# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

THE big black Tatra limousine stopped in front of a modernistic glass-and-concrete building with the trademark of a world-famous steel concern cut into marble plates on both sides of the entrance. The liveried chauffeur jumped out from behind the wheel, ran around the front of the car, opened the door at Benda's side, took off his cap, and stood in a waiting attitude, half at attention.

Benda looked up from the newspaper at which he had been staring absently for the past few minutes. He got up abruptly and bumped against the top of the car. His black Homburg was knocked off and fell down on the floor. I'll never learn to get out of a limousine without knocking my hat off, Benda thought. In fact, I'll never get used to Homburgs and limousines. Then he saw the twinkle in the chauffeur's eyes and knew that Anton had had the same thought.

Anton bent down quickly and picked up the hat and handed it to Benda. There was not a speck of dust on it. No matter what you thought of Anton, he did keep the car spotlessly clean. He stood there, his cap in his left hand, his right hand on the handle of the open door, as Benda got out and put on his hat.

"Shall I pick up the General Manager at six, as usual, *Pane Generalní Řediteli*?" he asked. It was always "Mr. General Manager" this and "Mr. General Manager" that with Anton, although he knew he shouldn't talk like that. After all, he and Benda were wearing the same emblem in their lapels, the emblem of the party that had dissolved social distinctions between chauffeurs and general managers in Czechoslovakia and in which everybody was addressed simply as "*Soudruh*," the Czech word for "Comrade." But somehow human relations, owing perhaps to people's inability to forget quickly, didn't always conform to Party discipline. Anton found it hard to forget that he'd always called Benda's predecessor, Dr. Jelinek, "Mr. General Manager" and had never dared address him directly. On the other hand, Benda found it hard to forget that only several months before, he and Anton had been on the same social level. Benda had been Dr. Jelinek's private secretary and Anton had been Dr. Jelinek's private chauffeur, and their jobs set them quite apart from the twenty-four thousand other employees of the concern, for whom the general manager was only a name and a signature.

Benda, following his sudden promotion to general manager, had made a conscientious effort to establish a new relationship with Anton, in accordance with Party rules, but Anton would have no part of it. After driving Dr. Jelinek for nine years, he found it impossible to address the new general manager, *any*body who was a general manager, in the second person singular and call him "Comrade." Dr. Jelinek had been a big, bluff man with powerful gestures, who liked to make it clear that it had taken him twenty-nine years, exactly half his life, to become head of the large concern, and that he didn't see any reason for not enjoying the customary prerogatives of his position.

Benda had made the grade much more quickly. He had joined the firm back in 1938, after graduating from commercial high school. He had been one of the many hundred file clerks and typists who seemed destined to lead a quasi-anonymous existence until the end of their bureaucratic lives. He made eleven hundred crowns a month, which was about as much as Dr. Jelinek made in a couple of days. In those early days, Benda decided bitterly that he had about as much chance of becoming general manager as of flying to the other side of the moon. A man had no chance for promotion unless he had outstanding brains or outstanding family connections. Later—he never found out why—he had been picked to be typist for Dr. Jelinek's private secretary. Probably it had been sheer luck—his name card lying on top of the others at the personnel office, or some such thing. Certainly it was a lucky break when the private secretary fell sick and Benda was called in by Dr. Jelinek to take dictation and type the general manager's private letters. Benda saw his chance and worked hard at it, but somehow it didn't alleviate the bitterness. He spent most of his time calling people by their titles: "Mr. General Manager," "Mr. Export Director," "Mr. General Secretary." Practically everybody entering Dr. Jelinek's office had a long title—everybody except himself. He was just Benda; no one bothered to call him so much as "*Pane Benda*"—"Mr. Benda." It was in those months that he'd begun paying attention to the editorials in *Rudé Pravo*. They reflected his bitterness and frustration, and the injustice that seemed to dominate his whole life. He didn't dare read *Rudé Pravo*, the official newspaper of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, at the office; Dr. Jelinek would have fired him immediately. Well, maybe he wouldn't have fired him, but possibly there would have been trouble. Fortunately, you could read the paper at home. This was a democracy, and you could read anything you liked. Everybody could read and say what he liked, and the editorials of *Rudé Pravo* said that one day there would be no people like Dr. Jelinek left; in fact, there would be no general managers and no typists. There would only be comrades.

