3 by E. B. White

I. *MRS. WIENCKUS*

The Newark police arrested a very interesting woman the other day—a Mrs. Sophie Wienckus—and she is now on probation after being arraigned as disorderly. Mrs. Wienckus interests us because her "disorderliness" was simply her capacity to live a far more self-contained life than most of us can manage. The police complained that she was asleep in two empty cartons in a hallway. This was her preferred method of bedding down. All the clothes she possessed she had on—several layers of coats and sweaters. On her person were bankbooks showing that she was ahead of the game to the amount of $19,799.09. She was a working woman—a domestic—and, on the evidence, a thrifty one. Her fault, the Court held, was that she lacked a habitation.

"Why didn't you rent a room?" asked the magistrate. But he should have added parenthetically "(and the coat hangers in the closet and the cord that pulls the light and the dish that holds the soap and the mirror that conceals the cabinet where lives the aspirin that kills the pain)." Why didn't you rent a room "(with the rug that collects the dirt and the vacuum that sucks the dirt and the man that fixes the vacuum and the fringe that adorns the shade that dims the lamp and the desk that holds the bill for the installment on the television set that tells of the wars)?" We feel that the magistrate oversimplified his question.

Mrs. Wienckus may be disorderly, but one pauses to wonder where the essential disorder really lies. All of us are instructed to seek hallways these days (except school children, who crawl under the desks), and it was in a hallway that they found Mrs. Wienckus, all compact. We read recently that the only hope of avoiding inflation is through ever increasing production of goods. This to us is always a terrifying conception of the social order—a theory of the good life through accumulation of objects. We lean toward the order of Mrs. Wienckus, who has eliminated everything except what she can conveniently carry, whose financial position is solid, and who can smile at Rufus Rastus Johnson Brown. We salute a woman whose affairs are in such excellent order in a world untidy beyond all belief.

II. *THE DREAM OF THE AMERICAN MALE*

Dorothy Lamour is the girl above all others desired by the men in Army camps. This fact was turned up by *Life* in a routine study of the unlimited national emergency. It is a fact which illuminates the war, the national dream, and our common unfulfillment. If you know what a soldier wants, you know what Man wants, for a soldier is young, sexually vigorous, and is caught in a line of work which leads toward a distant and tragic conclusion. He personifies Man. His dream of a woman can be said to be Everyman's dream of a woman. In desiring Lamour, obviously his longing is for a female creature encountered under primitive conditions and in a setting of great natural beauty and mystery. He does not want this woman to make any sudden or nervous movement. She should be in a glade, a swale, a grove, or a pool below a waterfall. This is the setting in which every American youth first encountered Miss Lamour. They were in a forest; she had walked slowly out of the pool and stood dripping in the ferns.

The dream of the American male is for a female who has an essential languor which is not laziness, who is unaccompanied except by himself, and who does not let him down. He desires a beautiful, but comprehensible, creature who does not destroy a perfect situation by forming a complete sentence. She is compounded of moonlight and shadows, and has a slightly husky voice, which she uses only in song or in an attempt to pick up a word or two that he teaches her. Her body, if concealed at all, is concealed by a water lily, a frond, a fern, a bit of moss, or by a sarong—which is a simple garment carrying the implicit promise that it will not long stay in place. For millions of years men everywhere have longed for Dorothy Lamour. Now, in the final complexity of an age which has reached its highest expression in the instrument panel of a long-range bomber, it is a good idea to remember that Man's most persistent dream is of a forest pool and a girl coming out of it unashamed, walking toward him with a wavy motion, childlike in her wonder, a girl exquisitely untroubled, as quiet and accommodating and beautiful as a young green tree. That's all he really wants. He sometimes wonders how this other stuff got in—the instrument panel, the night sky, the full load, the moment of exultation over the blackened city below. . . .

III. *Biographee*

We have a letter this morning from Wheeler Sammons, publisher of *Who's Who in America*. It is a long, chatty letter, full of shoptalk. He speaks intimately of his "next scheduled stuffing," of the "currency-of-content provided by the biographee's coöperation," and of "revisionary data." The thing that impresses us particularly about this letter from Mr. Sammons (and we have had many others) is his introductory remark. He starts with an apology: ". . . I appreciate your every moment is under pressure."

Mr. Sammons undoubtedly believes this to be true of his biographees, that their every moment is under pressure. He must think of himself as running a stable of thoroughbreds, in which there is no horse of no account, no horse that isn't terribly busy. But it is a delusion, a dream. A great many of the most consistently indolent characters in the United States are listed in *Who's Who*, and some of them haven't felt an ounce of pressure since 1910, when their first book came out. They are men who have made their mark, have joined a club, and are content to let bygones be bygones. We speak with knowledge about this matter. A biographee of no small inactivity ourself, we can state positively that we are under no pressure at the moment—except the tiny pressure connected with writing this ephemeral paragraph. After it is done, we intend to walk slowly to Central Park in the mild sunshine and visit the baby camel for a routine checkup, then to a saloon, where we shall pass the early afternoon hours in deep torpor over a glass of May wine—a biographee as near inert as a horned toad.