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Swing Your Lady

by

Henry Kuttner, writing as Kelvin Kent

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When the Amazons of Ancient Greece started chasing Pete Manx, they were in for a shock—electrical, no less!

Pete Manx was in the worst spot of his eventful life. Not even the splendor of his costume had power to lift his drooping spirits. And that showed pretty well how sunk Manx felt.

He fingered the carnation in the lapel of his cutaway and grimaced miserably. Then he craned his neck to look out the back window of the taxi. No sign of pursuit. Only upper Broadway, sweltering under an Indian summer sun.

He reflected, I been run out of Cowper, Kansas, for selling patent medicine, and that circus riot in Elk's Tooth wasn't no bed of roses. But I never came up against a dame like Margie before. Oh, gosh! Wish I was dead. What a life. Maybe she's trailing me now.

Pete Manx shuddered convulsively. If there was only some place to hide!

"Yipe!" said Mr. Manx aloud, and bent forward as though he had been kicked in the stomach. "Doc Mayhem! That's it . . . Hey, I don't want to go to the East River. Changed my mind. Uptown, and fast!"

He gave the driver an address.

Ten minutes later he burst into the home-and-laboratory of Dr. Mayhem, wild-eyed and disheveled.

"Doc!" he yowled. "Hey! I need help, but quick. Where are you?"

A burly, red-faced man with a paunch and the expression of an embittered gorilla appeared, puffing at a cigar and staring. "Pete? Mayhem isn't here. He'll be back pretty soon."

Pete Manx scowled at Professor Aker, who was an old enemy of his. Then he jumped nervously as an automobile horn blew in the street outside.

"I can't wait," he chattered. "That dame may come after me with an ax. Prof, you know how to work the Doc's time machine, don't you?"

Aker nodded. "Of course."

"Then you gotta use it on me. I need a hideout. And right now."

A hopeful gleam came into the scientist's eye. "Trouble with the police? Arson? Murder?"

"Lay off," Pete Manx muttered. "I ain't in any mood for gags. Look at me. What do you see?"

"A low-grade moron," Aker began, but he was interrupted.

"These duds," Manx explained. "Cutaway, carnation, silk topper. Margie made

me put 'em on. They're for the wedding."

"Wedding?"

"I tell you, that dame had me enchanted. I met up with her at Coney. She's a snake charmer. First thing I knew, she started treating me as if I was one of her snakes. The strength on that frill!" Pete Manx shivered.

Aker was grinning. "Go on."

"I dunno how I got into this scrape, anyhow. I took her out once or twice and then she decides we'll get married. Ugh, the way she looks at a guy! Like needles. She figures we'll be married and I'll spiel for her act." Pete Manx laughed hollowly.

The professor seemed amused. "Why not tell her no?"

"Look," said Mr. Manx, "let's say you're in a cage with Gargantua, or maybe a giant python. Talking don't do much good. All you can do is run like blazes. And Margie's got detectives trailing me. I tried to skip out four times, and the last time she talked to me—" Manx gulped. "You never been talked to by a snake charmer with gimlets for eyes and a couple of baby boas twined around her neck. I argued. I begged. I said I'd make a punk husband. 'I'll mold you into shape,' she says. And today's the wedding."

Aker was chuckling. "I'll be your best man, if you like."

"Why don't the Doc come back?" Mr. Manx groaned. "Margie's been trailing me all day. First thing I know, she'll come busting in and drag me off to the parson."

"I don't see how you can get out of it."

"Well, I do. She can't marry me if I'm not here. I want the Doc to let me use his time machine. Then when Margie gets here, she'll think I'm a stiff. You know how the gadget works."

"Of course," said Aker, seeing a chance to get off a lecture. "It releases the ego from the body and sends it back to the Central Time Consciousness, the hub of the time-wheel. Then centrifugal force shoots the *id* to another era, where it inhabits the body of someone who was alive at that time. The—"

"Oh-oh!" said Pete. "Here she is. In a taxi. With her snakes, too. Omigosh! I'm sunk," He began to chew the carnation in hopeless frenzy.

Aker came to a sudden decision. "I'll fix it, Pete. I know how to use the time machine. Come along."

"Y-you will?" Pete Manx sounded incredulous. "Prof, you ain't quite the heel I thought. But we gotta work fast." He shot into the laboratory like a torpedo and ensconced himself in a wired metal chair in one corner. "Shoot the works!"

Aker was hurriedly manipulating switches and dials. "It won't take long. And I'll get rid of Margie."

"That's your story," Pete Manx remarked, bouncing up and down in the chair. "You don't know Margie. That dame'd follow me to Frisco and drag me back by the ears. But she can't follow me where I'm going. Make it a nice safe time, Prof. I don't want to meet up with Lucrezia Borgia again—or Merlin!"

