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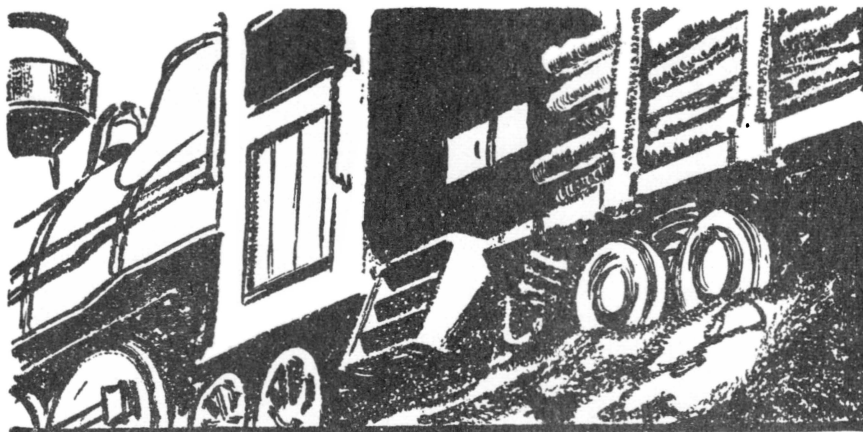
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TROPIC TALISMAN

BRICK CHURCHILL'S heart pounded when he saw the feminine prisoner being conducted toward him. He had a crazy impulse to leap from the desk at which he sat, the desk that was his badge of totalitarian authority in the district, and to call out a greeting.

Instead, he remained impassive. It cost him a mighty effort, but he succeeded. To display recognition would spell death for the girl who faced him—and for himself as well.

So he sat rigidly quiet. He told himself he must forget that he was a U. S. Naval Intelligence officer. For the present he was a

captain of Nazis, sitting in judgment on an enemy.

And the enemy was Diana Rand, the girl he loved!

Slender and auburn-haired and dainty in crisp white linen that limned her contours like a starched caress, she stood very poised and cool in that steamy room of corrugated metal near the Guadalombian seacoast, where banana-tainted heat was a visible presence as menacing as the thick-chested blond men who surrounded her. Despite the almost unbearable Torrid Zone swelter of late afternoon and the dark glowers of her captors, she seemed unmoved and unafraid. Her regal

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM



With Diana in his embrace,
he plunged into the night.

*Much as he loved the girl,
Churchill's first allegiance
was to his country. But even
as he handed her over to Nazi
indignities, he swore his ven-
geance would be terrible*

indifference to danger held a hint of contempt.

A bullnecked Gestapo sergeant, brown-shirted, his pate shaven to sweaty shine, roughly shoved her closer to the desk where Brick Churchill sat. "This is the woman, *Herr Oberst*."

Brick nodded, "*Sehr gut*, Heinboch." His eyes were twin splinters of ice, expressionless as window panes, when he looked at his fiancée. "Your name?" he demanded. As if he didn't know!

"Diana Rand. American citizen." Her voice was lilting, like a springtime brook. "I want to know by what right you took me off that fruit train as if I were a criminal."

"There is no need to discuss rights in the face of an accomplished fact," Brick retorted gutturally.

Her steady gaze measured him. "You know, I'd heard of German infiltration in these Central American republics. But I wouldn't have believed the extent of it if I weren't seeing it with my own eyes. So you and your Nazis are running things your own way down here in Guadalombia, eh?"

"We run things our own way on the banana plantations we happen to control, *Fraulein*." Brick's Teutonic accent was impeccable.

"And do you trademark your fruit with swastikas?"

Heinboch, the bullnecked sergeant, caught her arm and twisted it. "Enough of your *verdammte* Yankee insolence!"

CHURCHILL struggled against a desire to lunge at the fellow and slug him senseless. He

didn't dare. Nor was it necessary. Diana, with her free hand, slapped Heinboch across the mouth. "Get your dirty paws off me."

The sergeant's throat swelled with an oath. Then, before he could again grab the girl, he was brought to a halt by Churchill's knife-sharp: "*Achtung!* Attention!"

Heinboch saluted reluctantly. "*Ja, Oberst?*" A thin thread of blood trickled from his lower lip and he quivered like a hound on tight leash.

