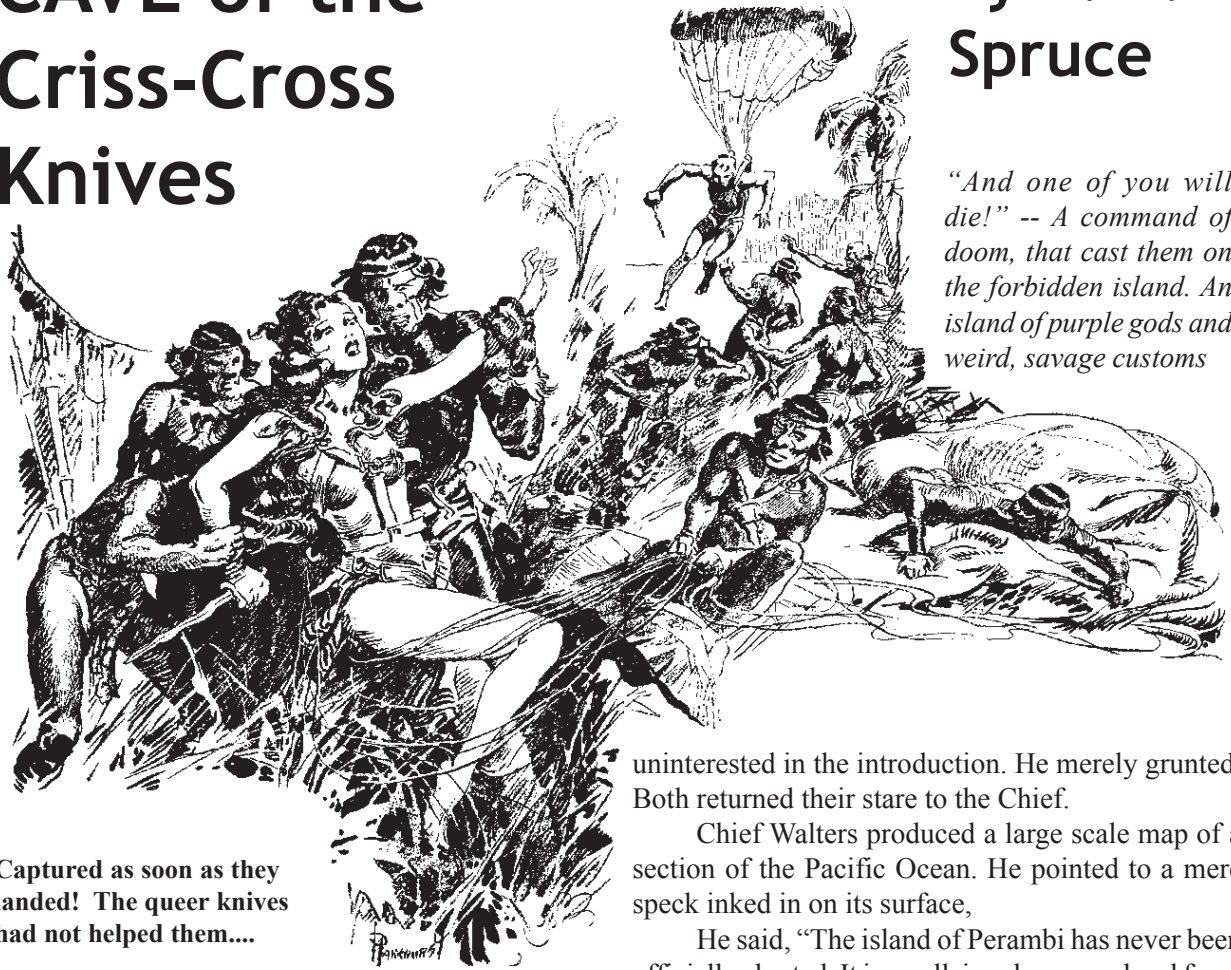


CAVE of the Criss-Cross Knives

By C. C.
Spruce



Captured as soon as they landed! The queer knives had not helped them....

