



SPICY- ADVENTURE STORIES

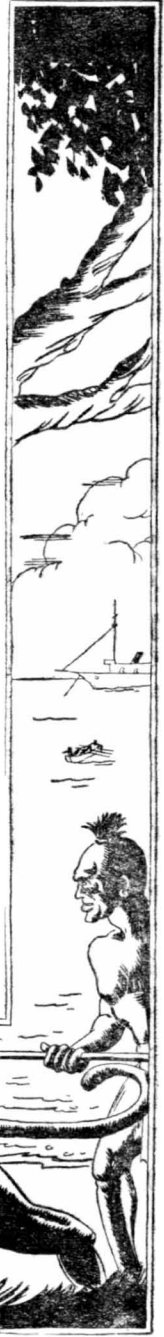
December, 1936

Vol. 5, No. 3

CONTENTS

FOR THE HONOR OF THE DUCHESS..	4
Lew Merrill	
RANGER'S REWARD	16
James A. Lawson	
MIDNIGHT LEGION	28
Robert Leslie Bellem	
VIPER PIT ..	40
Alan Anderson	
LA CABEZA HUMANA	52
Jose Vaca	
DIANA DAW	64
Clayton Maxwell	
TALE OF THE PERFECT WOMEN	66
Guy Russell	
CROWN OF THORNS	74
Arthur Wallace	
BANTU JUSTICE	86
Jerome Severs Perry	
TIGRIS TREASURE	94
Ellery Watson Calder	

SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES is published by the Culture Publications, Inc., 900 Market St., Wilmington, Del. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.





For the Honor of the Duchess

DAVE LURTON buttoned his overcoat at the neck with numbed fingers; even during that second or two, his throat was drenched with the rain. It was coming down in pailfuls. His hat was a soggy mess, his shoes squished dismally. And it looked very much as if he would have to give up all hope of finding shelter, and spend the night in the open.

"Romance!" Dave muttered. "Bah!"

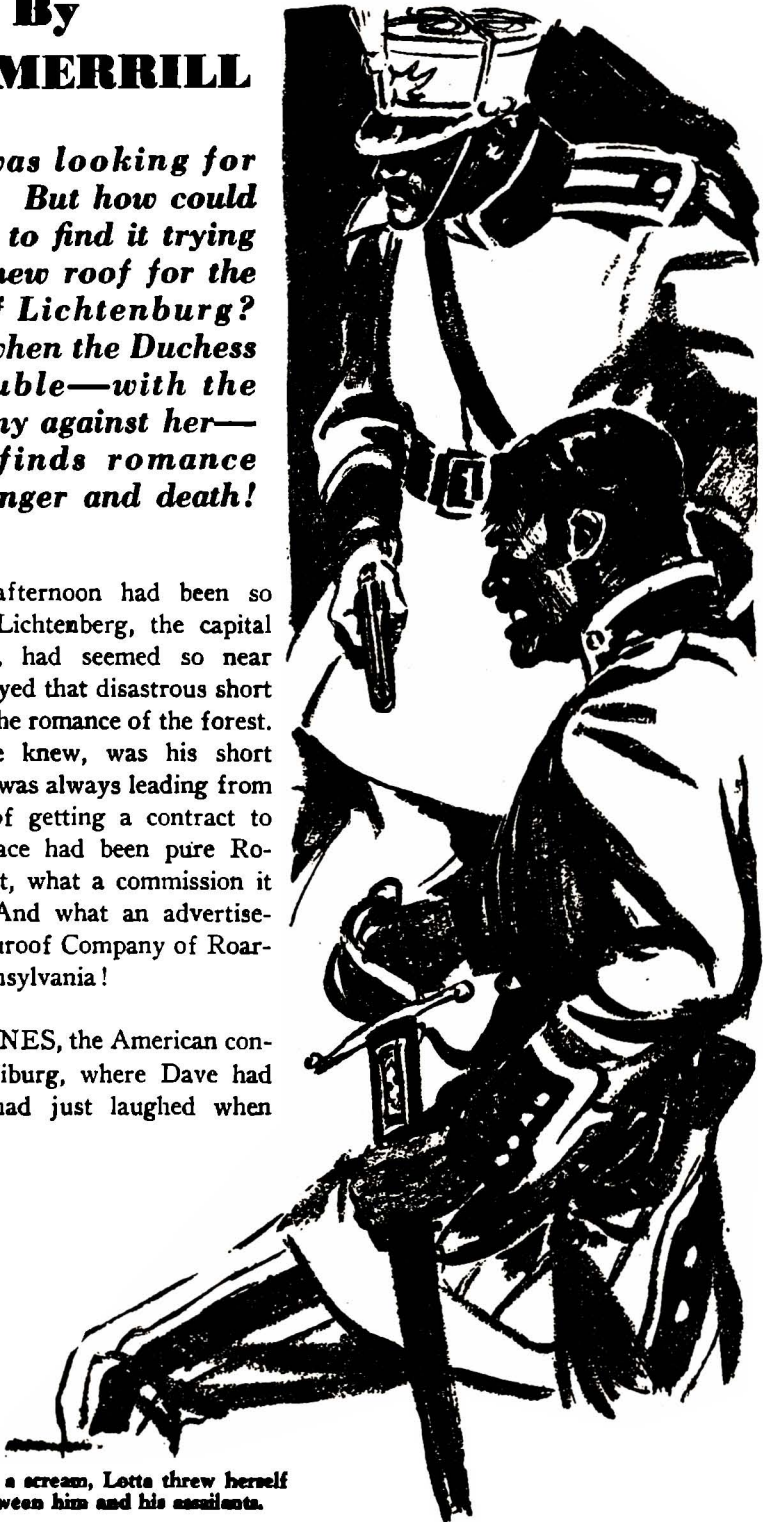
He cursed the folly that had led him, the representative of a responsible firm of manufacturers of roofing material, to yield to the impulse to find a short cut to the capital of the tiny Austrian Duchy of Lichtenberg. He had abandoned his car two miles back, hopelessly bogged. And there wasn't a sign of human habitation anywhere.

