



BREAKFAST TIME —

JONATHAN woke up. He wriggled the forefinger of his left hand up inside the head-piece of his sleeping bag and edged the flap a fraction of an inch away from his right eye. This he opened imperceptibly so that he could just peer through his eyelashes without anyone knowing he was awake.

"They must be getting hungry by now," he thought. Somebody would have to get up before long to cook breakfast. A shrewd man would lie low for a while. Urrrh! It was cold. No door on the old hut. Frost on the tussocks outside. No mattresses on the bunks and the chill coming up through the sacking they were made from. Now the cold was piercing through the opening he had made in the sleeping bag and pricking at the tip of his left ear. The right one, still comfortably in the lining of his bag, was aching with warmth. They had both been frostbitten on a climb last winter, were going to remind him of it all this one.

Getting up was the worst thing about being in the mountains, just as getting into the bag with a hot drink and a biscuit or perhaps a piece of cake seemed the best, he thought sleepily.

How he hated getting up. Always wondered at these early morning starts why he bothered coming into the hills at all. All the wet boots, damp socks, frozen gear, lukewarm, half-digested food, freezing darkness, blundering around hours before the sun. . . But later, sweating on the bare rocks half way up some ridge, or catapulting down the slopes of a fast ski run one felt better. Curious how one's illusions about mountaineering were somehow never quite lost.

"Ah! You're getting old," he told himself.

HE eyed the six-foot Geoff twisted up into the five-and-a-half foot bottom bunk opposite. Now Geoff was the man for a hearty breakfast. Would be feeling cramped in that little bunk soon. Had just got a new petrol cooker, too. Probably wanted to try it out. Or was he playing the same game and keeping quiet? It was no use waiting for young

Sim on the other bunk to get up first. He was one of those people who went to bed late, liked a soft mattress, complained about the cold, snored, threw his arms around, had nightmares; but always managed to withdraw into an impenetrable coma round about breakfast time.

Geoff groaned. Twice . . . resignedly. "C'mon now fellers. Breakfast time. Wakey, wakey! C'mon outa the sack. Who wants to get breakfast? Hey! Hey! Wake up! Wake up there!"

Silence . . .

"Wretches," grumbled Geoff, wriggling his head out of his sleeping bag. He stared round at the two rows of bunks, the packs and skis all over the floor, the pile of boxes jammed in the corner against the two spare sheets of corrugated iron, the dirty old sheet iron stove with its rusty chimney leaning out into the space where the door should have been, last night's dirty plates in a heap by the billy of water that had frozen solid.

Then Geoff sat up and Jonathan knew that the crisis was over. He watched Geoff's hand probe under his bunk to reappear with a new shiny brass petrol cooker. One of the light-weight pattern used by high climbers. It built up its own pressure when lit and had to be warmed to start.

Geoff pulled the cooker inside his bag and hugged it in his arms to start the petrol dribbling from the jet.

"Now you'll get nothing fancy from me for breakfast! I warn you! I'm no cook—I'll tell you that now—if anyone else wants to do it," Geoff announced sharply.

"Best not to wake up officially yet," Jonathan thought. "Better not answer."

HE lay still, thinking about breakfast time and what a hurried, uncomfortable business it always was. Down below in the tiny kitchen in the suburban house he had escaped from for the week-end, there would be plates chinking and the peculiar wheezing sound from the kettle. Then the door would be opened to let in the cats.

He thought about all the times he had lain in the mountains at this hour

by L. Cleveland

waiting for the billy to boil and the start of the day's responsibilities. Funny how the particular strangling, rushing sound from these petrol burners always reminded him of the battalion cooks at work in North Italy. They would thump and swear in their truck about four o'clock, struggling with dixies and ten gallon rosies. Their stoves would start roaring, and great gusts of petrol flame and smoke would blacken the white walls of the houses they always parked against. None of them knew anything about cooking, of course. Perhaps that was why they had to get up so early to manufacture the meal of lukewarm, stewed tea, watery porridge and canned bacon on time.

