

## The Treasure Punt #32

When Miss Virago Vanderbilt, lead artiste of the Thunder-Thighs, a singing and dancing troupe in the vaudeville tradition, joined long-time companion Captain Blackbird on The Bountiful for the short passage between Durban and Cape Town, it was cause for great celebration in the bowels and other nether regions of the boat.

Virago, with her hair as grey as the winter tundra, and as long, and her legs as svelte as drying biltong, cut a comely figure in the captain's cabin, reclining next to Honey, Blackbird's pet hyena, on the filthy brown bear-skin eiderdown. Many were the hours that the unlikely couple lazed longingly and lustily, wild canine at their feet, for such intimate times were few for a roving pirate and his curvaceous consort. Their cavorting, setting about a frenzied howling from the hyena, was so captivating that neither could face life, any life, outside the comfy confines of the cabin, leading to distress amongst the ship's other officers.

"I tell yer, with Blackbird's absent leadership, there's trouble brewing for the boat," lamented first-mate Long John Platinum (LJP), a paranoid pirate born as much with worry bones in his skeleton as an adventurous spirit in his soul.

"We're missing his myopic vision, and will run aground if we don't watch out," declared Rupert Redbeard.

After days surmising that their captain was still alive from the hysterical hyena's frenzied whooping and cackling, the officers became so agitated by Blackbird's voluntary separation from his maritime responsibilities that they interrupted the consumed couple.

"I'll feed the sharks with both of yer, after I've sliced yer into slithers," Blackbird shouted angrily. "Yer know not to intrude when me woman's about."

"But Captain, we want to protect yer pleasure," LJP argued craftily. "Someone with a skipper's license needs to stand in your stead. We're sailing directly towards the Wild Coast Guard."

Utterly mesmerized by the subtle charms of Virago Vanderbilt, Blackbird needed no further convincing, and the crew set about finding a licensed deputy skipper. Fortuitously, lady luck smiled as sweetly on The Bountiful as Virago's musk perfume, for the next morning there emerged from within the after-dawn mist, lo and behold, nothing but a makeshift life-raft.

"Ahoy!" shouted its lonely occupant. "Rescue me, and I'll serve yer loyally."

Like the ripples across the calm water, the voice lilted poetically and lyrically, and the castaway's influence was immediately rewarded by being welcomed on board by LJP.

"The pleasure's mine, I'm sure," he introduced warmly. "The name's O'Malley, Pally O'Malley. POM for short."

The newcomer faced an immediate grilling from his rescuers.

"This is a pirate ship. We're buccaneers," LJP needlessly pointed out. "Have yer done any murdering, raping and pillaging?"

"Plenty of pillaging, regular raping, and much murdering," POM replied confidently. "In better times, I captained The Carcass."

This was a pleasing and admirable admission, for The Carcass enjoyed a notorious reputation for cavalier criminality and unbridled cruelty.

"Have yer ever been caught? Had any trouble from the law?" enquired simple sailor Simon.

“Never! I’m far too smart. They got nothing on me,” POM replied with full conviction.

“You’re perfect,” concluded LJP, noticing the fawning ingratiation of his comrades to their new cohort. “Welcome aboard, POM. We’re in search of a temporary leader, a skipper licenced to steer our ship to the Cape of Good Hope. Behave yer’self, and we might even offer you a permanent post.”

So POM took to commanding The Bountiful, and for the next couple of days all went smoothly, until the boat was apprehended in a trap set by the Wild Coast Guard.

“We know he’s on board somewhere,” the guard-in-charge announced to Blackbird, rudely summoned on deck as the registered skipper of the boat.

“Who?” asked Blackbird.

“Hah! Don’t act daft. Pally O’Malley, of course, the scaliest scallywag on the sea. A heinous murderer, rapist and rogue.

“Bunkum! I got no record,” objected POM, emerging cavalierly from the helm.

“Oh yes, you do!” exclaimed the chief of the guards. “There’s a conviction for forging your skipper’s license, and that will prove your downfall. Fellow guards, arrest this man.”

The guards swung into action, and POM took fright, evading their clutches by diving overboard. He was chased by the guards’ numerous rubber dinghies, which frantically criss-crossed the water, but POM was too good a diver. Disappearing underwater for minutes at a time, and in ever widening circles, he pursed his lips like a periscope, furiously snorting brief bursts of oxygen, before submerging again. Eventually the guards wearied of their work, re-boarded The Bountiful, and fined Blackbird for leaving his ship in the care of an unlicensed skipper.

The following day POM, clutching onto the rump of a dead turtle, was rescued again by The Bountiful.

“But I told yer everything,” he protested. “I admitted to murdering, raping and pillaging.”

“They never caught yer for those, but yer never told us about yer conviction,” argued Blackbird, now wiser and poorer, before ordering the crew to prepare the plank. With strings of rowing cleats tied to his ankles, the fraudulent trickster POM took the deepest and longest dive of his life.

**Treasure Hunting Tip:** In temporary employment circumstances, some candidates are tempted to under-estimate the seriousness of past indiscretions, concealing them from head hunters and clients. If any previous criminal activity, irrespective how petty, is later uncovered, clients are seldom forgiving, refusing to consider the candidate for permanent employment.

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