

"BLACK ORCHIDS" by F. V. W. MASON

CHAPTER XVI

...a terrestrial rocket, Ian's car... to the summit of a hill and... that vantage his hot eyes be-... sprawling white houses of... an lying far below.

...the straight, white road he... see the headlights of a car... ing, dancing, like those of an... noble that is driven at head-... pace. Something told him that... er Bobkline had taken alarm... was dashing at top speed for... lane which would bear him to...

...e wonder man at the wheel... ed in despair. . . . After all he... lost. No human effort could... that gap of three kilometers... the Russian got to Hatvan... with that stubborn unwilling-... of his kind to call quits until... at effort has been made, Ian... forward, praying Bobkline's... might break down, might blow... re—anything to prevent his... ing the plane in time. But at... time he knew that such... nient miracles, rarely, if ever... red.

...re and more indistinct became... outline of the road, until the ef-... to focus the reeling headlong... scape became tremendous. How... he was—and how weak, the car... had become slippery with... All he knew was that Bob-... must not reach that plane—... not escape to ruin not only the... of Ilya and Leonard, but his... and Lolita's as well.

...rushed Ian's car. At the top... little rise Ian saw he had... ed on the other, but not... gh to catch it before Batvan... reached.

...black curtain seemed to mo-... arily obscure the driver's star-... eyes and instinctively his foot... the accelerator. Great God, he... have lost a lot of blood he had... set gone under that time. Hell!... speed had dropped a good... ty kilometers an hour. He... ed rather than saw that Lolita... peering at him; then he skid-... around a corner and saw Hat-... still a good kilometer away. To... fight lay a wide and apparently... field across which could be... the jolting lights of the other... which must have turned at the

village and was now traveling at right angles to him. While Ian made a desperate effort to clear his head, Bobkline's car swung around a little curve. Its lights, striking ahead, momentarily revealed in a meadow the outline of a large yellow and black monoplane, the propeller of which was turning over lazily.

It was an open job, Ian saw, a four-seater warmed up and ready for quick take-off. Towards it Bobkline's car was now dashing at top speed, lucky he could not know his pursuers were only a girl and a badly wounded man.

Sommoning all his will-power, Ian determined on a final gamble to retrieve a struggle which seemed doomed to hopeless defeat. He could never come up with the Russian if he followed the road through Hatvan, but if he took a chance and cut blindly across the field—well, there was a chance in a thousand he could stop Bobkline's escape and the disaster attendant upon it. Accordingly he braked the car viciously, wrenched the wheel to the right and, plunging wildly off the road started across the field.

Though his present speed was comparatively slow, yet he nevertheless was gaining, for Bobkline's car had run along two sides of a triangle and he was taking a short cut. Yes, it would be damned close, but there was a faint possibility that he could get to that monoplane in time to shoot it out with the Russian. Every jolt of the car sent searing bars of pain through his wounded shoulder and all the world seemed very queer and unreal. He must have lost a lot of blood.

Ah! The interval between his car and the swaying limousine had narrowed to a hundred yards or so, he was winning the converging race on the plane—winning freedom, love and honor for Leonard. When he could distinguish the passengers in the pursued car, his left hand fumbled for the pistol on the seat beside him, but just as his fingers closed over the butt, the two-seater slowed disasterously, its wheels digging hub-deep into soft loam which was no doubt watered by an underground spring. Furiously, he wrenched the driving wheel right and left. It was appalling, maddening, how the car lost speed through great clods of earth were spewed out by the spinning tires and the engine whined like a leashed hound.

It was sickening, unbearable, to see how the other car now forged on while Ian's slowed, skidding crazily and carried on only by its

momentum. With the pitiless and icy fingers of despair squeezing his heart, Ian, through a mist of pain, beheld the other car turn triumphantly into the meadow beyond the road, its jolting lights revealing the yellow and black monoplane to the last detail. He could even see the be-goggled pilot standing in his cockpit and beckoning frantically.

All at once the wheels of Ian's car hit firm ground again and lurched forward like a spurred thoroughbred. Too late, the race was lost. Ian, furious, saw the other car halt and watched two figures, one short and round, desert it to sprint across the ground towards the monoplane.

Forward in a magnificent burst of speed surged Ian's machine, but through the driving wheel his failing eyes beheld the two fugitives in the act of clambering hastily into the forward cockpit.

Risking broken springs, he drove the two-seater at full tilt across the road from Hatvan, just as the monoplane commenced to roll forward. Disjoined impressions were all Ian had now. A great V of headlight-illuminated turf—a streak of yellow-red flame shooting from the monoplane's exhaust—Lolita smiling bravely in the face of defeat. There was the plane. He must stop it! Cripple it before it could rise. Had he speed enough to overtake and ram it before it could rise? A thousand mad voices yelled that he had not—but he would make a try. "Get down!" he yelled to the girl beside him. "On the floor! Going to smash!"