Anton was still standing by the limousine, in his deferential position. "I'll have the office call you later if I need you," Benda said.

"Thank you, Mr. General Manager," said Anton, and put on his cap.

Benda walked into the building. A wave of cold air and the smell of marble rose against him. He hardly glanced at the enormous poster at the left of the lobby, which showed the production curve and the latest figures, measured in percentages of the Five Year Plan's quota. A thick red horizontal line was marked "100%," but the production curve was still slightly below the red line, somewhat in conflict with the big red banner on the other side, saying, "EVERY MAN A STAKHANOVITE—1950 MEANS 110 PER CENT FULFILLMENT OF THE PLAN'S QUOTA!"

The janitor got up from his chair and walked over to the elevator and opened the door with his crippled hand. "Good morning, Comrade Benda," he said.

"Good morning, Comrade Hampl," said Benda. Hampl was a thin, loose-jointed man with burning eyes and a pock-marked face, and there was an attitude of defiance about him. He had fought with the partisans during the Occupation, until the Germans caught him and imprisoned him at the Little Fortress in Terezin, where they had crippled his fingers. They had done other things to him, but he had not revealed the names of the members of his group. He never talked much, and Benda wondered whether it was true, as they were saying around the office, that Hampl worked for the Ministry of National Security's secret police. Sometimes he had



the feeling Hampl was watching him. It was plain nonsense, of course; they wouldn't make you general manager of one of the country's most important nationalized enterprises and have a half-educated, one-track-minded fanatic like Hampl spy on you. Or would they? They had done it to Benda's friend Kratky, general manager of a large nationalized textile concern. In many ways, Benda's and Kratky's careers had been strikingly similar. Both had been underpaid office workers in their respective firms in the prewar days. Both had joined the Party during the German occupation. Both had had minor brushes with the Gestapo and had managed to stay alive and out of prison. Both had been promoted to their jobs over the heads of many people with much longer experience. Now, in Party circles, it was sometimes said that the revolutionary period was over, that it was time to weed out the unfit political appointees and to consider managerial ability rather than political reliability. That was a lot of nonsense, of course; you might just as well hand over the steel mills to those fat animals in Wall Street. You could always find people to do the actual work for you, but in the leading positions you needed people who were absolutely reliable, no matter how limited their business experience.

Even the announcements of their promotion had been similar: One day Kratky (and a few weeks later Benda) read in *Rudé Pravo* that the Minister of Industry had appointed him to be general manager.

The janitor went back to his chair and picked up his paper—the same paper Benda was carrying under his arm—and Benda closed the elevator door and pressed the second-floor button. He tried to remember just when Kratky had given him the first indication of being in trouble. It must have been after the meeting of all the general managers at the Ministry of Industry, in the big reception hall behind the buffet. Benda remembered the buffet because there had been an enormous smoked ham, which was a rarity nowadays, and lots of other delicacies. They were having their second glass of wine when Kratky glanced over his shoulder to make sure that no one was listening and then whispered to Benda that he was being watched.

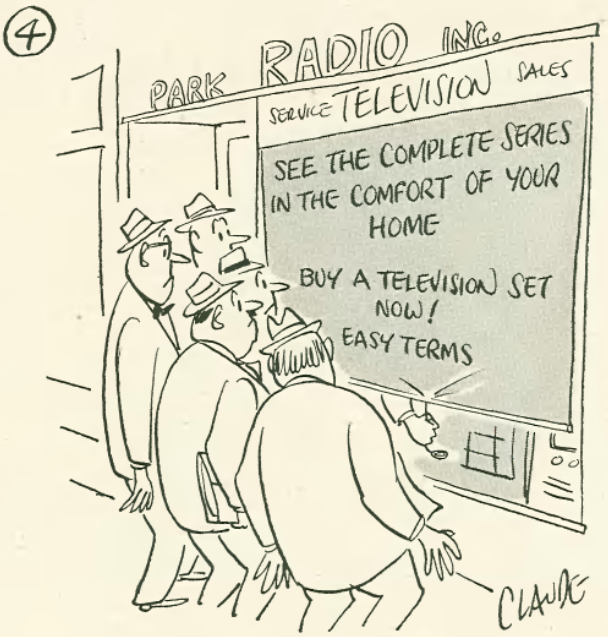
"Watched? By whom?"

