Jungle Breath

by Ben Lucien Burman

THIS HAS HAPPENED

Attempts have been made on the life of Elise Marberry, owner of considerable property near Porto Verde, Brazil, and several mysterious deaths have occurred. Vilak, Elise's cousin and guardian, believes that Gaylord Prentiss is responsible. Vilak, Elise, and Lincoln Nunnally, an elderly chemist, rescue Prentiss from being murdered by the natives. The next day Tinky, Elise's orphaned baby nephew, is stolen. Natives have seen Prentiss with a white child, and Vilak forms an expedition to penetrate the jungle and follow Prentiss. While bathing in the river with Nunnally, Vilak suddenly dashes out and seizes a native who had been squatting on the bank. The water where they had been swimming was infested with the fierce flesh-eating piranhas.

NOW BEGIN THE STORY

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"What did he do?" Nunnally repeated.

"Nothing except to cut his finger so that the blood would draw the piranhas and make them attack us. If you know anything about their characteristics you know that blood makes them perfectly mad. If we had waited a few minutes longer they'd have come in swarms and torn us to pieces."

He dragged the prisoner roughly back to the camp, kept him under strict guard, then at dawn when the expedition started on its way again slackened his bonds so that his feet were free and put him at the head of the train, where the wasps and fire ants were apt to be most irritating and the dangers from the pararaca and deadly coral snake greatest. Much as Vilak wished it, no jararaca struck him. Instead, one of the negroes, through carelessness in crossing a swamp, was bitten by a loathsome sort of copperhead and died before an antitoxin could be administered.

The last tragedy deepened the gloom which had begun like a cloud to overhang the travelers.

The murmuring among the men increased. When the cook was preparing supper the other albino shuffled forward to Vilak, and announced that he and his fellows would go no farther. It was certain death for all of them if they proceeded, he mumbled. Everyone except foolish white men knew that the country which they were approaching was haunted; the closer they came to it, the tighter the evil spell was woven about them. He and the other natives had decided to turn back.

To their astonishment, Vilak quietly replied that he and his friends were at liberty to depart any time they liked; further, that their departure would delight him.

At dawn the expedition split, the five mutineers sullenly going back in the direction from which they had come, while the three whites and the silent Indian guide, who after some vaccilation had refused to join in the rebels' councils, tramped on toward the west.

As they traveled the three friends conversed little, the humid heat of the jungle and their steady, unflagging pace consuming all the energies of Elise and the old man.

Day after day they went on uninterruptedly through the tangle of grim, towering trees, always with the feeling that they were being watched, followed. Soon the increasing density of the underbrush made traveling extremely difficlut for the remaining mules, which, on the point of exhaustion, were now mere breathing skeletons through the ravages of tiny winged and crawling parasites.

Reluctantly Vilak decided to abandon them, shift as many of their burdens as possible onto human shoulders, and for the rest, live on the country. Two days after they had so decided they came upon a tribe of dwarfed blackish Indians, almost pygmies, who lived in the branches of trees or in mere windbreaks which they hastily constructed wherever they might be.

The chief, whose favor Vilak won by a gift of jewelry, said in answer to the other's question that he had heard from a neighboring chief how strange men had passed that way not long before. But he could only say what he had heard from the lips of others; none of his own tribe had seen.

"Where you white men go?" he grunted in thick Guarany.

Vilak pointed toward the setting sun. "Other Indian tell me, white man, no good there. What there?"

The old chief shuddered, closed his ferret-like eyes, and did not answer.

As the sun disappeared, and the cool damp night enveloped the jungle, the chief took two pieces of wood, and rubbing them together while his followers murmured a dismal ceremonial chant, kindled a fire.

The newcomers sat around it to eat birds eggs and a large sort of squirrel. Their hunger satified, the women danced, then the chief folded his legs under him, and like Bagarundi, began to tell the heroic legends of his race.

He continued until his shrill, piping voice grew weary, bade the visitors good night and slowly climbed up into the trees, the other men and women following, leaping from limb to limb and liana to liana with all the dexterity of monkeys.

"More proof that there is a pronounced Oriental influence all through the Indians," Vilak said to Nunnally as they sat by the fire.

"Even a tribe in such a low state of development as this one. This chief, too, told the story about the man who walked through the fire and became a god. These men probably got the Oriental traces in their culture indirectly through the Incas, whose civilization was undoubtedly an Oriental one, possibly Egyptian.

"Certainly that's where these fire legends came from, for the Incas had the most elaborate fire-worship ritual the world has ever known.

