



SPICY- ADVENTURE STORIES

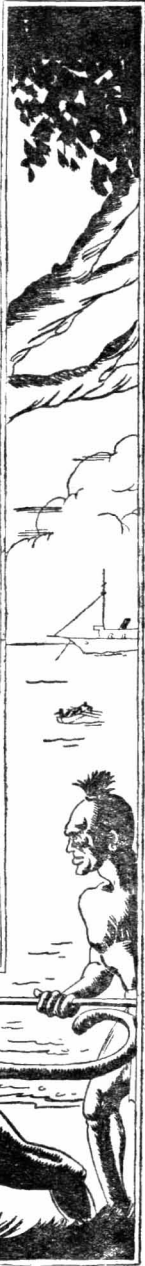
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PYGMY

Magic



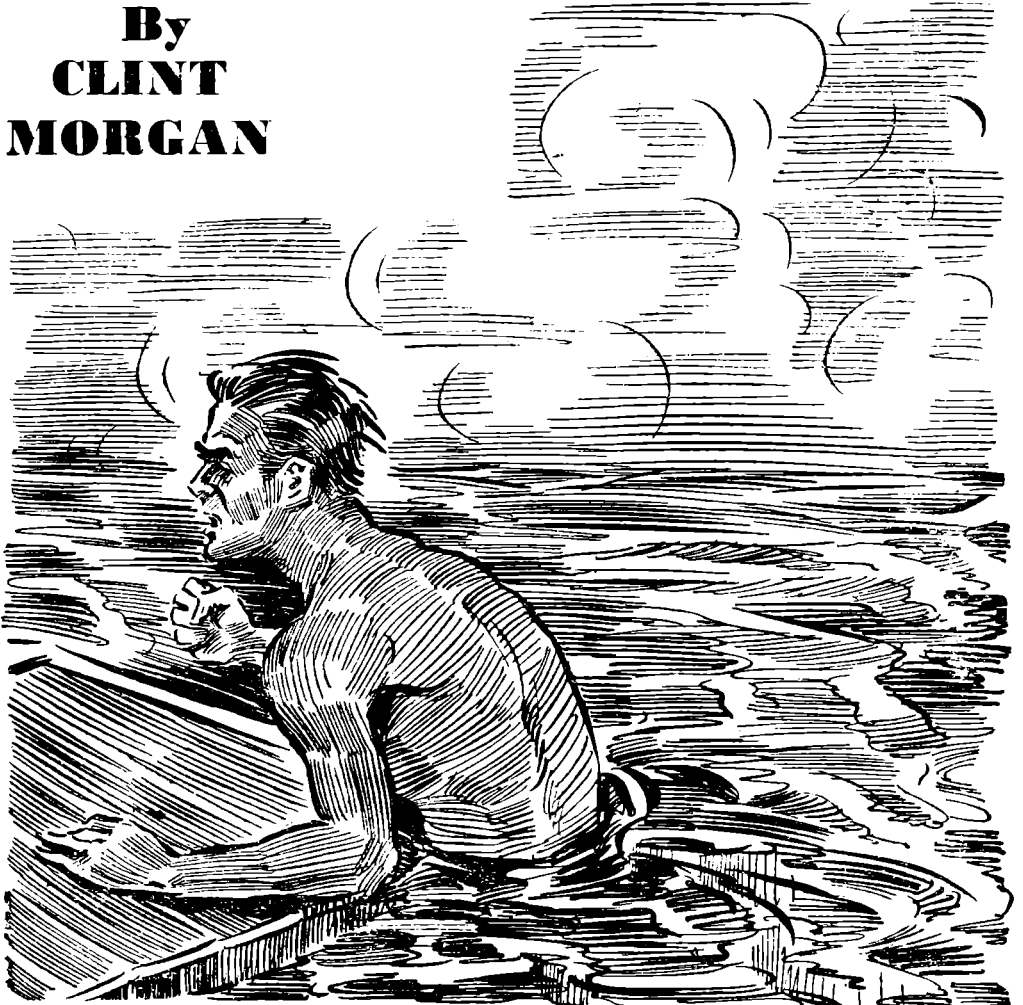
SUNRISE on an empty sea. Dark clouds that made the sunlight copper. Choppy waves that tossed the hatch cover relentlessly.

