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**‘No.’**

**‘Suppose I get an order  
to do the same thing  
to you. Should I do it?’**

The future of Libya depends  
on mercy or revenge.

**By ROBERT F. WORTH**

**Photographs by JEHAD NGA**

Marwan Gdoura, a Qaddafi loyalist,  
executed six rebel prisoners and  
is now a prisoner himself under the  
brother of one of the men he killed.

O

ne night last September, a prisoner named Naji Najjar was brought, blindfolded and handcuffed, to an abandoned military base on the outskirts of Tripoli. A group of young men in camouflage pushed him into a dimly lit interrogation room and forced him to his knees. The commander of the militia, a big man with disheveled hair and sleepy eyes, stood behind Najjar. “What do you want?” the commander said, clutching a length of industrial pipe.

“What do you mean?” the prisoner said.

“*What do you want?*” the commander repeated. He paused. “Don’t you remember?”

Of course Najjar remembered. Until a few weeks earlier, he was a notorious guard at one of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi’s prisons. Then Tripoli fell, and the same men he’d beaten for so long tracked him down at his sister’s house and dragged him to their base. Now they were mimicking his own sadistic ritual. Every day, Najjar greeted the prisoners with the words *What do you want?* forcing them to beg for the pipe — known in the prison by its industrial term, PPR — or be beaten twice as badly. The militia commander now standing behind him, Jalal Ragai, had been one of his favorite victims.

“What do you want?” Jalal said for the last time. He held the very same pipe that had so often been used on him.

“PPR!” Najjar howled, and his former victim brought the rod down on his back.

I heard this story in early April from Naji Najjar himself. He was still being held captive by the militia, living with 11 other men who had killed and tortured for Qaddafi, in a large room with a single barred window and mattresses piled on the floor. The rebels had attached a white metal plate onto the door and a couple of big bolts, to make it look more like a prison. Najjar’s old PPR pipe and *falga*, a wooden stick used to raise prisoners’ legs in order to beat them on the soles of the feet, rested on a table upstairs. They had gotten some use in the first months of his confinement, when former victims and their relatives came to the base to deliver revenge beatings. One rebel laughed as he told me about a woman whose brother had his finger cut off in prison: when she found the man who did it, she beat him with a broom until it broke. Now, though, the instruments of torture were mostly museum pieces. After six months in captivity, Najjar — Naji to everyone here — had come to seem more clown than villain, and the militiamen had appointed him their cook. Slouching in an armchair among a group of rebels who smoked and chatted casually, Najjar recounted his strange journey from guard to prisoner. “One of the visitors once broke the PPR on me,” he told me.

“Naji, that wasn’t a PPR; it was plastic,” one rebel shot back. “You could beat a pig with a PPR all day, and it wouldn’t break.” Besides, he said, the visitor in question had a ruptured disc from one of Naji’s own beatings, so it was only fair. The men then got into a friendly argument about Naji’s favorite tactics for beating and whether he had used a pipe or a hose when he gashed Jalal’s forehead back in July.

The militia’s deputy commander strolled into the room and gave Najjar’s palm a friendly slap. “Hey, Sheik Naji,” he said. “You got a letter.” The commander opened it and began to read. “It’s from your brother,” he said, and his face lit up with a derisive smile. “It says: ‘Naji is being held by an illegal entity, being tortured on a daily basis, starved and forced to sign false statements.’ Oh, and look at this — the letter is copied to the army and the Higher Security Committee!” This last detail elicited a burst of laughter from the men in the room. Even Naji seemed to find it funny. “We always tell the relatives the same thing,” one man added, for my benefit: “There is no legal entity for us to hand the prisoners over to.”

Libya has no army. It has no government. These things exist on paper, but in practice, Libya has yet to recover from the long maelstrom of Qaddafi’s rule. The country’s oil is being pumped again, but there are still no lawmakers, no provincial governors, no unions and almost no police.

Streetlights in Tripoli blink red and green and are universally ignored. Residents cart their garbage to Qaddafi’s ruined stronghold, Bab al-Aziziya, and dump it on piles that have grown mountainous, their stench overpowering. Even such basic issues as property ownership are in a state of profound confusion. Qaddafi nationalized much of the private property in Libya starting in 1978, and now the old owners, some of them returning after decades abroad, are clamoring for the apartments and villas and factories that belonged to their grandparents. I met Libyans brandishing faded documents in Turkish and Italian, threatening to take up arms if their ancestral tracts of land were not returned.

What Libya does have is militias, more than 60 of them, manned by rebels who had little or no military or police training when the revolution broke out less than 15 months ago. They prefer to be called *katibas*, or brigades, and their members are universally known as *thumar*, or revolutionaries. Each brigade exercises unfettered authority over its turf, with “revolutionary legitimacy” as its only warrant. Inside their barracks — usually repurposed schools, police stations or security centers — a vast experiment in role reversal is being carried out: the guards have become the prisoners and the prisoners have become the guards. There are no rules, and each *katiba* is left to deal in its own way with the captives, who range from common criminals to Seif al-Islam el-Qaddafi, the deposed leader’s son and onetime heir apparent. Some have simply replicated the worst tortures that were carried out under the old regime. More have exercised restraint. Almost all of them have

offered victims a chance to confront their former torturers face to face, to test their instincts, to balance the desire for revenge against the will to make Libya into something more than a madman’s playground.

**‘You’re a soldier, you must obey orders,’ Marwan said. ‘If you say no, you will be considered a traitor and added to the victims. And if you don’t do the execution, others will.’**

THE FIRST THING you see as you approach Jalal’s base in the Tajoura neighborhood is a bullet-scarred bus — now almost a holy relic — that was used as a shield by rebels during the first protests in Tripoli in early 2011. Across a patch of wasted ground is an ugly, dilapidated military-training facility made mostly of cinder blocks. On its second floor is a long hallway, the walls of which are covered with images of prisoners at the Yarmouk military base, where perhaps the most notorious massacre of the Libyan war took place. On Aug. 23, Qaddafi loyalists threw grenades and fired machine guns into a small hangar packed with prisoners. About 100 were killed; most of their bodies were piled up and burned. Dozens more were executed nearby. Many of the brigade’s current members are either former prisoners of Yarmouk or the relatives of men who were killed there. The victims’ portraits line the hallway. One of them appears twice, a man with a youthful, sensitive face, framed by rimless glasses and pale gray hair. This is Omar Salhoba, a 42-year-old doctor who was shot and killed on Aug. 24, more than two days after Tripoli fell. He was revered at Yarmouk for his insistence on treating injured fellow prisoners and for his brave, failed efforts to break the men free.