"Don't touch the prisoner again unless I order it!" Churchill snapped. "You will remember that I am in command here, even though I arrived but recently!"

"Yes, *Oberst*." Heinboch's square face turned a sullen crimson and he rejoined his three brown-shirted comrades at the far end of the warehouse, muttering something to them.

Churchill wondered if he had gone too far by interrupting the sergeant's brutality. It wouldn't do to show any softness at this stage of the dangerous game which he and Diana Rand were playing. To fit his role he must seem callous, merciless.

He stared frigidly at the auburn-haired girl. "We've learned that an operative from Washington has been busy in this region, investigating the domestic Guadalombian political situation; meddling in affairs which are of no concern to the United States."

Diana drawled: "Strikes me it is a concern of Washington when a secret jungle air-base is being built within four hours bomber-flight of the Panama Canal."

"So!" Churchill came out of his chair. "You must be the one we want! How else would you know—?"

For the first time, Diana looked uneasy. "Even tourists hear rumors," she defended herself. Her dainty breasts rose and fell.

"But you are no tourist, *Fraulein*. Tourists do not snap forbidden photographs and then conceal their cameras." Churchill turned to Heinboch. "You searched her luggage?"

"Thoroughly, *Oberst*. Soon as we took her from the train."

"You found nothing?"

"Nothing, *Oberst*."

Churchill stared at his fiancée. "Then the camera must still be on your person. Strip."

"Wh-what?"

"You heard me. Remove your clothing."

Her chin tilted defiance at him. "I won't!"

"Would you prefer that I do it for you?"

His tone seemed to frighten her. "I—all r-right. B-but you'll answer for this!" Blushing, keeping her back turned to Heinboch and the other three brown-shirts, she began to unfasten the snaps of her linen costume.

In roseate embarrassment she raised the hem of her starched skirt. Her legs were slim, chiffon-seathed symmetries melting into dimpled knees and creamy white thighs. Slowly she brought the dress over her auburn curls, where it seemed to stick for an instant. Then she whisked out of it, tossed it aside and posed bitterly before the desk like an enticing goddess.

Her figure was a sculptor's dream of perfection, alluringly enhanced by fragile silk step-ins and a wisp of brassiere that contoured the rising glories of her breasts, new-pink and superbly nubile. The sight of her almost-nude body sent tingling thrills through Brick Churchill's veins, and he damned the need that had forced her to disrobe before Heinboch and the other three. They were visually feasting on her disclosed charms; optically fondling her sleek hips, her proud bosom....

SHE shrugged a bare shoulder at Churchill. "D'you think I could hide a camera in an outfit like this?"

"No, *Fraulein*. But your dress, which gave you so much trouble when you took it off—that is another matter." He picked up the linen frock and shook a Leica from its folds. "You see?"

"Give me that!"

"*Nein*. Not until I have developed the film." Churchill barked an order to Heinboch and his fellows. "Take her to Cabin One while I go to my darkroom."

They seized the girl and hustled her from the warehouse without giving her a chance to salvage her dress. She seemed too stunned to resist, even when their hands touched her with unnecessary intimacy.

Churchill held himself in strict check, realizing the folly of interference. Then, presently, he strode into the swiftly-falling dusk; crossed the plantation compounded to his own shack of palmetto thatch. All about him was

tropic heat, the sweetish stink of overripe fruit, the droning of insects — and the ever-present hover of death if his true status should be discovered by his Nazi underlings.

Nearby, native peons labored at loading stalks of green bananas into a narrow guage train for shipment to the harbor, fourteen miles distant. Churchill knew these peons hated him, for he had gone out of his way to be harsh with them—in keeping with the role he was playing. He could not depend on them for help if anything went wrong, he knew. Therefore he must not permit anything to go wrong. Not with victory so near at hand . . . !

HE ENTERED his house—and froze as he heard someone coming toward him from the inner gloom. Then he relaxed. "Oh, it's you, Lolita," he murmured to the approaching native girl.

Her skin was golden-tawny, betraying the touch of white blood in her peon ancestry; her single garment of thin cotton print clung damply to her lush curves, delineating the sway of her hips and the generous mounds of her breasts. When she smiled, her lips were ripe blossoms of invitation. "Thy evening meal is prepared, master," she purred. "Thy house is cleaned and thy bed made, as you asked."