The hatch cover was all that was left of the freighter *Elba*, bound from Brisbane to Batavia through the Torres Straits and the Timor Sea. The blow had caught her off Point Kennedy just after she had dropped her rudder and while she lay temporarily disabled.

Now the hatch cover danced in the choppy waters off the coast of Papua.

*Shipwrecked—dying of thirst on a hatch-cover in mid-ocean.
And just as escape looms near, Moreland finds himself and
the girl in the power of a crazed sailor!*

**By
CLINT
MORGAN**



Lashed tightly to it was a woman, blonde, almost nude, her tender skin blistered and reddened where the sun of yesterday had poured cruelly down. She lay there with her eyes closed, cracked lips slightly parted, arms flung wide, one hand and wrist dangling in the sea. Her breasts rose and fell painfully only half covered by shreds of a torn slip. Her slim waist seemed hardly to move. Full hips and tapering thighs were almost completely exposed to the elements.

Clinging to the rope that lashed her

“Cast off, Griggs! I told you I’d kill you if you touched her again!”

firm, his body in the water, was Don Moreland, radio operator of the *Elba*. He rested his chin and the side of his face on the wooden cover, his red hair wild and wet flattened against the hatch. From time to time he licked the salt from his parched lips, spat into the water. Green eyes burned with a strange, tortured light.

On the other side of the hatch cover, Griggs, the Melbourne engine wiper, also in the water with his claw-like fingers twined in the same rope. His face was twisted, seamed, wracked by pain, the skin peeling from his skinny arms and shoulders. His lips, too, were puffed and cracked, but his eyes glowed with the fire of madness.

One skinny hand released its grip, crawled slowly toward the white body of the woman on the cover. For a second his fingers brushed soft feminine flesh. The woman did not move. The Melbourne dockrat sank the fingers convulsively in yielding whiteness. The woman stirred, her eyes came open. She saw the leering face of Griggs and groaned aloud, tried to pull away.

DON MORELAND raised his red head from the hatch cover, glimpsed the ugly drama before him. His eyes suddenly blazed. Inch by inch he made his way through the waves around the edge of the hatch cover. He was almost on Griggs before he was seen. The little man released his hold, started to whimper and whine. As he whined, he moved away, moved for the opposite side of the cover.

Moreland yelled hoarsely through cracked lips, "Cast off, Griggs, damn you! I'm going to throw you off if you don't. I told you I'd kill you if you touched her again!"

"Aw, Sparks, for the love of God! I

was just seeing if she was alive. Don't make me cast off. I'd die, man. They'll pick us up any time now! Let me stay!" His voice was an abject whine.

The exhausted woman had relaxed again, lay with her eyes closed. Her voice could hardly be heard. "Give him a chance, Don."

"Yeah," whined Griggs, "just a chance. It's gonna squall again, Sparks, and I wouldn't get fifty yards. Look at them clouds!"

Overhead black clouds were gathering, were racing through the skies as if bound for a common destination. Those clouds held wind, and rain! Don Moreland knew that. The sun dived behind the clouds, the velocity of the wind increased.

Then Griggs saw it. As the hatch cover was tossed high he screamed, "Look Look! It's a canoe, a native canoe and it's empty as hell!"

The girl strained upright. Moreland heaved himself half up on the hatch cover and peered into the wind. He smelled the canoe before he saw it, recognized the smell for the nauseating, revolting odor of putrifying flesh. A native canoe that had been swept to sea! The crew had no doubt died from thirst and starvation!

And, the wind was bringing the light craft directly down upon them. It would pass some fifty yards to starboard. Without a word he loosed his grip on the rope, turned on his face and started toward the drifting canoe with long, even strokes. Behind him he heard the voice of Griggs.

"Damn you! Damn you! Don't leave us here, Sparks, don't leave us, we'll die."

THE smell almost overwhelmed him as he rested on the outrigger of the

small dugout. He shook the saltwater from his eyes, made out a platform-like bamboo structure built in the prow of the canoe. Atop it was a rattan-wrapped bundle, a corpse! This, then was a burial canoe!

Well, it was no time to be squeamish. The wind was rising in a steady howl, the sky growing steadily darker. Two more strokes and he made it, clambered over the side and squatted in the bottom to catch his breath. The stench was terrible. In the gloom he made out three or four carved paddles, a spear, a stone axe, a war club. This man, evidently a warrior, had been sent to a sea burial with his weapons.

