



SPICY- ADVENTURE STORIES

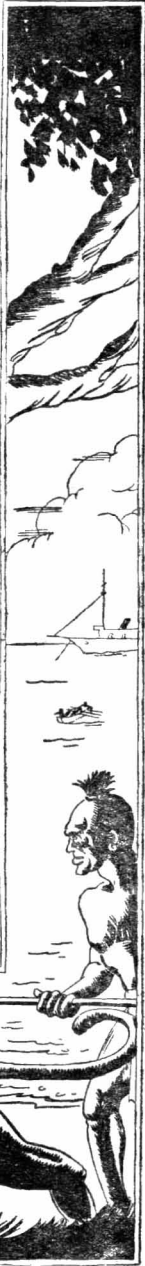
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VALLEY of BLOOD

They forbade Jim to fly his plane into the mad-woman's country. But all their warnings meant nothing when he received the message written in the white girl's blood!

MYNEER VAN STENT, the governor of that province of Celebes, had told Jim Darrell that no plane could cross the Salibaya Range, and certainly not the one in which he had arrived. It was not so much a matter of height as of a certain rarefaction of the atmosphere, due, to the alternations of blazing heat by day and freezing cold by night.

"It has been tried twice," van Stent explained, and told of crashes on the mountain tops. At least, neither of the planes nor their occupants had been seen again.

"But we got the pilots' heads," he went on grimly. "Neatly prepared in the approved Celebes fashion. We found them lying in the compound early one morning. Maybe The Hague will send



By LEW MERRILL

Her figure tottered to their feet and collapsed. "Save her! Forgive!" she murmured.



us out an up-to-date plane, with a couple of machine-guns. Then we'll wipe out that nest of freebooters."

And he went on to tell of a secret egress from the mountain valley, by which, periodically, the Dyaks raided their neighbors, killing men, women, and children, apparently for the sheer love of slaughter.

"But this legend of a white woman who rules them, the only woman among them—do you believe that?" asked Jim.

"That's true enough," said Mynheer the governor, with a glance at the old Dr. Beyers, who was seated with them on the verandah of the Government House.

"And that she was—?"

"An Englishwoman, Lady—well, we

won't mention names." said van Stent. "Fifteen or sixteen years ago her husband, a retiring British official, was taking her and their little daughter home after his service in Borneo expired. Their vessel was shipwrecked off this coast. The husband and child were massacred, the woman made a prisoner. That was the last that was heard of her, until she reappeared as the leader of this tribe."

"Persuaded the tribe to put all their women to death, and invented a new religion?" asked Jim, quoting a story he had heard at Macassar? "And—and—God, how many of these tribesmen are there?"

"Perhaps two hundred, perhaps three," said the governor.

"And she—one woman—?"

"Mine friend," grunted old Dr. Beyers, "I have seen her."

JIM saw a look of protest on the governor's face, but Beyers went on:

"It will do no harm to tell now. Fifteen years ago she came to me—well, captured me, with an escort of savages with spears, when I was traveling in the interior. A madwoman! I should have thought her a Dyak, save for her bright golden hair. The sun had bleached it to spun gold. Ach, Gott, she was beautiful then! She forced me to do something to her. A slight operation. I begged her to come back with me. But she forced me to do what she wanted, under pain of death.

"I understood then. The murder of her husband and child had driven her mad, and that madness had taken a certain form. She had had all the native women killed, so that she could be the only woman in the tribe. She had all the adult males killed too, murdered

asleep by the boys, and her escorts were youths of about sixteen. But that was fifteen years ago.

"Thus, for a madwoman, it was not so difficult to create that new religion, with herself as a mother-goddess, a wife-goddess, the only woman. You understand, Mr. Darrell?"

"But three hundred men!" protested Darrell.

"Not so difficult for her," grunted Beyers. "Not with that phase of madness. A system of rewards and punishments, and the psychology of anticipation, *ja?* They are mad too. I have told Mynheer, the governor, that, when our plane arrives, they must be wiped out like wild beasts. It is immoral—amoral, horrible!"

"But as for your plane," said the governor, "it could not cross the mountains, and you are forbidden to attempt it. There is no oil in that region, and your commission to locate oilfields for your American company might take you to many parts where the natives are orderly."

