

Love Is a Cannibal

by John Bard



The Passionate Cannibal sends out evil tendrils, seeking human flesh. Eddie realizes it's his life or the girl's...

“HELLO, Eddie Pell.”
“Hello, baby, what do you want?”
“You know what I want, Eddie.”
“Now, listen, baby, have we got to go into that again! You know how jealous

Miriam is. If she ever found you in my room she'd....”

“Don't keep me standing out in the hall, Eddie. Can't you see I've got a present for you? My arm's about broken from carrying it.... No, let me put it on the table;

you might damage it.... There! Right beside your bed where you can see it when you wake up in the morning. Unwrap it, Eddie. See ... isn't it lovely?"

"Yeah.... What the hell is it?"

"Why, Eddie, you shouldn't talk like that. It's a very rare plant my brother brought from Yucatan. It's a *Canibal Apacionada*, a Passionate Cannibal! Look! Watch it twine its tendrils around my arm. It loves the feel of human flesh. Oh-h ... Eddie, don't you love the feel of human flesh!"

"Don't do that, Pearl! Stop it! Damn you, anyway, you little witch!..."

"Aw-w, Eddie ... don't you think I'm beautiful? Isn't my body lovely? Lo-ook ... Eddie, I ... love ... you...."



The girl's face was distorted, her eyes were protruding as if from strangulation. "Mother of Saints! That plant's moving!" the policeman cried.

SO WHAT the hell could Eddie Pell do but look? And there they were, the two of them in that room. Eddie's whole body tingled and floated his tongue in a flood of hot saliva.

He tried to resist running his moist hands down her exquisite thighs, but the satin smoothness of her was irresistible.

He gasped from the impact of her wet molten lips as they closed possessively over

his. Her searing tongue played across his mouth....

"Damn it!"

"Oh, Eddie, you're not sorry!"

"Sorry! Hell no; sorry for what? It's just this cannibal plant. It's climbing around my neck and I don't want anything around my neck right now but you."

"Here, let me untwine it. It just loves you like I do, Eddie, only not as much. Honestly, Eddie, I love you so much I could die for you ... or kill you."

Eddie held her away from him and looked down at her lovely flame-colored hair and red-brown eyes.

"I believe you could, at that." He wagged a finger under her nose. "But you mustn't kill Eddie Pell, Pearl. Four Detectives, Inc., would lose their best private dick."

"Aren't you going to thank me for the Passionate Cannibal, Eddie?"

Eddie took Pearl in his arms and crushed her against him. He smiled.

"Yes, baby; every time it tries to choke me I'll think of you. But be good now! Eddie has a job of work. And you've got to scam out of here...."

"Eddie," ominously, "is Miriam coming here....?"

"No, Pearl," he laughed. "Eddie is going there—"

Pearl turned swiftly on her heel and headed for the door. It closed after her with an ominous little bang and then immediately opened again. Her face, white and tense, appeared around the edge of the door.

"I love you, Eddie," she said huskily. "Don't forget to water the plant. The directions are on the side of the pot."

EDDIE watched the door close softly after Pearl and then stood for a minute thinking guiltily of Miriam. After all, she did have first claim on him, and here he was....

He knelt down by the side of the table

to read the directions on the pot and in doing so again came in range of the roving tentacles of the Passionate Cannibal. It immediately began twining with a firm grip around his wrist. Curious phenomena, this plant that could move—but, after all, a natural thing.

All plants move when growing. This one had merely modernized its pace....

On a slip of white paper pasted to the side of the red earthenware pot he read a simple statement. “Water at midnight on Wednesdays.”

Eddie got up and, swinging his arm in a rotary movement to disengage it from the warm greenish-grey tentacles, looked at the alarm clock on the dresser. It was a quarter of nine. If he didn’t hurry he’d be late for his date with Miriam.

And he had forgotten to send her flowers! Damn Pearl, anyway! He stopped suddenly in his tracks as if something of great importance had flashed across his mind.