LEGEND

“And one time, two of the lesser ones (deities) of the sunset, by a trick did imprison the Sun, the Flaming One himself, in order to carry out their plans. In his rage and in his captivity the Sun bellowed like the mad bull of Wahini. Then faithful followers gathered and released their Master, holding him until the act was completed. After which they released him and carried out his commands to cast the offending one into the sea, so that there might be no more than one of that race. . . .

“Thus shall his power be maintained and his followers find peace!”

“T-4, MEET R-8.”

The Chief of Secret Service in Manila introduced the two operatives standing before his desk. T-4, the woman, nodded her blonde head with a curt jerk. R-8, the man, was equally

“And one of you will die!” -- A command of doom, that cast them on the forbidden island. An island of purple gods and weird, savage customs

uninterested in the introduction. He merely grunted. Both returned their stare to the Chief.

Chief Walters produced a large scale map of a section of the Pacific Ocean. He pointed to a mere speck inked in on its surface,

He said, “The island of Perambi has never been officially charted. It is small, jungle covered and fever ridden. Decidedly volcanic, we have only the assurance of our scientists that it will not lose itself in the depth of the Pacific at any time. That, however, is beside the point for the present. You will notice its strategic position.”

T-4’s blonde head bumped with R-8’s red thatch as both bent forward. Neither noticed.

Walters noticed, and chuckled. He leaned back in his chair. “I’ve chosen you two for reasons I’ll divulge later. The existing situation at Perambi is this: Our government has, for some little time, maintained a fueling station on that island. Other powers doubtless knew of that, but by the right of first come first served, our two men had not been molested. That has changed. The bi-yearly cutter which took them supplies returned here some time ago. Both men are dead. The supply of gasoline and oil is gone. Some coal remains. There was no sign of any of the two dozen or so natives which had inhabited this island. The bodies

of the two men remained. The commander of the cutter took photographs, left two more men and returned for orders. Pleasant pictures they were too. Here, look." He pushed photographs across the desk.

The two operatives did as they were bid.

The photographs were clear, all too clear. The bodies of the two white men, nude, were stretched across a pile of coal. Their torsos had almost been severed from their legs. Through the gaping wound which stretched across their abdomens could be seen, the gleam of white bone. The back bone. The only thing which still held the bodies together.

"Those were the first two. There have been others. One man only has managed to survive between visits of the cutter, which by the way has been changed to bi-monthly."

T-4 and R-8 bent forward again.

Walters went on. "But that man was insane. His hair had turned white. His talk was for the most part gibberish. Yet every word was taken down. From those fragments we have pieced together a plan of action—your orders!"

The man and woman picked up the two sealed envelopes Walters pushed across to them.

THE Secret Service chief went on, "We have studied every inch of that island by airplane. When you read your orders, please remember that they are the result of careful study and deduction. Here are two more packets for you. They contain dyes with which to stain your bodies. Here are the only weapons you will be able to take with you."

T-4 and R-8 stared at the two razor sharp wavy blades. The knives were about fourteen inches long and all but two inches of that was blade. The handle of each was only a circular band of metal, resembling the thumb hole on a pair of scissors.

Walters stood up. "I suggest that you two read your orders together. I don't think I need tell you about the danger of your mission." The Chief held out both hands. The operatives each placed a palm in his. Walters shook those hands. "The only way I can express what I am thinking is to say—that right at this moment I am shaking hands with at least one person—who will soon be dead!"

ONCE outside and on the street the two operatives underwent a distinct change. R-8, the red-headed man, slouched along as if he had no cares in the world.

The competent woman T-4 changed into a clinging vine, as far as outward appearances were concerned.

The man said, "Pleasant sort of chap—the chief. So cheerful." He kept his voice low. "Shall we go to my room?"

"Why not?" T-4 replied. "And by the way—you might tell me your name. If we have to work together—" She didn't finish the sentence but the man got the impression that she disliked the idea of working with anyone.

"And here I was just beginning to like you! Oh, all right. I might as well confess. I joined the Secret Service just to get a number and numeral instead of a name and now the hateful secret comes to light. My name—" he hesitated.

"Well." T-4's voice was a bit out of keeping with her clinging role.

"My name—is Toridzone Kinley. Now go on, laugh and then tell me yours."

The woman did laugh! "Where on earth did you get such a name?"

