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**BLACKIE'S GATEWAY TO ENGLISH**

**SUPPLEMENTARY READER FOR STANDARD VIII**

28  
**R. M. Ballantyne**

# **THE CORAL ISLAND**

Retold by  
**JOHN KENNETT**

**BLACKIE & SON (INDIA) LIMITED**

*Price 90 Paise*



6220



*The cat rubbed itself against Peterkin's legs, purring loudly all the time.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### *The Wreck*

FOR three days and nights our ship had been driven before the storm, and now the end was near. Death was staring us in the face.

There could be no doubt of that. The ship was breaking up. The extreme violence of the storm had carried away two of our masts: the frightful walls of water that came sweeping across the Pacific Ocean had torn off our rudder and left us at the mercy of wind and waves. Everything had been swept off the decks except one small boat, and we had been blown far out of our course. I knew that we might find ourselves among dangerous coral reefs—and I, Ralph Rover, fifteen years old and mad for adventure, was terribly afraid.

Then, at dawn of the third day, there came a cry from the look-out:

“Land! Land ahead!”

I tried to see through the heavy rain. Its drops struck at me like bullets. I had never dreamed it could blow so hard. The wind

rushed in through my mouth and choked me as I faced it . . . .

And then the ship rose on a mountain of water and I saw the dark mass of land that lay ahead. It was an island, and about it was a circular reef of coral on which the waves were breaking in a storm of flying foam. There was calm water beyond the reef, but I could see only one narrow opening into the lagoon. My heart sank. There was absolutely no chance of our steering the damaged ship through.

I was filled with despair.

I turned my head and stared at the two boys who were clinging to the rigging beside me. There were three of us serving as apprentices on board the *Arrow*: Jack Martin, a tall strong fellow of eighteen, Peterkin Gay, who was little and quick and funny, and about fourteen years old, and myself. Even in that frightening moment, Jack's face showed no sign of anxiety or fear, though Peterkin looked sick and scared, and there were tears of pain in his eyes from the hard blows of wind and rain.

Above the roar of the storm I heard the captain give a shout.

"We'll have to abandon ship! Stand by to launch the boat! We'll be on the rocks any minute now!"

Jack grabbed hold of my arm.

"Never mind the boat!" he shouted close to my ear. "It's sure to overturn in this. When I give the word, grab that big oar in the bows. It might help us get ashore."

I shouted an answer, and clung on, as a great wall of water caught the ship, threw her over at a sharp angle, and swung her towards the reef. I looked at the white waves that were boiling against the rocks, and had little hope of coming through alive.

Things happened quickly.

The wind and the heavy seas were driving the *Arrow* towards the reef. I saw the crew standing by the boat and the captain beside them giving orders. The reef was very close, and an enormous wave was rushing towards us.

"Now!" shouted Jack.

We struggled towards the bows, taking advantage of every handhold, choking for air as we leaned into the wind. The wave fell on the deck with a crash like thunder. A rush of water went over my head. As I clung to the rigging, the ship struck; the remaining mast broke off close to the deck and went over the side, carrying the boat and men with it. The sea was a mass of flying foam; I had a confused glimpse of black heads and waving arms

against the white of the waves, and then all of them vanished.

We three ran towards the bows to lay hold of our oar. It was entangled with the wreck, and Jack grabbed an axe to cut it free. A sudden movement of the ship made him miss the ropes and he struck the axe deep into the oar. Another wave washed it clear of the wreck. We all grabbed hold of it. Wind and water caught it and carried it away, and the next instant we were all struggling in the wild sea.

I felt myself lifted and driven through the air, and then I dropped like a stone. A rush of salt water went over my head. I was drowning. I could no longer breathe. Again the waves lifted me and threw me forward. I crashed down and something struck my head a heavy blow. I saw a bright light, felt a sharp pain, and then lost consciousness in a watery darkness.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Island*

I FELT water splashing on my face. I opened my eyes.

I was lying out of the wind, under an overhanging shelf of rock. Peterkin and Jack were kneeling beside me, their faces pale and scared-looking, and in that instant it all came back to me. I sat up, then frowned with pain. My head ached rather badly just above the eyes. I put a hand to my head, and there was blood on my fingers when I looked at them. I felt very weak.

"Don't rush things, Ralph," said Jack. "You're not quite better yet. Wet your lips with this water. I got it from a stream."

"What happened after we were thrown into the water?" I asked.

"The oar struck your head," said Jack. "I managed to grab you and push you towards the beach. It wasn't too difficult because the water was quite calm inside the reef."

"And the others?" I asked.

Jack shook his head. His face was very solemn.

"No sign of them," he said quietly.

We were silent for a minute or two.

"Did you see what happened to the ship?" I inquired at last.

"She's gone to the bottom," Jack replied. "She struck on the tail of the island and broke her back. The next wave swung her clear, and she floated away a bit before she filled and went down."

There was a longer silence while we thought about it all. For my part, I did not feel very happy. We might be on a desert island, but if it should turn out to be inhabited I felt certain from all I had heard of South Sea Islanders that we should be roasted alive and eaten. If on the other hand, it should be uninhabited, I fancied that we might well starve to death.

The same thoughts must have occurred to Jack.

"If this is a desert island," he said suddenly, "we'll have to live like wild animals. We haven't a tool of any kind—not even a knife."

Peterkin's face lit up.

"Yes we have!" he cried, and produced from his pocket a small folding knife, with only one blade—and that one was broken.

Jack gave a laugh.

"Well, that's better than nothing," he said. "Let's see what else we've got."

I sat up. I was beginning to feel better. My friends had taken off some of their clothes and spread them out in the sun. They had also removed most of my wet clothing.

We turned out our pockets and discovered that we had, between us, the broken knife, an old silver pencil-case, a length of strong string, a small sailmaker's needle, and a ship's telescope.

That was the sum total of our possessions!

"The oar!" cried Jack suddenly. "We've forgotten the oar!"

"What's the use of that?" asked Peterkin. "There's enough wood on this island to make a thousand oars."

"I know," said Jack, "but there was some hoop-iron at the end of oars, and that may prove of use to us."

"Come on, then," I said. "Let's go and fetch it."

I still felt rather feeble from loss of blood, but Jack lent me his shoulder and assisted me along. My spirits rose as we walked down to the beach. The wind had greatly decreased and the storm died away. The island was hilly and covered with richly coloured trees and bushes. A beach of sparkling white sand lined the bright green shore, and upon it there fell a gentle movement of the sea, although a mile

off across the lagoon the great seas were rolling in and crashing upon the reef.

Peterkin ran on ahead and down to the edge of the sea. All at once he gave a shout, and we saw him straining with all his strength to lift something that lay upon the shore.

It was the axe which Jack had struck into the oar, and which had remained fast—so fast and tight, indeed, that Peterkin could not move it.

“What luck!” cried Jack, and gave the axe a pull that tore it from the wood.

We carried the axe and the oar, which had some iron on the blade, back to the place where we had left the rest of our things, intending to burn the wood away from the iron at a more convenient time.

“Now let’s go to the tail of the island, where the ship struck, and see if anything else has been thrown ashore,” Jack suggested.

We set off immediately.

“What are we going to eat?” asked Peterkin, as we moved along the white beach. “I could do with a drink, too.”

“Look up there,” answered Jack, “and you’ll observe both food and drink, my lad.”

He pointed towards the branches of a coconut palm, heavily weighed with fruit. Peterkin gave a cry of delight and climbed the tree with the easy skill of a monkey.

In a matter of seconds he had thrown down more than a dozen nuts.

"Now let's have some that aren't ripe," Jack called up to him—and down they came, followed by Peterkin.

We cut holes in the green nuts with Peterkin's knife and drank gratefully of their cool, sweet milk.

"Wonderful!" cried Peterkin, in great delight. "This is the life! It's like Heaven!"

We went on till we came to the point of the island off which the ship had struck, and searched carefully along the shore. We found nothing of value.

The sun was sinking as we walked back. As long as the daylight lasted we worked hard cutting down leaves and branches and used them to build a sort of wall all round us; then we covered the inner floor with dry grass and leaves. On these we sat down and made our supper off the meat of coconuts.

All of us were weary by the time we had done, and we were glad to lie back under the shadow of the trees.

That night the stars looked down upon our sleep, and the distant roaring of the sea upon the reef was the last sound we heard before we dropped off.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *A Strange Discovery*

I WAS awakened by a loud scream. I sat up, puzzled. There came a roar of laughter from Jack and Peterkin, who were already on their feet and looking down at me.

"What was it?" I demanded.

"A monkey," replied Peterkin. "It's been sitting in a tree just above your head, looking into your mouth, which was wide open, and wondering if it ought to jump in."

I laughed and rubbed my eyes. The sky was blue and the air heavy with the scent of flowers.

