

## "PIRATE GOLD"

It happened on Dead Man's Island, about the middle of August, a little less than a year ago. The experience has been unique in my career and my friend Dr. Hopkins, used to such things, never refers to it without showing a momentary tremor. Dr. Hopkins, you know, was interested in investigating the occult—in tracing down Eastern magic and digging deep into the lore of the ancients relative to elementals and guardian spirits.

Hopkins and Lord Wansbrough—who together had shared rooms with me at Varsity and on many a vacation tour—were just back from Egypt. Hopkins had been probing the circumstances of the death of Lord Carnarvon, and Wansbrough had just come from the upper Nile regions where he had been hunting hippopotami and other monsters.

We met at the University Club—June 20th, 1923—and after greetings were over, sat smoking in the room discussing many things. It was a sort of valedictory for me, as I intended sailing for Canada immediately after the Wimbledon Tournament. Hopkins was reminiscent and Wanny was in one of his rare sceptical moods.

"By the way," I interjected, "What do you think, Hop, of the legend about the spirit protection of pirate treasures?"

"Pure balderdash," said Wanny.

"Don't jump to rash conclusions, my dear Wanny; because you are more or less impervious to an unseen world is no argument that it doesn't exist; I should like the opportunity of investigating a pirate horde."

"It might be exciting," Hopkins remarked quietly.

An idea entered my head on the instant—Pearson and I were going on a fishing trip in early August. In reality, I was going to fish, and Pearson thought to do some work on an historical treatise of some kind which he was preparing. We could as well go up the head waters of the

Lonesome River,—cross Lost Lake portage above the rapids and pitch our camp on one of the numerous clump of Islands that dotted this part of the world. The scenery there was magnificent, the fishing left nothing to be desired; we were a hundred miles from civilization and then there was Dead Man's Island, where some horrible pirate-legend gives half a dozen different names—buried gold, and as usual left a guard. The skeleton had been found there by some travellers—and it gave evidence of a cruel death. It was indeed a man's, but crushed as though a mountain had fallen on him. Indians would not go within five miles of that Island. So strong was their fear that in their annual descent with furs to Fort O' Seven Pines, they made a strong portage to avoid passing this spot. "Now," said I to myself, "Here Pearson can work uninterruptedly. Wansbrough and I can fish and perhaps add an odd head to our collection and Hopkins can investigate to his heart's content."

So I sprung my idea.

"Done" said Wanny.

But Hopkins was not so enthusiastic. "Do you know, Josh," he said, "I am beginning to lose some of my nerve—I am beginning to tackle these things with fear of the unknown,—but then the trip will be a rest, and I've never been to Canada."

"Do come," I said "and complete the old bunch. The last time we were all together was the night before you and I and Mike went down. Do you remember the lamentations of Wanny? He was going away at once but he stayed."

"Come on" said Wansbrough. "It will be a vac all through—There may be something in King Tut's tomb but I'll guarantee there is nothing in the old wives tale of Pirate guards for Gold."

So Hop agreed, but on this condition, that he should be allowed to take along his dog Joy—a beautiful Alsatian,

and Peter, just a plain cat and the inseparable companion, strange to say, of Joy.

Then things were arranged. I sailed as I planned. They were to join Mike and myself at my home for a week-end before setting out north. I took them to my home for a purpose.

Many years ago—I think it was somewhere in the 70's—my father had been a great traveller and in the course of his wanderings had come to Lost Lake. He introduced me to its excellencies as a hunter's and fisherman's paradise. But it wasn't hunting or fishing took him there, but the stories of "Pirate Gold."

Anyway he and his companions reached Deadman's Island, after having been deserted by their half breed guide. They started digging operations but did not pitch camp on the island. Strange things happened. As fast as they would dig, the holes would be filled in on the following mornings. Their canoes were stolen, though there was never a human being within fifty miles in every direction. Their tools were broken by curious accidents, and my father himself had a narrow escape from drowning in a pool which the day previous had not been more than four feet deep.

So the attempt was abandoned. McKay died of fever at Fort O'Seven Pines. De Drucourt returned to France, and my father was called home by the serious illness of my grandmother. That is his story and I wanted Hopkins to hear it before we set out.