“I’m a son-of-a-gun!” he whistled softly. “Today is Wednesday.”

“**Y**OU’RE late!”

“You’re nuts. It’s only twenty minutes after nine. Look what I brought you, baby.”

“You’ve been out with that redheaded bum again, Eddie!”

“Now, Miriam, I haven’t been out at all. So help me! I’ve been in my room ever since I got back from the agency. Look what I brought you. Isn’t that *something*?”

“I think you’re lying. You’ve got a tired look that doesn’t come from working.... What in the name of mud is that thing? Why....it’s alive!”

“That, my dear young lady,” said Eddie, taking a stance like a lecturer before a group of sophomores, “is a *Canibal Apacionada* Or Passionate Cannibal, a very rare and affectionate plant that has been brought all the way from Yucatan just for your

amusement. Note how fondly it encircles your hand and climbs toward your lovely neck.”

“Why, Eddie, it’s marvelous! ... I’ve never seen anything like it ... Oh ... you *are* sweet. It must have cost you a lot!”

“*Did* it! I haven’t got the heart to tell you how much. Say-ay, baby, you look fetching in those see-more pyjamas. But I thought we were going to see ‘The Devil Is a Woman.’ We’ve got just about time to make the second show.”

“Kiss me, Eddie.”

She swayed against him with a seductive movement of her hips. Her hot fragrant breath fanned his nostrils. He could feel the round, firm mounds of her breasts burning against his shirt.

“If we’re going to the movies, baby, we’d better get started....”

“Do you want to go, Eddie?” Her breasts, pushed up from the recesses of her silk pyjama waist by the pressure of her body against his chest, were lustrous satin bubbles. Her lips melted between his like molten honey and touched his tongue with fire. He could feel every lithe movement of her glorious body through the thin, transparent silk of her pyjamas.

“Well, baby,” he said huskily, “if you put it that way....”

He cupped his hands around her breasts, caressing their smooth firmness, then with a gentle movement slipped the shoulder straps from her creamy shoulders. He heard the soft rustle of silk as the pyjamas crumpled to the floor....

“Oh-h- ... Eddie ...” in a soft whisper, “I love you, I love you, I love you.... You’re big and strong and ... I just can’t express it Eddie ... but you are.”

Eddie crushed her to him. The hot fragrance of her made his head reel. He felt that he was breaking her in half.

“Baby,” he said in a hoarse whisper, “Eddie isn’t going anywhere.”

“OPEN up, Eddie!”

Eddie rolled over in bed, blinked the sleep out of his eyes and listened to the pounding on his door.

“Who is it?”

“Spode, Mister Pell, and you ain’t goin’ to be so glad to see me, but open up!”

Eddie shoved his feet into his carpet slippers and flung open the door.

“What’s the idea of routing me out this time of the morning, Spode? You know I’m never up until eight.”

“Well, you’re up now. Where were you last night, Eddie!”

“Am I still dreaming or are you giving me the quiz? Don’t forget, sergeant, I used to be your boss.”

“That’s what I ain’t forgettin’. Were you or were you not at Miriam Lord’s apartment last night?”

Eddie strode over and put a hand on each of Spode’s arms. His grip was like iron.

“What the hell’s eating you, Spode? Has something happened to Miriam?”

For a long minute Spode searched Eddie’s face without speaking.

“Damn it, man, answer me,” Eddie insisted.

“Eddie, you’re either a sight better actor than you are a detective or...”

“Spode,” Eddie said ominously, “you tell me what’s happened to Miriam before I sock you on the button.”

“She’s dead!”

Eddie made a sound like a fighter who’s been hit below the belt. For a moment he stood paralyzed, then he began methodically to put on his clothes.

“You’re a liar, Spode. She was all right at eleven o’clock last night.” His voice was cold and unnatural.

“So you were there ’til eleven, Eddie?”

“Yeah. And if this is somebody’s idea of a joke I’m still young enough to break an

Irishman’s jaw. Come on! Let’s go!”

