

*The  
Black  
Madonna*©

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*A Blazing! Adventure  
Serial-*

This is an original short story and has  
never appeared elsewhere.

Blazing! Adventures Magazine

*Publishers*  
2008

*New York*

## **I DREAM OF JULIA**

### **-)Part Five(-**

**Paul and I found floating flotsam that kept us afloat as we kick paddled our way back into the heart of the city. I had no idea how extensive the flooding would be, but I knew that some hilly sections of New Orleans were well above sea level. We waded up onto dry land and began making our way to where I knew we'd find temporary refuge. The city was already experiencing pandemonium and chaos. I knew that situation would be to our advantage, as civil authorities had too much on their plate to worry about two guys roaming the streets with guns. Turns out, we were just two among many. We'd learn much later that many cops shirked their duties and fled the city.**

**As we furtively made our way down the street, I nearly ran smack into a black cop hustling out of a Circuit City store carrying a huge color television set, the flat screen kind that I wanted for the bar. He pulled up short when he saw me, and his five fellow officers bunched up. Two of them were white, one a Latino. They were all engaged in looting. I recognized the men as Bull's crew. When the officer with the TV recognized me, his eyes grew wide with fear. I'm sure he remembered the time they had nearly killed me, beating me within an inch of my life. He looked pretty stupid standing there with his hands full. I relished the moment before opening fire. The sound of appliances crashing to the floor signaled that they were going for their guns. I blazed away. Paul followed suit without questioning my motives. They fired back, missing. One overzealous cop shot another in the back. We wasted them all. I caught the last guy in the back of the head as he fled back into the store. We gave each one a double-tap in the ear, following the old adage, "Two in the head, you know they're dead." We wiped the M16's clean of fingerprints and tossed them aside. I chuckled thinking how they'd**

be traced back to the Blackwater team who tried to murder us, and it amused me to imagine the consternation of the detectives trying to solve that mystery.

That's one worry eliminated next time I came to New Orleans. Now all I had to concern myself with was the occasional drug dealer's associate seeking revenge, or the drug cartel that never seemed to quit coming after me.

We made our way surreptitiously to a hilltop condo and rang the doorbell to 2010 on the top floor. Pierre Lebeau and his wife Jeanine bought the place years ago when he retired from the force. Pierre was my first partner and training officer when I was a rookie.

"Well, goddamn! Jeanine! Jeanine, honey! It's Ty! Come in, come in!"

Jeanine appeared as captivating as a fluttering butterfly on gossamer winds. She had always been knock-dead gorgeous, and time seemed to only enhance her beauty. She aged graciously. As usual, she was dressed in colorful flowing silk. She hurried to me and gave me a big hug. We kissed.

"Pierre, Jeanine, this is my best friend, Paul."

Pierre shook Paul's hand. Jeanine gave him a hug and a kiss.

"*Enchanté, Madame. Vous êtes tres, tres belle,*" Paul said.

Jeanine spoke fluent French. She blushed and giggled like a school girl at the compliment.

"You boys thirsty?" Pierre asked.

"Like a parched desert."

"*Oui, moi aussi,*" Paul enjoined.

"Figured as much. Me, too." Pierre walked to the bar. "Anything special?"

"Yeah. Anything special."

"Oh, Pierre!" Jeanine groused. "Let's get these boys out of those wet togs. My goodness, Ty! You look like you've been down forty miles of bad road."

"And put away wet!" Pierre agreed. He laughed at his unintended pun.

Pierre found some of his old clothes from his youth, which fit me fine. He dug out some clothes belonging to his grandson in high school, which fit Paul well enough. At least they were dry. Paul and I took turns taking soothing showers while drinking

ice cold beers. Such pleasure is pinnacle of modern civilization. The water was luke-warm. The electricity was out. No matter, it felt divine.

