

MULLINS and The Pretty Dumb Huntress

Amy found it was uphill work to court a man in duckhunting season—especially for a city girl whose intentions were better than her aim

By NORD RILEY

ONE afternoon, Barry Mullins, the editor of the weekly Richmoor Sentinel, a large, affable, and somewhat shaggy young man with the relaxed manner of an old union suit, met Mrs. Hazel Hansen at Mabel's Café for pie, coffee, and a half column of personals. Mrs. Hansen was a shapely divorcee upon whose ears local news items collected like iron filings on a magnet. For her news service there was no charge. Ever since Mr. Hansen, her ex-husband, had bitten the legal dust, Hazel had been stalking the editor.

On this, the day before the opening of the duck season, Barry had recorded most of Mrs. Hansen's gleanings when Tom Benson, sheriff of Watson County, limped over to their booth.

"Afternoon, Hazel." The sheriff was cheerless. "Been lookin' for you, son. Got a little item for the Sentinel."

The sheriff, a big, gray man with habitually sore feet and a paunch that fitted him like a bulb on a thermometer, was a sound friend, and Barry was happy to make room for him in the booth.

"What I come to tell you, Barry, is that last night some low cuss backed his truck up to Frank Humber's pile of wheat and swiped near four hundred dollars' worth of grain." The sheriff was pained. "Frank is snortin' like a boar with a toothache, but worse'n that, Billy Hofer was in a while ago hol-lerin' at me that he lost three hundred bushel night before last same way."

The editor looked at him with interest. "Any leads?"

"No leads. Nothin'. There'll be more of this stealin', too. With this big crop and nowheres near enough boxcars to haul it off, the farmers got to leave their wheat in the fields. Anybody with a truck, a shovel and ten itchy fingers can help himself. Beggin' your pardon, Hazel, it's been a hell of a hard situation for me. Election comin' up next month. People houndin' my tail to nab the crooks. Tell you, boy, I been rackin' my skimpy brain to a whey." He glanced at Barry. "Take it easy on the God-fearin', crime-bustin' old sheriff in your newspaper, will you, son? Your daddy and me used to hunt prairie chickens together from a democrat."

Barry assured him the press was loyal, and the sheriff padded off painfully to the courthouse. Barry got up to go. This story meant he had to make over his front page. Hazel put her hand on his. "Isn't that terrible about the stealing? I'm glad I've got my crop in a granary." She smiled. "Dinner tonight, hon?"

He shook his head. They'd known each other

since high school, when Hazel, an early ripener, had been precociously cuddlesome. But while Barry was spending four years in college and three more on some hot, moist islands in the Pacific where he and some strangers hid in the bushes and shot at one another at all hours, Hazel, back in Richmoor, was picking over the 4Fs for a live one. She latched onto a farmer Barry had never met, a thin young man with asthma and a three-hundred-and-twenty-acre farm. His name was Earl Hansen and he was doing nicely by Hazel until the Border Patrol caught him with his tail gate down, unloading hogs he'd smuggled across the nearby Canadian border. Earl got two years, and Hazel, in a divorce, got the farm.

After his release from the clink, Earl stayed away from Richmoor, and Hazel bloomed like a prairie bower. She bought a yellow Buick and took to serving wine at supper. A handsome woman of luxurious curves and basic attractions, she was established among local appraisers as the choicest thing in town. Though it was apparent that Hazel had decided to make Barry her creature, right now the young man was declining her invitation to dine.

"You forget I've got to put the paper to bed tonight, Hazel. Let's make it tomorrow night and I'll blast us a couple of mallards to feed on. Okay?"

Hazel squeezed his hand and they parted. The editor hustled back to his office and began pecking out his piece on the wheat rustling. He was fiddling with the lead paragraph when two young women came in. Marilyn Tobey, wife of Doc Tobey, his long-time hunting companion, crooked a finger at him through the glass wall of his office. Barry went out.

"Marilyn, you look so tasty standing there I'm going to kiss my pal's wife square between the eyes." He bent his large, bony frame across the counter and planted one on Mrs. Tobey's pink forehead. "This paper aims to keep its subscribers happy. Who is this pretty woman watching us?"

"I want it put in the paper that my kid sister, Amy Hannegan, is visiting me for a month."

