

MAR.

25¢

# SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES

**DEVILTRAIL**

*by Tom Mixell*



**Page  
Missing**

**Page  
Missing**

**Page  
Missing**



# REVOLT of



**D**AMASCUS was the city Mohammed had refused to enter, saying it was too much like paradise for any living man to visit. But the two lashed to the whipping post in the court yard of the French Foreign Legion barracks thought otherwise. The

By  
**E. HOFFMANN  
PRICE**



*The French Foreign Legion in Damascus was brewing revolt. And it didn't help Art Keane's loyalty when the captain had him whipped. And when he finally traced the woman for whose honor he had joined the Legion, Keane was ready for anything*

# the DAMNED

blistering hell glare of the noon day sun blazed down on their bare backs, flamed up in fierce reflection from the dusty flagstones.

"Whack—!" The lash strokes, almost simultaneous, blended.

"Un!" counted Captain Armand Leblanc, smiling thinly and stroking his pointed moustache.

"Whack!" The whip drove home again, ploughing a red furrow, curling about lean bodies, biting blood where the ends dug in.

"Deux . . . trois . . ." The captain

enumerated, then added, "Lay on harder, corporal! *Quatre . . . cinq . . .*"

One of the prisoners groaned; the other gasped; "We know you can count to twenty, you dirty son of a—!"

The captain understood English, and his answer was, "Raise it to twenty-five, corporal."

DAMASCUS was muttering under the iron hand of France. Discipline had to be maintained; but twenty lashes

As the Captain drew his pistol, Keane snatched up a tabouret—



for failing to salute an officer was unusual, even in the Legion. That was the opinion of the two men who, released from arrest the following day, dragged themselves from barracks.

"I'm sorry," said Art Keane, "that my cracking off got you those extra five."

"*Verdamnte schwein!*" growled Otto Schwartz. "That gives me something to remember. Once we get into action, a shot in the wrong direction will not be noticed."

The American's smile was bleak. He shook his head and said, "We won't live that long. Leblanc will see to that. I can't figure what made him change. He was okay until we came to Damascus—then he began riding me. And you too, ever since you tried to put a word in my favor."

"Mmm . . . that is right." The German's eyes narrowed. "Me, I wish to live."

"I have some native clothing hidden in a vacant house I rented," answered Keane.

"Ach, you rent houses?"

Though a Legionnaire's pay scarcely bought tobacco, Keane still had several thousand in his own right. Once a professor of Semitics in an American university, his knowledge of Arabic would see them through a venture which usually meant mutilation by vengeful natives, or else a firing squad in case of recapture. Desertion was dangerous work.

"That way, we'll have a hideout. But this town is ready to explode. Better wait till the natives raise the roof. Then we'll have a chance."

"What makes you think there is an uprising?" wondered Schwartz.

"That." Keane gestured toward three robed men hanging from an ancient

archway. A sentry was posted to keep the indignant natives from rescuing the bodies. France called them criminals; but the turbaned men who muttered in the market place called them Moslem saints.

An Arab approached, eyed their collar insignia, and said to Keane, "You are of Captain Leblanc's company? He sent me to find one of his men. He is ill and needs assistance."

It was Saoud, the captain's native servant. His words did not have the force of an order, but refusal would mean the lash again, and being spread eagled in the blazing courtyard.

"I will go too," said Schwartz, his voice hoarse with suppressed eagerness. He ignored Keane's nudge and warning glance.

But as they followed Saoud, the American whispered, "You damn fool, if you kill him here, it's suicide."

Keane's face, thin but no longer scholarly, tightened. Schwartz, his only friend in this hell hole, was loyal to a finish, but that hot temper and thick head would get them both into trouble.

Saoud led them to a resort reserved for officers. No enlisted man had ever had a peep at the interior.

Leblanc must be cracking. Administrative duties kept officers away from drink and bawdy houses until after mess call.

**A** DOZEN girls lounged in the shadowy salon. Some were European. Others were native: tawny skinned Syrians with long black eyes, red haired Circassians, sleek Levantines. They were languorously stretched out on rugs and cushions, their breasts and supple bodies and luxurious hips bare of all but thin scarves of transparent chiffon.

They regarded Keane and his coun-

panion with amazement, until the Arab cut in, "Captain Leblanc sent for them."

There was a cross fire of glances, a murmuring in half a dozen languages. A shapely, golden haired girl emerged from her corner and beckoned, saying, "Ah. . . to help him home. Come, I will show you."

Schwartz licked his lips, glanced hungrily at the tempting array of rippling flesh and silk and muttered, "So this is for officers. Too good for us. Only those louse-bound hags down the street."

One of the girls understood, laughed softly, twined a caressing arm about him, and whispered, "Why shouldn't we be nice to a soldier if we want to?"

"Cut it out!" growled Keane; but his blood raced as he caught a whiff of the fragrance his guide exhaled, and felt the caress of her fingers on his forearm, the contact of her hip against his.

She was white, and not a greasy camp follower. She was delicately shaped; her breasts were small and shapely, and her eyes were friendly. But with Keane's desire came an old and bitter memory of a seductive woman to whom he owed his present low position—Ardis Gray, whose husband, arriving at an inopportune moment, had given Keane the choice of enlisting in the legion, or else seeing the woman he loved made a public mockery.

He had made his choice without giving Ardis a chance to say that she would leave her wealthy home to go with a professor whose position would be blotted out by notoriety.

"He's in there," whispered the girl at his side. The Arab servant had turned down a cross passage, and Keane scarcely noticed his absence.

The room, though showing signs of recent occupancy, was empty. Keane frowned, turned sharply as he heard

what Schwartz was saying to the Syrian girl who had singled him out, and warned, "Keep your hands at home, you fool!"

"Mind your own business, my friend!" chuckled Schwartz. "Which is the captain's girl?"

"He left me, just a few minutes before you got here," a newcomer cut in. "And I'm glad."

Keane advanced to catch Schwartz by the arm, but blonde Frieda checked him and said, "Don't hurry away. They won't be back until after dinner—not for an hour or two—"

"I don't like this at all," he protested; but Frieda smiled, snuggled closer, and promised, "You will. . . ."

She was white and shapely, and the sway of her hips added to the lure of her firm, fine breasts. The way her persuasive arms twined about Keane reminded him of Ardis, who had not even written during his exile. He laughed bitterly, and relished the resemblance—and the scarlet lips she pressed to his mouth.

Schwartz turned to a cubicle across the hall, and Keane's inflamed blood kept him from following.

"That Arab servant," whispered Frieda, sinking back among the luxurious cushions of a couch, "hates his master as thoroughly as you do. He's gone, and so—"

Keane kissed the wine from her lips, and found bitter pleasure in that clinging flesh that reminded him of Ardis. . .

THE DOOR opened very softly. Keane's first warning was Frieda's cry of dismay. That seemed genuine; but as he broke from her arms he saw that nothing else that afternoon had been. Captain Leblanc was standing at

the threshold, riding crop in hand, smiling venomously.

"Delusions of grandeur, eh?" he mocked.

Leblanc was cold sober. He showed not a trace of illness, alcoholic or otherwise. Keane stared. He knew that had been a trap. No one would believe that he and Schwartz had entered the forbidden dive in response to a message from the captain's servant; but that an officer would go so far was incredible.

"Answer, pig!" snapped Leblanc. The riding crop bit Keane across the face.

He was no longer a scholar or a gentleman, but that was too much. Before either blow or question could be repeated, Leblanc had an answer: a hard fist that drove him against the door jamb, nose gushing blood over his tunic.

Though striking an officer was a capital offense, they could only shoot a man once. Keane closed in, too shaken with wrath and desperation to be accurate. He connected, but did not drop Leblanc.

The captain drew his pistol. Keane ducked as the tiny room rumbled with re-echoed fire. He snatched a tabouret, but a slug creased his arm.

Leblanc was now in the right. Keane was resisting arrest. And then Schwartz, growling his wrath, came ploughing into the room.

"Get out!" roared Keane. "Quick—"

Leblanc whirled, firing. Schwartz dropped, blood spurting from his head. Keane hurled the tabouret, knocking the pistol from the captain's grasp. He closed in, fists driving. Leblanc crumpled, out cold. Schwartz, however, was not dead; the slug had only stunned him.

Keane snatched the pistol, gestured toward the German, and shouted to the terrified girls, "Pick him up—get him out—"

And if Damascus had not been mut-

tering, he might have succeeded. As it was, the reports of Leblanc's pistol brought a vigilant patrol at the double time. The place was surrounded, and a squad of soldiers blocked the side door.



Too late now for Keane to shoulder his unconscious comrade and make a desperate dash for the hideout he had prepared.

They saw the blood that drenched the two legionnaires, the pistol in Keane's hand. A soldier run amuck left them no thought of parley. But as the rifles jerked into line, Saoud bounded from an alcove.

"They've wounded Captain Leblanc!" he shouted, bounding in to snatch Keane's weapon. "He's upstairs—"

Saoud had Keane's wrist before he could fire; but the American profited by the distraction. He whirled, flinging the Arab squarely athwart the lowered bayonets. And as he bounded for cover, he caught a glimpse of red blades projecting from the servant's back.

She fired before she saw who his companion was. The slug caught Otto. . . .



HE MOVED so swiftly that the corporal's pistol fire went wild; and before the confused squad could be organized, Keane was on the second floor. The roof was his only chance of escape. He turned toward a stairway, growled wrathfully, and lashed out as someone seized his arm.

It was Frieda.

"I saw you make a break—take this," she gasped, thrusting a hooded woolen

robe into his hand. "Not the roof—but that way—and this too—"

The last was a wallet; and as she thrust him through a narrow doorway, she added, "Captain Leblanc's—money in it—good luck—"

She made cover just as the squad came surging up the stairs; and Keane, safe for a moment, advanced down the narrow passageway. It dipped beneath

the street, and opened into a half ruined place adjoining the bawdy house.

From its shelter he saw the troops carrying Schwartz and Leblanc away from the building.

"Only friend I got in this lousy dump," he muttered, "and I can't save him from the firing squad. Probably not myself, either!"

Deserting was one thing; a man had a start before being missed. But striking an officer—they'd comb the town, then and there.

Leblanc had deliberately tempted Keane to strike him. Saoud's intervention, once the danger was over, clearly showed that master and man had worked together. But why this unbelievable animosity toward an enlisted man?

He emptied the wallet Frieda had snatched. Not expecting a sudden break, he had not cashed his letter of credit. Now it was too late. The wallet contained several thousand francs; but more than that, there was a letter addressed to Private Arthur Keane, Merejeh Barrack, Damascus.

He recognized the handwriting even before he saw the signature.

Ardis Gray wondered why he hadn't answered her letters. Ardis now was a widow; she did not blame him for his silence; she realized she should not have permitted him to vanish for her well being, and—"

He again scrutinized the frayed envelop, noted the stamp, the date and return address of the intercepted letter.

"Damn it—she's in Damascus—she's been here," he gasped.

The night became an insane whirl. Ardis had followed him to Syria.

"And Leblanc fell for her. That's why he's tried to finish me!"

It was a grim and vengeful man who later emerged from the ruined building

and crept through the odors of Damascus to the inconspicuous hovel he had rented in anticipation of desertion. But his eyes were ablaze with more than wrath when he emerged, divested of his uniform, and completely dressed as a native.

Ardis had a villa in the Salahiyeh suburb, east of the city. Keane knew the way, but despite his disguise, peril was on every side. Damascus was alive with patrols that were seeking him. Fortunately, no one knew of his fluent command of Arabic; but since a fugitive could not hope to escape detection if he wore uniform or European civilian clothing, natives likewise would be scrutinized.

It was ticklish work, but he finally crossed the square, passing close to the sentries who, guarding the dangling bodies of three Arabs, were discussing the attack on Captain Leblanc.

"Schwartz' trial won't last long," said one. "But it's funny—he says Keane wasn't with him. And then I heard Keane was captured and they'll both be shot tomorrow—"

"If Keane was caught," argued the other, "why all these patrols?"

So neither noticed the tall, gaunt man in brown robe and white turban, who was heading toward the eastern gate. . .

Keane passed the sentries posted there, and then picked his way along the tangle of lanes that wound in and out among verdant orchards and walled estates. He finally found the villa where Ardis lived; but first he had to be sure it was hers. Instead of approaching the gate, he scaled the wall. Though it was late, there might be servants quartered in the premises.

**H**E CREPT through the luxuriant foliage, and halted at a window



from which came a glow of light. It was barred; but before he could move on to find an unguarded entrance, he heard sounds that at first made him believe his ears were playing him false.

Then a deadly chill raced through his veins. What he heard was the inarticulate, amorous murmuring of a woman.

It might be almost any woman—and her utterances were becoming hysterical, gasping, half-laughing, half crying, as though trying, yet unable, to protest . . . it couldn't be Ardis. . .

He dared not look, lest he see and learn that his ears had not tricked him. Then he caught the sobbing catch of her breath, and a few words that were tense and eager: "Are you sure—can you really save him, Captain?"

"*Mordieu!* But yes! It will be easy to say that German pig attacked me and that Keane tried to help me. You see, I have not signed charges. The guard arrested them."

Then Keane looked into the room. Tears gleamed in the anxious blue eyes of that golden haired girl who regarded Captain Leblanc. She wore frail chiffon that scarcely concealed any of her exquisite body; and Keane saw that the white skin was still reddened by embracing arms, caught the sharp rise and fall of her blue veined breasts as they half parted the rumpled negligee.

Even if he had not heard he would have known that Ardis Gray had paid in advance for his life—for a life that the captain could not save, even if he wished.

Keane, leaving the window, heard Leblanc trying to soothe her sudden outburst of sobbing. And as he at last found an unbarred door that silently yielded to his touch, Keane was glad that he had lost Leblanc's pistol while escaping. It would be better to overpower him, then

kick him to death . . . not too rapidly. . .

Better yet . . . he dislodged the door bolt from its guides. The heavy iron sat well in his eager hand.

But he remembered his one friend, hot tempered Schwartz who had come to help instead of running from the fatal encounter, and Keane's heart sank. He couldn't kill the captain. He had to make him write an order for Schwartz to be brought to Leblanc's quarters, perhaps extort a written statement to exonerate Schwartz.

His head was reeling as he tried to devise the details. A dozen hopeless, dangerous schemes flashed through his mind; and life suddenly had become sweet, now that there was a chance of escaping with Ardis.

A STIRRING in an alcove warned him, but not in time. He had been too intent on listening to Leblanc and Ardis, in the room at the end of the passageway. He whirled, swinging his bludgeon, but it did not check the yell.

"*Ya sahib!*"

The bolt crunched home; and in the half gloom, Keane saw it was a man in uniform who lay sluddering in a pool of blood and brains: a *chasseur d'Afrique*, one of the Algerian troops on duty in Damascus, and probably Leblanc's chauffeur.

Keane reached the door as it slammed open. The light from within caught him squarely in the face; and as he lunged, Leblanc recognized him. Keane's voice betrayed his disguise.

Ardis screamed, leaped to her feet, staring wide eyed at the encounter. Keane dropped his gory bludgeon, lest he forget himself and kill Leblanc.

"You're going to do more than save my life, you—!" he growled, driving home before the astonished captain could



raise a hand. "Better wait till I'm in jail!"

Then Ardis recognized him. The edges of her disarrayed negligee dropped from her hand as she watched Leblanc double up before Keane's vengeful fist, and thud to the tiles, struggling for breath.

"Art! My God—I thought—he told me—"

"I heard him," gasped Keane, before he could check his words.

The color started from her cheeks and crept down to her breasts; then her lovely face froze, and she became paper white.

"I'm sorry—damn it—" He forgot his enemy, and moved toward her; but Ardis was quicker.

He realized that she was shocked; then, too late, he saw why she had evaded his embrace. Leblanc's belt and sabre and pistol hung from a chair. Before Keane could check her, Ardis had the automatic.

He never knew just what she said to the man who was trying to regain his feet. He only heard the remorseless chattering of the pistol, and saw Leblanc's expression change, thrice in as many instants.

He slumped, clutching his riddled stomach. Ardis dropped the half emptied pistol. Keane caught her as she swayed, and carried her back to the couch which she had left to avenge Leblanc's trickery.

"Quick!" he urged, as a swallow of brandy revived her, "did anyone know he was coming out here?"

"I don't know, but he drove a government car—"

Not a chance now to save Schwartz; but if Keane could get a few tins of gasoline, there was a chance to drive across the desert, following the six hundred

mile route of the Damascus-Baghdad bus line.

"You killed more than one man," muttered Keane, eyeing the riddled captain. Then he explained, and Ardis' face became tense as she understood.

"But you can't save Schwartz now," she protested. "I couldn't help it—when I realized you'd heard it all—but I did try to find you. Even before Gray died, I left the States to tell you how rotten I felt, letting you accept his terms. He wasn't man enough to shoot you, so he used me to condemn you to a living death in the Legion.

"But I might have suspected Leblanc—"

Her intercepted letters, and a picture enclosed in one, had given Leblanc both the story and a desire that was intensified when he met Ardis in Damascus. He had convinced her that Keane was in the guard house and could receive no visitors; and then the frame up, when she had resisted Leblanc's advances.

"I'll get some gasoline, somehow," Keane finally said.

The dead, and what he had overheard at the window made the meeting a strain. Somehow, it now seemed that they were two entirely different persons whose only common point was an odd coincidence in familiar names.

"Couldn't I get the gas?" she ventured.

"You? Driving a government car?"

**H**E PLUNGED through the garden, scaled the wall, and paused long enough to run the conspicuous car into a dark lane. The tank was almost full. Then he headed for Damascus on foot.

He needed at least another twenty gallons of gas; but he was thinking mainly of Schwartz, who was to have accompanied him over the hill. He could



"Here, take this," she said. "Captain Leblanc's money—and good luck!"

get fuel—and that made his decision more difficult.

He might the following day, disguised as a peddler, venture into the legion barracks; he might even get to the sentries posted at the guardhouse; but smuggling a file or saw blade to Schwartz would take days. And in the meanwhile, Captain Leblanc would be missed, and traced to Ardis' villa.

Whatever there was to do had to be done at once.

Suddenly it came to him, and his laugh was like a sabre hissing from a scabbard. He was thinking of the dead who hung from the archway. . .

In the Christian quarter he found an all night shop. There he bought a young, freshly butchered pig—an unclean beast no Moslem would touch. He bound it to his back, then scaled the wall, and worked his way toward the executioner's arch in the half ruined section that still skirted the square.

The sentries on duty were fellow soldiers, but Schwartz was his friend, and those dangling corpses were tools. He wrenched a loose block of masonry from its bed, aimed carefully, and dropped it.

The crunching sound was no prettier than the *chunk* that followed. The other sentry, startled by the clatter of the fallen soldier's Lebel, jerked about, rifle at the ready. No enemy was in sight. By the dim glow of a distant street lamp, he saw the block of stone, thought he understood, and stepped clear of the arch—

But not clear of the dark form that swooped down from its crown. He cried out in superstitious terror, but that was throttled in his throat. The butt of his own rifle finished it.

Keane moved swiftly, unslinging the pig he had lashed to his shoulders. He split it with a bayonet stroke, then tied

a half to each of the two who dangled in the breeze as an example and a warning to native troublemakers. Agitators, the military governor called them, but in the eyes of the muttering natives, they were martyrs, Moslem saints.

His next move came a moment earlier than he expected. In his haste, he had lost track of time when the sentries on duty would be relieved; and the new guard was filing out of a cross alley, bayonets a gleam.

His trick was exposed before it had a chance to work. There was but one move, and he made it. He snatched a Lebel and blazed away, raking the angle of the square with a withering fire. As he flung aside the emptied rifle to snatch another, the new guard took cover. The corporal's whistle shrilled, then a ripping blast of musketry swept the arch.

Keane, shooting from cover, emptied the second gun; and by then muttering Damascus came to life. His rapid fire had made it sound like a general uprising, and though most of his slugs had ricocheted harmlessly from the flagstones, the surprised guard could not realize that one man had laid the barrage.

That gave Keane the instant he needed. He bounded from cover, his dark robes making him a treacherous target. Three leaps, and he was beyond the arch and the lead that raked it.

"Look, O True Believers!" he roared in Arabic, dashing toward the crowd that was heading toward the disturbance. "The infidels have desecrated the dead! They defiled them with the flesh of a pig! I slew two of the dogs with my bare hands—"

"Wallah, we'll slay the rest! There is no God but Allah! Death to the infidels! Back, brothers—watch it—here they come—kill them! Paradise is in the

shadow of spears! We die for Allah and the Prophet!"

IT BECAME a roaring madhouse before the ambushed guard realized that no more fire came from the archway. The howling rabble, though retreating as the guard charged, had caught glimpses of something whitish hanging from the feet of the dangling criminals. They not could see what it was, but a holy man had called it pork. That sufficed; that, and the hatred that had smouldered for months.

Earthenware pots and blocks of masonry rained down from the tops of the houses overlooking the street. Escaping rioters doubled back through uncharted alleys and assailed the guard from the rear; and before the alarm reached headquarters, half the city was in revolt.

That the dead had been defiled with unclean pork flashed from lip to lip like fire in a fuse.

"This way, true believers!" shouted a tall, thin faced man in a voice that rang clearly over the roar of many throats. "This way—there are others in prison—others who will be barred from paradise because their bodies were defiled with unclean meat!"

Tall flames were rising in sections of the city. Machine guns were sputtering. Bugles brayed the call to arms. And then heavy detonations at intervals drowned the uproar. The artillery was shelling the native quarter; but the suddenness of the fanatical outburst had caught the troops off guard.

It would have happened sooner or later; it had been brewing; and Keane had no more than named the time for smouldering vengeance. Nor did he stop to think what it was costing to save

the life of one man; he had but one thought—

"This way, O Faithful! To the guard house!"

He was armed now, and so were many of the mob. Contraband weapons, ancient and modern, had sprouted from concealment; pistols, sabres, muzzle loading *jesails*, stolen Lebel's and Mausers. Renegade looters, to whom religious fanaticism was only a chance to come from cover, surged forth to slay and plunder.

But the fire of holy war blazed high, and men who knew that bullets would that night blast them into a paradise of smiling girls followed Keane to a gutted building that adjoined the guard house.

Someone was coming forward with stolen grenades to heap up and blow a hole into the wall that was blank, save for a few small, barred windows. And then Keane's heart sank. From his vantage point, he could view the courtyard beyond. In desperation, the commandant was releasing and arming the military prisoners.

"Anyhow," he muttered, no longer hearing the uncounted cries of "Allah!" "Schwartz won't be shot for striking an officer."

There was a droning overhead. Planes were circling over the city. Great jets of flame marked the bursting of the bombs they dropped.

Keane, rousing himself from that moment of despair, climbed down to a cornice, poised himself, leaped across the narrow alley and toward the roof of the ancient guardhouse. He made it—and then the world became a vast roar of rushing flame and whining fragments, and wind that smote him like a hammer.

A bomb had landed in the alley, at the further corner of the guardhouse.

(Continued on page 123)

# MARRIAGE



While the women fought, Rhodes felt the swish of something descending on his head.

*The girl is a believer in Maxie's magic preparations, and though Rhodes is a doubter, he learns that out of Maxie's shop can come tropical romance and sudden death*

**M**AXIE'S Magic Manhood Moss, boiled in water until it made a thick and evil-tasting brew, was guaranteed to instill red-blooded virility and unprecedented ardor into the most anæmic man in all the West Indies. Concentrated Extract of Cræsus Shin-bone, used to flavor herb soup drunk out of a gourd in the dark of the moon, would teach him how to get rich. Shredded Beard of King Solomon, rubbed assiduously into the scalp and the swellings back of the ears with appropriate incantations, would fill him with wisdom so that he might keep clear of de-

signing women who were unworthy of him and devote all his energies to the one whose love was true.

All these things the slim girl with the straight black hair and the gold-and-ivory skin purchased from Maxie the Magic Man, whose address had been the Bronx before New York's loss became San Juan's gain. Then she bought a phial of Irresistable Lure Lotion, imported direct from Harlem, which would envelope the woman who used it in an aura of scent to which no mere male could remain indifferent longer than a few seconds.

# for MURDER

By C. A. M. DONNE

Snarling like a tigress,  
she had sprung at the  
intruder.





Maxie smiled thinly as he fingered the silver coins the girl stacked on the counter, so that his blue jowls were creased wolfishly. "That's right, Maria," he said. "If you lose one, go after another. Sooner or later you're bound to get a good husband with Magic Max helping you." He winked at Matt Rhodes, waiting at the counter to get a loan. Maxie Werner sometimes supplied small amounts of cash to his best friends for as little as fifty per cent interest a month. Between checks from the Amalgamated News Service, for which he was correspondent in Puerto Rico, the young man occasionally found such generosity convenient.

The girl looked at Maxie with dark, liquid eyes that could dissolve in tears or burst into flame in a split second. "If he is to be my husband," she said scornfully in the careful English she had learned at the convent school, "he must never run away to marry an old American woman who stays drunk day and night, just because she is rich."

"Forget about Jarvis," Max advised. "He ain't no good, anyway."

"Forget him?" cried Maria, in sudden anger. "Perhaps I shall kill him yet—and his old hag of a wife, too!"

Rhodes' eyebrows lifted as he surveyed the impassioned creature. Infuriated, she might easily murder a man or a woman, he decided—but in gentler moods she would be charming. Beneath her thin white dress the firm lines of her lithe body were exquisite. Her small breasts, untrammelled by any brassiere, thrust outward against the light fabric. Her face was extraordinarily pretty, with soft mouth and eyes and proud nose and chin. She was eighteen or nineteen, he guessed, and her hot blood was pure Castilian, although her ancestors had

probably been in the islands for many generations.

Watching the smooth motion of her flaring hips as she turned to walk into the blinding sunlight, he was faintly envious of the man for whom she had bought the love philtre, whoever he might be.

AT THE door the girl nearly collided with a tall man of thirty or thirty-five, who wore a white suit and a tropical helmet with an air of swagger. He halted on his way into the shop, swept the helmet from his head and said, "Hello, my dear!"

Maria's chin went up and her eyes flashed. She would have pushed past the man, but he stepped in front of her, smiling at her fondly. He was Sylvester Jarvis, who lived at the Casa Ramirez by his wits, having fled the States to escape the consequences of some minor villainy. The previous day he had married Margaret Aiken, the well-to-do but unlovely grass-widow from Chicago, who also was in Puerto Rico to avoid scandal—and that same evening he had won the last of Rhodes' money at poker, while his bride celebrated her latest nuptials by getting sloppily drunk at the bar.

Jarvis spoke swiftly and softly to Maria, but his voice carried to Rhodes. "Don't be that way, baby," he said. "You know I hate her—but I need her money. I can come down to see you just the same, can't I?"

A serpent striking could not have been swifter. The girl's tiny hand darted to her bosom, snatched a thin stiletto from its sheath between her breasts. Jarvis leaped back, screaming, a spot of red showing suddenly upon the white of his coat from a pin-prick wound in the left shoulder. Before Maria could strike again Rhodes held her.

Her body writhed against the newspaper man, and even though it took all his strength to restrain her, he was happily conscious of her enticements. His right hand secured the dagger, forcing her tight fingers to relinquish its hilt; his left, encircling her chest, was brushed by a soft breast that throbbed with the racing of her blood. He was sorry when she ceased struggling abruptly.

Vincenzo, the Puerto Rican youth who helped Maxie sell charms and incantations and snake-oil panaceas to the superstitious natives of San Juan, came hurrying out of the back room, his handsome face marred by a black scowl.

"You would do better," he snarled at Rhodes, "to take her stiletto and drive it yourself into the yellow heart of Señor Jarvis! He should die for the things he has done to Señorita Morales!"

Maxie, who had shown no alarm throughout the scene, snickered. He said: "Vincenzo wishes she'd try out some love philtres on him!" He pretended not to notice that the youth's body stiffened and his scowl became positively murderous.

"We'll drop the subject," said Rhodes sharply. "Señorita, I don't blame you for what you tried to do, but this isn't the time or place for it—and you'd get your hands and dress all dirty." He released her, and she walked swiftly from the shop without a backward glance, forgetting her purchases, which she had dropped. "Maxie," Rhodes continued, "I came here to get fifty dollars."

"Twenty-five," Maxie said. "That's all you can afford to borrow at my interest rate."

"Forty, then."

"I'll give you thirty," Maxie said.

"You pay me forty-five the day your check comes. You been gambling again?"

Rhodes nodded at the white-faced Jarvis, who was too frightened to speak. "Those birds at the Casa Ramirez are sharks at poker."

"You got to have brains to win," remarked Maxie, shaking his head dubiously. "Now, if it was craps, I could give you a set of Maxie's Enchanted Devil-Dice—"

"But it isn't craps."

Maxie went into the back room to unearth money from some secret place. He returned presently with three ten-dollar bills and a note for Rhodes to sign.

"And if you ain't got brains," he said, handing Rhodes a metal disc three inches in diameter, "you might as well have some luck. This is guaranteed. It's got magic words on it."

The disc had a horseshoe design and the phrase "Good Luck," engraved upon it. Rhodes hung the cord to which it was attached around his neck, so that it hung out of sight beneath the open collar of his shirt. "I'll try anything that's guaranteed," he said.

**H**E PICKED up Maria's packages and the stiletto and went out into the dusty street. He saw her some distance away, walking slowly along the flagstone sidewalk beneath the spaced palms, and hurried after her. The youthful Vincenzo came out in front of the shop and stood looking after him, still frowning.

"Señorita Morales," Rhodes said, lifting his hat as he drew near to her. "You forgot these."

She looked at him, smiling as though no thought of murder had ever marred her serenity. "My name is Maria, if you wish—Señor Rhodes."

"Matt is mine, if you care for the name, Maria," he said.



She laughed, and as suddenly grew serious again. "You will carry those things for me?" she pleaded. "It is so hot!"

All together, they weighed perhaps six or eight ounces. Rhodes carried them with a will through the sizzling streets until she led him through a little passage into a courtyard where the sun was shut out and the air was cooled by a sparkling fountain. She put him in a canvas chair beside the fountain and ran into the house, to emerge in a short time with glasses in which ice tinkled pleasantly.

"You must refresh yourself after your walk," she said, raising her glass.