By
LEW MERRILL

Lurton was looking for Romance. But how could he expect to find it trying to sell a new roof for the palace of Lichtenburg? It's only when the Duchess is in trouble—with the whole army against her—that he finds romance means danger and death!

The sunny afternoon had been so tempting, and Lichtenberg, the capital of Lichtenberg, had seemed so near when Dave essayed that disastrous short cut, because of the romance of the forest. Romance, Dave knew, was his short suit, and yet he was always leading from it. That idea of getting a contract to re-roof the palace had been pure Romance. And yet, what a commission it would mean! And what an advertisement for the Nuroof Company of Roaring Falls, Pennsylvania!

MR. ALF JONES, the American consul at Freiburg, where Dave had been staying, had just laughed when



With a scream, Lotta threw herself between him and his assailants.

Dave broached the subject. After a few drinks he had become more explicit.

"You gotta undershtand, very conshervative folks in Lichtenberg," he explained. "Palace probly hasn't been roofed since Julius Caesar or Gustavus Adolphus deshtroyed it. Beshides, they're not thinking of roofing now. If Duchess Cecile don't make up her mind to marry her cousin, Duke Michael, mighty shoon, there's going to be revolution. Folks want a man at head of Shtate, not a woman. You're crazy, Lurton, crazy. Letsh have another!"

JUST as Dave was preparing to climb a tree for the night, or burrow under one, suddenly the forest ended. Cleared land appeared, and a light not far ahead.

Dave quickened his water-logged shoes into activity until he saw the cottage in front of him. It was substantially built, and looked like that of a prosperous farmer. Two horses were standing at a hitching-post before the door, but the light came from the rear. Dave moved slowly around to the kitchen door.

Three men and a woman were in the room. The woman and one of the men were old, obsequious, bent with toil. The other two men were in military uniform. One was red-haired, with a Hitler mustache, the other black-haired, arrogant, with upturned mustaches in the Kaiser style.

"It is a great honor," mumbled the old man.

"It is your right, Herr Schmidt," replied the black-haired officer graciously. "When, four hundred years ago, your ancestor saved the life of his ruler on the field of battle, it was solemnly agreed that in the future every reigning Duke should select at least one of his mistresses from his descendants, provided, of

course, that she pleased him. So bring forth the girl, that I may assure myself there is no blemish upon her."

"Lotta, come forth!" called the old woman sharply.

