



THE anvil-chorus of the kling-kling birds in the coconut palms over Sam Chung's rum-shop awoke Warden, the American visitor. What stirred the Anglo-Jamaican in his cot on the other side of the room was the whack of the American's shoe hitting that spot on the wall where a huge spider had been a second before.

Through sleepy eyes Hambridge, the sun-scorched man with the faded blue eyes and fair hair, amusedly observed his guest's apprehension over the fact that the spider had mysteriously reappeared right above the American's bed. Warden, pajamaed and slipperless, shot from his cot and armed himself with the tin wash-basin—loaded.

"Can the brute swim?" he asked, perceiving that Hambridge was awake.

"That spider," said the Anglo-Jamaican banana-man with a yawn and a drawl that had Creole languor in it; "that spider, *buccra*, can do anything. It can turn itself into a man or any other sort of beast. It can vanish and reappear somewhere else at will. It's the Br'er Fox of West Indian lore. Its name is 'Nancy' and it's harmless, so far as its bite goes. In darkest Africa it was the great god Ananzi—god of cunning—and it's the

most infernal bad luck to kill one. Now, how about caw-fee?"

"Mean to tell me that lump of hair and legs isn't poisonous? Wow! It's as big as my fist with the fingers spread!"

"He's also the god of beneficence," said Hambridge solemnly, "if you believe in him. If you don't—ask any roadside Quashie how buzzards came by their bald heads."

The overseer chuckled but suddenly turned his head toward the jalousied door leading to the native outhouses. His voice arose in the broad dialect:

"A weh dat gyal, Habigail? Dis *buccra* not gwine hab cawfw w dis fine marnin'?"

"Ah comin' ri' dis minnit, *busha* (overseer)!" sing-songed a voice from the outhouse kitchen.

"Mek it soon-soon den, for dis Banana Day—yah?" urged the *busha*.

Warden still eyed the motionless spider on the wall above his cot. He would rather have dispelled his doubts by slaughter, for he was not superstitious. Yet who was he to cast doubt upon the mystic beliefs of darkest Africa, especially when his Anglo-Jamaican host shared them.

"I suppose if I lammed the brute," said

Warden humorously, "and Pereira got ahead of you today by a single banana bunch, you'd boot me out of Rio Hacha."

"N-no," said Hambridge, rising lazily, "but if my runners heard you'd killed a Nancy before breakfast they'd chuck the fight before it was started. Ho, gyal! Weh dat cawfee?"

"Comin', *busha!*"

The jalousied door swung open and a beaming mulatto girl entered with a bent tray bearing two tin cups of steaming Blue Mountain, flanked by a couple of star-apples and some bread buttered with canned bluenose.

"Marnin', *buska,*" said the girl with a white-toothed grin.

To the visitor she accorded less genial deference. Without the grin she bowed to Warden and said—

"Marnin', *buccra.*"

That any fight was in the air Nature at least denied. Outside the rough shack which was the port's headquarters of the Caribbean Fruit Company, Rio Hacha lay like a dead Spanish ruin before being resurrected by the promise of new day.

It was a semi-circle of crumbling, slave-built houses on one side of a white sand road that curved inward between two horns of volcanic rock goring out to sea. On the eastern horn, under the coconut palms where the *klung-klung* birds clamored their anvil-chorus, Sam Chung, the heathen, let down the bars of his saltfish, *quattie* bread and rum store in preparation for the great business of the week—Banana Day. On the other horn, Pereira, the Portuguese Creole, emerged from the shack which was his abode and Rio Hacha headquarters of the banana trust, the Amalgamated, and scanned the field of prospective battle with his small, soft eyes.

There was no promise of conflict either in him or the scene. The world was tinged with rose. The sun's rim was not up over the edge of the still, oily Caribbean. The sea-breeze was not due for an hour, and the

noon roar of the surf on the reef was but as yet a mere sigh.