Rhodes enjoyed the sweet flavor of Virgin Islands rum as he sipped the drink, but no sooner did the first swallow hit his stomach than he began to suspect one of the ingredients must be molten fire. He looked at her sharply, but her face was so innocent that he put away his suspicions and tried another sip. This time he felt the jar of an explosion within him.

"Maria," he asked, "did you by any chance put dynamite in this drink?"

"No," she replied demurely. "Only a tiny bit of Maxie's Magic Manhood Moss, to see whether it is as efficacious as they say!"

"But—don't you know that it is apt to make me violent? Don't you realize that I may be tempted to—make love to you?"

Her eyes were inscrutable. "It may be," she said, "that it will not work."

**B**UT it did. It sent hot currents boiling through Rhodes' veins. It made him itch to touch the cool softness of Maria's small body, his lips yearn for her kisses.

Or maybe it was only the sight of her, stretched out in the deck chair at his

side, that inspired him. For it had been a long, long time since he had seen a girl as seductive.

He captured her hand in one of his. "You mustn't mind me," he told her. "I really can't help it, thanks to Maxie's magic."

"Mind it!" she cried, and there was something fierce in the way she spoke. "Why should I mind anything, since the man I trusted has betrayed me!"

"He's the kind that always betrays women," said Rhodes. "He'll betray his new wife, too—and I guess she'll deserve it."

"She is a hussy!" said the girl. "A slut!"

He nodded. "And a drunken bum, in the bargain."

They went into the house. It was cool and pleasantly dark after the glare of outdoors. Rhodes sat on a couch against one wall and drew her down beside him. He put his arms around her and kissed her lingeringly, and the sweetness of her—or maybe it was the mixture of Maxie's Magic Manhood Moss and Irresistable Lure Lotion, with which she had anointed herself—made him mad for her. His eyes roved feverishly over her breasts, her hips and the smooth slope of her thighs; his embrace tightened ardently and she responded with eager abandon. . . .

**T**HE sound of footsteps on the stones of the court aroused them. Rhodes smoothed his rumpled hair quickly and peered through a narrow window. The sun was nearly gone and the dim, fleeting twilight of the tropics filled the courtyard. He saw Margaret Aiken—Margaret Jarvis, she was now—standing at the fountain, glaring furiously about her. The middle-aged woman's face was flushed and she had a disheveled, drunk-

an appearance. In her hand she held a small revolver.

"Sylvester!" she called sharply. She waited for an answer that was not forthcoming. "Oh, I know you're here, all right!" she shouted. "I've been told about your affair with this cheap town girl! I'm here to have it out with the both of you right now!" She staggered a step or two toward the doorway.

In the light of the match he saw her. It was Maria!



Maria stirred swiftly beside Rhodes. He put his hand on her chest to keep her from rising.

"Let me up!" Maria gasped. "I shall kill her for what she called me!"

"No!" he whispered. "That would ruin everything!"

The sound of their voices must have reached the drunken woman. "So you're trying to hide!" she cried. She moved toward the door with determination, holding the gun in front of her, as if prepared to fire.

With a sudden twist Maria eluded Rhodes and sprang to her feet. The stiletto he had taken from her in the shop lay on the table. She snatched it up. He gripped her wrist with both hands and tried to take it from her.

The other woman was in the room now. In the dusk she must have thought Rhodes was her husband. "You beast!" she said. "I'll give you what you deserve!" She pulled the trigger of the revolver, and flame spurted from its muzzle and Rhodes felt a twinge of pain in his left shoulder.

Rhodes had the stiletto now, but he had lost Maria. Snarling like a tigress, she had wrenched herself free and had sprung at the intruder with hands clenched. Swearing beneath his breath, Rhodes was about to follow her and seize her again, for her own safety, when he heard a movement at his back. He whirled, holding the dagger ready to strike.

A tall shape loomed dimly before his eyes. Something swished through the air toward him. He tried to dodge, but the thing crashed against his temple and bright lights danced inside his brain. He felt himself falling down, down into pitch blackness. . . .

CONSCIOUSNESS returned very slowly. Rhodes opened aching eyes and found that night had fallen and darkness was all about him. He moved his limbs experimently and discovered that his left arm was useless and his right hand gripped something hard and rounded and coated with some slippery, viscid fluid. He uncoiled his fingers from the thing and his hand dropped to a soft mound that felt slimy, too. With dawning horror he became aware that he was touching a woman's breast!

He got to his feet and groped in his pockets for matches, swaying dizzily. He struck a match on the paper folder from which it had been torn. He saw that his right arm, from finger-tips to elbow, was coated with blood!

In front of him, on the floor, lay the body of a woman—the woman who had come there to seek her husband! Her clothing was only shredded rags. Blood drenched the upper part of her body and from beneath her left breast protruded the haft of a stiletto, around which Rhodes' fingers had been gripped.

He stared in awful fascination until the match burned down and licked viciously at his thumbnail, hissing as it came in contact with the thickening gore. He dropped it and groped until he found a wall switch and flooded the room with electric light. There was no one in the room save himself and the dead woman.

He ran through the house and found it empty. He wondered what had happened to Maria. A ghastly suspicion came into his mind.

Had the strange child planned that this would happen? Had she lured him there to play at love, knowing that her hated rival would come? Had she killed the American woman, then deliberately

framed him? Would the police arrive shortly, discover his fingerprints upon the bloody knife, and arrest him as the murderer?

He couldn't believe it—and yet he remembered that there is no length to which a Spaniard, man or woman, will not go in search of vengeance when cheated in love. . . .

Footsteps came hastily through the court. Rhodes snapped out the light and crouched beside the door. He had no weapon save the stiletto, which he could not bring himself to touch, and his bullet wound had crippled him, but he was resolved to fight nevertheless against any attempt to capture him until he had had a chance to go into this thing further.

A voice at the door called softly: "Rhodes!"

He recognized it as Maxie's voice, and decided to take a chance. He stepped into the half-light of the doorway and was relieved to see that the dealer in pseudo-magic was alone.

"What's up?" he asked.

"You've got to scram!" Maxie said.

"Why?"

The other's tone was sarcastic. "Maybe you'd rather spend your life in the oldest, dirtiest prison in the West Indies," he said, "—or hang!"

"But I haven't done a thing, Maxie!"

"Maybe not," he replied. "Maybe the girl done it. I don't know. But I do know that somebody sent word to the cops not ten minutes ago that you killed a woman here, and that, slow as they are, they'll be along any second. If you want, I can get you away."

"Let's go!" Rhodes said, realizing that this was not the time for argument. He followed the lean merchant through the passage into the street, into another pas-

sage and through a maze of black, unfrequented lanes that led toward the harbor. On the way Maxie spoke in jerky whispers.

"There's a freighter in," he said. "The *Mardi-Gras*. I know the skipper, and he'll take you to New Orleans." He thrust a roll of bills into Rhodes' hand. "Here's a hundred bucks. Pay me back when you get ready. There's a note with it, telling the skipper who you are."

THEY paused in the shadow of a warehouse at the end of the wharf. At the end of the pier the dark hull and superstructure of a ship rose out of the water. "That's her," said Maxie. "Just slip aboard and ask for Captain Carlson."

"Maxie," said Rhodes, holding out his hand, "you're a pal!"

"Forget it!" said Maxie. "Maybe you can do as much for me some day." He melted swiftly into the shadows.

Rhodes waited until he was certain Maxie was out of sight. Then he counted the money and read the note that was wrapped with it. The note was typewritten and said simply: "This is the guy."

The newspaperman turned away. Avoiding the infrequent street lamps of San Juan's waterfront, he headed back the way he had come. Once the approach of a group of men sent him deep into the shadow of a building, and as the men passed he saw that they wore the khaki uniforms of the police. They were going toward the pier he had just quitted.

He had never intended to run away. Now he was glad he had not lingered near the freighter. To have been caught there would have strengthened the case against him immeasurably.

**T**HERE were two persons he wanted to check on. Vincenzo, in Maxie's shop, loved Maria. If he had known or suspected that Rhodes had gone to her house, he might not be above trying to frame him for a murder. The dim form he had seen—the form of the man who had bludgeoned him into insensibility—had been tall and slender, as was Vincenzo.

And Jarvis would bear watching. He did not love the woman he had married, but cared only for her money. If she were dead, the money would be his. Jarvis, too, had seemed fond of Maria—had probably been her secret lover for a long time.

As for the girl—it was entirely within the realm of possibility that she had stabbed Margaret Jarvis. It would have been in keeping with her character. Yet he could not make himself think that she would have tried to make it appear that it had been the work of the man she had so recently held in her arms. He preferred to think that she had done it to protect him from the woman's bullets.

A roundabout route through alleys and those narrow passages between houses which are a part of the picturesqueness of San Juan brought Rhodes to the narrow space in the rear of Maxie's store. There were lights showing through the windows, but the back door was closed and he could hear no sound.

A cellar window opened to his touch, however, and he let himself through it. He had no definite plan, but he thought that if he could climb the stairs to the door that led into the shop he might overhear something that would help him, or might have an opportunity to seize Vincenzo and try to force a confession from him.

He took three steps through the blackness of the cellar and then stumbled over

something that lay upon the earthen floor. The thing moaned softly.

Rhodes dropped to his knees and ran his hands over the obstruction. His fingers brushed small breasts, quivering limbs, a face with the mouth bandaged. He struck a match and looked into the tearful face of Maria, whose hands and feet were bound tightly with rope.

When he had torn the gag from her mouth she said: "Madre de Dios! I was mad with fear that you had been arrested for what I had done!"

He was slashing the ropes that held her with his pocket knife. He stopped suddenly. "What you had done!"

"Certainly," she said. "When she shot you, I took the knife from you and stabbed her. It was no more than she deserved, the slut! But I never intended that you should be blamed."

"Then how—"

"Ah," she said sadly, "it was because he loved me so much. He struck me, so that I knew nothing. When I awakened he had tied me as you see, and he had made it seem as though you had killed her. I could not say or do anything. He carried me here. He meant to keep me a prisoner until you had been sent to prison or executed. But I should have told the truth when I was free, whether you were dead or alive, because I am not ashamed!"

"Then it was—Jarvis?"

"No!" Her voice was heavy with scorn. "It was Vincenzo! Did you think Jarvis would love me enough to take such a chance for my sake? He is not a man at all!"

"And I suppose you love Vincenzo?"

"Why not? I love Vincenzo and I love you, too, because you have both been good to me. But I shall probably marry Vincenzo, because he is of my race and temperament—although I should be sor-



Under threat of the gun he wrote his confession of murder.

ry not to see you again. That is—I shall marry Vincenzo if I am not sent to prison."

Rhodes laughed. Her psychology amused him. He bent and kissed her. Of course she would marry Vincenzo! It would be the best thing for both of them. But she should not go to jail. . . .

**S**OMETHING whizzed past his ear, so close that he could feel the breeze of its passage. From the steps that led



into the shop a man launched himself in a desperate spring. His body struck Rhodes, knocking him flat. The man rolled away from him with a muttered curse, and the voice was Vincenzo's.

Rhodes scrambled to his feet. In a moment the Spanish youth rushed at him, and the newspaperman met him squarely. Vincenzo had another knife, and the blade of it sliced through Rhodes' sleeve, cutting a thin gash in his right arm.

Rhodes swung his fists blindly in the darkness. They battered against a face. Vincenzo was staggering backward, too groggy to use a knife a second time. Rhodes groped with his left hand, located the youth's chin and brought his right fist up from his hip. His knuckles smashed against bone. Vincenzo dropped limply to the floor.

"Come quietly," Rhodes said, helping Maria to rise. "We'll get out of here before there's more trouble. We'll see whether we can figure out a way to keep both of us out of jail."

They tiptoed up the steps. Maxie's shop was dark, but a crack of light showed under the door to the rear room, and there was the low murmur of two voices.

Rhodes put his ear against the door. He heard Maxie saying: "They ought to have him now. It's been half an hour since I tipped off the police to the ship he was on. I hope they bring back my hundred bucks!"

"I still think it would have been better if the girl had had to take the blame," said another voice, that Rhodes recognized as belonging to Jarvis. "Under the circumstances, it would be more logical for her to have done the killing."

"Nuts!" Maxie retorted. "She would have talked too much and made people suspicious. Now she won't dare open

her mouth, nor will Vincenzo. As it is, Matt Rhodes has practically confessed by trying to run away. You know what the courts are like here—they'll railroad him right to the gallows, what with fingerprints and everything. I'll fix the judge with a hundred or so of the money I'll get out of it."

"Yeah," said Jarvis with bitterness. "The money *you'll* get! There won't be much left for me. I doubt if she's got thirty-five thousand dollars altogether, and you say you've got to have twenty-five of it!"

"Don't be dumb, Jarvis! Look at the money you owe me already. Haven't I kept you going for over a year, waiting for something like this? Didn't I send your blushing bride to Maria's house, knowing there'd be a quarrel and that Maria would kill her? If it wasn't for me, you'd have nothing but a lot of debts—and maybe a rope around your neck if I decided to talk."

"All right! All right!" Jarvis was nervous. "I'm not squawking. Only—" There was the sound of a quick movement. "Only, if I kill you, I won't have to give you a dime!" There was a sudden triumph in his voice.

After a half-minute of silence Maxie said softly: "Put down that gun, you fool!"

Jarvis laughed. "Not till I've done—*this!*"

A SHOT crashed out. While the thunder of it still rang in his ears, Rhodes flung the door open and sprang into the room. He was upon Jarvis before the latter could turn, had grabbed the smoking revolver and had smashed the killer into a corner.

Maxie had fallen out of the chair in front of his desk, and lay sprawled on the floor. His sightless eyes stared vacantly

at the ceiling. Between them was a hole big enough for a man to poke his finger in.

"Sit down at the desk, Jarvis!" Rhodes rasped. "I want you to write a confession."

"Good God!" the man pleaded, his face a fish-belly white. "Don't make me do that! Let me get away. He was a rat!"

"And so are you," Rhodes said. "Sit down or I'll put a bullet in your belly!" He thrust the gun forward menacingly, and Jarvis obeyed, trembling.

"Take that pen and that pad of paper," Rhodes commanded. "Write: 'I killed Maxie Werner because we quarreled about how much of my wife's money I was to give him for arranging to have her murdered.'"

The pen scratched across the paper, wrote the damning words and paused.

"Now," Rhodes continued, "write: 'Werner and I were solely responsible for the murder of my wife Margaret. I stabbed her to death.'"

"But I didn't!" Jarvis said, his face twisted. "I swear to God I didn't! I won't write that!"

"They can only hang you once," Rhodes said, "and I want you to clear the girl who was your innocent tool. However, if you'd rather, you can say: 'Maxie stabbed her to death.'"

Again the pen scratched.

"Finish it up," Rhodes ordered, "by writing: 'After she was dead, Maxie Werner lured Matt Rhodes to the place of the murder, knocked him unconscious with a blackjack, and made it appear that he had done the stabbing.'"

Jarvis finished the confession, signed his name at the bottom of the sheet, then buried his face in his hands. Rhodes picked up the paper, said "Thanks!" and

laid the revolver on the desk near the killer's elbow. He left the room.

At the door Vincenzo and Maria stood, their arms around each other. The youth had retrieved one of his knives. The lust to kill was in his eyes, but this time it was not directed towards Rhodes. "Would it not be better," he asked, "to kill him, so that he cannot say the confession was forced?"

"No," replied Rhodes. "It won't be necessary." He led them outside.

**I**N THE street in front of the weirdly-equipped, malodorous shop in which Maxie had capitalized on the age-old fears and hopes of superstitious men and women, the three paused, as if waiting for something.

"I heard Maxie and Jarvis planning to send that woman to Maria's house," Vincenzo said. "I went there to keep her from being killed by Maria. I wouldn't have tried to make trouble for you, except that when I found you there I thought perhaps you had been making love to her."

"I'm surprised at you!" Rhodes said. "Maria is a good girl and will make you a good wife. She would not permit anybody but you to make love to her, I'm sure!"

He had difficulty in restraining a smile as he saw a warm blush creep into her cheeks, tinting them a dull red in the faint light of a street lamp.

"All I ask," he continued slyly, "is that you name one of your children after me—perhaps the very first one. Rhodes, if it's a boy, and Rhoda, if it's a girl."

"Certainly—" Vincenzo began, then stopped. From the room behind the shop had come the roar of another shot. Rhodes nodded as though he had expected it.

(Continued on page 110)



# LUST TO

*In the insane carnage of red revolution Collins goes stark, staring mad. It is a woman of easy virtue who saves him, saves him for inscrutable sinister purposes of her own. . . .*



"Take his feet, fool!" she cried.  
"He isn't dead."

**C**OLLINS leaned against a ruined doorway and retched in the early Spanish dawn. His stomach was a ball of ice bouncing viciously, his nerves hot wires stretched taut, trembling, screaming. With shaking fingers he lifted the black velvet patch that covered the place where his right eye had once

been, dabbed weakly at the empty socket. Ken Collins, soldier of fortune, had left that eye in the fastnesses of the Atlas ranges as the result of a comrade's desertion, but it still ached when desolation such as this came into being.

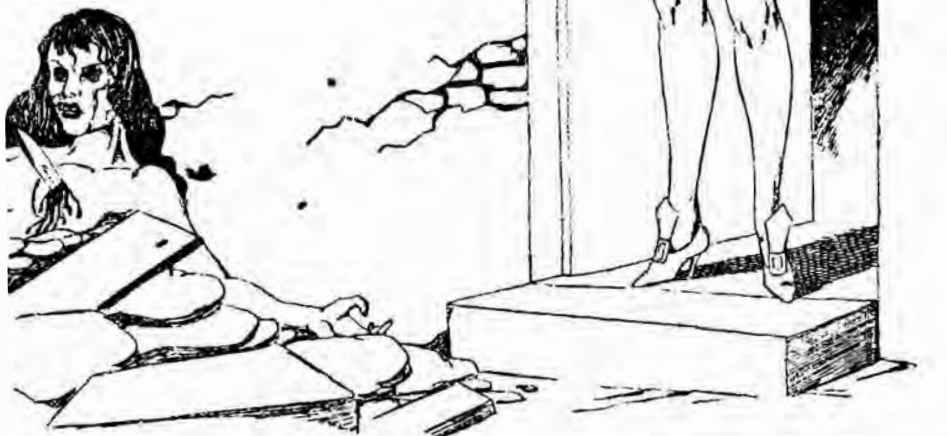
The little plaza of the ruined Spanish town was a shambles. Awnings hung in

# KILL

By JOSE VACA

taunting, fingerlike tatters from twisted supports, shattered glass, bricks and mortar littered the streets. Every building bore its share of pockmarks, jagged bullet holes resulting from the merciless street fighting of the last two days.

There were humans in that shattered square, but the one that breathed, the only one that would ever awaken to meet the cold magic of Spanish dawn was Collins, the Loyalist aviator, whose skill was for sale to the highest bidder, whose profession was death and destruction.



Now he leaned against the doorway and retched, his whipcord uniform and smart boots the only moving spot of color.

Except for the vultures.

They plodded like fat ducks from one delectable feast to another, their evil eyes glazed from the sating, their red necks like rings of blood on scrawny, dirty fingers.

Against the far wall lay the corpses of three boys, staring upward at the gray sky, faces twisted, contorted by the last

pangs of life. But the black holes that peered owlishly into the dawn were merely empty sockets. The vultures had seen to that.

**I**N A doorway across the street the brown, abused body of a young woman half lay, half sat. Clothes had been ripped from her. A bayonet still clung in the hideous wound between two cold breasts, the butt of the heavy rifle causing the body to sit half erect. *Rigor*

*mortis* had set in long ago. The nude corpse swayed grotesquely.

Collins raised the canteen that hung at his side, gulped once, twice. The *cognac* was like water in his dry throat, but the alcohol warmed the icy coldness of his stomach. Collins' little car was parked a street away; he had driven in from the air field in the grey light to view the desolation of the town. He was morbidly fascinated, had been growing more and more so through the days of the vicious revolution.

As a matter of fact Collins was tired of slaughter, tired of the war that had filled his life since the days of the Great Push. But he didn't know it. He knew only that his nerves were on edge, that the stench of death, the sight of death sickened him, yet fascinated him irresistibly. He turned slowly away, trying not to see the mutilated corpses, the torn faces, the gorging vultures.

Something squeaked beneath his very feet. The blood drained from his face. A giant rat crouched away from him, beady eyes venomous, sharp teeth gleaming whitely although its mouth was filled with a great strip of purple flesh torn from a corpse.

Collins rocked with laughter and as the rat turned and hurdled carrion, drew his heavy automatic and shot the clip empty. The rat exploded, a surprised vulture *awked* even as its head flew from its body. Another tried to waddle away, too gorged to fly, and met fitting death instead of escape.

Trembling, Collins reloaded, the sweat dripping off his nose, his chin, his nervous fingers refusing to answer the instructions of his brain. He had barely gotten the clip home, and was turning to go, when a car roared into the plaza, bumped two corpses and came to a stop.

Two men leaped from the front seat,

men in civilian clothes, clutching automatic rifles. A third leaped from the rear, a man in uniform, an automatic in his hand. To Collins' hysterical brain they were simply something more at which to shoot. His first shot caught one of the civilians between the eyes; his automatic rifle clattered to the cobblestones.

The little man in uniform leaped shrieking into the tonneau of the car: the second civilian raised his weapon.

"Kill, kill," screamed Collins. "Blood! Death you wanted, damn you! Death!"

The automatic rifle clattered only a short burst, for the user sprawled to the pavement. Unscathed Collins leaped forward, Lueger still blazing. The little officer in the tonneau of the car crouched, leveled his own gun across the door.

A corpse saved Collins' life, for as the man fired pointblank Collins stumbled, went to his knees. Coming up he threw his emptied gun in the officer's face, sprang into the tonneau and gripped a throat with sinewy fingers.

"Kill, kill," he screamed. His teeth closed on flesh. The man beneath him screamed as those relentless fingers demanded and received their toll.

ONLY when there was no movement beneath him did the crazed aviator release his victim. Stupidly he sat up, breathed deeply. The canteen again, a long drink. He spread his hands, gazed at iron fingers and giggled. His laugh was eerie, inane, the laughter of a demented one. Slaughter and horror had touched Collins' brain.

He looked down at the man in the floor of the car and for the first time the light of reason appeared in his one eye. He sprang up as if he had seen a ghost. "No! No!" he muttered. "*Christo!*"

The man who stared at him was

General Alfredo Gonzales, leader of the Loyalist troops in that sector. *Collins had killed his own superior officer.*

The wave of insanity swept over him again. He began to laugh. Slowly, he made his way across the square, still laughing, his demented mind rambling. "Kill me," he screamed, "they'll shoot me, torture me! I did it! I did it!"

Footsteps?

Blindly, blankly he ran, stumbling, falling to his knees, arising and running on. The black doorway of a large house. He missed it, hit the wall instead, fell back into the street and lay still beside the mutilated corpse of a girl of sixteen.

The sun was just peeping over the shattered rooftops. Collins' twisted strangely grotesque in the early morning sunshine.

For long moments there was silence in the square broken only by the squeaking rats. A red necked vulture circled low, lit on a rock, eyed Collins' still form. He lunged forward on six foot flapping wings, alighted on Collins' left boot. Collins twitched. The bird withdrew a few feet, paused to eye the recumbent man hungrily.

**A** WOMAN ran from the large house, a broken chair in her hand. She cursed the vulture, frightened it from its intended prey, knelt beside the unconscious American. She wore a tattered evening gown, black in contrast to the olive of her flesh. The skirt, rent and torn exposed the smoothness of a full fleshed thigh as she knelt, the rise and fall of olive breasts.

She called, "Come, Carlotta, it is the aviator, the one-eyed man of America. Help me, help me."

Another woman appeared in the bleak doorway, cautiously peering up and down the square before approaching.

Her solitary garment was a lacy *mantilla* that circled rounded shoulders, only half obscured trembling breasts and lyre-like hips. She leaned above the fallen man, said "*Madre de Dios*, Luisa, he has killed Gonzales! We dare not help him! Even now—"

"Take his feet, fool! We'll need him, we can use him. He isn't dead! Hurry!"

Scarcely had they disappeared with their sagging burden when a motorcycle shot into the plaza. The uniformed rider found the dead general, fled as if the devil pursued. But ten minutes later the place swarmed with Loyalist soldiers, enraged, blood thirsty, aching for revenge. Every ruin, every battered shop was searched. Trim Lieutenant Rosinante, a squad at his heels entered a certain black doorway to find a blonde woman calmly eating breakfast of hard bread and wine. The blonde woman's only covering was a black lace *mantilla*, which she carelessly let remain the way it was. Breasts quivered as her arms moved. She smiled lazily, said, "Good morning, lieutenant. You come early. You wish to see Carlotta, Luisa?"

The lieutenant allowed his hot eyes to rove over exposed charms. Gallantly he said, "Señorita, I will undoubtedly return tonight! But now we search for the killer of *El General Gonzales*." He launched into rapid Spanish describing the death of their leader. How one of the civilians accompanying him had only been wounded, how he had described the one eyed man in the aviator's uniform who was undoubtedly that Americano turned traitor. Wide eyed the blonde Carlotta listened, shrugged shapely shoulders and pouted.

"You soldiers! Adventures you have, adventures! And little Carlotta lies sleeping while all this happens! Share a drink with me, lieutenant, and tell me

you have caught the murderers when you come again tonight."

What could a gallant soldier do?

Behind the door, ear pressed to the wall, the woman, Luisa, sat tense and taut on a great Moorish chest. Her body ached, her breasts throbbled with the intensity of her fear and hope. For within the chest lay the six foot body of Ken Collins, soldier of fortune, whom this woman desired so greatly to save. Luisa had uses for an aviator, even though he was a little crazed, even though he had but one eye. She heard the lieutenant and his squad depart, leaped from the chest, threw back the lid. Her anxious fingers found a faint heartbeat in the great breast beneath her. She smiled contentedly.

**B**UT when the admiring lieutenant came that night he met not the alluring blonde, but the demure Luisa, radiant in a new dress that clung like a sheath to full hips, that exposed the upper slopes of olive breasts to admiring eyes. The lieutenant sat beside her on a divan, drank wine with her and boasted of his exploits.

These rebels, poof! They were nothing! These generals, Blanco, Mola and Cabenellas! Poof! The Loyalists, the Reds, would soon have them driven into the sea where fish would eat the carrion! Yes, war was cruel, but war was necessary to strong men! The *Señorita* Luisa was so sympathetic, so complimentary, that the pouter-pigeon lieutenant was quite enchanted. It was almost dawn when he took his departure, and the sloe eyed Luisa smiled grimly after him, pulled her disarrayed clothing about her body and went into another room.

A little later, following the lieutenant's orders, a soldier mounted guard at the door, for the *Señorita* Luisa was

quite annoyed by the constant searching parties of Loyalists who persisted in scouring the city for the one eyed killer of their leader.

**C**OLLINS lay for two weeks in a small alcove off the kitchen on a bed of soft blankets. He raved incessantly, sometimes so noisily that he must be restrained by force. His huge body grew thinner as jangled nerves prevented the regaining of his strength. His solitary eye was a headlight of madness. His beard grew black, ragged, and still the woman Luisa persisted in protecting him, shielding him from the men who searched.

He awakened that morning weak but sane, heard the two woman talking over him, but he did not open his eye because he was afraid; he did not know where he was.

He heard Carlotta, the blonde one, saying, "You are a fool, Luisa, to keep this one when it is so dangerous. What good can he possibly do you?"

Luisa said, "He is an aviator. Sometime he will recover his strength. I have him hand and foot because we witnessed the murder of Gonzales. Now do you see?"

"Even if he recovers, how can you bend him to your will? He'll run away!"

"Sssssh! There is someone in the front. Listen, Carlotta, I have a face and a body. This American is strong, a pillar of strength! We need him! Little fool, I will make him love me so much he cannot be driven away! Now go! If it is that Major Cervantes, bleed him. Get all the information you can get for our messenger will soon be here."

The door slammed, footsteps diminished. Slowly, carefully, Collins risked a look, peered through his eyelashes. For the first time he saw Luisa in all

her lush, dark beauty, for she wore only the briefest of tight panties, the thinnest of net brassieres. A transparent white *mantilla* covered her shoulders. He saw her kneel in the corner, saw the bowed,

tween her breasts deepened and darkened. She smoothed the hair back from his forehead tenderly. Collins stirred, sighed. The fragrance of her was in his nostrils. Presently she, too, left.



Mad with rage, he was choking the life from her body.

alluring line from full hip to thin ankle. She pried a stone, kneeled over a box. There came the rustle of paper, then the box was replaced, the stone set back in place.

The woman came closer to him. He peered down for a moment. Suddenly she leaned over so that the hollow be-

Weakly Collins rolled from the blanket, listened at the door. From the front of the rambling house came the sounds of merriment, the clink of glasses, of voices raised in song. The door was locked. He wobbled to the corner, knelt where the woman had knelt. It required a little time, for his fingers were weak, but presently when he went back to the bed his mouth was set determinedly.

So the woman thought she had him, did she, thought she could make him love her! Thought she could make him do as she pleased! Ha! *She and the blonde Carlotta were Rebel spies!* The little box held proof of that, held military information carefully written on thin, onionskin paper, other implicating letters! Why, he had only to notify the authorities and—

But how could Collins talk without meeting the same end? He lay there on the blanket and pondered. He remembered all too vividly the killing of the Loyalist commander; after that, nothing. His beard showed that this woman had sheltered him for many days. Perhaps he owed her something for that, even if she meant to use him later on. Weak as he was he almost grinned. Well, if he owed her something! Collins always paid his debts.

SHE came in later with wine and warm soup. To her surprise she found him sitting upright on the pallet.

Her eyes gleamed, she smiled, finger at her lips. "We must be very quiet, *señor*. You are better, eh?"

She pulled a low bench close to him, set the tray and its lighted candle on it. "You must eat," she whispered. "and grow strong again."

His one eye continued to gaze at her steadily, unwavering. If she wanted a game she could have it! She flushed a bit beneath his prying gaze, pulled the scanty negligee closer about her shoulders, accenting more than ever the flare of impudent breasts. His voice was a little hoarse, with just a trace of mockery.