A girl moved slowly forward into the light of the lamp. She was clothed only in a nightdress. Fair hair and eyes of violet blue, a face red with confusion. Little bare feet beneath the hem of the nightdress, planted firmly on the floor.

"Come, Lotta, let the Herr Duke look at you!" said the old woman harshly. "*Gott in himmel*, would you expect your grandfather to buy a cow before he had examined her?"

The blood rushed to Dave's face. He realized then that the man with the black hair and upturned mustaches was none other than Duke Michael, cousin of the ruling Duchess Cecilie, and suitor for her hand—or claimant for her throne, if she refused him!

DAVE saw the girl tremble and hang her head. Her face was fiery red. The old woman stepped forward; there was a faint protest, and the nightdress had been pulled down from her shoulders and lay upon the floor.

As the Duke walked around the girl, inspecting her as if she were some pedigreed beast of the fields, Dave felt a mad impulse to rush in and strike him to the floor. Mingled with this was the faintness of his senses at the sight of the girl's nude figure.

He had had plenty of Romance, but never yet had he felt such a thrill, at once pure and sensuous, as now. Lotta was flawless, from her white shoulders to the tips of her slender fingers:—the small, firm, rounded breasts that she was covering with her hands, the slim waist and widening hips, the tapering columns of the thighs.

He clutched at the thick stem of a vine to steady himself, and heard himself cursing. He poised himself for a leap against the door.

And then a hand clutched his wrist, a little hand, and, in the darkness, he saw a woman standing at his side.

"Don't be a fool," she whispered in German. "What business is it of yours?"

"They're selling her," Dave muttered. "That innocent little country girl, as if she were an animal of the fields."

A scornful laugh answered him. "You had better go away quickly, my American friend, before Duke Michial discovers you," said the woman.

She was slight, slim, veiled; it was impossible for Dave to see her face. He stood, still trembling with indignation; he saw the girl, Lotta, still standing in the lamplight, her hands now over her face, and all the softly moulded contours of her form revealed. The Duke was licking his lips.

"Ja, bring her to my hunting-box in the cart tomorrow," he said, pushing open the door.

"You swine!" roared Dave, and leaped, fists flailing.

A HEFTY punch caught Duke Michial on the jaw and sent him reeling back. For an instant there was dead silence; then the Duke and his attendant had whipped out their swords, and it looked like Dave's finish.

But, with a scream, Lotta threw herself between him and his assailants, and that gave Dave a chance to speak.

"I'm an American," he shouted. "You can't murder me and get away with it, even if you are the cousin of the Duchess Cecilie. I lost my way in the forest and saw a light here, and I heard your vile bargain, to buy this young girl—buy her for your own foul purposes! I'll

print that story in every newspaper in every civilized land unless you let her go!"

"*Ach Gott!*" With the ferocity of a tigress, Lotta threw herself upon Dave, now quite forgetful of her nudity, scratching his face and tearing at his hair. "My Duke! My Hero Duke!" she screeched. "You will not let him take me from you?"

The old man and woman were adding to the uproar. Dave, astounded by this feminine perverseness, tried in vain to free himself from his assailant. And then of a sudden a million stars flashed before his eyes, and he saw the Duke's aide standing beside him, holding his pistol by the muzzle.

Dave reeled, and saw the officer coolly put the muzzle to his head—saw it with a detached and quite impersonal interest as he reeled backward. But before the man could pull trigger, there came an unexpected intervention in the shape of the veiled woman, who leaped into the room and struck up the aide's arm.

"No!" Dave heard her cry, as if from very far away.

But the figures were looking grotesquely small and far away, and then a black veil swept down over everything and obliterated the scene, and consciousness likewise.

A LF JONES, the consul at Freiburg, being awakened at six in the morning, was inclined to be distinctly grouchy. Besides, Dave's feet were leaving pools of water all over his bedroom carpet. However, a shot of whiskey, and then another, eased them both, and Alf listened to Dave's story with increasing interest.

"So you woke up to find yourself lying at the edge of the forest a mile out of town? And you've got a hazy idea

somebody brought you there in a car?" he asked. "Well, I'd say luck's certainly with you, me lad. Why, you poor sap, that innocent country girl has probly been looking forward to becoming Duke Michael's mistress all her life! Things like that happen in all the best regulated courts of Europe. That veiled woman probly came to take charge of the preliminaries for him.