There was a gleam of wicked amusement in Aker's eyes. Pete Manx saw it too late. The professor chuckled. "You'll have a rest cure where you're going. Besides, I've always wondered how much truth there was in the legends of the—"

He knifed a switch.

"—the Amazons."

Swosh!

There was a crackle of electricity as the time-circuit closed. Pete Manx stiffened momentarily; then he fell back in the chair, jaw dropping. He resembled a corpse.

Aker was laughing like mad.

Pete Manx's ego shot away with a whizz, caromed off a stray century, arced toward Greece, and came to rest in the body of a small, meek-looking little man who was desperately trying to remove somebody's sandaled foot from his face.

Confusion reigned. It was extremely hot, and there was a great deal of yelling going on, together with a metallic clanking that puzzled Pete Manx a great deal. Also, he smelled blood.

With some difficulty, he removed the foot from his face and heaved at the heavy weight that was bearing him down. Finally his head popped into view. Apparently he had been buried under a pile of—*ulp*—corpses.

They wore armor, and were all indeed dead. Other mounds and individual stiffies lay here and there on the broad plain. A battle was just ending. Men on horses were hightailing it frantically, fleeing from their successful attackers. There was something decidedly odd about the victors of the battle. Not even armor could disguise their feminine figures.

A horse cantered by, and Pete Manx automatically captured it. He was in a backwash of the battle, and nobody noticed him, for the nonce. Should he mount and flee? But where?

The problem was solved for him by the approach of a burly, red-bearded man who crawled out from beneath a bush.

"You are indeed a faithful orderly," he informed Manx. "I am sorry I beat you for failing to polish my sword this morning. Well, if we meet again, I shall be kinder."

With that, he leaped astride the horse, drove spurs deep, and galloped away,

leaving Manx with one arm extended in futile protest.

Orderly, eh? Well, at any rate, he now knew what side he was on—the wrong side. Since there were no more horses in evidence except, Pete Manx thought with ill-timed and atrocious humor, the ones that were *hors de combat*. It would be well to hide. With this in mind, he dived for the nearest pile of corpses.

Hoofs clattered. “Ha, dog!” said a shrill, impassioned voice, and the point of a spear pricked the only visible portion of Pete Manx. “Now you die with your comrades.”

“Guk!” Manx cried incoherently, writhing aside to meet the cold blue stare of an Amazon woman astride her battle charger. “Hold everything! I ain’t in this.”

“Aye, hold,” a new voice broke in, deeper and more commanding. “He is no warrior, Clio, by his trappings. ’Twere shame to slay a mere slave.”

“As you like, Thecla,” Clio grunted.

Pete Manx saw, with a sudden shock of horror, that the blue-eyed, dark-haired Amazon bore a strong resemblance to Margie. There were, however, no snakes, but Clio’s muscles were enough to make anyone shudder.

Thecla was no weakling, either, but she was better proportioned. She was a big, brawny, red-haired wench, with catlike green eyes and a snub nose. Now she was eying Pete with an interest that boded the man no good.

“The battle’s over,” she remarked. “Those marauding Greeks won’t trouble us again for awhile. Take this prize of the war back to my tent, Clio. He is passing fair.”

Pete Manx reddened to the roots of his hair. “Now listen!” he objected hotly. “I got some rights.”

Clio interrupted him. She picked him up by the back of his tunic and flung him across her saddle. Pete Manx writhed and yelled in futile resentment.

He quieted suddenly when the point of a dagger dug into his spine.

“Men should know their places,” Clio said, “and keep to them. One more move from you and I’ll drag you behind my horse.”

“Don’t harm him,” Thecla urged. “ ’Twould be sad to mar his sweet young face.”

Pete Manx nearly fainted with horror. This could not be happening to him! Out of the frying-pan with a vengeance!

Thecla galloped away. With an annoyed grunt, Clio cantered in the opposite direction, muttering, “The Queen’s too kind to her men. The best way is to beat them and often. Hold still, you miserable little worm, or I’ll take pleasure in stepping on you. Hah!”

“B-but—” Pete Manx gurgled.

“Silence!” The dagger drove deeper into his spine.

Mr. Manx said no more.

The camp of the Amazons lay in a broad valley, near a good-sized stream bordered by groves of olive and oak. It seemed to be a semi-permanent encampment, a base established to guard the frontiers. Queen Thecla, ruler of all the Amazons, divided her time between the main city, far to the north, and such outposts as this.

