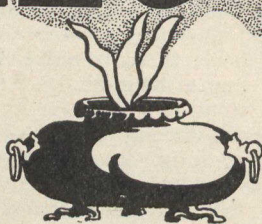


THE

YELLOW GOD

BY

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AUTHOR OF "SHE".

"KING SOLOMON'S MINES."

"THE WITCH'S HEAD", ETC.

Resume: Major Alan Vernon withdraws from partnership with Sir Robert Aylward and Mr. Champers-Haswell, promoters of Sahara, Limited, because the editor of "The Judge" has informed him of the company's dishonorable methods. Vernon refuses to sell to Sir Robert a curious idol which has been a feature of the office for over a year, and which seems to have a talismanic quality. Vernon spends the week-end at "The Court," Mr. Champers-Haswell's home, and while there Jeeki, the negro servant, tells the story of the idol, the "Yellow God," which was brought from Africa. Miss Barbara Champers, the niece of the host, is the object of Sir Robert Aylward's and also Major Vernon's devotion. Alan finally wins Barbara's promise to become his wife but their engagement is to be kept secret. Sir Robert becomes Alan's bitter enemy on learning of the betrothal.

CHAPTER VII.

JEKI EXPLAINS.



PROCEED, Jeeki," said Alan, removing the whiskey bottle, "proceed and explain."

"Major, thus: The Asiki tribe care nothing about all that gold, it no good to them. Dead people who live long, long ago, no one know when, dig it up and store it there and make the great fetish which they call Bonsa to keep away enemy who

want to steal. Also old custom when any one in country round find big nugget, or pretty stone, like ladies wear on bosom, to bring it as offering to Bonsa, so that there now great plenty of all this stuff. But no one use it for anything except to set on walls of house of Asiki, or to make basin, stool, table, and pot to cook with. Once an Arab come there and I see the priests give him weight in gold for iron hoe, though afterwards they murder him, not for the gold, but lest he go away and tell their secret."

"One might trade with them then, Jeeki?"

"Yes, perhaps, if you find anything they want buy and can carry it there, but I think there only one thing they want, and you got that, Major."

"I, Jeeki! What have I got?"

"You got Little Bonsa, which more holy than anything, even than Big Bonsa, her husband, I mean greater, more powerful devil. That Little Bonsa sit in front room Asiki's house, and when she want see things, she put it in big basin of gold, but I no tell you what it float in. Also once or twice every year they take out Little Bonsa; Asiki wear it on head as mask, and whoever they meet they kill as offering to Little Bonsa, that spirit come back to world to be priest of Bonsa. I tell you, Major, that Yellow God see thousand of people die."

"Indeed," said Alan. "A pleasing fetish truly. I should think that the Asiki must be glad it is gone."

"No, not glad, very sorry. No luck for them when Little Bonsa go away, but plenty luck for those who got her. That why firm Aylward and Haswell make so much money when you join them and bring her to office. She drop green in eye of public so they no smell rat. That why you so lucky, not die of blackwater fever when you should; get safe out of den of thieves in city with good name; win love of sweet maiden, Miss Barbara. Little Bonsa do all those things for you, and by and by do plenty more, as Little Bonsa bring my old master, your holy uncle, safe out of that country because all the Asiki run

away when they see him wear her on head, for they think she come sacrifice them after she eat up my life."

"I don't wonder that they ran," said Alan, laughing, for the vision of a missionary with Little Bonsa on his head caught his fancy. "But come to the point, you old heathen. What do you mean that I should do?"

"Jeeki not heathen, Major, but plenty other things true in this world, besides Christian religion. I no want you do anything, but I say this—you go back to Asiki wearing Little Bonsa on head and dressed like reverend uncle whom you very like, for he just your age then thirty years ago, and they give you all the gold you want, if you give them back Little Bonsa, whom they love and worship for ever and ever, for Little Bonsa very very old."

Alan sat up in his chair and stared at Jeeki, while Jeeki nodded his head at him.

"There is something in it," he said slowly, speaking more to himself than to the negro, "and perhaps that is why I would not sell the fetish, for as you say, there are plenty of true things in the world besides those which we believe. But, Jeeki, how should I find the way?"

"No trouble, Major, Little Bonsa find way, want to get back home, very hungry by now, much need sacrifice. Think it good thing kill pig to Little Bonsa—or even lamb. She know you do your best, since human being not to be come at in Christian land, and say 'thank you for life of pig.'"

"Stop that rubbish," said Alan. "I want a guide; if I go, will you come with me?"

