



SPICY- ADVENTURE STORIES

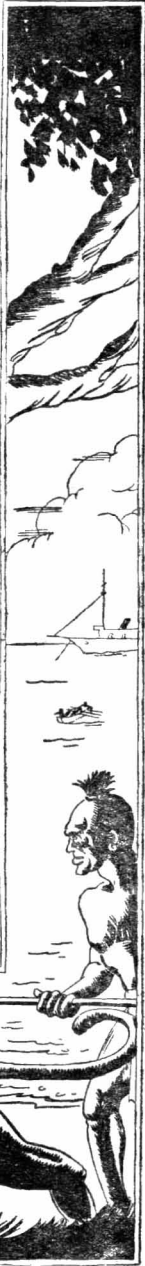
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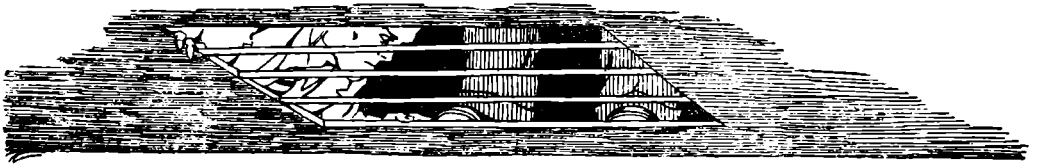
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POPPY



Latore pointed to the metal floor grate. "Look!"

By **WILLIS VACHEL KEITH**

TERRY Fargo was drunk. Gloriously drunk. He hooked his elbows over the bar at Peg Leg Hartwick's *Malakka Cafe* and bawled at the top of his lungs.

"Whiskey, dammit! Whiskey!"

Peg Leg, himself, hobbled from the rear of the stinking, smoke-heavy waterfront gin-mill. Little green pig-eyes glittered in his fat, sweating face.

"What ship, sailor?" he demanded.

Terry belched dramatically. His head rolled like a puppet's. "No ship!" he shouted. "Whiskey!"

Peg Leg knew an American when he heard one. He glanced at the native Malay bartender. There was a question in his eyes the brown man understood. He nodded.

Peg Leg curled stubby fingers about Terry Fargo's hard-muscled arm. He banged the steel-sheathed peg of his wooden leg twice against the brass rail. Two bull-necked giants came out of the smoky haze. They crowded close on either side of Terry.

"Whiskey!" Terry bawled, beating a fist on the wet, sloppy bar.

Peg Leg nodded. The two giants dropped ham-like hands on Terry's shoulders, jerked him away from the bar.

Nobody, least of all the bull-necked giants, expected what happened next. Terry twisted loose, spun on his heel

and shot four steel-hard knuckles into a hair-matted face. He one-twoed, driving his left fist to the point of the giant's jaw.

The first bruiser was just in the act of folding when Terry ducked, twisted like a top and put every ounce of his one hundred seventy-five pounds behind a bone-crushing uppercut. The blow lifted the second giant off his feet, shot his head back on his shoulders, and dropped him cold as a potato.

Terry sucked his bruised knuckles, spat out the open door, and hooked his elbows on the bar.

"Whiskey!" he yelled.

Peg Leg stared at the two inert mountains of flesh sprawled at the American's feet. Beads of sweat popped out on his forehead and trickled into the fatty folds of his cheeks.

"Whiskey!" he echoed. "Make it two, Tongo! *Jameson's!*"

THREE drinks later, when the two fallen giants had crawled away to nurse their swollen jaws, Peg Leg broke the conversational ice.

"How about a woman, mister?"

Terry looked into his empty whiskey glass. The pupils of his gray eyes were contracted to bright pin points.

"White," Peg Leg added. "Young, too."

DUST

Terry looked at him through slitted eyes. He snickered and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

Peg Leg's voice dropped. "No foolin', mister. Real white ones. Chickens, young as hell. Jus' come down."

"Where?" Terry blubbered, swaying uncertainly.

"Sshh! Not so loud. I'll steer yuh right. I could use a man like yuh. I'll fix yuh up if yuh promise me one thing."

Terry grinned foolishly. "Whush 'at?"

"I need a man like yuh, mister. Big money job. Is it a go?"

Terry shook his head. "Awright. Whersh th' woman?"

"Stay here." Peg Leg hobbled to the rear of the cafe. Terry's head swung around and his glassy eyes followed him.