The scene was idyllic. The gaily-colored pavilions were bright against the green meadows, and the blue sky of Greece was a canopy overhead. It reflected with sparkles of sunshine in the huge tub in which the unfortunate Pete Manx was washing clothes.

He reflected bitterly, a fine thing! Wish I had a bottle of my old Manx Cleansall. Hah.

The soap was not the best quality, and Manx was forced to use a good deal of elbow grease. Ruefully he contemplated his reddened knuckles.

"It ain't fair," he growled. "Damn Professor Aker, anyway. I hope Margie stuffed one of her snakes down his throat. Well, at least I'm still a bachelor."

"Not for long," said a cold voice. It was Clio, swaggering toward him, her hard blue eyes unpleasantly malicious. "Queen Thecla will wed you as soon as she's back. And that will be soon. Come along. She won't be pleased to find you at this task. But you'll get a meaner one if you try to escape again."

"I just wanted to take a walk," Mr. Manx explained, not hopefully. The brawny Amazon grinned and touched her dagger-hilt.

"By Artemis, you'd best not wander far from camp. Our archers have sharp arrows. Come."

Pete Manx was only too glad to relinquish his messy task. He changed his mind, however, when he found himself in one of the pavilions, attended by several masculine slaves armed with strigils, ointments, combs, brushes and perfumes. Manx felt like a Pekingese the day before a dog-show.

"Hey!" he objected passionately. "Don't smear that goo on me. It smells."

"'Tis myrrh," said one of the slaves. "The Queen likes its scent."

"Well, I don't!" yelled Mr. Manx and retreated into a corner of the tent. "A little after-shave lotion is my speed. But that's all."

Hearing the commotion, Clio appeared, looking annoyed.

"What's wrong here? . . . What? Oh, he doesn't, eh?" She drew her dagger and moved cat-footed toward the worried Mr. Manx. "There's no time to waste. Thecla will be here soon, and you must be ready for her."

She spoke further and profanely to Pete Manx, reminding him of an army top-kick he once knew. Presently the slaves continued their work, while Clio went outside with a final threat.

Pete Manx writhed. Yet he knew it was wisest to play along for the while, till he got at least a small break. So his beard was combed and curled luxuriantly, odorous perfumes smeared on him, and his hair anointed with the Grecian equivalent of bear-grease. Eventually he staggered to a couch of furs and collapsed, moaning faintly. He had just looked in a mirror.

“I ain’t neat,” he murmured.

“You will please the Queen,” said one of the slaves, a meek little man with shifty eyes and a flat dish-face. “That is always wise, Zeno.”

“Zeno?” Pete Manx looked up. “My name’s—uh—Petros Mancos.” He employed an alias he had used before in the past.

The other smiled furtively. “You do not remember, me—Antigonus? But it is wise of you to use a false name, Zeno. If your real one were known here, you would be tortured to death.”

Pete Manx swallowed. “I expected this,” he said, glaring bitterly at nothing. “Everything happens to me. I’m allergic to trouble. So I’m in the body of a guy named Zeno and he’s a public enemy.” He gripped Antigonus’ arm. “Now look, pal. Ever heard of amnesia?”

“No,” said the other. “Who is she?”

Pete Manx explained. “So there it is,” he ended. “I got a bump on the head and now I can’t remember anything. See? I gotta know the set-up.”

Antigonus glanced around at the other slaves, who were watching interestedly. “They won’t betray you. Well, years ago you and I were in a distant Amazon camp, far to the west, both of us slaves. You’re sure you don’t remember? Well, we belonged to a warrior-woman named Urganilla, called the Bear-Wrestler.”

“Ulp,” Pete remarked. “G-go on.”

“You betrayed that camp to the Greeks. Only a few escaped, Urganilla among them. She, I think, is the only Amazon who would recognize you. And if she does, of course, you will be torn to bits.”

Antigonus ended reflectively, “Or perhaps sliced at with swords. I’m not quite sure.”

“Where is this Bear-Wrestler?”

“In the city. But she’s due in camp in a day or so. When she arrives, you will die, I suppose. It is sad.”

“Sad!” Pete Manx gulped. “I got tears in my eyes already. Look, Antigonus, I gotta get out of here, double quick.”

“You can’t. The guards are always on the alert. It is impossible to escape from the camp.”

Manx shut his eyes and thought hard. Obviously he was in a spot. But he had been in trouble before, and his resources had not failed him. Despite their muscles and weapons, these Amazons did not seem especially bright. Perhaps he could outwit them and escape.

Where? Manx wasn’t sure. But, after questioning Antigonus further, he realized that to remain in the camp till Urganilla arrived would be fatal. For the Amazon would recognize him and immediately denounce him as a traitor.