Between the horns, on the inner side of the incurving sand road, Rio Hacha still slept. It would sleep late this morning, for the day would properly begin at noon and last through the ensuing night. About midday the place would wake up when Pereira took his station at the buying wharf of the Amalgamated Banana Company, when his rival, Hambridge of the Caribbean, occupied his overseer's bench at the independents' pier, and when the runners of the two companies began to squabble over the incoming drays, carts, donkeys and black humanity laden with banana bunches from the plantations and the native patches.

As the Banana Day progressed the fight would grow more bitter as price and demand soared or declined as the required fruit fell short or otherwise. The steamers of the rival lines would appear, racing neck and neck, perhaps, for the mouth of the bottle-shaped lagoon. Then would begin the loading, and when the last whaleboat was emptied of its green-gold treasure the race would be resumed for the market-ports of Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston. Then Rio Hacha, like many another port, would fall asleep again for another week.

BUT at that early hour there was no hint of the banana war, another battle of which was presently to be waged; the war which had been growing in heat for weeks between the banana trust and the independents who sought a place in the sun where the tiger defied all comers.

For a year the Amalgamated Banana Company had been making a point to put the Caribbean Fruit Company out of business. To defeat this—at Rio Hacha at least—the independents had sent Hambridge to that fruitful port to match his brains against a pastmaster of banana-running—Jose Pereira of the trust forces. Hambridge, with a white

man's mental energy, plus native birth and understanding, had made good in all branches of the business, from selecting and clearing ground to reaping a crop of "straights."

Pereira, wily behind his sleek, sleepy exterior, looked as harmless a West Indian as ever lost energy by climate and slack morals. He was unhealthily fat. His smooth, swarthy cheeks trickled humidity on all occasions. His silk shirt—he had a weakness for unwashable silk—clung to his perspiring girth like a clammy balloon.

He also wore sandals, strained crash pants and a broad felt hat which it was said he bought by width—it looked like a limp parasol. And he had a fondness for a sprinkling of dried lavender sprigs in his tobacco. When the breeze wafted a whiff of lavender from the west Hambridge was wont to become profanely energetic.

Pereira, having smelled the air and scanned the eastern horizon where the steamers would appear on the race from port to port, retired to morning coffee and buttered roast plantain.

Hambridge and his guest, Warden, having disposed of Blue Mountain and bluenose, strolled in their pajamas to the Rio Hacha for the morning swim. Usually they took the guns along, or Mitch-Chell, the *buska's* black henchman, brought the rods and live shrimps for tarpon, but—this was Banana Day.

Some power in the North who had thought not beyond his desk, or possibly was trying an experiment on public opinion, had proposed a tax on bananas. That the people howled mattered little to the banana-men at banana sources. It was all right about "the poor man's luxury" so long as the poor man bought.

At present the poor man's agents—the middlemen up North—were buying on his behalf, the other half for themselves. The dealers were stocking their refrigerators with green fruit to be ripened by raising the

temperature in sympathy with the ante.

Already the price per bunch, as yet the same to the poor man who bought "fingers," "hands" at most, from the corner grocer, was soaring among the banana islands. Future bunches "fitting" on the trees were being snapped up by contract and for fancy prices. Before the tax proposal the business had been at unusually low ebb, "straights" down to thirty-five cents on the tropic wharves, seven-handed bunches down to eighteen cents, "sixes" rejected altogether as not worth their stem weight and returned with all smaller bunches for Quashie's family pot and pig-feed.

But since the tax proposal prices had moved steadily upward. The first week the Rio Hacha quotations of both the Amalgamated and the Caribbean companies fluctuated from fifty cents to fifty-five, with a tot of rum for the donkey-man who brought in not less than four "straight" bunches. The second week, while "Constant Reader" and "Pro Bono" discussed the tax up North, the islands' price went up to sixty-five and seventy cents per "straight" with frequent fist-fights between the runners of Pereira and Hambridge.

In one such fight a scared jackass, laden with five eleven-handed bunches—extra "straights"—fled with its coveted load and committed inadvertent suicide in the Rio Hacha. And once Hambridge, irritated by lavender floating down from westward, called Pereira a *soor kaboocha*, which Pereira, ignorant of Hindustani, but suspicious, resented.

