



SPICY- ADVENTURE STORIES

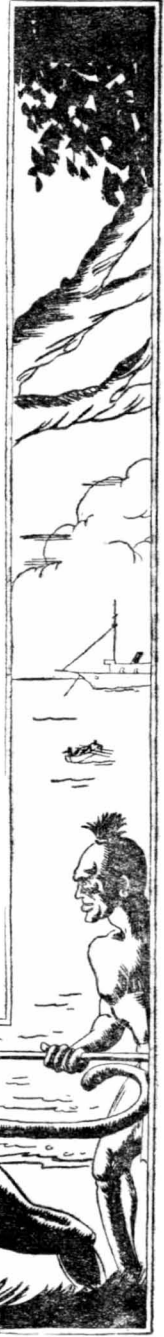
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CONTENTS

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	

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MIDNIGHT

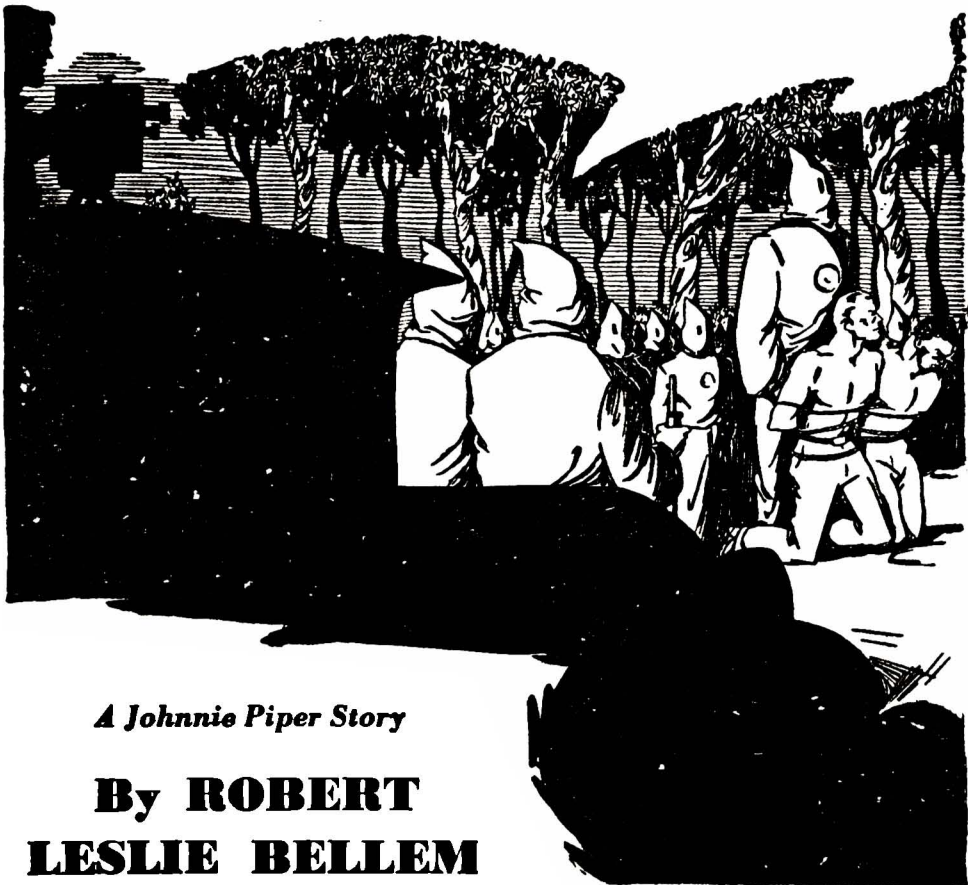
The dread organization wants to inspire terror with movies of their orgies; but Johnnie Piper is more interested in rescuing a helpless girl from their clutches!

IN THE darkness, chip-diamonds of light necklaced the landing-field below. With a swish of wings the Continental Airliner circled twice, glided in, dropped to earth with effortless ease.

Within the ship's cabin sat Johnnie Piper, camera guy for World Newsreel.

The plane's only other passenger was a blonde girl who looked to be in her early twenties.

