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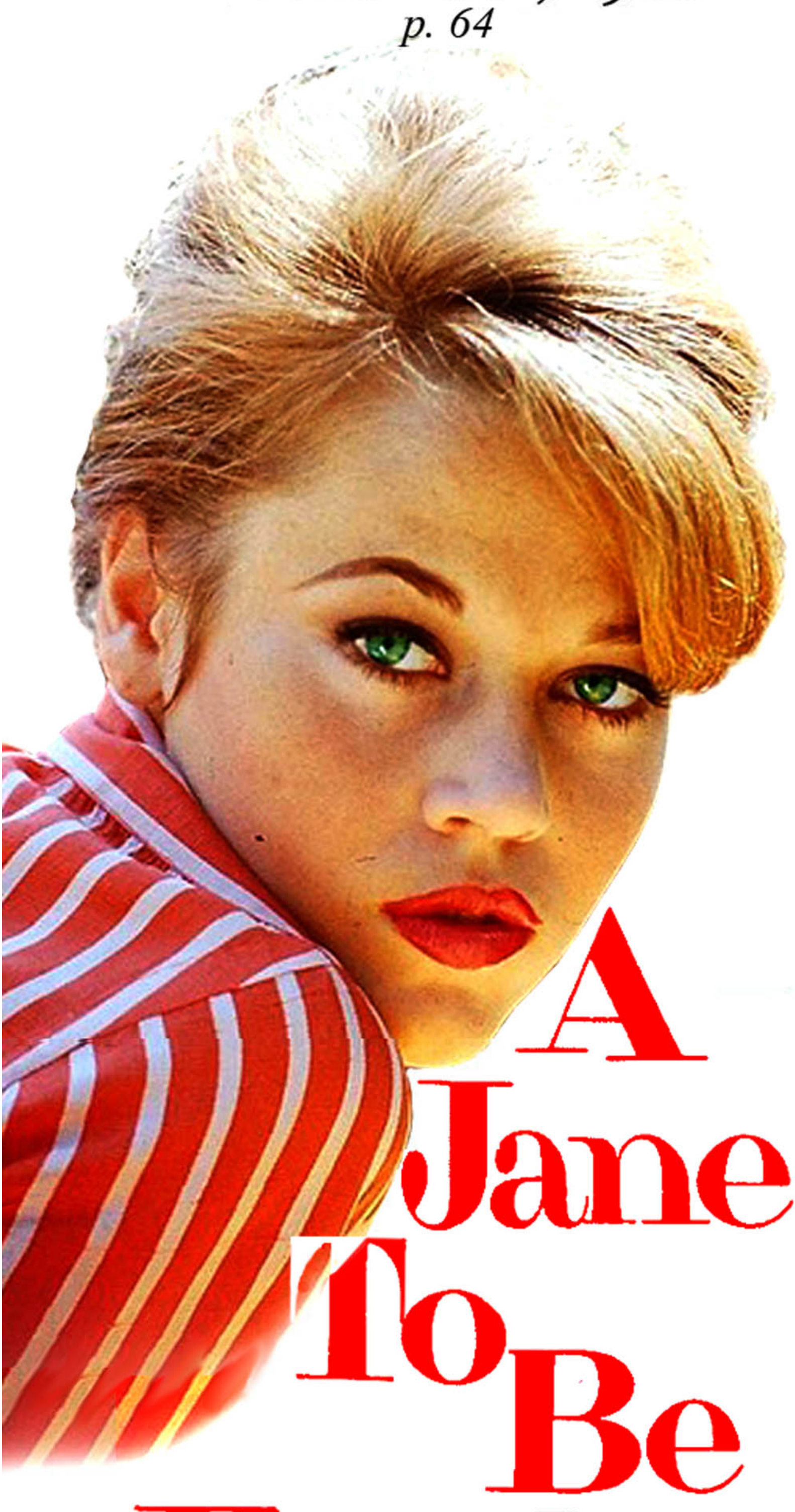

A Jane To Be Fonda

The cheers are only beginning for Henry's star-bright daughter

BY MARTHA WEINMAN

■ SOME MONTHS AGO in a theater in Boston, where the audience can underplay any actor alive, the curtain rose upon a young woman standing center stage with a spotlight shining full in her face. The stage was otherwise black, the house dim, the silence palpable.

Suddenly a voice, several cuts above *sotto voce*, rose from the front row and sliced through the stillness like a scalpel. "My goodness," said the voice, lifted in surprise and sustained in delight, "she's the *image* of her father!"

The expression of the girl onstage never changed. But the thought that crossed her mind was exceedingly grim. "I could," she later said suc-

cinctly, "have spit."

She was Jane Fonda, age 22, daughter of Henry. The play was *There Was a Little Girl,* a debacle which shortly thereafter took unanimous abuse from the critics and closed, as unobtrusively as possible, after 16 performances on Broadway.

