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STORIES RETOLD

James Baldwin

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

THIRTY MORE
FAMOUS STORIES
RETOLD

JAMES BALDWIN



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COLUMBUS AND THE EGG



CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS discovered America on the 12th of October, 1492. He had spent eighteen years in planning for that wonderful first voyage which he made across the Atlantic Ocean. The thoughts and hopes of the best part of his life had been given to it. He had talked and argued with sailors and scholars and princes and kings, saying, "I know that, by sailing west across the great ocean, one may at last reach lands that have never been visited by Europeans." But he had been laughed at as a foolish dreamer, and few people had any faith in his projects.

At last, however, the king and queen of Spain gave him ships with which to make the trial voyage. He crossed the ocean and discovered strange lands, inhabited by a people

unlike any that had been known before. He believed that these lands were a part of India.

When he returned home with the news of his discovery there was great rejoicing, and he was hailed as the hero who had given a new world to Spain. Crowds of people lined the streets through which he passed, and all were anxious to do him honor. The king and queen welcomed him to their palace and listened with pleasure to the story of his voyage. Never had so great respect been shown to any common man.

But there were some who were jealous of the discoverer, and as ready to find fault as others were to praise. "Who is this Columbus?" they asked, "and what has he done? Is he not a pauper pilot from Italy? And could not any other seaman sail across the ocean just as he has done?"

One day Columbus was at a dinner which a Spanish gentleman had given in his honor, and several of these persons were present. They were proud, conceited fellows, and they very soon began to try to make Columbus uncomfortable.

"You have discovered strange lands beyond the sea," they said. "But what of that? We do not see why there should be so much said about it.

Anybody can sail across the ocean; and anybody can coast along the islands on the other side, just as you have done. It is the simplest thing in the world."

Columbus made no answer; but after a while he took an egg from a dish and said to the company, "Who among you, gentlemen, can make this egg stand on end?"

One by one those at the table tried the experiment. When the egg had gone entirely around and none had

succeeded, all said that it could not be done.

Then Columbus took the egg and struck its small end gently upon the table so as to break the shell a little. After that there was no trouble in making it stand upright.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “what is easier than to do this which you said was impossible? It is the simplest thing in the world. Anybody can do it— *after he has been shown how.*”

“UPON A PEAK IN DARIEN”

FIRST STORY

AFTER Columbus had shown the way to America a great many Spaniards came over. They came to Haiti and Cuba and Porto Rico and the smaller islands near them. Like Columbus they believed that these lands were near the eastern coast of Asia. They believed that they were a part of India, and therefore spoke of them as the Indies. Afterwards, when their mistake became known, these islands were named the West Indies and the true islands of India were called the East Indies.

Far to the southwest of Cuba, Columbus had discovered a long coast which he named Darien. It was the neck of land which we call the Isthmus of Panama, but he supposed that it was a part of the mainland of Asia. A few years later some Spanish sailors visited Darien and carried word back to Haiti that there was gold there. Now at that time a Spaniard would go to the end of the world for gold, and therefore this news caused great excitement among the young men who had come across the ocean for the purpose of adventure.

“To Darien! to Darien!” was the cry; and soon a company was formed and two ships were made ready to sail to that land of promise.

The voyage was a delightful one from the start. The sea was calm, the wind was fair, and the vessels sped swiftly on their way. Soon the pleasant shores and green mountains of Haiti were lost to view. Only little rocky islets could be seen. The ship was heading straight into the Caribbean Sea.

Then, what was the surprise of the crew of the larger ship to hear strange rappings in the hold! A voice also was heard, like that of some one calling for help. What could it mean? The sailors could not see any one, and yet the sounds could not be mistaken.

"Please help me out!" The voice seemed to come from among some barrels in which provisions were stored.

"A man is in one of the barrels," said the captain.

Soon the barrel was found and opened. Out of it leaped a young man, richly clad in a velvet cloak and a silk doublet embroidered with gold. He was a handsome fellow. His eyes were keen and bright, and his face had a determined look, like that of one who is used to having his own way about things. At his side hung a long sword, and in his belt was a dagger.

Several of the men knew him; and so he did not need to say that his name was Vasco Nuñez de Balboa. They knew that he was a dashing adventurer, always doing and daring, and always borrowing and spending money. But why was he in the barrel?

