

# White Man

(Continued From Page One.)

ers left for home and the planting, their grass huts, scattered without the limits of the permanent camp, were also set on fire.

"Within a week of the first rains," said M'sungu to a listless Andrea, "the wilderness will have returned altogether to its own to all outward appearance. Three weeks after that, anyone penetrating to the clearing we have made will find nothing beyond a flourishing shamba or corn patch, the very natural property of the area."

On a night of downpour Andrea sat in her room, hands crossed upon a discarded book in her lap and eyes widely fixed on some point of focus far beyond the encircling walls of her hut. She was frightened, for her soul had come to talk with her and there was no escape. She could not phone up a taxi and a party of four and go to a show and supper afterward, thus losing the universal guest.

With a childish gesture of despair, she crept into bed, curled up with her face against the pillow and wept. The more she cried, the more it rained; the more it rained, the more she cried. There was no end to that—no end—no end—Sleep did its best to take and hold her but tonight its grip was uncertain and long before morning it saw defeat coming and made a dastardly retreat.

Andrea awoke, not slowly, not swimming up to consciousness through drowsy gradations, but suddenly with a snapping of eyes wide open on a great emptiness. She was alone, terribly alone, and helplessly awake. She lay staring up at the unbecomingly lantern that she had purposely left burning. Its chimney was smoked. Outside, rain still poured.

She decided to cry a little more and found she couldn't. Tears had withdrawn before an ineffectual rage. Her face hardened. Well, if she couldn't cry, something must happen; if not on its own, then it must be forced. She wondered what the white man was doing. Perhaps he was sound asleep; perhaps he was even snoring! What did she know about this man, anyway? Was he human? Had he live points of contact or was he an impalpable creation of her sick brain? Perhaps she wasn't here at all! If she screamed, would Aunty Gwen come running in or— Her eyes, following the sequence of her thoughts, fell upon the barred door.

She arose, put on her slippers and her bathrobe, walked deliberately to the door, grasped the bar with two trembling hands and threw it up with all her strength. The clang of the far-awag gong rang out above the din of the droning rain. Following it instantly came the thud of a falling chair. The door, released, swung slowly open with a long-drawn creak of unrolled hinges. Andrea was suddenly frightened.

Coming through the covered way she could hear the swift crush of hur-



M'sungu, Fully Dressed, Shot Into the Center of Her Room and Whirled, rying steps. M'sungu, fully dressed shot into the center of her room and whirled. In his hands, held at the hip finger on trigger, was a villainous

sawed-off shotgun. Only his long training to look twice before he fired saved Andrea when his eyes brought him the startling conviction that besides himself she was the only other living thing in the room. She stared at him, wide-eyed and trembling. She saw his figure, keyed to one sort of combat, relax only to grow slowly tense again. He turned, laid the shotgun aside and came toward her with swift sure strides. For an instant his eyes wavered but as he drew nearer they steadied to transfix and hold her pinned against the wall.

She felt herself struggling as against an unjust accusation. Under her trembling hands, her heart beat with great irregular throbs. A lump rose in her throat and it seemed as though it must strangle her if she did not let it out. In her desperation she hurled herself forward, threw her arms about M'sungu's neck, pressed her face against him and sobbed.

"Oh, White Man," she gasped, "I was so lonely—I am so lonely."

The embrace of a woman is one thing; the clinging of a child quite another. The sternness in M'sungu's eyes died suddenly; the hard look in his face faded, vanished and gave place to one of great tenderness. He gathered Andrea up in his arms and carried her quickly through the covered way. He told himself there was every reason to hasten, for he could feel her soft warm body, shaken with sobs, wrapping itself round his heart and crushing it beyond repair. He laid her on the couch in his room, made a nest for her in the many pelts with which it was covered, pillowed her head in a bundle of furs and drew over her a gaily figured sarong.

"You were cold," he said, as he tucked her in; then he knelt beside her, took her hand in both of his and suddenly laid his face in her open palm, still moist with her tears.

Andrea drew a long whimpering sigh and nestled down against the warm furs. Her eyes gazed impersonally and a little wonderingly at M'sungu's bowed head; then they wandered about the room. So this was where he had lived and worked during many months! It was a bachelor's room, arranged at once for comfort, utility and sloth. On one side was his cot, permanently inclosed in mosquito netting and having at its head a lantern for reading in bed. Next to it, came a high draughtsman's desk roughly made of packing cases. On each end of it, guttering candles, still lighted, rose from mysterious pedestals, empty bottles, disgarded under cascades of molten wax.

In the shadow of the high desk stood the one utterly incongruous bit of furniture, a glistening mahogany phonograph. Andrea's eyes passed it and then went back to linger for an instant in vague wonder. Why had M'sungu never brought it out? Never playing it? She was not interested enough to ask aloud.

