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# SPICY-ADVENTURE ADVENTURE STORIES



## COMMANDO

— BY —

*Lew Merrill*

**YES— I'M CONVINCED**  
 THAT I CAN MAKE GOOD  
 MONEY IN RADIO.  
 I'M GOING TO START  
 TRAINING FOR RADIO  
 RIGHT NOW.

**NO— NOT ME.**  
 I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE  
 MY TIME, SUCCESS IS  
 JUST A MATTER OF  
 LUCK AND I WASN'T  
 BORN LUCKY.



**BILL SAID  
 "YES"**  
 HE'S MAKING  
 GOOD MONEY  
 IN RADIO  
 NOW



THIS N.R.I. TRAINING  
 IS GREAT. AND THEY  
 SENT REAL RADIO  
 PARTS TO HELP  
 ME LEARN  
 QUICKLY

YOU CERTAINLY  
 KNOW RADIO.  
 MINE NEVER  
 SOUNDED  
 BETTER.

I'VE BEEN STUDYING RADIO  
 ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND  
 I'M ALREADY MAKING  
 GOOD MONEY IN  
 MY SPARE  
 TIME

THANKS

OH BILL! I'M  
 SO PROUD OF  
 YOU. YOU'VE  
 GONE AHEAD  
 SO FAST IN  
 RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A  
 GOOD JOB NOW AND  
 A REAL FUTURE.  
 THANKS TO  
 N.R.I. TRAINING



**TOM SAID  
 "NO"**  
 HE'S STILL  
 WAITING  
 FOR 'LUCK'



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE  
 HIS TIME STUDYING  
 RADIO AT HOME

SAME OLD GRIND --  
 SAME SKINNY PAY  
 ENVELOPE -- I'M  
 JUST WHERE I  
 WAS FIVE YEARS  
 AGO



GUESS I'M A  
 FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE  
 I'LL NEVER  
 GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE  
 A FAILURE, TOM.  
 UNLESS YOU DO SOME-  
 THING ABOUT IT.  
 WISHING AND WAITING  
 WON'T GET YOU  
 ANYWHERE



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# SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES



DECEMBER, 1942

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*Charles Atlas*

an actual, untouched photo of Charles Atlas, holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."



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Atlas Champion Cup Winner  
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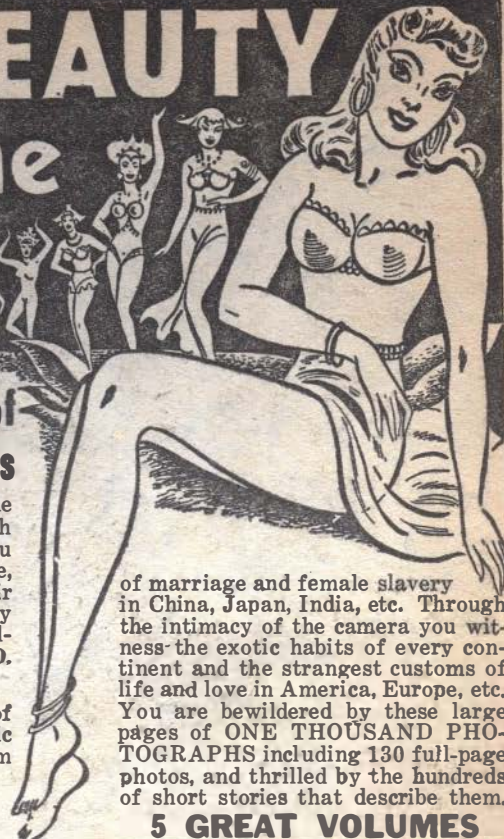
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The woman was coming at him with a knife—

*The dazzling Miss Strong knew nothing about men and their evil ways, but she could handle the natives, and she had a mind of her own. However, when Mulcahy decided her education had been neglected, she proved the aptest pupil any shipwrecked sailor ever had!*

# SAILOR'S



even as he heard the traitor's facial bones crack.

**T**HEY had four oars in the beginning, and they rowed for six days without a scrap of chow, because there was nothing in the boat except a keg of water. Then one of the oars broke, and the Finn jumped into the sea, crazed by the heat, brandishing another oar, and shouting that he was walking a tightrope.

Next day Kentucky broke one of the two remaining oars over Welshy's head, and leaped overboard, pulling Welshy with him.



# LUCK

By  
CLIVE TRENT



That left Mulcahy, Brooklyn, and Canuck. Brooklyn died first, and Mulcahy and Canuck had just strength enough to heave him overboard. It might have been hours or it might have been days later that Canuck said:

"Too hot for me, buddy. Me, I'm for cool water."

He grinned, and stepped into the sea. Mulcahy tried to hold him, but he was too weak. Canuck's head disappeared, his hand, with waggling fingers, showed above the surface for a moment longer—and then Mulcahy was alone.

MULCAHY had been in the brig, for talking back to a petty officer, when the destroyer was torpedoed. Old Flint-face, the lieutenant, remembered him, and unlocked the door personally. "We're sinking," he said. "When you report for duty, advise your superior officer that you've got another week to serve." That was all.

Swimming in the darkness, Mulcahy saw the lifeboat bobbing near him, and got hauled aboard. When the sun rose, there wasn't anything else floating to be seen.

It happened somewhere off New Guinea. On the map, the Pacific seems to be studded with islands, but it is a big piece of water, and there hadn't been sight of land since their ship went down.

Mulcahy sat huddled in the boat. He thought of Norfolk, Newport, and the friendly streets of New London, and wondered whether he'd ever see them again. He thought of Flint-face, and hoped he had been drowned. Then he hoped he hadn't. He had a queer

sort of liking for the looney, though Flint-face had characterized him in unprintable words as a pest, a nuisance, a drunken ruffian, and a disgrace to the Navy.

He must have dozed, for suddenly Canuck seemed to be shaking him by the shoulder and shouting, "Land!"

MULCAHY opened his eyes and eased his pain-racked body and realized again he was alone. Straight ahead of him rose a noble mountain, and under it was a stretch of foreshore, a beautiful white shingly beach. A current was driving the boat directly toward the island.

Mulcahy stared incredulously. He must have slept quite a long time, for there had been no sign of land when Canuck left him. That had been at dawn, and it was now mid-afternoon. Mulcahy wondered whose island it was, and whether the Japs had gobbled it yet.

Now he could see the shore unfolding. He could see a small cluster of houses, and, between them and the shore, a luxurious jungle. A figure was moving on the beach. And then Mulcahy's heart beat a quick tattoo. She was bathing—bathing in the surf, a native woman with an exquisite golden skin, and she didn't seem to be wearing anything. Her back was toward him, and she was standing on one foot, and attempting to insert the other through the opening of a little grass skirt.

Seen from the back, she looked awfully good to Mulcahy. Her form was plump, and the long, black hair that hung about her re-

vealed tantalizing glimpses of two perfect shoulders. As she stooped, Mulcahy could see one plump, firm little breast, peeking out through the fold of her arm.

The current was carrying the boat forward with increasing velocity. Suddenly it careened on a submerged rock, and Mulcahy went splashing into the water. At the sound, the girl turned, and uttered a little scream. Mulcahy waded toward her, gesturing, and calling out that he wasn't going to hurt her.

She didn't seem much afraid. She stood watching him, with the little grass skirt in place. Mulcahy gained the beach, and collapsed in a faint at her feet.

HE WAS lying in a little open space in the rattan jungle, through which the sea was visible. High overhead, seeming to sail among the clouds, he could see the mountain peak.

But Mulcahy took little interest in the panorama, for the girl was seated beside him, two adorable bare golden legs crossed under the grass skirt, and two small breasts slightly pendant above it. Mulcahy looked at her through half-closed eyelids, and knew that he hadn't been mistaken. She had the form of a young Venus. And Mulcahy had an odd feeling in his chest, as if the girl's bosom had recently been pressed against it.

Mulcahy said: "American sailor. Torpedoed. Hungry."

She laughed melodiously. "Yes, I know, American," she answered. "I go to bring you something to eat."

She rose, looking about her.

Mulcahy saw a shiny, yellow robe crumpled up on the grass. The girl shook it out, and began putting it about her. It was a graceful *sarong*, and it enveloped her lithe figure to the ankles.

"Wait a minute," said Mulcahy, putting out his hand, and catching the end of the robe. "I'm not as hungry as all that. I mean—wait just a minute. What's the name of this island, and who owns it?"

"This island Little Banda, Dutch island. Now everybody go, except Commandant Overijssel, and English Colonel, name of Mildmay, and the nurse who stays with the sick. This island was sanitarium island—you understand?"

"Yeah, I get you," said Mulcahy. "Jap man not come yet?"

"Not yet. We wait for him. No-where for us to go. The American planes fly over us, but never come to take us away."

"And what's your name?"

"Me I am Greta. My father Dutch, my mother Bandese."

"Huh! Married, Greta?"

She laughed again. "Oh yes, three times. My last husband leave me last week on a fish-boat. I do not like being not married for so long. What's your name?"

"You can call me Mulcahy. Say, I don't mind you being married, not the least bit in the world. Come here!"

SUDDENLY Mulcahy was aware that his strength had come back to him. He drew the girl toward him by her *sarong*, and then he drew off the *sarong*, and Greta sat down with her ankles crossed, and cuddled up against him. Mulcahy put his arm around her and

drew her closer. He felt her firm flesh yield under the pressure of his fingers. Her golden skin was satin-smooth and cool.

"You want to come to my house in the jungle and be my man?" she asked, glancing at him coyly through her lashes.

"Um—maybe, but what's the hurry about that?" asked Mulcahy.

"Me I'm afraid of Mees Strong."

"Who's that?"

"She is the nurse who stayed to take care of the sick when the others went away. All the girls are afraid of her. She says it is wicked to love mans."

"Say, how old is this Miss Strong?"

"She is—fifty, maybe. She is what you call a hellion, with a face like a sour durian fruit. She must not find us. I will take you to my house where you will be safe from the Japs when they come."

"We'll talk about it later," said Mulcahy, running his fingers over Greta's shoulders.

She sighed, and snuggled closer. Her arms went out about his neck, and he heard her breathing quicken. Then her lips clamped themselves upon his with sudden violence, and she lay taut in his arms. Through the tensed muscles of her body little vibrations seemed to run, and he could feel the hard drumming of her heart against his own. The cushions of her breasts were flat and resilient against him.

And suddenly a white woman stepped into the little glade, and Greta tore herself away with a little cry, and sat up, holding her hands across her breasts.

IT WAS Miss Strong, of course, and she wasn't fifty, or thirty either. She was a girl of about twenty-three, with flaxen hair arranged severely under her nurse's cap. Beneath her plain blue uniform Mulcahy could see the outlines of her bosom, and Greta hadn't anything on her. Miss Strong looked more like an angel than any woman Mulcahy had seen since he left the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

But she looked like an avenging angel, for her face was set in rigid disapproval as she looked from Greta to Mulcahy.

"Who is this man?" she demanded.

Greta began explaining volubly in a mixture of her own speech, Dutch, and English, of which latter Mulcahy could distinguish only the words "American," "shipwreck," and "torpedo." When she had finished, Miss Strong demanded:

"And what were you doing sitting there so close to him, wearing only your skirt? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Go to your hut, and I shall have a serious talk with you later."

It was evident that Miss Strong was a commanding personality, for Greta slipped away through the jungle without another word. Miss Strong looked icily at Mulcahy, and he had never seen such an angel.

"So you are an American sailor and have been torpedoed?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm a Staten Island man, a name of Mulcahy—Ignatius Mulcahy, which being my name, I prefer to be called Mulcahy. My destroyer was torpedoed



"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she asked. "Go to your hut."

a week ago. There was five of us in the boat, and I'm the last of them. Just got ashore an hour or so ago."

"I'm Agnes Strong, in charge of the hospital here. We're expecting the Japanese any hour. Meanwhile, we're trying to carry on in a Christian way. You've made a bad beginning, Mulcahy, with that girl, but I guess she's as much to blame as you are. You'll understand we're a moral community on Little Banda, and I shall expect

you to conduct yourself as an American sailor.

"Staten Island, did you say? My home's in Tompkinsville. I should like to feel I can look for your cooperation in helping to maintain decency and Christian morals so long as we're free to carry on my work. I shall take you to Commandant Overijssel, who's in charge here."

"Thank you, ma'am. And if you should happen to have any chow—it's a week since I've eaten—"

"Why, you poor man!" Mulcahy knew he was passing out. He felt Miss Strong's arm about him, and he knew he was limping up through the jungle, and she was half leading and half carrying him. He felt the thrilling warmth of her bosom, and tried to keep on his feet. But he was all out by the time the jungle ended, and he saw the hospital before him.

**MULCAHY** had eaten, though he was still only half-conscious of that fact. Warm soup, ladled down his throat by the soft, yet firm and capable hands of Miss Agnes Strong, had brought about a refreshing sleep, from which Mulcahy emerged to find himself lying in a bed with sheets and pillow-cases, in a small room.

It took quite a little time for Mulcahy to remember. Then a groan broke from his throat. He remembered Greta, and how soft and warm her breasts had been. And that damned nurse had interfered just when things were becoming interesting.

That groan must have been a loud one, for of a sudden Miss Strong was at his bedside, standing there in her blue uniform, looking down at him. Looking so heavenly that all thoughts of Greta vanished on the instant.

"Poor man, are you in pain?" she asked. "You must try to get a good sleep."

"What's the time?" asked Mulcahy.

"It's nearly midnight. You've been asleep for seven hours."

"What's that noise?" asked Mulcahy. From somewhere not far away he could hear something near

a riot, shouting, cursing, laughter.

Her eyes grew hard. "It's from Abrams's hotel," she answered. "It's those men who couldn't get away. They're drinking—drinking, when the Japanese may arrive to kill us all at any moment."

"Say, Miss Strong, listen—couldn't I have just a little drink to help me get to sleep?"

"Most certainly not! Liquor is all you sailors think about. I won't say I'm surprised, after the distressing occurrence of this afternoon, but intoxicants are one thing that I shall never permit in this hospital, except under medical prescription.

"Now let me turn you over, and you try to get a good night's sleep," she added. "I've got my other patients to attend to. How are you feeling now? Better? Of course you are. Remember you're an American, Mulcahy, and I'm counting on you to show the moral discipline that is our heritage."

Miss Strong's hand rested like a feather on Mulcahy's brow for a moment, and then she was gone.

**MULCAHY** had never wanted a drink as badly as he did then. The uproar from the hotel seemed to be increasing, and the thought of the drinks being dispensed there was gall to Mulcahy's spirit. He got out of bed and edged to the door. Opposite him was a ward, in which a number of humped up figures were visible. Suddenly a woman's voice rang out in shrill tones of terror. Mulcahy backed away hastily, returned to his room, and stood in his hospital nightgown, looking out through the open window.

He saw a street fringed with palms, and the shouting seemed to be coming from just around the corner. In the moonlight the street looked romantic, and the sounds of revelry added just the irresistible touch to the glamor of the scene. Mulcahy tiptoed to a closet to get his clothes.

The closet was empty.

Mulcahy suppressed a groan, fearful of bringing Miss Strong back upon his trail. He looked out again. The window was only about fifteen feet from the ground, and there was a strong creeper that would bear his weight. Mulcahy's limbs and body went into action simultaneously with the thought. In a moment he was embracing the creeper, and he slid down, till he arrived at the bottom with barked shins amid a clutter of leaves.

Abrams's bar-room was packed. Mulcahy's instantaneous view was of soldiers in British uniforms, soldiers in Dutch uniforms, brown men in the uniforms of native auxiliaries; also of brown girls in sheer *sarongs*, some sitting in chairs, others upon the knees of soldiers.

And then Mulcahy saw Greta. She was sitting on the knees of a Dutch officer, in a little booth, and they were both drinking out of the same glass, so that their faces were together. The Dutchman's thick hand was around Greta, and his fingers were tugging at the upper edge of the *sarong*, so that more and more of Greta's breasts was coming into view.

The Dutchman looked about fifty. He was red-faced and surly, and built like a bull; his face was

mean and scowling, and he was evidently as much native as he was Dutch. Mulcahy didn't like him.

His nightgowned figure crossed the intervening space at a single bound. "Get out of there!" he roared.

The other's hand went to the automatic in his holster. Mulcahy's fist caught the Dutchman on the jaw and sent him spinning to the floor. Greta screamed, then recognized Mulcahy, ran to him, and rested her head upon his breast. Mulcahy's arm went around her, and then he turned to face the howling mob.

"That's Commandant Overijssel!" somebody bawled.

"To hell with him!" shouted Mulcahy. "Any Yanks here who'll buy a shipwrecked gob a drink?"

THERE didn't seem to be any Americans in the crowd, but the barkeep, a bald, paunchy Dutchman, said, "You've come to the right shop, Yank. All drinks are free. What'll you have?"

"How come, free?" asked Mulcahy suspiciously. "I never heard of drinks being free."

"Because the Japs are coming," explained an English soldier. "They're going to cut our blooming kidneys out, and we're drinking up all the liquor, so we can die drunk while they're sober. Bloody good joke on the sons of heaven, what, mate?"

"And all we can't drink up tonight goes into the gutter," said a Dutchman.

"Wow!" roared Mulcahy indignantly. He snatched the bottle of whisky that the barkeep thrust before him, filled a tumbler to the

top and drained it. He filled the glass up again, while the crowd looked on, gaping.

Greta, at Mulcahy's side, screamed. Mulcahy whirled. The Commandant had got on his feet, and was staggering toward him. He was very drunk, and also groggy from his knockout. He was holding his automatic, and the muzzle was describing a succession of wide circles.

Two soldiers leaped at him and held his arms. "Put that man under arrest," bawled Overijssel in guttural English. "Call a firing-squad! He's a spy, dropped from that Jap plane that was over Banda this afternoon!"

Silence followed, but Mulcahy could see the crowd instinctively separating into two parts. On the one side, the British, on the other the Dutch and natives. And the Anglo-Saxons were outnumbered four to one.

It wasn't that there was anything but brotherhood between them, but they were getting ready for a fine old ruckus, and they were all roaring tight.

But at that moment the door was pushed back, and a white-haired officer entered. He limped, and carried a cane, and one arm was in a sling.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, looking about him.

"This swine claims to be an American. He's a Jap spy, and he assaulted me. He's going to stand before a firing-squad!" bawled Overijssel.

"Nonsense, man, go home and sleep it off," said Colonel Mildmay, limping forward.

"Get him!" roared Overijssel, trying to reach Mulcahy.

AS THE Dutch swarmed forward, Mulcahy turned and let the Commandant have it with his left, on the other jaw. That was enough for Overijssel, but next instant there was a free-for-all, in which Mulcahy seemed to be completely forgotten. Bottles were crashing down on heads, fists were colliding with faces, the girls were screaming, and Mulcahy's interest rose to fever point.

"Whirroo!" he yelled, and prepared to hurl himself into the thick of it. But Colonel Mildmay's hand upon his arm restrained him, and he suffered himself to be drawn a little aside from the thick of the melee.

"Who the devil are you?" asked the Colonel.

"American seaman, sir. Torpedoed. Made this damn' island after six days in a boat. Miss Strong put me in the hospital, and took my clothes away. I'd like my clothes, sir."

"I'll speak to her. What's your name? Well, Mulcahy, I've been trying to get a few men together to organize a defense when the Japs come. There are arms in Government House. But the Commandant's been drunk for days—everybody's drunk, and I'm crippled with shell wounds. All these men escaped in sailboats from Singapore and Java. What can we do, Mulcahy?"

"Glory be!" shouted Mulcahy. "I'll sober them up, sir."

With a roar he snatched two jagged sections of bottles, and leaped into the battle, wielding his



As if with a supreme effort, she sped like a deer toward the jungle.

weapons impartially on Dutch and English alike, but striking with especial efficiency at each dusky face he saw.

"Line up, ye dogs! The fight's over. It's a draw!" he bawled. "Git over there, all of you! Line up and listen to me! I'm Commandant Mulcahy now, and I'm leading you against the little brown brothers, under Colonel Whosits here. Line up, I'm tell-

ing ye, or I'll crack ye all over the heads again!"

Grinning, bleeding and battered, some twoscore soldiers lined up against the wall.

"We're getting arms from Government House," said Mulcahy, "and we're defending Banda and its glorious womanhood against the brown marauders. Go and get armed, ye whelps."

"Arrest him!" shouted Ove-



rijssel, swaying up from the floor, where he had been lying since the second knockout. "He's a spy, I tell you—"

"Put him somewhere to sleep it off," said Mulcahy, and two English soldiers grabbed the Commandant and hustled him through the doorway.

"One thing first," interposed Colonel Mildmay. "Smash every bottle in the place."

A chorus of groans answered him. "One more drink first, sir," pleaded Mulcahy.

**I**NTO an inferno of crashing bottles, and across a floor ankle-deep in wine and beer, stepped a young girl in a blue uniform. She looked like an angel, but an avenging angel, and, at the sight of her, the noisiest of the rioters subsided into sheepish silence.

Only Mulcahy wasn't aware of her presence for a moment or two. He was seated in the little booth but just now occupied by the Commandant, and he had the same girl, Greta, on his knee. Greta's *sarong* had slipped down so far that it really didn't hide much above her waist, and her lips and Mulcahy's had met on the rim of the glass of whisky—that last drink that Colonel Mildmay had graciously accorded.

The smashing of the bottles really represented a triumph for morality and sobriety and all the principles that Agnes Strong believed in, but of course she couldn't be expected to understand the significance of this frenzy.

Mulcahy was saying, "Sure I'll come to your house in the jungle, darling, but I've got to whip

these —s into shape first. We're fighting," Mulcahy hiccupped—"fighting for the purity of our —hic—glorious womanhood on Banda Island, against the—hic—shons of heaven."

"But I do not like being unmarried so long," protested Greta, snuggling closer. "You will come soon, Mulcahy?"

"First minute I can get away," said Mulcahy—and then he looked straight into the blue eyes of the avenging angel.

"I might have expected this," said Miss Strong in withering tones. "Sneaking out of the hospital the moment my back was turned, to gratify your bestial cravings for alcohol! Sneaking out in your nightshirt! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Mulcahy, sitting there with bare feet, with your arm around that wicked girl? Don't pretend you're not making love to her, for I know better. You're a corrupting influence on Banda, Mulcahy. You're a drunken pest, a nuisance, and a disgrace to the American Navy. You, a Staten Island man!"

Mulcahy winced. Her words stung him to the quick, for they were almost identically the same that old Flint-face had used about him—poor old Flint-face, probably mouldering in his watery grave.

They stung him to retort. "I want my clothes," he yelled. "What right 've you got to take—hic—take away—shailor's clothes? And I ain't here to sin. Greta and I was talking about things you wouldn't understand. And I'm Commandant here, and organizing the defense in behalf of Banda's

glorious pure womanhood, all colors of—hic—rainbow.”

“You’re certainly drunk,” said Miss Strong calmly. “I wash my hands of you. You’ll find your clothes on the steps of the hospital, when you’re sober enough to find your way there. As for you”—she turned to Greta—“if you’ve a spark of decency remaining, you’ll get back to your hut and stay there!”

**I**T WAS astonishing how much work could be done in a minimum of time. Mulcahy, regarbed in his sailor’s outfit, went about raging, and using his fists freely, and soon had secured the enthusiastic cooperation of his motley crew. There were machine-guns, rifles, and a considerable supply of ammunition in Government House, and well before dawn the defenders had become a disciplined little force.

Colonel Mildmay directed the work, while Overijssel, whose face was badly swollen, had disappeared. The machine-guns were placed in positions around the building. There was no time to dig trenches, till other defense measures had been completed, but barricades were constructed along the approaches, and two field guns, relics of past wars, were placed to command the main approach, though the ammunition for them had not yet been discovered.

Finally, supplies of food were brought in from the stores. Mildmay intended to make Government House the focus of the defense.

Toward dawn he said to Mulcahy, “We’d best evacuate the

hospital. Those Japs won’t respect it. Take six men with you and bring back all the inmates. If any can’t walk, you’ll find stretchers there. And don’t be—ah—bulldozed, I think you call it, by that Strong woman.”

Mulcahy, smarting under the remembrance of Miss Strong’s whip-lash of a tongue, accepted the commission with joy. He halted his men outside the hospital, and hammered on the door.

Agnes Strong looked more than ever like an angel in the dressing-robe that she had thrown over her night attire. Her fair hair was hanging down her back, and she was fumbling with one hand at the top button of her pajamas, which kept slipping through her fingers, disclosing the upper slopes of two perfect breasts.

Mulcahy knew for sure that Greta hadn’t anything Miss Strong didn’t have, and his triumph was blended with other feelings. Even Miss Strong’s icy attitude couldn’t destroy his satisfaction.

“We’re evacuating all the patients to Government House,” he explained. “And we’re taking them now.”

“You’ll do no such thing, and how dare you come here disturbing us at this hour in the night?” Miss Strong demanded.

“Go get them, boys,” said Mulcahy, “but go easy with the women. Only, get them out quick!”

**I**T HAPPENED like a flash, probably because Miss Strong’s nerves broke under the terrific strain of the past days. Suddenly

(Continued on page 103)

## By LEW MERRILL

**T**HE village of Restigat, in Brittany, seethed under the Nazi heel, seethed like a pot of soup that hardly seems to have come to the boil, until you look into it and see that the entire contents are in slow motion, ready to erupt at any instant in fury..

Restigat had always been slow-spoken, slow to action, holding within itself the primitive Breton spirit, slow to action because it

knows that, once the bond of caution has been released, it is limitless in its explosive action. So Restigat had waited.

It had seen its homes occupied, its produce seized; it had known starvation. It was satisfied to live for the day of the revenge promised by the English planes that roared at night overhead. It had been patient because, to suit some scheme concocted by the oppressor,



Again and again he brought down the whip, but no sound escaped the girl's lips.

# COMMANDO

its wives and daughters had not been made the victims of Teutonic lust.

On the contrary, the occupying troops were—by order—polite and soft-spoken. Not a woman had been harmed—except Madeleine Quelpart.

Everybody knew that—somehow.

See old *Mère* Juchereau, knitting in the sun at the door of her cottage. She knows. And Bonnard, the baker, who has no flour to make



*The village in Brittany seethed under the Nazi yoke, and the worst sufferer was a little French girl. When the young American came, she was ready to give her life to help him—for love of her people, but, too, for love of her young Commando*

into loaves. And Richard, the butcher, who has no creatures to slaughter. They know. And *Madame* Pinard, of the little empty store—she knows.

They all know. They all know that *Oberst* Sachs, commandant of the occupying forces, put the alternative up to Madeleine the evening of the day he moved into the decrepit old mansion.

"Your grandfather is eighty-four," he said. "A famous man in his day. As a boy, he took to the forests and fought with the *franc-tireurs* against us in the war of 1870. His name is catalogued. And Germany never forgets. He must die before a firing-squad, unless . . . well, you understand the alternative, *Mademoiselle* Quelpart."

Old General Quelpart, brooding in his armchair, called in his cracked voice, and Madeleine went in to him, leaving the *oberst* unanswered. The general, childish with age, was all that was left to Madeleine. She had lost her father in 1917, and her brother in 1940.

"This Colonel Sachs is a very decent fellow," wheezed the old man. "He shows the true generosity of an honorable enemy. We must show him, in return, that we French know how to honor brave and honorable foes. You will be good to him, Madeleine?"

Madeleine looked at the old man, the last repository of all her childhood memories. "Yes, I will be good to him, grandfather," she answered.

SUCH tragedies were of everyday occurrence, and how could Denny Burton, the young Ameri-

can attached to the commando force, know what he was going to find at Restigat? He had never even heard of Restigat. He spent his days jumping walls and hedges with a full pack on his back, and going through all the toughening devices of the commando routine.

How could he see the shrinking girl, with white face and teeth hard set, yielding herself to the butcher-faced *Oberst* Sachs? For the sake of the old, senile man with whom Sachs played *béziq*ue in the evenings, whom he ceremoniously wished good-night and saw to the stairs, lighting his way with a candle, before turning to clasp Madeleine in his arms?