Omar’s older brother Nasser is now the brigade’s chief interrogator. He is lean and wiry, with a taut face and dark eyes that seem fixed in a wistful expression. When I met him, he was sitting in his office, a spare room with

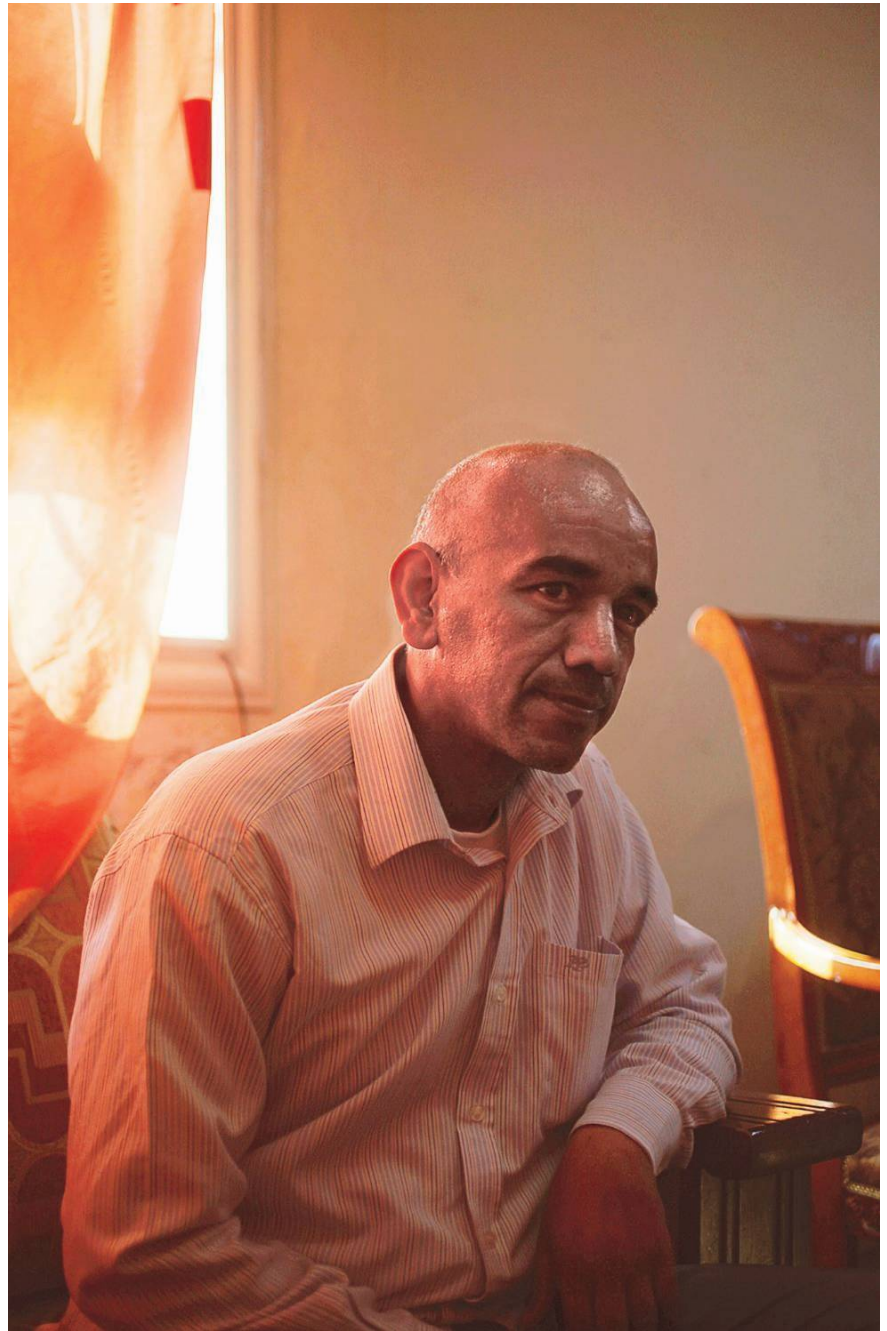
peeling paint and a battered desk with files stacked on it. He wore jeans and a blue-and-white button-down shirt, and he nervously chain-smoked. “I never left this place for the first three and a half months after we started,” he told me just after we met. “It’s only recently that I started sleeping at my apartment again.”

Nasser Salhoba’s grudge against Qaddafi goes back a long way. In 1996, he was in training to be a police investigator, his boyhood dream, when his brother Adel was gunned down in a Tripoli soccer stadium. The fans had dared to boo Saadi el-Qaddafi, the dictator’s son and sponsor of a local team, and Saadi’s guards opened fire, killing at least 20 people. When the Salhoba family was told they could not receive Adel’s body unless they signed a form stating that he was a *mushaghib*, a hooligan, Nasser went straight to the Interior Ministry headquarters and confronted officials there, an unthinkable act of defiance. “I was furious,” he told me. “I started waving my gun around and shouting.” Guards quickly subdued him, and though they allowed him to go home that night, he soon got wind of his impending arrest. On his family’s advice, Nasser fled to Malta, where he stayed for seven years, earning a meager living by smuggling cigarettes and falling into drinking and drugs. Even after he returned to Libya, his rampage at the Interior Ministry kept him blacklisted, and he could not find steady work. It was his little brother, Omar, now a successful pediatrician with two young daughters, who kept him going, lending him money and urging him to clean up his act.

Then came the revolution. While Nasser waited it out, cynical as ever, Omar — the family’s frail idealist — risked his life by providing thousands of dollars’ worth of medical supplies to the rebels. On June 7, Omar was operating on a child at his clinic in Tripoli when two intelligence agents arrived and bundled him into a car. No one knew where he was taken. More than two months later, on Aug. 24, Nasser got a call telling him Omar had been shot in the Yarmouk prison. Gunbattles were still raging in the streets, and Nasser searched for more than a day before a rebel showed him a picture of his brother’s bloodied body. Muslim ritual requires bodies to be buried quickly, and Nasser drove to a military hospital and frantically held up the picture to anyone who might help, until a doctor told him that Omar’s body had been sent to the local mosque to be buried. Nasser found the mosque and reached the graveyard just minutes after the body was sealed into a cement tomb. He reached out and touched the tomb: the mortar was still wet.

Nasser winced as he recalled that day. “I feel so bad I wasn’t able to save him,” he said more than once. “My brother was the special one in the family. I could never be compared to him.”

