

The Treasure Punt #12

With The Bountiful wrecked off the Tuscan coastline, some crew members deserted the stricken ship in favour of pursuits less cavalier than pirating.

“Darn!” exclaimed Captain Blackbird, “We’d better summons LJP back from his break,” instructing simple sailor Simon to find Long John Platinum, the ship’s first-mate, a devotee of Gothic architecture, and sightseeing in Florence.

“And while you’re at it, look out for seven simple sailors, at no more than five blunt a month, to replace the bleeding traitors,” ordered Blackbird. “I want The Bountiful back in tip-top, ship-shape condition before month-end, have you got me?”

“Aye-aye, Captain, it’s in good hands,” shouted Simon, running and running, for he was a resilient rogue, until he found LJP admiring the murals in the Santa Maria Novella.

“This isn’t Gothic,” Simon suggested to his superior.

“I know,” replied LJP, unsurprised by Simon’s cultured knowledge, who after all was a pirate of multiple talents. “In the morrow I’m off to Sienna.”

“No, you’re not,” corrected Simon, a step or two ahead of his superior. “Blackbird wants you back. We were wrecked, so it’s urgent, and we’ve got to hire some new hands.”

“I know just the blokes for our boat,” LJP, a well-connected pirate, replied confidently. “But I don’t want to prejudice your opinion. Meet them and see how you feel.”

LJP led Simon to a bar on the banks of the River Arno, and introduced him to twenty-seven unemployed pirates, all at a landlocked loose-end for lack of sailing opportunities.

“But we only need seven,” Simon whispered to LJP, careful not to offend what were a motley mob of men.

“Do what you have to, and choose the best seven,” LJP suggested.

Simon put those twenty-seven pirates-in-practice through a very complex, inter-connected set of nautical hoops, including knot-tying and navigational competency testing, in-depth interviews, some simple psychometrics based on tattoo patterning, and even took the time to obtain references received by LJP’s prodigal parrot, which for the last seven years had sailed on river rowboats with each of the possible pirates. Finally, Simon undertook astronomical processes, based on the candidates’ birth dates and corresponding phase of the moon, until his final selection was clear.

“It’ll be Marco, Maggiorino, Maurizio, Manetto, Massimo, Modesto and Milo,” he announced to all the other candidate crews’ disappointment, none of whose names began with M.

“Marco, Maggi ... Maggiori ... oh never mind, you know who you are,” Simon continued. “Congratulations! If LJP agrees, you’re hired.”

“Uno memento!” interrupted Modesto, an arresting Latino of strong shoulder and shin. “What about the money? Soldi! Denaro! Moola! Dosh! Dough! Bucks! Greenbacks!”

“Okay, I get you,” shouted Simon above a deepening din. “It’s five blunt a month,” a statement further perplexing the Italians, hardly knowing a blunt from a shunt.

“Five thousand lira for every new moon,” Simon clarified.

“Argh, go away,” Modesto protested, strongly supported by the other M-men. “It’s eight or nothing. Niente! No! Nulla!”

“My mandate’s five,” insisted Simon, but when the M-men all turned away, and he saw his considerable efforts proving fruitless, he became flustered.

“Okay, maybe Blackbird will negotiate, but we’ve got to begin re-building the boat, and you’ve got to start on five. All righty?”

The M-men all conferred, for quite some while, before nodding in agreement.

When LJP ratified Simon’s choices, the M-men again raised the issue of the pay.

“Well, I don’t know, let’s see what Blackbird can do. We’ll take it up with him. Blackbird’s no meanie, that’s for sure, but you’ve got to start on five,” said LJP, over-addled by Tuscany’s summer sun.

At the end of the first week of work repairing The Bountiful, The M-Men downed tools. When Blackbird neither agreed to speak to them, nor entertain a raise, they threw their tools at some of the other simple sailors, causing much alarm, and when again the captain refused to budge on their demands, they threatened to plunge their tools into deep water, where they’d be impossible to recover. Eventually Blackbird spoke individually to his new pirates, and facing another mutiny, he capitulated, raising the M-men’s earnings to eight thousand. Every single story of Marco, Maggiorino, Maurizio, Manetto, Massimo, Modesto and Milo had concurred. ‘We were told our wages were negotiable,’ each of them said.

“I never said anything of the sort, OUCH!” Simon screamed, as Blackbird pieced his hook-arm through the simple sailor’s earlobe.

“Neither did I, WHOA!” protested LJP in agony, with Blackbird pressing the end of his wooden-leg into his first-mate’s foot.

Treasure Hunting Tip: In negotiating the pay of new hires, be particularly careful not to say anything which may raise false expectations. Any ambiguity in communication is sure to be exploited in favour of the candidate, and where expectations remain unmet, dissatisfaction soon sets in.

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