

SPANISH DOUBLOONS

By CAMILLA KENYON

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(CHAPTER XIX—Continued.)

Plans were discussed for transferring the pirates from the cave to the cutter, for they were to be taken to Santa Marina to meet whatever punishment was thought fit for their rather indefinite ill-doing. They had not murdered us, they had robbed us of nothing but the provisions they had eaten; they had, after all, as much right on the island as ourselves. Yet there remained their high-handed conduct in invading our camp and treating us as prisoners, with the threat of darker possibilities. I fancy that Santa Marina justice works mainly by rule of thumb, and that the courts do not embarrass themselves much with precedents. Only I hope they did not shoot the picturesque "Tio against a wall."

The power-schooner, manned by a crew from the cutter, was to be taken to Santa Marina also. Senor Gonzales remained with us for the day as guest, and on the next the boats from the cutter took the pirates from the cave. We did not see them again. Through the convenient elasticity of Santa Marina procedure, Mr. Tubbs was headed along with the rest, although he might plausibly, if hypocritically, have pleaded that he had complied with the will of the invaders under duress. Aunt Jane wept very much, and handed me Petrus of Passion with the request that she might never see it again.

We parted from Senor Gonzales not without regrets. It was an impressive leave-taking—indeed, Senor Gonzales in his least word and gesture was impressive. Also, he managed subtly and respectfully to impart to me the knowledge that he shared Titian's tastes in the matter of looting. On his departure he made a pretty little speech, full of compliments and floral specimens, and bestowed upon me—as being mine by right, he earnestly protested—the two bags of Spanish doubloons.

"Since the above was written, Mr. Shaw has run across Tio on the San Francisco water-front. Tio tells him that they got off with three months' imprisonment. The American consul interested himself and the schooner was released to him. Tio owns, who were Tio's relations and hence did not prosecute. Hence the detained prisoners left the republic. Captain Magnus was asked, and he gave me a name. Mr. Tubbs married a wealthy half-Caste woman, the owner of the schooner, but a perfectly respectable Mrs. Tubbs from Puerto turned up later, and the two much married. It is obliged to achieve one of his over-night nights."

CHAPTER XX.

The Blameless Chest.
We waited nine days for the coming of the Rufus Smith. During that time an episode occurred as a result of which I sat one morning by myself on the rocks beside the sloop, over which such ardent hopes had been centered, only like the derelict itself to be wrecked at last. It was a lonely spot and I wanted to be alone. I felt abused, and sad, and sore. I realized that I was destined to do nothing but harm in the world, and to hurt people I was fond of, and be misunderstood by everyone, and to live on—if I wasn't lucky enough to meet with a premature death, and end—into a prison, lonely, crabbed old age, when I would wish to goodness I had married anybody, and might even finish by applying to a Matrimonial Agency.

As I sat nursing these melancholy thoughts I heard a footstep. I did not look up—for I knew the footstep. I should have known it if it had trodden over my grave.

"I take it you are not wanting company, you have come so far out of the way of it," said Dugald Shaw.

Still I did not look up.

"Nobody seemed to want me," I remarked sulkily, after a pause. He made no reply, but seated himself upon the rocks. For a little there was silence.

"Virginia," he said abruptly, "I'm thinking you have hurt the lad."

"Oh," I burst out, "what is all you think of—the lad, the lad? I'm about mad. Don't you suppose it hurt me, too?"

"No," he made deliberate answer. "I was not sure of that. I thought maybe you liked having men at your feet."

"Liked it? Liked to wound Cutbert—Cutbert? Oh, if only it had not happened, if we could have gone on being friends! It was all my fault for going with him into the cave. It was after you had buried the skeleton, and I wanted to see poor Peter's resting-place. And we spoke of Helen, and it was all rightfully melancholy and tender, and all at once he—"

"And I meant he never should!" In the serenity of my heart I began to weep.