"Hello, Mullins," Amy said.

"Let me look at you." She was taller, more lissome, and the owner of larger blue eyes than her sister. There was a faint puckishness in her expression. "As my own society editor I got to write this down. Where you from, big-eyed Amy?"

"St. Paul."

"One of them city gals. Probably smoke tobacco." He grinned widely. "Bet you don't know a shoat from a heifer, Amy."



Ambling toward them, munching a cricket, was a

A glint appeared in her eyes. "If I were a shoat and couldn't tell another shoat when I saw one I'd be nervous. As it is, the problem isn't worrying me."

"She just graduated from college in June," her sister said. "How can you expect her to know anything?"

Something about this big, smiling man with the mussed haircut was getting Amy's goat. "Beneath that Saint Bernard exterior," she said with some heat, "I detect an agricultural snob. Can I help it I never had to call a hog?"

"Marilyn," the editor said, chuckling, "this blue-eyed firebrand is St. Paul's contribution to central heating." He looked deep into Amy's eyes and Amy felt funny. "Girl as lovely as you has no business being familiar with a shoat anyway. I beg your pardon, Amy."

Aware of burning cheeks, Amy shook his wide hand.

"Amy's a landlord now," Marilyn said. "You know the quarter section where you and Doc plan to hunt tomorrow? That was Daddy's, but when Amy graduated this summer he deeded it over to her as a present. She hasn't seen it yet, but she's

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low-slung beast with a stinking reputation. Amy shot to her feet. "Skunk!" she shrieked. "Run, everybody!" The little skunk was appalled

hanging around until her crop's sold. The kid's going to be lousy with gold."

"Gee, look at me," Amy said, "the only dirt farmer in the state trained at Vassar."

"If you'll promise not to get mad at me again," Barry said, "I'd like to drop over some evening to sell you a subscription and fondle your grain checks."

The ladies agreed they'd like that and departed.

THE editor, toiling late that night to get out his paper, was thankful the season for shooting waterfowl did not open until noon of the following day. By 10:00 A.M. he was up and had hung assorted seedy garments about his person, pulled on rubber boots, and loaded his senile convertible with gear. He tooted over to pick up Doc Tobey. When he had banged on the back door a while, Amy opened it. The girl was a sight. Topside she wore a man's shirt that fitted her slender torso like a pup tent; below, immense duck pants, pursed at the waist like a drawstring poke. Astern, Amy drooped.

"My, my, is that you in there, Amy? Shall I call the Red Cross?"

Amy sat down in a kitchen chair and nervously

crossed her hip boots. "Trouble with Doc's hunting outfit is he outweighs me ninety pounds. He phoned from the hospital a while ago and said a Mrs. Swanson is having more babies than anyone expected. He can't leave until she stops."

"Mrs. Swanson must be an outsider. No local woman has the nerve to have a baby the day duck shooting starts."

Amy's cheeks were pink and she appeared embarrassed. "Doc said if you didn't put up too much of a squawk I should take his place. It'd give me a chance to see my land, too."

He unfurled his slow smile, and inside her awful clothes Amy shivered. "Ever hunted ducks, Amy?"

"No, sir, but I am advised to state in case you got stuffy that I can quack like a lonesome girl duck on a two-bottom nest."

"It is a sportsman's adage that a woman on a duck hunt is less useful than the common wart; however, anyone can see you are a superior woman, so take up the slack in your britches, Amy, and we'll shove off."

They sped over dirt roads across the rolling plain until Barry turned off through a ditch into a stubble field and parked. "These are your diggings,

Amy," he said. "We'll hunt a couple of sloughs up ahead. They should be full of mallards lying on their backs burping from your expensive food. See that durum over there? That's yours. I'd say about two thousand dollars' worth of free lunch for the birds. The ordinary duck eats like a horse, too."

"Ducks don't worry me," Amy said, "but this morning I heard Doc say somebody has been swiping the produce of us hard-working farmers. Is that a fact?"

BARRY said it was, and Amy said if anyone bothered her grain she'd trail him down and stomp him to death with Cuban heels. They alighted then and turned their attention to hunting.

