

Down with Charades



by Dick Emmons

REMEMBER the good old relaxed days when the host and hostess at a party liked nothing better than to have their guests sit around in amiable little groups talking animatedly about high taxes or small children, depending on the speakers' gender?

Dimly now I recall sweet evenings when the gang would get together at somebody's house. The men, following their natural precepts, would drift into the kitchen, lean fraternally against the various appliances (they were all white in those days!) and tell off-color jokes and sing off-key songs. The women, pretending annoyance at being left alone, would chatter away blissfully, all at the same time.

No more! Today the Organized Party stalks the land. Hostesses, who used to devote themselves merely to circulating the cheese-coated walnut halves, now prod their guests into parlor games.

Take the night we were at the Clendons recently. As soon as I had doffed my coat and hat, Irene Clendon handed me a piece of folded paper and barked, "Follow these directions!"

Bewildered, I opened the note and read: "Look on page 239 of the fourth book from the left on the third shelf in the den."

I wove off toward the den in a fog, found the book, and was immediately instructed by my next note: "Go to fruit cellar in basement. Search under raspberry-currant jelly jars."

It was in the fruit cellar that I bumped into Pete Forsythe. He was working on pear halves, shelf four, back row.

We exchanged greetings warmly. "You're the first human I've seen since I got here!" I cried.

"I saw Barry Jennings at the linen closet a half-hour or so ago," Pete said. "He had a tough assignment under the pillowcases. Said if I saw anyone he knew to say hello."

I nodded. "Well, see you downtown sometime, Pete. I've got to go find the vestibule clothes closet." Pete waved forlornly as I moved off, and I promised to send down some sandwiches if he didn't get back upstairs by midnight.

Finally the treasure hunt ended and there was a ripple of applause as Mrs. Clendon presented the winner, who was covered with attic cobwebs, with the prize. It was one of those plastic worms that you slip into someone's drink for a laugh.

Most of us had dropped halfway into comfortable chairs when Mrs. Clendon blew on a whistle. "Attention, everyone. Next comes my very favorite game, charades! After that we'll have a hands-and-knees race down the hall corridor blowing ping-pong balls, and then . . ." I glided out noiselessly and crept along the wall, trying to blend in with the ferns on the paper.

I very nearly made it to the den, when a strong hand clamped down on my shoulder. "Now then, what are we up to back here?" Mrs. Clendon rasped.

"Er—just getting a prop or two for my charade," I stammered.

"Good, good, good," my hostess chirped. "Hurry back to the living room and don't forget that each player has to depict a famous person in literature! It's such fun!"

Pulling my overcoat high above my ears, I galloped back into the living room, cantered twice around the coffee table, and raced out the front door and into the night, whinnying furiously.

I don't know if they ever guessed I was the Headless Horseman. I didn't come back to find out!

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