

(The following story appeared in the July 1973 issue of Playboy Magazine. My wedding was that July and I lived at my mother-in-law's for a week as we prepared for the wedding. It was the most hectic week of my life due to those shaggy toilet seat covers. I would not have survived except for this story. -mcb)

IN SEARCH OF THE SAVAGE BIJOONA

the scourge of bathrooms everywhere, it preys upon the human male when he least expects it

humor BY JAMES JACKSON KILPATRICK

ONE AFTERNOON in November of 1972, when I happened to be sojourning in Charlotte. taking the waters of North Carolina, I directed my native driver to take me to the telegraph office. There I dispatched the following wireless to the director-general at the Society's international headquarters in Woodville, Virginia: "HAVE SIGHTED BIJOONA. LETTER FOLLOWS."

This is within the accepted form. Some members incline toward "REPORT FOLLOWS," but there is something ominous in "report," rather out of character, or so it has seemed to me, for those of us devoted to the discovery and eradication of bijoonas, wherever they may be found. At one time, prior to the 1939 Revision of Forms and Procedures, it was customary to telegraph, "HAVE SPOTTED BIJOONA," but the Committee felt the phrase subject to a certain ambiguity that wisely should be avoided. In any event, I dispatched the customary message, and a bit later, as the November twilight gathered over this pleasant Southern city, I sat alone in my motel room, overlooking the parking lot, remembering other times, other bijoonas. Good years, these. The Presidential-election years are best, of course, if only because one is traveling more. This past year proved especially fine: five before the election, and then, unexpectedly, in this new hostelry in Charlotte, a sixth! No record, of course— Tarver sighted nine in] 948 and Stone of Scripps-Howard reported eight in 1952, including a Blue Double—but not bad, not bad.

It had not occurred to me, until I fell into casual conversation with a lady in Milwaukee in March, that there may be persons not familiar with the humanitarian work of the Society. But I recall her husky whisper, and die dark sweep of her languorous eyes, as she lifted her lovely head from the pillow to ask, "Darling, what is a bijoona?" It was then that I determined to prepare this small monograph, whenever time and appropriate opportunity might combine, not in the interests of publicizing the Society, which seeks no publicity, but in the hope of expanding the good work now being done.

In order quickly to comprehend the elementary but diabolical nature of the bijoona, it is necessary only to call to mind the ordinary, or conventional, toilet seat. This object commonly is found in the double-leaved version, though singles are not at all uncommon in public facilities and in lesser hotels. In repose, as it were, both the lid and the seat are in a horizontal position (H. P.). But when this familiar receptacle is put to its intended use by the male of the species, the components are raised to the vertical position (V. P.). Now, it sometimes happens that one, and occasionally both, of the components, instead of remaining obediently in the V. P., perversely will fall to the H. P. This phenomenon is at best an inconvenience. It can become a disaster. The phenomenon is known as a bijoona.

The etymology of the noun is obscure. An absurd story gained currency some 40 years ago that it derived from Bijou, from the theater of the same name. It was supposed that some theatergoer, having sought relief between *Paramount News* and *Coming Attractions*, encountered the phenomenon that is the subject of this paper and rushed headlong into the lobby, crying, "Bijoona! Bijoona!" In volume one of *The American Language*, H. L. Mencken dismissed this wild surmise, and I know of no serious student who embraces it today.

It was Mencken's conclusion that the origins of bijoona are simply onomatopoeic, in the fashion of many other nouns. If one imagines the descending component, as it whooshes from the V. P. to the H. P., catching the startled standee unaware, bijoona seems entirely appropriate. Bijoona! What else could one say?

So there we have it. The spelling has been fixed by the Society since 1939, though one encounters bijoona in parts of Alabama and Louisiana, and bijoona is common in the 23rd Congressional District of Pennsylvania. In France it is *le bijouner*, in Germany *das Lidgetroppendammit*. One finds *djoona* in the Punjab. British spelling follows our own.

The International Society of Bijoona Sighters was founded in 1935, largely through the inspirational efforts of Commodore Llewellyn N. Plunkitt, a Connecticut-born navigator and mathematician of Welsh extraction. His definitive paper, "The Bijoonas of New England," remains the finest work of its kind, though Professor Tarver's monumental *Classifications* has proved indispensable to the systematic study our subject deserves. Plunkitt, now retired from the Navy, in which he served with such distinction, continues to function without compensation, save in honor and acclaim, as director-general of the Society. It was to Commodore Plunkitt that my November wireless was dispatched.

You will understand more of the Society, perhaps, if I now insert in the record the letter I sent following my message. It read as follows:

My Dear Plunkitt:

Following my wireless of this date, I regret to advise you that at 4:58 o'clock this afternoon, in room 615 of the Downtowner East Motel in Charlotte, North Carolina, I have encountered a bijoona. This is a single, white seat by Olsonite, attached to fixture by Case Manufacturing Company, Robinson, Illinois. No exceptional features were observed.

I should very much appreciate your sending the Society's usual Letter of Remonstrance and Plea for Abatement to the management of the motel aforesaid.

