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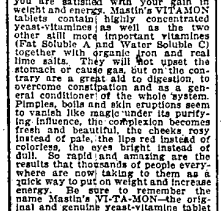

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SPANISH DOUBLOONS

By CAMILLA KENYON

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THE ISLAND.

Synopsis—Jane Harding, respectable and conservative old maid—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 and is unwillingly carried along. By no means concealing her distaste for the expedition and her contempt for its members, Virginia makes the acquaintance of the Honorable Cuthbert Vane. Talking with Dugald Shaw, 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 Jane Harding. Landing on the island is a matter of some difficulty, Virginia being carried ashore in the arms of Cuthbert Vane.

(CHAPTER IV—Continued.)

—5—

"I was," I announced, moved to defiance by the neighborhood of Mr. Shaw. "Before we started I was so afraid that if you had listened you might have heard my teeth chattering. But I had at least the comforting thought that if I did go to my end it would not be simply in pursuit of sordid gain!"

"And indeed that was almost a waste of noble sentiment under the circumstances," answered the dour Scot, with the fleeting shadow of an enraging smile.

I promised myself, as I went with Mr. Vane toward the fire, that some day I would find the weapon that would penetrate the Scotchman's armor—and would use it mercilessly.

Cookie received us with unctuous warmth.

"Well, now, 'clar to goodness if it aint the li'le lady! How come you git ashore all dry lak you is? Yes, sah, Cookie'll git you-all some'n hot immejusly." He waffled me with stately gestures to a seat on an overturned iron kettle, and served my coffee with an air appropriate to mahogany and plate. It was something to see him wait on Cuthbert Vane. As Cookie told me later, in the course of our rapidly developing friendship, "dat young gemman am sure one ob de quality." To indicate the certainty of Cookie's instinct, Miss Higglesby-Browne was never more to him than "dat pusson."

On the beach Mr. Shaw, Captain Magnus and the sailors were toiling, unloading and piling up stores. Rather laggingly, Apollo joined them. I was glad, for a heavy fatigue was steling over me. Cookie, taking note of my sagging head, brought me some-

"All Dry Lak You Is?"

body's dunnage bag for a pillow. I felt him drawing a tarpaulin over me as I sank into bottomless depths of sleep.

I opened my eyes to the dying stars. The moon had set. I heard men shouting. "Here she comes!" "Stand by to lend a hand!" In haste I scrambled up and tore for the beach. I must witness the landing of Aunt Jane.

Through the dawn-twilight that lay upon the cove the boat drew near that bore Mr. Tubbs and his fair charges. I saw the three cork helmets grouped together in the stern. Then the foaming fringe of wavelets caught the boat, hurled it forward, seemed all but to engulf it. Out leaped the sailors. Out leaped Mr. Tubbs, and disappeared at once beneath the waves. Shrill and prolonged rose the shrieks of my aunt and Miss Higglesby-Browne. Valiantly Mr. Shaw and Cuthbert Vane had rushed into the deep. Each now appeared staggering up the steep, foam-swept strand under a struggling burden. Even after they were safely deposited on the sand, Miss Browne and my aunt continued to shriek.

"Save, save Mr. Tubbs!" implored Aunt Jane.

But Mr. Tubbs, overlooked by all but this thoughtful friend, had cannily saved himself. He advanced upon us dripping.

"A close call!" he sang out cheerfully. "Thought one time old Nep had got a strangle-hold all right. Thinks I, I guess there'll be something doing when Wall Street gets this news—that old H. H. is food for the finny denizens of the deep!"

"It would have been most—most shocking!" quavered poor Aunt Jane with feeling. She was piteously striving to extricate herself from the folds of the green veil.

I came to her assistance. The poor plump little woman was trembling from head to foot.

"It was a most—unusual experience," she told me as I unwound her. "Probably extremely—unifying to the soul-forces and all that, as Miss Browne says, but for the moment—unsettling. Is my helmet on straight, dear? I think it is a little severe for my type of face, don't you? There was a sweet little hat in a Fifth avenue shop—simple and yet so chic. I thought it just the thing, but Miss Browne said no, helmets were always worn—Coffee? Oh, my dear child, how thankful I shall be!"

And Aunt Jane clung to me as of yore as I led-her up the beach.

CHAPTER V.

The Captain's Legacy.

When in—my tender years I was taken to the matinee, usually the most thrilling feature of the spectacle to me was the scene depicted on the drop-curtain. Directly I was seated—in the body—and had had my hat taken off and been told not to wriggle, I vaulted airily over the unconscious audience, over an orchestra engaged in tuning up, and was lost in the marvelous landscape of the drop-curtain. The adventures which I had there put to shame any which the raising of the curtain permitted to be seen upon the stage.

I had never hoped to recover in this prosaic world my long-lost paradise of the drop-curtain, but morning revealed it to me here on Leeward Island. Here was the feathery foliage, the gushing springs, the gorgeous flowers of that enchanted land. And here were the soft and intoxicating perfumes that I had imagined in my curtain landscape.

