
Fist and Fang

by

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I'VE FOUGHT ALL my life; sometimes for money, sometimes for fun--once in a while for my life. But the deadliest, most vicious fight I ever fought wasn't for none of them things; no, sir, I was fighting wild and desperate _for the privilege of getting a bullet through my brain!_

Stand by and I'll tell you why I was fighting so me and my best friend would get shot.

I'm the heavyweight champion of the _Sea Girl,_ merchant ship, my name being Steve Costigan. The Old Man is partial to warm waters and island trade, see? Well, we was cruising through the Solomons on our way to Brisbane, taking our time because the Old Man practically grewed up in the South Sea trade and knows all the old traders and native chiefs and the like, and is always on the lookout for bargains in pearls and such like.

Well, we hove to at a small island by the name of Roa-Toa which had a small trading post on it. This post was run by the only white man on the islands, a fellow named MacGregor, and him being an old friend of the captain's, we run in for a visit.

The minute the Old Man had stepped onto the ramshackle wharf, Bill O'Brien, my side kick, said to me, he said: "Steve, see that motor launch down there by the wharf? Let's grab it and chase over to Tamaru and see old Togo."

Tamaru was another little island so close to Roa-Toa you could see the top of the old dead volcano. Togo was the chief; that wasn't his name, but it was as near as we could come to pronouncing it. He was a wrinkled old scoundrel and was a terrible sot, but very friendly to the white men.

"The Old Man will likely stop at Tamaru," I said.

"He won't, either," said Bill. "Him and MacGregor will drink up all the whiskey we got on board before he ever weighs anchor from Roa-Toa. He won't stop by Tamaru because he won't have no liquor to give to or trade with old Togo. Come on," said Bill. "We can easy make it in that launch. If we hang around the mate will find somethin' for us to do. Let's get to that launch and scoot before the Old Man or MacGregor sees us. Mac wouldn't let us have it, like as not, if we asked him."

So in a very short time we was heading out to sea, me and Bill, and my white bulldog, Mike. I heard a kind of whooping above the sputter of the motor, and looked back to see the Old Man and MacGregor run out of the trading stores and they jumped up and down and shook their fists and hollered, but we waggled our fingers at them and kept on our course, full speed, dead ahead.

WELL, IN DUE time Tamaru grew up out of the ocean in front of us, all still and dark green, with its dead volcano, and the trees growing up the sides of the mountains.

Togo's village was right on the beach when we was there the year before, but now much to our surprise we found nothing but a heap of ruins. The huts was leveled, trees cut short close to the water's edge, and not a sign of human life.

While we was talking, four or five natives come slithering out of the jungle and approached us very friendly, with broad smiles. Mike bristled and growled, but I put it down to the fact that no white dog likes colored people. According to that, no black dog ought to like white people, but it don't work.

Anyway, these kanakas made us understand in their pidgin English that the village had been moved back in the jungle a way, and they signified for us to come with them.

"Ask 'em how come they moved the village," I told Bill, who could speak their language pretty well, and he said: "Aw, they say the salt water made the babies sick. Don't worry about that; they likely don't know theirselves why they moved. They don't often have no reason for what they do. Let's go see Togo."

"Ask 'em how Togo is," I said, and Bill did, and said: "They says he's as free from pain and sickness as a man can be."

The kanakas grinned and nodded. Well, we plodded after them, and Mike he come along and growled deep down in his throat till I asked him very irritably to please shut up. But he paid no attention.

After awhile we come on to a large open space and there was the village. Just now they wasn't a sign of life, except a few native dogs sleeping in the sun. A chill wiggled up and down my spine.

"Say," I said to Bill, "this is kind of queer; ask 'em where Togo is."

"Where at is Togo?" said Bill, and one of the natives grinned and pointed to a pole set in front of the biggest hut. At first I couldn't make out what he meant. Then I did, and I suddenly got sick at my stomach--and cold at the heart with fear. _On top of that pole was a human head!_ It was all that was left of poor old Togo.

The next second two big kanakas had grabbed each of us from behind, and a couple hundred more came swarming out of the huts.

Bill, he give a yell and ducked, throwing one of his natives clean over his head, and he twisted half way round and knocked the other cold with a terrible biff on the jaw. Then the one on the ground grabbed Bill by the legs, and another hit him over the head with a club, laying his scalp open and knocking him to his knees.