Sachs was not an impassioned lover. He wasn't a lover at all. Half-drunk, he ordered Madeleine from his room at the first glimpse of dawn. And, in her own room, she would kneel in prayer, shuddering at the pangs of her bruised flesh, and biting blood from the lips on which the *oberst* had clamped his own.

Hate can be so deep that it is silent and emotionless. Some day, in some way, death would come to Sachs for this defilement, and Madeleine might somehow hope to regain purity of body and serenity of spirit. That was her dream. And meanwhile her grandfather lived, and played his nightly game of *béziq*ue with the devil that had taken Madeleine's body and soul into his clutches.

But, though perhaps the German soldiers didn't know, all Restigat knew. When the *oberst* strode down the street, *Madame* Pinard would turn her face away, and mutter a prayer. Likewise old

Mère Juchereau. And Bonnard and Richard would stare sullenly from the doorways of their empty shops. And even the schoolchildren knew that the *Oberst* Sachs must die, when the English came. He might die before, but that would bring death upon all Restigat. So he would die when the English came, and France grew free again.

And this meant nothing at all to Denny Burton. He had passed all his tests. It was a great honor to be a member of a commando. You weren't just an ordinary soldier: you were a man who was a member of a Sacred Legion. You expected to give up your life any time, both heroically and bestially. You knew the different sounds made by the blood pumping from a sliced throat and the gurgle of a body that has been ripped up by a knife. No holds were barred when one was on commando.

SACHS, the *Oberst*, was drunk. He hadn't played his usual game of *béziq*ue with the old General, because he had had a gruelling day. Those *verdommte* commandos were likely to spring again, somewhere along the coast of France. It might be anywhere; it might even be at Restigat. That had been his advice from headquarters.

The *oberst* was fifty, a gross hulk of a man, and he didn't like sweating in the July sun. He had had to put his troops through their manoeuvres—all the seventy-seven of them. Afterward, beer and French spirits in the room over Bonnard's, which was used as a club.

Of course the old house of Gen-

eral Quelpart would have been an ideal spot for the club, but the *oberst* wasn't taking any chances with Madeleine. He was too wise to trust any woman, and he had some good-looking officers on his staff. So he got drunk, and cursed the war, and the fate that had relegated him—owing to a stupid tactical blunder in the past—to the obscure fishing village of Restigat.

In her home, Madeleine waited. Her father had gone to bed, grumbling because his friend, the *oberst*, hadn't appeared for the customary game of *béziq*ue. Now Madeleine was alone, in her little room on the ground floor.

The room occupied by the German was opposite it, just across the hall. Madeleine had been praying. Now she stood watching the room in horror. She had never dreamed that such bestiality could come into her life. And the *oberst* would come back drunk. He was always drunk when he was late. Then his love-making took the form of sadistic frenzy.

Standing there in her night-dress, she raised one arm and, as the sleeve slipped back, she looked at the bruises he had inflicted on her only a few nights before. In the broken mirror, in the hall, she could see her figure, slender, white, the soft orbs of her breasts half-visible beneath the open front of the garment. And she looked at her reflection without any feeling save horror and hatred.

It would be so easy to slip a knife up that sleeve of hers, and make an end of the monster. Only, that would mean the death of everybody in Restigat, of all those whom she had known intimately all

her life—of Richard the butcher, and Bonnard the baker, of *Madame Pinard* and old *Mère Juchereau*.

She went to the door and stared out into the moonlight. "If God willed it, He could send down an angel from heaven, to save us all," she whispered.

AND then she saw something falling. Something that appeared black as it crossed the face of the moon, and then turned white, and seemed to billow in the moonlight. Madeleine, following it with her eyes, suddenly knew what it was. It was a parachute, and she could see the man dangling beneath the shroud.

She gasped with fear. He was falling toward the garden. But there had been no air-battle. Where could he have come from? He must be an Englishman. And he would be seen and caught, unless the sentries were drunk too. They had often been drunk of late, since their morale had been undermined by the bleakness, the loneliness, the cold hostility of Restigat.

The parachute was falling into the garden. Madeleine could see him plainly, clinging to the cords. Now he was above the apple-tree. He was falling so fast—surely no man could survive such a descent as that! And, even as the girl watched, catching her breath, the parachute became entangled in the upper branches of the great old tree, and the man plunged heavily to the ground, within a dozen yards of her.

Madeleine ran to him. He was an Englishman, apparently, wearing a uniform without insignia, and tennis-shoes of some dark

color. He was bleeding from a gash across the head, and was unconscious, and breathing heavily.

Madeleine got him into her arms. He stirred, opened his eyes, and seemed vaguely to understand. He managed to get upon his feet, and she half-led and half-carried him into her bedroom. On the bed he collapsed, and passed into unconsciousness again.

Looking at him in dismay, Madeleine remembered the parachute. She ran into the garden, saw it billowing in the top of the tree, and began hauling desperately at the cords. Slowly it ripped down through the branches, and lay at her feet in a shower of leaves. The girl dragged it to the open entrance of the cellar, thrust it down, and closed the lid. Then she ran back to her room.

The boy was lying in the same position, and breathing stentoriously, one arm flung up above his head, as if to shield it. A good-looking, fair-haired boy, with the wisp of a blonde mustache, and curling hair. She couldn't let him fall into the Nazis' hands.

BUT the gash on his forehead was bleeding, and Madeleine, forgetting the danger of Sach's return, ran into the kitchen and got a towel and water. She began sponging away the blood. There, he looked better now! His eyes were opening. Blue eyes, in the light of the little oil lamp. He was muttering, and Madeleine bent down to hear. She caught the word "Very."

She knew that word. That was the signal light used to notify patrols and other reconnaissance

"Through with me, are you?"  
A bestial roar broke from his  
lips.



bodies. His hands were moving restlessly. He was searching for his Very pistol. Yes, she under-

stood the word "pistol." But he wasn't fully conscious yet, and now the terror of Sachs came over the



girl again. She must hide him. But where? In the cellar? That seemed the immediate place. And she tried to tell him—and then suddenly she saw his eyes fixed on hers with a look of new intelligence.

Suddenly she realized that she was standing before him in her short nightdress and slippers, leaving exposed two lengths of white limb, and two breasts that her exertions had almost freed from their confining garb. She put her hands across them in confusion. And suddenly she heard a heavy tramp at the front of the house.

It was Sachs. Sachs come back! No time to get the boy into the cellar now. No time to hide him anywhere except in her own room. Sachs never came in there; he called her when he wanted her, and she went into his. The last chance.

He seemed fully conscious now. She signaled to him what he was to do. She turned down the covers and motioned him to slide up against the wall. The big feather-bed half-filled the room. It would be easy for the Englishman to snuggle down in the feathers and be invisible—if she were on the other side of him.

There was nothing else to be done. Sachs was coming into the house, growling, and Madeleine knew from his step that he was very drunk.

He would stand at the door of her room, peering in, and call to her to come to him. She could manage to keep the young man hidden—in the darkness. There! The light was out. He had obeyed her, and she was sitting beside him,

trying to fasten the buttons of her nightdress.

She pressed her knee against his, indicating to him to move closer against the wall. Now! Now it was all right! Now he was as safe as possible. And now Sachs was blundering along the hall and to the door of his room.

“*Madelein! Frauelein! Was machen sie?*”

What was she doing? He had seen her lower her light to a glimmer. Had she been asleep? She sat on the side of the bed in a daze, listening to Sachs’s drunken snarling. “I shall not require your services tonight,” said Sachs, with a drunken leer. “I am tired. You may sleep, little *maedchen*, and dream of your lover. One kiss only—”

HE was coming into the room. Madeleine leaned toward him, to keep the Englishman concealed. She felt Sachs’s bestial lips on hers, and her heart almost stopped beating with terror. And then he was gone, and she collapsed, faint and helpless, beside the Englishman.

“Your father?” he asked in French.

She shuddered. “Of course not. Do you think I am a German? My father is upstairs; he is eighty-four; he is a famous general.”

“General Quelpart?”

“What, you know?”

“Of course we know. I was sent ahead of the commando to discover whether he could help us.”

“*Mon Dieu*, my father is childish!”

“It was not exactly that we hoped for help from him, but it

was thought something could be learned as to the disposition of the inhabitants toward the Nazis."

"*Ah mon Dieu*, we hate them for the beasts they are. If you English come, we shall slice their throats, we shall kill them by slow torture—"

"Listen to me. You are Madeleine Quelpart. You see, we know a great deal. And you love the German, and I do not know how far to trust you—"

"I love that beast?"

"No, I hardly think so. Well, I am nobody, a mere American attached to the commando. And I was sent ahead, dropped from a plane so high its engines could not be heard. If circumstances were favorable, I was to shoot a flare from my Very pistol from the hill behind Restigat. I was to ask your aid, and the general's. But I have lost my pistol, and it is too late. They will not come."

"But, *monsieur*—"

"Listen to me, please. How many men has Sachs? Between seventy and eighty? That was the extent of our information. What watch is kept? Have they artillery?"

And he shot question after question at her. "But of course this will not help, unless you can get me away," he said. "The commando was not to come unless I shot the flare. You must help me away in the morning, for the sake of our countries."

He raised her hand and kissed it in the darkness. Then he heard her crying, and his arm went about her.

"You must not cry. I think the

worst is over. What is that beast to you?"

"Nothing, *monsieur*," she lied. She dared not tell him. There was something steely about his voice. She didn't know what he might do. "He flirts with me. I have to pretend not to mind. Tonight he was drunk, and came into my room. He has never done that before."

"If I thought there was anything more to it, I'd kill him," said the American.

And he began to talk, because in his peril it was good to be near a woman and talk, and listen. He was weak from his injuries, and a little light in the head, and he talked of the commando life, of swift and sudden death, of the love of women, and how life had to be seized on the moment, before it escaped one. All this in simple, ungrammatical French; but it wasn't the words she understood so much as the thoughts behind them. Her breath came more quickly, and insensibly she let her knee press against the young man's again. And she forgot that she was in her nightdress, and that he was beside her in her own room.

Because, when youth calls to youth, the response is irresistible, and because she had no thought of anything but the moment, she responded to his embraces. She felt his fingers explore the soft satin surface of her back—and she laughed as his lips closed upon hers and checked her laughter. And for a brief, glorious time that seemed eternity, life took on a new meaning for her.

Afterward she held him in her arms and listened to his even breathing as he slept; and the old

perplexity crept back into her mind. How could she save him? How could she get him away?

Lying there in the darkness, it seemed to her that she was standing on a pinnacle, behind which lay Sachs and all the bestial past, and that her love and the nameless young American's for her, could be made permanent, if she knew how to snatch her freedom out of bondage and ignominy.

“**M**ADELEIN! *Liebe Madelein!*”

She shook with horror as she heard Sachs calling her. She roused herself from the half-sleep into which she had been falling. Then, in the dimness of the room, she saw the *oberst* standing in the doorway.

She sprang from the bed and went toward him. He hadn't seen! Thank God he hadn't seen! His arms were about her, and his lips clamped down on hers.

“Come, little *maedchen*. I cannot sleep.” He was drawing her into his room, the big spare-room that had housed many a distinguished guest in old time. “I don't know how I could stand this hell of a place without you,” he growled. “After the war, when all the world lies at our feet, it may be—if our *Fuehrer* decrees that the French are Aryans—it may be I shall take you back to Germany.”

His voice was raucous. Madeleine knew him too well. She knew that the bestial, sadistic mood was on him again. He seized her and dragged her to him, sitting squat on a chair, with her standing, pressed against him. His fingers, like claws of steel, were already

digging into her arms, bruising the flesh. The look upon his face was satanic.

She shuddered, and looked at him with deadly hatred. Sachs didn't understand that hatred. Nobody understood among the Nazis. They didn't know that, given the hour, knives would slice, and rip, and disembowel.

But Madeleine knew that she could never again be the slave of Sachs.

She struggled free of his lips, reeking of liquor and tobacco; she forced herself away from him and stood watching him, coldly contemptuous.

“What's the matter with you, you—?”

“Nothing.”

“Come here!”

“I'm through with you.”

A bestial roar broke from his lips. He flung out a gorilla arm and caught her. He dragged her to him. The other hand ripped the nightdress from her.

It ripped into shreds and tatters, leaving only a wisp about the hips. The white beauty of her, which might have awed another man, inflamed his sadistic fury. Sachs clamped his hands about her waist, so slender that the gross hands almost met around it. He bent her backward, watching the exquisite ripples of the contracting muscles, the sway of the breasts. Madeleine screamed, and struck Sachs in the face.

He roared again, and seized her, beat her with his fists, stained her white body with red and livid bruises. And Madeleine fought him with all the power of her slender frame, because she knew that



At last it was evident that neither kicks nor blows would revive him.

she must escape from his tyranny for ever.

His fists crashed into her face and body, and still she fought him. Sometimes she felt his breath hot

in her face, the grip of his hands about her waist was agony; her bruised breasts were two pain-racked globes against her chest. Still she fought him. He might kill

her, but he should never embrace her again. He had her down now, all but helpless, and his fingers were like claws, tearing at her. Her strength was almost gone. The red, drunken face of Sachs above her seemed to fill the entire room.

AND then of a sudden there sounded a yell of fury, and Denny Burton leaped through the doorway. As Sachs turned, with an oath, Denny's fists caught him, and flailed him mercilessly. Denny hurled Sachs from him, and he fell upon his back, struggling amid a pile of twisted bedclothes.

Those bedclothes entangled Madeleine too, so that their two bodies lay struggling in the twisted sheets and blankets. And the bedclothes were what saved Sachs from instant death at Denny's hands. Denny had spent six months acquiring the very easy art of breaking a man's neck with a single twist. It was the roll of sheeting, wrapped around Sachs, saved him. And it was Madeleine, her white limbs twisted in the linen.

Sachs had his science too—namely, the quick use of the whistle, on the cord that never left his neck. Since the lives of isolated Nazis had grown precarious, no German soldier was ever without that whistle, whose call meant danger.

The blast shrieked through the room, through the house and the night. All Restigat heard it. In her bed, old *Mère* Juchereau quaked with terror. Richard, Bonnard, and *Madame* Pinard heard, and trembled. They had heard that whistle once before, when there was panic about an alleged com-

mando raid, and knew it meant quick vengeance.

The sentries, in their shack at the end of the garden, heard it too, and were on their feet in an instant, racing toward the house.

IF Denny hadn't wasted a few precious moments in the darkness, setting Madeleine free, that would have been the end of the *oberst*. But the guards were in the bedroom before Denny had yanked Sachs out from beneath the bedclothes. They flung themselves upon the American. A pistol butt dropped on Denny's head, and sent him reeling against a wall.

There was no moonlight on that side of the house; only the faint reflected glow from the little, turned-down light in Madeleine's room. In that obscure and horrible obfuscation, the guards could see the reeling forms of Denny and the *oberst*, and Madeleine, nude save for the flimsy, tattered rags about her hips.

Sachs was staggering to and fro, and bellowing like a maniac. Denny leaped, but he was all in. Commando science is for the quick surprise, the stealthy leap of death. Denny's leap did not give him the chance to complete the deadly break-neck clinch. The other guard's automatic spat, and the heavy slug, impacting against Denny's shoulder-bone, spun him around. Then they had him.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Sachs. "Keep him for the questioning!"

As they knocked him to the floor, another figure came into the room. Dimly could be discerned that of old General Quelpart, aroused from his sleep by the tumult, his

nightgown flapping about his spindling shanks.

"What's this?" he quavered. "Has anybody been molesting you, colonel? Gentlemen, Colonel Sachs is my guest, and—"

He got no further. Neither of the guards understood a word of what he was saying, anyway, but it was Sachs who stopped the old man's senile chatter with a brutal blow in the face, that dropped the old Frenchman to the floor. He lay there, groaning feebly.

"Bring lights!" Sachs yelled.

Fresh guards, drawn from the village by the sound of the whistle, came running in. Sachs, raving, had Denny, Madeleine and old Quelpart bound.

CANDLES made the room as bright as day. It was the old-fashioned *salon*, disused since the last war, in which Sachs held his examination. With him were his two officers, brutes like himself, but younger men; also four of his most trusted aides, non-coms., who were old hands at the Gestapo business, and had been sent to Restigat for punishment, for some violation of routine.

Denny, his hands tied, stood before Sachs and his officers. Madeleine was tied in a chair, under guard. With a refinement of cruelty, Sachs had had old General Quelpart brought in. The old man sat heavily in an armchair of cedar and ormolu, that dated back to the Louis, staring about him in bewilderment. The bruise from Sachs's fist showed black under his eye, but Sachs's face was puffy from Denny's blows, and blood was oozing from his swollen lips.

"So, Englishman!" snarled Sachs. "How did you get here? Where is the plane that dropped you? What is your regiment, and why are you wearing tennis shoes? Are you from a commando unit, and where does it plan to attack, and when? Answer frankly, if you hope your life can be spared."

Denny's contemptuous laugh rang through the room. "I have nothing to tell you, *schweinhund*," he answered.

Sachs nodded to one of the ex-Gestapo men, who had evidently had his instructions, for he unbound Madeleine from the chair. With a sweep of his hand he tore off the rags of the sheet that covered her, leaving her nude to the waist. Sachs and his fellows leered at the sight of her white body with the red weals and the blackening bruise-marks on it.

In the hand of another man was a whip, a bull-hide whip. He raised it and brought it down. A red stripe sprang out on Madeleine's back. Again, and the weal became a bleeding cross. Not a sound escaped the girl's lips.

"You'll talk now, Englishman?" snarled Sachs.

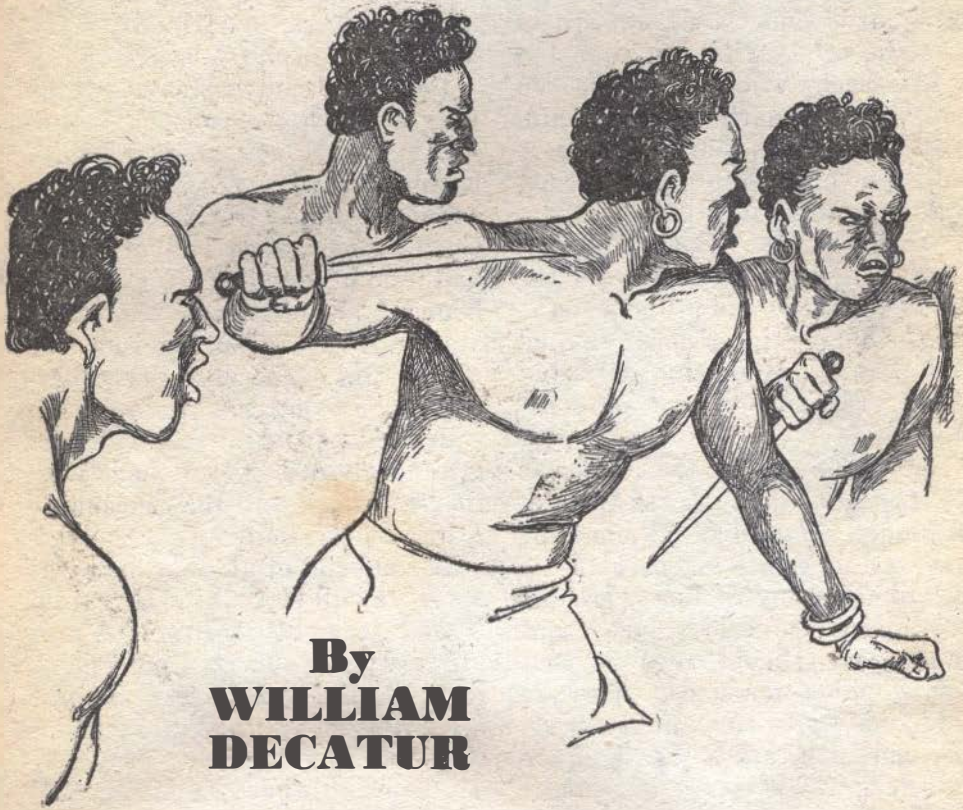
No answer came from Denny. But the old general was on his feet in shocked protest.

"My daughter!" he gasped. "My granddaughter!"

One of the guards knocked old Quelpart down. He bent over him. But, when he dragged him to his feet, the old man sagged lifelessly in his arms. Devotee of an old order, as he was, Quelpart had yielded up his bewildered spirit under the impact of the new.

(Continued on page 111)

# The PRICE of VICTORY



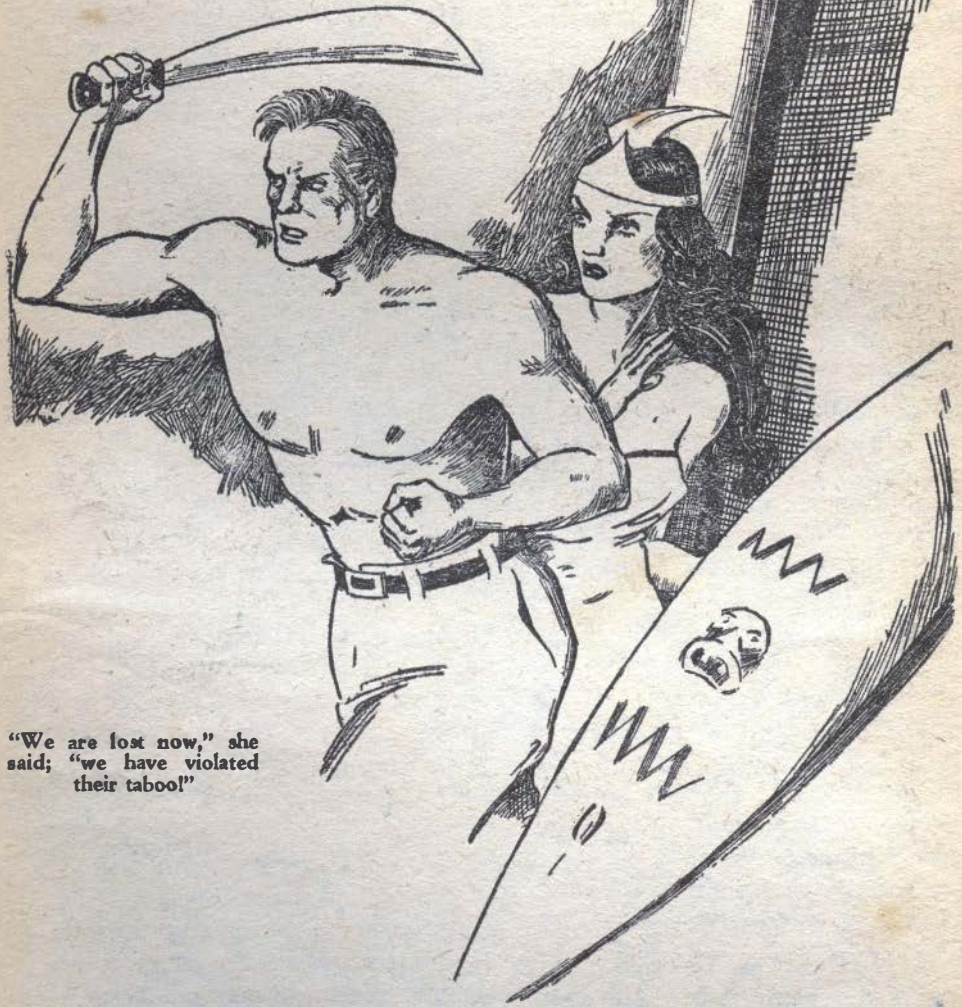
By  
**WILLIAM  
DECATUR**

**C**ARL RODGERS wiped steamy sweat from his lean, tanned face and bent forward eagerly in the bow of the dugout. Just ahead, where the mysterious Zambezi swept its muddy waters in a slow curve, he could see the twin peaks the natives called Nyasi and Nyadi, the male and female creators of life, rising above the green tangle of the jungle. Midway between those curiously shaped eminences of volcanic rock lay the Halfway Camp

of the Zambezi Nitrates Company, and in Halfway Camp he would meet Veronica Edwards again.

The two blacks behind him plied their painted, broad-bladed paddles industriously. They, too, had women waiting for them in the rude *kraal* between the deified mountains — full-breasted, wide-hipped ebony women with rings in their ears and their noses, whose love songs made a murmurous melody among the straw huts when darkness had fallen over the tiny

*Carl knew native superstition and its practices of horror; but he hadn't guessed how far a white man's cruelty can go when he has lost his woman and been beaten by a better man*



"We are lost now," she said; "we have violated their taboo!"

stockaded village. Yes, the blacks were as sick as he was of the silent river and the devil-haunted jungle, after a week of serving the young American engineer whose sole interest seemed to be bits of rock and topographical formations.

Only four years out of college, with no experience of the far places of the earth, Rodgers had jumped

at the chance to go to Mozambique, in Portuguese East Africa, to make a survey of territory being worked by the Zambezi Nitrates Company, an American concern carrying on mining operations under a grant from the government of Portugal. He had landed at Beira three weeks before, confidently expecting to find adventure. But he had



never expected to find, in that outlandish part of the world, a girl like Veronica Edwards.

She had been born and schooled in Ohio. In New York she had worked as secretary to one of the officials of the syndicate which owned Zambezi Nitrates. The adventurous spirit was in her, too, and before long she had wheedled her boss into sending her to Beira, against his better judgment.

Veronica had greeted Rodgers when he first strode into the company offices in the long, white-washed, shed-like building at Beira. She had hair like fine spun gold clinging in tight curls to her small, proud head. He was six feet tall and the top of her head came about to his shoulder, so that she had to tilt her head back to look at him. That brought her bold, young breasts into sharp relief against the thin stuff of her white waist—and made him realize that it had been a long time since he had been interested in any woman. Made him realize, too, that the face of this woman was prettier, and her body slimmer and daintier than those of any woman he had known.

HE HAD spent three days in Beira, learning about the country he was to prospect, and in that time he got to know Veronica better. So well, in fact, that the day he was to start up the Zambezi with Reginald Turner, a well-mannered young Englishman who had been with Zambezi Nitrates for several years, Rodgers told her he loved her.

"Then you won't mind my being with you so much," she said. And,

to his amazement, it developed that she had cajoled Williams, the Beira manager, to allow her to accompany the engineers into the interior. The news gladdened him and filled him with misgivings at once.

A launch took them as far as Half Way Camp the first day, and the moment they arrived there Rodgers knew that Veronica should have stayed behind. Pascal Brant, boss of the camp, was the only white person there. He lived in the most pretentious hut of the *kraal* with the prettiest black girl of the village, a slim, shy creature named Bara. He was brutal and thickset and ugly to meet, and the natives were terrified of him.

Rodgers could have smashed Brant's whiskery jaw when the latter said to Veronica, letting his little dark eyes rove over her in a way that left no doubt as to his thoughts: "So you're goin' to stay here while the others go up the river. You and me ought to get pretty well acquainted before they get back."

"No," Rogers contradicted, changing his plans in that second, "I'm going to take a couple of natives and go up the river alone. Turner is staying to take care of Miss Edwards."

Rodgers could trust Turner. He kissed Veronica goodbye without any undue fears for her, expecting to be gone ten days or two weeks. But in the jungle a vague disquietude had come over him and he had hurried his work, driving his native paddlers to the limit. And now he was back—almost.

More than glad to be back. . . .

THE blacks began to jabber to one another excitedly behind him. Twisting about, Rodgers found them gazing at the shore with eyes that bulged whitely with superstitious awe. Following the direction of their gaze he saw that they were passing the rocky headland whereon, clearly outlined against the background of the jungle, stood the image of the most terrible of all the devil-gods of the district—Zubuk, the ghost-god, to whom is reserved the power to pronounce and execute death sentence upon his subjects.

"See how he holds his arms curved in front of his chest?" Turner had explained to Rodgers the day they reached Halfway Camp. "Well, they tie the suspect and stand him on Zubuk's lap, so that he is within those arms. If the poor devil is to die, the arms simply fold against the chest and crush him to death, very messily. I saw it once and don't ever want to see it again. Of course, the arms are moved by ropes and pulleys and weights, and old Ana-Niki, the witch doctor, pulls the lever that works 'em. But you can't tell that to the natives."

