

## The Treasure Punt #11

“I tell yer, Blackbird, I need a break, and a long one at that,” Long John Platinum, The Bountiful’s first mate, exhorted the captain.

Truthfully, LJP’s pallor was paler than a pearl, his jowls drooped more sloppily than a spaniel’s, his eyes were greyer than gunmetal, and his voice tremor had less resonance than a flaccid balloon.

“Argh, LJP, you’re a sissy if ever I knew one,” Blackbird responded with his customary pirate sensitivity. “Oh, all righty then, get off with you,” the captain continued, witnessing the steepening slump of the first mate’s shoulders, the sloppy stoop of his gait, and his sailor friend’s darkening depression.

As LJP sloped down the gangplank, Blackbird ruminated, but not for long, on finding a temporary replacement pirate.

“Get yourselves down to the Piglet and Whale of a Time,” he instructed simple sailors Simon and Siphon, “and find me a pirate with a loose end. Someone I can rely on in stormy seas. We leave for the Tuscan coast at dawn.”

Simon and Siphon chastened themselves to this task with two glasses of scotch, before spreading the word to all the other salty sailors gathered for their spiritual sustenance.

Within a mere minute, Simon and Siphon were mesmerised by Short Sam Sulphur, an interim maritime specialist who surreptitiously sidled up to them at the bar counter. SSS, as he called himself, first proudly pulled up his baggy trousers, and winking sneakily, showed Simon and Siphon the two-gallon drums he had bolted through his feet and shins for added height. This was a unique and precious attribute, said SSS, and Siphon and Simon could not but agree. Then, SSS lifted his bandana, the scarf tying down the largest combination of Jew fro and Afro hair styles on the planet, more abundant than a collective of Woodstock hippies, and lifted it to show his completely bald head. ‘The wig’s helpful with the ladies,’ he added, before tying himself up again, not to mention his regular winking. Finally, SSS, in a rare show of subterfuge and obfuscation, after downing a tankard of rum with one gulp, pulled off his face! But Simon and Siphon, horrified as they were, need not have worried, for there was another one underneath, completely different from the first. Suddenly SSS was Spanish. And not an Albatross wing flap later, he was Mongolian. ‘I’ve sixty-seven different identities,’ he said, ‘another sixty-seven very useful things to have. I inherited the skill of mask-making from me father,’ he added. ‘It’s an old and distinguished family trait.’

“Yes, that is very plain to see,” agreed Siphon, “but much as your height, your wig and your faces are impressive, can you sail?” he asked, his critical questioning the reason why Blackbird had trusted him with this important talent identification task.

Well, never has a more heroic, a more adventurous, a more exciting, a more captivating, or a more thrilling tale ever been told, at least in the Piglet and Whale of a Time, than the story SSS then spun for Simon and Siphon. When he had finished, the boys from The Bountiful were convinced that no pirate on earth enjoyed the talent, the experience, the expertise, the knowledge, and even more admirably, the yarn-spinning ability of 'Triple S,' as they fondly called Short Sam Sulphur.

The three pirates gaily sang their way, this way and that, back to the ship, but when they got aboard, they found Blackbird in a scotch-induced stupor. Between bouts of semi-consciousness and sleep, Simon and Siphon regaled him with their good luck in finding such a short solution to LJP's absence.

"Sounds more than good enough for me," Blackbird slurred. "Welcome to The Bountiful, LJP, I mean, what do I mean?"

"Triple S," helped Siphon. "His name is Triple S."

"Whoever," the captain concluded, before passing out.

By the end of the following day, with The Bountiful making excellent headway easterly across the Mediterranean, at nightfall Blackbird got increasingly grumpy, as the hangover took its toll on his mood. During that fateful day he had thoroughly enjoyed the entertaining company of Triple S, who spoke with such confidence and assurance that Blackbird was happy, when he retired to his cabin, to leave him in charge of the boat. SSS was after all, his temporary first-mate.

But around ten that evening, the jagged rocks just off the Tuscan town of Versilia tore through The Bountiful's hull, and the flooded boat was almost completely wrecked on the coast of a calm sea. As Blackbird and the other pirates swam safely to shore, there was only one sailor swimming faster, a scoundrel by the name of SSS. By the time the entire crew had mustered on the beach, they could just make out the silhouette of his strangely-shaped feet, and considerable hairdo, set against the light of the moon.

**Treasure Hunting Tips:** Give the same attention to temporary placements, especially in critical interim management assignments, as you would to permanent placements. Also always validate the competencies of all favoured candidates, and never allow impression to supersede substance.

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