WHICH sounded reasonable to Jim, as he made his way back to the field where he had landed after his flight to Borneo. The plane, beside his tent, was guarded by six native policemen. All that afternoon it had been surrounded by a chattering crowd, but these had melted away at nightfall.

Jim entered his tent. Reasonable—yes. But he hadn't spoken of the message, scrawled on a dry leaf in what looked like blood, evidently from the madwoman:

"I am an English woman. Come and save me. Bearer will show you the secret way into the mountains."

There was a diagram of the mountain

range, and a crude representation of the way.

The bearer, a primitive savage, had secretly handed the leaf to Jim, apparently under the impression that he was the chief man in the settlement. He was crouching inside the tent now, like a dog, guarding Jim's baggage.

When Jim beckoned him out, he came, gibbering something in his own language. Jim pointed toward the plane. He planned to get as near as possible to the mountains, thirty miles away, before descending. If he couldn't top them, then he'd go by the secret trail.

THE nights were almost as hot as the days on the sea coast, and the motor started almost instantly. Jim indicated to the boy to get upon one wing. He started back for the tent to get his baggage.

That was when he fell foul of the native soldiers. They were not just to guard him and his plane against curiosity-mongers. They were to keep him from taking off. Mynheer must have shrewdly read his intentions, and issued special orders. They swarmed about the plane, evidently determined not to let him enter. Two of them tried to pull the native off the wing, but quick thrusts of a previously hidden dirk made them draw back.

Jim saw it all in a flash. His baggage would have to be left behind. Likewise his linen coat, for it was being pulled from his back. He sent one man reeling with a right to the jaw, drew his revolver, held the rest at bay, leaped into the cockpit. No time to adjust his safety-belt. Stick forward, tail up, bump, bump, and skip over the uneven ground. For a moment it looked as if one of the fools would connect with the propeller.

And then the old crate had taken the

air, and Jim pulled back the stick and gave her the gun, sending her shooting upward at almost a stalling angle.

Then he had levelled off, and was circling above the settlement, and Government House, starkly silhouetted in the moonlight. And now he was heading toward the mountains, working the stick nicely to counterbalance the weight of the native who clung, petrified with terror, to his strut.

After that, Jim winged his way northward, until the mighty range began to cap his horizon. Then upward, slowly upward, feeling his way through an atmosphere peculiarly bumpy. Once he turned toward the boy and swept his hand out in a gesture. The boy understood, and indicated a mighty cliff behind which Jim had already gathered the hidden valley lay.

Upward and upward, clearing minor peaks, up into the frigid air. The great cliff was not far away now, but Jim would need an elevation of seven thousand to clear it. Not much—in most places. But already the motor was protesting. Then it conked, with an expiring cough. It was through. The Dutchman had been right, hadn't been stalling, as Jim had supposed. The only hope now was to find a landing-place in that tangle of ravine and scrub.

The nose was pointing down, the tail beginning to spin. Jim went into neutral and right-ruddered, came out of the dive two thousand feet above the scrub. No landing-place. He was almost at the base of the great cliff, itself set three or four thousand feet above the flats beyond the base of the mountains. Slowly down, circling, till the giant rattans almost brushed the fuselage.

Crash into the rattans, splintering fuselage and folding wings!

Jim stepped out of the wreckage,

snapped his thumb joint back where it belonged, and yanked the chattering native to his feet. The native hadn't a single scratch upon him.

DAWN was breaking as the two emerged from the pass and saw the long, green valley stretching away before them, entirely girdled with mountains, unapproachable, save by that track up which the two men had labored all night.

Dawn, and a sudden rush of spear-men out of the mists, and a woman at their head. A woman as brown as they, but with a crown of brightest hair that hung down to her waist. A woman of perhaps forty years, nude, like her spear-men, save for a loin-clout. Two breasts superbly moulded, body a little fleshy, but lithe as a cat's, wide hips that strained against their covering, brown legs and bare brown feet that scrambled over the stones and thorns as if they were shod.

No time for friendly gestures. As the first spears began to fly, Jim let loose with his revolver. At the crack, at the sight of their leaders falling, the natives drew back. And simultaneously the mists rose, revealing a body of perhaps two hundred, crowding forward in a thick mass.

