

HUNT FOR TREASURE

Years ago I was the possessor of an income that killed all desire for work, and it was my custom, when the snow and ice of winter struck New York, to turn my face towards a warmer clime, taking passage, as a rule, on a sailing ship bound for West Indian ports. That was how I happened to meet Capt. Simmons.

A San Blas Indian with an evil countenance was sweeping the deck, and a round-shouldered little man wrapped in a pea-jacket rusted by salt, his feet dangling over the poop, sat watching the worker.

He hunched his shoulders. "So, so, I ain't looking for a cargo, I'm looking for an owner."

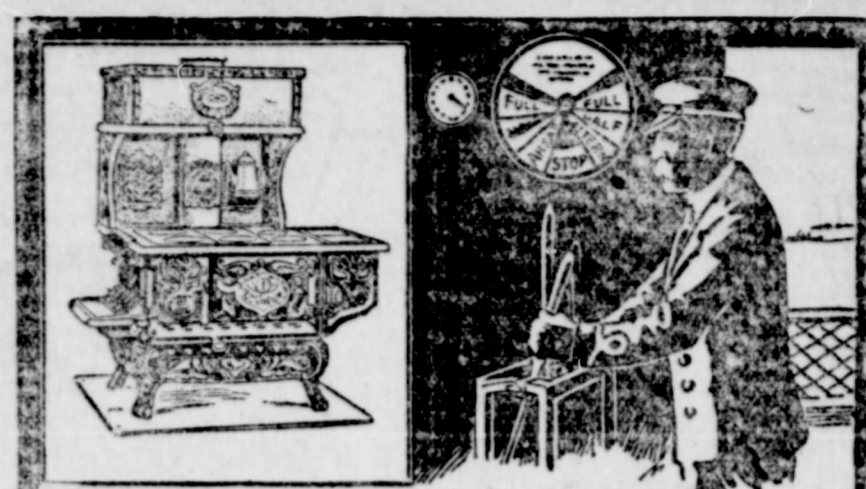
"No business, that's all right," he exclaimed, "but the name ain't high-toned enough. I'll have to change it; you'll be known as Mortimer Gaylord. Wait a second!"

He threw his cap on the table, produced pen and ink from a locker, and scratched painfully on a sheet of note paper. In the meantime, I observed his appearance. He was neither prepossessing nor repulsive.

"ALONZO SIMMONS," "The signature ought to be witnessed," I remarked.

"That's so," he rejoined. "Jim!" he called. "Jim!"

"His hunt for treasure," I repeated still more mystified.



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said. But Capt. Billy and me didn't lose our heads. All we wanted was a quiet place for to sit down and think, 'cause we wasn't going to give up that prize to no government.

"I ain't romantic, but no man can do that sort of thing long without getting a hitch in his heartstrings. The first thing I knowed Miranda had me tied with a bowline, and that ain't a slip-knot. We got married quick, and though the old man said it was foolish, he brought some land and built us a house on Cooper's Island. You can be sure that cottage was planted right over the treasure, so it couldn't get away from us.

"Well, I got so disgusted one day that I told Miranda she could have the jewels. I shipped aboard a brigantine and I ain't been back since. But I've heard about Miranda through my friends, and she still sleeps in the kitchen, though it's given her rheumatism. That makes me think the treasure is safe, and I want you to go down with me and see if we can't get it. I'll share even with you. We'll have to be cautious, but I'll tell you about my plans later."

"Long toward midnight we heard the breakers, but the Bella was too far gone to stay by her longer, and it was so dark we couldn't see more than five feet. When it came to cutting away the boat, Capt. Billy and me got into an argument about how it ought to be done.

"I'll remember that," said I, and he went on: "As I was telling you, I found myself on the beach without a friend in the world. Capt. Billy was gone and the Bella, too. I knew I'd never see 'em again, but the thought cheered me, though I was hungry and sore from exposure. Well, I hadn't been there more than an hour when a young girl, strong, husky and innocent like, came along. A pretty face always used to fetch me, so I hailed her to get my bearings.

"Well, that young woman put so many questions to me that it wasn't long before she had my whole life sketched, and I'd opened one of my bags. I didn't know it then, but from that moment the rest of my days was blasted.

"I'll have to bury the jewels," she said, 'because if they hear about them in town the mayor will have to seize 'em too. That's the law.' "You can bet that scared me, but she said there wasn't any secret she couldn't keep, and so we dug a hole with an oar and hid the bags in it. Then we rowed across to St. David's where Miranda—that was her name—lived with her father. They couldn't do enough for me, and I became one

"May I have a glass of water?" I stammered as politely as possible. Instead of a young girl I saw an old woman, bowed and rickety with rheumatism; her head swathed in flannels; between her lips a short black clay pipe. Miranda hobbled across the room and brought back a tin dipper.

"I visited Cooper's Island regularly for several days without seeing Miranda, but finally one morning, I found her sitting on the kitchen doorstep. She removed the pipe from her mouth and gazed at me critically as I passed the time of day and inquired after her ailment.

"I like you, and if you bring that medicine I may take some of it." Miranda did take the tonic, and we soon became the best of friends. Never a day went by that I did not call on her, and though Capt. Simmons knew this, he did not ask about his wife. Remembering his accustomed garrulity, I thought his silence decidedly peculiar, but to tell the truth I was glad he kept his counsel, as I had grown very fond of the quaint old woman and had secretly determined when the skipper gave me an opening, to protest against the violation of her property.

"Blackie!" shouted Miranda, flying to open the door. "Don't!" I exclaimed, fearing she might be harmed.

The rest of her sentence was lost as she sprang downstairs. For a cripple Miranda displayed surpassing agility.

"They belong to me," he was saying, his eyes fixed on the glittering stones, "but I'll go, so help me, and you can be—"

"You thiefing, lying old coward," Miranda broke in. "You said when you left me that I could have 'em, but I might have known you'd come back."

"I tried to assure Miranda that I was not a party to the crime, though I knew if Capt. Simmons had not trod on Blackie's tail I might well have been a confederate. Being under suspicion, I must confess that I cast one regretful glance at the treasure as I stepped through the doorway, leaving Miranda alone with her useless baubles.

"That place will be washed overboard some day," he predicted. "It's too near the water, sir."

"Miranda Simmons," he replied. "Her husband ran away ten years ago. She's funny, and don't like visitors."

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IF YOU HAVE Rheumatism "These are all that were left," she said, sadly. "The rest were washed away. Take them," she added, "and you'll bring your better luck."