

# Jungle Business

by Gordon MacCreagh, 1886-1953

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WHO calls for Theophilo Da Costa? Who is in trouble now about the upper rivers? Oho, a Senhor Gringo? *Bom*, what can I do for the senhor?

The name is—how? Faraday? Senhor, I desolate myself. You have me in disadvantage. The senhor's illustrious name is no identification to me.

A letter from your son, who says that I have befriended him, and gives the direction for your reply in the care of my name? Alas, Senhor, that the fact is still no identification. I am Theophilo of the upper rivers, and I have befriended many men's sons—and many men's sons, *Deu graças*, have befriended me. Else I should not be here. Perhaps you would be so good, then, to tell me some detail; some little—

A lad, you say, who came to wrest a fortune out of our wilderness? Yes, there have been many such. And he wrote to you to say that he was doing well but that capital was needed to expand his business against the hostility of competitors.

And so you have come to save him from all the manifold dangers of this savage outland of ours that beset him from all sides.

Oho! I know now! Why, that would be none other than the "Pelloroxo—the Red One!" Senhor, it is an honor to me to meet the distinguished father of my friend. But *carramba*, how should we of the upper rivers know that his name might be Faraday or what it might be? Pelloroxo, we called him, the Fire-Head; and what should we know or care besides? For we of the rivers are wanderers of the waterways, standing each man to himself by the things he does. Not like these city people of Manaus who set great store by names and families and by the things their grandfathers have done.

But come with me to a quiet corner, Senhor, where we can talk at ease over our little burnt coffee; and I will give you all the news of this son of yours, whom I have left not so long ago seated behind a tree with a rifle across his knees.

HE came, as you have said, to make a fortune out of the wilderness. Wide-eyed, eager, bustling or, as he boasted it, "hustling," asking innumerable questions about the affairs of everybody and expecting everybody to confide in him with as much friendliness as he in them, and demanding ever to be called by his first name.

But it is foolish of me, Senhor, to describe your own son to you. For these extraordinary peculiarities must have made themselves manifest to you long since.

No? Is it possible then that this is a type in your country? For there have been others; though this one had a talent for evoking hostility. Yet there have been others again who have been whole men—as also your son, Senhor.

Do not mistake. For in the course of time I have deemed him my friend. But it is necessary that I make clear to you how some of these curious ways of his impressed us, the people of Amazonas, in order that you may understand some of the vicissitudes that he brought upon himself.

It is perhaps difficult for you, as it was for him, to realize that he was a foreigner here in a strange city; and that, as such, it behooved him to deport himself circumspectly. But in this matter you *Americanos* are like the *Inglese*s, only not so bad. There was not an action of this lad's that did not jar upon the sensibilities of the residents. Consider, Senhor:

There is no manner of doubt that America of the north is the greatest and most progressive of the Americas. Yet we of the south do not care to have forced upon us the insistent conviction that we are an outlying and a primitive people, and that of all our manners and customs and doings there is not one which is not done better or not done at all in the north.

Yet the lad meant no offense. He spoke only his inborn conviction while conversing with the utmost friendliness. Not a subject was there, but presently he would be able to hold himself no longer and would say, "Well now; in the United States—" And he would proceed to tell all and sundry how much better the thing was done in his country. You understand the irritation, no?

And if his listeners out of courtesy would permit him to continue he would enlarge upon his theme, showing in detail how much better the thing was done in his particular petty township than in all the rest of those United States. A veritable patriotic illness he had.

We of the south have a conception of the north as some forty or so *united* States. Yet this youth divided them into three parts. Those of the two former he spoke with animosity and derision; while some central townlet or other, the name of which nobody had ever heard, he extolled as "God's own country."

I was here in Manaos at the time; and having listened to a two-hour exposition of the excellence of his home town sanitary system as compared with that of Manaos—where it was true we had the yellow fever—I laughed and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"My son," said I, "when the people of this town have driven you from among them; do not lose heart, but come on up to us of the upper rivers; and who knows but that you may be one of the lucky ones for whom fortune waits in this vast Amazonas of ours."

For I said to myself that this lad with his clear eyes and his strong nose and his wide mouth, and with his restless energy, looked to have the makings of a man—if indeed his enthusiasms should outlast the rebuffs which would be his portion here. And the good God knows that this Amazonas of ours needs men to develop its great resources.

But he, he looked at me with a great wonder in his eyes and wanted to know why should the good people of Manaos ever be hostile to him; they were his friends; he liked them and he had no enemies. Yet what could I say? *Meu Deus*, I am no evangelist to explain to youth its shortcomings. So I wished him well and left him, much mystified, to learn in the only school in which youth ever learns, that of experience.

And the first of the lessons came soon enough. In the full publicity of the Teatro Central it occurred. Some foolish picture was showing, depicting the life of your *vaqueiros* in which men rode among cattle and in and out of clapboard villages at a pace never less than a gallop and shot each other with a pistol to each hand.

Now we of the south can never understand this anomaly. How you of the most progressive north can abide such lawlessness at your very doors. And in this matter we think ourselves superior. For in our great plains, where the herds run in their vast thousands, we do not permit murder by the heroic wholesale.

Yet this lad of yours, conversing with a couple of other gringos, his companions, made some remark to the effect that it surprized him, having been in Manaos three months now, not to have witnessed some such exciting lawlessness; and he cited with an amazing twist of pride the number of men killed yearly by pistols in some town or other of yours of equal population to ours.

Whereupon a young hothead of the city sitting behind him, who understood English, as do most of our better class youths, could contain himself no longer; and leaning forward, he tapped the other on the shoulder and demanded with some asperity whether he thought that Manaos City was such a town of pioneer savagery.

You must remember, Senhor, that Manaos City, while situated indeed at the exact verge of civilization, possesses modern electric Ugh ting and water and tramway systems; a ten story brewery; a two-million-dollar opera house with a capacity of four thousand; and a system of floating docks capable of accommodating the largest ocean liners. So the local patriot's indignation can well

be understood. But to his question your lad must needs reply with wonder in his eyes, and somewhat indignant himself at the brusque interruption.

"Why—we, yes. I kinder thought that I'd see some excitement way out here."

Well, *qué carramba*, what happens when youth argues with hot youth? Words make more words; and many words make blows. I have regretted that I was not present to witness that fight. But the tale of it made good telling in the cafés for a week or two.

It began with the interchange of such ineffectual blows as men may deal in the half-dark over the backs of benches, and proceeded then by mutual consent into the passageway between the seats where there was more room. Who struck whom or how hard could not be seen; but in a moment the theater was in an uproar. Women, of course, shrieked—as they do on all occasions, whether of mirth or of fear. Men shouted; some for quiet; some demanding that the belligerents sit down and permit them to see; some calling for lights and the guard.

The fool of an attendant, instead of throwing in the switch, rushed first to separate what he thought might be no more than a little argument. Somebody, whether friend or foe, struck him under the ear, and nobody thereafter seemed to know where the lights might be turned on. The uproar increased. Partisans sprang up from all sides in response to the shouts of our youths and lent impetus to the fray by climbing over the seats to join in.

Your gringos, of course, called for no help, being imbued with your customary arrogant conviction that each one of them could conquer ten foreigners, as you term us in our own country. They fought silently—except that they cursed horribly by the name of God and of the \_\_\_ as they dealt each blow. Yet others must have come to their assistance; for no three could have stood against the mob.

The thing became an international riot; and it gravitated, of course, down the slope of the dim passageway till the combatants surged into the space of the orchestra and beat each other with the instruments of the musicians who, wretched ones, had no means of escape.

In the meanwhile those who struggled to get out at the upper end by the door hampered the *guardia civil* who struggled to get in. So it was not till fifteen minutes had passed that they finally gained entrance; and then, as is always the case when the law arrives, the rioters ducked this way and that and melted away in the dark; and there remained when light was eventually restored only those who were incapacitated for flight.

One of these was your son, who lay with a dark trickle oozing from his fiery hair. With him another gringo, a blond youth who belonged to a respectably established English house of the city. Three of our lads groaned among the wreckage; and—ho-ho! spice was added to the tale when the policemen extracted from among the wires of the piano the Senhor Da Sylvestra, a man of substance and position in the city, who had no right to mix himself up with the brawlings of hot-headed youths.

One result of that affair was an ordinance of the fire guard that all such houses be provided with at least one exit in the rear in addition to the door of entry. The result to your son was what was to be expected. They were taken up, all of them whom the policemen caught, and thrown into the calabouse together to reflect upon their foolishness in disturbing the peace.

LATER, in the course of a couple of days or so, there were fines to be paid before the judge and much anguished running about on the part of your harassed consul to get his countryman, the instigator of it all, off with no worse than a wholesome fine.

The youths, what with comforting each other in the lock-up and helping each other with their hurts—and having acquired a certain respect for the weight of each other's blows—became friends. All except the Da Sylvestra. For he was by way of being a pompous man; the wits of the cafes made sport of his misfortune, inventing many ribald explanations for the manner of his stuffing into the rear of the piano. And what man of conceit will forgive a hurt to his dignity?

For the rest all might have been well for your foolish son, for we of the South, though our own customs are different, do not hold it against your gringos that you are an excitable people and become often boisterous in your behavior. Unlike the Germans and Frenchmen, who are more like ourselves and fall into our customs immediately and with ease.

The city was prepared to look with tolerance upon your Fire-Head. But, *qué louco*, the fool! It was reported of him that the first thought he gave expression to in the *calabouça* was to rejoice that nobody had commenced to fight with pistols. And when asked indignantly whether he thought that our citizens went to their entertainment armed, he said with naive surprise that he thought surely so; and he admitted with a certain bravado that he carried an automatic pistol in a special pocket that was constructed in the rear of all trousers made in the United States.

Senhor, it is just little things like these that rankle. A city that is admittedly on the verge of civilization and which has passed through a period of wild lawlessness during its early building may well develop an extreme sensitiveness about its adherence to law and order. Did not the same spirit rise from time to time among your own pioneer communities, when in their sudden hysteria of virtue they organized committees of vigilance to deal more violently with the breakers of the law than the lawbreakers themselves? You understand the situation, no?

