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SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES



**EARL
OVER
SWASTIKA**
by Jose Vaca



J. E. SMITH
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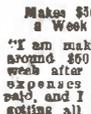
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SPICY 'ADVENTURE' STORIES



OCTOBER, 1941

Vol. 14, No. 4

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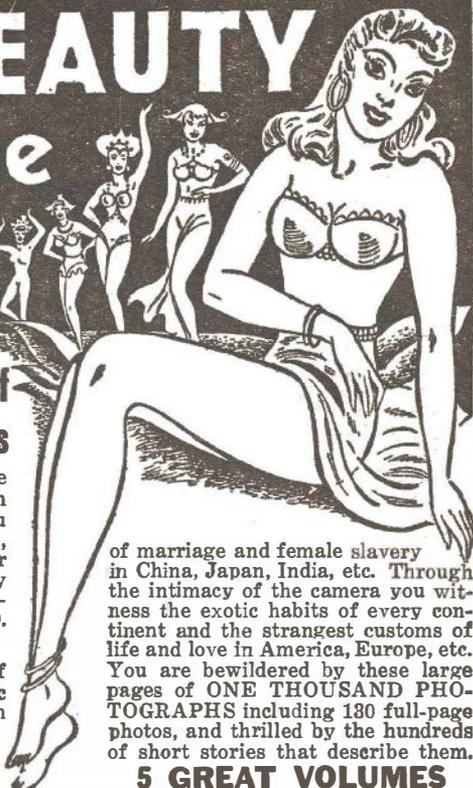
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EARS OVER Swastika



SHE came out of the shower singing "My Heart is Taking Lessons", the water gleaming on the white perfection of her body like tiny jewels. She went to the window of her bedroom, life pulsing and flowing through her veins, pulled back the curtains and looked down into the teeming *Paseo de la Reforma*. Mother Mexico! Mysterious, sullen, unpredictable Mother Mexico. She breathed deeply, her high, arrogant breasts rising and falling with pleasure. Then, throwing a negligee about her slender shoulders she wheeled to the second of the twin beds and glanced down at the girl who slept so soundly, her arm high over her head, the thin pajamas failing to conceal the loveliness that was her bosom.

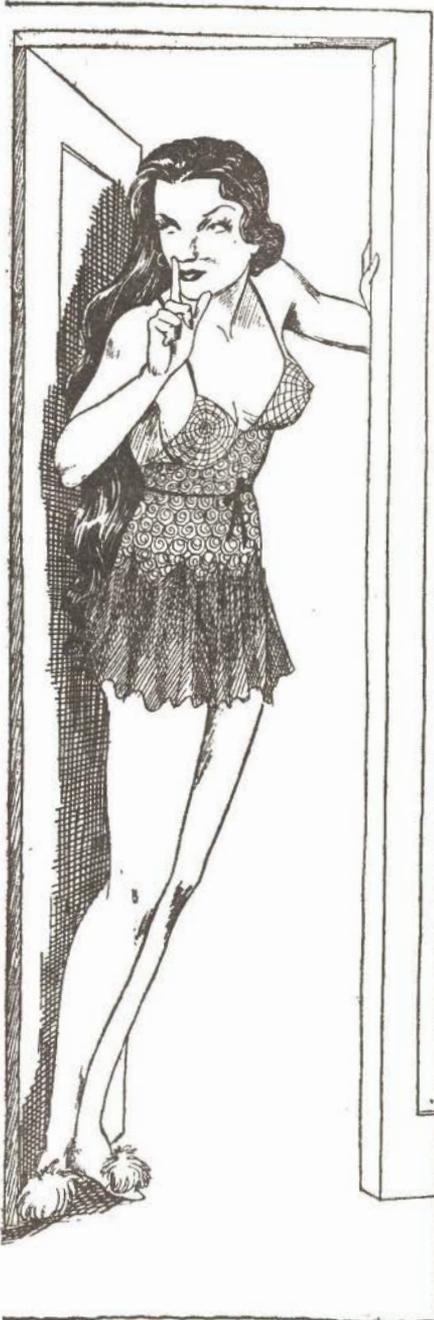
The first girl's name was Marta



Crane. The second was Edith Lar-

By JOSE VACA

"In here, beloved, in here!"
she whispered.

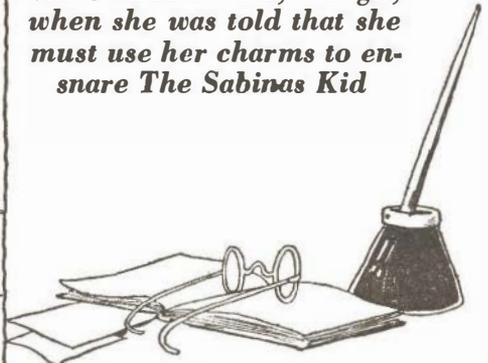


both presumably special students at an Eastern University, specializing in economics and political sciences. This was their first trip to the metropolis of Mexico, Mexico City.

Marta knelt over her luggage, opened a stationery holder and extracted a letter, neatly typed. It bore no signature, simply said, "Morning May 19th. Reforma Coffee Shop. Obviously English."

She tore it carefully to small shreds, went into the bathroom and let it wash into the sewers of Mexico. Only then did she return to the bedroom to awaken her companion. Thirty minutes later, still chattering about the sights they would see, Xochimilco, Chapultepec, and all the others, they descended in the elevator. More

It was a great adventure for the American girl. Mother Mexico harbored within her bosom the foes of Uncle Sam. And, to Marta Crane, it was her chance to do something fine, something romantic, something glamorous. She balked a little, though, when she was told that she must use her charms to ensnare The Sabinas Kid



sen. They were American girls,

than one brown, Spanish-American eye followed the two American girls as they went through the

lobby to the hotel coffee shop, for these two girls were typically American, well dressed, shapely, pretty and well aware of the fact. As they passed through the doors into the coffee shop, the clock read exactly ten.

ONE hour earlier, almost to the second, a man came out of a house in Coyoacan and started for his waiting car. It was a typically Mexican house, in the better section of the city, not far from the armed fortress where the Russian exile, Leon Trotsky, had been assassinated. The man walked through the flowering *patio*, past the singing fountain, smiled up at the parrot that screamed down at him from a flowering *retama*. He was, perhaps, thirty-five years old, with the blonde hair and ruddy cheeks of an Englishman.

He passed through a gate in the wall to where his limousine awaited. Odd! Really odd! Where was his chauffeur? But he smiled, and opened the rear door himself.

"*Buenos dias, senior*. This, as you see, is a gun! A *gringo* gun! It makes a very loud noise and a terrific hole. Please to enter, *senior*, and do not wonder concerning your chauffeur."

The man in the tweeds, who looked so greatly like an Englishman, shrugged, and entered the limousine. From across the street a uniformed chauffeur appeared—not the original chauffeur!—and slid beneath the wheel. The big limousine meshed its gears and headed away from the wall. A fat Mexican woman, the erstwhile cook for this English-appearing gentleman, peeped over the wall

with a smirk on her pock-marked face. It was the first time in her fifty years of precarious living that she had ever possessed a thousand *pesos* at one time.

By nine-thirty the nude body of the man who looked like an Englishman was floating face downward in the Churubusco River. It left a red trail as it floated along, like a white log.

THEY had finished their rolls, and their eggs, scrambled with Mexican sausage, when the man who was obviously English came into the coffee shop. He raised a monocle to his washed-out blue eyes, peered around, and indicated a table, not too far removed from that of the American girls. Edith Larsen went on chattering, endlessly. But Marta Crane's heart bounded and her pulse quickened. "Obviously English," the note had said.

Deliberately, she smiled. The Englishman blinked the monocle out of his eye and beamed in answer. He arose hurriedly, approached their table. He said, "Pardon me, but if I am not mistaken you are—!"

Marta Crane smiled and interrupted excitedly, "Marta Crane, Johnny's sister! I knew you the minute I saw you! Johnny said you were probably in Mexico City."

She extended her slender fingers, and the Englishman grasped them. "Old Johnny," he laughed. "Old Johnny, telling you Ronald Hargrave was here. Imagine!"

Hargrave, Ronald Hargrave. She introduced him to Edith Larsen as a friend of her brother's,

and the trio finished breakfast together. But it was noon before a rendezvous could be made, before Marta could meet Hargrave alone. The meeting took place behind some sheltering palms in the lobby of the hotel. Hargrave set the stage carefully, so that there could be no danger of their being overheard.

"My dear," he said, taking her hand in his, and not failing to note the trim beauty of her crossed ankles, "I suppose you have received all necessary instructions?"

She shook her head. "X talked to me a bit. There were no definite instructions outside of meeting you. He told me that Mexico, particularly Mexico City, was a hotbed of international intrigue. That more plots and counterplots were hatched here than in any place on this hemisphere. I'm cut loose, of course. Mexico doesn't like American secret service people any better than those of any other nationality. I realize all dangers, and I know that I am to take all orders from you."

Hargrave nodded gravely. "The thing is this: Mexico has so many minerals, and so much oil. Mexico has so many miles of unprotected and unpoliced sea coast, that these minerals, and this oil, can easily reach the—ah—er—wrong parties. Do you understand?"

She nodded. She was thrilled, from the top of her blonde head to the bottoms of her little feet.

Nor was this all, he went on to tell her. In spite of propaganda, the Mexican government followed the lead of its neighbor on the north and definitely leaned toward

the cause of Britain. Nevertheless, every move they made, was known to the Nazi powers! British concerns had purchased large supplies of necessary metals, sailed from secret ports. Only to have their ships waylaid and sunk—without trace! A few days previously, Mexico had determined to seize six Yugoslavian freighters, as the *Estados Unidos* had done. Every ship had been scuttled as it lay at anchor! This could not be coincidence!

Hargrave said, "Now we have found it less confusing for our operatives, to work on one thing at a time, even though it seems irrelevant. You have seen my credentials, you know who I am. I have your trust?" She assured him that such was the case. "Very well. Later this afternoon you will go to the Cafe de Paris." He gave her the address. "Presumably this is a haunt of the younger artists, the writers and sculptors, of Mexico. We think it something else. There is a waiter there, named Pablo, who is notoriously weak concerning blondes. Do not be too flagrant, but this waiter Pablo must fall head over heels! He . . ."

EXCEPT for a black patch over his left eye, the waiter, Pablo, was a handsome devil. He was tall, with a thin waist and narrow hips, and his shoulders were so wide as to make his torso wedge-shaped. He was clean-shaven, though a close observer might have turned him to the light, and noted by the less dark area that not too long ago he possessed a mustache. Pablo also was slightly pot-bellied, which was surprising

in one who moved with his catlike grace, whose body otherwise seemed the acme of perfection.

Indeed, many of the jovial patrons of the Cafe de Paris often slapped him on this rounded protruberance and called him, affectionately, *gordito*, which meant, little fatty. Pablo did not mind. He seemed to enjoy it. At night, in his sheltered room, he would take off the sponge rubber pad with a laugh, repeating the word, *gordito, gordito*. Then, as a connoisseur might handle a gem of great rareness, he would remove the big gun that rode there in a special holster.

The gun was gold mounted. The butts were things of beauty, engraved in minute scrolls, and curleycues, with the national arms of Mexico on one side, some lettering on the other. The lettering read: "Jose Maria Gardinia Guedea." For Pablo, the innocent, potbellied waiter, with such a pronounced weakness for blondes, was the Sabinas Kid.

AT TEN past two, when the siesta hour was over, and even the sleepest of the small storekeepers had emerged yawning to take the shutters from their windows, the Cafe de Paris began to fill up. It was, in truth, the haunt of artists, for the proprietor loved the arts himself. A man could pay ten *centavos* for *cafe con leche* or the syrup like *cafe extracto*, filling the cup with hot milk, and linger on for hours, discussing world problems with any and all who would listen.

Pablo scurried about, waiting on

this table, waiting on that. He whistled as he worked, he had a word and a joke for all. But Pablo was waiting, waiting. At three, General Rafael Esparza alighted from his Rolls-Royce, accompanied by his too beautiful niece, *Senorita Dolores*, and entered the cafe.

The proprietor hurried forward himself, beaming, but Pablo was before him. General Esparza, former governor of Oaxaca—virtually dictator of four southern states during the upheavals of the twenties—was a valued patron. He loved the arts, did the good general, and because he did not hear well, his niece always came with him. Pablo took his arm and guided him to his usual table, where he sat down carefully, as fat men always sit down. Pablo pulled out a chair for the beautiful *senorita*, who disdained him haughtily. And without being told, he hurried away for what he knew would be their order.

From the shadows, Pablo—or the Sabinas Kid, if you will—observed the ex-governor a little grimly. The Sabinas Kid had been Mexico's most romantic and daring outlaw for years. He knew Rafael Esparza for what he was. In spite of the bushy white beard and the innocent-appearing blue glasses, he knew Esparza had the grasping and blood-thirsty soul of a tyrant and dictator. Esparza cared no more for the arts than he did for human life—which was, perhaps a snap of his manicured fingers—and yet day after day he came to the Cafe de Paris. This puzzled the Sabinas Kid. And when he told his very good friend, Hargrave about it, Hargrave ad-

vised him to keep his eyes eternally on the old general.

He took the two coffees, the *habanero*, and the sliced lemon to the table. Dolores Esparza continued to disregard him completely. This was a game the Sabinas Kid played each day. He looked forward to it, enjoyed it, and knowing femininity as only a master can, he knew that she, too, really enjoyed the little contest.

He bowed discreetly, moved some three paces to the rear and began to hum a song, a song whose words were well known.

"Mujer que asesina con una mirada,



The letter bore no signature, but it was obviously written by an Englishman.



*mirar que se clava como punalada,
los ojos que tienes yo te los
quitara. . . ."*

The *Senorita* Dolores stirred, she even dimpled in a red-lipped

smile. She cast a dark eye back over her shapely shoulders, and the Sabinas Kid smiled.

The words were hummed again. "Woman that kills with your glances,

Glances that stab like a dagger, Would I could take those eyes from you . . .”

Dolores Esparza bit her lip, her eyes flashed. The Sabinas Kid was not even looking at her! For two American girls, one blonde and one brunette, had entered and the eyes of the Sabinas Kid were on the beautiful blonde. She was Marta Crane, though he did not know it.

Dolores' breasts filled with disdain—that turned to anger. Funny that she should feel so about a simple waiter! She watched the Sabinas Kid seat the two *gringos*, and tried to keep the anger from showing in her face. How he bowed over them, how he rolled his eyes, damn him! And that blonde hussy! Anyone could see with half an eye that she was deliberately leading him on!

SHORTLY afterward Jose Castano entered. Jose was a man of indeterminate age, employed in some capacity by the government. He was a poet, too, whose poetry her uncle, Esparza, seemed to enjoy. Jose hurried to their table, bowed and kissed her hand, though she almost snatched it from his loathsome lips, before he spoke respectfully to General Esparza. Then he went to the next table, where a group of Bohemians, or would-be Bohemians, awaited.

In almost no time at all he was reading his own poetry aloud. He read from manuscript, held high before his eyes, as though he were nearsighted. Dolores tapped her foot impatiently beneath the table and watched Pablo, the lowly waiter, flirt outrageously with the

gringo woman. Her fingers curled like talons. That one! She would like to tear her eyes out!

She might even have been angrier had she known what was transpiring. The girl from the *Estados Unidos* had asked concerning serenades, asked if it were true that Mexican *cabelleros* often played a guitar and sang love songs beneath the windows of beautiful women. The Sabinas Kid conceded that such was the case—and asked where she lived. Shrugging disconsolately, he replied, “But *senorita*, it is impossible to ‘play the bear’ at a hotel. Not too far out the Paseo de la Reforma is a club, the Rancho de la Marquesa! Perhaps if you were to be there tonight?”

But then he grew very, very busy, and was called away from the table. But he knew; the Sabinas Kid knew! And he was also very suspicious. Not for nothing had he dodged *federales* and *policia secreta* for so many years. He knew the average American girl held herself well above even a Mexican *cabellero*, or gentleman. Why, then, should this blonde of such great beauty flirt with Pablo, a poor waiter, in a cheap cafe?

Away, the general is leaving! Duty, and all that, he smiled wryly to himself. What was this? That haughty, cold, *senorita* who was the general's niece, looked meaningfully at the saucer where she had sat. A paper's edge protruded. A note! Hastily he picked up the cup and saucer, managing to hold the note in his hand as Dolores and the fat proprietor of the restaurant led the white-bearded general through the door and helped him

into his limousine that waited at the curb.

In the kitchen, the Kid opened the note and grinned. It said "Senor—The south gate at nine." Nor was there a signature!

The cook said, "Pablo, you are needed. I have news." He looked about to see if he were overheard. The cook and Pablo were old friends.

The Sabinas Kid listened, and slowly his face paled, his jaw set. Without a word he removed his apron, found his hat and coat on its nail behind the kitchen door, and departed hastily.

A HALF hour later the Sabinas Kid left the morgue. He had looked upon the body of his *gringo* friend, the man who called himself Hargrave. But neither by facial expression nor word did he betray the acquaintance, for the policeman from headquarters was right beside him. "That one," he had said, "is not the one I seek."

But there on the street a great bitterness filled his heart. The man's name was not, in reality, Hargrave. His name was Paul Lucas, and the Sabinas Kid had counted him among his finest and truest friends for years. When Lucas had come into Mexico as an undercover agent for the United States, he had immediately contacted the Sabinas Kid. And from friendship, the Sabinas Kid had offered to help him in any way. Lucas had confided his suspicions of General Rafael Esparza, because it was so greatly out of character for the general to come to such a place as the Cafe de Paris, and the Sabinas Kid had managed

to obtain a position as waiter there.

Now on the street he thrust his hand in to his shirt, and his fingers felt the keen edge of the long bladed knife that nestled so snugly against his hip. The knife was thirsting for blood! Sooner or later the Sabinas Kid would leave his mark—the mark of the earless corpse—on the man who had slain his friend.

AT FIFTEEN until nine the Sabinas Kid drove a Ford pickup truck close to the walls of General Rafael Esparza's great house, also in Coyoacan. It was, observed the Kid, not more than two or possibly three blocks from the home of the dead Paul Lucas, who had been his friend. He got out of the seat, climbed to the cab of the truck, and peered over the high wall. Inside was nothing but a welter of trees—he could not even see the house. But along the top of the wall stretched a full score of minute, threadlike wires, loosely strung.

The Kid's grin was not nice, and he was very careful not to touch those wires. He had seen the house where Trotsky, the exile, had dwelt, and those walls, too, had carried such wires. The slightest contact set off an alarm which not only aroused the guards but showed them on what wall the wires were touched.

Rafael Esparza, the Kid knew, had been suckled on the milk of revolution. Obregon, it had been who broke him back in 1922, when he had led his native state of Oaxaca in revolt. Again, in 1933, just eleven years later, he had tried to form a coalition with the

state of Chiapas and withdraw from Mexico altogether. Most assuredly he was a dangerous man; friend Paul Lucas was right, the leopard does not change its spots. The general would be exactly the type to make a deal with a foreign power, in order to gain power and favor for himself.

The Kid dared not risk those wires. Instead, knowing the time was approaching, he lowered himself, trotted on along the wall some half a block, where the rusty and little used south gate was his waiting place. In short moments she, the general's niece, was there.

What they said—the soft words of his wooing—are not important. She was a woman, a beautiful woman, and he was but a poor waiter in her eyes. Nevertheless the fact that the blonde American girl wanted him, enhanced his value in her eyes. She chided him, and he was abject. But eventually he took her in his arms, as he knew he would. And when he left her, standing against the gate with her hand pressed tightly against her trembling breasts, her lips still heavy with his kisses—the Sabinas Kid had the key to the gate.

His conscience assailed him a bit as, from a distance, he saw Dolores search the ground for that key. He was a psychologist, the Sabinas Kid. He knew what she would do, knew all that she *could* do. Presently she went back up the pathway the way she had come, and the gate was open. She dared tell no one where she had been, of course.

Back through that gate went the shadow that was the Sabinas Kid. To his friend, the dead Paul Lucas,

he had made a promise. He had promised to investigate General Rafael Esparza thoroughly and completely. The fact that Lucas was dead did not release him from his promise. In the Kid's code, it made him even more tightly bound. Up the same pathway taken by his light-of-love he went, glad that there was no revealing moon to illumine his movements. And as he broke through the heavy *bosque* and observed the patio of the house itself, the moon slid out from behind a cloud and lit the *patio* and house alike.

THE Sabinas Kid cursed. Then his eyes grew wide in disbelief. He rubbed them with the back of his hand, and saw the same thing. Slowly, slowly, a pair of slender steel poles were emerging from the top of the house. And strung between them were three wires. They were outlined as perfectly against the moonlit bowl of the sky as though an engraver or draftsman had made them with a pen. A radio! Quite naturally Esparza was entitled to a radio! But why collapsible poles, poles that slid down and left that aerie concealed?

It too the Kid nearly five minutes to get into the house. At that he ran into a *mozo*, a servant came upon him face to face, and was forced to crash the gold-mounted gun against his skull. He tugged him into a corner which was protected by a leather-covered chair, went padding softly down the wing in search of a locked room.

At last he found it, listened at the keyhole. Through it he heard a buzzing singing sound which he recognized as radio! Not receiving,



The girl screamed as a pair of bloody ears rolled on the table-top.

but sending! Now what? This room was the next but last to the end of the wing. A stained glass window was set in the far wall. A heavy chair beside it. Next the door of the room itself was an old Aztec urn, squatly and thick, some three or three and a half feet in height.

To think with the Kid was to act. He drew the gold-mounted gun, fired it twice and hurled the heavy chair through the window. By the time General Rafael Esparza opened his door, the Kid was crouching behind the urn. He had counted on the instant reactions of an old sildier, and he had counted rightly. Toward the broken window plunged the fat old general, his gun in his hand. And before a solitary servant appeared, the Sabinas Kid had slithered through the open doorway and was in the

room just vacated. He had been right. The room boasted a compact but complete sending apparatus. And there beside the bug lay the message the General had been sending when so rudely interrupted. True, there naturally was no address, but the wording was.

"Tungsteno y estano dos barcos Ingleses Progreso media noche."

There was no time to puzzle over it; he was afraid of discovery at any moment. It simply meant that two ships loaded with tungsten and tin were leaving the port of Progreso at midnight. English ships, at that! But to whom had General Esparza been sending that message—and why?

The Kid left it exactly where it was, having been careful not to touch it, and hurried back to the door. He held hit hat in his hands as he peered about the casing. A

group of aroused servants were now at the shattered window, calling out to others who were searching the grounds. The general himself was outside. Into the corridor the Kid slipped, and not one of them saw him, so intent were they on what was transpiring outside. He made the turn safely, heaved a sigh of relief, and thrust his hat on the back of his head.

Suddenly a door beside him opened, a laughing voice whispered, "In here, beloved, in here!" What could he do? Groaning a bit at his ill luck he went into the scented darkness. A pair of soft arms went about his neck, a soft body was pressed to his. Dolores whispered, "Ah, you could not stay away! I knew it was you as soon as I heard all the commotion! I knew you would be the clever one, to gain entrance! Beloved! Beloved..."

It was nearly eleven o'clock before he was able to leave the house of General Esparza and his hospitable niece!

MARTA CRANE said, disappointedly, "I am afraid I lack finesse, Mr. Hargrave. I felt sure he would come."

The man who called himself Hargrave, impeccable in evening dress, shook his head politely. "We have but to wait, Miss Crane, I am positive. No man, to say nothing of the Sabinas Kid, could resist such charm as yours!"

And in her strapless evening gown, her blonde hair glistening in the soft lights of the *patio* where there table stood, Marta Crane was at her best.

"What!" she exclaimed. "The Sabinas Kid! Why, in the States we have heard—!"

Hargrave waved a hand pleasantly. "I told you that in this work, my dear, we find it expedient not to reveal too many of our plans at once. Had I told you that you were to go to the Cafe de Paris and flirt with the Sabinas Kid, you could not have worked half so well. Now, it could not have worked out better." There was a sinister note in his voice that caused her to fear him suddenly.

"What do you mean?" And when he told her, she arose so quickly that her chair almost overturned. "No! I won't go through with it. Why—that's—that's what we say in the States, putting a man on the spot!"

"Exactly!" The voice was cold and grim. "The man is an enemy, a dangerous enemy, he works and conspires against us." Seeing her white, strained face, he added, "Against the United States!" How could she know he was lying? "And, a thousand such men die in Mexico each year. He is overdue. My dear, not twenty feet away, crouching there behind that clump of cactus, is the man who will put an end to this nefarious Sabinas Kid!"

And at that precise moment, a knife which had been thirsting for blood, was working grimly. For the Sabinas Kid had chosen the Rancho de la Marchesa purposely. He had, at one time, owned this property himself. He knew an entrance that led beneath the great wall and into the garden—and he had used this entrance.

FIVE minutes later Marta gasped. She saw a man in *charro* costume borrow a guitar from a player in the orchestra. His hat hung to his back, secured by a cord about his swarthy throat, his teeth gleamed, his eyes flashed as they roved the crowd in search for her.

"Signal him," said Hargrave sharply. But she shook her head stubbornly. The Sabinas Kid saw them, came across the flags of the pation with the grace of a cat.

"*Senorita*," he bowed low, smiling, "I have come as I promised." She was powerless to move! Any moment this man, this handsome flashing-eyed fellow, would die. The Sabinas Kid, to die like a dog on these dirty flags.

Somehow she got to her feet, her face white, her hands trembling. She turned to go, and the Kid's hands pulled her down, his eyes were cold and cruel.

"Cannot you introduce me to your friend?"

Hargrave, or the man who called himself Hargrave, started to speak. The Kid's hand slid past the guitar toward his armpit and the blonde man subsided. What difference did it make? The Kid would soon be dead.

"Mr.—Mr.—Mr. Hargrave, my friend Pablo—?"

"Just Pablo," smiled the Kid. "Did I understand you to say Hargrave?" The man in evening clothes was looking into the eyes of death and knew it. "I once knew a man named Hargrave," mused Pablo. "He was a great friend of mine."

Only those words, then nothing else but song for long moments.

He sang her love songs, low and tender and filled with meaning, as only a Mexican can sing them. And then the theme changed and he sang of death, death that must come to all of us, reaching out its bony finger to tap its victim on the shoulder, death that is a little silver bird to nestle in the tangled skein of life.

He placed the guitar beside the table, pulled up a chair. The man in evening clothes glanced uneasily at the clump of cactus. The Sabinas Kid threw back his head and laughed. Marta Crane said savagely, "Go away! Go quickly! I know who you are! Can't you understand that you're—?"

"Miss Crane!"

"Do not mind, my dear," laughed the Sabinas Kid, "but believe me, I thank you none the less. I was not at all sure of you! Now!" He shrugged. He turned savagely on the man. "Two British ships leave Progreso at midnight, with tin and tungsten. Do you think they will arrive safely?"

The man who called himself Hargrave leaped to his feet. Why didn't that fool behind the cactus do something! "I don't understand—?" he faltered.

"Then perhaps you will understand this! Perhaps you can manage to see the general and tell him the message was hardly in order! For that message must be countermanded!" He threw what appeared to be a handkerchief on the table. He took it by the corner, held it high so the handkerchief unrolled and dropped its burden. Marta Crane screamed. A pair of bloody ears dropped on the white cloth.

The man in evening clothes gasped. He looked toward the clump of cactus, his face white. The Sabinas Kid nodded, laughing softly. "You go, my friend?"

And the man stood not on the order of his going. He shot across the patio and through the hallway proper as though propelled by a gun. The Kid did not bother to watch, nor to follow. He knew the fake Englishman was headed for General Esparza's to countermand an order!

"My dear," he said grimly, "the man you introduced as Hargrave is not Hargrave. Hargrave was my friend." He told her the story, leaving her stunned and speechless. "You are no longer of any use to your country in Mexico. I think it best to start back for the *Estados Unidos* at once! No, no, do not thank me, you thanked me enough when you tried to warn me of that one behind the cactus." He took her hands and gazed into her eyes. "I was unsure of you, my dear. Now I am glad that I know truth—and sorry you cannot stay."

He watched her go across the flagstones, her high heels clacking rhythmically, and was truly sorry. The Sabinas Kid was a romantic! Then he glanced toward the clump of cactus where lay an earless dead man, and spat.

PABLO, the waiter, had a problem. He was only half through, his debt to Paul Lucas only half paid. General Rafael Esparza was the man who sent the forbidden messages on a secret radio. But where did he receive his information? The old dog would cross his own mother, Pablo was certain,

and hence was not at all surprised to find him mixed up in such a thing. But who was his confederate? Why in the name of the Virgin did he come to such a place as the Cafe de Paris, where the artists and poets foregathered. There, there was the sour note.

It took him three days to find the semblance of an answer. On two of those three days Jose Castano sat at the round table and read his poetry aloud. Pablo or the Sabinas Kid—did not care for Castano. The poetry was lousy, although the listeners always applauded. Castano paid the check. It was the directness of the old general's blue-spectacled gaze that puzzled the Kid.

On the third day, the general waited until past time for Castano, then departed. And the Kid was sure there was a connection. That night, holding Dolores in his arms, he pondered the question. He was almost positive that there was a connection, that Castano obtained the necessary information from his government associates, and passed it to the general.

"You must go, my dear," whispered Dolores, "it is near dawn. And you were asleep anyway."

