

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

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“Success depends on three things: who says it, what he says, how he says it; and of these three things, what he says is the least important.”

John, Viscount Morley of Blackburn - 1917

“ . . . but I thought you were finished with the filming, and what’s Texas got to do with it? You told me you filmed the whole thing in South America.”

“We’ll be done with the filming about thirty minutes before the picture’s finished, and from the way things have been going lately, that’ll be about 1980. So far, most of the filming has been done in South America, but Texas is a lot closer, and the country looks the same, so we’ll go to Texas. Do you mind?”

“Arthur, you’re up to something, I can tell from the way you’re acting. You bastard, you’re going to Mexico to visit the whorehouses; Texas, my eye, it just wouldn’t happen to be Laredo, would it?”

“Joyce, you’re the one that wants to visit the whorehouses, not me, I’ve already been there. We’re going to Laredo and to Del Rio, but we’re not going to visit the whorehouses, not unless you want to go see what they look like.”

“What’s Bill Binnings going to do? I thought you said he didn’t know which end of a camera to put a lens on?”

“That’s all you have to do, Joyce, just make one remark like that in front of Bill, and this will be your last trip.”

“Arthur, I won’t say anything in front of Bill, and I’m getting damned sick and tired of being lectured on the subject; I just wish you’d shut up about it.”

“You’re perfectly free to form any opinions you like, but keep them to yourself. We’re making this trip because of problems with Bill in the first place; he’s supposed to be the star, and I’ve got about three scenes I can use him in, out of about two thousand scenes in the picture.”

“But why? You’ve got a lot of scenes of Bill, I’ve seen them.”

“Joyce, if you’d never heard of Bill, judging entirely from the film you’ve seen, what would you think of him?”

“He looks like he’s scared to death.”

“That’s exactly the point; he was scared, and he looks scared on film. Joyce, most people think you can do any damned thing on film, but you can’t; Bill looks exactly like he really is, and I had to throw out nearly every scene he’s in. So I’ve got to add several sequences to the picture, just to get Bill back in it; Herbert and Raymond Johnson are the real stars, but I can’t cut Bill out entirely.”

“What can you do in Texas, that’ll fit into a South American picture?”

“Joyce, right now, I don’t have the slightest idea, but it really doesn’t matter, any damned thing’ll be better than what we’ve got now. The country around Del Rio looks exactly like the part of Colombia where we shot most of the film, and I’ll think of something for Bill to do when we get there.”

“Arthur, are you serious? You’re just going to Texas to shoot film, and you don’t even know what you plan to film?”

“Joyce, in 1961, in Africa, I shot twelve television shows and a feature film in twelve days, from scratch; no script, no plans, and damned little time, and I’d never even been in that part of Africa before. The feature film was pretty bad, I’ll have to admit, but the television shows turned out fine.”

“Now I know you’re crazy.”

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“Maybe I am, but several people made a lot of money out of that television series anyway. People do what they have to, Joyce, not what they want to, and I’m damned sure no exception; on that trip to Africa, we planned the whole thing for months, we knew exactly what we intended to do, and how to do it, and we had nearly nine weeks to do it in. Then I had an accident, and my arm was paralyzed for seven weeks; so we had two choices, we could blow the whole series, and kiss off several hundred thousand dollars, or we could do twelve shows in twelve days, plus a feature film.

“Originally, when we planned the trip, we intended to use a helicopter, and I had a hundred or more different sequences worked out in great detail, which was a tight schedule even for nine weeks; but when we were seven weeks late getting there, the helicopter was no longer available, and every damned one of the planned sequences required the use of the helicopter. So we had to throw out all the plans and start from scratch.

“We worked twenty hours a day, and slept about two hours a night, and some nights we didn’t sleep at all. We got up at three o’clock in the morning, ate breakfast, loaded all our stuff in the Landrovers, and got started about four o’clock, and we didn’t get back to camp until about eight o’clock at night. Then we had to clean equipment, load film magazines, and make plans for the next day. If we worked fast, we could eat supper at midnight and get to sleep by one o’clock in the morning.