Don seized a clumsy paddle, headed the canoe for the hatch cover. Griggs made for the boat. Moreland had to threaten him with the paddle before he would return to help Irene Garver from the hatch cover. Some few minutes later they were safely aboard the canoe, Moreland crouched in the stern, paddle in hand! Griggs beneath the platform, whining in the prow; and the girl stretched out amidships.

"Griggs," snapped Moreland, "pick up that axe and cut the body loose from the platform. It's going to storm again and it makes us top heavy." Griggs protested but went to work, hacking unsteadily at the rattan cords.

Suddenly he stopped, staggered back, dropping the axe. "Look at it, look at it," he whimpered.

A jagged streak of lightning illuminated the sea for a full two seconds as it crackled across the heavens. Although the body of the corpse was decomposed the head had been mummified. It was the black, gaunt face of the typical Papuan with a high bridged nose that bore a bone ornament stuck through the base. It was painted in grotesque figures, curling de-

signs fearful to see. But it wasn't the face that caused Moreland to start and shudder. It was the hair. Wild and outstanding like that of all bush savages, it was a vivid red in color! And the decomposed flesh of the body had at one time been gilded a brilliant gold!

"Throw him over," said Moreland hoarsely. The body hit the sea and the squall broke. The rain came down in torrents. The girl lay flat on her back and opened her mouth. The feel of fresh water was balm on her swollen tongue, her parched lips. Griggs and Moreland turned their faces toward the heavens. Moreland tried to keep the frail canoe pointed into the waves, tried to keep the gigantic breakers from swamping them.

HOW long he crouched there with tortured muscles he never knew. It must have been all day, for the sun did not reappear. When the wind died down and the waves subsided, the western sky was stained a faint scarlet through its grey. Moreland looked down at the sleeping woman in the bottom of the boat. Her whole body looked refreshed. What few wisps of clothing she still possessed were wet and clinging, scarcely hiding a solitary curve of her chiseled body.

From beneath the platform on the prow of the boat Moreland saw Griggs sweeping his inflamed little eyes over the feminine loveliness that lay at his feet. He tried to mumble a curse, tried to warn Griggs again, but weariness overtook him. His bowed head sank down on his chest. His body was one long exultant throb of paining muscles and protesting flesh. His eyes closed; he slept.

He was awakened by the sun high in the heavens beating down on his sore face. Seemingly from a great distance



ble on his chin, ran down on his skinny chest. He muttered and drove, cackled and laughed like a child with a new toy. The girl groaned as his clawlike hands darted out to caress her.

"Griggs! I'll kill you! Damn you, I'll kill you!" Moreland wondered if that harsh voice were his own. The eyes Griggs turned toward him were those of a madman. The irises had almost entirely disappeared. It was as if the pupil was alone on the white eyeball.

"Yah," he bawled, "You'll kill me! He! He! He! I've got you lashed, mate,

He fell back with a cry, the dart sticking in his chest.



he heard a low moaning sound. For a moment he lay with his eyes closed trying to remember where he was. Remembrance came to him with the force of a slap in the face. Eyes opened again, he tried to sit up. Something was holding his wrists with the long strips of rattan that had held the corpse to the boat! With a great effort he was able to raise his head, to peer toward the bow of the boat.

Irene Garver was lashed to the under side of the platform. More of the ragged clothing had been torn from her body and, squatted beside her, was Griggs, his red little eyes gloating over the sight of her palpitant flesh. Saliva ran unheeded from his blue lips, drooled over the stub-

and I've got all the weapons in this end of the boat. We'll die! Ay, we'll all die but Horace Griggs'll die happy! We're hungry and we're thirsty and we'll die of that, but all my life I've wanted a fine lady! And now—the captain's daughter!"

He threw himself toward the bound girl in an ecstasy of slobbering delight.

"Be still, you she-devil," he roared as the woman tried to fight herself away. "I'll cut your soft white throat, so help me!"

Moreland shuddered as he saw the stone knife in the madman's hand, saw its sharp point bite into the base of the white throat. The girl lay still, stiffened rigidly. The madman laughed. "This'll learn you!" He dragged the knife down across her collar bone into the yielding flesh below. The girl groaned. Moreland roared. Griggs laughed as the knife left a slender red wake from which oozed tiny gleaming globules of blood.

