

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

"OFF THERE to the right---somewhere---is a large island," said Whitney." It's rather a mystery---"

"What island is it?" Rainsford asked.

"The old maps call it `Ship-Trap Island,'" Whitney replied." A strange name, isn't it? Sailors have a fear of the place, I don't know why. Some superstition I guess---"

"I can't see it," remarked Rainsford, trying to look through the wet tropical night.

"You have good eyes," said Whitney, with a laugh," and I've seen you easily shoot a tiger running in the jungle, but even you can't see so far through this moonless Caribbean night."

"No I cannot," admitted Rainsford. "Oh! This dark is like black paper."

"It will be light and sunny in Rio de Janero," promised Whitney. "We should be there in a few days. I hope the hunting guns have arrived by then. We will have some good hunting up the Amazon River. Great sport, hunting."

"The best sport in the world," agreed Rainsford.

"For the *hunter*," added Whitney. "*Not* for the animal."

"Don't talk stupid!" said Rainsford. "You're a hunter, not a mother. Who cares how an animal feels?"

Maybe the animal does," observed Whitney.

"That's stupid! Animals have no understanding."

"Maybe, but I do think they understand one thing---fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you stupid. Be real. The world is made up of two kinds of people---the *hunters* and the *hunted*. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Did we pass that island yet?"

"I can't see in the dark. I hope so."

"Why? " asked Rainsford.

"Because the place has a bad reputation."

"Ghosts?" asked Rainsford.

"No. Not even ghosts would live in such a horrible place. But sailors are always afraid of it. Did you see how nervous the sailors looked today?"

"Yes, they were a bit strange--- even the Captain!"

"Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think *evil* is a real thing---just like sound and light. Anyhow, I'm glad we're leaving this area. Well, I think I'll go to bed now, Rainsford."

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe up here first."

"Good night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast."

"Right. Good night, Whitney."

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford sat there, except the sound of the engine that moved the ship through the darkness. Rainsford smoked slowly on his favorite pipe. The sleepiness of the night was on him." It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes..."

Then a sudden sound frightened him. A gun shot in the darkness! Bang! Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, someone had shot a gun three times.

-2- Rainsford stood up and moved quickly to the side, confused. He could see nothing. He jumped--- and then his pipe fell from his mouth and into the water. He tried to catch it, but he reached too far and lost his balance. He fell quickly into the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea.

He swam up to the surface and tried to yell out, but the salt water in his open mouth made him cough and cough. He tried to swim to the ship, but it passed him quickly by and its lights soon disappeared into the blackness and left him alone.

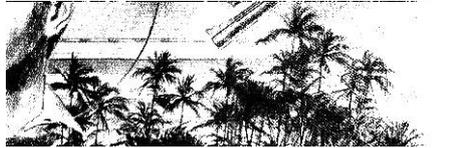
Then Rainsford remembered the gun shots. They had come from close-by, so he swam in that direction, swimming slow to save his strength. For a long time he fought the sea--- and then finally...

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high *screaming* sound, the sound of an animal in danger and terror.

He heard it again--- then it was stopped suddenly by another noise: another gun shot! Bang!

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes later there was another sound--- the most welcome he had ever heard! The sound of the sea on land! Then he was climbing onto rocks, pulling himself up from the salty, warm water. Thick jungle came down to the very edge of the water. But Rainsford didn't care. He was too tired to care. He threw himself down on the wet sand and fell into the deepest sleep of his life.



When he opened his eyes he knew from the Sun that it was late afternoon. Sleep had given him new strength; and he was painfully hungry. He looked around optimistically.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so scary a place? Trees and jungle plants were everywhere around the beach, and he looked for a road.

Not far from where he came on shore, he stopped. There on the ground were the marks of a large animal, the marks of a fight. There the plants were destroyed and covered with something red--- blood! Then Rainsford found a small shiny object and picked it up; it was a used bullet!

He then examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find--- the print of hunting boots. They walked in a direction into the jungle. Tired and hungry, he hurried along; night was beginning to come to the island.

Darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford saw the lights. His first thought was that he had found a village, for there were so many lights. But as he walked along he saw that all the lights were in one enormous building--- a huge structure with pointed towers reaching up up up into the night sky. The building was up on a high hill, and on three sides of it the land fell down to sea and shadows.

"Amazing," said Rainsford as he opened the tall iron gate. The stone steps were wet; the high wooden door was heavy and ancient; everything seemed unreal.

He knocked and the sound shocked him with its deep loudness. He thought he heard steps inside; but the door remained closed. Again Rainsford knocked. Then the door opened--- opened suddenly--- and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of gold light that came out. The first thing Rainsford saw was the largest man he had ever seen--- a giant with black beard to his waist. In his hand the man held a long pistol, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart.

The giant's two small eyes watched Rainsford carefully.

"Don't be afraid," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was friendly. "I'm no robber. I fell off a boat. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City."

The man's eyes did not change--- as if the giant were a statue. He gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in uniform--- a black uniform with gray stripes.

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a boat. I am hungry."

-3- The man's only answer was to raise his gun. Then Rainsford saw the man's hand go suddenly to his head in a military salute, and he stood at attention. Another man was coming down the broad stone steps, a tall, thin man in expensive clothes. He walked over to Rainsford and held out his hand.

In a voice with a slight foreign accent, he said, "It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home."

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting lions in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

Rainsford's first impression was that the General was quite handsome. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a bright white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military mustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheekbones, a sharp nose and dark face--- the face of a man used to giving orders, a leader. Turning to the giant, the general made a sign. The giant put away his gun, saluted and went away.



"Ivan is an really strong man," remarked the general, "but he has the bad luck of not being able to hear or speak. A simple fellow, a bit of a savage too."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack," said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I."

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be visiting here. We can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You will have them. This is a most-restful place."

The general spoke to Ivan him with lips that moved but gave no sound.

"Follow Ivan, please, Mr. Rainsford," said the general. "I was about to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge, fancy bedroom (with a bed big enough for six men!) that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan took out a suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from one of the most expensive stores in London.

The dining room was also remarkable. There was a ancient magic about it with its high wood ceiling. Around the room were dry heads of many animals: lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; Rainsford had never seen more perfect ones. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

"I will make you a drink, Mr. Rainsford," he insisted. But the drink was excellent, Rainsford noticed, and the the plates were all of fine china.

They were eating borsch, the rich, red soup with white cream so delicious to Russians. "We do our best to preserve the customs of civilization here," General Zaroff said. "We are far away, you know. Do you think the wine is good?"

"Perfect!" declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a thoughtful and kind friend. But there was one small thing that made Rainsford uncomfortable. Whenever he looked up from his plate, he found the general studying him, watching him carefully.

"Perhaps," said General Zaroff, "you were surprised that I knew your name. You see, I read all books on hunting written in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is hunting."

-4- "You have some wonderful animal heads here," said Rainsford as he ate a delicious steak. "That African Lion is the largest I ever saw."

"Oh, that fellow--- yes, he was a monster!"

"Did he attack you?"

"Threw me against a tree," said the general. "Injured my head. But then I shot him."

"I always thought," said Rainsford, "that the African Lion is the most dangerous of all hunting animals."

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling a strange smile. Then he said slowly, "No. You are wrong, sir. The African Lion is *not* the most dangerous." He drank his wine. "Here on this island, I hunt much more dangerous game. The *most* dangerous game!"

Rainsford was surprised. "Dangerous animals on this island?"

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to bring them to the island."

"What have you imported, general?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers stopped interesting me many years ago. No more excitement in killing tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford."

The general took from his pocket a cigarette and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver top; it was perfumed and gave off a beautiful smell.

"We will have some excellent hunting, you and I," said the general. "I will be very glad to have your company."

"But what animal---" asked Rainsford again.

"I will tell you," said the general. "You will think it funny, I know. Because I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new hunting sport. Would you like another glass of wine?"

"Thank you, general."

The general filled both glasses, and said, "God makes some men writers. Some He makes kings, some poor. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the pistol, my father said. My father was a very rich man and an excellent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, to shoot birds with. But when I shot some of his prize chickens with it, he did not punish me; he congratulated me on my talent. I killed my first bear when I was ten. My whole life has been one big hunt. Then I went into the army-- - but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of animal in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed. Too many!"