Ever since the take-off at Newark, Johnnie had been studying her—trying to muster up courage to speak to her. But she seemed distant, austere, more-



A Johnnie Piper Story

**By ROBERT
LESLIE BELLEM**

LEGION

over, Johnnie had other things on his mind. Mysterious things—such as the anonymous letter in his inner coat pocket.

Now that the airliner was grounded on the little-used field outside Spandee,

a hundred miles south of Detroit, Johnnie prepared to disembark. He felt a premonitory sensation, almost apprehensive. Then the feeling was erased by his surprise when he perceived that the blonde girl was also leaving the plane.

The whip lashed into the girl's tender skin!



Somehow Johnnie Piper was startled. He'd had the notion that she was going on through to Chicago. It hadn't struck him that she might end her journey when he did.

Covertly he eyed her. She wore a severely-tailored suit. The skirt partially outlined the nubile sleekness of her hips; the coat, despite its tailoring, bulged a little at the straining outward pressure of her firm, domed breasts. Slender chiffon ankles vanished in sensibly flat-heeled oxfords; a mannish hat rode recalcitrant yellow curls. Carrying a light overnight bag, she stepped from the plane; started across the stubbly field.

Johnnie nodded good-night to the ship's stewardess; also set forth across the lumpy terrain. Behind him, the airliner's motors roared; the ship trundled down the runway, swung into the wind, rose gracefully. The night swallowed it.

WITH the airliner's departure, Johnnie once again felt that queer sense of foreboding. He strode toward a small, unlighted building at the field's edge. A lone automobile stood there—a black, battered, powerful-looking touring car.

There was a man at the wheel, sullen-faced, watchful. Johnnie addressed him: "My name's Piper. Are you—"

"Yeah, pardner. Get in. Button your lip."

Frowning, Johnnie started to climb into the tonneau. A feminine hail halted him.

"Just a minute!"

Johnnie turned; saw the girl from the airliner. She flashed him a semi-smile. "I—I wonder if you'd mind giving me a lift as far as Spandee? This seems to be the only hire-car around, and I—"

Johnnie started to shake a vehement negative. He had good reason. He knew

the black touring car was about to ferry him into something that might prove damned dangerous—no place for a girl.

His thoughts raced back to New York that same morning. Johnnie's boss had summoned him. "Piper, I've got an assignment for you. Our Detroit-district sound-truck has been swiped—cameras, control-panels, mikes, the whole works. Along with the truck its sound technician, Barney Strake, has disappeared."

"You mean—kidnaped?"

"That's the size of it. A while ago I got this message. Look it over; keep it."

Johnnie had read the anonymous letter:

World Newsreel—

Much newspaper publicity has been given the recent activities of our organization. But our full purpose cannot be served until the public is thoroughly awakened to us. We want people to know we are 80,000 strong and still growing; want them to understand we are not fooling when we say we intend taking over the government. We shall attain our purpose **NO MATTER HOW MANY LIVES WE DESTROY IN THE PROCESS!**

To impress ourselves upon the public consciousness, we have decided to permit your World Newsreel to photograph one of our night meetings with sound—including the flogging, and perhaps death, of certain persons who have dared oppose us.

We have already borrowed one of your sound-trucks, abducted its driver, one Barney Strake. We find, unfortunately, that Strake is only a sound technician; knows nothing about cameras.

So we must ask you to send us a cameraman by tonight. Let him come by Continental Airline, disembark at the emergency field at Spandee. Wire ahead to the Acmar Garage, Spandee, giving your man's name. He will then be met at the landing-field by an automobile.

The slightest disobedience will result in most unpleasant reprisal upon Strake, your sound technician, whom we shall hold as hostage. Be warned.

THE MIDNIGHT LEGION.

Johnnie had put the letter down. His boss said, "It's going to be your job, Piper. We expect you to see that Strake is released without harm; we want you to come back with some extra special footage. This Midnight Legion is a potent outfit—a damned sight more dangerous than the Klan ever was. They've got Uncle Sam worried; so watch your step."

