SPANISH DOUBLOONS

By

CAMILLA KENYON

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Jane Harding, respectable and conservative old spinster—but never too old to think of marriage—with more money than brains, is inveigled by a strong-minded spinster, Miss Higglesby-Browne, into financing an expedition to hunt for buried treasure on Leeward Island. Her niece, Virginia Harding, undertaking to stop her, gets on the vessel engaged for the hunt, and in the confusion is unwillingly carried along.

CHAPTER II.—By no means concealing her distaste for the expedition and her contempt for its members, Virginia makes the acquaintance of the Honorable Cuthbert Vane, and is somewhat impressed.

CHAPTER III.—Talking with Dugald Shaw, the leader of the expedition, Virginia very frankly expresses her views, practically accusing Shaw and the other members of the party, including a somewhat uncertain personage, Captain Magnus, and a shady "financier," Hamilton H. Tubbs, of being in a conspiracy to defraud Miss Jane Harding. Their relations, naturally, are somewhat strained.

CHAPTER IV.—Landing on the island is a matter of some difficulty, Virginia being carried ashore in the arms of Cuthbert Vane, to her disquietude. The landing, however, is safely effected.

CHAPTER V.—Led by Miss Higglesby-Browne, the party draws up an agreement whereby Virginia Harding is barred from participation in the profits of the expedition. Believing the whole thing to be a fraud, Virginia is not greatly worried. Cuthbert Vane alone votes against the exclusion of Virginia.

CHAPTER VI.—Wild pigs abound on the island, and "Cookie," the colored member of the party, insists he has seen a "hant," in the form of a white pig. During a walk Virginia meets the "hant," a white bull terrier, and proudly brings him into camp.

CHAPTER VII.—On the island is the hut of a copra gatherer, and the presence of the dog, named "Crusoe" by Virginia, is thus accounted for. Rambling about, and feeling herself not to be a regular member of the expedition, Virginia comes on a sand-imbedded sloop, the Island Queen. Returning to the camp, she is intercepted by Captain Magnus, who accosts her unpleasantly. She escapes him, with the aid of "Crusoe."

CHAPTER VIII.—Fired with the idea of herself discovering the treasure, Virginia pays a visit to the cave which has been singled out as the most likely place in which it has been concealed, and there she is caught by the tide and rescued by Dugald Shaw, from certain death. Thinking her unconscious, Shaw whispers words of endearment, which she treasures.

CHAPTER IX.—In idle curiosity Virginia, dabbling about the wreck of the Island Queen, finds a diary, identified only as having been kept by "Peter," a former seeker of the treasure. In it he tells of his finding of the hidden wealth and there her reading is interrupted.

CHAPTER X.—Opinions as to the proper methods of prosecuting the search for the treasure are divided, and a wide divergence is apparent in the councils of the little party. Virginia's interest in the leader of the expedition increases.

CHAPTER XI.—The diary which Virginia has found in the remains of the Island Queen reveals the fact that the existence of the gold was known to others, and an active and successful search for it carried on. The record tells of the hiding of the treasure and its transference to the small boat, but it is evident the finder never left the island with his wealth. Virginia, of course, believes it to be on the Island Queen, and so within her reach. For various reasons she decides to say nothing of her discovery until she has investigated further.

CHAPTER XII.—Led by directions in "Peter's" diary, Virginia finds a highly important clue to the hidden treasure, but her courage fails when it comes to pushing her investigations.

CHAPTER XIII.—Interrupting a fervent declaration of love by Cuthbert Vane, Virginia is startled by the announcement of Mr. Tubbs that he has found the clew to the whereabouts of the treasure. He demands, as the price of his secret (as she supposes) a half of the wealth found. The party declines to accept his terms and decides to continue the search without his aid. During the excitement Captain Magnus disappears.

"What is it, on, what is it, Mr. Tubbs?" cried Aunt Jane, fluttering

"Eureka!" He Repeated, "I Have Found It!"

with the consciousness of her proprietorship.

But Mr. Tubbs glanced at her as indifferently as a sated turkey-buzzard at a morsel which has ceased to tempt him.

"Mr. Tubbs," commanded Violet, "speak—explain yourself!"

"Come, out with it, Tubbs," advised Mr. Shaw.

Then the lips of Mr. Tubbs parted, and from them issued this solitary word:

"Eureka!"

"What?" screamed Miss Higglesby-Browne. "You have found it?'

Solemnly Mr. Tubbs inclined his head.

"Eureka!" he repeated. "I have found it!"

Amidst the exclamations, the questions, the general commotion which ensued, I had room for only one thought—that Mr. Tubbs had somehow discovered the treasure in the cabin of the Island Queen. Indeed, I should have shrieked the words aloud but for a providential dumbness that fell upon me.

