SPANISH DOUBLOONS

By

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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 strong-minded spinster, Miss Higglesby-Browne, into financing an expedition to search for buried treasure on Leeward Island. Her niece, Virginia Harding, unwilling to stay behind 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 the "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 upon 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 betrays treasures.

CHAPTER IX.—In idle curiosity Virginia, dabbling about the wreck of the Island Queen, finds a diary, identified later 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 whole 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 finding 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 must 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.

But now, faced with the failure of his coup d'etat, Mr. Tubbs' situation was, to say the least, awkward. He had risked all and lost it. But he maintained an air of jaunty self-confidence, slightly tinged with irony. It was all very well, he seemed to imply, for us to try to get along without H. H. We would discover the impossibility of it soon enough.

Aunt Jane, drooping, had been led away to the cabin by Miss Higglesby-Browne. You now heard the voice of Violet in exhortation, mingled with Aunt Jane's sobs. I seemed to see that an ear of Mr. Tubbs was cocked attentively in that direction. He had indeed erred in the very wantonness of triumph, for a single glance would have kept Aunt Jane loyal and prodigal of excuses for him in the face of any treachery. Not even Violet could have clapped the lid on the up-welling font of sentiment in Aunt Jane's heart. Only the cold contemning eye of H. H. himself had congealed that tepid flow.

The morning wore on with ever-increasing heat, and as nothing happened I began to find my watchful waiting dull. Crusoe, worn out perhaps by some private nocturnal pig hunt, slept heavily where the drip of the spring over the brim of old Heintz's kettle cooled the air. I began to consider whether it would not be well to take a walk with Cuthbert Vane and discover the tombstone all over again. I knew nothing, of course, of Mr. Tubb's drastic measures with the celebrated landmark. As to Cuthbert's interrupted courtship, I depended on the vast excitement of discovering the cave to distract his mind from it. For that was the idea, of course—Cuthbert Vane and I would explore the cave, and then whenever I liked I could prick the bubble of Mr. Tubbs' ambitions, without relating the whole strange story of the diary and the Island Queen.

But meanwhile the cave drew me like a magnet. I jealously desired to be the first to see it, to snatch from Mr. Tubbs the honor of discovery. And I wanted to know about poor Peter—and the doubloons that he had gone back to fetch.

But already Captain Magnus had forsaken the post of duty and departed on an unknown errand. Could I ask Cuthbert Vane to do it, too? And then I smiled a smile that was half proud. I might ask him—but he would refuse me. In Cuthbert's simple code, certain things were "done," certain others not. Among the nots was to fail in standing by a friend. And just now Cuthbert was standing by Dugald Shaw. Therefore nods and becks and wreathed smiles were vain. In Cuthbert's quiet, easy-mannered, thick-headed way he could turn his back calmly on the face of love and follow the harsh call of duty even to death. It would not occur to him not to. And he never would suspect himself of being a hero—that would be quite the nicest part of it.

And yet I knew poor Cuthbert was an exploded superstition, an anachronism, part of a vanishing order of things, and that the ideal which was replacing him was a boiler-plated monster with clockwork heart and brain, named Efficiency. And that Cuthbert must go, along with his Jacobean manor, and his family ghost, and the oaks in the park, and everything else that couldn't prove its right to live except by being fine and lovely and full of garnered sweetness of the past—

At this point in my meditations the door of the cabin opened and Miss Browne came out, looking sternly resolute. Aunt Jane followed, very pink about the eyes and nose. With a commanding gesture Miss Browne signaled the rest to approach. Mr. Tubbs bounced up with alacrity. Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert obeyed less promptly, but they obeyed. Meanwhile Violet waited, looking implacable as fate.

"And where is Captain Magnus?" she demanded, glancing about her.

But no one knew what had become of Captain Magnus.

As for myself, I continued to sit in the shade and tat. But I could hear with ease all that was said.

