

# Bechuana Blood

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As Jan Pieter approached the native, some one struck him from behind

*The Boer Detective Adds One and One to Make Eleven—and Exposes a Dastardly Crime Plot!*

JAN PIETER VAN BRONCK sat on an upturned hogshead in one of the stalls of the Bloemfontein Stock Fair and chatted gaily with his old friend, Sergeant Baldwin of the Royal South African Mounted Police. The Dutchman's long clay pipe jutted out of his mouth, and curved down over his ample chest. His flat-topped Boer hat was pushed back on his head.

"Quite a crowd here for the show," he declared.

"Indeed," agreed Sergeant Baldwin,

"and it ought to be a relief to you to be here, where you don't have to worry about anything. No cares of the farm, and no thoughts of crime to engage you. What sort of prizes are you going after, Jan Pieter?"

"I'm hoping to take home a ribbon for my Herefords," Jan Pieter replied. Baldwin nodded and turned his attention to the moving crowd.

The paunchy Dutchman gazed out through the open window toward the grounds, where thousands of people from

all over the Orange River Colony were visiting the various exhibits. The late afternoon sky made an inverted blue dome, beneath which sun-burned farmers were displaying their wheat and maize. Housewives were discussing the benefits of the new electric kitchens or were bragging about the jellies that lined the shelves in the home crafts building.

Others were watching the ostriches from the farms to the south and weighing the possibility of a plume for a new hat.

The war spirit shadowed all of them. To some it meant worry over sons fighting in Italian East Africa. To others it meant prosperity, gained through new demands for cattle, sheep and grain. To Jan Pieter, weaned in the Boer war, schooled through the first World War and now matured and understanding in the midst of a third great conflict, it brought a soberness of purpose, an awareness of the undercurrents that tugged the Union and its people one way or another.

There was plenty of activity in the fair grounds. Beneath the lowing of the cattle, the baaing of the sheep and the neighing of the diminutive Cape horses, came the steady tum-a-turn-turn of the Bechuana drums, and the roar of men from across the area where the ostrich races were being held.

Suddenly this sonata of simple activity was jarred by a piercing scream.

Jan Pieter Van Bronck tensed. His mouth dropped open, and he lowered the clay pipe to a bale of hay alongside of his hogshead. Then he turned to Sergeant Baldwin. As though the scream were a signal, all sounds in the immediate vicinity ceased. Before they picked up in quicker tempo, Jan Pieter was running on legs that carried his paunchy body at an amazing rate of speed.

He hurried past four stalls and then slowed as he saw several men and women

gazing through one of the half-doors that opened into a cow-shed. Sergeant Baldwin, carrying the dignity of the law, was close on Jan Pieter's heels.

"What's happened?" the sturdy Dutchman demanded.

Beckoning fingers pointed to the stall, and Jan Pieter stepped inside. A cow was wedged in the far corner of the quadrangle, roped by a neck ring, her brown eyes filled with fear. Halfway between the door and the terrified bovine was the sprawled figure of a man.

"It's Raymond Dillon," gritted Sergeant Baldwin, peering past the bulky figure of the voortrekker detective. "How did he get here?"

Jan Pieter pointed to a wooden sign hanging over the stall. It read:

LADY MARIE OF DELAGOA  
Owned by Raymond Dillon

Sergeant Baldwin knelt beside the body of the fallen English farmer and then ran his hand over the form carefully. There was no trace of pulse or heart action. Blood was congealing about a wound in the chest.

As the Dutch detective and the Royal Mounted sergeant examined the body, the Bechuana drums outside took on a new rhythm. Both white men recognized the tones, and Jan Pieter turned to Sergeant Baldwin.

"The Bantu Dance of Death," he said quietly. "I wonder what that means?"

"You'll have to ask old Salda Kweena about that," Sergeant Baldwin declared.

Other policemen arrived then, and Sergeant Baldwin issued crisp instructions for the handling of the crowd, then sent for the higher officials of the Bloemfontein police department. Jan Pieter Van Bronck seemed to ignore all of this routine activity, but behind his lazy eyelids, his piercing eyes were gathering threads that might

weave a net about the killer.

**S**ALDA KWEENA was the old medicine man of the Bechuanas. Popular legend indicated that he was more than ninety years old, and a close confidante of *Modimo*, the Bantu god. Jan Pieter knew that this belief was nowhere so marked as in the vicinity of Bloemfontein, because of the great native village at the south end of the town.

