SALADA GREEN tea will give you most enjoyment

"SALADA" GREEN 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 large plantations near Porto Verde, Brazil. Her cousin and protector, Vilak, believes Gaylord Prentiss to be responsible. Elise's two-year-old orphaned nephew, Tinky, is kidnapped. Prentiss has been seen in the jungle with a white child. An expedition is formed and they follow Prentiss. Through desertion and ill fortune, only Elise, Vilak and Lincoln Nunnally, an elderly chemist, survive the trek through the jungle, and these three are captured by sun-worshippers who intend to offer up the men as a sacrifice at the feast of Raymi. The king intends to marry Elise.

NOW BEGIN THE STORY

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Got that ceremony from the Incas, too, probably," Vilak muttered as he turned his head to look at the old man lying on the stone two feet away. "Often a custom of fire-worshippers. Chief, headman, or king, whatever he happens to be, goes off to receive the first rays of the sun alone. You'd better try to sleep a little. Good as a drug in times like this.

These were the last words he spoke for hours. All day he lay rigid, motionless, as though he were another of the gloomy stone figures carved in the ruined temple walls.

As when he had lain in his room in Porto Verde, the pupils of his Mongolian-like eyes dulled until they appeared the eyes of a mummy rather than a man, while the thin film, like a bird's inner eyelid crept out from the corners. His swarthy skin became bloodless his breath came stertorously through his open mouth.

In the afternoon his breathing and his face became normal again; he spoke cheerfully to the old man, sweating profusely in the hot sun, and began watching a group of Indians erect a rude pavilion facing the idol and perhaps a hundred feet away.

Just before sunset this pavilion was the centre of another procession. Elise garbed in a robe of brilliantly woven wool, was borne into it on a litter and set upon a stone chair. Before her came the fat half-breed women with the painted aprons and ringed ears who had been her escorts a few days before, then a long line of native women of all varieties of dress, stature and racial mixture. Each deposited a flower or fruit at her feet. At sundown Batalagos appeared. Giggling, he threw a great veil or mantle of beautiful, ancient design over Elise and she was lifted onto the litter again and carried away.

For half an hour the court was once more deserted. The prisoners had been given no food during the day; now one of the hideously painted priests brought them wine in two clay ceremonial vessels, held the bowls to their lips so they could drink, then put the vessels at their sides in depressions cut especially for the purpose in the stone. Throughout the ceremonies, which began soon after, they returned at intervals of approximately an hour to touch the bowls to the captives' lips, as though the drinking of the wine was an act of purification which made them fit to be a gift to the gods.

The court now filled anew with a swarming, buzzing multitude. Elise was brought out again and placed in the pavilion. Batalagos took a seat beside her. D'Albentara stood at the altar. A dance was begun.

Thirty or forty black, brown, and reddish-skinned women, their bodies bright with paint and feathers and their limbs jingling with metal ornaments, leaped, bowed, quivered, gyrated, while rows of men, with faces painted like death masks stamped their feet and beat time with thudding tomtoms.

At a command from Batalagos the dance ceased. A fowl, a wild pig and two oxen were laid upon the altar-like stone, killed with a knife, and their hearts thrown into the crackling fire. More dancing.

A file of native soldiers came forward, each holding aloft a spear. On each spear-tip was a dried, shriveled human head. The soldiers fixed their burdens like standards in two rows on each side of the open-mouthed idol. Nunnally noticed that each grim trophy bore the same tattooed triangles which had marred Prentiss' forehead, while a tattooed line circled each shrunken neck just above the point where it had been severed.

Now a native with a particularly ferocious face was flung down near Vilak and made fast to another one of the seven stones, where he lay alternately screaming with terror and pleading piteously with his captors. A second young deer was slain to consult the omens; they decreed immediate sacrifice. Three of the soldiers danced a short pantomime in which there was much clashing of spears and stalking through imaginary bushes.

"This poor devil near us is a murderer," Vilak whispered to the old man. "I got that from what he said when he was begging for mercy. This pantomime is a favorite custom of savages. They're showing now how he committed the murder. Stabbed his friend in the back while they were out hunting."

The pantomime continued for a few moments longer. Then a bowl of wine was put to the criminal's lips. Roughly he was lifted from the stone to which he had been tied and dragged to the larger one serving as the altar.

One of the priests swiftly tattooed three teeth-like triangles upon his forehead, then a thin, black line around his neck. The Indian with the enormous nose came forward carrying a great knife, looked at the tattooing on the forehead, passed the back of his knife experimentally about the neck-line, then nodded approvingly. The tattooer put away his instruments.

The struggling victim, whose mouth had been stuffed with wool to stop his cries, and who was regarding his captors with bulging, agonized eyes, was now strapped down so that his forehead was directly beneath the three great thorns which formed the fingers of the idols' arm.