“Normally, when you’re filming outdoors in color, you don’t start shooting until about nine o’clock in the morning, and you quit about three o’clock in the afternoon; because, if you film earlier than that, or later than that, the film comes out red as Hell. So you’ve only got about six hours a day when it’s safe to film in color, but we were filming over twelve hours a day; we started right after dawn and didn’t quit ‘till it was damned near dark. Some of the film was so red that it looked like it was shot on Mars, but there wasn’t anything we could do about it, we had to film anyway, no matter what color it turned out. Besides, at the time, color television was so bad that people just blamed it on their sets, if they had color sets, and it didn’t make any difference in black and white.

“But the feature film was an entirely different matter, the color had to be good for that; so, altogether, we only had about seventy-two filming hours when the color was right for the feature, and you’re damned lucky if you can shoot a feature film in ten times seventy-two hours, especially when you have to write the script as you go along, and with people that can’t act in the first place.

“So, by comparison to that film, we’re in good shape this time; in fact, we’ve got a good picture right now, a damned good picture, but Bill Binnings just doesn’t happen to be in it yet, and he’s the star, or it says so in the credits, anyway.”

“Why don’t you change the credits, and just cut him out of the picture entirely?”

“Nothing would please me better, but I can’t; half the money in the picture is his, or his father’s, at least, and that’s part of the deal, Bill’s supposed to be the star. But it’ll look mighty damned funny if the star isn’t even in the film, and that’s the way it stands right now.

“But I’ve got a couple of ideas already, and I’ll think of some more when we get there. An Airforce cadet in Laredo has a homemade flying contraption called a gyrocopter, a one man, strap it on your back, go get killed by yourself type machine, and I’ll film Bill in it. He may end up spending the entire picture flying around in the gyrocopter, while Herbert and Raymond do all the action sequences, with him giving them instructions on the radio, but at least that would get him in the film.”

“Can Bill fly a gyrocopter, or whatever you call it?”

“Joyce, he couldn’t fly a kite, but he doesn’t have to, all he has to do is sit in it on the ground. I may let him taxi it, but somebody else will have to fly it.”

“Do you plan to fly it?”

“Not only no, but Hell no, a helicopter’s bad enough, but this thing’s complete insanity. Wait ‘till you see it, it’ll scare you just looking at it.”

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“So, if Bill can’t fly it, and if you won’t fly it, then I don’t see how you plan to use it in the film.”

“I may not use it at all, it’s just an idea, but if I do use it, the guy that built it will fly it. We’ll put Bill’s hero suit on him, and with a helmet and goggles on he’ll look enough like Bill to pass in the flying scenes. Then we’ll film the close-ups on the ground with Bill.”

“Why are you taking the jaguar?”

“Joyce, this is supposed to be an adventure film with animals, and as of right now, in the way of usable footage that includes Bill, I’ve got a scene of him shaving, a scene of him stringing his bow, which I can’t use anyway, because they’re supposed to be catching animals, not killing them, and a scene of him watching Eliza feed a tame jaguarondi, and he looks scared to death in that scene, which he was, he was afraid the jaguarondi might bite him.

“Then I’ve got about ten thousand scenes of him standing around scratching his ass, wondering what to do, and looking into the camera; he’s the world champion at that, he always looks into the camera. It’ll practically be a miracle if I can get him into the same scene with the jaguar, even if Ya Ya has her arm down it’s throat at the time, but I’ve damned sure got to get him into at least one scene with some kind of an animal.”

“Arthur, he’s in the jaguar noosing sequence, what about that?”

“Yes and no, he is and he isn’t; that sequence was filmed in Surinam, or most of it, anyway, but the scenes of Bill were shot in Colombia, a month later, and the closest jaguar was in the city zoo in Barranquilla. If you’ll look a little closer, the next time you see that sequence, you’ll see that Bill and the cat are never on the screen at the same time. That’s just an editing trick, but there’s a definite limit to how much of that you can use.

