

SPEARS of

By JEROME SEVERS PERRY

Doomed to the rajah's harem, she fought his cruel passion with her wits . . . braved even the hell-hole of his cobra pit



Jelingpur



A HIGH WALL surrounded the palace of Dowlah Inderjang, Rajah of Jelingpur. It loomed like a white and ghostly barrier in the Malay night. Cleve Merrill studied it with his hard, narrowed eyes; measured the wall and gauged his chances.

Behind him, the native town of Jelingpur sprawled in straggling disorder on the banks of the Telei River. No living thing moved in the darkness. Merrill gathered his muscles.

He sprang.

The leap carried him scrambling to the wall's broad top. He poised there for a single instant, surveying what lay before him.

Ahead, beyond a terraced garden the Rajah's palace gleamed like a snowy, pearl-lustered jewel in the reflected light of a thousand stars. The silence of midnight lay like a heavy hand on the earth.

Abruptly, from the shadows on the inner side of the wall, a soft feminine voice

said, "The way is clear, *Tuan*. Come quickly."

Lightly, soundlessly, Cleve Merrill vaulted down to the grounds of the palace garden. To his nostrils came the mingled, sensuously-Oriental fragrance of orange blossoms and of jasmine. A night-bird chattered eerily, ominously. Beyond the palace, the thin minaret of Rajah Dowlah Inderjang's private mosque was like a white finger stabbing at the sky.

A shadowy figure came toward Cleve Merrill. It was a girl—her lithe brown body was draped in a crimson *sarong* curved over her right shoulder and flowed down over her sleek hips, leaving her left breast bare and enticing. Timidly she touched Merrill's arm. "Follow me, *Tuan*," she whispered.

Merrill nodded grimly. His tall, broad-shouldered form bulked large in contrast to the slender figure of the native slave-girl.

They crept along the wall, clinging to the shadows. Their way led past a wide, gate-

like entrance in the wall. The gate was closed, and a native sentry stood guard with drawn *kris*. Cleve Merrill tensed: felt a vague, inner sixth sense of possible danger.

HE TOOK another step forward. A twig cached under his foot. In the night silence, the sound was as sharp as the report of a pistol. The native sentry whirled, his wavy-bladed sword upraised. From the lips of the slave-girl came a startled, frightened cry.

Merrill cursed. It was too late to turn back now; and he dared not risk discovery and capture at this stage of the dangerous enterprise. In another instant the native sentry would raise an alarm—

Cleve Merrill launched himself like a catapult at the sentry's legs; smashed into the man in a headlong flying-tackle. The native grunted as he went down. Merrill felt the man's *kris-point* bite into the fleshy part of his thigh; felt the hot blood trickling from the wound. He lashed out with his knotted fist, sent the wavy-edged blade flying out of the sentry's grasp.

The native twisted, tried to squirm free. Cleve Merrill's hard fingers closed about the sentry's brawn throat; tightened. His thumbs pressed into his adversary's windpipe.

The sentry gasped, choked, strutted desperately. His bare heels drummed against the earth in a spasmodic paroxysm. Then, abruptly, his form relaxed—became inert. His jaw sagged weirdly; his tongue protruded thickly from between flaccid, strangled lips.

It was over in an instant. Cleve Merrill whipped off the sentry's turban. With its long, greasy folds he bound his victim's wrists and ankles together. Then he leaped to his feet, faced the slave-girl. "Take me to the white *memsahib!*" he grated. Quaking, the bare-breasted native girl nodded mutely, clutched at Merrill's hard forearm. "Come, *Tuan,*" she whispered fearfully.

Merrill followed her across the terraced grounds, past a well-like opening in

the earth—a round hole whose edges were paved with burnished tiles, over which was stretched a canopy of scarlet silk suspended from four ancient spears thrust into the ground, point-upward. Past the tiled well they sped; and at last they came upon a bungalow-like pavilion at the far edge of the palace itself.

"She is kept locked in this house, *Tuan,*" the native girl's voice held a timbre of terror.

