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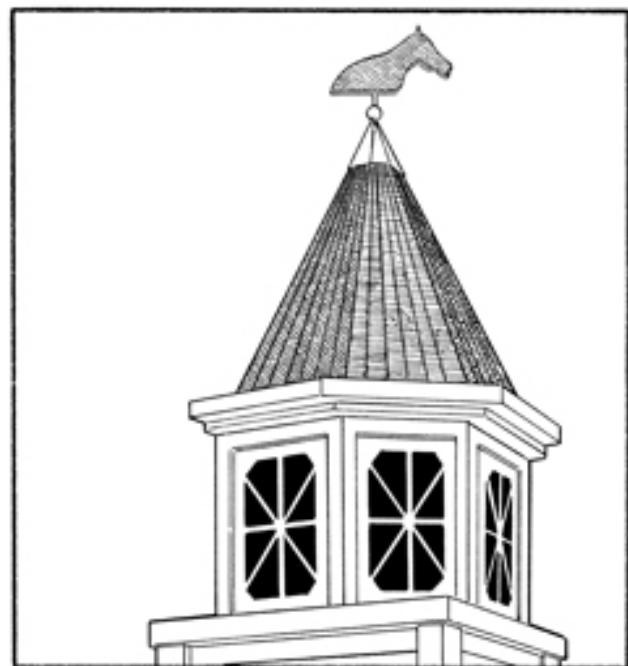
WHERE'S THE WIRE? WITH ELEANOR E.



On March 19th, I had the big German pancake at the restaurant next to the off-track betting parlor. Then I walked over and made my first-ever bet.



Back home that night, I found addresses I'd lost, books I'd lost, clothes I'd lost. The next day, I lost twenty dollars in the non-smoking room at the off-track betting parlor.



May: jogging in Naperville, cybersex in the computer-aided design lab. Absorbing online shorthand. I made show bets on chalk horses. Inevitably safe, but I acquired poise.



By August, thoughts of marriage erupted with debilitating frequency. On cue, I sprained my left ankle playing basketball. I stopped betting, started analyzing low-carb diets.



In order to get back into betting, I felt I had to shadow someone else's wagers. I sat directly behind a certain old man in the non-smoking room at the off-track betting parlor — I wanted his rhythm.



In any case, he always announced to the room what he was about to bet. At one unforgettable point, he told everyone he was putting thirty-eight dollars on a quarter horse at Los Alamitos.



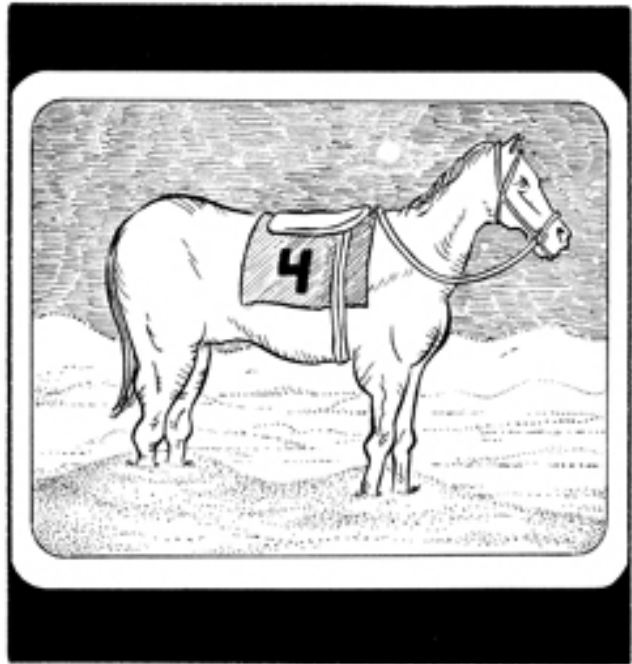
After placing the bet, he stood right in front of the wall of tv screens — a rare thing for him. During the very brief race from Mexico, he chanted, "Hit him with the shit stick!"



He won, which meant that I won too. One hundred eighty-eight dollars. Now he happily chanted, "I win once in a blue moon," emphasizing the word *blue*.



On October 7, the Canadian girl I'd been e-mailing wrote to tell me that she was engaged. Jpg of the ring. The following week, she wrote that she had been declared legally blind in her left eye.



Thanksgiving, Mel Tormé chat room. To honeytone69 I explained how Mel's version of "Blue Moon" displeased Richard Rodgers. "How old are you?" she asked.



The old man has begun sitting behind me. He changes seats when I try to sit behind him, or else he sits in back of the only empty seat. He still announces his bets; I still shadow him, but I'm disoriented.



The ceiling in the non-smoking room at the off-track betting parlor leaks. My heart skips more and more. I need a new diet—this time, completely new.