

THE OMINOUS PACKAGE

By JAMES COLLINS

I found it. A package sat ominously in the darkest corner of the attic of the prerevolutionary sea captain's house. Musty, disease threatening, smells surrounded it while disturbed, choking, dust particles glared in rays of sunlight emanating from the holes in the siding. Wrapped in old, stained, dust coated butcher paper with heavy dirty twine, the package reeked of evil intentions and defiantly dared any one to touch it or move it. I did!

The package felt heavy and sturdy; it had a personality and was not friendly. I took it out of its threatening environment and moved it out to the lawn where clean sea air, the smell of flowers, the bright sunlight and the brilliant green grass brought a positive benefit. This was my home field advantage. I opened it!

Cutting the twine released more noxious dust and dirt as it yielded its grip on the bundle. Removing the butcher paper was like opening a very old book. Its arthritic wings opened reluctantly and then tried to spring back to its historic position. But it was too old. The spring was gone. I overcame it!

A beautiful carved wooden pine box, about one foot square and five inches high, now sat displayed on a gray brown butcher paper doily. I picked up the heavy box; turned it around and then turned it over to see how I could open it. It was very tight and had been closed for decades. On the inside of the butcher paper was a date 1847. I was excited!

This could be some kind of treasure. Perhaps old currency, jewelry, a deed to a farm, a map to buried gold, silver coins, gems, diamonds or emeralds. I shook the box and there was a brief muffled clatter. Something wanted out. I obliged!

A small catch was discovered that when pressed opened the box. The treasure was there: a map for buried treasure, a small telescope, a dozen oversized English copper pennies in a little leather pouch, a broad military brown leather belt originally perforated for a 32 inch waist with nearer holes for a 10 inch waist. A soiled red kerchief, knotted at each end for a small pirate's head gear, was alongside of a macho eye patch on a loop of worn twine. But the *piece de resistance* was a short sword about 14 inches long lovingly carved out of wood with a narrow grip for a small pirate. Placed diagonally it managed to fit in the box. It had been handled rough with dents and scratches on its wooden blade. Obviously it encountered obstinate enemy trees. I swung it!

This was the cache of a ten year old pirate who wanted to stow his gear away as if on a wooden sailing ship. I wondered about the owner. Perhaps he died in the civil war or hopefully had a long and happy life regaling children and grandchildren with tales of long dead pirates. Captain Kidd, Blackbeard and Morgan the pirate were the bogey men of previous centuries and kids liked to play the bad guy. I looked at the treasure box again. I got a feeling. The box inhabitants wanted to play. They had been imprisoned much too long. I played pirate. I was bad!

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