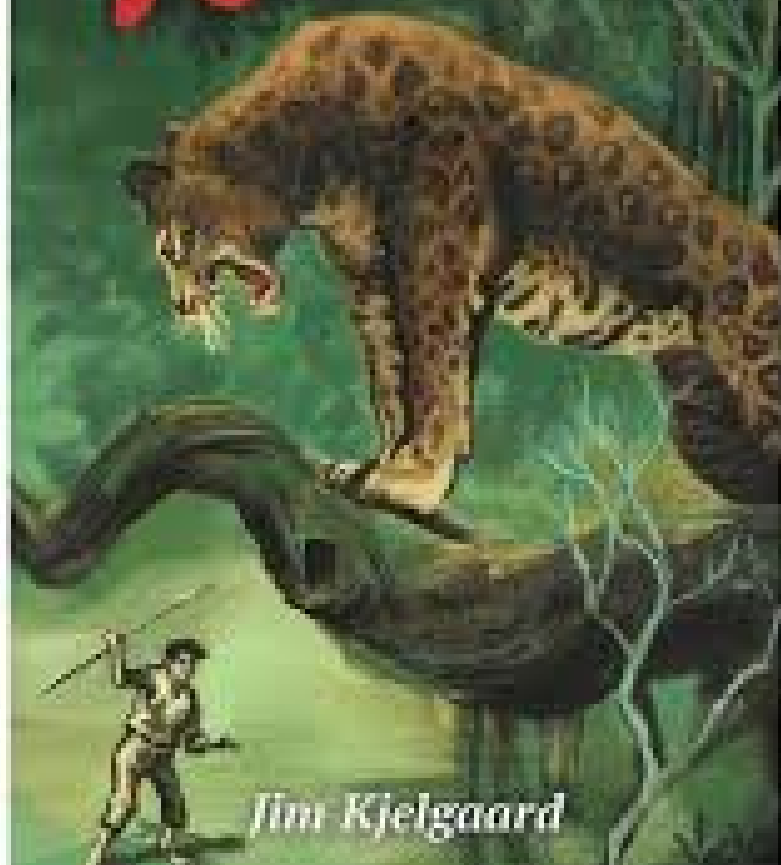


# TIGRE



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# TIGRE

By Jim Kjelgaard

ILLUSTRATED BY EVERETT RAYMOND  
KINSTLER

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To Lurton Blassingame

who guided, coaxed and helped with the many  
Kjelgaard books in publication

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The characters and situations in this book are wholly fictional and imaginative: they do not portray and are not intended to portray any actual persons or parties.

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# 1

## The Tigre Strikes

When the sun went down, a coolness fell over the meadow. Pepe Estrada's twenty-four goats that had been resting on the meadow's shady side throughout the afternoon heat got up and flexed their muscles. Then the great billy that ruled the flock led the twelve milk goats, the six half-grown kids and the five nannies soon to be with kids and in milk, out into the meadow.

Sitting with his back against the straight trunk of a banana tree, the brim of his woven-straw sombrero pulled over his eyes, Pepe knew when his goats rose. His *siesta* was never the sort of thorough slumber which those with no flock to look after might permit themselves. Even when he slept, he knew where his goats were, what they did and whether danger threatened.

Snatching at bits of grass as they moved, the goats started across the meadow toward the winding little path that led through gloomy jungle, across another meadow, through a grove of palms, across a river ford and, finally, to their home village of Muzo. Halfway across the meadow, the big billy stopped, and his flock halted behind him.

The big billy and the twelve older nannies looked around. Imitating their elders, the younger nannies and the kids glanced behind them, too. The big billy, known to Pepe as Brother Goat and to various villagers who had felt the impact

of his great, curving horns as Brother Devil, loosed a hoarse bleat. At once, in a varying range of voices, the rest of the flock raised a swelling chorus.

The goats wanted their master. Pepe pushed his sombrero up and grinned.

Midnight-black hair tumbled from beneath his hat, and sparkling black eyes were perfect foils for a rather impudent nose. His smile was warm, and nicely-matched teeth contrasted almost startlingly with a swarthy complexion.

The young goatherd rose, smoothing his white cotton trousers that ended six inches above his bare feet. He tightened his braided-grass belt, pushed the sombrero still further back until it dangled by the string around his throat, and straightened out his white shirt. He now presented a perfect picture of a carefree fifteen-year-old Mexican boy.

But there was something more, something a trained artist would have noted at first glance. Pepe's face, manner and bearing were gentle, but they were gentle in the same way that a blue sky can be one moment—and yet only an hour or even minutes afterward, support a fierce storm. Pepe, too, was fully capable of fierce, decisive and tremendous action—and at a second's notice—should the need arise.

Four years ago, Pepe's father, who was also named Pepe and also a goatherd, had battled to the end when a *tigre*, or jaguar, had struck his goats. Armed only with a knife, he had been killed by the great cat. But first he had battled so hard that man had never before witnessed such a conflict. Pablo Sanchez, who had watched the fight from where he crouched



behind a mahogany tree, still loved nothing better than to tell about it whenever he could corner a listener.

Neither Pablo nor anyone else in Muzo had ever before witnessed such a battle for the very good reason that never before had there been any. Even Lazario Rujan avoided *tigres*. He was the village hunter and the only man in Muzo who had a firearm. Lazario owned an ancient muzzle loading rifle. Only an insane man or one who had much to lose would even think of battling a *tigre* with a knife. But who could lose more than a goatherd whose flock was threatened? For the older Pepe it had indeed been a desperate battle in more ways than one. However, the *tigre* was so badly wounded in his right front paw that he had run away on three legs without getting even one goat.

On the point of walking over to his waiting flock, Pepe halted.

There was a gum tree at one side of the meadow. On a limb of this tree, about twenty feet up from the ground, a quetzal sat. With its rounded crest, green, scarlet and white plumage, and long false tail extending a full two feet beyond its true tail, this was indeed a very beautiful bird.

Pepe took due pleasure in the lovely sight. During all his fifteen years in Muzo he had seen no more than a dozen quetzales. This one would furnish something to talk about when he reached the village. Suddenly, the bird uttered a sharp cry and, with a flash of bright feathers, flew into the jungle. Pepe smiled and walked on.

Seeing him come, twenty-two of the goats set their own pace toward the jungle. Of the two that remained behind, Maria, a gentle brown-and-white nanny, waited for Pepe. Brother Goat, who counted that day lost when he did not exercise his horns on at least one villager, stood with lowered head and stamped a threatening hoof. Pepe laughed and continued to walk toward him.

"*Amigo*," he murmured. "Friend, you are bluffing and you know it. You would no more think of hurting me than I would of hurting you. Now begone and look to the safety of your flock."

As though he understood every word, Brother Goat raised his head, quit stamping his hoof, bleated, whirled and raced to overtake the herd. Maria sidled up to and fell in beside Pepe. His arm encircled her neck and a feeling as warm as Maria herself entered the boy's heart.

He loved, named and knew the personal characteristics of every goat in the flock. When it was necessary to kill one, and sometimes, unhappily, it was, Pepe turned that distasteful task over to Luis Ortega, the village butcher. On the day the dreadful deed must be done, Pepe took the rest of his flock to the farthest pasture as early as possible and returned as late as he could. He had never been able to make himself taste goat's flesh.

Of all the flock, Brother Goat stood first in Pepe's affections, and Maria second. Maria had been the target of the *tigre* on that fateful day when Pepe's father had battled with his knife and wounded the spotted killer cat so badly that, forever after, it must get about on three legs. It was Brother Goat,

then a young billy just coming into his prime, who had charged and butted the *tigre*, even while the battle raged. When it was over, both Maria and Brother Goat had stood close by Pepe's dying father, seeking to comfort him.

The rest of the flock had run—and who could blame them? Even a man had to be extraordinarily brave—or *loco*—to stand up against a *tigre*. But Maria and Brother Goat had not run, and for staying behind, their place in Pepe's flock was secure.

With his arm lingering around the gentle nanny's neck, Pepe looked proudly at the rest of his flock. When a father was no more, and there remained a mother, a young brother and two younger sisters to be cared for, it naturally followed that the oldest boy must wear his father's hat. And it was no small thing to be a goatherd.

Fortunately, with all the goats' milk they could drink and all the cheese they could eat, the Estrada family was the healthiest in Muzo. The villagers were eager for any surplus and for it they gladly traded cotton, clothing, jungle fruits and occasional marvels from far-off places. The Estradas even had a radio, a beautiful thing, with a huge, horn-shaped speaker and batteries that had long since run down. But Ramon Benavides, who spent twenty-four days a month at his potter's wheel and six transporting the fruit of his labors to the trading post at San Juan de la Rio, had promised new ones. They would arrive just as soon as Ramon had enough credit accumulated at the trader's on a kilo of goat's cheese delivered each month.

Some of the villagers wanted both milk and cheese and were willing to pay for them. The demand by far exceeded the supply. With an astute eye for business, Pepe confided his plans to Maria as they walked along.

"Two more kids from you, Maria and let both be nannies. Then you will be old, but never shall your soft throat know the sharp knife of Luis Ortega. You will live with us and feed on my mother's tortillas and the finest corn from the field that my brother Benito tends. You will see the flock become thirty-six or even forty-eight goats. We shall be rich—and live in peace and plenty."

The dream was so inspiring that Pepe fairly danced along. Who could dream of a better future than to live in Muzo and have thirty-six or forty-eight goats?

They reached the jungle and Pepe's smile faded while his feet moved swiftly. It was here the *tigre* had lain in wait four years ago and here, always supposing he came again, that he would lie in wait a second time. There was no real reason to expect him because, until this one came no *tigre* had been seen so near Muzo in the past ten years. Lazario Rujan, who brought down his game with his old muzzle-loader, when he could get powder and shot for it, and set snares when he could not, often found *tigre* tracks in the distant places he was forever visiting. But, as a rule, the big cats stayed away from villages.

Still, the very fact that one had come here was itself evidence that another might come. Brother Goat, who remembered both the place and the *tigre*, broke into a run and looked over his shoulder to make sure the flock ran with him. Pepe and

Maria started to trot. The meadow had been light, but, even at midday, it was dark in the jungle—and darker still, now that the sun had gone down.

When he and his charges were out of the jungle and in the next meadow, Pepe smiled again. *Tigres* did not hide in meadows, nor was it likely that one would lay in ambush among the straight-trunked, wide-spaced palms. There remained only the river. Wise Brother Goat halted ten feet short of the ford and turned to face his flock. The older nannies halted, too, but a kid tried to break and run to the water. Brother Goat stepped in front of the brash youngster and butted her, none too gently, with his horns. The chastened kid bleated and ran to its mother.

Letting Maria join the flock, Pepe went ahead.

The river was a sluggish jungle stream that flooded in the summer rainy season and kept its own dark secrets in its murky pools all year round. There were fish, great bass that had never had a lure cast among them. There were also crocodiles that ranged from wriggling babies, six inches long, to monsters of twenty feet. Crocodiles usually avoided the shallow ford, but they often lurked near it, waiting for whatever came by. It was well for a careful goatherd to take no chances.

Catching up a club which he always kept handy there, Pepe ran into the ford, splashing as much as possible and shouting. If a crocodile heard the commotion, it would come. One person alone could escape. But not all of a herd of goats could do likewise. Pepe waded across the brook to the far

side and back again. When no crocodile appeared, he called out cheerfully.

"Bring them in, Brother Goat! It is safe."

The flock crossed ... passed among the palms ... and looked down on the village.

Muzo consisted of sixteen thatched huts that housed sixty-five people. It was located in a green valley, with no trees for half a kilometer in any direction. A sparkling little spring-fed stream, too cold and too shallow for crocodiles, coursed in front of it, offering a never-failing supply of water for the gardens in which the villagers grew corn, squash, many kinds of melons and beans.

Pepe caught sight of his mother, who was patting tortillas into shape before their house, and waved to her. His two sisters, Rosalita and Ana, were grinding corn for more tortillas in the stone *metate*, or grinding bowl. Benito and the rest of the gardeners who were busily at work did not stop or even look up.

Of all the people of Muzo, only the children not yet old enough to labor and old Uncle Ruiz, who was past eighty and had his working days behind him, were not at some useful task. Absorbed in their games, the children hadn't a single glance for Pepe, either.

Uncle Ruiz came to meet him, however, and, since any man of Muzo was fair game, Brother Goat began to prance and snort as he prepared to attack. Pepe slipped a hand inside his shirt and brought out a little chunk of salt wrapped in cornhusks.

"For shame!" he scolded gently. "You would use your horns on an old man who is scarcely able to stand alone? For shame, Brother Goat!"

At the same time, he flicked the cornhusks away and passed the chunk of salt beneath Brother Goat's nose. Forgetting the quarry in sight, the big billy crowded close to Pepe and flicked his tongue out. Pepe drew the salt, a much-loved delicacy, away.

"You and Maria shall share it," he promised, "but only if you behave yourself and do not attack Uncle Ruiz. If you do, Maria shall have all the salt."

Brother Goat remained beside him, but the rest of the flock wandered toward their thorn-surrounded corral. The old man continued to draw near. Uncle Ruiz was fond of telling thrilling tales of his adventurous youth—which nobody believed. He was old now, and so stiff with age that he must walk with the aid of a stick that someone had brought him from the jungle. Hair that had once been midnight-black was frost-white, as was Uncle Ruiz's beard. His teeth were worn to the gums, and his eyes in old age had once more the complete innocence that had been theirs in babyhood. Uncle Ruiz did not see well unless, according to some villagers, there was something he wished to see. He was within thirty feet of Pepe when he halted.

"Hola, Pepe."

Pepe replied with the respect due old age, "Good evening, Uncle Ruiz."

"I thought I saw the goats go past," Uncle Ruiz was squinting, "but is that Brother Devil beside you?"

Pepe laughed. "Brother *Goat* is here—and he will not hurt you because he is anxious for the bit of salt in my hand."

"Then I am safe from his attack."

In his long-past youth, Uncle Ruiz had been a goatherd, too, and the memories stored up were dear to him. As he continued to advance, he asked, "Will you bring me a bowl of goat's milk tonight?"

"A bowl of the very best," Pepe promised. "Maria herself shall fill the bowl."

Uncle Ruiz, called uncle by everyone, was not really kin to Pepe or to anyone else in Muzo. He had lived so long that he had seen his wife die, and his nine children, and all his relatives. Unable now to do anything for himself and with no kin left to do anything for him, nevertheless, he knew neither cold nor hunger because every family in the village set aside a portion of what they had for Uncle Ruiz.

"What did you see today?" Uncle Ruiz asked.

Pepe answered, "I saw a quetzal."

"A quetzal?"

"It was a quetzal," Pepe affirmed.

"Tell me about it! All about it! Omit nothing!"



With the flock safely enclosed in their corral, Brother Goat centered all his attention on the hand that held the salt. Pepe pretended to ignore him as he told about the gum tree in the meadow, and the quetzal in the gum tree. He finished with, "It voiced a great cry and flew away."

"A quetzal cried?" Uncle Ruiz questioned.

"It cried."

"Are you sure? Might there have been something else, perhaps a chachalaca, near the gum tree? Could it not have been the chachalaca that cried?"

Pepe answered firmly, "There was nothing else. The quetzal cried."

"This surely means evil," Uncle Ruiz muttered darkly.

Pepe was astonished. "A quetzal can mean evil?"

"How many such birds have you seen, boy?"

"No great number," Pepe admitted.

"Of those you've seen, did you ever hear a quetzal cry out in the manner you have described?"

"Not that I remember," Pepe said uneasily.

"Then it means evil," Uncle Ruiz intoned. "From this point on, watch yourself, Pepe. Take every care."

"I will." Pepe's uneasiness mounted. "Now I must go, Uncle Ruiz, for the milking is to be done. I will bring or send your bowl of goat's milk."

Uncle Ruiz called hollowly as Pepe turned away with Brother Goat beside him, "Take care. Evil hangs over you."

Uncle Ruiz was very old, Pepe told himself as he walked to the corral. He was forever seeing things no one else saw and always making gloomy prophecies. Had he not declared that Jose Ramirez, a young and healthy man filled with the robust life of youth, would die in the next dark of the moon?

Pepe recalled suddenly that Jose Ramirez had gone into the jungle during the next dark of the moon. A tree that had lived for two hundred years and grown huge during its life had fallen upon him, and the men of Muzo had needed two full days to cut the tree away.

Again Pepe tried to shrug off the gloomy forebodings of an old man—and could not do it. But there was no point in worrying his mother, so when he paused in front of her, he smiled cheerfully.

She knew he was worried, in spite of his efforts to hide it, and asked, "Did something ill befall you today?"

"Nothing ill, Mother," Pepe said truthfully.

"You look troubled."

"I saw a quetzal."

"That is good. You must tell us of it."

"I will," Pepe promised.

Maria, who knew there'd be a treat because there was always one at milking time, left the flock and came running forward

when Pepe and Brother Goat entered the corral. The boy broke the chunk of salt in two and gave half to Maria, who ate daintily. The other half he gave to Brother Goat, who chewed lustily and looked back at the closed gate, as though remembering his lost opportunity and regretting that he had not butted Uncle Ruiz.

In their turn, Pepe put his nannies on the milking platform and milked them into earthenware jars. He sent Rosalita with a bowl of milk for Uncle Ruiz and tried to be properly merry as he himself partook of goat's milk and his mother's tortillas.

The attempt fell flat and soon his melancholy mood communicated itself to his brother, his sisters and even his mother, and they were among the first of the villagers of Muzo to seek their *petates*, or reed mats that served as beds.

Pepe covered himself with a *serape* and lay wakeful, looking through the doorway at the embers of the fire in front of his mother's house and wishing mightily that he had never seen the quetzal. Or, if he had to see it, at least he wished that he had not heard it cry. But if he was fated both to see it and hear it cry, then he wished that he had never told Uncle Ruiz.

Finally, the boy fell into a troubled sleep and presently dreamed that he heard goats calling.... He woke with a start and realized that he really did hear goats.

Throwing off the *serape* aside and springing from his *petate*, Pepe rushed outside and snatched a brand from the fire. Holding the torch aloft, he raced toward his goat corral.

He was some distance away when the torch's flickering light revealed most of his goats huddled at the far end of the

corral. Halfway between them and something Pepe could not see, Brother Goat trotted angrily back and forth, shaking his horns, breathing his rage and obviously waiting for the right moment to charge.

Pepe came nearer and saw what the enemy was!

A huge *tigre*, its tail lashing angrily, crouched full length in the semi-gloom, facing Brother Goat. It turned its head and its eyes glowed like two yellow moons fallen to earth as the torchlight reflected from them. Pepe tried to run faster and could not.

Disturbed by the torch, for fire was one of the few things it feared, the *tigre* rose and ran swiftly, despite the fact that it ran on only three legs. Its right front paw was shriveled and held close to its body, but the goat in the *tigre's* jaws impeded its progress no more than a mouse would hinder a cat. Brother Goat launched his charge.

Pepe hurled his only weapon, the firebrand, but the *tigre* cleared the stone fence and thorn barrier as though they did not even exist and was gone in the darkness. The torch fell beside Brother Goat, who was still snorting his anger and shaking his horns. Tears of mingled rage and sorrow sprang into Pepe's eyes.

The goat the *tigre* had carried was Maria.

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## Evil in Muzo

The *tigre* and its victim melted into the night as a clump of mud might dissolve in the little stream that watered the gardens of Muzo. Brother Goat voiced one final snort of defiance. The nannies and kids murmured to each other, still frightened.

The torch was flickering out beside the corral, and as he went slowly forward to pick it up, an overpowering shame rose to share Pepe's grief and anger. Four years ago, the family goats had been attacked by a *tigre*. From the shriveled right front paw, Pepe knew that this was the same beast. But a man, a man who knew how closely his life and the lives of his loved ones were interwoven with the flock he guarded, had defended them then. Now—

Pepe stooped to pick up the torch. He held it aloft and a little breeze chasing up the valley caused it to burn brightly. Pepe's shame mounted.

After the great battle of four years ago, the two pieces of his father's knife, with the blade snapped off at the hilt, had been picked up at the scene of the fight. The pieces, carefully wrapped in cloth, were now the dearest treasure of Pepe's mother—but useless as a weapon. However, there was the machete that every family of Muzo must have for cutting firewood.

Pepe hung his head. He might have seized the machete, but he had snatched a firebrand. Rather than come to grips with the *tigre* while armed with a weapon that would have been of some use, he had unerringly grasped the one thing that was sure to frighten it away. All alone, he must bear the crushing burden of being alive while Maria lay limp and dead in the *tigre's* jaws.

Brother Goat snorted again, although more softly this time. He was still angry, but he knew the *tigre* was gone, and all the threats he could utter would make no difference now. The big billy came to stand very near his master.

Pepe's hand dropped to Brother Goat's neck, and at once he felt a little better. Brother Goat was massive. A full third bigger than any billy Pepe had ever seen, his neck was like that of a fighting bull. His heavy chest and slim haunches were in proportion, while his horns, which went up and back in a graceful curve, were so thick at the base that they formed a solid plating of armor across the top of his skull. Only a very big and strong goat could have carried such horns. Pepe's gloom continued to lift.

For a moment after realizing that the *tigre* had killed Maria, he had felt as though he must wander forever in a world that no one else could share. Now he knew that he was not, and never would be, alone. In Brother Goat he had not only a friend, but a great and powerful friend who was completely on his side. All was not lost. Should the *tigre* come again, Pepe and Brother Goat would meet him. They might even defeat him if they were prepared.

"Pepe."

The boy turned to see his mother and Benito entering the corral. His eyes found the club Benito had snatched up, and when he reached for it, Benito yielded the weapon immediately. It was Pepe's right to fight the *tigre* in the corral, just as it would have been Benito's privilege to battle whatever invaded his garden.

Pepe's mother said gently, "It was not your fault."

Unable for a moment to reply, Pepe became aware of the yells of the village men. It seemed strange that they were arousing only now, for hours must have elapsed since the *tigre's* raid. Really, it was less than thirty seconds, which the boy's imagination had turned into hours because it did not seem to him that so much could possibly happen in such a short time.

Louder than any of the rest, Pablo Sanchez bellowed, "Give me your sword, Fernando! It may be a *tigre*, and no man knows more than I of the way *tigres* fight, for I watched one fight Pepe's father!"

Fernando Hidalgo replied sharply, "I wield my own sword!"

"Must I fight a *tigre* with a club?" Pablo demanded.

"You may fight one with melon seeds and never ruffle my feelings," Fernando retorted. "I wield my own sword."

Pablo said crossly, "Very well then. Keep it!"

Mentally, Pepe tallied the weapons in the village. Save for Lazario Rujan's muzzle-loading rifle—and Lazario and his rifle had disappeared into the jungle a week ago and hadn't

been seen since—there were Fernando's sword, two hatchets, an ax, nineteen machetes and assorted knives. No one of them—and, actually, not all together, were weapons that a man in his right mind would choose for fighting a *tigre*.

Pepe said, suddenly and fiercely, "There is that which I must do!"

"What is that?" his mother asked.

"I must acquire a gun, a great gun that may kill the biggest *tigre*, for I intend to be present the next time this one attacks, and I have no mind to lose either my own life or another goat!"

"Ramon Benavides, who has taken the products of his potter's wheel to the traders, will return with tomorrow's eve. We shall talk with him and he shall talk with the trader. Perhaps we will be able to get you a gun like Lazario Rujan's."

"No, mother," Pepe declared. "Lazario's gun kills very dead when it kills, but at best it is a clumsy thing and half the time it misses fire. I must have a gun that does not miss, one such, or so as the *norteamericanos* use—or so I have heard."

"*Norteamericanos* are all very rich," his mother chided him. "A gun that would satisfy them would cost more pesos that we may hope to earn if we live to have upon us more years than Uncle Ruiz."

"Nevertheless, I must have such a gun."



"Do not tear your heart yearning after what you may not have," his mother advised. "Lazario was absent from Muzo for all of one spring and all of one summer. Every day he worked very hard on the road. When he was done, he had saved just enough pesos to buy the gun he has. Such a gun, always supposing we may get one, must serve you, too."

"Never!" Pepe declared. "I must have a good gun—but, until I get one, I must be prepared. Mother, will you bring me the broken blade of the knife with which my father fought the *tigre*?"

"Advance!" the voice of Pablo Sanchez rang out. A club in his right hand, a machete in his belt and waving a torch like a fiery banner, he led the defending force. A step behind, carrying no torch but gripping his sword with both hands, came Fernando Hidalgo. Except for Uncle Ruiz, who hobbled twenty paces in the rear, the rest of the village men kept reasonably close to Pablo and Fernando—and very close to each other.

As they neared the corral, Brother Goat turned to face them and shuffled his feet in eager anticipation. Knowing the big billy was probably in the corral, Pablo halted at the gate, holding his torch high. In the flickering light from it, Pepe, Benito and their mother could be distinguished.

He said sternly, "Señora Estrada, do you not know that a demon might linger near?"

"A *tigre* lingers near!" Pepe flared. "And don't speak to my mother like that!"

"Hush!" his mother scolded. "That is not the way to address your elders. A *tigre* did indeed visit us, Pablo."

"I have found it!" Pablo bellowed. "A *tigre* visited us!" In a lower tone he inquired, "What did the *tigre* do?"

"It stole a goat," Pepe's mother answered.

"It stole a goat!" Pablo yelled, then lowered his voice again, "Which goat?"

"Maria."

Pablo roared, "It stole Maria, the very flower of our Pepe's flock! Ah! Four years ago, when I witnessed the life and death struggle between Pepe Estrada the elder and the *tigre* that would have stolen Maria—"

Bewitched by the night, the flaming torches and the dead nearness of a killer, the men listened once more to Pablo's hundred-times-told tale of the mighty battle between Pepe's father and the *tigre*.

Uncle Ruiz beckoned to Pepe, Benito and their mother and the three walked over to where he leaned on his stick, apart from the rest.

"I told you, Pepe," Uncle Ruiz said, "When a quetzal cries, there is always evil. My heart bleeds for you, even as it bleeds for Maria! It is a sad thing."

"What is this?" Pepe's mother asked sharply.

Uncle Ruiz said, "The quetzal Pepe saw summoned a spell of evil to entwine Pepe when it cried."

Señora Estrada turned to her son. "You told of seeing a quetzal. You said nothing of hearing it cry."

"I—I felt—" Pepe started lamely.

His mother came to his rescue. "I know you wished to spare me anxiety." She turned to Uncle Ruiz. "So that is what brought it about?"