The third week Hambridge's chief henchman, Mitch-Chell, smote the Amalgamated's chief runner in the eye, Pereira's man had called him a "t'iefin' porpus," which is not Hindustani but has to do with the questionable honesty of a person who has once been in a home for paupers. Both were arrested, but promptly released. The police force owed both Hambridge and Pereira

since the last poker game—a love-feast which occurred on the evening following each Banana Day, when the nights again grew lonesome.

Now it was the dawn of the fourth Banana Day since the tax proposal. In his hip pocket Pereira had a written slip brought in the night by a black boy on a mule. It was from the Amalgamated's boss at Port Antonio. It tersely stated his instructions:

Rio Hacha: Fifteen thousand bunches—sixes up. Average seventy-five cents—dollar limit. Steamer *Haciendado* arrive 4 P.M. to clear at midnight.

At the Caribbean's shack Hambridge had a message from the independents' chief, whose headquarters were at Port Maria. The chief happened to be Warden's father. His son, fresh from an American college, was in Jamaica to observe Ananzi spiders, the native and other animals, and to learn the difference between Para and Guinea grass, white yams and *afu*, and particularly the difference between a banana and a plantain. The *buska* was expert in these matters.

Warden Sr.'s message of instruction was less formal:

Buy all you can lay hands on and keep out of jail. Go Pereira's limit and then some. Tax on bananas taxing demand. If we don't get the trimmings the Amalgamated will. Show the rah-rah boy something.

This message Hambridge studied again after the swim, when he and the rah-rah boy had returned to the shack. It was a perfectly clear message. There was nothing about it that should have brought a moody frown to the *buska's* sun-scorched brow. He studied it, turned it over, and even held it up to the light. Once when the Amalgamated had been waylaying the Caribbean's dispatch bearers, the *buska* himself had written an important message with banana-juice, which remained invisible until it had been laundered with a hot flatiron.

But this message from Warden Sr. was all on the surface. It was just as Hambridge

had expected the wording would be. Yet he was troubled. He did not know himself why or what about. He had had the same vague feeling that time he put his money on a sure favorite in the Overseers' Sweepstakes and lost a month's pay, a saddle and faith in his own perspicacity. His abstracted reverie was disturbed by Warden Jr.

"But how can you tell it isn't a tarantula?" he asked.

The Ananzi was still on the wall.

"You can tell shortly after it bites," said the banana-man irritably. "The banana bunches are full of them and I never knew one bite except in the New York papers."

He rose and went to the jalousied door.

"Mitch-Chell!" he roared. "Go bring come a gallon a rum—yah?"

"*Eu-eu, busha,*" assented a guttural from without.

"An' tell he no sen' dis *buccra* parafeen all color up wi' annotta like las' week," said Hambridge. "Jamaica man no fool 'bout good rum."

"As bad as all that?" said Warden when Mitch-Chell had departed Chungward.

"A nigger out of the bush will fall for a three-farthings' of rum where he'll turn down a threepence extra on the bunch," the *busha* growled.

He went into the cubbyhole which was his office. Presently his runners, ragged, bare-footed, black and shiny as wet ebony, gathered around him for a war council over a sheet of names.

With a pencil the *busha* checked off this man of the hills and who were expected to bring in fruit before nightfall. This man was no good—Pereira's body and soul—Pereira had loaned him money. This fellow was doubtful, but Mitch-Chell was at his brother's wake, wasn't he? Mitch-Chell must take care of him. Pereira had been angling for this other fellow—a regular six-straight-bunch man. Give him a drink first, then talk him up!

And so on. Pereira on the western horn

was holding a similar war council with his native runners, the chiefest of whom had a bruised eye.

Warden had taken a gun, after one more respectful glance at the great god Ananzi on the wall, and gone off to the Hacha swamp to pot baldpates on the rise to the hog-plum feeding in the hills.

WHEN the American visitor returned to Rio Hacha it was past noon. His steps had taken him over into the Bengal plantation where he had become interested in the barracks of the indentured coolie laborers and a beautiful but brainless creature of no caste whatever who looked like Oriental romance under the sounding name of Latchimi.

