

7th Year,
Vol 12, No. 297

PRICE 1\$000

July 4, 1925
SPECIAL NUMBER

BRAZILIAN AMERICAN

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"Well, good woman, what is the price of the gun and the dog?"

"Three cents for the gun, and thirty dollars for the dog."

More and more astonished by the old woman's nonsense and not comprehending in the least the stratagem of the cunning heir, the farmer placed his hands on his hips and laughed so hard that he attracted the attention of everyone at the fair.

And in a few moments everyone there had learned the details of the curious proposal, that Uncle Pedro's widow would sell the cow for two cents, the gun for three cents, and the dog for thirty dollars, sub condition, sine qua non, that everything must go to a single buyer.

As the cow was young and had a reputation for being a good milker well worth the thirty dollars and five cents (the price of everything), the farmer, after repeated futile efforts to discover the reason for the old woman's queer way of doing business, closed the deal, paid the amount asked, and left the fair taking with him the cow, the dog and the rifle.

Then, Uncle Pedro's wife, completely satisfied and with tranquil conscience, went to the vicar's house and asked the good father:

"Reverend father, would you say a mass for my Pedro's soul for five cents?"

The vicar, who had not heard of what happened at the fair and who knew how poor the couple had been, replied immediately:

"Certainly, good woman. The poor are always welcome in the Kingdom of God."

"Well, then, here are the five cents, father. Please say the mass for the repose of the soul of my dead Pedro."

Then she went immediately to the notary to prove before witnesses, that she had carried out the dispositions of her dead husband's will.

And thus Uncle Pedro's cunning widow drew as much profit from the leprous dog which her husband had left her as the sore which she had fed for three years, the sore that the old man, egoist and miserly as usual, had borne with him underground, perhaps for the purpose of using it to defraud charitable imbeciles in the other world.

THE SMOKED APE

By MONTEIRO LOBATO

Translated by Boris Goudenov

"One!"

Ugarte. "Two!"

Adriano. "Five!"

Gasper—

"Bad position. A bad fix all around! I've Gaspar for partner, and he's bad luck itself! Put me in first place, Ugarte! Ugarte's a ferret. It was he who upset my triangle the last time. Let's see him do it again."

"Betting, Adriano? What, nothing? Come on, line them up! Genua, are you in it? One more point, want to go along? Genua's betting! Ai, Melchor, bravo! What, won again?"

Two old fellows at my side were engaged in "conversation."

"... a thing that you would never believe," said one of them, "but absolutely the truth. I was a witness: I saw it. I saw that white, ghostlike martyr before the horrible plate..."

Horrible plate? I lost interest in the game and decided to hear this mysterious story. Drawing nearer the two I listened intently.

"The ranch was far in the interior," the man continued. "But there in Matto Grosso everything

is far. Five leagues is 'way back there,' and fifteen leagues is 'a long way back there.' You tire a fellow out by exaggerating distances here in Matto Grosso! Every place is so far away! But I was looking for cattle. I wanted to round up a herd to drive down country and the man who had what I was looking for was this Colonel Theotonio, of Tremedal. I found him in the orchard watching a boy break a pony in, a lively little devil that I remember well. But what a face that man had! On my word, I have never seen such a face before nor since. A heavy beard, eyes like those of a snake, hard and keen, rough forehead the air of a hangman. . . . I said to myself: ten dead men, at least. That's the way it is up there. There are no private soldiers. Everyone wears well-earned 'shoulder straps' . . . and that fellow, unless I am greatly mistaken, was entitled to a general's rank, at least! I recalled immediately the notorious Pamphilo, of Rio Verde, who 'resisted' Lieutenant Gallinha, and thanks to that worthy 'jungle sweeper,' is now atoning for his sins in the devil's kettle.

"But, what did I care how he looked? I was looking for cattle and it made no difference to me whether I got them from Beelzebub or Saint Gabriel. I told him the reason for my visit and we set out at once for what he called 'the field beyond.' There I selected the animals that looked good to me. We dickered and closed a deal. Returning from the round-up in the late afternoon I suffered intensely from one of the finest appetites I have ever worked up in my life, for I hadn't had anything that day but a cup of coffee at daybreak. So, in spite of the repugnance the old vulture caused me, I had to accept his invitation to dinner.

The ranch house was a huge dark affair, with few windows, badly lighted, miserably furnished, and its disagreeable appearance harmonized so completely with the face and disposition of the proprietor that no one could fail to recognize it as his home. The old saying, 'A suit that doesn't look like the owner is stolen' is true indeed. The dining room looked like an attic. Besides the gloom, it had a queer, nauseating odor that I could never get out of my nose—a smell like that of decaying meat!

"We seated ourselves at the table, I and he, without a living soul coming to join our company. As silence reigned in the house I concluded that the old vulture lived alone—a bachelor or a widower. Ask him? Never! His face did not inspire the least attempt at familiarity, and, either because he had changed or the atmosphere of the place affected my imagination, he seemed more ferocious than he had been out there in the sun.