"That indeed," Uncle Ruiz affirmed.

"Does the evil spell continue to prevail?"

"I have seen no indication that it is broken."

"A gun would break it!" Pepe said fiercely. "A gun to blast the life from a *tigre*—or any other wicked animal that would hurt goats."

Uncle Ruiz murmured, "The young have thoughts of fire, but thoughts avail nothing against an evil spirit."

"Is there nothing we can do?" Pepe's mother asked.

"Take every care and pray for the good spirit that will overwhelm the evil."

"How may we know this good spirit?"

"You will know it when it appears," Uncle Ruiz told her.

"Until then, neglect no precaution. If you are careless, there shall soon be no goats. If there are no goats—" He shrugged significantly.

The men at the corral were deep in a lively discussion when the Estradas and Uncle Ruiz joined them. Would it not be

wise, Fernando Hidalgo wanted to know, to beat the grass in a body, find the *tigre* and do it to death with the weapons at their command? There was great merit in this idea, said Luis Ortega, but all the men present had just heard Pablo Sanchez relate how the *tigre* had done the elder Pepe Estrada to death. It would be far more sensible to imbed their machetes in the earth, with all the blades upright. Then they should truss a kid and place it behind the raised blades. The kid's bleating would attract the *tigre* and cause it to leap. When it leaped, it would impale itself upon the machetes.

"You use none of my kids for *tigre* bait," Pepe growled.

Nevertheless, the suggestion was greeted with considerably more enthusiasm than Fernando had evoked—until Uncle Ruiz called out, "You cannot prevail against this *tigre*, for it is possessed of an evil spirit."

The men gathered around Uncle Ruiz, whose predictions were known to all, and listened attentively while he told of the quetzal that had cried and summoned the evil spirit. Then they looked at each other solemnly—and finally at Pepe. A *tigre* was flesh and blood and might be resisted, but who could resist an evil spirit? Bidding the boy be of good cheer and hope for the best, the men wandered back to their huts and left the three Estradas with Uncle Ruiz.

"Return to your *petate* and rest until morning," Uncle Ruiz advised Pepe.

"I have goats to guard," Pepe said.

"Even an evil spirit cannot eat more than one goat," Uncle Ruiz pointed out, "and having eaten tonight, it will not be

back for more until it again knows hunger. You may rest."

Pepe insisted stubbornly, "I stay with my goats. Mother, the blade from my father's knife and a torch to light when this one burns out, please."

"It shall be as you wish," his mother said quietly.

"I'll stay with you," Benito offered.

"That is not necessary, but it will save our mother a trip if you bring what I need."

The others left, and Pepe held his torch high while he went outside the corral to a pile of young and green poles from which he had intended to fashion a new gate. He chose the best, a seven-foot pole as straight as a stretched string, and tested it for resiliency by thrusting one end into the ground and bending it. He nodded, satisfied, when the pole bent without breaking, for dead wood was useless for what he had in mind. The bent pole straightened itself. A few minutes later Benito was back.

"Here." He handed Pepe the knife blade, two fresh torches and, finally, the machete from the hut. "Just in case it does come again," he explained.

"Thank you, Benito."

"I will sleep very lightly," Benito said. "Should there be trouble, you have only to call and I'll hear you."

"I do not expect a second visit tonight, but I'll surely call if there is one—and thank you again."

Benito left. Pepe lighted a fresh torch, thrust it upright on top of the corral and stared into the great gap of darkness beyond the small circle of light. The villagers sorrowed for him, but the villagers did not own the goats. They had not loved Maria as he had.

Fifteen years ago, shortly before Pepe's birth, his father had started the flock with two young nannies and a young billy and it had been no easier to start than it had been for Lazario Rujan to acquire his rifle. But Pepe Estrada the elder had wanted more for his family than the average villager of Muzo ever got, and he had seen his shining dream of a wealthy future in a flock of goats. Pepe had inherited that dream along with the flock.

One by one, the goats settled down. Brother Goat detached himself from the others, came to Pepe and lay down very near him. Pepe sat on the ground, his back and shoulders pillowed comfortably against the big billy, and held his knife blade up to catch the light from the torch. An inch wide where it had broken from the hilt and six inches long, both sides of the double-edged knife sloped to a pointed tip.

"It shall be a spear," he informed Brother Goat. "Though it is not nearly as good as a gun, this way, it will be much better for battling the *tigre* than any plain knife. And should our enemy come, a battle there will be."

Pepe matched the base of the broken blade against the small end of his pole, found that there was a half inch to spare on either side and reversed the pole. Very carefully, he used the blade's pointed tip to carve out a thin bit of wood. This was

work that must be done exactly right, but it was work his fingers could do while his mind was free to wander.

Uncle Ruiz was very old and undoubtedly age had brought him wisdom. But it had also brought him a certain measure of childishness, for many times he sat in the sun, mumbling meaninglessly to himself, and afterward he had not the slightest memory of what he had been mumbling about. In this instance, he was only partly correct.

The *tigre* was certainly part spirit in a certain sense, for every living thing, not excepting every blade of grass, every tree, every leaf on every tree and every insect on the leaves, had a spirit of individuality of its own. But whoever heard of a spirit that had need of goat's flesh—or any other mortal food? On November second, The Day of the Dead, food was placed where the spirits of departed villagers of Muzo might find it. But it was never eaten, although Pepe had no doubt that it was properly appreciated, for it proved that the villagers remembered their dead.

While his thoughts wandered far afield, the boy continued to chip away at the slot he was making in the small end of the pole. He paused frequently to match the base of the knife blade against it, for the fit must be perfect. Meanwhile, he continued to draw his own conclusions.

A full-grown *tigre*, in the prime of life, could crush the neck of a big ox with one blow of a front paw. *Tigres* were almost as much at home in the trees as the twittering monkeys that scolded whatever passed and frequently pelted both human and four-footed jungle travelers with anything that came to hand. Prey that took to water, time-honored refuge of

harassed beasts, found no escape from the *tigre*, for the big cats swam well. They feared nothing—with the possible exception of fire and the herds of wild cattle that roamed jungle pastures and charged any enemy as soon as they sighted it.

But, like all other living things, *tigres* aged. When they did, they found no easy hunting in the jungle and must seek prey they could catch easily. This one had done well enough, even with only three good legs, but four years was a long time in any wild creature's life. Age had added another handicap to a useless forepaw. Hunger, doubtless desperate hunger, had driven the jaguar to attack the corralled goats. And having come once, it would come again.

The night lifted slowly, and Pepe fitted his knife blade into the slot he had made. It was a smooth fit, but the slot was not quite deep enough, not quite wide enough and not quite good enough. Pepe's thoughts reverted to a gun and the hundred and twenty pesos, approximately ten dollars, that lay buried in a covered pot beneath the dirt floor of his mother's house. This was all the money his mother had been able to save in her thirty-four years of life. It had always seemed an immense sum to Pepe. But Lazario Rujan had paid four times as much for his ancient rifle.

Although the spear must serve until he could acquire a gun, a gun he must and would have, the boy determined. But how could he accumulate the fabulous fortune necessary to buy one?

Leaning the partly finished spear against the corral, Pepe milked his nannies, gathered the containers of milk by the



ropes strung through their handles and carried them to his mother's house. Rosalita and Ana still slept. Benito was sitting cross-legged on his *petate*, eating breakfast. He grinned at his brother.

"I heard no call during the night."

"I did not call." Pepe, his heart still sore at the loss of Maria, managed a fleeting grin in return. "The *tigre* paid us no second visit."

"Did you sleep?" his mother queried anxiously.

"I rested," Pepe told her, "and Brother Goat, who was lying beside me, makes a very comfortable couch indeed. I gave most of the night to fashioning a spear."

"Do you really think you may fight a *tigre* with such a weapon?" His mother looked worried.

Pepe answered grimly, "I can try, or rather *we* can try, for I have a strong comrade in Brother Goat. Together, we may give the *tigre* a battle."

"No!" his mother cried impulsively. "You cannot fight this *tigre*! It—It is not a *tigre* at all!"

Pepe said gently, "Now mother, don't believe everything Uncle Ruiz says."

"Uncle Ruiz should know."

"He should, but he doesn't. All too often he twitters as meaninglessly as the monkeys in the trees, or carries on like the chattering parrots."

"Even if that were true," his mother said in a low voice, "I have already given a husband to the *tigre*. I would rather give him every goat in the flock than a son, too. Don't fight him, Pepe! Run! Let him have the goats!"

"Mother!" Pepe was shocked.

"I say no more."

She turned away to hide the tears in her eyes. Pepe stole up behind her and put an arm about her waist.

"Poor mother!" he soothed. "It must be a great strain indeed, but you need have no worries today. I must finish my spear, and the flock will graze within sight of the village. The *tigre* will never dare venture near to Muzo in full daylight."

She managed a tremulous smile. "That is good to hear, Pepe, for by tomorrow we may see the good spirit that will overwhelm the evil one."

"I'm sure of it," Pepe reassured her. "Aren't you, Benito?"

"Why—why—" From his brother's very hesitation, Pepe knew that he, too, believed in Uncle Ruiz's evil spirit. "Why, of course ... Well, I have my own private fight with such weeds as have stolen into my garden during the night. Ha! If corn, squash and beans only grew as well as weeds, how very well the Estradas would eat!" Benito left for his garden.

Pepe breakfasted, caught up a thirty-foot coil of stout rope and a hank of buckskin, reassured his mother with, "Now don't you worry. I'll be in sight all day long," and turned to his goats.

Just as he left, two burros that had been dozing at the lower end of the village came awake and stared fixedly down the beaten path that led to the distant highway. A second later, Brother Goat and the flock he ruled looked steadily in the same direction. Two minutes afterward, driving his six burros faster than any man of Muzo had ever seen him drive them before, Ramon Benavides, who was not due until sundown, came up the path. Knowing that only something very extraordinary could make Ramon move so swiftly, Pepe and such other men of Muzo as had not already set about the labors of the day, went to meet him.

"I have hurried," Ramon panted, "for indeed I have much to say!"

"There is a *norteamericano* at the trading post! His name is Sam Jackson and he is such a big man, with such a shock of red hair, and so insane!" Ramon waved a sheaf of peso notes. "He fancied a vase for which that cheating trader of a Juan Gonzalez allows me forty centavos in trade. 'Will forty pesos be sufficient?' he asked, and, before I could get my breath, he gave me forty pesos!"

"Astounding!" Fernando Hidalgo gasped.

Ramon announced triumphantly, "He is coming to Muzo!"

"What does a *norteamericano* want in Muzo?" Luis Ortega asked.

"He wishes to find a *tigre*."

The men gasped incredulously and looked at each other. Then they swung back to Ramon.

"Who but a loco hombre would wish to find a *tigre*?" Pablo Sanchez demanded.

"I have already said that he is loco, but why should Muzo forego such an opportunity? The *norteamericano* said that he will reward handsomely anyone who may lead him to a *tigre*, and if he pays forty pesos for a vase worth forty centavos, what is his idea of a handsome reward? I told him that our own Lazario Rujan might very well find a *tigre* for him. 'Ah,' he said, 'tell Laz that I'll be there with bells on.' I know not what he meant, unless it is additional evidence that he is indeed loco, for he had no bells on when I talked with him."

Louis Ortega said, "Lazario has been in the jungle for a week and who knows when he may come out? Who knows even *if* he will come out? All those hunters get themselves killed sooner or later. Already Elena Rujan is very worried about her husband."

Pepe slipped away to his goat corral. A *norteamericano*, a crazy man who paid forty pesos for a vase worth forty centavos in trade, was coming to Muzo. He wished to find a *tigre*, which, within itself, meant that he would have no time for a goatherd.

Brother Goat pranced to meet him and Pepe opened the gate just enough to admit his own slender body. He tickled the big billy behind his right ear, then behind his left one, and Brother Goat closed his eyes and sighed blissfully. Pepe slipped the rope around his horns and tied it.

"I do not like to do this to you, Brother Goat," he apologized, "but the flock is to graze near Muzo today and the gardeners

may chase the nannies and kids from their growing corn. But I fear you, in turn, would chase the gardeners from it."

He led the big billy through the gate and toward the little stream for, since there were no trees close by Muzo, Brother Goat must necessarily be tethered to one of the boulders near the stream bed. However, the grazing there was very rich and Brother Goat would know no hunger. Reaching the stream at a point well below the gardens, Pepe looked about for a suitable boulder and saw one about twenty feet downstream. He led the billy toward it.

They were still fifteen feet away when Brother Goat snorted angrily. He stiffened, and the hair on the back of his neck bristled. Three feet from the boulder, he bent his muzzle to the earth and began to paw it. An angry grunt, more like the challenge of a fighting bull than the bleat of a goat, escaped him.

Holding tightly to the rope, Pepe paid out enough to let him walk very close to the stream. He kept his eyes cast downward, and soon, in a patch of damp sand, he found what he had expected to find. It was the single paw mark of an immense *tigre*.

Pepe looked at Brother Goat with new respect and understanding. Maria's murderer had run this way with his booty and, hours afterward, Brother Goat had still smelled his tracks.

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The sun was down. The goats were back in their corral. Pepe sat in front of his mother's house, inspecting the spear he had made. All day long, he had worked on it, cutting the slot exactly as it should be, shaping the haft so that it slanted to conform with the knife and, finally, wrapping the whole with wet buckskin that, on drying, tightened itself and made a binding fully as effective as iron or steel. It was not the gun he should have—and would have—but it was far better than any knife. Should he be forced to fight the *tigre*, Pepe could stand seven feet away with his spear, rather than come at once to close grips.

The various burros lazing about Muzo, and then the goats, raised their heads to stare down the path. Pepe looked in the same direction. Presently, a tall, red-haired man who carried a pack on his own shoulders and dragged three laden but rebellious burros by their halter ropes, came out of the jungle and up the path.

Exactly at that moment, a quetzal left the jungle, winged over the village and uttered a hoarse cry as it flew. Unaccountably, Pepe's eyes turned to Uncle Ruiz. The old man was kneeling, muttering to himself and tracing designs with a stick.

Pepe's throat went dry and his heart beat faster. He'd been the first and loudest to denounce Uncle Ruiz and his visions—and even while so doing he had hoped with all his heart that he might really believe what he was saying. Now one thing was obvious, the good spirit had not appeared.

But the evil had come to Muzo.

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### 3

## Sam Jackson's Guns

The man who approached was no more than twenty-two or -three years old, and lean and well-muscled as a young buck just entering its prime. His khaki shirt was streaked with perspiration and beads of moisture glistened on his forehead and face. But there was no hint of exhaustion or even of weariness about him, and he moved as one who has set his feet upon many a solitary wilderness trail and in many a lonely place.

The burden on his shoulders was the smallest part of what he bore, for none of the burros wanted to move and all three were literally being dragged along. Tightly curled red hair clung closely to the man's head. Besides the khaki shirt, khaki trousers, and well-fitting pacs, he wore an infectious smile and a look of grim determination. He wished to come to Muzo and to bring three packed burros with him, so he was coming to Muzo and he was bringing three burros.

If he had wished to do so, Pepe decided as he watched, and if by so doing he could have served any useful purpose, the red-haired *norteamericano* would have dragged three burro-sized boulders behind him to Muzo. The very thought was a sobering one that compounded the doubts the boy would admit to no one except himself. Could any ordinary man do likewise?



Pepe's eyes returned to Uncle Ruiz, still tracing designs in the dirt and still murmuring incantations designed to thwart the evil spirit. Gathered about the old man, the men of Muzo divided their attention between him and the oncoming Sam Jackson. The *norteamericano* would, of course, be admitted to the village, and he might partake of anything Muzo had to offer for no stranger was ever turned away.

But his would not be a warm welcome and, except for the children who were too young to understand, no villager would rest easy until Sam Jackson took his leave. An evil spirit that hovered near the village was awesome enough. When the spirit came to live in Muzo, it was many times more terrible. All this Pepe understood clearly, but, as the redhead came on up the path, indecision was sheer torture to the boy.

Spirits indeed there were, and none could deny them, but were spirits not beyond the scope of human understanding? Was any spirit ever clothed in flesh? Had one such any need of food, clothing, shelter, or the other necessities of life with which the three burros were obviously loaded? For that matter, would any spirit need burros? Was a quetzal really capable of summoning anything by its cry, with the possible exception of its own young or mate? The *tigre* had killed because it was hungry and not because it was possessed of an evil spirit—of that much Pepe was sure.

Then, disturbingly, he was not so sure. If the *tigre* was merely hungry, how had Uncle Ruiz known it would come and been able to warn Pepe hours in advance? Uncle Ruiz was very old; surely he was not without wisdom. Who really knew what shape a spirit might assume, or what it needed

and did not need? For that matter, might the three burros be balking because they knew they were in the possession of a spirit which they feared? It was all very confusing.

Pepe told himself that he was being as foolish as Uncle Ruiz. He dared not permit such a thing, for if it was true that the quetzal had called up an evil spirit to harass the goats, or the goatherd, doom was inevitable anyway. Nor must he let himself suppose that Sam Jackson was the embodied evil come to stay in Muzo. With the latter thought firmly in mind, he rose and went forward to meet the redhead.

Suddenly, he remembered that Sam Jackson had given Ramon Benavides forty pesos for a vase worth forty centavos in trade, and he hesitated. Would any mortal man fling money about so recklessly? But he remembered also his mother's declaration that all *norteamericanos* were incredibly wealthy, so he went forward again. He clenched his teeth as he did so, uncertain as to whether he was right or wrong but knowing he must go. Spirit or mortal, he had goats that must be protected.

For reasons Pepe did not understand, but which doubtless were wholly sensible to Sam Jackson, the redhead wished to find a *tigre*, and he had come to Muzo to find it. His manner, the way he walked and his easy familiarity in these surroundings, all bespoke an experienced hunter. The pack on his back and the packs on his burros were evidence enough that he knew one did not simply stroll into the jungle and encounter a *tigre*—but obviously he knew little of burros.

Since a *norteamericano* would hardly bring his own pack animals when he came so far in Mexico, it followed that Sam Jackson had rented or bought the trio from Juan Gonzalez, owner of the trading post. It was also a fore-gone conclusion that Juan would scarcely part with three of his best pack animals. Even if he had been so open-hearted, burros that were accustomed to life near the trading post would not willingly walk the long trail to Muzo, unless they were under the direction of an experienced burro driver, and, if Sam Jackson was not an evil spirit whose very nearness made the burros balky, he was far from experienced.

Pepe halted a respectful distance in front of the visitor, smiled and said, "*Buenas tardes, Señor.*"

"Good afternoon, *amigo.*" Sam Jackson smiled back, wiping his dripping face with a very moist handkerchief. Pepe almost warmed to this stranger whose laughter sparkled in both eyes and threatened at any moment to burst from his mouth as he asked in Spanish, "Is this Muzo?"

"This is Muzo."

"Then I reckon I got to the right place, but I sure don't know how I did it." Sam Jackson turned to the burros. "Darndest orneriest critters I ever laid eyes on, but they oughtn't be tired. I pulled 'em most of the way."

In spite of himself, Pepe laughed out loud. The idea of pulling burros all the way from San Juan de la Rio to Muzo was entertaining enough, but, more than that, the stranger's Spanish was delightfully tinted with a full measure of drawl, straight out of the Old South. Pepe stifled his laughter and

said, "Let me show you, Señor—you are Señor Sam Jackson?"

"That's right. You call me Sam."

"I am Pepe."

"Pepe—Joe, eh? All right, Pepe, show me."

The boy twisted a limber switch from a nearby bush, went behind the burros and expertly flicked their rears. All three kicked out at the same time, but Pepe had known they would do exactly that, and he stepped nimbly away from their flying heels. He went in to flick the switch again. Sighing and flattening resigned ears, but knowing they were now in charge of one who knew burros, the trio stepped forward far enough to slacken taut lead ropes, and suddenly humble eyes signified their willingness to walk behind the man who led them. Sam Jackson looked over his shoulder and his grin lighted a warm glow in Pepe's heart.

"Sure wish I'd had you with me all along the trail, Pepe. I'd have been here last night if I could have found a way to make these ornery critters move faster. And how the dickens did you keep away from their heels? I've seen 'em kick a fly off their own right ears and never touch the ear."

Pepe smiled back, even while he tried to quiet his fluttering heart. He merely said, "*Si Señor.*"

"The name's Sam," the newcomer reprimanded him.

"*Si, Sam.*"

"That's better."

The village men, who no longer had the least doubt but that Sam Jackson was the incarnation of the evil spirit called up by the quetzal and explained by Uncle Ruiz, clustered tightly about the old man. They were uneasy and more than a little afraid—and at the same time they were uncertain. A stranger had come to Muzo, and he should be greeted, but so far only a headstrong boy, who doubtless knew no better, had dared go forth to greet him. What man would follow Pepe Estrada? They all looked at each other ... and the doubtful honor fell upon Ramon Benavides, who was directly responsible for Sam Jackson's presence in Muzo. Maintaining a discreet distance, the rest followed Ramon as he advanced toward the stranger.

"Welcome to our humble village of Muzo," Ramon said formally.

The smile never left Sam Jackson's lips as he looked all around him. "If you mean there aren't any supermarkets, skyscrapers, gasoline fumes, people elbowing each other out of the way, squawking horns, or a few other things that mark the path of progress, humble this village may be. Otherwise, it's right out of the Garden of Eden."

Ramon said, "I have never been to this Garden of Eden."

"You'd recognize the place," Sam Jackson assured him, "and you wouldn't even mind the serpent."

"We have serpents here," Ramon said.

"But none that walk on two legs."

Shaken, for even in his wildest dreams he had never imagined a serpent walking on two legs, Ramon was nonetheless pleased because the visitor evidently approved of Muzo. At the same time, he must forget neither the fact that he faced the incarnation of an evil spirit nor the rules of hospitality.

"My house is yours," he said courteously.

Sam Jackson replied as graciously, "And my gratitude is yours, but I have brought my own house."

"I did not hear that," Pepe said.

"He—" Ramon gasped. "He says that he has brought his own house."

"Sure thing." Sam Jackson grinned.

Pepe's eyes strayed from the pack on Sam Jackson's back to the tarpaulin-covered packs on the burros, and he knitted puzzled brows. Assuredly there was no house. The boy then looked searchingly at the redhead himself. Ramon had declared him loco and indeed he might be, but neither his burst of laughter nor the words that followed belonged to an insane man.

"I'll show you the house! Is Laz here?"

"Laz?" Ramon questioned.

"The hunter."

"Lazario Rujan has gone into the jungle," Ramon told him. "He is still in the jungle."

"Doggonit! I was hoping he'd show me a *tigre*."

"Take comfort. He may return."

"When?"

"Tomorrow. Next week. Next month. Whenever he is done with the business he went into the jungle to do—always supposing, of course, that he isn't killed first."

"Right encouraging," Sam Jackson said wryly. "All I have to do is sit around Muzo anywhere between a day and a month, and your hunter will be back to show me a *tigre*—if he doesn't get himself killed first. I bet you don't belong to Muzo's Chamber of Commerce."

"No," said Ramon, who hadn't the faintest idea as to what the stranger was talking about, "but had you been here last night, there would have been no need to find a *tigre*. A *tigre* would have found you."

"How so?"

"A *tigre* came," Ramon said dramatically. "Like a night shadow, it came so silently that no man was aware until it was among Pepe's goats. It seized upon a nanny—Pepe's best nanny whose name was Maria—and fled into the jungle with it."

"A big cat?" Sam Jackson's interest quickened.

"The biggest ever seen near Muzo."

The redhead declared happily, "I'm sure 'nough in the right place."

"You cannot prevail against this *tigre*," Ramon said meaningfully. "It is possessed by an evil spirit. A quetzal called it up, and it will not depart until all Pepe's goats are destroyed or until a good spirit overwhelms it."

Sam Jackson said gravely, "Evil spirits are very bad, but I'll rub my rabbit's foot and spit over my left shoulder. Meanwhile, I'd sure like a crack at this *tigre*."

"What says he?" Luis Ortega called guardedly.

Ramon excused himself, joined the group who stood at one side and said softly, "He will prevail against this spirit by rubbing his rabbit's foot, whatever that may be, and spitting over his left shoulder. Now I am convinced that Uncle Ruiz is correct, for what are these things if not spells of his own."

"I think he is the *tigre*, and for the present he has taken the shape of a man!" Pablo Sanchez cried excitedly.

Sam Jackson called out cheerfully, "Uh-uh! No whispering, boys! It's not polite!" He started to move ahead.

Fearful of and at the same time intrigued by this interesting stranger, the men of Muzo kept pace with him—at a safe distance, to one side. Feeling some measure of security in the nearness of their familiar homes, the women and children went about their routine tasks while they stole covert glances at the approaching cavalcade.

Reaching a grassy knoll that overlooked the corral, Sam Jackson halted. He studied Brother Goat and his remaining charges, then turned to Pepe.



"That's the corral the *tigre* raided?"

"Yes."

"He's getting old," Sam Jackson said, as if to himself. "He has found jungle hunting pretty rough and had to turn to something easier. Chances are he'll be back for another goat, so right here is where I set up housekeeping."

Pepe said, "The *tigre* has a shriveled paw."

"How'd he get it?"

"My father gave it to him with his knife."

"Did he jump on your dad?"

"He attacked the goats," Pepe explained. "My father attacked him."

"With a knife!" It was more an exclamation than a question.

"Yes."

"Your dad must be pretty *mucho hombre*, pretty much of a man. Wish I could meet him. Where is he?"

"The *tigre* killed him," Pepe answered simply.

"I'm sorry, Pepe," Sam Jackson said sincerely. "Not exactly a surprise ending, though," he murmured, then asked, "Do *tigres* hit your goats often?"

"Last night was the first time in four years. He took my Maria." Pepe's voice quavered.

Sam Jackson looked at him understandingly. "You thought a lot of this Maria, didn't you?"

"Next to Brother Goat, she was the dearest of my whole flock."

"What'd you do?"

"I acted as a child and snatched a firebrand," Pepe confessed. "Had I thought, there was a very good machete I might have taken instead. But now I am much better armed. I have spent the entire day making a spear."

"And you'd tackle a *tigre* with it?"

"Most certainly, if the *tigre* first attacked my goats."

Sam Jackson whistled. "And I was afraid a 30-06 might not have the smash these babies need! Well, I'd better set up my happy home."

He dropped the burro's lead ropes and the three animals stood patiently. The redhead shrugged out of his own pack, laid it carefully on the ground, caught up the lead ropes and tied all three burros to the pack.