"Blood! Blood!" screamed Griggs. "He! He! He! Not blue but red like mine!"

Moreland strained at his bonds until he fell exhausted in the stern. For a long time there was silence from the bow of the boat. The girl, thought Moreland, has fainted, thank God. Then the silence was broken by the wheezing breathing of the madman, interspersed with stupid little giggles. Nauseated Moreland tried not to watch.

LONG hours later something sharp stuck him in the chest. He opened his eyes to see Griggs standing near the middle of the boat. He bore the stone axe in one hand, the long sharp spear in the other. A spear point was prodding Moreland.

"I'm gonna cut you loose, Sparks, and you're going to paddle us toward that



grey cloud. It looks like a shore line to me. The shore means something to eat. Don't forget I'll be standing over you with a spear and an axe if you try anything funny."

Over Grigg's shoulder Moreland could glimpse the inert body of Irene Garver. She lay motionless except for the steady rise and fall of her breasts. Her eyes were closed. Her cheeks were wet with tears.

"You don't want to head for shore, Griggs," he protested. "We'll be picked up out here sooner or later. We can stand it another day or so. A plane will be sent from Cooktown or Moresby. Hit the coast and they'll miss us. That's the Lost Coast, man, and it's full of cannibals. They'll scoff us all, mister!"

The sharpened spear head bit at the rattan bounds. Griggs drew back the spear, stood ready for action. "Get to paddling," he giggled. "I'm the skipper now and we're going ashore."

THE frail canoe couldn't have made it had it been ebb tide. A protecting barrier of reefs worse than any Moreland had ever encountered barred the shore. They shot through the gaps like a bullet from a gun, spray and spume

stinging their sunburned bodies. Ahead loomed trees. No land. It seemed as if the trees grew from the very sea itself and over all hung the sickening stench of mud.

Straight into the trees Moreland plunged the canoe. A flood of voracious mosquitoes engulfed them, flies and small insects arrived to taste fresh blood. Griggs cursed and slapped at his sore skin viciously. The sluggish current seemed to follow a lane of interlaced trees with spiral vines to tie them together. Huge trees stood out of the water, their gnarled roots upraised like pawing clawing fingers. A greenish twilight overhung the lanes and the air was redolent with rot and decay.

Griggs began to tremble and shake. "Take us out of here, Moreland," he whimpered. "It's dead, the whole thing! We'll die in here!"

Without a word Moreland turned the canoe about, headed back the way he had come. It took only a few minutes of paddling to show him how lost they were. The maze of muddy water swirled them beneath overhanging trees that looked exactly like others they had passed. Eventually he quit paddling.

Griggs screamed, raised the spear. "Work, you blighter! We've got to get out of here!"

"We're lost," said Moreland calmly. "The best thing to do is to drift. This muddy stream is bound to hit the sea somewhere."

"Look," said Griggs, peering toward the trees as the boat drifted into a small clearing. "Look! What is it?"

FIVE conical straw houses rose on stilts out of the mud. Three more were perilously perched in tall trees at the clearing's edge. Even as the occupants

of the canoe watched, a bushy head appeared at the door of the tree house, a bushy head in which eyeballs were rolling whitely. A torrent of guttural dialect poured from the native's lips.

"Ahoy, ahoy," shouted Griggs, dancing up and down waving a spear. "Come get us; come and get us!"

Moreland dug in with the paddle. "You fool! Don't you know all these Papuan natives are cannibals? Do you want to be eaten?"

Griggs turned white, pointed the spear again at his shipmate. "Paddle, damn you." His voice was shaky with fear as he looked back over his shoulder. Tiny men were leaping from the stilt houses, others were clambering from the tree houses, all headed for dug out canoes. "Pygmies," groaned Moreland. Not a one of them was five feet in height. Each wore a solitary twisted garment of bark, or a single shell. As their canoes started in pursuit Moreland noted that they bore no weapons! He listened to the cry that came after them.

"*Mammoose! Mammoose! Ropatai!—Ropatai Mammoose!*" was as near as he could make out the words. Each black face was distorted in what was meant for a smile. He glimpsed pointed teeth, lips and molars black with betel nut. Then he heard the mad voice of Griggs again.