Here more than twenty thousand Bantus lived in their quaint rectangular houses, and went through all of the ancient rituals even to bridal payments and ancestral worship, as they had done long before the white man came to South Africa. Salda Kweena was a wrinkled old man, but when he was garbed in his ceremonial robes, and dancing before his people with his giant headdress and medicine bag, his dignity was in keeping with his rank.

Jan Pieter watched the old medicine man go through his gyrations while he waited for the police inspection to end. Baldwin's colleagues had finally taken their leave when the portly Dutchman turned again to the sergeant.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

In spite of the crowds in the fair grounds, the curious spectators had drifted away. Jan Pieter and the sergeant were alone with the body. A wagon would soon be there to take Dillon away.

"Unfortunate accident," Sergeant Baldwin declared. "According to the police doctor, Dillon was gored by the cow."

Jan Pieter shook his head slowly.

"Our murderer is going to be glad of the police doctor's verdict," he said. "Obviously he wanted this to appear as an accident. It would permit him to carry through one of the greatest plots I've met with."

"What do you mean?" Sergeant Baldwin demanded.

"If you'll examine the stall and the cow carefully," Jan Pieter said, "you'll find that the cow couldn't have been responsible for the killing. But if the killer wants us to think this is an accident, we'll let him think we do. That will put him off guard, and he'll probably betray himself."

With almost callous nonchalance, Jan Pieter turned from the body of Raymond Dillon to the cow, Lady Marie of Delagoa. He ran his hands over the beast with all the experience and care of the simple husbandman.

"Sergeant, you'd better get a veterinary, and a good one. I'd like to have this animal examined."

Baldwin looked at the Boer as though he could not believe his ears. But he had worked with Jan Pieter on a number of occasions before and knew that the corpulent voortrekker made few foolish moves in a case of this kind.

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders and headed out of the barn. The late afternoon sun was going down, and brief twilight closed over the stock barns. Soon the lamps would be lit along the walks and before the amusement and display booths. Up in the city, electricity burst into night bloom, marking the various government buildings, public edifices and the structures of the Glen Agricultural College.

**A**LWAYS on the alert, Jan Pieter sensed a movement alongside the open window of the cattle barn. Turning, he saw what he believed to be the familiar figure of Salda Kweena, the Bechuana medicine man. Even as he opened his mouth in greeting, a lithe brown arm darted toward his throat, and an uplifted club whirled toward his forehead.

Jan Pieter wriggled in the grasp, brought up a fist that clipped the medicine man on the chin. Then something caught him a terrific clout on the side of his head.

A wave of blackness swept over him, and he slumped down inside the stall. Jan Pieter's usually keen mind groped hazily for fading consciousness. But before he could marshal his thoughts, another brown fist brushed aside his futile defense gesture and cracked him on the chin.

When the Dutch detective regained consciousness, he realized that only a few moments had past, otherwise his rough Boer clothing would probably have been stained with his own life-blood. Sergeant Baldwin was standing over him, and the veterinary, stood beside him.

"Are you the patient?" the vet inquired, fighting to restrain a laugh.

"No," said Jan Pieter sadly, "I want you to look at the cow."

Doctor Turner turned to Lady Marie while Sergeant Baldwin found the light switch. Jan Pieter rubbed his chin ruefully, then shook his head to clear it. He looked at his fingers and saw there a reddish brown smudge where the blood had been drawn through his teeth and had dried on his chin.

"That old fellow sure packs a wallop," he declared. But even as he spoke, he was watching Doctor Turner adjust his pincenez, straighten up and turn.

"This is terrible!" the vet declared. "Do you know what is wrong with this cow, Jan Pieter?"

"Of course," replied Van Bronck, "now that my suspicions have been verified. It is *rinderpest!*"

"But that can't be!" exclaimed Baldwin. "That's the disease that wiped out more than ninety percent of the South African cattle back in 1896!"

"It's the same disease," Jan Pieter declared soberly.

"Jan Pieter, you've got to do something. There are more than eleven million cattle in the Union now, and the British are depending upon them for food

supplies. If they're wiped out it will be a tremendous blow."

"You're right there," agreed Jan Pieter. "By this time the Germans realize that if England is to be starved out, it won't be through the submarine blockade. This would be an ideal spot for one of those fifth column fellows to strike at the heart of the British Empire.

"Infecting the cattle here, and having the infection carried back to the prize stock farms of the Union would lead to the ruin of our agriculture. Raymond Dillon was unfortunate enough to stumble onto the killer as he was infecting Lady Marie of Delagoa. So, he was killed."

As he spoke, Jan Pieter was weighing the situation clear-headedly.

"Is there any vaccine for *rinderpest* available?" he asked Doctor Turner.

