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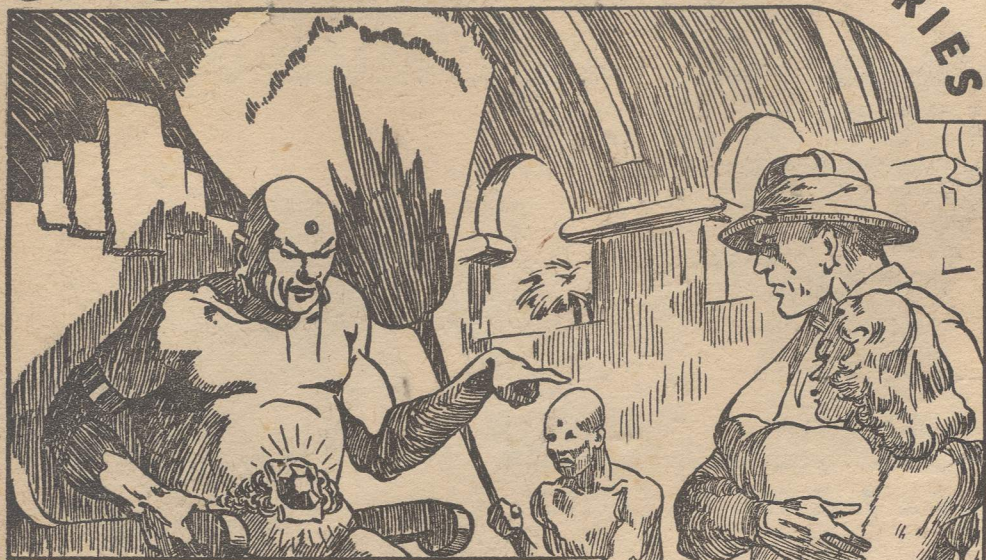
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SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES



JULY, 1941

Vol. 14, No. 1

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"Help me! I am betrayed!" she cried.

"LOADED dice!" he cried. His hand shot out toward gold, but I was too quick for him. I rose, icily cold, the dice already in my pouch, the gold ignored. What did I care for a little heap of gold when I had the young fool's note for three thousand sequins, payable at his father's bank?

"Show me those dice!" he bawled.

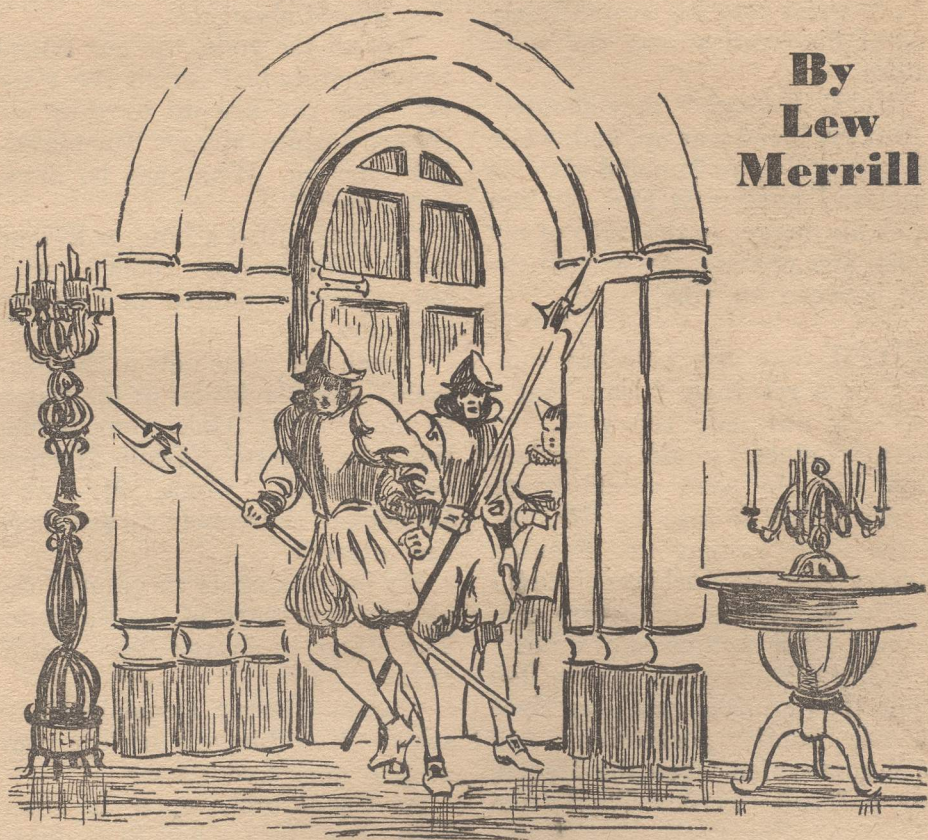
"I do not permit my honor to be called in question," I retorted.

The gaming-room above the apothecary's was in an uproar. On all sides youths were pressing in upon me. Yet they held back, knowing my reputation as a swordsman, and realizing that, be-

Rat Trap

The choice was simple that Machiavelli offered—death on the gallows, or freedom and money. With that choice before him, Domenico dared even to match wits with Lucrezia Borgia, monster of evil!

**By
Lew
Merrill**



ing so tightly packed, it would be difficult for them to draw. As for the young fool, his face was the picture of rage and fear.

"You will give back my notes, or I shall denounce you to the Eight!" he shouted, while "Cheat!" and "Rascal!" were tossed from lip to lip.

"Kill the Florentine dog!" said

the young fool's companion, a Roman noble, like himself, visiting our city.

That insult checked the anger of the crowd, which began to waver, and it probably saved my life. I am not slow to seize an opportunity.

"These Roman curs think they can lord it over us of free Flor-

ence," I said "If they could fight as badly as they play, and in the same foul spirit—"

He came at me with sword out-thrust, dagger in left hand. I whirled, to oppose my cloak to the shorter weapon, and, as our points clashed, I saw the young man was indeed a novice. The merest flick of my wrist sent his sword flying out of his hand among the spectators.

"Hold! Enough!" they shouted.

But my blood was up, and, while the young Roman fumbled with his dagger, I sprang at him, let him catch his dagger in the folds of my cloak, and plunged my own to the hilt between his ribs.

WITH that, my habitual coolness returned. I saw that I had lost not only the gold, but the note, since I could never dare hope that the bank would honor it. I was like to lose my life, too, if the Eight caught me. Besides, Messer Niccolo Machiavelli and I had had a falling out before concerning some escapades of mine.

And yet what other course had I had than crooked gambling since all our family possessions had been confiscated when the Medici, our patrons, were driven from Florence? For weeks that winter my mother and I had shivered over our tiny charcoal fire in the two wretched rooms in the Calimala.

Conscience troubled me not at all, but I cursed the folly into which my hot blood had led me. The young fool was a Roman and a noble, and justice would be hot after me.

I leaped down the stairway and gained the street, racing along the

Lung' Arno, with a dozen men at my heels, raising an outcry loud enough to wake the dead. Still, I was gaining on them when I saw a company of the watch running toward me from the opposite direction.

"It is a matter of honor, a quarrel among gentlemen," I cried, as they closed about me.

"By all the gods, 'tis our friend Domenico again!" cried the leader. "So you are up to your old tricks, despite Messer Machiavelli's warning. What has he done, gentlemen?"

"He has killed a man, a Roman noble, whom he robbed with loaded dice," panted one of my pursuers.

"Well, you come now to the Bargello," said the leader of the watch to me. "Psst! Hold your inventions for Messer Niccolo Machiavelli himself. Come, Messer Domenico; the sooner we are there the better."

My heart sank as we entered the gloomy courtyard of the Bargello. The officer in charge there leered at me.

"Again, Messer Domenico?" he asked. "You'll have a crick in your neck by noon tomorrow."

As I sank down upon the stone flags of my cell, I had little doubt that this would be the case.

TWO figures were in the small arched room. One was Piero Soderini, the Gonfaloniere, the second Niccolo Machiavelli, his beady black eyes staring at me, his mouth curved in a mocking smile.

I confess that never had I been able to look upon this man whose

web of intrigue was spun throughout all Italy without fear and repugnance. Since the expulsion of the Medici, Soderini had held the chief magistracy of Florence, but behind him, directing him like a puppet, and many a prince besides, stood Messer Niccolo.

"So there is a new charge against you, Messer Domenico," sneered Machiavelli, as my jailer halted me before him. "It seems that Florence is too small to hold a man of your high spirits, but you must needs add murder to your other crimes, you thieving *sgherro*, you broken gamester."

"The Roman drew on me first!" I cried, stung to fury by Messer Niccolo's words. "Moreover, he had assailed my honor."

"Your honor. Ah, to be sure, your honor!" sneered Machiavelli. "What do you think of this, Messer Piero?" he asked of the Gonfaloniere, who, as Chief Magistrate, presided over the Eight.

"I am for hanging the rogue in the Bargello yard forthwith," rasped Soderini.

"Of course," mused Machiavelli thoughtfully, "we should legally await the Roman's death before proceeding with the execution of the sentence. If he recovers, it will be the galleys for life."

The Gonfaloniere shrugged his shoulders. "As you please, Messer Niccolo," he said, drawing his furred coat about his throat. "I am ready to sign the sentence at any time."

He walked through an archway. Machiavelli signed to my guard to disappear. Now we two stood alone. I had wondered why the Gonfaloniere had arisen in the chill

of the dawn merely to see a man doomed to die; of a sudden I seemed to see a certain significance in his presence there with Machiavelli. And Machiavelli was scrutinizing me with those beady eyes of his, and, I could see, pondering.

"Which would you choose, Messer Domenico," he asked softly, "a miscreant's death upon the gallows with the possible alternative of a lifetime at the galleys, or life, freedom, and as much money as you won from that young rogue upon his note with those loaded dice of yours?"

"Why, Messer Niccolo, I should choose life, freedom, and gold," I answered.

HE rubbed that blue-black chin of his. "It happens to be within your power to render a service to the Republic," he said, "since your family was ever faithful to the exiled Medici. In brief, then, Madonna Clarice has sought shelter with her young sons, and her sister, Madonna Tessa, at the castle of the Duchess of Ferrara. The boys being the last representatives of the Medici family, their possession is vital to the Republic of Florence.

"To be plain with you, Messer Domenico, Pope Julius has demanded that Florence restore the Medici and pay a hundred thousand gold florins, or submit to war, and his army of Spaniards is already marshaled upon our borders.

"The Pope has sent a messenger to Madonna Clarice, bidding her bring her sons to Pistoja, where his army has its headquarters.

This messenger was captured by our outposts two days ago, bearing a letter and the papal signet ring. He yielded up his secret before he died—the fools racked him unskillfully.

"You, Messer Domenico, will take his place, bearing the letter and ring. You will present yourself to Madonna Clarice, reminding her of your family's loyalty to the House of Medici. You will persuade her, her sons, and her sister to accompany you—ostensibly to the invading army's headquarters at Pistoja. Actually, you will bring them here. With the last scions of the Medici in our hands, we shall then be in a position to dictate terms, not to receive them. Florence will free herself of the papal yoke, and the accursed Medici will—disappear for ever."

"But that will mean treachery!" I cried. "My honor—!"

Machiavelli smiled coldly. "The honor of a crooked gamester?" he inquired. "Come, Messer Domenico, I have no time to fence with you. You will leave Florence at once, with a troop of a dozen men, whom you will leave at a pass in the Apennines near Forli. You will ride on to Ferrara alone, and present the letter and ring, persuade the ladies to bring the two boys to Pistoja.

"On the way—at Forli—you will be surprised by the troop you have left there, captured, and brought back to Florence. Come, it is always simple."

"It is not always simple to betray women," I said.

"I do not know another man in Florence who could play the trai-

tor quite so well as you, Messer Domenico," he answered. And he thrust a bag of gold into my hands.

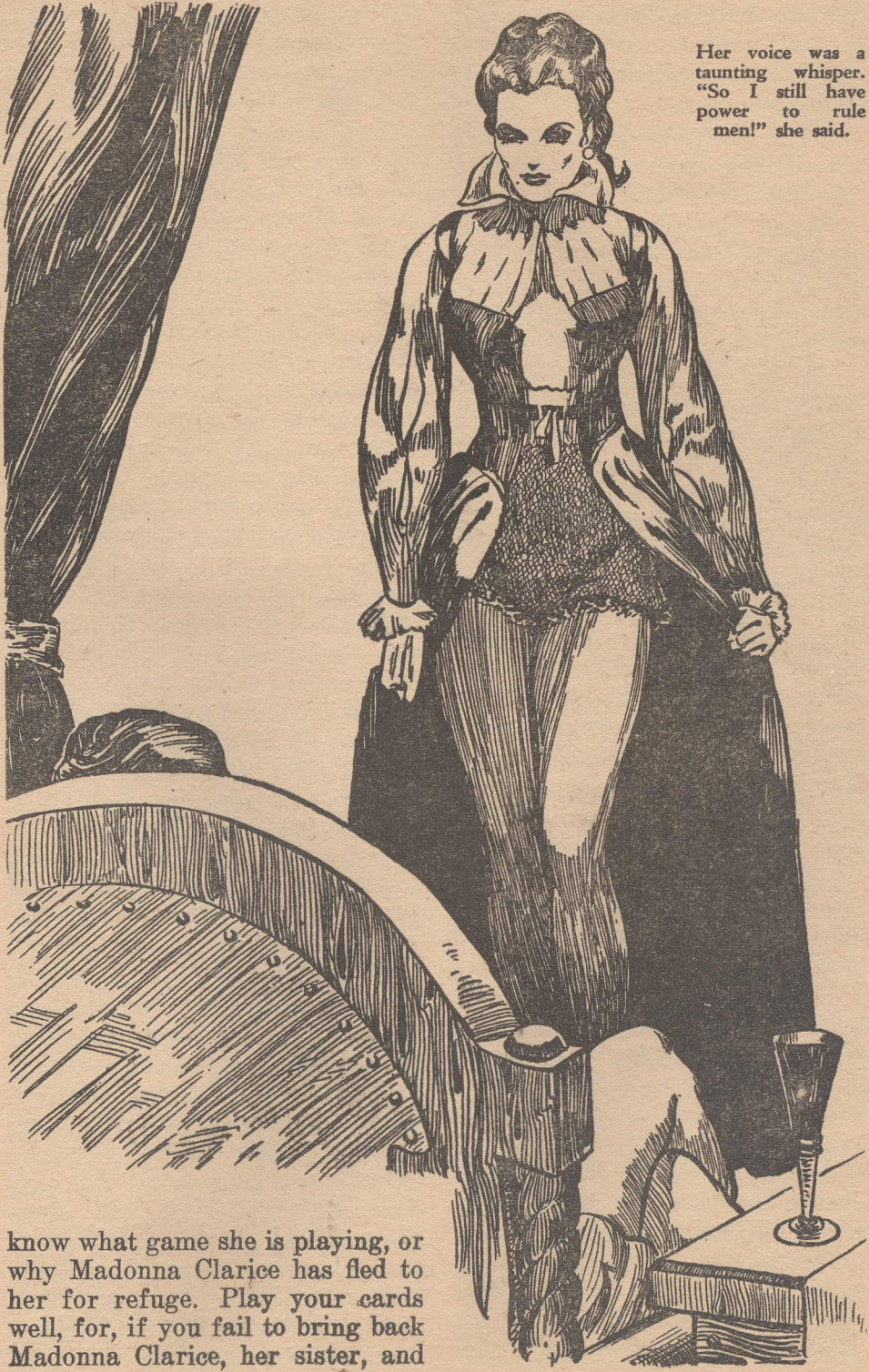
THAT was not the end of our talk. I thought it over that same afternoon as I rode at the head of my troop on a fine charger, toward the Apennines.

There had been a brief interview with my mother, who had looked doubtfully at the gold I brought her, and wept with happiness when I assured her that I had earned it in the service of the State, and yet looked doubtfully at me again, until suddenly she clasped me in her arms and commended me to God and kissed me.

I was thinking that, had she known it was in my mind to betray two women to whom our lives had been devoted, she would have called down imprecations on my head. I was planning to betray them—for my mother's sake, I pretended, but actually, I knew, to save my own neck from stretching in the Bargello yard.

I was thinking over the rest of my talk with Machiavelli. There was only one person to be feared, he warned me, and that was the Duchess of Ferrara, once known as Lucrezia Borgia, of infamous memory. How many murders, how many poisoned draughts, what depths of intrigue had been associated with her name, before she became ruler of Ferrara Duchy and gathered together her little court of poets and painters and those skilled in the new sciences?

"I think you, Messer Domenico, will be her match in guile," said Machiavelli, "even though I do not



Her voice was a
taunting whisper.
"So I still have
power to rule
men!" she said.

know what game she is playing, or why Madonna Clarice has fled to her for refuge. Play your cards well, for, if you fail to bring back Madonna Clarice, her sister, and

her two children, I pledge you that all Italy shall be too small to save you from the gibbet in the *cortile* here."

"It is unnecessary to threaten me, Messer Niccolo," I answered. "I shall come back."

"Aye," he croaked, "or else look to that old mother of yours, for the Eight have evidence enough of her correspondence with the Medici to send her to the stake."

He had me in his trap, that devil, who left nothing undone. I was thinking over all this, over my past, as I rode through the sunshine at the head of my troop. Everything passed before my mind in review—my luxurious childhood, before the banishment of the Medici stripped us of our fortune, my mother, my desperate, crooked gaming, the swelling bosoms of the masked women in the gambling hall above the apothecary, the look on the face of the Roman as I stabbed him. . . .

"If it will comfort you," Machiavelli added, "the young man is likely to get well. This for your encouragement. Nevertheless, fail me, and I pledge myself to hang you!"

MY TROOP looked more like cutthroats than trained soldiers, and their leader, one Carlo, a scowling, bearded ruffian with a sword-gash across his cheek, which had twisted it into a dog's snarl, showed me from the first that he regarded me as his equal.

"So we are to camp in the pass and await your magnificence's return with some ladies and children?" he asked insolently.

"Those are the orders," I returned curtly.

"Ah," he grinned, "and if your magnificence goes to Ferrara you will be putting your head into the lion's jaws. *Santiddio*, I should say the lioness rather, for the sister of Cesare Borgia, under whom I served, is not one to permit a personable young man to escape her clutches. How come it, magnificence, that we go to Ferrara?"

"That is not my business," I answered sharply. "I take my orders, as you take mine."

He subsided, growling, but it was not an auspicious beginning. And in the afternoon something occurred that disturbed me more. I was remounting, after we had partaken of our lunch of bread and cheese, sour wine and olives, when my horse stumbled, flinging me from the saddle. As I rose to my feet, I heard a tinkle, and saw that my pouch had come open, and spilled a few gold florins.

Carlo picked them up and handed them to me with a bow, but I saw the furtive glances that the cutthroats gave one another, and I knew that the night in the pass was likely to be my end.

In fact, as the sun set, and it began to grow dark, I felt it necessary to ride apart from my men, to forestall any sudden attack from the rear. This tactics, which was not unnoticed, brought forth drunken jests. They looked on me as a callow youth, and my accident with the horse had given them no high opinion of my prowess. Yet they feared Machiavelli too much to attack me until we had reached the pass, and then the approach was clumsy.

Carlo roweled his horse, so that it collided with my own. I think he expected to see me fall, but I leaned out of my saddle and boxed his ears soundly.

"There, lout! Be more careful in future," I said.

He leaped to the ground, pouring out oaths. "You raise your hand to me, who rode with Cesare Borgia?" he cried. And began circling with drawn sword.

A thunderstorm had come up, and, by the vivid lightning flashes, I could see the troop beginning to circle me too.

I leaped to my feet and backed my horse toward a ridge of rocks, to see two of the troop creeping in on me with their daggers.

I thrust, wrenched out my steel, and thrust again, and they dropped shrieking. The rest shrank back, and I sprang into my saddle again and galloped through the pass toward Ferrara.

THE sun was just rising when I rode into the town, through empty streets, past yawning market-dealers, and so up toward the castle, frowning down upon the houses huddled beneath it.

The old warden at the wicket stared at me when I cried that I was on a message of urgency to the Duchess, but presently the creaking portcullis went up, and the drawbridge dropped, and I rode into the bailey, between walls guarded by sentries, and past sheds from which yawning soldiers were issuing, buckling on their armor.

A page took my horse and ushered me into a washing-room within the castle, holding the basin

while I removed the stains of travel.

"Will you please to eat, sir," he asked, "while I convey your name to her magnificence?"

"Tell her," I answered, "that a messenger from His Holiness desires urgent audience with her. And meanwhile I will break my fast as quickly as possible." For I had fought in the Pisan war, and an old campaigner never quarrels with his stomach.

Within a few minutes I had refreshed myself with a lark patty and haunch of venison, with better wine than I had tasted for a long time. I had just completed my meal when the page returned, announcing that the Duchess awaited me in the gardens.

Around a bastion of the castle I came upon as pretty a scene as I have ever witnessed.

In the mild climate of Ferrara, innumerable Spring flowers were already spangling the ground. Beyond a dense hedge of hawthorn, a company of young men and ladies was seated on the sward.

Upon a cushion among them I could see Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara, and I was amazed to see this monster of evil, as I had considered her, merely a woman approaching middle age, and of a striking, stately beauty in her gown of black velvet, sprinkled with pearls.

Beside her was a lady who could be none other than Madonna Clarice, wearing a rose-colored gown, with a purse and rosary attached to her belt, holding a small boy by the hand. On her other side was a girl of about twenty years,

whom I guessed to be her sister, Madonna Tessa.

She was clad all in white. About her fair hair, which glinted golden in the sunlight, was a white fillet, fastened with a golden pin, and the beauty of her took my heart. Suddenly I grew breathless. Suddenly I knew that Madonna Tessa was the one woman in the world for me. I loved her—and she, unconscious of me, was listening to a young man with a lute.

Then I was pressing my lips to the Duchess's hand yet all the while conscious of Madonna Tessa, looking like one of those angels that Fra Angelico has painted on the walls of San Marco. And then Madonna Clarice was looking at me with wide eyes as I revealed my identity.

“DOMENICO, of the House of Strozzi,” I said, “and your servitor, Madonna. And entrusted with a letter from His Holiness to you.”

I handed it to her, and the signet ring, and I saw nothing but the eyes of her sister, Tessa. I saw Madonna Clarice break the seal and read the letter, then pass it silently to the Duchess. I withdrew a little while the ladies whispered together. Then the Duchess beckoned to me.

“Your name and person are sufficient guarantee for us,” she said. “And you are to escort us to Pistoja, to His Holiness's headquarters. But is the road safe?” She bent her dark brows on my face. “Safe where the future of Florence is at stake?” she asked, and glanced at the two boys.

“I guarantee it,” I answered.

“I shall, of course, send a troop with Madonna Clarice, to ensure her safety.”

I hadn't reckoned on that, but I kept my face steady. And all the while, because of the treachery I planned, I forced myself to think of my mother, aging, shivering in the cold of our wretched rooms in the Calimala.

The Duchess turned to Madonna Clarice. “You will be prepared to start at dawn tomorrow?” she asked. “And will a dozen guards suffice against all possibility of attack by brigands?” she inquired of me. “And have you news of Florence? We seem in backwater here in quiet Ferrara, and hear only rumors. Is there a possibility that that arch-roogue, Machiavelli, will offer armed resistance to the forces of His Holiness?”

“Magnificence, it is a long time since I was in Florence,” I answered, watching her warily, and remembering Machiavelli's warning.

“Ah, to be sure. Well, Messer Domenico, make yourself comfortable. Madonna Tessa, present Messer Domenico to some of our ladies and gentlemen.”

The girl in white gave me a swift, searching glance, before which my own eyes fell. It was no dream, my love for her, though it had come upon me like a thunderclap. And, but for the thought that Machiavelli had my mother at his mercy, I believe I would have fallen upon my knees, and then and there confessed my knavery. As it was, I accompanied the girl as she introduced me about the garden.

I REMEMBER the afternoon meal in the refectory, with the musicians playing soft airs, the courteous company, the stroll through the gardens, Madonna Tessa sometimes at my side, the silences and the shy speech. Once she said to me:



As the third man went down, I saw the chance for Tessa and me to escape.

"I am bewildered by this web of intrigue that is being spun all around me. I am afraid for the safety of my sister and my two nephews. Are you sure—can you pledge yourself that we shall not be intercepted on the road to Pistoja? That this Machiavelli is not plotting our destruction?"

"I pledge my word that there will be no interception," I answered—God forgive me! And I thought of Carlo and his cut-throats waiting in the pass at Forli.

Sunset through the slit in my tower window. The clank of the changing guard upon the walls. I was about to remove my doublet and trunk-hose for bed when there came a tapping upon my door.

Outside stood a page, not the one who had first assisted me, but a sly-faced boy of about fourteen, whom I had noticed in attendance upon the Duchess that day.

"Messer Domenico," he said, "her magnificence would speak with you concerning the preparations for the journey. Will it please you to accompany me?"

Startled, I tried to collect my wits. An interview with the Duchess was the last thing that I desired. However, there was nothing for me to do but accompany the page, through the long stone corridors, then down three flights of stairs, and so to a door behind some hanging tapestries.

A woman opened, whispered a word or two, and vanished.

"Will you enter, sir?" asked the page.

I found myself in a dimly lit *saletto*, with heavy furniture, and a soft Saracen rug upon the floor.

The room was empty, but a door opposite was opening.

The Duchess of Ferrara stood in the entrance. She was clad in a single long black garment. A band of jewels around her throat scintillated with colored fires. She raised one slim, white hand and beckoned to me.

The door closed softly behind me. I was in the Duchess's bedroom, containing the great carven bed of state, with crimson canopies. Two candles filled the room with flickering shadows.

"Be seated, Messer Domenico," said Lucrezia. "I wished to have you assure me again that there is no possibility of danger on the way to Pistoja."

"Magnificence, I have already given my assurances as to that," I answered.

"It would be unfortunate if the little Tessa were to be captured. Ah, do you think I have no eyes? Messer Domenico, this is the first time that any man has dared to look so at another woman in the presence of Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara. Look well at me now—look at me, I say!"

With a single sweep of her hand she tore the long black garment from her.

MY HEART contracted, then sent out furious pulsations, as I saw the beauty of her. Underneath the gown she wore nothing except a short garment of sheerest silk through which the curves of her bosom, the white arch of her hips were visible as though no garment existed.

She swayed slightly, and her breasts, full and divinely mould-

ed, moved with the gracious undulation of her form. A mocking smile played on her red lips. I forgot Tessa, everything. I caught her in my arms, and heard her taunting whisper:

"So Lucrezia Borgia still has the power to rule men, as of old? And you are a beautiful youth, my Domenico, such as I would have died for in the old days. Love—love—it is sweet, is it not, Domenico? And, since I am Duchess of Ferrara, and I may love only in the silence of the night, let us drink a pledge to our love, Domenico."

From a tall table she brought two cups brimming with wine. She raised her glass to mine, and we drank together. New life seemed to flow through me with that fiery draught. We sat side by side under the scarlet canopy, Lucrezia's white form with the thin, shimmering garment so close beside me that I could inhale the sweet and subtle perfume emanating from her. And yet I was afraid.

I was afraid, and trembling, like a boy with his first sweetheart, though I had loved women aplenty. I sat the cup down and looked at her. I heard her low laugh:

"Are you afraid of me, Domenico? I am nothing but a woman. Have you never had a sweetheart? And do you think me fair as that Tessa? Touch me, and see that I am neither marble nor bronze. Flesh and fire, perhaps, Domenico!"

She took my hand and placed it upon her smooth, gleaming shoulder. Again I clasped her, and her

very flesh seemed to melt into mine. I lost all sense of being. I only felt Lucrezia's lips clamped against mine, and her quickening breathing straining her rounded form against me. . . .

Then, out of the sweet blackness I heard her screaming, "Help me! I am betrayed!"

I tried to rise, but I was helpless, bound fast by the subtle poison of the draught she had given me. I heard the rush of serving-men and maids and pages, felt them wrenching and hammering at my insensate body; then Lucrezia's voice:

"Liar and traitor, I knew you were Machiavelli's envoy from the first, for the stone in that signet-ring had been reversed, which was to warn me."

I GROANED, opened my eyes. I was lying upon my back on a heap of sacking in a small stone cell, and twilight of morning was coming faintly through a slit in the wall.

I struggled up. I had regained the use of my limbs now, but my head was racking me, and, remembering those moments of madness, I cursed the abominable woman who had first used me and then entrapped me.

I cursed myself yet more for I had no doubt what my fate must be. The rack, the torture-chamber, and, finally, the gibbet. Better to have defied Machiavelli and accepted my fate in the yard of the Bargello.

The cell door opened. Two guards stood outside, with a crowd of ruffianly hangers-on

(Continued on page 98)

CHAIOS

and

The unbelievable had happened! Asiatic hordes had over-run the United States, and the girl Macklin loved had become The Dictator's wife! Was the Heart of America strong enough to save the country?



BACK

By **ROBERT
LESLIE
BELLEM**

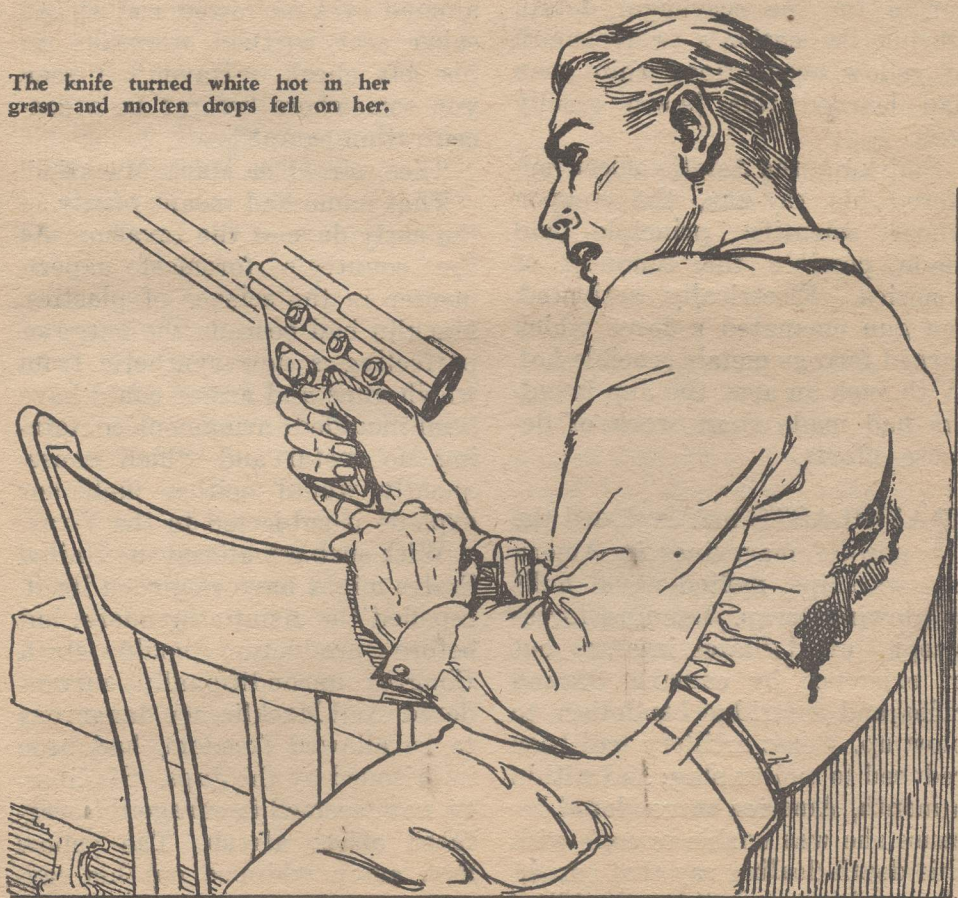
FOR Mark Macklin, freedom had a bitter taste. He was under no restraint as he walked along Pennsylvania Avenue that afternoon; yet he was conscious of imprisonment surrounding each step he took.