The three men responsible for Omar’s death were all now living one floor below us. The executioner was a 28-year-old named Marwan Gdoura. It was Marwan who insisted on speaking to the Yarmouk commander that morning, even though most of Tripoli had fallen to the rebels. It was Marwan who shot Omar and the other five victims first; the other two

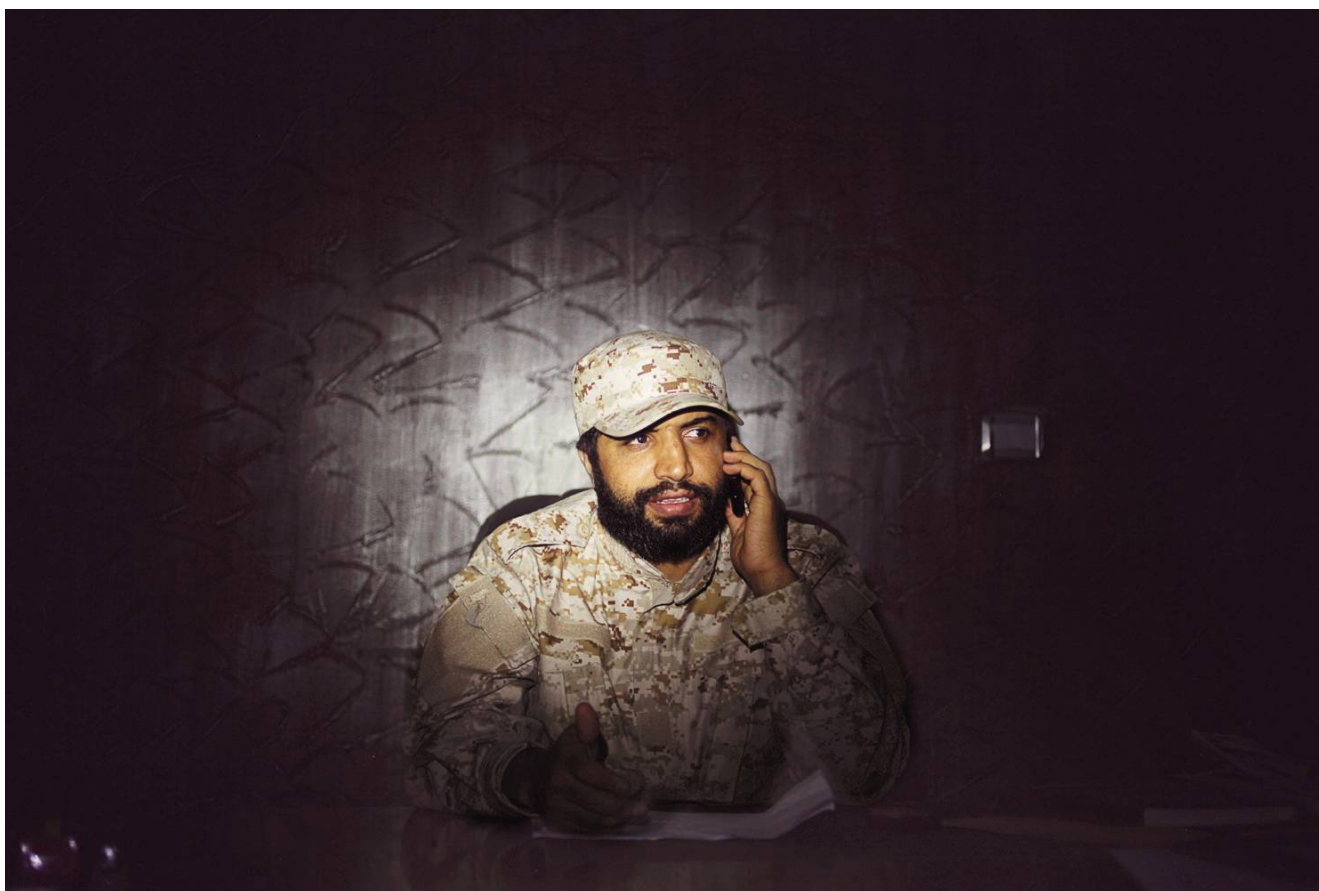


Nasser Salhoba is now the chief interrogator of the men responsible for the death of his brother Omar.

guards fired only after Marwan emptied two clips from his AK-47. I learned all this over the course of my conversations with them in the brigade jail. They were perfectly

open about their roles at Yarmouk, though they spoke in soft, penitent tones, saying they had tortured and killed only on orders.

When I asked Nasser what it felt like to interrogate the man who murdered his brother, he got up from his office chair and walked out of the room. Scarcely a minute later, he reappeared with Marwan, who sat down and leaned forward, his hands clasped in front of him. He had small, narrow-set eyes, a thin beard and monkish, close-cropped dark hair. His gaze



was direct but meek, and I could see nothing vicious in his face or manner. The rebels had already told me that Marwan was very devout, that he spent most of his time praying or reading the Koran. I asked about his background and then moved to the events of Aug. 24, when he executed Omar and the other five men. Marwan spoke softly but without hesitation. “One thing is very clear,” he said. “You’re a soldier, you must obey orders. At that moment, if you say no, you will be considered a traitor and added to the victims. And if you don’t do the execution, others will.” Nasser smoked quietly as Marwan spoke, glancing at him now and then with a look of professional detachment.

Marwan explained that the Yarmouk prison commander, a man named Hamza Hirazi, ordered him by phone to execute six prisoners, including Omar and several officers who had been arrested for helping the rebels. “We brought them from the hangar and put them in a small room,” he said when I pressed him for more details. “The killing happened with a light weapon. We closed the door and left.” Marwan did not tell me — though I heard it from the other men who were present for the executions — that in the last moments before he was murdered, Omar Salhoba turned and made a final plea: “Marwan, fear God.”

Hours after the execution, Marwan said, he fled with about 200 soldiers under the leadership of Khamis el-Qaddafi, another of the dictator’s sons. The convoy ran into rebels, and Khamis was killed in a gunbattle. The loyalists then fled to Bani Walid, where Seif al-Islam el-Qaddafi was receiving condolences for his brother’s death in a military barracks. “I won’t lie to you,” Marwan said. “I shook his hand and kissed him.” After camping out in an olive grove for a few days, a dwindling band of loyalists drove east to Sirte, Qaddafi’s final stronghold, and then south to the city of Sabha. Every

Jalal Ragai was once imprisoned by Qaddafi’s men, but now the roles are reversed.

day, men were deserting and driving home, Marwan said. But he stayed until there were only five or six loyalists left, holed up in a farmhouse outside Sabha. Only when a truck full of rebels attacked the farmhouse did he flee into the desert. He hid until dark and then made his way to a nearby town, where he caught a minibus northward. A day later, he arrived in his hometown, Surman. I asked him why he stayed with Qaddafi’s forces for so long. “I wanted to go home all along,” he said, “but I had no car.”

