

HEATHER IN HOT WEATHER

Why would anyone do what this poor man is doing? Play the bagpipes on a sweltering New York street? Nobody wants to hear bagpipes. Nobody wants to see him sweating in his green woolen kilt. Nobody gives him any money. And it isn't just that they won't give him any money, they really wish he'd stop. They walk by with their hands over their ears, grimacing at him. He doesn't care. He keeps breathing into the bagpipes. They sound like sheep with emphysema. Inflating. Collapsing. His blue eyes, beneath his sandy eyebrows, are distant and determined, as if he's convinced most of them secretly adore his music but won't say so because of peer pressure. Finally an elderly woman comes up and drops a quarter onto the blanket next to him. He nods his thanks with an almost imperceptible motion, adding the tiniest flourish to his notes while pretending to look the other way. Then it's back to scorn, rejection, and all the other indignities he seems to thrive on.

BIG BABIES

Why do we act like such big babies when the waitress doesn't get our order right, or when the car won't start in the morning? Why do our cars act like such big babies too, just because there's been a mild frost overnight? Call Triple A and the tow truck guy acts like a big baby when you tell him you want to give him a personal check. It's against company policy. He'll get in trouble if he makes an exception with you. "Oh don't be such a big baby," you want to say, but don't, because you need the car to get to work. You have a wife and baby to support, a baby growing bigger by the day. Will he turn out to be a big baby too? He's standing up in his crib by the window, listening to you blast the garbage men for tossing the cans in your favorite flowerbed. The pacifier works back and forth in his mouth as he draws his first key conclusion.