

The Secret of the Dead Mate

By W. Clark Russell

Black in the wake of the moon, in the heart of the trembling spread of white splendor, floated a boat. The night was breathless: beyond the verge of the eclipsing brightness of the moon the sky was full of stars. A man sat in the stern-sheets of the boat motionless with his chin on his breast and his arms in lifeless posture beside him, From time to time he groaned, and after he had been sitting as though dead for an hour he raised his head and lifted up his eyes to the moon, and cursed the thirst that was burning his throat, then shifted his figure close to the gunwale, over which he lay, with both hands in the water for the chill of it.

The moonshine was nigh as bright as day. The sea-line ran firm as a sweep of painted circle through the silver mist in the far recesses. An oar was stepped as a mast in the boat, and athwart it was lashed another oar from which hung a man's shirt and coat. She looked dry as a midsummer ditch in that piercing moonlight. At the feet of the man, distinctly visible, were two or three little pellets or lumps of rag, which he had been chewing throughout the day; but his jaws were now locked, the saliva had run dry, his sailor's teeth, blunted by junk and ship's bread, could bite no more moisture out of the fragment of stuff he had cut off his back. Oh! it is dreadful to suffer the agony of thirst, the froth, the baked and cracking up, the strangled throat, whilst beholding a vast breast of cold sea glazed into the beauty of ice by the moon, and whilst hearing the fountain-like murmur and refreshing ripple of water alongside!

The moon rolled slowly into the south-west, trailing her bright wake with her, and the boat and its solitary occupant floated into the shadow. Again the man lifted his head and looked around him. A soft breeze, but hot as the human breath, was blowing, and the shirt and coat dangling from the athwartship oar were lifting to the light pressure. The man saw that the boat was moving over the sea, but made no attempt to help her with the helm; once more he cast his eyes up at the moon and cursed the thirst that was choking him. But a boat, like a ship, has a life and a spirit of her own. The little fabric ran as though, with the sentience of a living organism; she knew there was something to hope for in the darkness ahead; her wake was a short, arrow-like line, and it streamed from her in emerald bubbles and circling wreaths of fire.

The sun rose, and the shadow of the earth rolled off the sea, which was feathering into the south-west to the steady pouring of the northeast wind. The boat ran straight, and now, the day being come, when the man looked up and ahead, he saw the shadow of land over the bows. Life sprang up in him with the sight, and a grin of hope twisted his face. With a husky groan he shifted himself for a grasp of the helm, and, laying his trembling hand upon the tiller, he held the boat—but not more steadily than she had been going—for the land.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age; half his clothes were aloft, and he was attired in fernaught trousers of the boatman's pattern, and a waistcoat buttoned over his vest. Suffering had sifted a pallor into the sun-brown of his skin, and his face was ghastly with famine and thirst. His short yellow beard stood straight out. His yellow hair was mixed with grey, and lay clotted with the sweat of pain into long streaks over his brow and ears, covering his eyes as though he was too weak or heedless to clear his vision.

The speed of the boat quickly raised the land, and by noon under the roasting sun it lay within a mile. It was one of the Bahama Cays—a flat island, with a low hill in the midst of it, to the right of which was a green wood; the rest of the island was green with some sort of tropic growth

as of guinea-grass. The breeze was now very light—the sun had eaten it up, as the Spaniards say. The man thought he saw the sparkle of a waterfall, and the sight made him mad, and as strong in that hour as in his heartiest time. He sprang from his seat, pulled down his queer fabric of oar and flapping shirt and coat, and flinging the two blades over, bent his back and drove the boat along. In a quarter of an hour her forefoot grounded on a coral-white beach that swept round a point clear of the foam of the breaker, and the man reeling out of her on to the shore, grasped her painter, and secured it to an oar, which he jammed into a thickness of some sort of bush that grew close to the wash of the water, and then, rocking and stumbling, he went up the beach.