"I was born on a boat," Kinley said with mock misery. "Just as it was crossing the equator. I guess my parents had a sense of humor. What's your name?"

"Lilandra Sweeney," T-4 said firmly. She added, "I guess it's your turn to laugh now."

The man did chuckle. He said "I wonder if that's why the chief chose us to work together? Really, two people with names like ours shouldn't be allowed to live!"

She said sweetly, "But it is a shame for such a name as Toridzon Kinley to end with your early death—"

He smiled languidly. "Nice."

"Suppose we get to work?" She snapped.

Kinley's room proved to be a small house on the outskirts of town. Its untidy state spoke of the complete absence of servants, but neither man nor woman paid any attention to that. They were both too interested in their orders.

First, they read the complete ravings of the man who had lived—and who had become insane. Certain words and phrases were repeated in that exact record: "The gods are purple—cave of the criss-cross knives—clearing in the jungle—coal is an altar—purple gods from the sunset—clothes are taboo—Poor Winton, he touched coal—the criss-cross knives—the criss-cross knives—poor Winton—saved by a sun-bath—purple gods—" There was much more of the



More horrible than the medicine man's preparations was the sacrifice itself!

same. The name "Peretti" was repeated again and again.

Kinley whistled. "Peretti! Do you know him, Lilandra Sweeney?"

She shrugged with impatience at his use of her

name. "Of course. Paid spy for whoever will give him his price. He used to be with Japan. A smart, cunning operative. And rather handsome.

"You would think of that last," the man said. "Let's read our orders."

WALTERS' commands were brief, yet explicit. "Be at the government air-field tomorrow just before dawn with your bodies stained purple. You will find the dye in the packet. Your hair too must be purple but that and the staining of your faces may be attended to in the plane which will fly over Perambi just at sunset. You will strap on the two purple parachutes and jump from the plane. You will land in the clearing which our air-men have discovered near the center of the island. Your weapons—the knives—you already have. Your apparel will be of the scantiest. I leave that to your own discretion, The man who was saved had on only a pair of shorts. The enclosed picture is of the remains of Winston. You will not touch coal. You will find "Peretti," discover for whom he is working, and destroy him. A cutter with fuel, two new men, and supplies will stand by the island—just out of sight. When you have completed your mission, signal the cutter by a single smoke fire." There was no signature.

Kinley pushed one hand through his red hair. He whistled softly through his teeth. "I get it," he muttered. "You and I are just a god and goddess—and purple at that—descending from the clouds on a few dozen ignorant natives. 'Destroy Peretti!' That's quite an order. It's been tried before." He sighed, "Oh well—I've always wanted someone to look up to me!"

The woman sniffed disdainfully. She opened her packet of dye. She read the directions and moistened the powder with water. She pulled her dress off over her head.

She said without turning around, "Well, we might as well get this first part over with. You better smear some dye on my back." She added, "I'm glad I have long hair—even if it does have to be purple!"

Toridzone Kinley was accustomed to sudden death in all manner of forms. He wasn't quite as hardened to sudden life.

When T-4, otherwise Lilandra Sweeney, pulled that simple dress from her body she slipped completely from the role of a Secret Service operative. Any part but that of "woman" fell from her.

And remember, she kept her back to the man!

Her body was vibrantly alive. The soft white flesh of her neck and shoulders, was divided from the sweep of her back by a scanty line of lace that hooked together in the sweet hollow made by her spine. A pair of sheer silk step-ins only partially covered her boyish hips. Boyish? Perhaps supple

would be a better adjective. Yet that word brings up an image of hardness. There was nothing hard about T-4 now.

She had the deceiving appearance of the sleek softness of a tiger. Beautiful—yet dangerous.

Her shapely legs were encased in high chiffon stockings that ended a few inches below the step-ins. Far enough to disclose an enticing stretch of gleaming flesh.

Kinley gulped. He reached one hand for a dab of the paste-like purple dye, He felt as if he were defiling some deity as his unwilling fingers spread a purple smear across the white expanse of one smooth shoulder. With the contact—his hands were unwilling no longer. He said slowly, "You'd better take off the—the—brassiere. After all you don't want a strip of white showing."

