This story strikes us as being less obviously real than the author's last story here (see note in "In this issue . . .") and at the same time is less provably fantasy. Indeed it is included here on the hope rather than the conviction that its eeriness derives in large measure from unreality.

THE FIESTA AT MANAGUAY

by John Anthony West

BOB GRIFFIN, SURREPTITIOUSLY, placed his hand on his wife's knee, half hoping the other passengers on the bus would notice, and Betty Griffin blushed, rewarding him with a look of shy, newlywed well being. Although she disliked his tendency to pet in public, she recalled the advice of her manual: "If your husband demonstrates his ardor openly, don't discourage him. As long as he stops short of indecency . . ." She put her hand over his and pressed it with reinforced sincerity.

They were on their honeymoon; on an all-inclusive tour; the tour a welcome surprise and bonus wedding present from Bob Griffin's father commemorating his graduation in the top third of his class at Midwest University (17,674th out of 68,893). They were having a marvellous time. Already they had visited the Caribbean islands, had made the loop of South America, touched Central America briefly, and now en route to Mexico City, having seen the ruins of Chichen-Itza, they were stopping for the fiesta at Managuay. Bob Griffin's hand crept past Betty's knee, and she stopped him (comfortably short of indecency) but smiled her knowing smile. The smile returned, he sank back into the deep plush seats: married life, as he had written on a hundred post cards, was the greatest.

The air-conditioned bus fled, a silver stripe, up the highway from the airport to the city, and the passengers speculated on the fiesta. Their brochure, prepared by experts; flowery, enthusiastic and detailed on other stopovers was

curiously laconic describing the one-day celebration: "Boarding a luxurious super-constellation, we now leave the unforgettable ruins of the ancient Mayans and journey to fabulous, modern Managuay for their fascinating and unique fiesta." No more.

There was a gasp of simultaneous, unanimous surprise and the passengers dove for their cameras. Around a barricade of cliffs appeared the city, thrust against the sky, tall and serried, white under a desert sun, countless windows beaming beacons of light out at an arid countryside. The bus flanked the city; then streamed down broad boulevards to a chorus of oohs and aahs.

The guide met them at the hotel, a comfortable ruddy man in a neat tropical suit. Had it not been for the placard he carried, "New World Tours", he would have passed for one of the tourists. He introduced himself and led the group inside.

A dozen buses stood before the hotel, yet the lobby was no scene of bustle and scramble. Like the rest of the city, bright, modern, air-conditioned, psychologically sound, it conveyed, nevertheless, an aura of luxury. For instance, though the six glass doors were activated by photo-electric cells, at each was placed a doorman, splendid in livery, standing at benign attention, whose sole duty was to smile gravely at guests.

The guide outlined the itinerary. After washing up and settling the luggage, the tourists were to convene at the bar to drink their complimentary cocktail. After the cocktail a walk about the city was planned.

The streets were festooned; pennants and streamers fluttered from light posts and gay banners were hung across wide streets. The sidewalks were crowded with modishly dressed men and women; and numerous groups of tourists trooped after their guides. Bob and Betty Griffin remarked on this and were informed that the fiesta was a part of most all-inclusive tours. There was expectation in the air.

The Griffins lolled behind their group. They were holding hands, inspecting a shop window when, unnoticed, from a deep entrance, a beggar emerged and tapped Bob on the shoulder. Unsuspecting, he turned, and recoiled in horror from the apparition at his side. A dwarfed hunchback with a riddled face plucked at him and held out a twisted hand for alms. Hastily Bob drew out his wallet; gave the beggar the first bill he touched. The hunchback looked up silently, took the bill, nodded a thank-you, and drifted back to his retreat. The Griffins, shaken, hurried to catch the group.

The guide was unsurprised. "You gave him something?" he asked calmly.

"Five dollars, I think. He was so . . ."

But the guide smiled and nodded disapproval. "No, no," he murmured.

"He took us by surprise . . ."

"At that rate you'll soon be penniless," said the guide, and reached into his briefcase. He began distributing rolls of pennies. "It's included in the tour," he reassured them.

"Pennies," said Betty. "Are there so many of them?"

"We have our share, naturally. But of course they come from everywhere for the fiesta."

"But can't you prevent it?" Bob asked. "Pass a law or something?"

Once again the guide smiled tolerantly. "Why it's their fiesta. Weren't you aware of that?"

The group clustered about him, they shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

"A fiesta for hunchbacks?" Betty asked incredulously.