“On that same trip, Bill tried to kill a jaguar with a shotgun, a jaguar that was so tired it couldn’t even stand up, let alone run off, or attack anybody, and he missed it twice; with a twelve bore shotgun, from six feet, which really shouldn’t be surprising, I guess, he was so scared he didn’t even know what was happening. After he missed it the second time, Raymond Johnson took the gun out of his hands, got some more shells out of his pocket, Bill’s pocket I mean, reloaded the gun, and then killed the jaguar.

“Then, the very next day, Bill told Raymond all about how he, Bill, killed the jaguar, and he probably believed it, he was so scared that he didn’t have the slightest idea of what really happened.

“Joyce, Cecil B. DeMille couldn’t make Bill look like a hero on film, but I’ve got to have him in the picture, and he can’t look like a complete ass; it’s supposed to be a dramatic film, not a comedy. When you see him trying to act, even as little as you know about it, you’ll think he’s kidding, but he won’t be, he’ll be dead serious, no matter how outrageous he looks. He honestly considers himself a serious actor.

“But you damned sure can’t make any remarks, and I know you well enough to know you’ll be tempted, and I also know what’ll happen if you do.”

“Arthur, I told you I’m getting sick of hearing that. I won’t say anything wrong to Bill, and I wish you’d shut up about it . . .”

“Your bed’s in Ya Ya’s room, unless you want to sleep with the jaguar. If you do, then I’ll sleep in Ya Ya’s room; but don’t complain if he licks all the skin off your ears; his tongue’s about as soft as a wood rasp.”

I wasn’t joking about the jaguar’s tongue, and part of one night with him as a bed partner was more than enough. Ya Ya had been sleeping with him for several months, and he didn’t bother her at all; but I spent several hours in completely unsuccessful attempts to keep him off my side of the bed, then gave him the entire bed, and spent the rest of the night sleeping in a single bed with my youngest son. Joyce went to bed in Ya Ya’s room a few minutes after midnight, then slept until the following afternoon.

In spite of the fact that Joyce and I were completely separated during her formative years, and had nothing approaching commonality of environment during our respective periods of maturation, Joyce displayed a number of striking similarities to my earlier thought patterns, and this was most obvious in relation to her methods. I could see

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myself all too clearly in Joyce, and it frightened me. But I was more frightened by a subtle difference; and the difference was something I have never been able to understand, Joyce was malicious.

This unconcealed maliciousness was apparent from the first, and it was the most important factor involved in my decision to bring Joyce to Louisiana. Yet, while some of her maliciousness was obvious, other indications were far less apparent, and, in some cases, I was left in doubt. Perhaps Joyce's sleeping schedule was part of a consciously motivated plan; certainly, at least, it worked to her advantage. When I was ready to retire, she was prepared to continue for hours. I could easily recognize my earlier methods in this as well; years ago I used a very similar system, frequently obtaining agreements only by continuing my arguments until I won by default, the contesting parties giving in from simple exhaustion.

I learned, however, that agreements obtained by such methods were almost always valueless, and I discontinued use of that system very quickly; but Joyce seemed unable to learn from similar experiences, in spite of repeated frustrations. Or so it seemed; and therein existed the hint of maliciousness directed towards me. If no desire for a sincere agreement existed, if, instead, Joyce desired only brief agreement, no matter how quickly such agreement might be recanted, and regardless of how much it might be regretted, then her motivation was obvious, and her maliciousness clearly revealed.

In the situation as it existed at that time, there were only two possibilities; Joyce was attempting my seduction in a sincere, if incestuously perverted, attempt to express her love, as she maintained, or on the other hand, she saw this as a necessary first step towards ultimate revenge, revenge probably motivated by what she considered my earlier abandonment of her and her mother. If the latter possibility was correct, and the preponderance of evidence seemed to indicate that it was, then this added the weight of responsibility to my motivations for helping Joyce.

