

# The Most Dangerous Game

*By Richard Connell*

OFF THERE to the right--somewhere--is a large island," said Whitney." It's rather a mystery--" "What island is it?"

Rainsford asked.

"The old charts call it `Ship-Trap Island,'" Whitney replied." A suggestive name, isn't it? Sailors have a curious fear of the place. I don't know why. Some superstition--"

"Can't see it," remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness upon the yacht.

"You've good eyes," said Whitney, with a laugh," and I've seen you shoot a moose moving in the brown fall bushes at four hundred yards, but even you can't see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night."

"Ugh! It's like moist black velvet.", admitted Rainsford.

"It will be light enough in Rio," promised Whitney. "We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey's. We should have some good hunting in Brazil. Great sport, hunting."

"The best sport in the world," agreed Rainsford.

"For the hunter," amended Whitney. "Not for the jaguar."

"You're a big-game hunter, not a philosopher." said Rainsford. "Who cares how a jaguar feels?" "Perhaps the jaguar does," observed Whitney.

"Bah! They've no understanding."

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

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "Whitney, be a realist. The world is made up of two classes--the hunters and the hunted. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we've passed that island yet?"

"I can't tell in the dark. I hope so."

"Why?" asked Rainsford.

"The place has a reputation--a bad one."

"Cannibals?" suggested Rainsford.

"Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn't live in such a God-forsaken place. Didn't you notice that the crew's nerves seemed a bit jumpy today?" replied Whitney.

"They were a bit strange, now you mention it. Even Captain Nielsen--"

"Yes, even that tough old Swede, who'd go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. All I could get out of him was `This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.' Then he said to me, very gravely, 'Don't you feel anything?'--as

if the air about us was actually poisonous. Now, you mustn't laugh when I tell you this--I did feel something like a sudden chill." commented Whitney.

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

"Pure imagination," said Rainsford.

"Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think evil is a tangible thing--with wavelengths, just as sound and light have. An evil place can, so to speak, broadcast vibrations of evil. Anyhow, I'm glad we're getting out of this zone. Well, I think I'll turn in now, Rainsford."

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe up on the afterdeck." "Good night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast."

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford.

Rainsford, reclining in a chair, smoking his favorite tobacco in his pipe." It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids--"

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

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, puzzled. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the shots had come. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; realized he had reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. A certain coolheadedness had come to him; it was not the first time he had been in a tight place. There was a chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht. But no one heard. The lights of the yacht became faint and ever-vanishing fireflies; then they were blotted out entirely by the night.

Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and so he swam in that direction. For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more and then--

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high screaming sound, the sound of an animal in anguish and terror.

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

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes of swimming brought another sound to his ears--the most welcome he had ever heard--the sound of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He was almost on the rocks before he saw them. With his remaining strength he dragged

himself from the swirling waters. Gasping, his hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. Dense jungle came down to the very edge of the cliffs. What perils that tangle of trees and underbrush might hold for him, he did not know. All he knew was that he was safe from his enemy, the sea, and that utter weariness was on him. He flung himself down at the jungle edge and tumbled into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigor; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked at him, almost cheerfully.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in such a hostile place?

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he landed, he stopped.

Some wounded things had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down and the moss was cut up; one patch of weeds was stained red. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford's eye and he picked it up. It was an empty bullet shell.

"A twenty-two," he remarked. "That's odd. It must have been a fairly large animal too. I suppose the first three shots I heard was when the hunter flushed his prey and wounded it. The last shot was when he trailed it here and finished it." He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find--the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along; night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he walked along he saw to his great astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous building. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of an enormous mansion; it was set on a high cliff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to the sea.

"Illusion," thought Rainsford. But it was no fantasy. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet above it all hung an air of unreality.

He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly, as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard steps within; the door remained closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker, and let it fall. The door opened then--opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring. The first thing Rainsford's eyes detected was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen--a gigantic man, with a black beard to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barreled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart.

Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

"Don't be alarmed," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming. "I'm no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City."

The threatening look in the eyes did not change. The revolver pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words. He was dressed in uniform.

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a yacht. I am hungry."

The man's only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man's free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in dress clothes. He came toward Rainsford and held out his

hand.

In a refined voice marked by a slight accent he said, "It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home."

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff." Rainsford's first impression was that the man was an impressive looking man. He was tall, past middle age; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military mustache were as black as the night. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheekbones, a sharpcut nose, a spare, dark face--the face of a man used to giving orders. Turning to the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his gun, saluted, and withdrew.

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he is deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack," said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I."

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be chatting here. You need to be comfortable. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most-restful spot."

Ivan had reappeared, and the general spoke to him with lips that moved but gave forth no sound.

"Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford," said the general. "I was about to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge bedroom with a massive canopied bed that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor and was made specifically for Zaroff.