MEANWHILE I WAS having my troubles. The minute them two grabbed me, Mike went for them, jerked one of them off me, got him down and nearly tore him apart. At the same instant I jammed my elbow backward, and by sheer luck connected with the other one's solar plexus. He grunted and loosened his hold, and I wheeled round to smash him, but as I did, I felt a sharp prick between my shoulders and knowed one of them was holding a spear at my back. I stopped short and stood still. The next minute me and Bill was tied hand and foot. I looked at Bill; he was bleeding plenty from the cut in his head, but he grinned.

Well, all that took something less than a minute. Three or four natives had went for Mike and pulled him off of his victim, which was howling and bleeding like a stuck hog. The said victim staggered away to the nearest hut, looking like a wreck on a lee shore, and the others danced and jumped around Mike trying to stab him with spears and hit him with clubs, without losing a leg at the same time; while Mike tried to eat his way through them to me.

Then while I watched with my heart in my mouth, _crack!_ went a pistol and Mike went down, rolling over and over till he lay still with the blood oozing from his head. I give a terrible cry and began to rave and tear at my ropes; I struggled so wild and desperate that I jerked loose from the kanakas which was holding me, and fell on the ground, being tied up like I was.

Then they pulled me and Bill roughly around to face a big dark fellow who came swaggering up, a smoking pistol in his hand. At first glance it struck me I'd seen him before, but all I wanted to do now was get loose and tear his throat out with my bare hands for killing Mike.

This bezark stopped in front of us, twirling his gun on his forefinger and I looked close at him. If looks and wishes would kill, he would of dropped dead three times in succession. A big, tall, beautifully built native he was, but he didn't look like the rest. He had a kind of yellow tint to his skin, whereas they was golden brown. And his face wasn't open and good natured like theirs was in repose; it was cruel and slant-eyed and thin-lipped. Malay blood there, I quickly seen. A half breed, with the worst blood of both races. He was dressed in just a loin cloth, like the rest, but somewhere, I knowed, I'd seen him in different clothes and different surroundings. Well, if I hadn't been so grieved and mad on account of Mike, I guess I'd have knowed him right off.

"Well, Meestah Costigan," said the big ham, in a kind of throaty voice, "you visit my island, eh? You like my welcome, maybeso? Maybeso you stay a long time, eh? Glad you come, me; I rather see you than any other man in the world!"

He was still grinning, but when he said the last his heavy jaws come together like the snap of a alligator. And then Bill, who was glaring at him like he couldn't believe his eyes, yelled: "Santos!"

IT ALL COME back to me in a flash! And I would of fell over from sheer surprise, hadst I not been tied and held up. Sure, I remembered! And you ought to, too, if you keep up with even part of the fighters that comes and goes.

A couple of years ago I'd met Santos in a Frisco ring. Yeah! Battling Santos, the Borneo Tiger, that Abie Hussenstein had discovered slaughtering second-raters in Asiatic ports. Abie brought him to America after Santos had cleaned up everything in sight over there.

They is no doubt that the big boy was good. In America he went through his first rank of set-ups like a sickle through wheat. He was fast, fairly clever for a big man, and strong as a bull.

Well, his first first-rater was Tom York, you remember, and Tom outboxed him easy in the first round, but in the second Santos landed a crusher that broke Tom's nose and knocked out four teeth. From then on it was a butchery, and the referee stopped it in the fifth to keep York from being killed. After that the scribes raved over Santos more than ever, called him a second Firpo and said he couldn't miss being champion.

Abie was sparring for matches in the Garden and he sent Santos back to Frisco to pad his k.o. record and keep in trim by toppling some ham-and-egggers. Then, enter a dark man, the villain of the play--otherwise Steve Costigan.

Santos was matched to meet Joe Handler ten rounds in San Francisco. The very day of the fight, Handler sprained his ankle, and they substituted me the last minute. I needn't tell you I went into the ring on the short end of about a hundred to one, with no takers--except the _Sea Girl_'s crew, who seem to think I can lick anybody, simply because I've licked all of them.