After that—*ugh!*

His reverie was interrupted by the arrival of Queen Thecla. The red-haired Amazon strode into the tent, chin arrogantly lifted, and her gaze found Manx.

“Ah,” she said. “You are more beautiful than I had thought.”

Manx looked desperate.

“Now look,” he said. “I ain’t beautiful.”

“Be not afraid,” the Queen murmured. “You will not be harmed. Now I must go. There are reports to be dictated, and plans to be made. Later we must have a friendly talk.” With that she departed, leaving Pete Manx to claw at his curled beard.

“She likes you.” Antigonus smiled suggestively.

“Shut up!” howled Mr. Manx, crimson with futile fury. “I’m no lap-dog. I’m no gigolo. I’m getting out of here right now!”

It was, however, easier said than done. Antigonus and the other slaves were friendly enough, and willing to help, so long as they were not involved in trouble. At nightfall Pete Manx slipped away through an olive grove and headed for the hills.

Some time later he came back, unwillingly, across the back of a horse ridden by an Amazon guard. Queen Thecla was considerate, but firm. She lectured Manx on the uselessness of attempting escape, and told him that the next time it happened, he would be whipped soundly. Then she patted the miserable man’s cheek, gave him a sweetmeat, and sent him back to the other slaves, chattering inarticulately.

“I told you so,” Antigonus said helpfully.

Pete Manx barked sharply and went off to brood in a corner. After a while he got an idea. He came back to the group of slaves.

“Look,” he said, “I saw a movie once about Amazons—”

“Movie?”

“Let it lay. I got a hunch. How’d you boys like to get the upper hand on these

Amazons?" He explained at length. His words were greeted with surprisingly little enthusiasm.

"But we like it this way," Antigonus objected. "We don't work hard, we don't have to fight or run risks, and we get plenty to eat."

Well, obviously only the weakest specimens of the Greeks were ever captured by Amazons. The strong ones either died in battle, or escaped to fight again.

"Where's your self-respect?" Mr. Manx said sharply. "Woman's place is in the home. Equal rights for everybody, that's what we want. Why should men have to do all the drudgery? Now listen—"

He was a persuasive talker. He pointed out the advantage of conquering the Amazons.

"Conquering them?"

"Peacefully. Propaganda, that's the stuff. Passive resistance. Equal rights. A man oughta be the master in his own tent."

He talked on, smoothly and convincingly. There was no point in explaining all his plans, of course. Equal rights would not be enough. What Pete Manx was working for was a complete reversal of the Amazonian social scheme. Men, not women, must be the masters.

It could be done. Pete Manx had read stories, and seen a film or two, that dealt with exactly the same subject. A guy was captured by the Amazons, got busy, and pretty soon the apple-cart was upset, and the women were doing the washing. That was what Pete Manx wanted. It was the only way he could save his own life.

If the Amazons were still in charge when Urganilla arrived and denounced him, it would be just too bad. But if the women were powerless, the men in charge, he would be safe.

It looked like the long way around; yet it was the only way. For by this time Manx was convinced of the impossibility of escape. His job was to persuade the slaves to help him.

"We'll be whipped," Antigonus objected.

"Not if we play smart. I got some tricks up my sleeve that ought to help. If we get the Amazons worried enough, the war's half won. Boring from within, see?"

"No," said Antigonus.

Pete Manx made a large gesture. "Just leave it to me." He was not too pleased with his companions. They did not seem to have enough backbone. But he had to use the tools that lay ready to his hand. "I'll try psychology. The Amazons are plenty superstitious. Suppose their goddess—"

“Artemis?”

“Yeah, Artemis. Suppose she says that men have to be the masters, and puts a curse on the Amazons till the change is made?”

Antigonus blinked. “One cannot make a goddess speak.”

Pete Manx smiled happily. “Wait and see. She’s the moon goddess, eh? Well, maybe I can make a moon—”

He brooded briefly over storage batteries, electric lights, and a public-address system.

Pretty complicated, but he would try what he could.

“We’ll want some signs painted. Now listen.”

It was dawn before Pete Manx slept. And by that time his plans were made. It would take several days at least, he knew, to prepare his materials. Even then, something might conceivably go amiss. It usually did. Yet Pete Manx’s round face bore a seraphic smile as he dropped into audible slumber on a pile of silks and furs.

The war was over, for the nonce—at least until the next attack. There was little for the male slaves to do. Manx found it not too difficult to enlist helpers. He worked with them under the noses of the Amazons who, of course, did not know what it was all about.

“A big spotlight will help a lot,” he informed Antigonus. “And that means electricity—batteries. Simple ones. Zinc, copper, and sulphuric acid. I can make zinc—let’s see—by distilling it with carbon. Only I need the ore.”

