Jungle Breath

by Ben Lucien Burman

THIS HAS HAPPENED

Posing at times as a barber, at others as Attorney Davis, Vilak has come to Porto Verde, Brazil, to help his cousin Elise Marberry, solve a strange mystery. Elise has inherited a coffee plantation and other property adjoining Porto Verde. Several strange deaths have occurred and Vilak believes that Gaylord Prentiss is responsible for these. Elise has been threatened and warned to leave the vicinity. Vilak sends for Lincoln Nunnally, a famous chemist. Elise's two-year-old orphaned nephew is kidnapped and Prentiss is suspected. Vilak tracks the kidnappers, and finally he and his companions come upon the child, unharmed, and being cared for by a gang of railroad workers in charge of Carlos D'Albentara. Vilak tells Elise she and the child must leave on the next boat. Vilak gains possession of a queer ring from off the finger of D'Albentara's half-breed foreman.

NOW BEGIN THE STORY

CHAPTER XVII.

"Incidentally I might add," Vilak said, "that the way things look now the usefulness of my esteemed relative, Mr. Riggs, the barber, is about over. Are you coming down to the shop with me?"

The old man nodded. Vilak sent the servants back with the cart. They turned into the highway. As they did so they saw an Indian staggering through the brush, obviously in the last stages of intoxication. He was

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constantly lifting to his mouth a tin cup which he refilled from a sort of crude canteen at his belt. As he walked he continually muttered an incomprehensible jargon. Nunnally recognized him as one of the Indians with the filed teeth who worked in the railroad gang. He zigzagged up the road in the direction of Vilak's house and Elise's fazenda. Vilak looked after him a moment. "That fellow is just fit for getting into trouble," he said. He continued thoughtfully down the road.

They rode to the shop, then returned to Vilak's modest house hidden behind the grove of mango trees. Vilak took some musty, dog-eared notebooks out of a suitcase which he had transformed into a sort of traveling desk and began to study them, smoking with quick feverish puffs, his eyes again slanted, his whole face again touched with a Chinese pallor. The old man busied himself with a great dull volume which he found lying on a table, a book describing the chemical resources of Brazil.

Two hours later they were on their way to the fazenda. They had passed the barrier of mango trees, and were just riding into the open highway when a cry, suddenly cut short, rose from the thick jungle back of Vilak's house. Short though it was, the cry was undoubtedly that of a human being. Vilak wheeled his horse, dashed back the way he had just come, and dismounting at his door, began running along a path which led from the old stone well to the narrow courtyard at the rear.

The old man followed, panting. For a quarter of a mile they bolted along, now in forest so black that though the moon was shining clearly they could see nothing of the sky, now past a pool of dark, evil-smelling water, along whose borders sat huge bullfrogs chanting their hoarse and mournful refrain. They saw a light between the tall trees ahead. Vilak halted. "Step softly as you can," he said to his companion.

They crept forward stealthily over the soil made into a veritable cushion by the leaf mould of centuries. As they went on they saw that the light was the light of a fire, around which two shadows were moving. They reached the edge of a small clearing and looked from behind the shelter of a tree.

Now they could see plainly the two shadows; they were Pasquale Branza of the patched cheek and the one-armed Detto Cicerone. On the ground lay a third man, the drunken Indian they had noticed going up the road. He was trussed with ropes like a wild beast just captured and made ready for shipment to some far off zoo. His arms were tied flatly behind his back, his mouth was gagged with a piece of old shirt, undoubtedly to stifle cries such as they heard a few moments before.

His skinny bare legs were also lashed together and placed over a log so that the bony feet projected high in the air. It was at this extremity of their victim's body that the two Italians were standing, Pasquale keeping up a running conversation in some uncouth Portuguese or Indian dialect, Detto holding in his one good arm a stick with a glowing ember at the end which he had drawn from the fire blazing a few feet away.

He gazed at the prostrate Indian a moment, grunted, then pressed the red ember against the victim's sole. Though the Indian was bound as in a vise, the horror-struck old man could see his lean body quiver with agony; the shirt over his mouth twitched convulsively as he vainly tried to express that agony in a cry. After leaving the ember against the other foot for perhaps five seconds, Detto withdrew it and put it back into the flame to be reheated. Then he removed the gag, and with his hand at the other's mouth ready to check any call for help, began growling a rapid series of questions at him.

The Indian's answers were evidently not satisfactory, for after several menaces with the hot coals again, he at length whistled a curse through the ugly orifice in his teeth, replaced the gag and lifted the glowing stick to the Indian's foot once more, this time directing it to the delicate and far more sensitive ankle.

The sight was too much for the old man's tense nerves. He gave an exclamation of horror. Vilak, forced to act before he was ready, leaped from the darkness. The astonished Detto dropped the burning stick and, turning, saw the tall, lean figure of the American. He whipped out a stiletto tucked in his belt and, as the other bounded on top of him, struck wildly.

Vilak had caught the shoulder which lacked an arm and thus gave him no hold. The siletto struck him full in the wrist, weakening his grip for an instant. But it was for this instant that the wiry Italian had hoped. Wriggling away from his attacker, he struck at him again, but ineffectively this time, and darted for the shelter of the woods.