With a shudder Rodgers saw that the god had lately claimed a human life. The arms were folded tight against the wooden chest, and the crushed body of a man, tiny at this distance, hung limply from them. It made him sick to think of the death scene, probably the night before, with the red fire-light flickering on the gray wood of the hideous fifteen-foot image, the voodoo drums thumping a mad tattoo, the circle of black faces leaning close to watch fearfully,

the dance of Old Ana-Niki in his dress of feathers and human skulls and, when the madness had reached its peak—the *thud* of the mighty wooden arms clamping shut, the agonized squeal of the dying man, the crunch of bones and the spurting of bright blood.

Rodgers' eyes narrowed as he looked more intently at the dead man. Somehow, the body did not seem as black as a native's should, since the men of the *kraal* never wore more than a narrow loin cloth. This body appeared brown, almost the color of khaki.

With sudden apprehension, he whirled again toward the paddler's. "Go ashore!" he ordered. "Quick!"

They shook their heads, terrified. "Taboo!" they muttered. In all Africa no native would transgress on ground sacred to a god so fearful until he had been consecrated and had seen the witch doctor perform the dance that would keep him from evil.

Rodgers took the big revolver from the holster at his thigh and aimed it at the gleaming chest of the black nearest him. "Ashore," he repeated, "or you die and your body will be eaten by crocodiles."

The dugout swerved and came abreast of the current. Their eyes rolling with fear, the blacks propelled it toward what seemed the immediately lesser of two evils. The prow grated on land and Rodgers leaped out. Before he had taken ten steps toward the horrid idol he knew that the man it held in its crushing embrace was Reginald Turner.

The young Englishman had not been dead many hours, Rodgers

guessed, as he brushed a swarm of flies from the still sticky blood that had welled from a dozen places in his broken body. The flesh was cold, but *rigor mortis* was not yet complete.

He tried to pry the great arms open, but their embrace was tighter than his strength could manage. Horror gagged him so that he could not do much more—horror, and a mighty fear of what might have happened to Veronica.

The dugout had not waited for him, its terrified crew speeding it on down-stream as soon as he left it. But Rodgers preferred the jungle path anyway, which led in a straight line to the *kraal*, barely half a mile away. And as he ran along the path at top speed, between impenetrable green walls that hid mysteries he would never know nor wish to know, he cursed himself, first for permitting Veronica to visit Halfway Camp and, secondly, for not keeping at her side every minute.

**T**HE men were at work in the mine cut in the side of Nyasi and only a few women moved about the *kraal*, some of them carrying naked babies on their shoulders. He saw Bara, Brant's mistress, sitting alone beside a hut, her eyes fixed stonily on nothingness.

"Where is your master?" he demanded of Bara.

Her dark eyes, no longer soft, flashed hatred. She lifted a slim arm and pointed significantly toward the main hut at the far end of the *kraal*.

Ana-Niki, hideous in his ornaments made of human bones,

barred Rodgers' way at the door of the hut. "Magic is being made," he warned, grimacing to show his toothless gums. "No one must enter."

Rodgers thrust him aside so impatiently that the old witch-doctor sprawled in the dust. The engineer strode through the low doorway of the hut. For a moment he could not accustom his eyes to the darkness.

Then he saw Veronica and Brant in a close embrace. She seemed only half dressed, and the curved whiteness of her flesh gleamed as he held her with eager, grimy paws.

**R**ODGERS' impulse in that first moment of terrible realization was to kill them both. In a moment, however, the red mists of fury had passed and he intended to leave silently, never letting them know he had seen them, never letting Veronica know how deeply she had wounded him. But even as he turned, his eyes, used to the gloom by this time, detected something strange about that intimate embrace.

The girl held herself rigid, her body arched away from the man—not at all like a woman responding to his caresses. Brant's sweaty shoulder was pressed against her mouth in such a manner that, even if she had tried, she could not cry out. Her arms were pinned to her sides by his left arm, circling her shoulders, as tightly as though they had been tied with rope. Her clothing had not been loosened or removed to expose the creamy curves of her body—the cloth had been torn almost to tatters.

Rodgers was surprised by the steadiness of his own voice as he said, not loudly: "Brant!"

The mining boss dropped the weakened girl to the floor and whirled, snarling an oath. Crouching, his broad body hunched and his feet wide apart, he reached for the butt of the revolver on his hip. His hand never touched it.



The betrayed native girl stole behind the image, knife in hand.

Rodgers took a single long step toward the man and swung his right arm stiffly from the hip. His knuckles battered into the center of the ugly face of the snarling Brant, flattened the fellow's broad nose, spattered blood in all directions. Brant went backward to the

floor. He reached for his gun again as he struggled to his feet, but it had fallen from its holster. At the same time Brant discovered his unarmed state. Rodgers' left fist drove into his face, straight from the shoulder, flooring him again.

Brant would have lain there, whipped and groveling, but Rodgers grasped the khaki of his shirt and yanked him to his feet. He shook the man as a terrier shakes a rat.

"What happened to Turner?" he demanded.

Brant looked at him blankly, dazed. "Turner? He went back to Beira. We had an argument."

"You're a damned liar, and I ought to kill you for it. The natives have murdered him with that damned idol of theirs."

Brant was startled. "So that's why he hasn't been around. I knew he had an argument with Ananiki, but I really thought he had gone to Beira. I didn't know—"

"I don't suppose there's any way of proving anything against you," Rodgers interrupted bitterly, "but I do know I owe you this and more, for Miss Edwards." He drove his fist forward again. For the third time his knuckles battered Brant's plump face. The mining boss flew backward, crashed head and shoulders through the glass wall of the hut, so that his face was in the sunlight. Rodgers heard startled cries from the women in the *kraal*.

VERONICA had not moved. Her blue eyes, wide with apprehension, had watched the scene. Tears of gratitude came into them as Rodgers took her arm and helped her to her feet. Her lushly con-

toured breasts quivered with her inner emotion, imparting a shimmer to their white-glossed skin.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said. "If you hadn't come just when you did—"

"I know," Rodgers said shortly. It made his stomach squeamish to think of it and he did not want to talk about it. Some imp of jealousy was trying to suggest to his mind that perhaps Veronica had flirted with Brant, had encouraged him in some manner to take violent measures, and he wanted to silence the voice.

"We'll go down to the river," he said. "My two black boys should still be there, unloading the dug-out. I'll have them take us down the Zambezi immediately. Then I'll have the Portuguese authorities look into the matter of Turner's death. I still think Brant had something to do with it."

"Turner threatened to knock Brant down when he got fresh with me," she volunteered. "That was what they quarreled about."

They walked through the camp, his arm protectingly about her. She held the edge of her torn blouse together below her throat as though ashamed to show her breasts to the native women, although the most any of them wore was a brief cotton kirtle about their hips.

The quarter-mile path from the *kraal* to the river was uneven and rutted by the wheels of carts used to carry the fruits of the mining operations to barges that visited the camp at regular intervals. Midway along it Veronica stumbled and turned her ankle so suddenly that she cried out in pain.

Rodgers lifted her in his arms and carried her into a little clearing beside the path, where there was a fallen tree to sit on. He knelt before her, taking off her boot, although she was already insisting that the ankle was not sprained and did not hurt.

She had let the edges of her blouse fall apart again. Fascinated, he forgot her ankle, and his own breath quickened.

He had kissed her before, but she had never stirred within him this blood-heating emotion that gripped him now and made his hands tremble as they supported her calf and ankle.

When he did look up, it was to meet her eyes, wide and deep and shining with a strange light. They held him like a magnet, seeming to draw him into their aquamarine depths.

Suddenly she leaned forward with a little murmur, put both her arms around his neck and drew him to her, until he could feel his heart beating against her bosom, maddeningly warm and soft and vibrant. He heard the surge and tumult of her heart. He put his arms around her, so eagerly that he ripped her already torn skirt anew and found his hands sliding over the satin flesh of her sides and back. As he tightened the pressure of her pliant form against his, her lips touched his mouth and he felt her whole body quiver. He kissed her tremulous mouth, her throbbing throat. Her breath was hot on his face and she clung to him with all her strength.

Rodgers forgot that the jungle had eyes and ears. Lost in ecstasy, he did not hear stealthy footsteps

about him, feel the hot gaze of malignant eyes, sense the nearness of peril. . . .

WHEN strong hands grasped his shoulders he was too surprised at first to fight, and then he saw the utter uselessness of resistance. Angry blacks ringed him in, menacing him with knives and *assagais*. Ana-Niki, with a necklace of infants' skulls rattling around his neck and his wrinkled face streaked with red and yellow paint, danced and grimaced in front of him.

Veronica screamed once and fainted. Hardly had she fallen to the ground than Brant stepped into the clearing and lifted her in his arms. Brant's face was so bruised and battered that it looked hardly human, but there was no mistaking the savage leer that twisted the swollen lips.

"Maybe I can get you out of this, and maybe I can't," he told Rodgers. "I understand you insulted Ana-Niki, and the natives will want to kill you for that. I'll see what good my influence will do." He grinned evilly. "Meanwhile, I'll take good care of the little girl. If you'd waited to find out the truth, instead of crashing in and starting to fight, you'd have found out I wasn't doing anything she didn't want me to do. If only you knew the truth about her, she's your girl, or my girl, or anybody's girl!"

UNDER Ana-Niki's direction the blacks led Rodgers to the taboo clearing beside the sluggish Zambezi and spread-eagled him before the image of Zubuk, the

ghost-god. His wrists and ankles were lashed to stakes set far apart in the firm soil. Then he was left alone so that the god might gaze upon him and contemplate the extent of his transgressions and decide his fate.

All through that long afternoon the pitiless sun beat upon him, burning his body through his thin khaki garments until he felt like one great cinder, searing his eyeballs beneath their lids, creating in him an almost unbearable craving for the cool water he could hear flowing over the stones of the point, not fifty feet away and yet as unattainable as though it had been on another planet.

Swarms of flies came and settled on his face, clustering about his lips and eyes, sucking his blood with tiny mouths that felt like wasp's stings. If he shook his head they would rise in a little cloud a foot above him, hover for just a second and then return—and there came a time when he was too tired to shake his head.

By craning his neck he could look up at the ghost-god. It was of hard wood, made gray by the weather, and must have been many years old. It squatted on a great flat rock like an altar, glaring balefully at him with eyes that were great green stones. It had massive hips and bulging breasts, the latter curved in such a way that the mighty arms, when they were folded, would fit perfectly against them.

The arms were open now and Turner's broken body had been removed—buried in the jungle, or perhaps thrown into the Zambezi to feed the crocodiles and

propitiate Amadok, the river-god. But Turner's blood still stained the figure's belly, mingling with the blood of numberless unhappy black men who had offended Zubuk and Ana-Niki, priest to all the evil deities.

Even greater than the tortures of the sun and the flies and the knowledge of the fate that awaited him were the tortures of the thoughts that whirled in Rodger's brain. By now, perhaps, Veronica had succumbed to Brant's brutality. . . .

It drove him mad to remember Brant's words: ". . . she's your girl, or my girl, or anybody's girl. . . ." He couldn't believe it. And yet—when he came upon the two of them in the hut she was not struggling, although at the time he had thought it was because she was exhausted and helpless. And when she had come into his own arms, she had made the first move, although he had believed it was because she loved him so greatly she couldn't help herself. Had he really given his love—yes, even his life—to a girl who held it cheaply?

Even so, he would have killed Brant as he would have killed a snake. The red mist made his mind hazy, blinded him, stifled him, when he thought of her—perhaps even now—in the bestial mining boss's arms. There were times when he felt, in his madness, that he could break the thongs that held his hands and feet to the stakes, could arise and walk to the *kraal* and strangle Brant and carry his squat corpse to the river and give it to the muddy waters. But when he tried, the cords only broke the

flesh they encircled and attracted flies thirsting for blood and redoubled his agonies.

**I**T SEEMED centuries before the sun dipped behind the peaks of Nyasi and Nyadi and cool twilight settled over the jungle, driving away the pestilential flies and quenching the fires in his flesh. Then darkness came and blotted out even the terrible visage of the silent ghost-god, and other centuries passed and he lay in a lethargic state of utter exhaustion.

When he heard the rustle of many bare feet in the grass and over the rocks of the little headland he did not even open his eyes,



With a crunch of bones, the huge arms of the image closed on its victim.



but he knew the natives were gathering for a ceremony and he could tell by the lurid light that forced itself beneath his eyelids that a great fire had been lighted. He told himself the end was near and, curiously, he did not feel tremendously upset about it.

The thongs that held his wrists and ankles were loosened suddenly, as though they had been cut with a sharp knife. Rude hands hustled him to his feet and other thongs were twisted through his arms, drawing the elbows so far back that his shoulders ached. He looked around him then and saw half a hundred tense black faces gleaming in the light of a great fire—the faces of men squatting in a wide semi-circle before the image of the god, and the breasts and faces of women standing behind them. He recognized the young face of Bara, whom Brant had sent away when the white girl came. She seemed to have forgotten her jealous anger; her eyes, like all the others in that assemblage, were shining with excitement.

In the dancing light of the flames the visage of the ghost-god was thrice dreadful. The play of shadows across it made it seem alive, made it seem now to laugh fiendishly and now to scowl dreadfully.

Two gigantic natives propelled Rodgers toward the monstrous figure, and as they moved the deep voodoo drums with their monkey-skin heads began a rhythmic muttering. The sound grew louder, faster as the prisoner was led up a rude stairway until he stood in the very lap of the god, and the

awesome arms encircled him at the height of his chest. As he stood there, staring at the scene below with more curiosity than fear, ropes were passed around the fat body of the idol and around his own body, binding him firmly against the bloated belly of Zubuk.

The drums were deep-throated thunder, presaging a storm. The fire leaped higher in a burst of vivid colors as some chemical powder was cast into the flames. Suddenly Ana-Niki was in front of the idol, crouched in a fantastic dance posture, his head surmounted by a tall headdress of feathers dyed in barbaric colors and his face hidden by a mask made from the skull of an animal. About his neck and his loins were strings of human skulls, large and small, and his arms were covered to the shoulders with burnished copper bracelets. Otherwise he was naked.

Slow and carefully timed at the beginning, Ana-Niki's dance grew more savage, became a thing to marvel at. His body jerked in furious rhythm, postured in horrid symbolism. The spectators watched with hot eyes, mumbling a half-audible chant.

**S**UDDENLY the witch-doctor leaped high in the air and a curved dagger glittered in his hand. Six times he drew the point of the keen blade across the naked flesh of his chest, cutting three crosses there. The crimson blood spurted like a fountain. He paused, looked expectantly at the circle about him, searching for a face.

The girl Bara came forth, walking with syncopated steps. Her

eyes were half closed and her head thrown back. Her firm breasts, still shapely with the grace of youth, quivered with her every move.

From Ana-Niki she took the knife. With its point she cut a single tiny cross between her own breasts. The blood ran down her sleek flesh in a tiny rivulet. The drums speeded their tempo and the girl ran back to her place in the circle, at the end nearest the image of the ghost-god.

Ana-Niki seemed to be waiting for something. He glanced toward the farthest point of the circle. Rodgers saw men and women step aside to let another couple through. All at once his cloak of indifference dropped from him and he strained afresh at his bonds.

The man was Brant, his bruised face still swollen from Rodgers' beating. Beside him, her arm casually in his, gazing fearfully at the faces about her, walked Veronica. They walked around the fire and stood directly in front of Rodgers. Brant looked up, sneering, but Veronica kept her eyes lowered.

"So you thought she was *your* girl?" Brant laughed. "You'll see in a minute whose girl she is, Rodgers. At ceremonies of this kind Ana-Niki always entertains the good right! Keep your eyes open and you can see for yourself whether she's your girl or not!"

The taste of blood was in Rodgers' mouth, squeezed out of his gums by tight-clenched teeth. He spoke without opening his jaws.

"If I come out of this alive," he swore, "I'll kill you, Brant, as sure as you lay a finger on her! If

I die, I'll come back from heaven or hell to get you!"

Brant laughed again. "I'll take a chance on that," he said. "Ana-Niki, strike up the band!"

The drums commenced a slow, soft throbbing. From the mouths of the natives came a mellow chant, broken now and then by a gasping, high-pitched scream. It was a weird-passionate love song. The throats of the women gave out little moans at intervals. The squatting men swayed backward and forward, and the women undulated from side to side.

Brant held out his arms, grinning expectantly, and Veronica moved toward him.

**R**ODGERS tried to force his eyes closed to keep out the nightmare, but they would not stay shut. They insisted upon tormenting him, showing him the incredible spectacle of Veronica, like a girl in a trance, submitting to Brant's brutal caresses. Her eyes were open, but her head lolled back and she was passive, resistless, as Brant's coarse mouth fastened on her soft throat.

The damnable chant never changed. The moans of the women, the occasional off-key yelp from one of the men, the throaty whispering of the drums cast a spell over the gathering. Only Rodgers was immune to it, immune to every influence in the world except those of enraged jealousy, mingled love and hatred, an infuriated sense of futility. He would have welcomed death at that moment.

Turning his head from side to side, seeking for anything else to

(Continued on page 94)

# Diana Daw

ESCAPE  
FROM  
THE  
HARPIES!

By  
CLAYTON  
MAXWELL

CAST ADRIFT IN A SPACE-SHIP IN THE ASTEROID BELT BETWEEN MARS AND JUPITER, TED AND DIANA HAVE BEEN SEPARATED.

CAPTURED BY THE HARDIES, WHO INHABIT A SMALL PLANETOID, DIANA HAS BEEN PLACED UPON EXHIBITION IN THE HARDY MUSEUM.

TED, COMING TO HER RESCUE, HAS ALSO BEEN OVERPOWERED AND CAPTURED BY THE HARDIES!

IMAGINE, NOT EATING THIS PERFECT SPECIMEN!

YEAH! IT'S GETTING SO THESE SCIENTISTS RUN EVERYTHING!



AT LEAST THEY AREN'T GOING TO EAT ME-- BUT I WONDER WHAT THEY DID WITH DIANA?

WHAT A LIFE--ON EXHIBITION AS A CURIOSITY IN A MUSEUM! I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO TED?

TED--I'M SO HAPPY THAT WE'RE REUNITED!

BUT UNDER WHAT VILE CONDITIONS--NOTHING BUT MUSEUM PIECES--LIKE GOLDFISH IN A BOWL!

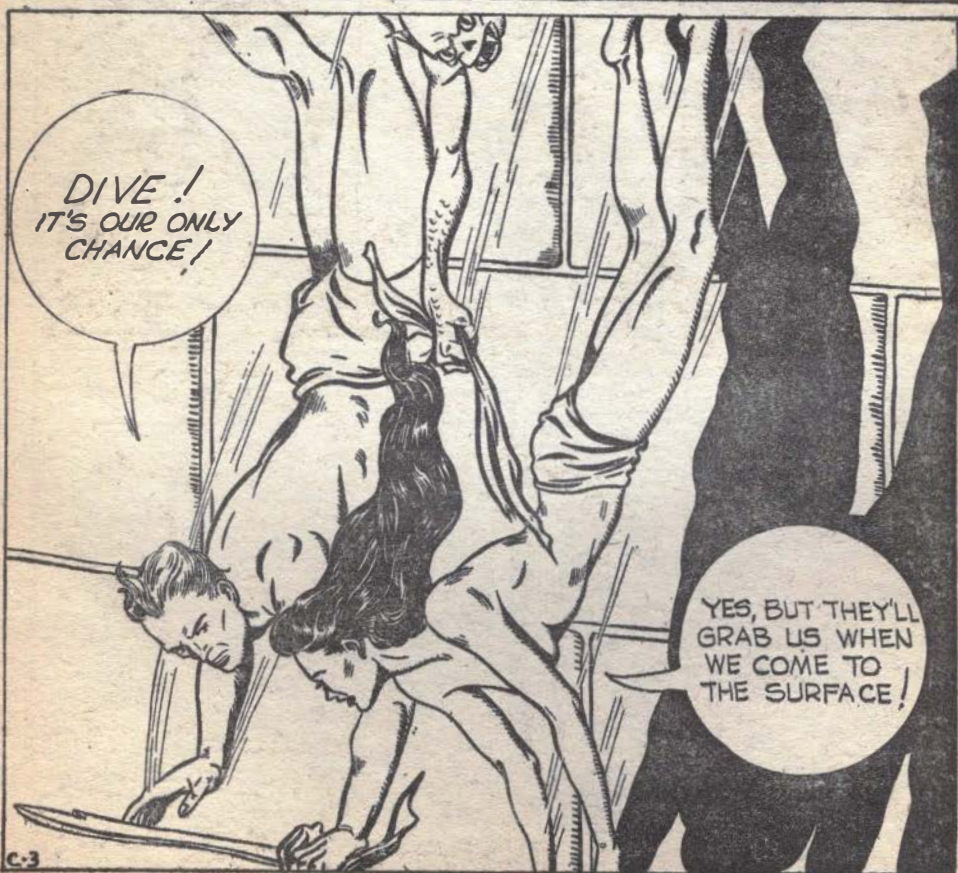


WHY AREN'T WE GOING TO EAT THEM, MOTHER?



SH-H-H! THE SCIENTISTS THINK IT MORE EDUCATIONAL TO OBSERVE LOW CREATURES!







# KING - SIZE

By SAM RICHARDS

**S**TUMBLING along the forest trail in the heart of Central America, Don Kirke had nothing but the towering pyramid to guide him.

He had sighted it soon after dawn when he took off in his plane to examine the reported ruins of a lost Mayan city. Long before noon a leaking fuel-tube had forced him to descend. He had crashed among the trees, the plane hopelessly disabled, he himself miraculously unscathed save for a few bruises.

Don had struck an Indian trail, and had walked all day toward the pyramid in the hope of finding a native village.

Three times he had been bogged in swamps. Now, in late afternoon, footsore and utterly weary, of a sudden Don came upon a clearing, fields heavy with maize, an orchard golden with oranges, and, right at the base of the pyramid, a stone ranchhouse.

Through the fields ran a limpid stream, dammed by a stone parapet. And then Don saw the girl.

She was swimming toward him, the rays of the setting sun gleaming on her white body, which looked like palest ivory against the masses of jet-black hair that floated on the surface. Don's heart beat faster.

A white girl, in the heart of this unknown Indian land!

It was three weeks since Don had seen a white woman. For three weeks he had fumed and fretted in the settlement, waiting for Robbins, his assistant, to arrive with the new plane. Finally he had started with his ancient crate, only to crash. Now Don stood leaning over the parapet, staring at the white form swimming toward him.

"Americano," called the girl, "wait for me!"

Beating the water with her hands, she paddled closer, grasped a ladder that Don hadn't seen, ascended it, and seated herself upon the parapet.

**W**HITE shoulders and beautifully modeled arms, hands with long, tapering fingers, small, firm breasts, straight legs and tapering ankles, two tiny feet that Don could have held in one hand, and a veil of dripping hair that hung about her like a garment, the girl sat at Don's feet, looking up at him and laughing. She seemed as unembarrassed by her nudity as a baby, yet Don felt his breath quickening at her loveliness.

"You are a stranger You are

*"You will be my ninth cousin," the girl told him, "but you must kiss me first." This was Paradise that he had discovered, Don thought, until he had reached the rancho and learned what he was letting himself in for under the old Aztec law*



In her own fashion, she had loved him, and it was now loyalty that spurred her on.

going to be one of my cousins, yes?" she asked.

"I—I got lost," answered Don huskily, trying to control himself

as he looked at that perfect figure. "If you could give me a night's lodging, and put me on the trail back to the coast—"

"You wish to go? But then I do not understand," she answered. "No one wishes to leave my uncle, Don Hernandez. And I want you to stay. I am tired of my cousins. They are all very stupid."

"Your cousins?" Don stammered. The palms of his hands were moist.



"Surely, *señor*. I have already eight cousins, and you will be the ninth. But you are wet and muddy. You must go up to the house at once, and my uncle will have you cared for.

"But will you not kiss me first?" she pleaded. "All my cousins kiss me, but it is very tiresome. I would as soon be kissed by old Jose. Perhaps you will be different." Don's knees trembled as he took a step forward.

Next moment her arms were about Don's neck, and her soft lips on his. Her breath on his mouth was sweet and sent prickles up and down his spine.

What was she, this woman in body, child in mind, whose innocence he dared not violate? With a mighty effort, Don tore himself away.

"But you do not like me?" asked the girl reproachfully. "That is sad, for never again shall I wish to kiss you. That is the way I kissed all my cousins when they arrived, and afterward I would as soon kiss old Jose, or my dog."

Suddenly, with a gay laugh, she sprang to her feet, poised herself upon the parapet, and dived into the depths beneath.

"Go, then, to Don Hernandez!" she cried, with a wave of one white arm. And, with another rippling laugh, she was gone, flashing like a mermaid up the stream, leaving Don limp and shaking.

**S**UDDENLY, as Don approached the stone house, the great door opened, and two Indian servants, attired in blue and silver liveries, appeared.

Down the seven white steps be-

tween them came a gigantic negro, wearing the same livery, but more richly ornamented. An immensely fat man, with a great paunch and flabby jowl, bowing profoundly.

*Señor*, Don Hernandez awaits you," he said in Spanish, his voice a piping treble, incongruous in a man of that stature.

Had they known of his coming? Don was aware that, in the jungle, everything is observed by watchful eyes. He guessed he had been under espionage throughout his journey.

"I am Jose. Enter, *señor*," said the black.

For a few moments Don could see nothing in the dark and cool interior. Then he began to make out the pieces of huge medieval furniture, and the figure of the old, shriveled man who stood bowing at the foot of the grand staircase.

"You are welcome, *señor*," he said. "I am Hernandez Guzman y Ribera."

"My name's Donald Kirke. I was flying to take some photographs of the pyramid for a scientific society in New York, when my plane crashed."

"So I am informed, *señor*," replied Don Hernandez suavely. "I regret your misfortune, though it has brought me the pleasure of your company. You have arrived on a fortunate day, a *fiesta*. My house is yours. But you have had a hard journey, *señor*. You must bathe and refresh yourself, and in an hour's time I shall have the pleasure of welcoming you at the dinner-table."

He clapped his hands, and Jose,

with a low bow, conducted Don up the thickly carpeted staircase.

The bedroom into which he ushered him was enormous, filled with pieces of ancient furniture that must have been brought from Spain centuries before. Don was amazed when the negro switched on the electric light. Beyond the bedroom was a bathroom hardly smaller, with a central pool in place of a tub, brimming with limpid water.

DON divested himself of his muddy clothing and stepped in. He cleansed the dirt from his long limbs and body, and he was standing on the edge of the pool, looking distastefully at his clothes, when a door on the opposite side opened, and an Indian girl came in, with a pair of sheer silk pajamas and an embroidered dressing-robe over her arm.

She wore a single garment of sheer muslin, fastening about the hips and dropping half-way to the knees. Her small breasts were hardly yet moulded into the maturity of womanhood. Between them hung two plaits of long black hair, and her black eyes were alight with admiration as she looked at Don's white skin and well developed muscles.

Don grabbed up a muddy shirt and tried to cover as much of himself as he could. "Say, see here, young lady—" he began.

Giggling, the girl hung the pajamas and robe on a rack. "Me Juanita," she said. "Me your bath-girl. You no like me?"

"I'm not used to having lady bath-attendants," answered Don in Spanish.

The red lips began to pout. "You take care," Juanita warned him. "You think you get the *Señorita* Dolores, yes? And then you will be—pouf!—like the rest of them! You tell Don Hernandez no, no, no, you do not want her! See?"

She went out, still pouting. Don drew in a deep breath. Perhaps he wouldn't have been so impervious to the charms of the little Indian girl, but for the recollection of the girl in the pool.

THE immense dining-room was aglow with electric lights. Silver and crystal sparkled on the white tablecloth, and the room was fragrant with flowers. Eight men were assembled, each wearing the same unconventional attire as Don. Their host, however, was in full evening dress.

Don Hernandez presented his other guests. Five were Spaniards, one a Frenchman, one an American named Garvin, one a big blond Russian, Slavinsky.

"We are delighted, Mr. Kirke," chattered Garvin, a tallish, red-haired man. "It is indeed a pleasure to welcome a compatriot to the *ranchero*. I was a member of the Ronalds expedition that was massacred by the Indians three years ago, if you remember."

