

**L. RON
HUBBARD**



*Hell's
Legionnaire*

GALAXY
P R E S E N T S

Hell's Legionnaire

BEHIND them, the ambush was sprung with the speed of a steel bear trap. One moment the Moroccan sunlight was warm and peaceful upon this high pass of the Atlas Mountains. The next lashed the world with the sound of flaming Sniders and Mannlichers and flintlocks.

Gray and brown djellabas swirled behind protecting rocks. Bloodshot eyes stared down sights. Scorching lead reached in with hammers and battered out lives with the gruesome regularity of a ticking clock.

Ann Halliday's shrill scream of terror was lost in an ocean of erupting sound. Her terrified Moorish barb plunged under her, striving to dash through the jamming corridor of the peaks.

Horses fell, maimed and screaming. Men died before they could reach their holsters, much less their guns. The two auto-rifles in the vanguard had been jerked from their packs but now they were covered with dust and blood and their gunners stared with glazed, dead eyes at the enemy, the Berbers.

John Halliday, Ann's father, tried to ride back to her. Within five feet of her pony, he stiffened in his saddle, shot through the back. The next instant his face was torn away by a ricocheting slug. He pitched off at her feet.

Muskets and rifles rolled like kettledrums. Black powder

smoke drifted heavily above the pass, a shroud to temporarily mark the passing of twenty men.

A voice was bellowing orders in Shilha and, dying a shot at a time, the volleying finally ceased. Then there was only dust and smoke and the blood-drenched floor of the pass.

Two Berbers, blue eyes hard and metallic in the hoods of their djellabas, jerked Ann Halliday from her barb. She struggled, but their sinews were trained by lifetimes spent on the Atlas and she might as well have tried to break steel chains.

Her boots made swirls of dust as she attempted to impede their progress. Once she looked back and saw a Berber delivering the death stroke to a wounded expedition aide. She did not look back again.

The Berbers half lifted, half threw her to the saddle of a waiting horse. Other mountain men were coming up, their arms filled with plunder. As though in a nightmare, Ann saw them mount their ponies.

They filed down the pass, up a slope, and trotted toward a mountain peak which loomed brown and sullen before them. The rapidity of the events was too much for her. They dazed her and made her slightly ill. But she had not yet realized that her party had been slain, that she was in the hands of revolting tribesmen. Mercifully, a sort of anesthetic had her in its grip.

Almost before she realized they were on their way, they stopped. Teeth flashed in laughter. Men were patting rifles and ammunition and bulky sacks of loot. Some of them pointed to her and laughed more loudly. She did not understand, not yet.

She did not struggle when they led her to the square block

of a house. She thought that within she might have time to rest and collect herself, that she might be able to devise some means of escape. But when the cool interior surrounded her, she stared across the room and knew that her experience had not yet begun.

A Berber was sitting there, knees drawn up, djellaba hood thrown back. His eyes were gray and ugly. His cheeks were thin and his strong arms were bundles of muscle as he extended them before him. He was white, true, and his hair and beard were brown. But from him there exuded a web of evil, almost tangible in its strength.

“Get thee from me!” snapped the crouching one to her two guards. They went without a backward glance, doubtless glad to be free and able to take their part in the loot division.

The bearded one on the mat looked appraisingly at Ann. He saw her delicate face, her full lips, her dark blue eyes. His study swept down. She was clothed in a cool, thin dress which clung tightly to her beautifully molded body.

Her breasts were firm and tight against the cloth. The material clung to her thighs, outlining smooth, mysteriously stirring indentations and curves.

The Berber licked thin lips, scarcely visible through the thickness of his beard. His eyes came back with a jerk to her face.

“I,” he said slowly, “am Abd el Malek, the man who shall soon sweep the *Franzawi* from the plains and mountains of Morocco.” His French was flawless. “I wonder that they did not kill you, but now . . .” He let his metallic eyes linger on her thighs. “Now I am overjoyed that they did not.”

She threw back her head, her eyes alight with anger: “Abd el Malek, dubbed ‘The Killer.’ It might please you to know that I am not a *Franzawi*. I am an American and if anything should happen to me . . . I suppose you think you can wipe out an expedition and fail to have *la Légion* after you.”