But he forgot about his Hindi flower—who had been married when she was nine, although he did not know it—when he tried to recognize Rio Hacha. The settlement which at morn had seemed as dead as the Spaniards who built it under Don Sasi, was now alive with Jamaican clamor and American hustle.

The wharves of the rival companies were scenes of activity. On the piers half-clad negroes were piling bunches of green-gold fruit, at each pile a mulatto clerk in an immense hat checking the bunches as they were passed into a whaleboat by perspiring handlers.

In the doorway of the Caribbean's wharf-building Hambridge sat under a huge pith-helmet watching the battle which was going on directly before him on the sand road. Down at the Amalgamated's wharf, where the Portuguese sat complacently breathing lavender, there was, on the other hand, comparative order.

The main road from the hills entered Rio Hacha from the east, and the incoming fruit-carriers ran the rivals' gauntlet at the Caribbean's wharf. Once past that point it was agreed that the spoils were to Pereira. But that worthy's runners were on the job with Hambridge's at the danger point. Both sides

yelled, cursed, cajoled, threatened and tried to bribe the dazed Quashie from the interior, who had arrived with his humble donkey and his banana patch's yield of "fit" bunches for the week.

Clashes between the rival runners, between the banana-sellers and the over-zealous banana-buyers, were so frequent that one continuous fight was in progress. The moment one was settled and peace established, generous libations at Sam Chung's rum-counter led to renewed recriminations.

When Warden arrived on the scene he witnessed a typical collision. A well-to-do native planter had arrived with twenty "straight" bunches in a small dray dragged by an unhappy mule that was half-suspended between the shafts. The negro was a newcomer to Rio Hacha, drawn thereto by the promise of high prices.

Unused to Rio Hacha methods he flayed the belligerent runners with his cowhide whip. Failing to dislodge them from the top of his dray he turned his lash upon the mule, urging it out of this pandemonium. Knowing that if the dray once passed the Caribbean's wharf the fruit was lost to Pereira, Hambridge's runners seized the animal's head. Pereira's runners tried to dislodge them. The proprietor raised his arms to heaven and called upon his Maker to bear witness that he was a Baptist in good standing and had never backslid or in the poorhouse—whatever these virtues had to do with the case.

Then the mule took a part in the affair—resentfully. It let loose with its hind legs. The traces broke; a shaft cracked. Two minutes later Pereira got the mule and sections of harness. Hambridge's men battled in the dust with the rival runners for possession of the fruit. That which survived undamaged presumably found its way to Baltimore by the Caribbean's steamer.

The man from the hills went back to his yam-patch and his dusky bride with a

smashed dray, a penitent mule in mended harness, the price of nine good bunches mostly in his head, the rest being in Sam Chung's till, five "rejects" and the remains of six mutilated banana stems. But then he had learned much.

Hambridge observed all this without once rising from his bench or removing the pipe from his mouth. Occasionally he wrote an order and had it passed to Mitch-Chell. It usually was a command to give some prospective banana-seller a la-a-arge drink of rum.

"How goes the battle, General?" asked Warden, coming to the *busha's* side.

"Good enough," said Hambridge, rather gloomily. "We hold our own. He's ahead of us on his contracted fruit, of course, and he's turned a lousy trick or two. But the day's young."

He spoke with a kind of abstraction, a certain doubt. Warden thought the overseer did not look quite himself—a touch of fever perhaps. He advised a personal application of the bribe-bottle as a stimulant to zest.

"I don't as a rule," said the *busha* thoughtfully, "but I may before I'm through."

The afternoon lengthened and swift dusk came. Into Rio Hacha trundled more donkeys, drays and natives burdened with bananas. Many lights appeared on land and sea and the tropic heavens lit their million candles. The fireflies danced among the coconut palms and the low logwood greenery.