The others spoke cordially to Don too. And yet there was something faintly repellent about them. Who were these eight men, of whom Dolores had spoken as "cousins"? Could Garvin have been actually Don Hernandez' guest for the past three years?

Why, so far as Don remembered, there had been no survivors of the Ronalds expedition!

Jose handed Don the cocktail tray. The liquor was strong enough to go to Don's head almost immediately. Yet something warned him to be on guard. He listened to the aimless chatter, trying to fathom the mystery of the men's presence there. They spoke of trivial things, like children.

Only Slavinsky held aloof. With sombre eyes, the big Russian seemed to be trying to convey to Don some unspoken warning.

And then Dolores was coming into the room.

All bowed to her, formally, disinterestedly. All save Slavinsky. Suddenly his eyes became two lambent points, mirrors of hatred, fires of hell.

"*Señor Kirke*, permit me to present you to my niece, Dolores," said Don Hernandez.

There was a startling change from the girl's appearance on the parapet by the pool. A change in manner as well as in costume. Dolores wore a stiff, old-fashioned Spanish dress of black silk, with a collar of old lace, revealing not an inch of the throat, back or breast. And there was no flicker of recognition in the girl's eyes. Pale, white, proud, utterly aloof, she took her place at the table. Jose and two young Indian men, in the blue and silver livery, served the courses of a meal cooked by a master-chef.

Yes, I'm the oldest of the family," Garvin was saying. "Then Slavinsky then Don Antonio, then *Monsieur Perrot*, then . . ."

The wine made Don's head swim. Through the haze he was trying to exact a glance of recognition from Dolores, totally in

vain. She seemed in a dream. She ate and drank mechanically, and spoke to no one.

CENTURIES before, an ancestor had fled into the wilds to escape the vengeance of a political enemy. Here, lost to the world, the Guzmans had lived ever since, until the Indians had accepted them as their overlords, and guardians of the old religious rites.

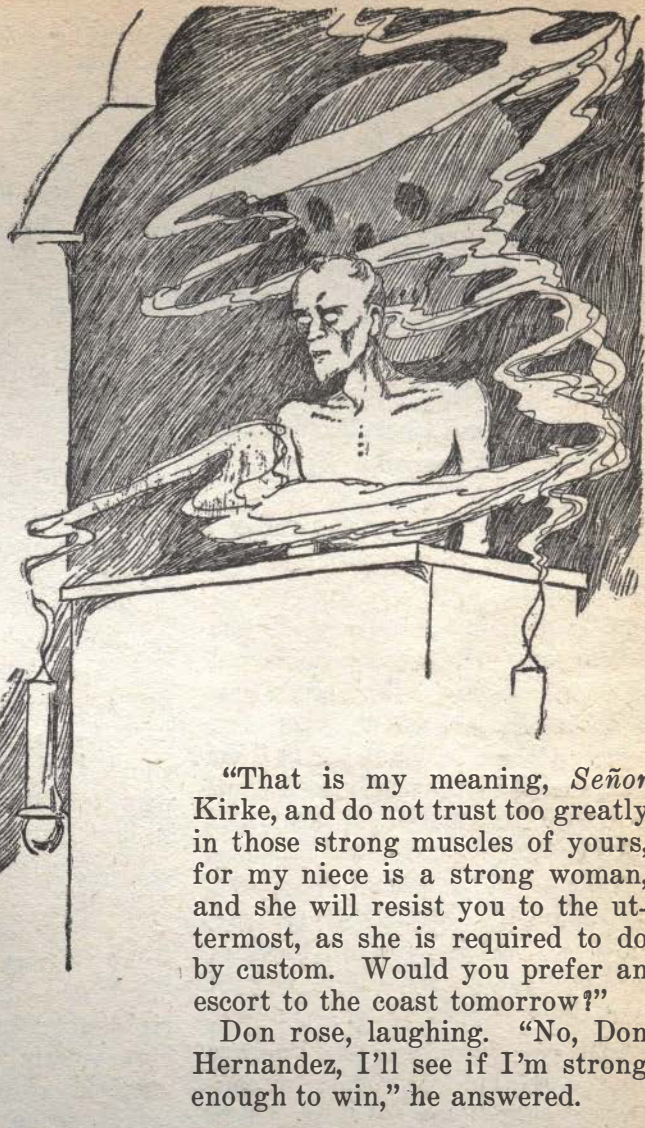
So much Don Hernandez told Don in the smoking-room. "And now, *señor*, I offer you an escort to the coast tomorrow morning," he said. "That is the alternative. If you are wise, you will accept it. If you are not wise—Ah, *Señor Kirke*, I speak as one man to another. I saw the admiration in your eyes when you looked at my niece. I know what is in your mind. You would win her, is it not so?"

"*Señor*, if you refuse my offer, do not blame me for what may follow. I am only the Keeper of the Aztec Law. I will be brief and frank. I am the last male of my line, and there must be an heir. The man who weds Dolores will succeed me here, and must take my place.

"*Señor*, the Aztec law requires that the man who mates with the princess of the tribe must first overcome her by force. It is a survival of the custom of marriage by capture, current in many parts of the world. It will be necessary for you to prove yourself the stronger."

Don looked at the old man in bewilderment. "But what am I to do?" he asked.

Facing them all, inscrutable in his expression, stood the old Indian priest. The day of the test had come.



"That is my meaning, *Señor Kirke*, and do not trust too greatly in those strong muscles of yours, for my niece is a strong woman, and she will resist you to the uttermost, as she is required to do by custom. Would you prefer an escort to the coast tomorrow?"

Don rose, laughing. "No, Don Hernandez, I'll see if I'm strong enough to win," he answered.

"You must overcome her in a wrestling bout, my friend," replied Don Hernandez. "Only on certain days in the year can the test be made, but fate has sent you here on the eve of one of these *fiestas*. Tonight, *señor*, at midnight, you shall be summoned, if you wish to try your fate."

"You mean that I must wrestle with her, a woman? Throw her?"

IT seemed unbelievable, and yet Don knew that there were queer rites in the old, dark Aztec religion, still practised in the Central American jungle. Lying on his bed in the dark, he tried to straighten out the tangle in his brain.

Had Don Hernandez, knowing of his coming, planned the crazy wrestling-match? But why?

Had the eight "cousins" undergone the test—and failed?

But it was madness, stark madness to suppose that he could fail!

It was difficult for Don to think very clearly, for his desire for Dolores had taken possession of his entire being. He lay in the dark, brooding over the problem without the slightest clue.

Suddenly there sounded the faint click of the bathroom door, and, as he raised himself, Don saw the faint outlines of a figure beside his bed.

Then two soft arms were about his neck, and Don recognized the girl Juanita.

"I love you, *Americano*," she said, in soft, sibilant Spanish. "I wish to save you. You must not go to meet her. You must not. Come with me. I have left a door open, and the night is dark. I shall save thee, because I love thee, and after that, I do not care."

Don gently detached the girl's arms from his neck. "No, my dear, it's no use talking to me. I've got to go through with it," he answered.

"Ah, you do not know. You are like those others, so proud, so confident," she whispered. "She is a devil. Strong—so strong that no man on earth can conquer her! Come with me!"

Don sat up. "Juanita, it's useless," he answered. "I tell you I've got to go through with it."

"Die, then!" she cried.

By a miracle of luck Don caught the hand that held the knife. For a moment Juanita fought like a madwoman; then, as Don wrenched the knife away, she gave

a gulping sob and fled, with a patter of bare feet, out of the room.

Minutes later, while Don was sitting on the edge of the bed in the darkness, there came a blaze of lights, evidently switched on from outside. There was a knocking at the door. The obese, repulsive figure of Jose appeared.

"The *señor* is ready?" he asked in his shrill falsetto. The girl, Juanita, waits in the bathroom to prepare him."

AFTER that, it was pure fantasy to Don. With limbs anointed with fragrant oil, and wearing something that might have been described as bathing trunks, Don followed Jose, not down the stairs, but through a doorway at the end of the passage. The little electric lights that burned at intervals showed Don that he was in a stone passage, the walls composed of squared, unmortared blocks.

He realized that he was in the pyramid, but he had had no idea of its vastness, nor of the honeycomb of passages, branching out on either side. Jose turned to the right, then to the left, then to the right again, and then proceeded straight ahead, until he stopped before a heavy wooden door.

A touch of the negro's hand upon an iron knob, and the door opened noiselessly. Don found himself in a vast chamber.

In the center was a great circular hole, that looked like the crater of an extinct volcano. Around this was a leveled space, a treadway, on which about a hundred Indian men and women were moving, chanting some song, and holding lighted torches in their hands.

Their painted faces, twisted with excitement and fanaticism, gave them the aspect of demons who had arisen from the central pit.

On the side of the pit opposite the door by which Don had entered was a stone platform, with two thrones that must have been some viceroy's in olden times, for they were elaborately carved of ornate, gilded wood.

On one of them sat Don Hernandez, wearing a long robe of white, a golden circlet on his head. Upon the other was Dolores, completely enveloped in a robe of crimson.

Beneath them, the space between the platform and the chasm had been roped off, to form a small arena. At one end of it was what looked like a stone altar, behind which, wearing only a fibre loin cloth, stood an old Indian, with lean sinewy frame and wrinkled features. Upon the altar was a knife, long, slightly curved, and vicious-looking.

As Don appeared, Don Hernandez stood up and waved his hand. The Indians ceased their chant, and gathered on either side of the two thrones.

Out of the darkness a new, low, sobbing chant began. Then came a file of men—white men, each wearing the same fibre loin cloth and holding a lighted torch.

Round and round the crater they moved, their chant now growing louder, now dying away. The torches held by them, and by the multitude, threw into relief the savage faces, showed Don Hernandez and Dolores side by side in the shadows, made the whole setting like a horrible inferno.

As the white men approached him, Don recognized the eight "cousins" of the dinner-table. Their faces were set in stony stares, as if they had been drugged and changed into automatons. Crude Aztec picture-writing had been daubed over their bodies with red and yellow ochre.

And of a sudden Don perceived the god himself, an enormous, leering, grinning face of stone, set on a shapeless body behind the thrones, so vast that he had been looking full at it without discovering its contours.

Like some evil thing materializing, it loomed out of the shadowy depths across the crater.

Wilder grew the chanting. The white men were twisting their bodies in a delirium of fanaticism, dancing, gyrating, pirouetting.

Suddenly, at a harsh cry from Don Hernandez, they stopped dead. Jose touched Don on the arm, and signed to him to enter the arena.

**T**HERE was an element of the grotesque in his situation, underlying the very obvious element of terror, that made Don oblivious to his condition, standing there in the trunks.

From behind the altar the old priest came moving, writhing serpent-wise, until he stood immediately before Dolores. He raised his hand, beckoned with three fingers.

The girl rose, and, as she did so, the crimson robe fell from her shoulders. She was wearing one of the fibre loin cloths, but somewhat amplified, and her breasts were bound tightly with a strip of

the same material, flattening them against her body.

She came forward, moving with the same automaton-like flexion of the body, and her face was utterly blank and expressionless. In a moment or two she was facing Don in the arena.

Don determined to throw her quickly and get the silly business over. He closed with her, caught her about the waist, and tried to heave her sidewise.

To his amazement, she did not yield an inch.

He tried again and again, shifting his grasp repeatedly. But it was all in vain; she might have been a marble woman, clamped to the floor.

The sweat was streaming down Don's face and body as he tried once more. The blood was drumming in his ears, his muscles were strained to the uttermost. Dolores did not stir. All about was utter silence.

And then the reason came to Don in a flash of understanding. Why, even in the United States Don had seen a woman give a performance—a magnet," she had called herself—and the strongest men in the audience had been unable to lift her. Some said it was a trick of balance, other a species of catalepsy induced by hypnotism.

And this was hypnotism or some drug, for the girl remained utterly expressionless, as if she neither felt Don's arms about her nor was conscious of his presence.

Gasping, Don relaxed his hold. There sounded a shrill cry from the old priest, and suddenly the girl was transformed into a tigress.

She sprang at Don and linked her arms about him, forced him backward, lifted him from his feet, threw him to the floor. Pounced upon him, knelt over him, and pinned his head and shoulders to the stones. No human being could have resisted that frenzied strength that the drug or hypnotism had endowed her with.

Then, in an instant, as if a film had been removed, intelligence came into the girl's eyes. She stared at him, dumfounded, as she kneeled over him.

"It is you!" she gasped. "*Ah Dios*, another one, and I did not know! They shall not harm you! They shall not carve the symbol of the god upon your body! I shall save you!"

A ROAR of frenzied triumph resounded through the vault. Drums began to beat in evil cadence. Two huge Indians leaped forward and seized Don in their arms.

Dolores shrieked and ran to his side, clutching at them in vain. The iron woman of a minute or two before had become a weak and helpless girl.

Nevertheless, the two ceased to move forward, and turned their heads as Dolores screamed to Don Hernandez: "Let him go! It was a trick! Let him go, I say!"

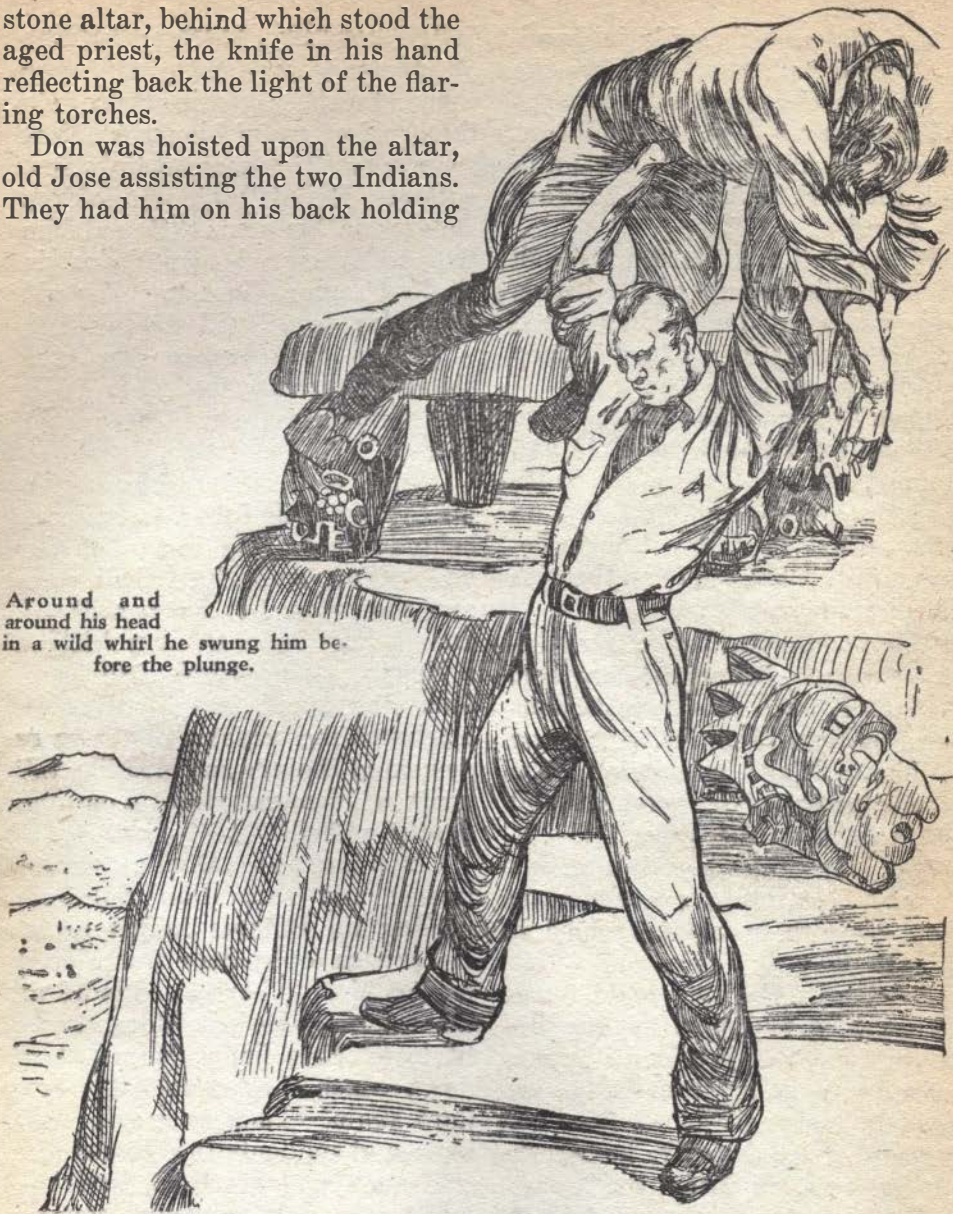
"It cannot be," came the grave voice of Don Hernandez. "He has tried and failed, and he must pay the penalty. He must be marked with the symbol of the god and become one of his priests."

The roar of the drums drowned every other sound. Fighting desperately, Don was dragged to the

stone altar, behind which stood the aged priest, the knife in his hand reflecting back the light of the flaring torches.

Don was hoisted upon the altar, old Jose assisting the two Indians. They had him on his back holding

Around and around his head in a wild whirl he swung him before the plunge.



him with grips that threatened dislocation of his vertebrae if he struggled further. Above him the old priest was standing, knife in hand, holding it upward, while some evil invocation came from his lips. Overhead the leering god looked down.

A wild chant broke out, drowned immediately, by the roar of the drums.

The priest's chant ceased. Don gathered all his powers of body and mind for a last effort.

Then, just as the priest's knife was raised, an Indian girl leaped



out of the crowd, knife in hand. It flashed, and was buried to the hilt in the old priest's throat.

Whinneying like a shell-torn horse, the old man let his knife fall, tottered, and slumped before the altar.

With a yell that pierced through the rhythmic cadence of the drums, Jose sprang at Juanita, wrenched away the knife, and drove it deep into her side.

Then Don made his effort. With a bound he was off the slab, had stooped, and picked up the knife that the priest had let fall. As Jose turned, he drove it clean between two ribs, straight through the negro's heart.

Then, while still the amazed Indians were clustering together, jabbering, screeching, gesticulating, Don found Dolores. She clung to him. "Take me away!" she seemed to say, though not a sound was audible in the uproar.

Don Hernandez leaped from his throne. He pulled an automatic from beneath his robes, aimed it at Don.

But before the slug could reach its mark, a man had sprung between them, and received it and a second one in his own body. It was Slavinsky, the blond Russian. Screaming dementedly, he wrested the weapon from the Spaniard's hand, and gathered him in his arms.

He swung him about his head in a mad whirl of death, clearing a passage through the Indians, now wild with terror. With a frightful laugh, he leaped into the crater, still clutching the screaming Spaniard. A dying echo ululated up—then there was silence.

THE howling, gibbering Indians pressed forward, men and women together, peering down into that gulf of awful blackness. For the moment Don seemed to be forgotten. He still stood, holding Dolores in his arms. Round him the crowd surged to and fro, in aimless terror, Jose and the old priest lay dead beside the altar.

Juanita was before Don, the blood streaming from her side. She seemed to sway. Don caught her.

"Come, come!" she whispered in his ear, pointing into the darkness behind the leering image of the god. "You two. No, I shall come and show you, but I can walk. I am not hurt bad. Come quick!"

Nearly every torch had been flung down, and, in the gathering blackness the screams of the half-demented Indians sounded like the wails of demons risen from the depths of hell.

Clutching at Don, Juanita turned and ran. Don followed, picking up Dolores in his arms. He saw an open door that closed behind him. There were more of the interminable corridors, dimly lit by electric bulbs, stone stairs down which they stumbled, corridors again. Then an earth passage—and suddenly the blessed air, the moon and starlight, and the huge hulk of the pyramid looming above them.

They had emerged on the side of the structure opposite that by which they had entered. There was nothing but forest about them, except a small space littered with fallen blocks.

Juanita stopped. "They will not dare to follow you," she mumbled.

"There is a trail, over there, that runs toward the sea."

The girl sank to the ground at Donald's feet. He bent over her, trying to stanch the blood that still poured from the wound.

"No, it is useless," she gasped. "I die, and must go through all the hells, because I killed the priest of Quetzalcoatl. I die. Forgive me! I love you—"

The breath rattled in her throat and ceased. Don heard Dolores sobbing at his side.

"I did not know," she whispered, clinging to him. "I knew nothing, ever, and yet I understand now that what I thought were dreams, were reality. That they made me wrestle with those men, after they had given me the drug that puts me to sleep."

"Dolores, what is your last remembrance?" asked Don.

"Seeing you at the pool, and going home. I was very sad, because I loved you, and I knew that, when I saw you again, you would just be like my cousins. So I took Jose's draft and went to bed."

"But you don't remember being at the dinner table?"

"I? Impossible. I tell you I remember nothing until I awoke in that frightful place. But last night I—I only drank part of the draft, for I did not want to sleep too long, and I hoped to see you again soon, even if you were not going to love me."

"You'll come away with me, Dolores?"

"Yes, wherever you wish. I am sorry that Don Hernandez is dead, but now I know the things he made me do, I cannot grieve for him as I should do."

Don drew her into his arms, and their lips met over the body of the dead girl.

Poor little Juanita, who had loved in her own fashion, and had paid the price of her loyalty!

For more than an hour Don labored, piling the fallen blocks about and above her, until her body was safe from the birds and beasts of the jungle. That was all he could do for her.

Then, in the warm embrace of Dolores's arms, and her soft form pressed against his own, Juanita was forgotten. For they were young, and life was brief, and youth still briefer. Afterward, when the girl had fallen asleep, her head resting on his arm, Don tried to plan. But he ended by falling asleep too, completely exhausted.

"**D**OLORES, listen, listen! Look!"

Over the tree-tops came the plane. Don sprang to his feet, waving frantically. He saw the pilot wave back, and, circling the pyramid, the machine came to a nice landing in a tiny spot free from fallen masonry.

"Robbins! Good old Robbins!" shouted Don, wringing the airman's hand.

"What's this, a nudist colony or a bathing party?" demanded Robbins, the irrepressible.

"I'll tell you, but—Lord, I'm glad you came, Robbins!"

"Lord, man, why didn't you wait for me? What happened to you? Cracked up? I was worried stiff when they told me you'd started in that old crate. And now—"

(Continued on page 90)

# For KEEPS

*At first he didn't know whether to trust the mountain girl; but then he fell in love with her and had to trust her, had to fight for her. He was a man who had never risked much, but this time he was fighting for keeps.*

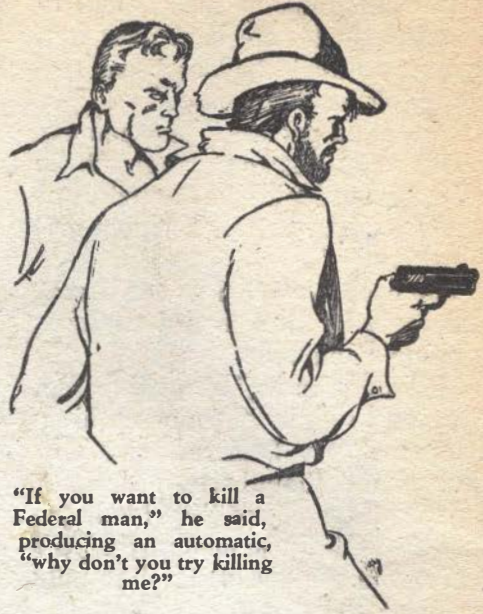
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YOU could hardly call the room occupied. It contained some rather decent wicker furniture, a few brilliant rugs, a couch, and a girl.

The couch was drawn up against the opposite window and the girl was lying on it. She might have been a sinister figure, taking into consideration the long-barreled Kentucky rifle and the box of cartridges on the stool beside her—except that she was obviously asleep, and incredibly lovely.

Tony Mason tried the door, found it bolted, and entered through a window. Thoughtfully he removed the rifle from the girl's limp hands before shaking her. Then, realizing that she was not asleep—not that way—he scouted around for water and a towel.

While bathing her face and forehead, which were burning hot to his touch, he stared at her. She was easy to stare at. She was blonde and slender and beautifully tanned, and the cotton dress torn at the neckline, revealed exquisite brown-flesh breasts which were as smooth and warm as sun-scorched



"If you want to kill a Federal man," he said, producing an automatic, "why don't you try killing me?"

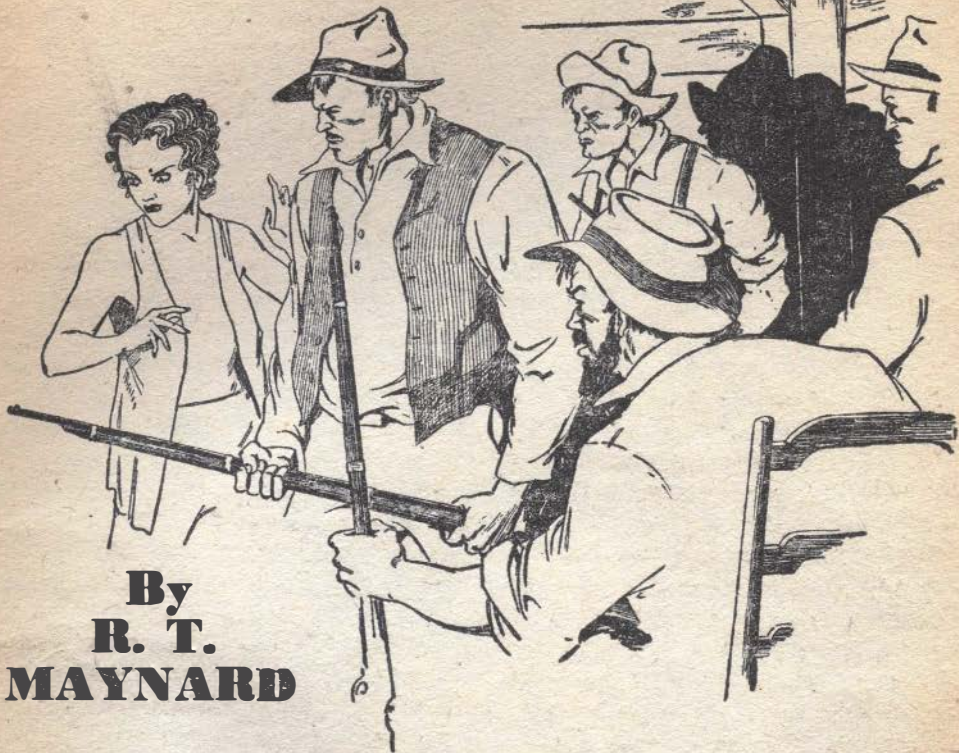
glass. Her lashes were dark and astonishingly long, her neck and shoulders void of a single harsh line, her lips naturally red and full.

Who the devil was she? What was she doing here in Paul LaRue's hunting lodge?

The girl's eyes opened. Tony said, "Hello there," and she sat up as if he had struck her. Sat and stared at him, frightened for an instant, then hostile. Her half-bare breasts lifted with her in-drawn breath and became firm, sleek hillocks that held his gaze.

"I guess you've been asleep," he said. "Who are you?"

The girl ceased gaping at him, looked all around as if to make sure they were alone. She didn't answer the question. Instead she countered suspiciously: "Who are you?"



By  
**R. T.  
MAYNARD**

"Tony Mason, I—" He hesitated. It might not be a good idea to say too much to this girl. She was a mountain girl. If he began talking about missing Federal Agents, moonshiners and that sort of thing, she might cause trouble.

Her slender legs and dainty feet, unbelievably fragile for a mountaineer, he noticed were covered, with scratches, as if she'd been running through the woods. She was tired, ill.

"How long have you been here?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Three or four days."

"Running from someone?"

"I—no, I just came here to be alone."

**H**E scowled. Her presence was going to be awkward. He had counted on finding the lodge unoccupied, on making it his headquarters for a few weeks while he explored the surrounding territory. The task confronting him was a big one. Government men had already given it up as hopeless. But until he found positive proof that young Bill Mason had been murdered, Tony Mason would carry on.

"Sorry," he said, "but I'll have to pack you off home, young lady."

She stared at him. "No, no! I can't go home! I don't dare!"

