

Jungle Guillotine

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Novelette

CHAPTER I.

MORTAL ENEMIES.

SUBDUED excitement seized every convict in the French Guianan prison barrack as Commandant Riche opened the clanging iron gate and swung into the long room. From the men on the canvas cots came only silence, but it was eloquent. Each asked himself quickly, "What has happened that Riche should come here now, to this pigpen as he calls it? Has there been an escape; has some stool pigeon

lied, perhaps said guns were in the prison; another murder—?"

Riche was tall with thick body, and his brown mustache proudly tipped. He enjoyed the apprehension his sudden appearance created, showed it by coldly staring them up and down, not speaking for moments. Then, white uniform stiffly starched, tropical helmet set straight on his Gallic head, he raised a hand, pointing at Hanson, the blond American giant.

"You!" Riche said. "Stand up." It was an order, sharp, abrupt.

*Most men go to Devil's
Island because they can't
help it—one went there for
revenge*



Riche groveled in the dirt, begging for mercy

Hanson heaved his great bulk from the canvas strip where he sat beside Etienne, the small, wiry Parisian apache. Shaggy, bleached yellow hair covered the American's head; the skin of his face, tanned by the equatorial sun, was smooth as a child's, while his wide eyes, very light blue, were like that same child's save there was a sadness in the depths youth does not know. There was tranquillity, serenity about the giant, whose hands were as large as plates, shoulders broad as two ordinary men. He stood six-feet-three, weighed over two hundred pounds. He was the sort of man his fellows take pride in, a handsome, huge animal women blindly loved.

"And you, little gutter rat," added Riche, indexing Etienne.

Etienne's eyes narrowed; he leaped to his feet, inches under his comrade, easily able to hide himself entirely behind Hanson. He whispered a French oath that perfectly described Commandant Riche. Compared with the spacious movements of Hanson, Etienne was a flea.

Swiftly then, Commandant Riche pointed to eight more men among the eighty in that dormitory. All, with the exception of Etienne, were strong and large, not yet withered by fever, bad food, the murderous climate of Guiana. "Pack your knapsacks and fall in at the gate," commanded Riche. "The *surveillant* will bring you there in ten minutes." He about-faced in military fashion, and the gate rang metallically after him.

At once a buzz of conjecture arose. "He has some dirty work to be done," growled Etienne, "for he's picked all the husky ones."

"Like you, *hein*?" joked a tattooed *zéphyr*.

Hanson set about packing his few rags and belongings from the shelf above his cot, binding them in a canvas bag.

"Maybe Riche has picked out his best pals for a pleasure jaunt," another said.

"Huh, Riche knows I hate him," cried Etienne. He drew a home-made knife from the folds of his shapeless gray uniform with black prison numerals across it. "I was

just telling Hanson what I'd like to do with Riche." His white teeth showed as he twirled the blade with twisting motion upward, as though he cut into the belly of the commandant. "Thrust, in and up, then turn it around so it tears his yellow guts," he shouted. "Oh, these lousy guards! They cheat us, insult us, kill us—and nothing is done. You great big hulks won't fight. Why don't we all mutiny, turn on them like the beasts they make us? If I could only get my hands on a machine gun! *Mon Dieu*, but those Thompsons are pretty, sweet. I used one in Paris; I could cut a dozen men down before one could shoot a pistol." He turned to Hanson. "Funny, American, Riche never bothers you. He's always picking on me, and on the others to some extent, but he lets you alone. I've never seen him hit you."

Hanson nodded. "Because I don't let him see he annoys me. He can always get a rise out of you, Etienne, and that gives him pleasure."

"Maybe. But I can't help snarling at him."

THE *surveillant* called them, led them through the corridor into the baking courtyard within the high walls of St. Laurent penitentiary. There were other barracks, a hospital, quarters for officers and for soldiers. When they reached the gates leading to the outer world—they had been locked in for the three hours of intense noon heat—they found thirty more prisoners from other dormitories ahead of them. Every one, save Etienne, was strong and large, the pick of the prison.

They were staring at one another with wondering eyes, lipless whispers of curiosity running up and down the ranks, when the black door of Riche's quarters opened and a small figure in whites and helmet stepped out, Riche close at his heels, smiling—the commandant had opened the door to let the slight, twisted man precede him, an action which astounded the convicts he bullied.

"Big shot," Etienne whispered to Hanson.

Hanson turned his eyes to the personage on whom Riche was fawning. An icy hand touched him. A shadow, a shadow of life that was past for him, clouded the clearness of his light eyes. But he did not move.

"I've chosen the most powerful brutes in the prison, M'sieu le Baron," Riche was saying, sweeping his hand up and down the lines, as though he exhibited animals.

And Hanson was asking himself, "Why has my deadly enemy come to Guiana? What does Marcel Lavine expect now?"