"Who's for a swim?" cried Peterkin.

He began tearing off his clothes, then rushed over the white sands and threw himself into the water. Within ten seconds Jack and I were running to join him.

While Peter enjoyed himself in the shallow water, Jack and I swam out into the deep and began diving for stones. After a few minutes, as we both rose to the surface, Jack gave a shout.

"Oysters!" he cried "Follow me, Ralph."

We dived together, and each picked up three or four large oysters; then we swam for the shore.

"Breakfast, Peterkin!" Jack shouted, as we ran up the beach.

"Oysters, my boy! Open them while Ralph and I get dressed."

Peterkin took the oysters and opened them with the edge of our axe.

"This is wonderful!" he said. "We'll get a fire going and roast them for breakfast."

"And how will you start a fire?" I asked.

"Easy!" said Peterkin. "We'll use the end of the telescope as a burning-glass. Leave it to me, my lad."

We left it to him. Inside ten minutes he had built up a fire, and we set about roasting our oysters. They tasted delightful.

Our next step, we decided, was to explore the island. Since we had no idea of what dangers we might have to face, we cut two strong sticks off a tree and Jack armed himself with the axe. Then we set off on our travels.

We followed the beach till we came to the entrance of a valley, through which flowed a little river. At the head of the valley, about two miles off, stood a small mountain.

In a matter of minutes we were climbing up the steep sides of the mountain. We saw, when

we reached its top, that it was not the highest point of the island, but that another mountain lay beyond, and between the two was a wide valley full of tall trees. We pushed on down the hillside, crossed the valley, and began to climb the second mountain.

We were not far from the top when we received a shock. That was when Jack, who was in the lead, came to a sudden stop and gave a cry of astonishment.

"Look at that!" he shouted, and pointed at the stump of a tree.

I stared—and for a moment I was puzzled. Then I saw what he meant. The tree had been cut down with an axe. We were not the first human beings to walk upon this beautiful isle!

We moved closer to the tree-stump and inspected it closely. There could be no doubt at all that it had been cut by the hand of man. The wood was all decayed, and partly covered with moss, so that it must have been done a long time before.

"I can't understand it," said Jack. "It must be the work of savages—but wait a moment! What's this?"

He leaned over the stump as he spoke and began to scrape at the moss with his axe. As the moss fell away, I saw two distinct marks, as if someone had tried to cut the first letters of his

name upon the trunk. They looked like J. S., but were so broken up that we could not be sure what they were.

It was a mystery, but, as the day was wearing on, we turned back the way we had come.

We sat up late that night, puzzling over the problem of the tree-stump. At last, however, we made up our minds that the island must be uninhabited, and retired to bed.

For several days we did not go far from our camp. Among other useful things, Jack turned about three inches of the hoop-iron into a fine sharp knife. First he beat it quite flat with the axe. Then he made a rough handle, tied the hoop-iron to it with a length of our string, and ground the iron to a sharp edge on a piece of hard sand-stone. When the blade was finished he used it to shape a superior form of handle.

A few days later we made up our minds to travel right round the island. Before we set out, however, Jack suggested that we should all provide ourselves with a useful weapon of some kind. We could manufacture bows and arrows, or spears, he thought, and make an effort to get some animal food.

We cut some strong sticks from a young tree and set to work. We were still working when night fell, but sat there happily enough by the light of our fire.

I noticed Peterkin trying to fit a small, sharp piece of hoop-iron to a long pole.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"I'm making a spear instead of a club," Peterkin answered.

"Good idea," I said. "I think I'll change my mind too. I'm going to make a sling out of this piece of cloth."

For some time we worked in silence. At last Peterkin looked up.

"Jack," he said, "may I have a strip of your handkerchief to tie on my spearhead? It's—."

He stopped dead and his eyes widened. Over the island there rang out a strange and frightful cry that seemed to come from the sea.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Hut*

THE sound filled me with horror. I felt shivers run up and down my back. It came again, loud and clear on the still night air. We all started to our feet and stared out across the sea. The moon had risen and we could see a number of little islands that lay a few miles beyond the lagoon, but there was nothing moving anywhere. The sound died away while we were staring at the sea.

"What is it?" asked Peterkin in a low, frightened whisper.

"I've heard it before," said Jack, "but never as loud as that. I said nothing to you, because I thought I might have imagined it. I don't know what makes it, but I'll find out before long. Now if you're ready, we'd better get to sleep . . ."

It was early next morning when we set out on our second journey of exploration. Half a mile's walk took us round a bend in the land which shut our camp from view, and a little after we reached the mouth of a valley that we

had not explored before. We were about to turn into it when Peterkin stopped and pointed along the shore.

"What's that?" he asked.

As he spoke, I saw a white column of something like steam shoot up above the rocks. It hung there for a moment, and then vanished. The odd thing was that it was about fifty yards inland, among rocks that stretched across the beach to the sea. As we stood there a second column flew up for a few seconds—and vanished.

"Come on," said Jack. "Let's see what it is."

We reached the spot in a couple of minutes. The rocks were high and steep and damp with moisture. Here and there were holes in the ground. We looked round, puzzled, as there came a low rumble of sound near by. It developed into a loud hiss and a moment later a thick spout of water burst from a hole in the rock only a few feet off. We sprang to one side, but not before Jack and I had been soaked to the skin.

Peterkin, who had been well clear, gave a roar of laughter, but suddenly there came a louder hiss and a fierce spout of water burst under his legs, threw him off his feet, and landed him in a bush.

It was our turn to laugh; then the three of

us ran from the spot before we were caught again. We looked at our wet clothes.

"We'll have to make a fire and dry them," said Jack.

I carried the burning-glass in my pocket, and in a few minutes we had a fire going and our clothes hanging up before it. While they were drying we moved along the cliff a bit. Suddenly Jack gave a shout. I ran to the overhanging ledge of rock from which he was looking down into the sea.

"What's that in the water?" he asked. "Is it a fish?"

Down in the water I could see a faint, pale object of a greenish colour which seemed to be moving slightly. Jack turned and shouted for Peterkin to bring his spear.

The spear, however, was too short for us to reach the object with it, and no matter how much we disturbed the water with the end of it, we could not drive the thing away. We continued our journey without discovering what it was.

Late that afternoon we were making our way along the edge of a wood, when we heard a loud, whistling noise above our heads and saw a large number of wild-ducks making for the coast. We watched them, saw where they came down, and followed after them until we

reached a most lovely blue lake about two hundred yards long, on which the ducks had settled.

"This is our chance to earn our supper," Jack whispered to me. "Put a stone in your sling and make sure your aim is good. I'll try to put an arrow in one. Mind how you go, now!"

We crept forward cautiously, but the ducks must have heard us, for they suddenly rose from the lake in a cloud. Both Jack and I let fly with our weapons, and we both brought a dead duck down into the lake, from which they were promptly rescued, for we were hungry and in need of our supper.

The ducks were big birds and, when roasted, seemed to taste better than anything we had ever eaten before. We had our fill, then lay down to sleep upon a bed of branches under an overhanging shelf of rock.

The sun was already high when we woke. We all felt full of vigour and made a good breakfast off cold duck and fruit.

We set out, but had not gone more than a mile or so, when, as we turned a point that showed us a new and beautiful group of islands beyond the reef, we heard the awful cry that had so scared us a few nights before.

"It's coming from one of those islands," said Jack.

We all looked towards the island. And then I gave a jump of astonishment. On the shore of the largest I could see some curious objects moving. At that distance they looked like an army of soldiers, marching in lines and squares. Even as we stared, that awful cry came again across the water.

And then Jack laughed.

"They're penguins," he said. "It's *their* cry we've been hearing."

We went on our way, much lighter at heart for having solved the mystery of the strange cry.

It was that afternoon that we found the footprints of a small animal, which were something like those of a dog. There were a lot of them, running off into the woods along a beaten track which seemed too wide to have been made by the animal itself. We followed them and had gone some way when we came upon an open space and heard a faint cry. We all stared. On the track before us stood a small black animal.

"It's a cat!" cried Peterkin.

"I think it's blind," I said. "Look, it keeps walking into branches as it moves along. It must be very old."

We hurried towards it. It did not hear our footsteps until we were right up to it, seeming deaf as well as blind. When we reached it,

the cat rubbed itself against Peterkin's legs, purring loudly all the time.

Peterkin lifted it in his arms. We watched in amazement as the cat rubbed its head against his cheek, and purred to show its pleasure. It was quite clear that the poor animal had known man before, and was showing its joy at meeting human beings.

At last we decided to follow the track, and went on with Peterkin carrying the cat. After fifty yards or so the track turned to the right and wandered for a short space along the banks of a stream. We were astonished once more when we came to a spot where there must at one time have been a rough bridge, the stones of which were now scattered in the stream. We moved on, filled with odd expectations, until under the shelter of some bread-fruit trees, we came upon a small half-ruined hut.