He sighed, shook his head. Why the devil did she have to look at him like that, with those liquid

blue eyes wide open, the whole attitude of her body seductively appealing? If she didn't stop it—well, there were limits to any man's resolve. She was no mere slip of a girl; she was all woman, every vital, alluring inch of her.

"If you're staying here," he said, "for God's sake, take off that torn dress and put on something more complete. I'm human."

She nodded. When he lifted her up, her face whitened and her whole body trembled, then nestled confidently against him. Quickly he curled an arm around her, but that was worse. She winced as if he had stuck something sharp into her. He let her down gently and stood over her, frowning. Grimly he said: "What's wrong?"

"You—you hurt me. You're so strong."

He leaned closer and saw an ugly tear in her dress, with a brownish stain around it. He grunted, strode into the adjoining room, a bedroom, and looked for some clothes belonging to LaRue's wife. Returning, he put a pair of black and gold pajamas on the stool.

They might belong to LaRue's wife, and they might belong to one of LaRue's girl-friends. LaRue was that kind of fellow. Right now it didn't matter.

The girl watched him curiously while he monkeyed with the oil stove in the corner. In a moment, with water heating over a blue flame, he returned to her.

"Easy now," he said.

Nervously he tore her dress and bared the ugly wound in her gleaming side. Apparently she had tried to doctor it herself. It was red

and inflamed, smeared with iodine, and looked like a crude tattoo on the soft, quivering velvet of her flesh. She winced when he touched it.

"You haven't told me your name," he said, to get her mind off the pain.

"It's Mary James."

"Lying, eh? You're afraid of something. Well, then, I'll name you myself." His fingers were gently massaging her bruises, and the intoxicating closeness of her sent electric chills to the core of his emotions. There was something about this girl. If she knew the ropes, she could make a man do anything she wanted—absolutely anything! Many a professional charmer would pay a fortune for this girl's natural allure!

"I'll call you Bill," Tony muttered. "Good old standby, and it'll keep me in my place, maybe. I guess that water's warm."

Bill. Funny how that had come out. But she was a lot like Bill, in a way. About the same age, the same height. Only she was alive—very much alive!—and if the Federal men were right, Bill Mason was dead.

Involuntarily he clenched his fists. By God, the Feds were wrong! Bill Mason *couldn't* be dead! Somewhere in these infernal hills, while seeking the source of the moonshine whiskey which had flooded Kentucky for the past year, Bill Mason was still alive and still working for Uncle Sam.

With some bottles from the bathroom shelf, Tony returned to the girl. Continuing his ministrations, he had to bend low over her, his lips close to hers. Her breasts be-

gan quivering in telltale confession that she, too, was feeling the intoxication of their nearness.

"Hungry?" he said.

She nodded. He finished his job and stood up.

"I'll see what's to eat. While I'm gone, you can be getting into those pajamas."

**H**E HAD time to think about her while rounding up canned goods and a box of pancake flour. The girl had evidently stumbled in here, seeking refuge from persecution of some sort. She was desperately afraid.

There would be trouble.

With a steaming coffee pot in one hand he walked into the other room, then stopped, stared. The girl was lying on the couch, her arms twined behind her head. Black and gold pajamas accenting vivid, pulsing curves, blonde hair, parted lips smiling . . .

Tony faced her grimly. "I made a mistake," he muttered. "Bill's not the right name for you at all. The right one—well, I dunno. But Bill isn't."

After that he was vaguely disturbed and not at all sure of himself. He told himself that the girl had no right to be here. He had a job to do, and her presence would hinder him. He didn't want her around.

Then he watched her, and cursed himself for being an idiot. Of course he wanted her. Who wouldn't?

"If you don't tell me who you are," he said savagely, "I'll—"

"You won't give me away?"

"Of course I won't."

"You see, they're looking for

me. My father, I mean, and my two brothers. And Vance—Vance Kelligrew. I was supposed to marry Vance."

Tony scowled.

"I wouldn't marry him," the girl said. "He's bad. They tried to make me do it, so I ran away. This hurt in my side, I got it when I fell down in the swamp. It didn't begin to hurt until today. But I don't care. I don't want to marry a bad man. I want someone good, like you."

Tony, his face crimsoning, said slowly: "How long before they'll find out where you are?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid."

The look in her eyes gave him the creeps. He turned, stared at the door as if expecting at any moment to see a gang of backwoodsmen entering the cabin. They'd be tough ones to handle. The fact that Federal Agent Bill Mason had been missing all these months was proof enough of that.

He thought about it while cleaning off the table. Later, standing at a window, he saw that darkness had crept in on them. The woods were black, furtive, unpleasantly close. The girl had retrieved her rifle and was sitting on the couch, close to the window nearest the door.

"You think they'll come at night?" he said, frowning.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"In the daytime they're afraid. The law wants them."

Tony stiffened, felt his fists tighten. A flood of questions leaped to his lips, and he stifled them. "Say . . ." he mumbled slowly,

"you don't talk like a backwoods girl."

"I've been to school."

NO school, he thought, could teach a girl to stare at a man that way, or instruct her in the art of increasing a man's blood-beat. Watching the slow rise and fall of her breasts, he wanted suddenly to stride over to her, to crush her firm young body against his and drink some of the nectar from those parted lips. Instead he said curtly:

"Suppose they find you here? What then?"

"They'll take me away, make me marry Vance." She shuddered.

He felt his fingers closing viciously around somebody's throat. Take her away? By God, they wouldn't. Not while Tony Mason was here to prevent it! No filthy paws were going to maul that body. No tobacco-stained mouth was going to slobber over those perfect lips!

Besides, if he played his cards right, he might be able to use this girl. She might be able to tell him some of the things he was anxious to know. If he could gain her confidence. . . .

He paced forward, took the rifle from her hands. "We're going to make a change in you," he said grimly. "Brains'll win this game, not brawn."

He went into the other room, returned with a towel full of stuff from a dressing-table, pulled up a stool and sat down. "First we'll alter the loveliness of those lips," he said. "Then—no, wait a minute."

It wouldn't work. Anyone who

had ever seen her before would know the glitter of that golden hair in an instant. He stood up, scowling. There would be something in the bathroom to take care of that. LaRue's wife changed the hue of her hair semi-annually.

He rummaged frantically for what he wanted. Now that he knew what could be done, there seemed to be a frightful shortage of time. "Come in here!" he called. "Make it snappy!"

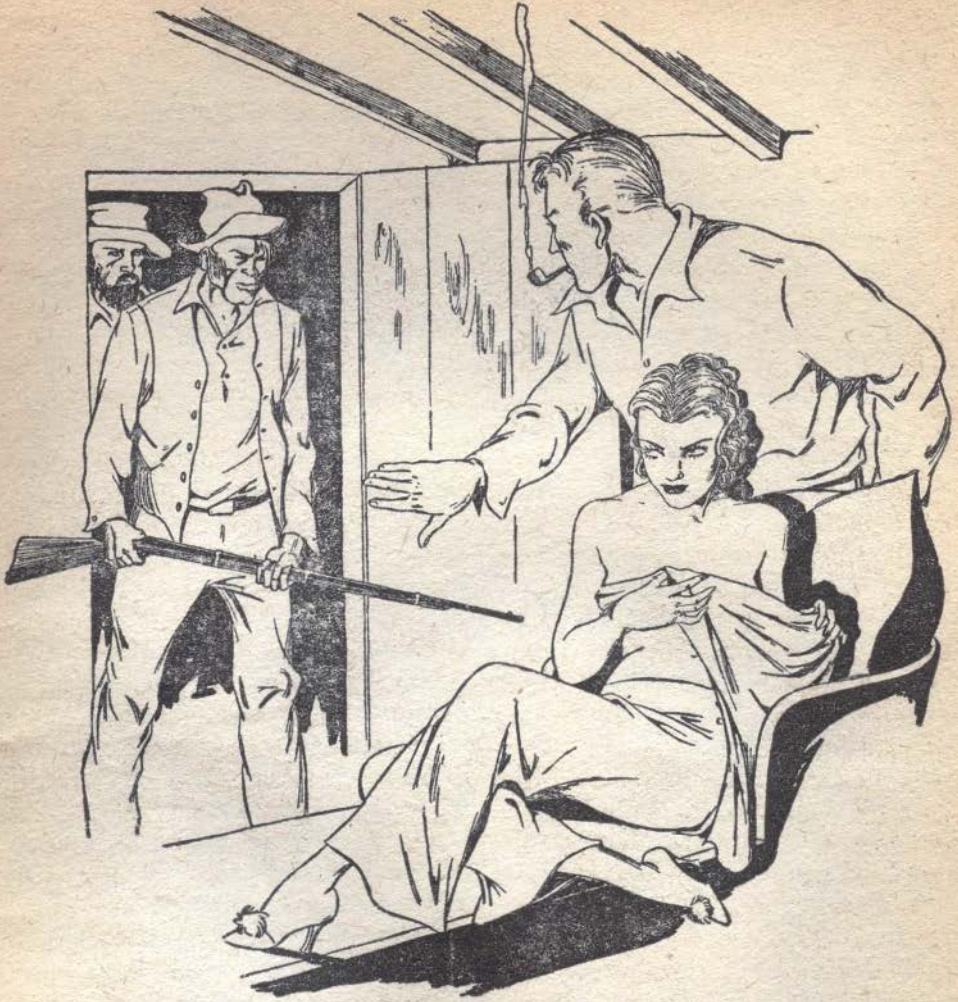
IT TOOK a long time, and the directions on the bottle were maddeningly indefinite. Rinse and massage, rinse and massage again. How in hell could you dye a girl's hair when you had to stand close to her, with the heat of her elastic young body stealing into your own, making every nerve tingle?

But there was a transformation. When he lit the lamp in the living-room and studied his handiwork, he nodded with approval. The blonde hair was streaked and damp, but was now a rich, deep brown, gleaming like polished copper.

He combed the copper strands straight back, parted them in the middle, and wound them into a coil behind her neck. When he stood back for a final inspection, her face was a wondering cameo framed in bronze, smiling up at him. She looked Spanish.

"Now," he said, "we'll operate. On the couch with you!"

She stretched herself like a lean, tawny cat. Good Lord, why did she have to be so casual about it? That was the trouble: all these movements of hers, the widening of her eyes, the eager quivering



"No you don't"—he prayed his bluff would work—"You can't come any farther!"

of her ruby lips, the lithe, supple relaxation of her body, were all so damned unintentional.

If any other woman had employed the same devices he could laugh and tell her he knew all the answers. But this girl was not trying to make him love her. She didn't want anything. She was just being herself!

He used eyebrow pencil first, transforming her natural loveliness into a sleek, woman-of-the-

world sophistication. Then rouge and powder, to mask the smooth, tanned complexion. And then, with vague misgivings, the lips. . .

All he could see were eyes and lips, haunting him. Eyes wide open, staring innocently, yet not so innocently perhaps, into his own. Lips moist, slightly parted, invitingly close. There was only one possible answer. He made it.

He lowered his mouth to hers and held it there. Red flames



leaped inside him, torturing him. The pressure of that sweet, warm mouth so eagerly and hungrily merged with his own was like a heady drug, destroying his reason.

Only the knowledge that time was precious saved him from plunging into the dark pool of madness that heaved up to engulf him.

He finished the ordeal and got to his feet again. She was no longer a backwoods girl, naive and simple; she was a carmine lady of dimly-lighted boudoirs and *affaires d'amour*. But she didn't seem to know it.

Totally unaware of her irresistible allure, she lay back on the couch, every line of her glorious body emphasized by the silken pajamas. And then, gathering up a flowered box and a huge powder-puff, Tony braced himself, said softly:

"You'll have to manipulate that jacket a bit while I—well—sort of spread some powder on. Around your neck, I mean, and down lower. And your back."

After a moment's hesitation she obeyed, and then lay flat on her back, awaiting the caress of the puff.

He dabbed on the powder, smeared it along the supple curve of her throat, over the smooth flesh of her shoulders. Fragrant though the powder was, he still caught the exotic aroma of her lovely body, and the aroma was like that of some stupefying'incense, numbling his reflexes.

Sweat was hot on his forehead when he finished.

"You haven't told me," she said, "why you came here."

He stared straight into her eyes. "I came to find my brother."

"He—lives here in the mountains?"

"He's a Federal man," Tony said cautiously, choosing his words with care. "He came here a long time ago, alone, to do a job for Uncle Sam. He—disappeared. Other Federal men came to look for him, but failed to find him. So now I'm here."

"And are you a Federal man, too?"

He shook his head. That was the queer part of it. He, Tony Mason, was not much of anything. Drifting along through life, he had worked at half a hundred odd jobs, played the horses, gambled—and yet was considered a gentleman.

That word "gentleman" didn't mean much. It seemed to fit almost any man who could make enough money to dress well and mingle with the right people. Bill Mason, for instance, would not be considered a "gentleman." Bill *worked* for a living.

More than once, Tony had envied Bill Mason. More than once he had wondered what would happen if he, himself, were ever forced to face some of the dangers that Bill faced almost daily.

"No," he said slowly, "I'm not a Federal man. I'm just—well—nothing."

He wondered if the girl knew what he meant.

**WHAT** time it was when the thing happened, he was not quite sure. For hours, it seemed, he had been playing poker with his charming companion—for matches—and trying to convince

her that diamonds and hearts were not the same suit—and talking to her, of course, about her father and brothers and about the man she was fated to marry.

The oil lamp on the table cast its ochre softness over them and made an Arabian Night's Dream of her, and Tony's heart had been spitting sparks.

Then, like a startled cat she dropped her handful of cards and said: "Listen, Tony! Someone is coming!"

He hadn't heard a thing, but stood up jerkily and grasped her arm. "In the bedroom!" he snapped. "Sprawl out on the bed as if you belonged there! I'm going to tell them you're my woman. You've got to make them believe it!"

She nodded, was gone before he had finished clearing the cards off the table. On second thought he threw the cards down again, snatched her old cotton dress off the couch, thrust it beneath the covers and patted it down.

An instant later, he had a bottle of whiskey on the table, and two glasses, half full, and was standing in the middle of the floor, staring about him to be sure that everything looked casual and commonplace when the veranda steps creaked outside and a heavy fist banged on the door.

Tony tiptoed to the bedroom threshold. "All right in there?" he whispered.

"Yes, I—I think so."

"Keep a stiff chin, sweetheart. Don't worry."

The door vibrated to another onslaught. Scowling, he stumped toward it and put a hand on the

latch. "Well, who is it?" he snarled. "Who's there?"

There was no reply. He raised the latch and jerked the door savagely and then stood quite still, staring into scowling features which were more anthropoid than human. If this was a sample of the local male, he didn't blame the girl for running away from it.

"Well," he said, "what do you want?"

"Ma'y Lou Conner come heuh. We come to git her."

"Who? Mary Lou who?" He took careful note that there were three other men behind the first. Wild, primitive fellows, undeniably looking for trouble. "If you're looking for someone," he shrugged, "you're in the wrong place. I'm alone here with my wife."

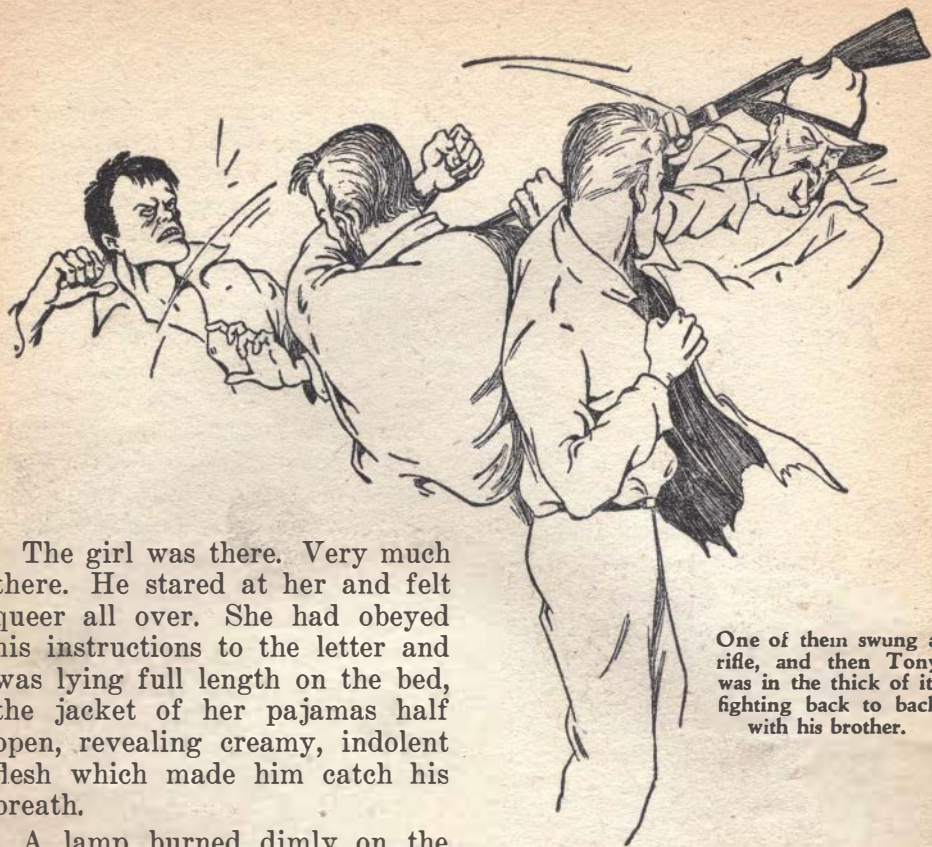
"Ain' true. We done track Ma'y Lou in heuh. Come 'long, you boys. We'm look foh oursel'."

Tony shrugged and stepped backward, eyeing the four intruders steadily, sizing them up. They were rough, tough backwoodsmen, accustomed to getting what they wanted.

The big fellow was probably the girl's father. Two others were her brothers, of course, and the fourth was a lean, unshaven youth who looked ugly and vicious. Tony drew a deep, slow breath and backed up. With the odds four to one against him, he was taking no chances, making no idiotic moves.

**I**GNORING him, they grouped in the center of the room and gazed about them. Each was armed with a long-barreled Kentucky rifle.

Tony walked into the bedroom.



One of them swung a rifle, and then Tony was in the thick of it, fighting back to back with his brother.

The girl was there. Very much there. He stared at her and felt queer all over. She had obeyed his instructions to the letter and was lying full length on the bed, the jacket of her pajamas half open, revealing creamy, indolent flesh which made him catch his breath.

A lamp burned dimly on the dressing-table, spreading just enough light to complete the illusion. They would never connect this Latin-eyed woman of the night with the simple backwoods girl they were seeking!

"My dear," Tony drawled, "we're being investigated. No, no, don't trouble your lovely head. The gentlemen are merely looking for someone."

The large man entered silently and stood staring. Tony faced him, scowling. "When you're through gawking," Tony rasped, "get out! This is a lady's bedroom!" Funny he should feel that way about it, but he did.

The large man turned and strode out, apparently satisfied. Tony

walked out after him. "Well?" Tony said insolently.

They seemed to be convinced. After helping themselves to a last look around, they headed for the door.

And then one of them stopped short—stared at a Kentucky rifle leaning in the corner. Tony's throat tightened convulsively. He stiffened. The fellow lifted the rifle, examined it, put it down again. He shot a quick, ominous glance at Tony and strode toward the bedroom.

"Not a chance," Tony said grimly, blocking the way. "Not a chance!"

There was an automatic in his



pocket and he jabbed a hand in after it. He hadn't meant to use it; these backwoodsmen were too thick-headed to respect anything so small. But now. . . .

He was too slow. The large man lurched toward him, snarling. Instinctively, Tony threw up both arms to defend himself, and found himself fighting.

Four against one, he didn't have much chance. But he put up a good show. The table splintered, dropping whiskey bottle and glasses and cards to the floor. Tony's fists beat a wild, desperate tattoo on insensate flesh.

A groping hand gripped the whiskey bottle by the neck, lifted it and brought it down again, hard. Tony staggered back, groaning.

Blood was hot and sweet on his lips as he collapsed.

WHEN he came to, a hand-organ in his hand was grinding out last year's melodies while demon drummers beat an infernal accompaniment. Men were talking in low tones. A girl was sobbing.

Tony stared into the sinister muzzle of a rifle.

They had propped him in a chair. Facing him, on the couch, sat the girl, her wide eyes staring and her face stained with tears. They were going to take her away now, damn them, and . . .

Tony narrowed his aching eyes and stared harder. Something was wrong. There had been four men in the room before; now there were three. One had departed. The others were sitting with rifles on their knees, apparently waiting for something.

Tony got to his feet and took a lurching step forward. "Well, what's up?" he demanded. "What are you hanging around for?" And then, bitterly: "What am I supposed to do? Serve drinks?"

"Yo'll stayin' right heuh until Vance comes."

"What?"

"Set down an' shut up!"

Tony didn't get it. It was too much, after that vicious smash on the head. Vance, of course, was Vance Kelligrew, the man Mary Lou Connor was supposed to marry. But . . .

He turned and saw that Mary Lou was sobbing again.

"What the devil is this?" he demanded.

"They—they've sent Joe Heskell

after Vance. They think we—we—”

He gazed mutely at her damp, gleaming hair, her carmine lips, at the black and gold pajamas which she was holding together with white, trembling hands. So that was it! They thought the worst. And because Mary Lou was Vance Kelligrew's girl, they had sent for Vance.

“Look here, you apes!” Tony snarled. “This girl and I don't even know each other. I was simply trying to help her out, that's all! Now get out of here!”

One of the men shifted slightly and stroked the barrel of his rifle. That was their answer.

Tony swore, walked to the couch. He wished his head would stop aching, so he could think clearly. “Let's get this straight,” he said, talking to Mary Lou because it was no use talking to the others. “They intend to hold us here until Vance arrives, and then Vance will tell them what to do with us. Is that it?”

“Yes,” she whispered, staring at him.

A mirthless smile curled Tony's lips. “Well,” he said, “it's been a pleasure meeting you. A genuine pleasure, Mary Lou. They can do their damndest now . . .”

He waited. Presently one of the men came a few steps closer and stared at him.

“Wouldn't surprise me none,” the fellow said, “if you was a Federal.”

“Well, I'm not.”

“Reckon Vance'll decide on that, when he gits heuh. Ain't healthy fer Federals 'round heuh.”

Tony was silent.

THEY came at last, and Vance Kelligrew was a gaunt, raw-boned man whose great, hulking body filled most of the room. With him were two strangers and the unshaven youth who had gone after him.

It was the first time Tony Mason had obtained a good, close-up look at the unshaven one. The first time the fellow had come near enough. Tony's eyes narrowed slowly. A scowl twisted over his mouth, and he leaned forward.

The youth stepped back abruptly, and turned away.

Vance Kelligrew put his hands on his hips, spread his legs wide, and glared. Grimly he said: “What's your *real* reason foh bein' heuh, mister?”

Tony, still staring at the youth and still struggling to believe what his eyes told him, did not answer.

“You a *Federal*?” Kelligrew snapped.

“No.”

“You're lyin! Ain't no one comes in heuh but Federals! You're a dirty, spyin' Government man!”

Tony sighed wearily. What was the use of arguing?

Vance Kelligrew ceased muttering, stepped back and talked to the others. When he stepped forward again, a crooked smile lengthened his thin lips.

“Reckon you and Ma'y Lou is goin' to git married,” he said.

“*What?*”

“You heard me.”

Tony swore softly, glanced at Mary Lou and saw that she was terrified. “Married?” he said hoarsely. “You mean—you're going to force us into a wedding ceremony?”

Kelligrew nodded. "And then I reckon we'll shoot you. Ain't got no use for Federals 'round heuh."

Beads of sweat formed on Tony's high forehead. "I thought you wanted this girl for yourself," he muttered.

"Do, sure 'nough."

"Then why in God's name—"

Mary Lou touched his arm. "You don't understand," she whispered. "They think that you and I—they think we—"

"I get it," Tony shrugged. "They want their women pure and noble, or they don't want 'em at all. Just a quaint little hill-billy custom, eh? Queer ideas some people have. Well, don't worry." He turned to Vance again. "What if I refuse to marry her?" he demanded.

"You won't do that."

"I sure as hell will!"

Vance raised his rifle an inch and fingered the lock. "You better make up your mind."

Tony choked back a snarling retort. This was backwoods country; these people had ideas and codes of their own, and he was in a spot. Marry the girl? It could be annulled, of course, later. He knew people who knew people.

But there'd be no annulment. Oh, no. Just as soon as the ceremony was over, they would murder him. The chances were, they wouldn't even give him time enough to kiss his bride.

He sighed. "All right," he shrugged. "Do your damndest." Then he sat beside Mary Lou again, and waited.

SHE huddled against him. Her hand, groping for his, was

trembling. Her whole body was trembling. When he put a protective arm around her, she was so close to him, so much a part of him, that he could almost hear the heart throbbing under an exquisitely formed breast.

He stared at her. She was so lovely in those black and gold pajamas. So young and sweet. Her sobs tortured him. Her wide eyes begged him to do something.

And then the man who eventually would own her—the huge, gaunt backwoodsman with the warped sense of humor—was ordering Tony to get up.

Tony turned his back to them all and took Mary Lou in his arms. He did it deliberately, did it slowly, because he wanted them all to know the truth.

"If these dirty apes weren't here to make us," he said gently, "I'd be asking you to marry me anyway, Mary Lou. I mean it."

The girl was close against him, warm, soft, sobbing. He put his mouth hard against hers and held it there.

Across the room, the unshaven youth was intently watching him. Tony knew that.

"Come on!" Kelligrew snarled. "Quit the stallin'!"

The unshaven youth stepped forward. It was he who answered, not Tony. "I reckon," he said grimly, "we won't go through with this. If you men want to kill a Federal Agent, try killing me!"

For seconds only, the room was wrapped in a blanket of weird silence. The youth stood there, swaying a little on the balls of his feet. The snub-nosed automatic

*(Continued on page 90)*

# CROSSBONES

By JOHN PHILLIPS

*He was face to face with Destiny, and a man didn't let a girl stop him at that point—even if it meant turning outlaw. . . .*

“HERNÁN—” Doña Catalina’s dark eyes clouded as she watched him buckle on his long bladed Toledo rapiér. “You said we’d have the evening together.”

She laid aside the glass that mirrored her lovely face and reflected the rise and fall of glorious breasts which tented the frail fabric of her low yoked gown seductively. Her perfect legs were stretched out in candle glow that made shadow and flickering gold play fascinating tricks with her knees and exquisitely modeled hips; but Catalina was handicapped—she was the wife of Hernán Cortez, this man who faced her.

“I’m sorry, *querida mia*. But I’m busy. And—” He hesitated; for a moment eyed the silk that caressed the supple curve of her waist. Then he impatiently donned his plumed cap. “I’ve spent a dozen years herding Indian slaves and hanging petty larceny thieves! And now there’s a chance to command the fleet that’s going out to find that bungler, Grijalva. Find him, and the gold mines of Yucatan. That is, if I can talk the governor out of that old grudge he’s been nursing.”

Catalina’s brow puckered in a faint frown. She had seen something in his eyes during that moment when they appraised her thinly veiled loveliness, that made

her realize he was comparing her to someone else.

SHE was right; but first, Cortez strode purposefully toward the mansion of Diego Velasquez, governor of Cuba. Later that night, on his way to the house of Juan Grijalva, he would not be so obvious in his movements! Not that the wife of the absent Grijalva interested him, she was fat, and had a perceptible mustache, beefy hips, and a bosom reminiscent of saddle bags. But there was Francisca, the niece: a *rubia*, red haired, and with greenish eyes.

Just past the plaza, Cortez passed a building entirely too large for the grocery store it was supposed to be. It was a high grade establishment, devoted to devious sorts of entertainment! Better, perhaps, meet Francisca there. It was a favorite trysting place of young people in love. And even as he pondered, a woman in an ankle length cape crossed the muddy street, heading for the narrow alley that led to a side door.

She was veiled; but a gust of warm seabreeze betrayed her. Hernán and she were almost face to face when the veil eluded her jeweled fingers. And the thread of light that crept from between the shutters of the ground floor gave Cortez a glimpse of sultry eyes, lips red and bee-stung, sensuous.