It was an uninhabited island, and nothing was in sight upon the whole circle of the white shining sea saving the dim blue haze of land in the north and a like film or delicate discoloration of the atmosphere in the south-west. The man with rounded back and hanging arms and staggering gait searched for water. The heat was frightful; the sunshine blazed in the white sand, and seemed to strike upwards into the face in darting and tingling needles, white hot. He went towards the wood, wading painfully on his trembling legs through the guinea-grass and thick undergrowth, with toadstools in it like red shields and astir with armored creatures, finger-long reptiles, of glorious hue, and spiders like bunches of jewels.

Suddenly he stopped; his ears had caught a distant noise of water; he turned his back upon the sun, and, thrusting onwards, came presently to a little stream, in which the grass stood thick, green, and sweet. He fell on his knees, and, putting his lips to the crystal surface, sucked up the water like a horse, till, being full nearly to bursting, he fell back with a moan of gratitude, his face hidden in his hands. He sat till the broiling sunshine forced him to rise. The slender stream narrowed in the direction of the wood, and he walked beside it; presently after pushing a little way into the green shade, he found the source in a rock rich with verdure and enamelled with many strange and beautiful flowers. The trees in this wood stood well apart, but their branches mingled in many places, and the shade they made was nearly continuous.

He threw himself down beside the source of the little stream to rest himself. The surf seethed with a noise of boiling through the silent, blazing atmosphere outside. The miserable castaway now directed his eyes round in search of food. He saw several kinds of berries, and things like apples, but durst not eat of them for fear of being poisoned. Being now rested and immeasurably refreshed, he cooled his head in the stream and walked to the beach, and picked up a number of crabs. He saw to his boat, hauling her almost high and dry. All that she contained besides the clothes which had served him for a sail, was a carpenter's hammer and a bag of spikes. He whipped off his waistcoat and put his coat on, and dropping the hammer into his pocket, returned to the wood with his collection of crabs; then with his knife he cut down a quantity of dry brush-wood and set fire to it with the old-fashioned tinder-box that seamen of this man's rating sometimes carried in those days to light their pipes. He roasted the crabs artfully, as one who has served an apprenticeship to hardship, and having eaten, he drank again, and then folded his arms to consider what he should do.

He knew that the island was one of the Bahama Cays, though which he could not imagine. But other islands were in sight. He guessed that New Providence was not out of reach of his boat, nor was the Florida coast remote, and then there was all the traffic of the Gulf of Mexico. He determined, whilst he reflected, to cook plenty of crabs and to seek for turtle, and so store himself with provisions. But how about watering his little craft? Fresh water, cold and sweet, there was in plenty, but he had nothing to put it in, and what could he contrive or invent to serve as a breaker? He thought to himself, if he could find cocoanuts he would let the milk drain, and

fill the fruit with water, and so carry away enough to last him until he should be picked up or make a port.

He cast his eyes up aloft with a fancy of beholding in the trees something growing that would answer his purpose, and started, still looking and staring, as though fascinated or lightning-struck.

His eye had sought a tree whose long lower branches overshadowed the little stream, and amidst the foliage he thought he saw the figure of a man! The shape jockeyed a bough; its back was upon the tree; and now, straining his vision steadily under the sharp of his hand, the man saw that it was the skeleton of a human being, apparently lashed or secured to the bough, and completely clothed, from the sugar-loaf hat upon his skull down to the rusty yellow sea-boots which dangled amidst the leaves.

The sailor was alone, and the ghastly sight shocked him; the sense of his loneliness was intensified by it; he thought he had been cast away upon the principality of death himself. The diabolic grin in the tree froze the blood in his veins, and for awhile he could do no more than stare and mutter fragments of the Lord's Prayer.