"Why did you do it?"

Her arched brows questioned his question.

He groped for her hand. "Why did you take me in and shelter me, hide me here? Don't you know how dangerous for you it is with the whole town in fever heat? Why did you do it, *señorita*?"

She laughed softly but he saw the masked shrewdness in her eyes. To himself he thought, "No matter what she says she'll be lying. She's saving me for some dirty work of her own! I'll play up!"

He listened to her say softly, "Perhaps it is because I have a weakness for *Americano* aviators who are real fighters! Who can say?"

He laughed depreciatingly. "But it was dangerous, and *is* dangerous." He tapped his forehead sadly. "I have seen too much of war and fighting. I am sick here. At any moment I may become violent, may attract attention to you."

She giggled. "Luisa can calm you, *Señor* Collins. Many times in the past two weeks you have raved and—"

"Then it wasn't all a dream! I thought I dreamed of Margo that I loved in Marseilles, thought I held her in my arms, kissed her and—"

Now he, too, paused.

Softly she answered, half demurely. "It was no dream, *señor*. It was the only way I could still you. Now you must be quiet and eat."

Instead the lean fingers on the olive wrist pulled her closer, until she was beside him. His arm slid about her smooth shoulder, displaced the negligee, while his lips met tawny skin. Collins had meant the gesture sardonically, had meant it as part of his plan.

He had known many women in many lands, knew how to play on their emotions. But this woman was different. She fairly flamed beneath his caresses and the fire of her response leaped

quickly into his own sinews until his muscles ached, yearned to crush her, to hurt her. Her mouth was a well of passion, her body a torch of love. Tremulous breasts, quivering thighs; an undulant body and writhing, flaming lips.

Carlotta, the blonde stood in the doorway, called Luisa's name softly. There was no answer. Half fearfully the blonde muttered, "*Verdad*, no good will come of this!" For a moment longer she stood there then closed the door and went slowly back to where the Lieutenant Rosinante waited for Luisa, his light of love.

The waiting was long, that night.

**D**AY after day Collins grew stronger, but he allowed the two women to believe he was still a sick man. His brain was healed; he thought hard. He told himself that it was a game he played with the spy. Luisa, that he was making love her him with one end in mind—so that he could escape. But always the door was locked when he was alone; he was a prisoner as surely as if he lay in the dungeon the Loyalists wanted to put him in.

Collins was between the devil and the deep blue sea. The Rebels would like much to capture him, for he was hated and feared by them as a cruel and vicious bomber and machine gunner. And the Loyalists wanted him for the killing of Gonzales. Yes, his only chance lay in the woman. Two could play her game. He *must* make her care for him.

Often he wondered what she meant by "using him." What plan did she have in mind wherein he fitted? Spies are notoriously treacherous; he knew he couldn't trust her. She would use him, then turn him over to his enemies. So in order to thwart this he must make

her love him, make her unable to hurt him through love.

Collins began to think he was succeeding. She came to him every day, not only to nurse him, but to feel the strength of his arms, the caress of his lips. He came to know every soft curve and turn of her tawny body, every tender gesture, every burning sign of surrender. But he never succeeded in getting her to leave the door unlocked. Her excuse was that it was for his own protection.

Often he feigned sleep while the woman stood over him staring at his reposed features. And often he lifted the little tin box and read the accumulated contents. These always filled him with cold fear, for Luisa Gomez' papers proved her to be as ruthless as she was beautiful.

The game went on and eventually it was the woman who surprised the man. As she lay within the circle of his arms, soft body warm against his chest she murmured, "Will you be frightened if I leave your door unlocked tonight?"

He simply looked at her. Something within warned him that here it was, here was the way she meant to use him.

"You know," she went on coyly, "sometimes some of our—er—our visitors drink too much. They get crude and—"

She brushed his cheek with her lips.

"Tonight I am expecting a man who is angry with me. I have no one else to turn to but you. I will leave your door unlocked, leave you at watch. At midnight come to my door, listen. If there is no noise, go back to your room and soon I will be with you."

**A**LL evening he turned it over in his mind while the hands crept around on the face of the little watch she had



given him. He knew the door was open, knew he could escape, but what then? Would he be recognized by a Loyalist? And if not, where could he go, what could he do? Better to play a waiting game, to see what she had up her sleeve.

He waited nervously till nearly midnight before swinging the thick door open, before tiptoeing down the corridor. A line of light gleamed beneath the last door to his left. He paused to listen. Beyond lay the *patio*, beyond the *patio*, the street. Dangerous, yes, but no more dangerous than this woman! Then the shrill, hysterical voice of little Lieutenant Rosinante came from behind the door.

"Damn you, you siren, you Circe, I'm going to kill you! You lead me on and on, you force me to betray my trusts with your sweet promises, and always when the bill is to be paid you put me off! Now I kill you, I throttle that pretty throat—"

A woman's scream of agony, the sound of blows. Unable to help himself, acting on impulse, Collins opened the door. Dishevelled, mad with passionate rage, the lieutenant had the woman by the throat, had her bowed over the table. Clothes were tatters on her body, long scratches crossed her olive skin, her olive legs flailed fruitlessly at the torturer, soft flesh quivering.

Collins saw red. He took three hasty strides, his own fingers closed around the throat of Rosinante. Once again the killer lust awakened in him. Rosinante's eyes bulged, his tongue protruded, his face purpled. When his struggles ceased, Collins still held him suspended, shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat, his toes scarcely touching the floor. He cast him off like a rag doll. The Spaniard's skull crunched like an eggshell on the floor.

The woman crouched at the table,

breathing hard, breasts rising and falling. Collins glared at her, realizing he had ruined his chances to get away from her. She found a torn and tattered dress, got it about her shoulders without speaking.

A knock at the door, a voice, "Lieutenant, Lieutenant!"

The sentry! Collins laughed, picked up a chair, stepped aside, said, "*Pasa usted!*"

The door flew open, the chair arced, the sentry joined the lieutenant on the floor.

Collins grinned and his grin was not nice to see. "Now what?"

The woman moved quickly. "We've got to make Madrid, we'll be all right there. I have friends—"

He laughed. "I'd be recognized! There's not a chance! I've done your killing for you, now go on without me. I'll take my chances here."

"There's no time to argue," she snapped. "We'll take Rosinante's car and try it at least. But what of Carlotta?" She paused. "We can't wait for her. This is a dangerous game. She'll take care of herself."

She stooped over the corpse of Rosinante, extracted a sheaf of papers from his breast pocket and ran from the room. When she returned, she wore a capelike cloak, clutched something beneath it. Her eyes were hard as her hand moved to disclose a gun.

"You're driving me to Madrid, Ken Collins, whether you are afraid or not."

SHE sat grimly beside him in the car as he made the four hour run. The wind whipped the cloak aside, exposed the torn dress, revealed the olive breasts that rose and fell so alluringly. Bitterly Collins stepped down on the



"Share a drink with me, lieutenant, and tell me you have caught the murderers when you come again to-night."

accelerator, fought the car over the rough back roads.

"And after we get there, what?"

"You go your way, I go mine." There was a catch in her throat, she did not look at him. His voice was bitter.

"And all the past weeks have been but a game to you?" Again that laughter, a little mad. The car shot forward even faster.

They heard the sounds of rioting before they hit Madrid. At one place a

barricaded highway caused them to detour while a peasant shot at them from behind a tree with a highpowered rifle. The car rocked along in the grey dawn.

Ahead the sky was illuminated by burning buildings. They heard the sound of singing, the shouting of a mob. Collins wheeled, backed and turned in the narrow street, but before the car was completely turned the mob rounded the corner.

They were women! The dreaded, deadly women's battalion of the Loyalists called *La Passionaria*, who asked no quarter and gave none. In the flickering

torchlight, even as he fought the wheel of the car, Collins glimpsed the deadly rifles, the gleam of light on bare breasts, the fiery flare of passionate eyes glinting with death.

"*Quien es?*" screamed the leader of the Amazons but the car finally answered Collins hand, roared away. A blast of rifle fire shook the body. Luisa leaped in the seat, sank slowly down as if relaxing. Collins shouted, "Are you hit?" and whirled about the corner.

She was hit. It was blocks before Collins felt safe enough to open the cape, withdraw the bloodstained dress from her breasts and examine her wound. It was high on the gentle slope of an olive mound, ugly and bleeding. He stopped the blood, bound it tightly. She opened her eyes.

"I'll find a doctor somehow," he assured her hoarsely, but she shook her head.

"No, there isn't time. I'll be all right but you'll have to help me now. There'll be no parting. I need you more than ever!"

He glared at her, but his eyes softened at sight of her pain. She tried to raise her gun to cover him, but it dropped from her fingers.

Grimly he said, "I'll help you, not from fear of the gun, but because I love you, God help me. It means death for me in Madrid, and you know it, yet you forced me to bring you here. I'm a fool, Luisa, I know who you are, what you are, know you're ruthless, that my life means nothing to you. I've known all along you meant merely to use me. But I can't help myself, I love you."

Somehow his arms were about her. Somehow in spite of her wounded shoulder she was pressing closer and closer to him, trembling like a leaf in the wind, shaken by passion. "Perhaps," she mur-

mured, "it wasn't all play. Perhaps I meant it—a little."

Presently she straightened, pushed him away. "If you know about me," her voice grim, "you know I have work to do, work that I put ahead of everything else, even my love for you. Skirt the town to the north, Ken, if you love me. I've got to deliver my papers, my reports. Nothing else matters."

THE grey car skirted the town in the grey dawn. He took the age old highway leading south, veered into a sideroad as she directed and brought up before a ruined castle nestling in the hills. A road of broken cobblestones led to it, passed it. Half concealed in a small grove, behind the castle was a hangar. Before the hangar, a powerful plane squatted like a bird ready for flight.

She stopped him before reaching the hangar. Again she kissed him, her eyes starry.

"I'll be back," she whispered, "then we take our chances, you and I—together."

Silently, almost glumly he waited while she ran toward the crumbling ruin. He smoked. Collins was in for it now. He knew his chances for escape were few, slim, even alone, and saddled with the woman he loved, a known spy, none at all. Death? Collins hated to die, but there was the girl—

He sat up straighter. In the first rays of sunshine, far down the road he saw approaching clouds of dust. For a long moment he sat there, then seized Luisa's fallen automatic and ran toward the ruined castle.

Hurry! Hurry!

Through one mouldering room after another he flew until at last the sound of voices off the *patio* drew him. He

heard a thick, guttural voice saying, "You fool, we've got to go, and it's your fault. All our work for nothing because of you! You left that blonde vixen Carlotta and she talked, she told all! My radio has just given me code dispatches saying the Loyalists know I am a spy. Come, we'll leave the fool you brought, we'll—"

Collins opened the door just as two automobiles roared into the courtyard, automobiles filled with armed soldiers. A German in a Spanish Loyalist uniform glared at him, motioned toward his gun then ran for a balcony. Collins heard his guttural Spanish addressed to the new arrivals.

"What do you want, swine? You come for *Colonel* Schwartz, eh? You want me to come down? Wait, wait, my friends, I am coming."

**H**E DASHED back into the room, disregarded Collins, spoke viciously to the woman. "Now, fool, see what your dumbness has done! They have come to arrest me! Me, Schwartz!"

All the time he fumbled at a desk drawer, opened it, withdrew a grenade. His feet were catlike as he made the balcony. Collins' eyes burned as he listened, heard the great booming explosion in the courtyard below, the screams of agony that soon were stilled.

Flushed, triumphant, eyes beady with victory, *Colonel* Schwartz, the rebel spy returned. A gun was in his hand, his voice was filled with glee. "Arrest *Colonel* Schwartz? My dear, impossible! The plane awaits, we go. You and I but not your friend. The plane carries two, and two alone."

His smile was mocking, he raised the gun.

Collins said, "Schwartz, Schwartz, remember me?" The German peered

closer, "Don't let the beard fool you, Schwartz! Remember the Atlas Ranges eight years ago when a plane crashed, when an unharmed observer left his wounded pilot because he was too yellow to stay and fight off the *Riffs*? And the pilot's name was Collins, and the observer's name was Schwartz! Remember Schwartz, remember?"

Step by step he advanced, hands outstretched, fingers crooked like talons. Schwartz' voice was hoarse. "No! Not you! Keep away, Collins, keep away!"

The gun boomed. Collins swayed, half fell, then laughed. "They took my eye, Schwartz, on account of your cowardice! I've looked for you for a long time."

The gun boomed again, but Collins did not sway this time. Nervous fingers had missed, frightened nerves had failed. Collins' fingers closed around the thick Teutonic throat, his knee flew into an unprotected groin, his teeth sank into flesh. The red lust to kill grabbed him again.

He was conscious once of the woman clawing at his back, beating at his shoulders, saying, "He's dead! He's dead. You've killed him! Schwartz, the head of our Intelligence! Get up, get up!"

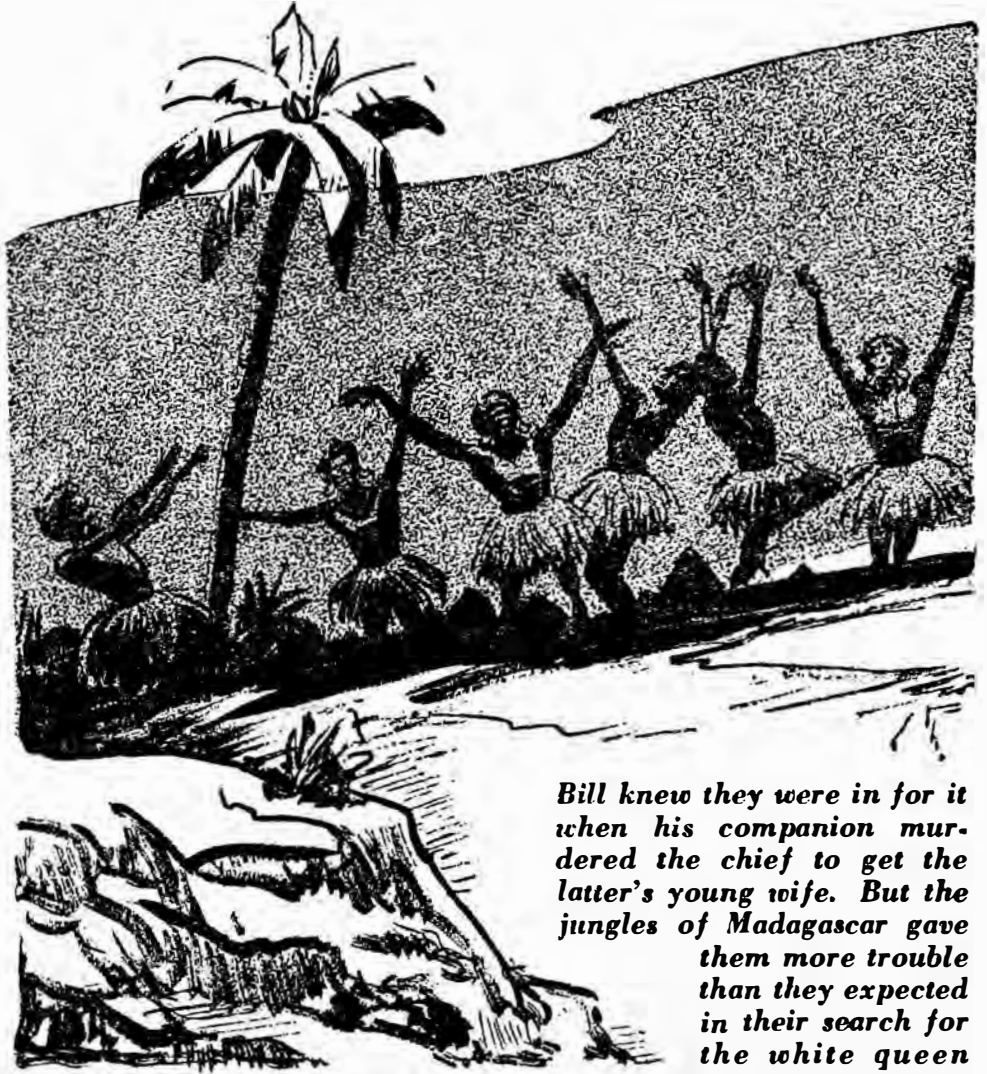
But the red lust to kill was heavy on him; he throbbed with it, raged with it. It was long moments before he arose from the thing that once had been Schwartz.

**H**OURS later the plane droned through the air, Collins at the controls. The woman, huddled beside him said softly, "San Sebastian and peace. These dispatches delivered, you and I together, together." He smiled grimly and headed the plane north. Presently she slept.

(Continued on page 127)

By  
**LEW  
MERRILL**

# DEVIL TRAIL



*Bill knew they were in for it when his companion murdered the chief to get the latter's young wife. But the jungles of Madagascar gave them more trouble than they expected in their search for the white queen*

**B**ILL WINCHELL heard Ranava's muffled cry coming from the inside of the tent, as he strode back, weary after an afternoon's unsuccessful hunt for game in the Madagascar jungles; and he guessed what was happening.

He quickened his pace, flung open the tent flap, and saw the Honorable Howard Thring, about as drunk as he usually got at that hour of the day, pawing at Ranava's *kitamby*, the apron that covered the lower part of her body from waist to heel. Her little jacket, which the



The priest raised his voice in a challenge while the girl drained the gourd.

•H.M.

Honorable Howard had already succeeded in ripping off, was lying on the grass, baring the upper part of her body.

It was a perfect golden-brown of womanhood, with full breasts, firm as a young white girl's and waist and hips of flawless contour.

Bill wasn't any saint. He hadn't seen a woman since they left Antananarivo, the capital, three weeks before, except

Ranava, who was old Kito's wife, and she had always been garbed with the instinctive modesty of the high-class Malagasy. The sight quickened his own blood. But he knew it wasn't a light matter to tamper with old Kito's wife, even though the chief was probably asleep, intoxicated with smoking native hemp.

When Bill burst in, the Honorable



Howard had almost succeeded in tearing away the *kitamby*. Sleek, rounded limbs, only partially covered, tapered down to bare slender ankles and small, arched feet; and the Venus of Milo hadn't anything on Ranava.

Bill dropped his hand on the Honorable Howard's shoulder and spun him around, forcing him to release the girl, who, snatching up her jacket, fled.

"Don't be a damn' fool, Thring. I warned you to leave that girl alone."

"Damn you, you interfering Yank, what business is it of yours?" snarled the Englishman.

"It's my job to see you don't get your wires crossed, especially when you're drunk."

"Curse you!" The Honorable Howard staggered toward the entrance. Bill pushed him down upon his stretcher, where he sat glaring.

"I brought you along to work for me, after you were left stranded in Tamatave, when that botanical expedition collapsed. What were you? A tramp! Hell, all you had in the world was a ring-tailed lemur. If you don't like my ways, go back! I'm sick to death of you!" the Englishman finished.

**B**ILL rolled a cigarette and waited till the Englishman's flow of speech had subsided. "Now I'm going to put it to you straight, Thring," he said. "We're on a job that's going to need all our judgment. You've got to cut out the booze, and you've got to leave Ranava alone. If I left you, you know what would happen to you. A few specks of one of their native poisons in your manioc, and—lights out! So I'm not going to quit. Now, are you going to listen to reason?"

"Oh hell, I know you're right," Thring mumbled. "That girl gets me, though,

and I'm damned if I can see why I shouldn't have some diversion. These hellish forests—three weeks hacking our way through them—"

"Old Kito said we'd reach the temple in three days more. You've got to pull yourself together, old man. Remember, Kito's a chief, one of the *Andriana*, the nobles—"

"That's his story."

"He wouldn't dare sport that scarlet umbrella if he wasn't. And the *Andriana* don't like having their women tampered with. Furthermore, Kito's the only man who can guide us to that temple. God knows, he may be lying! But why did he seek us out in Antananarivo, when he got wind of our plans?"

"All right, all right," growled Thring. "Have a peg, Winchell, and stop grouching like an old woman all the time. Damn it, these native women belong to anybody who wants them! She was just trying to be coy, when you interfered, you fool!"

He staggered to his feet, took up the whiskey bottle, and poured himself out a full glass. He drained it, sneered venomously at Bill, and collapsed upon his stretcher.

**B**ILL went outside. Thring wasn't a pleasant personality. High in the north loomed the great peaks, among which the temple was supposed to be. A short distance away, the three natives were preparing the evening meal of rice, manioc, and yams. Always rice, manioc, and yams. Lemurs and aye-eyes constituted almost the entire fauna of Madagascar, and Bill hadn't got to the point of eating them. The natives wouldn't, because they had a sort of mysterious lemur worship.

On the edge of the forest Bill could see the scarlet umbrella of the old chief,

erected above him, and Ranava squatting beside him, tending him. Bill cursed Thring. Certainly he was an unpleasant person, and a damn fool too. The Malagasy were not warlike, but they had a knowledge of poisons that would make the pharmacopoeia look silly.

The whole scheme had been preposterous, but the rumor that Molly Thring had survived the murder of her father, the missionary, had reached England, and brought Thring to Madagascar.

Molly's father, a peer of the realm, had given up everything to spread the Gospel among the heathen, and Molly was a cousin of Thring's with a castle and two hundred thousand pounds in the probate courts—a million dollars.

Thring, a typical ne'er-do-well, of good family, wanted to get his hands on that money, either by finding Molly and marrying her, or by proving her dead. He had told Bill so, when he was drunk.

In Antananarivo the rumor ran of a white girl chosen to guard the treasures of the dead queen of Madagascar, until she returned from the gods to reign again. A white girl, ruling a district where women were supreme, a matriarchate such as exists in Madagascar and many other odd corners of the world, such as the United States.

Bill had been frank enough to advise Thring not to believe the story, but he had been glad of the job, after the expedition of the western university had folded up and left him stranded.

Thring had babbled when he was drunk. Hence old Kito, who professed to know the site of the temple, his wife, Ranava, and the three native bearers. They had slipped out of the capital after Captain Lamaitre, the military commandant, had sternly informed them that the expedition could not be permitted.

They had been travelling three weeks through a district that no white man had ever penetrated.

BILL ate a little rice that night, but left the manico and yams. Though he was worried, he was tired out by his long trip into the jungle. That was why he slept so soundly. It was a distant hubbub, and then a scream, that brought him suddenly to his feet. The full moon, shining through the open flap of the tent, showed him that Thring's stretcher was unoccupied.

Buckling on his belt with his revolver in the holster, thrusting on his boots, Bill ran out into the moonlight. Those screams were Ranava's. In the distance Bill could see a little group at the edge of the forest. Then Thring's revolver barked once, sharply.

Bill yelled and raced toward the spot. As he ran, he saw the three natives break away and run into the forest.

On the ground lay old Kito, his head something Bill didn't want to look at twice. Clutched in one hand was a knife.

And, if this didn't tell the story, there was Thring, roaring drunk, swaying and laughing over Ranava, who crouched, clad only in her *kitamby*, upon the ground, beating her breasts and wailing bitterly.

Thring swung about as Bill came running toward him. "Too late this time, Sky-pilot," he jeered. He aimed the revolver unsteadily. "Keep back!" he warned.

Bill's leap was like a panther's. The revolver exploded, and Bill felt a sting across his hip. Then his right fist connected with Thring's jaw, and Thring, tottered, sagged, and fell flat upon the ground, completely out.

With a scream, Ranava flung herself upon the body of the dead chief, kissing



the lower part of the face, crooning, and brushing the body with her ivory breasts.

Bill touched her on the shoulder. "I'm sorry," he said awkwardly, in French. "Gold shall be paid for the killing, and the murderer punished according to the white man's code. Call back the bearers, and in the morning we'll bury the chief beneath his umbrella."

**B**ILL dragged Thring back into the tent. The Englishman was unconscious, though more from whiskey than the knockout. For the rest of the night Bill watched him, and listened to his stertorous breathing.

When Thring became conscious, shortly after dawn, Bill's remarks were short and to the point.

"You're a damn cur," he said, "and I ought to have shot you. I'm going to report the murder to the authorities at Antananarivo. You're coming back as my prisoner."

"God, I didn't mean to kill him," wailed Thring. "I didn't know what I was doing. Give me a drink."

Bill poured out a stiff one. Thring was all in. "You can explain all that to the court," Bill said, after Thring had drained his glass.

"My God, Winchell, you're not going to do this, just because I killed that old nigger? Why, we're nearly at the temple. There may be jewels there. They say the old queen's crown—"

"Pack what you mean to carry," Bill interrupted tersely. "I guess those natives won't be back."

He went to the tent door and looked out. He called, but no one answered, and there was no sign of either Ranava, Kito's body, or the umbrella. When he went back, Thring was standing, still in a daze; he had not begun to pack.

"I said we're starting," said Bill.

"You'd best eat something first." He pushed the pot toward him, with the unsavory mess of manioc from the evening before, dipped out a portion on his own plate, and swallowed the stuff. But Thring only backed into a corner.

"Listen, Winchell," he whined, "talk reason. My nerve's gone, damn it. I'll be better after another drink."

He poured out all that was left in the bottle and gulped down the contents of his glass.

"Old man, I'm sorry as hell, but there's nothing to be done about it now. I was crazy drunk, and crazy about that girl. You can't play a trick on me like that." And, seeing Bill's implacable face, "Damn you," he screamed, "give me back my gun, and I'll shoot it out with you."

"You'd best get your things together," said Bill. "I'm going to tie your hands behind your back."

**H**E wondered why it was so difficult to speak. A curious lethargy was coming over him, the result, no doubt, of the little sleep he had had the night before.

"You dirty bully of a Yank," snarled Thring, "I'll get even with you. You'll never get me to Antananarivo."

He stooped, as if to pick up his carry-all, then suddenly dived beneath the bottom of the tent and vanished.

Bill staggered to his feet and drew his gun. With an immense effort he made his way to the entrance. The world was reeling about him. Nearing the edge of the forest he saw Thring running. He saw two Thrings, three of them. He tried to draw his gun, but his hand refused to function.

Thring looked back from the edge of the forest, and waved his arm derisively.

Bill tried to follow, then suddenly found himself lying on the ground.

God, he knew now what had happened to him! The manioc had been poisoned by the natives, the master-poisoners of the world, in revenge for Thring's attack upon Ranava the afternoon before.



Thring stood over the girl who knelt weeping by her dead husband.

And Bill had been long enough in Madagascar to know that the poison used by the Malagasy is certain death.

He dropped and lay staring up at the sun, which seemed to blaze in a ring of suns from all quarters of the heavens. Then a blur of darkness came slowly weaving over the blue. Bill knew nothing more.

**N**OW you are better. Now you will soon be well."

The voice was a woman's, the speech the soft, liquid tones in which the Malagasy speak the French language.

Bill opened his eyes. He was lying on the ground inside the tent, and Ranava was crouching beside him. She was wearing only her *kitamby*, and as she leaned close, the touch of her soft breasts was warm against his chest. There was a bitter, pungent taste in Bill's mouth.

"Those swine poisoned me," he whispered.

"I did not know," murmured Ranava. "After they ran away I made a hole in the ground with a stick, and laid Kito in it. Then I crept back and saw the tent was still standing. For a long time I was afraid. At last I came, and found you alone, lying upon the ground, as if dead. I ran to pick the herb that cures one of the poison, and gave it to you. Now you will get well.

"And, since I saved your life, you will make me your woman after the manner of the white men, will you not? For I am a princess of the Hova people, and I know the temple where the *mana* mysteries are performed. I am the granddaughter of the queen, Ranavalona.

"When the French conquered the country, I fled from the temple, to follow her, but the French sent her across the black water, and so I become Kito's

woman, and dared not return to the temple to get the royal crown. Then, when the people chose the white girl to be their priestess, Kito told me I must return, to claim my rights.

"But now I no longer wish to return, for Kito is dead, and I am your woman."

Simply and gravely Ranava pressed the warm length of her body to Bill and gave him her lips.

Bill groaned as her arms closed about his neck. Whatever the nature of the antidote that Ranava had given him, he had never felt stronger or more virile than then. And the warmth of her, the scent of her, as she seemed to melt into his arms, was sweeping every scruple away.

Her mouth was a devouring flame. "I love you, I love you," she whispered, between gusty sighs. "I loved you since I saw you first. That was why I hated Taring. Now you are mine!"

**T**WO days later, at dawn, Bill saw the rugged, flat-topped peak, arising out of the jungle. For two days he and Ranava had gone forward, Ranava shouldering her share of the equipment with the strength of a man.

Bill had gone forward against the girl's urgent pleas, but, when she saw he was determined, she refused to forsake him.

The stories that she told him, in her halting French, sounded incredible. A matriarchate, a society in which women were supreme, as among the Hovas before the French conquest. The ceremony of the new moon, when the priestess, drugged with a potion, must yield to any man daring enough to court her. Death for him, by torture, if she rejected him. If she accepted him, a month of bliss, of royal honors—and then death just the same.

The man must be a stranger. And for years it was known no man had ventured within the territory of the priestesses.

"Whether she chooses you or rejects you, you must die," wailed Ranava. "Ah, you are already lost to me."

"I'll never leave you," Bill swore as he held her in his arms at night. "I'll beat that *tabu*. The white man is not bound by it."

He believed he meant it. For America seemed very far away, and Ranava was lovely and desirable, and there was no African blood in the Malagasy.

But that last night of their journey was the night of the new moon.

Bill had insisted on completing the journey, in part out of sheer doggedness, but largely because he strongly suspected that the Honorable Howard Thring would be found at his destination. They had gathered enough from old Kito to be fairly sure of the location of the temple, and Thring badly wanted the little cousin's money, not to speak of the crown and jewels of the ex-queen.

But of course the whole tale was fantasy. Bill would be ready to call it a day when he had Thring in his hands again, to take him back to the capital to stand trial for the killing of old Kito.

**T**HERE was no longer any mystery as to the location of the temple, for, as they ascended the lower slopes of the flat-topped peak, there came to their ears the distant cries of the *mana* worshippers, blending into an indescribable, discordant sound, blood-chilling as it rang through the stunted poinciana trees, whose pendant flowers hung like bunches of black grapes in the light of the tiny feather of a moon, just visible overhead.

Ranava grasped Bill's arm. "Now—

now, before it is too late, let us turn back," she pleaded.

