

# Bewitchment In The Veldt

Mary Roberts  
H. Ec. Jr.



**G**AVURE, stepping from the black opening of his pole and mud hut and catching sight of the stones, “yo-wayed” softly and persistently. In the crystalline African dawn each wailing “yo-way” cut the air knife-like, gathered itself together and travelled far out above the highest banana leaves, scattering desolation over the sunless earth. The desolation was immense, as if two thousand years had left only a primitive man writhing in a consuming agony. Abruptly the “yo-waying” ceased, and Gavure flung himself in anguish upon the innocent little pile of stones. These stones, the size of a man’s fist, were symbols of his death . . . a death so inevitable that already the clutch of fear pressed the very breath from his lungs. The sun, lightly touching wind-whipped leaves, slipped down the slender banana trees, flooded the small pile of rocks, and lay like a golden sunlit pool encircled by midnight shadows.

This was no trick of Nature. These stones placed side by side had a ring of small pebbles around them. It was a curse laid for him by his enemy. Three weeks from now he knew, he would die. He had seen this curse work many times in the village, and now he was bewitched because he had captured Ndongwe stealing the bananas yesterday and had reported him. Ndongwe, suffering the fine of five shillings, had put this curse on him. . . Far away the clang of the bell calling him to work sounded. He must go to the house and tell Maburu, the white Boss, that he must leave. In three weeks there would be a great deal to do. He must hurry. Very shortly he would become stiff in his joints

and unable to walk, then suddenly he would stop eating and then . . . but he must not think of it. No one had escaped this curse, the most deadly of all given by the Chimoyo tribe.

**S**LOWLY he stood up. Already his joints had begun to feel stiff. . . In his imagination he could hear the death drums, the loud wailing of the village mourners. The sun, temporarily behind a cloud, left the world grey and forbidding.

Slowly Gavure presented himself at the doorway of Maburu's house. Mayi, the American wife of Maburu, catching sight of him, began to give orders.

"Gavure, bring the roses from the bushes near the potato bed—and you must not forget to take the medicine to kill the beetles on those bushes. Yesterday you forgot to bring the mealies and the beets and . . ."

Gavure was trembling, and beneath his black skin the blood had receded to leave it bleached to greyness—it was no fantasy, and Mayi, victor of a thousand spirited word battles, shrank back while Gavure, never taking his eyes from her face, stepped closer.

"I am going to die," he said, "in three weeks—my enemy has bewitched me and I will die."

Hurriedly, as if remembering his promise to accomplish much, he sprang into a frenzy of action while he found the garden tools. He must find Maburu and demand a pass for his village so that he could go this evening. He flung away the basket and looked for Maburu.

**V**IOLENTLY he knocked at the office door, and without waiting for an answer he stepped in. The lighted rectangle of the doorway showed up the strange gaunt figure, the twitching fingers, the restless fear-ridden eyes, the uncontrolled distortion of the loose working face.

"I must go home now, immediately, to my home at Dunhu—my government pass is here at your office."

Gavure stood staring wildly at the white man as he looked up. He breathed heavily, his blood-shot eyes brightly crimson in his black face and his slathering lips moving savagely. Yesterday in the same office, he had stood all nonchalant bravado, to receive his five shillings, a reward for capturing the fruit thief. Now he had forgotten the elegant walking stick he had coveted for so

long and finally bought. He sensed a flexing of his master's will and was not prepared to angle skillfully to change it—he merely realized a senseless obstacle to an invincible purpose.

“Why do you want to go, Gavure?”

“I have plenty of work to do there.”

Gavure viciously jabbed a speculative finger through the hole in his felt hat, with the sly satisfaction of a cat pouncing, and quickly prepared another excuse.

“Also my head, she is aching—I must go away now.”

“Oh, no, Gavure—you want to go to the dispensary. I'll write an excuse for you.”

**W**ITH the last cunning of a beaten animal, Gavure tried a final dodge.

“No, no, sir! Yesterday my sister was ill and I must go home.”

