Samuel Steward (1909-93) was an English professor, a tattoo artist for the Hells Angels, a sexual adventurer who shared his considerable range of experiences with Alfred Kinsey, and a prolific writer of everything from scholarly articles to gay erotica (under the penname Phil Andros). Given this biography, he sounds like a most unlikely contributor to a trade magazine like the Illinois Dental Journal. Yet from 1944 to 1949, writing under the name Philip Sparrow, Steward produced monthly columns for the journal that were full of wit and flourish and that constituted a kind of disguised autobiography, with their reflections on his friendships and experiences and their endless allusions to his trove of multifarious knowledge. For Philip Sparrow Tells All, Jeremy Mulderig has gathered thirty of Stewards most playful and insightful columns, which together paint a vivid portrait of 1940s America. In these essays we spend time with Stewards friends like Gertrude Stein, Andre Gide, and Thornton Wilder (who was also Stewards occasional lover). We hear of his stint as a holiday sales clerk at Marshall Fields (where he met and seduced Rock Hudson), his roles as an opera and ballet extra in hilariously shoddy costumes, his hoarding tendencies, his disappointment with the drabness of mens fashions, and his dread of turning forty. We go along with him to a bodybuilding competition and a pet cemetery, and together we wander the boulevards of Paris and the alleys of Algiers. Throughout, Mulderigs entertaining annotations identify Stewards often obscure allusions and tie the essays to the people and events of the day. Many decades later, Stewards writing feels as stylistically fresh and charming as it did in his time. With richly detailed introductions to the essays that situate them in the context of Stewards fascinating life, Philip Sparrow Tells All will bring this unusual and engaging writer to a fresh readership beyond the dental chair.

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