Antigonus scratched his head. “Zinc is alloyed with copper to make brass. I know that.”

Pete Manx grinned delightedly. “You’ve got some? Swell!”

Sulphuric acid was not difficult, either. There were two ways of obtaining it that Pete Manx could employ: he could distil alum, or he could burn sulphur with saltpetre. He chose the easier method, with satisfactory results. In the end he had several crude but workable batteries, consisting chiefly of two rods—one of zinc, one of copper—immersed in dilute sulphuric acid. Wire was somewhat more difficult, but Manx finally drew some through a die he laboriously drilled.

Meanwhile, with the aid of Antigonus, he organized the slaves. It was, necessarily, a whispering campaign. But the Amazons had such a contempt for men that none of the warrior-women suspected what was going on.

“Dopes,” Mr. Manx remarked scornfully to himself. “This is gonna be easy.”

He sought out Antigonus. “Know what creosote is?” he wanted to know.

“No. Is it something to eat?”

Manx shook his head. “Not exactly. Never mind. I’ll just look around a bit.”

He experimented with various bushes, burning them and distilling the vapors. The sulphuric acid helped, too. At last he had several jugs filled with a deceptively mild-looking fluid that had a smoky, curious odor. Some of this he supplied to each of the men assigned to laundry duty.

“Just drop it in the tubs,” he instructed. “That’s all.”

The initial step was to start the Amazons wondering. After a consultation with Antigonus, he managed to swipe Queen Thecla’s sword and spent a difficult night electroplating it.

The next morning when the Amazon ruler unsheathed the blade at the pagan matin prayer, every eye was riveted on the weapon. It had apparently turned to copper, except for a line of Greek letters that read crisply:

The Curse of Artemis on the Amazons

A gasp of amazement went up. Those who were close enough to make out the message whispered it to their neighbors. Thecla looked worried. And like wildfire the story ran through the camp.

The curse of Artemis! But why—how—

They were not long in finding out. Those Amazons who had donned clean clothing that day began to twitch uneasily. They scratched futilely at their armor. Groups of them went down to the river to bathe.

It did no good. The strange malady persisted. The brawny Clio nearly dislocated a shoulder trying to scratch her back. Moreover, the slaves who had done the washing the day before all had an angry rash about their wrists.

Pete Manx thought happily about creosote and satisfactory imitations of it, and chuckled to himself as he watched Clio frantically writhing in her armor. He ducked for cover as the Amazon glared at him and snatched up a convenient spear.

There were other manifestations that day. Pete Manx had seen to it. The horses could not be ridden, since their trappings had been well soaked in an irritating but harmless compound the ingenious Mr. Manx had prepared. Since horses were sacred to Artemis, the Amazons felt more and more uneasy as the day wore on.

He had even made use of the time-honored dribble glass, boring tiny holes in metal goblets, so that when the Amazons drank, the result was far from neat.

It was sound psychology, for the warrior-women, despite their habits, were vain as peacocks, and wore gorgeous trappings. Quantities of these were ruined, and a great many tempers lost in the process. Pete Manx wandered about with a blandly innocent eye, watching the steady demoralization of the Amazons.

He did not want to go too far. He was merely breaking the ground for tonight's *coup de grace*. Even so, Clio sought him out and showed him the point of her sword.

"Do you know anything about this?" she snarled.

"I?" Pete Manx was the picture of injured innocence. "Why, what's wrong?"

But it was quite obvious what was wrong. On Clio's sword blade was copperplated a Greek sentence that was, to say the least, rather insulting. The Amazon, purple with fury, cursed Manx in terse monosyllables.

"If you weren't the Queen's favorite," she ended, gripping the sword hilt, "I'd slice you into food for vultures. Miserable worm of a man!" She looked more than ever like Margie.

There was a shriek from a nearby pavilion. Queen Thecla appeared, a golden jar in one hand and a look of anguish on her face. She was preceded by a strong and unpleasant odor.

"What now?" Clio inquired grumpily.

"My perfumes," Thecla gasped. "My most precious ointments—ambergris, attar of roses. Smell this."

She thrust the jar at Clio, who was rash enough to sniff. Both Amazons turned a delicate peagreen. Even Pete Manx who had spent a few hours mixing iron pyrites with other nauseous chemicals, gulped unhappily.

"It—does smell," Clio said inadequately.

"It's the curse!" Thecla whispered. "Artemis is avenging herself on us. But why?"

The other Amazon shrugged and scratched her flank. "I never heard of a curse like this. Lightning I can understand. But smells and itches! 'Tis more like the work of a mischievous satyr."

