Rich in body and delicate as blossoms in its flavour

"SALADA"

(GREEN)

741

JAPAN TEA

'Fresh from the gardens'

Jungle Breath

by Ben Lucien Burman

THIS HAS HAPPENED

Attempts have been made on the life of Elise Marberry, owner of a coffee plantation near Porto Verde, Brazil. Her two-year-old orphaned nephew has been kidnapped, but Vilak, her cousin, and Lincoln Nunnally an aged chemist, rescue the child. Elise receives a note purporting to be from the manager of her Villapa plantation. She, Vilak and Nunnally are ambushed on the way to Villapa, but escape. Vilak persuades Elise to agree to leave the country, and says he believes Gaylord Prentiss, an enemy of Elise's has been the cause of all the trouble. Meanwhile constant rains threatn Porto Verde with flood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Vilak rode to the wharf to ascertain if the floods were holding up the boat or whether it would arrive on time. But the drowsy, red-shirted negro clerk in charge could tell him nothing.

Leaving the dock, he visited the slovenly tobacco store, bought some tobacco and matches and meeting D'Albentara, who had come on a similar message, rode with him part of the way along the road.

D'Albentara said regretfully that he had not yet had an opportunity to thank Elise for her courtesy as he had been having considerable trouble with two or three of his men, and this had occupied all his time. He feared, he added, that he might never have the pleasure of a visit, as the rising waters had been playing havoc with the railroad property in other places to a far greater extent than at Porto Verde, and he rather thought he might be ordered back in the direction of Avilos that afternoon.

He had received no information about the boat, though he thought that in view of the conditions it would very likely be delayed, perhaps even a day or two. They shook hands at the crossroads and Vilak rode on to the fazenda.

"Looks mighty doubtful about your getting away tonight," he remarked a trifle anxiously as he entered Elise's rom and watched her heap piles of baby clothes into a trunk. "Mighty doubtful. And after what happened yesterday, you yourself now how vital it is that you get away. I suppose all we can do is to go down to the wharf at six o'clock when the boat's supposed to come in and wait. Then, if it doesn't come, we'll have to build a raft, or something equally desperate, and ship you down two thousand miles on that."

By noon Elise had finished her packing. She spent a few hours in giving explicit directions to the servants as to what was to be done in her brief absence, then, after a quick tea, gave the child to Hannah, who was waiting in the god-cart beside a gray-haired negro driver. Then she mounted her piebald mare and touched it lightly with her whip.

They rode off, Vilak and the old man on horseback on either side of her, the carriage close behind. They reached the wharf and dismounted. Six o'clock arrived without the hoarse, prolonged whistle that usually marked the arrival of the steamer at the bar a mile up the river. Seven o'clock. Still no whistle, no trail of black smoke. Seven-thirty. The equatorial night began its swift descent. Eight o'clock. Total darkness and the boat nowhere is sight.

Elise slushed impatiently through the mud of the tiny dock. "We'll have to camp here all night, I guess," she said. "I don't know whether anybody else is, but I getting hungry. Extremely hungry. And irritable."

She peered up the river anxiously, then began pacing the dock again. Suddenly she turned as a confused murmur of excited voices drifted up from the silent, darkened town square a quarter of a mile away. A clatter of hoofs sounded up the road. The noise became louder.

Vilak's eyes narrowed. "Wonder what this is," he murmured. He took a bit of betel. "Think I'll go have a look. Back in a hurry." He spurred into the darkness.

A few moments later he was speeding back. "The dam at Avilos has burst," he said quietly. "A wall of water forty feet high is sweeping down the valley. But it won't reach here for half an hour or more. You and Nanny hurry up to Chacos Hill."

Elise and the old man looked at him incredulously, for his voice was even as though he were relating some placid story in the corner of a dim lighted room. He had barely finished speaking when a horseman came speeding down the road shouting in frenzied Portuguese that death was upon the inhabitants if they did not flee. He vanished. Windows opened violently, lights appeared, animals grunted, men cursed, bedlam broke out in the street.

"You and Nanny go on to Chacos Hill," Vilak repeated. "With Tinky."

His words roused Elise from her daze. She caught the bridle of her horse. "What are you going to do" she asked.

"Go and warn some of the people in the outlying districts here. Don't get excited, Nanny. Keep cool, keep cool," he added, as the old man, trembling with excitement, tried to scramble upon his horse and hopelessly entangled his foot in the stirrup. "A man's like an engine. Much better when he's cool. Half an hour's a long time. Don't be stampeded."

He stooped down and with a quick movement freed the other's foot. The old man clambered onto his mount. Elise, too, leaped into her saddle. "I'm going with you," she said to Vilak. "We can't let these poor people on the outskirts die like beasts. Two of us can cover much more territory. Hannah can take Tinky up to Chacos. She's proved she can take care of him. It's only a few minutes."

"All right. We've no time to argue. Come on."

She kissed the baby quickly, then spoke a few words to the driver of the dogcart. The vehicle rattled off. The old man looked confusedly after it an instant, bewilderingly began to follow it, then turned and came awkwardly galloping back to Vilak. The three riders sped toward the murmuring town square. As they reached it, a panic-struck parade began to sweep past them.

Here a donkey struggled heroically to trot through the sloughs with its fat master and screaming mistress clinging hysterically to its back; here three squealing pigs lurched ahead of a grunting negro, driving them on with a club; there an Indian woman with huge ornaments in her lips and ears scurried through the mud shouting at the five naked and shining children who ran before her. So absorbed were the terrorized villagers in their headlong flight that they hardly saw the three riders coursing past, and Vilak was constantly binging his horse to a violent halt in order that he might not run them down.

Elise swept her mount round a bed toppled into a street by some frenzied householder. "Where are you going?" she flashed to Vilak.

"Prentiss' place," he snapped. "He'll get it the worst down there, he's so low. We've got time. We can get to Itzituba Hill from there just as quickly as to Chacos from here and be just as safe."

He heard her draw a sharp breath.

"I realize that you don't like him. I don't either. But however bad he is, we can't let him drown. No one else in the town will think of warning him, he's so hated. After all, he is a fellow human being. All grudges are done in a case like this. It's the jungle law as well as the human."

She stooped to swoop safely under a low-hanging branch. You're right. Of course we've got to do it. I was drifting into the family feud state of mind, I guess."

They swept on, and began to leave the city behind. Here and there Vilak on one side of the road and Elise on the other checked their horses for a moment before a miserable cabin of rushes to shout to the occupants the news of the disaster. But in each case an answering shout, or kinky head bobbing frantically through a door told them they had already been notified.

"Odd," he called to Elise as he bobbed furiously up and down. "No one's been overlooked. They've been quite systematic in carrying the news. Couldn't have done better if one man had taken charge of it. Never knew these lackadaisical natives to have so much method and energy. It's astonishing."

They wheeled past a Porto Verdean bouncing along in a clattering ox cart, through a vack of racing, wild-eyed digs which had been infected with the human panic and were fleeing from they knew not what; then over the wooden bridge they had crossed so slowly a few hours before. Vilak looked down at the narrow stream below. "That's odd, too," he murmured. "Water looks lower than it did this morning."

They took the crossroads paralleling the railroad tracks and galloped on.

(To be continued.)

A few moments later he was speeding back. "The dam at Avilos has burst," he said quietly.

To the census enumerator, the man of the house is the head of the family, but the man of the house may know a lot more about it than the census enumerator.

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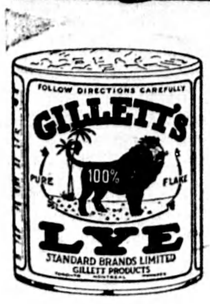

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