'Albentara gave a command. The savages swarming on all sides dropped to the ground and began a dismal chant. Their eyes were fixed as though hynotized upon the grotesque idol.

Suddenly a puff of smoke, followed by a tongue of flame, issued from its mouth; its upraised arm began to descend. Nearer and nearer came its thorny hand to the captive's forehead. At last thorn met tattooed triangle. The criminal's convulsive struggles ceased; he lay rigid. Yet he was not dead; his drawn eyes gleamed with the same bitter anguish which had marked the eyes of the prostrate Tony Barbetta and Detto Cicerone and the creeping Limey Potts.

While in this helpless condition, his bonds were united. The priests became four fiends. For half an hour they tortured him. Then another heart, like those of the beasts, went to the fire; another head and another spear joined the rows at the foot of the idol.

Four natives, carrying hollowed reeds and gourds of different sizes, began a shrill whistling and noisy rattling intended to be music. They ceased their discordant labors. D'Albentara approached Vilak. "All goes well, amigos?" he murmured.

Vilak did not answer.

The Portuguese shrugged his shoulders. "You will not speak with me, cavalhiero? Ah, if so it must be, so then it must be. You think that Carlos D'Albentara is cruel, do you not, cavalhiero? That he loves blood like the vampire bats who fly in the night. Yet is this not so. Not so. Rather does he hate blood, hate death. They are like mud, like wounds upon the face of a beautiful woman. They make life not pretty. Though he must cause you to die in the same way and do other things which may be yet more evil, it is not because he so wishes. No. It it always because of this miserable . . ." He smiled apologetically. "You know, amigos. I have told you often."

He strode off. A few moments later Batalagos rose pomposously from his stone seat, waited until the seething worshipper before him had become silent, then grunted a short oration. He clapped his hands. A litter was brought in again and put down near the altar. A great shout went up from the spectators. A man was lifted from the litter and put down on one of the stones. "There's Prentiss," grunted Vilak. A moment later as the priest took another figure from the litter, he added quietly: "and there's Tinky."

Suddenly a figure dashed from the pavilion. It was Elise. But she was permitted to run only a few feet. Two guards snatched her. She was carried back to the pavilion, then off into the darkness.

Again the omens were consulted. They decreed that Prentiss and the child should be sacrificed at noon when the sun was at its highest. Another dance was begun, another pantomime. In it D'Albentara took part. He shook hands in un-Indian-like fashion with a gaunt native who was wearing Prentiss grimy linen coat. Much running and stalking through imaginary bushes followed.

"I think we've seen something of Prentiss' recent history," Vilak muttered to the old man.

The ceremonies ceased for the night. Batalagos and D'Albentara disappeared. The crowd began to melt away. Soon the court was deserted except for the four captives on the stones and the solitary soldier standing guard.

A figure came creeping toward Vilak, then scuttled back into the shadows. The baby began to cry; ceased quickly. Vilak craned his head to see it. He could not. He could, however, distinguish the form of Prentiss on the other side of the altar. Even by the firelight he could see that the feverish, halfmad gleam which had hitherto marked the other's eyes had vanished; his skin no longer had its pallid, death-like appearance; his face, though still wasted and gaunt and still bearing the strange tattooed triangles, was the face of a normal man.

The shadowy figure crept forward once more, once more vanished. Vilak lay motionless, silent. Again his eyes became slanted eyes like a Chinese philosopher. Again the thin film like a bird's inner eyelid crept out from the corners to half cover the full pupils. Suddenly the clay wine-bowl at his side cracked and fell noisily to the ground. The soldier came running; muttered a curse. A priest swiftly brought another bowl, and returned to the temple from which he had come.

Vilak drew a quick breath. With a jagged fragment of the vessel he had just broken he began sawing at the thongs which bound his wrists. The edge was no keener than a dull knife. But even a dull knife cuts vigorously with pressure behind it; soon a thin gap appeared halfway through the tough leather.

He was preparing to begin anew, when the figure which had twice before crept forward only to disappear now crawled to the shadows of the stone on which he lay. He turned his head; saw below him the face of the Indian with the filed teeth whome he had saved from the fiery tortures of Detto Cicerone in the jungle behind his house in Porto Verde.

(To be continued.)