In the course of those 16 performances and the earlier ones out of town, however, there were many other front-row voices humming the same refrain of surprise and delight. And if Miss Fonda felt, as she put it, like spitting, it was only because she is, indeed, the image of her father, a fact which gives small comfort to an actress striving for individuality.

Actually, Jane had nothing to worry about on this score. She is no mere celebrity's child, cashing in on the parental face and fame.

It may have seemed so for a while: for almost a year preceding the opening of *Little Girl,* Jane Fonda was given that classic Big Build-Up behind which there lies, depressingly often, no talent whatever. She was "discovered" by more magazine editors, newspaper columnists and show business frontiersmen than anyone since Lana Turner sat on that immortal counter stool in Schwab's drug store. There was much smoke, but no reason to believe that there was any fire.

Until the play opened. Cast in the difficult and highly emotional role of a young girl who is raped by a hoodlum, and then finds herself suspected of having invited the attack, she won the New York Drama Critics' accolade as "most promising young actress of the year" and emerged, triumphantly afire, from the cold gray ashes of the play. Miss Fonda, it appeared—and this probably came as no greater surprise to anyone than to the critics themselves—had been worth the Big Build-Up.

This fact was reaffirmed last April with the release of Joshua Logan's production of *Tall Story,* the Warner Brothers comedy in which Jane made her movie debut.

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As a wide-eyed, sharp-witted college student bent on getting a degree in marriage, she demonstrated that she had grace, sex appeal and—with what is, for a newcomer, astonishing versatility—that she could handle comedy as well as drama.

Although Jane has a contract to make four more pictures with Logan, Hollywood must wait awhile. The stage is her main love. She played in stock last summer, and in late October, she will open on Broadway—along with Shelley Winters and James MacArthur—in Arthur Laurents' new play, *Invitation to a March*. If the play's a hit, movie plans will probably be postponed for the length of the run.

Logan, who is one of Jane's greatest admirers, said recently: "She's not overtly sexy, but terribly, terribly romantic-looking."

As Jane herself has noted, she is not beautiful. "If my face had gone a beat the other way," she once said, "I would be ugly." Her face is too long for beauty, her mouth too large, and her nose, like her father's, is sharp and distinctly uptilted. But the total effect is good. She has luxuriously long brown hair, heavy-lidded blue eyes and an outsized, exquisitely in-

Jane

fectious grin. Her figure—she is 5′7″, weighs 117 pounds—is a softened speciman of the type generally described as "coltish."

YET JANE is incessantly concerned about her weight. She is a chronic reluctant dieter and, on the self-established theory that good blood circulation helps one stay thin, works out with a masseuse every day. ("When we were making *Tall Story*," Joshua Logan recalls, "she was upset that she couldn't lose weight faster. She said she looked like a chipmunk with her cheeks full of nuts. She lost so much weight that the cameraman objected and we had to force-feed her.")

Jane's emotion-charged approach to acting contrasts strikingly with that of her father, who is a master of the low-key school.

"I can be quite a ham," she says. "I don't think Dad could overact if he tried. Certain of my mannerisms are like his—for example, I have a tendency to prolong some words the way he does. But actually we're pretty different. I get a marvelous feeling when I watch him move on the stage. He's so loose and relaxed . . . I think hé moves more beautifully than any man I've ever known. I'm far more tense. I get about two hours' sleep a night when I'm working, and I bite my nails and sometimes my face twitches and everybody thinks I'm going to die.

fully than any man I've ever known. I'm far more tense. I get about two hours' sleep a night when I'm working, and I bite my nails and sometimes my face twitches and everybody thinks I'm going to die.

"Am I neurotic? Well, no, I don't think so. Of course, it's easy to be in this business. What you're trying to do in the theater—put yourself into another character—is what they lock people up for. But I'm probably less neurotic than I'd have been in any other profession. The actor's ego is pretty strong and if it rebels against the drive to be an actor, why, then, you're really in trouble. The important thing is that I love it. I want to do everything—musical comedy, high drama—everything."

Jane does not add what a friend once heard her say: "Someday I hope to do more than my father has." The remark may smack softly of intra-family rivalry, but it is undoubtedly the ultimate expression of her admiration. The admiration is mutual: Fonda, in turn, has said: "This girl is so loaded with talent that it's scary."

THE TWO are close and see each other often. "He is very proud of her," says Timmy Everett, a young actor friend whom Jane dates in New York. "He calls her 'My little lady.' But he has been stern at times, too."

The tag most commonly pinned on Jane during her publicity build-

up was the American Bardot, a label which still clings.

