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Harry Collingwood

"The Strange Adventures of Eric Blackburn"

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## Chapter One.

### The Catastrophe.

It happened on our seventh night out from Cape Town, when we had accomplished about a third of the distance between that city and Melbourne.

The ship was the *Saturn*, of the well-known Planet Line of combined freight and passenger steamers trading between London, Cape Town, and Melbourne; and I—Eric Blackburn, aged a trifle over twenty-three years—was her fourth officer.

The *Saturn* was a brand-new ship, this being her maiden voyage. She was a twin-screw, of 9800 tons register, 100 A1 at Lloyd's, steaming 14 knots; and she had accommodation for 432 passengers, of whom 84 were first class, 128 second class, and 220 steerage; and every berth was occupied, the steerage crowd consisting mostly of miners attracted to Australia by the rumour of a newly discovered goldfield of fabulous richness. The crew of the ship numbered, all told, 103; therefore, when the catastrophe occurred, the *Saturn* was responsible for the lives of 535 people, of whom about 120 were women and children.

I was officer of the watch, and was therefore on the bridge when it happened, the time being shortly after six bells in the middle watch, or say about a quarter past three o'clock in the morning. The weather was fine, with so moderate a westerly wind blowing that the speed of the ship just balanced it, the smoke and sparks from the funnel rising straight up into the air when the firemen shovelled coal into the furnaces; and apart from the long westerly swell there was very little sea running. The motion of the ship was therefore very easy, just a slow roll of four or five degrees to port and starboard, and an equally slow, gentle rise and fall of the ship over the swell that followed us. The moon was only four days old, consequently she had set hours earlier, but the sky was cloudless, the air was clear, and the stars, shining brilliantly, afforded light enough to reveal a ship at a distance of quite three miles; it would be difficult, therefore, to imagine conditions of more apparently perfect safety than those at the moment prevailing aboard the *Saturn*. Yet destruction came upon us in a manner, and with a suddenness, that was absolutely appalling.

I was pacing the bridge from one extremity to the other, keeping a sharp look-out ahead and all round the ship; and when, at the port end of my promenade, I wheeled on my return march, there was no sign that but a few minutes intervened between us and eternity. But as I approached the wheel-house I became aware of a sudden access of light in the sky behind me, illuminating the entire ship in a radiance that increased with incredible rapidity, while at the same moment a low humming sound became audible that also grew in volume as rapidly as the light. Wheeling sharply round, to ascertain the meaning of this strange phenomenon, I heard the helmsman ejaculate, through the open window of the wheel-house:

"Gosh! that's a big 'un, and no mistake; the biggest I ever seen; and,"—on a note of sudden alarm—"it ain't goin' to fall so very far away from us, neither! D'ye see that big fireball, sir, headin' this way?"

As the man spoke I caught sight of the object to which he referred—and horror chilled me to the marrow; for never before, I verily believe, had mortal eyes beheld so awful an apparition. Broad over the port bow, at an elevation of some forty degrees above the horizon, I beheld a great white-hot flaming mass, emitting a long trail of brilliant sparks, *coming straight for the ship*. It was increasing in apparent size even as I gazed at it, dumb and paralysed with terror indescribable, while the sound of its passage through the air grew, in the course of a second or two, from a murmur to a deafening roar, and the light which it emitted became so dazzling that it nearly blinded me as I looked at it. As it came hurtling toward us it seemed to expand until it looked almost as big as the ship herself; but that was,

of course, an optical illusion, for when, a second or two later, it struck us, I saw that the fiercely incandescent mass, of roughly spherical shape, was some twelve feet in diameter.

It struck the ship aslant, on her port side, a few feet abaft the funnel and close to the water-line, passing through the engine-room and out through her bottom. There was no perceptible shock attending the blow, but the crash was terrific, while the smell of burning was almost suffocating—which is not to be wondered at, since the mass was blazing so fiercely that it set the ship on fire merely by passing through her. So intense was the heat of it that, as it passed through the ship's bottom into the water, we instantly became enveloped in a dense cloud of hot, steamy vapour. A moment later it exploded under us, throwing up a cone of water that came near to swamping the ship.

For a space of perhaps two seconds after the passage of the meteor through the ship's hull the silence of the night continued, and then, as though in response to a signal, there arose such a dreadful outcry as I hope never to hear again; while the cabin doors were dashed open, and out from the cabins and the companion-ways streamed crowds of distracted men, women, and children, clad in their night gear, just as they had leapt from their berths, the men shouting to know what had happened, while the poor women and children rushed frantically hither and thither, jostling each other, wringing their hands, some weeping, some screaming hysterically, and some calling to children who had become separated from them in the seething crowd.

The first man to run up against me was the skipper, who sprang out of his cabin straight on to the bridge, exclaiming, as he clutched me by the arm:

"What is it? What has happened? For God's sake speak, man!"

"The ship," I answered, "has been struck by an enormous meteorite, sir, which has set her on fire, I believe, and has passed out through her bottom. She has taken a perceptible list to starboard already."

At this moment I was interrupted by the chief engineer, who dashed up on the bridge, demanding breathlessly: "Where is the captain?"

"I am here, Mr Kennedy. What is the news? Out with it!" jerked the skipper.

"My engines are wrecked, sir; utterly destroyed," answered Kennedy; "and the ship is holed through her bottom, down in the engine-room. The hole is big enough to drive a coach through, and the room is half-full of water already. If either of the bulkheads goes we shall sink like a stone!"

At this juncture we were joined by the chief, second, and third officers, who came upon each other's heels.

"Ah! here you are, gentlemen," remarked the skipper. "I was about to send for you. I learn from Mr Blackburn that the ship has been struck by a falling meteor which, Mr Kennedy tells me, has passed through her bottom. According to him the engine-room is flooded; and he is of opinion that if either of the engine-room bulkheads yields the ship will go down quickly—in which opinion I agree with him. Even as it is, you may notice that the ship is taking a strong list, and is very perceptibly deeper in the water; therefore I will ask you, Mr Hoskins," (to the chief officer) "and you, Mr Cooper," (to the second) "to muster the hands, proceed to the boat-deck, and clear away the boats, ready for lowering, in case of necessity. You, Mr Stroud," (to the third officer) "will mount guard at the foot of the boat-deck ladder and prevent passengers passing up until the boats are ready and I give the word. Mr Blackburn, go down and find the purser; tell him what has happened, what we are doing, and ask him to keep the people quiet until we are ready for them, and you can lend him a hand. Thank God, the boats are all provisioned, ready for any emergency, while the water in them was renewed only yesterday, so there is nothing to do but cut them adrift and swing them outboard. That is all at present, gentlemen, so go and get to work at once—why, who are those men on the boat-deck now, and what are they doing with the boats?"

"Looks like the miners," answered Hoskins. "They're a rough lot, and as likely as not we may have trouble with 'em. Ay, I thought so! Our chaps are up there too, trying to send the others away, and they don't seem inclined to go. Come along, Cooper, we've got to clear those miners off somehow, or we shall get nothing done."

Therewith the four of us departed upon our respective missions, leaving the captain in charge on the bridge.

The decks were now full of people rushing aimlessly hither and thither, stopping everybody they met, and asking each other what had happened. Meanwhile all the electric lights had been switched on, so that it was possible to see who was who, and, as I quite expected, no sooner did those poor distracted creatures catch sight of my uniform than I was surrounded, hemmed in by a crowd who piteously besought me to tell them what had happened, and if there was any danger. I had by this time quite recovered my self-possession, and was therefore able to answer them calmly and with a steady voice. Naturally, I did not tell them the whole truth, for that, I knew, would precipitate a panic in which everybody would get out of hand. I therefore told them there had been a breakdown in the engine-room, which was being attended to; that there was no immediate danger, but that I strongly advised them, purely as a measure of precaution, to return to their cabins, dress themselves warmly, and put into their pockets, or into parcels, any money or valuables they might have in their baggage, so that in the event of anything untoward happening, whereby we might be compelled to take to the boats, they would be prepared to do so at a moment's notice. Some of them listened to me and allowed themselves to be persuaded, but others seemed afraid to leave the deck for a moment lest they should be overtaken by calamity.

After all, their apprehension was not to be wondered at; there was excuse enough for it, and to spare. There was a very strong smell of burning and occasional puffs of smoke coming up from below, where the engine-room staff were fighting the flames. The ship had taken a heavy and steadily-increasing list to starboard; she was visibly settling in the water; and, to crown all, the crowd of miners who upon the first alarm had taken possession of the boat-deck were refusing to leave it, and a brisk struggle between them and the seamen was proceeding, though as yet no firearms were being used. But I knew Hoskins's temper; he was by no means a patient man, or one given to much

verbal argument. It was usually a word and a blow with him, and not infrequently the blow came first; I knew also that he habitually carried a revolver in his pocket when at sea. I should not, therefore, have been at all surprised to hear the crack of the weapon at any moment.

I had just managed to extricate myself from the crowd, and was making my way toward the purser's cabin, when from the interior of the ship, and almost beneath my feet, there came a deep *boom*, and I knew that the after bulkhead of the engine-room had given way, and that the moments of the *Saturn* were numbered.

"No use to hunt up the purser, now," I thought; and I made a dash for the boat-deck, to see if I could render any assistance there. But I was too late; the sound of the bursting bulkhead, coming on top of the previous alarms, was all that was needed to produce the panic I had all along been dreading, and in an instant the decks were alive with frantic people, all desperately fighting their way upward to the boat-deck, where pandemonium now raged supreme, and where pistols were popping freely, showing that Hoskins was by no means the only man in the ship who went armed.

Now, what was the best thing for me to do? Could I do *anything* useful? I stood on the outskirts of that seething, maddened crowd, and watched men and women striving desperately together, trampling each other remorselessly down; shrieking, cursing, fighting; no longer human, but reduced by the fear of death to the condition of rabid, ferocious brutes. No, I could do nothing: as well go down below and attempt to stay the inrush of water with my two hands, as strive by argument to restore those people to reason; while, as for *force*, what could my strength avail against that of hundreds? No, they had all gone mad, and, in their madness, were destroying themselves, rendering it impossible to launch the boats, and so dooming themselves and everybody else to death. It was awful! That scene often revisits me in dreams, even to this day, and I awake sweating and trembling with the unspeakable horror of it.

Meanwhile the ship was rapidly sinking; she had taken so strong a list to starboard that it was only with the utmost difficulty I could retain my footing upon her steeply inclined deck, while she was so much down by the stern that the sea was almost level with the deck right aft. Scarcely knowing what I did, acting with the inconsequence of one in a dream, I clawed my way across the bridge that led from the upper deck to the poop, and reached the taffrail, where I stood gazing blankly down into the black water, thinking, I am afraid, some rather rebellious thoughts. I must have stood thus for at least five minutes before I realised that my hands were gripping a life-buoy, one of six that were stopped to the rail. Still acting mechanically, and with no very definite purpose, I drew forth my pocket-knife, severed the lashing, passed the buoy over my head and shoulders, thrust my arms through it, climbed the rail—and dropped into the water.

The chill of the immersion instantly brought me to my senses. In a moment I realised that if I would save my life I must, without an instant's delay, put the greatest possible distance between the ship and myself before she foundered, otherwise when she sank—which she might do at any moment—she would drag me down with her, and drown me. The desire to live, which seemed to have been paralysed within me by the suddenness of the disaster and the dreadful scenes I had subsequently witnessed, re-awoke, and I struck out vigorously.

I know not how long I had been swimming—it seemed to me, in my anxiety to get well away from the ship, to have been but a very few minutes—when the tumultuous sounds of contention aboard the doomed *Saturn* suddenly changed to a long wailing scream, and, glancing back over my shoulder, I saw, upreared against the star-lit sky, the fore end of the ship standing almost vertically out of the water, while at the same instant another loud *boom* reached my ears, proclaiming either the bursting of the ship's boilers, the yielding of another bulkhead, or, possibly, the blowing up of her decks; then, as I paused for a moment to watch the conclusion of the catastrophe, the hull sank lower and lower still in the water until within the space of a minute it completely vanished.

The dreadful sight stimulated me to superhuman exertion, for I believed I was still perilously near that great sinking mass; and indeed I had scarcely covered another dozen yards when I felt the strong suction of the foundering ship. I fought against it with desperate energy, and in about a minute's time it relaxed, and I ceased swimming.

"Now," I asked myself, "what is the next thing to be done? I suppose it was instinct that prompted me to get into this life-buoy and swim away from the sinking ship; but in doing so have I not merely exchanged a quick for a lingering death? If I had stuck to the ship I should have gone down with her, and died with very little suffering, if any; while, so far as I can see, I am now fated to drift about in this buoy until I perish slowly and miserably of cold, hunger, and thirst."

It was a most depressing reflection, and for a moment I felt strongly tempted to slip out of the buoy, throw up my hands, sink, and have done with it. But no; love of life, self-preservation, which we are told is the first law of nature, would not permit me to act foolishly; reason reasserted herself, reminding me that while there is life there is hope. I remembered that I was floating in a stretch of water that is the highway for ships bound round the Cape to and from Australia and New Zealand. It is a highway that, if not quite so busy as London's Fleet Street, is traversed almost daily by craft of one sort or another, bound either east or west; and something might come along at any moment and, if I could but attract attention to myself, pick me up. Besides, I did not really believe in "giving up". It had been instilled into me from my earliest childhood that the correct way to meet difficulties is to *fight* them, and to fight the harder the more formidable appear the difficulties. And the doctrine is sound; I had and have proved it to be so, over and over again, and I meant again to put it to the test, then, in the most discouraging combination of adverse circumstances with which I had ever been confronted.

But the water was bitterly cold; if I remained submerged to my armpits, as I then was, I could not survive long enough to get a fair chance. I needed a raft of some sort buoyant enough to support me practically dry; and, remembering that there were numerous loose articles such as deck-chairs, gratings, and what not that would probably float off the wreck when she sank, I turned and swam back towards the spot where the *Saturn* had gone down, hoping that I might be fortunate enough to find something that would afford me the support I required. And as I struck out afresh I was cheered and encouraged by the assurance that day was not far distant, for, looking ahead, I

saw that the sky low down toward the horizon wore the pallor that is the forerunner of dawn.

By imperceptible degrees the day crept up over the eastern horizon, cold and white; and, as soon as there was light enough to enable me to see from the crest of one swell to that of the next, I began to look about me in the hope of finding flotsam of some sort that would be useful to me; also it occurred to me that there might be some who had remembered that cork jackets were to be found in every state-room, and might have made use of them; in which case I might fall in with other survivors, who might be useful to me, and I to them, if we joined forces.

For several minutes my search of the surface of the sea proved fruitless, at which I was distinctly disconcerted, for I knew that there were many articles of a buoyant nature which had been lying loose about the decks, and which must have floated off when the ship sank; and I was beginning to fear that somehow I had got out of my reckoning and had missed the scene of the catastrophe. But a minute or two later, as I topped the ridge of a swell, I caught a momentary glimpse of something floating, some fifty or sixty fathoms away, and, striking out vigorously in that direction, I presently arrived at the spot and found myself in the midst of a small collection of brooms,



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I FIND ONE OF THE SHIP'S LIFE-BOATS

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scrubbing-brushes, squeegees, buckets, deck-chairs, gratings, and—gigantic slice of luck!—one of the ship's life-boats floating bottom up! But of human beings, living or dead, not a sign; it was therefore evident that, of the five hundred and thirty-five aboard the *Saturn* at the moment of the disaster, I was the sole survivor.

Naturally, I made straight for the upturned life-boat; but recognising that a bucket might prove very useful I secured one and towed it along with me. Reaching the boat I was greatly gratified to find that not only was she quite undamaged but also that she was riding buoyantly, with the whole of her keel and about a foot of her bottom above the surface of the water. Of course the first thing to be done was to right the boat, and then to bale her out; and, with the water as smooth as it then was, I thought there ought not to be much difficulty in doing either. The righting of the boat, however, proved to be very much more difficult than I had imagined. She was a fairly big boat and, floating wrong side up and full of water, she was very sluggish, and for a long time scarcely responded to my efforts; but I eventually succeeded, and, with a glad heart, seized the bucket I had secured, hove it into the boat, and climbed in after it, finding to my joy that, even with my weight in her, the boat floated with both gunwales nearly four inches above the surface of the water. Thus there would be no difficulty in baling her dry; and this I at once proceeded to do, working vigorously at the task, not only with the object of freeing the boat as speedily as possible, but, still more, to restore my circulation and get a little warmth into my chilled and benumbed body.

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## Chapter Two.

### The "Yorkshire Lass."

By the time that I had baled the boat dry the sun was above the horizon, the air had become quite genially warm, and my exertions had set my body aglow, while my clothing was rapidly drying in the gentle breeze that was blowing out from about north-west; also I discovered that I had somehow developed a most voracious appetite.

Fortunately, I was able to regard this last circumstance with equanimity, for the manager of the Planet Line of steamers had laid it down as a most stringent rule that while the ships were at sea all boats were not only to be maintained in a state of perfect preparation for instant launching, but were also to be fully supplied with provisions

and water upon a scale proportional to their passenger-carrying capacity, and each was also to have her full equipment of gear stowed in her, ready for instant service. Now, the boat which I had been fortunate enough to find—and which, by the way, seemed to be the only one that had not been carried down with the ship—was Number 5, a craft thirty-two feet long by eight feet beam, carvel-built, double-ended, fitted with air-chambers fore and aft and along each side, with a keel six inches deep to enable her to work to windward under sail. She was yawl-rigged, pulled six oars, and her full carrying capacity was twenty-four persons, for which number she carried provisions and water enough to last, according to a carefully regulated scale, four days, or even six days at a pinch. These provisions were all of the tinned variety, and were stowed in a locker specially arranged for their reception between the two midship thwarts. Thus there was no risk of the food being damaged by salt water, on the one hand, or of being washed out of the boat, on the other. Upon coming into possession of the boat, therefore, I was not only so fortunate as to find an ark of refuge, but also rations of food sufficient to last me ninety-six days.

Knowing all this—such knowledge being a part of my duty—no sooner had I hove the last bucketful of water out over the gunwale than I opened the food locker and spread the constituents of a very satisfying breakfast in the stern-sheets of the boat; whereupon I fell to and made an excellent meal.

As I sat there, eating and drinking, a solitary individual adrift in the vast expanse of the Southern Ocean, I began to look my future in the face and ask myself what I was now to do. In a general sense it was not at all a difficult question to answer. The *Saturn*, that splendid, new, perfectly equipped steamship, had gone to the bottom, taking with her five hundred and thirty-four human beings; and, apart from myself and the boat I sat in, there was nothing and nobody to tell what her fate had been. I was the sole survivor of a probably unexampled disaster, and my obvious duty was to hasten, with as little delay as possible, to some spot from which I could report the particulars of that disaster to the owners of the ship.

But what spot, precisely, must I endeavour to reach? As an officer of the ship I of course knew her exact position at noon on the day preceding her loss. It was Latitude 39 degrees 3 minutes 20 seconds South; Longitude 52 degrees 26 minutes 45 seconds East; I remembered the figures well, having something of a gift in that direction, which I had sedulously cultivated, in view of the possibility that some day I might find it exceedingly useful. In the same way I was able to form a fairly accurate mental picture of the chart upon which that position had been pricked off, for Cooper, our “second”, and I had been studying it together in the chart-house shortly after the skipper had “pricked her off”. As a result, I knew that the *Saturn* had foundered some two thousand miles east-south-east of the Cape of Good Hope; that Madagascar—the nearest land—bore about north-by-west, true; with the islands of Reunion and Mauritius, not much farther off, bearing about two points farther east. These items of information were of course valuable; but their value was to a very great extent discounted by the fact that I had neither sextant nor chronometer wherewith to determine the boat’s position, day after day, nor a chart to guide me.

At this point in my self-communion I realised that alternative courses were open to me, and I proceeded to give them my most careful consideration, comparing the one with the other. And the more carefully I examined them, the more difficult did I find it to come to a decision. On the one hand, here was I, right in the track of ships bound east and west; consequently I stood a very fair chance of being picked up at any moment, when the ship’s wireless installation would at once enable me to make my report. On the other hand, in the unlikely event of my failing to be picked up, I could dispatch a cablegram from, say, Port Louis, Mauritius, immediately upon my arrival there; and the point which I had to decide was whether I should at once steer north, or whether I should remain where I was, and trust to being speedily picked up. I will not weary the reader by repeating in detail the arguments, pro and con, that presented themselves to my mind; let it suffice me to say that I eventually adopted the second of the courses outlined above. And so certain did I feel that this was the right decision that I actually adhered to it for seven days, during which I sighted four steamers and one sailing ship; but, as ill-fortune would have it, three of the steamers and the sailing ship passed me at too great a distance to permit of my intercepting them, while the fourth steamer—a big liner, with three tiers of ports blazing with electric light—passed during the night, within less than four miles of me; but I had no light with which to signal to her, and thus I was passed unseen.

The liner passed me during the fifth night succeeding that of the wreck; and during the following two days I saw nothing. As I watched the sun go down on the seventh day that I had spent in the boat I said to myself:

“Well, here endeth the seventh day of a most disappointing experience. If, seven days ago, anyone had told me that I could hang about here in a boat for a whole week, right in the track of ships, without being sighted and picked up, I would not have believed it. Yet here I am, and, judging from past experience, here I may remain for another seven days, or even longer, with no more satisfactory result. I have spent seven precious days waiting for a ship to come along and find me; now I will go and see if I cannot find a ship, or, failing that, find land, where I shall at least be safe from destruction by the first gale that chances to spring up.”

Thinking thus, I put up my helm, wore the boat round, and headed her upon a course that I believed would eventually enable me to hit off either Reunion or Mauritius, should I not be picked up beforehand.

That was a very anxious night indeed for me; by far the most anxious that I had thus far spent since the destruction of the *Saturn*, for the wind steadily increased, compelling me to haul down a first and then a second reef in the mainsail, while—the wind and sea being now square abeam—I was continually exposed to the danger of being swamped by a sea breaking aboard. By constant watchfulness, however, I contrived to escape this danger, and my eighth morning found the boat bowling along to the northward and reeling off her six knots per hour, with a steady breeze from the westward, a long, regular sea running, and a clear sky giving promise that the weather conditions were unlikely to grow any worse than they were then. But I had to stick to the mainsheet and the yoke-lines, and do as best I could without rest, for the time being. Fortunately, as the day wore on, the wind moderated, until by nightfall it had dropped to such an extent that I was able to shake out first one reef and then the other, while with the moderating of the breeze the sea also went down until it was no longer dangerous.

I had now had no sleep for thirty-six hours, consequently I felt in sore need of rest. I therefore hove-to the boat,

coiled myself down, and instantly sank into a dreamless slumber. It must have been about midnight when I awoke. I at once let draw the fore-sheet, filled away upon the course I had decided upon, and kept the boat going for the remainder of the night.

The ninth day of my boat voyage dawned pleasantly, with the wind still blowing a moderate breeze from the westward, a long, regular swell running, and no sea worth troubling about. The conditions were therefore quite favourable for a little experiment I desired to make. Being only human, I could not avoid the necessity for securing a certain amount of sleep, and, up to now, when I needed rest it had been my habit to heave-to the boat and leave her to take care of herself, trusting to that curious sailor-sense, which all sailor-men soon acquire, to awake me should the need arise. But heaving-to meant loss of time; and having already lost so much I was very reluctant to lose more, if such loss could possibly be avoided. I therefore set the boat going on her correct compass course, and then, releasing the yoke-lines, I endeavoured to render the craft self-steering by adjusting the fore and mizen sheets. It took me the best part of half an hour to accomplish this to my complete satisfaction, but I did it at length and, this done, I went aloft and took a good look round. There was nothing in sight—indeed I scarcely expected to see anything in the part of the ocean which I had then reached; I therefore descended and rested until dinner-time, indulging in another nap until the hour for my evening meal, in preparation for an all-night watch.

The weather had now become quite settled, and was as favourable as it could possibly be to persons who, like myself, were engaged upon an ocean voyage in an open boat. The wind still held steadily in the western quarter, enabling me to lay my course with eased sheets, while its strength was sufficient to push the boat along under whole canvas at a speed of about five knots, with no need to keep one's eye continually watching the lee gunwale. My only difficulty at this time was the lack of a light to illuminate the boat compass at night, the can containing the supply of lamp oil seeming to have gone adrift when the boat was capsized. I was therefore compelled to steer entirely by the stars, and I was sometimes disturbed by an uneasy doubt as to whether I might not occasionally have deviated slightly from my proper course by holding on to one particular star for too long a time. In all other respects I did splendidly.

The morning of the tenth day of this remarkable but, on the whole, uneventful voyage of mine in the life-boat dawned auspiciously, and the daily routine into which I had settled began. I went aloft for a look round, and then, the horizon being empty, I had breakfast; after which, with the boat steering herself, I stretched myself out for a short sleep.

I must have slept for perhaps two hours when some mysterious influence awoke me, and I started up, gazing eagerly about me. There was still nothing in sight from the low elevation of the boat herself, but being awake I decided to have a look round from aloft. In another minute I was straddling the yard of the main lug, from which position, as the boat floated up on a ridge of swell, I caught a momentary glimpse of something gleaming white in the brilliant sunshine right ahead. It could, of course, be but one thing, namely, the upper canvas of a sailing craft of some sort. I remained where I was, intently watching that gleaming white speck until it had grown into the semblance of a royal and the head of a topgallant sail. From time to time I also got occasional glimpses of the upper part of another sail which I could not for the moment identify; but ultimately, as I watched, the strange craft seemed to alter her course a little, and then I made out the puzzling piece of canvas to be the triangular head of a gaff-topsail; the vessel was therefore, without a doubt, a brigantine. What I could not at first understand, however, was the way she was steering; at one moment she would appear absolutely end-on, while a minute or two later she would be broad off the wind, to the extent of four or five points. It was exceedingly erratic steering, to say the least of it, and I was tantalised too by my inability to determine whether she was heading toward or away from me; but eventually I decided that, since her masts had hove up above the horizon just where they were, she must be heading toward me. The only argument against this assumption was that she did not appear to be rising rapidly enough to justify it; but



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she certainly *was* rising, although slowly, and that was enough for me in the meantime. Without further ado, therefore, I slid down from aloft, went aft, and seized the yoke-lines, saying to myself:

"I believe it's going to be all right this time. She is a sailing craft and I am raising her, although very slowly. It will be afternoon before I can get alongside her, but, please God, there will be no more open boating for me after to-day."

That the craft in sight was indeed a brigantine became unmistakable as I stood on, slowly raising her canvas above the horizon; and later on in the day I made two further discoveries, of a rather peculiar character, in connection with her. One was, that she was hove-to; the other, that she was flying her ensign upside-down at the peak of her mainsail, the latter circumstance indicating that she was in distress or required assistance of some kind.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when the life-boat crept up near enough to the brigantine to enable me to distinguish details; and the first thing I observed was that a group of five or six men—apparently fore-castle hands—were grouped aft, curiously inspecting the boat through a telescope as I approached. A little later, when I arrived within a few fathoms of her, I learned, from the inscription in white letters on her stern, that the craft was named the *Yorkshire Lass*, and that she hailed from Hull.

As I drew up within hail I put my hands to my mouth, trumpet-wise, and shouted:

"*Yorkshire Lass* ahoy! I am a castaway, and have been adrift in this boat ten days. May I board you?"

To my amazement, instead of replying, the group of men clustered on deck aft turned to each other and seemed to hold a brief consultation. Finally, after a short palaver, one of them hailed:

"Boat ahoy! I say, mister, are you a navigator?"

"Yes, certainly," I replied, much astonished at having such a question addressed to me by a British seaman, instead of—as I had fully expected—receiving a cordial invitation to come alongside; "I was fourth officer of the *Saturn*, of the Planet Line of steamers running between London and Melbourne—" and then I stopped, for instead of listening to me they were all talking together again. At length, when the life-boat had crept up close under the brigantine's lee quarter, one of the men came to the rail and, looking down into the boat, remarked:

"All right, mister; come aboard, and welcome. Look out, and I'll heave ye a line."

A couple of minutes later the life-boat, with her sails lowered, was alongside, and, climbing the craft's low side, I reached her deck.

"Welcome aboard the *Yorkshire Lass*, mister," I was greeted by a great burly specimen of the British "shellback", as I stepped in over the rail. "Very glad to see ye, I'm sure. But what about your boat? She's a fine boat and no mistake; but I'm afraid we'll have to let her go adrift. She's too big for us to hoist her in; we've no place on deck where we could stow her. But if there's anything of value aboard her we'll have it out, eh, mister?"

"Certainly," I agreed. "There is still a quantity of preserved provisions in that locker; there are the two water breakers; there is a life-buoy—and that is about all. But, look here!" I continued; "if something must be turned adrift, why not get rid of that long-boat of yours, and hoist in the life-boat in her place? The latter is very much the better

boat of the two—there is indeed no comparison between them—and I am sure she would stow very snugly in your long-boat's chocks."

"Ay," agreed the other, "I believe she would. And, as you say, she's a lot better than the long-boat; she's got air-chambers, I see, and—in fact she's a proper life-boat, and she's roomy enough to take all hands of us if anything should happen. What say, chaps, shall us try it?"

This last to the other men, who had stood around listening to everything that was said.

The party, five of them in all, slouched over to the rail and stood looking down into the life-boat with an air of stolid indifference, as she rose and fell alongside. Then they turned and looked inboard at the long-boat, which stood upright in chocks, on top of the main hatch, with the jolly-boat stowed, keel-up, inside her. Finally one of them said:

"Yah, ve'll do id; she's wort' de drouble. Come on, poys, led's ged do vork; we haven'd done moosh dese lasd dwo days, und id von'd hurd us. Shoomp ub dere, zome of you und ged de sholly-boat out of dad!"

"Now," thought I, "what sort of a craft is this that I've blundered aboard of? She's Liberty Hall afloat, by the look of it—Jack as good as his master! There seems to be something a bit queer here—something that I can't quite understand at present, but I'll find out what it is before long. Which of those fellows is the skipper, I wonder—or, if neither of them is, as I am very much inclined to think, where is he?" And then I suddenly recalled to mind the question—"Are you a navigator?"—which had been put to me before I received permission to come aboard. For a moment I thought of demanding an explanation before permitting the life-boat to be hoisted in; but I changed my mind and resolved to defer my investigation until later. I flattered myself that if anything should prove to be really wrong aboard the brigantine I had wit enough to enable me to deal with it.

Meanwhile, the five men, having summoned three others from the fore-castle to their assistance, got to work with the exasperating deliberation characteristic of the British merchant seaman to be found in the fore-castles of small craft; and first of all they got the jolly-boat down on deck and ran her aft, out of the way; then they cleared out a number of warps, cork fenders, and other lumber from the long-boat, lifted her out of her chocks, and finally, unshipping the gangway, launched her overboard, fisherman-fashion, and dropped her astern, riding to her painter. Then they got their mast and yard tackles aloft, arranged the chocks in place on the main hatch, and with a tremendous amount of fuss, with the assistance of snatch-blocks, the windlass, and the winch, they contrived to hoist in and stow the life-boat that had stood me in such good stead for nearly a fortnight. That done, all hands held another somewhat lengthy and animated pow-wow on the fore-castle-head, at the conclusion of which the man who had given me permission to come aboard came aft and, pointing to the life-boat, remarked to me:

"I reckon we've made a very good job of that, mister, and I'm sure we're all very much obliged to ye for the idee. She's worth a dozen of the long-boat and quite worth all the trouble we've took to put her where she is." Then, without waiting for any response, he stepped aft, peered through the skylight, and, stepping to where the ship's bell hung, he struck eight bells (four o'clock). Rejoining me as I stood watching the long-boat, that had been cast adrift, he remarked, with a clumsy effort at civility:

"Tea'll be coming along aft in about five minutes, and I reckon you'll be glad of a cup. I s'pose you haven't been gettin' much hot food while you've been moochin' about in that boat, have ye?"

"I have not," I replied. "It was impossible to do cooking of any kind, as of course you will readily understand."

"Ah, well, ye'll be able to make up for it now," was the rejoinder, "for here comes the steward, teapot and all. Step down below into the cabin, and make yourself at home."

"Many thanks," said I. "By the way, are you the master of this vessel? And I gather from your ensign being hoisted union-down that you are in distress. What is wrong with you?"

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## Chapter Three.

### An Amazing Story.

We were now passing down the companion ladder on our way to the cabin, and as I finished speaking the man to whom I addressed my question, and who had led the way below, motioned me to enter an open doorway at the foot of the stairs.

Obedying the invitation, I found myself in a small, rather dark and stuffy cabin, very plainly fitted up; the woodwork painted dark-oak colour, the beams and underside of the deck planking overhead imparting a little cheerfulness to the small interior by being painted white, while the lockers were covered with cushions of much worn plush that had once been crimson, but which, through age, wear, and dirt, had become almost black. The place was lighted by a small skylight in the deck, and two ports, or scuttles, on each side. At one end of the skylight was screwed a clock, while to the other end was screwed a mercurial barometer hung in gimbals; and immediately over the chair at the fore end of the table hung a tell-tale compass. The table was laid with a damask table-cloth that had seen better days, and, no doubt, had once been white, while the ware was white and of that thick and solid character that defies breakage. A well-filled bread barge, containing ordinary ship biscuit, stood at one end of the table, flanked by a dish of butter on one side and a pot of jam on the other; the tray was placed at the starboard side of the table, and amidships, at the fore end, there stood a dish containing a large lump of salt beef behind three plates, with a carving knife and fork alongside them. To the chair in front of these, or at the head of the table, the man who was acting the part of host now waved a hand, mutely inviting me to take it.



"Certainly not," I said. "You are the master of the ship, I presume, and, as such, this is of course your rightful place. Why should you surrender it to me?"

"Ah, but that's just where you make a mistake, Mr—er—er—I forget your name. No, I'm not the skipper; I'm the bosun, and my name's Enderby—John Enderby. And this man,"—indicating an individual who at this moment joined us—"is William Johnson, the carpenter—otherwise 'Chips'."

"Then, where is your skipper—and your mate?" I demanded.

"That's what we're in distress about," answered the boatswain. "Sit down, sir, please, and let's get on with our tea; and while we're gettin' of it I'll spin ye the yarn. That's why me and Chips is havin' tea down here, aft, this afternoon. At other times we messes with the rest of the men in the fo'c'sle; but as soon as you comed aboard we all reckernised that you'd want to know the ins and outs of this here traverse that we finds ourselves in, so 'twas arranged that me and Chips should have tea with ye, and explain the whole thing."

"I see," said I. "Well, you may heave ahead while I carve this beef. I can do that and listen at the same time."

"Yes," assented Enderby. Then, breathing deeply, he gazed steadfastly at the clock for so long a time and with an air of such complete abstraction that at length Chips, who was sitting on the locker alongside him, gave him an awakening nudge of the elbow, accompanied by the injunction:

"Heave ahead, man; heave ahead! You'll never get under way if you don't show better than this."

"Ay, you're right there, my lad, I shan't, and that's a fact," returned Enderby. "The trouble is that I don't know where to make a start—whether to begin with what happened the night afore last, or whether 'twould be best to go back to our sailin' from London."

"Perhaps the last will be the better plan," I suggested. "If you start at the very beginning I shall stand a better chance of understanding the whole affair."

"Ay, ay; yes, of course you will," agreed the boatswain. "Well, it's like this here," he began. "We left London last September—you'll find the exact date in the log-book—with a full cargo for Cape Town, our complement bein' thirteen, all told. Thirteen's an unlucky number, mister; and as soon as I reckernised that our ship's company totted up to that I *knowed* we should have trouble, in some shape or form. But we arrived at Cape Town all right; discharged our cargo; took in ballast; filled up our water tanks, and got away to sea again all right; and it wasn't until the night afore last that the trouble comed along. Our skipper's name was Stenson, and the mate called hisself John Barber, but I 'low it was, as likely as not, a purser's name, for I never liked the man, and no more didn't any of us, for though he was a good enough seaman he had a very nasty temper and was everlastin'ly naggin' the men."

"It appeared that he and the skipper was old friends—or anyway they knowed one another pretty well, havin' been schoolfellers together; and the story goes that some while ago this man, Barber, bein' at the time on his beam-ends, runned foul of the skipper and begged help from him, spinnin' a yarn about a lot of treasure that he'd found on an island somewhere away to the east'ard, and offerin' to go shares if he'd help Barber to get hold of the stuff. I dunno whether the yarn's true or no, but the skipper believed it, for the upshot of it was that Cap'n Stenson—who, I might say, was the owner of the *Yorkshire Lass*—hustled around and got a general cargo for Cape Town, after dischargin' which we took in ballast and sailed in search of this here treasure. Well, everything worked all right until the night afore last, when Barber, who was takin' the middle watch, went below and, for some reason or another, brought the skipper up on deck. Svorensen, who was at the wheel, says that the pair of 'em walked fore and aft in the waist for a goodish bit, talkin' together; and then suddenly they got to high words; then, all in a minute, they started fightin' or strugglin' together, and before Svorensen could sing out or do anything they was at the rail, and the pair of 'em went overboard, locked in one another's arms."

"Went overboard!" I reiterated. "Good Heavens! what an extraordinary thing! And was no effort made to save them?"

"Svorensen sung out, of course," replied the boatswain, "but he couldn't leave the wheel, for 'twas pipin' up a freshish breeze on our port quarter, and we was doin' about seven, or seven and a half knots, with topmast and lower stunsails set to port, and of course we had to take 'em in, clew up the royal and to'ga'ntsail, and haul down the gaff-tops'l before we could round to; and that took us so long that at last, when we'd brought the hooker to the wind, hove her to, and had got the jolly-boat over the side, we knowed that it'd be no earthly use to look for either of 'em. All the same, I took the boat, with three hands, and we pulled back over the course we'd come; as near as we could guess at it; but although we pulled about until daylight. We never got a sight of either of 'em."

"What a truly extraordinary story!" I repeated. "And, pray, who is now in command of the ship?"

"Well, I s'pose I am, as much as anybody—though there haven't been much 'commandin'' since the skipper was lost," answered Enderby. "But I'm the oldest and most experienced man aboard, and the others have been sort of lookin' to me to advise 'em what to do; and since there's ne'er a one of us as knows anything about navigation I advised that we should heave-to, hoist a signal of distress, and then wait until something comed along that would supply us with a navigator. But now that you've comed along we needn't waste any more of this fine fair wind, because I s'pose you won't have no objection to do our navigatin' for us, eh?"

"That depends entirely upon where you are bound for," I replied. "Of course I shall be very pleased to navigate the ship to the nearest port on your way, but I cannot promise to do more than that. And you have not yet told me where you are bound. Did I not understand that it is to some island?"

"Ay, yes, that's right," answered the boatswain, "but,"—here he raised his voice to a shout—"Billy, come here, my lad, and tell the gen'leman what you knows about this here v'yage."

Whereupon, to my astonishment, a very intelligent-looking boy, of apparently about eleven or twelve years of age, emerged from the pantry, where it appeared he had been helping the steward, and stood before us, alert and evidently prepared to answer questions. He was only a little chap, fair-haired and blue-eyed, and his eyelids were red, as though he had recently been crying; but there were honesty, straightforwardness, and fearlessness in the way in which he looked me straight in the eye, and an evident eagerness in his manner that greatly pleased me.

"This," said Enderby, by way of introduction, "is Billy Stenson, the skipper's son. He haven't no mother, pore little chap, so he've been comin' to sea with his father the last two or three years, haven't you, Billy?"

"Yes, that's quite right, bosun," answered the boy.

"Well, now, this gentleman, Mr—er—dashed if I can remember your name, mister!" proceeded Enderby.

"Blackburn," I prompted.

