

Buryin' Pants

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

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Johnny Cumso knew the white man's ways, but the Seminole law was deep in his heart. He'd have let them kill him—except for the pair of bright-hued trousers that Mase McKay couldn't stand to see all stained with blood

"TWO barrels o' buckshot in a feller's shirt kinda disorganizes him. But his pants oughta be kept outa the mess. Now, Sheriff—listen!" Mase McKay turned clear blue eyes upon the officer. "I ain't a party to run up yere out the South Glades yellin' fer help from the law, am I? None us McKays is."

"I'll say," retorted Sheriff Orengo. "It's

the other way round. If I ever wanted to lay hands on you, Mase, them Shark River Seminoles'd hide you so slick the whole government couldn't find you. That's what makes this request of yours so funny.

"I bet the old men of the council don't

The net swished down over Mase
from above



know it. I heard you're pretty near one of 'em—the only white man ever allowed to see their 'gator dance and secret rites that ain't even known to the Indian towns up near Miami. So if old Spittin' Eagle ever knows you run to white man's law to stop 'em from executin' this Johnny Cumso, they'll never trust you again. Right?"

Mase McKay's lean brown face was Indian-hard. He wouldn't answer and the sheriff knew he wouldn't.

Orengo rolled up Johnny Cumso's death pants and handed them over the side of his car, parked just off the Key West road where Mase had stopped him.

"Hell!" said Mase suddenly. "If you can't save Johnny, save them pants! I paid two dollars and eighty cents fer 'em in Miami. Pink and purple stripes like what an Indian'd favor, guaranteed not to shrink, though I dunno what good *that'd* do a guy's bones once he's planted in swamp mud.

"I dunno what the old men's council is killin' Johnny fer. But the crazy fool is goin' to meet 'em tonight at a spot I'm tryin' to guess at, and stand up to a buckshot gun.

"No use argyin' with him. The council sent him word, and he'll be there. I told Johnny to lam out fer Andros Island and he looked insulted. His folks'd be disgraced forever in the tribe if he didn't foller Indian custom. All he asked me was to bring him down some pants. That's all he wears fer the buckshot."

"Well," grunted the sheriff. "You know how it is. We got a custom too, and it's to look the other way about Seminole fusses. They're a free nation; they never recognized the federal government—and it's the unwritten law of the state never to interfere with 'em. Matter of fact they never condemn one of their outfit unless he's a no-account Indian. They're pretty good folks all around."

"Yeh," said Mase. "An' so's little Johnny Cumso. I can't figger it out.

"He won't talk, and they won't talk. I'm

goin' to git to the bottom o' this, but I ain't got so much time. Tonight is shootin' time fer Johnny."

"You goin' to be witness?"

"Hell, no! I ain't even supposed to know about it. But I'm goin' to bootleg them fancy pants in to Johnny. I know how to find him; but I wouldn't have ol' Spittin' Eagle think I was snoopin'."

"That's it," said Orengo. "The law don't figger in this. Mase, I knowed you since you were a pup. And as your old man says, you ought to git some serious views on livin'. I know you McKays been pretty close to them Shark River Indians ever since some hellin', wreckin' ancestors of yours helped 'em run Andy Jackson's dragoons out of the glades a hundred years ago. But they won't stand for you inter-ferin'."

"I've known tough guys to just vanish in the swamp. An' I never sent in to ask how come. So if you disappear, I'm just sayin' farewell now, Mase."

"Damn if you don't sound cheerful." Mase grinned. "Why don't you furnish *me* some buryin' pants now if you feel so bad about it?"

"Ain't a bad idea," grunted the sheriff. "One way and another you pester the law a lot. Damn if I know why you come to me now."

"Fer Johnny. I figgered if you could git a couple o' swamp deputies in there first and arrest Johnny and throw him in jail, this buckshot party'd be postponed."

"Arrest him. What for? I dunno what he's done—but mebbe you do."

The sheriff turned hard, alert eyes on Mase's face. It showed nothing. "No," Mase grumbled, "I don't. I got mebbe ten hours to find out. Gimme them pants. I don't aim to waste good Indian pants argyin' white man's law."

He unrolled them and held them to the morning sun.

BOY, they *were* pants. Big broad stripes like a jukejoint awning. The sheriff thought there must be a rainbow heaving

up above the Gulf Stream offshore. Mase had hunted through every fire-sale house up Miami Avenue for them.

If they didn't fit little Johnny Cumso it wasn't Mase's fault. He'd tried them on and nearly cracked out the seams. Johnny was about twenty-eight inches waist measure, Mase figured.

When Johnny stepped out on the sand of some secret key of the south coast, Chief Spittin' Eagle would sure get an eye-ful. But he'd be right gratified that Johnny respected the tribe law. They thought Johnny was a renegade, that he'd been outside too much, and mixed too much with the whites. He'd even shipped on a sponger to the Bahama reefs.