This was hard to believe. I was reminded of what some of Marwan’s fellow prisoners had told me: that he was the true Qaddafi loyalist among the guards. They had all fled right after the execution. Naji Najjar left with another guard before it even started. But Marwan insisted on standing firm and carrying out Hamza Hirazi’s orders to kill the six men. Some of the other prisoners now resented Marwan and blamed him for their fate. Naji once told me: “I have told Marwan, ‘I wish I could be back in the prison, the first thing I would do is kill you.’ Because if he’d listened to me, we would all have escaped on the day after Tripoli fell.”

Marwan had stopped talking. Nasser was now staring at him through a cloud of cigarette smoke.

“During all that month after Tripoli fell, did you think about the six people you executed?” Nasser said.

“I did think about them and also about the prisoners who were killed and burned in the hangar.”

“But this was different,” Nasser said. “You executed these six people yourself. Did you talk about it with the other soldiers?”

“No,” Marwan replied quietly.

There was a long pause. Nasser looked away, as if he felt he ought to stop, but then he turned back toward Marwan. “You say you followed orders,” he said. “Suppose I get an order to do the same thing to you. Should I do it?”

Marwan stared down at the coffee table in front of him.

Later, after Marwan was taken back downstairs, Nasser said he still wanted to kill him. But more than that, he wanted to understand why. “I’ve asked him repeatedly why and how,” he said. “I’ve talked to him alone and in groups. Once Marwan told me, ‘One can’t truly understand it unless one goes through the same experience.’”

I asked Nasser if he believed that Marwan felt remorse, as he says he does. Nasser shook his head slowly and grimaced. Not long ago, he said, Marwan went out of his way to avoid stepping on a Qaddafi-era flag that had been placed in a doorway (the rebels all relish stomping on it). He apparently thought no one was watching.

“I was furious,” Nasser said. “I beat him with the *falga*. It was the only time I’ve ever done that. To think that he still feels that way after all this time, that he would kill all of us here if he could.”

**ONE EVENING** AT the brigade headquarters, Nasser and Jalal allowed me to sit with them as they looked through a packet of documents sent by someone urging them to arrest a Qaddafi loyalist. These kinds of letters still arrive at the rate of two or three a week, Jalal explained. “When there’s something substantial on the person, we go and get them,” he said. They sifted through the papers, and at one point, Jalal handed me a photocopied clipping, written in French, from a Burkina Faso newspaper. “Does it say anything bad about him?” Jalal asked. I looked at the story and translated its main points. As I did so, I had the uneasy feeling that my answer could decide whether they would go out into the night and grab this man from his home and put him into indefinite detention in the basement. “Nah,” Jalal finally said. “I think this is just another person looking for revenge.”

As far as I could tell, Jalal was more disciplined and less inclined to revenge than many of the commanders in Libya. In the early days after the fall of Tripoli, when I first met him, he had joined with a group of hard-core rebel fighters from Misurata, where some of the war’s bloodiest battles took place. But the Misuratans began carrying out brutal reprisals on their newly acquired prisoners. One of the Yarmouk guards they captured, a man named Abdel Razaq al-Barouni, was actually viewed as a hero by some of the former prisoners, who told me Barouni unlocked the door of the hangar and urged them to escape just before the Yarmouk massacre began. After Jalal watched one of the Misuratans shoot Barouni in the foot during an interrogation, he decided to take his own fighters and leave, reluctantly allowing the Misuratans to cart off some of his prisoners to their city.

As for the prisoners still in their possession, Nasser and Jalal told me they were eager to hand them over as soon as there was a reliable government to take them. But they were keen to let me know that in a few cases, notorious killers had been turned over and promptly released. Jalal, who is starting to develop political ambitions, seemed especially eager to prove that he had solid reasons to hold onto his 12 prisoners. He had evidence that no one had seen, he said: torture tapes made by Qaddafi’s jailers. He had taken them from the ransacked offices of Hamza Hirazi, the commander at Yarmouk.

One night Jalal drove me to his house in Tajoura, not far from the base. It was dark inside, a cluttered den crowded with black couches and tables and littered with cups and ashtrays. We sat on the floor with a couple of his friends sharing a bowl of spaghetti, and then Jalal set a dusty laptop on the edge of one of the couches. The screen lit up, revealing a small room with a brown leather desk chair. A man in a white blindfold appeared, arms tied behind his back, and was shoved into the chair. A voice behind the camera

began interrogating him: “Who gave you the money? What were their names?” A cellphone rang in the background. The prisoner was taken off-camera, and then a horrifying electronic buzzing sound could be heard, accompanied by moans and screams of pain.

“They almost killed us in that room,” Jalal said.

A slim, dark-skinned guard entered the torture room, carrying a tray of coffee. I recognized the face: This was Jumaa, one of the men now being held in the brigade’s jail. The contrast with the man I had met — meek, apologetic, full of remorse — was alarming. In the video, Jumaa wore a look of bored arrogance. He sipped his coffee casually as the electric torture-prod buzzed and the prisoner screamed. Occasionally he joined in, kicking the prisoner in the ribs and calling him a dog. He came and went at random, apparently joining in the beatings for the sheer pleasure of it.

Jalal clicked on another video. In this one, Jumaa and two other guards were kicking and beating a blindfolded prisoner with extraordinary ferocity. “Kill me, Ibrahim, kill me!” the prisoner screamed repeatedly. “I don’t want to live anymore! Kill me!” The man to whom he was pleading was Ibrahim Lousha, whom I already knew by

reputation as the most notorious torturer at Yarmouk. “Do you love the leader?” Lousha said, and the prisoner replied frantically, “Yes, yes!”

Yet another video showed a handcuffed man, whose body looked twisted and broken, speaking in a shaky voice. Jalal then showed a photo of the same man, lying dead on the ground, facedown, his hands bound. And then another photo, this one of a blackened corpse: “This man was covered with oil, we think, and then burned,” Jalal said.

On it went, a series of appalling scenes interrupted by Jalal’s running commentary: “That guy survived and is living in Zliten,” or “That guy died in the hangar.” But Jalal and his friends, including one who had been in the prison with him, were so used to it that they spent half the time laughing at the videos. At one point, Jalal pointed to the wall behind a blindfolded prisoner’s head, where a rack of keys could be seen. “Hey, look, on the end, those are the keys to my car!” he said. “I’m serious!” He and his friends cracked up and could not stop, the helpless peals of laughter filling the room. Later, Jumaa appeared on the screen grinning raucously and doing a mock-sensual dance behind the terrified prisoner. To an outsider like me, Jumaa’s dance was sickeningly callous, but Jalal and his friends found it so funny that they replayed it again and again, clapping their hands and doubling over with laughter. It was a distinctive sound, and I came to think of it as Libyan laughter: a high-pitched, giddy surrender, which seemed to convey the absurdity and despair these men had lived with for so long. Driving home that night, a Libyan friend offered me an old expression that shed some light: *Sharr al baliyya ma yudhik*, which translates roughly as “It’s the worst of the calamity that makes you laugh.”

