

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TREASURE

BOB paused with his hands buried among the coins.

“What was that?” he asked sharply.

“What?” said Jim. “Did you hear anything?”

“I’ll swear I did. A low whistle like.”

“A sandpiper,” scoffed Jim, but he spoke under his breath and glanced apprehensively toward the shadowed land.

“We left our guns in the ferns,” said Bob, “fools that we were. There it goes again!”

Jim scooped up a handful of the coins and dropped them into one of the pockets of his coat. His teeth were chattering.

“They’re around us!” he cried. “I feel ’em. Quick, Bob!”

Four frantic hands clutched at the gold and silver. Clumsy from fear and haste they spilled half what they seized. Jim was almost sob-

bing, but his hands flew back and forth with greedy rapidity. The sense of imminent danger shook them. In the blackness that lay upon the land they knew there were eyes watching them, evil bodies creeping toward them as they knelt there unarmed; but the magic of the buccaneer's gold held them in spite of themselves.

Then what they had been expecting happened. There was a rapid thud of feet. Black shapes came charging down the bank, terrifying in their silence. If the boys had not been in a measure forewarned they would certainly have been caught on the spot, but now they wasted no time in confusion.

"Up the beach!" cried Bob, and sped along the one avenue of retreat with Jim close beside him.

The turtlers sprang from the bank. For a moment they seemed in doubt as to what to do when a shout from the foremost one brought them running to the uncovered box. All four fell upon it like wild beasts on a bone, and their shouts of exultation rang along the beach.

"Oh, Bob!" wailed Jim. "To think that those fellows should get our treasure!"

“They might have had us too,” said Bob. “It’s lucky they found the box. We’ll have time enough to get away with what we have now, and my pockets are pretty full.”

The boys indeed were so heavily weighted with coins that a fast pace was impossible. But Jim was torn with unsatisfied cupidity.

“We must have left half of it,” he panted disconsolately. “And there may have been other boxes. I know there were other boxes. Morgan wouldn’t have taken all that trouble over one small one like that.”

“Let’s get away with what we have,” repeated Bob. “‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’”

Jim could not deny the truth of it, especially under the circumstances. They were two unarmed boys against four armed men whose natural depravity was roused by the sight of gold to a pitch that would drive them to any villainous deed. With a deep sigh of regret Jim relinquished all thoughts of reprisal at present.

The beach was not the safest course for them, and as soon as they had put a fair distance between them and the turtlers they turned inland

and plunged into the woods. Here it was so pitch dark they could not see one foot before their noses, and they were obliged to skirt along the edge to get what moonlight they could. There was no danger of getting lost. All they had to do was to hold a course parallel to the shore and it would eventually bring them to the lagoon where the *Emmie* lay.

After an hour's wearisome tramping they reached the lagoon, and stepping into the tender, paddled her across to the *Emmie*, who lay in so profound a darkness on the narrow, tree-shadowed stream that anyone unacquainted with her presence there would never have seen her. The strip of canvas flung tent-wise over the boom was in place as they had left it that morning. Drawing the edges closely together so that no ray could escape they lighted the lantern, and tumbled the contents of their pockets on the cock-pit floor.

Bob had spent an hour with the dictionary the evening before they sailed, and in the heap before them he felt sure of the identity of two coins, the big doubloon and the piece of eight. It was surprising to see how much the pockets of

their shooting coats could hold. The pile was an impressive one and the gold doubloons far outnumbered the other coins. The value of the silver could only be guessed at, and after much counting and figuring Bob placed a rough estimate of two thousand dollars upon their spoils. The magnitude of the sum made them gasp.

"A thousand dollars apiece, Jim!" cried Bob. "We can help the folks at home and set up as fishermen for ourselves."

"It'll be our start in life," said Jim with shining eyes.

"And we mustn't forget King," added Bob. "We'll see that his little girl has all she needs."

Jim nodded.

"I can't help wishing we had the rest of it," he said. "Not just for ourselves, but we could do a lot with it. It's ours by rights for the secret was given to you, and it was we who found it. Those turtlers are just thieves, and what good will the money do them? It will go for rum and gambling stakes, that's all."

Bob began to sweep the pile of coins into the burlap bag which had held their provisions.

"It's my idea that we haven't seen the last

of those fellows yet," he said. "We'll tuck this under the planking forward and stow ballast over it. Somehow I can't seem to think clearly while the stuff is in sight."