The five old men of the little Shark River clan had feared Johnny would not show up. But Mase knew he intended to. So he rolled up the pants and waved to the sheriff.

"Well," he said and grinned. "What about it? You won't interfere, an' I'm bound by—by—well, I reckon Indian custom—not to."

"That," grunted Orengo, "is what I've heard. Blood brother to 'em."

Mase grunted back. Some things he never told white men about.

There was talk that Mase McKay knew a lot about the obscure clans of Everglades Seminoles, who lived deep in the jungles, and had nothing to do with the show-Indians up around the Florida resort towns.

Mase let people think so but he really knew very little, friendly as he was with them.

Bluff, blow and brag—that's what Old Man McKay said Mase did about that Indian stuff, like he did about everything else.

But now and then Mase came through on something. Take that rumor that the eating seas and hurricane tides three years ago had uncovered the ribs of a British brigantine that had vanished in 1782 off the Tortugas, and that old time Key West wreckers were supposed to know more about than they should. When coast folks began to speculate where it might be, Mase

said he knew and he told them. But the few searchers never did find it and the matter was dropped.

Old Man McKay eyed his son shrewdly after that and, for once, didn't bawl him out about lyin' and bluffin'. He noticed about that time that the few Seminoles who came to the McKay store on Jigger Key showed a renewed interest in young McKay.

Just as Sheriff Orengo did now, by the side of the highway from which a half-choked little canal straggled westward into the pathless sawgrass. Mase went down the bank and tossed the buryin' pants into his dugout and waved a hand casually to the Law.

"You heard me!" yelled the sheriff, his foot on the gas, "If you go messin' in what don't concern white men, I ain't tailin' back in the swamp to find your bones—not in skeeter time."

"Any time you tail me back in, I'll be seein' buzzard sign an' know right exactly where yore bones is!" yelled Mase. "Dang if this ain't the last time I ever run to the law askin' anything!"

"Devilin' Mase," sneered the sheriff, "every time I quit talkin' to you and get up the road I can remember a dozen reasons why I shoulda took you to the jailhouse then and there."

"Jest goes to show," yelled Mase from his canoe, "yore brains is slippn'. This yere'll cost you the whole sixteen votes at Jigger Key come next 'lection—or mebber only fifteen if all that grief an' destruction you prophesy fer me should happen. Git gone!"

MASE poled his cypress canoe a mile up the ditch; and when he came to deeper water in the winding slough that entered the big grass, he sat back to his paddle, and the pelicans heard him singing:

*Settin' on the fence—didn't mean no harm,
When along comes a man, says 'I'll buy
yore farm.
I'll buy yore cows an' yore corn so bloomin'—
But dang if I swap fer yore ol' woman!*

Then he thought of little Johnny Cumso, and looked at his dollar watch. The darn thing run pretty good but only when he shook it. He looked at the sun and at the brackish tide along the mud bank; and he knew the time better than any gov'-ment perfesser in Washington.

"Hey, pants! Close to 'leven, an' you an' me got a date with Johnny afore sundown. Hope he ain't stallin' us. Hope he ain't fixin' to run out on us and meet his shootin' party with jest some ol' greasy overalls. It shore won't be right. Stow yore gab, pants—I got work cut out to do.

"Yeah," Mase thought, "Johnny won't lift a foot to save himself. I hope I never git so honest as them savages is about some things."

High, still noon, and the ebb was flowing. It took him faster, deeper, into the grassy sea. He saw the first mangrove islets west by south.

Johnny had been evasive about where his white friend should meet him until Mase had tempted him with those pants.

"Made me promise I wouldn't go near the shootin' party, or even let ol' Spittin' Eagle know I ever hear about it. If them Indians ever learn I run to the sheriff about it, they'd never trust me again. Well, I took the chance an' didn't do any good. Tough on Johnny Cumso."

He held on steadily, hot hours into the labyrinthine channels.

White egrets crossed ahead of him, a bull 'gator slipped from the mud, moccasins slid from his shadow passing grass points. The sun was lowering over the first mangrove barriers skirting the sea shoals beyond when Mase began to look for Indian sign.

Johnny had said there would be a mark by the end of the first salt lake.

"Yeh," said Mase softly. "A boy who keeps his date with death'll keep it with me—if he trusts me. Yeh."

Only a swamper would have noticed the little piece of cane with one white-skinned section stuck in the mud under the mangrove point of the lake. Mase stopped paddling, looked at the sun and drifted.

Silence; not a ripple on the pink mirror of a lake. Summer clouds piled like glaciers above the unseen Gulf. Mase watched the green-gray wall of mangrove. He saw a faint broken spot above the matted roots, and reached a hand to them.

"Proud folks, techy folks . . . But what's Johnny done? No use askin' *him*. Only clue I got was that he asked me, did I ever tell any white man that I knew where the ribs o' that British ship was found? And hell, I lied for three years about it to stop any swampers from findin' it! I never even went near the sand key after I saw the old council men didn't like it. Indian stuff—tabu. Nobody can go there except the five old men o' the council. Hey—I wonder now?"