"She knows I'm coming?"

"Aie, *Tuan.* She expects you." The slave-girl approached a barred window of the small building. With her fingernails she scratched at the whitewashed sill.

And then Cleve Merrill's heart leaped into his throat. A pale, fear-fraught face appeared at the barred window—the face of a white girl. Her lovely features were framed in an aureole of honey-colored hair; her violet eyes were deep pools of troubled hopelessness, and her red lips trembled.

"Carolyn!" Merrill whispered as he flung himself toward the window.

The imprisoned girl tensed; a choked cry issued from her red lips. "Cleve—Cleve Merrill! Thank God you've come!" she sobbed. Her hands stretched out through the bars of the window.

Merrill touched her bare arms longingly. "I got your letter in Singapore this afternoon—flew north up the Telei Valley as soon as I could get hold of a plane. My ship's an amphibian—it's anchored on the river just below the Jelingpur waterfront." Then, as he pressed his face close to the iron bars of the window, he stiffened. "Carolyn—what are you doing in that costume?" he rasped.

THERE was a tiny, flickering lamp burning within the room; and in its dim light he could see the blonde girl's body—feminine and seductive and practically nude.

A jeweled girdle was clasped about her waist and hips, and her nubile breasts were

restrained behind twin ruby-encrusted golden breastplates. For the rest, she was unclothed.

Her bare torso was pearl-white and slender—breath-takingly beautiful. Her naked thighs and tapered legs stirred surging desire in Cleve Merrill's racing blood. She flushed under his scrutiny. "I—I have no choice!" she whispered. "Dowlah Inderjang forced me to wear...these."

"Forced you?" Merrill grated. Then, "In your letter you said that you were in trouble. Tell me! Has Inderjang—?"

The girl's lower lip trembled. "He—he hasn't...touched me ... yet. But tomorrow I am to enter his *hareem*—"

"What?" Cleve Merrill barked.

"Y-yes. I am to become one of Dowlah Inderjang's ... wives..."

"The man must be mad! He knows the British Resident won't stand for a thing like that!"

"I—I dare not appeal to the Residency for help," the yellow-haired girl whispered hopelessly. Then, in a torrent of words, she explained. "As you know, I came here to Inderjang's palace ostensibly as governess for his children. At first, he treated me with every respect. And then, last week, my brother Tim came to visit me. There—there was some trouble. A native guard was found m-murdered, with Tim's hunting-knife in his heart. The Rajah threw Tim into his private prison; is threatening to turn him over to the British authorities. If—if that happens, T-Tim will be ... hanged ..."

Merrill's eyes narrowed. "Why should you be held prisoner because of that?"

"Dowlah Inderjang planned the whole thing. I—I'm positive that my brother is innocent. But Inderjang has piled up enough false evidence to convict Tim—unless—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I agree to become one of Inderjang's wives. If I agree to that, Inderjang will release Tim—let him get away. If I

refuse, Tim will be ... hanged..." The girl's violet eyes misted. "I dared not appeal to the British Resident for help. There was only one person to whom I could turn. That was...you. I bribed this slave-girl to smuggle a letter out of the palace. I sent for you. I—I wasn't sure you'd come, after what happened—in Singapore—"

Cleve Merrill smiled gently. Because you'd refused to marry me—because you wanted to prove you could make your own way in the world? Why should that change my love for you, Carolyn?" His eyes caressed the girl's semi-nude form through the bars of the window.

"Then—you'll help? You'll try to get Tim away—set him free?"

Merrill nodded grimly. "Yes. And when he's safely out of here, I'll demand your release—compel Dowlah Inderjang to let you go!"

He kissed the blonde girl's fingers, her bare arms. Then he turned away from the barred window. He looked into the eyes of the native slave-girl. "You know where the white sahib is kept prisoner?"

The slave-girl spoke. "Aie, *Tuan*. I will show you the way." She glided away from the pavilion on silent feet. Cleve Merrill followed her, his jaw thrust forward combatively.