Screeching like the madwoman she was supposed to be, the woman leaped forward, and drove the spear she carried through the native's throat. He toppled and dropped, his death-cry drowned in the gurgle of blood. Then the woman had withdrawn the spear and turned upon Jim.

There was—there ought to be another cartridge in Jim's revolver, but Jim couldn't shoot her. Was it in a moment of madness that the woman failed to recognize him as the man she had sent for?

As Jim hesitated, the woman leaped. Two strong arms encircled him and pressed his to his sides. She grappled with him madly, her breasts flattening against his chest, one knee hooked behind Jim's, trying to throw him, and her hair a cascade of gold over them both. The grip of that woman-body took his strength, filled him with mingled loathing and weakness.

Then he was down, and the revolver torn from his hand. Helpless in the grasp of half-a-dozen natives, Jim was frog-marched, despite his struggles, toward an ancient stone building that looked like one of the prehistoric fortresses scattered all over the East Indies.

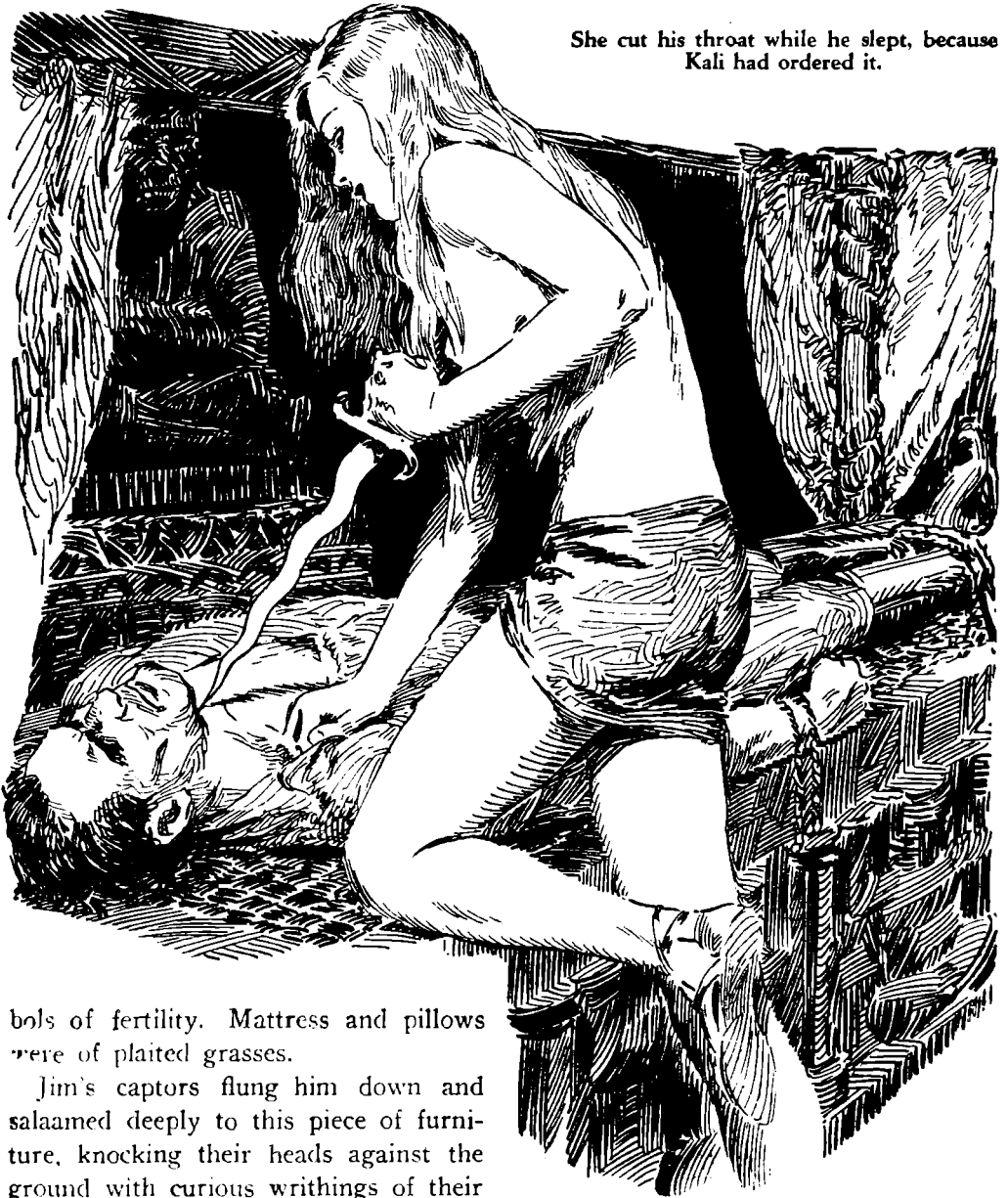
Two natives came running up with lengths of plaited rattan cord, pliant as silk, strong as steel. In a few moments Jim was securely trussed, and helpless.