Jeanine retrieved a professional first aid kit and treated my wounds. She stitched a couple of deep cuts. A retired registered nurse and policeman's wife, she had a lot of experience patching up injured persons. She also had a very comforting touch and manner. I was feeling much better in short order. When she finished up, though, I looked like a living ad for Johnson & Johnson Band-Aids.

We ate a sumptuous hot meal of ribeye steaks, French green beans, and potatoes, cooked on a propane-fueled outdoor grill. We caught up on old times over booze out on the veranda overlooking the city and the sea beyond. The sun was lowering in the west, casting a painter's pallet of colors against the sky and clouds. The fresh sea air smelled marvelous, and a light, warm wind caressed us.

"We were so very sorry to hear about Julia's death, darling" Jeanine almost whispered. The sadness in her face betrayed her age.

"Now, Jeanine," Pierre admonished.

"No, it's okay, Pierre. Thanks for your sentiments, Jeanine."

"She was such a lovely girl, so full of life."

"She was the only good thing in my life. She was the only light in the perpetual darkness of my soul."

Paul looked very somber. "*Mon Dieu!* I loved her, too. She was always so kind to me. She made me laugh. She was like sunshine following a storm. Everybody loved Julia, Ty, but she loved only you."

"Yeah," I agreed, trying to liven things up, "she was the sunshine, I was the storm."

We laughed.

Pierre cleared his throat. "You haven't said. Why are you in the city?"

"And why did you show up here in such a terrible state?" Jeanine asked. "I know it's really none of our business, but we are concerned, Ty."

I gave them a quick rundown on our situation, omitting incriminating events.

"You think this guy...what's his name?"

**"Paddy."**

**"You think this guy Paddy is still alive?"**

**"No idea. If he's dead, that's the end of it. If he's alive, I doubt he left the city."**

**"Probably can't leave, by now."**

**"Yeah. Anyway, he's not the kind of guy to leave after getting so close to what he was after."**

**"Makes sense. I know the type."**

**Pierre had been out of the loop too long to have any direct connections, but he called a friend of his, and acquaintance of mine, Bruce "Buddy" Holly, on his cell phone. Buddy contacted his snitch and let him know I'd pay a one-hundred-thousand-dollar bounty to anyone taking Paddy and his thugs alive, half that dead. We slept like dead men that night, then arose next morning to hot coffee and crêpe suzettes. Three hours later, we got the call we were waiting for. Paul and I went to the address we were given, and were met at the door of the ramshackle apartment by a very nervous and suspicious black man wearing a doo-rag.**

**"Tyrone Sullivan?" he asked.**

**"Yeah. George Hastings?"**

**"Come on in. Peoples calls me Flash."**

**We were led to a shabby back bedroom where Paddy and his men were tied up with ropes. It was so anticlimactic and, after all we had been through, amazingly simple. Paddy and his boys had also ended up without weapons, and as strangers in the city they were easy to track down by those who knew the streets. It took a lot of phone calls, but we finally arranged for a boat to take us all out of the city. George gave us all a ride in his pimp limo. It took an hour to find a way around the devastation down to the harbor. We clambered aboard.**

**"Thanks, Flash."**

**"No problem, dude."**

**"You haven't asked about the bounty."**

**"Buddy says you good for it."**

"And you trust him?" I asked, amazed.

"We goes back a long ways. He's had my life in his hands, got my kid brother out of the joint. He says you good," he shrugged, "you good."

The fishing trawler launched into the sea. Claudette met us at a rendezvous in her black Lincoln town car. We loaded Paddy and his boys into the trunk and set a meandering course for *L'Hotel Creole*. Once there, we transferred our prisoners to Paul's pickup, with Mad Dog and his brothers guarding them. We drove out to the bayou, and hiked the distance to Jimmy's cabin.

I had a lot of questions I wanted answered. I began to interrogate Paddy, but he was sullen and unresponsive.

"I'll make you a deal, Paddy, because I want to know everything. Tell me the whole story and I'll let you go."

"Go fuck yourself!"

"Okay, we can do it your way, if you prefer. Mad Dog?"

