

# BLOND GODDESS

A New Serial

by Herbert Jensen

SYNOPSIS: Justice Kent, the movie star, and her company are plunging into the jungle to make a picture, guided by the treacherous Ortega. From another point, Frank Grahame the explorer, is entering the jungle in search of his sister, Bill Langston who has disappeared. Grahame and Juan, Mexican boy, are trying to avoid a party that has gone to the Ortega headquarters to get reinforcements. Ortega has furnished them.

## Chapter 23 THE SHOT

THEY started forward. Juan's arm was lifted to push aside a tree branch. A rifle spat viciously from across the swamp. Grahame glimpsed the flash and saw Juan plunge sideways into the brush. The American dropped to his knees and crawled toward the boy.

"Hurt, son?" he called softly.

For an instant there was silence, then: "I do not think so, señor. The bullet hit my pack and knocked me down."

For a quarter of an hour they lay quiet. Their position was embarrassing. Ahead of them was the open swamp. Behind them the jungle, but there was a space between, and it looked impossible for them to cross it unobserved by the hidden rifleman.

They should wait until dark, but again, it was impossible to tell when the party that has been to the coast would return. If it were soon, the rifleman could waru them with a shot, and Grahame and the boy would be neatly caught.

It would be better, thought Frank, to bolt for cover and chance the marksmanship of the ambushed man. He old his thought to Juan.

"But surely," Juan agreed.

"Ready then?"

They arose and plunged toward the screen of jungle behind them. But no shot followed them. They lay panting behind a log and peered through the screen of hanging vines. Grahame thought he heard a call—a cry coming faintly across the swamp.

He saw a flash of white as of clothing from the far side of the muddy causeway. Juan flung his gun to his shoulder and Grahame knocked the muzzle into the air.

"Wait," he commanded.

A man came into sight, and headed toward them. He lurched between the upping branches of the felled trees. His chin was sunk to his chest and he dragged a rifle by its muzzle with the butt scraping in the mud.

"It's a white man!" exclaimed Frank. He half rose, but Juan caught his arm.

"Wait." This time it was Juan who spoke the word. "It may be a trick. I do not trust this country."

The man came close, it was apparent to Grahame that he was staggering, whether purposely as Juan had suggested, or from some hurt.

The man crossed the causeway; he was now within yards of the two men hidden by the trail's side. He plodded wearily up to firmer ground.

Then without warning, his knees buckled. He was so near that the hidden two heard his breath whistle in his throat. The stranger fell forward on his face.

GRAHAME leaped to his side and half rolled him over. Mud and blood smeared the face, but the man was white. Sweet trickled through the stubble of several days' growth of beard.

The eyelids twitched and two blue eyes glared into Grahame's. The stranger struggled to speak.

"Take it easy, old man," cautioned Grahame.

"I'm done for," whispered the fellow. "I know it. I can't breathe any more."

With the help of the boy Grahame lifted the inert white man and carried him away from the trail. He commanded Juan to build a fire and heat water. He drew his sheath knife and swiftly cut at the torn and stained clothing of the stranger.

Once he whistled softly beneath his breath. The man was badly wounded; Grahame wondered at the vitality that kept him alive.

There was a bullet hole in the man's abdomen at the right side, not far above the line of the hip bone. The back was a mass of torn flesh where the bullet had passed through. Grahame compressed his lips.

Dum-dums. A brutal wound. There wasn't a ghost of a chance for the fellow. Probably the lung was nicked too, since he had complained of his inability to breathe.

Frank took his first-aid box from his pack. He spread his yperidemic kit before him. The stranger's eyes followed his movements.

"Thanks," he whispered. "But I don't need the shot. Don't waste your morphine. I can't feel any-

thing anyway, and I've got something to tell you." He closed his eyes. "Listen!"

Grahame leaned over him. The words came slowly, twisted, as if they were strangled before they passed his lips. Grahame stored the broken sequence of words and made no attempt to prompt or question the man.

His name was McGrath, he said. He was from Hollywood and had come to Yucatan "on location." Other people were to follow him. He hoped they would not, and thought that they could not since Ortega, his guide, no doubt had been captured when they were fired upon from ambush three days before. Without Ortega they would not know where he, McGrath, had gone.

Who did it? Indians, McGrath thought. He saw one while he lay by the trail's side. He thought Ortega had been captured because he had heard his voice talking with the others. But he couldn't be sure. He'd been nearly unconscious; they had taken him for dead.

"They went through my pockets," whispered McGrath. "Then they threw me into the brush like... like a hunk of meat!"

"My gun had fallen in a swamp. I remembered that and fished it out when I came to. The, had gone—"

Juan crashed through the brush and crouched, panting, beside Grahame.

"Senor!" He spoke swiftly. "They come! I went back to watch and heard them. They are just behind me!"

"Good boy," breathed Grahame.

