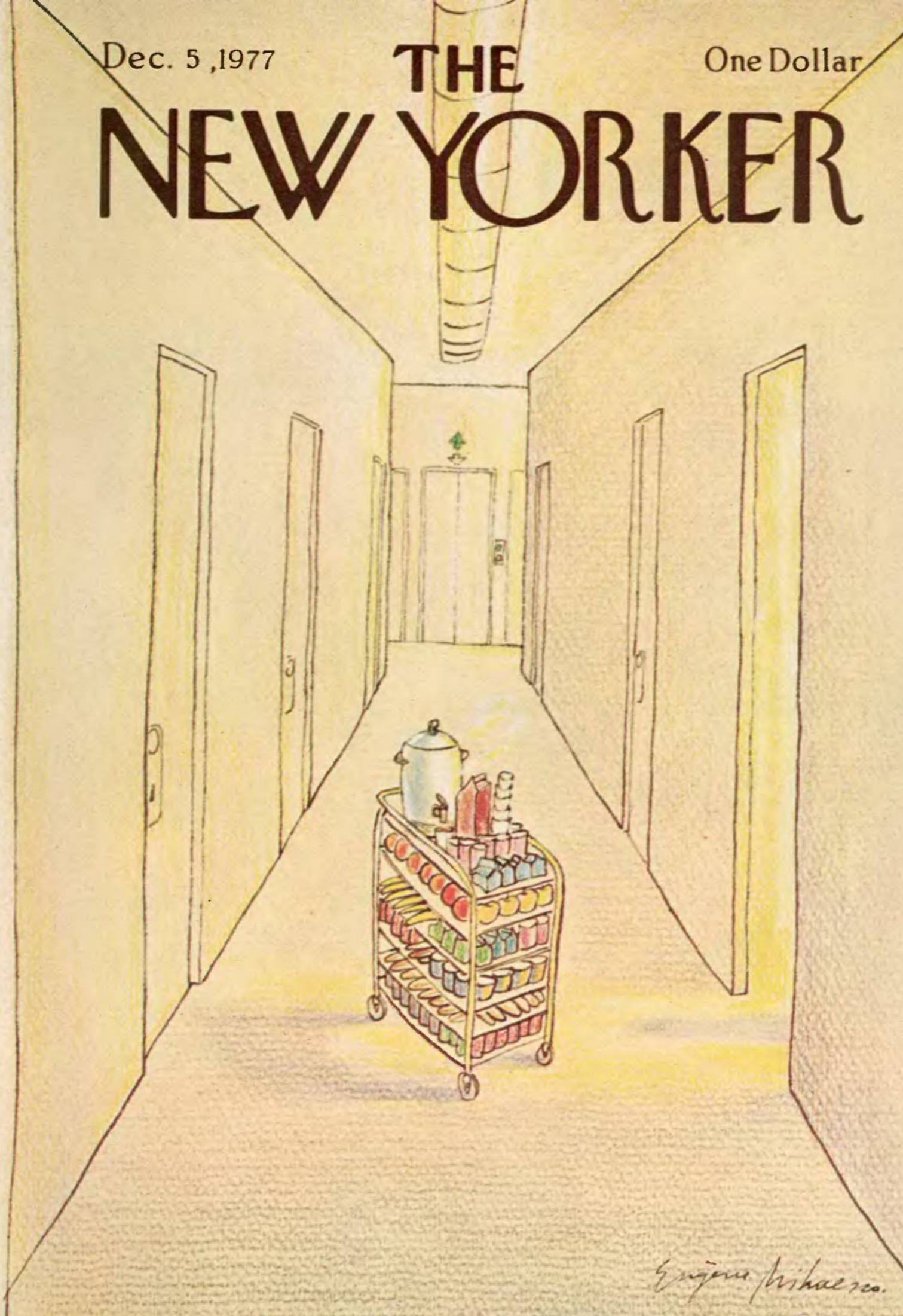


Dec. 5, 1977

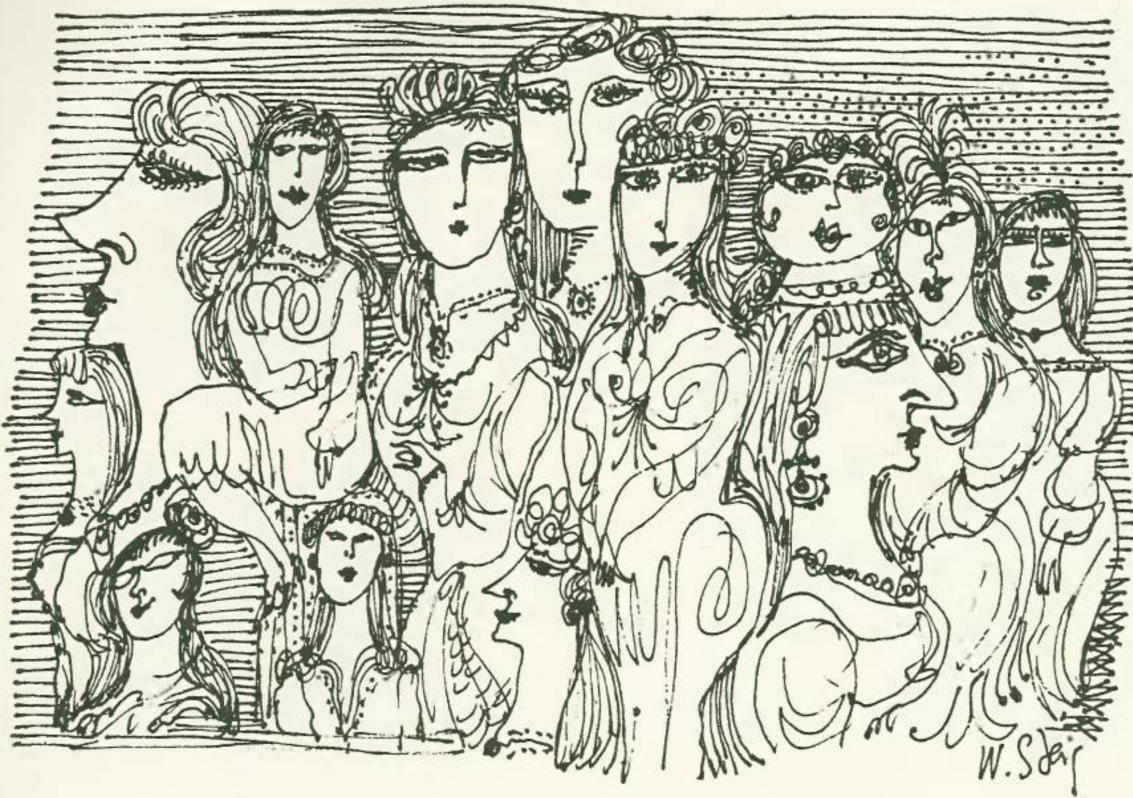
THE

One Dollar

NEW YORKER



Ernest Michalec



Memory of Various Women

their enthusiasm. Our executive secretaries, for example. Nearly all of them live on Long Island, and in the beginning I was afraid we'd have to hire a whole new group. But most of them wanted to come with us."

Mr. Marshall invited us to check the employees' reaction for ourselves, and we began when he introduced us to his own secretary, Mrs. Margaret Menear.

"I'm very pleased," she said. "I live in Wantagh, out on the Island, but I love the city. I worked here twenty years ago and I'm glad to be back. I don't even mind the commuting—now I can get caught up on all the reading I didn't have time for before."

From the president's office, we followed a trail of cardboard panels—covering and protecting a newly laid brown carpet during the moving operations—to the offices of several other company executives. Peter Prestegaard, the senior vice-president and treasurer, told us, "I live in Rockland County, so for me the commuting time here isn't much less. But I'm delighted about being so much closer to my contacts in the financial world."

A few of the reactions were not wholly favorable. "Today I'm enthusiastic," said Mrs. Elizabeth Murtha, a secretary. "Come back and ask me how I feel a month or so from now, on a day when the trains are freezing

and the traffic isn't moving, and we'll see what my answer is then."

Barry Shapiro, an assistant vice-president, told us he lived in Rockville Centre, which meant a commuting time of an hour and fifteen minutes now, instead of a mere fourteen minutes to Garden City. "That quick trip was one of the reasons I applied to Avis in the first place," he said, "and I miss it."

For the most part, however, the Avis people seemed as delighted by the move as Mr. Marshall himself. We encountered him again just as the last movers were leaving and some executives from Singapore and London were arriving for the first sales meeting in the New York office, and he remarked to us, "I've been thinking about what you said about the view. The important view isn't the view we have of the city but the view that people have of us. We're a service industry. We have to be highly visible, and for being visible there's no place like New York."