"The truth of the matter is this," he said; "I am in debt to almost everybody in Haiti. The officers were looking for me and would have taken me to prison. So I persuaded one of my friends to put me in a barrel and send me on board with the salt beef. And now here I am, bound with the rest of you for the rich coast of Darien."

The captain was very angry. He threatened to put Balboa ashore on one of the rocky islets. "Shame! shame!" cried the rest of the party. "Let him go with us. He will be a great help." And so the captain grew kinder and agreed to take him.

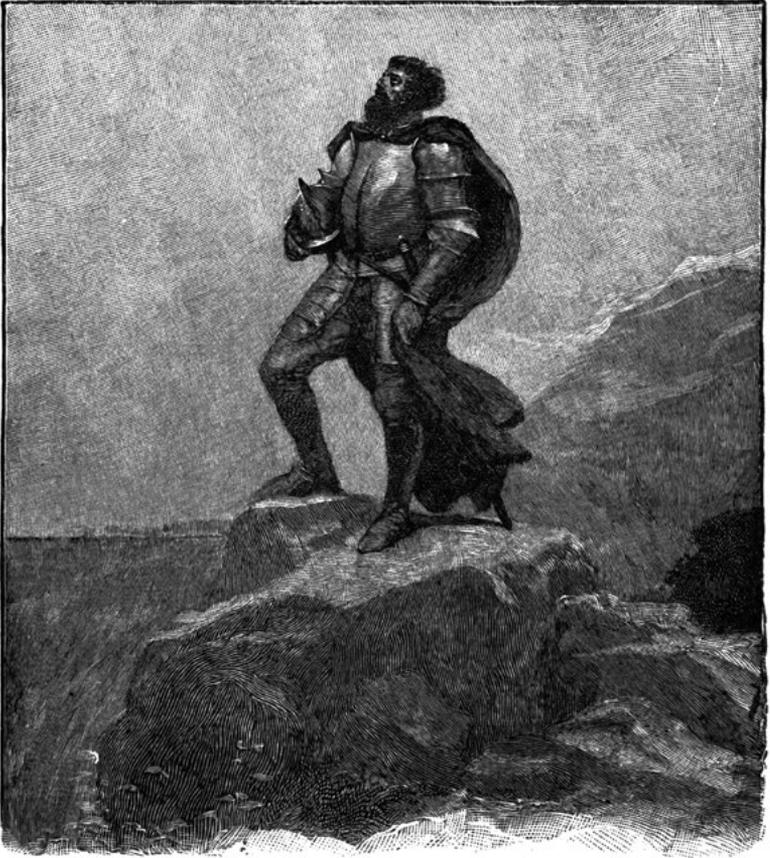
Balboa's manners were so pleasant, and he proved to be so able and brave, that soon nearly all on the ship looked up to him as their leader. When they reached Darien and began to seek for a good place to settle, Balboa gave them much help. He had been on the coast before, and he guided them to a safe harbor.

The captain proved to be so overbearing that the men at last refused to obey him. They chose Balboa to be their commander, and the captain was glad to go back to Haiti in one of the ships.

Balboa made a treaty with a powerful Indian chief who lived in a grand house and ruled all the country around. He married the chief's daughter; and at the wedding feast the chief gave the Spaniards a great quantity of gold and many slaves.

The Indians did not care much for gold. They did not know that it was worth anything. When they saw the Spaniards molding it into bars and quarreling over it, they were astonished. "If you think so much of that yellow stuff," they said, "why don't you go where there is plenty of it?" And then they told Balboa that far to the south, on the other side of the mountains, there was a great sea, and on the shores of the sea there lived a people who had so much gold that they used it to make cups and bowls and even pans and kettles.

Balboa made up his mind to go at once in search of that sea. With two hundred men and a pack of bloodhounds, to chase unfriendly Indians, he set off toward the mountains. The distance was not great, but the country was very rough, the forest was almost impassable, and the party had to move slowly. After many days they came to the highest



ridge of the mountains. Balboa climbed to the top of the loftiest peak and looked around. South and west of him he beheld a great sea. It was so near that it seemed almost at his feet; and it stretched away and away into the distance until it seemed to meet the blue sky.

