

Good Housekeeping®

MARCH 1959

fifty-seventh street at eighth avenue, new york 19, new york

The Magazine America Lives By

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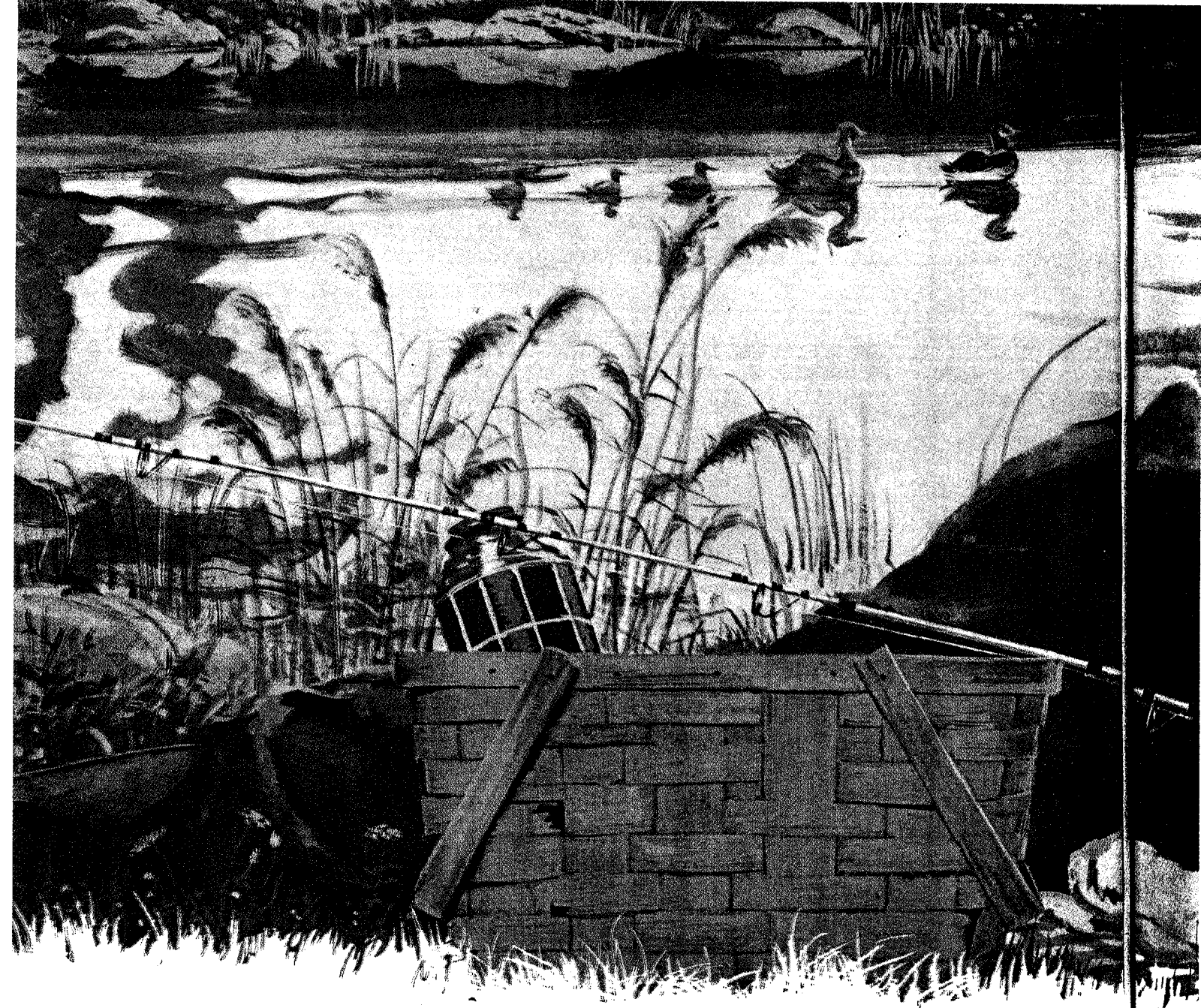
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH

- Harold Halma

Good Housekeeping is published monthly by The Hearst Corporation, 57th St. at 8th Ave., New York 19, N. Y., U. S. A. Richard E. Berlin, President; George Hearst, V-Pres.; Richard E. Deems, Exec. V-Pres. of Magazines; Fred Lewis, V-Pres. and Gen. Mgr. of Magazines; John R. Miller, V-Pres. for Circulation; Harry M. Dunlap, V-Pres. for Good Housekeeping; G. O. Markuson, V-Pres. and Treasurer; R. P. McCauley, Sec'y. Subscription prices: U. S. A. and Possessions, and Canada, \$3.50 for one year; \$6.00 for two years; \$8.50 for three years. All other countries, \$6.50 for one year. When changing address, give old address as well as the new, with postal-zone number, if any, and allow five weeks for change to become effective. Vol. 148, No. 3, © 1959, by The Hearst Corporation; all rights reserved. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail. Post Office Department, Ottawa. * Manuscripts must be accompanied by addressed envelopes and return postage. * Printed in U. S. A.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: Mail all subscription orders, changes of address, correspondence concerning subscriptions, and Postmaster notices of undeliverable copies to Good Housekeeping, 250 West 55th Street, New York 19, N. Y.



ILLUSTRATED BY BERNARD D'ANDREA

Adam Daggett looked as though a thunderbolt had struck him. "Twenty-six thousand, four hundred little boys and girls?" the president of Daggett Petroleum, central offices Fort Worth, repeated unbelievably. "You mean to tell me over twenty-six thousand kids *own* that property?"

"Approximately," James O'Connor said. "Give or take a dozen." He watched the bushy eyebrows lower in a threatened storm and hurried on. "It all happened because Sprague and Doyle make that breakfast food. S. & D. Toastie Wheats." O'Connor was a lean, easy-tempered young man, who had been with the company's legal department for the past five years. "Eight months ago, twenty-six thousand, four hundred eager kids tore the tops off twenty-six thousand, four hundred boxes of Toastie Wheats and mailed them to the company. In exchange, each one of the kids got a Ranger

badge and a genuine deed to one square foot of Texas."

Daggett was beginning to understand. He closed his eyes. "And naturally, Sprague and Doyle made out the deeds to a strip of land between their ranches. They probably thought it was cute, at the time."

O'Connor nodded. "A strip of land one mile long and five feet wide. It cuts right across the valley. There's no way around it."

Daggett rose from his desk and began pacing the floor. "We can't negotiate with twenty-six thousand kids for permission to run our pipeline across their property. We'll just go ahead and do it anyway. Who'll know the difference?"

O'Connor shook his head. "Sprague and Doyle were nice about letting us run through their own land, but they figure this is different. They think it would be bad public relations to let us (Continued on page 109)



a square foot of TEXAS

BY JACK RITCHIE

**Wanted: One set of parents. Boy, age 12, will trade
valuable Texas property he acquired through box tops, for loving care....**

A Square Foot of Texas

(Continued from page 90)

use the land without the kids' permission. The boys and girls might take it into their little heads to boycott Toastie Wheats if they ever found out."

Daggett rubbed his forehead irritably. "It's impossible to trace so many kids. Sprague and Doyle ought to know that."

O'Connor agreed. "I know. But I've come up with the solution. First of all, we don't need the whole strip. All we want is about a twenty-foot section for our pipe to cross."

Daggett found some comfort in that. "But that still means we've got to get in touch with a hundred boys and girls. A hundred kids scattered all over the country. Maybe Hawaii and Alaska."

O'Connor consulted a small notebook. "I went to the county clerk's office and did some checking. I discovered a twenty-one-foot section of that land that should simplify matters considerably. All the one hundred and five boys who own it have the same address."

Daggett raised an inquiring eyebrow.

O'Connor smiled. "It's an orphan asylum in Waterford, Wisconsin."

Slowly Daggett broke into a grin. "Perfect. We ought to be able to handle that, easily."

O'Connor thought so, too.

