

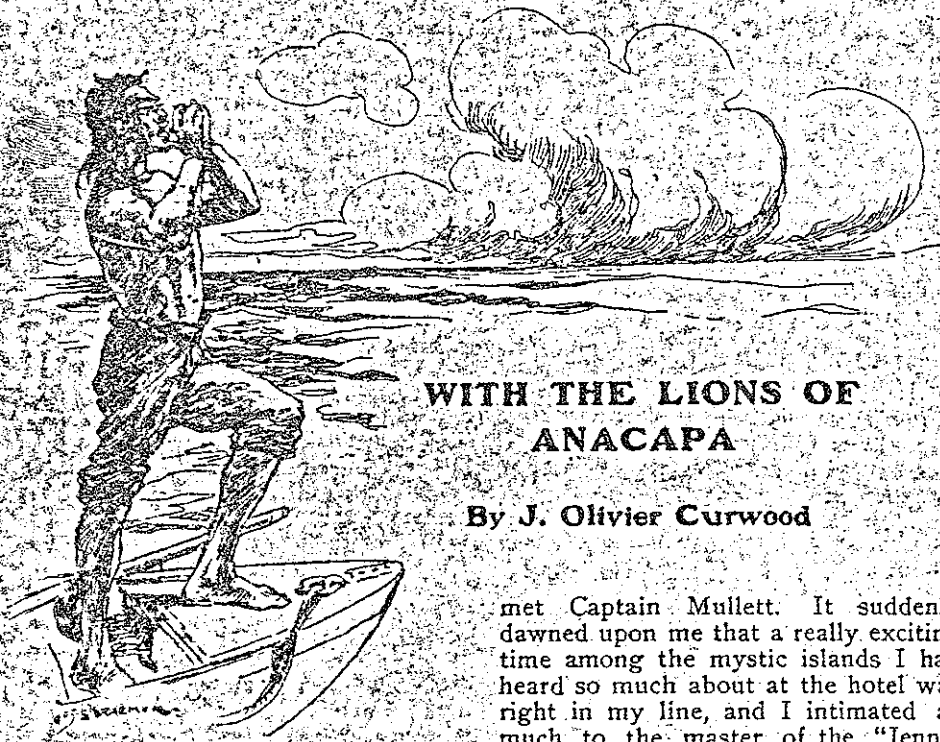
With the Lions of Anacapa
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The ERA MAGAZINE

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WITH THE LIONS OF ANACAPA

By J. Olivier Curwood

"Ugh!"

"Did it hurt much, sonny?"

"Si, señor!"

If it had not been for little Miguel's mishap I would not have accompanied him down past the crumbling old convent walls to the Bay, and if I had not gone to the Bay I probably would never have met Captain Mullett, that jolly, weather-beaten old salt whose name is familiar, by proxy, at least, to half the little children and grown-up folks the world over, and who catches sea lions for a living.

Little Miguel's black, doubled fist clung tenaciously to mine as he steered me through a bypath out of the way of the fashionables down to the littered shore, where the "Jennie Griffin" was cleaning up and tacking down preparatory to butting her rather old-fashioned nose out into the channel, and while doing it, he told me wonderful things about his father, who caught "lobos" with a lasso, and whose oldest son, his brother, had been chewed clean up by a sea-wolf somewhere away out in the misty ocean. My curiosity led me a little farther, and I

met Captain Mullett. It suddenly dawned upon me that a really exciting time among the mystic islands I had heard so much about at the hotel was right in my line, and I intimated as much to the master of the "Jennie Griffin," adding that if allowed to accompany him I would be perfectly willing to make myself useful in anything from cook to the sweeper of the caboose. Without the detail and argument that followed, it all ended in my joining Captain Mullett's thirtieth expedition after sea lions, which left Santa Barbara, California, early in June.