Over sixteen years earlier, when I reached the decision to sever relations completely, I considered what I then thought were all possibilities; I was fully aware that one almost inevitable result would be the destruction of any normal paternal relationship with Joyce, and if such was unavoidable, I was even prepared to accept, if not welcome, such a result. I was quickly learning, however, that actual results were far different from anything I had expected.

But, even during an unexpected and obviously final opportunity to reestablish something approaching a normal relationship with Joyce, I was far more interested in helping Joyce than in improving her opinion of me. And I was willing to help her regardless of her true motivations; I wasn't prepared to let her destroy me, but I was fully prepared to let her try, if such was her desire. If that was a condition attached to the opportunity to help Joyce, and so it appeared from the first, then I was willing to accept the opportunity in spite of the condition. In that respect, at least, my thoughts were very similar to the decision reached sixteen years earlier.

Joyce displayed almost classic symptoms of a persecution complex; seeing herself as the victim of personally directed vindictiveness, she considered her own maliciousness perfectly justified revenge. My efforts were primarily directed towards reducing, or removing, this obviously displayed maliciousness.

Joyce entered into every relationship with nothing approaching honesty on her side, yet she expected absolute selflessness in return; not finding it, she instantly turned to plans for revenge. An accurate estimation is obviously impossible, but I sincerely believe that at least fifty percent of Joyce's mental efforts were directed towards plans for revenge; on several occasions, somewhat later during our relationship, she told people, "I'll destroy Arthur, even if I have to destroy myself in order to do it."

Bringing Joyce into the complex relationships that existed in my business was a calculated risk, and I was fully aware that her addition to the group would create enormous problems; but, under the circumstances, there was no alternative, bringing her to Louisiana was the lesser of two evils, or so it appeared at the time. Then Herbert returned.

I returned from New Orleans about midnight; Joyce was in bed in my room, almost completely nude, but wide awake. She was anxiously awaiting my return, and I was immediately given a highly emotional account of her first meeting with Herbert.

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“Arthur, the son of a bitch just out and out tried to seduce me. Hell, he damned near tried to rape me. And, Arthur, Herbert hates you. He told me so.”

“I’ve got a much clearer idea of what Herbert thinks of me than you do.”

“No you don’t, if you did, you’d run him off. He hates your guts.”

“I told you he’d try to cause trouble, and I even told you how, and you said you could handle it.”

“You just don’t understand; you didn’t hear the things he said.”

“Joyce, I’ve heard them all before, and worse.”

“No you haven’t; you wouldn’t put up with that from anybody, I know you better than that.”

“You don’t know me at all, maybe you never will. From the looks of things, it was . . .”

“Arthur, do you believe what I’m telling you?”

“Yes and no; I don’t think you’re lying to me, I think you’re telling the truth as best you know it, but you don’t know Herbert, and all of my talking on the subject seems to have been wasted. I expected him to try to seduce you, and I warned you about it, and . . .”

“Herbert hates your guts, he wants to destroy you.”

“Joyce, that sounds more like you, not Herbert; you’re the only one I ever heard use that expression.”

“Well, maybe he didn’t say that, exactly, but that’s what he meant; he was damned plain about it, too. The sneaky son of a bitch came in here and pulled the covers off me while I was asleep; then, when I woke up, he started giving me a long sad story about how his dear little wife just doesn’t understand him. You should have heard him, it made me want to vomit.”

“Why didn’t you tell him to get to Hell out of the room?”

“I wanted to hear what he had to say, and I wanted to see how far he’d try to go.”

“Oh, so now you admit you led him on?”

“I did no such thing. He came into my room; I didn’t go busting into his house in the middle of the night.”

“It wasn’t in the middle of the night, it was broad daylight, and he works here too, you know.”

“Arthur, if you don’t care about me, if you don’t care what people say, or what they do, then . . .”

“Joyce, I’ve heard that ‘don’t care’ line about as much as I want to.”

“Well, that’s the way you act.”

“Just what did he say that you consider so awful?”

