

The BLACK LILY

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

SYNOPSIS

John Northington, Howard graduate, is saved from death by Dolores Ramirez, fiancée of his friend Ramon Montez. They escape the Priests of THE BLACK LILY, who had held the girl captive, by means of a pirogue taken from the hunters.

They meet with Ramon whom they thought had perished at the hands of his tribesmen. In escaping together they become separated. Northington is saved from death by a crocodile's teeth by Father Jose, a hermit priest.

When he regains consciousness he finds that Dolores has been saved also by a young novice to the priesthood, Chenah. But Ramon is in the hands of the priests and the party is on the way to the Sacred Grove of THE BLACK LILY. Jonthra, the high priest, has spotted the hiding place of the old hermit priest, and fear that he will return makes them decide to follow to the Grove on a desperate attempt to save Ramon.

They almost come upon Jonthra and the hunting party in the darkness, but Chenah saves them.

In the early morning, Father Jose unwraps the bandage from Northington's sorely wounded leg and they find that it is miraculously healed. Chenah by a weird and secret passage leads them to an underground room. But they are seen as they disappear and are followed.

The priests break down the door and take them prisoners.

any rate, we will have it for ourselves if the last stand falls." Northington's eyes glinted with the clear light of determined purpose and desperate courage.

"It will only serve to anger, and now TIME is the great element. Tomorrow is the day of THE FEAST OF THE BLOOMING. Already the pilgrims are pouring in. It is the day that as the Chosen Bride, forsworn of her own will and act, the maiden, here," he turned and pointed toward Dolores, "will be given into the arms of the cold death-groom, on the soft and fragrant bed of Sleep and—THE BLACK LILY." His face tightened and hardened with bitter memory.

Outside a babel of voices sounded. The thud of many running feet came faintly to the little group of anxious captives.

Father Jose's eyes, stern with authority, swept the small group. "You will go with them, quietly—it is the only way. I," he paused slightly for emphasis, "will not be with you—now. But it is that I may save you that I go. Whatever comes up at the Feast—whatever you see—however dire the extremity seems, do not give a sign. Say nothing—above all DO nothing. I go! Remember!"

Father Jose Acts Mysteriously.

Outside there was an ominous pause. The sort of thing that precedes decisive action.

"Trust me!" It was at Northington that the old man looked while Dolores in an anxiously tense whisper, told him what he had said.

The big bronze giant, trembling with eager desire to meet force with force, sent one quick, keen glance at the speaker and then—reluctantly dropped his trigger finger in line with the rest of his hand that closed around the hilt of the small weapon he held, and dropped it into his pocket.

Accompanied by the sound of countless alighting feet, a splintering crash resounded in the big bare room.

Father Jose, as quietly and soundlessly as vanishing smoke, disappeared into the inner room from which he had just emerged.

Hours later, at the time that the four who remained were being carried captives, bound, and with more or less roughness, into the central room of the great building that projected from the giant tree in the center of The Grove, there was no trace in the underground room of the old man. Only the stiffly protruding legs seemed to grow from the solid floor. The silent, sinister white block of marble, with its curious carvings, that occupied the center of the room, waited.

It was the day of the great FEAST OF THE BLOOMING. High overhead the tropic sun rode in a blaze of glory. The scene upon which it looked down in the wide green-carpeted setting of the Sacred Grove, was one of wildly barbaric splendor. Around the fringes of the trees just inside, and packed to within a few feet of the spokes of the temple, were massed the hundreds of devout pilgrims who had made the annual pilgrimage to this mecca of their religious life. They were to see more than the usual ceremonies—splendid as those seemed to their ritualistic souls.

The Black Lily Ceremony.

Today—a forsworn Bride of THE SACRED FLOWER would be spurned by the mystic bridegroom whose oath she had violated and, by the magic power of his breath, she would be sent on a last long journey to reach at length the arms of the other Bridegroom to whom alone, THE BLACK LILY would relinquish her—DEATH.

As the sun approached the mid-



Jonthra stood leaning down at her.

Installment XI
THROUGH THE FALLING SPLINTERS a brown claw-fingered hand was inserted. It fumbled toward the lock. The small black automatic in Northington's hand spoke sharply. The hand was withdrawn abruptly on a staccato grunt of pain.

There was a pause and murmur of voices from without. Then the sound of retreating footsteps.

Father Jose stepped forward. "My

children," he said, and his glance included John Northington, although he spoke in the tongue that only the other two understood, "there is a way out I believe for all of you but it means brave hearts and steady heads. They have but gone for the battering ram. When they return, go quietly with them. As for that dangerous toy, it cannot serve." He stepped to Northington's side and gently closed his hand over the gun tightly held there.

Dolores quickly translated his words to the young American. "But, it will account for at least five of them and perhaps for more with these other bullets that I have. At

sky a single booming note announced the beginning of the ceremonies of the day.

Out of the central door pointing toward the West two lines of grey-clad priests emerged. They were hooded and cloaked to the feet. Only long thin slits of eye-holes in the peaked grey headcovering indicated how they could see to keep the formation in the steady march. Just before the long winding line reached the outermost of the densely packed mass of pilgrims, the pairs separated. One going to the right, the other to the left—along the face of the circling throng of watchers.

The steady throbbing of enormous drums accompanied and set the measure of the march.

Slowly—steadily—the measured thud-thud of heavy feet falling in even rhythm on the yielding green-sward passed onward around the wheel-like centre, past the two north and south projecting spokes, past

Continued on Page Three

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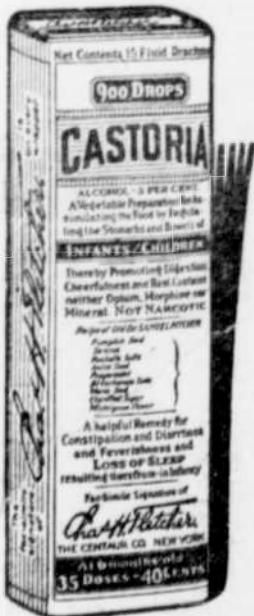
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