"We had beans, rice and beef for dinner and there was also a mysteriously covered plate on the table. I waited to see my host lift the cover, but apparently, he had no intention of doing so and I had to curb my curiosity. Despite the fact that I was almost sick from the queer odor the room seemed saturated in, my appetite returned, I found everything good and began to eat as much as two men. Several minutes passed thus. Suddenly the old vulture took his knife and beat imperiously on a plate three times. I supposed that he was calling the cook. He waited a little while, and, as no one came, repeated the signal with considerable impatience. This time he was heard. A door opened slowly and the form of a woman appeared before us. A sleep-walker? I had that impression. Without a drop of blood in her cheeks, without the faintest light in her glassy eyes, she looked like a ghost that had risen from the grave that moment. She approached with the slow short steps of an automaton, and seated herself after bowing her head. I shivered. The attic darkness, the vulture's diabolic appearance, that ghost at my side, all this united to throw me into a fever of terror. In the open, out

where it's light, I am not a coward. I don't mind a good, square fight with a knife or .32. But in that sombre dungeon, I trembled like a frightened woman.

"As soon as the ghost had been seated, the husband smilingly pushed over to her the mysterious plate and lifted the cover with an airy gesture. It contained something black that I couldn't identify. The woman, on seeing it, trembled, as if horrified.

"Help yourself!" her husband exclaimed.

"I don't know why, but that invitation contained so much inhuman cruelty that it pierced my soul like a cold razor blade. I was witnessing a horrible tragedy, one of those horrible tragedies lived within four walls without anyone outside suspecting its existence. From that day on I have never looked on dark old houses without imagining that horrible scenes were taking place within. Speaking of hyenas—I know one—a man.

"As the ghost remained motionless, the vulture leaned forward and repeated the invitation in a low voice with glacial ferocity.

"Do have some!"

"And picking up the revolting thing, he placed it gently on her plate.

"The martyr had another attack of trembling. Her cadaverous face twisted itself into horrible contortions as though from an electric shock. She raised her head: her dilated vitreous eyes stared at me for several minutes as if awaiting an impossible miracle. In those tormented eyes I read the most despairing call for help that human affliction ever silenced.

"The miracle did not take place—infamous wretch that I was! And that flash of hope, the last perhaps that ever shone in those eyes died out as her eyelids fell in a piercing gesture of despair. The nervous twitches diminished in frequency, ended. The magnificent head dropped to her breast and the living ghost, brought to life for a moment, returned to the slow death of her somnambulist marasmus. All the while the vulture watched us slyly and smiled venomously.

"What a dinner! A funeral ceremony in an Inquisition dungeon! I don't know how I ever digested those beans!

"The room had three doors, one opening on the kitchen, another on the hall, and the third on the pantry. My eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity and I could now see things better. While we waited for the demi-tasse I gave the room and the furniture a careful inspection. As the pantry door was open I looked in. I saw some white things on the floor—sacks of flour—and, hanging from a hook, something black that intrigued me. A piece of dry meat? Old clothes? My forehead must have been wrinkled and my eyes puzzled as I attempted to make out what that mysterious form was because the vulture asked in a cutting tone:

"Are you curious about anything? Hell is full of curious fellows, my boy."

"Extremely put out, but always on my guard, I thought it best to swallow the insult and remained silent. However, the man, after a pause, continued in a playful, ironic tone:

"Just one of the things that make up life, my boy. Now the lady here is crazy about smoked ape and there is enough there in the pantry to satisfy her for a long time . . . Did you ever eat smoked ape, my boy?"

"Never! It would be almost like eating a man!"

"Well, you don't know what you have been missing!" he murmured with a diabolic glint in his eyes, those little snake eyes."

Here the game interrupted the story. Melchor was winning and Gaspar losing heavily. I needed a "13" but didn't have it. The position changed to

"23." For the third time Ugarte won the triangle from me. I wanted to recuperate but couldn't. The story was reaching its climax and I preferred to hear the rest of it rather than safeguard my interests in the game. I remained in my place attentive to the narrator.

"When I was out in the road again, well out of that den, I took new courage. I made a cross on the gate post: never again! Credo! And I galloped into the night . . .

"Years passed. One day, in Tres Corações, I hired a negro by the name of Estevão. He was a serious, hard-working fellow and in a few months had become my right hand. He could be relied on absolutely for a round-up, to cure cattle diseases, or perform confidential missions. When a negro is good, he is better than two white men. Estevão was better still—he was worth three. But I needed more help. Business was increasing and he could not do all the work himself. I decided to hire another man like him and asked him once:

"You don't by any chance have a brother like yourself?"

"I did have," the negro replied, "I had Leandro, but the poor fellow is no longer alive."

"What did he die from?"

"He was murdered. He was murdered and eaten."

"Eaten?" I asked horrified.

"Yes, eaten by a woman."

"I listened with bated breath as he continued:

"Leandro," he said, "was a fine young fellow and a hard worker. He worked at Tremedal, at a ranch in—"

"... Matto Grosso? For Colonel Theotonio?"

"Yes! How did you know? Ah, you have been there! Well render thanks to God for being alive, because though it was easy to enter the house of that hangman . . . to get out! May God pardon me, but that beast was the worst fiend that the devil ever cast into the world!

"The vulture!" I murmured recalling the man, "it's the same one."

"Well, Leandro—I don't know what gossip started the story that—that he, pardon the word—was running after the mistress of the house, a white woman who looked like a saint. What happened, if anything happened at all, God only knows. For my part, I believe that it was all a put-up job on the part of Liduina, the Colonel's mulatto mistress. But innocent or not, poor Leandro was tied to a tree and lashed to death. And they threw pepper into his wounds! He died. After he died he was smoked."

"What?"

"Well, what of it? He was smoked like an ape. And they say he was eaten. They hung his flesh up in the pantry and every day a small piece was brought to the table for the lady of the house to eat—the poor thing . . ."

I changed places at once. I went over to the other side of the room to watch the end of the game. But I couldn't follow the plays. However much I tried, I could not see the numbers