We stopped and stood for a long time in silent wonder. There was a deep stillness about the place, a kind of sadness about this broken, lonely hut so far from the usual dwellings of man. It had one opening for a window and the door was very low. The roof was of leaves and branches. Most of it was in a state of decay.

We stood and talked in whispers before any of us dared go near the place. Then Jack crept

forward and tried to see in through the window. He could see nothing in the deep shadow of the trees, so we pushed the door open, entered, and looked around us.

As my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light I made out a wooden chair standing beside a roughly made table, on which stood an iron pot. Then my glance moved on and my heart gave a sudden big jump. In the corner farthest from the door was a low bed, and on it lay the skeleton of a man.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *The Diamond Cave*

FOR long, long moments we stood staring in the awful stillness of the place; then Jack stepped forward to the bed and we followed him with beating hearts.

There were two skeletons, I saw, lying in a little heap of dust. One was that of a man, and the other that of a dog, its head resting on its master's chest. We searched the hut for something that might tell us who the poor fellow was, but found nothing that helped at all.

I said that he must have been a sailor, wrecked upon the island with only his cat and dog for company. There seemed to be no other answer.

Then came a sudden exclamation from Peterkin, who was turning over a heap of broken wood that lay in a corner.

"Look here! These should be useful."

"What are they?" asked Jack, hurrying across the room.

"An old pistol and an axe," Peterkin replied.

"We might as well take them," said Jack

quietly, "though the gun won't be any use without powder."

We took these things and the iron pot with us. Peter lifted the cat and we left the hut. We continued our journey, though we did not recover our good spirits till we got back to our camp, late on the next day.

For several weeks after this we amused ourselves in various ways. And then one morning, after we had bathed and eaten, Peterkin said:

"Do you remember the green things we saw in the sea close to the water-spouts? Let's see if it's still there."

Jack and I agreed, so we took up our weapons and set out. When we reached the place and looked down into the sea, there was the same pale green object moving its tail from side to side in the water.

"I don't think it's alive at all," said Jack. "I think it's merely a light. Anyway, there's no reason why we shouldn't dive down to it. I'm going to have a look."

He pulled off his clothes and dived into the sea. For a second or so he was hidden by his own disturbance of the water; then the water became still and we saw him swimming far down towards the green object.

And then he vanished!

We held our breath and waited for him to appear once more. A minute passed, two, three—and still he did not come. We waited a little longer, and then a great fear took hold of me.

“Ralph!” said Peterkin in a scared voice. “He needs help. Dive for him, Ralph.”

I was already on my feet. I was on the point of diving when I saw something black shooting up through the water. Another second and Jack’s head rose to the surface. He gave a shout; then I stretched out an arm and helped him climb up to the ledge.

He sank down, breathing hard.

“Jack,” cried Peterkin, and there were tears in his eyes, “where were you?”

“Lads,” said Jack eagerly, “that green object is a stream of light that comes from a cave in the rocks beneath us. I swam right into it, saw a faint light above me, came up, and found my head out of water. At first I couldn’t see much, it was so dark; but when my eyes got used to the light, I found that I was in a big cave. I had a good look round; then I thought that you might be getting a bit worried, so I shot back up again.”

This was enough to make me want to see the cave, but Jack told me to wait for a minute or

two because he wanted to take down a torch, and set fire to it in the cave.

I waited while he cut some lengths of very dry wood and wrapped them up in several pieces of coconut cloth which he had manufactured; then he took a small piece of the tinder from the old pistol we had found, rolled up some dry grass, and made another bundle protected by the cloth.

At last we were ready. We walked to the edge of the rocks, Jack carrying one bundle and I the other. Peterkin, who could not dive, watched us unhappily.

"Don't worry about us, Peterkin," said Jack. "We may not be back for half an hour."

The next moment we sprang from the rock together.

It was easy to find the entrance to the cave. I watched Jack swim through, then went straight after him. There was light above me. I came up to the surface, holding my bundle above my head. As soon as our eyes grew accustomed to the faint light, we swam to a shelf of rock and climbed out on to it.

Inside five minutes Jack had our torch burning. I stared all round me, struck dumb by the wonders it revealed.

The whole place flashed and sparkled. Its roof was made of coral, and from it hung

brilliant icicles that were really a sort of limestone.

We moved far into the cave without reaching the end of it. Its walls and roof sparkled in the torchlight as if they were covered with diamonds and precious stones.

We turned back when the torch began to burn down. What was left of it we placed in a dry spot. Then we dived back off the ledge, swam through the entrance, and shot up to the surface.

As we dressed and walked home we tried to tell Peterkin all about the wonders of our Diamond Cave, little guessing then how much use it would soon prove to be in a moment of urgent danger . . . .

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Cannibals*

FOR some weeks after we lived happy and content. Sometimes we went fishing in the lagoon, sometimes we hunted in the woods, and often we climbed to the mountain-top to look for passing ships.

The weather was so fine, our island so beautiful, that it all seemed like a never-ending summer—until there happened something that filled us with horror.

It was when we were sitting on the rocks at Spouting Cliff one day that I noticed the two dark objects that had appeared on the horizon.

"Look!" I cried. "Boats!"

I felt my heart begin to race with excitement. We all sprang to our feet, staring out across the sunlit sea. Suddenly Jack gave a start.

"They're canoes," he said. "They may be war-canoes. I don't like the look of this. We mustn't forget that there are fierce cannibals on some of these islands. We'd better hide until we know what to make of them. Come on—behind the rocks!"

A minute later we lay hidden, each one of us with a thick club in his hand and his eyes on the approaching canoes.

It was soon clear that one was chasing the other. The one in the lead held about forty people, among them a few women and children. The canoe which followed held only men, who were paddling with all their might. It looked like a war-canoe.

The first canoe made for the shore almost right below us. From where I lay I could see the eyes of the paddlers flashing in their dark faces. As the canoe grounded on the sand, the whole party sprang to the shore. Three women and a girl rushed away into the woods, while the men crowded to the water's edge, waving spears and clubs as if to threaten the approaching enemy.

The second canoe struck the beach, and its savage crew jumped into the water and rushed to the attack.

The attackers were led by a tall, strong chief whose hair stood out all round his head. It was light yellow in colour and must have been dyed. He was painted in red and white from head to foot.

The battle that followed was frightful to watch. Most of the men swung enormous wooden clubs, with which they struck out each

other's brains. They looked more like devils than human beings. As they fought, I felt my heart grow sick within me at the awful sights I saw.

Suddenly the yellow-haired chief was attacked by a man as big and strong as himself. The two fought like wild animals, and then in an instant Yellow Hair tripped and went down to the ground. His enemy sprang forward, club upraised, but before he could strike he was knocked unconscious by a stone from the hand of one who had seen his chief's danger.

That was the turning point. The savages who had landed first turned and ran towards the woods, but not one of them escaped. All were captured and dragged to the ground. Fifteen were grabbed, tied hand and foot with ropes of some kind, and thrown down upon the sand. They were left where they lay while three or four of the victors were sent running into the woods to search for the women we had seen come ashore.

Still we stayed behind our rock. I saw another of the savages go into the woods and return with a great bundle of firewood. Soon he had an enormous fire burning upon the beach. Yellow Hair gave a shout, and two of his followers went over to the prisoners and began dragging one of them towards the fire.

A feeling of horror crept over me. I could see that the savages meant to burn their enemies. I made to spring to my feet, but Jack grabbed hold of me and held me where I was. A second later one of the savages swung up his club to crash it down on the skull of his enemy. I turned away, and when I looked again Yellow Hair and his men were roasting something over the fire. I could guess what it was . . . .

There came a frightened cry from the woods. A minute later two of the savages appeared, one dragging by the hair a woman who carried a baby in her arms, and the other struggling with the girl we had already seen.

Yellow Hair rose and walked towards the women. He put his hand upon the child. The woman cried out and pulled away from him. He gave a wild laugh, tore the child from her arms, and threw it down upon the sands. The mother screamed and fell in a faint.

The girl was dragged forward, and Yellow Hair spoke to her. It seemed to me, by the way he pointed to the fire, he was threatening her life.

I was filled with hate for him.

"Peterkin," whispered Jack suddenly, "have you got your knife?"

"Yes," replied Peterkin in a strange voice.

I looked at him and saw that he was as white as death.

"Listen," said Jack between his teeth, "I want you to run straight for the prisoners and cut them loose. I'll keep the others busy. Go on, before it's too late."

He rose, his great club ready in his hand. I heard him give a shout that rang wildly among the rocks. Next instant he went running towards the savages.

