

## Fiction

### A Spy in Squirrel County

By GRAM FILLMORE

It's squirrel season. You see them on your way to the market early Saturday mornings. They dash across the leaf-scattered lawns of the city, fat-cheeked and frisky, scale the towering elms and nestle in truck hollows overlooking the river. There's no nutbearing trees about. For all you know, their cheeks are full of air.

There's an elderly lady nearby, in the white house by the railway tracks, who buys nuts by the bushel and scatters them in her backyard for the squirrels to harvest. If it weren't for her, where would the squirrels turn? There's a health food store close at hand, with a barrel of assorted nuts, and jars of peanuts and cashews and filberts. Can't you just see it: a band of determined little squirrels in black masks, jimmying the locks with bobby pins in the first light of dawn, breaking and entering the criminal life. Then the getaway, the hidden stash and the paranoia.

But like the John Howard Society, this lady by the tracks is keeping countless squirrels on the straight and narrow. She's intriguing. You've got to see what she looks like. Is she thin and

bent, blue-haired and half-blind, like your great-grandmother, or majestically robust like the cat lady on the far side of the graveyard? You become a spy in Squirrel County.

Couched behind this tree, it's cold waiting for the mystery lady to seep out on her back porch and do her thing. Half-past breakfast time and the tree is full of squirrels, black and brown, noisy little brats and grumpy old codgers. Flying squirrels glide from branch to branch, looping the loop and doing barrel rolls in the crisp autumn air. They chatter endlessly and you're sure they're talking about you.

You're making a nuisance of yourself, probably wasting your time. The old lady peeks out from behind her kitchen curtains, bidding her time. She's got a big bowlful of nuts ready to go and she's sitting cosy with a nice cup of tea, knowing that she can outwait you.

And she's right. You've got to go for a walk to warm up. Down to the market and buy some apple cider, have a hot cup of coffee at the breakfast counter. See a man with squirrel-skin earmuffs. He knows that he's not long for this world, that he's dying of guilt. Somewhere out there in the cold, a coatless squirrel is shivering with goose bumps, probably catching pneumonia, just so—his ears can stay warm. Once he loved a girl who fed squirrels but now she's gone and left him alone without faith. A backslider.

Go back down to the railway tracks, sneak along the board fence of her backyard. You've missed her. The squirrels are playing touch football with a walnut in the park. Spectators crunch peanuts. There goes someone with a mouthful of pecans.

You walk down to the old stone church by the river and sit on a bench. Squirrels gather silently in the cathedral of elms and move in stately procession, their tails afluff

in the cold, their eyes bright with purpose. They slip under the cornerstone of the church. Another mystery. What's happening inside? Maybe a thanksgiving service, little squirrel voices raised in songs of praise for old ladies with hearts as big as bushel baskets. Autumn communion. And give us this day our daily almonds, Amen.

Give up spying on her. It's clear now that you have no business in the matter, no more than a stranger has in the kisses of lovers. But she has a mission in life, perhaps one she's carried from childhood.

And what are you going to be when you grow up, Florence?

I'm going to feed the squirrels.

The more you think about it, the more you're convinced there is a great and gentle conspiracy between the elderly ladies and squirrels of this city. Think of the pennies saved in old Mason jars through spring and bountiful summer, think of grandmothers scattering nuts in Squirrel County,

writers represented is Yves Theriault, whose contribution, *The Meerschmum Pipe*, was specially commissioned by CBC Stage for Nov. 20. Theriault's novels include *Agaguk*, about Eskimo life, and *Ashini*, about Indians, which won the Governor General's Award in 1961. His most recent work is *Ways of the Flesh*, a collection of comic erotic stories.

This play, in Theriault's words, is about "one of the oldest themes—love and jealousy". Set in a Gaspé fishing village, a young man is suspected by a trawler skipper of having an affair with his wife. The young man, it seems, has a pipe, and the skipper's wife is known to have bought one like it. Blind with jealousy, the skipper goes out in a storm with the young man in the crew to frighten him and get revenge. The boat capsizes and the young man saves the skipper's life. In the end, it is revealed there are two pipes, but the skipper never really knows whether there was an affair or not.