Daggett handed him a cigar. "Take the first plane out of here, and buy that land outright. We won't have any trouble in the future, that way. Be generous with the ice cream, chocolate, and things like that, and remember that every day that pipeline is delayed, it costs the company thousands of dollars."

O'CONNOR landed at General Mitchell Field early the next morning and rented a car. He drove approximately forty miles west, until he found a pleasant town with winding, tree-shaded streets. He located the group of old but sturdy buildings that comprised the Waterford Orphan Asylum.

The girl in the reception office directed him to a door at the end of the corridor. "Mr. Swenson is on vacation, but I'm sure Miss Morgan will be able to help you."

Miss Lyris Morgan proved to be about twenty-seven, with raven hair and large dark eyes. Her smile was pleasant, but businesslike. She listened attentively while O'Connor explained his predicament and then nodded. "Yes. I remember the time quite well. We had to save over one hundred box tops before we could send for the deeds and badges. You can't play favorites in an orphanage."

O'Connor agreed. "Of course not." He thought her clear, cameo skin could stand just a touch of Texas sun.

Miss Morgan was thoughtful for a moment. "You'll have to see Alfred."

O'Connor brought his mind back to the subject. "Alfred?"

"Yes. He has all the deeds. Because of his *Lederhosen*, you know."

O'Connor rubbed an ear lobe. "*Lederhosen*?"

Miss Morgan nodded. "Those short leather pants. Alfred is from Liechtenstein."

O'Connor tried again. "Liechtenstein?"

"Well, yes—and no," Miss Morgan said. "That's what complicates Alfred's case. He was visiting this country with his grandfather when the old man died. As far as we have been able to determine, Alfred has no living relatives, either here or in Europe. To make matters even more difficult, he claims that we can't send him back to Liechtenstein because he's a citizen of the United States. According to Alfred, his parents were in this country when he happened to be born. All this involves quite a bit of checking, both here and overseas, before we can determine whether that is true or not."

O'Connor managed to understand that, but he went back a bit. "What about the *Lederhosen*?"

Miss Morgan smiled. "Alfred let each of the boys wear them for an hour. That's how he accumulated all the deeds. That was his charge for the privilege."

IN THE corridor, a bell shrilled, and O'Connor was startled by the sudden rush of small, shouting boys past the open door.

Miss Morgan got quickly to her feet. "The boys are having recess now. I'll see if I can catch Alfred."

She was back in two minutes with a somewhat reluctant eleven-year-old boy with short blond hair. O'Connor had half expected him to be in *Lederhosen*, but the boy was wearing blue jeans.

Alfred's eyes strayed to the broad-brimmed hat on O'Connor's lap, and his solemn face lighted with interest. "You are from Texas?"

"That's right, son."

"And you have come to adopt me?" he asked eagerly.

"No, Alfred," Miss Morgan said gently. "Mr. O'Connor has come to see you about your land."

"Oh," Alfred said in a small voice. Then he nodded gravely. "I am the owner of one hundred and five square feet of Texas."

O'Connor smiled. "I'll tell you what I'll do, son. I'll give you a dollar for every square foot you have."

Alfred's face became meditative. "You have seen my land?"

"Yes."

"It is rich land?"

"Well, no," O'Connor said truthfully. "Grazing land, and pretty poor at that."

Alfred rubbed his chin with a slightly dirty hand. "Yet you offer one dollar a square foot?" He turned to Miss Morgan. "Perhaps there is oil under my land."

Miss Morgan regarded O'Connor with a trace of suspicion.

"No, Alfred," O'Connor said. "There is no oil under your land."

Alfred folded his arms. "Then why do you want this property?"

O'Connor explained.

Alfred's eyes strayed to O'Connor's hat. "I must think this over. A few days, perhaps."

O'Connor took a deep breath and turned to Miss Morgan. "I think I'd better deal directly with you. I assume that this institution is Alfred's guardian?"

Miss Morgan was almost shocked. "You expect me to go over Alfred's head in this matter? I wouldn't think of such a thing."

