



# BLACK & WHITE

By MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

Illustrated by SUMMERS

*When you start this story, about the last black man and the last white woman in the ruined world, you'll think: That old idea again! But you'll read on—and suddenly find yourself gripped by one of the keenest new approaches to the ancient myth.*

THIS has been an old story since Cain killed Abel," the man said quietly. "Brother against brother, city against city, nation against nation. But at least it will never be old again."

"Never again," the woman repeated, "at least, not on Earth."  
"Not on Earth."

In the ruin of what had been—when cities still were dignified by names—lower Harlem, a man and a woman were sitting in the only building left intact on The Day. It had once been a beer-hall. The walls were still gaudy with lascivious poses of women that no longer had mean-

ing, and the glass over the bar had been so thoroughly shattered that even now neither the man nor the woman dared cross the floor barefoot; the splintered glass from long-gone bottles was still working in fragments out of the wood floor.

They had been living there for three months—since they had found each other and realized they were the last man and woman in New York—probably, on the North American continent—almost certainly, in the world.

"All the Adam-and-Eve stories I ever read—" the woman said, with a hard little laugh. "Never thought I'd end up as the pro-

tagonist of one. It's ludicrous."

"Easy now!" The man's voice was soothing. He caught the edge of hysteria, easier to abort than to stop after it got going. "You're not."

"No," her voice brooded now; "I'm not."

"Kathy," he said gently, "have you heard the old saying, *I wouldn't marry her if she was the last woman in the world?*"

"Oh, Jeff—"

"For the love of God!" the man exploded, and stood up, the muscles running in ridges under the dark skin of his jaw. "Kathy, don't say it! For the love of God! Hand me a mirror, if you can find one in this empty rathole! But don't say it!"

THEN he spoke with a bitterness so deep that he himself did not recognize it as bitter. "Kathy, I'd leave here tomorrow—except I'd be so lonely I'd shoot myself."

"So would I."

"But you've got to use your head, Kathy. I thought this was permanently settled. I thought our ancestors settled it for us about three hundred years ago. And—we're both reasonably civilized. It's a good thing, or I'd—" he broke off, unclenched his fists and made himself lounge in a chair again.

"Is it really such a good thing?" Kathy asked softly. The

garish red lights over the bar—somehow unbroken, the power plant out here hadn't run down yet—gave a lustre to her fair hair as she leaned forward and looked at him. The man saw the play of the red light on her blonde hair—cut short like his—and briefly shut his eyes.

"All I know is—we're both the products of our respective civilizations, Kathy. Good or bad—I don't know. Who cares? Girl, go to bed! It's after midnight, and I thought we promised each other we weren't going to hash this over any more!"

The girl nodded. "I'm sorry." She rose, shading her eyes. "Jeff, tomorrow let's see if we can't find some other light bulbs *somewhere*. These red things are going to drive me nuts!"

He laughed. "Talk about needles and haystacks! New York of the bright lights and I have to look for a light-bulb. Okay, Kathy, I'll find one if I have to shinny up a light pole."

"Good night, Jeff."

"Night, Kathy."

The man sat quite still until he heard the Yale lock snap shut on the inside of the door; an old sign—this had once been a well-known night club—said NO STAGS, PLEASE. Jeff slid something out of his pocket and sat looking at it. It was a key, the key that belonged to the Yale lock.

He opened the street door and went out. The hunks of jammed cars, partially smashed, still blocked the sidewalks, and many of the light-poles were down, but here and there a solitary street lamp would burn until some day the power went off at the central station. One, near the corner, spilled a puddle of brilliance into the shadows of broken concrete and brickwork. Slinking figures a foot long made eerie shadows around the old bones that lay in the street. The man barely glanced their way. Once they had made him so sick that he could not walk in a street where they lay. Now he kicked them carelessly aside. *Deconditioning*, he thought. Too many of the dead to worry about them.

*Could other taboos go the same way?*

Grass would come back some day and cover the bones. He wouldn't live to see it. Grass, in Harlem!

HE still held the key in his hand. Did Kathy know he had it? Two weeks ago, she had told him that she had lost it, but since she could lock the door on the inside with a turn of her wrist, he hadn't worried—until he found the key, the next day, lying almost in plain sight by the bar. Had she *lost* it—on purpose?

Jeff scowled. What if she had?

They'd have it to live with for the rest of their lives.