That was because of the yellow men: the storm-troopers, the police, the soldiers. It seemed incredible for Washington to be in the hands of these Asiatic interlopers,

but it was true. They had conquered America; and the thought so blinded Mark Macklin that he forgot to step off into the gutter as a Jap officer swaggered by.

A snake-hiss of fury from the Nipponese made Macklin aware of the enormity of his blunder. But before he could rectify it, a stab of pain seared into his belly. Involuntarily he doubled forward.

The knife turned white hot in her grasp and molten drops fell on her.



"Please—turn it off—you're frying my guts—!"

The Jap grinned maliciously. "Very amusing. Six feet and a hundred seventy pounds of American manhood cringing like a cur when you taste the Ray. Where is your vaunted Caucasian supremacy now, dog?"

"God—switch it off—" Macklin groveled on his knees, hating himself for it but knowing he must make a convincing show of cowardice. That was the only way you could save yourself from these slant-eyed devils; otherwise they burned you to a cinder, left your corpse for the scavenger detail. During the nation's twelvemonth of yellow occupation, white men had learned this lesson cruelly well.

Smirking, the Asiatic officer holstered his ray-gun, the weapon whose scientific principle had made possible the conquest of America. Electrically activated, the gun emanated a force which turned ferrous metals crucible-hot. With such an arm, the Jap invaders had made short work of defense efforts.

RAY-BLASTS had exploded the powder magazines in American warships, melted naval hulls to glowing scrap. Landing forces swept United States infantry out of existence by causing Garand rifles and cartridge bandoliers to blow up. Coast artillery had been reduced to molten slag; and within a month, America surrendered because she was unable to cope with this death-dealing ray that turned steel and iron to hell-hot liquidity!

As it must to all defeated peo-

ples, a species of enslavement then came to the citizens of the United States. Every American was required to wear a special steel identification disc on his person, like a shameful badge of servitude. It was just such a disc that Mark Macklin now wore—and which was the cause of his present pain, his abject groveling. You humbled yourself to these arrogant Orientals or they turned the Y-ray on your identification badge and seared you to a cinder!

The uniformed Jap smirked again. "Next time remember to get off the sidewalk!" Then his almond eyes narrowed and an old saber scar writhed wormlike on his left cheek. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before? In a concentration camp?"

"Yes, sir. I'm Mark Macklin."

That name had meant plenty in the early days of the Invasion. As the country's foremost experimenter in the science of plastics, Macklin had been on the verge of perfecting a new synthetic from which guns and armor could have been moulded; armament containing no metal and which consequently would neither melt nor explode if subjected to the Y-ray.

With such a material the United States might have re-girded itself, repelled the Asiatic invaders; but before production could start, Congress unconditionally surrendered. And Macklin, too dangerous to be allowed freedom, had been imprisoned by the Japs. His liberty, now, seemed to enrage the scar-faced officer afresh. The yellow man again whipped out his ray-gun.

"How did you get loose, dog?"

Speak quickly before I melt your bowels!"

"I was released by order of the White House . . . I mean the Dictator's Palace," Macklin hastily amended his verbal slip. "I was told to present myself at the Palace immediately."

The officer scowled. "I happen to be Colonel Saburo of the Palace guard. Come; we'll see if you are lying!"

As a matter of fact, Macklin was telling the strict truth. This was proven when Colonel Saburo made a checkup inside the building which formerly had been the White House, but which was now the residence of America's Japanese ruler, Marshal Fangishi.

"Certainly," a bespectacled secretary of Fangishi's staff said. "This white dog was summoned by the wife of our master, the Marshal. Even now she awaits him in her private suite."

The scar-faced Saburo seemed annoyed. He bared his teeth and said: "So be it. Begone, scum!"

Macklin bowed humbly and followed the bespectacled secretary, who led him up a flight of stairs, indicated a door and left him. Knocking at the portal, Macklin wondered what this was all about. Why should the wife of the invading Japanese warlord send for him? Confound it, he didn't even know her; and he didn't care to. He wasn't interested in Oriental women—

THE door opened. A cool, detached feminine voice said: "Hello, Mark. How well you look." And Macklin, staring stupidly at the golden-haired girl

who thus addressed him, felt as if someone had slugged him across the soul with a bludgeon.

This was no Asiatic woman. This was an American girl, lovely, blonde, slender yet nubile in the first flush of youthful maturity. She was Elayne Dexter—and *she'd been Mark Macklin's fiancée up to the time of his imprisonment by the invaders.*

Seeing her, hearing her voice for the first time in so many months, was like the crystallization of a dream. Macklin, for a brief moment, was wordless. He was remembering that enigmatic and ambiguous letter he had received from her during his first week in the concentration camp; a letter breaking their engagement without explanation. After that there had been only silence. . .

He found his voice at last. "Elayne!" he breathed. "Elayne—beloved!" And he sprang toward her, encircled her lissome waist with his arms, mashed her lips with the demanding hunger of his mouth.

For an ecstatic instant it seemed almost that she yielded to him. He could feel the rising pressure of her young breasts, firm, magnificently mounded, swelling upon his chest like pulsating cushions of warmth, and then, without warning, she struggled out of his embrace.

And she whanged him across the face with her open palm!

Bewildered, he stared at her. "Elayne—!" he choked.

Her answering glance was cool, unemotional. "You should know better than to lay your hands on the Dictator's wife," she said in

a voice as impersonal as the sound of water purling on rocks.

MARK MACKLIN recoiled as if she had plunged a bayonet into him. "You—you mean you're—?"

"Yes. His Excellency Marshal Haraki Fangashi is my husband. What is so startling about that?"

Macklin tried to steady himself. He had seen newspaper cuts of the Dictator: fat, toadlike, bloated with puffy arrogance and good living. That Elayne Dexter should have married this repulsive yellow man, racially alien and physically repellant, seemed incomprehensible. It was sickening to envision her in Fangashi's arms. . . .

Yet it must be true, because Elayne's azure eyes were silently signaling to Mark Macklin; expressively trying to convey a wordless message to him. For this reason as well as for another one which he dared not indicate at the moment, Macklin struggled for calmness.

He summoned an impassive smile. "Forgive me for being surprised, Elayne. I had no idea you were married. It . . . well, it sort of took me off my feet. Anyhow, will you accept my felicitations? I hope you'll be happy."

"I am happy," she assured him evenly. And that was when her Oriental husband waddled asthmatically into the room.

Mark Macklin knew at once that this whole scene had been in the nature of a test-trap for Elayne. There could be no other explanation for Marshal Fangashi's nearness, his sudden entrance. The corpulent Dictator must have been

eavesdropping just beyond those velvet drapes to see if his wife would respond to the caresses of her former fiance.

And Elayne, apparently realizing the situation's peril, had reacted in the only possible way to avert danger.

As if in proof of all this, the toadlike Fangashi went to Elayne and took her in his arms, slobbered his lips across her snowy shoulder. "You are indeed worthy of my love, little blossom. You rejected your former suitor, and it is well."

She stirred in his embrace in a manner that almost drove Mark insane with jealousy as he watched. "God!" he whispered inaudibly, and his clenched fingers dug blood from his palms.

Then Fangashi turned to him. "You, too, passed the test excellently."

"What test?" the American's voice was bitter.

"When you were told that Elayne had a husband, you accepted it with calmness; wished her happiness. Which shows you are a man of discretion—and brings me to the real reason for having you come here."

Macklin's eyes narrowed. So there was another reason for his release from the concentration camp; a reason beyond the testing of Elayne's marital fidelity! He waited.

Fangashi said: "You are a research chemist in the field of moulded plastics. You had almost perfected a new synthetic at the time of your government's surrender. Well, I want that new synthetic. I have a laboratory all

ready for you to work in; and I offer you your freedom, plus any other reasonable reward, if you will begin producing the formula for me."

Macklin was on the verge of contemptuous refusal when he saw the signal in Elayne's frantic glance. That made him change his mind. "Very good, sir," he acquiesced. "I am ready to begin work immediately." And it seemed as if

With her open palm she whanged him across the face.



the words fettered his soul in the handcuffs of treachery...

THE laboratory they gave him turned out to be amazingly well equipped. In effect it was almost a factory; vast quantities of the Macklin-synthesized plastic could be produced and fabricated here, once the machinery got rolling.

But Mark Macklin wasn't interested in such things. Not now. He wanted solitude for a few minutes; freedom from prying almond eyes. And at last he found it in the private office which the Japs told him would be his exclusive quarters.

Alone at last, Macklin brought a tiny glass capsule out of his mouth: an ampule which had reposed under his tongue for the past hour or more—ever since he had kissed Elayne on the lips, back at the Dictator's Palace. *Elayne had passed the capsule to him at that moment!*

Now he broke it open, extracted the small twisted spill of rice-paper it contained. A message had been written on the paper, tiny, hairline-scrawled:

"Mark, beloved—

I know you are being brought to see me and I know we'll be watched. So this is my only way of communicating the truth to you. When you've read this note, destroy it.

First, I want you to know I love you even though I am Marshal Fangashi's wife. Marrying him was the sacrifice I made for my country. Later you will

understand more fully . . . and perhaps forgive me!

Tonight at midnight, go to your new laboratory office. Be sure nobody sees you. Under your desk you'll find a trapdoor, and a passage—which will lead you to the heart of America!

*Your own
Elayne."*

Even as Mark Macklin read the letter and tried to digest its amazing contents, he was interrupted. A girl entered his office without the formality of knocking; a Japanese girl. Macklin whirled, concealing the letter in his palm; stared at his feminine intruder.

She smiled boldly. "Did I startle you? Forgive me. I am your new private secretary, Petal Saburo." And she preened herself, like a small yellow cat.

Macklin studied her; and his intuition sensed a dangerous aura about her well-formed figure—a menace in the veiled glitter of her slanted eyes. For an Oriental woman she was strangely beautiful, her complexion creamy, her breasts full and pouting under a tight dress, her hips sleekly lyric. But beneath this veneer of allurements there was something ruthless. . .

Then he thought he understood. "Petal Saburo," he said. "A nice name. Could you be related to Colonel Saburo of the Palace guard?"

"He is my brother." And her expression suddenly reminded Mark Macklin of that scar-faced officer who had humiliated him on the sidewalk; an expression of

arrogance, of contempt for all conquered Caucasians.

Macklin's instinct told him that this Oriental girl was more than merely a secretary; she was probably a spy as well, placed in her present position by her brother in order to keep Macklin himself under constant surveillance. Well, forewarned was forearmed. He smiled into her slanted dark eyes. "I think you and I should hit it off very nicely together," he said. "And now let's see about getting my formula under way."

"Good," the Saburo girl said; and she went with Macklin into the main laboratory. There, for the next many hours, the American chemist buried himself in work; tried savagely not to think about the note which Elayne had slipped to him in that one brief kiss. . .

Like a man emerging from a dream, Mark eventually took cognizance of the time. "Eleven-thirty at night!" he gasped. "I had no idea I'd been concentrating so long!"

Petal Saburo, who'd remained beside him throughout the long hours at test-tubes and retorts, smiled wearily through a yawn. "Working for you is going to be difficult, I can see that."

He was contrite; ostentatiously so. "I should've sent you home ages ago. Forgive me. You may go now."

"And you? Are you not leaving?"

"Just as soon as I conclude this experiment," he answered casually. But his easy manner dropped away like a cloak when he was at last alone. Switching off the build-

ing's lights, he tiptoed toward his private office; chanced the striking of a match beneath his desk.

HIS eyes widened. Unless you knew what to look for, you'd never have noticed that concealed trapdoor. But Macklin found it at once; raised it and lowered himself into the pitch-dark aperture. His feet encountered the rungs of a ladder. He descended slowly until he found himself in a winding subterranean passage. Then, groping around a bend, he was abruptly bathed in light.

A well-remembered voice thrilled him. "Mark . . . darling!" And then Elayne Dexter was in his arms.

The fragrance of her golden hair was like a heady intoxicant to Macklin's senses. Through a thin silken frock her unbrassiered charms melted to the conformations of his own stalwart chest; she pressed her dainty body to his, surrendering herself to his thirsty lips. For a little while they were like rudderless ships tossed and buffeted in a tidal wave, clinging together, murmuring endearments, welded into a single integer by their love.

Even if there had been witnesses, it would have been the same. Mark's mouth feasted at the throbbing white hollow of her throat, where only that afternoon he had seen her Jap husband's lips straying. The very thought of Marshal Fangashi possessing her seemed to add fresh fuel to the flames of Macklin's yearning. "Elayne . . . sweet . . .!" he whispered. "I can't help myself. . ."

She gave him no answer in

words, but her eyes were azure wells of willingness and sultry anticipation. . .

A LONG while later, Elayne took time to explain the situation. "Fangashi seemed to think me desirable; offered me marriage. And I accepted—"

"But why?" Macklin interrupted harshly. "How could you let that yellow toad kiss you . . . make love to you. . .?"

"For two reasons, Mark darling. Had I refused his proposal of marriage he might have taken me anyhow; as a . . . a slave. Moreover, as his wife, I would be in a better position to help our secret organization, the Heart of America. Remember, I mentioned it to you in my note?"

Macklin nodded. "Tell me more."

She sketched the details for him. American patriots, working under cover, were laying plans for the day when they would overthrow the Nipponese yoke. Washington itself, like many another metropolitan center, was secretly tunneled with these subterranean passageways, where meetings were held. "And this very tunnel in which we stand," Elayne concluded, "will be the major channel through which the United States will regain its freedom—*thanks to you.*"

"To me?" Mark Macklin whispered in amazement.

"Yes." And she told him the dangerous job to which he was being assigned; a task that would mean his death if the Japs should discover it.

The plan's simplicity amazed

him. Barring unforeseen developments it couldn't fail. And the scheme's main burden fell upon Macklin's shoulders. Instinctively he straightened them; stood erect, like a soldier, as he bade Elayne goodbye.

Then he went back up the ladder to the secret trapdoor under his office desk.

THE weeks that followed were a chaos of activity for Mark Macklin. His formula perfected, his methods of production elaborated upon, he soon had the entire factory humming with a huge output of his new synthetic plastic—and his Japanese masters beamed approval as they found more and more new uses for the all-purpose substance.

But the Asiatics would not have been so content had they known a certain proportion of the plant's product was being diverted, daily, and sent down that tunnel under Macklin's desk. Workers in those underground passages, American patriots and members of the freedom organization, received the diverted stuff and took it to subterranean chambers where it was processed and moulded in a certain manner, then shipped to branch cells all over the conquered nation.

And then, one midnight, Mark Macklin was discovered as he emerged from the underground tunnel.

It was Petal Saburo, his Japanese secretary, who saw him coming out from under his desk. "What in the world—?" she exclaimed sharply; and her slanted eyes became slits of suspicion under down-drawn brows.

Fangashi's fist chopped down on her throat. She choked, and her eyes went glassy.



Macklin's brain raced. "I—er, I lost a coin. It rolled under the desk and I was hunting for it." That sounded lame, but his thoughts weren't functioning too clearly; the surprise of seeing the Asiatic girl there in his office had made him almost speechless.

Nor could he tell, from her face, whether she was aware of the fact that he had lied. She merely lifted a shapely shoulder and purred: "A lost coin. Is money so important to you, then?"

"I'm not too well supplied with it."

She smiled faintly. "And if you were, what would you buy?"

"Well . . ." he fished for thoughts. "Pleasures, perhaps. The luxuries of life."

"There are some pleasures one needn't pay for." Was that a hint of invitation in her tone, Macklin wondered? "There are some luxuries a man sometimes doesn't even realize are available—until they are called to his attention."

Now he was sure of it. She was baiting him, tempting him. There was no mistaking that smoky, smouldering expression in her eyes—or the swift lift and fall of her breasts, twin rounded hints of potential fervor. . .

He stepped toward her. No use beating about the bush, he thought. "I've always wanted to see your apartment," he said decisively. "But I never mentioned it because I was afraid you wouldn't like the idea. After all, you're Japanese—the ruling race. I'm American—the despised white."

Her laughter tinkled, mocking him. "You are a stupid fellow!

Or perhaps blind. . . ! Anyway, come along. I've some rice wine at home. It may lend you courage. . ."

SOMEHOW the conceit amused him, after he had made himself comfortable in her incense-fragrant quarters out on Fourteenth Street, northwest. Rice wine for courage? "Not at all, my dear!" he grinned when she emerged slinkily from her boudoir; and he grabbed her, began caressing her.

He didn't want to; there was no genuine thrill in it, even though she had removed her frock in favor of a clinging satin negligee that stressed her curvesome figure. Elayne Dexter was the only girl he loved; the only one he ever could love. This Saburo woman stirred him but shallowly; he paid court to her now only because of necessity. If he could delude her into thinking that he had fallen for her, she might not remember the suspicious circumstance surrounding his coming out from under that desk in his private office. . .

So he did his best to enact the ardent lover. He kissed the Japanese girl's eyelids, her cheeks, her sensual mouth. Her breasts were full and firm and rounded, tempting in spite of everything.

He crushed her in his arms, then; mashed her against the upholstery. Her flesh was hot and throbbing, her eyes closed. And then—

"Very good, my sweet sister!" a voice rasped from the doorway. "You may push the dog away. I have him covered."

Mark Macklin sprang upright;

pivoted. Colonel Saburo, the scar-faced Jap officer, was standing across the room with drawn ray-gun, backed by four guardsmen. And now Petal Saburo arose from the divan, laughing in her throat.

"Now, white eur!" she said. "Now you will die. I have long suspected something treacherous about you. Tonight when I saw you under your desk, I knew the time had come to act. I lured you here to my flat; and while I was in my boudoir, undressing, I contacted my brother."

The Japanese colonel nodded. "Right. And I investigated your secret tunnel-passageway; arrested several plotters! Now, scum, say your prayers!" He triggered the Y-ray full at Mark Macklin's steel identification disc.

BUT nothing happened. And Mark Macklin roared with savage triumph. "Damn your ray, you yellow rat!" he chortled. "It can't hurt me—any more than it can hurt forty million other American fighting men! We've checkmated you, my friend; and your raid on our tunnel tonight was all we needed to send this country into full revolt! All over the land, citizens of the United States have been waiting for just that kind of move to start the ball rolling!"

Saburo's lips writhed as he squeezed his ray-trigger again. "By the gods of war, I cannot understand it! Your identification disc should be white-hot—your guts should be burned—"

Once more Mark Macklin laughed. "It so happens that my slave-disc isn't metal! *It's a counterfeit, moulded from my own*

secret plastic—and your ray can't melt it!"

"You mean—?"

"I mean millions of the counterfeit slave-plates have been distributed to Americans. And that breaks your ray-grip on us! Because the ray is your only weapon; you discarded guns a long time ago as obsolescent and useless. Well, when Yankee fighting men start at you, they'll have no metal on them—and they won't be afraid of your damnable Y-ray!"

Saburo took a backward step. "You will be unarmed—"

That was when Macklin's grim amusement welled over. "Unarmed? You've forgotten something, rat. *An American is always armed as long as he has his fists.*" And he hurled himself at the yellow colonel's throat.

Saburo tried to evade that headlong rush, but it was impossible. Macklin snatched him, lifted him high in the air and literally catapulted him through the nearest window. Glass shattered outward and the scar-faced Asiatic screamed hideously as he went plunging over the sill to destruction ten floors below. Then hell broke loose.

The colonel's four guardsmen fanned out, trying to capture this berserk American chemist who had just slain their commanding officer. But Macklin was too fast for them. He leaped onto a table, dived feet-first at the oncoming soldiers. His heels crunched home to a saffron mouth, pulping it. Landing prone, he rolled over and over; felled two more squealing adversaries. His hands closed about

(Continued on page 102)

● HOSTAGE

"BING" WALSH thought he had learned French at school. True, that was some years ago, but, if you asked him the past definite tense of almost any verb, he could dig into his memory and produce it after fifteen seconds. Unfortunately conversation goes faster than that. Besides, the pronunciation of the words had always bothered him.

So, when, because he had qualified as a commercial aviator, he made his way to France, and got

accepted as a pilot in the air force, Bing found he couldn't understand any more than the traditional English tommy, with his 'na poo" and "promenade." He could only fulfil his duties with the aid of an interpreter.

Being a first-class pilot, and having an American crate, Bing did very well. He was on reconnaissance duty when he cracked up. It was an anti-aircraft gun that sent

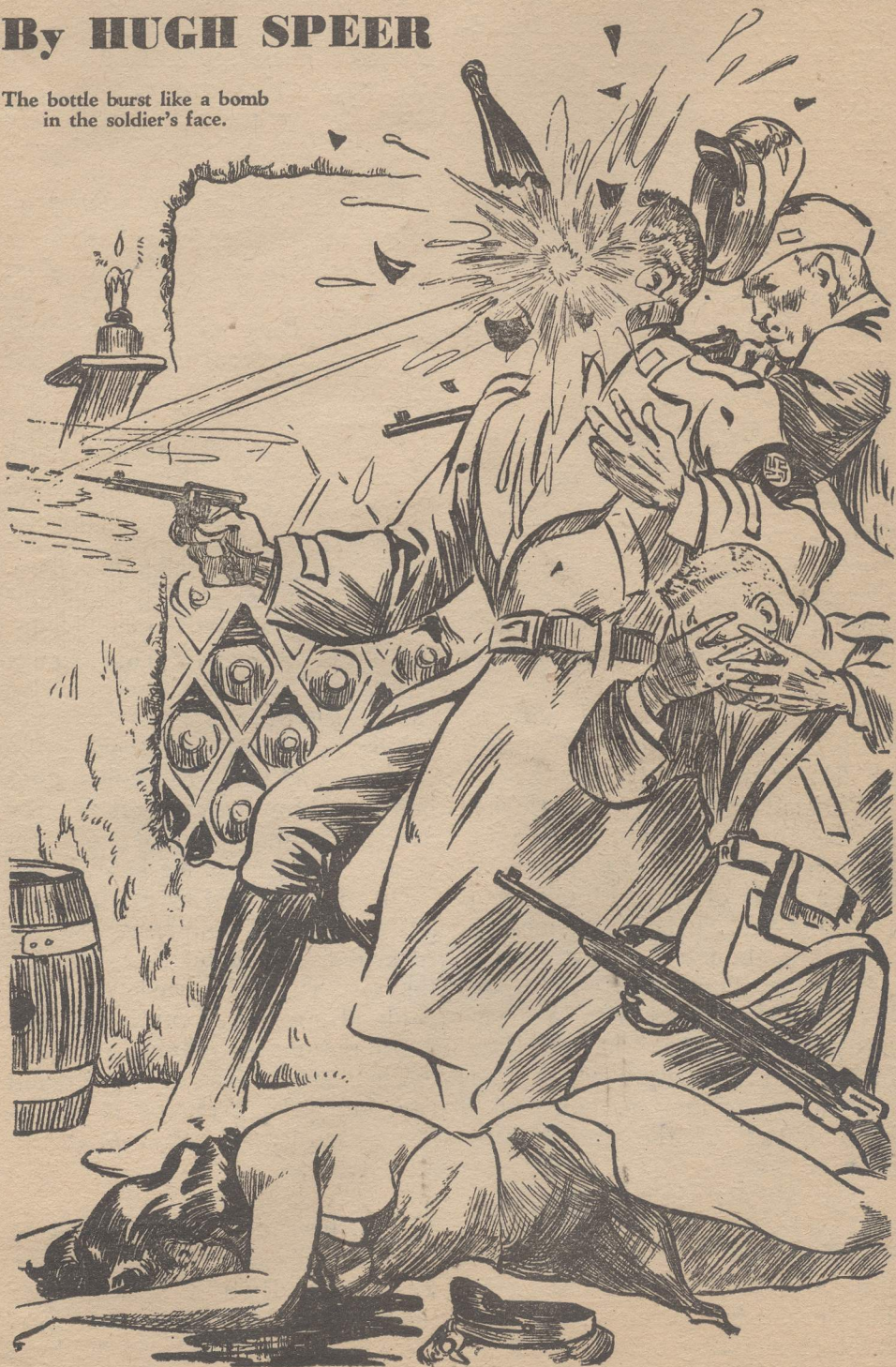


The Jerries had developed a nasty habit of shooting out of hand all foreign aviators found in the French service. So when Bing was brought down behind the lines, he had his work cut out for him. If it hadn't been for a French girl. . . .

OF BATTLE

By HUGH SPEER

The bottle burst like a bomb
in the soldier's face.



him down in a dizzy swirl, and few men except Bing would have succeeded in making the sort of landing he did.

Few men would have had the luck to be thrown fifty feet from the wreck, into a muddy stream, just when twilight rendered him immune against the storm of bullets that whipped its surface.

With his last failing strength, Bing swam, doubled back, inched along the bank into an almost impenetrable mass of furze, and then passed out.

IT WAS the something on his mind that brought him back to consciousness. He remembered that he had to hurry back to Headquarters with a piece of appalling news. The Jerries were on the west side of the Maginot Line, and pouring into the Champagne region. The Line was definitely turned. The gun that had shot him down must belong to an advanced detachment.

Bing sat up, cursing the prickles of the furze. He pulled two or three dozen spikes out of the more tender parts of his anatomy, then felt himself. No bones seemed to be broken, though he had wrenched a knee and shoulder. He got upon his feet. He appeared to be absolutely alone. Not a light anywhere in the vast stillness, which was broken only by the constant, throbbing mutter of the guns, miles away.

It was fully eighty miles back to Headquarters, and Headquarters might not be there any longer. Bing whistled through his teeth. The Jerries had developed a nasty habit of shooting out of hand—all

foreign aviators in the French service. There had been little Chapman, and Whitey Cook, for instance. There seemed nothing to do but to strike westward on foot, traveling by night and hiding up by day—not an impossible feat in sparsely settled France.

"It's a hell of a hike," Bing told himself. But it was better to try it than to be stood up against a wall.

Luckily Bing still had his automatic and several clips. He took his bearings by the pole star and hobbled across the fields.

Suddenly a field on his right blazed with light. Instantly Bing dropped for cover. A moment later he heard the roar of airplane engines overhead, and then he understood. This was a flying-field, and it was being lit up for the incoming ships. It wasn't more than a mile away. But was it occupied by the French or by Jerry?

No way of finding out, except by exploration. The detachment that had shot him down might be only a flying column, might have retreated. On the other hand . . .

On the right, the great chalk cliffs of the Champagne country formed a continuous barrier. On the left were the vast, deserted fields. Bing moved cautiously forward, automatic in hand.

Then suddenly a harsh command rang out, and a patrol of half-a-dozen men leaped out from among some trees.

BING fired and toppled three of them, fired until his weapon was empty. By a miracle, none of the Germans' bullets touched him. He was borne down, stunned by a

kick in the temple, dragged to his feet, still half unconscious, heard himself mumbling.

"*Fliegender Engelsmann*" — or something like that, Bing heard. His captors had spotted his flying togs, of course, and his mumblings had betrayed the fact that he was not a Frenchman. Prodded painfully by bayonets, he stumbled on and on, until he saw a field of subdued lights, and the dim outlines of tents in front of him.

And, still half-conscious, he found himself facing a peculiarly ferocious-looking, middle-aged German of considerable rank, to judge from the decorations on his uniform. A colonel—"Herr Oberst" they addressed him. But of the gabble that followed Bing could make nothing.

He dropped to the ground outside, guarded by four Germans, who drew their thumbs across their throats in a language that could have been understood universally. Bing felt too sick to care.

Presently men began entering the tent. Candles were lit. Bing was prodded to his feet again and inside. There the guards halted him. He found himself facing the Oberst and two younger officers, who were seated behind a table.

With his red face and hanging jowls, and two yellowing eye-teeth that protruded when he grinned, the Oberst resembled nothing so much as an African wart-hog, an animal whose personal endowments are more than matched by his unpleasant disposition.

Trying to maintain his balance, Bing listened to the meaningless conversation. It was about himself—that much was evident. Also

he could guess the tenor of it. But Bing didn't seem to care. That kick in the temple had temporarily robbed him of the zest for living.

After a while one of the younger officers addressed him in perfect English:

"You are an English aviator flying in French uniform? You are aware of the laws regarding the adoption of a uniform not of your country?"

"Hell, no," said Bing, "I'm an American."

"That is too bad. But cheer up, old chap. You won't be an American much longer. You'll be a fine fresh corpse."

"Okay, go to it," answered Bing.

Another exchange of German. "Stand to attention," rasped the English-speaking officer. "Herr Oberst—?"

And he translated the colonel's words sentence by sentence:

"To be shot for espionage, in accordance with the laws of war," was the conclusion.

"We're not going to keep you in suspense, my dear fellow," said the young officer. "Ten minutes. If you want any message sent to anybody—"

"Don't trouble about me," said Bing.

THEY marched him out of the tent, cleaned out his pockets, and stood him against a tree. From there, in the light of a quarter-moon, Bing could dimly see the flying-field, with the planes drawn up in orderly rows, and the faint outlines of the tents on either side. In those ten minutes Bing had time to think of a number of things, but the only thing that worried him

was that he had been such a damn' fool.

It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes when shouts came out of the darkness. Bing was prodded forward again, into the subdued light that came from the field. On to the wall of an immense hangar, with an unpleasant-looking chalk parallelogram on the wall. Bing didn't have to be told that he was expected to stand exactly inside this.

There was a still more unpleasant-looking short trench, almost at his feet. It was a deep trench—so deep that Bing was quite startled when a man with a pickaxe leaped out of it.

About fifteen yards away a dozen riflemen were standing. The *Oberst* stepped forward. He began reading something, and Bing wasn't in the least interested. His mind went back to a girl he had known in Brooklyn. He wished he'd stayed in Brooklyn instead of coming to France, even if it would have meant marrying her.

Suddenly there sounded the roar of airplanes overhead, and the floodlights went on.

Then everything was blotted out in the roar and smoke of a bomb that dropped squarely between Bing and his executioners. It was a French bomber—probably two or three of them.

Flung to the ground by the shock, Bing picked himself up. An immense smoking crater was hollered out in front of him. Three or four men, or what had been men, lay about it. The riflemen had disappeared.

Something told Bing that this was the time to go on being an

American. The floodlights had gone out. Everywhere sounded yells of panic. The bombers were roaring overhead, and another bomb dropped among the tents.

Bending almost double, Bing scurried for the nearest clump of trees. He was just free of the field when he collided with a colossal body, bent as double as he was. The shock hurled them both to the ground.

Bing recognized the *Oberst*. He got his fingers inside the collar of his tunic and hoisted him to his feet. He planted his foot twice on a prominent projection, and the *Oberst* yelled. Then Bing knocked him down, bent, and took away his automatic, fired one shot in the air, and decided that it was loaded. Ten cartridges to the clip, he guessed. That would be good enough.

