

Beryl and Guy MONTIN



DREAM ALIVE

**Australia to France on a Scootervan
1956**

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(1956)*

by

Beryl and Guy Montin

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I

ON YOUR MARKS

“Hooray,” shouts Jack. “We’re up the toughest hill between Sydney and Melbourne.”

“Ah...” Jil yawns. “A pity there is no shade.” She can only see a dry slope under two dead gums.

But Jack has crossed the road to climb the embankment. He looks at the hilltop, two hundred yards away, where a lone fir screws the landscape into the sky.

“There is a spot of green up there... Come on, let’s have our lunch.”

“All right,” says Jil. “... I’ll wake the children.”

... ..

Glitsy walks first, nursing the bottle of lemonade. The dry grass prickles his legs. His elbows stick out well in front, least he should fall. Elbows don’t break, not when one is four years old.

Tootie is only two. She drags a plastic tablecloth over the red dust. If she falls on that she will not dirty her track-suit. Tootie is very proud of her new track-suit, fluffy and green from neck to ankles, with a gold zipper down the middle. Daddy, Mummy and Glitsy wear just the same, only bigger.

“Keep your heads down, both of you,” orders Jil, “or else your noses will peel.”

The poor kids have Jil’s fair skin and her straight tilted-up nose. This looks fragile on Glitsy who also wears his mother’s oval face and hazel eyes. But it goes well on Tootie who is brown-eyed and square-faced like her father.

“Try and walk in your own shade,” suggests Jack.

That's easy. Both children wear a thick mop of golden silk, the wonder, pride and envy of their dark-haired parents, Cool as buttercups under the harsh sun, the little heads bob up and up, out of the grass onto the grey sandstone of the ridge.

"Look," shouts Tlitsy, "... a Christmas tree!"

"It's a Norfolk pine," corrects Jack.

The fir broods over the boulders which surround it. In the cool dark space near the trunk Tlitsy can jump as high as the lower branches. Some rusted cans blend with the carpet of pine needles. The boy kicks them out into the sun and Tootie spreads the tablecloth. Jill brings out the bread, the butter and the bully beef. Then she begins to search through the bottom of the bag in growing panic.

"We left the opener behind," she frets. "But then, why did we have to come up here?"

"We came up here for a spot of shade," says Jack, pulling the gadget out of his pocket, "...also, may be, for a last look at Sydney."

Jack slips his shoulder under a branch and, heave-ho, lifts the green lid off the landscape: Camden town, just down below, neat as a street map. Pasture country soft and rolling, as far as Liverpool and then...

"Blast that haze over the city!" curses Jack,

"I can see a dark square near the sky," says Tlitsy.

"The Harbour Bridge," reckons Jack, "showing length-ways, forty miles off. Not bad eh?"

"Sad-making," sighs Jil. "... to think we may never see it again."

"Plenty of time for that, we're young." Jack releases the branch.

Before Jil can sweep off the crumbs, Tootie curls on the tablecloth, ready for her afternoon nap.

"Shall I wake her up'?" asks Jil.

"No hurry," answers Jack, "Let's have a look from the other side of our tree."

There is no haze over the West. Only a straight, sea-flat horizon into which the tablelands twist, level with each other and flat as dead snakes. Between their grey cliffs wind the valleys, deadly still and blue like nowhere else in the world, except, perhaps, on the Ocean's bottom.

"So quiet," whispers Jill.

“It’s the size of it,” explains Jack, “... And yet Purlmere is only forty miles up this valley... Two hours at the most. Al won’t be expecting us till he’s fed his chooks for the afternoon.”

“Will you tell him we sold the house?”

“May be he won’t ask,” answers the Brute.

“What if he does?”

“He might feel envious... or think we’re mad.”

... ..

“Go and see,” says Jack.

Down in the gully where the Highway tops the rise, a signpost holds a board across the road. Black letters stand out on the white paint:

THE RAZORBACK MOUNTAIN

Jack never saw it on the way up because he parked his machine right against it, just off the bitumen. There she stands, too tall for her three small wheels. The front is a motor scooter. The rear is a baby truck with a plywood body and roof of green canvas like the covered wagons of the Old west.

“Get in,” orders the Brute, lifting the flap door at the back. Tlitsy jumps in, Tootie heaves herself up, Jil stoops under the last hoop of the roof. They sit facing the rear with two feet of floor space to stretch their legs. Jack walks round to the front, releases the parking brake and starts pushing the machine down the incline. Coasting is fun and saves gas.

“Don’t be mean...” begins Jill, but the contraption gathers speed, with a hiss from the rubbing clutch.

“New gears,” sings Jack., “new engine, new machine, new life, new everything!”

“Watch out,” cries the Brat, “you’re in the middle...”

“So what?...the road’s all ours, and all tarred to Augusta !”

“Daddy’s naughty,” declares Tlitsy, the Brutelet.

“No.” Tootie shouts her favorite word.

“Swallow your spittle,” orders the Brute, “or else you’ll get ear-ache. We’re going down faster than the Big Dipper.”

The clutch moans like a siren. Jack has to give a deep juicy squeeze on the hydra pedal before throwing the gear. Then the two-stroke takes over, drowning all prattle until the ear gets used to the noise.

Jack could never find a speedometer to fit his baby wheels. But Tlitsy spots the milestones and Jil reads them aloud:

BUNNY GALORE 16 MILES

“The Purlmere turn-off should be soon,” reckons Jack. “Watch for a gas station under two...”

“Two gums this side,” calls Tlitsy. From a limb of the first tree a sign swings over the roadway:

SHADES

the Gas for the Grades

The place is asleep. Except, perhaps for the cicadas, guesses Jack, as he switches off the engine. But the Brute is wrong: the insects are quiet, cowed by the noise of the two-stroke, no doubt... The silence stays solid for twenty seconds... Then a kookaburra laughs like mad:

‘Ha-ha-ha-ho-ho-hi-hi-hys-te-ri-cal-jack-ass’

Good bird. She has woken a man who shuffles out of his shed to lean against the pump:

“What’s this?.. Yawwwn... Chaffcutter or something?”

“Call it a scootwagon,” orders Jack, “and give it a gallon.”

“Is that all? How does it go in?”

“Under the seat... Here.. How far’s Purlmere?”

“Too far,” says the man, “two miles up the dirt track,”

“May I use your phone to call Al Fabert?”

“Sure, tell him to fetch you with his tractor... What is this doover anyway?”

“If you really want to know,” says Jack, “I’ll lend you the waiter’s booklet. You read it while I phone.”

the
SCOOTOVAN
Three-wheeler
Delivery
Unit

Tenacious Road Holding
Favorable Load Distribution
Easy Transport of Bulky Goods
Comfortable Riding on All Surfaces

Steering : 1 Front wheel on
Handlebars

Drive : 2 Back wheels on Differential

Engine : 2-Stroke 148cc – 1.25 H.P.

Load : 0.34 Tons Tare: 375 lbs

Speed : 34 MPH Cruising 25 MPH

FUEL CONSUMPTION : 100

MILES PER GALLON

Price : Austr.Pounds : 140/0/0

US dollars: 300.00

CHASSIS ONLY -- F.O.B. GENOA

... ..

Al was busy clearing rat-traps in the feed-shed. He had six whoppers, all of them caught in tile mash- bin.

“One rat eats like two hens... Yet it lays no eggs.” Al thought bitterly, pushing a finger under the black rim of his glasses. This simple gesture transforms Al: his nose dwarfs his finger and a large ear flaps out of his dark curls: a good natured merino.

Judy was singing in the little fibro-cement kitchen. Judy was good at singing and French. That’s why she married Al in the

first place. She found him this chicken farm when he came out of Belgium with his old folk. But Judy...

The phone rings and Judy stops singing.

But Judy, fair and smooth-faced with long grey slits for eyes, Judy is a townie to the core. By her kitchen door two runaway layers and one overgrown cockerel peck at an old cellophane wrap clearly marked:

CHICKEN NOODLE READYMIX

Tear along the dotted line

“Grab that fat idiot,” shouts Judy, kicking the cockerel into Al who blocks the pass,”...and let’s boil it for Jack. That was him on the phone, calling from the turn-off.”

Al takes the bird to the guillotine, a real, working model of the one in Paris. Just beyond the collar-piece stands a basket of choice grain. Peck-peck-peck, goes the bird, peck-peck. Click, goes the blade.

The corpse is hardly cold when the dogs, who have been waiting by the fee1 shed, make a dash across the yard, towards the road. Between their barks Al cart hear a two-stroke in the distance. ‘Mighty fast, thinks Al.’ But the dogs bark a new tune: Wow, this thing is worth running after ! Wow, what’s more, it can be kept up with, without loss of breath for a bark, Wooow!

Al watches a green monster bump over his drive, upset his best milk urn, knock down the old incubator and stop under his tool-shed. Al’s six rats hang by their tail from the end of his arms. The dogs are quite beside themselves. Wow, this thing actually came into their yard ! Wow, there are two children inside, Wooow !

But Al has a plan. He starts swinging a rat, sling-shot fashion, letting fly towards the bush. With each shot he calls the name of a French general of the First War. The dogs bounce off, one by one, as on roll call. Al’s father was a captain.

“Hullo ,“ says Al, “so you are really going’?” “Hi Al,” says Jack, “what’s hatching?”

The women kiss each other’s kids and vanish towards the kitchen.

“What a queer looking machine,” remarks Al.

"I had to build it so we could sleep in it," explains the Brute.

"Sleep?... You're kidding."

"We will," says Jack. "Look at the seat and the back rest. During the day they hold our sleeping bags and linen, At night they fit on the handlebars, towards the back: bunks for the kids,"

"What about yourselves'?"

"Flat on the floor, with our legs sticking out through the flap doors on either side of the engines"

"Must be drafty."

"Not with all that spare canvas tucked in both ends. It wraps around the windshield in front, At the back it stretches out, giving us an extra square yard to stand out of the rain. Cosy as a Coney Island caterpillar."

"May be," says All "but tonight you'll sleep in our house."

... ..

"Don't you miss your nice bungalow?" Judy asks Jil.

"Not yet. No doubt I will sooner or later."

"What about the kids?"

"They're tough. They think this is life."

"What do you call that thing of yours?"

"The kids call it the Putput, because of the noise it makes."

"Poot-Poot," sings Judy, "Poot-Poot-Poot... How do you eat?"

"It's got a false bottom with two Christmas cakes, very rich, and a ton of stuff, mostly noodles. Also a small gas stove and a six-pint pressure-cooker."

"You must take a couple of chooks. How far are you going?"

"Adelaide may be. Jack might get a job out there."

... ..

"The bush is real green this year," says Jack. "Lots of rain," All answers. "You can hear the creek from here."

"How's Judy settling down?"

"All right. But this sort of farming gets her goat. Too specialized, she says. Five thousand hens and not one rooster."

"That's real cruelty to animals," Jack sighs. "Could we have a look at the bush?"

Al shows the way, keeping near the creek for fear of getting lost. The wood is thick with old gums, twisted by the effort to keep their balance over the boulders. Even the men find it hard. The undergrowth is mean and crotchety. Small clearings show up here and there, yellow-brown mounds in the bracken, like boils on an unshaven chin.

“Ant hills,” explains Al. “... So you left your job?”

“I got two months holiday,” answers Jack. “If I’m not back by then I’ll loose my seniority.”

“Seniority,” muses Al, “se-ni-o-ri-ty.”

Al’s dogs follow, nosing about without gusto. Sniff, what can a dog expect so near a poultry yard, sniff.

Suddenly, the party enters a large clearing where a score of timber sheds slant away from the sunset.

“No matter how hard I try,” curses AL, «I always walk round to this spot.”

This is where his five thousand hens, dry nurses in white uniform, lay eggs that will never hatch.

... ..

“Can you kill a chicken?” asks Little Al from wonderstruck Tlitsy.

“It’s easy. You just press this button... Mind your fingers...”
Click.

... ..

“I’ve got to see the welder,” says Al. Coming with me?”

Jack plods along, nursing a three feet tall statue of solid brass. Albert the First, King of Belgium, minus a leg. The lane is slippery with mud. A two-storied building, the only one in Purlmere, pokes its brown roof above the tree tops.

“The Pub,” grunts Al. “... Couldn’t you buy yourself a car or something decent?”

“The Putput will go further on less gas,” answers Jack. “Also she won’t make anybody jealous.”

Al splashes past three little churches, built of timber like doghouses with Olde English trimmings.

“Lut’ran, Met’dist and Cat’lic,” explains Al.

“... Weren’t you happy in Sydney?”

“Too happy,” says Jack, “That’s why we’re shooting off... going walkabout. It’s an Australian tradition.”

The lane expands into a clearing, brown mud dotted with rusty junk. Three farmers discuss a broken plough in a slow Baltic language. Under a shed furnished with a welding set a youth stands in gumboots, bending a pipe into a pram’s handle.

“Hi Al,” says the fellow, “what’s wrong with Napoleon’?”

“Broken a leg,” says Al, fetching the limb from his pocket. “How much’?”

“A dollar,” answers the welder, a prosperous fellow, for sure. Behind his shed stands a fibro cabin with the latest of frigidaires gleaming through the wire-net of the door, A woman sings in the blocked-up trailer which still serves as a bedroom, A path leads into the bush beyond.

“This outfit,” sighs Jack, “this kind of outfit is just what we wanted.”

... ..

Back at the house another chook has lost its head. The body has been pressure-cooked and wrapped in grease-proof paper. In the morning Judy plonks it into Jil’s lap with two pounds of potatoes and a few tears:

“Bye kids, bye folks.”

“Bye Judy. Bye Al. Bye Little Al.”

“God bless.”

“Good luck.”

... ..

The Putput belts along, doing twenty miles an hour up the shallow rises, sunburnt and deserted. Here and there on the dry slopes a gum throws a green shadow.

“Why is it green under the trees?” asks Tlitsy.

“Some early shower brought the grass out,” explains Jack, “and the spot of shade kept it alive.”

With luck, this first growth could hold out another two weeks until the end of March. Then, with more luck, more rain and winter coming on it might even run to seed...

“A real big gum,” shouts Tlitsy, “...by the roadside.” “Lunch time,” decides Jack, switching off.

The little boy jumps out of the Putput, grabs the chicken, runs towards the tree and stops dead. A blue eye stares at Tlitsy from above a leathery cheek. Pink wrinkles run deep across the suntan and vanish under the beard which fans out, white as dry coral, over faded blue dungarees. The body leans back on the tree, cushioned by a long sausage made of grey blankets.

“Hi, snowy,” grunts the old man, “what have you got there?”

Tlitsy takes a step backwards.

“A chickens” answers Jack, “...will you let us share your tree?”

“Sure, it’s a free country,” snorts the oldster,

“.. Besides, I like nothing better than cold chook.”

“So you’re going West on that silly-looking doover,” says the ancient, lighting one of Jack’s smokes. “How far do you reckon she’ll pull you?”

“We have some friends in Canberra,” answers Jil.

“Government blokes, I bet Pasty-faced pen-pushers the likes of your husband... Me, I like the open. Walking about the bush like the Swagmen used to do in the old days...”

“I say...” wonders Jack, “isn’t that a swag you’re sitting on?”

“Sure.” The old man winks. “I carry my gear in a blanket roll, with that and my whiskers I get any job I like from the farmers. For old time’s sake, you see. They reckon I am the last of the Swaggies.”

Tootie curls up on the tablecloth spread over the new grass. She sucks her thumb, trying to sleep.

“Me hot, Mummy. Go home.”

“Home is too far,” says Jil. “Go to sleep.”

“Where is home?” asks the Swagman.

“Paddington,” answers Tlitsy proudly.

“Paddo, eh?” the Swaggie looks pleased. “That’s the best suburb in Sydney, sonnie, no matter what they say. Plumb over the Harbour and right up to the sky.”

“It could do with a coat of paint, «grunts Jack,

“Never,” says the old man, “Nothing like a rusted roof and brown wash on, a wall to give a place character.. And where else would you get ten houses made out of thirteen walls and one tin roof, like the Paddo terraces?”

“Ours was a semi-detached cottage,” Jill protests. “When we painted it blue all the street complained.”

“Which street?”

“The one that runs down the hill, with sandstone kerbs to break your legs on.”

“That’ll be Mitchell Street,” sighs the Swaggie, “running North-East into Rushcutters Bay. With all the breeze from the Pacific blowing through it and the lights of the Harbour shining up. The best place in the world, it is and no mistake.”

“Paddo was all right,” grants Jack. “At least a man could get a spot of shade from the walls. Not like these mangy gums.”

“Daddy, why are gums mangy?”

“Not enough leaves.” Jack always answers Tlitsy’s questions.

“Why haven’t they?”

“Because the soil’s too poor.”

“Why is the soil poor?”

“Because of the sandstone.”

“Why is there sandstone?”

“Because. ..ahem...”

“... Because of Adam and Eve,” says the Swagman and clears his throat.

... ..

“You see, sonnie, the Lord was very angry when Adam tried to blame Eve over the apple business. Lucky for us the flaming sword wasn’t handy just then. Instead the Lord tore up a shrub which happened to sprout by the apple-tree. When the rumpus was over, the Lord sat in the shade nursing His shrub: “Oh my poor innocent creature, «sighed He. “...How tough I made the skin of that fellow Adam... And there you are, all in a frump, unfit to stay in my Eden. Where on Earth shall I put you?”

That fool Adam had gone East. Not wishing to see him again, his Maker decided to walk South, South, He was wading waist-deep

past the Equator. "My Goodness," said He, "I did leave a lot of water running loose in these parts. Wonder what's underneath."

Fossicking in the depth of the Southern Seas, the Lord felt a harder patch. With His toe, He began to prize it upwards while volcanic rumbles stirred the Deep. In the end the toe came up, hooked to a large slab of sandstone. "Ah well," said the Lord to His shrub, "this will have to do you. See if you can stick to it, grow some gum. At least you'll have no competition."

And that's how Australia was created, all the flat emptiness of it under the mangy gum-trees too busy gumming up the rocks to bother throwing any proper shade, Mark my words, Sonnie, both the land and its trees bear us, sons of Adam a half-forgotten grudge.

All of it except Sydney Harbour. That's the sweetest spot on Earth. God dug it with his toe when he hooked up Australia. If there is anything sweeter it's where the Lord's toenail dented the sandstone. And that's Paddo."

"Any questions?" asks the Swaggie.

"... Huh?" Jack grunts. "... Nice story that, explains a lot of things. Thanks a lot for it. By the way, why do gum-trees make no gum?"

"That I don't know," answers the Swagman. "... Do you'?"

"No," says Jack, "... Ah well, now we must move up a few of those flat hills."

... ..

Thirteen miles from Canberra the clutch puller jumps out of its bearing. Ten little balls of steel start swimming in the gear case.

"My fault..." Jack curses, "The Putput should have been run-in before we started,"

It's getting dark. To make matters worse, a stray cloud begins to drip onto the party. Jack and Jil push the machine off the road between a wire fence and a clump of wattle, Jack extends the canvas, Jil lights the petrol stove to boil some noodles Sand and gum leaves drift into the pot. Then Tootie goes sick with too much chicken. All over the sleeping bag which Mummy took so long to stitch.

"Not bad for a first night out," Jil yawns."

II

READY

Oh but what a morning! Last night Jack forgot to black out the windshield. Through the square of Perspex the sun shoots one of its first rays, straight into Tootie's eyelashes. The child blinks twice. Enough to spot Tlitsy's ear handy to her mouth. Snap. Yells and scuffles... Tootie falls from her bunk, bounces on Jil's tummy and ends up, very happy, sitting on her father's face.

Jil gets busy cooking breakfast while Jack dismantles the gear case to fish the little steel balls out of the sump. Thank God, there is a ton of spare parts in the sidewalls of the Putput. Jack finds a new set of clutch bearings and fits them in with a new puller.

"Porridge," announces the Brat.

When the Brute is fed, Jil tries a question: "Isn't it a bit early for the Putput to start conking out?"

"Beginners luck," says Jack sombrely.

... ..

Canberra begins with a small hill like a clown's hat. Faintly green, planted with a dozen toy firs and bound with a broad loop of tarmac, leading nowhere. But this showpiece hides four banks, two drugstores, one grill room and a signpost:

CIVIC CENTRE
Consular Circle 3 M,
via Cedric Circus 2 M, and Crecy Crescent 1 M

All beautiful curves and roundabouts no doubt made of the best bitumen but quite vacant of people.

Two Siamese cats stroll around a sunny corner. Jack follows these envoys of Asia to the gates of the Ceylon Consulate.

“Two visas for Ceylon?...” the clerk raises a plump arm towards the Buddha on the wall, “...of course.” There is a rubber stamp at the end of the arm: Bang, bang.

“... Of course you’ll get to Ceylon... Beg your pardon?... Queanbeyan?... What is that?”

“A new suburb of Canberra,” Jack smiles, “could you tell us how to get there?”

“I’m sorry,” says the clerk, “I haven’t been out for months. Not after I got lost on Coronation Corso.”

Queanbeyan is a sane suburb. Square blocks of sensible houses stand at right angle to straight streets. Squads of kids at each corner,

“Sexton Street?” asks Jack,

“Straight ahead, mister.”

“Sixty-seven,” reads Jil from a square number plate. “Mr. Levine?... Good afternoon, Sir.. Our name is Monty. Your son Barry used to live next door to us in Sydney. He said we could camp in this yard if we came to Canberra.”

“Queanbeyan,” corrects Mr. Levine. “Sure, sure. Drive in. Won’t you have some beer?”

“Thank you, Sir, but not before I have a look at my engine.”

“I’ll be in that too” Mr. Levine rubs his dry hands. “I just love a new engine.

“S’ttruth,” explains Mr. Levine, “you got some whoppers for number plates.”

“Dreadful,” Jack agrees bitterly. Do you know anyone in the Department of Transport?”

“No.”

“Good,” says Jack. “They’re a fussy lot of aunts in pants. When they saw the Putput they couldn’t stop scratching their noodles. ‘Load-weight ratio,’ they said, meaning such a little thing couldn’t do so much. They looked up all the books, including the Paddo electoral list. In the end they said it was a truck.”

“Tough truck,” says Mr. Levine. “How much did you pay?”

“Fourteen pounds, ten shillings and three pence.” Jack winces.

“... the cashier was laughing like a kooka when he handed over the number plates: ‘Here you are,’ he said, ‘free bumpers for your truck.’”

... ..

Mrs. Levine loves to feed steak to children:
“My Barry used to eat so much of it,” she sighs.
“He still does,” answers Jil.
“My Barry has been away for two years now. So you think he’ll
pass his second year Phys. Ed.?”
“You bet he will,” says Jil.

... ..

“Good bye,” shouts Mr. Levine. “Try and make it to Gundagai.
There is a beaut caravan park...”
Tlitsy waves and Tooty cheers.

... ..

“Two things we must never do,” yells Jack. “One is to overheat
the engine. The other is to drive in the dark.”
“I’d like to be in Gundagai tonight,” shouts Jil, “there would be
people the like of us in the Carapark, things to buy, mates for the
kids.”
“We’ll never make it,” objects Jack, “it’s nearly dark...”
“Look, Daddy, a sleeping gum.” Tlitsy points to a fallen giant,
sixty yards off the road. The tree is not dead, in fact it seems to
be doing better that way. Its fork is like a green tent above the
dry grass.
“Snug as a chick under its mother,” laughs Jack, nosing the
Putput under the leaves.

Big trucks zoom along the highway and Tlitsy watches the pretty
lights twinkle across the branches. But Tootie feels the
strangeness of the place.
“Me want to go home, Mummy.”
“Home,” says Jil firmly, “is where the four of us are together.”
“Tonight we’ll stop early,” promises Jack.
At five o’clock the Putput squeezes into the Holbrook Carapark,
between two large trailers. The men tell Jack about the last hills

of New South Wales. Jil finds out sugar is a penny cheaper in Victoria.

Ned Kelly was Australia's Davy Crockett. But Glenrowan had no Indians, so the poor boy had to shoot policemen instead. He was caught in the saloon, blown up and hung for good measure. Too bad.

He died. People were sorry for him and made him a hero. And Glenrowan, up to this day, conducts business in its own way:

GRAPES 4 SALE

reads a sign on a gate post and on the other:

WATCH FOR K.9

"Anybody there?" Jack yells from the safe side.

A weatherboard cottage crouches amidst the vines, a good twenty yards in canine land. Not a bark.

"Yoohoo," shouts the Brute, warning up, it do you want to sell your bloomin' grapes?"

"Too right..." answers a voice. "You come and get them. "Two bits for all you can take and no baskets."

"Where is the dog'?" Jil wants to know first.

"Out for lunch." A red haired snout pokes over a window sill.

"Aw...so there is four of us, eh?"

Ah well, give us a quarter and grab all you can hold in one hand.

... ..

"Let's keep some for the Balmingtons, "says Jil. "After all, we haven't met them and, if we must camp in their yard..."

"Des said they were all right." Jack spits a pip.

"He even said they're one of us."

... ..

Balmo must be one of Us. Even if he lives in that asphalted mud-flat they call Melbourne he found himself a rare bit of dead-end.

Homer street begins as it should: Tarmac with concrete kerbs between privet hedges. But, as the Putput passes number Two-Six-One, the mud crumbles from under it. Like a flow of churned lava, the street runs into an expanse of waste mud called Bascoe Vale.

“Jump out,” orders Jack, Number Two-O-One, the Balmo home, stands nearly built thirty yards downhill. Jack eases the brake. Two wheels jump over the dry nicks, the other crushes a mass of broken bottles, rejected bricks and snapped twigs. This will be the side-walk, some day, no doubt... The house is empty but it smells of fresh paint.

“Nice view,” says Jil, The railway line in the vale, a deserted cycle track and the suburb on the hill opposite. The kids start a snack,

“Hullo, I bet you are the Montys.” A six foot girl smiles down at Jil. “I’m Lorna, Joe will be back in a minute.”

Joe arrives with sausages and goes back for some Melbourne bitter. It tastes better than Sydney brew.

.... .

Jack wakes to a nightmare. It is raining. A car is being jerked uphill, ploughing two foot deep in the mud behind a hawser at least twice as thick as the Putput’s shaft.

“This will never do,” wails Jack.

“So what,” Joe sounds hurt, “Aren’t you happy with us?” Jil goes shopping with the tall girl. Jack spends the day uprooting stumps from the future sidewalk. Towards sunset the Putput wins through, across a vacant corner block, into a new street.

“Thanks for the pioneer work,” says Balmo, “and from now on it’s all tarmac to Adelaide.”

.... .

“It’s funny,” says Jil, “I feel we are just leaving Sydney.”
“This is Melbourne, you silly, Sydney was... six days ago.”
“I know, it feels ages ago as well as being just now queer.”
“You’re gust growing younger,” the Brute laughs.

This time Jack finds a pepper tree. Mock pepper, of course, but it’s big enough to hide the Putput. Red berries and dark leaves smelling strong to keep off the mosquitoes. It grows on a disused section of the Western Highway, near Bacchus Marsh. The place teems with rabbits.

“Cheeky bunnies.” Tlitsy chucks slabs of tarmac at the most insolent ones.

“Me catch,” says Tootie, running into the line of fire.
The game ends when Tlitsy crashes into a barbed wire.
“Mercurochrome,” orders the Brute.

... ..

Ballarat centres around a memorial to Gold. A pile of quartz with a scale copy of the largest nugget ever found there. Tourists view the fake with respect, local people are used to it. There ain’t no more like it. Behind the nugget memorial lurks an old shop selling prospector’s gear.

“How much for a rabbit trap Jack feels tough and buys a couple.
“Painless ones, please.”

... ..

The bush grows thinner, the land drier. Gum-trees straggle on for a couple of hundred miles. Then they run out of leaves, out ‘if gum, out of stumps and, no doubt out of roots.

“Good riddance,” grunts Jack.

Now the wheat fields stretch to a wavy skyline of yellow hills. Every thirty miles a dozen iron roofs cluster under a dozen pepper trees. One hour between each village, one hour on the hot tarmac, between two rows of dry thistle. Two bands of ploughed earth protect the wheat from the thistle, least it decide to catch fire.

“What a waste of thistle,” Jil sighs over the dry blooms. “Spray them with silver frost,” barks the Brute, “and sell them to the city Scots.”

... ..

At the border of South Australia, the wheat gives up. Clumps of dusty shrubs dot the grey earth.

‘Mallee Country,’ says the map. A railway line follows the road for moral support, in empty stretches marked with deserted sidings every seven or eight miles.

It’s hot. Tlitsy’s cuts have festered, spreading sores all over his arms, legs and face. He dozes. Tootie sleeps across Mummy’s lap. ‘Better shut up,’ think the adults, ‘unless we want to have a row.’

... ..

“Murray Bridge,” shouts Jack, “and some hills, shall we stay here?”

The camping ground is a dust bowl under eight gums. Leafy enough, these eight gums, but smart. They have a trick to twist their leaves in line with the sunrays.

It blocks any likely breeze and lets the heat through onto Jack, son of Adam.

“Fifty miles to Adelaide,” muses the Brute.

“Let’s go,” says Jil, “and show Tlitsy’s spots to a chemist.”

‘KANMANTOO’, spells a signpost where the road starts to climb over some hills which pretend to be in Scotland. They grow trees which are not gums. In Nairne, water runs in a gully by a mill with a waterwheel. At Littlehampton, they sell red apples, home-grown. Ransdorf begins a mock Switzerland with real firs. Smart chalets make Jil feel shabby. Aldgate ends in a climax with a sign, red on white, pointing to the right:

MOUNT LOFTY
Altitude above M.S.L.
Two Thousand
Three Hundred
and Thirty four
Feet
'and
a
half'

... adds Jack with Jil's lipstick.

Adelaide lies below, flat as a spinster's apron, squarely edged in green park-lands. The tartan of straight avenues shows her Scottish upbringing.

"Better not startle the old girl." Jack switches off for a silent approach along the three mile descent. Adelaide has just gulped her last pint of mild for to- day. "Time, gentlemen, please." It's six o'clock. Men rush the streets, hurrying towards the dry suburbs past the Wine Exporting Board. More gums in the Carapark. Some olives in the public gardens, dropping fruit on the gravel paths. No one to pickle them to be served on a toothpick. For that, they have to come from Spain, via London.

... ..

A chemist daubs Tlitsy with a white mess, after which the boy looks fit to gatecrash a corroboree. Jack buys a map of the South Australian desert. Jil stores up dried fruit, dried milk, and other foodstuffs, mostly noodles. It's a long drive by the coast towards the Exmouth Gulf. By the roadside, a black pipe-line stretches gloomily, taking water to God knows where. Jack prefers not to think about such places. too many of them ahead. Ah well, maybe they'll have no gum-trees. Port Augusta owns a caravan park. Three shillings each, please. Six mock firs surround a sprinkle connected to the pipe line. Tlitsy's sores have prospered

under their whitewash. Some have spread as far as Jil's elbow. The boy, who has never been sick is beginning to wonder:

"What are spots for, Mummy.?"

Jack answers with a shot of Penicillin, which Tlitsy takes like a man, He spends the day with Tootie, teasing a tame kangaroo. Jack keeps looking at the country towards the East: Grey boulders and dusty shrubs. Then a straight line, like the edge of a tombstone with a dent like a V near the middle.

"That's where we enter the Plain," Jack tells himself again and again. "Tomorrow, maybe. I'd better look at the map."

Adding up miles of dirt track could be fun...

Augusta - Minnipa	185
Minnipa Ceduna	110
Ceduna - Koonalda	258
Koonalda - Kalladonja	377
Balladonia Coolgardie	245
Total	1175

If only the total were less depressing. For comfort, Jack turns to the Auto Guide:

EYRE HIGHWAY Adelaide Perth (1729.9 miles)

"Contrary to general belief," Jack reads aloud, "Contrary to general belief, this route presents no difficulty which a motorist with reasonable experience cannot overcome..."

SURFACE From Augusta to Coolgardie, the road is gravel and natural earth surface. Rain, which can render the road impassable for short periods, is very rare.

In dry weather, surfaces become dusty, pothole and corrugated with some stony outcrops. Fine powdery dust may cover large pot-holes, a worse danger than the rocks which are visible.

WATER - Carry adequate supplies at all times. Water-points cannot be relied upon and some are polluted.

KIT - A full set of tools should be carried to include: Axe, Spade, Knife, Rope, Cold chisel, Hammer, wrenches, Levers, Lifting jacks, etc...

It is important that loading be watched carefully from the standpoints of weight and balance...

“ ... Jil, how’s your waistline?”

“I’ve put on a couple of pounds, I think, why?”

“You’ll have to sit in the middle..”

... Six to seven days is the average car’s travelling time for this trip. As there is no garage in the Plains, cars must leave Augusta in perfect running order..

RAIL FREIGHT - For those who may not wish to drive over the Nullarbor, arrangements can be made by rail from Augusta to Kalgoorlie

Adults 16/12/6

Children 9/ 8/9

Car 16/2/6

“... Oh Jil, how much money in the kitty?”

“About thirty pounds. why?”

“Not enough. How do you like it here’?”

“I expect we shall see worse.” Jil looks at the sprinkler between the mock firs, then she lifts her eyes towards the West. She winces, then she shrugs.

“Sure,” says Jack, “tomorrow morning.”

... ..

Contrary to general belief... Jack sings, Calypso fashion, or so he thinks, to the wild beat of the Put-put over the corrugations.

Co o- o- orrugations.” Corrugations are little waves of earth which run across the road from ditch to ditch.

“Maybe the shoulder will be smoother,” thinks the drowsy Brute, steering left. Oops, Jack wakes up in a mad swerve out of the ditch. “Must keep awake... Corr- u- u- ugations.”

Corrugations are made by truck wheels over natural earth surfaces. Their depth and wavelength vary with the nature of the soil, and other mysterious factors. Jack has been wondering about

it for seven solid hours. No time to stop for lunch. Nobody was hungry in the hot noon. If they were, they could not stop their jaws rattling for long enough to say so. “Corru-ga- a- a- ations,” sings Jack, trying to work out how many extra furlongs it takes to make a corrugated mile.

... ..

“Co- o- o- ontrary to general belief,” sings Jack, giving a twist to the handlebar out of respect for the corpse of a rabbit. A two-dimensional rabbit, by the Grace of God and the night drivers. Must be the night drivers because Jack has not seen a day driver yet, after nine hours on the trail.

Plenty of dead rabbits, though. Jack is always driving round them, out of respect for Dr. Schweitzer.

Also dead wombats, dead bandicoots, dead kangaroos (mostly joeys), dead bottles of beer, dead tires and dead tin cans. Truckies have no reverence for life.

“One day,” thinks Jack very clearly in spite of the shaking, ‘one day I will invent a rabbit bottle-tire compound for coating the natural earth surface of the Nullarbor. There will be no bumps but Dr. Schweitzer will have to go by train.

... ..

“Contrary to ge- e- e- eneral belief,” sings Jack. After driving for eleven hours at twenty miles an hour one should have covered at least 185 miles. Stands to reason. “And yet,” thinks Jack, “where is Minnipa?”

We started at six. We never stopped... It’s five o’clock.

Where is Minnipa?”

It cannot be the fault of the potholes. Jack does not slow down for them. He can see a pothole fifteen yards away. At 20 M.P.H that gives him 90 seconds to pick a path for his three wheels.

When they were awake,

Jil and the kids took a hand in the game, calling the scores. “Bad bump. Bad daddy bump bad,” sang Tootie.

Now, they’re all asleep in the wagon, twisted about each other like a scoopful of crabs. Jack is alone with the gum-trees.

Yes, gum-trees. Meaner looking than ever. And yet, they might be hiding Minnipa. "If we have missed Minnipa," thinks Jack, "I shall set fire to the gum-trees. That will show them that man is smarter than vegetables."

... ..

"Contrary to general be- e- e- elief," sings Jack, driving into a deep pothole.

"Contrary to what?" asks Jil, woken up.

"General belief," answers Jack, glad of the company. "Who's General Beeleeeef? .." Jil yawns.

"Mate of mine," Jack shouts to keep her awake, "also known as the Swaggie on the Razorback. He was wrong and contrary. Australia was never created. This is what happened:

The Moon was Old Earth's joey, raring to jump out of the pouch. It shot out, leaving a gap called the Pacific-Ocean-with--It 's Volcanic Belt, Every child geologist knows that. Right?

Australia wanted to go too. But it got stuck at the last minute, being at the edge of the split. That's why it looks so sore. Look at it. By rights it should be in the Moon, nice and cool, instead of stewing under the bottom of the Earth. Right?"

"You're mad," says Jil,

"Right."

"Something in the gum-trees," Tlitsy shouts, now wide awake and feeling fine.

"Let's call it Minnipa," Jack yawns, "and sleep there." "It's ugly," the Brat protests.

"This," says Jack solemnly, "Is a gift from out Government. The corrugated iron roof collects the rain whenever it drops. The barrel underneath stores it up for the people who are foolish enough to need it. The map calls this place S.T.l., meaning Shed Tank One"

The tank is made of corrugated iron, like a huge barometer coil. Its flanks are smeared with writing in lipstick, charcoal and even a big one in red paint:

HARRY NOAKES GOING WEST Sept. 1955

But there is no water. Somebody shot a .22 bullet through the bottom of the tank to see if it was really empty. Jack hopes it wasn't Harry Noakes. Jil helps to push the Putput away from the tank, along a vague wheel-track between the gums.

'Harry Noakes won't find us here,' says Jil

The night is fine and the silence is solid. Except for a queer noise which seems to come from far away, "clink-clocketty-clonk," or else from very near, "clink- clonk.' Jack prefers to think it's from far away. Some pumping station, perhaps, in Minnipa, maybe.

"Let's go to sleep."

... ..

Minnipa was a group of six houses, ten miles from S. T. 1. Fifty miles past Minnipa something dreadful happens to the road. It divides into two furrows of loose sand. Jack chooses the one on the left. The Putput behaves like a beetle caught in the trap of a lion ant.

Out," orders the Brute, The Brat pushes while he pulls for nearly a mile.

'WORK IN PROGRESS'

reads a sign, but there is no one in sight.

"Today is Good Friday," puffs Jil, excusing the absentees as the road goes back to its old corrugated state.

"That's right," pants Jack, "I'd forgotten about the holidays... the road's all ours for a week. Hooray." Just then, a car rattles by, trailing a cloud of earth, sand and gravel. The windows are shut tight over four unhappy faces. They seem to be running away from something.

"The dust," Jack curses and stops the Putput to let the road float back to earth. "The dust is what does it."

"Does what?" Jil asks.

"Does nothing." Jack slaps his forehead and starts the Putput, very slowly. "I can see it all..."

Contrary to general belief, where there is nothing, nothing can hurt anybody. The Nullarbor is plain nothing. Nothing but a

plain. But people want to get to something. So they go fast, run over rabbits, raise a dust storm, shut the windows, shake and stew in their own juice for forty hours, even if they do forty miles an hour. The silly coots.

The Putput, doing eighteen, raises no dust. Open at both ends, she's like a draft on wheels. There is plenty to eat under the floor. Jil bought another yard of salami at Minnipa. Plenty to drink in the water tank sunk in the sidewall. What's the hurry?

"We're apples," shouts Jack, we'll do it in our own time. No more worry to get to Minnipa, like yesterday. Silly fool I was..."

"The Sea, Daddy, I can see the sea." For once the Brutelet shouts louder than the Brute.

... ..

III

GO

Ceduna is where the Eyre Highway meets the coast- line of the Australian Bight. There is a stretch of tarmac by the wharf, a camping lot by the beach, a pub by the jetty Also a baker, a grocer and thirty houses.

Next to the Putput, in the Carapark, stands a neat little caravan, the pride of a neat little man. He works as a rabbit catcher, staying for months in the plains. Knows them like the palm of his hand.