"Thank 'e, sir. Blackburn. Well, Billy," continued the boatswain, "this here Mr Blackburn is a first-class navigator, havin' been an orficer aboard a liner, and he'll be able to take us to Barber's treasure island, if anybody can. But, of course, he'll have to know whereabouts it is afore he can navigate the ship to it; and now that your pore father's—um—no longer aboard, I reckon that you're the only one who can say what's the latitood and longitood of it."

"But that's just what I *can't* do, bosun," answered Billy. "I know what the latitude of it is, but the longitude's another matter. Mr Barber didn't know it; Father didn't know it; and I don't know it."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that your father actually started out with the deliberate intention of looking for an island the latitude only of which he knew?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, "that's right. Let me tell you how it all happened. I know, because Father told me the story lots of times; and besides, I've heard him and Mr Barber talking about it so often that I'm not likely to forget a word of it. This is how it was:—

"Before Mr Barber met Father, this last time, he was mate of a Dutch ship trading out of Batavia, collecting sandalwood and shell. They called at a place named—named—Waing— Do you mind, sir, if I get the chart and show you the place on it? Somehow, I never can exactly remember the names of these places, but I can point 'em out on the chart, because I've listened and watched while Father and Mr Barber talked it over together."

"Yes," I said, "by all means get the chart, my boy. I shall be able to understand your story ever so much better with that before me." Whereupon the lad entered a state-room at the fore end of the main cabin, and presently returned with a chart of the Malay Archipelago, which he spread open on the table.

"There," he said, pointing with his finger, "that's the place they called at—Waingapu, in Sumba Island; and this pencil-mark Mr Barber drew to show the track of the ship and the boat afterwards—as nearly as he could remember. After leaving Waingapu the ship sailed along this line,"—pointing with his finger—"through Maurissa Strait, up to here. And here Mr Barber and the Dutch captain had a terrible quarrel and a fight—I don't know what about, because Mr Barber didn't say, but it ended in Mr Barber being turned adrift by himself in a boat, with a small stock of provisions and one breaker of fresh water. The boat was an old one, very leaky, and she had no sail, so Mr Barber could do nothing but just let her drift, hoping every day that something would come along and pick him up. But nothing came, and five days later he found that his water was all gone, the breaker havin' been leaky. The next thing that happened was that Mr Barker got light-headed with thirst; and it used to make me feel awfully uncomfortable to hear him tell about the things he thought he saw while he was that way. At last he got so thirsty that he couldn't stand it any longer, and, bein' mad, he filled the baler with water from over the side, and drank it. And then he found that the water was *fresh*, and he drank some more, and his senses came back to him, and, lookin' round, he saw that there was land on both sides of the boat and that she was in a sort of wide river. But, although the land was so plain in sight, Mr Barber was so weak that he couldn't do anything; for while he was light-headed he'd hove all his grub overboard and was now starving. So he just had to let the boat drift with the wind; and after a bit she drove ashore. But even then Mr Barber couldn't do anything but just climb out of the boat and fling himself down upon the sand, where he slept until next morning.

"When he woke up he felt a bit better, but awfully hungry, so he got up and, seeing a few trees not far off, he managed to crawl over to 'em, and was lucky enough to find some fruit on 'em. He said he didn't know what the fruit was, and didn't care, he was so awfully hungry that he'd have eaten it, even if he'd known it was poison. But it wasn't; it was quite good; and after he had eaten he felt so much stronger that he went back to the beach and moored his boat to a big boulder, so that she wouldn't drift away.

"Now that Mr Barber had found food and water he set about taking care of himself, so that he might get strong again and be able to get away from where he was—because, of course, he didn't want to spend the rest of his days there. But he wanted to find out as much as he could about the place; so as soon as he was strong enough he began to wander about a bit, explorin', and in particular he wanted to have a look at something that he thought might be a house all overgrown with creepers. And when at last he was able to get to it he found that it was a very ancient *ship*, that he thought must have drove ashore during the height of a very heavy gale of wind, when the level of the sea surface was raised several feet above ordinary, deeply flooding the low ground where he found her.

"Of course Mr Barber climbed aboard and had a good look round, thinking that he'd perhaps be able to take up his quarters aboard her until he could get away from the place; but he found her timbers and deck planking all so rotten that it wasn't safe to move about aboard her. All the same, he gave her a good overhaul; and down in the run he found a little room, and in it eight big chests all bound round with thick, steel bands. With a lot of trouble he broke 'em open, and five of 'em he found packed full of gold and silver things—coins, candlesticks, images and things that he believed had been stolen out of churches, with chains and rings and bracelets and things of that sort. And the

other three chests had in 'em all sorts of gems—diamonds, rubies, emeralds—and oh, I forget the names of all the things he said he found in them; but I remember he said that they looked as though they'd been broken out of articles of jewellery. Two of the chests were full, chock-a-block, and the other was about three-parts full; and he said that, altogether, the treasure must be worth millions!

“So as soon as Mr Barber felt well and strong enough to get away from the place, he caulked the seams of his boat, and his water breaker, with a kind of cotton that he found growing wild, made a mat sail for his boat out of grass, laid in a stock of fruit and water, and, taking a handful of the gems along with him, went out to sea again. But before leaving the place he got the meridian altitude of the sun, by setting a stick upright in the ground and measuring the length of its shadow very carefully several days running; and in this way he afterwards found that the latitude of the wreck was about 3 degrees 50 minutes South. Then, when he was satisfied that he'd got the position near enough to be able to find it again, he set his sail and went out to sea.

“But he was unlucky again, for on that very night a gale sprang up, his sail was blown away, and he had all his work cut out to keep the boat from being swamped. Then he fell ill again and went crazy once more, coming to himself again aboard a Chinese junk bound for Singapore. Of course the first thing he did was to search for his little packet of gems; but they were gone; and, although he strongly suspected the Chinese of having stolen them, they swore that they had seen nothing of them. At Singapore Mr Barber applied for help as a distressed sailor, and, after waiting a bit, he was sent home in a ship bound for London. Four days after he landed in London he met Father, who helped him by giving him money and inviting him to take up his quarters, for a bit, aboard the *Yorkshire Lass*. Then he told Father all about the treasure, and they kept on talkin' about it every evenin', when the day's work was done, until at last Father agreed to help Mr Barber to search for the treasure, he and Mr Barber to go halves in everything they found, and Mr Barber to come with us as mate. And—and—I think, sir, that's all.”

“And quite enough, too,” I said. “Why, it is the most amazing story to which I have ever listened. And do you really mean to say that your father actually allowed himself to be persuaded into engaging in such a wild-goose chase as that of hunting for a spot of which the latitude only is known—and that merely approximately, I should imagine.”

“Yes, indeed, sir, it is a fact,” answered Billy. “I know, because Father and Mr Barber drew up an agreement and signed it, Father keeping one copy, and Mr Barber the other. Father's copy is in his desk now, if you'd care to see it.”

“Later on, perhaps,” I said. “There are other and more pressing matters requiring attention just now. This—er—unfortunate affair of the night before last has, I suppose, upset all plans, and clapped an effectual stopper on the treasure-hunting scheme, eh?” I asked, turning to the boatswain.

“Oh no, sir, it haven't,” answered Enderby. “It looked a bit like it, first off, I'll allow; 'cause, you see, the loss of the Old Man and the mate left us without a navigator, and none of us knew which way to head the ship. But me and Chips, bein' the only two officers left, had a confab together, and then we mustered the rest of the hands and put it to 'em whether they'd all agree to what we two proposed. And what we proposed was this: Barber had evidently persuaded Cap'n Stenson that there wasn't no mistake about the treasure actually existin', and that it might be found, with a bit of tryin', otherwise the ship wouldn't be where she is now.

“Then there was the agreement between the two, by which the treasure—when found—was to be equally divided between 'em. Both of 'em havin' gone over the side, that agreement couldn't be carried out; but there was Billy, here; and there was us, the crew of the ship; and what me and Chips proposed was, first of all, to get hold of a navigator who'd agree to join in with us, and then go and try to find the treasure; the arrangement bein' that Billy, as his father's son, should have half of it, and we—the crew and the navigator—should divide the other half equally between us.

“There was a lot of palaver over it, naturally—you know, sir, what sailor-men are—but at last everybody agreed; and then, since we didn't know where to head for, we hove-to, waitin' for something to come along whereby we could get hold of a navigator. Then, at last, along comes you, and you havin' turned up, I s'pose there's no reason why we shouldn't haul down our ensign, swing the head yards, and fill away to complete the v'yage?”

“No,” I said; “no reason at all why you should not do those things. I advise you to fill on the ship at once, and steer as you were heading when you had the misfortune to lose your skipper and mate. Do you know what that course was?”

“Oh yes,” answered Enderby; “the course was north-east, a quarter east.”

“Very good,” said I. “Let that be the course until I shall have had an opportunity to take a set of sights to determine the ship's position. I suppose Captain Stenson had a sextant, chronometer, and all necessary navigation tables aboard?”

“Yes, sir,” said Billy. “They're all in his state-room. If you'll come with me I'll show them to you.”

“Thanks,” I said. “What I am chiefly interested in, just now, is the chronometer. Do you happen to know when it was last wound, Billy?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the boy; “last Sunday morning. Father used always to wind it every Sunday morning directly after breakfast.”

“Good!” I remarked. “Then everything will be quite all right. And now, bosun, what about berthing me? Where can you stow me?”

“No difficulty at all about that, sir,” answered Enderby. “The Old Man's state-room is the place for you, because his instruments and charts and books are all in there; and, as of course you'll want the place to yourself, Billy can shift over into the mate's state-room, which is also vacant.”

"An excellent suggestion," I remarked.

"All right," agreed Enderby; "then we'll call that settled. Steward!"

And when that functionary appeared the boatswain continued:

"Joe, this is Mr Blackburn, our new skipper. You'll take your orders from him in future; and—Joe, see that things are straightened up in those two state-rooms, the beds made, and so on."

The steward very cheerfully assented, and Enderby and the carpenter then rose to go on deck, quickly followed by myself. The two men went for'ard and joined the little crowd assembled on the fore-castle, to whom, as I of course surmised, they forthwith proceeded to relate what had passed in the cabin. Whatever it may have been, it seemed to afford the hearers satisfaction, for they smiled and nodded approval from time to time, as the story was being told; and when at length it was ended they all came aft and, while one hand hauled down the ensign and stowed it away, another stationed himself at the wheel, and the remainder tailed on to the braces, swung the headyards, boarded the fore-tack, and trimmed the jib and staysail sheets, getting way upon the ship and bringing her to her former course; after which, without waiting for any order from me, they set the port topgallant, topmast, and lower studding-sails. This done, the boatswain and carpenter came aft to where I stood and inquired whether what had been done met with my approval; to which I replied in the affirmative.

"And now, sir, about the watches," remarked Enderby. "Before the night afore last, the mate took the port watch, and I the starboard; but now that the mate's gone, how would it be if I was to take the port and Chips the starboard watch? Would that suit ye, sir?"

"Yes," I said, "that would be an excellent arrangement, I think. By the way, how many do you muster in a watch?"

"Four in each, includin' me and Chips," answered the boatswain.

"Um! none too many, especially considering the part of the world to which you are bound," I remarked. "You will have to keep a sharp eye upon the weather, and call me in good time if you should be in the least doubt as to what you ought to do. Has either of you ever been this way before?"

They had not, it appeared.

"And what about your fore-castle crowd?" I asked. "Are they all good, reliable men? Some of them are foreigners, aren't they?"

"Yes," answered Enderby, lowering his voice and drawing me away from the vicinity of the man at the wheel. "Yes, worse luck, our four A.B.s are all foreigners. Not that I've got anything very special to say against 'em. They're good sailor-men, all of 'em; but the fact is, sir, I don't like bein' shipmates with foreigners; I don't like their ways, and some of 'em has got very nasty tempers. There's Svorenssen, for instance—that big chap with the red hair and beard—he's a Roosian Finn; and he've got a vile temper, and I believe he's an unforgivin' sort of feller, remembers things against a man—if you understand what I mean. Then there's 'Dutchy', as we calls him—that chap that pushed hisself for'ard when we hoisted in your boat—he's an awk'ard feller to get on with, too; hates bein' ordered about, and don't believe in discipline. He and Svorenssen will both be in my watch, and I'll see to it that they minds their P's and Q's. The other two aren't so bad; but they'd be a lot better if Svorenssen and Dutchy was out of the ship."

"Ah, well," I said, "we are five Englishmen to four of them. If they should take it into their heads to be insubordinate I have no doubt we shall know how to deal with them. And now, I should like to have a look at the log-book. I suppose you know where it is kept?"

"Yes," answered Enderby, "the skipper used to keep it in his cabin. Billy'll give it you, and show you all you want to see. He knows where his father kept everything. Oh! and I forgot to mention it, but supper'll be on the table at seven o'clock."

"Righto!" I returned as I wheeled about and headed for the companion.

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## Chapter Four.

### I take Command of the "Yorkshire Lass."

"Billy, my boy, where are you?" I called, as I entered the cabin.

"Here I am, sir," replied the lad, emerging from what had been his father's state-room. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

Billy Stenson was certainly an amusing and very lovable little chap as he stood there before me, alert and bright-eyed, reminding me somehow of a dog asking for a stick to be thrown into the water, that he may show how cleverly he can retrieve it. If Billy had possessed a tail I am certain that at that moment it would have been wagging vigorously.

"Yes, Billy," I said. "I should like to see the ship's log-book. Enderby tells me that you know where it is kept, and can find it for me. And I should like another look at the chart that you showed me a little while ago. Also, if you can put your hand upon that agreement between your father and Mr Barber, I should like to look through it—with any other papers there may be, bearing upon the matter. The story is a very remarkable one, and I feel greatly interested in it."

"Yes, sir," said Billy. "I'll get you the log-book, and the chart, *and* the agreement. And I think you'd like to see Father's diary too, sir. When he met Mr Barber, and they began to talk about goin' huntin' for the treasure, he started to keep a diary, writin' down in it everything that Mr Barber told him about it; and there's a drawin' in it that Mr Barber made—a sort of picture of the place, showing how it looked, so that they might know it when they saw it again."

"Ah!" said I. "I should certainly like to see that diary, if you care to show it me. The perusal of it will be most interesting and will probably tell me all that I want to know."

A few minutes later I was seated at the table, with the chart spread open before me, the log-book open, and the diary at hand, ready for immediate reference. The log-book, however, had nothing to do with the story of the treasure; it simply recorded the daily happenings aboard the brigantine and her position every noon, from the date of her departure from London; and the only interest it had for me was that it enabled me to approximate the position of the ship at the moment of the tragedy. It had been written up to four o'clock in the afternoon of the day on which the tragedy had occurred, while the log slate carried on the story up to midnight. A few minutes sufficed to make me fully acquainted with all that I required to learn from the log-book, and I then laid it aside and turned to the diary.

This document was inscribed in a thick manuscript book, and appeared to have been started about the time when the writer first began seriously to entertain Barber's proposal to join him in a search for the treasure. It opened with a record of the meeting between Barber and the writer, and set forth at some length the story of Barber's destitute condition, and what the writer did to ameliorate it. Then followed, in full detail, Barber's story of his adventure culminating in the discovery of the stranded wreck and the chests of treasure stowed down in her run, with the expression of Barber's conviction that the ship had been a pirate. It also recorded at length the steps which Barber had taken to obtain the necessary data from which to calculate the latitude of the wreck; and it was the ingenuity of the man's methods that at last began to impress upon me the conviction that the story might possibly be true, especially as it was illustrated by a sketch—drawn from memory, it is true—showing the appearance of the land from the entrance of the river, very much in the same way that charts are occasionally illustrated for the guidance of the seaman.

This story was succeeded by a record of the successive stages by which the negotiations between the writer and Barber advanced, winding up with a final statement that on such and such a date an agreement had been drawn up in duplicate and signed by the contracting parties, whereby Stenson was to bear the entire cost of the expedition—recouping himself, so far as might be, by securing freights along the route, Barber undertaking to discharge the duties of mate during the voyage, without pay; the proceeds of such treasure as might be found to be equally divided between the two men.

The perusal of the diary fully occupied me right up to the moment when the steward entered to lay the table for supper; and when I had finished it I found myself regarding the adventure with very different eyes from those which I had turned upon it to start with. To be perfectly frank, when I first heard the yarn I had not a particle of faith in the existence of the treasure, and quite set down the late skipper as a credulous fool for risking his hard-earned money in such a hare-brained speculation; but after reading the story as set out *in extenso* and with a very great wealth of detail, I felt by no means sure that skipper Stenson, very far from being the credulous fool that I had originally supposed him to be, might not prove to have been an exceedingly shrewd and wide-awake person. In a word, I had begun to believe in the truth of the story of the treasure, strange and incredible as it had seemed at first hearing.

And this change of view on my part involved a corresponding change in my attitude toward the adventure. My conversation with Enderby and Johnson over the tea-table had left upon my mind the impression that I had been invited by them, as representatives of the entire crew, to act as navigator and assist in every possible way to secure the treasure, my remuneration for this service to be one share of half the value of the amount of treasure obtained. Now, Barber had expressed the opinion that this value was to be reckoned in *millions*; but, the eight chests notwithstanding, I regarded this estimate as enormously exaggerated, the result, probably, of ignorance of values on Barber's part. Nevertheless, assuming the value to be very considerably less, say half a million—and I believed it might possibly amount to that—only a very simple calculation was needed to show that if this sum were divided by two, and one of those parts were awarded to Billy, as skipper Stenson's heir, the remaining sum of one quarter of a million divided into eleven equal parts—there being eleven prospective participants, including myself—would yield to each participant nearly twenty-three thousand pounds; a sum very well worth trying for. Viewing the matter in all its bearings I finally came to the conclusion that, regarding it merely as a speculation, it might be quite worth my while to throw in my lot with these men.

The project certainly had its allurements, for it must be remembered that I was then young enough to be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of adventure. I was poor, and even the bare possibility of making over twenty thousand pounds in a few months very powerfully appealed to me; and finally, if I rejected this chance and made the best of my way back home, there was the possibility that I might be out of employment for a considerable period, while at best I could hope for nothing better than another billet as fourth officer in a Planet boat. In fine, the more I considered the boatswain's proposal, the better I liked it; but at the same time some inward monitor whispered that it would be wise not to manifest too keen a readiness to fall in with the men's proposals.

While these reflections were passing through my mind I noticed that the steward, in laying the table for supper, was laying for one person only—myself. But while this arrangement had its advantages, it also had certain disadvantages which I regarded as outweighing the former. I therefore bade him lay for the boatswain and the carpenter as well; for I had sense enough to recognise the importance of keeping my finger upon the pulse of the crew, so to speak, and I knew that this could best be done by means of little confidential chats with the boatswain and Chips, who were the men's representatives.

The steward presently brought along from the galley the chief ingredients of the supper, consisting of a pot of piping hot cocoa and a dish of steaming "lobscouse", to be followed, he informed me, by a jam tart. Then I sent Billy up on

deck to find Enderby and bid him come to supper in the cabin.

During the progress of the meal the conversation was of a general character, consisting chiefly of discussions concerning the weather, the behaviour of the ship under various circumstances, and the relation of certain not very interesting incidents connected with the voyage. But after we had finished, and Chips had come down to take his supper while Enderby took over the charge of the deck, the boatswain fell into step alongside me as I paced fore and aft, enjoying the unwonted luxury of a pipe.

"There's just one p'int in what was said at tea-time, Mr Blackburn," he remarked, "that I feels a bit hazy about, and that I haven't been able to make quite clear to the men. You remember that when I spoke about you navigatin' the ship for us, you said you'd be willin' to do it *so far as the nearest port*. That's about what it was, isn't it?"

"Yes," I replied. "That is what I said."

"So I thought," concurred the boatswain. "Well, sir," he continued, "do that mean that you're unwillin' to take a hand in this here treasure-huntin' game with us?"

"Oh, as to that," I said, "I really have not had time to consider the matter, as yet. Besides, I do not quite know what it is that you men propose. Let me know that, and I will give the matter my most careful consideration."

"Ay, ay, yes, of course; that's quite right," agreed Enderby. "I'll have a talk to the chaps for'ard, and hear what they've got to say about it. And—about that 'nearest port' that you mentioned, sir, had ye got any particular port in your mind's eye?"

"N-o, I can scarcely say that I had," I returned—"or if I had, it was probably Port Louis, Mauritius. But all my ideas are very hazy thus far, you must understand, for at the present moment I do not know where the ship is, and I shall be unable to discover her position until I can take the requisite sights. Then we will have out the chart, prick off our position, and discuss the matter further."

"Yes, sir; thank 'e," answered Enderby. "And that'll be some time to-morrow, I s'pose?"

"Certainly," I agreed; "some time to-morrow—unless of course the sky should be obscured by cloud, preventing the taking of the necessary observations. But I think we need not seriously fear anything of that kind."

"No, sir, no; not much fear of that," agreed Enderby; and therewith he trundled away for'ard and joined a little group of men who seemed to be somewhat impatiently awaiting him.

It was a pleasant evening. The sun was on the point of setting, and the western sky was a magnificent picture of massed clouds ablaze with the most brilliant hues of gold, scarlet, crimson, and purple, while the zenith was a vast dome of purest, richest ultramarine. A fresh breeze was blowing steadily out from about west-sou'-west, and there was a long and rather high swell, overrun by seas just heavy enough to break in squadrons of creaming foam-caps that would have meant an anxious night for me had I still been adrift in the life-boat. Apart from those white foam-caps the ocean was a wide expanse of deepest sapphire blue, over which the brigantine was rolling and plunging at a speed of fully eight knots, her taut rigging humming like an Aeolian harp with the sweep of the wind through it. For several minutes after Enderby had left me I stood gazing in admiration at the brilliant, exhilarating scene; then, for the mere pleasure of stretching my legs a bit, after being for so long cramped within the confined limits of the life-boat, I started upon a vigorous tramp fore and aft the weather side of the deck, between the wheel grating and the main rigging.

On the following morning, immediately after breakfast, I had a long talk with Enderby, who came aft to lay before me the proposals of the men as to the terms upon which I was to be admitted to partnership in the adventure. These were, in brief, that in consideration of my undertaking the navigation of the ship, I was to receive one-eleventh part of that half of the treasure to be shared among the crew. So far so good; I had no objection to that part of the proposal, but when we came to the question of my status in the ship I learned that the four foreigners insisted upon the brigantine being run upon strictly socialistic lines: there was to be no skipper, no officers, no giving of orders; the ship was to be worked by two committees consisting of the two watches, who were to decide all questions as to making, shortening, or trimming sail, while I was to have no authority whatever, no voice in anything except just the determination of the courses to be steered.

"Well," I demanded, "what have you Englishmen to say to such a proposal?"

"Oh, as to that," said Enderby, "me and Chips is dead against it. We knows as it wouldn't work at all. Fancy me sayin': 'Svorensen, nip up aloft and stow that there to'garns'!' and him turnin' round and sayin': 'If you wants the to'garns'! stowed, nip up and stow it yourself!' Oh no; it wouldn't never do."

"Of course it would not," I returned. "But what do the other Englishmen think of it?"

"Why, I fancy they don't much care, one way or t'other," answered Enderby. "Ye see, sir, they're an ignorant lot, and can easy be talked over by chaps with the gift of the gab, like Svorensen and Van Ryn. They'd be all right if they was left to their selves, and was treated as if they was men and not just dumb cattle at the mercy of a brutal driver; but them Dagoes has a way of talkin' about one man being as good as another that makes ignorant men feel dissatisfied with things the way they are."

"Just so," I returned. "I've been shipmate with that class of man before to-day, and I know from experience what mischief socialistic doctrines can work in a ship's fore-castle—and elsewhere. Now you can go for'ard and explain to the men that if I am to remain in this ship to navigate her and to find the spot where the treasure is supposed to be, I will have no socialism aboard her. The conditions I insist on are that I am to be skipper; that I am to issue such orders

as I may deem necessary for the safety of the ship and the welfare of all hands; and that I am to be obeyed without question or argument of any kind. If the men agree to those conditions, well and good; if not, I shape a course for the nearest port, and leave the ship there."

"Right ye are, sir," returned Enderby; "ye may trust me to put the matter to the chaps in a way that they'll understand; and I don't think as there'll be any trouble to speak of. And if there is, I fancy that me and Chips 'll be able to deal with it."

With that the boatswain walked away forward to convey my ultimatum to the men, who were all gathered on the fore-castle-head, evidently waiting for him, while I turned to Billy, who was standing close by, and said:

"When your father took his sights, Billy, who used to note the chronometer times?"

"Mr Barber, always," answered Billy; "and then he and Father used to work out the calculations together. But if you want anybody to note the times when you are taking your sights, Mr Blackburn, I can do it for you."

"Are you sure you can do it quite accurately?" I asked.

"Quite sure!" asserted Billy. "Just you try me, sir."

"Very well, I will," said I. "Come below, and let me see what you can do."

Billy soon demonstrated that he was to be implicitly trusted in the matter of noting the chronometer times while I took my sights, and, the morning being gloriously fine, I had no difficulty in determining the longitude of the ship, which I found to be 50 degrees 48 minutes 40 seconds East, while a meridian altitude of the sun, taken two hours later, gave our latitude as 34 degrees 26 minutes 15 seconds South. Then I got out the chart of the Indian Ocean, pricked off the ship's position on it, and sat down to consider what should be the next step. For, whether I decided to remain in the ship or to leave her, her position, as now laid down on the chart, showed that a shift of helm would be necessary. It did not take me very long to decide that in any case I would take the ship into Port Louis Harbour, Mauritius, which might be reached in a week, or less if the weather held favourable. Thence I could report to the owners the loss of the *Saturn*. Also, if I decided to quit the *Yorkshire Lass* there, I should have the choice of two routes home, namely by Messageries Maritimes, via Madagascar and the Suez Canal; or by the Union-Castle Line, via Cape Town and the Atlantic. If, on the other hand, the crew acceded to my conditions, and I was to remain in the ship, to call at Port Louis would be deviating but a mere trifle from a straight course for the east end of Sandalwood Island, whence I would pass through Maurissa Strait and go over, as nearly as might be, the ground that Barber was said to have travelled before he struck the spot where he was supposed to have found the treasure.

When at length I went up on deck again, Enderby was waiting for me.

"Well," I said, "have the people for'ard made up their minds what they are going to do? I am rather anxious to know, because upon their decision will depend my final plans."

"It's all right, Mr Blackburn," answered the boatswain. "Them two chaps, Svorensen and Van Ryn, seemed to have quite made up their minds to have things all their own way; but me and Chips soon brought 'em up with a round turn by tellin' all hands what you'd said. Says I: 'Now look here, you chaps. We've got the navigator we wants, and if this here treasure place is to be found you may all bet your boots he'll find it. But he won't have no socialism, no runnin' the ship by committees, nor no nonsense of that sort; he'll be Mister Skipper, and don't none of you forget it! Now, you was all quite satisfied when Cap'n Stenson commanded the ship: what difference do it make to any of you whether it's Stenson or Mr Blackburn what gives the orders? It don't make a hap'orth of difference to e'er a one of ye! Very well, then; me and Chips has been talkin' things over together and we've decided that, havin' been lucky enough to get hold of Mr Blackburn, we ain't goin' to lose 'im because of any socialistic tommy-rot; so if there's anybody here as objects to Mr Blackburn's conditions, let 'im say so, and we'll ask the new skipper to put in somewheres, and we'll shove the dissatisfied ones ashore.'

"There was a fine old rumpus when I said that. The four Dagoes swore as they wasn't goin' to be done out of their share of the treasure for nobody, nor nobody wasn't goin' to put 'em out of the ship; and for a minute or two it looked as though we was goin' to have a mutiny. But we Englishmen all stuck together, the others backin' up me and Chips; and at last, when the Dagoes seen which way the wind was blowin', they give in, and said, all right, we might 'ave our own way, since we seemed so stuck upon it. So there you are, sir; you're our new skipper, and if the Dagoes gets obstropolous we'll just shove 'em ashore, even if we has to maroon 'em."

"I scarcely think it will be necessary to adopt any such extremely drastic step as that," said I. "If the foreigners are made to understand that the rest of you will stand no nonsense from them they will probably settle down quietly enough. If they do not—if they manifest the least inclination to be troublesome—I will put them ashore at Port Louis, Mauritius, at which port I intend to call in any case, that I may report the loss of the *Saturn*, and send certain letters home. It will take us very little out of our way, and if the Dagoes learn that we are going to call in at a British port on our way, it may steady them a bit and help them to see that their wisest plan will be to settle down and behave themselves. Now I am going to shift the helm. Haul up to Nor'-Nor'-East, and take a pull upon the lee braces."

During the ensuing six days we made excellent progress, the brigantine revealing a quite unexpected and most welcome turn of speed, which carried us to Port Louis exactly a week after I had boarded her. We remained there four days, to enable me to dispatch a cablegram home and receive a reply; after which, having meanwhile laid in a good supply of fruit and a little fresh meat, we sailed again, shaping a course for Maurissa Strait.

For the four days following our departure from Port Louis we did well; then the breeze lessened in strength, became baffling, and finally died away altogether, leaving us helplessly becalmed, except when for a few minutes at a time some vagrant draught of air would come stealing along the glassy surface of the sea, imparting to it an evanescent

tint of delicate blue; and then there would be a call upon the watch to man the braces and trim the yards to meet the transient breathing, to the muttered disgust of the men, who could see no advantage in labour that resulted, in many cases, in moving the ship only to the extent of a few fathoms. But it had to be done, for we were on the border-line between the prevailing westerly winds of the Southern Ocean and the south-east Trades, and to get into the latter the ship had to be jockeyed across the intervening belt of calms. A curious fact in connection with this time of trial to our patience—and it was a fact that caused me some anxious speculation—was that the two men, Svorensen and Van Ryn, who, at the outset of my connection with them, seemed most likely to be a source of trouble, were the two who grumbled least at the continual calls to the braces.

It was on the afternoon of the fourth of these trying days that, as we lay becalmed in the middle of a glass-smooth sea, the polished surface became touched here and there with faint, evanescent patches of softest turquoise-blue, appearing for a moment and then vanishing again. They were the “cats-paws” that indicated a momentary stir in the stagnant air, and the appearances of which were always greeted by the foremast hands with execrations, for they meant “box-hauling” the yards—work for what they regarded as a ludicrously inadequate result. But on this occasion the cats-paws, instead of enduring for a few seconds and then being no more seen for hours at a time, lingered for as long, perhaps, as two or three minutes, then passing away only to be succeeded by others coming from the same quarter and enduring a little longer than their predecessors, so continuing until at length we not only got way upon the ship but were able to maintain it during the lessening intervals between one puff and another. Finally a moment arrived when the cats-paws began to merge one into another, while the whole surface of the sea down in the south-eastern quarter lost its hateful mirror-like appearance and donned a tint of faintest, most delicate blue that deepened, even as we watched, creeping steadily down toward us until it reached the ship and, with a last gentle rustle of canvas, she yielded to the impulse of the first breathing of the south-east Trades.

When at length the true breeze reached us it came away out from about South-East by South, enabling us still to lay our course, on the starboard tack, with the braces the merest trifle checked. Once fairly set in, the wind rapidly freshened until, when we of the afterguard went down to supper at seven o'clock that evening, a fiery breeze was humming through our tautened rigging, and the hooker was reeling off her seven knots, with the royal stowed, and a rapidly rising sea foaming under her lee bow.

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## Chapter Five.

### We find the Treasure.

It was a grand evening when, after supper, I went on deck for my usual “constitutional”. The salt, ozone-laden breeze was just cool enough to set one’s blood coursing freely through one’s veins and to fill one with the joy of living; the ship was making good headway; and the sky over our lee quarter was a gorgeous blaze of gold and colour where the sun was sinking in the midst of a galaxy of clouds of the most wonderful forms. It was like a yachting experience.

In those latitudes the glories of the sunset very quickly fade, and with their disappearance night falls upon the scene like the drawing of a curtain. So was it on the evening in question; but I had grown accustomed to those rapid nightfalls, and for a few minutes I, immersed in my own thoughts, was quite unaware of anything unusual in our surroundings. As the darkness deepened around us, however, it suddenly occurred to me that there was something strange in the appearance of the water; instead of its colour deepening under the shadow of night, as usual, it seemed to be becoming lighter, as though it was being diluted with increasing quantities of milk, until, as I stood and watched it, wondering, it became, first of all, snow-white, and then, as the darkness continued to deepen and the stars appeared, the entire ocean, from horizon to horizon, became a sea of luminous, molten silver, the weird, unearthly beauty of which there are no words to describe. Yet, beautiful as it was, the unusual, almost unique character of the phenomenon invested it with an awe-inspiring element that was not very far removed from terror, especially for the men on the forecastle, whose anxious glances aft, and restless, agitated movements sufficiently proclaimed their apprehension.

Presently Chips, who was in charge of the watch and who had been padding fore and aft on the lee side of the after-deck, crossed over and remarked:

“What’s the matter with the water to-night, Mr Blackburn? Boy and man I’ve used the sea a good twenty year and more, and never have I seen a sight like this. Do it signify anything particular, think ye?”

“Nothing beyond a most unusual and exceedingly beautiful state of phosphorescence,” I replied. “I have not used the sea for anything like so long a time as yourself, but I have seen something of the same kind once before, though nothing like so brilliant and beautiful as this. And it was not so very far from this spot that I saw it, while making the run from Cape Town to Melbourne. It is due to the presence, in quite unusual numbers, of the animalculae which produce the appearance of phosphorescence in the water; but while under ordinary circumstances those animalculae are only present in sufficient numbers to cause the usual appearance of stars and luminous clouds in agitated water, they are present here to-night in such incalculable myriads that the light they emit, instead of being more or less detached, is merged into one uniform blaze of the beautiful silvery radiance which we see. It may last for several hours yet, but sooner or later it will become normal again.”

My explanation seemed to afford Chips considerable relief, and he presently sauntered away for’ard, with the evident intention of allaying the apprehensions of the forecastle hands; while my prognostication as to the ending of the phenomenon was verified about an hour later.

There now ensued a full month and more during which we steadily plodded our way across the Indian Ocean, close-hauled day after day, with nothing more eventful than the occasional capture of a shark, or a capful of wind, to break the somewhat wearisome monotony of the voyage, during which I devoted an hour or two every day to the



improvement of Master Billy Stenson's education; also giving a considerable amount of study to the late skipper's diary, in the endeavour to arrive at some sort of conclusion as to the whereabouts of the spot where Barber's alleged treasure was to be looked for. Taking Barber's determination of the latitude of the place, 3 degrees 50 minutes South, as being approximately correct, I ruled a pencil line representing that parallel right across the chart and noted the various islands that it crossed. Then, marking the spot where the man had been turned adrift by the Dutch skipper, I strove to trace the course over which the boat had drifted, taking into consideration the prevailing winds and currents, as set forth in the Sailing Directions; and in this way I ultimately arrived at the conclusion that the spot we were seeking would be found somewhere between the meridians of 125 degrees and 135 degrees east longitude. Still assuming Barber's story to be true, I reasoned that the fact of the stranded ship having remained so long where she was, apparently unvisited and uninterfered with—until the Englishman's arrival upon the scene—argued that she was to be found on an island not only uninhabited but also very rarely visited; and reasoning thus I was at length enabled to make a fairly shrewd guess as to the most likely direction in which to look for her; and in that direction I accordingly headed the ship.

It was about a month after our passage through Maurissa Strait that, as we were working to windward against a light and fickle breeze, land was sighted about three points on the weather bow. The time was close upon eight bells in the afternoon watch, and the land sighted was a mere dot of faintest blue showing just clear of the horizon. I had been anticipating its appearance at any moment since I had worked out my sights at noon and pricked off the ship's position on the chart, for the spot of which we were in search was no unknown, mysterious island. Careful study of Barber's narrative, as recorded in the late Skipper Stenson's diary, had convinced me that the island was quite well known and had been more or less thoroughly surveyed; and exhaustive study of the diary and the chart combined had finally led me to the conclusion that if the treasure really existed it would be found not very far from the peak that had just hove in sight. But of that I should perhaps be better able to judge when I could see a little more of it. I therefore took the ship's telescope out of the beackets where it hung in the companion, and, slinging it over my shoulder, made my way up to the royal yard, where I seated myself comfortably and, steadying the tube of the instrument against the masthead, brought it to bear upon the land to windward. From my elevated position this now showed as a steep cone of moderate height rising from one extremity of a long range of lofty hills running away in a south-easterly direction until they sank below the horizon.

So far, so good; the contours of the distant land, as revealed by the lenses of the telescope, agreed in a general way fairly accurately with a sketch—made from memory by Barber—in the late skipper's diary, illustrating a passage descriptive of the appearance of the treasure country as it had appeared to the man upon his departure from it. If, as we drew nearer, a certain arrangement of white rocks outcropping on the hill-side immediately below the cone should reveal itself, I should then know, beyond all possibility of doubt, that I had found the spot of which we were in search. But this condition of certainty could not possibly be arrived at before the morrow, at the earliest, for the land was quite fifty miles away, it was dead to windward, and the ship—working up against a light breeze—was approaching it at the rate of less than a knot an hour.

Happily for our impatience, matters shortly afterwards improved somewhat, for with the setting of the sun the breeze freshened, and by the end of the second dog-watch we were slashing away to windward at a fine rate, reeling off our eight knots per hour, with the royal stowed. The breeze held all through the night, and when I went on deck at eight o'clock on the following morning the cone that I had viewed through the telescope on the previous evening was only some fifteen or sixteen miles distant, broad on the weather bow, and the arrangement of white rocks on the hill-side—five of them forming a vertical line—which the diary assured me was the distinguishing mark by which I might identify the spot for which I was searching—was clearly visible in the lenses of the telescope, while the mouth of the estuary was about five miles ahead.

"Yes," I said to Enderby, who was standing beside me as I closed the instrument, "we are all right—so far; the opening to the nor'ard of that curious hummock is the mouth of the estuary into which Barber drifted while in a state of delirium, and the stranded hulk which is supposed to contain the treasure stands, according to him, somewhere on the southern shore. We shall have to make short boards along that southern shore, keeping a sharp look-out for anything in the nature of a stranded craft, anchor abreast it, and go ashore and give it a careful overhaul. Thus far it looks as though there might be some truth in the man's story. I have no longer any doubt that Barber actually entered that estuary; but I shall still have to see that wreck before I am finally convinced of her existence. Barber was admittedly crazy when he landed yonder, and for all that we know to the contrary he may have remained crazy all the time that he was there, and have imagined the whole thing."

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed the boatswain, in consternation, "you surely don't mean to say, sir, that after all this time you still has doubts about the truth of that there treasure yarn, do ye? If we don't find that wrack there'll be the dickens to pay in the forecabin. The men—especially them Dagoes—'ll be that disapp'inted that there's no knowin' what game they may try to play."

"How—what do you mean, boatswain?" I demanded sharply.

"Well, Mr Blackburn," he returned, "what I means is that if we don't find the wrack the chaps'll be so disapp'inted that, in their rage, they may rise upon us, the afterguard, and try to take the ship from us."

"What good would that do them?" I demanded. "If they were to attempt so foolish a thing, and were to succeed, what could they do with the ship? I suppose even they—dolts as they would prove themselves in such an event as you mention—would not be idiots enough to suppose that they could compensate for their disappointment by becoming pirates, eh?"

"Blest if I know what they mightn't believe if Svorensen and the two Dutchmen got talkin' to 'em," asserted the boatswain. "They're wonderful talkers, all three of 'em, and they're everlastin'ly gassin' about one man bein' as good as another, and freedom, and the rights of man—you know, sir, the sort of slush that such chaps spouts, and that the shellback swallows as greedily as he would a pannikin of egg-flip!"

