

SPICY 'ADVENTURE' STORIES



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INDIGO ISLAND



It was all an incredible accident by which Shane found his identity irrevocably confused with that of a dead Mr. Burton, and for a while he didn't know whether his loyalties belonged to the Japanese or to Chiang Kai-Shek. All that he was sure of was that he was falling in love with the girl they called Mr. Li's Number One wife!



By CLIVE TRENT

SHANE had tangled with Chiang-Kai-Shek again, and Madame Chiang, who liked Shane, was away, and therefore no longer able to make peace between the American and the peppery Generalissimo. Now Shane was virtually a prisoner in the compound of the United Mission at Hankow, with the Japs threatening to storm the city at any hour.

The Generalissimo's blood was up. He had rounded up fifty members of the peace party, including old Han Mow, a friend of Shane's, and it looked as if heads were due to roll.

The trouble had all been brought about by Burton, and Burton wasn't in any condition to explain, because he was taking the gravel cure — about four feet underground.

Burton had brought Shane to Hankow because Chiang-Kai-Shek wanted more chemists on his staff, and Shane had majored in chemistry at Wesleyan. Shane had the impression that Burton was booked for a big job. He tried him, drunk and sober, but, the tighter Burton got, the tighter he kept his mouth closed. "Just stick

The bomb landed so close that it flung Camille to the ground.



around, old man," was Burton's idea of a confidence. So Shane just stuck around, drew his pay, and waited to see what he was wanted for.

Burton, sober, was quiet and forceful, but Burton, drunk, had the weird idea that he was a born flyer, and he insisted on taking Shane joy-riding. He had cracked up two machines before that unhappy night when he insisted on taking Shane up again. A Jap plane came their way, and Burton, with three slugs in him, got back with the best landing he had ever made, and dropped dead at the feet of the Generalissimo. That was just Shane's hard luck.

Shane paced the compound, listening to the crash of the Japanese shells in the old town. He had a nasty hangover. He cursed the Generalissimo. He cursed himself. He cursed Burton. In the brightening dawn he could see figures swarming beneath the pall of smoke that hung over the town. It looked and sounded as if the city was being stormed, house by house.

THERE came a new outburst of pandemonium, the rattle of machine-guns close at hand. Up the hill toward the compound came a troop of Japanese soldiers, led by a dwarfish officer in the uniform of the flying corps. They came to a halt outside the locked gates of the Mission, and the officer yelled to the native pastor to open.

The pastor, who was trying to reassure his terrified charges, moved forward; he was an old

Chinese, and paralyzed with terror.

Shane hurried forward. "This is American property," he shouted.

"Oh yes, it is all right," grinned the little officer. "The General has sent me to protect you. My word of honor nobody shall be harmed here."

The pastor was already unlocking the gate. The Japanese surged into the compound. Instantly Shane was seized. Rifle muzzles were thrust against his body. Still grinning, the dwarfish officer raised his automatic and shot the pastor dead. And next instant the Japanese were in the midst of the refugees, massacring the men in rows, dragging the screaming women inside, and tearing off their garments.

"You lying devil! So that's your word of honor! The word of honor of a Samurai!" Shane raged.

"But you mistake," explained the officer. "My word of honor is for the laugh. I am not a Samurai. Just common stock. I think the General will see you now."

Shane was forced out of the compound and led through streets in which the dead were piled up in an obscene medley of limbs and torsos. The whole lower part of the city was a shambles, and through the dense smoke Shane caught glimpses of soldiers running into shops, hauling out Chinese, slashing their throats. Others, laden with plunder, staggered away. The screams of the women, the yells of the men rose in a frightful diapason to the murkier skies.

In the courtyard of a public

building, old Han Mow, the head of the peace party, who had evidently escaped the Generalissimo's clutches, was standing amid a group of Japanese officers.

"How do you do, Mr. Burton?" he smiled benevolently. "I was afraid for you. I am glad you have come safely through this experience. You are the guest of the Japanese General. You must rest and have a good meal, and later we shall have a talk together."

Now why had old Han Mow, whom Shane knew intimately, addressed him as "Burton?"

WHEN Shane was conducted, later, into the room, the murderous little flying officer, and another, were seated with Han Mow, but the old man didn't introduce them.

"Well, we have both been fortunate, my dear Burton," said Han Mow. "I know the Generalissimo meant to have us both executed. He had a brain wave, in the absence of Madame Chiang. Fortunately I was released before he could carry out his plan as regards myself. So now we can proceed with our own measures. You have a general knowledge of the proposal?"

"Only slightly," said Shane, playing up to the old man, and wondering what was coming next.

"The trouble is that Indigo Island lies just outside the Japanese Mandate in the Pacific. Due to its proximity to the Philippines, it has not been thought advisable to take forcible possession of it.

"And yet it is essential that Mr. Li be prevented from ship-

ping his indigo to the Philippines. The payment for it is lying in a bank there, and the money would be used by our former friend, the Generalissimo, to pay for the supplies and munitions now piled up on the Burmese frontier, awaiting a cash settlement.

"As you know," Han Mow went on, "the vegetable indigo, which is so superior to the synthetic product, is cultivated hardly anywhere in the world except on Mr. Li's island. His last year's crop, together with the present crop, would pay for all the Generalissimo's war supplies. And that would mean a prolongation of hostilities. It is a veritable treasure, to which I understand Mr. Li is largely indifferent. A hermit, my dear friend Burton, enjoying the sunset of his days upon his island."

Han Mow leaned forward. "Your task, Mr. Burton, was to inspect and certify the product when it was delivered at Manila. You have agreed to work for the Patriotic Party instead, and inspect and certify the crop when it is delivered at a Japanese port instead of at Manila. Am I correct?"