IF the place had been a fort, it was a temple too, for the stone entrance was carved with vile figures of the Hindu gods. A reed curtain hung before it. But it was not through the entrance that Jim was carried. Through a small doorway to one side of it, and along a stone corridor, lit faintly by oil or butter lamps. Then a turn, the lifting of another curtain, and Jim guessed that he was in the temple.

It was a great rectangle, all of stone, divided half-way across by a wide curtain, so that the front part was invisible. But the portion into which Jim was carried contained no altar, nothing except an enormous bed.

A lamp on either side of it faintly illuminated this chamber, showing that the bed had once been the state bed of some dead and forgotten Rajah, for the four posts were carved with the Hindu sym-

She cut his throat while he slept, because
Kali had ordered it.



bolts of fertility. Mattress and pillows were of plaited grasses.

Jim's captors flung him down and salaamed deeply to this piece of furniture, knocking their heads against the ground with curious writhings of their bodies. Then, at the woman's crisp command, they were gone, and she seated herself upon the bed beside Jim and looked at him fixedly.

"I am Marian Curtis," she said, as one who is trying to remember a half-forgotten language. "How did you come into my kingdom?"

Some instinct kept Jim from referring to the *chit* that the native boy had

brought him. If Marian had forgotten writing it, it might be as well not to remind her yet.

"Ah, I know!" she cried in sudden frenzy. "That boy escaped and betrayed me. So you think to spy on me, do you? I have a law that is never broken. All strangers who come here die. You are only the third.

"The first who found the way—the

young Englishman, Crandall. Ah, that was long ago, before they took the brains out of the goddess Kali, and put them into mine. He wanted me to go away with him, and I almost yielded. His skin was white as a girl's, and yet he was a man. So I cut his throat while he slept, because the goddess Kali ordered me to do it.

"And the second was the Dutch hunter, Smidt. Forty years old, and strong as a bull, and hairy as an ape. He cried like a baby and begged me for mercy, and he almost broke his bonds before I plunged my knife into his heart.

"So you must die, too, but you shall love me before I die, as Smidt and the Englishman did. See, look at me! Do I not offer you a glorious gift before I sacrifice you to the Mother-goddess?"

She drew herself to her full height, posing there, conscious of what her beauty was doing to him, for a moment. Then she had flung herself upon him, and her hot mouth was glued on Jim's, and he could feel her breath, moist and sweet.

"Love me," she panted. "I am tired of these brown Malays. You are the first white man in years and years. Love me, if you are a man!"

And she clasped him furiously to her, but now sheer pity for her left Jim cold as ice. It was clear that the moment of lucidity in which she had written that note had been forgotten.

"Love me!" she whispered into Jim's ear. "This is the sacred bed of Kali, the Mother-goddess!"

Jim's pity changed to horror. Here, then—here was the center of the abominable religion that this madwoman had invented!

SUDDENLY her mood changed. She sprang to her feet, her heavy breasts

swaying, and struck him in the face with her clenched fist.

"You refuse me!" she screamed. "Is it because you are afraid of the death that shall come afterward. I would only have cut your throat, but now I swear you shall be tortured horribly, flayed alive, and torn into a thousand pieces!"

She struck him again and again, with all a man's force behind her blows, until Jim's lips and nose were bleeding. She drew a short, wavy kriss from her loincloth, and held it at his throat.

Then horrible laughter broke from her lips. "You shall love me when you drink the love-draught tonight," she shrieked. "You shall forget the death that waits for you, and think it a little thing when the divine madness of the goddess comes upon you! Lie there and dream of me. Look at me! Am I not beautiful? But when you drink the potion, you shall look upon me as if I were Mother Kali herself."

