Jungle Breath

by Ben Lucien Burman

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Vilak paused an instant while the droning of the priests took on a sharper, angry note. "The rest you can probably guess. The night when we came to warn Prentiss of an attack, he hurried out to put the baby down into a stony part of the cellar where it would be absolutely safe from chance bullets. Then when I announced my plan to flood the fazenda, he realized of course that it would be drowned where it was, and went out to bring it to the tower.

"It was then that D'Albentara and a few of his men who were able to reach the house before the water struck them, caught him, having first killed the dog which was carried off by the torrent. His captors started off with him toward the jungle. But they had been on the way only a day when the baby, who had been quite sickly ever since its first terrific journey, died. This was a contingency on which D'Albentara hadn't reckoned."

"I'm beginning to understand," Elise said, "That's why Tinky disappeared, isnt it?"

"Yes. Up to this time, you hadn't entered his affairs, except for him to steal your rifles which he needed badly and to send you a note or two warning you not to try to help Prentiss. I really think he liked you very much. But seeing all his hopes of gaining part of the vast gold supply of Batalagos going glimmering unless he brought back a live baby for the sacrifice, he naturally thought of Tinky, whom chance had thrown in his way when he found it along the road.

"I am quite sure he wouldn't have done this unless he were fairly desperate. But after you stop to consider it a moment, it doesn't seem such a desperate undertaking at that. The dead baby was approximately Tinky's age and size, and being light-skinned and of very fine aborigine stock, was in general appearance not unlike Tinky, who is, of course, pronouncedly dark. Besides, he could explain away any discrepancies by declaring them the work of time and travel. Though it was unlikely that he would have to do any explaining, for though Batalagos and the priests who were his friends undoubtedly knew the difference, the general public wouldn't be permitted to know. So he had the child stolen in the same fashion as the guns. For obvious reasons, Tinky was well taken care of on his trip and so didn't suffer the ill effects the other poor youngster did."

The angry chant became a dance. the priests began to leap up and down, shaking great gourd rattles. "How did he . . . er . . . steal him and the guns?" the old man asked. "There were no footprints."

"Merely by getting some of his men who were expert tree-climbers like those chaps we saw back in the jungle. If you remember there were trees by the shed where the guns were kept and trees shading the spot where Tinky was lying. They merely followed along the strip of woods which led to the road, let themselves down by vines or leather ropes which some of these Indians are expert in handling, and with their burdens returned the same way. I felt fairly sure it was this when I found a bit of leaf on the floor of the shed which showed bruised marks as though a rope or vine had cut forcibly against it."

"I . . . er . . . see that now. But why were all those . . . er Italians . . . and that Englishman, killed in that dreadful way? And how?"

"Tony's death was accidental. He got something which was intended for Prentiss. The other three were put out of the way because after Pasquale and Detto heard of the gold through the tortured Indian, they set out to get it. All of them were killed in a manner, Nanny, which you as a chemist should feel somewhat ashamed of yourself, as I do of myself, for not recognizing it sooner. It was curari."

Elise helped the child to crawl onto her khaki-clad knee. "What's curari?" she asked.

"A vegetable poison which occurs sporadically all over South America. Some natives use it to tip their blowpipe darts in hunting."

The old man looked sheepish. "I am . .er . . ashamed of myself," he stammered. "Should have recognized it at once . . yes . . er . . at once. Only poison of its kind in existence. Paralyzes all the muscles . . yet at the same time has no effect on nerves. So . . er . . tortured person can feel all pain acutely . . er . . and yet cannot make move to get away. Ashamed of myself. . . Quite ashamed. How did the curari get into their blood?"

"Thorns. There were a number of thorns in that thicket at the entrance to Prentiss' fazenda where Tony was killed which were smeared with it. They had been prepared this way on the chance that Prentiss woull strike against them. But it happened to be Tony instead who brushed against them when Limey struck him and he fell. That's the way some of the natives were killed, too. Lucky for Prentiss he went to town as seldom as he did. That's why I made you wear a rain-coat as a slight protection, for I imagined that there was something of the sort, though I didn't know just what, and that's why I burned the thicket. The fingers of the idol are coated with the same poison. And so are the little points on D'Albentara's ring when you press a spring and release them. Which, of course, makes it a fearfully dangerous weapon."

The dance of the pdiests ceased. The worshippers began slowly drifting out of the courtyard. Prentiss stirred uneasily in his sleep.

It began to grow cool. The old man moved closer to the fire. "Er . . . . Prentiss couldn't have told you all this. You must have known . . er . . much of it long before. Or you wouldn't have acted the way you did. How did you learn it? It's quite beyond me."

"Nothing miraculous in the slightest. Merely a simple bit of addition, using facts instead of numbers, and after that a bit of very ordinary reasoning. I got my first hint from the high collar Prentiss always wore. Man doesn't wear such a collar in hot climate like that of Porto Perde without a distinct reason.