"Oh, quite," said Shane, beginning to understand.

"Everything has been arranged. Your papers will prove to Mr. Li that you are Chiang's agent. Our own agents will be ready to take possession of the island at the proper moment. Captain Otarō here"—he glanced at the dwarfish officer—"will fly you to Hai-phong. There another pilot will meet you, and fly you to Indigo Island. The lady—"

"A woman pilot?"

"A very capable one. She is, I believe, Mr. Li's Number One wife, and she must not suspect the part you are playing, for Mr. Li trusts her implicitly, and she is his brains and his right hand. Mademoiselle Camille Davenant is the name she goes by. Well, how do you feel about it, Burton?"

"I've got to play a crooked game."

"Yes, my dear friend. War is crooked. We are all crooked. Even now our heads are sitting crookedly upon our shoulders." He broke into rapid Cantonese. "Don't be a fool," he said. "They have shot all the rest of the Generalissimo's advisers, who couldn't get away with him. They think you are Burton. I have his papers. I have been to great pains to save your life. You accept, of course?"

"Hell, yes," said Burton. "I'll be glad to take a crack at Chiang. Wanted my head, did he?"

"And nearly got it. Mr. Burton accepts the honorable proposition," said Han Mow to Captain Otaro.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Li's Paradise

WHEN Captain Otaro, the dwarfish officer, had deposited him at the Hai-phong field, Shane went to the Hotel Européen, where Mademoiselle Davenant was staying, and was shown up to her room.

The sight of her staggered Shane. He had expected to encounter an almond-eyed siren of at least half Chinese ancestry. But there seemed no trace of

Celestial blood in this dark-haired, dark-eyed French girl, in her early twenties, who smilingly gave Shane her hand.

That frock, which revealed the full curves of the form beneath it, must have come from Paris. The curves of her throat made Shane's heart beat faster. The V-shaped opening of the frock disclosed the upper curves of a bosom that, Shane felt, ought never to be concealed.

Mademoiselle Camille didn't ask to see Shane's papers. She took him for Burton readily enough. They talked about the war, and she asked him about the sack of Hankow. She became animated, vehement in her denunciations.

"It goes hard with poor China," she said. "But, if each of us does his best, China will win. The sale of Mr. Li's indigo, which he is presenting to Chaing-Kai-Shek out of patriotism and old friendship, will release for China munitions enough to guarantee her resistance for months. And I know you will do everything you can for us. I know that we can trust you."

They were standing together in the window embrasure. Camille turned and put her hands upon Shane's shoulders, looking into his face.

She was lovely, sweet, impassioned. Shane took her little hands in his, fighting back the impulse to take her in his arms. What could he answer? For the first time he felt ashamed of the deception that he was practising.

"We trust you, Mr. Burton, and we know that you will do every-

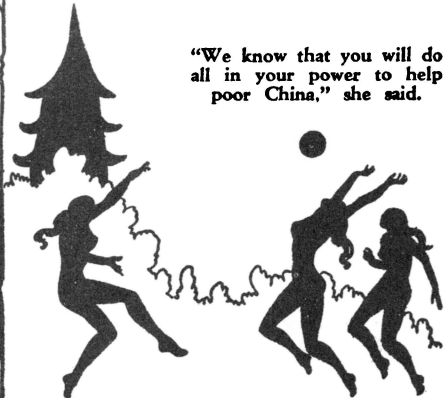


thing in your power to help poor China."

THE plane was an old war type, a three-seater, with the machine-gun beside the pilot, and synchronized mechanism. Camille looked quite competent to use it, too. They took off at earliest dawn, with the constellations slowly winding around the pole star, but growing dimmer in that opaque light spreading out of the east.

There would be no stop, no land until Indigo Island was sighted. Now it was beginning to grow light. The milky sea dissolved. Above the eastern horizon a blood-red sickle swung into view. Then suddenly it was day, and far underneath Shane saw the blue of the Pacific.

Through the hours, he watched Camille. Three or four times she turned to smile at him. Shane, already head over heels in love with her, brooded over the future. Camille's lovely head and shoulders, rising above the cockpit in front of him, seemed all that he



"We know that you will do all in your power to help poor China," she said.

wanted in the world. His mission had sunk into relative insignificance.

He munched sandwiches. Camille drank from a bottle of champagne and handed it to him. Shane put his lips to where her lips had been. "I'm making a fool of myself," he thought, and tried to harden himself. More time went by, and then Camille turned to point again.

Floating upon the blue Pacific, Shane saw a tiny island, swiftly growing larger. All around is was the white rim of surf-lashed sands. Hills rose in the interior, and the black became verdure.

They were losing altitude. Shane could distinguish long plantations, a checker-board of trees, a small wharf with a freighter moored to it, warehouses, with tiny figures bustling about them. A stretch of gardens, intersected by white paths leading up to an enormous, irregularly shaped bungalow. A little landing-field hard by—and, without a jar, the plane swooped to her landing.

FOUR figures awaited them, besides the Chinese mechanics. One was an immensely stout old Chinese, wearing a suit of yellow silk and a mandarin cap with a button, on his bald head. Another, a slender young Chinese, in white ducks. The two others were white men.

One of the pair, who seemed in his early thirties, had a scholarly face, with eyes of piercing blackness behind his convex lenses. He glanced at Shane with a detached, cynical look. The second, some ten

years older, wore a coat and trousers splashed with green stains. He looked tough, and Nature had evidently intended him to be tough when she gave him that bull-neck and barrel of a torso. There was a scowl on his red, sweat-beaded face.

