

THE BLACK LILY

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A Story of Romance and Daring, Laid in the Intrigue of a Strange South American Cult

Chenah Outlines A Plan to Rescue Ramon from the Desert Place

SYNOPSIS

John Northington, Howard University graduate, is wounded in an effort to save his friend's fiancée from the Priests of THE BLACK LILY. She saves his life. They escape in the pirogue. They meet up with Ramon, the friend and lover who they thought had perished in the torture ceremonial of his tribe.

Northington is separated from his friend and the girl. He is left floating unconscious in the pirogue. He is miraculously rescued from a crocodile's den by Father Jose, a hermit priest. In the priest's underground cavern he regains consciousness to find that Dolores the girl, has been saved from her pursuers by Chenah, a young novice to the priesthood.

This hiding place having been discovered by Jonthra as he is leading the hunting party homeward with Ramon, a bound captive, the group make their escape that same night and follow Ramon and the rest of the party.

They almost contact them in the darkness but with Chenah's help they elude them and start out by a short route to reach the Sacred Grove ahead of the returning hunting party.

INSTALLMENT IX

A QUICK ANGRY BELLOW brought the group of priestly warriors scampering back, goggle-eyed at their leader's sudden frenzy of anger indicated by his tone.

The greater surprise of seeing Ramon, the man whom they thought rotting in the lair of some fierce crocodile, by now, left them open-mouthed and silent.

"Mind him!" Jonthra half pushed, half threw, Ramon into the midst of the slant-headed group.

Like magic, one of them produced ropes, and unheeding his broken arm they trussed him up roughly and securely.

"To the Grove!" The big hunch-shouldered priest set out without a word. He looked neither to the right nor the left but plunged into the bushes ahead.

The path led downward through the long, overgrown ravine that ran at right angles to the river trail in places, and then twisted and turned throughout the forest and away to the West. It had probably been the bed of some old stream that had at one time emptied into the larger one.

But now, the trees in it were old and tall and the underbrush made it appear, from above, to be a solid floor of dense vegetation. The trail was scarcely perceptible and infrequently travelled. But today, Jonthra wished to get back to the Sacred Grove by the shortest route. He took the old trail across the ravine.

Leading the way, his head bent on his chest, and his great, brutal jaws, working as he muttered obscene blasphemies, Jonthra pushed ahead.

But for all that he seemed occupied and he was watching every moving bush keenly. His black eyes were shining with a startling light and his grey one was the peculiar shiny green that it always became in moments of anger or rage.

His followers came after him silently. Two of them roughly supported Ramon on either side. Half dragging him when exhaustion got the better of him.

Suddenly Jonthra stopped short in his tracks. He had seen a slight movement among some vines at his left. He waited, the vines were trembling slightly. Apparently Jonthra was engrossed in thought. The movement subsided slowly.

An Evil Omen

The priest started ahead. His followers came after. None of them had noticed the sudden stop as anything out of the ordinary. With the hatchet at his belt Jonthra stopped and marked a tree, high up. He marked it deeply, so deeply that it would be visible for a long time. Then he went on.

As he moved ahead he laughed deep in his hairy throat. Some grim joke seemed to be tickling him.

His followers came along behind him their minds only on the trail. But Ramon had seen the trembling vines as well as Jonthra. He had also seen the sudden stop, the surreptitious survey, and had noted the stop to mark the tree.

His eyes narrowed and something like fear came into them. Motioned the spot where the tremulous motion had been noted the prisoner stumbled and would have fallen but that

one of the guards jerked him up roughly.

"Why jerkest thou me so roughly, Halvus," Ramon spoke loudly and angrily. "The blow of thy hand is as hard as the blow with which Jonthra yonder marked the tallest tree. I did but fall from weakness and the way to the grove is a long one from

to the depths just below the rapids. It had a slight list as if it had been inadequately mended and did not set quite true.

In it were four shadowy figures. One tall and with flowing white beard manned the paddle. In the bottom of the boat a second lay at full length on some skins while a girl and a lithe slender figure sat quietly watching the water and the shores on either side. With strong strokes of the paddle the man drove the long craft forward into the silent night.

At a bend far down the river the four disembarked.

With no little difficulty the men drew the pirogue high up on the sand and into the shelter of the trees. Thus it was hidden from any chance-passers on the river and unless they came directly upon it from the land, it was hidden there also.

Jonthra hears a strange movement



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which the return will take a day's travel as does the going, a night's."

"As if we travelled at night, fool," the man addressed answered angrily. "Besides, thou wilt never make the journey back."

Far ahead Jonthra taught the angry tones. He turned. "Silence!" he bellowed, and all was still.

An hour by sun after the little procession had passed three people emerged from the underground place and hurried into the dense forest.

Four Shadowy Figures

They were gone until the deep shadows began to gather, when they returned. Later, they emerged again but this time they bore a fourth on an improvised litter. The night fell a little while after they left the opening beside the trail where the marked tree stood.

The moon was rising over the tropical river. A long pirogue shot out in-

From this point, Chenah — for the young man was he — took command of the little party.

"There is but one way, Father. If we can make it before them we will be safe. They do not travel at night, so the guard said."

"But art sure you understood aright? Might it not have been mere accident that he fell, and spoke?" The old man's voice was gravely questioning.