They crossed the terraced garden, came once more to the tiled well with its crimson awning suspended from the four upright spears. At the mouth of the opening in the earth, the slave-girl stopped. She pointed at the yawning, ominously-black hole. "The yellow-haired *memsahib's* brother is imprisoned down there, *Tuan*, she whispered.

Cleve Merrill tensed. "Down there—in that well?"

"It is not really a well, *Tuan*. It is a pit. Midway to the bottom, lateral tunnels have been bored into the earth. They are cells. Barred and locked doors open into the walls of the pit; and at the bottom of the hole, Dowlah Inderjang maintains three giant cobras..." The

slave-girl shuddered.

MERRILL'S eyes narrowed as he saw the hellish ingenuity of the prison-pit. Even though a captive might pick the lock of his cell, he could not escape—could not climb up to freedom along the smooth, tiled walls of the hole. To attempt such a thing would mean tumbling to the bottom—to fall helplessly into the cobra-nest....

"There is one guard who has a key to the cells," the slave-girl whispered. "He comes with a rope ladder, descends to the cell-doors. Thus he gives food and drink to the white prisoner."

Cleve Merrill grasped the native girl's wrist, drew her close to him. "When will this guard come here again?"

"He comes each hour during the night, *Tuan*, to make sure all is well."

"Then leave me. I will lie in wait for him!" Merrill rasped. A plan had leaped into his mind. If he could take the guard unaware, overpower him, steal the keys to the pit-cells—!

Silently the slave-girl departed into the night. Cleve Merrill froze in the shadows of the crimson awning, motionless, waiting. And then, suddenly, he heard a wailing cry—a feminine shriek of fear.

He whirled in the direction of the sound. And as he turned, a hard body hurtled at him from behind—smashed into his back, bore him to the ground. He struggled; felt a thin leather cord loop around his neck. The loop twisted, tightened.

Merrill clawed at the thing. A roaring pain hammered in his throat. His tortured, strangled breath seared his bursting lungs. He felt the strength drain from his body like an ebbing, eddying riptide, leaving him spent and nauseated. Abruptly, unconsciousness descended upon him like a smothering mantle of blackness.

A BOOT smashed cruelly into Cleve Merrill's ribs. He opened his eyes, drew a sobbing breath into his constricted throat.

He was bound, hand and foot. The leather noose had been removed from his neck. He was lying outstretched upon the floor of a vast room—a room of Oriental splendor, draped in rich silks of Trengganu weave. The heavy odor of incense drifted on the still air, mingling with the cloying fragrance of oleanders and hibiscus blossoms from the outer garden.

Merrill stared up into the basilisk-like eyes of a dark-skinned, black-bearded, turbaned man whose silken attire and jeweled fingers proclaimed his rank. "Rajah Dowlah Inderjang—!" Merrill gasped.

"Quite right, my man!" the Malay's clipped Oxonian accent was impeccable, meticulous. I am Rajah Dowlah Inderjang. And you are an intruder whom my guards have captured in the grounds of my palace. Perhaps you have some explanation to offer?"

Cleve Merrill thought swiftly. The aching numbness departed from his brain, leaving his thoughts lucid, crystal-clear. Abruptly he realized the full danger of his present position; realized that he had lost the first move in the dangerous game he was playing. But there was still hope. He still had an ace up his sleeve. And now was the time to play it!

Again the Rajah spoke. "Come, come! What is the meaning of your presence in my garden?"

Merrill met the native ruler's expressionless eyes. "I have a perfectly reasonable explanation, Your Highness," he answered, forcing his voice to calmness. "I wanted to see you privately. I tried to gain entrance through your front gate. Your sentry attacked me without warning. I throttled him—tied him up with his own turban. I was on my way to the palace itself when I was set upon by other guards, overpowered and captured."

Dowlah Inderjang stared at Merrill. "Why should you seek an audience with me at this hour of the night, my friend?"

"Because my mission is one that demands secrecy!" Merrill retorted boldly, audaciously.

"So say you? Then what is this mysterious mission of yours? Speak up!"