"Incidentally, if we keep on going west this way, we ought to be getting out of the jungle onto the uplands pretty quickly and probably see some Inca ruins. We're heading straight for the Andes plateau, and they weren't confined to that narrow area by any means. They were too vigorous and too colonizing a people. They were spreading out tremendously when the Spanish came and put a sudden end to their empire."

Another week they traveled through the gloomy, unbroken forest. Then they lost their last native adherent. They had seen a jaguar lurking in the underbrush as they were about to pitch their camp; Vilak and the Indian guide had gone out to stalk it to prevent the animal from springing upon them while they slept.

They separated to approach it from two sides; Vilak killed it with a well-placed bullet. Striding back to the camp, he rejoined Elise and the old man. The guide did not return. Vilak and the others began to beat the brush.

The setting sun swiftly put an end to the search. Long into the night, they sat by the fire shouting and shooting their rifles to guide the other back to the camp.

"Either he's lost in the thicket or he's chosen to disappear for his own purposes," Vilak grunted. "Almost certainly the latter, for he's one of the few men I've met who really know the jungle. However, we'll look in the morning."

At daylight they renewed their efforts until Vilak decided that they could afford to look no longer. They pushed on. The next day the jungle began to lessen perceptibly. The trees became fewer and smaller, the trail they were following became a narrow but well-beaten path. Soon the jungle was behind them, and they were on a wide rocky plateau covered here and there with dwarfed palm-trees with leaves like knives, or patches of spiny cactus and thickets of thistles and thorns. Great vulture-like carranchos circled in the sky, hopefully searching for some dying bush-deer which would soon provide them with a sumptuous meal; tiny gossamer spiders drifted everywhere on their fine webs. Mountains showed dimly in the distance. The trail led toward them.

They pitched camp on a wide red rock which formed part of a low bluff rising from the plain, delighted to be in the open once more. Two days later the mountains were much nearer. With a little straining of their eyes they could now distinguish the different peaks and ranges, all of the same brilliant red which had characterized the rock about Porto Verde.

Some were short and jagged, resembling great red icicles; others were long and rolling like huge dunes of vermillion sand. Over the highest, cone-shaped and looking rather like the upper half of an enormous pear, drifted a thin black cloud.

"Looks like an extinct volcano," said Vilak, pointing to it. "This whole western part of the continent is volcanic. Undoubtedly why they have so many earthquakes. This one doesn't look as if it compared in size with Chimborazo, but it must have been a good one in its day."

Another day and a half brought them to the foothills. The trail dropped sharply into a long mountain-girded valley which led like a highway built by giants to the great red heap in the distance. It was practically treeless, except for a few bare outcroppings of rock being almost entirely covered by continuous matted stretches of cactus and the other thorny plants which occurred on the plateau. Swarms of purple butterflis drifted lazily over the tops of the green vegetation. Here, too, carranchos wheeled lazily in the sky.

"This is obviously the devil valley Bagarundi warned us of," Vilak grunted as he stood on a high rock and looked down on the wide vista spread before him. 'And that extinct volcano is undoubtedly the red mountain." He took some betel. "We'll know in a little while whether he had any real reason to be afraid. Keep to the centre of the path. Remember that. Keep to the centre of the path. Our lives may depend upon it."

They descended. They had tramped cautiously down the valley for only three or four miles, when Vilak noticed that the carranchos over them had suddenly ceased their listless flying and were concentrating over a spot in the road about half a mile ahead.

He quickened his pace. In a few moments he had reached a rocky outcrop a few feet higher than the general level of the path. He stopped short. Ten yards ahead was a circle of fifteen or twenty carranchos, all motionless, silent, patiently watching an obect which lay in the middle of the road.

The object was a man. He was on his back, his legs and his single arm at rigid angles with his lean body. Vilak saw a velvet jacket bright with brass buttons. He did not need to look at the swarthy cheeks or the mouth, where four teeth had been broken off as though by a crowbar.

It was Detto Cicerone. He lay as dead, though there was no outward sign of a wound or bruise on his small body. Only his eyes seemed alive, drawn and gleaming with anguish like the eyes of the faithful Tony Barbetta as he lay dying on the road to Porto Verde weeks before.

(To be continued.)

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ISSUE No. 32—'30

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Little eyes that seem to see
  Everything that's round about;
Little mind that seems to be
  Bound to ferret wisdom out;
Little ears that seem to hold
  Every curious word we say.
For a child just eight years old
  You've a most surprising way.

Must you carry all you've heard
  Back and forth where'er you go?
Does an unfamiliar word
  Start the wish in you to know
All about it, that you pry
  Into hidden meanings deep?
Do you never shut an eye
  Only when you fall asleep?