He guessed from the costume that the figure had been lodged for a great number of years in that tree. He recollected that when he was a boy he had seen foreign seamen dressed as that skeleton up there was. It was now late in the afternoon, and with a shuddering glance aloft he began to consider how and where he should sleep. He walked out of the wood and gained the highest point of the little central bill, and looked about him for a sail. There was nothing in sight, saving the dim shadows of land red in the ether of sunset. The skeleton, as though it had been a devil, took possession of the castaway's soul. He could think of nothing else—not even of how he was to get away, how he was to store fresh water for his voyage. He did not mean to sleep in a tree: but the leaves provided a roof as sheltering as an awning, and he determined to lie down in the wood, and take his chance of snakes. Yet, before he could rest, he must have the skeleton out of it: the shadows would be frightful with the fancy of that figure above riding the bough and rattling its bones to every sigh of wind.

So with a resolved heart made desperate by superstition and fear, the sailor walked to the wood, and coming to the tree, climbed it by the aid of the strong tendrils of parasites which lay coiled round the trunk stout and stiff as ropes. He bestrode a thick bough close to the skeleton. It was a ghastly sight in that green glimmering dusk, darkening swiftly with the sinking of the sun. The flesh of the face was gone; the cloak hanging from the shoulders was lean, dusty, ragged as any twelfth-century banner drooping motionless in the gloom of a cathedral. The sailor saw that time and weather had rotted everything saving the bone of the thing. It was secured to the bough by what was, or had been, a scarf, as though the man had feared to fall in his sleep. The seaman stretched forth his hand, and to the first touch the scarf parted as though it had been formed of smoke; the figure reeled, dropped, and went to pieces at the foot of the tree.

The sailor had not expected this. He was almost afraid to descend. When he reached the ground he fled towards his boat, and lay in her all night.

He went for a drink of water at daybreak, and passing the scattered remains of the skeleton—with some degree of heart, for daylight brought courage, and a few hours of sleep had given him confidence—he spied something glittering amongst the rags of the skeleton's apparel. He picked it up. It was a silver snuffbox. He opened it, and inside found a piece of paper folded to the shape of the box. It was covered with a scrawl in pencil, faint, yet decipherable. To the man it would have been all one, whether the writing had been Chinese or English; he could not read. But he was a wary and cunning old sailor; every instinct of perception and suspicion was set a-crawling

by the sight of this queer faintly pencilled document, and by the look of the silver snuff-box which weighed very handsomely in his horny palm, yellow with tar. He pocketed the toy, and having refreshed himself with a drink of water, returned to the fragments of wearing apparel and old bones, no longer afraid, and with the handle of his hammer turned the stuff over, and in the course of a few minutes met with and pocketed the following articles: a stump of common lead pencil, three pieces of silver Spanish money, a clay pipe mounted in silver in the bone of an albatross's wing, a silver watch and hair guard, and a small gold cross.

He talked to himself with a composed countenance as he examined these trifles; then, having hunted after more relics to no purpose, he turned his back upon the bones and rags, and went about the business of the day.

During the morning he collected many crabs, but all the while he could not imagine how he was to carry away a store of water, till, chancing to look along the brilliant curve of beach, he spied a turtle of about three hundred pounds coming out of the sea, and then he made tip his mind to turn a turtle over after dark, and cut its throat, and make a tub of the shell.

Happily for this castaway he was spared the distress of passing another night upon the island. Two or three hours before sundown, a steady breeze then blowing from the north, a large schooner suddenly rounded the western point of the island at the distance of a couple of miles, heading east, and steering so as to keep the island fair abeam. The man had collected plenty of brushwood to roast his crabs with; he swiftly kindled a fire, and made a smoke with damp leaves, and whilst this signal was feathering down the wind, he launched and jumped into his boat, and, with the nimble experienced hands of the seaman, crossed his oars and set his sail of shirt and coat, and slowly blew away right before the wind towards the schooner. She saw the smoke and then the boat, and hove to, and in three-quarters of an hour the man was aboard.

"Who are you?" said the master of the schooner, when the man stood upon the deck.

"Christian Hawke, carpenter of the *Morning Star*," he answered.

"What's become of your ship?" said the other.

"Don't know," answered Hawke.

"What's your yarn?"

"Why," answered Hawke, speaking in a hoarse level growling voice, "we was becalmed, and the captain told me to get into a boat and nail a piece of copper, which had worked loose, on the rudder. We was flying-light."

