



## THE SUN GOD'S EYES

BY EDWIN GLENN HUDDLESTON

*Far up in the Napo jungles sat the Sun God, blinded. And all through the head waters of the Amazon the ominous throb of the Tockinoon drums betokened a dread pursuit of the missing eyes—eyes that were priceless opals*

**I**N THE Upper-Amazon rubber forests you ain't supposed to ask a man why the name he bears don't correspond with the initials on his arm. Fact is, you ain't supposed to ask a man anything there. Another fact is, you ain't got no business in the Upper-Amazon rubber forests; it's a steaming hell-hole—not exactly the jumping off place, but the place you hit after you've jumped!

Me? Why do I stay? Because if I went

back outside I doubt if anybody'd know me—and you couldn't much blame 'em. You see, a wounded jaguar thought I had the skin you love to touch, so he made a swipe at my face. You'd hardly call it a face now; but you don't specially need a face here. All you need is two legs and two arms, an eye or two, and a head. But of course now, sometimes a man lets an arm get separated from his clavicle, or a leg from his hip, or—his head from his neck.

Funny thing, that.

Mr. Kay, for instance—at least, that's what he said his name was.

One night when we was all swigging *maté* in the *barracas*, Kay come in—from nowhere in particular. A glance at him told that he'd been in the tropics a long while, but we didn't ask where, nor why.

He was stockily built, mahogany-hided—you couldn't call it skin; it was thick as a rhino's. But he had the voice and eyes of a white man, although his unfaltering gray eyes never disclosed just *what kind* of white man. I'm still wondering—

He'd a big Chinese parrot on his shoulder and a heavily-bradded leather contraption encircling his waist and vitals. Aside from that and his moroccan hip boots, he was naked. He didn't have no 'nitals tattooed on his arms to mess him up, either. Instead, on his right forearm he had a naked yellow woman who wriggled her hips when he quirked his muscles.

Mr. Kay made the yellow woman do the hula while we got acquainted. And when there's to be no questions asked it's a' damned funny acquaintance. He'd like to stay at our *seringal* a little while, he said, and then he was going away. Nowhere in particular—up the Maranon, or down the Amazon, or out the Orinoco—just going away. Meanwhile, he'd like a job—gathering rubber! A white man!

But he got the job, and he held it well. Never saw a white man work harder in the tropics than Mr. Kay did. I began to wonder if he was a white man at all—or god or devil.

WHEN he chose to, Kay could make the most perfectly rounded rubber *bollos* it's ever been my lot to see. He was proud of his *bollos* too, and he lugged one of the heavy things in one night for the boys to see. He'd embedded his initials in it with custard-apple seeds.

Everyone understood that simple, futile vanity.

I ran my fingers questioningly over the seeded letters, *M. K.*

"Mr. Kay," he grinned, and started the yellow woman a-jazzing on his arm. "By the way," he added, "ain't your brokers Laitz & Laitz at Manaos?"

I was startled that he should know, but I nodded, surmising that he'd seen the stack of *bollos* at the wharf awaiting the downriver boat.

The Chinese parrot remarked, "Hell, it's hot!" in a high, raucous voice and began fidgeting on its perch.

"Why, it ain't hot!" Cord broke out. "What's that bird so jumpy about?"

I noticed Kay was sharing the parrot's uneasiness. The man was shifting nervously on his stool, and our hut—a bamboo cage perched high above the quagmire on *hevea* stilts—contributed to the general agitation by beginning to sway in a cool rising wind.

Cord strode to the door of the hut; when he turned to us again his face was pasty beneath his tan.

"*God!*" he cried, "don't you hear it? The tom-toms—over there to the east—they give me the creeps—like a sick man gruntin'! I thought the Tockinoons was a peaceful people. Wonder what's riled 'em?"

"Guess something's gone wrong with the sun god," Smith told him, "and they're trying to appease the bounder! He's s'posed to hold off the rainy season, but it looks like he's 'bout to fizzle on 'em this time! This wind says rain—rain, fever and death—" He broke off in a hollow laugh.

A voice was calling from the darkness.

Cord returned to the hut's doorway, stood listening attentively while a native yammered up at him from below.

"No," Cord said at last, gesturing wildly, "he ain't here! Never heard of him!"

Cord faced us quizzically then, but he asked no question. His eyes sparkled at Kay.

