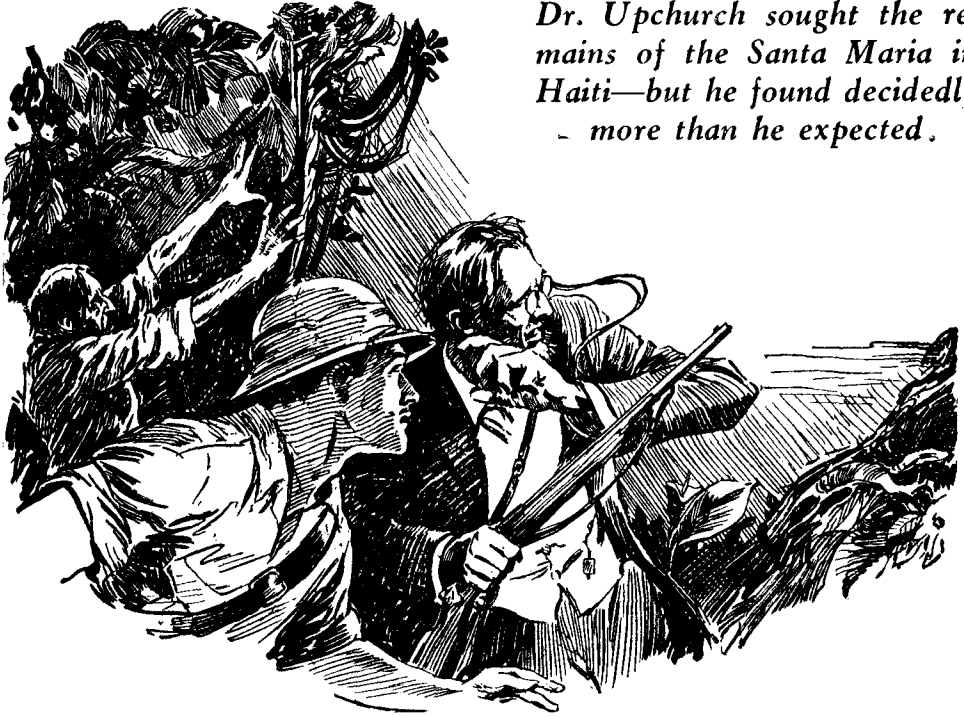


# That Son of a Gun Columbo

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "The Spy with the Bald Head," "Lady of Hades," etc.



*Dr. Upchurch sought the remains of the Santa Maria in Haiti—but he found decidedly more than he expected.*

## PROLOGUE

*In Fourteen Hundred Ninety-two—  
Away Off From I—talee—  
Co-lumbus sailed the o—schun blooo—  
In Search Of Hot Tomaleeee—*

THAT was the way it started, with that song. It seemed appropriate. A big, dollar-round Caribbean moon was wheeling down the sky, and the sea curved blue and away with a path of silver to the horizon. Starshine and tropic dark cloaked Port au Prince with that nameless witchery brewed only in lower latitudes—that moment of mellow twilight and after-dinner drinks. One could forget the day at "Hasco," the Haitian American Sugar Company with its factories, din and smell down by the Cul de Sac, and the low

price of cane. One could almost like it. Harley, the newcomer, was young, and the evening's romance was not lost on him. He lifted his voice in the lampshine, waved his glass.

*"Oh—he thought the worl'lld was round—O!"*

How many campfires, how many places of pit and flowing bowl have heard the ballad? The rest of us hummed the refrain. But McCord, the big engineer who had lived in Haiti longer than most of us, held a drink in his mouth, stopped his empty glass in mid air, swung to glare at the "Hasco" youngster.

McCord swallowed, and his palm struck the table with a bang. "Where'd you get that? That song!"

The boy pretended offense. "That's a

*Novelette—  
Complete*



He looked starved—almost a specter in armor

nice way to interrupt a crooner." He saw the big man's face. "Gee, what's the—"

It wasn't like McCord. Ordinarily he sat his evenings among us in silence, one might almost have said in solitude. On occasion he might join a word to our small talk, but we knew him as a man becalmed with his own thoughts. Now his copper-tinged countenance was tight at the jaws; his eyes fixed in a strange, bright look that went on past the boy, past the veranda, downhill over the starlit rooftops and far to seaward beyond the headlands of Haiti that reached for the moon.

Harley sidestepped to avoid the gaze. "Gosh," he apologized, "I thought everybody knew Columbo! Didn't you ever hear it before?"

"Did I ever? That son of a gun Columbo! Well, maybe you don't know it," McCord described a sweep with his arm, "but he sailed the Santa Maria down the skyline right out there. You bet he did. Fourteen Ninety Two, it was, and December when he came to Haiti—"

We had heard Columbus had discovered Haiti, but as "Hasco" employees, our heads had been too glutinous with sugar to ever think about it. And Lord only knew what note in Harley's lyric had struck this responsive chord in the big engineer's sandy head.

"Columbus cruised around those headlands and came along up the south coast," he went on in a voice as queer as his eye. "If you've never been up the south coast, don't go. Devil of a shore, all rivers, deep gorges, channels and whatnot never been explored to this day. Maps go in a little way and peter out. Haiti isn't tame yet, in spite of sugar mills and country club and shows. In 1492 it was a whole lot wilder, and I've an idea Columbus was sort of wild himself. History tells he ran the Santa Maria aground; had to pull the ship to pieces and build a blockhouse of the wood. Then, history says, he went back to Isabella and eventually died in chains." McCord leaned out of his chair and said, "I could tell something different, myself."

We stared at him. "What do you mean, something different?"

"I've heard Columbus never went back to Spain from Haiti," the big man whispered. "I've heard he sailed the Santa Maria into one of those unexplored rivers down there and never came out alive. I mean, when he did come out he was dead, and—"

"When he came out he was dead?" Harley cried.

"As the grave," McCord nodded. "And the Santa Maria was dead. The sailors from Spain had passed away. The beautiful native princess they had captive on board was cold as ice. And Columbus, himself, jumping around the deck of that gone-to-hell caravel just as dead as a corpse. Dead with his eyes stark open and the back of his head smashed in—and when I saw him coming at me—"

A glass went over. The big engineer was nodding to himself, his eyes veiled, shining darkly, strange.

"You saw Christopher Columbus?"

"Right here in Haiti," McCord growled his astounding answer. "I saw Christopher Columbus. It was in Nineteen Thirteen, and that's where I first heard the song. And if you want to listen I'll tell you about it, but you've got to promise not to call me a liar until I'm through—"

We wanted to listen, and we promised. But before he was through—

## CHAPTER I.

A PAGE FROM THE DIARY OF COLUMBUS!

**I**N Nineteen Thirteen (the big engineer began) I was a down-at-heel surveying engineer stranded in Haiti without a gaboon to spit in or window to throw it out of, and the sharper who'd hired me blew out with the rest of my baggage, and I drifted into Goava without a sou. When I found another white man there—and living there by choice!—I could have dropped in surprise. They say when Eve finished her apple and looked around for a place to

throw the core, the Lord decided He needed a garbage incinerator and made Goava.

You wouldn't sing after supper in that port. Dead fish, dead fever, dead heat, half dead natives, and dead souls who, according to gossip, floated out of their graves and strolled the beach at night. They were having *zombie* scares all over Haiti at the time, and Goava was a hot bed of superstition. Living *zombie* corpses were supposed to be everywhere, and the whole town rattled gourds and went to bed early.

I didn't have a friend in Haiti, and my nearest relative was a spinster aunt somewhere up in Ohio, the sort of old lady who wouldn't help a nephew even if he knew where to write for it. Dimly I recalled she'd always disapproved of men who didn't know enough to stay home and milk for Grandpa. Down and out, penniless, I'd have sold myself to the Devil for a ticket out of Haiti and that stinking black town. What in thunder was this other white man doing there?

First and last there's some queer fish down the Caribbean, and this specimen wasn't last. He presented himself as Roy Upchurch; Professor Upchurch—ahem!—with a string of Ph.D's, P.D.Q's and B.V.D's about nine miles long. I came up the beach and he came down the beach, and when he spied me he was at me like a welcoming mayor attacking a visiting fire chief.

"I'm from Harvard, yes. But just at present doing research on my own. My, my, but it's good to see a white man; I haven't seen one in years. Do come to my house, Mr. McCord; I must tell you about my fascinating work—"

Picture to yourself the typical college prof—classic brow, absent-minded stare, book in elbow and hand under coat tails—lank as Abe Lincoln, and you get an idea of Professor Upchurch as I met him in Goava. Owlsh glasses pinched to his nose, inspecting me, made him a little austere; but when he took them off his face possessed a sort of mocking good humor, fringed as it was with apricot colored whiskers that stuck out every-which-way like the petals of a sun flower. But he wasn't

old. A youthful enthusiasm, a burning energy twitched out of the chap and you had the feeling his skeleton was wired instead of veined. Or perhaps he wound himself up every morning with the gold Phi Bete Key that dangled on his watch chain.

The black Haitians bumped their foreheads on the sand as he came up the beach; and I sized him up at once as a fanatic. But I wanted white company, too, and he promised a drink, so I trailed along.

His hut was like a dog house, littered with books and papers in amazing confusion; and the minute we got inside the door behind an open bottle, he hung the owls on his nose and launched a quiz. Had I, by chance, ever heard of Martin Pinzon? Did I know the writings of Mandeville? Was I at all familiar with Las Casas, the early maps of Bedaire and Pietro Toscanelli? When he found I could speak Spanish and Creole, he hauled out a pack of ancient geographies and began pumping me about Haiti. He shouted, "Splendid!" when I told him I'd surveyed along the coast, and snowed me under a blizzard of notebooks, scrolls, queer old Spanish maps painted with sea serpents and curleycues.

Naturally I was a bit taken back, meeting such a fellow in that God-forsaken town, going to his hut and finding myself caught in a fast game of Twenty Questions. All this time I was wondering what in the devil was the "fascinating work" he'd threatened to tell me about. Finally I had to ask him.

"Why, it's this!" he enthused. "Don't you see? I'm a professor of history, and doing a book on the subject."

He tossed on my lap an old vellum-bound volume: *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, and, before I could figure that, he was turning the pages of an encyclopedia.

"What subject?" I wanted to know.

"Why," he cried, "the most fascinating subject in all the world. The Genoese Explorer! The Viceroy of Spain and Admiral of the Ocean. The subject of this famous painting by Sebastiano del Piombo"—opening a page and pointing at

a colored portrait—"the subject of Christopher Columbus!"

THE subject of Christopher Columbus! Now you see how the story gets around toward that little song of yours. If you listen closely you'll hear it beating an off-key undertone through the rest of this Baron Munchausen affair.

Columbus! Columbus! Columbus! Upchurch could talk of nothing or nobody else. I sat half the night in that hut with my neck sweating, my knees buried under a mound of ancient cartographs and Italian first editions, learning more about the life and times of Christopher Columbus than I'd ever learned about myself in thirty years.

