

RAGGEDY ROBIN

story by Hal Aigner



Raggedy Robin and Raggedy Jane are freelance clowns. The clown game doesn't pay much—even though the big circuses are finally showing a profit again after years in the red—but Robin and Jane eke out a living performing at birthday parties, boutique openings, underground movies, park events—anywhere they're needed.

The Raggedy's live in a four room apartment in a decrepit building in the heart of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. It looks like a house of clowns. The kitchen is painted in broad rainbow stripes. Posters, paintings and drawings rep-

resenting various holy fantasies bedeck the walls. There are pictures of elves and Oz characters, of Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy, of Hindu dieties, Meher Baba and Christ.

In the "nursery"—there are no children—are doves, monkeys and a parrot. The parrot's name is Sita, but most of the other animals are referred to interchangeably as "Raggedy Monkey" or "Raggedy Dove."

Robin and Jane have been a team for less than three months. They got together when Robin saw a picture of Jane in a story about a clown school which appeared in a February issue of Life magazine. He immediately deluged her with letters and

phone calls, and finally persuaded her to come to San Francisco.

The Raggedy's various costumes were made by themselves or their friends. They are all first generation garments, with no wealth of clown lore behind any of them. Robin moves easily in and out of several roles, each related to a specific costume. Sometimes he's a jester, sometimes he's a court page, sometimes, when he's feeling holy, he's a Christ-figure complete with doves.

But he's a clown every minute, and so is Raggedy Jane. Each day they recreate an idealized version of their own childhoods, the Tiny Tim trip in whiteface. It is hard to know

RAGGEDY JANE

photos by Ingeborg Gerdes



where the clown Raggedys leave off and the "real" Raggedys begin. Perhaps that division is meaningless.

Robin says that he is the son of Romanian gypsies who migrated to America when he was two. Robin says that his father was a bear tamer and he traveled around the country from circus to carnival to rodeo. Robin says that he decided to become a clown about four years ago, when he was 16. The fact that none of these things may be real does not mean that they are not true.

"I'm not only a clown," says Robin. "I'm a mystic. The magical mystical clown. Actually, Meher Baba picked me up as a

clown." Robin points to a picture of Baba grinning clumsily. "He's the world's greatest clown."

Robin toys with the total vision. "Being a clown is very holy and the natural position of all men. A clown was actually a vision I had of myself. I'm very silly, and because I'm very silly I make a good clown. I can make people laugh."

Jane is very much of the clown-waif. "I was born with a sad face, and I've never been able to wipe it off. Several years ago, people called me 'the little match girl.' They thought that's what I looked like. And when I got a chance to become a clown, I carried it over and became Rag-

gedy Jane because I was raggedy already."

The transition to full-time clown was not absolutely smooth. "I didn't think it was unusual to be a clown, but I soon found out that it was. I met a lot of people who said, 'Oh no, don't be a clown, be a showgirl.' When I told my parents, they disinherited me. My mother cried and everything because of her image of the people that you meet in the circus. But they like it now."

And so, in a cloud of sawdust, there are the Raggedys, proving that you can go home again—if you're willing to leave where you are now. Every man a fool. 🐾