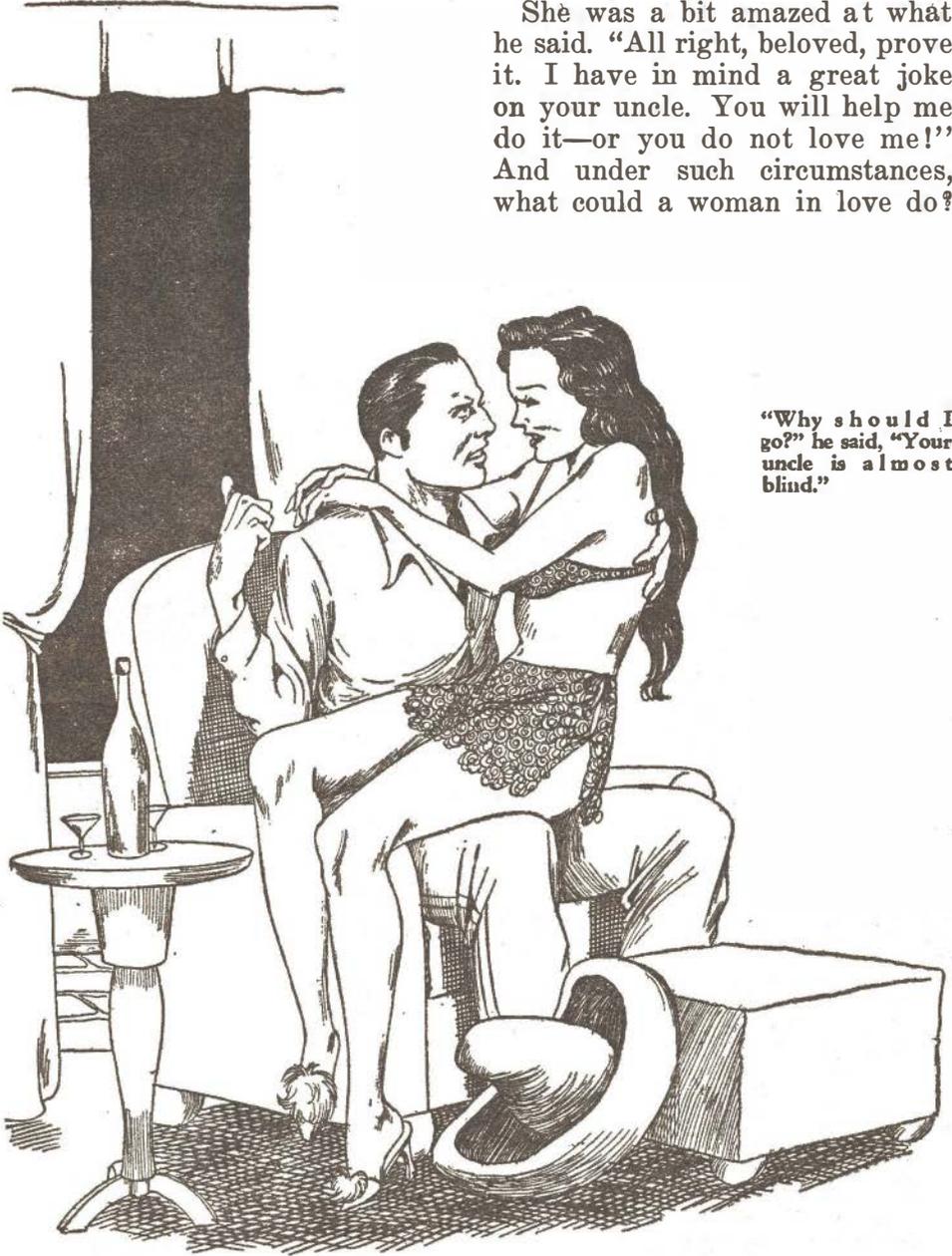
"No, no. I was but thinking little dove. And why should I go? It is still dark and your uncle is almost blind."

"That," she ejaculated, "is what you think. Do not let those glasses fool you. It is only recently he has been wearing them, the hateful things. And how he guards them!"

The Sabinas Kid sat bolt upright. Hunch struck him hard and suddenly. Slyly he said, "Ah, well, I go. You do not love me anyway!"

She was a bit amazed at what he said. "All right, beloved, prove it. I have in mind a great joke on your uncle. You will help me do it—or you do not love me!" And under such circumstances, what could a woman in love do?

"Why should I go?" he said, "Your uncle is almost blind."



Which quite naturally brought fervid protestations, soft arms and softer lips. Eventually she said, "—and you know I would do anything in God's great world for you!"

PPROMPTLY at two-fifteen the following day a Rolls Royce deposited a fat General Rafael Esparza, white whiskers, blue glasses and all, at the Cafe de Paris. The proprietor asked in concern if the

general's niece were ill, and received a sullen headshake in reply. He led the man to his table, shrugging, and another waiter took his order. Pablo, the dog had not reported for duty.

Jose Castano appeared with a sheaf of poems and asked the same question, also receiving the same answer. His cohorts and hangers-on appeared as if by magic, and soon the little man from the government bureau was reading his poems aloud. He had finished three torturous—but applauded—sonnets when it happened. A Rolls Royce appeared before the door—the first having gone on shortly before.

Dolores and a uniformed chauffeur helped the obese General Rafael Esparza from it and into the cafe. Never would the inmates of that cafe get over the shock of what followed. General Esparza arose from his table and bowed deeply to the incoming General Esparza! Each man wore blue glasses. Each man wore a military uniform. It was so ridiculous that all laughed, and it was the niece Dolores who laughed loudest of all. She laughed until her breasts threatened to erupt from her dress, until tears streamed down her face. But the incoming general turned and literally galloped back to his car. The amateur poet snatched his poems and ran for the door.

And no one noticed that the general first on the scene went quickly through the kitchen. No one noticed that the Rolls was now waiting for him at the end of the alley. It slid swiftly away in the proper direction.

Jose Castano started to cross a street on his frantic way back to the office, when the dark Rolls blocked his path. The door flung open. Inside he saw General Esparza, but he was still uncertain. His eyes must have been playing him a trick! But no! A gold-mounted revolver was pointed at him. He got in. But quickly.

In the woods about Toluca, on his knees, Jose Castano cried and prayed. A knife was gleaming in the hand of the man who towered over him. This one said, "You are a slimy little rat, Castano, too puny to kill. The plan you used was very clever. So I will not kill you, but I will take a souvenir!" The knife flashed and Castano screamed once and fainted.

THE fat cook in the walled house at Coyoacan pursed her lips, and her eyes were shrewd. The newcomer who glanced about so furtively, said, "But *Madre de Dios*, I tell you today was the day! I am the Sabinas Kid, I risk life and liberty. I was to meet him here today, at his house!"

Slyly she said, "But he will not be back until evening, *senor*. Could there be a message?"

He pondered. "Say to him that I shall meet him at the south gate of the Esparza house tonight at nine thirty!" Then he was gone.

The cook grinned. The Sabinas Kid. The south gate! He did not even know that his friend—that Lucas who had called himself Hargrave—was dead! Hastily she tossed her apron aside and went out the back door. This one should be worth much more than a thousand *pesos*.

THE blonde man who so greatly resembled an Englishman and was not, realized he had this one chance for redemption. He crouched in the bushes outside the south gate at fifteen after nine, a German Luger tight and hot in his fist. At first sight of the Sabinas Kid he meant to fire.

But the Sabinas Kid had been there since nine! There was scarcely a sound, scarcely more than a gasp, as the knife did its work.

Presently the Kid opened the gate and went into the Esparza grounds. And just as on the first night, the moonlight revealed the high spiderweb of the general's aerial. The Kid said aloud, "Now, Lucas, most assuredly you do not expect me to deal death to this one? He can no more help plotting and conniving than—!"

He shrugged dolefully, and pondered his problem there in the pathway. At last he grinned and hurried along humming "*Perfume de Gardenia*" beneath his breath.

General Esparza was hard at work at his books. Also he was waiting for a communication of some kind from that Castano, who had been so frightened that afternoon at the Cafe de Paris. Dolores—and the general grinned fondly—had admitted that she had hired a gay dog to play the joke. God love her, she had a sense of humor.

He quit his laughter! *Tappety-tap-tap!* "Come in," he called. But nothing happened. He called again. Could his ears be deceiving him? He went slowly to the door, opened it. Immediately his eye caught a piece of paper fluttering floorward, as though it had been tucked into the crack of the door.

His hands began to shake, his eyes to protrude. It was a leaf torn from an American catalogue advertising various mechanical means for cheating at cards and dice. It read: "This liquid, when applied to the backs of cards, immediately dries and is invisible to the naked eye. But when those in the secret, gaze at these cards either through our special eyeshade, or better still, through our specially ground spectacles, the marks or the writing is plainly seen. It is well worth—!"

But the general got no farther. His chest rose and fell rapidly; he was on the verge of apoplexy. Someone knew! Someone—! God! There, neatly thumbtacked on his door were four human ears! Two of them were slightly clotted and dried at the edge, at least. The other two seemed to drip blood even now, and they had a background! They were pinned against a small flag, whose marking was—a swastika!

The Sabinas Kid! The killer of killers! He slanted the door and threw the heavy bolt, leaned against it sweating and panting. Then he approached the accusing radio set.

The Sabinas Kid tiptoed from his place of concealment down the hall. He placed his own ear against the heavy panel, and smiled. From behind the heavy door came the crash of glass, the tinkle of breaking instruments—

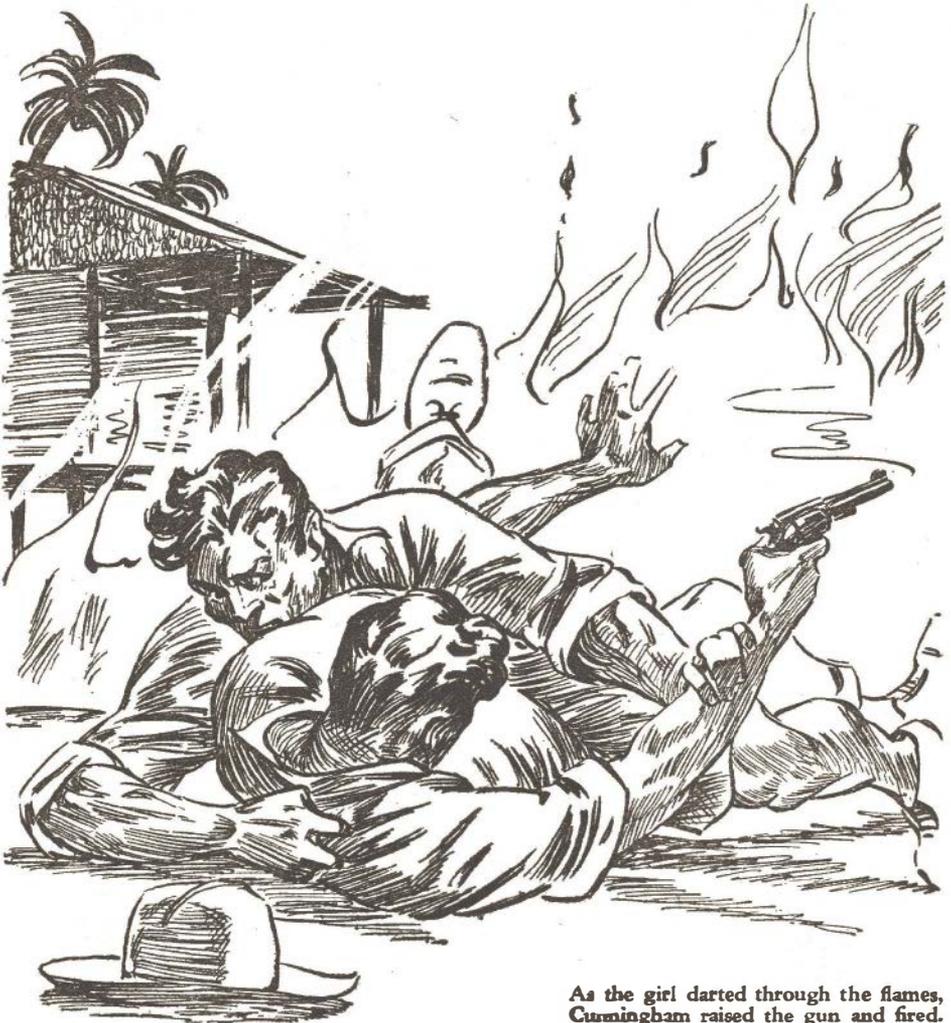
He walked softly down the hall humming "*Perfidia*." Friend Lucas was avenged, and Dolores was waiting in her room about the corner. . . .

HAMMOCK

THE folkways of the Manaos had become an open book to Hollis, after he had lived for two years beside that great tributary of the Amazon. The folk were the tapirs and the deer, the armadillos, the sloths, and the howler monkeys, the rodents, and the screeching parrots. There was a rhythm in all their movements;

nothing was aimless, and every movement was subordinated to fear of the two great enemies—the piranha and the driver ant.

“These, too, had their rhythms, though they were obscure to Hollis. The piranha, the fresh-water shark, small, but incredibly voracious, made the river a death-trap to any living thing that let itself



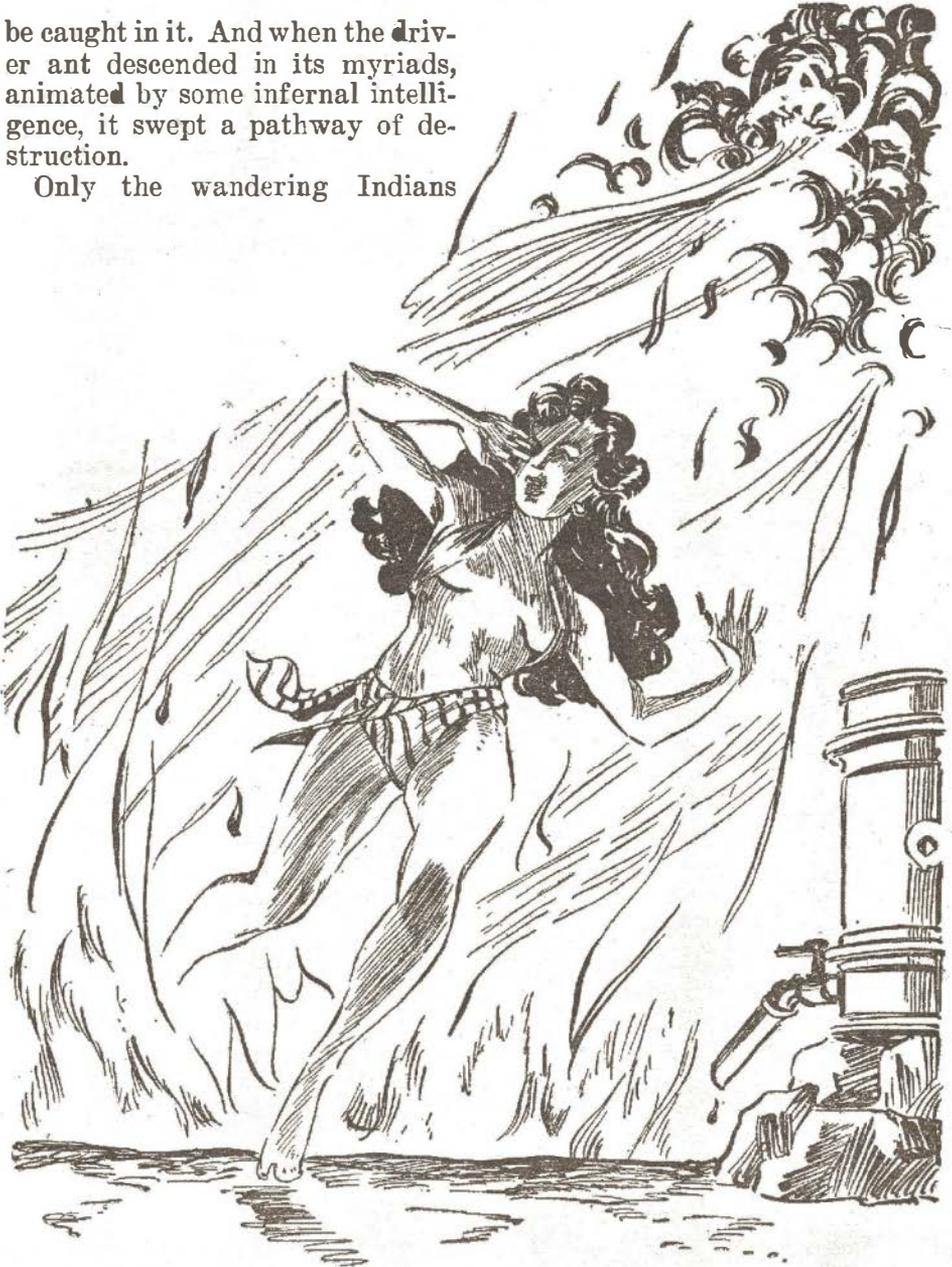
As the girl darted through the flames, Cunningham raised the gun and fired.

LAND

By
HUGH SPEER

be caught in it. And when the driver ant descended in its myriads, animated by some infernal intelligence, it swept a pathway of destruction.

Only the wandering Indians



Hollis laughed at the women, reflecting that it is woman's nature to be as treacherous as a jungle snake. But when the showdown came, he found his real danger was not from the women

seemed to possess the power of moving safely through the forest, unharmed by the drivers. As for the white men—well, twice Hollis had filled the wide trench around his little riverine domain with oil, and twice he had beaten back the swarming devils. But there was no certainty that some day they would not return, with an army large enough to cross his trenches. Hollis's last refuge was the skiff drawn up in its anti-proof sheath of corrugated iron at the river-side.

He awoke to the dawn clamor of the parrots and looked at Ica, sleeping on the ground beneath his hammock. Ica was a girl of a wandering Indian tribe, who had attached herself to him. How long ago? Hollis's memory for dates had become vague. His two years by the Manaos, an outcast from civilization, already seemed to stretch back immeasurably, usurping the earlier memories of the time when he had been a rich man's son in Boston. And obliterating the later memories of that incredible twelve-month in the penitentiary.

Hollis looked at Ica through the meshes of his hammock. In sleep, she had thrown off her blanket, and her thin garment of cotton had wrinkled up above the knees, displaying the loveliness of her brown legs. The curves of her small breasts were perfectly outlined through the sleazy texture of the material. Her long black hair was like a pool of darkness on the ground.

Hollis, as always on awaking, put his hand to the little bag at his throat, detached it, opened it. Six huge diamonds tilted into the

palm of his hand. Yellow stones, like topazes, Brazilian diamonds, but worth a little fortune in his own country. Plenty more where they came from.

SOME day, when he had found more, he would go back, maybe. He had about two dozen more, but those were smaller and less perfect stones. He had found the lot in a small volcanic pipe beside the Manaos months before. Some of the smaller stones had provided him with food from the rubber camp, fifteen miles down the river.

There, a score of white men and some hundred natives and imported negroes worked on the huge plantation, destined to provide rubber for one of the biggest automobile companies in the United States. It was to the camp that Hollis's father had sent him to after his discharge from the penitentiary.

Hollis thought of his father without rancor, simply as of someone of the past.

A wild collegiate career, a check forged with his father's name—thoughtlessly, to meet a friend's necessity. Hollis had never dreamed his father would repudiate it, still less have him arrested, sent to the pen . . . Oh, well, what was the use of remembering such banalities? Old Hollis, wounded to the soul by his son's divergence from the path he had drawn for him, had acted like a madman, crucifying his pride for the sake of his puritan principles.

After the year in the pen, the job at the rubber camp, "to redeem himself." Hollis had stayed one week, then walked away into the

wilds. Two years ago.

He had the diamonds now. Why did he stay? He stretched himself luxuriously in his hammock, cogitating. The hammock is like the wheel, one of the great primal inventions of man. The idea of the wheel was born from the tree-trunk; the hammock came from the sloth, hanging body down from the underside of branches.

All through the vast forest country, clear to the Andes, the hammock typifies life. The sloth, the monkey, and the Indian use it. And it begets a lethargy that blunts the edge of consciousness, so that nothing is quite real.

A hoactzin screeched; a red-faced monkey peered down from a tree above. Hollis grinned at it. "You're not real, you know," he said. "Nothing is real in this country."

Ica was stirring. Hollis dropped from his hammock and crouched at her side. The Indian girl's eyes opened; first Hollis saw in them the measureless depths of sleep, and then she smiled.

She rose, and the tattered garment dropped from one shapely shoulder, revealing the rounded bosom. Hollis drew her into his arms; the flesh of her back was pliant and warm beneath his exploring fingers. Ica's red lips pouted before his own.

"You're real," said Hollis, and clutched her hard against him. Ica was the only reality in that shadowy life of his, with its *dolce far niente* of the hammock and a bottle of whiskey.

river. "A big ship comes," she said in faltering Portuguese. "There are white people aboard."

Hollis made his way along the ridge of rock that ran out above the margin of the bank, beside his little iron boathouse. The water was alive with schools of tiny fish, scurrying in fear from the onset of the piranha. Up the stream a big launch was moving. On her flat deck were half-a-dozen girls, wearing pretty white dresses, with parasols over their heads.

Such boats appeared periodically. Da Silva and Cunningham ran the so-called theatrical agency that visited the rubber camps along the Amazon and its tributaries. It was a very profitable business, though the acting was only a by-product. The partners had a good taste in pretty Brazilian girls. Now and again there would be a girl from the United States among them, one of those unfortunate inveigled into joining a so-called theatrical troupe, and left stranded in some South American city.

Well, the blonde Anglo-Saxon girl was at a premium in Latin America.

Hollis saw just such a girl among those on deck, as the launch moved toward his side of the river, to avoid the central rapids. The vessel came on, her propeller churning up the water within a short stone's throw of where Hollis was standing.

The girl stood alone at the rail. The morning sun shone on her honey-colored hair. Her thin blouse disclosed the rounded perfection of her form. She was very young, and her face looked very hard. She looked at Hollis without

AFTER a while Ica detached herself and pointed toward the

greeting him, and the sight of her brought back to Hollis the memory of just such a girl, who had thrown him over when his father sent him to the pen.

He had gone to see her when he was released, because he was desperate about her, and there had been an ugly scene. Well, all that was in the half-remembered past.

"Hello there, Hollis!"

That was Cunningham. He was a man in his early forties, with a hard, shrewd face, the typical cosmopolitan adventurer. Cunningham and Da Silva were notorious even among the crooked adventurers of the Amazon ports. Hollis had met them at one of the coastal ports.

Cunningham stopped beside the girl and put his arm around her. He turned to leer at Hollis.

He waved his hand. "I'll be seeing you, Hollis," he called.

The girl looked up indifferently for a moment. The Brazilian beauties waved mockingly, and the launch went on, rounded the point of land, and disappeared from sight.

IN HAMMOCK Land the dulling of the mind is accompanied by a compensatory development of instinct. It is the dull-witted shrewdness of the ant-eater, or of the sloth, pendent beneath a branch and yet alive to danger. Hollis had known for a long time that Ica had a lover among her own tribe, though he had never been able to detect the man from among the Indians who occasionally wandered into his camp to exchange a slaughtered peccary for some cloth or flour, or trade goods.

Lying in his hammock, slung between two trees in front of the shack, within the clearing, Hollis vegetated, as the sloth might be said to do. His animal needs were satisfied, he still had a half-bottle of whiskey beside him, rendering unnecessary the labor of breaking out another from his store. He was thinking of the girl on the launch, a few days before, and wondering whether he would ever shake off the lethargy of Hammock Land, find some more diamonds, and go north.

He hadn't seen Ica pass, and yet, looking down in the moonlight and not seeing her below, he knew that she had gone to meet the tribesman somewhere in the forest.

The thought amused him, and then an unexpected spasm of anger gripped him, and jolted him into activity. He dropped to his feet and slung on his belt with the loaded automatic. It wasn't jealousy provoked him, but one of those spells of irrational anger that take possession of white men in the tropics. He started along the forest trail, not knowing quite what he meant to do.

The trail led to the diamond pocket. It had been an old passageway of the wild-rubber gatherers a few years before, and of course would long since have been obliterated, save that the peccary herds and solitary tapirs found it a convenient runway. They had trampled down the undergrowth, but they had not overcome the lianas, which wreathed themselves among the trees, forming almost impenetrable barriers across the trail.

Crawling beneath the creepers, Hollis worked his way along until



She screamed as the light played on them and she saw the guns.

the forest began to thin. The sound of rushing water, which had been in his ears, was accentuated. Suddenly he emerged upon the little volcanic pocket beside a waterfall.

It was the waterfall that had scooped out the pocket in the rocks, and then, changing its course, left it high and dry. Here Hollis had found his diamonds. Here, be-

neath the crumbling quartzite, lay a fortune for the gathering. And, as Hollis stooped, a gleam of yellow caught his eye.

He reached down and picked up another diamond, equal in size and color to his best.

He put it in his pouch, and stood there, musing. Nothing to keep him from returning, except that this was Hammock Land, and Ica was alluring and satisfying to him. Ica, now having a rendezvous with her Indian lover!

He laughed — and then his trained eyes saw that they had been here only a little while before. There were the faint marks of fresh footprints about the entrance of the pocket. Then Ica knew about the diamonds!

HE FOLLOWED the faint impressions of their naked feet back to the trail, lost them, and, with the instinct of the savage, instead of returning along the path by which he had come, struck off along another one that wound out from it, crawling again beneath the lianas until he reached a tiny open glade. Then he saw something that halted him with a shock of horror.

Here, in the middle of the glade, lay the freshly killed carcass of a capybara, a large rodent some four feet in length, and a prized source of food among the Indians.

No Indian would have left that carcass uneaten, unless for very special purposes. It had been shot, for the tiny darts were sticking in the side of the face. And, again, no Indian would have killed a capybara with poisoned darts, which would have rendered it inedible.

Yet the carcass had been eaten. It was alive with driver ants, which had already picked it almost clean, and other swarms were approaching from all directions, legions of them, in rows and columns as orderly as an army. The knowledge of this treasure had already been telegraphed far and wide among the ants everywhere.

For a moment Hollis stared, hardly able to realize what this portended. But then he knew. It was the first principle of all men along the Amazon, white or brown, to leave no food supply that could entice the predatory insects.

They would finish the capybara and then scout around for other prey. They would come to his camp. The capybara had been placed there deliberately to attract the insects. If Ica and her Indian lover had done that, it meant that they were conspiring to consign him to a dreadful death and then rob him of his diamonds and his supplies of food and trade goods. And they two, being Indians, possessed the secret that no white man had ever discovered, of moving unscathed through the deadly swarm, by means of some unknown drug that they daubed on their bodies.

ALREADY some of the approaching swarm seemed to have detected Hollis's presence, for scouts shot out from the leading files and made toward him. Hollis lost no time in returning to his camp. He knew that the drivers, with their infernal intelligence, would send those same scouts to survey the land before attacking. They would not come that night, nor the next day. Prob-

ably the next night would see them launch their assault.

The three great oil-barrels, brimming full, with inter-connecting pipes, stood side by side above the circular trench. It needed only the twist of a cock, a lighted match, and the camp would be surrounded by a river of flame.

Hollis surveyed the barrels and then went back to his hammock. He was lying still in it when he saw Ica glide like a wraith to her place beneath, and glance up at him. Her pale brown body gleamed in the rays of the moonlight that straggled through the trees. Suddenly Hollis laughed. Why, nothing mattered, since only Ica was real!

He saw her start in consternation, and beckoned her from the hammock. For a moment she stood poised and statuesque, her brown body more perfect than any sculptor's dream, her little breasts out-thrust beneath the tattered garment.

Then, with an answering laugh, lithe as a forest creature, light as a bird, she precipitated herself upward into the swinging hammock.

Hollis caught her and gripped her tightly, and they held each other in their swinging nest. Hollis's hand ripped through a tear in the cotton rags, and found the pliant coolness of Ica's body. His lips closed feverishly upon hers.

"Do you love me, Ica?"

"Always I love you," answered the Indian girl.

Hollis laughed again, but silently. Ica, fresh from the embraces of her Indian lover! But all women were like that, as treacherous as jungle snakes. What did it mat-

ter? It was their bodies that one loved, not their souls.

And it wasn't difficult to deceive them. Hollis didn't quite know what he was going to do about it, but he managed to keep Ica from knowing that his automatic was in his belt. He knew how short his time was—but the vast lethargy of Hammock Land, and the warmth and comfort of Ica paralyzed his mind.

THEY came down the Manaos in the afternoon in a small power-launch, and, when he saw them, Hollis knew that he had been subconsciously expecting them—Cunningham, Da Silva, and the girl.

Da Silva and his partner made a characteristic pair. Cunningham was an American, but Da Silva was in part of negroid origin. A grossly fat man, of about Cunningham's age, clad, like him, in a suit of soiled whites, with a wide-brimmed straw hat framing his dripping face. As for the girl, she looked as hard and cool as ever in her white frock. She was carrying a white parasol.

Out of the launch behind them stepped two bestial-looking negroes. It looked like trouble.

Cunningham advanced, hand outstretched, a grin on his face.

"Well, how's things, Hollis?" he boomed. "I want you to meet Madge—Miss Madge Leroy, my leading lady. I told her about you, and she was curious. Thought we'd run down and visit with you. You know Da Silva, of course."

La Silva extended a flabby hand. "I guess I know everybody in

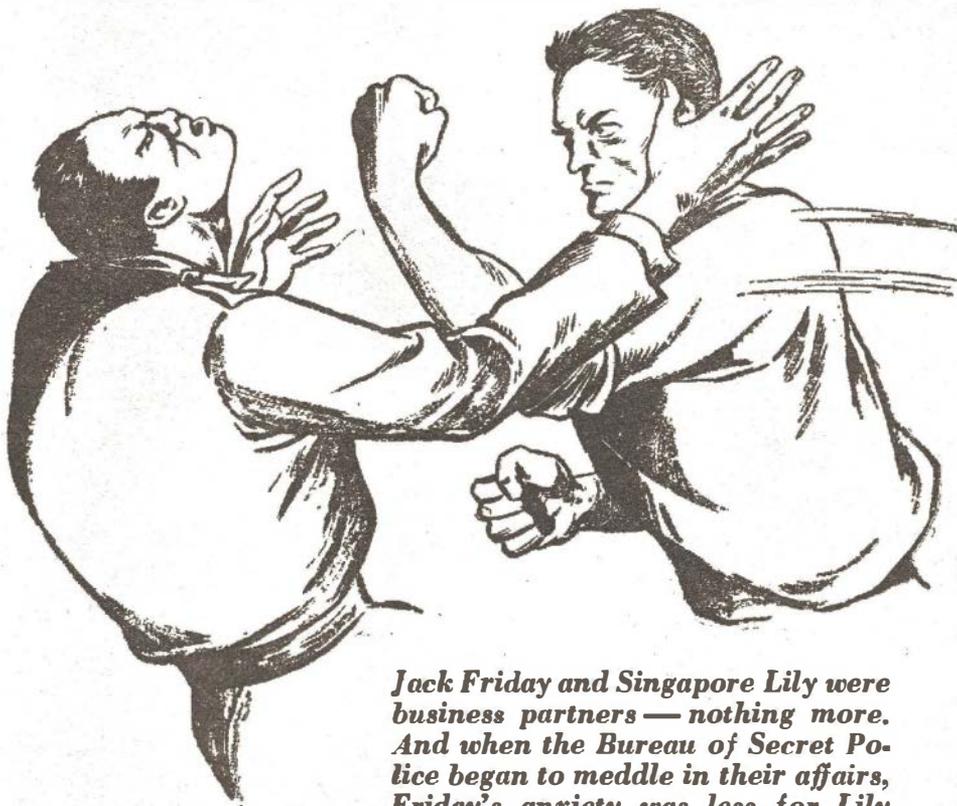
(Continued on page 84)

SHANGHAI

UNTIL the shot sounded upstairs, the hottest night-spot in Shanghai's notorious badlands district was humming with drunken revelry. Then a vicious *splat* of gunfire slugged at the face of the midnight, putting an end to merriment and the clink of glasses, corking the tinkle of a tinny piano and the jingling of cash registers. Every vestige of noise was wiped out like marks on a blackboard under the sudden swipe of an eraser.

