

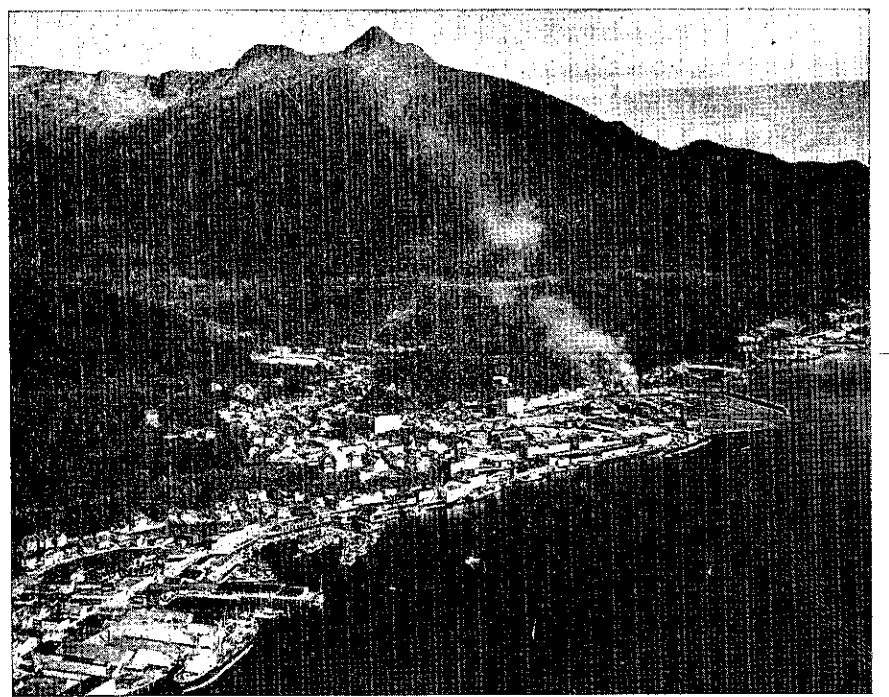
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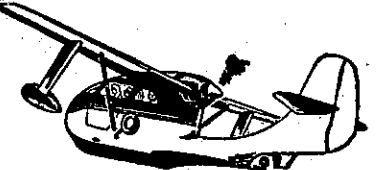
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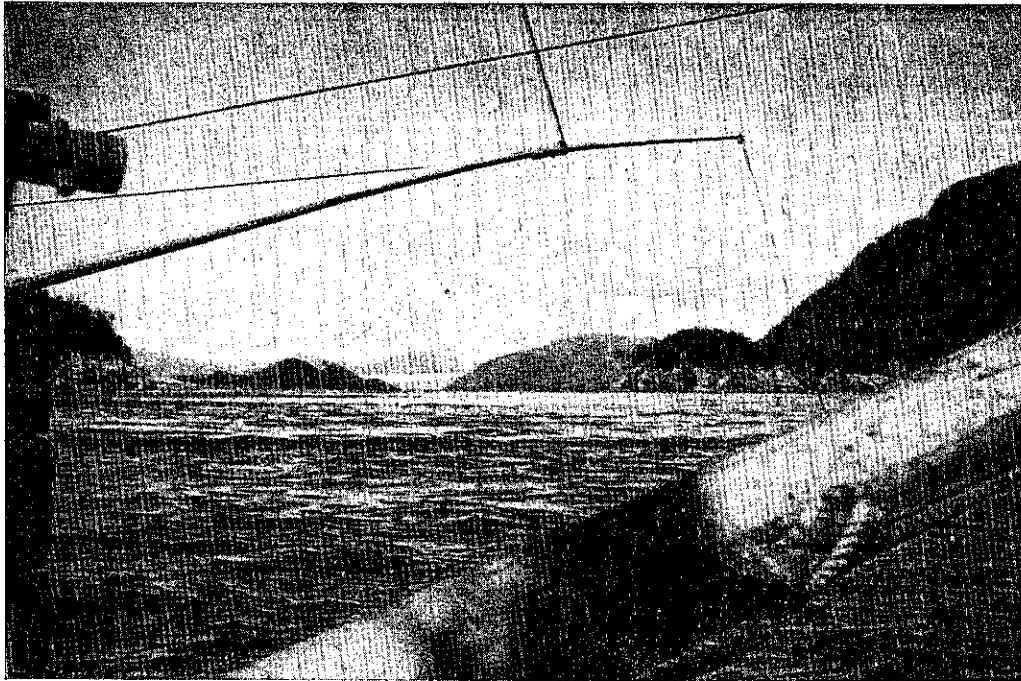
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Marilyn Jordan

You're constantly watching the tips of the poles for even a little twitch to indicate there's a fish on or that the bottom has come up and grabbed the lead sinker.