Little Miguel was my chief interlocutor during our short trip to Anacapa, and through him I became more or less acquainted with Captain Mullett's piratical looking crew of Mexicans and Indians. There were fifteen of them, picturesque looking dare-devils with black, unkempt hair, rough, sun-browned faces, and, as I soon learned, possessing a skill with the lariat that was marvellous. For such as these the master of the "Jennie Griffin" annually scoured the whole of Santa Barbara county with a fine-tooth comb. No ordinary rancheros would do among the slippery rocks and rumbling caverns of Anacapa. There were among them a number who had been in Captain Mullett's employ for years, and these

the old sea-dog had trained to run the "Jennie Griffin." One of them was Miguel's father.

"That's Santa Cruz, senior," he said to me, as we were running along in the trade to Anacapa just as evening was coming on. "You've heard of Santa Cruz? Ugh! I don't like to pass them in the dark. You will die if you see a light on San Clemente. Shall we go down and play monte?"

"I don't know how."

"But I will teach you. Ugh! If a light on San Clemente will kill you, why not a light on Santa Cruz? I know it will. My Pedro never saw San Clemente, but we passed a fire in the night time out *there*, and the next day a bull lobo bit him in two in a cavern. Shall we go down and play monte?"

"Go down and play solitaire, Miguel—Miguel the big and brave!" laughed Captain Mullett's cheerful voice behind us. "We will wait and see the light. We will prove you afraid of nothing. They *are* a ghostly lot, though," he said to me, as the Mexican turned away. "They ain't far from the coast, but from all that's known of 'em they might as well be in Africa. I've cruised among 'em for almost forty years, and have seen things that used to make me shiver. Santa Cruz off there, the biggest of the eight, is the only one of the Santa Barbaras with plenty of water. San Nicholas is a desert, a reg'lar Sahara. The Lord knows nobody ever lived on it. But I've found bones there—human bones—from one end of its five miles t' other, sometimes in piles, like as though the whole island had one time been a burying-ground! You've read what scientists say, but they've never reasoned it out, and neither have I. I've seen the same thing on San Clemente. Then there's Santa Barbara, a livin' den o' wild-cats! I've shot a lot of 'em, and I believe that sometime years and years ago a vessel was wrecked there with some house-cats on it, for the beasts ain't like the reg'lar wild-cat, but just as fierce, an' there's hundreds of 'em. As for Anacapa—you'll see that in the morning!"

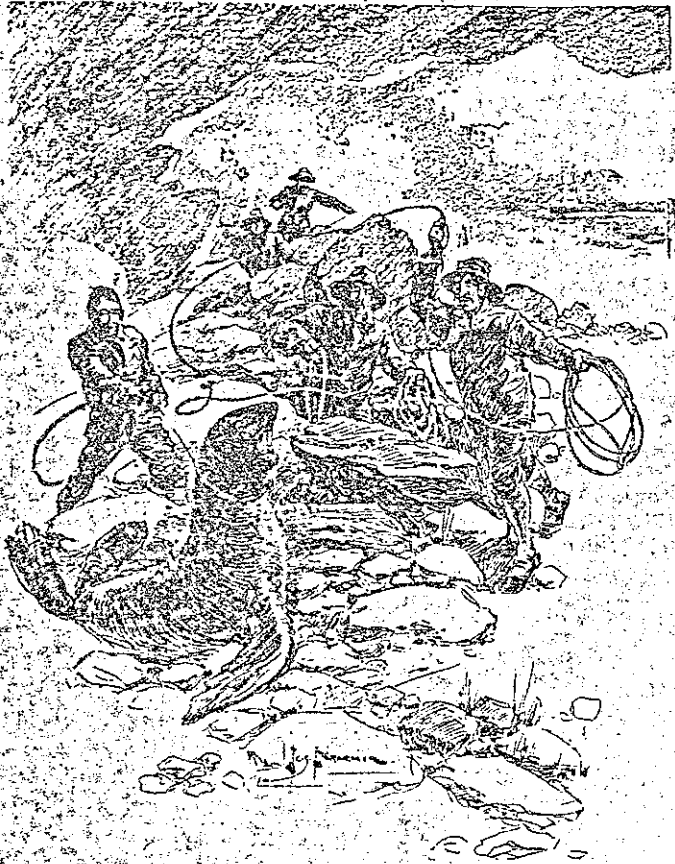
"But what will I see when I see Anacapa?" I urged.