Jack Friday, expatriate American soldier of fortune and co-proprietor of the dive, was in his private office behind the main bar-room when it happened. He was going over the ledgers with the regal blonde girl known as Singapore Lily, his partner in the enterprise; but that upstairs pistol-report brought him out of his chair like a released spring. He said: "What the hell was that?"

Singapore Lily might have had a last name, back in the States, but



Jack Friday and Singapore Lily were business partners — nothing more. And when the Bureau of Secret Police began to meddle in their affairs, Friday's anxiety was less for Lily than it was for the girl, Marcia. It took sudden death—and much more—before he was to learn the true meaning of loyalty and love

SELLOUT

By **ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM**

nobody in the Orient had ever heard it. Nobody in the Orient had even seen Lily display any sign of nerves, either. She displayed none now. "Hm-m-m. It could be trouble," she crushed out a long Russian cigarette and stood up. "I'll take a look." And she made for the door.

Jack Friday grabbed at her. "Lay off, baby. It's my job." He was a short, stocky man with eyes that had looked on many far places, seen many forms of death. He liked to think of himself as hard, indifferent to emotions. He'd spent half a lifetime convincing the world how hard he was.

"Stay put," Singapore Lily told

The knife buried itself, hilt-deep, in her breast.



him. "You're too likely to sock somebody first and ask questions afterward. We're making money here—and it's your last stand in China. If you get tosed out of Shanghai, you're finished."

SHE was right about that. This was his last stand, not only in

China but in all Asia. The police knew him from Vladivostok to the Malay Peninsula as a magnet for trouble. It seemed to follow him like lightning seeking a lightning rod. If anything went wrong now, he'd be kicked back to the United States so fast it would curl his teeth.

Which deportation was a possibility he disliked to think about, because there was the little matter of a homicide rap against him in San Francisco. It was a killing he hadn't done, but they pinned it on him just the same; and the fact that the crime was twenty years dormant would make no difference to the Frisco cops. As far as they were concerned, it might just as well have been day before yesterday.

So he nodded and let Singapore Lily go out to investigate the gunshot they had just heard. Lily was a dame competent to handle any situation that might come up, he realized. It was queer that so much capable self-assurance could be rolled up in such a lovely looking package, he mused. Watching her as she went toward the door, he couldn't help admiring the way she was stacked up in that white satin evening gown.

You can't beat white satin on voluptuous woman-curves. Especially when the cloth clings like skin, the way it did on Singapore Lily. Her thighs were flawless columns rippling under shimmering whiteness, and her lyric hips had a rhythmic impudence when she walked. A creamy expanse of bare back swelled out of the waist-low cut of the costume, melting into gorgeous shoulders and a pa-

trician neck topped with hair like so much burnished gold. Jack Friday, admiring her, wondered why he had never thought to fall in love with her—or at least to make an occasional pass.

Maybe it was because he had learned the hard way, never to mix business with pleasure. And Singapore Lily was strictly business in this partnership. She was after the dough, first, last and always. She seemed to be saving it for something.

He saw her walk out around the bar, into the crowd's frozen silence. He heard her saying: "What's the matter with you dopes? Some wise apple sets off a firecracker for a practical joke—and you act like a bunch of fugitives from an air raid! Come on, step up and have a drink on the house. Here, bartenders, set 'em up all around."

It broke the spell. Laughter and music swelled again, gay and strident as ever. Over in one corner a jane squealed in mock fear as a Lascar deck-hand tried to purloin a brassiere strap for a souvenir. Somebody else dropped a coin in the mechanical piano, brought three minutes of discordant boogie-woogie. Free drinks went down willing throats.

Singapore Lily flirted her hips away from the playful pat of a tipsy paw. She wormed her way through the throng; made for the staircase that led upstairs, where the private dining rooms were. Nobody paid much attention to Singapore Lily now.

Nobody except Jack Friday. *He* had a hunch what was coming. It made him uneasy.

HIS hunch was right. Presently Lily came down again, entered the office. Her face looked pale under the makeup. She said: "Jack—"

"Bad, hunh?" he asked her.

"Plenty bad. We've got a stiff on our hands. Also a hysterical flooze." She started for the stairs on the other side of the barroom, casually; almost too casually.

Jack Friday followed her, pretending not to. Then his throat tightened. Somebody had stopped Lily, halfway across the floor. "What's your rush, sweet heart?"

The man was a half-caste, tall, almond-eyed, with just enough white blood in his veins to make him think he was king of the world. His name was Bennie Chong, and he wasn't king of the world. But he came damned close to being baron of Shanghai's badlands.

Everybody knew Bennie Chong's status. He headed the night shift of the secret Bureau of Police operating out of 76 Jessfield Road. The mere mention of Jessfield Road was enough to make the toughest badlands thug take off his hat.

There was no connection between this so-called police force of 76 Jessfield Road and the regular Shanghai cops; no more than there's a connection between a Berlin traffic bull and Hitler's dread Gestapo. In fact, Bennie Chong's outfit was an evil combination of Gestapo, Ogpu and the bloodiest features of Chicago gangdom in the days of Al Capone.

Jessfield was an "outside," or extra-settlement, street. After the invasion and capture of Shanghai

city proper, the Jap-dominated puppet government had seized a spacious estate and turned it into the headquarters for their newly established secret police bureau. Now that bureau functioned more to protect criminals than honest citizens. Kidnaping, armed robbery, gambling and opium racketeering all flourished in this graft-ridden regime; and Bennie Chong, its night-time head, was the worst of a bad lot. There were a dozen notches on his knives, as many more on his guns, and one of his lesser occupations was the procuring of women for shipment to the Japanese army of invasion, deep in the interior.

A nice guy, this Bennie Chong; a guy whose throat you'd love to cut. And for more than a month he'd had his eye on Singapore Lily—whether for himself or his superiors, Jack Friday couldn't be sure.

There was only one thing Friday *could* be sure of: his ingrown hatred for the lordly half-caste. And this hatred was coming to a swift head as he saw Chong put a familiar hand on Lily's arm, arresting her progress toward the stairway.

Lily was smiling at the fellow, a smile that went no further than her kissable lips. "Hi, pal. Be careful or you'll lose a finger."

Chong pulled her just that much closer. "Going somewhere, beautiful?"

By that time Jack Friday had bulled his way up to them. "Lay off, Bennie. You can see she don't like it."

Chong cocked an eye at him, maliciously. "That's for her to tell

me—if it's so. Unless the two of you had some unfinished business upstairs, maybe?"

Singapore Lily's lush, firm breasts rose sharply; it was the only indication of her tenseness. She said: "Don't be a dope, pal. Jack and I are business partners, is all. Were you headed anywhere, Jack?"

HE CAUGHT the significance of her question. It was really not a question at all; it was a command. He bottled his wrath. "Thought I'd run up to see how things are going in the private rooms."

"Swell. Then you won't be using the office for a while. I was just going to invite Bennie in there with me for a drink. You don't mind?"

Jack Friday minded like hell, without exactly knowing why. He was well aware that Lily had a past she never mentioned; and he suspected that if she kept Bennie Chong occupied with kisses it wouldn't be her first attempt at that sort of bribery. And Chong *must* be kept occupied for the next few minutes; that was certain.

All the same, Jack Friday didn't like it. He liked it less when Lily and the half-caste went into the office and shut the door after them. Lily, he concluded, was getting the rotten end of the partnership in this instance.

Cursing silently, he went upstairs.

There was no mistaking the room in which the shot had been fired. No other private chamber was occupied just now, for one thing; and your nose could follow

the astringent odor of burned cordite, for another. Jack Friday went straight to the only closed door and thrust it open.

A girl screamed.

It was a tiny scream, to match the dainty little red-head from whose taut throat it issued. Seeing her cowering over in a dim corner, Jack Friday froze at the threshold and felt a sudden surging sensation within his veins, a curious tingling such as he could not remember ever having experienced before.

It was the girl who did this to him. She didn't seem to belong in Shanghai; certainly she was out of place in the badlands. Anybody could see that. Why, damn it all, she looked sweet. Clean. *Decent!*

Not her costume. That was dance-hall stuff; pert short shirt with spangles, thigh-length black silk hose, bare midriff, a red bra-top bodice that met the minimum of concealment for her perky little breasts. They were delicious, those dainty mounds of charm; ripe like miniature melons cupped in the conforming red mesh that was cut to flag the eye. The rest of her measured up, too. She had the smallest feet and slimmest ankles Jack Friday had ever seen; the most sweetly tapered legs. Her hips were boyish, her features *gamine*. And her hair was loose flame, almost as scarlet as her mouth.

Jack Friday said: "What the damnation hell are you doing in an outfit like that?" Which indicated the effect she had on him. He didn't ask her what had happened; he didn't even look at the corpse of a man sprawled on the floor

"You don't mind?" she asked. "I wanted to invite Benny in for a drink."



near an upset table. All he wanted to know was why this flame-haired girl should be clad like a dime-a-dance "hostess," when she really belonged in some exclusive finishing school.

INSTEAD of answering, she started to scream again. He went hurtling toward her, caught her in his arms, clapped a palm over her lips. "Nix, hon! For God's sake, nix!"

She fought him. "You can't arrest me! No—I'll k-kill myself first! I—"

He slapped her. He had to.

Nothing else would stop her from yelling her lungs out, it seemed. Hating himself for the needed brutality, he stung her across the cheek with his open hand. Once. Twice. Splat-splat.

The fight went out of her. She moaned and collapsed against him, her body trembling like a wind-whipped reed, her breasts rising and falling close to his chest. He felt the soft movement and it churned a hot storm of emotion in his veins.

He said: "For the love of cripes, I'm not the law. I'm Jack Friday. I run this joint. Now what the

hell are you doing here, a nice girl like you? What happened?"

She stared up at him. "You—you're Mr. Friday? I didn't realize—"

"Why should you?"

"B-but, I—I w-work for you. I started tonight. Singapore Lily hired me. I—I do a song and dance turn."

He closed his hands on her shoulders, angry not at her but at Lily for having hired her without first asking him about it. Not that Lily ever asked him about engaging entertainers; that was her province in the partnership. But damn it, Lily should've known better than to take on this little chick! Any fool could see that this one was out of place in a dive like Jack Friday's.

"What's your name, hon?"

"M-Marcia Durkin. I'm from Des Moines. I—I came here with a vaudeville troupe that went stranded. And—and tonight, just as I was about to start my first song, th-this man grabbed me. He dragged me up here to a private room, started to—"

"So you shot him."

"I had to," she whimpered. "I had to. Oh, please—don't let anything happen to me—!" And she welded her dulcet figure so close to him that he could feel the wild beating of her heart. It was a pleasant feeling, just as her fragrance was pleasant. And when she kissed him, the taste of her lips made him drunken with a dizzy exultation . . .

Then, presently, he dragged himself back to reality. "I don't ask that sort of pay," he growled. "I'll get you out of your jam.

After all, lives are a nickel a dozen in the badlands . . . Oh, good God!"

"Wh-what's the matter?"

He was staring at the man who lay sprawled on the floor, the man whose chest was a welter of thick red horror. But Jack Friday was paying no attention to the wound. He was looking at the death-pale face—

"*That guy's a member of Bennie Chong's secret police!*"

"D-does it make any di-difference? Murder is murder . . ."

JACK FRIDAY jerked her toward the door. "Sure. But lots of times you can get away with it in Shanghai. I mean, if the man you knock off doesn't happen to be anybody. In this case, baby, it's a different story. To bump a Jess-field Road policeman is like buying yourself a ticket to hell!"

Panic slithered into the Durkin girl's greenish eyes. "I—I'm scared! You've got to do something for me—get me out of here! Please! I—I'll be nice to you—I'll—"

He ripped out a grim: "Stow it. Come on. We're leaving by the back way." And he half-led, half-dragged her to a rear staircase. They went flurrying downward, and out into the night.

"Where do you live?"

She seemed almost afraid to speak, even in a whisper, as they reached his parked car. "I w-was in a hotel. But they locked me out when I couldn't pay my rent. I haven't any place to go."

He thought of his own bungalow; decided against it. In case anything went wrong, that would be the first place Bennie Chong's

hoodlums would search. Moreover, it was too far away. Singapore Lily's home was nearer. And safer, probably.

Jack Friday drove like a fiend through the dark, crooked streets of the sprawling badlands district. Five minutes got him to Lily's cottage. He had no key, his partnership with the voluptuous blonde woman not extending that far; but he was very handy with the thinness blade of his pocketknife. He picked the lock and said: "Okay, kiddo. In here and don't make any lights. Find the bedroom and turn in. "I'll take care of everything."

The small vestibule of the cottage was very dark, very intimate. Marcia Durkin clung to Friday's chunky frame, her breath hot, her words pleading. "I w-want to go home. To the States. I — I'm f-frightened here!" She kissed him again.

That was when he realized he was in love, for the first time in a life deviously spotted with many casual affairs. This was the real thing, he told himself. To him this girl represented suddenly all the realities he'd never had: a home, maybe kids, a way of life too long denied him.

An ugly thought came to him. Suppose he saved Marcia Durkin and then lost her? He didn't think he could stand that. Women had a habit of forgetting favors, he remembered sourly . . .

But there was one way to make sure this one would never forget. One way to bind her to him forever; and not merely through gratitude. She was decent; she had proven that by shooting the guy who had tried to maul her. Well,

that very decency could be made the bond that would always hold her to Jack Friday.

He crushed her in his embrace. "I love you, baby."

"You—you want—?"

"Yes," he grated through a working kiss. He jammed her against the wall, pinned her there with his mashing weight. He felt her breasts yielding to him, flattening tautly. Her mouth was sultry with surrender; she moaned, and then she stopped moaning . . .

A HELL of a honey moon, he thought, driving back to the dive. Five blissful minutes in a dark vestibule. No ring. No hunk of paper to make it right. And now, ahead of him, a corpse to be disposed of; the corpse of a man his bride had murdered!

An ordinary corpse wouldn't have been so bad. But this was a Jessfield Road cutthroat, one of Bennie Chong's secret-police bully boys. If Chong ever found out what had happened, Jack Friday's number would be up. Fast.

He braked his car to a silent stop behind the night club. Using the back door, he skulked inside and upstairs. He gained the private room where Marcia Durkin had killed the man who was assaulting her.

The body was where Friday had left it. Now he raised it to his shoulder like a sack of meal. He carried it down and out into the night; started toward his car—

The ray of a flashlight stabbed his eyes and Bennie Chong said: "Why didn't you wait a while, pal? I've already sent for a hearse."

Jack Friday dropped his gruesome burden; tried to guess if Chong were alone or had reinforcements. There was no way of telling, the way that light blinded you. Friday took a chance and jumped at the spot of illumination. A dead half-caste was better than a captured American.

Bennie Chong didn't expect the attack. He was caught flat-footed. He dropped his flash, and then Jack Friday's fingers went toward his throat. The two men locked in titanic struggle, pummeling each other like maniacs with sledgehammers for fists. A knee took Jack Friday in the groin and doubled him over, sick, gasping.

He straightened up, using his head for a battering ram. He butted Chong under the chin and the half-caste yowled weirdly through splintered front teeth; staggered backward, his balance gone. Friday closed in for the kill.

He should have known better. He should have guessed that Bennie Chong never exposed himself to danger without having a couple of pals nearby to lend a hand if needed. The pals showed themselves now, a choice pair of plug-uglies from Jessfield Road. They had knives.

Chong snarled: "No. I want him alive."

They sheathed the knives, then, and swarmed Jack Friday down with sheer weight. He had time to crack one of them a thundering wallop on the jaw; felt the satisfaction of it traveling up his arm from knuckles to shoulder. The guy went down. But his companion had a pair of brass knucks and

used them. He maced Friday across the nape of the neck, not too hard; just hard enough. Friday thought his head was coming off. He hit the ground and stayed there.

WHEN he woke up he was in his private office. Chong and his two cutthroat cops were standing over him, daring him to get off the floor. "Now we'll talk," Chong said.

"About what?"

"About where you took the dame that rubbed my operative upstairs."

Jack Friday's eyes slowly cleared of pain-fog. He looked around the room and saw Singapore Lily sitting over behind the desk. She looked neither frightened nor disturbed. Nothing ever seemed to disturb Singapore Lily.

"So you ratted," Friday said to her. His voice was colder than he had ever heard it.

"Jack—"

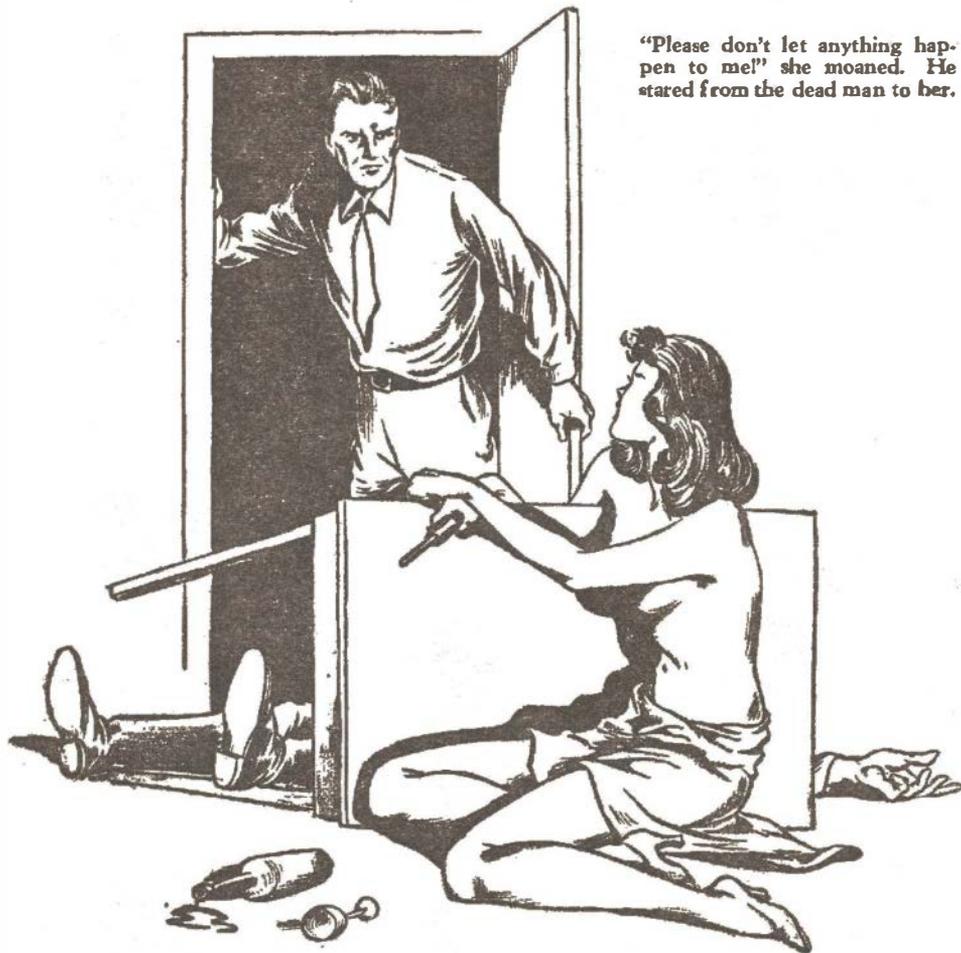
"You told these rats it was a girl who shot that mug."

Lily lifted a bare, sleek shoulder. The movement imparted faint undulance to her breasts under the décolletage of her clinging white satin gown. "Have it your way." She veiled her eyes to the task of lighting a cigarette, and then a cloud of exhaled smoke masked whatever expression they might have held.

Jack Friday squirmed around and glared up at Bennie Chong. "There was no dame. Lily's a liar. I'm the one you want."

"Ah. You confess killing my man?"

"Sure. He got in my hair."



"Please don't let anything happen to me!" she moaned. He stared from the dead man to her.

"Very curious," Bennie Chong purred. "Where did you get all that lipstick on your face?"

"I'm using makeup now. Swish-swish."

Chong's lips peeled away from the wreckage of his ugly front teeth. "Don't go comedian on me, buddy. You're not a bit funny. Where's the girl and who was she?"

"Nuts to you," Jack Friday said bitterly. He waited for a kick that would cave in his ribs.

Bennie Chong withheld it. "Look, sap. I could probably put

my finger on the jane if I wanted to. But maybe I won't want to. Maybe I've got my price."

"You've always had your price, you mongrel. I've been paying you juice ever since I opened up."

Chong said: "This time I'm not thinking about money." He went over to Singapore Lily, took the cigarette out of her mouth and thrust it between his own lips.

Jack Friday thought he understood, then. "You're asking for Singapore Lily? Hell, hasn't she already sold out to you?"

Lily seemed on the verge of say-

ing something, but kept her voice stoppered. Bennie Chong flipped away the cigarette and said: "Lily's part of it. But that's personal. It's a business deal I'm offering you."

"Name it."

"So I'll name it," Chong said. "*Ahpien*."

Jack Friday sat up. So that was it. Opium! Chong wanted him to turn his joint into a hop-house. Peddle narcotics. Other evils would follow; they always did. You started with providing addicts with pipes and layouts and a place to rest on their elbows. Presently you were in the game up to your throat. You were recruiting new customers—guys and girls who'd never touched the filthy junk before. The thing was an endless, widening circle. The more new addicts you created, the more *ahpien* you sold. The more you sold the deeper you got in with the criminal element. Pretty soon you never could get out.

THE Jap-dominated local government had good reason for desiring the spread of addiction. It narcotized the citizenry, made them less liable to revolt against alien overlordship. It made them passive. It was a trick the Japanese had been using throughout every Chinese province they'd ever conquered.

"Ah," Friday grunted. "Just opium. Nothing else, of course. No sidelines?"

"Well, perhaps a bit of spying on people we suspect of disloyalty," Bennie Chong said easily. "And it would be nice to adver-

tise for dancing girls, get them on the elbow. Makes it not quite so tough on them when they get shipped to the interior for the Japanese soldiers, if they're on the pipe. A jane in a dream doesn't mind so much what's happening to her. *Ahpien's* a humanitarian thing, that way."

The smirk on the half-caste's face was almost too much for Jack Friday to endure. It would be so damned easy to leap up now, grab the fellow by the gullet, finish him once and for all. Of course that would mean Jack Friday's own immediate death at the hands of Chong's men. But it would be worth it, almost.

Except for the red-haired Marcia Durkin.

What would become of Marcia, without a protector? How would she get out of her jam, find passage back to the States? And how about that interlude in the vestibule? After a thing like that, would it be fair to make her a widow before she was even married. . . ?

Friday thought about this, and suddenly realized he had to live. He had to let Bennie Chong take all the chips in the game—for Marcia's sake.

He looked up at the half-caste. "You win, if it's okay with Lily. After all, she's my partner."

Chong looked at the regal blonde woman. "Well, baby?"

"Whatever Jack says," Lily's voice held no emotion.

Bennie Chong chuckled. "Excellent. So now we'll say nothing about my dead man. He was a louse anyhow. I'll drop his carcass in the Whangpo. Tomorrow I'll

send you a few *aphien* layouts and a list of people I want you to work on." He beckoned his two underlings, and they all went out.

"Jack," Singapore Lily said. She came over to him, tried to help him to his feet. When she leaned to help him, the front of her costume fell away from lush white breasts. Once upon a time he had admired those beasts. Now he hated the very sight of them. He pushed her away and told her he could take care of himself.

Her eyes held a queer glitter. "You don't really think I told Bennie Chong what actually happened upstairs, do you?"

"How else did he learn?"

"I couldn't hold him here. Something seemed to be pulling him to the second floor; he was, well, like a ferret scenting game. Jack, I—I didn't tell him anything. He just went upstairs and found the corpse, and then . . . he and his men waited for you, out back. He acted as if he knew what you'd do. I couldn't warn you. They had me tied up in the office here."

Jack Friday didn't believe her. She was a beautiful and very damnable liar, he told himself. But an idea was dawning in his aching head; and he pretended to believe because it suited his new purpose.

He said: "Okay, Lily. So you didn't rat on me." He sank his fingers into her soft creamy shoulders, and he kissed her roughly on the mouth to prove he wasn't sore.

It had more effect than he had bargained for. She whimpered: "Oh-h-h, Jack . . . darling . . . I've waited so long for that. . . !" And

she wrapped her naked arms around him, welded her voluptuous body to his stalwart one.

HE WAS startled. Also he was a little thrilled—and furious at himself because of the pleasure this contact gave him. Damn her soul, she'd been doing this very thing with Bennie Chong not thirty minutes ago. . . .

Swelling pressure against his chest, woman-soft, was driving him off his chump. He cursed himself for it even as he kissed Singapore Lily again. He knew he was arousing her to white-hot fervor, because the same thing was happening to him. And he hated it.

But he continued, because he had a reason. It was screwy, he thought. A while ago he had gone through an identical scene with Marcia Durkin in order to bind Marcia to him, irrevocably. Now he was making love to Singapore Lily in order to rid himself of her, likewise irrevocably. It almost didn't make sense, but it seemed to work.

He fastened his mouth to her throbbing throat. He ran his fingers over her shoulders, down her smooth back. He said: "Now, baby."

She moaned: "Yes . . . now. . ."

LATER he poured two drinks, gave her one. "I guess you know I trust you, eh, Lil?"

She raised the glass to her swollen lips. "Here's to us." That was answer enough.

He said: "Look, Lil. About that little wren, the one that bumped the Jessfield Road monkey."

"What about her, Jack?"

"She's in a hell of a jam. I don't trust Bennie Chong. You know how he operates. Now that he's got us in the *ahpien* racket, he's liable to give us the cross. Liable to put the nab on Marcia Durkin anyhow. He could railroad her to the troops in the interior if he wanted to."

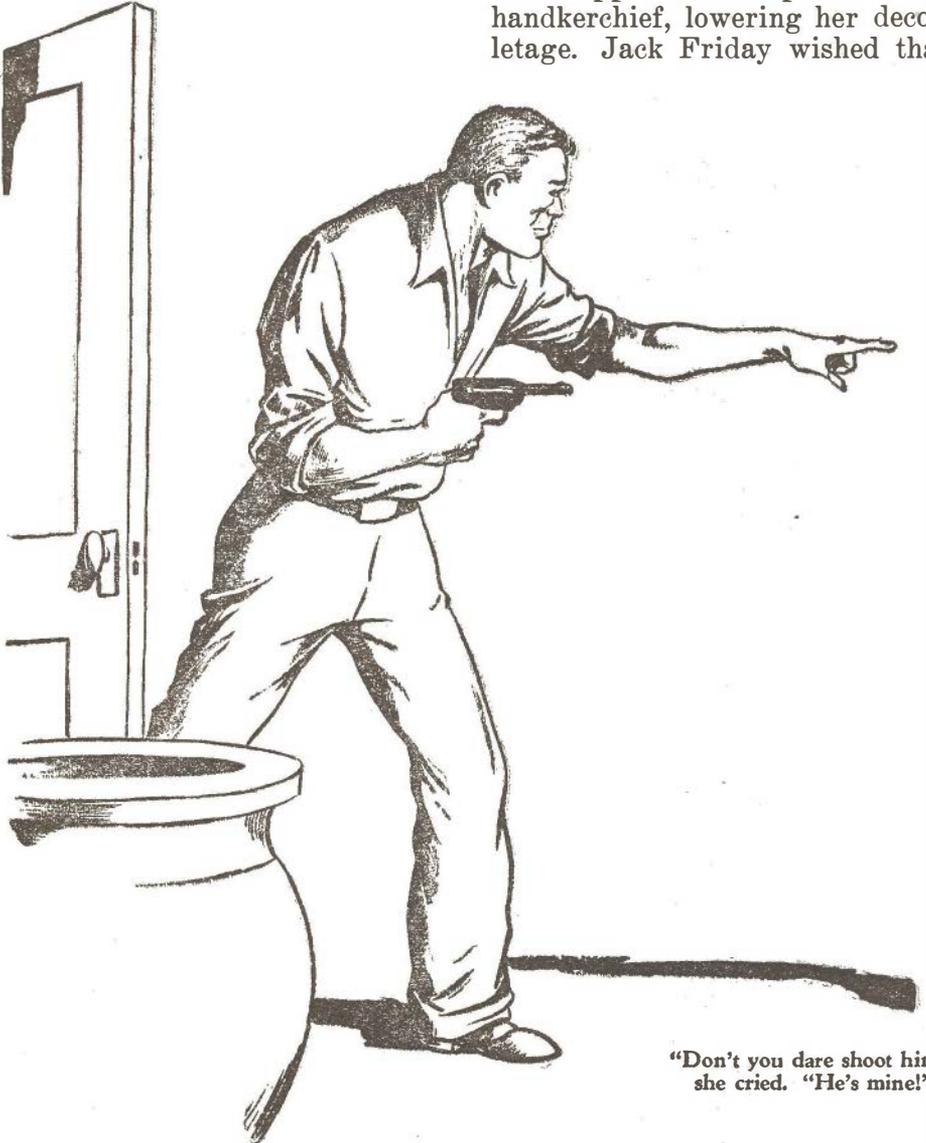
"Well, Jack?"

"He can't do a thing like that to the kid. She's too decent. I've got to get her out from under."

"How?"

"Take her back to the States," he said.

Singapore Lily stared at him. Some of her whiskey spilled down out of her mouth, dripped to the valley between her lush breasts. She mopped the wet place with a handkerchief, lowering her décolletage. Jack Friday wished that



"Don't you dare shoot him!" she cried. "He's mine!"

she would cover up her loveliness, so recently the target for his caresses. The memory of that, and the knowledge of what he was doing now, made him feel like a heel.

Lily said: "You want to take her back to the States?"

"Sure. She might not make it, alone. She's such an innocent kid."

"But didn't you tell me there's a rap against you back home?"

He shrugged. "With dough, I could hire a smart mouthpiece; get that wiped off the slate. It would

be another reason for me to go back for a while."

"A while," Lily mused. "You mean you'd come to Shanghai again?"

"Naturally," he said quickly. Almost too quickly. "Would I leave you in the lurch, after . . . what we mean to each other?"

Singapore Lily gave him a queer sort of smile. "I see. But how about money? Have you enough to swing it? I thought you poured most of your take down the fantan sewer."