The queen hurled the golden jar into the river. "We shall sacrifice to Artemis when the moon rises, and beg for forgiveness. Hera help us!"

Pete Manx, who had retreated into the shadow of a bush, grinned diabolically. All was going even better than he had planned.

He made a quick trip of inspection to the sacred grove, where he examined the altar of Artemis and checked the batteries and improvised searchlight he had set up there. There was nothing amiss. He was ready.

Minor manifestations continued all that day. By sundown the Amazons were in a state of nervous exhaustion. By moonrise they were fit to be tied. Matters were scarcely helped when the queen, drawing out her golden crown from its jeweled chest, discovered that the diadem had apparently turned to some dull, grayish metal. Luckily for Pete Manx, she did not scrape through the plating to the solid gold

beneath.

In a body the Amazons trooped toward the grove. They gathered there before the altar, while their worried ruler sacrificed to Artemis. Nothing happened.

The silence was broken. From the direction of the camp came a loud chant, confused and unmusical, in which could be traced some vague resemblance to *Mademoiselle from Armentieres*. It made, at any rate, a stirring marching song. The Amazons stirred uneasily.

What in the name of Hera was this? An unsightly rabble of slaves—men—pouring toward the grove, shouting, singing and carrying banners inscribed with strange and fantastic devices.

“Equal rights for slaves!” Thecla gasped. “Suffrage for men! ‘We want the vote!’ Have they gone mad?” Her eyes had widened with amazement.

The banners were plain to read in the bright moonlight. They demanded recognition.

“No more K.P.!” said one. Another went into more detail. “Are we mice or men? We want the four freedoms!” A third declared, “We’ll wear the greaves in our families!”

“They are mad,” Clio said. “Shall I gather a few warriors and drive them back to camp?”

But by this time the men were within the grove. They came to a halt, milling around in an uncertain fashion. Abruptly a blazing light flashed out of the darkness in the trees. It fell full on the altar of the goddess.

Ventriloquism was only one of Pete Manx’s accomplishments. Lurking in the gloom, he cupped his hands to his mouth and spoke.

“Gather ’round, folks! I come here to instruct you—Amazons and gentlemen! Just a bit closer, there. Now—”

Antigonus had been previously instructed.

“’Tis Artemis!” he shouted. “’Tis the goddess!”

Clio grew rather pale. “It is not meant for men to be in the sacred grove,” she said. “Drive them away.”

“Hold!” Pete Manx’s disguised voice shrilled through the clearing. He swung the guide-wires to the searchlight so that its beam found Clio. “My message is for all.”

“She has brought the moon down from the skies,” Thecla whispered.

There was a pause. Then the queen bowed before the altar. “We give you worship, Great Huntress. Why are you angry with us?”

Pete Manx almost purred. This was too easy. He took a deep breath.

“It ain’t right. It is not meant for women to rule men.”

“It has always been thus among the Amazons,” Clio cried.

“Then it’s gotta be changed,” Pete Manx said doggedly. “I’m your goddess and what I say goes. This set-up ain’t natural. It’s all right for women to have their rights, but making the men your slaves ain’t—is not meet.”

Thecla spoke unbelievably. “You would have us live as the Greeks do?”

“Sure,” Pete Manx told her, switching the searchlight again. “Equal rights. The women gotta stay home and mind the kids. The men—er—make a living.”

The queen drew a long shuddering breath and glanced around at the ranks of frozen astounded Amazons.

“We obey, Oh goddess,” she whispered. “If this is why you put your curse upon us we obey.”

“Swear it,” Pete Manx said inexorably.

The queen dropped on her knees, as did the other warrior-women. But before she could speak, there was an interruption. With a clatter of racing hoofs, a charger thundered into the clearing, carrying on its back an Amazon who bore a rather grim resemblance to Tony Galento.

“What?” the woman bellowed. “Amazons on their knees?”

“Urganilla!” Clio cried. “’Tis Artemis who speaks to us.”

Urganilla! Pete Manx’s knees turned to castinets. This was the woman who knew him as a traitor, the one who would denounce him at sight. A fine time for her to arrive!

The war-charger stepped about nervously.

“Time enough for the goddess later!” Urganilla roared. “I have ridden hard and fast to bring news! The Greeks have rallied and will be upon us by midday tomorrow. We must march to meet them or they will fall upon us here in the camp.”

Clio’s sword whipped out, but Queen Thecla struck down the other’s arm. “Nay, Artemis has spoken! We are no longer the rulers here. By the goddess’s command, we must go to our tents. ’Tis the men who must sally forth to fight the Greeks.”