"You'll jes' see Anacapa," chuckled Captain Mullett, "and then wonder how I've gone in and taken a thousand lions off'n it. I've an hour off—shall we go down and play monte?"

The following morning I was aroused by the clatter of many feet above, long before the light of day had penetrated to my stuffy little berth. It seemed as though the fifteen half-savage rancheros were dancing a horn-pipe and piling lumber at the same time, and when I stumbled on deck I found it partly so. One of the whale-boats was being loaded with the boards brought for cages, and with the ringing of hammers and the clatter of boxes I could hear the distant roar of surf out in the gloom. By the time we had breakfasted in the caboose the day had fairly broke, and I could catch glimpses of the white foaming of the water as it broke over the outermost reefs of Anacapa.

"It's a ca'm day, a very ca'm day, sir!" assured Captain Mullett. He seemed to take particular delight in everything that surprised me, and as he had assured me that I was the second white man he had ever taken with him on one of his cruises, I did not wonder at it. "But, sir, it's a reg'lar Niagara out there, no matter how ca'm it is. Can you reason out why it should roar so like blazes, an' not a feather o' cloud in the sky? But there goes the boat. You'll know soon."

I could see that the "Jennie Griffin" was very slowly working toward the island. Meanwhile one of the whale-boats had put out with two Indians and Miguel, and as it shot away from the stern the boat amidships was lowered and fell in its wake. Ahead of them at a distance of three-quarter of a mile was a wall of surf. Now an' then I caught a glimpse of black rock through it, but beyond that there were no visible signs of the island. I have heard the steady roar of Niagara at a distance, and the beating of the sea on Anacapa at three-quarters of a mile sounds much like it. When th



"YELLING, HUMAN DEMONS WERE RUSHING DOWN."

two boats seemed to almost rest in the edge of the surf a figure rose in the bow of each. Almost simultaneously they disappeared.

"You see they swim through the rocks," explained Captain Mullett. "A boat wouldn't live there. Both of 'em's good scouts, and we'll know if there's any lions there in a jiffy!"

An hour passed, when one of the boats was seen to turn. The other soon followed. Evidently the scouts had been unsuccessful, for the two boats beat along outside of the rocks for nearly a mile, the "Jennie Griffin" keeping parallel with them a little over half a mile away. The manoeuvre was repeated. This time barely fifteen minutes had elapsed when both boats turned toward the ship. On the instant Captain Mullett gave a yell of delight. A quarter of a mile away Miguel the Big, as I had come to know

little Miguel's father, stood up gaunt and naked in the bow of one of the boats and shouted across the water.

"Lobos!"
"Glory!" echoed Captain Mullett. "That's all we want. He says 'wolves.' Can't get 'em for the life of me to call 'em lions. Hey, the boats, my boys!"

In an instant the crew of the "Jennie Griffin" were stripping themselves, jabbering in Mexican and Indian, keeping up meanwhile an incessant fire of good humored raillery at their less lucky companions whom Captain Mullett had detailed to man the ship while we were ashore. Brown legs and arms appeared and disappeared in a twinkling, and when we were done each man had a pair of sandals on his feet, a loose pair of trunks about his middle, and a light, cheap pea-jacket

covering the rest of him. Mine was the only pair of white legs showing among them, for the Captain's were almost as black as the others, and it offered another vent for the bubbling spirits of those who were crazed with joy by the scent of coming adventure.

"Can you swim?" asked Captain Mullett anxiously, as though he had entirely forgotten about that very important matter.

"Like a fish!" I assured him.

"Well, now—just look!" he commanded. "If you find yourself in a tight place, do this." He gave a sudden kick, his sandals flying from his feet, and at the same time swished his loose jacket back over his shoulders. "I can do it in mid-air, and when I touch water I'm ready to swim," he added.

