

# STRUGGLING HEARTS

by CORA BALL MOTEN

**WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE**  
Zola, a beautiful and mysterious cabaret dancer, is in love with David Conway, a country youth who saved her from the unwelcome advances of Big Ott, gang leader and crook. David is in prison, accused of a crime committed by Big Ott. The crook has contrived to make it appear that Zola is responsible for his plight.

In her efforts to save David, Zola has disclosed a plot to rob the village bank of Etingford, David's home town. The result of her disclosure has landed Big Ott in jail, where he meets an old detective, John Bellington. Anson Bledsoe, hypocritical enemy and fellow-townsmen of David's, has escaped the net spread by Zola, but is wounded and is hiding at the Nest, his cottage in the forest, to which at one time Zola had been spirited by the Chocolate Kid, an aviator in Big Ott's employ. Angie, a girl of questionable character, in love with Anson, is taking care of him.

Having gotten the girl in trouble, Anson plans to put the guilt on David. Zola, disguised as a scrubwoman in the apartment of the Chocolate Kid, has been recognized by John Bellington, who is out of jail with the connivance of Big Ott for the purpose of delivering a message to the aviator. He has been directed to the apartment by Barry Dwane, a young weakling whom Ott dominates and in whom Zola has a warm interest.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

### CHAPTER 13

**GREAT** airplane slowly circled above the glade where Angie stood gazing upward from the doorway of the Nest. Twice, three times it zoomed in great spiraling loops above, then rising gracefully, soared humming toward the east, to drop down beyond the line of trees in a glide that carried it beyond her gaze.

"Wish I could fly away's easy as that," whispered Angie, dreadingly, talking to herself as troubled folk are wont to do. "That's big enough to carry a heap o' folks. It's lots bigger'n that'n the Chocolate Kid runs." Her voice ceased and she dropped listlessly down on the floor just inside, leaning her head against the rough hotel of the open door.

Angie still sat drooped despairingly where she had dropped when the commotion in the line of trees circling the east side of the cabin drew her attention.

### A SUDDEN FLASH

A sudden flashing light of hope swept across her wan face as four people stepped into the open space. Then, as she saw who they were, as suddenly went out.

Zola was the first to speak, and her voice was soft with sympathy. "Angie," she said, "are you alone? Where is your lover?"

But Angie did not answer at once. Her eyes were on the Chocolate Kid. Chocolate did not ASK if she was alone; but every nerve and muscle in his tense, wiry body was investigating each possibility. Angie's eyes were glued in fascinated attention on the business-like automatic he held ready in his hand. There was fear and questioning in her pose. Barry Dwane, with less of the dare-devil bravado but as much of caution in his own movements, stood by the Chocolate Kid's side. Behind them, bleared eyes, sober and sure, stood old John Bellington.

The Chocolate Kid turned to the wide-eyed outcast. His eyes lost some of their menacing quality, but they were still alert, watchful.

"Where's Bledsoe?" The question was cut with imperative command, certain knowledge that she held the answer.

Barry Dwane, with the crafty caution that his years with Big Ott had taught him, kept careful watch of the ring of trees as the Chocolate Kid faced the cowering girl.

Old John Bellington stood quite still, watching the proceedings. Zola, with her instinct for kindly sympathy, took an involuntary step toward the door.

Angie's face went pale, but something dawned in her eyes that was greater than her fear. She moistened her lips before she spoke. But her voice was steady.

"He's gone back to Etingford to

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tell Dave Conway's father that Dave is the cause of my trouble and get money from him for me."

### ZOLA ASTOUNDED

Zola gasped and stopped dead in her tracks. Her face looked suddenly haggard. Her eyes shot fire.

"You—" she said; then at the look on Angie's face she stopped, puzzled, uncertain.

Barry wheeled about, half relief in his face. But the Chocolate Kid still watched, apparently unmoved by the news.

"Is HE coming back, or did he say he would send somebody?" His voice was conversational in tone.



"The apron of the fireplace rose slowly, but steadily."

"He said the whole town would be out here by tomorrow, after he told them that this cabin belongs to Dave and that Dave built it for—tor—what Anson used it. And—" No one of those looking at the girl could fail to understand the genuine despair and desperation in her eyes. "Now he said if I told anything that would help Dave he would kill me, but I don't care; I might's well be dead anyway. Anson said Dave never

spoke and his voice too had gained assurance.

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### THE PARTY LEAVES

"Better get her things ready and help her out through the woods to the plane, daughter," he said to Zola. "Barry can go with you. The Chocolate Kid and I will look around here and then we will come on. We've got to get you folks to town; then we will come back and greet the delegation that the Sunday school



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superintendent is going to send out." He smiled reassuringly at the wondering hope that dawned in Angie's eyes at his words.

"Yes, father." The eyes that the beautiful dancer lifted to old John Bellington's face were soft with understanding and calm with certainty of clarifying knowledge and understanding.

Night was falling when John Bellington and the Chocolate Kid emerged a second time through the fringe of trees and entered the sinister hut that loomed like a huddled gray shadow in the dusk. This time they had come in a car. Outside, pulled up in the shadow of the overhanging branches of the giant trees that formed a dense canopy over the old, grass-grown woods road, the big black car made another blob of darker shadow in the gathering darkness.

The two men advanced without caution this time. There was no need of care, for the very nature of the wild silence advertised the absence of human tenacity.

The shrill trills of a treefrog's harsh, sharp croaking continued undisturbed as they made their way to the closed door. An owl hooted in the distance. Far away came the shadowy echo of a dog's barking, borne on some vagrant breeze and relayed through the sounding-boards of countless forest growths to the depths of its fastnesses.

The Chocolate Kid handed the elder man the small flashlight he carried. The other trained its beam on the padlock, which the Kid unlocked. Together they stepped into the room. It was just as they had left it earlier in the afternoon.

### AT ANGIE'S HOUSE

Angie was a neat housekeeper; everything was in place. The room was fragrant with the smell of the forest. The wide fireplace at one end was swept and garnished and piled high with cedar boughs, whose fragrance rose like pungent incense through the other pleasant odors.

Once within it took only an instant to locate the green shaded kerosene lamp. Its chimney sparklingly clean. Extracting the small box of safety matches from his pocket, John Bellington lit the lamp. Its clear gleam, as he slowly swept the room in a half circular sweep of his arm, brought each object successively into clearer view. As it rested on the little wall closet just behind the second window and in the angle of the wall behind the door and the opposite wall he

paused at a soft, quick-spoken word from the Chocolate Kid. "Wait!" (Continued on page 10)



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