

SPANISH DOUBLOONS



BY CAMILLA KENYON

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 Higgleby, into financing an expedition to Leeward Island. Her niece, Virginia Harding, undertaking to stop her, sets 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 disgust. The landing, however, is safely effected.

CHAPTER V.—Led by Miss Higgleby, 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.

The Cave With Two Mouths.

Obscure as were the directions which Hopperdown's niece had taken from his dying lips, one point at least was clear—the treasure-cave opened on the sea. This seemed an immense simplification of the problem, until you discovered that the great wall of cliffs was honeycombed with fissures. One of the boats which had conveyed us from the Rufus Smith had been left with us, and in it Mr. Shaw, with the Honorable Cuthbert and Captain Magnus, made a preliminary voyage of discovery. This yielded the



Made a Preliminary Voyage of Discovery.

Information above set down, plus, however, the thrilling and significant fact that a cave seemingly predestined to be the hiding place of treasure, and moreover a cave with the specified two openings, ran under the point which protected the anchorage on the south, connecting the cove with the sea. Only the Scotchman remained exasperatingly calm and declined to admit that the treasure was as good as found.

"I'll wait till I see the color of my money before I reckon the interest on it," he remarked. "It's true the cave would be a likely and convenient place for hiding the chest; the question is: Wouldn't it be too likely and convenient? Sampson would maybe not choose the spot of all others where the first comer who had got word of the story would be certain to look."

"Well, friends," remarked Mr. Tubbs, "there's them that sees nothing but the hole in the doughnut, and there's them that see the doughnut that's around the hole. I ain't ashamed to say that old H. H. is in the doughnut class. Why, the Old Man himself used to remark—I guess it ain't news to some here about me bein' on the inside with most of the leadin' financial lights of the country—he used to remark, 'Tubbs has it in him to bull the market on a Black Friday.' Ladies, I ain't one that's inclined to boast, but I jest want to warn you not to be too astonished when H. H. makes acquaintance with Bill Halliwell's tombstone, which I'm

willin' to lay he does yet."

"Well, good luck to you," said the grim Scot, "and let me likewise warn all hands not to be too astonished if we find that the treasure is not in the cave. But I'll admit it is as good a place as any for beginning the search."

The cave which was now the center of our hopes—I say our, because somehow or other I found myself hoping and fearing along with the rest, though carefully concealing it—ran under the point at its farther end. The distance was about sixty feet from mouth to mouth, and back of this transverse passage a great vaulted chamber stretched far under the land. The walls of the chamber rose sheer to a height of fifteen feet or more, when a broad ledge broke their smoothness. At high water the sea flooded the cavern to its farthest extremity and beat upon the walls. Now and again, it was to prove, even the water-worn pavement between the two archways was left bare, and one could walk dry-shod along the rocks under the high land of the point from the beach to the cave. But this was at the very bottom of the ebb. Mostly the lower end of the cave was flooded, and the explorers went back and forth in the boat.

A certain drawback to boating in our island waters was the presence of hungry hordes of sharks. You might forget them for a moment and sit happily trailing your fingers overboard, and then a huge moving shadow would darken the water, and you saw the ripple cut by a darting fin and the flash of a livid belly as the monster rolled over, ready for his mouthful.

What with the genius of Cookie and the fruitfulness of our island, not to speak of supplies from the Army and Navy stores, we lived like sybarites. There were fish from stream and sea, coconuts and bananas and oranges from the trees in the clearing. I had hopes of yams and breadfruit also, but if they grew on Leeward none of us had a speaking acquaintance with them. Cookie did wonders with the pigs that were shot and brought in to him, though I never could sit down with appetite to a massacred infant served up on a platter, which is just what little pigs look like.

"Jes' yo' eaz' yo' eye on dis yere in-nahcent," Cookie would request, as he placed the suckling before Mr. Tubbs. "Tendah as a new-bo'n babe, he am. Jes' lak he been tucked up to sleep by his mammy. Sho' now, how yo' got de heart to stick de knife in him, Mistah Tubbs?"

It was significant that Mr. Tubbs, after occupying for a day or two an undistinguished middle place at the board, had somehow slid into the carver's post at the head of the table. Flanking him were the two ladies. Everybody else had a sense of sitting in outer darkness, particularly I, whom fate had placed opposite Captain Magnus. Since landing on the island, Captain Magnus had forsworn the effeminacy of forks. Loaded to the hilt, his knife would approach his cavernous mouth and disappear in it. Yet when it emerged Captain Magnus was alive. Where did it go? This was a question that agitated me daily.

The history of Captain Magnus was obscure. It was certain that he had his captain's papers, though how he had mastered the science of navigation sufficiently to obtain them was a problem. Though he held a British navigator's license, he did not appear to be an Englishman.