Griggs had clambered atop the raised platform, was dancing up and down brandishing the pointed spear as he mouthed curses. He drew back his arm, crouched like a discus hurler.

"Don't throw it," yelled Don and looked back at the pursuing pygmies. The canoe hit a projecting mangrove root. Griggs screamed wildly, tossed the spear over the side, and fell into the water with a great splash. Horror-

stricken Don paused, then saw something that caused him to leap into action.

From the protecting shelter of the big mangrove an enormous snout emerged. Two unblinking, piglike eyes were fixed directly on the struggling body of Griggs. The water rippled a little, the snout shot forward. Griggs saw the huge New Guinea alligator approaching and cried out in terror. Moreland fumbled on the bottom of the boat for the stone axe.

The beast opened its huge mouth. The stench of its breath came clear to Moreland as he clutched the axe. He saw the gleaming white tusks set in the blood red mouth as the jaws yawned wide to rend their living prey. Moreland hurled the axe as Grigg's scream echoed in the glade. Straight and true it sped into the red cavern. The *sourian* snorted, flipped on its side, and disappeared leaving a bloody wake.

The pygmies screamed, "*Mammoose, Mammoose!*" at the top of their voices, danced in their canoes. Moreland hauled Griggs aboard, searched for another weapon. The axe was gone, the spear was gone. His eye caught the heavy war club. He seized it, turned defiantly to the oncoming pygmies, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

The tiny canoes gathered closer, the pygmies still pouring out a jargon of unintelligible gibberish. Don gripped the club. Irene Garver had found the knife and stood bravely beside him. Griggs cowered in the bottom of the boat.

"Ahoy, there! Ahoy!" The hail came from down the turgid river. Don stared unbelievably as another canoe hove into view, for, standing in the bow of the canoe, was a white man!

Fever raged and burned in his blood, his abused muscles and organs refused to function properly. When he finally opened his eyes to full consciousness, he stared straight upward into the brown ones of Irene Garver. She was holding a gourd filled with tepid water to his lips. Never before had he tasted anything so welcome, so soothing. He drank deep, closed his eyes then opened them to look about again.

No it wasn't a dream. It was really Irene. She wore a short native *sarong* of red calico that contrasted vividly with the whiteness of her skin. As she leaned over him to dab at his wet lips with a clean rag, the top of the shadowed cleft between her breasts was visible. The scent of the hibiscus flower she wore in her hair filled his nostrils. He smiled and she kissed him. Someone giggled in the background.

It was a native girl, as tall, as well rounded as Irene. She squatted in a corner pulling the cord of a *punkah* that waved above Moreland's head. Irene smiled. "That's Tuona, Tom's wife. Tuona, this is Don Moreland."

The girl giggled, tried unsuccessfully to say the name.

"And Tom, who's Tom?"

"The white man who rescued us, honey. He's a trader, been inside here for nearly a year. The natives think he's some sort of a god, but—"

"What happened to Griggs?"

Her face whitened, then turned red as she looked away. He squeezed her hand.

"The damned dog," he grated. "I'll see him hanging in a dock for what he did!"

"He's mad, Don. We shouldn't hate him so, poor fellow. He's still delirious in another hut. But here's Tom."

"Hello, young fellow, so you've

THE four days that followed were like a long delirious dream to Don More-

snapped out of it!" Tom Andrews stood all of six foot six in his sock feet and weighed in proportion. An enormous red beard hung down on his thick chest. His head was topped by a thatch of hair that matched the beard perfectly. He sat down beside Don's pallet. "The young lady here has told me most of your story but maybe you can fill in if you feel like it."

DON tried. He concluded with, "I don't understand it, Andrews. I'd always heard that pygmies were man-eaters but they came after us all smiles. Maybe they were grinning in anticipation of a full stomach."

Andrews roared with laughter. Before replying, he spoke to Tuona, "Better go see if the other fellow's all right, Tuona. He may want water or something." Then to Don. "You can thank that red hair for your escape, young fellow. Every native on this coast from the pygmies to the *Tugeri* think red hair brings luck. *Mammoose* they call it. They'd have captured you if they could, but they wouldn't have eaten you. They'd have kept you, so that your luck would stay with them. Now the young lady and your friend—I don't know about them! She *does* look sort of juicy! But you were safe."