No white man had ever beheld that sea before; none had even so much as heard of it. The Spaniards afterwards called it the South Sea, because in going to it across the isthmus it seemed to lie south of the land; but we know it as the largest of all the oceans, the mighty Pacific.

From that peak in Darien, Balboa looked down with mingled feelings of awe and exultation.

“With eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific,—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.”

Balboa had no idea that he had discovered an ocean. He supposed that the great water was merely a gulf or bay washing the coast, perhaps of India, perhaps of China. He hastened to get down to the shore. He stood on the beach, and as the waves broke about his feet he raised his sword in the air and declared that he took possession of the new-found sea in the name of the king of Spain.

Balboa with his men soon returned to the other side of the isthmus. He sent word to Spain of the discovery he had made. But ships and men and a new governor were already on their way to Darien; for word had reached the king that plenty of gold was to be had there.

The new governor was an old man, as fierce and heartless as a tiger. No sooner had he arrived in Darien than he began to oppress and kill the Indians. Thousands of them perished through his cruelty. Balboa was grieved to the heart; he felt pity for the poor savages. By the first homeward-bound ship he secretly sent complaints to the king about the governor's doings. Then he set to work getting ready to explore the South Sea.

Four small ships were taken apart at Darien, and Balboa caused the pieces to be carried over the mountains. At the shore on the farther side these pieces were again

put together, and the ships were launched upon the sea. They were the first European vessels that ever floated on the Pacific.

But they were not yet ready to sail. They still needed a few bolts to strengthen them and some pitch to stop the leaks. While Balboa was waiting for these things the governor sent for him. The old tiger had heard of the complaints that had been sent to the king.

Balboa was ready to obey orders. He recrossed the mountains and was met by the officers who had been sent to arrest him. "You have plotted against me, you have tried to turn the king against me," said the savage governor. "You shall die the death of a traitor."

Before the sun went down, the brave, dashing, handsome Balboa was dead.

“UPON A PEAK IN DARIEN”

SECOND STORY



After Balboa's discovery of the Pacific Ocean, seventy years went by. Then, one day, another bold adventurer stood upon a peak in Darien.

The name of this man was Francis Drake. He was known far and wide as the most daring sailor on the seas. He was an Englishman, and he hated Spain and the Spaniards with a bitter hatred. Like Balboa, he visited Darien in search of gold; but he meant to get it from those whom he called his enemies—to take it away from them by force.

He stood near the top of a high cliff, not far from the line where the famous Panama Canal is now being built. Below him there was a deep ravine, and along the ravine there was a mule path. This mule path was the road along which the

Spaniards carried their treasures over the mountains to the seaport of Darien, to be loaded on ships and sent to Spain. Close to this pathway, crouching behind rocks and trees, were Captain Drake's followers—a few rough sailors armed to the teeth and a band of light-footed Indians with spears and clubs. They seemed to be expecting some one to pass that way; for they moved very cautiously and kept their weapons in their hands ready for use, while they watched their leader on the steep mountain wall above them.

As Drake stood near the edge of the cliff he saw before him a tall tree with spreading branches reaching like gaunt, bare arms toward the sky. "Ah!" said he, "what better outlook could one want than this?"

Sailor as he was, it was easy enough for him to clamber up the gnarled trunk. Soon he was standing on the very topmost branch. As he looked around him, what a glorious view did he behold! On every side were wooded mountain tops, green with tropical verdure. Between them were deep ravines and broad valleys, with thick forests of giant trees and sprawling vines and tangled underwoods, through which the feet of man had never passed. Far to the north he caught faint glimpses of the sea on which he had lately sailed, and he knew that in a snug harbor somewhere on the coast of that sea his ship, safe hidden from Spanish eyes, was waiting for his return.

But it was not for the northern view that he cared. He turned and looked in the other direction. Never had he seen a grander sight. There, in plain view before him, was the great western ocean, the mighty Pacific, which the Spaniard Balboa had discovered, and which Spain had ever since claimed as her own.

The waters danced and sparkled in the sunlight, just as they had done in Balboa's time, and they stretched south and west a marvelous distance, until at last sea and sky seemed mingled in one. The heart of the bold sailor was strangely moved as he lazed upon this scene; for he was the first of Englishmen to behold that greatest of all waters.