"Just consider the wonderful man," Upchurch barked at me, "the way he started across the unknown ocean with those three little boats! He landed first in the Bahamas and left the Pinto behind to explore, and came on to Haiti with the Nina and Santa Maria. My! He thought Haiti was Zipangu (the mainland of Japan, you know) and he was sure he'd find the streets paved with gold."

Upchurch pinned me down with a finger. "Consider the man's courage and imagination. Oh, he had a great deal of imagination. You should read his Journal with its accounts of sea demons and giant serpents. And anointing his head with such fantastic titles as Viceroy of Spain and Admiral of the Ocean! Admiral, indeed! Why, he'd started across Spain as a dress goods salesman and ended up in Isabella's court offering to sail a fleet to India. Any sailor in his crew could navigate better than Columbus, and he never even learned how to read a chart!"

The professor laughed, waving his hands as he lectured. "There was his father a bankrupt weaver in Genoa, and Columbus pretending all kinds of swanky titles and a big family tree. To this day there's a tremendous amount of confusion about his real name. Sometimes he called himself Christopher Columbus and sometimes it was Colon and Christoferens, and again he

claimed kinship with a Gascon noble named Coullon. At his death he insisted he was related to one Count Columbo, descendent of the Roman general, Colonius. You can see that picturesque explorer standing on the bow of his little caravel somewhere off Haiti, telling his sailors to hurry ashore and find gold. Why, there wasn't enough gold on this island to take back to Spain in a hat, and what the Spanish sailors *did* take back—my dear fellow, that's another story.

"And just imagine the Haitian aborigines — Arawak Indians they were called—creeping out of the bushes to look at the white men. The poor, meek Indians, they were harmless as pigeons, you know. They thought the white men had come from heaven, but they soon found out differently. My, yes! The Spaniards didn't have any use for them and set about exterminating them most thoroughly. So thoroughly that there wasn't a handful left alive a hundred years later, and today they're extinct. The poor Indians were taken for slaves and their women were meek and good looking—it isn't the chapter on Columbus they like to teach in public schools.

"But one must remember Columbus was a product of his generation, and all the white explorers were hard on the Indians. And then Columbus was probably in a temper because he couldn't find any gold and (he was a bad navigator, of course) he ran the Santa Maria on the rocks. The sailors dismantled her and built a blockhouse of her timbers on the beach and called it Natividad. Columbus christened the island Hispaniola and returned to Spain on the Nina to tell the Queen about it. Next year he returned to Haiti and found the blockhouse burnt to the ground. Poor fellow, he went back to Spain and finally got mixed up in a wretched court intrigue, dying disgracefully in irons—"

UPCHURCH paced the mud floor, cranked up like a school teacher.

"That's the story of Columbus you can find in any history book, and on top of that there's a whole mass of legend. It's

the legendary aspect of the man that brings me here in research. Think, man! How would you like to see where the Santa Maria lay anchored? How would you like to stand on the very spot where the Great Discoverer once stood?"

I was thinking I didn't give a tinker's toot where Columbus once stood, and it might have been better for me if Haiti had never been discovered. Columbus wasn't half as remarkable, to my way of looking, as this cracked history prof who'd bury himself in a place like Goava to study that early voyager. I was interested that first evening, but two weeks later I was downright bored. All you had to do was say "Christopher," and Upchurch would be off like a phonograph.

Well, I'd have starved under that fellow's history-book nose if things hadn't started to happen. And when anything happens down there in Goava (where nothing ever happened before) it's liable to start with a bang. One day while we were off in the forest—Upchurch with nose sniffing history, and me with my nose sniffing bananas—a strang white man came to Goava. All of a sudden a bunch of natives came running through the dusk to find us and tell us about it. Any white man was unusual in that God-forsaken dump, enough to set the blacks chattering like guinea hens; but this stranger had been looking for somebody. The natives described him as a tall man who carried a rifle and a little leather bag and wore a khaki sun helmet and a big black beard. "*Gros moon!*" they shouted at Upchurch. Plenty big man!

I supposed it was a doctor of some sort. No, the natives blurted, it wasn't a doctor. The stranger hadn't been able to speak or understand much Creole, but had managed to inquire if there were any white men in Goava, and the blacks had said there were two of us and that we were off in the jungle. That had excited the black-bearded stranger. He'd run up the beach to look into the professor's hut; then he'd chased off in the jungle and hadn't been seen since.

For once in his life Upchurch forgot



Christopher Columbus. "What?" he shouted. "This stranger looked into my house? Quick, McCord! Come with me quick! He may have stolen—by heaven!—if it's gone—"

Lord knew what anybody would steal from Upchurch's hut; when we got there he set off pawing through his books and rubbish with wild yelps. Then he came up from the bottom of the heap with a little metal tube in his fingers, his face disheveled with relief.

"Thank God! I was a fool to leave it behind. Close the door, my friend, and I'll tell you what it is!"

**I** CLOSED the door. He crossed to a window to peek into the night. He peered under the table and sent a glare around that wolf's den as if he thought the walls were Peeping Toms. I supposed it was a diamond or something. His shaky fingers unscrewed the lid and he plucked from the tube a roll of faded parchment; unfolded the thing as if it were a million dollar banknote too sacred for mortal touch.

"This," he whispered, his sun-flower face wearing the queerest expression yet, "is my rarest possession and a sight seen by no other living man. A page from the diary of Christopher Columbus!"

Myself, I'd rather have seen a lettuce sandwich, and I'd have punched that savant in the whiskers if the shine behind his goggles hadn't paralyzed me. Then I wasn't only paralyzed, but ossified.

"McCord," he hoarsed at me, "how would you like to make a thousand dollars?"

How would I like to make a thousand dollars? It sobered me so I couldn't even yell. "A thousand dollars for what?" I gasped.

"Ever since you came here I've had you under observation," the professor husked, "and I've decided to let you in on this and make you an offer. You told me you knew this Haitian coast."

"All too well," I said bitterly, wondering whom he wanted me to murder, and quite prepared to hire for the job. Want-

ing to get out of Haiti like I did, I'd have almost signed a contract to commit suicide for a thousand dollars.

Upchurch scratched in his apricot-colored whiskers and sat me down with a stare. "You know I came here to write a book on Columbus, and now I'll tell you the secret. Nobody really knows where Columbus landed in Haiti. We read how the Santa Maria was run on the rocks, dismantled and made into a blockhouse called Natividad, but is it true?" He began to fiddle excitedly with the Phi Bete Key on his vest, talking low, rapid words. "There is no authentic record of that misadventure, my friend. Some authorities claim Natividad, the blockhouse, was up North on the coastline near Santo Domingo. Bah! I've been up there, myself, and there isn't a trace of such a blockhouse. No real proof! Even if it was burned to the ground after it was built there'd be ashes, scrap iron, something for the records. Now where do you think that blockhouse was?"

I told Upchurch he was telling me.

"Why, listen," he gulped mysteriously, "I think there *wasn't* any! There wasn't any blockhouse called Natividad. No! You see, it's true Columbus left the Pinta in the Bahamas and proceeded to Haiti with the Nina and Santa Maria. It has also been proved that Martin Pinzon, Columbus's second in command and captain of the Pinta, disliked the Admiral. They had a row, you know. Columbus didn't like Pinzon, and Pinzon distrusted Columbus.

"Now there's a legend—legend, mind you—that Columbus, coming to Haiti by himself, sailed the Santa Maria up an inland river and got lost and never came back. When the Santa Maria failed to return that scared Pinzon. Pinzon figured Queen Isabella, who knew of his quarrel with Columbus, would think he'd scuttled the Santa Maria out of spite."

**U**PCHURCH'S lecturing voice went off key, telling me this bedtime story. "The legend says," he hoarsed on, "that there was a sailor in Pinzon's crew—an Italian who somewhat

resembled Columbus. To save his uneasy reputation, Pinzon bribed the expedition, trained this Italian sailor to act and talk like Columbus, invented a plausible story about the Santa Maria going aground on the rocks, and worked off the masquerade on Isabella of Spain. You see it, don't you? Another man went back to Spain as Columbus, while the Admiral himself had actually disappeared with the Santa Maria somewhere in Haiti!"

When he came to this part of his story, the professor's eyes were blazing like bonfires. "McCord, I'm trying to find where the Santa Maria *went!* Couldn't a little ship like that be easily lost in one of these jungle rivers? And Pinzon could have faked another sailor as Columbus. They'd been absent from Spain a long time and Isabella wouldn't have known the difference. And then, finally, there's this page of diary I found in an old convent up in Port au Prince. Look! Do you see that signature?"

The man's low-pitched prattle filled the hut with excited nerves; and I found myself staring at that dim-written parchment, signed with a flourish, *Xpoferens*.

"What does it mean?" I grated.

"If it isn't forged," Upchurch whispered, "that stands for 'Christoferens'—one of the ways the Admiral signed his name. And it's dated December Tenth, Fourteen Ninety Two. It's written in medieval Italian, and in the first line the writer says he is lost. He goes on to say he has fever and is going to die. He says the Santa Maria is lost in a river and cannot be turned around. He says the crew is dying, too, and he writes this last message as he sits on the river bank under an old sablier tree. And signed, 'Christoferens!' Great Scott, man, don't you understand? It means I can scoop the greatest story in the world. If I can find—"

"Where do I come in?" I interrupted.

"From my studies with ancient maps I've deduced that Columbus sailed somewhere along this south coast. You say you know the country. I need a guide. McCord, I will pay you five hundred dollars to find

me an unexplored river with a sablier tree on its bank, and another five hundred if we locate the Santa Maria—"

I glared at him. A thousand dollars! Five hundred just to lead him to a river flowing by a sablier tree, and another five hundred if we dug up some waterlogged timbers or rotten anchor chains or something. Well, the first five hundred was a cinch.

"When do we start?" I grinned.

He fished in his pants, yanked out a roll of bills that made my eyes water, and counted five yellow ones on my palm. "Tomorrow! Just the two of us, mind! I'll leave the provisions to you—wait—somebody's coming!"

The words weren't out of his mouth, the bankroll buried and the wonderful diary page jammed down his shirt, before knuckles drummed on the door and a thick voice hailed, "You, in there. A Professor Upchurch live here?"

Without waiting for the answer, the door was pushed inward and two men loomed in the frame. One was a Negro in military khaki, his black face stern under the helmet of the *Garde d'Haiti*. The other was a stubby white man, freckled as a leopard, eyes like blue slits under the brim of an old straw hat, his spotted cheek swollen with chewing tobacco, his spotted hands knotted on a Winchester rifle.

"What the hell," I said.

"To what am I grateful for this intrusion?" Upchurch said.

"I'm Detective Cap'n Thomas from the States, and this is Lieutenant Benoit of the Haitian police," the freckled man said. "We want a guy who's got the dope on Christopher Columbus!"