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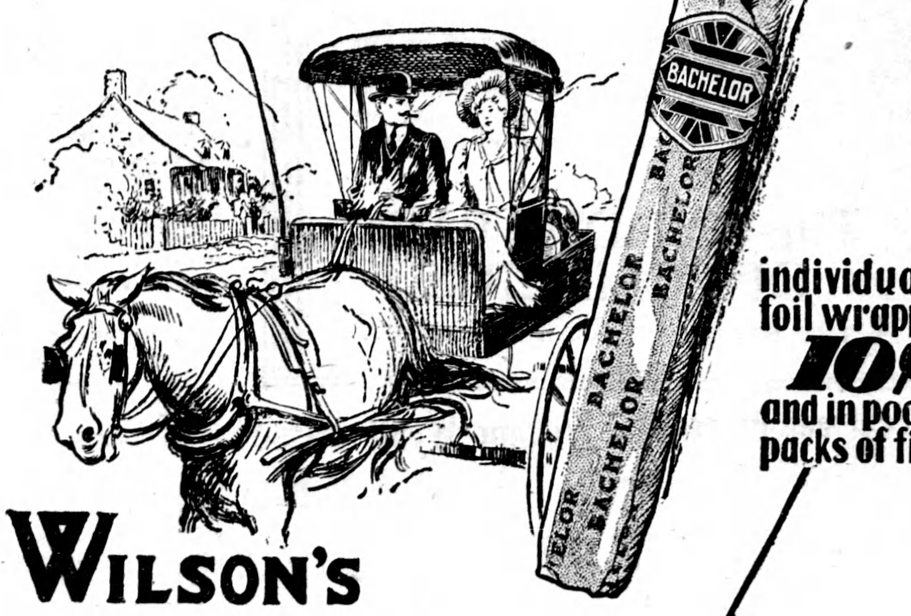

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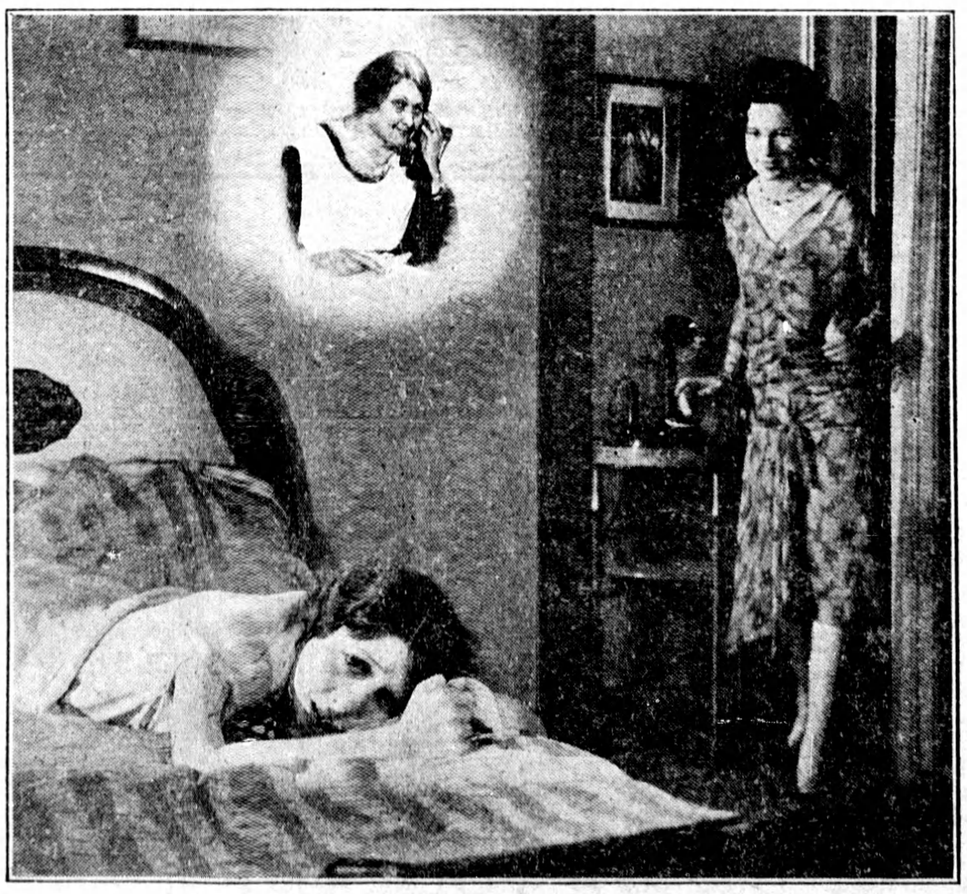

It's your mother, Mary!" exclaimed Hazel Wright, Mary's room mate in the college dormitory. "Mother!" cried Mary Strong who had thrown herself on the bed in a fit of homesickness.

As she poured out her heart to her mother and from the very sound of her parent's voice gathered strength to overcome that homesickness which only those who have experienced it can appreciate, Hazel Wright wondered how anyone could do without a telephone even as she herself expressed it "if it took the last cent."

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