"Nothing doing to that," said Bill—or, rather, its French equivalent. "I'm going to see this thing through. Huh, I've got two guns here, and I guess these Malagasy will find plenty poison in them."

"Then kiss me—kiss me!" Ranava pleaded.

Bill put his hands under her arms and felt her tremble beneath the little open jacket. He slid his arms about her, hugged her close, felt her go limp beneath his caress. Ranava sighed heavily. Bill kissed her, felt her a clinging fire in his embrace.

"Now we've got to forget the love business, Ranava," he said. "Dump this stuff here, and wait for me. I'll be back, don't worry."

He deposited his load a little below the edge of the plateau. Ranava dropped hers, and Bill made her sit on it. "I'll be back," he repeated, and moved forward through the velvet night toward the flat summit, from which the monotonous chanting came.

Now he could see, in the starlight, a ring of figures moving, with arms interlocked, about a small structure in their midst. The top of the plateau was bare, except for some palm and tree-fern scrub that had contrived to find lodgment among the rocks. Bill went down on his hands and knees, skirted the approach, and lay down at the edge of the scrub, looking at the scene before him.

**L**OUDER grew the chorus of the dancing figures, wilder their movements about the little structure in the centre. There was something that looked like a flat-topped stone in front of it, and, in front of that, Bill saw a woman seated.

She was slender, and nude, save for a short *hitamby* that looked like grass or fibre, about her waist and loins. But upon her head a circlet glowed and scintillated, and sent forth flashes of red, and blue, and green.

It was the crown of Queen Ranavalona!

All Bill's attention was concentrated on that motionless figure, seated on what he could now see was a tree-trunk, in front of the temple. He crawled nearer, nearer. The wild, leaping figures seemed unaware of his approach. And then he perceived that the flat-topped stone was some sort of altar.

He gained the shelter of a great boulder, and peered out. He could see the woman plainly now. It was—God! it was a white woman, seated there, a girl, motionless as a statue. Small, girlish breasts, a throat and shoulders for a sculptor, slender waist and thighs that the *kitemby* revealed in all their beauty, rather than concealed.

Bill drew in a deep breath. The story was true. It was Molly Thring, the priestess of these savages. Suddenly the yearning toward a woman of his own race grew mighty in him. In an instant he knew that he could never go native with poor Ranava.

Drums were thumping, and the chorus rose to a wild, shrill wail of triumph. Then suddenly all movement ceased. Then, from the midst of the crowd, which had frozen into complete immobility, a single figure approached the girl.

It was that of a very old native, bowed with years. He wore a *salaka*, or loin-cloth, of lemur skins, with a grotesque lemur tail that swept the ground, and a grinning lemur skull was on his head. In his right hand he carried a tiny gourd.

He approached the girl and handed

the gourd to her. For the first time she stirred. She took it, raised it to her lips, and drained the contents. The priest raised his voice in a bull bellow of challenge, or defiance, and, as the echoes rolled among the rocks, the drums began a wild tattoo.

The priest entered the structure behind the girl, and returned, leading Thring.

THRING's ankles were bound by a short length of twisted rope, and his arms strapped to his side. As he came forward, again the crowd began its capering. But now their frantic movements were bestial, orgiastic. Propelling themselves upon their toes and knuckles, they gamboled about Molly like great apes.

There was something hideously suggestive of apes or monkeys as they circled her in a fantastic ring. Or lemurs! Bill understood. These were the *mana* mysteries, in which the lemur, the *tarsius*, a sub-species of monkey peculiar to Madagascar, was symbolized and worshipped.

Bill crawled nearer. Unnoticed, he gained another boulder. He could see Molly's face clearly now. The hellish potion that had been given her was working. Her face was changing from the pure and innocent serenity of a white girl into that of a woman under the spell of inordinate impulse.

She was rising, moving forward slowly on little bare feet, her small breasts swaying, her hips undulating. Bill felt a sickening hate, a desire to crush out the whole monstrous group as men in olden times destroyed witches and warlocks.

Again the drums had ceased. The galloping savages came to a halt, still on their hands and knees. All grouped



Ranava pulled back from Thring and whipped up the knife.

themselves about the two figures, watching them.

Thring had been untied and now he and Molly watched each other face to face in a silence more terrific than the yells and the thudding of the drums had been.

There was something so piteously horrible in the girl's face, quivering under the stimulation of the drug, that Bill, now clutching a revolver in either hand, felt as if he were palsied, and he could only lie there, prone on his stomach, and watch. He knew what

this silent watching meant. Molly was to decide whether she would take Thring for her mate—the first man, by all odds, who had entered the district from outside since she was a child.

For, just before the hellish drug began to take effect, Bill had seen the girl's face, and he knew, as surely as he knew anything, that this had never happened to her before.

**I**T WAS only six years since Molly's father had been murdered. She must have been at least twelve years of age at that time. The veneer of savagery could not have destroyed her earlier memories. But Bill could see that she was stupefied by the drug that the old priest had given her. She was ignorant of where she was, or what she was doing.

Suddenly, with a cry, she flung herself into Thring's arms.

The drums beat and a fearful yell went up from the assembled savages. And still Bill waited. He had sense enough to realize that he must choose his moment before hurling himself single-handed into the midst of that crowd, stirred to the fullest depths of fanaticism.

The old priest sidled forward and drew them apart. Now Molly stood nude in the moonlight, like a white statue, flawless, perfect. She stood before Thring unashamed waiting. Only the working of her face showed the seething passions within her.

Next moment blind fury filled Bill's heart. He understood what the evil ceremony was to be . . .

And Thring was willing. Willing to lend himself to such a vile thing, to save his wretched life. Willing to dishonor Molly, a white girl, a drugged girl, before these savages!

Bill heard his own voice break from

his lips in a frenzied scream as he sprang to his feet and hurled himself into the midst of the circle, a gun in either hand. "Stand back, you swine!" he bawled, in healthy Anglo-Saxon, as he leaped between Molly and Thring, at the same time dealing the latter a buffet that sent him reeling backward.

**F**OR a moment there was dead silence. Then some of the savages turned to flee at the sight of the second white man. They wavered, surged to and fro, while Bill heard himself shouting, shrieking, threatening. Thring had staggered back, and stood crouching, eyeing him malevolently. Molly, as if she were unaware of Bill's presence, stood beside him, with arms upraised.

Next moment the old priest had sprung into the midst of his followers, screaming. They turned. Knives gleamed in their hands, whipped from their loin-cloths. They leaped at Bill, and Bill's gun cracked.

Six shots, each taking its toll, ploughing a bloody furrow into the packed masses. And six more, fired into the midst of the fleeing mob. That was all the ammunition that Bill had, but it looked as if no more would be needed. The Malagasy were running for dear life, all except the dead and wounded, and the old priest, who crouched, gibbering, behind the altar.

Bill seized Molly by the hand. She still stood there, motionless, but, as he pulled her, she toppled and sank upon her knees. Bill stooped to raise her in his arms.

A streak of fire pierced Bill through the thigh, and he stumbled, tried to get up, and saw an arrow fast in the flesh. Then, as he groped for stance, suddenly a figure hurled itself upon him. It was Thring, pinning him down, shouting to



the savages to come and capture him.

He was shouting in English, but his meaning was unmistakable. A fresh chorus of howls came from the edges of the plateau.

Thring dashed his fists into Bill's face, tumbling him backward. Curses broke from his lips. "I've got you now, you dirty Yank!" he shrieked. He snatched up one of the guns that had fallen from Bill's hands, and struck him across the head.

The world swam dizzily before Bill's eyes. Then the Malagasy were upon him. Like a jack-in-the-box, the priest popped out from behind the altar. Bill was lifted and deposited upon the flat six feet of stone. Knife upraised, the priest stood over him, howling an incantation, while the drums thundered, and Bill struggled in vain.

**O**UT of the crowd a figure broke—Ranava. She flung herself at Thring, knife in hand. It flashed, and, with a shout of horror, he reeled backward, clapping his hands to his chest. Again, again, like a fury the girl stabbed and hacked, until the writhing thing at her feet had ceased to groan, and lay, mere inanimate clay, among the blood-spattered rocks.

As his captors relaxed their grasp, Bill managed to gain his feet, but not in time. As Ranava stood over the body of the slain man, the old priest sidled forward, and in horror Bill saw the knife pass through Ranava's body and point emerge under one breast.

Then Bill was upon him like a wild beast, snatched the bloodstained knife from the priest's hand, and drove it through his throat.

He fell, his bubbling shriek cut off by death. That was enough for the Malagasy. With howls of terror, they bolted,

leaving Bill standing over Ranava, and Molly close beside him.

Bill raised Ranava in his arms and carried her into the temple. He laid her down, went back for Molly and led her in. She sank down in a stupor in front of one of the monstrous carved idols that were ranged about the interior of the building.

"Bill!" whispered Ranava faintly.

Bill bent over her. With his fingers he tried to wipe away the blood that was gushing from her mouth. She tried to put her arms about him, but they fell back, helpless, and Bill held her close to him.

"I die, Bill. It is well, for the brown people cannot mate with the white, and you would have grown tired of me."

"No, no, Ranava. I love you. I'm going to marry you in the white man's way, and you're going to get well."

In the moonbeam entering through the temple entrance Bill could see the flicker of a smile on Ranava's face.

"I die—now, Bill. I am glad—we loved. Perhaps—in the heaven where—there are no—whites—or browns—we shall meet again. Kiss—me—once more, Bill."

Bill pressed his lips to Ranava's. It was her last sigh that he received.

He left the dead girl and went to Molly. She was unconscious, breathing softly. He looked at the enticing, half nude body, at the soft breasts and rounded limbs, and he knew that, since he was a man, with his life to live, he must forget Ranava.

He went out; he picked up and placed about Molly poor Ranava's jacket. And he brought back Queen Ranavalona's crown, which had dropped beside the altar.

Suddenly rifle-fire broke out some—  
(Continued on page 122)



# Diana Daw

DIANA, TIED TO THE ANCHOR CHAIN OF A SLAVE SHIP IS CAST OVERBOARD. THUS, WHEN THE SHIP IS SEARCHED, NO SLAVES WILL BE FOUND. HOWEVER, JITHA MATH, A SLAYER, DIVES OVERBOARD AND CUTS HER LOOSE!

By  
CLAYTON  
MAXWELL

AIDED BY A LIFE PRESERVER, HE SWIMS WITH HER TO THE COAST OF INDIA



I KNOW WHERE I AM. I'VE OFTEN BEEN IN THAT TOWN!

I'LL TIE HER HERE -- THEN GO TO THE TOWN AND GET SOME CONVEYANCE TO SMUGGLE HER IN. SHE'S TOO PRECIOUS TO SHOW AT RANDOM!



DIANA AWAKES FROM HER FAINT TO SEE A SNAKE ABOUT TO STRIKE HER



HELP!

I HEARD YOUR SCREAM, MY PRECIOUS ONE!



THIS WAY I CAN SELECT MY BUYERS -- WITHOUT EXPOSING HER TO THE VIEW OF THE WHOLE TOWN!



THERE, MY PRECIOUS ONE. YOU'LL STAY HERE UNTIL I CAN FIND SOME BUYERS -- WHO CAN AFFORD TO PAY FOR YOUR BEAUTY!



THERE! SEE HER WHITE BEAUTY---LIKE MARBLE! HER SHAPE---LIKE A GODDESS!

FAIR JITHA---- I CAN'T OFFER YOU MUCH!

WHAT? YOU WOULD HAGGLE WITH ME? YOUR OFFER FOR SUCH BEAUTY INSULTS ME!

THEY WOULD HAGGLE OVER A PRICE FOR YOU! THEY ARE CHEAP. I WILL KEEP YOU FOR MY OWN. I WILL OPEN AN AMUSEMENT PLACE---YOU WILL DANCE AND ENTERTAIN---YOU WILL MAKE MUCH MONEY FOR ME. COME, FAIR ONE, I WOULD KISS YOU!

TWO MASKED HINDUS RUSH INTO THE ROOM AND KNOCK DOWN JITHA



YOU ARE SAFE FROM THE CLUTCHES OF THAT PIG, JITHA, MY FAIR ONE!

YOU ARE SPARED FOR FINER THINGS, WHITE ONE! COME!



WHO ARE DIANA'S STRANGE RESCUERS? SEE THE APRIL ISSUE OF SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES

# A MESSAGE

*Betraying the notorious Sir Henry Morgan was dangerous, but this girl of old San Cristobal wanted only to save her sweetheart. Then she found that betrayal can work both ways*



**T**HE big, blond-bearded lieutenant was very drunk. And the tale he was telling the dark-eyed girl across the rough deal table amused him enormously. He chucked into his flagon of chicade-maize, paying scant attention to the red, roaring hell that filled such a

ruffian's tavern of nights in Spain's farthest-flung outpost of San Cristobal.

Lithe, bright-bandanna-ed Caribs; huge, nose-ringed West Indian blacks; hawk-nosed Spanish soldiery; they filled the smoky, low-ceilinged room in cursing, jostling tumult. The bearded one

# to MORGAN

By GUY RUSSELL



As Blake struck the soldier, the Spaniard with the lantern cried: "Bind him!"

pulled deeply at the flagon and wiped his chin with a hairy-hand. He leaned over the table and laughed again.

"Why do I laugh, little one?" He reached for the girl's tight, silken bodice. She pulled away, black eyes flashing disdainfully.

"Yes, Don Jaime," she repeated coolly, "why do you laugh? With Sir Henry Morgan's fleet within gun-shot of the

town, it seems to me that a Spanish officer would have scant cause of mirth."

"Hah, but that is why I laugh." He winked, drunkenly. "Morgan only risks his bloody pirate's neck this close to our guns because he knows that Admiral De Vaca has taken the fleet to Cartagena. He thinks to catch us asleep."

"As he has," she said, shortly. "Everyone knows that De Vaca has sailed for

Cartagena. Why should not Morgan know it?"

"Morgan thinks he knows everything. Just as you do, chiquita. But you're both wrong. De Vaca did *not* go to Cartagena!"

The girl started, imperceptibly. "He didn't?" she asked, carelessly. "That was the talk about the tavern."

"It was meant to be the talk about the taverns. So that Morgan would also hear, and believe. And he would run his head into the noose which we have prepared for him."

"Noose? The noose for Morgan has not yet been woven," she said, contemptuously.

"Ho ho!" the Spaniard chuckled. "That's what Morgan thinks. But tomorrow we'll surprise him. When his men are ashore and De Vaca falls upon his ships from the southward."

"Southward? But you said that the fleet did not go to Cartagena! I fear your boasts come from the belly of that flagon, Don Jaime."

Nettled, he whispered, "Drunk I may be, but De Vaca did *not* go to Cartagena. Set sail for there, perhaps, but—he went no farther than Manzanilla Point!"

She shrugged. "Well, 'tis interesting, Don Jaime. But of no importance to me." Rising from the table, she said, "Unless you should bring me the monstrous jewel, after you have caught Morgan in your noose, which 'tis said he wears in his neckerchief."

Don Jaime caught at her wrist. Gladly—if you'll take me with you now."

She pressed a firm thigh against his shoulder but twisted away before his clutching hands could hold her. "After I get the jewel, Don Jaime," she said, laughing. "I trust not your promises."

SHE pushed through the crowd toward the rear of the tavern. She all but felt the Spaniard's eyes hot upon her lush hips and she slipped from sight behind a knot of sailors lest their provocative roll should inflame Don Jaime into following her. One of the sailors dropped a swarthy hand on her shoulder. A ribbon gave way and a firm, white-curved breast escaped from its flimsy moorings to gleam, naked and inviting.

She spat at the man in sudden fury, a short, glinting dirk leaping from her sash. But she had no need to use it. The black-browed sailor felt steel fingers close on his out-thrust wrist in a bone cracking grip. Snarling, he whirled to face cold, grey eyes above a tall, wide-shouldered body.

"Let the girl be, friend," his captor advised him, quietly. The grey-eyed man was dressed in the same rough seaman's blouse and wide-flaring trousers. But there was that in his lean, hawk-nosed face and level eyes that compelled obedience.

Hot, black eyes tried to meet those level ones and fell away. "I meant the wench no harm," the swarthy man muttered. His wrist released, he turned back to his drink.

The girl swished away without a word of thanks. But there was some obscure message in the fleeting glance she threw her rescuer. He drained his flagon and, tossing a coin on the table made his way to the door.

Out in the velvety tropic darkness, the tall man strode, his big body moving silently as a cat's, past a group of clanking soldiers, off to change the guard at the wharf. At an alley-way around the corner, he shot a swift glance up and down the dim-lit street and stepped into the black shadows of the alley's mouth. He had doubled back until he was behind

the tavern and waited there, his back to the rough bole of a great palm.

She came all in a rush. Almost before he heard the rustle of silk in the gloom, soft arms were about his neck and hot, seeking lips glued themselves to his mouth. Round, firm breasts set tingling fire to his skin as their warm flesh burned through his thin shirt; and he felt the trembling of her long, tapering legs as the length of her throbbing body was hugged to him.

"Rosa!" he chuckled. "Do those cat's eyes of yours never make a mistake in the dark? Did you attack some wandering Spaniard in this fashion, you'd not be used so gently, I can tell you!"

"Do not talk so, Roger," she murmured against his cheek. "Do you think I'd not know you, if I had no eyes at all? And I've worried so about you. I was afraid the guard would catch you."

Roger Blake tightened his arms about her. "A few flea-bitten Spaniards trap a man of Morgan's?" he scoffed. "Never. But—tell me! What did the drunken one say?"

"De Vaca's fleet did not go to Cartagena. They wait beyond Manzanilla Point for your men to come ashore. Then they will fall upon your ships."

"'Sblood!" he muttered. "We feared some such Spanish trick. Well, that means I've got to hurry."

"Hurry, Roger?" she breathed. "You mean, you must go—tonight?"

"Morgan must be warned," Blake told her softly. "Not that I want to go, so soon."

She pressed close; the touch of her breasts, of her soft, undulant body was a rhythmic, blood-maddening pressure. "It has been so long, Roger," she gasped. "Can't you come back—to me?"

He smashed his mouth down on hers until her answering lips became writhing

flame against his. "I'll be back," he promised, thickly. "As soon as the message has gone. Do you wait for me."

**T**EARING himself away from her, he left the alley. In the street, a squat, one-eyed man in the same rough dress fell into step. "What learned you from the jade?" he growled.

"Call her 'jade' again and I'll jam a thumb into the one eye you have left, rascal," Blake laughed at him. "But the Spanish dogs try to trick us, Dick. Old De Vaca did not go to Cartagena, as we heard. He lays back to Manzanilla, waiting until we attack the town and our decks are stripped of men."

Black Richard, the huge, bull-muscled giant who led the cutlassed cut-throats of Henry Morgan's terrible boarding-parties, rumbled from his thick chest. "And how do you know she does not lie?"

"Not to me, she doesn't lie, Richard. She tells me at such times as all maids tell the truth."

"Hah! They lie as well to their lovers as to other men. . . ."

"To hell with you!"

"For the sake of your neck," the thick man grumbled, "I hope the wench knows whereof she speaks. What will Morgan do?"

"That I don't know," Blake said. "But you get the news to him, as fast as that big carcass can pull oars, and let him decide."

"I?" Richard parroted. "Do you not return to the ship also?"

"Not I. I have business at Cristobal."

"'Tis rare business that keeps an officer of Morgan's ashore in Panama this night. I hope the Spaniards gut you like a turkey."

"They'll gut us all if you don't haul your trouser patches out to Morgan



right speedily," Blake warned him, grinning. They came to a dark, deserted section of the wharf. A skiff bumped against stone facing in the black water below. Black Richard lowered himself, with the agility of a monkey, into it.

"What shall I tell Morgan, when he asks for you," he growled.

"Tell him I've got to put my initials in my share of tomorrow's loot. Get gone!"

Richard sheered off with one mighty shove and the skiff disappeared seaward. Blake listened for a moment to the hushed rattle of oar-locks. Sound died away to the sucking of waves against stone piling.

**T**HERE was no shout of alarm from any guarda costa or thick-witted sentry along the sea-wall. So Blake retraced his steps, sticking close to the shadows, into San Cristobal.

Behind the tavern again, he tapped cautiously at the wooden shutter of a certain window. The shutter swung open and he pulled himself up and through the narrow opening. Warm arms came up to meet him.

He strained her yielding body to him and then pulled away the silken mantle which his fingers found between themselves and damp, satin skin. They trailed down her smooth back, to the slim waist-curve above the flares of her hips; hungrily he crushed her to him, found hot, eager lips and kissed her until the young body moulded to his was a writhing caress of abandon.

He felt the naked warmth of her arms about his neck; the firm breasts tortured into flat cushions upon his chest. Blake lifted her and sank to the cot with the girl on his lap. Almost roughly, he bent his face to the pulsing, smooth flesh of her throat.

She pulled at his head, tiny nails digging into his neck, with one hand. The fingers of the other made little, seeking paths of fire down his body. "Roger!" she gasped.

**B**LAKE watched the sky through the shutter cracks grow brilliant with the rising tropic moon. Beside him, Rosa murmured, "Will Morgan still attack the town, Roger?"

"That I don't know. Sometime, surely. Perhaps not until we have taken care of the old butcher, De Vaca."

Her lips were soft against his cheek. "Will you come to me when he does, Roger? The thought of Morgan's pirates frightens me."

Something in her voice rang a warning bell in Blake's consciousness. Before he could think again, the door slammed sharply open and a lantern's beam blinded him.

The lean, saturnine Spaniard behind the lantern spoke sharply. "Bind him!" Roger Blake whipped an iron fist to one chin as soldiers flooded the room. The man went down in a crash of clanging armor, his jaw shattered, but the others bore Blake down before he could strike another blow.

The lantern swung to Rosa, trying vainly to cover ivory nakedness with two small hands.

The Spanish officer bowed to her. "Well done, querida," he said, sardonically. "Short of Morgan himself, we could ask no better return for our pieces of silver than the great Roger Blake."

"Silver!" she cried. Then piteously, "No, Roger, no! Believe me, he lies."

Her semi-nudity forgotten, she ran to Blake. He laughed and tore her arms from about his neck. She fell back against the cot and lay there, sobbing.



Blake drove her back with an open-handed slap.



"Your knife, Blake!" the Spaniard snapped.

A soldier yanked it from Blake's sash and offered it, hilt foremost. "It will give me pleasure, some day, to give you such a blade, other end first, Don Diego," Blake told him, coolly.

"I'm afraid you'll not live to see that day," the other sneered. "Out with him."

They hustled him roughly out the door and through the sudden quiet, watchful mob in the tavern. There were men of Morgan's in that crowd, Blake knew. Which or how many, he did not know.

**B**UT, shackled to a stone pillar in a dank dungeon deep below the great stone fortress of San Cristobal, it seemed he would have plenty of time in which to think of that—and other things. Such was the way in which Roger Blake, trusted lieutenant of the famed Sir Henry Morgan, had been caught, like an inexperienced boy, by the lure of slim legs and a girl's soft breasts. He cursed himself in a growling sailor's litany until breathless. But, in the back of his head was, after all, the saving thought that Morgan had been warned.

"Ho! Such language, cockerel!" a deep voice rumbled from the gloom. "How did you happen to run foul of the guard?"

"Black Richard! Didn't you reach Morgan?"

"Aye," the voice chuckled. "But, like a fool, I came back to look after you. They took me as I stepped ashore. But you—you have not told me—"

"'Twas the wench, Dick," Blake told him, bitterly. "You may call her jade, now, to your heart's content. She betrayed me to Narvaez."

"Don Diego!" Richard breathed. "The captain of the Guard! He'd not climb

from a warm bed to catch any common sailor. She must have told him who you were."

"I said she betrayed me, fool."

"Then . . . the message, man! The information about De Vaca's fleet must be false!"

"Of course," Blake said, dully. "Unless Morgan stands to sea, he is trapped, somehow. They had something devilish in mind or they would never have taken the trouble to dupe me as they have."

"Not quite correct, Blake," Don Diego Narvaez spoke from the arched doorway. "The pleasure of seeing you hung will be well worth my trouble."

Rosa stood close to the Spaniard's shoulder, her face a disdainful mask as she stared coldly at Roger Blake. "It was really very little trouble, Don Diego," she said contemptuously.

"He looks not much like the daredevil Blake of whom we had heard such tall tales, does he, chiquita?" Narvaez laughed, pulling her to him. "I think you and I will laugh together often as we think of him chained to the wall like a runaway slave. Or dangling from a rope, as he soon will."

"You she-turtle!" Blake said, slowly and distinctly, ignoring Narvaez. "You ill-smelling mother of mangy curs! When Morgan's niggers have done with you, I'll have them lash you across a hogshead and roll you from one end of Cristobal to the other."

Black Richard roared. "That nimble brain of yours has come back to you, Roger. May I live to see it!"

"You won't," Narvaez promised, wolfishly, turning to leave. But the girl leaped at Blake in fury. She spat full in his face and raked at him with maddened, claw-like fingers. Blake drove her away with a careless, open-handed slap and she reeled back into Narvaez's arms.

Puzzled, Roger Blake watched the guard captain drag her, screaming with rage, from the dungeon. That blow had never touched her!

**S**OMETHING gleamed dully on the floor and he put his foot over it quickly. Bare-footed in his seaman's masquerade, he felt plainly the outline of the dirk. The one he had seen leap from her sash in the tavern!

His head whirling, he leaned back against the rough stone and tried to fit this new piece into the bloody puzzle. Rosa, the drunken lieutenant, the fact that Black Richard was allowed to reach Morgan, unhindered, and then caught as soon as he tried to return—all parts of an elaborate scheme to bring Morgan's ships into some trap at Manzanilla Point. But why the knife?

It was too much. And there were other, immediate things to be done. Black Richard was growling. "And the next time, Roger, I'll wager you'll listen to me and not set out after every pretty leg and wriggling stern that crosses your course."

"Listen to me," Blake rasped. "Raise a disturbance that will get that sentry in here. But not too much noise. Fall in a fit . . . foam at the mouth . . . but get him here! ! Quickly, man!"

Tearing strips from his shirt, he bound the haft of the knife securely to the bottom of his foot. With a muttered curse at such fool's play, Richard clanked his chains, and followed orders. He groaned and gasped, sucking at his lips like a madman. The sentry heard and put his head in.

"Silence, dogs!" he roared. Richard redoubled his efforts, rolling and squirming about the floor as lustily as the length of his shackles would let him. The sen-

try came in and aimed an angry kick at his ribs.

Blake had measured his distance. Flat on his back, he lay at the utmost limit of the chains fastened to his wrists. He drove his right foot up at the soldier's middle with all the tautened power in his long body.

The man toppled forward with an agonized grunt, a bloody mess bursting from his riven belly. Winding his long legs about the writhing corpse, Blake dragged it to him until his fingers could reach the keys at his belt.

Freeing himself and Richard, he caught up the cutlass from the dead sentry. They crept cautiously into the corridor and along it toward the winding stairway that led up to the outer air and freedom.

Some sound must have betrayed them. Blake came around a bend in the stairway and looked straight into the muzzle of a musket. It belched flame in his face and a mighty hand struck him across the head, felling him. As he went down, he saw a jumbled picture of Black Richard going down under the clubbed barrel.

**L**IGHT filtered back into his dazed, laching consciousness. his wrists were fast again. This time, to a wooden post in the center of a low, dim-lit room. Narvaez, the yellow-bearded man whom Rosa had called Don Jaime beside him, stood a few feet away, watching Blake's fluttering eye-lids.

"It's a thick skull you own, Blake," he said shortly. "It turns musket balls like granite."

Blake looked about the room. Rows of iron ring-bolts in the blood-caked wall and a dozen devilish contrivances about the floor told him what he had already suspected—that he was in the fortress' torture chamber. He saw Black Richard

at the next post and he groaned as his eyes came to the slender figure lashed to the one beyond.

"Rosa!" he gasped.

"Yes, Rosa!" Narvaez bit. "We were afraid that you'd not regain consciousness in time to watch your traitorous mistress keep her appointment with the Iron Maiden. You should not have kept the blade with which you gutted my guard, Blake. For her sake. Too many of us had seen it at her belt."

"The Iron Maiden! You murdering devil!"

"Aye, he's that, and more," Black Richard growled. "But wait 'till Morgan catches him. He'll wish he'd not delayed to torture women."

"I fear that Sir Henry Morgan will be long in coming," Narvaez sneered. "He swallowed your message, hook and all. Even now he makes ready for sea. He will set sail with the tide for Manzanilla Point to fall upon Admiral De Vaca. But De Vaca will be far at sea. Morgan will find himself, becalmed, under the fire of shore batteries concealed in the sand which he had not known were there. When he tries to man his boats and beat out to sea, De Vaca will come down with the westerly wind and smash him from the other side. I very much fear that that will be the end of your gallant Morgan."

Blake gazed past him. "Rosa," he asked, "why did you do this? What had I done to deserve it?"

She raised wet cheeks. "I love you, Roger," she said simply. "I did not do it for silver. Don Diego promised that, if I betrayed Morgan and succeeded in keeping you with me, he would spare your life. I . . . like a fool . . . believed him. Morgan would be dead and you would be safe and with me. There'd be

no more black flag of Morgan's for you to sail under."

"Then . . . the knife . . ." Blake whispered.

"Was all I could do to help you, Roger," she finished for him, bravely. "After I knew that Don Diego meant to break his promise. Now I will die with you. Roger . . . I'm not afraid . . . even of the . . . the Iron Maiden . . . if you'll say that you don't hate me."

"She's a brave wench, at that," Black Richard muttered. "Being a woman, she couldn't help being a little treacherous. Tell her that we don't hold it against her, Roger lad."

"Enough of this!" Narvaez snarled. "Prepare the Maiden!"

Two soldiers leaped beside a great wooden figure which Blake had steadfastly refused to look upon until now. He shuddered as he saw the monstrous thing, the outside carved into the rough semblance of a woman. A very pious woman; hands folded on chest and eyes raised upward. The men swung it open. Split in half and hinged, it yawned blackly to show the rows of needle-sharp spikes with which the interior was studded.

"Strip her!" Narvaez ordered. The men untied Rosa's thongs and dragged her into the center of the room. Stripping her bodice off her shoulders, one pawed avidly at the fastenings of her skirt in place below wide-set, perfect breasts.