HE THOUGHT a moment before he crawled under the mangroves. "This is Indian country. It's no good to anybody so, of course, the Indians can have it. Power boats can't get in from outside nor white hunters from inside—except guys like me. And I been allowed to perouse around since I was a kid, and knew Seminole kids. Like Little Johnny Cumso—an' Spittin' Eagle's boys. When I was a kid there was near a hundred in his tribe. Now I bet there ain't sixty. Gittin' too populated and civilized in here fer me and Indians."

It *was* populated. Crawling a hundred feet across the root mats, watching the tide mud and the coon oysters clumped around each mangrove butt, Mase met one snake, two frogs and nine horseflies. Yeh, gittin' settled up, this piece of jungle.

Beyond the mangrove barrier he pawed out on a low shell and coral ridge with a few cabbage palms and palmettos fighting their heads to the air.

He didn't see nor hear a thing but he squatted patiently in the bars of sunset finding a way through the growth. He knew that Johnny would have heard his first touch to the outer channel mangrove. Johnny would wait to see that Mase was alone.

"Funny suspicious guys, these back-in

Seminoles. They don't ackcherly trust anything that even smells white. Hey, boy!"

He spoke in a low voice, for he felt rather than heard his friend's coming.

Johnny Cumso stood erect behind him watching intently. As he'd want to face the old men's buckshot—head up, clean and proud. His mother would demand it that way.

"Hey?" grunted Mase. "You picked a fine meet-up hole. I might have missed you entire. No other way to git here except by that crawl you gave me? Who you tryin' to throw off the trail?"

"To be alone—think," said Johnny. "You know too."

"All I know," grunted Mase, "is if my old man told me he was goin' to sprinkle me with birdshot—jest number eight even, I'd tell him to go jump off the dock. If he didn't, I'd put him there. But then I'm jest a no'-count white man. How you, Johnny?"

"I am well," Johnny said and came closer. He was dark, slightly built, perhaps eighteen. He'd been outside, off and on since he was fourteen, and had picked up fair English.

"Gimme a cigarette," said Johnny, "I will smoke with you. I am well."

He smoked quietly, his thin face no more grave nor expressionless than as if he'd been sitting with Mase in a picture house at Everglades City or Immolakee.

Johnny's black hair was cut in a thick round mat at his neck, brushed carefully back and oiled. No shirt, no garment, save the ragged trousers held by a braided palm belt. Mase grinned and dragged on his smoke.

"What time you meet the three old men?"

"As the last light goes. They come by the west channel."

"I guess no use askin' where you meet 'em but it can't be far. Mebbe the west end o' this key. There's a clearin' and clean sand."

"How," said Johnny, "you know?"

"Oh, I rambled and scrambled this country! But I never been near the wreck

spot—since I first discovered it three year ago an' promised Spittin' Eagle I'd never mention it to any man. I bet now, with the new hurricane channels in there, it's more uncovered—ain't it?"

Johnny's face was a rock. No one save the old medicine men were supposed to visit that mystery spot; and he knew that Mase knew it. It had been a cunning question—but it was as if Johnny never heard it.

"You will go now," said Johnny. "I wait an hour and I go. It will not be right if you are near us. Go now, my friend."

Well, I'm through argyin," said Mase. "Said all my say to you. Can't talk to Spittin' or then he'd know I wormed the truth out o' you, by guess an' by Gawd—an' you'd lose face with yore family. So I'm through mebbe. Boy, you ought to see them pants!"

JOHNNY'S eyes had been fixed on that bundle with the only gleam of interest Mase had seen yet. But he said nothing as Mase broke the string. Mase shook them loose from the wrapping.

"Boy, when I start to Glory, I hope to wear pants like 'em. I wanta see Ol' Gabriel lose a toot of his trumpet when he sees me passin' them pearly gates. When I git to Heaven I hope I stop the show."

"They are nice," said Johnny slowly. "I thank you. No one will ask where I got them. But mebbe they guess who did this."

"Yeh, they'll figger me in it. But if I keep my trap shut an' pretend I never knew nothin' about it, Ol' Spittin' can't bring the subject up with me. I'd like to ask what you done to git the death call but I know it's no use. I never seen such close-mouthed guys as you can be, on family matters like a dose o' buckshot."

Mase rose. He was getting lathered into rage with his sense of defeat.

"Put 'em on," he growled. "I left the price tags on 'em so them medicine men'll know they ain't no secondhands. Hell, if I had pants like 'em you find me jiggin' around some juke joint Sattiday night down the Key road, an' not in some damn graveyard. . . . Get into 'em."

Mase passed them over—and then he trembled with some wild thought. Johnny took his buryin' pants silently, smoothed the two-inch purple stripes, and slid a thin leg into them. Mase turned aside. The last sunlight was on Johnny's pants and they sure hurt a man's eyes. They sure did. . . .