Terry was tough enough for the waterfront—he was the kind of man Peg-Leg needed. And it was a queer enough job they gave Terry—helping a Chinese white-slaver!



In a moment the saloon-keeper was back with a hat on his bald head. "One more drink, mister?"

Terry hiccuped. "No more. C'mon."

Outside the cafe Peg Leg hailed a rickety carriage and helped Terry in. The ancient vehicle rolled off the quay and headed for the Chinese coolie section of Malakka. Terry leaned back and closed his eyes.

Peg Leg nudged him with his elbow. "What's yuh name, mister?"

"Got none."

"No monicker? What's a man tuh call yuh?"

The ghost of a smile played about Terry's lips. In the darkness Peg Leg failed to see it. "Dynamite!" he mumbled. "Jush plain dynamite!"

"Good as any!" Peg Leg laughed. "Yuh sure hit me bonny boys like yuh wuz dynamite. Ever shipped?"

"No."

"Been long from th' States?"

"Five years."

THE carriage rolled to a stop before a large cream adobe house. It was set back from the dirt street and half-hidden behind scraggly sand-gray palms.

"All out, Dynamite!" Peg Leg said. "Kin yuh keep yuh pins?"

For answer Terry lurched out of the carriage. He came very near falling, managing to reach the trunk of a palm tree. He pulled himself erect.

Together they reached the door of the adobe house.

Peg Leg hit the heavy walnut panel a healthy smack with his fist. Footsteps sounded inside and the door opened. A Chinese in a black alpaca jacket nodded to Peg Leg and stepped out of the doorway.

Blinking as he stumbled into a sumptuously furnished foyer, Terry leaned

against the gold-leaf wall. He heard the cafe-keeper addressing the Chinese.

"Tell th' Master I'm here."

The Oriental shuffled away. Peg Leg bit off a chew from a sodden slab of tobacco. "Not a bad layout, eh?"

Terry heaved a momentous sigh. "Seen better," he mumbled.

"Where?"

"Calcutta."

Peg Leg eyed him. "Been 'round ain'cha?"

"Some. Whersh th' woman?"

"Hold yuh horses."

The Chinese servant came forward soundlessly. "Master say come—alone."

Peg Leg shifted his chew from one cheek to the other. "Be back in a minute, Dynamite." He hobbled off after the yellow man.

IN a high-ceiled, walnut-paneled room, entrance to which was gained by a steel door that rolled soundlessly back on oiled runners, Peg Leg Hartwick, cafe-keeper, faced the man who was overlord of everything illicit in the Malay States.

Latore was a product of the melting pot of Singapore. His half-caste Hindustan mother had given herself, willingly enough, to a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. She never knew whether Latore came as a result of this experience, or whether the blood of a rich Chinese trader ran through the baby's veins. In either event, he was left, at two months, on the docks, while the woman who had borne him accepted the invitation of a Manchurian goat farmer to accompany him into the mountains.

The early years had been hard for Latore. When he was ten, the Malay fisher family, who had cared for him since he was a babe, all died of scurvy. Suddenly, he found himself dependent

on his own resources. He learned quickly to steal from the fruit boats and to rob the pockets of drunken tourists. At eighteen he was trafficking in native women, supplying lithe, brown-breasted girls for the sailors of all countries whose ships dropped anchor in the Straits.

Now, at forty, imperialistically domineering behind a heavy mahogany desk in a room with a steel door, Latore was King of Vice.

He looked up as Peg Leg doffed his hat and hobbled forward. There was a slight Asiatic slant to his eyes—probably the influence of the rich Chinese trader—and a Teutonic hardness of his mouth that seemed to indicate something else in his heredity. His hair was ebony black. It glistened under the light of a glass-faceted chandelier. His skin was the color of rubbed nutmeg, combining the varied pigmentation of all the men who had paid their respects to his mother and her mother and all the mothers that had gone before.

At times, a strange softness came into Latore's face. It was mostly when his eyes licked at the loveliness of a beautiful girl. He worshiped beauty in any form. Yearly he would journey to the art marts of Paris and Vienna and bring back with him paintings and sculpture for the private gallery he maintained in Singapore.

FOR a long moment he glared at Peg Leg Hartwick. Disdain for the crippled cockney saloon-keeper was evident in the curl of his lips.

"Yes?" he questioned.

"I got th' man fer yuh, guv'nor," Peg Leg exclaimed enthusiastically. "Brains an' brawn he's got, like yuh said."