"Good. You can go."

She came closer, breathing hard in the deepening shadows. "When the other *Oberst* lived here, the one whose place you took, he did not send Lolita away."

He felt ill at ease, knowing

what she expected of him; knowing the habits of his predecessors, This was his one failure on the present job, the one flaw in an otherwise perfect impersonation. A true Nazi would not have sent the tawny Lolita away. Such alliances were so commonplace that a deviation became all the more noticeable, perhaps to the extent that it would arouse suspicion.

Yet Churchill had been unable to accept the condition. Not that Lolita was unattractive. On the contrary, her nearness made his body go hot; he was both human and masculine, and this peon girl radiated love-lure.

On more than one night he had tossed restlessly on his bed after sending her away, fitfully damning his own strict code of honor. Then he would calm himself by thinking of Diana Rand, the girl he really cared for; the girl who was his partner in this present hazardous counter-espionage enterprise. Remembering Diana's succulent lips, recalling the sweet yield of her body in his embrace, would lull and soothe him and make him forget the more pagan wiles of the peon woman.

He smiled now at Lolita, pretending not to notice her tawny beauty or the offered temptation of her smile. "Run along," he said gently. "I've work to do in the darkroom."

"All work can wait . . . for this." She slid her arms around his neck, welded her voluptuous figure against him. The pressure of her breasts sent spates of sensation through him; for an instant he held her responsively, with an ardor that flattened those cush-



ion y mounds until her dress threatened to split open.

Then he thought of Diana, and pushed the tawny girl away—more roughly than he had intended. She stumbled and almost fell. A sudden flame glowed cat-like in her eyes as she steadied herself. "So Lolita is not good enough for you?"

"It's not that. I simply have work to do." He went into the closet-sized cubicle which had been equipped with photographic apparatus by some previous occupant.

BUT he didn't take Diana's camera from his pocket. Instead, he waited until he heard Lolita leaving the house; then he emerged into the night that had draped its purple cloak over the compound. Draped in shadow, he moved stealthily across the

"Take her to Cabin One and hold her," he barked.

clearing to Cabin One, where Diana Rand had been locked up.

With a master key he opened the door. He stepped inside. "Diana, honey!" he whispered.

"Oh-h-h, Brick! Brick . . . darling!" She came into his arms.

To Churchill, it was like soaring from peril to Paradise. He had no need to see in the room's darkness; he knew Diana's eyes were shining and he sensed the sweet fervor that impelled her to hold up her mouth for his thirsty kiss. Searching, he found the sultry goal of her lips and drank deeply of their nectar.

"Diana . . ." he panted.

She was a fragrant flame igniting him; and she was the lake of feminine mystery that could quench his fiery yearnings. Throbbing hillocks were resilient upon his hard body; hillocks of dainty flesh lacily imprisoned in the cups of the wispy brassiere.

He bent her backward; lowered her gently. His embrace engulfed her, and for a brief moment he knew the full meaning of ecstasy in the midst of hazard. . . .

PRESENTLY, when sanity had returned to them both, Churchill whispered: "Tell me, beloved. Did you snap all the shots I wanted?"

"Yes. By following your instructions I found the air-base you told me they were building. I got telephoto pictures of the entire layout. Oh, Brick, darling, it's so terribly elaborate! Especially that hangar dug under the hill where the narrow gauge railroad runs along a curving trestle! After it's

camouflaged, nobody would ever be able to spot it!"

He clenched his fists. "Yes. And that hangar-cave is full of airplane parts shipped in as agricultural machinery and waiting to be assembled. That's why our work is so important, Diana. This thing must be nipped by the Guadalombian authorities as soon as we can send our findings through the Washington diplomatic channels. Guadalombia is friendly to the United States, but they don't know what's going on in this region; won't know until we get the information through."

Diana whispered: "Brick, why didn't you take the pictures yourself instead of assigning the job to me? And then why did you have me captured?"

"If I had made the snaps it might have aroused Sergeant Heinboch's suspicions, and he's a dangerous man. He hates my guts anyhow. He thinks he should have been promoted to command of this district when the last *Oberst* was transferred."

