

LITERARY PAGE

Next Time Fry the Train...

By BETTY ANN STEVENS
 LYDIA'S a darling . . . yes, an absolute darling. She has that aloof, unhurried air which lends a fascination to her blond perfection that has dazzled men and worried women ever since she wore her honey-colored mane in tight, painful pigtails. When she decided to come down to visit me last vacation, I was tickled to a palpitating pink for nothing ups my morale more than having a 14-karat nugget like Lydia on the premises. She always makes me feel that it isn't too hopeless, and that perhaps I will some day be able to stretch or shrink my chubby chassis into a svelte facsimile thereof. She even inspires me into reckless dreams of peroxide-dreached forelocks. That's the effect Lydia has on me.

Lydia arrived at our whistle-pause station. That is to say, she descended for her two-week stay in an aura of Prince Marchibelli's Potpourri, four fortnighters, three hat-boxes, flawlessly applied pancake, and skunk coat just like the one I'm going to have if Uncle Henry dies suddenly and they discover he's been running competition with the Fort Knox mint. It's very unlikely, since the only mints that Uncle Henry is acquainted with are the ones he eats after dinner when he listens to the "Tummy" program.

It was over an insipid "victory" coke in the corner hangout that I became conscious of The Perfect Man for Lydia. We were recovering from the bout with the baggage . . . I swear that our old Buick sagged a full six inches by the time we got to the last hat-box. As Bob Hope would say, "One tire said to the other tire . . ." Well, that's beside the point.

Lydia was looking like a mint julep in a pale green gabardine suit, while I was attired in a dubious white sweater that invariably came back from the cleaners giving me the appearance of either a pseudo-Lana Turner or Brenda and Cobina combination . . . large enough for both of them. I was trying to talk Lydia out of one of her moods while convincing myself that my falling bangs lent a casual, puckish air. One thing about Lydia is that she's a very sensitive, high-strung girl, conscious of many things that other people aren't. She also writes poetry sometimes. Perhaps it doesn't rhyme, but it's blank verse, and has lots beautiful-sounding adjectives.

To get back to the perfect Man for Lydia . . . He was a living example of the old adage that a uniform definitely does something . . . especially with shoulders and blond hair. Maybe a first lieutenant's uniform heightens the effect, too. Leaning up against the counter, with his good-looking nose absorbed in the ages of a magazine, he was obnoxiously oblivious to Lydia's blond charms.

Something clicked in my brain. My rapidly dawning imagination pictured them dancing together, his fanned face turned laughingly to hers . . . strolling together, the moonlight shimmering . . . dappling them with silvery magic . . . I'd even advanced to the point where Lydia, with luminous eyes and a misty expression fading into a fingertip-length veil, was advancing under crossed swords to the tune of Lohengrin and old shoes . . . pre-stamp number 17.

Something had to be done. The situation was rapidly becoming unbearable. It wasn't that we

were too desperately disturbed about the available manpower ration for this happened before girls began thinking about going to Alaska and Honolulu, and there were still a few civvies in circulation. It was just that the superior specimen had put in an appearance, and I, for Lydia's sake, was not one to ignore it, even though she was being decidedly uncooperative. At that moment she was discussing quite intellectually the pros and cons of "Then Chu" nail polish, its effect or morale, and "How Our Attitude Toward Material Things Will Prove the Downfall of Civilization As We Know It."

In what way did one subtly direct the attention of a perfect specimen to a blond lovely? I decided to try a modern version of the D.T.H. come-on. Lydia seemed just a bit annoyed at having to lend me her handkerchief.

With a careful semblance, at least, of nonchalance, I sauntered in my most careful manner to the juke box near the door, which had an electric fan setting thereupon. Bending forward, I frowned intently at an array of uninspiring song titles . . . Lydia's eyebrows were raised ever so slightly. Perhaps I had been a little rude, but after all, what I was about to attempt was for her sole benefit, not my own.

AN airy gesture was all that was necessary. The breeze from the fan caught my handkerchief, carried it up, and shot it in a haphazard fashion over the counter, where it finally came to a fluttering stop between the pages of what the perfect Specimen was reading . . . Praise the Lord that I've never liked non-glamorous kleenex. . . . The tanned nose rose abruptly, and two intense grey eyes squinted puzzledly at the intruding bit of cloth. Then they relaxed and crinkled at the corners, and a one-sided grin quirked, revealing

Literary Page Staff:
 Editor: Carol Greening
 Contributors:
 Betty Ann Stevens
 Ted Goodwin
 Marjorie Major

"I - scrub - 'em - for - the - grin - of - a - cutie" teeth.