Latore snarled. "Another drunken sailor! I watched you lead the helpless sot to the door. If that's your idea of

the man I need, you had better stop looking and attend to your business! That last parcel I gave you—only a pound—hasn't gone off yet. Nine ships have sailed in the last week and you could not find a single one on which to send it! Do you imagine my clients can wait a year?"

Peg Leg gulped and colored. He knew the uselessness of making a retort. Latore demanded the final word. He backed toward the steel door.

"One moment!" Latore barked. "This man—what nationality is he?"

"American, guv'nor! A bully boy, too, guv'nor! Had a hard time standin' on 'is pins, guv'nor, an' yet he—"

"What is his name?"

"Dynamite, he sez, guv'nor an' I'm 'ere to testify—"

"What did you tell him?"

"I give 'im th' ole baited 'ook guv'nor. Th' young, white girl. He swallowed it solid." Peg Leg grimaced, pleased with himself. "Y'see, I knowed about th' new one yuh got 'ere an'—"

Latore pushed a button under the top of his desk. The steel door slid open. A moment later the Chinese servant stepped into the room.

"The man who is waiting, Ching. Take him to the room where the girl is. Lock them both in. That is all."

Latore rose as the Oriental bowed and departed. He motioned to Peg Leg.

"We shall see," he said, "whether your American is a gentleman or the man I am looking for. Come with me."

TERRY was in the same position, leaning against the gold-leafed wall, when Ching took his arm and guided him up the heavily carpeted steps. He held back recalcitrantly.

"Where to?" he shouted.

Ching's voice flowed like new honey.

Latore rose. "My daughter, Zela, Mr. Dynamite," he said.

Terry gulped. "Pleased to meet you."

Zela extended her hand. The wide sleeve of the negligee fell away from her arm.

"I am delighted," she murmured, resting the cool petals of her fingers in Terry's moist palm.

"This is the young man I have chosen to accompany you when you venture out, Zela," Latore said.

Zela's hot eyes scanned Terry's shoulders and tapered hips.

"I am certain he will be satisfactory," she said. "If you will excuse me—" She stepped through the opening in the wall. The panel closed.

Latore's voice brought Terry out of his trance. "The compensation will be five pounds a week, if that is satisfactory. Later, perhaps, I will intrust you with other duties. Naturally, the remuneration will then be greater. You will occupy the room you had last night. My servant will be at your command."

"Okay," Terry said. "What about that blonde I saw last night. Where is she?"

"That," Latore replied, "will come later. For the present you had best forget her existence. You understand?"

Terry shrugged. "All right by me."

Latore offered a five pound note. "You will be free to come and go as you please, unless my daughter desires your services. That is all."

Terry was scarcely out of the studio when a withered, hunch-backed Oriental slid up to the desk. Latore addressed him rapidly in a Malayan dialect. The hunch-back grunted a reply and was gone.

A WEEK later, Zela and Latore were together in the study. The Eurasian woman smoked a cigarette through a long ivory holder.

"I should say he is perfect for your purposes," she said.

Latore's lips curled. "And for yours?"

"What do you mean?" Her shoulders squared and her breasts lifted under a loose-bodied blouse.

"I have no objections," Latore said. "However, do not lead yourself into believing that the American is infatuated with you. Time and again he has inquired for his country-woman. I assure you if I should allow him to see her—"

Zela's breath hissed through her lips. Contempt was mirrored in her seductive eyes. She pressed her blood-tipped fingers to the hill of a breast.

"You think so," she murmured.

Latore shrugged. "What difference? I think you are right about him. I have had him followed each time he went out alone. I am convinced he will have no objections. If you will adjourn to your room, I will see him." He pushed a button. Zela departed through the open panel into her boudoir.

LATORE motioned Terry to a chair when he came into the study. "It is time to take you into my confidence," he said. "However, I should first like to warn you that betrayal means death. You understand?"

"And how!"

"Very well. You have probably wondered as to my means of livelihood. Briefly, I am a dealer in opium. However, since the Mongolian growers of poppies have little or no use for money, I have been forced to develop another medium of exchange. Therefore, since their greatest desire is for women whose skin is white, I have been trading English and American girls for their wares."

He paused while his eyes studied the expression on Terry's face. It was non-committal. "The girl you met the first

night is to be delivered to a bandit chief on the morrow in return for ten pounds of opium. Naturally, securing these girls

tore. I'm no prude but when it comes to sending decent women—"

"You measure decency in a strange



Like a trapped animal the girl followed his every movement.

is by no means easy. For the most part they are women who come to the East in entertaining troupes. It will be your duty to meet them at the American Hotel or in the cafes and lure them here. After that I will do the rest."