The woman reached deft hands around. She unhooked the flimsy bit of lace.

How could she know that a man's man like Kinley had a mirror in the house? How could she know that it was directly in *front* of her?

She might have been unaware, but the man never forgot that unveiling!

He saw rounded breasts, standing out firm and white against the prevailing purple of the rest of her skin. He saw—well, he saw enough to make his hands falter in their task of daubing purple dye on velvety skin! He had to bite his lips to keep back a command to stop as the woman's fingers spread more dye, kneading it into the yielding resiliency of her snowy breasts.

She faced him at last.

"You'd better take off your shirt," she said.

"For tomorrow—we may die," his lips formed the words. He bent over and kissed her.

Not until he felt her hands pressing against him did he relent in the fierce pressure.

He took off his shirt—let her smear on the coloring.

WHEN they reached the airport the next dawn, they were calling each other "Tod and Lill."

SEEN from the air, the island of Perambi didn't look like much. Just a small darker speck in the broad expanse of the Pacific.

The pilot cut the motor. The plane began a graceful descent.

He swung the struggling form overhead and plunged to the brink of the cliff.



Tod and Lill stripped off their flying clothes. Their faces shone purple in the strong sunset light. They strapped on their parachutes.

Tod Kinley saw now why the woman was thankful for her long hair. She tucked the purple

strands into the belt of her 'chute. It outlined and concealed the curve of her breasts.

The pilot said, "There's the clearing. Kick open the trap. Jump when I give the word. Count ten and pull the rip-cord. Get ready—"

The plane circled closer to land. The man and woman could see the clearing in the center of the tangled jungle growth of the island. They managed a smile at each other. They both held the bare blades of the wavy knives in their left hands, in their right was clutched the ring of the parachute release.

"Jump!" said the pilot suddenly.

One after the other they plunged through the opening in the floor of the plane and into space!

Only a few minutes later, Kinley used his knife to cut loose from his chute. He raced across the clearing to the spot where Lill had landed. The fading

sunlight made the purple of her parachute and of her supple body take on a livid shade. He reached her side, helped her cut away from the purple, flattened mass.

“You O. K.?” he asked.

“O. K.,” she returned. “And now what?” She laughed nervously. “*We* are here anyway. You know—I think we’re the only living persons on this island!”

R-8 spoke. “Wrong as usual. Why don’t you look around?”

The woman looked when he pointed with his knife. She made out the swarthy forms of crouching natives. She made out the gleam of scant light from wavy steel. She stared around a small circle. She realized they were surrounded.

Kinley slipped his arm around her. For an instant he pulled her close to him. “Put your back to mine!” he demanded. “Hold the blade of your knife to the front. We’ll put up a fight anyway!”

When this maneuver was completed the natives stopped advancing but held their circle. A wizened old man stepped from the ranks. He spoke in English. “Come,” he said.

Tod caught his companion’s arm. “Don’t move—yet,” he cautioned in a voice that could not be heard beyond a few feet.

They stood as still as statues. He could feel her smooth skin, warm, vibrant, against his bare back.

The old native spoke then—in some strange gibberish. He pointed. Tod Kinley relaxed.

“I guess we might as well go now,” he said. “But wait just a second.”

Lill stopped. She had to clench her teeth when her companion burst out into a shrill screaming roar that penetrated to the depths of the jungle and echoed back to them threefold.

“East Side, West Side, All Around the Town!” Those were the words of the man’s shout.

THE natives retreated a little. They seemed more respectful—but they still beckoned and pointed.

“Let—let’s go to their party,” the woman suggested.

He held out his arm. They followed together.

In the ensuing short walk Tod explained in a whisper, “Someone had taught them that English word. If we had moved when they said ‘Come’ we wouldn’t be alive now. Did you notice their knives?”

“Yes,” came the soft answer. But where do we

go from here?”

Before the man could venture any opinion the strange party came to a yawning hole in the earth.

Once again the old native who was leader spoke at length. He pointed again.

Tod said softly and soberly, “I recognize a few words of that dialect. A dialect that has not been used for many hundreds of years. We might as well go down~ We might as well go into this hole—which is called ‘The Cave Of The Criss-Cross Knives’!”