"I don't know," Kratky said. "That's the worst part of it. I may be unduly sensitive. One begins to imagine things. But there's that man at the reception desk—they seem all afraid of him. And there's the chief telephone operator—I could swear she spends her nights writing reports about everything and everybody at the office. Sometimes I pick up the phone and after a moment there is a faraway click in the wire, as if somebody were cutting in. As I say, it may all be imagination, but the worst part of it is that it's beginning to affect my work. I feel self-conscious all the time, weighing every word and every sentence, and I keep tracing back my steps to last week, last month, last year, trying to discover whether I've done anything that could be interpreted against me. It's driving me crazy."

Benda tried to calm Kratky. It was all imagination and overwork. Everybody was overworked. You had to read too many directives, listen to too many influential people. Just nerves and being tired. While he was talking to Kratky, he noticed that Kratky's hand holding the wineglass was shaking. Benda said good night as soon as he could and left. Afterward, the picture of Kratky with his shaking hand disturbed Benda. Perhaps the newspaper stories about the campaign the Party was waging in Rumania and Hungary against incompetent managers and foremen had scared Kratky. Naturally, Kratky didn't have the experience of older men, but his political record was blameless, the Minister liked him, and he'd been on two hunting trips with the Party's General Secretary.

Two weeks later, *Rudé Pravo* had started its campaign against "increasing corruption in the textile industry." According to the paper, large quantities of textile goods had been diverted into the black market, and many of the industry's products were "of inferior quality, which met with sales resistance in the export trade." It was a stock phrase, and no one would have paid any attention to it if it had been printed in any other newspaper, but you couldn't afford to ignore *Rudé Pravo*. It would have been useless and dangerous to point out that even the most experienced experts couldn't run the textile industry with second-rate raw materials from the East, and that all imports from Australia had been cut to the bone; the paper said that "a reform was due." This was saying, in effect, that a scapegoat was needed.

Three weeks ago, in his office, Benda


had been studying a report about mounting absenteeism in the steel mills when his private phone rang. Only the Minister and the Minister's Cabinet chief; his wife, Adina; and three or four close friends, among them Kratky, had the number. It was Kratky. He sounded as if he'd run very fast and hadn't caught his breath yet.

"I'm talking from a phone booth on the street," he said quickly. The picture of Kratky nervously glancing over his shoulder, his hands shaking, came into Benda's mind, and again he was disturbed. "I'm in trouble," Kratky was saying. "They've called Vyskočil to the Ministry this morning without letting me know. I'm sure he's testifying against me."

"Vyskočil?"

"My production manager. One of the old fellows. They called him behind my back, without letting me know. You know what *that* means."

"Don't be silly," said Benda.

"No, no. They're going to blame me for the whole mess. Listen, do me a favor. If I shouldn't come home tonight, please drive over to the house and try to calm my wife. She has no idea of what's happened. I'm afraid to call her—they may already be watching her phone, too. Tell her— Sorry, I must go now." A click, and the voice was gone. Benda held the receiver to his ear for a while, and when he put it down, he noticed, to his utter surprise, that his palm was moist.

He didn't go to Kratky's house that night. Kratky was nervous and overworked; he was imagining things, and would be all right in a few days. No sense in frightening his wife; besides, Kratky's house *might* be watched, and Benda's visit would put him under suspicion. The next morning, he had his secretary call Kratky's office, and was told that the general manager had gone on "sick leave" for a few days. But a week later Kratky hadn't come back from his sick leave, and *Rudé Pravo* announced that Vyskočil had been named interim general manager. It was strange, because Vyskočil, although generally known as an able executive and hard worker, was not an old Party man. He had joined only in 1948, six years later than Kratky—and Benda, for that matter—had joined.