"Okay, boss. I'll be plenty cagey," Johnnie had said. But now, in the darkness bordering the Spandee flying-field, he wondered just how cagey he ought to be.

HE looked at the blonde girl who'd asked for a lift. Should he refuse outright—or should he give his reasons?

The decision was unexpectedly taken out of his hands. The sullen-eyed driver said: "Okay, cutie. Sure we'll give you a ride. Hop in here alongside me. The gent will ride in back."

Johnnie half-uttered a protest. He didn't like the way the man's glance licked over the girl's attractive curves, rested on the firm promontories of her breasts. He didn't relish the thought of her riding beside a member of the Midnight Legion—the most lawless outfit of masked, terrorizing government-flouters that ever scorged a countryside. Whip-wielders, murderers, a pack of wolves whose cowardice was hidden under the bravado of numerical superiority. . .

But before Johnnie could utter a word, the girl climbed in beside the driver. The camera guy, muttering, settled himself watchfully in the tonneau. Maybe the man up front would actually drive the girl to Spandee first, before conducting Johnnie to the Midnight Legion meeting. The touring car lurched forward, headed into the night.

Behind it, the landing-field's lights faded. Farther back, Spandee was a blur of yellow against the dark sky. The blonde girl seemed suddenly to sense something wrong. She stirred, spoke: "Aren't we headed in the wrong direction, driver?"

"Yeah. But keep quiet, baby—and maybe you won't get hurt."

She drew a sharp breath. "Stop this car! Let me out!" She reached forward, snapped off the ignition-switch, yanked the emergency brake. The car skidded to a halt on the dirt road.

The driver rasped. "You damn' little slut—!" and reached for the girl. She eluded him, opened the door. He caught at her again, thick fingers fastening upon the front of her coat. She jerked away. Cloth tore. She leaped from the car, started to run. Her unbrassiered breasts jounced, creamily exposed through the rent in her silken blouse.

The driver plunged after her. But before he had taken seven steps, Johnnie catapulted out of the tonneau. The camera guy snarled: "The hell!" and dived at the driver's legs.

Johnnie's hard shoulder took his adversary at the knees. The man went down, rolling. Piper scrambled at him, fists flashing; bashed his knuckles into peeled-back, snarling lips. The driver spat out shards of broken teeth, a string of blaspheming oaths. He twisted away from Johnnie, managed to regain his feet. He lashed out a savage kick at the camera guy's middle.

Johnnie squirmed aside; the kick took him in the ribs. A searing pain lanced through his lungs. He coughed back his agony, forced himself upright, plummeted straight at the man before him.

THUD of fist against flesh. Crunching impact of body against straining

body. A blow took Johnnie high on the cheek. He felt blood inside his mouth, warm, saline. He hammered piston-punches to the driver's face, midriff; his enemy gave ground with savage reluctance. Imminent victory throbbed in the camera guy's veins, sent him lunging once more at the cursing driver.

A flailing punch caught Piper low; doubled him over. His knees buckled. Then dimly he saw the blonde girl leaping in; saw her claw at the sullen-faced man in an attempt to pull him backward off-balance, give Johnnie a breathing-spell. The driver half-turned toward her; his palm smacked against her cheek. She reeled. Fingers ripped at her coat, her blouse. Her shoulders showed white, nude, lovely against the background of dark night. She cried out as a hand struck her again.

Johnnie forced himself upright. "You damned rat!" he barked. The driver whirled, met his attack. A balled fist smashed against the camera guy's jaw.

The explosive impact of knuckles sent an avalanche of hurt to Johnnie Piper's numbed senses. He staggered, tried to keep from falling. He saw the driver yank out an automatic, reverse it, club its butt at him. Johnnie tried to duck; failed. He went sprawling in the dirt, a semi-insensate heap.

As if from a great distance he heard the driver snarling at the girl: "Baby, I figure to have some fun with you and then maybe let you go. Now I'm gonna let some friends of mine in on it!"

She screamed. Johnnie tried to move, to stir. He couldn't. His muscles were paralyzed. Dimly he knew that the girl was being roped, trussed, tossed into the touring car's tonneau. Then he felt himself being bound, lifted, carried to the machine. He was limply dumped to the rear floor of the automobile. He sprawled

against the blonde girl's form. Up forward, the driver slid in behind the wheel, gunned his motor. The machine spurted ahead.

