

# ... AND THE ROUGH PLACES PLAIN

by "Augustus"

FLYING back from my camping holiday I was contentedly picking the biddy-bids out of my socks when this character next to me waved his hand at the rollicking landscape below.

"Pity it was never completed, what?"

"What?"

"The whole amazing project—mountains, rivers, beaches, forest. . . I mean, one can admire the outlines of the scheme, but one is left to regret that it was abandoned. . . A sort of Maui's Folly."

I looked again at the forbidding promontories, the rough shoulders of cliff and the gashes of valleys. A loose thread of smoke needed clipping off a hardly-finished volcano in the distance. "Oh, I dare say it all needs heeling in a bit. Have you been doing your share of walking around on it?"

"Have I! I've left the bitumen twice since I arrived. That's quite enough. We spent one day on a desert coastline, lashed by the tempest that blows straight off the sea. My body was the first obstacle the wind had struck since leaving Australia. The sun would have driven a camel rabid, for there was no shelter. The rocks were our only resting place and our feet were the feast of a million insects."

Unwittingly I scratched my own lacerated ankles while my companion continued. "But our exposure on the New Zealand beach was as nothing to our ordeal in the New Zealand bush. As one looked from the car the distant bush appeared bulging, almost roly-poly, and, well, comfy as though you could billow on it. But when we got into it!"

"You found it a little different, say, from Windermere?"

"My dear chap, these woods were fetid. A writhing nightmare of emaciated trunks all riddled with footrot and scented like a greengrocer's alleyway. From time to time a limb flopped to the forest floor like a roll of wet newspaper, startling its slums of gum-chewing squalid bug-inhabitants. The sandflies, however, never even glanced up; they continued devotedly injecting vitriol into our skin-tissue. There was nowhere to stand up and nowhere to sit down. I wanted to cry."

"You, er, camped somewhere?"

"We made a show of man's dominion over nature by throwing up a tent, yes. Unhappily we shared our blankets with some blowflies, a weta entered my boot in the night, and lamed me next morning. We returned to our hotel, bought several bottles of calomine lotion, and I got to work on my drawings."

"Ah! You found it all picturesque, then, in spite of everything? You felt you must capture it on canvas, as it were, though you were ill-at-ease with it under canvas, ha-ha."

"I'm an industrial designer," he said sternly. "Here, look at this," and he fetched a paper out of his brief-case.

I saw an open stretch of beach in the background, and in the foreground a lush little oasis with palms bending over a shallow pool, with hammocks swung in the shade of the palms and with flat mossy stones forming a natural table and chairs. A little bluff of stones ran out on the seaward side to shelter the little Eden from the blown sand.

"Ah, mm. Very nice. A bride bower on the Bomba Gulf, perhaps?"

"A mirage made real anywhere in New Zealand," he triumphed, and smilingly handed me a card:

Robinson's Inflatable Picnic Sites.

I was stunned. "You mean the whole thing is pumped up?"

"Ingenious, what? At the end of the day you simply pull firmly on this large date, and whoosh! you're back in the desert primeval. You stow the Robinson Oasis, Mark II, into the boot of the car, and drive home."

"There are other models?"

"Dozens. Here, let me show you. This is the Robinson Teenager Kit—Based on the familiar painting by Manet, the Teenager offers a leafy pleasance to young folks who wish to take a picnic lunch without fear of nettle rash or intrusion. The whole is walled above eye-level with fruitful shrubs and swelling banks. The prow of a rowing-boat makes a nifty nook for cast-off clothes and beer bottles. To deflate, pull sharp on cherry."

"Nom de Dieu!" I exclaimed in case it was appropriate. "But what about the sandflies? I mean, the ladies perhaps might be more than commonly imperilled?"

"If necessary a cerulean canopy of nylon netting may be stretched over the



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whole—it hooks on this squirrel's paws you observe."

"Cerulean?"

"We run in a touch of cirrus, nothing menacing."

"All this must come a bit expensive."

"Well, not outrageous actually—and, of course, the Teenager holds four. The Oasis is designed for a small nomadic type family. We have the larger-type family Site—the pneumatic Peacock Walk. That has the flight of broad steps and the bust of Beckford. Or larger still is one we are offering for Sunday School

Outings—the Botanical Gardens, Rotunda and Punting Stretch in three units."