Pepe offered silent approval. Burros carrying packs would balk, but they'd never run away because they knew that they could not rid themselves of their burdens. But burros without packs would not hesitate to leave a master with whom they were unacquainted and return to a home they knew. Sam Jackson did not know how to make packed burros move, but he understood animal nature. He unpacked the other two burros.

Too entranced even to think of the men of Muzo, all of whom stood silently near and did their best to miss no move, Pepe watched the visitor open up a pack. From it he took a neat parcel that, when unrolled, became a sleeping bag. There were also three steel picket pins that he drove into the ground at proper intervals. He tied one burro to each, undid another parcel and set up a small tent.

Pepe gasped. Sam had indeed brought his own house, but this was only one among many marvels. There were parcels and cans of food, cooking and eating utensils such as no Muzo housekeeper had ever seen—or even imagined. There was also a rectangular object whose use Pepe couldn't even imagine until Sam Jackson poured into it a liquid that resembled water, but that possessed a nose-tingling odor unlike any water Pepe had ever smelled. Then, the *norteamericano* struck and applied a match and blue flame hissed over a burner. Thus Pepe became acquainted with gasoline stoves.

There were various other articles, including a flashlight and a battery-powered torch that Sam handled very carefully but put to no immediate use. Then he turned to the pack he'd carried on his own shoulders, loosed a long sheath attached to one side, removed its contents—and Pepe's heart caught in his throat.

The sheath had held a rifle, a long, sleek marvel, beautiful as a sunrise and lethal as a cobra. The boy's eyes widened. Such a rifle was to Lazario Rujan's old muzzle-loader as a stately mahogany tree was to a sprig of thorn bush. Pepe followed with yearning looks as the rifle was laid on the sleeping bag.

Next, Sam Jackson unstrapped the flap of his pack, took out a shorter case and removed two halves of another gun. No rifle this, but a double-barrelled twelve gauge shotgun, it was still a weapon such as Pepe had never seen in his wildest dreams. Sam fitted barrels to stock, broke the shotgun to squint through each barrel in turn and laid it beside the rifle. Then he removed box after box of ammunition, some for the rifle and some for the shotgun.

He turned to Pepe with a question. "Reckon they'll at least burn the *tigre's* tail if he comes for another goat?"

"Yes," the boy whispered.

Unable to tear his eyes from the two firearms, Pepe yearned to touch one and dared not. They were a dream—and dreams vanished. He rose and ran to his mother's house, paying no attention to Sam Jackson's shouted, "Don't go away mad, Joe!"

Pepe ran on, unheeding, for all he wanted to do now was to run away from the two marvelous guns that, in his own mind, pursued him so closely and overtook him at will. First the shotgun, then the rifle ran beside him, stretching forth imploring arms and begging him to take them up. Just before he reached his mother's house, both guns sprang into the sky and presently were farther away than the crescent moon that struggled valiantly to make its feeble light felt in the fading day.

Later, Pepe's mother said, "You pecked at your supper like a sick bird, and now you say nothing."

"I think."

"Of the *norteamericano*?" his mother asked softly.

"His name is Sam," Pepe said.

"I know not his name but I know his stain. He is the evil spirit called up by the quetzal, and now he is here in Muzo."

"Uncle Ruiz babbles like a fledgling parrot!" Pepe raised his voice.

"Uncle Ruiz is very wise," his mother said firmly. "Who are you, an untried boy, to denounce as a falsehood that which older and better men have declared to be a truth?"

"Was there ever a spirit that had need of food? Would a spirit, good or bad, find it necessary to have two great guns, either of which might kill the biggest *tigre*?" Even as he spoke, the boy wished that he could put his whole heart into believing what he said.

His mother sighed, "Ah, Pepe!"

"I will go to him," said Pepe, who really wanted to feast his eyes once more on the two guns. "He is a stranger in our midst, and it is not right to leave him alone."

Pepe rose and made his way through the starlit night to where Sam Jackson sat on the soft grass in front of his tent, with the electric torch beside him and the rifle across his knees. "Hi, Pepe," he called out.

"Hello, Sam."

Sam Jackson patted the grass beside him and, at this unspoken invitation, Pepe sat down. He looked toward his

goat corral. Dim shadows in the night, Brother Goat and his flock were either lying down or moving slowly back and forth.

"Reckon the *tigre* will hit again tonight?" Sam asked.

"I do not know."

Sam said very gently, "If he does, I hope he doesn't steal another of your goats. I'll do all I can to stop him."

"But—you cannot see him from this distance."

"Watch."

Sam took up the torch, flicked the switch, and Pepe gasped as his goats were suddenly enveloped in brilliant white light. *Norteamericanos* did indeed possess endless marvels. Pepe's hand stole forth and his fingers caressed the rifle's sleek stock. He said, "Good."

Even in the darkness, Sam Jackson smiled approvingly. "I had you pegged from the first as a man who'd like guns."

Pepe, emboldened, asked, "How many pesos?"

"About five thousand," Sam Jackson said carelessly.

Pepe's voice sank, but not as much as his heart. "And the other gun?"

"Maybe three thousand."

For a very long while Pepe said nothing, then, "Shall you wait all night for the *tigre*?"

"I'll wait at least until there seems to be no more chance of his coming."

"I have discovered that Brother Goat has extraordinary powers of scent. You shall hear him snort like this," Pepe gave a very creditable imitation of Brother Goat's battle snort, "when danger is still a long way off. Be on your guard should you hear it, for it will mean the *tigre* is coming."

"Thanks for the tip, Pepe."

"Now I must go."

"Stay a while."

"No I cannot."

Pepe rose and walked swiftly toward his mother's house. His heart had turned hopeless, and he felt sure that this feeling must show in his eyes. Sam must not see it. Five thousand pesos and three thousand pesos—either sum was so far beyond his comprehension that one might as well try imagining the number of stars in the heavens. As far as he was concerned, the gun he wanted so badly had not merely flown as far off as the crescent moon. It had gone far beyond that. There never had been—and probably never would be—three thousand pesos in all of Muzo.

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## The Triumph of Brother Goat

Pepe ate his breakfast so early the next morning that the night had only begun to lift, and the embers of the fire in front of his mother's house still surrounded themselves with a little halo of reflected light. In the corral, Brother Goat and his charges were beginning to bestir themselves in anticipation of the day. Pepe walked swiftly to them, and the big billy met him at the gate.

Brother Goat could be a demon when circumstance warranted, but now he was gentle as a kid. He nuzzled Pepe affectionately and pushed his wriggling black nose as far as he could into his master's pockets. The boy laughed and brought out the little handful of corn he had been saving.

"Here, here, gluttonous one! Do you ever consider anything save your own paunch?"

Brother Goat munched the corn in stolid satisfaction. Pepe tickled him behind each ear, places the billy could very well reach himself with the appropriate rear hoof, but he still liked to have his master do it.

"I did not mean it," Pepe assured his friend. "You consider your flock and me and the battle we shall fight when the *tigre* comes again—" He broke off and stared unseeingly into space. The spotted killer cat—and the certainty that he would strike again—posed a very grave problem whose solution



was certainly not unattended by great danger. Before Sam Jackson came, he had dreamed of owning a mighty gun. However, knowing and accepting the fact that he did not have and most probably could not get one, he had prepared to meet the threat in his own way. His spear was not the perfect answer, but it was the best one he could improvise. And, somehow, just knowing that he had given his best made the peril seem less. Then Sam Jackson had come with his two great guns, either of which might very well kill the biggest *tigre* alive—but neither of which belonged to him. And, suddenly, he felt woefully inadequate and incompetent, as though anything he might do could not possibly be enough. Compared to Sam Jackson's guns, his spear was a child's toy.

Pepe had risen so early because he wanted to be far back in the jungle before Sam Jackson left his bed. All night long, the two guns had haunted his dreams, as they now took possession of his thoughts, but maybe they wouldn't any more, if only he could put enough distance between himself and them. Resolutely determined not even to look toward Sam Jackson's camp, the boy stole a glance anyhow. At once, he felt better.

The tent flaps were closed and the tent fabric sagged slightly beneath its load of morning dew. There was no cooking fire and not even any smoke that would mark the start of a fire. Obviously, the redhead still slept. When he did awake, he would still have to cook and eat breakfast, therefore Pepe's aim was accomplished. He would be far into the jungle before Sam even knew he was gone—and in the jungle, he would be out of sight of the two guns. By the time he

returned, Sam and his guns—and the temptation these guns represented—would be gone from Muzo, he hoped.

Pepe milked his nannies, carried the milk to his mother's house, caught up his spear and started back to his goat corral.

"Good morning, Pepe."

The boy halted abruptly in his tracks, at first not daring to look around, then unable to avoid doing so. Sam Jackson stood a dozen feet away, the shotgun in the crook of his arm and a grin on his face. Pepe hadn't heard him approaching, and the goats had given no warning. A moment later, it occurred to the boy that the goats were accustomed to the stranger by this time and knew no special reason why they should raise any outcry when he appeared. With a queer little shivery feeling, he realized that his goats were the only social group in Muzo to accept this wanderer from a far land with no reservations at all. They saw nothing evil in him.

"Good morning, Sam." Pepe managed a fluttery smile.

"Where are you going?"

"I must take my goats to pasture."

"I wish you had called me. I'd like to go along, if I may."

"I thought you still slept," Pepe said truthfully. "There was not even a fire over which you might have prepared your morning meal."

"Esmerelda doesn't smoke." Sam grinned.

"Esmerelda?" Pepe questioned.

"Now don't tell me you've forgotten my lil' ol' gasoline stove. I fixed me a mess of grub inside the tent."

"Oh!" Pepe remembered the object whose use he had not known, and the liquid that looked but did not smell like water which Sam had poured into it, and the blue flame that had hissed over a burner when Sam turned a valve and applied a match.

"Well?" Sam was looking searchingly at the boy. "Do I go along with you or don't I?"

Pepe wrenched his eyes from the shotgun. "Of course—of course you may go."

Pepe sighed, knowing that as long as he was near that wonderful gun, he would desire it so desperately that the mere wanting of such a thing became a great hurt inside. On the other hand, as long as Sam and his great gun were along, the goats would be safe for this day. Pepe debated as to whether he should tell his mother that Sam was going with him ... and decided against it. She would worry if she knew he was alone in the jungle. But she would worry as much, and perhaps more, if she knew he was in the company of an evil spirit. There would be no one else to tell her, for as yet nobody else in Muzo was awake.

Pepe hesitated before opening the gate. Brother Goat had just one human friend—one person whom he considered his equal. Whoever was not his friend must be his enemy. Even now, he was cavorting and prancing, waiting for the gate to be opened so that he might let Sam Jackson feel the power of his charge and the smash of his horns.

If the day was to degenerate into a constant series of battles between Sam Jackson and Brother Goat, they would be lucky if they were able to reach even the nearest pasture.

Something must be done.... Finally, after some hard thinking, Pepe had an inspiration. He took from his pocket the chunk of salt that was to have been Brother Goat's evening treat.

"Here," he said, handing the salt to Sam Jackson. "When I call Brother Goat, you give him this."

"Sure he won't bite my hand off? He's half as big as a plow horse." But Sam grinned when he said it, so Pepe knew that he had no fear.

The boy called, "Come, Brother Goat. Come to me. Come to Pepe, Brother Goat."

Snorting, bristling and stamping all four hoofs much harder than he ever did when he were merely going to pasture, the billy went to see what his master wanted. As he took time out for a baleful sidewise glance at Sam Jackson, Pepe stooped to tickle his ears.

"Now," he instructed. "Offer him the salt."

"Aye, aye, chief."

Sam lowered the salt on his cupped hand. Brother Goat took a half step backward, pranced and shook his horns. Getting the scent of the delicacy, he came unhesitatingly forward— Brother Goat backed up for nothing made of flesh and blood. He licked the salt from Sam's hand, ate it and took a second look at the redhead. There was no friendliness in the look— but neither was there any hostility. Sam Jackson was scarcely

on the same superior level as Pepe and Brother Goat, but he could be tolerated. Butting was scarcely a fitting reward for one who offered salt.

Pepe laughed. "He will not fight you now."

"Thank you." Sam bowed elaborately to Brother Goat. "May we go now?"

"One moment."

Pepe ran to his mother's house ... returned and explained, "It was necessary to get another bit of salt. Brother Goat expects it when he comes back to the corral at night."

"I see." The boy noted that the redhead did not grin. "Well, you sure enough can't let a pal down."

Pepe opened the corral gate and the goats crowded through. Yesterday they had grazed in the rather limited area around Muzo, while Brother Goat had spent the day on a tether. Afterward they had been corralled all night. Pent-up spirits found release now as, with Brother Goat heading them, they skipped down the path leading to the jungle pastures.

Sam Jackson watched with interest for a moment, then he turned to Pepe, saying, "Looks to me as though they'll run right out of sight."

"They will halt at the river," Pepe told him, "for Brother Goat will stop them."

"Why?"

"There are crocodiles in the river. Brother Goat knows it, and he will neither cross the ford himself nor let any of his flock cross until I have tested it and found it clear."

"Brother Goat does all that by himself?"

"Oh, yes."

"He's smarter'n some people I've known."

"Brother Goat," Pepe asserted, "is smarter than *most* people."

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When the two reached the river, they found the flock waiting. Alert for any attempt at breaking through to the ford, Brother Goat stalked back and forth in front of his charges and bullied those that might have run ahead into staying where they were.

Sam Jackson whistled in admiration. "I do declare, if he didn't stop 'em!"

"I told you he would," Pepe said.

"What's the next move, *maestro*?"

"I run across the ford, splashing and making as much noise as I can," Pepe explained. "Any crocodile that might be lurking near, with the hope of killing whatever tries to ford the river, will attack me."

Sam Jackson said wryly, "Simple, but isn't it a trifle nerve-wracking?"

"Oh, no. I will see the crocodile coming and can escape. But should my many goats be caught in the middle of the ford, one would certainly die."

"Sounds like a real quiet, harmless game," Sam Jackson commented dryly. "Must you run across the ford?"

"No, I run only because doing so gives me the advantage of a start, and I'll be running if I'm attacked."

"Then walk, and I'll walk behind you. If there is a crocodile, and if it comes at us, it will be the last time it ever attacks anything at all."

"You will shoot him with your great gun?" Pepe queried breathlessly.

"I will shoot him with my great gun," Sam promised. "Just a minute, please. I wish to have a great bullet in each barrel."

He broke the gun, extracted the load of number sixes from the right barrel, slipped it into his pocket, took a slug from another pocket, loaded the barrel from which he had taken the bird shot and clamped the gun. Then he nodded to Pepe.

"Now invite Señor Crocodile to make an appearance."

"Ha!" Pepe laughed. "I will do that!" He waded into the ford. As he did so, he thought of the many times he had crossed here with fear as his companion. No matter how certain a boy might be that he could outrun a crocodile, there was always the slippery stone to send him sprawling, the sunken snag to trip him, or the chance that an attacking crocodile could swim faster than he could run.

Now there was no fear, for the redheaded visitor who hoped to kill a *tigre* was wading behind him with his great gun ready. Pepe beat the water with the haft of his spear and shouted. He looked anxiously up and down stream and found himself hoping a crocodile would come. Then one did appear.

It broke the surface of the upstream pool, only its eyes, snout and the tip of its tail protruding. An ominous little V wake curled from either side as it began the downstream lunge. Pepe reversed his spear so that he gripped the shaft and faced this oncoming monster with the blade, for the crocodile was fully a dozen feet in length. He braced his feet to meet the charge. His heart fluttered and the hair on the back of his neck prickled—and, for a moment, he was nearly overcome by a wild impulse to run.

Then he glanced sideways at Sam Jackson and steadied. The redhead stood calmly with the river purling gently about his knees. The shotgun on his arm might have been a casting rod, and, for all any casual onlooker could have determined, his next move would be to cast a plug. Pepe's confidence returned—until he glanced again at the crocodile, and fear rose anew.

He had known and watched crocodiles almost since his baby days. He knew how they paddled watchfully up the river's murky pools, the way they dived, their method of hunting and the manner in which, like so many inert logs, they lay on the riverbank and dozed in the sun. He knew they were incredibly fast, but never before had he had even the faintest notion that they could be this fast! The approaching crocodile



seemed to be rushing down upon them with the speed of a tornado.

Pepe stole another sidewise glance at Sam. The *norteamericano* had still not raised his gun. The boy closed his eyes and held them tightly shut. The great gun was useless. All was lost! The crocodile would overwhelm them very shortly....

Then his ear drums were blasted by a mighty roar that was immediately followed by a terrific splashing and churning in the water. He opened his eyes to see the crocodile writhing like some great, thick-bodied serpent, while its scaled tail beat ceaselessly up and down, as though it were on a hinge and worked by a swift-running motor.

"Run!" Sam yelled.

He seized his younger companion's arm and, half pulling him, raced toward the riverbank. Their backs were to the stricken creature now, but the boy heard it still thrashing its tail up and down. It passed by so close that both Sam and Pepe were drenched with spray sent up by the struggling reptile.

Then all was silent. Pepe and Sam turned around to see the river as placid as it had been a moment before Brother Goat halted his charges just short of its bank. The surface of the downstream pool, to which the crocodile had floated and where he had finally died, was broken by not so much as a single bubble to show that the great reptile had ever been there.

Sam said ruefully, "Sure would have liked to take that baby's skin home with me, but I just didn't feel like grabbing him when he passed us."

Pepe told him gravely, "It would have been most unwise."

"Most unwise it sure would have been. I'll have to remember that prize understatement for when I get home." Sam laughed as though there were something uproariously funny in his companion's remark. "Well, anyway, it looks as though your goats can cross now without getting crocodile-chawed."

"Thanks to your great gun, they can," Pepe said appreciatively. He turned and called, "Come, Brother Goat, bring them in. Bring your flock across the river, for this day there is nothing to fear."

Pepe stood beside Sam while Brother Goat led his charges over the ford and up the path on the opposite side. A new wonder and a rising elation filled him—but, in the background, he saw the shadowy specter that had always dogged his steps and his flock. His goats were safe today, and that was good. But the *norteamericano* would not forever stay in Muzo, and what would happen when he left? More keenly than ever, Pepe felt the hopelessness of even dreaming that he might one day have a great gun such as the one with which Sam Jackson had killed the crocodile. There was not the faintest chance of his ever getting enough money to buy one.

Safe on the ford's opposite side, with the goats winding up the path toward a meadow, Sam Jackson broke his gun, took out the slug he had slipped into place after shooting the

crocodile and replaced it with a load of number six scatter shot.

While Sam's head was bent, Pepe stole a glance at his face, then looked quickly away. The redhead might be either evil spirit or friendly human, for doubt still lingered—but the former intense turmoil generated by doubt had subsided to near nothingness. An evil spirit might clothe itself in flesh. It might have need of food and other material comforts. But if, as Uncle Ruiz claimed, its purpose was to destroy Pepe's goats and, presumably Pepe, would it have stood between him and a charging crocodile?

Balancing his spear in one hand, Pepe kept close watch on the loosely strung out goats. He nodded, satisfied, when the giant billy led his flock down a side trail that ended at a meadow where the flock had not grazed for many days. It was where Pepe had intended to take them and where, in his wisdom, Brother Goat had known they should go.

Pepe walked more easily. The goats would not now stray from the path, for on both sides they were hemmed in by impenetrable jungle. After they reached the meadow, they would stop of their own accord to graze.

"Watch those leaves up there," Sam said.

Pepe looked where his companion indicated. High above, a little clump of leaves, trembling in a passing breeze, was silhouetted against the sky.

With studied deliberation, the redhead raised his shotgun, sighted and fired. The small cluster of leaves fluttered earthward.

Pepe gasped and looked with fresh awe on the shotgun. He had seen it kill a crocodile and now, even more incredible, he had seen it bring down a small, swaying bunch of leaves. It was indeed a magic weapon. Pepe's astonishment showed in his face. Sam laughed.

"You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"The gun!" Pepe gasped. "It catches alike the charging crocodile and the fluttering leaves."

"It's all in the load you use," Sam explained. "For the crocodile, I had a single ball that would tear a great hole. But for the leaves there were a number of small pellets that scattered in a pattern and encompassed their motion."

"It's a miracle!" Pepe breathed.

"Guess maybe it is. Guess maybe there are a lot of miracles that we people who have so much sort of figure belong naturally to the humdrum routine of daily living. I expect it'd pay all of us to think about such things a bit more and really offer thanks for our blessings."

Just then the goats broke from the gloomy jungle into the sun-sprayed meadow where, as Pepe had expected, the forage was very rich. The nannies and kids spread out to graze. Snatching a mouthful where he could, Brother Goat wandered from one member of his flock to another and bullied back into line those that he thought might have strayed too far.

Sam Jackson looked interestedly at the meadow. "So this is the place where you bring your goats?"

"Only one," Pepe explained. "There are many such meadows and I rotate so that my flock never grazes the same one on two succeeding days."

"What do you do now?"

"Stay with my flock."

"That's all you do?"

"That's all I dare do."

"Hm-m. Any game around here?"

"If you circle the meadow, staying near the jungle, you are certain to flush many chachalaca."

"Now this," Sam grinned, "is beginning to look like fun. You won't be afraid if I leave you to bag something for dinner?"

Pepe laughed. "Except when the *tigre* visits, I am never afraid in the jungle."

"Do you mind if I sort of mosey down along the meadow and see what I can kick up?"

"Please do."

"Yell if you want me."

Sam wandered away, keeping very close to where the meadow bordered the jungle. Pepe found a shady tree, arranged a comfortable place beneath it, placed his spear close at hand and sat down. Five minutes later, Sam's shotgun boomed. A chachalaca was probably now in Sam's bag, since the great gun was incapable of missing.

Pepe grinned faintly as he watched a near-black kid named Lolita leap into the air and come down with all four feet stiffly braced. She shook her head, tossed her budding horns and raced full speed from her mother and back again. Having eaten her fill, Lolita now wanted to play and the boy continued to watch her. But he was only partly interested in the playful kid's antics. As the scattered flock fed back into shade cast by jungle trees, Lolita and her mother were farthest away from Pepe and therefore farthest away from help.

Lolita was off again, skipping through the grass and swerving to come back. She circled, her course taking her near the jungle, and cavorted. Suddenly, she halted, but it was not a voluntary stop. At the same moment, her trembling cry of fear quavered across the meadow. She disappeared in the tall grass.

Before she was all the way down, and before the last echoes of her frightened cry had faded, Pepe had snatched up his spear, leaped to his feet and started running. Even as he did so, he heard Brother Goat's angry bleat and saw the big billy racing toward the place where Lolita had disappeared.

Pepe tried desperately to increase his speed. Whatever had come out of the jungle and dragged Lolita down in the grass was surely a fierce thing. It must not injure Brother Goat, too. But the big billy was nearer the scene of action than the boy, and he could run faster.

Wide-eyed, Pepe saw him reach the place where Lolita had been dragged down and circle for an opening. He lowered his horns and charged, and the silence that had reigned over the

meadow was shattered by the spitting snarl of an outraged cat. Brother Goat backed away, raised his head, and Pepe choked back a sob as he saw blood flowing down both sides of the big billy's face.

The billy charged again, and again the cat snarled. Then Pepe was beside his friend. He saw an ocelot, a fierce jungle cat that usually hunts by night, but will prowl by day, with the still-struggling Lolita pinned beneath it. No kitten this, but a full-grown male, weighing at least thirty-five pounds, the ocelot was not unlike a miniature *tigre*. It was enraged that Brother Goat had tried to take what it considered its rightful prey, and rage had driven away such powers of reason as it might have possessed. The cat had no intention of running, or of abandoning Lolita.

Pepe gripped his spear firmly with both hands, leveled it and advanced purposefully. He was under no illusions as to what he was doing. The ocelot's weight was less than half of his, but the spitting cat was fury incarnate. Should it charge and reach him, even though it probably would not be able to kill, it would certainly inflict wounds so terrible that Pepe would be prevented from bringing his goats to pasture for many days to come.

But his only choice was to go forward. Sam Jackson's great gun would make short work of the ocelot, but neither Sam nor his gun was here. It was a test that must be met, and there could be no faltering. Pepe thrust at the ocelot's chest, intending to sink his spear deeply.

With the fluid grace of fast-moving water, the ocelot rippled aside, judging his distance so perfectly that the spear point

came within a whisper of brushing his silken flank. He gathered himself for the leap that would carry him to Pepe's face, and just then Brother Goat charged again.

The billy struck the ocelot hard and squarely, and tumbled the raiding cat in the grass. Leaping immediately to follow up this advantage, Pepe pinned the ocelot down with his spear and held on with all his strength, while the jungle cat wriggled and squirmed and clawed the spear haft with all four paws....

After a while, Pepe withdrew his spear, and, once more his spirits were leaden, and cold dread sat heavily upon him. It had been difficult enough to kill the ocelot with his spear. What would happen when the *tigre* came?

Shaken, but suffering from nothing except deep lacerations, Lolita struggled to her feet and looked appealingly at her master. Tenderly, Pepe gathered her up and carried her to the tree beneath which he had been sitting so peacefully. He soaked his bandana in a nearby spring, gently bathed the wounds of the quivering kid, then washed the blood from Brother Goat.

Two hours later, a half dozen chachalaca dangling from his right hand and the shotgun in his left, Sam Jackson returned.

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## 5

### The Evil Spirit Is Known

In the thorn-surrounded corral, the kids and nannies moved restlessly about, but Brother Goat stood rigid as a carved statue. He had been standing that way for the past twenty minutes. His head was up. The better to detect any scent that might be in the air, or that might come, his nostrils flared as widely as he could distend them.

A sallow moon, riding high above Muzo, shed a soft glow over the village and the valley in which it was situated. Revealing everything in part but nothing in its entirety, it was a beautiful and at the same time a deceptive light. Muzo beneath such a moon was not the same village the sun knew. There were no sharp or ugly angles, but only gentle curves and shadows that blended perfectly with them. Even the fire that glowed in front of each thatched hut was softer, and the occasional tongue of flame that licked out complemented rather than conflicted with the moonlight.

It was just the kind of a night that was ideal for Brother Goat's purposes. But he must wait a while longer before putting into effect the plan he had in mind.

His first duty was to his flock, and today he had been remiss in that duty. He had smelled the ocelot a full five minutes before it struck Lolita but had paid no attention because he smelled ocelots every day the flock went into the jungle and never before had one attacked. Rather, whenever the flock

passed too near an ocelot, it had retreated farther into the jungle. This one was an exception, but it was a lesson Brother Goat would not forget. Hereafter, any ocelot would mean a potential threat.

