

PANAMA SKETCHES

By

Eleanore D. Greene

Illustrated

With the republics to the south claiming so much of our attention, these charming vignettes of life in Panama have the extra appeal of timeliness. In recounting some of the experiences of three years' Army service in the Canal Zone, the author shows us in lively, informal sketches the pleasures, trials and surprises that a northerner finds in Panama—the orchids and the lottery tickets and the strange, amusing pets; the delights of the native market and the struggle with armies of insects—and in so doing gives us an insight into a fascinatingly unfamiliar way of life. Her book will bring back happy memories to the thousands of Army people who loved their tour of duty in Panama, and will waken all its readers to an interest in this important bit of America.

Several of these stories were first published separately in *This Week*, the Sunday section of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, and attracted interested response from many parts of the country. Most of the material, however, is new, appearing in print here for the first time.

BRUCE HUMPHRIES, INC.

Panama Sketches



The Palms of Panama

Panama Sketches

By

ELEANORE D. GREENE



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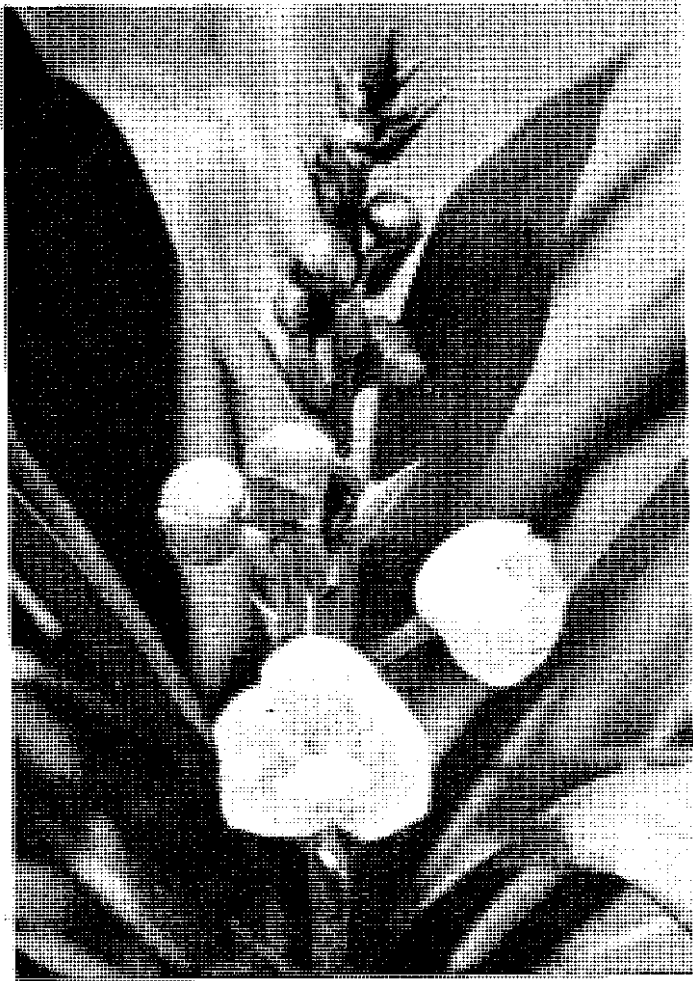
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To
PHILIP

Panama Sketches



Holy Ghost Orchid

ORCHIDS BY THE BASKET

“PLEASE, madam, would you like some orchids? The people who lived here before always bought from me.” I had had egg men and vegetable men, but never before an Orchid Man.

Hung over his arm were several pieces of bark, to which were attached queer, exotic-looking plants.

Black muck clung to his clothes, and in his belt was a wicked-looking machete; but the plants were fascinating. One looked as if a swarm of beautiful yellow butterflies had just alighted upon the long sprays.

“What is this lovely thing?” I exclaimed.

“It is the *Oncidium Porrellii*, madam, truly a butterfly orchid.”

Who could the man be, speaking in a cultured English accent and giving the plant its botanical name? I asked him where he had studied.

“I study always, madam, every day; we can never stop studying orchids. Some day I shall find the lost one — the white one that is some place in the hills of Panama.” That was all I

ever learned of the background of my Orchid Man.

“Madam has a wonderful place to grow orchids — may I show her how to care for them?”

Our tropical home had huge, screened, connecting verandas on all sides. On either side of the front door, on the top moulding, he hung a butterfly orchid. The lovely pictures that were to entrance everyone who entered our home, had begun. The screening was divided into sections and each section was enclosed in narrow black strips — a frame for an orchid each week — if I could afford it!

“They are lovely there, madam. I will sell them to you for one Balboa.” Only fifty cents!

The golden-yellow blossoms clung to the screen as if a cloud of butterflies had just alighted.

The next week he appeared with a big basket filled with lovely white blossoms, dozens of them. The flowers were delightful, two to three inches long, with greenish sepals and petals, and a pure white lip.

“The local name for this is *Dame de la Noche*. It has always been a great favorite with brides.”

As he spoke, he held out the big basket. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

“Do orchids never have a perfume?” I asked.



Shades of Lavender!

“Orchids have everything a flower should have; wait and see.”

After the sun set and night descended, the house gradually became filled with a heavenly perfume. As the sun rose in the morning the perfume vanished. My gorgeous white flowers were truly “Ladies of the Night.”

A few weeks before Easter, a voice called through the screen, “I bring madam a beautiful Easter gift!” He carried a plant in an old tin can.

“It is called the *Holy Ghost* orchid,” he explained; “it only blossoms once in three years. I was fortunate to find one for you.”

“But why is it called the Holy Ghost?” I asked.

“Madam will see Easter week; this is a very rare one, it will have several blossoms; often they have only one.”

Each day I watched my Holy Ghost plant. The buds soon began to swell, and finally showed a bit of white. The day before Easter the top bud opened. It was a fragrant, waxy white flower. The center showed a striking resemblance to a miniature dove with spread tail and outstretched wings over an altar. It was much like the conventional dove one sees in representations of the Holy Ghost.

The next one he called the *spider orchid*. The flower was a yellowish green and the lip was marked with purple. The sepals were unusually long and looked like spider legs. At eleven o'clock each morning it sent out a very sweet odor, which disappeared at sunset.

I could hardly wait from week to week for my man to appear. I asked if he couldn't bring more plants.

“I have to wait for them to blossom. Often I spend days before I find what I want to bring you. Today I bring a funny one. The natives call it the *Monkey Orchid*.” The blossom looked like the little wrinkled face of a monkey.

Another odd one a friend named “the Flying Gold Fish.” It had one large blossom — the upper part was yellow, sprinkled with



Baskets of Orchids

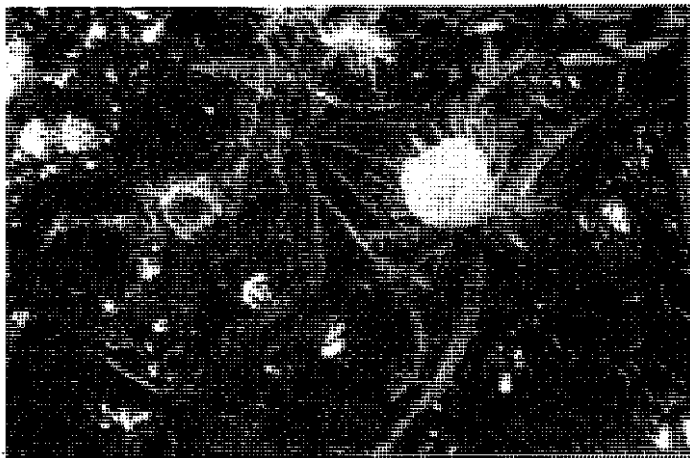
brown dots like a butterfly in flight. Underneath it was light cream and shaped like the Japanese gold fish. It had two large deep brown spots in the position of eyes.