Don laughed. "So that's how you get by, too! They figure red hair is *tabu*?"

Andrews nodded. "That and the fear of god I've put into them. This is bad country, man. I'm the only white man that ever managed to keep himself alive here. They're afraid of my *puri-puri*, my magic. Sometime I'll show you. I'm making a good thing of it though. Plenty of paradise skins from the pygmies and a few trinkets from the *Tugeri* and Sky people up the river. I—"

The sound of a sudden, penetrating

scream broke into the conversation. Don tensed, Andrews came slowly to his feet. Again that awful scream. With quick strides Andrews made the door. Don pulled himself up weakly, assisted by Irene. Together they made the door.

Some twenty feet away was another mud shack exactly like the one they were in. Andrews was almost there. Again that scream and a struggling figure leaped from the door, only to be pulled half in again by her captor.

It was Tuona, kicking, biting, flailing at the man who held her head in the crook of his arm. The man was Griggs, roaring with laughter, maddened with desire. He had torn the *sarong* from the girl's brown body. Her breasts bobbed and swayed pendulously, muscles rippled lithely in the fullness of her thighs and calves. As he glimpsed Andrews running approach, he hurled her behind him, crouched low to meet the attack of the giant, slobbering and whining.

Andrews walked in slowly, oblivious of kicks and blows that bounded off his huge body. He encircled little Griggs in his arms, smothered him in a brawny embrace and walked back into the shack with him. Presently he emerged, the naked, bleeding body of his native wife safe in his arms. Don and Irene made way for the man and his burden. Tuona wasn't hurt much, more frightened, but her man was grim.

"He's dangerous," he said, "as balmy as a bat and woman-crazy. Don't either of you go in there again."

DAYS passed, dragged by on weary legs. The fever burned itself out in Don Moreland. Irene explained what they had done about rescue. A smudge fire was constantly kept going on the mud island and another on the coast



where they had entered. Andrews had dispatched a pygmy to tend the coast fire. The pygmy bore a note telling where they were and had instructions to give it to the first white man who came, whether he come by boat or by the great white birds. Now all they could do was wait.

Moreland grew able to move about, to get around the mud island. He watched Andrews trade trinkets for the brilliant-hued Bird of Paradise skins the little pygmies brought in, the lumps of raw gold the *Tugeri* occasionally brought down from the mountains. Once a red headed Sky man, a *Raiakora*, showed with a double handful of uncut rubies and sapphires for which Andrews traded three knives and a quart of small nails.

"But why do they fear you?" persisted Don. "Why don't they attack you and eat you if they're cannibals."

Andrews laughed. "Because I'm the

It was Tuona—kicking, fighting, flailing at the man who held her.

Thunder God, Don. Besides being *mammoose, tabu*. I'm the man that makes thunder. Haven't you ever wondered what these plungers were for?"

Against the wall of the *kampung* were three plungers set in cases. Don eyed them curiously. "I press them down, Don, and it thunders! Before I got into this business, I was a blaster down Australia way. I've got plenty of dynamite out there and it's all wired up. Whenever the cannibals get a little unruly I set off a charge. They think my *puri-puri* is tops, call me the Thunder God. I've got it wired in the same way to my boat down there." Andrews had a twenty-eight foot auxiliary sloop at anchor off the island—"and a real charge beneath the house where I live. That's just in case. If they ever really got to me where I wouldn't have a chance, I'd blow the whole works into the air. No cannibal stewpot for mine! And I've got plenty of dynamite and caps. That whole chest you're sitting on is filled with it."

IRENE grew restless. As days passed, she often went to see Griggs, to take him food and water which was thrust through the bars of his cage. At his insistence she brought Don one evening. Griggs peered through the bamboo bars, began to whine.

"Lord love me, mate, you're looking good. Listen. I'm all right now. I've been mad, it's the fever that had me, mate. You know I wouldn't do nawthing like that if I was myself. Can't you fellows let me out of here a little while. I'll behave myself! I'll—"

His words broke off, an odd glow came in his eyes. Don followed the direction of his gaze. Tuona, clad in a scanty *sarong*, was crossing the mud island. The firm line of her hips, the

rounded boldness of her brown breasts, the trim muscularity of her thighs! Griggs licked his lips, sighed deeply.