THE LAST DAY BY FRANK BECKER

THE jangle of the alarm clock brought me out of my dreams with a thud, the thud occurring when my head struck the side of the boat. Rubbing the knot on my head with one hand and the sleep out of my eyes with the other, I reared up in my bunk to orient myself.

Shucks! I was still in Elfin Cove. But according to my dream I should have been out on the gently rolling sea in a spacious yacht, surrounded by a bevy of luscious lovelies with pleasing profiles all the way down. What a shocking thing is reality!

There should be some better way to start the day than having to get up in the morning. Especially being awakened by that handful of noisy springs and gears. But such is the

Sally can't help wondering sometimes why she didn't marry a banker, so she could at least sleep until daylight.



life of a commercial fisherman.

I shot a bleary glance over to the other bunk. Sally, my wife, was curled up like a little kitten, with just part of her sleep-flushed face sticking out of the sleeping bag. A crime to wake her, but we had to get going. It was September 20, the last day of the trolling season. We'd have to make it a grand finale.

Sliding into my wool trousers and socks in a hurry, I lit the oil burner and put on the coffee pot. Those are routine morning chores. Then out came the wash basin full of salt water, just as is from the ocean, guaranteed to dispel any and all inclination toward sleep with one application.

I've found it doesn't do any good to call Sally. All she does is moan a few times and go back to sleep. I've found two ways of getting her up. One is to turn up the oil burner and roast her out. The other is to start the engine and get going.

This morning I just started the motor and went about my business of getting ready to fish. A cough or two always helps a little. In a few minutes she rolled over and got up grumbling about getting up in the middle of the night and asking the universe in general why she hadn't married a guy who was at least a banker, so she could sleep until daylight, anyway.

With the promise of action in the galley, I went outside to "tie the boat loose" and head for the fishing grounds. From the harbor to the open water

of Port Althorp is only a few minutes' run. Then it's a fifteen-minute run to the grounds. Ordinarily we eat on the way out, but the weather had been rugged the last few days and the sea was rolling high. We hove to behind Three Hill Island and had breakfast.

I let down the poles—twenty-two footers, making forty-four feet between tag lines—and made them fast. The way it was roaring on the other side of the hill, it was a cinch the waves were rolling high. It's necessary to secure the poles with the sea running like that, or I might break a tag line or snap off a lead. With lead twenty-six cents a pound, it doesn't pay to take chances.

Coming from behind the island, we could see the ground swells. Maybe we wouldn't be able to fish. The swells were hitting the projecting rocks with such tremendous force as to send spray up into the woods. Ground swells like that are hard to fish in, but there's where the fish are. The tides and swells bank the small feed up against the cliff, and of course the cohos follow.