"Yes," I said, "I know. I have heard it all, over and over again, until I have been sick and tired of listening to it; and I have wondered how it is that sensible, level-headed British sailors, even though they may not have had very much education, can swallow and believe in such froth. However, I am very glad that you have mentioned the matter; I will keep my weather eye lifting, and at the very first sign of trouble I'll act, and to some purpose, too."

"That's right, sir; I hopes you will," approved Enderby. "And if action should ever be needful you may depend upon me and Chips to back ye up. In the meantime I'll keep my eyes and ears open, too, and let you know directly I sees any signs of trouble brewin'."

When I descended to the cabin, a few minutes later, in response to the steward's summons to breakfast, I found Billy Stenson already seated at the table. Billy, I should explain, had, within two days of my arrival aboard the *Yorkshire Lass*, been promoted from the position of pantry-boy to that of passenger, in virtue of the fact that, through his father's death, he had become the owner of the brigantine and the inheritor of all prospective profits which might accrue in respect of the present highly speculative voyage; he had also become my pupil, I having undertaken to ground him in the rudiments of navigation.

"Good morning, Billy," I said. "Do you happen to know whether there are any firearms, or weapons of any sort, aboard here?"

"Yes, Mr Blackburn," replied the lad. "When Father and Mr Barber agreed upon this voyage they decided that they ought to have the means of defending the ship, if necessary, and so Father bought a dozen rifles with bayonets, and three brace of navy revolvers, with a good supply of ammunition for both kinds of firearms. They're in two cases, down in the lazarette."

"Do the men for'ard know they're aboard?" I asked.

"Oh no, sir, I don't think so," answered the lad. "They came aboard and were stored away a week or more before the crew was shipped."

"Good!" I commented. Then, turning to Enderby, who also was present, I said: "What you said on deck, a little while ago, suggests to me that it will be a wise thing to have those cases up out of the lazarette without further delay. We'll open them, give their contents an overhaul, and clean and oil them, ready for immediate use, if need be. We may not require them, but if on the other hand we should, the need will probably be so urgent that there will then be no time for preparation. We will have them up immediately after breakfast."

Upon my return to the deck I found that we were just entering the estuary, the mouth of which was about three miles wide, the shore on either side being quite low, with, here and there, narrow strips of beach composed of sand and gravel. The low, flat shore on either side of the inlet was backed by ranges of hills extending inland as far as the eye could see, but whereas the low, flat country between the shore and the base of the hills was less than a mile wide on the northern bank, it ranged from five to twelve miles wide on the southern side. The soil was everywhere grass-clad, the grass seeming to be very luxuriant and about three feet high, while dotted about pretty thickly all over the plains were clumps of palmetto, palms, trees of various kinds—some of which would probably be the fruit-trees that had restored Barber to life—and big clumps of bamboo and scrub. I anticipated that it would be among those clumps of scrub that we should eventually find the treasure hulk, if indeed the craft actually existed and was not the figment of a madman's imagination; and I also foresaw that our search for the hulk might easily be a very much more arduous and protracted affair than I had anticipated, for it appeared to me that every one of those clumps big enough to conceal the hull of a five-hundred-ton hulk ought to be examined. There was no need, however, for us to begin our search quite at once, for we were only entering the estuary, whereas, according to Barber's account, the hulk lay some six or eight miles from the entrance. This assumed distance was of course a very vague and unreliable guide, and I therefore determined to take the ship up the inlet about five miles, anchor her, and commence our search at that point, gradually working our way upward. Meanwhile, the wind had come away far enough out from the southward to enable us to hug the southern shore as closely as we pleased; consequently although the breeze was light we made good progress, and within an hour had reached a point at which, I decided, our quest might very well begin. We therefore anchored, furled all canvas, hoisted out the jolly-boat, and, making up a search-party consisting of the four foreigners, Enderby, and myself, went ashore and began our hunt for a craft in the existence of which I had little or no belief.

Our chief difficulty was that we had no bearings to guide us. I concluded that at the time of Barber's visit he was destitute of all means to make notes or records of any kind, for his story was set down entirely from memory, and was singularly barren of all information but that of the most general character; there were no little illuminating details to tell us whether we were or were not nearing our goal. The one solitary fact from which I could draw a useful deduction was that, at the time of Barber's arrival in the estuary, he was very ill and weak, yet despite his feeble condition he was able to reach certain trees, the fruit of which restored him to health. Now, from that fact I deduced the inference that the particular fruit-trees to which Barber owed his restoration must of necessity be at no great distance from the beach, otherwise the man would not have had strength to reach them; hence, to find the spot at or near which Barber landed, we must look for a part of the plain where trees were growing within, say, two or three hundred yards of the water's edge. There was just one such clump abreast the spot where we had anchored, apart from which I could see no others anything like so near the beach for a distance of fully a mile to the eastward.

I confess that I entered upon this treasure-hunt hampered by a very strong feeling of doubt. Of course I had ocular evidence of the existence of such a place as Barber had described as that where the treasure was to be found, for there it was, visibly before me. I was also prepared to lend credence to the story of the stranded hulk, strange as that story might seem, for I actually had personal knowledge of even stranger happenings than that; but it was the existence of the treasure itself—those steel-bound chests packed with gold, silver, and gems—that I doubted. According to Barber's own story he was crazy when he drifted into the estuary, and, although he may not have known it, he perhaps remained crazy all the time he was there; and if it was indeed true that he had stumbled upon a

stranded ancient hulk, that very fact may have so excited his disordered brain as to cause him to imagine the treasure. Looking back at the episode now, after the lapse of years, that, it appears to me, was very much my mental attitude with regard to it; yet, my doubts notwithstanding, I was determined to leave no stone unturned to test Barber's story to the uttermost; consequently when, late in the afternoon of the following day, we actually came upon the hulk, my chief feeling was one of surprise.

There was nothing whatever of an exciting or dramatic character in the circumstances connected with our discovery; it was all absolutely commonplace; we were not even molested by natives, of whom we saw no sign from first to last. Having thoroughly searched, without result, the entire area of the flat country for a space of eight or nine square miles immediately opposite the spot where the brigantine was first anchored, we got under way again and, under fore-and-aft canvas only, moved the ship some three miles farther up the estuary, intently studying the country on our starboard hand, meanwhile, through the ship's telescope, on the look-out for any object suggestive of a stranded hulk overgrown with creepers. And it was in this way that we found her, the telescope enabling us to identify her at a distance of fully a mile.

Arrived abreast of her, we again anchored the brigantine, and the same search-party, under my command, once more landed and walked straight to the hulk.

She lay high and dry, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the beach, a dismantled craft of some seven hundred tons burden, built on the lines of the old Spanish galleon, with a low bow and forecastle and a lofty stern and after-castle; the great flat stern embellished with much carving and the remains of a gallery, and surmounted by the iron frames of three big poop lanterns. No doubt she had once presented a very gallant picture of paintwork and gilding, traces of which were discoverable about her here and there, but, apart from these, her whole exterior had been reduced by sun and rain to a uniform tint of neutral grey, except where moss and fungus had taken hold of her.

We boarded her without difficulty; but no sooner had we arrived below than we found ample confirmation of Barber's statement as to her rottenness, for, what with dry-rot and white ants, her deck planking and beams had become the merest shells of wood, yielding freely in places to the pressure of a man's weight, so that, in order to avoid accidents, we had to move about aboard her with the utmost circumspection.

What was very much more to the point, however, was that we found not only the ship but also the eight big chests of treasure, exactly as described by Barber in the yarn given in the late skipper's diary. They had all been broken open; but their contents appeared to be intact, and as I very carefully examined them I arrived at the conclusion that they



had never been touched since Barber himself had left them to go in search of the assistance he needed in order to secure possession of their contents.

The discovery of the chests and, still more, the sight of their contents was naturally productive of the utmost excitement, and, also quite naturally, it at once roused all the greed that was latent in our natures. So far as Enderby and I were concerned we were quite able to control ourselves; but no sooner did the four Dagoes set eyes upon the gold coins with which one of the chests was filled than they threw themselves upon that chest, as starving wolves might throw themselves upon a carcass, and proceeded to stuff their pockets with coin. This, of course, could not possibly be permitted, and Enderby and I, drawing our revolvers, compelled the quartette to replace in the chest every coin they had snatched; but they yielded only under compulsion, and with snarls, growls, and muttered menaces which were only silenced by my threat to maroon them on the spot if they showed the least sign of a

disposition to give further trouble.

The transfer of those eight heavy steel-bound chests with their contents was a trying job, but nothing would induce the men to leave a single one of them where they were for another night; they insisted on being allowed to stick to their task until it was completed; and, by dint of such strenuous effort as probably none of them had ever before exerted, the task was completed a few minutes after sunset; following upon which I caused the whole to be securely fastened up and struck down into the lazarette. The forenoon of the next day was spent ashore gathering an abundant stock of such fruits as the place afforded; and immediately after dinner the jolly-boat was hoisted in, the anchor hove up, and the *Yorkshire Lass* stood out to sea.

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## Chapter Six.

### Caught in a Typhoon.

Those who have never enjoyed the experience of suddenly coming upon a treasure of enormous value, a substantial share of which one knows will one day be one's own, will naturally suppose that the crew of the *Yorkshire Lass* would be one of the happiest and most contented little communities on the face of the earth. And assuredly they ought to have been, in so far at least as the prospective possession of great wealth can confer happiness; for, little as any of us knew of the actual value of the treasure we had so easily obtained, we knew enough to feel assured that, when the time for division should arrive, we should each be rich enough to be independent, for the rest of our lives, of any need to work for a living. But, on the contrary, as a matter of fact the acquisition of the treasure gave rise to a condition of restiveness and discontent that caused me grave uneasiness.

Not that I was greatly surprised. From the moment when I first climbed in over the brigantine's rail from the *Saturn's* life-boat I recognised that the presence of the four Dagoes in the ship's company was likely to breed discord, but it was not until I witnessed the mad covetousness with which they flung themselves upon the chest containing coin, and proceeded to help themselves regardless of the rights of us others, that I actually began to scent real, serious trouble; for I then foresaw that, having once glimpsed the treasure, those men would never more be content until it was actually theirs to squander in the debauchery that they called pleasure.

The trouble which I anticipated developed within twenty-four hours of our departure from the estuary, first taking the form of a demand, on the part of the six seamen in the forecabin, that the division of the treasure should be effected forthwith; and when I pointed out that, owing to the impossibility of justly valuing such articles as gold and silver candlesticks, salvers, bowls, cups, caskets, jewelled crosses, articles of jewellery and gems, such a division as they desired was out of the question, they insisted that the ship should forthwith be taken to the nearest civilised port, in order that the treasure might be turned into money, and the division effected. To this I replied that only in London would it be possible to obtain anything approaching fair value for so enormous a treasure as ours, therefore to London I intended to take it; whereupon the Dagoes became so violently insubordinate that forcible measures had to be resorted to, and a very pretty fight ensued between them on the one hand, and the boatswain, carpenter, and myself on the other before we succeeded in putting the quartette in irons and dumping them down upon the ballast in the main hold, where, I informed them, they would remain until they should show unmistakable signs of having come to their senses. Such resolute action, coupled with the fact that during their confinement their food consisted solely of coarse ship biscuit and water, soon brought the insubordinate ones to their bearings, a message of unconditional surrender being brought from them to me within thirty-six hours of their confinement, promising good behaviour in the future if I would release them and permit them to return to duty.

Naturally I was more than willing to accept the olive branch thus held out, for the absence from duty of four able seamen out of our little company left the ship perilously undermanned, and would have involved us in serious difficulties, might indeed have imperilled the safety of the ship, had we fallen in with bad weather. Fortunately, however, the weather, for the first week after our departure from the estuary, proved to be almost too fine for our liking, consisting as it did of light, baffling contrary airs, interspersed with spells of calm; thus the temporary confinement below of the four foreigners proved of no disadvantage to us, although I was heartily glad to have them back on duty again. Nevertheless it soon became apparent that their reformation was, like beauty, only skin-deep, and that at heart they were as ready as ever to give trouble.

The exceptionally fine weather, to which I have just referred, continued for nearly a month, during which, with much pulling and hauling at tacks, sheets, and braces, we contrived to jockey the brigantine fairly into the Pacific, where I intended to hunt up a cargo of copra, sandalwood, and shell on the way home.

But such an extraordinarily long spell of fine weather as we had been experiencing was bound to break, sooner or later, and the break came during the afternoon of our twenty-seventh day out. The barometer, which for nearly three weeks had been standing well above thirty inches, gave us the first warning of the coming change by an ominously rapid decline of the mercury, which was quickly succeeded by a subtle veiling of the sky, the clear, rich blue of which gradually changed to a uniform tint of dirty white, in the midst of which the sun hung a mere shapeless blotch. The light breeze that during the earlier part of the day had been fanning us along at a scant three knots, died away, leaving the surface of the sea oil-smooth and colourless, while the stagnant air grew so hot that we literally felt the heat of it in our nostrils with every breath we drew. The *quality* of the air seemed to change, too, rendering it difficult to breathe, so that we found ourselves gasping for breath at frequent intervals, while perspiration poured from us in streams that we could distinctly feel trickling down our bodies and limbs. So enervating were the conditions that none of us cared to make the slightest unnecessary movement; yet the steady decline of the mercury was a warning that I dared not ignore. Accordingly, at eight bells in the afternoon watch, when Enderby took charge of the deck, I showed him the barometer, expressed the conviction that we were in for a typhoon, and instructed him to set all hands to the task of stripping the ship to a close-reefed topsail, reefed fore topmast-staysail, and close-reefed main trysail.

When the boatswain went for'ard and gave the necessary orders, the men received them, as I had quite expected, with black looks, muttered curses, and inarticulate growls; but the sight of Chips and me lowering and stowing the big mainsail while they surlily slouched about the deck, letting go halliards, clewing up and hauling down; and perhaps, more than all, the aspect of the heavens, conveying a message that no man could misinterpret, caused them somewhat to modify their attitude, and by four bells the ship was as nearly ready for what might come as we could make her.

But our preparations were completed not a moment too soon, for we were in a latitude where twilight is unknown, and with the disappearance of the sun below the horizon there closed down upon us a darkness that might literally be felt, for any attempt to move about the decks, well as we believed ourselves to be acquainted with them, resulted in constant collisions with unexpected obstacles.

This bewildering state of affairs continued until shortly after five bells in the first watch, when we became aware that the atmosphere was being subtly and gradually suffused with ruddy light, coming from we knew not where. The change was so gradual that it was impossible to say just when it began, but within half an hour of our first perception of it the light had grown so strong that not only were we able to move about freely without running foul of things but, standing aft by the useless wheel and looking forward, every detail of the ship's hull, spars, sails, and rigging stood out clearly and sharply, like a silhouette cut out of black paper, against a background of shining oil-smooth water and dense masses of twisting and writhing cloud-shapes all reflecting the weird, mysterious ruddy light. It was an awe-inspiring phenomenon, strongly suggestive of the supernatural, and from the uneasy glances that were directed aft from the forecabin it was not difficult to surmise that none of the men had ever before beheld anything like it. Neither had we of the afterguard, for that matter, and I have no doubt that I should have been very much more seriously alarmed than I was at the spectacle, had I not read somewhere the description of a hurricane that had been similarly heralded. As it was, I was by no means happy at the prospect of what was in store for us, asking myself uneasily whether quite all had been done that it was possible to do to prepare the ship for the impending ordeal. There was but one thing I could think of, and that was to order all the scuttles to be securely closed, and this was at once done, although it rendered the cabins insupportably hot and close. Of course I should have liked to send down the royal and topgallant yards, and to have housed the fore topgallant mast and main topmast, and I would have attempted it had we had a decently willing crew; but I doubted whether the Dagoes would have undertaken the job, except under compulsion; and I was unwilling to engage in a tussle with a crowd of insubordinates with a hurricane threatening to burst upon us at any moment.

Naturally, under the circumstances I never dreamed of turning in; nor did any of the others, for that matter, the boatswain and Chips keeping me company aft, while a glance for'ard showed that even the forecabin bunch, jealous as they were of their "rights", preferred for once in a way to spend their watch below on deck. Shortly after midnight the weird, ruddy light began to fade, indicating that the crisis was approaching. I accordingly sent the boy Billy below, secured the companion doors, and closed the slide, knowing this to be one of the ship's most vulnerable points in a heavy sea, such as one might expect when the gale should burst upon us, and thereafter there was nothing more to be done but to abide events.

It was about half an hour later, and the light had almost entirely faded, when we got our first distinct warning to "stand by". It came in the form of a sudden scurry of wind, apparently from nowhere in particular, that swept, whining and moaning, over the ship, causing the canvas to flap violently—and then it was gone. This occurred perhaps half a dozen times, each gust lasting a few seconds longer and being perceptibly stronger than the one which preceded it, smiting the canvas with such violence that I quite expected to see it fly out of the bolt-ropes, while the brigantine, being only in ballast, rocked and staggered like a drunken man. Fortunately, there remained just light enough to enable us to trace the direction from which those tornadoes came. With their help, therefore, Chips and I, who at once sprang to the wheel, managed to get the ship's head round before the hurricane itself struck us, Enderby going for'ard to stand by on the forecabin.

It announced its approach by a low, weird, unearthly moaning that with terrifying rapidity swelled to a deafening compound of the shrieking yell of the swooping wind and the hiss of the tempest-lashed sea as it rushed, in the form of a wall of ghastly, heaped-up, phosphorescent foam stretching from horizon to horizon, straight down upon the ship. The spectacle of that unbridled outburst of elemental fury was awe-inspiring beyond the power of words to describe, but it was terrifying too, as was evidenced by Chips' remark, a moment before the gale struck us. Leaning over toward me as we stood on opposite sides of the wheel, he yelled:

"Good-bye, sir! This is the finish. The ship ain't built that could weather such an outfly as this!"

And I felt very much inclined to agree with him. To me it seemed impossible that any combination of wood and metal, the work of men's hands, however cunningly fashioned and deftly put together, could withstand such a frenzied onslaught as that which was about to burst upon us.

Another instant and we were within the hurricane's clutches. With a yell of indescribable fury the blast struck us, and as the storm-wave boiled in over our taffrail and swept along the deck, filling it to the level of the rail and taking with it in its rush for'ard every movable thing in its way, I saw the storm trysail fill, with a terrific jerk of the doubled sheets, and then go flying away out of the bolt-ropes like a sheet of tissue paper. Whether or not the remainder of our canvas had withstood the strain I could not for the moment determine, for I was up to the armpits in the surging water, pinned by it and the pressure of the wind so hard up against the wheel that I momentarily expected to feel my breast-bone collapse under the pressure. Luckily the gale came up square astern, and hit us end-on; luckily, also, we were in ballast, and the ship was therefore quite lively; nevertheless I felt the hull under my feet tremble perceptibly under the tremendous strain to which it was subjected as the wind and sea smote her, and for a few breathless moments I believed she was foundering under us. Then, as she gradually freed herself of the water that flooded her decks, she gathered way and went foaming off before the gale like a mad thing.

The next occurrence of which I was clearly conscious was that Chips was again leaning over toward me and shouting:

"My God! Mr Blackburn, that was a narrer squeak, if ever there was one! If anybody had told me that the old hooker would have stood it, I wouldn't ha' believed 'em. But I think we're all right now, so long as we can keep her runnin' afore it, if only the spars and riggin' 'll stand the strain. But what about what's ahead of us, sir? Is there anything that we're likely to run foul of?"

"Nothing, so far as I know," answered I. "The chart shows a clear sea for some hundreds of miles to the eastward; and before we have run that distance the gale will have blown itself out. But there is Enderby trying to claw his way aft. I wonder what news he has for us."

The unnatural, ruddy light in the sky had by this time quite died out, but it was replaced by a faint, ghostly sheen emitted by the foaming surface of the wind-scourged sea, and by this feeble radiance it was just possible to discern the burly form of the boatswain laboriously clawing aft along the port bulwarks against the tremendous pressure of the wind. Presently he reached us and seated himself upon the wheel grating at my feet, gasping and panting for breath.

"Well, Enderby," I shouted, "what's the news from the fore end of the ship? Did the sea that pooped us do any damage?"

"Not so much as might ha' been expected," returned the boatswain. "The jolly-boat's clean gone; the life-boat's a wreck; the to'gallant bulwark, both sides, is gone, for'ard of the fore riggin'; the staysail blowed out of the bolt-ropes directly the gale struck us; and—worst of all—we've lost three of our little crowd."

"Lost!" I ejaculated. "What d'ye mean, man?"

"Just what I says, Mr Blackburn," answered the boatswain. "We've lost three hands—Van Haalst, Mendal, and Manning. The sea that broke aboard us must have took 'em unawares and swept 'em over the bows, for they was on deck before we was swept, and when she cleared herself they was gone!"

"Jove! that's bad news indeed," said I. "We were short-handed enough before, but we shall be worse off than ever now. And they were all good men, too; we can ill spare them."

"Ay," agreed Enderby; "there's others that we could better have spared, if some of 'em had to go. But as to them bein' good men—well, they was good enough sailor-men, I won't deny, but if we'd lost 'em any other way than bein' drowned—if they'd cut and run, for instance—I wouldn't ha' grieved overmuch at the loss of the two Dagoes."

Thereupon we fell silent, for to out-shout the yell of the wind and the roar of the sea was no easy matter; moreover the loss of those three men set me thinking, and on top of that the ship needed most careful watching, for, in light trim as she was, there were moments when the rudder seemed to lose control of her, and then it taxed our skill and strength to the utmost to prevent her broaching to, which would have meant the end of her and of all hands.

I shall never forget that night, so long as I live. Never before had I known it blow anything like so hard; the wind smote one like something solid and with such tremendous force that to have stood up, unsupported, against the pressure of it, would have been impossible. If it had been blowing, say, half as hard as it actually was, there would have been a terrific sea running, but, far from this being the case, the surface of the ocean was as flat as a billiard-table, the slightest roughness being instantly seized by the wind and swept away to leeward in the form of scud-water.

Then there was the appalling unnatural darkness, through which the ship was rushing at a speed which I am certain she had never before attained. The only mitigating circumstance was that the wind-lashed sea emitted a certain ghostly radiance that, despite the deluge of spindrift and scud-water with which the air was saturated, enabled one dimly to discern objects as far forward as the foremast. But to rush, at the speed at which we were travelling, into the heart of that pitchy blackness was nerve-racking work, for although the chart assured us that we had a clear sea for some hundreds of miles ahead, there were still such possibilities as derelicts to be reckoned with, and under such circumstances as I have been endeavouring to describe, if an obstacle of any sort should happen to be in our way, to avoid it would be a sheer impossibility, while to strike it would mean for us simply—destruction.

I was anxiously considering the chance of such an eventuality when another terrific gust swooped down upon us; the ship trembled and lurched forward as though she were about to plunge to the bottom and have done with it; I heard a loud "crack" behind me, and simultaneously received a terrible blow on the back of the head; then—oblivion.

A dull, aching, throbbing pain at the back of my head was the sensation of which I was first conscious upon awaking from what seemed to have been a sleep haunted by innumerable harrowing nightmares. Then, before I had time to fully realise that I was once more awake and free from the torment of those dreadful nightmares, I became aware of two things; first, that a soft, warm, salt-laden breeze was gently fanning my face and affording me much refreshment, and next, that the air was vibrant with the deep, booming thunder of heavily breaking surf. I was aware also that I was in bed, and that, apart from my throbbing headache, I was quite comfortable; and for perhaps two or three minutes I remained as I was, quiescent, enjoying the sensation of comfort, quite oblivious of everything else. Then it suddenly occurred to me to wonder where I was, what was the matter with my head—and back came the memory of that awful night of hurricane—that terrible blow on the back of my head—and, opening my eyes, I started up, with an inarticulate cry.

That is to say I *attempted* to start up—but failed: my body felt like lead; I had no strength to move it, and after a moment's ineffectual struggle I abandoned the attempt and let my head sink back upon the pillow. As I did so I became aware of a slight movement at my side and, glancing in that direction, I saw the boy Billy bending over me with an expression of deep anxiety in his eyes. As he continued to gaze, the expression of anxiety gave place to one of satisfaction, and he said:

"Ah, that's better, Mr Blackburn! I believe you're not going to die yet, after all."

"Going to die!" I reiterated. "Have I been ill, then?"

"You *have*, and no mistake!" emphatically asserted the boy. "For four days and nights you have been just raving; and all the while you refused to take anything but an occasional drink of water. No wonder you found yourself too weak to rise just now."

"By Jove!" ejaculated I, "you amaze me, Billy. But—I am puzzled. I am in my own bunk, in my own cabin; there is a nice breeze blowing, for I can feel it coming through the open scuttle, and I hear the seething of water along the ship's side, yet I'll swear she is not moving an inch. What is the explanation?"

"I'll tell you in a minute or two," answered Billy. "But, first, let me get you some broth, for I can see that you're about done up, and need something to strengthen you. I thought, this morning, that you seemed a bit different, and when you stopped raving and dropped off to sleep I seized the chance to get something ready for you against the time when you woke up. I'll fetch it in half a jiffy."

So saying, Billy disappeared into the main cabin, returning a minute or two later with a bowl of steaming-hot, savoury-smelling soup, with which, after propping me up with cushions, he cautiously fed me, a little at a time, until he thought I had taken as much as was good for me. Then, removing the cushions, he lowered me gently back into a reclining position, made me comfortable and, seating himself by my bedside, proceeded to make me acquainted with the happenings succeeding my accident.

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## Chapter Seven.

Billy tells how we became wrecked.

"My word," began Billy, "I shan't forget in a hurry the awful look of the sky, that night, when you ordered me to come below, and I heard you slam the companion doors behind me, and draw over the slide. I felt certain that, with a sky blazing like that, when it was gettin' on toward the middle of the night, something dreadful was goin' to happen; and—it did, didn't it? I was frightened enough, to start with, but when you battened me down I tell you, Mr Blackburn, I was fairly terrified, and two or three times I climbed half-way up the companion stairs, intendin' to shout to you to let me out; then I thought again that you wouldn't have sent me below if you hadn't known it was the best place for me, so I crept back again and curled up on the locker cushions. And then came the hurricane. I heard it, even before it struck the ship; and when it hit her, and I felt her shiver, I made sure that it was all up with us, and I knelt down on the cabin floor and kept on sayin' my prayers, over and over again.

"I was still sayin' 'em when I suddenly heard the slide pushed back and the companion doors flung open; there was a scuffling of feet on the stairs, and I heard Enderby and Chips warnin' one another to be careful. Then they came into the cabin, carryin' you between 'em; and they laid you on the cabin table, and said you'd met with an accident; and I saw that your head was bleedin'. They undressed you, all in a hurry, put you in your bunk, told me to look after you, and then rushed up on deck again, shuttin' me in, just as you did.

"You were insensible then, so I got to work and hunted up some stuff to make bandages with. Then I opened the medicine-chest and got out the book of instructions; and while I was trying to find out what was the proper thing to do I heard the bosun and Chips shoutin' something. I listened, tryin' to hear what they were shoutin' about; and then, above the noise of the wind, I heard another sound, like—well, I can hardly describe it, but you can hear it now, the roar of the surf on the reef. It grew louder, and louder still, until it was—well, just deafenin'; then I felt the ship hove, first up and then down; then she touched something, but didn't seem to hit it very hard; I felt a blow, like a heavy sea hittin' her; I heard the fall and rush of water on her deck, and a crash that sounded as if the mainmast had gone over the side, then she struck again—harder—three or four times, heeling over until she seemed to be on her beam-ends, and flinging me right across the cabin floor; and all the time I could hear that she was bein' swept by awfully heavy seas. But after a bit things got rather more quiet. I felt that we were aground, but still rolling heavily, and I could hear at every roll a sort of crunching sound, as though the planking of the ship's bottom was grinding upon something; but the seas weren't coming aboard now nearly so heavy nor so often as they were, and after a time they didn't come aboard at all; the rocking motion eased up, and I thought, from the sound, that it didn't seem to be blowin' quite so hard.

"All this time you were in your bunk, insensible; but as soon as I was able to stand without bein' flung down again I got some water from the pantry filter, and bathed your head. There was a nasty cut in it, and it was still bleedin', but I washed it as well as I could, and made a pad that I bound tightly over it, accordin' to the directions I found in the book. And then I think I must have fallen asleep, for I don't remember anything more happenin' until I awoke and saw the sun shinin' through your scuttle and the cabin skylight.

"You were still insensible, so I bathed your head afresh, put a new dressing on it, and then went on deck to have a look round. My word! Mr Blackburn, I *was* astonished when I pushed open the companion slide and looked out. The ship is ashore on a reef; a total wreck; both masts gone by the board; bulwarks carried away; decks swept, and everything but the galley gone—and you and I are all that are left of the crew."

"Good Heavens, Billy, you surely don't mean to say that all hands except ourselves are lost!" I exclaimed, in horrified tones.

"Yes, I do, Mr Blackburn," protested the boy; "and you wouldn't be surprised if you had heard—as I did—the tremendous seas that swept the ship when she first hit the reef. I shouldn't have been a bit surprised if she had gone to pieces right then. It's no wonder that the decks were clean swept."

"No wonder, indeed," I agreed. "You say that we are ashore on a reef, Billy. What sort of a reef is it; just ordinary rocks, or—?"

"No," answered Billy; "it's not just jagged, seaweed-covered rocks, but all white, almost like marble, a little bit rough and uneven, but not like the rocks we get at home. This reef seems to be all in a piece, like a great, tremendously thick wall—"

"Yes," I interrupted; "I think I understand. It is probably a coral reef. How far does it extend?"

"How far?" reiterated Billy. "Why,"—pointing—"it comes from away over there, as far as you can see, and stretches right across to as far as you can see on the other side."

"Ay," I agreed; "a coral reef, without a doubt. And how much water is there alongside?"

"Not more than two or three feet, at most," answered Billy. "We're standin' a lot higher out of the water than we were when afloat. When I first noticed it I thought it was because it happened to be low water when I looked; but it isn't that, because it's always pretty nearly the same. I don't think there's a difference of more than just a few inches between high and low water."

"In that case," I commented, as much to myself as to my companion, "the explanation probably is that when we hit the reef the sea was heaped up by the gale considerably above its usual level, and that it has now subsided again, leaving us nearly high and dry. Now, Billy, is there any land in sight? If so, what does it look like?"

Billy considered for a moment or two, evidently conjuring up a mental picture. Then he answered:

"First, about two miles off, there's a beach of very white sand. Then there's a lot of trees—palm trees, I think they must be—growing all along the inner edge of the beach, and, behind them, bushes and more trees—thousands—millions of 'em, of all sorts of colours—white, yellow, green, red, purple—but I don't remember seein' any that were really black."

"Is there a mountain on the island?" I asked.

"Well—no; not exactly what you'd call a mountain, I think; but there are plenty of fairly high hills," answered Billy.

"And how big do you suppose the island to be?" I asked.

"How big?" repeated Billy. "Oh, really I don't know; quite a big place, I'd say. It stretches athwart our bows as far as you can see, both ways."

"The dickens it does!" I exclaimed. "That is very extraordinary. I cannot understand it. At that rate the island must be at least thirty miles long! Yet there is no such island shown on the chart; no island of any sort, indeed, large or small, just where we are. Yet I have been under the impression that these seas have been thoroughly surveyed. The main fact, however, and the one most important to us is that *we are here*, with very little prospect, I fear, of getting away again for some time. I must turn out and begin to get busy; there is evidently no time to waste. Billy, please find me my clothes."

Billy regarded me gravely; then shook his head.

"That's all very well, Mr Blackburn," he said, "but what's the good of talkin' about turnin' out, when you haven't even got strength enough to lift yourself up in bed? No, sir, please don't attempt to do anything so foolish; you'd only fall, and hurt yourself worse. What you've got to do is to get well as quick as ever you can; and the best way to do that is to stay where you are until you've got your strength again. And I'll help you all I can; I'll feed you up, and look after you, and tell you everything that happens; but please—*please* don't be in too great a hurry; this is a case of 'the more hurry, the less speed'; I'm sure of it. Only trust yourself to me, Mr Blackburn, and I'll get you well as quick as ever I can."

"By Jove, Billy," said I, "I believe you will. You have done marvellously well, thus far. Why, boy, you must have been born to become a great physician; and you talk more wisely than many lads of twice your age. Yes; I will trust myself absolutely to you. But, now that I come to look at you, your eyes are so heavy with sleeplessness that you seem scarcely able to keep them open. How have you managed for sleep while I have been ill?"

"Oh," answered Billy, "I've done pretty well. When you've been quiet for a bit I've stretched myself out on the sofa and slept until you woke me with your ravin'; but now that you've come to your senses I expect I shall be able to get a really *good* rest."

"I hope you will," said I. "And there's no time like the present; so, as I am feeling very comfortable just now, and much inclined to sleep, go and turn in, and get that really *good* rest that you spoke of. Leave open the door of my state-room, and that of your own, and if I need anything I'll call out for you."

Thanks to the tireless attention with which Billy tended me, and the meticulous care with which he followed the instructions set forth in the book of directions attached to the ship's medicine-chest, for such a case as mine, I was not again troubled with delirium, nor did I experience any other set-back of any kind; on the contrary, I made such excellent progress that within the fortnight I was able to be up and about again, although it was something of a task to climb the companion stairway to the deck, even with the help of Billy. But, that task once achieved, I made rapid headway, and was soon my old self again. Upon my first visit to the deck after my illness I sustained something of a shock. My last view of the brigantine had shown her all ataunto, and although what Billy had told me ought to have prepared me for the change that met my gaze, I must confess that I was distinctly taken aback when upon my first emergence from the companion I beheld both masts gone by the board, all the bulwarks swept away, and the deck



hampered by a confused mass of raffle consisting of the mainmast with all attached stretched fore and aft, while the foremast had gone over the bows, its head resting upon the coral while its splintered lower extremity projected some ten feet above the knightheads. The fore topmast had carried away close to the cap and, with the yards, was afloat under the bows, fast to the wreck by the standing and running rigging. The life-boat that had served me so well had practically disappeared, only the keel and a fragment of the sternpost remaining; but, by a miracle, the galley remained intact, and was in regular use by Billy for the preparation of our meals. Almost my first care was to sound the well, in the hope that by some stroke of marvellous good fortune the hull might have, so far, escaped serious damage and be capable of being floated again; but, of course, that was too much to expect. I found nearly two and a half feet of water in the well, which was about the depth alongside; the inference therefore was that, upon striking the reef, the ship had been bilged, or some of her planks had been started, and that therefore, if it depended upon my efforts alone, she would never float again.

I next turned my attention to externals. Helped by Billy, I tottered to the skylight and seated myself upon the cover, from which I obtained a clear view of the whole reef, from horizon to horizon. It appeared to be a typical example of a coral barrier reef, running roughly parallel to the shore of the island, from north to south; but it seemed to vary greatly in width, for while in some places I judged it to be not more than five or six yards wide, it was nearly or quite three hundred yards wide where the brigantine lay. And most fortunate was it for us that it was so; for if, after striking, the ship had been driven over the inner edge of the reef to the comparatively deep water of the lagoon, she would assuredly have gone down, taking us with her. As it was, there was a space of only about a fathom between our forefoot and the inner edge of the reef, as I ascertained later. The great wall of surf, fifty feet high, breaking perpetually upon the outer face of the reef, and stretching mile after mile to north and south of us, was a wonderful sight, especially in the early morning, when the sun's rays struck the great cloud of spray, creating a most beautiful and perfect rainbow. That same wall of spray, by the way, effectually excluded all view of the ocean outside, so that even if a whole navy happened to be passing, we should never catch the smallest glimpse of it, so long as we remained aboard the wreck. It was evident, therefore, that the first step toward an escape from our present predicament must be the transfer of ourselves and everything of value to the island.

By a natural transition of thought I next turned my attention to the land which stretched north and south athwart the bows of the wreck. A great belt of smooth water, averaging some two miles in width, lay between the reef and the beach of dazzling white sand, both extending to right and left as far as the eye could see. To the south the land seemed to dip out of sight below the horizon, but northward it appeared to terminate in a high headland which I estimated to be about eighteen miles distant; I considered, therefore, that the island must measure, from north to south, at least forty miles. What it might measure from east to west was not to be easily determined, but the summits of the most distant range of hills appeared to be nearly or quite twenty miles distant; and how much land lay beyond them it was of course impossible to guess. The description of the island which Billy had given me, several days earlier, was quite a good one. There was the far-stretching ribbon of white beach, bordered on its inshore margin by innumerable cocoa-nut palms, beyond which the land rose gently, in irregular folds, to the hills in the rear, every inch of soil, apparently, being clothed with vegetation of some sort, chiefly trees, many of which seemed—as seen through the ship's telescope—to be smothered in blossoms of varied and most beautiful hues. I subjected every foot of the land in sight to a most rigorous scrutiny through the lenses of the telescope, in search of some indication of inhabitants, but could find nothing; no cleared and cultivated land, no smoke, suggestive of dwellings, no canoes on the beach, no moving figures; to all appearances, indeed, the gulls, pelicans, and other aquatic birds that wheeled and screamed over the lagoon and dived into its waters might be the only life on the island.

"Well, Mr Blackburn, what do you think of it?" demanded Billy, when at length I lowered the telescope from my eye.

"It is wonderful," I declared. "I am amazed. I simply cannot understand it. That island is quite a big place. There is nothing in the least like it shown on the chart anywhere near the spot which it actually occupies, yet how it has so far escaped the notice of the hydrographers is a puzzle to me. The matter, however, which most concerns us is that, viewed from here at least, it appears to be a sufficiently desirable place, on which we ought, without difficulty, to find ample means of subsistence. How does the idea of living ashore there for a time appeal to you?"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Billy, "that will be splendid! Just think of the jolly times we shall be able to have, huntin' wild beasts, fightin' the savages, and havin' all sorts of splendid adventures."

"Well," I said, "some of those things may possibly come our way, but we really want no excitements of that sort, Billy boy. Of course, we are all right where we are, so long as the wreck holds together and remains habitable; but the trouble is that we don't know how long that may be. Another such gale as placed us here might send such a tremendous sea pouring in over the reef as to wash the old hooker off the reef into the lagoon, where she would quickly founder—which is the reason why I consider that we must establish ourselves ashore as soon as possible."

"Oh!" exclaimed Billy, "I never thought of that. Do you really think, Mr Blackburn, that there's a chance of the wreck sinking?"

"It is quite possible," I replied, "although I have known cases where stranded wrecks have remained for years undisturbed. Still the possibility must be recognised and provided against, wherefore it is of the utmost importance that we lose no time in getting ourselves safely settled ashore."

"Then, what do you propose to do, sir?" demanded Billy.

"The moment that I am strong enough to do any work," said I, "I shall start to build some sort of a craft in which we can ferry ourselves across the lagoon and explore the island in search of a suitable spot upon which to pitch our camp. After that, everything will depend upon the conditions on which we find it possible to live. But one condition is of paramount importance; we must establish ourselves where a clear view of the open sea can be obtained, and from which it will be possible to signal to any ship that may heave in sight. And now, Billy, do you happen to know whether there is any timber aboard, out of which it would be possible for me to build a boat without the preliminary necessity

to start breaking up the *Yorkshire Lass*?"

"Why—yes—I—I believe—there is," answered Billy hesitatingly. "I can't say for certain, but I seem to remember hearin' Dad say something about buyin' some planks as a stand-by in case of repairs of any sort bein' needed; and I believe I saw some planks and scantlin' down in the fore hold a bit later, while the ship was still in dock. If the timber's aboard anywhere, that's where you'll find it, Mr Blackburn."

"Thanks, Billy," said I. "As soon as I am strong enough to lift a hatch we will explore the fore hold, and see what is to be found there."

