The Motorsickle and the Lady

Illustrated by CHARLES ZINGARO

WHEN the state trooper came into Mike's, the only place licensed to sell beer in Newtown, the men standing at the pine counter made room for him without the silent, sullen fear usually shown cops.

It was "Hey, Jeb," and "Howdy, Jeb," the easy familiarity of villagers with one of their own kind. Only Dirty Tom Cribbit gave no greeting. He was talking to the new manager of one of the tomato canneries, swaying a little and holding tenuously to the lip of the counter with grease-blackened fingers.

"I got me my hundred dollars," he was saying loudly, shaking his head slowly from side to side, "an' I quit. I always quit when I git me my hundred dollars."

Jeb, the state trooper, ordered a grape soda. Dirty Tom turned and grinned beerily at him. "*You* tell 'im, Jeb," he said. "Th' gen'lman don' understand my talk."

Jeb took a swig of soda and smiled. "I've known Tom, here, since we were boys. More than twenty years. He's never had more than one hundred dollars. Never!"

Dirty Tom gestured triumphantly at the cannery man, and banged the counter. "Ain't it th' truth? Ain't it th' truth?" he said delightedly.

The cannery man pleaded over Tom to Jeb, "But he's a wonder with

As Tom let out a rebel yell, the machine reared up like a bucking bronco.

The Cribbits were set to defy the new schoolmarm, just as they defied death on that damn-fool motorsickle of theirs.

By HAROLD KATHMAN

machinery. I need him for another month. He'll have three hundred dollars then."

This caused a round of laughter. Jeb was telling the man, in as kind a way as he could, that he was wasting his time. Dirty Tom got that way by loving machinery and never washing . . .

"Why should I?" Tom interrupted, holding out his grimy hands. "They'll only be the same next day."

. . . and he religiously spent each hundred dollars before he allowed himself to earn another.

"It took m' daddy a year to save that much," Tom said, "an' we got along. I don't aim to make th' ol' man jealous in his grave." He bowed owlishly to the group and started for the door. "Think I'll be headin' home," he announced.

"Tom!" Jeb called. "I'll take you and Frankie home." He walked slowly to where Tom had halted. There was no bluster in his manner.

Tom's coveralls, shining with caked grease, seemed to poorly support his thin bones. He looked up and said gently, with a half-smile, "I'm all right, Jeb."

"I'm not thinking of you. I'm thinking of your boy."

Tom scratched his dark hair reflectively. "Frankie won't like ridin' on yer ol' concrete-mixer."

"You aren't in prime condition, Tom," said Jeb.

"I am, too! I only had a few beers.

I'm tired, that's all. I'll do things on my motorsickle *you* won't do."

"And you'll break yer greasy neck," Jeb said.

"Not today I won't. Let me show ye, Jeb. I *can't* git hurt on my motorsickle. Y' know me long enough for that."

"But the boy. . ."

At this hint of weakening, Tom started for the door, indicating that Jeb should follow. The men gleefully propelled the trooper along.

IN THE warm September afternoon sunlight, Tom, astride his battered motorcycle, suddenly took on pride and dignity. Frankie came running from across the state road where he had been playing.

"We goin' home?"

Tom looked affectionately on the blond head of his son. "Jus' a minit, Frankie. Yer daddy's goin' t' warm 'er up first."

He stood on the starter and lovingly gunned the motor. He cocked his head to one side, decelerated until the engine was barely audible. "Listen to 'er!" His brown eyes were wide and soft. Then he raced the motor until it backfired.

Frankie's treble arose above the noise. "Hey, m' daddy's goin' t' do tricks!"

The boys of the village seemed to emerge from everywhere and made an excited clump around Tom.

Jeb waded through them. Into Tom's ear he shouted, "Just go up and down the state road, Tom. No fancy stuff."

Tom nodded in exaggerated agreement, winked broadly, and took off in a blast of sandy dust. Sedately, he taxied to the edge of Newtown, made a careful, tight turn and came back sitting foolishly erect, going barely twenty miles an hour.

At the general store, he turned again. He melted into the machine as he bent low, opening the throttle. As he roared down on them, Tom's grin, creased in grease, grew wider. In a sweeping curve he zoomed close to Jeb and sent the machine bounding off into the dirt road that led across the bridge to the grist mill. Before he reached the bridge, he shot onto the footpath that dipped down to the mill dam.

"He's goin' across th' dam!"