"There ought to be plenty at the Agricultural College."

"Then get up there and bring as much of it down here as you can. Our poisoner has probably gone right down the line in this stock stable, and we'll have a couple of hundred cases to take care of. You'd better bring back all the veterinarians you can round up."

DOCTOR TURNER realized the gravity of the situation, and hastened off. Sergeant Baldwin, after seeing to the removal of Raymond Dillon's body, had ideas of his own, and went off to investigate them. Jan Pieter remained in the stable, examining the surroundings for some moments, then went back to his own quarters. As he stepped into the shed where his Hereford bulls and Devon and Frisian prize cattle were stalled, he saw a young Dutchman waiting near the troughs.

The Dutchman was clad in the uniform of the South African Air Force, and Jan Pieter greeted him as though he were a son. This was Dirk Van der Beck, one of Jan

Pieter's protégés.

"How goes everything, Dirk?" he asked.

"Pretty good," replied Dirk, "now that the Italians have been kicked out of East Africa, things ought to go more quickly."

"What are you doing down here?" Jan Pieter inquired. "Just the old call of a Bloemfontein fair? You're not falling for one of these Bantu beauties, are you? They'll cost you a pretty penny in beads and humpbacked Afrikander cattle."

"Nothing so amusing as that," Dirk replied soberly. Then he looked about him as though he were afraid of being overheard. "I'm here on service," he continued.

"Service?" Van Bronck cocked his head to one side, picked up his clay pipe from the hay bale.

"Yes," replied Dirk, "Military Intelligence."

Jan Pieter nodded his head sagely:

"It wouldn't have to do with sabotage, would it?" he asked.

"What sort of sabotage?" Dirk inquired, obviously not inclined to give more information than he had to.

"Foodstuffs." Jan Pieter Van Bronck bit off the single word with emphasis.

"You've hit it, by the great god Modimo. How did you figure it?"

"Well, first of all, I've heard stories of strange fires starting in the wheat fields. Then there is the little matter of *rinderpest* among the prize cattle here at the stock fair.

"If I hadn't discovered it tonight, it is likely that these prize cattle would have been taken back to their farms all over South Africa and contaminated the herds."

"It's gone further than that. Some of the foodstuffs that have been sent up the coast from Durban to Mombasa and Mogadiscio have been poisoned. I'm trying to round up the culprit."

"Have you any ideas?" asked Jan Pieter

seriously.

"There are two people I've had an eye on. One is a commercial traveler for a large Swedish electrical concern, who calls himself Eric Norrgaard. We know, though, that anyone coming from Sweden has to come through Germany or Russia. What happens in those countries is hard to tell.

"The other is a mystery man known hereabouts as Tott Leyden. I met him on the coasting steamer coming down. He seems to have made a mistake, posing as a Dutchman in South Africa."

"Perhaps we can work together," said Jan Pieter slowly. "Let us stroll about this place, and maybe you will see your friends."

Doctor Turner and his colleagues were at the Dillon stable when Jan Pieter and Dirk Van der Beeck passed by, but the portly Dutch detective merely nodded a greeting. Their steps led them to the electrical industries building, where the amazingly huge power plants were operated by the water from the Mazelpoort, and from the Madder River near Sannas' Port.

VAN BRONCK had determined that if Eric Norrgaard was indeed an electrical man his chief interest would be in this exhibit. He was not disappointed. The tall, blond-haired Swede was on a platform with one of the local electrical supply men, and they were both haranguing a crowd of people interested in electrical equipment of all kinds.

The Dutch detective went up to the side of the platform, and waited until Norrgaard turned around.

"May I speak to you in private for a few moments?" he asked.

The Swede climbed down and followed Jan Pieter into a small office behind the display.

"I'm from the police," Jan Pieter

announced abruptly. "I'm investigating a murder. Where have you been for the past hour?"

If Eric was surprised, he showed no indication of it.

"I've been here all afternoon," he replied. "I'm sure I can prove that if you think it is necessary. What makes you suspect me?" he asked frankly.

"We are careful about foreigners visiting in the Union of South Africa," Jan Pieter replied calmly, "I understand you are a newcomer."

"I came about a week ago," admitted Eric. "But you'll find me altogether innocent."

"Have you ever been in South Africa before?"

"No," replied Eric.

"Thanks for your help," Jan Pieter declared, then turned on his heel, walked out of the little office and beckoned Dirk, who waited by the electrical display.

"Did you discover anything?" Dirk asked.

"No," admitted Van Bronck, "he claims he was at the display all afternoon. But now I'll do something I was about to start when you came along."