Nearly a fortnight elapsed before I was strong enough to open the fore hatchway, even with Billy's help; but when at length we managed it we were amply rewarded for our labour, an abundant supply of planks and scantling for our utmost need being found. I took careful stock of it all, recording the nature and dimensions of each piece of scantling and plank, and then, providing myself with paper, pencil, and scale, I set to work to scheme out a craft that should be easy to build, fast, stiff and weatherly under canvas, a fairly good sea-boat, and of light draught. It was a decidedly ambitious scheme for an individual who, up to then, had attempted nothing bigger than a three-foot model; but even that experience was, I soon found, of great value to me; and ultimately I evolved a design that I believed would approach within a reasonable distance of my requirements. This done, I routed out the carpenter's chest of tools from the fore-castle, cleaned and sharpened them, got up on deck such timber as I immediately required, and started work, with Billy as an enthusiastic helpmate.

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## Chapter Eight.

### We go Exploring, and meet with an Adventure.

It cost Billy and me nearly three months of strenuous labour to build our boat, rig her, and get her afloat; then, upon a certain day, the boy and I, provided with a rifle apiece, a brace of revolvers, and an abundant supply of cartridges for each kind of weapon, climbed down the side of the wreck into our completed craft, set her sails, and pushed off upon our first voyage of exploration.

The wind was, as usual, blowing a moderate breeze from the eastward when we started, consequently the island lay dead to windward, a "beat" of two miles to the nearest point of the beach, thus affording an excellent opportunity to test the weatherly qualities of the boat; and I was agreeably surprised not only at the style in which she turned to windward, but also at the speed with which she slipped through the water, and the certainty and celerity with which she "stayed". She made the distance in a few minutes over the half-hour, which, considering that as we drew in under the land the wind grew ever more scanty, I regarded as a very creditable performance.

As we shortened the distance between ourselves and the land the prospect grew ever more attractive, eliciting frequent exclamations of delight from Billy. The ground now revealed itself as finely broken into a range of lofty hills of gracefully flowing outline, with suggestions of picturesque valleys winding between them, affording an infinite variety of glowing light and soft shadow, while the variegated and brilliant hues of the foliage completed a picture of indescribable beauty.

But all this beauty by no means exhausted the charm of the place, for as we drew still closer to the beach we were able to distinguish that the woods were the habitat of countless thousands of birds of strange and most gorgeous plumage, among which I identified what I believed to be three or four species of birds of paradise, as well as a great variety of sun birds flitting from flower to flower like living gems. It is to be admitted that the cries of those birds were not always in accord with the splendour of their plumage, being for the most part distinctly harsh and unmusical; but there was one exception that startled us not a little when we first heard it. Its cry was an exact reproduction of the sound of a sweet-toned bell, so exact, indeed, that for the moment I felt fully persuaded that, hidden somewhere in the heart of that vast ocean of greenery, there must be a monastery, or some such institution; and it was not until we marked the irregular, intermittent character of the sounds, and the fact that they emanated from frequently changing localities, that we at length arrived at an explanation of the apparent mystery.

While we were still discussing the matter the boat gently grounded upon the dazzlingly white beach of coral sand, and we stepped out, securing the boat by means of a grapnel attached to the end of a long painter, digging the flukes of the former deeply into the sand. Then Billy and I, each carrying the weapons with which we had provided ourselves, set out to explore the new territory.

The beach was of varying width, ranging from two or three yards to, in places, nothing at all; indeed many of the cocoa-nut trees were actually rooted in soil that was, at the moment, being laved by the salt water, due to the fact that we happened to land about the time of full tide. It happened also that the fruit was at that season just ripening, so many of the nuts falling to the ground with a thud, even as we stood staring about us, that we were able without difficulty to collect and place in the boat as many as we pleased. This done, we attempted to make our way inland, but so dense was the undergrowth at that point that we were soon compelled to abandon our efforts, it being clearly evident that the only way in which we could penetrate would be by hewing a path for ourselves.

But it did not follow that because we failed here we must necessarily fail everywhere. We therefore re-embarked and, again getting under way, headed northward, keeping close to the beach and maintaining a good look-out for a spot affording a reasonable prospect of successful penetration. Several times we believed we had found what we were seeking, but on each occasion our hopes were speedily dashed, our most successful effort resulting merely in penetration for a distance of less than half a mile. But, even so, our attempts were not unmitigated failures, for while our clothing suffered somewhat in our encounters with the thorns that persistently barred our passage, we were fortunate enough to secure a few bunches of delicious wild grapes, a large bunch of very delicately flavoured bananas, and six splendid pineapples. Upon our return to the beach I took the precaution to mark the spot by cutting

a good big branch and inserting it upright in the sand, so that it could easily be seen at some distance; and then we resumed our voyage of exploration, lurching luxuriously upon bananas, meanwhile.

At length, after working northward for a distance of some fourteen miles along the western shore, we quite suddenly opened out the mouth of what I at first supposed to be an important river running in a south-easterly direction toward the interior of the island, but which subsequently proved to be one of several channels dividing what I originally imagined to be only one island into a group of no less than seven. Naturally, I at once decided to abandon for the moment the further exploration of the lagoon, in favour of a survey of this waterway, and the boat was accordingly put about and headed into it. At its entrance it measured about half a mile wide, but as we proceeded it gradually widened out until, at a point about eight miles inward from the lagoon, it was quite two and a half miles wide. Here the channel trended a point or two farther to the eastward; and some four miles farther on it forked, one branch continuing to the south-eastward while the other trended away toward the north-east. I decided to follow the latter.

The land on both sides was still distinctly hilly, and densely covered with forest, but on our left the hills sloped rapidly downward until they died away in a plateau, the level of which was only two or three feet above the surface of the water. As the boat glided slowly onward under the influence of a breeze that had steadily grown more languid and fitful as we progressed, we subjected this plateau to a rigorous scrutiny through the ship's telescope, which we carried with us, but the place looked so uninviting that we decided against landing there. Nor did the land to the southward look any more inviting, for it consisted of cliffs ranging from two hundred to five or six hundred feet high, rising almost vertically from the water. We therefore pushed on, all the more impelled thereto because the channel now ran almost directly to windward and we were therefore obliged to beat up through it; moreover, the afternoon was progressing, and I wanted, if possible, to find some spot where we could pass the night in comfort.

At a point some eight miles farther on the channel again forked, one branch heading away to the north-east while the other trended off in a south-easterly direction. As we reached this point the wind suddenly freshened, and there was a salt tang in it quite distinctive from the odour of earth and vegetation that we had now been breathing for several hours; also there came to our ears, subdued by distance, the low, continuous booming thunder of surf, from which I surmised—correctly as it subsequently proved—that we were nearing the eastern extremity of the group.

Heading the boat into the south-eastern channel, with the long range of vertical rocky cliffs still stretching away on our starboard bow, we presently came abreast of an island measuring some six miles from east to west, by about seven miles from north to south, roughly triangular in plan, the surface sloping upward on all sides from the water's edge to a peak which I estimated to be about two thousand feet high. Standing close inshore, to get as near a view as possible of this island, we found its appearance most delectable. Like much of what we had already seen, the entire island was forest-clad, but the country was much more park-like in character; the trees grew less thickly together; they were not matted together by an impenetrable jungle of undergrowth, although many of them were almost smothered in what appeared to be innumerable varieties of orchids, and the soil was clothed with what looked like short, grey-green grass down to the inner edge of the narrow beach, which was lined with cocoa-nut palms. Taken altogether, the place wore so exceedingly attractive an appearance that, finding ourselves rather unexpectedly standing into a nice, snug little bay, I headed straightway for the beach, determined to push our explorations no farther for that day.

Securely mooring the boat as before, we landed and, fully armed, made our way inland over the southern shoulder of the hill, observing, as we went, that among the forest giants that towered about us on every hand there were fruit-trees in abundance, among which I identified the bread-fruit, the mango, the custard-apple, the shaddock or grape-fruit, grape-vines twining about many of the bigger trees and yielding large clusters of richly flavoured fruit, while bananas and plantains were to be seen wherever one turned one's eyes. Birds also seemed to regard this island as a desirable dwelling-place, for they were everywhere, their beautiful plumage adding a further charm to the little island paradise.

From the beach to the ridge of the hill, for which we were making, the distance was about a mile, the ground rising gently all the way; but the going was comparatively easy, for by making slight détours here and there we were able to progress without the need to force our way through dense undergrowth; a gentle saunter of about half an hour's duration therefore took us to the point for which I was aiming. Arrived there, we were afforded a clear view eastward, when we discovered, as I had suspected, that we had practically reached the eastern extremity of the group. Immediately before us the ground sloped down to the eastern shore, its distance being about a mile. That shore was washed by the waters of the lagoon, which was at this point some six or seven miles wide, its outer margin being marked by a continuous wall of spray thrown up by the long lines of Pacific swell that eternally hurled themselves upon the barrier reef. And midway between that reef and the island on which we stood there was a smaller island which, in all essentials, appeared to be a replica of the one we were on, for it, too, was park-like in the arrangement of the trees that grew upon it, while it also boasted a central peak, rising to a height of some six or seven hundred feet. This small island, it was evident, was the easternmost of the whole group, and I at once determined to pay it a visit early on the morrow; for if it should prove, upon inspection, to be as desirable as it looked, it would certainly be the place on which we ought to take up our abode, since from it we should best be able to signal any ship that might heave in sight, and from which also—if an opening in the reef happened to be anywhere handy—we could slip out to sea in our boat and, if need be, intercept that ship. South of us, and on the opposite side of a channel about three-quarters of a mile wide, lay the curious island of the vertical cliffs, already referred to. From the view-point which we occupied we could see the entire length of this island, which I estimated at about sixteen miles, its eastern extremity being a low cliff some eight miles south-east of us. I resolved that on the morrow, after visiting the small island to the eastward of us, which I already began to speak of as "ours", I would pay a visit to this other island, which somehow seemed to have invested itself in my eyes with an air of mystery. We spent that night encamped on the grass close to the beach, occupying a tent formed of an old sail and three oars which I had brought along for the purpose. And we slept soundly, the night air on the eastern side of the group being, as we discovered, very much fresher and cooler than on the western side, where the wreck lay.

We were astir by sunrise next morning, treating ourselves to a swim in the bay, after which we proceeded to prepare

breakfast. When we had finished the meal we struck the tent, packed it away in the boat, and started upon another day's exploration.

Our first call was at the small island forming the easternmost extremity of the group, which I had practically determined upon as our place of abode during such time as fate might keep us prisoners on the group; and we found it almost ideal for our purpose. In the first place there was, on its south-western side, a snug little cove, just large enough to accommodate our boat, and wherein she might ride safely in all weathers. Next, discharging into this cove there was a brook of deliciously cool, sweet water, springing from the side of the cove, affording us an ample supply for every purpose. The island was rich in fruit-trees of great variety; and, finally, a rigorous examination of it failed to disclose the existence upon it of anything noxious or inimical to human life, although, like the other islands visited, the place swarmed with birds. To crown all, and complete my satisfaction, we found that there was a passage through the reef immediately to the eastward of the island, through which, in our boat, we might reach the open sea.

We spent the entire morning on "our" island, and partook of our mid-day meal there, leaving it, rather reluctantly, to continue our survey of the group. The island which I next intended to visit was the one with the vertical cliffs, along which we had coasted on the previous day. Those rugged precipitous cliffs formed the northern coast-line of the island, but from certain observations which I had made from "our own" island I came to the conclusion that the southern side of the island would reveal very dissimilar characteristics. And so it proved, for when, after a sail of some six miles in a southerly direction, we rounded its south-eastern extremity, we discovered that its southern shore rose only a few feet above the level of the water, being bounded, as seemed usual in the group, by a narrow beach of coral sand, liberally fringed with cocoa-nut trees, the ground sloping gently up from the beach for a distance ranging from two to four miles, when it abruptly ended against the southern face of the cliffs to which I have so frequently referred. But this was by no means its most surprising characteristic to us explorers. For, having thus far failed to discover any sign of inhabitants, I had, perhaps rather hastily, jumped to the conclusion that the group was uninhabited, whereas we now saw that the whole surface of this particular island, from its southern shore right up to the base of its range of northern cliffs, was under cultivation. Wide areas of Indian corn were interspersed with spacious fields of sugar-cane, varied here and there by great orchards of what I assumed to be fruit-trees of various kinds, and what appeared to be garden plots devoted to the cultivation of vegetables. Occasionally we caught glimpses of the natives working, either singly or in small groups, in the fields, orchards, and gardens, and from their gestures of amazement, and from the manner in which they stood transfixed and staring when our boat swept within their range of vision, I conjectured that it was the first time in their lives that they had ever beheld such a sight. They were almost coal-black in colour, and inspection of them through the telescope showed them to be absolutely naked, wherefore I decided not to pay them a visit until some future occasion when Billy should not be with me, although, apart from their state of nudity, they impressed me as being perfectly harmless.

My resolve to abstain from landing there on that occasion was, however, broken down within the next half-hour, and that, too, in a sufficiently remarkable and tragic manner. We were skimming briskly along before the pleasant easterly breeze, Billy being at the helm, while I sat in the bottom of the boat, taking peeps through the telescope at interesting objects in the landscape that seemed to be gliding past us, when suddenly we heard, from some distance ahead of us, a sound as of a horn being blown, the sound being taken up and repeated at various points both ahead and astern of us.

"What do you think is the meaning of that rumpus, Mr Blackburn?" asked Billy. "Do you think they're scared at the sight of us? It looks a bit like it, doesn't it; for, see, sir, they've all started to run."

I directed the telescope toward the shore. It was as Billy had said; everybody within sight was running, and at remarkable speed too; but whether or not it was the apparition of the boat that had startled them I could not tell, for about half of them seemed to be hastening at breakneck speed toward a part of the beach about half a mile ahead, where a group of some forty or fifty blacks had already gathered, close to the water's edge, and seemed to be engaged, in feverish haste, in collecting stones, or lumps of coral. Other groups, which I believed to be composed of women, were running with equal speed toward the cliffs at the back of the island.

Turning my telescope again upon the rapidly gathering natives on the beach, I saw that it could not be the boat that was causing their excitement, for a number of them, having collected as many stones as could be conveniently held in the hollow of the left arm, were now excitedly pointing and directing their companions' attention to some object in the channel immediately before them. Turning the telescope in the direction toward which they were pointing, I presently sighted three objects, that I believed to be the heads of animals, making rapid progress through the water toward that point on the beach where the still rapidly swelling crowd had collected, and, as I watched, little jets of water began to spout up round the foremost of those heads. The blacks were stoning it, with the evident object of driving it off, or at least of preventing its approach; and remarkably good marksmen they appeared to be, too, for as I continued to watch I observed four or five direct hits, evoking from the target a most appalling shrieking roar, while its progress through the water perceptibly speeded up. That the three swimming creatures had been recognised by the blacks as enemies—possibly of long standing—was clear enough; and here, it appeared to me, was an excellent opportunity for me to establish good relations between ourselves and the savages by taking a hand in the game that was evidently toward. I accordingly laid down the telescope and, as I reached for the rifles, directed Billy to luff and head the boat straight for the spot where the blacks were gathered. As I rapidly threw open the breeches of the rifles, to assure myself that the weapons were loaded, the leading swimmer reached shallow water and, rising to its feet, revealed itself as a gigantic anthropoid ape, probably a species of gorilla. The creature towered a clear head and shoulders in stature above the natives; it had a comparatively small head with a flat receding forehead, very wide nostrils, a long, enormously muscular body, immensely wide across its massive shoulders, disproportionately short legs, and huge arms so long that even when the brute stood upright its clenched fists reached to within a foot of the ground. As it started to wade ashore its advance was momentarily checked by a terrific volley of stones, hurled with amazing force and precision; then, emitting a series of those dreadful, shrieking roars, it dashed forward with outstretched arms, seized the nearest native and, without apparent effort, literally tore the unfortunate man's head from his body.

It was evident that if I meant to intervene to any good purpose there was not a moment to lose. The boat was now within a hundred yards of the spot where the battle between the ape and the natives was raging, but I dared not risk a shot in that quarter, for the great brute, still roaring horribly, was completely hemmed in by a crowd of natives, all battering the huge, hairy body with big lumps of coral, and the movements of the combatants were so quick that I was more likely to hit a black than the beast; but the second ape was now in shallow water and on the point of rising to its feet. I therefore levelled the rifle I held, and pressed the trigger as the two sights of the weapon came into line with the centre of the head, just above the ear; a harrowing shriek pealed out on the hot air and, as the little puff of smoke from the rifle blew away, I had the satisfaction of seeing the creature throw up its great hands and sink back into the water, dead.

Dropping the empty weapon, I snatched up the loaded one, and threw a quick glance around to decide which should be my next mark. The third ape was now less than twenty yards distant, and as my gaze fell upon him I saw him change his course and head for the boat. This afforded me the opportunity I wanted, and levelling my weapon I aimed for the centre of the forehead, and fired. I distinctly heard the thud of the bullet as it crashed into the massive skull; but there was no shriek this time; the beast simply collapsed and sank.

Meanwhile, the aspect of affairs ashore had undergone a remarkable change. Whether it was the sharp crack of the rifles and the coincident deaths of the two apes, or the fact that the brute which had effected a landing had already put some seven or eight of the natives *hors de combat*, I could not guess, but the natives had, apparently with one accord, and as though at a preconcerted signal, suddenly abandoned the fight, and were now fleeing in all directions, while the ape, perhaps taken by surprise at the quick-change tactics, or possibly dazed by the severe blows that he had received, stood staring about him, as though undecided what to do next. But only for a moment, for just then the boat, with good way on, grounded and slid well up on the beach, while I rose to my feet and, leaping lightly over the bows, advanced toward the brute. Glancing quickly about him, the enormous beast instantly noted my movement and, with a deep, savage roar, turned to meet me. His little eyes blazing with fury, his lips drawn back in a snarl that



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exposed his formidable teeth and a pair of great tusks protruding from his lower jaw, with blood-stained foam dripping from his champing jaws, and blood from numerous wounds streaking his great hairy hide, he presented a most formidable spectacle as he approached me with his body bent and crouching ready to spring, and his long, sinewy arms outstretched, the great hands opening and closing, as though eager to clutch my throat. We were now within half a dozen yards of each other, and as though by mutual consent we each halted at the same instant, glaring into each other's eyes. I saw the beast crouch still lower and noted the ripple of the muscles of the great loins as he gathered himself together for the spring that was to settle the dispute off-hand, and quickly levelling the revolver which I had drawn from my belt as I sprang ashore, I pointed the weapon straight for his head and pulled the trigger. There was a sharp click as the hammer fell, but no explosion—the cartridge had missed fire—and at that precise moment the brute made his leap. As he came hurtling at me through the air I—by instinct, I suppose, for there was no time for reasoning—again pointed the revolver, this time straight at his wide-open mouth, and again pressed the trigger. On this occasion the explosion came off all right; then, while the report still rang in my ears the huge body of the ape, with a curious writhing motion, crashed down upon me and dashed me violently to the ground. We fell side by side, I upon my back, and the ape face downward. A convulsive shudder shook the body for a moment, and then it lay still. As for me, I remained where I had fallen, breathless, dazed, and half stunned, until I was aroused by Billy, who, springing ashore, rushed up to ask anxiously whether I was very much hurt. Fortunately, I was not; I was scarcely even bruised by my fall, and I scrambled to my feet not a penny the worse for my rather grim encounter.

I lingered on the beach for nearly half an hour, in the expectation that some of the natives might possibly return and thus afford me an opportunity to establish something in the nature of amicable relations with them; but none of them did; eventually, therefore, I got the boat afloat again and made sail on our way back to the wreck, abandoning for the moment all idea of further exploration.

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## Chapter Nine.

### We settle down on Eden.

We found the wreck, as of course we had quite expected, in precisely the same condition as we had left her. As I stowed the boat's sails and made her securely fast to the wreck it was my fixed intention to continue our exploration on the following day, but as I sat on deck that night, smoking a final pipe before turning in, my plans underwent a certain amount of modification. I had quite come to the conclusion that the tiny islet that formed the easternmost extremity of the group was the spot on which we ought to take up our abode in view of our hope of eventual rescue; and while considering the matter it also occurred to me that since it was impossible to forecast the duration of our detention upon the group—it might run to months, for aught that I could tell—a reasonably comfortable dwelling of some sort—something less susceptible to the vicissitudes of weather than a mere tent, for instance—was an absolute necessity. I therefore spent the ensuing four days in planning such a house as Billy and I might, between us, be able to construct; and by the end of that time I had got it satisfactorily planned out on paper. I determined to build it entirely of wood, first, because the wreck afforded us abundance of material, and next, because I could do all the cutting-out, the sawing, planing, mortising, and fitting aboard the ship, where such tools and conveniences as we possessed were at immediate command, and where I could work from early morn to dewy eve without fear of interruption of any kind. Then, when all my timbers were cut, shaped, and fitted, it would be a comparatively simple matter to transfer them to the islet by means of the boat, and there erect them and fit them together.

From such observations as I had already been able to make I had come to the conclusion that the barrier reef upon which the *Yorkshire Lass* lay stranded would probably be found to encircle the group completely—with, perhaps, a breach or two in it somewhere; and, as the determination of this point seemed to me a matter of some importance, I decided that our next exploration should be conducted with that object. Accordingly, upon the morning of the fifth day after our first expedition we again left the wreck, the boat being well stocked with everything we could think of as likely to be required during a week's cruise.

As before, we started by steering a northerly course, and in due time arrived off the entrance of the channel which we had explored on our first trip, and which had proved to lead to the centre of the group. But on this occasion, instead of entering the channel as before, I continued to push northward, the barrier reef still holding intact on our port hand while to starboard lay what proved to be the most northerly island of the group. As we coasted along its north-westerly shore we were able to see that, while the southern portion of it was low and flat, a range of hills occupied its eastern side, while another less lofty and less extensive range marked its north-western extremity. But the land looked savage, unattractive, uninviting. We therefore made no attempt to land, contenting ourselves with the maintenance of a strict and continuous scrutiny of the country through the telescope.

Uninviting, however, as was the aspect of the island, it became markedly more so when we were presently favoured with a glimpse of some of its inhabitants, of which, thus far, we had seen nothing. We had just rounded the headland that was the most northerly point of the group visible from the deck of the *Yorkshire Lass*, and had hauled up close to the wind to fetch another point, some four miles distant to the north-eastward, when, scrutinising the shore through the telescope, I saw two creatures suddenly burst through the dense scrub that seemed to be the only form of vegetation growing thereabout, and begin—or, possibly, it might have been, continue—what had all the appearance of a desperate fight, on the open beach.

We were at that moment not more than a quarter of a mile from the shore and but little farther than that from the spot where the fight was taking place. The creatures were therefore within plain view of us, while the telescope clearly revealed every detail of what was happening, and of the creatures themselves, but so incredibly agile were they in their movements that several minutes elapsed before I was able to do more than just form a rough estimate of their size; but presently the boat drew up fairly abreast of them, and then I directed Billy, who was steering, to haul the fore-sheet to windward to deaden the boat's way, for I was curious to see what would be the outcome of the struggle.

The combatants were well matched as to size and activity, there appearing to be not a pin to choose between them in those respects. I set them down to be about the same size as an ordinary donkey, but they did not in the least resemble donkeys as to shape; indeed at first sight they seemed to be more like gigantic frogs. That, however, was merely a first impression, for there presently occurred a momentary pause in the fight—presumably to enable them to get their second wind—and then I was enabled to note details accurately. Their hind legs were, proportionately, as long as those of frogs, but much more muscular, while their fore legs appeared to be not more than a foot long, all four extremities being armed with exceedingly stout and formidable claws. Unlike frogs, however, they boasted powerful tails that seemed to serve very much the same purpose as that of the kangaroo, both as a weapon and a propellant. At the base it was the same thickness as the body, tapering away to a point, and it appeared to be about the same length as the body. The head was, however, the most remarkable feature of the animal. When seen in profile it was not unlike those of the apes we had encountered, but it was evidently even more formidable, for projecting from its nose was a stout, sharp horn, similar to that of a rhinoceros, while a pair of long tusks projected from its upper jaw. In colour the animal was a greyish brown, dark on the upper part of the body, fading to a dirty white on the lower. A serrated ridge of what might be loose skin ran along its back from the nape of the neck to the extremity of the tail, and the body appeared to be thickly dotted with wart-like excrescences. Altogether it had very much more the appearance of a reptile than of any other class of the animal kingdom. These details I was able to observe during the short pause in the fight to which I have already alluded, but in less than a minute the struggle

was resumed with apparently greater ferocity than ever. Their method of fighting was as remarkable as their general appearance. Facing his opponent and crouching low, at a distance of some three or four yards apart, one of them would suddenly spring high in the air and land upon the body of his adversary, striking furiously with claws, tusks, and tail, while the other, throwing himself on his back, would lash out as vigorously with his own weapons. Then the two would grip, rolling over and over each other, and for a few minutes it would be impossible to see what was happening, so quick were their movements and dense the cloud of dust that they raised. Then would occur a brief pause, to be followed by a further renewal of the fight. But after about a quarter of an hour it became evident that the struggle was nearly over. The end came with dramatic suddenness: the one which happened to be lying upon his back made a lucky upward stroke with his hind claws, disembowelling his antagonist as the latter descended upon him, and a moment later he was tearing great morsels of flesh from the still writhing body of his late adversary.

"Let draw the fore-sheet, Billy," I exclaimed. "We'll get away from here as quickly as the wind will take us." For the sight was a horrible and disgusting one.

An hour later we arrived off a gap about a mile wide between two headlands, this gap forming the entrance of a noble bay some eight miles long by five miles wide at its widest part. And, curiously enough, immediately opposite that gap there occurred a corresponding gap or break, about two miles wide, in the barrier reef, so that, had the place been known to mariners, a ship in distress might have passed through this break in the reef and sailed straight into the bay, even in the hardest gale that ever blew.

Naturally, I at once headed the boat into the bay, and we sailed to its farther extremity, hugging the western shore all the way, and still maintaining a close watch upon the country generally through the telescope. It was very rugged and broken until we reached the bottom of the bay, where the hills, from a height of some eight hundred feet, sank into the plain. The hill-sides, inside as outside the bay, nourished a fairly dense growth of low, coarse scrub, that I searched with the glass, in vain, for any sign of life. But I noticed, very early after our passage between the two headlands, that, for some reason which I was quite unable to guess at, the waters of the bay were swarming with sharks—the first that we had seen since the occurrence of the wreck—wherefore I at once christened the great sheet of water "Shark Bay", while to the island itself I gave the name of "North Island."

The headlands that guarded the entrance to Shark Bay were a pair of lofty promontories rising to a height of some four or five hundred feet, forming part of the range of hills that engirdled the bay on either hand; but while the range on the western side sloped down to the water's edge, sinking into a plain at a distance of about ten miles from the entrance, the range on the eastern side, some sixteen miles long, gradually receded from the shore line as it swept southwards, the space between its foot and the beach being occupied by a swamp lying so low that it was difficult to judge, in places, the precise line of demarcation between land and water. The southern half of the island consisted entirely of low, flat ground, sparsely covered with coarse grass and isolated clumps of scrub, across which, at a distance of some eight miles, the high, precipitous cliffs of the island where we encountered the apes could be distinctly seen.

By the time that we arrived at the inner, or southern extremity of the bay the sun had declined to within a finger's width of the ridge of the western range of hills. It was clear, therefore, that there could be no further exploration for us until the morrow, and I began to look about in search of a suitable spot whereon to pitch our camp for the night. And to choose seemed difficult. The western shore of the bay, with its broken ground and scrubby vegetation looked uninviting to say the least of it, in addition to which it was on the other side of those same hills, at a spot only a few miles distant, that we had, that afternoon, witnessed the terrific fight between those two horrible, unknown creatures; and I had no inclination to place ourselves where we might perchance make closer acquaintance with other creatures of a similar or perhaps even more ferocious kind. The eastern shore of the bay was a swamp, and consequently out of the question. I therefore turned my attention to the plain that formed the southern part of the island, when, looking in that direction, I saw an animal of some sort squatting on its hind-quarters on the beach, staring at us. It was only about a quarter of a mile distant and, bringing the telescope to bear upon it, I at once identified it as either the victorious fighter of the afternoon or a creature similar in every respect. It was hardly likely to be the same beast, however, for I thought it doubtful whether the long arm of coincidence would bring the same creature within our ken again so soon; moreover the animal at that moment focused by the lenses of the telescope showed no wounds or other signs of recent battle.

"I'll have a shot at the beggar if he will only remain as he is half a minute longer," I exclaimed. "Take the telescope, Billy, and watch. I'll aim for his heart, and you will be able to see whether or not I score a hit." And, thrusting the telescope into Billy's hands, I snatched up a rifle.

"Four hundred and fifty yards should be about right," I muttered as I adjusted the back sight of the weapon to that range; then, raising the rifle to my shoulder and bringing the sights into line on that part of the still motionless beast's body where I supposed its heart to be, I pressed the trigger.

The "plop" of the bullet upon the creature's hide distinctly reached my ear a second or two after the crack of the rifle; but instead of toppling over, dead, as I fully expected, the beast simply wheeled about and, in a sequence of enormous bounds, quickly vanished in the distance.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, in amazement, "what an extraordinary thing. I'll swear I hit him. I had him as neatly covered as possible; my hands were as steady as rocks; and there is not enough wind to deflect the bullet; furthermore, I heard it strike."

"Yes; so did I," agreed Billy. "I am certain that you hit the brute, Mr Blackburn. I can't say for certain that I actually *saw* the bullet hit, but I believe that a second or two after you fired, and an instant before the beast turned and bounded away, I saw a tiny dark spot on the dirty white skin of its breast."

"I wonder whether you really did, or whether it was merely imagination," said I. "Anyway, the beggar must be a

tough one to kill; for while I feel as certain as you do that I hit him, the fact remains that he was very far from being dead when we last saw him; furthermore, that yonder plain harbours such creatures is a strong argument against our camping there to-night; the only thing, therefore, that I can see for it is to stand off-shore for a mile or two, anchor the boat, and rough it aboard her for the night."

Which we did. And ample reason had we to congratulate ourselves upon our decision, for shortly after nightfall and all through the hours of darkness our ears were assailed by an almost continuous succession of such hair-raising shrieks and howls, roars and bellowings, as thoroughly convinced me that North Island was no sort of dwelling-place for human beings with a penchant for peace and quietness. Furthermore, there was a moon, that night, well advanced in her second quarter, and at frequent intervals during a particularly restless night I caught glimpses of shadowy forms moving restlessly hither and thither ashore.

With the arrival of dawn next morning we were astir; and after an early breakfast the anchor was hove up and we got under way to resume our voyage of exploration. On the previous afternoon we pretty closely skirted the western shore of the bay; now, on our way out, we as closely hugged the eastern shore, which I kept under continuous scrutiny with the help of the telescope. But nothing worthy of record was seen; and that day's voyage might be dismissed with the mere mention of it, but for the fact that when we were about half-way down the bay we reached a spot where the water and the swamp were so intermingled that we actually ran right into a vast bed of rushes without grounding. There was, perhaps, nothing very remarkable about that, but there was a peculiarity about those rushes that Billy was the first to observe and remark upon, namely, their absolutely perfect straightness. This inspired me with an idea: our stock of ammunition was limited, and when it should become exhausted, what were we to do? So long as we remained upon the group we *must* have weapons of some sort, and the only substitute for the rifle and revolver that I could think of was the bow and arrow. I cut one of the rushes and found it to consist of an exceedingly hard outer casing filled with soft pith; it was remarkably light; and it instantly occurred to me that the smaller, thinner rushes—they ranged from about an eighth of an inch up to quite two inches in diameter—would make ideal arrows. We therefore set to work, there and then, and cut about two hundred reeds of suitable diameter, each of them being long enough to make at least two arrows. When, toward sunset that evening, we again reached the little islet that I had resolved to make our home—and which I named Eden because it was so like a garden—the first thing we did was to spread our reeds out on the grass to dry; next we rigged the tent—for we intended to spend the night on the island—and then Billy and I took a walk up as far as the shoulder of the hill, from which was to be obtained a view of the sea, upon the off-chance of there being a sail of some sort in sight. But, as I more than half expected, the ocean was bare. We met with no adventures, unpleasant or otherwise, that night, but enjoyed several hours of sound, dreamless sleep, and awoke refreshed the next morning to pursue our voyage of exploration.

Nor did we meet with any adventures worth recording on the third day of our voyage. We sailed past the eastern end of the island inhabited by the natives, leaving it about two miles on our starboard hand as we steered south; then we sailed past another and much bigger island, which I estimated to measure some sixteen miles long by about fourteen miles wide. It was in the form of a double-coned hill sloping on all sides down to the water's edge, the higher of the two cones being about nine hundred feet high, and the other perhaps two hundred feet less. It was thickly wooded from beach to summit, and I had no doubt that many of the trees we saw bore edible fruits; but we did not land to test the matter. Rather late in the afternoon we arrived abreast another and much smaller island that proved to be the southernmost of the group. This we named "South Island"; and about sunset we ran into a tiny bay close to its western extremity and, anchoring the boat, passed the night in her, this time without disturbance of any kind.

Continuing our circumnavigation of the group, we reached the wreck again about an hour before sunset on the fourth day of our travels, keeping within the lagoon all the time and thus confirming my theory that the reef completely encircled the whole group. I estimated that in the course of those four days we sailed a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles, but it was well worth it, for I now had considerable knowledge of the general characteristics of the entire group, to which I could add when I set out to traverse the intersecting channels.

The matter about which I was now most anxious was the erection of our projected house on our little islet of Eden; and to the cutting and shaping of the timber that was to be employed in its construction Billy and I at once devoted ourselves energetically, making remorseless inroads upon the wreck for the required materials, but maintaining the cabins and after part of the ship intact, that we might not deprive ourselves of the one dwelling-place until the other was ready to receive us. And I was all the more anxious to get this important piece of work completed without loss of time because I had a suspicion that in those latitudes there is what is known as a "hurricane season", during which extremely violent gales are prevalent, and I knew that the very first of these—when it came—might destroy the wreck and so turn us out of house and home.

No sooner had we begun our work than I recognised the wisdom that had prompted me to prepare a carefully drawn detailed plan of our future house beforehand, for now I was able to determine, by reference to my plan, the exact dimensions and shape of every piece of timber required, thus saving a vast amount of time and labour that must otherwise have been spent in consideration, and in the tentative fitting together of the several pieces.

There is no need to tax the patience of the reader by describing in detail our daily progress. Let it suffice to say that we worked all day and every day from dawn to sunset, until at length, after five weeks of strenuous but uneventful labour, punctuated at intervals by thunderstorms of terrific violence, accompanied by torrential downpours of rain—which we thankfully utilised for the replenishment of our fresh-water supply—the carpenter work of our projected house was finished, and then came the still more formidable task of erection.

We began by loading our boat with as much as she would carry of the building materials and the requisites for a few days' stay upon the islet; and then we left the wreck, arriving at our destination rather late the same evening, taking the short cut through those parts of the intersecting channels that we had already traversed upon the occasion of our discovery of the islet. The choice of a site for the house, and the unloading and conveyance of the tools and building materials to that site occupied the whole of another day, for the site chosen was on the eastern slope of the hill, about a mile distant from the cove where the boat lay, involving the carrying of several heavy loads of timber all that



distance up-hill; but it was well worth the labour, for the situation afforded a magnificent and uninterrupted view of the open sea to the eastward, while toward the west and south-west we had a view of a considerable portion of the island with the remarkable precipitous cliffs, and a broad stretch of lagoon to the south of it.

Spending the night of that very fatiguing day on Eden, we returned to the wreck on the day following, a fair wind the whole way enabling us to accomplish the trip in time to load up the boat that same evening in readiness for an early start next day. This mode of procedure was followed for nearly a month; by the end of which period we had transported from the wreck to our islet the whole of the material for our house, the chests of treasure, the ship's medicine-chest, all the tools of every description that were to be found in the ship, all the arms and ammunition, the chronometer and other navigating instruments, the charts, and a considerable quantity of the most valuable contents of the lazarette; after which we were practically independent of the wreck; for as soon as we had built our house we should be in possession of everything absolutely necessary to the maintenance of life and health.

The house, however, still remained to be built, and this task kept Billy and me busy for another six weeks; but when it was finished we found ourselves, relatively speaking, in clover, for our house consisted of a strongly-built, weather-proof bungalow containing living-room, store-room, two bedrooms, kitchen, scullery, fuel house, and other outbuildings, with a stoep and veranda extending all round it; and it was roofed with deck planking, caulked, thoroughly well tarred, and then coated with sand. The furniture was of course a bit rough, but it served its purpose, and it was eked out by the addition of a couple of comfortable arm-chairs and six deck-chairs from the wreck, with, of course, beds and bedding, table linen, crockery, cutlery, and all the cooking gear.

This great task accomplished, my next business was to run the boat, single-handed, to and fro between the islet and the wreck, removing from the latter everything that might by any chance be of the slightest value to us, while Billy, having developed an ambition to lay out a considerable expanse of the slope in front of the house as a garden, put in his time in the realisation of that ambition. After a time I was able to lend a hand at this job; and I finished up by setting on end, in front of the house, the brigantine's spare main topmast, which made a fine flagstaff, upon which I proposed to hoist the ship's ensign, union-down, if ever a ship should heave in sight.

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## **Chapter Ten.**

### **A Spider's Web!**

My next task was one which I felt I had already neglected too long, namely, the provision of weapons to supplement our firearms, and so save our ammunition for cases of extreme emergency. This I proposed to do by the manufacture of bows and arrows, if I could find materials suitable for the purpose. So far as the arrows were concerned, I had already found perfect material for the shafts in the bundle of rushes I had cut in the Shark Bay swamp, and which had by this time dried and hardened in the air until they had become all that I could wish for. But I still required wood from which to make bows, and I spent a whole day unsuccessfully searching the woods of Eden for suitable trees. But it did not follow that because there were no suitable trees on our own islet, there were none on any of the other islands of the group; therefore on a certain evening I announced my intention of starting next morning upon a further voyage of exploration and discovery.

In pursuance of this intention, immediately after breakfast on the following morning, I put two rifles in the boat, with an ample supply of cartridges, while we each carried a brace of revolvers in a belt strapped round our waists; in addition to which I took along with me a ship's cutlass to serve instead of an axe with which to cut any suitable boughs we might chance to find.

For prospecting purposes I chose the western island of the group, not only because it was the largest and most densely wooded but also because I seemed to remember vaguely having seen, when sailing past it on my way to and from the wreck, certain trees resembling yews, than which, of course, nothing could be better for my purpose. We got under way with a fine fair wind, and headed for East Channel, entering which we ran close in under the precipitous cliffs that formed the northern coast-line of the island inhabited by the natives. Thence we passed into North Island Channel, with the mysterious North Island on our starboard hand; and as the boat buzzed merrily along I kept the telescope focused upon the wide, flat plain that formed the southerly half of the island, upon the off-chance of catching another glimpse of some of its weird inhabitants. But we saw nothing. Then, rounding the southern extremity of North Island, we entered the North-west Channel and, with West Island close aboard on our port hand, hauled up to the northward, keeping a sharp look-out for the trees of which I was in search.

It was about noon when I spotted a clump of those trees growing all together at no great distance from the shore, and we at once headed for them and grounded the boat upon the beach. Looking well to our weapons, to ensure that they were in working order, Billy and I each shouldered a rifle and made our way toward the clump of trees. The grass was waist-high and very matted, rendering the going rather difficult, but the distance was a mere trifle, and in about ten minutes we were at the trees.

I looked well at them, and came to the conclusion that if they were not actually yews they were of very similar character, sufficiently so at least to justify me in testing their quality. I accordingly climbed into one of them and, with some care, selected about a dozen suitable branches, which I hacked off with my cutlass and threw to the ground, where Billy retrieved them from the long grass. This done, we decided that the next thing in order was to pipe to lunch, which meal we discussed in comfort and at leisure aboard the boat.