"Fantan and lottery," he admitted. Then he sprang it on her, the scheme he'd been hatching all this time. "Look, baby. You've



got a pile stashed, haven't you? You've been saving your cut ever since we hooked up. I always wondered why."

She drummed on the desk. "I'll tell you why, Jack. Some day I hoped to . . . go back home. With enough cash to see me through, so I wouldn't have to do. . ."

"Wouldn't have to do what?"

"The things that sent me out to China in the first place," she answered bitterly "I was a small town girl. From the wrong side of the tracks. My old man was the only parent I ever knew. He kicked off with the d. t.'s when I was just past fifteen. From then on I was on my own. If you get what I mean."

He felt uncomfortable. But what the hell, he told himself. She would do all right, now that she had her connection with Bennie Chong. She would make another pile of chips for herself without half trying. She had what it takes.

He said: "Look, Lil. This is what I mean. Suppose you buy me out. Take over the whole joint. I'll sell you my half for . . . have you got as much as five grand?"

IT WAS a shrewd estimate, based on what he knew she had drawn from the business since it opened. "I've got just about that much," she answered slowly. "You want me to give it to you so you can take the little redhead back home, eh?"

"Well, it would only be temporary," he said defensively. "I'm coming back for you pretty quick, remember. And meantime you'll be coining cabbage hand over fist, what with playing Bennie Chong's opium game."

She stared into his eyes. "Jack, listen. You're in love with Marcia Durkin, aren't you?"

He wanted to say *yes, goofy over her! And once I get her out of this hellhole you'll never see either of us again. You can play around with your precious half-caste till your own skin turns as yellow as his, for all I care!*

But instead, he forced hot denial out of his mouth. "In love with that poor little tike? Certainly not!"

"I see," Singapore Lily said. "By the way, where did you hide her?"

"In your cottage. I had a hell of a nerve, I guess."

"No, Jack. That was okay. It was a smart move. Wait here a minute." She went out of the office, and when she returned she had a tin cash box under her arm. She opened it and extracted sheaves of currency. American money. "Five thousand, maybe a little more," she said. She handed it to him without counting it. Her fingers were trembling a little. She said wryly: "There goes my future."

His conscience squirmed like a cesspool full of maggots. He was hard, he tried to tell himself; he'd always been hard and he always would be. Why the hell should he worry about Singapore Lily and her dreams of some day returning to the States? Nuts. It was Marcia Durkin he must think about, Marcia of the dainty figure and hot mouth and innocent sweetness. You couldn't call it crooked to double cross a dame like Singapore Lily when you were doing it for the sake of someone like Mar-

cia Durkin. Lily knew how to look out for herself; Marcia didn't. A man had to do what was right.

He took the currency. "Thanks, baby. Want a bill of sale for my half of the business?"

"No. Why should I want that? You'll be back . . . you said."

"Sure I'll be back. But right now I've got things to do. Got to get Marcia. Arrange passage on the next boat. A million details; you know."

"I'll go with you, Jack."

He didn't want her with him, but he didn't quite know how to tell her. Well, that was okay. Let her come along. He said: Let's go."

She settled beside him in his car, her long tapered legs stretched up under the instrument panel, gleaming silkily in the dash-light. They were gorgeous legs. Too damned gorgeous for a rat like Bennie Chong . . .

"We're here, Jack," she reminded him. He had almost driven past her bungalow.

HE STOPPED the car. They went up to her porch. The front door was open. A funny feeling slugged Jack Friday in the pit of the stomach. "Marcia—Marcia—! he called.

Marcia wasn't there. Marcia was gone.

He turned on Singapore Lily. "You stinking, dirty witch!"

"Jack—"

"While you were out getting the money you contacted Chong. Told him where he could find Marcia. You knew I was in love with her. You crossed me. Damn your

heart!" He doubled his fist and hit her on the jaw.

She went sailing across the room; landed on a davenport with her skirt up around her step-ins. "Jack—!" she whimpered. A thin trickle of blood wormed out of one corner of her ripe red mouth. "Jack—no—" She tried to pull up the bodice of her dress where it had slipped down to expose her snowy charms.

He cursed her. He turned on his heel and dashed out of the house. Jessfield Road wasn't far away. To Jessfield Road. Headquarters of the puppet government secret police. Bennie Chong's headquarters. That was where he'd find Marcia Durkin. That was where Chong would take her. And the things Chong would do to her were various and savage . . .

She'd be given a shot of dope. That would be to kill her resistance. Then Bennie Chong would take her to a room. When it was over, Marcia wouldn't want to be seen again—in Shanghai or the States or anywhere else. She's be dead, in her soul. Her sweet young body would go on living for a while, a playtoy for the Jap army of invasion deep in the interior; but Marcia, the real Marcia, would be as dead as if they'd put a bullet through her brain . . .

Jack Friday damned his car because it was slow in starting. He damned himself because he hadn't looked after his battery properly. The current was weak. The motor turned over with maddening laziness. Then the whole machine seemed to settle down and get going. He gunned it.

(Continued on page 91)

Diana Daw

DIANA AND TED HAVE BEEN CAST ADrift IN A SPACE SHIP AND LANDED ON PHOBOS, ONE OF THE TWO MOONS OF MARS.

By Clayton Maxwell

HERE, AFTER A SERIES OF INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES, THEY RESCUED A STRANGE GIRL FROM THE CANNIBAL PYGMIES OF PHOBOS.

AS THEY ZOOM INTO SPACE FROM PHOBOS, THE GIRL ANNOUNCES HERSELF AS ETARRE FROM KARZOOM.

YOU SAIL THROUGH SPACE / WE ON MARS THOUGHT THAT IMPOSSIBLE -- THOUGH WE DO HAVE FLYING MACHINES!



TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF -- WHY YOU WERE PUT IN THE SHELL AND SENT TO PHOBOS!

I AM ETARRE, RIGHTFUL QUEEN OF KARZOOM, GREATEST KINGDOM OF MARS. MY UNCLE, ATLO, WAS REGENT UNTIL I BECAME OF AGE -- WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN IN A FEW DAYS. HE DESIRED THE THRONE IN ORDER TO BECOME EMPEROR OF ALL MARS!



ONE DAY ATLO APPROACHED ME WITH A PROPOSITION I SUGGEST YOU MARRY ME, ETARRE, AND WE WILL RULE TOGETHER. OTHERWISE -- WELL --

YOU KNOW I AM AFFIANCED TO PRINCE DAKOT, AND YOU THREATEN ME --- HO, DAKOT, TO ME!



DAKOT -- ER -- JUST HAPPENED TO BE IN THE PALACE HE CAME TO MY RESCUE

DIE, DOG! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT IN THE PALACE!

E-E-E-E-VI! YOU'VE KILLED HIM!



THAT NIGHT ATLO AND HIS HENCHMEN TOOK ME TO THE SACRED VOLCANIC MOUNTAIN OF KARZOOM AND PLACED ME IN A SEALED SHELL.

THE VOLCANO ERUPTED, CASTING ME HIGH INTO THE AIR

THE MOUNTAIN IS BEGINNING TO RUMBLE!

HEAVE HER IN / YOU MEN WILL BE REWARDED HANDSOMELY!



THAT IS THE END OF HER / NONE EVER RETURN -- I AM KING OF KARZOOM!

THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD KILLED ME. THAT IS ALL I KNEW UNTIL THE PYGMIES DRAGGED ME FROM THE SHELL AND YOU RESCUED ME. YOU HAVE SAVED MY LIFE ... I AM SO GRATEFUL ... I MUST REWARD YOU!

YOU COULD SHOW YOUR GRATITUDE IN OTHER WAYS!



THAT IS THE WAY ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS OF KARZOOM ARE EXECUTED. WE NEVER KNEW THAT THEY LANDED ON PHOBOS!

I HAVE IT! PHOBOS PASSING OVER MARS FORCES THE VOLCANO TO ERUPT, THE SAME AS THE MOON FORCES TIDES TO RISE ON EARTH. WHEN THE SHELLS GET OUT INTO SPACE, THE GRAVITY OF PHOBOS DRAWS THEM TO IT. THAT IS WHY THEY NEVER RETURNED! QUITE SIMPLE, AFTER ALL!



WE'LL LAND ON THE MOON DEIMOS AND RECOUP OUR STRENGTH WHILE WE DECIDE WHAT TO DO. HOWEVER, WE'LL LOOK IT OVER CAREFULLY THROUGH THE TELESCOPE BEFORE WE LAND!



WE CAN LAND, TED. THERE'S NOT A SIGN OF LIFE ON THIS LITTLE MOON!

MORE SHELLS!

PERHAPS THE PEOPLE INSIDE ARE ALIVE!



SO, SOME WERE EVEN ATTRACTED BY THE GRAVITY OF DEIMOS!

UGH!

OF COURSE, THEY WOULD ALL BE DEAD. DEIMOS IS UNINHABITED AND THEY HAD NO WAY TO GET OUT OF THE SHELLS!





LATER ... TED COMES TO, FIRMLY BOUND IN HIS BUNK



NO USE TO STRUGGLE, LOVER. I'LL RELEASE YOU WHEN WE LAND ON MARS. YOU WILL HELP ME REGAIN MY THRONE AND RULE WITH ME!

YOU FIEND!



WHERE AM I ... THE SPACE-SHIP GONE? AND THERE'S A STRANGE, BIGGER ONE OVERHEAD!



MEN FLYING -- WITHOUT PARACHUTES / I'D BETTER RUN!

AFTER HER... GET HER!

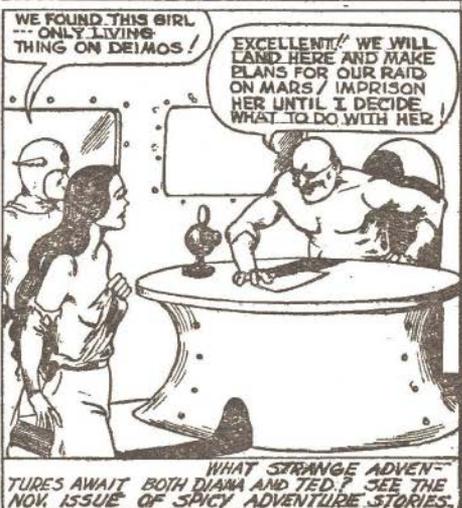


HELP!



WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

TO OUR CAPTAIN ON THAT SHIP! WE ARE SPACE-PIRATES!



WE FOUND THIS GIRL ... ONLY LIVING THING ON DEIMOS!

EXCELLENT! WE WILL LAND HERE AND MAKE PLANS FOR OUR RAID ON MARS / IMPRISON HER UNTIL I DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH HER!

WHAT STRANGE ADVENTURES AWAIT BOTH DIANA AND TED? SEE THE NOV. ISSUE OF SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES.

DANGER

ROY CRAIG stood on top the levee and looked out at the flood that swirled beneath him. Trees, logs, an occasional negro cabin, dead animals, all bobbed in the yellow water that stretched for more than an mile.

He turned to the girl beside him and smiled. "I've spent my life on the Mississippi," he said, "but this is the damndest flood I ever saw. It's already higher than the old levee, and a damn' good thing I've had my niggers putting sandbags up here for weeks."

"Is there any danger?" she asked. "I didn't know what might happen to you down here if the levee broke. That's why I drove down." She looked up at Craig and he saw in her eyes that it was not fear which had brought her down from New Orleans. It was something much more interesting to him.

CRAIG didn't answer. It always took his breath away to look at this girl. She was tall and slender with long blonde hair, but her skin had an olive tint and her eyes were surprisingly dark. She wore a white, short-sleeved dress and the high curve of her breasts molded it closely against her. In the long moment that they stood looking at one another her breath began to quicken.

Craig swallowed at the lump forming in his throat. He could feel his muscles growing stiff and trembling. His eyes moved down over the curve of her breasts, the slim waist, the hips tight-fitted by the white dress. His voice was taut when he said, "I've kept the niggers working on the levee since the river started rising. I knew that if it broke I'd be ruined; but it won't break."

Suddenly she had her arms around him, her body pressed flat against him, her head tilted back, lips parted. "I can't wait until we get married, Roy. I can't! I can't! That's why I drove down here. I want to be with you now!"

"Nell." Craig said huskily. His arms were tight around her, flattening her breasts against him. He kissed her furiously. His right hand slid down her back, tightened.

"Roy! Roy!" She whispered the words into his mouth. Her left hand pushed through his dark hair; her right hand beat convulsively at his back.

Craig felt his knees trembling. "Let's go to the house," he said.

She moved slightly away from him and his left hand rested upon the full mound of her breast. His fingers tightened. "Oh Roy!" she said, and stood still, trembling.

They were going to dynamite Craig's levee to save their own because there was too much water in the river. It was a challenge to Craig's plantation, to his life, and to his new-found love—and he accepted it!

PREFERRED

By JOHN GREER



The giant went over backward under his onslaught.

AT THE edge of the levee someone coughed noisily. Craig and the girl jerked around to face a grinning, white-haired old negro. "I sho' am sorry to bother you now, Mistur Roy. I know how 'tis —'least I used to, and' I ain't so old now."

Craig tried to grin but he was still panting heavily. "You go to hell," he said.

"Yes, sur. But dem three fellows

frum cross de ribber wants to see you. Dey say hit's moughty important."

Craig's lean, sunburned face darkened. "What three fellows?"

"Dat Mistur Bates, an' Mistur LeBlaine, an' Mistur Verot. Dey's down at de commissary."

"All right," Craig said. "Tell 'em I'll be there in a minute." He turned to the girl. Her lips were parted, hungry, her eyes wide. "Damn it!" Craig said. "They would have to come right now."

"Will it take long to see them?"

"I don't have an idea what they want. There's been bad blood between my family and the Verot's for two generaticns. It's fifteen years since Pete Verot put his foot on this plantation and my father kicked him away then. That was just a year or two before Dad died, but he wasn't too old to kick a Verot. LeBlaine and Bates are low type Cajuns. They've never even come here before."

"Let's see them, and hurry," Nell said. She caught Craig's hands and pressed them for one second hard. Then she turned quickly and started down the side of the levee.

IT WAS semi-dark inside the frame commissary and accustomed to the bright glare of the sunlight Craig could scarcely see the three men seated on the counter to the right. One of them had a shot-gun across his lap and two more guns were propped nearby. Nell stopped at the door, waiting.

Jules LeBlaine moved the gun from his lap and slid off the counter. He was a giant of a man with shoulders like a stevedore and his

big, hairy fingers hung only slightly above his knees. His face was square and brutal.

Jim Bates, sitting on the counter, looked like a grimy, unwashed Humpty-Dumpty. His big belly overflowed his belt and hung in sagging roles of fat above his legs. His head was egg-shaped with squint, colorless eyes. Sitting beside him was the gaunt, lipless, Death's Head of a man who was Pete Verot.

"Hello," Craig said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Verot moved then, letting his lank body slide off the counter like the links of a chain. He was even taller than Craig but so lean that his dirty clothes seemed to flap about him as though he were made of sticks. "We have come to do something for you," he drawled. "We've come to warn you that the levee on this side of the river is going to break soon and that it would be best for you to take your cattle and niggers and whatever you can move from your home—and leave. Immediately."

Craig's dark eyes opened wide, then slitted, turned hard and glittering. The muscle in his big shoulders stiffened. He leaned slightly forward. "How's it going to break?"

Jules LeBlaine lurched forward. He looked like an ape in the semi-darkness. "We're gonna blow it up. And it wasn't my idea to come and tell you. I jest as soon you drowned. I come here because Verot said we oughta."

"I've never thought much of your family," the calm, drawling voice of Verot said. "But a gentle-

man's code demanded that I tell you."

"I see the Verots are still borrowing things they have no right to," Craig said flatly. "You've borrowed a code and your great-grandfather borrowed fifty thousand dollars from a Craig. Neither of you pay them back."

Verot's dark face flushed. His lips twisted, then went straight again. "I'll let that pass," he said, "since enough is happening to you anyway. There's too much water in that river and our side of the levee is weak. I don't want it to break because I've got crops there. If this side breaks, it'll ease the pressure. You understand."

He picked up his **gun**, held it carelessly in the crook of his arm but the muzzle centered on Craig. "So I suggest you take your niggers and leave—before tonight." He bowed ironically and walked out. LeBlaine and Bates followed him.

ROY CRAIG did not even turn to watch them go. He stood staring into the gloom of the building, pulling a long breath into his lungs. So it was as simple as that.

Either he left and allowed them to blow up the levee, or he stayed and drowned when they did it. Two sticks of dynamite would blow up a hole in the top of the levee and the water tearing through would do the rest. His cotton and sugar cane, the negro cabins, even his own home would go under that howling yellow flood. Autumn would find him with barren, mud-covered acres—and ruinous debts.

What had promised to be the best crop he had ever raised, the

crop which would have allowed him to marry Nell and to repaint the old home in which four generations of Craigs had lived, to equip the whole plantation and start it going in a modern, paying fashion; it would all be gone. He'd be a pauper, and Nell. . . .

He did not even hear her steps behind him but all at once her hands were on his arm, pulling him around to face her. "What are you going to do?" she asked. Her face was a pale blur in the gloom.

He sucked a long breath into his lungs, straightened his shoulders. "I'm going to send you and the niggers away. And I'm going to stay here. They may blow up my levee, but somebody's going to get hurt when they do it."

She put her hands flat against his chest. Through his shirt he could feel the warmth of them, feel his skin tingle under their touch. "You're not going to send me away. I'm not going to leave you."

He put his hands on her shoulders. Even now he could feel desire for her trembling like an electrical current through his body. Perhaps he'd never have her now. . . . Tomorrow he might be only a water logged corpse tangled in thick brush somewhere near the Gulf. But by God! He'd died fighting!

"You're going," he said flatly. "They are three to one and I've two miles of levee to watch. You know what'll happen to anybody here when that levee goes."

She came close to him, her whole body tense, vibrant. He could see the rise and fall of the white dress above her breasts, her wide, dilated eyes. "I'm not go-

ing," she said. There were finality in her voice. "If you die, I'm going to die with you."

He argued, but it did no good. "I'm going to stay," she repeated. "You can't make me leave."

Shuffling steps sounded on the commissary porch. Craig turned to see the old white-haired negro coming through the door. "Well, Mistur Roy, you sho. . . . He was close enough now to see Craig's face and he stopped suddenly. His mouth opened and the whites of his eyes began to expand. "Lawd Gawd, Mistur Roy! What . . .?"

Craig's voice was low-pitched, brittle. "You go out and get all the hands together. Tell them to load as much of the live stock in the trucks as possible and go to New Orleans. Stay at Beroot's. Get *every* hand on the place, and leave this afternoon."

"Lawd Gawd, Mistur Ray, that ain't. . . ."

"You go do what I told you. Now get started."

"Yas, sur, but dis is shore sumpen. Hit ain't. . . ." The old negro shuffled out of the door muttering.

Craig turned back to the girl. His eyes came up from the slender, stockingless ankles, over the straight sweep of the white dress that suggested the beauty of the legs beneath, over the curving hips, the flat stomach, the swelling of the high breasts, to the loveliness of the girl's face and the glory of her long blonde hair. He wanted her to stay, wanted her close-locked in his arms—and *he knew that if she stayed it would probably mean her death!*

"You've got to go," he said huskily. "Got to."

"I'm staying," she said. "With you."

TWILIGHT was a blue and purple haze darkening the river, throwing dim shadows over the muddy road that ran past the commissary, past the deserted negro cabins, and on out through long, flat fields of sugar cane. Roy Craig rested the butt of his 30-30 on the levee top, looked off to where his home was a white shadow behind tall oak trees.

Then he turned and looked down at the girl beside him. "If the levee doesn't break," he said, "that'll be our home. If the levee *does* break—" he made a gesture with his left hand—"we won't need it."

"It's not going to break," she said. She was very close to him now, her head tilted back so that the line of her throat was a smooth curve. Her lips were parted, and looking into her eyes Craig saw the quick, passionate shadows being to move. "We're alone now," she whispered. "There's not anybody within miles." She sat down on the levee's edge, and pulled him down beside her.

For perhaps five seconds they sat, very close and yet not touching, each feeling the steady, furious growth of passion within their blood. Craig did not hear the girl's long breath, but he saw the line of her breasts rise higher, sharper against the white dress, saw the little pulse quickening in her throat. The muscles of his forearms and shoulders were stiff and trembling. Blood began to hammer in his temples.

"Nell," he said huskily. In the thickening twilight a mocking bird

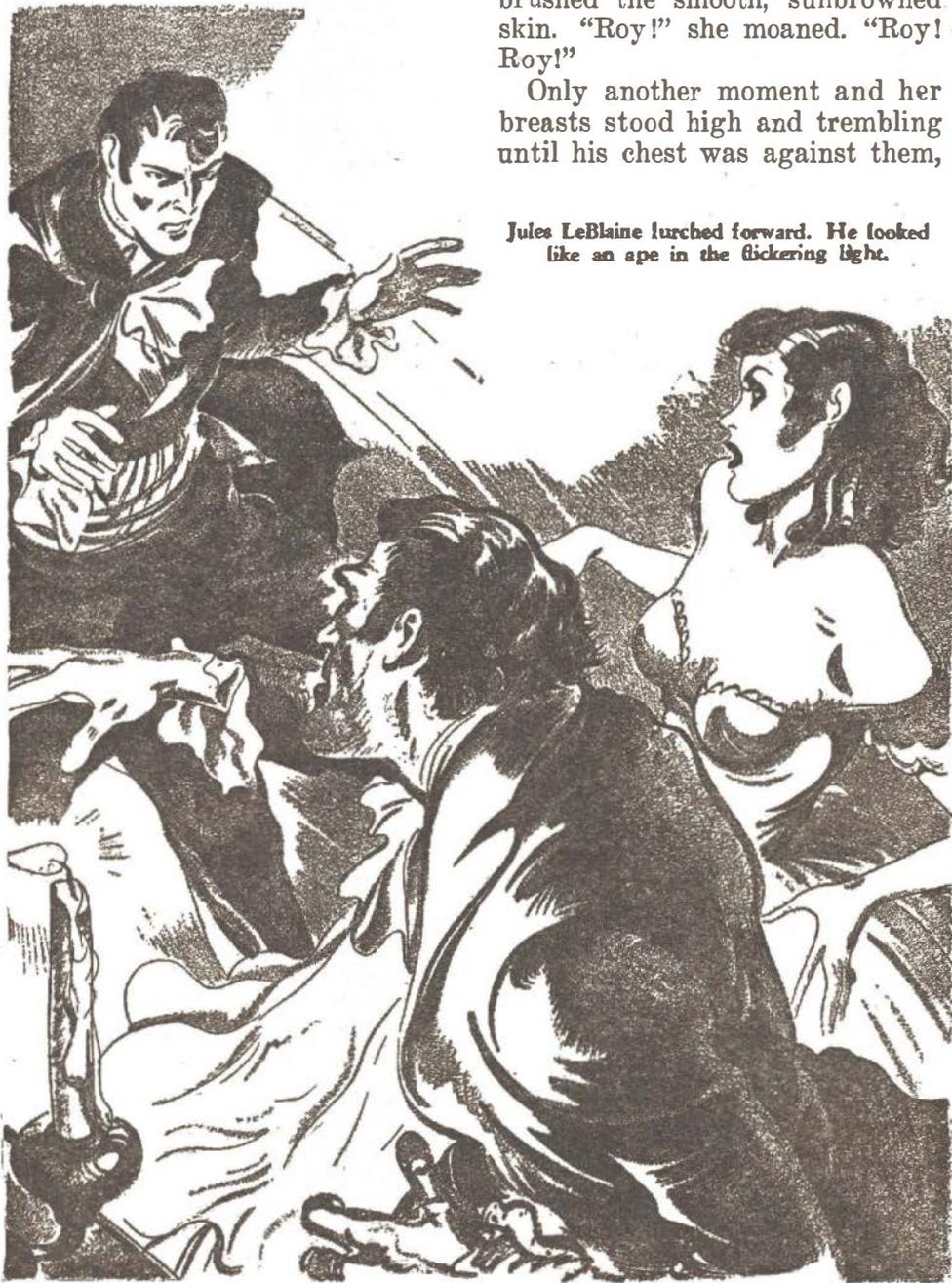
started to sing, but neither of them heard it.

And then, suddenly their arms were tight around one another, their mouths pushed hard to-

gether, bodies clinging like magnets. He could feel her lips quivering under his. She had twisted so that her dress was pulled above her knee and now his left hand brushed the smooth, sunbrowned skin. "Roy!" she moaned. "Roy! Roy!"

Only another moment and her breasts stood high and trembling until his chest was against them,

Jules LeBlaine lurched forward. He looked like an ape in the flickering light.



flattening them. "Roy . . . Roy . . ." she whimpered. And then, "Darling!" Her long blonde hair shook loose and his fingers tangled in it.

DAWN found them side by side on top the levee. The girl's head was cradled in Craig's right arm, her face against his chest. Her long blonde hair was tousled under her head; one gold strand fell down across her breast and Craig's hand.

Craig raised his head. By the growing light he could see the commissary looming up out of the mist, the muddy road stretching out through the sugar cane. He blinked heavy, sleep-led eyes, wondering why Verot and the others had not come during the night to carry out their threat. It wasn't like the tall, gaunt man to back down. Time and again during the night Craig had patrolled the whole length of his levee, but nothing had happened.

He leaned over and kissed Nell. She stirred and her eyes opened. "I wasn't asleep," she said. Her hand slid across Craig's cheek, finger tips trembling, sliding downward. His whole body stiffened, his fingers tightened on her breast.

LATER they sat on the commissary steps in the early sunlight and drank milk from a cow which had been left behind, ate cheese and bread from the commissary. Craig's rifle lay just to the right of him. "They must have decided not to try to blow up the levee," she said. "Maybe they were afraid to come while you stayed here."

Craig shook his head. "The crest of the flood won't reach here until

tonight. They've got all day, and . . ." His voice clicked short. His right hand scooped up the rifle.

From behind the commissary he had caught the whisper of steps sloughing in the mud.

"Get inside the building," Craig whispered. "There'll be bullets flying. And keep talking as if I had gone with you." He stood up, flatfooted, the butt of the rifle under his right arm pit. He waited until the girl was inside the building, her voice drifting out to him. Then he went down the steps silently.

At the bottom he stooped and peered under the commissary. The floor of the frame building was two feet above the ground and close against the back corner he could see giant, overall-clad legs.

Craig's lips twisted silently. "Jules LeBlaine." Finger on the trigger, muzzle centering on those giant legs. Craig waited.

"Drop that rifle and put your hands up." The voice was calm and drawling.

Roy Craig cursed silently, savagely. He dropped his rifle and straightened, turning. Pete Verot stood at a corner of the negro cabin across the narrow road, a shotgun at his shoulder. Behind him was Jim Bates. Watching LeBlaine, Craig had allowed the others to slip up on him.

A sense of bitterness, of utter frustration welled through Roy Craig, twisting his lips into a distorted smile. They had tricked him as though he were a child, beaten him with pitiful ease.

His eyes moved along the row of negro cabins, beyond them to the sugar cane fields, swung to the

white, tall columned old house that had been the home of the Craigs for so long—the home to which he had planned to bring Nell. And now it would all go under a yellow flood. And Nell. . . .

“Good God!” he said half aloud. What would they do with her? Even if she stayed hidden until they had killed him, planted their dynamite and gone, she wouldn’t stand a chance to escape. The flood would get her. That would be better than being in the hands of a human ape like LeBlaine.

THE giant came around the corner of the building, grinning nastily. “Where’s that wench of you’rn? I heard her talkin’?” He stooped and picked up Craig’s rifle.

Roy Craig dived. His shoulder struck LeBlaine just above the knees and both men smashed down into the mud. He heard Bates’ shrill scream, Verot’s curse, knew that the others could not shoot for fear of hitting LeBlaine. He heard the clatter of heels across the commissary porch, caught one glimpse of Nell running toward them.

Craig rolled, twisted his right hand free, and swung. The blow landed on the giant’s ear and he bellowed, flung his shotgun aside and lunged. Craig tried to twist away, but his knees slipped in the mud and the giant’s shoulder struck him. They went down together.

Somehow Craig got to his knees. He had only a split second in which to win: he had to knock the man out before the others reached him, get the rifle and shoot across the giant’s body.

LeBlaine crawled to hands and knees, cursing deep in his throat. Craig’s fist whipped up. But his knees had slipped in the mud again and the blow landed glancing. The giant’s arms circled his waist, tightening like a vise, crushing the air from his lungs.

Nell’s shrill scream ripped the air. Craig twisted slightly, saw her fighting with the egg-shaped Bates, saw the man’s hand catch the top of her dress, rip downward. A white breast quivered into view and Bates crackled even as the girl’s hand struck him.

Then Pete Verot brought his gun butt down on Craig’s head.

CONSCIOUSNESS never left Craig completely. He heard voices sounding far away and meaningless, felt himself being half dragged, half carried. Slowly his brain began to function, his eyes blinked. The voices came nearer, took on meaning. He was conscious of Nell’s angry sobbing, of Bates’ peering voice saying, “She’s a right pretty thing, ain’t she. This is gonna be good.”

Craig shook his head, tried to wipe the mist from in front of his eyes. His hand was jerked back.

“He’s comin’ to,” LeBlaine said.

“It won’t matter. He won’t get out of that river once he’s thrown in it.”

“Neither will I if he drags me in.”

“Hell,” Bates said, “shoot him and fling him in. But I ain’t ready to shoot the girl yet.”

Fury shook through Roy Craig, clearing his vision, though there was still a terrific pounding under his skull and his muscles were

watery. He began to struggle feebly, realizing that he was already half way up the levee. LeBlaine was holding his right arm. Verot his left.

Nell walked to one side of him, her arms crossed over her breasts where the dress had been torn almost completely away. Craig could see the high mounds shivering with each step she took. Bates was close behind her carrying a shotgun.

"Let's shoot him," Bates said again. "He'll start fighting sure 'nuff in a minute."

"Do you want them to find his body with a bullet hole in it?" Verot drawled. "We'll drown him. Here give me that gun and you go back to the commissary. Bring me a large bag of salt. Bring two if you can; we'll have to drown the girl also."

"Hell," Bates said, "we don't have to drown her yet. You take a look at her and you'll see."

The pain was still throbbing under Craig's head but his body felt stronger now. He jerked from LeBlaine's grip, turned to face the tall, Death's Head of a man who covered him with the shotgun. Nell ran to him, cringed against him.

Her breasts trembled below her arms and she had to keep reaching down with one hand to hitch up the torn dress so that it would not fall off altogether. LeBlaine's eye grew small and glittering like those of an animal.

"*Sacre!*" He came toward her, hairy hands reaching out.