A few days later, I went to see Ibrahim Lousha, the torturer on the video. He was being held by one of the brigades in Misurata, about two hours from

**‘What’s the definition of revenge?’ Nasser asked. ‘To make the family of the person who did it feel what my family felt? I could have killed Marwan at any time, nobody would have known.’**

Tripoli, in a battered old government building. I was led to a big empty room and told to wait, and then suddenly there he was, looking like a mere child as he slumped in a chair. He wore gray sweat pants and a blue V-neck sweater and flip-flops. He had big eyes and a buzz cut, a morose expression on his face. He sat with his hands together in his lap, his left leg bouncing restlessly. The Misurata brigade had become infamous for the torture of Qaddafi loyalists in recent months, but Lousha said he was treated well. No one was monitoring us, aside from a bored-looking guard across the room.

He was 20 years old, he said, the son of a Tripoli policeman. When I asked him about the torture at Yarmouk, Lousha answered numbly: beatings, electricity, other methods. “We didn’t give them water every day,” he said. “We brought them piss.” Whose? “Our piss. In bottles. Also we gave them a Muammar poster and made them pray on it.” I asked if he was ordered to do these things. He said no, that he and the fellow guards came up with these ideas while drinking liquor and smoking hashish. Wasn’t that an insult to Islam, to make people pray to Qaddafi, I asked. “We didn’t think about it,” he said. He told me that on the day of the massacre, a commander named Muhammad Mansour arrived late in the afternoon and ordered the guards to kill all the prisoners in the hangar. Then he left without saying anything about why they were to be killed or where the order originated. “We looked at each other,” Lousha said. “And then I got the grenades.” He spoke in monosyllables, and I had to press him constantly for more details. “The other guards had the grenades. I told them, ‘Give the grenades to me.’” He threw two into the hangar, one after the other, and the door blew open. He could hear the screams of the dying prisoners. I asked him what he thought about after he went home to his parents and siblings. He had made no effort to escape. “I was thinking about everything that happened,” he said, his face as expressionless as ever. “The whole disaster, the killing. I was thinking between me and God.”

**THE NEXT TIME** I saw Nasser, he proudly announced to me that their brigade was not just some freelance unit but officially recognized by the government. It turns out this is true of dozens of rebel bands in Libya, though all it means is that they have sent their names to the Interior Ministry, which has offered them the chance to apply for positions in the country’s new security services. The recruits are mostly being directed to the National Guard, a newly formed body — free of the taint of Qaddafi’s goon squads — that is housed in an old police academy building in Tripoli. I drove there on an April morning and found thousands of men standing outside in the sun. All of them were *thuwar*, and they were waiting to be paid. The transitional government decided in March to pay each rebel about \$1,900 (\$3,100 for married men). Anyone could sign up, and so 80,000 men registered as *thuwar* in Tripoli alone. One man waiting in line told me, “If we’d really had this many people fighting Qaddafi, the war would have lasted a week, not eight months.” It is lucky for Libya that the oil fields did not burn and enough crude is being pumped and sold to keep the *thuwar* happy.

Inside the building, I was led into an upstairs room that resembled a hotel suite, with plush carpets and curtains and bright green walls. On the walls were old maps used by the border patrol during the Qaddafi era. After a few minutes, a middle-aged man named Ali Nayab sat down and introduced himself as the deputy head of the new National Guard. He was a fighter pilot in the old Libyan Air Force, he told me, but was jailed for seven years for his role in a 1988 coup plot (he had intended to fly his jet, kamikaze-style, into Qaddafi’s villa). “I really didn’t want to die,” Nayab said, “but I would have if that was the only way to get Qaddafi.” When I asked about integrating the *thuwar* into the National Guard, he smiled apologetically and explained that the guard had not been able to do anything yet for the men who signed up. They were still waiting for the transitional government to make decisions. The men, meanwhile, were sitting at home or working with their brigades. “The result is a big void between the transitional gov-



Video stills of, clockwise from top left, Hamza Hirazi, the commander who oversaw the torture at Yarmouk; a prisoner being interrogated; an interrogator; and a prisoner who was later killed.

ernment and the *thuwar*. They are starting to feel frustrated.” Nayab also conceded that some brigade commanders were reluctant to give up the power they had acquired. Many were nobodies before the revolution, and now they command the respect due to a warlord. The

longer the current vacuum lasts, the more entrenched these men may become, making it harder for a new national government to enforce its writ.

One of those commanders is now holding Hamza Hirazi, the officer who oversaw the massacre at the Yarmouk prison. I was eager to talk to him, because no one had yet been able to explain to me one of the central mysteries of the terrible massacres that took place in Yarmouk and other places in the last days of Qaddafi’s regime. As Tripoli was clearly falling to the rebels, the loyalists killed Omar Salhoba and the others on Aug. 23 and 24. Why? And who gave the orders?

The man guarding Hirazi runs a large brigade of men from the Nafusah Mountains, three hours southwest of Tripoli. His name is Eissa Gliza, and his brigade is based in one of Tripoli’s wealthiest neighborhoods, in a



flamboyant villa that used to belong to Qaddafi's sons. Before the revolution, Gliza was a construction contractor, he told me. Now he commands 1,100 men. When I arrived on a Tuesday morning, he was sitting at his desk in an opulent office, watching a gigantic TV screen. A warm breeze blew in from the Mediterranean, which glittered in the sun a few hundred yards away. Gliza is a powerfully built man of 50, with thick greasy hair and a stubby beard. He looked sweaty and tired. As we made small talk, the guards outside got into a screaming match, and then one of them threw a punch and the others pinned him down. Gliza ignored it. He held out his cellphone, showing me a series of sickening videos of men being beaten and tortured by Qaddafi loyalists. "It's a shame they're still alive, after what they did," he said. I asked about a meeting with Hirazi. Gliza said he would try to arrange something, but it wasn't easy. There had been two attempts on Hirazi's life already, he said. He was moving Hirazi around constantly. I asked if the government had expressed any interest in Hirazi, given his prominent role under Qaddafi. "The government?" Gliza said with contempt. "They are interested in business and oil. They are the sons of Qatar. They are being directed by Sheika Mozah" — a wife of the emir of Qatar. "They have not seen the front line."