In the semi-darkness the broad negro voices, hilarious with rum or furious with rage, and the constant squealing and braying of mules and donkeys contrasted oddly with the mirroring sea from which the day-breeze had fled. Against the dense blue of the evening sky the palms rose as stenciled things in mid-air. The *kling-kling* birds, returning in pairs to the palm-crests, again beat out their anvil chorus, but not with the unanimous gusts of dawn.

Already the rival steamers had

appeared, the Caribbean's *Amato* first because it had gained time through failure to get its quota at the other ports along the coast. The Amalgamated's *Haciendado* was now in the lagoon, too. Her gun-ports were wide open and the trust's handlers were passing in thousands of bunches of bananas. From the wharf at the western end of the bay Pereira's loaders could be heard numbering the bunches for the checker in a singsong with doggerel rhymings:

Bana-a-ana—four!
Come gimme one mo-ore-O!

Bana-a-ana—five!
Ho, hoy, look all-ive—O!

The *Amato* had not begun, to load. The first whaleboat had just left the Caribbean's wharf and it would be some time before Hambridge could keep the passers as busy as the stevedores desired to be. Things were going badly.

Earlier in the afternoon he had received another dispatch from Warden Sr. at Port Maria.

Amalgamated cleaning up everything all along, *Amato* not half laden! It's up to you!

It was up to him. Yet what could he do to save the company from sending a half-laden steamer North, for ordinarily she cleared from Rio Hacha? And go she must with her perishable cargo ripening in her holds. But even if he captured every bunch that came into Rio Hacha, even if he stole fruit regularly contracted to Pereira, even if he assassinated the fat, lavender-soaked sponge and lifted his deliveries from the piled wharf, still he could not hope to fill the *Amato*.

So he told the anxious supercargo who came ashore from the *Amato* the minute she dropped her hook. But he went to work to do his best, although somehow that mysterious prescience followed him like a shadow. His pupil and guest, Warden, caught the fever of

the game and went so far as to leap himself to the driver's seat of a newly arrived dray, shoulder the proprietor off and drive the load of bananas into the Caribbean's shed.

"There!" he cried, dismounting, flushed with battle. "I like this game, *busha!*"

"You —— fool!" said Hambridge thickly. "You can't do that. He's Pereira's man. It's contract fruit."

"What's the odds! He's turned a trick or two on us! All's fair——"

"Drive out that dray!" said the *busha* to the negro planter who had picked himself up and was calling down anathema upon "de mad young *buccra* from obersea."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Warden of his father's employee.

"Nothing," said Hambridge with a queer laugh.

He waved a hand to the spangled skies. "God's in's heav'n——"

HE TURNED and walked, slightly unsteady, toward the shack across the way. Warden remained, stunned out of action. Hambridge, the best man the Caribbean had, the man his governor chose for his example in the business, had been drinking!

No doubt the negro hands knew it and slacked accordingly. It seemed to Warden that most of them were drunk, too. No wonder! They did precisely what the *buska* did. He was a white man and could do no wrong. What he did was worthy of emulation.

No wonder Pereira was winning—had won—banana hands up! He would hate to tell the governor of this, but—he ought to. Hambridge was the company's best man. Ye gods! Drunk!

Presently the *busha* came back. There was the curious grin on his face, the inane smirk of a man half-paralyzed by liquor.

"Come on!" said Warden, thinking the lapse might be merely temporary—a touch of fever and consequent light-headedness. "Let's lean up against it. We'll turn a trick on that

lavender chest yet!"

"What's the use?" gulped Hambridge, slumping down on his bench. "He wins. —— tax on b'nanas anyway!"

"Wins!" shouted Warden, his Yankee hatred of defeat cropping out. "Not by a darn sight! And if you're that sort of weak-spined rabbit——"

Hardly knowing what he expected to accomplish right away, he grabbed a bunch of bananas from the hands of one of the negroes and—just as quickly dropped it again. He sprang back aghast. The negro also leaped away.

From the bunch had dropped a huge spider, even larger than that which had dismayed him in the shack.

"Spidah!" yelled the negro.

It was Mitch-Chell.

