Jungle Breath

by Ben Lucien Burman

THIS HAS HAPPENED:

Posing at times as a barber, at others as Attorney Davis, a curious man called Vilak has came to the queer little town of Porto Verde, in Brazil, to help his cousin, Elise Marberry, solve a strange mystery. Elise, owns a coffee plantation. Several mysterious deaths occur and she herself has been threatened. Vilak sends for Lincoln Nunnally, a famous chemist. Gaylord Prentiss, an enemy of Elise's, is involved in the deaths, so Vilak believes. Elise's two-year-old orphaned nephew is kidnapped. Vilak tracks the kidnappers and recovers the child, unharmed, without finding its abductors. Word is brought that Elise's manager of her property in Villapa is sick and must see her. Vilak and Nunally accompany her and are ambushed by a band of soldiers.

NOW BEGIN THE STORY

CHAPTER XXI.

Vilak heard a rustle in the brush behind which left no doubt that the officer had told the truth. Coolly he flicked open his cigaret case. "A cigaret, amigos?"

The other eyed him warily. "I do not smoke, amigos, when I have work to do."

Vilak lit his own casually. "That is foolish. A cigaret and the work is well begun, two cigarets and the work is done. It is an old saying of the philosopher d'Almaro which you, a good Portuguese, should know, amigos. May I take to myself the privilege of troubling you to ask why your good soldiers have done us the honor of so escorting us?"

The other scowled. "Enough of this rigolade, enough of this folly," he muttered harshly. "You are all my prisoners until I see it to release you. I will begin by asking you some questions. Take care that you answer them well and truthfully, or it will be the worse for you. What is your name? Your profession?"

"Sherman Davis, attorney.'

"Nationality?"

"United States."

The officer laughed raucously. "You are droll, amigos, very, very droll." He leered as he looked at the bony, singular face with its slanted eyes which even Vilak's skillful makeup could not completely efface. "I have seen many who come from this great country in the north, but never any who have looked like you."

He turned and winked at a cadaverous soldier with corporal's stripes, who had been riding beside him. "What do you say, Jesu, of this man who calls himself an American? Is he not rather a perfect Argentine?"

"Assuredly, mon capitaz. Were he to walk into Buenos Aires, fifty children would run to call him father."

The officer pointed to the chemist. "And this one. Who is he?" he demanded.

The old man looked at his questioner nervously. "Er . . . Nunnally," he stammered. "Lincoln Nunnally. . . Er . . . chemist . . yes . . chemist."

"Nationality?"

"Ere . . . United States . . . New Jersey."

The officer chuckled. "You hear him, Jesu? You hear him? Is he not indeed more droll than the first? This bald rabbit, this tiny insect who hops in the grass, tells us he comes from the United States where no man is less than six feet in height, where they kill all men who have not this height. Is not this droll one also a perfect Argentine, Jesu?"

He reared himself haughtily in his saddle. "Enough!" he shouted.

"Assuredly, mon capitaz. In Buenos Aires there are a thousand in each street who would call him brother."

The officer grinned at Elise. "And this third one?" he murmured. "This lovely senhorita with the black eyes which flame with anger and the cheeks that glow like the olive when it ripens in the sun. Who is she?"

Elise started to make an indignant reply. Vilak checked her. "Don't lose your temper. It'll make matters worse. We've got no chance here. They'll shoot us down if we give them the slightest excuse."

She obeyed her cousin's injunction and silent, coolly returned the officer's stare. He laughed. "Put down another Argentine, Jesu," he chuckled. "A beautiful one this time. There are not many like her in that mis-begotten country. Yes, a perfect Argentine." He stared at the fourth member of the party, the messenger who had brought them from Porto Verde. "This one is nothing but a jackal who comes after the lions from the moldy bones they throw him. Let him go."

The half-breed scampered off down the road.