Baron Lavine limped down the rows of *bagnards*, each holding his scanty pack. He was bent out of the perpendicular to the right, as though his skin had shrunk; actually it was a spinal injury which had warped his body. He was pale, with sunken cheeks, and the white drill clothing hung loosely on his tiny frame. His head was too large for his body, covered with stringy black hair. But his remarkable eyes, ebony, so black the color was flat, were what set him apart; it was not the pain-racked lines about the large ugly mouth but the horrible expression of suffering in the eyes. They frightened, with their hopeless despair, made men silent since they felt the uselessness of pity, help. Such a look as comes to men condemned to die a painful death from disease, or by the law for a crime.

Lavine paused beside Hanson, looked up into the giant's calm face.

The baron's breathing grew faster, he began to shake as he stared at the serene mass before him.

"Damn you, Hanson," he cried. "Won't anything change you, disturb you—murderer!" He turned away as though unable to stand the sight of Hanson, and his glittering eyes fell on Etienne. "Riche," he snapped. "What's the idea of taking along a shrimp like this one? He can't carry a load."

"M'sieu le Baron," Riche said humbly, "I'm taking him—as my valet. You comprehend? I must have some pleasure, and this little rat amuses me. Is it all right?"

Lavine shrugged, grunted assent. "Riche," he ordered, "bring Hanson in-

side, to your room." They could see he was trembling as he went back through the black door.

Riche shoved Hanson, not missing a chance to kick at Etienne, who snarled, showing his teeth. The commandant threw back his head and laughed, but pushed Hanson along a dark passage into a square room. Lavine awaited Hanson, impatiently pacing up and down. When the American stood inside, Riche, who was curious about Lavine's interest in Hanson, wished to remain and listen, but Lavine waved him angrily away. "Outside! Shut the door and don't listen at it, Riche." Riche hopped out at once. And Lavine swung fiercely on Hanson.

"**W**HY did you kill her?" Lavine gasped. This great man, internationalist, worth millions, with projects embracing the world, was more interested in a broken convict than in anything else.

"I've told you again and again I didn't kill Adele," said Hanson, quite calm now, controlling the shock felt at seeing Lavine.

His serenity enraged the baron. "You did. You shot her, the only woman I ever loved. And she loved me!"

Hanson shook his head. "She chose to marry me, Lavine."

"But why? I had millions, could have given her anything. Why did she choose you, a great, stupid oaf, a pauper? You have no feelings, you don't suffer as I do—why don't you? Will nothing make you see the enormity of your crime?" Bursting with fury, Lavine hit Hanson, bruising his fist on Hanson's teeth as he drove it to the American's mouth.

Hanson lowered his head; then shook it, did not raise the hands that might have crushed the twisted man before him. No hate showed in his eyes. "Adele was sorry for you," he said gently. "I am, too. I didn't shoot her."

"The court convicted you, however. The concierge of the hovel in which you lived, to which Adele chose to go instead of to my palace, swore you quarreled with

her, that he heard the shot after you got home that night."

"He was mistaken. You know my story."

"Yes—a lie. You killed her! Life in Guiana—you were lucky they didn't cut off your head. I can't forget Adele, her gentleness; I see her eyes always. I've come here for more than one reason, Hanson. You're going into the jungle with me, going to carry in—machinery for mining gold. There's a new strike near the Brazilian border. And I mean to see you suffer physically. Mental worry seems beyond your capacity, the torture I go through at having lost Adele. For I can't forget—you killed her."

"I didn't. Would you like me to tell you again what happened? You hate me, have gone out of your way to see me punished for a crime I didn't commit. Do I look like a murderer, a woman-killer? No, and I'm not."

"Tell me, then—perhaps it will shake you! I'd like to see you show some remorse."

"I worked late that night, in Paris, and when I got home it was dark. I climbed two flights of stairs to our room—we were poor but happy together. The door stood half open. I went in. She lay in the center of the floor, shot through the head by a revolver close by her hand. I thought she'd done it herself. Maybe because of our poverty. It shocked me, blinded me. I picked up the gun, my eyes dim with horror. I don't know exactly what I did, maybe cried, maybe talked to myself, that's what the concierge heard, which he swore was a quarrel between us. My fingerprints, the Sûreté testified, were on the gun; they thought I was jealous of you, perhaps, and had killed her for that! But I wasn't. She loved me and I knew it."

"Shut up!" screamed Lavine. He shook violently. He began to hit Hanson in the face, in the body, with all his puny force. But his muscles soon tired, he breathed in gasps, and he stopped. The American took it without a quiver. "Damn you—murderer!" shouted Lavine, flinging open the

door. "Come, Riche! We'll start into the jungle—"

CHAPTER II.

LAVINE'S SECRET.

THE penitentiary gates opened to let the forty-odd out. They were marched by ten *surveillants* under Commandant Riche through the littered, baking streets of St. Laurent, the prison town. Black vultures preened their feathers on garden walls and housetops. The walks were empty of the many-shaded Negroes who formed the bulk of the free population, for it was siesta hour.

