

# Throw a Silver, Mister!

SONNY climbed on to the bank and stretched out, letting the sun dry up the smudges of water on his brown chest and legs. He smeared the black hair back from his forehead, and propped himself up on his arms, watching the other kids still in the water. They didn't seem to feel the cold as much as he did.

On the bridge hung a gallery of visitors, the men in open shirts and panama hats. Nearly all the women, Sonny noticed, were wearing light cotton dresses of bright colours. They all smiled indulgently as they leaned over the rail to toss in their coins. Just below the bridge Rita trod water, looking up pleadingly.

"Silver!" she begged. "Silver! Throw a silver, mister!"

A fat, perspiring man drew a sixpence from his pocket and flicked it, so that it sailed up into the air and then spun down towards the girl. There was a wild flurry as she thrust her head under the water, the old bloomers she wore for a costume clinging tightly to her bottom; then she was only a dark shape underwater, with the pink soles of her calloused feet occasionally breaking water as she strove to get the coin before it could reach the mud and be lost forever. Soon her glistening head, hair streaked all over her face, bobbed up, and she grinned impudently at the tourists. Then she slipped the coin to safety in her mouth, between her cheek and her teeth, and already her face was bulging. Soon she would have to put the coins in a little bag which she kept tied around her waist, inside her bloomers.

At the sight of the silver the other swimmers all surged forward excitedly. Reggie led them in a splashing troupe towards Rita, and they begged as she had done, not in a chorus, but each in his own style: "Throw us a silver!" "Come on, boss, chuck us a sixpence!" "Aw, come on," cried Reggie in a voice full of sorrow, "won't somebody throw a silver?" At this there was a gust of laughter, and some of the women reached inside their handbags for three-pences.

The smallest swimmer in the pool hung back from the others. He reasoned shrewdly that by not joining in with the others, he had more pool to himself. Instead of calling out for money, Henry raised his arm and pleaded with his fingers.

On the bridge a blonde girl in a big picture hat saw him, she liked his hopeful grin and his enterprise.

"Look, Bruce, see that little one at the back?"

Bruce, the jacket of his gaberdine suit in the crook of his arm, looked. He put a cigarette in his mouth.

"Little blighters," he said without rancour. "Come on, June, let's get back to the hotel and have a drink."

"Wait a minute, darling." She waved to Henry. "I'm sure he looks hungry.



... by PETER N. TEMM

Please throw him something, darling. A half-crown."

Bruce laughed. "These kids probably make more money a week than I do," he complained.

"Oh, Bruce, he's so little. Please. Just for me. And then we'll go."

He pulled out a handful of coins, selected a florin, and tossed it towards the boy.

Sonny, stretched out on the bank, saw the coin spin flashing through the

air. In an instant he was on his feet, and his dive took him towards the spot where the coin splashed. He went underwater, and it came to him like a tiny silver fish, slowly turning over and over. He seized it, and thrust his foot against the floor of the pool and shot upwards. When he broke water he put the coin in his mouth, and waved towards the bridge; but the lady and the man had gone. Sonny grinned anyway, and then turned to look at Henry.

Henry said nothing, but he looked like a man who has been within reach of Paradise, only to be turned away at the gates. In this hard school one had to learn quickly that the race was always to the swift. The big and the strong took the pickings, the small and the weak had to be grateful for whatever they could get. There was no bitterness, but there was a watchfulness. If one lacked brawn, one compensated by increasing one's natural cunning. The code was a very real one, although unspoken; first there, first served; finders keepers.

And Henry said nothing, because he knew the code. There was neither complaint nor sulking, for he went off to join the others beneath the bridge in their scramble. Sonny swam back to the side rather uneasily. He knew the code, too, but still . . .

He stretched out on the bank again, and counted his money: two shillings, five sixpences, nine threepences, five halfpennies and 17 pennies. He scooped all the coins up and let them run through his fingers back into the bag.

On the bridge Rita had button-holed a kind-looking old man in a blue and yellow blazer. She was talking very fast and pointing to the water. The old man nodded, and as the girl climbed on to the railing, took a sixpence from his purse. He threw it for her, and she jumped, feet first, after it.

Gold-digger, Sonny thought, as he watched.

Now the sun was getting low, and the people were dwindling off. The heat had gone, the air was getting its evening

chill characteristic of such altitudes. Some of the swimmers had already gone. Rita was still there, begging the last of the tourists for one last coin.

"Throw a silver, mister! Aw, come on, boss!"

A Maori guide in a purple dress and a straw hat went over the bridge towards the tearooms. She had some souvenir poi-poi in her hand, and she looked down disapprovingly at Rita as she went past. She spoke sharply to her in her own tongue, and Rita tossed her head cheekily.

Sonny got up from the bank and left the pool. He went to his little fibrecane case and took out an old towel, mopping himself with it. He leaned against the sun-warmed wall of the house, more thoughtful than usual, then he dressed slowly. He twisted the old navy-blue school shorts he had been wearing in the water, and put them and the towel back in the case. He put on an old pair of tennis shoes, holes at the toes. Somewhere near by Henry was counting up his money: it came to one and five.

Walking over the bridge, Sonny could hear the two boys in front talking.

"Come and get some fish and chips, Henry?"

"No," said Henry.

"Why not, Henry?"

"Not hungry."

"You come to the pictures tonight? Beauty on at the Ritz, a western?"

"No."

"Why not, Henry?"

"My father, he broke," said Henry.

Sonny could stand it no longer. He thrust between the two smaller boys and broke into a run; but as he brushed past something dropped from his hand and fell, glittering, at Henry's bare feet.

"Hey, Sonny-boy, you lose something!" Henry's friend yelled.

"You shut up," said Henry fiercely. "This is a present from Sonny!" He put the two shillings in his pocket. As he did so Sonny looked back from the corner. He grinned, and ran up the street.

## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

(Solution to No. 588)

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

### Clues Across

- Our city is muddled here . . . what a strange thing!
- There is a pleasure in the — —, There is a rapture on the lonely shore" (Byron) (8, 5).
- This year.
- Tibetan monastery.
- Two are said to be better than one.
- Coin and shoe have a tendency to stick together.
- Custom.

- This duckling turned out to be a swan.
- One of these is said to be worth two in the bush (4, 2, 3, 4).
- The person you are speaking or writing to.

### Clues Down

- This form of hug indicates repugnance, not affection.
- High principles only to be expected from the ladies.
- East Indian plant which figures in the story of Ali Baba and the forty thieves.
- The bride's wardrobe begins in a hole in France and ends in the water there.
- The sun may make your clothes do this but not your nose!
- Worshipped a fuss over a colour.
- Obstinate, in the manner of the companions of Odysseus when Circe had done her worst.
- Slag.

No. 589 (Constructed by R.W.C.)