*Their children would never know or care. . . .*

"Oh, Jesus," the man muttered, and put his face in his hands, almost a childhood reflex. "Oh sweet Jesus . . ."

The new awareness of Kathy was almost that; a crucifixion. Kathy's face swam before his eyes. He did not think it was a pretty face. He never had. A fair-haired, blue-eyed woman, an *object forbidden, forever taboo, beyond desire. Doubly taboo, doubly beyond desire.*

He scrambled to the summit of a pile of smashed concrete and looked down at the river. The water was clean, now, freed of the dead fish that had clogged it for a month. The river, like the city, had its own scavengers that ate the corruption away.

A question of sin? But is there a clean-cut question of sin in these days? Morality used to be a matter of black or white, right or wrong, not all shades of—of brown, he said with his teeth clenched. He fished in his pocket for the key and sent it flying in a high arch far out over the waters. He didn't even hear the tiny splash.

"Well, that's that," he said aloud. "Clear cut. Black or white."

*That was that, even before Kathy and I talked it over that*

one time. You know that, Father.

Father, lead us not into temptation . . . Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee . . . and I detest all my sins . . .

He put his hands to his temples, feeling the black crisped hair there. Who are you trying to kid—*Father*? He turned and walked back to their home. He spread his blankets, shucked shirt and pants. Under his pillow lay a curious white object Kathy had never seen. It was the one thing he concealed from her since they had come to share joint loneliness. He held it musingly a minute.

Did it mean anything now? You've lost everything else that goes with it.

Be honest now. Did it ever mean anything? It couldn't prevent this from happening—this, the end of the world!

He glanced up at the fragment of unbroken mirror over the bar and in a sudden rage raised his hand to shatter it. It only accentuated the difference between himself and Kathy. Then he stayed his hand. Mirrors meant a lot to a woman.

His own face looked grimly back at him. Neither handsome nor ugly to his eyes. Just an ordinary, brown-skinned face, the face of a Negro man about thirty years old. He swallowed, then did a curious thing. He raised the

white thing in his hand and started to put it around his neck—then crumpled it furiously in his fist. He started to throw it away, then thrust the Roman collar back beneath the pillow. Father Thomas Jefferson Brown, a priest without a parish, glared at his own image, turned suddenly away from the mirror, laughed softly, crawled into his blankets and went to sleep.

JEFF said, "Maybe it would have been easier on you if you'd been brought up in the south, Kathy. You wouldn't even have been thinking this way."

Kathy smiled and shook her head. "It wouldn't have changed much. Be honest, Jeff. What you're really thinking is—the human race isn't worth much, if it can end this way."

He laughed out loud. "At least it's not worth starting the whole bloody mess all over again," he said.

She spoke with a seriousness rare for her. "Did it ever occur to you, Jeff, that it might have been *meant*—our finding each other, from such a distance apart?"

He chuckled grimly. "Like Lot and his daughters, you mean? Frankly, no."

She rarely spoke of the thing which was so much in the forefront of their minds that it was almost never on their tongues.

But now she said "It's rather terrible, in a way. It took a cataclysm to make me realize that the problem even *existed*. If you'd ever asked me, I'd have said that civilization was just a veneer—take a man, and a woman, right out of society, and they'll revert to primitive man, and primitive woman."

*Against thy last temptations,  
O Father . . .*

Should I tell her I was a priest? No. She wasn't a Catholic, she made that clear. And, with all my apologies, dear Lord, I'm not going to fight for one last soul. You made your clean sweep of the fields, and left no gleanings in the corners, and I'm not going to try to convert her. But I'm not going to tell her and let her try to make me over-ride my vows either. *A priest forever*. If you wanted Adam and Eve, Lord, you should have picked a couple of other people. I don't mind letting her think it's because I'm colored and she's white, but I'm not going to have her call me a fool because with the world ending I count on the next one more than this. *Amen*.

After a stretched silence he said "Aren't you getting tired of canned foods? I am. Let's take the boat and go across the river. There are plenty of wild rabbits—we'll shoot a few for supper. It will be a welcome change."

THE breeze over the lower Hudson blew, with a clean freshness, down from the hills. They were both hardened now to the sight of the ruined city, but Jeff found himself toying, again, with the notion of striking upriver again. The few things they had—lights, a few caches of food and clothing—could be weighed against the immense good of not having to look at the ruins every time they moved.

Then he laughed, shortly. Only the memory of what the *last* civilization had done to itself, kept his resolve firm. . . .