## CHAPTER II.

### BLACKBEARD!

YOU can see Upchurch standing there, goggles owlsh in their nest of apricot whiskers, mouth annoyed. "You've come to the right place, gentlemen. I'm an authority on Columbus."

I thought the freckled man was a trifle biffed by that sun-flower face. Who wouldn't be? He turned to fire a comet of juice at the jungle, and when his face came around again his eyes were worried.

"They said there was a history professor doin' research around here. I figured this other bird might be around, too, seein' he's interested in the same thing. Didn't know but what you'd of seen him."

"Seen who?" I challenged, moving up with a candle.

The freckled man's eyes swivelled at me, and he shifted the rifle to put a hand in his pocket and hold out a badge. "I'm tailin' a criminal. Fella named Denver. Frank Denver. One of these master minds that can crack a safe like it was cheese. Escaped Atlanta to rob some valuable charts out of a museum in Washington. Stuff worth a fortune. About Columbus."

"I heard about that," Upchurch cried. "He stole an original Mercator, charts of Hispaniola—"

"Yeah, and I finally trailed him to Haiti, but I lost the track. When I got wind of a history researcher in Goava I came toot sweet, thinking this crook might try and sell you some of this valuable boodle. Just a hunch, because he might of come two years ago—the trail's that cold. But a white man oughta stand out like a sore thumb on this coast. Month ago I ran into a party takin' pictures down the coast, and they hadn't seen a soul. Aside from them it was like a desert." The freckled man spat. "This crook is after gold."

"Gold?" Upchurch plucked off his glasses and polished them, classroom-fashion. "How absurd. Any student knows there's no gold in Haiti—"

"I don't know about that," the freckled man rumbled. "I only know the Department figures he stole those charts because they said something about Columbus and Haiti and buried gold. Well—maybe in your work around here you'll run across the guy, and I better warn you he's bad medicine. A tall man. Jet black hair an' beard. And when he left the States he was carryin' a leather suitcase—"

"A tall man! Black beard! Carrying a bag!" I let fly a yell. "A man like that went through here this afternoon."

"Yes, yes, yes!" Upchurch remembered. "While we were in the jungle. A stranger—"

"Where'd he go?" the freckled man boomed. "Quick—"

"Off in the jungle. The blacks didn't know!"

"Steer way clear of him if you see him," the freckled man shouted; then he jumped out of the doorway, the Negro after him, and they were gone. I could hear them pounding off through the night, and I stood looking at the vacuum where they'd been, too surprised to move. Seemed to me this business of Christopher Columbus was getting pretty popular all the sudden. Upchurch slid by me; shut the door with a slam.

"You hear that, McCord? People down the coast taking pictures and a criminal come here to hunt gold with stolen charts? Tourists and crooks? Oh, my God—"

His classroom attitude was gone. He caught my lapel; simply quaked with rage. "I came here to do my research in seclusion. Now they're everywhere. Sight-seers! Policemen! And this dirty black-bearded criminal—but he mustn't find the Santa Maria! We must get there first, you hear me? We can't have the greatest story in history exposed by a batch of stupid fools! It's mine! All these years I've worked, slaved—it's mine—"

**I** GOT the idea all right. Columbus had been first to discover America, and Upchurch wanted to be first to discover Columbus. That "scoop" for his history book. Pretty mythical sort of prize, but you know how it is with scholars who devote their lives to a subject.

"Well," he panted. "Are you going to stand there? I've paid you to find me a river and a sablier tree. You said you could. Then we've got to hurry! We must start at once!"

I didn't know whether I wanted to start at once, but there was no holding the pro-



fessor, and I needed the five hundred. Lord forgive me, I told him let's go; and we plugged off cross-lots through the blackest jungle on the maddest quest I ever hope to know. I carried the packs. Upchurch was loaded with manuscripts, maps, that diary page, a head-full of history topped by that ridiculous graduation hat. Off in the night somewhere the nigger drums were rattling, two policemen were hounding the bush and there was a man with a black beard, a leather bag and a rifle. Away down there on that wicked coast of Haiti—and we were racing to find a river, a sablier tree, and what had become of a man and a ship that hadn't been seen in four hundred and twenty-one years.

Now don't think I didn't smell trouble. It perfumed the air the way those fish did back on Goava beach. Haiti is no place to go blundering off half cocked with no destination in front and a history professor behind. Besides, I was thinking that a crook who'd broken Federal prison to rob a museum and come to Haiti after gold wouldn't tolerate competition from a studious savant after historical honors.

Men who see gold are pretty apt to see red at the same time. The cops had warned us to keep clear of that black-whiskered johnny, and I didn't fancy bumping across him in that jungle. There wasn't a sign of the police, either. There wasn't a sign of anything. We cut along through darkness and mosquitoes, Upchurch voicing a constant din for speed, and by morning the only signs were ones I didn't like.

Trouble with a capital T. Somehow or other I'd missed my bearings in the dark, and, instead of the valley I expected to be in, dawn found us in a region of unfamiliar gullies, swamp bottoms, jungly escarpments and forbidding *mornes*, all green and steaming like some great plate of bones-and-spinach stew. The sun rolled up in the East, red as the globe over a fire box, and when the mists cleared under the trees the sky went yellow as jaundice. I knew what that meant. This was the *avalasse* season, the time for those tropical storms that make

Noah's flood look like an April shower, and the day was already spoiling for one.

THAT was something to look forward to, and by ten A.M., wandering under that red hot, yellow sky, I was fidgeting with apprehension. Upchurch fidgeted, too. That apricot-headed Harvard graduate was no tenderfoot, I soon discovered. His weedy legs refused to tire, the mosquitoes bothered his leather-bound, history-book hide no more than dew drops on a duck, and the sun couldn't get through those layers of learning on his skull. He strode at my elbow, swinging his Henry rifle, his whiskers sticking out like electricity.

"McCord, our findings will have a colossal significance, let me promise you! If I can find a trace of the Santa Maria up this south coast river I can prove Columbus died in Haiti and the greatest hoax in all history will be exposed! What a disclosure! The second Columbus a humbug! Think of it! What a dénouement on the historians! What a story—"

Did you ever see a reporter on a hot lead? Well, I'd seen the same high-powered fanatical glare in the eye of a doctor out to run down a cure for Yellow Jack, and in only one other place. In the eye of a treasure hunter sniffing lost gold.

"We must get there ahead of this criminal!" Upchurch crackled indignantly. "The meddling, cheap fool, trying to turn historical investigation into a silly treasure hunt. Anybody with an ounce of erudition realizes Columbus never found any gold here. I hope the police collar the ruffian. We must beat him to the spot, at all odds. Have we much farther to go before we find the river and the tree?"

"We'll come to the river soon," I promised. And we should have, but somehow we didn't. A mile farther on we got into a forest as hot as the private hunting preserves of the Devil, but instead of a river we were moving toward a scowling ridge of bronze cliffs I'd never seen before. There were plenty of trees that morning. Palms and bois chica trees, silk cotton

and mahogany. Trees festooned with great blue beards of moss, and trees that stood gigantic against the sun and crashed away off on the *mornes* with a sound like cannon, breaking under the weight of the heat. And trees able to poison you to death like the deadly manzanillo. But no sablier tree.

There was water, too. Swamp pools where spiders skated and snakes snoozed. Black fever ponds where alligators dozed like diplomats at a peace conference. But no river. Those unfamiliar cliffs had me baffled, and I pumped along steaming with doubt and impatience.

Upchurch swung along fanning himself with his absurd mortar board hat, craning his neck to look around. "Do you see any river where the Santa Maria could have navigated?"

"Do you?" I snarled, beginning to miss my beauty sleep. "Besides," I invented, "if Columbus could lose himself in here and his ship never be reported, the river must be pretty well hidden—"

"Good!" the professor cheered. "And we must find it first. Carry on!"

Well, Columbus ought to have lost himself for discovering a country like that. And if he did, he wasn't the only one. By noon I was hoping to find a native who could tell me where we were, and there wasn't a black man to be seen in that whole green dish of desolation. They must have been somewhere around, judging at evidences of Haitian handiwork along the trail, such as a goat's skeleton hanging in a guava tree and a horse's skull atop a post. Voodoo totems and little *zombie* warnings to cheer the traveler on his way. But there weren't any natives. Maybe Columbus had been right and this was Japan.

I WAS supposed to be a surveyor with a sense of orientation, and I guess the compass in my head must have cracked in the heat. The sun had started down the sky when we came smack against the bronze cliffs, and I had to lean on a rock to light a cigarette and arrange a look on my face as if I knew where I was. Upchurch stopped alongside with his hands full of

medieval maps (a lot of good they were when our modern maps don't mark the country) and all at once he blew my helmet off with a yell.

"Hiiii! Who's that?"

I jumped around, and my face went all out of shape. On the nearest cliff against the sky—no bigger than a saint atop a cornice of Notre Dame, but too darned big just the same—a man was standing. A stranger with a leather bag at his feet and a jet black beard on his chin and a rifle in his arm! And he was standing up there watching us with a hand shading his eyes. "It's him!" I bawled at Upchurch.

The professor was pawing the magazine of his gun. "Good heavens," he cawed at me, "we came away so fast last night I forgot the ammunition!"

"Run!" I shoved him. The man on the cliff answered with a tiny summons—"You down below! Stop!" I saw him whip up the rifle, and as I swan-dived into the bushes I heard the shot.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE LAST OF THE ARAWACKS!

THE shot caromed in echoes down the bronze crags, ending in a sinister drumroll on the yellow horizon; and I flopped in a thicket of wasp thorn, snatching my automatic. Then, when I got a bead on the cliff-top, that sniper was gone!

"Where is he?" I snarled at Upchurch. "Where'd he go?"

The professor, dropped on all fours, was peering up the crags like a March hare. "I didn't see him go! Anyway, he's behind us, and that means we passed him last night and his stolen charts must read the same as my reckonings. It's Blackbeard heading for the lost river, all right. We've got to keep ahead of him. Do you think Columbus could have—"

"Devil take Columbus!" I exploded wrathfully. Here we were messing for a gunfight in that lost end of Haiti, the sky getting ready to storm and nothing but an automatic pistol between us, and Upchurch

clearing his tonsils for a history lecture! And he'd forgotten to bring the ammunition! I was fit to be tied. "That fellow may try to shortcut on us and catch us in ambush. Keep your head down if you don't want it full of lead."

For answer, Upchurch barked an excited laugh. I don't suppose there was room in that fellow's brain for a bullet. That head of his was stuffed to the basting point with thoughts of his precious Columbus and the vanished Santa Maria. "We can't stand here!" he fumed. "That wretched crook is at least a mile behind. We must be near the river. Carry on!"