Softly, sinuously she glided from the chamber, leaving Jim lying there, feeling the blood running down his face.

Desperately he tried to free himself from his bonds, but the flexible rattan merely bit more deeply into his flesh, and he could not loosen them at all. Trussed, helpless, arms bound to his sides, legs tied at thighs, knees, and ankles, he tried to roll off the bed, and discovered that his feet and shoulders were fastened to the unyielding framework.

The heat within the temple was fearful. The sweat was pouring down Jim's face and body, seeping into the rags that his shirt and trousers had become after his struggle.

Hours seemed to pass. No one entered, and not a sound was to be heard.

Jim would have sold his soul for a drink of water.

It must have been in the full heat of the day when a click in the wall opposite the curtain focused Jim's eyes upon the spot.

Two great blocks in the temple wall were slowly revolving. Now there was a gap, and in that gap there stood a woman's figure.

For an instant Jim thought it was the madwoman come back. But then, faint though the light was, he saw that this was a younger, smaller, slighter figure, a girl, hardly a woman, even.

As she came stealthily forward, Jim saw that she was white. She wore a single garment of some native fibre, reaching to the knees. Soft girlish breasts pressed against it from beneath, revealing their rounded contours; under the skirt the white of feminine thighs and slender legs gleamed in the lamplight. In her hand was a jar of water.

JIM drank greedily, drained it, let her set it down, looked at her in wonder, and suddenly understood.

"You sent me that message?" he whispered.

"I sent Hassan to find some strong white *Tuan* who would save me," answered the girl, and again the words, though perfectly pronounced, seemed unaccustomed. "He brought you here, and they killed him. You should have brought an army."

"I was a fool," Jim muttered.

"Because they killed him, I shall never forgive her, though she is my mother."

"Your mother?" whispered Jim in amazement, recalling Mynheer's story.

"I am Mary Alice Curtis, and my father was a big white *Tuan*. He was ship-wrecked and killed, and my mother and I were captured and brought here. Then she went mad, and became the ruler of these people. We are the only

two women here. These Dyaks do not know for sure that there are other women in the world, for they are maddened with the draft when they go out to kill, and then they kill every living thing.

"My mother is the only woman they know, and so they worship her, because each of them thinks himself her husband."

"God!" muttered Jim.

"Each night they drink the love-draught, which is made from a tree, and then she rewards her favored ones. But she was not always mad. When she was sane, she managed to hide me in a secret treasure-room, and gave out that I was dead, and only Hassan discovered me. He told me about the secret way, and he would have helped me escape, but I told him to seek out a white *Tuan* like my father. I thought he would bring an army with him, for my father had more soldiers than he could count."

"You have been hidden since you were a child?"

"Only my mother knows. Sometimes, when she ceased to be mad, she would cry, and plan to escape with me. But of late years she has understood nothing, save that I must still be hidden, for fear that the Dyaks will turn from her to me. And of late I think she has planned to kill me."

Jim set his teeth hard. "Not if I can help you. Can you cut these ropes?" he said.

The girl bent over him. "It is simple," she answered. "No kriss could cut them, but they can be untied. See, now, but do not move."

Her fingers moved deftly in the rattan web for a few moments, and suddenly it loosened, fell apart upon the bed. Jim sat up, rubbing his bruised limbs.

"When will she come back?" he asked.

"Not until nightfall. All day she

sleeps. But tonight she will choose you for her first husband, and afterward the Dyaks will tear you limb from limb."

Jim took the girl's slender hand in his. "Mary Alice, if we can escape, will you come with me?" he asked. But there was no need of any answer.

AS he drew her toward him, the garment gaped at the top, and the two small breasts were momentarily free. Suddenly an immense reaction of emotion, a recklessness of the future, came upon Jim. If they won free, she would be his forever; if not, she would have short shrift from the madwoman. The sweet perfume of her maddened him as he drew her, unresisting, into his arms.

Soft panting sighs came from her lips, and her whole body quivered; suddenly she flung her arms about his neck and clung to him tautly.

"I am yours, *Tuan*. I was afraid of love, but now I know that it is beautiful," she whispered, pressing her mouth to his.