"She does have a sort of Bardot kittenishness," says Susan Stein, a friend from college days at Vassar

Jane

"Everyone's got a special quality and it's important to know what that quality is. Now, I'm no Monroe —there's no point fooling myself on *that* score. And I'm no Geraldine Paige—yet [she cites Miss Paige, the brilliant Broadway star who most recently appeared in Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*, as her favorite actress]. And I'm no beatnik. I feel fortunate in having a bit of everything, and—this sounds awful—I think I have a certain quality of class, and not everyone has that to offer."

Although Jane makes the claim reluctantly, fearful of being misunderstood, that "certain quality" of which she speaks is unmistakable. It is a quality compounded of intelligence, dignity and the faint beginnings of arrogance ("Yes," says Josh Logan, "she is starting to become arrogant now, and I hope she becomes more so; modesty is the one thing that could throw her"), all working together to produce that memorable personality which distinguishes star material from the pretty pin-up.

It is not, however, star material in the purely Hollywood sense. "This girl wants to be an *actress*," says Timmy Everett, "not a glamorous movie queen. She works harder than anyone I've ever met. She makes lists for the things she must do every day, and they run four or five pages long. Singing lessons, dancing lessons, speech lessons, dramatic lessons . . .

"And nothing gets her madder than not accomplishing everything on those lists."

Other friends have suggested that Jane feels compelled to work harder than people who came from the bottom up. Although she has never traded on her father's name—nor did Fonda himself ever push her career—she is well aware of the built-in advantages with which she approached show business. "If I hadn't been his daughter," she says, "it might have taken me a million years just to get through the door."

ACTUALLY, she never tried getting through the door until she was well into her teens. Logan, who is a longtime friend of her father's and

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has known Jane since her birth (although he is not, as has been widely reported, her godfather), recalls that she never played the standard "pretend" games as a child, or expressed any early interest in acting.

Her childhood was spent in Hollywood. The family (she has a brother, Peter, 19, now studying at the University of Omaha; her mother, Frances Seymour Brokaw, died when she was 12) moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1948. "Dad was doing *Mr. Roberts* at the time," Jane recalls. "We figured it would be a long run [a modest anticipation; the show ran for 1158 performances], so we moved East." Her first theatrical experience came when she was 15, and her father remembers it with great pleasure:

"I went to Omaha [his home town] to be guest star in a show we were doing to kick off a building-fund drive for a new theater. Friends suggested we use Jane in a minor role in the play. I didn't want it. I said, 'I can't have the added burden of an amateur onstage.' But they convinced me that it would be a nice touch. I needn't have worried at all—except for myself. My daughter almost stole the show."

Several years later, when Fonda was doing *The Male Animal* in a Cape Cod summer playhouse, Jane again played a supporting role.

Of these experiences Jane says: "When they were over, I decided I was awful. I lost all enthusiasm for acting." She didn't regain it until

she had left Vassar College in 1958, after two years' study ("At Vassar I became aware for the first time how aware others were of the fact that I was Henry Fonda's daughter; but I had too much pride ever to think people liked me because of that"). She then went off to Paris for six months, ostensibly to find out whether she might, perhaps, be a painter ("I found out I wasn't").

Back in New York, she began to work as a high-fashion model. She was having considerable success, enjoying it moderately and still casting about for a career, when she met Lee Strasberg, a director of the famed Actors' Studio in New York Through discussions with Strasberg about acting techniques, Jane's interest in theater was revived, and she began studying with him. "Then," she says, "I began to feel some confidence in myself. For the first time I really got a thrill out of acting."

Soon after this, Logan asked if she would be interested in a screen test. She was. He tested and signed her. The build-up was underway.

Today, Jane's life revolves about her work. In rehearsal for *Invitation to a March* since August, she makes dates, loves partying when she has the time, but demonstrates no impatience for marriage or family ("When it happens, fine"). For the present, at least, her first passion is clearly the business of acting.

Without taking the chic anti-Hollywood stance of many show-business lights who have migrated eastward, Jane, nonetheless, prefers New York to the West Coast ("Out there, it's relaxing; here, it's stimulating. I can't take too much relaxation"). Unlike her father, however, whose only acknowledged method of acting is the Fonda Method, Jane is a disciple of the famous Stanislavsky Method, embraced by the Actors' Studio.

Until rehearsals began for *Invitation*, she spent four days each week at Strasberg's classes, where a standard practice exercise—based on Stanislavsky's teachings—is to act out the characteristics of animals or inanimate objects. Students are

