



UNFOUND PIRATE TREASURES ♦

Captain Kidd's Buried Gold

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Pull your chair up to the fire, friends, and let me tell you where the whole idea came from — the buried chest, the lonely island, the map with an X marking the spot. It didn't come from a storybook first. It came from a real man, a respectable sea captain named William Kidd, who sailed out of New York more than three hundred years ago a gentleman and a family man, and came home a hunted pirate with a fortune hidden somewhere along this coast. To this night, Carol, no one has ever found the greater part of it.

CAROL

Oh, Marty, I've heard that name my whole life and always thought Captain Kidd was just a made-up bogeyman. You're telling me he was real, and he lived in New York? Start me at the beginning — who was this man before the word pirate ever touched him?



MARTY

A proper gentleman, Carol, that's the first surprise. In the sixteen-nineties William Kidd was one of the leading sea captains of New York, a Scotsman by birth who'd married a wealthy widow, kept a fine house on the harbor, owned a pew in Trinity Church, and helped raise the money to build it. He was respected. He was trusted. And in sixteen ninety-six he was handed the chance of a lifetime — a royal commission, signed under the King's own seal, making him a privateer.

CAROL

Now wait, Marty, a privateer — that's not quite the same as a pirate, is it? What exactly was he licensed to do?



MARTY

A fine and dangerous line, Carol. A privateer was a legal pirate, you might say — licensed by the Crown to hunt down actual pirates and to seize enemy French ships, and to keep a share of everything he captured. And Kidd's backers were no ordinary men. Behind him stood a syndicate of the most powerful lords in England, and quietly, the King himself. They fitted him out with a splendid new ship, the Adventure Galley, and sent him to the far side of the world, to the Indian Ocean, to make them all rich hunting pirates. It should have been the making of him. Instead, Carol, it was the ruin of him.

CAROL

The ruin of him. Oh, I don't like the sound of that. What went wrong out there, so far from anyone who could help him?



MARTY

Everything, Carol. Sickness swept the ship and killed a third of his crew. The seas were empty of the pirates he'd promised to catch. And the men he had left were rough characters who hadn't signed on for glory — they'd signed on for plunder, and month after month there was none. They grew mutinous. They wanted him to attack any ship, friend or foe, lawful or not. And one dark day it boiled over. Kidd got into a furious quarrel with his own gunner, a man named William Moore, and in his temper he snatched up an iron-bound bucket and struck Moore across the skull. The gunner died the next day.

CAROL

He killed one of his own men. Marty, that's a terrible thing — was it murder, or was it a captain fighting to keep control of a crew turning against him?



MARTY

That, Carol, is the very question that would one day put the rope around his neck — and we'll come to it. But hold that gunner in your mind, because it matters. Now, desperate, his crew half in mutiny, Kidd finally fell in with a great prize. A rich merchant ship, the Quedagh Merchant, heavy with silks and gold and satins, an Armenian ship crewed by many hands. And crucially, Carol, she was sailing under French passes — French papers of protection. And France was the enemy. Under his commission, that made her a lawful capture. So Kidd took her.

CAROL

Well, if she carried French papers and France was the enemy, that sounds legal to me, Marty. Where's the trouble in that?



MARTY

The trouble, Carol, is that the world had turned beneath his feet while he sailed. The great trading company back in London was howling that Kidd had turned pirate and was robbing peaceful merchants of the Indian seas. It became a scandal that shook the government. And the very lords who had backed him in secret now scrambled to save their own skins, and the easiest way to do that was to let William Kidd hang as a common pirate. Word raced across the oceans — Captain Kidd was a wanted man. And Kidd, sailing home to clear his good name, slowly began to understand he was sailing into a trap.

CAROL

Into a trap. Oh, Marty. And this — this is where the treasure comes in, isn't it? A hunted man, a hold full of gold, and enemies waiting. What did he do?



