

## TEA PARTY STATEMENTS

“The old charts call it ‘Ship-Trap Island,’” Whitney replied. “A suggestive name, isn’t it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don’t know why. Some superstition--”

“Don’t talk rot, Whitney,” said Rainsford. “You’re a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?”

“Even so, I rather think they understand one thing--fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death.”

“Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn’t live in such a God-forsaken place. But it’s gotten into sailor lore, somehow. Didn’t you notice that the crew’s nerves seemed a bit jumpy today?”

There was no breeze. The sea was as flat as a plate-glass window. We were drawing near the island then. What I felt was a--a mental chill; a sort of sudden dread.

An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times.

The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another noise, crisp, staccato.

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 forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled and ragged jungle fringed the shore.

His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial chateau; it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of its cliffs divided down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

Rainsford’s first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general’s face.

“You have some wonderful heads there,” said Rainsford as he ate a particularly well-cooked filet mignon. “That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw.”

“No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game.” He sipped his wine. “Here in my preserve on this island,” he said in the same slow tone, “I hunt more dangerous game.”

The general took from his pocket a gold cigarette case and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver tip; it was perfumed and gave off a smell like incense.

“Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call ‘a sporting proposition.’ It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection.”

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. “I had to invent a new animal to hunt,” he said.

“No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this, it was a tragic moment for me, I can tell you.”

“It supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match wits.”

“And the answer was, of course, ‘It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.’”

“I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbors romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war--”

“If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him” --the general smiled-- “he loses.”

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

“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.”

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.

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.

Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come.

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.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away.