An indication of this was that I found him a few days later in the Café dos Estrangeiros seated at a table, *alone*. Among us it is the custom; when a stranger sits alone, for some one of the residents to approach and request permission to sit while he takes a small coffee or a cigarette, the while he engages the stranger in such small conversation as may come to mind. It is a pleasing little ceremonial indicative of welcome at the hands of the citizens. So it is my observation that when a man sits alone he has given offense. I laughed as I slid into the chair opposite to him and signaled to the *moço* with my two fingers crooked.

"*Com permissão*, Senhor," I said. "We shall drink a little black one together." And observing his glum face, I laughed again and added, "Well, my young friend, you are beginning to learn that not all of these people are your friends, eh?"

He remained silent for a while, sipping moodily and with a wry face at the bitter coffee. Then—"I don't understand you people," he burst out.

I shrugged.

"No?" I asked. "Is it not yet clear to you that you have offended these good citizens in some manner?"

He remained silent again, stabbing at the thick coffee grounds with his little spoon. After a full minute:

"That's just it," he complained. "I have been engaged in a trifle of a brawl; but I do not see what there is to occasion so much of a fuss. The populace looks at me as if I had stolen something. Even those three who were locked up with me seem to have been frightened away." Silence again. Then a burst of youthful confidence. "Why, in my home town there would have been a whole gang of fellows ready to make friends, and my picture would have been in the local paper."

I was forced to laugh once more.

"True," I said. "Here we do not give honor to mere notoriety for its own sake. But you are right. To many of your people it is not given to understand our people. For them it does not matter. They work in somebody's office and they draw a wage; and presently they go home again—or they stay on and die. But you, you have ambitions. Yet you have been here three months and yet you do not understand that it is not on account of a little brawling that people avoid you. You do not grasp the many little, little reasons for your offense."

And he proceeded immediately to give me further proof of the fact by forcing upon me a cigarette out of his own case. In politeness I took and lighted the thing; and doubtless I made as wry a face over it as he over the bitter coffee. A foul tube it was, stuffed with the sweepings of the tobacco factories and tasting like a mixture of all things that burn. Yet he extolled it to the skies with genuine conviction. And for what reason? Listen.

"A million packages are sold every day," he said. And he added as a final proof of excellence, "Made in my own home State. I've brought five thousand with me; and \_\_\_ knows what I shall do when they are gone."

This to me, a native of Brazil, where, while our flavors are strong, we smoke at least pure tobacco. Yet he meant no insult. That sense of superiority of all things that emanated from his own petty corner of the earth was an instinct with him. I rose and left him.

"My son," I said to him. "If that God who shares with you that select little spot in your country where you were born is very good to you, it may be given to you to understand and learn. In the meanwhile remember: When you can give no longer here in Manaus, try once your fortune in the upper rivers before you go back to your heaven. Ask for Theophilo of the upper rivers. It will be a sufficient passport for your safe conduct."

And so I came away upon my own business which took me on that occasion up the Rio Negro and inland into some of the dim, overhung creeks, *igarapes* we call them, which come in above Santa Isabel. Word filtered up to me from time to time about the doings of the Fire-Head; for it had been very swiftly noticed that I had shown a small interest in him; and there were men who worked on the little flat stern-wheel steamer of the *Companha Navigacione*, which came once a month as far as Santa Isabel when the river currents allowed, who were anxious to have my favor.

It appears that he perpetrated no particular enormities. Except that he drove my good friend Vargas, the proprietor of the hotel, to impotent rage by repeating to him upon all occasions the glory of some hotel or other in the north which boasted eight thousand rooms. This barrack, with intimate details of its telegraphs and its

elevators and its valets and its cooks of the European nobility, was thorn enough in the proprietor's side. But its very immensity rendered comparison innocuous.

It was when the incurable patriot began to extol the superior system of the little hotel in his own home town that Vargas at last with gnashing teeth begged him either to desist or to go and find some other hotel where he would have less to criticize. Whereupon the young man with an aggrieved air capped the crime by apologizing profusely and saying that he thought the other would be glad to learn pointers about how an up-to-date, modern hotel was conducted.

What the climax was that finally persuaded him, I do not know. Suffice it that word came to me upon one of my creeks that the steamer of the *Companha* had arrived at Santa Isabel, and upon it a gringo whom the captain would have killed except that he had given it out that he came to seek Theophilo Da Costa.

"Oho!" said I to myself. "This must be none other than my Pelloroxo who, with the very best of intentions has exasperated the *commandante* to the point of murder."

And I took two extra men to my *batelão*, and with eight paddles going I sped down to take charge of this responsibility that I had invited. The steamer was always delayed some five or six days, tied up to the bank at Santa Isabel. For the only thing that paid the return journey was the cargo of *castanha*, which you call Brazil nuts. The company had tried desperately for years to establish a schedule.

But, *dientro*, Senhor, it must be admitted that we who live in the hot countries have grown into the habit of taking things easily; and nothing could teach those contractors of the nut gatherers who lived below the very belt of the equator that a few days could make any difference one way or the other. So they straggled in with their cargoes a day, two days, or even a week late. And the steamer must needs sit on the mud by the river bank and await their coming.

SO I found my young man still cheerfully occupying the cubicle which they called a cabin and apparently enjoying the glowering hostility of the captain.

"*Picaro*," I said to him. "Will you never learn? Up here is different to Manaos city. What have you done this time? Has nobody told you that this man is known as a killer in the rivers?"

He had the effrontery to grin.

"So the talk ran," he replied. "But the man laid needless insult upon me."

And he related how, the weather being stifling, he had sat down to the midday meal which was served on the open deck, without his coat; which, he maintained, since he wore a new silk shirt and a collar, would be considered in his home town formal enough in the presence of the seven or eight other passengers of nondescript appearance who wore, some of them, unclean pyjamas and others, no shirt at all but only an open coat over a dingy singlet.

"\_\_\_!" I exclaimed. "But this is not the custom among us. A coat of some sort one must wear, even though it be only a rag. Man, you were naked."

"How should I know?" he defended. "In any case, if the captain thought I was scandalising his ship he should have told me in private. Instead, he called a slovenly waiter and whispered certain instructions and had the fellow present me with one of his own not so very clean white duck uniform coats upon a salver."

"Name of a saint! And what then?" I asked quickly.

"Well," he grinned widely again. "I accepted it and bowed to him and put it on—I am learning your customs, you see. And then, at the next meal, I called the same waiter and whispered to him and had him present the captain with a pair of socks."

"*Sanctissimas!*" I shouted. "And you live?"

But I was forced to laugh with him. For, by the Holy Ones, the man had deserved the return. And, knowing that captain, I knew what a tale that would make for the cafés; how my gringo bearded the bad man on his own ground and suffered no penalty.

"The lad begins to strike back when he feels that he is in the right," said I to myself. "Here is good metal for the tempering."

But I called an Indian to take up his pair of great leather satchels and I hurried him away from the boat with speed before I, too, should become embroiled with the enraged captain; and I made him welcome to hammock space in my own *batelão*.

Being late, we ate and slept; and in the morning we talked of plans for the fortune that he was going to wrest out of the wilderness.

"*Então*, here we are," I said to him. "You find yourself at last in the lawless jungle that you thought was Manaos City. For Santa Isabel, as you see, is but a trampled landing place for the steamer and an adobe hut which the owner calls the hotel, and a deserted rubber shed. From here up is our country of the upper rivers where the law is to him who can make it. Here you may live with pistols tied to your thighs in the uncomfortable manner of your compatriots of the central plains. You are now a pioneer."

"Good," said he. "My fathers were pioneers. Here perhaps I shall fit. In Manaos, where I would have been friends with everybody, I met only hostility; which—" he grinned again—"may possibly have been somewhat my own fault. But

"Oho, you have indeed begun to learnt" I said to him; and I clapped him on the shoulder. "But my young friend, let me tell you this: Here in the jungle, where you hope to wrest a fortune, do not hope to be friends with anybody at all; for everybody is striving with all his mind and his heart and his sinew to accomplish the same thing, each in his own way. What way have you in mind to adopt?"

"Let me be accursed if I know," said he. And he sat, swinging his legs from the hammock and frowning in thought.

I, watching his face and his careless confidence, thought that I might use this young man here where there were few people for him to insult. So I made him a complimentary offer which many a youth of the city would have given his soul to accept.

"Good," I said. "I shall give you employment working with me till such time as you know the ropes, and then you may strike out for yourself."

But, *carramba*, he refused the chance as airily as if I had offered him a cigarette.

"No," said he. "I thank you, friend of the jungle places where I must look for no friends. I can not take employment; for in my home town, in an institute for the teaching of business, they taught me an advice for all young men, *Be your own boss*. So—" he cast about in his mind—"I shall make a business for myself."



Truly the man had a talent for giving offence. Yet he had smilingly called me his friend on top of my warning. And I reflected that it would not be a bad thing to have a youth with his unconquerable confidence and energy allied to me in those upper rivers. So instead of leaving him to his own devices, I decided to help him.

"*Bom*," I said. "You talk as if many varieties of business stand cataloged ready to hand. Yet business can be made by such men as are not fools or cowards, else how should we river runners live? Tell me, then, what is in your mind about a business?"

He showed no hesitation.

"\_\_\_," he said. "In my travel of six days in that sweating steamer I have observed but one business being carried on—*castanha*. And that business is conducted very badly. There is room for much improvement. Therefore, I shall go into the Brazil nut business."

"*Miravel!*" I was forced to exclaim. "He has put his finger upon it in a single viewing. For twenty years these nut gatherers have continued in the same haphazard manner. Exactly as they did in the old days when the business was a few *batelão* loads; so they do now, though the export is sixty thousand tons. This must be an example of—how do you call it?—hustle?"

"But, my young friend, you overlook a matter which is a stumbling block to all your compatriots. This manner of gathering and shipping these nuts has now become established custom: it is *costumbre*. And the man does not live who can in one lifetime alter *costumbre*."

His confidence hardened to the usual stubbornness of one who does not understand the difficulty.

"By golly," he began. "I'll bet I can speed up that—"

But I do not waste time any more in arguing with *Americanos* about the rigidity of established custom among our people. Instead of trying to convince him, I showed him an easier way, a gift of certain information which I had.

"Listen, my confident friend," I told him, "since you speak of nuts, there is an alternative, which may, with the expenditure of much hard work and a little money, be developed to great profit. In these *igarapes*, the creeks that I am having occasion to explore, there exists, within workable distance, *tagua* in great quantities."