“There is nothing ahead to frighten you after what you have done,” says the man, “except, may be, the seventeen miles detour. Just go easy and don’t miss the Shed Tanks.”

... ..

It is great fun not missing the Shed Tanks. Quite easy too, once the gum-trees have gone for good. Jack never lifts his eyes from the road but the kids scan the landscape from the top of each rise. The bad lands stretch ahead, in rocky waves crested with dusty shrubs.

“Tank ahead,” shouts Tlitsy. “Five miles to go,” guesses Jil.

Those five miles fly past like so many furlongs. Here is the Shed, the Waltabie S.T.2, according to the map. Apparently, 2 means two barrels. The water in the first one smells strongly of dead rabbit. The tap of the other one is clogged but a rusty tin hangs from the side at the end of a wire.

Jack lifts the metal flap which covers a vent on top of the barrel. Jil fishes out some water. It’s good.

Jack reads the inscription, painted in red under the flap:

Shut this
For bunny's sake
and Harry Noakes'.

A dusty patch surrounds the shed. Some old cans have been piled up to build a fireplace. A wheel track leads away from the tank into the emptiness to the North. The Putput rides high with her front wheel on the hump between the rucks. After three minutes Jack turns to the left, always to the left, into the scrub and stops under the highest shrub.

"It'll be dark in ten minutes," says Jack. Jil knows it will make no difference. No less to be seen, no less to be heard. Quietly, the kids gather dry twigs. Jil lights a fire in a hollow.

"Where there is nothing, nothing can hurt us..." Jack shouts into the wilderness. There isn't even an echo.

The children go to bed in their bunks, whispering into this stillness as they used to do in Mitchell Street. Jack can hear them from two hundred yards. He's laying two rabbit traps by a hole in the ground. He keeps looking back at the Putput, over there, in line with the Southern Cross. Once out of sight, she might be hard to find again in this land without a landmark.

"My God," says Jack aloud to the saltbush, "how can it be so quiet'?"

"Did you hear that?" Jil whispers as the Brute squeezes into the Putput, after a last look at nothing. Careful now. Jil's elbow is swollen and sore with the spots she caught from Tlitsy.

"Now," says Jil and Jack hears it: "Clink, clocketty-clonk." Nearer this time, unless it's further, possibly two hundred yards to the South.

"Some bird," says Jack firmly. "One of those impossible Australian birds which fly about making noises they've heard once... Go to sleep."

... ..

“I’ve heard of whip crack birds,” says the Woman, “cartwheel birds too, but that was in the old days. Your clicketty-clonk bird, is a new one on me. Must have roosted on a water pump.”

She ought to know, the dear soul, after being in the plains all her life. She is now running, single-handed, the Nullarbor Homestead: two stone huts, a petrol pump, three hundred sheep, and six children.

Jack loves this woman more than he has ever loved a woman. Jil included. She is the first human being he has seen in an eternity of three days.

Jil loves the big woman also, and her six brats who play in the dust with Tlitsy. She loves the petrol pump, the three hundred sheep hiding in the saltbush, the two stone huts most of all. They are the first stone huts she has seen in an infinity of three hundred miles.

“I always loved this sort of country,” says Jack, slowly turning on his heels, taking in the absolute emptiness of the flat earth. These are the plains proper. The saltbush is one foot high, dusty grey. There is nothing else under the raw sun and the bigg.c.st sky ever.

“Funny you saying that,” smiles the Woman. “Most people shut their eyes to it and run away.”

“They are afraid to look at it.” Jack knows. Until he found this solid woman he felt very small indeed. Six hours over sixty miles of the worst corrugations ever. Sharp and deep and spaced to fit the Putput’s length. Front up, back down, front down, back up. Like a dinghy on a short choppy sea.

And then three hours on the seventeen miles detour, with the diff rubbing the hump between the nicks. And then one hour to fix a puncture made by a sharp stump. And then the deserted station at White-Wells, with the bones of a horse who had come back to die of thirst...

But now, whoopee... Tootie is kissing the six children of the big wonderful woman. Jil is sipping a fizzy drink. The Putput is filling up with Shades, the gas for the glades. And the Woman,

the marvellous big Woman, bless the twenty stones of her, the dear fat and sunburnt woman is saying:

“You don’t have to worry about the road any more.

She’s apples from now on. The grader’s just been over it.

... ..

The Woman was right. A ribbon of flat earth cuts across the corrugations. It seems to run forever, five foot wide, by the left ditch. With the Putput doing twenty-five Jack can afford a look at the scenery. It is the sort of scenery that can be drawn by anyone. Even the Brute can do it. Here goes:

T.

A Tee and a dot. The crossbar stands for the sky-line, flat as the sea. The upright does for the road, straight as a die. The dot represents the saltbush. There is a lot of saltbush, from the road to the lid of the sky, but saltbushes are very much alike. Seeing one is like seeing them all.

Everything which is not saltbush is very exciting. Shed Tanks for instance. Gundalabbie, Yangoonabbie, Guinewarra,” the map calls them. Some of them hold water but all wear inscriptions: “HARRY NOAKES, broke but still smiling, Jan. 56.”

“I’m beginning to feel I’ve known that chap all my life,” says Jil.

“Something,” shouts Tlitsy, “something on the side.”

Jack stops by a pile of stones with four red letters on the top slab:

SA-WA

“We are entering Western Australia.” Jack sounds quite happy about it.

“I don’t see it makes much difference,” says Jil, looking at the unchanged scene.

“It does,” Jack is hurt. “For one thing, it makes us one and a half hour younger. Look up the Auto Guide, page 3.”

“STANDARD TIMES,” reads Jil, “motorists are reminded to set their watches back by ninety minutes when entering Western Australia.”

The Brat is quiet for a little while. Then she bursts out:

“I don’t see why we should waste all that time in this lousy spot. Couldn’t we keep it for having fun in Coolgardie?”

“Why not? I’ll leave the watch as it stands. What’s the good of the right time in a desert?” Jack feels like Joshua, with ninety minutes of sunshine up his sleeve he can win any battle.

... ..

“Something else,” shouts Tlitsy. A square post sticks two foot high above the ditch. Jack can read three figures burnt into the wood:

4
6
0

“Four hundred and sixty miles to somewhere,” guesses Jack, “probably to Norseman. We might make it in four days.” The posts appear every five or ten miles which is rather exciting.

“Four-forty miles to a milk-shake,” sings the Brat, forgetting her sore elbow. But Jack has lost interest for the time being. Something is happening to the road, something which shines in the afternoon sun, far away near the skyline. Mirage.... or bitumen?

It is bitumen and, what’s more, the road turns to the left. The Putput slows down to enjoy the smoothness, Jack takes the bend in small, pleasurable twists of the handlebars. First real curve in three hundred miles. Then the engine stops. Too much excitement.

Two furlongs of bitumen plunging downhill to a red roof around a yard with a petrol pump.. Next to that, a yellow insect, the grader. Then a line of sand hills, blinding white, and the sea, hazy blue. “Eucla,” says Jack.

To the right, between the edge of the plain and the coast of the Australian Bight, the Highway runs straight towards Madura and the setting sun. . The light picks out the corrugations on the road's surface like grooves on a washboard. Phew," says Jack.

... ..

At Madura, the road steps back onto the plains. It's the Putput's first climb in a thousand miles. Near the top Jack decides to give the machine a rest and parks it on the shoulder. The kids are asleep. Jil wants to stretch her legs and follows Jack some forty yards into the scrub. The Brute would like to have a last look at the sea but a shriek comes from the Putput.

"My God," cries Jil,

"My God," thinks Jack, running like he's never run for life. "My God, I hope I make it," Jack can see the Putput running back downhill as he hops wildly over the bushes.

"My God," prays Jack, "make it so I make it." He can hear another wail as he jumps over the ditch. Now he's on the road. The Putput is wobbling down over some potholes.

"My God, let me catch the be...". Jack runs downhill like he's never run for love. The Putput has nearly upset into the ditch, but a stone has twisted her back, bless her little wheels.

"Thank God," pants the Brute, a hand on the parking brake, squeezing hard. "Thank God... Hullo, kiddies."

The children are quiet. Something wrong? Tlitsy speaks up:

"I never said a word. It was Tootie that shouted."

"Good boy..." says Jack. "Good boy. You are unbreakable. Always will be... But, just the same... When the Putput runs away on its own, please let me know...and quick...otherwise..."

"Putput get hurt," Tootie nods, pleased to be right for once.

... ..

"Three hundred miles to a cool shower," sings Jack, driving into a pothole big enough to bury a wombat.

"Ouch," cries Jill, "my elbow."

“Sorry,” Jack slows down reluctantly. “I’d like to make Cocklebidly Tank by tonight. It’s only one day from Balladonia.”

“My elbow hurts,” Jil insists, “it’s swollen.”

“I’ll have a look at you in Cocklebidly,” concedes Jack. The Brute doesn’t believe in sick elbows. Not for his Brat. Jack can run faster than a runaway Putput. He can beat the sun by ninety minutes. He is smarter than a rabbit since he caught one last night. And he likes the sound of Cocklebidly.

“Cockl-l--l-le-biddy,” sings Jack, driving into another big pothole.

“Ouch,” cries the Brat.

Heavy and slow, a hatred for Cocklebidly seeps into Jack’s soul as the Putput limps away from Cocklebidly, heavy and slow: seven miles an hour. This place was nasty from the moment Tlitsy spotted it in the dusk of last night. “A house,” said the boy. It was a ruined wall, with enough rubble to hide a regiment of snakes. Short dry grass surrounded the tank instead of beaten earth. When the Putput turned off the road it sunk into a dust hole.

Jack lifted the tank’s lid to see four dead rabbits floating over the dark water. Jil couldn’t move her right arm so Jack built the fire to cook his bunny. Jil would not touch it. She went to bed but could not sleep. Jack made his bunk on the ground across the back of the Putput. Jil tossed about all night, mumbling nonsense in her sleep. When it got light, Jack washed his hands in a cup of water from the last gallon. He knew where to inject Penicillin but Jil was bruised all over the place. “Ouch,” she said.

“We’ll stay here for the day,” decided Jack, “We have enough water.”

The sun rose as Jack went back to lie on the ground. The dry grass lit up all around with brown earth showing between the stalks, three or four inches apart. Pretty, like the silks on a pig’s back. A sunray slanted under the Putput, lighting the dust on the diff., the yellow grease on the brake drum, the oil-caked earth on the spring bi...

“Oh no” cried Jack.

“What is it’?” asked Jil.

Jack did not answer. His head sank on his forearm as he looked at the right mainspring. One... two... three broken blades, sandwiched between the two remaining ones and the buffer.

“Anything wrong?” Jil insisted.

“We’ll have to move from here. I’ll go very slow because of you and the Putput. We’ll try and get to the next tank. Then we’ll see...”

Jack hammered the broken blades to reduce the gap at the breaks. He would have to stay in middle gear and stop every now and then.

... ..

Seven miles an hour. Twenty hours to Balladonia Homestead. If the spring holds. The map shows no other tank for sixty-six miles. The little man in Ceduna never got this far but he thought there might be a rabbit freezer working in these parts.

Jil gives the children cheese, biscuits and a cup of water each. The grown-ups are not hungry. Jack drives round the potholes but he runs over the dead rabbits when they are flat enough. Silently, he hates Cocklebidy and the potholes, the big trucks and himself, for three and a half hours.

“Silly murderous fool,” Jack insults himself to the slow heavy beat of the corrugations. “Silly criminal idiot... With a job and a house in Paddo.. And a wife as game as they come... And two kids, quite unbreakable... City life was a waste of strength... Wanted to see if he could...”

“A tank,” shouts Tlitsy. The water is good. Jack fills all the empty cans, about three gallons worth. Then he asks: “Shall we go on?”

“Yes,” says Jil. She falls asleep over the children. There will be no lunch but Jack is not hungry. His stomach weighs a ton and the surrounding nothingness keeps seeping into it as the hours pass. The sun begins to overtake the Putput. Jack curses the afternoon sun for going West. Every loose stone, however small, every saltbush, every broken bottle starts throwing a shade towards Jack. The world turns grey and dismal and hotter than ever. An old chassis stands on its hubs by the side of the track. Jack inspects the wreck for something useful. What a hope!

Nothing but junk, except for a slab of plate glass which must have been a windshield. The dust is thick over it, with a scribble running across:

BACK AFTER LUNCH GONE TO CATCH A RABBIT.

“Silly joke,” grunts the Brute...And yet that writing is fresh...No dust on it...

Jack wonders about it for another hour. It must be three o'clock. No use looking out for another tank yet. No use looking out for anything except potholes. And yet... Jack keeps lifting his eyes towards the skyline.

There is a grey patch up there, a square patch duller than the bush... Too small for a tank...Too big for a wrecked car... Easy now. Jack stops to check the springs.

That thing up there is more like a bill board... With some red stuff on it, like big letters... Couldn't be...not here... Easy now, what a pothole. “Hey Jill, look, Jil look ”

HARRY NOAKES

That's the big letters on the top and no mistake. The thing is a big trailer. There is a grey tent next to it, two grey tents...three...

“Nullarbor Rabbits and Pelts.”

... and four old cars in a clearing of churned dust.. and a petrol pump.. and a man with a red beard and two more coming out of the tent...

FREEZING UNIT N°1.

... and a pile of broken springs under the trailer and two dogs and a smell of roasting sausages...

“Me hungry,” says Tootie.

“Me too,” Tlitsy yawns.

“I feel a lot better,” says Jil.

... ..

The man with the red beard is Mick, a thirty year old Irishman, in charge of the unit. Mr. Noakes is in Perth, fixing a shipment. But Mick will do. He likes fixing springs, little ones especially, like the Putput's. Jack dives into the dust to set Mick's lifting jack under the axle. The Brute could eat the dust for joy.

Jil is cooking noodles behind a saltbush. The children wallow in the dust. It's thick and fluffy and tastes like Mummy's face powder. Mick says rabbit catching is a good job. He could let Jack have the old Chev over there. The Missus could cook for the boys...

"Not this time," says Jil. "On the way back, maybe."

"There is cool beer in the freezer," Mick insists. "I'll buy you a quick one," agrees Jack, "and then, we must get going." The Brute looks at the sun and then at his watch. He fiddles with the knob, setting the hands back ninety minutes. The shrubs are beginning to grow taller. There is enough of them to hide the Putput within a hundred yards of the Shed Tank. The children are in bed. Jil and Jack linger near the fire, drinking in the great silence and the moonlight.

"I can hear it," whispers Tlitsy from his bunk..

"What can you hear'?"

"The water pump bird....there it goes again."

Jack looks at Jil. She shakes her head. Not a sound. Jack walks to the Putput. "clink-clonk." The sidewalls are made of a dozen cubicles of plywood, holding the first-aid box, the tools and spare parts, plastic crockery, maps and other silent things. The central part, above the wheels, opens on the outside. It holds two gallon cans of water and four of petrol. Jack shakes the machine. "clop-clop-clop" go the liquids. That's not the noise... and yet...

Jack pulls out gallon of petrol and begins to unscrew the cap. A sucking noise and a loud "clonk." How simple: the petrol expands during the hot day, pushing out some gas. It cools down at night, pulling in the air through the cap. "clink-clocketty-clink," goes the tin can.

"I got the bird," laughs Jack, at peace with the Nullarbor.

... ..

It's a lovely morning like all mornings when one travels West. The track is creamy brown and the saltbush manages a green shine. Go West, young man, but go in the morning, even across the Nullarbor.

Forty miles to Balladonta, the last desert Homestead. Still, the desert wasn't so bad... Forty miles to Balladonia, that's four hours to a lemonade for the kids.

There is a dark band on both sides of the road where it dents the skyline. Gums, lovely gum-trees. Sweet old eucalyptus. Jack loves gum-trees. Always did. But he watches the potholes...

"A man," says Tlitsy.

"A what?" asks Jack, "don't be silly, not yet." "A man," confirms Jil. "On foot."

There he comes, waving shyly to the Putput, bare-headed, empty handed in a crumpled suit and dusty town shoes. Jack throws the gear in neutral, leaving the engine on. The man is tall and fierce looking, about thirty. His skin is red brick and stretches tight over his bones.

"Could you spare some water, please, Mister?"

"Sure," says Jack. Jill hands a quart bottle.

The man pours it into himself, his big body shivering with each gulp.

"Thanks," breathes the man, "I believe you have saved my life."

"There is plenty" mumbles Jack, for something to say...

"Is there?" The man is keen. "How far?"

"Sixteen miles."

"Oh," the man winces, "and after that?"

"Every thirty-two miles... But surely, you are not walking?"

"Oh...I'll manage. Besides, it's going to rain... thanks a lot I must get going."

The man is quite a way off when Jack realises he's gone. "But this man is going to die," shouts Jack, coming out of a daze. "It's not going to rain at all... He must be mad... Why didn't we give him some food?"

"What food?" asks Jil. "Let's make it to Balladonia and report him to the police."

... ..

“Let him go to Hades,” says the Balladonia home-steader. “The police know about him. They’ll pick him up when he’s ripe.”

“But he was nicely spoken and looked quite harmless.

“That’s the way they’ll like him. We see plenty of them, city slickers on the run. Come into my office and look at the map of the road to Norseman. I’ll show you some spots where you can camp quietly...”

The hundred and forty miles to Norseman are a crazy pavement of sandstone slabs between two solid walls of gum-trees. The Putput plods on at ten miles an hour. Jack knows it will get there if it can go slow enough.

Norseman is a gold mine and proud of it. It’s got at least ninety houses, built of weatherboard and corrugated iron. It couldn’t be more Western if it was built for films. The kids drink a milk shake, Jil buys a loaf of bread.

The last stretch to Coolgardie follows a pipe line. Jack remembers the gloomy tube on the way to Port Augusta. This one is black as well but a cheerful black: the Putput is going upstream. There are valves sticking out of the tube every four miles. Jack opens one of them and Jil strips the children for a shower. They yell.

... ..

“Bitumen,” shouts Tlitsy. For a minute Jil thinks she’s going deaf. After the rattle of the trail this is silence. Then Jack spots a bill-board with nothing written on it. “It’s only the back of it,” explains

Tlitsy. It marks the desert turnoff on the Perth to Kalgoorlie road and advertises a well known brand of gasoline:

Fill up with SHADES

Norseman 105

Adelaide 1381
Melbourne 1951
Sydney 2670

Jack parks the Putput in front of the big sign. He's going to take a photo. As he adjusts his camera he notices the first letter of the brand's name won't fit in. Too bad. It reads well enough that way.

... ..

Glitsy is growing hoarse calling out mileposts at the rate of one every two minutes now the Putput is going full speed over the new bitumen. It is a bit monotonous but it's goal for the boy: he's learning his numbers:

"Three-four-three, Daddy, what's after three-four-three?"

"Three four two," answers Jack patiently, "I wonder if we could do that in the day." Eleven hours. As there is nothing else to wonder or worry about in the empty landscape, Jack worries about that throughout the whole day. The night falls on mile One-O-Six.

Jil puts the kids to bed on the floor of the wagon and by eleven o'clock there is nothing more to wonder about: the Putput has run out of road.

"What is that noise?" mumbles Glitsy as Jil lifts him from the floor to his bunk.

"The surf," answers Jack, "the surf of the Indian Ocean."

Within minutes everyone is asleep except Jack. Three hundred and fifty miles, thinks Jack, that's

a record day's run for a scoot-wagon. But then, everything the Putput does is a record: she's the first scoot-wagon in the world and may be the last. What will she do next? Jack wonders but he knows one thing: There is no reverse gear on the Putput.

... ..

In Perth the sun does not rise from the sea, as it does in Sydney. Jack never thought of that last night when he parked the Putput with her back to the surf. So now the sun is pouring in through the windshield and the kids are walking all over Jack's face.

"Porridge," says Jil. "It's nine o'clock. What do we do today? Look for a job, or go back, or what?" "Let's think it over," Jack yawns.

After breakfast Jil invades the Carapark wash-rooms with her mob. They carry the family's dirt of a month. Jack is left in his swim suit with six pennies and the address book.

"There is a phone booth by the beach" says Jil.

... ..

"Hullo, Hullo," shouts Jack into the mouthpiece

"Is this the Indian Consulate?...Good morning, Sir... Are you from India?...From Bombay eh?...Good...When do the Monsoons start over there... First week in June eh?... Never before eh?...You're sure eh?... Good, thank you very much... Good bye.'

Jack hangs up and rubs his hands. Goody-goody.

Seven weeks to get to Colombo, cross Ceylon and India before the rains. Now it all depends on how soon a ship leaves.

... ..

"Hullo ,hullo.. .Orient Lines... Two and three quarter people, plus a scooter and a half for Colombo... That's right.. .Right. . . When?, .On the sixteenth?... In three days time, see you then.

... ..

Hullo, hullo. Bank of Australasia... I'd like to know if you have received a Letter of Credit draft in the name of Monty...from Paddo, I mean Paddington Branch, Sydney...Yes?...Good...Five hundred pounds, good...Valid for all countries, good...Except what? ... Soviet Russia, too bad...I'll collect it tomorrow... Yes, of course we're going. Cheerio."

“Gosh,” says Jack hanging up, “I hope the washing will be dry by tomorrow.”

... ..

IV

WITH A HEY

“Wait for me,” said Jack, “here, by this bollard.” Then he went along the wharf towards the Customs Shed. “Something to do with the Putput,” he said.

Jil didn't know these iron mushrooms were called bollards. She dragged the kitbag against the straight side of the thing facing the water. Then she sat with Tootie in her lap and the cool iron against her back. She could see the ship, two hundred yards away, dwarfing a fleet of small craft.

Now she can't see her any more... Oh yes...there she is... A tug must be pushing the liner about, so Jil can only see her stern and wonders how it can be so small.

“Ships are not real ,“ says Jil to Tootie who has fallen asleep. Ships are too nice to be true, with their smell of fresh paint and their three meals a day by the clock. In spite of which they move under-foot.

Most unreal are the people on board: big bosses playing quoits, tennis stars learning bridge, cheery spinsters, clever Toms, doubting Dicks and chatty Harrys, every man-Jack of them born a sailor.

“Ah well,” sighs Jil, “I needed a five-day sleep... But what can the old boy be doing all this time?”

Tlitsy has climbed the bollard. He sits on the kidney shaped top, sucking its coolness into his legs. He keeps an eye on the Customs Shed which swallowed Daddy and thinks Mummy was right to say that ships weren't real. Neither is this place anyway, with those people running about, wearing dark faces and white clothes. Before Tlitsy went on the ship it was the other way round.

“Why are the people so dark?”

“Because of the sun,” answers Jil. “But, Mummy, there is no sun.”

Tlitsy is right, there is no sun. The sky is pearly grey. May be that’s why the people run so fast and panicky, there must be a storm brewing. And yet Jack said it would not rain before June. What can the old boy be doing anyway?

It’s time to look for a camping spot, which will not be easy to find if there are so many people about the place... If at least Jack knew someone in Colombo... Jil looks at the crowd and begins to feel unreal again, as she did on the big ship.

“The Putput,” shouts Tlitsy, “I can hear it... over there.” Outside the wharf’s gate Jack is waving madly: the guard won’t let him in. Jil puts Tootie on her own feet and begins to drag the kitbag with Tlitsy lifting what he can of the heavy end. Crabwise, led by wobbly Tootie, they crawl towards reality.

... ..

Jack has stuck a street map of Colombo to his windshield. Once past the Fort, the Putput overtakes the rickshaws with the greatest of ease. Jil looks out on the crowded streets, the unknown trees and the strange people. All that is fine with Jil so long as it moves past.

“Where are we going?”

“Thimbirigasyaya,” answers Jack.

“... What was that?”

“A suburb....we have friends there.”

“Whose friends?”

“Mine, I just made them. Fellow sells scooters, our brand. Got a wife and a daughter who want to play with our kids.”

“All,” says Jil, and she feels Ceylon is real, at last.

Thimbirigasyaya is mostly trees and Lanka Lane is a tunnel of greenery. “Flamboyant, Mango, Jack-tree, Banana, Bougainvillea, Pawpaw,” Jack shows off the easy ones but there are twice as many he couldn’t name. The Putput stops in front of a gate: “PATTY ROERE,” reads a card on the yellow mailbox. A veranda shelters the house from the larger creepers but the most glamorous plants have been allowed in.

Jil finds the lounge room teeming with potted pets. They coil around the lampstand and climb along the pink walls. A tortoise shell liana is curled on the sofa.

“Shove that creeper away,” says Mrs. Roere, “and do sit down.”

“Beautiful colour scheme.” Jil admires the greens and the pinks.

“Oh,” says Tera Roere, “it’s common in Colombo.”

Tera would be uncommon anywhere. Her skin is cream toffee, Tlitsy is still liking his chops from kissing it. Her eyes are dark and deep and just as swift as clay pigeons. She darts about the house like a dozen humming birds.

“Patty will be back in a minute... I hope he beats the rain.”

“Rain?...” says Jack. “Rain... not yet surely?”

“Here they come.” Tera sounds excited. The gravel of the lane crinkles with footsteps... fast steps... faster... Patty turns into the yard, running towards the veranda, then swoosh, no more Patty, only a wall of pouring water.

“Couldn’t make it,” says Tera calmly.

The Putput wobbles into the shelter of the veranda, pushed by a soaked Patty. The man has peeled off his shirt and his deep suntan gleams like seal-skin. His black hair drops past his grey eyes straight down to his square jaw.

“From now on,” says he happily, “free showers for the next three months.” Jack winces.

... ..

“You see,” explains Patty, patiently, “the South West Monsoon begins in Colombo, five weeks before it reaches Bombay... But don’t you worry you’ll get a fine morning, one of these days, to drive over the Kandy hills into the North-East Monsoon territory. We’ve got cousins all over the place... they get their rain in December...”

“But where shall we camp meanwhile?” Jack is still gloomy.

“In my daughter’s room. Josie will sleep in her Grannie’s.”

Josie is a twelve years old brunette in love with Tlitsy. Granny is a strict old lady who resists Tootie’s advances.

“Time to help with dinner,” says Granny and Josie begins to set the table with Soma, the Sinhalese maid: they lay small dishes of

curried meat and big ones of curried vegetables, about a dozen of each kind, leaving an empty space in the middle.

“Hoppers or String Hoppers?” Ten asks “Which will you have?”

“We have no idea,” admits Jack... Better make it String Hoppers... Anything that hops will be safer on a string.”

There is a short silence and then a roar from all the Roeres. Patty slaps his thighs, Ten holds her ribs, Josie, in tears, explains the joke to Soma in Sinhalese.

“Here’s hopping,” laughs Ten setting down a plate with edges like a cycle track. It holds a flabby mass of noodles, fine threads of boiled rice flour spun in to fist-sized skeins.

“You take half a dozen,” urges Patty, “and sprinkle them with some curry.”

“So many curries...” Jil hesitates.

“Oh,” says Ten, “this is only a snack to what’s common in Colombo.”

.... ..

The snack is keeping Jil awake in Josie’s bed. She prods Jack with her elbow and whispers: “What are Burghers?”

“Fine people,” answers Jack, turning over. “Josie says her dad’s a Burgher.”

“Fine fellow...sharp sense of humour...go to sleep.”

“You don’t know what Burghers are.”

“Ceylonese of Dutch descent...now be quiet.”

“Ten looks Spanish.”

“Shush...or I’ll pinch you.”

“Don’t you think...” Jack pinches Jil.

“Ouch.”

... ..

Jil opens her eyes to a green world: a banana leaf filters the new day into the room. Behind the leaf a yellow stem rises five or six feet to bend smoothly under the weight of the fruit. The bunch is still green but a flower hangs from it, purple and gold. ‘Like a rocket,’ thinks Jil, ‘but for the bang.’ A squirrel races up the stem

and down the bunch until he clings upside down under the flower. Jil hears a couple of snips and sees the flower shudder twice. Then the squirrel races back over the stem, so fast and yet too slow.

He's only half-way when a bird, yellow and blue, crashes into him and drops him onto the lane. For ten seconds, a blurred fight frizzles the gravel... Jil doesn't know who's won, she never saw what it was about. But it might go on again...

"Shush... Daddy's asleep..." Jil whispers the kids awake. They scale the edge of the bed to reach the window-sill. Then Tootie gets a toe-hold on Jack's nostril and that ends the show.

... ..

"You must stay another couple of days," says Patty, "and show our friends your color slides."

"They'll stay a week," decides Ten, "and show me how to make a sleeping bag."

"Tlitsy should stay a month," suggests Josie, "and learn some Sinhalese."

"We'll let the weather decide," regrets Jack, "and bless your hospitality."

"It's common in Colombo," answers Tera.

... ..

"The drive from Colombo to Kandy ranks amongst the World's tourist musts," reads Jil from the Guide Book. "Elephants, Buffaloes, Monkeys, Coconut sellers, a life a yard for eighty miles, on a background of feathery palms and tender green paddy fields..." But for the luck of the party, that's all it would be: a tropical island puppet show without the strings. The Putput runs like Billy-Ho, fresh from Patty's workshop. Jil jumps with excitement at the contrast with the Nullarbor. The little ones laugh to see such fun. Then Swoosh, the scene jerks into new life, animated by the nylon strings of the rain. Elephants walk in a cloud of spray as the waters break on their backs. Buffaloes float along the ditches, back and glossy as pitched arks. Monkeys reap a bumper crop of half-drowned fleas from each other's fur.

The Putput loses her roos and Jil splashes after it across a paddy field, turning it from tender brown to mud-yellow.

“The water is warmish,” says she.

“We all know that,” grunts Jack.

In Kandy, Patty’s cousin Minnie rubs the kids dry from head to foot. Her husband runs a cycle shop which is lucky for the Putput’s roof:

“Anything that hops would be safer on a string,” quotes Jack who heard that one over the phone. “I’ll have a webbing brace sawn into that canvas. Then we’ll eat some hoppers and see the Temple of the Tooth.”

Tlitsy wakes up under a big mosquito net. He can see through the square top: the white ceiling, like inside a tent with big black sticks to hold it up. Also a brown fan which does not work with many dead flies on its wings.

Tlitsy remembers there was sunshine yesterday after they came down the hills. And so many trees he couldn’t see anything else, not even elephants, only monkeys which jumped so funny across the road.

Then Daddy stopped in front of this place and said it was a bungalow. Tlitsy liked the name. Also a big thing, bigger than the trees, which goes up like smoke, brown and black into the sky. Daddy called it Sigiriya Rock. He said there is a palace on top, build by an old king nasty.

But in the Bungalow there are two boys, big boys but not too much bigger. Their names are Len and Lee and they live here all the time. Tlitsy played with them all the afternoon. It was a long time since Tlitsy had played with boys and they played Tiger on the veranda. Tooty is asleep at the foot of the bed, her tummy is moving up and down. But where is Mummy? Len might know.

“Your parents have gone up the Rock,” says Len, “they said you must watch the Putput and not wake Tootie until they come eack. It is the first time Tlitsy has been left to watch the Putput and Tootie. That’s all right but how could Daddy and Mummy get up that Rock and how can they come down?”

“There are footholds in the Rock on the other side,” Len knows. “look...” On top of the flock, there is a blue speck which is Mummy’s dress and a white dot next to it which must be Daddy’s shirt. It’s an awful long way up.

“They’ll be back in half an hour.” Len knows everything. ‘Tlitsy will watch the Putput and Len will be the Tiger which comes from behind the house. If Tlitsy sees him he can say Brrr and the Tiger is Dead.

... ..

Tlitsy gollops down his breakfast because it’s his turn to be Tiger. But he has not even been Dead when Daddy calls for all aboard.

“Can I take Len with me to help watch the Putput?” asks Tlitsy.

“Of course not, Tlitsy,” answers Jil gently, “Len must stay with his Mummy.”

“Oh, but...” says Tlitsy and then nothing. Nothing except two big tears on Tlitsy’s cheeks. The first silent tears the boy has ever cried.

“We shouldn’t have left him behind,” says Jack.

“Even Sigiriya wasn’t worth that.”

... ..

The Roeres have no cousins in Polonnaruwa, so Jack has taken a room in the Guesthouse. Twenty rupees. That would be enough to live for a week in the open air. But Patty said not to camp near the ruins because of snakes. Not the cobras which are harmless brutes but a smaller brand called Polonga. Jack is worried about the twenty rupees. He had to pay fourteen at Sigiriya. Thirty four rupees is nearly seven dollars.

The kids walk bravely on the short grass between the ruins. Jil wonders how the Sinhalese could muster the energy to lift so many stones. The heat is enough to kill her. Tlitsy is impressed with the

headgear of the statues. Jack resents the cool indifference shown by the sculptured faces. Behold, Polonnaruwa has been dead eight centuries and her godlings still wear the arch smile of fashion models.

... ..

TRINCOMALEE 32 MILES

Bless the old British milestones. Jack is in a hurry to get out of the jungle. Patty used very strong words about this part of the island:

“Rogue elephants,” he said, “nasty brutes, and very curious. They stop cars and turn them over just to see what’s underneath.”

“But surely,” said Jack, “surely they can’t be doing it very often. If elephants never forget, surely they can remember what a car is like.”

“Yes,” Patty admitted that. “But they’ve never seen a Putput.”

So Jack decided to cross this district at a time when even the dumbest Junboes ought to be snoring their trunks off.

As a result Jil is stewing like she has never stewed before. The Nullarbor was a cool room compared to this overgrown arbor. There is nothing to see but the narrow road between two curtains of trees and tan grasses.

Trinco begins with a large field of extremely fine lawn, pale green and smooth like the best Australian cricket pitch. But for a dozen boulders sticking out in the middle the green would be perfectly flat. A flamingo alights heavily on one of the rocks and gives it a couple of pecks... Lo’... and behold the magic of the East: the rock turns into an aggravated buffalo and the meadow into a slime covered pond.

“Beef and vegetable stew,” shouts Jack. “Now let’s see what Trinco can offer to drink.”

... ..

Orangeade on the resthouse veranda by the old Dutch fort, while Jack phones Tera’s cousin in British Trinco. Joe lives on the other side of the barbed wire, in a strange world of tidy barracks and cement roads.

“Ho, ho, ho,” booms a voice into Jacks ear, “So there you are. Anything that hops, eh? Well, I’m Joe. When you cross the wire gate, tell the chap to show you the bungalow of the Harbour

Police Superintendent. That's me. Come along, Bubsy is waiting for you."

Jack goes back very happy to finish off his orangeade. That voice on the phone cheered him up no end.

The Putput storms the wire gate, saluted by the sentry.

The Harbour Police Superintendent's bungalow is too big for Bubsy and Joe. Their children are grown up and married away to the four corners of the world. Their only grandchild is Tootie's age.

The days pass like minutes in visits to old Trinco and boat trips over the Bay. It is so hot that Time doesn't matter any more. The children spend their afternoons playing Firemen with the garden hose. They keep shouting it's their turn to be the Fire.

"I'll borrow another hose from the Quartermaster," says Joe, "then you can all fire together."

"...Ahem..." says Jack, "we've been in Ceylon for nearly a month. It's time we caught up with the old Monsoon

... ..

"Water," said Bubsy, "good Trinco water. You must take at least twelve bottles."

"What for?" asked Jack "By tonight we'll be on the West Coast of Ceylon. It should be raining cisterns." "Don't be silly," replied Bubsy, "it never rains on Mannar Island. Too flat to stop the clouds. Uncle Nick will give you a curried partridge for each bottle of Trinco water."

And that is why the Putput clinks across along like a milk van, going North West across the Island. The sun rises three quarters behind, lighting the jungle yellow green. Everything goes swimmingly until a clearing opens out ahead, dotted with a dozen straw huts and twice as many buffaloes.

KAHATGASDOGOMTYA

reads the signpost where Jack begins to notice a starboard list. What a place to get a puncture. No sooner has the engine stopped

than twenty-four able bodied men rush out of the twelve huts, followed by forty-eight women nursing ninety-six kids. The men lift up the Putput while Jack changes the wheel. They pump air into the new tire, taking turns to enjoy this rare form of exercise. Jil offers peanuts to the kids. They run away behind their mothers. Tlitsy tries lollies on the ladies. They smile, shake their heads and give the boy a bunch of bananas. Jack fishes out a handful of coins. The men lift their hands in horror. What is the good of money to a Kahatagasdigiyan?

Meanwhile an old man has signalled his wish to feel the punctured tire and, after some prodding, extracted a copper nail. Holding it to the light, jeweller fashion, he nods. The men nigh in approval and look at Jack with gratitude. They had lost an ox-shoe nail. The Putput has given it back. Everything is well with Kahatagasdigiya.

Ceylon ends with a causeway so narrow and windswept that Jack carries a while, before letting the Putput walk the plank over the Mannar Channel. The island is a corel bank under a row of palms swaying under the dry gale. Mannar own counts a thousand houses and many straw huts.

Uncle Nick was dying of thirst. His grey eyes light up as he opens his arms to the twelve bottles of water.

“Imagine,” roars old Nick, “imagine the horror of my situation. Look at the sandbank on which I have to live. What can you see? Palms, yes Sir, but not Coconut Palms, Those round things up in the leaves are not nuts. They’re pots. The sap of the toddy palm drops into them. Let it brew and you get the best arrack in the Indies... Arrack is life. But, without water, arrack is death, painful and slow. And there you have the horror of this island: No water. The place is too low to catch the Monsoon and too sandy to filter the sea. Dig a well and you get brine, nasty stuff. Here, you taste this Trinco water with some Mannar arrack.”

“No thanks.” Jack never drinks.

“Come on... You can’t insult Mannar islands. Here you are ...”

“...Not bad eh?” Uncle Nick roars “I think you’ll like Mannar It’s amazing what you’ll find here if you stay a couple of days. Greek and Roman coins in the silted up harbour on the mainland. Baobabs, umbrella trees, goats and donkeys on the island, none of which exist in Ceylon or India... how come? Sindbad the

Sailor brought them over from Zanzibar to make himself at home on this sandbank. Only an Arab could do that. Then the Tamils brought the toddy palms from South India. Then the Portuguese came to show them how to brew the stuff. Also how to build a fort and a church or two. ...Come on now... you finish that glass.

"...Clever fellows, the Portuguese. When my Dutch fathers began to shoot them, they moved three hundred yards West and started a fishing village. I'll show it to you this afternoon and you'll hear a funny lingo. But you mustn't go back at night. They know how to throw a knife and their arrack is vile stuff...

"Ours is really good... Here... ...This place could be a paradise. Ask Father Donohue. He's a missionary and an old friend of mine. Also, he's a saint. He mixes his arrack with water from the well, just like his Tamil and Fishermen flock. One of these days the brine will turn him into a pillar of salt. A pity the Father is so hard boiled. Otherwise Hannar might have miracles as well as saints and baobabs. A miraculous baobab, in fact I'll show it to you on the way to the village. It's an enormous tree without a single leaf but with hundreds of arms twisting into the dry sky. To think about it makes me thirsty...

"... Come on. ...another drop...

"Among those branches, a little girl saw a white shape. The fishing folk believed it and so did the Tamils. The Sinhalese were impressed. The Chinese imported holy pictures. The Indians brought over their cripples. The English ran about with cameras. We nearly ran out of arrack. Then Father Donohue hit the roof: 'Stuff and nonsense,' he said, 'anybody who looks long enough at a baobab is sure to see a spook or two. It's just a matter of patience. And patience,' said he, 'patience is the vice of Mannar.' Nobody knew what had bitten our Father ... I guess it was the brine in his arrack... Here, go easy on the water...

"That was mean: the old baobab was doing fine, getting watered by the pilgrims. It even began to sprout leaves... 'sacred leaves,' said the Tamils. Father Donohue had them burnt. 'Should Heaven wish to send us a sign,' he asked from the pulpit, 'would Heaven pick on a baobab? Would not a spring be more miraculous? Especially one with drinking water?' That shook the audience all right and that's how Mannar lost her miracles. Except the daily wonder of the toddy palm.