When this was done Bob insisted that they eat supper before they discussed the matter further. Impatient as Jim was he had to yield to the other's firmer will. Grumbling and fidgetting he fooled with the food till Bob was through.

"Now," he said. "Tell me what we are going to do. I for one don't want to go back without a try for the rest of Morgan's treasure."

"Nor I," said Bob, "but we have got two thousand dollars and mustn't risk that or our skins foolishly. And I want to get old Bess back too. I should never care for another gun as I do for her.

"I've been thinking that we might run the *Emmie* out to-night," he added, "and put her in some cove near where those fellows are. Probably they have scouted about enough to know we're not in that vicinity, and they'll never expect us to walk into their hands.

"I figure it out like this. They'll carry the stuff back aboard the boat to-night. Then they'll

begin to fret and fume about our share. They won't know how much we took, but they won't underestimate it, you may be sure. I reckon there was some hitch in their plan or they'd have swooped down on us before we had time to get a dollar. They'll come, as soon as they get to thinking about it. If they sail round we'd better not be bottled up in here. If they walk, why — ”

He looked steadily at Jim who blinked and nodded understandingly.

“ If they do, why we may call on them while they're out.”

“ So you've been thinking it all out!” cried Jim. “ I'm with you, Bob. Who cares for sleep to-night. Up with the anchor now, I say.”

They had to turn the *Emmie* about with the sweeps and pole her out to the entrance before her sail could draw. But once outside they found a fair little breeze had risen, and stretching themselves comfortably in the cockpit they started on their course round the southern end of the island.

This carried them directly away from the beach where Morgan had sunk his treasure chest. The turtlers might still be thereabouts, and though the *Emmie* might slip by undetected, dis-

covery would upset all their plans. By the southern course the boys could approach the turtles' retreat by the back-door, so to speak.

Rounding the end of the island they bore up along the shore with the sheet well eased. Jim took the helm while Bob, crouching before the mast, studied the indentations in the beach as well as he could in the moonlight. At last he whistled warningly, and Jim promptly brought the boat up into the wind.

"I think they lie just ahead," said Bob, as he crawled back to the cockpit. "The cove isn't far off I know. It wouldn't be safe to go further. We'll run into this pocket here and get out of sight."

The little opening into which they ran the *Emmie* was not deep, but it was pouch-shaped and by anchoring close to the bank they were practically out of the direct range of vision of anyone passing the entrance.

"Now for a scouting expedition," said Bob. "We'll take the tender. With two pairs of oars you and I can outrow them without half trying. Theirs is a pot-bellied old tub, and leaks like a sieve, I'll wager."



They took their places in the light skiff, and passing out of the entrance, sent her along the shore with quiet strokes. The night was clouding up. The moon was seldom clear. Long wisps of torn vapor drifted across her yellow face, and dimmed her light. In keeping with the clouds the wind had begun to assume an increased steadiness and force, and the boys could hear the stir of roused water upon the beach.

"We're in for a storm, I reckon," said Bob.

"Let her blow," replied Jim. "We're in a snug harbor."

"Provided we're not driven out." Bob glanced up at the shrouded moon and sniffed the air. "The wind's cold and full of salt," he said. "There'll be a norther on to-morrow."

They were rowing so near the shore that in spite of gathering clouds they could make out their surroundings quite clearly. They had walked this stretch of beach the day before, and presently they noted a familiar point of sand. The entrance to the turtles' cove lay not far beyond this, and dropping to a slower stroke they ran in close upon the land and crept forward at a snail's pace.

A narrow wooded point now hid them from the cove. It was a question whether they should row round this and into the cove itself, or anchor the tender there and creep through the woods. As they lay there debating, the creak of oars against new thole-pins came across the little point with startling clearness. With one thrust of his oar into the shallow water Bob drove the skiff under the impenetrable shade of the mangroves. Grasping an arched root he held her there and Jim and he crouched low, not daring to move.

The boat swept round the point with a clumsy swash and seemed about to follow the course over which the boys had just come. But immediately a loud protest arose from her crew.

"Where are you steering her, Rafe?" one cried out.

"This is no way to go," said another, and the rowers lifted the oars and let the boat drift.

"What do you want, then?" asked Rafe impatiently. "Isn't this course as good's another?"