"Come on!" cried Peterkin to me, and the two of us went racing over the sand towards the prisoners.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Pirates*

As I dropped beside the first of the tied men I looked over my shoulder and saw Jack rushing upon Yellow Hair, swinging his club.

The chief jumped back as quick as a cat, and at the same time aimed a blow at Jack. Now it was Jack's turn to spring aside, and then the two of them were engaged in a fierce struggle.

I tore at the ropes that held the man's legs, while Peterkin went along the line cutting away with his knife. When I looked up again I saw Yellow Hair raising his club. Then Jack jumped in and struck the savage between the eyes with all his force. Yellow Hair fell forward and Jack, tripping, went down beneath the body of the chief.

The other savages screamed with anger. A dozen clubs were swung high, ready to break Jack's skull, but the men hesitated for a moment as if afraid to strike their chief.

That moment saved Jack's life. All the prisoners were free, and Peterkin and I led them across the sands in a screaming bunch, grabbing for stones and fallen clubs as we went.

A fierce hand-to-hand struggle followed. Seven of Yellow Hair's men went down beneath the clubs of the prisoners, who were well aware that they were fighting for their lives. Our enemies, I think, had lost heart because of the fall of their chief. They were also frightened by the fierceness and violence of Jack's attack, since he had no sooner shaken himself free of the chief's body than he rushed into the middle of them and struck down three men in as many blows.

Inside ten minutes all our enemies were either knocked down or made prisoners, bound hand and foot, and stretched out in a line upon the sand.

We stood there, breathing hard, while the savages crowded round and talked away in their own language. I saw Jack take hold of the hand of the big man who was their chief (and who seemed to have recovered from the blow that had struck him down) and shake it to show that we were friends. Then his eye fell upon the poor child that had been thrown upon the shore. Dropping the chief's hand he hurried towards it and found that it was still alive. Its mother was lying upon the sand where she had fallen, and Jack carried the baby to her and laid its warm little cheek on hers. The effect was wonderful. The woman opened her eyes,

felt the child, let out a scream of joy, and held the baby tight.

Jack turned away.

"Come on," he said to Peterkin and me. "Let's take them to the camp and hunt up some food."

Within half an hour all the savages were seated on the ground in front of our camp, making a hearty meal off several cold ducks, some cold fish, and an unlimited supply of fruits.

As soon as we had eaten, we three, who were now very weary, threw ourselves down on our beds and fell fast asleep. Then the savages followed our example, and in a little while the whole camp was lost to the world.

The sun was up when I awoke and the savages were already moving. We made a cold breakfast; then Jack signed to the savages to follow him down to the beach, where we had left the prisoners forgotten overnight.

They seemed to have suffered no ill effect from their night in the open, and they ate greedily of the food we gave them. Jack then began to dig a hole in the sand with one of the native paddles. After working at it for some time, he pointed to it and to the dead bodies that still lay stretched out upon the beach. The savages saw what he wanted, ran for their

paddles, and inside an hour had dug a hole big enough to make a common grave.

The savages stayed with us for three days. During that time we made every effort to talk with them, but all we could learn was that their chief was named Tararo and that the young girl was called Avatea.

On the fourth day the whole party made ready to depart. We helped them to load their canoe with fruit, and to put the prisoners in it. Since we could not speak to say good-bye, we went through the ceremony of shaking hands. Avatea was the last to take leave of us. Going up to Jack, she took hold of his arms and rubbed noses with him. Then she did the same to Peterkin and me. I thought that was quite enjoyable . . . .

Two hours later the canoe was out of sight and we were left with an odd feeling of sadness creeping round our hearts.

But the days passed by once more, and at last we began to think of the visit of the savages as if it had all been a bad dream—until, that is, there happened something equally as frightening . . . .

One afternoon Jack and I were sunning ourselves on the beach, while Peterkin was climbing about on a low cliff behind. Suddenly he gave a shout of excitement.

"A sail!" he cried. "There's a ship coming this way!"

We climbed up to where he stood. There, right enough, was a schooner, outside the reef, but making for the island under a steady breeze. We were mad with excitement.

In less than an hour the ship had dropped anchor just beyond the reef. We were all jumping and dancing and waving our arms, afraid that we should not be seen. Then, to our great joy, we saw men beginning to lower a boat.

"They've seen us!" cried Peterkin.

And then several things happened all at once.

A flag was suddenly run up to the schooner's mast-head, a little cloud of white smoke seemed to burst out of her side, and an instant later a cannon-shot came crashing through the bushes and exploded against the cliff not too far from where we stood.

For a moment we were too filled with horror to move. The flag, we could see, was black, with a skull and cross-bones picked out upon it in white. It was the flag flown by pirates, and feared upon all the seven seas.

The boat was making for the entrance to the lagoon. I looked at Jack.

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"Hide," he said, without hesitation. "We

don't want to fall into *their* hands. Come on—quickly!”

He led us through the woods and by winding path to Spouting Cliff. Here, from behind a rock, we saw the boat, crowded with men, just running ashore. In another instant the crew had landed and were running up towards our camp.

A minute or so later we saw them hurrying back towards the boat, one of them swinging our poor cat round his head by its tail. When he reached the edge of the sea, he threw it far out into the water, and moved towards his friends roaring with laughter.

“You see what we can expect from them,” said Jack bitterly. “If they decide to search the island, there's only one place we can go—down into the Diamond Cave.”

“What about me?” demanded Peterkin. “I can't dive down there—.”

“We'll take you down,” said Jack. “There's nowhere else we can hide. You'll just have to make up your mind to it.”

“All right,” said Peterkin, courageously. “I'll do it. Come on!”

We stooped low and ran towards the spot from which we always dived to the cave. Before we had gone far there came a shout from the beach: the pirates had seen us. We sprang

down to the ledge and Jack and I grabbed Peterkin by the arms.

"Keep quite still, Peterkin," said Jack urgently. "Take a deep breath—and don't struggle. Let us take you. Right? Now!"

As the pirates gained the foot of the rocks we dived together headfirst. Peterkin behaved like a hero. He floated between us as stiff as a log of wood. We shot through the opening and rose into the cave more quickly than I had ever done it previously.

We all took a deep, long breath and then climbed up out of the water. Jack felt around for the torch and the tinder which we always kept in the cave. Within two or three minutes the torchlight revealed to Peterkin the wonders he had never yet seen.

We decided that we should have to spend the night in the cave. At odd times Jack and I had carried coconuts and other fruits down to the cave, partly because we had an idea we might be driven there by the savages one day and would then be glad of a store of food. We fixed our torch in a crack in the rock and ate our supper, then sat and talked in whispers until the dim light that came through the entrance died away, and we knew that it was night. Then we put out our torch and settled down to sleep.

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A heavy hand clapped down on my shoulder and held it  
as if in a vice.

When I awoke I found it hard to remember where we were. We could see by the faint light that day had dawned, but we had no idea of the hour.

"One of us ought to dive out and have a look round," Jack suggested. "I'll go."

"No," I said. "You stay here. Let me take a few risks for a change."

"All right," Jack agreed. "But keep a sharp look-out."

"Don't get caught," whispered Peterkin.

While the words were still sounding in my ears I dived into the water, and swam out to the open air. I rose gently, and floated on my back, listening carefully. There was no suspicious sound. I swam to the ledge, pulled myself out, and climbed up the cliff till I had a view of the shore.

I gave a cry of joy. I saw the pirates schooner sailing away. We were safe! I shouted again.

"There she goes! They've not caught us this time!"

Almost before I had finished speaking I heard a little movement behind me.

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," said a rough voice. At the same moment a heavy hand clapped down on my shoulder and held it as if in a vice.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Schooner*

My heart jumped into my throat. I straightened to tear myself away, and received a hard blow on the side of the head. It left me half-stupid. Through tears of pain I looked up at the man who held me.

He seemed as tall as a tree. His face was burned dark by the sun; he had cruel eyes, a large hooked nose, and a heavy beard. Round his waist was a thick belt in which I could see a couple of pistols.

He shook me.

"Don't try any tricks," he warned, and gave a loud whistle.

It was answered immediately, and a second or two later I saw the ship's boat sweep into sight around a point of the island.

The man drew one of his pistols and waved it at me.

"Walk down to the beach," he said. "If you try to run away, I'll send a bullet after you."

I obeyed. The boat was pulled upon the beach when we arrived, and a group of fierce-looking seamen stood waiting on the sands.

"Get a fire going, one of you," ordered the man who had captured me.

A man sprang to obey. In a few minutes he had a fire burning, with clouds of thick smoke climbing into the air. Suddenly I heard the sound of a gun rolling over the sea and realized how I had been tricked. The fire was a signal to the schooner, calling her back after she had pretended to put out to sea.

The big man, who seemed to be the captain, pointed a finger at me.