The captain, as Mr. Vane had remarked, was Miss Browne's own find. Before the objections of Mr. Shaw—evidently a Negative Influence from the beginning—had caused her to abandon the scheme, Miss Browne had planned to charter a vessel in New York and sail around the Horn to the island. While nursing this project she had formed an extensive acquaintance with persons frequenting the New York water-front, among whom was Captain Magnus. As I heard her remark, he was the one nautical character whom she found sympathetic, by which I judge that the others were skeptical and rude. Being sympathetic, Captain Magnus found it an easy matter to attach himself to the expedition—or perhaps it was Violet who annexed him, I don't know which.

It was fortunate that Cookie knew nothing of the solitary grave somewhere on the island, with its stone marked with B. H. and a cross-bone, nor that the inhabitant thereof was supposed to walk. If he had, I think the strange spectacle of a lone negro

Thing had vanished like a shadow.

On its second appearance, having had a day and a night for meditation, he had known better than to commit such an outrage upon the possessor of ghostly powers, and had resorted to prayer instead. This had answered quite as well, for the phantom pig had dissolved like the morning mists. While the sun blazed, what with his devotions and his rabbit's foot and a

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In a small boat rowing lustily for the American continent might soon have been witnessed on the Pacific by any eyes that were there to see. And we could ill have spared either boat or cook.

Yet even though unweary by this grewsome knowledge, after two or three days I noticed that Cookie was ill at ease. As the leisure member of the party, I enjoyed more of Cookie's society than the rest. On this occasion while the morning was still in its freshness he was permitting me to make fudge. But his usual joviality was gone. I saw that he glanced over his shoulder at intervals, muttering darkly to himself. Also that a rabbit's foot was slung conspicuously about his neck.

Having made my fudge and set the pan on a stone in the stream to cool, I was about to retire with a view to conducting a limited exploring expedition of my own. The assurances of Mr. Shaw—not personally directed to me, of course; the armed truce under which we lived did not permit of that—had convinced me that I had not to dread anything more ferocious than the pigs, and the wildest of them would retire before a stick or a stone. Besides, I boasted a little automatic, which I carried strapped to my waist in a businesslike manner. Mr. Vane had almost got me to the point where I could shoot it off without shutting my eyes.

Thus equipped, I was about to set off into the woods. I had turned my back on Cookie and the camp, when I was arrested by an exclamation:

"Miss Jinny!"

I turned to find Cookie gazing after me with an expression which, in the familiar phrase of fiction, I could not interpret, though among its ingredients were doubt and anguish. Cookie, too, looked pale. I don't in the least know how he managed it, but that was the impression he conveyed, dusky as he was.

"Miss Jinny, it mos' look lak yo' 'bout to go perambulatin' in dese yere woods?"

"I am, Cookie," I admitted.

The whites of Cookie's eyes became alarmingly conspicuous. Drawing near in a stealthy manner he whispered:

"Yo' bettah not, Miss Jinny!"

"Oh, nonsense, Cookie!" I said impatiently. "There's not a thing on the island but the pigs!"

"Miss Jinny," he solemnly replied, "dey's pigs and pigs."

"Yes, but pigs is pigs, you know," I answered, laughing.

"Dey's pigs and pigs, chille—live ones and—dead ones."

"Dead ones? Of course—haven't we been eating them?"

"Yo' won't nevah eat dis yere kind o' dead pig, Miss Jinny. It's—it's a 'naut'!"

The murder was out. Cookie leaned against a cocoa-palm and wiped his bon brow.

Persistently questioned, he told at last how, today and yesterday, arising in the dim dawn to build his fire before the camp was stirring, he had seen lurking at the edge of the clearing a white four-footed shape. It was a pig, yet not a pig; its ghostly hue, its noiseless movements, divided it from all proper mundane porkers by the dreadful gulf which divides the living from the dead. The first morning Cookie, doubtful of his senses, had flung a stone and the spectral Thing had vanished like a shadow.

On its second appearance, having had a day and a night for meditation, he had known better than to commit such an outrage upon the possessor of ghostly powers, and had resorted to prayer instead. This had answered quite as well, for the phantom pig had dissolved like the morning mists. While the sun blazed, what with his devotions and his rabbit's foot and a



"Yo' Bettah Not, Miss Jinny!"

cross of twigs nailed to a tree, Cookie felt a fair degree of security. But his teeth chattered in his head at the thought of approaching night. Meanwhile he could not in conscience permit me to venture forth into the path of this horror, which might, for all we knew, be lurking in the jungle shadows, even through the daylight hours. Also, though he did not avow this motive, I believe he found my company very reassuring. It is immensely easier to face a ghost in the sustaining presence of other flesh and blood.