"What's that?" Dirk inquired.

"A visit to Salda Kweena, the Bechuana medicine man. I'd like to find out why he tried to brain me in the stable."

"You don't think we're in for a native uprising, do you? Why those twenty thousand Bechuanas could run over Bloemfontein before we knew what was going on. They might not get away with it, but they'd do plenty of damage before they were stopped."

"I wouldn't worry about it," Jan Pieter advised.

Ten minutes later they were mingling with the thousands of Bechuanas from the native town. Fires had been kindled about the impromptu compound, and new

rectangular buildings, built *pise de terre*, after the fashion of Bechuana huts, provided a colorful picture that was an important part of the Bloemfontein stock show.

Salda Kweena's hut was the largest in the community and was decorated with his own personal totem and the symbols of *Modimo*, along with other fetishes that had particular medicine virtues. Among these was the garb of the Leopard men of the Belgian Congo. Not necessarily an indication that Salda Kweena had once embraced the bloody beliefs of the Leopard men, it symbolized the fact that Salda Kweena had bested one of them in battle.

Inside the hut a wrinkled old Bechuana woman, her toothless mouth chewing on betel nut juices, pounded with gnarled fingers on a ceremonial drum to lend a weird accompaniment to the larger carved tree drum of the dancing Bechuanas before a large fire.

SALDA KWEENA swayed back and forth before the hut in rhythm to the drum. The Bechuanas were used to company during fair week. But Salda Kweena soon sensed that Jan Pieter was more than a casual visitor. Then his old eyes opened and gleamed, he recognized the corpulent Dutch farmer.

"Blessings of the *Modimo* on you, Salda Kweena," Jan Pieter greeted.

"And long life to you," returned the medicine man.

"You didn't think so when you tried to club me down in the stock shed," Jan Pieter insisted sternly.

A look of surprise came to the eyes of Salda Kweena.

"Jan Pieter does me an injustice," he said.

The Dutch detective studied the medicine man. Was Salda Kweena playing a deep game? Had the Bechuanas, under

the tutelage of Axis leaders, devised a method of overthrowing the British regime in South Africa? Or had Jan Pieter been mistaken in the identity of his assailant?

"Have you any strangers among you, Salda?" Jan Pieter asked.

"We have a visitor," replied Salda Kweena slowly, "but he is no stranger."

Jan Pieter Van Bronck immediately perked up, and looked around among the Bantu natives, expecting to be able to spot the visitor almost immediately. Any number of the people from Bloemfontein and the surrounding country that had come in for the stock show were mingling with the natives, but no one stood out particularly.

The Boer detective moved past the squatting form of the medicine man and looked into the thorn hut. Inside he saw a white man. The latter glanced up with some interest, took a pipe from his mouth. An odd smile crossed his face. He came forward, pushed through the opening and joined Jan Pieter.

"Looking for me?" he asked genially. Jan Pieter surveyed the fellow. He was about six feet in height, and fleshed accordingly. His hair was sandy, and his mustache lined a face that might have been German or English.

"Not particularly," replied Jan Pieter. "Salda Kweena said he had a visitor, I was wondering whether it was anyone I knew."

"Can't say I've had the pleasure," the visitor replied, "but I'm Tott Leyden."

The name registered with Jan Pieter.

"I'm Jan Pieter Van Bronck. I have a ranch out on the edge of the Karoo."

"Glad to know you," replied Tott, and though there was no indication that the name of the Boer detective meant anything to him, Jan Pieter was not one to overlook any contact.

"Are you an old friend of Salda Kweena's?"

"Not exactly," replied Tott with a touch of caution in his tone. "I've been around on some of the reserves, acting as labor agent for some of the ranchers and miners. Then I was native agent in South West Africa. I'm always attracted by the native dances. I heard they were going to have a big maize dance here during the fair. I came down to see it."

Jan Pieter nodded. "It's quite a sight," he declared.

Then he turned and strolled back toward the edge of the Bechuana camp where Dirk Van der Beeck was waiting for him.

"Find anything?" Dirk asked curiously.

"Maybe," replied Jan Pieter, "your friend Tott Leyden is visiting with the Bechuanas."

"That may mean a lot," agreed Dirk quickly. "Maybe he's stirring up the natives to work against Britain's war effort."

"That may be, too," agreed Jan Pieter, "but if he's anxious to start trouble here, he doesn't have to worry about the natives. There are some people right in parliament who would like to do that."

As he spoke, Jan Pieter turned on his heel, walked toward the stock-barns, then strolled toward a group of police officials. Sergeant Baldwin looked up.

