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Jungle Breath

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By Ben Lucien Burrows

THIS HAS HAPPENED

Attempts have been made on the life of Elise Marberry, an American girl owing considerable property near the little town of Porto Verde, in west central Brazil. Several mysterious deaths have occurred, but so far she has escaped harm, due to the shrewdness of her cousin and protector, Vilak, a curious mixture of American and Oriental blood and a student of criminology.

Vilak has been trying to persuade Elise to leave Porto Verde, letting him stay behind with his friend, Lincoln Nunnally, an elderly American chemist, to solve the mystery. She finally agrees, but her departure is prevented by threat of floods. Messengers ride through the countryside warning the natives. Vilak suggests they go to the house of Gaylord Prentiss, a recluse and a forbidding man and an enemy of Elise's, whom she suspects of a knowledge of the conspiracy against her. Nevertheless, she agrees it is their duty to warn him.

Vilak learns the flood warning is a ruse to get Prentiss out of his house and so informs him. The party is besieged by an armed force in a stone tower next to Prentiss' house. Vilak disperses the enemy by dynamiting a dam and causing a real flood. When the water recedes they discover Prentiss is gone.

The next day, Tinky, Elise's two-year-old orphaned nephew, is kidnapped for the second time. A native reports Prentiss has been seen with a baby. The trail leads into the jungle and Vilak makes preparations for a long journey in pursuit. With native trackers, they take up the trail. Calamity overtakes them. Two of their reliable natives are hurt and two of their white friends are fever victims. They are left with a friendly tribe. Theachery exists in their ranks.

After several days they emerge from the jungle and come upon a dying white man whom they had known in Porto Verde.

NOW BEGIN THE STORY

CHAPTER XXXVIII

With the aid of his two companions, who had come running up, Vilak, as he had done on the occasion of Barbetta's death, began to raise and lower the stricken man's arms in an attempt to bring air and thus oxygen to his paralyzed body. He had scarcely begun when a sudden dullness in the other's eyes told him that a further effort would be useless. Cerebrum was dead.

"Must have been lying there a day at least, poor devil," Vilak murmured. "Can tell that by the amount of dust that's collected on the under part of his clothing. Good thing these birds are only carrion-eaters, or he would have suffered worse than he did." He carried the body to the side of the road and began heaping stones on it to protect it from the carrachos

which at first seemed to look at him reproachfully as children might when some coveted prize was snatched from them, then began to flap about his head, screaming angrily. He beat them off, and proceeded down the road.

A few hundred yards away, he halted at a low rock which prevented his looking it before. He came upon what at first appeared to be another body but on closer inspection proved to be a skeleton clad in fragments of blue trousers and orange peasant blouse. A great straw sombrero, gaily decorated, lay near the shinning skull. A glance at a few stray papers in the trousers' pockets confirmed what Vilak already knew: this was the skeleton of Detto's friend and constant companion, Pasquale Branza of the patched cheek and enormous Adam's apple.

"Undoubtedly was stricken at the same time as Cleonore," Vilak muttered. "Only Detto had more resistance and lasted longer. The birds and ants have made quick work of him, poor wretch."

Shortly before sunset they passed the ruins of a small temple resting on a ledge of volcanic rock above them. The roof had long since disappeared. Half of the red pillars had collapsed and many of the stones tumbled to the road below, but enough of the building remained to show that it had been patterned after those magnificent Inca temples ruthlessly destroyed by the Spaniards under Pizarro, and whose ruins of great stones flatter together so expertly that no mortal was needed, still amaze the visitor to Bolivia or Peru. Three narrow doorways shaped, Inca fashion, like the head of an ax, were all that remained of the red facade; a few hundred feet away, facing these, was a crescent of tall, white stones.

A mile farther on they pitched their camp. At low spring tides a noisy nearby. Vilak shot a small brownish animal much resembling an opossum. They ate, then he took out a notebook and began studying a small calendar at the back.

"If my theory's correct, we ought to reach our journey's end quickly. Very quickly. And have news of Tinky. He gazed at his cousin, who was listlessly laying down rows of cards on the sand before a crackling fire. He took her delicate hand and pressed it in his steely fingers. "I hate like the devil to say this to you. But I think I ought to. It's taken us much longer to get here than I expected. I'm hoping that everything will still work out all right. But there's a chance it won't. Our news may be—bad news."

Her red lips grew taut; then she put her arms around his gaunt neck, and with her head against his breast, began to weep silently. He spoke to her soothingly. After some moments she mastered her grief. Mechanically, dully, she played a few hands of

Canfield, which Vilak permitted her to win, they lay down on a heap of grass to sleep.

When they stopped for a hasty lunch next day, they were only three or four miles from the mountain. Half a mile farther on, a high crumbling cylinder of stone, capped at the top like a mushroom, overlooked the road. As they neared it, they saw on the ground beneath a solitary carrancho watching a white-clad form crawling slowly toward the mountain. Vilak broke into a run. He caught up with the creeping figure. It staggered slowly to its feet.