She wailed with terror as his fingers closed.



IT WAS fifteen minutes by taxi to the Madrigal Apartments.

When they got off at the third floor they found Patrolman Cardigan on duty at number 317. Eddie brushed past Cardigan into the living room. He had a horrible empty feeling at the pit of his stomach. He heard Spode’s sarcastic voice behind him.

“In the *bedroom*, Mister Pell. Don’t you remember where you left the body?”

Eddie stepped through the bedroom door. The early sunlight streamed through the windows at the head of Miriam’s bed, turning her almost naked body, only partially hidden by the sheet, into a carven ivory statue. From the flat expanse of her stomach up to the moulded dresden china breasts, Eddie forced his stunned gaze.

Her lovely face was distorted, her eyes protruding as if she had died of strangulation. Around her neck was twined, in tight coils, the

long tentacles of the *Canibal Apacionada*.

“Hello, what’s this?” Spode strode by Eddie’s stunned figure to the side of the bed. “That wasn’t around her neck before. Cardigan! Cardigan! Who’s been in this room since I left here?”

“Not a soul, sergeant. I haven’t left the door for a minute.”

“Don’t give me that! Somebody’s been here and wrapped the murder weapon around her neck. It wasn’t there before. Mother of Saints! It’s moving! Is it moving or am I crazy?”

“Yes, Spode,” said Eddie quietly, thinking back to the night before. “It’s moving. It’s a cannibal plant. Don’t you see that it grows from that pot on the table?”

The tentacles were slowly uncoiling and when the last coil disengaged itself from the frail white neck, it began reaching out, tentatively, snake-like, searching for the live flesh that it seemed to sense was near.

Spode stood speechless, transfixed, until a tentacle with a swift movement flipped a greenish-grey coil around his thigh. Then with a strangled cry he leaped back, tearing at the vine with his hands.

The movement jerked the plant to the floor and broke the red clay pot into a dozen pieces. The earth around the plant scattered across the floor, exposing a mass of intertwined blood-colored roots.

“For God’s sake, what is it?” cried Spode, having finally disengaged the writhing tentacle.

EDDIE’S mind was still on the night before when Pearl had brought him the plant. He was thinking that this fate had been meant for *him*, not Miriam. His nostrils dilated and his mouth hardened as he spoke.

“That’s your killer, Spode. It’s a *Canibal Apacionada*, or Passionate Cannibal. It’s a rare plant from Yucatan.”

“Yea? How come you know so much

about it, Detective Pell?”

“I gave it to her.” Eddie was bending down and sniffing the soft earth that was scattered across the floor. It was damp from a recent watering. Carefully avoiding the searching tentacles of the plant, Eddie stood up and said softly to himself. “She remembered to water it at midnight.”

Eddie felt the round imprint of the muzzle against the small of his back even before Spode spoke.

“Put ’em up, Eddie! I was wondering how you were going to get rid of this Miriam. She was a regular. You stuck to her longer than any other bisquit you ever had.”

Eddie would have gone quietly if Spode hadn’t made that remark.

“O. K., sergeant, let’s get along to the station.” He moved slightly as if to turn toward the door. His right foot shot up and back, striking Spode a terrific blow in the groin.

At the same instant he pivoted and laid four knuckles on the button. Spode sighed and crumpled in a heap. Eddie caught the six-gun as it fell and whirled on Cardigan before the patrolman knew what was going on.

“Just take it easy, Cardigan, and you may be decorated for bravery. Make a move for your gat and you may be decorated with flowers.”

Cardigan gulped. “Sure, Mister Pell, whatever you say. I told Sergeant Spode you wasn’t guilty.”

“Well, thanks for the good word, Cardigan. Tell him again when he comes to. I’m afraid he won’t believe you, but tell him.”

“Yes, sir, Mister Pell! You rate pretty well with the department. Will you speak a good word for me to the captain?”

“Will I? And I’ll tell you how you can help me catch the real murderer.”

“How, sir?”