ITS movement rolled Johnnie Piper's head against the yellow-haired girl's bare skin. Soft warm flesh was silken-smooth against his cheek; her woman-fragrance in his nostrils. The thrill of that intimate, unavoidable contact was like wine in the camera guy's veins; like an antidote for his agony. Slowly, full consciousness returned to him.

The girl was panting; her heart hammering wildly within her bosom. Her ripped coat, torn blouse, afforded no concealment for the loveliness of her snowy breasts. Her eyes were wide with fear.

Abruptly she noticed that Johnnie was no longer unconscious. Her lips came closer to his ear. "Your hands—can you get them to the waist-band of my skirt . . . ?" she whispered.

The query startled him. "What—?"

"Please—quickly! A badge pinned there—"

He managed to get his bound hands to her slender waist; fumbled until he discovered something small, metallic, pinned inside her cloth belt. Awkwardly he unfastened it. "Now what?"

"Toss it away—"

He tried to get in position to throw the metallic object over the side of the careening car. But even as he made the attempt, the machine's brakes squealed harshly. There came the rattle of pebbles beneath the tonneau; a tire-destroying cessation of movement. And then the touring car was surrounded by black-cloaked, hood-masked figures.

Johnnie clenched the badge in his

Johnnie pushed open the door. The guard was gripping the girl cruelly, pulling her closer in a brutal embrace.



closed fist. What the hell did it mean? What was it all about?

He heard the driver's voice up forward. "Yeah. The dame got off the same plane he did. I smelled a fish, brought her along. She got gay. The guy poked his beezers in, too. So I slugged 'em both—and here they are."

Harsh hands laid hold of Johnnie and the girl, yanked them from the car. Johnnie felt himself propelled forward;

stumbled into the single room of a clapboard shack lighted by a flickering kerosene lantern. The yellow-haired girl was thrust in after him; the door slammed.

Johnnie stared about him. Guarding the door on the inside, he beheld a black-garbed, hooded figure with drawn automatic. Over on the far side, a group of people huddled. There was a quaking black man, a bruised white, a brunette woman whose eyes held terror, and—

Barney Strake, World Newsreel sound technician.

Strake spotted Johnnie. "You—Piper!"

Johnnie forced a grin. "Yeah. I came to take pictures. But I put my foot in it somehow."

The masked, black-hooded guard raised his voice; his eyes glowed with feral light through slits in the cloth that concealed his face. "Quiet down, you two mugs! No talking in here!"

AT the other side of the room, there sounded a muffled feminine sob. It came from the frightened-looking brunette woman who crouched among the other prisoners. She was young, lush; her breasts had a voluptuous fullness beneath her cheap frock and her hips were wide, feminine.

She edged toward the hooded guardian of the door, "Mister—"

"Pipe down, frail."

"No. Listen. You've got to listen to me! I—I haven't done anything! The Midnight Legion hasn't got any reason for bringing me here. I—I d-don't want to be wh-whipped. . . ."

"No? Ain't that just too bad!"

"Listen. I—I'll do anything you say if you'll let me g-get away. Anything . . ." Suddenly the brunette's hands went to the neck of her cheap dress, loosened it. She pulled it open almost to her waist; her soft-fleshed breasts spilled into view. The hooded guard started.

He said: "Hey! What the—?"

"Listen. I'm nice, aren't I? Don't you like me . . . ?"

"Lay off, sister. I—"

"Be a sport, mister. I'll . . . be nice to you."

The guard's eyes flashed behind his slitted mask. He grabbed the brunette

woman's wrists. "Come on, sweetheart!" He pulled her out of the room, slammed the door after them. From outside, Johnnie Piper could hear moans. . . .

JOHNNIE looked at Barney Strake. "Spill it. What's this all about?"

Strake shrugged. "I don't know what they've got against that black-haired dame. But they told her they were going to give her a hundred lashes tonight. These others—" he gestured toward the shivering negro and the bruised white man, "—are scheduled to be shot, from what I understand."