"Yeah?"

"Take these guys to your farm and feed them to the hogs."

"Sure." He and his brothers grinned wickedly. "You wanna kill 'em yourself first?"

"No. I want you to feed them to the hogs one piece at a time, then give their torsos to the hogs while their still conscious. Can you manage that?"

"Oh, fuck yeah!" Skeeter agreed. "We's good at that!"

Paddy pissed his pants and started crying. The horror of his fate seized upon his mind.

"Who's the little bitch now?" I taunted him. "Sing, bitch, and I'll let you go."

"Why would you let me go?" Paddy asked suspiciously.

"Because I want answers only you can provide, and I figure you've learned your lesson. You won't be coming back to Louisiana, will you?"

"No." He sniveled, "What do you want to know?"

"Who led you out here to Jimmy's?"

"His cousin Oliver."

**"Do you know where we can find him?"**

**"Jimmy killed him."**

**The guy with the missing face. Jimmy did what I would have done; kill the quisling first and foremost.**

**"Okay, tell me about the gold."**

**"Our platoon was left deep in country with the Montangard. We were all pissed off about the way the war was going, and we didn't like getting stuck way out in the boonies with those fucking bush monkeys and their ugly bitches with beetle nut teeth. Eating jungle swill when our C-Rats ran out, getting infested with bugs. When the chief requested a gold shipment, we all formed a pact."**

**"You ordered extra gold and made arrangements to get it out."**

**"Yeah. Jimmy was the one with all the connections, so we left everything to him."**

**"Connections?"**

**"He had gone native. Fell in love with a Vietnamese bitch..."**

**I slapped him across the chops with the .45. "Mind your fucking manners."**

**He looked hard at me, then continued. "Vietnamese woman, and made lots of friends among the natives. They carried the gold out. Jimmy was heavily involved in the black-market and had lots of contacts. Jimmy bribed an Air Force crew, which wasn't hard to do in them days, and got it all back to the states."**

**"That was many years ago. What took you so long to get here?"**

**He thought long and hard, not sure how to proceed. "Soon after, we all got reasigned. Some guys came back to the states and left the service. Some of us lost contact with each other. Some died. Jimmy seemed to fall off the face of the planet. We thought maybe he double-crossed us."**

**"Jimmy wouldn't do that."**

**"Your opinion. Gold makes men crazy."**

**"I'll grant you that. But why so long?"**

**"It took years to track all the guys down."**

**"Trying to find Jimmy."**

**"Yeah."**

**"And killing all the witnesses," I guessed.**

**He hesitated again, and dropped his head. "Yeah," he said quietly.**

**"Gold makes men crazy. You didn't want to share."**

**He suddenly became belligerent. "Why the fuck should I? Goddamn it, I took all the risks, I had to..."**

**"You were the platoon leader who made the request. You were the officer in charge."**

**"Fucking A! If I were caught, I'd be court-martialed and hung. It was my name on the documents. The gold was mine!"**

**I could see that he was crazy as a bedbug, like so many men eaten alive with greed. Criminals always justify themselves, no matter what.**

**"Well, you've told me everything I wanted to know."**

**"You, you going to let us go now?"**

**"Yes, as promised."**

**Paul cut the men free. They rubbed their wrists and stamped their feet to regain circulation.**

**"By the way," I added.**

**He looked at me with fear etched in his face. "Yeah?"**

**"Jimmy's Vietnamese woman's name was *Thai Thi Ai*. He wasn't calling my name when you butchered him, he was calling hers."**

**He blinked in comprehension.**

**"Take off," I commanded quietly.**

**"What?"**

**"Get going. You're free to go."**

**"How about a lift to town?"**

**"How about sucking my ass?"**

**"But..."**

**"You've got a..." I turned to Mad Dog and raised my eyebrows in question.**

**"One hour," he answered.**

**"You've got a one-hour head start, then the Madsen boys are going to hunt you**

down. If they catch you, you go to the hog farm. If you escape, you're free and clear."