The concrete top of the dam was barely two feet wide. Like a crazy toy on a wire, the motorcycle clung to its narrow path without wavering. Tom roared up the slope on the other side, brought the machine to a stop with a flourish. He waved to Jeb to follow him.

Jeb made a gesture of disgust, saying half aloud, "You damned fool," while the men and boys shouted encouragement.

Instead of sensibly coming back by the bridge, Tom sent his motorcycle careening downhill and across the dam again.

As he idled by the yelling group, he called out to Jeb, "Okay?"

The trooper grinned and waved him on.

"Git ready, Frankie!" Tom called.

The boy, barefoot, clad only in a ragged pair of overalls, self-consciously ran to the other side of the road. His bony chest was outthrust as he watched his father make the turn at the general store and start back. As Tom approached, Frankie sidled out to the center of the road, turned, and began to run. Easily and surely, Tom brought the machine alongside his son, scooped him up and tucked him on the carrier behind him. He smirked at the crowd in farewell.

"He'll kill that boy—and himself, too," Jeb said as he watched him go. Then he clamped his jaw tight and ground his teeth.

"Look at 'im! Look at 'im!" the boys were shouting.

Tom was standing on the saddle of the motorcycle, arms outstretched, and Frankie was looking up in ecstasy.

OUT of sight of the village Tom resumed his seat and sent the machine flying toward home. Home was a two-room shack far back in the pine woods. The state road gave way to a county road. From the county road they turned off onto a sandy private road, that bored deeper into the shadows and heavy pine smell of the woods. They met old Mr. Todd and his wife going to town in their buggy, drawn by a morbid-looking mule, and they stopped to pass the time of day.

It was about three o'clock when Tom and Frankie reached their shack. It was raised from the ground about two feet, but neglect had given it a posture like that of an old hound slowly getting to its feet. Beneath one corner was a milky pool of water from the kitchen sink. Flies and wasps were buzzing around it. Scattered around the shack were automobile chassis without wheels, steering columns, axles, housings and fenders all rusting, all imbedded in weeds.

"Y' weren't scared when y' went over th' dam, were ya, Pop?"

"Nope."

"That's what I thought. Eddie said y' musta been."

"Nope. People always judge everybody by theirselves."

"Did y' hear about th' new teacher?"

"Can't say that I did."

"She's just come from Balt'more."

Dirty Tom paused halfway up the rickety steps. "Y' aimin' t' go t' school?" he asked.

Frankie screwed his face into derision. "Not me, I ain't. Not me!" He ducked under Tom's arm before the kitchen door was half open. "Hey, Pop, I fixed th' pop-off valve. Look. I'll show ya."

He ran to a streaked and battered object that had once been a brass-bound toy steam boiler. His hands loved it and his eyes widened as Tom's had done when he was listening to the hum of his motorcycle.

"Light it, Pop. Bet it works."

"Check th' water?" Tom's tone was professional.

"She's as full as two ticks."

"Okay." He smiled a little as he struck a match and lighted the wick of the spirit lamp. Frankie was fixed by the side of his toy.

"Don't worry 'er," Tom advised. "She'll git goin' in her own sweet time. Machines is more sensible than people. Treat 'em right, an' they do you right. Besides, we've got some discussin' t' do."

Frankie jiggled around him. "We goin' on a trip, Pop? To Wilmington, like last month?"

"Nope."

"Tell me, Pop. Tell me!"

"W-e-l-l-l-l . . ." Tom drew it out until Frankie flung his bony arms around his father's neck from behind.

"Tell me! Tell me!"

Tom acted as though he could hardly speak. "How kin I when ye're chokin' me?"

The arms around his neck slacked off. "We're goin' t' Florida," he said.

Frankie became oddly still. "Florida!" He said it reverently, slowly, rubbing the sole of one bare foot over the instep of the other.

TOM got up, put one knee on the chair and faced him. "More'n a thousand miles—past Salisbury, Cape Charles, past Norfolk. Road as straight as a new drive shaft, flat as a gasket. Eighty miles per, purrin' along in the sunlight, goin' South. Just you an' me. Orange trees and palm trees and alligators. Yessiree, alligators bigger'n a horse."

Frankie's face was uplifted as if in prayer. "Jes' like Eddie said."

"Eddie? He ain't been t' Florida."

"No. Stories. He said th' new teacher told 'em lots of stories. About places like Florida, furrin places, far away. Y' did it, jes' now. I saw oranges on trees, an' palm trees in th' wind, an' big, ol', slimy alligators crawlin' in th' marsh. . . ."