With every good wish, and with warmest personal regards to your colleagues, believe me, sir,

Your obdt. svt., etc.

On receipt of this communication, under the rules, Commodore Plunkitt took two actions. He sent me, by return post, the usual Certificate of Appreciation, which now hangs with other trophies in my dressing room. This recites the time and place of the discovery. I should add that each such certificate counts as one red point toward a bijoona life-mastership, awarded when the number reaches 50.

Commodore Plunkitt also dispatched a formal Letter of Remonstrance to the Downtowner East Motel, to which was attached the usual Plea for Abatement. I feel certain, such is my confidence in the management, that the situation was at once put to rights. But so that you may understand the procedures, I should say that the Society retains a number of regional inspectors, properly accredited, each of them holding a life-mastership, whose duty is to determine if proper abatement has been made. An adamant or indifferent manager may expect to find his establishment posted in the Society's yearbook, *Bijoonas of North America*. The 1972 edition, covering bijoonas un-corrected through the fiscal year ending June 30, thus identified 84 hostelries in the States, 11 in Canada and four in Mexico. The number was eight percent under that of the preceding year.

As you will have noted, the bijoona in room 615 was of the ordinary variety. It was nothing, truly, to provoke special attention. Under Tarver's *Classifications*, it was a single; that is to say, only the lower of the two components, and not both components, descended from the V. P. to the H. P. upon

elevation. Had the specimen warranted full description, it might have been identified further as a single F. F., or Fast Fall. Much more interesting are the S.T.s, or Sneaky Topples. These are the bijoonas, deceptive little devils, that remain suspended in the V. P. for two or three seconds, just long enough for a gentleman to commence upon the act that brought him to the ambush in the first place. Then, *wham!*

These encounters demand speed, agility and poise. Tarver's ambidexterity some years ago in Oklahoma City, when he faced an S.T. in the old Huckins Hotel, remains a legend within the Society. He had just entered his room, rather in haste, and had neglected to put down an umbrella and a large bouquet of roses he was carrying in his right hand. It was his mother's birthday. How Tarver preserved dignity, umbrella and roses, all in a lightning stroke, is the stuff of which epics are made.

You may ask, as the lady in Milwaukee asked, what causes a bijoona? The most common cause (it is invariably the cause of a double F. F.) is the seat cover, frequently encountered in the chambers of maiden ladies. Such an adornment produces the Shaggy Bijoona, a species so quickly recognized as seldom to cause difficulty. The gentleman who approaches a John thus caparisoned is put on notice at once that a bijoona may be lying in wait. He is forewarned, and thus forearmed. He takes appropriate defensive action by holding the components firmly in the V. P. with his right hand or, as the case may be, with his left.

Other bijoonas result from a swelling or a cracking of the plaster in the wall behind the tank. This has the effect of moving the tank just enough out of alignment so that the seat and lid components, instead of resting at the peak of a 94-degree arc (the arc is 97 degrees in the Rocky Mountain states, of course, because of the altitude), now stand at a precarious 88 or 89. The slightest movement may send them crashing to the H. P. If one has had occasion in the past to trust a particular facility—if one has had no reason to suspect the burgeoning or late-blooming bijoona—its perfidy can be unnerving. Is nothing stable in a restless world? Such are the reflections that pass through a man's mind in the moment that an old John lid falls.

Most bijoonas, as the one in room 615, result simply from inattention on the part of the installer. He has his mind on other things. He fails to make the customary tests and checks. *Zap!* He bolts the seat in place. *Wham!* He slams it clown. And so to the next assignment, leaving behind a contraption, innocent in appearance, waiting patiently to trap the unwary.

Correcting a bijoona is no easy task. In some cases, the problem will yield to a whittling down of the little rubber bumpers that separate lid from seat. In other instances, a powerful screwdriver may be employed as a lever in the hinge. This approach demands caution. Too much pressure may, indeed, correct the angle of inclination, arresting the trajectory from V. P. to H. P., but it may also result in an unpleasant realignment of the seat as a whole, which, when put to sedentary use, produces thereafter a rocking motion. This tends to divert a man's concentration and may cause giddiness in the young. Better by far simply to scrap the thing altogether. A vetted bijoona, even though it may appear harmless, never can be wholly trusted again.

These few paragraphs by no means exhaust the subject. It is tempting to reminisce upon famous bijoonas one has known—the Monumental Oaken Bijoona of the Grove Park Inn at Asheville, North Carolina, discovered by this author in 1952, remains a cherished event. There have been interesting bijoonas in Wilkes-Barre, Portland, Sioux Falls, and an absolutely splendid S.T. in the Jayhawk Hotel in Topeka. The venerable Hilary Du Beau, a founder of the Society, some years ago recorded a Double Shaggy Purple S.T. in the boudoir of a lady in Butte. The committee approved five bonus points for the sighting, a superfluous award, to be sure, to a connoisseur who was even then a life master.

Membership in the Society demands only a modest fealty to the pursuit, together with an elementary grasp of Tarver's *Classifications*. The nonprofit Society, chartered under the laws of

Virginia, imposes no dues. It survives— indeed, it flourishes—on the gratitude of the countless travelers it has served around the world.