

One Man Feud

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Though this was a fight between men, it was like an animal battle with no rules or skill—except that of wolf and lynx

JUST at dusk Octave Garneau found the man whom he had come into the bush to kill. This was the best time, for several reasons. John Duncan was going in from his trap line and he would be less alert about camp than in the bush. And the door would be unbarred until bedtime. Garneau stopped at the edge of the bush

and watched. He saw a little log cabin with a bark roof, set in a small clearing. Duncan put his snowshoes up beside the door and went inside. After a moment the windows were lighted. Garneau crouched in the shelter of some firs and waited with a long patience.

He could not afford to miss, or even to



John Duncan's fists swung like hammers

wound his man. For Duncan was as quick as a panther, big-boned, with tremendous power in his long muscles. No matter how well Garneau might think of his own bulldog ferocity and granite block of a body he did not underestimate the man he had come to kill. John Duncan was dangerous.

Duncan came out of the cabin with a water pail in his hand and a dog yelping and bounding beside him. Garneau was glad that the faint drift of air was in his direction. Otherwise the dog might have caught his scent and that would have meant trouble. For Duncan was a man who would walk into a storm of bullets.

The trapper returned from the waterhole and kicked the cabin door shut behind him. The dog had gone inside. A pencil of light showed Garneau, as he approached, that the door was not latched. Luck was dealing him good cards.

He slipped out of the snowshoe thongs and his moccasins made no sound on the hard packed snow about the door. With the barrel of his rifle he pushed the door open another inch. He could see Duncan's back as the man stood in front of the fireplace, filling his pipe from a can of tobacco on the shelf there.

Octave Garneau was perfectly steady as he knelt and took a knee and elbow rest. His eye drew two imaginary lines, one down from the center of Duncan's head and one straight across his shoulders. The soft nose bullet would break John Duncan's spine, and Garneau hoped that he would live a few seconds to know who had killed him.

In kneeling Garneau had pushed the door, noiselessly, still farther open. His knee was on the threshold and his left arm extended into the room along the rifle barrel. He sighted carefully and squeezed the trigger.

At that instant something struck gun barrel and arm a violent blow. Garneau pitched forward into the room and the rifle blazed at the floor. He felt, even as he was falling, points of pain which sank into his arm through sleeves of shirt and jacket.

It was the dog, a black mongrel devil. Garneau rolled, struck the dog on the head

with the rifle butt, and came up onto his feet. John Duncan was on him, swinging fists like hammers. Garneau dropped the rifle and drew his knife. He made a lightning thrust.

It was an upward, well-driven knife blow, calculated to run in under the ribs and give a man a death wound. The fight would have ended then if one of those big knots of bone and muscle at the ends of Duncan's arms had not landed on the nose of Octave Garneau. It struck home like a sledge before the knife could touch flesh.

The pain was excruciating, blinding. In that moment of weakness Garneau's fingers released the knife and it fell. Then he bored in against the vague blur in front of him. His hands clawed for eyes, nose, mouth. An ear was better than no hold.

The fight was now an affair wholly of the bush, an animal battle to the death with no rules and no skill—except that of wolf and lynx. Garneau got one of Duncan's thumbs between his jaws; he felt his teeth grate on bone. He would have splintered the bone if there had not come a sudden, deathly pressure across the small of his back.

Garneau fell, and tried to double up. He kicked, struggled to raise a knee for a vicious blow in the groin. But the terrible pressure was too strong: it was an embrace of death. His hands groped. He tried to work his thumbs into Duncan's eyes but the strength was ebbing out of him. The cabin went black. He thought that this was death, that he would hear his backbone snap. He sank into darkness.

WHEN John Duncan rose from the still body of Garneau he could scarcely stand on his own two legs. His shoulders hung loose, his arms swung like nerveless pendulums before him. Blood and saliva ran from his mouth corners. There were livid bruises on his face and it seemed to him that every joint and sinew of his body had been wrenched upon the rack.

Duncan reeled to the bunk and fell upon it. The dog came up to him, whimpering.

He reached out with an arm as weak as a child's and laid his hand on the dog's head.

"Pete!" he gasped. "Good boy! He'd have got me if you hadn't jumped!"