The dining room to which Ivan led him was amazing. There was a magnificence about it, with its oaken panels, high ceiling, and its tables where twenty men could sit down to eat. About the hall were mounted heads of many animals--lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

"You'll have a cocktail, Mr. Rainsford," he suggested. The cocktail was surpassingly good; and, Rainsford noted, the table was laid out with linen, crystal, silver, and china.

Half apologetically General Zaroff said, "We do our best to preserve the services of civilization here. Please forgive any mistakes. We are well off the beaten track, you know. Do you think champagne has suffered from its long ocean trip?"

"Not in the least," declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a most thoughtful and affable host. But there was one small trait of the general's that made Rainsford uncomfortable. Whenever he looked up from his plate he found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly.

"Were you surprised that I recognized your name? You see, I read all books on hunting. I have but one obsession in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt." said General Zaroff.

"You have some wonderful heads here," said Rainsford as he ate the finest steak he had ever had in his life. "That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw."

"Oh, that fellow. Yes, he was a monster."

"Did he charge you?"

"Hurled me against a tree," said the general. "Fractured my skull. But I got the brute."

"I've always thought," said Rainsford, "that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game."

For a moment the general did not reply. Then he said slowly, "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game." He sipped his wine. "Here in my preserve on this island," he said in the same slow tone, "I hunt more dangerous game."

Rainsford expressed his surprise. "Is there a big game on this island?"

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island."

"What have you imported, general?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford."

"Wait, we'll have some fabulous hunting, you and I," said the general. "I am so glad to have your company."

"But what game, what animal--" began Rainsford.

"I'll tell you," said the general. "You will be amused, I know. I think I may say that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation. May I pour you another glass of wine?"

"Thank you, general."

The general filled both glasses, and said, "God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. He was a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made for me, to shoot sparrows with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed."

The general puffed at his cigarette.

"I continue to hunt--grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodiles in the Ganges, rhinoceroses in East Africa. It was in Africa that the Cape buffalo hit me and laid me up for six months. As soon as I recovered I went to the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard they were unusually cunning. They weren't." The General sighed. "They were no match for a hunter with his wits about him, and a high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting is my life."

"So, what did you do?," asked Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I had no wish to go to pieces," he said. " Now, mine is an investigative mind, Mr. Rainsford. Which is why I enjoy the problems of the hunt."

"So," continued the general, "I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. Can you guess the answer, Mr. Rainsford."

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting has become too easy. I always got my prey. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette.

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

Rainsford leaned across the table, listening to what his host was saying.

"It came to me as an inspiration for what I must do," the general went on.

"And that was?"

The general smiled a quiet smile. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said. "A new animal? You're joking." Said Rainsford.

"Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one! So I bought this island, built this house, and I do my hunting here. The island is perfect for my purposes--there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps--"

"But the animal, General Zaroff? What game is it that you hunt?"

"Oh," said the general, "it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a prey with which I can match my wits."

Rainsford's confusion showed in his face.

"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said, 'What are the characteristics of an ideal prey?' And the answer was, of course, 'It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.'"

"But *no* animal can think," objected Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "there is *one* that can."

"But you can't mean--" gasped Rainsford.

"And why not?"

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a gruesome joke."

"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."

"Hunting? Great Guns, General Zaroff, what you speak of is *murder*."

The general laughed. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. "I can't believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to harbor romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war--"

"Did not make me overlook cold-blooded murder," finished Rainsford stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. "How extraordinarily humorous you are!" he said. "I'll wager you'll forget your notions after you go hunting with me. You've got a genuine new *thrill* in store for you, Mr. Rainsford."

"Thank you. I'm a *hunter*, not a *murderer*."

"Again that unpleasant word", said the general, " But I think I can show you that your sense of right and wrong is quite ill founded."

"Yes?"

"Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my gift? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt only the scum of the earth: sailors from tramp ships--lassars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels--a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than them."

"But they are men," said Rainsford hotly.

"Precisely," said the general. "That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can think, after a fashion. So they are dangerous."

"But where do you get them?"

"This island is called Ship Trap," he answered. "Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes, when heaven is not kind, I help it a bit. Come to the window with me."

Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. Rainsford's eyes saw only blackness, and then, as the general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none; giant rocks with razor edges can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said, "I have electricity and try to be civilized here."

"Civilized? And you shoot down men?"

"Dear me, what an honorable young man you are! I assure you I do not do the thing you suggest. That would be impolite. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. A very inferior group of men, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to sailing than to the jungle."

"It's a game, you see," pursued the general blandly. "I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. I follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range. If my victim eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him "--the general smiled--" he loses."

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

"Oh," said the general, "I give him his option, of course. He does not need to play that game if he doesn't wish to. If he does not want to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once served as an official torturer. He has his own ideas of sport. Mr. Rainsford, regularly they choose to hunt."