“Please bring me,” I begged, “some plants with the real orchid shade.” So he brought me my lovely *Elinor Glyn*. He said he had named it that for a book he had read, called *Three Weeks*.

At nine o'clock the next morning, one blossom opened. It was an exquisite orchid color, and the odor was a combination of all the heavenly perfumes you ever dreamed about. The blossom lasted only a day, and fell off. In three

weeks, at nine o'clock in the morning, another beautiful blossom opened; at sundown it faded and fell. For months, every three weeks *Elinor Glyn* opened for the day.

At last the pictures were completed: each narrow, black frame had its interesting orchid; and even when they were not in bloom, the weird plants were as fascinating as a Japanese print — especially against the background of one of our brilliant tropical nights.



The Jungles Are Full of Orchids

AN ISLAND OF FRIENDLY “SAVAGES”

“I AM mighty glad to see you, Doctor,” the aviator said. “No, I’m not badly hurt, but badly frightened. I got into a cloudbank, and before I could find my way out the gas got low. I had to make a forced landing. When I saw I was just above the San Blas Islands — well, I said my prayers! I had heard, when I first arrived in Panama, that no white man was ever allowed to remain over night in that country. Also, that one had to have the permission of the chief even to land there. I hadn’t time to get that.

“My ship ‘cracked up’ in a mangrove swamp on an uninhabited island. It was luck that it happened to be near the one on which the chief lives. They all saw or heard me come down; and in no time the chief and his son, who speaks English, paddled over and helped me out of the wreck. The sun was sinking, and I knew no help could arrive until daylight. The field knew the direction of my flight, and I felt sure they would see the crackup from the air next day. But would I see a next day?

“Chief Nelli-Catula had several men carry me to his house — I was a bit shaken up — and put me in a hammock which had been slung on his porch. They had to go through the house to get to the porch.”

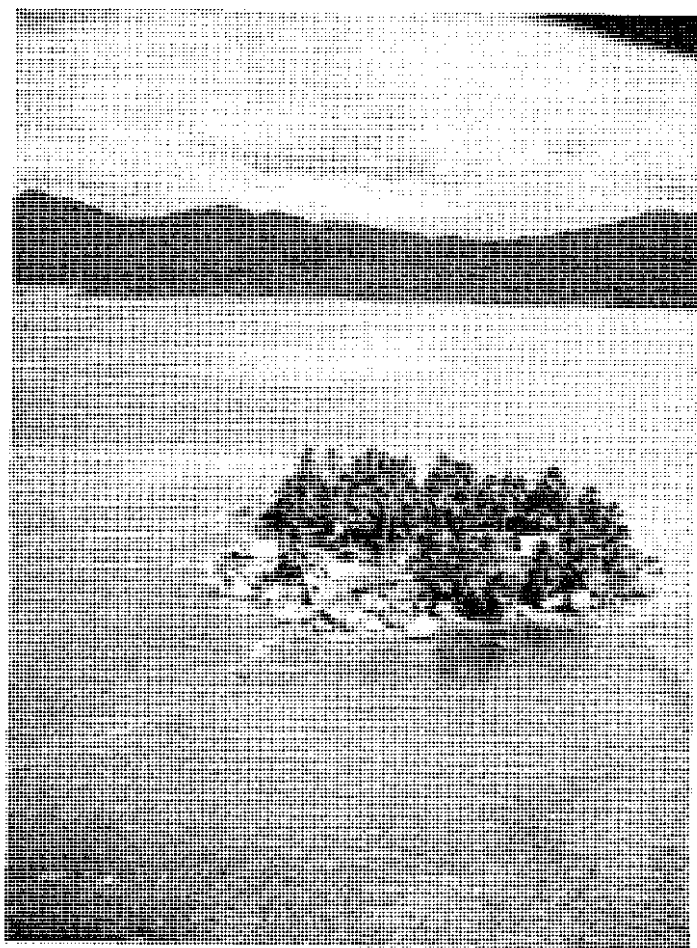
The doctor was relieved to find the lieutenant alive and not badly hurt. He thanked the chief for all he had done, and asked him to come to the flying field if ever he needed help.

Several months later the son of Chief Nelli-Catula appeared one day.

“The children in our country,” he said, “are much sick and plenty dying. Can the doctor come and help? My father, Chief Nelli-Catula — he sent me.”

Having procured an amphibian from the Navy, we reached the San Blas country in two hours. The son, to his great delight, was allowed to fly with us. The chief was waiting with an ulo (canoe) to take us in.

The place looked deserted. In front of each house there were tubs made of pieces of hollowed-out tree trunks, and filled with water. Bits of bark were floating around in them. There were from four to ten hammocks in each house, and a fevered little child was in each one. Over each hammock an anxious woman hovered, vainly trying to get the sick child to drink from a gourd — evidently the fluid brewed in



San Blas Island

the tubs outside the doors. Under each hammock, on the dirt floor, was a small wooden image. The very sick children had a dozen or more at the head of the hammock. They were crudely carved, and all seemed to represent the human face rather than that of an animal.

We had never seen more devotion shown by any race. The women seemed not to know that we were there. In one house we found a mother sitting in the corner with a dead baby at her breast. She rocked back and forth, muttering weird words as if she were trying to call it back to life.

We saw no cemeteries, but were told that the hammocks served as coffins. They were taken to one of the uninhabited islands and hidden away in the dense palm groves. Relatives of the dead keep fresh food by them until the cords of the hammock begin to rot. They are supposed then to have reached the other world.

After examining several children, the doctor thought they might have malaria — a virulent type he had seen in Panama City that season. He had come prepared to take blood smears, but had little hope that it would be allowed.

When the son explained to his father what the doctor wanted, he was much interested and insisted they take a smear of his blood also. Chief Nelli-Catula seemed to be the medicine

man as well as chief. The son told us his father had tried many things to cure the children, but they had all failed.

"Could we bring several nurses to help the mothers care for their children?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, if bring women; no man can stay in San Blas country all night," the son interpreted.

The doctor assured the chief he would bring only women, and they would do their best to help the children. They would be back early the next morning.

The blood smears showed malaria. Three women nurses were willing to go out there. They were told to respect the images. From island to island the nurses were taken in canoes. With young Catula to interpret for them, they instructed the mothers in the proper care of the sick children. The wonderful cooperation of the mothers with the nurses soon brought the malaria under control.

Chief Nelli-Catula was deeply grateful, and asked if he could repay us in any way. The doctor told him the American Government was well repaid in the care and aid he had given the young flier; and that we had been repaid in meeting them and watching their interesting life.