Kratky was still on sick leave. No one knew when he would be back or where he was, and no one dared ask. If he was where Benda thought him to be, he would never come back.

THE elevator stopped noiselessly at the second floor, and Benda got out. A girl carrying two files walked by. "Good morning," she said, and quickened her step. She was afraid of him. Everybody was afraid these days, Benda thought. What would the girl say if she knew that the general manager was afraid, too? Afraid of a janitor?

He turned to the left, where the linoleum on the floor was replaced by thick carpet. Even the corridor was panelled here, and old prints hung on the walls, to give a semi-private atmosphere. There were three doors leading to the rooms allocated to the general manager: the outer office, for the typist, which Benda knew well, having spent almost two years there; a larger room, for the private secretary; and, finally, the big corner room, for the general manager himself. Ordinarily, Benda went through the two anterooms, but this morning he walked down the carpeted corridor and entered his office through the hall door.

It was a big, impressive, dark-panelled room, designed to radiate dignity and confidence, with deep rugs, dark-leather chairs, bookshelves—a room in which to make Major Decisions. There were two dark-framed pictures on the wall. In the past twenty years, the portraits of T. G. Masaryk, Eduard Beneš, Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and others had at various times hung in these frames. Now they contained the confident, benevolently smiling features of Stalin and Gottwald. Between two windows stood an enormous desk. It was nine steps from either door to the desk, as Benda well remembered. Occasionally Dr. Jelinek had pushed the button for his private secretary several times, impatiently or angrily, and Benda had run there. Then the distance from door to desk could be made in seven steps. Now Benda was sitting behind the desk, waiting for people to approach it, and the distance seemed much too short, giving him hardly time to prepare himself for eventualities. Every caller might be a problem; every sentence might be a trap. In the old days, managers had run their enterprises according to certain fixed rules—supply and demand, making steel and selling it at a profit. Now it was different. There were always Policies, Directives, Special Considerations, Ne-

cessities, the Needs of Our Allies, and, above all, there was the unspoken question behind every move: What would *they* say? Would *they* agree with that deal or this decision? It wasn't always easy to guess the way *their* minds worked—those inscrutable minds in Moscow.

Benda put his hat and topcoat into a closet, sat down behind the desk, and placed the newspaper, folded lengthwise, before him. The desk was tidy, the sharpened pencils sticking out of their red container like bayonets, and the uppermost page of the desk calendar showing that day's date. Benda never left the office in the evening without tearing off the uppermost page, thus bringing the day officially to an end. He liked it that way. Well-sharpened pencils and the open desk calendar were a heritage of his file-clerk days.

He picked up the newspaper. An editorial ran down the entire left side of the front page. It was headed, "Managerial Incompetence in Our Steel Industry." The key sentences were printed in double-spaced capital letters, and read,

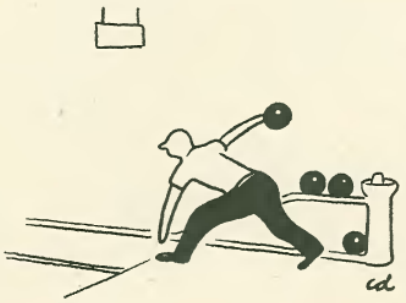
> The time has passed when we could tolerate incompetence and lack of experience because of a man's Party record. Today the state can no longer afford to tolerate managers unfit and unqualified for their responsibilities, and insufficiently trained to run our major industries. It was to those managers that the General Secretary of the Party referred at the last Party Congress when he said, "I'm less concerned with the number on a man's Party membership card than with his production effort. If he cannot deliver the quota and beyond the quota, he must be replaced."