Vilak coolly tapped the end of his cigaret against the pommel of his saddle. "May I again have the privilege of inquiring why you have conferred upon us the honor of surrounding us on the road? Pleasant enough, amigos, for the society of you and your men is a boon for which we could all wish. But at the moment it hinders us slightly, for we would be on our way. What do you want with us?"

The officer put his hands to his sides and laughed with hysterical glee. "Jesu," he said, after the outburst was over, "you hear him? Is he not the king of actors, the king of kings of comedians? He does not know why we have stopped them."

"He does not know! That is indeed droll!" roared Jesu. The five other men echoed his words, and burst into convulsive merriment.

The laughter became so loud that it irritated the mustached officer. He reared himself haughtily in his saddle. "Enough!" he shouted. The pandemonium ceased at once. He wheeled around to Vilak. "You pretend not to know why my men have stopped you," he said. "Good. I will tell you. Then you can no longer say that you do not know. Last night on the fazenda Bonjardos, four miles from Villapa, Colonel Miguel Bonjardos, who had the fazenda from his father, who had it from his father's father, went to sleep. It was his last sleep, for this morning, when the servants came to wake him, they found he had been killed as he lay in his bed. Killed with a pistol. All his thousands of reis were gone.

"Three persons were seen coming there in the night. Two men, one tall like yourself, the other short and old like your companion. Both English. With them was a woman. They could not see the woman well, but she was dark, Spanish, they said. They were seen by two servants who have described them well. They tell us the soldiers, for he was our commander, they will also tell the gendarmes. We go out to search. We see you. There can be no doubt. You are like the man and the woman the servants have seen as coffee bean is like coffee bean and palm leaf like palm leaf. We will take you to the jail here we will hold an inquiry, and if you are indeed those whom I know you are, you will be made to tell where you have hidden the money, and then you will be shot. For we will waste no time with those who have slain our beloved commander. The law courts are too long. Now do not say that you do not know." He tisted his mustache so that the two ends looked like miniature horns.

Elise's hand, holding the bridle, quivered with repressed emotion. "This is preposterous," she said as she leaned forward and indignantly confronted their accuser. "How could we have been here last night? All of us were on my fazenda. You are strangers here, that's why you're doing this. Go onto Villapa or Porto Verde, and ask who I am. Everyone knows me about here."

The officer spat between his teeth at a purplish lizard sleeping on a stone. "All who are taken by the law say they are innocent. If we took only those who said they were guilty, we should take no one."

"Somebody will pay for this stupidity," she went on doggedly. "I warn you. I hate to get anyone into trouble but I'll certainly telegraph to Rio the first chance I get. The idea of soldiers doing this, of government soldiers. It's inconceivable!"

The officer turned his back on her and walked over to speak to one of the men who had come forward from the bush. Vilak touched her arm. "Be calm, Elise," he whispered. "Whatever you do, don't get excited; you're only wasting your breath. These men aren't soldiers at all. They're degenerate types of the South American soldiers of fortune, insurrectos, who just go around the country waiting for a local revolution to break out which will give them a chance to do some looting. A lot of them are the worst sort of criminals.

"This whole thing is a frame-up. An absolute frame-up. I doubt if there's been a hint of either a theft or a murder. These men have been bought body and soul. Can't you see that? This is the work of some of our friends at Porto Verde. What I feared has happened. That message from Villapa was a trick and the man who brought it probably never saw your fazenda there. We've walked blindly into a trap."

(To be continued.)

The Try-Out

Visitor—"I suppose you are very careful what you feed your lovely Persian cat?"

Mrs. ——: "Oh, yes, indeed! I always have my husband taste everything before I offer it to her!"

Minard's Kills Dandruff.

Don't Humor Him

"Dear Miss Blake: The boy I like is angry at me because I did not tell him about a dance I was going to.—Sorry." I shouldn't do anything about it. He's infringing on your personal liberties when he offers objections.