"We better eat somethin'. Here, give these plates a wipe. No sense in washin' 'em; (*Continued on page* 84)

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(Continued from page 44)

we're having more fatback anyhow. Want some eggs?"

Frankie didn't move. "When we leavin'?" he asked dreamily.

"Let's see. Today's Saturday. Tomorrow's Sunday. I'll tune up th' motorsickle a bit, patch a spare. By sunup Monday we'll be kitin' along th' road."

The boy started running around the table. "One more day! Only one day!"

"Stop it! Ye'll bring th' house down." But Tom was grinning, and as Frankie raced by, he ran his grimy fingers through his son's hair. "I asked ye—want some eggs?"

"Can't eat, Pop. Stomach's all squiggly. Florida!"

"Settle down. I'll tell ye more."

Frankie stood by him, but he twitched and squirmed with the effort.

"We ain't comin' back from Florida right away, neither. *This* hunnerd"—he slapped his right hip pocket—"is for us to look around a bit. I heard tell there's some big cannin' houses down there. An' where there's cannin' machinery, that's where I shine. I'll work 'til we git *another* hunnerd. Then, know what we're goin' t' do?"

THERE was a sound of knocking on the door jamb, and a woman's voice asking, "May I come in?"

Frankie gave one quick look, and disappeared into the bedroom. Tom faced the woman with suspicion. This woman, with the foreign-sounding talk, the clean, friendly face, black hair pulled into a braid across her head, seemed at ease. She smiled, and her teeth were white and even, and her dark blue eyes seemed to say that he shouldn't be upset.

"Th' place ain't fixed," Tom said.

"That's all right," the woman said. "I'm the world's worst housekeeper, myself." She stepped inside. She wore gray slacks and a yellow blouse. She was, maybe, twenty-five years old.

"Is Mrs. Cribbit home?"

"Maggie's been dead for more'n a year."

"Oh."

Tom waited truculently, almost daring the woman to say something pitying. She looked at him with kindness, but not with pity.

"I'm Miss Hastings," she said. "The new schoolteacher. You have a boy, Frank, I believe?"

Tom allowed the silence to drift between them like long trailers of fog.

"I was checking the attendance against the last census. Frank should be in school. I wondered what the trouble was."

"No trouble."

"Then he'll be in school Monday?"

"Don't see how, in this world. Not unless he does a flip-flop an' flies. He ain't done that lately."

Miss Hastings smiled. "I'm probably very stupid," she said, "but I don't know what you mean."

"We're goin' on a trip, Frankie an' me."

"But, Mr. Cribbit! You can't do that."

"Come 'round sunup Monday, I'll show ye how it's done."

"I mean, there's a law that forces you to send your son to school."

"Never heard tell of it."

"It exists all the same. You're liable to arrest."

"They gotta ketch me first."

Miss Hastings took a deep breath. "I didn't mean it as a threat. I'm doing this on my own account. It was such a lovely afternoon, I took my bicycle and came over to see if there was anything I could do."

"Bicycle! In this sand?"

"I needed the exercise."

"That ain't exercise. That's work. You should git yerself a motorsickle."

"I doubt if I could manage one now."

"Simple as rollin' off a log."

"I know. I did just that off my brother's when I was in high school. It put me in bed for a week."

"What kind did he have?"

"Oh, I've forgotten. It was so long ago."

Tom half-closed his eyes in thought. Then he said, haltingly, "Miss, would ye like a spin on a *real* motorsickle right now?"

"You're very kind. But I'd better not. I'd like to talk about Frankie."

"That's all settled."

"He'll come, then?"

"Nope."

"Why?"

"He don't want to."

"Many boys don't like it at first. He'll get over that. You must encourage him."

"Ye mean *make* him do what he don't want t' do? I don't hold with that much. Seems like there's too many people *makin'* other people do somethin' they don't want t' do. Causes hard feelin's."

"But this will be for his own good, his future."

Dirty Tom put his hands on the greasy oilcloth of the table and stared full into her face.

"Are ye happy, miss?" he asked.

"Why—why, I'm reasonably happy, I guess."

"I heard tell that teachers is porely paid. Would more money make ye happy?"

Miss Hastings laughed. "Perhaps not happier, but it would certainly make life easier."

"Well, I'll tell ye. Me an' Frankie is happy. *Happy* happy. Not half nor a quarter. *All* happy. We was happier, I know, when Maggie was with us. She could ride a motorsickle almost as good as me. An' when she died, we was sad. After we came out of th' sad time, our happiness was shrunk a little, like a pair of new socks. But we was happy to th' limit, an' we still are. School, more money, a car, a big house—they can't give us nothin' we ain't got, 'cept troubles."