On the television, there was an announcement that the head of Libya's

Transitional National Council, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, had threatened to use force to quell a battle going on between two towns in western Libya. Gliza laughed dismissively. "Who? Who will use force?" he said. "Three days ago they went to Zuwarah and said, 'We're the national army, we want to go to the front line.' They didn't stay one hour. One of them pissed his pants. They say 35,000 men have joined the national army. I tell you, if all 35,000 came here, they could not get past our 200 men. Until there's a true government, no one will give up power."

Not long afterward, an old man walked into the office, dressed in a djel-laba, with a long white beard and a skullcap on his head, holding a cane. He began complaining that Gliza and his men were behaving as if they owned the entire neighborhood. They were giving out brigade ID cards to Africans and letting them wander all over the place, demanding money for cleaning people's cars. The old man's voice rose to a shout, and his thin arms shook with rage. "What gives you the right to issue IDs?" he went on. "These are not even Libyans!" Gliza shouted right back at him, saying the neighbors should be grateful. It went on for 20 minutes at earsplitting volume, each accusing the other of not showing proper respect, until finally the old man seemed to deflate and hobbled out the door.

Perhaps the most potent evidence of Libya's power vacuum is at the borders. In early April, fighting broke out between two bands of *thumar* near the western town Zuwarah. The smuggling trade is lucrative, and a similar fight over the country's southern borders had left about 150 people dead the previous week. When I arrived in Zuwarah, two days after my visit with Gliza, it was a war zone. The earth shook with mortar blasts, and I recognized the rapid-fire thumping of antiaircraft guns. A man who called himself the spokesman of the local military council offered to drive me to the front line. He said 14 people from Zuwarah had been killed that day, and another 126 wounded. We drove along Zuwarah's main street, where the buildings were pocked with bullet holes. At the edge of town, the road was clustered with cars and pickup trucks mounted with guns. Two shipping containers marked the start of no-man's land. Beyond it, the road rose to a dusty hilltop and disappeared from sight. One rebel, a handsome 23-year-old named Ayoub Sufyan who carried a rifle over his shoulder, shouted into my ear in English over the din of the guns: "The government says they sent the national army. Have you seen one of them? After they kidnapped 25 of our men, we said that's enough. We told the government: 'If you want to help us, fine. If not, we go alone.' As youngsters, we don't believe this is our government anymore."

A few hundred yards away, just beyond artillery range, I found some of Libya's best-known rebel commanders standing by the roadside in a state of confusion. Some said they represented the Interior Ministry, others the Defense Ministry, still others the Libya Shield border patrol. Among them was Mokhtar al-Akhdar, the famous leader of the Zintan brigade, which until recently controlled Tripoli's airport. He seemed born to play the part of a rebel, with chiseled features and a stoic expression, a scarf wrapped elegantly around his head. I asked him what he was doing here. "We're not fighting," he said. "We are the revolutionaries of Libya. We want to solve the problem. Both sides here are accusing each other, and we are determined to solve the problem."

The violence continued, and the following day, Jalal drove out to a town near Zuwarah to attend a meeting of a group called the Wise Men's Council. It was held in an old hotel on the seaside, in a conference room with a vast rectangular table set with miniature Libyan flags and bottles of water for each speaker. A series of older men wearing traditional white robes spoke about the lack of any government authority and the inability of any rebel leaders to stop the violence in Zuwarah. They reached no consensus, and after an hour, they began to get up and leave. "This council is useless," Jalal said as we drove back to Tripoli in his Land Cruiser. "The elders have no control over the street. Not like they used to. We



need to speak to youth in language they understand. Some people are here for personal gain. I'm just here because my friends were burned and killed."

**ONE MORNING** in early April, Nasser told me, his frustration with Marwan reached a boiling point. He had spent months talking to him, asking him why he killed his brother, demanding more details about Omar's final days, trying to understand how, if the war was over, the execution of his brother had come to pass. "I see Marwan as such a cold person," Nasser told me later. "He was the head of the snake. Of all the guards, he insisted on following orders. The others didn't want to kill. He was so emotionless and still is. I wanted to see: Is he the same person when he sees his family?"

So Nasser called Marwan's father and invited him to come see his son. For the last six months, the family stayed away out of fear that the *thuwar* would take revenge on them all. On the following Friday, eight of them showed up at the base in Tajoura. Nasser greeted them at the door and led them downstairs. "It was a very emotional moment," Nasser said. "You can imagine how I felt when I saw my brother's killer embracing his brother." The two brothers hugged each other for a long time, sobbing, until finally Nasser pushed them apart, because he could not bear it anymore. Later, he took one of the cousins aside and asked him if he knew why Marwan was being held. The man said no. "I told him: 'Your cousin killed six very qualified people whom Libya will need, two doctors and four officers. One of them was my brother.'" The cousin listened, and then he hugged Nasser before the family left.

For Nasser, the family meeting was a revelation. "He was very emotional," he said of Marwan. "His sister loves him; his brother loves him. You see him with them, and it's such a contrast with this cold killer." He seemed comforted by this, less burdened, though he could not say exactly why. He told me that he now felt that he understood Marwan a little better, even if his crime remained a mystery.

On the following Friday, Marwan's father returned, this time with two relatives. Nasser helped them carry crates of food — yogurt, fruit, homebaked biscuits — down to Marwan's cell. When Nasser came back upstairs, Marwan's father was standing by the door. He went straight up to Nasser and looked him sorrowfully in the eye. "He embraced me and kissed me on the forehead," Nasser said. "So he must know."

Two days later, as we talked in his office, Nasser asked me: "What's the definition of revenge? To make the family of the person who did it feel what my family felt? I could have killed Marwan at any time, nobody would have known. But I don't want to betray the blood of our martyrs. We want a country of laws." He picked up the files on his desk and put them into his cabi-

net. He seemed preoccupied, as though he were trying to convince himself of something. He rubbed out his cigarette in an ashtray and turned to me again. "Besides," he said, "where is the honor in taking revenge on a prisoner?"

I couldn't be sure exactly what was motivating Nasser in his long struggle with Marwan. Certainly part of it was anger, which has not subsided and possibly never will. But the long months of interrogations had given him an unexpected solace, too, a chance to get to know his brother better and to sift through his own failings. "I keep asking the prisoners small details, like how many times he was beaten, what he talked about, how he seemed," Nasser told me. "How he used to get into fights, demanding proper medical attention for the other inmates. Whenever they were tortured, they would be brought to his cell so he could treat them." Nasser had been moved by the stories he heard of his brother's bravery. Once, Omar paid a guard to take a prescription notice to a pharmacy. He had written a plea for help on the note, in English. But the woman at the pharmacy simply translated the note for the guard, who went straight back to Yarmouk and beat Omar severely. Omar kept on trying, sending notes to colleagues who either could not, or would not, help.

