

The author of *The Women* and *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*, often accused of betraying her sex and her class with a bitter pen, tells how it feels.

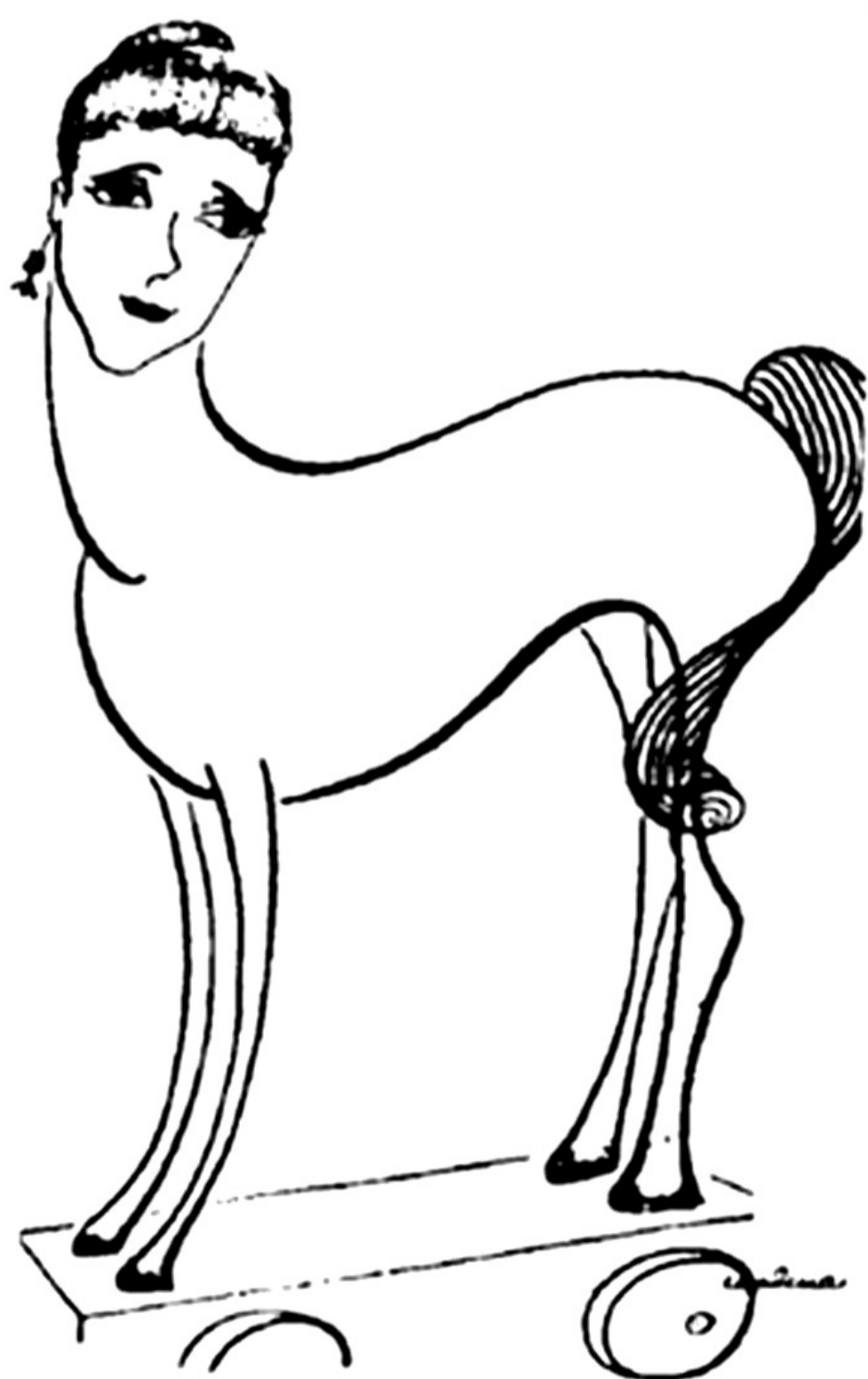
Confessions

OF A TROJAN HORSE
By Clare Booth

When the Editor of STAGE rang me out of bed at the crack of dawn one afternoon last week, and asked me to do a piece for her perfectly lovely magazine. I was terribly pleased (naturally). But pleasure gave way at once to the most fearful funk. If only she had wanted an interview, that would have been *but* divine. I could have chatted on and on about myself and my many, many interests, and we might even have gone a little into what I always laughingly refer to as "my work." And she could have jotted down the best bits, and after polishing them up so they'd look well in print, organized the whole drooling mess into a *really* adorable article.