"There, lassie, there, don't cry!" he said gently. "The boy didn't speak of it, of course. But I know how it must be. It has hit him hard, I'm afraid."

"I suppose," I wept, "you would have had me marry him whether I wanted to or not, just to keep from hurting him?"

"No," he answered quickly. "I did not say that—I did not say that I would have had you marry him. No, lassie, I did not say that."

"Then why are you scolding me?" I asked in a choked whisper.

"Scolding you? I was not. It was only that I love the lad—and I wish you both so well—I thought perhaps there was some mistake, and—it would not matter about me, if I could see you both happy."

"There is a mistake," I said clearly. "It is a great mistake, Dugald Shaw, that you should come to me and court me—for some one else."

There was silence for a while, the kind of silence when you hear your heartbeats.

When he spoke his voice was unsteady.

"But the boy has everything to offer you—his ancient name, his splendid unstained youth, a heart that is all loyalty. He is strong and brave and beautiful. Virginia, why couldn't you love him?"

"I could not love him," I replied, very low, "because my love was not mine any more to give. It belongs to someone else. Is his name ancient? I don't know. It is his, and he ennobles it." Cutbert has youth, but youth is only promise. In the man I love I find fulfillment. And he is loyal and brave and honest—I am afraid he isn't beautiful, but I love him the better for his scars."

After that I sat quite still, and I knew it depended on the next half minute whether I went all the days of my life crowned and glorious with happiness, or buried my shame and heartbreak under the waters of the cave.

And then Dugald Shaw took me in his arms.

By and by he said huskily: "Beloved, I had no right to ask you to share such a life as mine must be—the life of a poor sailor."

"At this I raised my head from its nestling place, and I asked you! Of course you could have refused me, but I depended on your not having the courage."

"And indeed that is a charge I'll not allow—that I am so little of a man as to let my courting be done for me. No, no, it was my love compelling you that made you speak the words you did."

"The love of a selfish man, who should have thought only of shielding you from the hardships of such a wandering, homeless life as mine."

"Well, Heaven reward you for your selfishness," I said earnestly. "I am thankful you were not so noble as to let me throw myself at your head in vain. I have been doing it for ever so long, in fact, but it is such a thick Scotch head that I dare say I made no impression."

"Sweet imp! You'll pay for that—oh, Virginia, if I had only something to offer you!"

"You can offer me something that I want very much, if you will, and at no cost but your strong right arm."

"It is an arm which is right to my service for life—but what am I to do with it now?"

"Sweet imp! You'll pay for that—oh, Virginia, if I had only something to offer you!"

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"Sweet imp! You'll pay for that—oh, Virginia, if I had only something to offer you!"



Dugald Shaw Took Me in His Arms.

It now? And indeed I think it is very well employed at this moment."

"But it must be employed much more strenuously," I remarked, moving a little away, "if you are to get me what I want. Before you came, I was meditating poison ways of getting it for myself. I wanted it for a melancholy relic—a sort of mausoleum in which all my hopes were buried. Now its purpose is quite different; it is to be my bride's chest and hold the dowry which I shall bring to one Dugald Shaw."

"You mean the chest—the chest that held the Spanish doubloons—that lies under the sand in the sloop?"

"Exactly. And now I shall know whether you are the true prince or not, because he always succeeds in the tasks he undertakes to win the princess."

It was low tide, such a tide as had all but buried me to my death in the cave. One could go and come from the beach along the rocks, without climbing the steep path up the cliff.

Only, she must let me keep Cutbert, please.

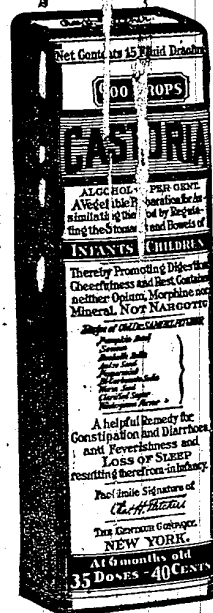
[THE END.]

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