"We might as well row plumb out to sea, I reckon," said one of the objectors. "Didn't they go the other way when we jumped 'em? Worse

luck for our being such fools as to let 'em get off with the money!"

"You!" cried Rafe, angrily. "Who let 'em get away? If I hadn't half broke my leg this afternoon I'd have overhauled the two of 'em myself. Mack knows that."

"Oh, I ain't saying you can't run," replied the other rower, "but that chance is passed and gone, and the question is now where'll we row her to. I figure hit out with Eben we'd ought to go the other way."

"Swing her round then," said Rafe sulkily, and the water gurgled as he threw the tiller over with a jerk. "There's one thing certain. We'll row plumb round this island and hunt hit so a duck couldn't hide from us if you-all have got any grit to you. Those kids have walked off with the biggest half of the stuff right under our noses."

"We'll hunt as long as you," said one of the others grimly. "Hump your back, Mack. We've wasted time enough now."

The oars dug the water viciously and the boat passed out of sight beyond the point. Bob stuck his fist in Jim's ribs and laughed silently.

"I reckon they spoke the truth when they said they'd row plumb round the island," he chuckled. "This is what I call a wonderful piece of luck."

"It wasn't luck that moved the *Emmie*," said Jim. "It was your good sense, Bob. First and last everything's owing to that."

"Quit that," said Bob seriously. "This expedition's had two heads, and we've put them together. Now what do you say to a call on our friend Joe?"

"I reckon that's in order," replied Jim. "But remember he's armed and we're not."

"We'll take our time about it," said Bob. "We may catch him asleep. He's had a long day of it and I'll wager he won't think it necessary to be on the lookout for a couple of kids."

They circled the point on which little waves were beginning to lap, and let the wind drive them into the cove. They were in no hurry. If Joe were awake and watchful his pistol would make him a bad customer to face. So shipping the oars they lay flat in the skiff while Bob kept her close to the bank by an occasional touch on the tiller.

The wind, increasing steadily, blew straight into the cove with sufficient force to waft the skiff gently onward. The moon was now almost wholly obscured, but to be on the safe side Bob kept the boat under the overhanging branches. The cove was fairly wide, and the water gave out a certain pale sheen. By and by they made out the dark bulk of the turtlers' craft, and as they drew opposite it a lighted lantern was visible, screened by a piece of canvas thrown over the jaws of the boom.

Bob pushed the skiff ashore and fastened her in place with an oar driven into the mud alongside.

"We're safe here," he said. "Joe's awake, worse luck. I reckon we'll have to lay siege to him."

Joe was sitting astern, his back against the shears. He was awake sure enough for the boys could see the dull glow of his pipe whenever he sucked hard upon it, and when that pleasure was exhausted he began to sing some long-winded ditties in a hoarse bass voice. Evidently Joe was in good spirits.

"Confound him," growled Jim. "He's a regular owl. Is he going to sit up all night!"

Presently the man stopped singing, depressed, perhaps, by the sound of his own voice in the profound night stillness. He stepped into the cockpit and thence into the small cabin forward, and for a moment the boys' hopes rose. But he soon reappeared, and began to walk about the boat, and once he stooped and examined the anchor rope. Immediately afterward he stared at the sky which was as black as ink.

"I reckon he's glad he was left aboard," said Bob.

The mangroves were beginning to creak overhead. The chill wind sighed through the leaves, and wrinkled the surface of the cove. Outside they could hear the low swash of water, and a vague, faint pulsation from the distant open sea.

Joe proceeded to snug things down methodically. He looked to the lashing of the lantern, pulled the jib neatly inboard, and tied several stops round the slovenly furled mainsail. Then with a long yawn he disappeared into the cabin. This time there was no doubt as to his intentions, and the boys waited restlessly till they thought the fellow had had sufficient time to fall asleep.

Muffling the thole-pins with their handkerchiefs Bob rowed softly out toward the sloop. It was a nervous moment when they reached her stern. As Jim fastened the painter of the tender to a cleat, Bob whispered his last instructions.

“When I jump on him, Jim, go for his legs and wrap this bit of rope round them. With his legs tied he’ll be as easy as a baby to handle. Remember, Jim! Stick to his legs whatever happens.”

Jim nodded. They crept cautiously up over the stern. The reassuring sound of snoring came from the cabin, and they dropped lightly into the cockpit. But at the next step Jim’s toe encountered a bucket and sent it clattering along the flooring. It sounded like a thunder-clap to their tense nerves, and it was sufficiently loud to rouse Joe.