Above the city, grass was beginning to grow down to the water's edge, and rabbits hopped on the overgrown fields without shyness. "Look how tame they are!" Kathy said in wonder. She had been loading her pistol; now she dropped it back into her windbreaker.

"Oh, Jeff, let's not shoot them! They're such cute little fellows, and now there's nobody to scare them!"

"I could sure go for some rabbit stew," the man said doubtfully, then chuckled. "But have it your way, Kathy. Why should the last humans make themselves obnoxious to the new dominant species?"

"You—really don't mind?" She looked at him with the look he had seen so often these last

days, half imploring, half concealed.

He shook his head. "Not a bit. Maybe we'll find a pig—some of them must have gotten loose and run wild. Anyway, we're sure to find something—"

"Jeff!" The woman froze. "*What was that noise?*"

"A shot," the man said huskily, "A shot—a rifle! Kathy, there's someone else here!"

"Were they—shooting at us?" the woman faltered.

"I doubt it. Rabbits, probably, but—"

"I'll fire a signal!"

Jeff was already heading the boat to shore. He said quietly "No. Kathy, it's rotten to sound suspicious, but there could be trouble. Men, running wild—well, you're a woman."

*And all men aren't like me . . . instincts tamed so long ago it doesn't matter. . . .*

She frowned at him "Oh, surely—there wouldn't be trouble? After all this time? Remember how—how glad we were just to find out we weren't alone in the world—"

"Just the same, keep the gun out of sight," Jeff urged gently. "They'll probably take to us better if we're not armed. Put it away until we're sure we're safe with friends—or until we know we'll have to fight."

Obediently, the woman put the pistol back into the pocket of her

windbreaker. Jeff stood up and shouted in his ringing basso "Hello! Hello! Anybody there?"

Silence. After a long time, a thin echo rang back, "Hello!"

"That was no echo," Jeff muttered, "took too long. Hello! Hey there! Can you hear us?"

THREE rifle shots in rapid succession answered them; after a little, a man topped the brow of the hill, stood looking down for a minute, then yelled and broke into a run toward them.

"Hello!" he gasped breathlessly when we got to them. "Well, I'll be damned, a few others made it too! You fellers been here long? I been—well, hell! It's a *girl!*" His eyes rested on Kathy. "Seeing you so far off, in them slacks—and with you—" his eyes, now strangely altered, rested on Jeff. The newcomer was a thickset man, bearded, his clothes in tatters, and Jeff held himself by force from distaste. A man alone in the wilds would not feel the same obligation as a man living with a fellow human being—to maintain some semblance of normalcy.

He said quietly, "I'm Jeff Brown, and this is Kathy Morgan."

"I'm Hank Nichols," the man said. "Glad to see y'all, Miss Morgan. Jeff."

Jeff held out his hand, but the man ignored it and after a mo-

ment Jeff let it fall to his side. *Social gestures were a little incongruous now, anyway.* Nichols' eyes were still fixed on Kathy, but Jeff, remembering how, after his own long isolation, he had wept for joy, just to see another human face, thought tolerantly; half mad with loneliness. Poor devil!

Nichols asked "Any more of you in the city? I hoped—"

It was Jeff who answered, though he had spoken to Kathy; "No. I travelled all over the Midwest, looking, and finally gave it up. Katherine travelled all over New England. There was an old man—he died just before she found me."

"Katherine, eh? I ain't seen any soul either. Guess we're all that's left." His gaze at Katherine was open now and his side glances at Jeff more frequent. "I just caught me a mess of rabbits. Y'all might as well come eat with me, they's plenty more."

Kathy was looking at the man with dismay; bearded, slouching, not exactly filthy but certainly not clean. His eyes, which followed her, made her feel strange. She caught Jeff's arm and murmured.

He smiled and said reassuringly "Steady, girl. He may not be a very prepossessing specimen, but he's one of God's creatures, after all. We're not in a position to be—" he smiled at

her, winningly, "segregationists."

She nodded, hesitantly, but clung to Jeff's arm. Nichols, turning, saw the gesture, and his eyes narrowed, an odd light behind them.

**I**N a small clearing not far away, he had pitched a tent, and the embers of a cookfire smoldered, smoke hanging over the untidy campsite. He squatted on his heels, skinning the rabbits deftly.

"Sure is nice here. I never got to see the country before—worked in a garage down in Kentucky. Only thing, I miss the movies. Some day I'm going to find me a movie projector someplace, must be one around. Sure lonesome, too."