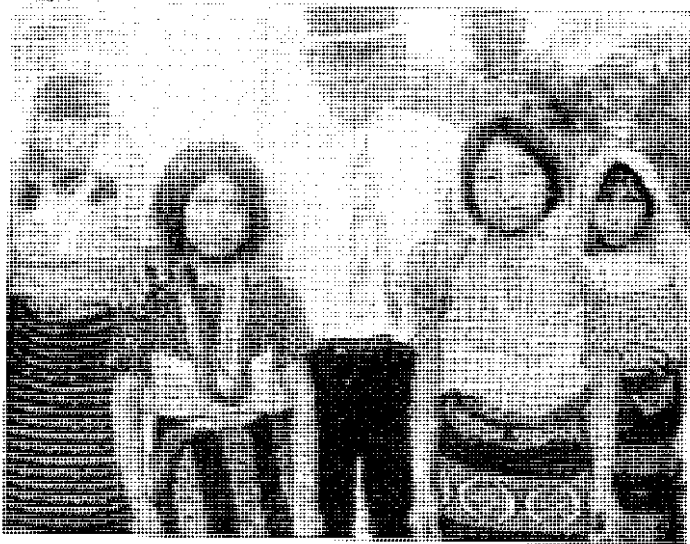
"Would there be any objection to our taking

a few pictures?" we asked. "We want our world to know what nice mothers the San Blas women are" we told him. He hesitated for a second and then whispered to his son. In half an hour the women shyly began to appear. They all wore blouses and short skirts, or serapes, twisted around their waists. I had heard about these garments, which are peculiar to the San Blas woman, but never believed anything so beautiful and interesting could be made from a few pieces of colored cotton.

One layer of cloth was applied over the other and cut out to form intricate designs. Most of the figures represented animals or flowers. The background was usually turkey-red cotton, and they were all lined with a cloth dyed a soft shade of blue, much like the Chinese blue. No two were alike; none was embroidered — just the design made by cutting out and applying layer after layer of different colored cloths.

The only other form of art we found were beautifully carved coconuts and gourds. We saw no pottery — perhaps because the islands are all coral reefs. The hammocks were very finely woven of silken grass, mahoe bark and the roots of vines, but they showed no designs.

All the females had gold rings in their noses; these were inserted in infancy. They evidently had put on all their finery to have their pictures



San Blas Indians

taken. Every finger had a ring upon it. Their arms were loaded with bracelets. Besides the small bead bracelets, with which the arms were covered, they all wore broad wrist-bands of gold, which fitted very tightly. The same type of band was worn on the ankles; these bands, however, were much larger, some being six or seven inches wide. The younger girls had on dozens of necklaces made from the small pink shells and from the small teeth of monkeys.

In the left ears of all the women were large brass disks. These were very highly polished. The little girls didn't wear these, and we were

told they were inserted when the girls became of marriageable age. The older girls also wore necklaces composed of many coins. On one were several United States half-dollars dated 1850.

A pair of white cotton pants and a shirt was the typical costume of the men; boys under eight or ten were usually naked. The shirts had a kind of tucked vest. They were all the same blue as the lining of the women's serapes. The chief wore a white shirt made in the same manner.

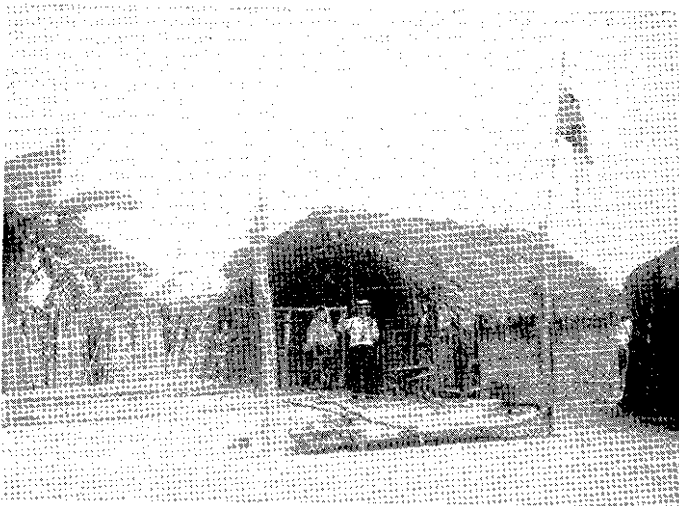
Whenever one of the women would appear, the men would put on their hats. This seemed to be a kind of honor. Everyone was bare-footed. We saw no type of foot covering on the island, and wondered how they endured the coral reefs.

The San Blas people never grow over five feet tall — the women almost seemed to be dwarfs. They resemble the Eskimos in appearance, having the same yellow-brown complexion and small eyes. The chief told us there had never been any intermarriage with any other race or tribe.

The men are very muscular, probably developed from the constant battling with the surf. Only coconuts grow on the islands, and everything else, even water, has to be brought from

the mainland. The women do all the work in the islands, while all day long the men steer their heavily-laden dugouts through the strong white-crested waves.

As we took the last picture, we felt we were leaving friends behind us. We hoped we had helped to dispel a little of the dread of strangers that these people seem to possess, inherited doubtless from their ancestors who had suffered so cruelly from the conquistadores. We also hoped that civilization would continue to pass them by, and leave them the happy, interesting race that we had discovered.



A Home on San Blas

OPERA IN THE TROPICS

“SELL him cheap,” said the one-eyed native, pointing to the marmoset on his shoulder. “Nice-a-monk.”

“No, no monkey,” I called above the screams of the marmoset, which now had run down his sleeve and was grabbing at the stalk of bananas that the native held out toward the car window. We had vowed, when we were ordered to Panama, that there should be no mischievous monkeys in our home.

“Plenty limes — fifty, sixty — stalk banans, and monk — all for three Balboa,” argued the man.

“One Balboa, and NO monkey,” I bargained. Suddenly something flew past my face. Firmly twisting his long fluffy tail around the wheel, the monkey sat looking at me. Then, turning his head on one side, his bright, wistful eyes looking into mine, he began to sing — soft, rich notes that were wonderfully musical.

“See, him lika you,” chuckled the native. “Two Balboa?”

He could have had his three.

All the way home the squirrel-like creature clung to the wheel, singing his sweet, plaintive little tune; only at the corners did he utter the harsh, shrill notes. By the time we had reached the house, he had sung his way fully into my heart.

I decided to keep "Fluffy" under the house — in the screened cupboard where the stalks of bananas hung. The marmoset decided otherwise. As soon as the car stopped, he jumped onto my shoulder and tucked his silky head under my chin. When I tried to remove him, he scolded and bit at my finger; when I took my hand away he uttered those flute-like notes and kissed my cheek. I was never able to resist those notes which the family insisted he used only for me — or to get his own way.

No opera singer had a greater range of notes. The first time we heard him trill, we hurried to the front door to see what new bird was in the palm tree. Fluffy sat on the ledge over the screen door. He sang from key to key through the whole gamut of vocal sounds.