As he looked he could see the ships of Spain, like specks upon the water, sailing into the port of Panama, and bringing the treasures of Peru and of the golden East to swell the wealth and increase the power of the Spanish king. Tears came to his eyes. He clenched his hands with strong determination. His breath came quickly as he thought of the hated Spaniards and of their claim to the ownership of half the world.

Then, forgetting where he was, he knelt down among the branches. "O God," he prayed, "help me to humble the pride of Spain, and help me to promote England's glory on the seas. And I vow to give my time and strength to this cause, and never to rest till I shall sail an English ship on the waters of this great ocean."

A call from his men in the ravine below aroused him; and as he hastened to descend from the tree he heard the tinkle of bells far down the mountain pass. A train of mules laden with gold and silver from the mines of Peru was slowly approaching. It was to waylay and capture such a train that he and his followers had come to this peak in Darien; and here, now, was his opportunity.

An hour later Captain Drake was dividing the treasure among his followers. There was so great a weight of precious metals that they could not carry it all, but were obliged to bury a part in a secret place in the forest.

The story of the bold capture was carried to Panama and the other Spanish towns on the isthmus, but Drake was soon safe back on board of his ship. The fear of the bold sea rover spread to every port on the coast, and from that day the pride of Spain began to be humbled.



"I myself will make him a knight."

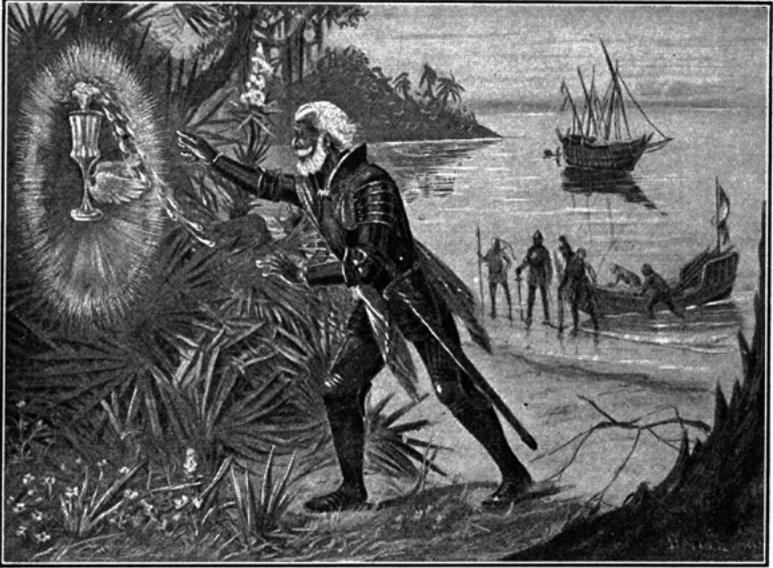
Two years later Captain Drake fulfilled his vow by sailing an English vessel on the mighty Pacific. Along the coasts of Chile and Peru he sailed. He captured Spanish towns, he waylaid Spanish treasure ships, he carried terror into all the Spanish provinces. Then, when his vessel was loaded with so much treasure that she could carry no more, he turned his course to the west, and was the first Englishman to sail across the Pacific. Westward and still westward he sailed. He passed on the south of the Philippines, he touched at the Spice Islands, he traversed the Indian Ocean, he sailed around Africa, and finally returned

in safety to England. It was a wonderful voyage—the first English voyage round the world.

Queen Elizabeth was so delighted when she heard of Drake's exploits that she cried out, "He shall be SIR Francis Drake. I myself will make him a knight."

And Sir Francis Drake it was; and from his time the power of England on the sea began to be felt.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH



AMONG the Spaniards who flocked to America in the hope of finding gold, there was a certain officer whose name was Juan Ponce de Leon. He had distinguished himself in the Spanish army and was very rich. He also had much influence with the king—so much, in fact, that he was soon appointed governor of all the eastern part of Haiti.

While attending to his duties in Haiti, he learned that at some distance farther eastward there was a rich island abounding in gold and other precious metals. The Indians called this island Borinquen; it was the same land which Columbus had discovered a few years before and called Porto Rico.