Mase had to blink and turn away again.

He picked up Indian Johnny's discarded ragged overalls and went to the edge of the shell ridge. He shoved them deep into the mud and planted a foot on them, and came back wiping his hands. Johnny was looking at himself carefully.

"Boy, you look like you was headin' a fish-fry parade through colored town in Miami, damn if you don't. I swear, I never seen such guys as you deep-swamp folks."

He came before little Johnny Cumso and blinked again. Johnny looked up suddenly and the last sun was on his copper face. He smiled slowly, and then Mase broke loose.

"Look here, blast you! You know somethin'? I fergot it myself. I ain't been paid fer them pants!"

"Pay?" said Johnny, puzzledly. "Me—how? I think you my friend—"

"That nothin' to do with it! I'm a business man, that's what—in spite o' what my ol' man says. I ain't been paid fer the pants—an' they cost me two dollars and eighty cents besides bus fare to Miami both ways. And extrys too, like eatin' and a coupla beers. Dang it, I'm gittin' stung on this buryin' deal. You hear me, Johnny?"

Johnny stared at him coldly, puzzled, then hurt to the core.

Mase bawled at him loudly. "Gimme my pants! Changed my mind! Git out them—"

Johnny nodded slowly, sorrowfully. He bent over to get out of his death pants and his chin was out. Mase swung from his heels. Little Johnny Cumso went back and his black head hit the shells with a crunch.

MASE listened a moment above him. "Boy, it ain't yore fault. You're jest kinda kidnapped. I found you swipin' my

clo'es and crocked you up. I'm tellin' Spittin' Eagle there ain't no buryin' till I git paid fer what the show cost me. Boy, I got to git you outa here fast."

The Indian was quickly slung over Mase's shoulder, and Mase started. When he had to crawl it was tough, for Johnny's head kept bumping Mase's heels. Mase got his teeth into the death pants and crawled back over the crushed path he had made.

When he reached water and his dugout, he was all in. He rolled Johnny over the side and sat with the paddle across his knees, unable to continue the growling chatter with which Mase was wont to jeer at the world and its doings.

But he watched the darkening western shore of mangroves. If that cleared point was the death rendezvous, a guy ought to travel east. He thought of another thing.

"If this fool comes to, he'll slide overboard or start to fight. Either way, it'll attract that shootin' party. Johnny, I got to be mean."

He fumbled under his seat for seine cord and gun rags.

When he took the paddle again, Johnny Cumso was neatly bound, gagged and lying face downward with his black head between Mase's ankles.

Mase dug water powerfully and as might be, keeping close under the evening shadows of the mangrove wall. Now and then he stopped, listened.

No sound or motion came down the little lake. Old Spittin' Eagle and the other two old men would be waiting, smoking quietly, with hardly a word to one another; and the muzzle-loading double-barrel number ten shotgun, which had been the Shark River council's execution piece for fifty years, loaded and oiled in its wrappings, waiting for the condemned to appear.

"This here action o' mine is goin' to be tough to explain. If I took Johnny outside and turned him over to the sheriff, he'd be back in no time. If I took him home to Jigger Key, it'd be a scandal fer the old man and git me nowhere. I dunno.

Won't have a friend left among the Seminoles. Not even Johnny."

He worked on more swiftly now for once he was across the slough where the big sawgrass cut through the mangrove islet he could evade pursuit.

But there would be none. The old men would wait tranquilly all night and then return to their tiny hammock beyond the head of Shark River.

They would do no more except to ask Johnny Cumso's family to have him appear before the council. If he did not, disgrace eternal; they would be condemned by silence to leave the tribe. Mase knew that much.

"Then medicine men got ways o' workin' on their people's feelin's that white folks can't guess at. Old stuff—deep stuff. Quit buttin' me, Johnny."

The bound victim had come to and was slowly trying to raise his head. He twisted about, gasped through the gag and glared up.

Mase stared over him at the canoe's bow. The Indian worked his chin over the side and watched the darkening woods. Then he looked at Mase and nodded slightly.

"Yeah? Don't give me trouble. Jest changed my mind about them pants. Wanted 'em back, and you happened to be in 'em. It's what some dang Miami lawyer'd call a writ o' seizure. Boy, you ain't no more than a bug on them pants that I ain't got time to shake off. Stop kickin'."

FIVE minutes later Johnny worked up to stare at a cove in the next mangrove reef. The trees were mighty here. their tops overhanging a labyrinthine slough and this was moving water.

Mase nodded back; he recognized the spot even after three years. It was after the October hurricane that he had been on a lone search along this coast and had come upon the ancient buried wreck. Storms of a century ago and more had driven a shattered brig far past Cape Sable, over the wide shoals to bury itself in the glades jungle.

Other hurricane tides had drifted it with sand; then others had uncovered and torn it apart.