"I am Li," said the old man, giving Shane his hand. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Burton. These are my assistants—Professor Hewlett, of Harvard, and Mr. Barron, my overseer, also from your own country."

"Oh, say the Bronx, and he'll place me," said the tough Barron, extending a ham-like hand. That hand was a dynamometer. Its grip hurt, and it was meant to hurt. Barron's leer changed to a wince as Shane put his own strength into his grip.

"And this," said Li, indicating the second Chinese, "is my secretary and—shall I say *liaison* officer?—Mr. Fang. He will be at your disposal, Mr. Burton, and will do everything in his power to make you comfortable.

"You must have a good rest after your flight, and we shall meet at dinner."

WHEN Shane awoke, after a comfortable sleep, in his room on the second story, he found that a suit of whites and a complete outfit of clothing had been brought in and laid down on a chair. Through the windows he could see the gardens, odoriferous and aflame with color. A gentle breeze was blowing. The plangent sound of the waves was audible; the wharf and *godowns* looked deserted.

He dressed and went down-stairs. The long living-room was cool and dark. A Chinese boy was handing a drink to Hewlett, who was lolling back on a couch. On another couch Barron was stretched out, with a rum *stenga* beside him.

"Hello, here's Burton," he called thickly. "Boy, bring Mr. Burton a drink. How about you, Hewlett? 'One-drink' Hewlett, huh? You ought to be in a museum, old fellow. So you hopped out of Hankow before the Japs got in, Burton? Turn on the radio, Hewlett; let's hear the baseball."

Hewlett ignored him. Shane took his drink and drained the glass. Then old Li appeared in the doorway between the living-room and one behind it. He was wearing a white silk Chinese coat and skirt. Beside him stood Camille in an evening frock that daringly revealed the rounded curves of her. Behind were two short, stocky Orientals, one in whites, the other in a blue military uniform.

"Good-evening, gentlemen. Mr. Burton, let me present you. Captain Machado, who commands my little garrison, and Captain Foo, who has charge of my freighter."

"Shall we go in to dinner?" asked Camille. Her eyes were raised to Shane's with an appraising look. Did she suspect him, after all? Shane guessed that old Han Mow hadn't been far wrong when he called her Li's brains and right hand. He took his seat at the table, and let his eyes rove from Li, at the head, over the faces of the four men.

Barron was drinking heavily and feeding grossly. Hewlett, poised and silent, was pecking shortsightedly at his food. Foo and Machado ate stolidly and in silence. Foo was wholly Chinese, but Machado looked like a Portuguese half-breed, probably from Macao.

And through the almost silent meal Shane was conscious of the play and interplay of thoughts and wills.

When they rose, Li ushered him into a room to one side of the dining-room. It was Chinese in its furnishings, and lined with books and Chinese scrolls. Li gestured Shane to a chair.

"I am glad you have come," he said.

"You would like to see my credentials, Mr. Li?"

"It is not necessary. I trust the judgment of my friend, Chiang-Kai-Shek, one of the greatest men in the world. How do you like my island paradise? Do you think you can endure it for a week or two, until my crop is ready for shipment?"

"I don't think that will be difficult, sir," said Shane.

Li seemed to brood, his wise old head drooping upon his breast. Then he raised it. He looked very old.

"I like you, Mr. Burton," he said. "Seventy years of life have given me a certain judgment of character. I hope to enjoy your companionship. And I hope you will like it here. To spend one's last years in this little paradise, where we are all friends, seems to me the perfect harmony."

He spoke a little more, and



bowed Shane out. For the second time Shane felt ashamed of his deception.

THE living-room was empty when he went out. Shane didn't feel like going to bed. He strolled out into the gardens, the scent of whose flowers came fragrantly on the night breeze. Beyond them lay the *godowns*, the warehouses, with the freighter moored beside them, a black hulk in the moonlight. Beyond all the sea, splashed ceaselessly upon the coral shingle.

Nobody seemed stirring. Shane walked along the front of the bungalow, rounded the corner,

and saw a long, low extension, the windows dimly lit and curtained. Suddenly a woman's voice whispered to him from a dark window.

Shane stopped. Camille had been in his thoughts. But the girl had whispered in English, and her invitation didn't seem to be that of a courtesan.

"Help us, American!"

An unseen door clicked open. Shane stepped inside. He heard the melodious laughter of girls from a room behind a curtain. But a girl barred the way. "Not

Swinging the rifle, he lunged at the two men.



in there," she whispered. "I must speak to you."

Shane had already raised the curtain. One by one, soft little lamps of varying colors sprang into light. He heard squeals of laughter. He perceived that he was in a huge court. Flowers bloomed beside tinkling fountains, and, in a space paved with alternate blocks of white and pink coral, a bevy of young Chinese girls were playing ball.

There were about eight of them, and they wore nothing but sheer silk shorts. White, softly rounded breasts, white arms gleamed in the lamplight. The girl at Shane's side had slipped away.

Shane stood stock-still, amazed. What were these girls, who came

running toward him, with neither invitation nor coquetry, but simply as children.

They flocked about him, tugging at his arms. "American man, tell us how goes the war," lisped one of them.

They drew him into the court and imprisoned him with their strong young arms. One of them brought a silver cup brimming with wine.

"Tell us about the war, American man."

They sprang away with little twitters as soft footsteps sounded. Shane saw Fang, the young Chinese secretary.

"No, Mr. Burton, it is not permitted," he said. "I must ask you to leave."