"Good-bye, wart-hog. Sorry I can't stay any longer," said Bing.

Without waiting for the colonel's response, he dashed into the thick of the trees, passed through them, and gained the stubby fields again. Behind him he heard riot and confusion, but he guessed that he wasn't being followed.

The bombing had ceased, but the air was filled with roaring planes. The Germans had evidently taken off to look for their assailants. Bing ran a little further, and reckoned he was free—provided he didn't run into any more patrols.

THEN suddenly, half-a-mile further on, a farm-house, dark and somber, suddenly appeared beyond the crest of a low hill. Unoccupied, doubtless—yet there might be someone there. Bing made his way toward it. He had pretty well re-

covered from the kick in the temple, and he was conscious that he hadn't eaten since early morning. It wouldn't take more than a couple of minutes to snatch a lump of meat and a loaf of bread.

The windows were shuttered, the door was locked. Bing walked around it, through the vineyards,



It was a mile across the field.
He followed her in silence.

between vines heavy with leaves. He tried the back door. No better luck. He was turning away when he saw a glimmer of white moving through the dark.

He called to it—in French. Evidently Bing's French was terrifying, for it raced, with a patter of bare feet, toward the barn. Bing started after it, and heard a low cry—a woman's cry.

Bing's curiosity was piqued.

Perhaps it wasn't quite etiquette to run after a bare-footed girl at night when she obviously preferred to be alone but, that was what Bing did. Suddenly the figure tripped and fell near the entrance of the barn, and Bing, stooping over it, discovered that it was a young girl.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he explained. "I'm an American in the French service. I—I—" That pesky past definite tense refused to come when called upon. "I am being shot down in my plane. The Jerries are shooting me. I am escaping," Bing explained.

As the girl seemed paralyzed with fear, Bing stooped and picked her up in his arms. She was small and soft and warm, and one hand closed easily over a little bare foot. She struggled, crying softly.

"American! American!" said Bing, slapping his chest. "*Vive la France!*"

"*Vous êtes Américain?*" Hope was in the girl's voice.

"Fight pour la France. Fly. *Vous comprenez.*" Bing flapped his arms. "Machine busted. My name is Bing."

The girl began laughing hysterically. "*Moi, Marguerite,*" she said.

"*Les damn' Allemands* over there. Hungry." Bing pointed to his throat and stomach.

The girl understood. She seized him by the hand and began running with him toward the house. Fumbling in her bosom, she produced a key.

IT IS one of the strange phenomena of nature, but a young man and a girl have less difficulty in understanding each other's language, however ignorant of it, than two

learned male linguists. In the dark kitchen, eating cold soup and drinking cold coffee, Bing seemed to understand everything that the girl was telling him.

Annette, whom Bing supposed to be the hired girl, had run away. And Marguerite's father was away, fighting for France. And her mother was dead. And she was alone. She had thought he was a German, and had tried to escape him.

Only the day before, the French had evacuated the flying field, and the Germans had occupied it. Marguerite had been hiding most of the time. She was afraid they had caught Annette. Tears rolled down the girl's cheeks.

"They won't harm her," Bing tried to say, but he couldn't make it. After all, plenty of farm girls must have been captured by the Germans, and—well, they wouldn't be killed. He tried to reassure Marguerite.

"And they tried to shoot you?"

"Yeah. I got away," said Bing. Pantomime explained it perfectly.

"I must hide you."

"No hurry. Bing wiped away Marguerite's tears, and then reached forward and drew her upon his knee.

"*Mais, monsieur, je suis honnête femme,*" the girl protested. However, she didn't resist him very hard. Instead, she tucked her little bare feet around a rung of the kitchen chair, and put up her mouth to be kissed. Bing had never had kisses like those before. He wanted to go on kissing her for ever.

Under the thin white blouse, her breasts were those of an adolescent girl, but there was a fire in her

kisses that made Bing's heart beat quickly. Marguerite twined her strong young arms around Bing's neck and sighed deeply.

Bing realized that he must put a check on himself. Only he didn't know how to do it. What saved him was a sudden hammering at the front door, and the sound of a thick Teutonic voice that sounded quite familiar:

"Open the door! Open immediately!"

The girl leaped to her feet with an exclamation of fear. "It is the officer!" she whispered. "Quick! I must take you away, before he breaks in. Not a word! Follow me!"

Bing understood only from her gestures. But in another moment Marguerite had noiselessly opened the kitchen door, and he followed her through the trees beside the house, while the knocks grew thunderous, and the hoarse voice filled the night with its angry shouts.

IT WAS a mile across the fields to where the great chalk cliffs rose like a rampart against the sky. There was now the continuous rumble of vehicles along the road, shouting of sentries; again the flying-field was flood-lit as planes came roaring down. But Bing and Marguerite were at the edge of the cliffs now, creeping through the dense undergrowth, until the girl pointed ahead and stopped.

Bing saw what looked like the mouth of a little cave. It didn't look too inviting in the darkness. But, with Marguerite, he would have gone anywhere. She said something that he didn't understand, and led the way inside, then

stretched out her hand to guide Bing through that darkness.

Bing could feel, with his other hand, that they were in a tunnel. Somehow Marguerite managed to convey to him that there were steps beneath his feet. They went down—twenty steps, then along a pitch-dark passage again, then twenty-four steps. It was near the freezing-point at this low level.

On again, turning two or three times. Then suddenly the girl stopped. Bing could no longer feel the tunnel wall. Marguerite left him. Her voice came back, followed by deep echoes from the interior:

"Wait, Beeng, till I make a light."

There came the flare of a match, the monstrous silhouette of the girl, flung on the rock wall. Another and another light sprang out. Marguerite was lighting candles, a dozen or more, at intervals of a few feet.

Bing looked about him in bewilderment. He was in a rock cavern, about as large as a big room, with passages radiating from it in all directions. But the cavern seemed to have been finished by man, for the floor was smooth, the walls roughly hewn, and lined with something that looked like wooden shelves, except that they contained innumerable tiny compartments.

From the front of each protruded the neck of a bottle. Suddenly Bing understood. He was in the famous caves in which the champagne is left to mature. They stretched for miles underground, and there was champagne and to spare for the entire German army.

Bang! With a noise like the ex-

plosion of a miniature bomb, one of the bottles exploded in a shower of glass. The girl's ringing laugh echoed through the cave.

"Come, Beeng!"

A short distance away there was a little stock of food, canned goods, stale bread. Water gushed from a faucet.

"My father works here. The Germans cannot find the way." Bing understood that, more by telepathy than from the words. Marguerite put her hands on Bing's shoulders. He drew her close to him.

"I love you, darling."

"*Ah, je t'aimerai toujours.*" Her lips were warm on his. Her soft breasts were tensed against him. Suddenly she released herself, and with a finger uplifted in warning, disappeared down one of the passages.

IT WASN'T until some twenty minutes had gone by that Bing became alarmed. Then he began calling her name, and his voice came echoing back in mocking tones. At last he started down the passage in search of her, candle in hand.

He had not gone more than a few yards when he saw that the search must be fruitless. The whole interiors of the cliff was a honeycomb of passages, a maze that none but those long accustomed to it could hope to understand. And all along the walls, on either side of him, were the bottles of fermenting champagne.

Now and again a bottle would explode, and the echoes came rolling toward him. Bing stopped. If he went any further he knew he could

never find his way back. He would be lost, he might wander for ever without finding his way to the outside. He almost lost the way trying to find the place he had started from. He sat down, waiting, cursing the confounded cold, flapping his arms for warmth. Hours seemed to pass—or were they minutes? What was Marguerite doing? Why hadn't she returned?

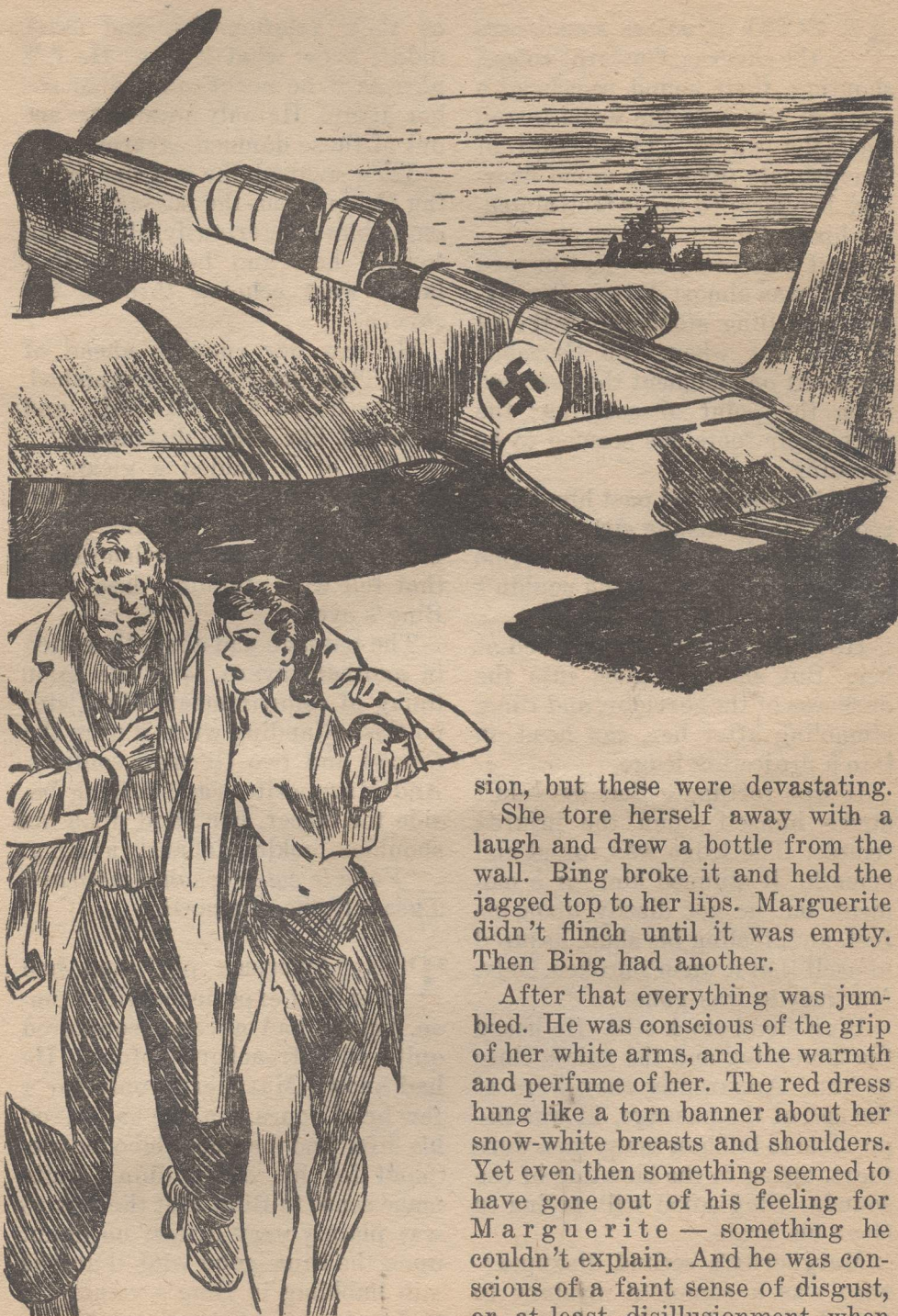
It was the pop of a bottle close beside him that gave Bing his idea. He drew a bottle from its receptacle and broke off the top against the wall. That champagne was like nectar, in spite of its half-fermented state. Bing tried another. One more, and he didn't feel so cold. He didn't care so much. Marguerite would be back soon, and, anyway. . . .

Light footsteps along one of the passages. She was back, standing stock still, looking at him as if in surprise, as if she wondered why he still was there. She must have been back to the farm-house, for she had changed the black skirt and white waist for a cheap and rather startling red dress, whose sheer material showed the contours of her breasts and sides. She had put on shoes and stockings.

Bing couldn't understand a word of the babble that broke from her lips.

But the wine was swimming in his head, and he didn't care about anything, except that Marguerite was back.

When he took her in his arms, she struggled more strenuously than before. Then suddenly her head fell on his shoulder, and she raised her lips to his. The former kisses had been instinct with pas-



He was so weak he would have fallen if she hadn't held him.

sion, but these were devastating.

She tore herself away with a laugh and drew a bottle from the wall. Bing broke it and held the jagged top to her lips. Marguerite didn't flinch until it was empty. Then Bing had another.

After that everything was jumbled. He was conscious of the grip of her white arms, and the warmth and perfume of her. The red dress hung like a torn banner about her snow-white breasts and shoulders. Yet even then something seemed to have gone out of his feeling for Marguerite — something he couldn't explain. And he was conscious of a faint sense of disgust, or, at least, disillusionment, when at length he drew the red dress about her and fastened it upon one shoulder.

AN ECHO of voices somewhere in the caverns. Guttural voices, shouting, their sound re-echoed a score of times as the walls tossed back the waves. The tramp of heavy boots upon the stone flooring. Bing leaped to his feet, clutching his pistol.

Most of the candles had burned out. It was almost dark in the cavern, and Bing stood there, trying to find out where the Germans were. At one moment they seemed upon the point of entering; the next, their footsteps seemed to be receding.

Something flitted past him like a red ghost. It was the girl. She was going again without warning. She might never return. Bing couldn't make head or tail of it.

He called to her. He grabbed at her. But she was gone into the darkness of the corridor, and Bing, stumbling after her, ran head on into a projecting ledge.

It was fortunate that he didn't strike himself upon the injured temple. The ledge was round and smooth. It stunned him for a moment, but he got dizzily upon his feet, and, feeling his skull, assured himself that it wasn't broken. Only, Marguerite was gone.

Bing stood stock still. He heard the trampling and the voices close to him. Apparently they were at the end of the passage. It was impossible to tell how many men were there, owing to the blending of the sounds. Bing stood still, trying to clear his brain.

Marguerite's second disappearance was a complete mystery to him. And somehow she hadn't been the same when she came back. Something beautiful had gone out

of their relationship, and Bing didn't know what it was. He felt now as if he never wanted to see her again. He only wanted to get out of those damned caverns.

Then suddenly he saw her, peering at him from the passage, beckoning him mysteriously. He sprang toward her, and her tantalizing laugh went echoing through the cavern.

He saw her running ahead of him. Then the little light vanished. But he heard her call again, and followed, like a man distraught.

Then of a sudden a gleam of light appeared. Another moment, and it became a brilliant shaft, projected from an acetylene lamp that fell with stunning daze upon Bing's eyes.

The passage had abruptly ended in another cavern, with the same lining of compartments filled with bottles. Standing within it were the *Oberst* and two German soldiers. And Marguerite was standing beside the officer, her hand upon his shoulder, looking defiantly at Bing.

"*Voilà le sale cochon Américain. Tuez-le!*" she screamed.

THE "American pig" had had plenty of experience with women, but he had never encountered quite such treachery before. He had known Marguerite only for a few brief hours, but she had saved his life, and her cold-blooded demand for his death didn't quite make sense to Bing. But the *Oberst* was plainly very drunk, no doubt upon the same good wine that was still bubbling in Bing's veins. He had a pistol in his hand, but his co-ordinations didn't seem very good.

As for the soldiers, they were

bringing up their rifles, but all that takes time. And Bing was quick on the draw. He had the *Oberst* covered before the officer could complete his own draw.

The *Oberst* yelled and leaped back into the shadows behind the stand on which the lamp stood. Bing weaved, and, as the nearest of the two soldiers got his rifle into position, sent a bullet crashing through his body.

The man dropped groaning. The second man turned to flee. Bing snapped his pistol again—and discovered that it hadn't a full clip of cartridges, as he had supposed. It hadn't another live cartridge in it.

All this was a matter of about a second and a half. Then the *Oberst's* pistol roared through the cave, and Bing was spun half around by the shock of the heavy bullet against his left shoulder.

Voices from the passage at the further end of the cave. Teutonic voices. Oh, Bing was finished. He knew that perfectly well. But he was going down fighting.

"*Tuez-le!*" shrieked the girl again, clutching the colonel by the arm.

All this a matter of about a second more. A lot besides happened in that second. For one thing, the *Oberst's* pistol cracked again. It was unfortunate that the officer's hand was unsteady, due to the good champagne, for that slug caught the girl through the heart as she clung to his arm. She plunged like a diver to the floor and died without a struggle.

BING went berserk then. To his last minute of life he would re-

member that scene. The soldier with the rifle, taking aim from the corridor behind him. Three or four more, also with rifles, coming in at the other end of the cave, and stopping, uncertain, perhaps even horrified at the body of the dead girl on the floor, and the little pool of blood beneath her. The *Oberst*, swaying drunkenly, and staggering forward to finish Bing with another slug.

The *Oberst* fired twice in succession. The first slug whizzed past Bing's head. The second struck the acetylene lamp and extinguished it instantly.

All this might have taken another second and a half, but the rhythm of time had changed, and it seemed more like half-an-hour that Bing had been in the cave.

Bing staggered back and drew two champagne bottles from the wall. He hurled one with his right, and it burst like a little bomb in the face of the soldier who was taking aim from the corridor. At the same time the rifle roared, and the slug traversed the cavern and struck down one of the men who were coming on from the other side.

The second bottle caught the *Oberst* squarely on the forehead, and he dropped with a yell, slashed and gashed by the broken glass, and blinded by the sizzling wine.

The next instant it was dark. But already Bing had two more bottles in his hands. The cave echoed with the roar of rifles, and the bullets chipped fragments from the walls, but Bing wasn't hit. He hurled his bottles across the cave, heard them burst with the sound of hand-grenades, and turned and

(Continued on page 106)

Diana Daw

DIANA AND TED ARE CAST ADrift IN A STRANGE SPACE-SHIP AND HAVE LANDED ON THE PLANET MERCURY

By CLAYTON MAXWELL

MERCURY IS INHABITED BY TWO RACES THE BLONDE AMAZONS AND THE REPTILE-MEN, WHO FIGHT FOR SUPREMACY OF THE PLANET.

DIANA HAS SERVED AS QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS, BUT IS AT PRESENT A HUNTED FUGITIVE, SOUGHT BY BOTH THE AMAZONS AND REPTILE-MEN.

A FINE STATE OF AFFAIRS --- HUNTED LIKE AN ANIMAL --- NOT A CHANCE TO GET AWAY --- AND TED A PRISONER OF THE AMAZONS. WELL, I'LL HAVE TO VENTURE OUT AND GET SOME FOOD!



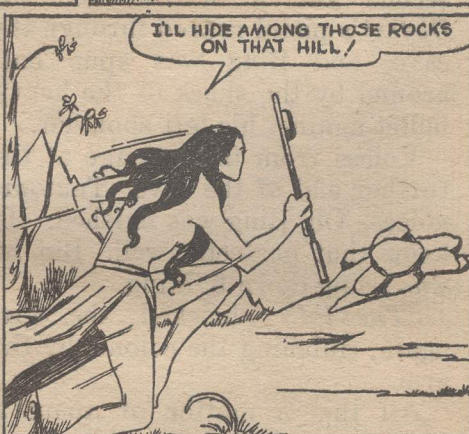
THERE'S ENOUGH MEAT TO LAST FOR AWHILE!



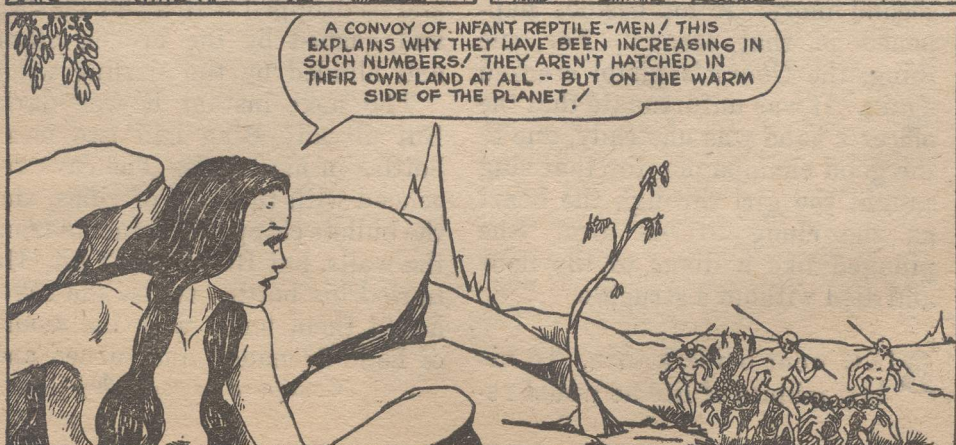
WHAT'S THAT NOISE? SOUNDS LIKE AN ARMY APPROACHING!



I'LL HIDE AMONG THOSE ROCKS ON THAT HILL!



A CONVOY OF INFANT REPTILE-MEN! THIS EXPLAINS WHY THEY HAVE BEEN INCREASING IN SUCH NUMBERS! THEY AREN'T HATCHED IN THEIR OWN LAND AT ALL -- BUT ON THE WARM SIDE OF THE PLANET!



DIANA FOLLOWS THE BACKWARD TRAIL OF THE CONVOY TO THE HOT DESERT LANDS OF MERCURY

WHEW, IT'S HOT... WORSE THAN THE SAHARA. THAT EXPLAINS IT... THOUSANDS OF EGGS HATCHING IN THE WARM SUN. THEIR OWN LAND IS TOO COLD TO HATCH THEM PROPERLY, OR IN GREAT NUMBERS. IF THIS SORT OF THING GOES ON, THEY'LL DOMINATE ALL MERCURY!



BUT DIANA IS SEEN BY A HATCHERY GUARD

I'LL HAVE TO RUN FOR IT!

AN AMAZON / SHE MUSTN'T ESCAPE! AFTER HER!



THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE --- BUT I'LL SOON OUTDISTANCE THEM!

BUT DIANA RUNS INTO A PARTY OF AMAZON WARRIORS

WHAT LUCK!

THERE SHE IS... KILL HER--QUEEN VARTA'S ORDERS!



BUT DIANA'S SUPERIOR EARTH STRENGTH GIVES HER A TEMPORARY ADVANTAGE

BACK, YOU BLONDE HUSSIES!

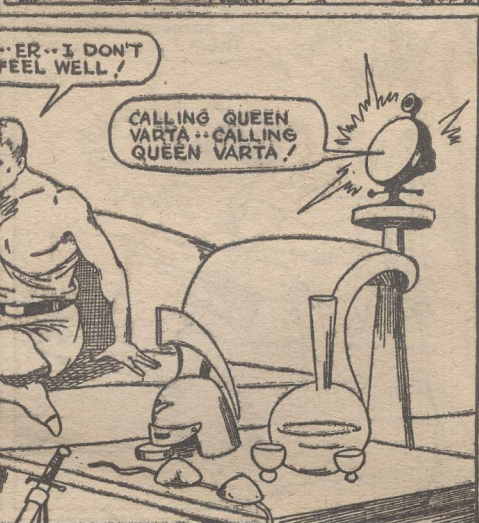
NOW TO BREAK AWAY!

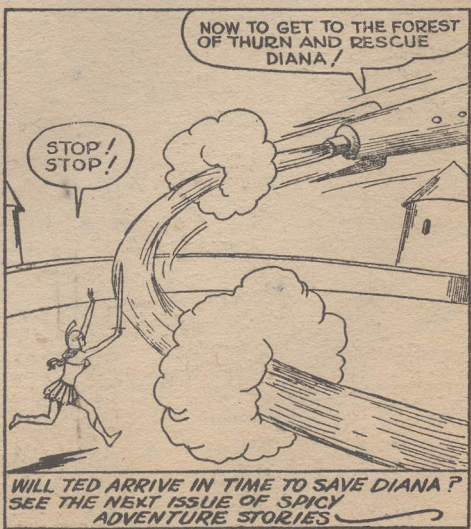
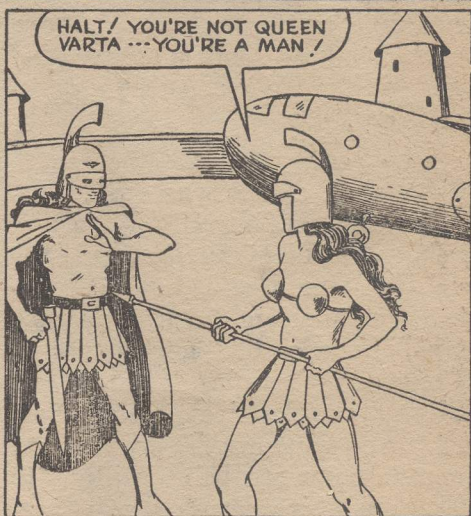
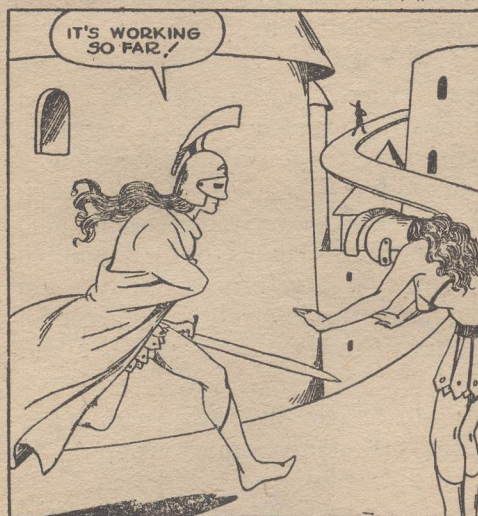
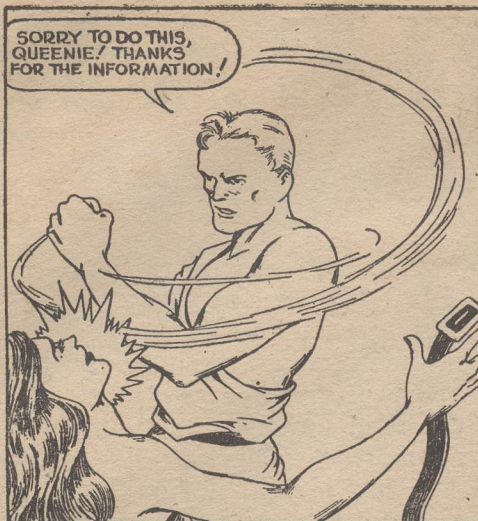


OUTDISTANCING PURSUIT, DIANA TAKES UP A POSITION ON A ROCKY HILLSIDE

I CAN HOLD OUT HERE FOR AWHILE!







THE HEAD

By STAN WARNER

LIEUTENANT RICHARD BARCLAY, clad in common seaman's clothes, came ashore at dusk and approached the village. Near the edge of it was a rambling inn where he had been told he would find the man he sought; namely, Captain Edward Teach, known as Blackbeard. As he came up to the inn he heard the sound of loud laughter and rude jests. He heard also a woman's cry.

The year was 1723, the month November, and it was dusk. Barclay, commanding His Majesty's schooner *King Philip* and the sloop-of-war *Pearl*, bore a written commission from Governor Spottiswoode of the Sovereign Colony of Virginia. It authorized him to take the pirate, destroy his ship, and wipe out his crew. None of the colonists being willing to pilot his ships across the dangerous shoals and sandbars guarding Ocracoke Inlet, on the North Carolina Coast, he had come ashore himself to reconnoiter.

Unobserved, he reached a window at the rear of the inn. He peered inside, and the sight that met his eyes made his gorge rise.

A group of villainous-looking seamen were gathered in a half-circle upon the floor of the tap-room. A blind negro slave scraped at a fiddle. At one end of the room, seated upon an inverted hogshead of rum, was a mountainous man whose face was the most sinister

Barclay had ever seen. He sat enthroned like a king of hell.

A brace of pistols were thrust in the wide sash around his waist, and a cutlass hung suspended from a leather harness that crossed diagonally over his cask-like chest. The lower half of his face was masked behind a great fan-like black beard and his eyes were alight with a fiendish glow.

Before him a young girl cringed in abject terror. Her long, wavy brown hair fell about her slender shoulders like a cascade of water; and only her tremendous fear marred the beauty of her youthful features. Her hips were lithe and narrow, and her breasts firm beneath the tight lacing of her bodice.

He heard the enthroned, black-bearded man roar out, "God's blood! She's my wife, and she shall do as I command!" At which the girl cowered and cried out once more.

She raised her eyes in supplication and in pleading, "Edward!" she whispered. "You would not have me do this—before all these men—"

"Strip, I said . . . Strip, wench, before I flay the living skin from your white body!" "God's wounds, but I shall show these rascals what a pretty trollop you are!"

The girl trembled. "I—I cannot—!" she whimpered.

Then the black-bearded man leaped from his hogshead with a

OF DEATH

The girl loved Blackbeard the pirate, even though he whipped her before his men. It was only after Barclay rescued her that she learned another meaning of love



To his surprise he saw the girl who was Captain Teach's wife—standing beside her husband.

lightness, a swiftness that belied his vast bulk. He reached forth, snatching at the girl's garment. He ripped it downward.

She tried to cover her breasts with her tiny hands, but the black-bearded man gave her a buffet across the face with the flat of his tremendous hand. The blow knocked her sprawling.

AS Barclay peered through the inn's window, his own hand went toward his belt, seeking his pistol. He desired nothing more than to send a ball crashing through the bearded man's gross skull. But his fingers encountered nothing; and then he remembered that he had come ashore unarmed, in order to allay any possible suspicion. For a moment he contemplated leaping into the room, flinging himself to the girl's defense. But such a move would be folly, he knew full well. They were twenty to one against him, and they were all armed to the teeth.

He continued to watch, beating down the surging anger that rose almost uncontrollably to his temples. He saw the bearded man's hands grasp at the girl's long hair. His fingers entwined themselves viciously in those soft tresses. Brutally he dragged her to her feet. And then, there before all those grinning villians, he ripped the dress from her body.

Despite Barclay's rage, he could not help drinking in the charming contours of the girl's revealed figure. Her legs and thighs were as white as the sands of Florida's reefs, and as smooth as flowing honey. Her hips were boyish and

yet feminine; her stomach flat and flawless. In all the days of his seafaring Barclay had never seen a figure more perfect.

"Now, you vixen!" the bearded man roared out. "Dance! Dance, as you dance for me in the cabin of my schooner."

At his words the blind slave scraped at his fiddle; and then the girl began to dance, slowly, sinuously, with the grace of paradise itself—the grace of paradise, and the blood-stirring earthiness of a woman of the streets. Her breasts swayed, and her body, her hips, undulated in sensuous simulation. She raised her sweet arms over her head. Her half-clothed body was like a flame that set fire to a man's veins.

"Faster! Faster, ye trollop!" the bearded man bellowed. He snatched at a short whip that dangled from the belt of one of his followers. He snapped it out, brought it stinging down across the cringing girl's bare white shoulders. The rawhide left a red weal, like a crimson brand against the snow-like purity of her flesh. Like a devil's mark.

Over the roaring laughter of the men who watched, Barclay heard a grog-cracked voice say, "A fitting entertainment indeed—We'll have it in our minds' eyes when we come to grips with Barclay's ships-of-war in the morning!"

"Barclay!" the bearded man snorted contemptuously. "I'll keel-haul him and blow him out of the water tomorrow!"