Luncheon over, we agreed that a little fruit would be acceptable and, leaving the boat, we set out to hunt for some. The vegetation on this eastern side of the island was not nearly so dense and impenetrable as we had found it on the west side, where we landed upon the occasion of our first boat excursion, the undergrowth here being almost entirely absent; consequently, apart from the trouble of forcing a passage through the long matted grass, we experienced

little difficulty in penetrating the woods. But where the timber grew thickly it was, comparatively speaking, very dark, and the sudden transition from brilliant sunlight in the open spaces to the deep shadow of the thickly wooded parts was distinctly trying to our eyes.

We went warily, halting at frequent intervals and listening for any sounds that might warn us of approaching danger—for we were now upon the biggest island of the group and we knew not what dangerous forms of life might be lurking within the recesses of the forest—when, as we were looking about us for fruit-bearing trees of some kind, quite suddenly the woodland silence was broken by a rapid succession of piercing cries that somehow suggested to us the idea of a cat in a state of acute terror and physical distress.

“Hark! what is that?” exclaimed Billy, laying his hand upon my arm. “It sounds as though there was a cat somewhere quite near, in the grip of an enemy. Let’s look for and rescue the poor thing, if we can, Mr Blackburn. A cat is just the one thing needed to complete the homelike look of our bungalow. The poor thing is over there, somewhere, and I’m sure it is in terrible distress.”

We hurried in the direction indicated by Billy’s pointing hand, and, a few seconds later, saw, at a distance of a yard or two ahead of us, a commotion in the long grass, as though some creature or creatures buried in it were engaged in a violent struggle. The spot happened to be in deep shadow, and the thought came to me that, hidden in the thick masses of that tangled grass, some small animal might be fighting for its life, possibly in the embrace of a snake that, as likely as not, might be of a deadly venomous species. Therefore I put forth a restraining hand and said sharply to Billy:

“Stay here, and do not come until I call you. I will go alone and see what all the trouble is about.”

With a couple of strides I reached the scene of the commotion, the cries meanwhile pealing out as piercingly as ever, and as I stooped to investigate, my cap came into contact with something that yielded slightly to the touch, and was snatched off my head. Surprised and a little startled by the unexpectedness of the happening, I straightened up, to see my cap apparently suspended in mid air! Still more surprised, I stretched forth my hand and seized the cap to replace it upon my head, when I found that it strongly resisted my efforts, and, looking closely to discover the reason, I saw that it had become entangled in a spider’s web! Yes, *a spider’s web!* but such a web as I venture to say very few men save myself have ever seen. It hung suspended from a branch quite ten feet above the ground, it was tightly strained between the trunks of two trees at least eight feet apart, and it reached right down to the ground, where it was strongly interwoven with the long grass. But that web was not spun to catch flies; the meshes were from two to four inches wide; and although the thread was so fine as to be invisible in the subdued light, until closely looked for, it was enormously strong; so strong indeed that it required quite a powerful tug on my part to disengage my cap. My efforts to do so caused the web to vibrate strongly, and that, I suppose, irritated the owner, for while I was still tugging, the brute suddenly appeared from nowhere in particular, running swiftly over the web in the direction of the still entangled cap. And that spider was in perfect keeping with the web that he had spun. There are home-staying people who, in their wonderful wisdom, will doubtless shake their heads and smile incredulously at what I am about to say, but possibly there may be among my more widely travelled readers one or two who will know, from experience, that I am not exaggerating when I say that the body of the creature—of a deep ruby colour—was as big as the head of an average-sized man! Its head was about the size of an orange; it had a pair of wicked-looking eyes that fairly blazed with fury as, catching sight of me, it suddenly halted, glaring at me, emitting a low, angry, hissing sound, and clashing its formidable jaws together in what looked like an access of perfectly demoniac ferocity. Struck motionless for the moment, in sheer amazement, I quickly recovered myself and, believing that the thing was about to spring at my face and inflict a possibly fatal bite, I raised my cutlass and, with a slashing blow, clove the creature through.

Leaving the severed parts of the body still clinging tenaciously to the web, I next turned my attention to the screaming, frantically struggling creature at my feet. A single glance sufficed to show that it was obviously feline, about as big as a full-grown cat; and it had somehow become entangled in the bottom meshes of the web. It was fighting desperately but ineffectually to free itself; indeed its struggles seemed to have but the more hopelessly involved it, for although it had torn a hole several feet long in the bottom of the web it was still held fast by a dozen or more of the threads, while its body was completely enveloped in layer upon layer of the tough, tenaciously glutinous web. The unfortunate animal was evidently near to the point of exhaustion from its violent efforts to break loose, and when I bent over it the poor thing looked up at me and whined piteously, as though appealing for help. It was an appeal that I could by no means resist; therefore, taking the creature in my hands, I tore it free by main force, parting thread after thread until all were severed.

Whether it was that the poor little beggar was too completely exhausted to struggle further, or whether it instinctively understood that I meant well by it, I cannot say, but the fact remains that from the moment it felt itself in my grasp it ceased to struggle and, when it was completely freed from the web, lay quite passively in my arms. I carried it to where Billy still stood awaiting my return and, showing it to him, said:

“Here is your ‘cat’, Billy; but you mustn’t touch it yet, for it is in a filthy state, having been tangled up in the most amazing spider’s web I ever saw.”

Of course the boy immediately fired a whole broadside of questions at me relative to my recent adventure, also he must needs be taken to see the web, and the defunct spider, after which, forgetting all about the fruit which we had started to seek, we re-entered the boat and set out upon our return to Eden, which we reached shortly before sunset. As we worked our way back through the winding channels Billy beguiled the time by taking our newest acquisition upon his lap and endeavouring to free it from the clinging tangle of web in which it had enveloped itself, and so agreeable did the operation appear to be to the animal that it lay quite passive, permitting itself to be handled freely; and eventually, to Billy’s great delight, it started to purr.

For my own part, however, reflection caused me to question whether I had been wise in introducing this new member

to our family circle. Had it been a dog I should have had no doubts; a dog would have been a delightful companion for both of us, but this creature—what was it? As I have already said, it was about the size of a full-grown cat, and it undoubtedly belonged to the cat tribe; but despite its size I judged it to be a mere kitten, and quite a young one at that. Its legs were much thicker and more muscular and its fur was shorter and not so fine as that of the domestic cat; and although I had seen a good many domestic cats I had never seen one marked like this creature, a rich, ruddy brown on the head, shoulders, and fore-quarters, shading off to a light tawny colour at the hind-quarters and the tail, with just a suggestion of darker spots here and there; white on the throat, breast, belly, and the inside of the legs. It occurred to me that if my suspicions were correct we might eventually find that we had introduced a decidedly awkward member into our domestic circle. But, meanwhile, I kept my suspicions to myself.

Billy displayed the utmost interest in his new pet; apparently he was unable, for the moment, to think of anything else. He was particularly anxious that the little beast should settle down in the house and become thoroughly domesticated, and with that object in view he at once proceeded to liberally smear its fore paws with part of our slender remaining stock of butter, having heard that cats so treated never deserted the house in which they had received such hospitality. Next, he set to work to make a kennel out of odds and ends of material left over from the construction of our house. As for me, I considered that I was far more usefully employed in stripping the bark from the branches which I had gathered, and converting them into bows.

Our respective enterprises progressed as satisfactorily as could be desired. Billy's protégé—which in a moment of inspiration he had given the highly original name of "Kit"—fed to repletion upon broth and fish, was apparently quite content to bask in the sun all day on the floor of the veranda, to be petted and played with by us when we could spare the time, and to take up his quarters at night in Billy's kennel, upon a luxurious bed of sweet-scented hay; while the bows, upon which I expended some pains, promised to be everything that I could desire. Billy and I made another voyage to the swamp in North Island and collected reeds enough to make some hundreds of arrows, which we headed with hard, sharp thorns, embedded in about three inches of clay at the head to impart steadiness of flight to the missile, an arrangement which I found to answer admirably. Then, when our bows were completed, we set up a target in front of the house and practised assiduously, until within a fortnight we became sufficiently expert to hit a six-inch bull's-eye, at two hundred yards, every time. Having attained to this degree of skill, we could get as many birds as we needed for food without the further expenditure of any ammunition; we accordingly hoarded the remainder of our powder and shot against the possible moment when we should be in dire need of it.

Striving for perfection, I made twelve bows before I was quite satisfied with the result of my efforts. Thus, allowing one bow for each of us, and a second as a stand-by, I had eight bows for which I had no particular use. They did not quite come up to my standard, yet I did not care to destroy them; after some consideration, therefore, I decided that they might be used as a medium for the establishment of friendly relations between ourselves and our neighbours, the natives on Cliff Island. Accordingly, on a certain day, placing the superfluous bows and a number of arrows in the boat, and taking our rifles and revolvers with us, Billy and I started to pay our visit.

Heading south, a run of five miles brought us, in the course of an hour, to the western extremity of Cliff Island, rounding which we presently saw that the natives appeared to be all at work in their fields of maize and sugar, or tending their fruit-trees. The sight of our sails, gliding along within a short distance of the beach, caused them to drop whatever work they might be engaged upon, to watch our progress, although the boat must by that time have become quite a familiar object to them, so often had we passed the island on our way to and from the wreck. Arrived at the spot where we had encountered the apes, I hauled the boat to the wind, ran her in upon the beach, and stepped ashore. This was the first time that I had landed upon the island since that memorable occasion, and consequently I was not surprised to observe that my action created something of a commotion among the inhabitants. The alarm trumpets were sounded, and there was again a stampede on the part of the women and children toward the curious caves in the cliff-face, while the men came running together and rallying round an individual who appeared to be their leader, or chief. Meanwhile I walked slowly up the narrow beach to the level ground beyond, and there stood with both hands upraised in token of amity.

The man whom I assumed to be the chief stood intently regarding me for several minutes, as though endeavouring to gather from my actions what my motive for landing on the island might be; whereupon I beckoned, and then again raised my hands above my head. By way of response the chief raised his hands for a moment, and then proceeded to discuss—as I surmised—the situation with certain others who were probably minor chiefs. Finally, after I had several times repeated my beckonings, about a dozen of them, including the man whom I supposed to be the chief, came slowly toward me, with their hands raised. Their approach was marked by a very considerable amount of hesitation, halts being frequent, and progress resumed only in response to vigorous beckonings on my part, so that fully twenty minutes were consumed in traversing the distance of some five hundred yards that originally separated us; but at length the party arrived within about a dozen yards of me, and there finally halted.

The moment had evidently arrived for me to declare my intentions. I therefore drew from my pocket a necklace of big turquoise-blue beads that formed part of the "truck" provided by the late skipper Stenson for purposes of trade, and, holding it aloft, advanced with a friendly smile toward the chief, who seemed more than half inclined to turn tail and run. As I purposely moved very slowly and deliberately, however, he stood his ground; and when I halted before him and placed the necklace round my own neck, a low murmur of admiration escaped the party. Then, removing the beads from my own neck, I stepped slowly forward again and lightly dropped them round the neck of the chief, who, I thought, seemed to find some difficulty in deciding whether he was the more frightened or delighted. But I continued smiling upon him in friendly fashion, and offered my right hand, in token of amity, a sign which he seemed to understand, for after a moment of hesitation he placed his hand in mine and gave a friendly squeeze, which I instantly returned.

I now turned toward the boat and, saying: "Come with me; I have something to show you," beckoned the party to follow me. Of course they did not understand my words, but they must have correctly interpreted the tones of my voice, for they followed me without hesitation, halting at the top of the bank, however, to take a good look at the boat and exchange excited remarks concerning her—as I easily conjectured from their animated gestures.

Meanwhile, advancing to the boat, I took from Billy a small wooden target that I had prepared, together with a bow and sheaf of arrows. The target I fixed up on the beach and, stationing myself at about a hundred yards from it, directed the attention of my little audience, first to the bow, then to an arrow which I drew from the quiver, and finally to the target. Then, fitting the arrow to the string, I drew the bow to its full extent, and the next moment the arrow was quivering in the bull's-eye, to the amazement and audible admiration of my new friends. This feat I performed a second and a third time, and then led the party to the target, that they might see for themselves how firmly were the arrows embedded in it; and this evidently provoked in them further admiration, for they at once plunged into an animated discussion of the matter, some at least of them already appreciating the value of the bow as a lethal weapon, for one of the party, admirably mimicking the action of an ape coming up the beach, then drew an imaginary bow, and, instantly clapping his hand over his heart, fell back in an imitation of the death-agony.

I patted him approvingly on the shoulder, nodded, and said: "Yes, that is the idea, old chap; that is precisely what I want you fellows to understand," and again they seemed to comprehend me, for they all nodded vigorously. Then, wrenching the arrows from the target, I conducted the party back to the hundred-yard mark, and placing the bow and an arrow in the hands of the chief, signed to him to try his hand.

Of course he made a terrible bungle of it to start with. First, he failed to put enough strength into the pull, and the arrow flew only a few yards; by dint of patient coaching on my part, however, he gradually improved, and when, after practising diligently for about an hour, he succeeded in sending an arrow as far as the target—although several yards wide—his delight and pride knew no bounds. I then showed him that it was possible to hit the target at double the distance; after which I took him to the boat and presented to him the remaining seven bows, with their sheaves of arrows, which filled the simple fellow's cup of joy to the brim. He insisted on conducting Billy and me through the plantations of maize and sugar-cane, directed our attention to the orchards of fruit-trees, and finally led us to the cliffs, which I now saw were honeycombed with rock-dwellings, and introduced us to his own particular mansion, which was a cave of some twelve feet wide by twenty feet deep, very stuffy and malodorous. Here we were entertained to a luncheon of boiled green maize cobs, and several varieties of delicious fruits. His household consisted of an elderly woman whom I conjectured to be his mother, two young men who, I understood, were his sons, and five girls who might be either his wives or his daughters. When at length we were able to effect our escape from his rather pressing hospitality, and returned to the boat, I found that during our absence somebody—presumably my recent host—had sent down several baskets containing green heads of indian corn, sugar-cane, and fruit, which we took back with us to Eden; I for my part feeling well satisfied with the result of my visit.

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## **Chapter Eleven.**

### **A Raid by the Apes.**

Having thus successfully established friendly relations with the natives I determined to maintain them, and, with this object, made frequent calls upon the chief, who was most anxious to display the increasing skill of himself and his subordinates in the use of the bow. And indeed the progress made was exceedingly creditable, and quite sufficient to enable them to put up a good defence against the apes which, I with some difficulty gathered, were prone to swim across the channel, from time to time, for the purpose of plundering the natives' fields and orchards. But, if I understood my new friends aright, these raids, though not perhaps very frequent, were occasionally of a far more formidable and disastrous character than I had thus far imagined, not infrequently resulting in a quite serious loss of life on the part of those natives who were courageous enough to defend their possessions. I accordingly decided to make and present to the plucky blacks twelve more bows, with a sufficient supply of arrows to enable them to resist successfully the incursions of their formidable enemies.

The work of procuring the materials necessary for the manufacture of those weapons, and the making of them, together with the performance of sundry odd jobs in the garden, kept me busy for nearly a month, during which I was afforded ample opportunity to note the progress which Billy was making in the domestication of his cat. The beast was growing fast, and it was also developing certain markings which tended to confirm my original suspicion that it was some species of leopard, or panther, a circumstance that not only occasioned me considerable uneasiness but also led me to impart my fears to Billy, and even to hint tentatively at the advisability of shooting the creature before the full development of its natural proclivities should render it actually dangerous. But Billy indignantly scouted the suggestion that his pet could possibly develop dangerous tendencies, directing my attention to the affection which it displayed for both of us; and I was compelled to admit that, so far, his contention was sound, for the beast followed us about like a dog. It could scarcely endure to be separated from either of us for any great length of time, and it seemed never so happy as when lying at full length on the floor of the veranda, before my chair, with my feet lightly resting upon its body, as upon a footstool. And upon the now comparatively rare occasions when we took a trip in the boat, Kit was invariably to be found on the beach, waiting and watching for our return; and it was amusing to observe the delighted gambols in which he indulged as we stepped ashore.

The new bows and arrows being at length ready, Billy and I started for Cliff Island on a certain morning, for the purpose of presenting the weapons to their prospective owners. Upon our arrival we were received by the natives with their accustomed cordiality, and I at once handed over our gift to Bowata, the chief, who was profuse in his expressions of gratitude. I had by this time acquired a sufficient grasp of their very simple language to enable me to make a pretty shrewd guess at their meaning when they spoke to me, and also to make myself fairly well understood by them, and I gathered from Bowata that the gift was singularly opportune, inasmuch as that the apes had of late, for some inexplicable reason, been unusually pertinacious in their raids upon the island; but that, thanks to my original gift, their attacks had been successfully withstood without loss of life on the part of the natives, the invading apes having all been slain before it was possible for them to effect a landing. The little fellow was immensely proud of those achievements—as indeed he might well be, considering that before the bow-and-arrow era every raid by the apes had resulted in the death of one or two natives and the more or less serious maiming of others; and so proud was he of the skill which he and his people had developed that he must needs set up a target, there and then, that I

might witness a display of that skill. It now became apparent that Bowata was by no means devoid of shrewdness, for not only had he personally practised assiduously at the target, but he had insisted that the petty chiefs who had been entrusted with bows should do the same; and, not content with that, he had chosen some two dozen other men, all of whom he had personally trained; so that when I turned up with my gift he had already about thirty men, every one of them a quite fairly expert bowman. I could not forbear a smile at this intelligence, imparted with the most perfect naïveté, for it almost appeared as though the man had divined my intention to make this second gift.

And now occurred a rather remarkable coincidence; for while the display of native skill was in full swing the trumpets were sounded, giving warning of another approaching raid. The apes, it appeared, were heading for a point about half a mile to the westward of the spot where we were assembled, and toward that spot the archers, twenty in number, including those who had been entrusted with the new bows, set off at top speed, followed by their unarmed comrades, who merely delayed long enough to collect such blocks of coral and rock of suitable size as happened to be in their way. As for me, I announced my intention to attack the brutes from the boat, if I should be in time to intercept them; but Bowata delayed his departure long enough to beg me to allow him and his men to deal, unaided, with the enemy, as every victory gained by his people increased their confidence in themselves. But, he added, if any of the apes should escape and attempt to swim back to their own island, I should be rendering good service by destroying them on the way. The sound common sense of both these contentions I instantly recognised.

Keeping well off-shore, that we might be safely out of range of stray arrows, Billy and I arrived, in the boat, off the scene of the impending struggle, while the leading ape was still a good three hundred yards from the beach, and I was glad to see that the blacks were keeping cool and withholding their fire, instead of wasting their arrows by discharging them prematurely. The apes were swimming easily, and keeping so well together that it was only with difficulty I was able to count them. Billy and I were agreed that they totalled sixteen, which, if I had understood Bowata aright, was far and away the most formidable number that had ever been encountered; and I looked to our rifles and edged the boat in a little nearer the shore, to be ready for possible eventualities; then, as the first arrow was discharged, I brought the boat to the wind and hove her to.

That first shot was a miss; but the second shot scored, for I saw the leading ape shake his head angrily, and go through the motion of plucking an arrow from his neck; he swam a few yards farther, however; then he suddenly flung up his arms and rolled over in the water, motionless.

I was glad to see that the natives had assimilated the advice I had endeavoured, somewhat laboriously, to impart to them, to shoot singly at a selected mark, thus economising arrows, and promoting good shooting. They were adopting those tactics now, and the soundness of them was demonstrated by the fact that no less than five of the apes were put *hors de combat* before the feet of any of them touched bottom and they started to wade ashore. Then, indeed, as some half-dozen of the huge creatures upreared themselves simultaneously, revealing the whole of their bodies above the hips, the blacks betrayed signs of panic, a whole flight of arrows greeting the brutes. But if that indiscriminate discharge was indeed the result of panic it was nevertheless thoroughly effective, for every one of the monsters went down, either dead or too desperately wounded to be capable of further effort. The fate of their comrades, however, seemed in no wise to dismay or act as a deterrent to the survivors, who, five in number, pressed resolutely on and, finding bottom, rose in quick succession to their feet and proceeded to scramble ashore, actually passing between the bodies of their dead and dying companions, and noticing them only to thrust them roughly aside in their eagerness to get to grips with their enemies. But the latter were quite ready for them. The success of Bowata and his fellow archers, thus far, had inspired them with such confidence in themselves and their weapons that I believe not a man of them would have turned tail so long as a single arrow remained to them, and as the surviving apes advanced they were met by such a withering flight of arrows that not one of them lived actually to emerge from the water; and then, with yells of triumph, the victors rushed into the water and gave the *coup de grâce* to such of the apes as betrayed any signs of lingering life.

“Let draw the fore-sheet, Billy,” said I. “We must go ashore and congratulate our friends upon their victory.”

As the boat grounded on the beach I saw that several of the natives were still in the water, busily engaged in retrieving arrows from the bodies of their victims; but I had a shrewd suspicion that many of the arrows shot had been hopelessly lost; and the suspicion suggested an idea upon which I acted later on. But for the moment my attention was fully occupied by Bowata and his people, who crowded round us, all talking at once, some of them excitedly relating particular incidents of the adventure, while others were striving to express their gratitude to me for putting into their hands the means to defend themselves successfully against the most formidable raid that had ever been attempted by the apes.

On our way back to Eden I gave some consideration to the idea referred to above. It was this. Long as we had been on the group without sighting so much as the most distant glimpse of a sail, the hope was ever present that the day would eventually dawn when we should be rescued from our imprisonment, mild and even agreeable as it was in some respects; and when that day should arrive, what would happen to Bowata and his people? Who would continue to supply them with weapons of defence against their ferocious enemies? It was obvious that, from the moment of our departure from the group, they would be left entirely to their own resources; and to me it seemed that it would be only humane, if not my actual duty, to supply the means whereby it might be possible for them to replenish for themselves their supply of bows and arrows.

Now, how was this to be done? I could see nothing for it but to provide them with something in the nature of a boat wherein to navigate the channels, then to show Bowata where the wood for the bows and the shafts for the arrows could be obtained, and finally teach him and his people how to make bows and arrows for themselves. I fully realised that to present the savages with a boat might be a proceeding not altogether devoid of danger; for savages—even such apparently harmless savages as our neighbours—were apt to develop treacherous tendencies, and, once provided with a boat, it would be difficult to prevent them visiting our own particular island of Eden, when, if any of our possessions should chance to excite their cupidity, who could say what might happen? There was, of course, a way whereby this danger might be reduced to a minimum, and that was by so reducing the dimensions of the boat

that she should be incapable of carrying more than two men at a time; and this I determined to do. As to material, there was plenty of such as I required to be obtained from the wreck, for I meant the boat to be of the simplest construction, being, in fact, nothing more than a miniature flat-bottomed Thames punt, to be propelled by a pair of paddles.

Having settled this matter to my satisfaction, I explained my intention to Billy that evening, as we sat together under the veranda discussing the events of the day by the light of a glorious full moon, with Kit sprawling as usual at my feet. My intention was to start next day with Billy for a trip to the wreck, where I proposed to remain until I had constructed the punt, which, I believed, could be done in something less than a week.

Starting immediately after breakfast, taking with us the carpenter's tool-chest, an ample supply of fruit and food, and of course Kit—who could not possibly be permitted to roam Eden at large and be deprived of our company for a whole week—the voyage was accomplished without incident, and we arrived at the wreck early in the afternoon. We found the old craft in every respect just as we had left her, excepting that her cabins, having been securely closed during our absence, were distinctly stuffy. This was soon remedied, however, by throwing back the companion slide and opening the skylight and all the scuttles, after which we filled in the remainder of the afternoon in making up the beds in the state-rooms and preparing generally for our week's sojourn. When all was done an hour or two of daylight still remained, which I utilised by preparing a sketch of my proposed punt. She was to be five feet long on her bottom, with a rising floor two feet long at each end, making her nine feet long over all, with a beam of four feet, and sufficient freeboard to enable her to carry two men safely in the tranquil waters of the inner channels. Being flat-bottomed, flat-sided, and square-ended, she was an easy model to build; there were no planks to be bent, and as the wreck afforded abundant material, and as we did not aim at such refinement of finish as was included in a coat of paint, we completed our task during the afternoon of the fifth day, even to putting her over the side into the water to "take up."

Leaving the wreck immediately after breakfast the next morning, with the punt in tow, we arrived at our anchorage in Eden Cove about half an hour before sunset, almost the whole of the passage being a beat to windward, while the towage of the punt further retarded our progress. We, however, found everything just as we had left it; and, although I think we enjoyed the little change involved in living on the wreck, we were glad to find ourselves once more "at home", particularly Kit, whose rambles had been restricted to the deck of the ship, and who displayed his delight at returning to the wider spaces of Eden by starting off at full gallop the moment his pads touched the sand, rushing out of sight and appearing no more until we reached the house, where we discovered the beggar squatted on the top steps of the veranda awaiting our arrival.

On the following morning, after breakfast, Billy and I got the boat under way and, with the punt in tow, sailed for Cliff Island. Running the boat in on the beach, we were quickly joined by Bowata, who informed us that four days earlier the apes, to the number of nine, had attempted another raid which, he proudly added, had been successfully repulsed, but at the expense of many lost arrows; and he hinted pretty broadly that a further gift of those very useful missiles would be highly appreciated. Whereupon I informed him that I intended to do even better than continue to furnish him and his people with bows and arrows—I was going to present them with means whereby they might procure the materials wherewith to make for themselves as many of those weapons as they pleased; and therewith I led him down to the beach and directed his attention to the punt.

Bowata looked at the craft and grunted his approval of her; but it was evident that he had not the remotest notion of how she was to be the means of providing him with bows and arrows; so, casting off her painter, Billy and I stepped into her and, paddling along close to the beach, showed the savage in a very practical manner how to handle her. Next, landing Billy and taking Bowata into the punt with me, I handed him a paddle, and, first directing his attention to the manner in which I manipulated my own, invited him to try his hand. He proved an apt pupil, and within the hour was able to manoeuvre the punt single-handed. Then, beaching the punt and securing her to a stake firmly driven into the beach, I invited Bowata and his son to enter the sailing boat, informing them that, having given them the means to navigate the channels, I now proposed to show them where to obtain the wherewithal from which to make as many bows and arrows as they desired.

The pair entered the boat with a distinct suggestion of trepidation; they could understand the punt, apparently, but they had evidently not yet grasped the fact that it was the wind that endowed the boat with mobility, and they seemed to regard her with distrust, as a magical craft that might as likely as not fly away with them, never to return. They were under the impression, it presently appeared, that we intended to turn them adrift to shift for themselves as best they could, but when I explained that Billy and I intended to go with them their fears vanished, and they seated themselves contentedly enough in the bottom of the boat in the places which I indicated. It was perfectly clear that not only they but also their fellow-savages regarded the expedition upon which we were embarking as a quite notable adventure, for they assembled in force to witness our departure, admiration and apprehension in about equal proportions being the dominant expressions upon the countenances of those we left behind us as the boat glided smoothly and rapidly away from the shore.

I took our guests, first of all, to West Island, upon which grew the trees from which I had obtained the wood found to be suitable for the making of bows; and, having directed Bowata's attention to the characteristic peculiarities of the trees, as distinguishing them from others, I shinned aloft into one of them, carrying with me a small hatchet that had come from the wreck, and proceeded to lop off about a dozen suitable branches which, with an ample supply of thorns to form arrow-heads, were duly placed aboard the boat. Then, shoving off again, we proceeded by way of the North-west Channel round to Shark Bay, in North Island, where, running the boat into the swamp, we cut a goodly stock of reeds from which to make shafts for the arrows. These two tasks, including the time occupied in sailing from place to place and returning, occupied the entire day, so that it was already dusk when, having landed Bowata and his son, and our cargo of branches and reeds, we arrived back at our own island of Eden.

The next day Billy and I again sailed for Cliff Island, where, with an old sheath knife as a tool, I showed Bowata how to make bows and arrows, at the same time presenting him with the hatchet, the knife, and a quantity of cord from

which to make bow-strings. We spent three days with the natives, supervising their work of making bows and arrows; and by the time that they had used up all the material with which I had supplied them, they had attained to a degree of proficiency that I felt would justify me in leaving them henceforth to their own devices.

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## Chapter Twelve.

### Islands of Fire!

We had by this time been on the group eight months; and although, with brief intervals spent in visits to the wreck, a sharp look-out for the appearance of a sail in the offing had been maintained, nothing had been sighted; and the disconcerting possibility now began to impress itself upon me that if I continued to trust only to such an occurrence for our deliverance we might spend *years* waiting for that event. Most fortunately, we had both thus far been blessed with perfect health; but it seemed too much to expect that this immunity from sickness or accident should continue indefinitely; and if both of us should chance to fall sick at the same time, what would be the result? Something very like panic seized me at the thought of such a possibility; I felt that I had been culpably foolish in relying so implicitly, and for so long a time, upon extraneous help; and the conviction forced itself upon me that I must at once take steps to effect our own deliverance.

Yet what could I do? The first idea that had suggested itself to me after the wreck of the brigantine was to build some sort of a craft in which we could effect our escape to civilisation; but after considering the matter I had come to the conclusion that such an undertaking would be altogether beyond my powers, with only Billy to assist me. No doubt I was helped to this conclusion by the conviction I then felt that something would certainly heave in sight within the next month or two to take us off. But with the lapse of time my confidence had insensibly waned, and I had accordingly set to work to make our stay upon the group as comfortable as might be. Now, however, I felt constrained to reconsider my original conclusion; and as a preliminary I took pencil and paper, drawing-instruments and scale, and proceeded to make tentative sketches of such a craft as I considered essential to enable us to make the voyage in safety and with a reasonable amount of comfort.

To insure these requirements I decided that the boat, whatever her dimensions, must be fully decked, and that she must be powerful enough to face and successfully battle with a whole gale of wind; also she must be capable of being handled by Billy and myself. Taking these requirements as a basis, I set to work upon my sketches.

The relative dimensions of the boat would be governed to a considerable extent by her rig. A cutter-rigged craft is more powerful than any other, but it is open to the objection that the mainsail—the cutter's most important sail—is an awkward sail to handle in a sudden emergency, if the craft happens to be short-handed, as we should be. I believed, however, that this difficulty might be overcome by watchfulness and the taking of timely precautions; therefore, after weighing the matter carefully, I decided in favour of the cutter rig. Bearing all the above requirements in mind, I set to work, and ultimately evolved a design for a craft thirty feet long on the water-line by ten feet beam, and six feet draught of water aft. To build a boat of these dimensions, with only Billy to help me, was a sufficiently ambitious project; but I had learned a good deal while building our existing boat; and, after all, I felt sure that if I should need more manpower, Bowata would willingly lend me some of his people. Also, realising that henceforth Billy and I would be fully occupied in building the new boat, the thought occurred to me that it was high time to secure such domestic help as would enable us to give our whole time and thought to our work without troubling about such matters as cooking, house-cleaning, and so on. Such help could only be obtained through Bowata. I therefore decided to seize an early opportunity to interview him upon the whole matter.

Meanwhile, however, now that I had at last determined to attempt the building of a sea-going boat, I was all impatience to make a beginning; and as I, further, came to the conclusion that the beginning—so far as the framing of the keel, stem, and sternpost was concerned—must be made aboard the wreck, where all the materials were at hand, we lost no time in again removing ourselves, with all necessary goods and chattels, to what remained of the *Yorkshire Lass*. Here I made a start by laying out, full-size, in chalk, upon the after-deck, an accurate outline of the keel, stem, and sternpost, which greatly facilitated my work. My chief difficulty, I discovered, was to find bolts at once of the required length and the necessary strength, since I could not possibly make them; and this difficulty absorbed so much time that we spent nearly a month on the wreck before the keel, stem, and sternpost were framed together in readiness to be set up on the beach at Eden, where I intended to do the remainder of the work.

The framework was much too big and heavy to be conveyed to Eden otherwise than by towing; and as the whole trip was more or less a beat to windward, the transport of it cost us two days, our arrival "home" occurring so late in the afternoon that there was no time to attempt anything further that day. But on the day following I sailed over to Bowata's island and explained to him my requirements, finding him more than eager to do anything and everything he could to oblige me. The domestic question was very easily arranged, Bowata suggesting that I should employ a man whom he could especially recommend, and who, with his two wives, would be able to do everything required in that particular direction; while as for labour for the building of the cutter, he assured me I might have as many men as I wished, for as long a time as I needed them. Nothing could be more satisfactory than this, the only point I felt doubtful about being the domestic part of the arrangement; but Billy settled this by undertaking to supervise the work until the man and his wives should be trained to efficiency; and the plan, when put into operation, worked excellently. The keel of the new boat being now ready, the next thing was to set it up, accurately plumb, longitudinally and transversely, upon the building blocks; and to do this I obtained the loan of twenty natives for a day, for the keel, with stem and sternpost attached, was much too heavy a mass of timber for Billy and me to manipulate without assistance; and with their help the work was most satisfactorily accomplished, they doing the manual work under Billy's guidance while I supervised and directed the adjustments that were frequently necessary. I next set up five stout moulds, one at the midship section of the boat, with two aft and two forward of it, giving the exact shape of the boat at those points, and to the moulds I firmly attached several temporary wales and stringers, thus obtaining a kind of skeleton giving an accurate idea of the form of the finished boat. And when I had got thus far

with my work and inspected the result from various view-points, I was as much amazed at my own audacity in attempting so ambitious an undertaking as I was gratified at the appearance which it presented; for I saw before me the outline of a very shapely, yacht-like little ship that, if I knew anything of such matters, promised to be fast, weatherly, and a very fine sea-boat, quite capable of taking care of herself when hove-to, even in a heavy gale of wind. It was my intention to plank her upon the diagonal principle, using three thicknesses of comparatively thin plank, for I had no means by which to steam a single layer of planking of the necessary thickness and so render it pliable enough to bend to the correct shape; while I believed that by using thin plank I could bend it to shape unsteamed. I am getting somewhat ahead of my yarn, however; for the progress outlined above represented nearly three months' hard work, an appreciable proportion of which had to be done a second time, owing to my inexperience.

With the accession of our black helpers our domestic arrangements flourished exceedingly, the only difficulty we experienced in connection with them occurring during the first fortnight or three weeks after their arrival, the trouble arising with Kit, who violently resented their intrusion and had to be kept strictly tied up until he had learned to understand that he must in nowise interfere with them. But even after reaching this stage the natives had to be exceedingly careful how they conducted themselves in his presence, for he never advanced farther than the merest toleration of them, while when any of the other blacks were on Eden, assisting me to build the cutter, it was absolutely necessary to keep the beast closely confined to the house until they had left.

I very soon made the discovery that had I been obliged to depend solely upon the efforts of Billy and myself, I should have been compelled to abandon the idea of building the cutter at a very early stage of the operations. It was not so much that we found the work beyond our strength—although in that respect we were often glad enough to have a little additional help—but it was often necessary to have a plank or a waling, or some such matter, held firmly in position at half a dozen points or more at the same moment, while I fixed it; and it was on such occasions that I welcomed the assistance of the natives. And as such occasions occurred pretty frequently, it happened that I was kept *au courant* with everything of importance—and with a great deal that was exceedingly unimportant—that occurred on Cliff Island. Thus I came to know that, contrary to hope and expectation, the arming of the natives with bows and arrows, with the resulting destruction of the raiding apes, had been absolutely ineffective in checking the raids, which were now occurring more frequently and in greater force than ever. It appeared almost as though the brutes were possessed of sufficient intelligence to understand that something had happened rendering it no longer possible for attacks by small numbers to be successful, and that they were strengthening their attacking forces accordingly, with the evident determination to succeed ultimately at whatever cost. I was greatly vexed to hear this, for it was evident that the existence of such formidable beasts in the group constituted a growing menace to the human life in it; and I was wondering how this menace was to be fought, when Bowata and his people, without consulting me, made an attempt to solve the problem, which, for a short time at least, seemed to be crowned with success.

It was the height of summer, and there had been a spell of some six weeks of very hot, dry weather, when on a certain morning, as Billy and I, with some natives, were at work upon the cutter, the lad directed my attention to a thin cloud of light brownish-blue smoke rising in the air beyond Cliff Island. There was a gentle easterly breeze blowing at the time, sweeping the smoke away in the direction of West Island, and, as we watched, the cloud rapidly increased in density, its colour darkened, and, somewhat to my astonishment, it seemed to spread in an easterly direction, or against the wind. It soon became clear that it was the forest on Apes' Island that had caught fire; and it was equally evident that, thanks to the long dry spell, and to the fanning of the easterly breeze, the fire was spreading with great rapidity; for within twenty minutes of the appearance of the first light film of smoke we were able to see, over the eastern extremity of Cliff Island, the flames speeding up the hill-side, toward the conical summit of the island, preceded by so vast a volume of smoke that it completely veiled the hills of West Island from our sight. While Billy and I stood watching the rapid march of the flames, one of the natives, noticing our interest in the spectacle, approached and informed us that Bowata and one of his sons, determined to drive the apes off Apes' Island, had that morning crossed Apes' Channel in the punt which I had given them, with the avowed intention of setting the entire island on fire, beginning at its northern extremity—in order to drive the apes away from that part of the island from whence they were wont to start to swim the channel—and thence working round the shore to the eastern extremity of the island, hoping thus to drive the anthropoids in a westerly and southerly direction, right away from Cliff Island. As Apes' Island was everywhere densely covered with forest and undergrowth it was exceedingly probable that, unless something unforeseen occurred to extinguish the fire, every living thing upon it would be destroyed, except such creatures as might essay to swim the Middle Channel and take refuge upon West Island.

But as the day progressed, and the fire advanced, spreading ever more rapidly as great volumes of sparks were borne by the wind on ahead of the main body of flame, kindling subsidiary fires in advance, I began to doubt whether West Island would escape, remembering as I did that there was a stretch of the Middle Channel which was little more than half a mile wide, across which such a tremendous volume of sparks as now filled the air might easily be wafted. Toward evening my anticipation in this respect was verified, for upon ascending to the summit of our own peak on Eden, at the conclusion of our day's work, we saw that not only was the surface of Apes' Island an unbroken expanse of black, smoking ashes and charred tree-stumps, but that the fire had leaped Middle Channel, and practically the whole eastern side of West Island was a mass of flame. The destruction of life would of course be enormous; but such glimpses as had thus far been afforded us of the animal life upon the group seemed to indicate that it was inimical to mankind; and if its destruction involved that of the apes, it was not to be greatly regretted.

I waited three days to allow the ashes to cool, and then, taking Billy with me, sailed for the Middle Channel, running the boat ashore on Apes' Island at a spot where a stream of fresh water discharged into the narrowest part of the channel. Here we landed, and started to walk eastward over and through ashes that were ankle-deep and in places still unpleasantly hot. I was quite prepared to find evidences that the destruction of animal life had been tremendous; but even so I was amazed at the innumerable scorched and shrivelled carcasses of creatures that had made their way to the water's edge and had there perished, probably suffocated by the smoke because they had feared to take to the water. They lay thick upon the ground, huddled together, as far as the eye could reach to the right and left of



the spot where we landed, and the odour of burnt flesh was almost overpowering, while flies and birds swarmed about them in legions. The remains were mostly so far consumed as to be impossible of identification, but here and there we came upon what, judging from the skull and teeth, had once been a creature of the cat tribe, probably a leopard; while the skeletons of snakes—some of them, from their dimensions, evidently pythons—were numerous. We also came upon several carcasses of what I thought might have been boars; but, if they were, the creatures must have been huge specimens of their kind. There were also a few calcined skeletons of animals that must have been as big as or bigger than a British dray-horse, but of very different build. They did not suggest any animal with which I was acquainted, and I was quite unable to put a name to them. We walked two miles or more inland before turning back, but nowhere did I see anything suggesting the destruction of so much as a solitary ape, at which I was in nowise surprised, for I felt sure that the apes at least would be able to keep well ahead of the fire, and make good their escape to West Island. But West Island was, like Apes' Island, a fire-blackened ruin as far as the eye could see, toward both the north and the south; and if the fire had swept clean across the island to its western shore, it would mean another holocaust, in which the apes also would be involved, for there was no retreat, no sanctuary beyond West Island. It was too late to push our investigations farther that day, but I resolved that on the morrow I would see what the western side of West Island looked like. Accordingly, eight o'clock in the morning of the following day found Billy and me emerging from the North-west Channel into the lagoon, and hauling round to the southward to skirt the western shore of West Island.