"Release my hands, Your Highness, and I will show you."

Dowlah Inderjang hesitated. Then his brown hand flashed to his gold-encrusted girdle, withdrew a jeweled dagger. He slashed at the ropes around Cleve Merrill's wrists.

Merrill's hands went to a secret belt around his waist, under his shirt. The Rajah's eyes glittered as he pressed the point of his jeweled dagger against Merrill's throat. "Draw weapon and I'll slit your gullet!" the Malay snarled.

"I have no weapon, Your Highness." By no quiver did Merrill betray fear. Instead, he fumbled once more at the secret belt next his skin; opened a chamois pouch; extracted a hard, round, iridescent object—

HE held it forth. It was a pearl—huge, lustrous—a rounded globule of pink-and-white perfection. Dowlah Inderjang's eyes went wide. "What is this?" he demanded.

"I came to offer it for sale, Your Highness." Merrill's voice was firm.

"Where did you get it?"

Merrill grinned impudently. "Had I procured it honestly, I would not have sought secret audience with you, Your Highness."

"You mean—you stole it somewhere?"

Cleve Merrill smiled faintly. "Does it matter? The point is—do you want to buy it?"

Dowlah Inderjang accepted the pearl, studied it. "How much?" he demanded heavily.

Before Cleve Merrill could answer, there came a thunderous knocking upon the outer door of the lavish room. The Rajah

turned swiftly. "Enter!" he called out sharply.

The heavy door opened. Two *sarong*-clad palace guards burst into the room. Between them they held the struggling form of a native girl. It was the slave-girl who had led Cleve Merrill through the palace grounds!

"This is the daughter of a camel whom we captured at the same time we made the white intruder prisoner!" one of the guards reported as he thrust the slave-girl forward.

Abruptly, Cleve Merrill's muscles tensed. Now he understood the meaning of that shrieking feminine cry he had heard outside, just before he had been smashed down from behind. It had been the slave-girl's wail of terror that had reached his ears—that had made him turn, so that his attackers could over-power him from the rear!



He saw Dowlah Inderjang's dark eyes grow narrow: saw the bearded rajah spring forward, grasp at the cowering native's girl's *sarong* and rip it from her cringing body. The girl went to her knees, her naked form groveling at the bearded man's feet. "Master—please—!" she cried faintly. Terror

leaped into her eyes.

Dowlah Inderjang's fingers curled in the girl's black hair. He yanked her roughly, brutally, to her feet. "What were you doing out there where slaves are not permitted?" the bearded Rajah rasped savagely.

"I—I did but seek to smell the perfume of the oleanders—" the slave's lie was unconvincing.

"Thou tellest an untruth!" Dowlah Inderjang snarled. His fist drew back, smashed into the girl's chest bruisingly. She cried out in abject agony; clutched at her bosom in a spasm of pain.

CLEVE MERRILL struggled to his hobbled feet, sudden rage in his eyes. Before he could fling himself forward, one of the two brown guards leaped at him, pinioned him. Dowlah Inderjang turned to the remaining sentry. "Tie this daughter of carrion to yonder pillar. I will whip the truth from her!" he rasped. Merrill saw the slave-girl being dragged to a fluted, white marble column; saw her being bound to it, her arms trussed behind her around the pillar so that her smooth brown breasts were thrust forth tautly. She strained with futile terror at her eyes; her lithe young body quivered with anticipatory horror for the torture to come. Her eyes widened piteously.

Dowlah Inderjang seized a short-handled whip—a whip with four long leather lashes to which were affixed sharp steel barbs, like razor-pointed fishhooks... The bearded Rajah raised the whip lash overhead, snapped it forward—

Venomously the thing whistled through the air, cracked out sickeningly, horribly. The slave-girl wailed out a cry that knifed into shrill, gibbering, pain-wracked insanity as the steel whip-hooks snagged into the cringing flesh of her body.

Dowlah Inderjang jerked backward on the handle of the lash. The steel barbs tore loose from quivering feminine flesh, leaving

shreds of bleeding skin and lacerated, crimson-dripping wounds in its cruel wake....

