

Our Man Hoppe

Busy Days in The White House



Arthur Hoppe

MY ELDERLY FRIEND, Miss Amantha Scroggs, visited Washington last week because she is incensed over the mess.

The mess she is incensed over is created daily by thoughtless sixth grade boys who toss their Tootsie Roll wrappers over her white picket fence into her delphinium bed.

And, naturally, the first person she called in Washington was her nephew, Scranton Scroggs III, who is an assistant Presidential assistant in the White House.

★ ★ ★

"MR. SCROGGS' OFFICE," answered his secretary. "And he didn't do it."

"Didn't do what?" inquired Miss Amantha.

"Wild horses couldn't drag it out of me," said the secretary grimly, "whatever it is he didn't do."

After raising her voice, Miss Amantha finally got through to her nephew. He said he'd be glad to see her before he left his office. And while he didn't know precisely when that would be, she'd better hurry.

"And don't forget, Aunt Amantha," he said, "you'll have to undergo a rigorous security check."

"At the White House gate?" she asked.

"No, at my office door. Please don't get caught carrying any money, FBI files, grand jury transcripts or other dangerous weapons."

By the time Miss Amantha had at last been ushered into her nephew's office, her wrath had risen. "Scranton!" she said, pounding her cane on the floor. "I demand you clean up this mess. And here," she said, dramatically tossing a Tootsie Roll wrapper on his desk, "is the evidence."

"When it comes to examining evidence, we can't be too careful," he said, swooping up the wrapper and gulping it down in a single swallow. "What was it? No, don't tell me!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Scroggs," said his secretary, "the Russian Ambassador's on the phone. He wants to discuss another wheat deal."

"No deals!" cried Mr. Scroggs blanching. "Who knows how much the Russians may have contributed to The Committee to Re-elect the President? I don't. The others do, but I don't. Send another mimeographed memo to the President to that effect."

"You look peaked, dear," said Miss Amantha, her sympathy aroused. "Why don't we go out and get a nice bowl of chicken soup?"

"Leave the office?" said Mr. Scroggs. "I haven't left the office for three weeks. What if I were seen talking to someone who's talking? Or, worse yet, someone who's not talking? I can't afford to talk to those who are or are not talking."

"Excuse me again, sir," said his secretary. "But a Cuban expeditionary force, led by Fidel Castro, has landed on Miami Beach. You've been asked to prepare a position paper on the subject."

"Certainly," said Mr. Scroggs. "First, I have never discussed with anyone any sneaky infiltrations by Cubans anywhere. Nor do I know how much Fidel Castro may have contributed to The Committee to Re-elect the President. Others do, but I don't. Therefore, I can only take the position we loyal White House staffers have been taking in this time of crisis."

And with that, he crawled back under his desk.

★ ★ ★

MISS AMANTHA has since returned home and is cleaning up her delphinium beds herself. But her anger's cooled.

"I can see where those important folks in the White House are a sight too busy these days," she says philosophically, "to be concerned with the likes of us."