"You d-dont think he's wise to you?"

"No, he hasn't guessed that I'm an imposter. But he might have, if I'd taken pictures of the air-base. As for having you captured—well, one of Heinboch's men spotted you and reported. I was forced to call for a showdown. Besides, I wanted to contact you."

"Why?" Her arms wound around him again and her lips brushed his mouth. "For . . . this?"

He stole another moment of rapture. Then: "Yes. I wanted . . . everything you had to give me."

But there was another reason, too. I've got a lot of dope: names and locations of Nazi agents all over Guadalombia, and what their activities are. But I had no way of transmitting the material without the chance of running into trouble."

"So—?"

"So you'll take the report with you when you escape."

He felt the outward surge of her enchanting breasts as she drew a startled gasp. "You mean you're staying here? You're not going with me?" Then she stiffened, and her whisper was sharp with alarm. "Listen! What was that noise outside?"

Churchill heard nothing. "Probably leaves rustling. You mustn't let your nerves get frayed now, my sweet. And you mustn't worry on my account. After you've escaped, Heinboch will probably report me to Berlin for inefficiency and I'll be officially transferred. Then I'll be able to slip away in complete safety."

"Brick . . . I'm scared for you. For us both."

"Nonsense!" he touched her reassuringly, caressingly. "Now for the information you're to take with you. Ready?" And he began droning data in a steady monotone, knowing that each syllable was being engraved on Diana's memory just as it was etched in his own. When he finished, she repeated every word flawlessly, like a phonograph record.

Churchill chuckled: "Good. Now for your getaway." He led her to the door; opened it. They stepped out into the night—

FOUR brown-shirts faced them with drawn Lugers. It was Sergeant Heinboch who snarled: "Halt, swine! You are my prisoners!" Then a sword of flashlight-glare stabbed Brick Churchill's eyes.

Impotent fury filled him as he grew accustomed to the light and saw that the Nazis were accompanied by a tawny peon girl—his own half-caste housekeeper, Lolita! She pointed a vengeful finger at him. "He and his red-haired woman are *Yanqui* agents! I heard him making love to her, giving her information, planning her escape!"

Churchill damned himself, then, for having made an enemy of Lolita; for refusing the gifts she'd offered him. And he damned himself for paying no heed to the sound that Diana Rand had heard; the sound he'd thought to be leaves rustling. . . .

But which, instead, had been Lolita eavesdropping!

Heinboch stepped forward; relieved him of his holstered gun. "*Schwein!*" he grunted; and he maced Churchill over the skull with the weapon's muzzle.

The American intelligence officer toppled into an explosive chaos of pain. This, he told himself, was death. This was the end of all his work.

But he wasn't dead. Nor was he slugged again. Instead, they bound his wrists and dragged him into the warehouse; dumped him to the floor. Blurrily, in the lantern-lighted structure of corrugated metal, he saw Diana Rand being lifted to the desk and

pinioned there by three grinning brown-shirts.

Heinboch's leer held evil satisfaction. "Now, dog, you will see what happens to Germany's enemies. You will die, yes; but first you will suffer. You, by watching what happens to your woman. She, by paying certain penalties. . . ." There was no mistaking the sergeant's meaning.

"No! You can't do that to Diana!" Churchill yelled. "Damn you to hell—"

It was futile. Heinboch joined his three fellows at the far end of the warehouse. All four of them leaned over the auburn-haired American girl, mauling her, plucking at her gossamer brassiere. She struggled, her lilt-ing white body twisting and contorting, but her captors held her down. Cruel hands choked off her cries; bestial kisses defiled her lips.

Brick Churchill fought his bonds until his wrists bled raw. No use. The ropes were tied too well. He sobbed and closed his eyes, unable to watch what was happening to his sweetheart. Even without looking, he knew. He could tell by her whimpering moans. . . .

THEN, abruptly, he felt cold steel against his fingers. He quirmed in the shadows. "*Lolita!*"

The half-caste girl slashed again. He felt his fetters dropping away; flexed his freed wrists as Lolita whispered: "Come! We will escape while they are intent on the red-haired one. Let them have her. I will be thy woman.