We needed not to travel so far as this, however, to discover that at least part of West Island had escaped the ravages of fire, for upon our arrival off the south-western extremity of Cliff Island we saw that, owing to the greatly increased width of the Middle Channel at that point, the direction of the wind, and the peculiar configuration of the island itself, an area which I roughly estimated at about a hundred square miles, at its northern extremity, had been untouched by the flames; and this area of forest, although probably little more than a quarter of that of the whole island, would still afford cover for a good many animals, had they the sense—or the instinct—to escape to it.

It was not until we had rounded the northern extremity of West Island and had followed the west coast southward for a distance of about eleven miles that we again came upon the ruin wrought by the flames, which, we found, had swept right across the island, leaving the area above referred to untouched, while to the southward, as far as the eye could see, all was black ruin and desolation. At this point, too, signs of the devastation wrought upon the animal life of the island began to reveal themselves in the shape first of isolated carcasses, and then of groups of the same, rapidly becoming more numerous and more crowded as the boat glided along southward within a stone's throw of the beach.

As I was exceedingly anxious to discover whether or not the apes had escaped the destruction that had overtaken the other creatures inhabiting the two fire-stricken islands, we landed at various points along the beach, and made short investigating excursions inland, coming upon the remains of animals and reptiles of several different kinds—the variety indeed was astonishing—including, I regretted to see, two or three varieties of deer; and at length we found the half-consumed carcasses of three apes, close together; but we found no more that day. It was by this time drawing on toward sunset; accordingly we made sail for the wreck of the brigantine, and took up our quarters aboard her for the night.

Early on the following morning we resumed our inspection of West Island, starting at the point where we had left off on the previous evening, and on this day we came upon the remains of two more apes, several miles apart. But although those five carcasses of apes were all that we found, it was of course quite possible that there might have been many more, for our excursions inland were necessarily of very limited extent. To have made anything approaching a complete examination of the burnt area would have been the work of weeks, rather than of days, and I was indisposed to devote very much time to such an undertaking. Moreover, the effluvium arising from so many rapidly decomposing carcasses was, of itself, a sufficient deterrent.

But slight and limited as was our examination, it sufficed to prove that the island must have literally swarmed with animal life, several species of which were, as in the case of those found on Apes' Island, quite new to me; and late in the day, having extended our walk to the crest of a hill, we discovered that there was, a little south of the middle of the island, a triangular-shaped lake, about six miles long by about five miles broad at its western end, that had served to protect and preserve a clump of forest about two miles long; and the sounds that proceeded from it indicated that many animals had found sanctuary there. By the time that we had completed our survey it was too late to think of returning to Eden that day, so we again bore up for the wreck, spending that night aboard her and returning to our own island on the day following.

On our way back I touched at Cliff Island and had a chat with Bowata, relating to him the result of our trip of inspection. I told him that we had seen very few dead apes, and hazarded the conjecture that the brutes, retreating before the flames on their own island, had swum the Middle Channel to West Island, on the northern and unburnt portion of which they might have established themselves. But when he suggested that this portion also of the island should be set on fire, to make assurance doubly sure, I very strongly demurred, pointing out that, even if my conjecture should be correct, the unburned forest would doubtless be swarming with animal life other than that of the apes, and that it would be a very great pity to destroy it all in order to effect the extermination of the apes, unless such a drastic measure should prove to be imperatively necessary.

After the little break following upon the firing of Apes' Island I returned with enthusiasm to work upon the cutter, and in the course of a month used up all the available material which I had thus far accumulated, necessitating another visit to the wreck to obtain more. I collected as large a quantity as I believed I could conveniently handle, and, forming it into a raft, took it in tow for transport to Eden. The passage, that under ordinary conditions could easily be accomplished in a single day, occupied *five days*, and was, I think, the toughest job I had ever undertaken in my life, the raft being so deadly sluggish in movement that it was impossible to tow it to windward; and finally I found myself compelled to kedge it more than half the way. But I was glad when I had at length brought it safely into the cove and anchored it there, for I now had enough material to carry on with for at least four months. I estimated that another raft of equal size would suffice to complete the cutter, and, notwithstanding the difficulties that I had just

encountered, I felt strongly inclined to return forthwith to the wreck and procure a sufficiency for all future needs; but I was very tired after my labours, and I finally persuaded myself to postpone the task for a while—to my subsequent intense regret.

The anniversary of the wreck of the *Yorkshire Lass* arrived and passed. We had been a whole year on the group, and, so far as we knew, not a solitary sail of any description had come within sight of the islands during the whole of those twelve months. It was an astounding, incomprehensible fact; I had never really anticipated such a possibility. With the passage of each day, each week, each month, I had said to myself—with gradually waning assurance certainly—"It cannot be long now before a craft of some sort comes along to take us off," until the moment when it suddenly dawned upon me that if we were ever to escape, it must be through our own efforts—my own especially. This conviction now came upon me with overwhelming force; my hopes of deliverance by means of some extraneous agency suddenly sank to zero, and I began to work with such febrile energy that it presently drew from Billy a steadily growing flood of remonstrance.

I had by this time expended so much of my material that I was in the very act of preparing for another visit to the wreck to obtain more when poor Billy fell sick of some sort of a fever. Within three hours of his seizure he became delirious and was so extremely violent that—he being by this time a strong sturdy boy—I was obliged to at once drop everything else to look after him and see that he did not injure himself during the more severe paroxysms. Of course I had long ago taken the precaution to secure possession of the ship's medicine-chest, with its accompanying book of instructions; but the latter afforded me little help, for I could find in it no case the symptoms of which quite corresponded with those of my patient, and I was therefore compelled to rely very much upon my own judgment, and upon the instructions for the treatment of fevers in general. A liberal administration of quinine seemed to constitute the most hopeful form of treatment, and luckily we possessed an ample supply of the drug. I accordingly dosed Billy with it for close upon sixty hours, when the delirium ceased and the poor boy sank into a semi-stupor of exhaustion, which enabled one of the native women to relieve me by watching at the patient's bedside. I had by this time been without sleep for two nights and more than three days, and I was therefore glad enough to be free to retire to my own room to rest for an hour or two. Arrived there, I removed my boots and then, without troubling to remove further clothing, flung myself upon my bed and instantly sank into complete oblivion.

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### We exterminate the Apes.

I was aroused to consciousness by the flash of a dazzling light upon my closed eyelids, accompanied by the crash of a terrific clap of thunder. Opening my eyes I discovered that the room was in opaque darkness—showing that I must have been allowed to sleep at least eight hours; but even as I swung my feet to the floor and started to grope for my boots, while the reverberations of the thunder-clap still rumbled and echoed in the distance, there came another blinding flash of lightning, instantly followed by a deafening crash of thunder; and, getting my bearings by the illumination of the lightning, I started to my feet and, forgetting my boots, rushed to Billy's bedside, apprehensive of what might be the effect of the storm upon him.

I found the patient not only awake but also in his right mind.

"Well, Billy, my boy, how are you by this time?" I demanded.

"I believe I'm better, thank you, Mr Blackburn," replied the boy; "but I feel very weak and—oh, goodness! isn't it hot?"

It was. I had just found time to become aware of the excessive heat and closeness of the atmosphere. The perspiration was simply streaming from every pore of my body, and I felt suffocating for want of sufficient air. All the doors and windows of the bungalow were wide open, but the atmosphere was absolutely stagnant, the naked flame of a newly ignited lamp burning without the faintest flicker.

One of our native domestics was now busying herself arranging the table in what we called the "dining-room", and in laying out the materials for a supper for me—for it now appeared that I had slept for nearly fourteen hours on end, and the good woman insisted that I must have a meal at once. While these preparations were in progress I went out and stood under the veranda to take a look at the weather.

The thunder-clap that had broken in upon my slumbers proved to be the prelude to a terrific electrical disturbance which was now in full action. The centre of the disturbance appeared to be almost immediately overhead, for flash after flash of lightning was striking all round the house, while the detonations of the thunder were continuous and so violent that I felt the floor literally tremble beneath my feet. But the lightning was not confined to discharges from the cloud overhead, it was darting earthward all round us, and practically at all distances from zenith to horizon; and so frequent were the discharges that the illumination from them was continuous, revealing a vault packed with enormous masses of heavy, black, writhing cloud. I stood for perhaps five minutes fascinated by the spectacle of the vivid lightning-play; and then, just as the native woman came out to announce that my supper was ready, down came the rain in a perfect deluge; and in a moment the eaves of the house, the foliage of the trees, and the earth itself poured with soft, warm water. It was too good an opportunity to be wasted, so I hurried to my own room, threw off my clothes, seized a morsel of soap, and, dashing out to the midst of the downpour, treated myself to a most delightful and refreshing bath, as a preliminary to supper.

The rain continued for about half an hour, and then it ceased with that abruptness which seems so characteristic of the tropics. But it had scarcely come to an end when there arose a loud rustling of leaves among the trees in the garden and round about the house, a blast of hot wind poured in through the open doors and windows, violently slamming the former and causing the latter to rattle furiously; and I had barely time to rush and close them all when

a terrific squall came roaring down upon the bungalow. This squall was only the precursor of several that followed each other at rapidly decreasing intervals until those intervals became so brief as to be no longer distinguishable, and the wind settled into a roaring gale from the westward that blew all night and did not break until close upon noon next day.

As luck would have it, I had chosen the eastern slope of the peak as the site upon which to erect the bungalow, consequently the structure was, to a very great extent, sheltered from the gale by the hill behind it; but, even so, the building quivered and shook under the stroke of the blasts. And my heart sank as I thought of the wreck, for I felt that she had not one chance in a thousand of weathering it out. She was on what was now the windward reef—as it had been when she struck upon it; the surf would pile up on the reef again, raising the level of the water by perhaps three or four feet, and in that case the poor old *Yorkshire Lass* would be washed off the coral into the lagoon, and would there sink. And with her would go all the material that I needed for the completion of the cutter.

Then there was the cutter herself, or at least as much of her as had thus far been put together. How would she stand the buffeting to which she was being subjected? I was hopeful, for she was at this time merely a skeleton, and a very imperfect skeleton at that; consequently there would not be much for the wind to take hold of; yet I was anxious too, for I feared lest the heavy rain might have displaced some of the keel blocks and so let the craft down and perhaps strained her out of shape. So anxious, indeed, was I that I would have gone down to the cove at once, despite the fury of the wind, but the night was so pitch dark that I could have seen nothing; nor, single-handed, could I have done anything, whatever might have happened; so I was perforce obliged to defer my visit until daylight. But when daylight came I fought my way down to the cove, against the gale that was still blowing, and there found, to my inexpressible relief, that nothing had happened but what could be put right in an hour or two.

I was naturally most anxious to ascertain what, if anything had happened to the wreck, but it was not until nearly a week after the gale that Billy had progressed so far toward recovery that I was able to leave him entirely to the care of the natives. When, however, that moment arrived I took immediate advantage of it, starting for the scene of the wreck immediately after an early breakfast, and enjoining Billy not to be anxious should I be detained until the next day.

With a fair wind all the way the boat made short miles of the trip, and I reached the scene of the wreck fairly early in the afternoon; but at least an hour before my arrival my worst fears were realised, for where the wreck had once been there was now no sign of her. But I knew pretty well where to look for her, and, coasting along the inner edge of the reef, I ultimately came upon her within a few fathoms of the reef, sunk in six fathoms of water, and of course irrevocably lost to us. I thought, however, that possibly some useful wreckage might be floating about in the lagoon. I therefore worked the boat over to West Island beach, near to which I did indeed find a few planks and some small odds and ends that had broken adrift or floated off when the wreck went down, and these I formed into a small raft which I towed round to Eden on the following day.

But when I looked from the skeleton of the cutter to the small quantity of material available for her completion, my heart sank within me, and I felt utterly discouraged, for what I had was ridiculously inadequate. It was not enough even to complete the shell of the craft; and where on earth was I to get more? There were, of course, thousands of trees on the group, and I had an axe with which to fell them; but when they were felled, how was I to convert them into plank and scantling? It was a problem which I puzzled over during the whole day succeeding my return to Eden, seeking in vain for a solution, until at last it seemed that we were really doomed to remain where we were until taken off by a ship, even though we should grow old while awaiting her arrival.

Such a conclusion would doubtless have been terribly discouraging to many people, but after the first shock its effect upon me was, on the contrary, so provocative that I resumed work upon the cutter with more resolution than ever, if that were possible, until, some six weeks later, I had used up all my available material, and my work was perforce brought to a standstill. But when this happened I had made such progress that the cutter was planked up to the gunwale with the first thickness of planking; and so thoroughly satisfied was I with my work that I was determined *nothing* should prevent its completion, even though, to provide the necessary material, I should be compelled to pull down the bungalow and break up our sailing boat. Such forcible measures as those, however, demanded the most careful consideration before adoption.

Meanwhile the rank luxuriance of tropical plant-growth had already changed the fire-blackened areas of Apes' and West Islands to varying tints of delicate green, the several varieties of new vegetation seeming to find congenial conditions in the thick coat of ashes resulting from the fire. But I learned from Bowata, whose people had been maintaining a close watch upon both islands, that thus far no signs of animal life had been detected upon either of them, although the chief agreed with me that, whatever might be the case with Apes' Island, West Island—or at least the unburnt part of it—must be simply swarming with living creatures. And the conviction that this was so was causing him and his people so much uneasiness that a permanent watch had been established at the western end of Cliff Island, and the natives resident there, to the number of forty, had all been armed with bows and arrows, that they might be prepared to repel possible incursions of apes from that part of West Island, the channel at that point being but little wider than that which the apes were wont to swim when crossing from their own island.

The liability to incursions by the apes seemed to be the only source of anxiety on the part of Bowata and his people. In all other respects they appeared to be perfectly happy; for their wants were few, and so fertile was the soil of their own island that it amply supplied all those wants, with very little exertion on the part of the easy-going inhabitants. The trouble was that the products of their industry unfortunately appealed so strongly to the appetite of the anthropoids that, to gratify it, the brutes were willing to swim a channel a mile wide. And the trouble was serious enough, in all conscience, for—as I gradually learned, in the course of frequent conversations with the chief—the apes not only destroyed far more than they ate, but, until my introduction of the bow and arrow as a weapon, they were only driven off with the utmost difficulty, and frequently with serious loss of life on the part of the savages. It was indeed to put an effectual end to those frequent raids upon their property that the natives, in desperation, had finally resorted to the drastic measure of setting fire to the island that harboured the monsters.

The longer I meditated upon the problem of how to meet the shortage of material for the completion of the cutter the more reluctant did I become to resort to so extreme a measure as the breaking up of the sailing boat, still more the bungalow, to supply the deficiency. In my perplexity I visited East Island, and here a possible way out of the difficulty was suggested to me by the discovery—as I then for the first time particularly noticed—that certain of the trees flourishing on that island appeared to be if not actually cedars at least a species very nearly akin thereto. And if upon closer investigation this should prove to be the case, here was a supply of timber admirably suited to my requirements and ample beyond my utmost needs. It was a matter worthy of my most particular attention; and accordingly I selected a group of the supposed cedars, and forthwith proceeded to operate upon them. They were three in number, of just about the right size for my requirements, and they were within a quarter of a mile of the cove. I began my investigation by hacking off a good stout branch, stripping off its bark, and testing its working qualities. I found that the wood gave off the characteristic odour of cedar; that it was close-grained; that it was easily workable; and that it was, in short, everything I could possibly desire. I therefore started work in earnest by felling the tree that I had already attacked and trimming off its branches. This brought my day's work to a close, and I returned to Eden with a mind relieved of a heavy load of anxiety, for there was now no longer any need to contemplate the breaking up of either the boat or the bungalow.

True, I had found the wood I required; but what I needed was thin planks, not heavy balks of timber such as one might be able to hew out of a tree trunk with an axe; and how was I to obtain those planks? I considered the matter and suddenly remembered that cedar splits easily; I therefore determined to ascertain by actual experiment whether it would be possible to procure the planks I required by splitting the felled trunk. The experiment was on the whole successful; for although I wasted more timber than I anticipated I nevertheless succeeded in securing several very fine planks that, when operated upon with the plane, could be reduced to the exact thickness required. Thus encouraged, I made an estimate of the quantity of planking required to complete the hull of the cutter, and then proceeded to fell as many trees as were needed to furnish that quantity.

It was while I was thus engaged that I one day received an urgent visit from Bowata and his son, who came in great distress to inform me that the watchers posted at the western extremity of Cliff Island, to guard against a surprise attack on the part of the apes believed to have retreated to West Island, had that morning reported that the anthropoids were recrossing the Middle Channel to Apes' Island; and that, from observation of the creatures' movements, it was strongly suspected that they meditated an attack in force upon Cliff Island and its inhabitants. Bowata concluded his communication with an entreaty that I would lend my aid to repel the threatened attack. I at once acceded to this request, and, with the two natives aboard the sailing boat and their punt in tow, proceeded to Eden, where I collected all the arms and ammunition we possessed, and, taking Billy with me, made sail for Cliff Island.

As we approached the northern extremity of Apes' Island, from which point the brutes usually started on their swim across the channel to Cliff Island, my telescope revealed numerous apes clustered together upon the beach, while many others could be seen wending their way toward the same spot; but I could see none in the water, so concluded that the threatened raid had not yet started. I inquired of Bowata how many of his people were now armed with bows and arrows, and was gratified to learn that every male above the age of fifteen had been so armed. This meant that there were more than a hundred archers to defend the island; learning which I came to the conclusion that the best form of defence was attack, and made my plans accordingly.

Landing Bowata and his son to conduct the defence of their island, I took aboard the boat seven natives, who, the chief assured me, were among his most expert bowmen, and headed across the channel toward Apes' Island, my plan being to cruise to and fro opposite the spot where the apes were mustering, and to pick off as many of the brutes as possible while passing.

At this point the channel was only about a mile wide; ten minutes, therefore, sufficed us to accomplish the passage and to round to at a distance of twenty yards from the beach, where some fifty or sixty of the gigantic brutes were now assembled, most of them squatting upon their haunches, as though awaiting a signal of some sort, while others were joining them at the rate of two or three per minute. As the boat approached, the monsters eyed her malignantly, while several rose to their feet as though preparing to repel an attack. This suited our purpose well, and as the boat, under Billy's skilful handling, rounding to into the wind, with her sails a-shiver, glided slowly past the spot where the apes were congregated, we each deliberately selected our target and, drawing our bows to the full length of our arrows, let fly with deadly effect. Every arrow went home, many of them finding the heart, and with screams of mingled pain and rage eight of the apes crashed to the ground, a few of them writhing convulsively in their death-agony but most of them dead. There was time for a second discharge before the boat drifted too far away, and three more of the brutes went down, while five of their comrades, screaming and bellowing with pain and rage, wrenched the arrows from their wounds, some of them in their blind fury turning upon and savagely attacking their fellows. The manoeuvre was so successful that it was repeated with equally satisfactory results.

Thus far the unwounded apes appeared to take little or no notice of the havoc we were working among them; and I feel certain that none of them connected that havoc with the appearance of the boat upon the scene; but when the manoeuvre was repeated a third time, and still more of their number fell dead or wounded, it seemed at last to dawn upon their imperfect intelligence that the strange object with white sails, which glided to and fro upon the water opposite them, must be somehow associated with the casualties occurring among their companions, and with yells of concentrated fury and eyes ablaze with deadly malice about a dozen of them shambled down the beach into the water, and, striking out, started to swim in pursuit of the boat.

Nothing could have better suited us than this senseless act of the great anthropoids, for, although they swam fast, the boat could easily out-distance them in the breeze then blowing, and I signed to Billy to edge away toward a wider part of the channel, so that when they should discover how impossible it was to overtake the boat they might have the farther to swim, should any of them escape us and attempt to make their way across to Cliff Island. But the precaution was unnecessary, for when they were in the water and swimming we could do as we would with them, and within a few minutes every ape that had started in pursuit of the boat was slain.

By this time, however, others had also taken to the water, there being now at least thirty of them swimming, some in pursuit of the boat while others headed directly across the channel toward Cliff Island. This necessitated an alteration of our plans, yet we still contrived to keep the boat between the apes and the island, crossing and recrossing in front of the brutes at a distance of five to ten yards, so that it was impossible for us to miss them. Thus the slaughter went on until my very soul revolted at such terrible destruction, for the brutes continued to come on by dozens and scores until there seemed to be no end of them. Most creatures would have had intelligence enough to recognise eventually that their persistence meant death to them and would have turned back, either discouraged or terrified, but the apes seemed to be incapable of either emotion and pressed resolutely on, so that their destruction became imperative if the natives of Cliff Island were not to be abandoned to their tender mercies. But that sort of thing could not go on for ever; the number of the brutes gradually decreased, and at the end of about three hours the last ape in sight succumbed to our attack, and it then appeared probable that we had exterminated the entire tribe of the dangerous and formidable creatures.

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### Attacked by Chinese Pirates.

The destruction of the apes accomplished, I returned with avidity to the task of felling the cedar trees on East Island and splitting the trunks into planks for the completion of the cutter—for I had by this time entirely abandoned the hope of rescue by a passing ship.

It was about three weeks later that, emerging on a certain morning from my bedroom, and stepping out to the veranda to scan the offing, according to custom, before beginning the regular routine of the day, my gaze was instantly arrested by an object poised on the very verge of the horizon, some twelve miles distant. Showing up almost black against the vivid hues of the early morning eastern sky it was yet too small to be capable of identification by the unassisted eye. I therefore darted back into the house, and procuring the telescope brought it to bear upon the stranger; and as I focused the image of that distant object in the lenses of the instrument I experienced a moment of most bitter disappointment. For when my gaze first fell upon that tiny speck the thought instantly leapt to my mind that at long last the moment of our deliverance had arrived; whereas a moment or two later my telescope revealed to me the disconcerting fact that the craft in sight, and heading straight for the group, was a Chinese junk!

It may be that certain of my readers will wonder why the approach of a Chinese junk to the group should cause me such acute disappointment, and they may perhaps ask the question: "Is not a Chinese junk as capable as any other vessel of rescuing shipwrecked people and conveying them back to civilisation?" To this question I would reply: "Yes, undoubtedly, under certain circumstances." But let me explain the proviso implied in that reply.

Had the boy Billy and I only been concerned I would have trusted ourselves aboard the junk; but—there was the treasure to be considered, and I was not altogether ignorant concerning the character and reputation of Chinese sailors. There may be, and probably are, Chinamen who are as honourable, upright, and honest as the average Englishman, but my experience, such as it has been, is that they are not to be found aboard a junk. The Chinese seaman is, as a rule, drawn from the lowest stratum of his people, and among such men the moral sense, if not absolutely lacking, is very nearly so. They are barbarian, and all their instincts are primitive. Honour and honesty are words that have no meaning for them; they are, before all things else, intensely acquisitive, and if they want a thing they will take it if they can, and woe betide the owner if he resists them. In a word, the Chinese seaman is by instinct a pirate, and a cruel, bloodthirsty one at that; hence my feeling of disappointment at the sight of that junk; for how could I hope that our treasure would remain inviolate if placed in the power of such men as I have endeavoured to describe? They would cut our throats without scruple in order to possess themselves of the contents of our chests, the very appearance of which was irresistibly suggestive of treasure. It took me not a moment to determine that, rather than expose ourselves to such possible risks, we would have nothing whatever to do with the junk if we could avoid it.

But could we? The junk was heading straight for the group, running before a light easterly breeze which would probably give her a speed of about three knots, and in the course of the next three hours she would be close enough to enable her crew to see the bungalow, the existence of which it was impossible to conceal, built as it was high up on the hill-side with a passage through the reef immediately opposite it. Was it at all reasonable to suppose that *any* craft would sail past the group without calling to investigate? There was, of course, the possibility that the junk in sight might be perfectly harmless, and that if she entered the lagoon it would be merely to satisfy curiosity and perhaps to obtain a little fruit or to replenish her stock of fresh water; and, if so, well and good. But if not—if her crew happened to be composed of such ruffians as I have endeavoured to picture, what then? Could I hope that they would be satisfied merely to come up to the bungalow, ask a few questions in pidgin English, and depart, leaving us unscathed? To suppose any such thing would be—to say the least of it—foolishness. The probability was that they would attack us, sack the place, carrying away everything that took their fancy, including the treasure-chests, murder Billy and me, and burn down the house out of sheer love of destruction.

These reflections, which have taken me so long to record, flashed through my mind upon the instant following my recognition of the character of the stranger; and realisation of the danger that possibly threatened us naturally led up to the question: How was that danger to be averted? Could Billy and I alone hope to put up a successful defence against an attack by perhaps thirty or forty determined men? For, let Chinamen be what they may in other respects, they are not easily daunted by a sense of personal danger, especially if animated by the hope of plunder. Then in a moment there came to me the memory of Bowata and the natives of Cliff Island. They had been most profuse in their expressions of gratitude for the help which we had afforded them from time to time, and had repeatedly declared their eagerness to find an opportunity to give practical demonstration of that gratitude: here was their opportunity; and all that was needed was to make them aware of it. I took another long look at the junk, and came to the

conclusion that she could not reach the lagoon in much less than four hours, which would allow me time to make a single trip in the boat to Cliff Island, get into touch with Bowata, secure his assistance, and return to Eden with my dusky reinforcements. I decided to do so, and, without waiting for breakfast, at once started for the cove—and the boat.

The wind being fair, I made a quick run across to Cliff Island; and a swift-footed native boy soon brought Bowata down to the landing-place where we usually met. Explaining the circumstances to him, I found him, as I had quite anticipated, more than ready to render me every possible assistance; and, departing to muster his men, he returned in a very short time with nineteen of his most reliable fighters—the boat's utmost capacity was twenty, in addition to myself, and the chief naturally elected to accompany and head his party. Those men, Bowata assured me, were the pick of the entire tribe, and I quite believed him, for, although small and slight compared with the average Englishman, they were lithe, wiry, active, and resolute-looking men, with an eager gleam in their eyes which seemed to suggest that the prospect of a fight was the reverse of distasteful to them. They were each armed with a bow, a quiver full of arrows, and a most formidable-looking war club, the head of which was thickly studded with bone spikes, and which promised to be terribly effective at close quarters—the latter being a quite recent addition to their armoury invented by Bowata's son, whose imagination had at last been stimulated by the persistent attacks of the apes.

The return passage to Eden—half of which was a dead beat to windward, with the boat loaded to her utmost capacity—occupied so long a time that I was in a perfect fever of anxiety lest the junk should arrive before us; but upon rounding the south-east point of Cliff Island I was somewhat relieved to see that she had, so far, not entered the lagoon, nor did I see any sign of her during the remainder of the passage; for, low down in the water as we were, the spray of the surf breaking upon the reef effectually veiled from our view everything outside.

There was still no sign of the junk when at length the boat entered the little cove that was our usual landing-place, and grounded on the beach. Ten minutes later we surmounted the crest of the ridge, on the far side of which stood the bungalow, and I once more got a view of the open sea outside, over the curtain of everlasting spray that had obstructed my view from the boat. The junk was visible, clearly enough, hove-to at a distance of about a mile to windward of the reef; and I hurried to the house for the telescope, that I might obtain a nearer view of what was happening aboard her. Seizing the telescope I proceeded to the veranda, from which I brought the instrument to bear upon the craft.

I now saw that she had lowered a boat that, manned by a crew of five, was heading for the opening in the reef immediately opposite our island. This boat I watched, keeping the telescope bearing upon her as she alternately topped and disappeared behind the long ridges of swell, until at length she passed through the opening and entered the lagoon. Once through the reef, she headed straight for Eden, and it looked as though the men in her contemplated landing on the beach at the foot of the slope upon which the bungalow was built; whereupon I thought it well to hoist the brigantine's ensign upon the flagstaff I had set up in front of the bungalow, as a hint to the intruders that the island was British territory, and that its inhabitants expected that territory to be respected.

The boat, approaching cautiously, at length reached a point about a quarter of a mile from the beach, when the crew lay upon their oars, while the man in the stern-sheets rose to his feet and proceeded to subject Eden, and as much of the rest of the group as was visible from his point of view, to a prolonged scrutiny, after which, at a sign from him, the oars again dipped in the water and, turning, the boat recrossed the lagoon and made her way back to the junk.

There was now a pause in the proceedings, during which, I conjectured, the man who had been in charge of the boat was making his report to his skipper. The pause, however, was not of long duration, for, as I continued to watch, signs of a sudden stir aboard the junk became perceptible, and a few minutes later I saw that her crew were lowering two more boats, much larger than the first, and that a considerable number of men—who, so far as it was possible to see at that distance, were all armed—were swarming down the junk's side into them. This seemed to indicate that my worst suspicions regarding the character of the vessel were only too well founded, and that a pretty stiff fight was in prospect for us. If this should be so it was time to see about making my dispositions for the conflict; I accordingly re-entered the house and, girding on my cutlass, thrust a brace of fully loaded revolvers into my belt, seized my own pet rifle and, filling my jacket pockets with cartridges, sallied forth and, joining Bowata and his party, led them down to the beach.

This particular strip of beach, it should be explained, was quite unlike the other beaches of the group. The latter, composed of white coral sand, were continuous, smooth, unencumbered, averaged from thirty feet wide in some cases to as much as a hundred feet wide in others, and usually sloped steeply enough to enable our boat, with good way on her, to run herself high enough on them to permit us to land dry-footed. On the other hand, the beach toward which we were now heading was a strip of coral sand not more than a quarter of a mile long, perfectly smooth, but sloping so very gently that I much doubted whether the boats I had seen preparing to leave the junk could approach within fifty yards of the shore without grounding. But the circumstance most greatly in our favour was that this comparatively short length of beach, while inviting enough in appearance as a landing-place, was backed, on its shore side, by an outcrop of black rocks that offered splendid cover for a defending force while leaving attackers from the sea completely exposed. These peculiarities of the shore rendered it morally certain that the beach itself would be the actual battle-ground in the coming conflict; and it was with the view to its decision there that I made my final arrangements, and posted Bowata and his men. Having done this to my satisfaction I took my rifle and advanced to the open beach, where I seated myself upon a detached fragment of rock, and patiently awaited developments.

These proved to be somewhat slow in arriving; and the period of waiting was rendered all the more tedious from the fact that, low down on the beach as I now was, the continuous veil of spray flying over the reef effectually hid everything that might be happening to seaward; but at length, after waiting for fully an hour for something to happen, one of the Chinese boats appeared in the gap in the reef, closely followed by a second and a third. The two leading boats were largish craft, pulling eight oars each, and they appeared to be carrying some fourteen or sixteen men each, while the third was the much smaller craft that had already once entered the lagoon, the crew of which



rifle leaning against the rock behind which I had been crouching, I drew my cutlass and advanced to meet the fellow, determined to personally tackle him and put him out of action without loss of time.

He was a sufficiently formidable antagonist, it must be admitted; two inches taller than myself, broad in proportion, with an enormously massive chest and shoulders, and great muscles that stood out like cables under the skin of his bare arms. His features were typically Tartar, and his small eyes blazed with ferocity as, waving his sword above his head, he advanced with a shout of defiance to meet me. Meanwhile Bowata and his followers poured in still another flight of arrows, and then, flinging down their bows, they gripped their formidable war clubs and, uttering weird yells, charged across the sand and fell upon the Chinamen as they emerged from the water.

I quite anticipated that the fight between the leader and myself would be a long and exceedingly tough one; but, to my amazement, it was begun and finished in a breath. The man came charging upon me with uplifted sword, his evident intention being to make a cut at my head that should finish me out of hand. And indeed he very nearly accomplished his purpose; for as I raised my cutlass to guard my head his blade descended upon it with terrific force—and shored my weapon clean in two, and if I had not at the same moment stepped nimbly aside I should assuredly have been cloven to the eyes. As it was, the descending weapon missed me by a hair-breadth, shearing a large hole in the sleeve of my shirt but not touching the skin. Scarcely realising what I was about, but acting upon instinct or the impulse of the moment, I suppose, before my antagonist could again raise his weapon I violently thrust my severed blade into his face, and as he staggered back with the force of the blow I whipped out my revolver and shot him through the head. That ended the fight; for as the man fell dead at my feet a shout of mingled horror and consternation arose from those Chinese who happened to witness the incident, and who thereupon incontinently turned and fled to their boats, an example immediately followed by their comrades, hotly pursued by the blacks, who plied their war clubs with terrible effect.

It was a disastrous adventure for the Chinamen; for of the total number engaged—which I estimated to be between thirty and forty—only eleven escaped, for I counted them. On the other hand, the casualties on our side were remarkably small, numbering only seven wounded, the wounds consisting entirely of sword cuts, none of which was serious. Of those seven Bowata happened to be one, his wound consisting of a sword thrust through the upper part of the left arm. I therefore took him and his six companions in misfortune up to the house to dress their wounds, leaving the remainder of the party on the beach to collect the weapons and their spent arrows, and to clear up generally.

My surgical duties occupied about an hour and a half; and when all my patients had been attended to I sent them with Billy down to the cove, to be ferried across in the sailing boat to Cliff Island, where no doubt their own people would look after them. Then, remembering that there were wounded Chinamen among those abandoned upon the beach, I started down to see what could be done for them; for although a party of wounded and no doubt treacherous and vindictive Chinks would be a most embarrassing charge to have on my hands, common humanity demanded that they should not be left to perish miserably where they had fallen. Before, however, I had covered half the distance between the bungalow and the beach I met the remaining blacks marching triumphantly up the hill, singing a song of victory, and carrying not only their own recovered weapons but also several swords that they had taken from the fallen enemy. They also brought the rifle that I had left on the beach, and the sword, scabbard, and belt of the Chinese leader, which they solemnly handed over to me as the victor. Seeing that they had evidently been busy among the fallen I asked whether there were many wounded among the latter, to which the man whom I was questioning replied: No, they were all dead! pointing significantly to his blood-smeared war club by way of explanation.

Well, it may perhaps seem inhuman to say it, but I was not altogether sorry. The men were undoubtedly pirates, if not by profession, pirates at least when opportunity seemed to be favourable. They had attacked me deliberately and without provocation, and, but for the help of the blacks, Billy and I would unquestionably have been “wiped out”. Ten or a dozen of such men, wounded, would have been a terribly embarrassing charge for me to have assumed; and it would have been still more embarrassing to have had them about the place when they were again hale and strong. No; taking everything into consideration I was not altogether sorry that they had been put beyond the possibility of perpetrating further mischief.

Meanwhile, what had become of the junk? I had looked for her just before leaving the bungalow on my way back to the beach, and had sighted her, some six miles off, in the south-eastern quarter, heading to the southward, close-hauled, by which I judged that no further trouble need be looked for from her.

But there were the dead on the beach to be disposed of, without loss of time. How could this disposal be best effected? I considered the matter, and presently hit upon a plan. The Chinese, in their precipitate flight, had abandoned two of their boats, namely the small one and one of the bigger ones. Those two would be sufficient to contain the whole of the dead; and, having now decided upon my mode of procedure, I led my little band of black warriors back to the beach and, with their assistance, transferred the dead Chinamen to the two abandoned boats. We had barely completed this gruesome task when Billy returned with the sailing boat, whereupon I boarded her, sailed her round from the cove to the east beach, took the Chinese boats in tow, and anchored them for the night under the lee of the northern extremity of Eden. The next day I again took the boats in tow and, with a party of eight natives to help me, towed them to the beach of North Island, where we buried the dead Chinamen. The smaller of the two boats I then presented to Bowata, in recognition of the assistance he had rendered me in repelling the attack by the Chinese, while the bigger one I kept, for the sake of her materials, which would be valuable to me in the completion of the cutter. It was while clearing up and putting matters generally straight after the Chinamen's unwelcome visit that the sword of the leader again came under my notice and, impelled by curiosity, I drew the weapon from its sheath and subjected it to a somewhat critical examination; for if that should prove satisfactory I intended to make use of it in future in place of the cutlass, the blade of which it had shorn through with such perfect ease. I found it to be somewhat heavier than the cutlass, the blade being considerably thicker than that of the other weapon, though not quite so wide; it was, however, perfectly balanced and I was able to wield it with the utmost ease, while it was literally as keen-edged as a razor; and so exquisite was its temper that there was no sign of a notch or indentation of any description on its edge along its entire length, from point to hilt. I returned it to its sheath



with much satisfaction, feeling that I had effected a most profitable exchange.

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### A Surprising Reappearance.

It was about three weeks later that, as Billy and I foregathered in the living-room of the bungalow, early on a certain morning, discussing our biscuit and early cup of coffee prior to setting out for the matutinal bath that always preceded the work of the day, Billy asked:

“By the way, Mr Blackburn, did Kit disturb you at all last night? He was so uneasy that I had to turn out twice and go to him, and both times I found him standing at the top of the veranda steps, straining at his leash,” (latterly we always tied him up at night) “switching his tail fiercely, and uttering half-suppressed growls, as though he scented or heard something unusual prowling near the house. It was only by staying with him for about half an hour that I at last succeeded in quieting him down. You see, I was afraid he would awake you, and I knew how frightfully tired you must be after your long day’s work at the cutter, under the broiling sun. I hope no apes or other unpleasant creatures have found their way to Eden, and are lurking to frighten the life out of me.”

“I think you need not greatly fear,” said I. “All the same, there was probably a cause for Kit’s uneasiness—which, by the way, did not in the least disturb me, for I never heard him—and we may as well try to discover what it was; therefore after breakfast I will take the rifle and give a look round.”

It was, however, unnecessary to wait until after breakfast for the elucidation of the mystery, for when Billy and I reached the beach upon which stood the nearly complete hull of the cutter, two ragged, unkempt, sunburnt scarecrows emerged from the shadow of the craft and approached me.

“Mornin’, Mister,” remarked the taller of the pair, in a would-be hearty tone of voice that nevertheless somehow suggested cringing, as did his manner. “Well, here we are again, turned up like bad pennies; just in time, by the looks of it, to help ye finish this dandy yacht and sail her to—wherever you thinks of goin’.”

“What!” I exclaimed, in inexpressible amazement, “can it be possible that you are Svorensen and—and Van Ryn? Why, I believed that you and all the rest of the crew of the *Yorkshire Lass* were drowned when she was wrecked, more than a year ago.”

“So we was, Mister—very nigh,” replied Svorensen. “There was only three of us—besides you and Billy—that escaped; and that was me, Dirk here, and a chap named Flemin’—Pete, we used to call ‘im. When the ship struck we was all washed overboard by the first sea as broke aboard; and nat’rally those of us as could swim struck out as soon as our heads rose above water. And—but, I say, Mister, ain’t there no breakfast knockin’ about? We haven’t ate nothin’ since yesterday a’ternoon, and we’re feelin’ pretty sharp set, I can tell ye.”

“Breakfast!” I reiterated. “Why, of course. It will be ready in about an hour’s time. But you cannot come up to the house as you are, you know—by the way, were you by any chance prowling about in the neighbourhood of the house last night?”

“Ay, we was,” answered Svorensen. “We landed on the beach below it, and made it out at once in the moonlight. We guessed as it was yours; and we was for rousin’ you out to give us a bite o’ supper; but that dog o’ yours growled so vicious, and seemed so savage, that we decided to wait till this mornin’.”

