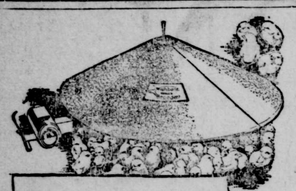

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SPANISH DOUBLOONS

By CAMILLA KENYON

PICTURES BY A. WEIL

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"It's the women, lad," said the Scotchman in a low voice to Cuthbert. "It's—it's Virginia." And Cuthbert heavily assented.

Seeing myself as the motif of such slaughter shocked my mind suddenly back to clearness.

"Oh," I cried, "not that. Why not surprise them in the cave, and make them stay there? One man could guard the entrance easily—and afterward we could build it up with logs or something."

Everybody stared.

"A remarkably neat scheme," said Mr. Shaw, "but impossible of application, I'm afraid, because none of us know where to find the cave."

I shook my head.

"I know!"

There was a lengthy silence. People looked at one another, and their eyes said, "This has been too much for her!"

"I know," I impatiently repeated. "I can take you straight there. I found the tombstone before Mr. Tubbs did, and the cave, too. Come, let's not waste time. We must hurry—they'll be getting back!"

Amazement, still more than half incredulous, surged round me. Then Mr. Shaw said rapidly:

"You're right. Of course, if you have found the cave, the best thing we can do is to keep them shut up in it. But we must move fast—perhaps we're too late already. If they have found the chest they may by now be starting for camp with the first load of doubloons."

Again I shook my head.

"They haven't found the gold," I assured him.

The astonished faces grew more anxious. "It sho' have told on li'le Miss Jinny's brain," muttered Cookie to himself.

"They haven't found the gold," I reiterated with emphasis, "because the gold is not in the cave. Don't ask me how I know, because there isn't time to tell you. There was no gold there but the two bags that the pirates brought back last night. The—the skeleton moved it all out."

"My Lawd!" groaned Cookie, staggering backward.

"Virginia! I had no idea you were superstitious!" quavered Aunt Jane.

"I say, do take some sleeping tablets or something and quiet your nerves!" implored Cuthbert with the tenderest solicitude.

In my exasperation I stamped my foot.

"And while we are arguing here the pirates may be starting back to camp! And then we'll have to kill them and go home and give ourselves up to be hanged! Please, please, come with me and let me show you that I know!" I lifted my eyes to the intent face of Dugald Shaw.

"All right," he said tersely. "I think you do know. How and what, we'll find out later." Rapidly he made his plan, got together the things needful for its execution, looked to the bonds of the still dazed and drowsy prisoners, posted Cookie in their neighborhood with a pair of pistols, and commanded Aunt Jane to dry her tears and look after Miss Higglesby-Browne, who had dismayed every one by most inopportunely toppling over in a perfectly genuine swoon.

Then the Scotchman, Cuthbert Vane and I set off through the woods. The men were heavily armed, and I had recovered my own little revolver and restored it to my belt. Mr. Shaw had seen to this, and had said to me, very quietly:

"You know, Virginia, if things don't go our way, it may be necessary for you to use it—on yourself."

And I nodded assentingly.

We went in silence through the green hush of the woods, moving in single file. My place as guide was in the van, but Mr. Shaw deposed me from it and went ahead himself, while Cuthbert Vane brought up the rear. No one spoke, even to whisper. I guided Dugald Shaw, when needful, by a light tough upon the arm. Our enterprise was one of utmost danger. If we met the pirates it was their lives or ours—and I recall with incredulity my resolution to imbed five of my six bullets in a pirate before I turned the sixth upon myself.

We passed the grave, and I saw that the vines had been torn aside again, and that the tombstone was gone. We came to the brink of the cliff, and I pointed silently downward along the ledge to the angle in which lay the mouth of the cave. My breath came quickly, for at any instant a head might be thrust forth from the opening.

Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert dropped down upon the ledge. Though under whispered orders to retreat I could not, but hung over the edge of the cliff, eager and breathless. Then with a bound the men were beside me. Mr. Shaw caught my hand, and we rushed

We Went in Silence Through the Green Hush of the Woods.

together into the woods.

A quake, a roar, a shower of flying rocks. It was over—the dynamite had done its work, whether successfully or not remained to be seen. After a little the Scotchman ventured back. He returned to us where we waited in the woods—Cuthbert to mount guard over me—with a cleared face.

"It's all right," he said. "The entrance is completely blocked. I set the charge six feet inside, but the roof is down clear to the mouth. Poor wretches—they have all come pouring out upon the sand—"

All three of us went back to the edge of the cliff. Seventy feet below, on the narrow strip of sand before the sea-mouth of the cave, we saw the figures of four men, who ran wildly about and sought for a foothold on the sheer face of the cliff. As we stood watching them, with, on my part, at least, unexpected qualms of pity and a cold interior sensation very unlike triumph, they discovered us. Then for the first time, I suppose, they understood the nature of their disaster. We could not hear their cries, but we saw arms stretched out to us, fists frantically shaken, hands lifted in prayer. We saw Mr. Tubbs flop down upon his unaccustomed knees—it was all rather horrible.

I drew back, shivering. "It won't be for long, of course," I said uncertainly, "just till the steamer comes—and we'll give them lots to eat—but I suppose they think—they will soon be just a lot more skeletons—" And here I was threatened with a moist anticlimax to my late Amazonian mood.