I could not endure the thought of thy death—"

Churchill wasn't listening. Already he had snatched Lolita's knife and leaped to his feet. Now, like a thunderbolt of destruction, he hurled himself down the room at the four brown-shirts clustered around the desk on which Diana lay helpless. "You fiends!"

Startled, the Germans pivoted. The nearest one went for his Luger. It stuck. Churchill's fist drove home to the fellow's jaw, then darted for the partially-unholstered automatic. But it was still stuck.

That gave the remaining brown-shirts a chance to snap out of their daze. Heinboch's gun leaped into his fist. He took aim.

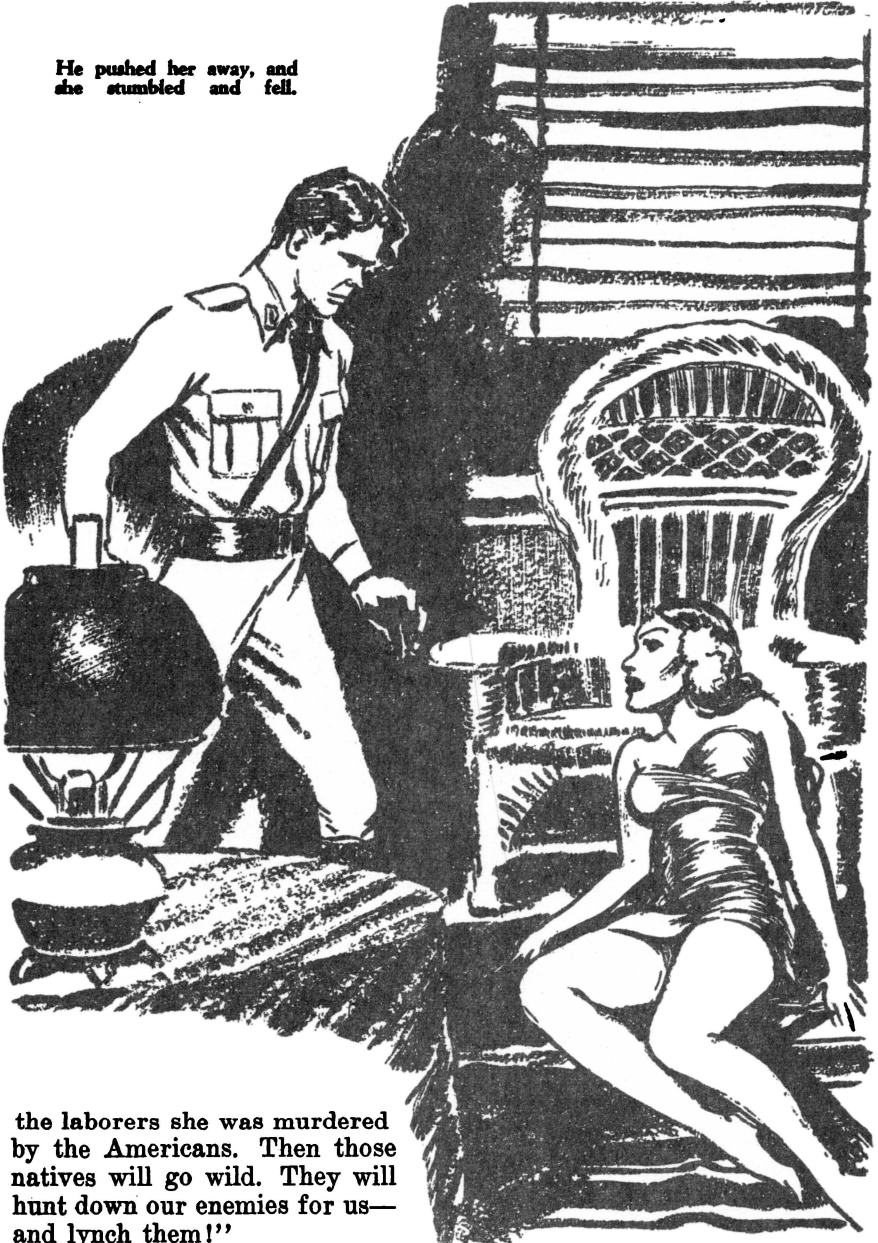
Lolita spoiled his shot. She threw an empty box, knocked the weapon aside. Heinboch's mis-directed bullet smashed the lantern overhead. Glass tinkled and solid blackness settled in the warehouse. Random gunthunder reverberated like drums of doom as flame-tongues licked from pistol muzzles, seeking Brick Churchill.

