

BLOND GODDESS

A New Serial

by Herbert Jensen

SYNOPSIS: Frank Grahame, the explorer, with the help of his pal Spin Winslow, stunt aviator, has rescued Janice Kent, the movie star, from a group of abductors. They believe to have been led by a man named Orion. Janice disagrees with them. The day Frank learns that his aviator friend Bill Langton may yet be alive in the Mexican jungle Janice answers his proposal of marriage with a slap. He leaves her, and Janice hysterically tries to reach him.

Chapter 15

LANGTON AGAIN

FINALLY Janice got Winslow on the wire.

"Spin," she said breathlessly. "It's about Frank. He was here and—"

"You mauled him plenty. He came to see me," Winslow's voice was remote, faintly accusing. "Frank's a swell guy. He's not like us. He can't take it... yet. You shouldn't have—"

"Oh, Spin, I know! I know! I've tried to get him on the phone, but he's out or won't answer. I don't know what to do. I think I'm in love—I like him very much. I—"

She heard Winslow's disgusted snort. He said in an even voice that was dimly bitter. "You don't know how you feel. You haven't got a legitimate emotion; with you it comes in cans. It's your mess. I hope you love him. I hope somehow he marries you. And then I hope he'll beat hell out of you!"

She heard the receiver slam. Tears sprang to her eyes. She threw herself on the chaise longue and sobbed. It was two o'clock in the morning when she made her last call. There was no answer.

In complete exhaustion she fell asleep at last upon the chaise longue. Her final impression was the shadow of her guard who patrolled the lawn—her employer's insurance that his star would not be molested.

FRANK had walked aimlessly away from Janice Kent's house with no particular destination in mind. He was sorely hurt and bewildered. All that old basic shyness that had been—before he knew Janice—kilt in his attitude toward women, had returned in full effect.

Until this moment the relation of the sexes had seemed very simple and uncomplicated. Women had certain outstanding characteristics: love of home and of children; they were gentle and dependent. One asked the girl he loved to marry him, and she accepted or declined; that was all.

He knew he loved Janice; he believed that she returned this emotion at least in part. The test had failed; to him there was no recourse.

His walk brought him near Spin Winslow's place. He saw the stunt flyer for a brief interval. At first he made no reference to Janice. He simply told his friend that he was going away; he was going to prowling about on his own account to see if he could discover what had really happened to Bill Langton.

But Spin was not deceived. "If at first you don't succeed," he said quizzically, "take another slap on the snout. You get used—"

Frank's face flushed a dull red. He could not prevent the unconscious jerking of his hand toward his cheek.

The flyer whistled softly. "Sorry, old man," he said gently. "Didn't mean—I'm a clumsy fool."

It didn't matter, Frank told him in a dull voice. He'd just asked Janice to marry him and she had refused him.

"I came to tell you I'm going away, Spin. I can't stick it out. Yellow, maybe; but I can't take this sort of a beating. I couldn't work on the set with her for months—seeing her, talking with her, thinking about her—"

He took up his hat and walked to the door. "So long, Spin. Explain to Myberg I'm called south. Happy landings."

Later he found himself walking deserted streets. He was unconscious of time. In the froth of his memory were dim jungle paths, mental scenes of warm-washed beaches spotted with lavender shadows of leaning coco-palms. Finally he went to his apartment.

It was very late. He lay down on his bed without troubling to undress. He would wait for daylight. Closing his eyes he hoped to conjure up thoughts of salt on his lips, and that he sailed over warm seas into tropic dusk.

But Janice's face smiled at him. She was in his arms. He caught the fragrance of her hair; he tasted the daintiness of her lips.

With a smothered curse he sat up right.

He packed his trunk and his bag. The sun was an hour over the horizon when he phoned for a taxi. By ten he was installed in a Pullman

compartment of the train the man in the ticket office had told him made the best connection at Laredo for Vera Cruz.

By his side was a sheaf of newspapers, most of which contained press despatches of transcripts from the Hydrographic Bulletin, published at Washington, D. C. The transcript was what later became known to the world as the famous Langton Bottle Paper.

Bottles containing data to aid in the determination of and to add to the knowledge of current drifts were thrown overboard and recovered as follows:

First bottle not given. Recovered on January 2, 1922—at center of sand bank East Triangle, off the coast of Yucatan, Mexico, in approximately lat. 23° 55' N., long. 82° 12' W. Paper in bad condition from sea water. Fragments believed to be in the handwriting of William Langton.