Our journey was made without incident, though the factor and guide at Fort O'Seven Pines could not refrain from smiling when Peter made his solemn and dignified appearance. True, I myself laughed inwardly at Hopkins, bringing his dog and cat, but then Hop was always queer. In his undergraduate days, he sported a young crocodile as a pet, until one night it escaped and found its way to Mercury Fountain in Christ Church quad, where its presence



was so unlooked for that the porter imagined he had achieved "D. T's." on half a pint of ale.

Hop was fined five pounds, and his amiable pet banished to London Zoo. So we smiled tolerantly and thanked our stars that it was a dog and a cat he was bringing along, and not a boa constrictor or a grizzly bear.

No Indian would guide us up, so McLaren, an old Scotch trapper long in the service of the Company, dour and silent—but an excellent cook and an infallible reader of weather signs, volunteered to accompany us.

We arrived just about sunset one glorious evening in August, and camped on a fairly spacious island close to the North shore. Joy immediately went on an exploring expedition, but soon was diverted to the pleasant occupation of barking at a squirrel. Peter disdained such foolishness, attached himself to McLaren, and patiently awaited the advent of a fire.

The scene was one of the most glorious that can be pictured by the imagination. The river here was running almost due West; about a mile down were the rapids, and a bit farther on, Lost Lake. So breathless was the air that one could almost see the individual trees mirrored in the lake. The rapids sang their age old song. The western wood retained that long halo of glory—slowly dying, so peculiar to a northern twilight. The sun went but the moon was coming—the harvest moon—and the East was even more beautiful than the faintly fading West had been.

Our supper was quickly over; everything was got ship shape, and sleep proved the superior attraction. Morning came all too soon. When I awakened, McLaren was stolidly frying trout and smoking the vilest briar I have ever known, not more than twenty feet from my head. Pearson was unpacking a typewriter. Hopkins and Wansbrough had gone to the river for a plunge and I immediately got up and followed them. When we got back and dressed we were ready for breakfast.

After breakfast Hopkins proposed delaying his work a few days. Anyway we would have to locate Deadman's Island, and some of our supplies were still below the rapids. Even Pearson thought of taking a day or so off.

For four days we fished, ate, and slept, as four carefree people should. Only McLaren remained as gloomy as ever. Around our fire at night we talked of old undergraduate days, or Wanny related marvellous adventures with ferocious beasts in the wilds of Africa. Sometimes Pearson told of amazing "howlers" made at Varsity where he was now teaching. Hopkins related Australian bush superstition, or told of Hindu magic, and when my turn came, I related a modest tale of the North. No one has yet solved the riddle of the Canadian North. It is a greater and grander one than that of the Sphinx. Only patient and wise men understand nature north of the line from Albasca to Lake St. Jean.

It seemed to me during the last day or so that there was something strained about things, something premonitory. McLaren had become furtive; Peter rarely moved more than ten feet from the fire. We seemed unnaturally fond of each other's company, though all would have denied such an imputation. Even Joy ceased to chase squirrels.

We had been there six days, and had revelled in taking beautiful large fighting fish. Wansbrough had brought in a fine Bull Caribou, and I had unsuccessfully made an attempt on a Moose some miles back. On the morning of the 16th of August, Pearson had brought out his typewriter and made his announcement that he intended to work. The rest of us decided the time had come to locate Deadman's Island, find the treasure if any, then collect a few more heads and return to civilization, as Pearson and I went back on duty about September 1st.

So we set out—McLaren and Wanny in one canoe and Hopkins and myself in another. Joy, Peter, and Mike were left with the camp.

Deadman's Island was easy to find, simply because the travellers who had found the skeleton, had erected a rude cross near the water's edge, and because we recognized the peculiar fringe of birch trees of which my father had spoken. It was about three miles from our first camp.

We landed and found that the Island was almost circular and not more than eighty yards in diameter. Also, that it was a good half mile from its nearest neighbor, and it seemed to us that the river around was particularly black and sullen looking. The Island itself was a veritable campers' paradise. Fringed with beautiful and stately birch, it was covered with the softest and greenest carpet of grass. On the south side a spring of purest crystal ran to the bank and dropped into the river with scarcely a murmur. There was a sort of dome-like mound in the centre which sloped gently towards the trees on all sides.