Well, I reckon the praise and hurrah and all had went to Santos' head. He come out clowning and playing up to the crowd. He fainted at me with his big long brown arms and made faces and wise-cracks, as I come out of my corner. He dropped his gloves, stuck out his jaw and motioned me to hit him. This got a big laugh out of the crowd, and while he was doing that, with his mouth wide open, laughing, I hit him!

I reckon I was closer to him than he thought, for it was a wide open shot. I crashed my right from my knee, and I plunged in behind it with everything I had. I smashed solid on his sagging jaw so hard it numbed my whole arm. I don't see how I come not to tear his jaw clean off. Anyway, he hit the canvas like he figured on staying there indefinite, and they had to carry him to his dressing room to bring him to.

When everybody got their breath back, they yelled "fluke! fluke!" And it was, because

Santos would of licked me, if he'd watched hisself. But it finished him; he'd lost his heart, or something.

His next start he dropped a decision to Kid Allison, and he lost two more fights in a row that way. Hussenstein give him the bounce and he dropped out of view. Santos had gone back to stoking, people supposed; the public had forgot all about him, and I had too, nearly. But here he was!

ALL THIS FLASHED through my brain as I stood and gawped at the big cheese. Say, if Santos had looked tigerish in the ring, in civilized settings, he looked deadly now.

He stuck the pistol back into his girdle and said, easy and lazy: "Well, Meestah Costigan, you remember me, eh?"

"Yeah, I do, you dirty half-breed!" I roared. "What you mean shootin' my dog? Lem'me loose, and I'll rip your heart out!"

He bared his white teeth in a kind of venomous smile and gestured lazily toward the pole where old Togo's head was.

"You come to see your old friend, eh? Well, there he is! What left of him. Now Santos is chief! The old man was fool; the young men, they follow Santos. Now we make palaver; you my guests!"

And with that he laughed in a cold deadly way and said something to the kanakas which was holding us. He turned his back and walked toward his hut, them dragging us along anyway. I looked back, though, and my heart give a jump. Old Mike got to his feet kind of groggy and glassy-eyed, and shook his head and looked around for me. He seen me and started toward me; then he seen Santos, and sneaked away among the trees. I give a sigh of relief. Must be the bullet just grazed him enough to knock him out; nobody had seen him get up and hide but me, and he was safe for the time being, at least--which was something me and Bill O'Brien wasn't--and I guess Bill felt the same way for he looked kind of white.

Santos sat down in a chair, which was one the Old Man had give poor old Togo, and we was propped up in front of him.

"Once we meet before, Costigan," he said, "in your country. Now we meet in mine. This my country. I born here. Big fool, me. I leave with white men on ship when very young. I scrub decks; then shovel coal. I fight with other stokers. I meet Hus'stein and fight for him. He take me to Australia--America; I lick everybody. Everybody yell when I come in ring."

The grin had faded off his map and a wild light was growing in his eyes; they was getting red.

"Then I meet you!" his voice had dropped to a kind of hiss. "They tell me you one big ham. Nothing in the head! I think make people laugh! I hold out my face, say: 'Hit me!' Then I think maybeso the roof fall on me."

He was snarling like a wild beast now; his chest was heaving with rage and his big hands was working like my throat was between them.

"After that, I not so good. People say dirty things now at me. They say: 'Yellow! Glass chin! Throw him out!' Hus'stein say: 'Get out! You no drawing card now!' I go to stoking again. I work my way back to my people; my island."

He give a short grim laugh. He hit his breast with his fist.

"Me king, now! Togo old fool; friend to white man! Bah! I say to young men: make me king! We kill white men, and take rum and cloth and guns like our people did long ago. So I kill Togo, and old men that follow him! And you--" His eyes burned into me.

"You make fool of me," he said slowly. "Aaahhh! I pay you back!" He looked like a madman, gnashing his teeth and rolling his eyes as he roared at us.

I LOOKED AT Bill, uncertain like, and Bill says, nervy enough, but in a kind of unsteady voice: "You don't dast harm a white man. You may be king of this one-horse hunk of mud, but you know blame well if you knock us off, you'll have a British gunboat on your neck."

Santos grinned like a ogre and sank back in his chair. If he'd ever been half way civilized, which I doubt, he had sure reverted back to type again.