Ponce de Leon was so much pleased by the reports which were brought to him of the great wealth of Porto Rico that he at once made up his mind to get that wealth

for himself. The king of Spain was very willing to please him and to have a share of the profits, and therefore appointed him governor of Porto Rico. Ponce was not a man to waste time in any undertaking. With eight stanch ships and several hundred men, he at once set sail for his new province and in due time landed upon the island.

The natives were kind and gentle. They welcomed the white men to their pleasant country and tried to help them in such ways as they could.

Ponce de Leon repaid them as the Spaniards at that time usually repaid a kindness,—he robbed them of all they had and made slaves of as many as he could. Then at length the harassed savages turned against their oppressors and tried to drive them from the island; but what could they do against enemies so cunning and strong?

Ponce was as heartless and unfeeling as any wild beast. Soon the once happy island was filled with distress and terror. The Indians were hunted from their homes. Thousands of them were killed, and the rest became the slaves of their conquerors.

Ponce began to form a settlement at a place now called Pueblo Viejo; but he soon changed his plans and removed to a fine harbor on the north shore of the island. There he laid out the city of San Juan. He built for himself, near the mouth of the harbor, a grand house which he called Casa Blanca, or the White Castle; and there he made his home for some time.

But, with all his wealth, Ponce was not happy. He had lived so carelessly and wildly that his youth went from him early. At fifty years of age he was a miserable old man. There was no more joy in the world for him.

One day as he was sitting unhappy in the White Castle, a thing occurred that kindled a spark of hope in his despairing mind. He overheard an Indian slave say, "In Bimini no one grows old."

"Bimini! What is Bimini?" he asked.

"It is a beautiful island that lies far, far to the north of us," was the answer.

"Tell me about it."

"There is a fountain there, a spring of clear water, the most wonderful in the world. Every one that bathes in it becomes as young and strong as he was in his best days. No one grows old in Bimini."

"Have you ever been there?"

"Ah, no. It is too far away for any of our people to make the voyage. But we have heard talk of the fountain all our lives."

Ponce asked other Indians about Bimini and its magic fountain. All had heard of it. It was a land fragrant with flowers. It lay far to the northwest—too far for frail canoes to venture. But the great ships of the white men could easily make the voyage in a few days.

Ponce made up his mind to discover the fountain. He first got the king's permission to conquer Bimini, wherever it might be. Then with three ships and a number of followers he sailed toward the northwest. He passed through the great group of islands known as the Bahamas; and, wherever there were natives living, he stopped and made inquiries.

"Where is Bimini? Where is the magic fountain of youth?"

They pointed to the northwest. It was always a little farther and a little farther. No one had ever seen the fountain, but Ponce understood that every one had heard of it.

At length, after leaving the Bahamas far behind them, the Spaniards discovered a strange coast where the land seemed to be covered with flowers. Was this Bimini?

Nobody could tell. The coast stretched so far northward and southward that Ponce felt sure it was no island but the mainland of a continent. The day was Easter Sunday, which in Spain is called Pascua de Flores, or the Feast of Flowers. For this reason, and also because of the abundance of flowers, the Spaniards named the land Florida.

Ponce de Leon went on shore at many places and sought for the wonderful fountain. He drank from every clear spring. He bathed in many a limpid stream. But his lost youth did not come back to him.

He sailed southward and around to the western coast of Florida, asking everywhere,—

“Is this Bimini? And where is the fountain of youth?”

But the Indians who lived there had never heard of Bimini, and they knew of no fountain of youth. And so, at last, the search was given up, and Ponce returned disappointed to Porto Rico.

Nine years passed, and then he sailed again for Florida. This time he took a number of men with him in order to conquer the country and seize upon whatever treasures he might find there. More than this, he expected to explore its woods and rivers and seek again for the mysterious fountain of youth.

The Florida Indians did not have any treasures; but they were brave and loved their homes. They would not be conquered and enslaved without a struggle. They therefore fell upon the Spaniards when they landed, and drove them back to their ships.

Ponce de Leon was struck by an arrow. He was wounded in the thigh.

“Take me back to Spain,” said he, “for I shall never find the fountain of youth.”

His ship carried him to Cuba; but no skill could heal his wound. He lingered in pain for a long time, and then died, bewailing his lost youth.