"And this publicity idea of yours—why, you're nuts, lad. No paper in Europe would print that story. It's not that they're afraid. It's just not news. Try to get that through your thick dome.

"Now here's my advice. Get a garage to haul your car out of that swamp you left it in, then pack your suitcase and scam over the border. And don't think you've done anything romantic, either. You've just made yourself a damn' nuisance, and escaped being killed by a miracle. Now, how about another?"

Dave blew up. "Maybe I shouldn't have interfered," he admitted, "but I came here to proposition the Duchess on the subject of re-roofing the palace, and I'm going to do it."

Alf Jones looked at him ironically. "Okay, go to it, Lurton," he said. "Go to it. It don't matter that Duke Michael's due to pull his revolution any day now. It don't matter that I've got no funds for funerals, and you'll be buried on the parish. It don't matter—Oh hell, say when!"

DAVE had read plenty about the palace. It had been built in the eleventh century, and the mad Duke, the grandfather of the ruling Duchess, Cecilie, had held wild orgies there, filling it with masterpieces of painting and sculpture, and collecting the most beautiful women from all parts of the world, of whom he was a connoisseur. Among

other things he had built the great artificial lake, surrounded by a twenty-foot wall, whereon he had diverted himself and his guests in his pleasure-craft.

If revolution was brooding, Dave saw no signs of it in Lichtenberg when he arrived by the slow local train. Still, there were more public portraits of Duke Michael than of the ruling Duchess, Cecilie, who had been married in her teens to an aged prince of the Hapsburgs, and, left a widow soon after, had ruled the little duchy for the past two years with apparent success. Of course, if Duke Michael recognized Dave. . .

What happened was pure fantasy. Just because outsiders don't try to approach crowned heads, no crowned head has ever perfected the technic of aloofness that is used by a third-rate Wall Street banker, or the editor of a newspaper. Dave, waiting in the palace audience hall to see the head of the Public Works department, perceived a door opposite him open, and a lady emerge, followed by a gang of elderly men. Instantly everybody in the audience hall sprang to his feet and stood as stiff as a ramrod.

Dave recognized the lady instantly, because her portrait was in most of the hotels in Freiburg. She didn't look a day over twenty; she was petite and extremely pretty, with a great plait of red-gold hair coiled up beneath a very natty little hat. Her dress was simple but effective, and her little feet moved over the polished floor to the click-clack of high heels. Above the feet were two slender ankles, and, above these, two fairly substantial and beautifully rounded calves, and, above these, ravishing flashes.

Smiling and bowing to the bowing and curtseying throng, the Duchess Cecilie passed down the audience hall, followed by her frock-coated councillors.

"PARDON me, Your Highness!"

As Dave spoke, and the Duchess stopped, everybody seemed palsied with amazement. It was something that had never been done, and therefore couldn't be happening. Guards started forward from the doors, but stopped as the Duchess inquired:

"You wish to hand me a petition?"

"Not exactly, Your Highness," answered Dave. "It's this way. I represent the Nuroof Company, of Roaring Falls, Pennsylvania, and I've got a strong hunch your palace could do with a new roof. It don't pay to let an old roof go too long, because, even if you haven't got termites, beetles get in and play old nick with the beams. Our terms are very moderate, and—"

"You mean that you are offering to put a new roof on the palace?" queried the Duchess in astonishment. "Why—why, it has never been done!"

"It ought to be done," said Dave.

"Well," said the Duchess, glancing at the scowling throng of old gentlemen

who now surrounded her, "I'd like to tear the nasty thing down myself, and put up a nice, new modern structure. What do you think, Herr Lambert?"

"It has never been done, Highness," growled a white-haired, white-whiskered old mummy.

The Duchess looked at Dave, and he could have sworn her eyes were twinkling. "What do you think of that?" she seemed to be saying. "Here are we, two nice young people, and. . ."

Well, Dave wasn't such a bad-looking six-footer at that. He looked at the curling ends of the Duchess's red-gold hair, and he forgot she was a Duchess. Also forgot all about the girl, Lotta.

"I am the Duchess!" she cried. "What is your message, traitor?"



"Come into this room and tell me about your plan," said the Duchess.