"Any luck?" he asked.

Jan Pieter looked at the thousands of people circulating around the fair grounds, glanced at the Bantu native encampment.

"Looking for a murderer in this crowd is worse than looking for the needle in the haystack. But I have an idea."

"Let's hear it," Sergeant Baldwin suggested.

"Our poisoner has been given a job by someone higher up. It was so important to him that he was willing to murder Raymond Dillon to accomplish his task. He's not going to be content until he

completes the job.”

“We’ll throw a cordon around the stock barns. No one will be allowed in there except the owners and their attendants.”

“No,” Jan Pieter declared. “That wouldn’t do. How do we know that the murderer isn’t one of the owners. The Nazis are clever enough to send a stock owner down here, so that he would have a legitimate reason for circulating openly. We’ll have to use another method. Leave everything to me.”

Sergeant Baldwin shrugged his shoulders. After a hurried consultation, he agreed to let Jan Pieter have his own way. They agreed upon the course of action.

“I’ll be getting back to my camp until it’s time to spring the trap,” Jan Pieter said then.

**J**AN PIETER’S camp was at Sanna’s Port, outside Bloemfontein, close to the historical marker that reminded the Boers of the ambush of Broadwood’s brigade and horse artillery in the Boer war. Most of the area in the vicinity of the one-time capital of the Orange Free State is marked with mementoes of the struggle between de Wet and the British, and maintains a constant feeling of national honor in rugged Boer hearts.

Van Bronck’s native boy, Luongne, had a fire going and a hearty meal cooking. The bullock cart was drawn up, and the animals were foraging close by. As darkness closed in over the veldt, the vagrant wind rustled through clumps of low shrubs, aloes, euphorbia and the tufted grass of the plains.

Now and then the bullocks pricked up their ears, and looked out over the veldt, responding to the quick, sharp barks of the Cape hunting dogs. There was a rustle in the brush, when a long-tailed secretary-bird darted out into the dust, and swept up a wriggling serpent that was heading into the ditch.

Jan Pieter gave some instructions to Luongne, then left the camp. He consulted his open-faced hunting watch, saw that it was well toward midnight. His stubby fingers went under the skirt of his Norfolk jacket and touched the butt of his automatic.

The crowds would be leaving the fair grounds now, and the prisoner, if he planned to continue his work, would again be abroad. When Van Bronck approached the fair grounds on foot about twenty minutes later, he saw that his path was clear. Sergeant Baldwin was strolling up and down near the gate, and with him were men of the South African police, as well as the familiar forms of Dirk Van der Beeck and Doctor Turner.

Deliberately, Jan Pieter moved along the fence until he was beyond the gaze of the police. In spite of his bulk, he managed to negotiate the barrier with all the skill and ease of a younger man. Inside, he cast a glance in the direction of the stock sheds. The moon neutralized gaudy fair colors with silver. Here and there, watchmen moved slowly in front of the buildings.

Over at the Bechuana camp the big fire blazed, and around it a number of the natives still moved through the intricate steps of the maize dance.

Jan Pieter examined his surroundings carefully. Then he pulled his flat-topped hat down over his eyes and hurried to the rear of the stock sheds toward the stall where Lady Marie of Delagoa had been berthed, where Raymond Dillon had been murdered.

As he turned down the rear alley leading along behind the sheds, he bumped into a crouching form. His finger flicked on the light of a flash which revealed a man.

It was Eric Norrgaard!

“What are you doing here?” Jan Pieter asked sharply.

“Just taking a walk,” Eric stammered.

His explanation didn't sound any too convincing. Jan Pieter flicked out the light.

"This is no time to be taking a walk, especially with the police searching for a murderer. You'd better get back to your electrical display and stay there."

Eric Norrgaard did not stand upon the order of his going, but turned and beat a hasty retreat. Watching him go, Jan Pieter wondered whether his plan to trap the killer had fallen through before he had put it into operation.

Time alone would supply the answer to this. Jan Pieter moved ahead until he was in the shadows of the stall next to that of Lady Marie of Delagoa. There he crouched, loosened the pistol in its holster and waited. From his position he could see the whole rear of the sheds. Occasionally he saw a silhouette at one end or the other, as a guard came to the corner of the alley and looked down.

The beat of the drums in the Bechuana camp rose in its rhythm, there was a sharper tone to the shouts. Then the cries died down, but the *dum-dum-dum-de-dum* continued.

**S**UDDENLY Jan Pieter's eyes narrowed as he saw a familiar figure approaching. It was Dirk Van der Beeck. While the secret service man was still some twenty yards away, another interruption took place. Dirk appeared to have heard it, too, for he flattened himself against the wall of the stock sheds.