Johnnie said: "And you—?"

"Hell, they snatched me while I was driving my sound-truck out of Detroit. You know the rest. You and I are supposed to take sound-pictures of the shindig tonight." Strake turned to the girl who had come in with Johnnie. "What about this dame?"

Tersely the camera guy explained what had happened. Then he remembered the metallic object he had unpinned from the blonde girl's waist. It was still tightly clenched in his fist. Now he looked at it. His eyes widened. "A Federal agent's badge!"

The blonde girl came close to him. "Y-yes. Listen. I—I'm Norma Millward. My brother was an F-B-I operative—a G-man. The Midnight Legion m-murdered him. That's his badge. I—I have a friend in the World Newsreel office in New York. I learned that you were coming here to make pictures of the Legion. I followed you . . ."

"But why, in God's name?" Johnnie demanded.

"I wanted to get information about the Legion; wanted to learn the names of the leaders, so they could be arrested, punished. I—"

WITH swift interruption, the room's door opened. The hooded guard entered, dragging the burnette woman with him. He shoved her into a corner. She sank down, trembling, shame-faced. Johnnie Piper realized what had happened. The masked man had accepted her offer . . . and then double-crossed her, refused to allow her to escape. A surge of rage welled up in the camera guy's throat.

And then the hooded man stepped toward Johnnie. "Listen, punk. I heard what this blonde dame just told you, see? I was listening outside the door." He whirled on Norma Millward. "So your brother was a Fed, huh? And you thought you could pull a fast one on us. Well, sister, that's just too bad. You'll get what's coming to you tonight!"

Johnnie's jaw thrust out. "If you lay a hand on her—"

"Shut up, lug. You're here to make movies, see? One haywire move out of you or your partner, and you'll both be crow-bait!"

As the guard spoke, there came a thunderous knocking on the door; a harsh command from outside. "Okay, in there. Everybody out! We're all set!"

The guard opened the door. A knot of similarly-hooded Midnight Legionnaires surged in, automatics drawn. Johnnie Piper and Barney Strake were herded off to one side; the other prisoners were whisked away.

JOHNNIE'S eyes widened as he saw the scene before him. The night's blackness was made bright by countless flaring torches and a circle of glaring headlights from more than a hundred parked automobiles. Within the arena formed by the parked cars, there must have been at least a thousand men of the sinister Midnight Legion — black-cloaked, hooded, masked, silent.

The camera guy and Strake were conducted to a car in the center of the circle. It was the World Newsreel sound-truck. A camera was already tripod-mounted on its roof. A masked leader spoke: "Okay, you guys. Get your equipment ready. *But don't start making pictures until we give the word—understand?*"

Johnnie nodded, climbed to the roof of the sound-truck, fiddled with the camera's lens. Below, Strake vanished within the truck, slipped the earphones over his head, commenced adjusting his microphone and his control-panels.

Johnnie watched what next took place; saw the welter of Midnight Legion minions form into orderly groups, each with a masked and hooded sub-leader at the fore. Then one man, in a black robe that differed from the others, stepped to the center of the circle. "Roll-call first, as usual!" his voice thundered out. Then he turned to Johnnie. "No pictures of this part of the ceremony, remember!"

Johnnie nodded. Then, suddenly, his heart leaped as an idea came to him. He dived down from the truck's roof grabbed for Barney, whispered a swift command.

Strake nodded understanding. "Got you!"

Once more the camera guy went to the roof of the truck, stood by his camera. Below, the Legion leader was calling out: "Group One. Captain Meade."

"Present. Group accounted for."

"Group Two. Captain Hastings."

"Present. Group accounted for."

"Group Three. Captain Moffat."

"Present. Group accounted for."

The roll-call went on—until ten groups had been told off. Then the hooded leader whirled toward Johnnie. "All right, you. Start your camera."

Johnnie nodded; pressed the switch that started his movie machine. He fo-

cused on the center of the improvised arena; saw four hooded figures come forward, dragging a struggling woman.