"Put him in the boat," he ordered. "Look alive! the breeze is freshening."

A couple of the men grabbed hold of me, swung me down the beach, and threw me into the bottom of their boat, where I struck my head on a seat and lay for some time only half-conscious.

We were alongside the schooner before I could think clearly once more. Someone swung a boot at me and a rough voice told me to jump on board. I rose and climbed up the side. In a few minutes the boat was pulled on deck, the ship's head put close to the wind, and the Coral Island was dropping back behind me. I leaned against the side, thinking of the friends I had left on shore, and a tear or two rolled slowly down my cheeks.

"So you're a cry-baby, are you?" said the

deep voice of the captain. "Well, *there's* something to cry for," and he gave me a blow on the ear that nearly felled me to the deck. "Now get below," he ordered, "till I call you!"

As I moved to obey, my eye fell on a small barrel standing by the main-mast. Written on its side in pencil was the word *gunpowder*. I saw, in an instant, that since we were beating up against the wind, anything floating in the sea would be driven on to the reef that surrounded Coral Island. And I remembered that my friends had a pistol!

Without a second's hesitation, I grabbed up the barrel and threw it into the sea. There was a roar from the captain. He moved towards me, his hand raised to strike.

"You little rat!" he shouted. "What do you mean by that?"

"I have some friends on that island," I answered. "They have a pistol, but no powder. Now, you can do what you like with me—."

The captain looked me up and down and then, to my amazement, he smiled and walked away. I went below.

There was a shout of laughter from the men in the forecastle when I appeared.

"We'll make something of you, my lad," said one. "You'll turn out all right. Bill there was

just like you at one time—and now he's the biggest cut-throat of us all!"

"Give the boy some food," said another. "He looks half-dead."

They handed me a plate of food. I ate it hungrily, while I listened to the stream of frightful curses that flowed from the lips of these evil men. Only one man kept silence, and that was the man they called Bill, who was nearly as big as the captain himself.

For the rest of the afternoon I was left to myself, but just after sunset one of the men on deck shouted down into the forecabin:

"Send that boy to the captain right away!"

I went up the ladder and on to the deck, where one of the crew showed me into the cabin.

Seated at the table, studying a chart of the Pacific, was the captain. He looked up at me.

"How did you come to be on that island?" he asked.

I told him. He sat frowning for a moment when I had finished.

"I could use a lad like you," he said at last. "I'm no pirate, boy, but an honest trader. I trade in sandal-wood—and if you choose to behave yourself I'll take you along with me

and give you a share in the profits. What do you say? Would you like to be a trader?"

What *could* I say? I agreed to become one of the crew till we reached some spot where I might be put ashore.

When I left the cabin and went on deck my heart was still heavy within me. Whatever the captain said, I was quite sure that he and his men were far from being honest traders.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *The Island of Emo*

THREE weeks had passed.

I stood on the quarter-deck leaning against the rail, watching the blue sea racing past the schooner's side. The man Bill, who had proved very friendly towards me, was at the tiller. On the horizon I could see the outline of a large island from which rose a high, bare mountain peak. I went to stand beside Bill and asked him what it was called.

"That's Emo," he said. "I know it well. I've been there before, and so has this ship. It's famous for its sandal-wood and we've taken off many cargoes already—and paid for them, too! The savages are so many that the captain hasn't dared to take what he wants by force. Even so, they don't like us very much. The last time we were here the men behaved very badly, and I wonder that the captain's come back to the place. If you ask me, it's more than probable that we shall run into trouble . . . ."

Next morning we dropped anchor inside the coral reef, just opposite the mouth of a small

creek. A big village lay about half a mile from this point. The captain called a boat to be lowered and ordered me to follow him. We pulled ashore, taking with us fifteen men armed with pistols, and with our big brass gun aimed to cover us.

A crowd of savages rushed to meet us. With them came their chief, Romata, who led us up to his house, where a feast was already prepared, and talked for a long time with the captain, who spoke the language of these people.

I gathered from Bill that Romata said he was glad to see us, and that he would set his men to work cutting down and loading sandal-wood trees for us. Romata, who was a huge man with a great black beard, was full of smiles and friendliness.

The next day most of our men were sent ashore to help cut the sandal-wood. I went with them, while the captain and one or two more stayed on board beside the brass gun, which they had aimed at Romata's hut.

During the rest-hour Bill and I wandered down to the beach, to watch the savages swimming and diving. After a little while one of them came towards me and I saw, to my delight, that he was Tararo—my old friend of the Coral Island!

We stared at each other. Then he gave a

shout, rushed forward, took me by the neck, and rubbed his nose hard against mine.

"Is this fellow an old friend?" asked Bill, in astonishment.

He spoke to Tararo in his own tongue, and the two spoke for some time. Tararo often pointed to me. When they paused I begged Bill to ask him about the girl Avatea, whom we had saved.

"Tararo is only on a visit to his island," said Bill at last. "He comes from an island called Mango, where the girl is now. He's angry with her because he's picked out a man for her to marry and she refuses to do it. *She* wants to marry a chief who lives on another island. If she still refuses when he goes back, he says he'll send her to her lover as a *long pig*!"

"What's that?" I asked, frowning.

"It means that he'll see her roasted over a fire—just like a pig—then send her off to be eaten."

I could do no more than stare at him, struck dumb with horror.

We were another week at Emo and, as the days passed it became clear that there was serious trouble arising between Romata and the captain. Once they quarrelled on the shore and Romata threatened to send his war-canoes to burn the ship. The captain just looked the

chief in the eye, and said: "Try it and see what happens. My big gun will blow your whole village to pieces!"

Romata quietened down, but I could see that he was very angry. On the next day he sent a message that he was no longer prepared to supply us, with sandal-wood. Our men were not to go ashore.

The captain was more angry than I had ever seen him before. The men were idle all day, but that evening, when I was on deck, I heard the captain talking to the mate.

"There's fine cargo lying in the woods and Romata knows that we want it," said the captain angrily. "Now he says he won't let me take it off. Well, I'm going to show him a thing or two!"

"What are you going to do?" asked the mate.

"I'm going to have the schooner rowed up to the head of that creek over there and then creep through the woods to the village. These cannibals are always feasting and dancing round their fires at night, so we can kill forty or fifty with the guns before they know we're there. After that the thing will be easy enough. The savages will take to the woods, we'll grab what we want, up anchor, and away. Tell the men to be ready at midnight."

I'd heard enough. I crept away, waiting for the coming struggle with horror.

At midnight the men were called on deck, and the schooner was quietly rowed up into the creek. It took half an hour to reach the spot where the captain wanted us to land. Here a small anchor was dropped.

Within a matter of minutes we were all ashore and lined up beneath the trees.

"There's no need to leave a man with the boat," I heard the mate whisper to the captain. "Let Ralph stay here."

The captain ordered me to stay where I was and guard the boat. Then he moved off among the bushes, followed by the men.

I waited anxiously in the darkness. I was sure that something terrible was about to happen.

And then I heard a shout.

It seemed to come from the village, and was followed at once by loud shouts and screams. Shot after shot rang out and echoed through the woods; there were more shouts and screams, and then the shooting seemed to be going on all over the place, as if parties of men were scattered through the forest.

The noise went on for a very long time, and then I heard what sounded like a victorious shout that could have come only from the

savages. It made my blood run cold. What should I do if our men were defeated?

I had just decided to get back on board the ship when I heard a frightful scream. I recognized the voice as that of one of the crew. It was followed by a shout of victory from at least a hundred savage throats. Then came another scream of pain, another, and another.

I hesitated no longer, but grabbed the boat-hook to push myself from shore. As the boat moved a man came crashing through the bushes.

"Stop, Ralph!" cried a voice. "Wait for me!" It was Bill. He jumped into the boat with such force that he almost overturned it.

"Push off!" he shouted, and I did so eagerly enough.

In a matter of seconds we were on board the ship; the boat was made fast, the line of the anchor cut, and the oars run out. It took all my strength to pull the great oars, but, between us, we got the schooner under way.

We began to move down the creek, but before we reached its mouth a shout from a thousand voices on the bank told us that we had been observed. A number of the savages dived into the water and swam towards us. One of them managed to grab hold of the cut rope hanging from the ship, and climbed up on to the deck.

Bill let the fellow straighten up, then struck him a blow that knocked him clean overboard.

But now a greater danger waited for us. The savages had got ahead of us on the bank and were about to dive into the water in front of the ship.

I shouted to Bill. He drew a pistol from his belt, sprang to the brass gun, held the pistol over the touch-hole, and fired. The flash and the crashing thunder of the big gun burst upon the savages with such a deafening roar that it seemed as if the island had been split in two.

