

## “Timepiece”

ON Monday, she arrived at the airport, expecting to be met there by a friend. He did not show up; she called around, and another friend came to pick her up. When she arrived back in her city, she felt like going to a movie, consulted the local paper, chose one that sounded good and was playing at a convenient time, and went downtown to the theatre. The marquee indicated another movie was showing. She inquired at the box office, and was told that the film she wanted to see had never been scheduled. And that the movie actually playing was on at the wrong time. She had a cup of tea at the corner restaurant and went home.

On Tuesday, she had a 4 p.m. appointment with a man who was to be her part-time secretary. Four o'clock came and went and the man did not show up; she called his home and his office; no answer. The woman, becoming depressed, went to take a nap. The phone woke her at around 9 p.m.; a man intended to visit her the coming weekend; this call was to tell her he was not going to be able to make it. As long as she was up, she called the secretary again; no answer. She made another call to her shrink to confirm an appointment she'd made a couple of weeks earlier, before getting on the plane — fine, for Wednesday, at 2:30.

She arrived at the shrink's at 2:40 because she knew he was usually ready to see her at that time. She talked to him for 75 minutes and was charged for “an hour,” as usual. She left his office to go straight home, as she was expecting a delivery of books by 4:00. The shipment arrived, by REA, at 5:05; there were five cartons, due four months earlier. She opened the cartons and discovered that they contained strange books, books she'd never ordered. She went into the bathroom and threw up. Then she wept, and slept.

The following morning, Thursday, the household helper, due at 9 a.m., did not show up. No call. The mailman did not show up as he usually did at 11 a.m. The phone finally rang. The phone rang at precisely noon. It was her husband, a man thought to be dead years ago, saying he was at the airport, and would she come meet him? Sure, why not! When she got there, no one there looked like him, no one there had ever heard of him, no such plane had ever arrived. By now it was 4:00 again. She arrived home in time to receive a phone call saying that the children were being taken away from her, would be placed in someone else's custody. The clock had stopped at noon.