I carried on, bustling along through the crags, anxious to keep as many cliffs between myself and that gunman as possible. About an hour later, *bam!* A shot cracked the distances behind us, and we dropped behind rocks, cursing. That was Blackbeard's rifle, no mistake, but I burned my eyes out on the landscape and couldn't see a sign of the fellow. It's no sport being sniped at by a gunman you can't see, and the sweat watered my forehead, expecting a bullet from almost any direction. I stuck my ears out to listen and finally caught an echo in the heat waves behind us, a faint plop that might have been a lizard's cough, a falling orchid or a killer on the trail. My nerves began to twang like guitar strings.

"Where do you suppose those two policemen are?" Upchurch fretted.

I told him they were probably where the cops always are when one wants them. A little while later the professor wanted to know where we were, and I told him Egypt. It might as well have been Egypt as far as I was concerned. The cliffs were like stove lids in the waning afternoon, and we tangled through a cul-de-sac of gullies and ravines through yellow air too hot to breathe.

Every once in a while we'd stop to listen, and each time we did I was sure we heard footsteps following. It began to get in my hair. Upchurch's Columbus story took on a semblance of truth with that other fellow hot on the trail, and the more I thought

of it, the less I thought of it. There's something darned uncanny about unexplored territory. Those silent crags would have had me down, without that unseen gunman bringing up the rear. And Blackbeard kept coming, that's the truth.

Well, the only thing to do was keep going, and finally we got into a ravine where there was no other choice. Sometime or other before mankind was invented, a mountain stream had chiseled a course through those dead, bronze crags. We footed along a path that zigzagged like chain lightning, where the sky was a narrow yellow ribbon overhead and the walls shot up smooth as polished obsidian and a rabbit couldn't have found a foothold for climbing. What was more, we came to a turn where rabbits would have been forced to hop single file. Scrambling through that narrow defile, we couldn't stop, climb or go back. Blackbeard was blocking the exit, and every once in a while he'd fire a couple of blasts just to let us know he was after us. That was a pretty pass, and I'm not punning, either.

THAT one-way maze was going to my head. Exhaustion can play queer tricks on your eyeballs, and I began to see Blackbeard in every rock-shadow and dust-puff. A couple of times I spun and fired at nothing, and every time I threw a bullet away, our trailing Nemesis would reply with a couple of mocking shots from Nowhere.

You can see how it was. One-way ravine, and the only thing to do was stay in the lead. I was having athlete's foot, and from the look of Professor Upchurch he was going to have a catfit, but we couldn't dilly-dally to nurse our complaints. In the end we outran the afternoon and the ravine, and another step farther we'd have outrun Life, itself. We rushed around a turn in that steep-walled defile and darted clean out into the sunset so abruptly that Upchurch fell shrieking to his face and I piled on top of him, howling like a fool and chinning myself on Infinity.

Wow! what a drop that was. Dead-end

street and no stop sign to that dizzy chasm. A valley spread out under the sunset with all the magnitude (to my popping gaze) of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, a straight mile to the bottom and five miles across to the mountain that hid the sun. Sweat showered off my temples and rained on a sea of tiny jungle-tops far below. We clung on that upper cliff like fledglings on the rim of an eagle's nest; took one look; threw ourselves backwards with a howl. Then I howled again, because we couldn't go backwards. That wasn't all. I snapped the magazine of my automatic to count the bullets left for Blackbeard. There weren't any!

"Keep back!" I gnashed at Upchurch. He'd crept on all fours to the edge of the abyss, and the sight of him teetering on that canyon brink pulled my hair. Unhooking the pack from my shoulders, I hurled it aside; whirled to face the bend of the ravine. Cornered rats, that's what we were; trapped in that high gully. But I wasn't going to stand against that pink wall of sunset and be shot like a peasant spy.

"Give me the rifle, quick! When Blackbeard clears the bend I'll swing for his head, and you jump for his legs—"

Upchurch didn't answer. I spun around. The ledge was empty, stark empty against space. "Professor!" I shrieked.

"Here!" I'm a liar if his voice didn't echo up over that awful rim as if he were floating in thin air. "This way! Don't be afraid!"

Afraid? My heart was making a xylophone of my ribs as I crawled out on the ledge to see where the voice was coming from. Gravity was pulling on me with eerie ropes, trying to yank me over the edge. You know that line from Kipling—"With a drop into nothing below you, as far as a beggar can spit?" When I peeked over that drop and saw Upchurch clinging on the sheer wall just under the overhang, I screeched in fear.

His face, fringed in those scholarly whiskers, looked up at me, glasses gleaming. He might have been telling me to come on in, the water's fine. "Take it easy coming

over. There's a stairway cut in the rock. I'll bet it's been here for a thousand years, long before Columbus—"

"I can't," I groaned. Then, *wham!* A rifle shot smashed silence back in the ravine, and I was over. Stupid with terror I slid off the ledge, fingers clawing the rim, legs bicycling for a foothold; then my toes dug in, my hand found a niche and I was started down. Gods in heaven, what a descent that was. I can't think of that stairway down the cliff without wanting to hang on to something. I'll never know how we got down that horrible precipice. Handholds a squirrel wouldn't have dared to sit in. Footholds scooped in the living rock to make a perch for sparrows. I'd like to know the cave man who engineered that ladder down from the sky. I'd like to congratulate that forefather of the Human Fly for his nerve. Only one other head could have conceived such nerve. The apricot-colored, Columbus-stuffed head under my appalled boots.

"We're nearly down," he would caw at me. "It's only a little farther." When we had a thousand feet yet to go. Or maybe five hundred. A few hundred feet didn't matter when you hit the bottom. Head swimming, I looked down to see. I didn't do that again. Upchurch's flat hat whisked from his scalp and went sailing down and down until it was no bigger than a penny.

The breath came chugging out of me, my hands bled, my shoulders throbbed at the sockets, and Eternity dragged by as I chugged down from heaven to stand at last dizzy and sick on solid ground. His voice was almost jubilant.

"I guess we've given him the slip, all right, all right. Can you hear anything? Can you see the scoundrel up there?"

**N**OT me! Black spots swarmed before my eyes when I tried to get them up that wall. And twilight came swooping over the valley as we panted there, a purple rush that carried the landscape and precipice with it. The storm had pulled an extra blanket over the sky, and night tumbled down with a bang. I mean a bang!

"He'd be a fool to come down that wall—" I started to say, and *bang!* the crack of a rifle whiplashed from invisibility, a tongue of fire made a tiny streak high in the night, the echoes clattered down like an iron safe falling down a building. Believe it or not, that human hound was quarter way down those aerial stairs already. Don't talk to me about perseverance removing mountains. I know a man who could have extinguished the Alps. Certainly he removed Upchurch and me from under that cliff. It wasn't Blackbeard's marksmanship, for a bullet couldn't have hit the broad side of a barn in that thick night. I think we fled to get away from that non-stop, terrible persistence.

The valley was Limbo and we were the lost souls, and the Devil was after us. I don't know how long we bored through the blackness before we wandered into a forest of giant mapou trees with the night lighted by a tremendous blood-orange moon that came wheeling slowly from behind the mountain to hang in the sky like a Japanese war shield, hot from a battle. Clouds were black dragons scribbled across the moon-face and a stormy and wizardish light assailed the valley, tiger-striping the thickets and illuminating the professor's apricot hair.

Whiskers askew, tattered as a Bolshevik, he moved downgrade in front of me, pawed through a wedge of brush, and stopped full tilt with a yell. "The river!"

I clawed through the thicket and found myself standing on a mud bank, wondering if we'd got across the trade winds to the Amazon. I don't know whether it was *the* river or not, but I can tell you, it was *a* river! John the Baptist or De Soto never saw a stream like the one that came suddenly out of the forest in front of us to slip around a corner in the night. That river was big. The trees on the opposite shore were dwarfed to geraniums. The channel swept by as deep and mysterious as quicksilver, and the moon had slipped down off the mountain to lie weird and stationary and watery-dim in mid flood, silent as the shine on the River of Dreams.

"Look!" Upchurch broke from a spell. "There's the sablier tree!"

Don't ask me how we could play blind man's buff at night through that haystack of a Haitian wilderness and find that needle of a sablier tree. There it was, not ten feet down the bank on the fringe of the mapous, gray and ugly and thorny as a pin cushion. No mistaking the brand—if you lean against one, you'll know. Perhaps that's why the man under this particular specimen wasn't leaning, but sitting on the roots, arms hugging his shins, all shrivelled up like those stale Inca mummies you see in the caves of Peru. Save a stale Inca mummy would have made twice the noise. That's why Upchurch didn't see it when he spied the tree. I guess he took it for part of the roots. I took it for dead. Then it lifted a chin from its kneecaps and turned its head.

"Be not afraid," it said in a basso six feet tall. "White Lords, what brings you here?"

UPCHURCH lifted his gun and whirled with a yell; but that thing under the tree opened its moon-soaked face and let loose a mummy laugh that froze the professor lock, stock and barrel. If there'd been a bullet in his rifle that burst of blind hilarity would have chased it back down the magazine. If I could have moved, that laugh would have chased me, I can tell you. Blind hilarity was the word for such a woozy guffaw. The thing let go of his shins, creaked upright like a rusty skeleton; and I saw it was blind as a mole. If the Man in the Moon is a thousand years old and hasn't had a bath or nourishment since he was three hundred, this was it!

For the first time in his life Professor Upchurch was up against a fish six times as queer as he was, and he didn't seem to relish the experience. The empty gun wobbled, lowered in his hands.

"Who are you?" he stammered. "What are you doing under this sablier tree?" The river and the tree had worked the professor into a great state, and this latest development had him hopping.



The latest development stared at us with his sightless, cored eyes, mouth puckered in his shrunk face, and lifted a hand wrinkled as an old kid glove to give a sort of tribal salute.

"White Lords, the old one you see before you is only Guacanagari—"

"Guacanagari!" Upchurch yelled. On my word of honor, he began to shout and caper like a dose of catnip. "You hear that, McCord? This man isn't Haitian! Guacanagari is an *Indian* name! That was the name of the *cacique*—the native chief who fought against Christopher Columbus! Great Scott! this man is an Arawak—"

"Arawak," the ancient mummy nodded, as if he understood. "Guacanagari, son of the chiefs, last of the Arawak race. Welcome by Guacanagari, Guardian of the Ghosts of the River—"

"River! Sablier tree! Arawak!" Upchurch was bellowing like an idiot. And in the middle of his fresh brainstorm, the last of the Arawaks put a finger to his lips and hissed like a steam valve.

"Quiet, white Lords. We are not alone. Somebody coming—" staring upriver with an expression on his blind frontispiece as if he saw all the specters of Tophet advancing on the tide.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### GHOSTS OF THE RIVER.

NOW I didn't like that. You bet I didn't. Something in that old mummy's voice had cooled the air to zero and the pits of his eyes, filled with moonlight, were like holes of sulphur in his head. I knew those Caribbean natives had ears like wireless, and it didn't take me long to remember we were being followed.

