

The Divine Ms. O

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ack in the summer of 1939, you might have encountered at your corner newsstand the huddled figure of a 19-year-old youth whose only claim to adulthood beyond his size 12 feet, was the fact he owned a can of Burma Shave used but twice in the past month. Clad in the dirty corduroys and black Keds of the day, he thumbed hurriedly through the pages of the current *Photoplay* magazine before the proprietor of the newsstand sent him packing.

The boy was searching for pictures of Olivia de Havilland, a comely confection with whom he had become besotted since she was first spotted four years previously as Hermia in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." She was four years his senior, an unobtainable goddess, especially for a youth whose salary had peaked at the \$24 per month he received from his paper route. The bulk of that went for the replacement of trousers whose right legs were forever being devoured by his insatiable bicycle chain.

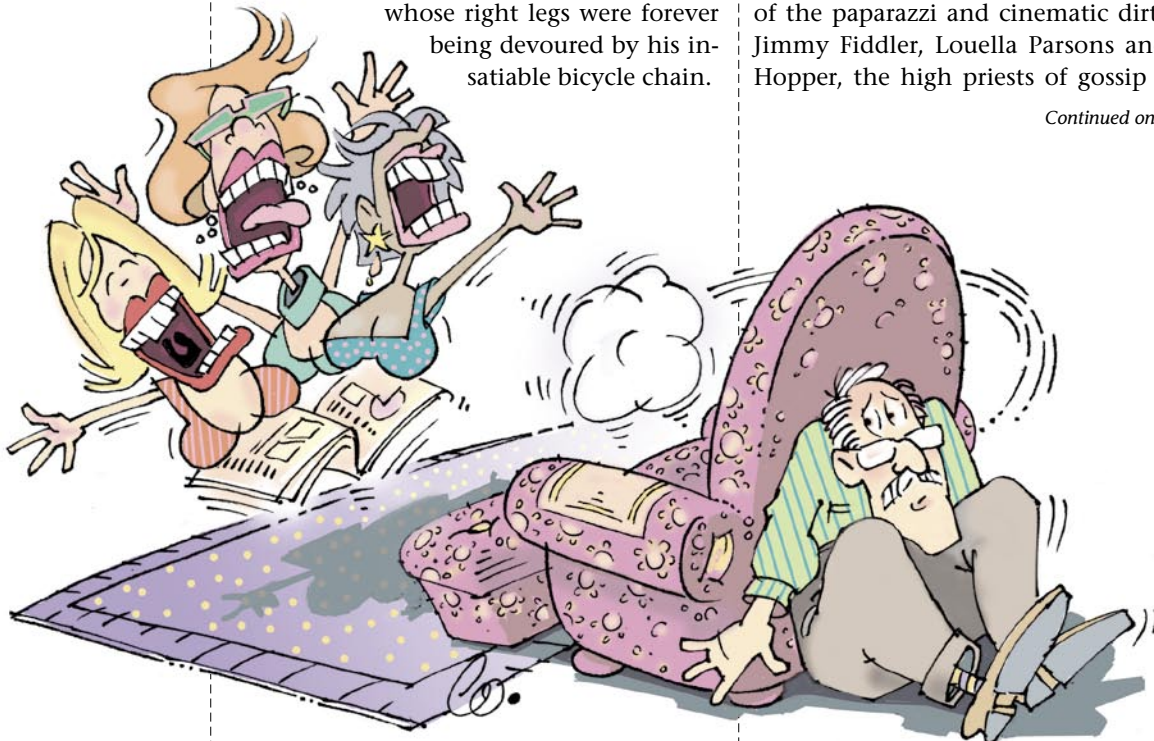
It took me nearly 50 years to finally forgive Ms. de Havilland for succumbing to the lecherous wiles of Errol Flynn, chewing the scenery as Robin Hood in the 1938 production of "The Adventures of Robin Hood and His Merry Hoodlums." Even now, in moments of nostalgia laced with masochism, I continue to look for evidence that the lovely Olivia is alive and well, still radiant at 89.

Unfortunately, I shall never find her regal likeness again in *Photoplay*, if, indeed, it still exists. That venerable publication has given way to a new generation of tabloid-inspired magazines such as *US*, *Life & Styles* and *In Touch*. Within their pages each month, if you have the buck ninety-nine to invest and are a member in good standing of the tattooed, body-pierced, under-20 crowd, you can be treated to the latest hyperbole from the entertainment world.

Served up weekly are the latest offerings of the paparazzi and cinematic dirt-diggers. Jimmy Fiddler, Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper, the high priests of gossip monger-

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ing in the '30s and '40s would never recognize the present-day genre. For example, we read in a piece holding the rapt attention of today's adolescent readers, "She (Sienna Miller) cries and cries — but look, no baggy eyes! As her world crumbles and her relationship with Jude (Law) hangs in the balance, how does Sienna stay so stunning?" It turns out she uses a cooling mask of cucumber and aloe vera amalgamated with a hydrating gel of wheat proteins. Curling her lashes has also helped assuage her grief in discovering her Significant Other has been smooching his child's babysitter on the side.

The point is — if there is one — the pop culture magazines appear to have unintentionally illuminated a medical-genetic phenomenon that has escaped the scrutiny of the entire scientific community. My own research has determined an actor-comedian by the name of Joe E. Brown, born in 1892, first gave hint that something was afoot. Mr. Brown's popularity and main claim to fame blossomed in the 1920s when it was noted he had a mouth approximately four times the size of a normal oral cavity. Not long afterwards, a comedienne-singer named Martha Raye (born 1916) assumed the distaff role with a mouth that was arguably even larger. It was rumored that if the two of them were to be in the same room and inhaled simultaneously, the windows and doors would implode.

Dentists of the era, if they noticed at all, failed to recognize this as anything beyond a one-time physiological anomaly instead of holding the potential of being the greatest thing for the profession since the introduction of the air-driven handpiece. To her credit, Ms.

Raye did her best for dentistry during her stint as spokeswoman for a denture adhesive that she allegedly used herself.

A few years later, a quaint musical ensemble who couldn't get no satisfaction materialized, featuring an artist with lips seldom seen outside the pages of medical texts on food allergies. Singer Carly Simon arrived to challenge the oral dimensions of Martha Raye and a person called Bowser fronted with a troupe of other mutants calling themselves Sha Na Na. Bowser's mouth was large enough to accommodate a medium-sized watermelon. Darwin would have been enthralled.

Both the evolutionists and the Intelligent Design camps would have remained blissfully unaware of the part show business was playing in this outsize mouth phenomenon if it weren't for the magazines now featuring on every page the mouths of Julia Roberts, Jessica Simpson, Britney Spears, and a host of other female stars and wannabes. The depicted mouths are always open to the fullest extent their TMJs will allow, giving us a perfect view without retraction of the facial surfaces of the upper second molars, including an occasional glimpse of the uvula and pharyngeal tonsils. In short, a dentist's fondest dream come true. This windfall for dentists, however, is not necessarily shared by startled readers. Confronted with full-color prints of gaping mouths and unnaturally blinding white teeth, the effect is similar to what one would experience suddenly facing down a pack of insanely hungry wolves.

What is important now to both dentists and genetic engineers is to sort out whether the mega-mouth syndrome will continue to be featured primarily by fe-

males as a result of a yet unidentified rogue gene or is simply another well-kept plastic surgery secret like universal nose jobs and silicone/saline implants.

In any event, in my dotage, I still cherish the diminutive mouth of Ms. de Havilland, however unobtainable. Bless you, Olivia, wherever you are! **CDA**