

# L. RON HUBBARD



## Spy Killer

GALAXY  
PRESENTS

## Dangerous Woman

THE water was black and the swim was long, but when a man is faced with death he does not consider odds.

Kurt Reid went over the side of the tanker *Rangoon* in a clean dive, cleaving the swirling dark surface of the Huangpu. The strong current swept him downriver toward the gaily lighted Bund. He did not want to go there. He knew that authorities would be after him like baying hounds before the night was out.

A shadow came between his half-immersed head and the glow. A sampan was sailing quietly through the gloom, its sculling oar stirring the thick black river.

Kurt Reid gripped the gunwale and slid himself over to the deck. The boatman stared at him with shuddering terror. Was this some devil come to life from the stream's depths?

"Ai! Ai!"

Kurt Reid was not too tired to grin. He stood up, water cascading from his black clothes.

"Put me ashore in the native city," he ordered in the Shanghai dialect.

"Ai . . . ai . . ."

"And chop-chop," added Kurt.

The boatman shriveled up over his oar. His eyes were two saucers of white porcelain, even his coolie coat sagged. He

put the small craft about and drove it swiftly in toward the bank.

Kurt Reid grinned back at the looming hulk of the *Rangoon*. He raised his hand in a mock salute and muttered, "Get me if you can, gentlemen." He turned then and faced the nearing shore.

As he wrung the water from his clothes he discarded his memories one by one. As mate of the *Rangoon*, he had been known as a bucko sailor, a hard case who struck first and questioned afterward, renowned for a temper as hot and swift as a glowing rapier.

And the reputation had not helped him when the captain had been found dead in his cabin and when it was discovered that the safe was open and empty. Kurt Reid had been the last man to see the captain alive, so they thought.

Shanghai stretched before him, and behind it lay all of China. If he could not escape there, he thought, he deserved to die. His only regret now was the lack of money he had been accused of stealing. A man does not go far on a few American dollars.

But, unlike most American mates, Kurt Reid had been raised in the Orient and he knew the yellow countries and their languages. Although his quick temper had earned him many enemies among the Japanese and Chinese, he hoped to avoid them. By now several men would be advised of his arrest and before morning his escape would also be known. Many men would think that excellent news and hope that his apprehension would be speedy.

If necessary he could assume one disguise or another. His eyes were the color of midnight and his hair was even blacker, and the pallor of his face could be easily made saffron.

The sampan rasped against a float and Kurt Reid, throwing a coin to the boatman, stepped ashore into the din of the native city.

Rickshaws clanged, vendors yowled their wares, jugglers threw tops high into the air and made them scream. Silk gowns rubbed against cotton gowns, scabby slippers stubbed over jeweled shoes. The crowds in the curving streets blended into the democracy of China.

Kurt Reid, head and shoulders above the rest, shoved his way toward a tea house. There, he supposed, he could dry his clothing and get himself a drink or two. Confidently he picked his way, looking neither to the right or the left, paying little heed to those who stopped to stare at this black-clothed giant who left the cobblestones spotted with his dripping passage.

The tea house was set a little apart from the other structures which hung flimsily over the street. The tea house had curving corners to foil the devils and a floating banner or two in red letters and a whole row of paper lanterns.

Kurt entered and rolled back the clouds of blue smoke which hung between ceiling and floor. Black caps bobbed, gowns rustled. Tea cups remained suspended for seconds.

Kurt went to the back of the room and found the round-faced, slit-eyed proprietor. "I want to dry my clothes. I fell into the river."

The man opened up a small cubicle at the rear, clapped his hands sharply, and presently a charcoal brazier was placed on the floor.

Kurt shut the door and disrobed, hanging his black flannel shirt and his bell-bottom pants over a bench to dry. Tea was brought, but he waved it aside in favor of hot rice wine.

The clothes began to steam and the rice wine took the chill from his body.

All unsuspecting and feeling at ease, Kurt began to plan ways and means of getting into the interior and away from possible arrest.

If he could buy a gown from this Chinese and perhaps a few other things, everything would be all right. He could join some party of merchants and get away.

But his plans were for nothing. His clothing was soon dry and he dressed again, feeling cheered and optimistic. He clapped his hands for the proprietor, and when that worthy came, Kurt was startled by a woman who sat with her back to the wall, staring out into the milling street.

