# Jungle Breath

## by Ben Lucien Burman

THIS HAS HAPPENED:

To the queer little South American town of Porto Verde, in west central Brazil, a town fringed by dark, forbidding jungle, comes an elderly American, Lincoln Nunnally, a famous chemist.

An air of mystery seems to hang over the place. In the barber shop, the barber, a strange, dark man with an Oriental cast to his eyes, speaks to Nunnally, who then recognizes him as Vilaka West, known to him as Vilak, a fellow American. Vilak says he has sent for him. The barber business, he explains, serves to conceal his real activities. He and his cousin, Elise Marberry, need assistance in getting at the root of a mystery that has already cost several lives and threatened Elise's.

Vilak is interrupted with news of another death and he and Nunnally hasten to the spot where the victim, Tony Barbetta, one of Elise's foremen, lies on the ground, almost at the feet of Limey Potts, another foreman, who admits having hit him with a club.

Barbetta seems to be in a strange sort of paralysis. He dies after accusing Potts, and Vilak astonishes Nunnally by declaring his belief that Potts was not the murderer.

NOW BEGIN THE STORY

CHAPTER V.

The chemist gazed at Vilak in bewildement. "But . . . er . . . Tony said Potts did it and Potts admits it himself. How can there be any doubt . . . er . . . doubt when facts are as clear as that?"

"Don't forget there are two kinds of facts," Vilak responded. "The tangible ones that you can see and hear and the intangible ones which you can neither see nor hear but only feel. This is a case where the latter are obviously the more important."

"A good scientist like yourself ought to know better than to let a suit and a trifle of makeup fool you."

" . . Er . . who . . er . . who do you believe is the murderer then?"

"Again, mon cher, I answer my ideas are deplorably scanty."

"You think it was . . er . . Prentiss, perhaps? Er Prentiss? Haven't you any idea of what's happened to make him look and act so Satanic . . . yes, Satanic? His . . er . . eyes appear as though he were working some evil spell upon everything at which he looks." Suddenly he jerked out the cigaret he had placed in his mouth a moment before, made a wry face, and spat bitterly.

"What's the matter?" drawled Vilak. "Too powerful for your Anglo-Saxon blood?" He chuckled. "You don't wish a bit of betel nut to top it off? No? Well, that's the advantage of having several races speeding through your veins. Increases your pleasures enormously. To me there's nothing like a little betel with a good smoke."

He pressed another section of the golden dragon. It opened, disclosing a number of tiny pellets. One of these he extracted and thrust into his mouth "I agree with you that Prentiss hasn't exactly the drawing-room manner. Certainly he appears to be a man who has lost his soul. Personally I feel rather positive that he's connected in some way with these terrible tragedies, but I've little to base it on.

"I do know that anyone who tries to be concerned in his affairs, even with the kindliest intent, suffers. As I think I mentioned to you, some time ago, Elise got interested in him largely because of that old feud which existed between their fathers. By some legal technicality it seemed that the land which old Prentiss developed for his fazenda turned out actually to belong to the Marberrys and Elise's father always insisted that Prentiss was nothing but a poacher and tried every means to get him out.

"Elise didn't want the land, and as I told you, rightly thinks family feuds are preposterous in this supposedly enlightened century, so she went ou to his house to extend the olive branch, and do anything for him that she could. He saw her coming, banged all the shutters and doors so that the house was sealed, and though she knocked repeatedly for twenty minutes, made no sign of being inside. The next day she was walking along the road and he almost rode her rown with his horse. She was certain that this wasn't an accident but a deliberate attempt."

He grunted. "Hum . . . I just happened to think. She to'd me the other day she was going out there yesterday to try again. This new attack may be one of the results." He chewed meditatively a moment, then went on: "No one talks to him now except the keepers of the little shops where he buys his food on his rare visits to town. He honored my establishment once. Lately his trips have been becoming fewer and fewer until now they've practically ceased. If we knew what caused him to resign by request from the museum a couple of years ago, we might have a clew. And then again, we mightn't."

"The . . er . . blacks and the Indians seem fearfully afraid of him. Yes . . . fearfully."

"Wouldn't you if you were a poor superstitious native who believes that when the sun goes down over a mountain that the mountain has eaten it? Some of them have a veneer of Christianity, but it's mighty thin. Just remember that, counting poor Tony today, four men have died since Prentiss has been here. The other three also in ways almost as mysterious as this. You couldn't hire one of the Porto Verdeans to go near his place at night for all the coffee on my cousin's fazenda.

"A lot of them say he's performing terrible experiments, vivisection, and that sort of thing on the jungle animals, and some of them go further and say he's been using human beings. They think he's some sort of devil doctor and is trying to mix souls and all that sort of native hocus-pocus. They'll swear to you on their Bibles—if they have any—that they've heard piercing screams coming from his fazenda at night, and those with more vivid imaginations will add that they've seen four-headed devils and fire-breathing bats big as men flying over the roof. Rank nonsense, of course, for the most part, but I don't blame them much.