They heard him stir, and then he said in sleepy tones:

“Hullo, boys! Did you get ’em?”

“Now!” said Bob, in a shrill whisper.

With Jim at his heels he dove forward into the cabin. Joe, stupid with sleep, half rose from his blanket on the floor, but the next moment he

was flat on his back again with Bob's strong arms around him.

He screeched like a wild-cat, and in his first superstitious fright he seemed about to faint away. But realizing immediately that it was something warm and as human as himself that had attacked him, he fought fiercely. The three rolled from side to side in the dark, ill-smelling little cabin. Tin and crockery fell clattering about them. A pot of soup was upset and the greasy contents seemed to spread over everything.

But Joe was no match for his two agile young opponents. Jim got a twist of the rope about his ankles at last, and the rest was easy. They soon had him trussed like a roasted fowl, and tucked into one of the bunks out of the way. Then Bob cut down the lantern and they began their search.

In the tiny space forward of the cabin they unearthed a goodly lot of coins, but not the full amount they knew the turtlers had taken. Where the rest was they could not imagine. They explored every nook and cranny, and looked into every pot and can in vain, while Joe's eyes watched them fiercely.



"Let it go," said Bob at last. "It's dirty work and we've enough. Good-night Joe, and let this be a lesson to you. If you or your fine friends ever show your faces in Ordville again you won't get off so easy. We haven't forgotten you tried to shoot us down in cold blood."

The man ground his teeth in impotent rage.

"I wish I'd got you!" he cried with an oath, and strained at his bonds.

"Good-night, Joe," said Jim sweetly. "I hope the gang won't be too hard on you when they get back."

The boys stepped into the tender and unfastening her started down the cove, but before they had taken a dozen strokes they heard with alarm the sound of oars ahead.

"In with her to the left," whispered Bob. "Keep her still now. Don't move for your life."

There was no mistake about it. The turtlers' crew were coming up the entrance. Why they had returned so unexpectedly the boys could only guess, and presently they found that their surmise was correct.

"Confound the wind!" cried one of the men.

"We'd have had the kids to-night if it hadn't started to blow a gale."

"Well, they won't dare to cut and run in this weather," said another, "and we'll hunt 'em out in the sloop at daybreak, wind or no wind."

"If that Joe hasn't let the light go out!" he added. "The sleepy-headed fool! Where does she lie?"

The boat passed on, a faint dark smudge against the water.

"Out with her, Jim," cried Bob. "They'll find it all out in a minute, and then nothing can hold 'em. They'll have the sloop out after us for they'll know we must be anchored near by."

Bending to the oars with a will they shot through the entrance and round the point. The wind was singing wildly across the water, and the sea had such a heave to it that it was no wonder the turtlers had given up the chase. The light skiff swooped and dove like a whistler duck, throwing the spray from her nose and charging through it as the wind whipped it back.

"Pull, Jim, pull!" encouraged Bob, and Jim pulled with a vigor that showed he was awake to the seriousness of their situation.

When they reached the *Emmie* there was no abatement of their energy. Bob triple reefed the mainsail while Jim got the anchor aboard. It was a wild night and growing worse, but it was better to face the wind than the rage of the revengeful turtlers. There were many chances among the reefs and keys to find a snug lee berth, and Bob believed in the heels of the *Emmie E.* If they could get away in time he was sure they could outrun the turtlers' craft, and it would not be difficult in that case to slip away from them in the darkness.

They poled the boat out to a spot where the wind began to belly out the sail.

"Haul her in!" cried Bob. "There, that will do. Keep your hand on the mainsheet and cast it off quick when I give the word."

The *Emmie* dashed out into the deeper water with a joyous plunge. Instantly Bob thrust the tiller hard over and she reeled and swung with a sickening list and a solid sheet of water poured over her lee rail. There was the turtlers' boat close upon them, but the *Emmie*, righting stanchly, swept away from under her nose.

A broad white bolt of lightning cracked the

sky from zenith to horizon. In the roll of thunder that followed the pistol shot from the turtlers' deck sounded like the popping of a cork. It was wasting ammunition to expend it in such thick darkness and no more shots were fired. It was a case now of boat against boat in a wind and sea that would test their qualities to the utmost.