

THE LOST CITY OF JAN GARI

"This is rather an unusual story that I am going to tell you, my friends. I know it will strike you as being a weird dream, but it is a fact."

"Wait till I get the cigars," replied Mike, "for I don't want to miss any of your fairy tale."

"Well, you all know John Fotheringham; I believe he is now known to undergraduates as Old Fotheringham. He was one of us in the good old Oxford days after the war. Times have changed there now, they tell me; I haven't been back there for four years."

"Sadly, Jack, sadly," murmured Mike, who had lately returned from a short stay there.

"Well, this story is about John and a girl we all knew and admired, and about myself. Margaret Young was the girl." I heard him sigh, for he had been her devoted slave, and even yet he has not forgotten her.

We had all been rather surprised when John Fotheringham had been called from a Readership in Anthropology at the National University of Ireland to that chair at our old Alma Mater. His ability is undeniable, but such honor rarely comes to one so young.

"Well, you know about John's appointment at Oxford, but you don't know that he is married and to Margaret Young. It was not a case of love at first sight but, I believe, of community of interests. She loves exploration and beating about in the wilds, and so does John. Of course, in other ways they are extremely different; she is as mercilessly logical as only a logical woman can be, and John, on the other hand, is the most illogical of men. He has arrived at his greatest discoveries intuitively. I remember being with him once as a student in Sicily; and one morning nothing would do but we should get some laborers and go to dig at a horribly uninteresting spot on an old road. Well, you know that digging first brought John to the notice of the old greybeards who then directed the department he has now made his own."

"But pardon me if I have so far wondered afield as to forget my story. Well, I'll not bother you with the details of how it happened, but suffice it to say that in the summer of 1925 I had occasion to make a hurried trip to London, and at the Grafton Galleries one night, much to my surprise and delight, I saw John. Margaret was with him

and they had just returned from a very short honeymoon. Then and there I learned the plans of the expedition I will tell you of, and then and there did I weakly yield and promise to go. Possibly the thing that decided my going was the news that Pat Kennedy was to be the other member of the party. You remeber Pat in those dear old thrilling, breathless days of post war Oxford."

A momentary silence struck us all as our minds turned back to some night on the Cher, perhaps, or our last College Ball, or the wild doings of Boat Race Night in London.

"Pat was the best fellow who ever trod the playing fields on Cowley Road—not the geatest player but the greatest heart—in our day. But Pat was more than that. He had great experience in Africa, for he was born and brought up in Rhodesia and South Africa, and he knew every tongue of importance from the Southern Jungle of the Sahara to Salisbury, in addition to having a fluent command of Arabic." "Well, in five days we disembarked at Tunis, and from there we quickly made our way to the South over the Haggar region so as to penetrate the Hausa States lying between the desert mountains and the forest lands of the Niger. The idea of the expedition was to investigate and study the worship and superstitions of the various peoples of that little known and difficult corner of the earth."

"Our journey down to the Haggar was quite without extraordinary incident, though our guides and company were always fearful when we camped near any of the old dead towns of which the regions have a full share. These, our Arabs told, were inhabited by Jinns, especially, they said, the Uwal Yara and the Ba Maguje. Here, too, were to be found the dwelling places of the more malicious Bari."

"About the 18th of October, the character of the country through which we were travelling began to change radically. The bleak mountains with their occasional watercourses, their lost and forbidding cities, fell far behind us. Oases were becoming much more frequent, and finally a sort of park like Savannah, with odd patches of elephant grass, made its appearance."

"Some fifty or seventy-five miles away, but yet near enough to be distinguishable, we could make out a rounded elevation of ground clothed apparently on all sides by a dense forest. We encamped that night in the chief village of the Filani, a Mohammedan tribe from the East which

had overcome the old Hausa inhabitants of that district and imposed their will over a wide stretch of country.

"It was there I learned the true object of the expedition, and it was no less a task than the location of the mythical city of Jan Gari and to find out what went on therein. Report had for many ages told of such a place, and its name and fame is spread far and wide among all the African peoples. Even those in America know of it.

"Somehow or other, the old chief, Nassar Ali, sensed our object, and long and earnest were his attempts to dissuade us from our journey. He told us of terrible cannibals who inhabited the country in our line of march, dreadful tribes who spoke no known tongue, who, equipped with dreadful talons and fangs, devoured their victims while the flesh still quivered. They differed from other men, too, in that they wore tails.

"Of course the immediate result was the complete and effective strike of our crew, all but an intelligent Tunisian Arab, called Auta, who vowed to go with us wherever we would lead. And then, by increasing our offers, we persuaded seven of our old carriers to continue. Seven desperate cutthroats from Algiers they were, who would beard the devil himself for gold.

