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HAMILTON - ONTARIO

The Yellow God

Continued from page 15)

"Of course it was a mistake, Vernon, for I suppose it is Vernon," said Aylward, as he rose. "I do not wonder that your servant is angry, but the truth is that your sudden appearance frightened me out of my wits and I fired automatically. We have been living in some danger here and my nerves are not as strong as they used to be."

"Indeed," answered Alan. "No, Jeeki will carry the rifle for you; yes, and I think that pistol also, every ounce makes a difference walking in a hot climate, and I remember that you always were dangerous with firearms. There, you will be more comfortable so. And now, who do you mean by 'we'?"

"I mean Barbara and myself," he answered slowly.

Alan's jaw dropped; he shook upon his feet.

"Barbara and yourself!" he said. "Do I understand—"

"Don't you understand nothing, Major," broke in Jeeki. "Don't you believe one word what this pig-dog say. If Miss Barbara marry him he no want shoot you; he ask you to tea to see the Missus and how much she love him, ducky! We just go on and call on Miss Barbara and hear the news. Walk up, Sir Robert Aylward, Bart., and show us which way."

"I do not choose to receive you and your impertinent servant at my camp," said Aylward.

"We quite understand that, Sir Robert Aylward,"

"Lord Aylward, if you please, Major Vernon."

"I beg your pardon—Lord Aylward. I was aware of the contemplated purchase of that title, I did not know that it had been completed. I was about to add that all the same we mean to go to that camp, and that if any violence towards us is attempted as we approach it, you will remember that you are in our hands."

"Yes, my lord," added Jeeki, bowing, "and that monkeys don't tell no tales, my lord, and that here there aint no twelve good-trues to sit on noble corpse unhappily deceased, my lord, and to bring in verdict of done to death lawful or unlawful, according as evidence may show when got, my lord. So march on, for we no breakfast yet. No, not that way, round here to left, where I think I hear kettle sing."

So having no choice Aylward came, marching between the other two and saying nothing. When they had gone a couple of hundred yards Alan also heard something, and to him it sounded like a man crying out in pain. Then suddenly they passed round some great trees and reached a glade in the forest where there was a spring of water which Alan remembered. In this glade the camp had been built, surrounded by a "boma," or palisade of rough wood, within which stood two tents and some native shelters made of tall grass and boughs. Outside of this camp a curious and unpleasant scene was in progress.

To a tall tree that grew there was tied a man, who from the fashion of his hair Alan knew to belong to the Coast negroes, while two great fellows, evidently of another tribe, flogged him unmercifully with hide whips.

"Ah," exclaimed Jeeki, "that the kettle what I hear sing. Think you better take him off fire, my lord, or he boil over. Also his brothers no seem to like that music," and he pointed to a number of other men who were standing round watching the scene with sullen dissatisfaction.

"A matter of camp discipline," muttered Aylward. "This man has disobeyed orders."

By now Jeeki was shouting something to the natives in an unknown tongue which they seemed to understand well enough. At any rate the flogging ceased, the two fellows who were inflicting it slunk away and the other men ran towards them, shouting back as they came.

"All right, Major. You please stop here one minute with my lord, late Bart., of Bloody Hand. Some of these chaps friends of mine. I meet them Old Calabar while we get ready to march last rains. Now I have little talk with them and find out thing or two."

Aylward began to bluster about interference with his servants and so forth. Jeeki turned on him with a very ugly grin and showing his white teeth, as was his fashion when he grew fierce.

"Beg pardon, right honourable lord," he said, or rather snarled, "you do what I tell you, just to please Jeeki. Jeeki no one in England, but Jeeki dam big lord, too, out here, great medicine man, pal of Little Bonga. You remember Little Bonga, eh! These chaps think it great honour to meet Jeeki, so, Major, if he stir, please shoot him through head; Jeeki 'sponsible, not you. Or if you not like do it, I come back and see to job myself, and don't think those fellows cry very much."

There was something about Jeeki's manner that frightened Aylward, who understood for the first time that beneath all the negro's grotesque talk lay some dreadful iron purpose. At any rate he halted with Alan, who stood beside him, the revolver of which Aylward had been relieved by Jeeki, in his hand. Meanwhile Jeeki, who held the rifle which he reloaded, went on and met the natives about twenty yards away.

"We always disliked each other, Vernon, but I must say that I never thought a time would come when you proposed to murder me in my own camp," said Aylward.

"Odd thing," answered Alan, "but a very similar idea was in my mind. I never thought, Lord Aylward, that however unscrupulous you might be—financially—a time could come when you would attempt to shoot down an unarmed man in an African forest. Oh! don't waste breath in lying. I saw you recognise me, aim, and fire, after which Jeeki would have had the other barrel, and who then would have remained to tell the story, Lord Aylward?"

Aylward made no answer, but Alan felt that if wishes could kill him he would not live long. His eye fell upon a long, unmistakable mound of fresh earth, beneath a tree. He calculated its length, and with a thrill of terror noticed that it was too small for a negro.

"Who is buried there?" he asked. "Find out for yourself," was the sneering answer.

"Don't be afraid, Lord Aylward, I shall find out everything in time."

The conversation between Jeeki and the natives proceeded; their heads were close together, it grew animated. They seemed to be coming to some decision. Presently one of them ran and cut the lashings of the man who had been bound to the tree, and he staggered towards them and joined in the talk, pointing to his wounds. Then the two fellows who had been engaged in flogging him, accompanied by eight companions of the same type—they appeared to be soldiers, for they carried guns—swaggered towards the group who were being addressed by Jeeki, of whom Alan counted twenty-three. As they approached Jeeki made some suggestion which, after one hesitating moment, the others seemed to accept, for they nodded their heads and separated out a little.

(To be continued.)



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