"He says somebody's blinded the sun

god and it's goin' to rain—oh, it's goin' to rain like hell! Somebody's stolen the sun god's eyes—and they're lookin' for the Man of the Dancing Woman!”

Mr. Kay hunched forward on his stool. “Ain't it funny something always happens to back up these natives' beliefs in their crazy religions? Ain't it a hellish coincidence that, of all the years for an early rainy season, it had to come just when the sun god got his eyes stolen?”

“Rats!” grunted Cord. But he was worried.

Fact is, we were all worried. The rain come on next morning in thick waving curtains. The tom-toms kept a-grunting, steady, rhythmic, louder, nearer—and it nearly made you sick. You had to keep your mind off yourself or you'd go mad. Some of the boys played cards—with celluloid decks that didn't wear out. Kay went down and got a little lumpy *bollos*, and made it round and smooth to kill time. He put his 'nitals on it too, poor jackass, and left it on the stack for the down-river boat—to advertise the workmanship of an unknown man of the hinterland.

Night brought the tom-toms nearer. They was grunting, thumping, madder—louder!

Still Mr. Kay kept his silence. But we knew—at least, we believed—that this was the man who'd stolen the sun god's eyes. Not that we cared—no; let him steal 'em; he was a good messmate and bunkmate and a real pally sort—except for his silence.

Our suspicions were confirmed that night. I was setting near the door when the woven rattan flooring started quivering beneath me. I knew some one was on the ladder, climbing up.

A MOMENT later a sinewy Tockinoon squatted in the opening. We observed with alarm that he wore the bloodchain—a length of red beads draped through the lobe of his

nose and caught in the lobes of his ears.

“I seek,” he said in the vernacular, “the Man of the Dancing Woman.”

“I told you once,” shouted Cord angrily, “that he ain't here! What kind of eyes did the sun god have, anyway?”

“Eyes of Cotopaxi opals, O lying son of a white-bellied snake! I see the Man of the Dancing Woman!” The man's hand darted to his gee-string. The knife he drew was long, gleaming. He tossed, and the knife cut a gleaming circle of light across the room. Kay lurched aside; the blade struck the wall where his chest had been, sank quivering into the rattan latticework.

There the hilt held it, preventing its penetrating the wall.

There was a screech of rage as the man saw he had missed his aim. He dashed madly across the room to retrieve the weapon.

Kay intercepted him, extended a booted foot. The native tripped headlong to the floor; the hut quaked violently at the impact.

Terror leapt into the Tockinoon's eyes as he saw Kay grasp the knife's handle, wrench it from the wall. He bounced up, plunged for the door, but not before the knife, flung from Kay's mahogany hand, had whizzed across the room and implanted itself in the native's claret-colored shoulder.

There was a howl of pain as the man dropped from the doorway, and a plop in the mud as he struck the marsh below.

We heard him crashing away through the underbrush. Shortly, as the drum-beats grew more furious, we surmised that he had joined his fellows; but although we lay awake all night, there was an open attack.

A gray daylight showed that the Amazon was out of her banks—and she's a stream that ain't particular where her banks should be. The jungle floor was flooded; a yellow sea swirled beneath the staples of our hut. None of the wharf was to be seen; the

rubber *bollos* which had been stacked upon it awaiting shipment had been swept away. Kay sighed for the loss of his last perfectly rounded *bollos*; Cord cursed at the ceaseless grunting of the tomtoms.

“My God, where are they? If they’re on the ground why ain’t they been washed away? My God, that damned thumpin’s gonna drive me mad!”

“Must be in anchored dug-outs in the shallows,” Smith put in. “Murki’s always said that the Tockinoons’ sun god’s a big idol up in the jungles of the Napo. It’d take boats, you know, to get down this far. But if somebody’s stole the old boy’s opal eyes he’s stole a hell of a lot of mazuma! Wish I’d stole ’em myself!”

“You’re crazy!” Kay countered. “How’d you get away before they’d catch you? And when they catch you they’re supposed to swab out the old boy’s eyeless sockets with the blood of the thief before they put in new peepers—always opals though, prime opals! Oh, boy! But it’s been done before—this eyeball stealin’ business, and the thief always gets caught!”

A SILENCE fell, a silence broken only by sudden muffled blows beneath us that could be nothing but the measured rise and fall of machetes, sinking into the hevea stilts of our hut.