The American was zig-zagging. He gained the desk, tugged at his sweetheart. She fell into his arms, a shuddering bundle of semi-nudity. "Brick . . . !"

"Quiet!" he whispered. "If they hear us moving they'll get us!" He led her toward the rear door.

It was a cat-and-mouse game now. The Nazis fanned out, hunting their prey. Then came Heinboch's snarl: "Never mind the Americans. They cannot escape far. Kill the peon wench, Lolita! It was she who released that Yankee dog! Kill her and we will tell

He pushed her away, and she stumbled and fell.



the laborers she was murdered by the Americans. Then those natives will go wild. They will hunt down our enemies for us—and lynch them!"

Churchill clenched his teeth. That Nazi sergeant was smart. Murderously smart. If Lolita died

and the peons were aroused, the whole damned jungle would seem with vengeance-seekers armed

with machetes. Churchill and Diana wouldn't stand a chance. . . .

"Here's the door!" he panted suddenly as he gripped Diana's fingers. "We'll run for it. Crouch low. Don't move in a straight line. And for God's sake hang onto my hand so I won't lose you!" Then he launched himself into the night, with the auburn-haired girl pelting at his side like a slender tropical goddess.

Together they arrowed across the plantation clearing. The Nazis erupted from the warehouse; spotted them. Gunfire raged and bullets slugged through the darkness.

Then, curiously, another automatic began to chatter from an angle. Those shots were aimed at the brown-shirts, sending them scattering for cover. Who could be coming to the rescue of Churchill and Diana at this unexpected moment?

A tawny, graceful figure appeared from the shadows. "Lolita!" Churchill gasped.

She joined him as he ran. "I got the gun from the man you struck with your fist, master."

He had no time to voice his approval. Dead ahead lay his goal: the fruit train which the peon laborers had been loading in the earlier dusk. The one avenue of possible escape. Churchill drove more speed into his legs, hoping against hope that he would find steam up in the ancient narrow gauge wood-burning locomotive. His heart hammered when he saw vague white plumes issuing from the engine's poppets. "Diana—Lolita—get in the cab and start

chucking wood into the fire-box!" he roared.

The two girls—one white, one brown, but both united in a sisterhood of jeopardy—obeyed his command. Churchill himself raced around between the tender and the first banana car; yanked out the old fashioned coupling pin which connected engine to train. Then he scrambled up into the locomotive cab; horsed the ancient Johnson bar forward on its notched trident and slammed the throttle wide open.

DRIVING wheels clattered. Sparks showered from the grind of iron tires against rusty rails. Churchill thumped the sander as his locomotive shuddered into reluctant motion. The sand gave his drivers purchase. Like an unleashed monster the wood-burner belched smoke and flame from its mushroom stack; plunged toward the jungle.

Back in the distance, gun-yammer volleyed. Churchill swept Diana Rand into his arms; crouched over her as soft-nosed slugs bashed into the cab. Glass shattered and a tongue of live steam licked at his shoulder, hellishly.

That was the pressure gauge. A bullet had smashed it. He pushed his bare left hand into that inferno of steam; found the stopcock and closed off the leak. Now there was no way to tell how much pressure there was in the boiler—but it didn't matter. Speed was what counted. Speed and more speed!

He released Diana and swayed past her to where the tawny Loli-

ta was piling chunks of wood into the blazing grate. "I'll fire for a while. It's no job for a woman."

"Lolita will do it. You go back to the controls!" There was something paganly magnificent about the peon girl as she spoke. Glare from the open fire-door bathed her in crimson, stressing the lush curves of her hips and breasts under the damp cling of her dress. "Go back to your controls—and to the one you love!" It was her way of relinquishing all claim to him. Then she began jamming more fuel under the boiler.

Churchill returned to Diana. Her lips framed a question. "Will we make it, Brick?"

