

# Weird Tales



MAY, 1953

Cover by Joseph Eberle

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(Copyright 1923 by Rural Publishing Company)
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(Copyright 1936 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

**THE EYRIE**

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D. McILWRAITH, Editor

*No Goddess of Destruction was going to keep him from the fabulous necklace a certain lady had demanded.*

**BY  
GARNETT  
RADCLIFFE**

Heading by Jon Arfstrom



# *The* Vengeance of Kali Mai

**B**ONDA, the Kashmiri nautch girl, liked to tease as much as she liked to dance. Above all she liked teasing Kenneth Shand. He was an Anglo-Indian,

a hard, tough man accustomed to getting what he wanted. He wanted Bonda, but Bonda, who had had the adulation of princes, thought Shand very small fry finan-

cially and always evaded him like she would a snake.

"You are big strong man, but I am Bonda," she told him in her sing-song voice. "Bonda ees not cheap bazaar missy. Bonda has a price. Last year a Rajah offered Bonda her weight in diamonds, but Bonda said, 'No, thank you. You are old and ugly and Bonda is the most beautiful nautch girl in India. You can keep your diamonds.'"

Her eyes tantalized him. Shand moistened his lips and spoke.

"Am I old and ugly?"

"No, you are quite 'andsome, Mistaire Shand. But I tell you Bonda has a price. For you the price ees—what shall I make the price? A lac of pink pearls?"

"Don't fool me, Bonda. I'm no million-  
aire."

"No, you are just a man who makes business in Calcutta. It ees big cheek for you to want Bonda. Still, you are quaiter 'andsome, so I say another price. You bring me ze Bo necklace! How is that, Mistaire Shand? You tink Bonda ees worth ze Bo necklace?"

"What the hell is the Bo necklace?"

She laughed up at him from her cushions. Her skin was gold, her mouth scarlet, her eyes deep pools of unholy enchantment. She wore a red flower behind each ear.

"You find out an' then you bring it to me. Now you must go, Mistaire Shand. Bonda 'as told you her price an' the rest ees for you to do."

She pressed the bell that would summon a servant. Shand rose with a growl between a laugh and a curse. He had no illusions about Bonda. All she wanted from men was what they could give her in the way of jewels.

"Au revoir, Bonda," he grinned. "When I've found the Bo necklace I'll give you a ring. In the meantime there are other girls."

**H**E WASN'T to rid himself of Bonda as easily as that. It was because of what she had said that he found himself some four months later walking along a jungle path too narrow to admit his car.

Probably tigers had made that path. The air was fetid, the branches of sissou trees met overhead and the spear grass grew higher

than a man. Shand was indifferent to the heat and the clouds of insects. Burly and powerful he strode on, conscious of the reassuring weight of the revolver he carried on his hip.

As he walked he thought of the nautch girl and he smiled. It would be a shock for the little devil if he turned up with the Bo necklace after all! She'd imagined he was putting an impossible price on herself, but she'd been wrong.

Luck had put him on the trail of the Bo necklace. By the sheerest chance he had met in the rest-bungalow at Chota Miran a little birch-like missionary called Dr. Erskine who was an antiquarian and an authority on Indian mythology.

Also, he was a bore—at least he was to a man like Shand. What did Shand care about the Vedic paradise, Gautama and the Temple of Buddh Gaya? He'd almost fallen asleep listening to the missionary's dry monologue. But then he'd heard Erskine mention the Goddess Kali Mai and the necklace from the Bo Tree supposed to have been given her by Siva, and he'd sat up as if he had heard a shot.

"The Bo necklace! Is there actually such a thing?" His surprise had made the missionary smile.

"Of course there is. As a matter of fact I am one of the few white men who have seen it. It is composed of enormous rubies which the lended says are washed in human blood to preserve the sheen. The clasp is a gold and diamond figure of Kali Mai. It's all very crude and blatant, but

He went droning on, making comparisons between Hindu and Chinese workmanship. At last Shand had managed to get in his question. He'd tried to make his voice sound off-hand.

"I suppose the priests have it locked up somewhere?"