The guards carried Lebel rifles, and pistols at their sides, umbrellas for shade. Convicts shouldered knapsacks of their keepers as well as their own. Riche led the way to the Maroni, to a pier along the amber river. Under a corrugated iron shed stood tarpaulin-covered boxes, tightly nailed, marked with large black letters, "Machinery—With Care!" And wooden litters, like stubby ladders, on which the powerful convicts hoisted a heavy box so it might be carried. They loaded them through the hot afternoon onto a long barge. And each man, as he returned with his stretcher partner to fetch another box, stared longingly northward in the direction of the Atlantic, avenue to Freedom. Behind, on both sides, was the jungle for hundreds of miles, mysterious, deadly, hemming them in.

Commandant Riche amused himself by prodding the small Etienne with the ferrule of his umbrella, hurrying him at the impossible task of lifting a box evidently full of scrap iron. The apache hopped, he swore, face plainly showing his rage.

"If only I had that machine gun now," he muttered to Hanson, the strongest of all, whose muscles had little difficulty performing the tasks. "I'd turn it loose!"

The loading finished, Riche sent a messenger for Baron Lavine. The commandant produced steel collars then, narrow but strong. "These are your necklaces, bag-

nards," he told them cheerfully as they lounged, panting, on the deck of the flat barge where they had loaded the boxes. "Chains run through the eye-staple at the side of each collar, you see, so if you try to run away during the night you'll have to drag each other through the jungle by the neck! My idea. Pretty, *hein?*"

The crushed men did not object; it was usual to chain jungle gangs during the darkness. Riche and his guards locked a steel circlet around the neck of every *bagnard*; at the side, under the ear, was the closed eye-staple through which the chain would pass.

Lavine came, morose, silent. At the rear of the long flatboat was a khaki army tent for him; the guards had pup tents, the convicts no cover at all. "They say that little monkey Lavine has great power in France," a big convict whispered to Hanson. "He can get anything he wants from the *Ministre*. And I could snap him in two with one hand!"

Slowly the powerful *bagnards*, ex-soldiers of the African Battalions, tattooed rascals condemned for murder, theft and desertion; big farmers of France, and men of other nations who had run afoul of the Republic's law, all sweating, ill-fed miseries, poled the heavy barge upriver. For days that seemed interminable, backs aching under the strain, for nights laden with fever-bearing insects which bit their defenseless bodies chained together by Riche's dog-collars, they fought on. The collars were always on; at sundown the guards would run the flexible chain through the staples and it would be locked at either end by Riche.

THEY reached a point out from civilization, which was along the coast. Only bush Negroes in mud-and-thatch jungle villages lived in the thick bush of southern Guiana. At last the barge was halted one night, and in the early dawn of the following day the convicts were ordered to unload the boxes. The litters had been brought, so that two partners carried two boxes on a stretcher along with several small packs containing equipment.

Etienne was worn out; his slight body could not stand the pace. He groaned under the load, sometimes fell. Hanson had the rear of the stretcher with the apache in front; the American tried to keep both boxes near his end to relieve Etienne.

They swung southeast from the river into the jungle. The treetops reared two hundred feet above, a mat of aerial vegetation of lianas, vines and leaves forming a roof through which the sun penetrated but occasionally in thin, white darts, so there was always a dank, rotting odor below. However, as they bore away from the stream, and pushed on mile after mile along a faint Indian trail, two men widening the path with machetes, the mushy lowlands gave way to higher, drier ground.

Resting at sundown the first day from the Maroni, Etienne spoke with his pal Hanson. Riche and Lavine camped some yards from the line of gray convicts. The chain had been passed through the staples, locked. Several guards lounged about; two were on duty, one at either end of the camp.

"I've got to get away," Etienne whispered.

"How?" Hanson asked calmly.

"I'll cut this collar somehow, run back to the river, head through the bush for Paramaribo. I still have my knife hidden on me. Riche devils me constantly, and if I were you I'd squash that dirty Lavine next time he kicked me. He's pulled every lousy trick on you, Hanson."

Hanson's face did not change.

"Will you escape with me?" asked Etienne.

Slowly the big man shook his head. "I don't want to."

"But—you must be *cajard*! Mad! Everyone wishes to get away from this hell, this Dry Guillotine."

"One place is the same to me as another. It's terrible here but I make the best of it, hoping some day to be cleared of the crime they say I committed. That's the only way out for me—if there is a way." He was silent a moment, evidently fighting to maintain his iron control. "It's my way of bearing it, you see."

Etienne cursed. "If only I could get back to France! Though she condemned me I love her. Why, I could pull some swell jobs. I was sent to Guiana, you know, for my part in the stick-up of the Marseilles National bank—my mob was up-to-date, believe me. We used sub-machine guns; I was best of all with them. American guns, Thompsons. Fire so fast you can wipe out a squad of *flics* before they can draw their pistols, cut them in half with .45 slugs! If I had one now!"

AND later on, when velvet-black night had fallen, Hanson woke from troubled sleep. He could hear a faint, squeaking sound. Close by him, flat, the apache worked at his collar. "Shh," Etienne said. Hanson shrugged, closed his eyes again. Next day he noted that the small one's collar, especially the eye-staple, was coated with dried mud, as though Etienne had lain on that side through the night. It seemed natural enough; other men had earth on them. The chain pulled through without hindrance when they were released for the march.

