

CARNIVAL KILLER

by G. MORRIS SAND

STRANGE, pulsing music filled the carnival show tent. There was a wild rolling of drums. Then she flashed upon the brightly-lighted stage, the famous, featured dancer of the midway. Dark, slender, fascinatingly beautiful, they billed her the "Exotic, Sensational Zorine."

Tonight, automatically, almost unconsciously, Zorine's body dipped and whirled. Her eyes gleamed savagely. Her brain was a madhouse. Raoul, her lover, was lost to her. He loved Carolyn. He preferred Carolyn. The drums twittered her as she danced. Laughing devils, they beat out the steady tattoo: "Raoul prefers Carolyn; Raoul prefers Carolyn."

Zorine's thoughts became angry and confused. They heated her whole body, sweating it like an ever constant flame. Pertinaciously, she swept on until at last the music ceased. Then a fiendish echo reminded: "Raoul prefers Carolyn."

The tent-audience dwindled away. It would be twenty minutes before the last performance of the evening. Until then Zorine was free!

Snatching her long, black cape, she drew it closely about her. Shaking, breathless, fighting for control of herself, she walked to the open flap of her tent. A moment she stood there, gazing out at the carnival crowds jostling each other about under the glaring, white lights of the midway. The mob milled expectantly about a huge cannon that, in fifteen minutes, now, was to furnish them with the thrill of a lifetime. At ten o'clock, Herman, the human cannonball, would be shot from the cavernous mouth of that iron monster. The noise of the explosion would be deafening. It would reverberate and fill the midway,

SHE must hurry. Recrossing to the back of her tent, she lifted the stiff canvas, bent and crawled out. How different from the midway's gaily-lighted front! No lights flickered here; thick blackness engulfed her. Carefully she picked her way over the uneven ground; avoided stumbling over tent ropes; circled trucks and packing boxes. Finally, beside the door of Raoul's trailer, she stopped. Raoul, the too-good-looking, too-popular, little French artist who so cleverly and quickly cut out lifelike silhouettes for carnival crowds. A

slender, dark shadow, Zorine glided within; noiselessly she closed the door. Motionless as any statue, she waited, following with her eyes the graceful movements of Raoul's long, slender fingers as with scissors and black paper he toyed with some new idea for his cutting. The muscles of her angry face twitched. Raoul, sensing her presence, glanced up. Instantly, he understood. She had heard about his affair with Carolyn! Mentally, he shrugged his shoulders. Well, a man had every right to change his mind and, incidentally, his mistress!

Zorine stepped nearer. "Go on with your cutting; don't stop for me."

Without comment, he snipped the black paper. It gave him a moment in which to think, to cover his annoyance at her intrusion. He would speak to her, kindly.

Maddened by jealousy, she gave him no opportunity. Enraged, she flew at him:

"So! You thought to push me aside like you would an old shoe. Well, you can't, do you hear? You can't. You thought I would step down like a lady. Let someone I hate steal your love. But I won't, do you understand? I won't." She stamped her small feet and stopped for lack of breath.

"Zorine," Raoul soothed, "my dear."

Choking back her rage, she mimicked: "I was 'your dear' once, but I certainly am no longer. If you don't believe me, look!" Her hand flashed in and out of her cape pocket.

Raoul's blood ran cold. Zorine's tiny, gloved hand held his own gun. He knew it to be loaded.

"Fool," he breathed, "to steal my gun." His hand shot out. "Give it to me."

Zorine was too quick for him. "Sit still. Don't worry. I'll give it you soon enough."

Raoul sat tense. Zorine must not guess his fear.

Lightly, he questioned: "Are you enjoying yourself? Just what would you like me to do?"

"What should I like you to do?" she repeated, "nothing. Nothing except sit where you are, and listen while I tell you I hate you. Hate you a thousand times more than ever I loved you! Hate you so much that I intend to shoot you. I came here, Raoul, to kill you!"

Her voice was icy; her hand steady; her eyes

In among the circus tents and wagons, death would strike tonight—and none would ever know why, or from whence it came!

flaming, murderous. Obviously she meant all she said. This termagant, could she be that same Zorine whom he had held in his arms, soft and clinging, night after night? She was like some wild thing!

“You can’t kill me now, Zorine. Put that gun down. Think. Just the other side of those tents, only a stone’s throw away, a thousand people wait. I need only to call. They will be here. If you dared shoot that gun, Zorine, you could never hope to escape. You must be mad to plan so heedlessly!”

She laughed, mirthlessly. “So! You think me mad—crazy? Maybe I am. Crazy for my dead love. Crazy because I would rather look upon you lifeless than think of you in her arms.” Her eyes shone, craftily. “But I am still smart, Raoul. Of course, I dare not shoot you, now. But suppose I fire this gun as Herman’s cannon booms? *Who’ll* be the wiser then? *That’s all we’re waiting for now.*”

Raoul’s mouth opened. No words came. He was trapped, unless—

THE cannon thundered. Simultaneously, the gun in Zorine’s hand spoke. Raoul slumped forward, slipped grotesquely to the floor. Instantly, Zorine knelt, curled the fingers of his out-flung hand carefully about the gun, rose, turned and without one backward glance, walked out into the night.

Next morning, someone found him. They came for Zorine immediately. Tightly clasped in his one hand they had found it. They held it out for Zorine to see—a small, perfectly-cut-out, black paper silhouette of Zorine brandishing a gun! They all knew that Raoul could make no likeness of anything unless the subject stood before him.