SHANE got up, shrugging his shoulders, and went back into the gardens. At the entrance of the bungalow he stopped for a moment, trying to orientate himself. He took the corridor that he thought led to the stairs. But there were no stairs. Where he thought they should have been, he saw Camille and Hewlett, standing in a recess. They were close together, talking earnestly, and the girl's fingers were on Hewlett's coat lapel.

Old Li's Number One wife and Hewlett! A spasm of jealous anger and disgust ran through Shane. He turned away, groped along another corridor, and a figure moved toward him out of a recess. It was a Chinese servant in a uniform of brown; the man was smiling, but he held an automatic in his hand. He gestured Shane back.

Suddenly Shane saw the stairs a short distance away, at the end of a little passage. He went up to his own room, and sat down pondering.

There was a light tap at the door. Shane opened it, to see Camille standing there. She glided in softly. She put her hands upon Shane's shoulders as she had done in the hotel at Hai-phong, and the warmth and perfume of her made Shane giddy. Besides, there was no longer any cause for restraint. He had seen enough downstairs. So he took her in his arms, and felt her supple bosom throbbing hard against him.

He tilted back her head and pressed his lips to hers. For an instant they were cold and unresponsive. Then it was as if warmth

flooded them. Her lips answered Shane's; Camille stood limp in his arms for a moment, breathing heavily, her eyes half-closed.

Shane's hands were fumbling at her shoulder-strap. A flap of the garment fell, revealing one rounded breast. But suddenly Camille struggled out of his grasp, pushed him away.

"Not yet!" she whispered.

"When?" asked Shane hoarsely.

"When the indigo is aboard. I shall tell you. You must trust me."

Alone, Shane stood looking out across the scented gardens. Who were his fellow-conspirators? Was Camille one of them? And the girls in the annex? It was all mystifying. They might be old Li's mistresses, and yet they had seemed like children, unashamed of their nudity, not understanding.

THERE was only Hewlett at breakfast when Shane went down. He was finishing an omelette, and he glanced up in his mocking way at Shane's greeting. While Shane ate the quite American breakfast that the China boy brought him, Hewlett smoked one cigarette after another.

"Of course, Burton, being a chemist, you are quite familiar with the process of extracting indigo?" he asked.

"I understand the principle."

"Nothing like seeing it in practice. Shall we go down to the shop?"

Shane accompanied Hewlett through the gardens. Through the open doorway of one of the godowns, he could see two elderly

Chinese, seated at high desks on old-fashioned high stools, bending over their ledgers. Laborers were carrying great baskets, filled with the freshly cut plants, into an end shed. But these laborers were not Chinese. They were dwarfish brown-skinned aborigines, with animal physiognomies, wearing nothing but loin-cloths over their emaciated bodies, their bellies swollen, their bare feet padding soundlessly on the road of crushed coral. Chinese overseers hastened them, cracking whips.

Inside the end shed the plants were soaking in huge vats, connected by pipes.

"Here," said Hewlett — "well, what should you say we are doing here?"

Shane, who had studied a textbook on the flight from Hankow, answered, "Converting the chemical constituents into glucose and indoxyl."

Hewlett cast an amused glance at him. "And here?" he asked, at the entrance to the next shed, where a monstrous paddle-wheel was whipping the surface of a sunken tank into a scummy froth.

"Oxydizing the indoxyl."

"You've learned your lesson well, Burton. Really, your assistance will be most valuable to me," said Hewlett sardonically.

In the next shed the deposit that had been drawn off was being pressed into moulds, and the damp bricks were passing on an endless carrier into a sun-drenched yard beyond.

"Ready to start?" leered Hewlett.

"I'll start with the plantation, I think."

"Now that's an excellent idea." Hewlett pointed up the road. "Keep straight ahead. You can't miss it."

THERE must have been a thousand acres under cultivation. The furrows, perfectly aligned, ran toward the uplands. All along them, lines of natives were busy with their hoes. In the distance Shane recognized Barron's stocky figure.

When Shane came nearer, he could hear Barron shouting, and see him brandishing his whip. Shane was about fifty yards away when the overseer broke into a storm of abuse, and Shane saw him bring the lash curling about the back of one of the loin-clad laborers, who cowered under it, screaming in a shrill voice.

Shane wouldn't have lost his self-control, perhaps, if he hadn't discovered, as he hurried up, that all these laborers were women.

Barron, plying his whip, swung about at Shane's angry shout, a sadistic leer upon his bloated features. Shane leaped at the big man, who raised his whip threateningly.

Shane swung to Barron's jaw, connecting with a crack that sent Barron reeling. "You damn' swine!" Shane roared.

Barron dropped the whip, and came back with flailing fists. Any of his blows, connecting fairly, would have put Shane to sleep. But it was clear in a moment that Barron couldn't box, and Shane let him exhaust himself dealing terrific blows in air, until he had the big man at his mercy. Then a strong right drive to the chin

dropped Barron like a felled tree.

Shane, standing over him, saw the scared faces of the brown women, with their pendulous breasts and bony ribs — then Li and Fang, who had come up during the altercation. Li spoke to Fang in high-pitched Mandarin, and Fang translated:

“Mr. Li says he is not pleased with you, Mr. Burton. He does not permit violence upon his island.”

“Violence? Did you see Barron flogging this girl? Look at her!” cried Shane, pointing to the cowering bush-woman.

Li’s features relaxed in a benignant smile. “Ah, my dear friend —” the old man began.