“It was extremely fortunate for you that you did,” said I. “The ‘dog’, as you call him, happens to be a *leopard*; and if you had persisted in your attempt to approach the house, the pair of you would assuredly have been killed. I tell you this at once, by way of warning.”

“The beast will ‘ave to be shained oop; else how are we to go in an’ out of der ‘ouse?” demanded Van Ryn.

“You will *not* go in and out of the house,” I retorted. “There is no room for you there. Then, just look at yourselves. You are as indecent in the matter of your clothing as you are filthy in your persons. Before anything else you will have to cleanse yourselves, and be clothed decently. The condition of your clothes you cannot help, I suppose, being castaways for more than a year; but you might at least have kept your bodies clean. You are disgustingly verminous, both of you; and after you have had a meal your first business must be to get yourselves clean. You will remain here while Billy and I go up to the house and bring you down some breakfast; after which I must see what can be done to make you reasonably presentable.”

“All right. Mister,” answered Svorensen, “we’ll keep clear of the ‘ouse, never fear. We don’t want to be tore to pieces by no leopards, after tryin’ our utmost for over a year to get to ye and lend a hand in whatever you might be doin’ to get away from this ruddy hole. We’re just as anxious as you can be to get away from it, you may bet on that.”

“Well,” said I to Billy, as we turned away to retrace our steps to the house, our bath completely forgotten, “this reappearance of Svorensen and Van Ryn is a surprise, and not altogether an agreeable one at that. I never particularly liked either of them; they impressed me from the very beginning as being insubordinate of disposition and impatient of discipline; and I have not forgotten the character that the boatswain and Chips gave them. How did they behave before I joined the *Yorkshire Lass*, Billy? Had your father ever any trouble with them?”

“Yes, in some ways a good deal,” answered Billy. “What the boatswain and Chips said about them was quite true. They and the other two foreigners were always quarrelling with the rest of the fore-castle hands; they wanted to do

only just what work suited them, and not what Father wanted them to do; and from what the other men said I believe that the Dagoes would have mutinied if it had not been for the chance of getting hold of and sharing the treasure."

Returning to the house, Billy and I snatched a hasty meal, and then we started back for the beach, bearing with us food, two suits of the lightest clothing the slop-chest afforded, two blue-striped shirts, two cloth caps, soap, towels, a comb, and a pair of scissors. The two seamen were too hungry to talk much while discussing their meal, nor did I attempt to question them just then, curbing my curiosity until a more favourable opportunity to satisfy it should present itself; and when the pair had finished eating I marched them off to the river where, handing them the soap and towels, I bade them strip, enter the water, and thoroughly cleanse themselves from the accumulated grime of a year's neglect. This at length done, I set them to cut each other's hair and beard and generally render themselves as decent looking and respectable as was possible; after which I handed them their new clothes and bade them burn their old rags. They seemed to consider me quite unreasonably particular, and grumbled a good deal at what they appeared to regard as the wholly unnecessary trouble I was imposing upon them; but I would take no denial; and when at length they realised that I intended to have my way they surlily submitted. In the end I believe that, in despite of themselves, they were rather glad that I had been so insistent; for when they once more stood fully clothed their appearance was improved almost beyond recognition, and they seemed quite pleased with themselves.

They were by no means so pleased, however, when, in response to a remark by one of them, I gave them to clearly understand that I would not house them in the bungalow, and that during the comparatively short period of our further stay on the group they would have to be content with such accommodation as a tent would afford. They argued hotly that, being castaways and survivors from the same shipwreck, we all stood upon a perfectly equal footing and were alike entitled to share equally in everything. To which I replied that the bungalow, the sailing boat, and the cutter were all mine, built with my own hands out of material salvaged by me from the wreck; that they had not participated or helped in the slightest degree in any of the salvaging or building operations. Therefore I considered they were not entitled to claim any share in the comforts or advantages arising from those operations; but that, as an act of grace, I was prepared to allow them a reasonable share of those comforts and advantages; while, if they would help me to complete the cutter, make her ready for sea, and assist me on the voyage, they should be welcome to a passage in her. For a heated five minutes I believed I was in for very serious trouble with the two men; but in the midst of the argument—which was chiefly between Van Ryn and myself—Svorenssen intervened, drawing his companion away and saying a few hasty words that seemed to have the effect of wonderfully calming the Dutchman's excitement; and the dispute ended by their admitting—rather lamely I thought—that since I was evidently master of the situation, they supposed they must make the best of it and accept what I chose to give them. As to helping with the completion of the cutter, they expressed themselves as only too willing to do so, since they had had more than enough of "Robinson Crusoeing" it.

"Now," said I to them as, their toilet at length completed, we moved away from the stream, "I must again warn you both to keep well clear of the house. I have already told you that the animal which you last night mistook for a dog is a leopard. Now that you have arrived on the island I shall be obliged to keep him tied up; but if you approach the house it will be at your peril; for if Kit sees or scents either of you he will probably break adrift, and you will simply be torn limb from limb. He is a most ferocious creature, and will not tolerate strangers; so bear in mind what I say and give him a wide berth."

"Bud I wants to see the house," protested Van Ryn. "How am I to do that?"

"You will have to forgo that pleasure, so that's all there is about it," I replied dryly.

"If the brute interveres mit me, I vill kill 'im," threatened the Dutchman.

"Will you?" said I. "Why, man, you would stand no more chance with that leopard than if you were the merest baby. But—enough of this. You had better pitch your tent on the beach, close to the cutter. Go down there now and choose a spot to suit yourselves, and Billy and I will come down later on with a sail, pole, and what other gear is necessary, and help you to rig it up."

By mid-afternoon the tent—consisting of the brigantine's fore-course, which I had salvaged—was satisfactorily rigged up, a trench dug round it to carry off water in the event of rain, and a sufficiency of rude but efficient furniture stored within it; and, somewhat to my surprise, the pair who were to occupy it expressed themselves as quite satisfied. Then, since it was too late in the day to do much work upon the cutter, I invited the seamen to give me a detailed account of how they had fared since the wreck. It was Svorenssen who undertook to tell the story, and he told it in the coarse, uncouth language of the fore-castle, embellishing and emphasising it here and there, after the manner of the shellback, by the introduction of words and phrases comprehensible enough to me but confusing and quite unintelligible to a landsman. I shall therefore take the liberty of translating the narrative into plain, simple English for the benefit of my readers. Thus translated, it ran as follows:

"It must have been about half an hour after Chips came for'ard with the news that you had met with an accident, and had been carried down into your cabin, and the gale was still blowing as heavy as ever, when some of us on the fore-castle thought we heard another sound above the shriek of the wind and the hiss of the sea; and, looking ahead, we presently saw, stretching away on both bows, as far as we could see, an unbroken line of wildly leaping breakers and flying spray. We at once hailed the quarter-deck, shouting: 'Breakers ahead and on both bows!' but it is exceedingly doubtful whether or not we were heard, and if we had been, it would have made no difference, for before anything could be done the ship was among the breakers, and a second later she struck, not very hard, but just sufficiently so to cant us broadside-on. Then she struck again, and hung until a tremendous sea broke aboard, sweeping her decks and doubtless washing all hands on deck overboard—at all events that sea took me and swept me helplessly over the bows, as also Van Ryn and another man, named Fleming. But I knew nothing about them until the next morning.

"Being a swimmer, I instinctively struck out, and I had not made more than a dozen strokes before my hands struck

something that I at once seized and clung to. It proved to be a bit of topgallant bulwark, about six feet long, and it afforded me a most welcome support, especially as the seas were still breaking over me so furiously that it was only with the utmost difficulty I contrived to snatch a breath between whiles. But the breaking seas that came near to smothering me were also sweeping me away fast to leeward, and after a time I found myself in smoother water, the seas no longer broke over me, and, the water being quite warm, I experienced no discomfort, apart from the uncertainty as to what was to eventually happen to me, and I just kept paddling along to leeward, following the run of the seas.

"I might have been overboard about half an hour when, clearing the salt water out of my eyes, I caught the loom of land ahead, through the darkness, the sight of which greatly cheered me, for I had no doubt of my ability to hold out until I could reach the shore, and I had the comforting conviction that where there was land there was also safety. About an hour later I found myself again among breakers; but they were a mere trifle compared with those that I had already encountered, and shortly afterward my feet touched bottom and, abandoning the fragment of wreckage to which I had been clinging, I crawled up the beach to above high-water mark, flung myself down upon the warm sand, and instantly fell asleep.

"When I awoke the sun was shining brilliantly, and the gale had broken, although it was still blowing a strong breeze. I looked out to seaward, and at once sighted the wreck, about two miles away, dismantled, and hard and fast upon the reef. Then, glancing at my surroundings, I perceived that I had landed upon a beach of fine white sand, backed by country densely wooded, with hills stretching away to north and south. The sight of the trees suggested possibilities of fruit, the thought of which reminded me that I was hungry; and I was about to make a plunge into the woods in search of something to eat when I heard a voice hailing, and, looking in the direction from which the hail had come, I saw, to my great satisfaction, Van Ryn and Fleming, about a quarter of a mile along the beach.

"Naturally we at once joined forces, and, they being like myself, hungry, we forthwith proceeded to hunt for food, speedily finding an abundance of cocoa-nuts that had fallen, ripe, from the trees that lined the inner edge of the beach. We ate and drank our fill of the fruit and milk of the nuts, and then, having meanwhile discussed our plans for the future, we began our quest for a practicable path inland, for the idea of camping on the beach, night after night, had few attractions for us. But the undergrowth was so dense and impenetrable that it was not until we had traversed quite a mile of the beach, under the rays of a scorching sun, that we at length found a spot where, by cutting and hacking the monkey-rope and creepers with our knives, we finally succeeded in working our way into a valley enclosed between two ranges of hills running practically parallel.

"My word! that was hot work, I assure you, Mr Blackburn. Of course there was no lack of shade, but, on the other hand, there was no air. The atmosphere was simply stifling, and what with that and the labour of hewing a way through the dense undergrowth—much of it consisting of bushes covered with tough, sharp thorns that got hold of our clothes, and not infrequently our skins, and refused to let go—the perspiration poured from us like water, and simply drenched our clothes. But the monkey-rope, the creepers, the thorns, and the heat were not the worst of our troubles; the whole place was swarming with mosquitoes that hovered about us in clouds and bit us savagely in a hundred places at once. And, as though these were not enough, there were myriads of small black ants that penetrated our clothing and bit us even more savagely than the mosquitoes. Luckily we did not encounter the ants until we were very nearly through the belt of bush, or we should have been compelled to abandon our attempt.

"Ultimately, however, we effected the passage of the bush, and found ourselves fairly in the valley, with long dry grass, waist-high, plenty of trees, big and little, but not much bush or creeper. And then we encountered potential trouble of a fresh kind, for although we were no longer attacked by ants, we too frequently heard rustlings in the long grass that we presently discovered to be caused by snakes, and we were compelled to walk very warily, lest we should perchance unwittingly tread upon one of the creatures, and be bitten, perhaps fatally, as a punishment. I confess that—well, to put it plainly, I did not half like it; but what were we to do? We were searching for a cave, or shelter of some sort, that would serve us for a lodging and a place of protection in the event of a recurrence of bad weather, and we were not likely to find it by standing still. Also we were looking for food, with a view to the future; but the question of supplies afforded us little anxiety, for banana and plantain trees were abundant in that valley, to say nothing of grapes and several other kinds of fruit. Coming to a banana tree, the fruit of which was fully ripe, we made a good meal, and then, feeling rather tired, we trampled down a smooth place in the grass, under the shade of a big tree, stretched ourselves thereon, and were soon fast asleep.

"Judging from the position of the sun in the heavens, it might be about five o'clock in the afternoon when I was awakened by somebody shaking me by the shoulder, and as I opened my eyes I heard a voice I at once recognised as that belonging to Dirk here, who was saying, in a sort of whisper:—

"'Hush! don't make a noise, but just lift your head, cautious, and look.'

"'Look where?' I returned, also in a sort of whisper; 'and what am I to hush for?'

"'Look to your right, at Pete,'—which is the name by which we usually addressed Fleming—'lying fast asleep there, and see what you'll see,' replied Dirk.

"I turned my head very cautiously and looked; and there, within less than a fathom of me, was Pete Fleming, lying flat on his back, fast asleep, with a snake coiled up like a cable right in the middle of his chest. The snake's head was resting upon the top flake of his coils, with his cold, cruel eyes gazing straight at us, and his long, black, forked tongue flickering in and out of his mouth in a most suggestively threatening manner.

"'What's the best thing to do?' murmured Dirk in low tones. 'We must do something quickly, for if Pete awakes and stirs as much as an eyelid the beggar will bite him, and then it will be all up with poor Pete.'

"There was a small branch, with a few twigs and a bunch of leaves on the end of it, lying on the ground within reach

of my right hand. I contrived to get hold of this without disturbing the snake; then, sitting up suddenly, I thrust the bunch of leaves on the end of the branch straight and hard at the reptile, and—it vanished! That is the only way in which I can convey any idea of the rapidity with which it retreated. The next instant Pete was sitting up, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, and demanding with many choice fore-castle embellishments what I meant by my fool tricks. When we explained to him the danger that he had so narrowly escaped, he had the grace to thank me for my intervention; but we all agreed that the spot had no longer any charm for us, and that it was high time for us to resume our search for a place where we might pass the night in safety.

“Such a place was by no means easy to find, but ultimately, within a few minutes of sunset, we came upon a sort of shelter among some rocks, of which we at once took possession—for our need was by this time urgent, total darkness being due in about ten minutes. Pete was strongly of opinion that, wherever our shelter might be, we ought to light a fire in front of it to scare away wild beasts, and, possessing a burning-glass, he took the precaution to make fire with it before the sun sank too low, and to kindle a torch with it for the purpose of lighting our fire. So, having at length found our shelter, we forthwith proceeded to gather materials, light our protective fire, and dispose of ourselves for the night.

“Having found a refuge of sorts, we anticipated a good night’s rest; but no sooner had darkness closed down upon us than from all quarters there arose a chorus of the most terrifying sounds—roars, barks, bellows, savage growls, grunts, shrieks—never in my life before had I heard anything like the pandemonium that raged around us! We heard the branches of trees being broken; great stones came rattling and crashing down the steep hill-side behind us, missing our shelter by only what seemed a series of miracles. There were heavy thuds, accompanied by blood-curdling snarls that suggested the progress of life-and-death fights between ferocious beasts; and at frequent intervals we caught, through the smoke of our fire, glimpses of great eyes glaring at us! Such was our first experience of night life in the wild.

“At length, however, toward morning the racket gradually quieted down, and we snatched a short spell of sleep until sunrise, when we turned out and proceeded to hunt for breakfast. Luck was with us that morning, for we had not gone far when we found the partly eaten carcass of a fine fat deer. The creature had not been dead very long, for the blood about it was scarcely dry, and the meat was quite fresh. We were hungry and not too squeamish, so we got to work upon that deer and cut some fine steaks off a part of him that had not been touched by the thing that had killed him, and, carrying the meat back to our shelter, we made up the fire and cooked ourselves a fine breakfast, finishing off with fruit as a substitute for the water that we failed to find.

“While partaking of breakfast we discussed our future as castaways. With our experiences of the past night fresh in his mind Fleming proposed a return to the beach and the construction of a raft, upon which, he suggested, we should paddle off to the wreck, with the view of giving her an overhaul, in the hope of finding something that would repay us for our trouble; but when it came to consideration of details, Dirk and I came to the conclusion that, with nothing but our sheath-knives to serve as tools, the scheme was impracticable. What we might have attempted had we known that you and Billy were alive and still aboard is, perhaps, another matter. Several other schemes of an equally impracticable character were suggested, only to be abandoned after discussion, until finally, failing any more satisfactory plan, we decided that if we could find a nice, comfortable cave to serve as a dwelling we would experiment a bit upon ‘Robinson Crusoe’ lines, and see how we liked it.

“We found several caves of one sort and another that day; but the most suitable of them were already tenanted, as we could tell immediately that we put our noses inside them. Moreover, many of the tenants happened to be at home when we called, and seemed to resent our presence upon their doorsteps. Therefore, to avoid unpleasantness, we retired, in many cases rather precipitately. Ultimately, however, we came upon a cave that for some inexplicable reason was untenanted, and seemed to be everything that could reasonably be desired. It was situated high up on the side of the hill, and the entrance was so small that we were obliged to bend almost double in order to pass through. But once past the entrance the cave widened out until its interior was as spacious as that of half a dozen fore-castles knocked into one, with head-room of ten or twelve feet. It had a beautiful dry, soft, sandy floor, and—best of all—there was a pool of deliciously cool, sweet water at the far end of it—the first fresh water that we had found. And the air was as clean and sweet as the water; no Zoological Gardens odour, or taint of rotting bones, you understand. We took possession at once.

“Vividly remembering our experiences of the night before, our first business was to go out again and collect enough dry stuff to make a fire at the entrance to last all night. We next cut a sufficient quantity of the long, dry grass to provide each of us with a comfortable bed, and we completed our arrangements by cutting and conveying to the cave a bunch of bananas big enough to furnish us with a supper that night and breakfast the next morning. Then, having supped, we built and lighted our fire, turned in, and slept soundly all night, notwithstanding that even in our sleep we were conscious of a repetition of all the weird sounds of the previous night.

“I suppose you will scarcely be anxious to hear the full details of every adventure that befell us during our sojourn in that valley; and indeed, if you did, I am afraid I could not relate them with much pretence to accuracy. Adventures enough and to spare there were, of one sort and another, but I seem to have got them all mixed up together, so that I am unable to say just exactly when any one in particular happened. The wild beasts did not very seriously trouble or interfere with us during the day-time. But the snakes more than compensated for this; they constituted a perfect terror! We grew so fearful of them at last, especially after our boots gave out, that we scarcely dared to put one foot before the other; indeed it was a snake that finally drove us out of the valley.”

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## Chapter Sixteen.

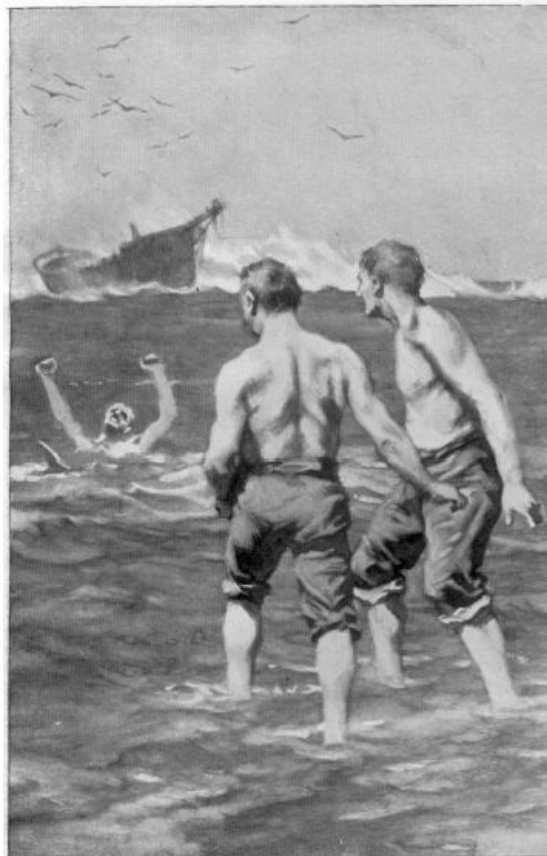
### Svorenssen relates an Interesting Story.

"It was while we were seeking fruit that the thing happened. We had crossed the valley, and plunged into the forest on the other side, Dirk and I being together while Pete was a few yards away, when suddenly, as we were passing under the boughs of a big tree, I heard a kind of *plop*, and at the same instant Dirk gave a yell that very nearly scared me stiff. Glancing round to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, I was horrified to see Dirk enveloped in the coils of an enormous snake, whose ugly head was poised within a few inches of my shipmate's face, the creature's forked tongue flickering in and out of its widely opened jaws. I suppose I shall never be able to explain or account for the impulse that actuated me at this horrid sight, but the fact remains that, without pausing an instant to reflect, I thrust forward my left hand and gripped the snake just behind the head, while with my right I drew my sheath knife across the reptile's throat, pretty nearly severing the head from the body at one stroke. Instantly it became a case of 'stand clear!' The snake uncoiled itself from about Dirk's body, and proceeded to fling itself about on the ground with such terrific violence that the air round about us was presently full of bits of grass, broken twigs, and flying leaves, while Dirk, yelling like a madman, flung himself upon the writhing body of the reptile, stabbing furiously here and there with his knife—but never touching the snake so far as I could see, while Pete came running up to ascertain what was the matter.

"We got Dirk away from the snake eventually, and helped him back to the cave; and when we got him there we stripped him, to learn the extent of his injuries. To our great relief, we found that there was very little the matter with him; he was much bruised about the body, from his waist to his shoulders, but that was all. It was, however, enough. We agreed that 'Robinson Crusoeing' was not quite all that in our boyhood's days we had believed it to be, and we resolved to return to the beach on the following morning and endeavour to swim off to the wreck.

"When we started to work our way back to the beach we discovered, to our annoyance, that the path which we had cut for ourselves through the scrub had become completely overgrown again, consequently we had all our former work to do over again, with the ants and mosquitoes even more pertinacious in their attentions than before; thus the afternoon was well advanced when at length we once more caught a glimpse of blue water. By that time we were so utterly fagged that we felt it would be folly to attempt a long swim under such conditions; we therefore postponed our attempt until the next day. We saw that the wreck was still on the reef, apparently in no worse condition than when we had last viewed her; and, with our experiences of life ashore still fresh in our memories, we told each other what fools we had been in making no attempt to get off to her again as soon as the weather had settled after our first landing.

"Pete Fleming was far and away the keenest of our little party to get aboard again. He directed us to observe how high she was standing out of the water, and expressed the opinion that for that reason it might be possible for us to penetrate to her lazarette, where we should doubtless find a quantity of tinned stuff that would be infinitely more palatable than the fruit diet upon which we had so long been subsisting, and of which we were all now thoroughly tired; and he was particularly eloquent upon the subject of drink, of which he seemed confident that we should find a considerable quantity. So keen, indeed, was he, that he was stripped and in the water four or five minutes before Dirk or myself, and was already swimming when we two started to wade in. And then a dreadful thing happened. We were



"WE HEARD HIM UTTER AN AWFUL SHRIEK"

little more than ankle-deep when we heard him utter an awful shriek, and saw him throw up his hands and disappear in the midst of a violent swirl of water. In an instant the terrible truth burst upon us that the poor chap had been seized by sharks—the existence of which in the lagoon we had never suspected—and on the instant Dirk and I, moved by the same impulse, turned and fled back to the beach. The incident effectually cured us of any further desire to reach the wreck; and we never again ventured to attempt any swimming until a few days ago.

“Dirk and I camped on the beach again that night, building a fire round our camping-place as a protection against wild beasts. But some time during the night I happened to awake, to discover that our fire had burned perilously low, and that some seven or eight great brutes were hungrily prowling round us, their eyes gleaming like green lamps, and themselves apparently waiting only until the fire had burned a little lower, or their courage had grown sufficiently to enable them to leap in and seize us. I sprang up, awaking Dirk, and together we heaped fresh brushwood upon the smouldering ashes until the flames leaped up again, and then our visitors left us. But our narrow escape brought home to us realisation of the extreme danger of sleeping in exposed situations; and after breakfast on the following morning we set out to return to our cave in the valley.

“How long we remained there on this occasion I cannot tell you, for we soon lost count of time; but it must have been several months, certainly. For some time we lived exclusively upon fruit; but later on we contrived to secure a morsel of meat now and then. Upon one occasion—I am afraid you will not believe me, but I assure you it is true—we found a young deer tangled up in the biggest and toughest spider’s web you ever saw; and of course we killed and ate the little creature. That spider’s web suggested to us the idea of setting traps, which we made of monkey-rope, and in which we sometimes caught small game of one sort or another.

“We should probably have been living in that cave to this day but for another bad scare—and in that case we should never have known that you and Billy had survived the wreck, and should have made no attempt to join you; so perhaps it is just as well for all of us that we had that scare.”

I was by no means certain that I fully agreed with Svorensen’s view of this matter; but I said nothing, and the man continued his story.

“There was something very curious and uncanny about that scare, though just exactly what was the nature of it I cannot tell you, for we never found the explanation of the mystery. It was a long time before we observed anything in the least degree strange connected with our surroundings. At first, not only when Pete was with us, but later, when Dirk and I returned alone, we slept soundly all night and every night, but eventually there arrived a time when—when— Now, how am I to say it so that you will understand me?”

“Ve had disturbin’ dreams,” prompted Van Ryn.

“Yes,” agreed Svorensen, “that was it; we had disturbing dreams—at least sometimes we thought they were dreams, while at other times we were convinced that they were real. A curious circumstance in connection with it was that the experiences began for both of us on the same night. It was our practice to build a big fire in front of the cave every night, to prevent the entrance of wild beasts while we slept, and on the night about which I am now going to speak we did it as usual.

“We were never long in dropping off to sleep after we had composed ourselves to rest for the night, and this particular night was no exception to the rule. I don’t know how long I had been asleep—but it could not have been long, for our fire outside was still burning brightly and the interior of the cave was brilliantly illuminated by it—when I suddenly started up, broad awake, with my hair on end and the sweat of terror literally streaming from my every pore, for I was feeling more thoroughly scared than I had ever before been, and I was trembling like a leaf, and my teeth were chattering; although at the moment I had not the slightest notion what it was that had frightened me.

“Then I heard Dirk muttering to himself, and looking round I saw that he too was sitting up, looking as terrified as I felt.

“‘Wha—what is it, mate?’ he stammered. ‘What’s happened?’

“‘That is exactly what I want to know,’ said I. ‘How come you to be awake?’

“‘Hush!’ whispered Dirk, in a trembling voice. ‘Listen!’ and he held up his hand for silence.

“I listened; and—believe me or not as you please, it is the solemn truth I’m telling you—that cave was full of queer little mysterious noises, like people whispering, and the soft tread of feet all about us. I looked, and Dirk looked, but we could see nothing; yet the sounds continued, now seeming to come from the back of the cave, and then all about us. I believe I should have been far less terrified if I could have *seen* anything to account for the sounds; but there was nothing. Panic seized me; I sprang to my feet and rushed, shrieking, out of the cave, dashing headlong right through our fire, and coming a terrible cropper on the rough, sloping ground in front of the cave. In falling I must have stunned myself, for I remember nothing more of what happened that night, but—and this I consider the most extraordinary part of the whole adventure—when I awoke next morning I found myself back in the cave again, lying upon my grass bed, with Dirk close alongside.”

“Ah!” I commented, “quite a queer dream. What had Van Ryn to say about it? I suppose you mentioned it to him?”

“I said dot it vas no dream; for shoost vot happened to Svorensen, the same thing happened to me,” answered Van Ryn, speaking for himself.

“Well, of course, that was very remarkable,” I agreed. “Still, it could have been only a dream, since you found yourselves, I understand, in the cave and on your own beds in the morning.”

“Yah, dot vas so,” assented Van Ryn. “But vhen ve comes to overhaul ourselves ve found dot our hands and faces vas badly skinned by our fall outside dot cave, und our hair and beards, as vell as our clothes, vas singed where ve had shooped through the fire.”

“Indeed!” said I. “That was certainly remarkable—if you are both quite sure you did not imagine those very peculiar happenings.”

"If you mean about our skinned hands and faces, and our singed hair and clothes, there was no imagination about *that*," asserted Svorensen. "But about the other—well, when we came to talk about it in broad daylight we were unable to decide whether we had actually heard the sounds, or whether we had dreamed them. You see, it was not as though the thing happened once only; it happened several nights running, and at length it got upon our nerves to such an extent that we could endure it no longer; so we agreed to return to the beach and work our way along-shore, on the look-out for a break in the reef, abreast of which we proposed to camp in the hope that sooner or later a ship might come along, enter the lagoon, and take us off."

"A most sensible plan," said I, "and the only thing I am surprised at is that, to a couple of sailor-men like yourselves, the idea did not come much earlier."

"Ay," agreed Svorensen, "it is a pity that it did not. Had it done so we should no doubt have discovered that you were still alive much earlier than we did, and found means to signal to you."

"No doubt," said I. "Well, what happened to you after you left the cave the second time?"

"The first thing," replied Svorensen, "was that we had the misfortune to lose Pete's burning-glass, which left us without the means to light a fire. That was a terrible loss, for it left us defenceless against the attacks of wild beasts at night, so that we dared not camp anywhere in the open. Dirk remembered having heard that the natives of certain countries made fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together, and we tried the same plan over and over again. Indeed we spent the better part of several days trying to get fire in that way, but without success; we could not even raise a whiff of smoke. That was about the worst misfortune that happened to us, for without fire to protect us at night, or to cook food during the day, we were continually in difficulties. But it was not long before we discovered a method of cooking after a fashion without fire. Of course you will understand that the only cooking we had to do was when we were able to obtain a morsel of meat, which was by no means every day. When we succeeded, we used to look about for a rock that had been exposed to the sun's rays for several hours, and when we had succeeded in our search we cut our meat into thin slices and laid it upon the rock, which was hot enough to so far broil our meat as to render it quite eatable.

"We dared not camp out at night, even on the open beach. The beasts were certain to discover us, somehow, and came prowling round, giving us not a minute's peace; and many a narrow escape we had from them. Thus we were compelled to get what sleep we could during the day-time, keeping watch and watch, while at night we did such travelling as was possible. But that was not much, for more often than not we were driven to take refuge in trees, or to retreat into the water, sitting in it up to our necks, with sharks cruising round within a few fathoms of us and occasionally making dashes into the shallow water and running themselves aground in their efforts to reach us. Ah! those were lively times and no mistake; and often enough we used to tell each other that life was not worth living; yet we spared no pains to preserve it.

"Then, as though we had not already enough trouble, Dirk must needs fall sick of a fever of some sort, and became violently delirious. For three nights and four days I could do nothing with him; he was simply stark, staring mad; he would not permit me to approach him, but threatened me with his knife whenever he saw me. The only thing I could do was to keep him just in sight, and a pretty dance he led me, following him into the woods and all over the place—excepting into the water. Luckily for us both he had sense enough to keep clear of that, or the sharks would assuredly have had him. But of course that sort of thing could not long continue, and toward the evening of the fourth day the poor chap collapsed, and, as luck would have it, I found a comparatively safe refuge for him among some rocks, where I looked after and attended to him until he was well enough to be up and about again. But the fatigue, anxiety, and loss of rest told upon me so severely that no sooner was Dirk able to look after himself than I fell ill; and then it was his turn to look after me for about a fortnight.

"Then one day, when I was beginning to pull round a bit, Dirk—who had been out foraging for food—returned to our refuge in a great state of excitement, with the intelligence that he had just seen a sailing boat alongside the wreck. The statement greatly alarmed me, for of course I did not believe a word of it, and my fear was that my chum was suffering a relapse, and was again experiencing delusions. But when I suggested this idea to him he indignantly scouted the idea, repeating his statement and bidding me crawl to the opening of the shelter and see for myself, if I did not believe him.

"I took his advice—it was of course the obvious thing to do—and there, to my amazement, was the boat, unmistakably enough, with her mast stepped, rigging set up, and sails stowed. What was more, after looking intently for several minutes I had the impression that I caught glimpses of one or two people moving about aboard the wreck. We watched all that day, and the next, and the next, every moment expecting to see the boat leave the wreck; and all that time we were trying desperately hard to make a fire and thus create a smoke, so that whoever was aboard the wreck would see it, and come across to ascertain what it meant; but, try as we would, we were unable to manage it. Then one day Dirk went out to look at a trap which he had set in the woods, and upon his return he reported that the boat had left the wreck and was heading along the lagoon in a northerly direction, and that there were two people in her—a man and a boy; so we naturally concluded that it must be you and Billy, and that you had somehow escaped drowning after all."

"Then," said I to Van Ryn, "if you saw us as distinctly as that, why did you not show yourself on the beach, and wave to attract our attention?"

"I did," replied the Dutchman. "D'ye think I'm such a fool as to miss a chance? But you vas not look my vay, not neither of you. Und though I shout and yell und run along the beach you take no notice, but sail on until at last you sails out of sight."

"That is very strange," said I, "for whenever I was cruising in the lagoon I always kept an eye on the shore."

"Then you moost 'ave been lookin' out abeam, or ahead, not astarn, where I 'appened to be," declared Van Ryn.

"Possibly," I agreed, for I saw that the man was in an aggressively disputatious humour, and I wanted to have no words with him. "Well, what happened after that? Go on with your yarn, Svorensen."

"We saw you three or four times after that," resumed Svorensen, "and once you passed so close that we easily recognised both of you. Unfortunately, we were both up a tree at the time, and were unable to descend, for the reason that there was a savage brute of a wild pig that had driven us up aloft and was waiting below for us to come down again. Of course we shouted our loudest, and as long as there seemed any possibility that you might hear; but it was no good. I suspect it was the roar of the surf on the reef that drowned our voices. But every time we saw you, if you were not going alongside the wreck you were steering north. So at length we came to the conclusion that you had probably rigged up some sort of a shelter in that direction; and we accordingly agreed to work along-shore in a northerly direction, and try to find out where you had bestowed yourselves.

"To you, sailing along easily and comfortably in your boat, I dare say it would seem no very arduous job to work your way along a few miles of open beach; but to us two, circumstanced as we were, in a place swarming with savage brutes that seemed to be for ever lurking on the watch for us; without the means of kindling a fire as a protection; and with only our sheath-knives as weapons; obliged to enter the woods at the peril of our lives to obtain food—and as often as not driven out again without the food; able to sleep only during the day-time—and very often not even then; compelled to seek shelter in trees for hours at a time—ay, and often enough for a whole day—to save our lives, it was simply—well, there are no words strong enough to describe it. Why, there were days—plenty of them—when we did not make so much as a mile of progress; when, from one cause or another, we did not make a fathom, much less a mile. No wonder that we were so long a time working our way round to you. Indeed, now that I look back upon the innumerable difficulties that we had to contend with, my only surprise is that we ever managed to get here at all.

"Then, as an appropriate climax of all our difficulties, the forest one day caught fire—perhaps you saw the blaze?—and almost the whole of the island was swept clean of every green thing. Phew! that was an experience, with a vengeance! If I had not beheld the scene with my own eyes I could never have believed there were so many wild creatures in all the world as we then saw; great, fierce monkeys, bigger than a man; little monkeys in thousands; leopards; wild pigs as savage as lions; deer of all sorts and sizes; and creatures the like of which we had never seen or heard of before—they all came swarming down to the beach to escape the flames. And—a very curious circumstance I thought it—they were all so thoroughly terrified that none of them interfered with the others, or with us, but all stood huddled together by the water's edge, bleating, squealing, roaring, howling—no, I cannot attempt to describe it; it is the kind of thing that has to be *seen* to be understood.

"Naturally, we all edged away as far as we could from the flames and the flying sparks, and eventually it began to dawn upon us all—beasts as well as men—that the extreme north end of the island might possibly be spared, and we all with one accord set off in that direction. And for a little while—twenty-four hours, or thereabout—we men did very well; the creatures all stood huddled together, trembling and making queer moaning, noises, too terrified to take notice of anybody or anything, and when we needed food all that was necessary was to lay hold of a deer, haul him out of the crowd, and cut his throat—and there was all the food we required.

"But that condition of affairs was of course quite temporary. No sooner had the fire burned itself out than the creatures recovered their courage and turned upon each other like—well, like wild beasts. Dirk and I quickly recognised that the north end of the island was too perilous a place for us. There was therefore nothing for us but to escape from our dangerous neighbours while we could, and this could only be done by bearing away south again, which we did.

"There was no cause for further fear of wild beasts as we pursued our journey southward; there was not a living thing to be seen anywhere ashore; even the birds had all vanished. That condition of affairs was of course all in our favour, so far as it went; but the unfortunate part of it was that the fruit was also destroyed; so that, while we could now rest undisturbed at night, our only food consisted of such raw shell-fish as we could find at the margin of the beach; and we could find no fresh water wherewith to quench our thirst.

"For two days and nights we were in that predicament, our thirst being terrible, and the only relief we could obtain—and it was very partial—was to enter the sea and lie down in it for about ten minutes, allowing the ripples to wash over us, and taking care not to go far enough in to give the sharks a chance to get at us. Then, when we felt sufficiently relieved, we staggered along for a few yards, repeating the process about thirty or forty times a day.

"At length, however, we found a stream of fresh water and camped beside it. But so terrible had been our suffering from thirst that, having at length found fresh water, we could not summon the courage to leave it again.

"One day, however, as we were seeking shell-fish on the beach near the mouth of the stream, Dirk suddenly remarked:—

"'Olaf, my son, just run your eye along the ridge of that hill yonder, and tell me what you see.'

"I did so; and presently saw what had attracted his attention. There was a little patch of green that looked as though it might be trees, while all below it was black, where the fire had been.

"'It certainly looks very like a clump of trees,' said I; 'and where there are trees there will also probably be fruit. Let us take a walk up there and investigate.'

"'And what about leaving this fresh water?' asked Dirk.

"'No need to do that,' said I. 'The stream comes down from that direction, and we can probably follow it for a good part of the way. Surely it is worth while to risk it.'



“So we started, following the course of the stream until we had arrived very near to our destination. And when that was reached we found it to be a nice little patch of forest, rising to the top of the hill and dipping down on the other side of it for a distance of about two miles. And the reason why it had not been burnt with the rest was because it stood on the lee side of a lake big enough to cut off the flames from that little patch.

“There were plenty of birds there; and when we proceeded to investigate we soon found that there were animals also—small monkeys, creatures very like hares but with short ears, a few deer; but nothing dangerous so far as we could discover. And there was an abundance of fruit of several kinds also; we therefore quickly determined to settle down there and rest a bit before going any farther. There was a great patch of reeds along the western end of the lake, and here thousands of wild duck used to settle every night; and we soon found that it was an easy matter to get a few by simply waiting for them among the reeds and catching them as they swam past.

“We built ourselves a hut of wattles, thatched with palm leaves, that kept us dry and comfortable when it rained. So happy and easy in our minds were we that we almost forgot your existence; and when we happened to remember, we used to say to each other: ‘Never mind; we are every bit as comfortable as they are; we will stop on here a bit longer.’ And so we did, deferring our departure day after day and week after week, until finally the ducks grew shy of us, and the other creatures seemed to recognise our traps and avoid them; so that at length a time came when we were pretty hard put to it to make a living. Then, too, we began to feel lonesome, and to get snappy and short-tempered with each other; to dream and think and talk about home and its comforts, until we grew thoroughly dissatisfied with the life we were living; and one day, after we had had one of our now frequent quarrels, I said to Dirk:—

“‘Look here, mate, we appear to have quite forgotten those other two. Do you think that a man of brains like Mr Blackburn is going to settle down and be satisfied to pass the remainder of his life among a group of desert islands like these? Because, if you do, I don’t. Just consider the facts. There is he and the boy; and you may safely bet that, whatever else they may have done, or left undone, they will have taken care to save the treasure that we found aboard that old galleon; and what good will it do them so long as they remain here? No good at all. Therefore I think we may take it for granted that he will set his wits to work to get away from here by hook or by crook, taking the treasure with them; and then where do *we* come in, and what becomes of our share of it? Let us cut adrift from this spot—which, anyhow, is of no further use to us—and join them; and when they go, we will go with them, and take our share of the treasure.’

“Dirk quite saw the force of my reasoning and eagerly agreed to my proposal; so we made a start there and then, and—and here we are.”

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### Is Trouble Brewing?

“Exactly,” I concurred. “Here you are. But how did you know where Billy and I had located ourselves? and how did you contrive to make your way here from the southern end of West Island?”