“That blessed tree goes on storing sunshine into little pots... Here. Hey... what’s the matter with you?... Blow me dry, the fellow’s gone to sleep...An Australian, no less... Ho-ho-ho... Here’s a miracle for Father Donohue, ho-ho-ho-HO...”

... ..

AND A 'HA'

“This Indian ferry is a clever boat.” Tlitsy admires the iron cage which is about to lift the Putput off the wharf. Here she goes, safe as houses, on to the foredeck. And, what’s more, the Putput won’t be lonely. A red bike leans against her side, friendly like. Jack does not care. He stands against the rail, dun, bitter and achy. His unloving eye blinks at receding Mannar Island with its rows of toddy palms reeling under the dry breeze... Serves them right.

Something clicks between Jack’s ears, or is it behind his back? He shuffles round to see what hit the deck, just missing him... A pair of army boots, sun-baked legs with a red mess instead of knees, khaki shorts and shirt, a face like roast pigskin under a mop of yellow silk.

“Duck,” go the boots again, “Hans Heinkel,” says the person.

“Huh,” says Jack, looking into baby blue eyes. “I also go to Australia,” says the young man. “Wrong way, my friend.” Jack points towards the stern.

“I go via. Calcutta,” Hans sounds unperturbed, “ with a detour to Kolombo, to sell small-power bike which from Hamburg alone I have driven. I buy big- power bike. No Gut. Nix equilibrium.” Hans points to his left knew which must be worse than the other. Jack winces.

Jil fetches the first-aid box from the Putput. Tlitsy chases the flies from the wound. Tootie

holds the patient’s hand. The ferry whistles three tites. This is India,

... ..

Dhanushkhodi is no showpiece. A jetty leans against a sandhill which would be white but for a dozen bamboo huts, a score of starved kids and a hundred skinny dogs.

Jack lends a hand with the red bike. Hans pours abuse on the coolies who unload the Putput onto the train. There is no road to the mainland, in the stuffy old carriage, three hours chugg by slowly.

Jil has found an American, a remarkable specimen in brown shoes, brown shorts and brown shirt. Also brown skin, brown beard and hair and brown eyes. If he becomes President he will look good on postage stamps, especially on the brown ones.

“Oh no ma’am,” says he happily, “I have no automobile. I am a one-man campaign against the world-wide fallacy that all Americans are tycoons in limousines. My name is Walker, Joe Brown Walker. So I walk the world over. I may walk across you folks again, even if you reckon on going faster.”

“That’ll be a pleasure.” Jil means it.

Something is wrong with the bridge over the Pamban Channel and the train chuggs even slower.

“Typical British Jerry-building,” grunts an Indian businessman.

“Nix British,” Hans looks daggers, “this bridge was built in Hamburg,” and he begins to prove it.

“So was your knee,” Jack thumps the wad of cotton wool to change the subject, “and it looks just like a hamburger.”

Hans laughs. Good boy.

In Ramnad, the Putput starts at the first kick. Joe. B. Walker resumes walking, after a dry wink at Tootie. The red bike refuse to go. A crowd begins to gather round the short-suffering Hans who blows up with a volley of throaty curses. This widens the circle somewhat and Jack adjusts the carbon brushes.

The road is flat, smooth and narrow between the paddy fields. Some water buffaloes shuffle along, owning the place. The Putput slows down with respect but the red bike charges ahead: “Achtung,” yells Hans, louder than his exhaust pipe. He skims along the grey flanks, raising his test leg to bring his boot to bear on the unruly rumps.

The Putput follows at twenty-five miles an hour and Jack manages to steal a look at the land. Behold the face of South India: fawn earth cut into square fields by hedges of spiny plants, toddy palms shooting thirty feet up to hold a dozen green fans against the blue sky, purple hills in the distance with small white temples on the crests, straw villages here and there and buffaloes everywhere. HEY...

A swift swerve to the right, a skid on a slab of fresh dung and crash into something hard. Jack bumps his head on the windshield and a shriek rises from the back... The cow lies across the tarmac, alongside the Putput, with a long red line cutting her flank.

"We're all right," Jil shouts. There is a hole in the plywood where a horn has got through to the tool-box and a tuft of fur pleated against a protruding screw. That's all.

If only this cow would get up and go, everything would be fine. Thank God, there is no one about so far... Except Hans, bless him, yelling curses in German. At this silly cow, no doubt.

It's only a small animal, half the size of the Put-put. Jack tries to shake its head by the horn. The horn moves but not the head... Jack lets go, hoping the thing won't fall to pieces... Really this is too bad... Three men appear from behind a hedge. Spurred on by this new danger, Hans begins to twist the tail into a knot. The beast opens an eye, scrambles on all fours and bolts across the ditch... Phew.

... ..

I think we should find a camp.

"Nix kamp," says Hans, "Dak Bungalow."

There is a Dak near Kadura, in a gravel yard neatly fenced off from the road. A veranda runs all around, cool looking under a low roof and thick pillars. Hans walks round to the caretakers quarters, yelling

"Chowkidar, Hah, Chowkidar." A rattle of keys answers him, followed by the flap of naked soles over the flagstones. The chowkidar is a bony ancient in a loincloth. He opens a door. The room is large and cool, full of the glory that was British India. A

large desk lies in state under a pall of duet. From the rafters hangs a flap of rattan, connected by a rope to a hole in the wall.

“The pankā,” sighs Jil, remembering Gunga Din.

Two camp beds and a ‘roken chair stand at ease under the faded portrait of a Prince of Wales in Highland uniform. The Prince’s whiskers curl up in disgust... then they hang down in despair...?.... then they run off after a fly on the wall with a ‘Tck-Tck-Tck.

“Gecko lizard,” says Jack, blinking slightly.

“This will do fine,” says Jil, “...How much?”

The chowkidar begins a speech but Hans cuts in: “Give him twelve annas, that’s three quarters of a rupee, about fifteen cents. It’ll be plenty.”

“Fair enough,” says Jack. “What about you?”

“Me nothing,” answers the boy, “I sleep outside in the Putput.”

“Then get us some water,” orders Jil, “I’ll cook you some rice and curry.”

“I ‘ll buy bananas for Tootie,” says Hans happily.

... ..

“We must see the big temple in Nudura,” says Jil.

“We must,” agrees Hans.

“How do we find it.” asks Jack.

“Pick out the highest gopuram.” Hans knows what a gopuram is like: “Kind of black stone wedding cake with thousands of little gods carved into a pyramid.”

“Over there.” Tlitsy has spotted the tower beyond a narrow street, clogged with people. Jack parks the Putput against the temple wall and Hans comes alongside to fend off the crowd.

Near by the wall recesses into a square nook where the Putput might fit but a Due of greenish cakes bars the entrance. Cow dung, waiting to be burnt for sacred ashes. More of the stuff dries on the wall in blobs the size of soup tureens, lining the recess up to a height of six feet where a ledge of stone sticks out under a row of statues,

“You go in first,” says Hans bravely, “I’ll watch over the bikes.”

The gate is under the gopurarn which, in fact, is only a glorified lintel stone, about sixty foot high. Tooty objects to all those gods

making faces at her. Tlitsy moans about taking off his shoes. Jack hates leaving the family's footwear among a couple of hundred pairs which await their owner's return.

"Ouch," says Jil, dancing over the wall where there is still some shade, thank God it's only ten o'clock. He feels like a fish but out of water in this abode of a faith he does not share.

The place looks like a bazaar, a doss-house, a bank and a labor exchange roled into one maze of carved stone. Impressive and embarrassing.

"Let's get out," grunts Jack after ten minutes.

"Which way?" asks Jil.

Hans is hot, thirsty and hoarse. The crowd keeps pressing against the bikes. He pours abuse onto the teeming Tamils, tinker, tailor, coolie, bearer, as they bump into his game leg. They teem on, undisturbed, living their little destinies.

"Mein Gott," cries Hans, "why did you make so many of them?" Little boys pull at the Putput's canvas. Hans make a swipe with his camera tripod. They run away... and come back.

"What can the Montys be doing?" Hans is getting frustrated. Action is what he needs... Ach... this cow dung heap can't be very solid. Hans rams the Putput into the recess of the wall, squashing the dung tureens into dung smithereens. Then he parks the red bike across the entrance and faces the crowd now reduced to a semi-circle, all within reach of his tripod.

... ..

How can a square temple be so twisty?" Jack is really worried.. "...Wait... we came in by the Southern gate... Now, if we walk towards the sun..."

There is a long wall and tehn no more shade. White hot flagstones fifty across to the shadow of the gopuram. Jack picks up Tlitsy, Jil lifts Tootie and they try to walk with dignity.

"Ouch," Jil breaks into a run. Jack resists the urge for a few steps and then runs even faster. The Hindus look on solemnly. Only the black gods make a face.

"Where is the Putput?" asks Tiltisy, once in the street. "I cannot see the Putput."

... ..

Four boys have scaled the wall and walked along the ledge under cover of the statues, to a vantage point in the recess from which they command a good view. Hans resents their glee but his tripod, even fully extended, will not reach their toes. One of the boys spits watermelon seeds onto the Putput's roof.

Hans grabs a half-dried dung cake from the ledge. It should fly like a saucer... It does ...and burst over the offenders like shrapnell.

"Bull's eye," shouts Hans reaching for more cow dung. The boys quit.

"Sorry, we got lost," says Jack, shoving the family's way through the crowd who does not mind. "What will this new lot do to amuse them?"

Jil steps into the Putput with the kids and pulls the canvas all around, preferring the heat to the stares. Jack sits on the red bike, holding the tripod and staring back at the people.

Not bad. As a crowd they are untidy, but singly they stand out sharply distinct: A hairless ball of fat rests on dhoti-clad legs like an ice cream on its cone. A tall faggot of bones wears a tailored potato bag. A military type twiddles his six-inch whiskers.

A professional leper leans on a dwarf clad in red satin. A sacred cow dribbles onto the hair of an old man covered in ashes...

... ..

Tlitsy pokes his head out of the canvas:

"Mummy and Tootie are asleep," says the boy.

"... Why has that man got a sheet around his legs?" "It's not a sheet, silly, it's a dhoti. It winds round and about so the man is covered and yet cool."

"But it's falling down."

"It does look like it," admits Jack, "but it won't. It's been holding on for a good many years."

The crowd looks at Jack without a trace of greed or malice. Just curiosity.

“So you speak English,” says the military person. “You like this country, Hah?”

“It’s amazing,” grants Jack, “but we could see more of it if there were less people.”

“Hah, but you’ve come to look at us all day long, hah. Why can’t we look at you for five minutes?”

“Hah,” says Jack, “fair enough.”

... ..

“Gangway,” shouts Hans, splitting the crowd open. He looks happy, patting his camera in the way a lesser man would pat his full tummy. The boy makes a living selling pictures of India to Indian newspapermen

Not bad for a twenty year old Hamburg herr.

“Let’s get out of this antheap,” says he, ungratefully, “and make a few miles to a quiet bungalow.”

The DIARY OF HEINS HEINKEL

WEDN.16. MAY (Continued)

PHOTOS

REEL N°

28	6 to 9	Tamil Burning Ground. 100 yards from to main road with Spirit Avenue (says Monty). Cement statues of griffins, bears, tigers, elephants with saddles, but no rider. Horrible faces, all in a row. Tootie cries.
	9 to 12	Prayer Chariot for processions. 20 feet to high, Carved wood and gilt, four wooden 12 wheels with yard diameter. Man says they pull it through the streets with ropes fixed to hooks in their flesh. Man says 500 years old, Can’t be more than 200 because of carvings showing rifle men.
29	1 to	Christian Burial Ground. Raised platform to 8

	4	yards square, about 1,500 small crosses. Jil says in India, even dead must teem
--	---	---

The road is flat, smooth and shady, Madras only a hundred miles away. Four days out of Ceylon, four hours to a cool lemonade, fresh stores for Jil, and maybe, with luck, new carbon brushes for the red bike.

Then comes temptation at the crossroads:

PONDICHERRY: 23 MILES

Pondi is the old capital of French India which used to thrive selling Paris fluff to British Empire builders.

We must go," says Jack, "I heard of Sri Aurobindo, an Indian mystic who had a yoga school in Pondi."

'Yoga my foot," says Hans, "but maybe the French have left some decent food."

"Or some pretty dresses," sighs Jil,

"Or some toys," says Tlitsy.

"Lollies," says Tootie.

- 0 M -

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Meditative Rest Center

NO SMOKING NO SPIRITS

No food from outside

"... and no talking after eight," adds the chow- kidar, "also lights out at nine. A simple but substantial meal will be offered at seven. Keep your cells locked and your souls open. Mother love you..."

"Hallelujah," answers Hans, looking suddenly very old, "... and give my love to the Paris of the East." Alas, the French are gone, the wharf deserted, Aurobindo dead and incinerated, and the Ashram seems to own the place,

"I have known many Ashrams," Hans groans, "... all of them run by a Mother, an old lady who got the job by will of the Founder. But I must say your Aurobindo picked a winner, all Pondy belongs to Mummy."

Hans kicks a flimsy door to reveal a cubicle with two wooden pallets for beds. "Mother Jil and her little angels will share this cell," says he bitterly, "Jack and I will have the next one."

"I suppose I'm the only woman here" says Jil.

"Don't let that worry you, sister." Hans smirks, "Ashrams are continent, abstinent and non-violent. Also those holy communitles are vegetarian. I bet we get dahl for supper."

Hans was wrong, it's bananas and curds. The meal is laid on the matted floor and Hans has a lot of trouble folding himself down. Curses gurgle up his throat as he gobbles his curds.

"Our reading room... Our leather shop.. Our rice fields... Our poultry farm.. Our infant school... Our nursery for foundlings..." The guide is a glossy Bengali, proud of his English and his paunch. "...Our elementary school... Our bigger pupils playground... Oh yes, the girls dress the same as the boys... Our Mother sees no difference."

"Won't she wear glasses?" Hans asks in a loud whisper, "Remember this Asram is open to all people of good will," says the guide, with his back turned on Hans. "... Also that we must be economical... This tour costs us fifteen rupees... Thank you... Come out to the March Past at six o'clock tonight. You may be meeting the Mother."

The Ashram's parade ground ends against a white wall facing the sunset and branded, at eye level, with a black and gold lotus sign. A whistle. Left, right, left, right. Four hundred kids swing their meager limbs in a timid version of the goose-step. Behind the bigger boys, and the most unboylike girls, some fifty adults swing to the same rythm.

"Mein Gott," giggles Hans, "we used to do better than that."

"You may come and meet the Mother," says the guide.

Hans stoops under a low lintel and Jack follows him, through a cloud of incense, into a small parlor, hung with white drapes, spread with white flowers, peopled with white sarees.

"Looks like the negative film of a funeral," Hans whispers to Jack.

“Reminds me of the White Death Chamber in King Solomon’s mine.” Jack holds his breath. A sheath of grey satin has entered the room. A face peers between the folds, wrinkled and grey like a bed of cinders with two dark embers for eyes. Watchful.

“Come and meet Gagul ,“ whispers Hans.

... ..

The Putput leads the way out of Pondicherry. The wrong way, no doubt. It seems to be going South between two rows of bamboo huts. It passes a toll barrier but there is no one about. Better that way: they would speak no English and try to charge a fee on behalf of a non-existing Government. Soon after that, the road peters out among the paddy fields.

“Nice trip,” laughs Hans, “now we go back.”

This time the toll gate is ready. A team of bare children has pushed a bamboo pole across the bitumen. An ancient, wearing a French kepi for dignity and a loincloth for comfort extends a horny palm. “Two rupees, please.”

Jack shakes the hand and moves quietly towards the bamboo pole. A jerk of a shoulder sends it back along its groove. Hans protects the rear, using his bike to threaten the toes of the authorities. As the Putput pulls out, Jil spots the old man wrapping up his kepi in a piece of brown paper.

“That was neat,” says the Brat. Hans catches up, bringing his padded knee level with the Putput. Jack gives it a hearty thump and shouts over the din of the engines:

“Good old Hans.”

“Same to you,” laughs Hans, fetching the Putput one of his best buffalo kicks.

... ..

Back on the main road, thirty miles from Madras. Seven days out of Ceylon, seventy minutesto a cool drink, may be.

MAHABALIPURAM-14 MILES

The signpost points Eastwards and Hans has stopped at the crossroad to look at his map.

“That spot is called ‘The seven Pagodas,’” says he. “Pagodas are in China,” objects Jack.

“My map is German.” Hans glares.

“All right, let’s go, Jack agrees.” “May be we’ll find some Chop Suey as well.”

The road winds towards the coast between two rows of toddy palms. A rock looms above the sands, topped with a light-house. The keeper is young Indian with spectacles.

“Pagodas” says he happily. “That was how your ignorant ancestors called the seven gopurams that you can see in the distance.”

“Nice trip,” laughs Jack, “now for our lemonades.

But ,as the Putput goes down the hill towards the sea, Hans points to a little sign:

ARJUNA’S PENANCE

The whole cliff, thirty feet high, thirty yards wide is carved into a lifelike crowd scene. Gods, men and beasts come out of the red stone to stare at Arjuna, an Indian Prometheus who stands on his right foot since the twelfth century.

“Wonderful,” Hans exults, “very vivid.”

“Just like Hans in a Tamil crowd,” grants Jil.

Madras is a big place and the Madrassi hardly notice the Putput but some of them wave to it urgently, asking for a ride into town, cheeky blighters.

Hans points to the Mylapore Temple, reflected in its two acres of lotus pond. Tootie reacts to the cool loveliness of the scene:

“Me thirsty.”

The Putput rushes towards the shopping centhe along the shaded avenues. More people hail it like a taxi. Jack gives them the bird and they look disappointed.

Tootie gets her first cool drink in ten days. Jil buys tinned herrings, corned beef, noodles and rice. Hans goes hunting for

carbon brushes and returns with two plastic toys, which must have cost him some of his last rupees.

“You ought to get married,” suggests Jack, “and have some kids of your own.”

“Look, Daddy, look,” shouts Tlitsy, “a whole row of Putputs.”

So there is, half a dozen old three-wheelers lined up along the kerb to a signpost:

City of Madras
MOTOR RICKSHAW STAND
4 annas a Mile

“Expensive,” thinks Jack, until he spots one of the poor things loaded with five Indians and one calf. “Let’s get out of this unfair city,” says Jack.

... ..

Bangalore lies due West of Madras, at the end of a two hundred miles strip of concrete. Jack could do it with his eyes shut, except in towns, where the concrete disappears under a carpet of cow-dung. Soon,

there is a change of scene as the road begins to climb: the toddy palms make room for mangoes and the paddy fields lose their square outlines among the rocks.

“What’s that?” Tlitsy points to a little wall three feet high, three yards wide, bright white against the brown earth. Three steps run up its whitewash, leading nowhere...

“Another one,” says Tlitsy. A bigger one, with three blind arches drawn by four mock-columns. The little steps run straight into the third pillar.

“Mosques,” decides Jack, “...Moslem prayer-walls, the faithful must be few and keen in these parts.”

Hans comes level with the Putput. He points to the ground with a severe look on his face.

“Bitumen,” shouts Jack, “so what’?”

“Should be cement,” yells Hans, “also we just passed Vellore.”

“Yes,” shouts Jack, “nice Moghul fort.”

“Vellore is not on the Bangalore Road,” Hans yells, “You’ve lost the way again.”

Jack nods sheepishly, then he looks at the sun, the stony hillside with the brown fields and sometimes a white wall facing his way. Shrugging his shoulders, he shouts:

“It doesn’t matter, we’re still going West.”

“How do you know’?”

“Allah is great,” shouts Jack, “and his mosques face Mecca, that’s West-North-West from here.”

“Smart imbecile,” yells Hans but he drives on.

When the climbs are steep he comes level with the back of the Putput and pushes with his good leg. He is getting bored. There are no buffaloes to insult.

Suddenly Hans passes the Putput, cursing loudly and shaking his fist.

“What is it now?” wonders Jack.

Hans is too far ahead to hear so Jil answers:

“My fault: I emptied the potty from the back. He must have got sprinkled. Tell him its from Tootie.

But Hans has disappeared.

... ..

Jack was fairly right. The little road meets the Madura-Bangalore Highway at Krishnagiri, fifty miles from the capital, But there is no Hans at the junction. Jack finds a bungalow under a Flamboyant tree. Hans is not there.

Its a lonely spot dwarfed by a layer cake of gravel and earth, a mountain of puff pastry, cream and brown, three hundred feet high. It is the first of the Southern Ghats. Jack does’t like the look of Ghats, nor the sound of their name,

VI

AND A HEY NONNY NO

Today, May 25th, happens to be the twenty-fifth centenary of Lord Buddha's Upheaval. Quite a big day in Bangalore, where every hotel is full, except:

ANANDA BHAVAN Brahmin Board & Lodge
Old Poorhouse Road
JUGDISH KUMAR, prop.

Jilts bedroom window opens onto the bazaar end of Old Poorhouse Road. Crowds flow under the balcony, loaded with strange ware. Tootie watches by the hour.

"Look, Mummy, look: lady sick mouth."

"She spits blood," precisest Tlitsy,

"It's only betel...." Jack bends over the railing to see why the sidewalk should wear a coat of scarlet instead of the usual few splashes. "..... No wonder" says he, "there is a betel stall underneath our window."

A packing case holds a bundle of heart shaped leaves, three dozen jars of colored mixtures, mostly red, and a tobacco tin for the cash, Business is brisk, The merchant daubs the leaf with a white paste, paints it with an ochre dye, sprinkles it with a red powder and folds it into a triangle..., one anna, please... The customer spits out the old cud in a blaze of scarlet and shoves in the new one.

"Revolting," Jil snorts.

“Four hundred million Indians can’t be wrong,” states Jack firmly. “.. Hey, look. Our lunch has been served,” “Where are the forks and spoons’?” asks Jil.

“Indians do without,” says Jack, “Let’s see how we manage.”

... ..

The bearer sneaks out of the room with a trar holding six empty bowls and the cloth in which he had brought the chapatti, twelve chapatti no less. These foreigners are no ordinary farangi: they ate up all the dahil, strong as tao khansama could make it. Normal foreigners do not like lentils, especially with curry. The cook had put plenty of that, hoping to get the stuff back. Worse luck.

Yet the bearer is pleased. The farangi did not ask fur spoons. They tore up the chapatti, using the shreds of wholemeal pancake to scoop up their dahl. The Man fed his only son, in the same way, from the Sweet Rice bowl. The Mem never asked if it was stewed in buffalo milk. She just fed it to her daughter saying a mysterious prayer which sounded like “Ricepudd.”

... ..

There is a mild knock at the doort, then Mr. Jugdish Kumar in person, folding a small tray:

“From the lack of remains, I gathered you like Indian feeding. To conclude your repast I present you with the best morsel India knows. These are small and delicate. We call them Chota Pan.”

Jack picks one of the small triangles, removes the clove which holds the leaf together and puts it on his tongue. I feels cool and crisp...

“Try anything once,” thinks Jack, biting nto the leaf...” Never again,” thinks the Brute, running into the bathroom.

When he returns, the manager has gone.

“What happened to you, dear?” Jack looks at his wife with concern.

“I swallowed it whole,” says Jil brightly. “I never felt a thing.”

“Just the same, that sort of thing didn’t happen with Hans about.” Jack sighs drowsily... Then he sits up as curses echo along the

“Would you believe you’re still on the Main Road unless you had the guide to tell you?... Look, here comes the bridge:”

86.0 SWARJAMUKHI River B.

86.4 JAVAGUNDANHAILI - DB.

“I wish your silly guide told us when the road gets better,” complains Jack, “this track is worse than the Nullarbor. It spoils my appetite.”

... ..

Bitumen ahead , “ shouts Tlitsy.

About time. Hans must be miles away on his two big wheels which don’t seem to mind the potholes... But no! ... Here he stands, by a crossroad, waiting for poor old Jack and his Putput, at:

101.1 Road Junct. Keep straight on.

(Road left: Vainvilasapura)

“I bought some chapatti and curried potatoes,” says Hans, and a fellow told me the road is fine from now on.”

174.0 HARIHAR - DB. PO. RRR. PP.

..and Jack calls it a day. Two more pages of the Auto Club Itinerary will take the Putput to Poona, right on top of Bombay. What a wonderful way to travel!

The road runs cosily between two rows of mango trees, up and down the folds of the Western Ghats. Up the stiff shrouds of the hills, striped with layers of black and grey, down the soft palls of the valleys, ploughed brown like corduroy.

Hans keeps ahead by a furlong, watching the road for buffaloes and the trees for ripe mangoes. While he moves, thousands of fruits look ready to fall, ripe and juicy. Whenever he stops half a dozen green midges hang from a giddy height. He pelts them with sticks, stones and curses. They hang on.

Yet the Indians must know how to get them: mango skins litter the road, sucked dry but for the core. Hans tries hard to run over those. When he hits them squarely the kernel shoots up with a plop and skims ahead for many yards...

The Putput is really too slow. Hans could go twice as fast on these empty roads. But then, the Putput is company, mixed company, nearly as good as a family. Hans hardly remembers his own folk and, until he met these Australians, he never thought a family could fit in with his kind of life...

Hans throttles down to let the Putput take the lead. He enjoys watching the awkward machine belt along on its ridiculous wheels. He can see the blond children, playing, fighting and laughing in their half a yard square of vital space. And that wonderful woman who chucks her waste overboard as though India was her sink... Ach, if Jack found one like that, why shouldn't Hans?

Another hill... Hans throttles up to hug the side of the Putput. He must be in a position to start pushing before Jack shifts into second gear, otherwise his own bike will stall...

Buffaloes... Hans curses the brutes. They always manage to cross the road at the wrong place, half way uphill. They do it on purpose, to break the Putput's headway, Hans knows he has seen Indians, non-violent Indians, hitting buffaloes: great wallops across the rump with a bamboo pole. What Hans would do to them is beyond words.

... ..

"There'll be no buffs on this one," Hans points to a really steep hill, the Rhatraj Ohat, The Putput braces herself for the last climb into Poona.

"We should get a nice view from up there," shouts Jack, "if only..."

Swoosh. The cloud sneaked in from behind the Ghat, keeping clear of the sunny side. A rainbow splits the mountain and eighteen inches of muddy water drowns the road. The Putput splutters, coughs twice and dies, shortcircuited. Now Jack can hear the rain, like static, and a faint rumble underfoot: the gravel rolling across the tarmac under the mud.

“Just hold on to the roof and keep dry,” orders Jack. “Hans will be back as soon as he misses us.

“I waited for you at the top. There is a tunnel but it’s very drafty.” Hans sneezes, The padding has come off his knees, leaving the square marks of the adhesive around the new skin. Knee-deep in the slime, he holds the Putput’s front wheel up to his waist while Jack cleans the wiring.

The rain abates, intending to last, and the Putput climbs on, picking her way on the gravel towards the tunnel.

“Hold on to the roof,” shouts Jack. “Here we go.” The Putput flaps like a moth standing up to a hair dryer.. . thank God that tunnel was only fifty yards long... Phew.

Poona would look nice from up here, if the rain would stop chopping slices out of the landscape. Jack runs downhill, full throthead on, in spite of the bends, just to dry the innards of his engine.

Old Poona is a puddle, with narrow streets like mountain streams, fast but shallow. A few motor-rickshaws lie stranded along the kerbs, their drivers a picture of grief. New Poona extends a broad strip of concrete towards Bombay.

“Now for the first Dak Bungalow,” says Jack.

Alas, Wadgaon is full up and so is Karla. Lonavia has a resthouse, three beds and a garage for sixteen rupees. Jil and Hans pool the small change: Fourteen rupees, thirteen annas and three paise. That’s all until Jack gets to Bombay.

‘Let’s move on,’ says Hans, but the red bike will not start. Things look bad as the rain settles in for a pitch darknight. Hans curses his machine which sulks, dark and silent, under the rain. No lights and no engine.

Jack takes it apart, under the awning of a railway station. Puts it together again, pushes it around the block a couple of times, takes it apart again. Nothing doing.

Jil has drawn the canvas tight over the sleeping children and idled the engine to blow dry air into the back of the Putput. Then she has gone exploring, towards the station.

“Vegetarian cutlets,” says the marvelous Brat, handing over a vile mixture of potatoes and herbs. Yet, such as it is, the food revives the men. Come to think of it, and who would but a

woman, no one has eaten a thing for twelve hours. But it's eleven o'clock and what next?

"I've gotten yards of nylon rope," says Jack, tying one end of Jil's clothesline to the rear of the Putput.

"I'll hold onto it in the teeth. It'll be easier to cast off." Hans ties his left sock into a ball at the end of the line. He shoves the gag into his mouth, after saying "let's go," his last words... for quite a while.

The nylon takes the pull beautifully. Hans hardly feels the jerks and wishes the Putput would go faster. He can't do a thing about it. It's frustrating.

The road goes down, and Jack begins to brake. A yell comes from the back:

"Hooray! Look at this signpost:"

BHOR GHAT

Steep descent for 7 miles

"Follow me, I know this place."

Hans is free wheeling like blazes. He has no light, no engine and hardly any brakes. Jack tries to keep him in the Putput beam but he disappears round a sharp bend. The rain streaks across the headlight like sparks from a whetstone.

"I've lost Hans," says Jack. Jill sees nothing, the Putput goes down, slowly, the Brute's legs get cramped over the brake pedal. Every minute he swallows drily, to release the pressure on his ear drums. Where is that Hans?

It seems to last for hours, possibly twenty minutes. The air gets warmer. Jil thinks of the scenery she must be missing. Then the road plunges towards a steep bend, facing a bill board with luminous paint.

Jil reads:

"FLY TO EUROPE"

Now the road runs straight into the dark, levelling off. A torch waves the Putput to a stop.

“I found a bungalow,” says Hans. “It’s full up but we can have the garage.”

... ..

“Scram” For the third time Hans kicks the chowkidar’s buffalo out of the Garage, into the rain. There is no room for the animal. Besides Hans wants to sleep in her feeding trough. She was having a super of bamboo leaves which will be soft under his ribs.

It’s nearly two months since Jil slept in the Putput. She is out of practice and feels itchy, stuffy and miserable. A smell of ammonia tickles her nose: that buff again.

“Tomorrow, we shall be in Bombay,” sighs the Brat, turning to the future from sheer disgust with the present. “We shall have a room with marble floor and no buffalo, a bath with hot and cold, a view over the sea...”

The Delphic oracle was a woman, sitting on a tripod, breathing heady fumes from a crack in the rock. Inferior stuff. The Brat lies on a tricycle eighteen inches above a carpet of dung, telling of a bright future: “...There’ll be an electric fan, twin beds with reading lights... It’ll be ours for many days... We’ll s1eeep.”

... ..

LOBOS’
GOAN INN
Lobos & Lobos prop.

“It comes out of this place,” says Jil, sniffing the wet air. Bombay is crowded with smells, even after three rainy days. Yet Jil picked up a sweet vinegary scent outside the hotel and followed it round the block to this door. The place could do with a coat of paint but the marble tables look clean enough.

“Give us whatever makes the smell,” orders Jack.

‘Chicken Vindaloo,’ smiles Mr.Lobos, “a very rich stew, based on onions simmered in vinegar. We Goans are the only cooks in Bombay.

... ..

“I’m still hungry,” says Jack,
“I can smell roast, agrees Jil. “This way...”

SURENDRA LAL SINGH
Punjab Restaurators
Tandoor Specialists

Today’ s Special: POMFRET TANDOORI

“A goodly fish,” says Mr. Singh, soaked raw in a secret sauce,
then roasted in the earthen oven we Punjab people call a Tandor.
We Punjabi are the only people in Bombay who know how to
roast.”

... ..

“That was fine,” grants Jack, “Now I’d like some curry.”
“There is plenty of that in the air,” Jil sniffs uncertainly, “...let’s
try up-street.”

NUR DAS
MADRAS CATERER
Mutton Biryani special

“Nowhere in India will you get such a variety of pickles around
your yellow rice,” swears Mr. Das.
“We Madrassi are the only cooks in Bombay.”

... ..

“I didn’t like that,” complains Tlitsy, “and Tootie didn’t either.”
“We’ll buy you some sweets,” Jil tests the air for sugar content. Her nose is fine and straight and precisely two inches long. It is because of her nose that Jack married her five years ago. Sniff. But there is no caramel smell in the streets of Bombay and yet...

S.CHATTERJEE
Makes the Best
SWEETS of BENGAL
RASSGOOLLA
etc...

“Most of our products are made of flour boiled in syrup,” explains Mr.Chatterjee. “But Rassgoolla is special: It’s a ball of cottage cheese poached in boiling sugar. We Bengali are the only...”

... ..

“I think we need a walk,” Jil can hardly move under the weight of a dozen rassgoollas.

“Let’s go and see how the Putput is doing,” puffs Jack, “it’s only three blocks away.”

Three blocks is a long way in Bombay on account of the obstructions across the footpath: wool-gathering humans and cud-chewing animals. The crowd is very dense in front of the house Jack is looking for:

BANNERJEE DADAKJEE
CYCLEWALA & CO.
Motor-Rickshaw
Imprs.

The showroom window is clogged with people rubbing their noses against the glass.

“The Putput, shouts Tlitsy from the top of Jack’s shoulder. There she is all right, clean as a new whisthe under the neon lights. B.D.C. & Co. have patched the hole made by the Tamil cow, put

in a few ignition coil and, bless Mr. Bannerjee, fitted her with a speedometer.

A big sign in English, Hindi and Mahratti proclaims her glories. She will be on show, says the notice, until June 6th.

"That's right," Jil counts her fingers, "Mr. Cyclewala said they'd pay our hotel for ten days."

... ..

HOTEL MAHAL
8, BORI BUNDER

Jacks switches on the electric fan and kicks his sandals off to feel the coolness of the marble floor. Then he opens the French window on to the balcony, to have a look at the sea. The children go into the bathroom to play with the hot and cold taps.

Jil plonks herself on her twin bed and turns on her reading light. She opens a newspaper given to her by the lift boy:

BHARAT SATYA
Bombay June 3rd

The front page shows a hazy shot of a family squatting round a tin of sardines. Jil reads:

"Globe trotting family arrived here from Australia by motorickshaw. Travel was joyful throughout, they say, and the vehicle achieved commendable velocity. The infants were jubilant. During their arduous argosy, they carried adequate victuals and broke journey in the open to partake of sumptuous feed..."

"...Hooray," says Jil, "we're famous."

... ..

“I’m telling you,” Hans shouts, “that it only rains in Bombay. We could on as far as Dhulia. Then you drive on towards Delhi and I towards Calcutta...”

“That’s right,” says Jil. “Let’s go before we have to.” She has just spent twenty five rupees buying tinned fish, salted herrings, condensed milk, meat cubes, rice and other staple foods, mostly noodles.

“Do you ‘mow...” Jack talks from the balcony, “we shall not meet the sea again for more than five thousand miles? That is if we’re lucky and ever make it to Beirut.”

“All right,” says Jil, “let’s get on with it.”

... ..

The Putput hates to leave the showrooms of Messrs. B.D. & Cyclewala. She purrs morosely for a couple of furlongs along the Marine Drive, then she shrieks like a siren and stops.

“New clutch disk working loose,” says Jack, tightening a screw. Then she starts again but refuses to pull. “Serious trouble,” grunts the Brute. Very serious indeed: a broken gearbox axle.

The mechanics refuse to believe it possible. If they were Japanese they would throw themselves into the nearest volcano, But they are Indians and worry about what the Boss will say.

“Lucky fellow,” says the Boss. “Just suppose it had happened in the middle of nowhere,”

“Ahem,” grunts Jack,

“I’ll wait for you outside Bombay,” says Hans. I have some friends near Santa Cruz, a family from New Zealand with six young daughters...”

“Gosh,” says Jack. “... and six hundred buffaloes.”

“We’ll be there,” promises Jil.

“Where are we?” asks Jil, as though Jack ought to know after splashing for two hours along miles of flooded streets.

“In India,” answers the Brute, “even if it looks like Ireland.” The houses have vanished suddenly, leaving a world of green hills, smooth and uniform, for the clouds to drip on. There are no hedges, only the narrow strip of tarmac running between two ditches and two white fences.

“A junction,” says Tlitsy, “and a signpost.”

GOVT. OF BOMBAY
AAREY MILK COLONY
ADM. CENTER

The arrow points to the left, where a road climbs towards a fold in the hill.

“Buffalo coming down,” shouts Tlitsy.

““Struth !” yells Jack, pushing the Putput out of the way, “isn’t it fast.”

A black mass flashes past the windshield, swooshes across the ditch, crashes through the white fence and thuds into a pile of bales in the field behind the signpost.

“Phew,” sighs the Brat, “that was close.” “There is no more,” regrets Tlitsy.

The Putput ventures uphill, passing some excited buff-hands. Near the top, a red haired boy of ten sits on the fence, clad in a poncho.

“Hullo,” says the urchin, “Hans is at the house... Did the buff scare you?”

“No,” answers Tlitsy.

“She lost control ,“ explains Red, “they often do. Dad says they have no braking power, ‘cause they’re built for plains.”

“Fair enough,” admits Jack.

“Dad has six hundred and twenty-three.”

“Too many,” says Tootie.

... ..

The O’Neils have been here eighteen months. Jil finds in Mrs.O’Neil a pleasant reminder of her Paddo neighbors. But her daughters are another kettle of fish. They range from eight to

eighteen, wear red hair and freckles and speak with the tilting accent of Anglo-Indian governesses:

“On the day of Holi, the Hindus celebrate the festival of colors,” declares Nonny, that is Miss O’Neil. “We dressed up like them and followed the procession of this sort of Mardi Gras.”

“They came home simply filthy,” laughs Mr. O’Neil, admiringly. “Those chaps throw colored powders over each other all day long.”

“My girls will never settle back to life in Wanganui,” worries Mrs. O’Neil, “and their fancy talk will frighten the boys away.”

“Nonny won’t frighten me,” Hans sighs.

“Blow me flat,” laughs the Brute, “I didn’t know Hans could sigh.”

“He can have the girl in Auckland as soon as we go back and find him settled there.” Mr. O’Neil chuckles. “She’ll cost him twice as much to feed over there than the seven of them cost me here... Come on, let’s go and have a look at the works.”

... ..

The works are Mr. O’Neil’s escape from the hen-coop. In a white and blue building all kinds of stainless steel contraptions convert buffalo milk into a human drink and a smell of curds and whey.

“I got the job by writing,” exults Mr. O’Neil.

“Used to run a small dairy near Auckland. Now I lunch with state ministers. They’re just like little boys when they get in here. They want to play with the faucets to see the gauge needles go round... Come on, let’s have a look at my buffs.”

The revolting brutes stand in rows of white-washed stalls, munching sugar canes from blue tile troughs.

Over each stall comes a water pipe, ending with a sprinkler.

“Buffs have no sweat glands,” explains Mr. O’Neil with good humored contempt. “Normally they keep cool by lying in puddles all day long. Here, we sprinkle them and they love it... Here, Hans, give us a hand...” One of the horrors has stuck a forepad into her feeding trough. The dairyman lifts it out while Hans shoves the beast backwards with a gentle push of his shoulder.

“My... My,” sneers Jack, “isn’t old Hans nice to Buffie-Wuffie!”

Hans shrugs his shoulders. Mr. O'Neil winks.
"Love me, love my daddy's buff," sings the Brute, cynically.
Hans blushes to the roots of his flaxen hair.

... ..

Hans is up at six o'clock in the morning but he takes a long time getting away. However, once started he keeps ahead. Fifty miles out of Bombay the rain peters out, half way up the Thul Ghat, as though exhausted by the height.