Benda looked up at the pictures on the wall. They were still smiling at him—but ironically rather than benevolently it seemed. There was no need to read the rest of the editorial. Everybody who read the paper would know the rest by heart, and everybody was under orders to read the paper every day. Practically the same editorial had been published a few months before, when the shoe industry was unable to deliver its quotas, and again, later, when there were sabotage and slowdowns in the coal mines. "Failure of the management to utilize reserves of socialist accumulation that made more rapid development in both quantity and quality of production possible . . . Inefficient use of manpower and raw material and permitting such acts by subordinates . . . Faulty judgment concerning measures bound to bolster workers' morale . . ." Stock phrases that surely must have been left standing in type, they were used so frequently. When the editors were told to attack a specific industry, they merely filled in specific names and statistics. The editorial represented no one's private opinion; these days, the newspapers expressed neither the writers' nor the editors' opinions but merely repeated, interpreted, and confirmed orders from the highest places. The editorial, Benda noted, was signed by the editor-in-chief himself, which meant that it had been printed by order of the Party's General Secretary.

There were two ways of dealing with the issue. You could be fatalistic and let things take their course, hoping for the best, knowing that the worst would happen. Or you could go to pieces, as Kratky had done, trying to figure out every possible contingency, lying awake nights devising ways of escape. The end would be the same; if they had decided to get you, they would get you. You would be sent on "sick leave" from which you were not likely to return. You would disappear. You would—

Benda got up and walked over to the window. Across the street, a new building was going up. Between the third and fourth floors, red banners with violent slogans were strung, and downstairs, by the phone booth near the entrance, was the inevitable Five Year Plan chart and the promise of the Stakhanovites to exceed the Plan's quotas. A group of workers were standing near the booth, talking idly. They had been at the job for four months; in the old days, it would have been finished sooner, but in the old days the masons had been masons and the bricklayers bricklayers. Now many of the masons and bricklayers had become government officials; the new masons and bricklayers had once been lawyers and shopkeepers and salesmen, and they were not too good at their new trade. I should have listened to Adina, he thought. She never wanted me to have this career. She was happy when I was only a typist and we had the cold-water flat in Karlin.

Their chief recreation had been going skiing on Sundays. They couldn't afford to go to the Krkonoš, but they would take the No. 1 tram to the White Mountain, on the outskirts of the city, and have fun getting up and down the soft hills. They would come home and make a fire in the tiled stove, and then there would be the smell of smoked sausages being cooked, and sweet-sour pickles, and good bread. Now Adina had a cook and a butler, who had come with the big villa in Bubeneč, and the garden and a gardener, and the car, and none of it meant anything to her. "The car belongs to the firm," she would say, "and the house isn't ours, either." It had been Dr. Jelinek's house, and they didn't use



## LIFE SCIENCES BUILDING, BERKELEY

This building is unequalled for expense and size.
These doors, constructed to heroic scale,
suitable to the huge dominion of
Science in the modern enterprise,
will close at five. Each young American male
will then return at sunset to his love.

Precautions must be taken: Animals
to be dissected must be fastened tight;
the heads of mongrels, emptied of their fear,
must be deposited in chemicals.
May Truth brood sweetly through the darkened night
upon the Fact a sophomore noted here.

May all the nebulae of Space-Time keep
their watch above this temple taxpayers built.
May all the boys who know that life is only
stimulus and response lie down to sleep,
invulnerable to human doubt and guilt.
May none of them have bad dreams, none be lonely.

—EDITH STUURMAN

• •

*"What do you mean you're out of gas?"*

• •

the master bedroom, in which Dr. Jelinek had been found after taking the pills, because Adina said she would rather sleep in the attic than in *that* room. The Jelineks' things were still in the house—their light-blue Danish vases, the Belgian glasses that Dr. Jelinek's wife had picked up in Brussels, the embroidered tablecloths from Lyon, and the silver lighter from Egypt, where the Jelineks had gone on their twentieth wedding anniversary. Adina liked the furniture and the paintings and tapestries, but she wasn't happy in the house. She said it was like living in someone else's place without paying the rent. Adina said the strangest things, and sometimes Benda worried when she talked in front of the servants.

BENDA went back to his desk and pushed a button. The door was opened so quickly that he knew Jarolim, his private secretary, had been waiting just outside the door. For a moment, Benda wondered whether Jarolim could have guessed his thoughts; then he discarded the preposterous idea. "I'm getting almost as bad as Kratky," he said to himself.