Jan Pieter watched as a gaudy figure approached from the direction of the Bechuana camp. The moonlight gleamed on the brown skin of a native. His arms were encircled by bangles, and his head was surmounted by a ceremonial wooden mask, decorated with gaily-painted feathers. Black eyes showed their whites through the eye-holes. A long, curved knife

was stuck in the woven belt about the naked middle.

Even as Jan Pieter was about to close in on the native, Dirk Van der Beeck made his move. A moment later the tall Bechuana and the slight secret service man were locked in combat. Jan Pieter bit his lip. E Dirk's interruption was almost as inopportune as the meeting with Eric Norrgaard.

The poisoner must be caught in the act, not before he had a chance to attempt the spread of the *rinderpest*.

Now that Dirk was in a jam, however, Jan Pieter had to go to his aid. The Dutchman moved forward, the heavy flashlight in his hand. He came up behind the Bechuana medicine man before the other realized that a new adversary had joined the fray.

Jan Pieter picked a spot on the back of the Bechuana's head, and brought down his weapon. Even as it was about to land, he was aware of the fact that someone else was behind him. He broke his swing, tried to whirl catlike on his trained leg muscles.

A stocky leg brushed against his thigh, and a pointed toe caught his instep. As he swung around, someone pushed against him, and he tripped and fell to the ground. The flashlight scraped against the shoulder of the Bechuana, then was wrenched from his grip and rolled away. His flat-crowned hat was pushed forward over his face. A wrenching hand tore at his jacket pocket.

This latest diversion permitted the Bechuana dancer to make his escape. Jan Pieter's assailant managed to fade into the shadows that pocketed the passage behind the stock sheds, as the Dutchman scabbled and felt for his flashlight, found the button and turned on the yellow beam of light again.

When Jan Pieter had recovered his light and his balance, he reached for his gun.

The jacket pocket had been ripped away from his coat. The flat automatic was gone.

Jan Pieter's attention was directed to the handle of his flashlight. The metal was moist. Jan Pieter examined it, and found a reddish brown spot forming on his hand. Apparently, while his unseen assailant had been striking him down, Jan Pieter's light had damaged the Bechuana.

Jan Pieter saw the huddled body close by, and went to it, fearful of what he might discover. The form was that of Dirk Van der Beeck.

"Dirk, Dirk!" he called. His caressing fingers touched the body, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Dirk was unconscious, but would come around all right. His pulse was strong, his breathing regular.

Jan Pieter climbed through one of the windows into the stock shed. Then, ignoring the stalls on the ground floor entirely, he found the ladder leading up to the feed lofts and climbed it rapidly.

His action was based on sound reasoning. With the agricultural school's veterinarians vaccinating the cattle to prevent the spread of the *rinderpest*, and the stalls containing the cattle patrolled carefully by the South African and Bloemfontein police, another approach to the prize stock was necessary.

A slow-acting virus mixed with the food supply now, would permit the cattle to get home to their herds before spreading the disease. Thus, by contaminating the stores gathered in the attic bins, the poisoner would be leaving it to the stable boys to spread the plague he had planted.

His deduction was verified when he spotted a moving figure on the second floor of the huge stock shed. He wished that he still had his gun. The man was too far away for the Dutch detective to close with him successfully. While Jan Pieter had been knocked down, the huge Bechuana—for it was he—had apparently accomplished his

task and was now about to make his escape.

Even as Jan Pieter moved across the feed loft on silent feet, the big native was sliding through one of the loading doors, dangling on the rope and pulley and dropping to the ground. When the Boer detective reached the ground behind him, the Bechuana was well on his way back to the native encampment.

Not wishing to lose the trail, Jan Pieter hurried after him, but when he reached the edge of the group, he realized that it would be almost impossible to pick a single native out of such a big crowd. He turned back where he had left Dirk Van der Beeck, found his young friend coming out of it. Jan Pieter gave him orders.

"Hurry to the gate and get Sergeant Baldwin. Tell him to come to the Bechuana camp with all the men he can get. And have guns ready. I'm going over there."

"Alone?"

"Alone," replied the Boer detective. "But you might tell Sergeant Baldwin not to forget to have someone guard the feed bins. None of the cattle are to be fed, if anyone does feel like feeding them at this time of the morning."

With these instructions given, Jan Pieter headed for the Bechuana camp, and again his steps took him to the hut of Salda Kweena. The medicine man saluted him.

"Has Mynheer Van Bronck found his murderer?"

