"If you're driving into town," our dinner party hostess offered helpfully, "there's a parking lot right on the corner of my block."

Egads! I thought later: she had said that the parking lot would be there if we chose to drive into town. But what if we decided to take the train? Would that entire concrete slab filled with cars suddenly vanish?

I never did find out because we drove to the dinner party that night. But this was the beginning of my obsession with a somewhat common case of poor construction or illogical deduction.

At that dinner party we were introduced to a professor from the University of Pennsylvania who mentioned that if my husband were interested in pre-Columbian art, Penn was offering a course on the subject next semester.

"If he were interested"?

But he is not! I couldn't keep from conjuring up an image of some large lecture hall at the venerable University of Pennsylvania, filled with serious students and a professor at the lectern. Then, because my husband is not particularly turned on to pre-Columbian art, the class is cancelled.

More examples began turning up:

- Our local TV weatherman informed viewers recently that "if you're going to New York City next weekend there will be four to six inches of snow." (I did my part by staying away.)
- Before we left on a trip to Maryland's Eastern Shore, a neighbor told us that if we liked seafood, we'd find a marvelous little restaurant at St. Michael's. (Naturally, I envisioned what might have happened had I been allergic to seafood. The entire place might have been swallowed up by an enormous wave!)
- At the grocery store, a friend mentioned that if I liked Prokofieff, "the Philadelphia Orchestra will be performing his Symphony #1 on Friday." (Imagine what popped into my mind!)

So let me offer this advice: never, never say to anyone "If you are interested in words, there's a great little quarterly called Word Ways." Please!