

# The Killers

—by PHILIP MINCHER

**A**FTER breakfast I went out to watch the hunt. It was a clear, dewy morning, and I took the gun and let the big red setter off his lead. He knew what it was all about.

The gorse was just short of blooming. I followed the big red dog down the old clay road, and both of us felt good about living. I was going to watch the hunt from the road and afterwards walk around the mountain to get one of the hares the hunt had missed. I liked to see the show, but they did not go in for hunting, practically speaking. They did not hunt for food, of course.

I heard the hounds for a long while before I saw anything. They were over on the other side of the mountain, but I knew which way they would come. They would skirt the slope and come across on to the clay road, because a hare breaking cover always ran that way.

There were parallel jumps set at intervals in the gorse on either side of the road, with straight, smooth branches set low to make it a safe jump for the ladies, and to save the ribs of a horse under a non-horseman. I took my time along the clay road, because I heard them coming.

The setter heard them, too, and forgot his self-importance around the gorse, and the cattle, safe on that part of the hill over which the hare would not run, heard them and forgot about their grass. I found a place near one of the jumps and put a lead on the dog.

I made it look as casual as I could, as though our paths had crossed by accident, as though it were incidental that I liked to see a horse jump, and to pick out a horseman from the rest, and if it happened that I liked the

flash of the coats and horseflesh, so much the better. I would not have hunted, but I liked to watch.

The hare came as a puff of dirty smoke bowling along through the grass. He had only a hundred yards lead on the pack, but he would draw out on them before he hit the road, and he was good for a mile between rests. The hounds got a good sight of him as he thumped out the quarter of a mile or so to the road, and they were truly a pack as he went into the gorse. He was not staying. The cover was not enough with death snapping at his pelt. He crossed the road at an angle while the hounds found an opening, and disappeared on the other side, thin-bodied in his dew-wet, clinging pelt.

At first sight the huntsmen looked a little less orderly than the hounds. They swung wide around the mountain, and some almost ran off, not seeming to know where they were going. Then they fell into something like order and came in for the jump. The hounds were through and away.

The leaders came up and took the jump well enough, in a flash of well-tailored red and black, the trim, clean little hunters over and away in a scattering of mud and an occasional clip of hoof on wood, ears pricked and

willing. They cleared the branch with a foot to spare.

Then the stragglers came up and it happened. Some of the ponies hit with a bang and scrape, the riders awkward and a mile out in timing. Then three came over at once and the near mount, crowded out to the end, got a late start and bellied into the branch. The rider, a neat, handsome young woman who had never really learned to ride, jerked his head and baulked the jump, and the pony bellied hard on to a sharp spike someone had been careless about at the end of the post. It was just long and strong enough to do the job and the trim little hunter hit in a soft place

and went right on to it. A clean foot of manuka prong went all the way in below the parting of his ribs, and he hung on it.

The pony's neck went down and his forequarters splayed, and the woman was over, head and shoulders on to the clay road. Impaled, he threw back again without finding his hind hooves, and I knew that I would remember his agony for the rest of my life. I knew by what I saw, but mostly from what I heard, that he would not live. But he was free before I got to the jump, and trotted, dying, down the clay road, his life dragging from the gaping belly-wound, tangling with his hooves until he fell. All I had was a shotgun. When it was over I was ashamed to look at the carcass.

Everybody was shaken. They stood about stricken-faced, shocked by the sight and sound and shame of what had happened. Only some could speak. One woman said over and over, "My God, what a terrible thing—Oh, God—" twisting her crop between tight fists. I thought she would throw a fit. A group of friends held the girl who had ridden the pony into his fatal jump, and I could see her shoulders shudder as she sobbed.

Somebody started to say how lucky it was I had been there.

I said: "Why the hell don't you import foxes to butcher?" I did not know what I meant. I kept seeing the thing and hearing it.

"I don't see—" the man started to say. He was just as shaken as I was, and no more sure of himself.

"No," I said, "you don't see, of course."

I felt cheap and nasty. It was nothing about the hunt in itself; it was everybody, the way we were, the excuses we always made for ourselves. And the shock that always came when things went out of line.

I got my dog and walked away without looking back. The setter trotted heavily, close to the ground, still smelling the death in the air. Even from the other side of the mountain I could hear the yelping of the hounds.



(Solution to No. 654)

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

## Clues Across

- Enlist, Mr. (anag.). This boy to the war has gone, according to the song.
- This old-fashioned domestic vessel consists largely of another, which was used formerly for storing ashes.
- On the point of death.
- Type of Bridge.
- Card game.
- Here you find us in front of her but we usually follow her.
- Is unable to use insincere moralising talk.
- Cup-bearer of Olympus.
- "The Turn of the ——" by Henry James.
- Quick to take offence.

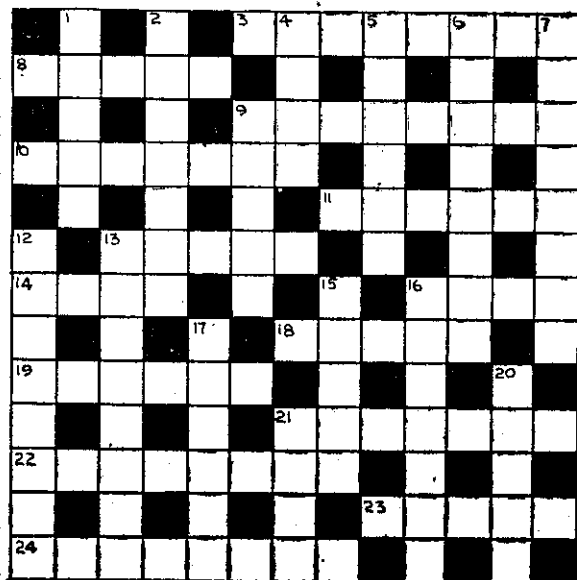
## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- "Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden ——"?
- O sweet content!" (Thomas Dekker).
- Take an aspirin for this.
- Adhere.
- "The women were proposed to be taxed according to their beauty and skill in ——" ("Gulliver's Travels").
- "We have ——" the snake, not killed it" ("Macbeth," Act 3, Scene 2).
- Hoofed.
- Relative dimensions of laces?
- Recluses.
- Defrauds.
- "—, loathed melancholy" (Milton).
- Avoid.

No. 655 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

## Clues Down

- From this plant you can make a brush.
- In favour of the trial? It's a matter for remonstrance.
- Image made out of a coin.
- Make a mistake (2 words).
- "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, ——— them how we will" (2 words, hyphenated) ("Hamlet," Act 5, Scene 2).
- Your stocking is? At least you've had a run for your money.
- "God ——" in a mysterious way His wonders to perform" (William Cowper),



## Longer and Better Record Playing

**A BETTER** service to listeners is given by new pick-ups which are going into service at NZBS stations throughout the country. They will replace all of the old pick-ups, which were due for renewal. Besides giving improved fidelity generally, the new equipment will make it possible for all stations to use long-playing records. The new pick-up unit has two detachable heads. One is used for standard recordings and one for LPs. The pick-up is carried on a new type of arm which will avoid the risk of retracking which occurs occasionally with some recordings where the modulation or amplitude is very high. A diamond point which should last about nine months is used on the pick-up head. A feature of the pick-up in line with modern needs is very light needle pressure on the disk, which greatly reduces record wear. Associated with it is an equalising amplifier to ensure that all types of recording are correctly reproduced. The complete unit, comprising pick-up, equalising amplifier and power supply is mounted on a turntable cabinet with the necessary controls conveniently to the hand of the operating technician. The amplifier units were designed by the NZBS Head Office Engineering Section.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 31, 1953,