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SHORTGRASS

Outside my hotel, the mayhem of New York City rages. People of every breed and description are racing to end their workday. Traffic fender to fender, horn honking, a parade of window shouting profanity. The stress of it all has driven me back to my room.

On the way from the air terminal, pedestrians were easy to study. Males and females alike wear elevated shoes. Like tadpoles in a muddy water trough, these folks are trying to reach clean air. High heels and thick soles lift them a few inches above the worst politician.

At a stop light, I saw a man laying unconscious off the edge of the sidewalk. People were standing in a huddle close to the body. You have heard of the indifference of the big city. My appraisal of this situation was that they were frightened — extremely frightened.

In the lobby of the hotel, a chandeliered splendor remains from the early 1900s. My host had left me there to ready the morning paper. For company, I had a big African looking hombra dressed in a white suit. My boots and hat were back at home. I had on a suit and a motoring cap that my Uncle Goat Whiskers left me.

The newspaper was uninteresting, so I turned to the big fellow. He said: “Picture on the wall is Queen Victoria. Are you English?”

I told him no I was middle of the road admirer of all humanity. I wasn't going to have this foreigner thinking that I was British. Those boys, you know, put a severe scald on a lot of colonies. It wouldn't have take much more than a sash and sword to turn the big fellow into a replica of the generals I'd seen in desert movies that featured plenty of trouble for colonizers. I could have said that I was from Texas, but I'd read in the spring that a shah had been sold a big string of feeder cattle. I didn't want to chance it being his majesty on the way back from the disappointment of a feedyard episode.

When I reviewed the visit to my guide, he said to never talk to strangers up here. He should have said to never talk. Everybody up here is a stranger.

The old buildings and windows have worn out to the point that the glass won't give off a reflection. Play grounds are about the size of the driveways around our hamburger stands. People sit on the stairways. In some neighborhoods, old women sweep the sidewalks clean. Human decency, I'm sure, is challenged, yet it does exist.

Subway riders are numbered by body contact. They are crowded worse than sheep on a truck. Underground transportation is necessary. Without the transit system, they'd have to stay home. Nevertheless, the subway is the worse place I've been. Air doesn't circulate; the cars lurch and buck so bad that the eardrums push against their walls. Cab rides cost fierce sums of money. However, the above ground trip does offer a chance to watch the crowds, if not the chance to suffer the crowds.

City councilmen and the Mayor of New York are having emergency sessions to raise money to run the city. Schoolteachers and policemen are going to be reduced in numbers. Crime and illiteracy are major problems. The Dutch are sure lucky that they let their \$24 tax base go in this outfit.

I've been following instructions closely. The big African had a broiled ribeye at lunch in the coffee shop. I could have shared one if I hadn't been a coward.