"I don't think I'm being unreasonable," O'Connor said defensively. "I simply want a right of way through a measly one hundred and five square feet."

"Besides," Miss Morgan said stiffly, "there remains the question of who actually is Alfred's guardian. This revolves around Alfred's citizenship." She turned to Alfred. "You may go now. I want you to think about Mr. O'Connor's offer, but don't allow yourself to be pressured into anything. Make up your mind for yourself." When Alfred was gone, Miss Morgan shook her head. "Alfred's been a little lonelier than most of the boys here. His parents died when he was only a year old, and he's had nobody but his grandfather."

O'Connor rose and smiled down at Miss Morgan. "I was wondering what you might be doing this evening. I have an offer."

Miss Morgan concentrated on making unnecessary notes on the margin of a paper on her desk. "I have several appointments this evening."

O'Connor noticed her slight flush and grinned. "I'll ask again tomorrow."

HE WAS opening the door of his car when Alfred trotted up. "You are a cowboy?" Alfred asked.

"No, son. A lawyer." O'Connor read the disappointment on Alfred's face. "But I did some fence riding when I was working my way through college."

Alfred's interest revived. "What was the name of your horse?"

"It was a jeep." Then, seeing that he was letting the boy down, he felt impelled to add more. "But I've ridden horses lots of times." It had been six years since he had actually mounted one, and even then, his descent had been hasty and involuntary.

"I have studied all about Texas," Alfred said. "Ever since I was but a little boy. Ask me questions about history, if you like."

O'Connor rubbed his head. "When was the siege of the Alamo?"

"Eighteen thirty-six," Alfred said swiftly. "February twenty-third to March sixth."

"Good," O'Connor said. I wonder if

Woody Woodpecker says—



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that's right, he thought uneasily. I could have sworn it was in the 1860s.

"Now I own part of Texas," Alfred said proudly. "Admitted on December twenty-nine, eighteen forty-five." He pointed to one of the boys on the baseball diamond. "Henry is getting adopted soon. What a pity. He will live only in West Allis." He sighed heavily.

O'Connor felt generous. "It can't be so bad in West Allis."

Alfred shook his head. "I have seen West Allis. Ranch houses, but no ranches." He glanced covertly at O'Connor. "You have a wife?"

"No."

"Then you must still be looking."

The recess bell rang, and Alfred ran back into the building.

AFTER registering in a small hotel on Main Street, O'Connor put in a long-distance call to Daggett.

"Good to hear from you," Daggett said briskly. "I assume that everything is settled?"

"Not quite. There's been a slight delay."

"Some of the boys been adopted and hard to trace? That it? Get on it right away. Time costs money."

"It isn't that. One boy owns the whole lot. He bought up all the deeds. In a manner of speaking."

Daggett chuckled. "Clever boy. Got a great future."

"He's stubborn about selling."

Daggett chuckled again. "Trying to hold us up, eh?"

"In a way."

"Well, don't bother me with the details," Daggett said. "Just get the job done, and get it done in a hurry."

"Yes, sir," O'Connor said. "I'll take care of everything tomorrow."

Over dinner, O'Connor reflected on the situation. I've been too direct, he thought. What does a little boy in an orphanage want? Obviously, to get out. A picnic? A fishing trip? O'Connor nodded. That was it. Take him out for an afternoon. Soften him up. Whip out a fountain pen at just the right moment. Getting Alfred's consent was the most important thing. Later, he could deal with the guardian, whether that was the State of Wisconsin or the principality of Liechtenstein.

O'Connor was satisfied with himself as he drove to the orphanage early the next afternoon. In the rear of his car were two spinning rods, a well-filled lunch basket, and a tackle box.

Miss Morgan met him in the corridor of the main building. She seemed a bit bewildered. "I let Alfred make a phone call this morning. He said he wanted some advice from Mr. Erhardt."

"Who's Erhardt?"

"He owns the meat market at Fifth and Main. Also, I just found out that he's something of an official. He and Alfred have been conferring in my office for the last hour."

Inside Miss Morgan's office, O'Connor was mildly startled to see that Alfred was wearing his *Lederhosen*.