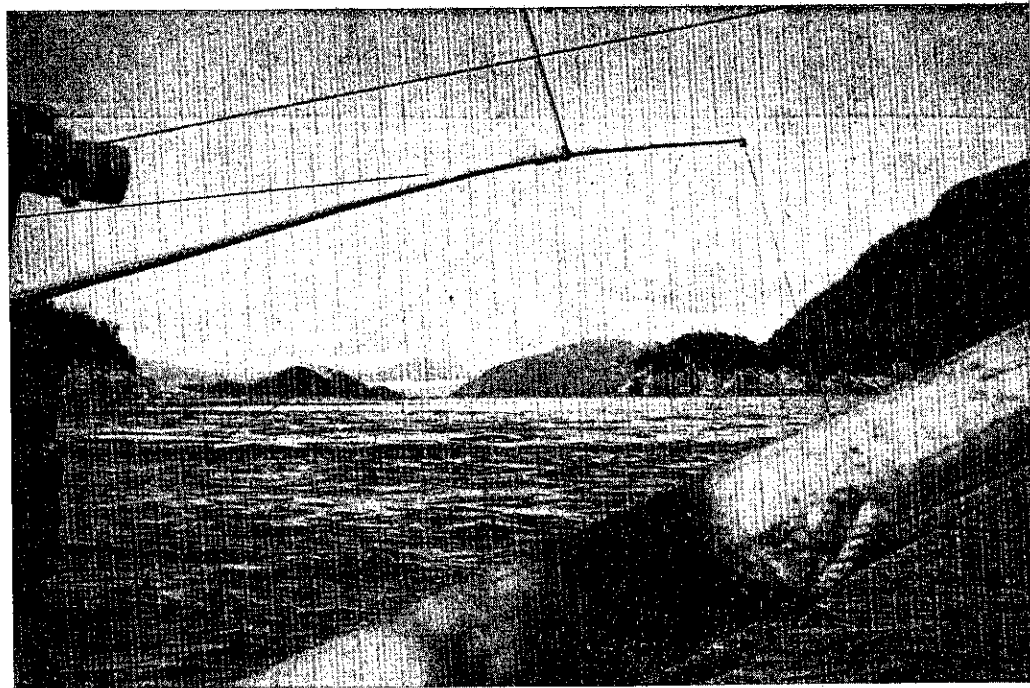
Those waves looked awfully big for our little twenty-three-foot troller. A good deal higher than the boat. But we kept going on out. The farther out we went, the longer the distance between crests. We were riding them like a little duck.

When I had twenty fathoms under me I started to hang spoons and wobblers until I had eight on each side pole and three on the stringer pole out over the afterdeck. Nineteen lures to catch one fish, or a chance to catch nineteen fish. But that chance is so small as to be negligible.

Watching the tips of those poles is a sure way to get all the neck exercise you need. You're constantly watching the tips for even a little twitch to in-

When the fish don't bite I can always dream of days when they did, days I've caught twenty, thirty, a hundred, even two hundred between dawn and dusk.





Marilyn Jordan

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dicating that a fish is on or that bottom has come up and grabbed the lead sinker. After several hours of fruitless watching your neck gets a little stiff. Then it's time to change your position or go out on the afterdeck.

We trolled as close to the rocks as we dared. Many times the spray would cover the boat like rain. We were fascinated by the waves as they slammed on the rocks with the ominous roar of on-rushing water. Fascinated as roll after roll chased one another up the sides of the perpendicular cliff, sending a backwash toward us that tossed us all over the bay. It was such a thrilling sight that we went still closer and took several shots with the movie camera, using color film. The sea seemed mad, sending up foam-flecked tongues of water as though trying to lick the gulls and sea parrots off the tops of the rocks.

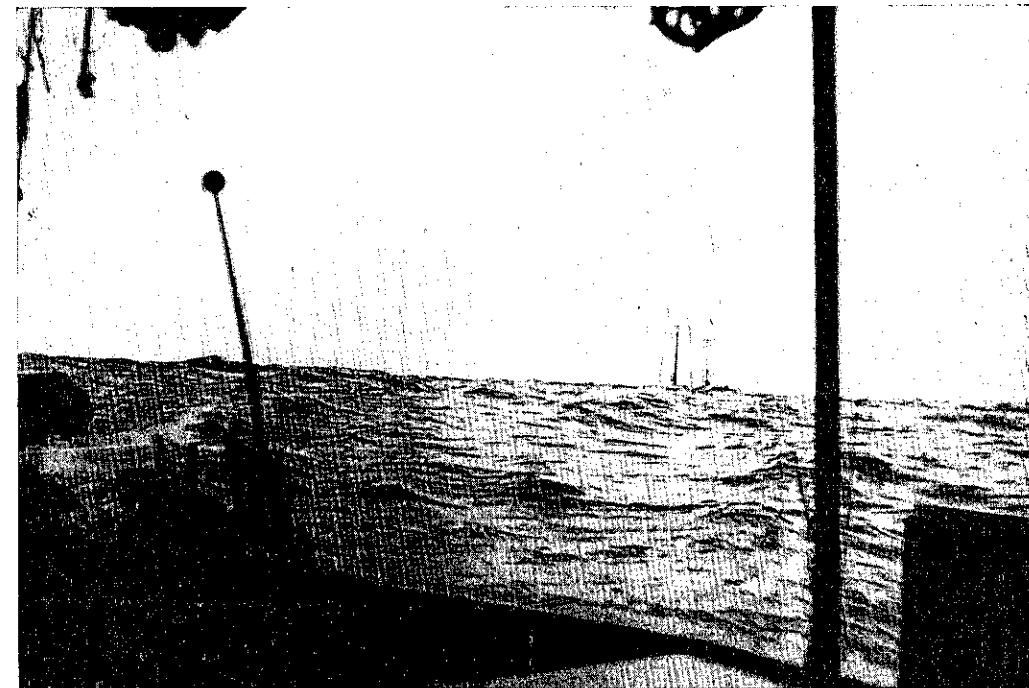
Sally's yell, "Fish on!" brought me out of my reverie. After more than five hours of trolling we were at last getting a little action. I threw in the clutch on the gurdies and watched the stainless steel line roll on the spool until the clothes pin came up to the boat. The clothes pin is used to hold the main line as the tag line takes the strain, and swings the main line even with the end of the poles.