But she was dreadfully adamant that I had to do the thing under my *own* name, on the debatable theory that I was not an actress, but a playwright. I mean, I *think* that's debatable, because you're just not *really* a playwright until you've written one or two very *distinguished* flops. . . . Well, I dumped the Persian cats off my lap, slunk out of bed, slithered into a little leopard-skin bed-jacket, and sat down at my dressing-table, to file my nails, and consider the problem.

Frankly, I was in a spot. To begin with, Georgie Guggenheim was out of town, so he couldn't help me with it. And I'd given my secretary a day off (which she *did* richly deserve after slaving day and night six solid months compiling a glossary of Southern expressions for me to choose from in doing **KISS THE BOYS GOODBYE**). That meant I had to type it *myself*. And typing plays absolute *havoc* with my nails, which are now so thrillingly long and sharp it's a grave question whether I won't some day make a careless gesture and cut my own throat. Moreover, I felt just *too* dreadful, having contracted a little set of horrid sniffles and one of those small nasty hacking coughs which one is so likely to get in badly ventilated theatres if one insists (as I *do*) on going to an occasional rehearsal. I mean, I would go *all* the time, if I could *only* bring my *friends*, but producers just *hate* to have you bring Mr. and Mrs. Willie Stewart and Jerry Zerbe and Lucius Beebe *before* the



opening night. Above all, now that the play is *really* on Broadway (isn't it divine—Elsa Maxwell makes *everybody* go) I longed to return to my social life. Oh, it's all very well to be blasé and casual about it, but, *seriously*, one's social life does get a bit discombobulated by extracurricular activities like writing plays, or even breeding blue-ribbon Dachs-hunds. I mean, if you get sort of *sucked* into the theatre, you just can't plan your evenings *ahead*, so that there are all sorts of exciting occasions, like Charity Previews, you're *bound* to miss. Because, actually, if you're going to *do* a play, you've got to schedule six weeks right out of your life! And how curiously *démodé* one's wardrobe becomes after six weeks of almost *absolute* neglect! One's hair loses that well-groomed! look, and even one's nail polish gets chipped.

No . . . I *couldn't* write a piece . . . And yet . . . and yet . . . after a little honest self-introspection in my mirror, I saw *clearly* all these were just excuses. The truth was, I couldn't *think up* a good idea for a piece. The only ideas I seemed to have were perfectly *innocuous*! Sort of 'whither away the theatre' and the 'social implications of the current drama,' and ghastly *gummy* topics like that. (It really isn't my fault . . . the Theatre just *does* contaminate one with gruesome, wishy-washy ideas like that.) And I *intuitively* felt that that sort of *deep* Polly-anna stuff is not my forte. Anyway, that's what I told the Editor (or *vice versa*). She said I could do an autobiographical piece. An autobiographical piece *might* throw some light on what my *plays* were driving at! Heavens, as if *any* piece weren't autobiographical! How can one *help* betraying what one *is* in *everything* one writes, except perhaps a check. (No, perhaps after all, one's check-book is one's *real* autobiography . . . tho' I know that remark is *cynical*, not to say a little *pink*.) Oh, how does anyone get to be what he (or she) is? He (or she) just wakes up one morning to find out that he (or she) has become what I like to think is a product of what I like to call "creative evolution," isn't it? I mean, *anybody*, even I, is like the *flower* in the crannied wall. You see, at heart, I'm frightfully philosophical . . . I learned to be philosophical reading philosophy in a fashionable finishing school on Columbus Avenue, while the rest of the girls played basketball or giggled in corners about boys. How the girls laughed at me then! "Poo," they used to say, "Clare and her Elbert Hubbard!" And *anyway* I'm saving up all that divine autobiographical junk for a perfectly fascinating book of memoirs which I intend to dash off when I get too bored writing plays. I told the Editor so. She seemed a little exasperated and I don't blame her, because that practically did leave us without any piece. So that's when she batted up the suggestion which gives the title to this.