"The British have come," said he. "They knocked our village to pieces and killed a few pigs. But we ran away into the jungle and they could no find us. They shoot some shells around and then steam away, the white swine! That was because we fire on a trading boat and kill a sailor."

"Well," said Bill, "the Sea Girl's anchored off Roa-Toa and if you harm us, the crew won't leave nobody alive on this island. They won't shoot at you from long range. They'll land and mop up."

"Soon I go to Roa-Toa," said Santos, very placid. "I think I like to be king of Roa-Toa too; I kill MacGregor, and take his guns and all. If your ship come here, I take her, too. You think I no dare kill white man? Eh? Big fool, you."

"Well," I roared, the suspense being too much for me, "what you goin' to do with us, you yellow-bellied half-breed!"

"I kill you both!" he hissed, smiling and playing with his gun.

"Then do it, and get it over with," I snarled, being afraid I'd blow up if he dragged it out too long. "But, lem'me tell you somethin'--"

"Oh, no," he smiled, "not with the pistol. That is too easy, eh? I want you to suffer like I suffered."

"I don't get yuh," I growled. "It's all in the game. I don't see why you got it in for me. If you'd a-licked me, I wouldn't of kicked. Anyway, you got no cause to bump off Bill, too."

"I kill you all!" he shouted, leaping up again. "And you two--you will howl for death before I get through. _Arrgh!_ You will scream to die--but you will no die till I am ready."

He came close to me and his wild beast eyes burned into mine.

"Slow you will die," he whispered. "Slow--slow! For that blow you strike me, you suffer--and for all I suffer at the hands of your people, you shall suffer ten times ten!"

He stopped and glared at me.

"The Death of a Thousand Cuts shall be yours," he purred. "You know that, eh? Ah, you been to China! I know you know it, because your face go white now!" I reckon mine did, all right. I knew what he meant, and so did Bill. "Me, I show them where to cut," went on Santos, "for I have seen the Chinese torture like those."

I felt froze solid and my clothes were damp with sweat; also I was mad, like a caged rat.

"All right, you black swine!" I yelled at him, kind of off my bat, I reckon. "Go ahead--do your worst! But remember one thing--remember that I licked you! I knocked you cold! Killin' me won't alter the fact that I'm the best man!"

He screamed like a maddened jungle cat and I thought he'd go clean nuts. I'd sure touched him to the quick there!

"You did no beat me!" he howled. "I was big fool! I let you hit me! White pig, I break you with my hands! I tear your heart out and give it to the dogs!"

"Well, why didn't you?" I asked bitterly. "You had your chance, and you sure muffed it! I licked you then, and I can lick you now. You wouldn't dare look at me crost-wise if my hands wasn't tied. I'll die knowin' that I licked you."

His eyes was red as a blood-mad tiger's now, and they glittered at me from under his thick black brows. He grinned, but they was no mirth in it.

"I fight you again," he whispered. "We fight before I kill you. I give you something to fight for, too: if I whip you, and no kill you--you die under the knives; and your friend,

too. If I whip you, and kill you with my hands--your friend die under the cuts. But if you whip me, then I no torture you, but kill you both quick." He tapped his pistol.

Anything sounded better than the thousand cuts business, and, anyway, I'd have a chance to go out fighting.

"And suppose I kill you?" I asked.

He laughed contemptuously. "No chance. But if you do, my people shoot you quick."

"Take him up, Steve," said Bill. "It's the best of a bad bargain, any way you look at it."

"I'll fight you on your own terms," I said to Santos.

He grunted, yelled some orders in his own tongue, and the stage was set for the strangest battle I ever had.

In the open space between the huts, the natives made a big ring, standing shoulder to shoulder, about three deep, the men behind looking over the shoulders of those in front. The kids and women come out of the huts and tried to watch the fight between the men's legs.

A sort of oval-shaped space was left clear. At each end of this space stood a thick post, set deep in the ground. They tied Bill to one of these posts.

"I can't be in your corner this fight, old sea horse," said Bill, kind of drawn-faced, but still grinning.

"Well, in a way you are," I said. "You can't sponge my cuts and wave a towel, but you can yell advice when the goin's rough. Anyway," I said, "you got a good view of the fight."

"Sure," he grinned, "I got a ringside seat."