The writing (said the papers) had been definitely established as Langton's. Upon further examination of the document the belief was expressed that the pigment used in the writing was human blood. This fact was to be confirmed by laboratory analysis.

The bottle itself—an ordinary "pop" bottle—seemed to indicate to some that the paper was a hoax—a tragic hoax, if true.

However it was pointed out that the bottle and the beverage it contained was largely exported, particularly into South American countries, and that it would not have been unusual for Langton to have taken a supply with him when he began that ill-fated flight. Further, handwriting experts denied any possibility of a hoax.

The paper itself was a torn-open cablegram envelope. No address appeared on the reverse side. Langton may have carried a supply with him on the plane.

The message—what could be deciphered—was meager. The first portion was fairly legible; it told that bearings had been lost about a hundred miles south of Belize in British Honduras. It referred to the hurricane, and of his attempt to make Belize for a landing.

The legibility faded swiftly here. The word "native" was made out. And startlingly vivid, almost as if the emotion of the writer had been concentrated in those four words was the fragment, "I die tomorrow morning."

SINCE the general theory appeared to be that Langton had gone down at sea; since it was concluded that the message had been written with a splinter and blood from a wound, this was interpreted to mean that Langton had hoped that some native craft would pick him up, and that by estimating the rate at which his wreckage was sinking he would die by "tomorrow morning."

Frank Grahame put down the paper he was reading and gazed out at the countryside flashing by. To him that interpretation made nonsense. No one in the middle of a storm lashed ocean, hanging on to what was left of an aeroplane could possibly figure with any accuracy a rate of sinking, even had that person—assumed to be wounded and desperate—thought of it in the first place.

He recalled his own theory: that Langton had gone down in the jungle back of the coast. It was puzzling, he admitted to himself, that the drift bottle had been picked out of the sea beyond the north coast of Yucatan; yet supposing that it had floated around from the east coast, Langton could not possibly have set the bottle adrift down some interior point since that coast had no rivers!

Still, maps of that coast were known to be inaccurate. The country was little explored. Perhaps there was a river or two that topographers had missed—if a topographer had ever been there. Frank thought not.

Once in the smoking room of a "banana boat" enroute to Havana, Frank had talked with an unusually tanned young man with a nervous manner. Later, when remembering the incident, he suspected that the young man traveled in an official capacity of some sort—probably a Navy gunnery officer, or, to be more exact, a Department of Justice operative.

This gentleman whose eyes looked tired behind their bleached eyelashes had said something about Quintana Roo—about natives who perched in tree-forks above the trails, with their throwing sticks ready, and whose only agreeable trait was patience.

He said that he knew of only one white man who had been through that particular strip, that lies between Merida, the capital of Yucatan, and Puerto Morelos on the coast opposite the island of Cozumel.

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Tomorrow, Frank jumps off into the unknown.

Correction—The Observer carried an item in Monday's paper to the effect that C. S. Townsend was a member of the game division of the state police department and that he had been transferred to Portland from Ontario. Local members of the state police today informed the Observer that Mr. Townsend has not been with the state police for several weeks.

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



COMING DOWN WITH THE GRIP.

JOE PALCOKA



OLLY OF THE MOVIES

by Ollendorff



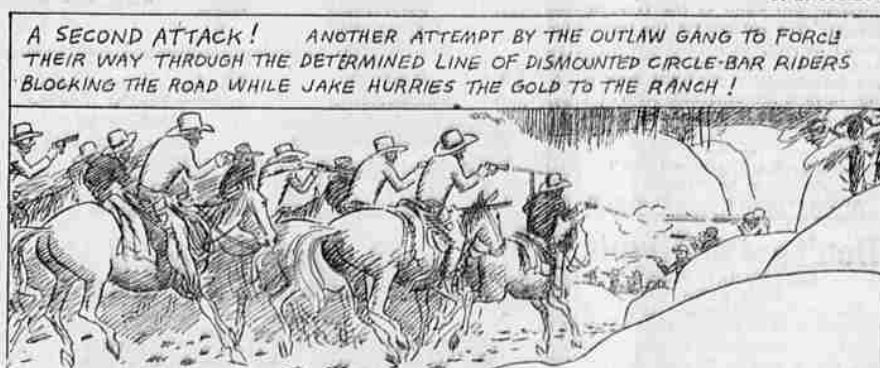
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THE DILLYS



THE NEWFANGLES

Brainy's Return!