Although the air was entirely free of any odor that smacked even slightly of peril, Brother Goat continued to stand at attention. Darkness had scarcely gathered and the village was still astir. It was very unlikely that any raider intent on stealing a goat would make his foray before Muzo settled down for the night, but Brother Goat dared do nothing else, but watch until he knew his flock was safe.

Pepe, going from his mother's hut to the creek for a jug of water, passed near enough to the corral so that his scent drowned all others, and Brother Goat wrinkled his nose in pleasure. Then the boy re-entered his mother's hut, and Brother Goat stared fixedly at Sam Jackson's tent.

Born wise, Brother Goat's wisdom had been strengthened and deepened, not only with each passing year, but almost with each day. But he had also been born with an insatiable bump of curiosity. That which he already knew was stored away in the mazes of his brain. What he did not know was a torment that gave him no peace until he found out, and Sam Jackson's tent was such a torment.

Brother Goat had wondered about it ever since the day it was erected, and he had devoted a fair portion of every night simply to staring at it and trying to decide what it was and what it meant. He had determined from the first that he must investigate the tent, but, like all wise creatures, he knew how

to bide his time and await the right moment. To act at the wrong one could bring nothing except disaster.

Because he knew everything that was going on in Muzo, Brother Goat knew when Sam Jackson left his tent and, flashlight and rifle in hand, started toward the river ford. It was a curious incident because, after night closed in, almost never did the people of Muzo care to leave the security offered by their fires. Brother Goat could not know that Sam had decided to his own satisfaction that any *tigre* with designs on Pepe's goats must come from the jungle, and the jungle across the river seemed, because of its very density, to offer the most favorable habitat for *tigres*. The chances were excellent that—since he would have to cross the river anyway—any *tigre* coming from the jungle would cross at the ford. Sam intended to wait near the ford, just to see what happened.

Brother Goat snorted softly and happily, for Pepe Estrada had left his mother's hut and was walking toward Sam's tent. The boy pulled the flap aside, looked in, called and left at once. Brother Goat followed his progress with eyes and nose, for although the billy's first duty was to the flock, his first love was for Pepe. He wanted his master to come to the corral. Brother Goat snorted again, this time a sigh of disappointment, when the boy disappeared inside his mother's hut.

Two minutes later, he came out again and headed for the corral, a bit of salt in one hand and even saltier tears stinging behind his eyes. Brother Goat, who had no understanding of tears and who would welcome Pepe however he came, danced happily and snorted a welcome. He accepted the salt,

chewed and swallowed it with his usual lip-smacking gusto, curved his head so his ears might be tickled more easily and listened while the boy poured out his heartbreak.

"He is gone," Pepe quavered. "Sam is gone, and he never even asked me if I wanted to go with him, although he must have known I would most happily walk wherever he went."

Brother Goat snorted softly. Pepe was silent for a moment, and when he resumed speaking, a note of pride had supplanted some of his misery. "He said we fought very well, Brother Goat. He said we acquitted ourselves with great honor, and that he would be grateful to accept the skin of the ocelot, which we offered, so that he would always remember the occasion."

Happy just to be near his master, Brother Goat sighed blissfully. After another short silence, Pepe continued. "But I know, and you know, that I missed my first thrust with the spear and, had it not been for your timely aid, the ocelot might very well have been upon me. We still cannot even hope to fight a *tigre* successfully."

Brother Goat licked his master's hand. Pepe stared into the distance, and the thin moon painted ghost shadows that danced before his eyes. He said, "There will be no *tigre* to fear this night, for Sam is watching. I do not know where he has gone and would not try to find him if I did. If he had cared to have me with him, he would have asked me to go. But wherever he may be, he is watching and we are safe. Good night, Brother Goat."

Pepe left and, for a short space, the billy gazed wistfully after him. Presently, he resumed staring at Sam Jackson's tent. Moonbeams glancing from the canvas left silvery little rivulets streaking down the side, then almost magically evaporating in thin air. Wind keened around the taut guy ropes and set the loose flap to quivering. Brother Goat tested the wind currents again.

Except Ramon Benavides, Luis Ortega and Pablo Sanchez, who had gathered in Uncle Ruiz's hut and were talking in guarded tones with the old man, all Muzo had gone to bed. Brother Goat dismissed the four who remained wakeful. When Uncle Ruiz's three visitors left, it would be only to make their way to their own huts as swiftly as possible. Rarely did the men of Muzo walk abroad after nightfall. Brother Goat could not possibly know two important things, however—first, that he was the only living creature in all Muzo who had seen Sam Jackson leave his tent and go down to the river ford and, second, just what Uncle Ruiz and his visitors were doing.

By the fire's flickering light, Uncle Ruiz held aloft a ring of thorns fashioned around the skull of a goat that had once been bleached and white. Except for a white swastika, Uncle Ruiz had used charcoal to stain the entire skull black, the color of evil. Gruesome enough by day, it was horrible by night, and Ramon, Luis, and Pablo recoiled from it, shuddering.

"It is the charm," Uncle Ruiz croaked. "If we wait until the red-haired *norteamericano* sleeps, then steal into his cloth house and place the charm near his bed, he will go away from Muzo and never return."

"Who—?" Pablo quavered. "Who shall enter this devil's tent?"

"I would do it myself if I were not an old man," Uncle Ruiz said. "But it is an act that must be accomplished silently. I fear that I would create a noise."

"I, too," Pablo declared hastily. "I injured my hand and am apt at any moment to groan with pain." By way of proof, he groaned pitifully.

For a moment, Ramon Benavides remained silent. Then he said, "I will go with you to this devil's cloth house, but, in all truth—and I might as well tell the truth—I do not think I could bring myself to enter it."

Luis Ortega spoke. "Since Uncle Ruiz is too old, Pablo has an injured hand and Ramon admits honestly that he is afraid, as soon as the *norteamericano* is asleep, I shall enter the cloth house and place the charm beside him. But you three must promise to await nearby until I come out."

Of all this, Brother Goat knew nothing. He did know, however, that, save for the four in Uncle Ruiz's house, all Muzo slept, and the cool night breezes carried not the least hint of an enemy. Since his flock was in no danger, he could safely leave it, at least for a short time.

Brother Goat walked to the downhill side of the corral and raised his head to a certain place where neither the stone corral nor the thorn barrier surrounding it were quite as high as elsewhere and, in addition, there was a downhill run. The billy had gone over the enclosure at that place more times than he could remember—and he had yet to be found out,

because he was too clever to be discovered. Dearly as he loved green corn and tender young vegetables, and although he never missed a chance to raid the gardens of Muzo whenever an opportunity presented itself during the day, he would not go near them at night.

Brother Goat had been chastised too many times by irate gardeners whose crops he had despoiled not to have some idea that he left his mark whenever he raided. He knew very well that he had not been seen on some of his daylight raids, therefore he must have left his mark behind him. He knew also that, if his nocturnal excursions were discovered, they would come to an abrupt end.

For a full two minutes after jumping the corral, the billy stood perfectly still, watching and listening. The only scents were those that had been there before. The only noises were the murmur of the wind, the purling of the stream and the muted voices of the men who still talked in Uncle Ruiz's hut. The very fact that there was no outcry and no scurry of feet toward him proved that his escape remained undetected—at least so far.

As silently as one of the night shadows, Brother Goat circled the corral and started toward Sam Jackson's tent. At no time did he hurry, for experience had taught him that the slow and deliberate have the best chance of escaping detection, while the quick and flitting are almost always the first to be seen. He felt an easy confidence born of a hundred such forays.

Even when he came near the tent, an object that had intrigued him since the newcomer set it up, he did not hurry.

He did forget everything else while he concentrated on gratifying long stifled curiosity.

The first sniff told him that Sam Jackson had not returned and was not within the tent, but the canvas walls were fascinating. The guy ropes were equally interesting, as were the pegs to which the ropes were staked. In turn, he investigated the cooking utensils that were hung on a sapling supported on two shorter lengths of sapling driven into the ground, the fireplace, the folding chair and the gasoline stove that now stood on a table. Brother Goat wrinkled his nose at the latter. He had no use for its smell.

A full fifteen minutes elapsed before the billy was ready for the tent itself and the many enticing promises contained in odors that seeped from it. Though he might have pushed his way through the walls at any point, Brother Goat's jungle training forbade anything so crude. Who pushed their way through the jungle was apt to push right into the hungry jaws of some carnivore that knew how to take advantage of any meal that blundered along in that clumsy fashion.

Another three minutes passed before Brother Goat found the loose flaps, entered the tent and sniffed interestedly at the midnight-dark interior. Although he could not see much, his nose served as an infallible guide. He smelled Sam's sleeping bag from one end to the other, sniffed at the food and tried in vain to open one of the cans in which these supplies were stored. He located Sam's toilet articles and licked experimentally at a bar of soap.

The result was so delightful that he took another lick, and the second lick tickled his palate so pleasingly that he took the



whole bar of soap in his mouth and began to eat it.

He was thus engaged when he both heard and smelled men approaching the tent and knew them at once for Uncle Ruiz, Ramon Benavides, Pablo Sanchez and Luis Ortega. Under ordinary circumstances, Brother Goat would have slipped silently away, but these circumstances were far from ordinary. Never before had he tasted anything as delicious as the bar of soap, and he did not want to leave the source of such delicacies until the last possible moment.

Brother Goat thrust his head out of the tent flaps just as Luis Ortega with Uncle Ruiz's charm in his hand, made ready to tiptoe in. There was a shriek of terror that was immediately echoed by three more shrieks. The four men began to run, and, for the first time in five years, Uncle Ruiz not only ran without his stick, but led the other three by a good ten paces.

Now there could no longer be even the slightest doubt that, in the person of Sam Jackson, the devil had indeed come to Muzo. Although the four who saw the shape that could be assumed by the *norteamericano* were not wholly in agreement concerning exact details, all said that he had great horns, around which sparks danced, and red eyes, and that he breathed fire from his nostrils. Pepe Estrada's goats were definitely lost, and the boy with them, for he was the devil's friend.

Had any of the four bothered to look behind them, they might have seen Brother Goat, still chewing the bar of soap, running back to the corral and leaping into it at the same spot where he had leaped out.

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## The Tigre's Second Strike

Pepe rose at dawn, anxious to be up and away before the village was astir, for he was greatly troubled, bewildered and more than a little frightened. Ramon Benavides, Luis Ortega, Pablo Sanchez and Uncle Ruiz had gone to the *norteamericano's* tent at night, bearing a charm to break the evil spell they agreed he had cast over Pepe's goats and lo, instead of a man, they had actually been met by the devil himself.

All four had seen the apparition clearly, and only by the greatest of good fortune had any escaped with their lives. Since Sam Jackson was the only occupant of his tent, it was obvious that he had temporarily changed himself into his true form, the better to commune with the evil things surrounding him. Pepe and all his goats were indeed lost, the quartette declared. There was nothing anyone could do about such an evil creature.

Pepe tightened his lips and kept his own counsel, neither wholly believing nor wholly disbelieving, but always grimly aware of the fact that he had his goats to protect. If he kept his goats, he was everything. If he lost them, he was nothing. To keep them, he would fight the ocelot and the *tigre*. Yet he could not protect them with his spear—of that he was becoming more and more convinced. Had it not been for Brother Goat's timely assistance, perhaps he would have failed even to drive the ocelot from Lolita—and an ocelot

was nothing compared to a *tigre*. He could protect his charges with the great gun of the *norteamericano*, however.

Pepe ran through the village, the dew-wet grass pleasantly cool against his bare feet and ankles. He found Sam Jackson bending over the sputtering gasoline stove. The big redhead greeted him with his usual friendly grin.

"Good morning, Pepe."

Pepe replied, "Good morning, Sam," and sat down, crossing his legs as he did so. All his fears melted away, as a warmth that was not generated by the little gasoline stove flowed through him. Away from the redhead, he could have his doubts. Near him, he never could. Even though, from time to time, Pepe wondered if he was not wholly under the charm brewed by a devil when he was near the redhead, he was never seriously troubled by such thoughts. Now he watched the man with fascinated eyes.

The gasoline stove remained a marvel, but even more wondrous was Sam's method of cooking and the things he had to cook. Pepe's mother baked her tortillas on a big earthenware griddle, but Sam used a fork to turn sputtering strips of bacon in a cast-iron skillet. When the bacon was crisp, he laid it on a tin plate near the flame and took up a bowl of viscous material that looked unappetizing, even repulsive, in its present form, but was more tasty than even the flakiest tortillas when cooked. Pepe frowned, trying to think of the name for this foreign delicacy; finally he found it.

"Flapjacks!" he blurted out triumphantly.

"Flapjacks," Sam agreed.

The two ate bacon and flapjacks swimming in syrup squeezed from a can and washed it all down with mugs of black coffee. Pepe scraped his plate with his fingers, licked his fingers and emitted a happy sigh. Muzo, he had always cheerfully believed, was the hub of the universe and everything good originated there. But now, at last, he conceded that the remainder of the world did not lack virtues. Whoever had created the dish of flapjacks, bacon and syrup must surely have received inspiration from the angels themselves.

The pair cleaned the camp; then Pepe watched with his heart in his eyes as Sam broke the shotgun and looked through both barrels. He carried the shotgun rather than the rifle, the *norteamericano* had explained to Pepe, because, if a *tigre* attacked the goats, it would almost surely do so in thick jungle and from a short range. The attack would be lightning-swift, which meant he would have to shoot quickly, and, with the single ball his rifle carried, there was an excellent chance of missing. But by loading one barrel of his shotgun with buckshot and the other with number sixes, he was ready for the *tigre*, as well as for any tinamou or other game bird that might be flushed. If the first blast of buckshot did not kill the *tigre*, it would certainly disable it until he had time to reload and finish it off.

Satisfied that both barrels were clean, Sam loaded his shotgun, then smiled in anticipation. "Let's hope the tabby picks today."

"Let us hope so!" Pepe echoed.

Referring to the dreaded and dreadful *tigre* as tabby was, of course, merely a capricious manner of speaking. Pepe now understood much that had never been plain before, because Sam Jackson had told him much. Lazario Rujan went into the jungle to shoot or snare whatever he could for practical reasons; the flesh and hides that he could not use he could sell or trade. *Norteamericanos* had different ideas.

It was not enough merely to kill haphazardly, as Lazario Rujan did. If a man were seeking deer, for instance, he could not choose a foolish young buck with just budding antlers but must pit himself against one of the craggy-horned, experienced veterans that knew the tactics of evasion as well as the hunter understood hunting.

It was a test, man against beast, and the man could not be triumphant unless he proved himself superior. The trophy he brought home—and it must always be a worthy one—was merely tangible evidence of his superiority. Some beasts were rated far more highly than others, and the man who brought home the skin of a *tigre* automatically became the most elite of hunters. Thus Sam Jackson had traveled such a great distance, and he could not return until he had either bagged a *tigre* or exhausted his every resource in trying to bag one.

Without understanding either trophy or the finer ethics of sportsmanship clearly, Pepe knew he approved of them, and he also knew that, whatever else he might be, Sam Jackson was anything but loco. Few people Pepe had met understood so clearly what they were doing as this redheaded *norteamericano*.

Sam asked, "Ready?"

"Ready," Pepe told him.

Side by side, they swung toward the goat corral and, as they did so, Lazario Rujan's wife, rail thin, cold eyed, emerged from her hut and looked at them. There were those among the villagers who vowed that Lazario went into the jungle so often and stayed so long because it was pleasanter to hear the monkeys chatter and the parrots screech than to bear with the waspish tongue of his lawfully wedded wife. She did not speak, but turned away in the cool dawn when Sam bowed to her. After the two friends had passed by her hut, Sam asked Pepe, "Isn't she the hunter's wife?"

"The hunter's wife," Pepe agreed.

"Wonder where the blazes he is?"

"No man but Lazario may tell you that," Pepe said. "He goes where he will and stays until he chooses to return."

"Independent cuss, eh? Do you think he'd really know how to find a *tigre*?"

"Neither Lazario nor any other man ever deliberately seeks a *tigre*." Pepe spoke gravely, but suddenly he broke down and chuckled. "When it became known in Muzo that you seek one, they said you are loco."

"Crazy, eh?" The redhead laughed out loud. "Shouldn't wonder but what they're right."

Pepe caught up his spear, that he had left leaning against the corral, opened the gate, and Brother Goat walked through. At

once, the billy stopped to brace his feet and threaten with his great horns. But instead of running as the men of Muzo invariably did, Sam tickled both of the big animal's ears and Brother Goat amiably led his flock down the path to the river ford. Sam and Pepe fell in behind them.

"Brother Goat reminds me of a man I know back in Chicago," the redhead remarked. "He's big as a ten-ton truck, looks harder than nine pounds of railroad spikes, and he wouldn't be afraid of Genghis Khan and his whole army. But he never has to fight because his looks alone are enough to scare anybody with a speck of sense."

Pepe said, "There is a man of Muzo who tries to frighten everyone and everything by shouting, but at heart he is cowardly. His name is Pablo Sanchez."

"Nobody in Muzo has been threatening me," Sam remarked dryly. "Except for you, nobody's even been near me. Have I got small pox or something? Or what the dickens is eating them?"

Pepe writhed inwardly but decided to say nothing. The situation was far from ideal, but it was the best that might be contrived at the moment and he had great need of both the *norteamericano* and his guns. If Sam knew he was not only hated but also feared in Muzo, might he not leave?

So Pepe said vaguely, "They do not know you well."

"Maybe I haven't made the most of my girlish charms. After I get this *tigre*, I might try being a bit more friendly myself."



The cavalcade paused only briefly at the river ford, since, with the great gun backing them, there was no need to fear the biggest crocodile. With the goats walking ahead, the man and boy started up a little winding path much traveled by jungle deer. Pepe's heart felt lighter than it had since the night the *tigre* raided his corral and took Maria. A *tigre* was a very great and fierce enemy, and unbelievably quick, but the swiftest *tigre* could not attack a flock of goats, take one and escape unseen. They would see it, if it struck, and shoot it before it could kill a goat. That is what ownership of a proper gun meant.

For a moment, but only for a moment, Pepe thought wistfully that all his troubles would be behind him if only the gun were his. But it was not and never would be. He'd even give up dreaming about the astronomical sum Sam Jackson had named as the cost of such a weapon. Once again, the boy reminded himself that all the people in Muzo together would never have that much money. He could only hope that Sam would stay here until the *tigre* was dead.

From the high branches of immense trees, gaudy parrots called them mean names as they passed. Monkeys, complacently sure of their own safety as long as they remained in the trees, didn't even bother to throw things. Little deer slunk furtively out of their way.

Then Brother Goat halted, braced his feet, raised his head and stared steadily at something only he saw. The nannies and kids bunched nervously behind their leader.

Pepe turned to Sam Jackson, knowing what had happened. Accustomed to parrots and monkeys, the goats would never

stop for them. Whatever they saw was dangerous. As soon as he turned, Pepe noted that his companion understood, too.

There was a metallic click as Sam slid the safety catch on his gun forward and made ready to shoot. Side by side, Pepe and Sam Jackson advanced until they were even with and then ahead of the halted goats. The redhead's sigh of disappointment was obvious. He had hoped for a *tigre*. What he saw, about forty yards ahead and holding very still beneath a great tree, was a young bull. Black as midnight, except for its white, needle-sharp horns, its head was held high and its nostrils were flaring as it studied the goats. Its every line bespoke anger, but not enough to attack. When the two humans appeared, the bull danced backward.

Sam Jackson raised his gun. The bull took two more backward steps, and Pepe whispered. "It will not attack. It will run." Even as the words left his mouth, the bull, graceful as a cloud, whirled about and faded into the jungle.

Sam Jackson lowered his gun and said calmly, "That baby didn't exactly like us."

"The wild ones like nobody," Pepe said. "All men are their enemies, although almost never do they attack unless they are in force. Then it's always."

"You mean there are wild cattle roaming around here?" the redhead asked.

"Very many."

"Where do they come from?"

"Although there are none in Muzo, some of the people in other villages keep cattle," Pepe explained. "Why, I do not know, since they neither make use of nor pay any attention to them. Some of the animals find their way into the jungle, increase there and become as jungle creatures. Lazario Rujan has spoken of finding herds of three hundred or more, and when there are that many, a man may be safe only if he climbs a tree."

"I can believe it," Sam said. "Haven't they ever bothered you when you take your goats out?"

Pepe answered, "There have been no herds of wild cattle near Muzo."

But a new worry had come to beset him. Doubtless the young bull, feeling his strength, had challenged and been driven from a jungle-dwelling herd by some mighty herd bull. Inevitably, he would go seeking mates; inevitably, he would find some; and surely he would bring them to this section of the jungle, where there were no great bulls to challenge him. In time, even though Muzo itself might not be imperiled, the goatherds would surely be in danger.

He said, "If you see the bull again, shoot him."

"Why? He isn't hurting anybody or anything."

"He will seek cows, bring them here, and, in due course, whoever travels in this jungle will be endangered by wild cattle."

"That's different," Sam Jackson agreed. "O.K. If I see him again, I'll bop him down for you."

But they did not see the young bull again, so Pepe stored the incident in the back of his mind. There were far too many dangers of the present to fret unduly about those that might appear in the future.

Eventually, the man and boy emerged from the jungle and entered the meadow where the goats were to graze. It was a wild and wonderful place, carpeted by thick green grass and enclosed on all sides by the jungle. A cold little stream cut down its center, and fish that had been swimming openly in the pools darted to shelter in the shadows when the humans appeared.

The goats promptly went about their business of grazing. Pepe and Sam Jackson made their way to three palms that grew in the center of the meadow, waving green fronds sixty feet in the air. They sat down to rest, their backs against the tree trunks, while a cool breeze from the north fanned their cheeks and ruffled their hair.

Sam rested the shotgun across his knees and sighed contentedly. "This is all right! I can see why you like being a goatherd."

"It is a very fine life."

"It sure is, but have you ever thought of anything finer?"

"Indeed I have. I plan to increase my flock to thirty-six or even forty-eight goats."

"Just that?" Sam persisted. "You don't want to become rich?"

Pepe countered in astonishment, "If I had thirty-six or forty-eight goats, I would be rich!"

"I get your point," Sam murmured. "Not all wealth, and maybe even very little of it, comes out of a mint. But have you no yearning for a great house, a stone house with glass in the windows?"

"I could not live in such a place," Pepe said. "Even if there were enough air so that one would not stifle, how would I lie on my *petate* and look out to make sure my goats were all right? My mother's house is a very fine one. When I marry, I shall build a house exactly like it for myself."

"You have no wish to visit the great cities?"

"How would one keep goats in a city?"

"In short, you don't want a darn thing except what you already have or can get?"

"That is right," Pepe said. "I am content."

Even as he spoke, he knew in his own heart that he had one reservation here, and he could not keep his eyes from the shotgun. He did want something. He wanted that gun so desperately that mere desire was a great ache within him. His mighty yearning showed on his face.

Sam Jackson, seeing the look, interpreted it only as the natural inclination any youngster might feel to know more about a weapon so fine. He patted the gun affectionately. "She's one sweetheart who'll never let you down," he said. "Let me show you how it works."

He broke the shotgun, extracted both shells, put them in his pocket, clamped the barrels back in place and slipped the safety on. Then he extended the gun toward Pepe, who gasped and shrank back.

Sam smiled encouragingly. "Go on and take it."

"But—"

"Take it."

Pepe received the gun with trembling hands that, for a moment, could do no more than caress it. Then a great pride swelled within him, and a mighty elation. He grasped the gun more firmly. His eyes bubbled with delight and his lips could not help framing a smile.

"She's single trigger but not selective. The right barrel—"  
Sam touched it, "goes first. That's why I always keep buckshot in the right and a slug in the left. She's on safe now and you can't shoot it, no matter how hard you try. Go ahead and try."

"I—" Pepe looked questioningly at his companion.

"Go ahead," Sam urged. "Nothing will happen."

Pepe braced the shotgun against his shoulder, hooked the trigger with a forefinger and exerted a feeble pressure.

Sam Jackson laughed. "Don't be afraid of breaking it; it just won't break. Pull harder."

Pepe pulled harder ... and still heard no sound of a firing pin descending. Suddenly—and even while he continued to float

on a cloud of ecstasy—he was very sure of himself. Whatever master craftsman had fashioned this exquisite weapon could not possibly have known that Pepe Estrada even existed. But it seemed to the boy as though he must have—and had made this shotgun just for him. He, Pepe, was born to have this shotgun, just as Brother Goat was born to have his great horns. With it, he was a whole man.

"Now flick the safety forward. That's this little gadget right here," Sam instructed. "Then pull the trigger twice, once for each barrel."

Pepe did as he was bidden, and when he raised the shotgun a second time, he pointed it toward where Brother Goat was eagerly cropping bunches of grass. Reason would have told him that nothing would happen when he pulled the trigger, but he was listening to the voice of imagination. He saw a *tigre*, a fierce, murderous beast, rise up beside the billy, and, when he pulled the trigger, the *tigre* fell dead. Then Pepe swung to cover a herd of wild cattle that was thundering down on him. He killed the lead bull and, their leader fallen, the rest of the cattle split to rush past on either side. Pepe's hands were again trembling, and his face and forehead were damp with perspiration when he handed the shotgun back to its owner.

"You did that all right!" Sam applauded. "How about letting off a couple of live shells?"

"Oh, no!" Pepe refused.

"Go on!" Sam urged. "I have plenty."

"No," Pepe repeated ... and groped for an excuse. "It is a sin to waste expensive ammunition."

"Now if that isn't the doggonedest reason I ever did hear!" Sam Jackson said plaintively. "You beat me forty ways for New Years!"

Pepe forebore telling his real reason for refusing to shoot. With the empty shotgun, he had held his dream in his hands, and he would always covet the weapon. But if he shot it off, would he be able to overcome his desire to have it for his own? Pepe shuddered at the temptations that beset him. But if he did not shoot the gun he would not yield to those temptations.

"Well," Sam Jackson said as he reloaded the shotgun, "might as well be ready for friend *tigre*, if he shows his ugly puss."

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Lying on his *petate*, Pepe came instantly awake when he heard Brother Goat's angry snort. It was a sound his ears had been waiting for ever since the *tigre*'s first raid. As the boy awakened, Brother Goat snorted again.

Pepe slipped quietly from his mother's house and ran to Sam Jackson's tent. He rustled the dew-damp canvas and whispered, "Sam!"

"Yes?"

"The *tigre* comes!"



"I'll be right with you!"