About that time the kanakas unfastened my ropes, and I worked my hands and fingers to get the circulation started again. Bill's hands was tied, so we couldn't shake hands, but I clapped him on the shoulder, and we looked at each other a second. Seafaring men ain't much on showing their emotions, and they ain't very demonstrative, but each of us knew how the other felt. We'd kicked around a good many years together--

Well, I turned around and walked to the middle of the oval, and waited. I didn't have to wait long. Santos came from the other end, his head lowered, his red eyes blazing, a terrible smile on his lips. All he wore was a loin cloth; all I had on was an old pair of pants. We was both bare-footed; and, of course, bare-handed.

I'D NEVER SEEN anything like this in my life before. They was no bright lights except

the merciless tropic sun; they was no cheering crowds--nothing but a band of savages that wanted our blood; they was no seconds, no referee--only a hard-faced kanaka with gaudy feathers in his hair, holding Santos' pistol. They was no purse but death. A quick death if I won; a long, slow, terrible death if I lost.

Santos was rangy, big, tapering from wide shoulders to lean legs. Speed and power there was in them smooth, heavy muscles. He was six feet one and a half inch tall; heavier than when I first fought him, but the extra weight was hard muscle. I don't believe he had a ounce of fat on him. He must have weighed two hundred, which gave him about ten pounds on me.

For a second we moved in a half circle, wary and deadly, and then he roared and come lashing in like a tidal wave. He shot left and right to my head so fast that for a second I was too busy ducking and blocking to think. He was crazy to knock my head off; he was shipping everything he had in that direction. Well, it's hard to knock a tough man cold with bare-knuckled head punches. The raw 'uns cut and bruise, but they ain't got the numbing shock the padded glove has. You'll notice most of the knock-outs in the old bare-knuckle days was from blows to the body and throat.

The moment I had a breathing space, I hooked a wicked left to the belly. His ridged muscles felt like flexible steel bands under my knuckles, and he merely snarled and lashed back with a right-hander which bruised my forearm when I blocked it. He was fast and his left was chain lightning--he shot it straight, he uppercut, and he hooked, just like that--_zip! blip! blam!_

The hook flattened my right ear, and almost simultaneously he threw his right with everything he had. I ducked and he missed by a hair's lash. Jerusha! I heard that right sing past my head like a slung shot, and Santos spun off balance and went to his knees from the force of it. He was up like a cat, spitting and snarling, and I heard Bill yell: "For the love of Mike, Steve, watch that right, or he'll knock your head clean off!"

Well, I guess in a ring with ordinary stakes, Santos would have finished me; but this was different. I'm tough any time; now I was fighting for the privilege of me and my pard going out clean. The thought of them sharp little knives put steel in me.

Santos grinned like a devil as he came in again. This time he didn't rush, he edged craftily, left hand out, watching for a chance to shoot his deadly right over. That's once I wished I was clever! But I ain't, and I knew if I tried to box him, I wouldn't have a chance. So I come in sudden and wide open; his right swished through the air and looped around my neck as I ducked and I braced my feet and ripped both hands to his midriff--_bam!--_bam!_ The next second his left chopped down on the back of my head. I went into a clinch, and his teeth snapped like a wolf's at my throat as I tied him up. He was snarling at me in his language as we worked out of the clinch, and he nailed me on the breakaway with a straight left to the mouth, which instantly began to bleed.

The sight of the blood maddened the kanakas, and they began to yell like jungle beasts.

Santos laughed wild and fierce, and began swinging at my head again with both hands. To date he hadn't tried a single body blow. Three times he landed to the side of my head with a swinging left, and I dug my right into his midriff. His right came over, and I blocked it with my elbow, then shot my own right to his belly again. He'd give a kind of sway with his whole body as he let go the right to give it extra force, and his arm would snap through the air like a big steel spring released.

Crash! His left landed on the side of my head, and I seen ten thousand stars. _Bam!_ His right followed, and I blocked it. But this time it landed flush on the upper arm instead of the elbow, and for a second I thought the bone was broke. The whole arm was numb, and, desperate, I crashed into close quarters and ripped short-arm rights to his belly, while he slashed at my head with short hooks. He wasn't so good in close; he didn't like it, and he broke away and backed off, spearing me with his long left as I followed.