"I suppose it would be useless to tell you that your boy will be a misfit in his generation."

"Misfit? Frankie? Not 'im. Wait, I'll git 'im." Tom arose, went to the door of the bedroom, turned and said, "He knows more 'bout motors than most growed men. Misfit!"

Tom walked over to the rumpled bed. Two dirty bare feet protruded from under it.

He squatted and peered underneath. "Hey, Frankie, c'mon out," he said softly. "Everything's all right."

The feet stirred, but the boy seemed to edge further under the bed.

A PIERCING, high whistle, like that of an old-fashioned peanut stand, came from the kitchen.

"Yer popoff valve, Frankie! It's workin'. Come look."

His son came out, crawling fast. "Didn't I tell ye, Pop?" he said.

They hurried toward the kitchen. Frankie stopped at the door.

Miss Hastings was chuckling. "That thing almost scared me to death," she said. "Come in, Frankie, and tell me how this works."

The boy clung to the door casing with both hands, scuffed one calloused foot across the board floor.

"Hear th' lady?" Tom coaxed.

Frankie studied the strange woman in a series of furtive glances. Neither of the adults said anything. He finally decided he would risk it. Giving his overalls a jerk, he went across the room to his boiler. He turned a miniature valve. Steam hissed and a piston began to move. The popoff valve stopped its whistling.

"Well!" Miss Hastings said. "That's fine. You need some new packing around that piston, don't you?"

Both Frankie and Tom stared at her. "Yes'm," the boy said eagerly. "I aim t' do that t'morrow. T'day I fixed th' valve."

"And a good job you did, too." To Tom she said, "I was one lone girl among four brothers, so I had to learn a little about machinery in self defense." Absent-mindedly she put her hand to the unkempt hair of the boy and smoothed it. He was startled for a moment, then he said timidly, "Mom used t' do that."

Miss Hastings spoke to Tom. "You won't send him to school?"

"Ye aim t' go t' school, Frankie?"

The boy looked at his father, then at Miss Hastings. He stared at the floor.

"Nope, guess not."

Miss Hastings sighed. "I feel like a fool saying this," she said, walking toward the door, "but I'll have to report you to the school board and they'll probably get out a warrant against you, Mr. Cribbit."

"Don't mind me none, miss. Just do yer duty. I hope they give th' warrant t' Jeb, so he'll chase me on thet ol' scooter-pooper of his'n. We'll have ourselves a time. I'll dawdle 'til he comes close an' step out a piece, an' dawdle some more. I'll plague 'im clear across th' Virginia line. He'll be so sore he'll spit."

Miss Hastings went down the precarious steps to her shining bicycle. Tom leaned against the doorway, Frankie by his side. There was a bluish-gray haze in the air. It dimmed the sun, and seemed to blur the outlines of the pines. She noticed it, too.

"Brush fire somewheres," Tom drawled, sniffing the air. "Nothin' t' worry about. One day last summer it got so bad we had t' light th' lamps at midday. Folks said a marsh was afire more'n a hunnerd miles away. Wind brung th' smoke along."

"It's a shame. Such a waste." Miss Hastings said goodbye, turned into the rut of the road, and disappeared.

Tom looked down at Frankie and in a conspiratorial whisper said, "We're eatin' quick, an' packin' an' startin' fer Florida right now. They ain't puttin' yer daddy in no jailhouse, nor you in no school."

IN LESS than a half hour, their best clothes were tied in a poncho on the carrier, Frankie was perched on top, and Dirty Tom was wheeling his motorcycle down the woods road at a good clip. The smoke from the fire was thickening. The acrid air stung the nostrils and smarted the eyes.

They hadn't gone more than a few hundred yards before it was plain the fire was not a hundred miles away this time. It was close, perhaps in the county, perhaps even in this stretch of pines. Tom continued to speed through the murk until he saw Miss Hastings standing in the middle of the road turning her bike around.

He stopped alongside her.

