Richard Harris Wrap-up:
A Charming Failure

BY BOB CRAFT

The closer the time came for Richard Harris to be in Columbia, the tighter the atmosphere around the campus became. Calls kept coming to the office, the voices were inevitably female, the question always was, "Do you know where Richard Harris is staying?" The motel or the room number?" Harris's myth precedes him and the thought related with gleeful panic by the Union people was, "Is he really as wild as everyone says? Will we need to hire attack dogs to keep him in line?" Will it be necessary to chain him in his room?" Not really.

Flutters. He arrived a day early. Sorry ladies. He's travelling with a girl he picked up at St. Bonny or Villanova and she's travelling with him now. She's beautiful, quite young, although her face is set in a mask of boredom that is supposed to pass for regal severity. There is nothing worse than a beautiful woman who looks bored, it makes you wonder why God created her.

The switchboard is out and the only way the Union people can keep in contact is by calling runners down to the Sheraton, Suite 601. It has started. Harris has asked where the student bars and he has told someone in the Union that his new girlfriend is going to precede him at the reading and give a lecture on sex. "We think he's serious," said Mary Moody, Union vice-president for finance.

Another tantalizing rumor. Be there, he's coming to the Golden Spur tonight at 8:00. I wait with a good friend, the noise level in the Spur constantly rise. We watch the last of Butcherek, simply staring listlessly at the set. The sound has long since been drowned and images change on the set, they could be people or swirls of for- mless color, it doesn't matter. We leave for the Stage Door.

Frank Siano the man who is keeping the Harris barnstorm together catches me on the second floor. There is a question and answer session with Harris at 1:00. University Union Television is taping the session in the Art Gallery.

Tom Moody is setting the video equipment up. There are cables everywhere and to add to the confusion, a new display is being set up in the art gallery. The time is changed to 2:00.

Richard arrives shortly before 2:00. He looks old, far older than his 42 years. He is clean shaven and his hair is almost completely gray. He seems to be aware that he is onstage and clucks to his "Richard Harris" characters. He stands in front of the wall and pulls his eyeglasses down on his nose, scrutinizing it playfully.

That night, I arrive late for the reading. The place is packed. He steps out and starts on a light note. "Helen is the poster Union Press has made for his visit and he uses it to give the five stages of an actor: 'First, Who is Richard Harris; second, Get me Richard Harris; third, Get me a Richard Harris type; fourth, get a young Richard Harris; fifth, Remember Richard Harris?' He says he loves the poster. He starts reading. He reads jumping from poem to poem in no apparent order. 'I'll do this one, no I'll do it later, I want to do this one first.'

Some of the poems are charming, some are bad. The two best are 'Christy Brown' written to the author of "Down All the Days" and "Too Many Saviours on My Cross," about the civil war in Northern Ireland.

People had expected him to sing and so people began to leave quite early. He interspersed his reading with anecdotes that he has told on the "Tonight Show" and some others. The whole production was boring in spots, although he did reward the audience by singing an old folk song at the end. He did an hour and left.

Technically, the reading was a failure, but it was done with charm and it had the sinews of Harris's Life to make it go. He was gone the next day, and the university, settled back after having him here for a few days.

He may have winged it, but he in such a person that he lit up this campus for a couple of days with excitement, an excitement that I have never seen generated here before.

For a couple of days, life was in the cadaver.

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