BARCLAY'S eyes narrowed. Then the presence of his vessels outside the shoals was known

here! This, then was the reason why no colonist would dare pilot his two ships into the inlet; his bosun's tale had been correct. And the bearded man's words confirmed something he had already known full well. He—with his barrel chest and great beard and piercing eyes—he was Captain Teach himself. He was Blackbeard, the man Barclay had come to destroy!

Again the pirate lifted the whip; again brought it down across the girl's naked back. She wailed and tried to escape him. "Dance!" he snarled at her. "Dance, I say!" He whipped her legs, so that perforce she must raise and lower them swiftly to avoid the stinging lashes he dealt her.

Barclay could stand it no longer. He turned from the window, ready to fling himself through the doorway of the inn, launch himself headlong into that evil company. And as he turned, he brushed against a crouching form.

It was a youth, white-faced and grim. In the gloom he had crept up silently behind Barclay; had watched, over his shoulders, the scene inside the taproom. Now he snatched at a pistol in his belt. The youth raised it, cocked it, and fired. The report was deafening.

A ball went screaming through the window. Through the acrid cloud of smoke that veiled Barclay's vision and stung his nostrils, he saw, Blackbeard leap sideways as the slug smashed into the far wall of the taproom.

Barclay whirled on the youth, grasped at his smoking pistol, wrenched it from him. "You fool!" he said sharply. "Why did you do

that? Now they will punish you—"

"That girl—she is my sister!" the youth answered in a trembling voice.

Barclay pushed the youth. "Run!" he commanded. "Run, before they find you here. These are dangerous men, boy." He grasped his shoulders, spun him around, sent him flying.

The youth disappeared in the darkness just as Blackbeard's men boiled out of the taproom. Yelling like fiends from hell, the buccaneers rounded the corner of the inn. They saw Barclay standing there, alone, with the smoking pistol still in his hand.

Blackbeard strode up to him, his cutlass raised. He darted the razor-sharp end of the blade at his throat. "Zounds, ye dog!" he roared in his great, bellowing voice. His eyes were pin-points of fire, and his bearded lips were twisted in a savage, vindictive snarl. "Ye'd take a shot from ambush at Captain Teach, would ye?"

Barclay met his gaze squarely. "Tis a pity I missed," He told him with all the boldness he could muster.

For an instant, he thought the pirate was going to run him through. Then Blackbeard's blade lowered, and his mouth widened in a savage grin. "God's wounds, but the man has nerve!" he cried out. He stared at him. "Who be ye?"

Barclay's heart leaped. Blackbeard had not recognized him then; did not know that he was Richard Barclay, Lieutenant in His Majesty's Navy. Had he known, the pirate would have spitted him on the points of his cutlass without

hesitation. But at it was, his anonymity and his effrontery had given him time.

BARCLAY stared back with an arrogance he was far from feeling. He said, "My name is Smith—and I do not happen to like the color of your damnable eyes, Captain Teach!"

Blackbeard actually took a backward step at the venom Barclay put into his words. And then he roared with laughter, so that his entire, great body shook. "Blood and death, but ye've hot blood!" he bellowed.

"Would that my aim had been as fair as my courage!" Barclay said evenly.

The pirate raised his heavy, bushy brows. "A fighting-cock, I trow—and no mistake! Hell's bones, but I think I shall test your courage, Mister Smith. We'll see how well it wears!" He turned to his evil followers. "Seize him and pinion him, my hearties! We'll take him out to the schooner; and when dawn comes, we'll see if his knees knock together when he walks the plank!"

Many hands were upon Barclay, bearing him down to earth. He felt strong lines being passed around his wrists and ankles, gy- ing him. And then he was lifted, carried to a waiting long-boat, flung roughly into its scuppers. Blackbeard and his villainous crew piled into the boat; the men laid hold of the oars.

Moments later, Barclay was carried aboard Teach's anchored schooner, with its skull and cross-bones floating from the mast-head in the white light of the moon.

He was thrust into a noxious chamber, deep in the stinking hold of the ship. He was left alone.

This gave Barclay time to gather his wits. He took stock of his situation, and found it desperate indeed. He was a prisoner in Blackbeard's piratical hands, and he would walk the plank at dawn. That would be the end of Richard Barclay! he thought.

And yet—he was still alive; and while a spark of breath remained in his lungs, all hope could not yet be lost. His tactics in outfacing Captain Teach had won him a night's reprieve, at least. That much he had gained.

He tested his bonds; but they had been well tied. And in the deep darkness of his prison he could find nothing with which he might sever them. For a long time he lay silent, conserving his strength, planning desperately.

And then, after hours had passed, he heard the door of his prison open slowly and cautiously.

A dim, shadowy figure approached him as he lay sprawled and helpless. It leaned over him. He felt a pannikin of water at his lips. "Drink!" a soft whisper bade him.

He drank thankfully, for his lips and mouth were parched. When he had drained the last sweet drop he whispered, "Who are you—and why do you do this for me?"

"I—I am Captain Teach's wife. And I owe you this much for having saved me from my humiliation there at the inn."

At once, he knew her for the girl who had danced, nude, in the tap-



room, under the cruel urge of Blackbeard's whip. And a plan leaped full-blown into his mind. He spoke to her once again, in a silent whisper. "Do you know why I fired that shot through the window?"

"Why did you?" she asked.

"Because I could not bear to see you treated so cruelly. Because you are so beautiful. Because I

It was the moment Barclay had been waiting for. He leaped in, ran his sword home.

could not bear to think of you being displayed before all those villains!"

"You—you make pretty speeches, sirrah," she flattered.

"A pretty girl has evoked them, lass," he answered. Then, "Per-

haps it is just as well that I am bound and helpless."

"Why?" she asked him.

"Were my arms free, I would sweep you into them and smother your sweet mouth with kisses!" he said boldly.

She drew a sharp breath. "You are an arrogant rogue!"

"I am a man in love." Barclay answered.

"What—what would you do if you were freed?"

His heart leaped in his throat. "I would seize you and taste the loveliness of your lips!" he told her.

She was silent a long while. Then he heard her hand rustle toward him; felt a sharp blade slicing into the ropes at his wrists and ankles. Suddenly he was free, ungagged. "Make good your boasts!" the girl whispered daringly.

He reached toward her in the solid darkness. Beneath his feet, the ship rolled lazily in the slow ground-swell. He found the girl, clasped her in his arms, drew her toward him. She came, not unwillingly. Her slender figure was clad in but a single garment—a clinging shift of heavy Oriental silk. Through it he could feel the sweeping contours of her firm breasts, the lithe smoothness of her hips . . . he kissed her.

Her lips parted, her arms went about his neck.

LATER, he said "Come with me. We will escape together—get away from Captain Teach—"

She arose, pushed herself out of his seeking arms. "No. I—I fear him—"

"You fear him. You are false

to him. But you love him!" he accused her. "In spite of his cruelties. Am I not right?" he said.

"Y-yes!" she admitted ruefully in the darkness.

Barclay understood. There are some women who are made that way. He kissed her once more in farewell. Then he slipped out through the open door of his prison, gained the upper deck of the ship. Unobserved and unhalting and unchallenged, he went over the rail and into the smooth waters of the inlet. He swam past the shoals, out toward his own anchored vessels.

Soon he was once more in the cabin of his own schooner, safely escaped from Blackbeard's clutches. On the morrow, he would attempt to take his two ships through the sand-bars, even though he had no pilot to guide the way. Then, if fortune were with him, he would come to grips with Captain Teach.

AT DAWN a boat scraped alongside his schooner. The lookout raised a warning cry. He leaped from his cabin, out to the deck.

He stared down at the small boat that had come alongside. And in the growing grey light, he recognized its lone passenger.

It was the youth he had saved, back at the inn. The youth who had fired at Blackbeard, through the taproom window. The youth whose pistol he had taken; whose blame Barclay had assumed.

The youth clambered aboard. When he saw and recognized Barclay, he tensed. He said "You—! What are you doing here?"

Barclay smiled at the youth and

said. "I am Lieutenant Barclay, boy. Commander of this ship. Might I ask you the same question you have asked me, "what are you doing here?"

The youth was pale and obviously nervous. "I—I came to offer my services, sir," he said in his trembling treble voice.

"Your services?"

"Yes, sir. I—I know the channel fairly well. You seek a pilot, so that you may enter the inlet and attack Blackbeard's ship. I—I think I can guide your vessels safely through the shoals."

Barclay smiled. "Do you realize what the consequences will be to yourself, lad, if Teach and his men happen to win the fight? They'll make you rue the day you ever helped me!"

"I—I'll take that chance, sir," the youth answered.

"Why should you run such a risk?" he asked the youth.

"Because—because Teach married my sister; and even though she loves him insanelly, he mistreats her. Cruelly. Therefore I want to kill him. And besides—now that I know who you are, sir, I have another reason for desiring to aid you. I owe you a debt. You saved me last night, from the consequences of my folly—when I fired at Captain Teach."

Barclay patted the youth's shoulder, and said, "Very well, you shall pilot the vessel through the shoals."

WITH the lad to pilot them their two ships crept slowly through the shoal-waters. When they had reached a point perhaps a mile distant from Captain

Teach's vessels, the inlet grew too shallow for them to venture any further with sail. Accordingly they furled their canvas and moved forward under the impetus of their long sweeps.

Behind Barclay's ship, the other vessel under his command hung to their stern. Through Barclay's glass, he perceived that Blackbeard had run up his Jolly Roger; and that he had unfurled his sails as though in preparation to come forth and meet them. But he had not yet drawn in his anchor.

Barclay's mate came to him on the poop. He saluted. "Sir," he said, "I beg to report that the shoals are very nearly scraping the keel. Me thinks that lad doesn't know the channel as well as he pretends—or else he's a traitor deliberately running us aground—"

Even as the mate spoke, Barclay felt a sudden soft jar and jerk; then his schooner lay still. They were fast on a sand-bar!

Barclay looked astern. His other ship, the sloop *Pearl*, had come to similar grief!

"Let go your sheets!" he roared angrily. "Push her off the lee!" His bosun spun his wheel desperately; a dozen men leaped for the sweeps, plunged them into the water. But the sweeps only sank into the mud, rolling the water a dirty brown.

The mate came running dragging the youth with him—the lad who had piloted them into peril. "It's his fault!" the second in command rasped. "He's got us into this!"

The lad was white-faced. Barclay reached forth, clutched his

shoulders, yanked him into his cabin. "Take off your shirt!" he said harshly.

"Wh-what?"

"Off with your shirt! I'm going to give you ten lashes for this day's work!" He reached for his nine-thonged cat-whip.

The youth went white. "Please, sir—"

"Take off your shirt or I'll rip it off you!" he said.

The youth's fingers went to the buttons of his shirt, unfastened them. He pulled the garment off over his head—

Barclay stared. He said, "God in heaven! A girl!"

She stood before him; and as he saw the loveliness of her small, perfect breasts, the whiteness of her slender body. He suddenly realized that she was beautiful. Her face had an elfin wistful quality, and her eyes were wide and blue. He wondered how he could ever have been deceived by her boy's garments . . . wondered how he could ever have mistaken her sex, despite her shortcut hair, her masculine breeches.

She came toward him slowly, and her eyes were wet with tears. "Please—believe me!" she whispered. "I did not run you aground purposely—"

He stared at her, too amazed to be other than silent and wordless.

A GAIN she spoke. "What I told you was true, Lieutenant Barclay. Captain Teach's wife is my sister. And I wanted to kill him, so that she would be released from his cruelty—" She touched his arm, and he felt fire dart through his veins. She was like her sister,

in a way; the same features, the same lovely breasts, the same white skin . . . only softer, more beautiful, less full-blown. A wave of longing swept over him, unaccountably. Then, because he could not hold himself, he took her into his arms.

She clung to him. He would have kissed her—

He heard a thunderous pounding on the door of his cabin. "Lieutenant Barclay, the pirate is approaching, sir!" the mate shouted.

Barclay leaped for the door. "Remain here!" he told the girl. Then he left her, launched himself out upon the deck.

Blackbeard's schooner was within a quarter-mile of them, and the distance was narrowing. Barclay could see the muzzles of his four cannonades and his single long-gun.

He cupped his hands and roared a command across the still water. "Heave to, Captain Teach!" he called. "Heave to, and surrender in the name of the King and of Governor Spottiswoode of Virginia!"

"Governor Spottiswoode has no authority in North Carolina!" Blackbeard roared back his defiant challenge. "This territory is governed by Governor Eden!"

"Then in the name of the King, I bid you surrender!"

"To hell with the King!" Captain Teach bellowed through his great black beard. By now the pirate was almost upon them. He turned to his villainous crew. "Let 'em have it, by God's blood!"

Barclay's men were still pushing frantically at their sweeps, en-

deavoring to get them free of the bar. Already their schooner was beginning to slide off, to move a little. Barclay yelled a command. "Leave the sweeps! Man your guns! Stand by to repel boarders!"

His crew leaped to their stations. And at that instant, Blackbeard gave them a broadside. Barclay heard a deafening, thunderous crash as the four cannonades belched fire and smoke; then like a mighty echo, the single long-gun spewed flame.

Through the smoke that enveloped them like a drifting cloud, Barclay saw a round half-dozen of his men go down in pools of blood that stained the white decks. There was a crashing and rending of broken wood, and clean yellow splinters flew through the air like pistol-balls.

Now Barclay's men were training their guns upon Teach's ship. "Fire!" he cried as loudly as he could. Torches were applied to torch-holes; his cannon roared out their flaming answer to Blackbeard's broadside.

The shock of their massed fire, added to the impact of the pirate's volley against their hull, freed them at last from the clutching grip of the sand-spit upon which they had grounded. They floated free. As the clouds of gunpowder smoke drifted away in the morning breeze, Barclay saw that they were almost hull to hull with Teach's ship. His men were racing wildly about the deck. He saw the glitter of grappling-hooks as they prepared to board.

They were too close for cannon-fire now. A rattle of musketry

burst from Blackbeard's men, and sloop *Pearl*, still hard aground; could render the *King Philip* no help. And Blackbeard's men outnumbered Barclay's men three to two.

"Muskets and pistols!" he roared. "Give them hell!"

His crew was firing their pieces as fast as they could load and pull trigger. Captain Teach's pirates returned their fire viciously.

Abruptly, Barclay saw something that brought a cry of surprise to his lips. The brown-haired girl who was Captain Teach's wife was standing beside her black-bearded husband—and she held a pistol in each hand! She raised the twin weapons. They belched streaks of flame. Barclay felt a ball sting into his thigh, just burning the skin.

And then the girl suddenly stiffened, swayed. Her pistols dropped to the deck. She clutched at her breast; Barclay saw a glint of red trickling between her fingers. She sank down, slowly.

She had been struck by a musket-bullet fired by one of Barclay's crew!

And at that instant, the two vessels ground together.

BLACKEBEARD'S men leaped railward with their grappling-hooks, bound the ships together. Barclay saw the pirates swarming over his rail, cutlasses and pistols in their fists, knives clenched between their savage jaws. And at their head, leading them, was Captain Teach—Blackbeard—the first man to set foot on the *King Philip*'s deck!

(Continued on page 111)

TROPIC TROUBLE

CHRIS BARRY followed the girl toward one of the anchored sponge-boats, stepped onto its bobbing deck. She went into a blue painted cabin. He trailed along behind her. She closed and locked the cabin door.

"Sit down," she said.

Barry sat on the edge of a bunk. "You called me a beach comber," he said, puzzled. "You didn't like me because I knocked hell out of that giant of a fellow out there on the beach—what is he, anyway?"

"I think he's an East Indian. I'm not sure."

"Okay, you invite me in here to talk about a job. What is it?"

She parried. "Did you whip him in a fair fight?"

"He came at me with a razor and ordered me away from the boats." Barry shrugged. "The beach is free. I just knocked him down."

"That's all I wanted to know."

He stared at her with narrowing eyes. Deliberately, while he watched her, she slipped down the straps of her overalls. She kicked out of them. Now she was clad solely in step-ins and a lace brassiere.

Barry stared and blood pounded in his wrists. She undulated before him. Her firm bosom swayed

gently. Her eyes met Barry. "Well?" she said flatly.

Barry got up. He went to the door. "To hell with you, my dear," he said.

She laughed and slipped back into the overalls. She opened a drawer and extracted a heavy, old-fashioned revolver. "If you had made a move toward me, I'd have shot you," she smiled quietly.

"Women don't interest me that much."

"I'm glad. Because I need a man like you on this boat. A man who can handle his fists. A man who isn't likely to think he owns every woman he sees."

Barry smiled faintly. "When do we sail?"

"Tonight at full tide. You can bring your duffel on board any time."

"I have no duffel." His eyes mocked her.

"Have you eaten recently?"

"Not very recently."

"I'll cook you some lunch. You can go up on deck and wait."

Barry went on deck. He stared toward the beach. The brown man had disappeared. After a while, the dark-haired girl brought him a bowl of soup and a sandwich. He wolfed the food.

Afterward, he strolled about the

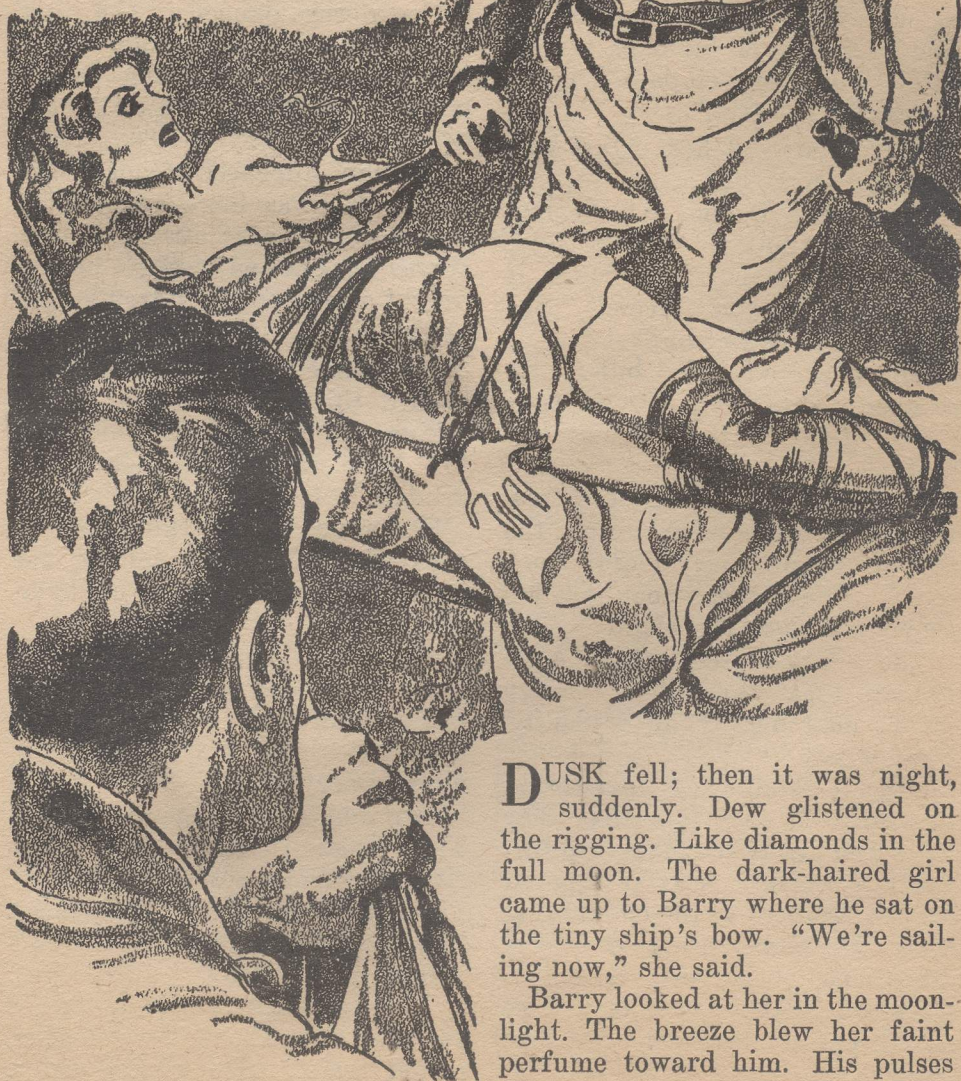
Women didn't interest Barry—he said. And it was on that ground that he got a job as bodyguard to a lovely girl. But even she didn't know how dangerous the mystery cruise was going to be

By CHARLES DANE

neat deck. There was an open port-hole. He glanced in. He saw a man lying on a bunk. The man was old; and his heavy face was more grey than his hair. He lay very still, very quiet.

Barry's eyes narrowed. He walked on, whistling soundlessly.

He plunged through the doorway into the cabin where the girl lay helpless before the mate.



DUSK fell; then it was night, suddenly. Dew glistened on the rigging. Like diamonds in the full moon. The dark-haired girl came up to Barry where he sat on the tiny ship's bow. "We're sailing now," she said.

Barry looked at her in the moonlight. The breeze blew her faint perfume toward him. His pulses

quicken. "What's my job?" he asked quietly. "Deck-hand?"

She shook her head. "No. Body-guard."

"Whose?"

"Mine."

"You already have a full crew?"

The girl nodded.

"Then you don't need me. You've been wasting my time." He stepped toward the dock.

She touched his arm. Again he felt that strange thrill course through him at the contact of her slender fingers on his bare, tanned skin. "You'll be well paid. Twenty dollars for the trip."

Barry stared at her. "Just who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm Alice Doone. At the moment, I'm master of this ship. Here's your money in advance, if that's what you mean." She handed him two crumpled tens.

He pocketed the bills. He grinned, shrugged. "It's your show. Ring up the curtain," he said.

She went aft, directed the crew to cast off. Sails were run up; the tiny boat's auxiliary motor sputtered. The sponge-boat headed slowly out into the river.

The dark-haired girl, Alice Doone, took the tiller. Barry stayed near her. That, evidently, was his job.

Hours later the increasing ground-swell told him that they were well out in the Gulf. Up forward a seaman heaved tapered leads overboard at the end of long lines. He hauled them in slowly measuring them with his outstretched arms. "Seventeen!" he called out. "Seventeen fathoms. Sand!"

The boat cruised slowly, feeling for the bar. It was dawn when they found it. Pulverized white coral clung to the tapered lead as it was drawn inboard. "Bar! Sixteen fathoms!" the seaman called. Then he said "Twelve fathoms! Eight! Seven!"

"Cast anchor!" the dark-haired girl's husky voice whipped out sharply.

Anchor-chains rattled as the hook splashed the water; brown flecks of rust danced in the pink-tinted morning from the uncoiling links. The girl, Alice Doone, lashed the tiller. "Sam!" she called out.

A man appeared from below decks. He was huge and sinewy and brown. Barry stared at him. It was the man with whom he had fought on the beach! Barry looked at the girl.

She smiled. "Sam's first mate aboard this tub. But you're not taking his orders. Just look out for him, that's all. He bears grudges a long time."

She went to the rail. Barry's eyes widened. Very calmly, she unfastened the buttons of her overalls, stepped out of them.

She was like a goddess in the rising sun. Her half-naked body was a hymn to the dawn—curving, pink-and-white, exquisitely feminine. Barry's eyes went to the brown man whose name was Sam. The East Indian's gaze was riveted upon the girl's lovely form.

Barry frowned darkly. He didn't like the hungry look he had surprised in the brown man's eyes.

The dark-haired girl lashed a coil of line about her slender, naked waist. She picked up a

heavy knife, clenched it between strong white teeth. In her hand she held the end of another coiled line. She climbed to the rail, poised there for a brief, flashing instant. Barry looked at her, drank in the sheer loveliness of her breasts, her hips. . . Then she dived.

HER lithe body cut into the water like a javelin. Sam, rolled swaggering over to the spot from which she had dived.

She was gone a long time—so long that Barry began to worry. Then her sleek head bobbed up, a few yards from the boat. She swam lazily toward the craft, hauled herself over the rail.

The brown man pulled at the length of line. Its end emerged, dripping, from the water. Attached to it were three or four black-skinned sponges, puny and worthless.

The girl shook herself. Beads of water sprayed from her. Her grey eyes were troubled. "It's no good. Sponges aren't of commercial quality." Her voice was bitter, frustrated.

"I guess we'll have to do Athinkos' bidding, after all!"

She went down into the blue-printed cabin. Barry stared after her. He frowned.

Sam went to the tiller, unlashd it. "Up anchor!" he rasped. "Set sail!"

Barry paced the deck as the little sponge-boat headed south-east. He was beginning to understand certain mysteries. Not all, but some.

All day the tiny craft nosed southward through the ground-

swells under the kick of its auxiliary gasoline engine. Swift tropic dusk fell. The blue-black sky was abruptly studded with stars.

Barry remained outside the blue-painted cabin. Alice Doone had not emerged all day.

And then, suddenly, the brown mate shouted, "Furl sails! Cast anchor!" Barry started forward through the dark night. He saw the riding-lights of a schooner anchored off a key.

He felt a puff of wind against his cheek. He looked upward. Clouds scudded across the sky like racing ghosts. The ground-swell grew more pronounced.

Alice Doone came out of the cabin. She held a lantern. Barry followed her to the rail. She wiggled the light, signaled with it. Then she turned to Barry. "Got to hurry this job. The glass is falling. Going to be a storm."

Barry heard the drone of a power-boat as it put off from the anchored schooner beyond the dark key. Five minutes later the power-boat grated against the sealing sides of the sponge-boat. "Lower a line!" a rasping voice commanded.

Sam, the mate, went to the rail. Barry watched, pulses racing strangely. He watched as load after load of small, oval cans were hoisted aboard the sponge-boat. Then the rasping voice of the man in the power-speedster said. "That's all. Fifteen grand worth of the stuff. Tell Athinkos he's getting a bargain." The power-boat's multi-cylindere motor roared; the narrow craft needled outward through the night, back

toward the anchored schooner in the distance.

Silently, Barry watched while Alice Doone superintended the stowing of those little oval cans below decks. Then she turned to the brown mate. "Let's get going. We may be able to outrun the storm—with luck!"

She went below, back into the cabin. Barry attempted to follow her. She flashed him an enigmatic glance. "You stay outside the door," she whispered. "Keep your eyes open." She vanished within the cabin.

OVERHEAD, the blue-black sky was now completely blotted out by flying grey clouds. Under the brown mate's orders, the crew unfurled two sails—a squat, loose-footed mainsail and the miniature mizzen, boomkin-rigged over the stern. Idly the canvas flapped for a single instant; then it bellied out under a puffing gust of wind. There was rain in that sudden gust—black, warm drops that beat a tattoo on the decks and on the canvas. Barry shivered. He could feel the deck lifting and falling under him, with a pitching motion. The hull shuddered under the pounding of the auxiliary.

Now the rain fell in slanting the seas rose higher. Wind whipped bits of white scud from the tops of the swells, pelted them against the hull of the sponge-boat as it wallowed forward like a fat cow. Abruptly the wind rose to a shrieking crescendo, wailed through the rigging. Barry heard a splitting of canvas, a sharp report. He stared upward. The squat mainsail blew in tattered

pennants from the swaying mast! And then, suddenly, Barry heard another report—from within the blue-painted cabin. It was the bark of a heavy pistol!

He flung himself at the cabin door. The barrier was bolted from within; his hard, muscular body bounced back achingly from the smashing impact. Ominously, eerily, the wind wailed; and then Barry heard a woman's terrified scream!

He lunged upward to the deck, stared through the cabin's port-hole. It was the cabin in which he had seen the grey-faced man lying on a bunk, earlier that day. Now, in the dim, flickering light of a binnacle lamp, he saw something that sent his heart into his throat.

The grey-faced man hung limply, half out of his berth. There was a bullet-hole squarely between his staring, sightless eyes!

Barry lunged toward the next port-hole, stared into Alice Doone's dimly-lighted quarters. His features went white.

The girl had been tied to her bunk by Sam, the brown mate! The huge East Indian had ripped most of the clothing from her body; now he pawed at her with his great, ape-like hands. His lips sought to capture her frantically evasive mouth. She screamed again terror-stricken, cringing away from his twisted features with ineffectual fists.

Barry acted. He knew that the brown man could not have entered the cabin from the forward door, because Barry himself had been standing guard there. Consequently there must be another entrance. He braced himself

against the pitching sway of the deck, lunged aft.

He came to a companionway, plunged downward. He found a door, smashed it open. Now he was in the cabin where the grey-faced dead man lay. A door led into the adjoining room. Barry leaped for it.

It was locked. He backed off, gathered his sinewy muscles, plunged his hard body against the barrier. It crashed inward with a splintering sound.

The brown mate whirled, faced Barry with a vicious snarl of animal hatred. He raised his hand, pointed a heavy pistol at Barry's heart. He squeezed the trigger.

Barry ducked, launched himself forward like a hurled projectile. He felt a stinging slug smash into his arm. He grunted. The East Indian fired again. But this time Barry was upon him; knocked the gun's muzzle upward. The bullet smashed into the overhead.

Barry's body locked against the brown man's. He felt the mate's knee come up, thud viciously into the pit of his stomach. A wave of nausea gripped at him. He staggered, righted himself. The sponge-boat heeled over ominously under the impact of a giant comber.

Barry closed in, left arm wounded and dangling and useless, right fist smashing piston-like blows into distorted, insane features. The East Indian gave ground, spat bloody froth from between twisted, battered lips. Barry followed inexorably. Again and again his hard knuckles crunched against the other's crimson-dripping mouth.

Then the mate struggled free, managed to get his pistol down to firing position. He took wavering aim. "Now," he snarled thickly. . . .

Barry swerved. There was a heavy brass ink-stand on the table beside him. He snatched at it with a lightning motion, just as his antagonist fired. The slug whistled viciously past Barry's ear. Barry leaped forward, swung the brass ink-stand in a venomous trajectory, smashed it down against the brown man's hard skull.

It crashed home with the sound of a dull axe splitting into a coconut. The mate cried out horribly, staggered. A wide, jagged split showed in his skull. He went down, quivered, lay still.

BARRY stepped over the corpse, leaned down over the white-featured girl on the couch-berth. He released her, and she clung to him frantically. He lifted her with his one good arm. She pressed her almost naked body close to him; he could feel the quivering of her taut breasts against his chest. "He—he killed my father" she sobbed.

Barry nodded. "Yes. And I killed him." His pulses stirred as the fragrance of the girl's dark hair reached his nostrils. "Did he—?"

"N-no." she whispered faintly in answer to his unfinished question. Then she looked into Barry's eyes. "Now you know why I wanted you on this voyage—why I needed a bodyguard!"

"You feared him from the start?"

"Y-yes."

"Then why did you permit him aboard your boat?"

"I—I had to. You see, my father owned this ship. But he had mortgaged it to a Greek named Athinkos. The mortgage was overdue. Athinkos demanded either the boat—or—that my father make a trip out to a certain key, take aboard a cargo of—contraband opium! My father had to agree; he didn't want to lose his boat. Then at the last minute, my father was taken seriously ill. It was my duty to step into his shoes, command the voyage for him. But Athinkos insisted on placing one of his own men aboard, to make sure we followed instructions."

"And Sam was Athinkos' representative?"

The girl nodded. "Yes. I had to sign him on as mate. That's why I engaged you. I was afraid of him and I had seen you whip him with your naked fists!"

