

SF Chronicle SEP 20 1974

Pardons Make Strange Bedfellows



Arthur Hoppe

I DROPPED AROUND to pay a call on my young friend, A. Christian Kent, the noted draft resister. I was shocked to find him supine on his bed, a single calla lily clutched across his heaving breast.

"I fear he has succumbed to the heart-break of coreopsis," his roommate, Ms. Candice Kupp, whispered with a shudder.

"But he's had coreopsis for years," I said.

"This time it's tertiary," explained his aunt, grabbing me by a lapel. "His left little finger has swollen to twice its normal size. The doctor says he will never play the piano again."

"He never played it before," I said. "But he played 18 holes of golf just yesterday."

"That just shows," said a nephew, "that even though he is bedridden, moody, disoriented, depressed and contemplating suicide, he wishes to keep up a brave front so as not to worry anybody."

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BUT JUST last week," I said, "you all told me he was feeling fine."

"And he was, too," said an uncle, "for someone at death's door. But we suddenly remembered that we forgot what terrible shape he was in."

Two brothers pushed me into a corner, demanding to know why I wasn't taking notes. "Write down 'manic depressive' and 'only a few hours to live,'" snarled one.

The hubbub aroused Mr. Kent. "As I am on my death bed," he said weakly, "I wish to make a full and complete confession. I fully and completely confess I may have made an error in judgment."

"Like what?" I asked.

"Like I should've gone to Sweden," he said, "where the chicks are prettier."

His physician, Dr. Pshaw, took his pulse and shook his head sadly. "He is much worse than when I last saw him two years ago," he said. "I fear he must enter a hospital."

"Over my dead body!" cried Mr. Kent.

"Then I have no choice but to prescribe medicine's ultimate remedy," said Dr. Pshaw, packing up his stethoscope. "Take two aspirin and call my office in the morning for the bill."

"You've been in hospitals before," I said to Mr. Kent. "Why have you now developed this morbid fear of them?"

"If I go into a hospital, I'll never come out alive," he said morbidly, "for at least two years."

"Two years?"

"Yes, they all want to put me in a hospital for two years, mopping floors and emptying bedpans," he said. "That could kill anybody."

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EVADING the draft was a spiritual body blow to him," said Dr. Pshaw, pausing at the door. "It's going to take a miracle for him to recover."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Kent, his eyes closing. "Only a miracle can save me now."

"A miracle?" I said. "What miracle?"

An elderly grandfather in the corner aimed his ear trumpet my way and shouted, "Pardon?"

Mr. Kent's eyes flew open. He leaped from the bed, jumped three feet in the air and clicked his heels four times. "That's it!" he cried.