Seeing his face remain blank, I explained further.

"The ivory nut, from which in your country they manufacture buttons, and then send catalogs to our merchants advertising products of genuine ivory. The creeks are not far. Indians are available and friendly; for the *castanha* does not grow there and so these trader fellows have not penetrated. The condition is ideal. Myself I can not use it; since I have other irons to heat and I can not devote the necessary time.

"I do not wish to let any of those low trader men come messing into my water, making trouble with the Indians. So I present this business to you, my Pelloroxo. With it I give my advice out of all my experience and such help as my time may permit. And you shall give me your word over hand clasp to apportion to me a one-third share."

His face expanded with eagerness as he listened, and he interrupted with oaths of the "gum" and the "cripes," to attest that the folks back in the insufferable home

town of his would surely call this a God-given opportunity to get into a "new business" and to be "one's own boss"—which things were apparently the religion of that town. But his enthusiasm faded again as he said with mournfulness:

"Sure sounds like the goods. But a new business needs capital; and I have but three hundred dollars."

"*Ouve lhe!* Listen to him!" I shouted, and smote him on the back. "You are here a pioneer, I have told you. Not money, but bowels—and a little sense—does a man need to make a business in a pioneer country. Three hundred dollars is nearly three thousand milreis; and with the half of that you can have built a *batelão* like mine and fill it up with trade goods enough for a year."

His eyes opened widely that same look of wonder that had so impressed me at our first meeting in Manaus City; and—"Gee," he said, "with three hundred dollars back home I couldn't—"

But I clapped my hand over his mouth before he could tell me about his home town.

"Listen, my friend," I told him. "I will instruct you in the rules for making business in our rivers. They are three.

"The first is: Make friends with the Indians by learning and respecting their customs and superstitions—for they represent your labor. Prate not to them about the superior manner of conduct in your accursed home town. When they say, 'In such a manner are we accustomed to do this thing,' say to them, 'Good. Let us then do it all together and with speed.'

"The second is: Make friends with the *ipagés*, the witch doctors, for they control your labor.

"And the third is: Never lie to either. For the former will believe your word but once, and the latter will surely find you out."

"Good," said he, "those are simple."

But I still added a warning.

"Simple to learn. But not so easy to remember in all one's dealings, *amigo*. For of all the men who trade these upper rivers there is perhaps but one other than myself who adheres to them—which is why they remain petty traders. Three simple rules; yet those fellows do not heed them. And for you, my Fire-Head, I will add a fourth. Forget that petty townlet which you share with your God in the center State of America. And concede that whole men are born also in the states of the east and of the west. Ay, and even in some of the States of America of the south."

He grinned at me again.

"So I am beginning to find out, my friend of the jungle places," he said.

"Good," said I. "You have learned much. Come then. Let us go to the steamer and purchase from the traveling agent of the house of Araujo Company such trade goods as will be needful for this business in the back creeks."

SO WE went together. And as we stood on the long plank that connected the steamer with the less moist of the mud of the adjoining bank, the captain, swelling at the neck, shouted at us from the upper deck.

"What is that man that you bring with you, you Theophilo, sheltering him under the cover of your name to insult me on my own ship?"

I was about to reply as the man deserved when this Fire-Head took the words upon himself and shouted back:

"This is an up-river man, *mio Capitão*, by name Pelloroxo. One who shelters under no man's name but his own."

"*Celestes*," I muttered. "Fool-Head. The man is ripe for quarrel. Be ready to jump into the river."

But the captain was clearly taken aback by this boldness; and he must surely have reflected quickly that this man's reputation was to carry a pistol in that specially constructed pocket of his, even in Manaus City. So instead of making any hostile move, he but grumbled and retreated into his wheel house. I breathed again at the passing of the trouble, and we went on into the ship to the Araujo man and I advised him in the selection of such goods as would be most acceptable to the Indians of the *igarapes*.

Knives and machetes and ax heads and fish hooks and small mirrors and salt. All such things as the Indians most desire. And I told him that I would make out a list for him of their values in terms of trade; for since the Indians understood nothing of cost, it was necessary for him to know how much labor could be bought for each article.

And I added for his own feeding, quinine and medicines and rice and great slabs of dried *pirarucu* fish and lard, to be used when the wild game should fall short. On the top of which he demanded potatoes. But I told him:

"You have seen your last leathery potato and your last musty vegetable on this river steamer. From now on you will eat the manihot yam of the Indians."

He made a face, but said nothing. I laughed and reminded him with gusto:

"Wait, my young pioneer, till it shall be your fate—as comes to all of us river men—to eat the stinking *pirarucu*."

And then I selected for him a rifle of the Winchester .44 with five hundred cartridges, which have become so standard in our rivers that they pass for currency. And I advised him further that, while it was against the law, since there was no law in our jungles, the best present that could be made to a chief in the back creeks would be a muzzle-loading gun of one barrel with black powder and shot for its use.

All the things that would be necessary for his subsistence in the jungle I selected for him, and in all things he submitted to my judgment; and we made a great pile of the goods upon the deck and I checked over the list to see that nothing was forgotten and said to him then:

"*Basta*, it is finished. You are outfitted now with all that any man needs in our back creeks."

But he demurred still.

"Will it not be necessary, *amigo*, to carry a pistol in those back creeks?"

"The automatic pistol that you have will suffice," I told him.

But he replied:

"I have no pistol, my good friend. For since they found such fault with me in Manaus and made such a fuss about the carrying of a pistol, I gave it to another gringo who was traveling back north."

"What is that?" I exclaimed. "What do you tell me? Do you mean to say that when you answered back to that captain you had no pistol in your back pocket?"

His grin was that of an infant without sense or care.

"Nary gun," said he. "But how was he to know that?"

"*Celestes*," I grumbled. "A fool like you needs two pistols at the least."

So we bought them. Great pistols of Colt, which are as good currency as the rifles of Winchester; and we called Indians and conveyed the whole mass into the aged rubber shed where I set a man of my own to watch over it.

"Now," I said. "All that you need is a *batelão*; and you are established. But that will take some little time to be built."

But in this matter we were fortunate. With all that pile of goods in the rubber shed it was evident to all the world that a boat would be needed to carry it in. And so in the course of a day or so there came to me a *padrão* of nut gatherers who told me that his partner had been bitten by a jararaca while dipping his hand foolishly to draw water, and that his boat was therefore for sale.

So we went to look it over, and found a very satisfactory craft; a *batelão* much like my own, stoutly built of hand-hewn planks of mahogany; some ten meters in length, having the stern half-covered over with a funnel-shaped roof of palm thatch to afford dry accommodation for goods and gear, and hammock room for the owner; amidships a small deck upon which he might recline while directing the craft; and the forward part half-decked with slats of split cane whereon the paddle men would squat, three to each side.

The rogue of a *padrão* immediately asked a gringo price. But the Pelloroxo told him swiftly:

"Name of a \_\_\_! What is this? I am an up-river man and the partner of Theophilo."

So the fellow accepted the half and was well satisfied. As was I also; for my own business demanded my time; and I had been wondering how this lad with no experience would be able to make his first approaches to the up-creek Indians without some guidance. Now I would be able to take him up with me and introduce him into the business personally. He would need only an interpreter who would be his mouth until such time as he could master sufficient of the Geral—which is a very simple language and easily learned—and a temporary paddle crew whom he would dismiss after having established friendly relations with the local Indians.

So I found for him a *piloto*, a reliable man who knew something of the management of a *batelão* in the currents and who could also cook a little in the *batelero* style; and, having spent a long day, we slept. He, for the first time in his own *batelão*, and as pleased as an infant with a new toy. I, satisfied that a profitable day had been spent and that nothing had been omitted. On the very morrow we would start.

A propitious morning. For nothing occurred to occasion delay—which among us of the south is unusual. The Pelloroxo appeared in the formal *Americano* dress for the trip into the wilderness. A shirt of khaki, open at the neck; breeches of cord; high yellow boots, all complete and all new, with one of his new pistols hanging at his hip from a loose belt.

"*Mira qué magnífico!*" I congratulated him as I laughed. And the bystanders who had gathered to see us off murmured approbation.

Collectors of the *castanha* and their *padrões* they were, with several ox-faced Indians; and they had never seen such magnificence of fashion. Old Tio Romeiro, a *batelero* of forty years' standing in the upper rivers, spat his chew of *ipadu* leaf upon the prow of the new boat for luck and said:

"Let be. Let him persevere till he reaches the creeks; and the Indians will surely think that he is a very great chief; far never have they seen such a white man. And within that time he will have learned from experience that breeches are good when one rides upon a horse and when one stands upright; but for all other purposes in the world they bind at the knee where they sweat and itch like the very cane lice themselves."

But he laughed in turn and told me:

"*Por Deus*, these are what I purchased at great expense in my home town at the advice of the camp-goods dealer who told me that such would be the appropriate costume for Manaus City. So wear them now I must."

WHAT need to relate our petty travel? Nothing of note occurred. In three days we reached the *igarape* Marauaiá and, passing into it out of the great river, were lost immediately in another world. For while the Rio Negro at that point is a sea of some four miles wide interspersed with islands, this *igarape* is suddenly a narrow tunnel winding for fifty miles into the very heart of the jungle. Sluggish and dark it is, overhung with great trees which send aerial roots and lianas as thick as a man's body to seek foothold in the lushy ground which never dries even in the dry season.

And while the great black river is silent and empty of all life, here one plunges into all the sounds of the jungle. Monkeys and parrots which one knows to be disporting themselves in the sunlit green far above but which one never sees; the hiss of insects that pass like bullets; the creaking talk of the trees; now and then a long call which one may identify as the cry of one of the larger beasts; and now and then again a wild cry which, in spite of twenty years' experience, one can not place at all. I looked back from my *batelão* and called to Pelloroxo:

"Be afraid, my *gringito*. For from now on you do not see the sun till you come out again with a cargo."

But he laughed.

"Yourself have told me that I am a pioneer, as were my fathers. Why then should I be afraid?"

And he sang as he sat on the thatch roof of his cabin, songs of atrocious tempo and the most lugubrious of sentiment. But in his voice was the careless spirit of his forefathers; the spirit that drove them ever to seek out and take delight in the new places.