Then suddenly Dave's heart leaped. This was—incredibly it was the veiled lady of the night before! He couldn't recognize her, but he'd have known her voice in a million.

This was Romance!

IT had all been Romance beyond Dave's wildest dreams. It couldn't really be true, that he was pacing the green sward beside the lake inside the palace grounds, in those grounds to which the public was never admitted, with sentries mounted on the battlements. And the moon above, and the little key to the door that the Duchess Cecilie had given him, and—and the Duchess coming to meet him in a very few minutes!

"I shall take you up to the roof, and you shall examine it for yourself by moonlight," Cecilie had said. "I cannot persuade Herr Lambert to move in the matter. He is stubborn and old. This must be our secret."

Gray eyes that had smiled into his own across the table in the little chamber off the audience hall. Then the touch of her fingers as she slipped the key into his hands. This was Romance, pure and undiluted.

Dave moved toward the summer-house beside the lake, which had been indicated as the rendezvous. A figure rose to meet him. A hand flung back the veil. A little light greeted him.

"This is the first time that anybody has *ever* kept me waiting, Mr. Lurton," said Cecilie in English.

"I'm so sorry," stammered Dave. "I thought I was on time. Now about that roof—"

"There's plenty of time to talk about the roof," said the lady. "Were you

really at that cottage last night by accident?"

"I sure was. I'd lost my way, and—"

"And you'd have lost your life, too, if I hadn't saved you and driven you through the forest as far as I dared. I'm glad I followed Michael. Of course that means the end. I'm modern enough not to stand for anything quite so deliberate as that."

"You're quite right," said Dave. "No girl would stand for it in America."

"I'd like to see America. I may be going there very soon."

"Why, Your Highness—"

"You see, I turned Michael down this morning, and he's mad enough to tear things apart. He's got the army with him, and those horrid old councilors. Oh, I wish I was living in Grandfather Otto's day. He did what he pleased. He made this lake, and had his friends here, and—well, even he had to have a secret tunnel made to escape by, in case his people rose against him. It's so hard being a ruler of a country, Mr. Lurton. And I've got nobody to lean upon—"

The Duchess Cecilie's voice broke in a sob. She leaned upon Dave.

IT didn't seem possible, but that red-gold head was upon Dave's shoulder, and the subtle perfume from it was driving Dave mad. He was trying to collect himself. Where was he? Why, he was sitting on a long, upholstered seat in the summer-house, and his arm was about Cecilie's waist, and his fingers were against the soft satin of her arm, just as if she had been any ordinary woman.

Soft lips brushed his, and then two pairs of lips met and clung with devastating fire. Two hearts were thudding in double tempo, and Cecilie's breath was coming quick and short.

Dave drew her upon his knee, and

saw the shimmer of silken hosiery, and the white glimpse of skin above. Her arms went about his neck. Dave was sinking. He didn't even stop to think that this was Romance.

"It's my red hair," whispered Cecilie. "It's been a torture to me since I was half-grown. I've heard that all women with red hair are made like that."

"I've always wanted a sweetheart with red hair," said Dave, "and I never had one. Not the real red."

"How many have you had?" demanded Cecilie with asperity. "Have you got one now? Are you playing with me?" She half-released herself and looked into his face.

"Course I haven't got one, or I wouldn't be here with you," said Dave. "I've never had more than one or two—well, maybe two or three, or three or—well, anyway I haven't got one now. Only you, darling."

Lips met again. Then, "You know, that was such a horrid old man they made me marry when I was a girl," said Cecilie. "When he died, I resolved I'd never give up my freedom again. Not even for Michael. I wasn't jealous last night, I was pleased to death. But I've never dared to fall in love with anybody about my court, and I don't think seven years without love go with red hair. Do you?"

Dave was sunk now. She was melting, swooning in his arms, her heart was drumming in that mad rhythm that now matched that of his own, he could feel her rounded breasts crushed against the muscles of his chest as she clung to him with a tenseness that drove the breath from his lungs, and one silk sheath had slipped from its moorings and fallen down, showing a glimmer of white flesh. Cecilie's soft laughter

changed to little sobs of happiness, to the silence of four lips like one.

CECILIE sighed and stirred in Dave's arms. How long they had been there, it was impossible to guess. It might have been hours or minutes. Yet there was a moon over the castle that had not been there when Dave entered by the little door in the wall.