“Well, a lot of things, but it wasn’t so much what he said, as how he said it; you know, like he was testing me, like he wanted to see what my reaction would be. But he meant what he said, there wasn’t any doubt about that.”

“You still haven’t said what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, Arthur, it went on for hours; he told me things about you and Eva, things about Eliza, things about you and other people, all kinds of things.”

“You’re still talking in generalities.”

“But there were so many things.”

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“In that case, it should be easy; I’m just asking for one.”

“Oh, he said you were mean as Hell to your ex-wife, Eva; he said you made her live in another town, that you wouldn’t even let her live here in Slidell with you.”

“Did he tell you that she was drinking like a fish? Did he tell you she was running around so much that it got to be a scandal all over town?”

“No, he didn’t say anything about that part of it.”

“O. K., get up, get your clothes on, let’s go talk to Herbert.”

“But it’s the middle of the night, can’t it wait till morning? I’m sleepy.”

“You weren’t sleepy two minutes ago . . .”

Herbert lived in a trailer park on the edge of town; he purchased and completely rebuilt an old trailer, then converted the interior into his own rather weird idea of a tropical paradise, complete with stuffed South American birds, a large tank of tropical fish, and even a small waterfall. Very little room was left for living space. Joyce and I drove to the trailer park, I knocked on Herbert’s door, and he came outside to talk.

I had already learned that it was impossible to hold any sort of rational discussion with Herbert if his emotions were involved, and I also realized that it was equally impossible to learn the truth about anything from him. Within less than a week I had learned to expect many similar emotional reactions from Joyce. Bringing the two of them together for the first time made me realize what a serious problem I was confronted with; the only thing that might work was an instant show of force, followed by later attempts at reasonable explanation.

“Get in the car, Herbert.”

“Wha, what?”

“Get in the car, sit down and shut up. I want to talk to you.”

“Can’t it wait ‘till morning?”

“Get in the car, Herbert.”

It was typical of Herbert to pursue a matter for months, then, at the first sign of reaction on my part, to switch tactics completely, and attempt to delay any discussion of the situation as long as possible. I was quickly learning to expect a similar pattern of reactions from Joyce. “Arthur, really, I think Herbert’s right. Can’t this wait ‘till morning?”

“Shut up, Joyce, just keep entirely out of this.”

She was surprised, and she sulked; but she shut up. That was the first time, and one of the few times, that I ever had the last word in any discussion with Joyce.

“Now, listen, what I have to say applies to both of you, equally. If I want a comment out of either one of you, I’ll ask for it; in the meantime, just keep your mouths shut.”

Neither one said a word. Herbert was reacting typically; he would never say anything in his own defense. Joyce’s normal reaction would have been an instant, highly emotional response; in that regard, at least, she differed from Herbert.

“I could beat around the bush all night, but I’m not going to; instead, I’m going to tell you people a few things, and you’re going to listen. I’ve already wasted several days trying to make Joyce realize just what a difficult bastard you are Herbert; and I wasted thirty or forty dollars on long distance calls trying to make you realize what to expect from her.

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“From the looks of things, I might as well have been talking to a couple of goats. I’m sick and tired of having to treat you like a prima donna, Herbert; you’re so God damned worried about your manly image that you make me sick, and, while we’re on that subject, let me tell you what’s fixing to happen to your manly image. If I hear one peep out of you, Herbert, then I’ll go in your trailer and drag your wife out here, and make her watch, while I beat your ass all over this trailer park. You hear me, Herbert?”

“I hear you, Arthur.”

“You believe me, Herbert?”

“I believe you, Arthur.”

“I don’t know what happened in the house this morning, and I’m not interested in hearing your lies about it; I just want both of you to understand one thing, I don’t care what happened. But, whatever it was, it’s not going to happen again; I’ve got all the problems I can handle right now, and I damned sure don’t intend to put up with any stupid problems from you people. So, if you can’t get along with one another, or if you won’t, then you just better get to Hell out of here while it’s still safe. Do you hear me, Herbert?”