In a couple of days we arrived into the country where I had discovered the tagua nuts; and there I summoned a council of the jungle chiefs and caused the Pelloroxo to stand before them as my friend who would deal with them even as I had dealt. After which I was compelled to leave him to his own devices, to stand or fall according to the limitations of his own wit and courage and his ability to absorb the many advices that I gave him. For my own business demanded that I return out to the big river and journey yet three days farther up.

It was with some misgiving that I went; for he was new and much in need of experience. Yet, since he would have only Indians to deal with, who are, up there, unspoiled and well-meaning, though lazy by heredity and inclination, I had a certain confidence. But as for him, *carramba*, confidence was the one thing that he lacked least ever since his first arrival in Manaos. So I wished him *á buena dicha*, the best of luck, and went.

FIVE months passed. I, thinking often of this so venturesome gringo, and wondering how he was progressing in his capacity of "his own boss" in our joint "new business," till I was able to journey again to Santa Isabel, and made a point of going up our *igarape* on a tour of inspection.

Paddling and poling up the dark passage, I began to be filled with dismay at seeing no signs of a healthy traffic; lianas cut and water passages cleared and all the marks that canoe traffic will leave. The *igarape* was empty and deserted. Even more so, it seemed to me, than before, when a few Indians passed occasionally to Santa Isabel to exchange feathers for goods.

But it turned out that I was needlessly alarmed. As I began to reach into the *tagua* district on the second day, signs of industry became apparent. The first was a far chopping in the forest.

"*Hau*, one makes a canoe," grunted my paddle men.

Presently we came upon a naked Indian in a dugout canoe with a new machete stuck through a thong at the back of his waist. Him I ordered to come near and account for his possession. He came readily enough, without fear; and said that he worked for the white man, gathering the fruit of the *tagua* tree for some strange purpose of the white man's; and that the white man was different from all other people in that he paid in advance. His machete, therefore, had been come by honestly; for he would fulfil his promise and collect three canoes full of fruit.

"*Qué louco!*" said I to myself. "What a fool system is this? How can one make contract with Indians who do not love work?"

Yet, just round the bend we came upon a small clearing and a palm leaf shelter by the creek edge under which a pile of nuts was accumulating. Other such shelters were passed, and more Indians. And presently, toward the end of the day came the camp of the white man himself.

A house, no less, built of split palm trunks and interlaced with lianas close enough to keep out the vampire bats; a luxurious affair of two rooms, all perched upon stilts a good two meters clear of flood water. A veritable *hacienda*.

The Pelloroxo descended upon me with loud cries and many oaths, and dragged me in immediately to eat; for his code of hospitality was that a friend must be first of all fed. Manatee steak it was; well prepared and tasty; the good effect of which he would have spoiled by thrusting upon me one of his pernicious cigarettes.

"I am conserving them with jealous care," he assured me.

But I pushed the foul paper aside and rolled one for myself of pure tobacco in a strip of *miripapo* bark.

"Now tell me all things," I said. "But first of all why, in the name of all the saints, you have not been sending your nuts down to Santa Isabel to ship? You have plenty enough already. This is a very center of unexpected industry."

He threw out his hands.

"My friend," said he. "Our business is held up by the transportation problem. I need here a fleet. The nuts you see are only a part; for I have been 'voyaging up and down stream and into all the little side creeks; and we have now many little sheds filling steadily up with nuts."

"Miracle!" I grunted. But with skepticism; for I knew those Indians. But he was eager to proceed.

"True, at first there was difficulty," he admitted in answer to my tone. "For these Indians have no desire to labor; and they were skeptical; for some of them had been down to the big river where they had fallen in with the traders; and there was a conviction among them that they would be paid either not at all or cheated in the amount. Till I hit upon the plan of paying in advance—and now we have the Indians of twenty-one villages working busily for us."

I grunted again.

"They may work," said I. "Or rather, promise to work while you dangle a knife or a machete before their eyes. But how busily they will continue to work after you have gone is another question."

"No my good friend, you are mistaken," he insisted against my twenty years' of experience. "They will work and produce; for I have taken the business precaution of insuring our business. Already we have many more tons of nuts than we can send down. What use in sending a *batelão* load or two and a few canoes, which will serve only to attract trader people here before we are well established? No, I will not begin to ship until my fleet is ready."

"*Cremento*, a fleet you talk of, and insurance? How do you propose to collect a fleet?" I demanded.

His grin flashed out. I could see that he was pleased with himself. So much so that he expended another of his precious cigarettes.

"High finance," he exulted. "These Indians, as you know, will do anything rather than settle down to the three months labor of hewing a canoe out of a tree trunk; and they struggle along with any ancient leaky thing till it positively falls apart—and then they will bind it up with vines and use it half full of water.

"So I conceived the idea of paying them for building new canoes for themselves. An ax head to each man who would immediately put it to use in hewing out a canoe; with the stipulation only that the canoe be of seven meters in length or more and that the man fill it up three times with nuts. I tell you my friend, presently we shall be able to despatch a fleet of a hunched ships; and in four trips we can collect in the old rubber shed at Santa Isabel a cargo sufficient to charter the whole available space in the steamer; and then those *castanha* gatherers will come to us begging with bribes in their hands—"

But I cut his rhapsody short.

"Hm, fine," I said with sarcasm. "A wonderful dream—if these Indians were people with whom you could make a contract and who could be compelled to hold to their agreements. But they will shortly weary of labor and will make excuses and—"

But he in turn interrupted me.

"No, my friend. They will not."

"Psha," said I. "I know these Indians for twenty years of experience. You can not tell me any new thing about them."

And he, grinning again:

"No new thing indeed. But I have done what you yourself advised. I have learned their customs and their beliefs, and have made friends above all things with the *ipagé*—who is my insurance. In this way it was: The old chief Upanha is old, and the second chief was an enlightened savage. He had been to Santa Isabel often and had worked rubber in the old days; and he was ambitious to gain the leadership. He used to be my chief opponent in persuading the others that the white men never paid what they promised.

"Now the *ipagé* is friendly to the old chief, who gives him honor and believes in his wizardries. So presently, when a big fever came, the second chief aimed to undermine the *ipagé's* power by telling all the people that his witchcraft was worthless as a cure; that men either died of fevers or got well of themselves; and that I, the white man would surely back him up in the knowledge that he had learned from the white men.

"*Por Dios*, the decision of a dynasty seemed to be thrust thus suddenly upon my shoulders. So I called the *ipagé* quietly and gave him quinine to make witchcraft with and proclaimed that I, for one, surely believed in his witchcraft to effect a cure for the fever.

"So the wizard triumphed; and the existing dynasty continued; and the pretender to the throne died—I do not know of what. And the *ipagé* is now my stout ally; and his threat is that those Indians who take the white man's pay and do not deliver their contract in full and with speed to the white man who gives honor where honor is due will be fearfully bewitched by him. So, my friend, have no fear. We are well insured. They will deliver."

*Basta*, it was sufficient. I was convinced. And I took credit to myself that I had rightly judged this young Fire-Head's shrewdness and energy; and I gave credit also to him. I smote him joyfully on the back and told him with some complacency:

"My son, you have learned well the lesson which I told you. Having forgotten your insufferable home town and its useless customs, you have learned the customs of the upper rivers and have been enabled thus to do a great work in organizing the beginnings of a very profitable business. Now tell me, was I not right?"

The eyes of that young ruffian laughed at me with the spirit of the very \_\_\_ in them.

"You were right in all things," he said, "except that in that institute which taught business in my home town they taught me that the first most important principle upon which a business could be built was—organization."

*Diabo lhe maldiça*. What can one say to such a fellow? Except curse him while he laughs. Which I did very properly. And he but laughed the more. But I was able to tell him:

"None the less, my so confident friend, you have learned the lesson that you must work with the customs of the people instead of trying to tell them how much better are your own."

To which he, with all humility, agreed. I stayed with him for two days; and in his *batelão* we cruised into the upper reaches of the creek, where I saw for myself how his system of advance payments with the insurance of the *ipagé's* witchcraft to back up his contracts was working out. And, *carramba*, it was like a system of



loans conducted by a bank. Never have I seen so much industry in the upper rivers.

I gave him congratulations and I left him; this time with no uneasiness in my mind. The man had learned and was established. Remained now only the problem of securing a market. His last words to me, shouted after my *batelão* as it was turning the first bend of the creek, were:

"Why not go on down to Manaus and make a contract with some export house to purchase our product? For we can very shortly now guarantee a fixed quantity every month. And that institute in my home town taught me that the second most important principle upon which a business can be conducted is—guaranteed delivery."

I made the sign with the palm of the hand against the thigh and the throat which signifies among us that misfortune is due to him who brags, and went on down to Santa Isabel. But I thought much over his suggestion; and truly it seemed good to me to make some sort of an agreement with some exporting house whereby we might gain some advantage in return for a steady delivery with each month.

So, the monthly steamer being there, I took passage and went. And in Manaus I found very favorable reception; for the price of *tagua* was standing at two and a half milreis per kilo and not much was coming in from the other rivers. Yet the arrangements took up some time; and the steamer went up again and returned before I was ready to go—and then it was delayed while its decrepit engine indulged in one of its periodical breakdowns. So that it went on into two months before I was able to travel up our *igarape* again; this time with a pleasurable anticipation.

BUT, *meu Deus*, as I traveled I met with a disquiet much greater than on my first trip. For at the first of the palm-leaf sheds I found two strange *batelões* tied up to the bank half full of nuts while the shed was empty. Their masters were away in the woods, the crews told me. But I knew their names. Gross fellows both, with a reputation for high handedness and a browbeating of the trader folk and *bateleros* who congregated at Santa Isabel.

The crew man were sullen and would tell me only that their masters had bought the nuts from the Indians who collected at that point and that they were arranging now for more laborers to work for them.

"Diabo!" said I to myself. "What villainy is this? Has the Pelloroxo also been browbeaten by their evil reputation to permit this robbery? Or is he, perhaps, dead up there in the jungle?"

So I passed on with anxiety. But Indians in a new canoe whom I met farther up told me that the white man lived and was well. So I told my paddle men to dip deep and strong so that I might reach the camp by the same evening and receive his explanation from himself.