"You black-hearted rat!" Cleve Merrill bellowed. He struggled desperately out of the arms of his guard, tried to smash himself forward at Dowlah Inderjang. His bound feet tripped him; he pitched headlong, his shoulders crashing against the Rajah's body.

Dowlah Inderjang staggered off-balance, his barbed whip knocked aside. He raised the butt of the lash, brought it viciously down against Merrill's skull.

Cleve Merrill felt a raging pain course through his numbed brain. He sagged, stunned and semi-conscious. As though from a vast distance he heard the barbed whip sing out once more; heard the slave-girl's tortured cry of agony as the steel-sharp hooks ate into her flesh, to be ripped free with monstrous, sadistic cruelty.

And the slave-girl wailed out faintly, "Master, Master! I will tell! I will tell you everything!"

BLURRILY, hazily, Cleve Merrill realized that now everything was lost. If the native girl confessed, then even Merrill's desperate stratagem of pretending to sell a stolen pearl to Dowlah Inderjang would have been futile!

Merrill heard the slave-girl's terror-stricken words. "The yellow-haired *memsahib* bribed me to send a letter to Singapore, summoning help. This man at your feet came in response to the letter. I led him through the palace grounds. He talked to the white *memsahib*—"

"So!" Dowlah Inderjang rasped. "Then thou art a traitor? For this—you die!" And the Rajah leaped forward, his jeweled dagger flashing.

Through pain-blurred, horrified eyes, Cleve Merrill saw the bearded Dowlah Inderjang plunge the blade's point into the slave-girl's breast—saw the knife slice through soft flesh, to quiver hilt-deep in the

native girl's bosom. She shrieked wildly, once; and then she sagged against her bonds, her young body contorted in the throes of her death-agony. Abruptly she was still, silent.

The Rajah grinned thinly behind his black beard. He turned, kicked at Cleve Merrill's prone form. In snarling English he said, "So you hoped to delude me with your lies, eh, white infidel dog? Well, your scheme has failed. And now you shall see how you have played into my hands!" Dowlah Inderjang turned to one of the two guards. "Go—fetch the yellow-haired *memsahib!* Bring her here!" he commanded.

Merrill tried to struggle to his bound feet, but the remaining native guard held him, pinioned him. And then, after long moments, the other guard entered dragging with him a struggling form—

"Carolyn!" Cleve Merrill groaned.

The fair-haired girl saw him lying there, and her features blanched, "Cleve—Cleve—you're hurt!" she wailed, and threw herself toward him.

Dowlah Inderjang intercepted her, caught her, held her. "No, no, my dear!" he purred silkily, ominously. "Your caresses are not for such carrion as that!" His brown fingers fumbled at the tightness of her gold-encrusted breastplates, sank roughly into the white firm flesh beneath... "I have captured this dog who would dare attempt to thwart my desire for you, little lily blossom!" the Rajah rasped. "And to-night he dies—unless—"

"Unless... what?"

"Unless you agree to become an inmate of my *hareem!* Do this--accept my love willingly—and I shall release your brother and this infidel who planned to rescue you. Refuse me, and they both die!"

The girl shivered. Then, abruptly, her lovely shoulders straightened—her face became calm, poised, resigned. "You promise to release this man and my brother? I have your word?"

"You have my word!"

"Then ... I accept your terms, Dowlah Inderjang.

THE Rajah's bearded mouth descended toward her lips, traversed her throat, wandered downward....

Then he turned. To the two waiting guards, he said, "Take this white man and place him in the pit-cell next to the *memsahib's* brother. In the morning they shall both be released—after this golden one has fulfilled her part of the bargain.

Cleve Merrill struggled in the arms of his two brown captors. "Carolyn!" he gritted savagely. "You can't do this! You can't give yourself to that swine! I—"

"There is no other way, Cleve darling," the girl answered slowly.