"Who do you hear?" I snarled, thinking of Blackbeard.

Old Man River, or whatever he was, began to strain at the silence like a medium calling your departed uncle. "Them! I hear them coming—"

"Who's them?" Upchurch cried.

I was hoping that Indian relic would say

the sound waves in his wireless ears came from the boots of the Haitian *gendarme* and the freckled cop. That was where I had another think coming.

"I hear the Ghosts of the River," he chanted, pulling a basso from the voice-box in his stomach. "They are coming on their monthly cruise."

"But what are they?" the professor gargled.

"The Ghosts of the River are those condemned to sail forever on this endless waterway," the blind mummy intoned. "Each night of full moon they go by this tree, coming around the bend and going around the bend; and before they come I can tell you about them if you wish—"

Believe me, I didn't wish any such thing; but Upchurch blurted, "Tell us about them!" before I could budge a hand, and that old Shaman started his mouth going, and it was too late. It was no time to stand around with our mouths open, drinking in a ghost story, but something in that Indian's voice rooted us in our tracks. Your average Indian is about as wordy as his twin in front of a cigar store, but this fellow wasn't the ordinary five cent brand. Not by a jugful! That blind mummy was the Grand Kleagle of story tellers, and he held us like flies in the moon-spun web of his yarn. That story was right up the professor's alley, too.

Once, he told us, he was the son of the sons of kings. So many moons and tropical hurricanes ago the heavens lost count, Haiti was ruled by Arawaks like him. Their chief was the original prince of good fellows, King Guacanagari. The people were as happy as contented cows. Their bins were full and their babies fat. There was a beautiful princess.

"We've got to clear out of here," I snarled at Upchurch; and then I had to wait and hear about the princess. That mummy was pounding his forehead when he told us about her, and you couldn't walk out on his voice any more than you could have walked out on Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech. He described the princess as a lady, a girl wonderful as a heart beat.

Her hair was spun by the spinning wheel of the gods, her eyes were stars that mirrored the purity of her soul. She was white. Whiter than the milk of a gourd, for she wasn't any ordinary Arawak. She was a princess, and the swallows came to learn her secret of grace, and strong men fainted when they saw her figure.

Then the old story teller's voice slid another octave, and his face contorted with passion as he described two great sea birds that swam up out of one morning's sunrise to feed on the shore. These birds had wings that shut out the sun, and shiny men on their backs to fold those wings. The shiny men came ashore with signals of friendship, and King Guacanagari thought them gods and offered them the keys to the city and introduced them personally to the delicious princess.

"Upchurch," I kicked him on the shin, "we've got to go!"

"Wait!" he breathed. "Listen to this!"

**W**HEN the newcomers saw the princess, the mummy snarled, they didn't faint like honest Arawak men, but turned as if by magic into devils. They captured the beautiful princess and hung her with chains of iron. They dragged her aboard one of the sea birds, and told the king they would give her back to him if he gave them gold. Gold they wanted. They would torture the princess if the king did not give them gold. King Guacanagari had no gold, and the shiny devils promptly tortured the princess. They whipped her with thongs and laughed and danced around her. They despoiled her pearl-like beauty. Old Man River didn't spare us any of the details of that torturing. Rocking at the hips and flailing his leathery arms, he made us see the captive princess, made us listen to her piteous cries.

"The swine!" Upchurch cried out. "Treating a girl like that!"

Guacanagari laughed a dreadful laugh. "They were breaking her to pieces, white Lords! They did it for gold—"

The professor's face was white. "Tell me she got away from the fiends—"

That last specimen of a tribe otherwise extinct as the Dodo told us his beloved ancestral daughter did not get away. The Arawaks struck at the devils with arrow and dart, but the shiny hides of the strangers turned away arrows and they struck back with sticks that spat lightning. The island rang with the crash of knives chopping bone, and the nights were red with blood and howls and pain. Smoke blackened the sky. Instead of candy, flame came out of the sugar cane. The princess was dying of despair in the sea bird's grip, and poor King Guacanagari, his army dead, had to run for it.

"The king had no gold," the old man moaned, "and the shiny devils thought of nothing else. They poured hate and terror on the land."

Well, there are always two sides to any story, and I suppose this was the Arawak side of it. Hand to mouth it had drifted down the generations of that forgotten and beaten race to become the lay of this last minstrel, and he was singing us his tribe's valedictory in a way to make any "white Lord" lose a little ego about his forefathers. He told us how the Arawak king fled, heartbroken; how the island was burned; the Indians enslaved. He made us sweat for that suffering Indian princess.

"The king fled straight up this river," he croaked, "with one of those terrible sea birds close behind him." Then he drew a big breath to fan the fires of his imagination, and his story got mixed up with Negro folklore. He told us the king ran till he could run no more, and finally fell to his knees and turned his face to the moon and prayed help from the gods. One of the Arawak gods pitied the king and rode down on a little black cloud.

"I cannot save your people," he sobbed to the king, "but I can make trouble for these treacherous invaders." Whereat the god snapped his fingers and all the water fell from the sky. Instantly the river coiled like a thousand snakes, banks disappeared, new banks came, there were a hundred different channels and a thousand confusing turns and a million lagoons. The

source of the river was lost and the delta was lost. So was the demon sea bird. In this wandering labyrinth the bird swam in circles and the men who rode its back couldn't find their way.

ON and on they sailed, hunting an exit, seeking to escape. But the river wouldn't let them escape. If they turned for the coast, the river coiled backwards and held them fast. They died of hunger and despair, those shiny strangers, but they had to keep going even after they were dead. Dead men must find graves, and those dead strangers couldn't locate a cemetery.

The withered story teller shrieked his mummy laugh in conclusion. "They never escaped the river, and they never will. Their dead eyes look for a passage—can dead eyes see? Their dead hands labor to guide the sea bird's wings—can dead hands move? Their dead tongues cry out for help, but no help will come for the dead. It is the curse of the Arawak gods, white Lords, and on nights of full moon you shall see them pass. Not dead. Not alive. The strangers, the sea bird and the poor, lost princess, condemned forever to this endless tide—"

I swear the water running down the professor's cheeks seemed to turn green the roots of his beard. "The fiends!" he choked. "The dirty fiends—torturing that princess—"

"They wanted gold, white Lord!"

"They should have caught hell," Upchurch snarled. "I hope something of the sort *did* happen to them!"

"But it happened," the old man cawed balefully. "I have seen them pass many times. I know the leader of the sea bird; know his name—"

Jumping forward, Upchurch fastened a hand on the Indian's wishbone; shook him till his head rattled like a dried mango. "What's his name?"

"Don Cristoval," was the answer; and the professor went clear off the ground.

"Why, that's another name for Christopher Columbus! The Admiral used all

kinds of names. Great Lord!" he whirled at me, empurpled. "This Indian's been telling us about the Spanish invasion, how the Santa Maria came up this very river and never found a passage out!" Then a quart of sweat purred down his face, and he was back at the mummy, hollering. "But that's a lie—about seeing the boat and the dead sailors and Columbus and the girl. You've found the caravel somewhere—the rest of it's a lie—"

"Of course it's a lie!" I snapped, so mad I could just about speak. I wanted to wring that spell-binder's neck for delaying us with a story that sounded true, and I could have kicked Upchurch in the pants. "How could a blind man see any such thing? It's a fairy story, you fool. There's more fables in Haiti than fleas on a dog, and—"

"But you are wrong," the mummy snored, winking the cored eyes to make them look like spiders on a coconut husk. "Don Cristoval will be on the demon water bird. So will the dead men and the beautiful princess. They are coming down-river now—"

But what came, right then, was a screech, and it didn't come from the river. Not then, it didn't. That screech sailed up from behind the sablier tree, and spun us around like tops. Grandpa Guacanagari twirled with both arms in the air. I heard a gust blow out of Upchurch as if all the helium was rushing from his brains. I looked and could have plopped. Brush crackled and a shadow fell away from the tree. I was staring at a Spanish sailor!

Do you think it was some Spanish A.B. wandering around Haiti on furlough? Some seaman from a visiting Cadiz gun-boat? But the Spanish navy of today isn't worth considering, or yesterday's Spanish navy, either.

THIS Spaniard was from the day before yesterday. From just about five hundred years before! He was from so many centuries back that he'd been able to sneak up on us without noise, and only a sablier thorn in his elbow had brought him up to the present.

You know those hats the Spanish explorers wore—those bowl-shaped steel helmets with the fin on the crown? And the cuirass, the breastplate shaped a little like a divided melon? He wore that outfit. And leg o' mutton sleeves and velvet breeches, and he carried on his shoulder a spear pointed like a fleur de lys.

The moon put a dim polish to his helmet and chest protector, and his fists on the spear were blue. I tell you, he looked so starved and skinny the shadows seemed to go right through him; his cheeks were wan, almost transparent, and there was a beard like a wisp of cobweb on his jaws. 'Talk about the skeleton in armor, that was it!

Old Man River didn't run because he couldn't see him, and Upchurch and I didn't run because we could. In the end it was the ghost who ran. I guess we looked pretty spectral ourselves—that Indian, the professor and me—and the Spanish mariner just stood there swallowing his Adam's apple, and then there was a flutter in the air where he'd been, and he was gone. Did you ever see terror on the face of an apparition?

If I was thinking at all, I was wondering if that Dodo Arawak had stunned us with an optical illusion, but bushes were crackling along the riverbank, and Upchurch shrieked: "It's one of the sailors!" and broad-jumped by me like a scarecrow thrown from a gun. Guacanagari the Last collapsed in the mud; I jumped his head and chased the professor's coat tails. Then we were tearing hell bent for leather along the river's edge after a shiny gleam that bobbed and ducked through the vines ahead of us. I don't know what became of the Last of the Arawaks. At the bend of the river I looked back and saw him under the sablier tree, his face soaked with moonlight, his arms wigwagging signals at the sky. No doubt the god of the Arawaks rode down on a little black cloud and took him away.

We made the bend in high gear, I remember, and I couldn't catch Upchurch and the professor couldn't catch the ghost. I don't know how long we trailed those

metallic gleams. Every step of the race I was telling myself it was all in the back of my head and I was running in a colossal nightmare. Columbus, Haiti, Upchurch, Blackbeard, a sailor from Spain and a moon getting ready for a storm. If nightmares are a succession of illogical incidents strung together in a queer semblance of reason, that was it. Old Man River was something I'd eaten and the smell of jungle was the window I'd forgotten to open in my bedroom. Another minute and I'd wake up.

The trouble was, I didn't wake up. That's the fault with our brilliant modern minds, we think we're too smart for mysteries. In the old days when they didn't know the answer they called it God's handiwork. Today if we can't find a reason for something we say it must have been a dream. I've an idea both sides are wrong. One's all right until a lightning bolt hits a church and knocks a lot of innocent people dead, and education is all right until somebody like Einstein knocks your arithmetic galley west. The answer's like a card trick, so simple you can't see it. Anyway, that's the way it was that night in Nineteen Thirteen when I raced after Upchurch to catch a sailor from Fourteen Ninety Two.