One thing in particular was haunting Nasser. According to the prisoners, Omar had talked a lot about Nasser in jail, saying he was sure his brother would rescue him if he could. "I feel such remorse I wasn't able to help him," Nasser said again and again. He told a long story about a well-connected soldier he'd known, who might have been able to do something if he had pushed him hard enough. He said he hadn't seen Omar during the last days before the arrest, and now he chastised himself, imagining alternative endings. "I would've done anything, even gone to the front for Qaddafi's people, if that would have saved my brother," Nasser told me. "At the end of the day, it's what's inside you that counts." But he didn't sound convinced.

Nasser didn't stop with the recent past. He reviewed his whole life for me, trying to understand where he went wrong. He was always the family's bad angel, he said, a prodigal son. Omar was the conscientious one. He returned to Libya after a decade abroad in 2009, telling friends that he was ashamed of Libya's backwardness and eager to help out. He brought back books about Qaddafi written by dissidents and a conviction that the country needed to change. At the time, Nasser told me, he thought his brother was being naive. Now he understood he was right. It was as if Omar had become a screen onto which Nasser's own failures were projected: the lies, the cowardly survival mechanisms that come with living under a dictatorship. I had the sense that Nasser was struggling to learn from his brother, and in an odd way, trying in turn to teach something to Marwan. After Marwan's family left, Nasser went downstairs and spoke to him.

"I said, 'Look what I did, and look what you did,'" Nasser told me. "You killed my brother, and I arranged for you to see your family."

Omar's life cast a similar shadow onto other people. One was his closest colleague, a doctor named Mahfoud Ghaddour. Omar's fellow prisoners from Yarmouk told me he was always trying to contact Ghaddour, whom he saw as a possible savior. In fact, Ghaddour was aware that Omar was being held in Yarmouk — one of the frantic messages Omar sent from the prison got through to him — and yet he did nothing. Ghaddour told me so himself, during a long talk in his office at the hospital. "I started looking in that place," he said, "using contacts with people in the government. But it was somewhat difficult. They started changing their mobile phones. I had difficulty getting help."

Ghaddour said this with *(Continued on Page 54)*

**ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS, PAGE 11**

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**ANSWERS TO PUZZLES OF 5.6.12**

**A-V CLUB**

E	S	T	A	T	E	F	A	L	C	O	N	A	T	P	E	A	C	E	
M	O	O	R	E	D	O	N	E	D	G	E	N	E	U	T	E	R	S	
A	U	X	I	L	I	A	R	Y	V	E	R	B	D	A	T	A	S	E	T
I	S	I	S	E	R	G	O	F	E	R	R	E	T	L	O	P	E		
L	E	N	T	O	M	A	N	E		E	A	R	P	P	E	R			
	A	C	T	I	V	E	V	O	L	C	A	N	O	E	S				
P	B	A	T	R	E	E	I	D	I	O	M	E	L	A	N	D			
C	A	L	L	O	U	S	F	L	O	P	S	O	B	L	I	Q	U	E	
P	H	O	E	B	E	J	E	E	R	S	I	N	R	E	T	U	R	N	
	E	N	E	T	O	N	Y	S	O	N	E	A	A	M	T				
A	T	V	A	R	I	A	N	C	E	A	R	T	I	C	L	E	V	I	
V	E	E	C	R	E	E	S	N	A	R	L	O	R	I					
A	P	R	I	C	O	T	S	L	O	T	T	O	S	C	O	T	C	H	
S	E	A	S	O	N	S	M	I	L	L	E	S	A	U	S	A	G	E	
T	E	S	L	A	A	I	M	E	E	A	L	I	S	E	I	N			
	A	L	E	S	S	A	N	D	R	O	V	O	L	T	A				
W	A	H	S	R	A	S	S	N	A	G	S	T	R	A	D				
A	D	E	E	A	L	T	T	A	B	E	T	A	S	M	E	D	O		
F	O	R	M	O	S	A	A	F	R	I	C	A	N	V	I	O	L	E	
T	R	O	T	T	E	R	C	A	E	S	A	R	E	N	S	I	L	E	
S	E	N	S	O	R	Y	O	R	D	E	R	S	N	E	T	T	E	D	

**OLIVER SACKS, UNCLE TUNGSTEN —**

My mother told me that diamond was a special form of carbon, like the coal we used in every room in winter. I was puzzled. . . . How could black, flaky, opaque coal be the same as the hard, transparent gemstone in her ring?

- A. Operator
- B. Liquefy
- C. Impacted
- D. Virtuoso
- E. Enzymes
- F. Rheology
- G. "Seinfeld"
- H. Alhambra
- I. Chain saw
- J. Kilowatt
- K. Spoof
- L. Upbraid
- M. Noah
- N. Charlatan
- O. Lester
- P. Edam
- Q. Twosome
- R. Umbral
- S. Necklace
- T. Gnawed
- U. Shrewd
- V. "Think"
- W. Etherized
- X. No comment

**LIBYA**

(Continued from Page 46)

a wincing half smile. I found it impossible to believe. I knew other people who got relatives out of Yarmouk. As a prominent doctor, Ghaddour had plenty of contacts he could have called on. And even if he failed, he could at least have told Omar's family, or his in-laws, who were desperate to know where he was being held. Ghaddour must have sensed my skepticism. He continued with a long, rambling narrative in which he tried to blame other people for not rescuing Omar from the prison and talked at length about how dangerous it was in Tripoli at that time. But there was something pained and apologetic about his manner, as if he were groping toward a confession. He cared about Omar but did not want to make trouble for his own family. He had done what so many others had done in Qaddafi's Libya — kept his head down and let others take the risks. These are the survivors in Libya, the ones who adapted to a place where fear was the only law. Most of the brave ones are dead.

**ONE AFTERNOON**, Nasser drove me to see his brother's widow in Souq al-Jumaa, a middle-class neighborhood of Tripoli. Omar's daughter opened the door, a pretty 10-year-old with lots of orange and pink bracelets on her wrists. She greeted me in English and led us to a Western-style living room with a white shag carpet. Her name was Abrar, and her 4-year-old sister, Ebaa, skipped across the room with us to the couch, where both girls sat beside me. After a minute their mother, Lubna, came downstairs and introduced herself. She launched right into a narrative about the family, their years living in Newcastle and Liverpool, their return to Libya and then her husband's disappearance. "We were so scared all during that time," she said. "Even now when I hear an airplane I am frightened." As Lubna spoke, her younger daughter toyed with my beard and stole my pen and notebook. Finally she cuddled up next to me, clutching my arm and pressing her head into my shoulder. "She has been like this ever since her father died," Lubna said. Abrar, the older girl, ran off to find a jour-

nal she kept about her father's death. It was a remarkable document, an account written in English on lined paper in a child's straightforward prose. "Then we got a phone call saying my daddy died, and my mama banged her head against the wall and screamed, and I cried," she wrote of the day they found out. This was followed by her descriptions of a series of dreams she had about her father. In all of them, he reassured her that he was in Paradise, and in two dreams he offered to introduce her to the Prophet Muhammad.