FOR a minute Johnnie's fists balled. Could it be Norma Millward . . . ? Then he saw that the woman was the burnette who had been in the little shack; the one who had attempted to bribe her way to freedom at the price of her body. . .

Red rage filled the camera guy as he watched. He knew he was impotent to aid the black-haired girl, powerless to avert the horror that confronted her. He was but one against a thousand; he wouldn't stand a chance. He saw her captors strip the dress from her body, leaving her clad in nothing but cheap rayon step-ins. He saw her being trussed to a tree-trunk, her arms stretched above her head so that her full breasts were drawn taut. And then—

Swish—thwack! A vicious nine-thonged lash whistled downward, bit into her bared flesh. She cringed, screamed. A raw red welt appeared against the whiteness of her skin. *Swish—thwack!* Again the whip descended, left a writhing red snake of raised flesh on her squirming torso. Once again the sound of the lash . . . and again . . . and again. . .

Abruptly the tortured woman slumped against her bonds, unconscious. Blood seeped from her lacerated hips, her pallid shoulders. A nausea of anger gripped at Johnnie Piper as he saw her being unfettered, dragged away. "Damn them . . . !" he grated savagely, helplessly.

Then another victim was yanked to the scene. It was the shivering negro who had been imprisoned within the shack a while before. The hooded leader spoke. "We've got nothing against this

man. But we're going to shoot him—just to make a good movie!"

COLD horror seeped into Johnnie's veins as he sighted his camera, saw the shrieking black man mowed down by a barrage of shots from a dozen automatics. Cold-blooded murder . . . without cause, without reason! A saturnalia of sadism . . . an orgy of death-lust . . . "God!" Johnnie whispered.

They were dragging the bruised white man to the center, now. The last of the prisoners scheduled to furnish tonight's reasonless, savage entertainment. They were holding a mock trial, condemning the man, sentencing him—

From somewhere in the rear, Johnnie Piper heard a woman's muffled scream. He turned, stared beyond the circle of automobile headlights. His marrow froze.

Norma Millward was being carried into that shack beyond the meeting-place. She was struggling in the arms of a masked, robed shape . . .

Johnnie leaped to the ground, grabbed Barney. "Get up on the roof. Pretend you're handling the camera!"

Strake said: "Where are you going—?"

But the camera guy didn't wait to answer. He hurled himself through the darkness—toward the shack into which Norma had been taken.

He gained the ramshackle building; hesitated before the partially-open door. He stared inside. "The hell—!" he whispered.

The girl's clothing had been torn away. She was nude except for her silken step-ins, her chiffon hose. A robed and masked Midnight Legionnaire was forcing her backward against a rough deal table. His hands were pawing at her shoulders, lower. . . His automatic



The driver whirled. A solid punch met the camera guy's jaw.

was holstered in a cartridge-belt about his robed waist.

In that instant's flashing view, Johnnie realized that she was exquisitely lovely despite her terror. Her body was like warm, living marble. Her milk-white breasts were domes of beauty, her hips and thighs and legs symmetrical symphonies of flesh. Masked lips were descending toward the crimson lotus-blossom of her mouth . . .

Johnnie Piper sprang.



LIKE an avenging avalanche he struck the hooded man, bowled him over. The Legionnaire grunted, squirmed, smashed a knee upward toward the camera guy's groin. But Johnnie twisted sidewise, avoided the crippling foul. Then he got his fingers about his enemy's throat. He squeezed—viciously, venomously.

The masked man choked, gasped, strangled under the constricting pressure of Johnnie's fingers. The camera guy felt his adversary's gullet collapsing, crunching. Abruptly the robed figure went limp, still.

Johnnie slumped himself to his feet.

He stooped, yanked away his senseless victim's black robe and hood and mask. Swiftly he doffed the disguise; fastened cartridge-belt and holstered automatic about his own middle. Then he turned, grabbed the golden-haired girl. "Come on!"

Together they sped from the shack, started for the sound-truck where Strake could be seen, still on the roof, handling the camera. And then—

"God!" the blonde girl whispered. "Look!"

Johnnie stared ahead; saw a group of hooded figures advancing. There seemed no way of avoiding them.