"I must go, my dear." She sat up and began arranging her frock, pulled up the fallen stocking. "I don't know what I'm going to tell my maids-in-waiting. I'm not supposed to be alone out of their sight, except when I'm asleep."

"When will I see you again?" asked Dave.

"You're sure you want to?"

"I've got to."

"You like red hair?"

"I adore yours," said Dave, coiling an errant tendril between his fingers.

"Keep the little key. I'll try to come tomorrow, if—"

"If what, my precious one?"

"If I'm still Duchess of Lichtenberg," she said. "Michael has the reputation of striking quickly, and he'll never forgive me for humiliating him last night. And I've only my personal bodyguard to rely upon, a hundred men."

"Is there nothing you can do?"

"Nothing. The army wants a man upon the throne, to lead them in case war should come, for Lichtenberg holds the passes between Austria and Italy. The townsfolk are for Michael, because he has always flattered them and paid court to them, and held out the prospects of a customs union with the Austrians, which the Great Powers have forbidden. No, I can only wait. Let me go now, let me go, and do you slip out through the gate unseen by the sentries upon the walls."

She rose to her feet, turned, and made him a little mocking salutation. Dave could see, in the moonlight, that slight, derisory smile upon her face. She had become the Duchess Cecilie again, no longer the woman who had clung to him like a searing flame, racking him with intolerable desire for her. And yet once more that flame was burning in him. He caught her hands.

"I want you," he said. "I can't let you go."

"Ah, my dear, if only I could come away with you—" she answered.

HARK! What was that? Suddenly, out of the dark beyond the palace, where the rising moon had not yet cast her rays, there sounded the crackling of rifle-firing, and, mingled with it, the shouting of a mob. Yells, dulled by the distance, blending with the sharp staccato crack of guns, and then the tap-tap of machine-guns. Shouts from the sentries on the walls, and men running along the road outside.

One instant Cecilie stared into Dave's face, and then she was running like a hare over the moonlit sward, and Dave was following her. They circled the end of the lake and ran down an avenue shaded with gigantic trees. The great bulk of the palace loomed up in front of them. An iron gate stood open, and in a moment they had passed through, and were within the outer precincts.

The noise was rapidly becoming a bedlam. The firing had now become continuous, and the yells were wilder, and spreading from one place to another, until they seemed to fill the night everywhere. From the walls rifles were crackling in answer, and, even as he ran, Dave saw one of the sentries topple and fall as if killed instantly by a bullet.

But the sound of bullets was con-

tinuous too, like the humming of a swarm of bees overhead, whipping through the branches of the trees like hail. Screams came from within the palace itself, and outside it dark figures were running down the great drive that ran to the main entrance.

More figures came running out of a long, barracks-like building at one side of the palace. They were soldiers, in the blue and white uniform of the Household Guards, carrying their rifles, with their bandoliers slung over their arms. They were swarming around Dave and Cecilie now, all running toward the entrance gates, from which others came running back, staggering men, wounded men, panicky figures that weaved and stumbled and collided with the force that was rushing to the defense.

Dave heard the incoherent shouting.

"They're attacking the gates! Duke Michael! The army's with him!"

Now the gates came into sight. Here, just inside them, a score of bodies lay writhing upon the ground. And now the bullets no longer hummed overhead, but whined spitefully about Dave's ears.

An officer, sword in hand, caught Cecilie by the arm. "Get back, you fool! This is no place for women!" he shouted. "Back to the palace!"

"I am your ruler, Cecilie," was the girl's quiet answer.

YET the words, distinct with authority, rang out clearly enough to be heard around her. In a moment the soldiers were cheering wildly. Yells from without answered them. Now Dave could see what was happening. In the moonlit road, that stretched straight away from the gates toward the town, long columns of troops were moving, and in front of them, as a screen, men were lying down, sheltered by a ditch

along the road, and picking off the men on the walls and those at the gates, who were trying to drag up a piece of ordnance.

The attempt was useless. The gunners were shot down as fast as they could man the weapon. The shouts of the attackers were growing bolder, more triumphant. It did not need a trained eye to see that the fall of the palace was only a matter of minutes—that, so soon as those approaching columns reached the walls, the defenders would be overwhelmed.