Playing X-22

WELL, George Plimpton finally got sacked. The rude upending of the longtime amateur scourge of professional sportsmen was effected the other afternoon, before our very eyes, by X-22, a professional player of and

writer about backgammon, who is sometimes also prosaically known by his name, Paul Magriel. The scene was a private dining room at "21." The occasion was a press conference to announce a forthcoming backgammon tournament in Las Vegas that was being co-chaired by Magriel and the venerable jack-of-all-games Oswald Jacoby, and would have a million dollars in prize money and a winner's purse of half a million. Plimpton's comeuppance occurred in a single game of backgammon against Magriel. However, Magriel, though his prowess has earned him the further sobriquet The Human Computer, was not heavily favored to prevail. The reason was that he had agreed to play blindfolded.

Oswald Jacoby had flown in for the press conference from Dallas, where he lives, to watch the contest, and before it started we asked him to tell us something about Magriel. Instead, he said, "I am the best seventy-four-year-old player of *any* game. Bridge, backgammon, poker, gin rummy—any of them. I play bridge better today than I did forty years ago, when I was the best in the world. I once played backgammon blindfolded, about thirty years ago. Very difficult. Harder than playing bridge out of my pocket, harder than playing chess blindfolded, because in backgammon you have these thirty men, all the same shape, wandering on and off and around a twenty-four-point board."

Mr. Plimpton joined us, and we put our question to him. "Paul is a noted mathematician who specializes in probabilities," X-22's adversary told us. "He began playing chess at the age of five, and he played all through Exeter and was a whiz. While he was a graduate student at Princeton on a National Science Foundation fellowship, he switched to serious backgammon. That was seven years ago, when he was twenty-three. Incidentally, it was my wife, Freddy, who taught him backgammon. I wish she were playing him today instead of me. Oh, well, I have nothing at stake except the honor of my psyche. My tactics are going to be

to talk as much as possible, ply him with drinks, and do everything else I can to befuddle him. If he loses track of a single piece on the board, I win."

Mr. Plimpton reminded Mr. Jacoby that they had played bridge together many years ago, at Harold Vanderbilt's. "You can probably remember the god-dam hand, Ossie," he said.

"Yes, and it wasn't too good," Jacoby said.

"I remember I was playing the hand," Plimpton went on, "and you suddenly said 'What on earth are you doing?' and I said 'I haven't the faintest idea.'"

It was time for the big match to start. "*À la table!*" cried Plimpton. Magriél tied a green-and-brown scarf over his eyes and, to make doubly sure he didn't inadvertently peek at the board, turned his back on it. His dice were rolled for him, and the outcome conveyed to him, by a young woman with a long string of pearls and a strong throwing arm.

Just as Magriél led off, with a 6-3, Barclay Cooke, another backgammon expert of international renown, arrived and stood alongside us. "I have never played backgammon blindfolded," he whispered. "I wouldn't dare. This is not a memory game."

The action proceeded in a hushed, tense atmosphere. Sportingly, Plimpton made no attempt to addle his foe either with drink or with gabble. At one point, Magriél, who scarcely hesitated over his moves, said, "I'll make a run for it." Plimpton could have smitten the piece that Magriél was running with if he had thrown either a 4 or a 2, but he came up with a 3-1, and Magriél escaped. Plimpton still had a chance, but the consensus of the onlookers was that he misplayed a crucial double 3. Then Magriél threw a fortuitous 5-3, followed shortly by a crushing double 6, and Plimpton's jig was up.

"I'm outraged," said the loser to the winner, without looking so at all. "Absolutely outraged. What have you done to my psyche? But it was a great privilege. I'll tell Freddy that I almost

won. I should have stuck to my original game plan."

"In any one game of backgammon, there's a lot of luck involved," Magriél told him soothingly. "But there are levels and levels and levels. Backgammon is far more complicated than people believe."

A woman who had been watching asked X-22 if it was good practice for him to play blindfolded.

"I don't do it much," he replied. "In Russia today, it's illegal to play simultaneous blindfolded chess, because too many good young players went insane doing it."

We asked X-22 how he had acquired that nickname.

"I used to play backgammon against myself," he said, "and once I had a private tournament with sixty-four imaginary entrants, whom I designated

X-1, X-2, and so forth, through X-64. In the final, X-22 was pitted against X-34, and X-22 won."

Concerned Farm Wives

DO you want to know what we think of the Concerned Farm Wives of South Central Kansas? We think they're great! We're crazy about them! They came to town recently to promote the cause of the family farmer and to tell people about the bad situation he's in. We have seen lots of press kits in our day—press kits containing socks, toy lawnmowers, pet rocks, sequined T-shirts, imitation-leather vests, eat-at-your-desk kits-within-kits, monogrammed umbrellas, and Congo-leum pieces of the Yellow Brick Road (from the film version of "The Wiz")—but the press kit distributed by