Barry's eyes narrowed. "But—you actually did dive for sponges!"

"Yes. It was a last desperate hope. If I could have brought up a good cargo. I wouldn't have had to take on the opium deal. . . But the sponges I found were valueless."

Barry gazed toward the still form of the giant East Indian on the floor. "I'm beginning to see it all now," he gritted. "Sam, the mate, saw a chance to double-cross his real employer, Athinkos; planned to capture the boat and make off with that fifteen thousand dollars' worth of opium. Also, he saw a chance to attack you."

His arm went protectingly about Alice Doone's lithe, bare waist. He pulled her toward him, thrilled

to the contact with her lovely form. Then, unexpectedly, her bare white arms encircled his neck, drew his head downward toward her parted lips. . . .

For a long moment they kissed. His one good hand caressed her lovely body, tenderly, gently. He kissed her mouth, her shoulders. . . .

She clung to him in a sudden ecstasy of newly-aroused passion. . . .

AFTER a long time, she pushed him away. Her eyes clouded; her red lower lip trembled. At that same moment, the sponge-boat careened over at a dangerous angle. "I—I must bring the boat safely into port. It is the last service I can do for—my father."

She donned her overalls. Barry followed her up to the deck. He stared about him.

Overhead, the clouds were thinning; the wind had died perceptibly. The seas were running smoother now; the storm was definitely waning. Barry followed the girl aft to the tiller. She relieved the weary seaman at the helm. Barry remained at her side through the balance of the night. . . .

It was dawn when finally they nosed in at their river anchorage. The girl stared across the docks. "There's Athinkos now!" she whispered. "In that blue sedan. He's come for his cargo of opium!"

Barry nodded. In the growing light of the new day, he stood aside while a swarthy-featured Greek stepped aboard the little sponge-boat, spoke softly to Alice

Doone. Barry watched while the swarthy man loaded the little oval cans into the blue sedan. . . .

And then, when the last can had been stowed within the automobile, Barry stepped forward. His hand dived into his ragged trousers, emerged with a small, flat automatic. "All right, Athinkos. Stick 'em up high. You're under arrest for illegal possession of narcotics!"

The Greek paled. "Wh-what? Who are you?" he gasped.

"Chris Barry of the Bureau of Internal Revenue." Barry barked sharply. Steel glittered in the rising sun as he pulled handcuffs from his pocket.

The dark-haired Alice Doone stared at Barry. "You—a revenue agent?" she whispered through

dry lips. "Then—that was why you were hanging around the river-front? You were hoping for just such a break as you got?"

Barry nodded slowly. "That's about it."

"And—I suppose you're going to take me to jail, too?" she sobbed.

Barry smiled. "No. But as soon as I get Athinkos safely in the hoosegow, I'm coming to take you somewhere else, my dear."

She stared at him wonderingly. "Whe—where?"

He smiled; and into his mind's eye there leaped a remembrance of that scene in the cabin of the sponge-boat, when he had held her in his arms . . . "I'm going to take you to the nearest minister!" he chuckled.

In our Next Issue

"Inca Gold"

**An exciting yarn
of high adventure
by
LEW MERRILL**

ONE FOR A MILLION

"SHANGHAIED," muttered Ted Carter, sitting up in the bunk and holding a throbbing head. He hadn't dreamed it, after all. Dimly he remembered a bar; a whiskered roughneck, an amber girl. Drinks of all colors.

No, he wasn't back in the Sleepy J bunkhouse, where he'd been a cowpuncher; he wasn't back in Frisco, where he'd ended up with rodeo prizes. He wasn't even in Honolulu, where he'd taken a trip to spend those prizes. He was on board ship. "Hey!" he yelled. Oaths and moans answered. Ted looked about the timbered hold. A sailing vessel.

A hoarse voice said, "We're kidnaped. They gave us Mickey Finns and took us aboard to sail this ship."

The owner of the hoarse voice, a huge, fat man with a bald head, sat on the edge of his bunk and asked, "How'd *you* get here?"

"I thought I'd try a side trip through some of the islands, and landed at one. Got to drinking. That's all."

A compact Japanese appeared from another bunk, then, from another, a slender, pale youngster with a mop of gold hair. "Did you say shanghaied?" quavered the youngster.

"That's right," squeaked the bald-headed one in mockery. He arose and reached out to pat the youngster's cheek. "No whiskers,"

he sneered. The youngster struck away the palm with a slim white hand.

"Let the kid alone," growled Ted.

"What's it to you, farmer?" Bald Head turned on him.

"Don't call me farmer," said Ted, and dashed his knotted right fist straight to the puffy chin. The blow popped like a breaking stick, the bully's feet skated from under him and he went sprawling.

The boy, watching, grew paler still, gave a little sigh and swayed into the arms of Ted.

"Fainted," said the red-head listlessly. "Get him a bucket of sea-water."

Ted had thrown most of his strength after that punch, but he managed to drag the limp, slender form to his bunk and stretch it out. He thrust his hand into the coarse shirt to feel for the heart.

Then he gasped, blinked and shook his head as if dizzy.

FOR he had touched a soft, round sphere, deliciously formed and feminine. His hand slipped out as if burned, and he flushed. The eyes opened—violet eyes, beautiful ones.

"Take it easy, miss," he whispered.

The eyes grew horrified. "How did you find out?"

"Never mind. Don't let the others know."

"I won't. Sorry I was sick."

By HAROLD RICE

Death grinned from the masthead—at this girl of weird beauty, mistress of a ship of mutiny. But there's many a double-cross betwixt the stem and the stern!

"Listen," he said, "I fought for you once. I still want to help."



Her smile was weak but lovely. "I'm afraid I had some of that drugged liquor, too."

A bellow sounded at Ted's shoulder. The bald-headed one was up again. "I'll kill you—" he began.

At that moment a hatchway opened at the top of a ladderlike flight of stairs.

"Tumble up, you scum!" roared a voice above. "Hit the deck, and lively's the word!"

Bald-Head forgot Ted in his rush for the stairs. The red-haired one and the Jap followed in groggy haste. Ted helped the girl onto her feet, set her on the steps and came up last of all.

The deck above them was shadowed by all the sail that could be crowded on three masts, carrying the vessel smoothly before a fresh breeze over a bright, gently swelling sea. "Aft! Get aft!" a squat, powerful-looking man in blue was bawling at them through a curly brown beard. The five of them obeyed.

They gathered at the mizzen-mast, looking up to where, on the poop, stood a figure at the wheel.

That figure would catch and hold the eye of any man that was a man—a goddess-like woman of golden bronze. Her Oriental jacket and trousers hugged her full-formed thighs, curving hips, swelling breasts. Slant eyes in an oval face and blue-black coils of hair betrayed Asiatic blood.

"I am your skipper, gentlemen," she said, throatily, mockingly. "Captain Hua Ta Fu. Welcome to the schooner *Caliban*. Mister Strunk and I got her under sail somehow. Now you'll keep her so, for a day or two."

She paused to let the irony bite in. "You're not a pretty crew, nor a big one, but I'll make you do. Obey orders and ask no questions or you'll rue your birth-dates. Any sailors among you?"

"Aye, aye," echoed the Jap. "Where are we bound?"

The big, bearded man stepped

to the Jap's side and struck with his open hand. The Jap fell as if stabbed to the heart.

"Didn't I say no questions?" reminded the woman silkily. "Stand ready to entertain others, Mister Strunk. I'll ease your curiosity this much, gentlemen. We're sailing nowhere."

Nobody commented. Ted started to, but fell silent. He didn't feel up to a fight with Strunk.

"Two of you will stand each watch. Mister Strunk, as mate you'll have the larboard, with Ponky and Red. I'll do with the Jap and—what's your name, there?"

"Ted Carter, ma'am," said Ted.

"What's your trade?"

"Cattle."

"And what's that behind you?"

The blonde girl had been trying to hide. Strunk dragged her into view. The almond eyes of the woman on the poop widened a bit.

"Thyra!" she exclaimed, and gazed a long minute. "Come up here," she ordered at last.

THE girl called Thyra walked walked fearlessly up the companionway and faced Hua Ta Fu across the wheel. "You didn't get rid of me," she said.

"Apparently the sharks weren't biting," commented the bronze goddess.

The blonde swung around and spoke to the group on the deck below.

"This woman is guilty of piracy," she charged. "The *Caliban* and her cargo belonged to my father. She sired him into declaring her a partner. Then she and Mr. Strunk poisoned him. I

found it out, and they threw me overboard, but I lived and swam to safety. I've hunted them down, dressed in man's clothing. Last night I was drugged like the rest of you. Won't you help me get my property back?"

"It's not your property now, Thyra," interrupted Hua Ta Fu. "You can't prove fraud or murder, and your daddy did name me his partner. Since you're here, you go to work—as cook."

"I'll never cook for you!" blazed Thyra.

Hua Ta Fu's strong hand shot out, tore Thyra's shirt from neck to waist. Shifting her clutch with lightning speed to the girl's shoulder, the Asaitic woman swung her so that the men below could see her white, heaving breasts.

"Pretty sight, eh?" cried Hua Ta Fu, crushing Thyra's shoulder to check her struggles. "Which of you wants her for a souvenir?"

Ponky recovered from his amazement. He stepped forward, eyes shining. "I'll take her, captain!" he cried.

TED leaped forward, white with rage, and clouted the man under the ear. Ponky spun clear around and slid along the deck, filling his face with splinters. He lay still.

Strunk growled and started for Ted, but Hua Ta Fu shouted for him to halt.

"That cowboy's all man, Mister Strunk, and we need him whole and sound for work. Let him be. Well, Thyra, what's your decision?"

Thyra yanked free with a sud-

den effort, pulling her torn shirt together.

"I'll cook—for the time being," she gritted. Walking down the companionway, she headed forward to the galley.

"You, Ted Carter, come here," was Hua Ta Fu's next speech. "I'll teach you to stand a trick at the wheel."

The others flew to various jobs at Strunk's bellows. Ted mounted the poop, came to the wheel and looked into the slant eyes of Hua Ta Fu. She was tall, almost as tall as he. She put out her hand to feel his biceps.

"Strong, aren't you? You cut that man Ponky down like a rotten tree."

"I don't like Ponky, ma'am," he said.

"Do you like me?" she queried, but he said nothing. "Well," she went on after a moment, "take the wheel."

He did so and she lectured on the art of steering. He went a point off the course and she corrected it, her hands over his. They were warm hands.

"You're learning fast," she said at length. "Smart, as well as strong. And good-looking."

"So I've heard, ma'am."

"I wonder if we'll get along—or maybe you're Thyra's boy friend."

"I hardly know her," said Ted.

She looked at him from the tail of her slant eye. Again her hands were on his to bring the ship back on the course and her firm, round breast pressed against him. "We might do all right together," she commented.

FOR two hours Ted steered under her tutelage. Then she raised her voice.

"Jap, lay aft and take the wheel." To Ted she said, "Fetch me some coffee to the cabin."

"Yes, ma'am," he nodded, and let Jap relieve him. In the galley he found Thyra bustling among kettles and dishes. Her violet eyes were grave.

"Pot of coffee, eh?" she replied to his request. "Running errands for Hua Ta Fu already—bad sign."

"Meaning what?"

"She's taken a fancy to you. Thinks she can use that fighting talent of yours. She'll do anything to win you, and she works fast."

"Listen," he said. "I fought for you once. I still want to help—"

"Do you?" she asked quickly. "Really?"

"I'm afraid we haven't got time enough for me to prove it in a court of law," he answered. "You'll have to trust me."

"You're right, there isn't time," nodded Thyra. "I have my work cut out to save this ship."

"Then what can I do for you, ma'am?"

She thought a minute. "Remember what Hua Ta Fu said about sailing nowhere?"

"Sure I do."

"Find out what she means by that," she said.

Her face was close, so close that he bent and kissed her lightly. She looked up at him in silence. Then, "Here's your coffee," she said.

He carried the pot aft and knocked on the cabin door. Hua Ta Fu's voice said, "You may go, Mister Strunk," and the mate

came out, scowling, at Ted. The cowboy entered and put the pot down.

THE bronze woman had changed her jacket and trousers for a loose, shimmery robe that, sliding down, bared the sweet-fleshed shoulder and the beginnings of her ivory bosom's generous swell. She gestured to two cups on the table. "Pour for us," she directed.

"Oh, but you aren't a sailor. Only an interesting landsman." Her eyes slid appraisingly over him. "Slim but not skinny, tough as cable, and handsome. What say we have some brandy, too?" She put out her hand for a bottle on a rack—the motion further disarranged the robe, exposed more shoulder and bosom—and poured generous tots into the cups. "To us," she toasted, lifting hers, and they drank.

After the cups were empty, she poured straight brandy into noggins. They sat together on a long, cushioned locker. "Why all this treatin' of me, ma'am?" Ted asked her.

She tilted her head back and regarded him through slanted lids. "Because you'd be pleasant to have around. Because you may be useful. And likewise just because. Fill your noggin again."

He did so, and toasted her. "Ted Carter," she went on, "how would you like to throw in with me?"

"Throw in for what?"

"This is going to be a funny voyage. Fatal to most, maybe, but two will get away and be rich. I'm one of the two, of course, and Mister Strunk was to be the other. But I could cut him out for you—

there'd be pleasure, then, as well as business."

She leaned toward him. A smoothly turned knee and thigh showed through the open robe.

"But what am I headed for?" Ted persisted.

"Pleasure and business, I said."

She smiled invitingly. He remembered Thyra's instructions—find out about sailing nowhere—and slid an arm around Hua Ta Fu. His hand dropped on her sleek, nude shoulder. A moment later she fastened her lips on his. Her arms locked him to her, her kisses were avid. He hugged her closer. She shuddered in delight at the touch. Her breasts were trembling . . .

IT WAS two hours before he brought the tray back to Thyra's galley.

"Was the coffee too hot for her to hurry over?" asked the blonde.

"We talked," said Ted.

"Talked, eh?" Violet eyes flashed. "Did she teach you something besides steering?"

"She told me her plan," he replied. "This time tomorrow there'll be no ship, no crew. Only two out of the seven on board will escape."

"Eh?" gasped Thyra, almost spilling a kettle of water.

"Here's the whole plot. After your father's death she and Strunk stowed the cargo—oil, worth thousands—in an island cave. Now they're fixing to sink the ship, let us drown, get away in the one boat they brought along. Then they'll collect insurance on ship and oil, slip back and get the cargo they hid and cash in on that, too."

"How did you get her to tell?" demanded Thyra.

"She thinks I'm in love with her, and wants to ditch Strunk for me. She even told me where the oil's hidden."

Thyra digested the information. "That's why they didn't ship a real crew, only shanghaied a handful of stiff," she said. "What shall we do?"

"Only one thing for us to do. Take the ship back."

"Take it back?" she repeated. "How?"

"The crew'll line up with us, once they know it's life and death. That'll make five against two. Of course, Hua Ta Fu and Strunk have guns, but—"

"Ted Carter!" called Hua Ta Fu from the direction of the cabin. "Relieve Jap at the wheel."

"Go," Thyra said quickly. "I'll tell Jap myself, and warn the others when I carry their supper below."

He turned to leave, but she caught his arm.

"Why are you helping me?" she asked softly.

"Because I don't like kidnaping and murder."

"Is that all?" She came very close, her hands shifting to his shoulders. "Do something, save this ship and me. And I'll do anything you want—anything."

He drew her to him and they kissed. His hands stirred over her trim slenderness, so different from Hua Ta Fu's opulent rondures, yet even more alluringly soft and feminine. Her warm, half open mouth pressed against his; he felt her firm little breasts quiver against him.

"Ted Carter!" came the call from the cabin again.

He walked out of the galley and went aft to where Hua Ta Fu lounged in the cabin door. "In here," she said, "before you take the wheel."

Inside she spoke tensely. "I lost my head a little while ago, told you too much. And you never said how you stood."

"What do you think?" challenged Ted.

Her hand whipped from her sleeve. It drove a long straight dagger toward him, the point quivering against his heart. "If you talk or—"

He lifted his hand deliberately, took the weapon from her and threw it on the table. She breathed quickly as he gathered her into his arms, then yielded—crushing her body to him passionately.

"Still doubt me?" he asked her.

"No, Ted . . . And don't go yet, Jap can steer a while longer . . ."

THE first streak of dawn split split the eastern darkness as four figures gathered behind the forecastle.

"Ready to do business?" demanded Ted for the last time.

"Sure," said Ponky. "Look what I swiped in the cabin." He held out a big revolver. "Now they'll be easy—unless you want to keep Hua Ta Fu," And he smirked at Ted.

"We'll save nobody," said Thyra sharply. "We daren't give them a chance to surrender. Let's start."

"Right," seconded Ted. "Move aft. Red's at the wheel, ready to

help. We'll get Strunk on the poop, then give Hua Ta Fu a chance to come out of the cabin with her hands up."

"You do want to save her, then," said Ponky with another smirk. "Shall I go first with the gun?"

"Do that," Ted agreed. "Jap, take that belaying pin, and Thyra the meat cleaver from the galley. I'll take this." And he showed a coil of thin, strong line.

The four slid aft along the deck. The sails whispered overhead. Nothing stirred on the poop as Ponky, reaching the companionway, mounted swiftly to the top and swung around.

"Cover Strunk with that gun," ordered Ted, starting up.

"Halt!" snarled Ponky, and leveled his revolver at Ted. "Get back!"

The Jap swore in his own tongue. Thyra gasped. Ted fell back from the companionway.

At that instant the streak of dawn ripened into gray light. Gazing upward, the three betrayed mutineers saw what was on the poop.

"Greetings, Ted Carter," said a triumphant, throaty voice. It was Hua Ta Fu, at the wheel.

"Red went to the sharks an hour ago," she informed him.

"I savvy," nodded Ted. "Ponky sold us out."

"Why not, when I get a cut of the loot?" snickered the bald-head. "I always did hate your guts, cowboy."

Strunk came forward on the poop. "Boat's ready, skipper," he said to Hua Ta Fu.

"Hear that, you scum?" Ponky taunted his former companions.

"We're leaving you—with a bomb in the hold!"

Ted said nothing. His hands fiddled with the coil of rope. Hua Ta Fu lashed the wheel, eyes on him. "I'm sorry," she said, "that you didn't know a good thing when you saw it."

"Don't let it spoil your trip," he returned.

She backed out of sight with Strunk. The mutineers could hear the boat being lowered. The brightening morn glanced from Ponky's smiling teeth and eyeballs.

"Ted Carter," he said, "I'll not let you wait for the bomb."

As his hands tensed on the gun Thyra flung herself in the way, arms around the cowboy's neck. He could feel the tender sweetness of her body through two thick-nesses of rough garments. "No!" she protested frantically. "No!"

"Might as well get two with one slug," said Ponky.

Ted flipped Thyra away. "Go ahead," he dared the man with the gun, "but your pals are leaving you behind."

Ponky spun around with an oath.

Ted made a quick casting motion. His coil of rope zipped out and up, like a striking snake. A loop of it spun around Ponky's head like a halo, settled abruptly over him, snapped tight on his feet. The gun barked as Ted jerked his end, the bullet sang through a sail, and Ponky tumbled head over heels to the deck below.

In an instant the Jap had the gun, while Ted pulled the gasping Ponky upright by the collar.

"Where's the bomb?" he gritted.

STRUNK came into view on the poop. The Jap fired and the mate crumpled.

"Where is it?" repeated Ted, his hands at Ponky's throat. The bald-head, pale and quivering, pointed to a hatchway. Ted dragged him to it and uncovered the opening with a quick heave. A light showed in the murk below—a sputtering candle, thrust into the bunghole of a keg.

"That's it," gurgled Ponky.

Ted upended him like a sack and tore the noose from his ankles. He dragged the loop wide and dropped it into the hold. At the right instant he gave a tightening jerk, felt it take hold, heaved with all his might. The keg came bumping up to the deck.

He yanked the little stump of candle from the bunghole. "Giant powder," he read the label aloud. "And this candle wouldn't have given us more than a couple minutes."

He carried it to the railing, then set it down to look. Hua Ta Fu was rowing the boat away over the gray water. At his call the Jap and Thyra came to his side.

"Cover her, Jap," Ted ordered. "Hi, ma'am, come back here!"

Hua Ta Fu saw the weapon and came alongside. Her troubled face turned up as she came alongside.

"Doesn't yesterday mean anything to you?" she pleaded to Ted.

Ponky came to the rail. He was lighting a cigarette with nonchalance.

"Cast us adrift, me and Hua Ta Fu," he suggested. "That's been

(Continued on page 114)

A THROAT



*Because of his promise to a
dying man, he must let the girl
he loved think him a coward!
There was only one way in which
Montespan could protect her
and keep his honor*

“YOU have been like a son
to me—Jacques—for the
past three years. I—
leave you—the task of caring for
my granddaughter—Louise.”

Jacques Montespan said gently,
“I shall keep your trust.”

The old man coughed—was
coughing out his life in Jacques’
arms. Blood flowed from a sword
wound in the thin chest, flecked

TO CUT

By MAX
NEILSON

"You have
courted death,"
Jussac said.
"Now you shall
taste it!"



Du Loire's mouth with each rattling, painful word.

"You will—need to watch—Jussac," he continued. "Louise is only—seventeen—and he has turned her head—"

Jacques' face flushed in helpless anger at mention of Jussac's name. "Jussac gave you no chance, did he?"

Du Loire sighed. "He was—too

swift for me." An amber streak of Paris sunshine came through the leaded window above him, cast a halo about his leonine white head.

Jacques lifted his eyes. The year was 1670. Crossed blades of Toledo steel hung dustily on the far wall. Below them a desk had

been mussed up, a drawer opened. The old man saw his glance, said: "Jussac is a dangerous man. He—came to me—demanding Louise's hand—in marriage. I refused—and he—killed me." The old man stiffened, clutched at the other's arm. "Also he—stole the rubies—which were to have been—Louise's dowry." His glazing eyes went toward the open drawer.

Jacques Montespan nodded grimly. "Jussac's time will come."

Du Loire turned his flaring gaze into the features of the younger man. "No, Jacques! You must—not—" His voice died in a moist, choking gurgle of sound; blood rattled in his throat. He died.

Very gently, Jacques lowered the old man's white head to the pillow of the couch. He closed those sightless, staring eyes with a touch as gentle as a man's. And then he turned swiftly as a door opened behind him.

A GIRL stood framed there in the doorway. Her flaming red hair hung braided down her back; her face was an ivory oval. From above her tightly-laced bodice gleamed the upper halves of her youthful breasts. She smiled at Jacques; and then her eyes came to rest on the body of Du Loire. "Grandfather!" she cried out, and ran swiftly toward the couch.

Jacques followed her. Tenderly he touched her, slipped an arm around her little waist, drew her back. "He is dead. There is nothing you can do, child."

She twisted around, faced him. "How did he die?" Her eyes were round, her face filled with a strange pallor.

Jacques' lips were grim. "Jussac killed him—ran him through with his sword. Jussac also stole the rubies that were to have been your dowry."

Louise Du Loire stepped backward. "You lie, Jacques." Her firm breasts rose and fell swiftly.

"Yes. The dog lies in his teeth!" The voice came from the doorway behind them. Montespan pivoted—and faced the sneering, handsome Chevalier De Jussac, resplendent in ruffled coat and silk stocks. Jussac advanced slowly into the room. His right hand rested lightly, ominously, upon his jeweled sword-hilt.

The girl went to Jussac, stood by him. Her eyes were hard. "You heard his accusation?" she looked up into Jussac's face.

Jussac nodded. "I entered in time to hear all of it. And I am sorry your grandfather is dead." His left arm went out, encircled her waist.

Jacques Montespan said, "Keep your hands off her, Jussac."

Jussac's eyes narrowed. "By whose command?"

"By mine! With his dying breath, Louise's grandfather entrusted her to my care. Now I bid you release her."

Jussac stepped forward, away from the girl. His voice was silkily venomous as he said, "Take care, dog. My swordpoint itches to taste your throat's blood."

For a single instant, hate welled into Montespan's eyes. He took a half-step in the direction of the crossed Toledo blades on the far wall. And then, remembering Du Loire's dying warning, he stopped still. His scarred fists knotted, so

that the criss-cross cicatrices on his knuckles loomed out like a sinister network. He forced himself to smile. "Is it the custom of a gentleman of honor to seek combat in a house where death has struck?"

Jussac flushed. "Touching words, indeed—words to mask your cowardice!" Deliberately he turned his back upon Montespan, went toward the red-haired Louise. "Now that your grandfather is dead, my sweet, we need no longer wait. We can marry at once."

She looked into his eyes. When she spoke, it was in a tone that utterly ignored the presence of Jacques Montespan; it was as though she had been alone in the room with Jussac. "I am yours when ever you want me, beloved," she whispered.

"Then tonight you will come to me," Jussac answered boldly. "I shall be waiting for you at the Inn of the Three Lions." He leaned forward, kissed the girl's upturned lips. Then, without another word, he turned and left the room.

Jacques Montespan approached the girl. "You shall not go to him," he spoke flatly, tonelessly. "He killed your grandfather, stole your dowry. You will remain here."

SHE whirled on him, her eyes blazing with scorn and contempt. "You think I shall take commands from you—a liar and a coward?" she flung at him bitterly. "If you were so sure that he had killed my grandfather, why did you not accept the challenge?"

Why did you refuse to cross swords with him when he threw the lie in your teeth?"

Montespan flushed. "I have no proof of Jussac's guilt—yet. I have only your grandfather's dying accusation. That is not enough."

"A thin excuse to salve your craven soul!" the girl retorted. "If instead of you, it had been my grandfather's old friend, The Rapier—"

Montespan started. "The Rapier?" he whispered. "What do you know of The Rapier?"

Louise Du Loire smiled. "My grandfather told me many tales. The Rapier was a man bold and fearless—a man whose sword knew no equal in all France. Had he been here, Jussac's challenge would not have gone unanswered!"

Montespan spoke slowly. "The Rapier disappeared years ago, child. He had killed too many prominent men. He was hunted by the police for many crimes—most of which he had not committed. The Rapier is—dead."

"And you," Louise Du Loire responded, "are a coward!" She turned away from him, went out of the room.

Montespan started after her, and his eyes were sick with longing. For a long time he stood silent.

His shoulders sagged. He left the chamber, went to his own quarters in another part of the house.

LATE that same afternoon, Jacques Montespan strode into the tap-room of the Inn of the Three Lions. To the leather-jack-

eted host he slipped a gold coin, whispered a question.

The man grinned and nodded. "Come, I will show you the room, messire." Montespan followed him up the twisting stairs to the second floor. "In there, messire," the innkeeper pointed to a closed door. "But take care. The Chevalier de Jussac brooks no dalliance with the woman who is his mistress."

Montespan smiled faintly. "He need not know."

The innkeeper chuckled and went back down the twisting stairs. Montespan approached the closed door that had been pointed out to him. He rapped, very softly.

"Enter!" a husky feminine voice commanded.

Montespan pushed open the door. "Mademoiselle Du Braquemond?"

The woman on the huge four-poster bed was pretty, with a worldly, hard beauty. Her hair was the black of a ravens wing, and she lay back among silken pillows, clad in a thin garment that revealed more than it concealed of her feminine charms. She looked at Montespan, studied his broad shoulders, his tall, straight body with insolent interest. Then she said, "Yes. I am Mademoiselle Du Braquemond. Who are you?"

Montespan entered the room, closed the door softly behind him, bolted it. "I am merely a man—one who has admired you from a distance, and who now has the courage to approach you."

The woman smiled. "A pretty speech, sir. You are very bold."

"I am made bold by the longing in my heart for you!" Montespan

came closer to the bed. He stared down at her; stared at the full curves of her breasts. His eyes swept over her powdered ivory shoulders, her gleaming throat. Her perfume, heavy and barbaric, assailed his nostrils.

She smiled at him, "Are you not aware, sir, that another man has first and exclusive claim to my affections?"

Montespan shrugged. "I am aware only that you set me afire with desire for you," he whispered. His arms went about her shoulders, drew her toward him.

For a single instant she tried to push free of his embrace. Then, with a tiny laugh, she submitted to his caresses. "You are a bold rogue!" she smiled. "And—I like bold rogues!"

He kissed her; and her red lips parted wetly under his questing mouth.

She drew a sharp breath; Montespan's lips slipped from her mouth, down along the smooth, perfumed column of her throat, over her shoulders. Her arms went about his neck . . .

IT WAS dusk when Montespan said, "It is time for me to depart. Jussac may arrive here earlier than you expect—"

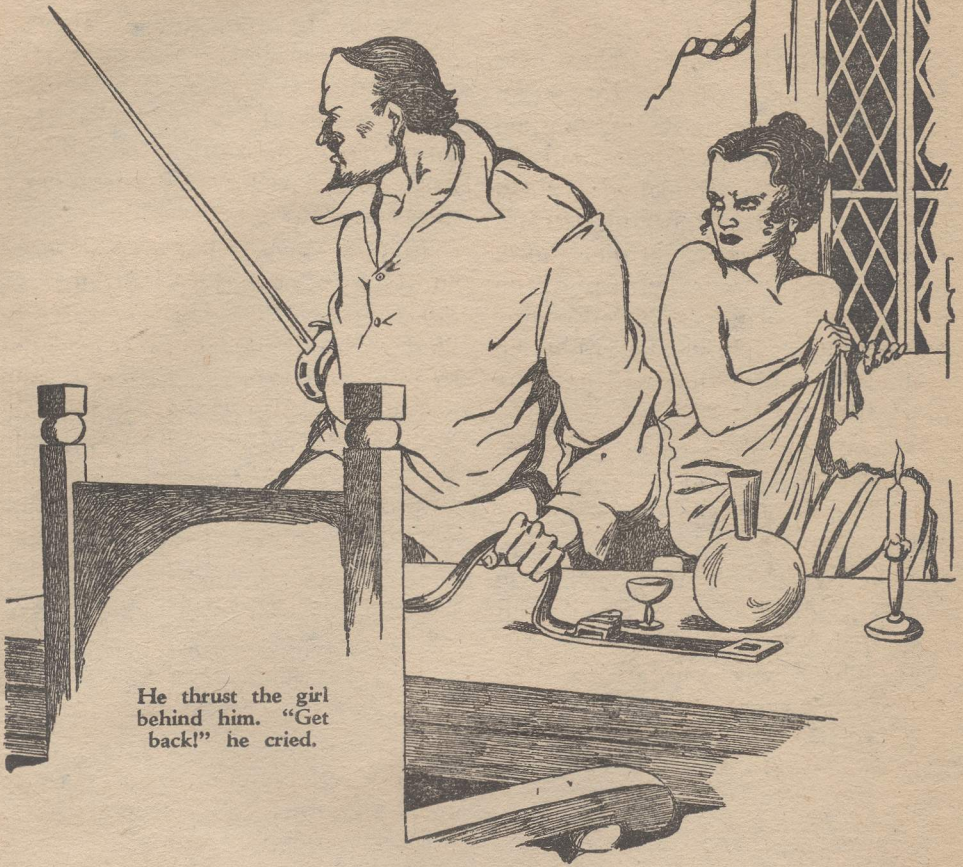
The woman laughed softly. "Jussac will come here to me no more!" she whispered.

"You mean—he has cast you aside?"