Warden, ashamed of the fact that the bunch he had dropped had burst into three pieces, sprang with both feet upon the insect, intent upon vengeance. He did not miss. That spider emerged from the impact a flat mess of pulp and quivering, hairy legs.

"Now you've done it!" said the Anglo-Jamaican overseer. "That settles it. I tell you——" He hiccuped—"might's well a killed Nancy this morning. Nancy heard ya, an'way. Killed the luck! That settl' zit. 'Ve killed a Nanzi spider!"

"But, *busha!*——!" Mitch-Chell protested.

"Shut up—you!" shouted Hambridge, glaring at his henchman.

"But, *busha!*——"

"Will you close your black mouth!" roared the *busha*. "Get me a drink!"

"My God!" groaned Warden, the pupil, and he turned toward the shack in despair.

He would have to talk to the governor.

Before he entered the shack he looked back at the wharf-shed. The chief runner, Mitch-Chell, appeared to be arguing with the *busha*. Hambridge had gripped the negro by the shoulders—possibly for support or in

drunken affection—and he was laughing in his face. Warden went to the room in the shack where he had slept every night for nearly a week—for no purpose except to be alone with his thoughts. The first thing his eyes sought and found was the Ananzi spider of the morning, still impending over his cot.

It had not moved. It was like a dead insect fastened by some invisible web. Only the light of the hurricane lamp caught two little gleaming points in its head,

He shuddered slightly. He desired to kill it, attributing to the strange creature somehow the ill-luck of the day; desiring more to slay it because Hambridge seemed to believe in its power, that he himself was half-inclined...Bah!

He picked up one of his still sodden bathing-shoes and balanced it for an accurate shot. But as he swung his arm a voice, thick with inebriation, said behind him:

“Don’ do it! Musn’ do it, ol’ fella!”

Warden gave the *busha* one contemptuous look and hurled the shoe with all his force. The spider vanished. The American turned furiously upon the overseer, who was chuckling inanely. Hambridge pointed waveringly to the opposite wall.

“Misshed!” said he.

There was the spider! How it had got over there, whether it had leaped or—some magic. It seemed impossible; yet there it was.

The overseer reeled toward the wash-stand. He poured a half tumbler of liquid from a black bottle which had stood there and drained it off. Then he fairly collapsed on his cot.

Warden, disgusted, dismayed beyond expression, went out into the night. A fury raged in him. He would not let his dad lose because his dad’s trusted best man had fallen down.

He took charge; but he might as well have followed the *busha*’s example, at least in the matter of going to bed. The hands listened dully to his orders, or quite ignored them.

They, too, had slacked up. They, too, had been drinking. They worked slowly, clumsily. Bunches of bananas were dropped and shattered. They pitched other bunches into the whaleboat, bruising them against marketable possibility. They allowed dray after dray to run the gauntlet unchallenged. The victorious Pereira on the other horn chuckled as he heard of the doings.

“Soused—on Banana Day!” he said to his chief runner. “Never knew him take a drink before, even. Well, it’s an ill wind—my tally says twenty-two thousand bunches. How about yours, Amos?”

As a last resort Warden appealed to Mitch-Chell, the faithful. Upon him, too, the spell of evil had descended. He, too, seemed more than half drunk.

“*Wehfado, buccra?*” (“What else can we do, white man?”) he said. “You no kill Nancy spidah, *buccra?*”

THE Amalgamated’s steamer, *Haciendado*, cleared at midnight with her holds full. The Caribbean’s *Amato* cleared hours later with less than half the cargo for which she had capacity. She headed back to Port Maria for instructions. It had been a disastrous week for the independents, especially at Rio Hacha. Pereira had exceeded his order for fifteen thousand bunches by seven thousand. Hambridge shipped only nine thousand.

While the Caribbean’s hands finished their debauch on the beach at the eastern end of the bay and on the other horn Pereira’s victors celebrated, Warden returned to the shack, tired, disappointed. On the other cot lay the *busha*, apparently dead to the world. By his side was a broken chair and on it the black bottle and a glass.

What was the man drinking, anyway? The dregs in the glass were not red or brown or amber, but transparent and colorless. Was it possible he had sunk secretly to the last resort of the tropic tippler—gin?