“West Island—is that the name of the place? Oh, we managed pretty well,” returned Svorensen. “From the ridge of the hill where the forest was all burned away we were able to get a very fair idea of the geography of the group in general. We counted six islands in addition to the one we were already on, and we observed that the one to the eastward of us was, like our own, fire-swept; also that at one point it was separated from our island by a channel only about half a mile wide. To the northward of that island we saw another, with small groups of trees dotted about here and there upon it, while the remainder of its surface appeared to be covered with corn-fields or something similar; so it is not to be wondered at if we jumped to the conclusion that we should find you established there. So we made a start by heading for the narrowest part of the channel between our own island and the next one, carrying with us as much fruit as we could handle, for we knew not when or where we should find more.

“Upon reaching the channel the question that confronted us was: How were we going to get across? We could see but one way, and that was to swim it. But what about sharks? We had already lost one of our number through them, and we had no desire that a similar fate should befall either of us. Therefore we camped alongside that channel two days, and while one of us foraged for food, the other just sat and intently watched the water. And when the evening of the second day arrived without disclosing any sign of sharks in the channel, we agreed to risk the passage; so we stripped off our clothes—or what remained of them—made them into a bundle, secured them upon our heads, and waded in.

“We got across safely, and were lucky enough to land just where a little stream of fresh water came down from the hill that rose in the middle of the island. We camped alongside the stream that night, and made our supper of melons and ground-nuts that had grown since the passage of the fire over the land. On the following day we proceeded inland, following the course of the stream and heading toward the top of the hill, from which we hoped to obtain a little further knowledge of the geography of the group and also, it might be, some more definite information as to your own whereabouts. And we were successful in both particulars, for while we were on the top of that hill we saw your sailing boat coming round the eastern end of the island across the channel northward of us. Watching you, we saw you land on that island, stay there a while, and then sail away again in a north-easterly direction. Upon seeing this, Dirk and I came to the conclusion that the proper thing for us to do would be to descend to the beach, and there await your next appearance, when we would signal you. We had already detected a little stream flowing down the hill-side and discharging into the channel, quite near the spot where we decided to await your reappearance, so we followed it down to the water’s edge, where we camped. Then that same evening your boat again hove in sight, and we saw you land a party of niggers just opposite where we were watching; having done which you again made sail to the northward and eastward; which led us to the conclusion that after all you had not settled upon that cultivated

island—as we had at first supposed—but somewhere else. Of course we showed ourselves upon the beach, and hailed; but the channel was too wide for our voices to carry across, and probably you never looked in our direction, so we failed to attract your attention. But we knew now that you were still on the group, and that we were on your track; so we did not trouble overmuch.

“Then, before your boat had passed out of sight, and while we were still watching, we saw a nigger paddling across the channel from the island you had touched at to the one that we were upon. He was heading to land at a spot rather more than a mile to the eastward of where we were, so we got back into the young growth that had sprung up after the fire, and pushed along toward the spot for which he was making. We arrived a few minutes before he did and, crouching down, we saw him haul up his tub of a canoe on the beach, and make his way inland. We allowed him to get well away from the beach, and then we crept down to the canoe, launched her, and proceeded to paddle in the track of your boat.

“It fell dark almost before we had got fairly under way, but there was a fine moon, so it did not greatly matter. We paddled down the channel and across it to the point round which you had recently vanished—a good eight miles we reckoned it to be—and hot work it was for two men who had been on short commons for more than a month; but we forgot all about that when, upon rounding the point, we saw, at a distance of not more than five or six miles, a *light*; and we knew that now you could not be very far away, while we were in possession of the means to reach you. But it was a tough job to get that little tub of the nigger’s along when once we had rounded the point, for at once we felt the full strength of the easterly breeze, and it and the popple it raised were together just as much as we could barely stem. It must have taken us *hours* to get across that five or six miles of water; and long before we landed you had put all lights out, and turned in; but there was the house, plain enough to be seen in the bright moonlight, so we headed straight for it, and landed at last on the beach just below.”

“And what became of the punt that you stole from that unfortunate native?” I demanded.

“Why, I reckon she’s still there on the beach where we left her,” was the reply.

“Still there!” I exclaimed. “Why—yes—I suppose she is. This must be looked to at once. Billy, take this man, Van Ryn, with you, and get him to show you where they left the punt. Then you and he will paddle her round to the cove here, and make her fast astern of the sailing boat. Then get the sailing boat under way, and Van Ryn will point out to you the spot on Apes’ Island from which he and Svorensen took her—”

“Nod me, misder; don’d you think id!” suddenly stormed the Dutchman. “You’re nod my schibber now, and I don’d dake orders from you or anybody else. Ve’re all equal now.”

“Are we?” said I, slipping my hand into my jacket pocket. “That’s where you are making a big mistake, my man. I mean to be just as much skipper here as I was aboard the *Yorkshire Lass*; and if you men wish to share in the comforts of life that I am able to give you, and to go home with me when I go, you will have to submit to discipline, and obey my orders.”

“Ah! ve’ll see about dot,” interrupted Van Ryn, springing to his feet. “Olaf, mine zon, haf ve comed all dis vay from over yonder to be ordered about mit dis man? Let’s show ’im dot ve means to do as ve likes here. Come on!” And, whipping out the remains of his sheath knife, he gathered himself together for a spring upon me, with one eye on Svorensen meanwhile, in full expectation that the latter would back him up.

But I was fully prepared. There had been, from the moment when I first encountered these two men, early that morning, a certain truculence of speech and demeanour that warned me against trusting them too implicitly, and I had been on my guard with them all day. So now, as the Dutchman sprang to his feet I sprang to mine, and, leaping back from them, out of arms’ reach, I whipped out the revolver that I had been carrying all day in my jacket pocket, and shouted:

“Hands up, both of you! Don’t so much as think of trying conclusions with me; for if either of you advance a single step, I shoot—to kill! I remember the reputation you two men—and *you* especially, Van Ryn—earned for yourselves aboard the brigantine; you were perpetually instigating trouble. But don’t for a moment imagine that you will be permitted to make trouble here, for I simply won’t have it. At the first hint of anything of that sort I’ll hand you over to my friends, the natives of yonder island, and ask them to take charge of you; indeed I believe it would only be an act of ordinary prudence to turn you over to them at once.”

“No, no, Mister,” interposed Svorensen hurriedly, “don’t think of it. There ain’t goin’ to be any trouble, I assure ye. Don’t take any notice o’ what Dirk says, Mister; ’is bark’s always a lot worse ’n ’is bite. He don’t mean a half nor a quarter of what ’e says—sit down, you thunderin’ fool, and put away that knife of yours,” he continued, turning suddenly upon the Dutchman and forcing him back on the packing-case upon which they had both been sitting, and seating himself beside him. Then he leaned over his companion and began whispering hurriedly and excitedly in his ear.

“Stop that, Svorensen!” I exclaimed. “If you have any advice to give that man, speak it aloud, so that I may hear. If it is good advice there is no need to whisper it.”

“All right, Mister,” returned the Finn, “I was only tellin’ him not to make a bloomin’ fool of hisself. And now, come on, Dirk, and let’s do what Mr Blackburn orders. What ’e says is right; he’s skipper still, and we may’s well recernise it first as last. You knows as well as I do that we can’t do nothin’ without ’im. Come along, Billy.”

Thereupon the two men rose to their feet and proceeded to slouch along the shore in the direction of the spot where they had left the punt.

“On second thoughts,” said I, “go, you two men, and bring the punt round here to the cove; and Billy and I will come

out in the sailing boat to meet you.”

Svorenssen waved his hand to indicate that he understood, and the two men continued on their way; the Finn, I observed, talking very earnestly to his companion.

As soon as they were out of sight, Billy and I walked down to the boat, boarded her, got under way, and worked her round to the south beach, off which we fell in with and took the punt in tow. The breeze was blowing moderately fresh, which enabled us to make the trip to Apes' Island in a trifle over two hours, at the end of which we found the unfortunate native, squatted on his haunches, anxiously awaiting deliverance from the former haunt of his enemies, where I perceived the young vegetation was already flourishing vigorously. We at once took the man aboard, where, during our passage across to Cliff Island, I explained to him as best I could the episode of the stolen punt—to the amazement of the two seaman, who seemed to regard as wonderful the fact that in the course of a year I had acquired a fairly fluent command of the natives' language. I observed with satisfaction that, when Bowata and a considerable company of the natives came down to the beach to greet us upon seeing our boat heading for the landing-place, the two seamen looked more than a trifle uneasy, fearing perhaps that I would seize the opportunity to fulfil my threat to hand them over to the charge of the blacks; and I was not sorry to let them see thus early what a powerful force of auxiliaries I had behind me should they be meditating anything in the nature of an undue assertion of independence. I designedly directed the particular attention of Bowata and his followers to my new companions, explaining who and what they were; but of course the shellbacks understood nothing of what I was saying, and they made little or no attempt to conceal their relief when I at length bade farewell to the blacks and we made sail again upon our return to Eden.

On the following morning I resumed work upon the cutter; and I thought that Van Ryn and Svorenssen looked somewhat disconcerted when, in accordance with my arrangement with Bowata, a party of ten sturdy natives arrived at the shipyard about 8 a.m. in the Chinese boat I had given them, to lend us a hand as and when required. But the two seamen turned to without demur, and I soon had reason to congratulate myself upon my acquisition of them; for while Svorenssen revealed an almost professional skill in the use of carpenters' tools, the Dutchman explained that if I would cut out the cutter's sails he would undertake to make them to my entire satisfaction. Both men did much more and far better work than I in the least anticipated; and when at length we knocked off work for the day, and I surveyed the result of that one day's work, I felt that I might now at last begin to calculate, with some approach to accuracy, the date at which our labours might be expected to come to a successful conclusion. Two days later Van Ryn—who was working at the new sails under the shade of a tree at some distance from the shipyard—requested that, if possible, I would spare Billy to assist him; and as the request seemed reasonable I acceded to it without demur.

Thereafter matters went so smoothly for a fortnight or more that, in my satisfaction at the progress we were making, I almost forgot the suspicions which the attitude and utterances of the two seamen had aroused when they so unexpectedly reappeared upon the scene. With their assistance, work upon the cutter had progressed so speedily that the planking of her was completed, the laying of her deck about half done, her mast and bowsprit finished, and her mainsail and gaff-topsail sewn and in process of roping; I therefore estimated that another month would see my ambitious project complete and possibly ourselves at sea.

But my complacency was somewhat disturbed when, on a certain evening, I was instructing Billy in the problem of the reduction of the sun's altitude to the meridian. I had concluded my explanation of the problem, when the boy, glancing up at me with a smile, remarked:

“That chap, Van Ryn, is awfully inquisitive, Mr Blackburn. He was chaffing me to-day upon the difference in my manner of speaking now from what it was when he first knew me, and I said: Yes, I had to thank you for it, for you had insisted I should study and improve my education every evening since we had been cast away. Then he wanted to know all about what you had taught me, and how much I knew; and I told him that you had been teaching me arithmetic, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, geography, and navigation; and that last word surprised him, I can tell you. It was amusing to see how interested he at once became; he wanted to know just how much I knew about navigation; and he would hardly believe me when I told him that I knew enough to enable me to determine a ship's position, day or night, provided that the sky was clear and I could get a sight of certain heavenly bodies. But when I insisted that I could do all I had said, he seemed no end pleased. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘I must tell Svorenssen what you say; he will be glad to hear it. It was only a few nights ago that we were talking about the time when we should leave these islands, and saying what a fix we should all be in if Mr Blackburn should meet with another accident, or fall ill while we were at sea. And so you really believe, Billy, that if such a thing should happen, you could navigate the cutter?’ I said I was quite sure I could; and then the conversation dropped; but he kept harking back to it, time after time, showing that he was still thinking about it.”

“Yes,” said I, “I can quite believe it; and I can understand, too, his amazement at your assurance that you—a mere boy—could, if put to it, navigate the cutter, or any other craft for that matter. There is probably not one boy in ten thousand of your age, Billy, who could truthfully claim such ability. But two circumstances have been in your favour; in the first place you are naturally a sharp, intelligent lad, with a strong predilection for study; and in the next place there was little else for you to do on this group but learn, until we started to build the cutter. Now, Billy, what you have told me relative to Van Ryn's inquisitiveness and his cross-questioning of you has greatly interested me, for a reason which I will explain later on; therefore, while I am not as a rule inquisitive, I will ask you to make a point of reporting to me the substance of any further conversations which the man may hold with you, and to take very particular notice of any questions he may ask you. And now, let us return to the consideration of our nautical problem.”

At the moment it seemed strange that Billy's story should so powerfully have affected me, but the fact remains that it did. After we had turned in that night I lay restlessly tossing upon my bed, wondering—wondering whether Van Ryn's questioning of Billy was the natural result of pure, unadulterated inquisitiveness, or whether it had a deeper significance. The conversation appeared to have arisen naturally enough. I could not detect in the relation of it any

indication of a deliberate attempt on the part of the man to lead up to the subject of Billy's educational acquirements; what reason, indeed, could he have for doing so, apart from the lad's more refined mode of speech? The matter that most powerfully exercised me was the Dutchman's eager curiosity to discover the full extent of Billy's qualifications as a navigator. Yet, even as to this, there seemed little enough reason for uneasiness; the man had given a quite plausible reason for such curiosity, a reason that I could perfectly understand and appreciate; but I wondered whether it was the true, the actual reason; or was there another and more sinister one at the back of his evil mind.

In any case, what, I wondered, could have put the thought in the Dutchman's head that something might possibly happen to me while we were at sea. Certainly the experience had already befallen him once since the commencement of the voyage; but with men of such limited intelligence as that of Van Ryn and Svorensen even such an experience as that usually makes so very transitory an impression that it soon fades. Moreover, the difficulty had been surmounted, and they would naturally believe that, should it again arise, it could again be surmounted in the same way. The only reason that I could think of why such an idea should have taken so strong a hold upon the Dutchman's mind was that, *under certain circumstances*, the eventuality of which he had spoken might be very much more than possible: *it might be inevitable*.

Reasoning thus, I next asked myself the question: Should anything happen to me—should I, for instance, *die*, either aboard the cutter or before leaving the islands—how would my death affect the fortunes of those two men, Svorensen and Van Ryn, to say nothing of that of Billy? And why should it be desired to get rid of me?

Those were not difficult questions to answer. In either of the above hypothetical cases the boy would be absolutely in the power and at the mercy of the two men; and I shuddered to think of what would happen to him, with me out of the way. Svorensen and Van Ryn were both big powerful men, and, should they resort to violence, what could a boy do by way of resisting them? Then the cutter was now so far advanced that, at a pinch, the two seamen could complete her, launch her, and make her ready for sea without my assistance. Their escape from the group was therefore in any case assured; while, so far as the navigation of the craft was concerned, they had already wormed out of Billy the information that he was competent to undertake that.

But if the two seamen were actually conspiring against me, as I now began to think was at least probable, their primary object would doubtless be to secure the whole of the treasure for themselves. They doubtless recognised that so long as I—a man as powerful as either of them, with a mind already tintured with suspicion of them—lived, to attempt to secure more than their fair share of the treasure might be both difficult and dangerous, and possibly even result in failure. But with me effectually disposed of the enterprise would wear a totally different aspect. They would complete the cutter, sail away in her, with the treasure on board and Billy as navigator, willing or unwilling, and upon arriving within sight of their destination they would murder the poor boy; and the rest would be easy—or so they would probably believe. Yes; knowing the men so well as I did, I felt that there was ground for suspicion of them, and I resolved that, without appearing to do so, I would henceforth keep a wary eye upon them both, and be constantly, day and night, on my guard against any act of treachery on their part.

Now it was not often that Billy did anything foolish; but boys will always be boys, to the end of time, I expect; and about a week after the lad's conversation with me on the subject of Van Ryn's inquisitiveness the spirit of mischief suddenly seized him and, "just for a lark", as he subsequently admitted to me, he must needs leave the Dutchman, upon some pretence, run up to the house, and then pay us a visit at the shipyard, bringing Kit with him on a leash, that he might enjoy the consternation of the natives at the sight of the leopard. It was fortunate that I spotted the pair when I did, for the beast was already beyond Billy's control and dragging the lad helplessly after him with the evident determination to interview the strangers more closely. The animal, although not yet fully grown, had developed into a magnificent specimen of his kind, as big as a mastiff and about twice as powerful. To hold him when I hurriedly relieved Billy of his charge taxed my strength to such an extent that I was obliged to shout to the workers to quit work and get into hiding at a safe distance; but, even so, the scent of the men excited Kit to such an extent that it was only with the utmost difficulty I was able to drag him back to the bungalow and safely lash him up.

I was therefore not very greatly surprised when, after work was over that evening, Svorensen approached me and said:

"See here, Mister, did ye happen to salve the arms chest from the wreck before she washed off the reef and foundered?"

"Yes," I said. "What about it?"

"Why, just this," he blustered. "Me and Dirk wants a brace of revolvers, cartridges, and a cutlash apiece out of that chest. That's what about it."

"Really!" said I. "A very modest request, very modestly put. Is it permissible to ask why you want those things, and in what way you purpose to use them?"

"Oh yes, cert'nly," was the reply. "There's no objections to you astin' as many questions as you bloomin' well likes. We wants 'em to purtect ourselves again' that snarlin', savage leopard o' yours. It ain't safe to be on the same hisland with the brute."

"He will not interfere with you, or molest you in any way if you give him a wide berth," I retorted. "As to giving you the weapons you demand, I won't do it, so that's flat."

"You won't, eh?" returned the Finn, glowering at me savagely. "Then all I can say, Mister, is that me and Dirk 'll have to see what can be done about purtectin' ourselves. I, for one, ain't goin' to take the risk of bein' tore to pieces; no, not for another day, and so I gives you warnin'."

"Now, see here, Svorensen," said I. "I can make allowance—and do—for your very natural fear of the leopard; but, as I have already told you, the animal will not hurt either of you men if you keep clear of him. And don't let me hear any more of such talk as you have been indulging in during the last few minutes. You forget yourself, my man; and you seem to forget also that you came to this island of your own free will. I did not invite you. I did not even *want* you; I was doing quite well without your assistance, as I can again, if necessary. So let me have no more threats of any sort, or I shall be compelled, for peace and quietness' sake, to request my friend Bowata and his people to take charge of you. This is not the first time that you have obliged me to say this. I shall not again repeat it. Let there be no more bickering between us. The cutter is very nearly completed and, please God, we shall soon be at sea in her and on our way back to civilisation and home."

The man stared at me for several seconds with, I thought, murder in his eyes, then he turned away, remarking:

"All right, Mister, you're top dog now, and what you says goes, but—"

I affected not to catch that final word, but proceeded to indicate to the natives the several jobs upon which I wished them to employ themselves on the morrow. But what, I wondered, was the explanation of this fresh outburst of turbulence on Svorensen's part—for fresh it was. Only once before had he displayed such insolence of manner to me; and I wondered whether, perchance, it had any connection with the suspicions that had been bred in my mind by Billy's report of the Dutchman's recent conversation with him. But, I argued, those suspicions might be wholly unfounded, and be the result of a certain unsuspected mental disorder brought about by the long series of unusual experiences through which I had passed, beginning with the destruction of the *Saturn*. In any case, whether my suspicions were well founded or otherwise, there could be no disputing the fact that the two seamen were turbulent, unruly, violent characters, liable at any moment to become dangerous; and therefore they must be carefully watched. As for voluntarily furnishing them with weapons, and so rendering them ten times more dangerous than they already were, if Svorensen really imagined I would do such a thing he must surely have set me down for a fool.

From this time forward, without appearing to do so, I maintained a close watch upon both men, noting and weighing their every word, and endeavouring to deduce from their general conduct, and especially from their demeanour toward myself, whether or not they were really hatching a plot against me; but for rather more than a week I was unable to detect anything to justify the least apprehension on my part. Of course it was impossible for me to observe the pair when they were alone together after the day's work was done, but although Svorensen maintained his usual surly demeanour I attached little importance to that, for I believed it to be natural to him, while there was no doubt that both men were working steadily and well.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

### A Tragic End to our Troubles.

On a certain evening, some eight or ten days after that outburst on the part of the Finn in connection with his demand for weapons, Billy remarked to me, apropos of nothing in particular, as we sat together studying as usual:

"That Dutchman is a queer chap and no mistake, Mr Blackburn. He will sit for hours, saying never a word but: 'Billy, pass me that,' or 'Billy, take hold of this,' and then all of a sudden he'll begin to chatter like a parrot."

"Really!" said I. "And what does he chatter about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," answered Billy, "chiefly about what he and Svorensen went through before they joined us here. And he likes to hear how *we* managed, too, before we settled down on Eden. Do you know, I'm beginning to think he's not such a bad sort of chap after all. He seems to admire you immensely."

"Does he, indeed?" I commented dryly. "In what particular way does he reveal his admiration?"

"Well," said Billy, "he thinks you are perfectly wonderful, every way. Wonderfully clever as a navigator, you know; clever to have been able to build the sailing boat; still more clever to have designed and very nearly built such a beautiful craft as the cutter; and most clever of all to have built this bungalow. He said that he could understand that a clever sailor like you might be able to build a boat; but he could not understand how any sailor—even *you*—could build such a fine house. He wanted to know how long it took us to build it, and how we set about it, whether you invented it as we went on, or whether you drew it out on paper beforehand; and when I said that you had drawn it all out before we began to build, he said that he'd dearly like to see the drawing, because it would give him some wrinkles if he should ever again be shipwrecked."

"And what did you say to that?" I asked.

"Well," said Billy, "you see, I thought it was perhaps his roundabout way of asking me to show him the plan, so I said I didn't know where it was; that I rather thought you had destroyed it; and when I said that, the poor chap looked so disappointed that I showed him what it was like, by sketching it out on the ground with the point of a sail needle."

"That is very interesting," I said. "Here is paper and a pencil. Just reproduce on it, as nearly as you can, the sketch you made on the ground."

The boy took the pencil and paper, and in a few minutes completed a rough but quite accurate plan of the bungalow, showing the relative positions of the several rooms in the front and rear portions of the house. I observed also that he indicated with scrupulous fidelity the position of every window and door, showing the possibility of passing from any one room to any other, through the passages and the living-room.

"This sketch does you credit," I said. "It gives an excellent idea of the general arrangement of the house; but I really do not see how the information it affords is in the least degree likely to be of use to Van Ryn, even should he be shipwrecked a dozen times over. To speak quite frankly, I would very much rather that you had not made that sketch on the ground for his information. Do you think he understood it?"

"No," confessed Billy, "I don't believe he did, for he asked all sorts of silly questions about it that he wouldn't have asked if he had understood the plan."

"Ah, indeed!" said I. "Do you happen to remember any of those questions?"

"N-o, I don't think I do," replied Billy. "They were so awfully stupid that I didn't pay much attention to them. I explained that those marks,"—pointing to the drawing—"represented doors; yet the silly ass couldn't understand how the servants got from their room to the kitchen, nor how they brought our meals from the kitchen to the living-room without going outside and walking round the house. And he couldn't understand how you and I got from our rooms to the living-room without going outside."

"That's too bad," said I. "It seems to reflect upon your powers of description, doesn't it, Billy?"

"It does, rather," admitted the boy, "yet I did my best to make him understand. But he didn't seem able to grasp that we were supposed to be looking down upon the bungalow, with the roof off. He persisted in thinking that we were looking square at it, and that the rooms in the rear were *above* those in the front of the house."

"Stupid fellow!" I commented. "And was the house the only thing he manifested curiosity about?"

"Oh no," answered Billy; "there were lots of other things he asked about. He wanted to know where we got Kit from, and how it is that he is so tame with us, and so savage with everybody else. He asked if we weren't afraid that some day he would turn upon us and do us an injury. He said that if he was boss he'd shoot the beast right away; and he grumbled a bit because you wouldn't give him and Svorensen any firearms to defend themselves with, not only from the leopard but also from the natives, whom, he said, he didn't trust a little bit, and who might come across any night and massacre us all in our sleep. Then he wanted to know how we are going to get the cutter into the water when she is ready for launching; and then—let me see—oh, yes, we got on about the natives again—and the apes. He said it was all very well for us who could bolt ourselves securely in the house at night; but what about him and Svorensen if an ape should come across and surprise them in their tent some night? How were they to defend themselves without weapons of any kind? I laughed at that, and told him that there was so little likelihood of anything of that sort happening that we never closed our doors or windows, except when it rained. But he said that didn't matter; we could defend ourselves if such a thing happened, because we had plenty of arms; and they ought to have some too. He said that, what with the leopard, the apes, and the savages, life was none too safe for unarmed men like him and the Finn."

"Did his terror seem quite real, or do you think it was at all exaggerated?" I asked.

"Oh no," asserted Billy, with conviction; "it was real enough, and it wasn't exaggerated either; he was in a regular funk. You see, he and Svorensen had a pretty bad time, one way and another, all the time they were on West Island; but it was the apes that frightened them worst of all."

"Yes," I agreed, "I can quite understand that; but,"—as an idea suggested itself to me—"do you think Van Ryn suspects that you repeat these conversations of his to me?"

"N-o, I don't think so," answered the boy. "Why should he. I don't believe such a thought ever enters his head."

I did not feel by any means so sure of that as Billy seemed to be. If the man suspected that his remarks and questionings were repeated to me, his assumption of extreme stupidity might be explained as designed to disarm any suspicion aroused in my mind by the queer character of some of his questions. Take those relating to the arrangement of the house, for example. The pretence that the information would be valuable to him, should he ever again be cast away, was altogether too puerile for consideration; he required the information—and very cleverly extracted it from the unsuspecting Billy, too—for some entirely different reason. But what was that reason? I wondered.

I was not long kept wondering.

The second night after the above-recorded conversation between Billy and myself brought with it the threat of a change of weather. It had been exceptionally hot all day, with less wind than usual, and there was a languorous quality in the atmosphere that seemed to portend thunder, a portent that was strengthened toward nightfall when the wind died away to the merest zephyr, while a great bank of heavy, lowering cloud piled itself up slowly along the eastern horizon so that the rising full moon had no chance to show herself. As the evening progressed what little air of wind there was died completely away, and we were left, with all doors and windows flung wide open, gasping for breath, and sweltering as in a Turkish bath. I endured it as long as I could, and then, tossing aside the book I was attempting to read, announced my determination to go down to the cove and have a swim.

Billy declared that he would like a swim too, if he could take a header off the veranda into deep water; but as to walking down to the cove in that heat—no; much as he would enjoy a dip he wasn't prepared to undergo that amount of exertion to get it.

As the gathering storm seemed unlikely to break suddenly, I did not unduly hurry over my dip, but remained in the water about an hour, emerging at last delightfully cool, and quite ready for bed. Upon my return to the house I found Billy still up and poring over a book; but he confessed to feeling sleepy, upon which I ordered the boy off to bed forthwith and, extinguishing the lamp in the living-room, retired to my own apartment and straightway turned in;

being quickly lulled to sleep by the sound of pouring rain that began just as I stretched myself upon my bed.

It seemed as though I had only just fallen asleep when I awoke with startling suddenness. The rain was pelting down on the roof in torrents, making quite noise enough to account for my sudden awakening, through which I could just hear poor Kit whining and fidgeting restlessly under the veranda, outside my French window. Imagining that it was these combined sounds that had awakened me, I rose, thinking:

“I must fetch that animal indoors. I expect the poor beggar is getting pretty wet, hence his restlessness.”

One of the doors of my room opened into the living-room, while the other gave on to the veranda, both of them being wide open. As I passed through the latter a vivid flash of lightning revealed the rain coming straight down in sheets and rebounding in glittering spray off the already streaming earth, with Kit straining at his leash, which Billy had made fast as usual to one of the veranda posts. The beast had withdrawn himself as far under the veranda as his leash would permit, and he did not appear to be very wet; but he seemed anxious to enjoy the more complete shelter of the living-room, so I stepped out and cast him adrift.

To my amazement, the instant that I released him from his leash, he tore himself away from my hold upon his collar and, with a savage snarl, bounded through the living-room door. The next instant there issued from the interior of the room a yell of consternation, immediately followed by a shriek of terror, the fall of a heavy body on the floor, screams, execrations, and the dreadful sound of Kit worrying somebody or something; and before I could draw another breath the figure of a yelling, screaming, frantic man dashed from the room, cleared the veranda steps at a bound, landed heavily on the ground some five feet below, and, still screaming, disappeared through the curtain of pouring rain.

But the sounds from the living-room still continued with increasing violence, augmented now by cries from Billy, whose form I dimly descried outlined against the dark background of the open door; and a perception of what had happened, and was still happening, leapt to my brain with sudden enlightenment.

“Bring a light, Billy, quick!” I shouted, as I sprang through into the living-room and, instinctively avoiding the table that stood in the middle of the room, flung myself upon the struggling group on the floor. My hands at once came into contact with Kit’s hairy hide, and slid along it until they closed upon the collar round his neck, when, exerting all my strength, I dragged the beast, still savagely snarling and resisting, off the writhing and groaning form at my feet. Somehow—to this day I know not how—I managed to drag the fiercely struggling creature out of the room and back to the veranda, where I securely tied him up again. Then I returned to the living-room as Billy entered it with a lighted lamp.

I took the lamp from him and said:

“Light the lamp in my room, boy, and then lend me a hand to put this man on my bed.”

I next turned to the writhing, groaning figure on the floor and saw that, as I had already surmised, it was that of—Svorenssen! He was dressed only in shirt and trousers, both of which, rain-sodden and drenched with blood, were torn to rags by the teeth and claws of the leopard, which was still raving outside and doing his utmost to break adrift from his moorings. The man’s injuries, especially about the throat, shoulders, arms, and chest, were shocking; and I felt that, with the limited appliances at our command, there was but very small hope of saving his life. He still grasped in his right hand a formidable bludgeon, and a similar weapon lay on the floor near him.

I had only time to take in these details when Billy returned, and between us we contrived to half carry, half drag the writhing and groaning Finn into my room and deposit him on my bed. I then sent Billy to the natives’ room, the occupants of which had been roused by the disturbance, bidding him set them to work providing warm water and such other matters as I thought I might require.

Guided by the book of instructions attached to the medicine-chest, I did the best I could for the injured man; but his wounds were of so ghastly a nature, and his suffering so acute, that I recognised from the very outset, not only that it was impossible he should recover, but that death must ensue in a very few hours. And it was dreadful to sit there by his side, listening to his moans, liberally interspersed with curses of the leopard, of me, and not infrequently of mankind in general, and to reflect that that flood of blasphemy was issuing from the lips of a man hovering on the brink of eternity! At length I could endure it no longer, and I said to him, rather sharply, I am afraid:

“Stop that blasphemy, Svorenssen, for pity’s sake, and rather turn your thoughts to prayer—if you know how to pray. I fear that your life has been a deplorably misspent one, and it can last but a few hours longer. Before to-morrow’s sun sets you will be face to face with God! Therefore I urge you to devote the few remaining hours at your disposal to making your peace with Him, instead of cursing those who have never knowingly wronged you.”

“What—d’ye—mean?” he gaspingly demanded. “I—ain’t goin’—to—die—am I?”

“Yes,” I said, “you are; and it is well that you should know it. Therefore, forget all your wrongs, real or imaginary, and —”

But here I was interrupted by an outburst of such vile and savage profanity that it literally rendered me speechless. It lasted, I suppose, fully ten minutes, and left its utterer gasping and in a state of collapse. I administered stimulant, and at length the colour came slowly back to the sufferer’s cheeks and lips, and he opened his eyes. For several minutes he lay there gazing up at me steadfastly, questioningly; then he muttered:

“Thank ’e, Mister. If it hadn’t been for you I’d have slipped my cable that time. And so you think I’m goin’ to die? Well, I’m beginnin’ to think so myself now. My God! it’s awful to think that a few hours more and I shall be face to face with my Maker, and bein’ called to account for a whole lifetime of wickedness. And there’s no way out!”

"Oh, but there *is*," I said eagerly, and thereupon I began to expound, with all the earnestness at my command, and as lucidly as I could, the wonderful story of man's redemption. I got my Bible and read passage after passage suited to the dying man's needs, until the expression of terror and anxiety gradually faded from his features, and ultimately his eyes closed and he seemed to fall asleep. Then the day dawned and Billy, entering softly, took my place as watcher while I snatched a brief hour or two of sleep on his bed.

I was aroused by the clatter of crockery in the living-room, where the native women were making ready to serve breakfast—for even when the shadow of Death hovers over a house its inmates must needs eat and drink; and then one of the natives who every day came over to help with the work on the cutter, brought the news that the sailing boat had disappeared, the inference being that Van Ryn had taken her. Nevertheless, I gave orders that Eden should be thoroughly searched for him; but he was never found, nor was the boat, and that was the end of him so far as we were concerned, for we never again heard of him.

When breakfast was ready I tiptoed to the door of my bedroom and beckoned Billy, who crept softly out, closing the door behind him.

"He is asleep again now," the boy whispered; "but he is dying in peace; and he wants to see you, Mr Blackburn, before he passes away, that he may repeat to you the terrible confession that he has made to me."

We took breakfast in silence, for our minds were full of thoughts too deep for utterance; and when we had finished I resumed my post beside the dying man's bed. Svorensen was still asleep—the sleep of utter exhaustion; but he was very uneasy, and moaning occasionally. About half an hour later, however, he awoke and, after I had again given him a stimulant, he stammered and gasped the confession he desired to make.

There is no need to repeat it here word for word. In substance it was to the effect that Van Ryn had proposed, and he had agreed, that they two, obtaining entry through the back of the house, should murder me—in my sleep if possible—arm themselves from the arms chest, and thereafter impose their will upon poor Billy. The cutter was to be completed and launched, the treasure shipped aboard her, and the conspirators, with Billy as forced navigator, were to make their way to some civilised port, arrived in sight of which, Billy was to be knocked on the head and hove overboard—exactly as I had suspected—while the two men were to divide the treasure equally between them. It was a dreadful confession for a man to make; and I found it bitterly hard to utter the words of forgiveness that were so piteously pleaded for, but I forced myself to do so at last; and shortly after noon of that day the man, happy now and, I believe, at peace with his Maker, passed away. We buried his body an hour or two later.

With the death of one, and the disappearance of the other of the two men who had come into our lives, only to act as a disturbing element from almost the first moment of our acquaintance with them, all my worries and anxieties passed away like the memory of an evil dream; and upon the day following that of Svorensen's death I turned with renewed zest to the completion of the cutter. The hull was by this time practically finished; her deck was laid, her companion and tiny self-emptying cockpit completed, and all that was now needed was to run a low bulwark around her, rig and step the completed mast and bowsprit, bend the sails, ballast and launch her, get the stores, water, *and treasure* aboard; and up anchor and away.

Taken as it stands, that list of work still remaining to be done looks simple enough; yet it took me a full month to complete it, for the greater part of it was of so technical a character that the natives were of little assistance to me, and I had to do most of it with my own hands. Also, I found that Van Ryn had by no means completed the task he had undertaken to perform; the two topsails—square-header and jib-header—still needed roping, as did the jib; and that work cost me several days' labour to complete to my satisfaction. Then there were the launching ways and the cradle to be built; and this task taxed my ingenuity to its utmost limit; but at length all was done, except the actual launching of the boat.

The finishing touches to my final preparations were completed too late in the afternoon for us to do anything more that day. Immediately after breakfast on the following morning, therefore, Billy and I climbed aboard the cutter, hoisted the *Yorkshire Lass's* ensign to her topmast head, suspended a bottle of wine—one of the very few that we had left—from her stem head, and then, leaving Billy aboard, I descended to the ground, removing the ladder by which we had ascended. The wedging-up having already been accomplished, I next took a maul and, shouting to Billy to "stand by", proceeded to knock away the spur shores. There was now a moment's hesitation on the part of the cutter, of which I took advantage to jump clear; and then she began to move, slowly at first but with rapidly increasing velocity, while I dashed the bottle of wine against the craft's cut-water, and named her the *Dolphin*, in accordance with Billy's earnestly expressed wish.

Two seconds later the craft took the water, plunging deeply with the foam brimming to her taffrail; then, rising buoyantly, she shot far out toward the middle of the cove until, in obedience to my hail, Billy let go her anchor and brought her up. I then saw that I had underestimated the amount of ballast required, and that she needed about half a ton more, and a slight readjustment of it to put her in correct trim. That, however, was an error that could be easily rectified; and meanwhile I was highly gratified by the graceful appearance she presented, now that she was afloat.

Next in order came a "cold collation" that I had caused to be prepared for the delectation of Bowata and his petty chiefs, the whole of whom I had invited over to Eden to witness the launch, and—Billy having been brought ashore in the islanders' boat—we forthwith fell to, all hands doing full justice to the feast. At its conclusion I formally presented the bungalow and all that we were leaving in it to Bowata, with a strict injunction to him and his to show the utmost kindness to any shipwrecked persons who might hereafter be so unfortunate as to be cast away on the group, an injunction which they all promised to obey most faithfully. Then followed our mutual farewells, to the accompaniment of much howling and weeping on the part of our black friends; after which the remainder of the day was devoted to the completion of the ballasting of the cutter and its correct adjustment.

There was but one other duty now to be done before we started for home, and that was the disposal of Kit, the



leopard. Since the night when he so fearfully mauled Svorensen the nature of the beast had undergone a material change for the worse. He had developed an uncertainty and ferocity of temper that rendered him distinctly unsafe and altogether unsuitable as a pet for anyone. With grief and many tears poor Billy was obliged to admit that such was the case; therefore it was at length agreed that he should be transported to West Island, where he could hurt no one, and where he would find ample prey for his sustenance; accordingly, on the following morning we weighed anchor and bade a final good-bye to our Pacific Eden, sailing through the East and North Island Channels to West Island, where, without mishap, we landed Kit and turned him adrift to shift for himself, not by any means without regret, for the beast had stood us in good stead on one memorable occasion. Then, sailing up North-west Channel, we entered the lagoon and, heading to the northward, passed through the wide gap in the reef, abreast of Shark Bay, and once more found ourselves riding buoyantly on the long swell of the open Pacific.

Of course I had long ago given most careful consideration to the question of where I should steer for, in the event of the cutter's completion, and after much study of the charts at my command I had decided to shape a course for Sydney, Australia. It meant a voyage of some two thousand three hundred and fifty miles across the open ocean in a ten-ton cutter, but I felt sure the *Dolphin* could do it, especially as we should have the south-east trade wind and the prospect of reasonably fine weather with us nearly all the way. Accordingly, as soon as we were fairly clear of the reef, I bore up and headed away to the southward, along the west side of the group, of which we finally lost sight about an hour before sunset.

To say that our voyage was unadventurous would be untrue; on the contrary, we had many thrilling adventures and several hair-breadth escapes from destruction, but lack of space forbids more than the bare mention of them here. Let it suffice to say that, after a voyage packed with sufficiently exciting incidents, we arrived safely in Sydney harbour on the twenty-third day after our departure from the group.

Arrived there, my first business was to negotiate with a firm of bankers for the exchange of some of the gold coinage, which formed part of our treasure, for a sufficient number of British sovereigns to carry both of us comfortably home, and, this done, we set about providing ourselves with outfits suitable for the voyage. It was, of course, impossible for us to keep our adventures entirely secret; a hint of them somehow got abroad, possibly from the people in the hotel at which we put up, and the enterprising reporters of the Sydney papers did the rest; one result of which was that I soon got from a local yachtsman so advantageous an offer for the *Dolphin* that I unhesitatingly accepted it. We spent a very pleasant fortnight in Sydney, many of its leading citizens vying with each other to show us hospitality; finally, on a certain day in the month of April we both embarked for England in an Orient liner, which, after a most delightful voyage, landed us in London on a glorious day in the month of May.

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