

The Haunted Walk; or, the Wreck on the Spanish Main.

By Geo. Mantville Peck.

The girl had run into the shelter of the trees, and as we joined her, she made a sign to ensure silence...

And sure enough, at the end of a minute, we saw a canoe, paddled by two men, come into sight...

Our way to get ashore was to step down into the boat, fastened by a running line to the moving ropes, and pull ourselves ashore...

As near as I could tell, it was about the time Bill had appointed; and, after taking my bearing, I made for a big tree wondering how long he would be before he came.

It was darker than ever beneath the trees - not so much as a star shining through; and it was going softly along with hands stretched out...

At that moment, I heard my name whispered. "Jack! - Jack!" "Here away!" I whispered back.

"Hush!" he said, and then he gave the low chirp, which was answered, and the next moment the little girl ran panting up and we started off for the haulk once more.

"Did I scare you, touching you, little one!" I said, after we had been walking about half an hour.

"Nothing!" he said, curiously. "Only that Indian chap who's been watching us all day long, if you mean him."

"Yes," he said, taking up all a rope. "I do mean him. But don't take any notice as to seem to be watching him. That's the Indian who always runs after my little Tezala, and she hates him."

"He?" I said. "Bit jealous, then?" "Suppose so," he said. "I wouldn't go after him might then, Bill?" "Why not?"

"Because Englishmen are jealous with their tongues, and when they are very jealous, it's with their fists."

"Well?" "But these Indian chaps are jealous with a long knife, which they make a spear and use, and shelter it in your ribs."

"I'm not afraid of him, Jack," he says, with a quiet smile; "but, as to not going ashore to-night, I must; for we must have a try and get a specimen of the kind of that old fellow. Then it may rest till we go again."

"Why, you won't go and face what I did last night, mate?" I says. "Indeed, Jack, but I will," he said, with a curious smile on his lip...

I took another pull at the rope, and then wetted my hands, and took another pull. I was answered. "For, look you, I won't deny it, I was frightened, and the idea of going and facing that party of uneasy-looking, old-world looking people scared me not a little."

"Well, Jack," says Bill, smiling, "you won't hang back, will you?" "If you ask my advice, Bill, old mate, what I says is, don't go; but if you do go, Jack Harris isn't the boy to hang back and let his message go alone."

"I know you'd go, Jack," he said, sliding his feet down the rope so as to get a grip at my hand; "and look here, mate, I won't be shabby over sharing. It's a fortune for both of us; only I must have certainty before I can charter a ship to come and unload her."

"Do you think them Dons will let you touch the cargo, Bill?" I says, in a whisper. "Do you think wind would stop us, or the figures we see in a dream, Jack?" he says, with the same quiet smile.

"There, man, don't be scared at shadows. I can explain it to you; but what was last night were only the shadows like of the man who used to wait over the treasure in that ship before she was cast away. Depend upon it, they were drowned at the time."

"And have walked that deck ever since?" I says with a bit of shiver. "Nonsense, man, there's nothing to be scared about," he said. "I'm more afraid of the Indian fellow dodging us than of all the Spanish crew."

"I didn't say any more just then; but just as we were finished for the evening, with the skipper in rare good humor because of the valuable timber; sticks he had got aboard, Bill says to me. "I'm more afraid of the Indian fellow dodging us than of all the Spanish crew."

"What was that noise?" said Bill, eagerly. "Only some kind of a wild cat tracking us," I said, "and I let it have my hanger."

"Bill gave me a doubtful sort of look, but as I said no more, he turned and went on, and in course of time we came out once more upon the sands, where the sea gently rippled in, and rolled over all golden with phosphorescence."

There lay the haulk, though, quite black, and without a sign of the dim light we had seen the night before. "There, Jack," Bill said, as the little maiden crouched under the shelter of a bush; "there's a good sign. Now, my lad, axe, spade, and a little activity, and we'll soon see whether the old ones is worth powder and shot. Bring the lanterns."

I took a firm grip at my courage, and hauled him home, as laying down such things as I did not want, I lit the lantern, shut up the horn door closely, and then hanging it to my neck by a lanyard, took spade and axe in hand, followed Bill to the haulk, and climbed up after him, till we stood once more on the ragged edge of the hull, level with the deck.

"Give me the lantern, lad," said Bill, and I gave it to him, when, to show me a good example, he leaped boldly on to the dried and rotten wood close by the long cannon, and called on me to follow.

"There, my lad," he said, laughing; "there's nothing to be afraid of, and we are not a pair of girls to be frightened at shadows. Give me that spade."

As he said, there was nothing to be afraid of, as far as I could see, but the darkness; while the lantern, from where he had set it, threw a dim, yellow glow on the place where Bill was going to dig.

The next minute, he had driven the shovel down into the sand and powdering wood, and thrown a shovelful aside; then another, and another.

"We shall soon get to something good," he said, encouragingly, "and the people are too much afraid of this place to come and interfere with it after we've gone. What's that?"

He had started, and so did I, for at that moment the lantern fell over on its side, rolled away, flickered a moment, and went out.

"You must have caught it with the edge of the shovel," I said, with my mouth feeling all dry, for I didn't believe he had.