"Brace yourself, girl," Barry said and heaped cork decoys, shells and a shotgun upon Amy. He loaded up similarly, plus lunch box and Thermos bottle. When they had clomped through the field a way, he said, "Now we crawl."

Already puffing, Amy sank to her knees.

"Keep your behind down," he advised earnestly. "Don't get dirt in your muzzle."

"All right. I'll breathe through my nose," Amy said. "Yes, sir." (Continued on page 48)

ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY BECKHOFF

Collier's COLOR CAMERA

Bringing Up MAMBO



Uncertain, Mambo posed stiffly for picture with Mrs. Martini when he was 20 months old

ONCE upon a time, according to the nursery rhyme, there was a woman who had so many children she never knew quite how to cope with them. Mrs. Helen Martini has a great many youngsters to care for, too, but she's young and she knows what to do. She puts them in cages: for this extraordinary lady is keeper in charge of the nursery at New York's Bronx Park Zoo. In her care at the moment are more than 20 marmosets (small monkeys), four tiger cubs, a red howler monkey and a woolly monkey. She hand-feeds them, nurses them through sniffles, watches their weights, fills them with vitamins and gently prepares them to accept the tensions of limited living in one of the busiest zoos in the U.S.

But Mrs. Martini's special pride, joy and headache these days is Mambo, a two-year-old gorilla with a face like a lopsided basketball, a penchant for being pampered and a royal future. Mambo arrived in the Bronx last May, when he was imported from Africa to replace the popular Ma-

koko, a ten-year-old male gorilla who fell into a moat surrounding his play yard and was drowned. Makoko's death was a heartbreaking blow to the zoo. He had been raised with a young female, and the zoo had hopes of breeding them to produce the first gorilla born in North America. Makoko was king of the simians in Bronx County. Today the crown waits for little Mambo.

Fully aware of the destiny of her charge, Mrs. Martini sees to it that the bright-eyed orphan, who was separated from his natural mother at a tender but undetermined age, enjoys a life comfortably composed of eating, snoozing, playing and eating.

Each morning he has four eight-ounce bottles containing a rich mixture of eggs, milks, cereal and vitamin concentrates. For lunch he has half a head of lettuce, half a head of cabbage, an orange or two, several bananas, a bunch of grapes and other fruits in season. These he crams daintily into his mouth, using only one hand at a time, and taking care to wipe his fingers on his soft brown fur. After lunch he may nap or play with his yellow Teddy bear, his rubber ball or his pink baby blanket. When he was younger, he spent a great deal of time in his play pen, rhythmically waving a rattle. Now he likes to climb, swing on the trapeze in his cage, chatter to himself and make faces at Mrs. Martini. But best of all he loves to sit in Mrs. Martini's arms while she sings to him.

In the afternoon he gets a snack of half a loaf of bread and a glass of orange juice with cod-liver oil. Just before bedtime, he drinks four more bottles of the eggs-milk-cereal-vitamins formula. This winter, juicy horseburgers will be added to Mambo's diet—something he never would have enjoyed in his native jungle.

The great apes are herbivorous by nature, do not eat meat of any kind except for occasional insect grubs. But Mrs. Martini and zoo veterinarians find that they thrive on it in captivity.

Though Mambo is currently no bigger than a man-child of his age, weighing 30 pounds and being two feet tall, by the time he is twelve he will weigh well over 500 pounds, stand close to six feet and be one of the strongest animals in the world. Right now Mambo would rather be pampered.