Dr. Erskine had adjusted his spectacles and smiled as if at the ingenuousness of a child.

"Dear me, no! They trust Kali Mai to guard her own property. When I saw it it was hanging round the neck of a life-size bronze image of the Black Mother in a little temple near Baruti. I could have stolen it with the greatest ease if I'd wished to.

The temple is tucked right away in the jungle and there hasn't been another soul within sight except an old priest snoring in an archway."

"Weren't you tempted?" Shand had grinned.

"Not in the least. Even if I had been I'd have been too afraid of Kali Mai to attempt any nonsense. She's a very jealous lady, you know. No, call me superstitious if you like, but I've been long enough in India to learn to respect Hindu deities!"

"I guess you're right," Shand had said.

Inwardly he had been grinning. *He'd* no fear of Kali Mai. The Bo necklace would look nicer round Bonda's slim neck than round that of a rusty old bronze idol with four arms and a lolling tongue!

THREE days after that talk with Dr. Erskine he had driven to Baruti, only thirty koss from Chota Miran. It was a sleepy, jungly country untouched by civilization. The natives seemed indifferent to everything except chewing *pan* and opium. They stared at the white man like doped bullocks.

Shand told himself that if he stole a hundred necklaces nobody would ever know nor care.

At last a turn in the path brought him within sight of his objective. The temple of the Goddess of Destruction was a squat little red affair with four golden minarets. In the shimmering silence of the jungle it looked like a crude toy dropped there by a child.

As he gazed he saw small brown forms creep shadow-like from the entrance and heard their anxious chatter. He grinned. So the temple had become a playground for monkeys! That indicated to him how often the locals had worshipped their Goddess!

A moment later he was inside the temple. It was pleasantly cool and dark after the jungle. Snakes, he warned himself. This is the sort of place one might expect to find them.

He looked around cautiously. He could see no sign of snakes, but the raucous cry of a bird like the sudden laugh of an idiot made him start. He swore aloud, then he

took a grip of himself. There was nothing, he told himself, to be scared of in this dank ruin of a temple.

THE image of Kali Mai stood on a sort of altar at the farther end. It was more than life-size, fashioned out of bronze black with time. Her knees were bent, her feet turned outwards and her four arms raised in what seemed a threatening attitude. The Goddess had been depicted in her most malignant aspect. Her face was contorted in a scowl, her tongue, which was painted red, lolled from her mouth.

Shand gasped. He had seen what he had hardly hoped to see. The price of Bonda was coiled like a red snake round the thick bronze throat. Even in that dim place the rubies glowed like huge drops of blood. Yes, the Bo necklace was superb, a treasure for which Bonda would have bartered her little soul.

He moved closer to the image that he might see better. Then a rustling sound made him whip around. A shaven, half-naked figure with a knife in its hand was darting at him, its bare feet falling like leaves on the marble floor.

Another second and the knife would have been in his back. As he dodged he saw mad eyes and a rage-distorted mouth. Somehow the priest had guessed his intent. He had intended to kill the profaner of the temple.

Shand's blow sent him staggering. He turned like a wild-cat and leapt again. This time his lunge brought the knife within an inch of Shand's throat.

Panic gripped Shand. There could be no reasoning with this crazed skeleton. It was his life or the priest's. As the priest leapt again he drew his revolver and fired point-blank.

Silence followed the shot. Shand stared down at something that twitched and jerked like a maimed insect on the tessellated floor. There were drops of blood more vivid than a ruby. 'The price of Bonda?' Shand thought.

At last the priest lay still, a heap of rags with limbs like brown sticks. Shand drew a deep breath. He hadn't reckoned on having to kill a man.

Could he conceal the body? He looked around and saw a ring set in the floor that seemed to indicate a trap-door. He grasped it with both hands, braced himself and heaved.

After a moment the slab in which the ring was set rose stiffly to disclose a pit of darkness.