"No. Not just for hunchbacks. For all of them; lame, blind, deaf; the lepers and spastics. For all the maimed and misfit. They come every year while they can, wouldn't miss it for the world. The City of Managuay invites them."

"Gee, it's a nice gesture," said Bob Griffin.

"It's the least we can do."

Warned now, they began to notice beggars everywhere. Close inspection revealed the frayed collars and cuffs, the patches, the faded materials. It was late, and they kept to the twilight, but the group soon acquired night vision and spotted them; in corners, doorways and dim niches; sitting quietly on park benches; melting into chance shadows, hunched in the far corners of street cafés. And now, too, they saw the crutches concealed in the grass, the empty sleeves and trouser legs, the noseless, eyeless faces half hidden in the penumbras of wide-brimmed hats.

"You know," Bob said, "they don't look like they're celebrating to me."

The guide glanced briefly at a spastic stumbling painfully along. "Of course the fiesta doesn't begin officially until tomorrow. They're busy now with finances and plans. You'll see," he said confidently, "in their own way they enjoy themselves."

"And it doesn't disturb you? The normal ones?"

"No, we're used to it. And, after all, it is only one day a year."

"Still," said Betty, "it must be unnerving."

"Naturally we do hear objections," the guide admitted, "but frankly, if we tried to suppress it we'd hear from the Chamber of Commerce." He indicated the crowded streets with a wave of his hand. "You can imagine what this means for business."

"Even so, I think it's a darn nice thing for the city to do."

"Perhaps," the guide agreed, "though we seldom think of it that way."

In the weeks past the Griffins had earned themselves a reputation as the adventurers of the group, often going off on their own for as long as an evening. And now they felt their position at stake. Despite the somewhat eerie nature of the evening, they asked and gained permission to detach themselves and explore independently. They left, aware of the tacit respect they commanded.

The streets became more crowded by the minute. Wraiths and spectres and derelicts drifted unnoticed into town or emerged from hiding places until, by dark, the broad boulevards were teeming. They moved slowly, shyly, almost silently, scuffling lightly or shambling hesitantly, canes tap-tapping before them. The parks were full, all benches taken, and many squatted patiently or lay prone like unwanted rags along the green promenades, or sat propped and docile against the walls of buildings and the gleaming plate-glass windows of the big shops. And throughout, behind their guides, marched bright groups of tourists, their cameras slung, glaring in the dark, abdominal third eyes.

Wandering about, Bob and Betty Griffin tried to enter into the spirit of the fiesta but the spirit eluded them and they felt uncomfortable and out of place. The silent beggars held up their hands for money, or, if they had no hands, pointed gravely with a glance to a cap on the ground. To each, the Griffins gave a penny. Not a one said thank you. Disconcerted but tenacious they distributed their pennies, and the last two they gave to a couple, unusual even in this strange congress.

The girl was Betty's age; delicate and fine, her face a cameo cut in an exquisite but decadent age. Her skin was pale to translucence, almost to opalescence; her spectral beauty held and perfected by hair once no doubt lustrous but now dull gold, the gold of antique jewelry, the faded gilt of rococo picture frames. The boy with her was her brother, perhaps a year or two her junior, with the same ageless sensitive features; and his hair was prematurely grey.

They sat just beyond a pool of light laid down by a street lamp and as Bob and Betty Griffin approached, the girl stretched out a wizened, purple, crab's claw of a hand with but two webbed fingers on it. Her other sleeve was empty. Though the Griffins had seen more and worse on their short tour, still they started instinctively. Betty could not bear to place the penny in the grisly hand, so she dropped it from the height of two inches and the coin fell and rolled away.

Both knew that retrieving the

penny meant placing it in that unbearable hand, but while they hesitated, the girl picked it up. The opportunity to escape was there; yet the Griffins stood transfixed. The girl returned and sat by her brother but Bob and Betty merely stood—as though hoping they would think of something to say. The girl made a just perceptible motion toward her brother and Bob hurriedly extracted his last penny, this time laying it on the ground. The boy did not look up and, at the same instant, Bob and Betty, examining the pair closely for the first time, exchanged a glance of baffled surprise. For though the boy suffered the same deformities as his sister, under his one arm he guarded a violin. In the light reflected from the white concrete road the wood shone with a deep lustre. Bob wanted to ask but at that moment the girl tilted her face upwards. He couldn't face her steady gaze; fathomless, wholly without fear, wholly without warmth. He tried; but could not face the still, unwavering gaze of her dark eyes and he could not form the words to his question.