Don snorted and walked away. But Irene was sorry for the man. All unknown to Andrews or Moreland she agreed to let him out each night for exercise. His whining pleas for mercy grated on her ears but she saw no need to keep him locked up like a beast.

Again he sent for Don. Again the face against the bars. "Mate, mate," he babbled, "we're rich! Never mind how I know, but this Andrews has got a tow sack half filled with gems and I know where they're at. Hit him on the head, let me out, and we'll take his boat and beat it. I'll show you. I'll share, I'll—"

Again Don turned and walked away in disgust. That night he spoke to Andrews about rescue.

Andrews said, "I could take you out, Moreland. My boat is big enough to cross the Torres Straight and make Australia at Point Kennedy. But this is the chance of a lifetime right here for me. I'm going at rainy season. If they haven't sent a search party along the Lost Coast by that time, I'll take you. Give me three more months and I'll be a rich man."

SO MORELAND spent the ensuing days idling the time away with Irene. Daily he grew to look forward to the sight of her in the short *sarong* that was her only garment. The lush lines of her hips were liquid, thrilled him. And the day he took her in his arms, thrilled to the touch of her hot lips felt her rounded breasts flatten against him, he knew he had found his woman.

That same evening the pygmy who had been stationed at the coast dropped down from the tree tops. His tale was prodigious. A great white bird had de-

scented from the sky to see his smoke. A man had gotten out of the bird and came to the smoke in a boat. And he, Mora, the greatest pygmy of all had explained that the *Mammoose* was up the river with the white lady. He handed Andrews a note written on an envelope. It read:

"We have only a small plane. Will be back three days from now with a cabin plane to take you out. Meet us at river mouth where smudge was."

There was rejoicing on the mud island that night. Even the red jungle moon seemed to smile down on the happiness. Irene Garver felt so happy she let Griggs out of his shack and told him the good news. Griggs slobbered and whined in gratitude, but kept out of sight.

It was decided that Andrews should take them to the mouth of the river the following morning where they would lie at anchor until the rescuing plane appeared.

DON MORELAND went to sleep to dream of Irene Garver. The feel of her soft flesh pressing his was in that dream, the feel of her searching lips, her eager arms. He awakened to find Griggs, mad Griggs, standing over him with a Papuan war club poised over his head. He tried to twist aside. The blow caught him on the side of the head, dazed him. As if in a nightmare he felt his hands being lashed, his feet bound. Griggs squatted beside him giggling and laughing.

"Crazy am I. crazy? Go on and yell! Yell for Andrews! He's laying dead out there where I bashed his bloody brains out with a rock! And that woman of his, I've got her tied up like a pig for market! I've got your woman too, you fool. Two women Griggs has got!" He kicked Moreland and trotted out.

In a moment he returned, pushing the cringing Irene before him. Her *sarong* was torn, her body scratched and bruised where it was exposed. Long tapering legs gleamed in the moonlight.

"There he is," snickered Griggs. "there's your lover. Not so pretty now with the red blood on his face. Moreland, I've got two women and Andrews' gems. I'm taking his boat and meeting the plane that's coming for us. You're going to stay here with Andrews. He! He! He! Get going, sister!" He struck Irene viciously with his fist. She tottered, fell to her knees.

She whispered, "I'll have to go with him. He's mad. When the plane comes, I'll tell them you're still alive. Try to hold out."

Griggs had the keen ears of the insane. He rocked with laughter. "Sis, it may be a couple of days before that plane comes! You don't seem to understand. I'm taking you and Tuona along for pastime. But I'm gonna be the only survivor! You can count on that."

He kicked her out the door to the tune of Moreland's threats and curses.

There at the door he paused. "And don't depend on the pygmies rescuing you. Watch."

He reached for the plungers, pulled the first. Off in the distance a tremendous booming rent the air. Another plunger, another, till all three blasts of dynamite had been exhausted. "While you two fools talked, I listened," jibed the madman. "After those blasts no native will come within miles of this island for a year. So long, mate. Starving is a hell of a death. Get going, you white slut!"

His laughter floated back.

(Continued on page 106)

PYGMY MAGIC

[Continued from page 39]

FOR long hours Don stared into the darkness. The echo of Andrews' chugging boat floated back up the river. Moreland groaned aloud. He knew the demented man's words were true. There was no chance for rescue. Andrews lay outside. The two women would soon share a like fate as soon as Griggs, the madman, tired of them. Then Griggs would lie in wait for the plane and swear he was the only survivor. Andrew's store of uncut jewels would make him wealthy for life. Moreland groaned again.