Sam Jackson quickly emerged from his tent, his feet thrust into unlaced pacs and carrying the rifle and the electric torch. The two made their way to the knoll overlooking the goat corral.

Brother Goat's angry snorts were sounding steadily now, and there came the thudding of his hoofs as he ran across the hard-packed corral. The nannies and kids were milling uneasily, knowing they were in danger but not understanding what kind. In sudden panic, they raced to the far end of the corral and began to cry their fear.

The billy's snorts became enraged grunts. He stamped his feet, and there came the harsh sound of his horns grating on the earth as, with the enemy not yet at close range, he vented his anger.

"Now!" Pepe whispered.

The torch's beam stabbed the night. The *tigre*, the same great beast with one shriveled forepaw, was caught in the golden cage of light just as he leaped into the corral. Sam Jackson's rifle cracked like a whiplash. The jaguar fell and spun crazily for a second.... Then, before Sam could shove the bolt home, inject a fresh cartridge into the chamber and shoot a second time, the *tigre* gathered himself together, leaped out of the corral and disappeared in the darkness.

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## Man-Killer

Down in the corral, the bunched nannies and kids talked in muted voices, as they discussed in their own fashion the *tigre's* second coming and his going. Snorting angrily, Brother Goat pawed the place where the great spotted cat had spun round and round when the bullet smashed into him. He knelt to scrape the place with his horns, driven to near madness by the scent of the blood that had been spilled there.

Sam and Pepe sat perfectly still, shocked into motionless silence by a sudden realization of just what they had seen and done in a few fleeting seconds. The *tigre's* appearance, the shot that had wounded him and his disappearance only now became real, and, for a moment, full comprehension of this reality was too much for these two human minds to bear.

Sam finally broke the silence. "If he isn't hit hard, I'm afraid we're in for trouble, Pepe."

"How so?" The boy spoke in a half whisper.

"If he gets into the jungle, how the blazes are we ever going to track him?"

Pepe remained silent for another moment, striving to rid himself of a steel band that tightened about his head and prohibited any clear thought. Then the band burst and he knew. The *tigre* had indeed come again, and Pepe would have breathed easily if he had been killed in the corral. But

he had not been killed there, although he was wounded. Perhaps he would go now to die in the jungle—although there was also the possibility that he would recover. If he did, he would certainly again attack the goats—and he would continue to do so until none was left. Now, while he was hurt, was the time to follow and put an end to him. It was unthinkable to let him escape.

Pepe exclaimed. "Look at Brother Goat!"

"I see him. He's about the maddest goat I ever saw."

"He smells the *tigre*."

"I expect he does. The scent must be plain enough."

Pepe said, "When the *tigre* came and stole Maria, I knew I must fashion my spear. That day, I decided to let my flock graze near Muzo. The nannies and kids could run free, but Brother Goat must be tethered, so he would not chase the gardeners from their gardens. I myself led him down to the stream, and when we came to where the *tigre* had crossed—this was at least seven hours afterward—Brother Goat snorted and showed his anger. He knew the *tigre* had been present, and he hates him even more than I do."

"I didn't know goats had a scent so keen. But just what are you trying to prove?"

"He will find the *tigre* for us."

Sam exclaimed in amazement, "A goat track a *tigre*!"

"He'll not track the *tigre*," Pepe said. "The tracking you and I must and can do. But should we stray, Brother Goat will tell

us when we again find the trail. We must not let this killer elude us!"

Sam said soberly, "You sound about as mad as that goat of yours—but your plan could work out. What do you suggest as the first move?"

"Unless the *tigre* is very badly hurt, he will think only of getting back into the jungle. He must cross the river to do so, and, since the ford offers the nearest way, he will cross there. With the first hint of daylight, you, I and Brother Goat shall go to the ford. If we find no evidence that the *tigre* has been there, we shall then look for him between the ford and the corral, for that is where we shall find him."

"We can try it," Sam agreed doubtfully. "How long before daylight is it now?"

"A bit more than an hour."

"I'll rustle some breakfast and make a pack to carry with us. We don't want to waste any time, once daylight's here, and we may have to spend the night in the jungle."

"I go to tell my mother what we do and to fetch my spear."

"No!" Sam objected. "That's *tigre's* wounded, and he'll sure be ugly. I don't want you poking at him with any spear, if he decides to see what he can do about taking you apart. I showed you how to use the shotgun. You carry that and I'll tote the rifle."

"You—you would let me carry one of your great guns?"

"I insist that you carry it."

"Then I shall do so," Pepe said proudly.

The two separated, Sam going to his tent, while Pepe hurried toward his mother's house. A grim sense of accomplishment and achievement possessed him. The *tigre* had cast over his flock the same shadow of death that wheeling buzzards cast over some unfortunate creature whose end they await. Now the *tigre* was hurt, and the boy knew that he could not be at ease until he saw it dead before him. There might never be another chance to end its raids—and raid it would if it were not killed.

As he trotted on, Pepe was aware of furtive rustlings and stirrings in the huts of Muzo. He gave them little attention. The people of Muzo had been awakened by the rifle's crack, but none would venture out to investigate, because all knew that a devil had fired the rifle. Four of Muzo's trusted citizens had seen the evil spirit with their own eyes, so there was no longer room for doubt.

Pepe entered his mother's house, walked softly to her *petate* and bent over it. She too had been awakened, and, in the darkness, her hand stole out to meet his.

"Pepe, what is it?"

"The *tigre* came again," Pepe whispered. "Brother Goat smelled it coming and gave me warning. I awakened Sam, who showed it up with his light and wounded it with his great rifle. With the first glow of dawn, Sam, I and Brother Goat will go in pursuit."

"Be careful," she pleaded. "Do you not understand that you are going into the jungle with a devil?"

"That may and may not be," Pepe said gently. "I'm not certain what Uncle Ruiz and the three with him saw in the moonlight. But I do know that the *tigre* is hurt, and I'd go into the jungle with a whole company of devils to put an end to him, for, when he is ended, my goats are safe."

"I cannot prevent your going, Son, though I would if I could. The goats shall be as nothing if Pepe is not here. Now be sure to carry your spear."

"That I shall not need, for I carry one of Sam's great guns. It is a mighty gun indeed, and you must not worry. I shall return after we have slain the *tigre*. The nannies and kids must stay in the corral until I do return, for with neither I nor Brother Goat to watch over them, there is no telling what they may do. Will you ask Ana and Rosalita to gather grass for them to eat, and to milk the nannies?"

"It shall be as you wish, Pepe, and I shall know neither rest nor peace until you return."

"There is nothing to fear, Mother."

He leaned over, kissed her, caught up the length of rope with which he would lead Brother Goat and hurried to his friend's tent. The good smell of bubbling coffee perfumed the air. Sam looked up from the sputtering gasoline stove and grinned.

"Soup's on."

"What?"

"A *norteamericano* way of saying 'breakfast's ready.' I'll corrupt you with slang yet, Pepe."

The two ate bacon and scrambled eggs, washing them down with scalding black coffee. A faint hint of daylight crept over the sky. While Sam busied himself making a pack, Pepe went to the corral to fetch Brother Goat.

The big billy met him at the gate, pranced to show his mettle, then drew back suspiciously when he saw the hated rope. Brother Goat was too accustomed to the freedom of the jungle pastures to like any restraint.

Pepe coaxed him with soothing words. "It is different today. You go with Sam and me to find this *tigre*, the murderer who has already killed Maria and who will slay all the rest of the flock unless we succeed in destroying him. You must help us on this all important mission. Come, Brother Goat."

Still suspicious, but willing to trust his master, the billy allowed the rope to be looped about his horns and tightened. When the boy and goat started through the gate, the nannies and kids came forward. They did so uncertainly, not at all sure of themselves, for although it was obvious that they were going to pasture, never before had they started until after the nannies were milked and the sun was well up.

Pepe opened the gate just enough to let Brother Goat through, slipped through behind him and turned to latch the gate. Brother Goat looked questioningly back, wondering why his flock did not follow. Then he fell in beside Pepe. Twenty feet from the corral, he halted a second time and looked back uneasily. In Brother Goat's opinion, he was the

real master of the flock, and they were his sole responsibility. It was not right that he go off and leave them behind.

Again Pepe reassured him. "It is all right. They will be safe, for they will not leave their corral until you return, and my mother and sisters shall see to it that they lack nothing. Today, we must depend on your help, and you must help us or we may be lost."

The billy did not look back again, but walked willingly to Sam Jackson's tent. He was master of the flock, but Pepe had their welfare at heart. If he was taking Brother Goat away, and leaving the rest behind, it stood to reason that he had made some provision for their safety.

Sam Jackson, who was bent over outside his tent, tightening the straps on the food pack he intended to carry, left it lying on the ground and straightened up. He smoothed his red hair reflectively, and for a moment he did not speak. Finally, he said, "The people of your village think I'm loco because I want to find a *tigre*. If my friends at home could just see this setup, they'd have no doubt either."

"But why?" Pepe queried.

"For the first time in history, a hunter is setting out to find a *tigre* with a goat rather than a pack of dogs. It just doesn't make sense."

"But it does," Pepe asserted. "Where you and I would surely miss the trail if the *tigre* has run a long way, Brother Goat will smell the track and tell us where the killer has gone."



"I'll try anything once," Sam asserted, but he obviously remained dubious. "If Brother Goat does anything at all to help out, he should go down in history along with Pegasus, the winged horse; the geese that saved Rome; and other famous animals and birds of history."

"I do not understand you," Pepe said bewilderedly.

"It isn't important as long as you do understand Brother Goat, and I'm betting on you. Just a minute." Sam ducked into his tent, came out carrying the rifle and shotgun and leaned the rifle on the pack. The shotgun he pressed into Pepe's hands. "Here you are—and both barrels are loaded. All you must do to blast 'em off is flick the safety forward and pull the trigger, once for each barrel."

"I understand."

The boy received the shotgun lovingly, and he felt again, as he had before, that whoever fashioned this exquisite weapon must have had Pepe Estrada in mind. In addition, he knew a great sense of pride and achievement because Sam would trust him with anything so marvelous.

It occurred to Pepe that Pablo Sanchez, were he the one to bear the shotgun, would have delivered himself of an impassioned oration that had to do with his boundless courage, his devotion to duty, his complete willingness to face any *tigre*, wounded or not, and his assurances that he would not fail. But Pablo would also remain steady as a rock when no danger threatened and run like a deer when it did. Besides, Sam had asked no assurances. As far as he was

concerned, Pepe's acceptance of the shotgun was sufficient proof that he would not fail.

The wan, evasive light of a newborn day strengthened. Jungle growth across the valley, that had presented an undulating, shimmering outline of shadows and vaguely seen thickets, took distinct shape and form. The lush gardens of Muzo, where growing corn waved high as a man's shoulders, came into sharp relief.

Pepe fretted because they were not on their way. "Let us be off," he urged.

"Hang onto your shirt," Sam advised calmly. "We must be able to see what we're doing."

"We can see now."

"But not clearly enough. That *tigre* may and may not be hurt badly enough to put him out of business. If he isn't, how do you know whether or not he might be waiting anywhere at all, just hoping for somebody or something to come along? I want to see what I'm doing."

"That had not occurred to me," Pepe admitted. His respect for Sam mounted. A *tigre* was a terrible thing, and crafty as it was awful. Not even Lazario Rujan, despite his vast experience with creatures of the jungle, could tell with any certainty what a *tigre* might do. If this one had not received a mortal wound, it might flee at full speed into the jungle. Or it might lay in ambush in the tall grass and wait quietly until it was able to avenge itself for the wound it had suffered by killing the first human who happened along.

Not for another ten minutes, when the new day was very much lighter, would Sam shoulder his pack, catch up his rifle and, with Pepe and Brother Goat beside him, start down the path to the river ford. There was still no resident of Muzo astir to see them go. But the nannies and kids watched from their corral, then raced to the rear and continued to gaze after them until the three disappeared.

They were still twenty yards from the ford when Brother Goat's angry snort blasted the early morning silence. Sam slung his rifle to a ready position and walked more slowly. Then they came to the ford and stopped short.

A six-foot crocodile, a junior-sized saurian that should have confined itself to junior-sized ideas and quarry, lay on the near bank. It was horribly lacerated and mangled, and the huge pug marks of the *tigre* were all about. The story was easy to read.

The *tigre* had tried to ford the river. The little crocodile, which had decided too soon that he was a big crocodile—and even a big one would have found itself in serious trouble—had felt that here was a meal for the taking and attacked. Already enraged by its failure to steal another goat, and with its temper far from sweetened by its wound, the *tigre* had literally ripped its attacker to shreds.

Sam Jackson said, "I don't like the looks of this."

"What is it that displeases you?" Pepe asked.

"I blasted the tabby with a 30-06 220 grain soft nose. If he was hit badly, or even half badly, he'd never have the gumption to tackle a crocodile this soon afterward."

Pepe said, "He was angry."

"I reckon I might be a little put out myself," Sam said dryly. "Just the same, I doubt if he was hit hard enough to stop him, or even inconvenience him, very seriously or very soon."

"A *tigre's* life is strong within him," Pepe pointed out. "He does not easily let it go."

"Well, whether he does or not, we can't let a wounded animal get away if there's a chance of stopping him," Sam said.

"There must be quite a few things more pleasant to a jaguar than crawling in some hole with a nasty sting from a rifle slug. Let's go."

The trio forded the river, then stopped uncertainly.

Beyond was solid jungle, except for the game paths up which Pepe took his goats to the meadows in which they pastured. It was jungle so dense that a man could travel through it only if armed with a machete to cut away vines and brush. Even then, after a full day's terrific labor, it was often impossible to advance more than a hundred and fifty yards. But a *tigre* might go where he would in such a place, for he could crawl beneath down-hanging vines and lianas, and the crudest jungle thorns did not penetrate his tough hide.

Lacking the faintest notion of where the wounded beast had entered the jungle, for a moment the three stood in troubled indecision. Then Brother Goat snorted again, bristled and strained upstream to the limit of his lead rope. His head was up, with nostrils questing, and he stamped angry feet as he continued to drink in the hated scent that his nose had detected.

Pepe exclaimed, "He entered up there!"

"Well—reckon we might as well go find out how good a *tigre* hound this billy goat of yours might be," Sam declared.

Thirty feet upstream, Brother Goat began to paw at the great pug marks that were plainly imprinted in the wet sand. Even had they not been positive identification of the *tigre*, a splash of drying blood would have furnished all the evidence necessary. Pepe raised his eyes to the thicket the *tigre* had entered.

It was a gloomy, forbidding place, so thickly overgrown with vines and creepers and so heavily shaded by jungle growth that day seemed to end and night begin scarcely an arm's length from the river bed. Beyond, for a very long way, there were just more such thickets and tangles.

Sam said, "Criminy!"

"Of what do you think?" Pepe asked.

"As soon as I get back home, I'm going to buy a flock of billy goats. Then I'm going to take them to Colorado, Wyoming, Arizona, any place where there are mountain lions, and watch 'em run the spots right off the best lion hounds in the States. But what do we do now?"

"I have a thought," Pepe said.

"Then you might as well shoot, because any thoughts I've got sure aren't worth a dime."

"A *tigre* is not a man."

"A brilliant deduction," Sam conceded. "It must have taken you days to figure that one out."

"Hear me," Pepe insisted. "The *tigre* came to steal another goat. You wounded him with your rifle. It is a certainty that he was never so wounded before and that he does not know the nature of a rifle, or anything except that he was stricken by that which is past his understanding. Did he not run? It is my thought that he will continue to run, or at least that he will continue to travel until he is deep in the jungle, a safe distance from the thing that hurt him."

"You might have something," Sam conceded, "but, even if you have, doesn't that leave us up just about the same tree we're already sitting in? How the blazes are we going to follow him through a tangle like this?"

"The *tigre* is traveling in that direction." Pepe waved an arm to the north. "I know a path that will take us a long way down there. I know another—" With a sweeping motion of his arm, he indicated that the second path ran at right angles to the first and across the section of jungle into which the *tigre* had gone.

Sam's eyes sparkled. "What are we waiting for, pardner?"

With Pepe leading the way, Brother Goat skipping beside him and Sam bringing up the rear, the trio hurried down the path which Pepe had pointed out, paying no attention to the squawking parrots, the twittering monkeys, the chachalacas, or anything else. Even when they again came across the little bull, standing lonesomely and sullenly beside the path and

muttering to himself, they allowed themselves only a brief look and sped on.

Forty minutes later, they came to the other path and cut off on it. Once again, everything hinged on Brother Goat. Deer, wild pigs, bear, wild cattle and any number of lesser creatures made this path their highway. The pug mark of the biggest *tigre* might easily escape the keenest human eye. The trio had been on the path less than fifteen minutes when again Brother Goat bristled, snorted and began to paw the earth.

Emerging from the hideous tangle he had entered after leaving the river, the *tigre* had crossed the path and, just beyond, he had stepped onto seepage that was doing its best to become a spring. In the soft earth, his tracks were as easy to read as newspaper headlines. The right front paw had never touched the earth and there was another splash of blood. It was brighter and fresher than the one the hunters had found at the river—and so were the tracks. Doubtless the *tigre* had rested for a while as soon as he considered that he was in thick enough cover. He had probably crossed here no more than fifteen minutes ago, and the wooded area he had entered was not too thick and tangled to forbid the passage of men.

When the seepage ended and the humans could no longer see the trail, Brother Goat took over. He did not follow as a hunting hound would have, but showed his anger when the scent of the *tigre* reached his nostrils and was calm when it did not. Since the two humans strayed often, and whenever they strayed it was necessary to cut back and forth until Brother Goat showed them that they were again on the scent,

progress was not swift. But Pepe enjoyed every second of it. This was jungle, deep and brooding jungle, where wild beasts lurked and danger was the rule. But with the shotgun balanced on his arm, he laughed at danger. A man could, if he had a good gun.

Suddenly, Pepe halted and strained to listen.

From far off, so far off that at first he could not be sure of the exact direction, came a faint clamor, as though a thousand different voices joined in harsh cacophony. The noise became a little stronger when the wind strengthened, and lulled with the diminishing wind. During the few brief moments when the wind blew strongly enough, Pepe identified the sound and determined the reason for it. He said quietly, "Sam."

The redhead knitted questioning brows. Pepe waved toward the distant clamor. "There. The *tigre*."

"Are you sure?"

"Very sure. He's passing beneath a parrot's rookery and the parrots are screaming at him."

"Come on!"

Again they were off, the trio running side by side. As they neared the rookery, the clamor was subsiding, but, beneath some tall trees in which countless gravel-voiced parrots made their homes and reared their young, they again found the *tigre's* tracks. It now lacked a little more than two hours until dark, which meant the three would have to camp in the



jungle, for there was not time to return to Muzo before nightfall.

Brother Goat had led the man and boy to the edge of a broad savannah, or meadow, and had started across it, when suddenly the big billy snorted again. Pepe looked sharply at him, for this was neither a blast of anger nor a snort of defiance.

Sam looked questioningly at Pepe. "What is it?"

"I do not know."

"The *tigre*, perhaps?"

"Perhaps, but I do not think so."

Sam said grimly, "Whatever it is, we'd better watch our step."

The two slowed down, keeping both guns ready.... It was Sam who suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Pepe, look!"

Stricken to silence, the boy looked down at the man who lay in the grass at his feet. He was thin and supple. His hair was long, as was his beard. Beside him lay a pack of deerskins and an ancient muzzle-loading rifle. His clothing was fearfully torn and stained with his own blood. But his eyes were serene.

Pepe finally murmured, "Lazario Rujan." He and Sam knelt beside the injured man.

"It is good to see you, Pepe," said the hunter from Muzo. "I had already told myself that I must die alone, and that my grave would never be known. That was not unbearable, for a

hunter who goes alone into the jungle knows the risks he runs, but it is a comfort to have one from my own village near me."

"What happened?"

"A *tigre*, a great beast with a shriveled forepaw, came. I saw him in time and my gun was loaded. But," Lazario tried to shrug but could not. He smiled wanly. "The gun missed fire. The *tigre* was shot without being mortally wounded. The bullet merely laid its left cheek open and caused it to lose much blood. Pepe, tell our people of Muzo that they shall face a man-killer, for the *tigre* is old and crippled. It attacked me because it wished to eat me. I think the coming of you and your companion, to say nothing of Brother Goat, frightened it."

Pepe said, "I shall not fail to carry the warning."

A cold dread clutched at his heart as the full horror of all this was driven home. No longer able to kill agile jungle creatures, the *tigre* had turned to Pepe's goats. Driven from them, it had been too desperately intent on escaping from whatever had wounded it in the goat corral to eat from the crocodile it slew. Probably it had tried, but obviously it had failed to make a kill on its travels. Finally, encountering Lazario Rujan—and only extreme desperation could have driven it to such a measure—it had not hesitated to attack him. In so doing, it had learned how puny men really are.

"When I die, bury me where I fell," Lazario Rujan said. "But carry my gun and my pack of deerskins home to Muzo and give them to my wife."

Pepe said gently, "You may give them to her yourself. We shall carry you to Muzo."

"No," Lazario Rujan told him, "I have seen enough of mortal wounds to understand when I have received one. It is not wholly a bad thing, for who lives as a hunter must be ready to die as a hunter. I—"

He was interrupted by a hoarse blat from Brother Goat and immediately Lazario became again the hunter, the man whose livelihood depends on his ability to interpret the ways of animals. For a moment he strained intently, seeming to forget everything except the meager warning he had received. Suddenly, he cried, "*Ganado! Ganado!* Cattle! Cattle! Look to yourselves!"

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## Charge of the Wild Cattle

When Pepe looked away from the wounded hunter, he glanced instinctively at Brother Goat. The big billy was strained and tense, and anger showed in his eyes as he gazed intently toward the jungle at the far end of the meadow. Looking in the same direction, Pepe saw nothing to cause alarm, but, at the same time, he could not doubt that some deadly and terrible thing lurked there. The keen nose of Brother Goat and the trained senses of a hunter had detected what eyes were as yet unable to see.

Sam looked from Brother Goat to Pepe to Lazario, then rose with the rifle in his hands. When he spoke, his voice was almost maddeningly calm. "He said wild cattle, didn't he?"

"Yes," Pepe answered.

Lazario tried to speak, but he could only whisper in a voice so faint that even the still kneeling Pepe could not hear. The boy bent to place his ear very close to Lazario's mouth, and the hunter gasped, "There is still time—to run."

"Does he need something?" Sam asked solicitously.

"He says there is still time for you and me to run."

"From a bunch of cows? Gosh! I never would dare show my face again on my grandpappy's Texas ranch!"

Sam laughed, not the strained laughter of one who is or shortly will be facing great danger, but the free-flowing mirth of a man who enjoys a hilarious story, and Pepe looked with new eyes upon this man he had seen so many times and yet, until now, seemed never to have seen at all. He shook his head in bewilderment. There were many men of Muzo who would face this wild herd if they must, and, if there was no alternative, would fight it as well as they could, but would any except a devil laugh at it? Or was it that Sam just did not appreciate the danger?

Still tense, snorting or grunting occasionally, Brother Goat kept his attention fixed on the jungle. He took ten forward steps, tautening the lead rope. Pepe rose, walked to the billy's side and slipped the rope from his horns. Despite the lion's heart that beat within Brother Goat's body, he'd be of no use in stopping a herd of charging wild cattle. But if he were free of the rope, he could at least take care of himself.

Pepe concentrated his gaze on the jungle, and although he could still see nothing, the setting for what was soon to be could not be improved. The meadow with its lush grasses was a perfect grazing ground and the cool jungle was ideal for lying up throughout the heat of the day. Now the wild herd was coming out for the evening grazing.

Neither raising nor lowering his voice, Sam said, "Looks as though they're arriving, Pepe."

Within the jungle, shadows moved, and, as the man and boy drew nearer the open meadow, the shadows took shape and form. Then the first of the wild cattle came into the meadow

and Pepe gulped. He did not know how many there were, but it was a great herd.

Brother Goat blatted and raced forward. The words that rose in Pepe's throat, and would have called his friend back, were never uttered, for the billy would not heed them, anyway. He stopped within twenty paces of a lithe gray bull and shook threatening horns.

The bull merely stared surlily at him. He did not recognize this creature, but the goat was not unlike the jungle deer and the bull had only contempt for deer. It was not until Brother Goat stalked nearer that the bull whirled to attack.

There was no preliminary pawing of the earth with a front hoof or scraping it with horns. This bull knew too well the rules of jungle warfare, where whoever did not kill was killed. He wasted no time in senseless threats. When he moved, he was as swift and direct as a striking viper.

Brother Goat was a shade swifter. He slithered aside, avoiding the bull's catlike rush by inches, and smashed full force into the gray animal's flank. Even as the enraged animal whirled to look for him, the billy swerved in the opposite direction and ran triumphantly back to Pepe.

Sam grinned. "First blood for our side, Pepe, but they're still coming."

"It is a great herd," the boy said.

The cattle continued to advance, with those behind forcing those ahead farther into the meadow. As usual, they ran almost entirely to blacks, with a very few duns and grays.

White cattle, brown and white, or any with an instantly noticeable color, might escape into the jungle, but, with all the hungry carnivores that prowled there, they never lived long. Solid-colored animals that blended with the jungle's own dark shadows had the only chance of surviving.

None of these cattle was even faintly suggestive of the plump beasts common to farms and ranches. Slim without being gaunt, all were at least three, and some twenty, generations removed from the domestic cattle that had started these herds. They were true creatures of the wild. Ancient man, living in caves and armed with clubs and spears, had matched himself against cattle exactly like these.

Their predominant manner was one of definite and great hostility, but they were also indecisive. All knew what they should do, but one of them must start it. Pepe realized that leadership was exactly what they awaited. Presently, they received it.

A sleek black bull with muscles smooth as a pool of water advanced ten paces and gave himself over for a moment to scrutinizing these trespassers on his domain. Except that he was older and better developed and heavier, he might have been the twin of the lone young bull that had sought a refuge near Pepe's goat pastures. Probably, he was its father.

Since he was the herd bull, he was less hesitant than the rest. It was his responsibility to rally his followers, and the tactics he chose were different from those employed by the gray bull that had whirled on Brother Goat. It was four hundred yards across the meadow to where the enemy waited, so there could be no immediate danger. The black bull bent his

head, scraped the earth with a needle-pointed horn, sent a little cascade of dirt flying against his belly with a raking front hoof and bellowed. It was the song of the war bugle, the invitation to fight, and the already tense herd became perceptibly more restless.