"Overboard!" he snapped at her. "We've got to get to the fleet!"

She was Doña Luisa, the mistress of gray haired, pudgy Diego Velasquez, the governor, one woman Cortez had to keep off his list of playmates.

He hurried on to the Velasquez mansion. Some minutes later he learned that the governor was not



in. The answer was easy; he must be on his way to meet Luisa. Cortez retraced his steps.

"I'll see him anyway! He'll be



half drunk and good humored."

VELASQUEZ, close to sixty, was inordinately proud of his young mistress. He could not even keep her out of his broad jests and boasts in the wineshops of Santiago; thus what would be a social error with another man would only leave the ribald Velasquez feeling expansive and lordly.

Cortez tapped at the side door of the house he had passed that morning. A leather faced hag with snagged teeth eyed him from head to foot. He thrust a golden *castellano* into her hand and ordered, "The best room in the house. And a bottle of Estramadura."

"*Si, si, señor el alcalde!*" She led him up a narrow stairway which reached to the second story. "There is almost no one here. You have your choice."

That made things easier. And while old Tula went back to wait for his fictitious playmate, he lost no time in stealing from door to door.

Presently he heard a woman's voice. It must be Doña Luisa, and she was being thoroughly kissed. That inarticulate moment, followed by a shuddering sigh, was a tribute to anyone's devotion.

"Oh—I shouldn't—" she finally protested. "I'm afraid—"

That afterthought, Cortez contended, was a lot too late. And the longer he listened, the more uneasy he became.

"*Cristo del Groa!* His breath was beginning to keep pace with Luisa's. "Where'd his excellency, that pot bellied *cabron*, ever learn to make a woman think she is listening to angel's voices?"

So he knelt to align his eye with the thread of light that filtered through the keyhole.

Doña Luisa's arms were lovely. Any woman's arms are, when they are wrapped that tightly about a man. And her legs—it did not take an *alcalde* to recognize exceptional curves. Her ankle length skirt had forgotten all about ankles, or even knees. Cortez, however, began to wonder how Velasquez had so suddenly grown a shock of black hair on his bald spot.

The fact of it was, the man inside was not the governor of Cuba. That added indignation to Cortez' other rapidly mounting emotions. The gentleman, he perceived, had unbuckled his sword. Then Cortez noted the crest emblazoned in enamel on the scabbard. He treated himself to one of his rare smiles; Luisa's sweetheart was Andres de Duero, private secretary to the governor!

Being appointed admiral of the fleet seemed much easier to Cortez, now that he had the great man's secretary thoroughly cornered.

The door was bolted. That was fortunate for Cortez. He drew his thin bladed dagger and with infinite caution, forced its splendidly tempered point into the soft wrought iron of the bolt, which he then was able to slip forward a fraction of an inch.

The couple on the other side was making his hand unsteady. But presently the prying dagger did the work. He kicked open the door. Luisa screamed, caught her gown, and in her haste, uncovered more than she managed to hide; but Cortez had no eyes for the third nicest thighs in Santiago, nor the sixth

loveliest other odds and ends that peeped from behind the lady's disheveled hair.

AS DE DUERO cursed wrathfully, diving for his sword, the intruder boomed in well feigned astonishment, "*Por dios, señor!* That old hag sent me—"

De Duero's blade hissed from its scabbard; but Hernán Cortez was already on guard with his own rapiér. He said, "A thousand pardons, Doña Luisa—I was looking for his excellency, the governor."

De Duero, panic stricken by his exposure, stretched out in a direct disengage that should have impaled the invader; but Cortez drew back on his guard.

The thrust fell short. The secretary made a fierce beat that nearly tore the blade from his opponent's hand. He gained his opening, and drove home; but Cortez, standing fast, dropped his point in a small, circling motion, and the thrust just touched his trailing cape. He had De Duero wide open; but instead of pressing his advantage, he traversed, forcing his adversary to shift.

Another clash of steel, crisp and deadly. De Duero, pea green with terror, bent trembling knees as he came on guard. Cortez' blade, motionless yet quivering like a thing endowed with life of its own, was seeking an opening. Then, warned by the rustling which he heard above De Duero's tense breathing, Cortez made a second unexpected shift, just as a decanter spattered to shreds against the wall behind him.

Luisa, recognized and exposed, was desperate. She screamed as

Cortez, untouched, sank forward, and his hissing *glissade* became a searching tongue of steel. His guard and *forte* deflected De Duero's vain stop-thrust.

Luisa did not wait for the score. The clang of a dropped blade hastened her flight. Thus she did not know that De Duero, merely run through the forearm, faced his opponent, empty handed.

"You needn't have crowded me, *señor*. I think the world of His Excellency." Cortez unbent enough to let that grave, winning smile invade his face. "If I told Velasquez of his *querida's* excellent taste in lovers, he'd get so mad he'd not put me in command of the expedition to Yucatan. The bearer of bad news, you know, never gets a hearty welcome."

De Duero's color was returning to his handsome, swarthy face. He stuttered, "Your heart is really set on going to Yucatan, *señor el Alcalde?*"

Cortez said, "It would be a shame if an artist like you were to be hanged by a peevish governor."

"Leave it to me! *Por dios*, he trusts me implicitly. He is very much against you, but I can persuade him—"

HALF an hour later, Hernán Cortez was back on the street. He had seen just enough of Doña Luisa to be eager to refresh his recollection of Francisca Grijalva!

Not more than an hour thereafter, a girl slim enough to be enticing by suggestion rather than by fullness of contour was removing the massive bars that guarded her window. They had been sawed, then secured by tar. And pres-

ently, the *alcalde* of Santiago was clearing the sill.

He could scarcely see Francisca's eyes in the dimness, but her greatest beauty—pert breasts only vaguely concealed by her fragile nightgown—were pressed too heartily against him for seeing, anyway.

"The governor's lady," decided Cortez, as he found Francisca's lips and drew her very close, "may have a bit more to squeeze, but on the other hand, she's been squeezed a lot more!"

As far as he could tell, Francisca's squeezable qualities were entirely satisfactory and there was no use striking a light to make further comparisons. . . .

Catalina was awake when he returned much later that night, but she feigned sleep, and watched him through half veiled lashes. She did not miss the flourish with which he hung up his sword. Bitterness corroded her heart as she noted that he was quite unaware that the warmth of the Cuban night had made her frail, lace-work gown all the covering she needed.

THE following evening, Cortez called on Diego Velasquez. The burly, red faced old governor greeted his visitor with his customary bluff heartiness, roared for wine, and wheezed out the latest ribald stories from Santiago; but his shrewd little eyes covered Cortez from head to foot. Finally, draining his flagon, he put it aside with a thump, and got down to facts: "Don Hernán, I've been thinking it over all day. You and I have had our disagreements in

the past, but let's forget that! You're the man to command the fleet I'm sending to Yucatan to find my kinsman, Juan Grijalva. To say nothing of the gold mines."

"Your Excellency!" Cortez feigned surprise. "This is an honor."

Don Diego chuckled, slapped Cortez on the thigh, and said: "It'll give the rest of us a better chance with the girls in Santiago. But it's going to cost money for ships, men, and provisions. At least twenty thousand *castellanos*."

That took Cortez' breath; but he shrugged, twisted his mustache, and said, "Better raise thirty thousand, your excellency."

Velasquez toyed with his neck-chain. "You can raise twenty of it?"

This was risky ground. If Cortez found Grijalva, and the gold of Yucatan, the governor would hog the plunder; if he failed, Cortez would pay the bill. But he had dreamed too long of those gilded lands.

Cortez stood up, very erect. "Your Excellency, raising twenty thousand *castellanos* is easy enough!"

He bowed, ceremoniously, furled his cape about him, and stalked from the governor's house. His destination was the wine shop frequented by all the great landlords of Cuba, the wealthier merchants, and the shipmasters.

This was the first sales talk in the New World. And late that night, Hernán Cortez emerged from the wine shop. His eyes were unnaturally bright. His step was not quite steady. Yet he had won his point; he had a thick sheaf of

bills of exchange, more than enough to finance the expedition.

But he and those captured by



The surprised lover whirled, panic-stricken, his blade leaping to his hand.

the spell of his argument had mortgaged their plantations to the hilt. Unless Cortez came back from Yucatan with gold aplenty, he would be a pauper. Worse than that, he would be promptly jailed on a trumped up charge and hanged.

He went to his office in the city hall. The night watchman, half drunk and asleep, was crouched on the steps. Cortez had too much on his mind to boot the fellow. Let him sleep. There would be no sleep for Cortez from now on. His pale face was set in deeper lines as he opened the iron strong box and thrust into it the bills of exchange.

He spent the day, and the days following, haggling, persuading merchants and ships chandlers, recruiting sailors, and soldiers. Indian slaves, bent double by their burdens, filed in endless columns to docks beyond which ten ships rode at anchor. And nights he sat in his office in the city hall, calculating and planning by candlelight.

Unease finally combined with weariness to overwhelm him. Velasquez, craftily cornering supplies, was selling them at an enormous profit; and Cortez recklessly borrowed more and more. His friends and creditors would tear him limb from limb if he did not bring each ship back loaded with gold.

**T**HIS night he did not walk along the water front. He set out for Juan Grijalva's house at the further outskirts of the town. Catalina thought he was insane, but Francisca understood. His weariness kept him from noting the dark

figure that was even then entering the city hall: a man, moving furtively.

But Cortez himself was just entering into a dark alley as the stealthy man reappeared, paused in the shadow of the *juzgado*, probing the darkness. There was a dull muttering, a rumble of voices from the water front, but Hernán Cortez strode on. Half an hour later, he was slipping between two widely spaced window bars whose mates had been removed.

A glamorous length of white uncoiled from the shadows of the room. Her face was a pale oval faintly haloed in gold. He could just see the tremulous ivory of her young breasts, the smooth pallor of fine slim legs. She murmured wordlessly, snuggled herself happily in his arms like a kitten.

"*Francisca mia,*" he fiercely kissed her.

She shuddered, and every fibre of her body became flame.

**T**HE tall man who had almost caught Cortez at the *juzgado* was Andrés De Duero, secretary to the governor. After a moment of pondering, he stretched his legs toward the *alcalde's* house; yet despite his haste, he moved stealthily, face ever averted.

Cortez' house was dark, except for a single lighted window. De Duero avoided the main entrance, and regarded the closely fitted masonry of the wall. There was not a chance to use its interstices as footholds. Sweat cropped out on his forehead. He had no time to lose.

He'd have to risk the porter. But as he turned the corner, he

noted a building which the masons had not yet completed. From the scaffolding he jerked a ladder and placed it against the wall, alongside the lighted window.

He flashed a glimpse past the casing. It was Doña Catalina he had found, not Don Hernán! At the moment, she was slipping out of the gown that concealed the fascinations which Cortez had been neglecting. De Duero knew that she had the tiniest feet in Santiago; but the gown she was drawing over her head bit by bit revealed beauties that neither the young secretary, nor the rest of Cuba dreamed of.

Before the hemline passed her hips, De Duero was ready to tear the window bars out of their sockets. And when a lace paneled slip clung to the rising skirt for an instant before it sank back and down, he caught an eyeful of reasons why Cortez should never leave home.

But despite the ardor that burned, he had to act, keep his mind on business. He stealthily retreated several rungs, then called, "Don Hernán."

The light blinked out. "*Que pasa?*" demanded a white shape at the sill.

"Where's Don Hernán," he repeated, retracing his steps. He hoped his strategy would convince her he had seen nothing of importance. "I am Andrés De Duero, his Excellency's secretary. I came to warn him."

"Warn him? So you couldn't trust our porter?"

"No, *señora*. Quick—where is he?"

She leaned against the window

bars. The iron rods tightened the yoke of her slip. She might as well have removed it!

"Since you have a ladder, climb to the roof," she answered. "Go up, Don Andrés. I will open the trap door and let you in."

De Duero never quite knew how he found his way. The young secretary's heart was choking him as he followed her down the narrow stairs to the room into which he had just peeped.

He seated himself beside her in the darkness. He could just feel the rounded warmth of her thigh, and a tendril of scented ringlets as she leaned close and whispered, "What's wrong? I'm dreadfully worried."

"Where is he?" he demanded, catching her wrist.

"What's the trouble," she countered. Her free hand was fumbling among the jars and vials on her dressing table. "Tell me—and I'll—"

She didn't tell him just what she would do, but the husky throb of her voice assured him against half measures.

"Juan Grijalva has returned!" he blurted out. "I've got to warn Don Hernán—I—"

Then Doña Catalina's left hand moved, a white blur and a silver arc.

That last was the massive mounding of a hair brush that cracked Andrés De Duero over the head. He slumped, fell across her lap, but gained no sensations from that luxurious contact. He was paralyzed.

A few minutes later, Doña Catalina was fully dressed. She hurried to the street, accompanied by the

Indian maid she had routed out of the servant quarters.

"Gold, is it?" she bitterly said to herself. "Then why be so heated up about Juan Grijalva unexpectedly coming home from Yucatan?"

AND in an upper room of the house of Juan Grijalva, Hernán Cortez knelt beside a red haired girl whose misty eyes looked up at him from the cushions that supported her bare shoulders and sleek hips.

"The savages of Yucatan worship idols of gold," he told her. "There's an empire of pagans—I'll be viceroy—devil take Velasquez, I'll write the king and get a commission—*querida mia*—"

Hernán Cortez knew that he was dancing on the lip of a precipice from which there was no retreat; and this fiery slip of a girl could understand dreams that the placid, lovely Doña Catalina could not grasp. He was mortally alone. Only to Francisca could he speak of his visions of empire and conquest. His reward would be imprisonment, and probably hanging if Velasquez ever suspected him of planning to hog the glory by dealing directly with the King of Spain. So, between kisses, Cortez told Francisca of the scheme too big for one mind to hold.

Then, from an adjoining room came an indignant outcry and the clang of steel, and a rumble of voices.

"Someone's breaking into my aunt's room!" gasped Francisca.

That bale of a woman wouldn't yelp if a dozen men broke into her room—unless they persisted in sticking to plain robbery.

"Bolt your door!" he whispered, diving for his sword and wrapping his cape about his left forearm.

Francisca hurdled the couch; but before she could reach the bar, the door swung inward, sending her asprawl. The torch glare in the hallway gilded her streaming hair, flirted with folds of the filmy gown that was entirely too disarrayed to make even a pretense of covering her slim beauty.

JUAN GRIJALVA, grim and haggard, crossed the threshold, sword drawn. He wore a steel casque and cuirass. Behind him was Diego Velasquez, the governor. He also was armed, and at his side was his nephew, Ramón, who was some day to marry Francisca. Ramón, encumbered with the torch, whipped out his blade. It was a family party: Francisca's uncle and two distant cousins.

Grijalva without a word lunged; but Cortez, too cunning to parry, shifted and with the cloak trailing from his left arm, entangled the explorer's blade. Velasquez, tearing his greedy eyes from Francisca's legs as she got her gown below her knees, thrust at Cortez' flank.

"Let me at him!" howled Ramón.

"Hold the light steady, you young jackass!" puffed Velasquez. "This is man's work!"

"You might take off that breast-plate," mocked Cortez, deadly cool as he realized his peril.

And then Velasquez yelled. His point dropped, and blood gushed from his forearm. Cortez, rashly feinting for his pudgy face, had made a drawing cut. Uncannily, his blade seemed never to have moved enough to open his guard;



"I've got a file and a dagger," she whispered, "to help you escape."

and steel rang as Grijalva's thrust was turned by a blistering counter in *sixte*. He shrank from a serpent flash of steel aimed at his unguarded thigh.

That gave Cortez a chance at the window. The governor, shifting his blade to his uninjured left hand, charged like a cub bear, but

he slipped in his own blood. Just as he measured his length, darkness enveloped the room. A crisp beat, a shower of sparks, and the sword swept from Grijalva's hand clanged to the floor.

Cortez cleared the sill. For an instant, he caught a glimpse of a



white figure in the gloom: Francisca, rushing toward him, arms extended. After dishonoring the



family name, imprisonment in a convent would be her fate.

A hand reached from behind her, slipping from her shoulder, stripping her frail gown to her waist. Then a dagger licked out at Cortez as he scrambled out of reach, down the wiry vine; but he had lost too much time.

Ramón blocked the way to the little wicket through which Cortez had counted on escaping. Francisca's aunt must have done some fast guessing and explaining.

"Get out, you idiot!" warned Cortez, stopping short.

"I'll never see her again!" raged the boy. "You—"

He lunged, recklessly. There was no time to parry. Cortez' body flicked like a striking serpent, suddenly edgewise, protected by the blade and guard which can hide a man as effectively as a fortress.

Ramón ran headlong into the stop thrust; but the delay was equally disastrous to the victor. Juan Grijalva, his pudgy wife, the pot bellied governor, and several howling servants enveloped him before he could jerk his blade free.

Sweaty Indians overwhelmed him, and a dagger raked his back. Velasquez shouted, "Lay off! Send him to Hispaniola and try him for treason! No use advertising Francisca's damn' foolishness."

**T**HEN as they hauled him away, half throttled, Cortez caught a glimpse of Ramón, weaving on his feet. The stop thrust had landed high, missing heart and lungs. But that would not help Cortez. Velasquez had things in hand; and Juan Grijalva would command the fleet that was to conquer the empire of

gold, whose existence he had verified before returning to Santiago.

Cortez marching under guard to the ship that was to carry him in irons to Hispaniola, overheard enough to have bitter confirmation of his dreams. There was a land of gold; and he had borrowed the money to find it!

De Duero, he bitterly reflected, as they led him to the brig and upset the shacklebolts that secured the massive irons to his ankles, had played safe by betraying him to the governor the moment Grijalva had come ashore. But how could the traitor have suspected him and Francisca?

From the porthole, he could distinguish the hulks of the fleet, silhouetted against the moonlit horizon. Men and provisions were aboard, ready to sail. Grijalva, the one other man in whose military skill the governor could have confidence, had returned in time to rob Cortez of his only remaining weapon: reminding Velasquez of the loot he would lose by taking him from command.

In haste and darkness, they had taken only his sword. Seeing his cape about his arm, they had concluded that the dagger, usually held in the left hand in that style of fighting, had been lost in the skirmish. Thus Cortez was not utterly disarmed. He drew the fine Toledo blade, tested the point and found it had not been damaged by prying the bar from De Duero's love nest.

There was a chance: by using his heavy chain as a mallet, he might shear the soft iron shacklebolt. He cut a strip from his cape to muffle the links. But he had scarcely set

to work when he heard a mutter of voices and the clank of arms. He crossed himself. If this was to be a summary execution—

A FLARING oil lamp brought glints from the helmets and cuirasses of men. They had a prisoner: Andrés De Duero, whose forehead was decorated with a purple lump. Cortez drew back into the shadows, nursing the hilt of his hastily concealed dagger. He listened to the hammer blows as the prisoner was secured.

When the guard filed out, locking the brig, Cortez emerged from his corner, and greeted, "This is a pleasure, *señor!*"

"*Por dios!* I tried to warn you!" de Duero protested. He jerked back, seeing the dagger. "You were not at home. I tried to warn Doña Catalina. But she suspected me—" He rubbed the bruise on his head. "Brained me, as well. Then she told the governor, and his men arrested me before I recovered."

"You tried to warn me?" Cortez lowered his dagger. "How?"

"She would not tell me where you were." The sweat on de Duero's brow gleamed in the moonlight that came in the porthole. "So I had to blurt it out. That Grijalva had unexpectedly returned. But she brained me before I could add that he and Velasquez were plotting to jerk you from command. By God, *señor*, I was trying to earn your silence about that little game the other night."

"You told Doña Catalina that Grijalva had returned? Just that?"

"She caught me off guard—she did not understand—"

Cortez laughed softly. "She un-

derstood entirely too much. So she must have gone right to Valasquez' house, where Grijalva would be, reporting. Think how it sounded, you accursed idiot! *Grijalva is on his way home!* When I've not spent a night at home for a week or more. She suspected. Everyone knows Grijalva has a lovely niece."

"We are dead men," groaned de Duero.

"Dead, hell! First, we'll cut each other's shacklebolts. Then we'll pretend we're fighting. The guard will come on the run. I'll knife one. You grab his sword—"

"You're crazy!" De Duero was aghast.

But Cortez was too busy to argue. Slowly, patiently, he forced his exquisitely tempered dagger into the soft iron.

THE night slowly wore on. De Duero, whose shackle had been designed for the heavy ankle of an Indian slave, was groaning and grunting as he tore his flesh in attempting to work his foot free.

Then, Cortez, driving the final stroke, punched the bolt from its socket. Freed, he crossed the brig, planted one foot on de Duero's chin, and stooping, thrust his shoulder to the secretary's stomach. He seized his leg, and heaved.

"*Madre de Cristo*—you're killing me—"

"Shut up!" The broad shouldered Cortez took a fresh hold. De Duero groaned, collapsed from the agony of twisted tendons; but his leg was clear. "Now that fight!"

"I can't stand—you've broken my ankle—"

"I'll break your head—" Then

(Continued on page 98)

# SHEEP'S CLOTHING

PESHAWAR was quiet when I got off the imitation train that runs over from Srinagar. Too quiet. The quieter this northwest India outpost is, the more kinds of Moslem hell there are in the air.

I wasn't surprised. When Belge Lebec traced me from Kabul to Srinagar with word that he had a job to do on the border, I smelled trouble. Whenever that crooked Levantine takes time out from vodka *pahits* to pay attention to something else, that something is bound to be trouble. Somebody's else's hard luck that he can make a piece of change out of.

A big piece of change.

I hadn't been on the northwest border for two years, 1929, to be exact. Naturally I turned my feet toward the Cumberland, the narrow street where the Jezebels sit in balconies and beckon to you and swear in all the tongues of Khyber Pass if you give them a skip. I had passed a lot of moons in the Cumberland with a supple Javanese Jezebel who had hips she could talk with and breasts she could sing with and—well, she could make moons pass pleasantly.

But it occurred to me that she wouldn't be there. If she were, a lot of water runs over a dam in two years. In the East it makes a big difference.

I turned back and went through the quarter of Pathan bazaars to the three story house of Belge Le-

bec. I pounded on an iron door hung in a stone wall and a Kashmiri girl let me in.

There is something about a Kashmiri maiden. They are fair as a lily to begin with and if a man goes on from there he will learn more than he ever knew before. This one had all the secrets of the Thousand and One Nights in her black eyes, and her full lips were a dew-damp challenge to any man seeking Oriental sensation. Her burkah shawl was drawn tight but it thrust out prettily in front over a pair of apple shaped mounds that left no doubt at all that their owner was every inch a girl.

"The master-sahib takes his afternoon sleeping," she interrupted my reflections upon those tempting cushions under the burkah. "If the guest-sahib will come, Tara will waken her master."

She led the way up a flight of stairs. A Kashmiri maiden wears a skirt that falls in sweeping voluminous folds to the very heels of her leather sandals so that not so much as an ankle peeps, but watching her, one sees with the mind's eye the fascinating sway of sinuous hips curving bewitchingly into the petal softness of peach tinted thighs, marble-like in their sleek columnar splendor, but pulsing with eager life . . .

This Kashmiri maiden's skirt was an opaque tent but she might as well have worn none at all for she had a way of telling me with

## By WALTON GREY

*Hell was brewing in northern India and the man they called Eater-of-Women was trying to keep it within bounds. With the aid of a little Kashmiri maiden he found some of his greatest difficulties could be made to melt away*



The khan's harem must be kept inviolate, and he himself could see to that!

every movement that beneath it was rapturous sculpture designed to raise Cain with believers and unbelievers alike.

I arranged with myself that no matter where Belge Lebec's business took me I would see a great deal more of this Tara of his as time went on.

On the second floor she showed

me to a waiting chamber with a divan piled deep with pillows. We crossed the threshold together; it was narrow, and when a young lady from Kashmir brushes against you, volcanos send forth flame and voluptuous music begins to play.

I considered thoughtfully. There was no good reason why Belge Lebec should not sleep a little longer undisturbed in his third floor chamber. I was about to express my ideas to the Kashmiri girl when she moved closer, seeming to float up to me and making it all the more important that her master sleep on. Her lashes lay back alluringly and her warm breath fanned my cheeks.

"I know who the guest-sahib is," she said in the liquid Pushtu of the border. "Why is it that you are called Na'ak ul Zuleem? Tara's eyes do not find in you the seeming Eater of Women."

**N**OW, when a man asks me why I am called Eater of Women, (behind my back) on both sides of the Khyber Pass, there is apt to be a prompt discussion with fists or knife, whichever the handier. For I am not an eater of women, if for no other reason than the established truth that no matter how much you like cake you can't eat it and have it too. But when a woman asks why I am called Eater of Women, that is different.

It makes a good story to tell a woman under such circumstances as when her master is asleep upstairs and there are a divan and pillows where two may sit close together. It is a particularly good yarn under such circumstances be-

cause I have thought up a finish to it that brings about a most satisfactory climax.

"We will sit on the divan," I said, "and close, so that our voices may not disturb the slumbers above."

A quick tremor shook her body and her eyes shone with alarm. She shrank against me and I folded her in my arms to allay her fears, which seemed a proper thing for me to do.

"If the master-sahib wakens," she whispered, "he will be very cruel to the soles of my feet with his bamboo stick."

"If he doesn't waken, I thought, "I shall be much otherwise than cruel as soon as I have finished my story."

She composed herself on the divan demurely, crossing her legs. Her skirt needed no arranging for it revealed nothing to the eye but just the same when she looked at me her eyes told me confidentially that her one thigh was warm and satin smooth flattened on the other, like two sisters cuddling in the dark.

I was not at all comfortable, sitting so close to her. Kashmiri maiden's clothes are exasperating. There is only one layer of them, and that is provoking because you know she is wearing nothing underneath them. And that one layer wraps her completely from chin to toes. When I turned and slipped an arm carelessly about her, the other across her shoulder, my wrist brushed ever so slightly the rounded treasures that nestled under her burkah; she lifted her long lashes wonderingly.

"I do not listen through my burkah, guest-sahib," she murmured.

"But when I come to the end of my story it will be in the way!" However, I took my arms away; she smiled and loosened the burkah, though her eyes told me she did not understand why; they told me also that they did understand why I started at the ivory smooth skin that melted into sweet little breasts, covered now only by the thin silk of her rekah bodice. She pouted a little and covered them with her hands but was demurely resigned when I took her hands away and held them.

I EXPLAINED that when I earned the name they call me in the Khyber country, I was doing one of Belge Lebec's jobs. An Afghan prince had the notion he would do better on the throne than his cousin, the Emir, and the Russians were egging him on with a generous supply of machine guns which they flew down across Mongolia.

Remember, this was all long before World War II. Now, the Chinese weren't fighting the Japs anymore and their generals had a sizeable lot of fairly good guns on their hands. Belge Lebec couldn't see why he shouldn't sell those guns to the Afghan.

My job was to stop delivery by the Russians. When I got into the Afghan hills, it was clear that I would have to destroy the aviator who had the nerve to make round trips from Siberia across the Gobi. Right in my line, of course, but I was disturbed somewhat when I discovered that the aviator was a woman.

THE Kasmiri girl stirred, when I reached this point, and looked up, her pandamus lips parted on a hung breath.

"You did not destroy her? A woman?"

"Wait," I said and continued.

My discovery had troubled me deeply because a pretty woman can make the time pass so agreeably when she is in the mood to abandon herself to the task, that is a foolish waste to destroy one. But it looked as if Belge Lebec wouldn't get anywhere with his Chinese guns until I had put this one and her plane out of business.

I wondered if I couldn't fix it up some other way and I tried. I caught her in the hills just after she had landed a fresh load. She turned out to be young, with glorious dark brown hair and the provocative body of an Olympian goddess. She wasn't Russian or English or anything I could place. Her name was Nahkla which had an Eurasian sound. I put my cards on the table, or rather, on the hillside grass, and pointed out that Belge Lebec was easy with his dollars, would pay more than Moscow, and would have his way anyhow because I prided myself on finishing any job I started out to do.