"Yes," replied Jan Pieter slowly, watching Salda Kweena carefully. But the stolid face of the native medicine man betrayed no emotion whatsoever.

"And I suppose by now he is in the jail?"

"No," replied Van Bronck. "I'd like to see the big maize dance."

**S**ALDA KWEENA'S eyes sparkled and he led Jan Pieter through the groups of

Bantu natives until they stood in the light of the huge blaze. Some forty men in ceremonial costume, wearing the head-dresses and masks of sub-chiefs, were going through the routine.

Jan Pieter watched the dance in some awe, then turned to Salda Kweena.

"The murderer is among your dancers. *Modimo*, god of the Bantus, will reach down his finger and mark the guilty one. The maize dance is a dance of fertility, of life. There is no place in it for death."

"*Modimo*, god of the Bantus is wise. If Mynheer Van Bronck says that he will point out a murderer, then it shall be so."

When the dance had come to its close, Salda Kweena spoke rapidly in the Bantu tongue, and the dancing Bechuana, their lithe bodies covered with the honest sweat of their exertions, formed a small circle about the medicine man and his companion.

Salda Kweena spoke.

"The Bechuana are a people of peace. For many years they have lived with their English and Dutch friends as brothers. Today at the fair, there has been a bloody murder in which our friend, Raymond Dillon, has been killed. Mynheer Van Bronck, working with the police, tells me that the killer is here among you."

A chorus of protest rose on the air. Then Jan Pieter Van Bronck looked along the line of men. There were two score of them, and Jan Pieter realized a mistake might start serious trouble.

"*Modimo* has marked the murderer," Jan Pieter said coldly. "Walk past me and I will point out the killer."

The first dancer started forward at a sign from Salda Kweena. The old Bechuana looked him over, then turned to Jan Pieter. The other natives formed in line and moved past slowly. Nearly all of the Bechuana dancers had passed Jan Pieter before a disturbance turned his attention

away from them.

Sergeant Baldwin, Dirk Van der Beeck, and a group of men were coming toward the Bechuana camp. Eric Norrgaard was among them. Dirk joined the Boer detective.

"How are you making out?" he asked.

"Good," replied Jan Pieter. "Get behind Eric Norrgaard, and be prepared for trouble."

Sergeant Baldwin came up.

"What is this Dirk has been telling me?" he wanted to know.

"Your murderer is here in this group before me."

Baldwin looked at the forty native dancers. They all looked alike to him. But Jan Pieter Van Bronck stepped up to one of them, took him by the shoulder and urged him forward.

"You are the killer!" he said a coldly.

Salda Kweena looked at the man, then Jan Pieter turned the dancer around and pointed to a place on the native's shoulder where there were marks of ghostly fingers.

"I have said that *Modimo*, god of the Bantus will mark the killer. Behold the mark!"

Salda Kweena looked at the fingermarks. Then the other natives saw them, and a great wailing went up as the Bantus flung themselves to the ground. The burly native writhed in Jan Pieter's grasp, flung the Dutch detective backward. But Jan Pieter was on his guard this time, and with a swift wrench, he turned the ceremonial mask slightly and the giant dancer was unable to see. His arms flailed aimlessly, and the Dutch detective had no trouble in avoiding them.

**I**NSTEAD, he brought up a capable fist, struck the Bantu full on the chin and stood back as he collapsed like an axe hewn tree. Then he knelt down to pull away the ceremonial mask.

"That's far enough," came a cold voice. "Stand back, all of you. I'm getting out of here, and I'm taking that Bechuana with me."

Jan Pieter turned to look at Eric Norrgaard. Then his glance went to the gun in the Swede's hand.

"I've been wondering what happened to my gun," Jan Pieter said calmly. "Your possession of it indicates that you were the one that tripped me behind the stock sheds. But really, it's no good without a clip of bullets in it." As he spoke, Jan Pieter opened the palm of his chubby hand, and exhibited the clip.

The gun in Eric's hand wavered, and Dirk immediately thrust a weapon against Eric's back. Jan Pieter wrenched the automatic from Norrgaard's trembling fingers, pressed the spring on the pistol butt, and a fully loaded clip of bullets dropped from the automatic.

"You so and so!" Eric said harshly, gritting his teeth. He wrestled the sergeant and the government agent, but as both men were armed, he did not get far. His wrath seemed to be directed toward his companion in crime, rather than his captors.

"I didn't trick you," Jan Pieter said slowly, "it was your own weakness that tricked you. You are a pawn in the hand of a Nazi spymaster. Your Scandinavian blood must boil at the thought that you're being made a fool of by a Hitler agent, just as your country was betrayed by a Quisling."