She said it would be so NICE if I did a thingumadiddie on "How it feels to be a Trojan Horse." For a moment my carefully arched eyebrows knit in perplexity . . . It *was* stupid of me, but I didn't get it. Then she *explained* the classical reference. The point was, hadn't I just been sort of *lugged* into what people who don't understand it laughingly refer to as *Society*, by *Society* itself? And hadn't I, once within

those sacrosanct walls, opened up with a positively *murderous* barrage on my poor unsuspecting hosts? Well! I just smiled *wryly*. Because what she did *actually* mean was, did I mind awfully being branded as a traitor to my *class*? I got a bit huffy (inside) for a split second. I mean, it's awful to think you're a sort of Aaron Burr in people's flesh! And no lady, after she's thirty, really *likes* to be called even a *Trojan Horse* . . . It was kind of a *mean* accusation, and a mean accusation *always* comes to me as a terrible shock! But wasn't the idea *cute*? After all, I had no ideas of my own, so I said, 'Right-Oh! I'll have a whack at it.' Also (I told myself) if one is *really* to have a fling at a *career*, *mustn't* one be prepared to go into one's *private* life a teeny bit?

So here I sit, wracking my poor brains to answer the question, truthfully, sincerely, and very, very simply . . . Straight, in fact, from The Trojan Horse's Mouth. If any bitterness creeps in, you really must forgive it. I'm at bottom a fearfully sentimental sort of person, and it *did* hurt me way, way *down* to be told I'm looked upon as a traitor to all the *dear* people—those nymphomaniacs, dipsomaniacs, egomaniacs, and schizophrenic lice—I've so long felt were part of my ineluctable class structure. But if that's the way they *do* feel, it's *awful*, but one just has to face things, doesn't one? I learned facing things in the depression, when I had to give up my chauffeur for three months. Although I was going to fire him *anyway*. He was a perfectly revolting fellow who *absolutely* refused to wait outside a night-club after 4 A. M.—as if he weren't the one to *know* how *hard* it is to get a taxi on a blizzardy winter night!

Now, having thought about it very *hard* for the past three minutes, I suppose I ought to admit it's *awful* to be a Trojan Horse. But it really is not. Oh, I know that sounds almost *callous*, but I do think intellectual integrity's terribly important (particularly in writing magazine and newspaper articles) so I've *got* to tell the truth. It's so *pleasant* to have lots of people really notice one, and they just *do* seem to notice anything as astonishing as a Trojan Horse.

Why before that positively *climactic* afternoon when my bridge party petered out (because while we waited and waited for our fourth she was being run over by a beer truck—my dear, a *beer* truck!) and I found myself with absolutely nothing to occupy my mind, and decided, with what I sometimes tell myself now was almost a flash of *genius*, that writing plays was a heavenly way to fill in footling intellectual gaps—well, before that, *nobody* seemed to notice me very much. I mean, I wasn't *really* a glamour-girl heiress . . . I didn't even endorse cigarette or soap ads—never having been asked. Why, I didn't even photograph well enough to pose for the fashion magazines . . . that is, I didn't before I was well on in my thirties and wrote a play . . . And how I *longed* to be noticed. Let's face it: Park Avenues are *such* exhibitionists, compared to Broadwayites, or Hollywoodites, or even all those other people who work and live so obscurely in Washington.