"On the single occasion that he came to the barber's shop to be shaved—incidentally that collar was one of the reasons for my adopting the role of my friend Riggs—I noticed that he refused to take it off, and of course I took pains to find out why. I saw the tattooed circle round it, and observed how his neck twitched nervously there whenever I brought the razor near. So I felt sure that the unusual sensitiveness arose because the nerves had suffered some distinct shock and the collar was thus an unconscious gesture of protection as well as a means to hide the tattooing.

"If a man had escaped from hanging after the rope had been placed round his neck he'd probably feel the same way. Then later, when I went out to his fazenda and tripped him up with a vine, I found that the bottle he was bringing from the tower where he kept his perishable kitchen supplies contained milk. This, coupled with the cries, caused me to suspect the presence of a child.

"On top of this were the facts of the stone lamps burning outside his gate, an obvious symbol, probably intended to give protection; the bits of bone chopped in ritualistic fashion which I found in the fire, and the ring which clearly showed signs of some degenerate form of nature worship. So when Tinky's last kidnapping occurred the story in between wasn't hard to imagine."

The court was now deserted, except for four soldiers, humbly waiting to take them off to the chief's apartment for the night. Vilak stretched his long gaunt arms, and yawned.

"I don't know what anybody else is going to do, but I, personally, am going to bed. I'm pretty well worn out, and we've two or three busy days ahead getting ready to make a trek back to civilization. Prentiss tells me there's a way across the desert and mountains to Peru that's very quick and very easy once you know it, particularly if Batalagos helps. Which you can be assured I'll take care he will. You see we've practically crossed Brazil and in two weeks of good healthy travelling we'll be in Cuzco. From there we can get a train to the coast, and then take a steamer to anywhere."

Elise glanced at him and shook her head in mock resignation.

"You're too clever," she said. "Much, much too clever to be tolerated. But I can't help being terribly grateful to you, and more than that, being awfully fond of you. I don't know what I'm going to do about it."

He yawned again, then rose to his feet and surveyed her quizzically. "Am I to consider that remark as cousinly, esteemed relative, or as rather in the nature of . . . a proposal?"

She started to make an indignant reply, then checked herself, and smiled. "Take it any way you like," she answered slowly.

He took a placid puff of his cigaret. "Thanks," he said suavely. "You've saved me a lot of trouble. I had just decided to do it myself."

(The End.)

"Am I to consider that remark as cousinly, esteemed relative, or as rather in the nature of . . . a proposal?"

Helping Hands

When the heart is heavy, when the soul is sad,
When we lose a treasure that was all we had,
There is not a trouble someone hasn't known—
Let us look a little farther than our own.

When the heart is weary with the mind's review,
When a dream is shattered nothing can renew,
There are other dreamers who have had a loss—
Let us see the stranger, help him with his cross.

When the heart is heavy, when the sky is grey,
When the thoughts of midnigt cloud the brightest day,
Surely then, if ever, we may understand—
Let us lift another with a helping hand.

—Douglas Malloch.

Wrong Shop

A big red-faced man pushed his way to the counter of a post-office and demanded a penny stamp. The clerk on duty was doing his best to explain something or other to an old lady, but this the big man did not appreciate. He grew more impatient.

"I say, boy," he shouted, "I've a train to catch. Give me a stamp."

The "boy" looked at him for a moment, then turned afresh to the old lady.

"I'm sorry, madam," he resumed, "but you see—"

The big man interrupted him.

"Do you hear me-" he yelled. "I've a train to catch."

The Civil Servant turned and said quietly, "Did you say you had a train to catch?"

"I did!" snapped the man.

"Then it's a railway station you want. This is a post-office."

Minard's Liniment has a hundred uses.

Bill's Little Girl

By Zona Gale

How I Came to Write This Story

The city editor of the New York Evening World once handed me a cutting from the want advertisements of that day's Morning World. "Go and find what lies back of that," he said.

The advertisement was that one which I have included in the story of Bill. His story is rather like that of the man who had advertised.

I do not recall this man's name. I never saw him again But I still have his photograph, with that of the little girl.