They made a show of crushing the red paper penny wrappers so beggars nearby would realize they had no more; and they walked away, ill at ease, not speaking, trying to avoid the hands that reached out to them.

Bob broke the silence. "By golly, it's different. You've got to admit that," he said. "No matter what; it's an experience."

"I'll bet there are lots of human interest stories *here,*" said Betty, who had studied sociology. "If they'd talk I bet we'd hear some real stories."

But a thought had occurred to Bob. "I wonder what they're up to," he mused. "That kid with the violin. It isn't any good to him."

"No."

"I mean they could sell it. I don't know anything about violins but it ought to be worth something."

"Yes, and they could buy artificial arms. And rehabilitate themselves. Artificial arms work very well; I remember reading that somewhere."

A group of beggars limped toward them hands outstretched, and Bob cut short his reply. He knew that he had nothing more to give, and had an uneasy feeling that the beggars might get angry. He squeezed Betty's hand and they walked briskly away, back to the hotel, relieved to flee the company of the maimed and return to civilization. Relating their experiences made them feel like adventurers, almost pioneers. They had dinner, went to a musical in the hotel theatre, and later, considerably refreshed, they went to bed, where, after consulting the manual, they made love in a new way, utilizing one of the recommended positions.

The fiesta opened to a gala parade and the Griffins joined their group on the hotel veranda. Beneath them crowds surged and fiesta-bright flags dipped; there was the constant muffled sound of an impatient multitude; broken intermittently by the bray or honk of a tin party horn, or the comic tootle of a plastic piccolo.

From the height of their vantage point, the Griffin's group was the first to notice the approaching parade; spots of light, reflections from the brass band in the vanguard. All eyes searched the distance. Then the first stray notes reached them, then a catch phrase riding a breeze, then a continuous sound growing louder and more distinct by the moment. The music swelled and it became clear to the watching thousands that it was not music at all; a blaring cacophony, a raucous anarchy of noise. Hundreds of groups turned thousands of puzzled faces toward their guides who explained: the musicians in the brass band were the deaf. The tourists had a thousand questions but the band forbade their asking them, as, unaware of the noise they made, they marched past, slowly and with great precision. They wore superb uniforms of blue and gold and the bandleader stepped high, handling his knobbed, sequinned baton with practiced verve, directing the marchers through complex formations. Rank upon rank passed before the hotel, and when, finally, the last had disappeared down the street, trailing a welter of noise behind it, the tourists turned to each other in blank perplexity.

"I don't get it," said Bob Griffin to Betty. "Who do they think they're kidding?" but she had no time to reply.

There was a ripple of laughter down the boulevard and the guide turned and pointed:

"There they are! The clowns!"

And squinting into the sun they saw a number of objects springing down the boulevard at tremendous speed. They overtook the band quickly, then reversed direction and bounded backward in erratic courses.

The clowns were basket cases in colored flour sacks, fitted all about with strong coil springs. Once set in motion they could keep in motion by utilizing their back, stomach and neck muscles. The crowd watched fascinated as the clowns performed; like big, bright gum erasers flung from rooftops, coming down, hitting the ground with a sharp *poinnnggg* and bounding even higher; or lowering the trajectory to cover long distances in a few leaps. If one became over-enthusiastic and inadvertently fell in among the crowd, two men would seize him, fling him high into the air, and he would be merrily off on his own again. Once, in front of Bob and Betty, one lost a spring at peak

height. He crashed to ground with a dull thud and lay inert. A policeman pulled him out of the way, for the dancers were coming.

Busy watching the clowns, the crowd had failed to notice the dancers and now thousands had materialized. The broad avenue seethed. Wave upon wave stretching back as far as the eye could see; an undulating river of brilliant color.

Dressed in extravagant regional costumes, in ballet tights, in flapper outfits, in theatrically patched jeans and checkered shirts; the lame, the one-legged, and the club-footed were an inspiring sight. Carefree and abandoned they danced to small, makeshift orchestras marching in the ranks, or to solo musicians piping strange and exotic airs. They were gay and exuberant; hopping, skipping, planting a crutch and pirouetting around it; concentrating on one-legged schottisches and herky-jerk tarantelles, ungainly arabesques and stumbling pavans. But all the crowd heard was a tangled mess of tonalities and rhythms from a hundred unconnected tunes.

Still they came; musicians with fingers missing playing flutes, a handless bagpipe player blowing a blatant whine while two club-footed men in kilts did a highland fling . . .