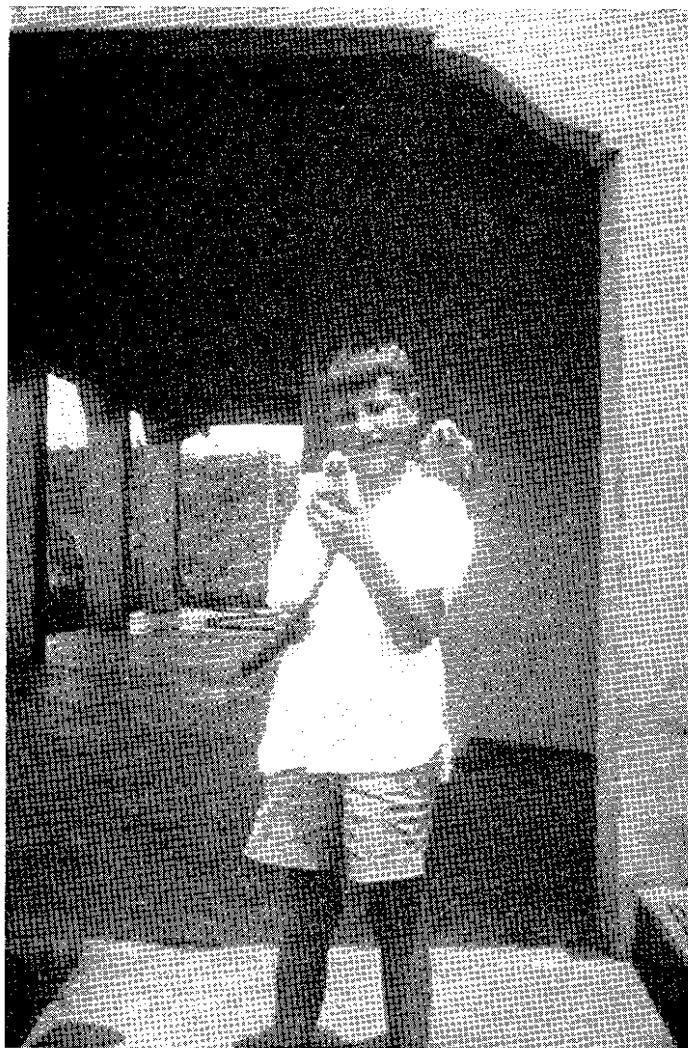
For many minutes he trilled, holding us breathless with the lilting notes. Something in his hands flashed in the sunlight as he sang. I discovered he had taken my gold thimble from my sewing box. Never could I force him to sing; only when he was greatly pleased with

some bright object would he climb on the ledge, out of my reach, and go through his repertoire.

One day I heard him singing on the ledge. He was holding a small glass jar filled with stick candy. He turned it round and round, biting at the glass. Then he began to scold, and after some coaxing brought it down to me. I opened the top. With his head on one side, he carefully studied the contents: a pink and white peppermint seemed to interest him. He began to lick it, round and round; for half an hour he licked, just like a child with a treasured lollypop.

That night was one of those hot, sticky nights when you turn your pillow over and over to try to find a cool place. At the second turn, my hair stuck and pulled . . . Fluffy had put his stick of candy there for safekeeping.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, when the trade wind begins to blow, Fluffy would always give his plaintive cry and spring on my shoulder. Then he would crawl in under my arm — only his tiny head, with its white ruff, protruding. There he would stay for an hour, taking the keenest interest in whatever I was doing, trilling a few notes to the flash of my knitting needles or the gold thimble, or giving the low, coaxing notes for bits from the tea tray. He knew there was something on the tray for him; often it was a few of his favorite



Fluffy, the Marmoset

raisin grapes. He would hold the grape and carefully pick out every seed before he began to nibble it.

The little marmoset had a remarkable power of facial expression. In repose his quaint little face wore a look of great wisdom; when pleased his face expressed every sign of extreme joy — the tiny mouth stretching from ear to ear in a broad grin. At night, when I tucked him in the small cage we had built to keep him out of mischief, he would put his arms under his head as a pillow, and look at me with the greatest devotion in his sad, brown eyes.

ANTS BY THE MILLIONS

RED ants, black ants, umbrella ants, termites — they all welcome you to the tropics.

The red and black ones give you a royal welcome the day you arrive. A bit of sugar spilled from the sack — and within an hour these little insects have taken possession of your kitchen. In single file, a solid line will enter under the screen, cross the floor, go up the legs of the table — and soon the table-top will disappear under the throng.

A birthday cake with smooth and shining white flowers looked most artistic as Marie placed it before me to serve. The knife slid through the frosting . . . then, up the knife and over the table ants began to appear. Millions of them.

“I only leave on kitchen-table one minute to harden frosting,” the maid wailed. “I brush off all ants for put in ice-box.” There was *no* cake inside — just ants. After a few experiences of this sort, you soon learn to put ant-tape around the tables, the ice-box and even the stove.

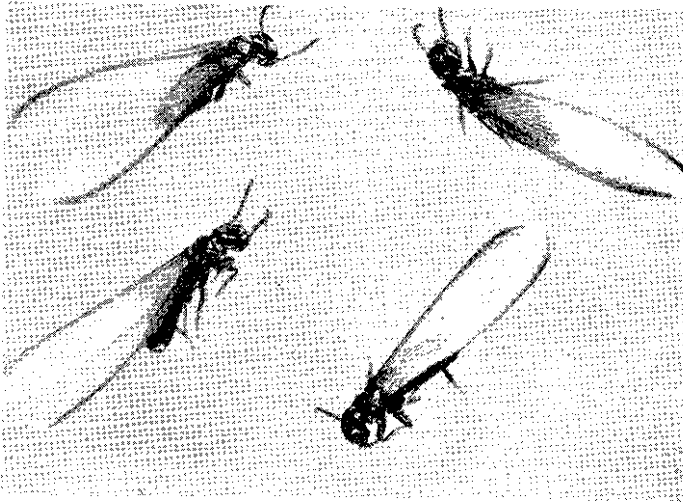
The termite, which is sometimes considered a

white ant, and looks very much like one, will never enter the house by an open door. It sneaks in subterraneously, boring through the foundations. Termites devour the house as they advance. The only notice they give you is a pile of sawdust that slowly trickles through a crack — and some day the whole ceiling may fall on your head.

One morning I heard a queer sound on the sleeping-porch. My baby was out there taking his nap. I hurried to the door. The porch was a mass of white wings . . . the baby was literally covered with winged creatures. Fortunately Marie had also heard the noise.

“Don’ touch! Don’ touch!” she screamed, seizing my arm. “Call ant-man. Bite babe if touch.” The ant-man came quickly. He removed a screen and instantly the swarm flew away. I rushed in to baby and found him quietly sleeping, unharmed.

“It was a good thing you didn’t touch the child,” the ant-man said. “The ants would have bitten him badly if they had been disturbed. That was a swarm of termites,” he explained. “Once a year the young grow wings and migrate from the parent nest — they grow wings to better sow their wild-oats. Then, finding a bit of rotten wood, they drop the wings, form a new government, and bore into your house,



Termites in the Winged Stage

eating and destroying as they go. I am sorry the baby was on the porch," he said as he was leaving. "I always like to destroy these swarms when I can find them."

When the gardener suggested Crotons (foliage plants) for our hedge, I objected that they would be too fantastic and ornate.

"The tropics are fantastic and ornate," he said, "and you will find a croton-hedge most satisfactory: they can be clipped and trimmed like boxwood; and as they are native to Panama, they stand the heat well."

Against the vivid green of the jungle the brilliant reds and yellows were stunning; there were no shades of reds and yellows that our hedge didn't have. Each day it seemed to grow like Jack's beanstalk. Each morning, I rushed to the window to see if it were ready to be clipped.