ALMOST with one gesture he emptied the pan of water upon the smoldering fire, and heaped dirt over the steaming embers. He glanced toward the trail and was satisfied that they were sufficiently screened from the company of men which would pass within the next few minutes. Ahead he could hear their vague shuffling trail noises.

It was late afternoon. Grahame blessed the luck that had given them this emergency when shadows were deep. Any tell-tale sign they may have left had good chances of being overlooked in that deceptive haze of pre-dusk.

He saw white moving through the screen of brush and trees; then they were abreast of him. Almost he held his breath. On the other side of the wounded man, Juan lay. Studiously the boy kept his eyes fastened upon the moving feet that padded the trail so few yards away.

Grahame smiled. It is said that jungle-wise folk can feel eyes upon them, and Juan was taking no chances. McGrath's breathing too, seemed quieter.

Mosquitoes and gnats whined at the sweat on Grahame's face. He ached to brush them away—to grind his palms against the skin that twitched in protest against the punishment it was taking.

The column of figures that passed them seemed to be without end. He saw patches of white drifting by—the ammunition cases upon the backs of men. Once the line halted. His hands tightened over the stock of his rifle. There was a faint call from ahead and the fragments of white moved again.

Then suddenly the last figure passed. Still Grahame and the boy lay immobile. All sound ceased. For minutes the American remained without movement, then slowly he began to draw one leg forward, preparing to rise. He felt Juan's hand grip his ankle. He relaxed.

He heard his wrist watch ticking a yard from his ear. Then came a soft sound from the trail—the breathing of men. It sounded as close as if he were locked in a closed room with several sleepers. He saw nothing although his eyes ached from the intensity of his gaze. Then a shadow drifted by between him and the trail's edge, and vanished.

It seemed hours later when somewhere off to the left sounded the call of a brush turkey. A small animal darted into the tangle ahead of him, moving so swiftly to be identified. Again the turkey called, nearer this time. Juan arose. Wings fluttered in the branches about as if its movement had disturbed them.

"It is all right now," said the boy. "It was very curious that no birds moved or called after the main company passed. I knew then that others followed to protect the rear." He drew a breath deeply. "We were very lucky," he concluded.

"That's right," said Grahame simply. He turned and looked at McGrath. "McGrath!" he called sharply.

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## SEASERPENT AMY HEADS NORTH FOR SUMMER VACATION

PENDER HARBOR, B. C., Feb. 9.—(AP)—Amy Hiaschuckauck, the amazing seaserpent of British Columbia, must be going north for the summer, like the wild geese.

Charles Kean, well-known fisherman, reported today he and his son saw the varicolored "cadborcaurus" swimming in Quarry bay, four miles from here, last Saturday.

The last previous report placed Amy at Powell river, which would indicate she was moving northward from her original residence, Point Cadboro.

Kean said he and his son saw the creature at a distance of 100 yards, the head appearing about 18 inches in breadth, and the body "about 49 feet long, with a big hump in the middle."

He dashed to his house for a rifle, but when he returned he said, Amy was making for the open water, 100 yards offshore.

Other Canadians have reported shooting at Amy, who has never retaliated, but always made for the open sea. No one has yet published a photograph, but hundreds of reputable citizens have reported seeing the long sea monster. She hasn't laid an egg yet, so they aren't sure of her sex, but she is affectionately called Amy just the same.

Heat of a candle 100 miles away could be detected by an instrument used by astronomers to study the stars.

## MARSHFIELD PWA PLANS APPROVED

PORTLAND, Ore., Feb. 9.—(AP)—The Oregon PWA investigating committee today approved and forwarded to Washington, D. C., the application of the Marshfield drainage district in Columbia county for \$12,500 to replace the pumping plant.

repair dikes and clean ditches damaged during the recent floods. The district includes about 1000 acres. Two other projects were discussed but were not acted upon because of need of further data. The proposed psychopathic ward at University of Oregon medical school here, involving expenditure of \$150,000, was delayed because of lack of information, and action on the state library at Salem, a \$350,000 project, was delayed because the site was not included.

An electric current is always passing from the atmosphere into the earth below.

## GIVE IT A WHIRL



## THE WORLD AT ITS WORST

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



## S'MATTER POP



## TAILSPIN TOMMY—Checking Up!



## BOUND TO WIN—Never Say Die!



## THE NEBBS—The Haters



## BRINGING UP FATHER



## JACK DEMPSEY BACK IN NBA GOOD GRACES

LOUISVILLE, Ky., Feb. 9.—(UP)—Announcement that the National Boxing association is ready to reinstate Jack Dempsey was made here today by Karl D. Malone, chairman of the N. B. A. suspensions committee. Dempsey was suspended about two years ago as a result of failure of a promoter of a boxing exhibition in Mississippi to pay certain expenses of a bout in which Dempsey was connected.

