

SALOON SOCIETY

by Bill Manville

"Thanks for giving me that ticket to the 'Obie' awards last week," Lou said when I ran into him at the White Horse. "Too bad you couldn't make it yourself. They held it at The Gate. You know the place? It's like a big cellar, a kind of subway station without gum machines.

"When I get there, a waitress comes over and gives me a little lollipop water in a paper cup, and something on a Ritz cracker I had seen before. 'What's this?' I ask

her after I taste it, 'permican?' Also I ask her: 'And what's in the punch?' 'Vodka' she says, but I don't see her wink, so I guess she was just lying. It didn't matter to me, because I figured ahead and came holding. I had a pint Puerto Rico rum on the hip.

"So the next thing happened is they waited until it got hot enough from all the people who crowded in there, and then they started. A guy got up and said that the people on the platform were the judges, and he admitted that they were all the best people in the world at whatever it was they did. Wasn't it a wonderful coincidence for the Event that all these champions should turn up as judges? I thought so too.

Sincere Applause

"Next they said: 'Now someone doesn't know we are going to call on him will stand up and tell you why we hold these awards every year.' So the guy got up, and he was surprised all right — he couldn't think of a single reason. So they filled in by making the microphone whine and we all applauded, no one more sincerely than me.

"They had other entertainers, too, a folk-singer, a couple of guitar-players. their names sound-

ed like Lum and Abner, and Jean Shepherd said he was Against Moses and For Shakespeare.

"Next a professional comedian got up and told a funny story about the atom bomb (proving that it can be done), and all the people laughed. 'Go ahead and laugh,' he said, 'for tomorrow we die.' They all laughed again and he said: 'Remember when that was a joke?' Yeah, he was like a sick Lenny Bruce.

Unhappy People

"Kim Stanley was the MC. She made that movie 'The Goddess.' Remember that one? They should of called it 'The Masturbator's Revenge.' It was all about how these big, blonde, beautiful movie stars that every guy in America it hot for, and who live in million-dollar castles with swimming pools in the bedroom, are Very Unhappy People. In fact, they are Insecure and Neurotic. It was a big hit, that movie, I remember, with the Frustration-and Acne Set.

"Anyway, she gave away the awards. The main thing you got to remember at these things is that actors aren't really human. If you remember that, things don't bug you so much. But one modest guy was my favorite. 'I accept this award,' he says, 'only in the name of the wonderful team I had behind me. Without their help I couldn't of won. I mean my director, the script girl, Tony the barber, Al the waiter at the Stage Delicatessen, the men's room attendant, Casey Stengel, my mother, the Sanitation Department who kept the theatre clean, and the Good Humor Man who sold me so many popsicles during the long, hot, grueling weeks of rehearsal. I hope I can live up to the faith they have shown in me.' It was a very emotional moment, and there wasn't a wet eye in the house.

Up at the House

"But anyway, all these people at least know that they won this award too, and any time they want to show it off to their friends, all they got to do is drag them up to this actor's house."

"What happened next?" I asked Lou.

"Next the rum was finished, so I went home," he said.