Then one morning I looked . . . and looked again. Only black bare stalks were etched against the sky. Half of the hedge was defoliated . . . for more than a hundred feet the leaves were gone. Perhaps only wilted. I hoped and looked again. The leaves were gone; but across the lawn something was moving. My Croton leaves, bit by bit, all sizes and colors were marching like soldiers on parade in ordered file, over the lawn and down the hill into the jungle!

The tropics do do queer things to you. As I watched, the foliage on a plant began to move down a stalk and join the procession. Then I knew that the tropics had "got" me . . .

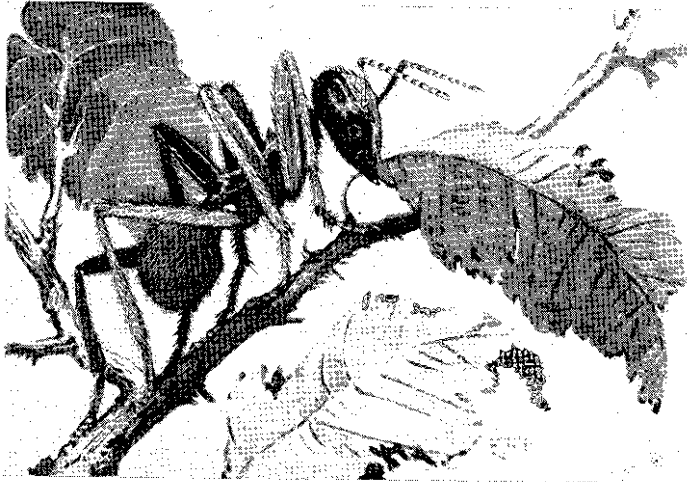
"No, not sick, just seeing things," I told the doctor when he answered my call. "Our hedge is running away!"

"You need the ant-man, not me," he laughed. "The hedge *is* probably marching down the hill."

Under each bit of leaf, the ant-man showed me a *small black ant*. They were holding the

leaves, many times their size, by their antenna over their heads like bright-colored umbrellas.

All is grist for an ant-mill—cakes, hedges, even houses, are just one more meal for that tiny animal!



Courtesy of American Museum of Natural History.

Umbrella Ant

WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER?

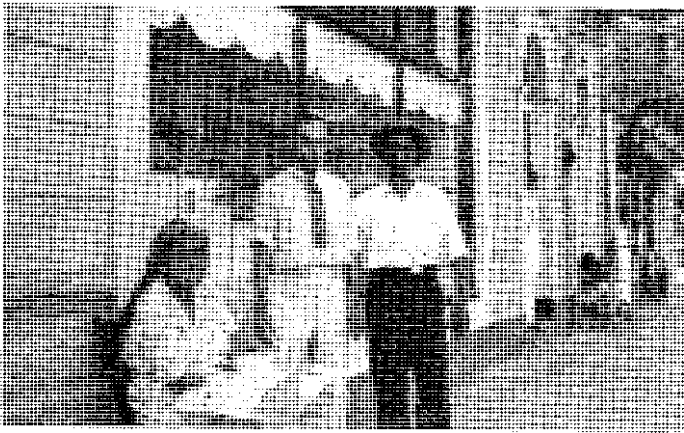
ONE of the greatest thrills, and one of the most talked-of subjects in Panama, is your Lottery Number. A salutation is more apt to be, "What's your number?" than "Whee-u, isn't it hot today!" The Number is a bond that unites everyone — from the General to his cook. In fact, the cook is quite supreme here; she can usually tell him a number that she has dreamed that week, for to be lucky, of course, the number has to appear in a dream. You often have a weary search to find the dream number, or the one your "hunch" tells you to buy, but Cook will always go down into the by-ways and find it for you.

The series of numbers are sold each week in different parts of the Republic. They go on sale every Monday morning. Up and down the streets and alleys the vendors place their stools and boxes. Here they sit all day with boards (to which the series are fastened) on their laps or at their sides. You may buy a ticket for fifty cents or a whole series for ten dollars. One favorite vendor always has a cage of love birds at

her side, and she insists that they bill and coo to one another if you choose a winning number. Another wizened old native places her stool just outside the door of the Union Club every Saturday night. She has been there for over half a century and 'tis said that whoever buys her last ticket is sure to win. This little country has no fear of the tax collector; its people buy lottery tickets to keep a balanced budget.

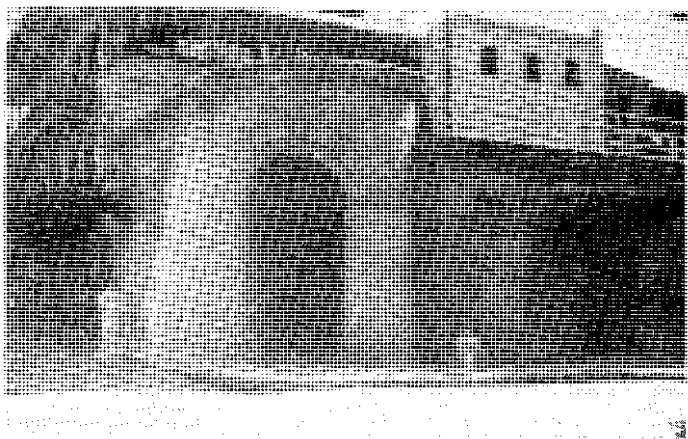
Sunday morning, about eleven o'clock, the Square in front of the National Bank begins to overflow with people; and cars begin to park on the side streets as far back as you can see. Native policemen run about through the crowd; but they are never needed. It is a friendly crowd: Spaniards, Jamaicans, Martiniques, people from India with their odd head-dress, Americans . . . every race on earth seems to be packed in that small square. They seldom speak your language, but they all speak the language of the ticket as they compare numbers.

When the Cathedral bell tolls the noon hour, the High-Ranker down to the poorest Mozo will push and crowd to get into the corner room of the bank building or as near its windows as possible. On a platform inside, suspended on a rod between two standards, is a large glass bowl. Within the bowl are many small ivory balls. A High Priest stands behind the bowl, and at his



Lottery Tickets for Sale!

side is a beautiful child with black curly hair, big brown eyes sparkling with excitement, and clothed in an exquisitely embroidered white dress. The man will twirl the bowl most vigorously on the rod, then unlock the cover, and the child will reach in and draw out one of the ivory balls. The High Priest will then unscrew the two parts of the ball and hold out the number that was enclosed within. The number will then be printed on a blackboard behind him. Again the bowl will be closed, locked, and twirled; again the child will draw out a number, until four digits are drawn. The prizes vary a little from time to time; the last digit usually is worth fifty cents; the first and last digits worth two dollars and fifty cents; the first three are

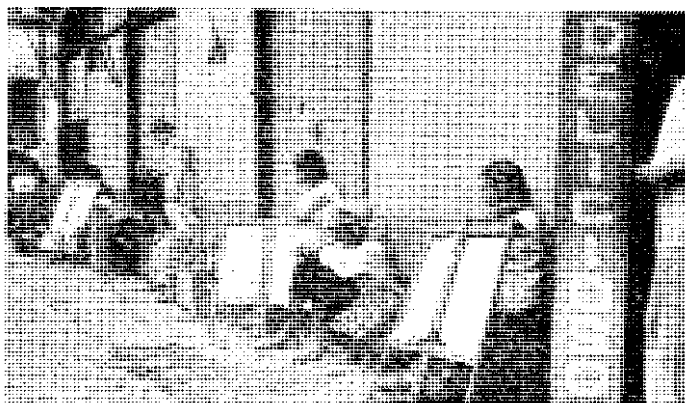


Where the Lottery Is Held Each Sunday

often worth five hundred dollars; but the full number always brings the winner a thousand dollars.

