

Wild Pastures

By REX BEACH

Two Madmen on Murder Island Fight It Out to the Death as a Hurricane Howls

CONCLUSION

HERE came a roar entirely different from that in the tree tops and Tom looked up to behold perhaps the wildest phenomenon of his entire fantastic experience. Up the main river bed and past the opening where the boats lay rolled a muddy tidal wave, higher than a man's head. It tumbled forward faster than any tide bore. The dry bottom over which it charged held it back, but the wind behind speeded it, piled up other waves which surged onward and overtook it. That comber galloped forward like a solid line of charging cavalry—it reminded the startled cowboy of a cattle stampede, the resistless force of which he well knew.

All this happened swiftly and amid an appalling confusion in which no man could retain his wits. The waters boiled, the wind yelled, that sooty sound brushed the tossing tree tops, everywhere was pandemonium.

Of the five men Hostetter alone worked with some definite purpose. Having seen his own craft safely afloat and tugging at her hawser, he made for the tree to which the smaller boat was tied. Already the creek bank under him was awash, the water rose to his ankles, then to his knees, but he floundered forward, plunging through and hauling himself over that mass of impeding roots. He had only a little way to go; with a shout he raised his ax and slashed at the rope. It parted, and the sloop was adrift. He left the blade sunk into the green wood and shook a massive fist in Kennedy's direction,

use more direct, more certain means. He raised the weapon, but the wind roared. "I'm so violently that he gazed himself with his back to it, then drew up his knees and, resting his elbows upon them, clamped the stock against his cheek in a vise-like grip.

The men were less than a hundred yards apart, nevertheless the sound of that shot was no louder than the faint clap of palms or the pop of a paper bag. Again and again Hostetter worked the lever, cursing at every miss. He wedged himself more securely, braced himself more solidly. Craftily he made allowance for windage, but his bullets still went wild.

TOM worried his way closer. He heard himself gasping, sobbing with impotent rage, for it was dreadful to crouch here in the open, bent against the storm while that maniac shot at him. If only he could lay hands on the wretch. If only the wind would cease for a second or two—

He rubbed the tears from his eyes and stared through the blur, for the storm was up to another prank and an amazing thing was taking place. That sugar house was being plucked apart bit by bit; it was disintegrating, and Hostetter was directly in the path of the debris. Evidently he

his hands. The girl fell upon him. She pressed him close, she covered him with caresses. Through the din she voiced a tearful psalm of thanksgiving. Her face was streaming.

It was a while before he could tell her what had happened and even then she understood only a part of what he said, for his voice failed.

Hostetter dead! He had tried to kill Tom! The girl's face blazed; she uttered words of Spanish that exploded like firecrackers. At this moment she could have hacked the giant's body into bits.

When she had herself under better control she apprised Tom of the new threat behind that locked door.

"I know, I heard him last night," he had recovered himself by now; he rose and pointed to the companionway. "Get upstairs," he ordered. "I'm going in."

He was astonished when she shook her head, then darted to the table where lay the remains of the last meal and seized Hostetter's butcher knife. Her face was chalky, but her dark eyes were flashing.

"No!" she cried. "We go together."

This was not the shy Cuban girl he had met at Punta Rassa, nor the timorous creature he had kidnaped. Argument was useless. Rita stormed, she stamped, she brandished the blade and poured forth a torrent of

with beard; plainly he was helpless. Not until Tom bent over him did he recognize the fellow, then in a flat tone of mingled relief and suspicion he said:

"Why, hello, Fisher!"

The prostrate man stared up at him. His lips moved; he appeared to cower.

Rita plucked at Tom's sleeve. "You know him?"

"His name is Sid Fisher. Partner of that fellow I shot at Okechobee."

"What all you, cowboy?"

"I'm right sick. . . I'm bad hurt." The feeble voice was barely

down any minute and—I don't care! It's hell, doing by inches this way! . . . They were right over that confession and Sonny was for killing me, but Tuttle wouldn't stand for it. Him and Tad took me to ride for the 'Glades and never come back. North-east of here I got into bad country and my horse broke a leg. It's all flat, flinty rock with an inch or two of mud and water on top. Little points and sharp edges sticking up.

jured man. "It would be a mercy if you finished me, mister."

Capt. Ben Noble was in deep distress, therefore he turned for relief to his Bible.

The storm, which had lashed this part of the state and which it was rumored had attained hurricane velocity farther south, had not only interrupted the search for Rita Mendez but also it had added enormously to Noble's apprehensions. Thus far he had taken no active part in the rescue measures, for every sailboat in the river had been either sunk or disabled, and of those that had put out ahead of the big blow at least one had been lost—a catastrophe that had shocked the town.