THE professor's legs were going like a barber's scissors and I was running like a fool, but we weren't speedy enough to catch that frightened ghost. Somewhere in the bank of vines that Spaniard gave us the ha-ha. All at once we crashed up short on a little mud beach, our game of tag stopped by a flat, mossy rock, wall-high, that shelved out into the tide. Water swished around the promontory; its blank face sheared up to cut off a piece of the moon; landward the jungle hedged in thick; and the river's surface was bare.

Upchurch began to beat around in the bush, scything at underbrush with his empty rifle. "He got away! What became of him?"

"Stop hollering!" I hollered. "Don't forget Blackbeard's after us." My nerves were going like a fiddler's foot, and I was back to my old theory that the bag-o-bones

Indian under the tree had mesmerized us and there'd never been a sailor in armor. But Blackbeard was a fact. "I've earned my money and I'm clearing out," I yelled.

"But the sailor—" Upchurch cawed. "Where did he go?"

"I don't care where he went. We're getting out of this. You've found your river and your tree, and—"

Upchurch skidded down the mud bank and went plowing into the river, stork-legged, to skirt the big rock. I knew the sailor hadn't gone around the rock or the water would have been roily. Upchurch didn't go around it, either. The water was up to his Phi Beta Key when he craned his neck to look around the rock and I heard him scream.

"And there's the Santa Maria! My God! It's coming around the bend!"

## CHAPTER V.

H.M.S. SANTA MARIA.

**M**AYBE I'm not telling this the way it should be told. I know I'm not.

It would take the last of the Arawaks with his sighs, groans, hobby-horse hips and Indian signs to tell it. I can only give you an idea of that creeping jungle river, that Haitian wilderness standing around in a way to curl your hair, that baited night without a leaf stirring and the queerness of moonlight slanting from that orange lantern decorated with dragon-clouds. I can only give you an idea of Professor Roy Upchurch standing belt-deep in the shallows, peeking like a scout around the tall green rock and gulping like a pelican at what he saw through his glasses. You're laughing? Well, so was I. Then I splashed out into the river to see for myself, and I didn't laugh. I had to grab that rock to keep from diving face down in the water.

The river bent sharply around a corner of the jungle, and a boat was coming around the turn. Maybe you've heard the song, "Here Comes the Show Boat!" they played a while ago on the radios around

here. Well, there weren't any radios around that neck of Haiti in 1913, and it wasn't any show boat, either. Not the Mississippi River kind. And it wasn't a freighter or fishing smack or giant Cunard. A caravel was bending that turn of trees! A Spanish caravel, roundish and stumpy and galley-rigged, her hull shaped like a rind of canteloupe with rocking double towers on her stern and a single tower high on the bows and a toy brass cannon on her fo'c's'le head and a list to her star-board beam.

"Look!" Upchurch screamed in wonder.

I was looking, all right. You've seen ship models over fireplaces, little brown carvings in wood with thick, painted sails? Well, you should have been there to see the grandmother of them all make the curve of that jungle-banked river and bowl down on Upchurch and me, her hull getting bigger, her masts growing taller, sails spread and the moon for a lantern in her tops, taller and taller by the minute. No sailor hung in her ancient rigging. No lookout stood her stem to cry, "Land!" The wooden figure-head under her stumpy jib loomed at us like a guiding idol floating in mid air, and a white moustache of water parted under her nose, and she was coming fast.

"The Green Cross!" Upchurch shrieked. "The Green Cross of the Admiral painted on her mains'l! McCord, do you see it?"

You bet I could see it. Those big square sails rose up to shut out the moon as the craft rocked around the bend and came mid channel, and I couldn't tear my eyes away from the thing. She must have been driven by the current. I'm sure there was no wind in her canvas, for there wasn't a moving leaf in the jungle and not a breath of air for my pumping lungs.

"She's going to pass us!" howled Upchurch; and as for me, I wouldn't have been surprised to see the vessel take off and journey away in the sky. The two of us stood in the shallows by the rock like pop-eyed Darkies at a baptism, and the caravel came abeam with the moonlight yellow in her crosstrees. Shadows pooled on her outlandish decks. The silence of four hundred



years pouring out of her hatchways and square, blind ports. But somewhere loose timbers whined, and I could hear the gurgle of her cutwater and, faint as a discord from a ghost's mandolin, the phantom creaking of her blocks. Word of honor, the thing was unsubstantial as a mirage; the boat was a piece of scenery, the river a fake, the moon a cheap stage-spot and the jungle colored cardboard.

I said I wouldn't have been surprised to see that vessel alter her course for the Pleiades, and instead of that she passed us mid channel, broadside, and I saw a rope dragging in her backwash as if she'd just parted her moorings and come loose. The Green Cross on her mains'l wasn't all. She shuffled by like smoke and took the next curve to give us full view of her junky, lop-side stern. The moon took her full on her absurd rear end, and the letters painted on that blunt high tower were limned in brush strokes of fire. *Santa Maria!*

**W**ATER showered in my face, and the professor's apricot head was a glassy-eyed vegetable churning out in the tide. His voice squalled back through a smother of foam—"Don't let her get away!"—and somehow I was swimming after him. I've hurried to catch more than one ship in my time, but never a ship like that one. Upchurch swam like a fool and never had a chance against my Australian crawl. Alligators to the contrary, I was going to board that boat. It's hard to tell you why. Something about saving my reason just then, if you can understand my feelings, and when the shock of a dive didn't wake me up it was worse.

Upchurch wore an expression on his face that told me he felt the same way about it. It was a darned queer expression for the face of a history professor. I guess it isn't a good thing to delve too deeply in the past. And we were delving in the past that night, don't think we weren't. Swimming down the river to catch the Santa Maria! Every time I dug my eyes out of the water I could see that historical name etched in

moonlight, and it got me by the throat. I certainly thought I was mad.

To this day I don't know how I got aboard that ship. Would you know how you boarded a magic carpet? But I tore water under the shadow of her stern, thrashed alongside to starboard, got a clutch on that dragging hawser and shinnied up the slippery hull, my boots clawing for a hold on the waterlogged timbers. I think that's how it was. Anyway I dropped over the rail amidships like a half drowned rat, and a minute later Upchurch came over flipflop after me, his watery goggles shining like the rings of Saturn. Puffing and blowing like hooked fish we stood in the scuppers, staring at the high, dark after-castle. Sails were moonlit clouds over our heads, and riverbanks went by in silence.

We held our breath and the only sound was water. Water lispng astern and pouring out of our pockets and running from the useless gun in my fist. It was too much, being aboard a ship like that. Too queer. Too everything. There wasn't anything to say.

There wasn't anything to say, and Upchurch said it, clutching the ship's rail for support and whispering as if he was afraid somebody would hear a secret. "Do you—do you realize, McCord, you are on board the Santa Maria?"

I don't know what I said.

The man's face was woozy. "That Indian told us it would come. And that sailor—trying to get back to his ship. He said—the Arawak said there would be others—Come on—"

His voice mumbled low in the tone of delirium, and before I could make up my mind about anything Upchurch charged along the rail and clattered down a wooden stairway to a well-deck below. Blood raced in my temples as I scrambled after him. You know how those ships were made in Fourteen Ninety Two. Galleries and bannister rails and verandas and a lot of carving and gingerbread. Any ship at night is mysterious enough. Try exploring the deck of a vanished Spanish caravel sailing down a tropic river four hundred years too

late! Don't talk to me about a haunted house.

That well-deck swarmed with black shadows. The moon had decided to sink in a nest of raven-wing clouds, all but a slim slice that lingered like a heated knife suspended in the night. We clawed through all kind of queer rubbish. Barrels and tangled hawser and tackle jumped at us out of dark corners. Once I stubbed my toe on an iron deck-ring and went headlong into a mess of big tin boxes and iron rods, knotted loops of wire and something that resembled a sort of telescope. Something I thought was a big wooden funnel fell off a big box and bounced off my head. Ha ha! If I'd had the brains left to guess what it was!

"Shhhhhhh!" Upchurch whispered. "They'll hear you!"

"Who?" I blared.

He shook his head, dragging me out of the junk. "Early navigating instruments," he guessed in a shaking voice. "He did have an astronomer with him."

I wish an astronomer had been there to get a look at that historian's eyes. He'd have found a couple of new planets. I stumbled after him, and we climbed a rickety stairway two flights to the tower on the stern. Get a picture of us clambering up on that two-storied stern while the caravel waddled around another bend in the jungle. Get a picture of us clawing the tower rail of that high tilted poop, ducking through networks of rigging, jumping leapfrog over old fashioned cannon-blocks, links of chain, anvils, sea gear archaic when Drake was young. Then get a picture of a low roof set in the middle of that high deck like the glass roof of a chicken coop; Upchurch convulsed in a crouch.

A skylight! God's sake! The Admiral's cabin! *Christopher Columbus!*

And that's where I first heard the song.

A WASH of light, dim as witch-shine, flowed up from the skylight to illumine Upchurch's shocked features, and that faint tune drifted up with it. "In Fourteen Hundred Ninety Two—Away off from I-talee—" Somebody under

that glass roof was humming the thing. I couldn't distinguish the words, but I caught the tune; and then I was spraddled along-side Upchurch, nose flattened on the glass. He was breathing like a broken accordion, and I guess I said something more than Christopher Columbus! A whole lot more!

I wish you could have looked down on that room the way we did. The ship's quarters of Columbus? Well, Don Cristoval hadn't stinted himself. The captain's cabin on the Aquitania would have been cell-like in comparison. Imagine a big square chamber, all mahogany and burgundy colored velvet, with a massive Gothic door to portside, and square barred windows draped with cloth of gold. Queen Isabella, herself, might have loaned the bed that loomed against one wall like a canopied catafalque.

There was a vast, carved writing desk loaded with ink pots and quill pens, and near the door a huge sea chest bound with iron and enormous hinges. The teakwood table in the center of that cabin was big enough for the signing of an international treaty; its surface was strewn with documents, manuscript, a litter of flat wooden boxes filled with something that resembled rolls of ticker tape. There was a big brass lamp in the middle—the kind they called lanterns—square sided with a big ring in the top and candlelight peppering out of little holes.

Just the furnishing of that cabin would have sent an antiquary into spasms of astonishment, but Upchurch and I weren't window-shopping the furniture. We were watching the man at the head of the table, the man who stood there with a flagon in his fist, grinning and humming through his teeth, wagging his head to mark time.