Minutes later Duncan got up, groaning through clenched teeth. He went to a cupboard and took out a cherished bottle of whisky. He drank, and drank again, and strength came back to him. He shut the door, dropped the bar into place, and made up the fire. Then he turned his attention to the man on the floor.

Garneau was alive. Duncan lifted him to the bunk, took off his jacket, searched him for weapons, and then tied his ankles securely. Duncan ran the rope to a spike in the wall. The prisoner could sit up in the bunk if he were able but he could not stand, for the rope was not long enough to allow his feet to reach the floor.

Duncan took the rifle and the knife and put them at the far end of the room. Then he turned out a generous cup of whisky and got it down Garneau's throat after a considerable struggle. In a minute or two life returned to the eyes of the man on the bunk. He began to mutter curses.

"Well, Octave," said Duncan. "You didn't kill me!"

Garneau sprang from the bunk as though his body were one spring of steel. He could have reached Duncan's throat, so sudden was that attack, but for the rope around his ankles. He sprawled headlong, face down, with a thud that shook the cabin and for the moment he was helpless again.

Duncan laid him back on the tumbled blankets. Garneau's crushed nose had begun to bleed afresh. He coughed and sat up. When he could speak he turned eyes black with hate on his captor.

"You killed Fleurette!" he snarled.

"So that's it!" exclaimed Duncan, in a low voice. "I thought of her when I turned around and saw you in the doorway tonight!"

Under the bruises John Duncan's face showed lines which had chiseled themselves into deep creases. His tousled brown hair was shot through with gray so that it had a silver gleam in the candlelight. He was a

young man suddenly overlaid by a score of years in suffering.

"You have win her from me!" cried Garneau, slipping into broken English. "Me, I go away then. When an old *bûcheron* come to my village and say that Fleurette Dubois, who have make marry with the Yankee, is dead in the bush I know that I have to kill you! For you have not taken care of my Fleurette!"

"SHE and the baby died together," answered Duncan, in a lifeless voice. "I didn't know her heart wasn't strong enough for the bush. Not until too late."

"Fool!" hissed Garneau. "She would be alive if she have make marry with me!"

"Yes," agreed Duncan. "I've thought of that a heap, Octave! If it was to do over—"

"What for you talk?" demanded Garneau. "You got my rifle, my knife! Come, woman-killer! Finish me!"

"It looks as though I might have to." Duncan rubbed his chin. "What'll you do if I let you go free?"

Garneau laughed, and the sound of that laughter struck through John Duncan like a chill.

"Kill you!" promised Octave. "But next time I make sure!"

"You don't care whether you live or not, do you?"

"No!"

"Nor I don't, either," Duncan told him. "Well, I guess we could both put away some hot soup."

"What you do with me?" demanded Garneau. "Don't you be man enough, John Duncan, to kill me?"

"I guess so," replied Duncan. "But not now. We better both of us eat."

He brought a length of rope and cut two pieces a few feet long, measuring Garneau and the bunk with his eye. Then he suddenly threw himself forward and pinned the prisoner down.

Three minutes later the wrists of Octave Garneau were lashed to the ropes, which ran to each end of the bunk. He could

raise either hand to his mouth but he could not get them together to work at the knots.

Duncan brought thick pea soup and a pewter spoon, and bread. Garneau hesitated; then he ate, and drank hot tea.

"You are a fool," he said.

"I know it, and this ain't the first time. But I'm too squeamish, I calculate, to starve you while I think things over. It looks as though one of us would have to make a visit to the angels, or the devil!"

"It will be that man who have bring Fleurette into the country above the river to die," said Garneau.

"Mebbe so," muttered John Duncan.

ON the morning of the third day Duncan rose as usual and went through the customary movements incident to living in a cabin in the bush. He raked up the coals out of the ashes and built a roaring fire. Then he took the water pail and went out, with Pete romping ahead.

When breakfast was ready Duncan went to the bunk where Octave Garneau lay securely tied through the night and readjusted the ropes. The arrangement of the first evening had proved satisfactory.

With feet and hands partially free Garneau could smoke, feed himself, shift his position at will, but he was helpless to make an attack. He had tried working at the knots with his teeth but Duncan had always seen him in time.