The woman showed her courage by humming a few bars of “The Song Of The Islands” as they stepped down into total blackness.

Tod’s arm was around her. His fingers closed automatically around the softness of one breast that was enshrined in the long purple of her hair.

They went down a rude flight of stone stairs together. The blades of their wavy knives pierced the dark before them.

Both man and woman were counting those steps in an undertone. Not until they had reached one hundred and eighty-nine, did the path level out. Even then there was a walk of several minutes, made long by the almost total blackness, before the tunnel widened into a lighted amphitheater.

The small party stopped at a brusque command from the ancient leader.

That one, apparently a medicine man or witch doctor, shouted one phrase in the strange dialect,

Tod translated, softly, “He says—the purple gods come!”

“I know.” Lill returned impatiently. “You aren’t the only one who has studied ancient Polynesian dialects—and customs—of these natives,”

Neither had time to carry on that line of talk. They both had eyes only for the spectacle of that underground cavern.

Nature can be prodigal with her beauties, no matter in what part of the earth they may be found.

That cavern was immense. It stretched beyond mere eyesight. Stalagmites and stalactites echoed and reflected the light of strangely perfumed torches stuck in stone sockets on the walls.

THE band proceeded down a worn path in the midst of this subterranean grandeur. Dwarfed by the magnificence of the sight, Lill and Tod walked together. Their bodies seemed to merge into one as they sought the comfort of another person who knew

and had felt the outside world. Still their strange wavy bladed knives were held before them.

Neither of them spoke.

The cavern narrowed slightly. More torches filled the notches on the walls and shed their flickering light. Weird growths reflected, that light in hitherto unseen and therefore unbelievable colors.

Tod almost stepped on the first prostrate native before he saw him. The members of the capturing party fell on their faces. For a second both man and woman felt a leap of joy in their hearts.

They believed—momentarily—that the natives were making obeisance to them.

That idea passed all too soon. Unless these folk had strange ideas of reverence, they were faced wrong. Tod and Lill could see only waving, undulating ranks of posteriors. They raised their eyes and looked ahead.

The woman's deep drawn breath of astonishment made her firm breast push out the strong fingers of Tod's encircling hand.

The cavern ended abruptly.

A HUGE, glittering pile of black, loomed up at that end. The steady drip of water could be heard. Water—that seeped slowly over the pile of coal and transformed it in torch light with a gem-like sheen.

Neither Tod nor Lill spared more than one glance at that pile. Both their minds formed the word "altar." They both stared then at the figure of the purple man sitting to the right of the pile.

That man smiled.

Lill pulled her arm from around Tod. She stuffed her fingers into her mouth to keep back a hysterical giggle.

That bizarre figure was seated on a Standard Oil gasoline tin!

Tod and Lill said together "Peretti!"

Peretti smiled again but he did not get up. He intoned in a loud voice, "Three blind mice, three blind mice, three blind mice."

Tod said, "Eenie meenie miney mo and nuts to you Peretti!"

Peretti lapsed into English—that is into meaningful English. "Welcome to my parlor! Won't you two come and sit down beside me? Sit beside me and help rule my kingdom. See—I have a place of honor for you—here on the sacred pile of coal!"

The man and woman did not move. They remembered the warning contained in Walter's orders.

"Do not touch coal!"

Tod said, "Why don't you quit this foolishness, Peretti? Come on, let's get out of here. My comrade and I will give you permission to leave. We'll even guarantee you safety. Your game is finished. You see—we carry the wavy bladed knives." He gesticulated with his weapon. Lill followed suit.

Peretti laughed again.

Tod Kinley hadn't expected his bluff to work, but he was hardly prepared for swiftness of the disaster which followed.

Peretti gestured languidly. He spoke in the strange dialect.

Before Tod's mind could form a meaning to the words, natives swarmed over him. They held his arms, his legs, his ankles, thighs and wrists. Even at the moment he thought there was a certain amount of reverence in the natives' grasp. But one tentative wriggle convinced him of the uselessness of struggle. He still held the knife, even though he had no chance to use it. With an effort he managed to turn his head toward the woman. She was held similarly—yet even more carefully.