Polkadots from the lantern pocked his tall forehead and spotted his long, shaved jaw. His features were handsome enough, in an oily sort of way; his straw-colored hair bobbed Dutch-fashion about the ears, and on his head a peaked hat, something like a trained nurse's, that stuck out over his ears like the roof of a birdhouse. He wore a short blue cape, tight red velvet

sleeves, a black velveteen jacket, belted at the middle. On the breast of the jacket were five gold anchors woven in strange design. One hand clapped to his belt, the other gesturing the flagon—somewhere I'd seen that pose before. Then I remembered the painting by Sebastiano del Piombo! Only the painting shows him without a flagon in hand. The painting can't wink its eyes. The eyes of that man below us were terrible eyes. They were yellow, filmed with alcohol, and they were glaring down the table at a girl.

I guess Upchurch was getting more material for his history book than he'd counted for. The night was making magic on all twelve cylinders, now. When I saw that girl the skeleton rattled inside of me. I could have pushed my nose through the skylight. That girl was beautiful, and the desperation in her face squeezed my heart. She was white. She was snowy—veiled and gold, one hand to the ivory curve of her throat, one hand in the sunset-chrome mass of her hair, star-blue eyes fixed on those of that drunken mummer in such scorn as would have melted wax. The table was between them, that tall, bobbed-haired, humming drunkard in red and black velvet, and that pale, slim girl in white and gold. Can you see that tableau in the cabin? I wonder how many pleasure yachts sailing week-end down the Sound have witnessed such a scene? Only this was a river in dark Haiti. This was a caravel from Spain. Christopher Columbus and a princess!

"And he's drunk!" Upchurch's voice shook at my ear. "That Genoese cur! Look at him! Look at that girl! Eyes like stars, that Indian said. White as the milk of a gourd— Look!"

The Admiral was moving. Cat-foot he came around the table, and the girl slipped away to keep that table between them. She wanted to reach the door, but Columbus wasn't going to let her. I could see his mouth going, but I couldn't hear what he said. Just a blur of words, faint under the glass. When he tagged her around the table I could see his legs, spindly in purple tights.

"Damn him! Damn his eyes!" Upchurch writhed on the skylight.

THE man below us had jumped to guard the door. Now he was grinning, head lowered and wagging, liquor slopping from the flagon in his fist. He tilted his head to drink, and threads of wine coursed from the corners of his mouth. The girl was pounding the table with white fists, one shoulder exposed where her gown had been torn. We could hear her voice, low music in an undertone of fury.

"Don Carlo!" That much came clearly. "Don Carlo—"

"She's calling him by a nickname," came out of Upchurch.

The man below gave a shout of mirth and hurled the emptied flagon at the bed where it slanted from a mahogany post with a ghostly *bong!* Circling the cabin at a bound, he tried to catch the girl's arm. She slid from his fingers. Rage squalled from his mouth and the birdhouse hat slopped over one ear. Upchurch dug his nails in the chicken coop glass and screamed, "Good girl! Run!"

I don't know whether Columbus heard that shriek on the skylight or not; but I saw him make a wild fling, grab out, sprawl over the table in a grab at the girl's blowing gown. The girl's cry, "Don! Don!" pierced the skylight. The brass lamp went over. The girl slumped to the floor. The table went up in a wave of white flame.

Whoosh! There was something mighty inflammable in those little boxes that looked like ticker tape. Fire shot from one to the next in snaky loops, the papers flared yellow, the table-top roared. A spiral of fire jumped the cabin and the bed seemed to explode. The draperies went. The window curtains. A second Columbus was posed like a dummy in a furnace, screaming. Then he whirled without looking at the girl; fled to the door. The door's slam made fire jump to the skylight, and the deck where we sprawled turned rose. And the face of Professor Roy Upchurch blazed with another fire.

"He's left her down there and she'll burn to death! The princess—"

Lashing around, he struck me hard between the eyes; snatched the gun I'd forgotten in my hand. Crash! Panes in the skylight cracked forty ways under the blow, a section fell in with a tremendous smash. Glass showered in brilliant shards. Heat slapped in an upburst of smoke. That velvet cabin was roaring like a den of lions, and I knew there wasn't a chance down there. But I didn't know Upchurch. You'll see I didn't. A streak of crimson towered out of the hole he'd smashed to scald his face, and I won't soon forget the sight of him standing over that scarlet, bellowing frame with all the fires of hell in his goggles and blood spilling down the gun-barrel from the gash in his hand. I won't ever forget the way he yelled and went down. He seemed to climb down that tower of fire. I saw him hit the table in a fountain of sparks; saw him jump.

I think Upchurch bounding around in that fire-blasting cabin was the most supernatural part of that whole supernatural night. It was two hundred and fifty in the shade down there. Upchurch didn't turn a hair in that volcano. Flames curled at him and went the other way. He jumped through a vermillion holocaust the way Moses went through the Red Sea, and with the same sort of holy glow in his eyes. Red light everywhere, but no exit. The door was a sheet of crimson. Flame made a gnashing sound, chewing the wood. If the princess wasn't a dream it was lucky she lay on the floor.

"I've got her, McCord, I've got her! I'll pass her up!" The professor's voice was a trumpet ringing above the shout of Inferno.

"Pass her up!" I screeched. I was sprawled out over the skylight like a man crawled to the edge of a hole in the ice. Only it wasn't ice. Not by the fires of Vesuvius, it wasn't! Even as I screeched for Upchurch to pass me the girl the hot glass under me burst into smithereens. Wham, crash! The whole skylight caved, and I went with it. Fire all the colors of con-

fetti founted around me as I lit feet first on the blazing table, fell through a cloud of pistachio smoke and hit the grilled floor. I wasn't asbestos. You bet I wasn't. But Upchurch of the apricot whiskers was.

I GLIMPSED him beyond the table with the girl in his arms. Smoke swam around his legs and embers showered on his hair, but he looked as cool as red ice. No resemblance then to the professor of history. No, nor anybody I'd ever seen on earth before. I think he was Thor. Thor among his lightning bolts with a goddess in his arms. Only a god could have faced flame the way Upchurch faced it.

"The door!" he squalled at me. There wasn't any door! Just a wall of flame across the cabin where the door had been. And Upchurch went straight through that wall. Chin down, he plunged across the cabin. Shielding the girl's golden head with his coat, he raced at the blaze that had been a door, burst the molten timbers with a kick and soared through. I threw an arm across my eyes. Any ordinary mortal would have been cooked like a lobster. Upchurch wasn't ordinary. He got out.

Wind gushed from the hole in the red, and the cabin was a forge. I was roasting like a chestnut, and I couldn't brave that red hole. I tried to jump through the skylight. My scalp was kindling. Tripped by a rope of smoke, I sprawled headlong. Valhalla nearly got me that time. A flag of fire bannered through the air where I'd been, and I must have scorched brown as a barbecue.

Then, wham! a waterfall dropped through the roof, and I was flat in a cataract. The volcano had turned to Niagara. Cold water smashing through smoke, hosing and spouting down billowy walls, pouring across the floor, smothering the air, turning hot red to hot black. Shoots of steam broke upward and were beaten down. A crackling and gasping as of hot iron plunged in a blacksmith's tub. The hissing of a million snakes. Suffocating gas. Lucky for me the skylight was open to the clouds. Do you know what happened? I

can tell you about one tropical cloudburst that saved my life. I can tell you how I swam to my feet in a rainstorm, fought through a tempest of black, smoke-filled water and dived through a smoldering cabin door. I'd cursed the wet season like a lot of fools, but I took it all back that night.

The passage was hot pitch, fogged. The ship was humming and drumming like an overworked boiler, the footing under me swayed. I don't know whether it was the storm pelting her hull or the fire undermining her lower companions. All I know is I was reeling down a black corridor with my face in my hands, my lungs fighting for fresh air. All at once it flowed in my nostrils and I bumped my shins up a ladder; flopped out of an open hatch.

Rain slammed my face. Water and darkness whirled around me in cloaks. That old boat was rocking like a hammock, groaning and caterwauling with the fires in her belly and a hurricane in her sails. Her hatches glowed where the rain couldn't douse her, yellow light varnishing her wet decks. Light streamed from her fiery aftercastle, flowed through shooting rain and picked out patches of jungle on either bank. The river was running as if a dyke had broken somewhere ahead, and the burning caravel dashed along in the torrent. The banks fled astern. The channel tumbled and foamed. The cloudburst boomed; the ship yelled with her hot stomach; tackle shrieked, blocks squealed; I heard the scream of canvas ripped up the mast.

THERE was another sound, too. An undertone cannonade, low with menace and loudening by the second. We were nearing a delta, and that cannonade was a storm at sea. I lifted a yell when I heard that sound.

"Upchurch!" I bawled. "Upchurch, where—"

Then I thought I saw him. A figure was standing on the stairway to the foredeck, and I ran for the stairway screaming the professor's name. I made the foot of those stairs before I was stopped. Just as I got

a boot on the bottom step a crush of flames broke from an afterhatch and the whole ship fired. Rain fell crimson, lashing the decks like a cataclysmic blood. It was queer as the devil, flame-light in that cloudburst. The man on the stairway was queerer, yet. It wasn't Upchurch. It was Christopher Columbus!

He lolled on the top step and sagged like a dummy. Legs sprawled, head wobbling, one arm hooked through the banister rail to keep him from falling down the flight. The wet glare flickered in his face and he looked sick with drink. His jaws were slung open and his mouth was all out of shape. Rain sluiced down his forehead and spouted from the end of his nose. His eyelids were wide apart, but the pupils had got stuck in the top of his head, and his eyes were popping oysters, unwinking in the rain.

He looked down on me with those oysterish optics, and I couldn't budge. His bobbed hair hung in strings to the hinges of his mouth, and red rain slashed the anchors braided on his chest; and I couldn't budge a joint, wondering if he was alive or dead or real.

Then the caravel struck a wall of surf, and he moved. Brine fell over him in a cloud as the ship rolled over, and he took his hand from the rail and came down. Bump, bump, bump, he pitched at me, and halfway down his ankles buckled and he dived with outflung hands to grab my throat.

I hit him, too. I hit that Christopher Columbus on the button with the last living ounce of power in my body. The deck swooped up under my boots, and I caught him square on his slopping jaw with everything I had. Wok! The blow shut his mouth with a dreadful sound. He slewed like a top, and something bright fell from his unsprung fist and twinkled across the planking at my feet. I saw what it was. Upchurch's Phi Bete Key! Upchurch's little gold Phi Bete Key fell from that devil's fist, and I yelled when I saw it. Then the dummified body came crashing off the stairs and dropped face-down on my root-



ed boots, and I saw something else. Looking down on the thing, I felt the scalp rise on my head. I think I came nearer praying at that moment than I ever did before or since.

That son of a gun Columbo! That velvet body on my boot-toes! I hadn't knocked him out, because he wasn't alive. I had slugged a dead man! The whole back of his head was smashed in!

I got my toes out from under and never stopped them going until they'd high-jumped the starboard rail and hit the river; and I didn't stop them going then. All the water in the world closed over me. But it will take more water than that to erase the indelible memory of that rotten uppercut, the picture of him flattened there without any back to his head. The day I'm laid out in lavender I'll remember him jumping down those steps at me, and I'll scare my happy mourners by sitting up in my coffin with a groan.