Early wreckers had seen it and then forgotten the spot. It had been buried in sand and mangrove until Mase McKay had discovered again the few white bones of a nameless ship.

Then Old Spittin' Eagle had come to him and asked that nothing be said outside to other white men. It had something to do with early Seminole wars. Spittin' had vaguely muttered.

Mase had understood and had told no man he was ever on this spot. Old Spittin' had nodded approvingly. Mase had no questions, and the old men of the hidden tribe understood that too.

Indian silence—this gabbing, boasting swamp man could hold that as faithfully as they did. It accounted for many of the privileges that McKay's traders had had back inside.

Mase stopped paddling.

His dugout was drifting silently into the cove; the dark mangroves hid the entrance behind him. In the starlight he saw the light blur which was the bed of the lost ship. He could even make out the broken bulwark, bits of the rail amidships, the white bone stump of a mast, and the shattered poop that hung now over a dark pool.

Mase stared hard.

Either the stern had been dug out from the sands by the hands of men, or storm tides had cut away the bar below it. There was water where he had seen sand hummocks three years ago.

He looked down at his captive, for Johnny had twitched against his foot. Johnny moaned slightly under the gag. There was terror in his eyes, where the buckshot sentence had brought none.

"What," Mase muttered, "is this about? What's got you down, Johnny? Sure, I know this place is queer—something yore old men didn't want Indians or whites messin' into—but who's been here? And why? Listen! Has it anything to do with you an' that buckshot gun?"

Johnny slumped sullenly. Gagged or not, he wouldn't answer. The canoe drifted nearer, and the high stern cut the starshine on the pool below.

He saw the dark ports; the sands of a century had been cleared from the stern cabin. He saw a rope coil and some tools and a water butt beyond the shattered rail.

Utter silence. Even Johnny, on his back in the canoe bottom, did not move.

Mase muttered: "It sure gives a guy creeps. A buckshot gun openin' up in here would sound right cheerful. Hey, boy, if I pull that rag wad out o' your teeth, will you talk to me or cuss me? Or raise a yammer that'll call ol' Spittin' mebbe a mile away? I guess I better not trust you. You wouldn't lie to me but you wouldn't promise either. Shouldn'ta come in here but when I remembered, I thought it might explain all this funny stuff.

"You been in here before an' the ol' medicine men didn't like it. But it oughtn't to draw a death sentence for a man. It don't make sense. It's somethin' else."

He picked up his paddle and Johnny flinched. Johnny's head hammered his ankle. One stroke sent the dugout nearer the wreck, and Johnny was fighting his bonds and moaning.

"Want me to back out, do you? Don't want me in here, hey? Well, my ol' man has frequent remarked that if I smell trouble anywhere I ain't happy till I gits my nose in it.

"Old Spittin' can buckshot you mebbe, but he'll think twice about me. I'm a guy who'd object. Yeh, boy, I'd squawk, dang if I wouldn't. When I ain't satisfied I let 'em know it a mile around."

The canoe drifted in the starlight under the overhanging stern. In the tide beyond the silent pool Mase saw a faint luminous blur, then something like a green shield turning to fade out.

"Sharks huntin' in on the tide. No skin off me an' you. They'll chase the mullet till they jump right in the boat an' that'll be breakfast tomorry. Hey, sharks, do yore stuff!"

Johnny was fighting to free his elbows. Jabbing his chin on Mase's shoe. Johnny was frightened at last—scared to his soul.

"Boy," Mase muttered. "I'll take the chance. You want to talk now. But don't you holler fer them buckshot boys. I wouldn't care to meet Spittin' just now. Get on yore side."

HE KNELT forward and bent over the bound man feeling for the knots in that wet cord. He'd made them pretty tight around Johnny's elbows and wrists. They sure were cuttin' deep. But Johnny kept banging his head on the wood and then staring upward past Mase's shoulder into the starlight.

Mase saw a shadow above. It was the high square transom of the ancient ship, white and dry as dead man's bones, and as lifeless.

Mase bent to his job. "Remember, boy, I get the gag out and you keep yore mouth shut. Otherwise I got to clip you goofy again. You—"

Mase heard something. The sound was very soft, slithering. Hardly the whir of a rattlesnake, hardly the rustle of a leaf. A sound like a very small motor perhaps, whirling.

He swerved back from Johnny, glanced up. Something was between him and the stars yet he could see the stars through it.

Then it fell on him.

On his head and shoulders, down on to his elbows and hands. Soft, damp, clinging coils, and he knew at once what it was. A circling cast-net and he was in it.

The lead weights came swiftly closing all about him. The draw rope was whistling up past his ear to the center ring above his head. It was fast and precise as a machine. The man who dropped it knew his job.

The heavy leaded fringe of the net dragged in mercilessly on Mase's arms and when he rose he was swung and the whole net tightened until his arms were as if in a straitjacket, and clamped to his sides by his own weight dangling in the web.