"Madam, you must come! You are in danger!" cried the officer with the

sword. He grasped Cecilie by the arm, and next moment went down in a crumpled, motionless heap, with a bullet through his throat.

Dave caught Cecilie in his arms, struggling and fighting, and carried her a dozen yards out of direct fire from the gate. He ran back, snatched the sword of the dead officer, his pistol and the cartridge-belt he wore. But again the girl was at his side.

"Go back! Go back!" he shouted,



They came to the end of the tunnel. "We're safe now," she said.

trying to make his voice heard above the din.

Men were falling all about him. Some, kneeling, were firing back at the rebels who lined the road, others stood stupidly, trying to form ranks, until the bullets caught them. Dave felt a red-hot sting across his upper arm; his leg buckled suddenly as a bullet pierced his calf.

Not more than half the little body of the defenders now survived.

"Shut the gates!" cried Cecilie, again running forward.

The answer came in a deafening roar, a spurt of flame and smoke. The gates and a section of the wall went hurtling down, crushing a half-dozen more of the defenders underneath them.

Cries, shrieks, groans, the crackle of bullets again, and then a strange and sudden silence. The moon passed behind a cloud, and the scene faded out.

Dave, gripping Cecilie by the arm, waited.

A voice was hailing from the road. "Truce! Truce! A parley!"

DAVE knew that voice that shouted out of the dark. It was Duke Michael, invisible, yet certainly reckless, to be standing there, within fifty yards of the rifles of the few defenders.

"I am Duke Michael! Call the Duchess, tell her to cease her futile defense. I have five thousand men behind me! Tell her to come forth and parley with me!"

Cecilie wrested herself out of Dave's grip, ran forward to where the bodies lay piled up beneath the débris of the gates and wall. "I am Cecile, Duchess of Lichtenberg!" she cried. "What is your message to me, traitor?"

"The *Landtag* has deposed you in secret session and elected me ruler of Lichtenberg," came the answer. "You

will surrender to avoid further bloodshed, and place yourself in my custody, in honorable custody!"

"To the first, yes, since I have no other resource," came the girl's ringing tones. "To the second, no. I loathe and despise you for the traitor you are!"

"Seize her!"

A sudden rush, again the crackle of rifles, then of pistols as the two parties closed. On the one side countless hundreds, on the other at most thirty men, fighting desperately behind the tumbled wall.

Dave ran into the thick of it, forgetful of his wounded leg. He emptied his pistol, flung it into the face of a soldier who was making a bayonet pass at him, and slashed with the sword. Dave had never held a sword in his hand before. He was surprised at the fearful ease with which it could cleave a man's face into a dark mask of blood.

Now he was in the midst of a little group of no more than a dozen men, fighting, fighting, being forced back, parrying blows, slashing, hewing his way to where he heard Cecilie crying in the darkness.

Suddenly he found her. She was on her knees, peering into the face of a dead man. As Dave gasped her name, she sprang to her feet, sobbing his name.

"I thought that man was you! He shall never take me. Come! Come! It is death for you, if you fall into Duke Michael's hands. And there is no more can be done!"

Cries of surrender were going up from the tiny band of the surviving defenders.

FOR an instant Dave hesitated, but Cecilie was dragging him by the hand. He yielded to her, and together they raced through the darkness, gained the avenue of trees, ran on. Michael's

men were swarming over the walls by now. Two of them sighted the fugitives, called to them to halt, then fired.

A slug nipped Dave's ear. He thrust Cecilie from him, turned, discovered only then that he was still holding the reeking sword in his hand. As the foremost man leaped forward with a shout, Dave brought the sword slashing down upon his head and felt the edge bite through the bone, saw, with a queer sense of detachment, the man crumple up, leaped at the other, and remembered afterward that he had already fired, and that his bullet had thudded into his falling comrade.

The trigger clicked on an empty cart-ridge-clip. Dave swung the sword again.

After that he was running with Cecilie through what seemed a nightmare, hearing the shouts die away behind them, until they stood at the edge of the lake. Escape seemed hopeless, for the high, unscalable wall surrounded them, and at any moment Michael's men might come swarming over it.

Dave looked at the girl. "I'm going back," he said, panting. "You don't want to be seen with me. You—"

She caught at his arm again. "The tunnel—the secret tunnel my grandfather, Duke Otto, made," she gasped. "I know the secret!"