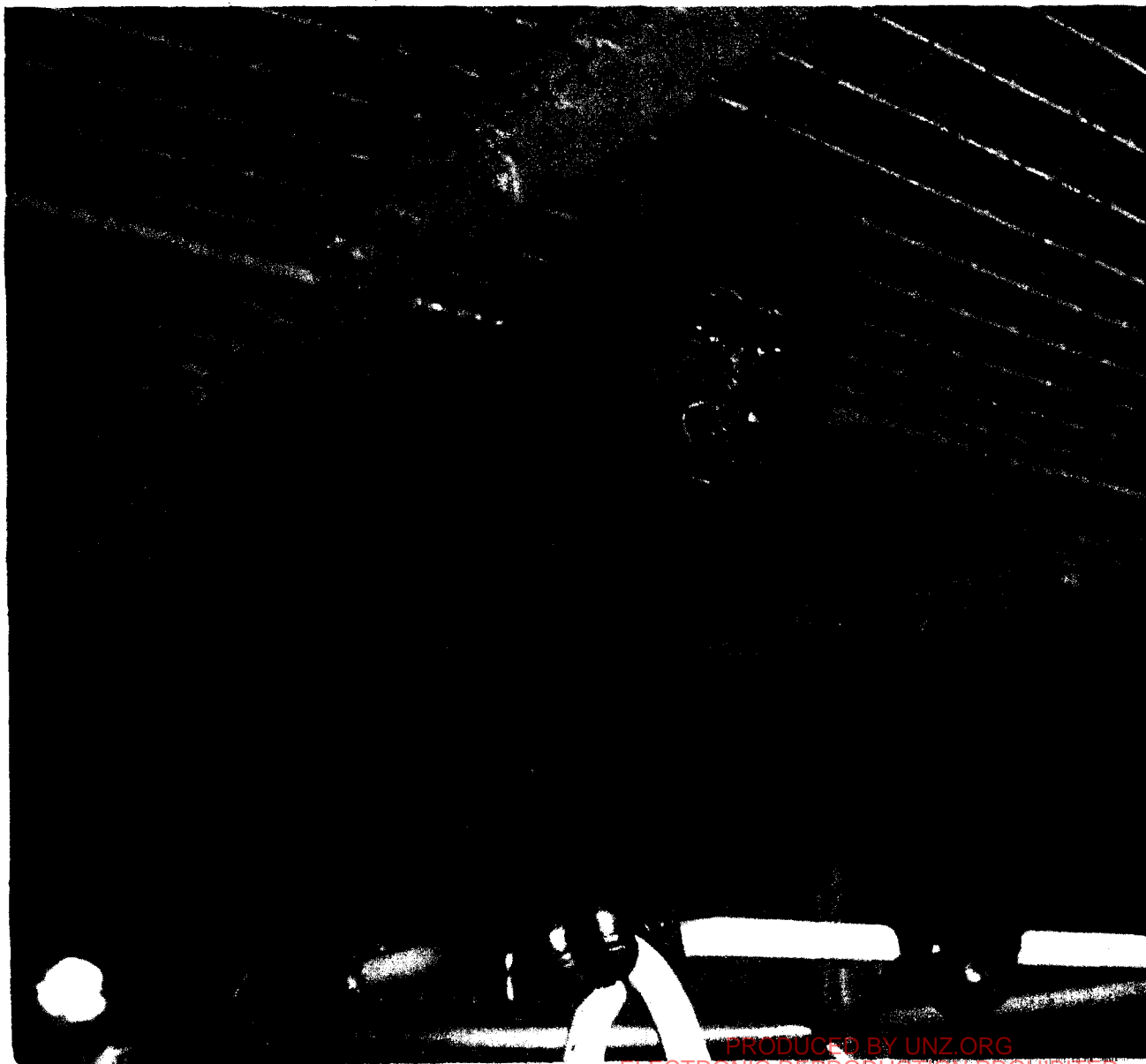
This youngster, who is worth something like \$5,000, doesn't know when he's had enough. When he's put down or left alone, he cries and whimpers. If that doesn't help, he may work himself up into a full-fledged tantrum.

Mrs. Martini lets him holler. "But," she says, "after a while I usually pick him up. How can you let an infant cry?"

Cute and cocky as he is now, Mambo is nevertheless not slated for mental brilliance. Although as a gorilla, he represents the apes which most closely resemble man physically, his cousins, the chimpanzees and orangutans, have it all over him mentally. Dr. Robert M. Yerkes, the animal-psychologist, says that "compared with chimpanzees and orangutans of like age [the gorilla] is remarkably slow in adaptation and limited in initiative, originality and insight." Mrs. Martini hasn't told Mambo about this conclusion—and chances are he wouldn't much care if she did. Someday he's going to be a king in the Bronx. Who could ask for anything more?

EDMUND BURKE

Because Bronx (N.Y.) Zoo's nursery keeper, Helen Martini, is careful never to startle him, the gorilla, at two, now has perfect self-confidence, will climb anywhere, except into bath



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