they're not even married, much less fifty! We can't have *hus*bands?")

* * *

Departures. Our houseguests (reunion couples bunked in with us instead of fighting the system like the general in the dorm) seem melancholy, and there's cause. At breakfast we talk about a Cape weekend soon, six of us, eight?—but what are the probabilities? We're feeling, I think, the accidental quality of connection. Randy and Merry . . . Robert and Janice . . . Our children wouldn't recognize each other in a crowd. We were close once, our lives substantial to each other, and then accident took over, flung us arbitrarily into measureless separations or else, astonishingly, into apartments next door to each other, and even the proximities vaguely lacked substance.

Also, my dream. I'd had a dream, coming, no doubt, from Janice's wrinkle story. In my dream they were showing slides of the class in a wide white room, our group together at a table, and the light dimmed and brightened—Office? Day? Kodachromes of us on the boathouse deck, on porches, anywhere . . . pictures of Rally Days, Mountain Days, earlier reunions. There went my older daughter marching as Class Baby. When the light brightened with a new slide our table held only strangers; when the light went down the aged faces disappeared and everyone sitting nearby was fresh and new as in youth in the half-dark, no more wear, ruin, disappointment, no lost husbands or wives, no defeats or wounds. We were bound tight in recollected joy.

"It was such fun." "I was so glad to see Jean." "But now really, let's not forget the Cape. Really." "August." "August." "We're counting on it."

Really.

Two clowns

Lou Jacobs, a playfully gruff, strong-shouldered man in his seventies, is premier clown with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's circus, which just finished a run at Hartford, Connecticut, Troy, New York, other points northeast. (His is the clown's face on circus billboards; his favorite costume is a multi-layered red plaid wool suit that looks as though it would have fit Moby Dick; among his key props is a motorized bathtub.) A circus man for half a century, Lou and his wife, a former trapeze artist, have reared a circus family (two daughters are well launched as aerialists) and appear to have in mind an extended circus future for themselves. The other night we spent an hour with the family backstage before the show, talking circus politics, watching some recent graduates of the Ringling Bros. Clown College (Sarasota, Florida) practicing tumbling and juggling, inspecting tigers, and being introduced to two rather oddly arranged white dogs, understudies to the venerable Knucklehead, premier circus dog.

Who Knucklehead?

She's a cuddly, equable white mutt that circus buffs may remember in various roles as Pink Elephant, Flying Lion, and Rabbit. (In this last number she is seen as a hunting dog, companion to Lou Jacobs, sportsman, as he goes forth to bag supper with rifle: subsequently she becomes beast of prey, a white rabbit who rolls over persuasively stone-dead when the hunter takes aim and fires.) As Lou noted with quizzical satisfaction, introducing us to this doggy star, Knucklehead has trod the tanbark with him for a decade; the presence of the two canine understudies reflects not only a sense of her fragility but a prejudice of her master's against premature retirement.

A break for circus audiences, this prejudice. As always, the B & B had some splendid turns. A high-wire duo from Colombia was dazzling, and the animal man brought off a dancing extravaganza, with horses, Bengal tigers, and elephants, that looked flawless to me. But missed or rocky pyramids marred some gymnast acts, and the groups appeared tired (the accountants dictate two and three performances a day during a run of this sort). And the Bicentennial production numbers—Paul Revere, ringmaster-tenors, lady aerialists hanging by their teeth from the clappers of Liberty Bells, God Bless America—stank. In a word, Knucklehead, a dog with considerable purity of style, was necessary. Our party savored her delicate figure eights in and out between her master's heedless, floppy-shod feet, as well as her effortless ascents from the ground into the crook of his arm, borne aloft at his hearty chuckling summons as though by love, not springy limbs.

I was also taken with a new young clown with an original, sharply contrasting manner—a tall, pin-thin, sinuous, long-fingered creature whose person blended kindness and hauteur. Nothing oafish or gemütlich, no hoarse shouts at the kids in the front rows; this clown's outfits were as mod-tight and sleek as Lou Jacobs' are baggy and blown; elegance is clearly the new clown thing. In ceaseless, undulant motion round the ring, welcoming and bidding farewell to performers with extraordinary, silken élan, pointing, bowing, seamlessly courteous, patient, sacramental, never still, never hurried, he continuously invited your eyes away from himself toward some marvel that, after a minute, you realized was far less engrossing than his own fluid grace. We learned later that the performer's name is Richard Mann, and that he's "very intelligent," married, and owns an Afghan. When he walks his dog, Dolly Jacobs (Lou's younger daughter) added, his hair "streams out behind him and he's a striking sight." Not your traditional item, to repeat; not yesteryear's clown, but piquant nevertheless.

We were almost the last out of the arena, crowds gone, streets empty, and by luck (no planning) we happened onto the famous great sight, huge shadowy bulks swaying forth from the mouth of the arena runway up onto the superhighway—mysterious, breathtaking. Leaving the sleeping city, the elephant procession reorganized the urban gray moonlight into something inexpressibly rich and strange.

The way you slide

Turtle Diary (Random House, $7.95) by Russell Hoban is a novel about a successful attempt by an unmarried couple, he a bookstore clerk, she an author of children's books, to kidnap some green turtles who have overgrown their quarters in a London aquarium, transport them to the Cornwall coast, and liberate them into the sea. The pace and talk are rapid, the people are quirky-real, and fine imaginings of long turtle journeys abound:

> There are green turtles whose feeding grounds are along the coast of Brazil, and they swim 1,400 miles to breed and lay their eggs on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, half way to Africa. Ascension Island is only five miles long. Nobody knows how they find it. . . . I think of the turtles swimming steadily against the current all the way to Ascension. I think of them swimming through all that golden-green water over the dark, over the chill of the deeps and the jaws of the dark. And I think of

the sun over the water, the sun through the water, the eye holding the sun, being held by it with no thought and only the rhythm of the going, the steady wing-strokes of the flippers in the water . . . swimming, swimming, the eye held by the sun. . . .