"It is," Jeff agreed. "But there may be others somewhere—in Europe, Africa—we just don't know. We've no way of knowing."

Nichols tossed away a rabbit skin. Kathy took up the skinned animal. "Can't I help you?"

"Sure, baby." He handed her his knife, holding her small hand for a moment in his great paw. "Sure been missing someone to cut up my rabbits." He laughed and leered, picked up a second rabbit from the pile and began expertly trimming off the paws and stripping away the pelt. "Jeff, why don't you hunt up some more brushwood?"



The tone, casual and commanding, made Jeff seethe; but he stood up, said mildly "Right you are," and walked away. His thoughts were confused. *Oh Lord, thy practical jokes are beyond human understanding.* A man and a woman, and even a priest to marry them. Kathy had been afraid of the man—yet she was laughing with him, offering to help him. Instinct. *Each after his own kind, male and female . . .* rough and dirty and unsavory as Nichols looked, he was a man; and he could, and would recognize the instincts in himself, and in Kathy.

The thought made sickness rise in Jeff's throat; he swallowed, trying not to gag. Kathy—and that creature!

Be sensible. He'll give her what she wants and you can't—or won't. *Damned fool . . . clinging to a remnant of superstition, a vow made for a world that's ended . . .*

You protected Kathy from a dozen dangers. A pack of starving dogs. Falling walls. Rats. Savage, homeless cats, turned predatory-wild. . . .

But are you going to turn her over to a man who's worse than any of these?

He clenched his fists and his teeth, shaking, sick, fighting the need to run back to the clearing, to fight Nichols, if need be, savagely, hand to hand, for his wom-

an. But she's not yours . . . *oh God, oh my dear God . . . blessed Mother of Mercy, Mary have pity on me . . .*

Kathy screamed. And screamed again, horribly. "No! No! Jeff—help! Help! Jeff! Oh, no-o-o—!" and the cry was choked off as if a rough hand had stifled the screamer's throat.

Jeff cast thought, prayer and compunction aside; the last remnant of civilization dropped from him and he ran. "Kathy! Kathy!" he shouted. "Easy, darling, I'm coming—"

Nichols bullet struck him broadside in the lung and he toppled headlong into the little gully.

KATHY, her hands to her mouth, stared in crazy horror at the bearded man. "You—shot him! You—shot him!"

"Yeah, I shot the dam—," he said, but Kathy understood nothing of the rest of the sentence except that it was unbelievably foul. "Anyway, *that's* all over. Figured you'd be damn glad to get rid of him. What'd he do—catch you when you were alone? Anyhow, now we got rid of him. Come on, babe, c'mere—hey! What you doing?"

Kathy fumbled in her windbreaker pocket. She had become expert at shooting the swift-moving, starveling rats. *Just another rat*, she told herself, and

her hand was steady on the trigger; the slug tore away his smile, wiped the sickening memory of his leer from her mind forever. Not until she found herself kicking his limp body again and again did she realize that she was crying. She ran to Jeff, kneeling at his side, babbling.

His eyes opened painfully. "Kathy—"

"I shot him," she wept, "I killed him, I—"

"You shouldn't have," he whispered. His mind strayed. "Say—an act of contrition—"

She stared down in horror and sudden wild surmise as the man clawed slowly at the deep agony in his chest. Then he muttered, his eyes and his brain quite clear, "I was—right all along. As long as we—feel this way—we might as well—end it here. Good thing he—came along, or I would have given in . . ." he choked on bloody spit.

"Don't talk! Oh, Jeff, darling, darling—don't talk—" Sobbing, she cradled his head on her knees. His eyes, already unseeing, sought vainly to find her in the closing darkness. He muttered incoherently in Latin for a moment, then suddenly, softly, "Kathy—darling—bend down and tell me—did you lose that key on purpose?"

Sobbing, the woman bent to whisper her answer, but he was already beyond hearing. Father Thomas Jefferson Brown said clearly, loudly, "Sorry, Lord, you'll have to start from a fresh batch of clay," and died. After a minute, Kathy straightened, letting his limp body fall.

"He was right all along," she said to nobody, put the pistol in her pocket, picked up the two skinned rabbits with a grim smile, and went back to the boat alone.

THE END

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*They were surrounded by desolation, adrift  
amid ruins—alone in an empty world.*

See BLACK AND WHITE