BUT MY BLOOD was up now and I kept right on top of him. I slashed a left hook to his face, sank a straight right under his heart--_wham!_ He brought up a left uppercut that nearly ripped my head off. He flailed in with a torrid right, and I hunched my left shoulder just in time to save my jaw. At the same time I shot my right for his jaw and landed solid, but a little high. He swayed like a tall tree, his eyes rolled, but he come back with a screech like a tree cat and flashed a vicious left to my already bleeding mouth. The right came in behind it like a thunderbolt and I done the only thing I could--ducked, and took it high on the front part of my head. Jerusha! It felt like my skull was unjointed! I heard Bill scream as I hit the ground so hard it nearly knocked the breath clean outa me.

It was just like being hit with a hammer. A stream of blood trickled down into my eyes from where the scalp had been laid open.

I dunno why Santos stepped back and let me get up. Force of habit, I guess. Anyway, as I scrambled up, shaking the blood outa my eyes, he give me a ferocious grin and said: "Now I kill you, white man!" And come slithering in to do it. He feinted his left, drew it back, and as he feinted again, I threw my right, wild and overhand, desperate like, and caught him under the cheek bone. Blood spurted and he went back on his heels. I ripped a left to his belly and he grabbed me and held on like a big python, clubbing me with his left till I tore loose.

He nailed me with the right as I went away from him, but it lacked the old jar. I got a hard skull. No man could of landed like he did without hurting his hand some, anyway. But his left was so fast it looked and felt like twins. He shot it at one of my eyes in straight jabs till I felt that eye closing, and then, as I stepped in with a slashing right to the ribs, he came back with a terrible left hook that split my other eyebrow wide open and the lid sagged down like a curtain halfway over the eye.

"Work in close, Steve!" I heard Bill yell, above the howling of the kanakas. "If he keeps you at long range, he'll kill you!"

I'd already decided that! I wrapped both arms around my head and plunged in till my

forehead bumped his chin, and then I started ripping both hands to the belly and heart. His left was beating my right cauliflower to a pulp, but I kept blasting away with both hands till the whole world was blind and red; but he was softening. My fists were sinking deeper into his belly at every blow, and I heard him gasp. Then he wrapped his long, snaky arms around me and pinned me tight. As we tussled back and forth, with his breath hot in my ear, he sunk his teeth into my shoulder and worried it like a dog shaking a rat, growling deep in his throat till I tore away by main strength, and brought a stream of blood from his lips with a smashing right hook.

Then Santos went clean crazy. He howled like a wolf and began throwing punches wild and terrible, without aim or timing. He wasn't thinking about that sore right no more. It was like the air was full of flying sledge-hammers. Some he missed from sheer wildness; I blocked till my arms and shoulders ached. Plenty landed. I slashed a left to his face--and _crack!_--his right bashed into mine, smashing my nose flat. I heard the bones crackle and snap and a red mist waved in front of my eyes so I couldn't see. I felt faintly the impact of another blow, and then I felt the ground under my shoulders.

I lay there, counting to myself; my head was clearing fast. Nobody ever accused me of not being tough! Having my nose broke was a old story. I said to myself: "Nine!" and got to my feet, wrapping both arms around my head and crouching. Santos yelled and battered at my arms while I glared at him over them, and suddenly I unwound and sank my right to the wrist in his belly. Yes, he was getting soft from my continued batterings! His body muscles was getting too sore to contract hard and my fists sank in deep. Santos bent double, but came up with a punishing left uppercut to the jaw that dazed me and before I could recover, he ripped over that sledge-hammer right. It tore my left ear loose from my head and I felt it flap against my cheek.

I was out on my feet; just fighting from the old battle instinct, now. Some kind of a smash sent me back on my heels, and I felt myself falling backward and couldn't stop. Then I fell against something and heard a fierce voice in my ear: "Steve! He's weakening! Just one more smash, old sea horse, and he's yours!"

We had fought back to the end of the oval space and I was leaning against the post where Bill was tied. I made a desperate effort to right myself. Santos was watching me with his hands down and a nasty sneer on his face. He put his hands out and gripped my shoulders. He was marked pretty well himself.

"You licked now," he said. "The little knives, now they feast! The Death of a Thousand Cuts, it is yours!"