The general smoked another cigarette.

"Very interesting story," said Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I knew I must do something. So I asked myself, why the hunt no longer interested me. Perhaps you can guess the answer?"

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting had become too easy. I always got my kill. Always. It is so boring to be perfect every time."

The general lit a new cigarette. "No animal had a chance with me. I was just too good."

Rainsford looked across the table, fascinated by what his friend was saying.

"It came to me as a great dream what I must do next," the general went on.

"And what was that?"

The general smiled, "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said.

"A new animal? Are you joking?"

-5- "Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purpose--- there are jungles with hills, lakes..."

"But the animal, General Zaroff?"

"Oh," said the general, "it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting is like it. Every day I hunt, and I am *never* bored now."

Rainsford's confusion showed on his face.

"I wanted the perfect animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said, 'What is the perfect animal like? And the answer was, 'It must have courage and the ability to think.'"

"But no animal can think," replied Rainsford.

"My dear friend," said the general, "there is one that can."

"But you can't mean---" asked Rainsford.

"And why not?"

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a terrible joke."

"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."

"Hunting? My god, General Zaroff, what you speak of is *murder*."

The general laughed. He smiled at Rainsford. "I can't believe that a modern young man like you has romantic ideas about the value of human life."

"I could never agree with cold murder," finished Rainsford angrily.

The General laughed loudly. "How boring you are!" he said. "But I guess you'll change your mind after you go hunting with me once, Mr. Rainsford."

"Thank you--- I'm a hunter, not a murderer."

"Oh dear," said the general, quite calmly, "again that romantic word. But I think I can show you my hunting is not really murder."

"Yes?"

"Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my strength? If I wish to hunt, why not?"

"But they are men," said Rainsford hotly.

"Exactly," said the general. "That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They are intelligent, a little, so they are dangerous."

"But where do you get them?"

"This island is called *Ship Trap Island*," the General answered. "Come to the window with me."

Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. "Huge rocks all around the shore. Those sharp rocks are like monsters, Mr. Rainsford--- they *eat* ships. Then the men swim here, like you did. It works very well."

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none; giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said, casually, as if in answer to a question, "I have electricity. We try to be civilized here."

"Very well!? And you hunt the men after?"

A little anger was in the general's black eyes, but only for a second; and he said, "Oh dear, what a polite young man you are! But you will see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

-6- "We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about twelve 'pupils' down there now. They're from a Spanish ship that had the bad luck to break on the rocks out there."

Rainsford, with much effort, said nothing.

"It's a game, you see," continued the general blandly. "I ask one if they want to go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. Then I follow, with only a small pistol. If the man escapes me for three days and nights, he wins the game. But if I find him "---the general smiled---" he loses."

"What if he refuses to hunt?"

"Oh," said the general, "He doesn't have to play that game if he doesn't want to. If he does not want to hunt, I give him to Ivan. After that, Mr. Rainsford, they always choose to hunt!"

"And if they win?"

The general's face smiled. "I have never lost," he said. "But I can always use the dogs."

"The dogs?"

"This way, please. I'll show you."

The general showed Rainsford to a window. Rainsford could see, moving about below, a large number of huge black shapes, their eyes green as they looked up.

"And now," said the general, "I want to show you my new collection of animal heads. Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford, "that you will excuse me tonight, General Zaroff. I am feeling sick."

"Ah, really?" the general asked. "Well, that seems only natural after your long swim. You need a good night's sleep. Tomorrow you'll feel like a new man, I believe. Then we will hunt, ok?" But Rainsford was already running from the room.

"Sorry you can't go with me tonight," called the general. "I expect rather fair sport--a big, strong, black. He looks resourceful--Well, good night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fiber of his being, but nevertheless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the chateau were out now, and it was dark and silent; but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its wan light he could see, dimly, the courtyard. There, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up, expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol.

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint."

To Rainsford's questioning glance the general said, "Ennui. Boredom."