You astound us now and then
  By the things you do and say,
And we often wonder when
  Fell such wisdom in your way.
But the mother says to me,
  It is plain, beyond a doubt,
We must very careful be
  When that busy mind's about.

Oh, there's much in life to learn,
  Little eyes and little ears.
Time shall teach you in your turn
  All the reasons for our fears.
And for you I make this prayer:
  Through the years which are to be
That but lovely things and fair
  Will you ever hear and see.

—Edgar A. Guest.

Out of His Element

A wealthy Irishman was proud of the opportunity to "show off" on the occasion of a visit to London of one of his compatriots. To dazzle him he invited him to dine at a fashionable restaurant.

"Now, me bhoy," he said, "just you follow my lead, and I'll order everything of the best."

Seated at table the host led off with—"Waiter, a couple of cocktails."

His friend gave himself away, however, when he whispered, audibly, "Waiter, if ye don't moind, I'd rather have a wing."

Fines imposed for motoring offences in England and Wales during 1929 totalled $1,006,575.—Tit-Bits.

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"SALADA" TEA

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Spends Ten Months On Cannibal Isle

Woman Anthropologist Visits Savage Tribe Alone

New York.—A simple civilization where divorces are granted merely by a refund of the dowry, where women have already gained equality with through magic spells and where no be-men, where courting is accomplished lief in any sort of a deity exists, was described by Dr. Hortense Powdermaker, who has just returned to this country after a ten-months' stay among the formerly cannibalistic Melanesians.

Dr. Powdermaker, a graduate of Goucher College and a Ph.D. from the University of London, single-handed constituted the first anthropological expedition to study the people on the island of New Ireland, a long, narrow strip of land off Australia in the mandated territory of New Guinea and a part of the Bismarck Archipelago.

Cannibalism has completely died out among the Melanesians, Dr. Powdermaker discovered, as a result of the discontinuance of tribal warfare ordered by white officials of the territory. The middle-aged and the old can still remember the cannibalistic days, however, and still smack their lips when recalling the dear old days when human flesh was a delicacy never to be forgotten.

The natives never ate anyone except their enemies, Dr. Powdermaker said, explaining that she became so friendly with them after she had picked up a few words of their language that she is quite certain the thought of devouring her never entered their heads.

Paint Hair White

Dr. Powdermaker landed in the little village in the south of New Ireland in April, 1929, being met at the landing by the entire village population of 270 inhabitants. They stared at her constantly, and the only way she at first made friends was by fondling the babies.

A thatched-roof two-room house with a floor off the ground—a Melanesian luxury of no small proportions—was built for her and there with the aid of two servants and a $50 supply of tobacco with which she regaled the natives, she maintained one of the most important establishments of the surrounding territory.

A simple wash dress of bright red and white made her the cynosure of all eyes at the high feasts. A native woman casually announced one day that she had adopted her and sent her a gift. The women paint their coal black hair white for ordinary wear, but on special occasions change it to blue and red.

A young gallant about town will paint a yellow ring around his left eye, and the women will gladly wear decorations in their hair, but not on their bodies. A simple loin-cloth constitutes their only wearing apparel.

There are any number of taboos, one of the most interesting being that no man is allowed, by tribal tradition, to speak to his mother-in-law, mention her name in public or enter a room which she occupies. If he does so, even inadvertently, he loses his social prestige and is disgraced for life.

Both polygamy and polyandry are practiced in the same village and tribe but not in the same family. While the old men of the village have the supreme say in political affairs, society is matrilineal and matrilcal. The lover asks the mother of his sweetheart for the hand of her daughter and pays her for his wife. He also goes to her house, rather than bringing the bride to his. The wife obtains a divorce by paying back the money.

Currency a Mystery

The local currency is one of the island's mysteries. It consists of disc-shaped shells strung on a special cord a yard long. Five of the units will buy a wife. The currency is made on another island and has been in circulation for about 1,000 years. How it first started no one knows. The only culture of the people consists of carving and dancing. Their music is also very melodious, although their instruments are primitive.

They worship no god or goddess and do not bow down before moon, sun or fire. They believe in the ghosts and spirits of the departed, however, but say no prayers for them. If they have a religion, Dr. Powdermaker said, it is their magic. Their morality does not coincide with ours, but they keep theirs with more strictness.

The World Is Too Much With Us

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for every thing, we are out of tune.

It moves us not—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

—William Wordsworth.

Summer COLDS

Almost everybody knows how Aspirin tablets break up a cold—but why not prevent it? Take a tablet or two when you first feel the cold coming on. Spare yourself the discomfort of a summer cold. Read the proven directions in every package for headaches, pain, etc.