This morning Garneau ate in silence. During the past three days he had said all the words there were in him, or so it seemed to Duncan. John Duncan felt that he could have thought the matter out more swiftly if Octave had kept still.

He had raved at times: now about Fleurette, calling Duncan a murderer. Again, Duncan was a coward, afraid to loose his prisoner and fight it out with rifles or knives.

Last night Octave had begged Duncan to shoot him rather than keep him tied there like a captured animal.

Garneau was smoking when Duncan finished washing the few dishes, a luxury often dispensed with in the bush. His wide black

eyes, still discolored from the fight, followed every movement of his captor.

Duncan went to the cupboard. He took out a razor and a shaving brush and broken fragment of mirror.

For a long time the rasp of the razor against the wiry stubble on his chin was the only sound in the room.

"What for you shave afore Sunday?" asked Garneau, at last. "What for you don't go out on trap line, for take in your catch, *hein*?"

"I didn't set the traps yesterday," replied Duncan slowly.

The silence that followed became fraught with meaning. There was going to be a change. Garneau sat up straight on the edge of the bunk and strained against the ropes.

"What you do?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"You'll find out pretty quick!" Duncan washed his face with a loud sputtering.

"He is brave man, that Jean Duncan!" sneered Octave. "He is *sauvage*! He like to make his enemy have pain, suffer!"

Duncan had heard worse things than that during the past three days. He did not reply. Instead he took his rifle, made sure that there was a cartridge in the chamber, and sat down with the weapon lying beside his chair.

"Octave," he began, wearily, "you and me was friends once."

"Yes, I have been friend with murderer," answered Garneau.

"I thought just as much of Fleurette as you did." Duncan's voice was very tired. He had not slept more than a handful of hours in the long nights. "But we'll let that go. I been trying to figger some way we could both live, for I don't want to kill you, Octave. But I can't see no way to work it out.

"Even if I was to take you out of the bush tied up and have you arrested it would only be putting off the end. That's so, ain't it?"

"I will kill you," Octave assured him, with the solemnity of a promise. "Next time I make sure!"

"I thought so."

Duncan rose and brought Garneau's rifle.

He threw a cartridge into the chamber and set it down beside the bunk, just out of reach of the roped hands.

"There's one question I want to ask," he said. "If anything happens to me will you take Pete and take good care of him, or give him to somebody that will? You always liked dogs."

GARNEAU stared into the face of the man before him. His eyes went to the dog. Pete thumped his tail on the floor, for since the battle he had forgiven that blow on the head. The feeling in the cabin was not right to him, and yet his master did not radiate either hatred or fear for the man who never left the bunk. It was a little too much for Pete.

"That's a funny question," mumbled Garneau. "You give me a chance to fight, *hein?*"

"I'm asking questions," replied Duncan, "not answering 'em right this minute. Will you look out for Pete? I'll take your word."

"You know dam' well you can take word of Octave Garneau for anything! Yes, I be good to those dog. Mebbe I don't want dog that has been your dog, but I find good home for him in my village."

"All right!" Duncan rose again, with shoulders which seemed to carry a great weight. He put a rope around Pete's neck and led him outside, to the little lean-to where firewood was stored.

There Duncan glanced over his shoulder, then he knelt and put his arms around the dog's great neck. Pete licked his ear and wriggled frantically. This was most unusual. His master had not done this since the day the woman was taken away from the cabin.

Garneau had one wrist partly untied when Duncan went back indoors. John Duncan laughed with a dry, crackling sound. His knife slashed the rope from Octave's ankles.

"Get clear!" he said.

The ropes dropped away from the wrists of Octave Garneau. His body bent and snapped up again. He was on his feet, staggering a little, with the rifle in his hands. He held it across his body, cocked, with his finger curled around the trigger. Then he paused.

"Take those gun!" he panted. "You give me chance and I give you one! You get those gun up like this one! Then we fire!"

But Duncan, in the chair, shook his head.

"I druther be the one to go," he said. "I got nobody but Pete. Your folks are living. And mebbe I'll find Fleurette somewhere and the baby. I druther take a chance on finding them than to keep on living, so long as Pete is provided for."