His joy to see me was as great as his relief; and he recounted to me immediately how those two had sneaked up our creek; and the first that he had known about it was when he received a machete, the same that he had given the Indian down there as payment for his labor. He did not blame the Indian; for those trader men had told him that if he returned the payment he would be free of his contract, and

that they would give him another machete and something more besides. But what was he to do about those two men he did not know till I should return; and he had been waiting for me now this full month while they stole our nuts. I looked at him with amazement and considerable disappointment.

"*Sangue Deus*," I growled. "What do you expect to do in such a case? Call for a policeman to protect you?"

"I don't know," he answered with a grave face. "I waited for your coming to find out what was the proper procedure according to the custom of the upper rivers."

"Proper procedure?" I said with sarcasm.

"*Carramba*, you come into our peaceful cities carrying a pistol, engaging in rioting, and comporting yourself after the manner of your Wild West beyond the borders of civilization. And now that you are here in pioneer country beyond our borders of law, you became tame and wait to inquire what is the proper procedure of law! I will show you what is my custom. I shall go down to those two ruffians and shall tell them that I, Theophilo, am interested in this business; and *basta*, they will apologize and withdraw."

But he bit upon his lip and swallowed my scorn.

"No," he insisted with a set face. "If I am to conduct a business in these upper rivers I must attend to this matter myself. I but wanted to know what might be done without antagonizing the whole of Amazonas. Let us say no more, but come in and eat."

So he took me into his stilt house and would say no more on the subject. But he called his *piloto* and gave orders that the *batelão* crew be prepared for an early start the next morning, and he remained in a silent mood till morning came. With the first screaming of the parrots he was up and shouting for his paddle men to jump and go; and he would have gone alone with his silence and his set face. But I insisted on accompanying him, for I know those two men to be cunning as well as treacherous.

They were lolling on the bank beside their *batelões* when we arrived, for it was the siesta hour. The one, a heavy set man of the same height as the Pelloroxo, but getting stout from easy living; and the other, equally tall, but as lean and stringy as the first was stout; though both their faces were well matched in a furtive sort of truculence.

Upon seeing our *batelão* come round the bend they sprang to their feet, cursing with Berman; for they had flaunted their insolence so long in security that this visit was very unexpected indeed. The stout one made as if to run to his *batelão*; but the other held him by the arm and drew him to himself, and they stood together whispering.

We swung into the bank, and the Pelloroxo sprang out with alacrity.

"Have a care," I warned him as I followed. "For both these fellows have the reputation of carrying weapons, not in open view like yours, but concealed."

But he, paying no attention to me, stalked close and addressed them in a tone of easy conversation.

"Do you two misborn brigands fight with pistols or with knives or how?"

This bluntness from one whom they had been regarding as a man easy to rob took them aback; but the lean one quickly recovered his surly self-possession and addressed himself to me.

"Have you, Theophilo, any interest with this gringo or with his fate?"

It was a leading question, and I knew that upon my answer would depend their action. But my mind was quickly made up.

"No," I said. "He handles his own affair by himself."

The Pelloroxo, while watching the others like a jaguar, still found time to flash a glance at me and to murmur, "Thanks, *amigo*." During which interval the other two looked at one another and laughed as if some joke were about to befall. Then the leaner of the two composed his features to that expression of ferocity which fellows of his class employ for the purpose of intimidation.

"Then," said he with contempt, "we do not care how we fight or when."

HE delivered it as an ultimatum, and stood as if expecting some argument in reply. But this gringo of mine was ever restless for action rather than talk. Hardly were the words out of the fellow's mouth when the Pelloroxo rushed at him with the suddenness of a peccary boar. With his fist he hit him once underneath the eye, so that the blood spurted under the blow. Again, before the man could recover his balance and while the scream of rage was yet in his throat, he hit him with the other fist a terrible blow in the belly so that the scream was choked to a groan and the man leaned forward with eyes turning back in his head and hands clutching at his middle. A third time with incredible speed he struck him upon the ear as he thus staggered, and completed his fall down the slope of the bank into the creek.

"*Brava!*" I shouted with excitement. And as I shouted, a pistol sounded and I heard the ball hum and clatter the next instant in the jungle beyond the creek. Thanking the holy saints in the same breath for that pistol shooting was an inaccurate sport at best, I turned my head and saw the other fellow running to shelter behind a tree and turning to shoot again as he ran.

Even as I threw myself upon the ground I saw the example of your national pistol play. As swiftly as do your *vaqueiros* in the motion pictures, the Pelloroxo snatched his pistol from the holster which hung at his loose belt of cartridges and fired without raising to aim. The man's arm flew away and upward from his side. The pistol dropped from his hand. He screamed once and lurched up against his tree where he supported himself like one drunk, and like a drunkard began to grow weak at the knees and sag to the ground.

Then Pelloroxo turned with ready pistol to attend once more to the other whom he had knocked into the creek. But that blow upon the ear, coming in addition to the terrible assault upon his stomach, had rendered him unconscious. He lay in the water inert while the Indians from the *batelões* chattered in affright and pointed at the swirl and splash of the black water all round him.

"Mercy of—!" I cried. "The *piranha!*"

And I rushed to haul the wretched man forth, shouting upon the Indians to help.

By the fellow's great good fortune this affair had taken only seconds to accomplish. Had it been a protracted battle his plight would have been a pitiable one. As it was, a veritable school of those ferocious fishes must have been nearby when he fell; for he bled from half a dozen places already on his unprotected

hands and face. Clean round holes as big as a vest button they were, showing that his luck was good again in that they had been young fish.

By this time the Indians had found their wits and were ready to help. Already a couple of them were chewing great wads of the *tamaquaré* leaf to apply as dressing. So I left them to bind him up as best they might and turned once more to look for my friend. He was leaning over the other fellow, shaking him by the shoulder.

"He is not hurt," he said to me with disgust. "I shot him only in the forearm."

And forthwith, by kicking him vigorously on the nether pants, he forced the man to his feet, and so held him, clutching at his arm and scowling.

"Now," he ordered, "tell your Indians immediately to unload those nuts back into my shed here. Make speed." And he thrust him toward his *batelão* and pointed him to his work with the pistol.

"*Miravel*," I said. "This is the first good thing that I have seen come out of that home town of yours—the miraculous pistol play of you *Americanos*."

At that he laughed at me with loud merriment.

"My friend," said he. "In my home town there is very probably no man who has ever fired a pistol in his life—as neither did I before I came here."

"But—but, name of a saint," I began.

But he interrupted me, jeering.

"But—but, am I not learning how to conduct a business here beyond the borders of the law? Twice have I sent down to Santa Isabel to the steamer and purchased I do not know how many kilos of cartridges. I have been practising the ways of your Amazonas, my friend; I have been practising. Yet I will tell you—" he laughed again—"I aimed to hit that man anywhere between his belt and his hat. But it is good for my reputation that he does not know that."

"*Carramba*, rest on that reputation," said I. "The tale will spread. You will never have to shoot again."

He shrugged and turned to see that his orders about the nuts were being carried out. Then he beckoned to an Indian who stood watching all these things with a scared countenance. The man came in answer to the summons and at five paces distance prostrated himself upon the ground with his face between his folded hands. The Pelloroxo spoke to him sternly in the *Geral*:

"Tutua, descendant of a black spider-monkey, you are a fool. You will return immediately to these men who are half white their machete; and you will come tomorrow to my place and will receive again that which I gave you—for which you will now deliver four canoe-loads of nuts."

The man raised himself, and laying his crossed fingers against his forehead, answered:

"What my white chief says, will be. Only, *O Kariwa*, those men gave me no machete, they only said they would give."

The Pelloroxo threw back his head and laughed with much enjoyment.

"Good," said he. "That tale will spread. Let them rest on that reputation." Then to the Indian, "Go. And take an offering with you to the *ipagé*, that he may remove his curse from you." And to me, "*Amigo*, we have time to smoke a cigarette while we watch these little thieves unload."

But I left him to enjoy his tube of refuse and busied myself with seeing that the last of our nuts was well and truly delivered out of the bottoms of those *batelãos*. At last it was finished; and the men stood denuded of their stolen plunder and sullenly submissive. Pitiably to look at; the one with his arm rudely bandaged and the other unrecognizable through the poultices of chewed leaf where the fish had taken pieces out of him. The Pelloroxo stood smiling at them with a hard mouth. Then he gave them their orders.

"Listen, you two. You will go from here quickly; and you will remember for your selves, and tell it also to all the rest of your kind, that I, Pelloroxo, the up-river man, have drawn a line across the mouth of this *igarape* to mark it as my water. That is all, and it is easy to remember. Now go."

They gave no argument; but climbed into their *batelãos*, scowling and silent. The Indians pushed off without the customary chant; and in less than a minute the dimness beyond the next bend had swallowed them. I laid my hand on my partner's shoulder.

"*Amigo*," said I. "That was well done. An improvement even on our custom. And for some of those things that I said yesterday when I came, I give you my apology."

He grinned.

"They are forgotten, good friend of the upper jungle," said he. "Have a cigarette."

I DID not go back with him to his camp. It was quite clear to me that he had well absorbed all the knowledge necessary for the conducting of an up-river man's business—at all events in the jungle. Santa Isabel would be another problem; for there I could foresee conflict with men not so simple and well-meaning as Indians of the back creeks. But there was growing in me a very satisfying confidence in this Pelloroxo since he had begun to understand that custom was a thing that people adhered to slavishly whether in our country or in his.

So I went back from that place and up to my own water to attend to my business; once again with an easy mind free of misgiving. His parting word to me was:

"If you listen carefully from up your creek you will hear the howl that those trader men raise when I grab all the available cargo space on that river steamer with our first shipment. Listen well; for the fleet is almost ready."

Which promise he kept within the month. With a hundred and seventeen canoes he descended one day upon Santa Isabel and piled his cargo into the old rubber shed. And nobody knew anything about his preparations; for the port, between steamer visits, is but an empty landing stage and nobody is there but the half-breed with his family who keeps the adobe hut which he magnificently calls the hotel.

The Pelloroxo wasted no time; but made the shed his home like a true river man by slinging his hammock between two posts, and quickly despatched his fleet to bring down another load. Six cargoes he brought in all; and when the steamer finally wheezed up to the landing stage he sat ready. He went on board and greeted the captain.