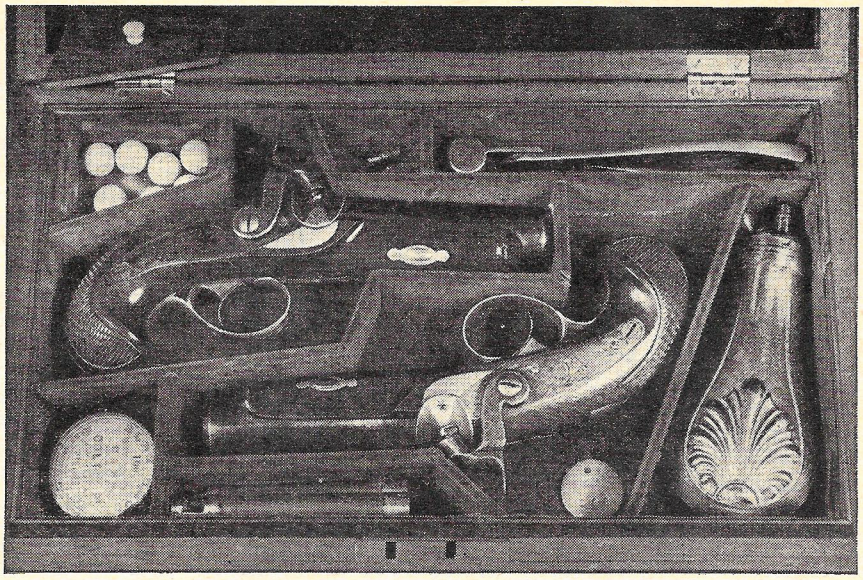
"I was going back," she said, "to find another road out of these woods. I'm afraid the fire is just ahead of us."

"There ain't no other road, miss," Tom said, coughing in the smoke. "It only goes about a mile beyond me to the Todds, an' behind them there's nothin' but marsh."

"We can't stay here. It's getting worse."

"Ye'll never git through on thet contraption." He squinted at the thickening haze. "Here, you git up with Frankie. I'll make a run fer it."

Miss Hastings (*Turn to next page*)



Set of caplock Philadelphia derringers—favorites of old-time gamblers.

Hobby Corner *(Continued from page 83)*

to clean and restore it properly. Many fine examples of the gunmaker's art have been ruined by uninformed but ambitious and over-zealous collectors. It requires patience as well as knowledge to restore an old gun.

Let's take the old Model 1849 .31-caliber Colt pocket pistol, for instance, the one shown on page 82, and follow the steps that led from the "before" to the "after" photo.

The first—and most important thing—is *to examine your gun to see if it is loaded.* If there are unexploded caps in the nipples, it is almost certain that the chambers are loaded with powder and ball. The Colt was loaded, and, after cautiously removing the percussion caps, we pulled the lead bullets by using a wood screw.

With the powder removed, we examined the chambers of the cylinder and the bore of the barrel. The Colt's bore turned out to be fairly well protected by hardened grease. Then we disassembled the gun—a hard job because the screws were corroded and most of them would not budge at first. We removed the wooden handle or grip and soaked the pistol overnight in kerosene. Even that did not do the trick and we finally had to tap the screws gently with a lead hammer before we could get them out. Incidentally, when we take an old weapon apart, we place the pieces on the workbench in the order in which we remove them. This insures getting it back together.

A little heat had to be applied to get one screw out. Too much heat may ruin a gun. It's a good idea to stop applying heat before the metal starts to change color.

When the gun was completely disassembled, each part was carefully cleaned. Fine emery cloth or fine steel wool may be used on interior parts, but only fine steel wool and a penetrating oil or nitro solvent should be used on the outside.

No antique arm should be polished bright unless that was the original factory finish. Most old guns were either blued or browned. Therefore, when removing rust, care should be taken that portions of the original finish under the rust are left intact.

After the parts were cleaned, we gave them a light coating of oil, then put them together again and set to work on the wooden stock, removing the dirt and grime carefully with pure, mild soap and water to make sure that the patina did not come off. (The patina of any antique is the result of years of care to keep the surface in good condition. Once destroyed, it can never be replaced.)

Where the old surface is completely ruined, a refinishing job is in order. The wood surface should be cleaned with hot lye water and dried by heat—but take care not to scorch the thin edges of the stock. Dents may be removed by placing wet blotting paper over the depressions and applying a hot soldering iron. The steam goes into the wood and raises it to its original level. Next, the surface should be sanded smooth, then rubbed with a wet rag and quickly dried over a flame to raise the grain. Remove any roughness with very fine sandpaper and continue wetting, drying and sanding until the grain will not raise any more.

For the final finish, some old stockmakers used linseed oil that had been colored red with alkinet root, and rubbed it in by hand. The oil was put on with a rag or brush and allowed to soak in overnight. The next day more oil was painted on and left to stand for a couple of hours, then the surplus removed with a hunk of waste or fine steel wool.

