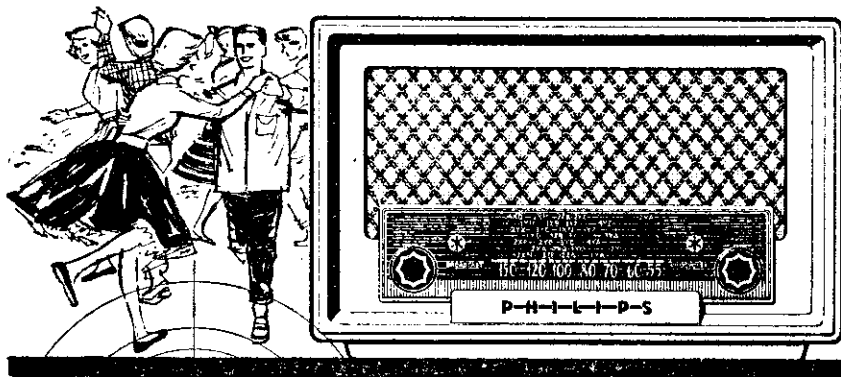


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AUGUST 2, 1957

Editorial and Business Offices: Hope Gibbons Building, Inglewood Place, Wellington, C.I.
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The Woman in the Cave

AMONG the stories which give newspaper readers a feeling of profound interest in a world where almost anything can happen, few in recent years have been stranger than the case of a man in England who imprisoned a young woman in a cave for three and a half months. Nothing improper occurred, the cables assured us; the girl was merely obliged to work for her master, in the cave or in a shed above it, and sometimes in the house. "In the course of time," said the report, she tried to attract the attention of neighbours, and for this she received a beating with a stick on her bare skin. She does not appear to have been impetuous in her efforts to escape—"the course of time" is a phrase of comfortable vagueness which suggests that she tried half-heartedly to get away until boredom set in. Clearly she was not really afraid of the young man, and may even have had romantic notions when he came in the night like Pluto on a motor-cycle and carried her off to the underworld. But the weeks passed in mild slavery, with no hint that she was to become a new Persephone; and eventually, a little desperate, she contrived to be rescued. Her captor has now been sent to gaol for three years.

Men follow a thin line as they walk carefully through the years. One step to the left or right and they may be at the mercy of that strange underworld, that inherited jungle, which all human beings carry silently with them. Some men step aside deliberately, and look around with interest and fascination; and if they have gifts of expression they become artists, and may even win fame and reward and be given the name of genius. True, they will not be altogether improved until their success is confirmed, for the messages they bring back to the outer world are often disconcerting. But there are others, less fortunate, who are weak in the presiding faculty of reason, and for whom fantasy is too easily confused with reality. Many young men have waking dreams in which by some daring and splendid action they win the devotion of women. The abduction by motor-cycle and the imprisonment in a cave would seem pallid in some imaginations. But the dreams pass, and instead of acting boldly the young men go dancing, and so by degrees are drawn into normal courtship and marriage. Oddly enough, dancing and other simple encounters may be terrifying to the man who does what others only dream of doing. It is hard for some people to be normal; they stay in a state of reverie until all the margins are blurred, and suddenly they are like sleepers awakened in a street full of staring citizens. The jungles they inhabit can be places where dreadful deeds are done. But now and then a story is told which does not end in tragedy, and because we are freed from fear and horror we can see the man in his cave as a pathetic and slightly comic figure. Yet there is nothing comic in the thought that a gaol sentence is still our only answer to "something quite outside normal human experience."

The judge who sentenced him said the "astounding affair" was something "quite outside normal human experience." It is admittedly unusual for men to behave in this way, and for young women to be submissive in such strange circumstances; but a learned judge has much opportunity to study the aberrations of behaviour, and should be beyond the reach of astonishment. And what indeed is "normal" experience? From a legal point of view a man may seem to be normal if he goes through life without being charged with offences against the law; but many people are lucky rather than virtuous, and every mind has memories which would cause shame and embarrassment if they were published in newspapers. Much that is strange and dramatic, even terrible if all the truth were known, takes place in homes that outwardly are calm and respectable. As for thinking, a prac-

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 2, 1957.