Then, taking a second helping of crêpes Suzette, the general explained: "The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. They do excessively stupid and obvious things. It's most annoying. Will you have another glass of Chablis,

Mr. Rainsford?"

"General," said Rainsford firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting--"

-7- "I wish to go today," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff's face suddenly brightened.

He filled Rainsford's glass with venerable Chablis from a dusty bottle.

"Tonight," said the general, "we will hunt--you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, general," he said. "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan's?"

He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

"You don't mean--" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel--at last." The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said enthusiastically. "Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess! And the stake is not without value, eh?"

"And if I win--" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeat if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff. "My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town." The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

"Oh, you can trust me," said the Cossack. "I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case--But why discuss that now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of Veuve Cliquot, unless--"

The general sipped his wine.

Then a businesslike air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We call it Death Swamp. There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable part of it was that Lazarus followed him. You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Rainsford. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You'll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? Au revoir, Mr. Rainsford, au revoir." General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a haversack of food, a leather sheath containing a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a cocked revolver thrust in the crimson sash about his waist.

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clearheaded when the chateau gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff; and, to this end, he had plunged along, spurred on by the sharp rowers of something very like panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped, and

was taking stock of himself and the situation. He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a frame of water, and his operations, clearly, must take place within that frame.

"I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford, and he struck off from the rude path he had been following into the trackless wilderness. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again -8- and again, recalling all the lore of the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him leg-weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a thickly wooded ridge. He knew it would be insane to blunder on through the dark, even if he had the strength. His need for rest was imperative and he thought, "I have played the fox, now I must play the cat of the fable." A big tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches was nearby, and, taking care to leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and, stretching out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so zealous a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that complicated trail through the jungle after dark. But perhaps the general was a devil--

An apprehensive night crawled slowly by like a wounded snake and sleep did not visit Rainsford, although the silence of a dead world was on the jungle. Toward morning when a dingy gray was varnishing the sky, the cry of some startled bird focused Rainsford's attention in that direction. Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb and, through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. . . . That which was approaching was a man.

It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic--- a small automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent incense-like smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come. The swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could follow an extremely difficult trail; he must have uncanny powers; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through his whole being. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true, but the truth was as evident as the sun that had by now pushed through the morning mists. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree, and struck off again into the woods. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding bough that was the trigger. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and

leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear again gripping his heart, heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

-9- "Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay mancatcher. Luckily for me I, too, have hunted in Malacca. You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it's only a slight one. But I shall be back. I shall be back."

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate, hopeless flight, that carried him on for some hours. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins; the vegetation grew ranker, denser; insects bit him savagely.

Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort, he tore his feet loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand.

His hands were tight closed as if his nerve were something tangible that someone in the darkness was trying to tear from his grip. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so and, like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig.

Rainsford had dug himself in in France when a second's delay meant death. That had been a placid pastime compared to his digging now. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew his pursuer was coming; he heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness; he was not feeling his way along, foot by foot. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see the general, nor could he see the pit. He lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. He leaped up from his place of concealment. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with a flashlight in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has claimed one of my best dogs. Again you score. I think, Mr. Rainsford, I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was a distant sound, faint and wavering, but he knew it. It was the baying of a pack of hounds.

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. That was postponing the inevitable. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and, tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

The baying of the hounds drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. On a ridge Rainsford climbed a tree. Down a watercourse, not a quarter of a mile away, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes, he saw the lean figure of General Zaroff; just ahead of him Rainsford made out another figure whose wide shoulders surged through the tall jungle weeds; it was the giant Ivan, and he seemed pulled forward by some unseen force; Rainsford knew that Ivan must be holding the pack in leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. But Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not wholly failed.

-10- Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Ever nearer drew the hounds. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. He reached it. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the chateau. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask, lit a cigarette, and hummed a bit from *Madame Butterfly*.

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great paneled dining hall that evening. With it he had a bottle of fine wine and half a bottle of Champaign. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course, the American hadn't played the game--so thought the general as he tasted his after-dinner liqueur. In his library he read, to soothe himself, from the works of Marcus Aurelius. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so, before turning on his light, he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called, "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford." . . .

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.