"*Hola, mio Capitão*. A quick return voyage for you this time; for I have a cargo all prepared for you."

The captain was not one to forget. He offered no open hostility; but he growled that he would carry no cargo for the gringo. The latter laughed easily.

"But surely, my *Commandante*. I have been on the river now for many months and I have learned many of the river ways. I know the rules of the *Companha*. You must take the first cargo that comes."

As indeed was the fact. For there used to be much wrangling, and not a little blood letting, among those *castanha* gatherers over whose cargo should be given preference when the boat was full. On one occasion, between the lot of them, they contrived in their rioting to set fire to the boat. So the *Companha* instituted a rule of first come, first served—and saved, incidentally, many days delay thereby. Though, as I have said, delay was plenty enough; for nothing could take away from those indolent fellows the hope that cargo space would not still be available after four or five days.

The rule, of course, was absolute, and the captain was compelled to recognize it. He glowered at the complacent gringo for a moment and then thought better of it and shrugged. He admitted the rule and said that, *bom*, he would be ready to begin loading cargo as soon as he should have done this thing and that thing connected with the management of his ship. But his eyes roved far up the stretches of the river and down again as he spoke. The Pelloroxo laughed again. In truth, tact was one thing that he very certainly had not learned. He might have gained his point with more circumspection. But he told the captain:

"No no, *mio Capitão*. I am no longer so much of a fool as I used to be. I know very well that if a single *batelão* should come alongside in the interval you would proceed to unload that one, and then another and then any others that might keep arriving; and you would claim that you took them in rotation. By no means am I such a fool. No, you will give me just one tally clerk, and my own Indians will load into your hold."

At this all the ferocity of the captain's nature blazed forth; and for a long half minute—so the Araujo agent who witnessed it, told me—he thought that violence would ensue; and he made for the shelter of his cabin storeroom. But it turned out as I had prophesied. The captain had very evidently heard the tale of that shooting—doubtless exaggerated in order that the teller's own honor might not be lowered. So his rage passed no farther than his eyes. The fire died in them and he covered their confusion with the lids. Then he shrugged and turned to spit over the rail. That was all.

"I thank you, *mio Capitão*," said the Pelloroxo. And he went to the lower deck and gave his orders to the tally clerk.

High-handed no doubt. But, as he told me himself later, it was urgently necessary; for his canoe men had told him as long as two days back that one of the *castanha padrãos* was waiting at his *sítio* but half a day's journey up river with three *batelãos* and some dozen canoes, taking things easy till he might come down and meet all his friends for the pleasant monthly carouse.

And within the same day he came; and on his heels others began to drift in from up-river and down-river with their *batelãos* and canoes; and the howl of dismay which went up when they found that all the available cargo space was taken was a national calamity. They appealed to the captain to give them at least the half of the space; to apportion it out according to each man's offering; and they suggested

absurdly that their own men would unload the cargo that was already stowed without expense or delay.

But that was out of the question, of course. Much as the captain would have liked to favor them against the gringo who had so cheerfully flouted him, he dared not openly break the rule. So the discomfited *castanha* traders stood about in groups and grumbled and asked each other what might be done in the matter. The answer of course was, nothing. They had come late as usual; and he who had come first with his business had been first served.

What is the usual outcome in such a situation? In a crowd of some forty or fifty rough fellows of no very great intelligence it is inevitable that anger should turn against the foreigner. Somebody started a murmur, and it was not long before the general grumble was against the accursed gringo who had out-manuevered them.

Somebody started the suggestion, and it was a matter of only a few minutes before there was a concerted move to go and interview this gringo. The thing was very nearly ready to become a mob. It remained only for somebody to start the suggestion about what to do with the gringo. And that suggestion would devolve naturally out of the heated words which would be exchanged at that interview. So the crowd, with much loud talking, moved toward the old rubber shed.

They found the gringo swinging in his hammock and kicking his heels. They stood about hesitant, waiting for somebody to begin that argument. The gringo looked at them never once. He was deeply engrossed in playing with his pistol, rolling it in a curious manner round his finger through the trigger guard so that the butt swung into the palm of his hand with a soft and satisfactory slap.

He spoke no word to the crowd; and no man in the crowd quite liked to start speaking to him; for the national shooting propensity of you *Americanos* was well known to all of them and the story of the shooting of that particular pistol had very wholesomely spread. It followed thus that there was no argument of heated words. Therefore nobody started the suggestion of what to do with the gringo, the crowd never became a mob at all. Instead, it went softly away to attend to other business.

But the enmity of the thing remained. For this I did not blame the Pelloroxo this time. It was no fault of his forcing that home town annoyance down the throats of our people. It was but the natural penalty that the foreigner must always pay for his cleverness. None the less, he had very thoroughly antagonized the whole of our up-river community. A most unfortunate thing when one wishes to conduct a business in that community.

I was much perturbed when I heard of it. But, *diabo, qué facer?* There was nothing that could be done about the thing. It seemed to be his fate to antagonize people. But it is my observation that business is antagonism; and it takes much skill to conduct a business and not make enemies.

And, by the very \_\_\_'s ill luck, just when the business was starting to stand on its feet the effect of all these antagonisms accumulated upon our Pelloroxo all in a heap. His very first success was the invitation that drew the most powerful opposition upon himself.

That shipment, upon its arrival in Manaus, created a stir. Tagua, high-grade and in quantity! That called for attention. For no other was coming in from the Rio Negro side at all and the price was high. If the stuff could be collected by the

shipload there was money to be made. So reasoned the merchants of the town, being entirely ignorant of the astute organization that lay behind that load.

An old enemy weighted the matter in his mind and decided to take action. No other than Da Sylvestra, the pompous fellow who had got mixed up in that theater riot. Here was a chance to invest some money to the purpose of making a profit and paying off a debt in a very pleasant manner. So on the very next return steamer he came up to Santa Isabel himself.

NEARLY a month had passed, and the Pelloroxo was, of course, waiting with his rubber-shed full *tagua*. The *castanha* men should have learned their lesson by this time. But it takes more than one lesson to teach a man the value of time; and even then, having learned that value, to know how to speed up his little organization of jungle workers who had been dilatory all their lives. Only a few of them, therefore, were ready. Room enough in the steamer's hold for all.

The Pelloroxo stepped on board to go through the formality of arranging for his loading. But the captain grinned a surly reply to his greeting and referred him to Da Sylvestra. That gentleman lounged in a hammock strung from cabin to deck rail so that all who passed had to stoop under his ropes. He smoked a good cigar and lifted one eyelid at the gringo, who stated civilly enough that the captain had passed him on to talk about the shipment of his goods. But Da Sylvestra threw out his hands, palms uppermost, and smiled as he fired his shot.

"I am desolate," said he. "But I have chartered the entire space for the return trip for my business."

"So?" said the Pelloroxo, wondering swiftly what this move might mean. "You are going into the *castanha* business?"

"But no," said the other, "into *tagua*."

Here was the direct challenge. The Pelloroxo rose to it immediately.

"I am not selling my *tagua* to you," said he. "And there is no other."

Da Sylvestra shrugged.

"There is *tagua* in the back creeks, and experienced nut gatherers are here in plenty."

So! That was the plan? The Pelloroxo understood now. But he was in a position to grin as he replied.

"True Senhor, there is *tagua* in my water. My water extends back for fifty miles into the jungle. How many Indians live in its back reaches, I do not know; for I have never had time to explore. But four hundred Indians under their chiefs and *ipagés* who are my friends, work for me. Believe me, then, when I tell you, Senhor Da Sylvestra; these expert nut gatherers of Santa Isabel will not enter into a war with my Indians."

He waited to let the reflection soak in for a few moments, and then added:

"You are a business man, Senhor. Therefore, I will make you a business offer: I will buy your charter from you for the half of what you paid for it."

With that he left him and came away to his own *batelão*. He spoke his insulting offer boldly; but no sooner was he away than he sent swift canoes to carry messages; one to the *ipagé* at his camp, and one to me. Then he sat down to make such preparations as he might and to wait.



Da Sylvestra was left to gnash upon the end of his cigar and to exercise his wits for the saving of his charter money. He sent for such of the nut *padrões* as were there to consult with them. But they shrugged and threw out their hands.

"He is a bad man, that gringo," they said. "And he has well trained his Indians by some \_\_\_'s means of his own. It is true what he says; they will surely fight for him; as ours—curses upon them—will not."

So Da Sylvestra thought angrily some more, and then said cunningly:

"*Bom*, the man is your enemy as well as mine. You know what may be done here and what may not. But I tell you this; and let it be known to all your friends who arrive; that I will pay the Manaos price, two and a half milreis per kilo, for *tagua* delivered here at Santa Isabel."

That was a cunning trick, and a bribe indeed to urge those fellows to desperate measures. For the best that they could get for their *castanha* was less than one and a half. *Então*, what would be the inevitable happening?

The Pelloroxo, sleeping in his *batelão*, was awakened by one of his Indians to listen to a noise up at the rubber shed. He rolled out of his hammock and stole up to investigate. But silently as he went, as he approached the shed, a pistol was fired out of the darkness and a ball coughed out over his head toward the black river. Happily, as I have said, pistol shooting is not so popular a pastime among us as it is with you of the north, and we have no experts.

The Pelloroxo fell to the ground and lay waiting in uncertainty; for only a fool will walk into what he doesn't know in the darkness. But those others lacked the courage to defend their position of advantage against that pistol of which they had heard so much. They fled into the night; and the Pelloroxo, when he called for a light, found some dozen or so big sacks filled with his *tagua* nuts ready to be taken away.

Petty thievery was what he had hardly expected. But that was not a matter to be greatly exercised about. He sent an Indian to fetch his hammock. He would sleep in the shed and put a stop to that sort of thing. But there were men among the back creek *padrões* who were arriving now with every hour of the night, who would risk much for the price that Da Sylvestra offered—provided that the risk were not too great.

As the Pelloroxo was tying his hammock ropes, another shot came out of the darkness. This time he jerked his own pistol loose and fired at the flash; and though he missed in the dark, he heard the startled squeal of the man as the bullet must have passed very close to his head. That would hold venturesome snipers for a while. But needless risk is foolish. The Pelloroxo called his men to scoop him a pit in the top of his pile of nuts; and in that fortress he spent the night on guard.