She grinned through the gathering gloom. "You may call it that, perhaps. But it cost him something."

"I do not understand," Montespan pretended stupidly.

"Then I will show you. Perceive!" She delved beneath her pillow, withdrew a small, gold-en-



He thrust the girl behind him. "Get back!" he cried.

crusted box, opened it. "Rubies!" She fondled the stone greedily. "A fortune in rubies! Jussac gave them to me today—this very noon. With them he bought his release from my arms. He has a younger light-o'-love now."

Montespan stared at the gems; and his heart leaped into his throat as he recognized them. Abruptly his face went grim. "Give me those stones!" he rasped.

The woman shrank back from the venom in his voice; her face went pale beneath the rouge.

"What do you mean?" she cried out.

For reply, Montespan hurled himself at her; caught her throat between his curling fingers. She gasped, clawed at his hands, tried to beat him away from her. Grimly he squeezed his thumbs against her windpipe; squeezed until suddenly she sagged backward into unconsciousness.

With strips torn from the bed's sheeting, he bound and gagged her. Then he snatched up the gold-encrusted box with its pre-

cious freight of blood-red rubies. To the unconscious woman he blew a mocking wiss; then he turned and leaped from the room.

BACK in the house where Du Loire had died, Montespan flung himself up the stairs, stopped before the red-haired Louise's closed door. He knocked; raised his voice in grim triumph. "Louise!" he cried out. "Come here, my sweet. I have with me the proof that Jussac killed your grandfather! I have the rubies he stole—the rubies that will be your dowry!"

There was no answer from behind the closed door. A tomb-like silence pervaded the entire house. Montespan twisted at the doors handle, wrenched it open. The room was dark, empty. He lighted a candle, held it in trembling fingers. There was a note pinned to the wall. It was from Louise. She had left the house—forever. She had gone to the Chevalier de Jussac . . .

Montespan turned, stumbled out of the room. He entered the chamber where the body of his old friend Du Loire, the girl's grandfather, still lay. In the flickering light of the candle, Du Loire's tired face seemed serene, peaceful . . . peaceful with the deep peace of death.

For a long moment, Montespan stared into those dead features. Then he went to the far wall, took down the crossed Toledo blades. He returned to Du Poire's body. "It has to be, old friend!" Montespan whispered. "The Rapier must . . . return . . ."

AT THE Inn of the Three Lions, Louise Du Loire looked into Jussac's face with widened eyes. "But—but beloved, you said that we would be—married—tonight!"

Jussac smiled, secure in the knowledge that the little room's door was firmly bolted. "What is marriage?" he said softly, mockingly. "Is a meaningless ceremony necessary for our love?"

Louise shrank back from him, suddenly afraid. "I—I do not understand you!" her voice trembled. "Now that I have come here to you, you seem . . . different . . ."

Jussac caught her by the shoulders, pulled her roughly into his arms. "What is there to fear?" he whispered. "You love me, do you not?"

"I—I don't know!"

"Then you will soon find out!" Jussac's eyes gleamed. His hands went to the laces of her bodice, ripped at them. He tore the garment from her shrinking body. She opened her mouth to cry out; and he clamped his lips over hers, smothering her screams.

At which moment, Jacques Montespan stepped into the outer room of the Inn of the Three Lions.

The taproom was crowded, roistering, noisy; but a sudden hush fell over the room at Jacques' entrance. His hand rested grimly upon the hilt of a sword scabbarded at his side; the knuckles were taut, so that criss-crossed cicatrices showed whitely like ancient saber-scars. His face was expressionless; deep lines showed at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were cold with the coldness of a deadly snake, so that men

quailed before his glance and stumbled from his path.

He went to the leather-jacketed inn-keeper. "Where is the Chevalier de Jussac?"

Mine host paled. "He—he—I am not sure he is here, messire," the man trembled.

"He is here. Where is he?" Montespan's voice was as cold as winter ice upon the Seine; as deadly as a pronouncement of doom.

The innkeeper licked suddenly-dry lips. "I—I have seen you before, messire, have I not?"

"I was here this afternoon. Where is Jussac?"

Desperately the other man fenced for time. "Not this afternoon, messire. I have seen you before that—years ago—"

"Where is Jussac?" Montespan's voice stung like a whiplash.

"He—he is in that room over there . . ." the innkeeper pointed to a closed door at the far end of the taproom.

"Knock for him. Summon him forth."

"But—he left instructions that he was not to be disturbed, messire—"

"Summon him!"

The innkeeper turned, stumbled toward the closed door. Timorously his knuckles resounded against the portal.

THE door flung open. Jussac stared out; and his eyes were narrowed, raging. "Did I not wish to be undisturbed?" he roared.

Jacques Montespan stepped forward, stared into the room over Jussac's shoulder. He saw Louise, cowering in a far corner. She

tried to pull the ripped shreds of her bodice up over her tiny breasts. Montespan said, "Come forth, Louise. You are going with me."

Jussac's dark face clouded thunderously. "So! You have the audacity to come here, eh, dog?" he snarled. "Did I not warn you today that my sword's point thirsted for your throat?"

Montespan disregarded him. His eyes were on the red-haired Louise. "Come out, my dear. It is my command."

The girl swayed as she moved forward out of the little room. Her eyes were wide with fright . . . with a nameless terror . . .

Jussac stayed her with a rough, outflung hand. "Get back in there!" he snarled.

Montespan's eyes flashed sudden hell-fire. "Take your hands off that girl, Jussac."

Jussac sneered. "Since when did the rabbit turn wolf?"

Montespan's face was impassive. "Draw your blade, Jussac."

The other man laughed. "It is well. You have courted death. Now you shall taste it!" His hand leaped toward the hilt of his sword; the gleaming blade slithered outward like a live thing. But though he moved with the swiftness of an uncoiling snake, Montespan was faster. Montespan's rapier danced from its sheath like lightning from a clear sky. And as his blade met Jussac's with a sudden shrill clangor of steel against steel, the innkeeper went white—

Went white, and gasped, "Now

(Continued on page 115)

By WALTON GREY **A S H E S**

A THIN sword of shadow swung like a pendulum in the blue Peruvian moonlight; crossed the bars of Bob Newton's tiny cell window. Newton sprang from his cot; leaped up; caught at the window's high bars. He hung there, waiting, watching for that shadow.

"She's alive! She *must* be alive. They can't have . . . murdered Ellen!" he muttered through clenched teeth.

A sandy mop of hair dropped down over his tanned, lean face. With a steel-hard grip he clung to the window's bars, his feet dangling almost a yard above the cell's stone floor. His shoulders ached with the effort of supporting his tall, muscular frame.

Again the shadow passed his window. But it was more than a shadow. It was a narrow ribbon of fragile silk, hanging down from the floor above.

Bob Newton tensed. There was a spill of paper tied to the end of the dangling ribbon.

He thrust out one hard, brown hand; clutched; missed. Then he tried again. This time he succeeded. He drew the scrap of paper through the bars of the window, unfastened it. Tying the dangling ribbon to a window-bar, he dropped to the floor and opened the paper.

In the brilliant moonlight, he read the message:

Bob—

*If it's you beneath, come
for me before it is too late!*

Ellen.

A wave of relief and hope flooded through Bob Newton's soul. Ellen—his Ellen—was alive! They had not harmed her . . . yet!

Desperately he ran his hands through his pockets. He must send her a reply. But he had nothing with which to write. Yesterday, Moreno's cutthroats had stolen everything, when they had kidnapped Newton and Ellen on the Callao waterfront . . .

THEN an idea came to him. Carefully he tore the note, until he had three words. They were "Bob," and the pair "It is." His message was: "*It is Bob.*"

He leaped back to the cell window with them, tied the scraps to the dangling ribbon. He jerked the ribbon lightly. Jubilantly, he saw the ribbon being pulled upward.

He dropped back to the floor of the cell; stared about him. He must break out—gain his freedom—rescue Ellen! But how? He was caged, imprisoned, helpless. The dungeon's only exit was a narrow, heavy door. In sudden red fury, Newton hurled himself at the wooden portal; crashed his two hundred pounds of bone and sinew against it.

Amazingly, it burst open, spilling him out upon the floor of the pitch-dark hallway outside the cell. Dazed, bewildered, Bob Newton scrambled to his feet and stood there for a brief moment unsteadily. He shook his head. He was out—free! He was free . . . and Ellen was on the floor just above

TO ASHES

The old man's prophecy was coming true. For he had warned: "The secret of the dead conquistador will bring bloodshed in its wake!" Bob wasn't worried for himself but for his fiancée



The bullet whined across the room. There was a sudden cry from the girl. . . .

in this strange house that had its cellar divided off into cells!

Stealthily, he crept down the hall. He found a narrow staircase; hesitated. Everything was strangely, ominously quiet. There was an atmosphere of danger, all-pervading and intense in the darkness. Newton still could not understand how his cell-door had come to be unbarred. And Ellen . . . ?

Up the stairs he went swiftly, noiselessly; gained the floor above. He was in another hallway now; and still he had encountered no sign of his abductors. Yesterday it had taken a half-dozen men to bring him here. Perhaps they were all gone—

He counted the doors on this floor, found the room directly over the cell in which he had been imprisoned. He tried the knob.

The door was unlocked. Slowly, quietly, he pushed inward. And then he was inside the chamber. He heard a faint sound in the solid darkness; crept toward it.

HE stumbled against a cot; put out his hands. His fingers encountered soft, warmly-pliant flesh A girl's flesh. . . . A woman's naked shoulder!

"Ellen!" Bob Newton whispered. Something caught in his throat. Was she unconscious? Had they hurt her? "Ellen!" he breathed again, harshly. In the blackness his hands groped for the warm loveliness of her unseen body. Tingling thrills raced through his veins as he pulled her close. Never before had he been so near to Ellen Lanhart, his *fiancée*. Her natural modesty and reserve had forbidden any situation

as intimate as that which danger now forced on them. . . . She wore nothing now but a brief tissue-thin wisp of underthings . . .

"Ellen—my dearest dear!" Newton whispered for the third time, desperately.

The girl moved, stirred uneasily. "Bob!" she moaned.

"Ellen—waken!" he panted. "We've got to get out of this place—quickly!" He bent over her, slipped an arm under the lovely sweetness of her waist, lifted her. Then some impelling attraction forced him to draw her toward him, crush her against his chest.

Her usual reserve had vanished; he heard her sigh, felt her breath against his cheek. . . . She quivered against him, and her arms drifted about his neck. "Bob—darling!" she whispered. "We cannot leave here, until you have told them the secret they want to know!" Her voice sounded oddly thick and accented.

"Secret?"

"Yes! The secret of Pizarro's bones!" her whisper held a sharp, vibrant quality. To Bob Newton's nostrils came a faint suggestion of perfume. It was strange; because Ellen never used perfume—

"Pizarro's bones!" Newton repeated, wonderingly. And then, suddenly, he remembered! The reason for his abduction and imprisonment was abruptly clear to him. And he cursed the blind chance that had brought him and Ellen here to Callao on a pre-nuptial, round-the-world tour. . . .

PIZARRO'S bones! Bob Newton recalled the legend which had existed in his family for three

generations. It was a legend handed down by Bob Newton's grandfather, who once had been an archaeological explorer in Peru, in Cuzco. The story dealt with the fabled bones of Francisco Pizarro, Spanish *conquistadore* who had subdued Peru centuries ago.

There was a mummy on exhibit at the cathedral in Lima—a mummy reputed to be Pizarro's body. But most historians agreed that the mummy was a fake; that it was not the mortal remains of the real Pizarro—

Pizarro's bones, according to the legend, were hidden in some other place, a secret crypt. And Bob Newton's grandfather was supposed to have stumbled upon that fabled tomb; to have discovered the last resting-place of the true Francisco Pizarro.

During the older Newton's lifetime, he had never revealed to his family the exact location of his discovery. "The knowledge will come in due time, and it will bring bloodshed in its wake . . ." the old man had often mumbled.

And now, Bob Newton realized the truth. His captor, Moreno, must have discovered in some way that Bob Newton was the grandson of the older Newton, the man who had found Pizarro's secret tomb. And Moreno thought that Bob Newton knew the secret! Moreno wanted to learn the tomb's location, so that he could exhume Pizarro's mummified body for exhibition purposes. . . . It would mean a fortune for Moreno!

Bob Newton fingered the huge, old-fashioned signet-ring on the third finger of his right hand, the ring his grandfather had willed to

him. He held the girl closer to him. "I can't tell Moreno where Pizarro's tomb is located!" he whispered.

"Why not?" she asked sharply.

"Because I don't know! My grandfather never told me!"

"You lie, Señor Bob Newton!" the girl said suddenly, viciously. And as she spoke, Bob Newton stiffened; and a great amazement filled him. This girl in his arms—with her accented voice her exotic perfume—*she was not Ellen Lanhart!*

Even as he realized it, lights flashed on in the room. Newton dropped the girl. She fell back toward the cot. He stared at her.

She was Spanish—a brunette. And Ellen was blonde.

"Who are you?" Bob Newton rasped out suddenly.

The strange girl's hand darted under her pillow; emerged with a flat automatic. She smiled mirthlessly, cruelly. "You are right, Señor Newton. I am not Ellen. I am Conchita Moreno, sister of the man who abducted you and your sweetheart!"

Bob Newton's widened eyes saw a trailing ribbon which ran zig-zag across the floor to the shuttered window. "You—you sent me that note!" he accused. His face went slowly pale.

"Si. I sent you that note. It was a trick to bring you up here. I thought to dupe you into mistaking me for your *fiancée*, in the darkness. I planned to make you tell me the location of Pizarro's tomb."

"You failed!" Bob Newton said slowly. His hard jaw jutted forward. "And now that you've failed

—where is Ellen Lanhart? What have you done to her?" His voice rose vengefully, savagely.

The dark-haired girl shrugged. Her swollen white breasts undulated with the movement of her smooth shoulders. "Señorita Lanhart is with my brother, Rico Moreno. He will entertain her very well!" she sneered.

AT Moreno's name, Bob Newton's face hardened. Rico Moreno—the Peruvian whom he had befriended a year ago, back in the states . . . and who had repaid the friendship by kidnaping Newton and Ellen Lanhart here in Callao! With a snarled oath, Bob Newton whirled toward the room's door—

"Stop!" Conchita Moreno called sharply. She leaped to her feet; leveled her automatic; squeezed the weapon's trigger.

The gun barked, and a singing slug whined past Newton's head, spanged into the wall before him. He froze; turned slowly to face the Spanish girl.

He sucked in his breath, and unwilling admiration dawned in his angry eyes. In the subdued light of the room's single electric lamp, she was beautiful with a feline, pantherish beauty as she stood there, legs spread wide, automatic held waist-high. Raven coils of hair tumbled about her pearly, naked shoulders. Despite an air of hardness about her lithe, slim figure, she was utterly feminine. Her dark eyes were narrowed, cat-like, glowing. . . .

"The next bullet will not miss, Señor Newton!" the girl spoke evenly.

"You wouldn't dare!" Bob Newton flung at her.

Her dark brows rose. "No? Try me and see!" she challenged.

He read the purpose in her narrowed, feline eyes. He knew that she would shoot him, without fear and without compunction, if he attempted escape. And then he thought of Ellen, his lovely, yellow-haired fiancée. . . .

Ellen was somewhere in this house; was in Rico Moreno's clutches. Abruptly, Bob Newton knew that he must tread carefully; that it would require all his guile, all his cunning to get to Ellen and save her from . . . death or worse

He forced a slow smile to his lips. "I believe you'd actually shoot me!" he whispered.

"I would indeed, Señor Bob Newton!"

His eyes went to her generous breasts; took in the wide arches of her hips, the cream-smooth, ivory-white contours of her legs, her thighs. . . . Then, once more, he met her eyes with his own. "It's hard to believe that one so beautiful could be so hard!" he said.

She laughed, shortly. "I shall not be fooled by your flattery. Your tongue is smooth—but not smooth enough!"

"You think I'm flattering you when I say that you are beautiful?" he asked her gently.

She shrugged. With her left hand, she patted lightly the curves of her hip. "I know that I am beautiful. I do not need you to tell me so."

"Your loveliness is a weapon far more potent than that automatic!" Bob Newton insinuated.

"Meaning—?" she purred, her dark eyes narrowing once more.

"Meaning that a bullet wouldn't make me tell you the secret you want to know. But you might learn it, through other means!" he said boldly, audaciously.

She stared at him. A new, comprehending light dawned in her gaze. She grinned faintly. "Then you *do* know the resting-place of Pizarro's mummy?"

"Maybe!" Bob Newton's heart leaped a little, but he strove to maintain the expressionlessness of his tanned features. He had a plan—a desperate plan. If he could trick this dark-haired girl into accepting his kisses, his caresses . . . he might wrest that automatic from her . . .

She lowered the automatic. "Kiss me!" she commanded.

HE went toward her; gathered her into his arms. He kissed her—and she responded with all the sultriness of her Latin nature. Despite himself, Bob Newton felt a tingling, electrical sensation of desire lancing through his veins.

This girl was a smouldering volcano of feminine passion—passion that leaped from her parted lips to his, and from her body to his body. He felt her quivering against him . . .

He pressed her close; kissed her shoulders, her throat. She clung to him, caught a sharp breath as his lips moved over her throat. She was like a vibrant flame that set fire to his soul—with a fire that charred his senses, seared his consciousness. He held her still for a moment, felt the little shud-

der that suddenly possessed her . . . He lifted her in his arms.

And then, abruptly, from somewhere behind him, Bob Newton heard a smothered, gasping sob—a woman's bitter cry of hurt and disillusionment. It was the voice of his fiancée, Ellen Lanhart—

And then a door slammed!

In a flooding, receding rush, desire departed from Bob Newton's veins; was replaced by disgust, dismay. Disgust with himself and with the blackhaired Conchita Moreno, whom he held in his arms. Dismay that Ellen Lanhart should have seen him in such a position!

NOW he remembered that he had begun making love to the Spanish girl for a certain definite purpose . . .

Like a flash, he leaped to his feet. At the same instant, his hand darted forward, seized the automatic from the brunette's grasp.

"You damned slut!" he rasped. Leveling the weapon, he backed away from the girl, toward the closed door of the room. Ellen Lanhart had been at that door, an instant before; and now Bob Newton would follow her, find her, rescue her . . . tell her the meaning of the scene she had inadvertently witnessed . . .

Conchita Moreno sprang to her feet. With a lithe bound, she reached the door first. Her fingers found the key; flipped it in the lock. Then, before Newton could stay her, she dashed for the window, pulled aside the drapery, flung the key out into the moon-drenched night.

"Damn you to everlasting hell!"

Newton snarled. He sprang at the girl.

She fought him with tooth and claw. He felt her sharp nails raking diagonally downward across his cheek. With an oath, he slapped her with his open palm, full across the mouth, with all his rage-born strength. She cried out; staggered backward. Newton hurled himself upon her, bore her backward to the floor.

His anger, built up by frustration, could be neither controlled nor checked. He pinioned her; reached at the window's heavy drapes; tore at them.

With a muffled crash, the velvet curtains came down, bringing the drapery-pole with them. Swiftly, Bob Newton yanked at the curtains, pulled away their long, tasseled cords. With the cords, he bound Conchita Moreno—trussed her, hand and foot. He stuffed his handkerchief into her open mouth, gagging her.

Her eyes glared up at him, twin pools of venomous hate. But Newton knew no remorse for the way he had man-handled her. Cursing, he leaped at the window, swung himself outward. In the baleful glare of the moon, he dropped.

He must find that key—get back into Conchita Moreno's room—unlock her door—and then commence a frantic search for the yellow-haired Ellen Lanhart! Desperately he went to hands and knees on the ground, seeking the key which the Spanish girl had tossed through the window.

To the left, below the hill on which the house stood, the Pacific was a broad gleaming jewel in the

moonlight; and on the open harbor of Callao, among that welter of anchored ships, was the steamer *Spardian* which had brought Bob Newton and Ellen Lanhart here.

In the opposite direction, the fertile valley of the Rimac widened toward the distant spires of Lima, limned against the purple range which ran inward to meet the might Andes

FRANTICALLY, Bob Newton searched for the key; and then, suddenly, he went cold. Something round and hard and metallic was boring into his back—

A gun's muzzle!

"Get up, Señor Newton. And no tricks!" a sibilant whisper came to Bob Newton's straining ears.

The American straightened, turned—and stared in the glittering eyes of Rico Moreno, the man who had abducted him!

"You Peruvian rat!" Newton rasped. His muscles tautened.

"One false move and you are a very dead *Americano!*" Morneo spoke silkily. "Come back into the house. Since my sweet sister's plan failed to elicit from you the information I desire, we will try a different scheme!"

For an instant, Newton toyed with the idea of chancing combat with the Spaniard; of hurling himself at the man, knocking aside his revolver, smashing his fist home against Moreno's jaw. But that would be foolhardy . . . and besides, there was Ellen somewhere within the house. She must be saved. Newton dared not risk a bullet through his belly just now. Not until Ellen was out of danger!

Moreno was leading him into the

house now; was prodding him up the corridor, toward an open door. They entered a room.

It was Conchita Moreno's room. Evidently there had been a duplicate key, for the door was now unlocked and open. Conchita herself was unbound, ungagged. And now a tight-fitting silken dress covered her voluptuous body.

Rico Moreno spoke. "*Listen*, Señor Newton!" he rasped. "You are going to tell me the location of Francisco Pizarro's tomb—do you understand?"

"How can I tell you something I do not know?" Bob Newton grunted.

"Ah, but you *do* know!" Moreno said. "You admitted as much to my sweet sister here. I overheard you. That was when I brought your lovely, golden-haired fiancée to the door of this room and permitted her to see you making love to Conchita!"

"Why did you do that?" Newton asked harshly.

"I thought to destroy her faith in you, Señor. I thought perhaps she, too, knew the secret—and if she believed you to be unfaithful to her, she might decide to loosen her tongue. Unfortunately, your fiancée could tell me nothing."

"And neither can I!" Newton retorted.

Rico Moreno's dark brows went up swiftly. "No? But perhaps there may be a way of unlocking that stubborn mouth of yours!" He raised his voice. "Fernando—Felipe! Bring the yellow-haired girl here!" he called loudly.

Bob Newton tensed. And then, a moment later, two saddle-colored Peruvian natives entered the

room, hauling between them the struggling form of Ellen Lanhart!

Lovely she was, with a slim entrancing youthfulness. Her blonde wavy hair, her fair shoulders, the seductive lines of her tiny breasts beneath her linen dress, the winsome contours of her slender hips and delicately-tapered legs, all combined to make a picture of naive deliciousness. When Bob Newton saw her, his heart gave a great bound.

"Ellen—my dear!" he gasped hoarsely.

She looked at him; and a dim contempt came into her starry blue eyes. Her red kissable lips were tremulous as she turned her gaze away from Newton . . .

It was more than he could bear. He whirled on Moreno. "Damn you!" he rasped. "You've made her think that I—" His fist smashed at the Peruvian's jaw.

MORENO staggered, almost went down under the exploding impact of Newton's savage blow. And then Moreno's two henchmen leaped at Bob Newton, bludgeoned him with the butts of their automatics, hammered him down under the force of their battering attack. Raging pain made a Niagara of agony through Newton's brain. He sagged into stupefied semi-consciousness. . . .

"Water!" he dimly heard Moreno's rasping command.

And then one of Moreno's henchmen leaped from the room, to return in a moment with a bucket brim-full of cold water. Moreno took it; flung its contents full

(Continued on page 116)

TRAIL TO

DANE sat beside Nelda Ewart on the wide platform that served indiscriminately as bed, divan, and table, and looked at her uncomfortably. Everything seemed crazy to him—the whole expedition; the interview with the missionaries at the hill station in Nepal, where Nelda had been reared; the eight days' march with the two Gurkha soldiers and the interpreter, provided by the Bengal Government; the wild story of Colonel Ewart's survival as a hermit somewhere in Tibet, fourteen years after his abduction.

The news had been filtered to the mission, relayed from man to man, and thence to the Bengal Government. Dane, sent by the Government to investigate, had made the mission his first objective. He discovered that Nelda, brought up by the simple German people, themselves long since divorced from western life, had only a dim recollection of her father.

A child of four, she had been hidden by a native nurse when the Tibetan fanatics seized her father and bore him away—into a silence that had never been broken until the news arrived that he had turned Buddhist and still survived, a hermit in some inaccessible region of the snows.

DANE had been three days on the march when Nelda appeared in his camp. She had fol-

lowed the little expedition, and refused to turn back. There was nothing to do but take her with them, as far as the K'ang, the high plateau of snows that girds the mighty tableland of Tibet. No woman could traverse that. Dane planned to leave Nelda at the last outpost of Nepal.

They had reached it that evening, a village inhabited by about twenty men and three women. From this village the mighty tableland arose, towering into the heavens. Four days' distance away was the sacred nunnery of Kwang-po, where Dane planned to begin his inquiries.

Samdup, his Tibetan guide, had shaken in his shoes when Dane made that proposition. "No man may enter the nunnery," he explained. "Nothing but female, dog, yak, hen . . . even the eagles—"

Dane was to learn more about those eagles.

And Samdup, who never spoke unadvisedly, had told Dane that Nelda and he must share the guest-house—which consisted of a single room—together.

DANE had hardly spoken to the girl on the march, he had been so incensed at her wilfulness in following him. He spoke roughly now, to conceal the emotions that her dark beauty aroused in him.

Eighteen years old, mission-trained, educated, speaking English, German, Nepalese, and prob-

They told him it was suicide to invade the strange Tibetan nunnery, but Dane had begun to love Nelda and, if in the nunnery, he could learn something of her missing father . . .

BEYOND

By **CLARK
NELSON**



He picked her up in his arms and
took to the winding stair.

ably half-a-dozen other languages, and yet reared like a hill-woman. After thirty years in Nepal, the good missionary and his wife had discarded European ways entirely.

"I'll have to send one of the Gurkhas back with you," Dane muttered. "I suppose one will do me as well as two. It's lucky the Government's sending a platoon to follow, in case my reception's not friendly. You've been a damned little fool, Nelda. How did you suppose your presence was going to help find your father?"

"I couldn't stay. I hate the mission, and I want to see him."

She had thrown off her coat of priceless furs, for the guest-house, heated by red-hot stones over glowing charcoal, was like a furnace. As she leaned forward, her girdle slipped, and the folds of her loose silken robe fell apart.

Beneath it she wore a single garment, girt in at the waist, but sheer enough to reveal the contours of her small, girlish breasts. Beneath the hem two thighs of milky whiteness tapered down to two rounded knees, and two slim calves. Then two slender ankles, reddened by the straps of her sandals.

Dane, hardened agent of the Government Service though he was, felt the gods of that ancient, devil-ridden land creep into his blood.

The girl must have seen the change in his face, for she pulled her robe together.

"I suppose I shall be an old maid, since there are no white men in my country, and I will not marry a native."

Dane knew it was artlessness, knew, too, how helpless Nelda

could be, should he take her in his arms. His heart was hammering a brisk tattoo against his ribs. He was glad she would be going back with the Gurkha in the morning.

"Lie down and try to sleep," he said shortly, and went out of that hut.

OUTSIDE, the wind from the K'ang cut like a knife. A little distance away Dane saw his Gurkhas and the interpreter crouched over a fire. He paced along the row of squalid huts, trying to shake off the memory of Nelda.

A figure beckoned to him from the entrance of a hut. Dane turned, and saw that it was a Tibetan girl. As he approached, he saw that she was about eighteen years of age, plump, pretty in the native way, and laughing as if existence were the most amusing thing in the world.

Two slender arms went up. Two brown hands caught Dane's shoulders.

"Ah, white man, would you like to talk with me awhile?" she asked. "All my six husbands are on the high plateau, searching for our sheep, and I do not like to be alone."

Her friendliness, her utter unconcern did not astonish Dane. He knew that polyandry was the custom in that district, where there were nearly a dozen men for every woman.

He laughed, a little uneasily.

A frightened cry, a scuffling somewhere behind him cut short any reply on his part. Dane ran back toward the guest-hut, outside which a number of figures were

struggling. That cry had been Nelda's.

"It is all right; don't shoot, sahib," came the voice of one of the Gurkhas. "These dumb beasts do not understand our ways. They think that women belong to all. No harm has been done, save that I laid out one of them with my pistol butt."

But it would have taken a harder blow to stun a Tibetan. Mumbling and scowling, the fallen man arose and rejoined his companions, chattering excitedly some little distance away. Samdup, the interpreter, however, was already making matters clear.

"I'm afraid," whispered Nelda, clinging to Dane.

He put his arm about her. "I told you you were a little fool to have come here," he said. "Tomorrow morning you start back for the mission with one of the Gurkhas."

He curled up in his blankets at the base of the stone platform, listening all night to Nelda breathing above him. But he knew she wasn't sleeping any more than he was.

Yes, he would be glad when he saw the last of her in the morning.

"I WILL go to the nunnery, lord," said Samdup, "though all know that it is death for any male to enter it. Perchance the white man's magic is powerful enough to overcome the spells of the devil-women there. But assuredly they will know nothing of Ewart Sahib, or, if they know, they will not tell."

"Tell me more of this nunnery," said Dane.

"The sahib knows that it is the abode of the great Panyang Lama, the only creature of the male sex who may abide in it?"

"I've heard something about it. How many women has he?"

"They say there are a score and half a score," answered Samdup. "They are taken when infants from the villages about here, which accounts for the scarcity of women in this part of Tibet. Thus, verily, these people are like brute beasts in the manner of their lives."

"Well, sahib, these women, brought to the nunnery in infancy, worship the Panyang Lama as a god, being, as they think, the only man who exists, and a divine being sent down from heaven for them. And each new moon, for a week, they worship him with abominable rites."

"But they say, sahib, that the devil-woman who rules the nunnery, Munshing—accursed one!—possesses spells that can kill with the glance of the eye or the outstretched finger. Verily I am afraid. And yet I go to death for love of the sahib and the Government I serve."

They were toiling up the K'ang. The last valley of Napal lay behind them. In front of them was an icy wall, over which the wind swept in icy blasts. They were perhaps half-way up to the edge of the great snow-bound plateau that is Tibet. With snowshoes on their feet and ice-picks in their hands, they panted upward.

Dane looked back at Nelda, toiling bravely up that icy wall, with a Gurkha on either side of her. What a fool he had been not to have sent her home when she first

appeared at his camp in the lowlands!

It was Samdup, the interpreter, who had explained that it would be impossible now for Nelda to return. The cowardly Tibetans of the Nepal border, in their greediness for women, would dog her and the Gurkha, murder him while asleep, and bear the girl away to some village where her fate would be viler than the imagination could picture.

ALL day they toiled upward, stopping only twice, in places sheltered by overhanging rocks, to drink scalding tea with a scum of melted butter, and to snatch a few mouthfuls of cold mutton. Once they were on the K'ang itself, there would be caves; there might even be villages, but it was essential that they should reach the summit before nightfall, lest a storm send avalanches of snow hurtling down upon them.

The sun, glaring weirdly out of a bank of heavy snowclouds, was dipping into the horizon when at last they stood upon the summit, breathless. The wind, roaring like a thousand fiends, sent up scurries of snow from a surface that never thawed, even in summer. Far beneath them they could see the warm valleys of Nepal. In front was nothing but an icy desolation.