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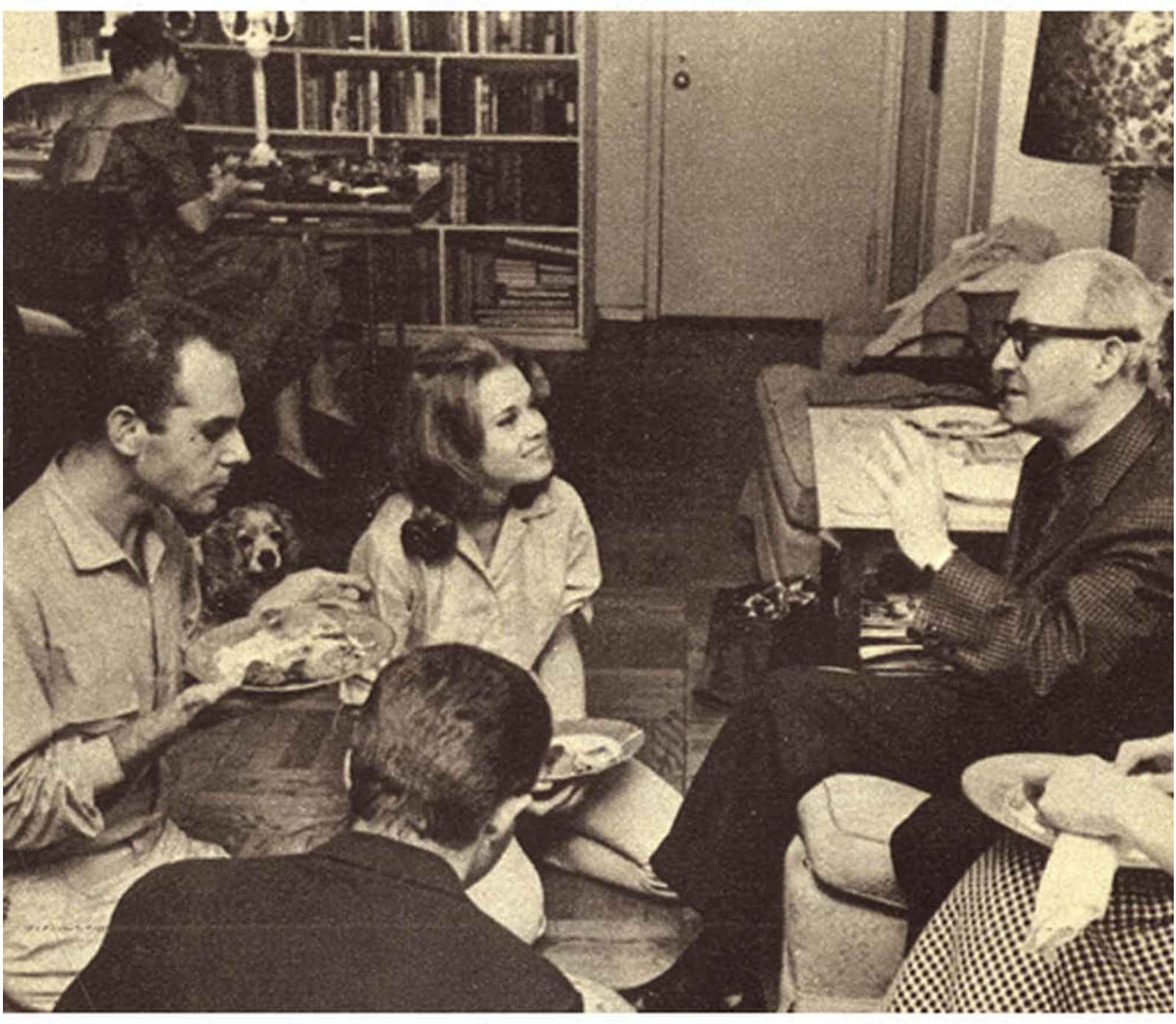
Two views of Jane reflect a pensive mood in dressing room between performances.



After final curtain, a happy Jane relaxes at a New York party. Man at her left is drama coach Lee Strasberg, who heads Actors' Studio.

asked to "be" monkeys or willow trees or melting candles. Jane went to the zoo to study animals for these exercises, and Susan Stein recalls coming into their apartment one night to find her roommate absorbed in her own particular brand of zoological homework.

"She was wandering around on all fours," Miss Stein says, "growling, pacing sideways, crossing her paws to make a turn, in that characteristic way lions have, you know? It gave me quite a start, but I must say she makes an impressive lion.

"She was a marvelous roommate," reports Miss Stein. "We never had an argument. When she felt depressed she'd stick her head out the window and look at Lenox Hill Hospital across the street to convince herself that her own troubles couldn't be that bad. By the time her head came back in, she was in a fine mood."

There was, one may presume, much contemplation of Lenox Hill Hospital when *There Was a Little*

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Girl closed. Jane had worked extremely hard in rehearsals, picked up momentum during the pre-Broadway run and anticipated her New York opening with all the incomparable fervor of a first-timer. The play's failure was a huge disappointment, but one which she now looks back on stoically. "If I had it all to do over again," she says, "I'd jump at the chance. You learn more from the flops than you do from the hits."

Propelled by this philosophy, which has all the virtue of a "Heads-I-win-tails-you-lose" proposition, there is clearly no place for Jane to go but up.

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