The cracked and battered lips of Octave Garneau worked without bringing forth sound.

His finger inside the trigger guard moved slightly.

"I have swear I will kill you!" he whispered, finally. "I have make a vow!"

"Go ahead!" Duncan told him. "Take a rest on your knee! You're shaking! I don't want to be damaged without being finished off!"

Slowly the leg of Octave bent. His elbow met his knee, with the rifle leveled. Duncan, looking down the barrel, met the black eye behind the sights.

A strange elation filled him, and involuntarily he smiled.

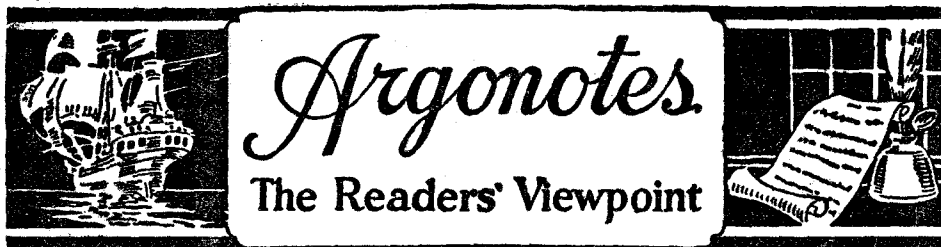
A cry rang in the cabin, the cry of a soul tormented beyond endurance. The rifle clattered to the floor. Octave Garneau was on both knees before the bunk, with his face buried in the blankets. His brown, thick fingers dug into the fabric, his body shook from head to feet.

John Duncan rose with a sigh and stood beside the kneeling man. Good-by, Fleurette, for now. His hand dropped to Garneau's shoulder.

He would have to carry on, after all. Pete would be glad.

"Octave," he said, "a live friend is better than a dead enemy."

THE END



STUPENDOUS! — Powerful! —
Magnificent!

Warm Springs, Ga.

Have just finished the last installment of "The Monster of the Lagoon," by George F. Worts. In my opinion, it is indisputably the best story you have published since January 1, 1935—or in quite a few other Januarys. It is, as the movie magnates say, "Stupendous! . . . Powerful! . . . Magnificent!" My reasons are easily given:

First, the characters—especially *Singapore Sammy*. Second, the element of surprise which constantly held the reader's interest. Third, the genuine thrills he received from the accounts of the terrible battles with the giant protoplasm. Fourth, the two principal elements of human interest, love and tragedy, which were inextricably woven into the plot, taking the story straight into the reader's heart and soul. Fifth, the beautiful English of the last two paragraphs. (Some may not consider this a real reason, but it left me with the feeling of having been a witness to something very sacred and very beautiful.) Sixth, the author, George F. Worts (more power to him!).

I hope that we may soon have more stories about *Singapore Sammy*—and of such high caliber.

SIDNEY WILLIAMS.

A VOTE for the unknown quantity:

Harrisburg, Pa.

I never read the ARGOSY until about three

months ago. A friend of mine has been reading them for several years and had saved about forty back copies, which I borrowed. Since then Wednesday doesn't come soon enough for me to secure my copy.

To be truthful, I like all the stories, but the one that got me going was "The Monster of the Lagoon," by George F. Worts. It had me on pins and needles—I wanted to know what the monster was and what happened to the victims. The unknown quantity in such stories is what I like. "The Monster of the Lagoon" had it in full measure.

(MRS.) JEANETTE R. NORRIS.

A WRITER of masterpieces—or
not?

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

I was about to sit down at my typewriter and give up a line about one of the stories in the March 23rd ARGOSY, "With the Help of Henry," by W. C. Tuttle ("Tut"). I thought I liked that yarn so well I might be able to win a prize of a year's subscription to ARGOSY. But along came the April 6th number, and I went into raptures over "Hind Hide," by H. H. Matteson. It is by far the best story I have read in ARGOSY for many a year, and I have been reading ARGOSY since back in the days of *Allstory-Cavalier Weekly*.

Every angle of Matteson's story is true to the atmosphere of the far Aleutians, as I remember that rugged country and its rough and colorful

WHAT is your idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.