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THE

Price \$1.75

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for young people to know. There were lots of politics involved in helping Bell get his patent. He had financial backers. Mr. Bell didn't lose a single fight. Money was more powerful than argument. My father returned to Italy in 1913, disillusioned. In 1929, when I was nineteen years old, sure enough, I came to America. My father said to me, 'John, you're my oldest child, but I let you go to America because you have a mission to fulfill.' You know what happened in 1969, when I went to the phone company with my documentation of what Meucci had done? I said, 'If you want to challenge, here it is.' They said, 'Mr. La Corte, we cannot challenge it. We are not historians. We are here for the shareholders.'"

Anna Marie Piluso wandered by, smiled at Mr. La Corte, and said, "See what I mean about dangerous?"

All That's Left

HENRY GALIANO points to the twisted horns of half a dozen impala skulls lying on the floor of his basement stockroom and says, "These are not just bones, you know—this is not just a Halloween joke. This is serious." Then he laughs. "This is natural history. This is a lot of impalas."

Henry Galiano is serious, and his store, Maxilla & Mandible, Ltd., on Columbus Avenue, is a serious purveyor of natural history in its raw form: the world's only osteological emporium. Most people notice the skulls and bones first—the entire articulated skeleton of a pony rearing up in one of the street windows, for instance—but the store also stocks beetles, butterflies, seashells, and dried bats. Every specimen is offered as the thing itself, unsentimentalized. Wooden and glass cases display trays of small skulls and rows of larger ones according to class: Mammalia, Reptilia, Insecta. Butterflies march up a section of wall in proper riker mounts, their brilliant colors stark against white. Mr. Galiano makes a point of saying, "We don't do anything with an item that would embarrass the animal. We don't make coats or clock radios or furniture with horns. We're careful to keep the dignity of the animal intact." He doesn't approve of the anthropomorphizing of animals even in the advertisements of conservation organizations trying to solicit donations. "If you



"Unfortunately, our hands are tied. Congress won't let us take part in any covert operations that will risk global annihilation."

don't love it the way it is, you don't really love it," he says.

Mr. Galiano, who is of Chinese-Cuban extraction, was born here, in 1951, grew up in East Harlem, and, without a college degree, worked for fifteen years at his favorite childhood haunt, the American Museum of Natural History, ending up as a curator's assistant in the Department of Vertebrate Paleontology. (A species of sabre-toothed cat is named for him: *Nimravides galiani*.) He also published scholarly papers and built a private collection. He left the museum eight years ago and began selling some of his specimens at flea markets and out of his apartment; six years ago, he established his store, a few blocks from the museum.

He now flies all over the world to convince game wardens and ranchers and animal dealers that he has a legitimate use for their carcasses. Although

all his animals are ethically obtained, he must placate customs officials with reams of paperwork. Once the specimens are in the basement, it can take months to prepare them. After the carcasses are skinned and scraped, the bones may be boiled or introduced to a company of carpet beetles. When all the meat is gone, the bones are cleaned, bleached, and sealed. "What we sell is labor," Galiano says.

The eeriest thing about Maxilla & Mandible is not the skulls or the odd smell, which is detectable even upstairs. It is that, despite the avoidance of anthropomorphism, every specimen seems firmly fixed in some human story. The preserved cobras are coiled and rising in striking position, hoods spread, ready for Rikki-Tikki-Tavi; the shells of the pearly nautilus stand near *Spondylus americanus*, a shell found, according to a card alongside, "on wrecks 135 feet off Fla. keys"; and

the picked-clean cattle skulls inevitably suggest Georgia O'Keeffe or "Death Valley Days." The ostrich eggs are displayed in a big wicker basket on a bed of Easter grass, and a placard explains that they are used by African Bushmen as canteens and can hold forty-five fluid ounces. Galiano has a steady supply of them: ostriches are now farm animals.

Fittingly, it is the one animal in the store capable of embarrassment which most lacks dignity. Man (Catalogue No. N212, after "Llama" and before "Marten") is represented by the usual gangly forms, grinning rigidly, each on its own "Human Skeleton Stand" (Catalogue No. SSH 005, which "includes lumbar vertebrae clutch attachment"). One glass case is devoted solely to *Homo sapiens*: articulated hands strung on plastic fish line; the odd thigh bone. As in life, so in death: the skull and mandible of a first-quality male (\$775) are worth more than those of a first-quality female (\$650). But the skulls and mandibles all look pretty much the same: the bones of the face clustered at the lower front (the teeth thrust out, a lacy fragile escarpment between the eye sockets where the nose eroded); the brain case blooming out behind like an insect's egg sac. The top of the skull can be lifted off like a lid, and fastens back on with the aid of two little brass hooks above where the ears used to be.

Henry Galiano disapproves of the "morbid" interest generated by the human remains in his store, and complains that since the Indian government ended the emigration of any of its deceased citizens to the medical schools and supply houses of the world a few years ago the prices he has to charge for the skeletons he can get are prohibitive. "They'll sit here for five, six months," he says, shaking his head. "The medical world has had no infusion of human material in years. It's a multimillion-dollar market. I was thinking of getting into

it myself, but no government will touch it."

M.M.

A FRIEND writes: At age seventeen, my mother emigrated from one island (Barbados) to another (Manhattan), and she spent many hours in her new land doing things that she had read, mostly in American newspapers and magazines, were the things New Yorkers liked to do—visiting the Empire State Building, going to Radio City, taking tea at the Plaza Hotel, riding on the Staten Island Ferry. What she discovered at those places was that most of the people she met and talked to were not native New Yorkers; mostly, they, too, had come from some faraway place as émigrés, and with the belief that New York was the one city in the world where, if their stories needed to be told, someone would listen. These people said things better, she used to say, than "any half-made-up story t'ing in this or that magazine."

Without much prompting, my mother would tell me stories in her bedroom, in the dark, of people she had met back in the fifties, her voice—melodious and soft and tinged with a West Indian accent—rising and falling in the same way it must have when

she talked to the Jamaican son of a follower of Marcus Garvey who did not want to go back to Africa, because he had fallen in love with someone from New Jersey, or the Irish poet who had lived in Braddock, Pennsylvania, and who no longer wrote poetry, because he worked as an assistant to Marlene Dietrich's press agent, and what did poetry matter in the light of Marlene Dietrich's face? On and on my mother's voice would go—it was my imagination's radio, played as I drifted off to sleep. That probably explains a habit I've developed, since my mother's death, of listening to the radio until sleep comes and then, at around 6:30 or 8:30 A.M., on WRKS, to Mama Montego, who always says when she signs off, "Take care, darlin', and walk good."

For those who tune in every weekday morning, Mama Montego is a model of compassionate good sense. A fellow-listener once compared her with "the Op-Ed page in the *Times* and the title character in 'Miss Lonelyhearts.'" I would agree, except that Mama Montego, in the two minutes or two minutes and thirty seconds she is actually on the air, almost always replaces argument or metaphor with what sounds like direct concern. Mama Montego's subject is the listener and the life he or she may lead in a city where, if stories need to be told, someone should listen.

First, there is a voice, a male voice—almost a parody of a "distinguished" baritone—that says, "Scanning the stars, perusing the planets, from the heights of the heavens to the depths of the Caribbean Sea: Ladies and gentlemen, Mama Montego." That voice is immediately followed by a reggae tune—always the same one, light on the ear and rhythmically compelling—which plays under Mama Montego's voice as she says, for example, "I got a nice letter from a lady named Monique in Brooklyn. She say she concern about unity in the black community. She



C. Barzotti