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The Terrible Captain of the Captured Panama

KEY WEST FLA., April 27.—Propelled by the unmitigated efforts of some two hundred and fifty newspaper correspondents Key West furnishes a vast amount of news to the public. But if anything happens in another corner of the globe, Key West is the last place to hear of it. Under the present conditions of crowded cables, Key West is as remote and as silent as a lone reef until everything has finished vibrating, and then by reason of time-worn newspapers it achieves a separate and belated vibration of its own.

It was only lately that Key West had come to understand that when the Spanish steamship *Panama* left New York her officers and passengers had been very confident, very talkative, in their pride. Key West understands that the Spaniards boasted they were sure of doing certain things and they were also sure of doing certain other things. Key West understands they were full of taunts.

As everybody knows, the *Panama* was brought into harbor today, the prize of the *Mangrove* and the *Indiana*; and this article is to relate a change that has come over the spirit of the *Panama*.

She has lain all day in the sunshine of the bay with United States marines pacing her decks and with four armed jackies lounging under the awnings. Her crew, very dirty and a most remarkably diversified collection, crowded the rail with the passengers, and proved that to be captured in war is to cause a most extraordinary demand upon the linen supply. They also were still haggard from their uncertainty of mind during the first few hours after capture. They were a sleepy, pale, dead-gone crowd, with eyes that roamed suspiciously over the marines, approaching boats, everything. They did not know but what something might happen.

The marines looked very grim. The jack tars looked more grim.

About 4 o'clock a government tug came alongside, and, withdrawing the naval guard, deposited on board the crowded steamer a formidable array of three United States deputy marshals. The tug then steamed away, leaving the marshals and their charge far out and alone in the bay.

There was a discussion on the quarterdeck. All the passengers crowded aft to overhear it. There was a boy who kept first giggling and then almost weeping. There was a girl who had temporarily forgotten the feminine arts of preparation and pose. There were some ten officers in more or less soiled duck, smoking cigarettes with the air of men who found life intolerable.

The chief engineer, who spoke English like a tourist with an English passport, had been talking to the marshal in charge. It seems the captain wanted to go ashore to see the British Consul, but he was afraid. Afraid, mind you; this thundering, brass-bound captain was afraid. Then up spake the marshal, a collarless man but certain of himself.

“Well, I’ll take him ashore,” said he to the chief engineer, “and I’ll guarantee he won’t be hurt either.”

When the captain and chief engineer, accompanied by the marshal, stepped down the side into *The World's* launch the remaining officers, the passengers and the crew thronged the rail, making a fringe of pallid faces from the stem to the stern of the *Panama*. The launch swung away for a moment and the waiting Spanish captain remained hanging to the brass rail of the gangway. He seemed about to fall. His face was yellow and lined like an ape's. If he had strutted in New York he was now a miserable man.

On the way to the dock nobody could help wondering what would happen when the inflammable populace saw two Spaniards in their streets.

The Spanish captain smoked hard. The Spanish chief engineer smoked hard, too; but that was all. In the meantime he talked coolly of the shipping in the harbor. He might have been Scotch.

The launch fastened alongside of a pile of palmetto logs. And it came to pass that these palmetto logs were absolutely the things to betray a man in terror. Their rounded surfaces made difficult footing at best, but a man with weak knees was bound to disclose it. And so the palmetto logs made a singular exhibition of the terrible captain of the *Panama*. One felt ashamed to scrutinize a creature who was the victim of such uncontrollable legs. He shambled, tottered, almost fell, caught himself, almost fell again and finally reached ground.

Nothing happened. Key West, enervated from too much excitement, slept in dust-thickened sunshine.

But the palmetto logs avenged New York.