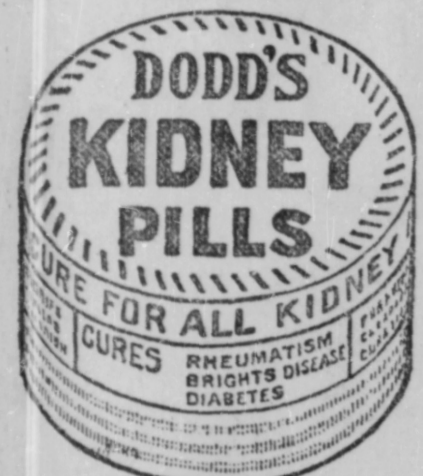


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Meals and lunches served at short notice. Also a choice line of Cigars, Cigarettes and Ginger Ale. Open from 7 a. m. till 12 p. m.

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CHAPTER I—(Continued.)

"I wonder if he could have been on the job when some one came to interfere with him," said I.

"I don't know about that, sir, but I am perfectly certain that I could open the box. There's a screwdriver here in the locker. Just hold the lamp, Allardyce, and I'll have it done in a brace of shakes."

"Wait a bit," said I, for already, with eyes which gleamed with curiosity and with avarice, he was stooping over the lid. "I don't see that there is any hurry over this matter. You've read that card which warns us not to open it. It may mean anything or it may mean nothing, but somehow I feel inclined to obey it. After all, whatever is in it will keep, and if it is valuable it will be worth as much if it is opened in the owner's offices as in the cabin of the Mary Sinclair."

The first officer seemed bitterly disappointed at my decision.

"Surely, sir, you are not superstitious about it," said he, with a slight sneer upon his thin lips. "If it gets out of our own hands and we don't see for ourselves what is inside it, we may be done out of our rights; besides—"

"That's enough, Mr. Armstrong," said I abruptly. "You may have every confidence that you will get your rights, but I will not have that box opened tonight."

"Why, the label itself shows that the box has been examined by Europeans," Allardyce added. "Because a box is a treasure box is no reason that it has treasures inside it now. A good many folk have had a peep into it since the days of the old governor of Terra Firma."

Armstrong threw the screwdriver down upon the table and shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like," said he, but for the rest of the evening, although we spoke upon many subjects, I noticed that his eyes were continually coming round with the same expression of curiosity and greed to the old striped box.

And now I come to that portion of my story which fills me even now with a shuddering horror when I think of it. The main cabin had the rooms of the officers round it, but mine was the farthest away from it at the end of the little passage which led to the companion. No regular watch was kept by me except in cases of emergency, and the three mates divided them among them. Armstrong had the middle watch, which ends at 4 in the morning, and he was relieved by Allardyce. For my part, I have always been one of the soundest of sleepers, and it is rare for anything less than a hand upon my shoulder to arouse me.

And yet I was aroused that night, or rather in the early gray of the morning. It was just 4:30 by my chronometer when something caused me to sit up in my berth wide awake and with every nerve tingling. It was a sound of some

sort, a crash with a human cry at the end of it, which still jarred upon my ears. I sat listening, but all was now silent.

And yet it could not have been imagination, that hideous cry, for the echo of it still rang in my head, and it seemed to have come from some place quite close to me. I sprang from my bunk, and, pulling on some clothes, I made my way into the cabin.

At first I saw nothing unusual there. In the cold gray light I made out the red clothed table, the six rotating chairs, the walnut lockers, the swinging barometer, and there at the end the big striped chest. I was turning away with the intention of going upon deck and asking the second mate if he had heard anything when my eyes fell suddenly upon something which projected from under the table. It was the leg of a man, a leg with a long sea boot upon it. I stooped, and there was a figure sprawling upon his face, his arms thrown forward and his body twisted. One glance told me that it was Armstrong, the first officer, and a second that he was a dead man. For a few moments I stood gasping. Then I rushed on to the deck, called Allardyce to my assistance and came back with him into the cabin.

Together we pulled the unfortunate fellow from under the table, and as we looked at his dripping head we exchanged glances, and I do not know which was the paler of the two.

"The same as the Spanish sailor," said I.

"The very same. God preserve us! It's that infernal chest! Look at Armstrong's hand!"