Sam said calmly, "Blackie sure thinks he's high cockalorum in this particular part of the jungle, but I can't say I think much of his singing."

"They will not delay much longer," Pepe warned. "What shall we do?"

"We might try saying, 'So-o, bossie,' in Spanish." Sam looked at Pepe and grinned. The boy smiled back. Sam continued, "Now why don't you, me and Brother Goat just stay right here and call their bluff?"

"*Si*," Pepe agreed.

"'Cept I can't shoot so good from where I am," Sam grumbled. "Want to move up a mite?"

"Surely."

They stepped forward ten paces and Pepe knew that, if he lived through this—although he might live as long as Uncle Ruiz—every day would glow with the warmth that the *norteamericano* had kindled by moving forward. This would still be true if he never saw Sam Jackson again after the redhead left Muzo. The shooting position they had just taken was no better than the one they had left, but the helpless Lazario Rujan was behind them now. Before any of the wild



cattle could reach and further hurt Lazario, they must first get past the defenders who had undertaken to stop them.

Pepe asked impulsively, "Are you a devil?"

"Sure," Sam said cheerfully. "If you don't believe it, ask my eighth-grade teacher."

It was, Pepe thought happily, as though a blindfold that had covered his eyes was suddenly removed. Old Uncle Ruiz had professed to see something evil in the quetzal's cry—and the incarnation of that evil in Sam Jackson—and the rest of Muzo had been all too ready to listen and believe. Pepe knew suddenly that an evil spirit had indeed come to his village, but it was not embodied in Sam Jackson. It was contained in Uncle Ruiz, who commanded respect because *supposedly* he was very wise, and it was supplemented by the people of Muzo who listened to Uncle Ruiz because they were too lazy, too careless or too indifferent to think for themselves.

Pepe wondered suddenly if those who spoke lies, and those who listened to lies when a little diligence on their part would have unveiled the truth, were not merely the greatest but the only evil to afflict humanity the world over. He was unable to answer his own question because he knew only Muzo, but he was very certain that no devil and no evil spirit would place himself in danger and invite injury or death in order to spare further hurt to a man already seriously injured.

"Here's some spares." Sam reached in his pocket, drew out a handful of shells and passed them to Pepe. Suddenly, and despite the charge of the wild herd that was sure to come very soon, the boy was glad he was here and would not have

been elsewhere if he could. He had a fine gun, plenty of ammunition—and himself. Most important of all, and most revealing of all, he also had Sam and Brother Goat. In that moment, he learned the genuine worth of other beings, and he reached out to pet the big billy. In that moment, as he was to know later, Pepe stopped being a boy and, in truth, became a man.

Sam said, "This looks like it."

"It is."

"Better not shoot until they're pretty close," Sam observed. "I can slip a few gadflies under their hides because Old Betsie here has got a bit longer range than your shotgun. The shotgun won't stop 'em at that range, even with buckshot, but it'll make 'em holler uncle, once they're near enough. O.K.?"

"Agreed," Pepe said.

The charge came, led by the ground-pawing black bull and followed by a veritable sea of maddened cattle. But Pepe had eyes only for the bull.

He was lithe as a cat and swift as a greyhound, and he no longer bellowed or grunted because, Pepe thought, every tense nerve and muscle beneath his taut hide was so fiercely intent on the kill that he was no longer capable of making a noise. The black bull knew exactly what he was doing and appreciated to the fullest the power of the herd he led. The biggest *tigre*, or a dozen big *tigres*, would run from its path, if running were possible.

Pepe's eyes widened. His mouth became dry. Somehow, he did not picture his own death in this wild charge of maddened cattle, or see his body trampled beneath split hoofs and gored by sharp horns, for that was something one imagined only when in some secure place and *thinking* about a charge of wild cattle. Actually, facing it, Pepe saw only a spectacle so awesome that the running bodies, pounding hoofs and tossing horns seemed a prelude to the destruction of the earth itself.

The black bull that had launched the charge became symbolic of all such a thing meant. As he came on, he seemed to increase in size, until he was tall as the tallest tree and then bigger than the biggest mountain. His speed was greater than that of the wind. Pepe was certain that he saw twin spouts of fire flaring from his nostrils. His eyes were burning red balls, so intense that the grass shriveled beneath them.

Desperate for something familiar and an old friend to whom he might turn, Pepe extended his hand to touch Brother Goat. His fingers found only air. The billy had gone—possibly into the very path of the charging herd. The boy fought back the panic this realization brought ... He remained steady. As though there were some powerful magnet that drew his gaze and would not let him look away, his eyes again found the challenging animal.

Sam Jackson's rifle cracked. The black bull, carried by his own momentum, ran three more steps. Then he fell so heavily that the breeze his falling created rippled the grass in all directions. He flipped his tail, lay still—and the trance that had come so dangerously near to overwhelming Pepe

was no more. The mist that had swirled in his brain and prevented clear thinking drifted away.

He now saw the charge in its true light. It was terrible, but there was a definite pattern and form that was very evident, and whatever could be recognized could be fought.

Some years past, Pepe remembered, one of the men of Muzo—offhand he could not remember which one—had gone away to work for a while as a *vaquero*, or cowboy. He had returned with marvelous tales of his adventures and foremost among them was a story of a stampede which, according to the man, he had not only helped to stop but that never could have been stopped at all without his help. Each single member of a great herd of cattle was smitten by the same devil at the same time, so that its only thought was to run. It did not matter what direction it took, or what obstacles might lie in the way; and those that fell were trampled to bloody particles by those that did not. They had what the man called a herd mind, which meant that they had no mind at all but were moved by an insane impulse, identical in each cow, that led to nothing in particular.

A herd mind there might well be in domesticated or semi-domesticated beasts when they were stampeding, but, as Pepe watched the oncoming wild cattle, he knew that no such term applied here. They had a purpose, a fixed and deadly purpose of killing these rash men who had dared invade their meadow. However, not by any means were all the cattle of the same mind.

As in any crowd, human or animal, the temperaments varied widely. There were no timid among these wild cattle, but

there were many indecisive, some that would not do anything until they had first analyzed the situation, and all the shades in between, up to a few overbold. The indecisive and the cautious might—and might not—decide and then pursue a course of action. But, if rallied behind the more aggressive, they needed nothing more, and this herd had no lack of aggressive beasts. As the animals came on, Pepe found and pin-pointed their leaders, their rallying points.

There were two more bulls, a dun cow, a runty black bull that probably made up in aggressiveness and ability what he lacked in size, a second cow. These and others knew exactly what must be done, and because they not only knew but were doing it, the rest were satisfied to follow.

Pepe noted with satisfaction that Sam Jackson had also analyzed the situation and was acting accordingly. His rifle continued to crack, and, with each shot, one of the herd around which others had rallied went down—but the rest came on.

Sam turned to Pepe and raised his voice just enough to be heard above the noise of pounding hoofs. "O.K., pardner. Might as well get in on the party."

Pepe slipped the safety catch, raised the shotgun, sighted on the dun cow and felt a tremendous awe that was instantly followed by a sense of vast achievement. The gun emitted a wholly satisfying roar when he shot, but the recoil jolt against his shoulder was so slight as to be scarcely worth noticing. What took place at the other end was a revelation, however.

The dun cow fell with such a heavy thump that her horns plowed into the ground while her rear bounded a foot in the air. She did not move again. A medium-sized bull running beside her swapped ends so suddenly that he seemed to whirl on a pivot, and, instead of looking at Pepe and Sam, he was staring back in the direction from which the herd had come.

Then, as though he were about to lie down, he bent his knees and settled to the ground. Suddenly, he wilted. The bull that had been running on the dun cow's opposite side voiced a guttural bark, almost like the bark of a dog. Barking with every jump and running full speed, he cut at right angles to the line of charge and momentarily slowed the animals whose path he crossed.

Pepe stared dumfounded at the gun he held. Sam Jackson laughed, but, for the first time since Pepe had known him, his laughter was grim rather than mirthful.

"Buckshot spreads plenty at that distance, Pepe, and it also hurts plenty. Keep it going. Our little pals need more persuading."

Pepe sought another suitable target and found it in a sinewy little bull, a deer-flanked thing that never would have drawn a second glance from anyone seriously interested in cattle breeding. But the animal's size and build were ideal for his life. Small enough to avoid the lunges of other cattle—and perhaps even the swipe of a *tigre*—he was big and strong enough to sink his polished horns to the hilt in any target he selected and was able to reach.

Pepe sighted, and, as he did so, fear was once more his companion. Already Sam had worked fearful havoc with his rifle and he had not wasted a single shot. Every animal down was a leader around which others had rallied. But the rest were coming on as swiftly and as determinedly as before. The sight and scent of their fallen comrades seemed to enrage more than it frightened them. Pepe shot, saw his target fall, ejected the two spent shells and reloaded.

He heard Sam shout, "Let's pile some up in front of us, pardner!"

Pepe glanced toward the *norteamericano*, saw him gesture directly before them, understood—and approved. A bulwark of dead cattle directly in front of them might at least provide a barrier that the rest could not go over and, therefore, must necessarily go around. And now there was no further necessity for picking targets.

The five shots from Sam's rifle were so closely spaced that they sounded almost as one but five cattle went down. Pepe blasted into the mass. Without bothering to see the effect of his shots, he reloaded and shot again. A frenzy that was almost a fever sat upon him. A good gun was the grandest of possessions. Whoever had a good gun—and used it well—need fear nothing. Pepe had a good gun. How well could he use it?

He was greatly astonished, suddenly, to see cattle running past on both sides. At first he thought they did so because they feared his gun and dared not come near. Then he noted the sprawled pile of dead cattle directly before him and knew that the final desperate strategy had succeeded. The charging

herd must pass on either side because they could not cross over the bodies of their own herd mates.

Startlingly, as though he had sprung from the earth itself, Brother Goat appeared. He was running when Pepe saw him, and he launched himself, as though his body was a great projectile, at the rear of one of the flying cattle and chivvied it on its way. Immediately he sought another. Once more Brother Goat had proven, not only his ability to watch out for himself, but his indispensability in any undertaking.

Pepe watched, grateful for Brother Goat's deliverance but, at the same time, a little sick and more than a little overawed. There was justification for the dead cattle for, had they not died, Pepe and Sam certainly would have. But a gun was a mightier weapon than Pepe had ever imagined it to be. It must at all times be used with discretion, for if a weapon so powerful was ever otherwise employed, even Uncle Ruiz would not be able to imagine the evil that could come about.

Warned by sounds he only half heard, Pepe whirled to confront a bull charging down on him. It was a mighty dun brute. He had not heard it until it was dangerously near because, even when it ran, it made no more noise than a cat. Pepe stood his ground and raised his gun—and a sudden sickness gripped the pit of his stomach when the firing pin descended on an empty chamber. He pulled the trigger again and was rewarded with another click. Thinking the charge broken, he hadn't reloaded after his last two shots.

Desperately, he fumbled for more shells, and, even as he did, he knew he was lost. The bull would be upon him before he could reload.



A rifle cracked. The bull halted. It grunted and stood very still, turning its head slowly. Then, as though it were going to sleep, it lay down.

"It failed not that time!" a joyous voice said. "My little friend needed only coaxing!"

Pepe turned to where they had left the badly injured Lazario Rujan lying on the grass. Now Lazario was sitting up, a smile of pure ecstasy on his lips and his ancient rifle held lovingly in both hands. He spoke again: "So many hours of hard toil my sweetheart cost me, and like all sweethearts, she was fickle at times. Would she have been as intriguing if she were not? But at the last she was true! Oh, so true!"

Pepe glanced at the wild cattle that had spent their charge and were now running off into the jungle. Sam Jackson came to his side and together they made their way to Lazario Rujan.

The hunter said serenely, "Repeat your promise that my rifle and my pack of deerskins, which is all I have to send, will be carried to my wife. My body you must bury where it fell, for there it belongs."

"You must not speak so, Lazario," Pepe chided him. "You could not arise when we found you, but you have arisen now. You will go back to Muzo with us."

Lazario Rujan remained serene. "You may be forgiven for you are little more than a boy who cannot be expected to have much knowledge, and you speak as such. But I know my wound is mortal and I shall not go back to Muzo. Your promise?"

"We shall carry your rifle and your pack of deerskins to Muzo and give them to your wife," Pepe promised.

"You will also remember to tell the villagers of Muzo that the *tigre* is a man-eater?" Lazario pressed.

"We will remember."

"Then," Lazario said, "my work upon this earth is finished and I have earned the right to die."

So saying, quietly and very gently, with more than the hint of a smile on his lips, Lazario lay down and composed himself. A moment later he was dead.

Off in the jungle, one of the cattle blatted. Some small rodent rustled the grass nearby. Already, a black buzzard wheeled in the sky. Sam Jackson stood for a long while without moving or speaking.... At last he said, obviously deeply moved, "Your friend was quite a man, Pepe."

Pepe said in a low voice, "Lazario was a great hunter."

"Wish I'd had a chance to know him better."

"Why—" Pepe throttled a sob, "why did he have to die?"

"You'll have to ask somebody who knows more about such things than I do."

"He—he knew he would not live. But he seemed so calm."

"A hunter must be calm, no matter what he faces."

Pepe found a ray of comfort. "His rifle did not really fail him. That seemed to make him happy."

Presently, Pepe took Lazario Rujan's machete and began to dig in the yielding earth. When he was weary, Sam relieved him. They dug a proper grave and tenderly laid all that remained of Lazario Rujan within. Then they covered him and found stones to lay on top of his resting place. Thus his grave was marked.

Finally, with Sam carrying Lazario's old rifle and Pepe the pack of deerskins, and Brother Goat pacing contentedly beside them, the trio made its way farther into the jungle. When darkness came, they built a fire, ate and took their rest.

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## The Tigre Wanders

When the *tigre* came again to Pepe Estrada's goat corral, he was driven by hunger desperate enough to overcome his one fear. The people of Muzo did not inspire that fear, only a haughty contempt, but the fires that burned in front of their huts were always to be shunned. Light where darkness should be was as terrifying to the *tigre* as black magic is to the mind of a primitive man.

Fire was the only thing the *tigre* had ever feared. Although he knew Pepe's goats were there, penned, helpless and unable to escape, the remembrance of Muzo's fires and the knowledge that they burned kept him prowling the jungle in search of food that had once been so very easy to get and now was so very difficult.

The *tigre* was past his prime without being old, and, if he had possessed four useful paws, he would still have been a good hunter. But a wild pig or deer was quick as a flitting shadow, and whatever would kill and eat a wild pig or a deer must be proportionately quicker.

For months before his first raid on the goat corral, the *tigre* had known his hungry moments. He existed because there was always the unwary beast, or the cripple or outcast, that he was able to catch and kill. On occasion, he drove other, smaller *tigres* from game that they had killed.

It still followed that the law of the jungle, changeless since the beginning of time, would not change now. The strong and fierce or the strong and fleet could live there. So could the very timid that were content to live with fear as their constant companion, and that never ventured into any dangerous place. But the infirm and the aging must die.

The *tigre*, on his second raid of the goat corral, had not been greatly disturbed by the shot from Sam Jackson's rifle. The weapon delivered a sharp and carrying report that jarred harshly on his sensitive ears and for which he had little liking. But during the rainy season fierce thunderstorms raged over the jungle, and he didn't care for the reverberating roll of thunder either, or the splintering crack when a high wind toppled some tree, or any other harsh and jarring noise. They set his feline nerves to screaming, but aside from that, there was no real harm in any of them, and he attached no special significance to the blast of the rifle. It was unpleasant, but unpleasantness, when weighed in the balance with a hungry belly, was relatively unimportant.

As far as the *tigre* was concerned, Muzo's people rated considerably lower in the scale of animal life than the jungle-dwelling deer that he had caught and eaten when he was still physically capable of catching and killing deer. People had an odor so different from the jungle smells to which he was accustomed that it offended his nostrils. Their speed and physical prowess were inferior to that of the humblest jungle dweller, and the *tigre* had never once thought that they might be good to eat. Pepe Estrada's father was the only human being in the *tigre's* whole experience whom he remembered with any degree of respect.

His attack on the goats, then under the stewardship of Pepe's father, was brought about by circumstance rather than design. The *tigre* knew, and long had known, that Pepe's father took the flock to pasture every morning and back to Muzo every night. But four years ago the *tigre* had been at the very height of his powers. Far from experiencing difficulty in catching all the game he wanted, he had been able to take the very choicest delicacies and goats had not impressed him as an epicure's delight. A half-grown pig or a young deer was greatly to be preferred.

But the path chosen by Pepe's father that night lay directly across a section of jungle that the *tigre* had marked out as his own. He did not travel it often, partly because it took him too close to Muzo and he did not like villages, and partly because he was a wanderer by nature and visited no one place often. But he was there that night and five minutes before the flock came he had marked down a deer. It should have been an easy kill. The deer was feeding so unwarily that it seldom bothered to raise its head and search for lurking peril. The *tigre* knew he could kill it, and his very certainty brought failure. Had he used even half the hunting skill at his command, he would have brought the deer down, but he was so careless that the intended quarry saw him while he was more than a safe distance away, snorted, wheeled and skipped to safety in the jungle.

The *tigre* bounded after the fleeing deer until it became apparent that the chase was hopeless, and the failure roused to fever pitch all that berserk, near-insane rage which never lingered far beneath a normally cool brain. It is a trait common to all his kind, a characteristic that sometimes

drives *tigres* to seek battle, even when the odds are so hopeless that the only possible ending for them is death. Thus a berserk *tigre* might, with no hesitation whatsoever, attack twenty or more huge crocodiles, or hurl himself headlong at a herd of wild cattle, or take on a vast number of wild pigs. Always, in such encounters, a *tigre* has mangled some of his enemies and usually killed some—but, in the end, he has always died.

A few minutes later, the goats came, and, with no hesitation at all, the *tigre* attacked. He knew Pepe's father was with them as he did so, but so complete was his contempt for human beings and so great was his rage that he would still have attacked had there been twenty men, or a hundred. From time to time he had run across men in the jungle, and, without a single exception, they had fled from his path. He singled out Maria and prepared to bring her down, but nothing in his experience had prepared him for the fury that attacked him next.

As soon as the two closed, the *tigre* knew that, in a physical sense, Pepe's father was not a match for him, and, in a short time, he would kill the man. But not even when he had battled other male *tigres* for the favors of females, had he fought with anything that struggled so fiercely or with such desperate singleness of purpose.

The *tigre* had Pepe's father pinned down in such a fashion that the man could reach only his right front paw and leg. But the knife plunged into that again and again. At first, in the heat of battle, the *tigre* scarcely felt it. Then he could no longer ignore it, but, because he was what he was, neither could he stop fighting.

When Pepe's father finally lay still, the *tigre* rose and glanced down the path, where Brother Goat and most of his frightened flock had scurried. Next he looked at the frightened Maria. She trembled nearby, afraid but unwilling to leave her master. Now it would be a simple matter to kill her, but there was something here that the *tigre* did not understand and failure to do so created a certain nervousness. In its turn, this nervousness bred indecision.... The *tigre* wheeled and fled into the jungle.

Pepe's father had driven his knife deep enough to sever muscles and tendons, so that, from the very first, the *tigre's* right front paw was useless. But, like all living things that are deprived of the use of one member, the *tigre* learned to compensate by becoming far more skillful with the others. Although at first hunting was more difficult, he never knew hunger.

Three years elapsed before there was the first definite evidence that age was exacting its inevitable toll. The *tigre* stalked another deer, a yearling doe that complacently cropped grass in a little clearing—and there was no mistake this time. All the skill and finesse that long experience had taught the *tigre* went into the hunt and a kill should have resulted. But when he made the final rush—and many times he had run farther and caught his game with a safe margin to spare—he missed by a full fifteen inches.

Therefore hunting became uncertain, with now a full belly and now an empty one, and always the necessity for being on the prowl for twice as many hours as ever before. The deep-shaded jungle thickets where the *tigre* had loved to lie when it was hot and the high rock ledges where he had basked in



the first rays of the morning sun knew him almost never. He ate dead fish cast up on the river bank, drove buzzards from some sick or injured beast that had finally died in the jungle, caught insects and sought other foods that formerly he would have scorned. Finally, the only kills that he himself was able to make consisted of sick or injured creatures or those that, like himself, were slowed by age—and these were uncomfortably few. The most agile jungle dweller that might conceivably furnish a meal for some carnivore was apt to be translated into one on shortest notice. The slow never lived long.

It was chance alone that led the *tigre* to a new source of supply.

He ran across another *tigre*, a two-year-old with a wild pig it had just killed, and promptly rushed it. Had the youngster stood its ground, it might have defended its rightful booty. It chose to run, and thereafter the *tigre* haunted the hunting grounds of other big cats. There were a few battles, but none worthy of note until the *tigre* found another male, a cat almost as big as himself and unhampered by a shriveled paw with a fresh-killed deer.

The battle that followed was short but fierce and bloody. The defeated *tigre* retired to lick his wounds, and for six days lay up in a thicket so dense and dark that little else ever came there. When he finally left, he was ravenous, in desperate and immediate need of food. The nearest meat he knew of, and at the same time was sure he could catch, were Pepe Estrada's goats.

He approached Muzo as night was falling, and his coming was very uneasy and troubled. The people worried him not at all, for although he had not forgotten that a man had given him his shriveled paw, he remembered how weak and yielding the man had been in his grasp. It was the fires he feared, and for more than two hours he paced restlessly back and forth while he studied them from a distance.

Finally, he left the sheltering jungle to slip into the treeless valley and, when he did, he was once again the complete and perfect hunter. The trail he left in the tall grass was so faint and hard to trace that only the most expert hunter could have known that a *tigre* had walked there.

When the goats finally scented him and began to bleat, he abandoned all pretense of stalking and acted. He cleared the corral in one near-effortless leap, seized the nearest goat and was out again. He was still the *tigre*, still capable of crushing the neck of the biggest ox with one swipe of his mighty paw. Anything as small as a goat did not even slow him perceptibly.

He filled his belly with goat's flesh and covered what remained with sticks and grass until such time as he might again be hungry. When the goat was finished, he had a mighty stroke of luck.

A deer, running in wild panic from something it had seen or thought it had seen, passed so near to where the *tigre* lay resting that he had to do little more than extend a paw and seize it. But good luck turned to bad when a pair of *tigres* drove him from that kill.

Again he turned to Pepe's goats, and, this time, although he still feared the fires, he had learned to evaluate them and he approached far more confidently. The sudden, dazzling beam of the flashlight, the whiplash crack of Sam Jackson's rifle and the bullet that whined within an inch of his ear, startled him. But he took another goat when he left.

Now he knew not only where to find a dependable and easily caught source of food but how to go about securing it. The next time he raided, his confidence had increased a hundredfold.

Sam's bullet plowed a furrow alongside his head, tumbled him into the corral and set him spinning there. Of this the *tigre* knew nothing, for such a bullet delivers a terrible shock and he was too dazed to know anything. Instinct, and that alone, got him up, sent him back over the corral fence and guided him toward the safe and friendly jungle.

When the foolish little crocodile attacked as he was fording the river, he turned ferociously on it, dragged it up on the river bank—and left without eating any part of it. He was still too dazed to have any clear idea of what he was doing. He forded the river and melted into the jungle.

His senses returned gradually—and pain with them, but he connected no part of that pain with anything any man might have done. He did know that he had entered the goat corral at night, and that he had unaccountably been stricken down. But he could know nothing except that some mighty and terrible force had stricken him, and that the night concealed hitherto unsuspected perils whenever he raided in Muzo. For

men, and all human beings, he retained only a lofty contempt.

The *tigre* lay down deep in the thicket and rested until after sunup.... Then he rose to go on.

He knew when Pepe and Sam Jackson came with Brother Goat but he was not in the least disturbed by their arrival. Far more important was the fact that he was almost completely recovered from the shock of the bullet. With recovery, hunger became an unendurable torment.

Then he came to the edge of the savannah and saw Lazario Rujan swinging toward him. The *tigre* stopped short, the extreme tip of his tail twitching excitedly but the rest of his body still as a carved statue. Men were made of flesh that bled when rended, as the *tigre* had proven when he killed Pepe Estrada's father, and hunger such as he now knew was unbearable. The *tigre* raced swiftly toward Lazario Rujan and, when he was near enough, sprang.

It was unbelievably easy, far more simple even than felling a goat. The *tigre* stood over his victim and was ready to kill him when his nostrils were assailed by a troublesome scent and his ears detected a warning sound. The wild cattle, that were preparing to leave the shady jungle where they had rested during the day and come into the meadow to graze, were in considerable force.

The *tigre* lingered briefly and bent his head to sniff at Lazario Rujan. Then he left his victim and raced full speed into the jungle. Not only danger, but danger against which there was no defense in an open meadow, was approaching.

Caught singly, as they sometimes were, the wild cattle were not only fairly easy to stalk and kill but they offered choice eating. However, nothing could even hope to stand against a herd as big as the one now approaching, and wild cattle had a special hatred for *tigres*. The only hope was to climb a tree where the cattle could not follow. Even so, once they'd treed a *tigre*, the herd sometimes stamped and bellowed beneath the tree for hours.

Again in the jungle, with trees on all sides, the *tigre* slowed his pace. Here he was again sure of himself, but, with danger behind, hunger mounted and anger rose with it. The *tigre* decided to hunt.

He stalked and missed a deer and scattered a drove of wild pigs. Hearing the sound of gunfire in the meadow, he stopped and turned his head toward it. Without knowing what it was or what it meant, he did know that it annoyed him. He ran until the sound of guns faded in the distance and presently was heard no more.

This was country so familiar that he knew every trail and rivulet, and almost every tree. He was acquainted with the favorite browsing places of the jungle deer, the feeding grounds of the wild pigs, and the trees and thickets where the twittering monkeys liked best to congregate. But although there was as much game as there had ever been, all of it eluded him.

The *tigre* passed beneath the huge and gnarled old tree. High in its branches, one of a flock of birds chirped fretfully on its roost. The *tigre* tilted his head toward the sound and licked his chops.

At best, birds were mere tidbits and in the past he had always disdained to hunt them. Now, anything was acceptable. Rearing against the tree, the *tigre* climbed to the first crotch, worked his way upward and located the birds on a limb far too slender to bear his weight. They were as far beyond his reach as they would have been on the thin crescent of moon that painted the topmost branches of the tree with a wan, yellow light.

Descending the tree, for a moment the *tigre* stood half seen in the thick curtain of gloom that draped itself around the base of the huge trunk. His thoughts turned to Muzo, and he swung on a circling course that would take him back toward the village.