"Tear it off, fools!" the Spaniard snapped, tongue-tip at his red snarling lips. "She'll have no more use for it."

The soldier yanked and the thin cloth split, baring gleaming thighs and soft-moulded hips. Blake snarled, deep in his throat, at the sight of that sweet body. A single, silken wisp remained about her upper thighs.



She had no use for the knife, for a new voice said quietly: "Let the girl be, my friend!"

They pulled her roughly to the maiden and bound her, outspread, by the wrist and ankle within it. A crank turned slowly and the mighty front of the thing began to close. She forced her quivering lips to smile and whispered, "Good-bye, Roger!"

Blake tore at his bonds, but they gave no more than steel. "Rosa," he gasped,

"God forgive me! You'll be avenged on these Spanish butchers!"

**T**HE halves of the Maiden swung slowly, inexorably together. As they came near closing, the helpless girl within shrieked in a long crescendo of heart-wrenching agony.

Narvaez, almost beside himself in a

bestial frenzy, flung up his hand. "Open!" he ordered, thickly. His men reversed the crank and the maiden swung apart again.

The girl had fainted. Her limp body hung lifelessly in its cruel shackles. From her ankles, up swelling lovely limbs to curving, stomach and full, pear-shaped breasts, her warm ivory skin gleamed with tiny scarlet drops. It was as if some heathen worshipers had set the matchless image of their goddess with innumerable little rubies. Some of the drops broke and ran, netting the ivory in a wavering tracery of crimson.

"See?" Narvaez panted. "The Maiden's embrace has but touched her skin. The next time we show her to you, each of those pin-pricks will be a spouting fountain." Little trickles of saliva ran down his chin as he screamed, "Close it! All the way, this time!"

The crank began to creak again. Black Richard, frothing like a maniac, went berserk. The rope-maker who had fashioned the lashings about the black one's wrists had not thought to hold a maddened bull. The ropes parted like so much rotten twine. Richard leaped on Narvaez. Blake cried, "No, Dick! That black devil belongs to me!"

Richard wasn't listening. He sent Narvaez spinning with one sledge-hammer blow and then Don Jaime went down with a shattered skull. He caught the two men-at-arms over the crank with a great hand on each throat. Huge muscles knotted and Blake heard a sickening crack, and then another. Both men went limp.

Black Richard shook himself like a great dog. Slowly, he took a dagger from one of the two corpses at his feet and slashed Blake's bonds.

"That was well-done, Richard!" Roger Blake chuckled. He stopped and

pulled a rapier from Don Jaime's lifeless body; then leaped to the Maiden. He cranked it open and took Rosa's still limp form from its fastening. He lowered her gently to a bench and stooped over her.

Richard's roar warned him. "Roger! Behind you!" He whirled to face Narvaez, and take the man's leaping blade across his guard.

"Ah, Don Diego," he grinned, mirthlessly, "you were mistaken. I *do* have opportunity to offer you my steel, again—point foremost!"

He fainted low and, as the Spaniard's guard came down, shifted lightning-like to his throat. The needle-pointed rapier slit Narvaez's jugular, passing through until the hilt smashed against the guard captain's chin.

"Good eye, lad!" Black Richard grunted. "Now, get something around that wench of yours and let's begone before we have the town about our ears."

"And before the tide sets out with Morgan," Roger Blake reminded. "There's still damage to be undone."

He wound Don Diego's cloak about the unconscious girl's body, still traced and speckled with blood from the torture-spikes that had needled her tender flesh. He lifted her to his arms.

They won free of the fortress without trouble.

"Strange," Richard commented.

"Not so strange. The Spaniards are all down at those shore batteries Don Diego bragged of."

"'Tis a piece of luck for us, no matter where they be."

THEY came to the wharf, still unmolested. But the skiff was gone. Search as they might, they could find no other boat. Rosa, revived by the dawn-cold air, said softly, "Roger, since we

must hasten—I can swim, if it's not too far."

"It's something less than half a league, lass," Roger told her doubtfully. "But, it looks as if we'll have to try."

Close against him, she hesitated, looking at Black Richard. Blake said, "She has no garment but the cloak, Dick. And she can't swim in that. Do you start out ahead of us."

"Hah!" the giant grumbled. "I don't know what secrets she thinks she has from me, after this night. But—so be it."

He stripped shirt and trousers from his hairy body and slipped silently into the water. Blake, doing likewise, followed him. As his head came above water, he saw her poised on the wharf above him. His eyes filled with the lilt-ing curves of that slim body, silhouetted sharply against the faint-dawning sky, and he thought he had never seen beauty before. Then a white streak came down beside him and the water closed behind her without a ripple. They struck out for the ships.

"Roger?" she whispered, a long time later, "are we almost to the ships?"

"Almost," he told her. "Tired?"

"Not very. What will Morgan say when you bring me aboard?"

"He'll think of nothing else but the news we bring. And never fear, we'll keep you safe. The English King has promised Morgan a pardon, if we sack Panama. Then you and I can go ashore in Barbados and become respectable."

"Oh, Roger!" He could barely hear her. Then, "Roger, I think I can see the ships."

The black bulk of hulls and masts loomed up ahead. "'Tis but a few strokes more," he encouraged.

"I know, Roger . . . will you kiss me before we reach the ship?"

He rolled on his side and slipped an arm beneath wet shoulders. As his mouth glued itself to hers, he felt soft, cool arms entwine themselves about him. The cold water became suddenly warm as they sank down into shadowy depths.

He tore his mouth away and broke for the surface. Laughing as she came up beside him, he said, "The Atlantic's too deep for that. And we've time enough aboard."

"Oh," she breathed. "My beloved! Then . . . let's hasten, Roger!"

**In deepest Borneo the Eel finds adventure and romance**

**next month.**

***Don't miss Justin Case's***

**"THE RIVER OF BLOOD"!**

# LOG

By  
**ROBERT LESLIE  
BELLEM**

**N**IGHT had spilled purple ink over the sky as Steve Conlan headed for camp headquarters. His caulked boots crunching on the snow, the broad-shouldered boss logger of the Thayer Timber Company strode forward with his mind tuned on trouble.

And trouble came.



*A blue-eyed, slim-hipped girl owned the last logging outfit that dared make a stand against the octopus-tentacles of the Trust. Steve promised himself that she'd win, come hell or high-water!*



# JAM

As if out of nowhere, something lanced past his shoulder in the darkness, like a hurled javelin. It clunked savagely into a tree-boie and quivered there.

Startled, Steve Conlan cursed and leaped at the thing; wrenched it free. It was a peavy-stick: a long shaft of hardwood tipped with a murder-sharp spike and a curved hook. Another two inches and it would have impaled him like a spear!

The Canuck charged. "By gar, thees jam she is not to be feexed!"



He pivoted and hurled himself toward the shadows from which the deadly peavy had been thrown. He saw someone running through the trees, and he launched forward in grim pursuit. He drew back the peavy-stick, took aim, hurled it. The stick's point thwacked



into the hard snow alongside Conlan's quarry; and its hardwood shaft caught between the fleeing man's legs, tripped him. He went down.

Like a puma, Conlan pounced. He dragged the fellow upright. "You damned murderous rat!" he snarled; and his hard, calloused fingers closed about his assailant's throat.

The man choked out a whimpering moan of fright. "Don't—!"

"I'll break your neck, by God! Ambush me, will you? I ought to kill you!"

"No—no—!"

"All right, then. Talk. Fast. Who hired you to stick a peavy through me? Cough it out, you rat, before I start working you over!"

"It—it was—"

**T**HE words aborted in the fellow's throat. Out of the surrounding blackness a tongue of yellow flame licked out. *Cra-a-ck!* came the whiplike report of a .30-30.

Steve Conlan dropped prone. He heard the .30-30 bark again, and a slug sprayed stinging particles of snow into his face. He felt something heavy slump over him, pinning him down. Then, in the distance, he heard running footsteps.

Conlan waited a cautious minute, while a red haze of fury filmed his eyes. Then he stirred, moved. He grasped the shoulder of the man whose weight had pinioned him. "Talk up!" he whispered. "Somebody hired you to throw that peavy at me, isn't that true? And when you were about to tell me the name of the man, he shot you. Isn't that it?"

But the fellow didn't answer. He would never answer anything again. There was a .30-30 slug in his brain. He was dead.

Steve Conlan swore softly, deep in his throat. This was more Lumber Trust

deviltry, of a piece with the other sinister things which had happened recently. The boss logger's mind raced back over the preceding six weeks. Six weeks of blistering his crew of lumberjacks into frenzied effort. Sawyers and swamper working savagely, felling the giant first-growth spruce. Trimmers hacking and slashing like maniacs, preparing the straight green logs for the tractor-drawn sleigh-trains that hauled them down to the frozen river. Deck after deck of logs piling up symmetrically on the ice, chained and ready for the spring break-up.

It had been a tough job. Now, with the lifting of sub-zero weather, the end was almost in sight. Cracks were already appearing on the river's icy surface. Perhaps tomorrow the water would start to move out; and with it, ten million feet of prime Thayer Timber Company logs, headed for the waiting mills downstream. That is, if nothing went wrong tonight. Conlan's eyes narrowed. If nothing went wrong! That was the rub! Plenty of things had already gone haywire. Key-logs had been mysteriously sawed apart, permitting piled decks to collapse in confused chaos on the ice and endangering the lives of deckers. Tractors had been sabotaged. Links had developed a habit of snapping apart when chainmen made their hookups. And now—this murderous attack on Steve Conlan himself!

The Lumber Trust was behind it all, of course. They wanted the Thayer outfit bankrupted, so they could buy in the property for a song. Well, they wouldn't get away with it, Steve Conlan told himself grimly. By tomorrow, the drive would start. River action! Huge log-rafts would go churning downstream with the breaking ice; and when the lumber reached the mills. Beth Thayer

would collect enough money to keep her company out of the red for another season.

When he thought of Beth Thayer, a single raced through Conlan's veins. A blue-eyed, slim-bipped girl, she had inherited this logging outfit just a few months before, upon the death of her father. Last of the independents to make a stand against the octopus-tentacles of the Trust, she was putting up a brave fight to keep her company going. And now Steve Conlan promised himself that she'd win through, come hell or high water!

**H**E WENT back to the trail, paced swiftly to Beth Thayer's log shack. He knocked on the door.

After a minute, it opened. Beth Thayer herself stood framed in the portal, the light from a kerosene lamp flickering behind her. She'd evidently been in bed, for she wore a warm woolen robe over thin crepe pajamas; and where the robe fell open at her throat, Conlan caught a thrilling glimpse of smooth, lilted breasts beneath the pajama-jacket.

She seemed a little surprised to see him. "Steve—! What brings you here at this hour?"

He entered, closing the door behind him. Hungrily he eyed her, drinking in the sweet contours of her slim body, the gamine piquancy of her features, the glorious golden sheen of her hair. "Trouble," he said shortly.

"Trouble?"

"Yes. Somebody slammed a peavy at me on my way here. Missed me. I caught the guy; tried to make him talk. Then someone shot him, killed him. Almost plugged me, too."

She paled. Her hand fluttered to her heart. "YOU mean—?"

"I mean it's probably the Trust getting in its last licks. Either they've got to wreck us tonight, or they won't wreck us at all. That's why I was on my way here. I want permission to pay ten men all-night overtime, so I can post them to guard the decks until dawn."

She took a step toward him, and his appreciative glance caught the sleek ripple of her thigh-muscles through the robe. "Anything you say, Steve. Do whatever you think best. But—"

"But what?"

"I want you to promise me you'll be careful. You mustn't take chances . . ."

"Would it matter to you if I got hurt?" he asked softly.

"It would matter terribly!" she whispered.

A leaping elation surged into Conlan's stout heart. His hard arms swept out, encircled her girlish waist. He pulled her close, tilted her chin with his palm, looked down into her clear azure eyes. "Beth . . .!" he said. And he kissed her on the lips.

She gave him her mouth willingly; surrendered her kisses with sweet, virginal fervor. Somehow the woolen robe slipped downward upon her arms, baring her shoulders and the silken smoothness of her bosom. He saw the partially-revealed upper halves of her hard little breasts, and the faint shadow that hinted at the hidden nuances and curves of those scented hillocks of charm—

**T**HE click of the door-latch behind him made Steve Conlan stiffen, spring back, whirl around. His eyes were abruptly filled with darts of anger-lightning as he saw a man standing there in the doorway. "L'Ableu—what's the idea of coming in here without knocking?" he demanded.

The newcomer was Hectoire L'Ableu,

boss decker of the Thayer Timber outfit; a dark-visaged, saturnine French Canadian whose sarcastic smile was a thinly veiled accusation. His narrow ferret-eyes licked at Beth Thayer's partly-un-draped body, and his grin widened. "Me, I am ver' sorry. The door, she was open a leetle way. I deed not know I was be interrupt' such *charmant* love-scene."

Beth Thayer's cheeks flushed roseately as she pulled her robe more closely about her throbbing throat. "What did you want, L'Ableu?"

The Canuck laughed silkily. "Me, I guess I was be wanting notheeng now. Somebody else, she's beat me to eet."

There was no misunderstanding the implication of his words, the malicious disappointment in his beady eyes. Steve Conlan took a long step forward. "You louse! Are you hinting that Miss Thayer—"

"Me, L'Ableu, I hint notheeng. My heart, she's satisfied to wait. Maybe I take what you leave, eh, Conlan?"

The boss logger's knuckles whitened. "Get out of here! And keep your filthy tongue off Miss Thayer's name, hear me?"

L'Ableu shrugged, turned, swaggered out.

Conlan swung back toward Beth Thayer. He wanted to take her once more in his arms; but somehow the magic spell had been broken by the Canuck's openly suggestive hints. The serpent had entered Eden; and for the time, the slimy trail of his innuendoes could not be erased . . .

"It's—it's all right, Steve," Beth Thayer whispered. "He didn't mean anything wrong. Now you must go and post your guards along the river. Nothing must happen to those log-decks. If anything went wrong, it would mean the end of the Thayer Timber Company."

"Nothing will go wrong, my sweet," he said grimly. "Good night."

"Good night, Steve . . . dearest . . ."

He left her; strode out of the house and down toward his own shack by the bank of the frozen river. But singing in his heart was the memory of her kisses, the fragrance of her yellow hair, the slender liteness of her body pressed close to him . . .

**H**IS NEXT hour was a fury of activity. First he directed the removal of the corpse of the man who had tried to murder him with a peavy; then he superintended the stationing of ten burly lumberjacks to guard the log-decks at strategic points along the river. The night was filled with men's shouts and with odd crackling sounds as thawing ice commenced to break and grind on the stream's surface; and the air held a heavy redolence of spruce-sap and pine-wood flares.

For himself, Conlan chose a key position near his own shack, close to the most important log-decks. Grimly he eyed the set-up; found it to his liking. He commenced slowly to pace the river-bank—

*What was that?*

Again he heard the sound: a woman's wailing, gurgling moan of terror. It came from somewhere out on the river; muffled, wet, laden with the fear of death.

Conlan's heart constricted. Someone was in the water. A woman—a girl! Could it be Beth Thayer?

He plunged down upon the ice, started racing outward. His caulked boots gave him purchase, gripped the slippery surface as he sprinted toward that wailing cry. He came abruptly to a wide crack on the frozen river; a black, yawning fissure in the ice. He saw a head bobbing

in the dark water; saw a ghost-pale face.

It was not Beth Thayer. It was some other girl—a girl whom Steve Conlan had never seen before. Her long black hair streamed out upon the water, and her eyes were wide with frantic fear.

"Hold steady, girl!" Conlan grated. He went down on his belly, stretched out

Steve tugged,  
slipped her up  
out of the water.



his arms beyond the ice-fissure. His fingers entwined in thick, coarse long hair. He tugged; pulled the swimmer back to the precarious safety of the ice. He slid her up out of the water.

In the darkness he saw that she was young, brunette, pretty. Her soaked dress adhered to the lush curves of her body, intimately conforming to every swelling feminine contour of thighs and

hips and nubile breasts. Her eyes were closed, and a faint moan issued from her parted, sensuous lips.

Conlan lifted her; felt her arms go about his neck as she clung to him. He turned, raced back across the ice, gained the gently-sloping bank. His own cabin was just a few rods away, and he made for it, kicked the door open, carried the girl inside.

He had left a lantern burning on his table; and now, in its yellow light, he saw the brunette girl open her eyes as he deposited her on his bunk. "*Mon Dieu*—I am c-cold—!" she whimpered.

He got out a bottle, poured a stiff slug of brandy into a tin cup, held it to her lips. "Drink this!" he commanded. She choked the fiery stuff down, and color began returning to her ivory cheeks.

Meanwhile, Steve Conlan was fumbling at her dress, unfastened it. "How the devil did you come to fall in?" he demanded as he worked.

"I—I was crosseeng the ice, and I deed not see the *crevasse*," she answered simply.

But Conlan thought he noticed a faint touch of hesitancy in her voice; somehow he got the impression that she might be telling a little less than the truth. "Where do you live?" he asked her, still fumbling at the catches of her dripping frock.

"In the settlement across the rivaire."

**T**HERE was something very fishy about that, Conlan thought. No river-dweller would be careless enough to fall into an ice-break. The region's natives were wise in the ways of the river. Moreover, the girl didn't talk like most of the people around here; didn't employ the same dialect. Her locutions were somehow different.

It nuzzled the boss logger a little. But

he had no time for thinking about it. He had to get the girl dry, restore warmth to her chilled flesh. Otherwise she'd be flirting with pneumonia. At last he managed to unfasten the last snaps of her frock, and he peeled the clinging garment away from her.

She lay back upon the bed, and her soft, full lips parted in a half-smile as she saw his eyes taking in the voluptuous whiteness of her almost-naked form. Clad now in nothing but a soaked bandeau and a triangular wisp of chiffon panties, she submitted with docile willingness as Conlan got a rough towel and started briskly rubbing circulation back into her arms, her legs, her body.

He went at his task with impersonal vigor; and yet, when he inadvertently brushed the ivory smoothness of her skin, an unsummoned tingle darted through him. The wet brassiere was no concealment for the quivering perfection of her soft, tantalizing breasts; and as far as the chiffon panties were concerned, they might almost as well have been entirely absent.

Resolutely, Conlan closed his mind to the indubitable flawlessness of her exposed charms. Just the same, when her skin finally began to take on a pink glow, he found it impossible to restrain his eyes from lingering just a little upon the smoothness of her flesh. And at this, she smiled at him lazily; gave him a worldly, inviting glance.

He disregarded the challenge in her dark eyes. Instead, he stood back. "You're dry now. I'll give you a robe, and then you'd better crawl under the covers until you're thoroughly warm."

She sat up. "You are ver-ree kind, *Monsieur*."

He turned, went to his closet, pulled out a tattered robe. When he again approached the girl, his eyes widened. Her

hands were behind her, fumbling with the hook of her wet bandeau.

The sight of her thinly covered breasts, swinging forward with her movement, was like an electric shock in his veins. He flushed a little; extended the robe. "Wait until I leave before you undress completely."

She laughed liquidly. "*Oui*. I understand, *Monsieur*." She desisted from her efforts to unhook the bandeau, but her dark eyes were mocking.

Steve Conlan scowled. He fought back an impulse to grab her in his arms. He turned away—

And even as he turned, she slipped to the floor and ran toward him. Before he could realize what was happening, she was clinging to him; had her arms about his neck. Her mouth was riveted upon his own.

A fiery cascade of sensation seemed to leap from her body into Steve Conlan's veins. He could feel the moist warmth of her mouth, as her lips parted. Her breasts were twin throbbing mounds pressing upon his chest, and her body was welded against his as she writhed in a savage rhythm of abandonment.

Almost without volition his hands strayed along the smooth skin of her back. He crushed her in a momentary embrace. And then—

**B**EHIND him, he heard a choked cry of dismayed disillusionment. He wheeled—and saw Beth Thayer standing there, white-faced and unbelieving.

"Steve—how could you—!" the golden-haired girl whispered. Then she turned and raced from the cabin, through the open door.

For a single instant he stared after her; saw the swishing flare of her corduroy skirt that limned her slender hips. Then she was gone. With a bitter cry of

self-condemnation Conlan pelted after her, leaving the brunette French-Canadian girl standing in the middle of the room.

Outside, the boss logger saw Beth Thayer running toward her own shack. On mighty strides he pursued her. "Beth—my dearest! Wait! You've got to listen to me! You've got to!"

But she paid him no heed; kept to her headlong course. Then suddenly, off in the downstream distance, Steve Conlan heard a rumbling detonation—a bellowing, earth-shaking roar that filled the night with a hideous blast of sound.

Dynamite!

The shattering reverberation reached Steve Conlan's ears, stopped him dead in his tracks. What the hell did it mean? He heard a confusion of shouts; and over the voices of the men, there came a new and more ominous sound. It was a grinding, metallic undertone with a queer obbligato of cracking noise.

"The river! The ice is going out!" Conlan whispered.

Up to him pelted a sweating, white-faced lumberjack. "Hey—Steve! For Cripe's sake! Hell's busted loose! Somebody dynamited the booms downstream!"

"The booms—!" Steve Conlan rasped. Into his mind's eye leaped a picture of those log structures built like half-dams across the river a half-mile down. Extending outward from either bank, the booms served to guide rafts of logs past perilous rapids; served to keep the floating decks of lumber from piling up and jamming and splintering into worthless nothingness. "The booms—dynamited?" Conlan repeated harshly.

"Yeah! An' the ice is breakin' up! Jeeze, boss, we gotta work fast! Them booms is gotta be fixed before the river

starts runnin'—or else we'll never be able to fix 'em at all!"

The man was right. Conlan knew that. Conlan knew that if the booms were not immediately repaired, it would be worse than useless to start the log-decks floating down to the mills below. Without those booms, the lumber-rafts would pile up in the rapids and be irrevocably lost. And if that happened, Beth Thayer's company would be bankrupt!

With a snarled oath, the boss logger leaped into action. "Roust out the men! Get the tractors going! Chain up five or six decks of logs and snake 'em down to those dynamited booms! Get a move on! We've got to make repairs while the ice still holds—and by God, we'll do it! We'll show the damned Lumber Trust that they can't blast us out of the picture!"

The lumberjack nodded, scurried away. Conlan whirled and smashed himself down to the river's edge; went thundering along the bank to the spot where those wrecked log-booms lay in twisted chaos upon the cracked surface of the ice.

Already his men were on the job, toiling like beavers. Chainmen and riggers were clearing away splintered logs, ripping into the mess with peavy-hooks and axes and saws. Off in the distance, tractor-engines roared and chugger-chuggered-chuggered. The first caterpillar waddled into view, snaking a ten-sleigh train laden with fresh timber from the mountainous decks upstream.

**I**N THE flickering light from scattered resin flares, Steve Conlan went into action. Seizing a peavy, he unsnarled a shambles of splintered spruce at the nearest boom; yelled directions while fresh logs were lowered into place and chained. And over the confusion of

shouts and crashes could still be heard that ominous upstream grinding: the crackle of breaking ice and moving water unpent after its winter-long freeze.

Desperately Conlan fell to his task with renewed frenzy. Beneath his feet, the river-ice was beginning to move a little; he could feel the surging sway of it under his caulked boots. Sweat poured into his eyes. A chuggering caterpillar nosed out upon the cracking ice, hauling its sleigh-train of new logs. On the first sleigh reposed a donkey-engine. Conlan swung forward, grabbed chains, made a hook-up on the second sleigh's load of logs. "Swing 'em!" he roared.

The donkey-engine snorted and chuffed. The logs went sailing upward, hung suspended by a short trestle-boom. "Okay—trip 'em!" Conlan bellowed.

Three chainmen plunged in, struck at the logs. The load crashed down upon the ice, fell in orderly rows. Other jacks leaped at the logs, jerked them with peavy-hooks, set them in place on the reconstructed boom.

**A**N hour. Two hours. Three. Three hours of spine-breaking, muscle-shattering labor. And then, at last, the dynamite damage had been repaired. Not satisfactorily, perhaps; but as Steve Conlan surveyed the rebuilt booms and jetties, a hard smile crossed his stern face. They'd hold, with luck. They'd hold long enough to permit ten million feet of prime Thayer Timber Company logs to stay in the channel and go shooting safely past the rapids to the waiting mills downstream!

The boss logger pounded the last log into place with the blunt snout of his single-bitted axe. Then he raised his voice. "Okay, jacks! Haul away! Get going!"

Men scrambled off the insecure ice,



gained the less precarious banks. Caterpillars went chugger-chuggering back toward camp, and weary lumberjacks headed for the bunkhouses. A silence descended upon the midnight, broken only by the growing thunder of thawing ice and moving water.

As he trudged back upriver, Steve Conlan for the first time in hours had

**There was a flashing instant as the logs went out with the ice.**

**He held Beth to him.**



time to think things over. He remembered that brunette girl whom he had rescued from the river; remembered how she had flaunted her charms before his eyes, tried to lure him with her seductive body! His fists clenched. "By God!" he whispered. "The Lumber Trust bunch

must have hired her to pull that trick on me to keep me out of the way while they were dynamiting the booms!"

Then he thought of Beth Thayer, who had caught the brunette girl in his arms. He must find Beth now; explain things to her—

As he started toward her cabin a sudden chill surprise clutched at his heart. Through the darkness he spied Beth just ahead. "Beth—!" he cried out in a startled voice.

She was standing atop a towering, mountain-high log-deck at the river's brink. She seemed to be making a survey of things; and her footing was perilous, insecure. It was no place for a girl. Even a seasoned jack would be in a bad fix if that deck's key-log happened to give way. . .

"Beth!" Conlan called again, hoarsely. And he started climbing toward her, his caulked boots taking heavy purchase upon the rough bark of the piled logs.

**O**UT of the tail of his eye he saw something far below him—a moving, skulking shape. It was a man with a peavy-hook. But for the moment, Conlan paid no attention. His thoughts were on Beth Thayer. He reached her, slipped a steadying arm about her waist. His hand brushed against her blouse, touched a nubile mound of flesh. "Beth—come down out of here—"

The words died in his throat. At the bottom of the log-deck, something happened with unexpected suddenness. There was a quiver, a jerk, a sudden rending roar. Steve Conlan felt the top logs fly out from under his feet; felt the deck collapsing, spilling into black space. And at the same instant, the river-ice went out with a thundering roar of sound.

"God in heaven!" Steve Conlan rasped

as he fell. He reached out, caught Beth, held her against him as their two bodies went hurtling through the air. There was a brief, flashing instant of kaleidoscopic sensation as he crushed her close, shielded her with his muscular torso. Somehow, as he fell, Conlan caught a glimpse of that skulking shape below.

It was Hectoire L'Ableu, the Canuck—the top decker of the Thayer Timber Company. L'Ableu with his peavy—the only decker in the outfit clever enough to yank out a key-log and send a whole deck plunging into splintered confusion!

L'Ableu! Then he was the man who had planted that girl to keep Conlan from his duties! L'Ableu was the rat behind all the dirty work that had happened to the Thayer camp! L'Ableu—in the pay of the Lumber Trust!

It was just a single flashing instant of stunned realization in Conlan's mind. And then—a cold, savage plunge into the river's ice-strewn water, with Beth Thayer still in his protecting arms. . .

The golden-haired girl gasped, screamed as she struck the frigid surface and went under. Steve Conlan wrenched her back up. He grasped a floating log bobbing amidst the churned ice. He dragged himself upright on the spinning tree-trunk, gripping it with his logger's caulked boots as he held Beth Thayer in his grasp. Other logs caromed into the one under his feet, and he danced desperately to retain his balance and his footing. On the shore, men were shouting, yelling, signaling.

Conlan stared. With a sickening sensation, he saw what was happening. He was headed downstream on the floating log; and already other logs were piling up in gigantic chaos at the booms. The wrecked deck, plummeted into the water by L'Ableu's treacherous peavy-work, had disintegrated and scattered; now the

jumbled timber was jamming in the narrow channel, piling up against the hastily-rebuilt jetties.

Steve Conlan knew what would follow. The log-jam would grow skyscraper-high; then, crushed forward by ice-pressure from behind, it would smash those rebuilt booms like kindling. There was only one chance of salvation. Conlan's eyes narrowed. If he could get at the key-logs of the jam, dislodge them, he might relieve the tremendous back-pressure. He might be able to free a channel for the swirling logs to pass through. . .

The log on which he was riding now jarred under his gripping caulks. He was at the jam!

**H**E WHIRLED and danced precariously to the nearest bank. He set Beth Thayer on her feet. "Run!" he grated. "Back to camp! Send powdermen here with dynamite!"

"Dynamite—? What for?"

"We'll set off a small charge. Free the key-logs ahead of the jam."

"But—that might wreck the booms!"

"We'll have to run that risk." He didn't have time to argue with her. He turned, raced back across the log-jam. Without a peavy he was almost impotent; yet he set to work with his bare, calloused hands. He scrambled to the key-logs of the jam, wrenched at them, kicked them. One shot free, went skirling downstream. The jam shuddered a little, shifted its position. Elation leaped grimly into Conlan's heart. Perhaps if he could move two or three more logs—

He heard a shrill feminine scream behind him. He spun on his heel—and the movement saved his life. Something arrowed past his ear, thwacked into a log beyond him. It was a peavy—and someone had hurled it at his heart!

He saw Beth Thayer coming toward him over the jam. "Steve—my dearest —"

"Go back!" he roared at her. "Go back!"

"No! *Look out—behind you—!*"

Steve Conlan jumped around—and saw L'Ableu leaping at him across the jam from the opposite bank of the river. It was L'Ableu who had hurled that peavy just now! And the Canuck had a .44 Colt in his fist, was aiming it at Conlan's guts.

Beth Thayer screamed again. Over her keening shriek came L'Ableu's snarling voice: "By gar, thees jam she ees not to be feexed, you onderstan'? Me, Hec-toire L'Ableu, have say so!"

Conlan's eyes gleamed with red rage. "The hell you say!" he roared. And he wrenched at the peavy which the Canuck had thrown at him. Wrenched it free. Raised it in one swift motion. Hurled it.

It clunked into the log under L'Ableu's feet; and the hardwood handle came up, smashed into the decker's jaw. L'Ableu staggered, lost his footing, dropped his gun. He clung desperately to a log at the side of the jam.