Sunshine again, a pale sun in a pearly sky, as dully hot as the concrete road which winds its way between the rock towards Nasik.

Hans keeps a long way ahead. Now and then he glances back at the struggling Putput, then slows down to its level. The red bike had a power lift in Bombay and the boy is rearing to let her go.

"It's a long, long way to Wanganui," shouts Jack.

"Why don't you run away, little boy?"

Hans smiles ruefully, his head lifted into the wind of his own speed, looking beyond the horizon... Calcutta... Rangoon..., Singapore... Auckland. A twist of the throttle projects the red bike ten yards ahead.

"Go on," shouts Jack, "we'll be all right."

Hans drops back alongside the Putput. He blows a kiss to Tootie, nods his head to Jil, winks an eye to Tlitsy and opens the throttle. Within seconds he's round the next bend.

... ..

VII

STOP

Seen by the light of the Moon, the Tomb of Mumtaz Mahal dissolves under her magic rays into luminous vagueness ghostly yet indescribably beautiful..."

"Like a meringue at the mouth of an oven," precisest Jack.

"Shut up." Jil closes the Guide Book and throws it at the Brute. It falls among the dead lotus. Seeing the Taj by moonlight was one of Jil's secret reasons for coming on this trip. And now the Taj Mahal is there, with enough moonlight to read by, all Jil can feel is the heat oozing up her legs from the marble floor.

"Places loose all their romance as soon as I get there..." concludes Jil sadly.

"To heck with places," agrees Jack, "To me, a live Indian is worth ten Moghul tombs,"

"Yet, it's nice to be in Agra," protests the Brat.

"It sounds nice," says Jack, "Let's go and see if our kids are asleep."

... ..

The walls of Jil's bedroom are three foot thick and a fig tree grows from a crack in the brick. Door and windows are blocked up with screens of plaited straw kept moist by the constant effort of a water bearer, The result is coolness, for the first three minutes after one gets in.

Jil gives the children a drink and goes to bed. Jack opens his map without gusto. Tomorrow's stretch, the Agra-Delhi road, lies flat

as a dead cobra between the railway and the river Junna. No Ghats, no ferrys, no toll bridges...

“And no vapor locks if we travel from four to nine in the morning.” Jack thinks aloud. “I guess we might make it.”

“Tomorrow will tell , Jil yawns, darkly resigned to the worst. She doesn’t mind the weather, hot and nasty as it’s sure to be, like Jack’s temper. That’s all right too, she can deal with it by going to sleep. And yet she’s worried.

The fact is Jil has grown superstitious, lately. India is a strange place. Things have a way of going from Good to Bad, or from Worst to Best, in a twinkling. There is no happy medium ever.

... ..

Jil remembers the third day after Hans left. Such a good start from Dhulia on a breakfast of fried bananas and the Putput going so well up the Satpura Ranges. Barren hills open to the following breeze with not a tree in sight, nor a village, and yet hundreds and thousands of people marching uphill.

Queer people: tall men with a loincloth around their middle, bows, arrows and battle-axes over their broad shoulders, big women in scarlet saris split along the side to show a brown leg right up to the hips. All of them going uphill and nobody turning a head as the Putput came up behind.

“Extras,” said Jack, “for some large-screen movie.”

And then the road levelled off before another climb and disappeared under a wall of scarlet women, tall creatures who blocked the view and didn’t care a hoot about it. Jack knew what to do in a crowd: hug the left side of the tarmac and keep going until there is no more. Jil tried to look over their heads but they were taller than the roof of the Putput.

“I’m getting diszy,” said Jack, watching the tarmac between the brown legs. Thousands of legs dancing away from the front wheel with a clink of their ankle rings and a swish of their red saris. Jil spotted a one legged woman with all her rings on the one ankle.

“I feel like a bull,” said Jack, “with a surplus of matadors.” Jil began to feel unreal. There couldn’t be so many women in one place. The Putput had been plowing through this lot at least ten minutes... Hey, that one legged female again.

“This must be a roundabout,” said Jil.

“Not likely in these parts.” Jack began to edge towards the right of the tarmac, just in case...

“There,” yelled Jil after a while, “to the right.”

The road cleared of women and began to climb. Jack stopped halfway uphill to see what had happened.

Jil was right, a sort of roundabout turned off the left of the road, like the loop on the letter q, with a small temple in the centre and rows of dark men all around. Then the crowd of scarlet women filling the circle of tarmac and spilling onto the road.

“We must have gone round that loop a good few times, grunted Jack, “I wonder what was going on’?” “I’d like to know,” said Jil, “but I wouldn’t care to ask.”

... ..

The Putput must have offended some god, or lost its luck, or caught the evil eye. The country grew hostile, showing India at her poorest, dustiest and hottest. From the barren hillside horrible gods of yellow plaster stood making faces at the poor machine.

3he began to choke with vapor-loccks.

These could be cured by pouring good petrol over the carburettor unit, a costly process. The fumes made Tootie sick. Stopping for lunch Jil found the sardines were heat-blown and Jack said the water was stale. Angry with hunger, the Brute kicked the starter, calling Jil horrible names over the uneven roar of the engine:

“Improvident Brat,” said Jack, “Muddleheaded Wombat.”

But for the lack of moisture in the air, Jil would have melted into tears. By and by Jack got busy cursing the road which began climbing and running out of bitumen.

“A signpost,” shouted Tlitsy.

WHOW CANTT.
Club of Central India
Transit quarters

Jil sank into an armchair under an electric fan. A bearer brought four lemonades, cool and frothy like the carpet underfoot.

“These contrasts are killing,” said Jil.

“Then let’s die here,” Jack agreed.

... ..

After seven days like that one Jil feels anything might happen: “Tomorrow will tell.”

JIL’S DIARY

Sat. June 16th:: Agra 1064 (speedo miles) to Delhi 1187

Up at 3, away by 4. Dark but fairly cool. Buffcarts, loaded with marble slabs blocking the road, drivers asleep. Jack curses in German.

Daybreak at 5. Life is everywhere: peacocks, red-bum monkeys, camels pulling enormous carts, loaded donkeys, loaded coolies, veiled women peeping thru a square hole in black shroud (purdah).

8 o’clock. Delhi 28 miles. Wind rises three quarters front. Hold on to roof. Gusty, hot, dry, gritty gale from the desert. Slows Putput down to misery (15 mph).

Arrive Dehli 9.55. Find address given by Bombay people. Sort of flat for visiting executives. Wee can have it for a week, says keeper. Hooray: air-condish, fans, bath, kitchenette, pale blue sheets, etc...

Sanwiches at 12. Go to bed with air-condish know on full cold. Too excited to sleep.

12.30. News comes through the wall from neighbor’s wireless: All-India Radio Weather Bulletin: Heavy rains Himachal Pradesh. Swollen rivers. Sutlej broke banks. Ludhiana cut-off. Pakistan isolated for three weeks. Jack moans and looks at the map.

“We’re stuck. I go to sleep.”

Wake at 5 with stiff neck, cure it by stepping outside: natural Delhi air as good as Turkish bath. Take Jack and kids out to buy

food for six days. Light supper of veges stewed. Tootie and Tlitsy with slight diarrhoea. Go to sleep at 8.

Sun. June 17th : New Delhi.

Wake up 10. Bath kids. Cook brunch: chops and eggs. Write up diary from Gwalior to date.

Things to be done tomorrow:

1. Chemist for kids dysentery.
- 2 - Bank for more rupees.
3. G.P.O. for mail.
- 4 - Auto Club about road.
(IF OPEN (IF SHUT)
5. Visa Pakistan Extend Indian visa
- 6 Visa Afgan Find cheap digs
- 7 Scooter people for small ads and spares
8. All-India-Radio for talk (how much?)
9. Shades oil Co. for Bombay article.
10. Photo shop for colorslides
11. Visit Qutab Minar, Birla Nandir, etc...

Monday June 18th ... comes all too soon. By nine o'clock Jack has been torn from the blue sheets, fed scrambled eggs, shoved into his nylon shirt and tergal trousers. The children are ready too and Jil has finished doing her hair.

Jack opens the door and reels back under the hot blast from outside. But Jil stands firm on his heels:

“The sooner we go out, the sooner we come back.”

... ..

New Delhi reminds Jack of Canberra's curves and roundabouts. The capital must be the neatest and most empty place in India, a terror to the bazaar loving Indians.

Jack finds some, life around Connaught Circus. Enough of it to do his first three jobs and rush into the Auto Club a few minutes before tiffin time. A strangely efficient place, the North Indian

Auto Club: Without even asking for his name, a bearer takes Jack into the Secretary's office.

The man is about thirty, with wavy hair, sad brown eyes, a square forehead and a longish nose pointing at the oval, chin across his full lower lip. He looks at Jack with amazement.

"I am from Bengal," says he, "my name is Bose."

"My name is Jack Monty and I come from Sydney."

Mr. Bose sighs with relief: "For a moment I thought I saw myself coming into my office."

"My tan is deeper tan yours," laughs Jack.

"I'm very fair by Bengal standards," beams Mr. Bose. "What may I do for you?"

"Tell me how to get to Pakistan by road."

"That is impossible for at least three weeks."

"Then may be you can tell me where to live really cheap for a month or two. A village in the mountains would do."

"I'll find you something... Tonight... Come out for dinner... I'll pick you up at your address... eight o'clock... And don't worry..."

... ..

Eight o'clock sharp. An old ama has just arrived from the neighbor with the wireless, to act as baby sitter. Mr. Bose is at the door, impressed with the splendid flat.

"Don't get the wrong idea," implores Jack. "An old straw hut will do just as well, providing it's cheap."

"Of course," smiles Mr. Bose. "What would you rather for dinner, Indian or Western?"

"Something out of a Tandoor," says Jill.

"I see." Mr. Bose sounds pleased. "I'll take you to a Punjabi clud I belong to but I must warn you: it's no sample of village life."

The hall is lined with tiger skins, the bar bristles with naked swords and, from the lounge wall, portraits of bearded gentlemen follow Jill with a steely glare.

"Don't tell me these are non-violent," says she.

"Shush," whispers Mr. Bose, "most Punjabi are Sikh by religion, which means they eat flesh, hope to die fighting Islam, never cut their hair and cultivate a fierce look. However just call them

‘Sardar Ji’ that is ‘Warrior Honorable’ and they’ll give you a good dinner. Let’s go and have it

... ..

“Now I know you can eat Punjabi food,” says Mr. Bose. “But could you live like real Hindus for a whole month?”

“We’d like to try,” answers Jil.

“Plucky of you, Madam. Would you also be rash enough to try this Chota Pan instead of coffee?” “With pleasure,” Jil smiles as she takes the green triangle from a silver tray. She still smiles after putting it into her mouth. Quietly, daintily she chews the bitter cud.

“...Well” Mr. Bose exclaims, “...you pass! Excuse me if I appear to test your stomach but I wouldn’t send you to a small mountain village unless I knew you could be happy there. It is a very special and holy place with quite a few taboos. My friend will explain them to you... Ho, bearer... some paper please...” Mr. Bose writes

*Pandit Shivanand Trepoti Ji,
Daksha Mandir, Kankhal,
Uttar Pradesh.*

Dear Pandit Ji

*Please let Mr. Monty and his family
have the Eight-Side Burj for a couple of
months.*

*Har Prashad Bose
Dehli, June 18th.*

How to get there: Calcutta Road for 12 miles, turn left at Graziabad for Neerut, 20 miles, right towards Nuzzaffarnagar, 35 miles, right to Roorkee, 40 miles, pass bridge, then right to follow canal, 15 miles, then right at Jwalapur and then 2 miles. And may our gods be with you.

... ..

“Kankhal?” shouts Jack, curling his eyebrows into a question mark.

“Hah,” answers a rickshaw puller with a forward jerk of his chin.

“Hah, hah,” nods his passenger with a sweeping gesture meaning this is it. Jack hates the certainty. It was so nice watching the mountains grow nearer under the high Monsoon clouds, so nice hoping for a small village by a baby river. Alas, the hills are still ten miles off. Canals run straight and slow across the square paddy fields. Kanikhal is a town of brick with twisty lanes, narrow but cemented, waterpumps at the corners and electric wires overhead.

“Daksha Mandir?” shouts Jack. A coolie points to the right, away from the mountains. The Putput squeezes between a row of shops and the toes of their customers, chases three white cows from a square of vegetable stalls, scatters hundreds of children along a street of sweet sellers. Jack keeps yelling “Daksha Mandir?” and the arms keep pointing south.

“A river,” shouts Tlitsy, “a real big river.”

“The Ganges,” precises Jack, “and there is our place, I bet.” A ruin looms by the waterside like the neglected sandcastle of some child giant, the size of a rugger field and the height of its goal posts. It looks like a huge brick worn at the edges and mossy on top with shrubs and creepers. Best preserved is the short side along the road and the wide horseshoe gate in its middle. “Daksha Mandir?” asks Jack, switching off. “Hah.” The man grabs Mr. Bose’s letter and vanishes into the shade. From the gate, Jack can see along the middle of a courtyard: lots of people standing around a kind of stone platform... the man isn’t coming back so Jack takes two steps forward...

From the platform rises an old giant of a tree split in half down to the roots but still leafy. Running water gleams through the lower branches, which means the yard opens onto the river...

“Good,” says Jack, taking another two steps.

The yard covers about an acre between the river and two arcades, the vaults are in no better state than the outer walls except towards the end of the right wing. There, a couple of new arches lean against a white tower rising from the river. The current breaks two sides of its base... two sides... it must be an eight-sided tower... "eight-sided Burj?"... Jack takes four quick steps. The tower is level with the outer wall and only three sides show from where Jack stands. The middle one has a small window, facing upstream, hardly four feet above the running waters... Quite an interesting spot. Jack runs back to Jil. "I think it might be very nice," says he, "if only we find room to park the Putput... Let's shut her up and wait in the shade."

... ..

The man returns shaking his head. A corner of Mr. Bose's letter shows whiter than the fellow's shirt, above his breast pocket.

"Pandit away?" queries Jack.

"Hah."

"Long time?"

"Hah."

"Where can we wait?"

"Hah,

"It's hot outside, is there a room we can wait in?"

"Hah." The man does not move.

Jack points to his family standing by the Putput, then leans his cheek against his joined hands and shuts his eyes, breathing deeply.

"Hah," says the man and disappears...

A woman climbs on the platform round the old tree. She wears a blue sari tightened about her waist by a broad belt of red material... or rather some sort of thread. She pulls out one end of it and ties it to a crack in the bark. Then she begins to spin on her heels while turning round the split trunk. Spin and turn and spin and turn like the Earth around the sun, while the thread unwinds itself from her waist onto the tree... Spin and turn...

The man returns with a large key and nods to be followed. Jil grabs a ground sheet from the Putput, Tlitsy carries two small kit-bags and Jack lifts Tootie. The man opens the door of a vault,

dark green with the glow from a curtain of vines which filters the skylight. Jil stretches the ground-sheet over the flagstones. She will share a kit-bag with Tootie. It'll make a good pillow. She hears the door bang shut and falls asleep.

... ..

When Jack opens his eyes, the sun shines straight into the room through the sky-light, which means it must be getting late in the day. A man squats by the door, tailor fashion, with his sandals neatly laid in front of him on the flagstones.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there to greet you," says he quietly, "I was busy burning an old friend."

"Hah," Jack rubs his eyes into focus for a look at the man's face. Not a twitch to the grey whiskers, not a twist in the many wrinkled cheeks, not a twinkle in the old eye. "Are you Pandit Shivanand Trepati..."

"You may call me 'Pandit Ji' and look at me without anguish. I only did my duty by incinerating my dead friend before throwing him into the Ganges... Now I will tell you about the place you have come to.

The Daksha Mandir is the oldest temple in India, just as Lord Daksh is our oldest god, being the father of Parvathi, who became wife to Shiva, or Shankar, the central god of the Hindu trinity.

Many thousand years ago, Lord Daksh built this mandir as his residence. It has a full square then and a long way from the Ganga, or Ganges, mother-river of India, who ran along the mountains, domain of her father Shankar, or Shiva. When Shiva married Parvathi, Ganga was annoyed. She sent the strongest of her many arms towards this temple and, in time, she managed to knock a wall off. Many moons ago, Mr. Bose's forefathers built a tower against the river at the end of the Southern wing. They kept it for their own use, along with the last two vaults of the arcade. If you care to follow me I will open it for you."

Pandit Ji picks up his sandals and threads a big toe into the loop holding each sole. Then he uncurls his wiry frame with a swish of his dhoti and rises, nearly six foot tall, like a human version of

the rope trick. Silently, Jack steals out of the room leaving his family asleep.

The temple is busier now. The crowd is thick near the cloven tree and between the little shrines scattered over the yard. But Pandit Ji is taller than most people so his elbow swings long and sharp, mowing a way through the faithful. The courtyard ends with a flight of steps stretching thirty yards across from the North wing to the white tower. Stone steps, going down, one, two, three, four to a cloud bank.

The cloud extends one hundred yards across to a grey shore where four cows and one stork stand profiled against the distant hill.

“Ganga wearing her bridal veil,” whispers Pandit Ji, “... a rare sight indeed. Britishers tried to explain it by the hot air of our plains condensing on the icy waters of the mountain. But we have a better story...”

“It is chilly,” Jack shivers, “and nearly dark...”

“Let us o in,” agrees the Pandit, climbing three steps to the end of the arcade. “This last arch will be your veranda. It is rather open but the inner rooms will be more private.”

The door is a three foot recess into the thickness of a wall. Pandit Ji turns a key and disappears.

“Wait until I switch on the light.”

“You dontt mean...” begins Jack, but a light does come on, spreading its feeble glow over a vaulted room, at least twenty feet square, two tables, four chairs and a fuel stove. The walls are recessed into a multitude of shelves and pierced by three loopholes full of sunset. Stone steps climb up the side to a door which must open onto the roof.

“Under the stairs is another door,” says the Pandit. “It opens on a dead-end lane outside the temple. You may use it to park your machine and bring your wife in until she chooses to wear local dress.”

“Pertect,” says Jack, “but where do we sleep?”

“In the tower room.”

The bed is a wooden platform six feet square, and eighteen inches high in the middle of an eight sided vault. There is just enough room to walk around it. Nails stick out of the white-

washed walls to act as clothes pegs. Pieces of sacking hang over the three windows, muffling the swish of the rushing waters.

“Cool in summer, warm in winter, dry in the Monsoon and silent as the tomb,” exults the Pandit, “except for the sighs of the Ganga at the foot of the Burj... No need to worry... She rarely rises this high,. I trust you shall sleep well but I shall ask you tomorrow morning. ..”

... ..

“Daddy , wake up, the window is leaking.”

“Be quiet...s’too early... WHAT?”

I mean the sun is shining through the sack that shuts it, explains Tlitsy. “May I look out?...”

“Oh look, Daddy... look, there is sunshine on the waters, running fast that way. And cows on the other side running fast the other way... without moving their legs, like merry merry-go-round, and the mountaines move as well, only slower...”

“Nothing’s moving except the water, you big silly, it’s a mistake of your eyes...”

“This isnt,” says Jil looking out of her window.

“It’s ladies day at the holy baths. They’re all over the steps, going down into the water all dressed up. But how their saris cling when they’re wet... No I won’t let you look.”

Jack moves to the third window, hoping for a saner scene...Ah... a garden beyond the Putput’s lane, peaceful under the early sun. A white bearded man stands in deep meditation, quite relaxed. He rests on the triangle formed by his elbows and the top of his head. His joined feet point to Heaven and his pink soles implore the blue sky. His loincloth, however, still obeys the pull of gravity.

“A good thing we have a window each,” grunts Jack.

... ..

Punjabi Halwa for breakfast, announces Jil from a cloud of caramel fumes.

PUNJABI HALWA

2. TS. Coarse flour or meal
3. TS. Granulated sugar
2. T3. Margarine or butter
2. cups water

METHOD: Fry flour in fat until brown and pleasant smelling. Gradually add one cup of water, then one tablespoon of sugar, then more water, more sugar and so on. Raisins, currants and nuts chopped fine and added last would improve Halwa.

It will have to serve four. In Delhi Jack was told that food would be cheaper up country, so the Putput's cupboards are empty.

And yet, it's a happy breakfast, thanks to the feeling that nobody is going anywhere for a while. First thing after breakfast, Jack opens the door upstairs, flooding the kitchen with light. This distresses a few spiders already shaken by the halwa fumes. Jil finds an old, non-violent broom to finish them off.

The roof is flat and railed-in high enough to be safe for the kids. From up there Jack surveys the divine domains: The House of Daksh at his back with the cloven tree hiding Kankhal. In front rises the wall of Shankar's Himalayas, ten miles away under the Monsoon clouds. The rest belongs to Ganga who sweeps in from the left, four miles wide, brushes against the tower and turns to the right as far as the eye can see.

One hundred yards across the tower begins a bank of gravel, first of a chain of low islands on which graze the village's cows. The Mother-River on India purring up with Go-Mitar, the Cow-Mother of Indians. But it can't last and Jack feels certain the cows will have to swim for it at the first serious rain. That will be fun to watch.

VIII

LOOK

Trying to swat a spider from one of the top shelves Jil knocks down a little book with some gilt still showing through the dust on its bedraggled edges.

“Of all the unexpected finds...” she says. With its first ten pages missing the book begins:

10. And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

“Bandit Ji, Bandit Ji, Bandit Ji,” sings Tootie from the veranda’s door.

“Namastey” says the old man, “Namastey, that is ‘I kiss your feet,’ and my name is Pandit Ji, which means ‘Learned Honorable.’ I have come to see about your food requirements.”

“We require everything,” agrees Jil.

“You shall have it for next to nothing,” beams the Pandit, “but first I must tell you about some things you may not have without offending Lord Daksh. They are: meat, fish, eggs, spirits and animal fats.”

“Phew”, says Jil, “and what MAY we eat?”

“Lots of things: chapatti, dahl, milk, rice, fruit, sweets, all Western vegetables and twice as many Indian ones, the best of which is q’tahl.”

“Q’ tahl?”

“Q’ tahl is right. It is the meat of the Hindu. I’m sure you’ve seen the fruit, hanging like boxing gloves from a mango-like tree.”

“Broad fruit,” agrees Jil, “from the Jack-tree.”

“It contains a tough yellow pulp around potato-like seeds,” says the old man. “Meat and vegetable for the one: at the most one

anna a pound. Four annas equal five cents. For that money you can make a first class meal of stew.

But two annas worth of q'tahl, one anna worth of onion, that is one pound of bias, and two ounces of palm fat, that is one anna worth of dalda. That's all.

Now, you brown the onions in the fat, add the pulp and then and then the; see is of the c 'tahl, 3imaer seice, and c.er'le .stcaaing hot.

it sound lske Irish stew" says Jib

"Me hungrv, sings Tootie,

'Good," smiles the Pandit, now please Mister Ji, follow me to the market with a bag and five rupees..." "Five rupees!" exclaims Jack, "that is a dollar!"

"Alas," sighs the Pandit, "life is expensive. You will need that to feed your family for a week."

... ..

"When you address a shopkeeper," warns the Pandit, "you should call him 'Lala Ji' to make him feel good. It means "Busy honourable."

"Thank you, Pandit Ji, I will remember." Jack feels heavy with facts, figures, weigths and measures. One sehr is two pounds and a bit, that is sixteen setta, or else four paoo. Ten paysse equal dai anna, that is two and a half annas, the price of twenty-five cigarillos (biri).

Heavy also is the kit-bag on Jack's shoulder: A maun is eighty-two pounds, that is eighteen sehr, or is it twenty? There is at least a maun of stuff in that kit-bag: q'tahl, bias, dalda, flour (atta) potatoes (alco), chini and mirch (sugar and spices) and all things nice to feed four for a week of Fridays.

"I must go home now, Pandit."

"Wait. You have some money left."

"About three paysse."

"You owe them to charity... Ha, Lala Ji, gram tin paissa ka... Three paysse of gram, that's three handfuls of dry peas. You will give them to the beggars who sit along the path to the North gate. Three peas per beggar. If you have enough left, you can hand

them out to the priests of the small shrines, twelve peas per priest... Lord Daksh be with you..."

The beggars squat, facing each other across the temple's avenue, an unconvincing lot of scare-crows. Jack begins dishing out his peas, three at a time, but a growl of discontent rises from the leper's row, Professional lepers rate four peas, A one-legged man wants five and then comes the man with no feet asking for six. Behind Jack's back business is brisk, peas change hands and fly across the path with great precision: three peas for one guava, five for a slice of pawpaw. The Daksh beggars believe in a balanced diet.

The priests show less gusto for their dozen peas. They hardly not their fleecy heads, least the ashes fall off, no doubt. Yet, from the neon-lit recess of a larger chapel, a priest sends out a flashy smile. He wears gold teeth and gold rims without glasses. Apart from that he rather looks like his god, the source of all this wealth, whose man-sized statue glows redly beneath the neon tube.

"Hanuman," says the priest, "Ape-god, monkey-king, plenty gram."

"Then I won't give him any," answers Jack, thinking of the poorer beggars.

... ..

Against the back of Hanuman's shrine leans a kennel-like shanty. It houses a miserable godling made of a spidery bit of driftwood polished with elbow grease. But its priest is a real statue. He squats in strict Yoga fashion with the back of his feet pulled up across his thighs. Veins beat from the pressure under the skin of his calves: too much muscle for this kind of act.

Copper-yellow hair flows down to his large shoulders and a beard of the same un-Indian hue fans out over a saffron robe which is strangely clean. His face is young, may be twenty, with a warm tan, rather like melted freckles.

'If only he would lift his eyes...' thinks Jack, dropping the rest of his peas by the spidery god. But the priest does not seem to notice.

... ..

It rains nearly everyday but never in the early morning so Jil serves breakfast on the tower's roof: hrawa, bananas and tea. The kids chuck bits of rubble into the bosom of Ganga. The sun is about to rise behind the foothills of Shankar's giants. Daksha's monks yodel off matins and the priest of tile Stider-godling returns from his bath. His eyes are downcast as usual. A pity, even from up here Jack could tell what color they are and then, perhaps he might know enough to ask more.

"Do you know..." muses Jil, "it is four months today since we saw the sun rise on Cocklebidy."

"Really?" Jack sighs. "It feels like four years."

"Perhaps but just the same, something must be wrong with my inner time-keeping. We got here a week ago but it feels like yesterday. A rainy week flies like a day and yet four months seem like eight years. How come?"

"This kind of life is short to live but long to remember," explains Jack happily. "Something always happens..."

"The cows !" shouts Tlitsy. "The cows are coming over..."

Every morning sixty nine beasts cross the river to spend the day on the islands opposite Daksha's house, hardly a hundred yards across. The current is so swift that the herd has to start half a mile up from the temple. They struggle for an eternity of three minutes, drifting a yard to swim an inch.

"That's how I feel about our trip," says Jil. "It's like half-mile swim across a hundred yards of water."

"Easy now, old girl, you forget about the islands: Colombo, Trinco, Bombay and Dehli."

"And Kankhal... Remember this is only half-way, and the next half is the toughest..." Jil sighs, looking at the river. This evening, the cows will assemble on the tip and of their gravel bank, look at the water for three minutes and go in, facing the tower. Within seconds, they'll be drifting away and Jil will shade her eyes from the sunset to see if they all make it this side of the rapids, half a mile downstream.

"... so what?" says Jack, "we shan't die of it and we'll have lived... Time for me to get the milk."

"May I come too?" asks Tlitsy.

“Of course.”

... ..

The sun is up and the temple yard deserted after the early mornins rush. Tlitsy carries the milk back from the merchant by the North gate. To carry a pint of milk in a quart-size plastic jug is easys, so easy it's dull. There is little to look at, all the funny men. with ashes on their heads are away for breakfast... Ah...a mango stone...

Plop:... Kicking a mango is fun, there is no telling where it'll go, so slippery it is. Hit squarely from the middle of a flagstone it'll skid along way. This time it's stopped by the wall around the double tree... Plop, right across to the far corner of the Monkey-god's church. That's a good lay to shoot it by the open space as far as the river may be. Tlitsy takes a little run and ... bang... his foot knocks a stone, his shoulder bumps on the angle and the milk flies around the corner...

“You clumsy clot...” snaps a grown-up voice which is not daddy's while two blue eyes drill into Tlitsy's soul.

“I am sorry,” says Jack, arriving on the scene.

The priest does not answer. Tlitsy picks up the jug, looking sad enough to melt a heart of stone.

The priest does not seem to notice.

... ..

“Letter for us,” shouts Jil. The bearer stands breathing heavily by the door under the stairs. Jack checks the address:

Jack Maunty, esq.
Daksha Burj.

And opens the pink envelope:

*Doctor Ram Sharub Ghose
B.I.A.S. LUCKNOW
(Ayurvedic & Occidental)
Gangananda Kutir*

*Imli
Mohalla
U.P.*

*Dear Sir,
On this seventh day of your presence among
us and ninety seventh birthday of my father,
may I hope to see your family at the feast
which shall take place at sunset at my house.
Please nod acceptance to bearer of this note.*

R.S. Ghose

Jack nods before Jil has time to object:

“Tooty has diarrhea again.”

Too late: the bearer has gone.

“Our host is a doctor,” Jack points out, reassuringly.

... ..

Pandit Ji’s whitest shirt hangs over his cleanest dhoti as the old man shows the way to Imli Mohalla. Kanhal’s residential district is so compact and twisty that no fair-sized buffalo could follow her calf through its lanes. Yet, without climbing any stairs, the party emerges on what must be the roof of the tallest house in the village.

A cloud has strayed from the mountains to reflect the sunset onto the terrace, a quarter acre of brick tiles planted with rows and rows of squatting Indians, at least five hundred of them, separated by rattan slats. Women bob up and down along the rows, setting a foot length of banana leaf before each guest, Others carry large baskets from which they dish out to small pancakes a head. More ladies laddle out curried pot-atoes, more

drops a handful of fried batter balls on each leaf. Last comes the fruit, diced guava sprinkled with red pepper,

“You are not late,” smiles Doctor Ghose without rising from his mat at the head of the middle row. Jil takes in the raised face with the large forehead and the big feverish eyes. She likes the man, “Please find your seats over there...” The doctor points to the end of his row, near the edge of the terrace.

Tootie and Jil sit between their men, take a quiet loom around and begin to peck at their banana leaves. Good light stuff, easy to eat,

“I am Bahrendra Nash Sharma,” says the young man who sits facing Jil. “I study economics in Dehra Dun. You may call me Bahri.”

“I was about to call you Barry,” answers Jil. “You remind me of a friend of my husband, a gym trainee from Canberra. About your size but very strong too...more suntanned but fairer uptop.”

“Was he a vegetarran also’?” asks Bahri, “Not exactly...but he did look like you,”

“We are all vegetarians,” states Bahri’s neighbour, “and we are stranger than other people. My name is Raj Kumar but they call me Rajah.”

“You are the first Europeans who ever lived in our Kankhal,” asserts Bahri

“Really?” Jack sounds doubtful,

“Really,” confirms Rajah, “and it is a great boon for us to pratice our English with you.”

“I wish you taught me Hindi,” says Jack.

“Hah, that will be a pleasant duty,” answers Bahri.

“I am on holidays for six weeks. That should be long enough for you to learn.”

A young lady comes along with a brass bowl and a pitcher of warm water. With simple distinction Tlitsy and Tootie wash their fingers and lips.

“Come tomorrow,” shouts the doctor through the crowd which surrounds him. “We’ll have a quiet chat.”

“Rajah and I will escort you home,” says Bahri.

... ..

The gravel islands loom black as a netful of whales between the moonlit arms of Ganga. Hanuman's shrine glows like a little Taj Mahal in the darkness of Daksha's tree. Through the foliage, the fingers of the moon play on the whitewash, turning it to mottled marble above the shack of the spider-god.

Bahri, Rajak and Jack sit on the veranda steps long after Jil has gone to sleep with the children. The shadow of Rajah's face falls in front of Jack who takes a secret pleasure watching it move between his feet.

A typical Rajput profile, fancies Jack, with the short forehead, the smoothly hooked nose and the upper lip which curls up as the boy speaks:

"Have you such nights in your country?"

"It is the same moon," answers Jack.

"Of course... but the river..."

"We have rivers," says Jack, "but no mandirs..." What do you call that tree which looks so old?"

"A pipul," answers Rajah, "a very sacred tree whose shade cures the sick. Modern science admits its capacity to release more oxygen than other vegetables. This proves our religion precludes science.

"No doubt," agrees Jack, "... but what split the tree?"

"Lord Shankar did that when he was angry at Lord Daksh about something Parvarthi said. The old god was sitting by the tree, looking at the mountain when Shankar sent a thunderbolt to chop off his head. It did and split the tree as well."

"I thought gods were immortal," says Jack.

"Daksh didn't die. His daughter sent for the doctor god to fix him up. I've forgotten that god's name..."

"Make it Ghanesh," suggest Bahri.

"Ghanesh sewed back Daksha's head. It proves that our ancients knew more about surgery than modern doctors, does it not?"

"Definitely," agrees Jack... "Who is the god in the little chapel behind Hanuman's shrine?"

"I do not know it," admits Rajah.

“I have seen it,” says Bahri, “it must be Shakti, the Power-goddess. Her sign is the Swastika but she can take any form she likes, which is a boon to those who can’t afford a read statue. The priest who owns this one is deaf and dumb, therefore poor. He made signs to say he came from over the mountains. The other priests let him into the mandir on account of his looks, They tell the pilgrims he’s from another world, therefore he does not need gram.”

... ..

“Daddy, may I come and fetch the milk?”

“Not this morning, old boy, tomorrow if it doesn’t rain.”

Milk is dear, two annas a pao, that is four annas for a little more than a pint. Yet, Jack buys an extra pao with a little earthen pot to carry it. This he lays before the Spider-godling and says:

“Jay Shakti, Victory to Shakti and good luck to her friends.”

The priest says nothing. His eyelids, tanned as the rest of his face do not flutter. Jack stands still a minute, making sure no one is about and whispers:

“I heard you call my son a clumsy clot. That was well and truly spoken. How about saying more?”

“Mind your own business, sighs the priest.

Jack hears the clap of sandals on the pavement. Then a bell rings in Hanuman’s shrine and Jack whispers hurriedly:

“If you want a cup of tea after lights out just knock on...”

“Namastey, o guest of our gods,” shouts Bahri, with a slap on Jack’s back which nearly upsets the milk... “Stop gaping at this poor fellow and come and play Kuppatti.”

“Cup o’tea?”

“Kup-pat-ti,” laughs Bahri, “an Indian game of speed and wind. Rajan would say it proves our sport is better than yours. I think you’ll like it just the same... By the way, better keep out of your house for an hour or so. It’s full of women: Rajah’s sister Urmila, my cousin Usha, my wife Kusum and her sister Goyatre...”

“Your wife?”

“Yes, my wife, I have been married seven years.” “How old are you, then?”

“Nineteen. Kusum is sixteen, very sweet and loves me like a sister, when I finish my studies we shall live together... But now, we’re going to play Kuppatti. Rajah will be there with Suresh, Gopi, Rakesh and five more.”

... ..

The road from Kankhal carries on for a couple of furlongs past the temple of Daksh. It ends in a mango shaded meadow which forms a point between the river and a canal. A dozen cattle graze there, too young

or too weak to swim across to the islands. Some of them are recovering from a tussle with the rapids.

Bahri and the boys take off their shirts, dropping them on the grass to mark an area the size of a tennis

court. To clear the cows away, Rajah stiffens his right hand into a shallow cup and slaps the hollow flanks between rump and spine. It makes a loud plompy noise, painless but impressive.

The boys divide the area by lining up their sandals across the field. Then they split into two groups of five with Rajah and Bahri for captains.

“You will referee the first games,” says Rajah to Jack. “Please sit at the end of the shoe line, with your back to the sun. Now we shall toss an anna... Heads...”

“Tails...” says Bahri, “I choose the side on Jack’s left. Now I toss again, heads I go in... Heads”

Bahri’s boys relax on the grass, rolling up their dhotis while Rajah arranges his team to form a loose curve across his side of the field, five or six yards inwards of the shoe line. His toes on his side of the line, Bahri tucks in his dhoti and warns Jack:

“Now you look and listen: I am going to step into Rajah’s camp. From the time I go over to the time I come back I must be saying ‘Kuppattikuppattikuppatti- kuppatti...’ without once catching my breath. If I touch one of Rajah’s men and come back still saying Kuppatti I score one, two if I touch two men and so on. If I get caught and held down until I can say no more Kuppatti Rajah scores one.

But if I manage to drag myself and touch the shoe line with the tip of a finger while still saying Kuppatti then I score for all of them that touched me. Right?.. here I go..."

Bahri takes a deep breath, steps over the shoes and begins to mumble 'Kuppattikuppatti...' while behaving like a cross-wired puppet. His legs shoot up both ways at once, his arms flail about, he dashes in sideways and backs out crosswired saying 'Kuppatti' all the time.

Rajah's men keep on the edge of the whirlwind, trying to draw him in while Rajah outflanks him. Then, over the Kuppatti, Jack hears the thud of Bahri's knuckles over someone's chest and sees the boy jump back and cross the line still mumbling 'Kuppatti.'

"One to Bahri," announces Jack.

"Gopi," breathes Bahri.

Gopi rushes into Rajah's camp to find the boys ready for him. Gopi is slight of build and squeals his Kuppatti. He runs out of wind and back home.

"No score," announces Jack.

"Suresh," orders Bahri.

Suresh is hefty. He barges into Rajah's group, turns about and charges back, shoulder forward. Rajah trips him down into a fresh dung cake and the five boys sit on his spine. Suresh's Kuppatti gurgle up steadily from the grass. His bulk allows him some jerks towards the line and his arm stretches out, a hand short of a shoe. Rajah twists the arm back. The Kuppatti ebb out to a falsetto. Jack hears an intake of breathlike a seal's.

"One all," says Jack, "Rajah's in."

As Rajah breathes in, Jack fills his own lungs, hoping to say Kuppatti as long as the boy keeps it up. But Rajah keeps prancing through Bahri's camp, touching three men, long after Jack, still as he sits, has run out of wind... Phew... Jack breathes out the new score:

"Bahri one, Rajah three."

Rajah's second man gets caught and sat upon.

"Bahri two, Rajah three, Babri's in."

But Bahri's last two men do not score and the game goes to Rajah:

"Bahri two and out, Rajah three."

“Would you like to stand-in the next game for Suresh?” Bahri asks Jack.

“Not yet, I can hardly breathe as a referee.”

... ..

“I am sick,” says Jil.

“What’s the matter?” asks Jack.

“Head and tummy, like morning sickness.” “Oh no” Jack turns pale.

“It can’t be,” says Jil, “must be some fever.” “Monsoon fever... I’ll ask Dr. Ghose..”

“It hurts.” Jil lies down on the hard bunk.

“I’ll go now,” says Jack.

... ..

“It really hurts now,” Jil sounds groggy. “How long have you been away?”

“Half an hour,” answers Jack. “Doctor was out.”

“What did he say?”

“Drink this.”

“... Whooah !”

There is a knock on the lane’s door. Jack opens it to face a little man in khaki, who holds out a parcel and a receipt book. Jack signs.

“Color slides from Bombay,” grunts Jack, shutting the door.

“Eh?” Jil yawns, “funny feeling... What was in that glass you gave me?”

“A powder,” answers Jack, “Doctor said it cures Monsoon fever in five minutes.”

“It does... Who was it the door?”

“Postman with our colorslides... Want to see them?” Jack fetches the little projector from the Put-put. It is dusty, having stayed under the floor boards since Bombay, but the bulb lights all right. When Jack returns Jil has called the kids down from the roof,

pulled the sacks over the windows and stretched her white petticoat as a screen across the door.