It was Norma who frantically supplied the answer. "Quick—over here in the shadows. Make love to me . . . !"

Johnnie understood; dragged her from the narrow path, into a clump of bushes. He threw her to the ground; sank down beside her.

Somehow, even though it was play-acting, the touch of her sweet charms was tinder to the fire in Johnnie's soul. He cradled her in his arms, mashed her against him so that her firm breasts were

pancaked against his chest. And it seemed that she was responding . . . Her arms were about his neck, her lips parted for his kiss. . . .

A few feet away, Johnnie heard the approaching group of Midnight Legion thugs; heard a voice: "Damn him, why don't he bring her out like he was told?"

Then another voice: "Yeah. He—Hey, fellas! Look!"

JOHNIE felt the impact of eyes upon his back. He twisted his masked face, glared up at the hooded group. "Beat it, you guys! Can't you see I'm busy? I'll bring this dame to you, soon enough. . . ."

Laughter. Sardonic, vulgar amusement. Then: "... Okay, fella. Make it snappy." The group wandered back toward the circle of parked cars . . .

Johnnie waited a long harrowing instant. Then he was on his feet. "We fooled them! Come on, kiddo. It's now or never!"

He dragged her forward; reached the edge of the headlight-illuminated, improvised arena. He raised his voice. "Strake! Barney! Get at the wheel!"

The sound-technician heard. He hurled himself from the roof of the sound-truck, raced around the safe side, slammed himself under the steering-wheel. The sound-truck lurched forward.

A shout went up from the milling members of the Midnight Legion as they realized something had gone wrong. Guns were drawn. The night was suddenly hideous with the puncturing staccato of shots—

Crouching, Johnnie drew the automatic from the holster at his side. He took aim, squeezed the trigger, sent scalding lead into the closely-bunched legion of lawlessness. Hooded figures went

sprawling. And then Barney had the World Newsreel truck out of the circle; slowed it down as Johnnie plummeted into its path. And as the truck flashed by, Johnnie grabbed for the rear end, yanked the door open. He gathered Norma in his arms, flung her inside the truck, catapulted after her. Strake jammed down on his throttle. The machine roared forward.

Overhead, something smashed on the roof and went flying to the ground. "The camera!" Norma Millward whispered.

Johnnie grunted, stared out the rear window of the careening sound-truck. He saw the movie-camera lying shattered and broken on the earth; saw a mass of Midnight Legion gunmen racing in pursuit. Grimly, swiftly, he reloaded the clip of the automatic in his fist; punched another stream of hot lead back toward the masked mob. Three or four went down; the others hesitated. And then Barney screeched the sound-truck around a bend in the rutted road, came to the highway—and juiced the last drop of speed from his motor.

The Midnight Legion faded in the distance.

Within the truck, Johnnie's arm stole about Norma's slender waist. He pulled her close to him. His hand brushed against something warm, rounded, pliant. . . "It's all over, kiddo," he whispered. "They'll never catch us now!"

BACK in New York, Johnnie faced his boss. He said: "Yeah. We lost the

camera. Lost every inch of film we'd taken of the affair. But—"

"But, hell! You've missed the biggest newsreel scoop of the century! I ought to can you!"

Johnnie grinned a patient grin. "Wait a minute, boss. There's something else. You know we take movies on one film, record sound on another strip inside the truck.

"So what?"

"So this, boss. From the very start, when they started calling a roll of captains in that meeting, I tipped Barney to turn his mike on full blast, set his sound-apparatus in motion. So we recorded every bit of that roll-call; got the names of every last one of those ten so-called group-captains. Now we can turn the sound-strip over to Uncle Sam—and with a little detective work, the leaders of the Midnight Legion will be behind bars before the month's out!"

The World Newsreel chief widened his eyes. "You—you mean you got the whole thing in sound? Well, I'll be damned! Johnnie, I'm going to give you and Barney Strake a raise! You've earned it!"

Johnnie said: "Yeah. But what I'd sooner have is a vacation. I brought a certain girl back to New York with me—and I want to spend a lot of time with her." He turned and walked out, whistling. Norma Millward, very lovely in a tailored costume, was waiting for him downstairs . . .