Finally, Nov. 27, *Two Plays For Dreamers*, a double bill beginning with *If You Don't See What You Want* an existentialist drama by Ernesto Cuevas Robin Gemmill stars, as a man who leaves home to go to work every day, but his double actually does the work for him, while the man goes to the movies. His wife nags him for being a dreamer, and eventually he arranges for his double to move in as the perfect husband and father.

The second of the two plays stars Monique Mercure (who won a Cannes Film Festival award for her role in the film, *J.A. Martin, Photographer*) in *No Pets Allowed* by Marlie Purves. An old lady, through her love of humanity and animals, takes in every stray animal that comes her way. However, in solving other people's problems, she creates her own. Her apartment degenerates and she is finally forced out to an old people's home.

The first three plays were produced by Philip Coulter in Montreal; the double bill was produced by David Windsor.

CBC presents

### ...Theatre season...

In keeping with its new policy of "theatre seasons" from different regions of Canada, CBC Stage moves to Quebec during November. Broadcast Sundays on the CBC Radio network, this hour-long drama series is heard at 4:05 p.m. est, pst; 5:05 a.m.; 5:35 nst; 6:05 a.m. nst.

All the plays are by contemporary Quebec writers writing in French and English and reflect a style unique to that province. The season begins Sun. Nov. 6 with the *Trial of Jean Baptiste* from the original stage play by Robert Gurik, adapted by Alvin Goldman. The young man of the title, played by Richard Davidson, is unable to hold down a job because of a minor criminal record. Eventually he lands a job but only succeeds in alienating his bosses and fellow workers. After being fired, he shoots his bosses and the trial that ensues acts as a counterbalance to his behavior. The play is on the Quebec school curriculum.

The *Jumper of Beaucanton* by Claude Roussin, translated and adapted by Maurice Gagnon from the original stage play is slated for Sun. Nov. 13. *Le Sauteur de Beaucanton* was first staged at Le Theatre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, in October 1974. This lively comedy centres on Paul Latraverse, champion jumper and pride of his village, who jumps sideways one day and gets stuck. His coach, the village wheeler-dealer Aldeo, decides to make a tourist attraction out of Paul when all attempts to "cure" him fail. Terrence LaBrosse and Marcel Gauthier play Paul and Aldeo respectively, and the music is by Marc Belanger.

The best-known of all the

by the king's cousin and minister, the treacherous Scindia.

Tenor Ron Stevens of the Australian Opera makes his Canadian debut as Alim, with Toronto-based baritone Cornelis Opthof as Scindia. Internationally acclaimed Canadian contralto Huguette Tourangeau is Kaled, a young officer, and Spiro Malas, leading basso with the New York City Opera, is the god Indra.

The broadcast of *Le Roi de Lahore* is produced by George Laverock of CBC Vancouver.

### ...comedy & emotion

The most popular of Donizetti's more than 70 operas, *Daughter of the Regiment*, a charming mixture of broad comedy and emotion, will be presented on Special Occasion. It was recorded at the Canadian Opera Festival in Toronto on Oct. 16.

*Daughter of the Regiment* will be heard on CBC Stereo Thursday, Nov. 3, at 9:04 p.m. (9:34 nst), and on CBC Radio Sunday, Nov. 6, at 1:05 p.m. est, cst, mst, 2:05 a.m., 2:35 nst, 5:05 pst. Production for the CBC: Warren Wilson. Host: Alan Maitland. Executive producer: Michael Snook.

The cast features Irish-born soprano Norma Burrows as Marie; contralto Maureen Forrester as the Marquise of Berkenfield; Michael Fletcher as Horetensio, master of ceremonies; tenor William Harness as Tonio; bass Jules Bastin as Sulpice; Stuart Hamilton as the Duchess of Crankentorp; Gino Quilico as a corporal; Donald Himes as the dance master; and Joel Katz as a notary. The opera is conducted by Baris Brott, music director and conductor of the Hamilton Philharmonic, chief conductor of the BBC Welsh Symphony, and conductor of the CBC Winnipeg Orchestra. This is his first season with the Canadian Opera.