Dowlah Inderjang grinned. "You are quite right, my dear. There is no other way. Come—I shall take you to the women of the *hareem*. They will bathe you and perfume you—prepare you for your bridal night."

Raging, impotent, helpless, Cleve Merrill felt himself being lifted and carried out of the palace. To the well-like, tiled pit he was forced. One of his guards produced a rope ladder, lowered it into the black, circular hole. The man descended. Merrill heard the grating of a key in an ancient lock. Then he was lowered into the yawning aperture. Far below, he heard a sinuous, crawling sound that raised the hackles at the back of his neck. Dowlah Inderjang's cobras....!

And then he was shoved into a damp, lateral tunnel leading from the pit's inner wall. A barred door clanged; a lock shot home. His guard started slowly up the rope ladder.

Cleve Merrill clutched at the bars of his prison. His guard's brown, bare legs were on a level with Merrill's eyes as the native ascended the rope ladder. Abruptly, Cleve Merrill conceived a desperate scheme—

His hard hands flashed out through the barred door of his subterranean cell, closed

about the Malay guard's ankles in a steel-vice grip. The native grunted. Merrill yanked downward with all the strength of his sinewy muscles.

The native jailer's feet lost their hold on the rope ladder. With a startled grunt, the man toppled backward, flashed down. Through his cell bars, Merrill clung grimly to the fellow's twisting ankles. And then the Malay's head cracked sickeningly against the pit's tiled walls below Merrill's prison.

Cleve Merrill waited a split second. His captive was still, motionless—unconscious from the concussion of his head against the hard tiles. Head-downward, the native dangled in the pit, with Merrill holding to his ankles through the bars of the cell door. Then slowly, cautiously, Cleve Merrill began to draw the native upward by his legs. The strain of lifting that dangling, inert, heavy form brought streams of sweat down Merrill's weather-tanned features. Upward, inch by inch, he lifted the Malay guard.

At last the native's limp body was on a level with Merrill's cell. Merrill reached out, fumbled at a belt around the brown man's body. There was a ring of heavy, ancient keys. Merrill snatched at them, drew them in through the iron bars. Then he released his clutch on the unconscious guard.

THE man's form plummeted down into the pit. Then came a soft, dull thudding impact as the native sprawled at the pit's bottom. And then a hissing sound—and the slithering of crawling reptilian bodies seeking human prey....

Cleve Merrill selected a key, thrust it through the barred door, worked it into the lock, turned it. The cell-door swung inward.

Merrill drew a deep breath. The dangling rope-ladder was still before him. He grasped at it, started upward: with leaping jerks of his powerful frame. He reached the upper edge of the tiled pit. The remaining Malay guard stood a few paces away, gazing

off into the night, oblivious to what had happened to his companion.

Cleve Merrill leaped.

His hard body smashed into the unsuspecting sentry, bore him earthward. The Malay's wavy-bladed kris clattered on the tiles, skittered into the yawning hole of the pit, disappeared. Weaponless, the guard struggled in Cleve Merrill's grasp. Merrill's arms locked about the brown man's body, lifted him—

The native screamed, horribly. Merrill flung the man—saw his twisting form describe a parabola through the air straight for the black, round hole in the earth. The guard clutched at the smooth tiled edges of the pit with desperate fingers; slipped; plunged into the hole and vanished.

With a snarling laugh, Cleve Merrill turned and launched himself toward Rajah Dowlah Inderjang's palace.

The white building that housed the women's quarters loomed before him. There was a latticed window. Faint light gleamed through the interstices of the window's *jhilmil*. Merrill flung himself at the aperture, smashed through the blind, catapulted into a tiny, heavily scented room.

A sloe-eyed Circassian girl leaped from a bed of soft cushions, where she had been sleeping. She was nude to the waist, and her breasts were heavy and languorous. From a girdle about her wide hips descended thin gauze trousers through which her thighs and legs gleamed in semi-revelment. She opened her rouged lips to cry out.