"Mr. Tubbs," began Miss Browne, "your recent claims have been matter of prolonged consideration between Miss Harding and myself. We feel—we cannot but feel—that there was a harshness in your announcement of them, an apparent concentration of your own interests, ill befitting a member of this expedition. Also, that in actual substance, they were excessive. Not half, Mr. Tubbs: oh, no, not half! But one-quarter, Miss Harding and myself, as the joint heads of the Harding-Browne expedition, are inclined to think no more than the reward which is your due. We suggest, therefore, a simple way out of the difficulty. Mr. Dugald Shaw was engaged on liberal terms to find the treasure. He has not found the treasure. He has not found the slightest clue to its present whereabouts. Mr. Tubbs, on the contrary, has found a clue. It is a clue of the first importance. It is equivalent almost to the actual discovery of the chest. Therefore let Mr. Shaw, convinced I am sure by this calm presentation of the matter of the justice of such a course, resign his claim to a fourth of the treasure in favor of Mr. Hamilton H. Tubbs, and agree to receive instead the former allotment of Mr. Tubbs, namely, one-sixteenth."

Having offered this remarkable suggestion, Miss Browne folded her arms and waited for it to bear fruit.

It did—in the enthusiastic response of Mr. Tubbs. "Well, well!" he exclaimed. "To think of our takin' old H. H. that literal! O' course, havin' formed my habits in the financial centers of the country, I named a stiff price at first—a stiff price, I won't deny. But that's jest the leetle way of a man used to handlin' large affairs—nothing else to it, I do assure you. The Old Man himself used to say, 'There's old H. H.—you'd think he'd eat the paint off a house, he'll show up that graspin' in a deal. And all the time it's jest love of the game. Let him know he's goin' to win out, and bless you, old H. H. will swing right round and fair force the profits on the other party. H. H. is slicker than soap to handle, if only you handle him right.' Can I say without hard feelin's that jest now H. H. was not handled right? Instead o' bein' joshed with, as he looked for, he was took up short, and even them which he might have expected to show confidence"—here Mr. Tubbs cast a reproachful eye at Aunt Jane—"run off with the notion that he meant jest what he said. All he'd done for this expedition, his loyalty and faith to same, was forgotten, and he was thought of as a self-seeker and Voracious Shark!" The pain of these recollections dammed the torrent of Mr. Tubbs' speech.

"Oh, Mr. Tubbs!" breathed Aunt Jane, heart-brokenly, and of course a tear trickled gently down her nose, following the path of many previous tears which had already left their saline traces.

Mr. Tubbs managed in some impossible fashion to roll one eye tenderly at Aunt Jane, while keeping the other fastened shrewdly on the remainder of his audience.

"Miss Higglesby-Browne and Miss Jane Harding," he resumed. "I accept. It would astonish them as has only known H. H. on his financial side to see him agree to a reduction of profits like this without a kick. But I'm a man of impulse, I am. Get me on my soft side and a kitten ain't more impulsive than old H. H. And o' course the business of this expedition ain't jest business to me. It's—er—friendship, and—er—sentiment—in short, there's feelin's that is more than worth their weight in gold!"

At these significant words the agitation of Aunt Jane was extreme. Was it possible that Mr. Tubbs was declaring himself in the presence of others—and was a response demanded from herself—would his sensitive nature, so lately wounded by cruel suspicion, interpret her silence as fatal to his hopes? But while she struggled between maiden shyness and the fear of crushing Mr. Tubbs, the conversation had swept on.

"Mr. Shaw," said Miss Browne, "you have heard Mr. Tubbs, in the interest of the expedition, liberally consent to reduce his claim by one-half. Doubtless, if only in a spirit of emulation, you will attempt to match this conduct by canceling our present agreement and consenting to another crediting you with the former sixteenth share of Mr. Tubbs."

"Don't do it, Shaw—hold the fort, old boy!" broke in Cuthbert Vane. "I say, Miss Browne, this is a bally shame!"

Miss Browne had always treated the prospective Lord Grasmere with distinguished politeness. Even now her air was mild, though lofty.

"Mr. Vane," she replied, "as a member of the British aristocracy, it is not to be supposed that you would view financial matters with the same eye as those of us of the Middle Classes, who, unhappily perhaps for our finer feelings, have been obliged to experience the harsh contacts of common life. Your devotion to Mr. Shaw has a romantic ardor which I cannot but admire. But permit us also our enthusiasm for the perspicacity of Mr. Tubbs, to which we owe the wealth now within our grasp."