Once, he remembered he had cooked breakfast himself in a ruined farmhouse in the line. They had rather cheekily lit the kitchen stove with scraps of furniture. The bacon was just warming in an old frying pan when the crew of a German Tiger tank saw the smoke and blew what was left of the place to pieces with three shells at close range. . . . He had wasted precious time, fiddling with a piece of newspaper, trying to cover the pan from the dust and debris that poured down. Then nobody was hungry afterwards.

DAYDREAMING again, he realised with a start and looked over to Geoff. The stove was not starting well. Geoff had lit his third match, but the petrol that had been coaxed from the tank just glimmered for a few seconds on the cold metal and went out. Geoff would have to prime the whole thing with some more fuel poured from a tin. Just the right amount or he would risk an explosion. Perhaps he should suggest this to Geoff, but that would give the show away that he was awake.

Geoff swore quietly and came to the same conclusion. He swung the lower part of his sleeping bag over the edge of his bunk and sat upright with his feet alongside the stove on the floor. Then he stretched out and secured a tin of petrol from his pack, unscrewed the top, poured some over the burner of his stove and set a light to it. It burned steadily.

"Good," thought Jonathan. "It will get quite warm in here after a while and we can all ease ourselves out of the sacks and get dressed by degrees. That's the way to get up—slowly, comfortably."

He kept on watching Geoff at the controls of the cooker, wishing he could interject some advice, but not daring to.

Geoff fiddled in the flames that were now pouring from the little metal burner. Suddenly the whole thing roared into action—first a six-inch jet of fierce blue flame, then a long spurting arc of

burning petrol that leaped across the wooden floor.

"Uh!" said Geoff, pulling his hand away and smothering the flames licking around it with a jersey.

They both stared at the little stove now squirting petrol like a fountain.

Then Geoff jumped up, grabbed a boot in one hand and knocked the stove along the floor with it, hopping towards the door as he did so, still in his sleeping bag. Three hops and he had the stove safely out in the snowgrass, smothered in an old sack.

"Bravo! Good save!" shouted Jonathan in the excitement forgetting to stay asleep. He jumped out of the bunk and came to the door. They leaned over the cooker. It had a bulge in the circular brass bottom where the pressure had forced the metal to expand. A little metal plug, soldered into its side as a safety valve, was nowhere about.

Geoff looked crestfallen, said nothing.

"It'll be all right. We'll soon solder it up again in town," said Jonathan. "Suppose we'll have to light the big stove now."

"One way of getting people out of bed, anyway," grunted Geoff.

THEY both stood at the door of the little wooden hut and looked up the valley to the steep ridge and the skyline. Fresh snow had streaked the black rocks on its crest like the breakers on a reef. The sky behind was clear and even-toned, with the half-lit inky blueness of a gigantic stage backdrop. Below they could just make out their old car parked on the pass where the road cut away like a knife-edge scar down the steep-sided valley to the plains. Their breath steamed on the air and as they inhaled they could scent the musky dryness of the lifeless snowgrass.

"She's a glorious morning. There'll be some good ski-ing today," said Geoff, hopping back inside.

"Yes, if I'd known it was so beautiful, I would have got up early and cooked breakfast for you all," said Jonathan briskly.

"Could I have my eggs done hard?" asked Sim, suddenly waking up.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

LISTENERS who enjoyed A. J. Cronin's book *The Keys of the Kingdom* will welcome the news that it has been adapted for radio and will be heard soon from Commercial stations. It is the story of Francis Chisholm, a Scots priest who, exposed in his youth to various beliefs, grows up believing that tolerance is the highest virtue, followed by humility. Much of the story is set in China, where Father Chisholm goes after two unsuccessful curateships in Scotland. The story has some exciting incidents—on one occasion Father Chisholm is captured by bandits and tortured while awaiting ransom—and interest is increased when friends of the priest's youth re-enter his life. *The Keys of the Kingdom* will replace *Doctor Mac* from Commercial stations at 9.0 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, starting at 12B on Thursday, August 9, 22B on August 23, 32B on September 6, 42B on September 20, and 22A on October 16.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 3, 1951