Of course, writing plays wasn't *exactly* a flash of genius. I mean, I am *shrewd* in spots. And I'd remarked quite often that all

the *best* seats at openings, at El Morocco and even the *swankiest* parties Elsa and Condé give are generally for people connected with The Arts! But inspiration or calculation, it was frightfully lucky I hit on writing plays, wasn't it? And it was so wonderfully fortunate that quite a lot of people I'd met socially on Park Avenue, at very exclusive parties, people like cowboys, cooks, manicurists, nurses, hat-check girls, fitters, ex-chorines, declassée countesses, Westport intellectuals, Hollywood producers, Southern girls, and radical columnists, gave me such lovely material to write about. I mean, I'm so *indebted* to them, it just pains me something fierce if all these Social Registerites feel pouty about it. But what *would* I have written about, if not the Social Register, I ask. After all, *think* of my life, a life of seclusion and grace and luxury, in which one is *never* exposed to the world of brutal fact, of bitterness, of moral or intellectual strife—above *all*, intellectual strife. Of course, one just can't help, no matter *how* one tries, reading a little here and there about that great *outside* world, the world of War, and Fascism, and Socialized Medicine, and the C.L.O. and the A.I.F. and the increasing insanity-rate, and HOUSING, and Mr. Corcoran and Mr. Cohen, and other absolutely tear-making topics. But I just haven't had much *dynamic* contact with all that. Though, when I do make out my income-tax checks, I *dimly* suspect that the size of them *does* bear *some* relation to these problems. . . . I suppose I could inform myself, but then you must realize that with all my feverish social and personal activities there is very little time to get *personal* experience of what I like to call 'humanity' in contrast to the people I write about. Alas, one hardly has time to read one's breakfast mail and press clippings, much less those clarifying *earthy* editorials in the *Daily News*, before lo! it is time for lunch at the Colony and one's fittings at Carnegie's and Bergdorf's! But sociological problems *are* divinely fascinating. So long as one likes to putter about with a typewriter, it would be so satisfactory (at least to one's *own* ego) to write down all the marvelous *answers* that pop into one's head about them, the way the columnists do, three times a week. But do you *really* think it matters about *my* not being able to do it? After all, everybody else, who's so *much* better equipped, is *trying* to do it.

I mean, I *do* believe that the Theatre is in the hands of the Left Wingers! (Georgie Guggenheim says only *spiritually* because Mr. Max Gordon, Sam Harris, Brock Pemberton, and John Golden *do* still have a small Right Wing stake in it.) . . .? But oh, *shouldn't* the Theatre be *anyway* mildly Left? I mean, *has* the Theatre any vitality if it does not reflect the moods and the emotions of Our Times? I always say, a little *modest* revolution in our time, O Lord, is the *prayer* in *all* our hearts! I do think in this 'transition period' of our 'national economic life' that a play—even a musical—without a *message* is just as inappropriate and *gauche* as a silk hat on a picket line. Why it's *almost* an insult to the *Weltanschauung* of Our Times when a modern play doesn't make a *detent* Social Protest! Why, it's just as obvious as the nose on Elmer Rice's face that *modern* plays should be about MAN and full of MESSAGES. I mean, plays like *To Quito and Back*, *American Dream*, *Prelude to Exile*,

Siege, The Cradle Will Rock, Ten Million Ghosts, Between Two Worlds, We the People, Johnny Johnson, The Ghost of Yankee Doodle, Paths of Glory, End of Summer, Rain From Heaven, Paradise Lost, Marching Song, First Mortgage, Searching for the Sun, Steel, They Shall Not Die, Days to Come and Men Must Fight are positive contributions to the *Living Theatre*.

But Georgie Guggenheim says the trouble with the theatre seems to be that the *public* is positively unregenerate. Sometimes I grow perfectly *livid* about it . . . I mean, I do think it's disgraceful when people with \$5.00 in their pockets for a pair of theatre tickets get frightfully uppity about patronizing plays in which people who are disgusting enough to have \$5.00 in their pockets are shown up. . . . But Georgie Guggenheim says that proletarian plays (unless you make them *terribly* amusing!) are for some perfectly cockeyed reason rarely marketable except at proletarian prices. . . . He says if wonderful plays like these, with which everybody agrees in *substance*, are to succeed, the system you've got to destroy first is the one that makes you *pay* for a ticket. . . .