"Where from?" said the captain suspiciously.

"From New Orleans to Havannah, for orders."

"Well?" said the captain.

"Well," continued Hawke, "I was hammering away all right, and doing my bit, when a squall came along, and the ship, with a kick-up of her stern, let go the painter of her own accord and bolted into the thickness; 'twas like muck when that squall bursted, with me a-hollering; I lost sight of the vessel, and should have been a dead man if it hadn't been for that there island." After a pause: "What island is it, sir?" he asked.

"An island fifteen mile east of Rum Cay," answered the captain.

Hawke had got it into his head that the paper in the snuff-box was the record of a treasure secret, but he was afraid to exhibit it and ask questions. He did not know in what language it was written, whether, in fact, it might not be in good English, and he thought if he showed the paper and it proved a confession of money-burial, or something of that sort, the man who read it, knowing where the island was, would forestall him.

On the arrival of the schooner at Kingston, Jamaica, Christian Hawke went ashore. He was without money or clothes, and at once sold the skeleton's watch and hair guard, for which he received thirty dollars. The purchaser of the watch looked at Hawke curiously across the counter after paying down the money, and said—

“Vere did you get this?”

“It's a family heirloom,” answered Hawke, pointing to the watchguard with a singular grin.

“This here vatch,” said Mr. Solomons, “is a hundred years old, and a vast curiosity in her vurks. Have you more of this sort of thing to sell? If so, I was the most liberal dealer of any man in Jamaica.”

Hawke gave him a nod and walked out. He found a ship next morning and signed articles as carpenter and second mate. She was sailing for England in a week from that date, and was a plump, old-fashioned barque of four hundred tons. At the sailor's lodging-house he had put up at he fell into conversation one evening, a day or two before he sailed, with a dark, black-eyed, handsome, intelligent foreign seaman, who called himself simply Pedro. This fellow did not scruple to hint at experiences gained both as a contrabandist and piccaroon.

“D'ye speak many languages?” said Hawke, puffing at a long clay pipe, and casting his grave, slow-moving little eyes upon a tumbler of amber rum at his elbow.

“I can speak three or four languages,” said the foreign seaman.

Hawke surveyed him thoughtfully and then, putting down his pipe, thrust his hand in his pocket, and extracted the paper from the snuff-box without exposing the box.

“What language is this wrote in?” said he, handing the paper to his companion.

The man looked at it, frowning with the severity of his gaze, so dim was the pencil scrawl, so queer the characters, as though the handwriting were the march of a spider's legs over the page. He then exclaimed suddenly, “Yes, I have it. It is my own language. It is Spanish.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Hawke, “and what's it all about, mate?”

“How did you come by it?” said the man.

“Found it in an old French Testament,” answered Hawke.

The man glanced at him, and then fixed his eyes upon the paper and began to read. He read very slowly, with difficulty deciphering the Spanish, and with greater difficulty interpreting it. The two men were alone. The foreign seaman made out the writing to signify this

“I who write am Lois do Argensola, that was second in command of the *Gil Polo*, commanded by Leonardo de Leon. In a terrible hurricane the ship that was bound from the Havannah to old Spain was lost. I escaped in a boat with Dona Mariana do Mesa and two seamen; both men went mad, and cast themselves overboard in the night. The Dona Mariana was my cousin. She was following her husband to Madrid. He had preceded her by two months. She had many valuable jewels, the gift of her husband, and some had been for many centuries in possession of her own family, who were nobles of Spain. Before the ship foundered the Dona urged me to save these jewels, which were in a box in her cabin. I found the box and threw it into the boat, and shortly afterwards the ship went down.