I swam. The Santa Maria went bowling out to sea. Making for home, I suppose. Her fevered portholes ignited the shore where the river emptied out into surf. In the havoc of storming dark she was a dwindling crimson smear. Then a spark. Then she was gone.

Sea and sky howled at her passing; and I dragged my carcass through black foam to a sandbank, and lay on my face for a long time.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MAKING HISTORY.

THE sun found me out. Little Caribbean zephyrs came skipping in off the blue to twist playful fingers in my hair. I sat up with a stench of burnt wood in my nostrils; stared at a blistered palm and bruise-purpled knuckles on my right hand. Then I walked across rice-white sand to put my face in a bubbling spring. The morning was cleansed in sunshine. There was the river winding cobalt from emerald jungle, and the Caribbean cool as a lake. Somewhere in palms a par-

rot whistled. Horizonward there wasn't a blemish on the sky. River and its jungle fringe were as good as when God made them. I might have been Robinson Crusoe.

But Crusoe didn't have swollen knuckles on his right hand. I straggled along the beach staring at my fist, and that was when I stumbled on the rest of the story. Just some bits of rubbish floating in the shallows, but I splashed out to get them, whooping hoarse yells.

A queer armful of salvage, I want to tell you. I spread the litter out to dry on the sand; got down on my hands and knees to study those bits with my mouth open. There was a folding camp chair with one leg burnt to a stump. There was that funnel-shaped thing that had bounced on my head (remember?) when I'd boarded the dark caravel and stumbled up the deck. There was a flat wooden box with the lid broken off—one of those boxes filled with stuff I'd thought was ticker tape.

I pulled the contents out of the box and watched it uncoil through my fingers in spirals and loops; and I was kneeling there pop-eyed when the morning quiet behind me was shattered by jubilant yells.

"Halloo! By heaven, it's McCord!"

I spun on my knees in time to see Upchurch step from the jungle's green with a white figure slung in his arms. He came marching at me on steady legs, and, word of honor! I wouldn't have known the man. I shouted his name, and he advanced grinning. Who wouldn't have grinned with that head of gold on his shoulders? But daylight had done something to his face. I had to squint before I saw what it was. His hair was singed black to the scalp, his beard burnt the color of coal-smoke. He was dirty as a smoked herring, but he came up grinning so fiercely his cheeks must have hurt; and I saw his glasses were gone and his eyes were like blue light.

"Professor!" I bawled. I shouldn't have recognized that face in a hundred years!

"Yeah," he nodded at the girl, gently lowering her to her feet, "this is Mr. McCord. I told you he'd turn up."

Hand in hand they walked up to me, and maybe you can see me gawking! Beautiful was no word for that girl with her hair like a gold shawl on her shoulders and a smile to match the professor's on her lips. And Upchurch was no word for Upchurch either! You know the fool little things one says in a climax like that.

I stared at the professor. "Your beard's burnt," I said

He shook his head, chuckling. "Natural color, old man, the rain finally washed out the dye." He thrust out a hand. "You're a good scout, McCord, and I'm glad I met you. My name's Denver."

"Denver!" I dizzied at him. "Whaaat?"

"Remember?" he asked cheerfully. "The cops were after me—Frank Denver. Fella who walked out of Atlanta and robbed Columbus charts from the Washington museum."

"But, good God—"

HE stared at the rim of a charred shoe. "They were right about me head-in' down here after gold. The Admiral never found any gold here in Haiti, but he came here from the Bahamas. That diary page—I picked that up in Le Cap ten years ago. Spent my stretch in prison studying medieval Italian so I could translate the thing. I told you most of it. But the last paragraph says the Santa Maria loaded gold in the Bahamas, see?" He reddened. "That's why I borrowed those ancient charts from the museum, figuring they'd help me trace the Santa Maria. That's why I played the professor act and came to Haiti, trying to locate the old caravel's hulk. I—I didn't care about history. No more than those Spanish discoverers did. I was after gold, the same way Columbus was, himself. Then—after I heard old Guacanagari's yarn—about the conquest and all—well, I felt pretty mean about gold. And when I saw history being played on that ship last night"—he smiled down at the girl—"I guess I found all the gold I'll ever want. McCord, this is Miss Carlyle. I've told her all about me, so this isn't news to her."

Haiti went merry-go-round in my vision, but I managed to mumble something to the girl and get up off my knees. Her blue eyes steadied me.

"I've thanked him, and I want to thank you for what you did last night," she said in a low voice. "That beast was drunk and—and attacking me. You see, we'd been lost up the river for days. Mr. Kline took the extras and other men downriver in the launches and they must have gone up one of those channels and lost their way. We came here for authentic atmosphere. I—I guess we got it. It was going to be a super, too." Tears glimmered on her lashes. "Yesterday afternoon all our food was gone, and we sent the Spaniard out to find water. Don said not to worry. He suggested we go over a scene; said it would take our minds off our predicament. I thought at first he was only fooling. He always overplayed. Then Don—he got out of hand. He—he—"

"He won't overplay anything again," the man beside her snapped. "I met him out on deck, up on the forward stairway. Why, he'd left you to burn alive, and then he tried to stop me. He pulled a gun and I—"

"He always tried to make love to me," the girl shuddered. "It was dreadful to—to work opposite him—"

Me? Well, I couldn't utter a syllable. I could only fix a stunned eyeball on the rubbish at my feet. What do you think that "funnel" thing was? But you've seen a megaphone. This one had white lettering on its conical side. *Triograph Company. Mr. Kline. Director.* A brass name plate on the camp chair said: *Donald de Carlo. Star. On Location.* There was a card tacked on the flat wooden box, and I read: *Serial. Episode One. Adventures of Christopher Columbus.* The ticker tape stuff in my hands was a reel of camera film!

A thousand years ago a freckled man stood in a hut door saying, "There's a party down the coast taking pictures—"

Upchurch's voice came at me through the fog, "I suppose you'll want to turn me over to the police."

"If you do," the girl whispered, taking my hand and looking up at me, "you're not the man I think you are—"

"Nobody is," I heard myself say, thinking of film stars, gold hunters and explorers. "You'd better get rid of those whiskers before we get to Goava, Upchurch. There's a movie actor went down on a ship out here, and a fellow named Denver went with him. The police wouldn't understand."

Arm in arm we walked up the sand.

### EPILOGUE

**M**CCORD, the big engineer who had lived in Haiti longer than most of us, eased his feet with a growl. Beyond the veranda the tree frogs were chirping, the moon was down, and Port au Prince rooftops were mauve in starshine. The big man's silhouette was blue against the screen, his eyes turned seaward as if to sight a ship against the sky.

"There's a fellow out in Hollywood," he said thoughtfully, "and he's one of the few still married to his first wife. Character actor. Says he owes all his success to her. His name isn't what you might think, but you know how it is with picture folk. The movie mags like to write about him; say he's eccentric. Refuses to play in crook films and these costume shows so popular lately. I read how they wanted him to star in a big feature picture, and he turned down the part with an awful row. It was a film about Christopher Columbus—"

"Lord!" Young Harley's shadow detached itself from the shadows of the door. "Then those two police officers never took him—"

McCord's silhouette shrugged. "You know how it is with cops—always nab the wrong guy—"

"But," the young "Hasco" man blurted, "what became of the man with the black beard, then? The man who came to Goava with a leather bag and rifle, and trailed you through that jungle—who was he?"

"He's the wrong guy the cops nabbed,"

the engineer grunted, "and the day after we got to Goava they brought him in, all handcuffed up. Maybe you think that dirty little town wasn't throwing a connoption. First of all a couple of launches jammed with camera men, film extras and a hysterical fat man named Kline had drifted in out of the storm. Then Upchurch and the girl and I straggled in, more dead than alive. Next day who should show up but the freckled American cop, the Haitian *gendarme*, a scared 'Spanish sailor,' and our old friend Blackbeard, trussed up like a turkey.

"The police had caught Blackbeard on a river bank where he was trying to talk with that masquerading Spaniard. Blackbeard had handed the cops a story about being hired by a lawyer to come to Haiti and find an American who'd been left a rich estate. Said he'd trailed his party to Goava and headed into the jungle to find him.

"First thing he knew he was lost; then just by luck he sighted the party next day. He'd fired in the air to attract attention, but his party took it on the run. When Blackbeard tried to catch up with the man, he got lost again. He kept shooting and the other party kept shooting as if to signal him on the track. Finally he'd come across the Spaniard hiding in the underbrush."

McCord grinned, turning his gaze on his listeners. "You can imagine Blackbeard was sore at being arrested after all his trouble. He was mighty sore. The freckled cop didn't believe a word of his story, either, until I happened along. Then the fellow pointed at me, waved his leather bag, and let out a shriek. 'That's the man!' *Me!* I was the party he was hired to find. *Me—John McCord!*"

Harley gasped out, "Blackbeard was trying to find you?"

"Can you beat it?" the engineer nodded. "And it just fitted in with Upchurch's gold-hunting racket and threw the police off his trail. And all that time I'd been biting my finger nails to get out of Haiti. All that time I was combing the beach. There was this lawyer's agent after me,

and me running like mad to get away from him, to shoot him down. That old aunt of mine in the States had died, willing me her property. There were the papers in Blackbeard's leather bag.

"I looked at him with my eyes bugging. 'You're the devil of a client,' he reproached me. 'You certainly led me a dirty chase. Your aunt left you a big estate in America,

and it's all yours provided you go back there and live the rest of your life on the property.'"

"'Will I?' I roared. 'You bet I will! Where is it?'"

"'Columbus,' he told me with a bow. 'Columbus, Ohio.'"

"'The hell with it!' I said. And I've lived in Haiti ever since—"

THE END

### *An Ancient Skyscraper*

TWO thousand years ago a skyscraper was built in Egypt which must have looked somewhat like ours of to-day. It was thirty stories tall. At the base it was square; farther up it became hexagonal and then round, tapering to a pedestal on which stood a statue. From a distance the building must have looked a little like the Empire State Building or the Wrigley Building in Chicago.

This was the famed Pharos at the entrance to the harbor of Alexandria. At its top glowed a beacon of charcoal, backed by a huge concave mirror which was built so as to swing and throw the beam in various directions. So powerful was this mirror that, used as a burning glass, it more than once set fire to an enemy ship—or so run the legends.

In the lower floors of the Pharos were three hundred rooms, used as quarters by the huge staff of workmen who carried wood to the beacon, climbing day and night like ants up two spiral ramps.

For centuries Oriental minarets were copied after the Pharos, which was called one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Even the island on which it stood was connected to the mainland by a remarkable highway, built for a mile on the ocean bed. At the shore end stood two giant obelisks. The people of Alexandria called them "skewers."

*J. W. Holden.*

*Hiram Walker & Sons*



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