“*La Légion!*” He spat as though the name tasted bad. “What do I care about *la Légion*? There is no company within five days’ march. Resign yourself, my little one, to the time you pass with me.”

Her eyes lost a little of their rage. Something of terror began to creep into them. “But . . . but there might be . . . ransom.”

“Ha! Ransom! What do I care for ransom? In my stronghold over the Atlas I have the price to buy every man, woman and child in Morocco. No, sweet morsel, I am not interested in ransom. Ordinarily I would not be interested in you, Christian dog that you are. I would not touch you.”

He stood up, towering over her. She backed up against the mud wall.

“No,” he said, “I would not be interested. But this campaign has been long, rather boring. My women are far away, and . . .” He smiled, fastening his hot eyes on her body.

Reaching out he tried to hold her wrist. She jerked it away and aimed a slap at his leathery cheek. He laughed, displaying discolored, uneven teeth. “So,” he said, “you will have it another way.”

He stripped a bundle of thongs from the wall. Taking one, he wheeled on her and, before she could dodge, he had placed his arm about her shoulders, holding her there powerless. She

strived to writhe out of the grip, but he held her as though she had not moved. His fingers stroked her body and he laughed.

Taking the thong, he wrapped it quickly about her hands. Throwing it over a beam, he pulled it taut and lashed it there. She was held rigidly upright, unable to move. Her trimly shod feet barely touched the floor as she swung. Her brown hair cascaded down over her shoulders.

Languidly, as though this was something to be mouthed and enjoyed like a morsel of food too good to swallow, he reached up to the throat of her dress.

He brought his hand down with a wrench. The frail cloth ripped with a loud, rasping sound. Most of the dress fell in shreds on the floor.

Then, seizing a crude riding whip, he commenced to lash her body with all the lustful, sadistic passion one finds in the Riffs, the Berbers and the Jebel Druses—a lust to slay, to punish.

Ann threatened him, insulted him, but did not plead for mercy. As a member of a geographical expedition she had been in tight places before and knew that whining was not a way out of this predicament. Besides, she knew only too well that the agony she was undergoing was but child's play compared to the unspeakable mutilations and tortures inflicted by the desert women on deserters or captured prisoners of the Foreign Legion.

Suddenly he reached up and crushed her swinging body to him. The djellaba was like sandpaper against her skin. His beard was so many copper wires. She watched with horror-arrested eyes, her throat too tight to loose a scream.



Then, seizing a crude riding whip, he commenced to lash her body with all the lustful, sadistic passion one finds in the Riffs, the Berbers and the Jebel Druses—a lust to slay, to punish.

His hand was going up to the thongs. His hot foul breath beat in waves against her bosom. Abruptly, a Berber's scream pierced the hot dry air. The scream was followed by a rattle of machine-gun fire.

Head up, eyes eager, Ann Halliday listened. From close by came the staccato, stirring notes of a bugle sounding the charge. *La Légion!* The racketing snarl of an auto-rifle hammered the compound. Slugs, maimed by rocks, shrilled as they twisted through the air.

The babble of Berber voices was shrill. A face jutted through the doorway.

"*La Légion!*" shrieked the Berber. "Thousands of them! There is no escape!"

Abd el Malek's features were contorted with anger. He snatched a rifle from the wall and ran outside. The blast of the auto-rifle was quickening. A man fell in front of the door, digging agonized fingers into his waist.

Abd el Malek's shout was distinct above the others. "It is the vanguard! Mount! We still have time to escape!"

The crackle of Sniders and Mannlichers ceased but the auto-rifle raved on. The hard, heat-caked earth was hammered by the hoofs of departing horses. Another Berber dropped to the ground, choking and calling on Allah.

And then everything was quiet. The thin air of the Atlas was undisturbed beneath a spinning copper sun.

Boots were scraping the mud wall of the compound. Presently the regular steps of one man were audible.