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shouted something unintelligible, then turned his back and rushed toward higher ground. He tripped, he fell; like a hippopotamus he charged shoreward. Plainly his one thought was to beat his way back to the house ahead of the hurricane. Rita was there.

Too late Tom realized the trap into which he had been decoyed. He would be swept into the swamp on the far side of the creek, his flimsy boat would be dashed to pieces against the tree trunks, and to swim that channel against such a rush of wind and wave was too much for any man. He reached for his revolver, but the boat was rocking under him and Hostetter was all but hidden in the woody tangle.

IN A panic his mind leaped to Rita and he felt himself growing deathly sick, then the drifting sloop fetched up with a jerk that sent him sprawling. It had collided with nothing. The waters rushed past it. He realized in a flash what had happened. That severed rope, knotted at the end, in paying out through the man-grove roots had caught, wedged. For the moment, at least, it held, and meanwhile the onrushing torrent slewed the boat shoreward. It swung closer to the bank and its occupant was crouched to leap when the rope gave way and the boat began to drift.

Tom flung himself overboard. Overhead the hurricane yelled in glee, for now there were two mad men on Murder Island.

It was impossible to run against that gale. Tom tried it, but out here the full force of the wind made itself felt and he was flung off his feet. He rose and bore into it. The most he could do, however, was to creep. At times he went on all fours, and when the hurricane howled louder he flung himself down, claved at roots or stumps, and held himself to the ground by main strength. The back of his sleeves, his pants legs, the loose flesh of his face fluttered, there was a roaring in his ears, his nostrils were blown shut, and his eyes were blinded with tears. Yard by yard he advanced, lifting with his shoulders the crushing weight of the gale.

His lost sight of Hostetter, then saw him again, emerging from the sugar house where the sap was boiled. This was the shelter in which the Negroes had spent the night and evidently it was where he had ordered them to store Tom's belongings, for now in his hands he carried the missing carbine. His intent was plain. Having failed in his first crafty attempt to dispose of his unwelcome guest he now intended to

had failed to close the door behind him as he came out and now the wind had entered and was lifting the roof. Those sheets of corrugated iron bulged, tore loose and parted from each other like the leaves of a newspaper; boards, pieces of timber followed them as the walls of the structure belled and burst. They streamed away from it like charred embers blown from a fire. Those thin iron sheets scaled through the air like playing cards, but each was a razor-sharp blade that dove whatever it collided with. Here one sailed flat, whirling with the speed of a circular saw; yonder one rolled and bounded in fifty foot leaps; others zigzagged like darting kites.

Realizing his danger, Hostetter scrambled to his feet and tried to run, to dodge, but the storm slowed his movements. He could not control his course. Out of somewhere, like a silver bird of prey, a gleaming metal sheet swooped at him and, seeing it coming, he threw up his hands to protect himself. It touched him lightly and passed on, soaring higher. It left him in two pieces.

Kennedy closed his eyes and clung to the earth like a leech.

THIS breathing spell was a merciful relief to Rita, who had endured about all she could. She refused to believe that this calm was merely a break in the storm, for her tired mind refused to envisage another night as dreadful as the last.

She clapped a hand over her lips to smother a cry, for out of some-where came a voice. A man's voice. It issued from the adjoining room, that locked room, and the quality of it was strange, terrifying, for the man was conversing with himself. In heaven's name, what next? she asked herself.

Soon a distant roaring came to her. The sound grew louder and she saw, far down the empty lagoon, a spectacle that paralyzed her. Those mud flats were moving, squirming; they had bloomed into foaming white. Dimly she realized what was happening, and meanwhile the humming in the air around her grew more pronounced.

Kennedy managed somehow to regain the house and leave the door shut. With Rita's aid he wedged a prop against it. Then he lurched to a bench, his knees buckled; he collapsed upon it and took his head in

Spanish too swift for him to follow. Its effect upon Tom was electrifying. Her man! She was ready to fight for him with tooth and nail! What a darling! God! If he could get her out of this scrape!

"Keep back," he directed. He drew his revolver, blew the mud and water out of it, then cocked and uncocked it several times. His legs, which had carried the weight of the storm, had ceased their trembling and were strong again. He lifted his boot and kicked in the door.

Gun in hand, he crossed the threshold and Rita followed him, crouching like a cat. She had the face of a Valkyrie.

The room was gloomy. In a bed against the wall lay a man. His cheeks were hollow and overgrown

audible above the general clatter and banging. "Where's Hostetter? Man, I'm thirsty!"