Of the digging operations of which my father had spoken, there remained not a trace. Even the cross erected to the unknown was outside the fringe of trees on the shore. The only thing that showed the hand of man the destroyer, was a decayed and dying birch tree which gave evidence on closer investigation that some one had at one time formed the idea of cutting it down, but was diverted to something else at the last moment. It looked for all the world like an old crippled soldier, yet there was something vengeful and defiant in its attitude.

"Why, here is the place where we should have pitched at the start," declared Wanny.

"Ideal" murmured Hopkins.

"It looks delightful" I admitted. McLaren said never a word.

"Our purpose," I said, "is to locate a likely spot for the burial of doubloons and Louisd'or."

"Dig where you like," said Wanny, "I'm not digging. You can have my share of the gold, but don't interfere with my fishing."



"It doesn't look very occult," said Hopkins, surveying the pleasant prospect. "Let's move here,"

"I'd advise you, sir, to stay where ye are" said McLaren. That was the fourth time I had heard McLaren speak. On two of the other occasions he had been muttering in Gaelic to himself.

The volubility of McLaren clean bowled the whole of us, and, before we could recover from our astonishment, McLaren continued: "I'm no given to speakin', but I've heard things from the tribes yonder," and he waved his hand vaguely to the East: "they say this is the home of some heathen god or devil or other. It's no place for a Christian man."

Wanny laughed outright. McLaren turned away in contempt. I felt like laughing but did not dare. I turned to Hopkins who was staring with a set face into space.

"We move here tonight," he said suddenly, and then strode to our canoe.

By noon, we were ready to move, and at three o'clock we disembarked on Deadman's Island. We pitched our tents by the spring.

"The weather will break tonight" volunteered McLaren. "It's looking bad now." Too good a prophet was our guide, for we saw no sunset that night, nor were we destined to see one for some days. About five o'clock the wind rose to a gale. Cloud piled up on cloud in the south-east. A hollow moan came from the birches, and every now and again we were bitten with driving rain.

Just about dark we were startled when Wanny remarked: "Who's that by the edge of the Island."

We looked and saw what we thought to be an Indian passing slowly up stream in the teeth of the gale; we looked more closely and it seemed the canoe was heavily laden, but when we moved to the bank it was gone.

The night passed well enough, as our tents withstood the weather, but the next day the wind blew as hard as

ever so that we were effectually confined to the Island.

"I told ye this was no place for Christian men," McLaren remarked at breakfast.

Joy and Peter remained with McLaren all day by the fire. About three o'clock I was re-called to myself by Hopkins' excited shout of "What's that, Wanny?"

"I don't know" said Wanny, as he hastily procured his rifle.

"Stop," said McLaren quietly. "It is the messenger of the Scarlet Hunter of the Kimash Hills who summons the Sleepers to Judgment there."

"Sleep—Sleep! Woe to those who desecrate the sanctuary given to me." I should have sworn it came from the ground. I looked down with a start and Peter was rubbing my leg and purring contentedly, but Joy with hair erect on his back was whining at the feet of his master. McLaren muttered Gaelic to himself for the rest of the afternoon, and at supper broke into the chant of the Scarlet Hunter. He was evidently beside himself with fear. None of us felt too comfortable and our conversational efforts were not a success. Hopkins alone seemed himself, although Wanny kept up the bluff of not appearing to notice anything strange. I don't know how Pearson felt, but I think he and I were affected much in the same way. We were expecting something to happen which we felt might be unpleasant. We weren't afraid, but we were not happy. We little dreamed the sequel.

Finally after a struggle, sleep claimed us all. I think I was the first to awake the next morning. Only Peter was in evidence sitting by the blackened ruins of last night's fire. McLaren wasn't astir. I got up, and my movements brought Joy, whining pitifully to me. In a few minutes Pearson, Wanny, and Hopkins appeared. Then we decided to awake McLaren. His tent was empty.

"He must be looking to the canoes," said Hopkins.

"I believe he has deserted," from Wanny.



"Deserted," I replied. "Why, no canoe could get fifty yards from this Island with this sea running. He must be about somewhere."

"I'll send him in," shouted Pearson, as he moved off with Joy at his heels.

I had just begun to resurrect the fire when Pearson staggered past me with a look on his face as though he had seen Lucifer himself.