"Friends," Mr. Tubbs began, "it has been known from the start that there was a landmark on this little old island that would give any party discovering the same a line on that chest of money right away. There's been some that was too high up in the exploring business to waste time looking for landmarks. They had rather do more fancy stunts, where what with surf, and sharks, and bangin' up the boat, they could make a good show of gettin' busy. But old Ham Tubbs, he don't let on to be a hero. Jest a plain man o' business—that's old H. H. Consequence is, he leaves the other fellers have the brass band, while he sets out on the q. t. to run a certain little clue to earth. And, ladies and gentlemen, he's run it!"

"You have found—you have found the treasure!" shrilled Aunt Jane.

Contrary to his bland custom, Mr. Tubbs frowned at her darkly.

"I said I found the clue," he corrected. "Of course, it's the same thing. Ladies and gentlemen, not to appear to be a hot-air artist, I will tell you in a word, that I have located the tombstone of one William Halliwell, deceased!"

Of course. Not once had I thought of it. Bare, stark, glaring up at the sun, lay the stone carved with the letters and the cross-bones. Forgetting in the haste of my departure to replace the vines upon the grave, I had left the stone to shout its secret to the first comer. And that happened to be Mr. Tubbs. Happened, I say, for I knew that he had not had the slightest notion where to look for the grave of Bill Halliwell. This running to earth of clues was purely an affair of his own picturesque imagination.

I wondered uneasily what he had made of the uprooted vines—but he would lay them to the pigs, no doubt. In the countenance of Mr. Tubbs, flushed and exultant, there was no suspicion that the secret was not all his own.

Miss Higglesby-Browne had a closed umbrella beneath her arm, and she drew and brandished it like a saber as she took a long stride forward.

"Mr. Tubbs," she commanded, "lead on!"

But Mr. Tubbs did not lead on. "Oh, no indeed," he said. "Old H. H. wasn't born yesterday. It may have struck you that to possess the sole and exclusive knowledge of the whereabout a million or two—ratin' it now—is some considerable of an asset. And it's one I ain't got the least idee of partin' with unless for inducements held out."

Aunt Jane gave a faint shriek. I had been silently debating what my own course should be in the face of this unexpected development. Suddenly I saw my way quite clear. I would say nothing. Mr. Tubbs should reveal his own perfidy. And the curtain should ring down upon the play, leaving Mr. Tubbs foiled all around, bereft both of the treasure and of Aunt Jane.

Little I dreamed what surprises ensuing acts of the play were to hold for me, or their astounding contrast with the farce of my joyous imagination.

I took no part in the storm that raged round Mr. Tubbs. His face adorned by a seraphic, buttery smile, he stood unmoved, while Miss Higglesby-Browne uttered cyclonic exhortations and reproaches, while Aunt Jane sobbed and said, "Oh, Mr. Tubbs!" while Mr. Shaw strove to make himself heard above the din. He did at least succeed in extracting from the traitor a definite statement of terms. These were nothing less than fifty per cent of the treasure, secured to him by a document, sealed and delivered into his own hands. To a suggestion that as he had discovered the all-important tombstone, so might some one else, he replied with tranquillity that he thought not, as he had taken precautions against such an eventuality. In other words, as I was later to discover, the wily Mr. Tubbs had contrived to raise the boulder from its bed and push it over the cliff into the sea, afterward replacing the mass of vines upon the grave.

As to the entrance to the tunnel, it was apparent to me that Mr. Tubbs had not yet discovered it. Even if he had, I am certain that he would have been no more heroic than myself about exploring it, though there was no missing Peter to haunt his imagination. But with the grave as a starting point, there could be no question as to the ultimate discovery of the cave.

I was so eager myself to see the inside of the cave, and to know whatever it had to reveal of the fate of Peter, that I was inclined to wish Mr. Tubbs success in driving his hard bargain, especially as it would profit him nothing in the end. But this sentiment was exclusively my own. On all hands indignation greeted the rigorous demands of Mr. Tubbs. With a righteous joy I saw the fabric of Aunt Jane's illusions shaken by the rude blast of reality. For where was the Tubbs of yesterday—the honey-tongued, the suave, the anxiously obsequious Tubbs? Gone, quite gone. Instead, here was a Tubbs who cocked his helmet rakishly, and leered round upon the company, deaf to the claims of loyalty, the pleas of friendship, the voice of tenderness—Aunt Jane's.

Manfully Miss Higglesby-Browne stormed up and down the beach. She demanded of Mr. Shaw, of Cuthbert Vane, of Captain Magnus, each and severally, that Mr. Tubbs be compelled to disgorge his secret. You saw that she would not have shrunk from a regimen of racks and thumbscrews. But there were no racks and thumbscrews on the island. Of course we could have invented various instruments of torture—I felt I could have developed some ingenuity that way myself—but too fatally well Mr. Tubbs knew the civilized prejudices of those with whom he had to deal. With perfect impunity he could strut about the camp, sure that no weapons worse than words would be brought to bear upon him, that he would not even be turned away from the general board to browse on coconuts in solitude.