"I suppose I did," he said, in a strange voice; "but it don't matter, for there's light enough, and he went on digging away."

He was quite right, though my hand seemed to be stirred by a cold hand as I saw what I did; for, as he now fiercely drove in the spade, at every stroke there was a pale bluish light seemed to come out of the sand, and spread and spread till there was a faint glow shining up, so that I could see the shovel quite plain, and Bill's figure as he stooped.

"Only phosphorus, out of dead rotten wood and bones, Jack," he said, in a hoarse sort of voice; and he went on digging away till I heard the blade of the shovel give a sharp jar, as if it had hit upon a piece of iron.

"Now, Jack," he said, as the shovel rattled once more, and stooping down, he thrust his hands into the hole he had made, where the light was so strong that I could see them quite plainly, and that he caught up a piece of metal.

"Aha! that's the haulk, nearly as big as crowns, but mixed up with sand and bits of rotten wood."

"Gold!" I said, speaking now as hoarsely as he.

"Yes, lad, gold! I've just cut through the side of the rotten keg, and there it is, gold, chipping with the shovel, 'there's the haulk; and down below here, and on either side, are any quantity. Look!"

He drew his outlass as he spoke, and thrust it down here and there, for to let us stop and admire directly, as if hitting something hard, like metal.

But I hardly noticed this, though I seemed to take it in at the same glance; for, as Bill was doing this, I could see that he was working like in the middle of the black-looking Spaniard, who was just lowering down the keg as I had seen it done when the deck was perfect. Wines still, just over me - for my head was on a level with where the deck used to be - there was the Spanish Don sitting nursing his sword and twisting his pointed mustaches as he looked right into my eyes with the most horrible stare I ever saw.

All round, too, sitting and standing about, were the Spanish crew, in the midst of the pale glow, which had now grown quite bright, and I could see that everyone had his eyes fixed on me in the same terrible stare as their leader's.

I tried to call to my mate, but my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, and I could not move hand or foot, while to my horror, there was Bill still digging up like with the great Spaniard, mixing through him and passing the shovel through his back or legs at every stroke.

All at once Bill stood straight up, and I felt now that he must see all that I did; but a terrible cry from the sands made him drop the shovel and bound to the side.

"Here, quick, Jack, help!" he shouted, as he flung himself down from the haulk, falling heavily on the sand, while I, in a strange hurry way, as if my legs were of lead, dragged myself after him.

I don't know how I got down from that horrible haulk, only that I half rolled, half fell, and then, gathering myself up, staggered after Bill to the tree where we had left the little Indian girl, and where it seemed to me a struggle was going on.

I heard a wild cry, and what sounded like a blow and a smothered groan. The next moment some one leaped at me, and I seemed to see a thousand stars, as I was dashed down on the sands, where, in a confused, dim way, I seemed to hear cries and shrieks, and all was blank.

When I came to, it was to find Bill leaning over me, with his face all cut and bloody, and he was splashing water out of his cap upon my feet.

I struggled to my face to find it was broad daylight, with the sun shining full upon us.

"Where's -" "I didn't finish what I was going to say, for I had felt what had happened - that the Indian had followed us up, and that after getting us down, carried off the girl, and Bill, my poor mate, out me short by pointing into the woods."

"Back to the ship," he said faintly; and getting his arm under mine, after one shuddering look at the haulk, I helped him along, dropping more and more after the first mile through the woods.

Then he lay down and rested, and I found that the Indian had passed his knife right through the poor fellow's chest, leaving two ugly wounds, that I was obliged to plug to keep the life in him.

"Let's get away - farther away, a little," he whispered, and we struggled on again, a bit at a time, till we reached the spring, where I laid him down on the leaves, and washed his face, and made him drink out of a big gulf.

That revived him for a bit; but I could see a change in his face that told me what was coming.

"Jack," he said at last, "come back some day, and get the gold. I leave it to you, and if you see my poor girl again, tell her I loved her very true, and she should have been my wife."

I didn't make him any promise, for no sooner had he said that than he gave a faint kind of sigh, and it was all over, leaving me crying like a great child - for Bill had been a good mate to me, and I felt lost alone like in the world.

I covered the poor lad over with leaves and branches, as soon as I could pull myself together, and then trudged back to the ship, and told the skipper, saying it was a case of jealousy, for I had no mind to mention the haulk.

The skipper was in a fine way; but he sent off a party of men with me, and a hammock, and we brought poor Bill on board, where he had the regular sailor's burial from a boat rowed out into the bay.

The next day there was a fine trouble on, for the skipper threatened to burn the village if the man who killed Bill was not hung; and this worried the Indians, who came down to fight, and the ship had to be unmoored, and we set sail in haste, with not quite a full cargo, though enough to give plenty of profit to the owners.

That was in '42, and I've never been back the place since; for it's always seemed to me as the Spanish Don kept watch still over the gold; and though, as shadows, they a living soul, yet they could work on the feelings of others, and that's how my poor mate came to his end.

There's nothing to be afraid of, and we are not a pair of girls to be frightened at shadows. Give me that spade."

As he said, there was nothing to be afraid of, as far as I could see, but the darkness; while the lantern, from where he had set it, threw a dim, yellow glow on the place where Bill was going to dig.

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