"Johnny!" Mase yelled, and forgot that

Johnny was still bound in the canoe. "Look out, Johnny!"

His foot struck the water. The canoe had veered under him.

Mase saw a green blur below it, then another ahead as the boat drifted slowly. He tried to draw his feet higher.

The sea wolves were roving in from the tide, drawn by the stirred water. The mullet fled in streaks of phosphorescent light. The flash of one shark followed them; but the two larger shapes faded slowly till he saw them no more. A man only saw them when they moved.

"Waitin'," Mase thought. "Curious. Watchin' that canoe—and me. This rope's tightenin' on me. If I could git hand to my pocket, my knife—open it. If I could—"

The leads and meshes gripped his thigh on one side. On the other it was higher. Maybe he could twist his arm free with a little slack in the central draw rope. Then he felt his body lifted.

He could see nothing except the rope above him vanishing as it was hauled over the stern of the wreck. That silent unseen man had power.

"Once he drags me to deck I'm gone," Mase muttered. "Or if he swings and drops me . . . I'd be a fine chunk o' meat tied in a package for them killers below. Three now—three—"

He kicked out with his legs, struck the water. The three unseen sharks became luminous again, moving slowly to watch this struggle under the overhang of the ship.

The rope stopped ascending.

"That's it," Mase grunted. "Swing an' drop me—tied—to 'em."

The rope did swing a bit and Mase swung his legs wildly backward.

His shoe caught something. Rusty metal, a segment of twisted metal, the collar of an ancient rudder post which he now saw dimly. He gripped it with his foot.

When the next swing came he thrust his head back and caught the taut rope in his teeth and dragged at it. That gave him a little slack. He strained and bit and hauled. He got enough slack to loosen the

leads about his body an instant, and jerked his right arm free.

"Now, that knife—"

HE WORKED his hand to the pocket and gripped the heavy knife. Now he had locked both legs about the rudder post, and the man who had trapped him hauled and jerked the line.

Mase resisted desperately while he tried to get the back of the knife in his teeth and use his hand to open it. He got it open at last and drove the blade across the cast-net knots just as the draw-rope tightened and dragged again.

The knife came back across his cheek, gashed it from ear to chin. But his arm broke through the rent he'd made, and he wrapped it about the post.

"Now, damn you," Mase grunted, "drag your dangedest—see who's best at it, you or me." He wiped his face. Blood. Plenty of blood from his cut. Suddenly there was a mighty threshing battle just under him. The pool gleamed in pale fire. Blood. That was it. The killers had smelled the first drip of it and were furious.

By the light of one whipping fin Mase saw the head of another. The head above water, the serried teeth; and the brute was pushed aside by another's charge.

The little pool filled with them, wild at the blood smell. They could have touched Mase's knee with their snouts if they'd charged higher. Suddenly the rope went loose above him and he nearly fell headlong upon the gleaming killers.

But the net saved him now for he'd twisted a broken square of it about the post with his arm and he hung. That knife—if only he had not dropped the bloody knife when it was jerked into his face!

The water below was livid with battle. The sharks crashed the sand and coral pool seeking that blood taint. They charged the heavy dugout in which Johnny Cumso drifted ten yards away and spun it aside. But Mase was thinking grimly.

"He loosed the line—all that racket made him think they had me. Yeh, it'd

sound that way. Now what'll he do? I can work my way out this bag now, but then what? He'll try to make sure I'm gone."

The water was quiet now.

The sharks were a moving blur out toward the tide. The canoe had drawn them—they believed it to be the source of the blood scent. Mase tried to cease breathing. The unseen man would surely try to peer below the counter now, to see a victim torn to pieces in the net.

Mase hung and crouched.

It was so still that he heard his blood drip. Strike the water with a soft *plop*, and a smaller shark came flashing back. Then they all charged and again the battle was on thirty inches below Mase's bent knees. Gripping with knees and one arm, trying to free the other from his side. He had just got it loose when he heard a voice.

It came not from the deck above him but from the sandbar toward the end of the spit. The unknown man had dropped from the hulk forward.

"Johnny?" he called in a low voice. "That's you, eh? So you did bring someone in here, did you? Well, you saw what happened to him. You said you'd never bring anyone to spit on me, didn't you?"

Mase tried to guess that voice. Not an Indian, not American—it had the soft broad quality of an Out-Island man, somewhere down the Bahamas, Turk's Island, or maybe farther down the West Indies.

"Johnny?" the voice called. "It certainly is you. Come ashore." The voice laughed unpleasantly. "Something to say to you, Johnny." Then the voice snarled. Johnny was writhing and gasping unable to answer.

Mase could just see the dugout close off shore and the figure on the sand by the bright starlight. Then the voice said:

"Won't talk to your old chum, eh, Johnny? I'll come get you."