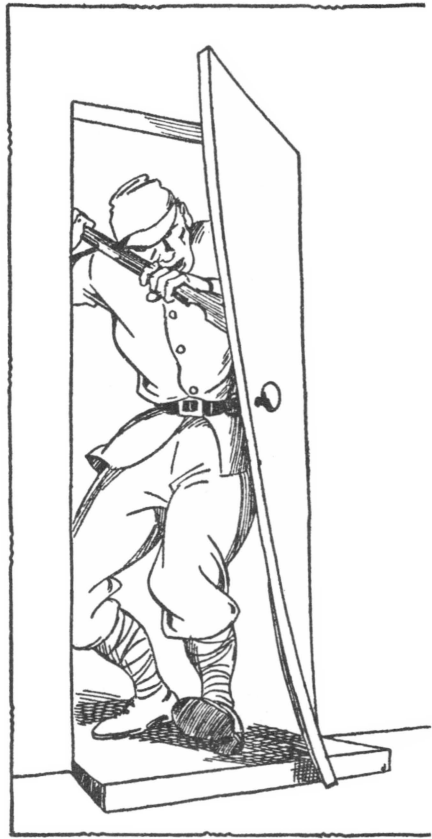
“You spoke to me last night about a little paradise of perfect harmony.”

Li smiled as at a fractious child. “But I referred to civilized man, of course,” he answered. “For the enjoyment of the full fruit of happiness, naturally there must be the lower races to minister to our needs.”

Shane, still glowering, wondered whether Li’s indignation might not have another origin. It was certainly probable in the extreme that Fang had told him of his intrusion into the harem the night before.

HEWLETT, seated on the edge of the laboratory table, listened and drummed his fingers. Shane had recounted the episode in the hope of drawing him out.

“So you licked Barron. You seem to be a man of unexpected prowess, Burton. But I’m afraid you’ve started in wrong, antagonizing Barron and old Li. Flogged one of the nigger wenches, did he? Probably one of



his women, and I’ll bet she loved it.

“However, don’t let Barron get on your mind. He’s a dumb ox. He’s not likely to trouble you any more, but I’d advise you not to talk too much in his presence. The trouble is about Li. I should think you’d realize it’s important not to antagonize old Li.

“By the way, I suppose Li told you about your ten thousand dollars?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“No? Well, there will be a bonus of ten thousand dollars American coming to you as soon as the indigo has been certified and

It was Barron who headed the charge as the door sagged.



passed. Don't think I'm asking you to violate your conscience, Burton. The product isn't being adulterated. We don't play tricks like that—no need to. That's just a sweetener.

"Yes, Burton, ten thousand bonus for you as soon as your job's completed, and we ought to sail within two weeks. And you're a pretty slick worker, Burton; I've got to hand you that."

Hewlett went out chuckling. Following slowly, Shane had no doubt that Hewlett and Shane were the "agents" of whom Han Mow had spoken. But Hewlett had chosen to deal in hints, rather than come out in the open, and there was nothing for Shane to do but wait until he declared himself.

CHAPTER III

The Storm Breaks

BARRON came to Shane surlily next day. "Well, Burton, you whipped me," he acknowledged. "If I was ten years younger, you couldn't have done it. I sized you up for a weak sister. Well, I was wrong."

He held out his hand, and Shane took it. There was no more trouble with Barron. But neither he nor Hewlett approached Shane with proposals. There was nothing to do but wait. And, as the days passed, Shane began to wonder whether, at the last moment, he wouldn't change sides and fight for Li.

He liked the old man, and Li seemed to have forgotten the little trouble with Barron. But Camille was the chief cause of Shane's

change of attitude. Shane had thought it would be a fine thing to hit at the Generalissimo, but China was very far away, and Camille was daily before Shane's eyes.

Shane avoided her, but no more than she avoided him. He was torn between jealousy and desire. It was obvious how Hewlett's eyes followed the girl. It was amazing that old Li appeared unconscious of it. Was she Hewlett's mistress? Where did they meet? Once Shane and Camille had come face to face unexpectedly, in a secluded corner of the gardens. Instinctively their hands had gone out and clung. But Shane couldn't read that inscrutable look on Camille's face. He knew only that she was his for the taking.

When? As if in answer to his question, she seemed to say again, "Wait till the indigo is aboard!" But had she said that in reality, or was the message telepathically conveyed? Shane watched her hurry away along the coral path, watched her as one who might already have possessed her—the lissom curves of her, the length of limb beneath the short skirt, the slender ankles and the tiny feet.

He couldn't wait much longer. Meanwhile he inspected the indigo, taking samples in the shops, examined it aboard the freighter, and talked with Captain Foo. But it was impossible to discover whether Foo was one of the conspirators, or if his half-dozen moon-faced Chinese sailors knew anything. The only interesting fact that Shane ascertained was that there was a three-inch gun

under the tarpaulin at the stern of the freighter.

There was an atmosphere of brooding mystery over the island, and Shane waited daily for the storm to break.

IT WAS about a week after his altercation with Barron that he awoke one night with a start. Thunder was muttering in the distance, but that wasn't what had awakened him. It was the figure gliding into his room.

Shane reached under his pillow for his gun—but the next instant he saw that the figure was a woman. His heart leaped suddenly. Camille! He wasn't going to let her go—this time.

But then he saw it wasn't Camille. It was one of the little Chinese girls. Shane couldn't imagine how she had gained admittance to his room, but he had guessed that there were concealed passages in the bungalow, whose inner rooms were still a mystery to him.

She was wearing a single garment of white silk, that came a little below the knees, showing the slim legs and sandaled feet. Beneath the sheer, close-fitting texture, Shane could see the outlines of the firm breasts, and the slender waist.

She kneeled beside Shane and put her cheek against his. "You must help us, American man," she reiterated, over and over.

"What do you want me to do?" Shane was bewildered. His blood was stirred by her proximity, despite Camille, by the youthful, vital vibrance of her. Who was she? Was this a trap or a test?