**B**UT Conlan didn't go after him. Not yet. There was another task—a more important job. Like a madman, the boss logger grabbed the peavy and attacked the remaining key-logs of the jam. He grunted, swore, swung his weight against the peavy. A log shot out, went skittering downstream. Another. The jam shuddered, began to move. Began to break up.

Conlan wheeled, thrust the peavy's hook under L'Ableu's mackinaw collar; pulled the Canuck out of the icy water. Then he grabbed for Beth Thayer, dragged her across the bobbing logs.

*(Continued on page 112)*

*When Bob Carson went into the bayou country with his young wife, he thought only of combatting superstition and disease. But he soon found truth in the saying—“Women don't mean nothin' down in this here neck o' the woods!”*

**By  
KEN COOPER**

# **RIVER of FIRE**



**“Y**OU know what this assignment means, Dr. Carson?”

The gray-haired Divisional Director of the United States Public Health Service looked up.

Bob Carson nodded. “Yes, I understand perfectly.”

“You will be as much a missionary as a physician,” the director continued. “These bayou people are almost fanatic in their distrust of medical science. Despite every effort to wipe it out, barbaric voodooism is still rampant. Our latest report shows a ghastly increase in mortality. The Okochee Bayou is a fester of filth and disease. Are you still willing to accept the post?”

A faint smile curled Bob's lips. He was thinking of Pasteur, of Lister, of Walter Reed. They had all flirted with death to bring enlightenment. He squared his broad shoulders.

“Yes, I'm willing. Mrs. Carson will accompany me as my nurse.”

The director frowned. “If I may so suggest, Dr. Carson,” he said, “I don't think it's wise to take a woman into the bayou country. You will find conditions precarious enough without the added burden of protecting your wife. The practically uncivilized men who inhabit the region regard women as chattels. I feel it imperative to warn you about this.”

“Mrs. Carson is eager to go along. I've told her of the dangers. She comes from pioneer stock, sir. I'm certain she can be of great assistance.”

The director shrugged. “It's up to you, doctor.” He fumbled through some papers. “This is your assignment. Arrangements have already been made to ship instruments, medicinals, and food supplies. A bungalow has been built.



The fiends were spreading oil on the water—igniting it. There could be no escape!

Naturally, utmost secrecy as to its purpose was necessary. Nobody knows, as yet, who will occupy the bungalow. Now, as to getting there. The Spring floods have made the wagon roads impassable. You will have to go by steam launch up the Okochee River to the delta. There, according to our investigator, you will find a native eel fisher who can row you across the bayou to the bungalow. If possible, send out monthly reports."

He rose, extended his hand. "You have my best wishes, doctor. The knowledge that you are aiding humanity should compensate for any discomfiture you may experience. Good-bye and good luck!"

**A**N HOUR later, in a Savannah hotel room, Bob interrupted his packing to sweep the slim, lovely figure of Enid, his bride of a month, into his arms. He kissed the soft hollow of her throat, her cheeks, her warm, poppy-red lips. His arms tightened lovingly about her mature curves, moulding her high firm breasts against him.

"This can easily make a name for me, darling," he enthused. "If we go in there and clean those people up we'll both be famous." His face darkened. "There's just one thing, Enid. It's about you. Blake, at the Health Service, warned me against letting you go along. He said it might be dangerous."

Enid pressed her young, vitally alive

body close. "Do you think I'd let you go without me?"

"No, but—but I thought I might refuse the post."

"Goose! It's a wonderful opportunity, isn't it? Haven't you been talking about it all the way from New York. How many young men just out of medical school get appointments to the Public Health Service?" She twined her arms about Bob's neck, mashed her parted lips down on his mouth. The swelling of her splendid breasts was Bob's answer. She amplified it only when she drew her moist lips away. "We're going together, darling. If it's dangerous you need me and I need you. Right?"

Bob thrilled to her courage. "Right," he whispered, again seeking the ecstatic well-spring of her mouth, feeling the globular fullness of her breasts as his arms enfolded her.

**N**IGHT on the bayou. Only the deep croaking of giant bull frogs and the faint, muffled splash of an oar in the dark water.

Huddled in the back seat of a flat-bottomed eel boat, Enid shivered as the chorus of throaty sound echoed from the ebony pine grove on the far side of the bayou.

Bob tightened his arm about her waist. "Cold?" he whispered.

"N-No." Her teeth chattered. "It—it's just a little spooky."

The wrinkled, stoop-shouldered native in the prow of the boat spat into the water. "Nigguh night," he mumbled.

The very timbre of his voice seemed to match the croaking of the frogs. Bob's hand slid up to where he could feel the pounding of her heart.

"You're not frightened, are you, darling?"

She laughed softly. "Of course not."

Her head came back and her mouth sought Bob's lips. They were warm when they touched, but they turned to ice as a weird shriek knifed out of the black pine grove, rippled over the water like a snake and scuttled into the valley beyond the bayou.

"What's that?" Bob gasped.

The fisherman answered without turning. "Screech owl. Swamp's full uh dem. Ain' no hurt but dey sho' frightens duh wits out uh yuh." He cackled hideously. "Some folks say dey's duh spirits ub duh dead. Ah dunno."

The boat swung around as it neared the steep-banked shore. Bob made out the outlines of a small building set in a cluster of towering pines. There was a flickering light in one window.

"Is—is that the bungalow?" he questioned.

Their ferryman leaned over, grabbed the stump of a sapling tree and pulled the boat in close. "Yassuh, dat's it. Don' look so good in duh night but it's a right smaht shack. Heah, step easy." He held a bony hand out to Enid. She drew back.

Bob lifted her from the boat to the bank, handed up his personal instrument bag, their two suitcases. He dug into his pocket and brought out a dollar bill. The ancient took it, examined it in the orange-yellow glow of an oil lamp.

"Fixin' to stay on a spell?" he questioned.

Bob caught a whiff of his breath. It was heavy with raw alcohol. "I—I suppose we'll be here some time," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Wal, ah thought mebbe you'd be a-needin' some fresh eels. I'll be over mebbe in a week. If yuh'r heal, I'll see yuh."

Bob stepped up on the bank. The boat slid out on the black water. The

eel fisher's fiendish cackle came back to them faintly.

Enid hugged Bob close. "What did he mean?" she panted. "Why did he say if we're here?"

Bob tried desperately to make his voice sound cheery. It was a pitiful effort. "He—he doesn't know we're staying, that's all. You take the small bag and I'll take the rest. I'm anxious to see our new home. Come on."

**A**S THEY neared the bungalow the door opened and a man in boots and breeches stepped out on the porch. The high crown of his tan sombrero almost touched the porch roof. He was big and rangy. The light from the room beyond silhouetted his broad-shouldered figure.

"You the Doc?" he questioned.

Bob stepped in front of Enid. "Yes, I am."

"Here, let me take those bags." Ham-like hands reached out and snatched the baggage from Bob's grip. "Been waitin' for you. Got a fire all set. There's a chill."

Holding Enid's arm, Bob followed the giant stranger inside. He turned to face them, pushing his hat back on his head, towering like a Goliath above them. The skin of his cheeks was like oil-rubbed leather. Bright gray eyes flashed from beneath shaggy brows.

"My name's Eddinger," he said bluffly. "Boll Eddinger. Heard you were comin' down so thought I'd drop in an' get things set to rights."

His hand grip had the strength of a vise. Bob winced. "That—that's awfully nice of you," he stammered.

Eddinger shrugged. "Nothin' at all." He eyed Enid curiously, but there was warmth in the movement of his eyes ever her youthfully curved figure. "Didn't expect a woman, though."

"My wife," Bob explained. "Mrs. Carson, Mr. Eddinger."

Enid forced a wan smile. "How—how do you do, Mr. Eddinger."

He nodded, shuffled his feet self-consciously. "It's high time we had a doc down here," he said. "Yes, sir, it sure is. Why, them white trash are dyin' off like rats in a flood, they are. Burned six yesterday."

"Burned?" Bob echoed.

"Sure thing. They don't believe in decent burial, no, sir. Burn up the corpses an' eat the ashes, that's what they do."

Enid turned white. Her hand covered her mouth. Even Bob blanched. Eddinger seemed not to notice their disgust.

"They kinda figure a man's soul stays with his ashes," he continued. "So they eat 'em to keep him alive. When a woman dies they scatter the ashes on the bayou for the eels. Women don't mean nothin' down in this here neck of the woods."

"But—but how do you happen to be here, Mr. Eddinger?" Bob questioned.

"Me? Oh, I come in before the Spring floods an' stay on until late summer. I buy up all the turps they tap, haul it out around August."

"Turps?"

"Turpentine." He pulled a turnip of a silver watch out of his pocket. "Guess I'll be goin' along. You folks 'll be wantin' some sleep. There's just one thing, Doc. You won't be gettin' much thanks for anythin' you do. These folks kinda got their own way of handlin' sickness. Last week a girl run a sliver through her hand. They didn't wait to see what come of it. They just chopped the hand off. She bled to death durin' the night." He paused at the door. "Jus' go easy for a spell. If you need me ask anyone where Boll is. G'night."



When the door had closed behind him, Bob turned to Enid. Her cheeks were pallid white and her eyes burned like live coals.

"Bob!" she whispered. "Did—did you ever hear anything so horrible?"

He slipped his arms about her waist. "Buck up, kid. We knew what we were coming to. That's why we came, because it *was* this way. In a month we'll have them eating out of our hands." He kissed the delicately soft hollow of her throat, ran his lips up over her chin to her mouth.

Neither of them saw the face at the window. It was thin, pallid and heavily bearded. Dark, malevolent eyes peered out from under scraggly, unkempt brows. The yellow-green tusks of root-rotted teeth hung viscously over a twisted lower lip. It was the face of a maniac; the face of a warped, undeveloped mentality; the face of a human creature whose habitat was the sluggish, oily bayou.

A white-coated tongue slithered out and licked the shapeless lips as Bob and Enid and Enid's mouths joined. Saliva drooled from the tartar-stained teeth and dropped to the filthy rag that was the creature's only covering. Its pupils dilated sensuously, riveted on Enid's breasts. Then, breathing heavily, it melted into the darkness.

**T**HAT first night was mental and physical torture. The macabre croaking of the frogs, the ghastly outcries of the screech owls, all conspired to keep them both awake until sheer exhaustion conquered stark, unmentionable terror. As best they could, they tried to hide from each other the fear that gripped them.

Daylight brought surcease from the pitch horror of night. A bright sun shone down on the bayou. Gay plum-

aged birds dipped low over the surface of the water. It was a different world with the shades of darkness gone.

Bob unpacked his instruments and medicinals. Enid busied herself with the foodstuffs. Not a human soul other than themselves disturbed the sylvan tranquility of their pine-shaded retreat.

"I don't suppose there's much transient trade here," Bob said jokingly. "No use hanging up a shingle."

Enid laughed. "This drum of kerosene, Bob. What's it for?"

"Lamps and lice. That's where you'll come in, darling." He scratched his head significantly. "I'll wager every kid on the bayou is inhabited. You won't mind working on them, will you?"

"Mind?" She slid into Bob's arms, pressed his cheeks between the palms of her hands. "You know I won't mind doing anything—for you."

As though they were powerful magnets, the upthrust hills of her breasts drew his caressing eyes. It seemed as though he could never get enough of Enid's loveliness. Her body was a holy shrine on which he laid the votive offering of his adoration.

"I love you," he whispered, his lips close to the sweet warmth of her mouth. "I love, love, love, *love* you!"

Enid's eyes smiled. Her lips parted in expectancy. "I guess you love me," she murmured.

**D**ARKNESS fell all too soon. Gray fingers of dusk reached down over the bayou, clutched at the daylight, moved it beyond the horizon. The frogs began their incessant croaking. Crickets chirped in the swamp grass outside the cabin.

Enid prepared dinner. It was while she was washing up the few dishes and Bob was labeling his bottles, that a



"Get out!" Enid screamed. "Get out!"

knock sounded at the door. Bob answered.

It was a barefoot girl clothed in a filthy rag of a cotton dress. At first glance Bob thought she was a child. Her ethereally beautiful face was hunger-pinched and dirt-smeared. Her black eyes burned in deep-sunk sockets.

"Cud yuh come, mistuh?" she queried. "Paw's sick tuh dyin'."

Her voice was thin and quavering. Her lips, ripe and full, quivered. Bob ran his eyes up and down her figure. He was amazed to see the plump, globular outlines of mature breasts, the lyred sweep of curved hips. She was a

woman rather than a child. A full-grown woman, voluptuously soft and rounded. The bodice of her faded dress had been torn. The grimy color of her face almost belied the whiteness of the breast Bob could see through the rent.

"Come in," he said.

The girl hung back. "Druther not," she blurted. "Cud yuh come quick, mistuh?" Her fingers fidgeted with the front of her dress, tightening the thin material over her high, swelling breasts. It was evident that the dress was her sole covering.

Enid came out of the kitchen. Her eyes dampened sympathetically as she

saw the woe-begone figure at the door.

"What is it, Bob?" she questioned.

"She says her father is sick. I'd better go along with her. Do you mind staying alone or do you want to come along?"

"Don't be silly! I'll stay." She addressed the girl. "Won't you come in for a moment?"

The girls eyes dropped to the floor. She hid one dirty foot behind the other. The rapid rhythm of her breathing raised and lowered her resilient breasts. Bob was back with his bag.

"What's the matter with your father?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Dunno."

"What's your name?" Enid questioned.

Again the girl hung her head. She seemed dazzled in the presence of a woman who wore clean things, stockings, shoes.

"Peg Cowber," she mumbled.

Bob kissed Enid hurriedly on the lips. "I'll be back as soon as possible. Don't worry."

"Bring her with you," Enid whispered. "I have an old dress she can wear. She looks hungry, too."

"Sweet!"

**H**E WAS gone, following the bare-foot girl through the pine grove. Enid stood in the doorway until the crunch of his footsteps in the dry down needles was lost in the black beyond. The slim crescent of a cold, silvery moon was coming up over the bayou. A bat crossed it, wings widespread. Enid shuddered, closed the door, returned to her dishes.

As she worked she sang softly. The sound of her own voice seemed to lend warmth to the aloneness. She could feel the pounding of her heart under the flesh cushion of her breast. It made

the soft hillock throb like the pulses in her temples. Afraid? Yes, she was afraid. It was a fear born of the intangible; fear of the pagan unknown lurking in these wilds.

Finished with the dishes, Enid busied herself measuring dimity curtains for the windows. She was attaching the rod on one of the two windows facing the bayou when her face froze in an expression of abysmal horror. There, staring at her through the glass, was the sallow-cheeked creature whose malevolent eyes had licked sensuously at her once before.

A scream rose in Enid's throat, died as it reached her numbed lips. The walking, living cadaver pressed its face against the pane. A leer, spawned of the darkest pits of hell, twisted its shapeless mouth.

Enid stumbled to the center of the room. She wanted to cry out but the fingers of hideous fright were iron claws about her throat. She braced herself against the table, waiting for the inevitable, helpless before its coming.

The door opened slowly and the blackness of the night vomited the hunched, bearded man. His shoe-button eyes were maliciously bright as they glittered from rheumy lids. His white-coated tongue slid like a giant grub over a twisted lower lip.

"Ain' aimin' tuh harm yuh," he croaked. "Jus' come by tuh tell yuh we don't like town folk messin' in our business. S'pect yuh'd bettuh be shippin' back f'um wheah yuh come. Ain' healthy in these heah pahts."

He wasn't an idiot. His speech was thick but he knew what he was talking about. He waited for a reply, his eyes moving up and down Enid's body.

She could almost feel the hot, covetous flame of them penetrating her cotton dress and curling about her naked

breasts. It was an unclean sensation.

Somelhow, the power of speech returned to Enid. She drew a deep breath. "You—you can't force us to go! My husband is a government employe! He's here to help you!"

A wolfish snarl leaped from the man's blue lips. "We ain' askin' none o' yuh'r help! We got ways o' makin' yuh git." He backed to the door, motioned.

Enid quivered as she heard the *clump-clump-clump* of heavy feet. A shuffling, gray-haired hag appeared in the orange-yellow light thrown by the lamp on the table. Saliva dripped from her bloodless lips.

Madness was probing into the softness of Enid's brain. She was a graven image, incapable of movement, as the bent, hooded crone came forward. The dank odor of flesh rot swept across Enid's nostrils, choking her with its foulness.

"Put th' hex on her, Ada!" the man screeched. "Show her we ain' no fools!"

**T**HE old hag raised her bony arms. They were fleshless. Her toothless gums gleamed behind spread lips. She began to chant, swaying from side to side.

"Light intuh darkness, blacker'n pitch,  
Eye o' th' night-owl, hell's own witch,  
Debbil come up f'um the pits o' sin,  
Ole Ada askin' th' ha'nt tuh begin!"

The bearded man laughed hysterically, eyes glowing like live coals. Enid's finger-nails bit into the wooden table until the excruciating pain was almost an analgesic. The room began getting darker and she wondered whether she was losing consciousness. She seemed to be in a different world; a world divorced from reality. The old crone and the leering, bearded men were not hu-

mans. They were creatures of the black beyond.

"Light intuh darkness, blacker'n pitch,  
Eye o' the night-owl—"

Droning . . . droning . . . droning. Enid turned her head, looked at the lamp on the table. The flaming wick was fluttering, *going out!* The same thing was happening to the lamp in the kitchen!

"—hell's own witch,  
Debbil come up f'um th' pits o' sin . . ."

Droning . . . droning . . . droning. And darkness, settling like a death's pall over the cabin.

"Get out!" Enid screamed. "*Get out!*"

The man's mocking laughter and the old crone's droning. On and on and on . . . endlessly . . . while it grew darker. The wick of the kitchen lamp sputtered, went out. The second lamp, giving off a feeble, crooked light, threw gaunt, eerie shadows across the walls.

"Light intuh darkness!  
Light intuh darkness!  
Light intuh darkness!"

The hag was screaming now . . . screaming like a demented thing.

"Light intuh darkness, blacker'n pitch!  
Eye o' th' night-owl, hell's own witch!  
Darkness!  
*Darkness!*  
*Eeccc . . . oooooohh!"*

The second lamp went out. A stygian blackness descended on the room. Even the slim, silver crescent of the moon dipped behind a cloud

DETRIFIED, Enid stood rooted to the spot. What madness was this? What evil machinations of black magic? Why had the lamps gone out when the thing began chanting?

Her mind, torn by fear beyond all human endurance, spun like the vortex of a whirlpool. Numbed, timeless moments passed on leaden feet. A heavy, oppressive silence seemed to have come with the darkness, was one with the pall of pitch. Then, out of the nothingness came the shuffle of feet. *Swish-thud. swish-thud. swish-thud.* Ever nearer, ever louder.

Enid tensed herself, scarcely daring to breathe. Oh, God, why didn't Bob come? She wanted to scream for him, but her vocal cords were like taut-drawn piano wires.

She sensed the presence of an alien thing even before she saw the two great, glaring eyes looking out at her from a stygian depth whose boundaries were endless.

They were no human eyes, of that she was certain. They were either the eyes of a beast or the eyes of a monstrosity spawned in the womb of hell. They glowed like two balls of white fire; two balls of white fire alone in the darkness.

The shock brought speech to Enid's icy lips. "Bob!" she shrieked insanely, tearing at her dress to pull it away from her constricted throat. "*Bob!*"

As though in answer to her frenzied cry, there came the chanting of the crone. Softly, so softly, now. A flat, toneless threnody of horror.

"Body is young an' flesh is white,  
All foh th' debbil on th' ha'ntin' night!"

An agonized shriek, ripped from Enid's very soul, screamed like a million mad denizens of hell's furnace as

it shuddered out into the night, echoing across the bayou only to return in a ghastly echo.

Again and again her tortured throat gave voice. Spasms shook her body. In her hysteria she had torn the bodice of her cotton dress, ripped it to the waist. Tears that felt as cold as liquid air rolled down her cheeks and dropped on her bare breasts.

"No!" her brain shrilled. "No!" her lips answered. "*No! No!*"

The eyes grew larger as they came closer. Enid felt hot exhalations, the smacking of thick, moist lips. Two shrouded arms came out, wrapped themselves around her.

Nausea turned Enid's stomach. She tried to escape the thing's horrible clutching arms, but they held her tight, painfully contorting her, digging into her soft flesh like thick, torturous ropes. Wet, clammy fingers raced over her body, leaving their hideous marks on her flesh.

Blindly, Enid fought to repulse the creature. Its brutal clawings had left her half-naked. Her dress was a tattered shred about her body. In her heart she knew this was the end. Death would be sweet by comparison.

"Bob! Bob!"

HER stark cry pierced the gray veil of horror. The echo of it came back in a faint whisper. Again a shrill, high wail—her own agonized voice—threaded through space quiveringly. The slimy lips of the thing were against her mouth, forcing all sound back into her throat.

"Bob! Bob!" The plea was no longer spoken. It came from deep within the tumult of her tortured soul, found no expression. Enid opened her eyes for one horrific instant. Then, blissfully, darkness swept into her brain, shroud-



"My paw made me do it," she said. "He tole me to get yuh intuh the woods!"

ing all the beastly ugliness, all the mad, tragic horror.

**F**OR twenty minutes Bob dogged Peg Cowber's footsteps as she led him through the pine woods. They had gone at least a mile from the cabin, taking a devious, twisting route the girl seemed to know unerringly.

Suddenly, when they reached a thick-set growth through which not a beam of moonlight could penetrate, the girl darted off into the blackness.

"Come back!" Bob shouted. "Hey!"

There was only the boom of his own voice and the rustling of underbrush. Then, out of the silence that followed, came a cry of pain, the thud of a body on the soft bed of dry pine needles.

Bob stumbled in the direction the girl had taken; the direction from which the cry had come. He might just as well have been blind, so complete was the darkness. A faint, sobbing moan led him to the twisted trunk of a fallen tree. His groping hands told him the story

Peg Cowber had caught her ankle in the vise-like space where a thick branch joined the trunk of the tree. She was sprawled out on the ground, her leg twisted cruelly, unable to pull it free.

Bob fumbled for his tiny throat light, flashed it on. A twig had caught in the girl's dress bodice, ripped it down the front. It had fallen from her shoulders. Her youthfully firm breasts were bare, but more than that, the whiteness of her shoulders and back was marred by ghastly green and blue bruises.

She fainted as Bob wrenched her ankle out of its constricting prison. He opened his bag, brought out a bottle of smelling salts. Cradling her head in the crook of his arm he passed the open bottle under her nostrils. Her eyelids fluttered, a moan escaped her pale lips.

Bob directed his tiny light on her body. The soft flesh had been struck again and again by some blunt object. The bruises were not new, no result of her fall. Someone had beaten her.

She opened her eyes. Terror lights flickered in the dilated pupils. "I ain' th' one!" she gasped. "I ain', mistuh!"

She was frightened to death. Her body quivered spasmodically. Her lips trembled.

Bob touched his fingers to her discolored skin. "Who did this?"

"Muh paw! He's th' one. mistuh! He made me!"

"Your father beat you?"

"Yuh!"

"Why?"

"Ah dunno."

"I thought you said your father was sick."

"He ain'! He made me say ut! Ah swear ah didn' do ut muhself, mistuh! It's muh paw an' maw! They say yuh ain' got no right heah! They tol' me tuh get yuh intuh th' woods!"

BOB went cold. The horrible truth hit him in the pit of the stomach, sickening him. He had been drawn away from the cabin so that this girl's parents might wreak their vengeance on Enid!

He shot to his feet. "Show me the way back to the cabin!" he gasped.

The girl cowered. "Ah can't! They'll whip me!"

Bob jerked her up. Pain contorted her face. The ankle that had been caught was swollen and useless. She couldn't walk.

Panic gripped Bob. Chilling visions of Enid at the mercy of these primitive bayou settlers froze his heart. God only knew what was happening to her! Torture, death—maybe worse!

He leaned over, lifted the girl in his arms. "I'll carry you!" he panted. "Tell me how to go!"

Peg Cowber was no lightweight. Her body was full and solid. Sweat stood out on Bob's brow before he had gone half the distance. His arms ached and his legs were lead heavy. He felt the girl's warm, plump breasts against his chest but the voluptuous lure of them was lost on him. He knew only one thing. He *had* to reach that cabin before—before it was too late.

Now he remembered the warning he had been given; the warning that the bayou country was no place for a civilized woman. He cursed himself for being a blind fool.

When it seemed as though he could no longer carry on, the woods opened up and there was the black bayou sucking in the light from the moon crescent. The cabin on the bank.

Bob dropped the girl to the ground. From his bag, slung over his arm, he snatched a keen-edged scalpel. He ran forward, heart pounding, each drop of



cold sweat on his face paradoxically burning like acid.

His body was a twisted bundle of tortured nerves when he reached the open door. In the semi-darkness he stumbled over the kneeling figure of the old hag. The scalpel slashed out, caught the crone across the back of her wrinkled neck. She dropped like an empty sack, blood pouring from the deep slash.

Bob vaulted her body. A ray of moonlight penetrated the dark interior of the hut. What he saw in its cold, silvery light dragged him down . . . down into the deepest pits of hellish horror.

Enid, practically stripped of clothing, was stretched out on the floor. Hovering over her was a huge, shapeless Thing with great, glaring eyes.

Reason fled from Bob's mind. That the Thing was inhuman failed to check his savage lunge. He closed with it feeling himself sucked into a foulness beyond life. The Thing enclosed him, shut out every breath of air. Time and again he struck at it with the sharp scalpel, but the deadly weapon wasted itself on nothingness; on soft masses that were without substance.

Then, suddenly, a great force pushed him back against the wall. There was a screech and a black shadow passed out of the door. Then silence—utter and complete silence. Bob looked at the dead witch woman, her haggard face swimming in a crimson pool of her own blood. He looked at Enid, pale, lifeless. The power of movement returned to his muscles. He dropped on his knees beside Enid, lifted her, carried her into the bedroom. He pressed his cheek to her cruelly lacerated face, laid soothing caresses on the velvet softness of her skin.

"Enid," he whispered. "Enid, darling."

She stirred and her eyes opened.

They looked at him strangely, as though her beaten mind refused to believe what they conveyed. He touched her lips with his fingers.

"Bob!" she cried. "It's you!"

His lips were against hers. "Yes, darling."

"Oh, God!" she murmured.

His voice was low and soothing. "It's all over, Enid."

FOOTSTEPS sounded on the wooden floor of the front room. Bob leaped to his feet, wheeled. It was the native girl, Peg Cowber. Her eyes were fear bright.

"They're comin' aftuh yuh, mistuh!" she gasped. "Yuh bettuh go! They'll kill yuh! He got cut up an' he's dyin'." She pointed to the bayou. "I know where theah's a boat. Yuh gottuh hurry."

Frantic minutes later, Peg shoved the rowboat bearing Bob and Enid out into the dark water. Bob gripped the oars.

"Thanks," he called to the girl on the bank.

The echo of his voice had scarcely died when a chorus of maniacal shrieks drowned out even the sombre croaking of the frogs. In the light of the moon Bob saw a tattered army of men and women pouring out of the pine woods. They lined the bank, screaming and cursing at the departing boat.

Suddenly a burst of flame shot up from the water near the shore. It scuttled out like a giant red bug. Another. Another. In a moment the surface of the bayou was a roaring furnace. Bob knew what was happening. The fiends were spreading oil on the surface of the water! *Igniting it!* There would be no escape! They were trapped, like rats, with a wall of flames around them!

Bob rowed feverishly in an effort at escaping the almost certain death that

(Continued on page 110)

# SKY

By  
**CLIVE  
TRENT**

# GODDESS



*On the Tumbleweed's one side stands the barbaric white queen of a savage land; on the other the ultra-sophisticated aviatrix who knows everything about love. Choose he must, but only after a baptism in blood!*



Poised like a leopard, Lady Di entered the fight.

NEALE, the American, called himself the Tumbleweed, because, like the tumbleweeds of his native West, he was forever rolling. And he didn't want to roll.

But that is the tragedy of all tumbleweeds, who dream of a home, a wife, and kids. The giant hand of destiny grips them and sets them down in odd corners of the earth, and there doesn't seem to be anything that one can do about it at all.

Neale, at thirty, was a pretty thoroughly disillusioned man. He had learned to take life as he found it. And

life, in one of its hilarious moods, was being kind to him. He had a soft job, and a sweetheart. He was Acting-Deputy-Commissioner at the *kraal* of Allaha, the white queen of the Amatonga, in that vast territory known as Rhodesia, extending between the Limpopo and Zambesi rivers, in South Africa.

A white queen? Yes. One of the granddaughters of the famous Englishman, John Dunn, who became a tribal chief in Zululand, and had at least a hundred children, of all shades and colorings. But John Dunn had his moments when he remembered that he was a white man and one of those moments probably accounted for Allaha.

At least, there was no evidence of native blood in her smooth white skin and black, straight hair.

A white girl, brought up in a savage *kraal*, remembering nothing of her re-

doubtable old grandfather, and married to a coal-black chief of the Amatonga, in Rhodesia, at fifteen, because her royal blood required a royal husband.

A coal-black savage, just learning to wear shoes and trousers, and to hunt with a rifle instead of a spear. There were no children. As to the reason for that, perhaps Allaha could have explained; perhaps it was some lingering remnant of race pride.

When the chief died, from being mauled by a lion in a hunt, Allaha became queen of the Amatonga tribe.

She lived in a three-room frame house in the middle of a village of beehive-shaped wattle-and-daub huts. She dispensed justice seated on a chair with a lot of gilding, surrounded by her almost nude head counsellors. Sometimes she wore a loin cloth and a leopard-skin cloak, and at others she wore a second-hand European frock, with silk stockings, and a perky little hat over her ear. And she was white—white all through.

NEALE stirred when the dawn wind began to blow through the bush, and opened his eyes. It was always an adventure, this awaking at dawn. One retravelled one's old life in dreams, and one never knew where one would find oneself.

He dressed and went into Allaha's room and stood looking down at her. She was still asleep, an arm thrown above her head, lifting the firm cone of one breast beneath the light cover. He bent over and lifted her toward him. He felt her stir in his arms, sigh slightly, and then her lips were glued to his.