"Good morning, Comrade," said the secretary coldly and correctly, and put the mail in a neat pile in front of Benda. Jarolim was a short man with steel-rimmed glasses and steely teeth; he was proud of the teeth, because they had been fitted by a dentist in Moscow. Jarolim's quick glance took in Benda's face but pointedly ignored the newspaper on the desk, thereby indicating that he had already read the editorial. Benda realized that he knew very little about his private secretary, aside from the man's political record. Who were his friends? Where did he go in the evening? Whom did he know at the Ministry? Was he spending his nights writing reports for the secret police? Was he trying to get Benda's job?

"At eleven-thirty, the Rumanian delegation is expected," Jarolim said, consulting a pad. "Vondráček called from Pilsen. His report will be in a day late. They had another breakdown at the mill."

"Did you read the paper?" Benda asked, looking straight at Jarolim.

"I read all the papers, Comrade," said Jarolim. "Every day."

It was the sort of evasive answer that Benda would have given if he had still been Dr. Jelinek's private secretary. He remembered the day when *Rudé Pravo* had attacked Dr. Jelinek, because his political record made him "unfit to run the country's biggest steel concern." That day, Benda had been standing where Jarolim now stood, and he had rather enjoyed fancying himself in the role of public prosecutor. The State v. Dr. Jelinek, "a reactionary and old-time foe of a planned economy." You couldn't leave such a man in charge of a big concern; you might as well turn the factories over to the Western cartels. A few days later, Benda had been secretly called to the Ministry. They had asked him all about Dr. Jelinek—his evenings, his telephone calls, his friends. Had Dr. Jelinek given parties at his villa? What had he done on his business trips to Paris and Luxembourg? Had he treated his secretary and chauffeur in a "capitalistic, arrogant" way? Knowing Dr. Jelinek as Benda knew him, it hadn't been difficult to answer their questions. It wasn't his, Benda's, fault that Dr. Jelinek had kept up a private correspondence with some of his friends in the Western countries even

after 1948, when he should have known better.

Benda leaned back in his chair and faced Jarolim, and the issue. "I suppose you've read the editorial," he said, pointing to the paper. It seemed to him that he was almost apologizing, as if he were now the defendant and Jarolim were the public prosecutor. The State v. Benda, "incompetent manager."

Jarolim nodded and said nothing.

"We'll have a production meeting at three o'clock," Benda said. "Notify all department heads and their assistants." He'd said, "We'll have," not "I will have." After thinking all those years in terms of "we," it was difficult to get used to the "I."

The secretary seemed to hesitate. "Comrade Brouk won't be here," he said. "He was called to the Ministry this morning. He said he might be gone all day long."

Brouk was assistant general manager and head of the export department. He had joined the Party only late in 1947, and he'd once been a member of Dr. Beneš' National Socialist Party. He was one of the three or four old-time executives who had not been removed, because it had seemed impossible to carry on without them, even though it was always said that personalities didn't count. He had been with the firm for twenty-four years and had built up its vast export organization, which had become the most important department since, in the words of the Prime Minister, export had become "a matter of economic survival."

"No one told me that Brouk was going there," Benda said sharply. He was sorry as soon as he'd said it, but it was too late.

"He just phoned," the secretary said. "It must have been a matter of urgency. They asked him to come over directly from his home."

"A matter of urgency," Benda repeated to himself, and his thoughts went back to the editorial. He wondered what Brouk was telling them about him at the Ministry right now, this very minute. And once again, as he'd done ever since he saw the title of the editorial, he wondered whether they had any doubts as to his political reliability. Suppose they found out that the chauffeur called him "Mr. General Manager." Could they object to his giving a birthday party for Adina and reserving the box at the National Theatre? They couldn't possibly know that in the middle of the opera his thoughts had wandered off and he had found himself wishing wistfully that he could be a file clerk again, sitting with Adina high up in the gallery. They used to sit there hand in hand, like lovers. Looking back at those days again now, Benda wondered what possible reason he could have had then to feel unhappy and bitter. Now it was different. They had no children, and Adina was lonely in the big house when he was away. If anything should happen to him, Adina would be unbearably lonely. He thought briefly of Dr. Jelinek's widow and how lonely she must be now in the tiny, cold room in the suburban tenement house where she had been moved after the death of her husband. Of late, Adina had been so lonely that she'd cried when he had to leave on his short business trips to Warsaw and to Zurich. He wondered whether there was anything about his trips that could have cast suspicion on him. Certainly not the Warsaw trip, because the Poles hadn't left him alone for a minute. But the Swiss trip was different. He had gone there alone, and stayed six days, and if they wanted to make a case of that . . .