"It's difficult to see howling demons when you're standing on the corner of 42nd and Broadway in New York City, but it takes very little effort when you're swallowed up in the jungle of Porto Verde."

He gazed at the old man, who was again fumbling in his pocket. "You're a nuisance. Haven't changed a bit in ten years. . Always having torn pockets and letting your matches get down into some obscure lining of your coat." He drew out two boxes of matches. "Put these in your pocket, and don't lose them. Matches are valuable down here. After which lecture I'll tell you that the affair of this afternoon has made me decide to go out to Prentiss' place tonight to do a little investigation. Would you like to come along? It may be just a bit dangerous. Seriously, quite dangerous."

The chemist's sprightliness had returned. "Because your a few years . . er . . younger you're not so . . er . . . superior," he replied amiably. "Aftr all, I've faced enough . er . . . perils in a laboratory not to fear a man merely because he has a . . er . . singular forehead. Moreover . . er . . insurance statistics give me ten more years to live, and I detest statistics. I should greatly enjoy proving them wrong. At what hour do we . . er . . start?"

Vilak puffed placidly at his cigaret. "After I've gone again on a fruitless mission to try to induce my cousin to leave and, more important, introduce you to her. When it's dark I'll change my clothes a bit and meet you. I always go out there as a Mr. Davis, her attorney, a person I've invented for convenience and who has a secluded house up the road on some of Elise's property, where I can make the change without creating suspicion. Wouldn't be just the thing for barber Riggs to be seen at the house of the grand senhorita. Nor to be too intimate with you, for that matter, so be a bit careful when you meet me at the hotel in public. Though it probably wouldn't make a particle of difference to most of the natives, because they think all Americans are mad, anyway.

"Elise wanted to have you stay at the fazenda, but I won't permit it, for a day or two at least. It's probably cruel to you, but I'll see more of you closer at hand. Charming girl Elise. But too determined to be comfortable. I think you'll like her. I should say we ought to get there about eight, stay an hour or two and start from there for our visit to Prentiss. I'll call for you about seven-thirty. We'll ride out of course."

A few moments later they had descended to the valley and separated, Vilak to return to his barber shop, Nunnally to examine with academic interest the sandy deposits at the edge of a tiny lake which sparkled a short distance from the river. His inspection completed, the chemist sauntered to the town, marveled again at the view of the hill slopes carpeted with the green of the jungle and the white mountains rising far off in the distance, entered his room, and busied himself with some documents and books he took from his bag.

After a few hours spent thus, he began unpacking his luggage, and happening to place a clean shirt upon a table, found that it instantly took up a gray smudge of dust from the table top. Investigating, he discovered that every piece of furniture in the room was similarly coated. Horrified, he took out his pocket handkerchief and gingerly set about cleaning the room. So absorbed was he in the task that he failed to hear a light knock outside and only looked up when the door opened and a tall, striking appearing stranger clad in a riding suit stood at his side. He started. "I . . . er . . . beg pardon," he stammered. "You were looking for me?"

"Yes," the stranger replied bluntly. "Stop being cleanly and Nordic and put on your hat. A good scientist like yourself ought to know better than to let a suit and a trifle of makeup fool you. It's time for us to get started."

The chemist stared then smiled sheepishly. "You take too many . . er . . . liberties with me. Too many liberties. What shall I . . . er . . . wear?"

"Come just as you are. We can pick up storm boots, heavy gloves, and a pistol for you at my cousin's What sort of a raincoat have you?"

"One of those . . . er . . . oilcloth ones, like the heavy army ones."

"That'll be just the thing. Bring it with you."

The chemist gave a parting fillip of his handkerchief to the dust on the washstand, then looked out of the window. "Why must I wear a raincoat? The stars are shining very . . . er . . . brightly. It's too hot to wear a raincoat."

"Observe, my dear Nanny, that I also carry a raincoat. We won't need them until after we leave my cousin's. Then they will be vitally necessary. Perhaps perilously necessary. No. I'm not going to tell you why. It's no use asking. Come on now. Don't pother around any more. Or I'll make you smoke another of my cigarettes."

(To be continued)

### FALLEN LIVES

Recently a man, prospecting in the mining regions of Arizona, found a remarkable natural bridge. It spans a deep canon, forty-five feet in width. The bridge is made by a great petrified tree that lies across the gorge. Scientific men say that, many ages since, this tree was prostrated by some terrific storm, and fell across the canon. By the effects of the water and time, it has passed through many stages of mineralization, and is now a wonderful tree of solid agate. And there it lies, making an agate bridge over which men may pass from side to side. This tree seemed to be a failure when, that day in its prime, it was broken off by the storm and hurled to the ground. But, instead of being a failure, to what nobler use could it have been put than thus to become a bridge of agate, to stand for ages, and on which countless human feet may walk across the chasm? This fallen tree is an illustration of countless human lives which have fallen, and seemed to fall, but which in time have proved to be bridges over which others can walk to honor, success and triumph. —Rev. J. R. Miller, D.D.

"Woe to you when all men speak well of you"—Stanley Baldwin.