One of the boats ran alongside. While those of the crew who were to remain behind attended to hoisting it, another and larger one was lowered. Into this dropped, one after another, eight of the men, followed by the Captain and myself. A smaller boat, loaded with lumber and one of the Indians, was towed behind us as we left the ship.

I was stowed in, rather carefully, between Miguel and the Captain. The Mexican had taken quite a fancy to me, perhaps because I had befriended his little boy, and without betraying my knowledge of the fact I could see that he regarded my voyage to the island a trifle anxiously, and always had one of his eyes upon me.

"We did not see a light on Santa Cruz, senior," he said, showing his white teeth at me; "but, still, you must be careful."

As we drew nearer the island I began to realize the force of the sea as it beat against the rocks. Beginning in an occasional rumble that reached the ship, the noise of the surf increased to a roar, with thunderous echoes and rumbling explosions that sent a chill of fear through me. Soon the spray began dashing in our faces, and the black rocks stood out stark naked through the white mist. Now and then an explosion like the report of a great gun

boomed ahead of us, followed by the ugly swish of water as it cut itself to pieces on the jagged reefs.

"That's Anacapa!" roared Captain Mullett in my ear. His voice was just intelligible above the booming of the surf. "It sounds like great guns going—but it's only the water rolling in and out of the caverns!"

Right into the white foam the whale-boat plunged her nose. Every man now stripped himself, and I imitated the rest. Would I dare plunge into that awful sea? The shore, if there was such a thing, was hidden by the dashing spray, and I tried to stifle the thought that I was taking my life into my own hands. One of the Indians plunged in first; another followed; two or three Mexicans; then Miguel seized me by the arm.

"Now, senior!"

I did not care to show my cowardice if it was that, so over I went. Miguel was beside me. I heard the plunge of the Captain behind. Evidently it was cooked up between them to take care of me, so I put on a spurt and showed them how people learn to swim in fresh water. Hardly a minute had passed when I dragged myself out upon the rocks; the tumbling of the white sea was back of me, but the infernal booming of the water washing up into the caverns was everywhere. In turn the Mexicans and Indians came up; two of them with ropes attached to the boats. These were pulled in, and after landing the lumber and donning our sandals and jackets we crept up among the rocks.

The roar of the sea drowned every sound of our progress. As we clambered higher above the dashing surf, our feet I caught my first good look of Anacapa. The curve of the ocean as it rounded off into the distance was blocked out by walls of black, honey-combed rock, and on every side of it were the caverns and huge crevices that boomed like heavy guns with the washing of the sea. The sun came down brilliantly from a cloudless sky lit up the water-swept wilderness with an oily lustre, until the whole of Anacapa looked like a huge, slippery mo-

water poking its dripping back up out of the ocean.

"This is Anacapa!" bellowed Captain Mullett in my ear. Miguel heard him, and turned with a warning gesture, crooking his arm to signify that up and down over the rocks were the lions.

A hundred feet farther on he paused, and the Mexicans and Indians gathered close around. No word was spoken.

not the surf breaking upon the rocks. It was not the booming of water in the caverns. The truth dawned upon me. It was the heavy, coughing bark of the lions. In this wild region, surrounded by a thundering sea and cavernous rocks, the tongue of these monsters of the deep set the blood firing through my veins as the tame sight of a splendid stag or the weird wailing of a panther had never done. There was something awesome about it, as there is to the distant roar of an African Lion rumbling across a plain. As we crept nearer and nearer the top of the rocks the noise increased, until we could distinguish the cries of the individual bulls.

Captain Mullett placed his hands, trumpet shape, close to my ear.



"THE FRIGHTENED ANIMAL" MADE A DIVE FOR THE BOX "

In fact, it would have taken a shout to have been heard above the sea, so Miguel made himself understood by setting an example. He prepared his lariat, and the others followed suit. In place of the rope the Captain was armed with a heavy iron-tipped club, and I carried a pike.