“After five days of anguish we arrived at a little island, and twenty-four hours afterwards the Dona Mariana expired. I had no spade to dig a grave, and placed her body in a cave on the left hand side of a little bay opposite the wood or grove where the fresh water stream begins. I have now been here six weeks, and have beheld no ship, and am without hope and feel as a dying man. Oh, stranger, who shall discover this my writing, to your honor as a man and to your charity as a Christian do I appeal. My own bones may rest in the place where I die—I care not, but I entreat that the remains of the Dona Mariana may be enclosed in a box, and carefully

conveyed for interment to her relatives at Madrid, and that this may prove no profitless duty to him who undertakes it, behold! in the foot of the tree I am accustomed to climb at night, that I may sleep free from the sting of the scorpion you shall find a hole. There, within easy reach of your hand lies the box of jewels. This box and the remains of Dona Mariana I entreat of your Christian charity to convey to Alonzo Reyes, Villagarcia. Spain, and I pledge the honor of a Spaniard that one half the value of the jewels shall be given to you.—LUIS DE ARGENSOLA. July, 1840.”

“That’s twenty years ago, said Hawke, sucking at his pipe.

“What’ll you take for the secret?” said his companion

“If I can find some one to help you to recover those jewels, what share will you give me!”

Hawke pocketed the paper with a sour smile and went out of the room.

His ship sailed and all went well with her. On his arrival in England. as soon as he had taken up his wages and purchased a suit of clothes, he went down to Ramsgate where, in a little off street not far from the entrance to the pier, dwelt his brother Reuben. This man was by trade a boat-builder. He also owned some bathing-machines. The brothers had not met for some years. nor had they heard from or of each other since they were last together. Yet when Christian, after beating with a little brass knocker upon a little green door, turned the handle and entered straight into a dwelling-room, his brother Reuben, who sat at tea with his wife, two girls, and his wife’s grandfather, exhibited no surprise. Their greeting was simply, “Hallo, Christian!” “ Well, Rube

Christian sat down and partook of tea with the family, and related his adventures to the great entertainment of the grandfather, who laughed till his cheeks were wet at all the pathetic parts—such as Hawke’s description of his thirst and his feelings of loneliness when upon the ocean and when lying in the boat at the island. The women cleared away the tea-things and went out; the old grandfather fell asleep then said Christian to his brother—

“Rube, I’m down here to have an airnest chat along with yer.”

“So I guessed,” said Reuben, who resembled his brother in face, manner, and tone of voice.

“Still got that cutter o’ yourn?”

“D’yer mean the *Petrel*?”

“Yes, she’s a-lying in the west gully. She airnt me some good money last year as a pleasure-boat. I’ve been thinking of sending her out a-fishing.”

“What’s her tonnage?”

“Eighteen. Want to buy her, Christian?”

“Not I. Suppose you and me goes down and takes a look at her.”

Reuben put on his coat and cap, and the brothers issued forth. Two square figures, the shoregoer rolling in his gait like the sea-farer, as though in fact, he was as fresh from the heave of the sea as the other. They walked along the pier till they came abreast of a stout little cutter lying at her moorings in the thick of a fleet of smacks hailing from Gravelines, Penzance, and other places. Christian viewed her in silence with the critical eye of an old sailor and a ship’s carpenter to boot.

“How old’s she, Rube?”

“Nine year.”

“She’ll do,” said Christian. “Rube, I’m going to spin yer a yarn.”

They went leisurely along the pier, and as they walked Christian told his brother about the skeleton in the tree and the document in Spanish which he had found in the dead man’s snuff-box. He produced the snuff-box and the paper, also the clay pipe mounted in the bone of an albatross’s wing, and the small gold cross. Reuben listened with an eye bright and keen with

interest and conviction. The mere sight of the silver box was as convincing to his mind as though he had been carried to the island, and stood looking at Argensola's bones and the hole in the tree in which the box of jewels lay hid.

That night the two brothers sat up late, deep in discourse. Christian put ten pounds upon the table.

"That's all I own in the world," said he. "It'll help to victual the boat."

"We shall want a navigator," said Reuben. "I'm rather ignorant myself of that art, and I don't suppose you've learnt yourself to read yet, ha' ye, Christian? There's young Bob Maxted knows all about shooting of the sun. Us two and him'll be hands enough. Shall we make shares?"

"No," said Christian; "you and me divides. T'other'll come along on wages."

