

DON'T FORWARD MY MAIL

by "AUGUSTUS"

SIMMY had been at school with my grandfather and that's how I came to know him. Before my grandfather died they had shared a fishing hut on the bank of a dispirited and eel-infested river twenty-five miles from the city. I sometimes used to visit them there.

There were about half a dozen shacks altogether, thrown together from iron and wood and scattered into a vague settlement whose communication lines were marked only by single tracks worn erratically through the gorse and grass. If a gorse bush or kerosine tin or heap of ashes lay in the line of advance, the track wound round it so often that there were unaccountable curves, the original obstacle having rotted away.

A visitor picking his way into this settlement would observe a pair of bare feet propped out of every window, the inhabitants having established beyond dispute that the feet are the chief suppliers of oxygen to the brain. You can fill a hut with tobacco or wood smoke and still remain sweet-headed if your feet are out the window breathing.

Well, a couple of years ago, being in the vicinity, I decided to call in and see how old Simmy was managing the hut after all these years without my grandfather.

Astonished, I found the huts had been enlarged into holiday baches. There were scores of them. The baches had been put into straight streets. The streets were named. The baches were named. In front of each was a little patch of shaven lawn. In front of the lawn were flower beds. In front of the flower beds were little picket fences. In front of the fences were more lawn and flowers.

Curtains prinked in the windows. The Andrews Sisters climbed up one an-

other's throats in all the living rooms. The men captured the holiday spirit with extra bed-making, dish-washing, dusting, vacuuming and ironing. Roughing it they sat outside on camp stools peeling potatoes for six, calling with desperate abandon to the potato-peelers next door, and exchanging rueful badinage about one another's aprons.

The women planned new flower beds and whittled back into the lawn. They wore grey slacks and bought food from cruising vans, fetching the milk in a can with ecstatic emancipation from city bottles.

One committee organised sports days and square dancing, another judged gardens and gave prizes for the best street.

Wherever I asked I could get no news of Simmy or of Doc Saunders or of Perce Enticott, until I chanced upon a dejected old codger listlessly weeding a border of lobelia. To my enquiries about the old firm he showed a sudden confusion of guilt and regret and pointed agitatedly upstream. Long after I left him I could see him wistfully watching me and wiping a fat moustache with the back of his hand.

It took me an hour to find Simmy's new home, but there was no mistaking it. Breasting through grass, blackberry and broom I suddenly came upon half a dozen shacks nearly ready for Eric Lee-Johnson. On each window-sill was propped a pair of ancient bald feet.

Simmy was as good as new, being still only eighty-five. I was entranced to see that he still picked up match-boxes in his toes and, passing his pipe down to the window by way of one foot, knocked the ashes out on the sill without stirring from his bunk.

So our friendship was renewed, and I frequently found time after that to visit the old boy and gather up some of the wisdom which had filtered into that aerated and undistracted skull.

Sitting crosswise on his bunk (which, like all the hut, was rich with his personality) he talked or kept silence as he chose. The leamy air that hung above the water and the mud, nourishing Simmy at his roots, had produced many a rare theory concerning such things as hermaphroditism among blowflies and the conscious intractability of matter. But it was his theory about population shifts that seemed to me of the greatest significance.

"You see that bedlam of baches further downstream?" he enquired once. Me and your grand-dad founded that place. We had it lovely, screened from the road by a belt of willows, a friendly old cow that used to wander down to the fence and stand purring while Doc Saunders milked her, notices at all approaches saying Beware of the Bull.

"But look at it now. A man can't breathe for petrol fumes and face powder, can't hear hisself thinking for them ruddy wireless boxes, can't move in his own house for antimacassars and what-nots. And that's all on account of they women moving in and a-cluttering of the place up with gee-gaws."

Savage poops of smoke spurted to the ceiling like Indians sending morse



"On each window-sill . . . a pair of ancient bald feet"

as Simmy's pipe vented his disgruntlement.

"Now you might be asking yourself how it comes about that they women get in in the first place."

I had certainly been wondering. It was difficult to picture these ladies arriving for the first week-end with no sink to wash their stockings in, no refrigerator for the pressed tongues and lettuces brought in a damp cloth, no linen-closet, no cupboards for bottled fruit, soap-powder and suit-cases, no electricity, no blinds, no mirrors.

"Nature soon got round that," Simmy was saying, always crossly grateful to feel that there were patterns of existence outside his arranging. "I been thinking and remembering things I read at school and I reckon it's always been the same. First of all a bunch of the boys get together and cook up a yarn about going after walrus teeth or alluvial gold or an island full of breadfruit. And then before the girls can stop them they've lit out for the hills or the open sea."

He spat out the doorway on to a patch of grass grown taller and lusher than any around it.

"Well, then, they settle down in a nice fishing sort of way and everything is going dandy until one day along comes a sort of she-male. She can run like a stag, change motor-car tyres, drink straight whisky and is ruthlessly chaste. She just kind of moves in, pinches the best fishing holes, puts up a line for her undies, plants a hedge, does oil paintings of the settlement and plays Parly-moi d'Amour on the gramophone.

"Then she slips back to town for some more Turkish cigarettes, shows her paintings to the other girls and How Chawming they all say, and before you can say Gladstone out they all come wiv their hollyhocks and tea-pots.

"It's that wench wiv her long legs and cigarette holder that starts the rot every time. I reckon it's one of they Spenglerian cycles. You remember all them Greek buckos who thought up the one about a golden fleece? Jason it was who thought of it. Well, they just get round the first cape and are fetching out the keg for a bit of a jubilation when who do they see a-sitting in the bulwarks adjusting her shoulder straps but that there Atalanta dressed like a man. So then the game's up and they have to go looking for the golden fleece after all."

(continued on next page)

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

(Solution to No. 581)

S	P	O	T	T	E	D	A	D	E
L	A	D	S	P	E	E	D		
R	E	S	C	I	N	D	C	M	I
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I	M	A	D	E	N				
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O	P	A	T	A	S	T	I	N	G
D	U	S	T	Y	K	I	O		
E	Y	S	D	I	S	C	E	R	N

Clues Across

- Unless unclean.
- This particular aptitude is little more than faulty.
- "So may some gentle Muse With lucky words favour my destined —" (Milton, "Lycidas").
- Metrical composition about a broken tail . . . this is readily adaptable.
- Psalm 146 advises us not to put our trust in them.
- This robin is not a bird at all.
- This bird comes to an end in a hurry.
- Ghost stories or spiders may give you these.

- Steps in space.
- He solved the riddle of the Sphinx and gave his name to a complex.
- Lifeless.
- "— cannot wither her, nor custom stale Her infinite variety" ("Antony and Cleopatra," Act II., Scene 2).
- Wanders.
- "Whenas in — my Julia goes Then, then (me-thinks) how sweetly flows That liquefaction of her clothes" (Herrick)

Clues Down

- Member of Parliament in a confused truce.
- Boredom.
- Beginners haven't got any particular forms of depravity apparently.
- Softer (anag.).
- A peculiar thing to find in a comic hair-style.
- Spare time.
- Crop.

- Miracle (anag.).
- Remedy, apparently about clothes?
- According to Kipling, this is what the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady are, under their skins.
- Marsh composed partly of moss.
- Earlier.
- Tranquil, but sick in the end.
- Gem containing both vegetable and fruit.

No. 582 (Constructed by R.W.C.)

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