Day in the Veldt

Mary Roberts*
life, for I had lived it ere he took it. I had slain hunger, beaten death!"

WHEN he died at Johns Hopkins on September 15, 1938, while doctors sought to remove a tumor from his tortured brain, he had slain hunger, perhaps—he had completed *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*—but he had not finished. He had only begun.

Jonathan Daniels, a pall-bearer, has described the funeral—the special coffin from New York to hold his six-foot, four-inch frame, the sermon delivered by the Presbyterian minister, who knew Wolfe was saved because he came to visit him every time he was in Asheville, the wig Wolfe wore to cover his scarred and barren skull, his mother and sister, exactly as Wolfe had them in *Of Time and the River*. It was a colorful day. Only one person could have written about it adequately—Tom Wolfe.

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**Day in the Veldt**

*Mary Roberts*  

IT WASN'T high noon yet, but Stephen, jogging uncomfortably on the back of his government mule, longed to reach the river bank where he knew the party would halt while he drank his tea, and while his natives noisily washed out their mouths with water spooned up in cupped hands.

Resignedly he slipped back into his reverie by the simple process of half closing his eyes to shut out the sun, which seared his eyeballs and burnt a red rim where his shirt and hat left exposed skin. Stephen could not understand this stubborn unyielding earth, so different from the green graciousness, the friendly, low-swung hills, the clean, rushing rivers, the vast buxom pines of the country where he had been nurtured. He glanced up to observe wearily the sky which earlier in the morning had been a brilliant blue. Now it seemed to be a faded, washed-out canopy, hung over an equally uninviting bed. The mountains in the distance were fat-topped and ethereal as if they had drained the very essence of blue from their too weak sister.

He glanced around to note again this quality of hardness ex-
pressed in the cruel glare of the sun on the parched veldt grass, on the wizened thorn bushes, with thorns out of all proportion to their midget size, at the cracked heaps of grey granite. Then, with a quirk of humor, he watched his party weaving back and forth across the veldt like little pawns on some huge chess board; the fantasy amused him; he was the lone white player and his native servants the black ones, and though he had the vantage position, yet he was entirely within their power; he was an outcast because he did not understand and share their oneness with this country.

WOULD they never arrive at the river? Again his glance rested on the molten gold coloring of the surrounding veldt which must, he thought, be a facsimile of the one fabulous King Midas created. Once again he decided that his natives with their childish, wily humor, their raucous laughs, alone fitted this crude country, this vastness, to answer the hawk's wild untamed 'krak' 'krak' as it circled far above them. Again he felt a misfit in this country of unyielding stubborness; it was as hard as his saddle of poorly cured leather, as relentless and searching as the merciless sun which still moved in a scorpion-like motion over the baked ground, as suggestive as the pile of ox bones lying bleached and broken by the path, as never ending as the jog-jog of his stiff-legged mule, as minute and inconspicuous as an atom being ground into still smaller particles in some huge mill.

Dully, Stephen watched his own shadow swallowed up by that of his mule as it became dwarfed, seeming only a dark patch under his belly and the swinging soles of Stephen's shoes—then he knew it was midday. Dimly he could see the river; already he could taste the thick syrupy sweetness of tea and recall the coolness of evening instead of the sharp glare of high noon.

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**STRIPES**

*Maurine Park*

Sci. Sr.

Oh, the world is full of striped things—
Tiger skins, and blue-jay wings,
White-bark aspens, near-dark pines,
Ski tracks tracing sleek designs
Across fresh snow.

*March, 1941*