"Come with me!"

"Where?"

"I shall show you."

"Who sent you? Mademoiselle Camille?"

"I do not know who you mean," she answered, to Shane's astonishment: "You must come! If you do not come, there is death for many, and for us—" She shivered.

Shane still suspected some trap, but now curiosity was paramount. "Wait outside for a minute," he said. He dressed, thrust his automatic into his pocket, and went outside. The girl was crouching, waiting for him. Shane remembered afterward that the silence within the bungalow was like the silence outside, as Nature waited for the breaking of the thunderstorm.

THERE was a hidden door, as Shane had suspected, and he had passed that wall a score of times without suspecting its existence. A narrow corridor, another door, and Shane was standing in a passage-way between the extension and the aloe hedge that bounded the gardens. The girl had disappeared.

A trap? Standing immobile, Shane saw the glowing tip of a cigarette close by him. Slowly there came into the field of vision two men, and Shane recognized Hewlett and the stocky Captain Machado. Shortly, without a word, Machado detached himself and disappeared behind the hedge.

From another direction sounded the clatter of horsehoofs on the coral road. Shane recognized Camille as she rode by, and

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Indigo Island

(Continued from page 17)

smelled the sweat-stained horse.

Instinct of danger, rather than any sound, made Shane swerve. A form hurtled against him out of the dark, and a fist jarred his shoulder. There was the gleam of a dagger in that fist, but it had passed over Shane's shoulder. As Shane leaped back, another form hurtled out of the dark, and flung itself upon his assailant. Shane heard a groan, and saw the man drop, writhing in his death-agony, a dagger in his back.

"It's all right, Burton," called Hewlett's voice.

Shane stepped forward, clutching the automatic in his pocket. The dead man was Fang, lying in a widening pool of blood. Standing over him was squat Machado; it was he who had struck the blow, not Hewlett.

"No, no, Burton, you are not in danger," Hewlett jeered. "Captain Machado has just saved your life. I am merely the innocent on-looker. But it doesn't pay to play a lone hand on Indigo Island, nor to be interested in the ladies of Mr. Li's harem. Romance is very dangerous, Burton.

"You fool, why haven't you opened up? Li has discovered our plans, and our lives are worth about five minutes' purchase if we stay here. Come along, Burton!"

THE crash of thunder, the swish of rain, and then, suddenly, from the sea end of the gardens, the crackle of rifle-fire

and the confused clamor of voices. Shane heard Camille scream somewhere, and ran toward the place from which her cry came. Then Barron burst through the hedge, with half-a-dozen blue-clad soldiers at his heels, and in his arms Camille, fighting like a wild-cat.

Hewlett roared with laughter. "Good for you, Barron!" he shouted. "Bring her along! Come, Burton!"

Shane had to keep his head, he told himself as he followed Hewlett, Machado, and Barron, clutching the struggling, screaming girl. A battle seemed to be in progress at the foot of the gardens, though the rain and the thunder drowned the sound of the firing. In a few moments Shane found himself at the entrance to the tunnel, near the warehouses, that led into the fort. A dozen soldiers had taken charge of Camille, and were forcing her along.

Beyond the tunnel, Shane found himself inside the fort, with its sheds and buildings, and open ground flanked by earthworks, extending down to the sea. A troop of soldiers were dragging out a field-piece. An electric light was shining from a long, one-story house.

Hewlett and Shane followed the rest inside. It was a guard-house, with a table and benches, and a door at the end. Four soldiers, fully armed, were standing to attention. Hewlett turned to Shane with his mocking smile.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you to open up, my friend," he said. "*What did they do with Burton?*"

He went on, "No, I thought at first you might be Burton. But Burton was a drunk, and you're not. Burton handled his knife and fork in the English way—he'd picked that up in Shanghai. You see, we're not quite dumb, Mr.—er—Burton!

"Well, Burton, or whatever your real name is, we knew that the real Burton had been killed. Han Mow was to send a substitute. We were supposed not to know. But I don't trust you, and I'm going to hold you till the fighting is over, and then you'll sail as Burton and certify to the indigo. You've nothing to be afraid of, and we'd rather not have you accidentally killed in the fighting. Oblige me by walking through that doorway—Burton!"

Shane looked at Camille, standing helpless under the bayonets of the soldiers. "I'm damned if I will!" he said.

His fist shot out, but Hewlett wasn't there. Something dropped on Shane's head, and he went tumbling into a pit of darkness.

THE sound of a dull concussion brought him back to consciousness. Another, and then another. This must be Hankow, for those were cannon-shots! But suddenly the links of memory snapped back into place.

Two guns were answering each other. Captain Foo's gun answering Machado's!

Shane got upon his feet and groped forward in the darkness. He found a stone wall, traced it

around its perimeter. He was in a cell. There was a door, but not a chink of light came through.

A long time passed, during which Shane could hear the guns firing steadily. Now and again he thought he heard the faint crackle of firearms. He had hurled himself against the door again and again, without the least result. When the lock clicked suddenly, and the door opened, Shane was lying exhausted on the stone floor.

A figure slipped into the cell. In the faint light that came from without, Shane recognized the Chinese girl.

As he sprang to his feet, she clung to him, warm and supple. She was trembling. She seemed like a young girl in her first transports of love. This child couldn't be old Li's concubine. But that thought flashed through Shane's mind and was gone as he followed the girl through the empty guard-room, into the outer court. No one seemed to be near them, but the crack of the rifles still came from the direction of the gardens, and the guns were still challenging each other. Shane heard the plashing of the sea, and discovered that they were at the water-end of the fort. The rain was drizzling down.