Sadly anxious to know the worst,

Warden tiptoed to the side of the man he had admired until that night. He smelled of the liquid in the glass. It had no odor. Neither had the remainder of it in the black bottle. He poured a few drops on the palm of his left hand and touched it with the tip of his tongue.

It was plain water! Yet....

IN THE morning there was little to be said. The *busha*, naturally enough, slept late. Warden took his dip in the Rio Hacha alone.

Pereira came around, as usual after Banana Day, to talk it over, offer to shake hands and call it a deal for another week. On this occasion he expressed the sympathy of good fellowship.

“We all do it, even the best of us, at times,” said he. “Suppose you have a hair of the dog, Hambridge?”

“No, *massa*,” said Hambridge gravely. “I never touch the stuff.”

Pereira chuckled and helped himself from the bottle he had brought along for diplomatic use.

When Warden came back from the river he found them seated together, quite friendly, talking over the setting of a turtle net.

Warden did not like it. The dark thought occurred that these two—alone so much together—might be closer than he had been led to believe; that possibly the Amalgamated, through Pereira, had bought the *busha* into the secret service of the trust. He would certainly have a talk with the governor.

After the late tropic breakfast Warden announced his intention of returning to Port Maria. The *busha* did not press him to remain. The farewells were rather awkward. Warden felt he ought to be frank.

“I’m sorry, Hambridge,” said he, “but there were things last night. I needn’t say more, except that it’s clearly up to me, as my father’s son—”

“Go ahead,” said the *busha* wearily. “When I make an ass of myself I bray but don’t kick. It’s my funeral. So long.”

When Warden Jr. told Warden Sr. of the matter of which he felt he was bound to speak, the governor’s face expressed utter disappointment and dismay.

“If you weren’t my own son I’d call you a liar,” said he. “But this explains yesterday. I’ve been twisting my brain for some explanation of the fall-down of Rio Hacha. We didn’t expect Hambridge to raise twenty-two thousand bunches as Pereira did—he gets half that in contracted fruit—but we did bank on twelve thousand, maybe fifteen. He was authorized to go Pereira’s limit, and then some. I didn’t understand, but now—Hambridge! Drunk! And I’d meant to make him general manager. Well, I’ll give him a fair hearing.”

Hambridge, upon a summons to Port Maria next day, rode there huddled in his saddle like a bag of loose bricks. His face was stamped with woe and his brow furrowed with remorse. Possibly he had been an ass, a superstitious fool, but ever since that time he lost on the favorite in the Overseers’ Sweepstakes he had been more and more inclined to listen to that inward voice. No, not voice. That... What was it the Americans called it? Ah, well, it didn’t matter now.

It was therefore a much surprised overseer who, walking listlessly into Warden Sr.’s office at Port Maria, suddenly found himself enclosed in that banana magnate’s arms and being given a lesson in the two-step.

The *busha* backed off. The head of the independent company trod mincingly around the office, cackling like a gander and waving a pink slip of paper.

“Go out and get drunk again, Hambridge, me boy,” he chanted chortlingly. “Go out and get paralyzed!”

“I never touch the stuff,” said the *busha*, his usual languid tones heavy with melancholy.

“Eh!” ejaculated Warden Sr. “But there—that’s all right. Don’t discuss it. I won’t. Luckiest thing ever happened, only

don't do it again. Listen to this!"

He started to read the cablegram, but broke off to explain in full what the laconic words meant.

"Bottom's dropped out of the boom banana market," he declaimed. "Tax on bananas gone up in smoke. 'Constant Reader' and 'Pro Bono Publico' and the 'poor man's food' and all that—killed it before it was born. Markets flooded with bananas to be sold at a loss by dealers. Prices dropped through the basement floor and——"

"And—?" the *busha* chimed in, leaning forward with a great light in his eyes.

