

**J. Allan Dunn**



***The Marooner***

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# CHAPTER I

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### EL CAY DE LOS QUATROS HOMBRES

Like herrings cured in sun and wind  
The four lie side by side,  
Dry as a husk of coco-rind  
Above the creaming tide.  
Buccaneer Ballades.

"**T**URTLE TOM" was the man who discovered them and gave name to the islet. He had beached his sloop in the leeward lagoon the better to calk a leaking seam and found them lying on the sand just above tide reach, the desiccated rinds of what had once been human beings, mummified, distorted husks of shriveled skin and flesh and bone, their bleaching skulls wisped with hair, a few discolored rags flapping about the pitiful remnants.

What tortures had forerun the giving up of their ghosts on this arid shoal that thrust itself above the blue Bermudan waters, Tom could well imagine. There was no water on the cay, no shade, no growth but scanty herbage and brown palmetto scrub that survived between the rains by some miracle. He looked for identification traces in the shreds of personal belongings and found none.

"Dead of hunger and of thirst," Tom said to his Carib sailor. "What brought them here? There is no wreckage."

Then his foot kicked up an object buried in the sand and wind-drift. He stooped and picked it up.

It was a boarding-pistol of unusual design. Forged of the same strip to which the trigger-guard was attached and deep-set in the wooden frame of the barrel was a heavy blade, *machete*-shaped, sickle-curving, a formidable weapon for close quarters after the discharge of the pan-primed powder and bullet, a thing designed by the genius of deviltry.

Turtler Tom had seen this pattern before though it was rare those days, the recent invention of a buccaneer scourge of the Caribbean. His moody eyes gleamed as he hefted the cunningly balanced weapon by its carved grip.

"Marooned, poor devils! Marooned by 'Long Tom' Pugh!" he exclaimed. "One of his bullies dropped it from his belt, likely, and it got shuffled under the sand. Come, Tampi, we'll bury what's left of 'em."

Turtler Tom bore the news of his grisly find with him back to Providence and to Port Royal and all along his devious water wanderings but the score of Long Tom Pugh was a long one and *los quatros hombres* lay beneath the weather-fluted sands on the cay that bore their name as only epitaph, unrecognized though doubtless not unmourned.

## CHAPTER II

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#### THE MERCY OF LONG TOM PUGH

**T**HE chase had been a long one and Long Tom Pugh raged like a thwarted devil. From dawn until a scant half-hour of sunset Pugh's schooner had trailed the