Terry shook his head. "Not me, La-

manner, my friend," Latore interrupted. "These women are chips on the sea of life. I am giving them, at least, a permanent home. They are the lowest of the low."

"Not that blonde dame. She was class."

"Beautiful white girl, sir. Velly beautiful."

Terry grunted. "Where's my buddy? Where's the guy with the wooden stump, huh?"

"Come later," Ching murmured.

On the second landing Ching led the way to a door. He unlocked it and urged Terry into a large room. The door slammed and the key grated.

Terry swayed on wide-set legs. He blinked and rubbed his hand over his eyes. For a split second he seemed to snap out of his stupefied state as he stared at the wide-eyed, terror-stricken girl cringing on a couch in the corner.

You might expect to find a girl like that dining at the Ritz or lolling on the beach at Newport, but certainly not in a filthy hell-hole like Malakka.

She was beautiful—and young. Long, golden hair fell in high-lighted waves far below her hunched shoulders. Her cheeks were white with fear and her lips were scarlet splashes in the alabaster mask. Dark blue eyes—terror bright—met his. Terry could see where once they might have been limpid, swimming pools. Now they were like hard sapphires.

She was dressed in a cheap cotton frock. The hem was ragged and there was a rip down the side. Her arms were crossed over her breasts but even that protection failed to shield completely the nubile firmness of the twin, flesh-round globes. She wore neither shoes nor stockings. Her legs were slim and gently curved where the calves swelled.

Terry glanced about the room. There were no windows. A grate in the ceiling indicated a ventilation system. He lurched forward hungrily, arms outstretched.

The girl screamed and darted off the couch, backing into an opposite corner.

Her arms were down at her sides now and Terry could see the sweet curves of her body even under her formless dress. He licked his lips as her soft, deep-set breasts rose and fell. His eyes dropped to the sweep of her hips and the outline of her thighs beneath thin cotton.

"Be sociable, baby!" he blurted.

The girl trembled like a leaf. Her face was devoid of color, like a sheet of snow-white paper.

Terry groped in his pockets and brought out a package of native, brown paper cigarettes. He lit one quickly and blew a gray funnel of smoke ceilingward. He heard a faint shuffle above him. The pupils of his gray eyes flickered.

"Cigarette, baby?" he questioned.

The girl's quivering lips gave forth no sound. Like a trapped animal she followed his every movement, waiting for the attack she seemed to know was coming.

Terry took one more drag at the cigarette then dropped it to the floor. He made four stabs with his foot before he ground the butt under his heel, almost going off balance. His bleary eyes burned at the cowering girl.

"C'mere!" he growled.

THE girl was a graven image, tense. Even her breasts had no movement as she held her breath. Her neck muscles stood out like whipcords.

Terry moved toward her, swaying drunkenly. She waited until he was within arm's reach to duck past him to the momentary safety of the other side of the room. Terry's hand shot out. Steel fingers clamped her wrist. A piercing scream made the tight-ceiled room alive with high-pitched horror as Terry jerked her body into his arms.

Like a wildcat she writhed and strug-



gled. Her dress dropped off one shoulder, baring the creamy loveliness of the upper slope of a breast. Before Terry's fingers could tear it farther, the girl raked five sharp nails across his face.

Bellowing like a stuck pig, Terry released her. But only for a moment. His face, contorted with unspeakable rage, he lunged at her, smashing the flat of his hand against the side of her head.

The blow knocked her across the room and down on the couch. Terry leaped after her. His arm shot out. One

wrench ripped her cotton dress from her body. She wore only a tattered slip beneath it. Terry's eyes ran up the mother-of-pearl smoothness of exposed flesh. The plane of her stomach melted into luxuriously rounded hips. One cheek, where Terry's palm had struck, was pink with mounting color. Her breath came in great gasps.

Terry swayed backward. He waved the girl's torn dress above him, yelling triumphantly. Then, suddenly, as though the liquor he had imbibed had finally

become too much for him, his knees buckled and he crumpled to the floor, out cold!

For a long moment the girl stared at his inert body, unable to fully realize that she had temporarily escaped. Tears filled her eyes. Her shoulders twitched. She buried her face in a cushion, sobbing hysterically.