"There's no doubt about the situation of the island, I suppose?" said Reuben.

"No."

"Let's look at that there Spanish writing again."

Christian produced the snuff-box and Reuben opened the paper.

"Are you cocksure," said Reuben, fastening his eyes upon the dim scrawl, "that that there Pedro, as you call him, gave you the right meaning of this writing?"

"Yes; and there was my own ixpurrence to back his varson."

"I'm rather for having it made into English again, Christian," said Reuben, thoughtfully. "Young Jones down at Consul Hammond's office speaks Spanish. What d'yer say?"

"No; I'm not a-going to trust any man but yourself with the secret. See here: if we come back rich—as'll follow—and you've bin meanwhile and shown that there paper to some one who understands it, what'll be thought? The gaff'll be blowed; the relatives of that there Mary Ann'll be getting wind of our haul, and'll come upon us for the jewels."

This and the like reasoning satisfied Reuben, who presently returned the paper to Christian, and, after drinking a final glass of grog, the two brothers went to bed.

Next day, and for some days afterwards, they were full of business. Young Maxted was willing to sail with them; they gave out vaguely that they were bound to the West Indies, partly on pleasure, partly on business. The true character of their errand was not revealed to Maxted, who had agreed for six pounds a month to navigate the little ship into the West Indian seas and back again. Reuben drew all his savings from the bank; twenty pounds and Christian's ten pounds formed their capital. They provisioned themselves with fore-castle fare, adding some bottled beer and a few gallons of rum, and on a fine morning at daybreak, when Ramsgate still slumbered, and the hush of the night yet brooded over the harbor, the three men hoisted their mainsail and jib, and blew softly down the gulley and round the head of the pier into the English Channel, which was by this time white with the risen sun, and beautiful in the south-west, where a hundred ships that had lain wind-bound in the Downs were flashing into canvas, and moving like a cloud before the light easterly breeze.

All went well down-Channel with the little craft. She was a stout and buoyant sea boat, with a dominant sheer of bow, coppered to the bends like a revenue cutter, and uncommonly stout of scantling for a vessel of her class. She was in good trim, and she plunged along stoutly, making fine weather of some ugly seas which ridged to her bow as she drove aslant through the Bay. By this time young Maxted had been made acquainted with the cutter's destination, and was steering a course for the little island. He plied his sextant nimbly, and clearly understood his business. The brothers represented to him that the object of their voyage was to recover some treasure which had been washed ashore out of a small Spanish plate ship and buried.

“We ain’t sure,” Christian Hawke told him. “that the island we’re bound to is the island where the wreck took place. But the herrant’s worth the cost and the time, and we mean to have a look round, anyhow.”

Maxted was silent; perhaps with the proverbial heedlessness of the sailor he was satisfied to take things as they happened. The actual motive of the voyage could be of no interest to him. All that he had to do was to steer the little ship to an island and receive so many sovereigns in wages on their return.

They made a swift run for so small a keel; in fact, the island was in sight at the grey of dawn thirty-three days after the start from Ramsgate. Christian Hawke with a telescope at his eye quickly recognized the central hill, the soft, cloud-like mass of green shadow made by the wood or grove on the right, and the slope of the green land to the ivory dazzle of sand vanishing in the foam of the charging comber. He warmly commended Maxted’s navigation, and both brothers stared with flushed faces and nostrils wide with expectation at the beautiful little cay that lay floating like a jewel full of gleams upon the calm blue brine right ahead.

They hove-to and rounded at about a mile from the land, and then let go their anchor in sixteen fathoms of water. They next launched their little fat jolly-boat smack-fashion through the gangway, and Christian and Reuben entered her and pulled away for the land, leaving Maxted in charge of the cutter; but little vigilance was needed in such weather as that; the sea was flat, and bare, and as brilliant as the sky; under the sun the water trembled in a glory of diamonds to the delicate brushing of a hot, light breeze. Nothing broke the silence upon the deep save the low, organ-like music of the surf beating on the western and northern boards of the island.