It was Limey Potts. His hard, brutal face and the front of his dirty blouse were covered with dirt of the road; his hair hung tangled and unkempt over his forehead. The movements of his bulky body came in quick wooden jerks, like the movements of an automaton; his eyes were gleaming with the same feverish intensity which had marked the eyes of Tony Barbetta and Detto Cleonore. He stared stupidly at Vilak. "Uhh—Mister Davis—What yer don't here?—What yer—doin'—Doin' fool—you—come here—like me—Doin' fool—They'll get yer—Get—He toppled and fell to the road, dead.

Once more the travelers heaped up a few stones, then hastened on. They passed another hot spring, then reached the foot of the mountain. The path became a road which led gradually up its steep red side.

They passed another mushroom-like watch-tower. The road turned sharply. They climbed a low rock and looked beyond. Stretching along the horizon as far as the eye could see was desert, white, black, bare of tree or bush, except a few green cactus plants sparkling like emeralds. Directly below them, the mountain on which they stood became a wide plateau which dropped sharply to the desert. On this plateau was a city.

It was not a large city, occupying no more ground perhaps than the average American town of six or seven thousand inhabitants; but to the travelers who saw it in its entirety and in the course of weeks had seen only the rush lutes of one hunting village, it seemed a metropolis.

Three sets of ruined stone walls completely encircled it. The inner wall, which was the highest and in the best state of preservation, rising thirty or forty feet above the plateau. Within this, at the end nearest the travelers, was a long stone structure pierced with many as-like doorways; this, too, like the walls, was partly in ruins.

Some distance behind was a great stone figure. In front of it a fire was burning. Behind it were two shafts of stone, then another building. These were the only erections on the mound, the only structures of any size in the city. Everywhere else was nothing but small stone houses, many in ruins, and huts of adobe or rushes.

All the buildings were rooted with straw. Men and women, pigmies in the distance, were walking

in the narrow streets. "Inca ruins there, all right," Vilak grunted. "Very much like those I've seen in Ecuador. Somehow don't look quite right, though, even at this distance. Looks as if something's been done to them fairly recently."

They resumed their march. They passed a third hot spring, then a small geyser spouting vigorously a few feet into the air. The road turned again and began going through a deep ravine. The travelers could see tiny puffs of smoke issuing out of a crevice in the slope far above them. They walked in the ravine a few moments. Vilak halted.

"Don't like the looks of this at all," he muttered to the old man. "That smoke, what is it, is this geyser, and these hot springs are obvious signs of subterranean activity. In an old volcanic region like this, it's pretty apt to mean sulphur-dioxide and a few other pleasant, poisonous gases. There's not a leaf or blade of grass here. Everything's been killed off. Looks as if things had tried to grow but were destroyed before they had a chance. Doesn't it look that way to you?"

The chemist nodded eagerly. "Quite—er—likely to be—er—sulphur gases here. Almost certain—er—certain. Sulphur in any volcanic region. Even in water."

Vilak scraped his finger nail thoughtfully along the rock wall which rose redly on both sides of them. "This ravine's a natural channel. If there are any gases coming out anywhere above us, it would be nothing for someone from the city we've just seen and who's watching up on the mountains, to shift a couple of stones and let the gases drift down here whenever he felt like it. Make the city absolutely immune from attack. Might very well be that which has given the mountain its sinister reputation, particularly since the nice thing about some of these gases is that you can't either see or smell them."

"Frankly, I'm quite skeptical about this spot. If we weren't probably as near one end as the other, I'd be strongly inclined to turn back and try to find some other way."

He began quickly walking forward again, the end of his long, hooked nose quivering as he carefully sniffed the air. He had been walking for perhaps three or four minutes when he felt his nostrils tingle as though they had been touched with some invisible acid. "Run!" he shouted to his companions, and turning swiftly to see that they had heeded, began darting toward the end of the ravine, now only two or three hundred yards away.

The sting in his nostrils increased in its fiery intensity. With reeling brain, he turned again, to see Elise fall stonily to the road. He turned back, reached her, stooped, and with ever-wakening muscles, caught her up. He started on again. Dimly, as though in a dense equatorial mist, he saw Nunnally, who was now ten or twelve feet ahead of him, stagger and crumple in a heap. As Vilak reached the spot, he

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drowsily tried to raise the body of his cousin to his shoulders that his arms might be free to drag the old man to safety. But his dulled muscles would not obey. The mist encircling his leader's brain seemed to grow thicker, blacker; his burden slipped from his arms. He stretched out his hands heavily, darkness, then slumped against the red ground.

(To Be Continued)

KILLS TWO COUGARS

Two cougars have been killed during the past ten days by Arthur Smith, who resides about 10 miles east of Oakland. The animals were in the High Point vicinity and apparently had come down from Mount Scott. The first one, a big male, was killed about ten days ago and the other, a female, was treed and killed yesterday.