AT THAT I went kind of crazy, too. I lunged away from the post, and missed with a wild right, and the slaughter recommenced. Santos was mad and bewildered. Well, he wasn't the first fighter who couldn't understand why I kept getting up. My eyes was full of blood and sweat; one was nearly closed, and the sagging lid nearly hid the other. My nose was busted flat, one ear was hanging loose and the other swole out of all proportions. My left shoulder and arm was so numbed from blocking Santos' terrible

right, I couldn't lift it but a few inches above my waist line. My wind was giving out; I didn't know how long the fight had been going on; it seemed to me like we'd been fighting for centuries. I dunno what kept me on my feet; I dunno what kept me going. I'd almost got to where I didn't know nor care what they did to me. Sometimes I'd forget what we was fighting for. Sometimes I'd think it was because Santos had killed Mike, then again it would be Bill I'd think he'd killed. Once I thought we was back in the ring in Frisco.

Then I was down on my back, and Santos was kneeling on my chest, strangling me. I tore his hold loose and threw him off, and then we was standing toe to toe, trading slow, hard smashes. Then suddenly Santos shifted his attack for the first time and catapulted a blasting right to my body. Something snapped like a dead stick and I went to my knees with a red-hot knife cutting into my left side.

Santos standing over me, kicked at me with his big bare feet till I caught his legs, and as I clung on and he rained blows down at my head, I heard Bill's voice above the uproar: _"You got his goat, Steve! Get up! Get up once and he's licked!"_

I got up. I climbed that Malay devil's legs, paying no attention to the punches he showered on me, and as I leaned on his chest and our eyes glared into each other's, I saw a wild, terrible light had come into his--the light that's in a trapped tiger's--scared and bewildered, and dangerous as death. I'd fought him to a standstill--I had his number! And at them thoughts, strength flowed back into my arms. He flailed at me, but the kick was going from his blows; he was nearly punched out.

I stepped back and then drove in again. He was snarling between his teeth, and then he took a deep breath. The instant I saw his midriff go in, I sank my left in to the wrist, and as he bent forward I slugged him behind the ear, and he dropped to his knees. But he come up, gasping and wild. He'd forgot all the boxing he ever knowed, now. I stepped inside his wild swings and crashed my right under his heart, and though it was the most fearful agony to do it, brought up my left to his jaw. He went down on his haunches and I heard, in the deathly silence which had fell, Bill yelling for me to give him the boots. But I don't fight that way--even if I'd of had any boots on.

But Santos wasn't through. He was all savage now, and too primitive to be stopped by ordinary means. I'd fought him to a standstill; he was licked at this game. And he went clean back to the Stone Age. He leaped off the ground, howling and slaving at the mouth, and sprang at me with his fingers spread like talons; not to hit, but to strangle, tear, claw and gnash. And as he came in wide open, I met him with the same kind of punch I'd flattened him with once; a blasting right I brought up from my knee. _Crack!_ I felt his jaw-bone and my hand give way as I landed, and he turned a complete somersault, heels over head, and crashed down on his back a dozen feet away. You'd think that would hold a man, wouldn't you? Well, it would--a man.

It's possible to break a man's jaw with your bare fist, and still not knock him unconscious. Any ordinary man wouldn't be able to do nothing more after that. But

Santos wasn't a man, no more; he was a jungle varmint, and he'd gone mad.

BEFORE I COULD tell what he was going to do, he whirled and tore a long-handled battle-axe from the hand of a warrior in the front rank. He must have been on the point of collapse; he'd taken fearful punishment. Where he found strength for his last effort, I dunno. But it all happened in a flash. He had the axe and was looming over me like a black cloud of death before I could move. As he bounded in and swung up the thing above his head, I threw up my right arm. That saved my life; and the axe head missed the arm, but the heavy handle broke my forearm like a match, and knocked me flat on my shoulders.

Santos howled, swung up the axe and leaped again--and a white thunderbolt shot across me and met him in mid-air! Square on the Malay's chest Mike landed, and the impact knocked Santos flat on his back. One terrible scream he gave, and then Mike's iron jaws closed on his throat.