Why should the frequent and natural phenomena of tears produce such panic in the male breast? "It's been too much for her!" exclaimed the once dour Scot in tones of anguish. "Hurry, lad—we must find her some water—"

"Nonsense," I interposed, winking rapidly. "Just think of some way to calm those creatures, so that I shan't see them in my dreams, begging and beseeching—" For I had not forgotten the immensity of my debt to Tony.

So a note was written on a leaf torn from a pocketbook and thrown over the cliff weighted with a stone. The captives swooped upon it. Followed then a vivid pantomime by Tony, expressive of eased if unrepentant minds, while Mr. Tubbs, by gestures, indicated that though sadly misunderstood, old H. H. was still our friend and benefactor.

It was an attentive group to which on our return to camp I related the circumstances which had made possible our late exploit of imprisoning the pirates in the cave. The tale of my achievements, though recounted with due modesty, seemed to put the finishing touch to the extinction of Violet, for she wilted finally and forever, and was henceforth even bullied by Aunt Jane. The diary of Peter was produced, and passed about with awe from hand to hand. Yesterday's discovery in the cave had rounded out the history of Peter to a melancholy completion. But though we knew the end we guessed in vain at the beginning, at Peter's name, at that of the old grandfather whose thrifty piety had brought him to Havana and to the acquaintance of the dying mate of the Bonny Lass, at the whereabouts of the old New England farm which had been mortgaged to buy the Island Queen, at the identity of Helen, who waited still, perhaps, for the lover who never would return.

But even our regrets for Peter did not chill the exultation with which we thought of the treasure-chest waiting there under the sand in the cabin of the Island Queen.

All afternoon we talked of it. That, for the present, was all we could do. There were the two prisoners in camp to be guarded—and they had presently awakened and made remarks of a strongly personal and unpleasant trend on discovering their situation. There was Crusoe invalided, and needing petting, and getting it from everybody on the score of his romantic past as Benjy as well as of his present virtues. The broken leg had been cleverly set by Dugald—somehow in the late upheaval Miss and Mister had dropped quite out of our vocabularies—with Cuthbert as surgeon's assistant and me holding the chloroform to the patient's nose. There was the fatigue and reaction from excitement which everybody felt, and Peter's diary to be read, and golden dreams to be indulged. And there was the delicate question to be discussed, of how the treasure should be divided.

"Why, it all belongs to Virginia, of course," said Cuthbert, opening his eyes at the thought of any other view being taken but this obvious one.

"Nonsense!" I hastily interposed. "My finding the diary was just an accident; I'll take a share of it—no more."

Here Miss Browne murmured something half inaudible about "—confined to members of the expedition—" but subsided for lack of encouragement.

"I suggest," said Dugald, "that, our numbers having most fortunately diminished and there being, on the basis of Peter's calculations, enough to enrich us all, we should share and share alike." And this proposal was received with acclamations, as was a second from the same source, devoting a certain percentage of each share to Cookie, to whom the news of his good fortune was to come later as a great surprise.

Shortly before sundown Cuthbert and Cookie were dispatched by Dugald Shaw to the cliff above the cave with supplies for the inhumed pirates. These were let down by rope. A note was brought up on the rope, signed by Mr. Tubbs, and containing strangely jumbled exhortations, prayers and threats. A second descent of the rope elicited another missive, neatly folded and addressed in the same hand to Miss Jane Harding. Cuthbert gave this privately to me, but its contents must forever be unknown, for it went, unread, into Cookie's fire. I had no mind to find Aunt Jane, with her umbrella as a parachute, vanishing over the cliffs to seek the arms of a repentant Tubbs.

The fly in the ointment of our satisfaction, and the one remaining obstacle to our possession of the treasure, was the presence of the two pirates in our midst. They were not nice pirates. They were quite the least choice of the collection. Chris, when he was not swearing, wept moistly, and so touched the heart of Aunt Jane that we lived in fear of her letting him go if she got the opportunity.

What to do with the pirates continued for a day and a night a knotty problem.

It was Cuthbert Vane who solved it, and with the simplicity of genius.

"Why not send 'em down to their chums the way we do the eats?" he asked.

Dire outcries greeted the decision. Aunt Jane wept, and Chris wept.

The Remarkable Program Was Triumphantly Carried Out.

Oaths flowed from Captain Magnus in a turgid stream. Nevertheless the twain were led away, firmly bound, and guarded by Dugald, Cuthbert and the negro. And the remarkable program proposed by Cuthbert Vane was triumphantly carried out. Six prisoners now occupied the old cave of the buccaneers.

With the camp freed from the presence of the pirates all need of watchfulness was over. The prisoners in the cave were provided with no implements but spades, whereas dynamite and crowbars would be necessary to force a way through the debris which choked the mouth of the tunnel. A looking over of the ground at the daily feeding time would be enough.

Tomorrow's sun would see our hopes crowned and all our toil rewarded by the recovery of the treasure from the Island Queen.

(To Be Continued.)

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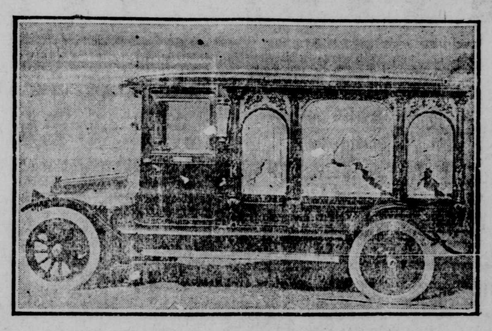

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