With the coming of morning his cargo was still intact. But the fight disclosed a string of *batelões* straining in the stiff current of that place against their head ropes tied to stakes. The more fortunate early comers nestled along the outer side of the steamer. Though not more than a half dozen or so; for the captain would not allow too great a weight to attach itself to the strain against his own cable which was bent round a stout *paxiuba* palm.

The owners stood about in groups or busied themselves with their boats; all elaborately unconcerned with the doings of the lone foreigner. Yet all eyes shot

furtive glances at him and heads turned to look after he had passed. A veritable camp had risen over night, and all of it was hostile to him.

What could he do? He could not accuse this man or that one at random of coming in the night and attempting to steal his nuts. So, as he passed among them, he took the cue to pretend that he had no suspicions against any man. He greeted those whom he knew as he went about his business, and showed an unconcern as great as anybody's.

By daylight he felt safe; for nobody would care to make an issue against that very wholesome reputation of his shooting. And the day passed without trouble, of course. But that night was a different matter again.

More of the back creek *padrões* had arrived, and among them were bold spirits who had to learn by experience. Attempts to steal nuts, more or less desperate, were made all through the night. Had it not been for the fortunate convenience of the fortress within the great pile of nuts who can tell what ill chance might not have happened? For the shot of even the poorest sniper in the dark might speed true.

This thing could not go on. So the Pelloroxo with the next morning bestirred himself betimes and stalked down to the steamer, both pistols swinging very much in evidence, to hold a parley with Da Sylvestra. But that crafty one, pretending to be still full of sleep in his hammock, snarled from the upper deck that he was not in a mood to parley just now. After taking his morning coffee he would talk.

So the Pelloroxo, poor innocent, returned to his watch and sat down to wait without thought of treachery. Had I been there I could not have been so easily hoodwinked. For I have experience of some of those business men of ours. It would have been clear to me that Da Sylvestra played only for time to plan some new fine of assault; since it must have been clear to him that his paltry thought of bribing others to claw the nuts out of the fire for him was not so successful as he had hoped against the existing respect for the gringo's pistols. He utilized his time, of course, as well as any other cunning fellow might. The plan was simple: He collected a gang.

The senhor must not misunderstand me in thinking that all those *bateleros* who gather monthly at Santa Isabel are scoundrels. Most of them are good fellows enough; and some of the best have even the makings of a good up-river man. Antagonistic to the gringo who usurped their trade they might well be, as is natural; but the most of them would not stoop to regular villainy.

Yet in such a gathering of rough men there are always enough who will undertake much for money. Da Sylvestra gathered some half dozen such round himself and then sent a message to the Pelloroxo to say that he was ready to talk. The latter walked down to the steamer without suspicion. Da Sylvestra himself came down the gang plank to meet him on the bank where his hirelings lounged with unconcern. It was all so simple. And like many a simple plan, it worked without a hitch.

Da Sylvestra proffered his hand in greeting. The Pelloroxo accepted it. Da Sylvestra gripped that dangerous right hand fast; and on the instant the rest leaped upon the dupe.

What chance had he to struggle against half a dozen? He was quickly bound and laid helpless; and then at last Da Sylvestra felt that he could afford himself

the luxury of the customary sneers that men of small mind heap upon their adversaries when helpless.

"Fool. You thought to pit your feeble wits against me?" and so forth.

Then, accompanied by much laughter, those hired bravos called upon their Indians to invade the rubber shed and load all their victim's *tagua* into the waiting hold of the steamer. When every last nut had been removed, they took the Pelloroxo's pistols away from him, retreated onto the steamer, and withdrew the gang plank. Then an Indian was ordered to loosen his bonds and they, from their safety, shouted to him with jeers that it would be good for his health to keep out of sight and rifle shot.

A good coup and perfectly successful. The Pelloroxo was left with no alternative but to obey. One can not single-handed climb the side of an iron steamer against rifle fire. And some of those fellows from the security of the steamer deck would surely have fired had he attempted any such insanity. So the Pelloroxo showed wisdom in going away from there and retiring to his own *batelão* to plan whatever he might.

AND then I arrived. The Pelloroxo was, of course, raging. As was I also as soon as I heard the full tale. But while I was furious and unable to contain myself, his was a colder anger. He sat with a hard face and narrow eyes and asked me first:

"What is now the custom? What may be done without antagonizing yet further the whole community? And tell me, just how far is this place from the law? It seems to me very far indeed." And I said:

"Death of a thousand saints! It is six long days steamer journey from the law—and that is far enough. What may be done is to collect all our Indians and to make a war upon him and all the rest of this bribed community who are your enemies already. What are they? A city man and some fifty *bateleros*. They are nothing. We can summon half a thousand."

But his was the cooler judgment.

"No," he said. "It is a bad thing to try and do business in the middle of an enemy community. And besides, they are not nearly so many. For—" he smiled with tight lips and tapped me with emphasis on the knee—"look you, my friend. His own cunning has turned against him. For of the fifty *bateleros*, how many of them are any the better off? He has filled up the hold with my *tagua* nuts and they are left still without cargo space for their product. Our enemies then are not fifty, but six; the half dozen who have profited by his pay."

"*Valgame Deus!*" I swore. For it was true. Those deserted ones would at least be neutral. "*Então*, it is enough," I said. "We are two; and with your *batelão* crew and mine we have twelve men. Sufficient. We will start a private war immediately. We can not go down to the open river bank against their rifles. But from the shelter of the jungle we can pick them off at our ease and with perfect security bring them to terms."

But again he shook his head.

"Not so good, *amigo*. I have been thinking this thing over this few hours ahead of you—and this bushwhacking does not appeal to me. In any case, what we do we

must do quickly. For consider. They have nothing to wait for now. The captain will soon get up steam, and they will be gone, laughing at our helplessness."

"\_\_\_!" That was so. I was taken aback.

"*Carramba*, what then?"

He leaned over toward me and lowered his voice; for other *batelões* were tied up near us; and, neutral or no, who knows who might carry a tale?

"In these hours I have been thinking of a plan," he told me with caution, "and that is why I asked you how far was this place from the law. Consider then. You know how the current swings from this place?"

Assuredly I knew. It was a stiff four-mile current, and it swung round the shoulder of that landing place and cut diagonally across the wide breadth of the river, where it split some two miles down over the sand spit at the head of Peccary Island. Many a time have I been put to it, driving my men to hard paddling, to avoid being washed ashore there. The Pelloroxo fixed his gaze upon me with narrow eyes.

"What would happen?" said he. "If we were to cut the steamer's cable before they could get up steam?"

I caught at my breath; for I could foresee the result. But in the next instant I told him:

"You can never cut it. They would fill you with rifle balls from the deck before you could swing a machete once."

He shrugged and grinned at last like he was wont.

"With a machete, never," he agreed. "But with a rifle?"

"*Sanctissimas!* Can you?" I demanded.

He shrugged again.

"Why not, my friend? And so can you. Consider. We do not shoot at half a mile. From the close shelter of the adobe hotel we command a clear view of that *paxiuba* palm to which the cable is fastened; and we can take our leisure. Not in one shot may we succeed; nor in ten. But why not in fifty? While I shoot—or you, it does not matter—the other will prevent interference. And who will interfere? Our enemies are on the steamer, as surely marooned from the open bank as are we; and why should these others, neutrals, intrude themselves?"

*Picaro!* The lad was right. It was no trick at all. For the first time I was able to laugh. I said no word, but stepped from his *batelão* into mine to fetch my rifle with many shells. His own was ready. So we went without more ado to the adobe hut. The proprietor knew me of old; and with him I made no bones. I told him simply that we proposed to use his house for a little while for our private purpose and that he would favor me by getting out swiftly and telling all those trader fellows that I, Theophilo, and my friend the Pelloroxo, would be engaged in a little business in which we desired no interference. *Basta*, that was all.

Without question he left us. And the Pelloroxo, laughing grimly, took a poncho from the bed and spread it on the dirt floor before the doorway. Then he lay down confidently on his belly and snuggled himself to take an easy aim.

"Bet you I hit it first crack," said he.

But he lost. I could see in the clear water beyond, against which the cable stood out stiff and black, that the ball had flown high.

He called softly on the name of the \_\_\_ after the manner of you gringos and tried again. This time was better. I saw a thin spurt of dust; and, after its passing, a little frayed edge of cord stood up against the light some two feet from the palm trunk.

"*Brava!*" I shouted. "I must join in this good sport."

But already footsteps were running to see what the shooting was about. I stepped quickly to the door to stand guard; and to those *bateleros* who came I said sternly that this was entirely a private matter to which I and my friend were attending ourselves. They offered no interference. But stood only, wondering. The Pelloroxo took no notice of them; but continued calmly to shoot from within the hut. I was flattered at his confidence in me. Presently another little puff of dust flew from the cable; and then those others understood. But beyond a gasp of wonder and a thousand questions, they made no move to annoy me.

"*Por Diabo,*" said one. "This will be a merry Berman to that stiff-necked captain."

And another:

"To that *Sylvestra bandido*, too. I will wager you, friend João, that he cuts it in ten shots."

"I will stake a good machete against that," said the first.

So it was clear to me and a relief to my anxiety that these men bore no particular affection for that gang of ruffians who had once again preempted the steamer's hold. Others of them took sides in the wagering and added to the play; and thereafter they cursed or cheered according as the shots went. I was able to turn my attention to possible interference from the steamer.

As yet those on board knew nothing of the merry play, beyond wondering perhaps what all that steady shooting was about. But I took the precaution of slipping out of the hut and taking up a sheltered position in the nearby bushes from where I could command the deck if need should arise. To those who watched and wagered on the exciting sport I said:

"Hola, there. Go one of you and warn your friends to stand clear of that cable; for this will not last long now, and when it parts it will snap back like a watch spring."

BUT I was still speaking when an uproar suddenly arose on the steamer. Either they had felt some vibration of the striking shots transmitted along the cable, or somebody friendly disposed had given a warning. There was a shouting and much aimless scurrying; till presently somebody thought to run out the gang plank, while impatient men with rifles waited fiercely to cross over and put a stop to the menace.