We faced each other aghast.

“Why—why, they’re choppin’ us down,” Smith gasped.

“Get a gun!” shouted Cord.

Kay protested. “No you don’t! Don’t make ’em any madder by shootin’ at ’em! They’d just lay low till they starved you out—but they won’t do that.” Kay lifted the parrot to his shoulder. “I’m the only one they want—and I’m goin’ to ’em! Sorry I’ve troubled you so, *hombres*.” He turned to the doorway.

Cord stopped him. “Kay, you blitherin’ jackass! What d’ya mean, tryin’ this noble

sacrificial stuff on us? What d’ya think we are—cannibals? Lettin’ a white man give himself up to the Tocks—hell, no! You set down on your stool and stay there! When this thing falls we can fall with it, I guess, and swim for it! We’re free, sun-baked, and twenty-one, ain’t we? We can take care of ourselves! In the trees and water the Tocks’ll have a swell time telling the Man of the Dancing Woman from anybody else!”

But before the argument ended it was more physical force than palaver that kept Kay with us. The room grew tense. Below we could hear the machetes biting into the *hevea* boles with harsh, staccato clacks. We knew that each stroke, each passing moment, meant a shortening of the time which separated us from the yellow, crocodile-infested swirl below us. Yet, in that fraught interval, there was more warmth of good fellowship than I ever expect to know again in this world.

Still, Kay was silent. That he appreciated it, his eyes told us—but his eyes told us no more.

Suddenly the hut listed, swayed. We steadied ourselves, vainly. The world seemed to careen giddily. There was a downward plunge, a splash of water, and a chorus of maniacal yells from the machete-armed Tockinoon boatmen as our cage struck the swirling muddy current.

The rain was lashing our faces, the grunt of the drums and the cries of natives rilling our ears as we extricated ourselves from the rattan wreckage.

Kay’s voice rose above the clamor. “Thank you, buddies! Meet you—on the red hot—ramparts of hell!”

We saw him strike out furiously for a maze of treeferns, the parrot squawking wildly as it pirouetted after him.

And it must have been the parrot that gave him away.

A shout went up from a native dug-out as it went gliding over the surface toward the

Man of the Dancing Woman and his parrot. A droning rain-curtain swept down and enveloped them then, but not before I had seen, in that fleeting instant, that the Tockinoons in the dug-out wore their blood-chains!

That was the last I saw of Mr. Kay; I guess the devilment he did or didn't do is really at an end.

But I saw his Chinese parrot again.

THE following day I returned to the scene of the disaster—I don't leave, see?—and there, perched on the *hevea* staple the Tocks had chopped into, was Mr.

Kay's bird, bedrabbled now, and a-squaking in the rain.

"Kay say you keel me! Kay say you keel me!" he screeched, as my friendly *seringneiro* poled the craft in nearer the perch.

I lifted the parrot down into the boat, but the crazed bird continued its weird chant, "Kay say you keel me! Kay say you keel me!"

Where did the bird pick up the words? It was a new addition to his more or less lurid vocabulary. The repetition of the ghoulish statement got on my nerves—but not for long; morning found the Chinese parrot dead! Examination show that he'd died from somewhat painful indigestion; I felt a tinge of

compunction that I hadn't killed him the night before—like he'd asked me to. Like he'd asked me to, indeed!

But that message had been from Kay, hadn't it? "*Kay say you keel me!*" A recently learned statement too; the bird hadn't known it a few days before! Had Kay known of the bird's impending death? But how could he have known? Not without knowing what the bird had eaten, what the bird had swallowed, now—Maybe Kay had known—reckon? I slit the bird with my bowie; his craw disgorged a dozen sizable opals. Compliments of Mr. Kay!

And suddenly I saw the idea of the marked, perfectly rounded bollos. Embedded in the heart of them may have been a king's ransom in opals for some employee of Laitz & Laitz at Manaos. I like to speculate on the scene following the finding and splitting of those bollos, maybe thousands of miles down the Amazon, maybe in some rubber factory in the States—

Maybe Mr. Kay'd kept the opals in his leather belt. But wherever he kept 'em, I don't care; here was a portion of 'em in the Chinese parrot's craw.

I've a big opal ring now. Set in onyx. I call it the Sun God's Eyes.