Grimly determined, Ian set his jaw and drove his car like a gray lance to head of the speeding monoplane, perhaps to force it into a low stone wall to the right. Mechanically he gauged his speed and the plane's and knew it was too late even for that. Sick with futile despair, he saw the aeroplane's tail commence to bounce, the skid raising little puffs of dust. Hell! They would take off any moment now.

He pressed home the accelerator and drove straight at the taxiing plane which yet lacked enough speed to rise. Through staring and glazed eyes he glimpsed the monoplane's ailerons and elevators just in front of the radiator cap—could he catch them?

The next instant he drove through the aeroplane's tail amid a blinding, crashing confusion of shorn yellow and black fabric and snapping wires. Past his head whirled a mass of canvas and wires, a staggering yellow wing and then,

SOMETHING ALL CAN DO



M. A. Dunning cartoon courtesy of Assoc. (L) Stamps.

fighting to retain consciousness, he jerked his foot from the accelerator and blindly snatched for the emergency brake, his attention riveted on the Russian's plane.

Short of its after fuselage and equilibrium, the yellow and black monoplane was lurching drunkenly, grotesquely. Then, all at once, it nosed violently over and turned a disastrous series of somersaults that ripped off the wings and crumpled the cockpit into shapeless wreckage. There sounded a deafening report when the mass settled and from beneath the engine cowl burst a blinding sheet of white hot flame.

That much Ian saw and then commenced to slip into the black abyss of unconsciousness—but his descent was checked; above him was the beloved face of Lolita, infinitely tender of expression. Gently her arms went about him to draw him back.

"We've won, darling—" he gasped faintly. For ourselves and Leonard—I'm glad now—Crane said he'd live—it's terrible how much Ilya loves him."

Her head bent close, bringing with it a suggestion of Black Orchids perfume.

"Leonard? Live?—I do not understand. But, Ian, my darling, I

do know we have survived."

With incredible speed the plane roared into a vast torch, in the heart of which Ian and the horrified girl glimpsed a few briefly moving figures.

"How—how terrible!" Lolita choked.

"Terrible but necessary," Ian gasped. "Come on, we've got to get away from here."

But he was too weak, and it was the girl who guided the big auto—still mobile despite the recent crash—away from the hissing inferno.

Your paper, sir." A valet hurried into the room. "This is the first edition I could find."

"Give it to me," said Lolita von Waldeck. "Monsieur is very tired."

"Yes, Madame." And the hotel valet smiled to himself as if the remark were unnecessary. After all, who was he to think things if a lovely young woman and a handsome young man appeared in the early morning demanding a room and with no more luggage than a big car?

With a faint swish of her long skirts, Lolita crossed to the bed, upon the pillow of which Ian Gray's face made a rugged brown blot.

"It—is it there?" he demanded. "Yes. Oh—Oh, thank heaven,

they suspected nothing! It would cost you your career if it were even breathed that you killed Bobkline and the others, even though they were monsters."

A silence fell in the pleasant little bedroom and the clip-clop of a horse's hoofs on the street outside sounded very loud. Lolita drew a long breath and straightened the newspaper.

"Listen to this, my beloved: FATAL CRACK-UP NEAR HATVAN

The remains of an unidentified plane were discovered by two gendarmes late last night. Police inspectors state that the plane was of German construction and that it apparently crashed in the act of taking off. Identification of plane's four passengers is impossible, and as yet no one has appeared to make inquiry concerning them.

"No one saw us," Ian said and heaved a sigh of relief. "Bobkline's car must have rushed on as soon as he was dropped."

"Yes, dear, we are safe . . . for present, at least. No inquiry may ever be made. You see, I know Soviet methods." Infinitely tender of expression, she bent above him and gently her arms crept about his neck. "Oh, Ian—"

"We've won, I'm sure, darling!" he cried and felt the strength flow back into him.

"Yes, Ian, darling, we have won

Haywood 4-H Club Plan Achievement Day On Saturday, Feb. 14

The 4-H clubs of Haywood county will hold their Achievement Day program at the court house on Saturday, Feb. 14th, beginning at 10:00 o'clock. All members are urged to attend and take part, and the public is cordially invited to visit the group.

TRANSACTIONS IN Real Estate (As Recorded to Monday Noon Of This Week)

- East Fork Township
J. B. Watts, et ex, to L. V. Kohler.
- Jonathan Creek Township
F. M. Davis, et ux, et al, to W. P. Boyd.
- Waynesville Township
J. P. Francis, et al, to Charlie Grasty, et ux.

—each other—to be sure." Lolita—the Lady of the Black Orchids—smiled. "And that is greater than any diplomatic triumph." The air seemed heavy with orchidees noires. (THE END.)

High Cash Prices For TAN BARK

We are in the Market for both Chestnut Oak and Hemlock Tan Bark. If you have any to sell, come to our Office at once and secure contract.

Turn Your Tan Bark Into CASH

Junaluska Tannery

HAZELWOOD, N. C.

1941 Town Taxes ARE DUE

This is to Give Notice that Penalties will be Added to all Unpaid 1941 Taxes on the First Day of February, 1942.

THE PENALTY PAY NOW AND SAVE J. W. BOYD

Tax Collector for Town of Waynesville



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