Peretti grinned mirthlessly. He spoke again. The two captives were pulled to one side.

Tod's scanty knowledge of the dialect brought him the one horrid word "Sacrifice." He tried to struggle then. Tried, and wisely desisted when he felt the strength of the hands that still held him.

Wild screams echoed through the cavern. Yells of complete, unmitigated horror, that was beyond the pale word, fear.

Tod recognized the struggling woman who was being dragged toward the pile of coal as a half-caste, a composite of the races in the islands. He began to struggle again.

Peretti turned his purple stained countenance toward Kinley. He grinned sardonically.

Something about that smile stopped Tod. Stopped him with his bare arms still bent in muscle disclosing arcs. Tod waited—and watched.

Only a knowledge of the futility of struggle kept him quiet during the scene that followed:

THE nude, howling woman was pushed onto the coal altar. Arms and hands were fastened until she was spread-eagled across the pile.

Peretti spoke then, a short gruff sentence. He reached behind the oil can on which he was seated

and produced what appeared to be a single bladed, wavy knife.

The natives prostrated themselves at the sight of that strange blade. Only the weather-beaten medicine man advanced. There was a trace of fear even in his movement. Fear—that is—until the double handle of the knife rested in his gnarled palm.

Still another happening made this bizarre sacrifice border on the humorous. Peretti reached over and made a motion with one hand. The hand was hidden behind a stalagmite—but the results were noticeable.

A phonograph began playing. The record was cracked. At its every circuit a “crock” spoke of the split. A bar-room tenor started the words—

“When dames wore hoops and powdered hair
And very strict was etiquette
When men were brave and ladies fair
They danced the graceful Minuette.”

There was nothing funny about that for the natives. They began a dance, keeping time to the words with a rising chant.

The medicine man held the curved knife above the victim’s heaving abdomen. The song ended. The dance died away into the hush of expectation.

The knife plunged down suddenly.

There was only one scream that pushed up the half-caste woman’s quivering breasts.

There was a long drawn “Ahhhhhhhhhh” from the natives. Inconsistently, Tod was reminded of a time when he was a boy watching fireworks on the fourth of July. That “Ahhhhh!” had greeted each burst of a sky-rocket. . . .

The priest was bending over his victim, whose face had assumed the taut expression of the half-dead. The thumbs of his two hands hooked in the double circle of the knife handle. He pulled. A huge gaping split appeared. The knife pulled clear. The “Sacrifice’s” torso was completely severed with the exception of the white backbone! No longer did the wavy knife seem one blade. Instead it looked like a huge pair of scissors distended, scissors with the cutting edge on the outside of the blade!

For Tod Kinley at least the rest of the proceeding was lost in the haze of partial unconsciousness, as an excited captor struck him on the head.

HE heard again the sound of voices, two voices. They were coming—from a great distance. He—would listen—

“But, Mr. Peretti, I still don’t understand. I don’t see how you did all this with the few natives.”

Then Peretti’s voice replied, “There’s no reason for such a good looking woman as yourself to bother her head with such things. Why don’t you be—natural?”

“Oh—Mr. Peretti—” That was Lill’s voice cooing.

“Why don’t you call me by my first name?”

“But I don’t know it.”

“Arturo. Why not call me Art?”

“But—Art,” she said shyly. “I—I don’t know whether I ought to call a deity by his first name. It sounds almost like sacrilege.”

“Even when I sit on a Standard Oil can?” the man laughed.

“Even then—you have something about you.”

“It must be this purple dye I’m wearing. Why not give us a kiss?”

“Why not?” said Lill. There was a sound that told of the granting of that favor. “Please—Art,” Lill said then.

The man’s laugh was husky now.

Toridzone Kinley pulled himself from the stone bench where he had been lying, struggled to get to his feet. Nearly complete darkness made his footing doubly treacherous. One shaft of light burnt through the black. Tod weaved toward it. His right hand was knotted around the knife which he still retained. His body stopped forcibly at the contact with stone. He had to content himself with looking out a narrow, grated window.

Lill, still clothed only in a brief loin cloth, was sitting beside Peretti. From the position of the two people, Tod could guess what had gone before. His growl of rage was too heart-felt to be articulate.