The sharks were swarming under the wreck's counter. The man watched them briefly, then took a swift plunge to the canoe's bow. Mase heard him mutter astonishment to find a bound prisoner within. He drew the dugout softly to the sand and stood above it silently.

"A bit thick," he said slowly. "I can't get it. You didn't come back as you promised, Johnny, but here you are—trussed up and gagged! It couldn't be a trick on your old skipper of the *Saddie Scott*, could it? Captain Larry who got you out of Quarry Rock prison in Jamaica? No—hardly a trick—not with you tied and gagged."

Johnny twisted in the dugout. The skipper, Larry, dragged the bow farther up and bent above the captive. "Can't understand it, but I must let you talk, Johnny—for a while."

MASE McKay swung to the rudder post under the dark of the ship's overhang. He heard Johnny's first sullen mutter when he sat up. "Jamaica man?" Mase thought. "Or one of those Cayman Islanders by his talk. They get me down with their line o' language, like outa a book."

"So Johnny got into trouble when he shipped with the turtle men last year? And this Larry got him out o' jail—then Johnny brought him in to Florida. Smuggled him in past the patrols? Fetched him to this wreck—and what for? I guess that explains the buckshot council. The medicine men got wind of it an' so they staged tonight's party fer Johnny. Still, it don't seem crime enough to draw killin'. Must be more to it."

Captain Larry dragged Johnny up to his feet. His elbows still tight behind back. Helpless and silent.

Larry spoke. "Now tell your old skipper. I told you if you brought your Indian clan in here to interfere I'd finish you. But you came bound. Who did it, and what for? He went to the sharks—a nice bit."

"A good man," whispered Johnny thickly. "A white man—my friend. Good man—"

"An American, eh? An officer, was he? That's worse for you."

"No," said Johnny stolidly. "Now he is dead. Let me go to my people tonight. I will die then. That is all."

"No, it isn't. I'm not through searching yet for the ship's chest."

"There is nothing," said Johnny. "I told

you so before. My people came here years ago. The old men. They took iron and things they could use from this ship. Then the sand buried it again in the storms. They never found money I think. It was before I was born."

"I read the records in Jamaica long ago too. No great treasure but sovereigns and shillings—gold and silver in the pay chest. I came to find it and no one will stop me. Johnny. Not you. Nor any Indian ghost story nor American law. I'm not that sort."

"My friend is dead," said Johnny: and would say no more.

Larry laughed. Mase could see him dimly in the starlight. A tall, agile seaman sort: he had known those yellow-skinned Out Islanders. Quick with knot and knife. They gave a lot of trouble to Colony or American law when they wanted to be bad. Turtle hunters, fishermen, smugglers from Campeche Bay to the Gulf Coast, great schooner-men.

"You better speak," Larry said. "You're in trouble with your tribe but you're worse off here now—after you informed on me."

"No," said Johnny. "I don't know how it was found out. But you killed one of us. Billy Tigertail when he was sent here to find out what was going on. You threw his body in the upper lake and it drifted ashore. The council said I did it, and I had betrayed this place where they come to meet for old customs. They will shoot me for it when I go home."

"When?" Larry laughed. "No—it won't be safe for me. You'll stay."

Johnny squatted on the shells and was silent again. A late moon was making the light better and he stared at the East over the swamp.

Mase was working silently free of the clinging net. He feared to drop it and make the slightest splash in the pool. Larry would hear and the sharks would return. He saw two out in the tide past the cove. Even the sound of a voice would draw them now, alert to a lost blood trail. Larry was watching those faint luminous shapes.

"No," he muttered, "I better keep you here—with your friend. So, you won't tell

me who he was? Strange you were tied up—and he was your friend! No matter now. When he sent his boat under the old *Vesta's* stern. I knew I had him. Daren't shoot, Johnny, but I could throw a castnet better than any man on Grand Cayman. Clever trick, eh?"

EVEN as he talked he watched the sharks roving back to the wreck, and then nose along the margins of the pool, hunting. Then a ripple stirred. A gleam came under Mase's feet.

The wolves knew meat was there just above water. Another gathered closer. They swam in small circles, slowly, alertly. Perhaps another drop of blood had fallen?

Larry thought that was queer. The killers should have dragged the bait out in the tide, torn it to shreds by now.

He left Johnny standing on the sands and went cautiously back. He thought he saw a trailing rope from the stern, and everything should have gone under the sea wolves' teeth. Larry came into the denser shadow over the pool and watched long, silently.

"Now this is odd." He called: "What is that hanging there?"

He bent from the sand's edge to see more, and then Mase saw Indian Johnny move. He came soundlessly in Larry's track, barefeet in the sand. Then Johnny rushed, head down. Awkwardly with his bound arms, he crashed into the bigger man's back.

Mase McKay sprang from the post. High and far as he could above the green shapes of death in the pool. He couldn't make it, quite. He came down in water to his waist with a mighty splash, and saw the sharks make way like streaks of sheet lightning before him. When they turned back he was in the shoals. Then ashore where Larry had whirled on the helpless Indian.

