

Voyage to Cocos Island (continue)

'He said I was the prettiest girl he's ever seen!' she exaggerated.

'I'll bet,' remarked Sam, knowingly. 'What say we head back to the 'Beach Bum' and catch some shut-eye?'

'Great idea' Freeb concurred. 'We've got to wake up bright and early if we're going clamdigging tomorrow.'

'You've got to be kidding!' griped Maria. 'You won't get me up at some unearthly hour to dig up those disgusting things.'

'Okay, suit yourself,' retorted Freebie. 'But don't come crying to me when you want some fried clams for breakfast.'

Maria grimaced. 'Gag me with a spoon. I'd rather eat corn flakes any day.'

'Ha. You've got no sense of taste,' concluded Freebie.

'I hate to interrupt you guys,' interrupted Sam, with a smile, 'but someone's got to take in the rigging before we retire. Any volunteers?'

That shut them up. Before you could count to ten, Maria and Freebie has disappeared into their respective cabins, leaving Sam to take in the rigging.

Next morning, Maria awoke with the sun shining into her room, and the smell of fried clams pervading the air. Getting up, she took a shower and then slipped into her jeans and a T-shirt. When she stepped into the galley, Freebie was lounging back reading the 'Miami Moon' while Sam pored over a nautical map on the table.

'Mornin' y'all!' Maria greeted. The others mumbled their response.

'Want some coffee?' offered Sam. Maria accepted and helped herself to some toast and jam. Just as she was beginning to eat, Freebie's head appeared from behind the 'Moon' and he uttered: 'Well I'll be...'

'What is it, Freeb?' enquired Sam, knowing his friend may have gotten an important hunch.

Freebie pointed to an article in the paper, and expounded, 'It says here that there's an island off the coast of Costa Rica where they think there might be some treasure hidden.'

'So what else is new?' remarked Maria, with a yawn.

'Just what's the name of that island?' asked Sam, half-interestedly.

'Cocos,' answered Freebie. Sam glanced at his map, but didn't find the island for several minutes.

'Here it is,' he said at last. 'What else does it say about that treasure?'

'It says that there were actually three treasures buried there. The first was a fortune in gold and doubloons buried by one Captain Edward Davis in 1709. The second treasure was left by a marauder named Benito Bonito, and consists of 150 tons of gold (Sam let out a low whistle). But you ain't heard nothing yet. Just two years later, in 1821, the city of Lima, Peru, sent the entire contents of its cathedral to Cocos, for safekeeping.'

'Someone should have wised up and opened a bank there!' Maria offered, astutely. Then Freebie continued:

'This last treasure consisted of a life-sized statue of the Virgin Mary made of gold and diamonds, and other items of gold and silver worth a total of \$98 million!. Doesn't that blow you away?'

'Pretty near,' Sam admitted. 'But if these treasures are worth so much, how come they've never been recovered?'

'Good question,' Freebie answered. 'Apparently, dozens of people have tried to find them, but nobody's had any luck because the island is plagued by earthquakes, landslides and tropical storms, as well as ferocious, man-eating insects.'

'I knew there was a catch,' deduced Maria. 'Could I see the comics, Freeb?'

'Hey, wait a minute' protested the redhead.

'You're not dismissing the chance of making an instant fortune, are you guys?'

'Let's put it this way,' responded Sam. 'Which is better: staying here in Key West and doing odd jobs, or going off to some jungle island and struggling to survive while we search for some nonexistent treasure?'

Freebie was silent for a moment (much to the others' surprise). Then a lightbulb lit above his head, and countered: 'But even if we don't find the treasures, I'll bet we'll get publicity.'

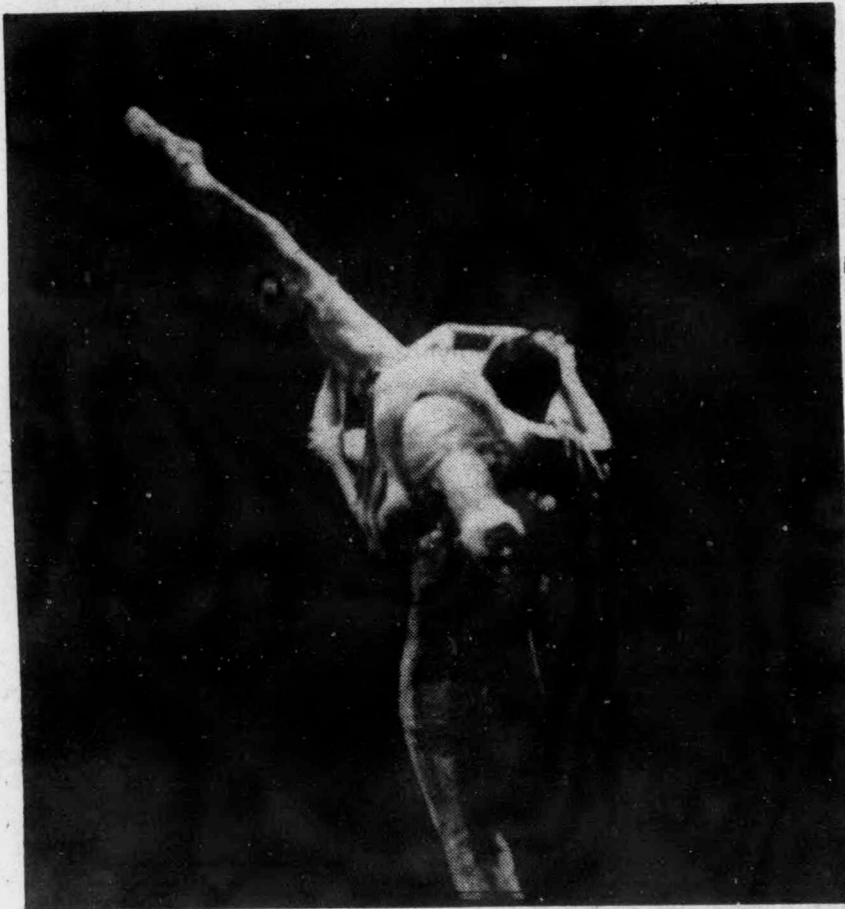
'He's right,' admitted Maria. 'Maybe we could get National Geographic to do a story on it.'

'I can see it now,' Sam visualized. 'Three Treasure Hunters Get Stranded on Desert Island for a Year! Some story that would make.'

Freebie did his best to look frustrated, and retorted, 'The trouble with you, Sam, is that you always look on the dark side of things.'

'Oh yeah? Well, if I don't, who will? All I want to do is keep us from blowing our life-savings on a trip that might end up getting us killed.'

-continued next issue-



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