Kurt slipped a dollar bill into the proprietor's hand. He still studied the woman. She was obviously a Russian. Her face was flat, with high cheekbones, and her nostrils were broad. There was the slightest hint of a slant to her eyes. She wore a coat made of expensive fur, and a small fur hat sat rakishly on the side of her blonde head. It was not usual to find Russian women alone in the native city, especially Russian women who dressed so well.

"Who is that?" demanded Kurt.

The Chinese inspected the girl as though he were seeing her for the first time. "Name Varinka Savischna," he replied, stumbling over the unfamiliar vowels of the Russian name.

"But . . . a white woman in the native city . . ." said Kurt.

"Russian woman," grumbled the Chinese. "She brings trouble to me." He looked at Kurt's lean body and handsome, inquisitive face and then grinned.

As though the thoughts of the two men were projected to her, Varinka Savischna turned slowly in her chair, placed her arm idly against the table and tapped the toe of a fur-topped boot against the rough floor. The steam which rose from her cup of tea was not less illusive than the quality of her eyes. Casually, impersonally, she inspected the tall American. She drew a long cigarette from her pocket and inserted it languidly between her full, scarlet lips.

Kurt felt the magnetic pull of her personality, and he caught an uneasiness she did not display. She was signaling him somehow. He picked up a packet of Chinese matches from a table and went slowly toward her. Without a word he lighted her cigarette.

She touched a chair leg with her boot. "Sit down, American."

Kurt sat down. He had two thoughts in mind. This girl appeared rich and she might be in trouble. If he could perform some small service for her, he might gain materially as well appease the taste for chivalry which bubbled up inside him.

Varinka looked quickly about her and then leaned across the table, staring intently at him through the steam which flowed upward from her cup.

“You do not belong here, American.”

“No, and neither do you,” said Kurt.

“My messenger is late. Perhaps you have a moment’s time to do a small favor for Varinka, eh?”

“Perhaps,” said Kurt.

“This is a very important matter, American. If I can trust you to take a letter to— But then, how do I know that I can give you my confidence, eh?”

“Look at me and find out,” said Kurt.

She drew a small envelope from her pocket and slid it face-down across the board to him. “I cannot take this myself. I have been waiting here for one who could, but my messenger did not come, and if they have caught him then perhaps you had better not stay with me too long. You understand, American? Tell this man that you have been of slight service to Varinka, and he will reward you.”

“If you’re liable to be caught,” said Kurt, “let’s get out of here.”

“No, there is too much—” She broke off with a startled gasp. Her eyes flew wide as she looked at the door.

Kurt spun in his chair. Two men were there at the entrance, looking over the room. They were both Chinese from the North, tall and bony-faced. They wore black suits which had a suggestion of a uniform. Their hands were thrust deep into their pockets, as though they held hidden guns.

The pair saw Varinka and their glance steadied on her. They came slowly through the crowded room. The Chinese, knowing what to expect, dived sideways out of the line of fire. Kurt was rising slowly from his chair.

“No, no,” whispered Varinka. “Let them take me. Take the letter and go while there is yet time.”

The two men came on, skirting tables, eyes fastened upon the Russian girl. Kurt knew that he was in no position to involve himself in some political mess, but he was spoiling for a fight. He got it.

Kurt stepped out, away from the table, as though about to leave the girl and make his escape. The Chinese on the right shifted his glance, hesitated, and then started after Kurt. The other man walked on toward Varinka.

There was something horrible in the way the pair walked, something which suggested an executioner’s keen blade or perhaps a firing squad.

Kurt stopped. The Chinese came on. Kurt began to advance. The Chinese hesitated briefly and started to pull an automatic into view.

With an ear-shattering yell, Kurt dived in toward the gun. The blunt muzzle swept up. Kurt’s palm jabbed the slide back. The firing pin clicked a fraction of an inch from the cartridge.

Kurt swung his right. The Chinese was lifted up a foot from the floor. Bent backward like a falling tree, the man crashed into a table and went down.

The other man whirled about and whipped up his weapon. He fired, but the hand of Varinka was quicker than his trigger finger, and the shot furrowed the ceiling.

Kurt stepped within two feet of the big Chinese and swung. The fist connected with a crack louder than a breaking staff. Kurt swung again and the Chinese folded into himself with a grunt.