It was Neale who had taught Allaha how to kiss. Black savages don't kiss. Her husband, the native chief, had never

kissed her, wouldn't have wanted to, even if she had let him.

It was queer how Neale loved Allaha. Once, the Tumbleweed had even thought of taking her to America and marrying her. But he had quickly realized that, white though she was, her home could never be anywhere but among her own savage people. She was quite happy there.

Every two weeks or so, Neale, in his official capacity, visited Allaha's *kraal* to hear legal cases that went beyond petty theft, assault, and to issue the latest orders of the white government at Buluwayo.

He always spent two or three days in Allaha's frame house, with its real European bed, and Allaha used to put on her second-hand frock and silk stockings for him.

She couldn't have been more than twenty-five, and had all the fiery nature of the tropic races.

Soft arms went about Neale's neck, warm breasts were pressed against him. Her breathing quickened, and presently little gasps began to come from her lips. Allaha's slim body quivered under Neale's embrace.

An immense satisfaction filled his heart, and all the past had grown obscure. He was young, he was alive under the warm sun, thrilling to the love of this woman of his own race, a white woman who would never trouble him with the problems of marriage—oil furnaces and cooking-stoves and grocers' bills. And in two weeks' time he would see Allaha again.

He kissed her very gratefully, and felt her cling to him in the ecstasy of the moment.

HE was standing on the porch of the three-room house, watching a file

of graceful native girls returning from the crocodile-pool, their gourds of water balanced on their heads, when he saw a trooper of the Police riding up through the scrub.

In another moment he recognized young Phil Roscoe. The boy jumped from his saddle and saluted.

"Orders, sir," he said, handing Neale a paper.

Neale read it and pursed his lips in a whistle. "Lady Diana Sutwell and Fred Blake, flying from England to Capetown," he read. "Last seen over Victoria Falls. Supposed to have crashed. Employ all available natives to beat the bush for them.

"We've got a troop of police out too, scouring the country," said Roscoe. "This Lady Diana is a duke's daughter. Freddy Blake is her flying companion. They've got to be found and brought in, if they're alive. Must have crashed, or they'd have been in Buluwayo two days ago."

It took Neale about three minutes to get the orders issued—through Allaha, of course. In three minutes more, three score of blacks, with spears and loin-cloths, had departed, to scour the bush and look for the white woman from the skies.

The *kraal* was empty now, except for the chattering women and the pot-bellied piccaninies. Neale was discussing plans with Roscoe on the little porch of Allaha's three-room house.

"I think we'd best strike north along the Hunters' Trail and see if we can get any news," Neale was saying.

Then there was an immense shouting, and the blacks, who had hardly started, were coming back, in their midst a white girl and a white man who stumbled, and had an arm about the girl's neck, and was upheld by her while he made the

weaving journey among the yelling natives.

THEY were dragging in the remains of the plane, and the savages had gone crazy with superstitious awe. They were dancing about the three-room frame house of Allaha, brandishing spears, and what was in their minds no white man could possibly have determined.

Allaha herself, at Neale's curt request, had taken up her quarters in one of the native huts.

"I'm all right," grinned Freddy Blake, from the bed. "We ran out of petrol and had to come down. The damned old plane crashed in the thorn bushes, and I feel as if I've got a busted rib, that's all. Sorry we missed the record, but we'll try it again."

"You're doing fine, old thing," said Lady Di.

Freddy Blake, the young Englishman, was a man of the modern world, the type that every virile nation is turning out today. Not more than twenty-two, utterly fearless and reckless, facing life with a defiant grin.

And the Tumbleweed, at thirty, knew that, because of those eight years' difference between their ages, he had just slipped this modern generation. The Tumbleweed had never ridden in a plane. He had the same desperate courage as Freddy Blake, just the same recklessness, but those eight years separated him from the modern generation. The poor Tumbleweed had certain queer, old-fashioned instincts, Victorian instincts about women, and life in general, that even Allaha couldn't wholly destroy.

Lady Di smiled as she thanked Neale. She was wearing flying garb, trousers and a leather coat. Under the leather coat was a soft shirt, stained

with perspiration and travel. And under the shirt were two little breasts that she was flaunting as if she didn't care a damn about them.

No brassiere restrained them. They stood out, firm little mounds pressing against that shirt of hers, as if she was saying, "Yes, I am a woman. Now what the hell are you going to do about it?"

Blonde hair, and a rounded figure that the flying garb couldn't hide. Hips alone that would drive a man crazy. She stood smiling at Neale, as if she was saying, "Well, what the hell? I'm a woman—yes. What does that mean to you?"

**F**REDDY BLAKE was resting in the bedroom. Roscoe had parked himself some little distance away. An ominous silence had fallen over the *kraal*, and Neale, who knew the natives, was a little uneasy. Also, Allaha hadn't come to the house. Feeling hurt, perhaps. After all, she was a queen, and had been put out for the strangers.

"I don't exactly understand you, Mr. Neale," said Lady Di, as they squatted on the porch together. "You have been telling me your life history, haven't you? You do seem to have had a tough break, but why don't you go back to your own country and marry this mythical woman whom you've made up in your own mind?"

"I'm in love with you," said the Tumbleweed.

"Plenty of men have told me that," said Lady Di. "Any man is drawn toward a presentable woman like me. We take that for granted. But what do you propose to do about it?"

"I'm not such a fool as you think," said Neale. "I guess you're rich. I know I can't ask you to marry me. I couldn't take you to England and live up to that

highly specialized life of yours. I wouldn't fit in."

"What do you want, then?" asked Lady Di.

"I want you," said the Tumbleweed. "Is that frank?"

"Too frank," said Lady Di. "It just happens that I get a tremendous kick out of waiting for the man I shall some day marry. I may not be old-fashioned, but I'm not promiscuous, Mr. Neale. Sorry, and thanks for the compliment."

She went back to the reed mat in the living-room, and, without closing the door, began to pull off the leather coat and the shirt. Two small, but plump breasts tumbled out. Neale watched for an instant, then strode away into the night. He was looking for Roscoe. He found the trooper parked on the ground, his saddle under his head.

"I don't like this quiet in the *kraal*," he said, with a vague instinct of danger. "Camp on the porch, with your rifle handy. I'll squat at the back. These Amatonga have never seen a plane before, and God knows how they'll react."

And he went among the **beehive huts**, looking for Allaha.

They were all empty. Men, women and piccaninies had taken to the bush. It looked ugly to Neale. He couldn't think, couldn't make his mind function properly. The sight of Lady Di's breasts, something youthful and gay and free about her made her the most desirable woman he had ever seen, maddened him in the soft African night, with the moon rising over the thorn-bushes.

He wanted Allaha, to hold her in his arms, and sink into blissful unconsciousness, and forget. Too often before, the Tumbleweed had been through that experience. Old-fashioned Vic-





torian love, the search for that ideal woman who no more exists than the ideal man. And the cure—Allaha!

She wasn't to be found.

Neale sat down among the huts and tried to think the thing out. How was he going to get Freddy Blake and Lady Di across two hundred miles of bush to Buluwayo, without horses? If he sent Roscoe back for horses or a cart, and the natives went crazy—no, that was impossible!

Allaha would have advised him, but Allaha wasn't there. She had taken to the bush with the Amatonga. She was a woman, and she was obviously mad clear through. Neale remembered that he had ordered her out of her house

Bitterness rose up in him at what he saw.



without the smallest ceremony. He had treated her like a native when she was a white woman, and a queen.

An error, a bad error. God only knew what was likely to happen now.

He got his rifle from his saddle, and went back to the back of the house, moving softly through the night. Outside, he sat down. Through the tiny window he heard the sound of voices, Lady Di's and a man's. At first he thought the man was Freddy Blake. Then, with amazement, he recognized it as Roscoe's.

He heard Lady Di laughing softly.

**“WHY**, Phil, you're silly,” she said. “Your old-fashioned scruples remind me of that fool, Neale. Of course Freddy and I were something more than flying-partners when we stopped over on our flight. What do you think we were? Flight over the jungle, death staring us in the face, always the chance of cracking, of being tortured by savages if we landed. Why shouldn't I have done everything in my power to make Freddy happy?”

“Besides, I—I happen to like men . . . Not men like that fool, Neale, who told me his life-story and his dreams and aspirations, but real men who live as if every day was their last, and don't care a damn. I tell you Freddy wouldn't mind, and it's not his business, anyway. Now hold me tighter and kiss me the way you did before.”

Appalled, the Tumbleweed listened. Bitterness rose up within him then. He knew that he would never be quite the same fool again, the fool who revered women. He hated Lady Di now, and he wanted Allaha.

Quietly he opened the door and stepped into the room, to see Lady Di in Phil Roscoe's arms. A shaft of

moonlight played about her plump, small breasts, showed Neale the whole contour of her lovely body.

“Very pretty,” said Neale, “but those were not the orders that I gave you, Roscoe, if you remember. Now get your rifle and watch the front porch.”

Lady Di sprang back, confronting Neale, maddeningly tempting in her apparent unconsciousness of her deshabelle . . . of the brief and tenuous bandeau and step-ins . . . .

“You beast,” she said “Snooping— isn't that your American word?— snooping outside my house. Telling me you respected women, and I say you haven't begun to understand what respecting them means. If you had, you'd learn to leave them alone, with their little falsehoods and inconsistencies, and not go snooping around, trying to trap them.”

**“GET** ready, Roscoe,” said the Tumbleweed. “And take up your position on guard.”

Phil Roscoe muttered a curse. After all, an order from a superior was an order.

The door opened, and Freddy Blake came weaving into the room. He took in the situation with a glance.

“My word, Di,” he said, “what's this? Deceiving me when I had a busted rib?”

Lady Di shrieked her laughter. “That fool,” she said, pointing to Neale, “thought he could win me by telling me his life history and his dreams. Hell, I love both you boys. You understand, Freddy.”

“Sure, it's all right with me,” said Freddy Blake, “only I'm sorry I've got a busted rib.”

“Blake,” said the Tumbleweed, “I'm rather worried about the attitude of the

natives. They've taken to the bush, and they probably think you and this—are gods from the skies."

Lady Di shrieked out derision at the epithet, which wasn't pretty.

"Got a rifle or revolver?" Neale continued.

"I've got a Lueger automatic and plenty of cartridges," said Freddy.

"You be ready to help defend this shack, if we have to. No telling what those witch-doctors are telling the niggers in the bush. Okay." He picked up Lady Di's clothes—the coat and shirt, the trousers and little shoes.

"Going into the second-hand clothing business?" asked Lady Di derisively.

"No," answered Neale. "I'll give these back to you before we leave. Till then, you're going to be just a human female creature, and you're going about without clothes, like a female of any animal species, the horse, or—the dog."

"I say, damn it, you can't treat a lady like that, just because she didn't like you," said Freddy Blake. "A fellow's got to be a gentleman, Neale.

A SUDDEN outburst of yells from the bush punctuated Freddy's words. In the moonlight the four could see the Amatonga swarming toward the hut, brandishing their throwing-spears. Neale heard the shrieks, '*Bulala Umlungu*,' "Kill the white sorcerers!"

Two figures were at their head. One was Allaha, and she was screaming like nothing human. The other was the head tribal witch-doctor, with cow-horns on his head, and his snuffbox thrust through the slit lobe of his ear.

In an instant Roscoe and Neale had their rifles in their hands, while Freddy Blake had darted back for his automatic. A shower of spears flew against the

wall of the frame house, and stuck quivering in it. And the Amatonga had plenty more.

"Don't shoot the woman!" Neale shouted, as the two rifles and the automatic began pumping lead.

But another pistol was coming into action too. Lady Di had one, and she was standing among the three, her magnificent, lean body poised like a leopard's, her plump breasts resting on the arch of her chest, sublimely and magnificently unconscious of her femininity.

The leading files of the Amatonga collapsed under that hail of lead from automatic rifles and pistols. A score of threshing bodies littered the ground in front of the shack. The witch-doctor was down, but Allaha wasn't down. She was standing alone, screaming, and urging on her men.

There came another rush. Stabbing spears were now brought into use, the keen-pointed *assegai* of the South African native. That rush brought the Amatonga warriors up to the doorway.

The last burst of lead drove them back, into the bush, leaving the four together, gasping from the exertion of the fight. In front of the shack was a heap of moaning, writhing bodies. From time to time one would disentangle itself and crawl back into the scrub. The four recharged their weapons.

"I say," gasped Freddy Blake, "this would be rather fun if I didn't have a busted rib, but won't you give Di back her clothes?"

"No," answered Neale.

"Hell, I don't want them," said Lady Di. "I'm not ashamed of my figure."

NEALE looked at her, standing there, and realized that she was purposely torturing him.

He supposed he'd have to let her have her clothes and just forget her. But everything was badly jumbled in the Tumbleweed's head. He'd been so happy with Allaha, until she staged this fantastic fight, and he'd been fooled about Lady Di, as he was always being fooled. He had been mad about her, and now he only wanted to heap insult and ignominy upon her.

Allaha was screaming somewhere in the bush. The Amatonga were not through yet.

No, for there came another rush, another shower of spears. Phil Roscoe gasped and doubled up as an *assegai* stood quivering in his chest. A gush of blood burst from his lips. He quivered and lay still. Phil Roscoe had got his. He was dead.

Shrieking with fury, the Amatonga rushed again, and again the two automatics and Neale's rifle mowed down the leading files. But the ranks behind were coming on, and, at their head, Allaha, screaming like a demented woman.

Rifles and pistols were empty. It was rifle-butt and pistol-butts against spears. A huge savage leaped at Neale, and Neale split his head open as if it had been an egg. Then it was Allaha, with a little spear in her hand, drawn back to thrust.

Neale caught the girl's arm and twisted it, tore the spear from it and left her disarmed.

"*Hamba gachle,*" he said. "Go slowly."

He saw her torture-twisted face. He saw Lady Di aiming her automatic at Allaha's head, and he struck up her hand. The slug passed harmlessly above the girl.

"One of your dreams? Your ideal woman?" sneered Lady Di.

God, how magnificent she was, standing there, half naked, utterly fearless!

FREDDY BLAKE pointed his automatic at Allaha and fired. Allaha dropped. But now the Amatonga were all about them. A savage, holding a flaming brand, flung it at the roof of the shack. It struck, dropped, lay at the foot, a pithy brand of fire. Another flew, another brand. It lit upon the roof and rested there. A little curl of smoke began to spread into the night sky.

The savages had withdrawn again. Neale, Freddy, and Lady Di recharged their weapons. But the whole roof had now caught fire, and the shack was blazing steadily down to its foundations.

"Well, we've got to make a break for it," said Neale.

"Where?" asked Freddy.

Neale hadn't any answer for that. For the Amatonga were all around them, and the throwing spears were still striking into the smoking frame wall of the house. One grazed Neale's shoulder and passed by, quivering in a clapboard.

Suddenly Freddy Blake's face turned gray. He turned to Neale. "They've got me, the damn devils," he said. Neale saw an *assegai* with a head almost as big as a shovel, standing out six inches behind him. It had pierced him through the body.

Freddy Blake supported himself against the smoking wall and grinned. "So—that's the end," he mumbled.

And went down, dying. Twenty-two. The type of young manhood that every civilized country in the world produces. Dying now, and didn't care a damn, because life and death were the same grand adventure.

But Lady Di was down upon her

knees, heedless of the flying spears, and her lips were upon Freddy Blake's. Her lover—one of her lovers. Had he meant anything at all to her, or was that just



Neale tore the spear from the girl's hands and left her disarmed.

a gesture, a salute to a life that was passing.

The Tumbleweed couldn't know. He just stood there, with the throwing-spears flying about him, while Lady Di received the last breath of life from Freddy Blake with her lips.

**H**E went back into the house and got her clothes. "Here, put these on," said the Tumbleweed roughly.

There wasn't much time, for the whole house was becoming a fiery furnace, but Lady Di calmly put on her shoes, then the trousers, then buttoned

her plump breasts into the shirt, then adjusted the leather jacket.

"And now?" she asked of Neale.

The savage yells from the bush indicated that the Amatonga realized that the defenders had reached their end. But of a sudden there sounded the crackle of rifles from another quarter, the yells redoubled, and suddenly the shower of spears ceased to fly.

Through the bush came a troop of hard-bitted Rhodesian police troopers, firing with carbines from their saddles, and driving the natives into the depths of the scrub, tramping them down, imposing on them the terror that the white man exercises on the native, everywhere in the world.

The fight was ended, and two dozen troopers swung up to the blazing hut, just as Neale and Lady Di emerged.

Neale wasn't quite sane at that moment. He was bending over Allaha, crumpled on the ground. Allaha had been shot through the lungs, and was gasping out her life-blood, but she was still what she had always been, a woman.

She smiled up at Neale as he kneeled beside her. "I die," she said.

The Tumbleweed said nothing. Just held the dying girl in his arms. A white girl, whom destiny had cast among savages. Neale had been wise not to have taken her back to America. Their lives hadn't been meant to run that way.

"I was angry," whispered Allaha, in the Amatonga tongue. I was jealous because of her. Do you love her, my man?"

"No," answered Neale. "I think I hate her more than any human being in the world. I love you, Allaha."

Allaha, put her arms around Neale's neck, and died very happily, very peacefully with her cheek against his.

THE troopers were congregating about Neale. "Glad we came in time, sir," said the sergeant in command.

Neale looked at the dead girl, at the two dead men whose corpses had been dragged from the blazing shack. "Yes, in time," he answered bitterly.

"We were sent out to look for Lady Diana Sutwell. Too bad those niggers got Freddy Blake and Phil. But we saved her anyway.

"Yes," said Neale.

"Orders are to bring Lady Diana back to Buluwayo. I'd suggest you come with us, Mr. Neale, and the Commissioner will no doubt send a troop to clear up this district later."

"I don't think this district will need clearing up," said Neale. "That plane scared the natives, And Allaha here"—he pointed to the body of the girl—"well, she was a white woman, and she resented Lady Diana butting in and occupying her house. I don't think there will be any more trouble with the natives."

"I see, sir," said the sergeant.

"Detail some men to dig a grave," said Neale. And then he looked at Allaha. It was incredible that all the beauty and the passion of her had mouldered into this insensate clay. That he would never again feel her arms twine themselves about his neck, and her lips warm and moist upon his own.

He'd taught her to kiss, Neale was thinking, and Allaha had proved an apt pupil.

"I'll do that, sir. We'll fix a shelter for Lady Diana, and tomorrow we'll start for Buluwayo."

"Okay," said Neale. But he followed what had been Allaha until she was cast into the common grave. And then the heart of the Tumbleweed was brok-

en. No, Allaha hadn't been much to him. Just a white girl whom he had fondled when he went to the *kraal*. He hadn't really loved Allaha. But a queer idea was entering into the brain of the Tumbleweed. It was that all women were one and the same person. With the death of Allaha, something had happened to the Tumbleweed that had changed his entire destiny.

He would never have those Victorian, romantic ideas of women again, and his whole outlook on life was altered. Suddenly he felt that he was a man, whose function it was to dominate women, instead of worshiping them.

So that was how he went to the shelter that the troopers had improvised for Lady Diana that night, when the troopers—except for the sentries—were snoring some little distance away.

**S**HE was awake. In the hot African night, she had tossed off her blankets. She was wearing the soiled shirt that came almost to her knees. And it had been rumbled up, so that the sleek columns of her thighs gleamed smooth and white.

"Hello!" Lady Di greeted the Tumbleweed.

Neale squatted down beside her, on his haunches, in the way of Europeans in South Africa.

"How do you feel about me?" he asked.

"I hate you like nothing human,"

answered Lady Di, pulling the shirt down about her hips. "Those two poor boys who died!"

"Not my fault," said the Tumbleweed.

"Perhaps not. Oh, Neale, you fought so gallantly, and I had thought you were just a weakling. I couldn't love you when you came to me with your life history instead of just dominating me."

"No, I guess not," said Neale.

Lady Di began crying. "I never want to see your face again," she said.

"You'll never need to, after we get to Buluwayo. But you'll have to, now—because I still feel the same way about you."

"You dare to—to—?"

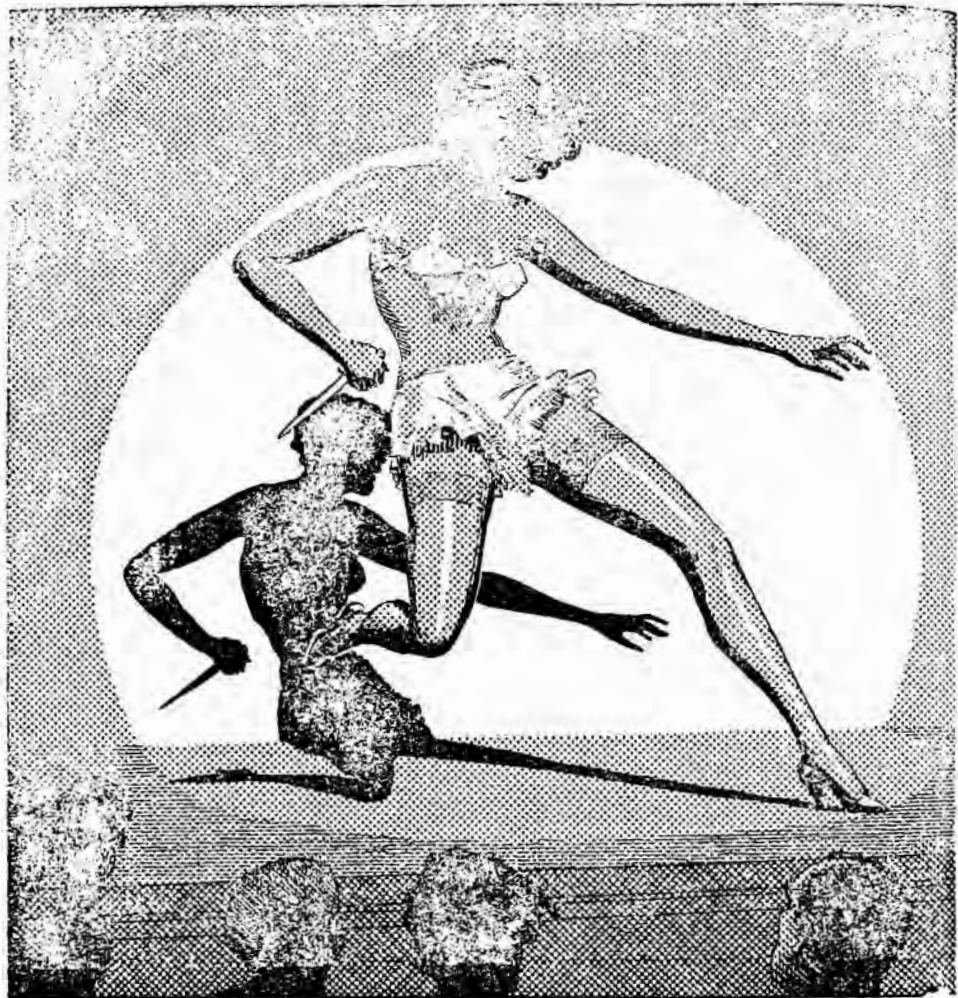
"Yes. Because hate and love are the same thing."

**L**ATER, Neale was holding Lady Di, and thinking about Allaha, whom he would never see any more, and wondering whether all women really were the same.

He was still wondering when the dawn bugle blew, and he detached himself from Lady Di's arms, and made his way back to the house.

He was riding into Buluwayo with Lady Di, and after that he never wanted to see her again. He was thinking of Allaha, lost to him forever. He was a much wiser Tumbleweed, when he placed his lips in a farewell gesture upon hers.

**Lew Merrill, Robert Leslie Bellem, Stewart Gates,  
and others—next month!**



**BLOOD  
WILL SINK  
A SHIP**

**By JOHN BARD**





I took careful aim and let her have it!

***On the flagship are the rulers of seventeen nations.  
Between them and their doom are only Sangre  
Brown and the seductive Rosa—who isn't Rosa at all!***

I SEE the lights of the taxi as it swings down the ramp toward the entrance to the pier. That will be "Ramón & Rosa". I strike three sharp blows with my heel against the weather-beaten planking and, with the brisk sea wind blowing in my face, start for the pier end.

Ahead of me, silhouetted against the moonlight-spangled waters of the bay,

I can see a woman going through ominous motions.

She is removing her clothing one piece at a time. A light flimsy sweater comes off over her head lifting as it does the round bulbs of her breasts that quiver and dance like silver bubbles. Flattening her stomach, she sways her graceful thighs slightly to one side and her skirt slides down around her ankles. A thin

wisp of silk clings lovingly around her hips guarding with faint tenderness the lovely curves of her body. She raises her arms in a gesture of despair. I can see she's going to throw herself into the cold depths below.

I run. Behind me I hear the taxi stop, then drive on again. Over my shoulder I can see that a man and woman have dismounted. I reach the naked girl just as she leaps. I have to brace myself to resist the weight of her body as I lock my arms around her slender waist. Struggling silently, she is desperate in her efforts to hurl herself away from me into the water. Her lovely full breasts sway back and forth to the rhythm of her writhing muscles. A faint perfume tingles at my nostrils. I grow suddenly stronger. I carry her back away from the edge.

I AM conscious of running feet and excited voices behind me. I turn with the struggling girl in my arms. It is Ramón and Rosa who dismounted from the taxi.

"What's up?" says Ramón.

"Hold her a minute," I say, tossing the near-naked girl into his arms.

He catches her with the competence of a professional dancer. Then, as if she had planned it beforehand, she locks her arms around his shoulders with her hands gripped together behind so that he cannot move his arms. She clamps her legs around his body, crossing her feet so that he cannot dislodge her, and places her mouth leech-like over his so that he cannot cry out.

With a little sound of dismay Rosa attacks with clawing hands. From my pocket I jerk a heavy silk scarf, and stepping up behind her, clap it across her mouth, tying it quickly behind her head. Then, with one arm crooked

around her throat, I bend both her wrists behind her and tie her hands together with the ends of the scarf. In another moment I have laid Rosa on her back on the weathered planking and bound her feet with a piece of cord.

By this time Ramón has realized that something is rotten in Denmark. He makes a run for the pier edge staggering under his lovely human burden. I hear her faint cry, "Sangre!" I beat him to the edge by an instant. I hate to hit a man who can't protect himself but I have to. One swift blow on the button does the trick. He goes down backward with a sigh, the girl releasing him as he falls.

"Oh, Sangre," she breathes a sigh of relief. "I'm so glad that's over. I was afraid I'd bungle it."

"You pulled the whole act swell," I congratulate her as I tie and gag the prone figure. "Get your things on quick! I see the blue light of the launch this side of the breakwater."

"What about these two?" she says, raising her bare arms to slip into her sweater.

I suck in my breath at the seductive lift of her rounded breasts. "Blackie will be along to take care of them when he's put the snoop on their hang-out. Snap into it, Lovita, we've got to make the landing platform before that launch arrives."

"Sangre, these people are desperate. It's an awful chance."

"I didn't come all the way from Yucatan to Enseñada to back out now."

"Are you sure they won't recognize us?"

"How can they? They've never seen 'Ramón and Rosa' except across the footlights. They booked the act through an agent." I watch the svelte movement of her white thighs as she slips into her

skat. I lick my lips. "Come on!"

**WE**-tart for the end of the pier where the gangway leads down onto the landing float. From a dark recess at the side of the gangway I grab a small suitcase. "Our costumes, cute one," I grin.

"Oh," she says breathlessly, passing down the gangway ahead of me. "if only we don't have to dance!"

We reach the float which rises and falls to each gentle swell. Straight ahead I see the blue light of the night club ships launch. I hear the muffled roar of its powerful motor.

"Lovita," I say, slipping an arm consolingly around her. "Faint heart never saved a president."

"You can't believe *that* report, Sangre. They wouldn't dare."

"Listen. Old Hardhead believes that night club ship didn't hit that sand bar by accident."

"But maybe business was poor off Frisco and they came south for a new stand."

"Then why don't they throw out the anchor? But no, they want a firm foundation for *something*, so they run her on a sand bar. Why, they struck head on in broad daylight right at the entrance to the narrows! Don't you think that's odd?"

"But, Sangre, what can we do in such a short time? The fleet's due to begin passing around one o'clock."

"We've got to find out if there's anything to do. . . . Shhh. . . . tie on your best personality. Here's the launch. If you value your life, remember your name is Rosa. Mine's Ramón."

The launch bears down upon the platform. A searchlight licks a white tongue out of the shadows to blind us. A dark form leaps to the float, as the launch

draws alongside, flipping the painter around a hardwood cleat. A head topped by a pilot's cap pokes out of the doorway of the dim-lit cabin. A guttural voice with a **Russian** accent shouts above the roar of the motor.

"Ramón and Rosa?"

"Caught in the act." I say, taking Lovita's arm and moving forward.

"Pile in. The floor show goes on at ten sharp. Your act better be good. All right. Loshka; let 'er go."

I laugh. "Don't worry about that. 'Ramón and Rosa' were held over for a third week at the Palace in New York. You have to be good to do that. No, thanks, pilot, we'll stay out here in the air. . . . just in case. . . . well, I'm not a very good sailor."

The man called Loshka leaps onto the prow with the painter in his hand and the launch roars away in a seaward circle. As we pass the breakwater, the guttural voice says, "What kind of a act you two got?"

"I really couldn't say," I answer truthfully. "Come and see. You'll be surprised."

"Oh," whispers Lovita, sinking against me, "if only they *are* surprised."

**T**HE thin bladed spotlight slits the sudden darkness carving out the briskly moving figure of the girl. She is walking toe-and-heel, heel-and-toe, toe-and-heel-and-toe in a smart, cocky "get out of my way, I'm somebody" prance to the sharp rhythm of the music. Her little black-velvet cutaway jacket is fastened with a white pearl button over her full breasts. A very short black wrap-around skirt flicks up and down, up and down at each step revealing enough of her pale thighs to make my muscles tighten.

Gun in hand I leap into the bright

circle of light. The girl stops suddenly on her toes, aghast. I see the flat white stomach suck inward. Her coral lips open in a gasp. A hand raises to her mouth to suppress a scream. Her round breasts peek trembling above the low curved lapels of the jacket. I hold out my hand and snap my fingers as if to say, "Come across with the jack!"