There is never a sound while the drawing is going on; but when the number is written on the blackboard it is whispered to those who cannot see, and back until it reaches the edge of the crowd. Then you may cry out, "I've got it!" and a black paw will reach out and pat your shoulder; or you may smile into a dark-skinned, happy face next to you. The crowd disperses quickly; always happy and always hoping for better luck next week. No money is paid on Sunday; you collect it from your favorite vendor or from the bank the next day.

Your friends and you will probably drift to



Lottery Vendors

the hotel around the corner for a frosted limeade or a Planter's Punch. It was rather warm jammed in that "smelly crowd" under the broiling sun. Sometimes you have several drinks on a winner; but "the house" will insist that you have one on them!

"What an attractive, unusual lamp-shade; where did you find that?" I once asked a Colonel's wife.

"In Panama City," she answered.

"But attractive lamp-shades are one of the few things I can't find there," I argued.

"Look again," she urged. It was made of lottery tickets -- over a hundred were pasted on the plain parchment shade.

She laughed. "The accumulation of the family's bad luck!"

Lottery tickets are also favorite bridge prizes — there is great excitement on a post if you find on Sunday morning that your guest has won.

When the band plays its farewell piece; and you sail away from this friendly, interesting country, you always clutch a last lottery ticket, hoping against hope that a cable from some friend in Panama will be handed to you at the dock in New York, reading:

“Your number WON!” . . . It did happen *once*, you know.

THE HOWLING WEATHERCOCK

THE horses were not at the crossroads. No automobile could travel the narrow overhung jungle-trail that had to be taken to reach the coffee finca.

“Mañana! Mañana!” stormed my son. “You never can teach these mozoes to be on time.” He started to back the car into the log garage that had been built by the side of the road. “Sorry, Mother, to lock you up; but you can’t walk it. I’ll hurry and have a horse back before night-fall.”

To be shut up in that dark garage with probably scorpions, cockroaches, and possibly a snake, didn’t appeal to me; so after a bit of coaxing the car was left out under a tree.

“Nothing to fear really,” my son called as he hurried away. “Not a soul around for miles; but keep the windows closed for the malaria mosquito begins to bite around sundown.”

It had been a trying day. We had left Panama City at five that morning in order to reach the Volcan region before dark. Although it was only two hundred miles, the rainy season

was hardly over, and we found the roads slick and the fords still a foot or so under water. The trip up the mountain had been most uncomfortable; the road was partly washed away and big boulders had to be circumferenced. But never had I seen the tropics more beautiful. The rain had restored the brilliant coloring that the hot sun had dimmed and faded; and it had refreshed the mysterious pungent odors that belong only to the jungle. It was that peaceful hour that comes before the sun sets: the gentle sighing of the wind through the palms, a sleepy bird call . . . my eyes closed.

I was awakend by a cry: fine and clear at first, then rising at the end to a shriek so loud, piercing, and unearthly that my blood seemed to freeze in my veins. Before the long shriek expired, a mighty chorus of thunderous voices burst all around me. The sound of sticks being hurled against the top and sides of the car aroused me from my frozen terror. Quickly I fastened the locks on the doors, and turned on the lights — I had read that a bright light would frighten beasts away. But over the hood of the car a grotesque human-like face appeared . . . it was as black as ebony. Other faces looked in the windows; and the rain of sticks and bits of mango increased.

The sound of a gun-shot . . . silence . . . and my son's voice restored my reason.

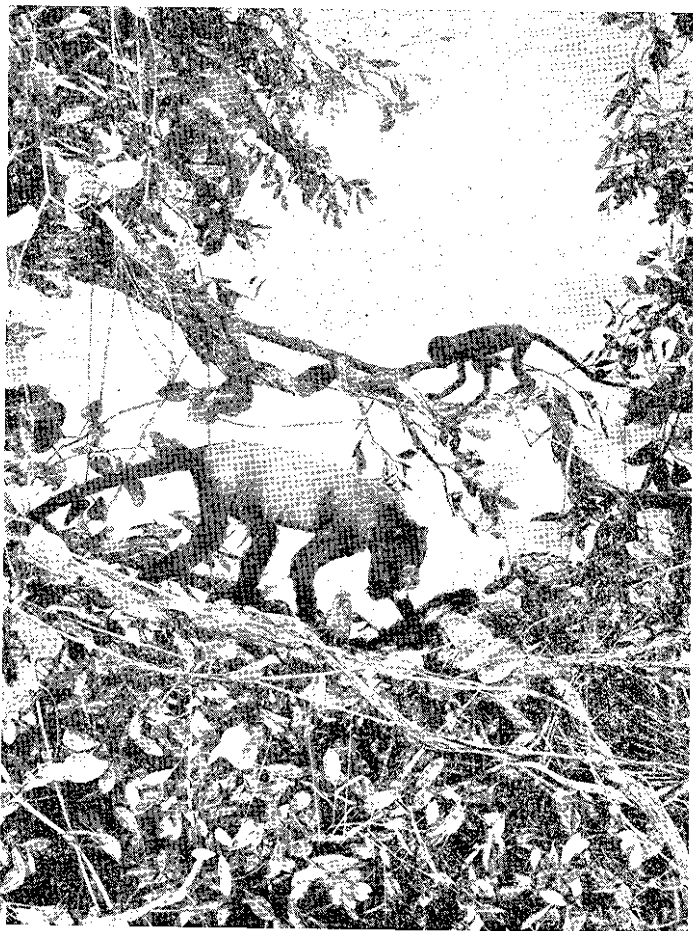
"That was a close shave!" he called through the window. "Open the door, you are safe now! It was just a pack of monkeys," he assured me. "The little devils get mighty mischievous at times, though."

"Monkeys!" I gasped, opening the door. "Monkeys making *that* noise!"

"Howler monkeys," he explained. "They certainly are misnamed for they can out roar the mightiest lion that ever wakened the echoes of an African jungle. When I heard that roaring concert, I knew you must be petrified," he said as he took the wheel. "I fired my gun not only to frighten them away but to let you know I was near."

After backing the car into the garage, we started across the road to Petro and the waiting horses. A black object sprawled out in the dirt attracted our attention.

"I didn't mean to shoot one of the little beggars," my son said as he leaned over . . . "Oh, I am sorry!" Clinging to the back of the dead object in the road was a baby-monkey. His arms embraced his mother's neck, his feet were caught up under her front limbs, he lay stretched out with his cheek caressing the mother's face. As I knelt down, the little black head, as smooth



Courtesy of American Museum of Natural History.

Howling Monkeys

as velvet, lifted, and frightened brown eyes looked straight into mine.