Gavure, looking into the firm hazel eyes of the Boss, only half comprehended that he had been refused his pass. On other occasions any one of these excuses would have been good. He didn't realize that his wild manner bespoke a more serious reason to the experienced teacher. With childish abandon he shouted, “If you will not let me go I will go anyway.”

Gavure's bony knuckles gleamed whitely as he clenched his hands in an agony of futility before flinging himself into the sunshine. Outside, he stood poised for an instant in the bright light, like some clownish figure cut in black paper against the whitewashed building. Worn out by his outburst, he collapsed weakly, a huddled and shapeless form in khaki shorts and patched shirt. His thoughts seemed to tear with ineffective fingers at the webs of fear which shrouded his mind.

All the golden morning Gavure sat, his mind a stage for the dreams of a mad man; he did not notice his friends standing near by, openly staring and whispering. Two or three times he had answered ineffectually the simply worded questions the Boss asked him. As yet he had given the other natives no clue to his behavior; their shrugging shoulders and garrulous talking were the only responses to any queries.

**T**HE lengthened shadow of the water tower fell across his knees, and Gavure realized that it was very late in the afternoon. Now he felt like an old man whom the fever had left; his legs were bent and his head seemed bowed by a great num-

ber of years. He could hear the sharp crack of the screen door and then Maburu's voice.

"How are you, Gavure? You must go now, and tonight you need not irrigate the garden."

The native, startled from his dreams, flung up his arm as if for protection, and then, in the cracked voice of a very ill man, repeated:

"I am going to die; there is nothing that can save me; the white man's God cannot save me from Gwa—I must return to Dunhu for proper burial."

To the white man's persistent reasoning Gavure only answered:

"Dico! Dico! it is true. I will die, die," and his rising voice shrieked his own sentence. He heard nothing, but his tongue seemed to move without volition as he thought out loud.

"Boss—you can hear it, can't you?"

"Hear what—Gavure?"

"That! It is the sound of my feet on the dusty road near Dunhu—There! You can see them! My relatives and the mourners—Already my blood moves more slowly, and Gwa has caused this soreness in my legs."

Placing a large hand on Gavure's tense shoulder, the white man shook him.

"Don't be a fool, Gavure—your legs are as good as mine. The sounds you hear are in your head—see—look about you—this is not Dunhu. Those people have come to see me, not to mourn for you—get up and ask the girl to give you food and then go to your hut. . . . Did you hear me, Gavure?"

Gavure shook his ox-like shoulders and turned his head as in a dream.

"You are wrong, Boss—Gwa has taken me. . . . I will return to my home."

**S**UDDENLY the Boss shivered and drew back as if from a brief contact with the supernatural as the shadow of Gavure fell across his legs. With a grief matching that of the luckless native, he watched Gavure turn about and start down the long white road which luridly divided the ebony expanse of veldt. The sun showed a thin crimson rim over the toy-like mound that represented a hill in that barren country. Once again the white man felt that contact with the strange world from which he was

barred and which so completely owned the mind and body of this half-civilized creature. Again he shivered.

Gavure, as if understanding, looked back, with a half smile making a white gleam across his face only half discernible in the fading light. Then slowly he shuffled down the hill, head bent, only the shadow of a soul returning to the shadows. As he walked on down the dim road, the tropical night swallowed him in its lean and hungry jaws.



## Bowling

Halycon Heline

H. Ec. So.



It gripes my soul  
To bowl  
A ninety-seven.  
When Sam,  
By damn,  
Bowls two eleven!



## Iowa In November

Evogene G. Wallace

H. Ec. Jr.

**T**HERE is nothing lush or fruitful about Iowa in November. There is no promise of things to come in a later time—no hint of the earth's pregnancy and calm waiting—no hint of life already borne by her. There are only shades of gray in crazy squares and stripped trees and beaten houses. There is only an acceptance of age and disillusionment. The very cold is suggestive of fires that have burned and died. Iowa in November is like a farmer's wife who no longer cares to make her hair shine or her voice soft. All this is seen by everyone, but only those who feel deeply can understand.