She looked me up and down and seemed all at once to get the idea that it would be pleasant to change the subject, there in the hills with nothing around but a tremendous silence and landscape. She dropped onto the grass and stretched out languorously, propped on an elbow.

"Tell me the truth," she suggested with a slumbrous smile on her inviting lips." It isn't guns or

dollars or Belge Lebec that is on your mind at this minute."

I stood over her and looked down and wished mightily that I might tell her truthfully what I was thinking, but I didn't dare. I had known her only ten minutes. It is hot in the Afghan sun and she had changed from her flying kit to a native serai, a single square of printed cloth wrapped under her arm pits and held around her hips by a broad sash.

Native fingers, can arrange a serai safely but unaccustomed hands are not so sure. Nahkla's shoulders were bare and the edges of her serai fell loosely across the lift of her upreaching breasts, leaving the upper swells of them open to the warm kisses of the sun. My eyes traced the hollows in those creamy shoulders, probed at the twin enchantments scarcely guarded by the scrap of pink silk that lay across them like a transparent ribbon.

**A**T THIS point my Kashmiri companion on the divan stirred in my arms and lifted a hand to her bosom as if to assure herself that she was better concealed than by a mere ribbon. She was relieved by the feel of her protecting bodice, which so irritated me, and settled back in my arms again. I resumed my explanation of why I am called Eater of Women.

Nahkla turned onto her back and pillowed her shining brown head in her arms. No, unaccustomed fingers do not know how to arrange a serai. Hers fell open below her sash and the sun leapt to caress the ivory pure velvet of an exposed thigh that tapered deliciously into

the snug embrace of a gartered stocking. I dropped beside her, glowing with fever, and sat cross-legged, pillowing her head and back across my knees. Her pliant body was soft and her serai parted on her throat and the scrap of ribbon was only a gossamer web that might as well not have been there at all. Soft flesh quivered deliriously when I joined the sun at its caressing play.

"Now," I said down into her upturned eyes, brown like the swirl of a walnut's heart, "I shall tell you what I am thinking."

"No need," she whispered, her hands brushing my face, "I know."

Well, what with the loose way the serai sash was tied, and the way her eager lips grew warm against mine while the sun traveled quite a distance across the heavens, it looked for a time as if I was doing a good job for Belge Lebec and not so badly for myself. Then, all at once, it looked completely otherwise, as Nahkla twisted from my embrace.

"It is time we go back with our thoughts," she said with a mysterious smile, "to Belge Lebec and his guns you swore you would finish."

I jumped up, protesting, but she gave a call that was something like the whistle of a bird. I heard a sound behind me and wheeled just as three wiry Afghans came running and bellowing out of a crevice in the hillside. The sun glinted on a curved knife.

I let out a curse that described Nahkla as being altogether different from a thing or two I had told her about herself a few minutes previously and reached into the



The giggling laughter died down as he relaxed on the cushions and gave his order.

grass where I had laid aside my American Colt. Nahkla's toe kicked the gun out of my fingers and before I could smash her a knife sang through the air dangerously close to my head. A strong hint, that

was, that I must not smash the lady who stood there, still smiling mysteriously, and arranging the flimsy ribbon of silk under her serai.

As a rule I am good for any three Afghans, but I was handicapped now. I was too full of indignation. I went to work stubbornly and flattened one Afghan



with a broken jaw. But every so often the scrap brought me close enough to Nahkla to make a lunge at her and the remaining Afghans would take advantage of my digression.

Presently my wrists were tied behind me and I was in a stone dungeon set in a steep hill slope and closed in by an iron barred door.

**A**LL this time Tara had listened attentively. Now she turned up her face to give me a sympathetic glance.

"I would not have treated you so wickedly," she murmured.

I clasped her exultantly. "You wouldn't have?" I exclaimed. "You would have allowed love to have its day?"

"I mean," she explained hurriedly, "the dungeon. That was cruel."

I didn't explain that the worst of Nahkla's cruelty was not in having me thrown into a cell.

**W**HILE the night wore away in my prison, I had the feeling that sooner or later Nahkla would come to gloat, and in the first gray light of dawn she came.

The hillside rose steeply to the dungeon door and the pair of Afghans assigned to guard me lounged on a level space some fifty yards below. Nahkla got their keys and came up alone. There was no comfortable foothold on the sheer slope outside the door and she turned the lock and came in, secure in the knowledge that I was bound, that the guards were within call, and that I would hardly be foolish enough to make a hopeless dash.

She was dressed in full flying togs ready to take-off for Siberia and a fresh load of Russian guns.

"Make it short," I grunted. "When I don't like a woman I don't like her worse than anything else I don't like. I can go a long time without looking at you."

She leaned against the stone wall and was like an impudent boy, a mocking twist to her lips.

"I am not so sure you will go very long," she said. "You'll forgive me I know for telling the prince that you were the Emir's spy. It was the best excuse I could make for having you locked up and out of my way. Trouble is, the prince has a prejudice against the Emir's spies. I'm afraid you will be dead in a day or two. I am sorry. I thought to keep you around. It is nice to have a man like you around."

I went into great detail telling her what kind of a blot on the landscape she was. "I wouldn't take you in my arms again," I pointed out. "No more than a carbuncle."

She started to leave the cell but I cried "Wait!" so earnestly that she settled back against the wall smiling again. That opened tunic, flaunting the impudent beauties under the silk blouse, had given me an idea. I stole a glance down the slope and saw that my guards were on their knees, faces to Mecca and backs to the dungeon, droning the morning prayer to Allah. From the valley below, a morning mist was rising, which would also be helpful if my idea worked.

I eased toward Nahkla, trying to look as yearning as I could. "I can take what the prince hands out," I said pleadingly, "but don't go

away without letting me kiss you once again. I'll shut my eyes and think I'm back yesterday and I'll die in a better humor."

She liked that. She put a tantalizing curve in her lips and made it a game to lure me on so she could laugh at me. Her deep breathing lifted her shaking breasts while she slid her hands voluptuously down the sweep of her lissome hips.

"I am still beautiful?" she murmured. "You would still like to have a thousand armfuls of me?"

I took another step and was close. The warmth of her enveloped me. She kept her taunting smile and waited.

**S**HE did not wait long. Suddenly I threw myself upon her, my body crushing her against the wall and pinioning her. My hands were helpless but my teeth were not. They fastened in the soft throbbing flesh of the throat and held on viciously.

My mouth was muffled but I snapped out of the corner of it, "Squawk and I'll turn savage. You'll never look the same again."

I felt a yell rising in her throat. I snarled and sent a stab of pain down to her toes. The yell turned into an agonized squeak.

"You've got a knife," I grunted. I didn't know whether she had a knife or not, but it was a chance. "Cut my wrists free and if you try sticking the blade into me instead, it won't save you."

She had a knife and went into a panic of hurry to cut my bonds. I got a hand over her mouth before she could start screaming. Her flying togs would be a tight fit but I wanted them. She fought like a

spitfire, but I tore off her blouse and made a gag and fastened it with the bit of pink silk that had so fascinated me the day before. I stripped off her togs then, and when I had them all, all but brief undergarments and her shoes, which would be of no use to my feet, I ripped my own shirt into strips and bound her securely.

When I got into her clothes, which was a job, I took a last look at her, stretched on the floor. Rage tinted her creamy white flesh to the hue of a rose. Her eyes were twin daggers. I said, "I could take a thousand armfuls of you now, but you can notice that I'm not bothering."

In the morning haze the guards took me for Nahkla when I appeared in the open. I tossed down the keys and while I was picking my way around the hill out of sight, they were still searching for where they had fallen.

**T**ARA gave a sigh and thought I was finished. "I am so glad you got away," she breathed. "Shall I waken the master-sahib now?"

"Not till I've done." I twisted her around gently so that she faced me. Her eyes met mine and her lips parted. Her delicious breasts throbbed and her thigh nestled against mine. "Now that you know why I am called Eater of Women," I murmured, "I must show you just how, and where, I caught Nahkla." Eyeing the soft throat from which the burkah had been lowered.

That is the finish I have thought up.

(Continued on page 117)

# King - Size

{Continued from page 57}

er—?"

He glanced quickly at Dolores, then turned his face modestly away.

"Robbins," said Don, "you'll have to squeeze the two of us in as passengers, if I have to ride on a wing. I'm bringing back my wife."

Robbins, after another furtive glance at Dolores, whispered:

"Listen, old man, I don't know what you've been doing, but are you aware how you're—er—dressed, both of you?"

"We are," laughed Don. "So you'd best leave us at some convenient place, with some food, while you fly back and get our trousseau. You see, this is our honeymoon."

# For Keeps

{Continued from page 69}

in his fist was merely a blur in the shadows—but the blur did not waver.

His companions gasped at him. Slow-witted, they did not immediately realize the significance of his challenge.

Then one of them snarled a lurid oath and swung his rifle up for action.

It was a big rifle, hard to handle. The fellow went down, groaning, with a bullet in his beefy shoulder and another in the fleshy part of his side.

The others surged forward in a wild rush. But when that happened, Tony Mason was at the youth's side and was rasping out with a kind of wild elation: "Give 'em hell, Bill! God love you!"

**I**T WAS a good fight. Tight-lipped and relentless, the unshaven youth put four bullets into the tangle of bodies, and then,

with a sidestep swift as light, swung the automatic hard down on the skulls of his assailants. Tony Mason, unarmed but eager, fought with him.

Mary Lou Connor, huddled on the couch, watched fearfully and cried out in alarm whenever danger threatened the man she had learned to love.

Back to back, Tony and the younger man fought with a cool, level-headed fury that brought results. The room was a mess. Wounded men crawled; one reached the door and wriggled out into the night. And slowly, while hell raged and men cursed and fists crunched against tortured flesh, amazement welled into the eyes of the unshaven youth. Amazement and admiration for the courage of the man who fought beside him.

For the first time in his life, Tony Mason was earning his keep. His eyes glittered through a film

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of blood. He swung his fists with a wild abandon that surprised even himself.

"Been looking for you—all over—hell," he gasped. "They told me you were dead, Bill. I wouldn't believe 'em."

"Look out!" the kid yelled.

Tony ducked. A rifle in the beefy hands of Vance Kelligrew missed his head by inches. He lunged forward, caught the big man by the hips and slammed him with pile-driver force into the wall.

"This," Tony snarled, "is for Mary Lou!"

His fist came up and crashed. The blow would have dropped a horse. Vance Kelligrew straightened with a grotesque jerk, then sagged to his knees and slumped forward on his face.

Tony stepped back and stared around him.

It was all over. Kelligrew's men were licked. Mary Lou Connor, wide-eyed but no longer sobbing, ran to him and put her arms around him. Bill Mason's right hand was outthrust, and Tony gripped it hard, saying nothing.

"Without you," the kid said, "I might have failed. It took me months of slow, patient work to get myself into Kelligrew's organization. Only a few days ago I learned the names of the higher-ups, the big shots back in civiliza-

tion. I didn't dare start a war around here without help. But now . . ."

Tony drew Mary Lou closer to him. "Which one of these men was going to marry us?" he demanded.

"Kelligrew. He's a Justice of the Peace."

Tony strode forward and yanked Kelligrew erect, shook him. "Listen, you," he snarled. "If Mary Lou is willing, you've still got a job to do. Understand? And you're going to do it!"

He glanced at Mary Lou as she came toward him. She wasn't holding the pajama jacket together now; she had forgotten it. Lamplight gleamed on her beautiful young body, on soft, lilted, half-covered breasts, on glowing eyes damp from crying. She wasn't sure that he meant it; he couldn't see that. It was too abrupt. It left her unbelieving.

"I mean it," he said passionately. "I love you, Mary Lou. So help me, I'm in love."

She stood close to him, her whole body trembling, tears gleaming again in her eyes. He knew the answer.

Holding her hard against him with one arm, he raised the nose of his brother's automatic, glared at Vance Kelligrew, and said softly:

"Go ahead. Marry us."

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# The Price of Victory

[Continued from page 41]

look at save this scene that he would have given his life to prevent, he noticed how tense and bitter the face of Bara had become. He felt pity for her, knowing she must be experiencing something very like his own torture. He turned his eyes away from her, and when he looked back he saw her slipping silently from the circle, moving toward the darkness behind the idol.

If only he could have slipped away into the darkness, too, and spared himself this final punishment!

Then he realized that the ropes that bound him against the belly of Zubuk had loosened, that they no longer held him there immovably, and he understood why Bara had slipped away. She had kept the witch-doctor's ceremonial knife, and with it she had slashed the bonds. He knew what courage it must have taken to dare both the witch-doctor and the supernatural wrath of the god himself. A sense of gratitude swelled his heart.

He would have hurled himself forward, even with his arms still bound behind him, to part Brant and Veronica, but now the mine boss was approaching the idol. Veronica lay before the fire, motionless. Brant looked at her and then leered at Rodgers.

"Take a good look at her!" he said. "It's the last time you ever will see her, before I have you killed as I had Turner killed when he meddled. Look at your girl!—and think about her while you're

having hell squeezed out of you!"

Then he noticed that the ropes had fallen from Rodgers and his expression changed. "Ana-Niki!" he yelled. "He's free! Pull the lever, quick!"

The witch-doctor took one look and ran toward the rear of the image.

Rodgers stepped forward. Seeing that his arms were still bound, Brant leaped upon the stone pedestal and put the flat of his hand against Rodgers' chest, keeping his own head bowed out of the way of the wooden arms. He pushed Rodgers back into his former position against Zubuk's belly.

"Now!" he shouted. "Hurry, Ana-Niki!"

Rodgers twisted, crouched and whirled out of the circle of the arms. Brant stumbled forward into the lap of the idol. Terrified, he gathered his feet beneath him, desperate to scramble out of his dangerous position. One hand reached for the gun in his belt.

Knowing that his life and Veronica's depended upon it, Rodgers moved with all the speed of which he was capable. The revolver in Brant's hand was swinging to bear upon him. Rodgers lowered his head and leaped forward, butting the mine boss in the chest, flinging the man back against the belly of Zubuk and staggering backward himself to fall from the flat rock to the ground beside Veronica.

AS HE lay there he heard a *thud* and a hellish scream, and then a sickening crunching of bones.

He struggled to his feet and faced the startled natives. "You see?" he cried. "Zubuk has chosen. Free me!"

They hesitated, chattering, waiting for Ana-Niki to reappear and direct them. When the witch-doctor did not return from behind the idol, one grew brave enough to peer back there. He gave an alarmed cry and presently others joined him and carried the body of the aged evil-worker into the light of the fire.

Ana-Niki's own ceremonial knife was plunged to the hilt in his back. Rodgers looked from it to the face of Bara, who stood nearby. Her face was stony, inscrutable.

Some one cut the ropes that held Rodgers' arms. He flexed them to restore circulation. Then he stooped and shook Veronica until she opened her eyes, and helped her to rise. She looked at him dully, shuddered as she saw the bloody thing that had been Brant crushed in the arms of the ghost-god, and averted her eyes from them both. Her hand went up to gather the torn edges of her blouse beneath her throat, hiding her breasts. In the firelight her hair coiled around her shoulders like spun gold mingled with threads of shining copper.

"I'll be leaving now," Rodgers said, keeping his voice even with an effort because of the tumult within him. "You have nothing more to fear. Tomorrow I'll see that you get downriver safely."

"Wait!" She put out her hand as if to grasp his sleeve, yet did

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not touch him. Her eyes met his and he saw desperation in them, and something else he could not fathom. "Before you go I must tell you something. You mustn't think—what you're thinking."

"I'm not thinking what I *want* to think," he reminded her, "but seeing is believing in some cases. I really don't wish you any harm. If there had been any way to do it, I would even have saved the life of your—lover."

"Lover!" she stormed. "I hated him. Oh, you stupid idiot, can't you see what I'm trying to tell you? He'd been bullying me, threatening me, ever since I came here. Tonight I played up to him for just one reason—because he told me the natives would kill you unless I did. I know now he would have had them kill you anyway, but I didn't know that at the time. Can't you understand?"

He took a deep breath that seemed to clear away some of the mists in his brain. "So that was the way of it," he said softly.

"I wanted you to know that much. Not that I want it to make any difference." Her voice trembled. "I—I know you'll find some other woman. It's best that way, because I know there are some things a man can't forget." She laughed shakily. "I came here looking for adventure, and I guess I've found it!"

Looking down at her, he was conscious again of the richly curved loveliness beneath her tattered garments, of the ivory white

of her skin where it showed through the rents. He made no effort to sort out the mixture of emotions that swept through him.

"Yes," he said, "there *are* some things a man can't forget."

Her eyes were startled, then suddenly bright with tears. "Don't!" she said faintly; her voice tense to keep from sobbing. "I tried to make you realize that I'm not cheap. And you. . . ."

As if he had not heard he went on: "One of the things he can't forget is loving a girl as I love you, in spite of everything. If a man keeps thinking of a thing like that, he needn't remember much else. Back home again, we can bury the past. Shall we, Veronica?"

**T**HE mysterious Zambezi flowed with scarcely a sound between its jungle walls, under the male and female peaks of Nyasi and Nyadi. The ceremonial fire had died until it cast only a dull glow over the huddled natives, fearful of an evil god who had just stricken his highest priest in a fit of holy anger. Only the girl Bara was not awed; she was standing at the base of the ghost-god's image, gazing with mournful eyes at the twisted thing dangling from its wooden arms.

Watching her, Veronica did not reply for many seconds. A shiver passed through her figure. Tears starred her lashes finally when she nodded, wordlessly, and moved into his arms.



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# Crossbones

[Continued from page 81]

Cortez froze. Something was blocking the porthole. He lunged, chipped dagger flashing; but he checked himself in time. It was a woman, white hands gripping the port.

"Andrés," she whispered, "I've got a file—and a dagger—I heard your voice—"

She was Doña Luisa, the governor's faithless mistress. Her dark hair and the bodice that cupped her full breasts were dry. She had rowed instead of swimming out to the prison ship, whose lowest ports were close to the water.

Then, as she saw that it was not a lover who faced her, de Duero hobbled over to the opening and said, "Stay close in the shadow of the hull. We'll be out, quick—"

"And you'll both go with me to conquer an empire," Cortez promised, lordly and again assured. "Now, that fight—"

Chains rattled, whipped across the barred door. De Duero yelled, and Cortez reviled him as a traitor, the son of a goat, a heretic. The guard, coming on the run, roared for order. They both took time out to curse him; and in the gloom near the door, he could not see that they were free of their chains.

"So you won't pipe down, eh?" He fumbled with his keys, twisted one in the creaking lock. Then, hefting a heavy truncheon: "Try this—"

"Give them hell, Pablo!" bawled a voice from above.

But just then, Cortez' dagger found a joint in the fellow's armor.

He dropped, groaning and coughing blood. De Duero seized his casque and truncheon. Cortez snatched his sword and dashed up the companionway toward the deck.

It would have been easy; but during the skirmish below, the lookout, peering into the early gray of dawn, had spied a cutter propelled by three rowers. In the prow was a stocky man; behind him were two crossbowmen and one other, who carried the banner of the governor.

VELASQUEZ, pompous at any hour, was heading for the prison ship, eager to start the preliminary examination of his captives, and build up an iron clad case of treason. The vigilant lookout turned out the deck watch to pipe him over the side. That was just when Cortez, sword drawn, popped up from a hatch.

"Jailbreak!" roared the sergeant, who had discovered the dead guard in the suddenly quiet brig.

De Duero hurled the casque instead of fitting it to his head. It caught the sergeant between the teeth. Cortez, whipping the heavy sword as though it were a light rapier, lashed out, yelling, "San Jago!"

Sparks showered as his stroke cut through both parry and helmet of the guardsman who had followed the sergeant. De Duero, flailing his truncheon, smacked down on the heads of the sailors

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who were joining the surprise party. But it was Cortez whose booming voice and dancing blade cut a lane to the rail.

Velasquez was not piped over the side. In the rapidly brightening dawn, he saw two men dive into the water. He yelled to his crossbowmen. Strings twanged. Bolts hissed, glanced from the water, sailed screaming into the sunrise. De Duero howled, but Cortez dragged him toward the boat which Luisa had paddled from cover to meet them.

The ship's crew were lowering boats, but confusion muddled their efforts. Velasquez, who had recognized the voice of Cortez, snatched a crossbow and cranked it up.

*Chunk!* He missed by a foot. The fugitives nearly capsized the frail boat as they tumbled into it.

*"Sangre de Cristo!"* groaned de Duero. "We can't get away—"

"Row, you fool, row! Grab the other oars!" growled Cortez, snatching the pair that had already raised blisters on Doña Luisa's tender hands.

"Where to? My God—!"

"To the fleet, jackass! Where else?" It was now simple to Cortez.

Simple, that is, if Velasquez' crossbowmen did not pick them off. The gap was closing, despite the frantic efforts of the fugitives. Far off, ten ships lay at anchor. A shark's fin for a moment disturbed the placid water. A wild shot made the fish dive.

The musketeers aboard the prison ship were blowing their fuses, lowering them to the touch holes. Lead and smoke belched over the side; but the governor's crossbow-

men were far more dangerous. The range was becoming shorter every moment. De Duero was nearly useless with the oars.

"He'll kill me!" Luisa was white, and her breasts ready to burst her bodice.

De Duero was praying as he gasped for breath.

"Peel off that dress!" Cortez growled. "Quick!"

Then he quit his oars. His dagger flashed, ripping the dark gown from shoulder to hem. Luisa's generous curves blossomed golden in the sunrise. Even Velasquez learned new things about his mistress. He yelled, and the crossbowmen ceased firing, lest they hit the girl.

"He'll kill me," repeated Luisa, shivering in the morning chill, and trying to hide as much of herself as she could from the dazzled pursuers.

"I doubt it." Cortez smiled, sour and contemptuous.

But Velasquez, cursing furiously, spurred his men on. The fleet was near now, but the governor was nearer. Once he gained enough to flank Cortez' undermanned boat, the crossbows could cut down all but Luisa.

HE COULD already see the soldiers and sailors of the fleet, crowding to the rail. He caught the flash of glasses; heard the yell of recognition as an officer's exclamation told the men it was Cortez trying to escape from the prison ship.

For some minutes now Velasquez had had Luisa, almost bare from ankle to breast, staring him in the face. Then a bowstring

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again twanged; with the ever changing angle, she was of little use as a shield.

Cortez pushed her overboard. One scream, a splash. De Duero, glancing back, saw and abandoned his oars. Cortez knocked him flat, then bent to his rowing. He saw the deadly ripple and triangular blade of a shark's fin. The governor's rowers were heading for Luisa. His archers were twanging at the shark. Velasquez had snapped at the bait.

Cortez hoped they'd save Luisa; but that was aside from the issue. No man can mince matters while looking Destiny in the face.

Only his will carried him on. And then the drumming in his ears

became a cheer that spread from ship to ship. Ladders were lowered. Strong hands helped him and de Duero over the side. Captain and crew, seeing Cortez snatch victory from certain defeat, were captured by the spell of his dark eyes and commanding voice; it made no difference now that they had become outlaws by sheltering him.

"Sail at once, captain! Before the shore batteries fire!" ordered Cortez. Then, turning to de Duero: "Buck up, man, buck up! We're on the way to conquer Mexico—what—*Luisa?* Hell, I've lost a wife *and* a sweetheart by your damn' dumbness! And listen—I'm appointing you treasurer. I need a good man to check in the loot."

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# Sailor's Luck

[Continued from page 17]

she flung herself at Mulcahy, beating at his face with her fists. "Leave us alone, you drunken beast!" she cried. "Go back to your liquor and your women, and leave us alone!"

Mulcahy caught her wrists in his hands, but she struggled like a wildcat. The dressing-robe flew open, the top garment of the pajamas flew open, revealing just what Mulcahy had known were underneath it—two orbs of dazzling whiteness, and better shaped than Greta's. The warmth and fragrance of her, as she struggled with him, made Mulcahy frantic. He squinted at the little clenched teeth, within an inch of his face, and the red lips. He wasn't sure Miss Strong wasn't going to bite him, but he took a chance, and implanted a kiss firmly on those lips.

Then suddenly Miss Strong went limp. She looked like a fallen angel now. Fallen? Mulcahy's heart was hammering so fast it was like an imp thudding on a drum. He caught Miss Strong in his arms, and felt her supple, yielding body against him. She sighed, and looked up piteously at him. And then suddenly, as if with a supreme effort, she broke from him, and went running down the road with the swiftness of a deer toward the jungle.

Mulcahy followed her. From the desperation on her face he was

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afraid she was going to kill herself. Anyway, he had orders to evacuate her, and this wasn't evacuating her, letting her run into the jungle in her pajamas, in a land like Banda, where pure womanhood wasn't likely to be respected when it was running bare-footed in pajamas. For both Miss Strong's slippers had come off, and he could glimpse her distant figure, and saw that the pajamas were dropping lower and lower, so that there was the gleam of white flesh between the upper and the nether portions.

Then Miss Strong had disappeared, and Mulcahy was racing after her at top speed, and he had forgotten everything about the evacuation.

Sometimes he caught a glimpse of her flying form, as he sped after her along the jungle path. Then, through the rattans, he caught a glimpse of the sea. Fear for her quickened his footsteps. Now he saw her again, running, like a nymph, among the trees. Miss Strong looked back, and saw him. She dove beneath an overhanging branch, tripped, and fell. Her legs had become entangled in the pajamas.

**A**ND she was trying frantically to get them back where they belonged when Mulcahy caught her. He pulled her to her knees, and she looked at him imploringly. He bent and kissed her. "I love you, darilng," he said. "I can't help it. You're such an angel. Never mind about that."

For Miss Strong was trying to pull the jacket of the pajamas over her bosom. Suddenly, she

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dropped her hands and looked inscrutably at Mulcahy. He fell upon his knees in front of her—and then her arms were about his neck as quickly as his were about her waist.

And then they both forgot time and place, for Miss Agnes Strong's lips were closed on Mulcahy's with a tenseness that seemed to draw all the breath out of him. He could see her eyes glimmering like stars. The surge of the sea, the jungle noises were all a part of the mighty rhythm of their love.

It might have been any time later when Mulcahy sat beside her and tried to stop her from crying.

"I couldn't help loving you," she wept. "I loved you the minute I saw you, and I was so mad about that native girl that I was ready to kill you. I suppose you'll go back to her now."

"Back to her? Why, she never was anything to me—I mean—"

"Then how dared you bring me here, to the very spot where I found you making love to her yesterday afternoon?"

Mulcahy looked about him. It was the spot. But—but the unfairness of the words made him choke.

"Listen, darling," he said. "I've got to get back to the others. And I'm going to take you with me. Tell me you'll marry me when we get out of this—back to Tompkinsville. Promise me."

"I suppose I'll have to now," said Agnes Strong. "Look, what's that light?" she added.

**A** FLASH-LIGHT was working somewhere down near the beach. Mulcahy watched. He didn't

know the Morse code or the International, but the person who held that flash was signaling something. Dot dash, dash dot. Again, a long string of dots and dashes. Instantly Mulcahy was on the alert. Quietly he left the woman's side and stole through the jungle.

Now he could see a dark figure standing just where the beach began, about fifty paces to his left, and a second figure squatting on the sand beside the first.

Hardly a bamboo rattled as Mulcahy crept toward them. But in the dense jungle he could see nothing. He judged the place of his exit, and moved stealthily down toward the beach. He emerged within ten feet of the signaler.

A clump of dead canes set up an infernal clatter as Mulcahy came out of the thick growth. The figure with the flashlight turned. Commandant Overijssel, of course! And recognition was mutual and instantaneous.

If the Commandant hadn't had to shift the flash to his left hand to draw his automatic . . . even so, he was quick as a cat in his movements. The automatic roared as Mulcahy was in the act of leaping, and his left leg buckled under him. It was the impetus of his leap that kept him going. He landed on the traitor's chest before a second shot could come, and heard the facial bones crack under his third wallop of that night. Again, if the Commandant had dropped his automatic, instead of thrusting it into Mulcahy's hand in the confusion . . .

Mulcahy twisted the weapon, felt the trigger under his finger, and fired. The first two shots evoked

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spasmodic jerks and grunts, but after that it was just pumping lead into a dead body.

