

The Young Women

THE GREAT GRAB

By Margaret T. Applegarth

There never was a "grab" like it in the history of man. It was unbelievable! It was staggering! It was amusing! It was depressing! It was devastating! Yet, if the Man himself had not said that the grab could take place, it would never have occurred; at least, not on such an overwhelming scale. One by one, perhaps, the things might have disappeared just as they had been disappearing for four years—black feet would tiptoe secretly into the hut, and black hands would close covetously on a much-envied object: but that was theft, and everyone knew it; whereas this other greater grab the Man himself permitted—oh, it was unbelievable—staggering—amusing—. How people laughed! Long and low and guttural, at first; then in high glee. The little stars winked down in sheer surprise. Had such very special laughing ever risen from that jungle village in all the history of man? Never! Never!

You will be wanting to know all about it, for there is wonder in it, and dismay, and glee, and a happy ending. Moreover, every bit of it actually happened to the actual Man.

When he first came, he was better than a circus would be to you. Speaking very reverently of him, it is still true that he was like a continuous side show to the people in that village on the Congo.

"What a lot of trouble he is to himself!" everybody thought, for he was surrounded by the most peculiar set of objects. Not a person in that village could guess what anything was. Surely this man was foolish above all men, for he took a little stick with stiff bristles on one end, and with these bristles and some water, he scrubbed his teeth. So silly of him! The very babies gurgled over such absurdity.

"He must be very proud of his teeth!" people chuckled, nudging one another. But by and by it was whispered in awe: "He has gold teeth. Not all. But some!"

Now nobody in all that tribe had ever had a gold tooth. People stopped laughing at the stick-with-bristles. They accepted it as necessary for the proper respect due to precious gold teeth. But although they accepted the

toothbrush, there were still the hundred and one other queer belongings. For instance, he sat on specially-prepared pieces of wood, raised up in the air on legs.

"As if the ground weren't made to be sat on," people said, their eyebrows raised.

"It is those tight pieces of cloth he puts his legs into! Can a man sit just *anywhere* when his body is sheathed in such stuff as he wears?"

In fact, his clothes caused talk for a whole year. Shoes, for instance. What atrocities they were! Why should any sensible mortal want to wedge five toes into one big round leather toe so stiff and tight and airless.

The only possible answer was: his feet are white. White feet must be very soft and tender. White bodies must be very sensitive, they evidently needed all sorts of nonsensical things: clothes, peculiar sticks of wood to sleep on—for a bed was the prize surprise, there was so much trouble to it! The funny legs, the queer mattress, the punchable pillows, the white sheets. All absolutely unbelievable, except, of course, that one could see and feel and handle with one's own eyes and hands. Or even steal these unbelievable things, when fortunate enough to succeed.

Here then was a man who was a great deal of trouble to himself. But otherwise quite harmless. He seemed to have come to live among them forever. Also, he seemed to have no other purpose than to talk.

Well, talk was a good thing. There was always plenty of time to sit in circles around him on the ground and let him talk. But their eyes were busy with his belongings. So that for a long time his talk went in one ear and out the other. They would interrupt him frequently with their deep questions:

"Are you really white all over?"

"Can a man grow gold teeth?"

All this time the Man talked. It was good talking. About someone called God-the-Father. It took four years to tell them over and over how God-the-Father said: "Don't do this!" and "Don't do that!" They always nodded their black heads at the appropriate times: yes, this was a good talking. Yes, this was a wise talking. Yes, they had no doubt that it