Merrill sprang at her, clamped his palms over her mouth. "Quiet!" he rasped in the Malay tongue. He stared grimly into her kohl-fringed eyes. "I seek your master, Dowlah Inderjang! Tell me where he is and I shall do you no harm!"

She looked up at him; and there came into her dark, liquid eyes a speculative light. She pulled his hand from her mouth; smiled lazily. "Thou are very strong, *Tuan!*" she whispered as she touched his muscular

shoulders.

"Where is Dowlah Inderjang?" Merrill whispered tensely. He shook the girl roughly. "Tell me!"

Again the Circassian *hareem*-woman smiled. "He is busy with a new bride—one who is even whiter than I."

"Lead me to him!"

The Circassian girl grinned. Once more she touched Merrill's broad shoulders, his thick chest. "It would please me better were you to remain here with me, *Tuan*," she whispered seductively. Her hands fluttered lazily toward her heavy breasts. "Not often have I seen a strange man at such close range!"

"Take me to Dowlah Inderjang's room—at once!" Merrill's tone was a threat.



The girl's eyes challenged him. "I could raise an alarm—and you would be immediately beheaded for intruding upon the sacred rooms of the *hareem*," she said evenly. Her voluptuous body swayed toward Merrill, sinuously, passionately ... "But I will not betray you, *Tuan*, if—"

"If what?"

"If you grant me ... what you know I desire..."

"And if I do, then will you lead me to Dowlah Inderjang?"

"Yes, *Tuan*"

Cleve Merrill studied the girl before him; read the promise in her eyes, the desire that throbbed in her breasts. Roughly he grabbed her, pulled her toward him. His hands touched the succulent curves of her bosom, wandered downward over her lush hips.

She locked her bare anus about his neck, drew him toward the piled cushions, pulled him down with her into their scented depths... Despite his desperate desire to find Dowlah Inderjang before harm befell the yellow-haired Carolyn, Cleve Merrill felt a surging, insistent thrill at the Circassian girl's tantalizing touch. He took her in his arms....

ABRUPTLY, Merrill leaped to his feet. "Now take me to the Rajah!" he grated.

"Aie, *Tuan*." The Circassian *hareem*-girl yawned sleepily, arose, went to a door, opened it. "Follow me!" she whispered.

He trailed her into a cool, lightless corridor. She pointed to a partially-opened door. "In there, *Tuan*. That is the Chamber of the New Brides."

Merrill lunged at the door, smashed into the room. He heard a feminine scream, muffled, terrified. He stared.

"Carolyn!" he whispered harshly.

Save for a silken loin-cloth, the golden-haired girl was naked. Her pink-and-white breasts were like rounded, quivering cones of living marble; her body a rhapsody in nubile, girlish flesh. She was alone. She saw Cleve Merrill, swayed toward him.

Heavy perfume wafted from the valley between her white breasts; her cheeks were heavily rouged, her eyes dark with kohl. "Cleve—Cleve Merrill!" she cried weakly.

He grabbed at her, held her. "Has—has Inderjang?"

"He is to come to me in a few moments. The slave-women just finished preparing me for the bridal night...."

Merrill picked up the girl, carried her

in his arms, raced back down the corridor into the room of the Circassian girl. Through the gaping window he plunged with his trembling blonde feminine burden.

They were in the garden now. “Cleve—what about—my brother Tim?” the golden-haired girl whispered.

“I have a key to his prison. We’ll release him. Then we’ll escape in my plane!” As he spoke, Merrill reached the tiled pit with its suspended awning of crimson silk. The rope-ladder still dangled into the circular well. Merrill fumbled for the keys he had taken from the Malay guard—

“God in heaven!” he gasped.

From the palace, harsh cries thrust forth into the night’s stillness—and a leaping knot of Malay’s swept out of the building, raced across the terraced garden. Wavy-bladed kris-swords flashed in the starlight, Merrill saw Dowlah Inderjang at the head of his men....