If Eric planned to defend himself verbally, Jan Pieter gave him no opportunity. He again knelt beside the recumbent Bechuana dancer, wrenched off the ceremonial mask. Then with a damp handkerchief he rubbed away the stain on the man's face. Eric Norrgaard leaned forward with the others, obviously puzzled.

"It's our friend Tott Leyden, Dirk,"

said Jan Pieter. "He probably thought that by disguising himself as a native, and losing himself among the dancers it would be impossible for us to find him."

Eric strained forward in the combined grips of Sergeant Baldwin and Dirk Van der Beeck. At a signal from Van Bronck, the two captors released the Norwegian renegade. He rushed toward Tott Leyden, swung a half-hearted punch toward the supine man. Jan Pieter caught the punch before it landed, but made no effort to halt the flow of angry words that dripped from Eric's lips.

"You're to blame for all this, Tott," the Scandinavian babbled. "I *was* a fool! I believed a lot of this pap you and your mates have been handing out." Tott Leyden opened his eyes. His craftiness revealed itself in his poise. Obviously he still felt that he might salvage something from the situation. He ignored the ranting Norrgaard, turned to Jan Pieter.

"What is this fellow talking about anyway?"

"You might call it turning King's evidence," Jan Pieter replied. "He's going to fill in the gaps in my case, or I miss my guess."

"You bet I will," Eric said emphatically.

"Eric never knew enough to really harm me," Tott insisted defiantly.

"But *I* do," Jan Pieter replied. "I know just how you tried to induce the *rinderpest*. Dirk here has evidence of your poisoning of the food sent northward to Mombasa and Mogadiscio. Your clothes are in Salda Kweena's boma, and they still hold the smoke from the grain field burnings. You have a long score to settle, Tott Leyden."

"You are jumping at conclusions. Your proof isn't altogether conclusive."

"Maybe not," Jan Pieter replied. "But I did see you escaping from the feed loft after poisoning the grain. That is direct

evidence. And an explanation of your masquerade here is going to be difficult. Frankly, Tott, knowing the temper of the Bechuanas, I'd say you'd be safer in jail."

Tott looked about him as though he expected Salda Kweena and his men to act promptly on Jan Pieter's suggestion. His brown streaked face paled.

"Take me out of here," he insisted.

VAN BRONCK nodded to Dirk and the sergeant, and the two prisoners were led away. The Dutch detective shook the hand of Salda Kweena.

"I'm sorry I suspected you of any part in this. Salda Kweena is great friend of *Modimo*, great friend of Jan Pieter Van Bronck." The Bechuana nodded.

In the police patrol on the way to the Bloemfontein jail, Sergeant Baldwin chatted with Jan Pieter van Bronck.

"I can follow most of this case," he said. "I realize that the police doctor erred in his suspicion that the cow might have been responsible for Dillon's death. There was no blood on either the hoofs or the horns of Lady Marie of Delagoa."

"Right," replied van Bronck. Tott Leyden was listening with interest. Jan Pieter's next words were directed to him. "When you plan to conceal yourself in a group of Bantu maize dancers, it would be wise to wear a Bantu ceremonial mask.

"The one you brought with you must have been a throw-back to the days when South West Africa was a Germany colony. Your mask is a Zulu mask. But the crowning evidence was a bit of Bechuana Blood!"

Jan Pieter laughed.

"I don't think I understand," Tott declared.

"When you attacked Dirk Van der Beeck as he tried to stop you from getting into the stock sheds, I struck you a glancing blow with my flashlight. Eric was on hand to aid you, and took me out of action for the moment. When I picked it up I saw a smear on my flashlight, and thought it was Bechuana blood. It proved to be brown stain.

"When I lined up the dancers, I looked for the place where the stain had been rubbed off your shoulder. Salda Kweena and his Bechuanas were willing to believe that the hand of *Modimo*, their god, had come down and marked you for punishment. I think you'll make a nice pair in front of a British firing squad."

"That was shrewd, Jan," said young Dirk. "But I still can't see why they didn't kill us."

"Simple," replied Jan Pieter, "they wanted us to believe we'd frightened them off. Then no one would have thought to inspect the food, and the *rinderpest* would have been scattered the length and breadth of the Union of South Africa."

"You ought to get a Victoria Cross," Dirk declared.

"All I want is a chance to get back to my farm with a few blue ribbons for my cattle." Jan Pieter laughed. Then he tamped some tobacco into his clay pipe, hummed the opening notes of the *Stellenbosch Boys* and headed after the police party.