He says it's the public which *really* discourages the straight-thinking, message-bearing playwrights. That and one other *teeny* thing. . . . It's so frightfully difficult to write more than *one* Formal Social-Protest Play. I mean, when you've *said* you're *against* Social Injustice, well then you've actually gone on record about it! And it's so tiresome to say it all over again, just with a different set of *puppets*—tiresome, and tricky, too, because very often the thing you go on record about one year isn't *fashionable* to protest against the next. Georgie Guggenheim says, take WAR. Until a year ago, it was just too inspiring to hear so many playwrights saying 'WAR' was the *greatest* tragedy, and the munition manufacturers were positively soulless maniacs. But now it seems that Fascism is a Fate worse than DEATH—and why didn't all those *blind* pacifists avail themselves of the wonderful services of those munition manufacturers? Georgie Guggenheim says when you write about MAN, the answers *do* slosh about quite a lot. Maybe it is just safer, and—from a Box Office point of view—a touch more artistic, to write about *men* and *women*. But then it's so *hard* to write about *men* and *women* in a *modern* play if you still have to plump in *messages* the way you do truffles in a pudding. . . .

Georgie gets terribly nostalgic when he talks about the old days before Pulitzer Prizes and Critics' Circle Prizes were Popularity Polls, or something you got by collecting soap-box wrappers. When 'The Boys' (as he calls them) *could* write about contemporary men and women. You know, Coquette, Minick, Jarnegan, The Show-Off, Craig's Wife. . . . Anna Christie, Lulu Bett, Dulcy, even Lulu Belle! He says those were the days when you could (if you wanted) *chip* away at the Social System, but you didn't have to go out and hack it to *pieces*. But then, he says, our playwrights are *terribly* resourceful. They've sort of found a way out of this *nasty* dilemma. They write *costume* plays, which is frightfully clever, don't you think? I mean, you can always hide your Social Conscience under a *Bustle*! You can rush to your typewriter, and without any *obligation* to deliver a *message*, write about *dead* people. The de Peysters and

Vanderbilts and Astors of today are positive *bombshells* to handle. . . . It's even difficult to write about a Jewish family in the Bronx without having a lot of people get the feeling you're race conscious, or something. . . . But you can write about the Schermerhorns and Stuyvesants of yesteryear without being *obliged* to rip the stuffings out of them. When you write about dead people you can make them *Individuals*, can't you? Whereas anybody *alive* is really not a *person*, but just one small facet of Collective Society. Dead People have *real* human nature, and I always say, *human nature* is something we like to think everybody has—particularly actors. So I just go *everywhere*, saying "Hurrah for the ghosts!" What *life* they've brought to the Theatre! Victoria Regina, Oscar Wilde, the Dutchmen in *Knickerbocker Holiday* and *High Tor* and Edgar Allan Poe, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Marie Antoinette, Jesse James, Mary Stuart, George Washington, Crown Prince Rudolph, Queen Elizabeth, and a lovely flock of Abe Lincolns, and the sweet *theatrical* ghosts in *The Fabulous Invalid*, and the eternally popular ghost of Hamlet's father! (Why, Eugene O'Neill is writing *eight* historical dramas . . .) Georgie says even Musical Comedy's caught on to it, in *The Boys From Syracuse* and in *Knights of Song*, which is all about Gilbert & Sullivan. He says all the playwrights with brains are doing it, on account that they've discovered a wonderful new thing, too. . . . Dead people not only have human *nature*, but they sometimes have quite a lot of good answers and Messages! But, if you just *don't* want to prowl about in the history books, well there's another, though not quite so clever, way to get away from MAN. You can escape into *The Fourth Dimension*. . . . *Our Town* did that so *sweetly* in the last act. . . . Priestley's tried to twice. . . . Connelly, they say, is going to. Just go chase Death up a tree, or if you are musically *inclined*, marry an angel! Or, better still, stage a Miracle, in Catholic Ireland. (If you're just a poor old producer who can't write or get hold of a script, Georgie says, you should revive the classics.) But *do* be either historical or whimsical!



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