Vilak took quick aim and fired. But the darkness beyond the range of the fire made accurate shooting impossible. The bullet crashed to the lower hanging branches of the trees, and whether it had found its mark or no he could not tell. Pasquale, who had seen the chemist bursting excitedly through the bushes, evidently believing they were attacked in force, had fled ignominiously, without lifting a hand to aid his comrade.

"God, what cruelty!" Vilak murmured as he whipped out a knife and with his bleeding hand cut the Indian free. He took out a small first aid kit and put some salve on the aborigine's burned sole, then looked at his own arm. The blood was coursing faster.

"You're wounded, er . . . badly," the old man panted in alarm. "It's my fault, too, er . . . my fault. If I hadn't cried out he wouldn't have seen us. I'm a doddering . . . old fool . . . yes . . . old fool."

Vilak cooly whipped his brilliant necktie from his collar. "It wasn't your fault any more than it was my carelessness. Don't pay any attention to me. I'll make a tourniquet and stop it in a hurry. You look after that poor devil there. Put some more of that salve on his feet."

He knottd the necktie quickly round his arm and with a lead pencil tightened it so that it cut deeply into his flesh. The flow of blood perceptibly slackened. Then he took out a sealed tube of iodine and, breaking it open, spilled the contents over the wound. "May not be necessary," he said. "But I don't want to take chances of infection. I haven't too great an admiration for Detto's personal habits. This poor devil is fortunate in that he does not need any disinfectants at least. The fire's perfect for that."

With his good hand he aided the old man in applying the salve to the seared places of the other's foot. The labor caused his arm to bleed again. He wrapped it tighly with a bandage. Satisfied that it would bleed no longer, he stooped once more and began lifting up handfuls of mud and putting them on the burned feet. "The best thing for burns, by far," he said, as the nervous old man who was guiltily eyeing his wound began following suit. "It'll fix him in no time. Make a regular cast, if you can. It's lucky we arrived when we did. I believe they would have actually burned his feet off."

"It's ghastly . . . er . . . nothing but ghastly. It almost makes me . . . er . . . makes me . . ."

"Faint? You're not used to the cruelty of your fellow men as I am. Here, have one of my strong cigarets. It'll straighten you out. No joking."

The Indian who, with his whole body a-quiver, had been watching like a wounded dog, suddenly became rigid. His eyes closed, the throbbing of a vivid purplish vein showing in his copper black cheek ceased.

Nunnally paled. 'Is he going to die? . . . Like poor . . . er . . Tony . . . Tony did yesterday?"

(To be continued.)

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GOOD HUMOR

Honest good humor is the oil and wine of a merry meeting, and there is no jovial companionship equal to that where the jokes are rather small and the laughter abundant.—Washington Irving.

"Religion is, in reality, only philosophy under another name."J. S. Haldane.

Doris — "Let's call on Patricia." Sally—"No; she's got a new dress, too."

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ISSUE No. 12—'30

Princess Silhouette

Smart Juniors Demand Smart Sophisticated Togs

By ANNETTE

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PITY

Pity is answerable for almost as many marriages as love; but the State cannot thrive on it. It is wrong. Once the glow of self-satisfaction has died out of the pitier, contempt has a way of coming in.—E. V. Lucas.

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'Fresh from the gardens'

The Child and the Flicker

Ruby Whitcomb

The other day I met the most disreputable child that lives in our neighborhood, with a small hurt flicker in her hands. Few folks have ever trusted her as she is very dishonest, but the incident I am about to relate will show a different appeal to her sympathy. The tiny bird was fluttering with fright, both from injury and the handling of the youngster. She was talking gently to the bird and stroking it. I asked her where she found it and she told me that some boys had shot it with a nigger shooter; there were tears in her eyes when she looked up at me.

She said, "I am going to take it home and granddaddy will mend it so it will live."

Her grandfather is quite clever and ingenious in mending different things, so of course the child had all confidence in his "mending the bird.

Our ways separated then and I thought no more of the incident until I saw her about a week later. In asking for the bird I seemed to open a theme that the child loved. She simply radiated with gladness.

The answer in her sweet voice was, "Oh, the bird is so tame that it eats out of my hand now and its leg is much better. Would you like to see the bird? I will run right over and get it so that you may see how granddaddy mended it."

She ran away and very shortly she was back with the bird which did not flutter in her hands as she held it and talked to it.

On the bird's leg was a tiny splint holding it in shape while the bone was knitting. The bird was as tame as any canary that I have ever seen living in a cage anywhere. Soon it would be able to fly in the open spaces once more.—Our Dumb Animals.

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CHILDREN

Golden head, that bears the sun
Wheresoe"er the feet may run;
Little feet, that hardly know
If on earth or air they go;
Lips through which the soul of glee
Lisps its gracious fancies free;
Eyes whose lucid depths confess
All the heart's ingenuousness;
Love unstinted, eager, pure;—
Womanhood in miniature.
—F. T. Palgrave. (The Visions of England).

MILITARY GLORY

Military glory is sharing with plague, pestilence and famine the honor of destroying your species, and participating with Alexander's horse the distinction of transmitting your name to prosterity.—Horace Smith.

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