"He's back there," he said, "and he's dead. Get Hopkins and Wanny to go. I can't go back—its too terrible."

About twenty yards from the spring and almost under a birch tree we found McLaren with the frozen stare of terror still on his countenance, and his body crushed to a shapeless mass. A huge boulder which, strangely enough, we had not noticed before, seemed to have rolled right over him. So we buried poor McLaren there, and said a prayer for his soul.

It was a sad breakfast party we were. Peter was the only cheery individual, I think, to be found north of Fort O'Seven Pines that morning. At midday, we weren't much better, though Hopkins was heard to whistle to himself. Wanny was restless and paced back and forth. I was arrested in my housewifely duty of washing out a frying pan by an exclamation from Wanny:—

"How wide did you say this Island was, Josh?"

"Eighty yards," I replied.

"Eighty yards, well it's forty yards wide today," he threw back.

"You're either drunk or in a nightmare," I said as I kept on scrubbing.

"Well, I'm not drunk," growled Wanny, "cause this is a cursed Prohibition country, and I am as wide awake as you; come and measure it for yourself."

I did and found he spoke the truth. It made an extremely unpleasant impression on my mind. Pearson only laughed and said we had been seeing double the first

day we landed. But Hopkins became pale as death and proposed we see to our canoes. It was only then we made our most startling discovery. Not a paddle was to be found, and each of our four canoes had a hole as large as a man's head in the bottom. We were effectively cut off from the world, until we could mend the boats and make paddles, even though the weather should have been fit to travel in.

"Here's where I take charge," said Hopkins when we called a council of war at supper. "McLaren told me something before we came up here. This Island has long been the supposed sanctuary of one of the most powerful Indian gods, —The Spirit of the Trees. From what I gathered from our guide, this spirit is one of the most malevolent of the Indian Spirit world and was banished here countless ages past through the power of 'Hiawatha.' Here, its powers have never been restricted. It resides, if I can credit what I have been told, preferably in the tree. The tale of Pirate Gold is a myth, I think, and only arose after the finding of that first skeleton."

"It is in other words what ancient Egyptians would call an elemental and I must say, my friends, that my experience doesn't allow me to under-estimate its power for evil."

"But what can we do?" Wanny cried.

"Do as I direct, and possibly we may get out of this alive," returned Hopkins. "My directions will be simple, so act unquestioningly when the time comes."

"So be it," said I. Pearson remained silent.

"If we can materialize the elemental, I think I can effectually dispose of it for all time," the doctor continued; "that depends somewhat on you, but in fact, I rely more on Joy and Peter for assistance in this work. They can see and hear things our over-civilized senses fail to grasp; they shall warn us when to be ready, because I am sure the vital moment will come sometime

to-night. Let me say this—sleep will be fatal after midnight. I will call you at twelve.”

Pearson has no nerves sometimes, and Wanny wouldn't give in, so both turned into bed. I couldn't have slept, so I remained with Hopkins; Peter climbed on my knee and was soon asleep; Joy lay down at Hop's feet. There we sat, staring into the fire and smoking endless pipes of tobacco, until Hop looked at his watch and remarked: “It's a quarter to twelve; I think I had better rouse Wanny and Mike.”

I simply nodded. I don't know why, but I was too scared to speak.

Shortly Wanny and Mike appeared, and I knew very well that Wanny, at least, had never closed his eyes; a few desultory remarks were made, but soon everyone lapsed into silence.

About one o'clock I sensed a growing tenseness in the air. Hopkins signed us all to remain silent and still. Time ticked on; at half past one, the wind, which had been blowing moderately strong, died down. Peter arose on my knee, stretched himself, washed his face, and then sat staring towards the east. Soon he got down and walked straight out into the darkness. Then the moon broke through the clouds. Probably we sat there another half-hour when Peter came back rather scared looking. Joy jumped to his feet and slunk behind Hop, whining and growling. I saw Hop brace himself mentally and I knew our trial was at hand.

