

SPICY ADVENTURE STORIES



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ONE FOR A MILLION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Let the kid alone,” growled Ted.

“What’s it to you, farmer?” Bald Head turned on him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Take it easy, miss,” he whispered.

The eyes grew horrified. “How did you find out?”

“Never mind. Don’t let the others know.”

“I won’t. Sorry I was sick.”

By HAROLD RICE

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The big, bearded man stepped

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

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

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

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

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

"What's your trade?"

"Cattle."

"And what's that behind you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thyra yanked free with a sud-

den effort, pulling her torn shirt together.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I hardly know her," said Ted.

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

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

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

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

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

"Meaning what?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sure I do."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Throw in for what?"

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

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

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

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

"Pleasure and business, I said."

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

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

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

"We talked," said Ted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He turned to leave, but she caught his arm.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you think?" challenged Ted.

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

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

"Still doubt me?" he asked her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ponky spun around with an oath.

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

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

"Where's the bomb?" he gritted.

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

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

"That's it," gurgled Ponky.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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One for a Million

[Continued from page 71]

done before. We'll never bother you again."

Ted shook his head. "No. You'll both stand trial."

"Like hell!" Ponky stooped, caught up the powder keg. "We'll all go up together!"

Even as he bent and spat his cigarette into the bunghole, Ted smashed a fist to his chin. Keg and Ponky flew backward over the railing, striking the gunwale of Hua Ta Fu's boat. They heard the bronze woman scream as the stout shell capsized under her, Ponky and the keg.

Next instant a mighty roar rocked the ship to its keel, a great upward spout of water drenched them. Ted caught Thyra and saved her from going overside. Shattered bits of the boat flew past them. Gradually things settled again.

Where the boat had been they could see only splinters. Nothing

showed of Ponky. Nothing of Hua Ta Fu.

MID-MORNING. The schooner skimmed back along the way it had come. The Jap was forward at lookout. On the poop Thyra, almost lost in the silk robe that had been Hua Ta Fu's, watched Ted at his steering. Her white hands went over his to put the ship back on the course.

"You're not much of a helmsman, for all your teaching," she said.

"I worked too hard getting you and your ship out of that jam," he smiled. "Now we can hunt up the oil those schooner-rustlers hid out on you, take it to port and sell it. Being one girl in a million, you ought to be one *for* a million, too. After that, what say we—?"

"Let's not wait that long," she interrupted. She kissed him. "You don't need teaching at that!" she murmured.