Samdup touched Dane on the arm. "See, sahib!" he said, pointing northward. "It is the nunnery of the Yanyang Lama and of Munshing, the accursed woman!"

Far in the distance a huge building looking like a serrated peak, stood clear against the northern sky.

"It is death for us all," wailed the interpreter. "Yet I go at your behest, sahib."

"Meanwhile," said Dane, "let's make a camp in the shelter of those rocks."

The grunting Gurkhas flung down their packs upon the hard-frozen snow. In the lee of the docks a layer of yak-manure, their principal burden, was laid and ignited, and the kettle set on to boil. They huddled in their sheepskins, drinking the eternal tea, their eyes streaming from the acrid smoke. Dane lit his pipe. Nelda cuddled against him for warmth. The low voices of the two Gurkhas broke the silence of the night. Overhead, stars, brighter than any stars seen elsewhere, filled the heavens.

"You were a fool to come," Dane said to Nelda. "I was a bigger fool to let you come."

She nestled against him. "Don't be angry with me, Dane," she pleaded. "I have never seen a white man, except Herr Osthuizen and his wife."

She began sobbing desolately against his shoulder.

DANE'S heart beat hard again as he felt her cheek against his own, and her arms about his neck. In the icy night, in the fantasy of their situation, he felt reality slipping away from him; he was conscious only of the warmth of her presence.

She was shivering, despite her fur coat, and Dane opened his sheepskin robe, and they gave warmth to each other. Yes, but the soft, yielding curves of her seemed to draw him more closely to her, and he could feel the rounded orbs

of her breasts pressed hard against him, and heard the caught, in-drawn breaths. Instinctively his mouth sought hers, and with that first kiss Dane all but forgot everything but the sweetness and softness of her.

His hands groped and found the smooth, warm, surface of her back. She clung to him tightly, and her

Suddenly the temple came to life. On all sides of him there were women.



mouth closed on his with a pressure that seemed to draw all sentience from him, save of her proximity.

"Is this wrong, as I have been taught?" she whispered. "When shall I ever again meet a man of my own race?"

Something told him, if he remained strong now and protected her the black gods of Tibet could never overcome him. For, like most white men who have spent years along the northern Indian border, he had half-consciously assimilated much of the Indian lore.

Warm in the bitter cold, he pressed her more closely in his arms, feeling her pliant in his tightening arms. . . .

Then yells, shots, scuffling brought him abruptly to himself.

Dim figures were rushing toward him through the darkness. He saw the two Gurkhas stumble and go down under thudding clubs. As he reached frantically for his revolver, three figures leaped at him.

Women, nude save for skins about their waists—he could see the curves of their swaying breasts. A club thudded hard upon his forehead, and he sank down into a pit of blackness.

DANE was faintly conscious of being carried through what seemed an eternity of blackness. Again he grew unconscious, to become aware later of a stabbing light that pierced his eyeballs to the brain. Then rest—merciful rest, and silence.

It was the memory of Nelda, flooding back through his consciousness, that brought him to

himself. Overhead he could hear the swoop of mighty pinions. Dane opened his eyes, and a black harpy swept so close above him that he could smell the fetid odor of its foul body and wings.

He was lying upon a high, stone platform on the summit of a low hill. He was lying amid a debris of bones, picked white and clear—human bones, the bones of those who had died and had been given to the eagles, in accordance with the Tibetan practice. His body was strapped tightly to the stones, but, with devilish ingenuity, his captors had left his arms and legs free, in order that his torture might be prolonged.

High overhead a score of eagles were circling in the sky, circling, swooping, watching him, as if discerning something formidable in this corpse that moved, and yet impelled by their hunger toward their feast.

A huge black bird swooped downward and dived at Dane's eyes. Dane flung up his arm and struck at the gaping beak and little, avid eyes. With a whir, the air-devil passed, and another swooped, and, as it passed, its beak tore a red ribbon of flesh from Dane's bare thigh.

Another and another swooped. Dane's clenched fist struck one of them, glancing as lightly as in a dream off the feathered body. The eagles were growing bolder, or more frantic. A tuft of hair was torn from Dane's head; the under-clothing which his captors had left was torn to tatters by the rending beaks and claws. A cry, more of horror than of pain escaped Dane's

lips as a beak sank deep into his forearm.

After that, Dane seemed to fight through an eternity of nightmare, straining desperately but unavailingly to break the bonds that held him. His strength was failing him. Just a few minutes more, and he would be lying there, blinded and helpless, to be devoured alive, rent into strips of writhing tissue.

THEN suddenly the birds retreated, circling high into the sky. A figure was standing by the platform, and at first Dane thought it was Samdup or one of the Gurkhas. Then there came the slashing of his bonds, and he sat up, to look into the face of the village woman.

"Ohé, so I came just in time, white man!" she exclaimed in Nepalese. "A little while, and there would have been no more left of you than those bones."

Dane leaped from the platform, forgetful of his cramped body and aching head. "Where is she, the woman I brought with me?" he demanded.

"Ohé, do not search for her! She has been taken to the nunnery where the Panyang Lama and Munshing, the holy woman, rule. And none who pass this way may ever return. As for the black soldiers whom you brought with you, they are already food for the eagles. But I shall take you back to my home, and you shall be my chief husband, and the other shall serve you."

"I must get on," Dane muttered in English. But the woman understood.

"You will go? You will go to your death then. Ohé, and you will

never be mine until the Wheel of rebirth has made its cycle. Come, pay me for the life that I have given back to you!"

Dane stared at her speechlessly. All about him were the eternal snows, overhead the eagles were whirling, swooping angrily, with outspread wings and gaping beaks; in front of him stood the village girl, smiling invitingly.

She pulled the heavy sheepskin coat from her shoulders, and drawing nearer until her plump breasts brushed him, she took him by the hands. And nothing of all this phantasmagoria was real, except the presence of her. The black gods who control the Wheel of life were shrieking in Dane's ears, and filling him with a terrible fear.

AFTER that he was barely conscious of staggering on, through nights and days, under a huge revolving sun and a white, leering moon, foodless, toward that mighty fane that gradually grew clearer, nearer. Afterward he remembered that the village woman had given him her sheepskin coat, without which he must have perished in the cold. The sun was half-way down the west when Dane awoke from a daze, and saw that he was approaching the nunnery at last.

He pulled himself together. The witchcraft of Tibet was strong—he half believed in it—but he must save Nelda Ewart from whatever fate those devils had in store for her.

Dane looked up and saw the new moon like a feather in the sky, and remembered that Samdup had told him about the rites in the temple.

A thrill of horror ran through him, and suddenly he knew that he was sane again, and master of the black gods that ruled the land.

Despite his anxiety he could not repress his stupefaction at the sight of the great nunnery. High on the plain it rose, immense, portentous, evidently the work of ages, for it was as large as a king's palace, and was built entirely of squared blocks of stone.

In the center was a massive pile, square in shape, with a wing thrust out on either side. Above the central structure was an enormous, rotund thing that gradually took shape as Dane approached, until he saw that it was a huge head.

It was a stone head of the Buddha, looking like a small dome, and in the gray light of the afternoon, instead of the reposeful smile of the Perfected One, it seemed to leer like some vulturine god.

Dane stumbled on, too weary to consider entering by subterfuge. Unarmed, helpless, he knew that he could trust only to his native wit, and perhaps the Abbess's fears of offending the representative of the Indian Raj.

The great bronze-bound doors of the temple stood wide open. Dane entered. At first he could see nothing; then he perceived the enormous figure of the Buddha facing him, at the end of the vast hall, the roof of which was level with its shoulders, so that the head protruded into the sky.

Lights burned before it, banners hung from the roof, partly obscuring the vast interior. The temple appeared empty.

But somewhere a gong was ham-

mering monotonously, and somewhere Dane could hear the reiterated "*Om Mani Padmi Hum*," the Buddhist invocation, repeated by women's voices.

Dane advanced to the altar before the idol—and suddenly the temple came to life. From all sides they came rushing in upon him, a mob of women in saffron robes.

THEY tore at his clothing, shrieking like fiends, clawing at him, dragging him this way and that, their yellow faces distorted with maniacal rage. Dane was losing the last vestiges of his attire. His coat was gone, his flannel shirt had been torn from his back, his underclothing was in rags.

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the attack ceased. Suddenly the enraged females drew off from him and prostrated themselves upon their faces in a ring about him.

Dane gaped about him, completely at a loss. His face was bleeding from the scratches of feminine nails, his underclothes were shreds; he stooped and picked up his sheepskin coat to cover his all but nudity.

They were clawing about him, kissing his feet, murmuring what sounded like blandishments, and Dane was utterly dumbfounded at the change.

But a Tibetan woman in saffron robes, looking about five-and-thirty years of age, came down the aisle toward him. She stopped and watched him, smiling.

"Please come this way, Mr. Dane; there seems to have been a misunderstanding," she said. "I

am Munshing the Abbess; I have been expecting you."

Her perfect English, her knowledge of his name puzzled Dane still more. In utter bewilderment, he stepped over the bodies of the groveling women, and followed the Abbess past the huge Buddha, into a very European room.

There was European furniture, a writing-desk, a fine Bokhara rug upon the floor; there were clocks—four or five of them; and there was Munshing, looking at Dane with a smile on her comely face.

"The fools," she laughed. "They thought the Panyang Lama was the only man in the world, and you have undeceived them! Yes, I heard that you were coming to see Colonel Ewart. He contrived to send some message in a moment of aberration. But he will never return. He has adopted the life of a hermit, hoping to attain the state of a Boddhisatva, with only one more incarnation before reaching Nirvana.

"It is unfortunate that you brought his daughter on your wild quest, for it is the rule that none who enters the sacred nunnery of Kwang-po may ever return to the outside world. Still, there is solace here."

Still smiling, Munshing spread her hands with a slight gesture, that stripped the saffron robe from her body to the hips, displaying a profusion of feminine beauty that, despite his weakness, set Dane's heart to pumping wildly.

MUNSHING laughed melodiously. "The fate that reared me in an Indian mission brought me here twelve years ago," she said.

"I am a woman, and the Panyang Lama grows old and stupid, and I am tired of sharing his companionship with my foolish girls. You shall stay with me, Dane. He shall join Colonel Ewart in the subterranean chamber, in darkness for the rest of his life, and you shall become the Panyang Lama!"

She came nearer, swaying as she moved, radiating an indescribable power of femininity that made Dane's senses swoon. He knew that if she overcame him, he would lose his soul forever, and, with a mighty effort, he thrust her away.

"I have come for Colonel Ewart's daughter," he cried. "Where is she?"

At that moment the gongs and conches in the temple broke out in a mad, discordant medley, and, mingled with it the screams of the women.

"Damn you, you witch, where is she?" cried Dane. "Tell me, or—!"

His hands dropped to his sides. For the life of him he couldn't move an inch. He saw Munshing's mocking face through a white haze.

"Ah, you will think better, Dane," she laughed.

She clapped her hands, and two of the temple girls entered and prostrated themselves before her. She spoke to them in Tibetan, which Dane didn't understand.

But, as they moved away, he found himself following them against his will; his feet seemed to drag his reluctant body, and all the while Munshing's silvery laughter tinkled in his ears.

Past the huge statue, before

(Continued on page 123)

Rat Trap

[Continued from page 17]

peering over their shoulders, mocking me.

"A brazen scoundrel to force his way by night into the chamber of her magnificence as if she were some goose-wench! She'll twist his pretty limbs for him."

"Flay him alive, more likely, and use his skin for vellum."

"Be silent, knaves!" shouted one of the guards. "Come, fellow, would you hold up the entire party?" he cried to me.

"Where do I go?" I asked, still stupid from the drug.

He laughed. "To Pistoja, for the question and the torture, so far as I know," he answered. "Hasten, magnificence!"

At point of pike I was thrust upstairs and out into the bailey, where the blinding light of the newly risen sun seared my eyeballs. Nevertheless I could discern the party already gathered at the entrance—the two ladies and the boys, seated on horses richly caparisoned, their maids on palfreys, the mailed guard, beginning to form ranks; behind, a dozen mules laden with baggage, and other beasts for the accommodation of the men-servants.

At my appearance shouts of laughter, taunts and oaths resounded. I was prodded toward a mule and bidden mount. Somebody thrust a chunk of bread into my hand.

In the tail of the procession, with an armed, mounted guard on either side of me, I saw all faces turned upon me in derision and

mockery—all save those of Donna Clarice and Tessa, who looked fixedly ahead of them.

The portcullis rose, the drawbridge clanked down, foot by foot, with creak of chains. The procession started. I rode between the castle towers, down toward Ferrara, on my way toward Pistoja, torture, death, and infamy.

Yet more bitter than all was the remembrance of those moments when Lucrezia Borgia's body had been warm and pliant against me. If I could have strangled the accursed woman, I could have died with better grace.

Of Madonna Tessa I dared not think, for I had betrayed my undeclared love for her.

WOULD Carlo and his men be waiting in the pass at Forli—waiting for the chance of plunder? That filled my mind to the exclusion of all else as we wound uphill toward the crest of the Apennines.

We halted for food at midday. My guards, who watched me closely, gave me more bread and sour wine. I could see from my place in the rear of the procession that some discussion was taking place ahead of me.

"Well, well, and so we push on to cross the pass of Forli before nightfall," said one of my guards to me. "It is considered safer to camp in the plain beyond. You shall see Pistoja the sooner, *sgherro!* You must have been mad with drink, I'll warrant me, to

push into the apartment of her magnificence. Eh, and tore the clothing from her! Tell me, is it true that she is shaped like Venus? Eh, thou'lt remember her, for thy consolation, on the rack, varlet!"

He roared with laughter. I ate my bread and drank my wine in silence. That decision to cross the pass at nightfall seemed to me madness. If Carlo was still waiting there. . . .

Half-way up, a storm burst upon us, smothering the embers of the setting sun, sweeping down in a deluge of icy rain, and throwing the line into confusion. There was a halt, while drivers struggled with the refractory mules. Had I wished to escape, now seemed my chance. But my eyes were set upon the ladies and the boys, halted ahead. I did not know what my purpose was, but I meant to remain with them.

"Forward! Forward!" The mules, under the lash, broke into a gallop, my own beast too, the guards shouting and swearing as they brought up the rear. We were nearing the pass now. The red of the setting sun had vanished, gray twilight was changing into night. Then suddenly a boulder came toppling down, striking a mule and pinning it to the ground. More boulders, a stampede of the maddened beasts—then mounted men came charging down upon us, yelling madly.

Carlo and his cutthroats had not abandoned their intentions.

A man rode at me, and his sword-slash gashed my mule's neck. I was afoot in an instant. As the man raised his sword again,

I drove my shoulder into his body, thrusting him to the ground. Next moment his sword was in my hand. I ran up ahead, where the guards were contending furiously with Carlo's cutthroats.

I could see only struggling shadows in the blackness, but I heard a woman scream close beside me, and saw a man dragging her away. I recognized Carlo by that dog's snarl of his, and thrust.

My point pierced his throat, and he dropped, bubbling horribly in his death-agony. I caught the woman as she toppled, and recognized Madonna Tessa.

Three more made at me, howling with fury as they heard my voice and knew. I pierced one through the body, disengaged my sword just in time to meet the play of the second, and, even as we clashed, I saw the third was upon me from the left side, dagger-hand drawn back. Then suddenly Madonna Tessa's cloak went over the fellow's head and blinded him; while he struggled with the folds of it, I got my own man under the hauberk, a good belly-thrust that sent him down writhing in slow death.

Then the third man had fled. I saw a gap in the wall of the pass ahead of me, and, dragging Tessa with me, made for it. The noise of battle was dying away; everything was hidden in a swirling cloud of snow.

I found a little cave, into which we crawled, and lay close to each other for warmth in the bitter cold of the Apennines. But the power of the accursed woman's drug was still upon me. Almost

upon the moment I was unconscious.

"SO, THEN, Madonna," I said, returning from my exploration the next morning, "it appears that your party have won through to Pistoja, for they have left no dead, whereas five bodies of the brigands are frozen in the snow."

She looked at me coldly. "What is your purpose with me?" she asked.

"You know me, Madonna. I came to Ferrara to entrap your sister and her two sons, and failed."

"I am not of the Medici. I matter nothing. Here, too, you have failed, Messer Domenico," she answered. "So what is your plan?"

"Madonna, you would hardly expect me to escort you to Pistoja, to face the rack, the torture, and the gibbet? My way lies back toward Florence."

"Would more gold tempt you?" she inquired in a curious tone.

"I think, Madonna, you do not understand," I said. "Because of our loyalty to the Medici, my mother and I suffered cold, hunger, and privation for years, and none of the Medici remembered us or sent us a sequin. Thus I was forced to become a cheat, a gamester, and a traitor, and Machiavelli picked me for that role because he could find none baser in all Florence. Now look at me with those great eyes of yours, Madonna, you who have been reared all your life in gentleness, and pass judgment on me."

She put her hands upon my shoulders. "I do not pass judg-

ment on you, Messer Domenico," she said, "because you do not judge yourself fairly. Last night you cried out, in your sleep that it is to save your mother's life you are returning to Florence—and death."

"If I were not returning to my death, I would not dare to tell you that I love you," I said. "Yes, I go to Florence. But first I shall escort you to some nunnery for refuge."

Her eyes were luminous. "No, Messer Domenico, I shall go to Florence with you, since I myself am of no value to Machiavelli," she answered. "You see, I love you too."

I THINK we walked through Paradise, we two, tramping like peasants over rough goat-tracks toward Florence, and eating gratefully the crusts that the farmers gave us. That night we lay still closer together in a rick of straw, holding each other in our arms like children, and beneath her soft breast I felt the steady rhythm of Tessa's heart, as if seeking to attune itself to mine.

But the next day, in the distance, I saw great clouds of smoke covering the horizon, and, as it seemed, flashes of fire in the heart of it.

I did not know from which city it came, but it showed me one thing—Pope Julius and his Spaniards were on the march against Florence, and this was the first fruits of the war.

Once Tessa stopped and put her hands on my shoulders in that dear way of hers.

"Domenico, if it were not for your mother, we might flee to some city where we might be safe for ever," she said. "Is there no other way than to go back?"

"No, there is no other way," I said. "Besides, I have pledged my word to Machiavelli."

She said no more, and we went on our way, I going to death, Tessa to captivity, both immeasurably content. The smoke clouds were behind us now, and, shortly after noon, suddenly I saw the glorious city on the Arno, the Duomo and the spire of the Campanile, and an army maneuvering in the fields without the walls.

Very solemnly we stopped and kissed each other, and then went on in silence, till three scouts came upon us suddenly with cries to yield.

I knew their leader, who greeted me with a cry of astonishment. "You, Messer Domenico? Whence come you? Not from Prato? They say the Spaniards have taken it by the sword, and fired the town, and Florence is expecting to see the enemy vanguard at any hour."

"That news," I said, "is for Messer Niccolo."

"Where is the troop you took with you?"

"That news is also for Messer Niccolo."

He grinned. "You are a very unlucky man, Messer Domenico," he said. "I understand that Messer Niccolo has given orders you are to be brought before the military tribunal forthwith. They are hanging traitors by dozens."

"I shall make the baker's dozen, then," I answered, referring to a country proverb.

We went with our captors across the fields, where all the city train-bands were encamped, preparing to repel the expected attack. All the while there had been no question regarding Tessa, but, when we reached the city confines—now attended by an entire troop, it was indicated to me that I was to go forward alone.

"Remember always that I love thee, *Domenico mio*," said Tessa kissing me.

BACK in a cell of the Bargello, I wondered whether it had not all been a dream, and I awaiting judgment for the stabbing of the Roman in the gaming-house. Tessa, my mother, the infamous woman of Ferrara were all jumbled in my mind, and yet out of this confusion my love for Tessa emerged like a bright star.

I had lost all count of time when my cell door opened, and a voice hailed me:

"Come out, Messer Domenico. Your case is to be heard."

I stumbled up into the *cortile*, expecting to find the gibbet waiting for me; but the *cortile* was empty, though the streets were filled with a shouting crowd. I was led into a chamber on the ground floor, and left there.

A door opened, and *he* came forward with a soft step, the archfiend who had sent me on my mission. His beady eyes blazed into mine.

"Well, Messer Domenico—you failed?"

"I failed, Messer Niccolo."

"And came back?"

"As I pledged myself. Now I am ready for your worst."

Machiavelli made a clucking sound with his tongue. His hand dropped upon my shoulder.

"He would be a poor statesman," he said, "who was not prepared to change his policy to suit the times. Well, I see you know nothing. Florence has made her peace with Pope Julius and the Spaniards. Your failure to secure the princes was the cause of our success. You are free, Messer Domenico!"

I gaped at him incredulously.

And now I could hear the shouts of the crowd again. They were calling "*Palle! Palle!*" the watch-cry of the Medici. Our cause had triumphed!

"In the next room," said Machiavelli, linking his arm through mine, "there awaits a lady who has interested herself in you, and is now a person of extreme consequence."

He released me, and I went stumbling blindly through—into Madonna Tessa's arms.

Chaos and Back

[Continued from page 29]

their necks and he smacked their shaven pates together with a horrid, *thunk-crunch* sound. Now there was only one guardsman left. He was trying to get away.

Macklin picked up a heavy vase; threw it. The uniformed man went down, his brains spraying.

But even in the moment of his triumph, Mark Macklin felt a sharp jab of agony through his back. He gasped, choked, pulled away. He saw Petal Saburo with a crimson-dripping knife in her fist. And he knew that she had stabbed him through the lungs. . .

"She-wolf!" he rasped. He bent down, snatched a ray-gun, turned it on her. The Oriental woman screeched hellishly as the knife turned white-hot in her fist. She tried to drop it but the metal handle had fused to her cooked palm. Somehow, in her struggles, she raised the blade—just as it turned molten.

Liquid steel dripped down upon her breast, frying that mollescent dome of ivory flesh to sickening redness. Still maniacally screaming, Petal Saburo collapsed—and died.

PANTING, bleeding internally, his strength waning, Mark Macklin turned and sped from the apartment. He made it downstairs to the street. Washington was a shambles. From every alley, from every hidden meeting-place, Americans had burst out of concealment and fallen upon Japanese soldiery. And the Japs, armed only with their Y-ray guns, were the same as impotent against this onslaught of enraged United States citizens who had no fear of the ray, now.

Macklin smiled bloodily as he saw a grim-eyed white man smash three squalling Japs against a brick wall and kick them unconscious. "Good . . . work . . ." Mack-



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lin applauded, knowing that the same sort of scenes were being enacted from Atlantic to Pacific. By morning the yellow yoke would be broken; an enslaved nation would once again be free!

And Mark Macklin, with his moulded plastic identification discs which resembled steel, but which in reality were impervious to the Y-ray, was responsible for all this. His invention had enabled his countrymen to throw off their shackles of fear. The task had been his, and he had done it well.

But he was not yet finished. There remained one more job for him to accomplish. And he slogged forward toward the White House, fighting against the pain of his stabbed back.

He gained the grounds. A sentry tried to stop him with the Y-ray. Macklin laughed and hit the fellow in the guts; doubled him over. "I'd kill you if I had the time," the American snarled. Then he pressed onward.

The palace was dead ahead; its door stood open. Macklin trudged wearily over the threshold—and then he heard a scream. A woman's scream. *Elayne Dexter's scream!*

It galvanized the research chemist; sent new strength into him. He gathered his muscles, catapulted himself forward. Then he drew up short. "You foul swine!" he choked.

MARSHAL Fangashi, the Dictator, stood over by a window—apparently getting ready to make his escape before a white mob could lay hands on him. And the fat yellow man was not alone. He

had his pudgy fingers entwined in Elayne's golden hair and he was holding her head far back so that her flawless throat was arched, throbbing, exposed.

Spotting Mark Macklin, the Asiatic ruler grinned evilly. With his free hand he clawed at Elayne's dress; ripped it away from her trembling body. Her lovely white breasts spilled into view, palpitant, creamy. "Stand back!" Fangashi yelled; and he made a pudgy fist. "Stand back or this girl dies!"

"You wouldn't?—"

Fangashi's lips writhed fatly. "I know enough of jiu-jitsu to be able to kill her with one stroke of my hand. Now will you stand back?"

It was Elayne who made Macklin's decision for him. "Mark—darling—don't let him get away! He might rally the Japanese forces, turn the tide. But if you capture him, America will be free. Get him, Mark—and never mind wh-what happens to me—!"

Mark Macklin acted. He sprinted toward his quarry.

Even as he made the move, Fangashi's fist chopped downward; connected cruelly with Elayne's lovely throat. She choked horridly; her eyes went glassy. She slumped. . .

And then Macklin came to grips with the Dictator.

"You saffron murderer!" he panted as he closed in. Fangashi tried to foul his way free with fingernails and knees and teeth; but Macklin's vengeance was not to be denied. The struggle was short, vicious, decisive.

And it ended with Fangashi on

the floor, his gullet ripped out by the gory roots.

Then, and only then, did Mark Macklin realize his own weakness. Loss of blood from that knife-wound had done for him. He was through, he realized.

He slumped over; landed with his cheek pillowing upon Elayne Dexter's sweet breast. Perhaps her heart was beating, perhaps not; he couldn't be sure, because he was too far gone, himself. Maybe, if help came in time, medical attention would save Elayne—and himself.

If not, it scarcely mattered. America would be free again. And Elayne's self-imposed bondage to a yellow dictator was broken at last. Her bosom was a restful cushion for Macklin's tired head. He closed his eyes and slept.

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Hostage of Battle

[Continued from page 41]

ran past the blinded soldier who had fired at him first. Down the corridor, staggering into the darkness, his left arm growing numb. It wasn't just that he wanted to live. He wanted to have a few minutes to reason things out, to understand why Marguerite had turned against him.

If she hadn't saved him—if she hadn't all but given herself to him it might all have been different. Were all women like that?

He felt the blood dripping from his shoulder. He knew his strength was going fast. But he was going to live long enough to make a comeback.

Probably it was the wine rather than the loss of blood that was making him light-headed. He groped through the dark toward the wall, and found the ever-ready bottle, knocked off the head, and drank. Another. He drew in a deep breath. He felt better now, though, even in the darkness, he felt that the passage was heaving and swaying like a ship at sea.

He was going to live—but he didn't know how. He didn't know any way out of the subterranean passages. He leaned against the wall, and heard his voice going out in obscene blasphemies.

"Beeng! Beeng!"

That was insanity, of course. But a hand was on his arm, an arm was about his neck, his face was pulled down, and two warm lips were pressed against his. Bing stood in incredulous wonder. If

Marguerite was still alive, then they were both in a new life, a life after death.

"Beeng, come with me! There is no time to lose. There is a quicker way out of the vaults."

Bing only vaguely understood this, but something that the girl thrust into his hand brought him suddenly to the realization that he couldn't be dead after all. At least, he didn't believe that there were revolvers in heaven—or wherever else he might have been. And she was tugging at his arm, and guiding him along the pitch-dark corridor.

"Come quick! He is in the vaults, and he may discover the way here. He has men with him!"

Bing hadn't the faintest idea of his location, but he yielded to the girl. He was conscious of turning down one passage after another. And suddenly a gleam of light appeared in front of him.

IT WAS only a pencil. It wasn't the acetylene lamp, of course, but a big flashlight that somebody seemed to have dropped or placed on the floor. It illuminated only a narrow circle just above the stones.

Marguerite stopped suddenly. Feet came into view. A raucous voice was bellowing curses in German. The feet tripped, and a body fell face downward. Bing recognized the *Oberst*. He was evidently drunk, and he seemed to have hurt himself, for he writhed and twisted in the effort to regain stability,

while the curses flowed more profusely from his lips.

"Kill him! Quick!" whispered Marguerite; and Bing understood that. But he'd have to give the *Oberst* a chance to rise and draw.

Marguerite would have run forward again, but Bing pushed her behind him and preceded her toward the cavern. In the seconds that intervened before his irruption Bing saw the dead man on the floor—then the body of the dead girl. He thought he was growing crazy. Why, Marguerite was behind him! He leaped into the cavern, to find himself face to face with two riflemen, whose weapons rang out simultaneously.

The slugs whizzed past Bing's ear. But he was in darkness, and they were vainly illumined by the light of the fallen flash. Bing's revolver roared twice, and the rifles clattered to the stones. One man pitched forward with a groan, and lay motionless; the second sat down, screaming and pleading for his life.

Marguerite darted past Bing with a wild cry and flung herself upon her knees, beside the dead girl, moaning softly. The *Oberst* yelled, and got upon one knee.

Bing deftly relieved him of his pistol, jerked him to his feet. "Shut up!" he shouted.

Marguerite was looking up at him. "Annette," she moaned. "My sister. I went to look for her, to save her. She'd dead, Beeng. What shall I do?"

Suddenly she sprang to her feet. "Come, Beeng. I shall show you the way out. But kill him! Kill him!" She pointed to the *Oberst*.

A better thought had come to

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Bing. "I'm going to do something better than that," he said. "I'm following the Boche custom. I'm going to take him as a hostage."

The *Oberst*, who evidently understood, broke into a flood of voluble German. Of course Bing didn't understand, but he did catch the words "*tausend reichsmarks*."

"Sorry, old man, but I don't want your polluted money," he said. "You cracked up my plane, and you're going to provide me with another to get back to my headquarters—understand?" He prodded the *Oberst* in the belly with the muzzle of his revolver. Then he glanced swiftly back. The wounded man was inching toward one of the rifles. Bing picked them up and hurled them into the darkness of the passage.

"Okay, *Oberst*," he said. "This lady will lead the way. Go ahead. No, wait a minute."

He handed Marguerite the revolver. "Belly-shoot him if he starts acting up," he said. "Understand?"

Marguerite understood, and the hand that held the revolver was perfectly steady.

IT TOOK barely a minute for Bing to strip the uniform off one of the dead men, to divest himself of his flying togs, and to put it on. And it was almost dark, so there was no shock to Marguerite's modesty.

Her sister! That was why he had felt that their relationship was not the same, even when he held her in his arms. That explained Annette's treachery, and, dreadful though her death was, Bing felt a

thrill of exultation that Marguerite hadn't played him false.

"Okay, darling," he said, taking the revolver from the girl, and prodding the stupefied *Oberst* again. "Follow the lady," he ordered, picking up the flash and putting it in Marguerite's hand. "Quick march!"

How had Marguerite ever learned the secret of those endless tunnels in the chalk cliffs, even if her father had been employed there? Right turn, left turn, straight ahead, cave after cave, and everywhere the champagne bottles protruding from the walls. Then, at last, a gleam of moonlight in the distance. It brightened, and Marguerite squeezed out of what was hardly bigger than a fox-hole.

In the distance was the dull, subdued glow of the German camp.

The *Oberst* chattered. He was saying "*tausend reichsmarks*" again, but there was a word before the "*tausend*" that Bing didn't get. He was intrigued. He wished he had learned the German numerals at school.

"Shut up, I told you! And listen! You're going to get us a plane, you understand? And you're coming with us—just a short distance. Then I'll drop you. No, no, not out of the plane. Just set you down, *comprenez?*—I mean *verstehen?*"

A threatening gesture with the revolver reduced the *Oberst* to silence. Bing called to Marguerite to walk beside him. He followed close upon the *Oberst's* heels. They were nearing the camp when two sentries sprang up with a challenge.