What unseen force is at work against Vilak and his friends? In the next chapter there is a strange awakening.

Leave for Diamond Lake—Mr. and Mrs. Iain D. Stephens left this morning for Diamond Lake to enjoy a short outing.

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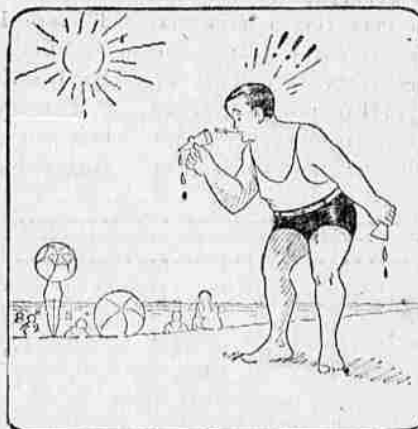
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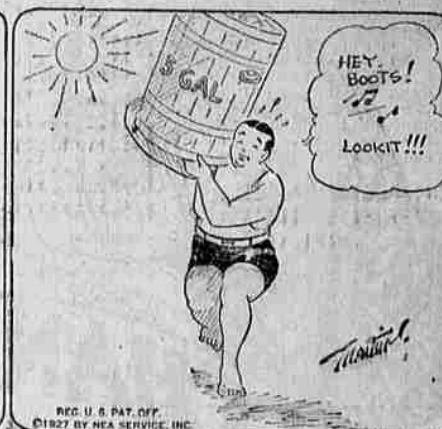
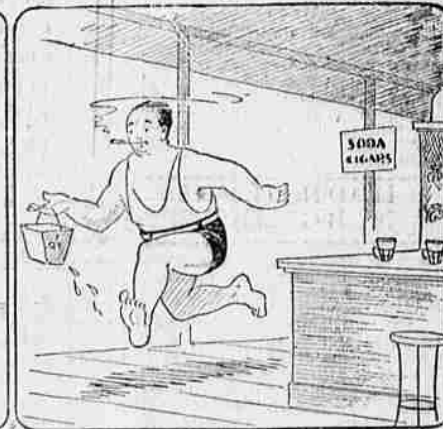
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MISCELLANEOUS

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FARM NEWS

State Market Agent's Letter
(By Seymour Jones)

"Tremendous losses to prune growers of Oregon and Clark county, Washington, would be averted if business men and growers would demand that packers would immediately work together in stabilizing the price," says R. H. Kipp of the Portland Chamber of Commerce. Losses on this year's crop are imminent because the proclaimed protected prune marketing organization which it was hoped would function during the sale of this crop will not get under way until next year. A drop of a single cent a pound means a loss of \$600,000 to the growers of the district, says Mr. Kipp. "Packers can't agree on a price for prunes, or enter into a combination; that would be illegal," said Kipp. "But they can agree to notify a third party at any time they may think it advisable to lower the price. The third party would notify other packers. That arrangement would be almost identical to one recommended a year ago. What the business men and growers could do is this: They could get together and bring pressure to bear upon the packers in an industrial way to make the packers realize that they must give consideration to the views of others."

The World's Wheat Crop

The latest crop estimates place the wheat yield of Oregon at about 23,000,000 bushels and of the three states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho at 100,000,000 bushels. The estimate for all of North America is 1,199,000,000, which is 58,000,000 bushels less than the yield of 1926. For Europe, except Russia, 1,277,000,000 bushels, against 1,211,000,000 last year; in North Africa 88,000,000, against 90,000,000 in 1926, and in Asia 368,000,000, against 363,000,000 last year.

Some Portland Markets

In Portland markets, pork is firm, dressed hogs selling at 15 to 16 cents; veal is weak; cattle came in large numbers for Monday and buyers had the upper hand, causing a sharp decline in prices; eggs are still advancing, now 22 to 25 cents; butter firm; wool 24 to 32 cents; mohair 35 to 50 cents.

A Few Cherries

Eighty-nine carloads of black cherries shipped from Salem is the record for this season, and in the meantime eight carmen were handling all the Royal Anns and other varieties that their capacity would permit.

Berry Harvest Satisfactory

Lebanon reports the berry harvest concluded and a very satisfactory one for the growers. The season's pack at Lebanon was close to three million pounds.

Hot Winds Hurtful

The Condon Globe-Times of the 22nd stated that the estimate of wheat yield for Gilliam county had been reduced 300,000 bushels by hot winds during the early days of last week. The total now expected, however, is 1,200,000 bushels. Unatilla county expects seven million bushels of wheat this year of exceptionally fine quality, and other counties of the wheat belt will have similar yields.

Market a Little Shaky

The wheat market is a little shaky, with slight reduction in quotations. In Manitoba and part of Saskatchewan both red and black rust have appeared, with what resulting damage not yet determined.

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