He held up the mate's right hand, and there was the screwdriver which he had wished to use the night before.

"He's been at the chest, sir. He knew that I was on deck and you asleep. He knelt down in front of it and he pushed the lock back with that tool. Then something happened to him and he cried out so that you heard him?"

"Allardyce," I whispered, "what could have happened to him?"

The second mate put his hand upon my sleeve and drew me into his cabin.

"We can talk here, sir, and we don't know who may be listening to us in there. What do you suppose is in that box, Captain Barclay?"

"I give you my word, Allardyce, that I have no idea."

"Well, I can only find one theory which will fit all the facts. Look at the size of the box. Look at all the carving and metal work which may conceal any number of holes. Look at the weight of it. It took four men to carry it. On the top of that remember that two men have tried to open it, and both have come to their end through it. Now, sir, what can it mean except one thing?"

"You mean that there is a man in it?"

"Of course there is a man in it. You know how it is in these South American states, sir. A man may be president one week and hunted like a dog the next. They are forever flying for their lives. My idea is that there is some fellow in hiding there who is armed and desperate, and who will fight to the death before he is taken."

"But his food and drink?"

"It's a roomy chest, sir, and he may have some provisions stowed away. As to his drink, he had a friend among the crew upon the brig who saw that he had what he needed."

"You think, then, that the label asking people not to open the box was simply written in his interest?"

"Yes, sir, that is my idea. Have you any other way of explaining the facts?"

I had to confess that I had not.

"The question is, What are we to do?" I asked.

"The man's a dangerous ruffian who sticks at nothing. I'm thinking it

our case. Or if we just tied the box up and kept him from getting any water maybe that would do as well, or the carpenter could put a coat of varnish over it and stop all the blowholes."

"Come, Allardyce," said I angrily. "You don't seriously mean to say that a whole ship's company are going to be terrorized by a single man in a box. If he's there, I'll engage to fetch him out!" I went to my room and came back with my revolver in my hand.

"Now, Allardyce," said I. "Do you open the lock and I'll stand on guard."

"For God's sake, think what you are doing, sir!" cried the mate. "Two men have lost their lives over it, and the blood of one not yet dry upon the carpet."

"The more reason why we should revenge him."

"Well, sir, at least let me call the carpenter. Three are better than two, and he is a good stout man."

He went off in search of him, and I was left alone with the striped chest in the cabin. I don't think that I'm a nervous man, but I kept the table between me and this solid old relic of the Spanish main. In the growing light of morning the red and white striping was beginning to appear and the curious scrolls and wreaths of metal and carving, which showed the loving pains which cunning craftsmen had expended upon it. Presently the carpenter and the mate came back together, the former with a hammer in his hand.

"It's a bad business this, sir," said he, shaking his head as he looked at the body of the mate. "And you think there's some one hiding in the box?"

"There's no doubt about it," said Allardyce, picking up the screwdriver and setting his jaw like a man who needs to brace his courage. "I'll drive the lock back if you will both stand by. If he rises, let him have it on the head with your hammer, carpenter! shoot at once, sir, if he raises his hand. Now!"

(To be Continued.)

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to secure that dinner set you have been talking about so long.

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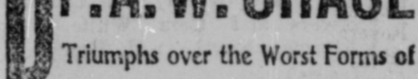
are also beautiful, and cannot be beaten either in quality or designs. We have just received another case of jet black teapots, magnificent ones they are too. Come in and see our stock, you surely will find what will suit you. Bear in mind we make a specialty of dinner sets, tea sets, and toilet sets

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The wonderful success of Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills adds to the fame of the great doctor whose name is familiar in almost every home as the author of the world famous Recipe Book.

Scores and thousands of grateful men and women have been rescued from the miseries and dangers of kidney disease by this greatest of all kidney cures.

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Just received from Glasgow and Leith

500 cases qts. and pts. and 100 Octaves and quarter casks Scotch Whisky.

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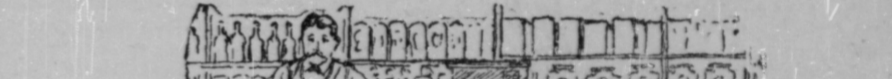
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