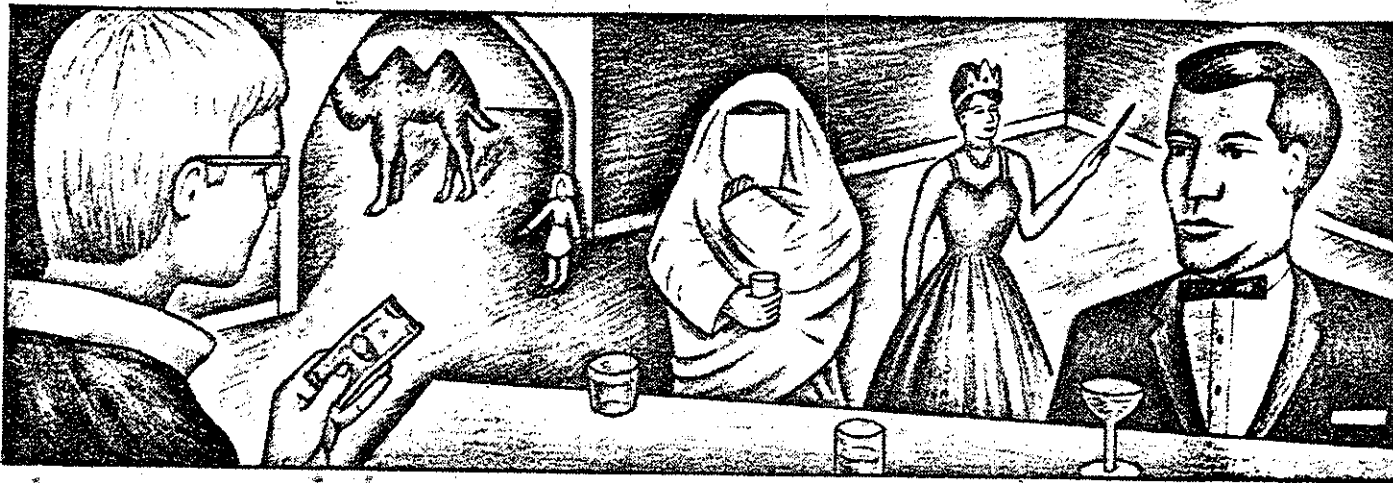


A Dollar Falls in Guitta's Garden



TON SMITH

By David Tipmore

TANGIER—We really *must* do something about this faltering American dollar. Otherwise I shall have to move out of my perfect pension above Guitta's Restaurant, where the \$9.50 a day I pay for the little yellow room and continental breakfast in the garden is going to inflate to \$12, and then \$15, and then I shall have to move back into the Hotel Madrid, where the showers double as toilets.

You should hear what Anneliese Sommer has to say about the faltering American dollar. Anneliese, a generally mean-spirited and highly German girl of 16, lives next door to me above Guitta's. She makes my life miserable. All she talks about is the faltering American dollar. She gloats over the fact that I cannot afford to live in Paris. She relishes the increasing worthlessness of my American Express Travelers Cheques. She says the United States is getting soft, sliding into second-rateness. She grins when she says it. Yesterday, just to make her feel bad, I told her that if America went, you could kiss Western Europe goodbye, and she said—with a strange Teutonic wink—that the Germans

have an "alternative economic plan [Kriegs-falle] which takes into full account "a planned obsolescence of the United States in the world economy" [Die geplante Veralterung der Vereinigten Staaten in der Wirtschaftswelt].

Every morning, Anneliese catches me on the way to the loo and demands to know the current rate of exchange. Every morning, I rush down to the Banque Commerciale du Maroc to get the bad news. 4.04 francs to the dollar. 3.93 francs to the dollar, then 3.92 and so on and so on. Every morning the bank teller laughs at my sickened expression, says something incomprehensible to his co-worker in Arabic, and then they both point at me and say something side-splitting with the word "American" in it. I stalk back to Guitta's and try to get to my room before running into Anneliese. Then I usually have a cup of coffee and start to write.

This morning, I am writing about what I shall have to give up if I am forced out of Guitta's due to the faltering American dollar. I am thinking that what I shall mainly have to give up is that at Guitta's, should I ever get lonely, I can throw on my sneakers and run

downstairs and out into the bar and meet a most extraordinary mix of Americans and Europeans. Guitta's, a watering hole for what remains of Tangier's palmy international society, serves as a meeting place much like 1/5 for downtown or Elaine's for uptown. At Guitta's you can meet Peers of the Realm, diplomats, real princesses, famous authors, Parisian culturati, daughters of Johannesburg diamond mine owners, rich, discredited American heirs, occasional students, and, once in a while, a legitimate playboy. You can imagine the resolutely sophisticated set of facts about Morocco these people have at their fingertips. For instance, you can learn from the Honourable David Herbert, second son of the Earl of Pembroke, that work on the mosque being built across the street from Guitta's, reputedly the largest mosque in North Africa, has been halted because most of the 12 million Kuwaiti dollars in the building fund have been embezzled. You can learn from Arndt Friedrich Alfred von Bohlein und Halbach, last *Konzernherr* to the Krupp fortune, that there are actually, in the countryside near Tangier, parties of men who

"sleep with" camels. You can learn from the Honourable Caroline Berry Wagg, granddaughter of the founder of the *London Telegraph*, that the word for "ghetto" in Arabic is *mellah*, which means "salt" and refers to the fact that for centuries it was the Jews who salted the severed heads of the vanquished for public display on city walls.

You can learn from Wendell Anderson, grandson of the inventor of the "self-starter" for automobiles, that in 1953 a Casablanca restaurant much patronized by students was discovered serving savory stews composed of nothing but human flesh. Or from Joseph McPhillips, headmaster of the American School of Tangier, that much of Morocco has seven feet of topsoil, almost three feet more than the Corn Belt, of sufficient fertility to feed the entire Arab world. Or from Alec Waugh, the venerable British author, that the royal family has a residence, and sometimes two, in every major city throughout Morocco and is worth an incalculable amount, more than any European royal family, more than most of the American top-10 industrialists.

Which brings me back to the faltering American dollar. And Anneliese, who doesn't care a bit about fascinating conversation. She is constantly running into the bar, much like Kay Thompson's Eloise without the charm, and interrupting, throwing up the faltering American dollar in my face. Whenever she sees me buying somebody a drink, she asks me if I can afford it. The trouble is that I am no longer sure. The trouble is that I may have to give all this up, all the lore and elegance and whiskey and sodas under the crescent moon in Guitta's garden. Of course, Anneliese told me that if I get really desperate I can always sell my blue jeans for \$12 on the Boulevard near the Cafe de France, which, at this point, is not a bad thought. That should give me one more night at Guitta's. And one more tomorrow. And, as a renowned heroine once said when she found herself in the same position, tomorrow is another day.