“When Sergeant Spode comes to, take the butt of your gun and sock him gently

behind the ear! See you later, Cardigan.”

EDDIE sprinted down the flights of stairs and slipped out a rear door of the Madrigal Apartments into the alley. At the end of the alley he hailed a taxi.

“Two-eleven Greenwich and give her the gun!” He flashed his badge.

As he jumped out of the cab in front of a two-story building he tossed the driver a buck. He looked at his watch. It was five minutes of eight.

“Won’t be up yet,” he said to himself as he climbed the flight of creaking carpeted stairs. At number 7 he knocked softly.

He heard a quick movement within and something that sounded like a gasp. Then he knocked again, more peremptorily. After a breathless pause a trembling voice said, “Yes?”

He said, “It’s Eddie.”

This time there was a smothered gasp and a longer pause.

“Eddie w-who?”

“Listen, baby, how many Eddie’s do you know?”

The door was flung suddenly open and two soft arms went around his neck. “Oh, Eddie Pell; it’s *you*! Oh-hhh, I’m so relieved. I didn’t sleep a wink all night!”

Eddie pressed her trembling body, hardly concealed by a filmy pink night gown, close to his own. A sweet, warm fragrance assailed his nostrils as she wriggled against him. Eddie looked down at her quivering white breasts.

“What were you worried about, baby?”

“Oh-h-hhh, about *you*, Eddie. I was so afraid something might happen to you and I love you so-o.”

“Nothing ever happens to Eddie, baby.”

“Did—did you forget to water the Passionate Cannibal, Eddie?”

“Yes, baby, I forgot. I’ll water it

tonight.”

“Oh—*don’t!* Just throw the nasty thing away! Eddie, hold me tight.”

IT WAS a long time before Eddie said, “Do you still want to kill me, baby?”

“Oh-hhh, *no-ooo*, Eddie. How could I?”

Eddie took the automatic from his shoulder holster and laid it on the table.

“If you want to kill me you’d better do it now, because it’s my duty to run you in for killing Miriam.”

“Is Miriam dead? ... I was so jealous I would have done it, Eddie ... but I didn’t.”

“You didn’t mean to, Pearl. You meant to kill me, but I gave the Passionate Cannibal to Miriam. When she watered it last night the water liberated the *Calaveric Monoxide* gas that you had mixed with the earth, and strangled her while she slept!”

“I’m so glad it was Miriam instead of you, Eddie.”

“Are you going to kill me, Pearl?”

“Of course not, Eddie.”

“Then get your clothes on, baby. I’ve got to run you in. Spode’s after me for the killing because I gave Miriam the plant. He thinks what you expected the police to think, if they had found *my* corpse this morning, that the *Canibal* choked her to death. It has to be you or me.”

Pearl threw herself seductively against Eddie’s tall, solid form.

“You wouldn’t really run me in, would you, Eddie?”

“It’s got to be *you or me*, baby.”

THE soft light of Pearl’s eyes changed suddenly to a yellow gleam. With a quick, cat-like movement she stepped back, picked up the automatic, and leveled it at Eddie’s stomach.

She spoke in a sharp, raucous voice, “No private dick can run me in, Eddie Pell!

How would you like a belly full of lead?"

"My! Such language from a lady!"

Her voice had an edge like chilled steel. "Eddie, you always were a stinker. You're a two-timing, double-crossing key-hole peeper. You're a yellow buzzard without guts. ... Somebody ought to kill you, and it might as well be me!"

Eddie said, "You couldn't shoot a man to his face. You'd put arsenic in his coffee or calaveric in his potted plants. I thought you were a lady and worth saving, but you're not. I'm going to take that gat away from you and run you in."

"You move one step, Eddie Pell, and I plug you."

"Plug away, baby; I take my lead standing up. Just keep in mind, sweet, that if you shoot, *you* go like Miriam did. You strangle to death. Eddie will die with his long, thin fingers clamped around your pretty neck!"

Eddie took one step forward.