In that moment of doubt and hesitation we had time to pass the danger point. A breeze, which the woods of the shore had stopped us from feeling, caught and filled our sails. The ship leaned over before it and we were driven out to sea.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *The Return*

Now that the danger was past, I was suddenly aware that I was very weary. I remember feeling the cool breeze upon my face as we left that terrible island behind us, and then I must have dropped down and fallen asleep upon the deck.

When I awoke the sun was shining in my eyes. I sat up and stared round. I saw a calm sea and felt the schooner cutting through it with the aid of a steady breeze. Bill was sitting upon the deck behind me, his head laid upon his right arm, which was wrapped around the tiller. The slight noise I made as I got to my feet made him look up and see me there.

One look at his face and I sprang towards him in great anxiety. He was very pale. His hair, his hollow cheeks, and the front of his shirt were all stained with blood.

"Bill!" I cried. "You are wounded!"

"Yes," he answered quietly. "I've got a nasty wound, lad. I've been waiting for you to wake up, to ask you to get me a drop of brandy from the cabin."

I ran below at once, and found the brandy and a little food. He seemed to improve after he had eaten and taken a long drink of the brandy and water. Almost at once he fell asleep, and I watched him anxiously till he woke. He smiled at me when he did so.

"I feel better for that, Ralph," he said, and made to rise.

"Lie still" I said hurriedly. "I'll get you some proper food, and then take a look at your wound."

I left him, lit a fire in the galley, cooked him some eggs, and made a pot of coffee. He managed to eat well enough. Then I helped him off with his shirt and inspected his wound.

It was a knife-wound, very deep, in the chest. It did not bleed much and I was in high hopes that it might not be serious. But Bill shook his head.

"Sit down, Ralph," he said, "and I'll tell you all about it. Romata must have expected us to attack last night, and he kept a good watch on us. Those savages sprang out on us before we reached the village. Ralph, there seemed to be thousands of them. The captain was killed almost at once. The rest of us scattered into the woods. One of the savages caught up with me and we had a bit of a fight. He wounded me before I could knock him down. There

were more of them after me, but they weren't quick enough to stop me reaching the boat."

He paused, his face all white and tired.

"Bill," I said, "we've got to decide what we are going to do now. The wind's getting up. Which way shall we steer?"

He shook his head.

"It doesn't matter to me," he replied. "I think my time's getting short. Go where you like."

"I think we'd better steer for the Coral Island. The captain once pointed it out to me on the chart, and I marked it afterwards. We ought to manage to find it again."

Bill said nothing, but sank back, his face all twisted with pain. I had no time to consider what more I might do for him. A strong wind was rising and I had to run to shorten sail, then return and take my stand at the tiller. The schooner sprang forward like a war-horse. Clouds had darkened the sky, and the wind began to whistle through the rigging.

For two hours the wind drove us along, while Bill appeared to be sleeping. As soon as the breeze dropped a little I ran to Bill's side and spoke to him.

He did not answer. I touched his hands and found that they were very cold. I tried to pour a little brandy down his throat. It was no use.

I put my hand over his heart, but could feel no movement at all. The truth dawned on me. Bill was dead.

I sat for some time, looking upon his pale, cold face. Then I rose, tied a cannon-ball to his feet, and, with feelings of deepest sorrow, let him slip over the side into the sea.

For a whole week after that a steady breeze blew out of the east. I managed to raise the top-sails, having fastened the tiller to hold the schooner on her course. In this way I was able to snatch a few hours' sleep whenever the sea was calm. After a week of fair sailing I guessed that I must be drawing near to Coral Island.

On the evening of the fourteenth day I was wakened from my sleep by a loud cry. I started up, and was delighted to see a large bird flying over the ship.

Next morning, as I stood with heavy eyes at the tiller, I waited anxiously for first light, and stared towards the horizon, where I thought I saw something like a black cloud against the dark sky. After another hour the day was dawning clear. As a single ray of the rising sun reached out over the ocean I saw—what! could it be that I was dreaming?—that so familiar mountain-top!—yes, once more I was seeing our Coral Island!

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *The Last of the Coral Island*

I SHOUTED and cried with joy as I looked towards the island. It was still many miles away, but near enough for me to distinguish the outlines of the two mountains.

It would take me another two or three hours to run the ship in. I remembered that Jack and Peterkin were not in the habit of rising before six, and as it was now only three, I hoped to arrive before they were awake.

An amusing thought struck me. I went and loaded the big brass gun, and put an iron bar ready in the galley fire.

All was now ready. In no time at all, it seemed, I was sailing through the opening in the reef. On coming opposite the camp, I put the tiller hard down. The schooner came round and lost way. I ran forward, let go the anchor, caught up the red-hot iron bar, put it to the brass gun, and disturbed the morning silence with a loud explosion.

I stared hopefully towards the shore.

Before the echoes had died away, I saw Peterkin run out of the camp, his eyes starting from his head. He gave one look, one frightened shout, then ran off into the bushes like a wild cat. The next moment Jack appeared, took one look, and turned to run.

I was almost mad with joy.

"Jack!" I shouted. "Peterkin!" "It's *me*!"

Jack stopped and turned. Peterkin appeared out of the bushes. I shouted again, and the two of them ran at full speed towards the beach. I could no longer contain myself. I threw off my clothing and jumped overboard . . . .

How can I tell of the joy that followed my landing on the beach? We all of us acted as if we had lost our sanity, dancing and laughing and shouting, and beating each other upon the back.

And then, of course, I had to tell in detail all that had happened to me. Both were very worried by what I could tell them of the probable fate of the girl Avatea. Jack shook his fist towards the sea, and said that he'd like to break Tararo's head.

When I had finished they told me how they had come out of the Diamond Cave in time to see the schooner putting out to sea, how they had searched the island for me, and how badly

they felt when they knew for certain that the pirates had carried me off. The day after that they were out on the reef when Peterkin saw a small, dark object lying among the rocks. It was a small barrel of gunpowder.

"I sent you that," I interrupted, with a smile.

"Well, we found it very useful," said Jack "and we've been able to use the pistol ever since. But the island was never the same after you'd gone, and we were longing for a ship to take us off. Now that we've got it, I think we couldn't do better than make course for the island on which Avatea lives, and see if we can do anything to rescue her."

Peterkin and I answered him together.

"Good! ideal!" we said. "We'll come!"

It was decided. We lost no time in making ready to leave the island. As the schooner already carried a good stock of food, we had very little to do.

When all was ready, we climbed to the mountain-top and looked for the last time at the rich green valleys, the white sandy beach, the blue lagoon, and the coral reef with the waves curling over it.

We went back to the camp, and cut our names upon a piece of board, which we set up upon the shore. A few minutes later we were on board the schooner.

A strong breeze was blowing when we set sail, a little before sunset. It carried us past the reef and out to sea. The shore fell back behind us as our ship flew over the waves. Slowly the mountain-top sank on the horizon until it could only just be seen. In another moment the sun and our Coral Island sank together into the darkening waters of the Pacific.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *The Island of Mango*

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WE made good speed. For three weeks the breeze blew fair, and at the end of that time we arrived off the island of Mango, of which Tararo was chief. We took the schooner in through a passage in the reef, and anchored off a village at the head of a small bay.

No sooner were we anchored than a canoe put off from the shore. As it drew close we saw in it a gentle-looking brown man, about forty years of age, who was dressed in European clothes and wore a straw hat.

"Good day, gentleman," he said, when he came on board. "Welcome to the island of Mango. I am the missionary teacher at this station."

"You're the very man we want to see, then," said Jack. "Come down to the cabin, and let's have a talk."

We learned from the missionary that the people of the island were divided into two groups—those who obeyed the teachings of the missionary, and the tribe of Tararo. Avatea was one of Tararo's people, but the poor girl had fallen in love with a chief who lived on an island about fifty miles to the south, and who knew nothing as yet of the girl's fate.

The next day, when we went ashore, we were given a warm welcome by the missionary and his wife who led us to their hut and set before us a meal of baked meats and fruit. When we had eaten, we asked the missionary if he could find us a crew for the schooner. This he did easily enough, so we <sup>decide</sup> made up our minds to sail round the island at once and drop anchor opposite Tararo's village. When we sailed a few hours later, the missionary himself came with us.

After only two hours' sailing, we dropped anchor about a hundred yards from a village on the shore, and fired our big gun by way of salute. The excitement on shore showed us that the gun had struck the savages with fear; but seeing that we did nothing to harm them, they at last sent a canoe out towards us. The missionary spoke to the men in it and told them that we were friends. He also said that we wished to speak with their chief, and that we should like him to come on board.

The canoe put back to the shore, but shortly returned with the message that Tararo could not come at once, since he was busy with certain religious ceremonies before the gods. He therefore invited us to land and visit him, and this we decided to do.