Jil and her kids admire themselves in Tamil land, shed a tear for Han's red bike and laugh at Josie climbing a tree Lanka lane.

Says Tlitsy: "Yesterday-long-time-ago, I saw a girl like that."

"We must give a show to Dr.Ghose," says Jil. "By the way could you trust me with twenty rupees?"

"What for?"

"That's a secret... Thank you, darling... Now I'll cook your supper... noodles and curds."

... ..

Curds being a chilly food, Jil always serves tea after them. While she pours the brew into the plastic bowls, a knock comes from the veranda door, a funny knock: Toc-toc-toc...'Pock, like Di-di-di-Dah. Jack switches off the light and half-opens the door...

"Come in," whispers Jack... "Come in quick... If any one drops in, you can always go up the roof..."

"I only came because you nearly made me talk before that Indian..."

"Shush," interrupts Jack, "come upstairs and have a cup of tea..."

Jack begins to walk up the stairs and the priest of Shakti follows him.

... ..

IX

LISTEN

It is pitch dark on the roof top but the tiles are still warm from the day's sun. The priest of Shakti lies down near the parapet, his eyes level with the top, watching the darkness around his shanty, ten feet below. Jil brings up two bowls ?" asks the priest.

"I'd like to know what you know," answers Jack. "You know nothing," says the priest.

"Then tell me."

"Why? You wouldn't understand anyway."

"Give me a chance..."

"You'd think I'm just a fool," says the priest, "a mad fool stuck in this mad hole."

"That would make two of us."

"May be, but you can get out. I can't."

"Money?"

"Money is nothing to me. I hiked seven thousand miles from London, walked four thousand miles around India without any money."

"I wish I was that smart."

"Slop kidding me, you only want my story."

"It sounds interesting," agrees Jack. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-one next month."

"Not bad... How did you get here?"

"I told you: I hiked. I got from London to Istanbul in two weeks. Then I took a wrong lift out of Izmir. I finished up walking the small roads beyond Eskishehir. I came to a village called Karaniye. Some rich peasant took me in, fed me dried figs and halwa. He looked pleased when I turned down some goat meat."

Next day he brought me an old fellow who spoke a mixture of French and English. He had been a prisoner in the First War. Wanted to know why I did not eat meat. I tried to explain I was vegetarian.

The fellow said 'tres bon.' He took me out through the orchards, saying 'très bon', all the time, meaning very good. It was not bad, rather pretty in a dry way, mostly figs and almonds. Back in the house I was given a large feed of haricot beans, 'fasuli' they call them, then more sweet stuff and fruits, even oranges. 'Très bon,' said the fellow.

There was a woman serving us, a girl really, though she wore a black hood. When she had a chance she looked at me as though was a bit of Rahat Lookoom. We had some of that stuff, very gooey, not as good as what I thought Turkish Delight ought to be. 'Très bon,' said the old boy, the farmer that is. He was picking up some French: '*très bon, chok iyil.*'

Then the old P.O.W. explained to me about the girl in black. She was the only child of the old bloke, 'tres bon' The poor thing was a one-day widow. Her husband had died after the wedding meal, too much goat meat, 'tres mauvais.' Nobody would marry her after that, even with her ten 'gürlugs' of orchards. Only maybe, a fellow that didn't eat meat and needn't be afraid of spooks because he had red hair.

I spilled some sweet coffee on my beard which was getting about three inches long. I said nothing. The girl kept looking at me like I was pistacchio halwa. I went to bed on a nice carpet spread over the dry beaten earth of the big room. I kept thinking of the look in the girl's eyes, of her fierce old father and the blunderbusses on the wall.

In the morning I had mare halwa and figs, then the girl brought some sort of curds. I turned that down. The old boy insisted and showed me how to scoop it up with my fingers. I shrugged, looked sorry, and tried a bit. Then I clawed at my shirt, rolled my eyes and began to move my mouth as if I shouted, only I didn't make a sound. When the P.O.W. was brought in, I never heard a thing he said. I was deaf and dumb. They put me on a donkey and left me on the main road with some figs.

In Ankara I was very lucky. A truckie gave me a real big lift. He was going to Lahore, non-stop, with a government cargo. He was

hard of hearing so I stayed dumb. We got there in twelve days and soon I arrived at an Ashram in the mountains.”

“Did you see much of the roads?”

“Terrible all over Iran, I couldn’t sleep for the bumps, but then, that was three years ago.”

“You were eighteen then, what made you do that fantastic trip?”

“That’s a long story: My father was an Irishman serving in India. when my mother died he took me back with him to a market-garden she had owned near Cardiff. He was a vegetarian and wanted everybody to be one, mostly his son. I was only a kid and the others used to laugh at me until I grew bigger than any of them and began to beat them up.

That proved vegetarians were better people than meat-eaters so I began to improve on my father’s ideas: if I could grow used to eating raw grasses, I would become the freest man in the world: free food every where. My father thought I overdid it so I went to see an aunt near London. She was a theosophist of some sort and I met an Hindu priest at her place. He told me all Hindus were vegetarians, that they lived happily and wisely, that India was my rightful place. I had a job in a vegetarian cafe, studied Yoga with the priest and, for a small fee he made me a Saddhu of the Kailash Order. I left as soon as I had saved my Channel fare.

During the trip I found out there were a lot of places without grass. It was autumn and I never saw a green thing from Saloniki to Delhi. But when I got to these mountains I felt very happy. The place is greener than Wales with a thousand new vegetables. Only, most of them were no good to eat.

Still, I was fairly happy in the Ashram for the first six months. Except I could not see any Yogis, real ones I mean, doing body lift and all that; I asked and walked about the mountains but I found no real Yoga. I also began to notice some things.... Oops, I think the moon is going to rise... I must go back to my shack...”

“Come again,” says Jack. “I have an idea where you could go... From what I know of you...”

“You know nothing,” cuts the priest. “Just let me be and good bye.”

“So long, I hope,” says Jack.

... ..

Jil is worried: There isn't a full-length mirror within miles and a mirror is what she needs most, right now. The little one she pinched from the Putput just shows her shoulders and face.

Jil has plaited her long brown hair on each side, interlocking a skein of matching silk into each plait. Urmila call these skeins choti, they end in a tassel which beats against Jil's hips when she walks. A satin tunic, split on the sides, sheathes her from neck to knees. Urmila called it a kamiz or kurta, the top part of a lady Punjabi dress. It is dark blue with a gold mesh and pink orchids in fine print.

The slight bulge under the waist of the tunic is the salwar, a bag of navy satin with a two yards waistband gathered by a cord. It drops in harem style to a stiff hem around Jil's ankles.

Over her plaits and shoulders Jil throws a gossamer of pale blue cashmere called anprnhi. She twiddles with the yard long ends. One over the head, maybe, the other across her chest.

"Oh for a mirror," cries Jil, "before Jack sees me."

What is the Brute going to say? Jil sticks a little red disk above her nose. It is the tiniest sort of bindbi, the Indian lady's caste mark. This one is made of stiff like scotch tape, very bright and ruby like. It cost eight annas, all that was left from Jack's twenty rupees.

... ..

Jack drifts down river at an amazing pace. Swimming in the Ganges is mostly drifting. Then one must walk back across the hot flagstones of the shore temples. The water is icy and milky grey from the rain on the mountains. Better that way, perhaps.

"Do they still throw bodies in the river?"

"Only their ashes," answers Bahri, "except for babies and very old saints. But Ganga's bosom is vast. Swimming in it is good for your soul, they say, and for the body, I think. I do it every day."

"I think I've had enough for a while," pants Jack, "besides I must see the doctor and fetch my wife from Urmila's house."

"Let's drift down to your place," agrees Bahri.

“I’ll take you to the doctor’s surgery in the village. He will be nearly finished with the afternoon patients... Now swim in, if you don’t want to miss the Daksha steps... These... Here.”

“Hey,” Jack exclaims, “the Shakti priest has gone!”

“Over there.” Bahri points to the third pillar of the arcade. “He had to shift his premises: Hanuman’s place is getting a new coat of whitewash.”

“So it is,” says Jack, “will it be long?”

“It’ll be dry by tomorrow night, Hanuman pays well and gets quick service.”

“Who is he?”

“The King of the Monkeys in the days of Lord Rama father of the Indian Race. And a god of strength he built a bridge from India to Ceylon for the army of Rama to go over... By the way, did you see any ruins in the sea when you came that way?”

“... Ahem,” says Jack, “there was a coral bank which the maps call Adam’s Bridge.”

“Don’t tell Rajah it’s a coral bank... It is the ruin of Rama’s bridge. It proves our fathers were better engineers and so on.”

“Of course,” says Jack. “What does Rajah study?”

“Engineering and Palmistry... here,” Bahri. stops in front of a shop, strangely clean and bare in a row of grain merchants.

The doctor sits behind a desk, facing the street. The room is white and empty except for a washstand at the back, a chart of the human body on the left wall and a patient on the right.

The patient is female and young. Hiding her face under the end of her sari, she talks in shrill Hindi. Now and then the doctor stops her with a question, without looking at her.

“Hullo Mr. Jack,” he shouts above the woman’s speech. “I’ll be finished in a minute... Take this newspaper and turn to page three...”

Jack squats on the front steps, with Bahri looking over his shoulder:

INDUS FLOODS SMITE ROADS

Quetta cut off for month

“Looks like you’ll stay here a little longer,” says Bahri.

“We don’t mind.”

“You ought to come up to Dehra Dun. It is a healthier place and more... comfortable...”

“Your turn,” shouts the doctor, “where does it hurt?”

“Tootie has diarrhoea,” answers Jack.

“Too much q’tahl and dahl,” says the doctor, “buy her some rusks and give her this powder.”

“Thank you, doctor.... Now another thing: could you come to my place to morrow night, if it doesn’t rain, half an hour after sunset?”

“I could...is it a party?”

“Yes, and a surprise.”

... ..

The sun has set behind the Pipul tree and the Monsoon clouds, pink for an instant, are turning grey again. Soon they will be pitch black. The moon should not rise for a couple of hours at least.

Jack steadies his little projector on the roof’s edge, facing Hanuman’s wall, Two flat bricks will hold it tight at the right angle. More bricks weigh on the flex so Jil can squat on the kit-bag without pulling everything down.

Right now Jil is on the veranda, helping Urmila and Kusum serve the tit-bits and the tea. Everyone has admired her Punjabi dress. Everyone, even the doctor, calls her Bhabhi Ji, which means ‘Big sister honorable,’ a title reserved to the wife of the family’s elder brother.

The children are asleep in the tower and Jil wholly enjoys being hostess to such a party. The ladies do keep apart at the back of the veranda but Jil remembers it was often the same in Australia.

“All set,” whispers Jack, “just watch you don’t trip over the flex.”

Bahri posts himself by the switch, Jack sits near the corner pillar, holding a stone in his right hand. He knocks on the pillar. Bahri switches off the light and shouts: “Jay Hanuman.”

On the roof, Jil slides in the first view: from the wall of Hanuman’s shrine an ape-like creature beams at the audience.

The ladies squeal, the kuppatti boys hold their breath, Pandit Ji mutters something in Sanskrit.

“A Koala Bear, is it not?” asks the doctor.

“That’s right,” approves Jack, “this Australian creature has come all this way to say Namastey to Hanuman. It is a vegetarian beast, eating only gum leaves. Also, it is non-violent like all Australian animals...’

Jack knocks and the Koala makes room for a Kangaroo, Wallabies, Kookaburras, Platypusses and Emus appear in turn while he explains the slides, Jack leans out of the veranda to glance along the arcade. In the glow of a lighter picture he can see the Shakti priest standing by the third pillar. Jack knocks his stone against the brick and raises his voice:

“And here is where they live...” the wall turns blue under a scene of cliffs and misty valleys, “... in the gum tree forests of the Blue Mountains, fifty miles from Sydney and yet quite deserted... On this picture you can see a small patch, lighter than the surrounding bush. From where the photo was taken it takes two days to walk there. There is an abandoned hut with a tank of cool water, a garden growing wild, with potatoes, vines, fruit trees, wild bees and even wild cattle. Anybody who cared to stay there could claim it for his own.”

“An Indian would die of loneliness,” objects the doctor. So would most Australians, but...” Jack raises his voice ‘... it would be ideal for some holy man in search of peace.”

The show lasts a good hour. After the views of Ceylon and India the ladies want another look at the Koala Bear.

“Every family in Kankhal will want to see your pictures,” says the doctor. “Better come and see me tomorrow: I’ll give you some powder to help you through all the meals.

Bahri and Rajah wait for the ladies to finish clearing up. Before taking his ‘wife’ and his sister away, Bahri goes all sad:

“Tomorrow, I shall go to Dehra Dun but I shall not forget you and I’ll be back by the week-end.

... ..

‘Toc-toc-toc.... Tock’ goes the door to the roof-top. Jack rushes up.

“I’m sorry to trouble you this late,” says the Shakti priest, “but I wanted to let you know one thing and ask another. First: I’m not interested in your Swiss Robinson Paradise. Second, just out of curiosity: How

did you intend to get me there?”

“No point in telling you if you don’t want to go,” answers Jack. “Sit down and tell me what keeps you here... apart from money and documents.”

“Nothing keeps me here or anywhere,” says the priest. “At twenty I have been in places the likes of you don’t dream about. I told you I left the Ashram to find real Yoga. That took me to South India, walking and begging, deaf and dumb most of the time. I couldn’t be bothered learning all the dialects on the way. In Rameshwaram they told me to try Pondicherry. In Pondi, they sent me towards Orissa.

I ended up in Assam during a rise of the Brahmaputra. For days I tagged on to a group of pilgrims, wading shoulder-deep through miles after miles of flooded plains, between two walls of the tallest trees I have ever seen. By then, I knew there was no such thing as real Yoga. One day I left the others and walked into the woods. I was quite excited, as in a fever. I knew I had to get beyond human reach to find myself among the gods.

I was right. I knew it when I came on two tiger cubs playing together and I was not scared. One of them looked at me for three seconds without even letting go of the other’s tail. I walked on to a small clearing and laid down to sleep and to look at the stars. Early morning, a bear came to sit by me. He was brown and about six feet long. He sat close, looked pleasantly silly and scratched himself. Then he was rude on my yellow robe and went off.

After that I wanted to sleep in a tree but the monkeys made such a fuss that I couldn’t shut an eye. I went back to my clearing but, on the fourth night, I felt something cold on my chest. I never moved. At dawn a snake slid off me, a black and yellow chap, real pretty. In the end, I found a river, running shallow on a bed of gravel. A slab of rock stuck out in the middle

with a root growing over it like a twisted cross. There was just enough room to rest my head, That was fine. I laid there day and night, looking at the stars and thinking of many things. When the

sun shone on my face the water was cool on my body and I felt just like a plant. Then I knew I was right. Right against my father, right against the Welsh kids, right against the fools who set me chasing Yoga from Pondi to Darjeeling. I was right: for one thing I wasn't hungry although I hadn't eaten for a week, except some of the water weeds which grew around my rock..

One morning the jungle went quiet and I knew that men were coming. The soldiers found me on my rock and, when I smiled my contempt, one of them went down on his knees and face, groveling into the water. The sergeant, had to kick him up but he was nice to me. He tore off the twisted root, keeping only a small piece for himself. I walked for three days and found a train.

They put me on it. and it brought me this way. Of course I was deaf and dumb and yet I felt that my story was traveling with me. In the train, people kept wanting to touch my twisted root. They gave me food and even coins so I would let them. I never had to beg since then and, even in this temple, I do not really beg. In fact, I was quite happy until your child bumped into me.”

“I... I'm sorry,” Jack whispers, “very sorry.”

“Do you think I was right?”

“... Right?... Oh yes... Of course you were right?... Really, I must...think about it. Come again and I'll tell you...”

... ..

July 18th

Dear Mr.Jack

Today is Guru Purnima, the last full moon in July on which date we worship our Teachers, or Gurus. Rajah, I and others are going to our musick teacher at 10 am. We shall make musick, do Tilak, give presents. Come quick, bring camera-photo, please Guru Ji. and learn about Guru Pua, intimate Indian Festival.

... ..

The doctor is ready, looking like Julius Caesar in a white dhoti and linen stole. On the way to the Guru's house he buys a basket of fruit and drops three silver rupees on the bottom of it.

"Present for Guru Ji," he explains. "The ceremony is simple: we shall sing some songs, do Tilak, exchange presents, sing more songs and go."

"Do Tilak'?" queries Jack.

"You shall see."

The music room is whitewashed, well lit and furnished with a camp bed, a rattan mat and three instruments: a yard long mandolin, called tampura, a fingerdrum the size and shape of a chamber pot, the tabla and a portable organ called harmonium.

"Harmonium?" queries Jack, "surely that is a latin name?"

"Perhaps," says the Guru who looks like Cato the Elder. Rajah would make a fair Brutus until he bursts into song, tickling the tampura while the doctor thumps the tabla and the Guru hums on the harmonium.

Jack winces with anguish, then he remembers a bloodcurdling dirge he once picked up on the wireless. The announcer called it a Jewish Passover Lament. it had a little more go than this.

"Our finest Indian love song," whispers Rajah. Then the doctor fetches a brass tray like a collection plate laden with odd things, threads, lollies, red paste, tiny statues and a black candle. He swings it round the Guru a couple of times then dips a thumb into the red paste and marks the old man's forehead with a large blob. Guru Ji retaliates by blobbing back at his former pupil. Then, horror of horrors, he beckons to Jack.

"Tilak," whispers Dr. Ghose as the Brute submits. After which, another wail begins, like the Mock-Turtle's "Soup Song," less the rythm.

"A stirring march of India," whispers Rajah.

Jack busies himself with his camera, hoping to be forgotten and to forget the stuff which dries on his forehead, pulling his skin together as would a boil. The pupils hand out their presents,

laying them down before the Guru who collects the silver rupees, blesses the fruit and dishes it out again. Jack gets a slice of pawpaw.

“Now for a sad parting song,” whispers Rajah, beginning what sounds like a Zulu Wax’ Dance, less the tune.

On the way home Jack carries his slice of pawpaw in the left hand, discreetly rubbing his forehead with his right finger.

“What did you make of it’?” asks Dr. Ghose.

“Indian music is too much for me,” admits Jack, “but I liked the pretty doings. Everyone seemed to have a good time for a small outlay. Was there a deeper meaning to it’?”

“Only for those who care to seek one,” answers the doctor. “Few Indians do. They enjoy the pretty doings, as you call them, and feel good about being together to praise the Lord.”

“Fair enough, but then why do so many Westerners go the deep end about Hinduism?”

“Very few do, mostly old ladies to whom it does no harm anyway...”

“What about Yoga, though?”

“An excellent gymnastic,” the doctor speaks with finality.

“...how are you doing with Tootie’s tummy trouble’?”

“We are all catching it from her.”

“Indian food is too weak for you... What you need is some yeasty stuff like Western bread.”

“That’s a tall order in Kankhal, isn’t ... Hullo ... I mean Namastey, Pandit Ji.”

“Namastey, I have been seeking you everywhere,” puffs the Pandit. “An American is asking for you.”

... ..

PROCEED

Brown as ever, he sits in a rickshaw by the Western Gate, where the Putput waited for Pandit Ji, four weeks ago.

“What?” says Jack, “not walking?”

“I twisted my ankle,” answers Joe. B. Walker. “I was stopping at a hotel in Jwalapur when I heard about white folks living here. I came to look you over.”

“Can you walk sixty yards?”

“Sure.” Joe hands a rupee to his rickshaw wallah and follows Jack down the side lane.

“Hi Ya, little machine,” says he, patting the Putput’s windshield, “I wish I had you now.”

Jil opens the door and says it’s a pleasure but there is no meat for dinner.

“You’d be lucky,” says Joe, “I haven’t had a bite since Delhi... How do the kids manage?”

Tootie answers that by jumping on Joe’s sore foot in an effort to grab his brown shorts.

“Say, you got a swell place here, all to yourselves.” “Jealous?” asks Jil.

“Well...” answers Joe, “my hotel stinks and charges me five rupees a day. The food is terrible. I wouldn’t mind a room of my own if I had some cooking things.”

“How long would you stay?” queries Jack.

“A week or two may be, until my foot gets O.K. I could learn some Hindi and make friends in this holy spot. They might help me find what I’m looking for...”

“How did you eat so far?” asks Jil, peeling a potato.

“Railway canteens, hotels and the like,” answers Joe. “It’s beginning to tell on my gizzard. You know, I nearly died of ulcers two years ago.”

“Go on,” says Jack, “how old would you be’?”
“I’m forty-two.”
“You’re kidding,” protests Jil. “Thirty at the most.”
“That’s how it is,” insists Joe. “I reckon I got a new life, when the doctor gave me up I went to see a healer in Ashland. A nice old woman who did it by touch. After two months I felt fine. She said I had good hands and I should study healing to cure others.”
“What was your line before?” asks Jil.
“Lumber,” answers Joe, “... Well I studied in books and found out about the things they do in India: body- lift, snake-bite cures and all. The old lady said I ought to go and see. I sold my house and flew over...”
“So,” Jack sighs, “you’re after Yoga.”
“I know what you think,” says Joe, “but you’re wrong. I’m not after the fakir stuff but I reckon there is no smoke without fire... In Calcutta, they sent me down to Pondicherry but the fellow there was dead. His wife was carrying on with no end of nonsense. But I reckon the real place is somewhere up from here, in the mountains.”
“How about some stew?” asks Jil.
“Stew will do for now,” answers Joe, beginning to chew his q’tahl, slowly, methodically. “Not bad,” says he, “but I could do with some bread.”
“So could we,” sighs Jack, “the doctor was just telling me we ought to eat some yeasty stuff but he never said where to get it.”
“What do the Indians make with their flour?” asks Joe.
“Halwa, chapatti, pancakes and other lumpy things,” answers Jil.
“Ever tried sour dough?”
“Sour dough?”
“Yep, sour dough, good old pioneer sour dough. I saw my poor mother make it during the Depression. Say, what’s in that old can?”
“Used to be condensed milk,” answers Jil.
“Good, put in a handful of flour, some water, a spoonful of sugar and a pinch of salt. Mix it up and, let it stand until tomorrow. It’s sure to rise. Then you start some cakes with it, fried cakes if you haven’t got an oven. Keep some sour dough for the next day and so on...”

“Will it really rise?” Jil doesn’t believe a word. “Just you try it, sister, and if you want it to go faster, add a drop of sour milk... Now I must skedaddle. Thanks a lot for the stew and cheerio.”
“You come back tomorrow,” says Jack, walking Joe up the lane, “I bet we find a room for you near our place.”

... ..

Toc-toc-toc. Tock

“Who was that fellow?” asks the priest.

“An American,” answers Jack, “in search of Yoga.” “You must let me talk to him.”

“Not on your life... You wouldn’t do any good, he’s got to find out for himself. Besides, haven’t you got enough trouble of your own?”

Jil brings two bowls of tea and goes back to put the kids to bed.

“Thank you, Madam,” says the priest, “I had forgotten tea could taste so nice... Do you know, when I saw that fair kid of yours I remembered myself as a little boy...

Before you came I hadn’t seen a really white face since I left that village in Turkey, where I saw the girl in black... Kibar was her name... Kibar.”

“Would you like to go away from here?”

“I think so... the more I look at this place, the more I dislike it. To think I was taking it for granted... with all that filth and meanness...”

“Easy now, old boy, there are some nice people...”

“May be, but mostly a lot of crooks. Take this racket of the thread around the tree. The poor women walk miles from their villages with that red stuff squeezing their middle. Then they get giddy trying to fix the tree, like the old god got fixed. Well, the priests unwind it at night and sell it back to them in the villages.”

“Everyone has to live.”

“Oh yes, that’s what they say...they never kill a thing, not even their vermin. Monkeys were no exception until six months ago. They ran all over the place eating most of the crops but the Indians would rather starve than say boo to them. Then, one day, we saw a crowd of city wallahs come running up the trees. Starving scarecrows from Delhi, so mean that only the teeth

showed in their faces. They caught monkeys by the hundred, poor trustful little animals. They told everybody it was for the beasts' own good. The sacred apes would come to no harm, they would go to a country which was short of them, where they'd be happier. Soon there wasn't a monkey left. But the men kept coming back, growing fatter every day, rolling up on their rickshaws, so plump that you couldn't see the teeth in their faces. That's when, Hanuman's shrine began to do so well with all the fatsoes pouring rupees into it. I couldn't see why the Ape-god should get all the trade until a couple of them came round the corner talking. They were complaining about monkeys getting scarce, even in the hills, and how Americans still paid only two rupees per head... So there... they were blackmailing Hanuman into letting them catch monkeys for some horrible experiments."

"Polio vaccine," says Jack, "a good thing too... Talking of Americans, were there any in that Ashram of yours up mountain?"

"I never saw any white people but there was an old Indian who spoke some English. He said he had taught Yoga to Westerners."

"How far is that Ashram?"

"Three days up from Rishikesh, but surely..."

"I'm not going, but I know somebody who might want a guide...might even pay for it..,"

"I couldn't take a chap up there... It isn't fair." "Remember the fellow must find out for himself. The sooner the better...then I could write a letter to a friend I have in Delhi. He knows a lot of people. He'd get your papers up to date and he might find you some transport... providing you kept your feelings to yourself...about this place, I mean." "I shall be deaf and dumb,"

"We'll see," says Jack.

... ..

The sky is grey again and the roof top shows a couple of wet patches from last night's rain. Jack had stretched the plastic tablecloth, aslant between two walls, with a jar under the lower corner, He got about two gallons of water which: can be drunk unboiled.

Jil is doing the breakfast dishes, stopping every now and then to see if the sour dough will rise. The roof will be cool enough for the children to play until it rains again. Jil will stay with them, do some mending and watch the temple's life.

It's amazing what she can see from up there. Last night she couldn't believe her eyes. A beautiful lady went down the steps into the Ganga, dressed in the most precious sari, pink and gold, rings on her fingers and a diamond in the side of her nose. Two servants helped her down until she was thigh deep. Then she dipped under, bobbed up twice and came out a complete wreck.

And of this Jil is certain: she didn't have her rings on when she went back up the steps. Some sacrifice!

This morning the temple is quiet and the bathing steps are deserted except for two men who are paddling with water up to their loincloths... Funny they seem to be shifting sideways without moving their legs, as though their feet could crawl of their own will on the bottom... The water is too cloudy for Jil to see how they do it but the bigger fellow is really agile: he just bent down to touch his toes without bending his knees...

Jil sits up against the railings: as the fellow's hand came up to his loincloth, she saw something sparkle in the water...too bright for a fish...much too bright for a pebble...

"Ah well," sighs Jil, "everyone must live."

... ..

Jack holds Tootie up so she can see the inside of the frying pan. Tlitsy stands on a chair. Jil picks up a spoonful of sour dough and drops it into the boiling palm oil. It sizzles, it splutters...and it swells...

Tlitsy goes to answer a knock at the lane's door: Joe.... Hooray for Joe !

"Just in time," says Jack, "to try your own recipe with some stuffed peppercorns. Then we'll go and see Pandit Ji about your room, that is if you still want to live around here."

"Sure, I'll stay for a while... Guess what I have in this here bag." Joe pats the U.S.Army satchel which hangs on his hip.

“What?...can’t you guess?” he unzips the bag to show some white balls.

“Cockleberries,” crows Joe, “two dozen: of them. I got them for two rupees in Jwalapur.”

“You have broken the temple’s law.” Jack protests.

“Blast the law,” answers Joe, “everybody must live, especially your kids.”

“If you do that sort of thing,” warns Jack, “you’ll have to board with us and share the guilt.”

“That’ll be a pleasure,” says Joe.

... ..

Pandit Ji has found a room for Joe in the temple of saraswati: two square yards of beaten earth under a cube of whitewash for two rupees a week. But the window alone is worth the money.

Gauga dashes against the temple then whirls back past Joe’s window trying to dig herself a new bed through the village. Huge boulders line the banks of the whirlpool to keep the water in check. Squatting on the biggest pebble like a wren on an emu’s egg, an old woman dangles a bamboo pole over the eddies. “What?” grunts Joe in mock surprise, “fishing in the holy Ganges?”

“Catching driftwood,” corrects Pandit Ji, “from the only place in Kankhal where the water is slow enough. She will soon have the price of a meal. Then she’ll make room for another woman... Everyone must live.”

... ..

“Let’s go for a walk along the Ghats,” says Doctor Ghose, locking up his surgery.

“Ghats?” exclaims Jack, “I thought...”

“River Ghats,” explains the doctor, “are the banks of holy rivers. There are Bathing Ghats like the one in Dashka’s temple, Burning Ghats where we dispose of my unlucky patients, Suttee Ghats, where, in the old days, widows were burnt alive. We shall go and see a group of those.”

Cemented platforms, the height and size of a double bed, rise from the grassy bank between two shore temples. On each Suttee Ghat, a row of three to five headstones face the river.

“They look rather well kept,” comments Jack, pointing to a newly painted one.

“They still serve,” answers the doctor, “... Look.”

A young woman kneels on one of the platforms, building a little pile of twigs over a piece of charcoal. She blows on it until it catches fire. Two crows land on the tallest headstone, watching her with interest.

“A widow,” explains Dr.Ghose, “burning herself in effigy. Now she will put some grain in front of each stone as a gift to the souls of the women who were actually burnt there.”

There are four headstones in the row. As the woman busies herself with the third one the crows sneak past her elbow to eat the grain in front of the first two.

“Couldn’t she chase those birds?” asks Jack.

“Ah well,” sighs the doctor, “everyone must live.”

... ..

Joe is licking his fingers, sticky from the guava jelly spread over the sour-dough cakes.

“I’ll be sorry to leave you folks,” says he.

“When will you be going?” asks Jil.

“I don’t know,” answers Joe, “but soon. Nobody can teach me Hindi, they’re all learning American from me. I heard about a Yoga Ashram up river.”

I know a fellow who could take you there,” says Jack, “for ten dollars and his grub for three days.” “That’s a bit stiff for these parts,” complains Joe. “The man is Irish,” says Jack, “he spent all he had learning Yoga. He needs the money to go home.”

“Well...,” says Joe, “I guess ten dollars won’t break the bank. Where is the fellow?”

“You might meet him if you stay in for a while.

He is a priest in the temple, sometimes the comes after work to talk with me on the rooftop.” “Gosh,” says Joe, “some body-lift.”

“He walks along the temple’s wall ,“ explains Jil, “...will you have some tea?”

Joe pulls six white cubes out of his short pocket.

"I brought you some lump-sugar," says he, "I'd sure like some coffee."

"I haven't got any....but wait, would some bush coffee do you?"

"Anything you say..."

Jil puts the milk can over the fire and stirs the embers, leaving the poker among the coals. When the milk is hot, Jil stands two lumps of sugar on a fork above the can. Then she touches the sugar with the red-hot poker. In a cloud of smoke the sugar turns caramel and runs into the milk.

"Not bad at all," admires Joe, "... I'll sure be sorry to loose you folks..." Toc-toc-toc. . .Tock."

"There comes your guide," says Jack, going upstairs.

".... Be sure to keep your voice down."

Good evening," Joe whispers hoarsely, "My name is Joe Brown Walker."

"I'm Pat Daly," murmurs the priest, "I'll take you to the Ashram on one condition: that you go straight home if you can't learn Yoga up there."

"Easy," says Joe, "we'll talk about that on the way... Would you like your ten dollars now?"

"Well,"sighs Pat Daly, "everyone must live..." "JAY HANUMAN," shouts a voice from the veranda,

"Jay Hanuman !" Loud knocks ratthe on the kitchen door.

"Be quiet, you'll wake the children," shouts Jack, then he whispers: "You two run along the temple's roof. See you tomorrow..."

"I've just arrived back from Dehra Dun," says Bahri. "I came to you as soon as I had saluted my father and wife. I have news which should please you." The boy stops, quite out of breath, which must not happen often to a Kuppatti player of his class.

"Really?" says Jack.

"Really. You are invited by Mr. Jay Shankar Singh who owns the Art School of Dehra Doon. I told him about your color pictures. He said would you like to live at his place until the end of the Monsoon?"

He would take you into his family, Punjabi style, so you could give slide shows to all the colleges who send students to his school."

“How many colleges are there?”
“Half a dozen... Then you could go to the big schools up in the Simla mountains. They’d keep you three or four days each for a slide show to the pupils. You’d really see the best of India and live like kings.” “You make it sound very tempting.”
“Well,” says Bahri, “everyone must live.”
“How much longer will the rains last?”
“Two or three weeks at the most,” answers Bahri. “They are abating already and the road to Dehra is open.”

17. And the flood, reads Jil’s little book, was forty days upon the earth.

... ..

Dear Mr. Bose,

Kankhal, August 7th.

We are leaving Kankhal tomorrow after staying in your little tower just two days short of six weeks. We have had a happy time, the children are fine and we dont know how to thank you for this wonderful break.

We shall stay for a while at the Art Centhe in Dehra. Perhaps we shall see you there or read from you about Pat Daly. Hope he’s no trouble, Bleas you.

J & J.Monty.

... ..

14. And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dry.

... ..

Dehra Dun, August .27th.

Dear Bahri,

We are leaving Dehra tomorrow after being in Mr. Singh's house for three weeks without finding a minute to thank you for getting us here. The children speak Punjabi and Jil knows how to cook Punjabi food. I have given sixteen slide shows.

We shall do a tour of the hills schools and go up to Simla to test the Putput before taking her away from this friendly country. If you know what happened to Joe, write G.P.O. Quetta, Pakistan. Jay Hanuman.

J&J Monty

... ..

18. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife...

... ..

...--S-T-O-P--, spells a green, white and orange barrier across the Great Trunk Road. A large Sikh, wearing black glasses to match his beard and offset his turban, stands by the door of a white bungalow marked "Checking Office."

"This way please," says he. "How many of you?" "two adults and two children," answers Jack.

"Five cups of tea, and biscuits," orders the Sikh from a bearer, "and two more chairs."

Jack hands out his documents over the four cups of tea while Jil manages to control the children's appetite for biscuits. The big Sikh tries to look severe behind his row of rubber stamps.

"More sugar?... Ahem... You are two days late on your visa."

"Sorry," says Jack, "it was the floods."

"I see... Ahem... Your Exchange Sheet shows you spent two hundred dollars."

“That is correct.”

“Correct’?...to travel over two thousand miles..”

“Hardly twenty-five gallons of gas,” says Jack.

“... And feed four people,” insists the bearded giant, “for four months and two days?”

“That’s right,” answers Jack, “you see, India. is a generous place. For instance the schools of Chandigarh, Sanawar, Simla and Jullundur boarded us for three days each against a showing of our color-slides.”

“Did you get to Simla in that machine?”

“That was easy. You see, if anything went wrong anywhere we could always coast down to Kalka.”

“Any trouble this side of Kalka?”

“You mean that place where the river runs across the road? It was only a foot deep and so clear we could see the bottom, we nearly ran over a fish.’

“I see you have been there,” laughs the big Sikh.

“Congratulations... Here you are...”

Bang goes a rubber stamp onto Jack’s passport:

GOVERNMENT of
INDIA
=Checking Offices= :
SEPT. 16
Exit by Attari. Road
AMRITSAR
---- N° 576

XI

PUSH

“Lahore depresses me,” complains Jil. She could not find a thing to buy in the bazaar, apart from dried fruit.

“It does look hot and bothered,” agrees Jack. The place needs a coat of paint, the sidewalk could do with a stroke of the broom, cars are few, scooters unknown and the people know nothing of the road to Quetta. What’s more, they don’t care.

“Must be the heat,” sighs Jil. “Let’s get to the rivers.

... ..

At Muzzaffargarh the road turns South, and runs for sixty miles half-way between the Chenab and the Indus. By rights the place ought to be green, cool and fertile.

The plain is hot, grey and sterile, a bed of cinders fostering the meanest forms of life: thorns, tamarisks and a kind of palm which seems to grow neither dates, nuts nor toddy pots. Some men shuffle about the villages, few and far between. So dull they look, and so withdrawn into themselves that they might as well not be there.

“Something is wrong with this place,” grunts Jack but Jil does not answer. She is asleep, all tangled up with her kids, in best Nullarbor fashion.

“Something is wrong.” Jack finds a new reason to think so in the queer look of the buffaloes. The Indus buff wears a black fringe between the horns, a roguish tilt on the snout and the periwinkle-blue, slightly bulging eyes of Jack’s favorite movie dancer.

“Hi Liil, Hi Liili,” sings Jack, “Hi Lo...” and behold: there is no road anymore, only a couple of dozen men shifting basketfuls of grey sand up and down an embankment.

“Wake up,” shouts Jack to Jil, ...and push.”

Jil sinks into the dust up to her knees and begins to push while the back wheels churn the fluffy stuff up her skirts.

“But why can’t some of these fellows give us a hand?” moans Jil. Like grey ghosts the men file up and down, dropping their little loads where the road ought to be. No good trying to catch their eye, there is no soul behind their stare.

“I don’t think they can see us,” says Jack.

“Why not?” asks Jil, pushing savagely.

“Because,” answers Jack, “they need all their strength to keep alive.”

The sand pit lasts three hundred yards and then the Putput gets a wheel-hold onto a hard but uneven surface, dusty brown like a fallen brick wall.

“What’s this’?” wonders Jack, inspecting the new horror. A man in khaki shorts, no doubt an overseer, answers pleasantly:

“The brick road from here to Ubauro, a bit rough pextaps, but flood-proof. You’ll find no more wash-outs this side of the Indus.”

... ..

At fifteen miles an hour the Putput rattles over the brick road like a donkey load of walnuts. Just before noon on the third day out of Lahore, Jack faces a new disaster. The clutch puller sticks out of the gear case. Its covering nut has worked loose and fallen away.

“I haven’t a spare,” moans Jack, “and yet I must keep the dust out of the works. Let me see your lipstick case.”

Jil passes it over with protests. It will not fit the hole, Sweating under the noonday sun, Jack tries

a thimble, a plastic syringe, an aspirin tube. Nothing will fit...

“I can see a big house,” shouts Tlitsy, “with a cross on top of it,”

“A cross?” grunts Jack, “...in this Allah-forsaken hole?”

Tlitsy is right, of course, and Jack finds a lane-way which takes the Putput to the shaded yard of a Roman mission.

“*Cosa volete?*” asks an old father, trustful as a Capitoline goose.

Jack begins to explain he would like a Clutch-Pufler-Cover-Dome-Nut for Scootovan, Model 57, when a tenor voice bursts in from the shaded room behind the old priest.

“Come in,” roars the voice, “Father Nonno does not bite.. I am Brother Pio and glad to see you.”

Brother Pio is big, red and round, the junior partner in this two-man mission lost in its two million acres parish.

“We haven’t got a thing,” says he cheerfully, “not a thing except these walls and furniture.”

This isn’t quite true. On the dining-room table Jack spots an aluminium pepper shaker with a screw top that might just fit the thread of his clutch case... and so it does, to a hair’s breadth.

“May be,” protests Father Nonno, “but...”

“I give it to you,” booms Brother Pio, “It is the work of Providence.” Which is quite true, as there is no Scootovan agency from here to Teheran. Dizzily happy, Jack begins to thank the Fathers.

“Stay for lunch,” orders Brother Pio, “we have a fish and some yams.”

The dining room is cool and dimly lit. Over the fish and fried yams, the Father explains the plight of his mission, the roads destroyed by floods and the despair of the people, ruined by one of the worse Monsoons in history followed by the hottest autumn in years.

Jack hates to go into the flaming afternoon but he must let the dear old Father take his afternoon nap. Especially as the children, cool and well fed, make enough noise to wake a dead saint. As Jil goes out, shading her eyes from the glare, Father Nonno returns from his quarters with a present for her. Its a fur coat, a full-length dream of astrakhan, heavy but soft to the touch.