Here was where the tables of Berman were to be turned upon that crew of bandits. I laughed, and fired a shot that rang like a cracked gong upon the plates of the steamer right at the feet of the men who handled the plank. Lead must have spattered into the face of one of them; for he yelled and leaped up, to fall and roll with his hands over his eyes. The rest yelled, too, with alarm and leaped away from the plank, letting it go in their haste; and it slipped from the deck and trailed alongside by its rope.

That put a stop to that effort for a while. Men ran about again in a frenzy and shouted orders at each other, each urging the rest to do something while he

himself scurried for sheltered position. Some of the hired bravos fired shots in the general direction of our sound. But I laughed again. They could see nothing at all to shoot at. We were safe. I called to the Pelloroxo to take it easy; I could hold them. And he answered cheerfully:

"Righto. Hold them just a minute yet."

I fired again, as a reminder to the venturesome ones, and hoping besides to puncture the boiler, the round top of which protruded from the middle of the lower deck. But in this I failed. And then, suddenly, before I was well aware of it, the steamer gave a great heave, as if struck a heavy blow. A confusion of shouts came from the adobe hut; and a great serpent of cable lashed back hissing and coiled itself about the boat's bows.

I leaped up to shout with the rest—and then ducked down again in haste; for one of the bravos still retained presence of mind enough to fire at me. But that was the last. After that all was confusion and cursing; calling upon the name of \_\_\_ and of all the patron saints.

The steamer's bows slowly swung away from the bank as the current got beneath it. Faster it swung and faster as the strong outer current got its grip. From the farther side of the steamer arose more shouting and imprecations as those *bateleros* who had made fast to the favorable position cast off and paddled furiously to get out of the way.

On its stern, as on a pivot against the mud, the steamer swung in a grand arc till the bow had passed the middle point. Then slowly the stern, too, left the bank and swung free, and the boat was in the full grip of the current. Decrepit and rusted and lacking paint though the thing was, it looked almost majestic as it drifted off without steam, swinging and waltzing to the whim of the currents.

Round the shoulder of the landing place it floated; and the crowd followed along the bank; some shouting futile advice to those who hung helplessly over the rail; some running aimlessly like ants, as if they might accomplish something; some laughing, quite the most of them laughing, and all eager to see the outcome. It was a fiesta. So much entertainment had never been furnished at Santa Isabel before.

But the outcome was sure, as every *batelero* knew. The steamer went with the current, down stream and diagonally across; and there, two miles down and two hundred meters from the shore, the sand spit of the Peccary waited.

In less than half an hour came the crash. Sooner, indeed, than any one had expected; for the dry land was still quite a distance away, and I for one had never suspected that the shallows of the spit extended so far out. Yet, crash, is not the right word; for that was no hard landing. The boat, driving three-quarters on, was seen to lurch once, stagger and halt apparently in its stride; then its momentum seized it, and it ground slowly on to a stop, sending a veritable tidal wave before it to scare the sand crabs.

Well aground—and lucky at that. For the good Lord he knows why He made a sand spit at that splitting of waters where there should have been bare rocks as at the head of the other islands lower down. Some curious shifting of the under-surface currents doubtless caused it, and thereby the life of the ship was saved. For beyond a slight list, it seemed to be otherwise unhurt.

From the crowd on the bank came a loud, "Aa-ahl" as the boat remained stationary and did not swing off to float on to sure destruction on some one or

other of the lower islands. With the loosening of the tension came time for comment. Much of it was ribald; much, jesting; and all was careless. No man in that crowd had any particular stake in the fate of that steamer. They stood about for some time to see what further interest might happen. But nothing did. The shouting and the confusion died down on the steamer; and presently it was apparent from the furious smoke issuing from the funnel that they were getting up steam.

"So!" said some. "She is unhurt. They will pull off and proceed."

So those who had business to attend to gradually went away. A few stayed and waited to watch. As did the Pelloroxo and I. No words passed between us. Our coup had been played. But what now? What would be the final outcome? Our cargo of *tagua* was still in the hold of that ship. An hour passed, or perhaps two; I was keeping no account of time. Then the shouting of the captain came to us faintly over the water. The boat whistled—from habit, I suppose—and there followed a mighty churning of sand and water from the great stern wheel in reverse.

I held my breath, and I observed that my friend's face, too, was hard and set. But still nothing happened. More whistling and billows of black smoke full of hot sparks and more furious churning. Half an hour or so of this. But there the boat remained; listed, perhaps, a little less than before; but still fast. At last I was able to breathe again. I looked at the Pelloroxo. His eyes were still hard, but he grinned.

"How do you think, friend Theophilo, is the best way," he asked speculatively, "to bring our prisoners to terms?"

"Prisoners" was a word most satisfactory to contemplate. Yet I asked him how he could consider that we two on the bank could call prisoners men who were on a ship a quarter of a mile away, even though stuck fast upon a sand bank.

"The boat can not leave that place," he said shortly. "And they can not leave the boat."

"How so?" I demanded.

But he only grinned the more hardly and sat him down in the shade to wait. I with him, wondering what would be the next move. It was not a long wait. Mighty preparations went forth on the ship. With much shouting of the captain a great anchor was lifted from the bow and lowered into a boat. The cable was lowered also; and the boat then proceeded to row off up-stream.

"Ha!" I exclaimed. "They will drop the anchor above and will kedge off with the winch. *Carramba!* they will escape us yet."

"That is to be seen," said the Pelloroxo coolly. "This will be the test." And, as the boat appeared from behind the steamer's body laboring up-steam, he raised his rifle and fired.

I heard the answering crack of the ball somewhere in the boat and the scream of a man. In instant confusion the boat turned and scurried back to the shelter of the ship. The Pelloroxo grinned out wide.

"The test holds good in our favor," he said grimly.

But even as he spoke, one shouted a warning. A bullet spattered among the rocks of the shore front and the quick report of a rifle came from the ship. Without waste of time all who still watched scrambled for shelter behind the jungle fringe. In safety, the Pelloroxo grinned at me as I embraced him.

"Truly are they prisoners," I agreed. "They can not see us, while we can watch them at our leisure. Yet—" a horrid thought came to me—"they will surely try by night."

"I am not at all afraid of the night," said the Pelloroxo easily. "The distance is but two hundred meters. This is not the cloud season; and even when the moon will be late, the star reflection on the water will show up a boat black against the surface. And they will have a long way to row with that anchor. No, my friend, they will not succeed by night. We can hold them for a month."

"And when we must at last sleep?" I found objection.

But he was confident.

"We will post our Indians to watch and wake us as soon as anything occurs. Their eyes are better than ours; and besides, I have taught my *piloto* to shoot."

"There will be other dangers," said he.

"Assuredly," said he. "But lesser ones. We shall meet them as they come."

And so it turned out. To those other *bateleros* who still watched from the jungle fringe I said:

"My friends, this affair is our business. Bullets that will come will be for us. Do you, therefore, leave us to attend to our business. And will one of you do me the favor to send my *piloto*."

So they went. And if curiosity impelled any to watch still, they watched from some other point, leaving us to our vigil from our selected spot directly opposite to the stranded steamer.

With the first coming of the dark they, of course, made another attempt to carry out their anchor. But it was as the Pelloroxo had said. The boat showed up as a black smudge clear against the shiny surface of the water. A few balls from our rifles sent them quickly scurrying back to the shelter of the ship, just as before. Whether we struck, or by how far we missed, I could not tell. But what matter? We went close enough to make them realize that an open boat is a wide target and that no one can tell whom a ball might strike or when.

"*Graça Deus*, it is true," I said. "We can hold them for a month if need be."

And I laughed. For the situation was not without humor. There were those brigands, having stolen our *tagua* nuts; and here were we, able to keep them there at our will till we should hit upon some plan of recovering our property.

And the plan, after much talk during the following day, was that I should come down with all speed, paddling a double crew night and day, to Manaos, where I have friends, who are even now ready to come back with me and take back what is ours.

Only one further danger I foresaw before I came; and that was that some of them might make the farther shore under cover of the night and the bulk of the ship, and so row down-stream and across again and men creep upon the Pelloroxo through the jungle. But he was supremely confident. He leaned back against his comfortable bed of leaves and lighted first one of those terrible cigarettes. Then he blew smoke into the clean jungle and grinned without care.

"*Psha*," said he. "Have no fear on that score. I will post my Indians in a circle to watch. They have their blow guns. I shall be safer than in a city. Have no fear, *amigo*; but go swiftly and return with help. The ship at least will be here. I can guarantee you that. And I will be here, keeping watch with my rifle and my good



Indians over our wealth. And of those robbers, some may still be here. Some, I think, may be dead; others may well get a bellyful before our little bickering is over, and they may steal away. What matter? They can not steal away our cargo any more."

SO there he is, Senhor. Your Fire-Head son, eating and drinking and sleeping with a rifle across his knees, holding down a shipload of robbers. And here am I, ready to laugh at the situation; for all things have now turned in our favor, and the situation is in our hands and complete. For, look you, this is that Fire-Head's plan, a plan which has my approval.

That I charter here quickly a small river steamer and go up with our friends and transfer our stolen cargo right at the sand spit.

Come with us, Senhor, to witness this jest that will be your son's triumph. For consider what will then happen. We shall chase those robbers, any who may still remain, into the jungles. We shall not hunt them down; for we are not vindictive. *Dentro*, let them suffer a while from the insects before we let them return to the community of respectable folk. When that time comes they will have learned to leave alone such men as Theophilo Da Costa and Pelloroxo.

And the Da Sylvestra, if we do not have to kill him, being caught with his charter of the regular steamer, must needs accept for transport the *castanha* of all those other *padrões* at whatever price he can get—which, ho-ho, it will not be much, I can tell you. So shall the goodwill of the rest of that community of Santa Isabel swing back to us. And the last words of that incorrigible Fire-Head to me as I left him, were:

"In that institute in my home town they taught me that the third most important principle for conducting a business is, so to conduct it that you have the respect and goodwill of your neighbors."

*Por Deus*, a true teaching. But he did not assimilate it for a long time. Not till he came up to us of the upper rivers. But he has learned much. He has learned, and he is established now as one of us. King of the *tagua* he will be. And I, I shall have a one-third interest in the king's business. Come with us then, Senhor, and join in the *fiesta* which we shall make with our friends over that kingship.

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