

House & Garden

Published by The Condé Nast Publications, Inc.

PUBLISHERS OF VOGUE, BRITISH VOGUE, VOGUE PATTERN BOOK, AND GLAMOUR

Contents September, 1943

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A man came up to us on the street and said, "What is your magazine doing about the future?"

"What future?" we said. "One man's future is another man's broken leg."

"The group future," he said. "The stuff you read about in the papers. Plastics, helicopters, prefabricoid, soy crispies, television cooking and all like that there." "You forgot plywood," we pointed out quietly.

"O.K., plywood," he said. "But what about the whole business?"

We rocked back on our heels and looked at the sky. "We are treating it," we said, "with the respect it deserves, the hope it gives rise to and the worried look out of the corner of the eyes it sometimes calls for."

"Do you believe in it?" he asked.

"Do you believe the sun will rise tomorrow?" we countered slyly.

"That isn't what I meant," he grunted. "Do you approve of it?"

"The future is what you make it," we said pontifically. "Let us tell you a fable."



"Make it short," the man snapped.

"Once there were three brothers," we said, "with a fairy godmother."

"Like Barnaby in the comic strips?" asked the man.

"Except for the gender, yes," we said, "like Barnaby in the comic strips. And the fairy godmother told them each that when he reached twenty-one she'd give him anything he asked for, often adding, but not very loudly, that he'd have to take the consequences of what he wanted . . ."

"And the oldest brother," the man said rapidly, "wanted to live in the twenty-fifth century in a duraluminum house, with two of each sort of vitamin in his capsule box, two interstellar rocket ships in his garage and a battalion of trained robots."

"Don't forget the Buck Rogers pistol," we snarled. "Suppose you finish the fable."

"Nope," said the man suavely, "it's your fable. What happened to the oldest brother? Something terrible?"

"You bet," we said. "His muscles collapsed, his teeth fell out, he shot his foot off with the Buck

Rogers pistol and both of the rocket ships blasted his seamless duraluminum house down around his ears. . . the-second-brother," we added very fast, "wanted-to-return-to-the-middle-ages. He-specified-the-sort-of-manor-he-wanted-the-gay-and-manly-men, the-fair-and-womanly-women . . ."

"Cut the local color," said the man, "I'm quick-witted."

"He wanted a spirited horse, too," we said.

"And within a week," said the man, "he had been thrown by the horse, caught three unknown plagues and was about to be burned as a witch by the townspeople."

"As a wizard," we growled. "Witches are dames."

"Now what about the third brother?" said the man with assumed calm.

"The third brother," we said, "was the thoughtful type. He told his godmother that all he wanted was to live in a world full of happy people who danced and sang quite a bit and didn't throw adjectives or much else at each other, but, you understand, not so happy that they got stupid."

"What did the godmother do? Laugh?"

"Far from laughing," we said, "she accounted his choice very wise and told him that he had chosen the best of both the past and the future and predicted that he would live happily, but not too happily, ever after."

"Trite and obvious," the man sneered. "I sneer because everybody knows that."

"You'd be surprised," we said cryptically and turned to go.

"Just a minute," he said. "Is that all you have to say about the world of tomorrow?"

"Kind hearts are more than plasticoid," we reminded him. "It is worth repeating."

"Nothing about kitchen-bathroom units?"

"All," we said, "that is worth knowing about kitchen-bathroom units. They are a likely part of the good of tomorrow. Whenever people have good ideas about making people happier we are going to tell our readers."

"Sounds crazy to me," said the man.

"To the contrary," we said and left him.



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A Condé Nast Publication



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SEPTEMBER 1943

PRICE 35 CENTS

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SPRINGFIELD, 1943, THE CONDÉ NAST PUBLICATIONS, INC.