His next task was unpleasant. With set teeth and averted head he raised the body of the priest and dragged it to the pit. A trailing hand seemed to claw the marble as if reluctant to leave the temple. Again the unseen bird uttered its raucous laugh. Shand started at the sound. With a quick, guilty movement he pushed the body into the pit. The darkness swallowed it and after what seemed a long time he heard a splash of water.

He felt better when he had closed the trap-door. In that lethargic, opium-sodden district it was a thousand to one against anyone ever discovering his crime. Kali Mai had been the only witness. He had no fear of Kali Mai.

He mopped his face and addressed the image.

"You won't split, will you, old girl? Now don't go sticking out your tongue at me! I want your necklace for someone much prettier than you are."

THE image scowled in the half-light. Quickly he sprang up the three wide steps leading to the altar. There were little charred bones scattered around on those steps, relics of sacrifices that had been offered to the Goddess.

She was taller than he was. To reach the clasp of the Bo necklace he had to stand on one of her bronze feet and lean against her hard bronze body. As he did so the horrific face with its leering tongue was close to his.

His fingers fumbled with the clasp. As he did so the foot on which he was standing seemed to move. He heard a dull metallic clang followed by a creaking, rumbling sound as if some heavy machinery had suddenly been set in motion.

He sprang like an animal aware of a trap. He was too late. The four arms of Kali Mai had curled inwards like the legs of a

centipede. They had caught him and were crushing him to her breast in a horrible embrace.

He yelled. In another instant he would be crushed to a pulp by those inexorable bronze arms. As he felt the pressure increase he grasped her throat and exerted all his strength in a last mad struggle for life.

Tighter and tighter grew the arms. They closed quite slowly. The ancient priests who had devised that trap had intended a lingering death for any thief who dared to rob the Black Mother of Destruction.

Lolling tongue and cold staring eyes! Shand screamed again and beat at the face with bleeding fists. Her arms like iron bands were hugging him to death. *Tighter—tighter.*

He couldn't breathe and the blood was roaring in his head.

Then he became aware that the image was swaying on its base. It was tilting forward as if her victim was too heavy for Kali Mai. Suddenly, there was the snap of something breaking. He was aware of a falling sensation followed by a crash.

A spell of blackness followed. Then he awoke to realize he was free. The image of Kali Mai lay beside him on the marble floor. Some age-weakened spring had broken and he could drag himself from her arms.

He stood swaying above the prostrate Goddess. It hurt to breathe and his hands were bruised and bleeding. But he'd escaped!

A miracle had delivered him from the clutches of Kali Mai!

She looked horrible and malignant lying at his feet. He grinned as he bent over her and took the necklace from her throat. He'd beaten her—he'd escaped the vengeance of Kali Mai! And now for Bonda and his reward.

EVEN Bonda was impressed by the Bo necklace. She stroked the great stones with sensuous delight. They glowed on her golden throat, as they had never glowed on Kali Mai.

"You, are brave and clevoire as well as handsome, Mistaire Shand. I ask you to do what I think impossible and you 'ave done

it! Yes, I love you. . . . For every stone in the necklace I kiss you—so and so. . . . I will show you 'ow I love you!"

That temple at Baruti seemed very far away. With the nautch girl in his arms he sank at last into a deep sleep. The room was cool and heavy with a scent of jasmine.

Late next morning he woke with a start. He had had a most frightful nightmare. It had left his heart pounding and his body wet.

What a dream! He had seemed to be again in that silent temple wrestling with Kali Mai. He'd felt her arms embracing him, he'd seen her staring eyes and lolling tongue, and he'd felt his hands closing around her throat . . .

Yes, it had been a horribly vivid nightmare. What a wonderful relief to be awake and know himself safely in Calcutta with Bonda at his side. Bonda? He put out his arm to draw her closer to him.

She felt strangely limp and still. And she was huddled in a strange position. He lifted himself in the disordered bed. As he did so he realized his hands felt stiff and strained.

"Bonda?" he called sharply. "*Bonda?*"

The sun fell through the curtain for him to see her face. As her head rolled towards him he saw with a shock of horror beyond horror that his dream had not been a dream after all. It was as if Kali Mai herself were grinning up at him from the silken pillow!

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