Dawn came. He could no longer hear the boat. He knew thirst, knew the gnawing pains of hunger. But worst of all, bleak fear gripped his heart. Over and over he pictured his woman in the desecrating hands of the demented Griggs. He rolled and twisted, closed his eyes but could not blot out the vision. He even prayed for death to take the horrible mental scene from him. He couldn't stand it.

As midday lighted the shack more and more, his eyes grew able to pierce the gloom. He started. Some six feet away from his bound ankles was the fourth plunger, the key to the dynamite beneath the house itself! Andrews' last resort! He inched toward it a little at a time, painfully, his bound body cramped and deadened. Death! That's what he needed! Death! *That's what he wanted!* Irene was worse than dead. Andrews was dead. Painful inch by painful inch he made his way toward the dynamite plunger.

Now he was over it. He worked his

feet up the wall ready to drop them on the plunger that would send the hut and its contents roaring aloft in the stillness of the swamp. *Death!*

Then he heard it, a scratching, whimpering cry. Presently, dripping water, slime-covered, Tuona crawled through the doorway and collapsed on the floor. Her body gleamed red from many wounds, showed great welts and bruises where the slime had washed away. Presently she revived and a few moments later Don Moreland was free.

Griggs had finished with Tuona and had cast her overboard, believing her to be dead. Tuona had obtained a pygmy canoe and returned for the body of her master and mate. Griggs had shot her once through the shoulder. In her crude way she refused to say anything concerning the fate of Irene other than that she was alive.

Dully she hunkered down, a hand covering a bleeding gash on her breast while Don gouged out a shallow grave for Andrews. He wouldn't have stopped that long, except that she refused to guide him until he did.

PRESENTLY they were in the water in the small dugout, Moreland paddling like mad as she gestured straight ahead. Beneath the swamp plants, around mangrove roots where lurked slimy swamp creatures. On and on they went until Don's muscles were one exquisite pain. Blood throbbed and pounded at his temples. Suddenly, the green swamp mist began to grow thinner, the stench less pronounced. Don sniffed hungrily,

redoubled his efforts as he smelled the fresh salt air of the open sea.

They shot out of the trees. Not a hundred yards away the little auxiliary schooner rode at anchor. There was no one in sight aboard her. The canoe shot forward. Don glanced down at the big war club at his feet, glanced forward at the stony-faced Tuona. In her right hand she bore a six foot slender rod of bamboo.

They were still unobserved as they made the schooner. Noiselessly Don went aboard. A step forward, another. The door of the cabin flew open and Griggs stood there a gun in his hand.

"Welcome, mate," he said. "Stand right where you are. I was just having a little pastime. See?"

He threw the door wide. Even in the dimness of the cabin Don could make out the white form of the woman he loved lashed to the bunk.

"Don, Don," she moaned. Her eyes were piteous.

A low growl rumbled in Don's throat, his hands gripped the war club. He stepped forward. Griggs raised the revolver and shot him in the hip.

As Don hit the deck, the war club clattered towards Griggs. Griggs laughed, kicked it overboard.

"You damned fool," he giggled, "I'll—"

A surprised expression overspread his face. He gazed down at the center of his chest. Something had thudded against bone. Imbedded there in the flesh was a dart, a tiny blowgun dart.

Don began to laugh hysterically, then the pain of his wounded hip got him. Everything went black.

HE AWAKENED to find Irene cradling his throbbing head, wrapping soft cloth about his bleeding hip. Past her he could see Tuona sitting in the stern, staring back in the direction of the mud island where her lord and master was buried. There was no expression on her face. Across her naked knees she still held the blowgun.

"Griggs, where's Griggs?"

Irene shuddered, gestured over her shoulder. "The dart was poisoned," she said.

Griggs lay hideously where he had fallen. His head and limbs were puffed and swollen, rapidly blackening. The face was contorted in a grimace of utter agony and from the bony chest blood was oozing in a thousand places like tiny red drops of perspiration.

Don shuddered, turned back to the lips that awaited him. Overhead a great white plane droned and prepared to settle on the quiet waters of the muddy bay.