For a moment I wavered in my determination. What if the island had its wild creatures after all? But neither lynx nor panther nor any other beast of prey is white, except a polar bear, and it would be unusual to meet one on a tropical island.

I decided that Cookie's pig was after all a pig, though still in the flesh. I thought I remembered having seen quite fair pigs, which would pass for white with a frightened negro in the dim light of dawn. I consoled Cookie as best I could by promising to cross my fingers if I heard or saw anything suspicious, and struck out into the woods.

For all my brave words to Cookie, I had no intention of going very far afield. From the shore of the cove I had observed that the ground behind the clearing rose to the summit of a low ridge, perhaps four hundred feet in height, which jutted from the base of the peak. From this ridge I thought I might see something more of the island than the limited environment of Lantern bay.

As the woods shut out the last glimpse of the white tents in the clearing, as even the familiar sound of the surf died down to a faint, half-imagined whisper mingling with the

rustling of the palms overhead, I experienced a certain discomfort, which persons given to hard and unqualified terms might have called fear. It seemed to me as if a very strong cord at the rear of my belt were jerking me back toward the inglorious safety of the camp. I fingered my automatic and marched on up the hill, trying not to gasp when a leaf rustled or a cocoon dropped in the woods.

I gained the summit of the ridge, and stood upon a bare rock platform, scantily sheltered by a few trees, large shrubs, rather, with a smooth, waxy leaf of vivid green. On the left rose the great mass of the peak. From far above among its crags a beautiful foamy waterfall came hurtling down.

I had not dreamed of getting a view so glorious from the little eminence of the ridge. Here was an item of news to take back to camp. Having with great originality christened the place Lookout, I turned to go. And as I turned I saw a shape vanish into the woods.

It was an animal, not a human shape. And it was white. It had, indeed, every distinguishing trait of Cookie's phantom pig. Only it was not a pig. My brief shadowy glimpse of it had told me that. I knew what it was not, but what it was I could not, as I stood there rooted, even guess.

Would it attack me, or should I only die of fright? I wondered if my heart were weak, and hoped it was, so that I should not live to feel the teeth of the unknown Thing sink in my flesh. I thought of my revolver and after an infinity of time managed to draw it from the case. My fingers seemed at once nervelessly limp and woodenly rigid. This was not at all the daunting front with which I had dreamed of meeting danger. I had fancied myself with my automatic making a rather pretty picture as a young Amazon—but I had now a dreadful fear that my revolver might spasmodically go off and wound the Thing, and then, even if it had meditated letting me go, it would certainly attack me. Nevertheless I clung to my revolver as to my last hope.

I began to edge away crab-wise into the wood. Like a metronome I said to myself over and over monotonously, "Don't run, don't run!"

I did not run. Instead, I stepped on a smooth surface of rock and slid downhill like a human toboggan until I fetched up against a dead log after a confused interval during which I vaguely believed myself to have been swallowed by an alligator. While the alligator illusion endured I must have lain comatose and immovable. Indeed, when my senses began to come back I was still quite inert. I experienced that curious tranquillity which is said to visit those who are actually within the jaws of death. There I lay prone, absolutely at the mercy of the mysterious white prowler of the forest—and I did not care. The whole petty business of living seemed a long way behind me now.

Languidly at last I opened my eyes. Within three yards of me, in the open rock-paved glade where I had fallen, stood the Thing. Yes, there it was—only now it had put an ear back and was sniffing at me with a mingling of interest and apprehension.

The strange beast of the jungle was a white bull-terrier. Abruptly I sat up. The terrier gave a startled sidewise bound, but paused again and stood regarding me.

"Here, pup! Here, pup! Nice dog-cums!" I said in soothing accents.

The dog gave a low whine and stood shivering, eager but afraid. I continued my blandishments. Little by little the forlorn creature drew nearer, until I put out a cautious hand and stroked his ears. He dodged afrightedly, but presently crept back again. Soon his head was against my knee, and he was devouring my hand with avid caresses. Some time, before his abandonment on the island, he had been a well-brought-up and petted animal. Months or years of wild life had estranged him from humanity, yet at the human touch the old devotion woke again.

The thing now was to lure him back to camp and restore him to the happy service of his gods. With another alluring, "Here, dogcums!" I started on my way. He shrank, trembled, hesitated, then was after me with a bound. So I brought him triumphantly across the Rubicon of the little stream, and marched him into camp under the astounded eyes of Cookie.

At sight of the negro the dog growled softly and crouched against my skirt. Cookie stood like an effigy of amazement. "Don't run, don't run!"

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