“Quick!” Cleve Merrill turned, thrust the keys into Carolyn’s trembling hand, “Go down the rope-ladder. Unlock the door of your brother’s cell. Move fast—bring him back up with you. Then make a dash for the wall—get away. I’ll hold Dowlah Inderjang’s men back—long enough for you to escape—”

The girl sobbed; then she turned, lowered herself into the pit by the rope ladder. Weaponless, Cleve Merrill stood in the face of the advancing attackers. Abruptly, he saw a last, desperate ray of hope—

HE leaped for the four spears that held the crimson awning over the circular pit. He grasped at the first, snatched it out of its tiled holder, shook its point free of the clinging awning. Then he lunged forward at the second spear. It snapped off short, close to the sharp tip. Merrill’s hard hand closed about the abbreviated haft of the weapon. He turned.

Dowlah Inderjang’s men were upon him. He raised his long spear, poised it, hurled it straight at the advancing horde. Like a

javelin it lanced through the night—straight at Dowlah Inderjang’s dark throat. The Rajah cried out, tried to swerve—and the spear-point buried itself in his neck.

Dowlah Inderjang sagged, clawing at the impaling spear. Blood gushed along the shaft of the grim weapon....

The guards hesitated in abrupt dismay and sudden disorder. In that brief breathing-spell, Cleve Merrill wrenched another spear from its upright position. Behind him, he saw the golden-haired Carolyn and her brother scrambling out of the pit. “Run—both of you!” he shouted. And then he leaped headlong at the milling Malays.

They wavered. Merrill flung his long spear. It skewered into a brown chest. The man screamed weirdly as he went backward into death. And then Cleve Merrill was in the midst of the guards, his only weapon the broken, short spear he had snapped off a moment before.

His enemies closed in about him, too close to wield their long swords. He felt thudding blows beating at his head, his shoulders, his arms. Grimly he thrust with his short spear—thrust, withdrew, thrust again and again. A *kris* licked into his left arm like a tongue of agonizing fire. Merrill’s short spear dripped blood in streaming rivulets. Twisting, writhing bodies piled at his feet, hampering his movements. He stumbled, went to his knees—

He felt the body of Dowlah Inderjang on the ground beside him. Grimly, desperately, his hand went to the dead Rajah’s belt. If the man only had carried a revolver... Abruptly Merrill gasped out a sobbing breath of triumph. His hard hand closed over the butt of an automatic in Dowlah Inderjang’s girdle!

He yanked forth the weapon: his finger curled about the trigger. He raised the gun’s muzzle. His finger tightened—

Flaming fire and roaring, leaden death vomited from the automatic in a blazing stream. The Malay guards swept back in

sudden terror; half their number dead before their eyes.

Cleve Merrill staggered to his feet, saving his remaining bullets. "Death to the first of you who makes a move!" he snarled in Malay dialect.

His adversaries shrank back. Merrill faced them for a long, grim instant. Then, slowly, he backed away from them—backed toward the high white wall that surrounded the palace grounds.

One of the *sarong*-clad guards latched at a knife, raised his arm to throw it. Cleve Merrill fired—and the Malay went down with a lead slug through his brain. Merrill pressed his trigger once more. It snapped metallically. The automatic was empty!

With a curse, Merrill turned and raced for the wall. He gained it, leaped high, scrambled over. Pain shot suddenly through his battered muscles as he landed on the far side. He staggered to his feet. Two

shadow-shapes crouched near "Carolyn—!" he gasped.

"Yes! My brother's here with me!" Merrill felt strong, masculine arms supporting him as the girl's brother grabbed at him. The three turned, ran toward the sprawling native town at the river's edge.

"My plane—there by the wharf!" Merrill gritted through pain-clenched teeth.

The girl's brother spoke. "I can fly it. Carolyn will take care of you in the cabin!"

And then they were in the ship. Its motor was roaring a challenge to the night. Cleve Merrill was lying against the golden-haired girl, his head pillowed gently against her soft throbbing body. He felt the plane rise from the surface of the river, wing its way southward—

He closed his eyes wearily; felt warm, moist feminine lips press against his own. "Carolyn ... sweetheart," he mumbled.

He slept.