in an electric percolator, found two cups and put them on a table that had a chair on either side of it. He motioned Sangstrom to one of the chairs and took the other himself. "Now," he said. "Tell me. Whom do you want to kill, and why?"

"Does it matter?" Sangstrom asked. "Isn't it enough that I pay for —"

The druggist interrupted him with an upraised hand. "Yes, it matters. I must be convinced that you deserve what I can

give you. Otherwise —" He shrugged.

"All right," Sangstrom said. "The whom is my wife. The why —" He started the long story. Before he had quite finished the percolator had completed its task and the druggist briefly interrupted to get the coffee for them. Sangstrom concluded his story.

The little druggist nodded. "Yes, I occasionally dispense an undetectable poison. I do so freely; I do not charge for it, if I think the case is deserving. I have helped many murderers."

"Fine," Sangstrom said. "Please give it to me, then."

The druggist smiled at him. "I already have. By the time the coffee was ready I had decided that you deserved it. It was, as I said, free. But there is a price for the antidote."

Sangstrom turned pale. But he had anticipated — not this, but the possibility of a double cross or some form of black mail. He pulled a pistol from his pocket.

The little druggist chuckled. "You daren't use that. Can you find the antidote —" he waved at the shelves — "among those thousands of bottles? Or would you find a faster, more virulent poison? Or if you think I'm bluffing, that you are not really poisoned, go ahead and shoot. You'll know the answer within three hours when the poison starts to work."

"How much for the antidote?" Sangstrom growled.

"Quite reasonable, a thousand dollars. After all, a man must live: even if his hobby is preventing murders, there's no reason why he shouldn't make money at it, is there?"

Sangstrom growled and put the pistol down, but within reach, and took out his wallet. Maybe after he had the antidote, he'd still use that pistol. He counted out a thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills and put them on the table.

The druggist made no immediate move to pick them up. He said, "And one other thing — for your wife's safety and mine. You will write a confession of your intention — your former intention, I trust — to murder your wife. Then you will wait till I go out and mail it to a friend of mine on the homicide detail. He'll keep it as evidence in case you ever do decide to kill your wife. Or me, for that matter."

"When that is in the mail it will be safe for me to return here and give you the antidote. I'll get you paper and pen. Oh, one other thing — although I do not absolutely insist on it. Please help spread the word about my undetectable poison, will you? One never knows, Mr. Sangstrom. The life you save, if you have any enemies, just might be your own."