"Goddamn it, there's nothing but swamp out there!"

"Your tour in Vietnam should help."

We all raised our guns and fired into the air. The trio went running off into the bayou. Deep, deep into the bayou.

"Watch out for them snakes, gators, and quicksand!" Louis yelled after them.

The Madsen boys grinned and laughed at the upcoming sporting event. We all headed into the cabin for some moonshine to slake our thirst. We already knew the outcome.

The president of the United States in particular, and the federal government in general, left New Orleans to rot in the sweltering sun, but in time the waters receded enough for us to fetch the gold from Walker's Funeral Home. I fenced it all at a good rate of return. I made a gift of the vintage hearses to Crawford, and gave him enough money to renovate the funeral home. I also gave him a substantial sum to help his community.

Flash got his hundred grand.

I contributed handsome sums to the campaign funds of certain Louisiana politicians who were only too willing to help a loyal citizen. I got all the information and assistance I needed.

Jimmy had managed to get his pregnant wife to the states during a daring venture. He risked his life to go back and rescue her on a fishing boat. They were married at the church of Our Lady of the Assumption. Problem was, she was a Communist cadre and spy during the war. As in so many love stories, their romance blossomed in the most improbable of circumstances. Love conquers all, they say.

The North Vietnamese government demanded her extradition as a deserter, the American government hated communists, she had no proper documents from the INS since she was smuggled into the country as a illegal alien, and so it was *fait accompli*. She languished for years in a reeducation interment camp, where she gave birth to their daughter, Thai Thi Kim. As the years passed, relations between the two governments normalized, and Thai Thi Ai was released to resume life in her native hamlet.

**It took months of red tape, but I finally got her whole clan over to the United States.**

**It's funny how you learn about someone's baby, then forget all the years that pass. When Paul, Claudette, and I went to the airport to greet the family, I was still expecting to see Jimmy's daughter as a baby or a toddler. Of course, she was all grown up now, with a family of her own. Some of Jimmy's grandkids were babies and toddlers. Thai Thi Ai was a shriveled old woman, aged beyond her years. Twenty Vietnamese of all ages entered the airport terminal, and all twenty had tears in their eyes. They mobbed me. Despite myself, I cried, too. I was very embarrassed until I saw that Claudette and Paul had tears running down their cheeks.**

**We bought two shrimp boats for Kim's oldest boys, who were already skilled at sea as teenagers. We bought a huge farm up north for the clan, and they settled right in. Farming was in their blood.**

**Claudette, Paul, and I were set for life, but whoring and boozing was in our blood. Everybody at *L'Hotel Creole* got a bonus.**

**Paul and I kept Jimmy's cabin as a fishing camp and retreat.**

**As I grew closer to the Vietnamese clan, I came to realize that I had a big family, something new for me. After all, they were Julia's and Jimmy's kinfolk, and by extension, mine as well. Every time I visited them, they thronged me and smothered me in genuine affection. Family is everything to the Vietnamese, and they considered me one of their own. I had a new life.**

**I had a beautiful granite vault built on the Thai farm with life-size angels guarding the entrance, carved flying cherubs and roses round about. It stood solemnly out near the flowing brook, where flowers blossomed profusely in the spring, beneath the weeping willow tree. I had Julia's body exhumed and re-interred in a gold casket, lined with white silk. Jimmy's hand rested upon her heart. I entombed them together in the crypt, where they would always be surrounded by family. I went there regularly, and spoke with them frequently. I always brought a dozen yellow roses, her favorite.**

**The Thai clan usually joined me. They performed traditional rituals for the dead, weeping and wailing. Ai would often sit for hours by Jimmy's and Julia's side, mourn-**

**ing her eternal loss. She loved him so deeply, she could never be consoled.**

**I stopped drinking heavily. In time, the nightmares subsided. Most nights now, I dream of Julia.**

**-)The End(-**

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