Lill said, “But I still want to know—Art! I want to know who you’re working for and why you did this thing.” Only her innocent tone of voice made the blunt question possible.

Peretti looked at her suspiciously nevertheless. “How did you happen to get into this?” he demanded.

Lill giggled. Tod was shocked at that sound. He wouldn’t have believed it possible. But he heard rightly. Lill giggled!

“Well,” she said. “You see—I had just met



As Peretti made love to the girl, Tod Kinley let out a bellow of rage and tore at the bars.

letting me put on any more clothes than this. He tied on a parachute. When we got over this island he pushed me out. You know the rest.”

Lill looked at Peretti archly. “Now you tell me,” she requested.

Tod—you know, the man I came with. He came home—that is, he came to see me one evening and said he had to go on a trip. He swore he wouldn’t leave me behind. He—he pulled off my clothes and smeared me with this purple stuff. I—I guess he was half crazy. He made me get in a plane with him without

PERETTI laughed. “All right. After that. I guess I might as well tell my story. I have only one thing in this world to sell—my services. Various countries have seen fit to bid for them for special missions. I command a high price!” His lips that would have been red but for the dye twisted sardonically. “At any rate I was offered a certain sum by a certain nation to do a

certain thing.”

Lill smiled up at him. “You sound so—so vague,” she protested.

“Perhaps. Well, I’ll be more explicit. My duty, or my assignment, was to break up the hold of the United States on this bit of an island. I made a visit here. I talked to the natives. I discovered that they were a remnant of a lost tribe. I copied down the sound of some of their words. I went back to—the certain country and spent a year in research. I found a musty book at last. It was filled with strange legends of a forgotten race. It even held a few of their words—words that appeared to correspond with those I had copied down. Armed with those words and legends I came back. And now—now I am a purple god and have accomplished my mission. Don’t you think so, Miss Member of the United States Secret Service?”

Tod Kinley’s hands clenched. He was startled by this sudden unmasking of Lill. Goodness knows he had thought her story thin enough, but he had hoped . . .

The woman said calmly, “So you didn’t believe me. Well—what are you going to do about it?”

Peretti was taken aback by her lack of denial. “Well—well—Nothing, I guess,” he said at last. He looked at Lill again.

She had pushed aside a part of her long hair. One firm, darkly gleaming breast peered out. A breast that could not lose its rounded beauty for all of the disfiguring dye.

“What have you done with—him?” she asked.

Peretti gestured with one hand toward the stone cell which held Kinley. “He’s in there, all right except for a sock on the head. That is—he’s all right so far. Probably still unconscious, but all right. He’ll be all right until he recovers and tries to find his way out: Then he’ll fall in the pit!”

The pit?

Tod held onto the grating and explored the floor with one foot. He had to reach out quite a way before that foot failed to find footing. Cold sweat stood out suddenly on Kinley’s forehead. He forced himself to pay attention to the talk. The woman was keeping her head! He must do the same. Beside the talk of “legends of a forgotten race” had touched his memory. He had studied the weird legends of the Pacific islands. He knew them. That was one of the reasons he had been chosen for this mission. Was it not reasonable that Lill had been chosen too for her similar

knowledge? That legend of the lesser god and goddess—lesser to the Sun the all powerful—the ones who had disobeyed—?

But Lill was talking again. “You say you learned the legends?”

Peretti’s white teeth looked out of place as his purple lips wrinkled back in the almost perpetual smile. “All of them?” he echoed. “No. Of course not. Just enough to work on the natives’ superstition, just enough so I could land as a purple god and make them do what I wanted. ‘Purple of the sunset,’” he finished suggestively.

Lill nodded. The movement of her head uncovered that enticing breast still further. “I know about that of course. That’s the reason for our dyeing our skins. Didn’t you read about the part where there was a goddess as well as a god?”

PERETTI looked worried for a minute. “No,” he admitted. He smiled then. One of his hands reached out and captured the treasure his eyes had been caressing for some time.

Even to Tod came the sound of Lill’s sharply in-drawn breath. The man cursed silently. He cursed in a whisper when Peretti bent down and kissed Lill’s lips.