IN his walnut-paneled retreat, Latore counted bank-notes into Peg Leg Hartwick's outstretched hand.

"Ten pounds?"

Peg Leg's eyes were live coals. "Tha's right, gov'nor. He's th' man ain't he? No gentleman, that bully boy, gov'nor! See 'im strike 'er down?"

Latore wiped his hands one against the other as though to clean them of the taint of the bank-notes. "You will see that the package I gave you gets aboard a ship. That is all."

Peg Leg thumped to the door. "Sure thing, gov'nor an' thanks ter yuh."

Latore pushed a desk button. The steel door slid back. Ching was waiting.

"Show him out, Ching. Then remove the drunkard from the girl's room. Put him to bed. When he awakens, let me know."

Ching nodded. Latore pressed a second button. The steel door closed soundlessly. He walked across the room. The tips of his heavily ringed fingers touched a spot on the wall. One of the panels slid up. Latore stepped through and into a gorgeously furnished boudoir. Resting on a silk brocade *chaise longue* was a voluptuous raven-haired woman.

She smiled a greeting, her blood-red lips parting to reveal two rows of even white teeth. A marabou-trimmed negligee was loosely draped about her undulating figure. The saffron-hued full-

ness of her conical breasts was visible through the diaphanous chiffon.

Latore approached the couch, accepted her outstretched hand, and kissed the long, tapering fingers. Her eyes, naturally almond-shaped, slitted until the long, curling lashes almost came together.

"I have been waiting," she murmured, sliding her sinuous hips to make room for Latore on the *longue*.

He sat beside her. One hand dropped to a knee, silk covered. The other moved sensuously up the roundness of an arm until it reached her bare, flesh-warm shoulder. Her lips parted and her eyelids fluttered. She sighed softly.

"I have found the man I need, Zela. An American."

She curled an arm about Latore's neck. "Must it always be business?" Her breasts swelled majestically under their cob-web sheath. She drew his head down. "Kiss me!"

Latore held back. "It is important, Zela."

A frown crossed her beautiful face. Her arm dropped to her side. "It is possible that the white girl is important, too!" she snapped.

Latore's eyes flashed. The muscles of his jaws twitched. He was about to utter harsh words but instead he drew a deep breath.

"At times I am amazed at your lack of mentality, my beautiful one," he said. Idly his fingers moved over her shoulder, tracing patterns. Hot lights flamed in Zela's pupils. Her body writhed under the exquisite flesh torture.

"Kiss me!" she gasped.

LATORE lowered his mouth to her moist lips. Her lips parted. He could barely restrain himself from clasping her burning body in his arms. But he did, sitting erect, breathing heavily.

"First you will listen to me," he said softly. "This American will take your place, providing I am assured of his trustworthiness. That will be for you to discover. You will treat him kindly, as only you know how. You will even make love to him, if necessary. Learn everything you can. Of course, I will have him followed wherever he goes. At present he is asleep. When he awakens, I will have him brought to my study. You will enter at a propitious moment. Is that clear?"

Zela's slim fingers caressed Latore's cheeks. "Yes," she whispered. "Tell me now, my lover. Who is the most beautiful woman on this earth?" Her hips arched gently.

Latore pressed her warm body to his own. His hands laved the warmth of her shoulders, her smooth back. His lips forged themselves to the well-spring of her mouth.

TERRY Fargo sat up in bed. He started to swallow but changed his mind. His mouth felt like a piece of pickled tripe. He had a hell of a headache. He rubbed his hand over his face and grimaced. What he needed now, he thought, was a good stiff drink.

"Whiskey!" he yelled.

The door of the room opened. Ching stepped inside. "You called, sir."

Terry blinked. "Yes! Get me a drink! Whiskey!"

Ching's expression was blank. "You wish, perhaps, the bath first, sir?"

"Bath? Hell, no! Get me whiskey!"

Ching nodded and departed. Terry pushed the covers down. He seemed faintly surprised to see himself dressed in rich silk pajamas. He remembered vividly what had gone before, even to the blonde girl on the couch. He could never forget her.

Ching returned with a glass of whiskey. Terry gulped it down, swung out of bed. A new suit of clothes and fresh linen were spread out on a table.

"There will be something else, sir?" Ching questioned.

Terry scratched his head. "Maybe that bath. Where is it?"

A HALF-HOUR later, freshly shaved and clothed, Terry watched the steel door to Latore's study open. He walked in, swinging his shoulders jauntily, his gray eyes riveted on the face of the man behind the desk.

