LOST GLAMOR
CHAPTER IX
DARKNESS engulfed them gradually as the small mule caravan moved farther into the jungle, but the matted roof of trees above them kept off the heaviest force of the rain.

force of the rain.

For the first hour along the slippery trail there was a constant checking of mules and luggage by the muleteer, the Indian servant boys and Renaldo. Then, satisfied the baggage was secure and the mules arranged in the best order possible, they settled down to the arduous, monotonous task of sticking onto the muscular little animals as they made their little animals as they made their way over steep, slippery roots and pulled themselves out of mud

Barry, mopping the water from his face, peered ahead at Allison's slight figure beginning to slump in the saddle. "How you coming?"

his face, peered ahead at Amison's slight figure beginning to slump in the saddle. "How you coming?" he called.

When she didn't answer, he spurred his mule ahead at a wide spot in the trall and came alongside her. There was a look of strained pain on her face under the rivulets of water.

"Anything wrong?" Honest concern and humorous malice blended nicely in Barry's voice.

She pulled up the corners of her mouth in angry imitation of mirth. "Wrong?" she echoed, her voice wobbling shrilly. She raised one trembling hand and pushed back tendrils of escaping hair, with a fluttering laugh. "What could be wrong?" she scoffed, bitterly. "Beyond being broken in 16 pleces, every tooth in my head shaken out by this fiendish beast of a mule, and baked and drowned at the same time. I'm just fine. How are all your family?"

Barry threw back his head with a laugh. "It hasn't touched your disposition yet," he said.

"If I ever find out," she added vehemently, "that there's any sither way of getting into that plantation than over this torture rack, I'll shoot Renaldo right in the middle of that beautiful back of his and draw and quarter him with my own hands."

Renaldo turned about in his saddle with a dismayed smile. "After an hour or so," he suggested, "we might stop for an early lunch."

"You can put me right in the kettle," Allison blazed. "I'll be

"You can put me right in the kettle," Allison blazed. "I'll be dead and pounded tender by then."

THE rain went steadily on. By afternoon the trail was a quagmire and the mules' progress painfully slow. Allison had revived somewhat during the pause for lunch—enough to resent Renaldo's plea that she go back to Puerto Barrios.

"Have I held you up this morning?" she demanded indignantly.

"No." Renaldo admitted, his sharp, dark eyes brooding over her pale face, "but I can't bear to see you suffer."

"You'll have to bear it," snapped Allison. "Do you want me to get

"You'll have to bear it," snapped Allison. "Do you want me to get repressions?"

As the afternoon wore on the jungle grew denser, the trees larger. The buzz of insects rose in a heavy pall of sound. The jungle seemed suddenly to have closed in around them.

Allison turned and motioned Barry to crowd his mule closer. He thought he caught a frightened glint in her wide eyes. She began to talk brightly.

"I have some Mayan knives that were dug from around here," she told him. "Father sent them to me once. Did you know this was Mayan country?"

Renaldo smiled back at them. "It was the chicle scouts looking for many the server was the discourse of the server was the discourse of the server was the server wa

Renaldo smiled back at them. "It was the chicle scouts looking for zapote trees who discovered the Mayan ruins," he said. "So, you might say, if it were not for the gum chewers, the ancient civilization might never have been known to historians."
"I wish I'd had that argument to use when I was a kid," laughed Barry. "I never could convince mother that I was abetting culture with my gum chewing."

ture with my gum chewing."

The light moment was broken by Allison's scream. Her mule had stepped into one of the treacherous suck holes. The mud was rising rapidly around his knees.

"What can I do?" she screamed.

RENALDO called curt directions to his own beast and tugged on his reins. It backed slowly toward Allison's until its tail touched the other mule's desperately fialling head. The struggling little animal seemed reassured. It grasped the lead mule's tail with its strong white teeth. Renaldo lesped off and pulled. His mule strained forward. Allison's smaller animal held on grimly, his legs kicking feebly at the sucking mud. Slowly he was pulled free and scrambled like a mountain goat up onto firmer ground.

onto firmer ground.

"Bravo!" Allison patted the mule's heaving side. "Plucky little devils, aren't they?" she cried to Barry. "I'm going to call him

Cassidy. Look at him hopping around like a sand fies."

Renaldo drew his mule up at

around like a sand fiea."

Renaldo drew his mule up at the first good specimen of zapote tree. Allison examined it eagerly. She turned to Barry with a flash of her old spirit.

"That's what I'm going to climb when I learn to be a chiclero," she said arrogantly.

"You see that other tree so close to the zapote?" Renaldo went on. "That is the compadre tree—very poisonous. Its leaves drip into the eyes of the chicleros. Many have their cychalls destroyed."

Allison didn't answer him. She dug her heels abruptly into the sides of Cassidy and went on, but Barry could see the shiver of horror that went through her slim body.

They were within a mile of the estancia where they would stop for the night, balancing their last hoarded strength against these final minutes—when it happened. The hindmost mule of the baggage train stumbled wearily into a vicious suck hole. The two small trunks, lashed to its back were

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