Many thoughts race through your mind in the minute or so it takes the line to come up. How big? Is he still on? Will I knock him off the hook? Will the sonovagun tangle the leader in the propeller? Is there any shark around to snap him in half? Is he well hooked? These and more are possibilities of losing your fish and a little welcome moola.

In a few seconds the leader was in sight. Well, whadya know! He's on the first leader. Now I've got that silvery flash of fighting coho just two fathoms from me. Just twelve feet from ship to fish. A quick slap at the clutch handle stops the gurdies and puts the automatic brake on, holding the fish close to the top of the water.

That last ten or twelve feet he came up like a well-trained dog, but as soon as he saw the boat his docility ceased. He erupted from the water doing a tail walk, trying to throw that hateful thing that was keeping him from freedom. Surging from side to side, driving to the end of the leader, coming to a stop with a jerk, he made me cringe for fear he would tear the hook loose.

I brought him in slowly, hand over hand, till he was close enough to smack with the gaff, only to have him turn at the crucial moment. I missed him. That's when he really did get wild! Surging frantically, pulling the leader through my hand until he was at the end again. Again the sudden stop. But this time he seemed stunned for a moment.



Marilyn Jordan

You have to secure the trolling poles when the seas are running so high, or you may break a tag line or snap off a lead. Lead's too expensive to take chances.

Again I brought him in. Now he was getting tired. A few half-hearted runs and he was alongside the boat. This time I didn't miss. A quick rap on the nose and he was done.

Bringing my prize on board was a simple matter of slipping the gaff under his gills and sliding him into the cockpit. Now I could say, "We've got one!" Many a fish I've had on only to say, "There he goes," and fit the occasion with an assortment of adjectives, nouns, verbs and pronouns gleaned during my years of association with fishermen. Like a mule-skinner's vocabulary, my various expostulations have no chance of getting into print.

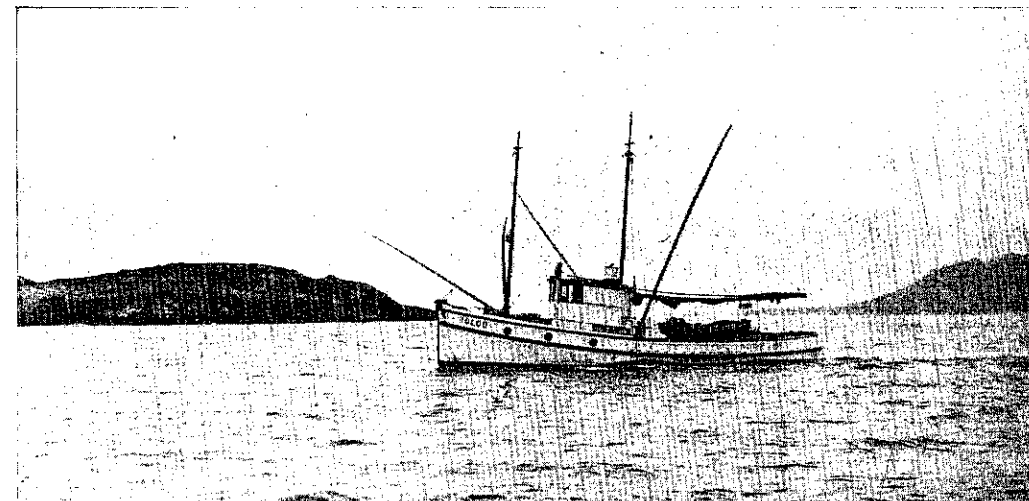
I yelled to Sally to turn and go back over the same place. Where there's one there should be more. In fact there should be a school of them close by. This time of year they are on their

way to the creeks and spawning grounds. The fellow I'd just landed was developing the hooked nose with which the male coho fights off other fish or anything impeding his and his mate's progress toward the spawning grounds.