Through another sweltering day they pushed on. Riche goaded Etienne; and Baron Lavine cursed Hanson.

Again, that night, Hanson was awakened by Etienne's stealthy movements. It was late, but a lamp burned in Lavine's tent, Hanson could hear Riche's gruff voice mingling with the Baron's lighter tones. A sentry stood at each end of the long line of sleeping *bagnards*. The others rested.

Etienne was not in his place. Hanson put out his hand. The chain had not been cut in any way; he concluded that the apache had managed to saw one side of the eye-staple so he could turn it and work the chain out. A faint sound close behind him caused him to look around quietly. Etienne wormed back into line, and adjusted the chain, working it into the staple and covering the split with dirt.

"Hanson," whispered the apache excitedly, "I know what's in the boxes! The secret of Lavine! I heard Riche trying to wheedle more money out of him—Riche

has guessed what's up, and wants his split. Lavine called him a crook, but Riche insists he'll get his—"

The commandant stepped from Lavine's tent, and Etienne broke off. They watched Riche go to his pup tent, pull up the mosquito netting, his movements showing against Lavine's lighted tent wall.

After midday next afternoon they met the black men in the forest. There were a half dozen, armed with rifles, clad in green uniforms, plainly a delegation from a larger band. Lavine parleyed with them as the convicts rested on their loads. Then the baron ordered Riche to take the *bagnards* away, leaving the boxes.

An hour later, having parted from Lavine and the blacks in the forest clearing where they had connected, the French prisoners heard in the distance a sound like the rattling of a stick along a metal picket fence, compelling, rapid. Hanson felt Etienne trembling. "Sub-machine guns," whispered the apache. "Lavine has brought them in here to sell to those soldiers—he'll get plenty and Riche wants a cut."

The commandant strolled over, cigarette drooping from his gash of a mouth. He frowned, kicked Etienne. "What are you whispering about, *bagnard*?"

Etienne scowled up at his enemy, the sadistic Riche.

CHAPTER III.

MUTINY.

NEXT morning when gray dawn woke Hanson, he found Etienne gone, out of sight. The chain space was vacant. Frie, the man at the other side, a stocky *zéphyr* from the Bat' d' Afrique, well-liked by his fellows because he sometimes essayed a jest, in Guiana where there was nothing but sadness, winked at Hanson.

"The little one's made the break," he whispered. "See how Riche takes it; he's had plenty fun deviling Etienne."

Riche, coming from under his netting, yawned, took out a cigarette, lit up, blew

clouds of bluish smoke toward the jungle roof. They were camped in a natural clearing; a few darts of sun could reach in. Riche extracted the key to the padlocks that held the long chain, and unlocked the end toward the river. Then, still sleepy, he walked slowly along the line to unfasten the second lock and pull the chain through. And suddenly, coming on Hanson, he noticed the vacant space, realized Etienne was gone.

He cursed, turned red, knelt quickly and picked up the chain. "The dirty little rat," he bawled. "Gris! Meurot!" He was calling for his two sentinels. Gris, a lanky guard, appeared from around a bend in the trail toward the Maroni. But Meurot, who had been on duty inland, failed to reply. Riche snarled, "You'll suffer, you Frie, and Hanson! Yes, I'm going to see you get yours for letting him stroll off."

"We were asleep, M'sieu le Commandant," cried Frie. "We slept soundly, as always in this pleasant land."

A subdued ripple of amusement ran along the ranks; it infuriated Riche, made him grind his teeth. "I'll teach you dogs a lesson in a moment," he shouted. He drew his Ruby pistol, ran to seize Guard Gris's arm. "Fool—didn't you see or hear the shrimp?"

"No, no, Commandant; he didn't come my way."

Riche started back the other side. They heard him after a minute bawling for Meurot. Next he began calling Gris, who went to him, and they dragged back to the camp Meurot's corpse, throat slit from ear to ear.

Baron Lavine pushed out his tent flap, eyes red, mouth crooked. "What is it, Riche?" he demanded.

"One has escaped," replied Riche, "and murdered my guard Meurot—a terrible reflection on me. But I'll get the killer, tear him to pieces—"

Lavine rushed to him. "Not Hanson?" he cried.

"No. It was Etienne, the little rat. But I must try to trail him."

Riche was gone with three *surveillants*.

The others stood alert over the unchained prisoners. Whispers of excitement ran along the line. "Etienne can't get away, it's too far through the bush." "He has no food, no money, he'll die in the jungle." "Well, anyway, he'll die free!"

Lavine came over to Hanson. "I was afraid you'd gone, Hanson. When Riche said 'murder' I thought you'd killed—again."

Hanson stared up into his enemy's eyes. "No, I don't want to escape, not as a fugitive. There'd be no place for me in this world, forever condemned. But I have faith, I know some day I'll be declared innocent."

Lavine bit his pale lip, turned quickly away.

Riche returned in twenty minutes, cursing. "No tracks, ground's too dry," he announced. "But he'll die in the jungle, never get away."