"Anything more intimate? Suitable, say, for a two-seater sports car?"

"Oh, rather. Look, this is one that might appeal—the Guttapercha Gondola. It will even float, though it wasn't primarily intended as a water-going craft. Or in the same range there is the Robinson Burgeoning Back-seat, which goes easily into the back seat of the smallest English car, but which inflates to the size of an American back seat. An attraction here, of course, is that you don't even need a car. The Robinson Burgeoning can be carried by hikers."

I gazed out on the challenging world below us and tried to picture the efflorescence upon it of a thousand exotic, mushrooming grots and groves and water-musical champignons. Suddenly I was shocked. The idea was based on a hideous fallacy and I protested:

"Yes, that's all very well, but think of the labour of blowing them up!"

My companion was undismayed. "In the first place, the New Zealander would feel deprived if he didn't have something to toil at on holiday. In the second place, we can supply for back-sliders a small cylinder of compressed gas which will inflate the Site in a Trice. And in the third place one naturally looks ahead to the time when every camping ground will have free compressed air laid on. I mean it will be in the interests of various local bodies to make such a provision and so attract the new rubberised tourist traffic."

It was with some irrational regret that I saw in my dream the old hazards and hardships receding while my companion was chanting, "... and who knows, but the time will come when the Eglinton Valley will bloom during Labour Week-end into a gay butterfly suburb of bulbous bungalows with little rubber lawns and distended letter-boxes. . ."

Pensively I chewed a seed from my sock.

(Solution to No. 839)

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## Clues Across

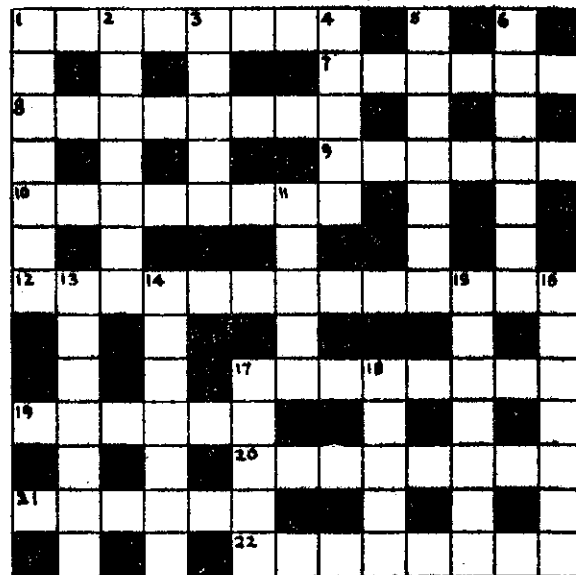
1. In some confusion, she raced to be subjected to an investigation (8).
7. The Lady Superior who brought the sailor to the Good Queen (6).
8. With such a perfectionist, the aim naturally comes before the inclination (8).
9. A riddle which is muddled in game (6).
10. And a time to be lively (8).
12. See! her love had gone awry. No wonder, if she was thus in love (4, 4, 5).

## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

17. "Him thus intent — with his spear Touched lightly" (Milton, "Paradise Lost"). He could, of course, use it differently, i.e., hurl it! (8).
19. Demand to be accursed (6).
20. Noel's aim is to be in layers (8).
21. Sink into a seat (6).
22. This famous House in London is composed solely of tree and moss. Is it kept up by will-power? (8).

15. They can be so tired. (Especially after they've put the paper to bed?) (7).
16. You'll always be this if you follow Mr. Micawber's recipe for happiness (7).
17. Is led astray and wastes time (5).
18. Join together, but a little adjustment will loosen again (5).

No. 840 (Constructed by R.W.H.)



## Clues Down

1. Hips can be made into quite a different vegetable (7).
2. You can get A.I. cream from this country (7).
3. The girl Alice might become if she changes her name (5).
4. Arranged to go out in rather an old-fashioned way? (5).
5. Shorten by means of a game (7).
6. An outcast from the Jewish maelstrom (7).
11. Choice part of the selection (5).
13. Synonymously and anagrammatically angered (7).
14. If you stand on it too hard you may find it dying (7).