Whilst Christian pulled, Reuben steering the boat with an oar, he talked of his sufferings n-hen in these parts, how his jaws had been fixed in a horrid gape by thirst, and of the terror that had besieged him when he looked up into the trees and beheld the skeleton. They made direct for the little creek into which Christian had driven his boat, and where he had slept on that first and only night he had passed on the island; and when her forefoot grounded they sprang out and hauled the boat high and dry, and then with hearts loud in their ears and restless eyes, directed their steps towards the little wood. Christian glanced wildly about him, imagining that in everything his sight went to, he beheld a token of the island having been recently visited.

“How long’ll it be since you was here, Christian?” rumbled Reuben, in a note subdued by expectation and other passions.

“Five month,” answered Christian, hoarsely.

They walked to the margin of the little wood, and arrived at the source of the stream that ran glittering and straying like pearls amidst the tall sweet green grass that grew in the bed of it. Reuben grasped Christian by the arm.

“What’s that?” he cried.

It was a human skull, and close beside it were the complete bones of a human skeleton, together with a little heap of rags. It looked as though the stuff had been raked together for removal and forgotten.

“That wasn’t how they was left,” exclaimed Christian, coming to a halt and looking at the bones and rags. “There’s been a hand arter me here in that job.”

“A boat’s crew may ha’ landed and shovelled the stuff together out of a sort o’ respect for the remains of something that might have been a sailor,” exclaimed Reuben. “Where’s the tree with the hole in it?”

Christian walked to the place where he had been seated when his eye went to the skeleton aloft.

“That’ll be the tree, said he.

It was a large tree, the trunk of the bigness of an English chestnut, but dwarfed in altitude; its beauty was in the spread and curve of its branches. In the hinder part of the trunk—speaking with regard to its bearings from the source of the stream—about five feet above the ground was a large hole, partly concealed by the festooning drapery of the leaves of a rich and vigorous parasite, which soared in coils to the summit of the tree. Christian put his hand in.

“Stand by for snakes!” shouted Reuben.

The other drew out a little common brass tobacco-box.

“What’s here?” cried he.

“Try for the jewel box!” exclaimed Reuben.

Christian entered his hand again and felt round.

“There’s nothen more here,” said he.

“Has it fallen to the bottom?”

“There ain’t no hole for it to fall through,” cried Christian, still feeling. “It’s tight as a locker.”

He looked at the common little brass tobacco-box, then opened it, and found inside a slip of paper, folded to the shape of the box, as though in imitation of the snuff-box document in Christian’s possession. The handwriting was a bold scrawl in ink. With a trembling hand and ashen face the poor fellow presented the paper to his brother, who, putting on his glasses, read aloud as follows”—

I would have been glad to take a small share to help you to find the jewels, but you would not put a little money in my way, though by interpreting Lois do Argensola’s dying request in writing I was the instrument of your discovering that there lay a treasure to your hand. I therefore arranged with another to seek for the jewels: the situation being exactly known to me, because of your ignorance of the Spanish language, and perhaps of the art of reading, for at the end of the document, in three lines which it did not suit my purpose to interpret to you, Don Lois states how the island bears—that, in short, it is between ten and fifteen miles east of Rum Cay. My friend, I have found the jewels, and thank you for a fortune. They consist of pearl and diamond necklaces, brooches, bracelets, earrings, smelling-bottles, rings, and diamond ornaments for the hair. I should say they will not fetch less than £10,000.—Your amigo of Kingston, PEDRO.

“I have left the skeletons to your pious care to coffin and carry to the representatives at Villagarcia. You will find the remains of the Lady Mariana de Mesa in a cave on the west side of the island.”

The two men burst into a storm of oaths, and the little wood rang with fore-castle and ’longshore imprecations. When they had exhausted their passions they knelt and drank from the spring of water, then walked to the boat, launched her, and returned to the cutter.

They arrived in England safely in due course, but some time later Reuben was obliged to compound with his creditors. Christian Hawke died in 1868 on board ship, still a carpenter.