"Stay where you are, Eddie!"

He took another step.

"I'll shoot!"

He took a third step.

A spit of pink flame licked at Eddie's stomach. Eddie grunted and took another step.

Pearl held her finger on the trigger and the pink flames drummed a rataplan at Eddie's body. Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-tat! Eddie put both hands against his stomach, as if to keep his guts from falling out. He took another step.

Pearl wailed with terror as Eddie's fingers reached up and closed relentlessly around her slim white neck. She dropped the empty gun and tore at his iron wrists with her fingers. She screamed out a blabber of words.

"Don't strangle me, Eddie! I'll go with you! I'll confess everything, Eddie! For God's sake, don't strangle me!!"

Eddie's fingers tightened inexorably. The words changed to gasps. Her eyes began to bulge and then, as if the spark of life had

suddenly gone out, her body became limp in his hands.

Eddie laid her fragile form gently on the floor and stood looking down at the lovely contours of her tiny, luscious figure. He rubbed his stomach absent-mindedly where the wadding from the blanks had stung his skin.

"I hated to fool you about the gat, baby, but you killed Miriam and you've got to pay for it some way."

She collapsed when he smacked her. The door opened and the policemen entered, guns drawn.



HE PICKED up the phone from the stand and dialed a number. After a minute he said, "This is Eddie Pell. Tell Spode I'm in room 7 at 211 Greenwich. Thanks."

As he turned around he smiled at Pearl's still figure and said, "Come out of it, possum. You're not dead and I know it."

Pearl sighed and moved one leg, then slowly, with a faint flutter opened her eyes. Gradually she got to her feet, being careful to expose as much of her glorious body as possible.

Eddie said, "You didn't think I'd fall for that old gag, did you?"

“Oh, Eddie, let me go! Don’t keep me here till Spode comes! Let me go!”

No answer.

“Eddie ... ?” Her voice was suppliant and seductive.

“Yeah?”

“Look....”

She had slipped one shoulder strap and let her filmy night gown fall half off, exposing her luscious pale torso. Then, lifting her arms she locked her hands behind her flame-colored hair. Her milk-white breasts rose with the movement, quivering alluringly like tea roses in a summer breeze.

“You’d better finish the dance, baby, because Spode is on his way.”

She moved toward him with a feline, tantalizing movement. He didn’t move.

He could catch the faint aromatic fragrance of her body as she pressed wet velvet lips against his mouth. Her molten tongue seeped between his lips and filled his lungs with fire. Still he didn’t move.

He clenched his fists, digging his fingernails into the palms of his hands.

“I can take it, baby. You’re wasting your time. And Spode is on the way.”

A single deep gasp came from the little figure as she stiffened against him. She spat one word into his ear like the hiss of a snake and sank her teeth into his neck. The blood spurted in a stream across her bare shoulder.

WITH a lightning, involuntary movement Eddie shot up his fist and struck the red-head a smack behind the ear. Instantly her chin dropped away from his jugular vein and she collapsed against the side of the bed. Eddie clapped a hand against his neck to stop the spurting blood.

A terrific pounding shook the door. Then, suddenly, it opened to reveal Spode and Cardigan, both with weapons drawn, crouching like bears ready to attack.

Spode said, “Will you go quietly, Eddie, or do I have to be rough!”

Eddie laughed, “I’ll go quietly, sergeant, if you’ll take along the killer.” He nodded his head towards Pearl’s inert body.

Spode’s jaw dropped. “Is she the killer?”

“Yes, sergeant, she’s the killer. When we get to headquarters I’ll draw you a diagram. Let’s go before Eddie loses another pail of blood.”

Spode was very business-like. “Cardigan, pick up the ... ah ... lady. There’ll be room enough in the squad car.”

Cardigan, bewildered, looked first at Pearl and then at Sergeant Spode.

Spode glared at him. “Throw a sheet around her, you ninny, and let’s get going!”

“Yeah,” Eddie grinned at Cardigan, “and be careful she doesn’t bite.”