"And if *they* win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost," he said. Then he added, hastily: "I don't wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs."

"The dogs?"

"This way, please. I'll show you."

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering light and Rainsford could see moving about their huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their hounds eyes glittered greenly.

"A rather good lot, I think," observed the general. "They are let out at seven o'clock every night. If anyone should try to get into my house--or out of it—they would attack."

"And now, I want to show you my new collection of heads," said the general, "Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford suddenly, "that you will excuse me tonight, General Zaroff. I'm really not feeling well."

"Well, I suppose that's only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night's sleep. Tomorrow you'll feel like a new man, I'll bet." Commented Zaroff, "We'll hunt, tomorrow, eh? I've one rather promising victim."

Rainsford was hurrying from the room before the general finished..

"Sorry you can't go with me tonight," called Zaroff. "I rather expect a good hunt--a big, strong, black. He looks resourceful--Well, good night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fiber of his being, but Rainsford could not quiet his brain. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. The lights of the chateau were out now, and it was dark and silent. Below in the courtyard, there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were the hounds. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze



when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint shot of a pistol. General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was considerate, asking about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint."

To Rainsford's questioning glance the general said, "Boredom."

Taking a second helping of crêpes Suzette, the general explained: "The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. They do stupid and obvious things. It's most annoying. Will you have another glass of champagne, Mr. Rainsford?"

"General," said Rainsford firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting--"

"I wish to go today," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. Then suddenly, General Zaroff's face brightened.

He filled Rainsford's glass with wine.

"Tonight," said the general, "we will hunt--you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, general," he said. "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find *my* idea of sport more diverting than *Ivan's*?"

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

"You don't mean--" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a woman worthy of my steel--at last." The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said enthusiastically. "Your brain is against mine. Your skill against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess."

"And if I win--" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge my defeat if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff. "My yacht will place you on the mainland near a town." The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

"Oh, you can trust me," said the Cossack. "I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case--But why discuss that now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of champagne, unless--"

The general sipped his wine.

Then a businesslike air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, and a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a nap after lunch. You'll hardly have time for that, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I won't follow you until after dark.. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? Goodbye, Mr. Rainsford, Good bye." General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a sack of food, a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a revolver.

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear headed when the chateau gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped, and was taking stock of himself and the situation. He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a frame of water.

"I'll give him a trail he'll never be able to follow," muttered Rainsford. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again. Night found him weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches. He knew it would be insane to blunder on through the dark. His need for rest was imperative. A big tree with a thick trunk was nearby, and, taking care not to leave the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so zealous a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that trail through the jungle. But perhaps the general was a devil--

The night crawled by slowly and sleep did not visit Rainsford. Toward morning the cry of some startled bird focused Rainsford's attention in that direction. Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb and, through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. . . . That which was approaching was a man.

It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic--a small automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his cigarettes; its smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were traveling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the branch where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come..

The air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could follow an extremely difficult trail; only by the merest chance had Zaroff failed to see his prey.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through him. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The General was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The trap was finished at last. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes. So intent was Zaroff on stalking his prey that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree crashed down and struck the general on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his shoulder, and Rainsford heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

"Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within the sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay mancatcher. You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed. But I shall be back. I shall be back."

Rainsford took up his flight again, a desperate, hopeless flight that carried him on for some hours. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins

Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. The muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort, he tore his feet loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand.

His hands were tightly closed. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so. He began to dig furiously.

The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew Zaroff was approaching. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see the general, nor could he see the pit. He lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. He leaped up, then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with an electric torch in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has killed one of my best dogs. Again you score. Now, let's see what you can do against my whole pack. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was a distant sound, faint and wavering, but he knew it. Zaroff was using the dogs.

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him. The baying of the dogs drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. Rainsford climbed a tree, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes, he saw General Zaroff; just ahead of him Rainsford made out another figure; it was the giant Ivan, and he seemed pulled forward by some unseen force; Rainsford knew that Ivan must be holding the dogs on a leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young tree and to it he fastened his hunting knife; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The barking of the dogs stopped, and Rainsford's heart stopped too. They must have reached the knife.

He climbed excitedly up a tree and looked back. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw that General Zaroff was still on his feet. Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not completely failed.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A gap filled with sky showed between the trees dead ahead, as the hounds came closer. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. He reached it. It was a cliff plunging down to the sea. Across a bay he could see Zaroff's chateau. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped off the cliff, far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the General stopped. For some minutes he stood looking at the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask and lit a cigarette.

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner. With it he had a bottle of Pol Roger and half a bottle of champagne. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his prey had escaped him; of course, the American hadn't played the game--so thought the general. In his library he read, to soothe himself. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so, before turning on his light, he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called, "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there. "Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?" "Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."  
The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a feast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford." . . .

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.