And later, when the storm had passed, Jim knew, somehow, that he could not fail. The gods hadn't sent him this girl that he might lose her again. Even the dread Kali couldn't be so cruel as that.

HOURS must have passed again before Mary Alice detached herself gently. From her garment she withdrew a wavy-edged kriss which she handed Jim. For a moment she stood before him in the light of the butter-lamps, elusive, fragrant, feminine, then she drew the *sarong* more closely about her.

"We must wait till it grows dark," she said, "or they would catch us before we reached the secret pass. Hide this." She slipped the kriss beneath him, and rearranged the rattan ropes, so that they looked as if they had not been tampered

with. "Lie still, and do not let her see that you are free," she said.

"And then?"

"Tonight the Dyaks will be maddened with the love-draught, and she will select those whom she intends to honor, and, after she has done with you, they will tear you to pieces. Such is her plan, for Hassan has told me what they did to the two other white men who came here."

"Then she lied to me about them," thought Jim.

"When she has chosen her husbands, and the rest are mad with the draught, you must choose your time, cut your way through to that wall, and I shall be waiting there. I shall open it for you. If we can close it in their faces, they cannot open it from the temple side, and there will be a chance, just one little chance. But do not taste the love-draught."

"You're a wonderful girl," said Jim. "Bend down and kiss me."

Again his senses reeled as he felt her warm, fragrant form in his arms, and the moist pressure of her lips on his. Then she had rearranged the rattan, picked up the water-jar, and glided like a wraith from the temple.

THE noise was beginning now, the droning of many voices in a monotonous, hoarse chant, somewhere outside, and gradually growing louder and coming nearer.

The sounds grew wilder. The thud of naked feet upon the earth was audible, like a buffalo stampede. Wilder and wilder grew the shouting, and then suddenly the part of the temple behind the curtain was filled with a shrieking crowd.

Above the sounds Jim could hear that of the woman, Marian's voice.

Then suddenly the curtain was pulled

away on either side, sliding on a taut rope of rattan. And Jim saw the front part of the temple.

All around the sides were the grotesque figures of Hindoo gods. The

tallest of them stood immediately before the bed. Jim could see only the back of a female figure, before which was a long, flat altar. And on the altar stood Marian, almost nude.



The native toppled and dropped, his death-cry drowned in a gurgle of blood.

Before her all the Dyaks were assembled, cramming every inch of the stone temple, all gazing up at her with rapt attention and rolling eyes, while wild peals broke from their throats.

Slowly the woman raised an earthen goblet to her lips and drank from it. Then each man of the crowd came forward, stooping to knock head against the floor, and drank from two huge fiber pails containing the potion.

Marian spoke, and the hall grew still as death. The eyeballs were the only things that moved, flashes of whiteness in the brown faces.

She was speaking names, and, one by one, ten of the natives detached themselves from the crowd and came forward to the altar. And a thrill of shame and horror ran through Jim as he realized what this meant.

She waved her hand, and suddenly wild yells rang forth, and the rest of the crowd ran leaping out of the temple. She spoke to the ten men, who prostrated themselves again and knocked their heads upon the floor.

They rose and stood in line before her, their rolling eyes following each movement of her sinuous body. The twitching muscles showed that the drug had already taken effect. Its sensuous effects were shown in the slaving lips, the quiver of the lithe brown forms.

Marian turned and walked to where Jim lay, apparently helpless in his bonds. The earthen goblet was in her hands. She placed it to his lips.

"Drink," she said softly, crooningly. "Drink, my beloved." Her eyes were hot upon his face.

With one bound Jim had leaped from the bed, shaking off the rattan ropes. He dashed the goblet from the woman's hands. He dealt her a buffet that sent

her sprawling among the slaving brown men.

Then, kriss in hand, he ran toward the wall.

Marian shrieked, and instantly the ten were galvanized into demoniac fury. They leaped toward Jim.

But the wall was opening—opening. . . .

Jim turned, the kriss flashed in the lamplight, and, with a scream, the foremost of the Dyaks dropped, stabbed through the belly. Jim wrenched the kriss free. The wall was open now. He leaped through, and saw Mary Alice standing on the other side.