The story of *Daughter of the Regiment* focuses on Marie, a beautiful orphan who was found on a battlefield and adopted by the French 21st Regiment as its sister-mascot. She is in love with Tonio, a handsome young Tyrolean who saved her life when she nearly fell over a cliff. But the French Soldiers think he's an enemy spy. They're determined to prevent Marie from marrying anyone outside the regiment. So Tonio enlists.

Meanwhile the travelling Marquise of Berkenfield has been trapped in the village by the army manoeuvres: Claiming that Marie is the daughter of her dead sister, the Marquise takes the girl away to her chateau to polish this rough diamond so she can marry the son of the Marquise's friend, the Duchess of Crankentorp. Marie is in tears because she still loves Tonio.

The regiment is now camped near the chateau. Tonio has been doing some research on Marie's parentage, and has discovered that her real mother is the Marquise. In the midst of the engagement celebration at the chateau, Tonio and his army pals

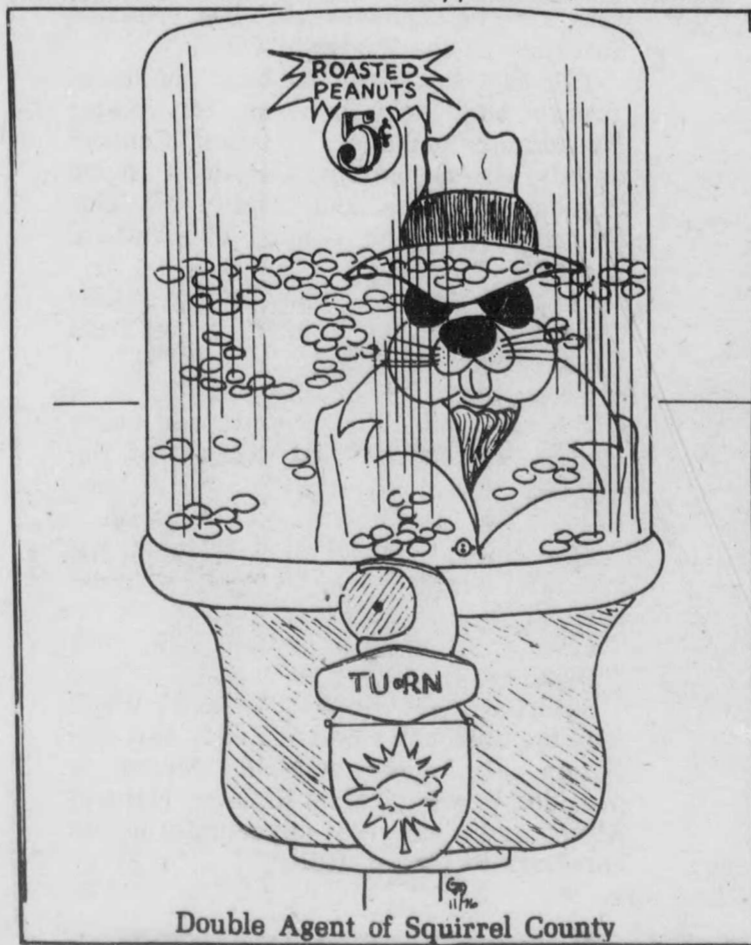
### ...Tragic romance...

It has been more than 50 years since Massenet's romantic opera *Le Roi de Lahore*, created in 1877, was last performed.

Saturday, November 5, soprano Joan Sutherland stars in the Vancouver Opera Association revival of this tragic love opera, on both CBC Radio networks.

Conductor Richard Bonyngue, who was responsible for the revival of *Le Roi*, as well as the revival of Massenet's *Esclarmonde*, directs the new Vancouver Opera Orchestra in the three-hour broadcast Nov. 5, 2:05 p.m. on CBC Radio, and 7:05 p.m. on CBC Stereo.

James Morris, a resident attraction out of Paul when all attempts to "cure" him fail. Terrence LaBrosse and Marcel Gauthier play Paul and Aldeo respectively, and the music is by Marc Belanger.



Double Agent of Squirrel County