She strode forward, extending her sword, hilt first to the shrinking Antigonus.

“Here. This shall be yours.”

“B-but!” stuttered Antigonus. “Your Majesty, we cannot fight.”

“You must. Else the Greeks will slaughter us all. It is the divine command.”

The men dropped their banners and wailed in horror. Above the tumult rose Antigonus’ terrified voice.

“Nay, we have no wish to rule. We are content as we were. It was that slave Petros Mancos who bent us to his wishes. We d-don’t want equal rights. Oh, your Majesty, please let us go back to our tents and do the washing as we’ve always done.”

“Petros Mancos!” There was fury in Clio’s voice. “I suspected him of trouble-making. Where is he now?”

Antigonus was spared the necessity of answering. Urganilla’s horse, frightened by the commotion, danced over to the altar and tried to mount it. The searchlight swung wildly as flying hooves jerked at concealed wires. The glaring beam swept in an arc and, as though guided by some malevolent demon, rested on the shrinking figure of Pete Manx, cowering in the lower branches of an olive tree.

“Petros Mancos!” It was Clio who spoke, and in no friendly voice.

“Nay,” Urganilla bellowed. “That is not his name. That coward slave is Zeno, who once betrayed us to the Greeks. I promised then that I would tear out his heart and eat it. *A-argh!*”

She hurled herself from the horse’s back and plunged like a berserk gorilla toward Pete Manx.

There was no time for thought. Automatically Pete Manx jerked at a wire, and the searchlight’s beam vanished. In the sudden darkness, he descended from the olive tree and took to his heels. Behind him he heard a thunderous crash and a roar of searing oaths. There was tumult.

“Find him!” Clio shouted. “Throw a cordon around the camp. Search the tents! Warn the sentries! We shall slay him together, Urganilla.”

“Oh, gosh,” Pete Manx gasped as he fled for his life. “This is the worst yet. What a spot!”

Impartially he cursed Professor Aker, Margie, the Amazons, and Fate.

Pine torches flared. The camp was a riot of activity. The men were cowering in their tents, horrified at the result of their abortive rebellion. The women went raging about, swords bared, keen eyes searching for sight of Mr. Manx.

That worthy was high in an oak tree, sharing his quarters with a disinterested owl. He had already tried to pass alert sentries, and escaped capture only by the skin of his teeth. He was safe on his precarious perch till daylight. Then anything could happen.

“Think, brain,” Pete admonished himself. “Quick, go to town. I’ve gotta figure something out, and fast.”

Then inspiration came. Pete Manx let out a subdued whoop of joy that made the owl contemplate him curiously. With a quick glance around, he descended from the

oak and stealthily slipped off into the gloom.

There was a way, a desperate one, but it was the only chance Pete Manx had. If it worked, he might save his skin.

Twenty minutes later the searchlight again blazed out on the clearing in the sacred grove. An Amazon saw it, then another. One by one, and two by two, the perspiring, panting warriors hurried off to investigate.

They found Pete Manx sitting on the altar, swinging his legs and grinning.

“Wait,” said an Amazon, seizing her companion’s arm. “Urganilla will wish to kill the slave herself. He cannot escape.”

Pete Manx seemingly had no wish to escape. He waited till Queen Thecla and Clio had appeared, then leaped nimbly to the ground. In the distance the bellowing of Urganilla was growing louder. Someone had told her that the culprit had been found.

“It is no use to throw yourself on my mercy,” Thecla said coldly. “You must die.”

“Let me slay him,” Clio urged.

“Urganilla shall have that pleasure. For his blasphemy he deserves death.”

“Well, here she is,” Clio said, smiling in a pleased fashion.

Urganilla burst into view, roared, and made for Pete Manx, sword flashing. Pete Manx summoned all his courage.

“Halt!” he yelled.

Automatically the Amazon slowed down. Manx followed up his advantage.

“Listen,” he said. “This ain’t fair. I don’t mind a fight, but that dame’s got a sword.”

Urganilla laughed like a hyena. “With my bare hands I shall crush you. I need no sword.” She hurled it away.

Pete Manx nodded, glancing around the ring of Amazons. “Fair enough. You ladies think you’re pretty tough. But you never run up against a real man before. If you ain’t afraid of me, Urganilla, how about a wrestling match?”

Someone laughed. Even the giantess could not repress a grin.

“Puny shrimp! Aye, we wrestle. As you like. No one has ever challenged me and lived.”

Pete Manx looked at Thecla. “How about it? If I win, can I go free?”

The queen nodded. “Aye, poor fool, if you win.”

And with that the female gorilla rushed at Pete Manx.