HOWLING like devils, the nine, with Marian in their midst, sprang for the aperture. One leaped through, and again the kriss rose and fell, and another Dyak lay at Jim's feet, his life-blood gushing from a frightful wound in the throat. Another sprang, and got wedged in the revolving stones. For an instant the mechanism ceased; then it went on, and the mangled, screeching thing that had been a man dropped in a dark mass on the other side as the aperture closed, shutting off completely the sound of the shrieking, raving madwoman and her companions.

Mary Alice was standing against the wall of a stone corridor, a little butter-lamp in her hand. The shapeless thing at Jim's feet neither cried nor stirred.

"Quick, Tuan, quick! Our chance is small, but I know the way, for I went with Hassan once to the very edge of the pass, after he gave me the key of my room."

She almost dragged him after her, down a flight of ancient steps, then along a tunnel, littered with great fallen blocks of stone. At last, where stone completely blocked the tunnel, the moonlight ap-

peared through an opening overhead.

Jim scrambled up the rough blocks, found his head above ground, stooped, and hoisted up the girl. A scramble, and they emerged some hundred feet from the extreme edge of the stone fort, with the scrub-covered base of the mountains close at hand.

"This way, Tuan, this way!" sobbed the girl.

Jim stopped for an instant, caught her to him, felt her breasts strained against his, and kissed her. And that was the moment of discovery.

WILD, maniacal shrieks indicated that the madwoman had shrewdly guessed their course. In the moonlight Jim could see at least fifty of the Dyaks streaming in pursuit.

He ran as he had never run before, but a white man, hampered with boots, could hardly hope to outrun a native on his own ground; the woman, Marian, ran with the swiftest of the natives, and Mary Alice, with long years of imprisonment behind her, could hardly run at all.

Already spears were whizzing past Jim's head. And the pass by which he had come—he could guess its location—was still far away.

"Run! Run!" Jim shouted to Mary Alice, and then planted himself, kriss in hand, directly in the path of the oncoming savages.

The madwoman's shrieks rose above the din. She was calling to her followers, and Jim guessed what she was telling them. They were to take him alive, reserve him for the torture she had meant for him all the time.

The spears no longer flew. But the natives were coming on. They were about twenty feet away from him, and Jim braced himself for the last fight.

He was no longer conscious of Mary Alice.

Then suddenly the roar of firearms drowned the yells. The front rank of the natives melted away. Firearms? No, a machine-gun, manned by half-a-dozen brown men under command of a white, bearded officer.

Again, again those staccato blasts ripped through the air. The savages had turned to flee, but there was no flight for them. Swiftly, inexorably, as a reaper mows, they were cut down, until the last man dropped among his companions on that bloodstained field.

Only one figure tottered to Jim's feet and collapsed there. It was Marian, and the whole upper portion of her body had almost been blown to pieces.

"Save her! Forgive!" she whispered, and sobbed, and died. But the madness seemed to have been gone from her face.

Jim swung about, to see Mary Alice in the grasp of the white officer. He was leading her toward Jim. Jim recognized the face beneath the white sun-helmet. It was that of Mynheer van Stent.

"UND so you outwitted us, you thought, eh?" grinned the Dutchman a little later, as Jim sprawled upon the ground at the head of the pass. He was feeling better, distinctly better, with a bottle of champagne, ice-cold from the thermos flask into which it had been emptied, inside him. And much better because Mary Alice was seated beside him, and her hand was in his own.

"Id seems to haf been even worse than I expected," continued Heer van Stent. "And if I had let you go to your death, your Government would have raised hell with mine Government, and I should have been recalled. But who

(Continued on page 127)

VALLEY OF BLOOD

[Continued from page 77]

is this young lady? She will not talk to me."

Jim explained, and the Dutchman's eyes opened wide. "So the daughter was not massacred, and she kept her all these years alive," he said. "Well, it is a fortunate thing all around."

"But how did you get here? How did you find the pass?" Jim asked.

Van Stent laughed. "When you left your coat behind you, I took the liberty of going through your pockets, and I found this," he answered. "So I took my men by plane to the foot of the pass, and then we come up—just in time."

And he held up in front of Jim's eyes the leaf with the message and the map.

Jim made some murmur of understanding. Van Stent got up and moved away. Perhaps he understood that look in Jim's eyes as he looked at Mary Alice.

He drew her to him, felt her rounded breasts against his chest, and heard the quick thudding of her heart. "My wife—my little wife!" he whispered.