"Greetings!" he said.

Latore smiled. "Good morning. Do you feel better?"

"Much. Who do I thank for these duds?"

"It is unnecessary to thank anyone. Your name, I am given to understand, is 'Dynamite'?"

"Correct."

"You have no other name? No family name?"

"Never had a family."

"I see. Well, it does not matter. I am Latore."

"Glad to know you."

"You desire employment, Mr. Dynamite?"

"That's right."

"I may have employment for you. I am anxious to secure a bodyguard for my daughter. Malakka is not the most law-abiding of places. I have been told you are fearless."

ZELA, in the boudoir, regarded the moment as propitious. The wall panel slid up and she came into the study. Now her tall, siren's body was clothed in a red satin negligee. Her left hand held it closed under her swollen breasts. Terry gaped at her as she came forward.

"A stray fish that happened to fall into my net. Most of them, however, are hardened." His lips twisted. "And even the one of whom you speak. If you saw her now, you might change your mind."

"What do you mean?"

Latore drummed his finger-tips on the desk. "Merely that she had become resigned to whatever fate I have in store for her. Come, I will show you."

They mounted the steps to the third floor of the house. Latore opened the door of a room. He pointed to a metal grate in the floor.

"Look!"

DOWN on his knees Terry peered into the room below. The blonde girl was reclining on the couch. A silk kimono she was wearing was half open at the front, baring glimpses of her high, luscious breasts and the modeled sweep of her hips. A wrinkled, yellow Oriental ran his spider hands down her sides while his thick lips kissed her mouth. She moaned and writhed. Her arms circled the yellow man's neck, drawing him to her.

Terry stood erect. "I don't get it," he said. "How come the quick change?"

Latore smiled wisely. "A simple Oriental preparation, my friend. You see how utterly depraved the girl is. When her Mongolian master comes for her, she will go willingly."

"This job," Terry said. "What's it worth?"

"One hundred pounds for each girl you bring me. I can use as many as you can find."

Terry's knuckles were white through the skin of his hand. "All right," he muttered. "When do I start?"

Latore shrugged. "As soon as you desire." The vice king's eyes narrowed. "But, remember, my friend, that secrecy

is the essence. I have ways of knowing whether or not you are working for Latore or not."

Terry passed his forefinger across his throat. He grinned. "Something like that?"

"Something, my friend."

As he passed alone through the lower hall, Terry heard a soft voice calling. He turned to see Zela motioning from a doorway that was another entrance to her boudoir.

"Latore has told you everything?" she questioned, once Terry was in the room and the door was closed. Her hands slid up to his shoulders, fingering meaningfully.

"Yes."

Her voice dropped. "You must be careful. You are being constantly watched. Latore is not the man with whom to trifle." She moistened her carmine lips. "I tell you this because—because—" Her body swayed forward. Terry felt her breasts mashing against his chest. He inhaled the pungent perfume of her lips as she pressed their parted moistness to his mouth.

Hot, thrilling sensations swept over Terry. The Eurasian's mouth was a blow-torch for heat.

She drew away, panting. "Now you know," she whispered. "Some other time when there is no danger, yes?" Her eyes were star-bright.

Terry nodded. He backed to the door, still trembling from the avidness of her caress.

SOMEHOW he found his way to the quay and Peg Leg Hartwick's cafe. At the bar he had two whiskies. It was just enough to warm him for the work he had to do. He was finishing the second drink when Peg Leg hobbled up.

"H'ya. Dynamite!"

"Okay," Terry replied. "Thanks a lot for that job."

The saloon keeper's voice dropped. "You in with Latore?"

"Yes."

"Good boy! I knowed yuh'd fit in." He motioned to the bartender. "Two whiskies, Tongo!"

When he backed away from the bar an hour later, Terry was reeling. He stumbled out into the street, glassy-eyed. A native woman, carrying a basket, bumped against him. Terry yelled bloody murder as he struck the woman across the face. She fell and rolled into the road.

A white-turbaned policeman on the docks saw the drunken assault. He came on the run, swinging his club. Terry ducked it and plowed his fist into the policeman's belly. That done, he spun like a top and went out cold.

THE first officer's shrill whistle brought two more white-turbaned minions of the law. Despite Peg Leg's protestations, Terry was bundled into a wagon and driven off to the local station house.