Peretti said, “Well—you’ve supplied that lack now. That is—if you’re willing to talk—business with me?”

Lill’s voice was so low Tod had to strain his ears to catch the words—“I’m willing to talk business—or anything else with you—Art—You and I will be the purple rulers of this island—together!”

Those words brought the rest of the shadowy legend to Toridzone Kinley. But he forgot all that in the spectacle that followed. He forgot everything and roared like a mad bull!

Peretti was not bashful. Neither was he the sort of man who would let a little thing like strands of hair and a miniature girdle stand in his way. From the first kiss, he progressed rapidly.

And Tod knew he had good reason to progress! The captive agent recalled the thrill, the ecstasy he had had when Lill’s little pointed tongue had explored the opening between his lips! Any man would forget—almost anything when Lill kissed him—when Lill arched her warm, pulsing body toward him—when Lill—

Neither man nor woman looked up as Tod began

his bellowings of rage and disappointment.

Tod had forgotten the legends. He had forgotten he was a trusted member of the United States Secret Service. He had forgotten everything but that one too brief night with Lill. That, and the spectacle of her giving herself to another man!

He hardly knew when his dim cage was lit with many torches. He scarcely felt the restraining hands that kept him from hurling himself into the now visible pit. Toridzone Kinley yelled out his rage and disappointment. He would not look out of the narrow grated window again.

The natives who held him looked—and grunted their approval!

HOURS, or minutes were clouded by the delirium of his unforgetting rage.

He remembered, but took no joy, from the time when his cell door was opened, when he and he alone was called upon to judge the fate of Peretti and Lill who were captives now. He saw the woman's enigmatic smile. He saw Peretti's still challenging grin. He said the words he remembered from the legend.

"Let the man be stripped and cast into the sea!"

The glee of the natives at the prophetic and correct words echoed through the cavern. The scene shifted rapidly. Tod was dragged along, willy-nilly. They came at last from the underground passage, marched along a high promontory that strode out into the depths of the ocean.

Peretti still smiled as hard hands stripped him, spilled a hidden automatic from his scanty coverings. He grinned once as two husky natives swung his unresisting body—"A little knowledge is a dangerous—" The words were cut off as the natives hurled him into space.

Kinley watched his arching fall. He saw the writhings of the man's body. He saw Peretti strike feet first in a huge swell!

He shook his head and looked around. With the exception of Lill, he was alone on that wind swept out thrust of rock.

"Well," Lill said calmly. "I guess that's that. I guess we've accomplished our mission. We have

destroyed Peretti, and we know who hired him."

Tod Kinley shook himself. The ocean air was good—and clean. It swept away the hate torn fragments of thoughts from his mind. He muttered, "How—do we know who hired him?" His eyes were still focused on the ocean—on the Spot where Peretti had disappeared.

"Silly," said Lill. "You and I know the one library in the world where the 'musty' book containing that legend can be found. That legend—'*And one time two of the purple ones, lesser deities of the sunset, by a trick did imprison the Sun, the Flaming One himself, in order to—er—carry out their plans. In his rage and in his captivity the Sun bellowed like the mad bull of Wahini. Then faithful followers gathered and released their Master, holding him until the act was completed. After which they released him and carried out his commands to cast the offending one into the sea—so that there might be no more than one of that race. Thus shall his power be maintained and his followers find peace.*'"

The man tried to think only of the great library belonging to a certain great nation, in which that legend had been found. He said suddenly, "He—he came up—! He's swimming!" He bent over and picked up the automatic. It blasted down into the water, raising miniature geysers until Lill caught his hand.

"Why—why do that?" she asked. "He—he can't swim to—to the Philippines."

Tod looked at her. "You worried?" he asked.

"Not particularly—if you'll walk along this cliff and down onto—the dark beach with me. That is—after we build a single smoke fire!"

Tod Kinley, sometimes known as R-8, looked at his companion in this adventure. In the light of the setting sun, her lithe figure glowed like burnished bronze. The jutting cones of her lovely breasts rose and fell with each breath—then trembled slightly as she dropped her eyes before his gaze. He turned away and stared down into the darkening waters. There was no dark head visible.

"At your service, Lill," he snapped. "As soon as I build the fire!"