Long ago Mr. Shaw had left the field to Violet and with a curt shrug had turned his back and stood looking out over the cove, stroking his chin reflectively. Miss Browne's eloquence had risen to amazing flights, and she already had Mr. Tubbs inextricably mixed with Ananias and Sapphira, when the Scotchman broke in upon her ruthlessly.

"Friends," he said, "so far as I can see we have been put a good bit ahead by this morning's work. First, we know the grave which should be our landmark has not been entirely obliterated by the jungle, as I had thought most likely. Second, we know that it is on this side of the island, for the reason that this chap Tubbs hasn't nerve to go much beyond shouting distance by himself. Third, as Tubbs has tried this hold-up business, I believe we should consider the agreement by which he was to receive a sixteenth share null and void, and decide here and now that he gets nothing whatever. [illegible], the boat is now pretty w[illegible]ghts, and as soon as we have a [illegible] Bert and Magnus and I will se[illegible] out, in twice as good heart as before, having had the story

"Tubbs and His Tombstone Can Go to Thunder!"

[illegible] here confirmed for the first time. So Tubbs and his tombstone can go to thunder."

"I can, can I?" cried Mr. Tubbs. "Say, are you a human iceberg, to talk that cool before a man's own face? Say, I'll—"

But Cuthbert Vance broke in.

"Three rousing cheers, old boy!" he cried to the Scotchman enthusiastically. "Always did think that chap a frightful bounder, don't you know? We'll stand by old Shaw, won't we, Magnus?" Which comradely outbreak showed the excess of the beautiful youth's emotions, for usually he turned a large cold shoulder on the captain, though managing in some mysterious manner to be perfectly civil all the time. Perhaps you have to be born at High Staunton manor or its equivalent to possess the art of relegating people to immense distances without seeming to administer even the gentlest shove.

But unfortunately the effort of the Honorable Cuthbert's cordiality was lost, so far as the object of it was concerned, because of the surprising fact, only now remarked by any one, that Captain Magnus had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

Some Secret Diplomacy.

The evanishment of Captain Magnus, though quite unlooked for at so critical a moment, was too much in keeping with his eccentric and unsocial ways to arouse much comment. Everybody looked about with mild ejaculations of surprise, and then forgot about the matter.

Whistling a Scotch tune, Dugald Shaw set to work again on the boat. In the face of difficulty or opposition he always grew more brisk and cheerful. I used to wonder whether in the event of a tornado he would not warm into positive geniality. Perhaps it would not have needed a tornado, if I had not begun by suspecting him of conspiring against Aunt Jane's pocket, or if the Triumvirate, inspired by Mr. Tubbs, had not sat in gloomy judgment on his every movement. Or if he hadn't been reproached so for saving me from the cave, instead of leaving it to Cuthbert Vane—

But now under the stimulus of speaking his mind about Mr. Tubbs the Scotchman whistled as he worked, and slapped the noble youth affectionately on the back when he came and got in the way with anxious industry.

As I wanted to observe developments—a very necessary thing when you are playing Providence—I chose a central position in the shade and pulled out some very smudgy tatting, a sort of Penelope's web which there was no prospect of my ever completing, but which served admirably to give me an appearance of occupation at critical moments.

Mr. Tubbs also had sought a shady spot, and was fanning himself with his helmet. From time to time he hummed, in a manner determinedly gay. However he might disguise it from himself, this time Mr. Tubbs had overshot his mark. The truth was, since our arrival on the island Mr. Tubbs had felt himself the spoiled child of fortune. Aunt Jane and Miss Higglesby-Browne were the joint commanders of the expedition, and he commanded them. The Scotchman's theoretical rank as leader had involved merely the acceptance of all the responsibility and blame, while authority rested with the petticoat government dominated by the bland and wily Tubbs.

(To Be Continued.)

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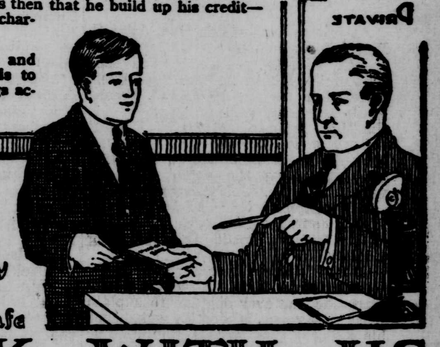

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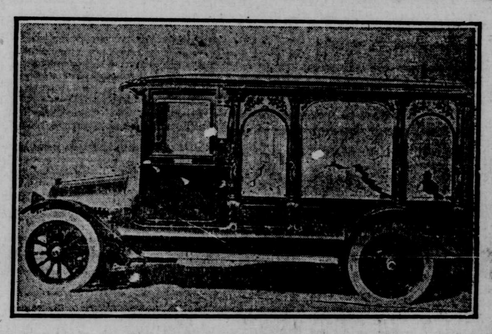

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