There was a confused tangle, a shriek of agony from Urganilla, and the lady landed flat on her back near the altar. Mr. Manx brushed off his sleeve and sighed in

a bored fashion.

The Amazons gasped.

Urganilla bounced up.

“*Yaah!*” she bellowed. “By Zeus, Hero, Apollo and all the devils of Hades, I shall eat your heart for this!”

She looked as if she meant it.

Instead, she described an arc that ended at the foot of a gnarled oak. Urganilla twitched a few times, then lay still. There was blank silence.

Pete Manx yawned. “Anybody else?” he inquired. “One at a time, of course. That’ll make it last longer.”

Clio accepted the offer. Grinning with fury, she leaped for Manx. Then, suddenly, she screamed at the top of her voice and almost turned a backward somersault, landing heavily on her back.

She did not offer to get up.

“Well, I’m open to offers,” Pete Manx remarked. “Winner take all. Who wants to wrestle?”

An Amazon glanced at Thecla for permission which was given with a nod. She landed on top of Clio. Another tried her luck. Then another. None of them had better luck.

Thecla was the last. She, too, uttered a piercing, scream and fell sprawling. By the time she revived, the other Amazons were sitting quietly in a group, staring at Pete. The queen gulped.

“Forgive us,” she said unsteadily. “We did not recognize you in mortal form, O Zeus. Loose no more lightnings upon us. Only tell us how we can serve you and atone for our blindness.”

“Forget it,” Pete Manx said generously. “Just see it don’t happen again, that’s all. You trot out and drive off the Greeks, and we’ll call it quits.”

“As you command,” Thecla said humbly, and all the Amazons crawled off backwards, dragging with them the unconscious bodies of Urganilla and Clio. Pete Manx heaved a deep sigh.

“Women!” he said bitterly.

Whoosh!

He was, of course, back in the laboratory, sitting in the time machine chair and looking up into the massive red face of Professor Aker. The scientist appeared rather repentant.

“Well,” said Pete Manx. “A fine pal you turned out to be.”

“I couldn’t resist the temptation,” Aker explained, helping the other stand up on

cramped legs. “Besides, I’ve always been curious about the Amazons. It worked out all right, I see. Eh?”

“No thanks to you.” Pete Manx massaged aching arms. “Oh—oh! I almost forgot. What about Margie?”

Aker fingered a slight discoloration under one eye. “She gave me a—uh—mouse, I believe it is termed. An extraordinary woman. I showed her your body and said you were dead, but she didn’t believe it. She’s marching up and down outside the house now, with two snakes around her neck.”

The professor coughed. “I’m curious to know what happened to you among the Amazons, but that can wait. After meeting this—this Margie, I can’t help sympathizing with you. The woman has a remarkably strong will. If you care to leave by the rear fire-escape just open that window over there.”

“No, thanks.” Mr. Manx whistled a few bars of a popular melody. “I’m in no hurry. Let Margie wait a while. Want me to tell you just what happened?”

“By all means. Here, have a cigar.”

Pete Manx relaxed in a comfortable chair and started talking. Half an hour later he threw away his second cigar.

“And that’s all. I ain’t so dumb, Prof. I can always get along.”

Aker stared at him, fascinated. “How you do these things I don’t know.” He hesitated. “One point puzzles me. I never knew you were a wrestler. How did you manage that? Ju-jitsu?”

Pete Manx preened himself. “Brain-work was all. When those Amazons tried to wrestle me, they got a shock. A big one. I had wires up my sleeve.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ever see the Electric Woman in a circus? She’s got a couple of flashlight batteries in her armpits, and wires running down inside her sleeves. Touch her hand and you get a jolt. Well, I had my batteries and wire all ready, so I just found some stuff to insulate my sandals, and when the Amazons touched the wires in my hands, they got enough voltage to knock ’em endwise. A cinch.” Pete Manx finished, arose and waved casually at Aker. “Be seeing you, Prof.”

“But Margie,” the scientist said, suddenly reminded. “You’re not going out the front door.”

“Margie ain’t so bad. Just a clinging vine compared to Urganilla. I’ll just stop in at the radio store next door, before seeing her.” Pete Manx departed.

Professor Aker remained motionless till the sound of a feminine shriek reached his ears. Then he hastily lumbered to the front room and drew back a window

curtain.

Margie was sitting on the sidewalk, her mouth wide open, and an expression of blank astonishment in her eyes. Two snakes lay motionless beside her.

And Pete Manx was swaggering down the street, the silk hat tilted at a rakish angle, while he whistled *Mademoiselle from Armentieres* with an air of gay and jubilant triumph.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Swing Your Lady* by Henry Kuttner [as Kelvin Kent]]