Kennedy sheathed his revolver. Out of a jug he poured a glass of water and held it to Fisher's lips. The latter drank greedily. "I'm bad off, mister," he croaked. "You got a cigar?" Tom shook his head; he indicated his sodden clothes. "How come Hostetter told on me?"

"He didn't tell. He's dead. He tried to kill me just now."

It was some time later, Fisher was resting more easily, so Tom inquired: "How did this happen?"

"Well, when they turned me loose at the jail—"

"They?"

"Tuttle and the Dolman boys. No use lying now. This house'll blow

I'd heard of the place, but I was too far in to go back, so I come on through afoot. . . . It was like walking on knives. My boots give out. I tried everything. Some Injuns picked me up and turned me over to a plume hunter and I laid in his camp. He tied up my feet in palm-leaf fiber and it stopped the bleeding, but he didn't have no medicine at all. I reckon that mud was plzened, or the flies must have got at me. My feet got terrible bad. He brought me here and I been flat on my back all summer. Just petersing out. . . . Hostetter told me he was going to talk about it. . . . And no chloroform anywhere! . . . He liked to talk about it. . . . He was fixing to do it when you came along. . . . A sweat stood on the face of the in-

mentioned, advertised that his jars were guaranteed to be sans cere (without wax). And so the words sans cere came eventually to mean "whole," "sound," "genuine"—sincerity. That is supposed to be how we got the word.

Now is a good time for pushing out the frontiers of your occupation and reputation, especially if you were born Jan. 12-Feb. 12, April 20-May 22, June 23-July 24, or Nov. 7-Dec. 6, or Dec. 10 to Jan. 9, however, are the birthdays of those who, in addition to the above, should be careful to avoid difficulty with those above them in all walks of life, including occupation, social affairs, and governmental matters. In either case, with or without temptations, sincerity is of prime importance if we are to make our efforts the basis of substantial prosperity.

As Above, So Below

Look for your birthday or the group in which it appears throughout the following notes—it may be mentioned more than once. Mark it with a pencil wherever you see it, and then pay attention to the counsel given.

Sincerity

Whether it is true or not, here is a good story: An old French merchant once became disgusted with the trade practices of his day. His competitors were selling earthenware pots that were defective; when they filled it with wax of the same color and sell it as a sound vessel. The poor purchaser would put it over his fire, the wax would melt and run out, and he would realize he had been swindled. But in those days it was caveat emptor—let the buyer beware—and all he could do was buy another jar and hope it would be better. Then our hero, the merchant first

By WYNN

VIBRATIONS favorable to worth-while expansion are with us this week till Wednesday at least. Make the most of opportunities to widen your business, friendly, and financial interests along lines justified by your foundations. From late Wednesday, however, till Friday there is temptation to be hasty both in entering and abandoning projects; best to withhold anything that looks like turning a corner on one wheel. Be warful in dealing with strangers; take time to learn their reputations, whether buying or selling, all this week.

Today and tomorrow: Personal days; rely on yourself as much as possible; use your brain; develop and improve your capacities. Tuesday and Wednesday: Apply your skill and abilities in making money and in paying and collecting all just debts. Thursday and Friday: Mental strength is to be developed here, strength to say no or yes, according to the truth; these also are days for getting around among neighbors and business acquaintances—remembering, of course, the remarks above, Saturday and next Sunday: Check up on matters of insurance, estate, savings, home, and relations with parents.

Faith

Stand up, take a deep breath, and focus your mind on this point, for it can mean years of happiness, more money, better service, and all the

Your Future Forecast

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NOTE: Wynn cannot undertake to answer personal inquiries

Beginning Next Week: A thrilling new serial, "Who Rides On a Tiger," by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. Into a fascinating murder mystery, set in the great world of English high society, the author has cast a brilliant group of principal characters. You will meet Zella Blunt, 21, lovely with a sprite's allure; John Pomfret, her somewhat older second cousin; Capt. Broke Castledyne, a dangerously attractive man; and several others.

two ragged Negroes entered bearing a stretcher upon which lay a white man. "It's Sid Fisher," he explained. "He needs medical attention and—"

Noble did not hear his nephew's explanation, for behind the stretcher bearers came Rita Mendez. She was dressed in a boy's suit. Apparently she was unharmed, for she smiled and greeted him cheerfully. In fact, her face was beaming.

Tom was saying something about a resting place for Fisher until a doctor could be summoned. His uncle interrupted hastily to ask why the fellow had been brought here.

"He's afraid to go to jail and I'm afraid to take him there until you've had a talk with him."