“I hear you, Arthur.”

“All right, get your ass out of the car; I’ll see you in the morning, and I don’t want to hear another word about this, this ends it, here and now.”

“I’m, I’m sorry; you’re right, it was my fault, and it won’t happen again.”

“Herbert, I just want to say that . . .”

“Shut up, Joyce, you’ve already said too much. The matter’s closed.”

“But I . . .”

“Shut up, Joyce . . .”

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER . . .

“. . . and now, I’ve got a few things to say to you.”

“I’m not at all interested in talking to you.”

“Good, just keep your mouth shut and listen, or would you rather go to the bus station?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That means you’re perfectly free to leave, Joyce; I’ll put you on a bus to Arkansas right now if you want to go.”

“Do you want me to leave?”

“At the moment, I’m not really sure; from the way you started off with Herbert, you won’t last long in any case, so . . .”

“Arthur, I didn’t do a damned thing; it was entirely Herbert’s fault.”

“Joyce, you just don’t seem to understand; it’s completely unimportant who’s fault it was. In any case, even granting that it was Herbert’s fault, and I’m granting no such thing, it still takes two people to create an argument.”

“But, Arthur, I . . .”

“Shut up, Joyce, just listen or leave. Take your pick; which will it be?”

“I’ll listen.”

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“All right, then listen. Bill Binnings is important to my business; without his father’s help, and that depends on Bill, I can’t do a damned thing except sit and wait until the rest of my money comes in from the last series we made, and that might be two years, or more.”

“But I thought you said you already made over a hundred thousand dollars this year?”

“Joyce, just listen, I have; but to go on with my work I’ll need at least half a million dollars during the next year, and maybe a Hell of a lot more. I can get a lot of it, but I can’t get it all without Bill’s father’s help. I can’t make half a film, that’s worse than worthless, I’ve got to make an entire series of films; but I’ve got to have help to do it. Do you understand that, Joyce?”

“I understand, Arthur.”

“You said you understood about Herbert, too, but you didn’t.”

“But I . . . “

“Shut up and listen. Binnings is far too complex a character for you to play games with, but I’ve already seen enough out of you to know you’ll be tempted to try. So don’t. As far as Binnings is concerned, you’re going to be an extremely quiet, very shy, hillbilly girl from Arkansas; if you can’t play that part to perfection, or if you won’t, then I just can’t risk exposing you to Binnings, and I won’t. Now, do you understand that?”

“I understand perfectly, and I can do it, you’ll see.”

“You said that before, about Herbert, and I’ve seen all right.”

“Let’s go in the house, I want to go to sleep.”

“One more point, something I started to say the other day, when we were talking about the Mexican prostitutes; I’ve known quite a lot of those girls, and you have absolutely no experience with such people, and that’s why I hesitated to tell you about them, because I don’t think you can understand my feelings towards them.

“I’ve never met a single American prostitute that was worth the powder it would take to blow her to Hell; but if I had to make a list of the ten people in the world that I have the most respect for, then at least two Mexican prostitutes would be on that list; and right now, I’d have a Hell of a time trying to think of eight more.”

“What about Eliza?”

“Yes, I’d forgotten her for the moment; she’d be on the list, damned high on the list.”

“What about me?”

“I won’t answer that question, Joyce, not now, anyway. I hope you can head that list someday, but you’ve got a lot to learn first, and a lot to demonstrate.”

“Gee, look at me, my own father ranks me below a Mexican whore. Oh, I really like your comparison.”

“I didn’t say that, Joyce.”

“You said exactly that . . . ”

“Joyce . . . ”

“Did you ever do it with a queer?”

“I prefer girls, Joyce. If I didn’t, you wouldn’t be here now.”

“Are you going to seduce me, right here and now?”

“I mean, Joyce, that you could never have been born if I didn’t like girls, your mother in particular.”

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“What do you think of mother now?”

“You’re getting off the subject again.”

“O. K., well, anyway, since that came up; what do you think about incest?”