I looked at Pearson; his face was blanched; his expression was that of one frozen with fear. Once before had I seen such a countenance, and that was poor McLaren when we found him dead. Then, Wanny and I saw it at the same time. The trees around the Island were not trees any longer. They were malevolent devils—they were hideous and twisted and distorted—they had a hundred arms and a thousand eyes. They were all closing in on us imperceptibly—but even now, they were but ten



yards way—there was the old maimed one most wicked looking of all. Each carried in its branches a huge boulder such as the one we had seen by McLaren's body. We sat stiff and horror stricken. Hopkins arose and drew something from his pocket and slipped outside the circle. What he did I know not. I was helpless. I could not even turn my eyes from the hideous monsters around. In a moment Hop was back, and sprinkled a powder that burned like incense on the fire. Then he spoke to us:

"Look at me," he said, "everyone."

By a superhuman effort we did turn our heads inward.

"Will with me," he said.

We tried to will, but I for one had no will left. I was conscious of two things, the monsters around us and Hopkins at the fire. I prayed in my heart, I think, as I never prayed before.

Peter began to mew most pitifully, but Joy had become silent from sheer terror. Hopkins now began a weird chant in a language I didn't understand. Stronger and more insistent came the refrain. Slowly a mist seemed forming over the fire, slowly the mist formed into the most fantastic shape. It looked to me like a giant maple seed with gauzy wings outspread, but then we saw its head. I don't think Dante in his inferno ever conceived anything more horrid.

Peter immediately leaped into the air scratching and clawing at some unseen things, only to be flung back breathless. Joy too joined the fray, jumping and snapping only to be hurled back in the same way. I felt as though death was clutching me by the throat. A terrible mental fight for life was going on in my brain. Hopkins' chant continued, rising and falling. The evil powers of dim primeval ages were struggling desperately here to maintain a last foul hold on earth. Slowly the hideous monster sank hissing and groaning into the fire. I could see the beads of perspiration standing out on Hopkins'

brow. The hand on my throat loosed—and, as the terrible thing disappeared, I saw him stagger. Wanny caught him in his arms.

“Don’t move,” he said before he fell into unconsciousness.

We sat like statues. In two or three minutes he opened his eyes.

“I think I have conquered, but don’t move,” he repeated.

I felt something against my leg. I looked down and there was Peter blinking up at me and purring contentedly. I picked him up and noticed one of his ears was torn and bleeding. I dared to look around. The trees seemed to be imperceptably retreating. I knew Hopkins had won and then I collapsed.

When I came to, Pearson was sprinkling water on my face and laughing and crying like an hysterical woman.

“We thought they had got you, Josh,” he managed to get out between sobs—

“Safe, thank God” said Hopkins, and poor doubting Wanny stood behind and said amen.

Well, morning found us still nervous and excited around the fire. Pearson was in a state of prostration, Hopkins worn and haggard. I felt shaky enough myself, but Wanny was beginning to recover his usual vim.

“Me for Picadilly,” he said, “as soon as possible. I want something gay to banish this nightmare from my mind. What d’you say, Hopkins.”

“But” Hopkins replied: “I am going down with Josh to peaceful Prince Edward Island for at least two weeks. After that I am going to practise—straight medicine. I’m through with elementals.”

“I’m due in Toronto in a week,” spoke up Mike. “Better come along Wanny. We’ll take in the exhibition, and I hope to forget. Curse this place anyway.”

“I’ll think it over” replied Wansbrough.

In the course of a week we were back in civilization. Wanny went on with Mike to Toronto for a few days before returning to England. Later he decided to wait for Hopkins. Hop and I journeyed down to the Garden of the Gulf to find harvest in full swing. The second night after we arrived my father asked about the success of our trip. My sister was interested as well. Would Dr. Hopkins tell us about it? But the lot fell to me, and I told my tale in the imperfect way I have set it down here. When I was through, we all found ourselves closer to the fire. For a minute all was silence. Then my father got up and went out. In a moment he was back and in his hand he held a sort of flat disc of gold. It proved to be the remains of a watch. On the back we could faintly make out the initial "M."

My father spoke. "McKay didn't die of fever at Fort O'Seven Pines. This was his watch. De Druecourt shares his grave on Deadman's Island."

"But you"—said Hopkins—"How did you escape?"

"I know the secret of the Sleepers. I know the charm of the Hunter—the Son of the North. I know the way of the Safe Tent, but I was helpless to save my friends."

"Yes!" said Hopkins with a gleam in his eye.

I retired. Hopkins and my father continued talking far into the night.

J. R. H. F.