Bill was thirty, when his wife died, and little Minna was four. Bill's carpenter shop was in the yard of his house, so he thought that he could keep up his home for Minna and himself. All day while he worked at his bench, she played in the yard, and when he was obliged to be absent for a few hours, the woman next door looked after her. Bill could cook a little, coffee and bacon and fried potatoes and flapjacks, and he found bananas and sardines and crackers useful. When the woman next door said this was not the diet for four-year olds, he asked her to teach him to cook oatmeal and vegetables, and though he always burned the dishes in which he cooked these things, he cooked them every day. He swept, all but the corners, and he dusted, dabbed at every objct; and he complained that after he had cleaned the windows he could not see out as well as he could before. He washed and patched Minna's little garments and mended her doll. He found a kitten for her so that she wouldn't be lonely. At night he heard her say her prayer; he either woke her up, or else he made her say them first thing next morning. He himself used to try to pray: "Lord, make me do right by her if you see me doing wrong." On Sundays he took her to church and sat listening with his head on one side, trying to understand, and giving Minna peppermints when she rustled. He stopped work for a day and took her to the Sunday school picnic. "Her mother would of," he explained. When Minna was old enough to go to kindergarten, Bill used to take her morning or afternoon, and he would call for her. Once he dressed himself in his best clothes and went to visit the school. "I think her mother would of," he told the teacher, diffidently. But he could make little of the colored paper and the designs and the games, and he did not go again. "There's some things I can't be any help to her with", he thought.

Minna was six when Bill fell ill. On a May afternoon he went to a doctor. When he came home he sat in his shop for a long time and did nothing. The sun was beaming through the window in bright squares. He was not going to get well. It might be that he had six months. He could hear Minna singing to her doll.

When she came to kiss him that night, he made an excuse, for he must never kiss her now. He held her at arm's length, looked in her eyes, said: "Minna's a big girl now. She doesn't want papa to kiss her." But her lip curled and she turned away sorrowful, so the next day Bill went to another doctor to make sure. The other doctor made him sure.

He tried to think what to do. He had a sister in Nebraska, but she was a tired woman. His wife had a brother in the city, but he was a man of many words. And little Minna—there were things known to her which he himself did not know—matters of fairies and the words of songs. He wished that he could hear of somebody who would understand her. And he had only six months.

Then the woman next door told him bluntly that he ought not to have the child there, and him coughing as he was; and he knew that his decision was already upon him.

One whole night he thought. Then he advertised in a city paper:

A man with a few months to live would like nice people to adopt his little girl, six, blue eyes, curls. References required.

They came in a limousine, as he had hoped that they would come. Their clothes were as he had hoped. They had with them a little girl who cried: "Is this my little sister?" On which the woman in the smart frock said sharply:

"Now then, you do as mamma tells you and keep out of this or we'll leave you here and take this darling little girl away with us."

So Bill looked at this woman and said steadily that he had now other plans for his little girl. He watched the great blue car roll away. "For the land sake!" said the woman next door when she heard. "You done her out of a fortune. You hadn't the right—a man in your health.' And when other cars came, and he let them go, this woman told her husband that Bill ought most certainly to be reported to the authorities.

The man and woman who walked into Bill's shop one morning were still mourning their own little girl. The woman was not sad—only sorrowful, and the man, who was tender of her, was a carpenter. In a blooming of his hope and his dread, Bill said to them: "You're the ones.' When they asked: "How long before we can have her?" Bill said: "One day more."

That day he spent in the shop. It was summer and Minna was playing in the yard. He could hear the words of her songs. He cooked their supper and while she ate, he watched. When he had tucked her in her bed, he stood in the dark hearing her breathing. "I'm a little girl to-night—kiss me," she had said, but he shook his head. "A big girl, a big girl,' he told her.

When they came for her the next morning he had her ready and her little garments were ready, washed and mended, and he had mended her doll. "Minna's never been for a visit!" he told her buoyantly. And when she ran toward him, "A big girl, a big girl," he reminded her.

He stood and watched the man and woman walking down the street with Minna between them. They had brought her a little blue parasol in case the parting should be hard. This parasol Minna held bobbing above her head, and she was so absorbed in looking up at the blue silk that she did not remember to turn and wave her hand.—The Golden Book.

High Up

Switzerland can already boast that it possesses the highest railway in Europe—the Jungfrau line, which goes up to 11,340 feet. But it isn't satisfied with this—a new railway connecting St. Moritz with the Piz Bernina is now to be built. It will attain an altitude of 13,390 feet.

At present there are only six railways in the world which go higher than the Jungfrau line. When the Piz Bernina is built there will be only four railways in the world to beat it in altitude.

The Peruvian Central Railway is the present holder of the world's record. At one point it reaches 15,865 feet—just thirty-one feet more than is attained by the runner-up, the Antofagasta (Chili) and Bolivia Railway at its highest point.

But Switzerland holds a world's record in the matter of electrification that no other country can challenge. Counting lines of all gauges, Switzerland has electrified 4,834 kilometres of railway, or 88.1 per cent. of its total track.

Minard's Liniment aids tired feet.

Vicar's Wife: "Ah, Mrs. Miles, one-half of the world is ignorant of how the other half lives." Cottager: "Not in this village, ma'am."

A: "You'd believe anything a fool told you." B: "Not always; but sometimes you are quite convincing."

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