AND he came toward Hanson and Frie, slowly, and with the intention of getting revenge on them. He bulked over the seated convicts. "You two were guilty with Etienne of Meurot's murder," he accused. "When you return to the prison it will be to the guillotine for allowing Etienne to escape. Why didn't you call out when he sawed his collar, *hein*? You're both brutes—you knew he meant to slit my guard's throat." He kicked Hanson, then swung on Frie, began beating the *zéphyr* over the head with his fists.

The soldier, tattooed from ankles to neck, lost his frayed temper and, with a ferocious growl, swung his powerful arm sideways, tripping Riche, sending him sprawling. It was a mortal offense to strike a guard. Speechless with rage—though perhaps he had hoped to goad Frie to such a length—Riche came up on his knees, fumbling at his holstered Ruby. Hanson reached out, seized the commandant's gun arm, knocked it down as Riche pulled the trigger. The bullet thudded dully into the dirt.

Held helpless in the iron grip of the giant American, pistol useless since Hanson kept the arm tightly down, barrel pointed

at the ground, Riche screamed with the stridency of madness for his guards. "Kill Hanson—kill them all," shouted Riche, voice cracking.

Four of his men dashed to him, and shoved between Hanson and the commandant, forcing Hanson back. Riche held absolute power over the convicts; none had ever dared touch him. It was a mortal offense to do so at the prison. In the jungle it was punishable by instant death. And Frie made the mistake of grinning at the officer's fury. The *surveillants* stood between Riche and Hanson, but Frie was unprotected, it was he who had first struck Riche. Thirsting for some victim's blood, Riche quickly raised his pistol and fired three bullets into Frie.

Hanson, having allowed the guards to push him back, cursed. The cold murder enraged him, his breath came swiftly. He cried in anger, heaved his great body to his feet, against the four guards who strove to hold him down. A roar of rage rose from the throats of the other *bagnards* as they realized the murder of Frie, whom all had liked. They had stood too much already. They gathered in a threatening circle around the commandant, whose eyes were flecked with red, whose mouth was twisted. Hanson scattered those between Riche and himself like chaff, sweeping his mighty arms. Riche saw him reaching out, turned and fired a quick shot that passed through Hanson's blouse sleeve and seared the flesh of his upper shoulder. The American had Riche's gun wrist, however, and jerked it so hard that the commandant's elbow gave a cracking sound, Riche screaming in pain. Hanson tore the Ruby from his fingers and threw it off into the bushes.

Half a dozen of the guards stuck rifle muzzles against Hanson, hammers back. "Stop, American, or we'll shoot—"

The growl of the convicts, of infuriated wild beasts, swelled to a roar. Hanson, after disarming Riche, stood quiet, head up. The commandant's anger could not be quenched, however, by anything but more blood. Used to absolute command, Riche snatched a Ruby from the belt of a guard.

"Stand back, away from the American," he ordered dangerously. "He's going to die—"

Baron Lavine, pale, trembling, suddenly cried out, "Stop! Riche—you mustn't—"

As Riche, gun up, did not fire for a moment, Lavine took courage, stepped over and touched Riche's tense arm. "Put down that gun, Riche," Lavine gasped. "You're mad. You'll be courtmartialed for this. I'll see to it—"

LAVINE failed to realize the depth of Riche's rage. Every other impulse was smothered by its immensity, and the commandant thought of nothing save killing Hanson. He had paused a moment simply to clear the way for his shot and let Hanson realize he was going to die. The American stared into Riche's fiery eyes. All the guards were close, looking only at their commandant, frightened by his fury.

Again the scared Lavine pulled Riche's arm. The commandant's brain snapped, he swept the pistol up, jabbing it into Lavine's face. By intent or by accident his finger convulsed on the trigger as the baron staggered back, clutching at his split lip, bruised by the sharp gun sight. An instant later there was a roar as the big pistol went off, and Lavine fell, lay silent.

Blood at once began to stain the white uniform he wore, blood from his breast under the heart.

And as Commandant Riche swung and once again raised his Ruby, intent on shooting Hanson, the convicts made a concerted lunge in, overrunning the bunched, pale-faced *surveillants*. The *forçats* screamed with the sound of men driven beyond the limit, berserk, and every one of the big fellows wished to get his hands on Riche and tear him to pieces.

"Mutiny—mutiny—!" The cry rose in shrill crescendo. And the guards began firing at short range, rifles at the hip, pulled in. Three convicts went down at the first volley. A slug from Riche's pistol whizzed close to Hanson's head; then he was struck by the surging mass of heavy men, knocked to his knees.

Screams, curses, shots. Half a dozen guards, breaking before the mob's charge, dashed with Commandant Riche in their center back for the trees across the clearing, and paused there, firing as fast as they could into the seething mutineers who had got their hands on three *surveillants*, torn away their rifles, stamped them underfoot, beating the life out of them. Under the steady fire from Riche and his men, convicts fell swiftly. A *zéphyr* snatched up one of the rifles taken from the fallen guards, began shooting at the party of guards among the trees. The din was horrible.

A soldier beside Riche fell, bullet through the throat, sent by the *zéphyr*.