"The next morning our little cavalcade marched out under the sorrowful and disappointing gaze of the old shiek who, however, commended us to the protection of Allah.

"We had scarcely proceeded ten miles when we met with a band of these cannibals, who completely surrounded us and took us prisoners. They proved to be the fabulous Magazawa who worshipped Uwal Gwona, and who made annual pilgrimages to the Niger banks to offer human sacrifice to Dodo the river god. They became quite friendly under the influence of Pat's smile and eloquence, and evidently took us for beings of a higher order. But I saw them looking approving eyes on the huge bulk and round limbs of Hassan, one of our porters, and I knew we had to be very careful. They conducted us to their town about fifteen miles distant, which was rather a sprawled out place of round huts inclosed by a palisade.

"After long palaver and exchange of gifts, we again started on our way, though the disapproval of these people was much more marked, and their prophecies for our future much more pessimistic than that of the Tilani; so we march-

ed once more in the direction of the forest clad hill with pointing of hands after us. Towards evening, we came upon a well defined track, which seemed to lead directly up the slope towards the wooded hill in the distance. There we camped for the night, and early the following morning we took the trail which stretched out before us. Up to this time we had experienced no difficulty with our horses, as the country had all been practically open, but in places, as we penetrated the forest, we had to lower our heads to escape the overhanging boughs of the trees. Luckily, we had exchanged our camels for donkeys after we left the desert country, and our drivers had no difficulty in getting their beasts along.

"We now judged ourselves to be within twelve or fifteen miles of the hill crests, and we headed directly for them. The strange thing that struck us was that, although the trail we followed was well defined, there were no traces of men or horses. There were numerous marks of other beasts having travelled that way, but we saw no animals or birds of any kind. Soon we came to clearings in the wood and saw the remains of what were once palatial villas and gardens. Then did John smile at us all, for he knew we were hot on the trail of something that was likely to prove big.

"So, late in the afternoon when the sun was slanting through the giant evergreens of that sub-equatorial forest, we rode into the lost city of Jan Gari. In a fair state of preservation it seemed to be, with its streets straight and houses of stone, and in the central square, a huge temple overtopped and dwarfed the surrounding edifices. We investigated one of the houses and found the roof fallen in but the building otherwise practicable as a camping place. We marched our little force into its abandoned courtyard and prepared for a night of real rest. Everything was scarce made ship shape when down came that tropical darkness with all its suddenness, cutting off the day.

"During the night nothing disturbed us, but our horses stamped and whinnied incessantly, and I thought that once or twice I heard the faint footfall of some feline prowler.

"The city was evidently the remains of some great ancient people. Their architecture was more akin to the Roman than the Greek or Egyptian, but, of course, may have been a development concomitant with that of Mycene,

or even perhaps it was on the fringe of Atlantean civilization. The carving and inscriptions were all of a kind unknown to us, and the birds and beasts, of orders for the most part now extinct; yet the most prevalent sign of all to be found on every wall and in every angle was the common African leopard in relief.

"We walked the paved streets where the rank grasses grew between the giant paving stones laid by some great people in its pomp of power. The temple was a much more enormous structure than we at first imagined, and covered a superficial area at least as great as St. Peter's, Rome. It frowned down upon us pigmies of a later day from its imposing situation in the central square.

"Along its square columned facade were cut numerous figures of gods and goddesses, some who, indeed, seemed to resemble a cross between Etruscan and Mayan work if such a thing can be imagined, and we saw one figure which I still believe was Quetzal, but the beating of the rains of a thousand years had almost obliterated detail in many of the works. On through great grim halls we went and found nothing remained but the stones of the building itself, and then we discovered traces of the fires. It seemed to us from what we found there and elsewhere that the city, at some far prehistoric period, had been sacked and then given up to the flames. So thoroughly was this done, that even the metal and pottery, if there was any, was all carried off, and the inhabitants too, for we found no bones. Nothing of wood remained, naught but the stone buildings themselves with their disfigured, giant images.

"That night again nothing happened, but we all were conscious that the denizens of the forests had found us out, and we could see beyond the shadow of the fire light the greedy, gleaming eyes of some carnivorous beasts. What they were we knew not. There were no traces to be found in the morning. It was during this day that Hassan began manufacturing his powerful charm against witchcraft and sorcery. It was that evening, too, that Margaret and I discovered the burial place of these ancient people of Jan Gari, where they lay row upon row stretching down a long building. They must have known an even better system of embalming than the Egyptians, for each figure seemed as fresh and lifelike as if it had but yesterday lived and breathed.