Minard's Wards Off Grippe.



## Which Wins—Crook or Bank?

### Crib-cracking Versus Safe-making is a Struggle Not Yet at an End

In New York a sixty-storey skyscraper is rising, and at its heart is a mammoth vault, an armored fortress of steel and concrete. Behind the doors of that vault may lie $1,000,000,000. Every human and mechanical device will be employed to guard that treasure. Will it be safe?

"I put that question to a distinguished vault engineer, who has built some of the strongest vaults in existence. His answer amazed me.

"'Give me a million dollars with which to build a vault,' he said, 'and there would still be half a dozen men in the world who could open and rob it!'

"Nor are these men Houdinis, or Jimmy Valentines who open tumbler locks with sandpapered fingers. They are experts in the use of two of the most terrible safe-breaking weapons known—the 'fluxing rod' and the 'oxygen lance.' Against these latest potential tools of safe breakers, no absolute defense is known. The financial world is waiting to see if any super-criminal will dare to use them. Nothing is 'impossible' in the never-ending battle between safe makers and safe breakers," says Henry Morton Robinson in Popular Science.

"Burglar-proof" vaults have perforce undergone great and devolutionary changes in the past fifty years. From the days of the eighties, when a bank's idea of the last word in security was a four foot thick door studded with cannon balls and bolted home into their vault's framework . . . which door was incidentally pried out completely by theives to the tune of nearly three million dollars . . . to the up-to-date strong-box such as described at the commencement of this article is a far cry. The progress of the opposed sciences of safe-making and safe-breaking has been an interesting one through the phase of the "stepped" door, the introduction of nitro-glycerine and the "soup man," the cone door machined so closely that that artist could not get his "soup" into the cracks, and finally . . . last stage but one . . . the oxy-acetylene torch, which will bite through a six-ich steel plate in a few minutes.

"To-day science meets the threat of the 'cutter-burner' with composite walls that embody materials resistant to heat, drills, and explosives. Yet even such walls cannot meet the new threat of the 'fluxing rod' and the 'oxygen lance.' The first is simply a stick of soft steel which the expert operator holds against the metal to be burned. Then he applies the oxy-acetylene flame to the tip of the fluxing rod, which oxidizes so rapidly that the temperature can be raised to unbelievable heights.

"The 'oxygen lance' has been known for some time. It consists of a long small iron pipe through which oxygen gas is forced. The business end of the pipe is heated red-hot by a cutter-burner. The hot iron ignites in th oxygen stream and flares so fiercely that it will burn its way straight through anything. Blast furnace men use the oxygen lance to cut away 'frozen' steel from the tapholes of the furnace.

"So expert must be the men behind these instruments that only half a dozen men in the world are capable of breaking into a vault with them. Fortunately these men are not criminals. They are experts whose names ar well known. Moreover there are practical objections to the use of such tools illegally. The oxygen pipe is dangerous to use without cumbersome shields. And it generates billows of black smoke when it meets cast iron, leading to probable detection.

"Still, in face of possibilities from their friends the enemy, engineers have been spurred to design super-vaults that will stave off safe breakers, if not indefinitely, at least as long as possible. How successful they have been was demonstrated in New York not long ago, when wreckers were actually called upon to demolish a newly built vault because a bank moved. The outer shell of the vault was a four foot thick wall of concrete or fireproofing and protection against earthquake shock.

Then came a six-inch thickness of material especially developed as a protection against the cutter-burner. It consisted of large iron slabs, the outside face tool-proof and its inside filled with a core of magnesium oxide —a material manufactured at Niagara Falls under a fusing temperature of 8000 degrees Fahrenheit, and proof against tremendous heat. Inside this came a seven-inch buttressing wall containing steel H-columns, heavy metallic ribs, crosswise round bars, a filling of rich concrete, and a binding of steel plates half an inch thick bolted to the H-beams. The doors were smooth-face, conical plug doors impervious to explosives.

"A competent wrecking company using the most modern tools found itself all but baffled by this vault. The best progress that the wreckers could make through the walls, even with the advantage of being able to attack them from the inside, was half an inch a day. It took thirteen and one-half weeks to demolish the entire vault. Although a safe breaker might have entered it in less time, it is doubtful if he would have cared to tackle the job.

"With the desig of such formidable vaults the advantage lies temporarily with the protectors of money rather than with the thieves. Still, there is always the threat of some unexpected development in the safe cracker's art, or of some super-criminal with th skill to use the means now known. It is against this possibility that the vault builders are constantly matching their wits in their thrilling war against the unseen.

### GRACES

Virtue and genuine graces in themselves speak what no words can utter.—Shakespeare.

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2963

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### LOST OPPORTUNITIES

Who can tell another's shortcomings, lost opportunities, weigh the passions which overpower, the defects which incapacitate reason?—What extent of right and truth his neighbor's mind is organized to perceive and do?

"Do you read all the health points?" "Not all," answered Mr. Chuggins. 'In my efforts to keep out of the hospital I limit myself to a study of the traffic regulations."

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