“I’ve never given it much thought. According to some sources, seventy percent of all French girls are seduced by their fathers; but I never believed it, having known a few Frenchmen, and French girls, I’d say it’s probably closer to ninety percent.”

“You’re joking, aren’t you?”

“What we call ‘kidding on the square,’ Joyce; about half joking but with a lot of truth in it.”

“What about in this country?”

“I haven’t a clue, you’ll have to ask Kinsey; although I doubt if he’d know, I don’t imagine it’s a subject many people talk about, no matter how much they practice it. It’s kind of illegal, you know.”

“Why? Are there any good reasons to make it illegal? Or is it just another superstition?”

“Joyce, inbreeding, which incest amounts to, can be good or bad in animals, and most of the same rules, probably all of them, apply to humans as well as to other animals. It just depends on what you’re trying to do; practically all racial characteristics are just as much a result of inbreeding as they are of any other factor involved. Sometimes, it’s the most important factor.”

“But is it good or bad?”

“It depends. According to most published theories on the subject, it’s supposed to be bad in humans, although it’s perfectly standard practice in almost all other animal breeding. But it’s bad if it’s carried to an extreme even in animals; that’s why they talk about bringing ‘new blood’ into a herd.”

“I wouldn’t mind having your baby; in fact, I’d kind of like to.”

“Don’t hold your breath.”

“Oh, I won’t, I was just making a comment. I know it’s not possible.”

“It’s ‘possible,’ Joyce, in that it’s physically possible, assuming that both of us are fertile; but it rather presupposes desire on both sides, and you just don’t happen to be my type.”

“What is your type?”

“You’re off the subject again.”

“O. K., well, like I was saying; I don’t see anything so awful about incest, it’s just a word to me. If a man appealed to me, then it wouldn’t matter who he was, even my own son, if I had one.”

“There’s even a precedent for that, so you wouldn’t be doing anything original; they call guys like that ‘mother-fuckers,’ in case you haven’t heard.”

“I’ve heard. I guess I’ve heard anything you could say.”

“I doubt it, but get back on the subject.”

TWO DAYS LATER . . .

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“ . . . Liza, so far, I’ve heard about six different versions of that story from Joyce, and another one from her mother; I didn’t meet her husband, so I haven’t heard his version. Joyce won’t tell me the truth about it, and I don’t think her mother really knows what happened; so all I can do is try to fit the pieces together.

“About three years ago, when Joyce was fifteen, they were living in Fort Smith, and Joyce got into some kind of trouble with a boy; so they jerked her out of school, pulled up stakes, and moved to Pine Bluff. Both Gladys and her husband were working, and according to Joyce, her mother had a good job, so, if they were willing to give up their jobs and move halfway across the state, then the problem must have been pretty serious. Gladys won’t give me any details, and Joyce flatly refuses to discuss it, except to say that nothing happened, so I know about as much about that as I do about her problems with her husband; that is to say, nothing.

“Somewhere around that same time, Joyce was in Oklahoma visiting my father, and she did something that caused him to send her home ahead of schedule, and I don’t know the truth about that either. But it does, at least, establish a pattern; around the age of fifteen, Joyce apparently started having problems over boys, and it’s gotten worse since then.

“But it’s not just boys, she’s had trouble with practically everybody she knows. I spent nearly a week warning her about Herbert, but it only took them about five minutes to get a big mutual hate going. In your case, you’ve got one advantage over Herbert, and one disadvantage; you’ve got about ten times as much common sense as Herbert, at least you don’t worry about me replacing you with the garbage man, although you weren’t too sure about Mildred. But you’re a girl, and in this case that’s a strong disadvantage, that makes you a natural rival for Joyce.”

“But I don’t see why; she’s your daughter, and I’m, well I’m . . . ”

“Yeah. Look, Liza, that . . . ”

“No, wait a minute. Just what the Hell am I, anyway?”

