Winter 1955

("?-!'") in dissonance

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As he settled down upon it, he thought the red-topped stool resembled part of a baboon he had once seen at the St. Louis Zoo. He would have giggled had he not been him and had he not been there. It would be too silly, he thought, and besides...

The man who glided toward him (whose name was Wally) looks like a Cedric, he thought. Yes, he is a Cedric, unless, perhaps he could be a Caesar or a Pierre, or even a Clyde... but surely a lion tamer. It really wasn’t too absurd a thought, for the man (Wally) did look like the ones found in “center ring” cages. His coat was little and tight and red and he even had a thin moustache.

The man smiled. I think I’ll growl at him, he thought. But only momentarily, that would have been too much.

A thick and loud, “Hey, Hippo!” attracted him from the left. He turned, stared and thought, sure enough, a hippo... a great ugly hippo.

The hippo said, “Save it,” to the voice and then winked at the man.

“You are, though,” he said.

“Yep, sure am,” admitted the hippo.

Funny, he thought—all this. I wonder why. (He always seemed to be wondering why.)

Something rubbed against his back and he turned quickly to observe it. It was a long woman who proceeded to slide on the baboon beside him. She seemed sleek and showed an immediate attraction for Wally. He couldn’t uncover the significance but knew it was there. Then, he noticed her long nails.

Of course, he thought. How silly of me, Cedric must have something to train. And appropriately enough she purred.

“You dog!” A little man addressed a larger one in jest. A St. Bernard, he mused. A goddamned St. Bernard. By God, this is uncanny.

“I suppose it’s proper,” he told the lady beside him.

She ran a moist, pink tongue over her little lips and peered at him cautiously. “What’s that, honey?” A purr!

“Well, I mean... he’s only a terrier.”
“Say...”
“No really, he has to be like that.”
“If you say so honey.”

It was beginning to be fun now.
In less than fifteen minutes he had nearly a complete ark. It wasn’t any good, however. He began to think too much. Why do I always have to do that, he thought.

He made a journey about the place and talked with several of them. Most of them told jokes and many were funny. He was becoming relaxed now, and didn’t notice it anymore.

He told a few of his own jokes and seemed to be accepted into the group. This pleased him for a while but then he began to think again. Someone said, “Aw, don’t pay no attention to hippo, he never says very much.” Then he was right back where he started. Of course not, he thought, they never do.

“Oh don’t be an ass!” one of them said.

“But, he has to!” he cried. He was standing up now and his face was white. “He has to... don’t you see?”

Then he noticed that he was nearly whinnying. He became horribly frightened and fled from the place... but it was in a gallop.

Over in a corner a woman whispered to her companion, “Are you a man or a mouse?”

Clouds Small in Contrast...

Morning and one in a large bed,
Lying there still; beautiful and legendary.
A kiss, she awakes, a dream is dead,
Not her’s — mine instead.
I feel the chills — a moment more to stay
While she wills others to begin.

... Gordon Hope Jr.