The final polish was started by slightly moistening the hands with the oil and rubbing—yes, with the bare hand—until dry. This chore was repeated once a week until the desired finish was obtained.

THE END

hesitated. "Isn't there some trail we can take to get around it?"

"Nothin' 'cept a lumberin' road all growed over. C'mon, climb up." He gunned the motor impatiently.

LIKE an echo from the silent gloom ahead there came the answering roar of a motorcycle. Closer and closer it came. Instinctively Tom moved his machine off to one side and Miss Hastings wheeled her bicycle into a laurel bush. They saw a form hurtling toward them from the smoke, someone crouched so low that his goggled eyes could barely see over the handlebars. It was Jeb, the State trooper, and he skidded to a stop in the sand.

"Thank God, you're safe," he said to Tom and Frankie. "And you, too, miss. Didn't expect to find beauty in distress back here." He pushed up his goggles and beat his blouse. Charred bits of wood flipped out of the creases. He took off his cap and ruefully put his finger through a large hole that had been burned through it.

"We're aimin' t' git out now," Tom said.

"Not along this road, you won't," Jeb answered. "The fire's jumped it in a half-dozen places. I could hear trees falling behind me as I came through. I came to get you and the Todds out."

"The Todds is in town," Tom said. "They went out when we came in."

Miss Hastings spoke up. "How did you plan to get back? After you had notified the Todds, I mean."

Jeb laughed shortly. "To tell the truth, miss, I hadn't thought about that much. As soon as I got the report from the barracks I knew that Tom here and the Todds would be trapped. So I just came over fast to tell them. Now that that's done, getting out is the next problem. It isn't very complicated. There's only one way out. Through the woods, this way." He swung his arm to the north. "The south end of the fire is at the marsh already. The other end is almost there. We've got to circle the northern end in a hurry, before it reaches the marsh."

Tom began wheeling his machine around. "An' if it beats us, we got some marsh-trottin' t' do."

"About three miles to the river, and up to our hips all the way," Jeb said, pulling down his goggles.

Tom looked expectantly at Miss Hastings. "Well, hop on, miss. We're takin' th' ol' lumberin' road."

Jeb said, "I can take the lady, or Frankie. No reason why you should make it tough for yourself, Tom."

Tom snorted and gave his motor a shot of gas. "Tough!" he said. "Ye'll have yer hands full with thet go-cart, tryin' t' follow me single."

Jeb came close to him. "This is no time for show-off stuff. Somebody might get hurt."

Tom twisted around and said to Frankie, "Ye want t' ride with Jeb?"

Frankie shook his head violently.

Jeb turned and said brusquely to Miss Hastings, "You come with me."

Tom chuckled as he saw the schoolteacher's back stiffen and her head go up. "I'm going with Mr. Cribbit." And she climbed on behind Frankie.

Jeb gave his belt a vicious hitch. "Go ahead, I'll pick up the pieces."

They taxied down the road a piece, then Tom sent his machine crashing into the brush, through a gully and up into the woods where traces of the old lumbering road could still be seen. Laurel, holly, bay and magnolia had sprung up between the second-growth timber, the post oaks and seedling pines. Now and then, black, thick stumps were upthrust from the pine needles. Dead trunks and branches lay every which way.

Tom was taking it easy, just drifting along, estimating, choosing the clear spots, the weakest bushes and punky deadwood. In the low places, there were still remnants of corduroy roadbeds, rotten and broken. He raised himself off the saddle while crossing them, but his two passengers took a beating.

JEB followed without effort. He stopped frequently, listening. The smoke, instead of being a hazy, indefinite something in the air, became evil. Bands of darker smoke and billows of grayish-brown could be seen above the trees. A steady roar, at first like far-off surf, could be heard. It grew more distinct as they went on, and changed from surf to the steady roar of a gigantic furnace going wild with all drafts open.

Jeb touched his siren. Tom, unwilling to take his eyes from the tricky way ahead, called, "What's eatin' on pretty-boy now?"

Miss Hastings, between bumps, shouted, "He's waving . . . to go on . . . faster!"

Tom, muttering, increased speed. Branches and needles tore at them. Sudden jouncings sent all three flying off their perches, and they were sometimes met in midair by the seats they had just vacated. Tom's weaving, throwing his slight body to one side and then the other, with the overloaded machine answering sluggishly, looked like a man struggling with clutching forces in a nightmare.