A stout, pleasant-faced man in his

sixties rose from his chair and bowed slightly. "I am Franz Erhardt, consul for Liechtenstein in that part of the state which is not Milwaukee."

O'Connor regarded him skeptically.

Erhardt evidently read his mind. He smiled cheerfully. "I am a butcher, too, but also I represent Liechtenstein. It is for no pay; but then, in thirty years as consul, I have never had to do any work." His blue eyes sparkled amiably. "I represent Alfred in his difficulties if it is decided that he is truly from Liechtenstein. I will see that he is protected in his dealings with big, soulless companies."

"It's only a small section of land," O'Connor said, with a touch of asperity. "Why make a Supreme Court case out of it?"

Erhardt touched his full gray mustache. "We cannot be too careful. For instance, this pipe you plan to put on Alfred's land. You do not say whether it is to be vertical or horizontal."

O'Connor blinked.

"Aha," Erhardt said genially. "Perhaps a mere technicality. Or perhaps you will fool us. We think the pipe is to be horizontal and flow oil over Alfred's land; but all the time maybe you plan to make the pipe vertical, and therefore you are in fact drilling for oil." Erhardt smiled at Miss Morgan. "In the old days, I was going to be a lawyer. I think of everything."

O'Connor controlled his temper. "I'll see that everything is made clear. Horizontal only."

Erhardt rubbed his chin thoughtfully and studied O'Connor. "But perhaps we approach this matter too much from mistrust and antagonism. We need rapport between parties." He stared at the ceiling for a moment. "Ah! I have it. Why do not you and Alfred have a man-to-man talk? Go someplace. Relax. It is a fine afternoon."

O'Connor's face cleared. "A brilliant idea."

Erhardt beamed. "I will get you fishing poles. A lunch basket."

O'Connor cleared his throat. "I just happen to have those things in my car."

Miss Morgan was doubtful. "I really don't know if regulations would permit me to let you take Alfred out alone."

Erhardt waved aside the objection. "Go with them. This I would do myself, but I must get back to the shop."

JUST a half hour later, O'Connor turned his car into a sheltered lane that wound down to the bank of a small river.

Alfred got out of the car and filled his lungs. "In Liechtenstein we have outdoors like this, too. But closer together."

The three of them carried the lunch basket and fishing equipment to a clearing a hundred yards upstream.

Alfred took the spinning rod O'Connor put together for him and disappeared around a bend. O'Connor had the urge to keep close to him, but he decided not to press things. There would be time for talk later in the afternoon.

The Picture of for Health March



by MAXINE DAVIS

Fatigue bleaches the zest out of life for everyone from time to time. Not the pleasant weariness that follows physical exercise

or the understandable kind that comes with convalescence but the sort that makes you wake up thinking, "Another day to live through!" Mole-hills seem mountains, nothing's exhilarating. Why?

It could come from some physical or emotional ailment. To be on the safe side one should ask the doctor. Chances are it's nervous fatigue.

This is the season for it. But Spring is almost here, and every woman needs her usual vitality, energy and bounce. There's so much to do—housecleaning to begin, children's clothes to ready for milder days, early garden chores to start. How is she going to cope when it's an effort even to put on a little lipstick?

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BETTER...by McKESSON

(Adv.)

O'Connor cast for half an hour without success, then joined Miss Morgan near the riverbank. "Where's Alfred?"

She put down her book. "I haven't seen him since we got here."

O'Connor watched a wisp of her dark hair stir in the breeze. "This is no way for Alfred and me to achieve rapport." He relaxed on one elbow. "However, at the moment, I don't particularly care whether Alfred comes back here or not."

Miss Morgan smiled. "Then it might be a long time before you get his land."

O'CONNOR chewed on a blade of grass and watched her. "For myself, I wouldn't care how long it takes. I find things interesting here. But the company I work for has forty miles of pipeline waiting to be connected on Alfred's property."

"Alfred will come around eventually. He seems to be quite taken with you."

"With Texas, you mean."

Miss Morgan shook her head. "I'm sure he'd like you even if you weren't from Texas."