"Take cover, men," shouted the commandant, leaping behind a forest giant. Riche was a soldier, used to fire and cool under it, able to think when bullets flew around him. From the side of his tree trunk, Riche shot steadily into the bunched convicts.

Hanson was down, he was kicked, trampled on by the bare feet of his friends in their excitement. They milled in the clearing, yelling and swearing, while Riche and his men steadily poured a murderous lead hail at them. For moments the fact that their pals on the outer edge of the mass were shot did not register on the *forçats*, mad with mob-rage. Half had fallen under the fire of the guards; the remainder, suddenly realizing they were being picked off steadily, was seized by panic, broke, scattered, trying to escape. Riche showed no mercy, but brought down man after man, as did his guards.

"Every one shall die!" he screamed. "Not one of you shall go back to the prison. Fire, men, fire!"

Hanson, dazed, bruised, covered with blood from dying and wounded, rubbed his eyes with his torn blouse sleeve. Riche saw him move, shouted, turned his gun on Hanson. "You, American pig—"

ABOVE the din, which lessened as the stricken *bagnards* fled, a sudden sharp staccato sound came from the jungle behind the soldiers. Riche, a few

yards in advance of his men, having stepped forth to murder Hanson, paled, turning swiftly.

Hanson, ready to die, knowing Riche would surely kill him, stared at the sight in the trees. Etienne, half crouched, had come up in the rear of the *surveillants*. In his hands he held a thick weapon with pistol grip ahead, shoulder butt firmly pressed into his side, half rifle, half machine. A bulge of black metal showed the large magazine; from the muzzle of the sub-machine gun .45 slugs spat at terrific rate, a scything hail of lead. Steadily, deliberately, but with no wasted motion, the small apache, teeth showing in his joy, swung the blunt muzzle along the line of guards. In a few moments they were dead, riddled, before they could half turn.

Riche shouted hoarsely, fired a wild shot at Etienne that passed over the little one's head. The apache was now moving slowly in on him, the muzzle of his weapon raised. Riche pulled his trigger again—and the firing pin hit an empty shell—

"I got you, Riche, you pig, you gutter snipe, you murderer—" screamed Etienne.

Riche threw himself flat, frantically trying to reload his gun. But Etienne was upon him, and Riche groveled in the dirt, begging for mercy. Etienne stood grinning down at his deadly enemy.

"Don't—" began Hanson. But it was over before he could cross the space to Riche and the apache, over in a moment. Nothing could stop Etienne's revenge. Hanson saw the gloating joy in Etienne's dark face. And after an instant's triumph, watching the fright in Riche's eyes, the apache, an expert machine-gunner, held the black muzzle on the commandant and fired. The rat-a-tat-tat was dull, muffled by the closeness of the gun to the body. As though spraying an ant hill, his form turning slightly back and forth, Etienne poured the slugs into the prostrate Riche.

When Hanson seized his friend's arm, Riche was practically cut in two.

Etienne's breath came in great gasps. He threw up his arms in victory. "I knew I'd win," he cried. "*Bagnards*, come back!

This beautiful weapon has freed you. Come!"

Eight convicts, left of the forty besides Hanson and Etienne, after peeking from the bush, slowly returned to the apache's side. The rest lay dead or wounded, in heaps and where they had fallen on the run, in the clearing. The smoke of the exploded powder tinged the air with an acrid odor, and a low sound of groans came from the injured.

"I stole it, boys," Etienne went on excitedly. "I knew those blacks wouldn't watch the guns as carefully as Riche did! I trailed them; they had camped a few miles back in the bush, a couple of hundred of them. I crept in, cut a sentry's throat in the night, got my gun and three loads of bullets! I was hidden near here when the shooting began."

Etienne was the leader. "We'll escape," he announced. "Plenty of food and equipment, guns for us all and—money. We'll beat back to the river, cross over to Dutch Guiana and down to Paramaribo. Nothing can stop us; we'll shoot our way to freedom, *bagnards*. Thank me—or rather my beautiful gun here. It speaks a language any *flic* respects. *Vite*, let's go. Cut all throats of guards left; we want no witnesses against us. The wounded cons must do the best they can. Come on, Hanson. Escape, and the world of the living once again!"

THE big American had been sickened by the bloodshed. He saw a convict kill a *surveillant* who groaned, moved. He followed Etienne over as the apache, the sub-machine gun under one arm, began searching the corpses.

"What are you looking for?" demanded Hanson.

"Cash. I want the dough the blacks paid your pal the baron—he's dead, huh? He can't bother you any more—here he is, dirty rat that he was. It was a state revolution he came up here to supply with guns, I found that out by my keen ears. The rebels couldn't get enough weapons in front from the coast; the government had the

ports all covered; but Lavine figured out how to reach them."

Etienne bent over the baron, who lay on his side, head covered by an extended arm. Roughly the apache rolled Lavine over on his back, and ripped open his tunic, soaked with blood. He drew from the breast pocket over the heart a picture, looked curiously at it, laughed and showed it to Hanson. "His sweetheart back in France—one of 'em, I guess," he said carelessly.