The road teetered on the side of a ridge for a while, limiting the area in which he could dodge. The gantlet of flailing bludgeons and sharp whips had Frankie and Miss Hastings with their heads down, eyes tightly shut, hanging on grimly to handholds.

Momentary relief came in a clearing as the road finally crawled to the top of the ridge. From this slight rise they could see the immense, rolling horror of smoke rising to the sky. In a deceptively lazy curve the line of fire pointed at their path about a mile away.

Tom stopped, straddling his machine; breathing hard, he looked for Jeb. The trooper came up a moment later. Both of the men had welts across cheeks and chin, and droplets of blood showed. In Tom's case they seemed to stand on the greasy surface of his skin.

"Fast enough fer ye, Jeb?" he shouted.

"Doing fine," Jeb yelled back, "but we've got to do better." He pointed at the danger point. "Two minutes, or else!"

"Follow me, Jebby, boy. Ye'll be a man after this ride!"

They plunged down into the woods again. Ahead, the scraggly top of a big pine burst into a yellowish-red crown of fire, as suddenly as though an electric switch had been thrown.

As the road wandered toward the marsh, it seemed pushed back toward the fire. The riders became conscious of blasts of heat as they streaked by small clearings. Flaming brands began falling around them.

One snakelike branch, alive with pennants of fire, landed on Tom's arms. The speed at which they were traveling forced the wood to burn with the intensity of a blow torch. Tom tried pushing it off with one hand, but the force of the wind held it against him. He tried the other hand, but it still stuck. He flung both arms high, to clear his passengers, and the fiery ember whipped away. The front wheel of the motorcycle grazed a stump, and the machine lurched suddenly; before he could regain control, they charged through a clump of alders matted with brambles. The machine staggered and threatened to fall. Tom furiously fought to keep it upright, fending the fall by bracing and shoving with one leg.

In the last fifty yards, the heat seemed too intense and the smoke too dense to breathe or see through. Then they felt blessed gusts of cool air being drawn in by the fire. The rain of flaming branches stopped. They were safe. Tom turned triumphantly. His mouth, opened wide in a rebel yell, was a red gash in his blackened, singed face. Just then they hit a deep hole partially covered by deadwood. The motorcycle reared up like a bucking bronco, throwing the three of them into the brush. The machine skidded off to the side.

Frankie and Miss Hastings were on their feet immediately. Tom lay on the ground in a slack heap, his head against a heavy log.

WHEN he awoke he saw Frankie beside him. His son's hair was plastered down with water, brushed carefully except for a spray of short hairs erect from his crown. His face was shining clean. He wore a clean blue jersey that matched the color of

his wide-open eyes. He had clean knickers on, too. Beyond that Tom couldn't see because of the bed.

This white bed, with its white cover, this room with its pale green walls, the window with its curtains shining in the late afternoon sun and billowing with breeze, gave Tom a quiet feeling of well-being.

"Hi, son." Tom's voice felt as though it were coming from the top of his head rather than his mouth.

"Hi, Pop," Frankie said.

"Did we lose th' motorsickle?"

"Nope. I mean, no. Guess who brought it in?"

"Jeb?"

"Miss Hastings! She shut it off. Jeb started it for her. An' she rode it t' town. Wobbly, though. I rode with Jeb—an' you."

"Fine, fine."

"Y' didn't make much sense lately, Pop."

"Talked wild, did I?"

"I'll say. Didn't listen, neither. I told y' I was in school, an' y' went on about sprockets an' bearin's. Every time Miss Hastings an' Jeb came together," Frankie giggled, "y' blackguarded 'em somethin' awful, said they couldn't set valves if they was made of butter, an' they couldn't weld worth a darn—an', oh, lots of crazy things."

"Nothin' bad, eh?"

"Not really. Only about machinery."

Tom breathed deeply. He looked down past the bandages on his arms and studied his strangely white hands.

"They sure cleaned us up, didn't they?"

"Yep. I mean, yes. Miss Hastings an' Mrs. Clark plague me not to say 'nope' an' 'yep.' I'm stayin' at th' Clarks'. Mr. Clark's th' new manager at th' cannin' house y' used t' work for. He says y' kin come back soon's ye're well."

Tom put one hand to his head and felt a gauze bandage.

"When's that?"

Frankie said, "Oh, 'bout a week, ten days, th' doc said."

Tom's hand came wearily to rest on the counterpane.

"Ye like school?"

"I'll say. Miss Hastings tol' me I kin be a engineer. Hey, Pop, guess what . . ."

