

WORM FARM UPDATE

On the evening of Mr. MacGregor's barbecue, as I turned onto his street, I could hear Ravel's Bolero blaring madly from somewhere in the neighborhood. People were out on the sidewalk, gesticulating and complaining to one another about the noise. As I had feared--somehow I knew!--it came from Mr. MacGregor's place. Once we were settled in lawn chairs in his back yard with Ballantine Ales and had exchanged a few unheard pleasantries, I mentioned the angry mob out front and warned him he may be in danger of getting lynched. He went inside and turned it down.

"But it's supposed to be loud," he protested, when he returned. "The book says worms can hear sound only when it is loud enough to produce vibrations in the ground."

"What book is it this time?" I asked.

Mr. MacGregor had been reading a lot of dubious books about worms. It is amazing how much crank literature there is on the subject and even more so how it all manages to

find its way into his hands. He was concerned our worms had grown apathetic.

"Worms Are All Erogenous Zone," he said. "The author has made the discovery that the females are the principle obstacle to successful breeding. They require scientific techniques to induce the proper frame of mind."

"Like Bolero," I said. "I see."

"Barry White will also do," he said, then laughed and said in a deep voice, "Ooh baby, ooh baby, keep on doing it, right on." He picked up a watering can. "This," he explained, "contains a diluted alcoholic mixture. Our worms really look forward to this moment, as you can imagine." He got up and wandered about the yard, sprinkling the contents.

"Happy hour!" he called out. "Ladies night!"

I thought I saw faces peeping over the fence.

Mr. MacGregor sat back down and thumbed through his book.

"What next?" he said.

"Exactly," I said.

"Oh, yes...That's right." He looked up at me from his book. "I will need your assistance on this next part. We are supposed to recite a few phrases. The first one is,

'Ladies, let me hear you say mercy.' The initial syllable in 'mercy' should be heavily stressed. And keep in mind, it must be loud or the worms won't respond. You start."

"Like heck I will," I said. "I'm already expecting the police to arrive at any moment."

Concerned he might be doing harm to our investment, I laid down my paper plate (the hamburger still intact), walked over to the earthworm area and scraped aside a little dirt with my foot.

I had quite a shock.

"Oh my!" I said. "Sorry!...Uh, carry on as you were...I mean, pretend I'm not here...I'll just cover you back up again."

I sat down again and dabbed my forehead with my napkin.

"Mr. MacGregor," I said, when I had recovered, "if it will help the bottom line, I'm ready to get down."

"I'll turn on the disco ball," Mr. McGregor said.

<end>