Hanson was trembling. The portrait was of Adele, his dead wife, for whose murder he had been condemned to Guiana. "Give it to me," he growled, and snatched it from Etienne.

He stared into that face, sweet, full of life, that had meant the world to him. Life had stopped suddenly for Hanson at her death; his arrest had come, his trial, conviction and deportation to Guiana.

"Lavine loved her, too," he muttered painfully.

Etienne had again bent over the baron. He drew out a leather wallet, but as he extracted a paper from it he began to sputter curses. "A draught made out to Lavine!" he cried disgustedly. "No good to me. That shrimp was a smart fox, no doubt of it. Oh, well. There'll be some francs for us on the guards." He turned Lavine over and hunted in the other pockets, found a small roll of bills and some silver.

Lavine moaned, faintly, opened his eyes, glassy, staring. He did not seem to realize where he was; did not see the men at his side.

"Ain't dead. Well, we'll fix him," growled Etienne. "Here, Hanson, you can have the pleasure of finishing him. Go ahead, just touch that trigger—"

Hanson shook his head. "No. I won't kill him."

Etienne shrugged, raised the gun. "I'll do it, then, since you're so squeamish—"

But Hanson tore the weapon from him and flung it away. "Let him be," he ordered.

Etienne shrugged, went and retrieved his precious gun. The convicts had stripped the bodies of valuables, make packs of food,

strung together canteens of wine and whisky. They were drinking already, drinking to drown out horror.

Hanson squatted beside Lavine. The baron breathed very faintly, hardly disturbing the red-stained breast of his tunic. Yes, Adele had been sorry for this twisted, unfortunate man with his millions, whom everyone had hated. Lavine had seen her as she danced in a cabaret. Hanson put his face in his scarred hands, and fought to control his emotions. The past was as dead as his wife. The present was horrible—and there was no future but torture.

“COME on, Hanson,” said Etienne impatiently, back at his side. “He’ll die quick enough and the vultures and ants can finish him up fine. Let’s get started.”

“I’m not going with you,” said Hanson.

“What? You must be bitten by the bug, you fool. You can’t stay here in the jungle.”

“I’m going back to prison.”

Etienne’s eyes narrowed. He began to think that Hanson was really mad. “You realize they’ll guillotine you for mutiny? And d’ you think we’ll give you a chance to squeal on us, say which way we’ve headed?”

“You know damn well I’m no traitor; I won’t tell that, Etienne. But—there’s no way out for me. I’ve been convicted of murder. I’m an honest man—or I was. I couldn’t live happily any other way. I’d like to go back to America, try to forget what’s past; but I couldn’t do it as a fugitive.”

The apache shrugged. “*Bien*,” he replied coldly. “Have it your own way. But you’re nuts, Hanson. We can’t fail to get away with guns, food and money. Nothing will stop me, with this baby in my arms.” He patted his sub-machine gun. “*Adieu*, then—and good luck. Don’t tell anyone which way we’ve headed, in case you get to St. Laurent before we reach the sea.” He turned and rallied his pals. A few of the wounded convicts could walk, though most of those hit had died, since

Riche and his men had aimed for the head, to kill. The *bagnards* loaded injured survivors on the stretchers and swung into line, heading west for the Maroni.

Hanson was alone with the dead—and his wounded enemy. Etienne had left him some food, drink. Urged by finer instincts than the criminal apache could comprehend, the big man tended the terrible wound under the baron’s heart, washing it clean, staunching the flow of blood, finally bandaging it. He packed food and water and brandy, strapped the knapsack on his side. Then, gently, he lifted the unconscious Lavine and placed the small figure on his back, started for the river. The wound in his shoulder burned where he had roughly cauterized it to stop infection; at each step he felt a pang of anguish from the ripped, scarified flesh.

With his human burden, the mighty American strode on, slowly following the others toward the river, but keeping out of their sight. In his pocket he carried the blood-stained picture of Adele.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFESSION.

IT was a scarecrow figure which staggered from a bush Negro’s dugout at St. Laurent, and lifted Baron Lavine, at the point of death, to the pier. A prison guard saw, hurried to Hanson. Each day throughout the long trip down the river, Hanson had expected the baron to die, for every hour drained more of the wounded man’s life. Hanson, face bearded, stained black, covered with dried blood, went to the prison blockhouse after they had identified him. “One of the mutineers,” the prison commandant growled at the interview.

Hanson was so weary he did not mind lying on the bare boards of the blockhouse into which he was cast. He slept at once, unheeding, not disturbed by the restless movements of other prisoners there.

When he finally woke, asked for water, the convicts—all had broken a prison rule

or been arrested trying to escape and were awaiting trial—demanded eagerly details of the great mutiny. Word had filtered to the prison and all were anxious to hear just what had occurred. He satisfied their curiosity, but without saying where the survivors had gone.

"You, you were a wise one," the *bag-nard* next him growled. "Wise not to go with that crazy flea Etienne."

"Why?" demanded Hanson.

"Don't you know? They were all killed or captured."