Suddenly I distinguished a sound that was strange and new to me. It was

"They are right over and below us," he cried, loud enough for me to hear. "I am going to creep up among the rocks and get our bearing. If you are very careful you may go with me."

At the very top he paused. Cautiously raising his eyes above the rocks he beckoned me beside him. For a few moments my eyes were on a level with his own. Below us was a singularly

wild and savage spectacle. The sea was perhaps two hundred yards away, and between our hiding place and the surf the dip in the rocks was literally alive with the monsters we were seeking. Those nearest us were gamboling among themselves as if in a game of their own; some were sunning themselves; others, half raised, were making the hoarse barking we had heard below. Even as we looked a number came tumbling up out of the surf and scrambled over the rocks with the swiftness of dogs. An instant more and a half a score of yelling human demons were rushing down upon them.

The sudden attack took me by surprise, but following in the footsteps of Miguel I caught up with him as he almost stumbled over an old bull making for the sea. In my excitement I flung my pike at it, a monster weighing at least a ton, as the Captain afterward told me. A 500 pound lion in captivity is a big one, but when he is compared beside one nine or ten feet in length, and so broad he could not squeeze through an ordinary dwelling-house door, he is a mere pigmy. To these giants the Mexicans and Indians paid no attention, unless it was to keep out of their way. The smaller ones were their game; the ones easily transported and easily fed. Shouting like fiends the rancheros tried to get between the lions and the sea. Two of the Indians succeeded. There was a thirty foot throw—a shriek of triumph!

"Two man! Two man!" yelled Miguel.

Another joined him. With encouraging cries they rushed to the aid of the lucky Indian. As the Mexican's lariat circled through the air the Indian's hold was lost. Miguel's rope caught the animal as it freed itself, and whirled it upon its side. If you have ever noticed a sea lion you will have seen that its neck is larger than its head. When this neck is wet and slippery it is impossible to keep a rope about it for more than an instant at a time, so to make a capture three or four men are compelled to throw in turn, as fast as one rope loses its hold, until the lion

is tired out. The rocks were now completely cleared of the animals with the exception of the two which were cornered, and a third which had taken refuge in a cavernous fissure near the ocean.

For half an hour Miguel and his companions kept throwing their capture, while between them and the sea the man who had come with the lumber was building a rough, cage-like box about three feet high and eight or nine feet long. When he had finished his job I gave him a lift, and together we shoved and tumbled it within a few steps of the lion's head. Hardly had the frightened animal caught sight of the retreat than he made a dive for it, to escape his persecutors, and in a trice he was ready to be taken aboard ship.

"That's the way we catch lobos, señor!" cried Miguel, triumphantly. He looked up at me with a smile, and as he did so his eyes traveled past me over the rocks. As I smiled back at him his jaw fell, his brown face set with horror, and the next instant a piercing shriek rose above the roar of the surf.

"Diable! Look!"

I whirled around. Coming directly toward me, not over twenty yards away, was one of the Indians who had aided in Captain Mullett's catch; at his heels, a dozen feet behind, came the lion the others had cornered. For one brief, awful second the race kept up, and during that time no man spoke or moved. In that moment the ranchero's lariat caught on a rock; the next the infuriated animal was upon him like a great dog, crushing the man down upon the rocks under his enormous weight. Another blood-curdling scream, a piercing wail of agony! During the whole of the horrible scene the doomed man's comrades stood as if turned to stone. But it had taken no more than half a dozen seconds. It had begun and was over like a flash. With a shout I sprang forward with uplifted pike, but before any of us had taken more than a step the lion was rushing like a streak toward the sea. The black rocks at our feet were spattered with blood. As the Mexicans and Indians

lifted their comrade it took no more than a glance to show that his arm had been bitten almost entirely in two.

"Hurry him to the boat, boys!" shouted Captain Mullett.