Now and again the dancers shanghaied a spectator; dragged him into the riotous street and made him perform while the crowd roared approval. A gap opened for the newcomer to show his skill but rarely did the tourist maintain the dizzy incongruous pace. Amid laughter, red-faced and perspiring he would fight his way to the sidelines, struggle back to his group against the flood tide of dancers. Exhausted, bedraggled, undecided as to whether he should be indignant or pleased, he would take his place in the crowd.

Often the dancers fell. Some scrambled to their feet unaided, or climbed up a crutch; others were helped up by their comrades. But often they lay where they fell. The tourists listened with expressions of distaste as the guide informed them that many died in the dance—from over-exertion and excitement. By the end of the parade, he warned, the street would be scattered with the dead. The group, the guide said, should not be alarmed.

"Stupidest thing I've ever heard," remarked Bob Griffin.

"It isn't easy to understand," the guide agreed. "After all, they could go on for years, yet they come here to spend everything on one last fling."

"That's pretty bright."

The guide smiled. "Of course, if they took the sensible view there wouldn't be a fiesta."

But Bob Griffin had turned back to the spectacle.

Still they came; in bumbling charlestons and strutting, off-center cakewalks, in horahs and reels, and gavottes and black-bottoms. The Griffins spotted the haunting brother and sister; he holding the violin, fingering the strings, she walking alongside working the bow. To their music a group of men and women with braces on their legs danced a minuet. And all along, between the ranks of dancers, bounced clowns; popping precisely into gaps no larger than laundry baskets and bursting out, over the tossing heads.

The dancers passed and the crowd, overpowered by the action and noise had a respite. A formation of bearded men walked uncertainly by, all carrying easels, dressed haphazardly in corduroy. They wore tinted glasses and the tourists, beginning to comprehend, did not need their guides to tell them that these were the painters: the blind.

Another brass band followed and behind them a twitching regiment of spastics in athletic uniforms. Then a disorganized crowd in the finery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lepers and hunchbacks, said the guide; but the Griffins had to look closely to notice the ravaged features beneath the outrageous coiffures and tophats; twisted bodies were concealed under luxurious dresses and flowing capes. They filed slowly by and suddenly the parade was over. A few sundry freaks plodded along. A spent clown bobbed wearily down the boulevard. A truck came to collect the dead.

The Griffins and their group turned into the hotel, all feeling a vague hangover, the inevitable aftermath of a parade, when the gay streets are silent. After breakfast the itinerary called for a visit to the main plaza where the artists had set up their easels.

The artist assigned to the Griffins' group was a tall, stooped man with flowing white hair, and watching him work made Bob and Betty exchange secret smiles—until they realized that secrecy was unnecessary. The painter took himself seriously, running his hands over his subject's face before setting to work. With great show he daubed at a palette spread with colors he would never see, and he sighted down his thumb for perspective. The result of course was hodgepodge of brushstrokes that seldom resembled a face.

For the most part, the tourists entered into the spirit of the event, some even assuring the painter that he had produced an excellent likeness. One tourist, however, a stout man given to banter, told the artist that his portrait (a flattened circle scrawled over with nondescript orangish gashes) was not at all like him.

The artist drew himself to his full height, threw his brush to the

ground and said, haughtily: "It happens to be the way *I* see you, Sir. If you want a likeness, go to the photographer."

The fat tourist, taken aback, stammered in confusion but the group smiled at him and reassured him. The artist, thinking he had beaten his antagonist, groped for his brush but it had rolled out of reach. Bob Griffin retrieved it and placed it in the artist's hand. He did not deign to thank him.

When it was Bob Griffin's turn, it occurred to him to ask the price of the portrait, and again, the temperamental artist was offended.

"You would not pay what it is worth," he said. "Therefore consider it a gift. A souvenir of the fiesta, as it were."

Bob Griffin and the rest turned to the guide with puzzled expressions; they were not accustomed to receiving things without paying for them. The guide winked and motioned to a cap that lay (now, pointed out, rather conspicuous) on the ground by the easel, then he explained in a whisper that by such little deceptions the artist maintained his pride.

When the portraits were finished, they returned to the hotel for luncheon, and after the exhausting morning, one and all welcomed the hour siesta listed on the itinerary. But at two o'clock they were awakened. The bus stood ready to take them to Managuay Field for the Spastics' track meet; the main attraction of the afternoon.