He remained hesitant, for vivid in his memory were the bright beam of the flashlight, the crack of the rifle and the numbing shock of Sam Jackson's bullet. But all these were associated with the goat corral and the night, and not with any man or any action of man. They made the *tigre* cautious without making him afraid, but, at the same time, they furnished reason enough for not taking the most direct course to Muzo.

Twice more he stalked feeding deer, and each time he missed. Then he climbed a tree and lay for hours on a broad limb that overhung a runway much used by game of various kinds, but nothing came. When the *tigre* descended and went on, there was no more hesitation.

The sun was high when he came to the valley of Muzo and slunk into the tall grass. He made his way toward the gardens, whose tall and dense cornfields offered perfect

cover, and made his way between the close, cool stalks. The men of Muzo, who had been working their fields throughout the morning coolness, had left them now and would not return till the lowering sun brought shadows and once again made it cool enough for them to till their gardens. But from somewhere nearby the *tigre* heard the chattering of women and crept toward the sound. He came to the edge of the gardens and peered out.

Not thirty feet away was a roly-poly, brown-skinned child.

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## The Trap

Juana Benavides, wife of Ramon, knelt beside the little stream that sparkled past Muzo's gardens and divided her attention among the laundry she was scrubbing, the animated conversation she was carrying on with the wives of Luis Ortega and Francisco Hidalgo, who were also doing the family laundry, and the whereabouts of her youngest, a three-year-old man child, also named Ramon. The first two of these essential duties demanded her concentrated attention and utmost diligence. The third was less exacting. Juana, mother of seven, had been taught by experience that all children are natural adventurers, given to wandering. But sooner or later, and usually sooner, the pangs of hunger sent them flying back to the maternal source of food.

There was small reason to worry about her child, since it was full daylight and they were little more than a stone's throw from the village itself. Night would be a different matter. Had not the *tigre*—or was it really the devil that Uncle Ruiz so darkly muttered had been summoned by the quetzal's call?—come four times to Pepe Estrada's goat corral? Sometimes Juana believed and sometimes she did not, but, regardless of what it was, her children did not go wandering at night.

Juana enjoyed what she was doing for various reasons. In the first place, she had an inborn passion for cleanliness. It did her good to rub dirty clothing over rubbing stones, then rinse it in the running water, then scrub it again, until stains and



blemishes were no more and the cloth was as pure and white as it had been the day it came from the loom. In the second place, laundry day offered welcome relief from the never ending, often difficult and always monotonous routine of keeping house for a husband and seven youngsters. In the third place, it was the only opportunity ever offered Juana to have a good, intimate and uninterrupted talk with her women neighbors about everyday life in Muzo. If that life wouldn't have interested anyone else in the whole wide world, it meant everything to those who lived there because, as far as they were concerned, Muzo was the world.

It made no difference that the men had made up their minds that it was too hot to work and left their fields. Except for Lazario Rujan—and pity his wife, Ernestina!—who'd chosen to be a hunter and was forever hunting, men were always deciding that it was too hot, or too cold, or that the wind was in the wrong quarter, or that it might rain, or finding some other excuse for not working. That was a foible of men and it was one well understood by women. Pepe Estrada had herded his goats to pasture every morning, watched them all day, and brought them back at night—at least that is what he'd done before he'd taken up with the crazy *norteamericano*, who was an evil spirit, Uncle Ruiz said more loudly than ever as time went by. It went without saying that Ramon, Juana's own husband, who had seven children to feed and was most shamefully cheated by the trader at San Juan de la Rio on every piece he brought in, could spend little time away from his potter's wheel. But the exceptions were few indeed. Most of the men did quite a bit of resting during the day.

However, the sky was blue, the horizon was clear and, despite the men who had protested that it was too hot to work, a fine cool breeze blew up the valley and rippled the grass. Juana selected one of her husband's shirts, a garment with so many patches that it was difficult to detect where the shirt began and the patches ended, and prepared to scrub it on her scrubbing stone.

"I talked with Ynez Estrada this morning," she said. "I asked her if Pepe has returned to look after his goats, as a goatherd should, or if he is still wandering in the jungle with the *norteamericano*. She told me that he is still in the jungle."

"It is a thing of shame," the wife of Luis Ortega said righteously. "Pepe was such a good boy, such a steady boy, so filled with plans to let his flock increase and make him a rich man. The crazy, red-haired *norteamericano* has put a spell upon him."

"*Poo!*" snorted Carmen Hidalgo, the youngest of the three. "The *norteamericano* is but a man like other men! He cannot put a spell upon anyone!"

Luis Ortega's wife was properly shocked. "Uncle Ruiz says he is a devil!"

"Uncle Ruiz," said Carmen, "is an old fool."

"How can you say that?" the butcher's wife gasped. "He is very old, therefore very wise!"

"If age alone brought wisdom," Carmen said, "a turtle would be the wisest creature on earth. Do they not live longer than anything else?"

"Most men of Muzo agree with Uncle Ruiz."

"Except for Pepe Estrada, who knows the *norteamericano* for what he is, and what he is is a very rich man with two great guns that may very well slay the *tigre* which has been killing Pepe's goats. The men of Muzo are also fools."

"What think you?" Luis Ortega's wife appealed to Juana. "Is the redheaded *norteamericano* a devil or is he not?"

"I do not know," Juana said thoughtfully. "Uncle Ruiz says he is, and that he was called up by a quetzal. But though I myself have seen several quetzales, I have yet to see one that even looked as though it could call up a devil. I—"

Juana raised the shirt, and, at the same moment, she raised her eyes. For a split second, she sat transfixed with horror.

At the precise time she looked up, the wind parted the corn stalks to reveal a vision more dreadful than she had ever seen in her most terrible dreams. It was the head and whiskered face of a *tigre*, a great and awful thing—and it was little more than a single bound away from her youngest son. Almost as soon as she saw, Juana acted.

Forgetting the shirt in her hands, but retaining her hold on it, she sprang toward her little boy. It was not what she should have done, but it was the only thing she could have done. She knew nothing except that her child was in danger, and that she must get him to safety.

The shirt, the existence of which she was no longer even faintly aware, saved her life. The *tigre* was not afraid of her or twenty more like her. He would have faced all the people

in Muzo had they rushed him at that moment. But he could not face an apparition, something that was part human and part flapping, wind-whipped shirt. It was the exact touch needed, if only for a moment, to transform Juana Benavides from the natural to the supernatural. Rather than seize the child, which he had fully intended to do, the *tigre* retreated into the cornfields and hid.

In the same motion, Juana flung the shirt from her and stooped to snatch up her son. She hugged him very tightly and raced back to where the wives of Luis Ortega and Francisco Hidalgo were just beginning to understand that something frightening had happened.

"*Tigre!*" Juana gasped.

Abandoning their laundry, the three women raced toward the village. Felipe, seven-year-old son of Pablo Sanchez, saw them coming and, at first, merely stared curiously. Then he sensed something amiss. Like everyone else in Muzo, and all the rest of the world, his day fell into a well-ordered and established pattern. No part of his routine had anything to do with women who had gone to the creek to do their laundry and who suddenly came racing to the village while the laundry lay unheeded where they had left it. Felipe dived into the house where his father was enjoying what he doubtless considered a well-earned rest.

"They come!" Felipe shouted.

Pablo turned over, grunted, wheezed, opened one eye, groaned, succeeded in opening the other eye and testily

regarded this stripling who had dared interfere with his *siesta*.

"Who comes?"

"Señoras Hidalgo, Ortega and Benavides!"

"And why should they not come?" Pablo demanded.

"The clothing they went to wash lies abandoned along the creek!"

"It is not wholly impossible for even women to exercise common sense," Pablo said testily. "When *siesta* time arrives, people should take a *siesta*, for that is the proper order of things. Now go about your own affairs and leave me in peace."

"They run madly," Felipe breathed, "with Señora Benavides carrying Ramon! It is as though they are threatened by some terrible danger!"

"What danger?"

"That I did not see."

"Have you no eyes?"

"I have eyes, but I saw no danger."

"This," said Pablo, who relished nothing more than playing the star role in any drama that might arise, "is an affair that can best be administered by a man of my intelligence and judgment."

He rose and went outside to meet the three breathless women. The wives of Luis Ortega and Francisco Hidalgo, who had seen nothing and heard only Juana's gasped "*Tigre!*" as she sped past with Ramon in her arms, were largely bewildered. They had run because Juana had run and because, in Juana's strange actions and wild flight, they had read danger to all.

Juana, her son no longer in peril, was at last able to understand clearly what she had seen and what had been. She had literally raced into the jaws of death and snatched her son out of them. There had been no fear then, but she was free to be afraid now. Perspiration beaded her forehead and streaked her dress. Her face was white as the milk Pepe Estrada drew from his goats, and her body trembled like a sapling in a gale.

"What is it?" Pablo Sanchez demanded. "What is it that frightened you, Señora Benavides?"

For a moment she could not speak. Then, "*Tigre!*" she breathed weakly.

"*Tigre?*" Pablo questioned.

"It is there," Juana gestured. "It is in the cornfields."

Pablo asked incredulously, "You are sure? There can be no mistake?"

"I saw it." She was conquering her fear. "In another moment," unconsciously her arms tightened about her boy, "in another moment it would have had my Ramonito."

"There is a *tigre*!" Pablo bellowed. "It is in the cornfields!" He lowered his voice. "You women are not to leave your houses until we men have dealt with this. A *tigre* is very bad."

Hearing—and nobody could avoid hearing, since Pablo Sanchez owned a voice that would not have shamed the lustiest wild bull that ever roamed the jungle—the men, women and children of Muzo gathered around. His potter's wheel abandoned, Ramon Benavides took his wife in his arms and, after putting the boy down, she rested her tired head gratefully against his sturdy shoulder. Pepe Estrada's mother, brother and two sisters joined the assembly. Supporting himself on his stick, Uncle Ruiz was the last to arrive.

Alarmed, for a *tigre* near the village was certainly cause for alarm, but not letting fright steal the spotlight from himself, Pablo Sanchez waited until all were present. Then he addressed his fellow villagers.

"A *tigre* has come to Muzo. It sprang upon and was about to eat this child—" he gestured toward little Ramon Benavides, "when Señora Benavides, brave woman, attacked the beast and drove it off."

"A woman beat a *tigre* from a child it had already seized?" Luis Ortega asked incredulously.

"I did not beat it off and it had not yet seized my Ramonito," Juana Benavides spoke up. "I merely saw the *tigre*, its great head framed at the edge of the corn, and ran as swiftly as I could to catch up my child before the *tigre* got him."

"How far away was it?" Francisco Hidalgo asked.

"Between the *tigre* and my child," Juana pointed to a stone about thirty feet away, "It was from here to there."

Francisco grunted. "Close enough."

"Much too close," Hector Caballero said. "I like my *tigres* best when they are at least fifty kilometers away."

Somewhat crestfallen because the embellishments he had added to Juana's story had fallen flat, but with no intention of letting anyone else assume the stellar role he had already commandeered, Pablo Sanchez continued, "The *tigre* is in the cornfields. Is it not, Señora Benavides?"

Juana said, "That is where I saw it, and that is where it retreated when I ran to get my Ramonito."

"I need not point out," Pablo went on, "that a *tigre* so near Muzo, and especially one that dared come so near in full daylight, means the greatest danger for every one of us. We must not rest, or think of resting, until we kill it."

"You will never kill it," Uncle Ruiz croaked, "for it is not a *tigre*. It is a devil. I knew it would come the evening Pepe Estrada brought his goats home and told me he'd heard a quetzal cry. A quetzal always calls up devils. Pepe, foolish boy, chose to ignore my warning and to ally himself with the devil."

"That is not so!" Benito, Pepe's brother, flared. "Pepe befriends the *norteamericano* because he likes him, and because he has guns that in time will kill the *tigre* that has



been killing Pepe's goats! My brother has no traffic with devils!"

"Benito," his mother admonished, "that is not the way to speak to Uncle Ruiz."

"Nor is that a way for Uncle Ruiz to speak," Benito growled. "The *norteamericano* is not a devil."

"Benito!" his mother warned.

"Scold him not," Uncle Ruiz said sadly. "He is very young, and because he is young he both speaks with a hot tongue and knows not whereof he speaks. I am old and have seen much, and I know about devils. I tell you that there is one among us, and that his primary purpose is to destroy Pepe Estrada. Soon, Pepe will be left without a single goat and be forced to wander as a beggar, rather than become a man of substance. And in destroying Pepe, the devil shall not hesitate to destroy other people of Muzo."

"Uncle Ruiz," Benito said flatly, "you are very foolish."

"Benito!" his mother blazed. "I care to hear no more such talk!"

"Forgive me, Mother," Benito said. "Forgive me for forgetting myself and my place to such an extent I could speak so to one who has the years of Uncle Ruiz."

But although his words were humble, his eyes still said very plainly that Uncle Ruiz *was* very foolish.

"How do we rid ourselves of this devil?" Luis Ortega asked.

"We shall be rid of him when the *norteamericano* leaves," pronounced Uncle Ruiz, "*for he is the devil.*" There was a moment's silence while his audience digested this.

Finally, Francisco Hidalgo spoke up. "Your words are past my understanding. The *norteamericano* is the devil and the *tigre* is also the devil?"

"That," said Uncle Ruiz, "is indeed the truth."

"Then how is it that the *norteamericano* sat with Pepe Estrada and waited for the *tigre* to come again to Pepe's goat corral? When it came, he did his best to kill it with his great gun."

"My words and the nature of devils are both past your understanding," said Uncle Ruiz. "Devils are not as mortal beings who must confine themselves to a single body, be it the body of a man, a wild cow or a crocodile. A devil may enter into as many bodies as suits its purpose, and all at the same time."

Ramon Benavides spoke. "I must confess that, when you first said the *norteamericano* was a devil come among us, your arguments were persuasive and I was swayed by them. Then I began to doubt and I still doubt. When the *tigre* came, did not the *norteamericano* do all he could to kill it with his great gun?"

"Let me ask you this," said Uncle Ruiz, "do you really consider it a great gun?"

"Both his guns are great, the greatest ever seen in Muzo."

"Would either kill a *tigre*?"

"Either should kill anything."

"But, even though the *norteamericano* shot at it, did he kill the *tigre*?"

The remark was thought-provoking—and so sobering that nobody could think of anything to say.

Uncle Ruiz continued, "The *tigre* is again with us. Where is the *norteamericano*?"

Francisco Hidalgo said uncertainly, "I wish Lazario Rujan were here. He would know what to do."

"I question that any of us shall ever see Lazario again," Uncle Ruiz said.

"Why?"

"Lazario is alone in the jungle. The *norteamericano* is also in the jungle. Should they meet, Lazario will never return to Muzo, for the devil will kill him."

Ernestina Rujan gasped. Luis Ortega put forth a comforting hand to steady her, and the skeptical Francisco Hidalgo turned again to Uncle Ruiz to demand, "Pepe Estrada is also with him. Why will he not kill Pepe?"

"Not death, but ruin, is his wish for Pepe. He will bring him to misery, so that his days on earth shall be terrible and, when it finally comes, death shall be both welcome and blessed."

"You—" Benito growled, but quieted when his mother looked sternly at him.

For a short space the people of Muzo maintained an uneasy silence. They looked almost accusingly at each other, as though everybody thought somebody else should have a good idea for solving a problem that appeared to have no solution.

Luis Ortega said, "Devil or *tigre*, it is among us and we cannot rest easily until it is not. We must do something."

"Let us beat through the cornfields," Pablo Sanchez suggested. "I will arm myself with your sword, Francisco, and when I meet this *tigre*—"

Francisco Hidalgo said dryly, "Were I to subscribe to any such hare-brained scheme, that can only result in someone getting killed, I would carry my own sword. Let us hear some sense."

Tight-lipped, but dry-eyed, Ernestina Rujan said, "There is a trap. It is a great iron thing, with huge jaws and a mighty chain, and not even a devil could escape if he were caught in it. I cannot set it myself, but I can show you how it is done."

"That is sense," Francisco conceded, "but first let us build up our fires. Whatever it may be, devil or *tigre*, it will not risk the flames."

This suggestion was greeted with such enthusiasm that soon the fires of Muzo leaped higher than ever before, and great piles of wood lay near at hand to keep them burning. Then the men of Muzo armed themselves with whatever they

could lay their hands on. Ernestina Rujan armed herself with the far more powerful weapon of knowing that, if her husband was dead, the devil had killed him, and that if the devil could be enticed into the trap, her husband would be avenged. So prepared, they went forth to set the trap.

It was indeed a great thing, so big and heavy that Luis Ortega, who was noted for his strength, grunted beneath its weight. But after a serious, though not prolonged, consultation about the best place to set it—the consultation was understandably brief because the *tigre*, devil, or whatever it might be, most certainly still lingered in the corn—it proved a most satisfactory trap. Ernestina Rujan showed the men how to depress the springs with a jackscrew and put the trigger in place. The jaws were surely spacious enough to enfold the foot of anything that might trip the trigger. The men of Muzo bound the chain to a massive boulder, camouflaged the trap so cunningly that no eye could possibly have detected it and hurried to the safety of their fires.

The jungle night was an hour and a half away when Pepe Estrada and Sam Jackson appeared. The people of Muzo looked at them, then at each other, then back at the approaching pair, and those who had been skeptical of Uncle Ruiz's second sight were skeptics no longer. Regardless of whether it was a machete, knife, ax or rifle, no man who went into the jungle alone ever let his weapon out of his hand. But—there could be no doubt that the long object carried by Pepe Estrada was nothing other than Lazario Rujan's rifle.

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## Pepe Faces the Villagers

When morning came, Pepe and Sam ate from Sam's pack, Brother Goat stayed his hunger with some choice shrubs and clumps of grass, then the three started off to look once more for the *tigre*.

They knew where he had attacked Lazario Rujan and the approximate direction in which he had been moving when he did so. But now a dozen unknown factors entered in. Would the *tigre* have taken a different direction, would he have entered the meadow at all, if he had not scented or seen Lazario and decided to attack him? Leaving the fallen hunter, had he kept on the course he was traveling or returned to some other plan? How had the herd of wild cattle affected his movements?

There was no possible way of knowing the answers to these and other equally perplexing questions. Nor, after the trio had walked for miles and sought every path which it seemed the *tigre* might logically pursue, did there seem to be any possibility of locating their quarry. They found no tracks themselves, and not once did Brother Goat's reaction tell them that the hated scent of his enemy was again in his nostrils. But it was not until the day was almost half gone that Sam was willing to concede defeat.

"Guess he's given us the slip, Pepe."

"Let us continue for just a little while," the boy pleaded.

"Brother Goat's nostrils must be clogged, or he's too lazy to smell the track for us, but we may still find the *tigre*."

"A good hound would have trouble finding that track after this much time has passed to let it grow stale, not to mention a herd of wild cattle pounding over it."

"There is still a chance. We must not give up so easily."

"Easily? We've been racing around here since it was light enough to see and nary a sign of that cat. Do you call that giving up easily?"

"You are right," Pepe admitted miserably. Then he stiffened. "But I have not given up the hunt. I am quitting only because it is hopeless to search any farther at the present time. The *tigre* will die or I will!"

Sam murmured to himself, "I hope I never get you mad at me!" Then he said out loud, "I've not given up, either. I came here to get a *tigre*, and, sooner or later, this one will be back for another goat.

"You will stay?" Pepe brightened.

"I will stay," Sam promised, "and the next time tabby comes prowling around your corral, there'll be the three of us waiting for him—me with the rifle, you with the shotgun and Brother Goat with his natural armament. A team like that just has to win in the end."

"You will stay until the *tigre* is dead?" Pepe pressed.

"What do you take me for, Pepe?"

"I do not understand you."

"I came to Muzo to kill a *tigre*, and all I wanted was a trophy. Then it turns out this particular *tigre* has your goats on his menu and my expedition became something more than a trophy hunt to me. I wouldn't let a *tigre* kill my pardner's goats any more than you'd run off and leave me if the situation was reversed, and I was bumping up against some tough going. Now it seems the *tigre* has become a man-eater and, while I have no doubt that you and Brother Goat could handle him, maybe my guns will prove a bit more effective and quicker. You couldn't drive me out of Muzo now until that mean cat's either dead or until we're sure he isn't coming back. The men he has already killed are two too many. We can't have him chawing up any more. Doggone! Things got snarled up worse'n nine miles of barbed wire, didn't they?"

"Then we shall return to Muzo," Pepe said happily.

"Lead on, MacDuff."

"What?"

Sam grinned. "Proceed, *amigo*."

And so, once again, with Sam carrying Lazario's old rifle and Pepe the pack of deerskins, and Brother Goat pacing cheerfully beside them, the trio made its way down a game path. When they came to where such a path branched, with an instinct born of a lifetime in the jungle, Pepe unerringly chose the right one.

When they finally forded the river and approached Muzo, they noticed that the fires burned unusually bright and high.



Brother Goat snorted hopefully and had to be restrained with the lead rope when Pablo Sanchez came to meet them.

Besides his usual tattered clothing, Pablo wore a belligerent expression and an air of excitement. He carried a machete that had once been a good tool—and would still be one if he had managed to divert enough time from his frequent and prolonged *siestas* to keep it polished and honed. Now it was both rusty and nicked, but Pablo whirled it about his head while he thundered, "Begone, and at once! No devils shall share the hospitality of Muzo! Go! Or feel the bite of my blade!"

Sam grinned and continued to advance. Pablo stopped whirling the machete, grasped the hilt with his right hand and raised the blade to what he evidently considered was a wonderfully effective and unassailable position.

Sam walked right on, and when he spoke, his voice was so gently soothing that he might have been addressing a petulant child. "I don't know what's eating you, and I don't care to get tough with you, my man, but you'd better put that toothpick sheer away and stop waving it in front of me, else I'll just naturally have to take it away from you and warm your hinder with it."

Pablo stepped belligerently forward and, when Sam refused to yield, danced backward even more quickly.

"Devil," he screeched. "Bewitcher of people! Stealer of goats! Go and leave Muzo in peace!"

Sam whirled to Pepe. "What the blazes is eating this bird?"

Pepe's face was pale. "I fear that it has come."

"What has come?"

"They've thought you a devil ever since you arrived."

"For pete's sake! Why?"

"I—" Pepe found it a great effort even to speak. "I saw a quetzal and heard it cry. When I returned to Muzo and told Uncle Ruiz, he said a quetzal that cries in such a fashion always calls up a devil. That night, the *tigre* stole my Maria. Then—then you came. Just as you arrived, a quetzal flew over Muzo and cried as it flew. Nothing more was needed."

"So! That explains my cordial welcome! Did you think I was a devil, too?"

"I could not be sure at first," Pepe confessed, "but I am now."

"When did you make up your mind?"

"No devil would have stepped in front of Lazario Rujan when the wild cattle charged. That was the act of a human being. I thought—"

Pepe hesitated, and Sam prompted, "What did you think?"

"The real devil that plagues Muzo lies in the words of Uncle Ruiz, who is supposedly wise because he is old, but who mouths lies when he should speak truth. Within itself, that would be harmless enough if other men, who are too ready to listen and too unready to see and think for themselves, did not believe these lies when they themselves could find the truth if they but sought it."

"From the mouths of children comes wisdom," Sam quoted. "That devil plagues the whole world, Pepe. Now, are we going to run into a ruckus here?"

Pepe knew a rising panic. "You must not leave Muzo!"

"I can't leave Muzo until that *tigre's* hash is settled, once and for all. But I sure don't want to hurt anybody here—and I won't unless they get rough first. What's the score on that?"

"No man will lay a hand upon you," Pepe promised. "Uncle Ruiz will try to banish you with more of his charms."

Sam grinned fleetingly. "Some charms I couldn't resist, but I'm sure Uncle Ruiz's aren't among them. You really thought I might be a devil?"

"Yes," Pepe admitted.

"Yet you went into the jungle with me?"

"I have goats to protect."

"And you'll fight a *tigre* or go along with the devil to protect 'em, eh? All right, pardner, let's go."

Pablo Sanchez, who had retreated to an even safer distance, was still brandishing his machete and mouthing belligerence. Sam gave him no attention and Pepe little, for the fellow would surely run the instant he was threatened. But presently, bearing no arms and their manner one of grave courtliness, Ramon Benavides, Luis Ortega and Francisco Hidalgo approached. Again Pepe restrained the eager Brother Goat. The delegation came near, and Ramon Benavides acted as spokesman.

"It is no easy thing to say this," and his manner proved that it was not, "but we must ask you to leave Muzo. You need not start tonight, for we would have no man, or no creature, travel that dangerous trail in darkness, but we shall be very grateful if you depart with the first light of morning. Tonight, you may again sleep here, and no man will trouble you."

Sam asked, "Will you be so good as to explain why my welcome in Muzo is worn out?"

"We do not relish being the butt of your jokes!" Ramon said sharply. "You know why we ask you to leave. We know, and you know, why you have Lazario Rujan's rifle. Be so kind as to give it to us."

"Lazario died after being attacked by the very *tigre* we followed!" Pepe said defiantly. "Even so, had not my friend placed himself before the wounded Lazario and stood off a charge of wild cattle with his great rifle, no man would know how or where he died or the whereabouts of his grave! He asked us to bring his rifle and the pack of deerskins I carry to his wife."

"Spare both your advice and your foolish talk, stripling!" Ramon said sternly. "No man ever has or ever will face a charge of wild cattle and live to speak of it. Now, give us that which was Lazario's, and which now belongs to Señora Rujan, for we know what took place."

Sam said politely, "We promised Lazario that we would deliver them in person."

"They will carry them to Señora Rujan," Pepe assured him.

"O.K., pardner, if you say so."

The two friends surrendered the rifle and pack of deerskins; then Ramon Benavides turned to Pepe. "Your mother awaits you in her house. Your brother and sisters shall greet you there, too."

"As they shall greet my friend," Pepe said haughtily.

Ramon shook his head sorrowfully. "I fear that you are indeed beyond hope, but I shall continue to hope for you because I have always liked you." He turned to Sam. "You will leave Muzo?"

"No," Sam answered bluntly, "I won't."

The three Muzo delegates turned and strode away. Sam gazed after them for a moment, then turned to Pepe.

"I promised I'd stay and I'm staying, but let me carry the ball from now on. Go to your mother's house alone. Leave me."

"No!" Pepe flared.

"Now look, *amigo*," Sam coaxed, "I won't think any the less of you if you go. I'm going to leave Muzo sooner or later. If this scurvy, leprosy, rash of bottle flies, witchcraft, or whatever you call it, is catching and spreads to you, you'll be invited to leave, too, and you have nowhere else to go. Leave me while there's time."