Craig swayed forward on the balls of his feet, fists clenched. If he could get LeBlaine between him and Verot's gun. . . .

"Keep out of the way," Verot drawled. "Do you want to give him a chance to get away?"

"I want the girl," LeBlaine said. He was beginning to pant like a beast now, but he moved away, his gaze riveted on Nell's body, saliva drooling from his thick lips.

"You and Bates can have her—if you hurry—after we finish with this gentleman." Verot bowed ironically at Craig. "I'll tie two large bags of salt to him, leave him on top the levee. While I plant the dynamite you and Bates can have the girl. Then we'll have to tie salt on her and get out before the explosion. The salt will hold them under until they drown, then dissolve and the ropes'll wash off. If they are ever found, nobody can tell they didn't drown naturally."

"I don't give a damn how they drown," LeBlaine said. He was hunched over, staring at Nell with beaded eyes, his lips parted, panting.

CRAIG stood flatfooted, fists clenched at his sides, looking into the muzzle of Verot's gun. His lips felt stiff and cold and his heart was a hard ball high in his chest. A half hour ago he had been sitting with Nell, his arm around her. Now . . . he was to be left to watch the yellow flood come toward him and the girl he loved—the girl who would have been horribly man-handled by men who were no more than beasts.

And then the water would flow over him, and over Nell, whirl their bodies through what had been his fields of sugar cane and cotton.

Bates came slushing through the

mud and up the levee bank dragging two fifty pound sacks of salt. While Verot kept Craig covered, Bates tied one of the sacks to his legs, tripped him, and tied his arms around the second bag.

Abruptly Nell's scream jerked high and terrible in the air. Craig twisted his head, saw her fighting with LeBlaine. The giant had torn the dress from her completely, was trying to lift her as she beat at his face. Her long, curving body was clothed only by a pair of silk step-ins that molded the full thighs, the soft flanks, the slim waist. Her breasts shivered and jerked as she fought.

LeBlaine's hands pawed at them, at the step-ins. He was making snarling, animal noises deep in his throat, never feeling the girl's blows.

"Hey!" Bates screamed and ran at LeBlaine. "She's mine first. I got her first!" He tried to push the giant away, but LeBlaine tossed him to one side, caught the girl up in his arms and started toward the edge of the levee. Bates followed, cursing furiously, beating fat hands against his back.

"You two settle it." the gaunt man drawled. "I'll get the dynamite." He leaned over Craig and smiled. "I don't think you'll leave while tied to that salt. It's not so heavy, but you can't use your legs or hands. You may be able to roll to the edge of the levee and watch LeBlaine with the girl. And while you watch think of the time your father told me to leave his plantation." He spat in Craig's face, turned and walked away.

Slowly now, face gray beneath the sunburn, Craig began to work

at his bonds. He heard nothing, not even the sullen mutter of the river a few feet away or the girl's occasional cry from down the levee, the angry sound of Bates' and LeBlaine's voices. For a full minute he twisted feet and wrists, jerked and tugged. His skin cracked under the ropes and blood oozed, but there was no slackening.

It wasn't a long struggle, but it was a furious one, straining every muscle and fibre in Craig's body. And when he lay still, panting, he knew that it was impossible, to free the ropes.

Craig's face was wet with perspiration now, his lips stiff and cold. Under the weight of the sack his heart pounded heavily, like a rock heating at his ribs. There was only one chance left—and no time to waste.

Slowly, fighting his way, rolling and twisting, Roy Craig moved toward the river's edge.

FOUR complete rolls he made, then paused, lying on his face two feet from the levee's end. He twisted his head, looked out at the expanse of yellow, rushing water. A whole tree, torn up by its roots somewhere to the north, broke the surface, rolled over slowly, and went under again.

Craig's teeth made loud, grating noises. What chance did a man have in that flood, even unhampered by any weight? The strongest swimmer would be a feather against the current.

The water was within a yard of the levee top and Craig began to tear with his finger tips at one of

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The LONGEST

VANCE MADDEN stared angrily into the calm eyes of the French police prefect. He said: "See here, *monsieur*, I don't like this. Don't like it at all. I've been in Saigon exactly four hours; and now two of your Cambodian constables yank me out of my room at the *Hotel de l'Est* and bring me down here to your office. You ask me a lot of damned fool questions. You even take my fingerprints. What's behind it? I'm an American citizen and my credentials are okay. So what?"

The prefect smiled. At that moment a clerk entered the bare little office, laid a photographic print on the police official's desk. The clerk whispered something. Vance Madden couldn't hear what the fellow said.

Then the prefect dismissed his underling, turned to Madden. "*Monsieur Madden*," he said quietly, "we owe you our apologies. From your fingerprints, we have learned that you are not the man we suspected you of being. You are free to depart.

"In explanation of your being brought here, I may say only this: You strongly resemble a man who has given us much trouble in the past, here in French Indo-China. He, too, was an American. It was

our belief that he was dead—killed by certain of his underworld enemies. But when you registered at the *Hotel de l'Est*, your resemblance to his man was immediately noticed. Obviously, it was our duty to investigate."

VANCE MADDEN grinned wryly. He heaved his thick-chested, muscular body out of the chair in which he had been sitting; stood up to his full six-feet-two of height. "Who was this chap who looked so much like me?" he asked curiously.

"We never knew his real name. He was known as Sapphire Slade."

"Sapphire Slade? Funny name."

"He collected sapphires, *monsieur*. They were his passion, his mania. His presence in Indo-China raised *le diable* with the natives."

Vance Madden raised an eyebrow. "How so?"

"Because Slade had a habit of obtaining sapphires which had been stolen from sacred native temples—from idols. We could never prove positively that he himself did the actual stealing. He probably bribed crooked priests—or obtained his sapphires from native thieves. In any case, he disappeared about a year ago. Word trickled through that he had been

Why should the girl call him "Sapphire Slade"? In spite of his denial, she persisted. And the cut-throats who wanted his life did the same. What was their game? Madden threw himself into an Oriental torture-trap to find out

WAY HOME

By PAUL HANNA



"You lied to me, you dog!" Fang Shan roared.

murdered and robbed of his collection of sapphires. His body was never found."

Madden grinned. "Well," he said, "under the circumstances I guess I can't blame you for collaring me and giving me a check-up. And now—good night. I'll be going back to my hotel."

The police prefect hesitated, as though weighing something in his mind. Then he said: "One moment, *Monsieur* Madden. I should like to give you a word of warning."

"Warning?" Vance Madden's eyes narrowed to steely slits.

"*Oui*. In all friendliness, I suggest that you stay away from the native quarter — especially the Street of Five Serpents."

The tall, broad-shouldered American stared. "The Street of Five Serpents? That's the low-life district, isn't it?"

"*Oui*."

"And why should I steer clear of it?"

"For a very good reason, my friend. This man, Sapphire Slade, whom you resemble, is supposed to be dead. But he had many enemies among the lawless native element. Some of those enemies might not know that Slade is dead. They might mistake you for him—even as we did. You might find yourself with a knife in your ribs."

Vance Madden laughed shortly. "I'll bear that in mind. And thanks." He bowed to the prefect; went out into the night.

As he walked, he frowned. The Street of Five Serpents, the police official had mentioned. And a man named Sapphire Slade. Abruptly, Madden turned in his tracks; headed for the native quarter. Headed for the Street of Five Serpents.

And as he strode along through the darkness, his hard right hand went to the pocket of his linen coat; caressed the cold outlines of a Webley automatic.

After a long time, he reached his destination.

The Street of Five Serpents was a narrow, tortuous alleyway in the heart of Saigon's native district, reeking with the odors of decayed fish, of offal, of cheap gin.

Blatant music floated noisily from many vice-dives that ran full blast; and over the music came the strident, high-pitched laughter of women, the muttering tones of drunken men. Not a healthy neighborhood, Vance Madden decided.

He spotted a saloon, swung into it.

IT was a low-ceilinged place, blue with tobacco smoke, noxious with the smell of sweating bodies and rot gut liquor, and the cheap perfume of low-grade women. Along the back wall there was a bar.

Madden elbowed a couple of insolent Malays out of his path. He reached the bar. "Whiskey," he said tersely.

The *Chinoise* barkeep slid a dirty glass toward him, followed it with a brown bottle. Madden poured himself a generous slug. The stuff scorched his tonsils. Then he felt a tug at his sleeve.

A small-breasted native girl was standing there, smiling at him invitingly. Her almond eyes were heavily kohled, her lips thickly rouged. She wore a kimono that fell open to reveal a glimpse of diminutive, honey-colored breasts. She was slender, looked underfed, in fact. She said: "White man like dance, mebbe-so?"

Madden slapped a coin on the bar to pay for his drink. Then he said: "Not tonight, sister."

The girl grinned at him. "Me good girl. You like—lots. I prom-

ise." Deliberately she drew the kimono farther open. "See!" she whispered. "Me young. Me not old woman."

Madden started to refuse once more. Then he reconsidered. Maybe this little almond-eyed cutie could tell him one or two things that he wanted to know. He smiled. "Okay, baby."

The girl plucked at his coat, drew him toward one side of the saloon. Half-way across the floor, something happened. The girl's ivory-yellow face went suddenly pale. She froze in her tracks.

Vance Madden stared at her. "What's up, baby?" he growled.

She didn't answer him. Didn't have time. Because a hulking, slant-eyed half-caste was plunging toward her, cursing like a fiend. The man was drunk; and there was murder-rage in his red-rimmed eyes. "Slut! Daughter of a camel!" he roared out in coarse French-Chinese. And then he grabbed at the girl.

She tried to elude him. His fingers caught in her kimono, ripped it from her shrinking body. She cried out in terror.

Vance Madden rasped a curse. "Lay off her, you damned Chink!" he gritted. And he flung himself at the half-caste.

The man ducked him. Like magic, a glittering knife appeared in the drunken half-caste's fist. Madden, off-balance, went plunging past his adversary. And then, while his back was still turned, before he could whirl to protect himself, the half-caste raised his knife; threw it viciously.

Madden saw the blade coming. And then an ivory figure leaped in

front of him. It was the native girl. She took the knife full in her breast.

It bit into her flesh, sank hilt-deep to her heart. With a gasping, agonized shriek, the girl went down. Blood streamed over her bosom. The glaze of death was already in her widened eyes. Her crimson-tipped fingers clutched spasmodically at eternity.

A RED film of rage hazed over Vance Madden's narrowed eyes. "You murdering hound!" he bellowed. He sprang, hurled himself like an avalanche toward the half-caste who had thrown the knife. His hard body smashed into the man, bowled him backward.

Madden's fist flashed up in a venomous uppercut that exploded against the half-caste's jaw with sickening concussion. The man toppled, fell on his face. And as he fell, his skull cracked against the edge of a chair. The sound of it was like the splitting of a coconut. Blood and grey brains oozed. . . .

The American turned, stared at the startled faces which surrounded him. He licked his grim lips. "Anybody else looking for trouble?" he rasped.

Nobody was. Madden walked out of the dive on the balls of his feet. He started back toward his hotel. He walked slowly, taking his time. His jaw jutted pugnaciously.

And then, three blocks farther ahead, he heard a woman's sudden scream.

It came from directly in front of him, around a dark corner. Madden heard it again, ear-piercing, freighted with helpless fear. He

hastened his pace; broke into a loping run. He rounded the corner.

There was a girl. A white girl. She was in a rickshaw. Her rickshaw-boy lay crumpled between his shafts, battered into unconsciousness. And three thug-like natives were hauling at the girl, pulling her out of the cart despite her frantic struggles.

Madden saw that a clawing, clutching hand had ripped at the front of her dress. He saw that she was very young, very beautiful, very blonde. And then the American had launched himself into the thick of it.

Typically, he didn't think of his Webley. Fists were made for fighting men; and Vance Madden was a fighting man. He slugged one of the three attacking natives; smashed a vicious blow at the fellow's mouth. The native screamed and went reeling backward, spitting blood and shards of betel-stained teeth.

Madden caught the second native around the waist, lifted him as though he were a toy. The man shrieked—and Madden threw him, square at the remaining thug. Skull smashed against skull, and both kidnapers went down.

Then, from behind, the American heard pattering foot-falls. He pivoted. He was a thought too late. Somebody bashed him over the head with a length of iron pipe. Madden felt a Niagara of pain drowning his brain. Blinding lights blasted his eyeballs. The street came up to meet him. He threw out his hands to save his face. Then, for a long while, he didn't know anything at all.

THERE was a cool, wet cloth lav-
ing his temples. A subtle fra-
grance was in his nostrils. Gentle
hands touched his cheeks.

Vance Madden opened his eyes, stirred a little. He looked up. Someone was leaning over him. A girl. A white girl. The blonde girl of the rickshaw—the one who had been attacked by those three native thugs.

She said: "You must be quiet, Mr. Slade."

He stared at her. Her eyes were azure pools, shadowed by trouble. Her lips were full, crimson, very kissable. Her hair was like yellow corn-silk—soft, wavy, infinitely beautiful.

As she leaned over him, her torn frock gaped open, so that he could see the swelling crescents of her milk-white breasts; could see the deep, delicious valley between them. Her skin was satin-smooth, flawless—

And she had called him "Slade."

He frowned. Sapphire Slade . . . that was the name of the man Vance Madden was supposed to resemble. The man who was dead—murdered by his enemies in Saigon's underworld. Once more Madden looked up at the girl. "Where am I? What's happened?" he demanded. "And who are you?"

"You're in my home," the girl whispered softly. "Just as the fourth native leaped from the shadows and hit you over the head, the police came. They wanted to take you to a hospital. But I insisted on bringing you here. I owe you my life. I want to repay you if I can."

"Who are you?" Madden asked again.

"I—my name is Felice Carroll."

"You talk like an American."

She smiled faintly. "I am. But you mustn't talk any more. You must rest."

Vance Madden grinned. "I'm okay. I've got a thick skull. If you'll give me a drink, I'll be on my feet."

He watched her as she walked to a sideboard. Madden drank in the lilting symmetry of her hips—hips that swayed gently, provocatively, with every step she took. Her legs were twin dreams.

And when she came back to hand him a slug of Scotch, her torn frock bulged open once more. Again Madden glimpsed the perfection of her flawless breasts—nubile mounds that set him afire with desire to see more . . . to mold them, flatten them with his palms. . . .

HE GULPED his Scotch, gratefully. The stuff brought his strength returning in a flooding tide. He set down the empty glass. Then he caught the blonde girl's hand, pulled her toward him.

She came, with just a faint display of reluctance. His arm encircled her pliant waist. He touched the curve of her hips. The girl made no objection.

Vance Madden pulled the girl closer to him; and the nearness of her warm, feminine body ignited a smoldering desire within him. He said: "I like you, Felice Carroll. Lots. I don't understand what a girl like you can be doing in Saigon."

There was a tinge of bitterness to her smile. "I came out with an American show—girl-and-music

revue. We stranded. I had a little money saved. I stayed here."

Madden looked around him. The room was luxuriously furnished. It didn't look like the quarters of a stranded showgirl. But he concealed his thoughts on the subject. If Felice Carroll was lying to him, she must have a reason. He said: "I'm glad we met, sweetheart. I'd like to see a lot of you."

"I—I'd like you to, Sapphire Slade," she answered slowly.

He stared at her. That was the second time she'd called him Slade. He let it ride. He drew her toward him, tilted her chin. He kissed her.

The contact with her moist lips sent a dancing cascade of fire through his veins; brought his smoldering desire to a leaping fury of white-hot flames.

She panted. Her breath was fire-hot. "My dear!" she whispered as her bare arms bent about his neck.

He kissed her closed eyes, her parted lips. Kissed the palpitant hollow of her throat.

"I love you!" she said huskily. "I love you . . . *you are in danger!*" That last sentence came in a vibrant whisper. "Hold me—hold me tight . . . ! *There is a man in the next room, listening!* Squeeze me in your arms . . . ! *That fight in the street was faked!*"

Madden stiffened. But he continued to kiss the girl. "Beloved!" he said.

"*It was a scheme to get you up here in this room! Kiss me, but don't talk. . . . Fang Shan is after your emeralds! Kiss me again! . . . I am in Fang Shan's power. He forced me to lure you here!*"

"You're too beautiful to be real!" Madden breathed. Then in a whisper: "*What's to be done?*"

"But I am real . . . ! *We'll have to go through with this or Fang Shan will suspect me of double-crossing him!*"

Abruptly the girl went limp in Madden's arms. . . .

THEN, long moments later, she smiled at him, dreamily. "You will always love me, Sapphire Slade? And perhaps you will some day bring your collection of sapphires here for me to see . . . ? *Say yes . . . it's your only hope of getting out alive. . . .*"

Slowly, Vance Madden got to his feet. He smiled. "Why should I bring my sapphires some other time? I have them with me now," he said quietly.

The girl went white. "You fool—you've signed your own death-warrant!" she gasped in a choked whisper. And then a door punched open; and a voice said:

"You are quite right, Felice. He has signed his own death-warrant!"

Madden whirled. A man came toward him; a man clad in the yellow robes of the mandarin caste. An Asiatic, slant-eyed, cruel-visaged, thin-lipped. He held a Luger in his right fist; and the weapon's muzzle was trained at Madden's heart.

Madden said: "What the bleeding hell!"

The yellow man grinned. "So we meet again, Mr. Sapphire Slade! And this time, you will not escape the death which I have planned for you. This time Fang

Shan will not entrust the work to others!"

"What do you mean?" Madden rasped.

"You know quite well what I mean, Slade. My men told me they had killed you, a year ago. They lied. I shall punish them for that! Fortunately for me, when you went into that saloon on the Street of Five Serpents tonight, and killed that half-caste, one of my men was in the place. He saw you, recognized you. He slipped out and told me that you were in Saigon"

The snarling Asiatic raised his voice. "Wang Sing! Li Po!" he called harshly.

Madden heard shuffling footsteps. Then two lowering natives entered. "You called us, master?" one said.

"*Aie!* I called you. Did you not tell me, long months ago, that you had killed Sapphire Slade? And that his sapphires were missing from his carcass?"

The two natives blanched. They looked at Vance Madden—and fear leaped into their slanted eyes. "A ghost! He has returned from the grave!" the second thug wailed in terror.

Fang Shan, their master sneered. "You lied to me, you dogs! You did not kill Sapphire Slade! This man is no ghost—and his very presence in this room proves that you lied when you told me you had murdered him!"

"Master—we slit his throat! We swear it!"

"Sons of turtles! You would still cram your falsehoods into my teeth?" Glaring fury slithered into the Asiatic's demoniac eyes.

Whirling, he swung his Luger; pressed the trigger—twice.

The room was filled with the hollow roar of the weapon as it spat out two pellets of flaming death. And then the two native thugs went tumbling into hell with bullets in their brains.

IT WAS over in a flash. Fang Shan swung the smoking muzzle of his Luger back at Vance Madden. "Thus do I wreak my vengeance on those who displease me!" he grated. "And you, Sapphire Slade, have displeased me for lo, these long months! Your time has come to go to your foul infidel hell. But before you die—hand me those sapphires!"

Madden's lips were a thin line. "Go to hell, O father of tortoises!" he barked.

Fang Shan went white. "You dog!" he roared. "For that you die on the instant!" His finger curled about the Luger's trigger—

And then Felice Carroll, the blonde girl, threw herself at the snarling Asiatic, clung to him. "Spare him—do not slay him!" she wailed. "Take his sapphires and allow him to go—for my sake!"

Fang Shan stared at her wickedly. "What is this?" he purred. "Why are you so interested in the white foreign devil?"

"I love him!" the girl whispered tremulously.

At her words, Vance Madden's heart leaped. She had spoken with simple sincerity; had meant her whispered confession. And the knowledge filled Madden with exultant satisfaction . . . because, abruptly, he knew that he loved the

blonde girl—loved her and hungered for her . . . now and forever. . . .

The yellow Fang Shan sneered savagely. "So! My little white girl has found a man who pleases her better, eh?"

The girl went red from the roots of her pale gold hair to the pink tips of her liling, symmetrical breasts. "You—you beast!" she cried. "Yes, I have been your girl . . . but only because I would otherwise have starved! Only because I had no money, and you offered me a home. . . ."

Her naked shoulders slumped. "And now you have told Sapphire Slade exactly what I am. A yellow man's . . . woman. Well, he won't be interested in me any more. You needn't fear that he'll take me away from you, Fang Shan. But please—for my sake—let him go! Do this, and I shall be your slave. . . ."

THE Oriental leered bestially. "We shall see, my pretty soiled dove!" he purred, cat-like. He turned back to Vance Madden, prodded the American with his Luger. "Give me your sapphires. Then perhaps I will permit you to depart."

Madden said: "I have no sapphires."

"You lie, dog! I heard you tell this little white flower that you had them with you!"

"It was not true."

Fang Shan leaped at Madden; and because the Luger was jammed against his guts, the American dared make no protest. Swiftly, efficiently, the Asiatic went through

(Continued on page 96)

AFTER NIGHT

By **BOB LEESON**

It was a woman who made a fool of the King's Guardsman . . . until he proved that he could also make a fool of a woman! But in the end it took courage and a flashing sword to defeat the forces arrayed against him

THE streets of Paris in the year 1625 did not make the safest of spots for a girl to travel unescorted by night. And yet he who so evidently annoyed the young lady appearing at the end of the Rue Vanguard had not the appearance of a thug, but rather—by his boots, cloak, and plumed hat—to say nothing of a clanking, scabbarded sword—of a gentleman.

"*Mais, ma foi!*" muttered D'Artagnan, irritated. "By his looks a gentleman, the more damning his conduct!" And with his right hand on the pommel of his sword he sprang forward to meet the approaching pair.

"Your pardon, monsieur." He placed himself squarely in the path, hand on hip. "Mademoiselle seems to have little liking for your company."

"No less than I for yours, I assure you," retorted the older man contemptuously, halting. "Leave us, then, unless you seek trouble."

"*Non—non, si'l vous plais monsieur. . . .*"

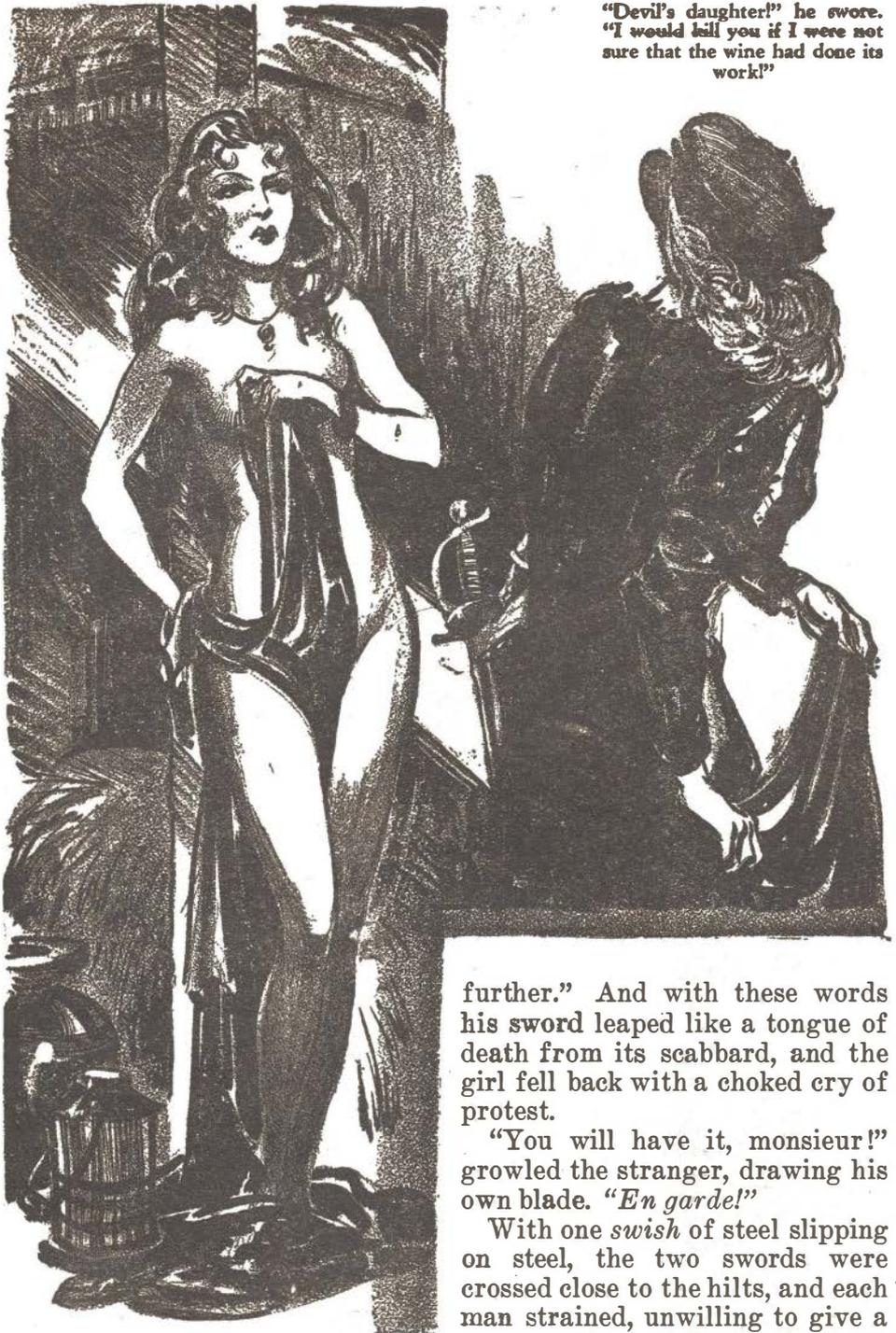
"No, please, monsieur. . . ." The girl enveloped in the shadows of her long cloak, laid a soft warm hand on D'Artagnan's sword arm. "Leave us—you cannot help."

The mere touch of the mysterious girl's hand—for she was beautiful even in the vagueness of dark—sent blood pounding to the guardsman's head. "But this man is annoying you."

"And you annoy *me*, sir!" The stranger's voice was frigid.

NOW, stamping for half an hour along the barren spot at the foot of the convent of the Carmes-Dechaux had already rendered volatile the temper of the impulsive D'Artagnan. Had anyone but an expected Queen's messenger kept him waiting, the cadet from Gascony would long since have returned to the rooms of Athos, where he had left that musketeer over his inevitable bottle of Spanish wine.

"Devil's daughter!" he swore.
"I would kill you if I were not
sure that the wine had done its
work!"



further." And with these words his sword leaped like a tongue of death from its scabbard, and the girl fell back with a choked cry of protest.

"You will have it, monsieur!" growled the stranger, drawing his own blade. "*En garde!*"

With one *swish* of steel slipping on steel, the two swords were crossed close to the hilts, and each man strained, unwilling to give a step. Suddenly D'Artagnan yielded slightly and then instantly thrust harder than before. Unbal-

"Then *pardieu!*" exploded D'Artagnan. "Allow me to annoy you

anced, his adversary retreated a pace, and D'Artagnan, weapon freed, lunged in the same second.

The touch was only a light one upon the chest. The guardsman would have sworn he had not even scratched his opponent; yet the latter faltered, stumbled in avoiding a further lunge, and then turned and ran rapidly through the street, to disappear around the corner.

"*Sacre nom de bleu!*" ejaculated D'Artagnan, astounded. Then, laughing as he sheathed his sword, "*Eh, bien, ma'm'selle*, you could have put your pursuer to flight yourself, with a slap on the wrist."

The girl shrank toward him, looking over her shoulder. "No—you are wrong, monsieur! That man is no coward . . . something is back of his leaving us like this—and I am afraid!"

D'Artagnan started at the acute fear in her voice. "The sword of D'Artagnan is at your service, mademoiselle," he said quietly. "Who are you?"

"D'Artagnan?" The girl clutched his arm tensely. "I am your messenger from the Queen—Monsieur D'Artagnan!"

"From the Queen?" Instantly suspicious, he asked softly, "And the password?"

"*Rochelle et Amiens.*"

"It is well."

"And yours?"

"*Villiers.*" D'Artagnan glanced swiftly about, saw the street deserted. "What are my orders from Her Majesty?"

"The meeting has been postponed. You are to go to your apartment and wait until later tonight, when you will receive further instructions."

FAR from being disconcerted at this, D'Artagnan, accustomed to obeying royal orders without question, bowed. All he knew was that Anne of Austria, to whom he had rendered more than slight service before this, was in fresh need of his ready sword and agile brain in a matter that could not be handled publicly.

"And who, mademoiselle, will make known to me these additional instructions?"

"They will be communicated to me," the girl murmured hesitantly, "and I . . . you understand," she added delicately, "that I am supposed to remain near you."

"To my apartment, then," responded D'Artagnan carelessly, offering her his arm—not without a lift to his own pulse.

"I do not," she hesitated, "seek this of myself."

"You are safe with me, mademoiselle," D'Artagnan said earnestly. "*Parole d'honneur.*"

And yet, as he escorted her through the silent dark streets toward the Rue des Fossoyeurs, he could not help grinning to himself. Passing an hour or two with this girl whom he did not know would be exciting even if innocent.

For D'Artagnan, whose sword was long but whose pay was short, had few *pistoles* to squander upon the uses of gallantry, and he had not yet fallen into the custom of the time; wherein many a mistress paid for her lover's uniform and purchased with fine laces and baldricks the amorous attendance of handsome young officers. . . . D'Artagnan, at the pressure of the young girl's leg as she strode be-

side him, shivered a little and squeezed her arm.

What D'Artagnan did not see was that the girl also smiled to herself. . . . What he did not know was that five minutes after they had left the grounds of the Carmes-Dechaux another girl appeared, clothed in the habiliments of one of the King's musketeers.

"Monsieur D'Artagnan?" she said softly, approaching the lone figure waiting there.

"I have been awaiting you," responded D'Artagnan's late opponent calmly. Without haste he produced a pistol from beneath his cloak. Presenting the muzzle at the girl's breast, he said coolly: "You will please accompany me, mademoiselle."

The girl took one look at her captor's face and opened her mouth to scream, but at that instant the man whipped his fist with moderate force to the point of her jaw and caught her with the same hand. Stunned and staggering, she suffered him to lead her away, pistol pressed into her side.

CAPTIVATED by the slender ankles and shapely calves of his pretty companion—who he was sure lifted her skirt much higher than was necessary in preceding him up the narrow staircase to his apartment.—D'Artagnan was breathing a bit heavily when they came into the lighted room.

"Here?" D'Artagnan tossed half a *pistole* to his lackey, who sprang up instantly from the *fauteuil*—the only armchair in the modestly furnished room. "Go and find amusement for yourself."

Planchet grinned a knowing and

altogether approving grin, pocketed the coin, and departed whistling.