"And!" roared Warden Sr. "The Amalgamated has six steamers crammed to the gunwales steaming seventeen knots to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston, and they'll have to chuck the whole caboodle overboard, as they've done before, or further spoil the market. The Caribbean loses only a poor half cargo on the *Amato*, for the *Jacquelin* and the *Portuondo* of our fleet couldn't make up and turned over their fruit to the *Amato* and didn't sail at all!"

"*Imphm!*" was the *busha's* comment.

There was a queer look on his sun-scorched face.

"Now, as to my getting drunk——"

"Not a word!" interrupted Warden Sr. "As I say, it was the luckiest thing ever happened, only——"

"As to my getting drunk," continued Hambridge lazily, "it was like this. One time I bet a month's salary and a fifty-dollar saddle on a sure thing in the Overseers'——"

"Oh, can that old yarn! Only——"

"And ever since I've sort of leaned to a bet on the possibility of a rank outsider finishing first. Now, I had a feeling——"

"A hunch?" said Warden Sr., becoming grave at once.

"Much obliged," said the *busha*, relieved. "I've been hunting that word for nearly two days—a hunch. I had a hunch that that tax wouldn't go through, and the high

prices of the last month and the way we've been flooding the market meant—you see? My hunch was for its happening this week, between sailing and arriving in the States—within these five days. It was such a strong—er—hunch. Then there was a fool thing about a Nancy spider——"

"What about the Ananzi spider?" asked some one in the doorway.

It was Warden Jr., a curious grin on his face.

"Hullo, Warden," said Hambridge coolly, and went on, "Maybe that was what got me started. Your young man here missed it with his boot and it stayed right in the room all day. Maybe I pleaded for its life and—maybe Ananzi took a hand in gratitude."

Warden Sr. was shaking with mirth. He knew the native-born Jamaican's superstition about Br'er Ananzi.

"The Nancy stayed in the room and I got a feeling—a hunch—it had something on its mind; that it had a hunch, too, and wanted to tip me off on a sure thing.

"When I got word how badly things were going at the other ports, I went to the shack and had a long confab with Br'er Nancy—in my mind, you know. *That's* what was on my mind," turning to Warden Jr. "Fever be blowed! And when you suggested a drink—a thing I never do—it occurred to me the only way to cover up a lie-down before Pereira was to get paralyzed. I drank so much water out of that black bottle that after you left I had to go over to Sam Chung's for a real drink—something I never do.

"It was just a—a hunch, you see."

"Hmm! There was a good deal of cold reasoning behind that hunch," said Warden Sr.

"I'm sorry, old man," said Warden Jr. "Honest—I thought you were really—all to the bad, and—and I was disappointed. I'm frank, and I want to apologize."

"I meant you to think so," said the *busha*. "I meant everybody to think so—so it would come straight to Pereira. Even

Mitch-Chell believed it until I put him on and thereafter he proceeded to demoralize the whole handling staff.”

“But why pretend to be drunk at all?” asked Warden Jr.

“As I never touch the stuff,” the *busha* drawled, “it was the only thing would account to Pereira for my falling down. He would have been suspicious of anything else and would have got a—a hunch, maybe, that I had private information from headquarters. A throw-down of the tax on bananas would have been the first thing to occur to him. I didn’t want him to put that into the heads of the Amalgamates at Port Antonio. I wanted ’em to go on buying—and they sure did. I helped ’em all I could,”

“But how can you give any credit to the Ananzi, or my not killing it? Didn’t I smash one to pulp that time in the wharf-shed?”

“Oh, that?” said Hambridge with a queer smile. “Mitch-Chell knew. That’s why I had to shut him up sharp. I wanted you to think it was a Nancy. If it had been, I’d ha’ known we were really in bad. That was a tarantula!

“Your Nancy is still doing business at the same stand. It was right on the ceiling over my head last night when Pereira, Sam Chung, the police force and I had our little weekly game. Sam Chung has a mortgage now on the constable’s horse and I stung Pereira for eighty-seven cold dollars.”

However, when the *busha* was promoted to the general managership at Port Maria, Warden Sr. presented him with a seal ring upon which was engraved the great god Ananzi in the shape of a spider, somewhat reduced.