I smiled back at him uncertainly. The magazine was laid aside, and he bared his g.-i. haircut.

"Lynn Randall is the name," he drawled, with another quirk . . . this time in the old Gable-ish
 (Please turn to page seven)

Mencken the Divine

HEATHEN DAYS, by H. L. Mencken; Knopf, 1943, \$3.00.

Probably one of the most refreshing volumes to roll from the press of 1943, (year of our Lord and the great war) is this delightfully cynical recollection whose only reference to the global war is the bald statement that Huey Long was assassinated by the Japs.

Henry Louis Mencken, writer, editor and scholar of the English tongue as practiced in these United States, spares no one in his penetration of the American scene as it came under his ob-

servation during the days of Republicanism and prohibition.

Williams Jennings Bryan, that golden tongued orator of silver and fundamentalism, comes under the same sharp analysis that recalls vividly the stable boy who hated cats and the vendor of dirty post cards in Naples.

Worldly Things

The book is not necessarily agnostic, it weryly renders unto Caesar that which is his to the exclusion of God, Allah, Maygog, or Shinto. Mencken's world during the twenties was of necessity secular. Things of the spirit were somehow repelling to a man whose zest for malt liquor was unbuffed by the devilish cunning of prohibitioners.

Recollections of his delightful excursions into choice pilsner (while thousands were "dying of thirst" outside decrepit speak-easies) would make an evangelist drool.

Al Smith he dismisses as a mediocre politician who couldn't win because the cards were stacked anyway. The Scopes trial where the magnificent Bryan declared that he believed every word of the King James version "including the typographical errors," was covered by Mencken who recalls that one of Darrow's colleagues won \$17, drawing four nines to a six. "Of course," writes Mencken, "Bryan was a fraud, but sometimes I think he actually believed that Jonah did swallow the whale."

Carthage

On visiting the runs of ancient Carthage, where Hanibal and Hamilcar fought "Japs and Nazis" more than two millenniums ago, Mencken observed that a fellow citizen of Baltimore had a baseball club practicing there. It was admirable the way Mencken resisted the temptation to tie Carthage and the see of Augustine in some way with the present battle of Tunisia, in progress as he wrote.

Occasionally he shed the bonds of restraint and described with evident glee and profound skill the orgies of living the full life, without women, no wine, and a little song. He writes with tenderness and compassion of the days when he had to walk more than a mile for a glass of beer.

On one occasion in a political battle, Mencken accused a man of having once been a Sunday school superintendent. He was safe from a libel suit because the truth came out that the man actually had been.

(Please turn to page seven)

Journey

After a while I would search about for the colorless faces
 For the white faces that are watching
 For something—

But first I would gather the blood-stained bandages in the world—
 I would melt the rapiers and shrapnel in the world
 And leave them spread on wide fields
 Like gentle moonlight—
 I would find red meat in the cities
 And say, "This is for the people, when I find them."
 I would look for an enamel butterfly
 So that when I found a child
 I could say, "This is for you to hold in your hand—"

But I would do these things futilely,
 since it is the faces, the colorless and watching faces
 Which constitute the wounds—
 Which have lost the kindly sky
 And have no more
 Kinship with gracile butterflies
 Or blurred owls in a summer night.

So I would search about for the colorless faces
 For white faces, dull and
 Uncomprehending

One day I would find them
 Sitting by a road.

And when, after I had found them,
 We should see rows of men marching
 Into somewhere—

I would gather the people
 And explain to them by the road the mystery
 Of tolerance—
 I would speak to them
 Of quiet sleep and love,
 Of warm milk for children—how flowers grow.

All night while echos plodded softly
 Into somewhere,
 I would speak of roofs glistening in the rain—
 Of chimneys blowing smoke at five o'clock—
 Of contentment—
 Of the bension of hot food and familiar silverware—

All night there by the road I would speak
 Of the burned bandages—
 Of the metal poured out harmlessly like moonlight—
 Of the red meat—
 And of the butterfly I had for some child—

And they would listen with white faces.
 Uncomprehending

—By Marjorie Major.

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