Ann Halliday called out, "Over here! In this big hut!" Then, paradoxically, she wished she hadn't spoken. Here she

was nearly naked, hanging by her wrists from a beam. And one had heard things about Legionnaires. . . .

A lean, tanned, handsome face appeared in the entrance. Keen gray eyes opened wide with surprise under the Legion kepi. The man came forward, mute with astonishment.

His eyes traveled over her body. He swallowed hard and reached for his tri-bladed bayonet. "I'm sorry," he said in English. "I don't mean to stare . . . stare at you . . . but . . . God, lady, but you're beautiful!" His eyes went hard after that. Hard and impersonal. He cut the thongs and she slumped into a sitting posture on the floor.

He eyed the remnants of her dress and then went outside. In a moment he was back, bringing some white garments—white except for the place a bullet had passed. There, they were red.

"I'm sorry, miss," said the Legionnaire. "I guess you'll have to wear this djellaba. The rest of the clothes are pretty fresh and clean. I found them in that dead . . . pardon me . . . in that Berber's pack."

Turning away from him, she slipped into the baggy garments and flung the cloak about her slim shoulders. Then, although she was white of face and weak from reaction, she smiled.

"You're American," she said.

"Yes. American. Come on. We'll have to get out of here before they come back. They'll stop running in a minute and . . ."

"But where are the rest of you? The rest of your outfit, I mean?"

"Outfit?" He stared at her blankly. "Miss, I haven't any outfit. Not any more, that is."

“And what does that mean?”

He glanced uneasily toward the distant trail and then turned again to her. “I’m . . . well, ma’am, I’m a deserter, I guess. I’ve been gone for twelve days.”

“But you mean you drove them off by yourself?”

He grinned, his tan face growing a little red. “Yes, I guess that’s right. You see, ma’am, I took this bugle and this auto-rifle when I left. That’s all I’m carrying. Those and bullets. I have to travel fast. These hills are dangerous and then . . . well, there’s a price on my head, you see. I . . . I killed a corporal back there at the post. He was going to shoot me and . . . well, I killed him.

“Right now, ma’am, we’d better get going. They’re liable to come back. I’m trying to make Casablanca and the Atlantic.”

“But how?”

“I heard the firing about three miles away from the pass and I went over and found a lot of dead men. Thinking they might have taken some captives, I came up to look into the matter. They thought . . .” he grinned again, more easily. “I guess they thought I was a whole regiment.”

“But who are you?”

“I was John Doe of the Legion, ma’am. But if I’m caught I’ll be John Doe of the *bataillon pénal*. My real name is Colton, ma’am. Dusty Colton. Let’s get going. They left a couple horses over there.”

She followed him across the body-strewn compound, the hot sun beating down upon her back. He held a barb for her and eased her up into the saddle.

A yell of rage and exultation came from the higher reaches

of the trail. Looking back, Ann saw the swirling robes of the riders sweeping down upon them. The Berbers were some five hundred yards away, riding hard. They had discovered the trick, and Abd el Malek was burning with two distinct fires. He had temporarily forgotten one of them in the suddenness of the attack, but he remembered it now.

Dusty Colton's barb plunged down a steep slope and veered sharply into the ravine. Hard on his heels came Ann Halliday, swinging low in her saddle, glancing back.

Spiteful puffs of dust were geysering about them. The Berbers were shooting from their saddles—picturesque but rarely accurate. If these men had been Arabs, thought Ann, the story would be different. A Berber is not exactly at home in the saddle.

Colton lashed his pony up a steep slope. The barb struggled, dust rising about its hoofs. Ann's mount sidestepped the boulders, and under the pressure of whip and rein, labored in the wake of Colton.

The Berbers still on the level, swung closer. Some of them dropped to the sand, kneeling to fire. A leaden slug smashed the leather of Ann's cante. Another twitched her djellaba. Colton looked back through the suffocating haze and gave her a reassuring grin.

Colton's khaki blended well with the dry tan fog. His blond hair streamed out from under his kepi.

The Berbers were toiling up the slope behind them. The marksmen were trying their best to bring the horses down. Ahead was a ridge, and beyond it lay temporary safety . . . perhaps.