Mr. Shaw now spoke for the first time.

"Miss Browne, I do not recognize the justice of your standpoint in this matter. I have done and am still prepared to do my best in the business of the treasure. If Mr. Tubbs will not give his information except for a bribe, I say—let him keep it. I shall continue the search for the treasure on the same lines as at present."

"One moment," said Miss Browne haughtily. She had never spoken otherwise than haughtily to Mr. Shaw since the episode of the Wise Woman of Dumbiedykes. "One moment, Jane—and you, Mr. Tubbs—"

She drew them aside, and they moved off out of earshot, where they stood with their backs to us and their heads together.

It was my opportunity. Violet herself had proposed that the original agreement—the agreement which bound me to ask for no share of the treasure—should be canceled. Nothing now was necessary to the ripening of my hopes but to induce Dugald Shaw to immolate himself. Would he do so—on my bare word? There was no time to explain anything—he must trust me.

I sprang up and dashed over to the pair who stood looking gloomily out to sea. "Mr. Shaw," I whispered quickly, "you must do as Miss Browne wishes." In my earnestness I laid a hand upon his arm. He regarded me bewilderedly.

"You must—you must!" I urged. "You'll spoil everything if you refuse!"

The surprise in his face yielded to a look composed of many elements, but which was mainly hard and bitter.

"And still I shall refuse," he said sardonically.

"Oh, no, no," I implored, "you don't understand! I—oh, if you would only believe that I am your friend!"

His face changed subtly. It was still questioning and guarded, but with a softening in it, too.

"Why don't you believe it?" I whispered unsteadily. "Do you forget that I owe you my life?"

And at the recollection of that day in the sea-cave the scarlet burned in my cheeks and my head drooped. But I saw how the lines about his mouth

"You Must Do as Miss Browne Wishes."

relaxed. "Surely you must know that I would repay you if I could!" I hurried on. "And not by—treachery."

He laughed suddenly. "Treachery? No! I think you would always be an open foe."

"Indeed I would!" I answered with a flash of wrath. Then, as I remembered the need of haste, I spoke in an intense quick whisper. "Listen—I can't explain, there isn't time. I can only ask you to trust me—to agree to what Miss Browne wishes. Everything—you don't dream how much—depends on it!" For I felt that I would let the treasure lie hidden in the Island Queen forever rather than that Mr. Tubbs should, under the original contract, claim a share of it.

The doubt had quite left his face.

"I do trust you, little Virginia," he said gently. "Yes, I trust in your honesty, heaven knows, child. But permit me to question your wisdom in desiring to enrich our friend Tubbs."

"Enrich him—enrich him! The best I wish him is unlimited gruel in an almshouse somewhere. No! What I want is to get that wretched paper of Miss Browne's nullified. Afterward we can divide things up as we like—"

Bewilderment, shot with a gleam of half-incredulous understanding, seemed to transfix him. We stood a long moment, our eyes challenging each other, exchanging their countersign of faith and steadfastness. Then slowly he held out his hand. I laid mine in it—we stood hand in hand, comrades at last. Without more words he turned away and strode over to the council of three.

(To Be Continued.)

Names Mixed

"Come let us stop here awhile in front of this cage of stilsons."

"What do you mean, stilsons? Those are monkeys."

"Oh, that's all right. I knew they were named after some kind of a wrench."

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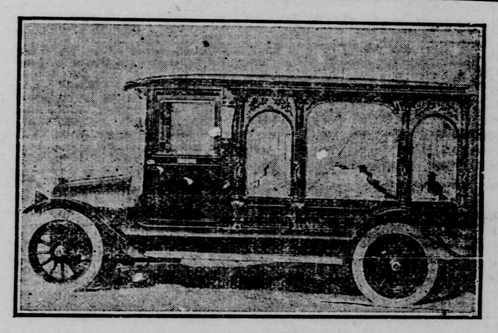

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