Two sentries came into view, shouted and came running forward with leveled rifles. Shane felt for his automatic; of course it was gone.

He made a perfect dive, caught the nearer of the two men about the knees and brought him down. As the second rifle roared, he snatched away the first man's weapon and brought the stock



The two sentries came running in like men gone mad.

down on his skull. The man behind him fired again, the slug nipped Shane's cheek; but now Shane had his rifle in his hands. The sentry, a wiry Anamese, fought stoutly. The rifle roared again. Then Shane got it and didn't hesitate in what he had to do. The sentry dropped, shot through the forehead.

Shane heard a cry behind him. Camille was standing near him, bending over the body of the Chinese girl. The sentry's last shot had pierced her heart, and she was already in the throes of death.

Camille ran to Shane, caught him by the hand, and pointed upward. They raced through the scrub beside the fort. Now they were above the sunken interior, and Shane saw that all the waterfront was ablaze, including one end of the freighter, though she was still replying to Machado's gun.

Camille cried, "I rode to Taglu, chief of the hill village, and he has promised to bring aid. I knew what was coming, because I lured Hewlett on for weeks, until I had confirmed my own suspicions, and Li's. There was nothing between us. I swear it. That poor girl was working for us. She got the key from a guard who was her lover. She gave herself and her life for Li. I knew you would be with us."

"I'm with you," said Shane.

THEY raced around the aloe hedge, under a storm of bullets from Machado's men and the servants of Li, who were still putting up a stubborn resistance in

the gardens. Suddenly the night was rent with a terrific roar. A blast of flame, a mighty sheet of fire spread half-way over the horizon. Black against that flame, they saw the remnants of Captain Foo's freighter hurled skyward.

Camille, leading the way, ran down a sunken path beside the bungalow. She stopped before an iron door and pressed a lever somewhere. Swiftly and silently the door opened before them; swiftly and silently it closed again. In front of him Shane saw a large windowless room, illuminated by oil lamps swung by gilt chains from the roof.

Inside, the Chinese girls were huddled. There was another door beyond. Camille pulled Shane through the bevy of girls, felt for another hidden lever beside the inner door, and pressed it.

In the small inner room, Shane saw Li seated at a table in front of a microphone that stood before a small radio transmitter and receiver. The windowless room was empty save for the table, the radio apparatus, and a divan.

Calm and unruffled, old Li was speaking in some dialect that Shane couldn't understand. He stopped, turned, looked at Camille in gentle inquiry. She spoke rapidly in the same language, and Li turned to Shane.

"Yes, I knew from the first that you would come over to us, Mr. Shane," he said. "This room is of steel. We are safe here until help arrives."

"What about the girls outside?" demanded Shane.

Li smiled. "What about them?" he asked.

"Aren't you going to bring them in?"

"Their presence would disturb our serenity," sighed old Li. "Besides—"

"Wait!" Camille made a sign to Li, who shook his head in assent. She drew Shane to the end of the long, narrow room. Half the blank wall slid back, revealing a long hangar, in which the airplane stood, faintly purring.

"It is for us three," said Camille. "Li, you, and I. At any moment we can be on our way. But we cannot take those girls. You see?"

"I'm not going," said Shane.

Old Li shuffled forward, and laid his hand affectionately on Shane's shoulder. "You are a very foolish young man," he said.

Nevertheless, at Shane's insistence, he stepped aside and let him pass.

CHAPTER IV

Winged Victory

THE girls were huddled into a corner in terrified apathy. But in the center of the room, to Shane's astonishment, was the gross figure of Barron, reeling to and fro.

Camille, who had followed Shane, said, "Mr. Barron has decided to stand by us. He was deceived. He thought he was taking me to safety. He didn't understand who was behind the plot."

Barron was very drunk. "Goo' fellow, Burton," he mumbled. "Ten years ago you couldn't have beat me. Maybe I'll take another crack at you some day."

"How about a crack at Hewlett?" Shane suggested.

Inside the steel rooms, not a sound from the outside had penetrated, but now there came a violent hammering at the door. It flew open, and a dozen of the servants came staggering in. Most of them were bleeding from wounds. Behind them sounded exultant yells of Machado's soldiers, cut off by the closing of the door.

Sledge-hammer blows resounded. The girls were moaning in fear, while the servants staggered about the room uncertainly. Some of them had swords, others revolvers; one man clutched a rifle.

Shane took a sword from the hand of a badly wounded man. Barron came reeling up to him, holding a revolver.

"Crack at Hewlett," he tittered. "By God, they'll have that door down in a minute!"

"Get the girls back into Li's room," Shane told Camille. "We're going to fight it out."

Camille said, "They can't get the door down."

But the door was cracking under the pounding blows of sledgehammers. It sagged inward, and a yelling crowd of Anamese soldiers came swarming over it.

It was Barron who headed the charge. Before they could free themselves from the wreck of the door, and aim their rifles, he was in their midst, emptying his revolver, then using his fists. He snatched a rifle from a fallen man and laid about him, while close upon his heels came Shane, un-

able to use his sword, though, without hurting Barron.

The Anamese broke and fled. With wild yells the servants streamed after them, Barron at their head. Shane, failing to stop them, followed. He heard a volley; then, emerging into the gardens, he saw Barron lying dead, with the back of his head blown in. The servants were scattering among the bushes.

Hewlett's voice came, cool and jeering, from the shrubbery: "Don't make a false move, Burton. I've got a platoon and a couple of tommy-guns.