"While we were philosophizing there, down came the

tropical dark, and in a moment we were swallowed up in the blackness. I was about to strike a match, when Margaret clutched my arm with a grip of steel; and then at that moment I saw what she saw. The dead were waking up. We saw each corpse stir, roll over, and scramble noiselessly to the stone floor, then, one after another, disappear through the doorway, and not one of them stood upright.

"After seeming hours had passed, we got out to the street which ran straight past our camp, and eventually got safely there. When we related what had occurred, John looked grave but said nothing. That night the eyes out of the darkness came nearer to us. Then I thought I heard someone call me faintly from the distance,—a voice I knew and loved—and it took all my strength to remain seated by the fire. Suddenly, as if summoned by someone, one of the porters started from his sleep, looked about him, and darted beyond the circle of the fire. The next morning we found his mangled body within fifty yards of where he had slept, the victim of a leopard, for the unmistakable claw marks were there.

"To tell the truth, the place was getting on my nerves, though I never suspected what was really in store for us. Pat and John had pretty well done all the work they could do with their present forces, and I had photographed most of the ruins from every angle—I'll show you some of them later, though most were left behind—and so we decided to pull out at dawn the next day.

"Pat and John proposed that, in order to get away early, we move our camp to the gate of Quetzal, as we called it (near the charnel house), and accordingly we did. That direction faced due South, in the direction of the Niger River some hundred and fifty miles away. Out of curiosity, I suppose, we thought to visit the dead possessors of the ancient stronghold, to remain there all night if need be to see them awaken. It was a foolish and idle venture and bitterly did we rue it.

"With the first warning of impending darkness, armed with our pocket flashes and automatics, we entered the House of Death. We had not long to wait when we felt rather than saw or heard the waking of the sleepers. It was John who brought the catastrophe upon us, for it was his flashlight that brought the place down about our ears. That single flash told all. As fast as they tumbled down

from their racks of doom, they turned into real live, sleek leopards. Thousands of them there were, and one giant cat without that seemed to call his dead to revel with him. The flash of light brought pandemonium. It seemed as though hell was opened and its horrid noises let forth. Some fatal miasma seemed to fill the air, and the stench of rotting blood assailed our nostrils. It was at that moment that these things assumed their human shapes once more, but no longer asleep as mummies of the past. A dull glow of phosphorescent light filled the whole hall, and then the attack began. On came every one of them with a stealthy, catlike tread. For an instant I remained frozen. Then Pat's automatic barked on my right. Down came one of that evil multitude, and, horror of horrors, as he fell, his evil flesh dropped from his bones and fell into dust, leaving the grinning skeleton almost at our feet. A momentary halt followed this new development, and then Hassan appeared with the camp light in the entrance. "Allah is great!" he cried, "and Mahomet is his prophet! I have the charm, my lords," and he strode through the cowering assembly of devils. "Don't shoot again," he cried, "lest you be lost!". Then we got out. The porters had gone with the mules, but Auta held our horses—poor, faithful Auta, who alone fell a victim to this place of dread. Then out swarmed the demons on our trail, but we were away from that haunted place. Only Auta fell behind, and we saw him torn and devoured by that furious band.

"I don't know why. It was not what had happened that crazed us with fear. It was something more terrible than what had manifested itself that we sensed to be there, some primal spirit of evil from the far old days of devil worship and bloody sacrifice.

"On, on we rode through the fear filled forest until we were reeling in the saddles from weariness and heat, and, when I almost fell from my horse, John turned upon me a look of scorn, saying: "Your will, man, where's your will? We must ride."

"All this time Margaret clung white and silent to her horse, mercifully in a sort of forgetting stupor which was destined to last for two days, and which was the only thing that carried her through to the shore of the Niger and the little trading station inhabited solely by a certain Guido Cordati, a son of Italy who desired to be forgotten by his native land. Cordati gave us rest and a chance to allow

our shattered nerves to recover. To the stories of our adventures he invariably answered: "Yes, it is unbelievable, but I know; I was there. But it is not always there. It has been seen in the wildest interior of Sicily, and I know a man who saw it in Ashantee."

"And so, my friends, that is it, shortly. I cannot tell it yet. I am too near to it. John has had enough of it; so have I, but Pat says some day he is going back.—Perhaps I shall go——"

"By Jove," said Wanny, "do you chaps know it's one o'clock?"

"Yes, let's go to bed. Pass the decanter, Mike."

—J.R.H.F.