Jarolim cleared his throat. "Anything else, Comrade?"

"No," Benda said. He waited until the secretary had closed the door, and then he reached for the phone.

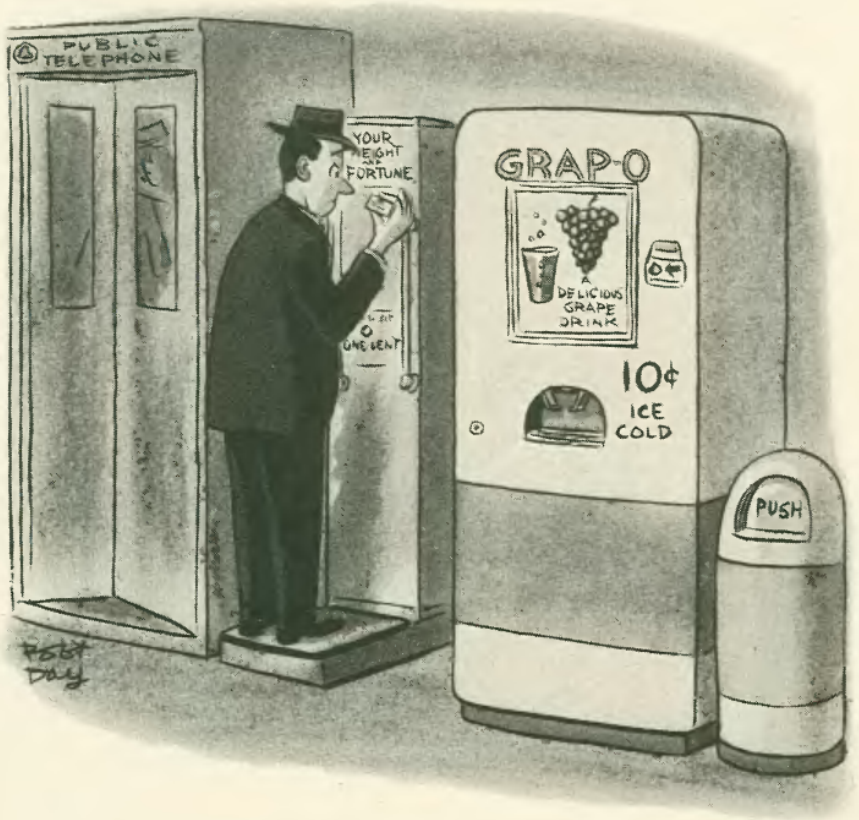
"Yes?" said the operator. There was a click in the wire. Or he thought he'd heard a click. He wasn't quite sure.

"Never mind," Benda said, and put down the receiver. Maybe he could walk across the street and call Adina from the booth. He got up and looked out the window. The group of workers were still standing in front of the booth, and Hampl, the janitor, was walking up and down past it, his crippled hand behind his back.

Benda walked back to his desk and sat down. Mechanically, he straightened the pencils, tore off the uppermost page of the desk calendar, with that day's date, and tossed it off into the wastebasket, as he had always done at the end of the day. The mail was still lying there unread, but there was no need to read it now. As he pushed the pile of letters aside, Benda noticed, with almost clinical detachment, that his hand was shaking. He hoped they would come soon.

—Joseph Wechsberg

•




*". . . and you are about to enjoy a cool, delightful drink of refreshing Grap-O."*

Can you imagine taking a train from New York to California with seven young children, all of whom have whooping cough? This is but one episode in a genuinely funny book.—*Hollywood Reporter.*

It was but one episode in the life of the other passengers on that train, too.