“Sent by a missions 3supporter,” explains the Father.

“Would you like it’?”

“I’m afraid we have’t room to carry it,” sighs Jil broken-hearted,

... ..

Over Sukkur the sun drops from the muggy sky into the muddy water of the Indus. On the Bungalow’s veranda Jack looks at his pretty colored map of Pakistan. Tomorrow’s route is a red line which bisects a green triangle between the Kalat Ranges in brownt, the Marri hills in pink and a pale blue scroll marked ‘Indus Riv.’ Apex of the triangle is the Bolan Passd, dark brown

above the black letter town of Sibi. Blue squiggles wind down from the hills into the triangle. Rivers no doubt, but why don't they join the Indus instead of ending miserably in a dotted line, miles from anywhere? Jack does not like the look of the place, nor its name:

KACHHI

... ..

"Daddy, I can see nothing." The little voice quavers with wonderment. Never in all his travels has Tlitsy seen so much of nothing. Nothing but the road, narrow and straight over the earth, naked and flat. The color of nothing is sandy grey, turning to silver in the distance but even Tlitsy can tell a mirage. And yet there has been some water in the Kachhi, lots and lots of it, not so long ago. When it dried up the earth broke into six-sided scallops, the size and thickness of soup plates. A large-scale job, regular as honeycomb, over thousands of acres, enough to make a fellow loose his faith in Old Nature's commonsense. And here goes that silly river which gets nowhere, small wonder. It's just a trail of gravel swinging across the plain with no serious purpose other than to destroy the road, which it does only too well. Jil pushes and Jack pulls while a gritty breeze prickles their legs and sandpapers their eyeballs. The kids trot alongside then stop to play a novel game. They stack up the scallops of earth until the pile is Tootie high and topples down with a dry clatter.

"Come here, you monsters, shouts Jil when the Putput is back on the road,

"That was more fun than bottle caps," says Tlitsy. Jack doesn't think so. Every four or five miles bring a new wash-out, sandy or dusty, gravelly or seafloppy, long and shallow or deep and short. This infernal diversity begins to weigh on Jack's tummy... There is bound to be one that the Putput will not manage. Then what? Jil keeps quiet and, by five o'clock, the children haven't said a word for over an hour.

"I'm hungry," admits Tlitsy at last.

"Too hot to eat," snaps theBrute. The truth is that Jack's stomach is taut with worry... Oh, to be out of the Kachhi.

“Mountains,” says Tlitsy. Very faint in the hazy distance, they darken to a sombre pink. Then a green patch dotted with white squares: Sibi.

“I’m hungry too,” says Jack, “breakfast was a long time ago.”

... ..

The chowkidar of Sibi Bungalow has thirteen eggs for sale. They feel warm to Jil’s hand but then so does everything in Sibi. The Brat sniffs the eggs, one by one before she mixes them with her last tin of baked beans.

She works on the sill of a window shut tight against the grit from outside. No sooner had the Putput stopped than a dust storm rose from the Kachhi, blotting out the mountains and turning the sunset into a blizzard of gold-dust.

“Very pretty,” says Jil, “but I wouldn’t like to be out there.”

“Don’t worry,” answers Jack, “tomorrow we shall climb six thousand feet up the Bolan, nearly as high as Simla. Remember how green that was?”

... ..

“Good bye, Kachhi, see you no more.” Jack leans out of the Putput for a last look at the plain, deadly quiet in the early sun. Ahead, the bills are growing sharper with every turn of the wheels. Their real color is sandy brown with blotches of grey near the crests.

The ghost river of the Bolan shows the way through a dent in the brown cliff. Trustfully, the road follows it between sheer walls of rock, topped with boulders the size of skyscrapers. Green pools stagnate under the overhang of the sharper bends, and yet there is no grass to be seen.

“Ah well,” says Jack, “we haven’t started climbing.” The road misses a blind corner and begins to rise aslant a fantastic slope, a sort of tilted Kachhi which seems to last for hours.

“This place is built on a big scale,” comments Jil unhappily. Brought up to think the world was meant

for living things, the Brat does not approve of this enormous rockery.

“The trees should begin soon,” promises Jack as the Putput tops the long rise. But alas, it’s the ghost river again, half a mile between cliffs of grey rocks. Judging by its size it must be a longway from the pass.

Three hours later the bed of gravel has shrunk to a width. of eighty yards. The incline grows steeper after every bend but the mountain remains naked.

To save time Jil begins to hand-feed the Brute with mouthfuls of rusk and dried figs. ‘Packed in Quetta,’ reads the label,

“Tonight,” says Jack, “we shall sleep under a fig tree. Meanwhile, the road falls into the river bed. The

Putput has to be emptied and pushed over the pebbles, most of which are bigger than her wheels. The children hop over the boulders dragging the kit bags. Then Jack and Jil pull the machine backwards up the bank, with the gears locked, least she slip back.

Four hours and three wash-outs later the river is five yards wide and the grade so steep that Jil offers to follow on foot. The mountain is still raw stone but a wisp of cloud hangs above a dent which might be the Pass.

“I bet it rains in Quetta,” says Jack happily... Another hour and the river is no more...a cool breeze flaps the canvas, some rain drops star the windshield... the road levels off through a cutting and then...

“The top,” shouts Jack, stopping the engine, “and now...” his voice falls, “oh my God !”

“What is the matter?” Jil is leaning out of the back to feel the rain from the wisp of cloud caught in the Pass like wool on barbed wire.

“In front,” wails Jack, “look in front !” ... Perhaps Jil is going to say it’s all right, green as a high-land ought to be... Perhaps Jack has gone color-blind in the Kachhi.. Perhaps this yellow-brown nothingness isn’t real... It does not stand to reason, this plain like a sheet of sandpaper and this mountain made of putty under a sky of sawdust.

“Stark,” says Jil. “where is Quetta ?”

“Must be over there, behind the two willy-willies,” Jack points to the North-East where two columns of yellow dust whirl along a line of barren hills.

“Did you know it would be like this?” asks Jil.

“I didn’t,” admits Jack. “Books never tell about such things.”

... ..

The road follows a valley, or rather a sagging shroud of sand between two grey ridges.

“Signposts,” warns Tlitsy, “two of them.” The big one stands in line with the road:

>--QUETTA --- 8 MILES---)
--SIBI 97 MILES-

The little one points to a narrow strip of bitumen which races across the nothingness towards the sunset:

--LONDON - 4877 MILES-

“There goes our road for tomorrow,” Jack sighs heavily.

“H’m,” says Jil, “.. Are you all right?”

“Just the old empty feeling,” answers Jack,

A wall of mud bricks, eight feet high, encloses the garden of St.Margaret’s mission, inside which everything is lovely Tender green apricot and peach trees, silvery olives, glossy pomegranates, medlars, pears and custard apples Two fat fig trees shade the pavilion in which Jil and the children are still asleep.

“Two rupees a day, water included,” said Miss Twiss, the Mission’s Head, “and, if the gate is wide enough, please bring your machine inside.”

That was lucky, the Putput needs a check-up, the work of a whole day, a nice day in the shade of the climbing vines. Tomorrow, may be... Jack could be happy in this garden if only the walls were a little higher. Another yard would be enough to hide the mountain. Then Jack might forget the barren world outside, the very thought of which knocks him full of emptiness.

... ..

Bringing the desert to the gate of the Mission, Lytton Road lies broad and dusty between the garden walls. The raw mountains loom at the end of each street. It is hot on the sunny side and cold as Quetta water in the shade of the Post Office.

“Three letters for us,” shouts Jack from the steps. One is from Jil’s mummy:

“...Beware of Asiatic flu, dears, now you’re in Asia... Watch out... Children... God bless”

One is from Bahri in Dehra:

“... All well in Kankhal... Joe was seen walking down towards Delhi... Jay Hanuman...”

One from Paddo... Gosh! from Auntie Helen, no less:

“...in spite of all I said...mad trip...poor kids ..unnatural parents...silly risks...”

“Blah-blah-blah.” Jack curses Auntie Hel, then looks at the mountain and sighs, “the old witch might be right yet.

“Any news?” asks Jil,

“Peuh...” answers Jack, “something about Pam Hilary.”

“Who’s that?”

“Pranky Pam, a school mate of mine. Her people ran the Funeral Parlor in Morton Street, big black shop with silver letters. She used to shift them around to make it read Real Fun Parlor... Hey listen:

“... Had her engaged to an embalmer...big rumpus. Had engagement ring fitter with squirter... formaline...ruined everything... Parents warned... trip to Europe... Pam’s Psychologist...said she was all right... Just reacting or something... Married her to prove it...”

“Was she pretty,” asks Jil.

“Shush !” Jack reads on: “They are now in Teheran... Shah’s patronage... Fine house,five servants.. .swimming pool... Heard about your trip... Want to put you up...”

“Bless Auntie Helen,” shouts Jack.

“How far is Teheran’?” asks Jil, “I mean how many days?”

“Ten or twelve,” Jack looks at the mountain, “... May be.”

... ..

“I found a spot to cure your empty feeling,” says Jil. “The markets. Piles of pears, quinces and apples, grapes like footballs, Miss Twiss says it all comes from behind the walls And the nuts: Pistacchio, hazel, walnuts and huge lumps of a new sort of halwa...”

“Does the mountain show?”

“Not a chance, there is a roof, hung with dried figs threaded with strings, miles of it at four annas a foot.”

“Let’s go and buy a yard or two,” says Jack. Without Miss Twiss the market is too much for Jil.

She loses Jack in the meat section, goat meat, enough to turn a fellow faint. Then comes a row of stalls piled up with stuff like broken plaster, Jil wonders:

“Who can be wanting all this chalk?”

“It’s cheese,” corrects a merchant, dropping a lump of the stuff into a glass of water. Some bubbles come up as the flake loses its sharp outline,

“And this is *Nan*,” adds the fellow, tearing a shred of brown dough from an enormous pancake.

“It does taste like bread and cheese,” declares Jil. “I bet the *Nan* dries up like biscuit and keeps for ages in the desert, just like this cheese and the strung figs.”

“That’s nearly a complete diet,” says Jil.

“And light to carry,” agrees Jack, “at least we shall not starve.”

Festooned with six yards of fig rope, plastered with twelve square feet of nan, clattering with a bushel

of hard cheese, the Putput enters the Iranian Consulate.

His Excellency himself comes out of his shade and carpets, blinks twice and asks:

“Will you be going through Iran?”

“If we may,” answers Jack, “and if the roads let us.”

“The roads of my country,” states the Consul, “were already laid in the days of Darius.

“Ah,” Jack sounds impressed. “How do they stand up to modern traffic?”

“Just as they stood up to the armies of Alexander the Great.”

“I see... how about big trucks and corrugations?”

“Well,” says the Consul, “I always travel by air... but I can tell you they are excellent roads. Why, only the other day I saw a fellow who was going on foot...”

“I trust he was well shod,” Jack sounds concerned.

“On the contrary, he was barefooted, and dumb for good measure... Look at this.” The Consul reaches for a bundle of stall leaves torn from a notebook. He passes one to Jack who reads:

“Your Highest Excellency may learn my human name from the erstwhile document men call a passport. But I am truly an Avatar of Karma coming from Shakti’s womb on my way to Khali’s bosom.”

“Did you grant him a visa?”

“I did.” The Consul hands out another leaf.

“I beg no favor from your highest Excellency but that he let me pass through His Imperial Majesty’s domains for no other fee than my prayers for His prosperity.”

“Which way did he go?”

“He left towards Zahidan,” says the Consul. “Will you be going that way yourselves?”

“Yes please,” answers Jack, holding out his passport to be stamped.

... ..

“Let’s see, three days and four nights at two rupees...” Miss Twiss counts on her fingers. “That’s nine...no...seven... Oh well, make it three rupees.

You see, we do not charge people normally, unless they’re going West... It’s amazing how long some of these hang about Quetta...”

“We’ll leave tomorrow at six,” says Jil firmly.

... ..

“What time is it?” Jack pushes the words through the thick wool of his balaclava.

“Seven-thirty,” quavers Jil, who has piled up all her woollies on top of the sleeping children. “How are we doing?”

“Fine,” answers Jack, “we might make it to Dalbandin.” With the sun about to rise, Balutchistan is like the shroud of hessian on a war memorial waiting to be unveiled. On the right the Sarlath Range bulges up like a fallen dragon. The peak of Shaik Hussain soars to the left, where St. George nearly pokes through the brown cloth. In front, where the sacking lies flat on the pedestal stretches the Pishin Lora plain. Starkly beautiful is the saggingslant of material between plain and mountain. Dali wouldn’t do better.

... ..

“What is the time?” demands Jack, peeling off his shirt.

“Half past nine,” answers Jil, trying to squeeze the woollies into a bundle that will leave some space for the children to play in.

“Nushki in half an hour,” pants Jack.

“Pffff...” goes the left wheel over a silex.

Seconds after stopping the Putput turns into a Tandoor and coming out is no better than jumping from the oven into a frying pan. As Jack opens the puncture kit, a twig of dry paddy falls out of it. All the way from that place in Ceylon with the long name and the nice people.

“Those were the days,” sighs Jack.

This time, the spare wheel has lost its pressure the gash in the tube is too big for a single patch. Ah well, with luck and a good overlap, perhaps two patches will hold...

The old hand pump is full of grit. Two hundred strokes leave the tire as flabby as Jack’s tummy feels when he looks at the scenery... Phew. What a place to get a blow-out!

A shadow falls across the dust, Two men stand above Jack. Blue beards, black eyes and white turbans. without a word, they get hold of the pump and begin to work it in turn while Jack feels the tire grow harder.

All set, Jack sits on the saddle, revving the engine. The two Balutchis have turned down a small fortune, half a rupee. Yet they stand by, obviously waiting for something. They do not smoke, they say no to dried cheese, shake their heads to a bowl of water, refuse a yard of dried figs... One of them keeps patting Jack's hand, then touching his forehead...

'We must get...' mumbles Jack, with a sweep of his hand towards the nothingness ahead, The man grabs the hand in mid-air and pulls it to his forehead... Jack understands.

Joining his hands, palms downward, he lays them for a second on the men's turbans. Eyes downcast, they bow under the blessing, smile their thanks and walk away.

'What was that in aid of?' wonders Jil.

'I don't know,' answers Jack, 'perhaps they think we are from another world.'

... ..

On a narrow army bed in the Nushki Dak Bungalow Jil tosses and turns, trying to sleep.

'The children are well, perhaps a little quiet but healthy looking and always hungry...'

'Jack is not really sick in the stomach. Worried, perhaps, and jumpy, but not truly afraid...'

'The Putput is going all right and well looked after, there is no reason why she should stop...'

'There is plenty to eat, and two gallons of water. Fresh eggs can be bought sometimes.'

'Jack says the tarmac ends at Dalbandin but then so will the wash-outs...'

'A train runs once a week to Zahidan and the line is near the road..'

'The Balutchi are friendly folk and always about...'

'Many people do this trip in old cars..'

'I feel perfectly all right,'

'Nothing to worry about...' Jil falls asleep,

Jack looks at the watch. Five o'clock in the afternoon.. Outside, it's nearly dark with flying sand..

'Lucky that puncture kept us here.. Twelve hours sleep... then a hundred and twenty miles to Dalbandin ... twelve hours, maybe...'

XII

PHEW !

The wash-outs: three sandy ones just out of Nushki, then five more, short and pebbly. Pebbles are easier to shift than sand. Jack has found a trick to pull on the handlebars without letting go of the throttle.

“Another one,” warns Tlitsy, “...pebbly.”

“Just routine...” Jack jumps off the footplate, Jil and Tlitsy begin to push. “Come on now...” pants Jack, “...for goodness s...” But there is no one at the back and Jack, in his surprise, stalls the engine...

He can hear running feet and a hum, like a distant plane. Jil is rushing away towards the road, with Tootie under one arm and Tlitsy close behind...

“Hornets,” shouts Jil from the distance.

Jack watches three huge wasps explore the inside of the canvas. Yellow and black bodywork with a silver blurr for wings and a goad like a pine needle.

‘Gazoline,’ thinks Jack. Gently he pulls off the carburettor feed, letting the stuff drip onto the hot engine. Then he sprinkles some of it over the strings of figs... the hornets move off... ‘Phew!’

... ..

The Ras Koh: ‘Iron-stone mountains,’ explains the map. They rise jet black and jagged from the flat and flaxen plain. The road is like a sidewalk, hugging the black wall for thirty miles, in fear of the emptiness on its right.

... ..

The Chagai Militia: cement-grey tunic and trousers, a small turban above a shaven face. They appear in pairs, tall and motionless among the rocks, miles apart. One of them, a splendid fellow in the middle of nowhere, has turned his pill-box into a shop. Pencils by the inch, matches by the dozen, smokes by the half, cotton by the foot and a needle for hire.

Business must be good, for he owns a gramophone and three records of Urdu songs which he plays while the kettle boils tea-dust. Also a bicycle, model 98, heavy and wash-out proof.

He will not accept money for his tea, so Jack takes his photograph and his address: Bela Than, son of Hadji Bebar Than, c/o Ohagai, Nushki. Finest and most lovable person since the Nullarbor woman.

... ..

The sandy Desert from Ras Koh to Dalbandin: Just thirty miles of nothing under a gritty sky, getting grittier as the afternoon wind gains strength. Thank God, for once it's a following wind. By five o'clock Jack knocks at a side door in the high wall which surrounds the Bungalow. A man, a Chagai, peers at Jack's face, then at the Putput. Then he rushes to open the gate.

... ..

Dalbandin: two streets, ten yards wide, filling up with sand between walls of dried mud, five feet high. Seven eggs and ten hours sleep.

... ..

End of a good friend: Fine shingle mixed with sand replaces the bitumen. But the railway line follows the road. Every ten miles, that is every hour, a pill box provides three square yards of shade.

Yak-Mach: a name on the map and a taller pill-box, double ration of shade. Jack drives off the road, stops against the wall and begins to refuel. Within seconds a score of children surround the

Putput. They are friendly but covered in sores. To keep them away from her brood, Jil chucks dried figs over their heads.

Nok-Kundi is full of surprises. There is a railway station made of sleepers. Then a town, flat as a Nullarbor rabbit, then a faded green and white barrier across the road. It marks the border post, ninety miles from Mirjaweh where Iran is supposed to begin.

“Your visa ends tonight,” says Mr. Abdul in the Customs Shack. “Don’t worry, though. In Nok-Kundi time doesn’t count. We are a law unto ourselves.”

“That’s nice to hear,” says Jack politely.

“For instance,” pursues Mr. Abdul, “would you like a train ride ?”

“Eh ?” pants Jack, “... where to ?”

“Mirjaweh of course, or even Zahidan... in a freight car all to yourselves.”

“How much ?”

“Free. You see, we shall empty our supply car. It will be simpler to put you in than to unhitch it.”

“Hooray,” shouts Jack. “Where is the train ?”

“It’ll be here in a couple of days. You may wait for it in the line engineer’s house. Mrs Gamal is a Christian. She’ll be glad of the company.

“We are rather short of food,” objects Jil.

“Plenty of that in the train,” answers Mr. Abdul, “wait until I send word to Mr. Gamal...”

... ..

Waiting in the shade of the Customs Shack, Jil takes a second look at Nok-Kundi. She is going to spend two days behind one of those sleeper fences which stick out of the sand, six feet high, with nothing showing above. Perhaps Mrs. Gamal lives on Main street, a twenty yards wide sandpit, pockmarked with footprints.

“Nice place,” says Jil, “...to start a train journey.

Mr. Gamal materialises from a gap in the nearest fence. A man of about thirty with grey eyes in a sallow face.

“Come down into our house,” says he.

Down between two rows of sleepers to a cement yard where a workman is busy shoveling sand back over the fence. Down six steps into a whitewashed vault, cool, vast and silent, A bookshelf, a radio, a frigidaire...

"I am a mission-trained nurse," says Mrs. Gamal to Jil. "Tomorrow we shall visit the local ladies. They pray all day for a white skin but will not hear of soap and water... I'll show them your children,"

You must know a lot about small engines," says Mr. Gamal to Jack. "Perhaps you'll have a look at my new inspection trolley. It won't pull me up-grade."

Two exciting days for everyone.

... ..

On the way to the loading ramp Jack spots Mr. Abdul ready to board the train for Customs inspection.

"If you see a dumb fellow with a red beard please let me know," shouts Jack.

"He went through last week," answers the officer. "You'll find him in Zahidan. He had no money."

... ..

Jack watches the supply-car stop before the loading ramp. It's a steel truck and the door hardly looks three feet wide... The men take hours unloading. . .and then...

"Gosh," says Mr. Gamal, "it's two inches over. Couldn't you take your machine apart?"

"Takes hours,"cries Jack. "Is there another car with larger doors?"

"They're all the same...perhaps an open-decker..."

"Phewt..." goes the train.

... ..

"I'll warn my friend Sally to be on the look-out in Mirjaweh," says Mr. Gamal. "What time will you get there?"

"In nine hours time," sighs Jack, "four o'clock, may be."

“Don’t you stop for anyone... Some of the hill people are pretty rough. Did you hear about that American couple...”

“Shush,” says Jack, “here comes my wife...”

... ..

Grit and gravel on all sides as far as the eye can be bothered to see. Every half-hour or so, a band of darker soil dotted with thistles, nine inches high, nine feet apart.

On one of these patches, forty miles from Nok-Kundi kneel twenty goats and stands one man. A man, son of woman, planted there between earth and sky, two hundred yards off the road. Jack waves but the lone one happens to be looking the other way.

“Perhaps he kids himself we are not real,” suggests Jil.

“Perhaps.” Jack wonders how he would feel, had he been born a Balutchi goat herd instead of a Paddo burgher.

Sixty miles from Nok-Kundi it’s a young man, nearer the road this time and quite real. A brown body clad in goat skins and two dreamy eyes in a dark face. Just as human, two legged and featherless, as the rest of the species.

“But for the grade of God,” sighs Jack, “there goes me.”

... ..

Ninety miles from Nok-Kundi, two men crouch in the shade of a towel stretched between the handles of two shovels planted in the sand. They lead towards the Putput, shouting “Salah-ud-Din,” and some words Jack fails to catch. Waving politely, the Brute keeps going. “Salah-ud-Din,” shout the men, charging behind, shovels at the ready.

“I think it means ‘Salvation of the Creed,’” explains Jack, reassuringly... No use trying to go faster on this shingle, the gear would jump off, something loose in the gear-case. Oops, there goes the road and the Putput, axle deep, into a sandbank.

“Salah-ud-Din...” the man who ran faster points to a lone palm beyond the sandhills. “Mirjaweh... says he, beginning to shovel

the sand before the front wheel. "Karam Malik," he adds disparagingly, pointing to the sand.

This rings a bell. Karam Malik is the river which separates Iran from Pakistan. So this is it, a mile wide ghost under a shroud of loose sand. A lot of bother to get across, even with the two shovel men. But it is worth the effort. For, on the other side is Mirjaweh, where the West commences.

"Remember to drive on the right-hand side," says Jil, as the Putput emerges from the sands onto a shingle track.

"Salah-ud-Din," the shovel man points to a bungalow enclosed in the sleeper fence of the station, Jack offers a rupee. The man refuses, repeats "Salah-ud-Din" and opens a gate.

"I am Mr. Sultan Salan-ud-Din," says a tall gentleman in a dark blue town suit, "Mr. Gamal warned me of your coming. Your beds are ready on the back veranda."

... ..

This is the West all right. The soldiers wear G.I. helmets and the Customs Officer pajama trousers. The formalities take two hours. A tunman equals ten rials and is worth about nine cents, At eleven o'clock, the air grows thick with fried onion instead of curry.

"Madam Sally wants us to stay the day," says Jil, she thinks it's important."

"It's the second of October," objects Jack, "what's so important?"

"I think she wants to copy the pattern of my bra."

... ..

Carefully shielding the gear box from the all-pervading grit, Jack unscrews the gear-selector- locking-lever-spring-plunger's recessed tap... ZING goes the spring leaping into the sand. Jack cleans it in good gazoline, forces the screwdriver's head between the coils, hopes for the best and shoves it all back.

“Keep a sharp look-out from here to Zahidan,” says Mr. Sally. “Don’t ever come near a siding. Never stop for anyone... Remember that American couple...”

... ..

“How far are we now’?” asks Jil.

“About half-way,” reckons Jack. “Forty kilos.” Kilometres are short, eight of them make up five miles. Just a matter of habit, like driving on the right handside. However, that fool speedometer keeps counting miles. But then, taking the corrugations into account, the gadget might not be so wrong.

More serious is the gear trouble. It keeps slipping off middle speed and sends the engine into fits.

Jack gets wrist cramps holding the lever on N°2 as the road plays leap-frog from gravel hill to sandy vale. Up and down, across and up again and down and...what’s that?... A dozen khaki dots on the next hill, lined up across the road.

“Men,” shouts Tlitsy, “...carrying stones.”

“Road workers,” declares Jack as the Putput runs downhill, out of sight of the coming ridge. At seven miles an hour, a good deal slower than she could go, the Putput begins to climb. Jack is in no hurry.

First appear the men, now loosely grouped on the right shoulder, then the stones, a good dozen of them, the size of a sheep, neatly spaced across the road... three hundred yards to go, may be...ninety seconds... The stones are just on the crest. Near the left ditch are two smaller ones... Two lazy blighters in the team, no doubt. What a lot of nasty-looking, lamentable, underfed scarecrows unshod, unkempt and...unarmed, so far as can be seen.

Jack remembers the Pondi toll-gate and begins to edge the Putput leftwards, Those smaller stones are no bigger than prize pumpkins... The tallest of the men lifts an arm as a signal to stop. Does the idiot take the Putput for a flipping kangaroo?

Jack nods testily and stops when the front wheel comes level with the small stones then he gets down, hand uplifted in a friendly, what’s-all-the-rush gesture. He shoves one stone against its neighbor and rolls the other into the ditch with a side-kick...

The men have't begun to move. They gape at the Putput which is slowly backing down the way it came.

'Blast that brake again,' Jack rushes back, hops on, throttles up, gears in, full gas, between the stones... A grimy hand grabs at the handlebar, which sends the machine thudding into someone's hip. More hands clutch at the roof but the canvas just caves in under their grasp. This tickles Jil into a giggle, loud and shrill for a couple of seconds...long enough to win five yards and out downhill.

From the next rise, Jack looks back at the men. They stand on the road, motionless.

... ..

"Bless the Brat for giggling, bless the Putput for sliding back and the stones for being small, bless the Lord for making the wicked slow."

For nearly an hour Jack bubbles with silent blessings.

Over the dusty heat he does not feel, over the dead world he doesn't see, over his tummy no longer taut, over his limbs which feel light with quicksilver. But then...

"Over there," Jack points.

"What ?" ask Tlitsy and Jil.

Over there, in the sag between two ranges, a pattern of cube and dome overlays the brown disorder of the earth. Mud out of dust, it only shows by its shadows, pale grey squares in the gritty haze.

"Zahidan," sighs Jack.

... ..

It looks even worse from inside, square streets of loose dust, squalid walls of crumbling mud. A taller wall shows patches of whitewash, one of which spells the word 'Hotel.'

Men and boys crowd the Putput, rub against the canvas, staring at Jil. They wear the discard of the world's armies, navies and mortuaries. Angrily, Jack applies for moving space. The crowd tenses visibly and a man points to the desert in mock invitation.

Then the wall of men crumbles out. Two policemen charge into it, elbows raised to the level of the faces, jerking heads back like ninepins.

“Tough sort of place,” says Jack unhappily.

... ..

The garage watchman wears a black beard, a white turban and clean blue denims.

“Sardar?” queries Jack.

“Hah... Come from Punjab. Many sikh here. Truck drivers all.”

“Good,” says Jack happily.

... ..

The policeman wears a blue drill battle-dress tight over buttocks and shoulders, yellow tape on his cap and a smug look on his face as he leads Jack to Headquarters. His chief wears dark navy serge and gold braid.

“Where do you go from here?”

“Teheran,” answers Jenk, “via Yezd.”

“No,” says the officer, “the road is cut by an oil leak near Qum. You will not pass.”

“Via Meshed then.”

“No, the road goes near the Afghanborder. It is unsafe for your family in such a machine as yours. We shall not let you through.”

“What then?”

“You go and see Mr.Pishnemazzadeh.”

... ..

Mr. Pishnemazzadeh owns six buses and wears pale blue shark-skin.

“We shall place your machine on the top of the Meshed car. The fare will be three hundred tummans, inclusive...cheap for six hundred miles...”

“See you...tomorrow,” says Jack pleasantly.

... ..

“Now,” says Jack.

Sardar Ji pushes the spring into the hole while Jack holds the locking lever up with a piece of wire and then, with his other hand, inserts the plunger and the nut. Sardar Ji winks.

“Jay Ranuman,” says Jack, “... have you been to Meshed?”

“Two-three times... Desert... Road very bad.”

“Many Sardars go that way?” “Two-three week...”

A cyclist comes into the garage. Dusty blue pin- stripe and brown fur cap over greying hairs. He looks the Putput over while the Sardar fixes his bike.

“Nice little thing but no good around here.”

“It got here,” counters Jack.

“That is the trouble,” smiles the man, “and now it can’t get out, can it?... I heard about you at the tea house... Take my tip, get on a truck to Meshed, or at least to Birjand which is half-way.”

“Too dear,” says Jack.

“You could find a free ride if you stopped here for a few days.”

“That also is too dear,” says Jack somberly.

... ..

Jack finds the hotel room bedecked with a month’s washing. It drips onto the gritty floor as Jilcombs the sand from her hair.

“Marvelous place,” says she, “...for drying things.”

“I’m glad you like it,” grunts Jack. “We’re stuck.”

“Really?” says Jil, quietly. “... I wonder if we could buy some vaseline. Tootie’s legs are beginning to chap from dryness.

“Poor kid.” Jack sighs. “Try putting her in her track-suit.”

There is a timid knock on the door: the cyclist. But now he wears a bright new suit and drags two children in their Friday best.

“My son, Manoucheh Nathi,” says he proudly, “a good little boy waiting for the little brother Mummy will bring back by the Teheran plane... Next week, may be...”

“I like him,” says Tootie.

“... And this is my daughter Soraya. She is looking after her Dad but she’s not too good a cook for a big girl of ten...”

“I like her,” says Tlitsy.

“Very good,” beams Mr.Nathi. “... Now I have some serious news. I know a sardar who will take your machine to Birjand on top of a load of dates. He’ll be here in two or three days. If you did not mind a poor Persian house, you could...may be... You see Manoucheh could learn some English from your son. Madame could teach Soraya some cooking...”

... ..

From the street, Mr. Nathi’s house looks like one of the bricks it is made of. Much bigger, of course: fifteen yards wide, fifty long, fifteen feet thick.

Inside it is a paradise of white vaults, flagged terraces, sunken garden and fish pond. And it contains no less than:

Store T Eight Pomegranate Trees Cook 3 Twenty Red
Pepper Vines Dine B Six Orange Trees
R Fish One Well and Pump Sleep A Nine Lemon Trees
Sleey C Forty-six Tomatoes
Sleep ir Sixteen Grapes W.C.

“Hooray...” Tlitsy and Tootie begin a war dance, nearly pulling Manoucheh into the fish pond. Mr. Nathi laughs with pleasure.

Your room is the third on the right, says he, returning from the storeroom with mattresses and quilts. The room is whitewashed, void of furniture except for a carpet, a luminous pattern of red and blue.

“It’s like walking up a church window,” admires Jil.

“I have ten of these,” laughs Mr. Nathi. “I’d give them away for a single bath tub.”

“In Australia,” says Jil, “you’d get ten bath-rooms for this one carpet. You’d be a rich man.”

“I am one by Zahidan standards,” admits Mr. Nathi, “and Zahidan is richer from my being here. You see, I am the only man who knows how to make a water-pump from a worn-out tire

and a yard length of six-inch pipe. Lucky to get that, so far from anywhere... Ah well, your truck will be here on Friday. The day after tomorrow you will forget Zahidan.”

... ..

On Friday, Tootie falls into the fish-pond. It cures her chapped legs. Mr. Nathi says:

“The Sardar will arrive tomorrow for sure.”

On Sunday, Jil learns from Soraya how to make a date omelette. Just stone, mince and mix. No salt.

“Your Sardar,” says Mr. Nathi, “will arrive tomorrow.”

... ..

On Tuesday, Jack designs and fits an extension for Tlitsy’s bunk in the Putput. The boy has grown three inches during the trip.

“Tomorrow,” says Mr. Nathi, “the Sardar will come.”

... ..

Sardar Amric Singh arrives on Thursday. A jolly old Sikh, with a peppery beard and a pink turban. His tummy pushes up the waistcoat of his grey striped suit, more like a business man’s than a truckie’s.

“Hullo Mister,” says he and relapses into Urdu which Mr. Nathi translates:

“He will place your machine, with yourselves hiding inside it, on top of his load of dates. You will buy a twenty pound bale of dates for your own needs and for Backshee to the Militia posts. You shall leave at three o’clock on Saturday afternoon and be in Birjand the next day.”

“Why doesn’t he accept a fare?” wonders Jack.

“He says God will provide.”

... ..

“Aren’t you happy?” asks Jil, spitting a date stone over the truck’s side. “A whole day’s rest in your bunk, watching the miles fly and then, presto, the open roads of North Iran, safe and green, may be.”

“May be, but it sounds too easy.” Jack looks at the Putput, extended in fun camping rig from the truck’s cabin to the middle of the platform. Four layers of date bales cushion her wheels. Two steel hawsers stretch from the top rail on the trucks side, level with her back door and handle-bar. Safe as houses.

“What can that Sikh be doing?” worries Jack.

“He only two hours late,” says Jil, passing some dates to the children. The kids lie on their bunks, noses stuck to the windshield, watching the garage yard over the truck’s cabin. Under the Putput’s back door, an open bale of dates rests between two water- melons, easily reached from the bunks. Two water-bags hang from the hawser, waiting for the wind of motion to cool them. Nan, strung figs, dried cheese and halwa fill the side ledges just above the sleeping bags.

“Set for a week,” says Jil. “We can wait,”

“Hullo Mister,” Sardar Ji enters the yard and waves cheerfully. Jack and Jil rush into the Putput and lie down expectantly. They hear the slam of the cabin door, feel the distant throb of the engine, muffled by the layers of dates. The truck backs out of the garage onto the road across a shallow drain... BANG.

“What was that?” asks Jil, shakily,

“That was us,” answers Jack. “That drain must be deeper than it looks... Perhaps I’d better blow up the air-beds..”

Too late. The truck is gaining speed over the corrugations, Each jolt, amplified by the Putput’s springs, tosses her human cargo four inches up, twice a second,

“Ou-ou-ouch,” quavers Jil.

Jack rattles out a few curses. Then he looks at the children. The little blighters do not bounce half as much as the adults. Perhaps on account of their small weight, perhaps because they lie nearer

the front. By squatting near their bunks Jack manages to blow some air into the rubber beds.

“That’s better,” sighs Jil, “but couldn’t we get out of the Putput?”
“She’d jump off the truck,” answers Jack. “Come on, let’s put the kids to bed and play ‘Whatson.’”

‘Whatson’ is about the only game that could be played under the circumstances. It consists of calling surnames ending in ‘son’, one each in turn, beginning with the initial A until a player runs out, loses a point, begins on B’s and so on. The finest point of this game is that something else is bound to happen before Jack can say Robinson...

At the end of the first hour Jil is leading three to two:

“...Fordson,” says she.

“...Farquharson,” counters Jack.

“...Ferguson”...

The truck stops. Jack wobbles out of the Putput into the sunset. His weary eyes take in three mud houses and a mountain which bars the way to the North.

“Hullo Mister,” shouts the Sardar, pointing a finger first to his mouth then, invitingly, to the bigger mud house.

Jack shakes his head.

“Let’s sleep while we may,” says he to Jil.

... ..

Jil wakes in the dark, achy and cold. The truck must have moved uphill while she slept. It is stopped near a lone hut under a wide-open, chilly sky. Jil pots the kids, covers them up, empties the potty over the face of Persia and goes back to bed.

... ..

Jack hangs on to sleep until he grows too hot under his sleeping bag. Pushing it back, he finds Tootie curled up between his legs and Jil’s. She must have fallen from her bunk without waking up. Jack blinks at the sun, looks at his watch, finds it stopped, curses

and winds it, setting it on nine o'clock. The truck ploughs quietly North across some sandy flats. Jack prays for more of these. In the distance to the East, a salt pan underlines the horizon.

"Where are you?" Jil yawns. "Where are we?"

"I cant make it out," answers Jack. "Not enough landmarks on the map... Perhaps here.., 'Lurg-I-Shuturan' ... that would be nice. Only one hundred miles left..."

"Let's feed the children and eat while we may," says Jil.

The shaking resumes soon after breakfast and the children go back to sleep. The grown-ups squat against the little bunks, nursing their bruised ribs and playing 'Whatkins.' Before he can say 'Bodkins', Jack dozes off.

... ..

In his dream, the Brute is the piston of an over-heated Putput pulling uphill under a paunchy Punjabi called Sardarkins, Just when the knocking passes belief the engine starts free-wheeling in heavenly smoothness and the Sikh begins to singh:

"Hullo Mister."

Jack opens his eyes to a vast expanse of bitumen, the pride of a neat little town.

"Birjand?" he shouts and gestures: 'do we get down? Sardar Ji lifts a hand like a stop signal and disappears along a side lane. The town looks bigger than Zahidan and, although made of the same mud, a lot prettier and cleaner.

"Birjand'?" Jack shouts at a brighter-looking pedestrian. The fellow's answer is a worried stare.

"Let's sleep," says Jil.

... ..

Jack resists the shaking for a while then wakes up and comes out. The road runs due North, judging by the sun. The country is hilly and bare, worse, if possible, than near Zahidan. The sun begins to set with the watch reading five o'clock. Jack sets the hands on seven.

"Shall I get the kids ready for the night?" asks Jil.

"Sure," answers Jack, "we'll have a good night's sleep before unloading."

... ..

When Jack wakes up, the sun is rising three-quarter astern and the truck wobbles slowly up a barren hill.

“Where are we?” asks Jil.

“I don’t know,” answers Jack. “How are the kids?” “Sleeping better than ever... What’s happening?” “Nothing,” answers Jack. “Just running late... let’s play Whatington... Come on... I start with Aldington...”

“What is happening?” insists Jil.

Jack looks out of the Putput. Nothing in sight but now the sun is back on the right.

“Nothing to worry about,” says the Brute. “We are running North, making up for lost time... We’ll soon be in Birjand. After all it would have taken us four days in the Putput... Come on, let’s go back to sleep...”

Jack shuts his eyes... No matter how much sleeping time he allows Sardar Ji, the truck should be well over four hundred miles North of Zahidan...well past Birjand... unless... unless what?

“That sardar is just plain lazy,” says Jack firmly and goes to sleep.

XIII

DEFEAT

“Hullo Mister.”

The Sardar stands in the middle of the empty road, signalling for Jack to come down. Jack swings a leg over the truck’s side. The Sardar shakes his head and repeats the gesture, adding a circular sweep of the hand which means ‘all of you.’ Then he points to the truck’s cabin and utters his third word of English: “Police”... and then his fourth: “Passport.”

Jack takes a quick look around. Nothing except barren hills and the empty road... Two miles ahead, a brown cube which might be a house...

“Get down,” says Jack to Jil. “I’ll pass you the kids. Go straight into the cabin.”

While Jil climbs down, Jack shuts the back of the Putput, then drops the children over. Tlitsy laughs and Tootie makes a pass at the man’s beard, Jack jumps down and sits next to the driver.