I read the tale hand running, impressed to the end with the author's wit and invention.

But I can't pretend that I owe this pleasure to my alertness to unknown new fictional talents. Russell Hoban has been well known for years as an author not of novels for grown-ups but of admirable children's books, a series about a young badger named Frances, and an especially memorable character study of a runaway beaver called *Charlie the Tramp.*

These books are unique, first, because the adults in their pages are usually humorous, precise of speech, and understandingly conversant with general life, and second, because the author confronts—not unfancifully but without kinky secret garden stuff—problems with which ordinary parents and children have to cope. (The problems include reluctance to accept one's lot, too many sweets, disloyal friends, non-permissive grandparents, etc.) The lessons taught to Frances—for example, that a child's best friend may cheat her—are widely applicable, and learning them under Russell Hoban's tutelage entails no sacrifice of, say, one's right to pay back a dirty deed in kind. This writer's world is dense with small jokes and large appreciations, not alone with moral realities. How remarkable the sound of trickling that teases Charlie the runaway beaver at midnight, and gives him back his beaver self! How touching the moment when Charlie's father looks at his truant son's first serious nighttime labor and says, "Any tramp that can make a pond like that is going to be some beaver one of these days."

I may actually have shouted aloud in glee—it was ten years ago or more in the rear of Scribners Fifth Avenue shop—on first reading *Bread and Jam for Frances.* The book is partly about Frances' coolness toward eggs, and opens with a fine anti-apostrophe to this food:

> I do not like the way you slide,
> I do not like your soft inside,
> I do not like you lots of ways,
> And I could do for many days
> Without eggs.

Unfair to continue. Looking up the Frances books just now, I went upstairs through the sewing room to locked doors—a closed-up room and bath. Chilly inside, even with summer sun in the window. The early Hoban oeuvre was high on a closet shelf, hard by Bemelmans, Mixed Up Twins, Thidwick, White's web, that lot. Turning pages, remembering, pleased anew by the closing lines wherein Frances advances from bread and jam to Good Food, I came face to face with my own wayward wishfulness. I saw, that is, the perversity of asking a writer for more children's books when all the children to whom you might read them have flown. Better to say (as Russell Hoban said to himself?), Grow up, remember your pleasures, move along.

Two in one

In Raissa life isn't happy. People nag their kids and fight with each other, says Italo Calvino, describing the place in *Invisible Cities,* his most recent (1974) work of fiction. Work often goes poorly and dishes are broken and there's a general grim haze. Even so, the writer adds, the place is full of contradiction. Showing us how this can be, he constructs an extremely beautiful sentence which, for no reason I can name, describes the world exactly as it appears after a reunion, a circus performance, or the reading of a forgotten picture book of a daughter more or less gone for good. The sentence is meant to be read gaily, viz:

> . . . yet . . . at every moment there is a child in a window who laughs seeing a dog that has jumped on a shed to bite into a piece of polenta dropped by a stonemason who has shouted from the top of the scaffolding, 'Darling, let me dip into it,' to a young serving-maid who holds up a dish of ragout under the pergola, happy to serve it to the umbrella-maker who is celebrating a successful transaction, a white lace parasol bought to display at the races by a great lady in love with an officer who has smiled at her taking the last jump, happy man, and still happier his horse, flying over the obstacles, seeing a francolin flying in the sky, happy bird freed from its cage by a painter happy at having painted it feather by feather, speckled with red and yellow in the illumination of that page in the volume where the philosopher says: 'Also in Raissa, city of sadness, there runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again between moving points as it draws new and rapid patterns so that at every second the unhappy city contains a happy city unaware of its own existence.'

SHORT REVIEWS

THE EDUCATION OF A PUBLIC MAN: My Life and Politics
by Hubert H. Humphrey
Doubleday, $12.50

America's longest-distance also-ran set out to tell his story as it was. As with practically everything else he ever attempted, he succeeded—almost. At its best, the Minnesota senator and former Vice President's memoir reflects the man's virtues: good humor, good nature, good works. But too often it is the willing instrument of the author's renowned gift of gab. In his cheery resilience, he fails to probe very deeply into just how it was that, time and time again, his stars were crossed. Of his nomination at the bloody Chicago convention in 1968: "Should I have kicked [Mayor Richard] Daley beyond what I believed? Trying to be fair, I looked weak." He pulls his punches in dealing with old adversaries such as Eugene McCarthy and various Kennedys, but has enlivened the record of campaigns past with an unbuttoned account of the late Richard Cardinal Cushing's version of how JFK beat HHH in the 1960 West Virginia primary:

> "I keep reading these books by the young men around Jack Kennedy and how they claim credit for electing him. . . . You-bert, I believe you should know that the decisions on West Virginia were made here, in [my] library. Joe Kennedy and I sat and discussed the strategy of that campaign in this room. We decided which of the Protestant ministers would receive a contribution for their church."

Humphrey's story is bittersweet. The moral ought to be that a fighting faith and honorable ambition are attributes that enable a decent man to confront the challenges of the political battlefield