The tourists were treated to a banner day. Five records fell; a fantastic performance said the excited guide, and explained:

The fiesta had been deteriorating over the past years. Though the streets were mobbed, and the parade was still an impressive event, there were fewer revellers than previously. Furthermore, they lacked the stamina of their predecessors. Formerly, for instance, a small converted bus served to collect the victims of the parade, now a trailer truck was forced to make several trips. And of course the general debilitation was much in evidence at the track meet. In recent years, old records had not been approached, much less exceeded. Yet here, in one day, five had fallen.

The guide himself searched for a reason, but found none, and in the end convinced himself and his group that no new trend was indicated by the day's results. For despite the heroic efforts of winners, the stretcher bearers had had a difficult afternoon.

Though they knew they had witnessed a unique event, the Griffins could not honestly show enthusiasm; they could not get excited over a seven foot broad jump, or a hundred yard dash run in under a minute; and they were baffled by the elder tourists who

seemed almost to take genuine pleasure in the afternoon. Entertaining though the fiesta might be —in its own way—the Griffins felt that the whole celebration was wasted effort, if not downright silly. The thought even struck them that it was a hoax. But it was unlikely that New World Tours would exploit their clients. It was also possible, but highly unlikely, that New World Tours itself was a victim of the Associated Freaks or whatever they called themselves. The Griffins felt an uncertainty, a disappointment they could not define.

Dinner put them in a better mood but the evening promised to be more of the same: The Lepers and Hunchbacks Ball at the old Hotel Ritz. They discussed not going but since no alternative entertainment was listed in the itinerary they had no choice.

The Ritz had once been Managuay's leading hotel but was now outdated and in disrepair; overshadowed by the chrome and glass utopias along the boulevard. And it was a strange thing, said the guide, that though many of the latter had offered their improved facilities for the Ball, they were consistently refused. It was a nuisance travelling to the Old Town, he continued, but he did concede one point; in the baroque of Grand Ballroom, the foppish costumes of the dancers did not seem quite so ridiculous.

Gas lights cast a green haze over the flaking facade of the old Ritz and concealed damage that daylight made all too plain; and inside, soft candlelight from sconces and enormous chandeliers flickered and favored the moth-eaten but still rich dubonnet of the carpet, the mildewed, intricately wrought panels of the wall, and the faded brocades of the once fabulous draperies. Somewhat subdued by the crumbling splendor, the Griffins and their group ascended the marble sweep of the stairway and took places in the horseshoe balcony overlooking the ballroom. Here too there were candles and the ball had already begun. Held in a misty light, the swaying, mincing dancers, dressed in the eveningwear of Edwardian times and earlier, were elegant and lithe; but the tourists knew that a periwig concealed a missing ear, a cape covered a hunched back and a full theatrical mask hid some unknown horror. Yet they danced brilliantly and those with full use of their limbs were graceful to the whining strings and tinkling clavichord. On the podium the orchestra played now a Strauss waltz, now a Mozart serenade and the mutilated musicians almost created harmony. The brother and sister with the violin were among them, and as the tourists watched, a thin masked man in black called her to dance. There was a short conference between the musicians

and presently she left, went easily into his arms and floated weightlessly over the floor. In oyster white, as pale as her skin, incredibly thin and lissome, she seemed scarcely human; an imperfect masterpiece of lalique come briefly to motion. The Griffins could not take their eyes off the shrivelled hand that rested on the man's shoulder.

The music stopped, the dancers drifted apart and walked to tables gleaming with crystal and silver, liveried butlers opened champagne and corks rained on the balcony (where they were fought over like foul balls). There was caviar, exotic patés, dishes of smoked thrushes, truffles, lotus seed cakes, countless frail delicacies; more champagne. The glasses were thinnest crystal and the dancers hurled them against the walls; they fell in showers of diamond splinters.

Music rose and the dancers swirled, so fast now the deformities could not be singled out. But the dance took its toll and many fell, crumpling to the ground, their borrowed grace gone, silken marionettes shorn of their strings. Waiters in brocade carried out the fallen. The truck, said the guide, waited at the delivery entrance.

Bob Griffin turned to Betty. "You know," he said, "the guide was right. They do have fun."

"I think it's wonderful," she said, "just like Senior Prom."

Bob tapped a finger on the balustrade, when he spoke his voice was a rush of gleeful excitement. "I've got a great idea, Darling. What do you say we crash the Ball, the guys back in the House'll flip. Just one dance. We'll get one of group to take a picture . . ."

"Go down *there* . . ."

"Sure. Why not?" He said it without certainty.

"Why *not?* It must be contagious . . ."

"If it's contagious down there, it must be contagious up here. Do you think the agency would let us come if it was dangerous?"

"Gee, Bob, honey, I don't know . . ."