Leeward Island measures roughly four miles across from east to west by three from north to south. The core of the island is the peak, rising to a height of nearly three thousand feet. At its base on three sides lies a plateau, its edges gnawed away by the sea to the underlying rocky skeleton. On the southeastern quarter the peak drops by a series of great precipices straight into the sea.

All the plateau and much of the peak are clothed with woods, a beautiful bright green against the sapphire of sea and sky. High above all other growth wave the feathery tops of the cocoa-palms, which flourish here luxuriantly.

The palms were nowhere more abundant than in the hollow by the cove where our camp was made, and their size and the regularity of their order spoke of cultivation. Guavas, oranges and lemons grew here, too, and many beautiful banana-palms.

At the side of the clearing toward the stream stood a hut, built of cocoa-palm logs. Its roof of palm-thatch had been scattered by storms. Nearer the stream on a bench were an old decaying washtub and a board. A broken frying-pan and a rusty axhead lay in the grass.

In the hut itself were a rude bedstead, a small table and a cupboard made of boxes. I was excited at first, and fancied we had come upon the dwelling of a marooned pirate. Without taking the trouble to combat this opinion, Mr. Shaw explained to Cuthbert Vane that a copra gatherer had once lived here, and that the place must have yielded such a profit that he was only surprised to find it deserted now. Behind this cool, emphatic speech I sensed an ironic zest in the destruction of my pirate.

After their thrilling experience of being ferried from the Rufus Smith to the island, my aunt and Miss Browne had been easily persuaded to dispose themselves for naps.

The boats of the Rufus Smith had departed from the island, and our relations with humanity were severed. The thought of our isolation awed and fascinated me as I sat meditatively upon a keg of nails watching the mirache of the tropic dawn. The men were hard at work with bales and boxes, except Mr. Tubbs, who gave advice. It must have been valuable advice, for he assured everybody that a word from his lips had invariably been enough to make Wall Street sit up and take notice. But it is a far cry from Wall Street to Leeward Island. Mr. Tubbs, ignored, sought refuge with me at last, and pointed out the beauties of Arcurer as she rose from the embrace of Neptune.

"Arcurer Borealis, so to speak," he explained, "but they didn't use parties' surnames much in classic times."

The glad cry of breakfast put an end to Mr. Tubbs' exposition of mythology.

So does dull reality clip the feet of dreams that it proved impossible to begin the day by digging up the treasure. Camp had to be arranged, for folk must eat and see; even with the wealth of the Indies to be had for the turning of a sod. The cabin was reroofed and set apart as the bower of Aunt Jane and Miss Browne. I declined to make a third in this sanctuary. You could tell by looking at her that Violet was the sort of person who would inevitably sleep out loud.

"Hang me up in a tree or anywhere," I insisted, and it ended by my having a tarpaulin shelter rigged up in a group of cocoa-palms.

Among our earliest discoveries on the island was one regrettable from the point of view of romance, though rich in practical advantages; the woods were the abode of numerous wild pigs. You should have seen how

"No, We Do Our Best to Keep Out of Them."

clean, how seemly, how self-respecting were our Leeward Island pigs to realize how profoundly the pig of Christian lands is a debased and slandered animal. These quadrupeds would have strengthened Jean Jacques' belief in the primitive virtue of man before civilization debauched him.

Aunt Jane had been dreadfully alarmed by the pigs, and wanted to keep me immured in the cabin o' nights so that I should not be eaten. But nothing less than a Bengal tiger would have driven me to such extremity.

"Though if a pig should eat me," I suggested, "you might mark him to avoid becoming a cannibal at second hand. I should hate to think of you, Aunt Jane, as the family tomb!"

"Virginia, you are most unfeeling," said Aunt Jane, getting pink about the eyelids.

"Ah, I didn't know you Americans went in much for family tombs," remarked the beautiful youth interestedly.

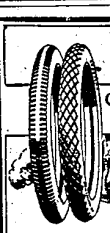
"No, we do our best to keep out of them," I assured him, and he walked off meditatively revolving this.

If the beautiful youth had been beautiful on shipboard, in the informal costume he affected on the island he was more splendid, still. His white cotton shirt and trousers showed him lithe and lean and muscular. His bared arms and chest were like cream solidified into flesh. With his striped silk sash of red and blue about his waist, and his crown of ambrosial chestnut curls—a development due to the absence of a barber—the Honorable Cuthbert would certainly have been hailed by the natives, if there had been any, as the island's god.

Camp was made in the early hours of the day. Then came luncheon, prepared with skill by Cookie, and eaten from a table of packing cases laid in the shade. Afterward everyone, hot and weary, retired for a siesta. Always around the island blew the faint cooling breath of the sea. No marsh or stagnant water bred insect pests or fever. Every day while we were there the men worked hard, and grew lean and sun-browned, and thrived on it. Every afternoon with unfailing regularity a light shower fell, but in twenty minutes it was over and the sun shone again, greedily lapping up the moisture that glittered on the leaves.

"In the first place, I don't believe in your treasure."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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