“Liza, if you don’t know by now, then I really don’t know how to explain it to you. But we’re getting off the subject, I wanted to . . . ”

“Speaking of changing the subject, you’re always mighty quick to get off that subject. Go ahead and say what you started to about Joyce, but we’ll come back to the other point later, and we will, too.”

“Regardless of what Joyce says now, or even what she thinks privately, she’ll see you as a rival, so, if you react the same way, then we’ll have our hands full within a matter of days. She’s bound to test you, to try to feel you out, and if you react in a hostile fashion, then we’ll have another big feud going. Maybe, if you can put up with her long enough, she may have sense enough to learn from experience. But it won’t be easy, and it won’t be quick, and it’ll probably depend entirely upon you; don’t expect much in the way of cooperation from Joyce, you’ll be lucky if you get any.”

“You keep talking about trouble, and you sound like you’re serious, but you haven’t said what kind of trouble; just what do you expect her to do?”

“Liza, I’m damned serious, but I really don’t have the slightest idea what to expect. I wish I did. A lot depends of her real reason for coming down here, and I don’t think she’s even very sure about that herself. Joyce has a strong love-hate attitude towards me, and she does everything in extremes; she either loves me almost passionately, or she hates my guts, as she always puts it, and there’s nothing in between.

“But don’t make the mistake of underestimating her; she’s damned intelligent, almost frighteningly so, but she’s green as grass and she sounds like a hick, so first impressions are deceiving. In fact, I think that’s the source of her problems in the first place; I think she’s always been able to outsmart everybody she came in contact with, including her mother, and I think she’s developed deception as a way of life. But Joyce’s mother isn’t exactly an idiot, either; we were married a few days after her sixteenth birthday, and at that time, she’d graduated from high school with honors, had two years in college, and had just finished teaching school for two full years.

The Arthur Jones Collection

“But I think Joyce was simply too intelligent to accept her mother’s religious beliefs, and I think she rejected religion entirely at a very early age, then, being forced to live with her mother, she was placed in a difficult position; she couldn’t reject religion openly, and she was too intelligent to accept it, so she was forced to develop the art of deception at an early age, and by this time, she’s afraid to tell anyone the truth about anything.

“She may simply see me as an opportunity to get away from her mother, and she admits that she got married just to get away from home, or it may be a carefully calculated attempt at revenge.

“Revenge for what?”

“She may feel that I abandoned her as a baby, and that might be enough. She hates practically everybody she ever knew, and she’s constantly talking about trying to destroy people, maybe she wants to destroy me.”

“If that’s true, how long do you intend to put up with it?”

“As long as I can, or as long as I can see any hope of helping her; her mother can’t help her, and Joyce wouldn’t stay with her very long in any case, so if I can’t help her, or won’t, then she’s in bad trouble. With her present attitude, left to her own devices, Christ only knows what she’d be up to; so I’ve got to change that attitude, no matter what it takes; right now, she’s a downright menace to everybody, and especially to herself.”

“Arthur, you’re not a psychiatrist, and you’ve got your hands full already; if her mother couldn’t help her in eighteen years, how do you expect to in a few weeks?”

“Somebody’s got to start someplace; the way she’s heading now, she’ll soon be completely beyond help, if she isn’t already.”

“All right, I’ll do what I can.”

“We’re going to Texas in a few days, and I want you to drive the car out with Herbert; he wrecked it on the trip to Pennsylvania, and I want to get it fixed in Laredo while we’re filming in Del Rio. In the meantime, don’t let Joyce lead you into starting any more feuds, we’ve got one too many already.”

“I didn’t notice anything wrong with the car when I got in, and I can’t see anything from here; what did he do to it?”

“The whole front’s smashed in, you just couldn’t see it from that angle. We’ve got the lights hooked on with chewing gum and bailing wire, but I wouldn’t be surprised if they fall off before we get home.”

“What did he hit?”

“Another car. He claims it backed into him. Nothing’s ever his fault, of course, but he felt so damned guilty about it that he had Bea call to tell me about it. He’s had at least ten wrecks in the last five years, but it’s never his fault, or so he thinks . . .”