MARTY

This is where it comes in, Carol. In sixteen ninety-nine Kidd came creeping back toward New England, and he could feel the noose waiting. So he did the thing that echoes down three whole centuries. He stopped his ship off the eastern tip of Long Island, at a lonely, wind-swept place called Gardiners Island — a private island owned by one family. And there, Carol, he went ashore and he buried a treasure. A cache of gold, and silver, and bars of precious metal, and a little bag of jewels. He handed it into the keeping of the island's owner, John Gardiner, and he said, in effect — guard this for me. If I do not return for it, there will be a reckoning.

CAROL

He actually buried it — a real chest of gold in the ground on a real island. Marty, I'm getting chills. Why bury it? Why not keep it close?



MARTY

Insurance, Carol. A hunted man's insurance. That gold was his bargaining chip, his proof, his ransom for his own neck — treasure to trade for his life once he faced his accusers. But it was a fatal move. Kidd sailed on up to Boston to plead his innocence to the very lords he trusted, and the moment he arrived, they clapped him in irons. Arrested. And then, Carol, they went straight to Gardiners Island and they dug his buried treasure up out of the ground — and instead of saving him, that gold became the evidence that damned him. Proof, they said, of his piracy.

CAROL

Oh, that's cruel — his own hidden gold used against him. And the powerful men who sent him out there, Marty? Did none of them stand up for him?



MARTY

Not one, Carol. They shipped him across the ocean in chains to London, and they made him the scapegoat for the whole affair — a poor sacrifice to cover the sins of great men. At his trial the one thing that might have saved him, those French passes that made his capture lawful, had conveniently vanished from the records. He never had a chance. They convicted him of piracy, and of the murder of his gunner Moore, and they sentenced him to die. And his death, Carol, was as unlucky as his life. They led him to the gallows on the bank of the Thames in seventeen oh-one, and they dropped him — and the rope broke. He fell to the mud, still alive. And they hauled him up and hanged him a second time until he was dead. Then they tarred his body and hung it in an iron cage over the river, for years, as a warning to sailors.

CAROL

Twice, Marty — they hanged the poor man twice. That's the saddest, most terrible thing. But the gold on Gardiners Island — they found that. So the treasure was recovered. Where's the mystery?



MARTY

Ah, Carol, here is where history ends and the legend catches fire. The gold they dug up on Gardiners Island was a fortune, yes — but the whisper went round that it was only a taste. That the great Quedagh Merchant had carried far, far more, and that clever Captain Kidd had buried the rest of it in secret, up and down this coast, before ever he reached Boston — chests of it, hidden on lonely beaches and river mouths and islands from the Carolinas to Nova Scotia. And that whisper, Carol, never died. For three hundred years men have dug for Captain Kidd's lost gold by moonlight, tearing up shorelines, chasing rumors of that map with the X. It lit a fire in the imagination of the whole world — it gave Edgar Allan Poe his story "The Gold-Bug," and it gave Robert Louis Stevenson his "Treasure Island," the very picture of buried pirate gold we all carry in our heads. All of it traces back to this one unlucky Scotsman.

CAROL

So every X on every treasure map, every buried chest in every story I loved as a child — it all began with a real, hunted man burying his gold in the dark. Marty, tell me true — is any of it still out there?

MARTY

If it was ever real, Carol, it has never been found. Somewhere along the wild American shore, under the sand and the sea grass and three hundred years of tides, the great hoard of Captain Kidd may still be waiting in the dark — or it may be nothing but a hanged man's rumor. No one knows. And so on a moonless night, if you walk a lonely beach on the Atlantic coast and feel the ground soft beneath your feet, think of the respectable captain who buried his fortune to save his life and lost both. Keep your lantern low, and dig gently. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I'll be dreaming of moonlit diggers on a cold shore and a chest of gold still sleeping under the sand where a doomed man left it. Be careful whose bargains you carry, hold the ones you love close, and always, always come back to the fire.