"And how much would you say this colt was worth?" asked the railroad claim agent of the farmer. "Not a cent less than $500!" emphatically declared that sturdy son of the soil. "Pedigreed stock, I suppose?" "Well, no," the bereaved admitted reluctantly. "But you could never judge a colt like that by its parents." "No," the attorney agreed dryily. "I've often noticed how crossing it with a locomotive will improve a breed!"

Several Cars To Family Has Become Habit

All Adult Members of Household Find Personal Use of Auto is a Necessity

Call for Vehicles Gains

It used to be, not so long ago, quite an event if the family owned a car. One automobile seemed sufficient to take care of its needs, and usually only one member of the family could drive, that member being the father of the household. Those were the days when women were accepted with humor and patience if they expressed a desire to drive, and with exaggerated annoyance, should there be any trouble or delay in progress through traffic when women were driving.

Car Needs Increase

Gradually a change came. Four or five years ago the idea evolved that the average family could use two cars to good advantage ,a town car and a country car; or a closed body model and the open touring; or a big family car and a smaller runabout. Two cars to a family began to be considered the thing.

To-day, with lower prices and more exacting demands on life, a one-family car won't do. The modern American family is arriving at a point where every member needs a car to fit in with his or her own particular purpose. In cases where only one member makes exclusive use of the car, when he is away on business or otherwise, the rest of the folks find themselves at a loss. When one has enjoyed the advantages and pleasures of an automobile it is as hard to live without one as to forego warm and running water in the modern home.

So then we find the family arriving at a stage—in city life, but particularly in rural communities—where it is essential that mother as well as well as father own a car, and the children and the grown-up sons and daughters have theirs.

Women Drivers Lauded

It was an easy matter for women to learn to manipulate a car. They are known to be as careful in driving and as quick-thinking in an emergency as most men; perhaps they are more so, for they have had to overcome the prejudice against their automotive activity. Women, as well as men, have come to appreciate the many advantages in owning an automobile to use at will, and in having a car for children to use without interference with the parents' own particular purposes.

The duties and obligations of modern women in which they can make excellent use of a car are countless. To enumerate a few, we find her using the car in fulfilling social engagements, in visiting friends and relatives, in driving to town during the day. She finds distance no barrier in the matter of looking for better rpices or better material when shopping. She entertains guests with it, she tours the countryside and enjoys the out-of-doors; she can also relieve friend husband of matters that he might be too busy to attend to, or feel indisposed to bother with. The automobile has become so much a part of the everyday life of women that they are finding it impossible to dispense with this vehicle.

In the case of children, it might be a question of taking them to school; in many cases enabling them to attend better institutions, which they otherwise would not be able to do; such schools being too far from home or too hard to get to with other transportation facilities.

The young adult daughter in city or country finds manifold uses for the automobile, as does her grown brother, in keeping engagements, in driving to town or to school, to the shops, to the theatre, in getting to week-end parties, in entertaining guests, in performing errands and enjoying themselves in general. Not having to bother with train shedules or the crowded subways is a cause for elation that well warrants an automobile.

Of course, it is not advocated that children operate automobiles. But boys and girls sixteen years of age and over in most states can secure a junior operator's license and in the main drive carefully. Those eighteen years of age and over are really adults and are usually perfectly competent as operators of an automobile. They have needs for using cars which, as long as they are legitimate, should be recognized and some provision should be made for meeting such needs.

Auto is Part of Life

To sell a car to every member or to several members of a family would have been quite a preposterous idea a few years ago. It is not so strange a matter to-day. When the family visits the automobile show or views the cars displayed in automobile showrooms or the windows of such concerns, the salesmen well know that mother is considering a car that will be of most use to her, and son and daughter are making their pick, even though father might decide (to himself only) that one family car will do.

Pigmies placed on the shoulders of giants see more than the giants themselves.—Robert Burton

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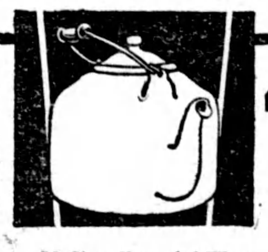

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