A night in jail sobered him up. He was released in the morning and went immediately to the American Hotel. Late in the afternoon a carriage drove up to the door of Latore's adobe residence. Terry helped a stunning auburn-tressed girl out of the conveyance.

Ching admitted them. "Master like to see you—alone," he said.

Terry turned to the girl. "I'll just be a moment, Margot."

Latore was standing behind his desk when Terry entered his study. His face was dark.

"One more episode of that nature, my friend, and we will sever connections."

Terry grimaced. "I just took a few

drinks too many. But I got a girl for you."

"I have seen her enter."

"Want me to bring her in? I told her—"

"She has already been taken to a room," Latore said quietly.

Terry's head jerked. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, my friend. No time is wasted. I wish to prepare her for the visit of my Mongolian customer. Possibly he would prefer her to the fair-haired girl. I will give him a choice." He opened the top drawer of his desk. "And secondly, it is not my desire to have any evidence in view when the British authorities arrive!"

His hand snapped out of the drawer holding a blunt-nosed automatic.

"Did you imagine for one moment, my friend, that I might be fooled by so shoddy a ruse?" Latore's voice was exasperatingly smooth. "You knew you were being followed and realized how impossible it would be to reach the authorities. And so, cleverly, in your bungling fashion, you managed to have yourself arrested. No doubt you have already informed the Colonial police as to my activities. You shall not live to bear witness against me!"

Terry blanched. There was nothing to do now but brazen it out. Either that or—

His next move indicated the decision. He shoved the desk toward Latore, ducking behind it. The massive piece of furniture slid across the polished floor. The gun in Latore's hand belched fire a moment before he was hit at the hips. A singing bullet whizzed over Terry's head and flattened against the steel door.

Terry shot up and vaulted over the desk. Luckily Latore's weapon had spun

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POPPY DUST

[Continued from page 105]

from his hand when the desk mowed him down. He was on his knees when Terry hit him.

LIKE two jungle beasts they clawed at each other, rolling over and over to the far wall. Terry saw an opening and shot his fist into it. His knuckles

went numb as they cracked Latore's jaw. The man quivered and lay still.

At the desk Terry fumbled with the concealed buttons. The steel door slid open, revealing Ching with a bright-bladed knife in his right hand. Terry lunged for the automatic on the floor. His fingers touched it just as he heard

the knife sing out of the Oriental's fingers. Blindly he twisted his body to one side. The deadly blade whizzed over his chest.

Terry pumped two shots at the opening in the wall. The first one went wild but the second bullet caught Ching between the eyes. His arms jerked up and he dropped lifeless, blood pouring from the black hole in his forehead.

Turning to see whether Latore showed any signs of recovery, Terry's eyes bulged. The knife Ching had thrown was buried hilt deep in Latore's throat! The man's head rested in a pool of his own crimson gore! He was dead from a severed jugular!

Gun in hand Terry dashed up the steps. He had no way of telling where Margot and the blonde girl were held imprisoned. Only when he heard a shrill, hysterical scream was he led to the door of a room. He threw it open. Margot was backed against a wall while the same shriveled Chinese whom Terry had seen before with the blonde, lashed a black, braided whip across her.

Terry clubbed his gun, leaped forward, and brought the butt down on the yellow man's head. There was a hollow thud. The Oriental dropped like an empty sack.

“**WE** apprehended the wooden-legged saloon-keeper,” Major Gran-

ville, head of the Colonial Police informed Terry. “He made a complete confession. And we certainly owe a debt of gratitude to you and the American Secret Service for cleaning up this foul mess for us.”

Terry bowed in the direction of Margot Kingsley. “Miss Kingsley's willingness to co-operate was a great help.”

The English girl smiled. “I have battle scars to show for it. I never knew whips could hurt that much.”

Terry turned to the little blonde girl. She had recovered from Latore's administration of drugs.

“And next time, Miss Lord, you won't decide to take a trip around the world unaccompanied and let yourself be influenced by exotic foreign strangers.”

Ann Lord heaved a deep sigh. “Next time, Mr. Fargo, you might accompany me.”

Terry had a vivid recollection of her almost nude loveliness. “I might at that,” he replied.

Major Granville drew Terry aside. “One of my men found that woman you mentioned. She was in the basement. Her throat had been cut.”

Terry nodded. “I expected as much. It was she who told me I was being followed. I'm sorry.” He thought of the one time her lips had burned against his. “It's dark in the shadow of the poppy,” he said softly.