She slipped noiselessly into the clear water, raised her hand and beckoned to Dave, who followed her. How deep the lake was, he couldn't tell, but it was much deeper than his height.

Cecilie was swimming toward the end of the artificial excavation. She stopped, trod water, pointed to an opening two feet above the water's level, a circular orifice hardly larger than a man's body.

"Have you been here?" Dave asked her.

"No, but I've seen the plan. Quick, lead the way!"

Dave scrambled into the hole. Behind them the shouts were growing louder.

LIKE a worm he worked his way along the hole, gripping the encrusted sides of what had once been tiles. But a few feet in the walls receded. He groped for them and couldn't find them. He let his feet down into six inches of water. He heard Cecilie breathing hard behind him.

"It runs under the walls, under the road. We're safe now," whispered the girl.

Dave found one wall and groped through impenetrable blackness, guiding himself by touch. Cecilie's hand was on his shoulder.

On and on for what seemed a mile. It looked as if the tunnel would never end. And then suddenly there was a ray of moonlight, the tunnel became earth, Dave flattened himself and crawled out into the night. A moment later they lay gasping side by side.

All about them was forest, but in the distance, about a mile away, they could hear shouting, and a spire of flame was shooting up to the sky.

"Where are we?" whispered Dave.

"Near the city. This is a park, but the real forest begins two miles further on, on the road to Freiburg."

"Is this the road to Freiburg?"

"Yes. We can't go there. They are all for Michael. I know some peasants who would hide us—"

"No," said Dave, "we're going toward Freiburg. I want you to trust me, Cecilie. It's just a hunch I've got, but I think it's going to work. Can you walk six miles?"

"Where are you taking me?"

(Continued on page 106)

FOR THE HONOR OF THE DUCHESS

[Continued from page 15]

"I'll tell you when we get there. Do you trust me? Darling—Oh, darling!"

He clasped her in his arms, and their lips met. Then they went on, mile after mile, forgetting their soaked clothes, Dave all but oblivious of his aching leg. Hand in hand, mile after mile. . . .

"You—you're not taking me here?" whispered Cecilie, as they passed the cottage of Lotta's grandfather.

"Just two miles more."

Mile after mile. Two miles! There it stood, blocking the trail, Dave's abandoned car. But the swamp had dried a little. That one rear wheel. . . .

Some beech-bark in the rut, a mighty heave, and the car came up. Dave opened the door.

"Get in, darling," he said. "She's

mine, and there's gas enough to get us across the border."

THE landlord of the little inn stood in his nightshirt, his good wife behind him, similarly attired, both glaring at the intruders who had aroused them from their sleep at four in the morning.

"What country's this?" asked Dave in German.

"What country? Croatia, fool! What do you want? No German dog can wake me up at this hour of the night, when I am in bed with my wife! Olga, run for the gun!"

Cecilie stepped forward and placed two gold pieces in the landlord's hand. He held them up, to see their color in the light of the moon. He bit them.

He handed them to his wife, and cunning smiles appeared on the round Slavonic faces.



"Get in, darling," he said, "there's gas enough to take us across the border."

"Oh, an elopement, eh?"

"That's clever of you to guess," answered Cecile. "We want rooms. We're going to sleep most of tomorrow. If anybody inquires whether you have guests, you'll answer no. There will be more gold pieces."

The landlord bowed almost to the floor. "Excellencies, I understand. This way. This way."

"I'll throw our clothes outside. In the morning you'll wash and iron them."

Chuckles and grins. But there was only one big room with a feather-bed wide enough for a family. Cecile and Dave alone together, looking at each other.

Cecile put out the lamp. There was the soft frou-frou of wet garments sliding to the floor.

Dave gathered up a heap of her clothes and threw them outside, returned and locked the door behind him, settled into a huge chair.

"You don't despise me?" came a muffled voice from the bed.

"Despise you, darling?"

"I can't help—having—red hair." She was out of the bed and she snuggled against him. "I'm glad I'm no longer Duchess of Lichtenberg, but I do wish

you could have re-roofed the palace, darling."

Dave mumbled indistinctly as he laid his face against her soft shoulder. He didn't even care about the roofing contract any more. For this was Romance at last.