His father seemed preoccupied, but Frankie went on, lowering his voice as though telling a secret. "Jeb's sweet on Miss Hastings. He comes t' school every day."

"No Florida fer a while, eh, Frankie?" Tom was looking at the drifting curtains in the sun.

"Guess not, Pop."

Tom watched the curtains for a long time, then he looked at Frankie as though he were going to cry. Finally he said, in a low, choked voice, "They sure cleaned us up, son. They sure did."

THE END

If You're in Real Trouble—Call The Emergency Squad

(Continued from page 37)

emergency cop, there is usually an animal hunt to relieve the monotony. Somehow elephants, lions, monkeys, raccoons, opossums, steer, bats, rabbits, hogs, tarantulas, cockatoos, hawks—one or the other—seem to be on the loose all the time.

Not long ago an excited pigeon fancier called the New York police to inform them that a huge snake was devouring his entire roost. The desk lieutenant who had seen Indian snake charmers at work in the movies, ordered a clarinet-playing member of his command to proceed to the scene with his instrument—and a pillow case. As insurance he called for an emergency squad. The squad got there first, and with the aid of a long pole, a set of pincers, and a sack, snared the snake. It was a beauty, six feet long, six inches in diameter, with purple and brown stripes.

Shortly before that, thirty-four monkeys escaped from a downtown pet shop and headed in the direction of Wall Street. The financial district was in an uproar for two days—until the last one was rounded up. In Elizabeth, New Jersey, a three-hundred-pound gorilla broke out of a circus, but was quickly captured because of an unfortunate addiction—nicotine. A police squad, tipped off about it by the trainer, baited a trap with cigarettes.

Emergency squads have their headaches with tame animals, too. Dogs become wedged between buildings and, as with humans, the standard treatment is to douse them with lubricating oil. Cats get marooned in treetops, and the only way to get them down is to go up after them.

HORSES may be on their way out but you can't prove it by emergency police records. Hardly a week goes by without a horse rescue of some kind—from a river, an open manhole, a railroad trestle, or the bumper of a car. About a year ago someone phoned the police about a horse's head that was sticking out of the ground. At first they suspected a hoax but decided to investigate. Their informant was right. It was a saddle horse which had bolted from its rider and run into a quagmire adjoining a sewage disposal plant.

The emergency squad could not get within 150 feet of the house. Borrowing some lumber from a nearby construction job, the crew laid down a bridge of planks. That brought them up close enough to slip a belly band around the animal. Then, with a long tow rope hooked to the truck, they dragged him to safety.

In addition to everything else, emergency police have the weather on their hands, too. Sudden changes usually bring a flurry of extra calls that keep them working long beyond quitting time. Rainstorms weaken clothes poles and telegraph poles, short circuit burglar alarms, undermine building foundations. Last summer, after a heavy rain, seven workers were ordered out of a building whose underpinnings looked shaky. Fifteen minutes later the structure collapsed.

Windstorms blow down high tension wires, trees, roofs, and advertising signs. The onset of cold weather brings on boiler explosions, gas cases, and heart attacks on the street. On hot days dogs go mad, people cave in, drownings increase. In the wake of snow and ice, come skidding cars, frozen inebriates, and skull fractures.

EMERGENCY police are probably among the best first-aiders to be found anywhere outside the medical profession. Their skill in applying tourniquets, dressing serious wounds, and handling complicated fractures at the scene of an accident has saved countless lives. Very often, when no doctor is available, they are called on home cases. Here they minister to heart attacks, hemorrhages, epileptic fits, and may even deliver babies.

Doctors themselves frequently call for emergency squads, especially in suffocation cases. In one instance a woman with a bad case of cardiac asthma suffered an attack in a doctor's office. Three different stimulants failed to bring her around. The doctor put in a hurry call to squad headquarters. A crew was contacted by radio and got there in ninety seconds. An hour's work with the resuscitator revived the woman. The doctor publicly credited the squad with saving her life.

Hospitals, too, avail themselves of the services of the emergency police. A few years ago a fire in a Newark powerhouse shut off the city's electricity for six hours. The sudden shutdown caught the City Hospital operating room in the midst of two operations. The emergency squad was ready for that one with its own portable generator, which operates on a hookup from the truck motor. Lights were provided until power was restored.

Thousands of people are alive and in one piece today who wouldn't be but for this new, humane function of police departments. Not one of these thousands—or anyone else who has ever seen an emergency squad in action—will ever again raise the old familiar cry about cops who are never around when you need them.

THE END