O'Connor grinned. "I hope everybody feels the same way."

Miss Morgan colored faintly. She decided to look at the river. "Mr. Erhardt has been trying to adopt Alfred."

O'Connor considered that. "He and the boy appear to get along well."

"But I'm afraid it can't be done. Mr. Erhardt is over sixty, and the placement board wouldn't consider him for that reason."

"I wouldn't worry too much about Alfred. He'll be adopted by someone. He's a nice kid. Maybe a little stubborn and suspicious, though."

Miss Morgan sighed. "We've had several offers to take him, but he's refused even to be interested."

O'Connor watched a turtle slide off a rock and into the water. "In some ways, Alfred reminds me a lot of myself when I was a boy. Without the *Lederhosen*, of course. I was about the stubbornest boy in Texas when I made up my mind about anything."

Alfred appeared from a clump of bushes. "I have caught nothing. Now I am hungry." Alfred finished one sandwich in short order and reached for another. "I have made up my mind about my land."

O'Connor waited expectantly. "Name a price. I'm prepared to be generous."

"I do not want money," Alfred said solemnly. He put one arm over a bare knee and chewed on his sandwich. "I wish to give my one hundred and five square feet of Texas to my parents."

"But, Alfred," Miss Morgan began, "you haven't—"

"To my parents who adopt me," Alfred said. "And they can give it away or sell it, as they wish."

O'Connor felt an uneasy premonition. "Alfred, I think they'd prefer something more portable. Like money. Shall we say five hundred dollars?"

Alfred's eyes went to O'Connor. "I would like to be adopted by a father who is six feet tall."

O'Connor smiled stiffly. "I'm only five feet eleven and three quarters."

"Approximately," Alfred amended.

O'Connor played an ace. "Yesterday I went through West Allis. I think I'll settle down there."

The sandwich stopped halfway to Alfred's mouth. "Leave Texas?" He was aghast.

"It's been done. By a few perfectly sane people."

There was half a minute of silence. Then Alfred sighed. "West Allis is not so bad if you are with your parents."

"I'm single," O'Connor said, with a touch of desperation. "I couldn't adopt anyone."

Alfred hesitated a moment and then looked at Miss Morgan. "But this could be changed. Miss Morgan is single, too."

Miss Morgan's eyes widened. "Alfred!"

O'Connor had trouble with his voice. "This is nothing but blackmail."

Alfred was somewhat disconcerted by their reaction. "I do not think it would be bad. We will all be happy together. I do not give up my land otherwise." There were both hope and worry on his face. "It is agreed?"

"Of course not," O'Connor snapped. "It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of."

Miss Morgan stood up. "Of course it's ridiculous. But there's no need to use that tone of voice and accuse the boy of blackmail."

"Please," Alfred pleaded, "do not argue. I have not planned on this."

O'Connor glared at him. "Don't tell me there's something you haven't planned." His eyes narrowed as he remembered Alfred's conference with Mr. Erhardt. "Or did you have somebody to help you do the planning?"

Miss Morgan stiffened. "Are you insinuating that Alfred and I cooked this up together? I assure you I'm not that desperate for a husband."

O'Connor was about to explain his remark when suddenly it occurred to him that Miss Morgan *might* be the second half of Alfred's conspiracy.

Miss Morgan read the suspicion on his face, and anger snapped in her eyes. "This picnic is over." She turned abruptly and began walking up the slope.

O'Connor picked up the rods and the quickly repacked lunch basket and stalked grimly after her. "I agree entirely." He crossed over the brow of the slope and stopped in his tracks.

ALFRED came to a halt beside him, puffing slightly. "I believe you have a flat tire, Mr. O'Connor. Left front."

"Thank you," O'Connor said dryly.

"I never would have noticed it myself."

Alfred hovered over O'Connor as he jacked up the front of the car. "I can be useful. I can hold the bolts so that they do not get lost."

"Never mind," O'Connor said gruffly.

"I will bring the spare tire," Alfred said eagerly. He ran to the rear of the car and wrestled the spare out of the