Tenderly, my son pulled the clinging baby from the mother's back. "Don't grow too fond of him," he warned as I took the tiny monkey into my arms and buttoned my sweater over the quivering body. "Howler monkeys are hard to tame and never do well in captivity. They travel in packs of twenty to thirty and are hard to catch; and although they are found only in this Chiriqui region, we have never been able to keep one alive long enough to study it."

Through the overhung stretches of the trail, where I had to trust entirely to the instinct of my native pony, the monkey clung tightly to my body, his arms around my neck and his soft velvety head tucked under my chin. The next few days were anxious ones: the monkey refused to swallow the canned milk that I warmed again and again or the bits of mashed banana that I gently tried to force between his lips. It was only when Petro brought in the heart of a palm that I had any success. Although this always remained his favorite food, he soon began to eat many bananas and to demand his quart of milk a day. He learned to drink from a cup more easily than any baby I had ever trained — but it had to be his special cup. The seedless grapes that came to us from California

THE HOWLING WEATHERCOCK 45

were also a favorite food. He would sit for hours with a bunch in one hand, picking off one grape at a time and eating it with the keenest relish.

Christopher (I am not sure why we named him that) grew very rapidly — especially his tail. This powerful, prehensile appendage constituted really a fifth hand, and he used it as he did the other four. It grew to be nearly seventeen inches long; and felt like a piece of rubber hose when he wrapped it around your arm or neck. The upper part was covered with long black hair but the under side was bare with a black hard skin. A naked area near the tip was as sensitive to touch as the tip of one's fingers. His body soon was an inch longer than the tail and was covered with straight, black, long hair.

The cunning face began to change also: the soft down disappeared, leaving the face naked; the forehead retracted a bit, the hair on it growing backward forming a pompadour that any boy would envy. It was a gamin little face with its protruding muzzle; but with each succeeding day became more expressive. A deep searching look was given to a stranger, a look of inquiry when he was perplexed; and sometimes his eyes would moisten with tears when I shut him up in his cage. But never did he display a sullen expression; usually there was a grin of

genuine mirth which often developed into a loud, hearty laugh.

Like all monkeys, Chris loved attention and would go through all sorts of stunts for a bit of applause. He loved to summersault. He would stand straight for a second until he had the attention of his audience, then put his head upon the ground, turn over, rise to his feet again, and then burst into laughter. We placed two swings in the yard about thirty feet apart. Chris would sit on the seat, grabbing the ropes, and swing for an hour — until an audience appeared. Then he would leap from one swing to the other; a better term would be swing, for these flights were performed chiefly by his arms, or he would catch the clothes-line with the tip of his tail and, swinging to and fro, he would chatter, gesticulate, or make faces at us.

Only once was he ill. I went to the States for two months during the dry season; during that period Christopher ate little, showed every sign of grief, and seldom played. When I returned he looked at me for a second, then with a grin of delight he rolled over, kicked his heels together, and, springing on my shoulder, laughed so heartily that he was heard all through the house. He began to eat at once, and for several weeks I feared I could never fill him up.

Chris was about six months old before we

noticed that his throat was visibly thickening. His only sounds up to that time were a deep metallic cluck when he liked his food, a chirping squeal to call attention to his antics, or a hearty laugh for those he loved. One extremely sultry afternoon, near the end of the dry season, we were startled by a roaring noise in the backyard. It was a tremendous sound that vibrated all over the place and, we were told, was heard nearly two miles away. Hurrying out to the yard, we found Chris sitting in his swing. His eyes were shut, his head thrown back, and his mouth was wide open. From the big hollow sound-box in his windpipe the sounds poured forth.

He paid no attention to us but seemed to be listening to something in the jungle. Between the roars, from over the jungle-trees, we also heard the longed-for sound . . . a sound like the tramp of millions of feet -- the feet of the rain-drops.

I GO A-MARKETING

TO market to market! — to find something different. How tired we had grown of the frozen meats and the wilted vegetables that greeted us at the commissary. Down on the water-front was a native market. You could hear its screaming parrots, shrieking parrakeets, chattering monkeys, and the even-worse chattering natives a mile away. I had sometimes wondered if one could find something there besides noise and bunches of bananas.

One day I smelled something cooking on the little stove in the laundry. Going below, I found Marie, our Martinique cook, stirring a boiling mess. It smelled good.

“What is it?” I questioned. “May I have a taste?”

“Oui, Madam,” Marie giggled, “but you no like, I fear. Is native dish.” It tasted as good as it smelt.

“Please give us some native dishes,” I requested.

“You have to buy at water-front market then,” she answered.

Next day, with a list that Marie had made out, I went to the market. "Yam" headed the list; I did not know that they grew in Panama. We had been very fond of the red sweet-potato that was called a yam in San Antonio.

"Yam!" I ordered from the one-eyed native with a chattering marmoset on his shoulder. From a basket near, he took a large, weird-shaped root. It was knotted and gnarled like horseradish root.

"No, yam!" I yelled above the screams of the monkey who had run down his sleeve and was grabbing at the thing.

"Yam, yam." He smiled, holding it out to me. With the black muck of the jungle clinging to it, the yam didn't look as inviting as the wilted vegetables in the commissary. I decided to try only this one dish at first. A stem of bananas, one hundred limes, and several yam-roots were put in the back of the car for twenty-five cents.

It was one of those humid days at the beginning of the wet season. No one was hungry at first; but the dinner that Marie served was attractive and satisfying. She served a planked-dinner. Around the edge of the board was a wreath of potato-flowers — made from the dirty roots from the market; down the center were pieces of banana wrapped in bacon; in be-



Water Front Market

tween these Marie had placed scarlet, plum-sized tomatoes which are native only in Panama and which she had saved from her lunch-bag. The yams had a decidedly nutty flavor, and we grew to like them better than potatoes. It was all cooked to a golden-brown. Tall, frosted glasses of tart limeade made from the limes I had bought, and a few mashed mangoes from a tree in the yard served with toasted casabas wafers, completed the dinner.

I found the coconuts, that Marie ordered another day, a very versatile food. She used them for a drink, an ice-cream, and for a condiment.



How Pineapples Grow

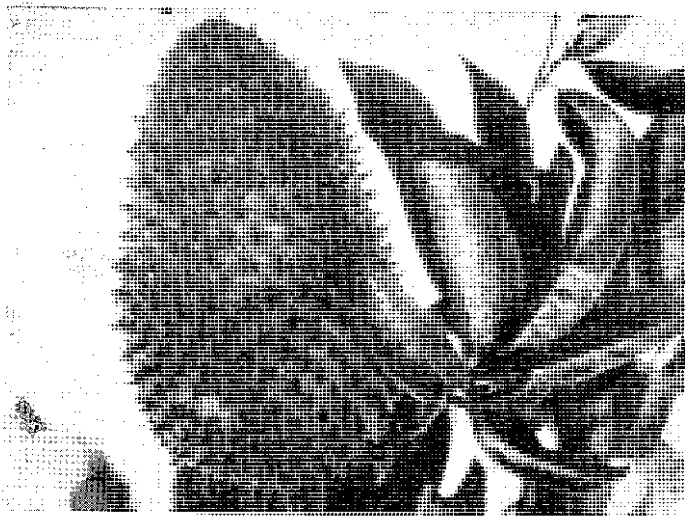
“Drink much coconut-water,” she insisted, “good medicine, cure most things.” We found nothing more satisfying on a hot day than plenty of the juice served in a big pitcher with lots of ice-cubes. The coconut shell is also a marvelous thermos-bottle. A stone for a hammer, a nail to open the three small holes in the top, a few straws (a native will serve you a bamboo stalk) and a green coconut — with these you need never go thirsty in the jungles, for the shell always keeps the fluid cold.