She puts one hand over the little hollow between her breasts as if to protect her valuables and steps backward three short quick steps. I follow. I snap my fingers in a second demand. She shakes her head in determination. I step forward suddenly, grasp the white pearl button and yank. The jacket flips open revealing the entrancing globules of her breasts. From ten feet off, you couldn't see the thin net that covers them. She smothers a little cry of dismay. Holstering my gun I reach out, take the jacket in both hands, and push it backward off her shoulders. For a moment her breasts stand boldly forward, their firm roundness straining at their scant protection.

Then, she spins away from me, leaving the jacket in my hands. I toss it away into the darkness and weave after her to the momentum of the music.

Whirling suddenly in her tracks she slaps me a terrific smack on the cheek. For a moment I am nonplussed. She stands there defiantly, hands on hips, practically naked to the waist, tapping one tiny high-heeled slipper ominously against the floor.

With my right hand I suddenly grip the loose fold of the wrap-around skirt, jerk it violently and spinning her around like a top unwind the skirt and leave her standing, doll-like in a skin tight triangle of pink silk, rolled silk stockings and slippers.

She poises for a moment quivering with a kind of rage. Then bending co-

quettishly she draws something from the top of her stocking. I see a silvery twinkle in the glare of the spot. This will be the payoff. Weaving up to me with a seductive grapevine walk that sways her thighs deliciously she throws her arms around my neck and holds me close. I can feel the soft quivering pressure of her body against my chest.

**S**UDDENLY her right hand snaps up and backward like the jaw of a trap. In it I see a bright sliver of a dagger. But I am too late. The dagger descends, sinks to the hilt, raises again, but before it descends a second time I have placed one hand against her throat, given a violent shove and sent her backward across the floor where she stands, blood-lust in her eyes, dagger in hand.

Twitching my shoulder against the pain of the wound I draw my "38", raise it, take careful aim between her breasts and let her have it. Those six rapid shots shatter the silence like a revolution. She pauses a moment motionless, then begins swaying slightly from side to side. In three strides I am beside her. I catch her as she falls. She lies, white and still, in my arms as I walk slowly out of the spotlight into the darkness.

**T**HE applause is thunderous and insistent considering that there can't be more than a hundred persons on board the night club ship. I walk back into the spotlight and drop her to her feet. Out of the side of my mouth I say, "We got away with it, Lovita. They're lapping it up. Did you pump anything out of that American steward?"

She bows to the applause and says huskily, "I didn't get much time. I asked him how they happened to hit the sand bar. He laughed and said the

captain was taking photographs and didn't see it. What do you think the captain's name is?"

We escape once more from the dance floor into the darkness and start for our dressing rooms.

"I'll bite," I say, "What is his name?"

"Apolinar Koslov."

"What! Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun-man!" We pause in the doorway of cabin 31, her dressing room. "So Captain Koslov was taking photographs when he ran his night club on a sand bar. I'd give my left leg to see the camera the captain was using."

**It's close shooting, if I'm to miss the girl, but I have to chance it.**



Lovita smiles. "I couldn't use your left leg but I saw the camera."

I push her through the doorway and step quickly after her, closing the door. "Pardon the intrusion, Rosa, you interest me."

She stands there open eyed, smiling at me, "It's no intrusion, Ramón, you interest me, too," she whispers the last word. . . "Sangre," as she sways close, holds up her lips and breathes her hot fragrant breath into my face. I'm suddenly conscious of the rise and fall of her beautiful breasts as they brush against my shirt. I fight down the delicious ecstasy that creeps over me.

"Skip that," I growl. "Till after office hours. What about that camera?"

Miffed, she turns sharply on her heel and begins putting on her clothing. "It's a big square box clamped to the rail of the bridge. Take off that bandit regalia and I'll take you on deck and show it to you."

"Done," I say, beating it for the cabin next door. I remove the empty blanks from the .38 and refill it with steel jackets. I change my clothes rapidly, and in ten minutes I'm tapping on Lovita's door. I wait. There is no answer. I knock more loudly. There is still no answer. I call "Lovita" and push open the door. The room is empty.

**I** FIGURE she's got tired of waiting and gone up top-side, so I hike for the end of the hall where a short staircase leads up to "A" deck. The fresh sea breeze strikes my face as I step out on the clean polished deck. There is a bright moon and the first thing I notice is the absolute motionlessness of the ship. It is unnatural. Captain Koslov must have had full speed ahead to wedge the ship so firmly on that sand bar.

Faintly, as I walk forward, I can

hear the music for the act that followed "Ramón and Rosa" in "The Lady and the Bandit". Over the ship's rail to the right I see the dark blur of Tiger Island. On its highest peak a fire is burning. There are goat herders on Tiger Island. The fire's bright blaze blinks at me as if a goatherd were passing back and forth in front of it.

I go forward once more till I'm opposite the bridge. Above me, clamped to the polished brass rail I see a large, square, white enamel box. From it a thin cable extends downward. If that's a camera, I'll eat my hat. I look around for Lovita. She is not here. Inside the glassed-in pilot house I see a light but Koslov is not in evidence. There is a sort of ominous absence of persons. Can it be that posts have been deserted to watch the floor show? This is too convenient.

I climb the metal gangway and examine the white enamel box at closer quarters. I grunt with satisfaction. I raise my eyes once more to Tiger Island. The fire is still blinking. One. . . . One, two, three. . . . I am wondering if there could be another metal box like this on Tiger Island . . . one, two . . . one, two. . . . one . . . . I do not like the regularity of that red blinking eye. I look at my wristwatch. It is ten minutes to twelve.

In one hour and ten minutes the fleet will begin passing through the narrows between Tiger Island and Captain Koslov's night club ship. I feel certain that Koslov knows that on the flag ship at the head of the procession will be the presidents, dictators, and divine rulers of seventeen nations come together to settle the destinies of the world. I feel certain that Koslov knows his country is not represented on the flag ship. I feel certain that he knows why. . . .



I hear a step behind me. That will be Lovita. Something hard smashes against the back of my skull. The moon turns red. The fire on Tiger Island goes out. I feel myself falling. Something cold and wet slaps me in the face. My mouth is full of salt. I come to the surface gasping.

**I** HEAR the crack of a gat and a bullet smacks the water so close it stings my face. I dive and swim under water until I touch the cold metal of the ship's hull, then I come up very slowly. Zowie, but my head aches! I am hidden from above by the curve of the ship's prow but I am so weighted down by my clothing and my gat that I find it work to keep afloat. Nevertheless I breathe a sigh of thanks as I tread water.

Off to my right are the great black links of the anchor chain. Just above me I see the large round orifice of a porthole and reaching up I grab the edge of its riveted steel frame. The tips of my fingers strike something metallic that curves outward and up. I raise my other hand to the frame and draw myself upward. I almost lose my grip with surprise.

I am not looking at a porthole. I am looking into the ominous mouth of a torpedo tube!

I swear softly. Could that explain why the ship was run on the sand bar instead of just anchored? But a torpedo can be shot from a moving ship. *Hija Maria Santissima!* I have it. The ship has to be stationary to use the white enamel box!

Feeling my gat to be certain it's secure, I slide softly back into the water and make for the anchor chain. The metal links are so cold they numb my hands. I pull the .38 and, with each link a step, I begin cautiously to ascend. As

I look up, the hull of the ship is a black wall silhouetted against the sky. Suddenly a round object projects over that wall. It is a head. I can feel eyes boring into me. A hand follows swiftly holding an automatic. I lie flat against the chain, take quick aim and fire. I hear a kind of gurgle and the splash of the automatic as it hits the water. The head and arm drop forward and swing limply astride the railing. I feel something warm and sticky dripping on my face. It has the smell of blood.

Caution will serve me no longer. Someone may have heard the shot. So I scramble up the chain like a frightened monkey. As my head comes level with the deck, I see that the body hanging over the rail is the man called "Loshka". Then I hear Lovita's muffled scream.

I look upward. I can see her through the glass of the pilot house. Her clothing is torn and disarranged, so that plenty of her is exposed and she is pounding the red-bearded face of a great bulk of a man. I recognize Apolinar Koslov. He is laughing at her and pulling her close against him. The cabaret band is still going full blast but I don't dare risk another shot. Some of the crew is sure to come running.

**S**WIFTLY I look at my wrist watch. It has been stopped by the water but I realize all of a sudden that the flag ship is due in less than an hour. Something has to be done quickly. I clamber up to the bridge. Peering through the glass, I see that Lovita has fainted and Koslov is crushing her limp body in his arms, kissing her hungrily. I smash my pistol barrel through the glass and bark, "Cut it, Koslov!"

Swift as light, Koslov swings with  
(Continued on page 114)



# MARRIAGE for MURDER

[Continued from page 27]

"I didn't think he'd **have** the guts to face arrest and trial," he remarked. "I left the gun there so he could take the easiest way out if he wished. Now I'll go back and put his confession on the desk for the police to find. They'll never question it."

When he had done that he walked a little distance with the couple beneath the pulsing stars. He was going to his office, where he meant to spend the night writing a story of tropic romance and sudden death to cable to New York.

"Go easy on the Manhood Moss," he warned as he bade them farewell, "but use plenty of the Croesus Shinbone and Solomon's whiskers. Don't keep any stilettos in the house, don't cheat on each other—and don't forget what to name the first baby!" He took the Good Luck disc from beneath his shirt and hung it around Maria's slender neck. "Wedding present," he said. "I can vouch for it!"

When he looked back they were clasped in an ardent embrace. He was just a little bit jealous, remembering . . .

## RIVER of FIRE

[Continued from page 89]

faced them. But it was useless. The viscous, flaming oil seemed to have feet as it spread. Now, to make the end more certain, the madmen on the bank were hurling full cans of oil far out into the water. As it bubbled to the placid surface it caught fire.

Now there was only a small area around the boat that was, as yet, untouched. It was only a matter of minutes before the seering flames would catch the dry wood. Bob helped Enid to her feet. The boat rocked, moving nearer to the hell of heat.

"Take a deep breath!" he gasped. "Hold it in as long as you can! Dive with me! Keep your arms around my neck!"

A split second before the licking flames enveloped the boat, Bob and Enid went over. Down . . . down into the murky depths. Blindly, Bob struck out for shore. Enid's dead weight ham-

pered him, but he knew that if he failed there was only the roaring inferno above them; the roaring inferno and hideous cremation.

Another foot . . . another foot! His lungs were bursting for lack of air. He felt Enid's arms loosen from about his throat. Twisting, he grabbed her hair in his fingers, paddled furiously with his free hand.

When it seemed that his chest would burst apart, when he could no longer stand the pressure, his feet scraped against the mud bottom of the bayou. He reached a hand up. The water on the surface was warm, but there was no fire. It had burned out close to shore, was raging in the center of the bayou, feeding gluttonously at the wooden boat.

He shot his head up, lifted Enid. She was limp in his arms. He sucked air into his tortured lungs, all they could

stand. Through a haze he saw the gaping natives on the bank. They were down on their knees, chanting. Horror gripped him until he realized they were no longer mad, inhuman beasts. For some unknown reason they were worshipping him.

The truth dawned on him. They had, with their own eyes, seen him come unscathed through a river of fire! It was a miracle! They considered him the possessor of magic powers.

"Help me!" he called.

Willing hands lifted Enid to the bank, dragged him up. Then, the tumult and the raging within him snapped all reason.

"Enid!" he screamed. "Enid!"

The rest was shrouded in the black of night.

**H**OURS later they both stood at the cabin door, gazing at the reflection of flame against the black sky.

"It was Eddinger," Bob said. "He was playing on the superstitions of these ignorant people and exchanging mystic potions for their turpentine. When we came, he knew he had to get rid of us. You remember he was here when we first arrived. He had emptied the lamps of all but enough oil to make certain they would go out when that hag and her husband came to frighten you away. I guess I stabbed him and he bled to death. They're burning his body now."

He slipped his arm around Enid's waist. "When I think of that river of fire, I marvel how we escaped it."

"Let's not think," Enid whispered, huddling close to him. "There's only one thing, Bob. Those eyes—those hideous glaring eyes."

Bob pointed towards the bayou. "See the fireflies? He caught a lot of them

**Learn to DANCE in FIVE DAYS  
... or no cost!  
A SHORT TIME EACH DAY  
IS ALL YOU NEED**



*Popularity...  
good times  
depend on your DANCING!*

**D**ON'T be an unwanted wall-flower just because you have never learned the grace, the swing, of dancing! The people who get invited to the club affairs, to the big dances, to the house-parties, are the ones who can dance well.

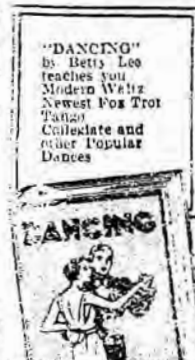
**IT'S EASY THE MODERN WAY!**

It's so simple to learn at home—you don't need a partner nor a teacher. When you learn from a book your teacher is *always* at hand. Clear, detailed descriptions are illustrated by graphic diagrams. Read this book—practice a few hours in your own room—then step out on the dance floor and astonish your friends by doing the newest dances with ease and assurance.

**Make This FREE Test!**

● You don't have to take one word that Betty Lee, with her background of Southern grace and rhythm, can teach you to be a wonderful dancer—you don't take a penny! We will let you try it at our expense because we know you will be thrilled at your success! Don't confuse this full-size, complete book with inexpensive booklets! Send no money—just mail the coupon and when your copy of "Dancing" arrives, deposit \$1.00 (plus postage) with the postman. **PRAC-TICE** a short time each day and in 5 days if you have not learned to dance well, we will refund your money and **MAIL THE COUPON NOW** and enjoy the best party!

**PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.**  
1270 Sixth Ave., Radio City, N. Y. C.



"DANCING" by Betty Lee teaches you Modern Waltz, Newest Fox Trot, Tango, Colleilate and other Popular Dances

.....  
 Pioneer Publications, Inc., Dept. 223E, 1270 Sixth Ave.,  
 Radio City, N. Y. C.  
 Gentlemen: Send me "Dancing" by Betty Lee. I will pay  
 postman \$1.00 (plus postage) on arrival. If in 5 days I  
 have failed to learn to dance, I will return the book and  
 you will refund purchase price.  
 If money accompanies order we pay postage.  
 Name.....  
 Address.....  
 City..... State.....  
 Orders from Foreign Countries \$/s in advance.

rubbed the phosphorescence of their bodies on the hood he wore."

He drew her into the cabin, closed the door. His arms tightened about the pliant softness of her body. His lips

hovered over her mouth.

"We won," he whispered, "you and I. That's all that counts."

They embraced with only the night and the moon to bear witness.

## LOG JAM

[Continued from page 77]

They gained the far bank just as the jam broke loose and went thundering past the booms.

"Steve—Steve darling! You saved the jetties! Saved everything...!" the yellow-haired girl whispered.

But before the boss logger could answer, L'Ableu sprang. "By gar, he ees not save hees own life. Me, Hectoire L'Ableu, I keel thees peeg!" And he leaped at Conlan's throat.

Steve Conlan side-stepped; but his enemy must have sensed the move, for he swerved in mid-stride and bashed full force into the boss logger. Flesh met flesh; brawn smashed into brawn. Conlan felt iron-hard knuckles impact on his jaw, and a numb haze dropped before his eyes for a single instant. He shook his head to clear it; then, with balled fists and flailing arms, he sailed in.

The thudding explosion of his punch sent lightnings of pain up to his elbow as his fists ploughed into L'Ableu's mouth. The Canuck groaned, spat blood and curses. Conlan struck again—heavy, vicious, hammer-hard blows to the decker's midriff and jaw. No man could stand up under that savage maelstrom of infuriated, raging punches. L'Ableu

staggered, swayed and went down. Went down—and stayed down.

Steve Conlan leaned over his exhausted adversary. "Now, you rat! Confess that you dynamited the boom tonight! Confess that you hired that girl to fall in the water so that I'd rescue her and take her to my cabin! Admit that it was a trick to keep me out of action for a while! Confess that you yanked out the key-log of that deck a while ago, when Miss Thayer and I were on top of it! Admit everything or I'll give you the boots!"

"Eet—eet ees true. I admeet ever'theeng you say..."

Conlan turned contemptuously away; and then he saw Beth Thayer standing there, her blue eyes shining in the semi-gloom. He noticed that her blouse had been torn in her fall from the deck; he could see the glories of her firm breasts beneath a filmy brassiere. He could see—

As a matter of fact, he couldn't see anything. Because she was in his arms, and his lips were welded to her mouth, and his eyes were closed in sudden, intoxicated rapture.

### ARE YOU A BORE?

at parties, stags, get-togethers, etc. Well, don't be! With a set of these sensational **NOVELTIES** you can provide many hearty laughs and loads of fun. More than a dozen different, **\$1.00** cash.

**PALACE SALES CO.**  
126 Lexington Ave. Dept. 53 New York, N. Y.

*Be sure to read  
next month's*

**SPICY-ADVENTURE  
STORIES**

**THE WORLD'S GREATEST**  
**Oriental and Occidental Privately Printed Books in English on the**  
**SEX and LOVE RELATIONS**  
**of MANKIND Amazingly Illustrated**

**By the Greatest Sexual Anthropologists of the Orient and the Occident**

*Some of the recent FALSTAFF Private Publications for adults only are:*

**1. The**  
**EROTIKON**  
 By Doctor Augustin Cabanes

THE MOST AMAZINGLY ILLUSTRATED CULTURAL EROTIC WORK EVER ISSUED IN AMERICA PORTRAYING THE STRANGEST PHASES OF THE EROTIC LIFE OF SAVAGE AND CIVILIZED RACES.

The '1001' Strangest Sexual & Amatory Curiosa  
 in the EROTIC LIFE of MEN and WOMEN across the ages

with **550** CURIOUS RACIAL—Erotic Photographs  
 and illustrations—500 in color!

After authentic originals from Anthropological Expeditions—Field Studies—Museum—Archives

**HIGH AIM OF**  
**Falstaff Publications**  
 STATED IN THE WORDS OF THE GREAT  
 PROFESSOR PAOLO MANTEGAZZA



to study love as a complex phenomenon, as a gigantic power which molds itself in a thousand ways among various races and in various epochs, and as an element of health and pleasure for the individual and for the generations has appealed to me as a great and worthy undertaking.

"Whether the Anthropologist describes the bestialities and savageries of African tribes or the supersensitive sensualities of the most aesthetic races, he should use the frankest and simplest language. I saw early that interesting scientific works were possible only by employing bold outlines and by eschewing all technical, and usually wearisome, analyses and descriptions. . . . A wealth of hitherto unknown esoteric documents and manuscripts were there to be unearthed lifting the curtain on mysterious and wise procedure in strange lands, that can increase the happiness of Occidental races. . . ."

Anthropological Studies in the  
**2. STRANGE SEXUAL PRACTICES** of All Races in All Ages  
 of Primitive and Civilized  
 By Dr. Iwan Bloch—Germany's foremost Sex Anthropologist and Physician

Dr. Iwan Bloch's Ethnological and Cultural Studies in the  
**3. SEX LIFE IN ENGLAND ILLUSTRATED**  
 as revealed in its Erotic and Curiosa Literature and Art through our own day  
 with Joyce's Ulysses; Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover; etc., etc.  
 with **169** Rare Erotic Illustrations in Color by England's Greatest Masters  
 of Erotic Art; Hogarth, Beardsley, Rowlandson, etc.  
 Frazer's Million Dollar Private Collection Was Used by Dr. Bloch

**4. MAGICA SEXUALIS ILLUSTRATED EXOTICALLY**  
 Esoteric Sex Sciences and Immemorial Arts of Love of All Lands  
 By the World-famous French Savants—Dr. Emile Laurent and Professor Nagour

● INCOMPARABLY ● The Greatest Work in any language on this subject  
 Scientific and Anthropological Studies in

**5. ILLUSTRATED JAPANESE SEX RELATIONS** 2 vols. de Luxe  
 Thousands of staggering unfoldments not found in any other work  
 Hidden sources in life and letters have been ransacked by the foremost native and  
 European authorities and eyewitnesses of the incredible practices in Japan

Anthropological Studies on the  
**6. SEXUAL RELATIONS OF MANKIND**  
 Including Oriental, Occidental and Savage Arts, Rites, Customs of Love  
 bewildering discoveries and disclosures derived from his vast travels and practice  
 in strange lands, and his ingenious life-long researches  
 By Prof. Paolo Mantegazza—Great Anthropologist—Founder of  
 Italian Museum of Anthropology

Prof. Paolo Mantegazza's Cultural Anthropological Studies in the  
**7. SAVAGE ARTS OF LOVE ILLUSTRATED**  
 with hundreds of authentic photographs of the love life of all Savage Races

**PRIVATELY PRINTED**  
**FOR MATURE READERS**  
 AND COLLECTORS OF  
**AMATORY**  
**CURIOSA**  
 OF ALL RACES  
 SEND FOR FREE CATALOGUE  
 OF BOOKS ON  
 SCIENTIFIC SEXUALIA  
 ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
 ESOTERICA  
 UNEXPURGATED CLASSICS  
 EXOTICALLY ILLUSTRATED  
 Racial Art of Love  
**MAGICA SEXUALIS**  
**LIMITED EDITIONS**

"No serious adult can afford to do without the valuable Falstaff Private Publications or The Falstaff Private Service, unique in America," says a famous American lawyer. IF YOU ARE A SERIOUS ADULT and want FREE ILLUSTRATED LITERATURE fully describing the above and other erotic masterpieces

**Please Mail This Coupon at Once**  
 or use your own stationery, giving your age, and mention Dept. 242-B  
 If you send in this coupon, we will inform you how to get **ABSOLUTELY FREE** SEX ANATOMY AND TECHNIQUE with 227 Photographs and Illustrations and also the Natural Method of Birth Control, illustrated.  
**FALSTAFF PRESS, INC., Dept. 242-B**  
**230 Fifth Ave., New York City**

Please send me marked "Personal" and in a sealed envelope your FREE Illustrated Literature on Books on the Sex and Love Relations by Authorities of World Repute, and how to get FREE the above mentioned books.

NAME .....  
 Written Signature

ADDRESS .....

CITY..... STATE..... AGE.....  
 Note: PLEASE DO NOT FAIL to fill in AGE and SIGNATURE as NO FALSTAFF Publication is ever sent to any one whose age (over 21 or married) and written signature have not been registered on our special files.

## MANLY POWER Increased in a Few Hours with PROSTORIES

The Sex-Stimulating Suppositories

AN AMAZING NEW MEDICAL DISCOVERY

THESE Suppositories strengthen and stimulate the PROSTATE GLAND (which is the base of all manly power) by medicating the gland DIRECT—a natural and logical method. Ask your own doctor. No drugs are taken into the system. Prostories contain no narcotics, yet are so effective that they need to be used only a few hours before the stimulation is wanted.

Originally developed to relieve the pain and sexual weakness of prostate sufferers—repeated tests have proved that PROSTORIES bring greatly increased sexual power to normal men as well—and in just 2 or 3 hours.

There is nothing else on the market like Prostories. Don't confuse them with the harmful, temporary drugs that must be taken constantly to get results. Mixed in plain wrapper.

Trial Box of 10—\$1.00; 24 for \$2.00

Sold on Absolutely MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTS CO.

644 Diversey Boulevard, Dept. F-2, Chicago, Ill.

## Original Reproductions of Photographs

Made in Paris

As a special and to convince you, we offer on FINE, CLEAR FINISH Photographic paper well made and clean: developed actual photos the following 4 groups:

No. 1 Group consisting of 8 Picture Combination

No. 2 Group consisting of 8 Picture Combination

No. 3 Group consisting of 12 Picture Combination

No. 4 Group consisting of 12 Picture Combination

All Year Groups include photos of men and women, etc., all real photos for the Lover of Art. Remember, they are actual reproductions of genuine IMPORTED pictures, and imported negatives.

Also, with the above 4 complete sets of pictures, we include a combination of 72 miniature pictures, 21 of which are of couples, at no extra cost. These are included so that you may, if you wish, select your own subjects and we will make up for you a large photographic reproduction in any size at moderate cost from original negatives.

FREE.—With your first order, we also send you absolutely free, 12 humorous letters, read two ways, also some smartly interesting short stories. These will be free along with everything listed in this advertisement. Get your order in now and get acquainted.

Remember, Everything for \$1.00

Send Cash, Money Order or Stamps, Immediate Shipment, AREX COMPANY, 548 Melrose Ave., Dept. S.D., New York City

## FACTORY SALE— BELOW COST

Cal. AUTOMATIC  
st Pocket Size \$5.95

Model 006-7 shot; fine blued steel; accuracy; safety; flat model. Length overall 11"; wt. 15 oz. Special \$5.95. 25 Cal.—10 Shot—\$7.55; 32 Cal.—8 Shot—\$6.85; 10 Shot Mil. Model—\$7.95. Holsters—Open Top—75c; Shoulder—\$1.75. Cartridges: 25 cal.—65c; 32 cal. 75c per box of 25. \$2 Deposit returned on C.O.D.'s. Send M.O. in full and save charges. Note sold to minors. Catalog: S&W, Colts, Rifles, Air Guns, etc. Send 3c stamp.

LEE SALES CO. (Dept. FX)  
33 W. 32nd St., N. Y. City



## Don't Take Dangerous Drugs

to regain your PEP and VITALITY,

but try and use our French VITALITY CREAM, an external remedy giving immediate results.

The tube \$1.00. Information FREE.

LUC PROUVESKI, Abonne Bo. 13

Lvry-Gargan (S-et-O), FRANCE.

## PILES DON'T BE CUT Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., 474-B-5 Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

When answering advertisements please mention SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES

# Blood Will Sink a Ship

[Continued from page 109]

Lovita in front of him and reaches for his gat. It is close shooting but I have to do it. I let him have it. Just above the left eye appears a round black hole. The shot brings Lovita to. She stands for an instant dazed as Koslov crumples to the floor. I shove my head through the hole in the glass.

"Snap out of it, Lovita!" I say sharply, "Break the glass front of that red box on the wall and pull the brass ring!"

She obeys mechanically. A fire siren begins on a low note and gradually zooms to a screaming, hysterical wail.

"Beat it," I command. "Never mind your clothes. Make for that life boat. Everybody'll be heading for the gangway on the far side by the launches. Hell will break loose here any minute."

Leaping down the iron steps, we haven't more than hit the deck when people start pouring from every doorway out onto the deck. I yell at the top of my lungs, "Gangway on the port side! Launches on the port side! Don't crowd! Plenty of room for everybody!" I pray that nobody gets hurt but I have to get these people off the ship.

A steward rushes up to me. "Where's the fire?"

"In the engine room!" I scream. "The fuel tanks. Get everybody off before she explodes!" The steward leaves me flat.

The first officer speeds along the deck and makes for the bridge.

I thunder at him, "The captain's gone below. Rush all extinguishers below!"

**Page  
Missing**

—just like the Baghdad bus—get her there—dump me over the side—when—”

Ardis choked a sob, and for a moment they clung together in a blood drenched kiss. Then in the desert moonlight she saw the sudden smile that brightened the

face of the man who raised a revolt to save a friend.

“Drive on, Otto,” she said, very softly. “I know you’ll make it. You must be a good man, or he’d never have gone back after you.”

## LUST to KILL

[Continued from page 39]

The plane hit the ground before she awakened. She sat up straight, fumbled for the tin box of papers, glared at the man as the plane came to a halt in a cleared field.

The box was gone.

Calmly he forced her out despite her protests, calmly he took her in his arms. His wound throbbed, her wound throbbed, but both pains were forgotten in the heat of their embrace. Bodies melted, lips flamed and were one.

Eventually she moaned, “But if you

threw the dispatches into the sea what will I tell my superiors at San Sebastian?”

He drew her close again. “San Sebastian? Miles away, dear. You won’t tell them anything. We’ve crossed the Pyrenees now. We’re on the outskirts of Hendaye, in French territory. The only orders you’ll take from now on are mine.”

She shuddered, trembled beneath his caresses. Again he sought her mouth. It was a long while before they caught a ride into Hendaye.



# Women! Delayed?

The GENUINE MENSTRUA when delayed! REMARKABLY SPEEDY RESULTS in many unusual, overdue, difficult, abnormal delays, without pain, harm or inconvenience.

### QUICKER ACTING

Especially recommended where ordinary relief compounds fail, as QUICKER ACTING and much easier and sooner assimilated by body. Not an experiment but widely known for years, and of a type often favored by physicians.

### SO COSTLY RARELY OFFERED

Costs us over 500% more than ordinary relief compounds, but costs you no more! Tasteless, easy to take. Contains no dope, no narcotics, no opiates, no habit-forming drugs, no harsh drastic mineral poisons to punish the body—only pure, harmless, laboratory-tested vegetable ingredients used for many years by physicians all over the world. Absolutely safe to take, for women report no bad effects at all, after the flow was restored.

### READ WHAT SATISFIED CUSTOMERS SAY

Wonderful enthusiastic testimonials. M. L. “3 months overdue. Tried different remedies and nothing worked except Menstrua.” PURITY PRODUCTS CO., 6023 HARPER AVENUE, DEPT. 3-WM-5

O. N. “Missed 3 months. Menstrua deserves wonderful praise.” H. W. “4 other remedies failed. Menstrua relieved 5 weeks delay.” A. P. “9 doses relieved 7 weeks delay. Splendid.” M. M. “Delayed 9 weeks. 1st box worked. Other remedies failed. Amazing!” L. G. “Believed 2 delays (5 weeks and 3 weeks). Wonderful. Painless.” F. D. “Tried many similar medicines. None ever worked. Imagine my surprise and happiness when after missing 2 periods Menstrua did the trick.” E. W. “Missed 2 months and 1 box brought wonderful results.” E. Y. “After several similar products failed, Menstrua did wonderful work!”

### NOTHING BETTER THAN MENSTRUA

When you order MENSTRUA we will not send you one telling of something better and “stronger,” for we have this one relief compound—the best we can procure! In MENSTRUA we offer you our BEST product FIRST, and at the lowest possible price—price no higher than asked for ordinary relief compounds. SAFETY—PURITY GUARANTEED! Price \$2.00. Orders filled same day received, postpaid, in plain sealed box. “PRICELESS INFORMATION” free with order.

CHICAGO, ILL.

When answering advertisements please mention SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES



**Page  
Missing**