In a second it was the craziest confusion you ever seen. Kanakas whooping and yelling and running and falling over each other doing nothing, and Bill swearing something terrible and tearing at his bonds--and Mike making a bloody mess out of Santos in the middle of all of it. I tried to get up, but I was done. I got to my knees and slumped over again.

THE REST IS all like a dream. I saw the kanaka with the pistol shoot at Mike, and miss--and then, like an echo, come another shot--and the kanaka whooped, clapped his hand to the seat of his loin cloth, and scooted. I heard yelling in white men's voices, shots and a hurrah generally and then into my line of vision--considerably blurred--hove the Old Man, MacGregor, and Penrhyn, the mate, all cursing and whooping, with the whole crew behind them.

"Great Jupiter!" squawked the Old Man, red faced and puffing, as he leaned over me.

"They've kilt Steve! They've beat him to death with axes!"

"He ain't dead!" snarled Bill, twisting at his ropes. "He has just fit the toughest fight I ever seen--will some of you salt pork and biscuit eaters untie me from this post?"

"Rig a stretcher," said the Old Man. "If Steve ain't dead, he's the next thing to it. Hey, what the--!"

At this moment Mike came sauntering over and sat down beside me, licking my hand.

"Wh-who--who is--_was--_that?" asked the Old Man, kind of white-faced, pointing to what Mike had left.

"That there is what's left of Battlin' Santos, the Borneo Tiger," said Bill, stretching his arms with relish. "History repeats itself, and Steve has just handed him a most artistic

trimmin'--are you goopin' swabs goin' to let Steve die here? Get him on board ship, will you?"

"Look about Mike first," I mumbled. "Santos shot him with a pistol."

"Just a graze," pronounced MacGregor, examining Mike's unusually hard head. "Shot him with a pistol, eh? Guess if he'd used a rifle the dawg would of slaughtered the whole tribe. Wait, don't put Costigan on the stretcher till I mop off some of his blood."

I felt his hands feeling around over me, and I cursed when he'd gouge me.

"He'll be all right," he pronounced, "soon's we've set his arm and this rib here, and stitched his ear back on, and took up a few more gashes. And that nose'll need some attention, though I ain't set many noses."

I kind of dimly remember being carried back to the ship, with Mike trotting alongside, and I heard Bill and the Old Man yappin' at each other back and forth.

"--and no sooner had Mac here got through tellin' me that Santos had killed old Togo and set hisself up as king, than we heard the motor launch sputter, and see you two prize jackasses scootin' away into the jaws uh death. We yelled and whooped but you was too smart to listen--"

"How in the name of seven dizzy mermaids did you expect us to hear you with the motor goin'?"

"--and I says, 'Mac,' I says, 'it ain't worth it to save their useless hides, but we got to do it.' And it bein' a well-known fact that a fast motor launch can make more speed than a sailin' vessel, includin' even the _Sea Girl,_ which is all we had to rescue you in, we have just now arrove at the village. Hadst it not been for me--"

"Hadst it not been for Steve, you would of found only a few hunks of raw beef. Santos was goin' to carve us, and believe you me when I tell yuh Steve fought him to a standstill! Steve was licked to a frazzle, and didn't know it! Santos had everything, and he made Steve into the hash which now lies on that stretcher, but the old sea horse just naturally outgamed him. Accordin' to rights, Steve shoulda been knocked cold five times."

"_Arrumph, arrumph!"_ growled the Old Man, but I could tell he was that proud he couldn't hardly keep his feet on the ground. "I'd of give the price of a cargo to see that fight. Well, we didn't do like the British gunboat did--anchor off-shore and shell a few huts. We went through that jungle like Neptune goes through the water, and all of the bucks was too interested to know we was comin' till we swarmed out on 'em.

"I'm tellin' you, we'd of scuppered a flock of them, if my crew wasn't the worst aggregation of poor shots on the Seven Seas--"

"Well, hey," said the crew, "we didn't notice you bringin' down nobody on the fly."

"Shut up!" roared the Old Man. "I'm boss here and I'll be respected."

"For cats' sake," I snarled through my pulped lips, "will you cock-eyed sea horses dry up and let a sufferin' man suffer in his own way?"

"Don't think you rate so high, just because you're a little bunged up," growled Bill; but they was a catch in his voice. From the way he gripped my hand, I knowed exactly how he felt.

THE END

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