Andrea's eyes finished their slow circuit of the room and came back to the white man's bowed head. He had not moved and she herself had lain very still, more through languor than by volition. She had been in that state of subdued consciousness which sweeps troubled humanity back to the borderland of childhood, but now her mind awoke. A deep flush stained her neck and crept up through her cheeks, carrying with it her eyes a look of sudden age. Her hand, imprisoned under the man's cheek, doubled and contracted into a hard little fist. He looked up quickly and saw the transition that had come to her face. "Don't give in to it," he said, throwing one arm across her knees. "Don't give in to age. Do you think I am so blind that I don't know where I found you? Why do you think I am on my knees? It's in reverence before the glimpse that I caught of the girlhood of Andrea Pellor. My arms are trembling because they have dared to carry her clean youth, soft and warm as it was before the touch of the world and years, and my heart is aching with a memory that will never die."

"White Man," said Andrea, her face unsoftened, "would you pay three pounds for me?"

He stared at her, leaped to his feet and started pacing up and down beside the couch, a look of thunder on his brow. "No," he said, "I wouldn't." Without looking at her he went to the door and, after a moment, drew out a worn volume; then he placed a chair close to the couch so that the rim of the lantern would fall over his shoulder, sat down and began to read aloud.

Very gradually the hardened and unresponsive look in Andrea's eyes died out. They grew wide again and dwelt dreamily on the man's slim figure. She saw many things about him she had never noted before. His hair was thin and touched with premature gray at the temples; his shoulders were broad and his hips very narrow. He had a good "boot leg," but his feet were small enough to preserve balance even there. In spite of his height he was well-knit by grace of the life he had led.

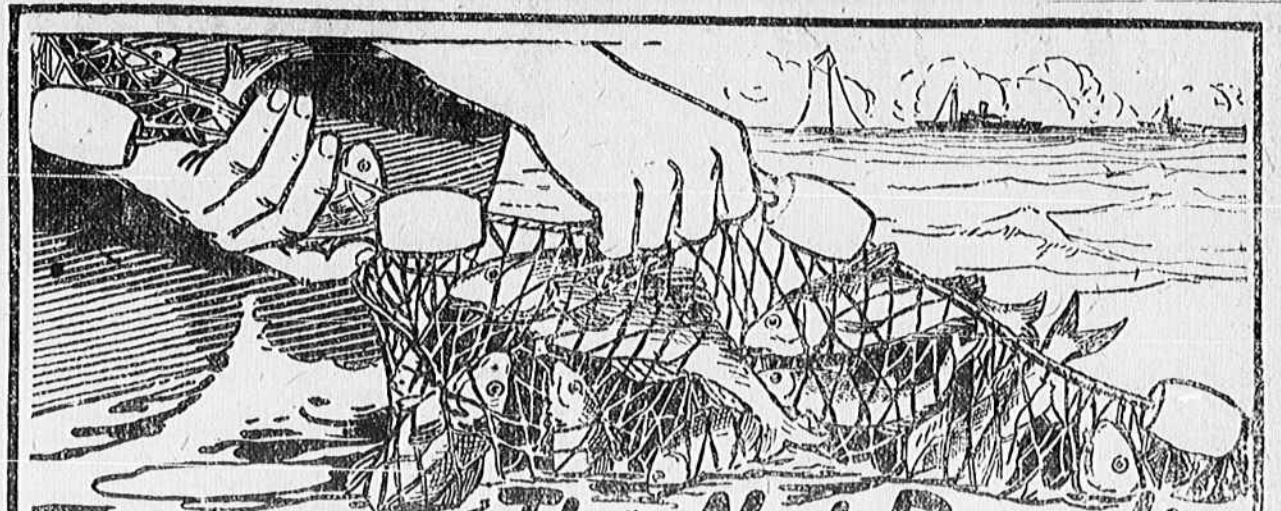
(To Be Continued.)

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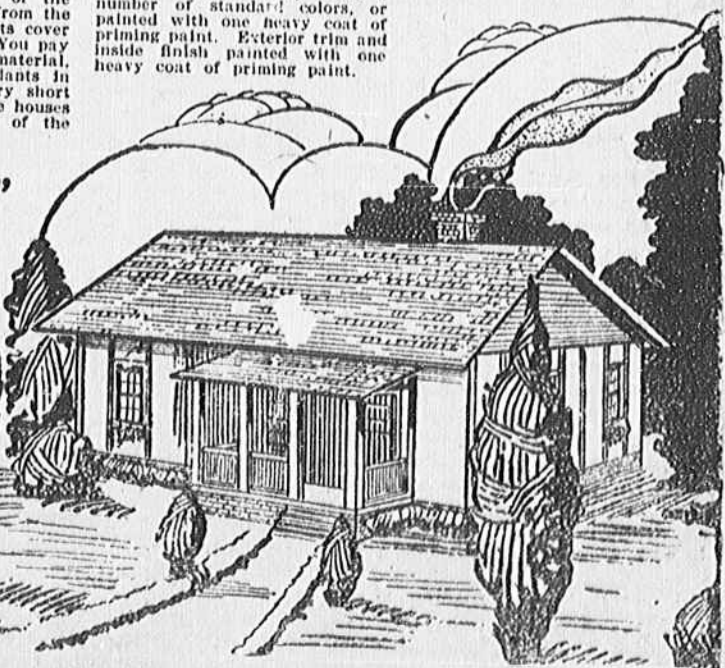
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