Chenah Cleverly Explains

"Nay, Father, I have known Ramon long. I have also known Jonthra. When we parted in the tree place yonder, seeing that Jonthra stood beneath and hurled his taunting threats at us thinking I held her whom I had started to pursue instead of him, he whispered he would go to his death without words, that Dolores might be safe.

"I whispered that I should come

to you and her through the racing-way to THE PLACE. He knew it did exist, this PLACE of thine, as all the Forest People believe, but where, he knew not till I whispered there into his ear; 'If thou canst win away, come to the ravine and hunt a curtain of vine, there wilt thou find safety.'

"It was as I watched for them to pass, that perchance I might give some sign, that he might know the PLACE when Dolores, here, stole up behind me — watching and hoping for she knew not what.

"It was her jostling at my elbow that set the vines atremble so that Jonthra saw. I saw him pause — and Jonthra does not pause for naught, when he is on the trail. Nay, Father, even then I trembled, for I knew.

"I also heard the heavy sound of the hatchet, but I knew not of the marking of the tree till Ramon cried aloud as if in grievous pain which he was — for sure. But when he called I knew he called to me to give me knowledge for my governance in saving her who is dearer than life to — us both."

He stressed the final words, pausing a bit before them.

"And thinkest thou that if we win through to the very Grove thou canst penetrate to the Secret Place without the guards becoming aware?"

"Aye, Father, that, I know. For I am guardian of the Secret Way and but one other than I. It is only guarded when there is one there imprisoned. She who lay there last is with us now. Besides the other guard, the only other guard is with Jonthra on the way. The Secret Place is many roomed, for long occupancy perhaps in time of siege in the old days it was used by many priests, but today there is only the one or two who are ever held there. If we can but win there and — wait."

To the Secret Place

If they bring Ramon there we may be able to hold it till thou or another can make the way to the coast and bring help from the outland for Northington whom safety commands we carry with us, since the PLACE is known to — Jonthra."

"May the gods direct us!" The old man's voice was low with reverence.

"And give me the use of my legs so I can help them," said John Northington after Dolores had translated the old man's prayer to his eager question.

"If I had a crutch," he added to

the girl, "I could hobble along with the rest of you."

"Nay, but thy strength will come quicker, so," she answered him. "The oils and unguents that Father Jose uses are miraculously swift. They will heal before the light passes twice across the sky, but thou must follow his directions as he gives them."

Lifting the litter with Chenah leading, the little procession set out into the overhanging gloom of the deep forest. The bright moonlight could hardly penetrate the thick overhanging greenery even on the less thickly shadowed trail.

But to Chenah the forest held no secrets. He knew its ways even in that most dangerous of all times, the night.

Slowly but without hesitation he pressed forward. Every once in a while they set the litter down to rest and take their bearing but they pressed steadily on toward their goal.

At length after an hour's travel Chenah called a halt. For a while he stood listening carefully. The others bent their attention to the night noises. There was a low murmurous sound that broke through the others, every once in a while.

A Close Call

"Jonthra's camp is near," Chenah whispered. "There will be guards. It is yonder to the right. Wait here close by the trail until I scout and find the surest way around."

Without a word the others waited in the denser shadows beside the trail.

Chenah disappeared in the darkness. Suddenly a muffled regular thump, thump, sounded very close. It was the regular tread of heavy feet on the soft mold of the trail. The three drew together. John Northington on his litter seemed to for the center of the huddle. They thumped the precaution that had set them down in the thick screen of bushes by the side rather than on the obscure path.

A vagrant moonbeam strayed like a flickering light into the gloom of the trail. Breathlessly the travelers watched that patch of light. Thump, thump, thump, the steps came nearer.

They were on the edge of the revealing light. They were passing through it. The watchers were indeed breathless now. The slowly striding figure was an armed guard.

The camp of Jonthra must indeed be very near.

Even as they watched they caught the low murmurous sound again. Then out of the shadows almost upon them another figure loomed. Dolores gave a little gasping sound.

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When Love Steps In Does Wisdom Step Out?

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expect to. I shall be content if Joe is just one half as good.

No, I shan't forget you, Jason, and as crazy as it may sound to you after what I have done, I love you with all my heart. And I suppose that is all a woman can love with.

Joe attracted me from the start, the man and his diamonds. I knew he was a successful man. Nobody but a successful person could show so many fine diamonds. The big ring he wears on his finger simply knocked me for a row of rose bushes. And he promised to buy me some diamonds, just like his.

I knew the big stone on his finger couldn't have cost less than twenty-five hundred dollars, — maybe three thousand. Therefore, poor Jason, you understand. Forgive me and try to be happy. You will find happiness in forgetfulness.

You cannot continue to love a woman who gave you up for the sake of diamonds.

Devotedly,

Jason laughed, a hollow mirthless laugh, and he clenched his hands into hard balls as he laughed like a maniac.

"Diamonds," he roared, "diamonds!"

The fact that she had been deceived by Joe was some consolation to Jason. She had left the man she loved for imitation diamonds, and when she found out her mistake she would come back and ask him to forgive her and take her back.

She would find it out soon. She wouldn't always remain blind to the fact that Joe's diamonds were cheap

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