

Zebra

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WITH a halter concealed inside my shirt, I noiselessly crept to the top of the crest and peered into the sheltered clump of guayavos. I was almost certain to find Zebra there—there where the grass was tender and green, where the water was sparkling and refreshing, and where a sweet windfall might be nibbled in dull moments. And there was Zebra, with legs folded in under her, looking serenely down the valley, recalling perhaps the hundreds of times she had carried me through that valley and over the pine-covered mountain sides beyond.

Zebra was beautiful—if mules can be called beautiful—and appropriately named, too, for distinct black markings on her smooth buff coat gave her a decided resemblance to her African cousin. Her face seemed to have a knowing, kind expression, an expression molded by the experience of long years of faithful service. Her ears, short for a mule's, twitched occasionally as if she suspected my presence.

SHE turned with a start as she heard me approach. With the halter still concealed I came up to her and patted her warm nose. Further to win her favor, I tempted her with ripe guavas. But too many times I had used the same means of approach. That knowing look made my sham seem shallow. She sniffed my shirt as if to say, "Come now, out with it. You know I don't object too much." I put on the halter as she always demanded that it be done, first over the right ear and then over the left. Zebra was set in her ways. With slow, deliberate movements she rose, and without my direction she started down the trail to the ranch house.