Four minutes later the truck stops by the little brown cube. Two soldiers gape at passport. The truck rattles on, shaking Jil and the kids into one steaming mass of suffering. Jack worries about the Putput until a dusty patch of sky catches his eye, to the North East. The blue-green dome of a Persian mosque pierces the haze above a grey-brown pattern of cubes and cones. Jack points at the distant city. Sardar Ji nods and says:

“Meshed.”

“Meshed ?” exclaims Jil, “Meshed.”

“Hah,” beams the Sardar, “Meshed.”

Jack says nothing.

“Aren’t you pleased?” asks Jil.

“Of course I am,” answers Jack, “but I hoped the place would be greener than Southern Iran... and the roads better.

... ..

The last seven miles into Meshed are a smooth sheet of bitumen, then a broad avenue shaded with poplars, the first real trees this side of the KachhiA. As the truck turns into an open-air garage Jack spots a thing on the sidewalk which knocks some gloom off his chest:

“A... a... a Putput chassis,” pants the Brute.

The owner of the garage is another grey-bearded Sikh but he speaks English and does not mind answering questions:

“... My friend Amric could not sell his dates in Birjand. He thought it would bring him luck to carry you on to Meshed. As it happens he was right and will make a good profit.”

“Won’t he accept some money?”

“That would break his luck, but he would like a letter from you, to show Mr. Nathi he brought you here safe and sound.”

“Why did he put us in the cabin before entering Meshed?”

“Because of the road check which does not allow passengers on freight trucks.”

“Can we find a room near here?”

“Very near, on top of my shop. You see, my son has just obtained the agency for your machine and brought the first one from Teheran a week ago. You might show him how to take it apart while revising your motor in our workshops.”

... ..

Jil unwraps her purchases: two dozen eggs, eight large tomatoes, a dried fish from the Caspian Sea, potatoes and a few kind of halwa,

“You taste it,” says she, handing Jack a fist size lump folded in an oily newspaper.

The stuff is like putty in color, texture and oil-oozing capacity. It clings to the paper and tastes like a more gooey brand of peanut butter. As Jack scrapes the sheet he notices a photograph and yells:

“Look who’s here!”

“Pat Daly!” exclaims Jil. “Where is he now?”

"I can't read Persian," laments the Brute, "lets take this paper to our Sardar,"

"This sheet is a week old," says Sardar Ji, "it mentions that Swami Shaktanand Patdali Ji is about to leave for Teheran."

"We must go tomorrow morning," announces Jack.

"We must really be in Beyrut before winter and its already mid-October,"

"Will you send word to your old girl friend in Teheran?" asks Jil.

"Better wait until we get nearer," answers Jack, "Six hundred miles is a long way in these parts."

... ..

The Putput takes four hours over the first thirty- five miles out of Meshed, after which the corrugations ease down to Nullarbor standard.

"Let's take it easy," says Jack, "and stop at the next tea-house."

Four hours later Tlitsy spots a mud hut by the roadsides It bears the yellow and black inscription denoting a *Chai Khanoh*.

"Let's skip this one," decides Jack, "and make it to Nishapur. We have done seventy miles and I don't want to stop unless it's for the night"

Two hours later, Tlitsy announces the town. Also a yellow cloud trailing outwards,

"It's a funny car makes it," says the boy, "...like a square box, coming this way."

Jack looks up from the rucks and blinks. The thing is turning off the road into the desert. Profiled against the sands, it shows the gaunt outline of an old London taxi cab.

"Do you see what I see?"

"It's got a Kangaroo painted on the side," says Tlitsy. "And a Kiwi on the back," adds Jil.

Jack picks up the wheel track where the odd vehicle turned off into nowhere. It leads across an unfinished railway line and over a shallow rise. It ends in a dusty patch against a mud wall. The old car is there all right with three fair-haired boys in shorts putting up a tent near the wall and two girls in ieans busy with an oil stove.

“Peter and Joan are from Adelaide,” says Barry Miles, “Dick and Mary from Auckland, and I from Sydney, we know about you from a Perth news clipping.”

“It was sent to us in London,” adds Joan, “to help us make up our mind about this trip.”

The Putput noses up to the wall between the taxi and the tent, Jil and the children crowd the girl’s stove while Jack compares road notes with the boys.

“I reckon you ought to go through Afghanistan,” says Jack, “it is shorter and the surface could not be worse than in south Iran.”

“You’ll find it tough from here to Teheran,” says Barry, “slightly easier from there to Baghdad. then it’s bitumen all the way.”

“And don’t miss the Habhaniya Air Base near Baghdad,” adds Mary. “The C.O. is an Aussie. He’ll give you lemonade powder.”

“Hooray,” shouts Jack. “I’m sure glad to have met you, but what brought you to this spot?”

“Behind this,” Peter points to the wall, “is the tomb of Omar Khayyam. We’ll look it over tomorrow morning.”

... ..

The tomb and the good-byes keep the Putput in Nishapur until eight o’clock. By twelve she has bumped over some forty miles and passed two men. They were busy with shovels smoothing down the corrugations. By six in the evening she glides over the two furlongs of bitumen which put Sabzwar on the map. But the greedy look from the hotel keeper sends Jack off into the sunset and then the night.

“You shouldn’t,” warns Jil.

Jack knows but now there is nowhere to stop... As he scans the darkness ahead the front wheel sinks into a hole, nearly throwing him off. A ditch has just been dug across the road, perhaps by some gardener who takes advantage of the night to water his melon patch.

“Which means we are near some place,” concludes Jack, driving on very slowly. Ten minutes later, the headlight picks up a whitewashed wall.

It’s a militia post, thank God. The officer-in-charge installs the Putput between the sentry-box and the gate of the block-house. A

soldier brings six eggs, refuses Jack's money but accepts a small packet of tea-dust.

Jil does not sleep very well. Too much barking from the dogs in the nearby village.

... ..

Early in the morning, Jack inspects the front wheel and fork. They show no damage so, by seven o'clock, the Putput is on the road. By twelve she has covered fifty miles and passed a tea-house from which a man came out, waving a dead chicken in forceful invitation. The road skirts a shallow rise which blocks the view to the left. But to the right, a plain of grey soil stretches endlessly, dotted with black pebbles. Columns of whirling dust rise two or three hundred feet into the sky, taller than the tallest willy-willies of Australia.

By three Jack is exhausted and stops in front of a tea-house. The room is dark and smoky, furnished with raised mud platforms and moth-eaten rugs. Jil prefers to squat outside, on the shelf of beaten-earth which buttresses the wall. In the light of the door sits an old woman hacking little lumps out of a sugar-loaf, a real, old fashioned sugar-loaf wrapped in blue paper. She seems quite an expert, Yet she manages to hit her fingers quite often. Then she licks them all in turn with great thoroughness.

"Come on, says Jil, 'let's get to the next one.

"We should be in Shahrud by lunch time." Jil beams at the rising sun, She feels better for a good night's sleep, safe and snug in the yard of the Maiamai tea-house. The children are finishing breakfast in high spirit, fighting over Tootie's hoard of date stones.

"All aboard," shouts Jack. The low sun does show up the corrugations but it also lends some color to the deadly stillness of the hills. And, from where he stands, Jack can see no less than three poplars.

Two in a fold of the mountain on the left and a lone one three miles to the West.

“Things are looking up,” says he, a foot on the starter. “Three hours to Shahrud, three days to Pam’s paradise and swimming pool.”

“Brrr,” shivers Jil in the the cold morning. “brrr,” starts the Putput at the first kick, She bumps happily out of sight of the poplars and begins leapfrogging over some shallow hills, the color of stale candy nut. Then up a steeper one with a bead near the tops “funny,” grunts Jack, “...the steering feels wobbly.” Then there is a loud crack and the Putput hits the dust with the stump of her broken fork.

JIL’S DIARY

...however we were climbing and our speed was very low so, apart from a terrific jolt, the family is safe, We lift the dead Putput to the side of the road and pick up the broken wheel. We wait, saying nothing, for nearly an hour.

The first truck comes uphill and two men jump down. We signal to send truck from Shahrud and hope they understand, Soon after, an empty truck comes down from Shahrud way. Men make hurry signs and do not stop.

The third truck comes up. ‘Afghanistan-Turkiye,’ says dapper little man with no English but friendly. He gestures to the the front of the Putput to the back of his truck. That will finish her off but what else? We squeeze in truck’s cabin. Jack watches through back window, twenty-thirty miles, very slow, then Shahrud. The man unties Putput in front of garage and goes. Crowds surround us, they speak no English but lift the Putput into the garage. A big young man takes the fork and goes away. Everyone friendly and helpful. Putput white with dust, a real ghost. I take possession of waiting room, very dirty, like ourselves. Man brings water for washing hands then Big Boy returns with fork and signals it will go away for Bshshsh.. ‘Oxy-welding,” says Jack and Big boy nods

We are shown the garage’s restaurant and eat some greasy rice with charred meat. As we come out, we see Putput being lifted up onto a big truck.

Big Boy says 'Goombat,' makes up and down signs and shoves us inside truck's cabin. Big Boy's offside hangs on footplate. Points to himself: "Assam," points to Big Boy: "Awen," points to road ahead: "Goombat," and laughs.

The truck belts out of Shahrud, stops at militia post for long discussion: "Amerikani... Rooski... Australiani..." Awen yells and wins.

We go up desolate mountainside, sun down behind, "West-North-West," reckons Jack, for hours. Assam still hanging on, climbing up the side of truck every so often to check Putput. Laughs every time. The track levels off between furzy mountains. The sun begins to set on the left. "Going North," says Jack and worries about Russia. He left his map in the Putput. "Gurgan ?" he asks and Awen points to the left.

The sunset ends when truck begins descent. Hair-raising bends, then view over a sea of clouds which melt away into dusk. "Daryacheh... Deniz," says Awen. "The Caspian," says Jack, flabbergasted. We go down, then level for two hours. It's ten o'clock.

We stop for rice at a tea-house. Men with Astrakhan hats. Soldiers with bayonets. Then on for another hour until Assam points to some lights and says "Goombad." We are shown a room, pay five tummans and fall asleep.

Sat. Oct. 14 Gumbab-I.-Quabus

Wake up at six, look out on dismal place. Grey sky, pebbled streets with kiosks of corners, dusty trees and a smell of sour fat. Awen finds a welder. Poor Job, but it might hold out until Teheran via the Caspian seaside and the Quruk Pass. Begin to clean Putput but too many people around. Awen brings gentleman who speaks English. Mr. Garabedian, agent of Ninneapolis-Noline Tractors. He thanks Awen who refuses our money but accepts photographs for good luck.

Mr. G. offers his cemented yard and workshop. We push Putput across rough street and settle in N.N. yard, nice and clean with big wall and no one inside except two mechanics. Jack feels better in tummy, Work all day. Sleep in Putput under awning,

Sun. Oct.1 Gumbad

Wake up to a rainy cold day. Jack rushes out and returns saying the place is a sea of mud. The Putput will never get through. We go out shopping. Best stuff in little kiosks at street corners. Potatoes, tomatoes, spinach. Two kinds of halwa. Returning we find two policemen who take Jack's passport away.

Mr. G. says we bring him luck, he has sold three tractors. The mechanic kills a chicken, makes pilaff to celebrate. Mr. G, brings vodka. Horrible stuff,

The Policemen return. No passport. We had no special permit to enter Turkmenistan. We shall be confined to the N.N. yard until decision is taken. Mr. G, says he will talk to Governor. Jack mopes and is sick.

Mon, Oct, 16 Gumbad

Jack is sick all night and all morning with diarrhoea and the willies, The mechanic gives him some evil medicine. Miserable day but less rainy. I mend track suits and write letters. Mr. G, comes to say he has sold two more tractors and is ordering more from Teheran. They'll come in huge trucks one of which could carry fifty Putputs. The trucks will load with cotton bales but we might fit on top. They will be here in three days. I pray for truck and go to sleep, feeling better, but Jack is still sick and will not eat.

Tues. Oct.17 Gumbad or Gonbad

Gumbad on the map. Gonbad on the packets of tea, silly place by any name, fit for horses of which there is plenty, under little red-faced men in big astrakhan hats. Turkmen. Mr. G. says the Governor OK'd truck idea. Trucks will be in after two or three days. Mr. G. sold two more tractors. Big cotton farms around here. Jack feels a bit better but still does not eat.

Wed. Oct.18 Gonbad

Mechanic brings nan for breakfast, very thin, paper-like stuff. Grapes plentiful. Jack eats the white of an egg. The mechanic kills a chicken, makes pilaff with horrible sheep fat which makes Jack sick. Go to bed miserable.

Thur. Oct.19 Gumbad

Day much like yesterday. Jack eats chicken white. Tootie colicky with too much grapes. No news of truck. A little rain in the evening. The mechanic's name is Tchastakalian. Big old fellow from Armenia. Hates the Russians.

Friday. Oct.20 Gumbad

Jack begins to work on Putput, taking it all to pieces. I wash track suits in petrol. Mechanic kills chicken: "Like Russians," he says, "Tcha..." No news of truck.

Sat. Oct.21 Gumbad

Jack begins to study tractors with old Tcha. Big simple machinery, satisfying, says Jack. He eats some chicken but is sick again. No truck.

Sun. Oct.22 Gumbad

Trucks left Teheran, two of them with eight tractors. Mechanic kills two chicken, makes pilaff, waste of good chooks.

Mon. Oct.23 Gumbad

Trucks delayed. Write letters to be posted from Teheran, if there is such a place anywhere.

Tues. Oct.24 Gumbad

Mr.G. says trucks will be here any day. He buys biscuits for T & T.

Wed. Oct.25 Gumbad

Tootie colicky but playful. Jack the same.

Thur. Oct.26 Gumbad

Shah's birthday, flags about the place.

Fri. Oct.27 Gumbad

No news of truck. Play hide and seek with children among tractors. Eat grapes.

Sat. Oct. 28 Gumbad

Jack bad and depressed. Tootie colicky. Boiled veges and potatoes for lunch. Jack goes out for halwa and returns, having seen the trucks. Mountainous things. They unload in the evening, We may get away tomorrow. Jack better, writes note to Teheran friend.

Sun. Oct. 29 Gumbad

Drivers of the big trucks, Hussein and Dawood come to talk with Jack. Tail skinny Arabs from Bahrein, Sheikh's sons, Nature's gentlemen, splendid fellows. Dawood laughing and irresponsible, Hussein quieter and speaks some English. We might load up tomorrow afternoon,

Mon. Oct. 30 Gumbad

Our visa for Iran expires to-day. Spend morning taking Putput's roof down. Tootie better. In the afternoon Mr. G. tells us we shall only go tomorrow. In the evening a man hands me an envelope which contains compliments of the Governor, apologies for the present state of the roads in his country, best wishes, our passport and eighteen, brand new ten-tumman notes.

About twenty-five dollars, Jack wants to return the money but Mr. G. says it would be bad luck for Gumbad. So we write our thanks on the back of a photograph of the children. I feel a lot happier but Jack remains depressed. We go to bed on the workshop floor in a snug pile of tractor's wrappings.

Tues, Oct. 31 Gumbad

The trucks have gone to pick up their cotton bales. They return at three o'clock loaded up fifteen feet high. I grow old as I watch Jack help a dozen men pull up the Putput with ropes. Twice it nearly falls on Jack but ends up safely tied on top of the cabin. The children get presents of biscuits and Mr. G. tells us the

truckies are paid for their trouble. We squeeze in the cabin and leave at five. It is night by the time we begin to climb the fantastic mountain, thank God. Stop near Shahrud. Four hours sleep. Very cold.

Tues. Nov.1st Shahrud - Teheran

Breakfast at 9 well past Shahrud. Jack does not eat. Bleak country, yellow and ochre mountains to the right. Very hot in truck, sticky and miserable. Jack watches the shadow of the Putput as it leaps across the ravines on the right handside of the road. Stop for tea at seven. Tootie and Jack sick. Keep going until 10 in the dark, terrible road. Drivers stop for supper. We stay in, very cold. At midnight we see a glow in the sky ahead, then the earth blooms with thousands of lights. We are still bumping hard on a road deviation but the little lights are closing in. They thicken near the skyline into a starry haze. Then a light passes overhead, then another and we roll on the bitumen of a large avenue, within ten minutes we are in a garage and fall asleep on the floor of an office. It's bitter cold in the sleeping bags and Jack keeps getting up all night, so only the children sleep.

Wed. Nov. 2nd Teheran

Work all morning unloading Putput and reassembling her. Jack will not eat lunch. He shaves and tries to make himself presentable to go and find Pam or her husband. I do my best to clean his track-suit but it's hopeless. He hangs about until four o'clock, then hurries off, leaving me and the kids in the garage.

... ..

The wall is part of the Teheran Hospital's enclosure. Nine feet high, like all Persian walls, but made of glazed bricks. The door is of polished cedar with an ivory bell button above a copper name plate.

Dr. J. Mayard

Psychanalyste

Jack presses the button and, when the spy-hole clicks open, bends forward, his face hiding the rest of his person.

“I’m a friend of Mrs. Mayard. May I see the doctor?”

The hole slaps to and the door slides open. Jack finds himself half-way up a stretch of fine lawn, between a pink brick house and a blue-tiled swimming pool.

“*Le docteur se repose,*” says the doorkeeper, pointing towards a row of cypress trees. Jack tip-toes across the lawn towards the back of a deck-chair on which lies a man in rope sandals, grey flannel trousers and white apron. An open book covers the doctor’s face like a little roof, glossy black with silver letters:

LETHAL PRANKS

by Yul
Nowhom

There is a dog under the doctor’s chair. It sniffs and growls. Jack paces the silent lawn, noting how well the cypresses shield the place from a view of the dead mountains to the North. Then he stops, still

as a scarecrow. The book has slipped down three inches, revealing a broad forehead between grey-blond hair and blue-grey eyes.

“You’re Jack Monty,” says the doctor, “... You look dead-beat.”

“Beat is the word,” sighs Jack. “How is Madame Mayard?”

“Pam’s fine. She’s had your room ready for the last month. What happened to you?”

“Broke down,” says Jack, “First the machine then my... innards.”

“We’ll fix that up... How is your family?”

“They say they’re all right. I left them at the garage while I looked for your place.”

“You fetch them in quick. Let me have a look at them before Pam gets home,”

... ..

XIV

GET UP

“Your wife and the boy are in top form,” says Dr. Mayard. “The little girl’s diarrhoea will go away after a half-dose of oil. As for you...”

Jack says nothing.

“What made you do the trip?” asks the doctor. “I thought... I wish you could tell me...”

“I’m not that good... What do you tell the people who ask you?”

“I say we wanted to see if four could travel for the price of one...the most with the least and all that...”

“Who is ‘we’?”

“Jil and I. We used to be tough...when Tlitsy was still on the breast, we took him rock-climbing. I put him in my knapsack with his head sticking out. He cooed...”

“He still does...when did you go really sick?”

“When the fork broke and I couldn’t do a thing except trust other people.”

“Did you have a tight feeling a long time before?”

“... Yes, I’m afraid I had cold feet since we got into the desert... You see, I felt responsible...”

“Quite natural... Did you feel better in the towns?”

“Not really...but I did feel good, for a while, after we fooled some chaps who wanted to stop us.”

“I see... By the way, Pam told me you were a pilot in the war... did you have an actual fight?”

“... No, I was too late in for that. They sent me to Malaya but the other side had no planes. It was just base duty and a few shots from the dark.”

“I see... Are you going on with this trip?”

“What...”

“WHACKO ! Look what the cat’s brought in...”

Pam bounces in, kisses Jack, the dog and the doctor.

“... Where is the family ?”

“In the bathroom,” answers Jack, “... My turn next.” But Pam has streaked out, a slim, blond and ambergrised lightning. A great noise of splashes, wet smacks and giggles echoes from the end of the hall. The dog trots out and then returns with a sad look and a blob of lather on his nose.

“God willing,” says the doctor, “we’ll have a brat of our own next January.”

“Congratulations,” smiles Jack, “... Good old Pranky... I mean Pram.. I ...”

“You mean Pranky Pam,” laughs the doctor, “but we have already changed that.” With the stem of his pipe he points to a bookshelf neatly stacked with glossy black volumes. Silver letters blaze out the teasing titles and the author’s name: Yul Nowhom.

“A goodly case for creative diversion,” explains Dr. Mayard.

“Stand up, you men,” irrupts the case. “Come on, stand back to back, that’s right, a perfit fit... Jack will wear your charcoal suit and Jil my beige ensemble, we’ll go to old Aziz’s party. Tomorrow I’ll ring the Karachalians... then some of the Point Four Johnnies. Come on, Paddo, your bath is getting cold...”

“Wait a minute...” objects the doctor, “my orders call for a night’s rest with two tablets of Enterophormyl... And relax, he says to Jack, “I think I know what’s eating up your innards... Trust the old Psycho... We’ll have you cured before you find a new fork for your machine.”

... ..

Dr.Mayard’s car has dropped Pam at her beauty salon. Jack at his garage and Jil in front of the Grand Poste. The Brat walks to 1(213 wicket in the great hall. It bears an inscription tn Arabic, thus translated for the western eye:

POSTE RESTANTES

A-M

“Any mail for Monty,” asks Jil, “...M...O...N...”

“t” answers the clerk with a forward nod of the chin, “tomorrow morning.”

“Couldn’t I get it now?” smiles Jil.

“T’t,” goes the man and shuts the wicket.

Jil glares at the closed glass and feels like putting out her tongue. Instead she presses it against the back of her teeth and sucks in some air. It goes T’t.

“T’t yourself,” says Jil and, slightly relieved, walks back to the waiting car. At one o’clock, the driver takes her to Madame Babu’s Beauty Boutique.

“Do you know if Madame Mayard is in’?” asks Jil.

“T’t,” nods up the janitor.

“Do you know where she has gone?”

“T’t.

“What does T’t mean?” asks Jil from the driver.

“Nehi, Nein, Non,” answers the man, “Niet, Yok, No. When Irani say T’t he mean Never.”

Nevertheless Pam pops out of the beauty shop and directs the driver to Jack’s garage. The Brute lifts his eyes from a pool of sump oil to see two smart cuties in fawn and beige offering him a lift home.

“T’t,” says he, “bring me a sandwich and see if you can get our visa renewed. I’ll come home with the new fork on.”

... ..

Pam and Jil have taken the children on a visit of the Golestan Palace. Jack relaxes on the lawn with one of the best Yul Nowhoms. Then a shadow falls across the page and Dr. Mayard asks:

“Have you heard the news?”

“News’?” Jack blinks, “good or bad?”

“Just another Middle-East rumpus. Have you got your visa for Jordan?”

“I’ll get it in Baghdad,” says Jack.

“You won’t, even if you get that far... But never mind. No doubt you’ll get through somehow.” The doctor sits on his deck-chair.

“Where are you going?”

“To England,” answers Jack, “see Jil’s relatives, work for a couple of years, sell a story or two, may be, and go back. It’s an Australian tradition.”

“You could have gone by ship.”

“Ships are a waste of travel.”

“Too soft eh?.. What you wanted was a sort of private war, the Montys versus everything, just to make up for missing out on the last organised scrap.” Jack keeps his tongue.

“And you collapsed when you had to rely on other people... That’s all the trouble with you. All you have to do is to accept outside help as a right. After all, you’re not drawing any child endowment...”

“Neither was my grandfather.”

“Oh yes, he had some sort of help from the tribe... We all do... When our child will be born, we shall accept a present from the Shah. Why not?”

“Because he had better save the money,” Jack laughs, “...and buy some bitumen for his roads.”

“Or a jeep for the Montys... Do you know, you may have to go via Tabriz and the Ararat road into Turkey. In December too. You’ll be lucky to keep out of the snow...”

“Any suggestions from the tribe?”

“Certainly... I’ll call Dr. Aziz.”

... ..

Jil has written forty-seven postcards thanking some of the helpful people between Purlmere and Gumbad-I-Quabus.

“It’ll cost thirty-five tummans in postage,” says the worried Brat.

“Money well spent,” sighs Jack.

... ..

Dr.Aziz comes armed with a gold pen full of red ink and a pad of notepaper with much letterhead:

SHIKH O KHORSHID SOKH
LION ET SOLEIL ROUGES
RED LION AND SUN

Irani Branch of
International Red Cross

LE Directeur Général:

DR. ABD UL AZIZ
Docteur en Médecine, Paris
M.D. Cambndge

“All you want,’ says he, “is a letter from me to all our branches in North-west Iran, wherever you arrive you will only have to ask for the Shikh o Khorshid Sokh.”

“Shikh o Kh..,” begins Jack,

“ShiKHHH,” corrects D.Aziz, “KH is the sound you make when clearing your tonsils... KHHH, the Germans do it well, ShiKH o KHorshid SoKHHH. Some people find it hard to clear their throats three times running. However, just say the word and you’ll get a meal and the night’s lodgings,”

“Shikh o Khorshid Sokh,” roars Jack with gusto, “and thank you very much, Doctor.”

... ..

“Pustins is all you need,” says Mrs Karachalian, the brunette wife of the Hospital’s purser. Pustins is warm, Pustins is the Afghan shepherd’s jacket. I’ll take you to the bazaar and help you get them at the right price.”

The Teheran bazaar is a brick and mud warren, a maze of vaulted alleyways clogged with half the world's junk. Pustins are plentiful. They are rough fleece bum-warmers with the hair on the inside. The outer skin is dyed bright yellow and decorated with red cord along the seams.

"It'll fade," says Mrs Karachalian regretfully. For thirty-eight tummans, about six dollars, the family is equipped, Jack adds four pairs of matching knee-length socks and four sets of cotton-fleece underwear.

"Now for the snows," says Jil bravely,

"All you need," says the doctor, "is a couple of weeks of fair weather. You may get them, although the snow has started in Azerbaidjan. Nothing very serious yet, judging by this report," Dr.Mayard points to a paragraph in the weekly English newsheet:

FIRST SNOW IN BAZERGAN

Maku, Nov.15, A snowstorm lasting six hours has isolated the Iran-Turkey border post of Bazergan. It is believed however that the snow will not hold. During the storm occurred the disappearance of an Indian mystic who travelled under the name of Pat Daly. He had been refused admission into Turkey and, for the last twenty-four hours before the storm, had stood barefooted and lightly clad, between the two border posts.

The morning is crisp and crystalclear, sharpening the brittle nakedness of the burz Mountains to the right of the road, wrapped in the stiff new pustins, the family feels strangely numb. The children are quiet. By nine o'clock the sun makes the woollen fleece unbearable. Jil rolls the coats into a bundle which takes half the children's playing space.

“Funny,” says she, “there is a hard lump in the back-rest. She tosses and frets for a while then pushes her hand beneath the canvas.

“Eeeek,” squeals the Brat, “a snake or something.’ Jack brakes hard, feels the smooth coil under the stiff cloth, puts his hand through and pulls out a yard length of salami. A square of cardboard follows at the end of a string:

PROTEINS from PRANKY

A light moment in a rather sad day. The bitumen peters out after forty miles and the remaining sixty miles to Khazvin take all the afternoon. It is dark and cold when Jack begins to call for Shikh o Rhorshid Sokh,

An oil-stove warms the newly built dispensary and a meal of rice, eggs and nan appears on a trolley.

A couple of friendly but Persian speaking ladies watch the children eat and be put to sleep on the stretcher beds.

... ..

All the afternoon the Putput has climbed against a bitter wind. Ever since the road branched off the Khazvin-Kermanshah highway which looked so flat and tempting, running South-West towards the warm but forbidden plains of Irak.

Jil rubs her hands against her thighs trying to keep the blood going. Tlitsy looks out quietly. Tootie sobs:

“Where is Pretty Auntie?... pretty house?”

The night falls, the wind drops, thank sod, and the moon rises. Tootie goes to sleep. Very slowly the Putput crawls over the corrugations.

“Teheran” shouts Tlitsy, “I can see the lights like we did in the big truck.”

“There are not so many,” points out Jack, “its only Zinjan.”

The Shikh o Khorshid is closed but the keeper directs Jack to a large Persian house. A lady smiles and brings Chelo Kebab the standard Iranian dish of white rice heaped over a blob of butter, wetted with raw egg, sprinkled with raw onion and served with a six inch sliver of grilled meat,

There is an oil-stove, and, laid over the thick carpet, a quilt lined with a sheet tagged on by safety pins.

By rights, the road should go down towards the Kizil Uzun valley but the corrugations cancel the downgrade. Sometimes, a cattle trail runs parallel to the highway for two or three miles. Jack always takes his chance and glides over the hoof-trodden earth at fifteen miles an hour until a dry gulch or a rock forces him back onto the bone-rattling road. Miles from anywhere a signpost proclaims:

You are now entering
Iranian Azerbaidjan.

The naked hills close in from all sides. Patches of whitish grey or even pale blue contrast strangely with the normal ochre to purple color range. Countless gullies wrinkle the variegated slopes, in the crisp morning they remind Jil of fresh coral, In the endless afternoon they inspire Jack' with a horror of stale brains. The valley narrows down to a fantastic gorge spanned by the broken arch of an old Moghubl bridge. Then it opens again to a carpet of gravel strewn with mud cubes: Mianeh.

“Shikh o Khorsid Sokhl” The old tribal coil brings out a fat and cheerful gentleman in blue stripe. Mr. Sapphar Phoor is the first fat and cheerful Irani in Jack's life. After a splendid chicken and peppercorn pilaff, Jack fetches hiscolorslides. The room is warm and the newly painted wall does justice to the Blue Mountains. In sign language, Jack explains the way of life of the Koala and other beasts unknown in Mianeh. He shrieks the Kookaburra call and does the Kangaroo hop over the priceless carpet. Soon the Brute sweats like a Botany Bay native telling Captain Cook and his soberside crew the facts of Australian life.

... ..

“Big white cloud,” Tlitsy yells, pointing to the left horizon.
“Snow,” corrects Jack, “...on the mountain tops.”

But Tlitsy has never seen the stuff. Jil does her best to explain this exciting freak of Nature. It's more than ten years since Jack has touched any snow, yet there is no thrill for him in the sight of the Kuh-I-Sahand, barring the way to Tabriz.

However the road keeps shy of the white cloud on its left. Up the brown hills it climbs and down the narrow vales, often cut by a shallow, icy cold stream. The Putput runs short of time and settles in the yard of a tea-house for a cruel night in the open. 'Shikh o Rhorshid' is unknown in Bostanabad. From the darkness come the blood-curdling shrieks of some animal. "Wolves'?" asks Jil.

"Just Jackals," answers Jack.

... ..

TABRIZ IZ WELCOMING NOW

...with a whitewashed billboard, a pale sun and a wispy sky. But she means it. The 'Shikh o Khorshid' man happens to own a bank and a hotel. Also a large family, slightly short of entertainment.

"Shall we stay another day'?" asks Jil.

"Its criminal," answers Jack.

But the hotel room is warm and the meals come up on the dot, big slices of fresh nan, mountains of pilaff, litres of lemonade...

Three blue-clad policemen make sure the Putput turns left at Narand, least she bang into the Iron Curtain some forty miles up the Highway.

The path to Khoi is straight and narrow but far less corrugated. Some melted snow runs across it in places, yet the Putput manages to do twenty miles an hour, smashing her Iranian record and the lower blade of a rear spring.

Khoi is pretty and well tarred. The quest for 'Shikh o Khorshid' takes Jack all over town in search of an absent doctor, At last, a large gate opens in a taller mud wall. Carpets, oil-stoves, pilaff and a family well dressed in Western style. The Master looks at the Koala in dignified silence, twiddling a string of amber beads.

He is as tall, lean and austere as Mr. Sapphar Phoor was round, pink and jolly. A commotion arises by Platypus' time. A little man stands at the door, all smiles and bows, who says:
"Please to begin again, I am English Master, I shall translate your words to His Excellency, the Governor of West Azerbaidjan."

... ..

His Excellency is brushing his teeth by the fish pond when Jack leaves for the garage to work on his broken spring. With the handle of his tooth-brush Jil points to a little note, held by a stone on the pool's ledge.

"Would you grant my respected Mother's wish for another spectacular exhibition?"

Jack nods. Within himself he knows losing a day is criminal. But then, His Excellency's oil-stove works right through the night, a rare performance.

It begins with a ten-gallon drum equipped with a small tap. This drops the oil, drop, drop, drop, into a funnel. The funnel takes it along a little pipe to a twenty-gallon barrel topped with a stove pipe. What happens inside the larger drum is one of the last mysteries. But it raises a lot of heat and not too much smell.

More modern, however is His Excellency's wife. She owns the latest Electratomovitaminopulverizer, made in Germany. It turns an unpeeled apple into the creamiest juice Tlitsy has ever tasted.

And yet, when Jack enquires about the distance from Maku to the border, she answers:

"Chhar Pharsang."

"Four what?" queries Jack.

"Pha -ra- sang," explains the English Master. "One pharsang equals four and a half miles. The Greek general Xenophon calls them 'Parasangai.' He passed this way with his Ten Thousand soldiers."

"But surely," objects the Brute, "that was way back before Christ."

"401 BC," precisifies the Master, "quite a recent date by Persian standards."

... ..

There are twenty one pharsang from Khol to Maku.

First a long steady climb towards the snow, until patches of the dreaded stuff appear in the ditches. Then down, thank God, to the edge of a grey desert with ten miles to the East, a Russian train puffing hotly towards Nakhikhevan.

Westwards again, against the wind, very slowly, up and down some barren hills. Jack stops to refuel on the crest of a high ridge. It's easier to re-start on the clutch, after a short but restful spell of coasting. Quietly the Putput free-wheels round a steep bend.

"Look, Daddy, look." Tlitsy points down to the brown slope on the right. A dozen sheep nibble at the invisible grass. Jack brakes to a stop. Some life for the kids to watch.

"Listen..." Tootie points downhill to the left... "Look, big doggie.!"

A large wolf is about to cross the road, a stone throw from the Putput. The wind ruffles the long dark bristles up his back. He looks up, stops still for an instant, then slinks back among the rocks.

"Let's make it to Maku," urges Jil.

Maku is the last link in the Shiku o Khorshid chain. A pretty red and white dispensary, clinging to the wall of rock on which clusters the town, tiers upon tiers of mud cubes.

... ..

In the Bazergan border-post the Iranian Empire and the Turkish Republic stand united against the wind, snugly, they share a square compound, framed by their Police and Customs billets. Facing each other across the yard stand two flag-poles between which any number of 'Indian' mystics could wait barefooted and lightly clad for a snowstorm to blind the sentries.

The Turkish road sweeps down a valley past Mount Ararat which sulks behind its clouds. The road is just beaten earth, but broad and smooth. For the pleasure of belting along at thirty miles an hour, Jack blesses Turkey and the Turks:

“Fine soldierly lot, look at them...” Jack points to a line of khafki dots which moves in leaps and bounds across the floor of the valley.

“What are they doing?” asks Tlitsy.

“Just training, I hope,” answers Jack,

“Let’s keep going,” urges Jil, “it’s getting bitter,” The wind slashes through the Putput and the sky turns to cold lead. Towards four o’clock, the snow begins to fall, numbing the children with wonderment and the adults with chillworry. Then Jack curses.

The clutch lead has snapped broken, blocking itself in top gear. On full throttle the Putput manages a couple of rises without stalling. The snow piles up on the windshield, Jack leans out to wipe it off, finds himself between two rows of houses and stalls the engine. Changing the clutch lead takes twelve minutes, by which time the snow is a foot thick on the road. Six men hunch around Jack, grey and bulky, their long coats deflect some of the wind. The men, dark-eyed and pale-faced, watch quietly until the work is done. Then one points to a near-by shed, mutters a vague invitation and opens the door. The Putput squeezes between the wall and a snow plough. The kids jump out to feel, smell and taste the stuff that falls from the sky.

“Kar,” say the men and laugh. Two of them grab Tootie and carry her across the street to a low-roofed house with a glass-top door. Another beckons to Jil, saying something like Chai Khaneh.

Its a large room with tables and chairs grouped loosely around a wood stove. Red apples hang in festoons from the black rafters, A partition in the far corner fences off the kitchen and a booth with two bunks. The floor is of beaten earth, A dingy place, but warm. Four glasses of dark tea appear on a vacant table. No one wants any money. A man wearing a leather jacket and peaked cap reaches up for two apples and gives them to the children.

Jack walks to the window, peers at the sky, points Westward and looks worried. The men nod sadly. One of them says Kar. Another puts on a dumb show which seems to mean first sleep, then go. Jack takes up the ‘sleep’ mimic and twists his face to say ‘where.’ The man points to the booth with the two bunks, Jack slaps his pocket rubs fingers and thumb and looks worried.

“Elle Kurush,” is the answer. Jack looks dumb.

The man says: Lira, holds up one finger and goes through the motion of halving it. Jack nods half a lira is fifty kurush, that is ...two and a half cents. This reminds the Brute of his next chore, his first job on entering a new country. He pulls out a page of Jil’s diary and scribbles:

TURKISH NUMBERS

Lifting one finger, then two, then three, and so on, Jack writes down the men’s answers:

Bir, Iki, Uch, Dort, Besh, Alti, Yedi, Sekiz, Dokus, On...

...which is by far the queerest lot of sounds he’s ever heard outside science-fiction. By comparison, Hindi (Ek, Do, Tin, Char, Panch...) and Persian (Yek, Do, Seh, Chhar, Panch...) were quite human.

And there is worse to come: Water is Su, Bread sounds like Ekmek. No is Yok or, even better, T’t with a forward nod of the chin.

Bir glass of tea costs iki kurush. By his fourth glass, Jack has learnt two dozen words, It is growing dark outside and the kar is still falling. Now comes the big test:

“Yemek?” says Jack, pointing to his mouth and working his jaws.

“Lokanta,” answers the men’s chorus.

This floors the Brute but a man rises and takes him next door, The lokanta holds two rows of tables and four of chairs, Before each chair is a glass of su and a large chunk of ekmek, real he-stuff with a wheaty dough and an ashy crust, An oil-lamp dangles from a rafter above the kitchen range. Four wash-basins squat over the embers: Soup, mutton stew, baked beans and an appetising mess of meat balls rolled in cabbage leaves.

The baked beans and the rolls are excellent, hot and not too fat. And the bill for eight portions, comes to one and a half lira.

At this rate, beams Jack, “we can last out the winter.”

On his way back to the tea-house Jack goes to the Putput for the sleeping bags, the potty, the insect-killer and the map. Jil, who does not know the Turkish for toilet, takes the children for a walk across the snow. When Jack unfolds his map under the lamp, the men shout “Harita” and crowd round. Turks love a map. One of them points to a dot, some fifteen miles East of Karachose,

“Taslichay,” says the fellow with a sweeping gesture meaning this is it. Jack sighs. Judging by the brown filigree on the paper, Taslichay is five thousand feet above sea-level, But, between Karakohose and Erzurum there is a patch of plain brown, that is over seven thousand feet, Jack points to that spot and asks “kar?” The men nod sadly, except one who makes the ‘sleep’ sign then points to the sky and shrugs his shoulders. Jil translates: “Tomorrow will tell.”

XV

AND UP

Jil has chosen the bunk at the deep end of the booth. Above her head, a mixture of straw and dried mud lines the wall. Near the rafters it bulges around a square of glass set into the mortar like a pool in the desert... A. pool of grey light... Jil sits up in her sleeping bag, rubs the frost off the glass and looks out. It's still snowing. She goes back to sleep.

Much later, there is a noise of wood against iron, of pots and pans and stricken matches. Jack gets up and brings four glasses of tea, four apples, four chunks of real bread and real cheese.

"I like it here," says he.

The men reappear, one by one, until the room is nearly full, a couple of dozen in all. They stand by the door for a few seconds, shaking the snow off their shoulders. They say "Gunaydin," and sit down to a glass of tea.

At nine o'clock enters a small fellow who walks straight towards Jack and says: "Good morning."