That was Bing's supreme moment, but the *Oberst's* growl si-

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lenced them into respectful presentation of rifles. Bing knew he was safe then. When they had gone a little farther, he stopped his prisoner.

"This is far enough. Call those men and tell them to have a plane brought here—with just one pilot," he said. He dug his revolver muzzle deep into the *Oberst's* ribs, and the *Oberst* obeyed.

IT ALL seemed incredible, Bing thought afterward. No doubt the *Oberst* was brave enough in battle, but it takes something more than ordinary courage to face swift and imminent death by belly-shooting, especially when you are three parts drunk. At any rate, the officer had obeyed Bing's commands minutely. And they three stood alone beside the big pursuit-ship. The pilot had walked back, stifling his curiosity, and never dreaming what the situation was. The sentries had resumed their station. Bing watched the *Oberst* enter, with a muffled protest, and handed Marguerite the revolver after she had taken her place behind him.

But it didn't look as if the *Oberst* was going to make any trouble. His chief fear seemed to be that he would be, as Bing had phrased it, "dropped."

Bing set down the plane some dozen miles away. The officer tore off his safety-belt, leaped from the cockpit, and disappeared in the darkness. Bing flew on again.

He was striking for headquarters. It must be somewhere in the unoccupied part of France, and how was he to know that an armistice was on the point of being arranged, and that his flying days

were over for a while.

Then for the first time Marguerite saw the bloodstains upon his shoulder, and leaned forward with a cry that was drowned by the engines. She clutched at him, pointing.

Yes, Bing was feeling pretty much shot up. He had lost a good deal of blood. But he was well out of the danger zone by now, and already the east was tinged with the pink of dawn. He sought out a recess in a patch of woodland, and set the plane down.

He was quite weak when he staggered out; he would have slumped to the ground if Marguerite hadn't held him.

But the pine needles were soft, and they were alone together, and, after Marguerite had finished trying to bind up Bing's wound, he put his uninjured arm around her.

She couldn't explain to him about Annette, but he could reconstruct that picture. Her twin, of course, taken away by the *Oberst*, or gone to the German camp voluntarily, like so many French country girls, maddened by loneliness. It didn't matter much, now that Bing had Marguerite.

Her lap was so soft and comfortable for his head. He must sleep awhile—so, with her arms about him. He'd be feeling fine when he awoke.

"What are you laughing at, Beeng?" she whispered.

"I was wondering what my value is," said Bing. "I wish I knew how much the *Oberst* was offering me."

She didn't understand that, of course, but she understood the coinage of love, which is the same everywhere.

The Head of Death

[Continued from page 55]

"All hands—repel boarders!" Barclay barked. Then he ran forward, into the thick of it. His pistol was in his left fist. With his right hand he swept his cutlass out of its scabbard.

Blackbeard loomed before him, grinning evilly through his beard. "God's wounds and hell's blood! He snarled. "So 'tis you!" He raised his pistol.

Barclay fired first. His ball struck Blackbeard's right hand, knocking his pistol into the sea and shattering the clenched fist into a crimson pulp. He flung his unloaded weapon full into Blackbeard's evil face. It smashed against the pirate's mouth, and he spat bloody froth and a rasping oath. He leaped.

Barclay side-stepped, drawing his second pistol. He fired. Captain Teach staggered, grunted. But still he came on. His cutlass was raised high. It whirled down.

Barclay raised his own blade, parried the stroke desperately. There was a carmine stain on Blackbeard's shirt-front where Barclay's second shot had smashed into his belly; but the man seemed inhuman, oblivious to pain, incapable of death. He slashed at Barclay again, and his cutlass licked into the lieutenant's shoulder. Barclay felt hot blood gushing down his left arm. He clenched his teeth and a red haze filmed his eyes. This murderous, evil mon-

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ster had killed hundreds of men and women in his career of piracy; but by God, Barclay was determined to end him now! He lunged, and his cutlass sliced into Teach's neck.

Great gouts of blood spewed from the raw wound. Teach's head lolled grotesquely. But abruptly he straightened, flung himself toward Barclay once more. Barclay beat aside the cutlass, slashed at the pirate again and again. His point found Blackbeard's left eye, ripped it out of its socket. For an instant Teach's blade lowered as pain raged through him.

It was a moment Barclay was waiting for. He leaped in, ran his sword through the pirate's guts.

Teach sank to the deck, lay still for a split-second, then quivered, tried to rise; tried to force his great body upward with the strength of his mighty arms. His good hand reached for his belt, withdrew a pistol. He aimed it at Barclay—

And then he collapsed on his face as the weapon dropped from his nerveless, thick fingers. Barclay leaped toward him, leaned over him.

TEACH rolled his great, shaggy head so that he could look at Barclay. "A—game-cock—that's what—ye—are!" he gasped. "An' now that my wife is—dead—I shan't be—sorry to—go—"

Blood gushed from his flaccid lips, trickled down nauseatingly into his matted black beard. And thus he died.

His men, seeing their leader had been vanquished, set up a cry for quarter; threw down their arms; surrendered. More than two-thirds of their number had been killed in the fight.

Barclay roared a command to his crew. "Take them and tie them up!" He shouted triumphantly. "They'll all swing from yard-arms in the James River, five days from now!"

Blackbeard and his evil, murderous buccaneers had been swept from the sea at last.

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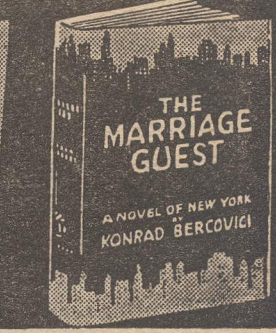
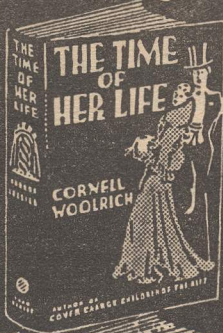
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[Continued from page 71]

done before. We'll never bother you again."

Ted shook his head. "No. You'll both stand trial."

"Like hell!" Ponky stooped, caught up the powder keg. "We'll all go up together!"

Even as he bent and spat his cigarette into the bunghole, Ted smashed a fist to his chin. Keg and Ponky flew backward over the railing, striking the gunwale of Hua Ta Fu's boat. They heard the bronze woman scream as the stout shell capsized under her, Ponky and the keg.

Next instant a mighty roar rocked the ship to its keel, a great upward spout of water drenched them. Ted caught Thyra and saved her from going overside. Shattered bits of the boat flew past them. Gradually things settled again.

Where the boat had been they could see only splinters. Nothing

showed of Ponky. Nothing of Hua Ta Fu.

MID-MORNING. The schooner skimmed back along the way it had come. The Jap was forward at lookout. On the poop Thyra, almost lost in the silk robe that had been Hua Ta Fu's, watched Ted at his steering. Her white hands went over his to put the ship back on the course.

"You're not much of a helmsman, for all your teaching," she said.

"I worked too hard getting you and your ship out of that jam," he smiled. "Now we can hunt up the oil those schooner-rustlers hid out on you, take it to port and sell it. Being one girl in a million, you ought to be one *for* a million, too. After that, what say we—?"

"Let's not wait that long," she interrupted. She kissed him. "You don't need teaching at that!" she murmured.



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A Throat to Cut

[Continued from page 79]

I know where I have seen you!" He pointed a trembling finger at Jacques Montespan. "You are wanted by the police all over France! You are The Rapier!"

At his words, Jussac took a half step backward. His face turned a mottled grey. "The Rapier—you!" He stared at Montespan.

Montespan nodded. "On guard, Jussac!" his voice was brassy, frigid.

Jussac lunged with the sudden fury of desperation—the desperation of a cornered rat. His blade sang out, licked at Montespan's throat. Montespan countered, swept his adversary's point aside. Montespan's rapier was like a thing of living, breathing steel, darting, flicking, whipping at Jussac's frantic guard, smashing it down.

And then it happened—a thrust so lightning-swift that the eye could not follow its lunging symmetry. Jussac cried out in sudden agony, clutched at his ripped throat, dropped his own blade with a thin metallic clatter. Blood gushed from Jussac's severed carotid artery in crimson spurts. He staggered, swayed—and collapsed to the floor at Montespan's feet.

"Dead! You've killed him!" the innkeeper screamed.

But Jacques Montespan was not listening. He had sheathed his blade; now he grabbed at Louise Du Loire's bare arm, dragged her past the gauntlet of staring eyes

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that surrounded them, carried her swiftly out into the night.

She trembled against him. "You—killed him!"

"Even as he killed your grandfather!" Montespán responded tonelessly.

"But—you were sure?"

"I found the proof. I found the rubies he stole."

"And—you are really—The Rapier?"

Montespán nodded grimly. "I am the Rapier—with a price on my head."

"They shall not take you!" the girl whispered frantically. She clung to him, so that her breasts were pressed against his arm as they ran through the deserted streets. "I won't let them take you from me!"

Jacques Montespán looked down at her. His brows rose, uncompre-

hendingly. "Why do you say that, Louise?"

"I say it because you risked your life for me tonight. Because you saved me from—Jussac. Because you were willing to expose yourself as The Rapier—a man with a price on his head—for my sake."

"Are those the only reasons, Louise?"

She choked. "And because . . . I love you, Jacques!" she whispered faintly.

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Jacques Montespán and Louise Du Loire were upon it. And as the coast of France faded in the morning mists, a rising sun cast its red rays upon Paris—a Paris which they were leaving forever . . .

Ashes to Ashes

[Continued from page 87]

into Bob Newton's blood-smeared face.

"D-don't. . . ! You b-beast!" Ellen's voice rang out sharply. And to Bob Newton, slowly reviving, her attempt at intercession was like a reprieve from hell. Then she still loved him—didn't want him to be tortured.

But even as he opened his eyes, Moreno had whirled on the golden-haired girl. "You keep your mouth shut!" the Peruvian snarled. And he dashed the remainder of the water on Ellen Lanhart's shrinking body.

It soaked her thin dress; and where the garment clung to her lovely body, wet and tight, it revealed more than ever the sweet outlines of her young breasts. Like a second skin the wet material limned every seductive curve, every enticing line. Two alluring mounds of girl-flesh pressed outward through the wet dress until they appeared so clear in detail as if they were bared . . .

Bob Newton groaned, staggered to his feet. Rage made a red haze of hatred before his eyes. He

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tried to fling himself at Rico Moreno.

But the Peruvian's two native henchmen were upon him, pinioning him so that he could not move. Helpless in the grasp of his captors, Bob Newton stared foggily at the scene before him.

Rico Moreno held Ellen in his hard arms. The man was leering wickedly. He turned his hard eyes on Newton. "Now, Señor Gringo!" he barked. "You are helpless, and I have your sweetheart here as my prisoner. Will you tell me what I want to know? Will you reveal the secret hiding-place of Pizarro's bones?"

"I've already told you I don't know!" Newton panted thickly.

"You are a stubborn jackass, my friend. But perhaps I know a way to cure that stubbornness!" With that, Moreno's claw-like hands went to the neck of Ellen Lanhart's frock. He ripped downward, savagely—

ELLEN cried out; tried to struggle away from her captor. But it was useless. Moreno was ripping, tearing at her dress, until at last he had snatched all but tattered remnants from her lovely form. . . . She tried to turn away, tried to cover her breasts with her fluttering palms. . . .

Wide-eyed with rage, livid with a consuming hate, Bob Newton felt a surging and consuming fury welling up in his throat. Moreno had defiled Ellen Lanhart—the girl Newton loved. And for that Moreno would pay, the American swore silently!

Rico Moreno once more pulled Ellen toward him; enfolded her

half-nude body in his arms. He locked her in a rough and savage embrace. . . . He kissed her, despite her agonized struggles to free herself from his brutal arms. . . . Then he turned to Bob Newton. "Will you tell me the secret, gringo dog?"

Sweat stood out on Newton's strained forehead. Desperately, vainly, he attempted to release himself from the two natives who held him. "I tell you I don't know where Pizarro's bones are buried!" he cried hoarsely, insanely.

"Still stubborn, eh?" Moreno's eyes narrowed. He barked a command to his henchmen. "Rope the *Americano* to the wall!"

Newton felt his wrists being bound with a length of rawhide. His arms were jerked over his head; fastened to a huge spike which protruded from the wall. He swayed against his fetters.

Moreno turned to the cringing Ellen Lanhart. His hand dropped to his wide leather belt; unfastened a many-thonged quirt. He handed the whip to the yellow-haired girl. "Here!" he barked. "Take this and whip your lover until he is ready to tell me what I wish to know!"

Ellen's eyes widened in horror. "You—you want me to whip Bob Newton?"

"Si!"

"I won't do it!"

MORENO turned to his sister, dark-haired Conchita. "Take a whip from one of my men. Then whip this girl until she in turn whips her sweetheart!"

Conchita's cat-like eyes lighted up sadistically. "With the great-

est of delight, my brother!" she grinned readily. She snatched a thick-handled rawhide quirt from the belt of one of Moreno's underlings. She hefted the lash; swung it deftly, viciously—

The long, snaky thong curled out and cut sharply across the snowy, flawless whiteness of Ellen Lanhart's back. . . .

Ellen screamed. Again Conchita Moreno raised her quirt, brought it singing down across Ellen's rounded hips. And Ellen moaned with agonized pain—

"Ellen—for God's sake do as you've been ordered!" Bob Newton gasped out desperately. "Go ahead and lash me!"

Ellen hesitated. Once more Conchita's quirt descended upon the yellow-haired girl's naked back. And then, because she had no other course, Ellen raised her own whip, brought it down across the chest of her sweetheart, Bob Newton.

And as Conchita's stinging whip-blows bit into Ellen's cringing white flesh, Ellen in turn increased the tempo of her own lashes at Newton's squirming body.

Newton closed his eyes to the pain. Ellen's quirt was cutting through his shirt, biting into his flesh. . . . But he knew that this torture was not really meant for him. Rico Moreno had another purpose, now. The man was a fiend, a sadistic monster, a flagellant. . . .

Like some modern Caligula, the Peruvian was gloating over the scene now being enacted before his narrowed eyes. Slash—slash—slash—the whips descended, upon Bob Newton and upon the

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agonized Ellen Lanhart—

Newton's shirt was ripped and slashed to ribbons, now, and his flesh was raw, bleeding. Ellen Lanhart's unwilling and inexperienced hand could not control her whip, and every blow she dealt him was like a razor-cut. Whereas Conchita Moreno, more adept, was careful not to draw blood from Ellen's lovely white body.

Conchita's slashing quirt was a thing of finesse, of exquisite and graduated cruelty that raised angry weals on Ellen's back, but drew no crimson. . . .

Bob Newton gritted his teeth under the double torture of being whipped and seeing his beloved Ellen similarly lashed. And then, abruptly, hope leaped into his heart. The rope, which bound him to that overhead spike in the wall, seemed to be loosening!

He pretended to sag, semi-conscious; and he threw his full weight against the rawhide thong. It slipped, stretched—

And he almost slipped his hands from the noose!

AT THE same instant, Ellen saw what he was doing. Like a flash, she pivoted—and her next quirt-blow, instead of lashing down on Newton, sang through the air and sliced full across Conchita Moreno's face.

Conchita screamed a harsh, agonized cry. Blood dripped from her mutilated cheek. She dropped her whip, staggered backward. . . . And simultaneously, Bob Newton launched himself headlong at Rico Moreno, Conchita's brother.

Moreno was totally unprepared for the attack. He went sprawling;

punched up against the far wall. And as he fell, Newton leaped after him, flicked the Peruvian's automatic from the man's broad leather belt. Newton whirled.

Moreno's two henchmen were closing in. Bob Newton's finger tightened on the automatic's trigger. He squeezed hot lead out of the weapon's flame-belching muzzle; and the two natives went tumbling down to some Peruvian hell, with bullets through their skulls.

But in that brief instant, Rico Moreno had regained his feet. Now he hurled himself upon Bob Newton from behind; and the American went down, with Moreno on top of him. Desperately, Newton squirmed over on his back, so that he was face to face with the savage-eyed Moreno who pinioned him.

Moreno was battering at the American's face; was snatching at the automatic in Newton's right fist. Newton strove to bring the gun's muzzle upward; to blow a hole through Moreno's guts. But suddenly, the Peruvian plunged his knee into Bob Newton's groin; and as the nauseating agony ate like a cancer through the American's abdomen, Moreno got the automatic.

He got it, raised it, aimed it—

With the last ounce of his strength, Bob Newton smashed upward with his fist, knocking the automatic aside even as it spat flame and belched leaden death. The bullet whined across the room. Newton heard a sudden, wailing, feminine cry—and the thud of a slumping body.

Cold horror gripped at the

American's vitals. Had that deflected bullet struck Ellen Lanhart ... killed her. ...? He twisted, and a new, rage-born strength flowed into him. Savagely he raised his head; and his teeth closed down into the side of Rico Moreno's straining neck. Like a wolf the American clamped his hard jaws. ...

Moreno shrieked wildly, insanely, as Newton's teeth met in his jugular. ... The American felt a spurting, brackish hot fountain in his face; tasted the salt tang of the Peruvian's blood. ...

And thus, by the fangs of a man who had momentarily turned savage, Rico Moreno died. ...

BOB NEWTON staggered to his feet, nauseated, sick, horror-stricken at what he had done. But it had been his life or Moreno's ... a fight to the death. ... Newton squared his shoulders, whirled around, searching—

Searching for Ellen Lanhart, desperately afraid that she had been struck by that singing slug from Moreno's deflected automatic. And then, suddenly, Bob said, "Ellen—Ellen my dear!"

She was standing there in the far corner, wide-eyed, white-faced, exquisite ... and unharmed! Newton looked at his left. He saw a slumped figure—a feminine figure.

The body of Conchita Moreno, with a bullet hole in her breast! She was dead.

He leaped at the Peruvian girl's corpse, callously stripped away its tight silken dress. Then he turned to Ellen. "Come, my dear. Put this on!" he commanded gently.

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She swayed toward him. "Bob—Bob darling . . ."

He caught her in his arms. Kissed her reverently. . . .

And then she dressed, and they went out of that house of death.

THEY were on the afterdeck of the steamship *Spardian*, Bob Newton and Ellen Lanhart. The descending sun was a glowing orange disc on the western rim of the Pacific, and Callao was a dim memory, far behind them.

"My grandfather always said that death and destruction would follow in the wake of any attempt to disinter Pizarro's bones," Newton said softly. He fingered the signet-ring on the third finger of his hard right hand, the ring which his dead grandfather had left to him. And then, as he touched the bauble, something happened.

The entablature of the ring popped open!

Newton stared at the secret hollow place thus revealed. He saw

a folded, tiny scarp of tough, onion-skin paper.

Bob!" Ellen Lanhart whispered. "What is it?"

Wondering, he withdrew the paper. Unfolded it. Held it up in the day's dying light.

"A map!" he breathed. "Look—Ellen! A map showing the location of Pizarro's tomb, in the Peruvian wilderness!"

Ellen shuddered. "Death . . . and destruction . . . following in the wake of Pizarro's bones . . ." she whispered unsteadily.

Bob Newton looked at her; then at the unfolded map. He smiled, a little grimly. Then, with calm deliberation, he tore the map into many tiny fragments, and spilled them from his palm.

The little pieces of paper danced and settled to the roiled surface of the Pacific.

Bob Newton turned and gathered Ellen into his arms. And somewhere beyond the Styx Francisco Pizarro smiled approval.

■ ■ ■

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Trail to Beyond

[Continued from page 97]

which, in the dim light of a hundred butter-lamps, a score of girls lay prostrate, down a flight of stone steps apparently running beneath the statue, down another flight and along a stone corridor, into an open cell.

Upon the threshold Dane strove in vain to stay himself. The hypnotic spell persisted. In another moment the door had clanged upon him, and he was alone in utter darkness.

THE moment he was alone, the spell lifted. Dane hurled himself madly against the door. It did not yield an inch. Again and again, in a fury of desperation. For he remembered *this was the night of the new moon, when Nelda would be initiated into the abominable rites of the debased Tibetan Buddhists.*

Again and again, till he sank back, hopeless and helpless. And hours seemed to go by in the blackness, while Dane agonized there.

He knew that he loved Nelda; her childishness, her helplessness, the sweetness of her filled him with horror at the fate reserved for her. If he couldn't save her, he meant to die, but first to break Munshing's hypnotic spell and take her with him to black *Avitchi*, the lowest Buddhist hell.

Suddenly he heard a key turn in the heavy lock. A voice whispered to him in the darkness. Dane stepped forward, caught at the

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form of the girl who crouched before him, whispering in Tibetan.

Dane understood nothing, but he realized that she was worshipping him as a god, felt her hands patting his chest in wonder. And, with a sort of telepathic insight, he knew what was passing in her mind. Another god had come, another man-god to supplant the Panyang Lama.

Dane put his arm about her and walked from the cell. He felt her supple body clinging to him; she was faint from emotion, dreaming of heaven knew what treachery whereby she might supplant Munshing and win Dane's love.

Dane knew the infinite instability of women, untamed and untrammelled by civilization; it was as if he had understood her speech. Gently he drew her up the lower flight of stairs. At the top, where there was a faint reflection from the butter-lamps above, he looked into her face.

She pointed at a door set in the rear of the base of the enormous idol.

From the temple above came the monotonous chant of the worshippers. But from high overhead, *from within the idol* came the wild, maenad scream of women.

DANE run up, panting as the stairs seemed to circle perpetually, ran up in utter darkness, hearing faintly the clash of cymbals and the booming of the gongs below. Overhead that maenad screaming was growing wilder. Not far now—not far now—Ah God, the scream of a white girl, of Nelda!

Suddenly a beam of dazzling

light shone through the darkness. The stairs terminated in a platform, illumined, not by any interior light, but by a light without. Dane realized that he had reached the Buddha's head. That light shone through the enormous eye, and it was nothing but the light of the stars, blinding after the darkness.

From within the chamber came that wild screaming. Dane flung himself against the door; it gave, and he found himself in a round chamber, which was the Buddha's head.

Softest rugs and divans filled it. Dane didn't glance at them. Instantly his eyes took in the occupants. There were four girls and a man—and the Abbess, Munshing, seated on a low footstool, watching. . . .

The man was tall, slender, robed in saffron, and on his face was one of the devil's masks of the Tibetans, a hideous thing that gave him the very aspect of a devil.

He was releasing a Tibetan girl, who was screaming in ecstasy, as if she had been drugged. Two others were dragging Nelda forward.

They had stripped her completely, save for a tenuous garment about her hips, while she fought furiously, screaming—screaming Dane's name! The masked devil who was the Panyang Lama was bending forward, the mask a leer of hideousness.

And Munshing was watching. . . . As Dane leaped into the room, Munshing was the first to see him. She sprang to her feet as if to run between him and Nelda.

DANE bounded past her. He drove his fist into the Panyang Lama's midriff, doubling him up with pain. He shouted like a madman. The Lama staggered back, as if bewildered, glanced right and left, and bolted for a door in the rear.

Munshing was at Dane's side, clinging to him. He thrust her away, leaped after the fleeing devil before he could lock the door, and followed him into a hollow, slippery bowl.

The Panyang Lama turned with a howl of imprecation. He struck at Dane who closed with him. As they fought, Dane realized that the bowl was the Buddha's ear. Far beneath, through the aperture in the temple roof, Dane could see the body of the huge statue, and the prone worshippers, black dots upon the ground in the faint light of the butter-lamps.

The Lama was fighting desperately, but it was Dane who was the madman. He grappled him with both hands about the throat, lifted him, lifted him. . . . He heard the weakening whistles come through the constricted windpipe, saw the eyes glaring at him through the

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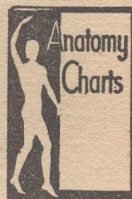
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slits in the hideous mask, and lifted him—lifted him. . . .

"For God's sake—!"

A white man's voice, the words of an Englishman or American behind the mask! Suddenly Dane knew! In horror he released his hold. The Lama stumbled, tried to straighten himself, and, reeling, plunged over the edge of the slippery ear, down—three hundred feet down, whirling to his death upon the ground beneath.

But, as he fell, the mask slipped, and, in the fear-distorted features behind it, Dane knew he had found the man he had come to seek.

Sick with horror, he turned back. There were now three figures in the room—Nelda, swooning on the floor, and the girl who had freed him, standing over the dead body of Munshing, the Ab-bess, a dripping knife in her hand.

"NO, do not take off his mask," said Dane to the officer of the Gurkha platoon, which, guided by the village woman, had followed hard upon his footsteps. "Let him be buried in it, since otherwise his soul would have to pass through even more hells than it is bound for, according to the Buddhist belief."

Later Dane said to Nelda, "Your father died years ago, and was buried in some place unknown. The story that he was still living was untrue. Now I shall take you back."

"To the Mission?" asked Nelda. And she clung to him, whimpering. "Don't take me there," she whispered.

Then she smiled happily, for in Dane's face she saw her answer.

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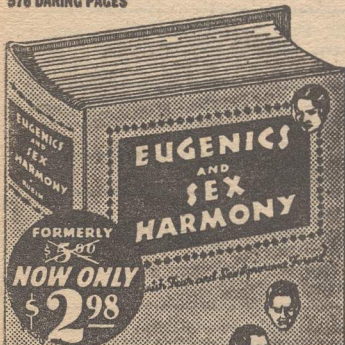
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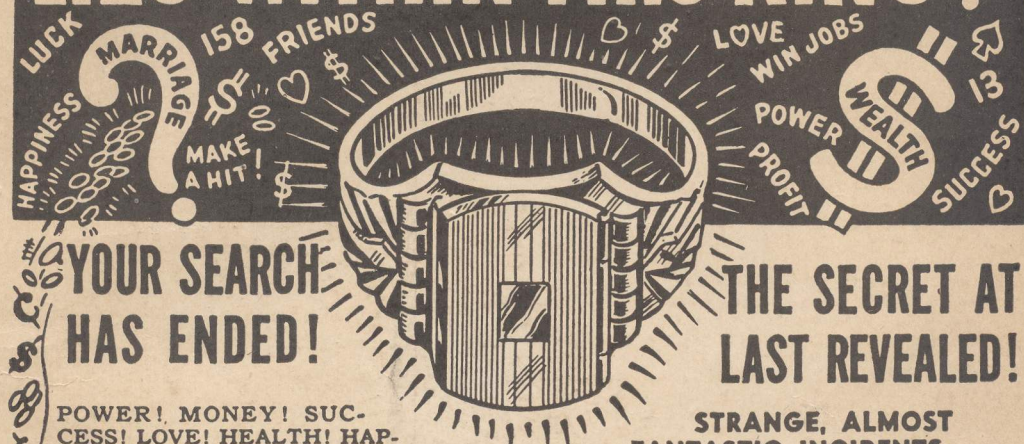
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MANY MYSTICAL POWERS

were attributed to MYRRH as far back as the time of Moses and reference to it may be found in Exodus, Chapt. XXX, Verse 34. The ancient Sassamans, Zoroastrians and Egyptians used it in strange rituals which they claimed induced the vibration of a Lucky Planet toward them and followed them into the Astral Plane of Good Fortune and Success.

Old Folklore manuscripts relate that these ancient Metaphysicists burned an incense made of Myrrh and *bathed their hands in its smoke* in the belief that whatsoever their hands touched thereafter met with success. Could this have been the source of the seemingly supernatural powers which have been attributed to these ancient Mystics in so many old manuscripts?

THERE ARE MANY WHO BELIEVE

that this is so and accordingly use Myrrh as a Talismanic Symbol of Power. Since followers of this old custom claim that Myrrh *must be carried in the hands*, a beautiful 14 Karat gold plated ring has been designed with a *secret compartment* in which Myrrh may be placed and kept on the hand at all times.

STRANGE, ALMOST FANTASTIC INCIDENTS

are related about this Talismanic Ring in Folklore, Legend and Tradition. It has been written that the hand which wore the Talismanic Ring with Myrrh won at the Wheel of Fortune, Brought Success to contracts and other written documents, brought Favor to requests for Jobs, Gifts, Money and other petitions; gave Power to overcome obstacles and hidden fears.

WE GUARANTEE

that you will be in every way satisfied with the beautiful Rings which we offer—not at their originally labelled price of \$5.00 but for the amazingly low price of \$1.97. Each ring has a Hidden, secret compartment in the top which contains *genuine imported Myrrh*.

USE THIS COUPON

SEDUCTIVE PRODUCTS, Dept. CF-6
890 6th Ave., New York, N. Y.

I have read your offer and Guarantee and would like to have a genuine 14K gold plated Ring with Secret Compartment containing genuine imported Myrrh—ready to wear. I understand that this will cost me only \$1.97 instead of the label price of \$5.00.

- ☐ I enclose \$1.97 Money Order. Please send PREPAID and enclose FREE Talismanic Seal and Psalm.
- ☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman \$1.97 PLUS Postal charges on delivery. (NOTE: No Free Talismanic Seal on C.O.D. Orders.)

Name.....

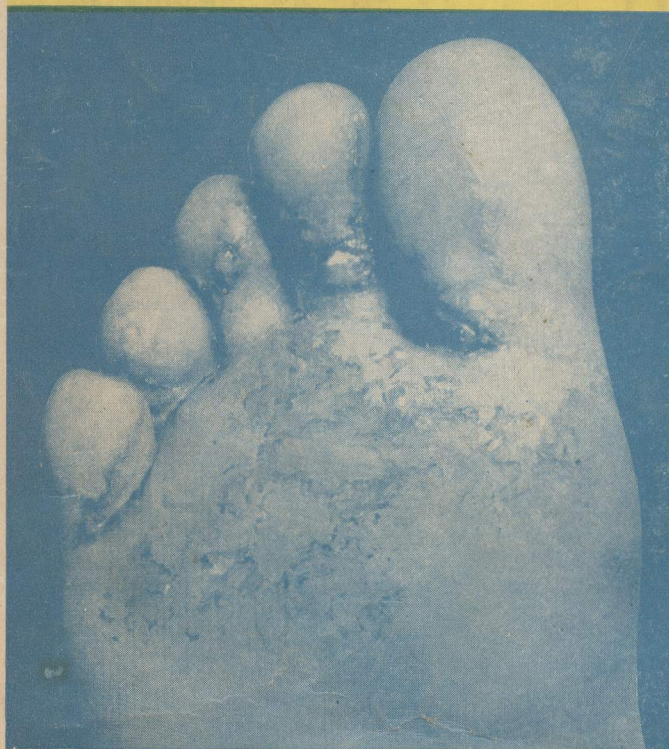
Address.....

City..... State.....

SEND NO MONEY!

FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT



WHY TAKE CHANCES?

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy the germ, whereas, upon contact, laboratory tests show that H. F. will kill the germ Tinea Trichophyton within 15 seconds.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. H. F. gently peels the skin, which enables it to get to parasites which exist under the outer cuticle.

ITCHING OFTEN RELIEVED QUICKLY

As soon as you apply H. F. you may find that the itching is relieved. You should paint the infected part with H. F. night and morning until your feet are better. Usually this takes from three to ten days.

H. F. should leave the skin soft and smooth. You may marvel at the quick way it brings you relief. It costs you nothing to try, so if you are troubled with Athlete's Foot why wait a day longer.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

Send Coupon

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



GORE PRODUCTS, INC.
800 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

C. P.

Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....