"Think of the great snapshot."

"It must be against the rules anyhow."

"You're not chicken?" he said hopefully.

"I'd go if you go."

"O.K. We'll ask the guide."

The guide was shocked. "No one," he said, "has ever done it before."

"Oh," said Betty expectantly; but the group was watching them with open admiration.

"But it's not against the rules, then," Bob pursued.

"No, there are no rules, but . . ."

"But what?"

"They may not like it."

"One extra couple?"

"I understand. But it *is* their ball of course."

"If they don't like it they can kick us out." Bob Griffin grinned and took his wife by the hand.

The guide restrained them a moment. "It is understood in the event of something . . . ah . . . happening amiss, New World Tours is not responsible."

"Roger. Let's go, honey."

Without a glance backward, the Griffins left the balcony and strode down the stairs. Their group craned over the balustrade to watch.

They stood out clearly against the whirling haute couture of two centuries; Bob in a summer jacket of indeterminate powder blue, slightly darker blue trousers and crêpe-soled shoes, Betty in a bright green skirt and transparent nylon blouse printed with the heads of various pedigreed dogs. Yet the dancers paid them no attention as they swept to the music, and the Griffins stood vacillating, a bit frightened by the proximity of these swirling wrecks who now, surrounding them, displayed their infirmities all too plainly.

But all eyes were upon them and happily the orchestra began a waltz. The Griffins launched into the slow rotary about the floor with stiff, rudimentary steps. They were outclassed, perhaps, but not in the least embarrassed and they nodded to the pale girl and she went gliding by with her masked partner.

The orchestra switched to an unknown rhythm; the Griffins watched groups of eight gathering and joined one of the formations; doing their best to follow the curlicues and curtsies of the elaborate pattern. They only broke the continuity of the dance twice, and glancing over his shoulder at an appropriate moment, Bob Griffin saw that they were watched with open admiration from the balcony.

Their example inspired the young bloods in the audience, for when the next waltz began three couples in modern dress had joined the Griffins on the floor. By the time the dance finished there were a dozen and twenty minutes later there were as many tourists as dancers in costume.

The room was crowded now and the restricted space hampered the style of the lepers and hunchbacks. The Griffins were not displeased; they felt the dancers had deliberately flaunted their skill when they had been the first to take an active part in the entertainment.

Presently the older tourists arrived and the floor was so crowded that open reels and minuets were impracticable. Old costumes stood out against a background of jackets and flowered print dresses. The orchestra attempted a waltz but that too was impossible and the music ceased; for several long minutes the crowd milled about the floor.

The balcony was empty.

A tourist suggested a fox trot to the orchestra leader. He had never heard of such a dance. The tourist obligingly whistled a typical tune, and after several tentative notes the orchestra played it, not well but passably. The dancers in costume who had not been wise enough to retreat to the sidelines were immured by the crowd. Bob and Betty spotted the pale girl and her masked partner, and the girl gazed at Bob. He thought at first that it had been with anger; but it was just horror. Not knowing the steps they stood helpless, pushed this way and that in the eddies of the crowd.

But the tourists, at home now, jammed in solid, body to body, scuffled and swayed to the familiar music.

***Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot:* XLVI**

After Richard Wagner's visit to the planet Madamabutterfly, where the natives claimed title to all operatic ideas, and where he was summarily convicted on three counts of plagiarism*, he insisted that Ferdinand Feghoot take him back there directly. "It iss abzurd!" he shouted. "It iss they vhat are plachiarists. Mein ideas are mein own!"

Feghoot fianlly gave in; and on landing they were greeted by the very same police official who had arrested Wagner before. This time, the composer refused to be shown around. Marching into a suburban district, he entered a residence. "Ha-ha!" he snorted, peering around. "Vhat iss hier mit der idea for der opera?"

"There is this post, kindly sir," said the policeman, "which meets the above-floor where is young girl's bedroom. In the night, her father puts only one rung in the hole of the post, so she can go up to bed. Then he takes it out to protect her." He winked. "But sometimes a nice suitor is coming after papa makes sleep. So this girl takes a hammer from of papa the tools chest, and puts in the hole of the post. Then she is hanging one garter upon to let the boy know he is welcome." He smiled at Wagner. "Therefore, goodly sir, you are under arrest."

"Dumkopf!" screamed Wagner. "*How* could I shteal this idea for mein beaudtiful opera?"

"I'm afraid that it's only too obvious," replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "*Gartered hammer-rung.*"

* *As explained in our April 1961 issue.*