At this suggestion the negro looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Not like to, not like to at all," he said, rolling his eyes. "Asikiland very funny place for native-born. But," he added sadly, "if you go I must, for I servant of Little Bonsa, and if I stay behind, she angry and kill me because I not attend her where she walk. But perhaps if I go and take her to Gold House again she pleased and let me off. Also I able help you there. Yes, if you take lot kill her."

After this announcement Jeeki rose and walked down the room, carrying the cold mutton in his hand. Then he returned, replaced it on the table, and, standing in front of Alan, said earnestly:

"Major, I tell you all truth, just this once. Jeeki think he got go with you to Asikiland. Jeeki have plenty bad dream lately, Little Bonsa come in middle of the night and sit on his stomach and scratch his face with her gold leg, and say, 'Jeeki, Jeeki, you son of Bonsa, you get up quick and take me back Bonsa Town, for I darned tired of city fog and finished all I come here to do. Now I want jolly good old sacrifice and got plenty business attend to there at home, things you not understand just yet. You take me back sharp, or I make you sit up, Jeeki, my boy,' and he paused.

"Indeed," said Alan, "and did she tell you anything else in her midnight visitations?"

"Yes, Major. She say, 'You take that white master of yours along also, for I want come back Asikiland on his head, and someone wish see him there, old pal what he forget but what not forget him. You tell him Little Bonsa got score she wants settle with that party and wish use him square account. You tell him, too, that she pay him well for trip; he lose nothing if he play her game, 'cause she got no score against him. But if he not go, that 'nother matter, then he look out, for Little Bonsa very nasty customer if she riled, as his late partners find out one day.'"

"Oh, shut up, Jeeki. What's the use of wasting time telling me your nightmares?"

"Very well, Major, just as you like, Major. But

I got other reason why I willing go. Jeeki want see his ma."

"Your ma? I never heard you had a 'Ma.' Besides, she must be dead long ago."

"No, Major, 'cause she turn up in dream, too, very much alive, swear at me 'cause I took her blanket. Also she tough old woman, take lot to kill her."

"Perhaps you have a pa, too," suggested Alan.

"Think not, Major, my ma always say she forget him. What she mean, she not like talk about him, he such a swell. Why Jeeki so strong, so clever, and with such beautiful face? No doubt 'cause he son of very great man. All this true reason why he want go with you, Major. Still, p'raps poor old Jeeki make mistake, p'raps he dream 'cause he eat too much supper, p'raps his ma dead, after all. If so, p'raps better stay at home—not know."

"No," answered Alan, "not know. What between Little Bonsa and one thing and another my head is swimming—like Little Bonsa in the water."

"Big Bonsa swim in water," interrupted Jeeki. "Little Bonsa swim in gold tub."

"Well, Big Bonsa, or Little Bonsa, I don't care which. I'm going to bed, and you had better clear away these things and do the same. But, Jeeki, if you say a word of our talk to anyone, I shall be very angry. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Major. I understand. I understand that if I tell secrets of Little Bonsa to anyone except you with whom she live in strange land away from home, Little Bonsa come at me like lion, and cut my throat. No fear Jeeki split on Little Bonsa, no fear at all," and still shaking his head solemnly for the second time, he seized the cold mutton and vanished from the room.

"A farrago of superstitious nonsense," thought Alan to himself when he had gone. "But still, there may be something to be made out of it. Evidently there is lots of gold in this Asiki country, if only one can persuade the people to deal."

So Alan went to bed, and for a while to sleep, but he did not sleep very long, for presently he fell to dreaming, something about Big Bonsa and Little Bonsa, which sat, or rather floated, on either side of his couch and held an interminable conversation over him, while Jeeki and Sir Robert Aylward, perched respectively at its head and its foot, like the symbols of the good and evil genii on a Mohammedan tomb, acted as a kind of insane chorus.

For an hour or more Alan persevered, then at last in despair jumped out of bed wondering what he could do to occupy his mind. Suddenly he remembered the diary of his uncle, the Rev. Mr. Austin, which he had inherited with the Yellow God and a few other possessions, but never examined. These had been put away in a box in the library about fifteen years before, just at the time he entered the army, and there, doubtless, they remained. Well, as he could not sleep, why should he not examine them now, and thus get through some of this weary night?

He lit a candle and went down to the library, an ancient and beautiful apartment with black oak panelling between the bookcases set there in the time of Elizabeth. In this panelling there were cupboards, and in one of the cupboards was the box he sought made of teak wood. On its lid was painted, "The Reverend Henry Austin, Passenger to Accra," showing that it had once been his uncle's cabin box. The key hung from the handle, and having lit more candles, Alan drew it out and unlocked it, to be greeted by a smell of musty documents done up in great bundles.

At length he came to the end of the bundles and saw that beneath lay a number of manuscript

(Continued on page 24.)