"Bless you," answers Jack., "How long will it snow?"

"One...two..." the man's English is very rusty but it improves as the day wears on. Jack buys him a

meal at the Lokanta and a tiny botthe of aniseed liqueur. The man swears it will be fine tomorrow and the snow-plough will open the road to Karachose. After which he walks out into the snow..."to fix you all," says he.

For a couple of hours Jack watches the snow, Jil darns a hole in her sleeping bag and the children play in the wood pile. At dusk the little man returns:

"Bank directqr... Big house... we go now."

A path cuts across the snow, so deep that Tootie can hardly see above the sides. It leads away from the road, between two rows of plucked trees, towards a group of houses. A large, two-story building bears an inscription in Western letters:

TURKIYE CUMURIYETI BANKASI Taslıçay

The office has just closed but it is warm and roomy. The manager looks thirtyish, tall and lean. He does not speak English. The little man from the tea-house is all bows and smiles, translating salutations, then a request:

“Bankasi papers... passport. You show,”

Jack pulls out his Letter of Credit, a square foot parchment with purple and green scrollwork.

“Director house is yours,” says the little man and bows out. The manager shows the way upstairs, to a large carpeted room furnished with a fuel stove, white-hot. A platform, three feet wide and two foot high, runs all along the walls. Its piled with cushions and folded bedding. A kerosine lamp hangs from the whitewashed ceilings.

A girl of Tlitsy’s size walks in, spreads a waxed cloth on the floor, points to herself, says aineh, and walks out.

A slightly larger girl appears with a wooden bowl, It contains eight eggs, a lump of cheese, a smaller bowl full of black olives and a larger chunk of halwa, firm grey stuff streaked with kind of meringue.

The girl names herself “Kibar,” and goes out. Jack has peeled off his pustin and fleece boots to crouch near the stove. Jil and the children pitty-pat round the room in their socks. Then comes a dark-eyed lady with jet black hair framing a square, pale white face. She wears a mauve two-piece suit under a black lace shawl. She carries two square feet of nan and a frying pan. She bows, smiles, says ubra, and begins to cook the eggs on the stove.

The little girls, plus three small boys called Atila, Melik and Tanner squat about and watch the strangers feed. They pass no comment, but the young Atila, who must be four, keeps edging towards Tootie.

The Master appears, armed with an English-Turkish booklet. He points to a sentence on page three:

“Will you come to my club?”

Jack puts on his pustin, his boots and his best smile, When the men have gone two more ladies come in with a gramophone. They spend half an hour teaching their names to Jil. Then they want to see her watch, her wedding ring, her lipstick case and her bra. Satisfied, they put on a record of Turkish music.

It becomes clear they want Jil to dance. Kubra shows her a few steps, very like those of a Hungarian czarda. The Brat peels off her track suit and performs.

The ladies clap, the children squeal. Jil warms up and keeps at it for a good hour.

By the time Jack comes back she has gone to bed on the floor under a sheet-lined quilt.

‘The snow has stopped, whispers Jack, ‘and I saw two stars.

... ..

Jil wakes with a pain behind the eyes. She blinks

“Ouch!” ... Again, “ouch!” She must be going blind, only...in reverse. Everything is dazzling white. Jil knows she is lying on her back. Yet she feels like a moth that’s just smashed into a flash light. She pokes Jack with her elbow.

“Gosh,” says he, then “wow!”

Jil turns over and rises backwards. Jack is sitting up, shading his eyes from the sun, the snow and the ceiling. The bay window opens towards the East, full of light, blue, gold and white, blinding white.

“Listen,” says Tootie pointing to the window. Jack jumps up, screws his face to the glass and shouts:

“The snow-plough, going West.”

... ..

It takes half an hour to say “thank you,” and “good bye,” ten minutes to load the Putput and defrost the front wheel. Then half an hour to catch up with the snow-plough. For a while Jack follows the yellow monster at ten miles an hour, then stops for

breakfast. Jil produces a frozen slab of nan. Jack sits on it, pulling out little chunks as it defrosts.

The road seems to be going down and the snowbanks look thinner on the roadside. Jack catches up with the plough and overtakes it with a wave of thanks.

“Karachose, kach kilometro? “Oniki,” snout the men.

Twelve muddy kilometers in half an hour, then a mile over splashy cobblestones through the town with a short stop to buy bread. Then more mud for a couple of hours, where the road is like a red ribbon across the white plain.

“Mountains ahead,” says Jack. “Just keep going,” answers Jil.

The road turns slushy with half melted snow mixed with the red mud. The Putput stays in top gear. Soon, the middle of the road begins to show white between two wheel-tracks. In second gear, the Putput ploughs a third groove for her front wheel, She keeps going up, that is the main thing. Then the road goes creamy white with hard, matted snow, smooth all over and shiny on the side of the gully, Jack throws the low gear. She climbs on, at five miles an hour, towards the blue sky.

“We’ll get through it in the end,” says Jack,

Three hours later the road winds down towards a cluster of white roofs. On the map, Velibaba marks the edge of the seven thousand feet contour,

“We’ll get through anything,” shouts Jack,

“Watch the road,” urges Jil, “it’s slushy again. “Not for long,” answers Jack. “Look..”

A plain to the North-West, pale-brown between the white roofs of Velibaba. And a straight, pale-yellow line like a giant straw: the open road towards Erzurum.

Jack loves the Turks for their roads, dry, smooth and well graded. Jil likes them for the two-story house to be found in each small town under the sign

‘OTEL’

Tiny, timber-lined rooms with two bunks under the old sheet-lined quilts. A stove that burns all night and smells good. And all that for a lira or two.

Tlitsy loves the Turks for their dark, chewy bread and their peaked caps, which make them look like grey birds. Tootie worships the Turks for their pastry, especially the baclavas. They look and taste like wheat flakes soaked in syrup.

Turks always answer questions. tenever a mountain looms ahead Jack stops by the nearest Turk, salutes him and asks:

“Kar?”

“Yok,” answers the Turk or, even better, “t’t” The Turk was right in Erzurum. The map showed a brown ridge between the Aras and Upper Euphrates valley. But the Turk has said “Yak” and Jack got down to Erzincan without once touching the snow line. “Kar?” asks the Brute, ten miles past Erzincan. “Yok,” answers the Turk.

This time the map must be right. Whichever way Jack looks a large band of white cuts the red earth from the blue sky. The road climbs muddily for an hour then turns white with slushy, sun-rotted snow. The sun burns through the pustins but the wind freezes the fingers. It also cements the slush between wheel and mudguard.

In the next five hours the Putput covers five miles in a fierce white and blue world. The engine stalls every fifty yards and becomes harder to start.

“Four o’clock,” says Jil, “...not much day left.” “The sun is still high,” pants Jack, “let’s push up to the next bend...” From there the sun looks even higher and Jack wonders why.

“There is no more mountain,” explains Tlitsy.

Jack kisses the boy, lights a cigarette and begins to unclog the front wheel. The snow comes off easily. Ahead, the white shroud falls gently away under a layer of blue haze, towards the south-West. The wind has died.

“Get going,” urges Jil. “A night here would kill us.”

“Listen...” says Tootie.

Jack stops, his foot on the kick starter. The purr of a motor comes from behind with a rattle of snow chains. Soon, a bus appears over the crest, then stops near the Putput. The driver jumps out and uncoils a length of rope.

“Yak,” says Jack.

The man explains something about the sun, the snow and the road ahead. “Tt,” says Jack.

The driver looks at Jack, shrugs his shoulders and climbs back into his bus. As the big machine wobbles away four or five faces stare out of the rear window.

“A tow would finish us out,” explains Jack, “we must see this through on our own.”

“Come on, then,” says Jil.

It’s nearly dark when the Putput comes off the snow onto the mud. Jack switches the light on as the road sinks deep into a gorge. The wheel-tracks of the bus stand out darkly on the shiny surface between the cliff and the torrent. Fallen debris, jagged and wet prick the darkness.

... ..

“Daddy,” calls Tlitsy, “you’ve lost the bus.”

Jack drives on for a mile or so, No trace of tires, even on the softest patches. Another mile, until the road is wide enough to turn back safely, then up again, following the treble path of the Putput, very slowly, until the larger marks of the bus re- appear suddenly.

The path turns off the road towards the torrent, going down a steep incline to cross a wooden bridge. Rather unfair to Putputs, the two wheel planks with only a rough grid in the middle.

“Here we go,” breathes Jack. “... Here...we...are” Two miles from the bridge, up the muddy track, looms a mass of denser shade. The sneaky old bus, herself, parked by a small Otel. Some of the men in the lokanta give Jack a sober look. The bus driver is among those, looking as though he’s lost a bet.

But the young waiter must be one of the winners.. He fusses over the children, brings a cushion for Tootie and serves six fried. river fish instead of beans. When Jack brings out his map, the young fellow points to the ground, says “Refahiyeh,” then to the west: “Sushehri, elle kilometro,” and shakes his head.

“Fifty kilos to the next place...” Jack nods thoughtfully, then gives Tlitsy one of his fish. “To make a bright boy even brighter,” says he.

... ..

Sushehri lies at the bottom of a dry and warn valley facing a white monster of a mountain which the Putput will not have to climb. Beyond it lies the Black Sea, eighty miles to the North.

The Putput is going South-West, over a shallow pass into the Kizil Irinak valley, towards Sivas and Kayseri. No more brown patches on the map, no more white on the road.

Three days running South West, one rainy hour in Kayseri, then three days trekking North West in the teeth of an icy wind, across the bleak highlands of Anatolia, still above three thousand feet.

At noon, on the twentieth day from Teheran by Jil's diary, the wind dies out of the blue sky. The road turns to bitumen and a dome of brown mist bulges up from the North

'Ankara, says Jack,

... ..

A beacon blinks from green to amber. The shock of it stalls the Putput. It's the first traffic lights since Perth. The avenue tries to run straight between two rows of new buildings. After a mile it peters out in a jumble of hills piledsky high with brown buildings.

"Big," says Jil, but dull,"

"Tomorrow, promises Jack, "well paint it red.

"Hadn't we better wait until Stambul?" asks Jil.

A heated room vritn two iron bunks cost sixteen liras. Jack spreads the four sleeping bags on the floor. With his feet against the heater and his head under the window he will be more than snug.

Under Jil's cot lies a newspaper in Western print. Jack stretches a hand.. "Of course, the darned thing is in Turkish. On top of the front page is a red splash:

HURRIYET

Funny name to call a newspaper. The date is not much help either: 'Carsamba, Kasim 13, Istanbul,'

A snow scene covers half the page above a three line caption mentioning 'Kar' and 'Bolu Daglari.' Jack knows the Bolu Pass is only three thousand feet high. These journalists...

On page Iki, somebody has won a football match by Dortmund goals to Uç...

Page Uç shows three photos and a room chart of the Istanbul Hilton Otel,

On the lower left of page Dortmund is the picture of a man who can fold his feet above his thighs. His calves stand out in bold foreground, sinewy and taut under the rolled-up trousers. His clean-shaven face looms strangely white under a peaked cap, His name is Pattud Ali...

"Jay Shakti," sighs Jack and falls asleep.

... ..

The Putput steals out of Ankara, leaving the city to wake up under a grey quilt, speckled with a few hesitant snow flakes. An hour later the road turns North up a long valley, towards a pine-clad mountain.

"First pines this side of Simla," remarks Jack.

"Hurry up," urges Jil, "we're freezing."

The snow is beginning to set on the track when the Putput tops the range. It clears a little on the way down but thickens to a real blizzard on the open country beyond.

"We must be very near Bolu," says Jack.

But the blast veers into the Putput's nose, holding her down to second gear on the flat road. Jil and Tlitsy hang on to the canvas.

"I can see a house," says the boy, "with a big shed on the side."

Jack turns off the road, opens a five-barred gate and drives under the barn. The floor is of beaten dung, dry and warm to the soles. The shed is tall and forms a windless nook with the two-storied stone house,

"It's paradise," says Jil, flapping her arms against her sides.

Two female faces peer from behind a pane of glass. They look doubtful and worried.

"Tootie," calls Jack, "Look at the pretty house,"

Tootie pokes out of the canvas, spots the ladies and smiles. Instantly a door opens and a girl of twelve rushes out, "Otel?" asks Jil,

The girl looks amazed but she grabs Tootie and signals for all to follow. Two minutes later she has lit a stove in a vast, carpeted room, said "Kibar" and bowed out,

"Kibar seems quite a common name," remarks Jacks
"Didn't we know one in India?"

"It was the name of Pat Daly's widow," remembers Jil.

Kibar's mother brings a tray of halwa, cheese, nan and olives. Jil spreads the pustins to dry on the platform which runs around the room. Jack wipes the frost off the window pane. The snow falls thickly outside, blurring the outlines of a small town.

"Bolu queries Jack.

"Gerede," answers Kibar. Jack finds the place on the map, forty miles East of Bolu.

... ..

In the early morning the snow is two feet thick in the yard but, at eight o'clock, a snow-plough comes from the West, bright yellow under the pale sun. The master of the house refuses a ten lira note and gives Jil a big lump of halwa. As he helps to push the Putput onto the cleared path his wife comes out with a bottle of hot water.

Two hours later the Putput begins to skid down the hairpin bends of the Bolu Pass. It's raining in sheets all over the plains but who cares? There are houses everywhere, real trees and a bitumen road. The Otela are cleaner, better heated and yet no more than twice as dear: twenty cents instead of ten. The lokanlas carry as many as six different dishes. In Adapazari Tootie drinks a fizzy lemonade. Tlitsy prefers a bar of chocolate.

"Because it keeps," says he.

The air itself feels richer, more sustaining. For a whole day Jil sniffs it with a vague sense of recognition. On that same evening the grey sky to the West drops away between two ranges. It melts, nearly out of sight, with a flat sheet of dull silver, "The sea," shouts Tlitsy, 'the sea.'

Next morning, on the two hundred and second day out of Bombay, the Putput scurries along the shore of the Izmit Gulf. Olive trees line the hillsides on her right. Far ahead lies a denser patch of haze. "silly to enter Istanbul on a Saturday," sighs Jil, after a look at her diary.

"Why?" wonders Jack.

"All the shops will be closed until Monday."

"Don't be..." begins Jack but the cobblestones of Haydar Pasha rattle the breath out of his lungs.

They are terrible and require all his attention. Jil is left to admire the skyline of Uskudar and count the domes of Istanbul,

"Boats," shouts Tlitsy.

A ferry is just about to leave for Europe. The Putput squeezes in between a very old Jeep and a brand new horse-cart.

"Hullo," says the Jeep's owner, "where are you from?"

"Sydney," answers Jack happily, "nice day."

"At what time do the shops close on Saturday?" asks Jil.

"Most of them never do," answers the man "And anyway, today is Monday,"

"Today's Saturday," insists Jil, diary in hand, "Fourteenth of December."

"Today is Pazartesi, Onalti Aralik," laughs the man, "It means Monday, 16th December,"

"Gosh," cries Jil, "those Turks have stolen two days out of our lives."

"Never mind," says Jack, "we're in Europe."

... ..

"Otel? shouts Jack over the rattle of cobblestones.

"Sirkeji," answer the Turk, pointing South.

"Sirkeji?" shouts Jack, after driving over the bridge across the Golden Horn. The Turks nod, meaning 'here.' They must be right. Nearly every house bears the 'Otel' sign. Most of them could do with some patching up, new woodwork, a fresh coat of paint or, perhaps better, a demolition squad. The street paving is

murderous. But at the end of each dingy street looms a cupola or soars a minaret.

“Exciting place,” sighs Jil.

Jack finds a room with two cots for ten liras a night. The Putput will sleep outside in a side lane. The Turks are honest. Besides, in the four discolored pustins, the family looks no richer than the poorest Turk. Yet the shopkeepers are polite and helpful.

All the prices are marked, even in the lokanta’s windows, crammed with splendid fish.

Jil needs a week to digest her two liras’ worth of Black Sea Sole. Halfway up the avenue which leads to the bazaar a large fellow steps up to her:

“Hullo there: where is your famous vehicle?”

“Why’?” asks Jil.

“I want a picture of it and yourselves for my newspaper. The fellow shows his flash camera.

“Frankly,” says Jack, “we re not interested in publicity. Scootovans are not fit for Stambul streets,

“What is your papers narne?”

“Harriyet,” answers the man, “the best and biggest. I run she Odd Bods column.”

“Let’s walk that way,” says Jack. “. .. Did you do a Yoga Bod lately’?”

“He did me. Do you know him?”

“We did know him,” says Jil. “I don’t think he’d do anybody.”

“He did me out of his story. When I spotted him he had a first class beard and long hair. He promised to tell me everything if I got him a visa to stay in Turkey. When he collected the papers he had shaven his beard and cut his hair. He palmed me off with a silly story about marrying a widow and let me take a picture of himself doing a trick with his legs.”

“Tough,” says Jack. “How long ago was that?” “About two weeks. I heard of him a little later from one of my touts. He was trying to get a lift out of Uskudar towards Eskishehir.”

Jack and Jil walk quietly towards the Otel.

... ..

... Here we are,” says Jacck. “This is our machine. It’s very dirty. Do you really want to waste your film on it?”

“Yes please... You could stand against this side and hide some of the mud.”

“It’s Turkish mud,” says Jack, “we’re proud of it. Besides... Does your paper ever reach the small villages around Eskishenir?”

“Why of course... We print the fruit market prices.”

“Then, if you don’t mind, we’ll do it this way...” Jack lines up the family near the front end of the Putput and scrapes the thick mud on her side to form the words:

JAY KIBAR

“What does that mean’?” asks the journalist.

“Nothing much,” answers Jack, “but our friend will understand.”

... ..

“Not much to be bought in Stambul,” moans Jil after a day in the bazaar. Jack saves his breath, staggering up the cobbled lane under two hundred liras’ worth of raincoats, fur lined boots, tinned herrings, noodles and pistacchio halwa.

“There isn’t even a plastic toy,” complains Tlitsy. “Then let’s get out,” pants Jack. “Let’s be in Greece for Christmas.”

“I must send out our Christmas cards,” says Jil, “also leave the Consulate our forwarding address. Now that we’ve lost Pat Daly, we’ll never know what happened to Joe, unless he writes.”

“I bet he’s back home,” sighs Jack. “Lucky Joe.”

... ..

Jil is sad at leaving Stambul. Stambul mourns the Brat’s departure with an appalling array of dark mud, drizzle and soot. The dreary hills of Eastern Thrace fail to dispel the gloom. Halfway to the Greek border a small town shivers among the furze. Corlu, pronounced “Chorloo” holds little prospect of cheer. The Otel is drafty and the lokanta’s stews cloud over with congealed fat.

“Five days to Christmas,” sighs Jil, “and not much hope of a hot dinner.”

... ..

XVI

AND GO

While refuelling for the day's run, Jack spills some gas on his fingers already numb with cold.

The pump attendant offers his wiping rag but the Brute prefers to slap his shoulder blades and curse a little.

"That's no Turkish way to talk," remarks a low, slow voice behind Jack's back. The drawl comes out of a beam-pole in blue denims who stands on the steps of a Western style house. Then comes a question:

"What 's in that truckle-box marked AUS ?"

Tootie, then Tlitsy, then Jil poke their heads out of the canvas to stare in. silent reproof. Big boy's blue eyes pop out of his russet face.

"Well, I'm beat," says he. "Any more?... Are you really coming from Australia in that?"

"We are," answers Jil.

"My name is Bob Skagg... won't you come in and have some coffee?..."

Inside the house are two more men. Lee Strelitz is grey-eyed, souare-headed, a good thirty. Aloysius Castroani, who does not mind being called Dag, is the baby, dark-haired, dark-eyed and pink-faced with good humor.

"Pioneers," he shouts after seeing the Putput. "Pioneers is what these people are!... Like they tell us in school to make us proud of America."

"What about you?" laughs Jil. "What kind of decadent game are you playing in this luxury spot?"

"What were you doing in Australia?"

“I was a proof-reader,” says Jack. “Lovely quiet job. I’ll will be glad to go back.”

“Don’t you like the life?” asks Bob.

“It’s interesting,” answers Jil, “but we’ve been at it for nine months.”

“It must have cost you a packet.”

“Seven hundred dollars so far,’ reckons Jack, “fares, repairs and all. We’re not complaning. We get a lot of help. Some people even offer us coffee.”

“Qosh... I forgot...” Bob walks out of the room, then returns empty handed and crestfallen, “I’m sorry, folks... Cook says he’s too busy... You see, we’re breaking out today. That’s why you find us in the house, This afternoon Lee and I will fly to Athens for a week and Bag will go to Switzerland. In another hour we’ll be having our Christmas dinner... I suggest...” “I second it,” shouts Bag.

“Sure,” nods Lee,

“I suggest you folks stay for Christmas dinner,

“You’ll have the afternoon to get to Edirne.”

“Will there be enough food for all of us and the cook?” worries Jil.

“Plenty. There is tomato soup, pilaff, green beans, and, a roast Turkey and an apple pie.”

Tootie cheers and jumps for joy.

“If it’s really no trouble...” says Jack.

At one o’clock Bob, Lee and Bag climb into their Jeep and blast off towards Stambul airfield. Drowsy with warmth and food Jil fumbles with the back door of the Putput.

“Something is blocking it,” says she. A packing case, two feet square and nearly as high takes up most of the floor space. There is a pencil scribble across the top:

“Three cheers from Qhorloo
Lee, Bob and Dag.”

“Pile in on top of it,” says Jack. “We must go.” As the Putput races over the last hills of Turkey, Jack hears a great shuffling of cans, a lot of Qos and Ahs and Jil’s excited squeals:

“Chili Con Carne... Cream of Chicken... Yams in Syrup... Salted Peanuts... Chlorophyll aolll., Santa Gerty’s Stew... Maple Syrup... Butterscotch Cream... Miami Mix.”

“Look at that sunset,” shouts Jack,

It is red velvet and gold, a fitting backdrop to the Edirne mosque. The huge dome, between its four needle-sharp minarets, is the last Moslem landmark on the Putput’s route, six thousand miles from the little prayer walls of South India.

“Tomorrow,” exults Jack, “we’ll be among Christians.”

“Tonight,” sighs Jil happily, “we’ll have the baked Butter Beans.”

“Can’t you stop thinking of food?” complains the Brute.

“Let’s eat and get strong,” answers Jil, “Then let’s get to some place where we can stop, wash and feel human again.”

... ..

Jil feels better in the morning, She goes into a reverent hush as the Putput files past the white gate with the red crescent and the won ‘Turnye. She tenses with expectation over the bumpy no-man’s land. Safe and sound behind the blue-on-white cross of Greece Jil bursts into speech:

“Greeks are Christians. Many of them speak English. Perhaps they have little week-enders built near the sea. Perhaps they might let us rent one until the winter’s over...”

“Perhaps in the South,1’ concedes Jack as the Put-put nearly capsizes into a giant pothole. “If we ever get there...this road is worse than anything yet.

“I still like Greece,” says Jil. “Look...the women walk with the men... Look at the old girl driving a horse cart.”

“Just a new road menace.” Jack growls indulgently. It’s good to watch the mixed crowd on their way back from the market. Indeed, it is the first time since Australia that men and women walk together in the open.

Didymoteichon feels happier than Chorloo. The Aenodochio shows a marked improvement on the Oteig

it provides toilet paper and the sheets are not pinned to the quilts. The Estiatoric offers more scope than the Lokanta: Haggis stew,

for instance, and a noodle-like concoction which turns out to be chicken-tripe.

The Cafeneio replaces the Chai Khaneh. To his surprise Jack likes the smell of Retsina there is something healthy about the pine-bud flavor of the Greek wine.

“Mummy, I want Baclavas,” yells Tootie. She knows the flake and syrup mixture from Turkey. But the sweet shops offers French-style goo as well.

“Any halwa?” enquires Jil.

“T’t,” nods up the merchant.

... ..

Tlitsy freezes on the footpath, pointing to the brighter shop in the lot. A Christmas tree grows in the window, bearing dozens of pretty lights.

“Toys” breathes Tlitsy. “Plastic toys.”

“Christmas in two days time,” says Jil.

... ..

Alexandropouli is paradise: the sea, the tarred road with just enough potholes to make it interesting, a meal of roast pork in a beach restaurant. Roast PORK, mind you, the first meat that divides the hoof and does not chew the cud this side of Fremantle. Then, to help digest it, a genthe climb up the olive-clad hills.

“Big cloud,” warns Tlitsy, “...coming behind.” “We’ll beat him to Xanthi,” answers Jack.

Two minutes later the Putput stalls in eighteen inches of water. The back of the canvas caves in, flooding the precious box from Chorloo.

Double disaster: Jack’s raw fleece boots shrink so tight around his ankles that they have to be cut off him. And, when Jil decides on a stew supper she finds all her cans look the same. A gluey soup of soggy

labels lines the bottow of the case.

... ..

Christmas Day rises greyly over Xanthi, to the sweet-and-sad chant of a Greek mass. The service seems to last forever so Jil pulls on Jack's sleeve,

"We must go."

The sky clears for a breath-taking view of Kay-ala, white cubes over the blue sea. It turns darkly foggy for two hours behind the Synwolon range. Then it brightens again at two o'clock, in time for the Christmas Dinner.

The place is a sunlit gully lined with silvery moss at the head of the Strymon gulf near the mouth of the Strymon river. The sea shimmers pale blue for fifty miles to the holy cone of Mount Athos. There isn't a soul in sight but Tootie's, Tlitsy's, Jil's and Jack's. A lone bush of Juniper grows on the cropped slope, dark and sharp as an ace of spades.

The children comb the gully for driftwood and dry twigs. When they come back Jil has decorated the Juniper with the silk tilt of her Punjabi dress, a star cut out of a cigarette wrap and chlorophyll tissue streamers. A plastic scootovan, a Greek Patriot doll, various Eastern sweetmeats hang from the brittle twigs.

"Ooooh," squeal the kiddies.

"More driftwood," urges Jack. He has dug two belly-fires in the stony slope. The smoke rises straight up the blue with a sweet peppery smell.

Jil is busy guessing the contents of the cans. She remembers the larger one holds sausages, three pounds of them. She opens it, squats it on the bigger fire and it begins to smell like home. Maybe the long can holds baked beans. Jil opens it. It's Miami Mix, very rich and Christmassy, with diced pineapple and perhaps pa'wpaw, or guava. The second longest might be the beans. It's yams in syrup, but not so sweet that they can't serve as vegetables, once drained of their clear, faintly winey juice, and browned over the embers...

... ..

Who wants more? asks Jil.

“Phew,” pants Jack.

“No room in me,” pipes Tlitsy.

Tootie is obviously bloated, She just manages to keep awake by staring at the Christmas tree.

“What a pity,” sighs Jil. “Three sausages left and six slices of yams. What we need is a guest.

“That would be nice,’ agrees Jack, “but let’s be content. . There was something mighty good about those Chorloo boys... They were the first people I got help from without feeling a heel on account of the starving millions. There aren’t any coolies in America.”

“Nor in Australia,” Jil points out,

“There is something else. That Dag fellow...you could see he didn’t mind his nickname, A Woolloornooloc Italian wouldn’t like it... see what I mean’

“I see you’re full of U.S. tucker and cupboard love, but don’t worry, may be we’ll hear from Joe,”

“Hilnic, klinic, kilnic,” says Tootie, pointing a sticky finger towards the gully. Tootie is growing up to be the Ear of the family, Tlitsy being the Eye and Jil the Nose.

“Here come our guests, maybe,” says Jack as he picks up the very faint tinkle of a cattle bell. Two cows appear, shaggy and reddish brown. Their only escort is a kelpie, black and white and long haired. He gets there first and accepts the sausages with a broad wag of his tail.

The cows show more dignity. They give the yarns three long sniffs, moist and soulful. Then, from their goose-pimpled snout curls out a raspy tongue.

“Shrip,” echoes Tootie, Christmas is over,” says Jil firmly, now for the road to our week-ender by the sea.”

... ..

Drizzle and slush in Saloniki. No room in the LWCA. No spare parts at the Scootovan agents. No fire in the small hotel at sixteen drachmae a bed. No coastal road open towards Lansea, No is ‘Oihi” or, sometimes, “Ut” with a forward nod of the chin.

“Oihi,” says the Tourist Bureau lady, “there are no week-enders on the coasts of Macedonia... Perhaps in the South...’
But there are English-spoken pictures all over town. The latest hit runs at the Pallas. Its title shines in big neon letters across the grecian gable:

N K A M I I Y

Greek is easy. Jack knows all the letters including the fifth which is a Pi (3.1416.)

Nkampy, spells out the Brute, “... What the heck can it mean?”

“Gaby,” reads Jil from a poster, “let’s go in.”

“BPOIA’ reads the signpost, ‘Veria’ says Jack’s map. A pleasant little town which must look fine under a blue sky, with some leaves on its poplar trees

As Jack pulls up to refuel a bus comes downhill, covered in snow. The rattle of its chains nearly deafens Tootie.

“Oihi,” says the men, pointing to Jack’s unfetted wheels, “Hioni.” They raise their hands to show how thick the stuff is up there.

It turns out to be thick and matted, a cinch for the Putput. A pea-soup of a fog reduces Tlitsy’s scope to the nearest ten yards. It saves Jack the repeated let-down of finding a new climb behind every bend. Eventually a swift descent clears the fog and brings out a signpost

KOZARHI 5 X

“Fifteen kilos to Kozati,” translates Jack. “...a good night’s sleep and then South. This was our highest climb in Greece.”

... ..

On the icy slope behind Mount Olympos, the Putput meets with the steepest grade in all her travels. she stalls on full gas, in lower gear and with Jil pushing behind. Jack hops down, slips on the frozen

slush and makes a frantic grab at the brake. Two heartbeats later, the sliding bulk of the machine tucks him under a snow ridge, twenty feet downhill.

Jil has clung to the back and come tumbling after. She rises from the snow, three feet from the edge of a sixty yards drop.

“Phew,” says she, “anything broken?”

“I don’t think so,” answers Jack, brushing the snow off his crown. “Let’s get the kids down and push her up to the pass. I feel this is the last hill troubles.”

... ..

A fantastic wall of rock rises beyond Lamia to end flush with the sea at the famous pass of the Thermopylae. However, the road climbs it in long, sensibly graded hairpins, Beyond this looms the Parnassos, the snow-clad mountain of the poets, which Jack does not dream of climbing.

On New Year’s day Jack prepares to enter Thebes, IQHBAI spells the signpost, ‘Thivai’ insists the map. A pretty place by any name, white walls above silver-green olive groves.

A grey sky over Athens, grey shambles around grey ruins. A despairing Parthenon, crying bitter shame into the bleak winds

“Never mind,” says Jack, “the best preserved of all Greek ruins are in Italy. Paestum is the place.

And the best kept Roman ruins are in Nimes France.”

“What I’d like now,” sighs Jil, “is a weatherproof cabin by the seaside.”

“No such thing near Athens,” say the Tourist Bureau, “...perhaps around Corinth..”

... ..

Corinth smiles, dazzling white between its blue gulf and the pale, windswept sky. It lures Jack into a drive South for a sun-drenched afternoon on the ruins of Mykenni, a pule sunset over the bay of Nafplion and a sad return North through a drizzle soaked Argos.

Jack has found no bungalow but, on that first sunny day, he has shown Jil the Greece of his dreams:

Burnished stones, silvery mosses, somber asphodels, gnarled olive trees. Craggy hillsides dented by stony paths. Small white houses, guarded by a lone cypress or screened by the inefficient shade of an old olive grove.

“What about that one up there?” Jil points to a pale blue cube on the slope of Acro Corinth. “Do you think it could be rented?”

“They wouldn’t believe we meant it,” answers Jack.

“Let’s get across to Italy... The language is easier there, judging by what I learnt of it in the Sydney markets... Maybe we’ll have better luck...”

... ..

The passage from Patras to Brindisi will cost eighty dollars in all and take thirty hours with stops at Ithaca and Corfu. The family will enter Italy with more than a third of the money Jack took along from Perth.

“I think we can call it a day as soon as we land on the Italian bitumen,” says Jack, waving the shipping tickets. “We’ll follow the coast until we find a room to rent for a couple of months. Then we’ll see...”

“Hooray,” says Jil. “Let’s get the Putput ready for the ship.”

Plenty of room to do the job on the Patras waterfront. Plenty of walking space left for the evening stroll of the Patrassians. Yet a crowd gathers round the dismantled Putput and the strange family with yellow coats and yellow-haired children.

“American?” asks a young fellow.

Jack shakes his head,

‘Deutsh?’

“No.”

“English?”

“No.”

“Italiano?”

“No.”

“Turk?”

“T’t.”

The young fellow makes a last effort: “Russi?”

Jack shakes his head.

“Heh!” shrugs an old man, “Anthropi.”

“He said ‘Humans,’” translates Jack.
Jil blushes at the compliment.

... ..

Brindisi is nearly too good to be true, It has an Albergo Diurno, a place where, for a small fee, one can shave, bathe, press one’s trousers and shine one’s shoes, It has a dime and nickel store. That is a fantastic shop where one can buy hairpins without haggling over the price,

“Tre lire” says the counter girl and Jil can feel the young lady’s life does not hang on the outcome of the transaction. Bad for business, perhaps, but relaxing after her struggles in the bazaars, Brindisians are neat as new pins They make Jil feel slightly shabby.

“Let’s find a small village,” says the Brat, “Italy is like a boot,” explains Jack, “We can go North up the back seam or cross the heel and run South along the sole.” “South, please,” says Jil,

... ..

Taranto is larger than Brindisi but not so prim. Jil watches its life from the balcony of a small hotel in the old town, overlooking a bridge. After three minutes she reaches for her diary and jots down:

7 scootovans, 2 dozen Fiats of various vintage, one wheel-chair, three jet planes, two buses with trailers, two row-boats, one submarine, many bicycles, six or seven horsecarts. Horses wear tall collar pieces with wrought metal weather-vane on top. Also padded mufflers on three of their feet making them go clop-thud- thud-cl op-thud-thud-clop...

“Do you still want a small village’?” asks the Brute over her shoulder.

“Yes,” answers Jil, “small but lively. Something like a fishing village.”

... ..

No fishing village is to be found along the instep of the Italian boot, There are a few under the toe but Crotona is too big, Soverato too windy and Locri has no sand.

“I can see a nice mountain over the water,” says Tlitsy in the early morning of the third day.

“It’s in Sicily,” protests Jack, “We can’t go there,”

“Why not’?” asks Jil,

... ..

Tlitsy’s nice mountain was the Etna. The volcano is now a prisoner of Jilt’s bedroom window. It has stood there for seven sunrises, filling the room with reflected dawn and a much needed sense of stability. It will stay there until all its snow has melted.

This should take at least a couple of months. Right now the white mantle floats half-way down to the green and yellow orchards above the pink walls of the village. Jil rubs her eyes, just once more. She knows the mountain is real but there is no telling what a volcano might do overnight.

Jil slips out of bed, tiptoes over the tiled floor into the kitchen, She lights the liquid-gas stove to fry breakfast: thick slices of light Italian bread soaked in a mixture of milk and egg. When a slice is brown she squeezes half a lemon on it and stows it in the warming rack. She opens the door to clear the smell of burnt oil. But that is a mistake. With the door open she cannot resist the call of the terrace. She saunters across the ten yard square of cement to lean on the iron railings, fifteen feet above the quay, twenty feet from the waves. Ahead the sea is a sheet of beaten gold under the new sun. To the right the nineteen boats of the villagers wait on the pebbly beach. To the left squats the village, its flat roofs dwarfed by its church and the proud brow of

Taormina, six miles to the North, Taormina the white, Taormina the famous, getting her early whack of sunshine at fifty dollars a day. Jil does not mind. No one in Taormina can chuck their orange peel straight into the Med as she does from her ten dollars a month terrace. Torre is no tourist spot. It thrives at the tip of an old lava flow between its nineteen fishing boats and the lemon trees which shade a crop of potatoes. Perhaps some of its nine hundred people would like to see a few tourists. Perhaps that's why they are so nice to Jil.

... ..

Jack gets up for a easy day. First eat the fried bread and half a dozen oranges. Then work through the morning, writing letters and clearing up Jil's diary. If he could only get a story out of this trip, may be he could sell it...

In the afternoon the village priest will send the pupils. The old boy was so impressed by Jack's lightning progress with Italian. He couldn't possibly know how easy it sounds to a Turkey-trained ear. The young folks are keen to learn English. They want jobs on the big liners. One is the second son of the butcher. Another is third cousin to a wholesale grocer. A third is the nephew of a fisherman. And the girl is the daughter of an orchard owner. A most suitable selection. The priest says he will find more pupils in the town of Riposto. Those will have to help with the rent. They'll get their money's worth, three solid hours of repeating an English phrase until they say it right. something simple at first:

'Jack and Jil went up the hill...'

... ..

Tlitsy is busier than Jack. Eating oranges, catching baby crabs on the shore, picking lemons with the boys, singing with the Choir, fetching the milk, shelling almonds...

By five in the evening he's quite an old man, just fit to gobble up a pound of noodles and remember things from yesterday-long-time-ago:

“Pippo’s shop has little steps going down the side like in that place where it rained so much... The Church street is made of red stones like where it was so hot... There is a cart in the back of the church, with gold people on top, like we saw with Hans...

Nunzi has a tree in her garden with big leaves like we saw in Jackie’s house...”

“The fact is,” agrees Jack, “this place has a lot in common with the East.”

“But it’s a lot nearer the West,” says Jil happily. “... Tlitsy, you fetch another botthe of Tomato Ketchup.

“Ketchup?” queries Jack.

“Yap,” answers Jil. “Ketchup. Our grocer spent most of his life in Brooklyn.”

“He says he was a Knight of Kalaboos,” precises Tlitsy, going out.

“He can’t make up his mind whether to stay or go back,” adds Jil.

“Lucky man to have the choice,” says Jack.

After fetching the ketchup, Tlitsy squats on the terrace to watch the sea. He likes the sea because he can see very far on it. May be a red sail, may be a bat of wood or a bird. Anything so long as he can see it first.

... ..

Tootie is waxing fat. All day she plays dolly to the Torre ladies, grannies and teenagers alike. They keep patting her soft hair and hard little legs and stuffing her with almond paste.

“Like halwa,” says she.

Bloated, she lies on the terrace floor, her tummy flat on the tiles still warm from the day’s sun. She listens to the dusk. Through the beat of the sea, which is much milder than the Putput’s, she can hear a lot of things:

Pigeons cooing under the terrace ledge. The clocks of Riposto which strike the hour a good while before Torre’s church. A boat scraping on the gravel. A rumble in the ground which, says Daddy, comes from the Volcano. A fish being scaled. Anything, so long as she can hear it first.

“Lady come upstairs,’ says she.

It's the postmistress, a featherweight spinster in felt slippers. She hands Jack a long envelope and begins a speech:

"Dall' America... anche lei..."

But Jack will miss this lesson. The stamp bears a postmark he doesn't know: Oregon. The letter has been redirected by Jil's mummy. The writing is a bit rough:

Ashland Jan. 20th

Hi folks

I thought I'd better let you know. I'm back home. The Ashram said Yoga took seven years to learn but an old chap showed me some jerks which are mighty good for my innards. I got out with enough dough left to buy myself a little share in a lumber job. It's clean up here and the people talk Christian. If you come up this way, be sure to look us up. We can always do with folks who can use a screwdriver and a frying pan...

"Oregon," muses Jack, "that's where the Putput timbers come from..."

"It sounds a nice healthy place," admits Jil.

"It's on the way back to Austrafra, says Jack with a side look at the Brat.

"The long way round," corrects Jil, "with a few boat fares."

"Ah well," sighs Jack, "...just another dream."

"Just what we need," says Jil, "to keep truly alive."