"Burton—well, Burton, you've played your hand. You've lost. I've got the ship, and I'm bringing up a gun to blow Li's house about his ears. But I can still use you, ah—Burton. I need your certificate on that consignment. I'm willing to overlook your little aberration. Bring Camille out, and we'll negotiate."

Almost while he was speaking the incredibly swift tropical dawn had begun to spread across the gardens. The moon paled; there was a pearly opalescence in the air.

Suddenly Shane was aware of Camille at his side. Out of the shrubs came Hewlett's mocking laughter. Shane caught glimpses of the blue-clad Anamese about him. Others were coming up along the aloe hedge.

"Go back, for God's sake! Take Li away in the plane!" Shane whispered.

"Last call, Shane," jeered Hewlett, through the white mist of dawn that had crept up from the sea.

SUDDENLY a fiercer outburst of yelling came from out of the mist. And, swarming into the gardens and along the seafront, came a horde of the brown natives, wielding short curved swords, and howling like devils as they precipitated themselves upon the Anamese soldiery.

Hewlett fired. Shane flung Camille to the ground, then leaped through a hail of bullets into the mist. Hewlett stood before him, gun in hand, peering. All about them the sound of battle raged, but they two seemed alone.

Shane's sword dashed aside the muzzle of Hewlett's gun. There was no time to parley now. Shane slashed, and the cry on Hewlett's lips changed to a whining whistle as he dropped, cut through the throat.

Shane turned and saw Camille. He caught her in his arms. "I love you. I've loved you since I saw you," he said. "Tell me—this may be our end—tell me!"

"Didn't you know?" she answered gently. "I was only afraid—that you would think—I cared for Hewlett. Li said—"

Li's Number One Wife! Shane had forgotten that. It seemed incredible. He released Camille and stood staring at her, until she seized him by the arm. "Back!" she cried.

They raced beneath the bullets that were whining overhead. Machado's men seemed to be putting up a stiff resistance, but the exultant yells of the aborigines showed who would be the victors. As they ran back, a droning sounded high overhead. Looking up through the thinning mists,

Shane saw the black speck of a plane, high in the sky.

It soared against its background of the golden dawn, it swooped. . . .

Crash! A bomb dropped in the gardens, and the jar shook the earth. The plane was winging up into the ether, circling on its course. Crash! Another bomb, so near that it flung Camille to the ground.

Shane picked her up and ran. The inner door was open. Shane saw old Li still at the table, and the Chinese girls huddled behind him.

The hangar doors were open. Camille ran through. Following her, to try to stop her, Shane only succeeded in gaining the cockpit behind her as the plane raced along the runway and took off into the sky.

Down by the wharf, and all along the aloe hedge, Shane saw the corpses of the fallen fighters. The brown men were swarming everywhere, and resistance seemed to have ceased. The *godowns* were a fiery shell.

IT WAS queer, sitting behind Camille again, seeing her back and profile. How Shane wished he had learned to fly better when he used to go on jaunts with Burton!

Camille turned and smiled at him, gestured to him to adjust his safety-belt. Shane hooked it, and watched the bomber climbing over him. When it was almost directly overhead, another bomb came dropping. It crashed below, sending the plane into wild gyrations.

The bomber circled and winged down. Camille right-ruddered,

and a vicious burst of machine-gun fire perforated a wing. A wire snapped with a shrill whine. The bomber climbed again. Camille shot upward. Then earth and sky revolved in a dizzy maze for Shane. It was his first experience of an *immelman*.

Shane saw Camille's hand upon the gun-trip. The bomber winged up, and a blast of lead shattered the instrument panel. The bomber passed so near that Shane could recognize Otaro, the murderous little Jap, at the bomber's wheel.

Camille slumped in her cockpit. In the bright sunshine Shane saw her silk blouse grow bright with blood.

He flung off his belt and threw himself forward over the fuselage. He caught the gun-trip in his hand, saw that Camille was still controlling the stick, waited, and knew Otaro would come into his sight, because he had to die. He saw him in alignment. It was a desperate chance, from the position Shane occupied, but perhaps it was Shane's rage that worked the miracle.

For, as the gun chattered, the bomber rocked, seemed to hang nose downward between heaven and earth, and then went down in a cloud of smoke that swiftly changed to a sheet of fire.

"I can—land," cried Camille.

But Shane was addressing the dead thing plummeting down in widening circles within the plane. No, my friend," he said, you were right. You certainly are not a Samurai."

Camille brought the plane to a bumpy landing. Shane pulled her from the cockpit and tore off her

blouse, revealing the rounded beauty of her bosom. Blood was oozing from a flesh wound beneath one rounded breast, but the bullet had merely cut the flesh and passed out again.

"I must tell you—if I am dying," whispered Camille. "I sent that poor little Chinese girl to you, to try to find out—what you knew—what you were going to do."

"You're going to live for me," said Shane. Then he remembered again.

"You are Li's wife."

A faint smile trembled on her lips. "Li has no wife. I am like those little girls, a refugee from war-ridden China, whom he brought here out of the kindness of his heart."

He took her in his arms gently. "Forgive me for what I've thought," he begged her.

CAMILLE rested on the divan. Li touched Shane on the shoulder, and he got up from beside her.

"I think you are wanted on the radio," said Li.

The voice that came out of the ether made Shane jump. It was impossible not to recognize that of Madame Chiang.

"The Generalissimo is very pleased with you," she said. "He knows all about it, and hopes to see you again soon, here in Chungking. You know Han Mow is dead? Poor Han Mow! It happened very suddenly. He had trouble with his head."

"I am not surprised, madame," said Shane.

"We are looking forward to welcoming you and your bride, Mr. Shane."

"Why—er—madame—"

But the radio had gone dead