D'Artagnan relieved himself of the awkward length of his sword, while the young lady sank hesitantly into the *fauteuil*.

"You will find it difficult of entertainment here," said the guardsman slowly. "I can offer you only a half a bottle of Anjou."

The girl had thrown off her hood to reveal a dazzling profusion of dark curly hair. Now she dropped her eyes delicately. "Wine," she murmured, "is not the only entertainment . . . with an ingenious young man. . . ."

"*Ma foi*," laughed D'Artagnan; "since when does the Queen employ angels as messengers?"

Without prelude he dropped to one knee beside the chair and took the girl's hand in both his. "You are beautiful," he whispered. "Would your name be as much so?"

"It is Camille," the girl said, smiling. Then boldly, "and now I must shame myself by confessing that I begged tonight's mission of the Queen . . . because I had seen you so often near M. de Treville's. . . . and I liked you."

With a joyous laugh, D'Artagnan gathered the girl in his arms, kissed her swiftly on the lips and then buried his face in her fragrant hair. His young inexperience, coupled with his always amazing ego, made such simple flattery excitingly pleasurable.

Camille drew a shaky breath and caught D'Artagnan's head in both her small warm hands and held his face so that she could kiss him again. Then, with a paradoxical

air of caution, she slowly undid and loosened the laces of her blue silk bodice, so that the material, instead of binding, now fell loosely over the clear outlines of firm, youthful breasts.

THIS simple, deliberate act sent D'Artagnan's blood humming, transformed the fire of his hot Gascon's temper into an emotion more tender and consuming. For a moment, he eased the pressure of his clasp about the girl's slender waist. The sudden release allowed the already loosened silk of her bodice to fall half off her smooth shoulders.

"My soul, but you are sweet!" D'Artagnan breathed hoarsely. But even this small talk taxed him, for he was unused to saying pretty things to a woman. Instead of talking, therefore, he kissed Camille upon the throat above the throbbing treasure which tantalized him.

Camille made small gasping sounds, and the blush that started around her eyes spread swiftly downward and transformed the flawless whiteness of her breast to a faint *couleur de rose*.

"Monsieur D'Artagnan!" she murmured into his ear. "You drive me. . . . mad!" But at the same time her low laugh sent her sweet breath tingling across the hairs behind his ear; far from objecting to such madness, she helped it by crossing her knees with a seemingly careless gesture so that before D'Artagnan's unbelieving yet eager eyes was laid bare a portion of the curving white flesh above her knee. Never had D'Artagnan felt the thrill that suffused him as his avid eyes caressed the sweet

curves of that satiny skin that faded enticingly into frothy lace and warm shadows.

In a few seconds, with the blood pounding in his head till he thought his temples should crack, he gathered Camille in a crushing embrace and picked her up from the chair, stifled her little moans of pleasure with his mouth smothering her.

Never had a duel or a sword scrimmage with three of the Cardinal's guards caused D'Artagnan's knees to shake as they did when he lifted this girl, like a feather doll, warm and slender and loving, in his arms. . . .

SO completely overwhelmed was the young guardsman by his infatuation that, an hour later, it took some seconds of listening before he recognized the voice, accompanying the pounding at his door, as that of Athos.

"*Un moment, mon ami!*" D'Artagnan, leaving the girl, hastened to the front room and unlocked the door.

"*Pardieu*, Athos, what has taken you?" Paling, D'Artagnan fell back a step, for the stoical musketeer's eyes glittered, and his mustache twitched as it did only in those rare moments when he permitted himself to show excitement.

Inside, Athos closed the door carefully; he asked coolly, "You have the *Queen's* messenger here, my dear D'Artagnan?"

"But—of course! That is," he stammered, "she—we are waiting, Athos. . . . But how did you know?"

"Where is she?"

"Camille!" Still unable to banish

a trace of tenderness from his tone, D'Artagnan dashed to the ante-chamber where he had left the girl but a moment before.

In another moment they were outside the wall, where the carriage was waiting.



"Athos, she is gone!"

"By the back staircase, you fool! D'Artagnan," Athos shook his head sadly, "you have been duped by a woman. Your Gascon shrewdness, which I have been the first to praise, operates best against the tricks of His Eminence. You had best leave women to Aramis."

"You mean she—she was not the Queen's messenger?" groaned D'Artagnan. "Then I'm a fool indeed, Athos!"

"She is one of the cleverest tools of the Cardinal," Athos said calmly. "Your real messenger has been kidnaped, and Porthos, Aramis, and I have been waiting on you over an hour. Come, we are late."

D'Artagnan was not one to waste talk when time pressed. Swiftly donning his sword, he sped with Athos down the narrow stairs and along the Rue des Fossoyeurs.

Still, D'Artagnan found time to ask: "Were you three, then, to be in on this adventure with me? I was told to keep silent."

"Ever a good policy," observed Athos. "But in this case Her Majesty doubtless meant for you to work with us. For as soon as we did not appear, and her messenger did not return, she sent M. Laporte to my rooms, where he gave me instructions."

"And they are—?"

"Meagre. As you know, courage and not curiosity is expected of fighting men. The Queen is going by carriage to a certain small *auberge* in St. Cloud. We are to follow her to the inn, acting as guards and lookouts, to stop suspicious persons, and so on."

"All this is extremely vague," muttered D'Artagnan.

"She trusts to our ingenuity and intelligence," said Athos, just as they arrived at the door of his apartment, only a few steps from the Luxemburg, in the Rue Ferou.

AS A lone carriage, drawn by two horses, slipped through the gate of La Conference and proceeded at a moderate pace along the road to St. Cloud, four horsemen emerged from the darkness of the trees and followed, cantering, at a distance of a hundred paces.

They rode wordlessly at first; Athos and D'Artagnan in front, followed by the lumbering gigantic figure of Porthos and the slim, handsome Aramis. All were in the uniform of the King's musketeers save D'Artagnan, who wore the uniform of the guards; and each man carried two loaded pistols in his belt and one in his saddle holster.

As they neared St. Cloud, D'Artagnan exclaimed in a low voice: "It has just occurred to me, Athos, that if we are stopped, it will be better if at least one of us has taken a different route, so that if the odds are great we shall not all be placed *hors de combat!*"

"You are right, my Gascon, *morbleu!*"

"Then, since I know this road well, I leave you."

D'Artagnan plunged into a by-path, which led behind the chateau to a little frequented lane, and soon came to the end of high wall separating the lane from the *auberge* in question. The Queen's carriage had already arrived, and a lackey held the horses at a little distance from the gate.

"*Ma foi!* since the Queen has

left it to us," thought D'Artagnan, "I shall have a look at the inside of this inn."

But as the host hastened to meet him just inside the doorway, D'Artagnan, staring over his shoulder, started.

"Ventrebleu! . . . Camille!"

The girl seated alone at the table looked up quickly, half arose at the sound of her name. Then she sank back in the chair with a smile.

Lived with the memory of his recent shame, D'Artagnan shouldered the host aside and strode to the table.

"Ma chérie!" he breathed caustically. "Shall I slit your throat now, ma'am'selle?"

"It is true you have reason for anger." The girl's voice trembled; her eyes dropped. "But believe me, monsieur, I deceived you for your own good. Had you remained at the Carmes-Dechaux ten minutes longer, you would have been assassinated!"

". . . As I doubtless should have been anyway if my friend had not arrived to warn me that you were an agent of the—"

"Silence!" the girl whispered. *"Mon Dieu!* do you want us both to die?"

"Zounds!" muttered D'Artagnan, "I am not an old woman."

"And I shall not live to be, unless you hold your reckless tongue, monsieur."

The girl glanced at the watchful host. She beckoned. "Have you a chamber where monsieur and I can talk privately? And a bottle of old Burgundy, mine host."

IT WAS only after a short hesitation that the young guardsman decided to follow the girl, rid himself of her quickly, and continue his investigation.

Once inside the small, taper-lighted room, the girl lost her cool manner. With a choked sob, she threw herself into D'Artagnan's arms, as though to remind that she had been there not long since.

Disconcerted, D'Artagnan set her firmly in a straight-back chair, not without an unwilling thrill as her soft breasts brushed against his chest, at the ingratiating pressure of her slim body against his own.

"Enough, mademoiselle," he said coolly, pouring a measure of rich red Burgundy into the glasses on the table. "Explain why you are here."

"I can't, monsieur! I can't, truly. I only beseech you to leave, on your life. Believe me, the Cardinal has a knife ready for your back!"

"And as you are an agent of His Eminence," D'Artagnan observed, "I can be trusted to follow your directions."

The girl sprang from the chair, flung herself again into his arms. "Monsieur D'Artagnan, can you not believe I love you . . . that you drive me frantic . . . that *Mon Dieu!*" she murmured passionately, "I would betray anyone—even to my life—for you?"

Cursing himself for a fool, D'Artagnan yielded long enough to hold her lissome body tightly against him, long enough to kiss swiftly her moist, half parted lips.

(Continued on page 103)

ENEMY OPERATIVE

By FRANK DECKER

The stake was arms for the Moro rebels, and the quarry was the munitions smuggler. But in the adventure Dan found glamorous girls and swift knives

THE broad-shouldered American who lolled in his chair and stared somberly at the colorful whirl of dancers in the ballroom of Chow Kit's cabaret was still sober, though he had spent all evening challenging native liquor to do its worst. His white duck suit was still neat, and he was clean shaven, but his craggy, bronzed face was drawn and deeply lined, and his blue eyes were haggard.

Lieutenant Dan Slade, posing as a dishonorably discharged soldier, had come to Manila to find out how Datu Ali, the Moro rebel down in Jolo, was getting United States government ammunition.

Chow Kit was the answer; but try and prove it. His fleet of inter-island trading boats had a dozen times been searched for contraband, but in vain. The only remaining move was to get the low down on that crafty Chinaman by a flank attack directed through the chain of dance halls and bawdy houses that made him wealthier every day.

Slade spat disgustedly as he saw Chow Kit emerge from the private

office of the cabaret. Suave, immaculate in a shantung suit, his slanted eyes inscrutable as the moonstones that gleamed in the only ring that adorned his long nailed, thin hands. The Chinaman was sizing up the colorful whirl of *bailarinas* whisked about the pavilion by dancing soldiers, sailors, and white civilians.

Exotic girls of every shade from walnut to old ivory. Malay, Japanese, Chinese; Eurasians, and *mestizas* whose touch of Spanish blood gave them an inflaming glamor that no white woman can have. Those girls had the inside rumors of Manila—but try to get at the truth behind their dance hall smiles!

Chow Kit, seeing that business was good, turned back to his office, leaving Slade to continue pondering on a bedroom and bottle approach to the theft of government ammunition.

PRESENTLY the office door again opened. The girl who emerged could have no more than a drop of Malay blood. The slant of her dark eyes was scarcely per-



"You will both take a ride in the waiting boat," Chow Kit said. "And sharks dispose of bodies very discreetly. . . ."

ceptible, and the faint flare of her delicate nostrils was just enough to be exotic. And as she picked her way to a table near Slade's, the American sensed that he was getting a break. She had the run of Chow Kit's office, and she might warm up to a white man, and tell him things.

Bell shaped sleeves, and a scarf of incredibly fine *piña* cloth about her shapely shoulders, and the tall, glistening combs that adorned her high piled, blue black hair gave an oddly foreign touch to the apricot satin of an evening gown, cut low in front, and lower in back. And the *piña* scarf cast a tantalizing mist about the warm, firm curves that smiled at Slade as she

reached across her table for a match.

His glance shifted from the pert breasts that rounded out the shimmering bodice, lingered along the inviting curve of her waist and the blossoming richness of her sleek hips. Finally he noticed that her tiny feet were encased in scarlet sandals.

Slade slid from his chair and planted himself beside the New Idea.

"Let's dance, *chiquita*," he proposed as he caught her hand.

Agata Moreno's clinging, supple curves aroused more than Slade's hope of information. At the end of the dance, as she headed for her table, he countered, "Nuts on that notion! Let's go home and talk—"

"About how nice a shack we can keep on thirty *pesos* a month?" mocked Agata in English almost devoid of accent. "Don't be stupid, Dan."

"Thirty *pesos*, hell! Wait till I tell you who I am, and then we'll get your suitcase and spend a week or two in Baguio."

Sade, short circuiting all arguments, headed Agata toward one of the square, bamboo houses on the main street of the village just off Paranaque Road. They're primitive things, these *nipa* shacks, with floors of split bamboo. Agata's shack, however was ritzy. She had wicker furniture, and an American style bed instead of a grass mat.

Agata's eyes narrowed speculatively as she regarded him for a moment. Then she said, "Let's not talk about Baguio. Why don't you go back to the States?"

His story had spread. She was sorry for him.

"To hell with the States! Not after the deal I got. Just pure luck I didn't get three years and a kick, instead of a straight bobtail. So I'm staying. From now on."

IN THE Islands, jobs for white men are as scarce as *bailarinas* who can say no. A *nipa* shack and a Tagalog girl to hustle the groceries is the only career left to a white drifter. Slade was paving the way for someone to hint that a rebellious Moro *datu* down in Jolo could use desperate American renegades as well as stolen ammunition.

Agata's dark eyes were troubled. She was white enough to sympathize with the American outcast in a way no native woman could. Which made her valuable.

"Don't be stupid!" she whispered as she seated herself on the arm of his chair. "Go back. While you can."

"Go back with me?" proposed Slade.

Her brows rose, but her smile contradicted the shake of her head.

"Sure you'll go," Slade urged. "As soon as I can raise enough money for the two of us to travel."

And that was an offer that few *mestizas* can decline, coming from a white man, even if he is a renegade.

Agata's smile was becoming more personal, but she hesitated.

"We'll get married," he added. That was the ultimate bait. And the only way a bobtailed soldier could raise transportation across the Pacific would be in some illicit

enterprise. She'd talk to Chow Kit, now. "How about it?"

And before Agata could answer, Slade's arms closed about her. Despite her parrying gesture, he found her unwilling lips. Unwilling—but only for a moment. She broke away, but only to be drawn closer, to have her mouth seared anew by that savage kiss.

Agata was a fragrant armful, and as Slade's embrace tightened about her, he forgot that he was searching for information. Her slender hands clawed at his face, but he evaded their attack, kissing her throat and shapely shoulders; and as he shifted back again to her crimson lips, she no longer struggled, but clung to him. Each supple, rounded curve was quivering, and as one hand probed the sleek folds of the apricot satin skirt that was working its way over her knees, Agata shuddered, and sighed luxuriously.

Slade broke away long enough to catch a fresh breath, but her questing lips followed his.

"Don't!" she begged; but her dark eyes were misty with promise. "Stay away from here, Dan! It's dangerous."

"What are you afraid of?" Slade retorted.

"Chow Kit," she tremulously whispered. "He's been making a play for me ever since I came here. I just about convinced him that I do nothing but dance—but if he suspects—oh, don't you see, I won't be able to stall him off any longer—I'll have to leave here—he'll kill me—and you—"

play. But with his clinging, quivering armful, the munitions situation in Jolo became quite unimportant.

"Don't . . . you'll get my dress all rumpled up. . ."

Well, that might arouse Chow Kit's suspicions. Slade's embrace relaxed.

And then Agata let out a yelp that shook the *nipa* thatch. The sudden flurry of arms and legs caught Slade off balance and the treacherous footing of bamboo slats did the rest. He clutched at empty air and crashed to the floor. As he gained his knees, he saw the cause of Agata's sudden alarm; not Chow Kit but a bronzed American with shoulders as broad as a box car and a face like Gibraltar on a stormy night.

One glimpse of Agata's dismayed recognition and the newcomer's wrathful amazement told Slade that Granite Face was very much at home in that shack. Nor was there any time to spring the one about waiting for a street car; not after the display of ivory tinted flesh that had greeted him as he reached the threshold.

Granite Face crossed the room like a *carabao* charging through a cane brake. Slade escaped utter demolition by flinging himself clear of a devastating fist that would have lifted him through the roof.

Sock!—Slade's return bombardment. The explosion caught Granite Face like a pile driver, but it was like spraying a roman candle against the side of a battleship. They closed in as Agata, getting her legs, her streaming hair and

THAT rang true; which made Agata all the more worth a

other odds and ends untangled, gained the floor.

It looked as though she was screaming, but Slade couldn't hear. A sizzling hook had turned his head into something that sounded like a dozen cathedral bells shaken up in a basket; and the stranger's wrathful words were like thunder out beyond Corregidor, only louder and dirtier. Slade, lighter, was quicker on his feet; but his efforts were as useful as assault and battery against a locomotive.

The *nipa* shack now resembled the center of a China Sea typhoon, a roaring confusion with sound effects by Agata and the splintering furniture. They clashed in a savage clinch that ended in a power dive that carried them both under the table. They emerged, whirling. Then Slade broke clear, bounded back, side stepped, and gained enough space to time the *bailarina's* jealous lover.

SMACK! Granite Face took it, but it knocked him boareyed and loop-legged. Slade followed through, fists hammering. Another concussion. For an instant the iron man looked silly. Slade's guard lowered. And that was a mistake. The refreshing pause was just long enough to let the enemy decide that swapping punches was an error. He recovered and flashed from a crouch. It was like feeding time at the zoo, with Slade at the receiving end.

The world became a blur of bamboo slats, overturned furniture, *nipa* thatched ceiling, and Agata's bare legs viewed from the oddest angles . . . and then the

room began blackening; but Slade's muscles still worked, though with a blind, instinctive stubbornness. He relaxed, absorbed a crushing punch, then got his hold. It was good. Granite Face catapulted half way across the room. Slade followed through—but so did Agata.

The three met in one spot. Something sizzled past Slade's ear as he plunged forward to finish Granite Face. It smashed down on his shoulder, numbing him to his ankles. Agata, swinging the standard of a floor lamp, had missed her aim—and her boy friend got the works.

The *bailarina* knelt for a moment beside her victim in error, then dashed into the other room to get water. Slade retrieved a cigarette case and wallet, automatically thrust them into his pocket. Then he saw the fun was just beginning.

Half a dozen brown men came swarming up the veranda stairs and into the living room. Tagalog bouncers, drawn from the dance hall by the riot. At their heels was Chow Kit, narrowed eyes flashing from Slade's battered face and torn tropicals to Agata's streaming hair and rumpled gown. He chuckled silkily as she started, yeepped, and dropped the tumbler she was filling. The shock troops charged, clubs and bolos flailing.

Slade snatched a chair and slashed out at the advance guard, but the short, broad blades and pounding staves were too much for one man so near the end of his strength. He was forced back, raked and battered. They were

now flanking him right and left. From the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of Agata's hand—but he had no time to wonder what her contribution would be this time.

It looked like pay day on Paranaque Road—

And then the lights flickered out. Slade, milling the splintered remains of the chair, ploughed through the enemy's line. A long bound carried him to the veranda; and another flung him clear of the pack. He landed in a heap at the foot of the compound palisade, stumbled over a stray pig, and headed east. Native legs were not long enough to break his lead. As he reached the highway that led toward the Walled City, a grin crinkled his battered face.

For some reason, Agata had given him a break.

NEARING Cuartel d'España, he hailed a Red Diamond. As he boarded the cab, he fumbled for his wallet. He drew two from his pocket. For a moment he was perplexed; then he understood.

The extra item was Granite Face's roll.

Slade went through the contents. The wallet belonged to Captain Rupert Dwyer, Post Quartermaster at Fort McKinley. He had charge of enough ammunition to equip a *datu's* army. Lord knows how many thousand rounds were stored at McKinley for the coming target season.

It proved nothing, but it was a strong hint.

And one card among the others that filled a compartment of that wallet upholstered with five hun-

dred *peso* notes seconded the growing conviction that Captain Dwyer was not entirely what a well regulated officer should be.

"*Nomura-ro*" was engraved across the center of the card. Beneath it was a street address. At one end was a column of Japanese, and in a corner were the words, "*Shigashi San—O Shoku Kabu.*"

Shigashi San was the lady who had given the captain that card. The words that followed her name indicated that she was the reigning beauty of the house.

Such luxury might not be beyond the means of a captain, but Slade's suspicions became more pointed as he recollected that the *Nomura-ro* belonged to Chow Kit; that it catered to the wealthiest sports of Manila; and that a patron who had established himself followed the oriental custom of running a charge account.

What an officer does with his spare time is his own business; but once his taste for Asiatic diversions became noised about in the somewhat straight laced military circles, it would be somewhat too bad. Evidence of indebtedness to Chow Kit would be more than enough to finish his career.

Chow Kit could thus demand government munitions as the price of discretion.

ALL this flashed through Slade's mind as he stepped into his room and set to work obliterating the marks of battle.

An hour later he was presentable. And Shigashi San's card, being unmarked by any handwriting would get him an audience with the lady without arousing

suspicion as to his right to be received. She wouldn't scratch or scream, and she'd know plenty about Captain Dwyer.

A hired car took him toward the lights of Sampoloc.

Nomura-ro was a rambling, two story bungalow a block from the blazing lights of the quarter where the proletariat played with ladies whose greetings depended on their race. Crude places for crude people; whereas an evening in Nomura-ro was like being presented at the Court of Saint James, except a lot more entertaining.

Slade presented his card to the gray-haired, leather-faced *obasan* who managed the palace.

"*Irrasshai*," she greeted. "You are very welcome."

The *Obasan* consulted a register, nodded, pressed a bell button; and oriental courtesy somewhat lightened the ensuing shock as Slade's expense account for the evening was jacked up to astronomical figures.

No mere captain playing the Nomura-ro could be on the level!

A tiny, black eyed *kamuro*—one of the several maids who attend a high class Japanese *oiran* to serve a seven year apprenticeship—conducted Slade down a hallway and into a reception room.

SHIGASHI SAN, her slender body ablaze with brocaded silks gathered about her waist with an eighteen inch sash that one flip of her fingers and Lord knows how many silver pesos would unwind, sat in the sacred seclusion of her *zashiki* to receive her guest. Her glistening black hair, towering pa-

goda-high, was rayed with long jade pins and garnished with jewel-frosted tortoise shell combs.

Her gesture and bow and voice were the artistry of an ancient tradition; yet her smile was alluring, and her dark, oblique eyes animated the ivory and carmine painted mask of her face.

Shigashi San, famed from Singapore to Tokyo—and Slade saw how genius escaped the bonds of formal ritual and made that feminine toy a vibrant fascination, an infinite promise lurking behind screens of studied artificiality.

One of the *Kamuros* knelt at Slade's feet to remove his shoes. Another prepared to serve tea. A third set a low table with trays and platters of Japanese hors d'oeuvres; the "august repast" itemized in the two yard long bill.

Three geishas entered the reception room to twang their three stringed *samisens*, dance and entertain Slade with Japanese ballads. And he had to like it.

He tossed the chief *geisha* a fifty peso note. She scooped up the extravagant tip, clicked her fan shut, and utterly ignoring Slade, turned to Shigashi San to say, "*Oiran maido arigato!*" — Thank you, Madam, for your constant favors!"

Yoshiwara courtesy: entertainers don't thank the patron of the house for his liberality; they thank the courtesan whose fascinations have dazzled him. And Slade, though he did not know it was to see an ironic play on those words before the evening was over!

Twice at long intervals during the *saki* sipping, Shigashi San retired to one of the further rooms of her suite, each time returning

in lighter, more informal robes. And at last when the three bright eyed *kamuros* finally left their mistress, Slade, head buzzing from rice wine, followed her into an inner room whose ceiling was painted with an enormous phoenix.

A single subdued light cast the shadow of a six fold screen across a foot-deep pile of silken quilts. At the head of which was a curious little cylinder of wood supported on carved legs: Shigashi San's pillow, which supporting the nape of her neck, preserved her mountainous coiffure.

His heart began rising into his throat, eagerness flamed in his blood; and as his eyes became accustomed to the scented dimness of the alcove, the gauzy gown seemed almost to melt before his hungry gaze.

SHIGASHI SAN finally rang for *saki*. Time now for matching wits with that exotic toy imported from Japan; but a buzzer whirred, and one of the little *kamuros* entered.

A murmur of Japanese that Slade could not understand; and then Shigashi San apologized, in sweet voiced, stilted English, "August friend, the unexpectedness of your visit forbids me the pleasure of your company for a longer period."

Heavy feet invaded the outer *zashiki*. Some guest with a previous engagement was entitled to her time. Slade would be ushered out a side door so that new arrival and departing playmate would not meet. He had to check the rush act, or the evening was wasted.

But Slade's knowledge of Yoshiwara traditions saved the night. He had but to follow the ancient precedent of many an infatuated Japanese *samurai*.

"I am going to my lonely plantation in Mindanao in the morning. Go with me. I will buy your contract and debts to the house."

As he spoke he flashed a roll that fortunately was fronted with a five hundred peso note. He replaced it before she could see that it was far from enough to withdraw a *de luxe* courtesan from her river of debt.

And if Slade met her terms, she would be well established for life. For a long moment she regarded him. Slade returned her gaze, and her loveliness put a convincing glow in his eyes.

Finally she beckoned to the little *kamuro*; but before she could tell her to cancel the newcomer's engagement, Slade interposed.

"Is there no *naki* leaf in your mirror?" The subtle question was to remind her that Hakone Gongen, the Japanese god of pledges between men and women forbade her breaking her promise to the waiting guest. More than that, it told her that he knew the old tradition.

She smiled and murmured a few words to the *kamuro*, who conducted Slade to a further room of the suite. He could now wait for Shigashi San's visitor to leave. He could postpone the trip to Mindanao; and with the promised liberation ever dangled before her eyes, she would try to spur him to haste by hinting at another who wanted to buy her contract.

She might mention Captain Dwyer. . .

(Continued on page 113)

Hammock Land

[Continued from page 29]

Manaos," he grinned amiably.

"Glad to have you," said Hollis. "I've got two bunks and some hammocks if you care to stay overnight."

"Maybe we will. We brought along some grub and drinks. Sam, go get the bottles," he ordered one of the negroes.

Hollis produced whiskey, but it was champagne that the negro brought—two magnums, ice-cold and dripping with river water.

"Here's mud in your eye, Hollis!" shouted Cunningham, raising his brimming glass.

They emptied both magnums, and the negro brought two more. Hollis, seeing the looks that passed between Cunningham and Da Silva, was wondering what had brought the two men there. He was slightly drunk, but less so than usually at that hour of the afternoon.

He was watching Madge too. Her relationship to Cunningham was obvious from the glances that he gave her. And it was that resemblance of hers to the girl he had known in Boston that made Hollis want to revenge himself on her for all he had been through.

Cunningham and Da Silva grew drunker. Cunningham was uproarious. His jokes became unbearable. Now Hollis was aware that Madge was looking at him, as if she had something to disclose to him. He was aware of a new feeling of sympathy for her.

The negroes brought in dinner from the launch—canned chicken

and a tongue, fresh bread, tinned butter. They had finished the fourth magnum of champagne and were half-way through the second bottle of whiskey. Hollis's head was reeling. The sun was setting.

"You've been living here two years, Hollis," Cunningham hic-coughed. "Quite a hermit, ain't you. Well, I've got some news for you from the manager of the plantation. That's why I came. Your father's dead, and you're part owner of the rubber company. They want you home."

He staggered to one of the bunks and dropped upon it. Da Silva had slumped to the floor. The negroes raised him and laid him on the other bunk. Madge looked at Hollis and then toward the door. As Hollis stepped outside, the rim of the sun vanished, and instantly, like a pall, the tropic darkness descended.

ONE could see nothing in that blackness, which blotted out the camp itself. Hollis felt Madge's extended hand, and grasped it to steady himself. It was a long time since he had been quite so drunk. And Hammock Land had disappeared, and in place of it there was the sudden, desperate longing for home.

"I want to speak to you. Let's sit down here," the girl said.

She leaned toward him, and the faint perfume of her brought back more clearly the memory of that other girl.

"I want you to help me," she went on.

"I'll do anything I can."

"You know what I am. You made me ashamed, the way you looked at me when the launch went by here. As if I was the dirt beneath your feet. Cunningham's agent in New York offered me a fine contract to join his company in South America. I thought that we were opening in Rio. When we reached Para, I learned what an old trick I'd fallen for. What was I to do? I met others like myself there—other girls who'd fallen for the same game. Two years ago I wasn't what I am today."

Two years ago he had come out of the pen, thought Hollis.

"I want you to take me away. I can see you at the plantation, make arrangements. But I can't get a passport to leave Brazil alone. If you'd marry me, just to get me away, you could get a divorce afterward. You're a rich man now. I heard them saying how much money you'll have. Will you take me away?"

"If I go," mumbled Hollis. He couldn't think very clearly, and he knew that in the morning Hammock Land would have resumed her old sway over him.

She began to cry. "I hate him. And there's no escape for me, unless—Da Silva," she whimpered. "Won't you promise me?"

She was in his arms, and Hollis had never been so stirred. In his fogged brain, this wasn't Madge Leroy, but that other girl in whom he had once believed. In Madge's embraces, all the past seemed to be obliterated, everything that had happened since the day when

Adele had betrayed him.

He felt the heavy pulsing of her heart. And she was soft, yielding, and ardent, and there was nothing beneath the frock except the warmth and softness of her. She clung to him, with her lips pressed hard against his, and little moans broke from them as her grip tightened, and Hollis forgot all else.

Then suddenly she wrenched herself away, and scream after scream broke from her. Hollis heard running footsteps, and suddenly a flashlight played upon him. He blinked into the cone of illumination, and saw the two negroes, with revolvers in their hands. Madge was still screaming.

A huge body precipitated itself upon Hollis. He put up his hands, and felt a bone in his wrist snap as the revolver muzzle descended. It dropped again upon his head, and he sank into oblivion.

HE OPENED his eyes to see an oil lamp burning. He tried to stir, and found that he was trussed immovably in the meshes of a hammock. He groaned from the pain in his head and tried to remember.

Odd how his memories stopped on that day when he left the penitentiary. All that had happened since was vague and blurred. Memory seemed to cling to that single focal point of Adele's treachery. But he realized that he was lying on the floor of his shack.

"He's coming out of it!"

Two faces, criss-crossed by the meshes of the hammock in which Hollis was tied, were looking down at him. For a moment he stared at them vacantly, and then memory

came flooding back. He recognized Cunningham and Da Silva, and Madge, seated behind them, looking at him with an insolent smile upon her face. In the doorway stood the negro, Sam.

And simultaneously Hollis saw something more. For, creeping over the mud floor of the shack, came a single driver ant. Behind it, in a tiny path of moonlight, moving in the same direction, Hollis saw a single line, extending clear across that moonlit track.

The river ants had sent out their scouts to report on the prospects of food. Behind them the whole army was swarming down, uncounted myriads of them. What did Ica's and Madge's treachery matter now?