Mase went into the two with a rush, swinging both hands.

Larry had jerked Johnny from his feet at the edge of the sand, and kicked him in the face closer to the pool before he turned to face the fighting man in the star-

light. He just got his hands up when Mase bull-necked him in the breast, lifted him and let go.

The Cayman Islander yelled in mid-air. Then he struck. The splash of him went over Johnny, and then a mightier surge from the charging brutes. Mase jerked at Johnny, hauled him back, for now the sharks were heaving fins in a fighting mass half out of the water in their madness to kill.

Mase pulled Johnny to his feet. "Come on away—it ain't nothin' to look at. They got him ten feet below."

"It is quiet now," said Johnny. "I saw you there under the boat before he did. I was afraid he would notice. Then he did."

Mase did nothing. He didn't like this. It was quiet now—very. Ripples on the pool, and far down and out towards the tide, a dim moving shield of green. It turned and sank, brightened to luminous beauty for a second and dimmed to nothing.

"Took him out with the tide like he thought they'd took me," said Mase. "Funny he didn't notice the difference—they all came back—but now they won't. I guess that guy never studied 'em when they was on a hunt for big meat. Well, anyhow I ain't it. Not tonight!"

He worked at the bonds on the Indian's numb arms.

"Hey, Johnny? I heard most of what that bird said. And he wasn't goin' to let you get out o' here. One of your clan, old Billy Tigertail, interfered with him and Larry put him away. You were blamed. Why couldn't you tell the old men?"

Johnny was passive while Mase stripped off his bonds: his face held no excitement. Then he began to speak quietly, seeming to pick his words with care.

"It would have made no difference when I couldn't prove it. They knew I had brought an outside man in and this was a place the council allowed no one to come. They had a story of spirits here—dead sailors seen by their fathers. So the old men said."

"Them big shots'll tell you anything—

jest like white medicine men will do. Only we call 'em lawyers and such. How about that ship's chest he dug for in the cabin?"

"I don't know," said Johnny slowly. "I think the first Seminoles who found the wreck would have got it. But Captain Larry believed it was there. He got me out of the jail when I was arrested in Jamaica with his smugglers if I promised to bring him here. That is all, my friend."

"You been in bad company," said Mase. "Now, listen, maybe there ain't bad company enough in this yere world to go 'round, so you lemme have what there is. You don't ship on no boats outside no more. You stay back in with your folks—hear me? The old home spot fer a simple little Injun like you. Hear me, Johnny?"

"Yes," said Johnny. "I know. You are now blood brother again. I will tell the council all—that you heard the man say all. And that you saved me tonight."

Mase wiped blood and water from his cheeks and laughed.

"Boy, yo're right. I'll tell Spittin' Eagie, an' make him like it. But you saved me, Johnny—rushin' this Larry. He'da got me under there with a gun or knife. I was what you might call kinda treed by them sharks.

"Come on, let's paddle out an' find that buckshot party tonight. Ol' Spittin' will call me down somethin' terrible fer hookin' into Indian business. But shucks, my hide's tough."

"The council will decide," repeated little Johnny.

Mase grinned. The council would decide, huh? Well, not this time. Mr. McKay's son had been dodging sharks and worse and he couldn't be bothered acting polite to any old council.

"It's me that decides," said Mase. "And say, about them pants? You won't be needin' 'em right soon, so I'm gonna borry 'em an' wear 'em to a beer joint down Key Largo next Sattiday night. There's a curb waitress there I sure aim to make jealous. I hope we didn't git no blood on 'em, did we, Johnny?"

LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W.A.WINDAS



WINDAS 1940

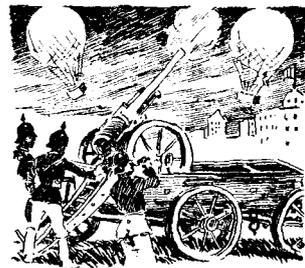


• LAST INDIAN CAMPAIGN •

Some will be surprised to learn that the last Indian War of the U.S. Army was the Powder River Campaign, and that it was fought as recently, believe it or not, as 1908.

• CONQUEST and TRADE •

Contrary to general belief, conquest rarely has any adverse effect on trade. For example, during the first 14 years after Britain occupied Egypt, the latter's trade multiplied five times.



• PIPE CLAY PARADE •

This name, meaning a dress parade, had its origin in the days when white crossbelts were common army ornaments. Pipe clay was used to clean the belts, hence the term.



• BULLETIN •	
FOREIGN TRADE	1888
.....	12,500,00
FOREIGN TRADE	1902
.....	60,500,00
GOVT.	EGYPT

The first gun designed to engage aerial targets was the German Balloon Gun. During the siege of Paris 1871, the French sent messages by balloons and the Prussians found ordinary field-guns useless for shooting them down, so made the new weapon.