On reaching the beach we were received by

a crowd of naked savages, who shouted a wild welcome and led us to a hut where food had been prepared for us. When we had eaten, we asked that we might be taken to Tararo but were told that he was at the temple of his gods and could not see us yet.

"Well," said Jack, rising, "if he won't come to see me, then I'll go and see him."

We left the hut and Jack led us through some banana groves to rising ground immediately behind the village, on top of which stood the temple, under the dark shade of a group of iron-wood trees.

As we followed the broad path that climbed the hills we heard the shouts of a great crowd coming from behind. We stepped aside into the bushes and waited for them to come up. Soon we saw them—a long procession of savages dancing and screaming in the wildest manner. In their middle came a group of men carrying three or four long boards, on which were seated more than a dozen men.

Only when they drew very close did the terrible truth dawn upon me. All the men upon the boards were dead, but tied up in a sitting position. They were, we learned later, men who had been killed in battle the day before. They were now on their way to be presented to the gods, and then eaten!

Behind the procession came a screaming crowd of women and children whom we followed to the temple.

It was a tall round building open at one side. Around it were piles of human bones and skulls. At a long table inside sat the priest, an old man with a grey beard, and before him lay several knives with which he performed his office of cutting up the dead bodies.

The bodies were arranged before the temple in a sitting position. A man walked up to them and began to talk to them in a loud and angry voice. We did not understand a word, but as he went on his voice grew louder. Then he shouted to them at the top of his lungs and finished up by kicking the bodies over and running away, to the shouts and laughter of the people, who now rushed forward and dragged the bodies into the temple . . . .

But we had seen enough. We were all pale and sickened as we hurried back to Tararo's hut—and very much aware of the difficulties that we must face if we were to see Avatea, set free.

Before long, however, Tararo came along the beach, followed by a long line of men who carried huge baskets of fruit upon their heads. We walked to meet him, and he showed much pleasure at seeing us.

"And what is it that my friends wish to say to me?" he asked.

The missionary explained that we had come to ask him to spare Avatea's life.

Tararo frowned at this, and then replied fiercely and at some length.

"He will not hear of this thing," the missionary told us sadly. "He says the girl must die."

It was Jack's turn to frown.

"Tell him that if he does not do as I ask it will be the worse for him," he said fiercely. "Say that my big gun upon the ship will blow his village into the sea if he does not give up the girl."

"What does my friend say?" asked the chief, who seemed annoyed by Jack's angry looks.

"He is displeased with you," replied the missionary.

Tararo turned away, and walked towards the men who had carried the baskets, which they had emptied on to the beach in an enormous pile. A moment later two more men appeared, leading a young girl between them. They walked up to the heap of fruit and placed her on the top of it. We all started, for the girl was Avatea.

The missionary grabbed Jack by the arm.

"We are too late," he said. "They are going to sacrifice her *now*!"

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *The Hurricane*

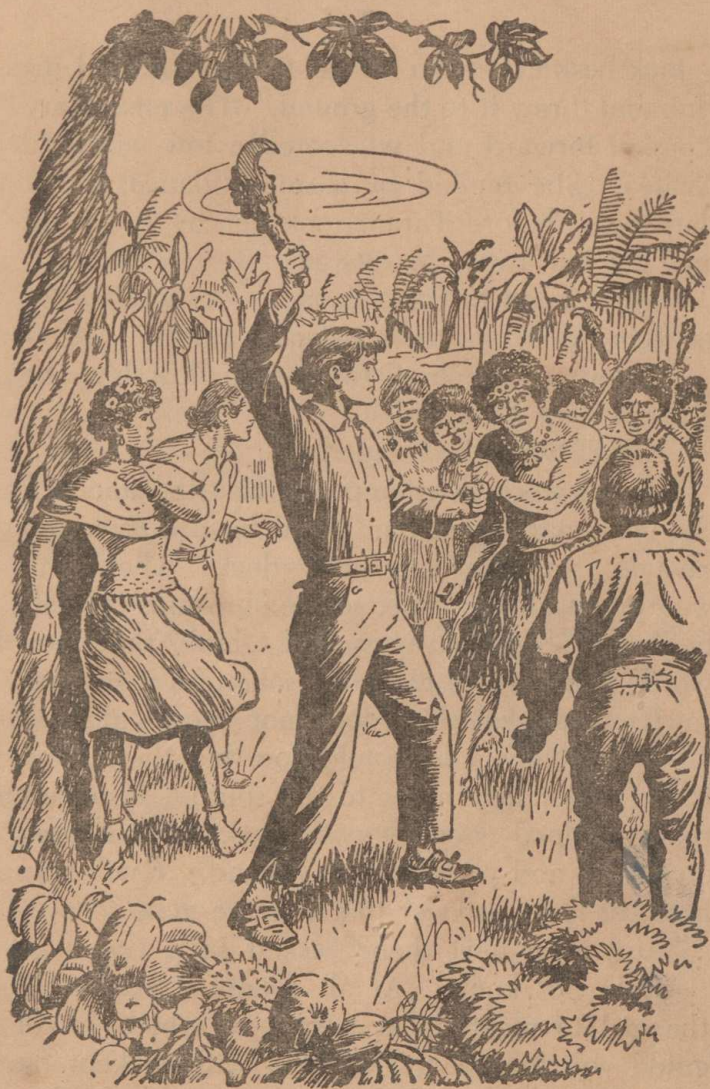
WE stood rooted to the earth with horror. Then Jack gave a fierce shout, threw aside two of the savages who stood in his path, rushed towards the heap, sprang up its side and caught Avatea in his arms. He jumped down again and placed her back to a large tree. Then, snatching a war-club from the hand of one of the savages, he waved it above his head and shouted:

"Come on, the lot of you, and do your worst!"

The savages gave an answering shout and started towards him, but Tararo sprang forward and raised his hand above his head. The savages ceased their noise and came to a standstill, while the chief turned to Jack.

"You are very brave—but foolish," he said. "But I do not forget that once you helped me. I will say that Avatea shall not be harmed for three days. Now go back to your ship."

"Do as he says," the missionary advised Jack. "Three days are worth having. It will give us an opportunity to make another plan."



"Come on, the lot of you, and do your worst!"

Jack hesitated for a moment, then lowered his club and threw it to the ground. The missionary stepped forward and whispered a few words to Avatea. She replied by a single glance of her dark eyes, before Tararo took her by the hand and led her away.

We returned to the schooner. As soon as we were in the cabin, the missionary said:

"If you are prepared to give up this ship, the girl may yet be saved."

"How?" we asked eagerly.

"If you were to attempt to raise the anchor," the missionary went on, "you'd have a thousand savages standing on your deck. They will watch you all the time, so the ship must be left behind. These savages will think that you would not sacrifice it for the sake of a mere girl, so long as the ship does not move all will be well. Now, I have told you that there is an island about fifty miles to the south. I suggest that you load a canoe with stores, put Avatea on board, and paddle to the island. I will stay here till they discover that you are gone."

"And what next then?" asked Jack.

"I do not know. At all events, I have told the girl to meet us at a spot to which I will guide you tonight. No watch will be kept on the girl, for they will think it impossible for her to escape. It will be easy for me to obtain a

canoe, but fifty miles on the open sea will be a difficult voyage to make."

"There's no other way," said Jack, and looked at Peterkin and me. "Do we go?" he asked.

We nodded. It was agreed.

It was close on midnight when we dropped over the side of the schooner and into the canoe which the missionary had got for us. We paddled quietly across the bay. A quarter of an hour brought us beneath an overhanging cliff. As we touched the beach a dim figure stepped on board.

"Avatea?" whispered the missionary.

We heard the girl answer softly, and then we turned the canoe, moved back across the still waters, and put the missionary on board the schooner again. Immediately, then, we made for the opening in the reef and drove the canoe out into the ocean.

All that night and the whole of the following day we took it in turns to paddle. At sunset of that day, Jack threw down his paddle and said that it was time we all had a proper meal and a good night's sleep.

We ate hungrily of the food we had brought with us, while the darkness closed in, and then we slept . . . .

I was awakened by a cry from Peterkin, just

as the grey dawn began to light up the eastern sky.

"What's wrong?" said Jack, starting up.

"Look!" cried Peterkin.

He pointed across the sea. A glance showed me a great war-canoe speeding towards us. It was already so close that we had no chance at all to escape. We grabbed up our paddles and turned the side of the canoe towards our enemies. Jack said nothing, but stood up and lifted his club in a threatening attitude.

The other canoe came on like a war-horse, with a wave curling up from its sharp bow, and the spear-heads of the savages flashing in the first rays of the sun. No one spoke. We could hear the rush of the water and see the fierce faces of our enemies as they came speeding on. I waited for them to turn the head of their canoe. They made no move to do so, and suddenly I realized their intention. I stood up, swinging my paddle above my head, and gave one cry. Next moment the bow of the war-canoe crashed into ours and threw us all into the sea.