"I don't know. Look back." Far to the rear, a headlight cut the darkness, baleful as the glare of a Cyclops. "Our plantation Diesel-electric car. Fastest thing in the district. Heinboch and his cut-throats are after us! We'll try to outrun them, but—"

But! So much hinged on the word! That Diesel car had power and it was balanced to stay on the rails at top speed, whereas this chuffing antique wood-burner was jumping crazily. The roadbed's slight upgrade was a safety factor now, but in a moment there would be a downhill stretch toward that curving trestle spanning Camino Gorge like a flimsy wooden spiderweb—Camino Gorge, where the Nazis had burrowed their underground airplane hangar. To hit that trestle curve at high speed would spell disaster.

But it had to be risked. The Diesel car was gaining. Churchill poured more steam into clattering

cylinders; sent his locomotive plunging up the rise. Up—and over—and now downgrade; The rails, twin streaks of narrow rust in engulfing jungle. Wheels hammering a maniac percussion of speed. Steam belching from pop-off like a stiff white feather. The treacherous trestle of Camino Gorge less than a mile distant. And Heinboch's Diesel-car drawing nearer!

Churchill reached for the throttle. No matter how close the pursuit, he had to shut off his power now that the locomotive was lunging downhill. This insane pace must be braked before they hit the trestle. Otherwise—

Diana tugged at his arm. "Brick! Look!"

His eyes widened as he stared in the direction of her pointing finger. "What in God's name—?"

LOLITA, the peon girl, had fallen to the heaving iron deck between cab and tender, her skirt rucked up past her thighs. A dark splotch stained the back of her dress and she rolled limply with each jerking plunge of the engine.

Churchill leaped to her, lifted her. His palm sank into swelling flesh, but he gave it no thought. "Lolita, what's wrong?"

"I . . . am finished . . . a bullet struck me . . . just as we began . . . to move . . . I held out as long as I could . . ."

His throat ached with tightness. She had fired the boiler with a slug through her lungs! He propped her in the left side of the cab and staggered back to his

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Tropic Talisman

(Continued from page 29)

post; rammèd the throttle shut. To Diana Rand he shouted: "Got to get her to first aid! There's medical kits in the concealed hangar under Camino Trestle. If we can carry her down there and doctor her, we'll still have a chance to fight Heinboch off!"

But the ancient wood-burner plunged down-grade with no loss of speed as Churchill starved his drivers. Gravity had gripped the engine in a tugging, invisible fist—and the curving trestle was dead ahead!

There were no air brakes on the

antiquated locomotive. Brick Churchill set his strength against the hand brake's iron wheel. He heard the snap of a broken link rod, the drag of loosened shoes. The wood-burner was out of control, a downgrade runaway!

No time now to horse the Johnson bar into reverse and squirt steam into the cylinders. Not with Heinboch's Diesel car rocketing closer, its savage speed safe because the Nazis had air brakes to use when the need came. "We can't do anything but jump!"

Churchill panted. "If we stay on his thing, we'll be killed!"

He slid an arm around Diana's slender waist. His other arm encompassed the wounded peon girl. He poised himself.

Lolita squirmed weakly, her soft curves brushing his chest. "Put me down . . . save yourself and your loved one . . ." Suddenly she fluttered her lips to Churchill's mouth in a last salute. Then, freeing herself, she shoved him with unexpected strength.

With Diana in his embrace, he toppled into the night. Tropic ferns cushioned them as they landed. Churchill saw the runway engine plunge out upon the curving trestle. "God—!"

For an instant the locomotive clung to its rails. Then it was plucked sidewise by centrifugal force. It lifted, careened—and went smashing down into the draw like a blazing meteor. It struck bottom at the very mouth of the underground airplane hangar far below; the hangar where Nazi bombers awaited the day of possible attack on the Panama Canal.

A thunderclap of hideous sound vomited upward. That was the boiler exploding under steam pressure too great for it to hold—steam pressure impossible to measure after the gauge had been shattered by a bullet. The blast was earth-shaking, like the eruption of a volcano. And it brought the cave-like hangar's roof collapsing on planes and billeted pilots, obliterating them under tons of shale forever.

And thus Lolita went to her Valhalla; in death she had wiped

out Nazi air-menace to a flag she had despised in life.

CHURCHILL turned away from the scene of destruction below him. "She's gone," he said to Diana. "But there's still Heinboch and his three cutthroats—and *here they come!*"

The auburn-haired girl fused herself to him. "Brick—don't try to fight them! Hide—with me! I can't stand any more!" She tempted him with her lips, her surging breasts, her swaying feminine body.