When the coconut was at a riper stage, and had begun to solidify and form a creamy mass, Marie made ice-cream. She just dumped the

contents of the nut into a pan of the freezing-compartment of the refrigerator. Voila! in a few hours there appeared a rich, most delicious cream; the only kind of ice-cream I have ever discovered that is absolutely smooth made in an ice-tray.

The hardened stage of the coconut (this is exported), Marie used in various ways. Grated, it was excellent as one of the condiments for a curried dish; in many salads and over soup; and balls of vanilla ice-cream rolled in the grated fruit made a party dessert.

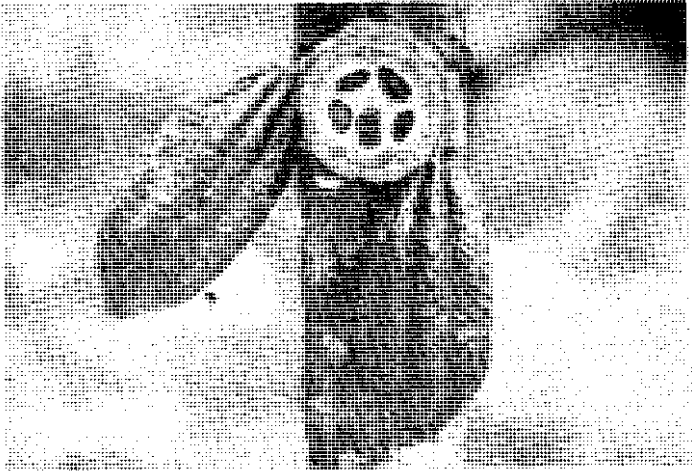
Marie then asked for a sour-sap. This was the shape and size of a melon but had a dark green skin covered with sharp thorns. The inside was of the consistency of heavy cream, only the mass was rather stringy. The whole interior was pressed through a colander; rather, it should have been, but Marie like all French cooks used her hands. She added whipped cream to the juice and made a delectable ice-cream; another time a bit of lime was added for an ice. I cannot tell you exactly how it tasted for we all had a different opinion: one member of the family thought it tasted like peaches; my husband, who adores pears, insisted it had pear flavor; while I knew it had the combined flavor of pineapple and guava. It was always our most satisfying desert as it appealed to every taste.



Sour Sap

At one time I was to have a General and an Admiral (or does it go the other way) for dinner. That honor called for something different and something perfect. Never had I been to a dinner-party in Panama where I was not served turkey — the flavor all frozen out — and stringed beans — the one vegetable that we dared to buy from the Chinese garden. Great was my delight when Marie suggested that I might use native meat.

“You can buy the fillet for twenty-cent the pound,” she said. “I rub him with the papaya-juice and make all tender and very good.” So we served the Admiral and the General a



Cocoa Beans

planked steak. It was a *coup de maître*. Heaped around the edge were flowerettes of yam; down the middle the fillets — rare, tender, cut two-inches thick, and encased in ribbons of crisp bacon. For a vegetable, she had used cho-choes. They were cut in two, cooked in their skins, and seasoned with “much butter and lime.” The cho-cho is a delicate green the size of a pear and tastes a bit like summer squash. For added color she had found more native tomatoes.

Our favorite fruit was papaya, which is a form of melon. It is now beginning to be imported into the United States. For a fruit-cup

a mixture of golden papaya and pink watermelon balls is very attractive. No breakfast is ever served in the tropics without a slice of papaya and its accompanying half of lime. Another favorite breakfast fruit is native pineapple. This Marie always served in segments. The fruit was never peeled, just the round-eyes pulled off with her fingers. A few strawberries (a great luxury that once or twice a year came to the commissary from California) served in their hulls, and several cones of pineapple served around a mound of sugar, was Marie's *piece de resistance* to start a dinner-party or end a luncheon.

And there were grandella, nesparo, ma'me, pee'va — all fruits that I discovered in that water-front market to help vary our earlier monotonous menu.

DOPEY, THE SLOTH

A GREENISH-BROWN object hung on the clothesline. The thing, through the rain-spattered window, looked suspiciously like my son's beloved teddybear. Our Martinique maid had a fetish for washing everything in sight. When a bit of liquid sunshine had scattered the downpour, I hurried out to the line.

The rain or the washing seemed to have swollen the bear out of all proportions. He was a sorry sight as he clung by one limb, head down, dripping water from every angle. I reached out with Marie's boiler-stick to carry him into the washroom.

The creature winked at me.

"Don' touch him!" Marie, hearing my terrified scream, called from the kitchen window. "Philip say, don' touch him when he hang him up for he go to school."

"Do you mean to say, Marie, that the poor creature has been hanging like that since nine o'clock?" I demanded. It was then nearly three-thirty.



Dopey, the Sloth

"Him just sloth. Sloths always hang — never walk," was her astounding answer.

Gingerly I approached and gently poked the creature with the stick. The only response was the blinking of the stupid, sullen eyes, but I felt that I could not leave him hanging longer in that position. I placed the stick under a clinging claw but he made no attempt to grasp it. I seemed unable to find a way to lift him down with the stick. It was with great relief that at that moment I heard the voices of the children from the bus coming up the hill.

"Isn't Dopey a beaut, Moms?" my son called as the whole bus-load rushed across the lawn.

"Well!" I hesitated, for the creature was about the ugliest thing I had ever seen. "When he is dried-out and cleaned up . . . but do take him down," I begged, holding out the stick. Ignoring the stick, he took the animal in his arms and laid him on the ground. He was a ludicrous figure as he lay sprawled out, making no attempt to move.

With his short rounded head outlined by a frill of hair, his small ears almost buried among the fur, and his rudimentary tail, he looked more than ever like a washed-out teddybear. It was the rigid, three-to-four-inch claws into which his paws were so curiously transformed that startled me.

As Philip attempted to clean-up this new Panamanian pet, we discovered to our amazement that the greenish color was caused by a vegetable — a form of lichen which grew on its fur. It was the same growth that clothed the gnarled and knotted boughs of the tropical forest back of the house. It would not wash off.

“So that’s the way you hid yourself from me!” my son said, stroking the uncouth head. “I saw him a month ago hanging on a tree in the mango grove,” he explained. “I have hunted and hunted for him ever since. This morning I went up early to see if the hard wind that blew last night had blown down some ripe mangoes. Dopey was on the ground clinging to a branch that had been blown down. I guess the fall had stunned him; anyway, he didn’t know how to walk so I carried him home and hung him up to dry.”

Toward dawn the following morning, I was wakened by a queer sound which seemed to come from my son’s room. It sounded like the bleating of a sheep — a soft, plaintive sound. I hurried to the room.

Hanging to the foot of the bed, to which a branch of the large-leaved and milky cecropia tree had been tied, hung the sloth. He had rolled himself into a ball with his head tucked

between his arms, resembling the lichen-clad knot of a jungle tree.

“Poor old lazy bones,” I whispered. “I might grow to like you if only you didn’t wear your nails so long.”

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