

House of Horrors on Pacific Heights

IT GAVE EVERYBODY SOMETHING TO DO. By Louise Thoresen with F. M. Nathanson. M. Evans & Co. (distributed by Lippincott); 346 pp.; \$8.95.

Reviewed by

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THIS BOOK, with its frivolous, inept title, is essentially a horrifying depiction of folie a deux. William Thoresen undoubtedly was congenitally psychotic, but his parents, his brother, and above all his wife, in association with his abnormal personality, themselves increasingly skirted the edge of psychosis. There was no violence in Louise, and William was made up of frightening violence spurred by self-absorption and self-indulgence; but one wonders if Mrs. Thoresen realizes how much she reveals of her own imbalance.

Which is not to say that the jury was not entirely correct in exonerating her of his killing. She was within an inch of being murdered; her husband had confessed to having his brother (supposedly a suicide) murdered and then of killing the man he had hired to do it. There was nothing she could do but react in self-defense. But her account of the ten years of their marriage, the crimes and amorality and bizarre actions to which she gradually ac-



LOUISE THORESEN.

quiesced, displays a masochistic nature in its own way as appalling, as outside normality, as was his.

We in San Francisco during the 1960s grew familiar with the grotesque story of the arms-collecting Thoresens in their house of horrors in Pacific Heights. Here is the story behind the story. How much of the descriptive details comes from the ostensible author herself, how much was the work of a professional writer on crime, we cannot know. But there are expressions that sound true: "how much he needed me . . . (My answer was always) 'Yes, yes, all right; . . . his answer was (always) to escape. . . . Neither of us was very good at looking into the future. . . . Sometimes I wonder if my entire relationship with William was not predicated on mutual insanity.'"

This is a book of immense value to psychiatrists; laymen must read it at their own peril — it will induce nightmares. It took courage — and, one hopes, increasing command of herself — to bare it to the world. It is indeed "an American tragedy" which goes far beyond the sordid, ordinary crime to which Dreiser gave that name. All one can hope is that somehow Louise Thoresen recovers completely from the decade of obsession that she called love.

S. F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle