MISTER BOXING

BY KYLE CRICHTON

Nat Fleischer makes no matches, handles no fighters, works no angles. But as self-appointed historian he rules over boxing like a brood hen

Nat in the midst of his treasures. His collection of ring relics—championship items—is the greatest in the world

LAST summer at the Chicago Stadium in the middleweight championship, Rocky Graziano had Tony Zale draped over a lower strand and was belting him with such enthusiasm that it was only a question of time till the bout was stopped or Mr. Zale was dead.

At this juncture a man leaned over and spoke into the ear of Mr. Nat Fleischer.

"Bang," he said in a cool, bored voice. "There goes another fifty bucks for one of those phony tin belts."

Mr. Fleischer sat up sharply and whirled around. Then he grinned in recognition.

"Two hundred and twenty-eight," said Mr. Fleischer precisely, "and happy to do it, too."

A week after Mr. Fleischer's return to New York another voice belabored him. This came over the telephone and belonged to M. Graziano, a sterling soul with native graces.

"Whenamigonna get 'at thing?" bellowed Graziano in Mr. Fleischer's ear. "Alla guys downa poolroom been astin' me."

"Pretty soon now, Rocky," cried the enraptured Mr. Fleischer, his face wreathed in happiness. "Getting it all made up nice for you."

Mr. Fleischer has revived the charming custom of awarding belts for all new boxing champions. The Graziano emblem brought the total to one hundred and twenty-six and made the afore-mentioned nick of $228 in the Fleischer surplus. As publisher and editor of The Ring, the bible of all red-blooded men, he considers this not only good advertising but a worthy reward for meritorious endeavor.

"Also," say Nat's friends, "it gives him a chance to say a few million words every time he presents a belt."

There are cynics who maintain that boxing is the only sport in the world where a man gets a medal for homicide, but Mr. Fleischer winces at such sacrilege. When Mr. Fleischer enters a ring to present a belt there are observers who swear that a halo appears around his head. In a gravelly voice tinged with New York East Side nuances he launches into a sweet and reverent eulogy of the art of mayhem. As the hours pass his voice grows in fervor and there are tears in the eyes of those members of the audience still awake. The tension became so great one night in Detroit that some kindly individual doused the lights. When they were turned on again five minutes later Nat was still speaking but the crowd had left.

Lore of the Pugilistic Ages

Romantic writers have called him Mr. Boxing, the Boswell of Jacobs' Beach and the Great Father of *La Boxe*. Admirers consult him from points as far distant as Bloemfontein, Reykjavik and Oskaloosa. His word is law in any boxing dispute and his records are so complete that they are said to provide the approximate fighting weight of David on the day he conked Goliath. What Nat knows about fighting he gets secondhand because he never got much over five feet tall and could be floored by a widgeon. He tut-tuts sternly when anyone mentions corruption in prize fighting and has been known to tremble indignantly at charges of brutality in boxing.

At sixty, Nat rules over boxing like a brood hen. He makes no matches, handles no fighters, works no angles. He just affords a clearinghouse for

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A fruit cocktail for your pocket!

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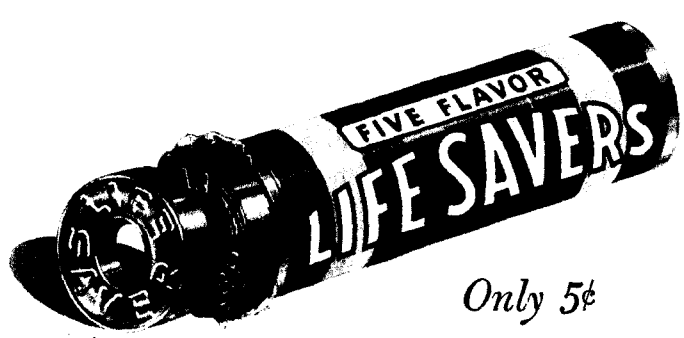
So dandy—so handy! Any place! Any time!
You can have yummy Orange! And Lemon and Lime!

And tempting Wild Cherry! Swell Pineapple, too,
All in a pocket-size package for you!



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the sport, providing the statistical data and mystical lore that assure it a place in history. He will fly anywhere in the world to referee a fight and say a few words. He works fourteen hours a day at his office in Madison Square Garden, has turned out billions of words and is solely responsible for what is known as the Meat Ax School of Literature. He will write a book at the drop of a cap and has thirty-eight volumes to his credit.

His collection of boxiana (the greatest in the world) will be set up in the New York Public Library at his death. It is held at $300,000 and contains every known book on the sport and practically every belt not given away originally by Nat. No issue of The Ring appears with fewer than four Fleischer triumphs, all written in a free-flowing, catch-as-catch-can style and punctuated with abandon. He is dynamic, forthright and chicken-hearted. He cries at newsreels, considers all fighters heroes and would turn in his own mother if she tried to throw a fight.

The early Fleischer years may be covered quickly. He was born on Avenue A in New York and scoffs at the idea that only thugs, grifters and candidates for the hot seat came from the district. After Townsend-Harris High he went to City College and was a track man, with marks of 10.2 in the 100; 25 in the 220 and 19.6 in the broad jump. After a year at the Yale Forestry School, he started a term in chemistry at New York University. A slight mishap in an ammonia experiment resulted in Nat blowing up the laboratory and departing without a refund on his $400 tuition fee.

Recognition from Frank Munsey

What made him so sleepy in chemistry class was a night job in the sports department of the old New York Press, which kept him going till two and three in the morning. In due course he ran into Mr. Frank Munsey, the new owner, and was made sports editor. Munsey had a conviction that youth must be served and Nat was certainly young and had no objection to attention.

What followed took on the air of a kaleidoscope because Munsey began buying all the papers in town, and Nat was shifted around as the new sports editor. Nobody, including Nat, was ever able to keep the papers straight because in a few years time Munsey bought the Press, Morning Sun, Evening Sun, Herald, Telegram, Mail and Globe. He combined these in quaint fashion, keeping "the best features of each" and Nat was always one of the better assets.

Scripps-Howard bought the Telegram after Munsey's death and Nat was ensconced there as sports editor when he made the mistake of taking a trip abroad. During that period Roy Howard bought the World and combined it with the Telegram. When Nat got back, the reporters met him at the boat and asked him politely what he was going to do.

"Go back to the Telegram, of course," cried Nat glibly.

They pointed a wavy finger at him and chanted in chorus:

"Oh, no, you're not, Nattie; you're fired."

And thus it proved to be. Joe Williams had the job and Nat was out. Instead of looking around for anything else, he decided to give all his time to The Ring, which he had started a few years before and had been conducting with his left hand. He had launched it with a capital of $4,000 and any slight change of wind would have washed it on the rocks. Nat saved it by fancy maneuvering and now had it taking the big waves in very brisk fashion. The depression of 1929 forced him into the arms of Bernarr Macfadden for one sad year but Nat managed to wrench free and eventually paid off the paper company that had carried him so nobly.

Mr. Fleischer has to be careful to remain impartial but anybody can see he yearns for the days of Jim Corbett, Jack Johnson and Joe Gans, when footwork and feinting were sciences and a fighter like Graziano would have had the top of his head pecked off by lefts without managing to land a blow.

"That's why I say Jack Johnson was the greatest fighter that ever lived," says Nat. "Why, he was in here just before he died, big, fat, slow, and he put on the gloves with some of these tough young fellows. Why, he feinted them almost off the second floor. They never laid a glove on him."

This seems the proper place to report the distillation of Nat's thinking over a period of forty-three years. The essence is as follows:

(a) Most eccentric fighter I have ever seen—Battling Siki, the Senegalese.

(b) Greatest boxing thrills—Dempsey-Firpo fight when Dempsey went over the ropes. The Richie Mitchell-Benny Leonard fight in which the Milwaukee fighter, dropped seven times, put Leonard down and almost had the champ out.

(c) Best left hand in boxing—Jack Dempsey.

(d) Most aggressive fighters—Jack Dempsey and Jackie Kid Berg.

(e) Best feinter—Jack Johnson.

(f) Best jabber and counterpuncher—Jack Johnson.

(g) Coolest fighter—Gene Tunney.

(h) Hardest hitter—Bob Fitzsimmons.

(i) Most durable heavyweight—Jim Jeffries.

(j) Greatest upsets—Schmeling's knockout of Joe Louis and Louis' knockout of Schmeling.

(k) Greatest fistic heroes—John L. Sullivan and Jack Dempsey.

(l) Great fighter who came to the front most rapidly—Jim Jeffries.

(m) Most thrilling era in boxing—the white-hope period that followed Jack Johnson's defeat of Jeffries.

(n) Greatest champions in all divisions: heavyweight—Jack Johnson; light heavy—Bob Fitzsimmons; middleweight—Stanley Ketchel; welter—Joe Walcott; lightweight—Joe Gans; feather—Abe Attell; bantam—Jimmy Barry; flyweight—Jimmy Wilde.

Nat sticks to his guns on Jack Johnson, although he gets into an argument every time he opens his trap on the subject.

"I've seen them all and that's my choice," he says flatly. "Dempsey was a tiger, Jeffries was a stone wall, Fitzsimmons was a killer, Corbett was a magician, Joe Louis is dynamite with both hands, but Johnson was daddy of them all. He was a wonderful boxer, a splendid jabber, and the best feinter who ever lived and he could catch a blow with his left and counter with his right, all with such speed that it became almost a simultaneous movement. And no matter what anybody says, he could take it and dish it out. He's my boy."

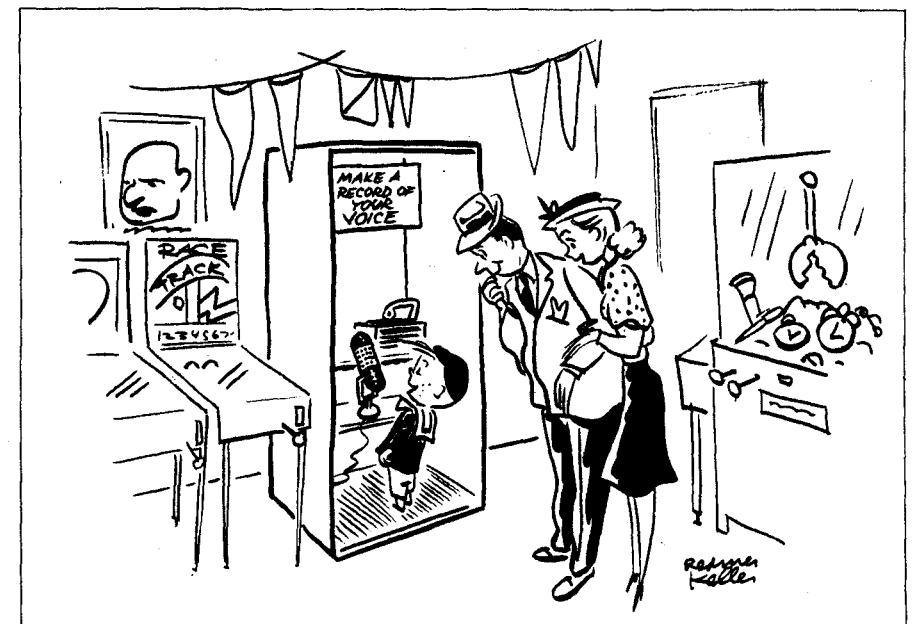
Nat has the heavyweights lined up in this way:

1. Jack Johnson, 2. Jim Jeffries, 3. Bob Fitzsimmons, 4. Jack Dempsey, 5. Jim Corbett, 6. Sam Langford, 7. Joe Louis, 8. Tom Sharkey, 9. Gene Tunney, 10. Tommy Burns.

While the patrons are gnawing over this effrontery, we pass on to Nat's boxing collection, which now resides on the second floor of Madison Square Garden and has the look of a Third Avenue pawnshop planted in the jungles of Mato Grosso. From the ceiling hang acres of boxing gloves used by sundry champions to paralyze their opponents. In a case to the right are the watches and belts surrendered by champions to their heirs and hence to Nat either for money or as a gift. When Nat was refereeing bouts in Albuquerque during the war, the old white hope Carl Morris showed up with a watch and presented it to him.

"It ain't much," said Carl, "but it's yours. I die and it ends up in hock. You have it in your place and maybe somebody remembers old Carl."

The business of the watches needs some explaining. In the old days no ban-



COLLIER'S "Dear grandchildren, this is a record of your grandpa's voice when he was a little kid just like you" REAMER KELLER

quet for a pug was complete without the presentation of the ticker. In addition to these Nat has a mess of watches that fighters bought for themselves. Among them is a monstrosity once owned by John L. Sullivan. It weighs a pound and is replete with gadgets telling everything from the state of the weather to the current quotations on the stock market. John L. probably used it as a gag; at least that is what Nat does with it now.

On a recent trip to Venezuela he staggered the natives by dragging out the potato on any excuse and gazing at the mysterious dials with attention and reverence. The new development in watches centers around Nat's championship belts. When Nat presents the belts, the champs counter with a watch for Nat. He loses on the deal but makes it up on sentiment.

The most valuable memento in Nat's collection is the famous belt given Charlie Mitchell after his bout with John L. Sullivan. A hundred London nobs banded together and had a masterpiece made up in gold that represented the equivalent of $10,000. When old Charlie's son was killed in the first World War, he put the belt up for auction in behalf of the War Relief Fund. The auction continued from 1916 to 1922 and raised two million dollars in relief. When it was finally knocked down it went to Ted

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KINSEY'S DECEMBER CALENDAR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1 *Inter-American Peace Conf. hears FDR, 1936.*	2 *Monroe Doctrine formulated, 1823.*	3 *Gilbert Stuart, famous painter, born 1755.*	4 *Washington takes leave of officers, 1783. S'long!*	5 *Get up your gift list early . . . shop early!*	6 *Be a smart Santa . . . give pleasure . . . give Kinsey!*
7 *N.Y. Philharmonic gives 1st concert, 1842. Sharp!*	8 *Telephone ship-to-shore service inaugurated, 1929.*	*S pair*	1	12 *Japs sin nay, 1937. Later, sink Japs!*	13 *Drydock patented, 1816. . . . for sea-sick ships!*	
14 *Alabama 22nd state to join Union, 1819. Hi, you-all!*	15 *Sitting Bull shot, 1890. Whom can he Sioux?*	1 *Boston Tea Party, Look . . . I'm an Indian!*	8 *Slavery abo ed, 1865 Legree gets his lumps!*	19 *Time to hint you want Kinsey 'neath the tree!*	20 *Broadway lit by arcs, 1880. Hence "Gay White Way"!*	
21 *Pilgrims land on Plymouth Rock, 1620.*	22 *Why worry about style, fit, color? Just give Kinsey!*	23 *Fed. Reserve System est'd., 1913. Spare a buck, bud?*	24 *"T'is the night before Christmas and . . ."*	25 *Peace on Earth . . . Good-will to Men!*	26 *Mason and Dixon set up their famous line, 1767.*	27 *He's nuts about those delicious Kinsey Egg-Nogs!*
28 *Chewing gum pat'd., 1869. Now we're stuck with it!*	29 *USS Constitution battles HMS Java; wins, 1812.*	30 *Made your New Year Party plans? Count on Kinsey!*	31 *The end of a perfect (?) year!*	 		

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Serve your guests a drink supreme... A Kinsey Egg-nog... smooth as cream!

Enrich your holiday hospitality with this grandest of *all* drinks . . . a matchless, magnificent Kinsey Egg-Nog. Here's how:

Beat separately whites and yolks of 6 eggs. Add 1 cup of sugar to yolks while beating. Mix together with 1 pint cream, 1 pint milk, 3 oz. Jamaica Rum, 1 pint Kinsey Whiskey. Chill, dust with grated nutmeg. Serves 15-20.

Superb is the *word* for it . . . and Kinsey is the *whiskey* for it! Yes, holiday or any day, Kinsey makes *any* drink taste better. Try it . . . tonight!

KINSEY

SINCE 1892

the unhurried whiskey

for unhurried moments

GOLD LABEL Rich, Full-Bodied

SILVER LABEL Light, Mellow

BLENDED WHISKIES: *Gold Label—86.8 Proof, 65% Grain Neutral Spirits. Silver Label—86.8 Proof, 72½% Grain Neutral Spirits. Kinsey Dist. Corp., Linfield, Pa.*

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Broadribb, the British manager, who paid $1,200 for it and then gave it to Nat.

That is when his troubles started. The United States Customs confiscated it when it arrived and declared Nat would either plunk out $624 in duty or see the belt melted down. Nat hollered murder and the matter finally went to the Solicitor General. The government claimed that when the belt left the possession of the original recipient it could be used for practical purposes by others and hence was subject to duty. Nat whipped out a roll and peeled off a grand note.

"If any of you gentlemen here can put that belt on, walk down two flights and get back here alive, I'll pay the duty and throw in this thousand-dollar bill."

The government forces declined the offer, looked askance at such horseplay and reiterated the $624 figure. Nat finally paid.

The thing that interests Nat most in his collection are the Indian clubs Jim Corbett once used. They are less than a pound in weight and although Nat has been assured Jim found them excellent for strengthening the wrists, he still doesn't quite believe it.

Gloves of Many Champions

Souvenirs keep drifting in now that the boxing world knows Nat will take anything that deals with the sport. He has the gloves used in most famous championship fights and now has an arrangement whereby they are now presented to him right after the occurrence. Except for a few pairs Joe Louis has held out for himself (and which Nat confidently expects to get someday), he has all the gloves of the Louis career. He also has the timekeeper's bell used in the Jeffries-Johnson fight at Reno, Nevada. He has everything and you couldn't buy a blasted bit of it.

But this exercise in acquisitiveness, no matter how laudable, is less interesting to us than the pages of Nat's magazine. It now has 117,000 circulation in all parts of the world. Before the war he distributed 19,000 in London and 4,000 in Australia. Mr. Attlee or somebody has protested the use of good American dollars for such pleasure with the result that Nat now *gives* the magazine to his old subscribers in England but the folks in South Africa are still ponying over for 5,200 copies a month.

It is in a section known as the Managers' Directory that The Ring finally gets to the meat of the coconut. In this market the percentage boys offer their wares for sale in a scene somewhat resembling Uncle Tom's Cabin. It is human flesh presented on the hoof for the edification of the patrons. From Frank Gatto of Kansas City you can get "Howard Jackson, 118 pounds. Perpetual Fighting Machine. World's Greatest Crowd Pleaser." Fats Gary and Pete Martin of Philadelphia provide two excellent specimens in "Frank Feener, Irish welterweight kayo artist, and Sal Clementi, bantamweight Bundle of Dynamite."

In case that doesn't please your taste Guy T. Sulpi of Buffalo will let you gaze on "Stanley Myska, the Bull of the Heavyweights." Max Yeargain of Topeka stresses sentiment as well as prowess with "Pat McCafferty, the Middle West's light heavyweight sensation and Navy Hero." Jack Solomons, international boxing promoter of London, combines business with a delicate threat: "I am anxious to secure the best boxing talent obtainable and managers who would like to tour Europe with high-class fighters would do well to contact me."

But near the end of a list a sour note intrudes. Ike Williams, the lightweight champion, has a simple announcement, saying, "I am now handling my own business arrangements." This was obviously treason but we understand that Ike finally recanted. However, for a few fleeting moments he was a free man.

That's the way it is with Nat Fleischer, too. He wears his own soft shirt and takes lip from no man. He once had a 10 per cent contract with Max Schmeling that would have netted him $240,000 but he never exercised it. Max didn't want to pay and Nat didn't want his money anyhow.

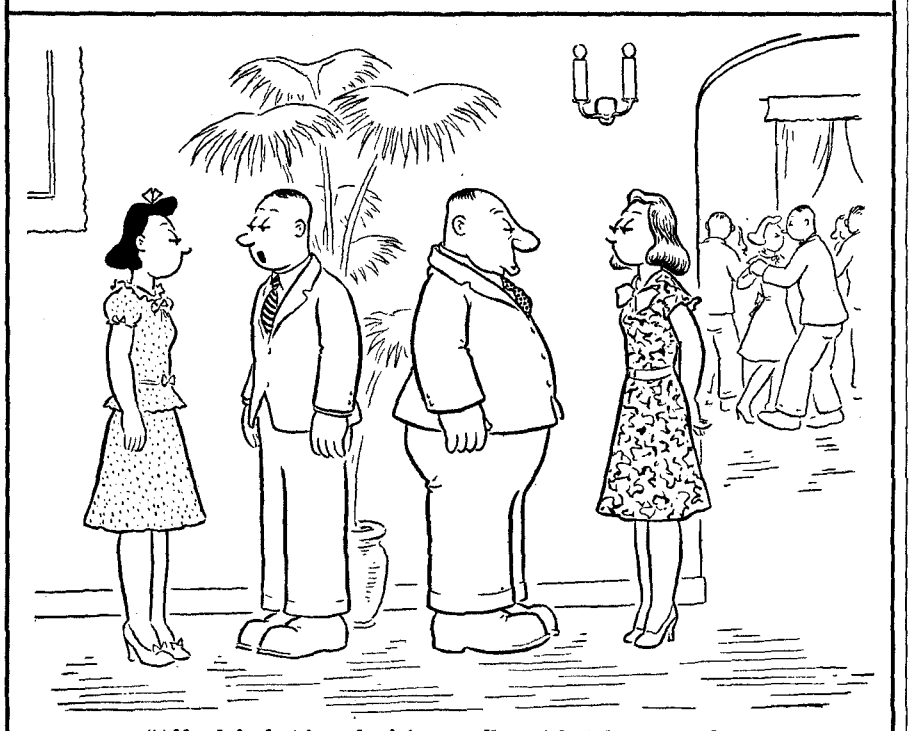
"I just wanted to prove to Tex Rickard that I knew a good fighter when I saw one," says Nat. "I didn't know he was going to turn out to be a political louse."

In the Fleischer book nobody is a boxing louse. He is a good fighter or a punk fighter and Nat loves him just the same. He has a standing order for his world-wide string of correspondents (all working gratis for the honor of it): "If you can't praise a guy, keep quiet. He'll take enough licks from the other guy anyhow."

This seems to be the basic Fleischer philosophy—and probably could stand a bit of reflection from us all.

THE END

ALFRED by FOSTER HUMFREVILLE



COLLIER'S "Alfred feels it's only fair to tell a girl right away that the door to his heart is locked and another has the key"

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THE MARTIN *Automatic* FISHING REEL

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He will appreciate *you* every time he uses it. Martin Fly-Wates are carried by the better sporting goods stores in your town. Ask your dealer to help you select one for your best angler friend. If he cannot supply you—

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She pays $10,000 for her diamond necklace...
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EVERVESS Yes, Yes!
Makes drinks taste better—costs less!

YES . . . it's bonded for quality by a famous surety company.
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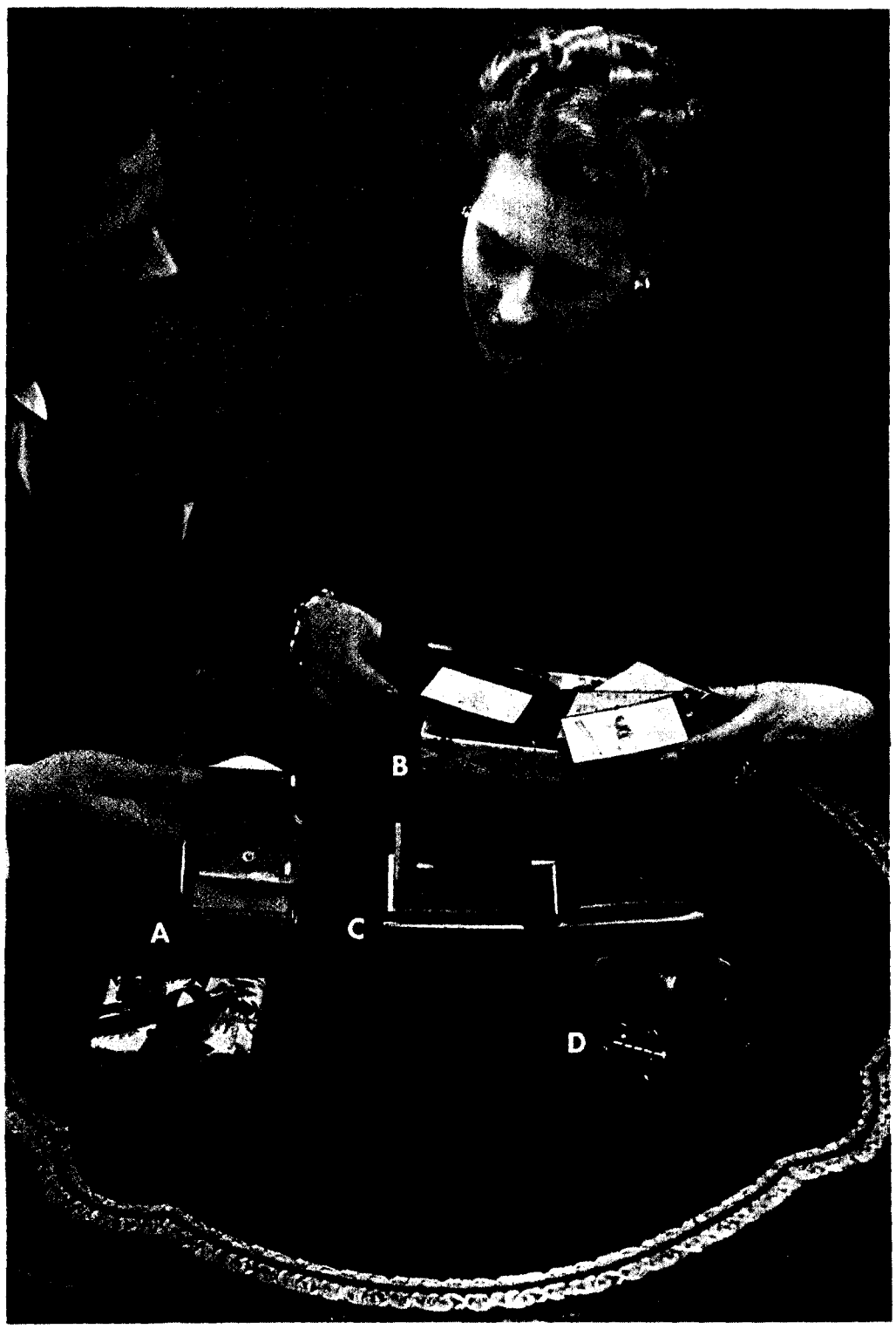

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For a lovely lady...the high fashion ensemble of a Princess Gardner Registrar billfold and Key Gard, glowing Cactus Rose in luxurious leathers.

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FINE LEATHER GOODS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

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THE TIN STAR

Continued from page 11

what I mean? You don't get a thing for it. You've got to risk everything. And you're free inside. Like the larks. You know the larks? How they get up in the sky and sing when they want to? A pretty bird. A very pretty bird. That's the way I like to feel inside."

Toby looked at him without expression. "That's the way you look at it. I don't see it. I've only got one life. You talk about doing it all for nothing, and that gives you something. What? What've you got now, waiting for Jordan to come?"

"I don't know yet. We'll have to wait and see."

Toby turned back to the window. "All right, but I'm through. I don't see any sense in risking your neck for nothing."

"Maybe you will," Doane said, beginning to work on his hands again.

"Here comes Mettrick. I guess he don't give up so easy. He's still got that resignation in his hand."

"I guess he doesn't," Doane said. "But I'm through listening. Has young Jordan come out of the saloon yet?"

"No," Toby said, and stepped aside as the door opened. Mettrick came in. "Now listen, Doane," he burst out, "for the last time—"

"Shut up, Percy," Doane said. "Sit down over there and shut up or get out."

The flare went out of the mayor's eyes. "Doane," he moaned, "you are the biggest—"

"Shut up," Doane said. "Toby, has he come out yet?"

Toby stood a little back from the window, where the slant of golden sunlight, swarming with dust, wouldn't strike his white shirt.

"Yes. He's got a chair. He's looking this way, Doane. He's still drinking. I can see a bottle on the porch beside him."

"I expected that. Not that it makes much difference." He looked down at the bunch of flowers.

Mettrick, in the straight chair against the wall, looked up at him, his black eyes scornful in his long, hopeless face.

"Don't make much difference? Who the hell do you think you are, Doane? God? It just means he'll start the trouble without waiting for his stinking brother, that's all it means." His hand was shaking, and the white paper hanging listlessly from his fingers fluttered slightly. He looked at it angrily and stuck it out at Doane. "I gave it to you. I did the best I could. Whatever happens, don't be blaming me, Doane. I gave you a chance to resign, and if—" He left off and sat looking at the paper in his hand as though it were a dead puppy of his that somebody had run a buggy over.

Doane, standing with the square, almost chisel-pointed tips of his fingers just touching the flowers, turned slowly, with the care of movement he would have used around a crazy horse. "I know you're my friend, Percy. Just take it easy, Percy. If I don't resign, it's not because I'm ungrateful."

"Here comes Staley with the news," Toby said from the window. "He looks like somebody just shot his grandma."

Percy Mettrick laid his paper on the desk and began smoothing it out ruefully. "It's not as though it were dishonorable, Doane. You should have quit two years ago, when your hands went bad. It's not dishonorable now. You've still got time."

He glanced up at the wall clock. "It's only three. You've got an hour before he gets in, you can take your horse . . ." As he talked to himself, Doane looking slantwise at him with his little smile, he grew more cheerful. "Here." He jabbed a pen out at Doane. "Sign it and get out of town."

THE smile left Doane's mouth. "This is an elective office. I don't have to take orders, even if you are mayor." His face softened. "It's simpler than you think, Percy. When they didn't hang Jordan, I knew this day would come. Five years ago, I knew it was coming, when they gave him that silly sentence. I've been waiting for it."

"But not to commit suicide," Mettrick said in a low voice, his eyes going down to Doane's gouty hands. Doane's knobby, twisted fingers closed slowly into fists, as though hiding themselves; his face flushed slightly. "I may be slow, but I can still shoot."

The mayor stood up and went slowly over to the door.

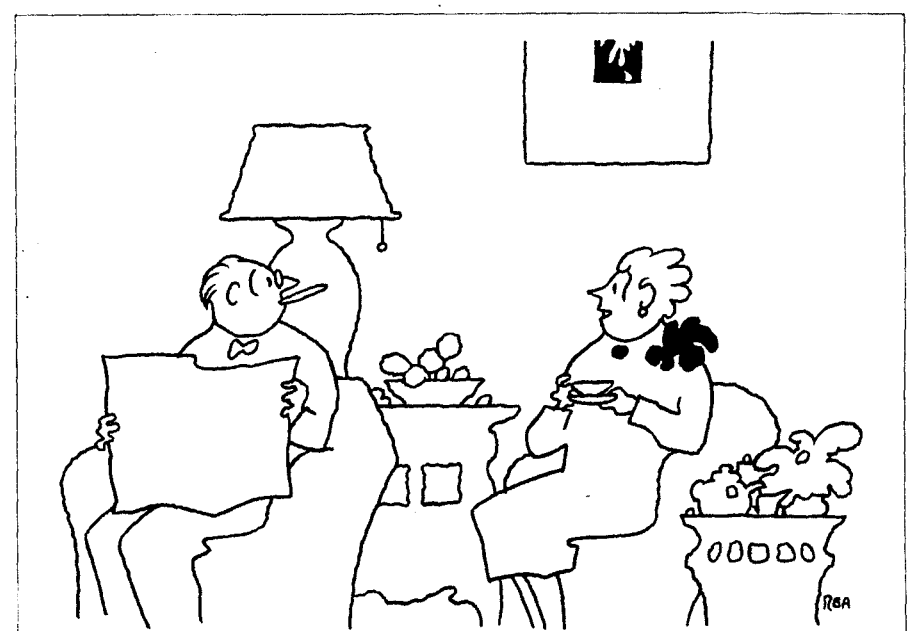
"Goodby, Doane."

"I'm not saying goodby, Percy. Not yet."

"Goodby," Mettrick repeated, and went out of the door.

Toby turned from the window. His face was tight around the mouth. "You should have resigned like he said, Doane. You ain't a match for one of them alone, much less two of them together. And if Pierce and Frank Colby come, too, like they was all together before—"

"Shut up, shut up," Doane said. "For God's sake, shut up." He sat down suddenly at the desk and covered his face



"Do you think that if the Democrats lose, Herbert, they will go underground?"

COLLIER'S GARDNER REA

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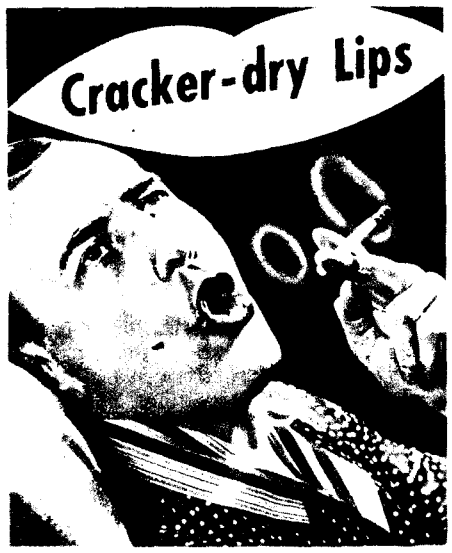

Smokers have them, indoor workers have them, early risers have them—most everyone has cracker-dry lips off and on. Licking them won't help, but 'CHAP STICK' *will.* Its soothing comfort is swift and lasting. That harsh dryness vanishes in a twinkling—smoking pleasure is increased—your lips feel fit.

Keep famous 'CHAP STICK' handy—the great little lip reparative for chapped, cracked, parched lips. Easy to apply—Specially medicated, *it's the one and only antiseptic lip balm.*

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THE ANTISEPTIC LIP BALM
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with his hands. "Maybe the pen changes a man." He was sitting stiff, hardly breathing.

"What are you going to do, Doane?"

"Nothing. I can't do anything until they start something. I can't do a thing. . . . Maybe the pen changes a man. Sometimes it does. I remember—"

"Listen, Doane," Toby said, his voice, for the first time, urgent. "It maybe changes some men, but not Jordan. It's already planned, what they're going to do. Why else would young Jordan be over there, watching? He's come three hundred miles for this."

"I've seen men go in the pen hard as rock and come out peaceful and settle down. Maybe Jordan—"

Toby's face relapsed into dullness. He turned back to the window listlessly. Doane's hands dropped.

"You don't think that's true, Toby?"

Toby sighed. "You know it isn't so, Doane. He swore he'd get you. That's the truth."

Doane's hands came up again in front of his face, but this time he was looking at them, his big gray eyes going quickly from one to the other, almost as though he were afraid of them. He curled his fingers slowly into fists, and uncurled them slowly, pulling with all his might, yet slowly. A thin sheen on his face reflected the sunlight from the floor. He got up.

"Is he still there?" he asked.

"Sure, he's still there."

"Maybe he'll get drunk. Dead drunk."

"You can't get a Jordan that drunk."

Doane stood with feet apart, looking at the floor, staring back and forth along one of the cracks. "Why didn't they hang him?" he asked the silence in the room.

"Why didn't they hang him?" he repeated, his voice louder.

Toby kept his post by the window, not moving a muscle in his face, staring out at the man across the street. "I don't know," he said. "For murder, they should. I guess they should, but they didn't."

DOANE'S eyes came again to the flowers, and some of the strain went out of his face. Then suddenly his eyes closed and he gave a long sigh, and then, luxuriously, stretched his arms. "Good God!" he said, his voice easy again. "It's funny how it comes over you like that." He shook his head violently. "I don't know why it should. It's not the first time. But it always does."

"I know," Toby said.

"It just builds up and then it busts."

"I know."

"The train may be late."

Toby said nothing.

"You never can tell," Doane said, buckling on his gun belt. "Things may have changed with Jordan. Maybe he won't even come. You never can tell. I'm going up to the cemetery as soon as we hear from Staley."

"I wouldn't. You'd just tempt young Jordan to start something."

"I've been going up there every Sunday since she died."

"We'd best both just stay in here. Let them make the first move."

Feet sounded on the steps outside and Doane stopped breathing for a second. Staley came in, his face pinched, tight and dead, his eyes on the floor. Doane looked him over carefully.

"Is it on time?" he asked steadily.

Staley looked up, his faded blue eyes distant, pointed somewhere over Doane's head. "Mr. Doane, you ain't handled this thing right. You should of drove young Jordan out of town." His hand went to his chest and he took off the deputy's badge.

"What are you doing?" Doane asked sharply.

"If you'd of handled it right, we could have beat this," Staley said, his voice louder.

"You know nobody's done nothing

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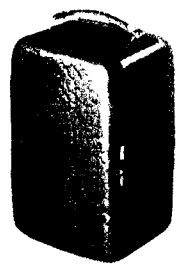

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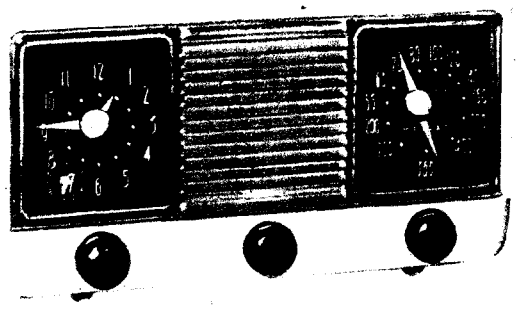

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yet," Toby said softly, his gentle brown eyes on Staley. "There's nothing we can do until they start something."

"I'm quitting, Mr. Doane," Staley said. He looked around for someplace to put the star. He started for the desk, hesitated, and then awkwardly, with a peculiar diffidence, laid the star gently on the window sill.

Doane's jaw began to jut a little. "You still haven't answered my question. Is the train on time?"

"Yes. Four ten. Just on time." Staley stood staring at Doane, then swallowed. "I saw Frank Colby. He was in the livery putting up his horse. He'd had a long ride on that horse. I asked him what he was doing in town—friendly like." He ducked his head and swallowed again. "He didn't know I was a deputy, I had my star off." He looked up again. "They're all meeting together, Mr. Doane. Young Jordan, and Colby and Pierce. They're going to meet Jordan when he comes in. The same four."

"So you're quitting," Doane said.

"Yes, sir. It ain't been handled right."

Toby stood looking at him, his gentle eyes dull. "Get out," he said, his voice low and tight.

Staley looked at him, nodded and tried to smile, which was too weak to last. "Sure."

Toby took a step toward him. Staley's eyes were wild as he stood against the door. He tried to back out of Toby's way.

"Get out," Toby said again, and his small brown fist flashed out. Staley stepped backward and fell down the steps in a sprawling heap, scrambled to his feet and hobbled away. Toby closed the door slowly. He stood rubbing his knuckles, his face red and tight.

"That didn't do any good," Doane said softly.

Toby turned on him. "It couldn't do no harm," he said acidly, throwing the words into Doane's face.

"You want to quit, too?" Doane asked, smiling.

"Sure, I want to quit," Toby shot out. "Sure. Go on to your blasted cemetery, go on with your flowers, old man—" He sat down suddenly on the straight chair. "Put a flower up there for me, too."

Doane went to the door. "Put some water on the heater, Toby. Set out the liniment that the vet gave me. I'll try it again when I get back. It might do some good yet."

He let himself out and stood in the sunlight on the porch, the flowers drooping in his hand, looking against the sun across the street at the dim figure under the shaded porch.

Then he saw the two other shapes hunkered against the front of the saloon in the shade of the porch, one on each side of young Jordan, who sat tilted back in a chair. Colby and Pierce. The glare of the sun beat back from the blinding white dust and fought shimmering in the air.

Doane pulled the brim of his hat farther down in front and stepped slowly down to the board sidewalk, observing carefully from squinted eyes, and just as carefully avoiding any pause which might be interpreted as a challenge.

Young Jordan had the bottle to his lips as Doane came out. He held it there for a moment motionless, and then, as Doane reached the walk, he passed the bottle slowly sideward to Colby and leaned forward, away from the wall, so that the chair came down softly. He sat there, leaning forward slightly, watching while Doane untied his horse. As Doane mounted, Jordan got up. Colby's hand grabbed one of his arms. He shook it off and untied his own horse from the rail.

DOANE'S mouth tightened and his eyes looked a little sad. He turned his horse, and holding the flowers so the jog would not rattle off the petals, headed up the street, looking straight ahead.

The hoofs of his horse made soft, almost inaudible little plops in the deep dust. Behind him he heard a sudden stamping of hoofs and then the harsh splitting and crash of wood. He looked back. Young Jordan's horse was up on the sidewalk, wild-eyed and snorting, with young Jordan leaning forward half out of the saddle, pushing himself back from the horse's neck, back off the horn into the saddle, swaying insecurely. And as Jordan managed the horse off the sidewalk Doane looked quickly forward again, his eyes fixed distantly ahead and blank.

He passed men he knew, and out of the corner of his eye he saw their glances slowly follow him, calm, or gloomy, or shrewdly speculative. As he passed, he knew their glances were shifting to the man whose horse was softly coming behind him. It was like that all the way up

COLLIER'S "Did you notice, George? No style at all!" FRED BALK

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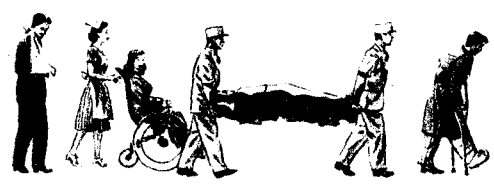

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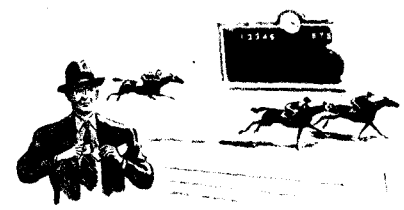

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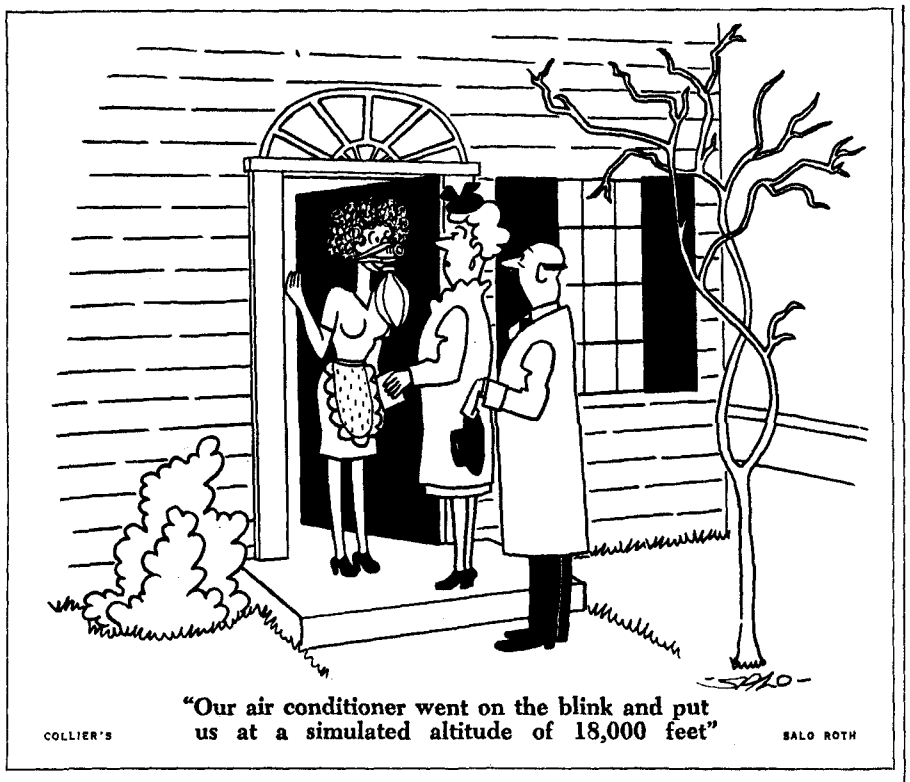

COLLIER'S "Our air conditioner went on the blink and put us at a simulated altitude of 18,000 feet" SALO ROTH

the street. The flowers were drooping markedly now.

The town petered out with a few Mexican shacks, the road dwindled to broad ruts, and the sage was suddenly on all sides of him, stretching away toward the heat-obscured mountains like an infinite multitude of gray-green sheep. He turned off the road and began the slight ascent up the little hill whereon the cemetery lay. Grasshoppers shrilled invisibly in the sparse, dried grass along the track, silent as he came by, and shrill again as he passed, only to become silent again as the other rider came.

He swung off at the rusty barbed wire Missouri gate and slipped the loop from the post, and the shadow of the other slid tall across his path and stopped. Doane licked his lips quickly and looked up, his grasp tightening on the now sweat-wilted newspaper. Young Jordan was sitting his horse, open-mouthed, leaning forward with his hands on the pommel to support himself, his eyes vague and dull. His lips were wet and red, and hung in a slight smile.

A lark made the air sweet over to the left, and then Doane saw it, rising into the air. It hung in the sun, over the cemetery. Moving steadily and avoiding all suddenness, Doane hung his reins over the post.

"You don't like me, do you?" young Jordan said. A long thread of saliva descended from the corner of his slackly smiling mouth.

DOANE'S face set into a sort of blank preparedness. He turned and started slowly through the gate, his shoulders hunched up and pulled backward.

Jordan got down from the saddle, and Doane turned toward him slowly. Jordan came forward straight enough, with his feet apart, braced against staggering. He stopped three feet from Doane, bent forward, his mouth slightly open.

"You got any objections to me being in town?"

"No," Doane said, and stood still.

Jordan thought that over, his eyes drifting idly sideways for a moment. Then they came back, to a finer focus this time, and he said, "Why not?" hunching forward again, his hands open and held away from the holsters at his hips.

Doane looked at the point of his nose. "You haven't done anything, Jordan. Except get drunk. Nothing to break the law."

"I haven't done nothing," Jordan said, his eyes squinting away at one of the small, tilting tombstones. "By God, I'll do something. Whadda I got to do?" He drew his head back, as though he were farsighted, and squinted. "Whadda I got to do to make you fight, huh?"

"Don't do anything," Doane said quietly, keeping his voice even. "Just go back and have another drink. Have a good time."

"You think I ain't sober enough to fight?" Jordan slipped his right gun out of its holster, turning away from Doane. Doane stiffened. "Wait, mister," Jordan said.

He cocked the gun. "See that bird?" He raised the gun into the air, squinting along the barrel. The bright nickel of its finish gleamed in the sun. The lark wheeled and fluttered. Jordan's arm swung unsteadily in a small circle.

He pulled the trigger and the gun blasted. The lark jumped in the air, flew away about twenty feet, and began circling again, catching insects.

"Missed 'im," Jordan mumbled, lowering his arm and wiping sweat off his forehead. "Damn it, I can't see!" He raised his arm again. Again the heavy blast cracked Doane's ears. Down in the town, near the Mexican huts, he could see tiny figures run out into the street.

The bird didn't jump this time, but darted away out of sight over the hill.

"Got him," Jordan said, scanning the sky. His eyes wandered over the graveyard for a moment, looking for the bird's body. "Now you see?" he said, turning to Doane, his eyes blurred and watering with the sun's glare. "I'm going down and shoot up the damned town. Come down and stop me, you old—"

He turned and lurched sideways a step, straightened himself out and walked more steadily toward his horse, laughing to himself. Doane turned away, his face sick, and trudged slowly up the hill, his eyes on the ground.

He stopped at one of the newer graves. The headstone was straight on this one. He looked at it, his face changing expression. "Here lies Cecelia Doane, born 1837, died 1885, the loyal wife . . ."

He stooped and pulled a weed from the side of the grave, then pulled a bunch of withered stems from a small green funnel by the headstone, and awkwardly took the fresh flowers out of the newspaper. He put the flowers into the funnel, wedging them firmly down into the bottom, and set it down again. He stood up and moved back, wiping sweat from his eyes.

A sudden shout came from the gate, and the sharp crack of a quirt. Doane turned with a befuddled look.

Jordan was back on his horse, beating

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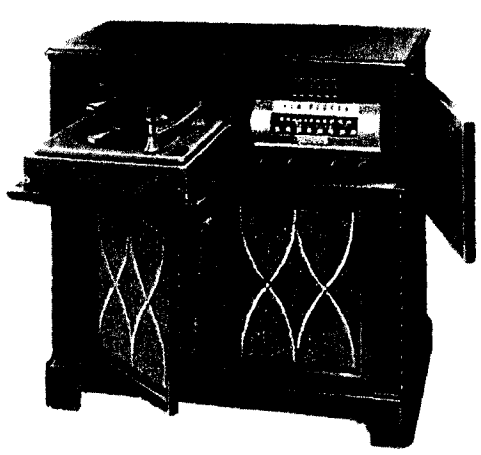

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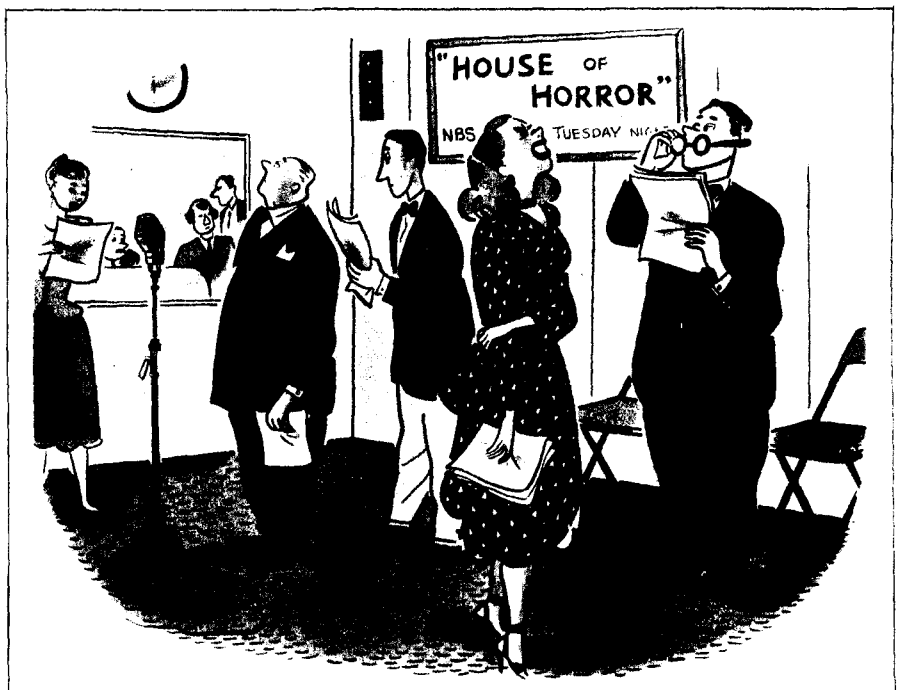
Doane's. He had looped the reins over its neck so that it would run free. It was tearing away down the slope headed back for town.

Doane stood with his hat in his hand, his face suddenly beet red. He took a step after Jordan, and then stood still, shaking a little. He stared fixedly after him, watching him turn into the main road and toward the main street again. Then, sighing deeply, he turned back to the grave. Folding the newspaper, he began dusting off the heavy slab, whispering to himself. "No, Cissie. I could have gone. But, you know—it's my town."

He straightened up, his face flushed, put on his hat, and slapping the folded paper against his knee, started down the path. He got to the Missouri gate, closed it, and started down the ruts again.

A SHOT came from the town, and he stopped. Then there were two more, sharp spurts of sound coming clear and definite across the sage. He made out a tiny figure in a blue shirt running along a sidewalk.

He stood stock-still, the grasshoppers singing in a contented chorus all around



"Sometimes I think if I have to shriek just one more time, I'll scream!"

COLLIER'S DON TOBIN

him in the bright yellow glare. A train whistle came faint from off the plain, and he looked far across it. He made out the tiny trailed plume of smoke.

His knees began to quiver very slightly and he began to walk, very slowly, down the road.

Then suddenly there was a splatter of shots from below. The train whistle came again, louder, a crying wail of despair in the burning, brilliant, dancing air.

He began to hurry, stumbling a little in the ruts. And then he stopped short, his face open in fear. "My God, my empty horse, those shots—Toby, no!" He began to run, shambling, awkward and stumbling, his face ashen.

From the end of the street, as he hobbled panting past the tight-shut Mexican shanties, he could see a blue patch in the dust in front of the saloon, and shambled to a halt. It wasn't Toby, whoever it was, lying there face down: face buried in the deep, pillowing dust, feet still on the board sidewalk where the man had been standing.

The street was empty. None of the faces he knew looked at him now. He drew one of his guns and cocked it and walked fast up the walk, on the saloon side.

A shot smashed ahead of him and he stopped, shrinking against a store front. Inside, through the glass door, he could see two pale faces in the murk. Blue powder smoke curled out from under the saloon porch ahead of him.

Another shot smashed, this time from his office. The spurt of smoke, almost invisible in the sunlight, was low down in the doorway. Two horses were loose in the street now, his own, standing alert up past the saloon, and young Jordan's, half up on the boardwalk under one of the porches.

He walked forward, past young Jordan's horse, to the corner of the saloon building. Another shot slammed out of his office door, the bullet smacking the window ahead of him. A small, slow smile grew on his mouth. He looked sideways at the body in the street. Young Jordan lay with the back of his head open to the sun, crimson and brilliant, his bright nickel gun still in his right hand, its hammer still cocked, unfired.

The train whistle moaned again, closer.

"Doane," Toby called from the office door, invisible. "Get out of town." There was a surge of effort in the voice, a strain that made it almost a squeal. "I'm shot in the leg. Get out before they get together."

A door slammed somewhere. Doane glanced down between the saloon and the store beside it. Then he saw, fifty yards down the street, a figure come out of another side alley and hurry away down the walk toward the station. From the saloon door another shot slammed across the street. Toby held his fire.

Doane peered after the running figure, his eyes squinting thoughtfully. The train's whistle shrieked again like the ultimatum of an approaching conqueror at the edge of town, and in a moment the ground under his feet began to vibrate slightly and the hoarse roar of braking wheels came up the street.

He turned back to young Jordan's horse, petted it around the head a moment and then took it by the reins close to the bit. He guided it across the street, keeping its body between him and the front of the saloon, without drawing fire, and went on down the alley beside his office. At the rear door he hitched the horse and went inside.

Toby was on the floor, a gun in his hand, his hat beside him, peering out across the sill. Doane kept low, beneath the level of the window, and crawled up to him. Toby's left leg was twisted peculiarly and blood leaked steadily out from the boot top onto the floor. His face was sweating and very pale, and his lips were tight.

"I thought he got you," Toby said, keeping his eyes on the saloon across the street. "I heard those shots and then your horse came bucketing back down the street. I got Jordan. Colby got me in the leg before I got back inside."

"Never mind about that. Come on, get on your feet if you can and I'll help you on the horse in back. You can get out of town and I'll shift for myself."

"I think I'm going to pass out. I don't want to move. It won't hurt no worse getting killed than it does now. The hell with the horse! Take it yourself."

Doane looked across the street, his eyes moving over the door and the windows carefully, inch by inch.

"I'm sorry I shot him," Toby said. "It's my fault. And it's my fight now, Doane. Clear out."

Doane turned and scuttled out of the back. He mounted the horse and rode down behind four stores. He turned up another alley, dashed across the main street, down another alley, then back up behind the saloon.

He dismounted, his gun cocked in his hand. The back door of the place was open and he got through it quickly, the sound of his boot heels dimmed under the blast of a shot from the front of the saloon. From the dark rear of the room, he could see Pierce, crouched behind the bar, squinting through a bullet hole in the stained-glass bottom half of the front window.

There was a bottle of whisky standing on the bar beside Pierce; he reached out a hand and tilted the bottle up to his mouth, half turning toward Doane as he did so. Pierce kept the bottle to his lips, pretending to drink, and, with his right hand invisible behind the bar, brought his gun into line with Doane.

The tip of Pierce's gun came over the edge of the bar, the rest of him not moving a hair, and Doane, gritting his teeth, squeezed slowly and painfully on his gun trigger. The gun flamed and bucked in his hand, and he dropped it, his face twisting in agony. The bottle fell out of Pierce's hand and spun slowly on the bar. Pierce sat there for a moment before his head fell forward and he crashed against the edge of the bar and slipped down out of sight.

DOANE picked up his gun with his left hand and walked forward to the bar, holding his right hand like a crippled paw in front of him. The bottle had stopped revolving. Whisky inside it, moving back and forth, rocked it gently. He righted it and took a short pull at the neck, and in a moment the pain lines relaxed in his face. He went to the batwing doors and pushed one of them partly open.

"Toby!" he called.

There was no answer from across the street, and then he saw the barrel of a revolver sticking out of his office door, lying flat, and behind it one hand, curled loosely and uselessly around the butt.

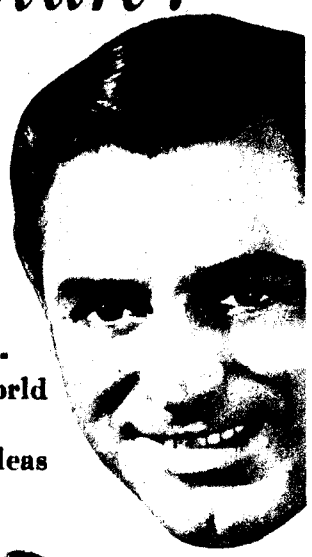
He looked down the street. The train stood across it. A brakeman moved along the cars slowly, his head down. There was nobody else in sight.

He started to step out, and saw then two men coming up the opposite walk, running fast. Suddenly one of them stopped, grabbing the other by the arm, and pointed at him. He stared back for a moment, seeing Jordan clearly now, the square, hard face unchanged except for its pallor, bleak and bony as before.

Doane let the door swing to and continued to watch them over the top of it. They talked for a moment. Then Colby ran back down the street—well out of effective range—sprinted across it and disappeared. Down the street the engine, hidden by some building, chuffed angrily, and the cars began to move again. Jordan stood still, leaning against the front of a building, fully exposed, a hard smile on his face.

Doane turned and hurried to the back door. It opened outward. He slammed and bolted it, then hurried back to the

what an idea for a picture!



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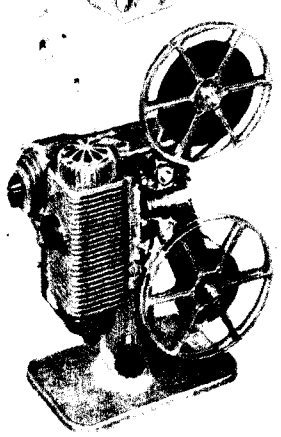

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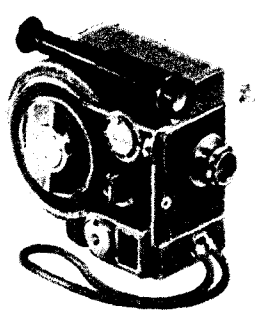

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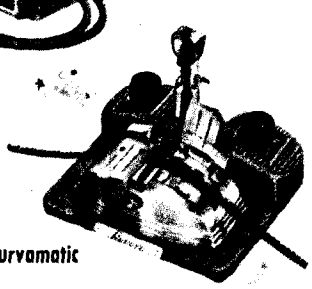

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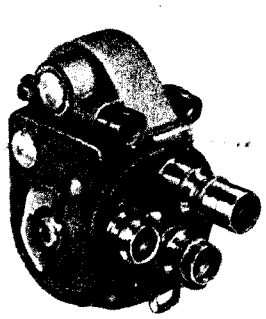

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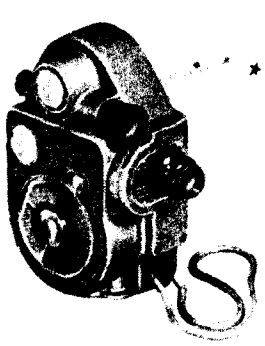

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front and waited, his gun ready. He smiled as the back door rattled, turned, fired a shot at it and listened. For a moment there was no sound. Then something solid hit it, bumped a couple of times and silence came again.

From the side of the building, just beyond the corner where Pierce's body lay, a shot crashed. The gun in the office door jumped out of the hand and spun wildly. The hand lay still.

He heard Jordan's voice from down the street, calling, the words formed slowly, slightly spaced.

"Is he dead?"

"Passed out," Colby called back.

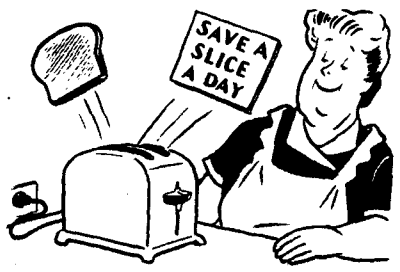
"I'm going around back to get him. Keep Doane inside." Jordan turned and disappeared down an alley.

DOANE leaned across the bar, knocked bottles off the shelves of the back bar and held his pistol on the corner of the wall, about a foot above the floor.

"Pierce," he said.

"Throw out your guns," Pierce answered.

Doane squinted at the corner, moved his gun slightly and fired. He heard a cry of pain, then curses; saw the bat-wing doors swing slightly. Then he turned and ran for the back door. He threw back the bolt and pushed on the door. It wouldn't give. He threw himself against



SAVE FOOD !

it. It gave a little at the bottom. Colby had thrown a stake up against it to keep him locked in.

He ran back to the front.

Across the street, he could see somebody moving in his office, dimly, beyond the window. Suddenly the hand on the floor disappeared.

"Come on out, you old ——" Pierce said, panting. "You only skinned me." His voice was closer than before, somewhere between the door and the corner of the building, below the level of the stained glass.

Then Doane saw Toby's white shirt beyond the window opposite. Jordan was holding him up, and moving toward the door. Jordan came out on the porch, hugging Toby around the chest, protecting himself with the limp body. With a heave he sent Toby flying down the steps, and jumped back out of sight. Toby rolled across the sidewalk and fell into the street, where he lay motionless.

Doane looked stupidly at Toby, then at young Jordan, still lying with his feet cocked up on the sidewalk.

"He ain't dead, Doane," Jordan called. "Come and get him if you want him alive." He fired through the window. Dust jumped six inches from Toby's head. "Come on out, Doane, and shoot it out. You got a chance to save him." The gun roared again, and dust jumped a second time beside Toby's head, almost in the same spot.

"Leave the kid alone," Doane called. "This fight's between you and me."

"The next shot kills him, Doane."

Doane's face sagged white and he leaned against the side of the door. He could hear Pierce breathing heavily in the silence, just outside. He pushed himself away from the door and drew a breath through clenched teeth. He cocked his pistol and strode out, swinging around. Pierce fired from the sidewalk, and Doane aimed straight into the blast and pulled as he felt himself flung violently around by Pierce's bullet.

Pierce came up from the sidewalk and took two steps toward him, opening and shutting a mouth that was suddenly full of blood, his eyes wide and wild, and then pitched down at his feet.

Doane's right arm hung useless, his gun at his feet. With his left hand he drew his other gun and stepped out from the walk, his mouth wide open, as though he were gasping for breath or were about to scream, and took two steps toward Toby as Jordan came out of the office door, firing. The slug caught Doane along the side of his neck, cutting the shoulder muscle, and his head fell over to one side. He staggered on, firing. He saw Toby trying to get up, saw Jordan fall back against the building, red running down the front of his shirt, and the smile gone.

Jordan stood braced against the building, holding his gun in both hands, firing as he slid slowly down. One bullet took Doane in the stomach, another in the knee. He went down, flopped forward and dragged himself up to where Toby lay trying to prop himself up on one elbow. Doane knelt there like a dog, puking blood into the dust, blood running out of his nose, but his gray eyes almost indifferent, as though there were one man dying and another watching.

He saw Jordan lift his gun with both hands and aim it toward Toby, and as the hammer fell, he threw himself across Toby's head and took it in the back. He rolled off onto his back and lay staring into the sky.

Upside down, he saw Toby take his gun and get up on one elbow, level it at Jordan and fire, and then saw Toby's face, over his, looking down at him as the deputy knelt in the street.

THEY stayed that way for a long moment, while Doane's eyes grew more and more dull and the dark of his blood in the white dust grew broader. His breath was coming hard, in small sharp gasps.

"There's nothing in it, kid," he whispered. "Only a tin star. They don't hang the right ones. You got to fight everything twice. It's a job for a dog."

"Thank you, Doane."

"It's all for free. You going to quit, Toby?"

Toby looked down at the gray face, the mouth and chin and neck crimson, the gray eyes dull. Toby shook his head. His face was hard as a rock.

Doane's face suddenly looked a little surprised, his eyes went past Toby to the sky. Toby looked up. A lark was high above them, circling and fluttering, directly overhead. "A pretty bird," Doane mumbled. "A very pretty bird."

His head turned slowly to one side, and Toby looked down at him and saw him as though fast asleep.

He took Doane's gun in his hand, and took off Doane's star, and sat there in the street while men slowly came out of stores and circled about them. He sat there unmoving, looking at Doane's half-averted face, holding the two things tightly, one in each hand, like a child with a broken toy, his face soft and blurred, his eyes unwet.

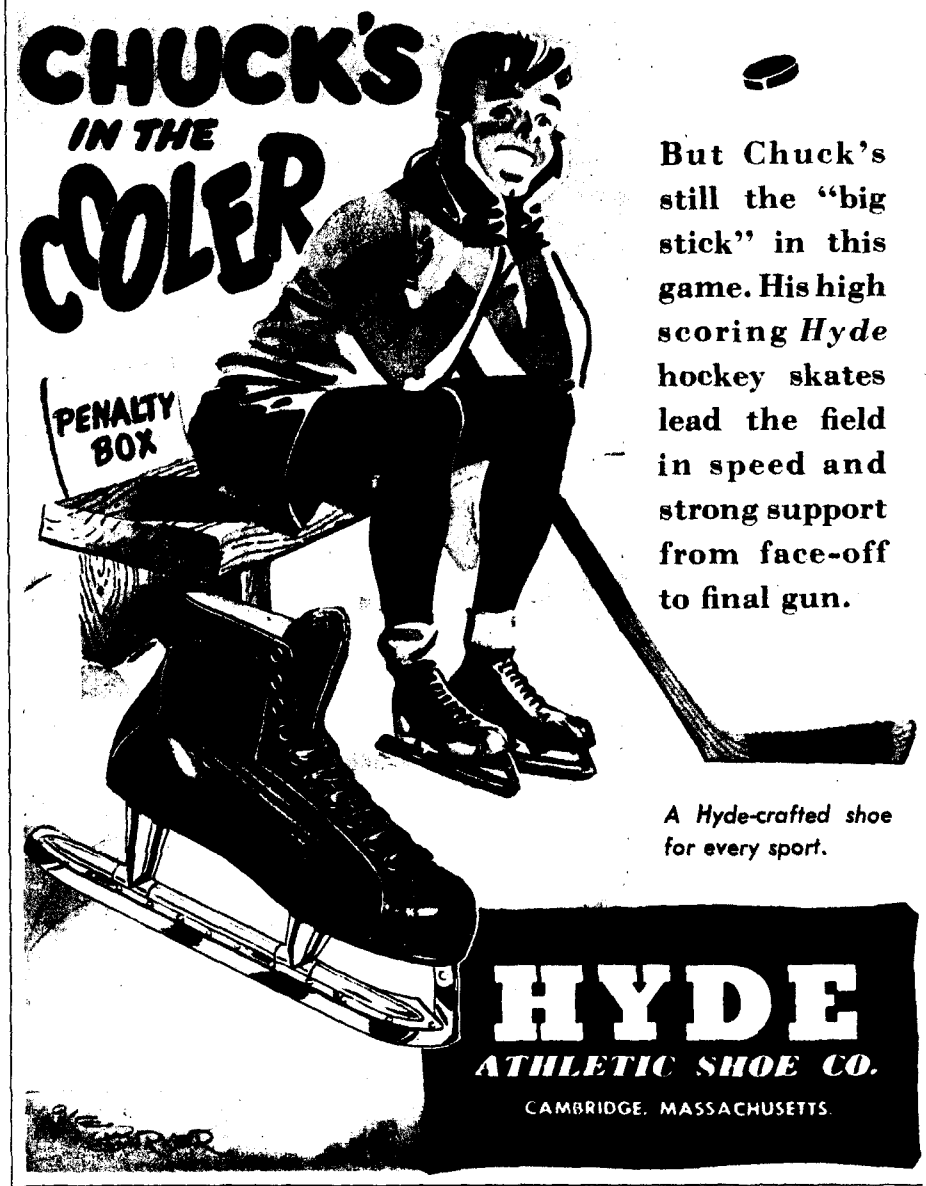
After a while the lark went away. He looked up at the men, and saw Mettrick.

"I told him he should have resigned," Mettrick said, his voice high. "He could have taken his horse—"

"Shut up," Toby said. "Shut up or get out." His eyes were sharp and his face placid and set. He turned to another of the men. "Get the doc," he said. "I've got a busted leg. And I've got a lot to do."

The man looked at him, a little startled, and then ran.