I'm not sure what happened after that, for I was struck on the head by the canoe in passing, went into the sea, and almost drowned. When I recovered my senses I found myself stretched on my back, tied hand and foot, in the bottom

of the large canoe. Peterkin and Jack were beside me.

We did not enjoy the voyage back to Mango. We were given neither food nor water the whole time, and suffered a great deal from thirst, for the air was excessively hot and it seemed that a storm was building up.

While we were being led ashore we caught a glimpse of Avatea, who was not tied in any way. The savages drove us before them towards the hut of Tararo. The chief waited for us with an ugly look on his face. He spoke, his eyes flashing with anger, to the missionary, who stood beside him.

"My friends," said the missionary quietly, "Tararo says that his debt to you is cancelled. You must die for what you have done."

Tararo signed to several of his men, who took hold of the three of us and dragged us through the bush to the edge of the village. Here they pushed us into a cave in the cliff, and, having built a barricade at the entrance, left us in total darkness.

We felt about for some time—for our legs had been freed so that we might walk, although our wrists were still tied—till we found a low ledge of rock running along one side of the cave. On this we seated ourselves and waited quietly for the end that we knew must be near.

At last we heard a noise at the entrance to the cave. The barricade was dragged away; then three savages entered and led us through the forest towards the temple that stood on the hill. We had not gone far when a procession of savages came to meet us, shouting and beating drums. We were placed at the head of the procession and forced along towards the temple where, we knew, human beings were offered for sacrifice.

I was so lost in fear and horror that I was scarcely aware how much the sky had darkened. Suddenly there came a crash of thunder overhead, and heavy drops of rain began to fall; the air was filled with the rush of something, and then the afternoon went mad . . . .

A hurricane hit Mango with a deafening roar. The savages ran for shelter on every side, leaving us to the violence of the storm. The wind caught us and drove us along, while enormous rain-drops struck against our flesh.

"Get down!" I heard Jack shout, and I threw myself to the ground.

A body dropped down beside me. It was the missionary, and he had a knife in his hand.

"Thank the Lord," he cried, as he cut us free, "I am in time! Now, follow me."

We fought our way along in the teeth of the

wind, which burst with the noise of a cannon among the trees, tearing many of them from their roots and throwing them to the ground. Rain cut across the land in sheets; lightning played in the air; and high above the roar of the wind thunder crashed and rolled.

We found shelter in a cave and stayed there all through that night and the next day, while the storm went on without decreasing. The scene in the village was terrible. Houses came crashing down and were blown away. Great waves came sweeping in from the mighty ocean, rising higher and higher on the beach, until the angry waters had reached far inland and had wrecked those few houses that were still standing.

The storm died away a little before dawn on the second day. For the first time in two days we thought of the dangers from which we had been rescued.

"You must have food," the missionary told us. "I will get that for you, and then you must try to escape."

He went off and was gone for a long time. At last we heard his steps returning and moved to the entrance to greet him. The first thing he did was to take Jack by the shoulders and say:

"My dear young friend, through the great goodness of God you are free!"

"Free!" we cried together.

"Yes—at liberty to come and go as you will. I warned Tararo that if he tried to kill you, then the good Lord would punish him and his people. The hurricane came to prove my words. He is a changed man. Come and see for yourselves!"

We could scarcely believe our senses as we followed him from the cave and into the wrecked village. One after another the savages rushed towards us and shook us by the hand. Tararo was kindness itself, ready to do anything to help us; and Avatea, he promised, should be sent in a war-canoe to the island of her lover-chief.

Our next thought was for the schooner, which we found, had been washed ashore but had not been seriously damaged by the storm. With the help of Tararo's people we got her afloat again, and repaired what little damage she had suffered. Within a week she was fit for the open sea.

We decided that it was time for us to depart. Three of the savages offered to go with us to Tahiti, where we thought it likely that we should be able to find a crew to man our vessel.

It was a bright clear morning when we left the shores of Mango. The missionary and thousands of the people came down to wish us farewell, and to see us sail away. As the vessel

leaned over to the wind, we moved quickly over the lagoon under a fine spread of sail.

That night, as we sat upon the deck looking out over the wide sea, a thrill of joy, strangely mixed with sadness, passed through our hearts; for we were at last "homeward bound", and leaving far behind us the beautiful, bright green coral islands of the Pacific Ocean.

## QUESTIONS

1. How old was Ralph Rover? Why were the three boys present on the ship? Who was the recognized leader of the three boys? What happened to the captain and crew?
2. How did Ralph reach the shore of the island? What happened to the ship? What equipment did the three boys have with them? Explain how it was that they were able to get hold of an axe. Of what did they make their first meal on the island?
3. What did they find for breakfast? Explain how they were able to light a fire. What did they find to make them believe that another human being had been there before them? Explain how Jack manufactured a knife.
4. Describe two puzzling discoveries that the boys made. What had caused the strange cry? Tell how the boys found the half-ruined hut.
5. What two useful articles did the boys take from the hut? Describe the Diamond Cave. How did Jack ensure that they had light in the cave?
6. Describe the coming of the cannibals. What, finally, moved the boys to attack the savages?
7. Why did the savages lose heart? Who were the next visitors to the island? Describe the flag flown by the pirates. Where did the boys hide? What happened when Ralph left the cave?
8. Why did the pirates light a fire? How did Ralph help assist his friends even when he was on board the schooner?

9. What was the island of Emo famous for? Why did Bill anticipate trouble on the island? What did Romata do to annoy the captain? How did the captain plan to retaliate? Who was left in charge of the small boat? How did Ralph and Bill get the schooner under way?
10. Explain why the captain's attack had failed. What had happened to Bill? How did Ralph know the position of the Coral Island?
11. Tell how Ralph returned to the Coral Island. Why did the boys decide to sail to the island of Mango?
12. Why was Tararo so angry with Avatea? What new friend did the boys make on the island of Mango? Why did not Tararo come immediately to meet them upon arrival?
13. Why did the missionary say that the boys should be prepared to sacrifice their ship? Explain how they escaped with Avatea. Tell how they were recaptured. What saved the boys from death? What made Tararo become a changed man?

(The words in this list are new words which are outside the prescribed vocabulary for Standard VIII).

## NEW WORDS

- anchor: a ship's mooring-hook.
- apprentice: a learner of a trade.
- arrow: a pointed stick shot from a bow.
- barricade: a hastily made fence or barrier for obstruction, protection, or shelter.
- bow: a weapon from which arrows are shot, made from a piece of flexible wood, slightly curved so that its ends are joined by a tight string.
- brandy: a strong spirit made from wine.
- cabin: a room in a ship.
- canoe: a light boat that can be paddled.
- cargo: a ship's load.
- column: a pillar.
- coral: a rock-like substance formed in tropical seas.
- creek: a narrow inlet on the coast.
- deck: a platform across a ship's hull.
- dwelling: a place to live in.
- entangle: to make tangled, or mixed in difficulties.
- entrance: a way in.
- exclamation: a cry of surprise, fear, etc.

- flash: a sudden bright light.
- forecastle: the crew's living-quarters near the bows  
of a ship.
- galley: a ship's kitchen.
- glimpse: a brief view.
- grab: to snatch suddenly.
- grove: a small wood.
- heave-to: to stop a ship's progress.
- hoop: a ring of wood or metal.
- hurricane: a storm with violent wind.
- icicle: a hanging spike of ice.
- lad: a boy.
- lagoon: an enclosed lake of sea-water.
- ledge: a narrow shelf.
- mate: the captain's assistant on a merchant ship.
- moss: a low plant that grows like soft carpet or  
cushions.
- oyster: a kind of shell-fish.
- paddle: a short oar. Paddling.
- penguin: an Antarctic sea-bird.
- pirate: a sea-robber.
- pistol: a small gun held in one hand.
- purr: the sound made by a cat when pleased.
- reef: a line of rocks in the sea.
- rigging: a ship's ropes, etc.
- rudder: a flat piece of wood at the stern of a ship,  
used for steering.
- rumble: to make a low and heavy rolling sound.
- scream: to make a shrill, piercing cry.

- skeleton: the bone framework of the body.  
skull: the bone case around the brain.  
sling: a strap for slinging stones.  
spear: a long-handled weapon with a sharp point.  
spout: to gush out with force.  
stump: a short part remaining when the main part has been removed.  
surface: the outer side or face of anything.  
telescope: an instrument that makes distant objects seem nearer and larger.  
tiller: a rudder-handle.  
tinder: dry material used for fire-making.  
torch: a burning stick, etc., carried to give light.  
trip: to stumble.  
vice: a bench-clamp with jaws tightened by a screw.  
voice: the sound given out through the mouth.

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