He turned to lead the way over the rocks. As he did so one of the Indians fell upon his knees beside the wounded man and lifted the almost severed arm. A grim look passed over his face. The next instant his keen-edged knife was out, and before I had time to turn from the horrifying spectacle he had completed the work by amputating the member at a single skillful stroke. I turned from the sickening sight as they bore him back towards the boats, and as I did so Miguel touched me nervously on the shoulder.

"Senor, you were up when we passed Santa Cruz last night?" he queried.

"But there was no light on it!" I shouted.

He looked at me dubiously.

"Well perhaps not." He coiled his lariat and motioned to where the ocean was beating up in a white mist before us.

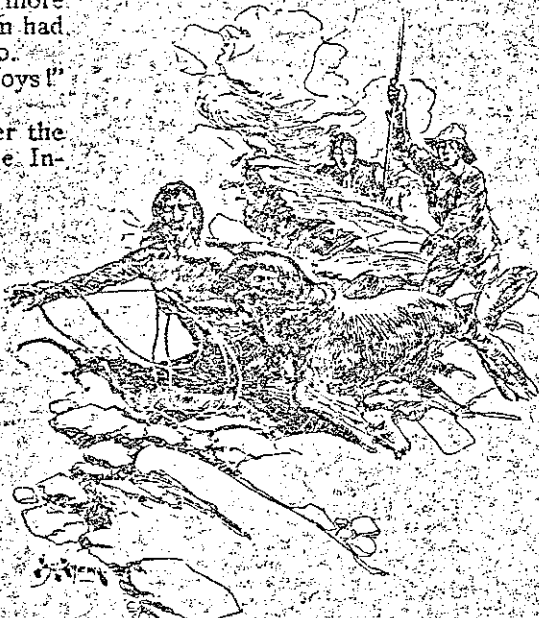
"There's a big lobo over there in the cave, senor. We must get him before high tide."

For a few minutes I sat down and stared hard at the red stains upon the rocks. Miguel left me, and I could hear occasional shouts coming from the direction of the sea. Soon Captain Mullett joined me, and smiling a little queerly he motioned for me to follow him.

"He shouldn't ha' done it," he explained; "he shouldn't o' hit 'im with the rope!"

I followed him to the cavern, but there it was a short, quick fight. And it was well so, for the sea had already begun to lap the beginning of the pebbly floor. Out beyond the white mist and the breaking of the tide over the reefs the "Jennie Griffin" was slowly patrolling the shore.

"Hola, for the box!" shouted Miguel. He had forgotten the accident. His face was alive with joyful excitement. Again and again his lariat cut through



"A PIERCING WAIL OF AGONY"

the air, and from the very way he threw I could see the Mexican took pride in his accuracy. Quickly the box grew in front of the dazed lion, while the sea began to rumble in the mouth of the cavern.

"Hola, hurry in or we'll drown!" joked Miguel in a shout. Springing forward he struck the lion a blow with his lariat, as the other had done; but this time the animal went into the box. The spray of the surf was dashing into the cave. A long rope was attached to the box, and as we went out the water dashed up to our waists.

"You'll see a jolly sight now!" shouted Captain Mullett.

Each minute the water came higher. Soon it began to rumble in the cavern we had left. As the sound grew deeper we could feel by the rope that the lion and the cage were floating. All about us the sea crept up, inch by inch, foot by foot. Through the foam and mist we could descry the whale-boat holding as near the land as its two oarsmen could safely keep it. The water lapped our feet, crept up to the cage on the

rocks, rose to our waist. When it was that high the cage floated.

"Ho, for the boats, boys!"

Three men to a rope, we began our swim. The cages were light, and in them the lions kept themselves afloat. A hard, strong swim and the whale-boat met us. Miguel was ahead of me, and heaved himself aboard first.

"Ah, senor," he said as he gave me a lift, "to-night we will play monte, and pray."

"Two of the fifty I've got to take back with me, anyway," puffed Captain Mullett as he scrambled in.

"Yes Miguel," I gurgled, as I heaved the water out of my mouth, "I'll play monte with anyone for evermore. I mean until we go home!"