And all the while a woman was screaming, and then Mulcahy felt the point of a knife slice through his upper arm, close to his heart. He swung about. It was Greta, her face distorted with fury, the dripping knife raised in her hand.

For an instant they faced each other thus, and then, with a shriek of terror, Greta dropped the knife and went bounding into the jungle.

Out across the dark ocean another light was flashing, and Mulcahy knew what that meant. The Japs would be on the island by day-break. Already there seemed to be a pearly opalescence in the air.

Forgetting his injured leg, Mulcahy went stumbling back to Agnes. He found her, caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"We've got to get to Government House," he said. "I caught that Dutchman signaling and killed him. That? Oh, just a scratch. Our friend Greta was with him, and she tried to stick me with a knife. I guess you were right about her."

**B**EFORE they reached the town they heard the drone of airplanes overhead. Fire-flares began to fall, lighting up the entire scene, followed by the detonation of bombs. A spurt of fire rose from Government House. More bombs, and the droning grew less, but suddenly the yells of the attacking Japs sounded in the jungle, answered by the crackle of the machine-guns.

Mulcahy and the girl raced into an inferno of light and lead, and it

was just a miracle of luck that the men at the machine-guns recognized them in time. From the jungle on either side of the road came flashes of fire, and the savage shouts of the attackers, but the road was empty, and they dashed under a canopy of lead between the two groups of staring machine-gunners, up to the little lawn in front of Government House.

Colonel Mildmay was standing there alone, watching the fight. The flares dropped by the planes had flickered out, but Government House was a pillar of fire, topped with a smoky plume.

"Did you get the patients, sir?" asked Mulcahy.

"I did. You've been a long time." Mildmay glanced at Agnes, and dropped his eyes. She had fastened her pajamas, but she was too much for an elderly Colonel who had never quite thought of her that way before.

The screaming of women broke out from somewhere on the other side of the house. Mildmay said:

"The patients are in the native quarters. Perhaps you could take a look at them, Miss Strong. Mulcahy, the best thing you can do is to find a dead man, and use his rifle. It looks like what your novelists call—ah—'curtains,'" he added, as the girl vanished.

Cursing, Mulcahy limped toward that part of the grounds from which the firing sounded heaviest. The buzz of bullets was an odd, sibilant undertone in the crash of the firing.

"Lie down, you bloody fool!" somebody shouted; and now Mulcahy saw that the ground was dotted with a line of prostrate men,

firing back at the dark forms momentarily visible among the trees.

A shell whined overhead and landed in the grounds, throwing up a pyramid of earth. Another came, and another, and another, and another.

Mulcahy, flat on his face, a dead man's rifle in his hands, heard somebody say, "They'll rush us at daybreak."

Mulcahy fired until the cartridges he had found were gone. He'd have to look for some more, but he was feeling curiously weak and sleepy. The dawn was coming up fast. Hell, if he snatched a few winks of shuteye, nobody would know, and it wouldn't do any harm. He dozed. It was all preposterous; everything had been preposterous since that torpedo crashed into the old ship's hull. Nothing had been real since then, for here were Canuck and Welshy, grinning at him.

"Was it a dream, or am I dead?" asked Mulcahy.

"You're not dead, darling, and the doctor says you're going to live," said a voice in his ear.

MULCAHY opened his eyes. He was back in the hospital, and Miss Strong was bending over him.

"What the—what the—?" asked Mulcahy.

"Darling, you were unconscious and didn't know. You see, that traitor thought he was signaling to the Jap navy, but it was an American destroyer with two transports that had come to rescue us. They rushed the Japs at dawn and saved us all. Now don't talk, do you hear

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me? Everything's all right, I tell you."

"But was it a dream—I mean that other part?" asked Mulcahy, and then he knew, from the look in Agnes's eyes, that that part had been real.

She bent and kissed him, and Mulcahy knew everything was quite all right, and they'd be married some day and go back to Tompkinsville.

"How's he doing?" asked a male voice in the doorway.

Mulcahy uttered a gasp. Flint-face! Old Flint-face, who had unlocked the brig and let him out when the ship was torpedoed!

"You look as if you're going to get well enough to be a disgrace to the Navy again," said Flint-face. "Don't forget, when you report for duty, to mention that you've got another week to serve in the brig."

"Y-yes, sir," mumbled Mulcahy.

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# Commando

[Continued from page 29]

DENNY watched impassively as they wielded their whips. He saw Madeleine's back cut into a mesh of bleeding gashes, and gave no sign. At last, when the girl fainted, still silent, under the blows, Sachs turned his fury on Denny.

Denny's science was swift killing, but Sachs had a subtler one—wrecking the organism that is a man. When the lash failed of effect, the kidney-punch came into use, and the kick that can rupture the spleen and fill the abdominal cavity with blood. These and many other refinements of Nazi lust. And Denny remained mute.

At last, when it was evident that neither kicks, blows, nor lashes could revive him, Sachs rose and barked a command. It was then about two hours before the dawn, and for two hours past Sachs's men had been busy about his commands in the village of Restigat.

They had rounded up the inhabitants, pulling them from their beds, all forty of them, men, women, and children. Many were bruised and bleeding, and all were in their night clothes. Women had been attacked and violated by the panic-stricken troops, who had seen in their commandant's order the threat of their greatest terror—a commando raid.

They had rounded up old *Mère* Juchereau, from her cottage, and *Madame* Pinard, from her little shop, and Bonnard, the baker, who had no flour, and the butcher, Richard, who had no meat. The full



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moon was bright and high, and they had lined up the inhabitants of Resitgat along the edge of a field, and given them spades, and ordered them to dig.

They were digging a grave, a common trench. Whether or not the women would be spared in the end, nobody could say. That depended on Sachs, and Sachs was oscillating between the desire to take supreme revenge, and the fear that Berlin might not approve of measures so extreme.

As for the children, they stood apart, herded into a group by the soldiers. Even the Nazis couldn't slaughter children, but it gave their captors a sadistic thrill to have the children watch their parents drop, riddled with machine-gun bullets, into a common grave.

Madeleine was dragged there, and placed among the victims, singing, half-conscious, on the ground. And there they took Deny.

They had worked their will on him, and, because he was now only the shell of a man, his spirit soared to meet whatever more the Nazi devils might have in store for him.

He walked between his guards, deriding that battered, screaming body of his. Commando! It rises above the body. It is the last cry of heroism, the last challenge against tyranny and oppression. And it says, "Use that body of yours to its last ounce of power!"

SACHS strolled between his two aides. He looked gloatingly at the line of captives. There were forty of them, digging a common grave. Ha, this would teach the subject slave-peoples the penalty

for rebellion against the *herren-volk!*

"Dig, dig, you Breton scum!" shouted the soldiers, moving along the line, and belaboring the backs of the bent, submissive workers with their rifle butts.

Now, though every inhabitant of Restigat understood exactly why he was so willingly digging his own grave, there was not one Nazi who understood. The people could have refused to dig, have been shot down instantly, and so have escaped the protracted agony. But they dug with zeal, with a strange eager fervor. And the reason was such a primitive one. It was that they wanted burial in their beloved soil of Brittany. And in the heart of each was the fear of dying *above* the soil.

They were afraid of their bones being homeless above the earth, and they knew that their souls would find no peace then. It was the oldest of human instincts.

And not one of them whimpered. They dug their common grave before the eyes of their children, and nobody spoke. They worked in the same dour silence that they had always shown the invader. That was what infuriated the Germans most. They couldn't understand why these Bretons didn't whine and shriek for mercy.

"Dig, scum!" shouted a soldier, digging his rifle-butt into an old man's back. Then stooped to caress a dog with an injured paw that came slinking by.

The long trench was dug. Now, under Sachs's order, the Nazis brought up two machine-guns. Still, nobody knew whether Sachs intended to slaughter the women,



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but the men were doomed beyond hope. The people of Restigat watched Sachs in the same silence. Life was precious to all of them, even old *Mère* Juchereau, but at the same time life had become insignificant in the face of the Nazi horrors.

Denny, straightening his maimed body, watched Madeleine. Nobody else mattered. She had taken Sachs's tortures, and had remained silent. They had both risen above the body. And yet that body of hers, which he had held in his arms, was infinitely precious to him.

Dawn was in the air. The moon was paling, the stars were pin-points in infinite blackness.

IT came upon them like a sudden whirlwind out of the night. Perhaps fifty men, who had slit the throats of the sentries—fifty men with blackened faces, and wearing tennis-shoes, with automatics in their hands, appearing out of nowhere, shooting, running amok, killing with strange, exotic means where bullets failed.

The commando! The commando that wouldn't come unless the flare was shot from the hill. But it had come anyway, because Denny hadn't come back. And it wasn't like an ordinary army. It didn't move with artillery preparation, nor by tactical rules. It was a little horde of screeching fiends that drove into the frightened Nazi soldiery.

And Denny drove his battered body into action. The machine-guns were already sputtering—and then they ceased the gunners dropped under the commando

knives. Denny possessed himself of a knife—somehow, and he ran forward like a madman. Suddenly his racked body had become instinct with vitality and youth. And there was *Oberst* Sachs, waving a white handkerchief in token of surrender!

"*Kamerad! Kamerad!*" Sachs shouted.

Denny was alone, and Sachs still had his revolver, and his chief torturer was beside him, and the pair were crouching in the doorway of *Madame* Pinard's empty store. Everywhere Restigat was aflame with slaughter. Old fowling-pieces had appeared magically, and kitchen knives, kept sharp, were taking toll of lives.

"*Kamerad!*" shouted Sachs—and then he whipped the hidden automatic from his coat and fired. But that was play to Denny. He leaped, the knife flashed once, and Sachs collapsed screaming on the ground, half of him inside his body, and half of him spilled.

The pistol of the Gestapo man roared, and Denny felt the shock of the slug in his leg, and laughed, because he knew he couldn't die.

But if he hadn't tripped the man, he couldn't have caught him. Denny knew he was too weak to run, but not too weak to slice a man's throat the way one rips a melon—a very juicy melon.

He looked at the writhing thing, whose scream of agony had died into a whistling screech, and turned and staggered toward the crowd of Restigat inhabitants who were moving back to their homes.

Why shouldn't they move back? They had nowhere else to go. They had been taken away, to dig their

graves and lie under good Breton soil, and now the sentence seemed to have been postponed.

HE found Madeleine among them. *Madame* Pinard, and *Madame* Bonnard, the baker's wife, were supporting her, and the rags that covered her were stained with her blood.

They tottered toward each other, and both sank to the ground. But it was Madeleine who supported Denny, because he was growing still weaker from his wounds. The night was gone now, and the gray of dawn was in the air. In the east, over the hill, the sky was red.

They lay there, their arms about one another, mute, because there was nothing to say. All about them they could hear the shouts of the raiders, and the screeches of the dying Nazis, but they seemed in the center of a profound peace.

She drew Denny's head to her lap, and he was content to lie like that. And her arms were about him, and she was murmuring words of love, and Denny didn't understand one of them, because they were not in the ordinary English-French vocabulary.

Somebody was shaking him by the arm, and he saw the face of his captain outlined against the risen sun.

"Thank God we found you, old man. I was for calling off the trip when you didn't show the flare, but the boys wanted to find what had happened to you. We're moving out now, and we're taking the inhabitants. Think you can walk?"

Denny, with the captain's aid, tottered to his feet. Madeleine, beside him, leaned her slim young

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body against his, to support him. Then, in the new sunlight, Denny saw old *Mère Juchereau*, and *Madame Pinard*, of the little empty store, and *Bónnard*, the baker, and *Richard*, the butcher, and the rest of *Restigat's* inhabitants, lined up, together with the children.

About them the young, keen-eyed members of the commando. On the ground, here and there, the twisted and eviscerated forms of

the dead.

"Well, let's get going."

The column began moving slowly down toward the shore. And Denny, stumbling, with *Madeleine's* arm for guidance, knew that he would get well. He would enjoy a little love again before the commando called him. What could one ask more? *Madeleine's* lips were smiling. She had learned the lesson of commando too.

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# Sheep's Clothing

[Continued from page 89]

Tara quivered and drew back.

"No, no!"

"I was not gentle with Nahkla, but with you I shall be very gentle."

I drew her close and bent my head eagerly. Tara's soft body relaxed in my arms with a little breath of resignation to the completion of her knowledge of why I was called Eater of Women, but my lips had barely touched hers and slid to her throat, when suddenly she stiffened with a gasp.

I looked up and Belge Lebec, greasy and gross and scowling like thunder stood on the threshold.

"You should still be sleeping," I growled. "I was making certain explanations and I hadn't concluded them."

Belge Lebec, still scowling, motioned me upstairs to his private chamber.

"Not until you agree that the soles of her feet are not to be mistreated," I stipulated.

He scowled at the girl uncertainly. I am very valuable to Lebec and he doesn't like to cross me. The Kashmiri maid read the indecision in his scowl and slid up to him with her hands folded meekly across her breasts, her lips quivering. He took a short look into her upturned eyes and shrugged.

"I shall leave your feet in your sandals," he decided aloud. The girl sent me a grateful glance and ran out, and it was as if the room was suddenly chilly.

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SEATED across his teakwood table looking more like an obese Buddha than himself, Belge Lebec outlined his business. It was hard for me to listen because my ears would rather have picked up the swish of a Kashmiri maiden's skirt and my mind was bothered.

The story of how I came to be called Eater of Women had not been finished as it should have been and would have been if Lebec hadn't wakened prematurely as master-sahibs have a way of doing when they have a Tara in the house to watch. I do not like to go to the trouble of describing the unsatisfactory turn of events that afternoon in the Afghan hills without capping off the yarn properly, and I had never had as enchanting a listener as Tara.

But Lebec commanded my attention. "It is a difficult job this time, but you will be well paid. The Hillmen and Afridis beyond the Pass are brewing hell for northern India. They have dug up a boy whom they claim to be the only living direct descendant of Mohammed—a grandson of old Abdul Hammid, I understand—and they've got him somewhere inside the Khyber. The hill tribes are going fanatic for a sweep into India and the establishment of a new Moslem empire with the boy as Emperor. They'll fail, of course, but they can do a lot of damage first if the Red Sea Arabs join up with them, which they hope."

"Pretty mess," I grunted.

"Pretty. It's your job to break it up before it begins."

"Eh!" That was a knockout. Belge Lebec turning patriotic and

trying to break up a mess, when messes are what he lives off.

"Strange as it may seem," he grunted. "I want to know where that boy emperor is. He is somewhere close to the village of Zakhka Khel, which is the headquarters of the most important of the Hillmen chiefs, old Ibrahim Khan. Old Ibrahim, I learn, is the spirit behind the whole business. He is wise enough to know he can't get away with it, but he thinks there will be a bit of looting for his people. You're to get an eye on Ibrahim somehow and learn if you can where the spawn of the Prophet is hidden. You are the only man who can do it, because you know the Khyber dialects."

"They won't have money for any of your guns or condemned planes", I said.

"But the British have money. Much money. They'll pay through the nose if I can send you to lead a raiding party to surround the hideout of His Moslem Nibs."

I looked at him sourly. "It isn't a dangerous job, is it? Oh, no! Not at all! Butting into a lot of devils who have frenzied up their religion for a Holy War. The pay had better be good."

"You can name your own figure," he said easily. "I'll tack it onto the British."

That started me thinking. About the Kashmiri maiden downstairs and a certain unfinished job.

"I'll make terms," I said. "Half in gold and half in girl."

"Make it clearer."

"Tara. She's the girl half. The explanations you interrupted have got to be finished."

Well, he didn't like that bargain.

He said he had plans of his own to enjoy the companionship of Tara. He said it would depend upon how much he could hit the British for, whether he could get enough for a solace, and I had to let it go at that.

I GOT through the Pass without difficulty, being used to the Afridi jellab, turban, and lingo. Outside the Pass I joined up with an Afridi caravan that pretended it was headed for Mongolia. I wasn't surprised when it became apparent that the caravan, carrying some important Pathan chiefs, was really headed for Ibrahim Khan's village of Zakkah Khel.

It wasn't as much luck as it sounds for out of the babel of tongues in the Pass I picked up the news that almost every caravan headed north was taking visitors to the wily old Khan. Tribesmen were tense with suppressed excitement and more than once I heard the whisper of a name—"Menhai. Menhai the Prince. Menhai the Deliverer. Menhai the Chosen of Mohammedt."

And while the caravan camped the first night in from the mouth of the Pass the *provindahs* who squatted in murmuring circle talked of Menhai, the Moslem Lord, about to rule India.

Old Ibrahim himself received the caravan chiefs in an open space before his rambling low walled house in the center of the village. A patriarchial old scoundrel who had more sin behind his beard than a Christian knows about.

With the coming of night I set about the job of finding a way into the walled-in precincts of the ram-

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bling house. There would be confabs going on and I would need to hear only a little to pick up a lot. Let them talk long enough of their Menhai and they let loose a clew to his hiding place.

Feeling safe in the village, patrolled as it was on the outskirts by Ibrahim's guards, the caravan *provindahs* were noisily snoring by the time the moon was up. And by the same time I was prowling the shadows of the Khan's outer walls. Easy to climb over and drop down into a dark spot, but not so easy to cross a court yard toward a white building where light shone under a heavy wooden door. But I made it and got onto a roof.

I passed more than an hour searching corners and crannies and peering down into black wells of emptiness hidden within the walls of the big house. It was immaterial that I had a dozen narrow escapes, so long as I escaped, and came at last to a parapet-like wall that I could look over and down into a great room that was open to the sky.

What I saw made me jump.

**D**OWN there, bent on their knees, was a ring of Hillman chiefs and Afridi priests, my Pathan leaders from the caravan. Every last one wore a green turban, sign that he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and was therefore the best of his fellows. My eyes skimmed over these to the old khan, who was seated on a great mound of bright cushions, his long beard touching his knees.

But my eyes didn't rest on the khan. Behind him, on a platform, seated in a gilt chair, was a boy. A

handsome, fragile youngster, in a green turban with a great jewel in its folds. A gold threaded jellab concealed his figure, but I knew he would be slight, and knew, too, that I was looking down from the roof on Menhai—who was to be declared the boy emperor!

So Old Ibrahim had him now in his keeping! News for Belge Lebec and the British. Fascinated, I watched while the green turbans made their obeisances until, at last, all had passed before their "deliverer," touched his fingers reverently, and filed out into a courtyard and on into the night.

Then the boys got up, a little wearily, I thought, and Old Ibrahim, and two or three of his elders who had remained in the room, knelt while he passed them also to fade into the dark courtyard. When he was gone, I realized suddenly that the youngster had not said a word all the time I watched.

I would have set promptly about the hardest part of the job—getting out of the house and onto the open plane headed back to the Pass, but movements of the khan and his elders, after the boy disappeared, held my attention. They were strange. The khan spread his palms for all the world as if he were saying in Pushtu, "That's that!" One of the elders laughed in his beard until his shoulders shook.

"What's this?" I murmured to myself.

Then a voice came up, the guttural voice of an elder, not the one who laughed.

"May Allah be praised, all goes well—so far! Too well, my old bones tell me. What shall we do

afterwards, O Ibrahim? What is it your wisdom prepares for the day when there must be a reckoning?"

When he finished, he pointed to the door through which the boy had gone.

The old Khan stroked his beard.

"I have taken long counsel with my wisdom, O Ali," the khan said slowly. "The way is clear."

And then, after a meaning pause, the khan slowly ran his fingers across his bristly old throat. The gesture was eloquent. Someone's throat was to be cut. There was no mistaking whose throat it was.

Menhai, the boy descendant of Mohammed, was in for having his throat cut by these conspirators as soon as the day of reckoning for revolution arrived! It didn't make me feel good. I liked the distant look of that boy.

But, it wasn't my affair. The spot I was in had to be gotten out of. The courtyards now were full of lingering green turbans. No chance to escape the way I got in. And then I made a discovery that was startling. Shapes of women, unveiled, began to come to the roof where I was. Now I have often wondered about a harem, having the mind I have, but I've never wanted to be caught on the roof of one. The khan wouldn't have oil to boil me in, but plenty of camel fat.

I MANAGED to steal along the parapet shadows until I came to an open skylight and I lost no time dropping through this into utter darkness. The odor of perfumes was pungent, and the smell of unguents and hair oils. Still in the harem!

I felt around the walls until a

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door gave to a gentle push and I found myself in a long passage lit far down by a single candle bracketed in the wall. Behind me the passage came to a dead end, I could only go toward the candle. The khan's women apparently were all on the roof, for the passage remained deserted and I began to hope that I would reach the door at the far end undetected, and that the room beyond would be empty with a window that would let me onto the ground. My hope was just settling down comfortably when a door creaked and a figure was silhouetted against the candle flare.

The figure of a woman! I was in for it.

But when the figure moved on toward the far door I was struck with a sense of strangeness. All at once I realized that the woman ahead of me wore no serai or harem pantaloons.

The garb of an aviator!

And then I knew. By the very curve of the silhouetted hips, the poise of the brown head. Nahkla!

I could only stand rigid and hold my breath. If she looked back I was lost. And if she went ahead, and into the door, I would have to follow, for there was no other way out of the corridor. I couldn't climb back onto the roof.

She didn't look back. When she opened the far door she was bathed for an instant in a brilliant light as from many candles. Then the door closed and I crept up to it to listen.

For a long time I strained my ears. There was no sound from beyond the door, but suddenly there were scraps of giggling laughter drifting down through the skylight and I was afraid the wom-

en on the roof were preparing to descend. Where the stairs were I didn't know, and in any event they would be beyond the door where I listened.

I cast the die and pushed the door in.

**T**HE splendor of the chamber startled me. Rich silks draped the walls, and candles hung from the ceiling in red brass cups. I was suddenly aware of why I had heard no sounds.

In a corner of the room pillows were piled high behind curtains that shut in a wall recess. On these pillows the boy emperor was outstretched, his jellab covering his slight form, his head resting on an outflung arm. He had not taken off his turban, but had dropped down wearily.

And over him, silent and motionless, stood Nahkla looking down. Her rigidity was sign that she was so wrapped in her thoughts that she hadn't heard me come in.

I searched for an exit but there was only one. An arched door that led to some other interior and which I could reach only by passing the girl who watched the sleeping boy.

I must have made a sound, for she turned suddenly, and we faced each other. She lifted her fingers to her lips to warn me into silence before her mind comprehended that not only a man had come out of the harem corridor, but that that man was me.

When she recognized me, she gave a gasp and her eyes glittered.

"You!" she whispered hoarsely. "Here, in the house of Ibrahim!"

"You've got new flying breeches

I see," I observed. "Hope you weren't embarrassed when the Afghans found you in my little dungeon."

All the time, of course, I was trying to think up an idea of how to get out of this spot, and wasn't succeeding. The boy had wakened and sat up, staring at me out of great round eyes. Nahkla had her ideas ahead of mine. Suddenly a knife flashed in her hand and she was at me like a tigress. She had to come far enough for me to be ready. Neither of us made a sound, for different reasons. I didn't want to attract anybody else and say what you please, Nahkla had no right in the boy's bed chamber—not in a Moslem household. Or so I figured it.

I managed to get her wrist and the knife clattered to the floor. She had one experience of me when I wasn't gentle and now she had another. We struggled over to the pillowed bed and the boy cried out softly in alarm, and then Nahkla was in my arms, gripped like a vise. I held her a minute while she got her breath. Then I tilted up her chin with a jerk.

"I don't know how this is coming out," I said, "but if we were alone in this room, I'd go on from where we left off in the Afghan hills. As it is I'll have one good kiss anyway, just to prove I can take what I want."

I proved that and took my time. Her lips were just as luscious, but I had to threaten a spanking to keep her from biting. She relaxed suddenly and then I let her go with a laugh. The laugh seemed to hurt, for she gathered herself together



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and came close; her eyes slumbrous and inviting.

"This time," she whispered, "you are master. I agree to—any terms—but you must come with me. Out of this room. I will see that you go free—for there will be plenty of time to remove Menhai."

For some reason she was more anxious to get me out of the room than to see me captured. Ready to agree to "any terms" and even to let me go free. It didn't make sense and I said so.

I reached for her, cut off her breath, and said, "Now, little one, you'll show me the way out. Or I'll leave more scars on you than I did before."

But I hadn't counted on her strength. She tore free and opened her mouth for a warning yelp. Before she loosed it the boy leapt up from the cushions, his jeweled turban tumbling off. I heard him cry, "Stop!" in an imperious tone, but what else he said I didn't know.

The falling turban had released a cloud of ebony hair that glittered like black diamonds. The jellab had fallen open and there were two round globes where there shouldn't have been on any boy emperor. And the tightly wrapped trousers of the Afridi noble revealed the contour of a thigh deliciously girlish.

Menhai, the "boy emperor" about to be fostered on the faithful by the scoundrelly Ibrahim, was a girl!

ONCE again I stripped Nahkla of her flying kit. Rather, this time she stripped herself. Under the point of her own knife which I

held at her breasts. Master indeed was I, this time.

Menhai, who wasn't Menhai at all, but Lenhai, her girl's name, and really a forgotten Moslem princess if not a boy emperor, looked on meekly while the creamy whiteness that was Nahkla in the flesh emerged from her reluctantly discarded clothing. When Nahkla was standing disrobed and shaking with rage, I kicked the garments toward the little princess.

"Put them on," I commanded. "I'll be watching Nahkla, not you. I'm saving you from getting your throat cut by taking you along—after you've shown me out, which you'll do if you treasure your throat at all."

WELL, I tied Nahkla up again, though I didn't have to use my shirt this time. Little Lenhai seemed to have taken a fancy to me and, as it turned out, was only too eager to escape the fraud Ibrahim and his elders were practising with her. She was only too glad, too, to be instructed somewhat in the unbeliever's ways of love during the nights and days it took us to make the Pass, what with having to dodge the thousands of Afridis searching for our trail.

When I took her in to Belge Lebec and told him everything—everything except about the softness of little Lenhai while she nestled in my arms for her occasional nap on the way, he was elated. "For her, and the unmasking of the boy emperor, the British will pay much more gold than I had planned," he said. "Your reward will be handsome. You have finished your job well."

"But there is one job I haven't finished," I reminded him. "I haven't finished telling my story to Tara—of why I am called Eater of Women. That still has to be done, and I'll go off to the British myself and tip them off that 'Menhai' is here, without asking any gold, unless you transfer little Tara to me. I must finish that story."

He could have only one answer to that when he saw that I would be firm.

But when I had taken Tara away to where we wouldn't be interrupted for many, many moons, it turned out that the only story she was interested in was the story of those nights on the road and in the Pass with little Lenhai. She would never believe me when I told her I was fatherly only, my mind dwelling solely upon Kashmiri beauty, but I have long known that a woman does not think as highly of a man she can always believe as Tara learned to think of me.

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(Continued on page 127)



## Where Satan Is King

**T**HREATENED now by a warfare in which it wants no part, the fabled country of Kurdistan will probably offer as little welcome either to Allied or Axis troops as it ever offered to travelers during the years of peace.

For Kurdistan, in a remote corner of the Iran that used to be called Persia, is a strange country inhabited by strange tribes. They dislike outsiders, they despise modern ways of living—and *they worship the Devil!*

Satan-worship is the religion of the Jezidees, on the theory that God is good and benevolent, and it would be futile to pray for indulgences from a Supreme Being who is already well disposed. But believing that all ailments and misfortunes are the work of the Devil, these strange people argue that they had better spend their time, money and sacrifices in trying to humor the Evil One into being easy on them.

Even the traveler from Christian lands must pretend to fall in with this belief; for unless he shows great respect for Satan he will lose his life.

Kurdistan is one of the most barbarous and inaccessible places on the globe, far beyond the reach

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Live chickens are slain as sacrificial offerings to the peacock idol, and it is rumored that human victims sometimes replace the chick-

ens. It is very likely that these rumors are based upon true fact, for scores of explorers have vanished in that wild land, never to return to civilization. There can be no doubt that these missing travelers were murdered by natives; and it is reasonable to assume that many such murders were of a sacrificial nature—death-offerings of a religion based on demoniac perversion of a world-wide belief in God and the Devil.

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(Continued from page 125)

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