"You can untie him," said Cunningham, and, as Sam unfastened the hammock, he slipped a revolver out of his holster and watched, grinning. Both Cunningham and Da Silva were reeling drunk. Hollis guessed that no more than three hours had passed since he had been in the forest with Madge, to judge from the moon.

Strange that a woman could still be treacherous, after anything and everything. Of course, it didn't matter—only Hammock Land mattered. But Hollis watched Madge's sneering face in a kind of wonder.

Released by Sam, at Cunningham's gesture he got stiffly on his feet. His arms, swollen and raised into strips of white flesh by the pressure of the cords, hung helplessly at his sides.

A bottle of whiskey and two tin cups stood on the table. "Take a drink, Hollis," jeered Cunningham. "You're going to need it."

Hollis obeyed. The two men guffawed as they watched him raise the cup to his lips with shaking hands. But that drink hit the spot. Hollis began to feel better.

"Now what you got to say?" snarled Cunningham. "You were caught in the act, tampering with my woman. You ain't a tenderfoot; you know how we treat fellows like you in this part of the world."

Hollis made no reply, because there was nothing to say.

"I got the right to shoot you, under Brazil law," Cunningham went on. "But I also got the right to damages. Maybe we could make a deal. You're a rich man, Hollis. You've got a fortune waiting for you back home."

"How much do you want?" asked Hollis.

"You show us that diamond mine and we'll call it quits," answered Cunningham.

THE first thought that flashed through Hollis's head was that Ica hadn't betrayed him after all. He remembered the storekeeper's queer look, some weeks before, when he had traded one of the larger stones for supplies. A week later, the man had come to his camp, ostensibly to speak about a case of whiskey that Hollis had ordered. He had made some reference to the diamonds then.

That explained the visit of the two men, and their using Madge as bait for their trap.

Hollis caught Madge's glance across Cunningham's shoulder. Her lips were moving. She was trying to signal to him. Maybe she had been forced to play the part

that she had played, maybe. . . . Oh, well, what did it matter? Nothing mattered in Hammock Land.

Da Silva was fingering something, and suddenly Hollis clapped his hand to his throat, and realized that the little bag was gone. Da Silva had it. He tumbled out the yellow stones into his palm.

"Pretty, Hollis," he jeered. "Yellow, but good. And where those came from there ought to be a fortune waiting. You sign over that claim to us, for value received, and show us where it is. That'll be all. You'll get your fare back to the States. How about it, Hollis?"

Behind the two men Madge was signaling "yes!" The two were watching him intently. Hollis was trying to collect his thoughts. To hell with the diamonds. It wasn't the diamonds that made him hesitate. It was the thought that, deprived of them, he must leave Hammock Land behind him and go back into the world. No more days and nights of perfect peace, lying sluggishly in his hammock, with his bottle beside him.

Cunningham raised his revolver. "Think quick, Hollis!" he snarled. "We'll get the stones anyway."

He was drunk enough to shoot. Hollis realized that. And still he hesitated. And then, glancing down, he saw that the clearing was a swarming mass of driver ants, moving toward the shack in serried columns. The leaders, heading the files, were just entering the room.

Hollis burst out laughing. "I'll trade the diamond claim for my life," he answered.

The two roared approval. "Good boy! Take another drink!" shouted De Silva, clapping Hollis on the back. "You'll show us in the morning. And don't try to slip away, because we've stove in the bottom of your boat, and my man Jose's keeping guard aboard the launch."

"I won't," said Hollis.

HE POURED another drink with a steady hand, and, as he drank, he felt a sharp sting on one ankle. Then on the other. The battle had begun, and there was no doubt as to the result, unless he filled the trench with blazing oil. Even then it was doubtful, for the drivers were moving steadily across the clearing.

Da Silva yelled and clapped his hand to his ankle. Then he looked down and saw, and his voice went out in a shriek.

Cunningham saw too, and both were too expert in jungle ways not to realize the meaning of that black swarm that, with incredible swiftness, had covered the floor of the shack. As they turned to run, Hollis barred the way.

"No use trying to make the launch," he said. "They'll get you, cut you off. . . . I've got some oil."

He raced out of the shack toward the place where the barrels stood, crushing the insects underfoot in thousands. He beat at his body, but already he was covered from head to foot, and he could feel the bite of the mandibles through his clothing. Behind him ran Cunningham and Da Silva, and the negro, Sam. It was only a short distance to the launch, but before they could reach it they

would be a crawling mass of the deadly drivers.

And the drivers had the instinct of sublime strategicians. They were already at the launch—they were everywhere. Hollis heard yells from aboard, and saw the negro Jose running up and down the deck, fighting the swarm that was attacking him. His screams blended with those of the three others. Madge was running at Hollis's side, sobbing, and Hollis saw that she, too, was already covered from head to foot.

She was tearing at her clothing. Hollis couldn't wait to help her. Their only chance lay in that ring of fire, and each second was of crucial consequence. He himself was in agony from the bites of the swarm that had fastened upon him.

He turned the spigot, and the oil gushed out. He managed to get his hand into his pocket, found a box of matches, and struck one. It went out. Hollis struck another and flung it into the seeping stream. Instantly the oil blazed up, running along the trench.

But a whole precious minute would elapse before the river circumnavigated the trench, and the drivers were not waiting.

Beyond the trench Hollis saw Sam running, shrieking with pain and terror, toward the launch. He stopped suddenly, and began tearing off his clothes. Underneath, Hollis could see that his whole body was a mass of the crawling furies. Streaks of blood began to stain the negro's skin, and he howled wolfishly as he struggled to free himself of the swarming devils. He stumbled on toward the

launch, where Jose, mad with fear, was slashing at the painter.

A FIERY wall now barred the exit for Da Silva and Cunningham, though the circle of flames had not quite closed. They raced up and down it, screaming, beating at their bodies, tearing at their faces, which had become grotesque, blood-stained masks. Suddenly Cunningham wheeled upon Hollis and fired at him.

The slug hissed past his head. Hollis closed with him, trying to wrest the revolver from his hand, but terror had invested Cunningham with the strength of a madman. A blow with the muzzle across Hollis's face sent him reeling back. Falling, Hollis clutched Cunningham about the legs, and the two dropped along the edge of the fiery wall. They grappled each other, Hollis smashing his fist into Cunningham's face, and, with his other hand, trying to snatch away the weapon. They writhed beneath a crawling film of biting devils. And then suddenly a girl appeared, running out of the forest toward the little gap that still remained in the closing circle of fire, and Hollis recognized Ica.

She was nude, save for a loin-cloth of woven bark that covered her hips, leaving her limbs and bosom bare. As the girl darted into the clearing, Cunningham screeched, shook off Hollis's clutch, and fired at her. Ica tumbled, caught at her breast, and dropped.

Next moment Hollis had the revolver in his hand. He pressed the muzzle against Cunningham's throat and pulled the trigger.

The slug tore through the muscles at the side of the neck. Cunningham howled, seemed to rocket to his feet, and shot through the closing ring of fire, his head hanging grotesquely upon one shoulder.

Da Silva was cursing and trying to draw. Hollis fired again, and shot him through the body. The Portuguese dropped into the heart of the flames. And now the circle of fire had closed.

Beyond it, Hollis could see Cunningham, stumbling in the wake of the negro, Sam. Jose had slashed the painter, and was trying to push off with an oar. Sam sprang aboard, and the two men grappled each other, swaying to and fro upon the deck of the rocking launch.

THE end came almost instantly. Hollis saw Cunningham leap aboard. For a moment the three men were a whirling mass, and suddenly the launch capsized, spewing them into the water. Then, righting herself, she drifted out upon the bosom of the Manaos.

The fearful shrieks that rang out indicated the end. And what was there to choose between being picked to the bone by driver ants, and slashed to ribbons by the voracious, merciless piranha?

Hollis caught at Ica and dragged her back from the circle of the roaring flames. There was not a single driver ant upon the girl's smooth body. But there was a mass of clotting blood above her heart, where Cunningham's slug had pierced her.

Perhaps a half-minute had passed since Hollis turned the spigot. He ran to the side of

Madge. She had torn away her clothing, and he began frantically brushing away the drivers. Little flecks of red had already sprung out over the girl's body. Hollis fought furiously, forgetting the pain that racked him. But the drivers were swarming up Madge's legs as fast as he brushed them away. The main body of the devils had crossed the trench before the circle closed, and, now that the fire was beginning to die down, more and more were crossing, making a bridge of the countless bodies of their dead.

Hollis could hardly see the girl through his swollen eyelids, his body was afire, and weakness was creeping over him. Yet strangely he was conscious of a sort of reconciliation with life. For of a sudden Hammock Land had passed away, and death no longer had any significance.

In that moment Hollis was aware that Madge hadn't betrayed him.

As if she understood, she smiled at him. "He made me do it," she said faintly. "If I hadn't, he would have killed you. Forgive me!"

Hollis held her close for a moment, and then resumed his hopeless struggle with the drivers.

ICA came crawling toward them through the black masses that littered the ground, and Hollis, while his tired hands automatically brushed the insects from Madge's body, watched the progress of the Indian girl. She came crawling on all fours like a dog, leaving a trail of blood behind her, and stretched out her hand. In it was a little ornate vase, one of the

pieces of cheap trade goods that the Indians prize, and originally it had held some cheap perfume.

She gestured toward Madge. "When you made love to her, I ran away," she whispered. "I—came back, because—I knew—the drivers were coming."

The jar was filled with some aromatic oil. Ica tried to say more, but suddenly collapsed in a little, quiet heap at Hollis's feet. But Hollis understood, and he stripped the blood-flecked rags from about Madge's waist and began frantically smearing the oil over the girl's body, from her neck to her feet. He daubed it on her shoulders and between her breasts, over her slender sides and down the smooth length of her limbs.

And, wherever the oil touched her, the devils dropped to earth and heaped up a little pile about her.

Hollis daubed the stuff over his face and eyelids. He tore off his own clothes and rubbed his body, and the scarified flesh appeared. They stood facing each other, racked with pain and yet miraculously free.

Hollis rubbed Madge's little feet, and then his own. He bent over Ica, and saw that she was dead, but, even in death, she was free of the swarming devils still

streaming thickly over the bridges they had built across the dying flames. He ran back into his shack and brought out an armful of clothing—shirts and two raincoats, a pair of boots, and a pair of little slippers that had been Ica's.

They smiled at one another through their swollen lips in the red glow of the dawn. Hollis raised Madge's feet and put the slippers on them. He drew a shirt over her head, and wrapped the raincoat about her. Then he thrust his feet into the boots and robed himself.

The entire clearing was a mass of drivers. They were in the house. The crepitation of their movements was a single note, as of a huge rasping file. But there was a clear space around Hollis and Madge, and he took her by the hand and led her toward the trench.

They overleaped the flickering flames and reached the edge of the forest. For a moment Hollis hesitated, then struck off along a path leading eastward.

There would be food at Indian settlements along the Manaos. And eastward was the homeward way. A hard way, and a long one, but they were leaving Hammock Land and all the past behind them.

Next Month —

"Swordsman's Choice"

by

HUGH SPEER

Shanghai Sellout

[Continued from page 45]

He headed for Jessfield Road.

Here was Bennie Chong's headquarters—a big, rambling house set deep in tailored grounds now going to seed for lack of care. Jack Friday slammed his car up the curved driveway; pelted his brake pedal. He was out before the wheels had stopped squealing. He made for the front door.

A plainclothes Mongol secret agent tried to stop him with drawn Luger. Friday tackled the man low, toppled him, got the gun. He slugged its barrel across the yellow man's forehead before the guy could even gasp. That made one less Jessfield Road policeman in the world.

Inside, in what had once been a vast reception hall, there was now a regiment of desks. A renegade Russian clerk sat at one of them. He was another of Chong's slit-throats. He saw Jack Friday coming with that confiscated Luger, and he dropped a long knife out of his sleeve into his hand. He threw the knife at Jack Friday's throat.

Friday jerked aside, took the blade in his left shoulder. Hurt would come later; he felt nothing now. Rage was his anesthetic; he was above pain, above everything except a consuming hatred for Bennie Chong and everything Bennie Chong represented.

THE Russian knife-artist went down with a bullet through his belly. Jack Friday gloated when the Luger kicked in his palm as he

triggered it. The roar it made was music in his ears.

He saw a closed door to the left. He made for it, smashed it open. Instinct had guided him this way—or some power beyond instinct. Fate, maybe.

Bennie Chong was in that little room. He'd been holding Marcia Durkin in his arms. Marcia was trying to adjust her abbreviated skirt back in place. Bennie Chong had Marcia's lipstick on his mouth.

He stared at Jack Friday. "So." He raised his hands when he saw the smoking Luger drawing a bead on him.

Friday said: "This is it, Bennie."

Then the red-haired Durkin girl did a startling thing. She threw herself in front of the half-caste. "Don't you dare shot him!" she caterwauled. "He's mine, you hear me? Mine!"

Friday felt his mouth going dust-dry; a bitterness welled into his throat. "I don't get it. I've killed two men to rescue you. I don't get it." The voice was not his own. It came from his lips, but it belonged to a corpse. At least it sounded that way to him.

Bennie Chong laughed. "Put down the gun, bud. Now that you admit you've killed two men, I've got all the hold on you I need. I don't have to bother with the frameup."

"Frameup—?"

Chong put his arm around Marcia Durkin. "The kill in your up-

stairs room. Marcia didn't do that. I did. That guy was a rat. I bumped him. I fixed it so you'd think a poor little innocent dame had done it. You—the hard guy. Soft inside, pal. I've known that all along. I knew you'd go chivalrous if you thought a sweet little sister needed protecting."

"Marcia . . . is it true? You were kidding me? You were in with Chong all the time? It was a trick to get me under his thumb so he could force me into the opium racket?"

She told him yes, and she laughed in his face.

He went a little crazy, then. "And you came here of your own free will, from Singapore Lily's place? Lily didn't turn you in?"

Chong answered that. "Singapore Lily had nothing to do with it, bud. Now drop the gun. You're hooked, sucker. I can put you before a firing squad for murder if I want to. Or I can let you run—if you'll stick to our agreement. About the *ah pien*, and the spy work, and the girls."

Jack Friday threw the Luger across the room. It clattered into a corner. "I won't need a gun, Bennie Chong. All I'll need is my hands. My two naked hands. I'm going to kill you with my two naked hands." And he leaped at the half-caste, not because of the trick that had been pulled on him; but because of what Chong had done to Singapore Lily. And because of what Chong had caused him, Friday, to do to Singapore Lily.

this was a struggle from which only one could emerge alive. The conqueror would live; the vanquished would die. It was like that—and they both knew it.

Chong had a knife. It slashed Jack Friday's left arm, already wounded, to ribbons. Friday's right hand slugged at the weapon, knocked it skittering. It was a throwing-knife, loaded at the blade point. Somehow Marcia Durkin got in its way as it arrowed across the room. It buried itself hilt-deep in her breast.

Bennie Chong yelled: "Damn you, Friday!" and used his knee. Jack Friday had learned about that trick from previous experience, and he turned aside just enough to take it on his hip where it wouldn't hurt. Then he got his fingers on the yellow man's windpipe.

He squeezed. Gristle crunched eerily. Chong's slanted eyes bulged and his tongue protruded. He tried to free himself from the inexorably throttling grip of the fingers that were blacking out his life. He died rather horribly.

Then Jack Friday heard a throaty voice behind him. "Jack—they're coming! *Chong's men!*"

A hell of gunfire erupted from the doorway. Friday swung around; stared stupidly. Singapore Lily was with him. She had the Luger he had thrown away. She was blasting a barrage of bullets at the oncoming secret police of 76 Jessfield Road.

There was blood marring the perfection of Singapore Lily's perfect breast. "I . . . hung to the back . . . of your car . . . followed you . . . in here . . . quick

THEY came together like two berserk animals, knowing that

... the window ...” The Luger was empty now. It had knocked down its quota, but now it was useless—and more Jessfield cut-throats were swarming at the threshold; piling over their downed companions

Jack Friday grabbed the blonde girl. With his one good arm he lifted her, carried her to the window. He leaped the sill, went smashing through the plate glass pane with his satin-clad and voluptuous feminine burden.

They landed sprawling. Staggered upright. Made for Jack Friday's parked car. He was weak, but not too weak to drive; not too weak to make sure Singapore Lily was okay beside him. “God!” he muttered as he sent the machine roaring toward the street. “And I thought I was in love with that—that—”

“Drive, Jack. Faster.”

“And you knew I was in love with her. Yet you were willing to give me the money to take her to the States. Realizing I wouldn't come back.”

“Drive, Jack . . . !”

“Money you were saving to go home with, yourself. You were willing to sacrifice all that . . . for my happiness.”

“Jack . . . you *will* go home. Clear yourself of those charges in Frisco. And . . . maybe . . . sometimes you'll . . . remember Singapore Lily . . . ?”

He found a secret alley, deep in the badlands. He parked. “Remember you?” he growled. “I won't have to remember you. If I get away, you'll be with me. Always.”

“No, Jack . . . a bullet . . . got me . . . back there . . .”

NOW he knew what a blind fool he had been. What a stupid, blundering fool. He had dreamed of a normal life, a home, maybe kids some day. With a decent woman—like Marcia Durkin. God, how could a man be so blind? What the hell was decency, anyhow? How could you ever tell? But loyalty—that was something else. That was Singapore Lily.

With a handkerchief he mopped at her bosom. “It's not bad, baby.” He was lying and he knew it. “You'll live. We'll both live to go home . . . together.”

“Jack . . . listen. All I ever did was to k-kiss Bennie Chong in your office when I tried to hold him there. Tried to give you a chance to remove that corpse . . . I kissed him, Jack. Nothing else . . .”

He cradled her, hungrily “I know an unfrocked doctor, baby. He'll fix us up. We're going home, baby. You hear me?”

Singapore Lily's eyes were closed. Her face had the look of a tired child sleeping.

“God!” Jack Friday whispered. He wasn't hard now. He was soft. He was crying as he headed his car into the night.

Next Month—

“Drums of Madness”

by C. A. M. DONNE

Danger Preferred

{Continued from page 59}

the sandbags with which his negroes had reenforced the levee. He struggled until his fingers made bloody spots on the burlap but the bag wouldn't move. His arms, bound to the salt, were helpless, and he could use only his fingers.

Writhing, Craig slid his feet over the edge of the levee. The muscles in his neck ached as he twisted his head. He saw his ankles, part of the bag of salt slide over. He wriggled farther and the whole bag went over, jerking down on his legs, snatching him toward the river's lip. The sack tied to his chest tottered on the edge of the levee, then held.

The terrific current whipped about Craig's legs, driving them downstream. His fingers clawed at the levee, leaving bloody tracks, while he began to twist his ankles frantically against the ropes holding them. Very little of the salt would have to melt before there would be some play to the ropes.

Almost suddenly he felt the weight fall away. The current whipped his legs so high that he almost lost his grip on the levee top. He skidded toward the edge, his fingers clawing wildly, furiously. Finally he checked himself, wriggled to safety.

With his legs free he managed to kick loose a couple of sandbags, get much nearer the river. It was comparatively easy then to get the other bag of salt in the water and free his arms. He was standing up when Nell's high, terrible scream

jabbed like pointed ice into his ears.

CRAIG whirled, sprinted across the levee, down the far side. He heard the girl shriek again, swung to the left. And then he saw her at the edge of the sugar cane!

She was lying on her back, the giant bending over her while they fought like two animals. The man was snarling; saliva drooled from his mouth—an insane beast.

To the left of them, his head twisted queerly, lay Jim Bates. Near him was a shotgun.

Craig went half mad with fury then. He yelled, ducked his big shoulders and plunged forward. The giant heard him, swung around, still holding the girl with one hand. For a half-second he watched, motionless, while Craig rushed at him. Then he let go the girl and dived for the gun.

His fingers were on it when Roy Craig was still ten feet away. He began to turn, swinging up the muzzle. Craig left his feet, head first. The gun roared and flame stung his cheek. Then his forehead smashed into LeBlaine's belly. The giant went over backward, dropping the gun.

Craig twisted and came to his feet like a cat. LeBlaine was slower, holding his hands over his belly. Then like a bull he charged.

Craig made a half step to the right, caught the shotgun by the barrel and swung it, all with the same motion. If he had been swinging a baseball bat he could

not have struck harder. There was a dull crunching sound as the heavy butt landed on LeBlaine's temple. The giant went down like an ox, his skull crushed.

It was the same instant that Nell screamed, "Look out! Behind you!"

CRAIG wasted no time turning. His knees doubled under him and he crashed down. He felt the hot streak of fire the buckshot made across his face before he heard the boom of the shotgun. Then he hit the ground and was rolling, twisting his gun so that the butt was under his armpit.

He got one glimpse of Pete Verot's gaunt body, the skull-like face above the shotgun. The two explosions mingled so that it was impossible to tell which had fired first. Craig felt something stab into his left shoulder. At the same instant Verot's face went almost black. The gun fell from his hands. He plunged forward.

Nell ran to Craig, clung to him.

"You're hurt!" she sobbed. "You've hurt!" She ran a finger over the spot where blood was welling from his cheek.

Craig dropped the gun, put his arms around her, feeling the warm curves of her body through his clothes. "It's just a scratch. That and my shoulder. But you. . . .?"

The memory of terror came into her face for a moment. Then she smiled. "No. Nothing happened to me. LeBlaine and Bates kept fighting over me. Bates got the gun and LeBlaine took it away from him, broke Bates' neck with his hands. Then he had come for me—just as you came."

Craig kissed her. His blood, already hot with anger and fighting, was taking on a different kind of heat. His muscles were trembling as he held her against him. "LeBlaine certainly didn't waste much time," Craig said. "It took me months to get that close to you."

She smiled. "Yes, but you're as close now as he ever got and you—Oh Roy!—with you it's going to be forever and ever."



Next Month—

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by

LEW MERRILL

The Longest Way Home

[Continued from page 67]

Madden's pockets. First he abstracted Madden's snub-nosed Webley automatic. Then he continued his search, relentlessly, quickly—without result.

The Asiatic stepped back, his yellow face a thundercloud of baffled fury. "Where are the sapphires? Where have you hidden them?"

"Try and find out!" Madden answered evenly.

A sinister gleam leaped into Fang Shan's slanted, glittering eyes. "Aie! That I shall, offspring of jackals!" Like a flash, he jerked down a heavy length of velvet rope from the drapery on the wall.

Then he leaped at Madden, smashed him over the head with the muzzle of the Luger. Madden staggered, stunned. Before he could regain his faculties, put up any resistance, the yellow man had tied Madden's wrists and ankles, hurled him into a corner.

Then, as the mists cleared from the American's brain, he saw Fang Shan grab the yellow-haired Felice Carroll, rip the torn dress from her shrinking, lovely form. She cried out; tried to struggle free. Fang Shan struck her a vicious blow with his fist, and she went limp.

Vance Madden saw red. Desperately he tugged at his fetters, while rage-sweat poured into his eyes. But the velvet rope held firm. Helpless, impotent, raging, the American watched as Fang Shan looped more velvet cord about the girl's arms and legs. He

saw the Asiatic lift Felice Carroll, dump her upon the cushions of the divan.

And then Fang Shan went to a corner, picked up a length of iron rod. There was a brass charcoal brazier in the center of the room. Fang Shan ignited the coals, fanned them to a red-glowing, hellish heat. He thrust the iron rod into the heart of the fire.

Madden tensed. Was he to be tortured? Or had Fang Shan another plan—far more bestial, more horrible?

HIS answer came too soon. The yellow man withdrew the iron rod. It glowed with white heat at its far end. Madden stiffened—and then his eyes went wide. Fang Shan had approached the semi-conscious Felice Carroll. Now, slowly, he lowered the white hot iron toward her breasts.

The approaching heat awakened her. She stirred; stared upward; saw what was in store for her. She shrieked insanely, blindly, a gibbering scream of pure terror.

Fang Shan said: "Sapphire Slade. I shall count to ten. If by then you have not told me the location of your collection of sapphires, I shall roast my name in this girl's flesh!"

Madden clenched his teeth. "You dog—you wouldn't dare!"

"No? Then watch! One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—" The glowing iron descended. Felice Carroll screamed again; twisted; tried to shrink



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from the flaming torture-rod.

"You fiend!" Vance Madden gritted. "I'll tell!"

Fang Shan grinned silkily. "I thought you would, my friend!" He returned the branding-iron to the charcoal brazier. "Well, speak up!" he barked.

Madden said: "The sapphires are in my Gladstone—in my room at the *Hotel de l'Est*."

Triumph gleamed in Fang Shan's evil eyes. "Ah! So!" he whispered.

"I'm registered there as Vance Madden," the American added.

"Good!" Fang Shan leaned over Madden, saw that his fetters were tight. He examined the bonds which held Felice Carroll. Satisfied, he went to the room's door. "I shall leave you both here. I shall get those sapphires. And when I return, I may release you. I might . . . and I might not!" Then he had gone.

The blonde girl stared toward Madden. "He won't let us go!" she whispered despairingly. "He hates you too much. You tricked him and triumphed over him too often in the old days, Sapphire Slade. When he comes back he will kill you . . . and me, too."

"Let's not cross that bridge until we come to it," Madden said. "In the first place, he won't find those gems in my room. I haven't got them."

"Haven't . . . got them?" the girl's blue eyes widened.

Madden smiled grimly. "No. *Because I'm not Sapphire Slade!*"

She drew a sharp breath that pouted out her full, swelling breasts in a manner than sent leaping desire coursing through Mad-

den's heart. "You—aren't Sapphire Slade?" she whispered. "Then . . . who are you?"

"I'm Vance Madden."

THE girl stared at him. "God!" she breathed unsteadily. "When Fang Shan learns that you have tricked him—and that he slew his two henchmen because you allowed him to think you were Slade—he will be savage with rage! He will kill—"

"Maybe. Maybe not!" Madden gritted. Then he hunched his bound body forward, inching his way painfully, laboriously toward the center of the room.

"Wh-what are you going to do?" the blonde girl whispered.

"You'll see!" Madden answered. Aching, raging agony stormed through his skull, for he had been struck twice that night. Only his indomitable courage, his supreme will-power, kept him going. And as he wormed his way, the yellow-haired girl spoke in an agonized rasp. "Why did you not tell Fang Shan your true identity? Why did you allow him to think you were Sapphire Slade, the man he hates?"

"I had a good reason, my dear," Madden answered thickly. "Besides, he wouldn't have believed me. And I already knew too much about Fang Shan, once he had abducted me and brought me here. I let him believe I was Slade, in order to get him out of here and leave us alone for a short while. It was our only chance."

The girl grew silent. Desperately, Vance Madden inched his way along the floor. And at last he gained his goal—he reached the

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red-glowing charcoal brazier.

He rolled over; smashed his hard shoulder against the brass tripod. The brazier swayed, toppled—and fell over with a clang of metal. Live, white-hot coals scattered over the rug. Tiny flames leaped up; and the smell of scorched, burning carpet arose.

Vance Madden worked fast, desperately. With calm deliberation, he rolled over on his back, directly over one of the scattered, glowing coals; jammed his fettered wrists against the white-hot lump of charcoal.

He closed his eyes, clenched his teeth as the hell-hot fire bit into the flesh of his wrists. Pain surged through his arms, into his reeling soul. He smelled scorched flesh—his own flesh. But the coal was biting into the velvet rope that bound his arms; and he remained motionless, forced himself to endure the excruciating agony . . .

He tugged. And then he gasped with relief. The velvet rope had burned through! His hands were free!

HEEDLESS of the pain, he sat upright, jammed his legs against another glowing charcoal. His ankle-fetters burned through. Madden leaped unsteadily to his feet, stamped out the patches of fire burning on the carpet.

He found a flat, hammered brass dish; scooped up the remaining coals. He righted the brazier on its tripod, dumped the charcoal into it. He lighted the coals, fanned them once more to cherry-glowing heat.

There was a Malay kris hanging on the wall. He leaped for it,

yanked it from its hangings; went to the bound girl on the divan. With slashing strokes he severed her gyves.

She staggered upright; clung to him suddenly, fearfully. The warmth of her trembling body was like brandy in his veins. For an instant he held her; kissed her willing lips. And then she whispered: "Come—let us go! Let us escape before Fang Shan returns . . . !"

"No!" Madden rasped. "We stay here until he comes back. I have a debt to settle with him!"

Even as he spoke, he heard approaching footsteps outside the room. With a sweep of his powerful arm, Madden flung the girl into a corner. She crouched there, shivering, like a nude statuette of Niobe. Madden leaped behind the door, just as it swung inward.

Fang Shan lurched into the room. "You lied to me, you dog!" he roared out. His eyes went to the spot where he had left Madden fettered and helpless. He stiffened, started to whirl. A cry of amazement issued from his evil lips—

"Make a move and I'll spill your guts on the floor!" Vance Madden rasped. He hurled himself from the door's concealment; raised the scalpel-keen, murder-edged Malay kris; flicked it at Fang Shan's throat.

Fang Shan went white-green. "You—you devil from hell!" he choked. "Again you get the upper hand on me, Fang Shan! You—Sapphire Slade—you are a fiend from the nether regions!"

Madden grunted. "I'm not a fiend from the nether regions. Nor am I Sapphire Slade! My name's

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The Asiatic staggered. Madden lunged at him, bore him backward. There was a struggle—short, incisive. And then the yellow man was bound with velvet ropes. Madden lifted him, dumped him on the divan.

THEN the American picked up that iron branding-rod, thrust it into the glowing charcoal brazier. Fang Shan's lips twisted in abject fear. "You—you would not torture me—!" he cried out.

"Wouldn't I?" Madden rasped. "Let me tell you a story. Once I had a twin brother. His name was Tom Madden. He and I were jewelry importers in San Francisco. A wealthy man commissioned us to collect sapphires for him. My twin brother came to Asia on the mission. He took the name of Sapphire Slade—an alias; because he knew that the sapphires he wanted must be procured by devious means; sometimes illegal means."

Fang Shan stared. A new fear was born in his slanted eyes.

Vance Madden went on grimly "My brother completed his collection, after long months in the Orient. He sent the sapphires to America. That was the last I ever heard from him. His last communication came from here in Saigon. Then I heard no more from him. It was as though the earth had swallowed him."

As he spoke, Madden withdrew the branding-iron. Its tip glowed whitely. He approached Fang Shan. "I came to Saigon in search of my missing twin brother. I learned that he had been murdered. I went to the Street of Five Serpents, hoping to learn something of the identity of his killer. My plan worked better than I dared hope. I know that you ordered my brother's death. I have seen you slay the two natives who murdered him. And now—you, too, shall die!"