With the gear back in the water, I went inside to have a bite to eat. When we're out like that we eat only one meal a day. That meal generally starts when we get up, and ends at bed time. Eat and sleep! If the fish aren't biting, one of us stays at the wheel while the other takes a snooze or sticks his nose into a story.

The afternoon brought a slowing down of the ground swells, giving the boat a slow, easy roll that, added to the euphony of the motor, is anything but stimulating. Soon there came a call from —Please turn to page 24

Back and forth, back and forth till you almost wear a groove in the water, trying different depths and lures, slower, faster, as close to the rocks as you dare. Such is the routine of a fisherman when the salmon just aren't biting.



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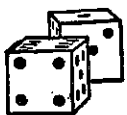


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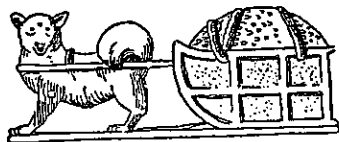
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THE LAST DAY

(Continued from page 11)

the pilot that her eyelids were drooping so she couldn't see the rocks. From the erratic course of the boat I had to agree with her, so I took control while she stretched out for a little shut-eye.

Just to be devilish I ran the boat crosswise in the sea, which made it too rough even to think of sleep. In a short time I was told off, and I do mean told off! I scrambled out to the afterdeck to steer, but I could still hear her scolding. In a few minutes the explosion dwindled to a grumble about people who pulled stunts like that, and finally it gave way to even breathing. Peace once again.

Here it was late afternoon and only one fish. On some days I'd have had ten, twenty, thirty, sometimes more than a hundred in the same length of time. I've even had a few days when



Marilyn Jordan

He was developing that hooked nose characteristic of the male coho ready to fight his way to his spawning area.

I caught more than two hundred cohos. But on days like that, in fact any day in a commercial fisherman's life, an eight-hour day is something you read about in the newspapers.

I trolled back and forth till I just about wore a groove in the water. I changed the course and went out into deep water, let the lines down to thirty fathoms on one side and forty on the other. Still no results. I changed spoons. I went slower, faster, crosswise with the swells, even out where it was really rolling high. Nary a fish. Not another boat in sight. We had the entire ocean to ourselves, but the briny deep failed to produce.

The sun sent pink and red streamers across the sky, painting the mountains and glaciers, making the glaciers look like huge gobs of ice cream covered with strawberry frosting. The cliffs

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WILD CREATURES OF KAIGANI

(Continued from page 15)

of the food, complaining and scolding. They aren't really our geese. At best we're only foster-foster parents to them. A fisherman and his wife who camped here on the beach last summer found them up in the muskeg when they were still five downy balls of yellow fluff. Even at that early age they showed no fear of man, and it was easy for the fisherman to pick them up and put them in his hat. When neither father nor mother appeared to protest he assumed they were orphans, and brought them back to camp where he built a pen for them.

All summer long they flourished on fisherman's fare, and learned to expect their morning hot cakes on time. The fisherman's little black dog appointed herself as nurse, lay by their pen all day, and resented anyone who took too much interest in her charges.

When they were about half-grown they were allowed to run at large during the day, but always they returned to the pen at night. They were well feathered-out by then but still unable to fly, as the strong quill feathers on their wings had not yet developed. That was when we first met them, for one day, becoming very daring they swam all the way out to the scow. All the fishermen were delighted with them, just as we were. I would hate to try to estimate how many loaves of bread those goslings consumed, or how many rolls of film were snapped at them.

Late in August, when the fisherman and his wife left, they placed the geese in our care.

"You'll see that they get fed, won't you?" he begged.

"Sure," promised Vady, then added jokingly, "along about Thanksgiving or Christmas they ought to be pretty good-sized."

"I believe my wife would murder anyone who killed one of those geese!" the fisherman said.

We knew how she felt. Secretly we felt the same way, especially when we heard one of the fishermen meditating that "fried gosling makes a mighty tasty dish," or, as sometimes happened, one would coax the little goslings close to the float with bread, then grab one to test its weight or run an explor-