At one point Lubna mentioned that she had urged her husband to take them all to Tunisia, where it was safer. Abrar piped up, speaking in the same direct, poised tone as her writing: "We said, 'Take us out of Libya.' He said: 'Never, the hospital needs me. The kids need me. I will never leave. I will die in it.'"

Throughout our visit, Nasser quietly sat on the couch, now and then offering toys to the younger girl. On our way out, the girls offered to show us their father's home office. It was a small room, sparsely decorated, with his British medical

degrees framed on the wall, and two big drawers full of toys for the girls. "This is what kills me," Nasser said. "All men love their children, but with him, it was even more."

We walked through the gathering dusk to the car, and I asked Nasser about his future. What would he do once the brigade no longer existed? He wants to become a police investigator, he said, but for a real department. Abrar got into the back seat, clutching a stuffed bear. Her uncle was taking her to the stationery store to buy school supplies. We drove toward Martyrs' Square, the new name given to the plaza where Qaddafi once urged Libyans to fight to the last man. Now there wasn't a single image of his face in the streets, and rebels had scrawled "Change the color" on any wall that was painted his signature green. There was a chill in the air, and I heard a single shot ring out over the Mediterranean as we wove through the traffic.

"I didn't always get along with my brother," Nasser said. "But only because he wanted me to be better." ♦

# ALL MIXED UP

By **MATT GINSBERG**

In each pair of clues, one is for the answer word, the other for an anagram of the answer. Which is which is for you to discover.

**ACROSS**

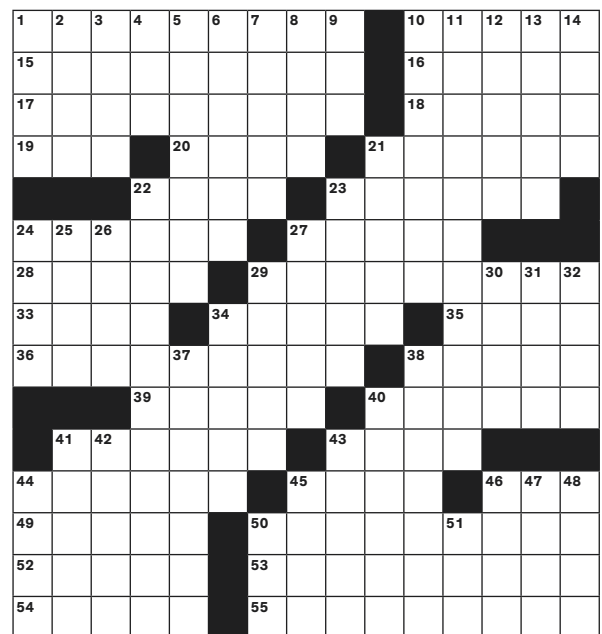
- 1 Unlike / Unlike the "h" in honor
- 10 Plantain lily / Curses
- 15 Dressed smartly (2 wds.) / Without schooling
- 16 Half of "The Odd Couple" / Shamu and kin
- 17 Without a country / Crass
- 18 Climb / Shoestrings
- 19 "Just kidding!" / Lot
- 20 Back muscles, informally / In the cellar
- 21 Mushroom stems / Gets back at, say
- 22 Pickup shtick? / Tax \_\_\_
- 23 Token takers / Keys
- 24 Get steamed (2 wds.) / Plant again
- 27 Motown or Columbia / Whole essence
- 28 Mongol invader / Rose oil
- 29 Eminence / Drill instructors, typically
- 33 Darling dog / Indian bread
- 34 Aloe vera, often / Toil

- 35 Milk source / London gallery
- 36 Undeniable facts / Ancient Hebrew
- 38 Legal filing / British thread
- 39 No-see-ums / Zingy tastes
- 40 Riskless (hyph.) / Slack off
- 41 Performs together / Waylay
- 43 Litter's littlest / Sour
- 44 Frenzies / Souls
- 45 Executes / 10 cc, perhaps
- 46 Court call / Rolodex no.
- 49 Shackles / Pitcher's bagful
- 50 Ohio college (2 wds.) / Camping need (2 wds.)
- 52 Brains / German steel city
- 53 Passes / Coups
- 54 Keeps, in a way / Small pavers
- 55 Imbroglio (hyph.) / One with a hand on the tiller

**DOWN**

- 1 Pixie \_\_\_ / Macho sort

- 2 Absorbed by / Little Red Hen response (2 wds.)
- 3 Cartoonist Thomas / Baseball's Musial
- 4 Place / Ram, in Ramsgate
- 5 Art studio / Amazon, for one (hyph.)
- 6 Deschain of "The Dark Tower" / Noted traitor
- 7 Gourmand / Glacial ridge
- 8 Hardy girl / Gels
- 9 Of the: Fr. / Mag. workers
- 10 Most sacred / Enemy
- 11 Part of a waveform / Cecil Rhodes, e.g.
- 12 Gap / Ending with sea or land
- 13 Chronicles / Merest
- 14 War god / All \_\_\_
- 21 Put on / Slalom targets
- 22 Ipswich native (2 wds.) / Rest on (2 wds.)
- 23 Chapter's partner / Court opening
- 24 Eastern queen / Pour
- 25 Greek H's / Some socials
- 26 \* / "Dang it!"
- 27 Deranged motel owner / Thrashes
- 29 Knife cuts / Shopping aids
- 30 Beaks / Uncle \_\_\_
- 31 Weight allowance / Zip
- 32 On its way / British gun
- 34 Puts (away) / Blind parts
- 37 Sheathes / Rap sessions?



- 38 Aussie beer / Wilderness areas
- 40 British brilliance / Consequence
- 41 Addition sign / Scintilla
- 42 Nary a soul (2 wds.) / Down \_\_\_ knee (2 wds.)
- 43 Kind of sax / Printer need
- 44 Girl / Computer game family, with "the"
- 45 Hindu deity / Noted Barry
- 46 Boating locale / Moolah
- 47 Search / Squeezes (out)
- 48 Check / Hanoi holidays
- 50 Mr. Turkey / Witticism
- 51 Army \_\_\_ / Catch some rays