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"There are two threats to Muzo, and the *tigre* has become the least of the pair. This devil, this real devil whose substance is rooted in carelessness, ignorance and thoughtlessness, must be battled, too."

"You do know what you're doing?"

"I know."

"O.K., pardner, if that's the way it is."

"Come."

Pepe led Sam through the village. Except for the nannies and kids, who bleated a happy welcome when Pepe let Brother Goat back into the corral, the two friends encountered only silent hostility.

When Pepe came to his mother's house and looked in, he saw Benito lying on his *petate*, knees drawn up and staring at nothing. Rosalita and Ana, far too soberly, were grinding corn in the stone *metate*. Pepe's mother was stirring tortillas in a bowl, and nobody looked up until Pepe said,

"*Hola!*"

Benito bounced up as though he were somehow propelled by steel springs, looked, blinked, and then his lips framed a broad grin as he rose.

"Pepe!" he said delightedly. "I've been praying for your return! Now you yourself can go tell that half-witted old owl —"

"Benito," his mother chided, "that is enough."

Benito fell silent, but Pepe's curiosity was piqued. "Who's a half-witted old owl?"

Pepe's mother said, "Benito and Uncle Ruiz became involved in an argument. It is of no consequence."

Pepe laughed. "My brother picks a fight with a harmless old man?"

"Harmless?" Benito cocked a caustic eye at Pepe. "Do you know everything he's been doing?"

"Not everything, for I have been—"

"Enter, my son," Pepe's mother said hastily. "Enter and take your comfort. This house, which for too long has been saddened by your absence, is once again gladdened by your presence."

"My friend is with me."

"My son's friend is welcome."

Pepe said, "Come on in, Sam."

When Sam came through the doorway, it was as though he was accompanied by a blast of air so cold as to be numbing. It did not appear to affect Benito, but the two little girls stopped what they were doing and went to shiver in a corner. Pepe's mother stiffened, became less talkative, and did not look at Sam. But sardonic laughter glinted in the eyes of Benito, who seated himself on his *petate*. Pepe sat on his own bed and motioned Sam to a seat beside him.

"We followed the *tigre* far into the jungle," Pepe said. "There we found Lazario Rujan."

"I do hope you persuaded him to come back with you," Pepe's mother said quickly. "Señora Rujan has been beside herself with worry."

"Lazario will never come back, Mother, for he was so badly mauled by the *tigre*, the very *tigre* we followed, that there was no faint hope of his living. We buried him where he fell, because that was his wish, but we brought his rifle and his pack of deerskins back for Señora Rujan."

"Uncle Ruiz would be jumping for joy if he could jump at all," Benito observed sarcastically. "From this day on, he will be the most honored prophet in Muzo or anywhere else."

"Benito!" his mother said sharply.

"This isn't a village meeting, Mother, but the bosom of my own family. Here I should be allowed to say that I still think Uncle Ruiz is very foolish, for I do think this is so. At any rate, my brother and his friend have a right to know." He turned to Pepe and Sam. "This morning Uncle Ruiz addressed the entire village. He said that you," Benito nodded at Sam, "are a devil come to steal Pepe's substance and reduce him to beggary. He said also that, should you meet Lazario in the jungle, you would kill him. Now you return with Lazario's rifle, his pack of deerskins and a tale that he is dead. Can you not see how wonderfully everything worked out—for Uncle Ruiz?"

"That's silly!" Pepe blurted out.



"Of course," Benito agreed. "I know you didn't kill Lazario. You know it. Surely the *tigre* knows it; but who else knows or will believe? However, the villagers might have been less easily swayed had it not been for the *tigre* that came to Muzo."

"A *tigre* came to Muzo?" Pepe's interest quickened.

"Yes," and despite the knowing air he hoped he was achieving, Benito was carried away by the excitement his news created. "Señoras Benavides, Hidalgo and Ortega were doing their laundry when they saw the *tigre* looking from a corn patch at them. Señora Benavides snatched up her youngest, who was playing near, and all escaped. Uncle Ruiz declared that you," again Benito nodded at Sam, "are not only the *tigre* but you are also a devil that may enter as many bodies as you choose whenever you wish. Were you warmly greeted when you came back to Muzo just now?"

"Pablo Sanchez met us," Pepe said. "He jumped, threatened and waved a machete."

"Pablo is always jumping, threatening and waving a machete," Benito observed. "What else?"

"Ramon Benavides, Luis Ortega and Francisco Hidalgo waited upon us. They informed Sam that he might sleep in Muzo tonight, and no man will do him harm, but he must leave with daylight," Pepe told his brother.

"Are you going?" Benito asked Sam.

"He is not," Pepe answered for his friend. "He has promised to stay until he kills the *tigre*, and the very people who would

drive him out are those who will benefit most from his staying. The *tigre* has already killed Lazario. It will kill others."

"That's so!" Benito exclaimed.

"Where is the *tigre*?"

"Since no one saw it leave, it must still be in the corn."

"Was nothing done about it?"

Benito shrugged eloquently. "Do men beat a cornfield in which a *tigre* is known to lie? I believe they did set some sort of trap."

Pepe turned to Sam. "Do you think it is the same *tigre*?"

"It must be," Sam replied seriously. "This is where it would be found, since this is the only place where it can get food easily. But how will we get it out of the cornfield?"

"Bait it with a goat."

"You cannot afford to lose another goat, Pepe."

"We will not only bait it with a goat," Pepe said firmly, "but you yourself said that you, I and Brother Goat form a team that cannot be beaten. Brother Goat himself shall lure the *tigre* from the corn."

Making no immediate reply, Sam pursed thoughtful lips. It really hadn't been so very long, but it seemed that an age had passed since he'd come among these natives for the purpose of shooting a *tigre*. He'd been reliably informed that they

were poverty stricken in the extreme. Some men would fight devils and *tigres*, or the equivalent of *tigres*, for oil wells; some for diamonds; some for industrial empires; and some for the dream of having thirty-six or forty-eight goats. Where Sam had found a brave but wavering boy blindly ready to give his own life for the realization of his dream of a big herd of goats for a secure future, he now looked at a man who had found his own abilities, a new confidence in himself and his sure choice of action. Brother Goat represented much, for, without a billy, Pepe's flock was lost, anyhow. But much could be risked when the stakes were very high.

So Sam agreed finally, "That's a good idea."

The two friends chose a knoll overlooking the course the *tigre* would take when he left the cornfields to attack either the village or the goats. Then they brought Brother Goat from his corral and tethered him to a stake at the edge of the fields. The big billy wrinkled his nose, shook his horns and grunted angrily as the wind brought snatches of the *tigre's* scent to him. The enemy cat was still in the cornfields.

Just before darkness, Pepe, carrying the shotgun and electric torch, and Sam with his rifle took up positions on the knoll. A strange peace flowed into the boy's heart. Had he chosen to look behind him, he could have seen the fires of Muzo. Ahead was only jungle blackness, so dense and thick that it seemed he might walk upon it and mount up and up until, at last, he came to heights that only eagles knew. The threat of grim things to be seemed very faint and far off. Pepe felt that he could have sat there companionably with Sam forever and never asked anything more.

He did not know how many hours had passed when Brother Goat's angry bleat recalled him to the dangerous realities of the situation. He felt the familiar, cold fingers of fear caress his spine, but his thumb sought the torch's switch and the fingers of his left hand clamped tightly around the shotgun as he waited for Sam to give the designated signal. Brother Goat snorted.

An interminable time elapsed before Sam whispered, "Now!"

Pepe flicked the switch. A stream of light poured like a flow of golden water into the blackness and revealed the billy, all four feet braced, staring fixedly toward the gardens of Muzo. Some sixty feet beyond him, the tall grass, that seemed so much taller and thicker by night, than it ever did by day, rippled slightly. It was a sinister, terrible motion, as though some monstrous serpent pursued its undulating way through the growth. The short hair on the back of Pepe's neck prickled. He willed desperately for the rifle to speak and the shot to come.

As though sensing his partner's desperation, Sam whispered, "Wait! I must be sure."

Certain of his game and not in the least hurry, the *tigre* came nearer ... and ever nearer. Now, in the tall grass, an occasional splash of mottled hide was seen and once a fleeting view of the great head. Then the big cat came into that area which Brother Goat had either browsed or trampled and was seen very plainly. The billy lowered his head to make ready for a charge. Unafraid, but wanting to know what this situation was and why it was before planning a

counter move, the *tigre* halted for a split second. Exactly at that second, Sam's rifle cracked.

Swift as a striking bushmaster, the *tigre* whirled to bite at his own ribs. Then he was seen no more—but the rippling grass that marked his progress as he struggled back toward the gardens of Muzo rippled very slowly.

This time he was hit hard.

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The hut of Uncle Ruiz was lighted only by the fire that burned in front of its door. Sitting in the near-dark interior with Uncle Ruiz, Ramon Benavides, Francisco Hidalgo and Luis Ortega flinched and moved a little closer to each other when the rifle cracked.

Ramon Benavides whispered, "He has shot!"

"Had you not expected him to do so?" Only Uncle Ruiz remained calm.

"Suppose," Ramon voiced a doubt that at first he dared not express and then could not help uttering, "suppose he kills the *tigre*? That will prove him a man, and if he is a man, we have done a terrible injustice."

"You were with me that night we went to place the charm at his bed," Uncle Ruiz said. "With your own eyes you saw what he is."

"I saw. But—"

"The quetzal is never wrong, and the devil does not destroy his own," Uncle Ruiz said. "He will not kill the *tigre*. He may say he has hurt it, and tomorrow morning he will go into the cornfields with the false purpose of routing the *tigre*, but with the real aim of gaining time so that he may fulfill his mission in Muzo. Then—" Uncle Ruiz took up a small pouch, opened the drawstrings and dribbled a little powder onto the palm of his hand. His eyes gleamed in the firelight, and his old man's cackling laugh was such a terrible thing that the three with him shuddered anew.

"Enough powdered root of the *peyote* will make even a devil sleep!" Uncle Ruiz gloated. "Then, when he goes into the cornfield and risks the *tigre's* charge—" The sentence left hanging spoke volumes.

"You are sure he will wait until morning?" Luis Ortega asked uncertainly.

"Even a devil does not seek a wounded *tigre* at night."

"I do not like this," Ramon Benavides said firmly. "It is quite one thing to let a wounded *tigre* destroy this devil, since he would not heed our warning and leave Muzo of his own will. But Pepe Estrada will be with him, and Pepe has done nothing wrong. Why must he die, too?"

"Do you grow faint hearted, Ramon?" Uncle Ruiz asked scornfully. "Pepe has been warned not once but a dozen times that the devil is upon him. Since he chose to ignore all warnings, let him accept what befalls."

The three fell silent under the powerful spell of the soothsayer, the witch doctor. Finally, Luis Ortega, who was

never timid in ordinary circumstances, asked quaveringly, "How—how shall you make this devil partake of the *peyote* root?"

"Fear not." Uncle Ruiz cackled again. "I know how, and I will do it."

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## The Tigre in the Corn

For perhaps five seconds, that seemed to Pepe a much longer interval than any he had ever endured between the rising and the setting of the sun, he and Sam stayed where they were. The boy kept his light trained on the scene, but all he saw now was the blowing grass and Brother Goat, pawing the earth and shaking his horns as he strained toward the gardens of Muzo wherein the *tigre* had disappeared.

There was no sound except the murmur of the wind until Sam exclaimed, "Really plastered him that time, Pepe! Got him right good! He isn't going very far!"

"We must go get him," the boy said.

"We must," Sam agreed, "but not before morning. Tabby may not go sixty yards before he gives up the ghost. Or he may be lying there, waiting to explode like forty-nine tons of TNT over whomever or whatever comes near. When I go in for him, I want to see what I'm doing—and see clearly in all directions. Now let's bring the third member of this *tigre* hunting team up here. Tabby may decide Brother Goat's to blame for all his troubles and act accordingly."

The two went forward, Sam a little to one side and a little ahead. His rifle was half raised, with the safety off, ready to shoot on a split second's notice. Pepe gripped the shotgun and the light never wavered, although, even better than his



companion, he knew what they could be facing. Nothing was more tenacious of life than a *tigre*. It was hit, very hard hit—but was it lying dead within a few yards? Or was it merely lying still, renewing strength as it rested, while the wind-rippled grasses or the cornfields of Muzo hid it as completely as a wild turkey hides her nest?

There was no way to know—and nothing to do except what they were doing. Brother Goat had run his risk, and in so doing he had done his part well. Now they must do theirs and remove him from danger.

Then Pepe was near and the big billy stalked stiffly toward him. Kneeling, with the shotgun across his knees, Pepe held the light in his left hand, while he loosed the tether rope from the stake with his right. Taking both shotgun and light in his right hand, he drew Brother Goat close to him, encircling his friend's neck with an affectionate arm.

He called, "We're ready."

"When I back up to you, give me the light," Sam ordered.

"But—"

"Do as I say."

Sam backed up, thrust out his hand, and Pepe put the light in it.

Sam said tensely, "Take him up on the knoll and walk slowly."

Pepe walked very slowly, knowing as he did so that Sam was walking backward and following, lighting their retreat with

the torch and covering it with his rifle.

When they finally reached the knoll, Sam gasped, "Whew! That was the longest five minutes of my life! But we made it!"

For a moment, Pepe did not reply. The gallant billy licked his hand with a raspy tongue and a little wave of warm delight swept through the boy. Brother Goat had served his purpose and, if he were just an animal, it would now be proper to return him to the corral. But he was something more, he was really part of the team. He had been with them this far. It was right and just that he stay to the end.

"We made it," Pepe said finally. "What now?"

"I reckon we'd better stay right here. There's no telling what Tabby will do, but there'd better be somebody between him and the village. He may try to get into it."

The man and boy sat side by side, straining into the darkness, while Brother Goat wandered to the end of his tether. He bent his head for a mouthful of grass, and there followed the noisy sound of his chewing. Presently the night began to lift. The gardens of Muzo, the tall grasses, became visible, and Pepe felt an inward tension mount. He sensed the same tautness in Sam.

Daylight was not far off. An hour, perhaps three-quarters of an hour, would bring the final skirmish of a battle that had started four years ago, when Pepe's father, armed only with a knife, had battled the *tigre* that would have killed his goats. It was a very short time, but waiting for the dawn seemed an eternity and more than human nerves could bear.

Brother Goat's rasping snort was the spark that touched off the explosion. Sam leaped to his feet, leveling the rifle as he did so. Pepe sprang up beside him. They strained into the gloom and distinguished the tall grasses clearly. Farther off, and vaguely, they could see the cornfields of Muzo. Then Pepe turned to look at Brother Goat and stifled a nervous giggle.

"He's looking toward the village."

The thatched huts of Muzo were half seen and half hidden in a light that was neither night nor day, but a part of each. The fires, replenished from time to time during the night as a defense should the *tigre* come, leaped brightly. Pepe saw Uncle Ruiz, walking without a stick and going to his mother's house. The old man stopped at the door, called and entered when bidden.

Pepe frowned. "Uncle Ruiz visits my mother. Why?"

Sam shrugged. "Isn't he the old coot who started all this devil business?"

"Yes."

"He's probably trying to mooch a handout before the village wakes up." Sam raised the rifle to his shoulder and squinted over the sights. "Not quite light enough. We'll give it another fifteen or twenty minutes, Pepe."

They faced the gardens, forgetting Uncle Ruiz, for he was not important now. Then Brother Goat snorted again and Sam turned, frowning.

"What the blazes?"

Uncle Ruiz had left the house of Pepe's mother and was coming toward them, an earthenware bowl in each hand.

Sam spoke so only Pepe could hear, "Tell that fellow to clear out. We'll have all we can do without looking after him."

About to speak, Pepe was forestalled by Uncle Ruiz's greeting. "*Hola*, Pepe and Señor *Norteamericano*."

Pepe's wonder mounted and with it, anxiety. Uncle Ruiz, trafficker in devils, was suddenly and unexpectedly the kindly and friendly patriarch. There was something wrong with the picture.

"I bring a bowl of goat's milk for each of you brave men," Uncle Ruiz quavered. "Your mother sent it. Will you please hold Brother Devil so that I may come near?"

"Tell him to make it quick!" Sam snapped. "He shouldn't be fooling around here at all!"

"Be quick!" Even as he spoke, Pepe drew Brother Goat close to him. "We go to find the *tigre* in a matter of minutes."

Uncle Ruiz came up, a toothless smile framed on his lips. His eyes were gentle, and his snow-white hair made a soft halo on his head. He handed a bowl of goat's milk to Sam and one to Pepe.

"We heard the great rifle speak in the night," he said. "Is the *tigre* dead?"

"He may be, but we know only that he is badly wounded," Pepe answered. "We go in to find him as soon as the light is strong enough."

Sam drank his milk in two gulps and Pepe followed suit. As they gave the empty bowls back to Uncle Ruiz, Sam spoke sharply, "Now go, old man! This is no place for you!"

"I go," Uncle Ruiz said meekly. "Ah! Should you kill the *tigre*, Muzo will never forget this day."

Uncle Ruiz left and, forgetting him at once, Pepe and Sam turned to face the gardens into which the wounded *tigre* had made his way. The night departed more swiftly as the newborn day became aware of its own strength and flexed its muscles. They saw the gardens clearly now and the jungle beyond and, finally, even the birds that flitted about the jungle trees.

Pepe waited for Sam to give the signal to go into action and, when he did not, prompted him with, "Is this not light enough?"

For a moment, the redhead did not answer; then he mumbled, "What?"

"We may see all that is necessary now."

"Oh—oh, yes."

Pepe looked at his companion sharply, for again the reply was delayed and the tongue thick, like that of Pablo Sanchez when he partook of too much corn beer. Nevertheless, Sam rose and took the lead. Pepe wondered, however, for he did

so without glancing over his rifle sights to make sure he could see clearly. About to prompt him, Pepe forebore. Sam knew what he was doing.

Brother Goat, scenting battle in the offing, pranced stiffly to the end of his rope and, for a moment, Pepe had difficulty holding him in. He caught a loop of the rope, then another, and fought the powerful billy back to him. He could not keep the cold hand of fear from caressing his spine or the dire voice of warning from whispering to him. Should they find the *tigre* dead, there would be no problem. Should it be merely wounded, it would certainly charge. If they were unable to stop it with their guns before it reached them, one or both hunters would die. And could they stop it? A *tigre* maddened by wounds was a berserk thing.

The trio reached the stake to which Brother Goat had been tethered, and Sam paused. He dropped one hand to the pole, as though he wanted to rest on it while studying the situation. But he trembled like a sapling in a gale and his knees seemed limp as a stalk of uprooted corn in the sun.

Pepe asked in sudden alarm, "Are you all right?"

"Sure. I—I'm all right." He nodded. "That—that's where he went."

They went to the place indicated, and Pepe saw for himself that Brother Goat had never cropped or trampled the grass in such a fashion. Nor had Brother Goat left the bright red stain that sprinkled the grass like rain drops for five feet on either side. The trail was easy to follow, but, as they neared the gardens of Muzo, Sam reeled. Instead of holding his rifle at a

ready position, he clutched it across his chest and gripped it desperately with both hands.

It was then that the *tigre* growled.

Sam halted, and Pepe stopped beside him. The *tigre* was indeed hurt and badly hurt. But that full-throated, rumbling growl had never come from the throat of a beast near death. The *tigre* had rested while the night hours passed. He not only could but would still challenge and fight his enemies.

Pepe tried and failed to pinpoint the growl. At first it seemed deep in the corn, then almost at the very edge, then again it was deep. Pepe knew only that the *tigre* was in the corn and that it would charge.

Sam said weakly, "My—my head's spinning, Pepe."

The rifle fell from nerveless fingers. Cushioned by grass, the trigger did not trip and the cartridge did not detonate. Sam swayed and would have fallen had not Pepe let go of Brother Goat's lead rope and caught his friend.

Precisely at that second, sickeningly nearer than Pepe had thought it could be, the *tigre* launched its charge. Gripping the shotgun with his right hand, Pepe knelt to ease Sam down in the grass, for he would not let him fall. But even as he knelt, he knew that he had lost. He needed only a split second, but, before he could rise and shoot, the *tigre* would be upon him.

His eyes became magnifying lenses through which he viewed the scene as though from a great distance. He saw the *tigre*, no more than three strong leaps away. And he saw

Brother Goat, snorting his fury, charge in from the side to take the spotted killer cat full in the ribs.

Brother Goat retreated to gather momentum for another charge. The *tigre* paused to turn upon this rash creature that had dared challenge it. Pepe stifled the scream that rose in his throat.

Brother Goat's lead rope, left dragging, was hopelessly entangled in the tall grasses. The big billy could neither maneuver nor run, and he knew it. Warrior that he was, Brother Goat awaited the charge with head down and horns lowered. As he eased Sam onto the grass and rose to aim the shotgun, Pepe knew that, even though he might now save himself, he couldn't possibly hope to save Brother Goat. Two more leaps would carry the *tigre* onto him, and the big cat was in the midst of the first leap when Pepe gained his feet.

The *tigre* came down—to plant his one good front paw squarely in the trap set by the men of Muzo.

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It was not an official *fiesta* time in Muzo, but for two days *fiesta* had held sway. Carried to his own sleeping bag by many willing hands, Sam had slept until the evening of that day and awakened wanting to know what had happened.

The men of Muzo had told him, each in his own way, of how Pepe had run to within a yard of the trapped *tigre* and filled its head with buckshot—and was it not admirably foresighted of them to have set the trap? Everyone in Muzo could claim



a share in ending the career of this great and dangerous beast that had come so perilously near to ending the lives of Pepe, Sam and Brother Goat.

Señora Rujan had informed Sam that she knew now that her husband had indeed been killed by a *tigre*, and not by a devil, and to thank him for bringing Lazario's rifle and packet of deerskins to her.

The three younger men involved in the *peyote* powder plot—Uncle Ruiz would admit nothing—had confessed to Sam, and all had begged his pardon for being so gullible. Devils indeed there were, and no man would deny them, but never again would any of them be so foolish as to think a quetzal could call a devil up. Luis Ortega had extracted that full story from Uncle Ruiz.

"It is past understanding!" Uncle Ruiz wailed to Luis. "When a quetzal calls, he always calls a devil."

"Who told you that, old man?" Luis asked.

"Why, I cannot remember that anyone ever told me, but it must be."

"You are a foolish old man!" Luis said sternly.

After that, nobody paid any attention to Uncle Ruiz, for a time of great sadness was at hand. Sam Jackson was leaving Muzo. Ramon Benavides, who did not have nearly a full load of pottery, but who hoped to atone in some measure for the wrongs he had done the visitor, would go with him as far as the trader's at San Juan de la Rio. Sam Jackson was surpassingly wise in regard to some matters, but he was

stupid where burros were concerned, and Ramon would both pack and drive his burros for him.

Pepe stood wistfully aloof, wanting no part of this and wishing with all his heart that it needn't be, but too proud to say so. He watched Ramon expertly pack the big *tigre* skin and Sam Jackson's camp gear on the burros, until only the two great guns were left, and he waited for them to be packed. Before they were, Sam Jackson caught up the shotgun in one hand, a case of shells in the other and came to Pepe. He laid the shells on the ground at his young friend's feet and pressed the shotgun into his hands.

"It is yours, Pepe."

Too overwhelmed to speak, the boy said nothing.

Sam Jackson did not smile as he said, "With this you may protect your goats from whatever threatens them. When I come back to Muzo, which I cannot do next year but shall certainly do the year following, for I wish to go hunting again with my friend, I shall expect to find you a very rich man. Instead of thirty-six or forty-eight goats, you may have sixty or even seventy-two." He extended a hand. "*Adios*, Pepe."

Pepe shook the proffered hand warmly. "*Adios*, Sam."

Just before the trail entered the jungle, Sam turned to wave to the whole village of Muzo. Then he disappeared. It was a very sad time for everybody. Even Pablo Sanchez was crying. But on turning around, they all discovered two things. Uncle Ruiz, finding that nobody would listen to him, had gone off to sulk near a place where the little stream sent

a trickle of water into a back eddy and formed a deep puddle of mud. Brother Goat, choosing a time when the whole village of Muzo seemed to be so well occupied, had jumped out of the corral and, not having to be hit over the head by knocking opportunity, seized this rare chance. With the whole village watching, he butted Uncle Ruiz into the deep, soft mud, where anything could get very dirty but nothing could get hurt.

So the people of Muzo forgot their tears and began the new and more enlightened life that all of them were to lead with gales of side-splitting laughter.

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# Jim Kjelgaard

was born in New York City. Happily enough, he was still in the pre-school age when his father decided to move the family to the Pennsylvania mountains. There young Jim grew up among some of the best hunting and fishing in the United States. He commented: "If I had pursued my scholastic duties as diligently as I did deer, trout, grouse, squirrel, etc., I might have had better report cards!"

Jim Kjelgaard worked at various jobs—trapper, teamster, guide, surveyor, factory worker and laborer. When he was in his late twenties, he decided to become a full-time writer. He succeeded in his wish. Several hundred of his short stories and articles and quite a few books for young people have been published.

He indicated his favorite hobbies as hunting, fishing, lifelong interest in conservation, dogs and questing for new stories. He has described some of these searches in this way: "Story hunts have led me from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic Circle to Mexico City. Stories, like gold, are where you find them. You may discover one three thousand miles from home or, as in *The Spell of the White Sturgeon* and *Hi Jolly!*, right on your own door step."

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# BOOKS BY JIM KJELGAARD

Big Red  
Rebel Siege  
Forest Patrol  
Buckskin Brigade  
Chip, the Dam Builder  
Fire Hunter  
Irish Red  
Kalak of the Ice  
A Nose for Trouble  
Snow Dog  
The Story of Geronimo  
Stormy  
Cochise, Chief of Warriors  
Trailing Trouble  
The Explorations of Pere Marquette  
The Spell of the White Sturgeon  
Wild Trek  
Outlaw Red  
The Lost Wagon  
Lion Hound  
The Coming of the Mormons  
Cracker Barrel Trouble Shooter  
Trading Jeff and His Dog  
Desert Dog  
Haunt Fox  
The Oklahoma Land Run  
Duck-footed Hound  
Double Challenge

Swamp Cat  
The Land Is Bright  
Rescue Dog of the High Pass  
Hi Jolly!  
Wolf Brother  
Wildlife Cameraman  
Ulysses and His Woodland Zoo  
Tigre

[The end of *Tigre* by Jim Kjelgaard]