Fang Shan shrieked—once. And then Madden had plunged the red-hot iron straight into the yellow man's constricted throat. Smoke billowed up; smoke and a nauseous stink of frying human flesh. The iron hissed as it buried itself deep in Fang Shan's evil gullet.

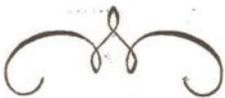
And thus died Fang Shan.

Vance Madden dropped the iron; whirled; swept Felice Carroll into his strong arms. "Now we'll go. Back to America. The two of us—together!" he whispered.

Pale, abject, she looked at him. "You . . . don't mean that, Vance Madden. You forget that I've been . . . a yellow man's woman."

"You're right. I've forgotten it. And so must you!" he whispered as he kissed her gently. His hands touched her breasts, her lovely hips. Then he picked up a robe, drew it about her white shoulders.

They went out into the night—toward happiness.



After Night

[Continued from page 75]

Then he disengaged himself and turned to lean his elbow on the chimney piece.

When he turned back, Camille was straightened from the wine glasses.

"So?" thought he. He picked up the glass nearest him, watched Camille sip the other. Catching his sharp glance she looked away, and D'Artagnan quietly emptied his own glass upon the couch at his back, then raised the empty glass to his lips.

"That calls for another," he smiled. He refilled the two empty glasses, watched her drink. "And now, my little traitor, since you have drunk, I will confess that I managed to let you take the glass into which you emptied that powder."

She set the glass down, hand shaking, her lovely face pale with fear. "Misericorde!" she groaned. "You couldn't!"

"Devil's daughter!" D'Artagnan laughed grimly. "I would kill you *certes*, if I did not know the wine has done its work."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" the girl gasped, and with a moan, she slipped from the chair and lay huddled in a faint upon the floor.

"What a lively imagination will do!" D'Artagnan exclaimed softly. After a glance into the hallway, he left the room and closed the door. And the next instant he came face to face with a man of middle height, booted and spurred and enveloped in an enormous cloak. Above the thin mustaches,

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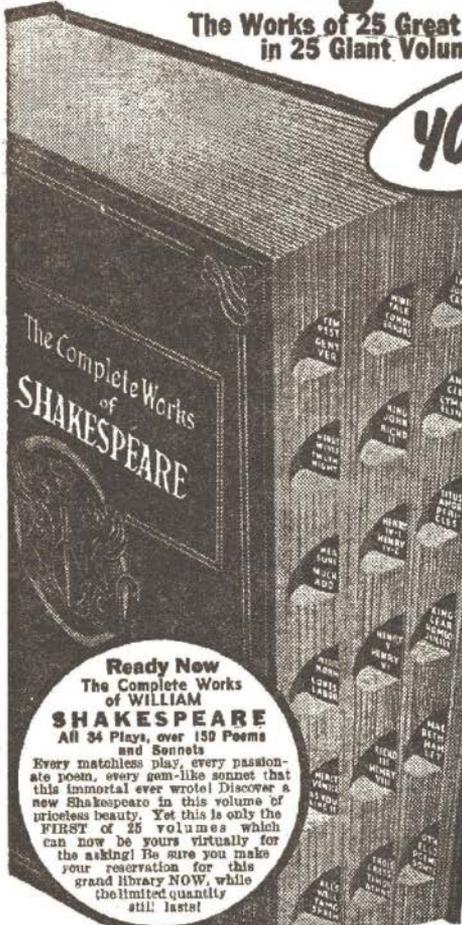
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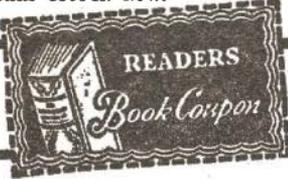
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his piercing eyes blazed fury.

"Your Eminence!" gasped D'Artagnan, sinking to one knee.

"I shall inquire later as to your presence here," said the Cardinal de Richelieu coldly. "For the present, remain in this hallway; you are armed; allow no one to pass!"

"*Oui Monseigneur!*"

THE Cardinal, in his turn, had been already disconcerted in his assignation a few moments since. Riding alone on a black charger, he had been halted at the gateway of the inn by the MM Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

Athos, who could not discern the identity of the lone rider holding a corner of the cloak before his face, advanced.

"Monsieur will find an auberge a few moments ride down the road," he said, "whose hospitality will be equal to this one."

"You pretend to stop me?" inquired the muffled voice beneath the large brimmed hat.

Athos bowed to the neck of his horse, the while cocking and holding a pistol across his saddle-bow. The Cardinal, on a swift decision, lowered the cloak and smiled whitely. "I believe I recognize Monsieur Athos."

"You do," said Athos without turning a hair. Again he bowed. "At the service of Your Eminence," he finished slowly.

"Very well," said the Cardinal, after biting his lip in reflection. "Collect your companions and guard well this gate. Allow no one to enter until my further orders."

The Cardinal cantered past into the yard of the inn, while Porthos and Aramis spurred swiftly to

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the side of their spokesman.

"You allowed him to pass!" accused Aramis. "Why?"

"Did you expect me to hold the Cardinal at pistol's point, my dear fellow?"

"The Cardinal!" groaned Porthos. "And the Queen's inside? Do you think she expected him?"

"I only hope she won't be too surprised," said Athos. "For, however we may hate His Eminence we take orders from him before the Queen."

"Diable! but you are right!" gritted Porthos. "A devil of a state in which the Cardinal can, you might say, command the Queen."

"Nevertheless, gentlemen," Athos finished. "We have received our orders. . . I wonder what is happening to D'Artagnan?"

IN A chamber on the second floor of the inn, a young woman in her twenties paced alone, pausing nervously every few seconds to glance at the door, hand at her throat. Anne of Austria, Louis XIII's Queen, had come here alone, desperately, at the command of the Cardinal, hating yet fearing her pursuer. The slightest hint by Richelieu, she knew, of certain things of which he had knowledge, would bring the suspicious King's anger down about her ears . . . might cause him to banish the few friends she could still trust among her ladies in court.

Remembering her last misadventure, in which Richelieu had lured the Duke of Buckingham to Paris by a forged letter, the Queen had feared that some such plan

might be in store tonight, to trap her before the King's eyes.

She turned quickly at a light knock on the door, and at the grate of a key, realized that she had been locked in the room.

The Cardinal entered, bowed, and still without words, divested himself of his cloak, hat, and spurs.

"I have obeyed Your Eminence's command," the Queen said bitterly, looking past him at the wall. "Since you realize how odious this is to me, I hope you will make a speedy end to whatever business is in hand."

"I have that same hope, madame."

The Queen's eyes widened, for Richelieu's questing gaze was directed along the whole length of her slender, white-gowned body . . . was coming to rest upon the intimate shadowed valley peeping from the lace of her bodice, eyes that sought like fingers the smooth curves sweeping up from her hidden, delicious breasts.

"Monseigneur! you alarm me!" the Queen faltered.

"I trust that is not so, madame," purred the Cardinal, advancing. "Once I was not so distasteful to you, until you committed imprudences with others whom you, apparently, found less so."

"You lie!" breathed Anne of Austria, pale to her eyes. "I never encouraged you. On the contrary I—"

"—said some very unpleasant things to me, madame, for which you will presently pay."

"If the King hears of this—!"

"The King will not hear, madame, else he will also hear. . . ."



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"*Viv' Dieu!*" the Queen breathed.

"Of your little adventure with him at Amiens, and of the night when he entered the palace in the disguise of an Italian fortune-teller, for the purpose, no doubt, of kissing Your Majesty's hand..."

"My God! my God!" moaned the Queen. "You will ruin me!"

"Not at all, madame, I am not so cruel."

"Then," the Queen lifted her fear-tensed face, even lovelier in tears than in its habitual hauteur, "what do you want of me?"

Trembling, the Cardinal advanced and took the Queen's hands in his own thin fingers. "Madame, I want your... love!" he whispered hoarsely.

For an instant Anne of Austria remained straight and defiant, head lifted. Then she drooped like a wilted flower, sagging in the Cardinal's arms. He could hear her faint murmur: "My existence is in your hands!"

At such intimate contact with this woman who for years had commanded both his hate and his infatuation, the Cardinal's temples pounded to the rocking of his heart, and his brain lost its caution.

Mad with anticipation and ecstasy, he lifted the Queen in his arms and pressed burning lips to her throat. Heedless that, half faint-

ing, she made no response, he caressed her, eyeing greedily the soft warm bulges made by her young breasts; and as he sank with her into a deep *fauteuil*, he paused for a long second to breathe the fragrance of her perfumed chestnut curls.

LEAVING Porthos to guard the gate, Athos and Aramis each had set off in a different direction to scout along the road. And the restless Athos had, trotting and galloping his horse by turns, progressed no more than quarter of a league when he perceived that a carriage had drawn up in the shadows and that a man was transferring himself from its depths to the back of a led saddle horse. This horseman set out now at a dead gallop and only drew up when Athos, spurring his steed from the side of the road in pursuit, laid hand on the other's bridle and thrust a pistol muzzle at his breast.

As the horses slid to a halt, the stranger's voice cut clear and cold. "Leave go, monsieur!"

At that voice, Athos' pistol dropped and he peered under the low drawn hat brim. "*Le Roi! Mon Dieu!*" And he threw himself from his saddle. "Your Majesty's servant."

"Monsieur Athos," said the King, his voice softening, "what do you here, my brave musketeer?"

"Sire," answered Athos truthfully, "Monsieur the Cardinal has commanded MM. Aramis, Porthos, and me to guard the entrance to yonder auberge, and to allow no one to pass."

"And where are the Cardinal's

guards," asked Louis XIII frigidly, "that he must command my musketeers? . . . I will give you new orders, monsieur. Follow me and kill whoever interferes."

"Yes, sire." Athos remounted. "That exempts, I hope," he added anxiously, "my two companions, who will undoubtedly stop you."

"Then ride ahead and see them first." Bowing, Athos spurred ahead.

CONSCIOUS that the Cardinal would soon become even more impetuous Anne of Austria yet made no move either to stop or aid him. With short gasping breaths she lay with her eyes closed, head against his shoulder.

"Mordieu! my dear, you make but a cold companion!" the triumphant Cardinal muttered ardently. "But all that will change. All that will change!"

He kissed the rosy mouth of the young Queen, the slightly protruding underlip that swelled in a natural pout. Inflamed, he trailed moist lips downward to the delicate hollow of her throat.

"Dieu! Monseigneur . . ." moaned the Queen. "You cannot . . . mean this!"

"But I can and do, my sweet!" laughed Richelieu. "And remember!"

"I remember—and I defy you!" cried the Queen suddenly. "Tell the King!" And she tried to tear herself from the Cardinal's arms.

"Shall I? But that will not help you now," the Cardinal cried in delight. For in struggling, the Queen had loosened her dress more than ever, had torn it almost to the waist, and quivering white



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mounds of her breasts almost kissed his eyes as she strained to release herself from him.

Finding her strength unavailing, Anne of Austria fell sobbing in surrender, faint and helpless as Richelieu's avid grasp roughly embraced her soft waist.

"*Ventrebleu!*" muttered the Cardinal. The Queen had fainted. Undeterred, he lifted her in his arms, carried her to the couch and placed her there in a forlorn huddled heap. Breathing hard, he bent over her again.

But at that instant a rapid cautious knock sounded at the door.

Richelieu crossed swiftly, some of his senses recovered. "Who is it?"

"It is I, D'Artagnan."

Cautiously, Richelieu opened the door a crack. "Well?"

"Am I right in supposing," D'Artagnan asked sardonically, "that Your Eminence has an appointment with the King? If so, I am here to announce the arrival of His Majesty at the inn."

"The devil!" ejaculated Richelieu. "The King here?"

"He is even now speaking with the innkeeper."

Unwittingly the Cardinal had allowed the door to open further, and by the flickering light, D'Artagnan saw the figure on the couch. His eyes sprang wide. "The Queen!"

SUDDENLY, he pushed roughly through the door into the room, took in the Queen's torn gown with a single glance. The Cardinal stepped in front of him.

"Leave the room, Monsieur D'Artagnan!"

"*Mordieu!* no!" exploded D'Artagnan. "This affair does not become Your Eminence."

The Cardinal plucked a pistol from his belt. D'Artagnan twisted it from his hand and drew his own sword.

"You will die for this monsieur," said the Cardinal in cold rage.

"Understand me, Monseigneur," growled D'Artagnan. "You are not my King. I would run you through with this blade and hang for it, if I thought the Queen had—"

"Then if you would protect the Queen," interrupted the Cardinal hastily, "get her out of here instantly—by the back way. Guard her with your life and see that she is returned to the Louvre."

"Whatever else, you are right there," reasoned D'Artagnan. "Go down and meet His Majesty. I will take care of the Queen."

A few moments later, D'Artagnan was stealing down the rear staircase with the lovely Queen in his arms.

Reviving, the Queen clasped her arms about his neck and murmured, "Who are you, monsieur?"

"Your Majesty's servant," whispered D'Artagnan, impulsively kissing her arm. "Quiet! and I will get you back to the Louvre. The King is below."

"My carriage is outside the wall."

"And so are we, now," D'Artagnan had stepped out the rear door directly into the starless night outside the wall. They soon found the carriage and the impatient, fearful driver.

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"Return," D'Artagnan whispered fiercely to the driver, "but not by the highroad . . . and at all speed, as you value your life!"

TWO hours later, in the rooms of Athos, the four companions sipped wine, while D'Artagnan swore softly.

"*Ma foi!* Athos, but I came near to murdering His Eminence to-night."

"They would hang you," said Athos, "and then what?"

"An unpleasant way for a gentleman to die," said Porthos diffidently, while Aramis sat silently.

"And I may come to 't yet," agreed D'Artagnan, and he told them of his side of the night's adventure.

"Zounds!" Porthos swore. "We are all in a pickle, because we know His Eminence's secret."

"Then that will put the Cardinal in our power," said Aramis.

"On the contrary," Athos observed quietly, "as soon as his Eminence has finished explaining to the King just what plot against the State led him to St. Cloud to-night, and appeasing whatever suspicion led the King to surprise the assignation, then His Eminence will find small ways of entertaining us. And," he finished gloomily, "though I don't mind dying with a sword in hand, yet to have a rock fall on my head. . . ."

"And yet," said D'Artagnan dreamily, "I am returning to St. Cloud with daylight. To investigate," he added with dignity, "a certain spy of the Cardinal against whom I have a grudge. You remember her, Athos," he said.

But Athos only laughed.

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Enemy Operative

(Continued from page 83)

Slade listened to the murmur of voices. He opened his penknife and set to work on the partition that separated him from the room he had left.

The *oiran's* guest wore quarter-master collar ornaments; but he was not Captain Dwyer. Sergeant's chevrons were on his sleeves.

Yet that twilight shrouded meeting was more than it seemed. One of the sergeant's arms slipped clear of Shigashi San's embrace. He was reaching toward a low cabinet. Toward a small brazen Buddah that adorned its top.

The move was stealthy, not swift. The sergeant was placing a second image on the cabinet. Then he palmed its identical duplicate, the one that had originally been there.

The exchange could mean but one thing: the sergeant had either received or delivered a message or token of identification. All in one move which Shigashi San could scarcely have perceived.

HAVING seen as much as he had, Slade could not afford the risk of missing anything that took place in that room. This was more than the meeting of a soldier and an *oiran*; it must be the subtle hand of Chow Kit. But Slade gritted his teeth as he watched . . .

Clearing thinking became difficult . . . it all hinged on whether

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the Sergeant had delivered or received a message. If the former, wait and see who came to Shigashi San’s room to get it; if the latter, follow the quartermaster man. But which?

An insurrection in Jolo depended on the right guess.

Finally the sergeant prepared to leave. Such haste confirmed Slade’s growing certainty. Shigashi San accompanied him to the *zashiki*. That gave Slade his chance. He tiptoed into her room, snatched the brazen Buddah, and turned to the exit. Ducking into an alley, he paused to scrutinize the tiny image by the glow of a distant street light.

A fine line indicated that it could be removed from its pedestal; but there was no time to seek the combination. He pocketed the effigy, rounded the corner, lurking in the shadows where he could command a view of all approaches to the Nomura-ro.

Presently the sergeant emerged. Neither car nor *caromata* awaited him. He had trusted no one with his destination.

Slade followed. Ahead of him was a *tienda* from whose window a light gleamed. He reached for a handful of silver, stepped into the store and in a moment emerged with a pair of coarse socks and a cake of soap. Then, stretching long legs, he narrowed the gap between him and his quarry.

Another block. The sergeant entered a saloon. Slade caught a glimpse of him as he stepped to a telephone booth. Aside from a bartender, and a few Chinese and Filipino loafers the place was de-

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served. Slade ordered a beer and edged toward the booth.

"Two-one six-nine six."

He recognized the number: Red Diamond Cab. Slade drained his beer and stepped to the street. He slipped one sock into the other, then thrust the cake of soap into the foot of the inner one. Silent, effective, and harmless.

A moment later, the sergeant ploughed through the swinging doors. His tropic tanned face was tense, and his eyes instinctively flashed right and left as he cleared the threshold. Slade swooped from cover; but some sixth sense warned his victim. He jerked his head. The soapcake bludgeon missed by a hair, instead of laying him out for a long count; and for the second time that evening, Slade has his hands full.

BEFORE he could drop his now useless weapon, the Manila night blazed into a carnival glow. Groggy and with legs limp as macaroni, Slade tried to block the sergeant's rush, but it was like boxing with a kangaroo. One more charge—

But before it connected, the sergeant, over reaching himself, tripped and sprawled headlong into the gutter. That gave Slade an instant's respite. When the non-com regained his feet, the mill began in earnest. It was touch and go for a moment, reckless, wrathful slugging; and then Slade blasted home with one that popped like a boiler explosion.

The sergeant was frozen before he hit the ground. Slade settled back on his heels and drew a long breath; but that was cut short in

mid gasp. A brazen gleam from the darkness caught his eye. He made a dive for his pocket as he recognized the little Buddha lying in the dust. His own was still in place; it was the sergeant's that had rolled from cover.

Slade stooped to pick it up. The hidden springs of the trick pedestal had responded to the impact against the corner of the saloon! The Buddha's body contained a slip of paper. He struck a match.

"*Sin Ban Fong is waiting,*" he read, which was damn little to learn for his trouble!

He stuffed the paper and the halves of the image into his pocket, regarded the prostrate sergent, then used his victim's shirt and belt to improvise gag and bonds. That done, Slade stepped into the saloon, slid ten pesos across the bar, and struck a bargain with the proprietor.

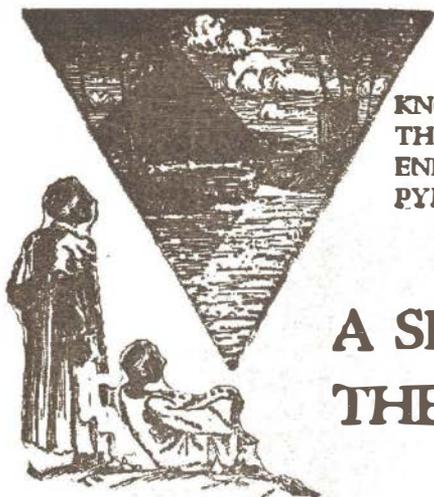
"Keep him on ice until morning," Slade concluded. "If he's here when I come back, it's five more for you; if he's gone, you'll get some of what he got. And when the taxi gets here, tell him it's the wrong number. *Sabe, hombre?*"

He did; and Slade dashed back toward the Nomura-ro.

The next play was to put the empty Buddha on Shigashi San's cabinet, and wait for someone to call for the one the sergeant had left.

"*Sin Ban Fong,*" he muttered as he slipped in through the back door. Then, with a bleak grin, "I hope the —— enjoys waiting!"

Shigashi San, hearing him enter the further room of her suite, appeared. Her smile was cryptic.



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He wondered if she suspected. She might not even know that the Buddha swapping had taken place in her room. The smile became alluring... it began to seem not such a bad idea after all to have the exalted blossom shed a few more petals.

All of which he worked into the discussion of his estates in Mindanao. But Slade put the empty bronze Buddha back on the lacquered cabinet.

And then the *oiran's* arms closed about him.

BUT that embrace was checked by the faint whine of a sliding panel. Slade was on his feet at a bound. Shigashi San, outraged at the invasion of her privacy, shed half a dozen hair pins as she snatched for the edges of her robe.

Chow Kit was in the doorway! Sallow, evilly smiling Chow Kit behind the muzzle of an automatic that yawned like a siege gun. He also had come by the back door; and at his heels were half a dozen Chinese and Gugus; murderous riff-raff, armed and leering and spitting *betel* juice on the mats as they waited for action. And two at the further edge of the further edge cluster between them supported a woman in apricot silk. She was bound, and a gag masked half her face, but Slade recognized Agata Moreno.

All in an instant. "*Sin Ban Fong*, my dear sir," murmured Chow Kit, "is waiting with the patience known only to a ship. A Chinese junk whose concealed engines have fooled the revenue cutters. You and Señorita Agata will both take a long ride down the

a corner. Flinging Chow Kit aside, Slade scooped up the six fold screen and hurled it athwart the headlong charge of the Chinaman's armed retainers.

Wadding a silken quilt about his left arm, he parried a sweeping bolo slash, and hammered home with a blasting fist that knocked a Gugu smashing into an alcove. He shifted as the attack swerved to envelope him, seized a lacquered wash basin and crashed it about the ears of the flank guard. He ducked a hurled bolo, flung out the folds of the silken quilt to parry another, side stepped and snatched the first weapon by the hilt.

Slade was now armed; but his breath was coming in jerking gasps, and the odds were heavy. Chow Kit, once more on his feet, was urging his shaken retainers to the attack. He had recovered his pistol, and hovered on the fringe of the battle, watching Slade's blade dance in and out, steel striking fire from steel. The Chinaman feared to risk another shot; but as Slade's desperate charge swept the pack a yard to the rear, the weapon rose into line.

Shigashi San's voice shrilled high above the cursing confusion. Slade caught the warning, and his brain blazed red. The heavy bolo zipped point on, a streak of steel that ended at the Chinaman's chest as the automatic spurted flame. Slade won the exchange. Hot lead seared his ribs, but the bolo split Chow Kit's chest like a chicken for the grille.

Slade was empty-handed. Another *saki* jug, hurled from the side lines by Shigashi San, bowled the foremost enemy end for end;

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and then the charge broke. They saw Chow Kit crumpled up on the matting, a red, twitching huddle. They scrambled madly for the door. No chief, no fight. Slade's reckless wrath had succeeded where caution would have been overwhelmed.

He bounded from his corner. As he snatched Chow Kit's weapon, he heard a pounding of feet, and a polygot chatter that was submerged by a voice like a typhoon. An unpleasantly familiar voice—Captain Rupert Dwyer!

Slade's salvaged pistol jerked into line as the granite faced renegade burst into the room.

"Drop it, you rat!" Slade commanded.

Dwyer's hands rose. He recognized death when it stared him in the eye. But Slade's weapon dropped the next instant: behind Dwyer was a squad of military police, and the Provost Marshal.

"What the hell?" boomed Dwyer, eying the gory wreckage.

Then a cross-fire of questions, and Slade identified himself.

"And cut that girl loose—over there in the corner. That *mestiza* with the gag in her mouth—"

Dwyer followed Slade's gesture. "*Mestiza*, my eye? That's my sister!"

AND Agata, when she was liberated, explained, "Dad was a colonel. And years ago, we were in the Islands, so it was easy—"

"But why that *bailarina* gag at Chow Kit's?" demanded Slade.

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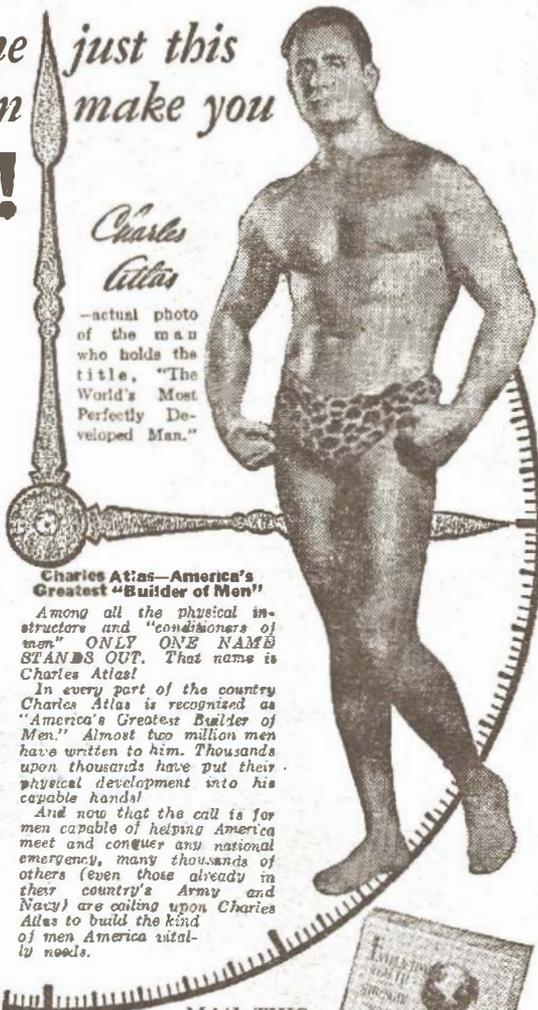
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find me in a rotten jam," interposed Captain Dwyer. "Ammunition being lost by the case. And me responsible. You know what that would mean. I had to clear it up. We suspected Chow Kit. And Agata, damned little idiot, insisted on getting a job as a *bailarina* to do a bit of spying—"

"Agata?" echoed Slade. "But what's her real name?"

"Named after my stepmother: Agata Moreno Dwyer."

That simplified it.

"Anyway," resumed Dwyer, "I went out to Chow Kit's place to check up on Agata's hazardous game, and when I saw you two—"

"Rupert, you idiot!" interposed Agata, "you didn't see a thing!" As if I couldn't take care of myself!"

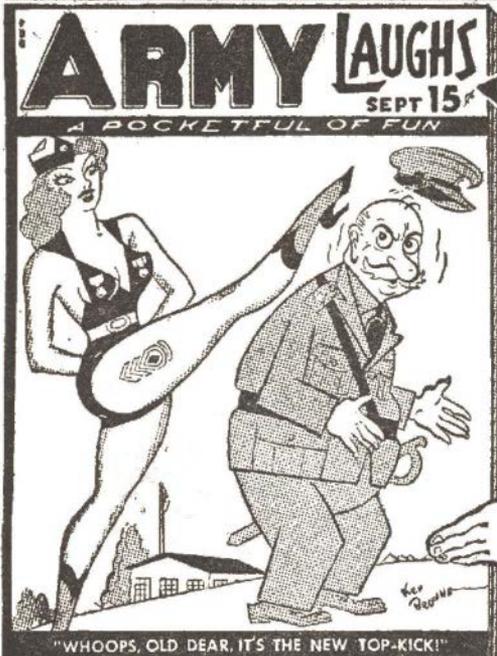
"Listen, Dwyer," intervened Slade, "honest to God, I didn't mean a thing—and anyway, it was in the line of duty, getting evidence."

Dwyer snorted, and Agata's Spanish eyes glowed in fond reminiscence. Slade changed the subject to ammunition.

"Chow Kit was so busy with you, there in Agata's shack," resumed Dwyer, "that he overlooked me. And when I recovered from that crack on the bean, she was gone, and I checked up.

"That card of admission you took from my wallet was one the sergeant had dropped. That gave me a hunch as to his connections. I'd suspected him for some time anyway. And in trailing Agata, we tangled up with him, all beaten up,

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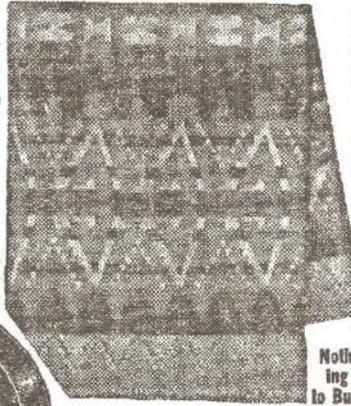
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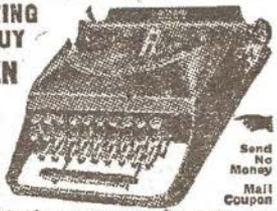
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And then Slade remembered that Shigashi San *saki* jug had given his chance to hang on until the M.P.'s arrived.

"Sorry about that plantation," he said, "but I'll buy up your contract."

"Death has canceled it," she answered, gesturing toward Chow Kit's body.

Slade dug out his wallet and handed the *oiran* the contents.

"Anyway, here's a ticket home."

Shigashi San had not missed the glow in Agata's dark eyes, and the glances she and Slade had exchanged. She accepted the present; then, utterly ignoring Slade, she turned to Agata to bow and say: "*Oiran mairido arigato!*—Thank you, madam, for your constant favors."

Shigashi San, now a free woman, used Japanese courtesy as a... only Slade caught

ondered
ery.

ified, "that
girl to get a
here we left
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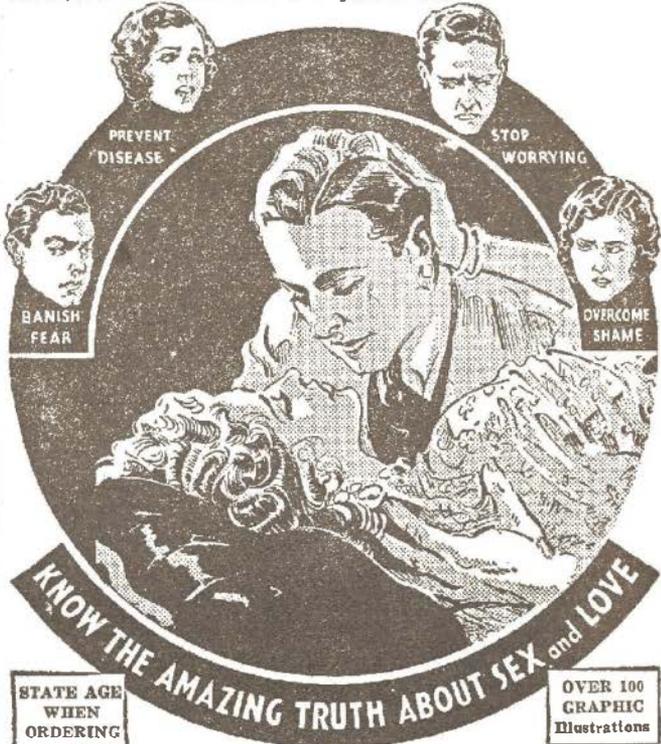
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