THE END



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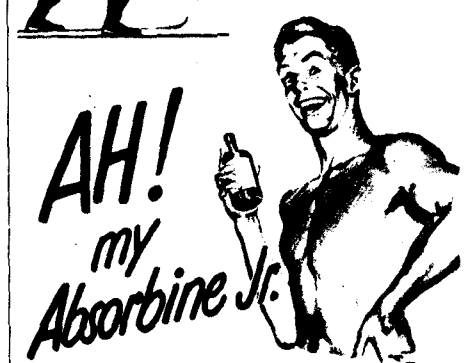

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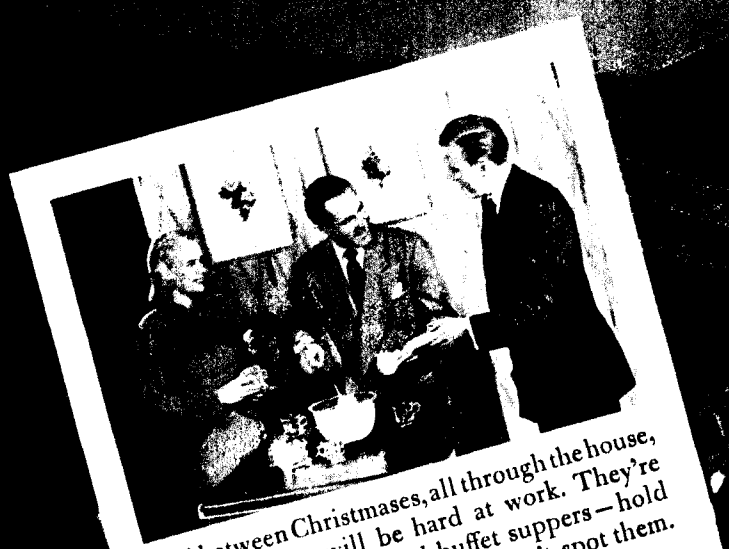

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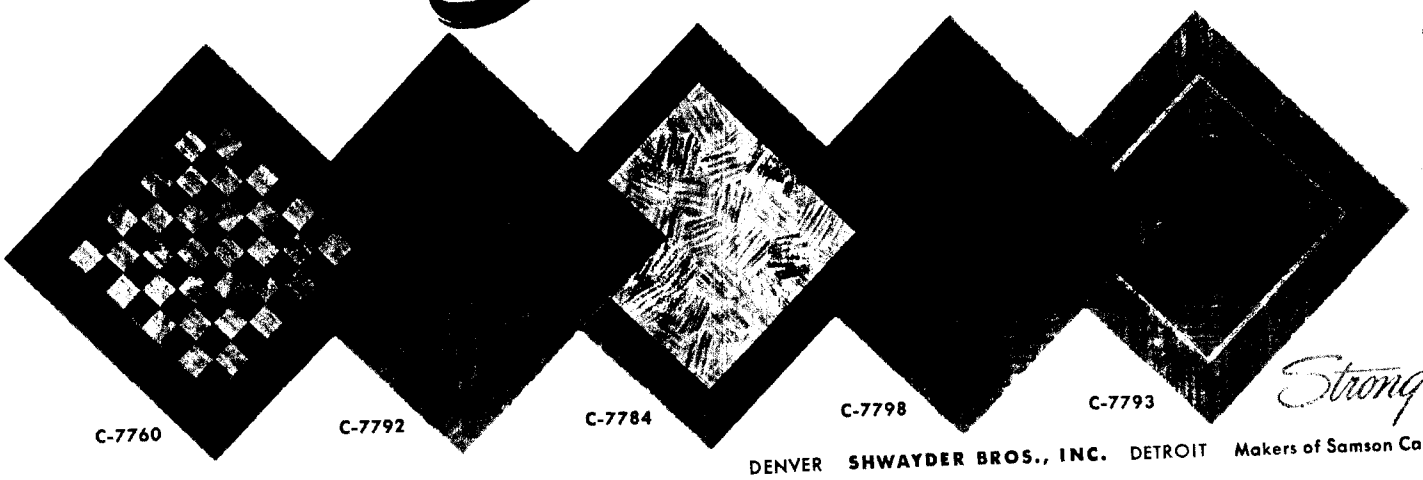

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ALFRED AND THE STAFF OF LIFE

BY FRANK LASKIER

I WAS driving down to Boston to join my ship when something about a diner just off the main road caught my eye. It was a cleanly little place, and even from the outside, it had an air of prosperity. I pulled off the road and went in, took a stool, and there, behind the counter, in gleaming whites, was my old shipmate, Alfred Gilhooley.

It was easy to see that he was the boss. The information was shouted aloud in the set of his shoulders, the flick of his cloth as he wiped the counter, his proud smile as he told me that my "eats" were on the house.

I took a cup of coffee, and over the screaming protests of my stomach, I drank some.

It was just the right strength, and as fresh as the morning. I was never so surprised in my life.

Alfred turned his back on me as he gave an extra rub to the sign over the cash register. "Homemade doughnuts," I read. "All bread baked on the premises."

He looked at me with that old pleading smile on his guileless face—the smile that had trapped me so often on the Tarela.

"The sandwiches is awful good," he said. "Will ye have one?"

"Half a one," I said, weakly.

ALFRED GILHOOLEY had reported aboard the Tarela as ship's cook during the last years of the war. Unfortunately, we sailed right away.

He was a long, gangling youth with a shy manner and a quiet voice, and he aroused concern in every stomach from the first day he set foot aboard the ship. The boatswain saw him standing in the galley for fifteen minutes, staring about him as though transported to a strange new world. A sailor found him idly carving his name on the workbench with the ship's only serviceable meat knife.

In his first two hours in the galley, Alfred set the stove on fire with spilled grease and stopped up the sink for a week with a carelessly disposed dishrag. Before the voyage was a day old, we discovered that this was Alfred's first trip as cook, and to say that he could not boil water would be to state only the least of his shortcomings.

We did the best we could to help, for he was a likable lad and he tried hard to please, but there was a jinx on him, he was a Jonah, and nothing that he ever put his hand to aboard the ship turned out right.

He made a plum cake and forgot to take the pits out, and the boatswain smashed four of his store teeth, first bite. He was given a prime piece of beef to roast for dinner, and it came to the messroom burned black as the mouth of the Pit on the outside, and as raw as Halifax on a Sunday morning on the inside. If he made soup, and it was good, he was more than likely to forget, and drop a sliver of blue mottled soap into it. Once, he made us a good meal—a perfect meal. We sniffed it all over the ship, and our hungry mouths drooled. He forgot to put the guard rails on the stove top, the ship rolled and the dinner skittered off and landed on a man's foot. Not Alfred's.

These were but minor culinary ailments when placed beside his greatest failing.

Alfred could not bake bread.

Now, on board an old freighter such as the Tarela we ate a lot of bread. The watchkeepers were always eating sandwiches, and it was a rare hour of the night when there was not a sailor in the galley, slurping down his coffee and bread and jam.

At the first, Alfred produced a batch of bread with holes in each loaf, the size of the old-fashioned silver dollar. The boatswain returned these loaves to the galley and placed them on the bench and walked out.

"Too much yeast," he said in a weary voice, and Alfred shuffled his feet in shame.

Thereupon, he served us small rancid wads of dough that were cold to the touch and could be pulled apart in strands like well-chewed gum.

It was the lamp trimmer who elected to take these back.

"Not enough yeast," he said brokenly, and going from the galley, he went straight to his quarters and broke out those tins of emergency rations he had kept through the war in case the ship be torpedoed.

All that night, Alfred pored over the weighty cookbooks he had brought aboard the ship. The next day, he produced small hard bricks that clinked when they were dropped; they were dropped often.

A hollow-eyed able seaman made the long trek aft.

"There's enough yeast," he said, "but you ain't put enough salt in it."

The next batch of bread contained so much salt that it seemed to us that our vitals were consumed by flame. Otherwise, a good batch. But we panted through the day like a troupe of tortured collie dogs.

As soon as our thirst was slaked and our voices returned, we marched in a body to the galley.

"Before you ruin the stomach of every man aboard of us," said the boatswain, "take a word of advice."

He led Alfred to the rail.

"D'you see the ocean?" he said. "Well, there's just the right amount in a bucket of salt water to make bread."

He took Alfred by the arm and led him to the galley.

"That there tap," said the boatswain gently, and he pointed to the tap marked Sea Water, "is connected by pipes to the ocean. Use that, and don't add no salt."

Alfred nodded his head, and the joyful light of intelligence gleamed from his eyes.

THEREAFTER, the bread was good, and daily Alfred rose in our esteem. The carefree days sped on until we reached Abadan, on the Persian Gulf. It was on the morning when the thermometer showed 135 degrees in the shade that wasn't there, that Alfred fell from grace.

The bread smelled queer, even as he baked it.

I went to the messroom to find the crew examining one of these loaves as it reposed on the table, under a strong light.

It was small (compact would be a charitable word), in color an aged gray, and heavy enough to bash a man's brains out.

A seaman decided it had been baked in a fireman's sock. This started a bitter argument with the members of the black gang, who wanted to take him up. But the watchword was "Unity."

Again, we marched to the galley. I could see, by the expression on Alfred's face, that he knew he had done wrong, but he showed us how much flour and yeast he had used—

"Did you use the water from the sea tap?" asked the boatswain in a faint voice, and Alfred nodded his head.

One by one we drifted out of the galley, and we had not the heart to say a thing, and we left Alfred, standing there still with that dumfounded look on his face.

I went to the rail and lighted a cigarette. The greasy yellow stream flowing past the ship's side seemed solid enough to walk upon. A dead dog came drifting along, and the current gave it a sort of waltzing effect. A little, just a little, upstream a native boy sat on the bank and washed a lifetime of encrusted dirt from between his odoriferous spatulate toes.

I turned to find Alfred at my side. I was going to bawl him out, and I didn't have the heart, so I gave him a cigarette.

"They told me to use that tap," he said sadly, "but they didn't tell me *not* to use it in port."

"It wouldn't have mattered," I said.

MY THOUGHTS came back with a jolt to the present. I was in the neat little diner, and Alfred was handing me a plate, and on it, half a sandwich. I ate it, and it was superb.

"Did you bake this bread?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"No. My wife does," he whispered. "I'm a married man now, nice little business, doin' well. But I only serve. She won't allow me to cook."

I could scarce control a grin, and Alfred picked up my empty coffee cup, went to refill it and found the pot was empty. "I just made more in the other urn," he chattered, and he filled my cup and put it before me.

I took one look at it and pushed the cup back. He looked down, and at least he had the grace to blush.

"Gee," he said, "I plumb forgot."

But, at that, Alfred *was* showing an improvement.

It was certainly not good coffee, but it was beautifully boiled water.

A SHORT SHORT STORY COMPLETE ON THIS PAGE

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