"Hurry! Hurry!" Rita cried. "I'll explain everything." She waved Tom on and he passed through the living room. The Negroes followed him.

When he returned a few moments later he found Capt. Ben with the girl's hands in his. The old man appeared relieved, but he looked bewildered. Rita was laughing; she was triumphant, gay.

"I told him," she announced. "He's not angry."

"Angry!" the cattleman explained. "I'm too glad that you're alive and well and safe. . . . Tom! She says you're married!"

"Yes, sir. But we've got to make haste. Fisher declares the Dolmans will kill him, sure. He's ready to tell on them, if you'll protect him. He knows enough to run them out of the country and he'll turn state's evidence—"

"Haven't you heard what happened to the Dolman boys?"

Tom shook his head. "We just got in."

"They were lost in the storm."

RITA uttered an exclamation. Tom's expression altered, but before he could voice his astonishment or relief the uncle explained: "It happened down around Chokelokee. Their boat capsized—"

"At Punta Rassa I heard about some boat—"

The other members of the party managed to get ashore, but Sonny couldn't swim, and Tad—well, I reckon he sort of redeemed himself."

"With them gone and Tuttle, too, that'll clear things up pretty well," said Tom. "Fisher has got enough on the outfit to send them all to the pen. He helped in most of Asa's stealing and—". His tone altered suddenly. "I suppose that sheriff is dead and there's a reward out for Big?"

"Bile? Why, Homer is telling everybody you shot him!"

"So! Alive and lying, as usual! No doubt he claims we started the trouble."

"Exactly!"

"I'm getting right sick of this stuff. I'll look him up and—"

"You'll sit down and help me get the straight of this," Noble declared forcefully. "Don't bother about Homer; I'll handle him. . . . Now, then, what about this marriage?"

"Why, Rita never cared for Tad. He threatened to tell the Cuban authorities on her father—that about contraband—so we up and eloped. The storm caught us and we couldn't get back. We didn't mean to worry people."

"No, of course not!" Noble spoke dryly. "Where have you been?"

"We don't exactly know, sir. After we were married that storm broke and—we've had quite a time. It's right nice to be back."

"She told me you were married tonight in Punta Rassa. By a ship's captain!"

"Did it?" the girl inquired. "It must have popped out. I'm so excited. Well, I'm no good at telling stories."

"Are you really married?" Noble inquired suspiciously.

"O, señor!"

"Yes, sir. That part about the ship's captain is true."

The listener drew a deep breath of relief. "I was about to send one of those Niggers for a doctor and the other one for a preacher. . . . Him! Seems like you children need somebody to do your lying—somebody with an established practice."

"I figured it would sound better if—"

"What do we care how it sounds or what people say?" the bride exclaimed. "He carried me away and I loved it. A thousand times I prayed for that very thing. My heart was bursting for joy. Alas, it had known as much then as I know now I would have eloped by myself and gone to him. Señor Uncle Ben, I have altogether grown up."

"She's—wonderful!" Tom said huskily. "She's the bravest girl I ever saw."

Rita nodded her dark head with vigor. "Yes, I have the courage of ten thousand lions. I could free Cuba. All the same I'm a little bit afraid to go to my uncle's house. Perhaps you would go first, captain. It is helping millions."

"Good Lord!" Noble cried with a start. "Haven't you been there?"

He stared queerly at the girl. "Why, then you have a surprise. . . . Your father is here."

Rita gasped, one hand fluttered to her breast in a characteristic gesture. "So? He escaped? He's safe?"

"Of course. I've immediately called him at once and he left vicinately. He arrived tonight. Hurry, child—"

But this admonition was wasted. With a choking cry Rita sped from the room. The screen door slammed

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Dr. Walter G. Geon, for many years Health Director of Indianapolis, says: "Insufficient kidney excretions are the cause of much needless suffering with Aching Back, Frequent Urination, Headaches, Burning, Painful Urination, Rheumatism, Stiff Neck, Headaches, and generally run-down body. I am of the opinion that the prescription Cystex corrects such functional conditions. It aids in flushing poisons from the urinary tract, and in freeing the blood of retained toxins. Cystex deserves the endorsement of all doctors." If you suffer from kidney and bladder dysfunctions, delay endangers your vitality, and you should not lose a single minute in starting to take the doctor's special prescription called Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) which helps kidney functions in a few hours. It starts work in 15 minutes. Gently tones, soothes, and cleans raw, sore membranes. Gives new energy and vitality in 48 hours. It is helping millions of sufferers and is guaranteed to fix you up and make you feel like new in 8 days, or money back on return of empty package. Get guaranteed Cystex from your druggist today.