He held her for a brief moment, reveling in her nearness, savoring the delicious warmth of her sweet contours. Then: "It's a job I've got to do, darling. Heinboch and all he stands for must be rooted out of Guadalombia. And he's got to pay for the things he did to you. . . ."

Already the Diesel-electric car had squealed to a halt at the approach to the trestle. Heinboch and his three brown-shirts were piling out, running forward. They raved gutterally when they saw the irreparable damage done by the exploded locomotive below. Vengeance thirst fanned them out, searching the underbrush to see if anybody had survived the blast.

Brick Churchill knew he was one against four. He was unarmed against a quartette of trigger-furious killers—

Unarmed?

He felt a weight sagging in his coat pocket. A Luger! It was the automatic with which Lolita had impeded pursuit, back at the plantation clearing. She must have

thrust it into his pocket when she gave him that farewell kiss. It was a token; a tropic talisman—a message of hope from beyond death!

Hefting it, Churchill smiled grimly. Then, pushing Diana away from him, he walked forward into the open.

Heinboch wasn't in sight, but his three henchmen were. They spotted Churchill, made for him. Stabs of flame blossomed from hot gun-muzzles. Slugs whined through the darkness.

Churchill swerved and kept going. Deliberately he squeezed his own trigger, husbanding his shots. A Nazi screamed and went down with his skull ripped open by the passage of a bullet. Another staggered over the brink of the gorge, his gullet torn out. The third tried to run. Churchill plugged him through the spine.

Then Heinboch lunged into the slash of light from the Diesel car's headlamp. Churchill, too, was in that path of brilliance. He raised Lolita's Luger, triggered it—and heard only a metallic click. The clip was spent, the last slug gone. And Heinboch was moving in with a full gun, grinning his anticipation of the kill.

Churchill knew he could expect no quarter. And he knew that if he died now, Washington would never get the information it needed concerning Nazi activities in Guadalombia. Fifth columnists would continue their work, unsuspected, untouched. A new secret airbase would be constructed. . . .

"Never! he roared. And he hurled his useless Luger.

It smashed Heinboch's gun-

hand. The Nazi yelped, dropped his weapon. This was Churchill's moment. He lunged at his enemy.

MAN against man, now. Churchill with a useless left fist, scalded by steam from that locomotive's smashed gauge. And Heinboch's right hand equally damaged by the hurled Luger. A battle of wounded men; a struggle from which only one could emerge alive. And perhaps a nation's fate swinging in the balance. . . .

Churchill slugged at his enemy's mouth; connected. In return he took a belly-smash that doubled him over, left him gasping. The Nazi had the advantage now. He battered Churchill with sharp, slicing uppercuts that straightened him and cut his face to ribbons. The American yielded ground; struck out blindly. He felt the squishy splash of a ruptured eyeball on his knuckles and knew he had destroyed Heinboch's left eye.

He tried to stay on the German's blind side. But Heinboch was smart. He circled, lashed out with his foot, tripped Churchill. The American went down.

Heinboch jumped at him with both boots. Churchill saw it coming; brought up his own heels. He caught the Nazi full on the chest.

The breath coughed out of Heinboch's lungs as they collapsed. He flew backward, struggling for balance. An eerie scream bubbled to his lips as he lost his footing, realized he couldn't save himself. Then he fell from the trestle, and his shriek died out in a horrid plop-sound far below as

he struck the bottom of the gorge.

Dazed, like a man emerging from nightmare, Brick Churchill stumbled away. Diana came pelting up to him. Her arms steadied him, and her vibrant young body seemed to send strength into his battered frame. "Brick . . . Brick, darling!"

"The road's clear now," he mumbled. "We'll make it to the harbor. There's an American destroyer there; we can use its

radio to transmit our report to Washington. Every Nazi agent will be rooted out of Guadalombia before another month passes. Come, my sweet."

They climbed into the Diesel-electric car. Churchill notched the control-handle forward gently; sent the vehicle into smooth motion over the curving trestle. Beside him, Diana Rand nestled; ahead lay the soft tropic night and the end of all travail.
