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ORDEAL ON THE FINSTERWALD (Conclusion)

Norm Wallach

Editors' Note: Back by popular demand, our peripatetic peregrinating correspondent Norm Wallach climaxes his thrilling story of the Finsterwald disaster. Begun in April, promised in June, ended in July, and reaching the public in September, ORDEAL ON THE FINSTERWALD.

When I regained consciousness on that rocky ledge so far above the valley of the Feca, I knew instantly that I was in trouble! Terrible waves of fear and self pity broke over me as I lay there. I could not see the point from which we had fallen, and had no idea how far above me the fatal accident had occurred. All I knew was that I had to get down, injured though I might be. I slowly tested my limbs, and was relieved to find that I had not only survived, but that my injuries were not as bad as I had first supposed. Though I'd lost quite a bit of skin and had some bad cuts besides, all bones seemed to be intact. I still had about 25 feet of rope about me, and my climbing sack with a bit of sausage, cheese and a bottle of Valkenkroner Johannesberger Riesling, 1964. I took out the bottle, thrusting it into a nearby snow bank on the ledge so as to allow it to chill. Then, lighting my tourist cooker, I sliced the sausage into 5 thin pieces, browned it a little in the pan, pouring off the fat, decanted a bit of the wine into one of my saucers, and added some of the cheese, a lovely Roquefort. These I warmed gently together until the cheese had melted, being careful not to heat it too abruptly, nor to so high a temperature as to scorch it but only enough to allow the subtle nuances of the separate flavors to blend and awaken new soft aromas and tastes in the whole. Adding a leaf from a nearby sage brush and a pinch of pepper, I held the sauce at this temperature for about 4 minutes while re-heating the rendered sausage. Then, arranging the sausage quincunxially (1), I poured the sauce over the sausage and toasted the whole with some more of that quintessential wine. Ah rapture -- lest I digress.

Cheered by this meal, I looked about me. My situation, though bad, was not hopeless, but I knew that I must start down before my abrasions began to stiffen.

I will spare my readers the details of my bitter descent from the Finsterwald. My life-long climbing companion lost, my body bruised and painful, I lurched from hold to hold and down the easier slopes little caring that I might plunge to my death at any moment. Below me, the little town of Feca lay sleeping in the morning sun. I could see the peasants as they went about their daily chores -- tiny dots in the fields, and meadows, around the barns, houses and stills.

Charcoal manufacturing, one of the leading industries of this region, is carried on by the peasants of the Feca Valley who cut the wood and distill it in large ricks. It is later bought up by shippers and sent to the bigger cities to be

pressed into briquets, or lumps. The briquets of the Feca Valley, or Fecal lumps, are known throughout the world as a rich fuel for barbecues.

By late afternoon, my wounds had become so sore, my abraded limbs so stiff, that I was reduced to crawling. Having reached the scree slopes, I decided to rest, knowing full well that to do so meant almost certain death. The heat of the sun and my intense pain so drove me back into the darkness.

Some hours later, I awoke to see stars shining up above me. It had become bitter cold, and I found that I could barely move my stiffened limbs. Again I began to crawl, when suddenly, I heard shouts on the slope below, "I'm here," I croaked weakly. Soon I saw a party of climbers with a litter, food, water, and something to drink. But, wonder of wonders! Nom de Nom! At the head of the rescue party strode my bosom friend Hermann Eusterford himself!

"Sacre!" I exclaimed, "Hermann, what are you doing here?"

"Alors," roared Hermann, "You are alive, mon ami!"

"Sacre Dieu," I shrieked, "But Hermann! How did you get here?"

"Por La Plume de ma Tante," exclaimed Hermann, exhausting his knowledge of French, "Somebody had to guide the rescue party!"

¹QUINCUNXIAL: In the manner of the members of a pentamerous bud or flower so imbricated that two are exterior, two are interior, and one has one edge exterior and one edge interior. Webster's 7th New Collegiate Dictionary.

NO MEETING IN AUGUST. NEXT MEETING

SEPTEMBER 9.