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Costly Neglect

It costs more to neglect our duties than to accomplish them. It costs more to take care of the idle poor, the able pauper, than to se that they are trained in some wise to work, and the means of self-support put before them. It costs more to cure, than to prevent, ten times over.—Anna Dickinson.

Knavery

Cunning leads to knavery; but it is but a step from one to another, and that very slippery; lying only makes the difference; add that to cunning and it is knavery.—Locke.

"Hey," cried the sergeant at rifle practice, "don't you know better than to fire before the range is clear? You just missed me." "I am awfully sorry, sergeant," responded the recruit.

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Househod Hints Re Window Screens

The infallible and unerring way in which a mosquito will discover a hole in a wire screen must evoke admiration even while the unhappy human who neglected to mend it slaps himself black and blue in vain attempts to locate the elusive pest.

The following directions for maintenance and repair are given in "Fix It Yourself; Home Repairs Made Easy," by Arthur Wakeling, home-workshop editor of Popular Science Monthly. We read:

"Nothing so adds to the general appearance of dilapidation as unpainted screen frames and sagging and broken screening, yet these can be remedied with a little work, and almost entirely prevented with a little thought and care.

"When the screens are removed in the fall, gather loose screws, hooks, buttons, and attachments and tie them securely in a piece of canvas. Fasten the bundle to the handle of one of the screen doors.

"See that each screen is marked for ready identification. One way is to cut a Roman numeral in the edge of each screen with a half inch wide chisel and a corresponding numeral on the edge of the window casing opposite where the screen has been marked. Another method is to obtain metallic number tacks, which may be purchased cheaply at any hardware store. Even marking the bottom of each screen with a heavy colored marking crayon will serve as a makeshift.

"When the screens are down, brush them well outdoors. While doing this, note carefully whether any of the screens, if covered with paint or galvanized wire, have a brown or slightly rusty look. These should be placed at one side for painting at the earliest opportunity; the wire may be past service if left until sring.

"Asphaltum varnish thinned with turpentine may be used for painting the wire, or regular black or green screen anamel. Boiled linseed oil with a little turpentine added, together with sufficient lampblack to color it black, is very easy to use, especially if applied with a small piece of close-grained sponge instead of a brush. This mixture can be used on galvanized screening one year, and spar varnish thinned with turpentine can be applied the following year, and so on through the life of the wire. With bronze and copper screening, this labor is saved."

Now to come to the important paragraphs on mending holes:

"If any tears or holes are seen, they may be repaired by sewing a neat patch through and through with a piece of the screen wire.

"Usually it is impossible to repair a 'run' or tear along the line of tacks. In such a case, even if the wire is otherwise in good condition, it is best to put on new wire.

"To remove old wire, take off the molding covering the tacks, put out a few tacks at one corner only, hold down the frame firmly with the left hand, and catching hold of the loosened wire at the corner, give a sharp upward pull. The entire piece of netting will come off. Remove all remaining tacks. Lay the new piece of wire on the frame, and fasten with new tacks.

"The lower panel of a screen door may be filled with a thin board, or a wall-board panel can be set in with strips of wood to resist the onslaught of children, dogs, and cats. A handpiece 3/4 by 3 inches fastened from stile to stile, about 4 feet 6 inches from the floor, will reduce the damage done by careless persons who push against the wire netting, which soon pulls the wire from its fastenings.

"Temporary screens, as for a camp, may be made by cutting woven cloth screen about 6 inches larger each way than the opening between the casings of the window to be screened. Wind the edges around 3/8 by 3/8 inch strips of wood of a length to fit loosely in the opening, and drive small brads through the strips into the edge of the window casing."

Only His Pride

Benn had taken a cottage in the country and, owing to the bad state of the roads, he decided to sell his car and buy a horse on the hire-purchase system.

A week following his purchase of the animal he arrived at his dealer's stables.

"How do you like the horse?" asked the latter.

"He's all right," Benn returned. "There's just one small thing I don't like about him, however."

"Oh, and what's that?" inquired the dealer.

"He won't lift up his head," Benn explained.

The dealer nodded in return.

"That's only his pride," he murmured. "He will when he's paid for."—Answers.

Pat called upon his friend, Mike, and found him sitting in his shed with the much-mended inner tube of his bicycle wheel over his knee. "Puncture, Mike?" he asked sympathetically. The other shook his head. "Then why are you covering the tube with all those patches?" inquired Pat wonderingly. "Well, ye see," explained Mike, "when I do get a puncture it'll be all ready mended and all."

What piece of china are plays ball? —Pitcher.

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