"How—how?" cried Hanson.

"Oh, it was a great battle. They got all the way down to the outskirts of Paramaribo and then they bumped into a Dutch police patrol out looking for another gang of prisoners from here—you know they have special cops to pick us up. Etienne killed three Dutchmen."

"And the machine gun?"

The other convicts laughed. "It jammed! Otherwise Etienne would have killed that whole patrol. The remaining Dutchies shot him dead before he could get it working again. With Etienne down, they took the rest easily enough—but they say the shrimp fell with a smile on his lips, gun tucked under his arm.

"You'll probably get a year in solitary on *Ile Joseph*; but at least you're alive to tell the tale."

THAT evening they came for Hanson, brought him clothes—prisoners lay without garments in the block-house. He was led to the hospital.

A priest stood near Baron Lavine's bed, and on the other side were two high prison officials. The small man lay with head back, face completely drained of blood. He looked up at Hanson, his lips moving.

"You may go to him, American," the Governor told Hanson.

Hanson bent over Lavine. "I—hated you," Lavine whispered. "I blamed you for winning her love. I wanted to break you, as I had been broken. But I couldn't. And I always saw her eyes, the look in them when I killed her!" The pain was in Lavine's eyes and face; he moved slightly, teeth grinding together.

"He is dying," the Governor told Hanson gently. "He has signed a confession that it was he who murdered your wife. He shot her when she refused to leave you, for him. He bribed the concierge to perjure himself on the witness stand, to convict you—we cabled back to France and received our reply; the concierge admitted to Sûreté officials that what Lavine says is true. It is all down in black and white, Lavine's free confession. His conscience has always tortured him, he told me he has never rested soundly since he killed the woman. He came to Guiana in the hope of having you murdered in the jungle. He feared that some day you might discover the truth. But when it came to letting Riche shoot you, he was unable to go through with it. And now, dying, he is no longer afraid to tell the truth. In retribution he has willed you a large sum of money—and your freedom."

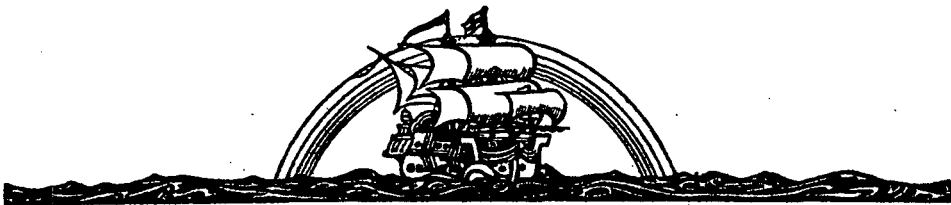
Hanson's fists clenched; he took a step forward, toward Lavine. "He—he killed her!"

"Forgive—" whispered Lavine.

Hanson stood erect. "I—forgive you, Lavine."

He could not trust himself to look for moments on the baron's face. When he did so, the eyes were still open, wide, and round. But now there was no pain, no torture in them. They were at peace forever.

THE END



MEN'S DARING

(BY) STOOKIE ALLEN

FLYING SOLDIER

PHILIP MOHUN WAS BORN WITH A LOVE OF FIGHTING. FROM EARLIEST BOYHOOD HE CRAVED ADVENTURE AND ACTION. A SON OF PHILIP V. MOHUN, RETIRED NAVAL COMMANDER OF NEW YORK, HE WAS BORN IN THAT CITY IN 1903. HE ATTENDED THE PENNSYLVANIA MILITARY INSTITUTE AT CHESTER, PA.

PHILIP
"RED"
MOHUN

YOUNG MOHUN WENT OFF ON HIS OWN AND JOINED A FLYING CIRCUS. HE LEARNED TO FLY AND TO STUNT. AFTER A BARNSTORMING FOR A TIME IN THE SOUTH, HE WENT IN FOR GUN-RUNNING, AND FLEW CASES OF LIQUOR FROM BIMINI TO FLORIDA BY SEAPLANE. MOHUN COULD NOT SETTLE DOWN.

AS A CADET BUGLER HE PLAYED THE "STAR SPANGLED BANNER" INSTEAD OF THE REVEILLE, ONE WINTER MORNING, CAUSING THE ENTIRE COMPANY TO JUMP OUT AND STAND AT ATTENTION—BAREFOOTED AND PAJAMA-CLAD—IN THE SNOW. THE ESCAPE COST HIM EXPULSION AND THE DISPLEASURE OF HIS DAD.

SEEKING SOME REAL ACTION RED BECAME A-FLYER FOR THE NATIONALIST FORCES IN CHINA IN 1926. HE BOMBED PIRATES AS WELL AS THE OPPOSING CHINESE. AT FOO CHOW HE GOT INTO A FIGHT WITH A CHINAMAN WHOM HE HAD CAUGHT STEALING GASOLINE AND DROVE HIS FIST SO HARD ON THE JAW OF HIS ADVERSARY THAT THE MAN SLAMMED INTO A WALL AND DROPPED DEAD AT RED'S FEET!

A True Story in Pictures Every Week