

As the sun dried the last bits of the bridge, the natives were given less and less work to carry out on it. One afternoon, after keen inspection, the large cobra declared the work satisfactory and gave his workers the rest of the day off. The natives, of course, had to stay back to sweep the bridge and the surroundings to make it ready for cobra use the next morning before church service.

He lit his pipe as usual after dinner and sat down on the balcony of his newly built house. He thought about his daughter back home. It had been three years since he last saw her. He recalled how she had cried at seeing him go and how he had almost decided not to take the train that day had it not been for the promise of great fortune on this side of the world to make their lives better. His own father had worked on ships all his life and had died poor. He had joined his father working on the ship when he was a teenager. The work was hard and the pay meagre. They would go out to sea for months and months with little food and under harsh weather. The ships were usually infested with rats of all sorts. His own job had been to set traps for the rats and clean the ship.

Whenever they came back ashore, it was time to catch a glimpse of city life before heading back to sea. The best way to let off the frustration was with booze and women. It was on one of such pastimes that he had met the mother of his daughter. He had gone back to sea a few days later and returned ten months later to have a baby girl put in his arms. Her family had obliged him to 'do the right thing' by marrying her, and so he had. The relationship had grown sour after that because she was a woman with more demands than he could afford. When the opportunity came up a few years later to make a fortune in what they called the Dark Continent, he seized it to make a better future for his daughter.

The job seemed easy at first, but when he had got to Lumani, he realized it was quite an uphill task. The natives were stubborn, and understanding their native language was impossible, at least to him. It did not sound like anything he had heard before, but he was amazed at how easily the natives had got to understand their language. As he sat there, pulling, and puffing on his pipe, he imagined his daughter reciting her poems and chasing her pet rabbit around their little garden. He was determined to see her the next summer.

He pulled again at his pipe and puffed. Suddenly, his chest felt as if it was on fire. He tried to cough, but he couldn't get to. It was as if his nose and throat were blocked. He put his pipe down and started for the kitchen to get some water but fell to the ground. The earth seemed to be spinning around him. He could hear the voices of the other cobras in the living room as they laughed and played cards. He screamed as loud as he could but couldn't scream loud enough for them to hear. He finally managed to cough. What came out was a large clog of blood and yellow substance. He stretched his trembling hand to grab a chair but couldn't get to it.

Suddenly, he thought he saw an old man watching him very calmly at the edge of the balcony. He turned his head painfully to take a better look. The old man was holding a short stick, which he was leaning on with both hands, and watching him carefully. He was sure he had seen the old man somewhere, but with all the pain, his memory failed him. He stretched his arm out in a gesture to ask for help, but the old man didn't move. He just stood there, watching him. The cobra was suffocating, and as he drew his last breath, he finally recognized him.