

THE ISLAND OF
GOLD
VOLUME III
BY
WILLIAM GORDON
STABLES

The Island of Gold Volume III by William Gordon Stables

Chapter One

“A Sight I shall Remember till my Dying Day.”

Captain Halcott sat on the skylight, and near him sat Tandy his mate, while between them—tacked down with pins to the painted canvas, so that the wind might not catch it—lay a chart of a portion of the South Pacific Ocean.

At one particular spot was a blue cross.

“I marked it myself,” said Halcott; “and here, on this piece of cardboard, is the island, which I’ve shown you before—every creek and bay, every river and hill, so far as I know them, distinctly depicted.”

“The exact longitude and latitude?” said Tandy.

“As near as I could make them, my friend.”

“And yet we don’t seem to be able to discover this island. Strange things happen in these seas, Halcott; islands shift and islands sink, but one so large as this could do neither. Come, Halcott, we’ll work out the reckoning again. It will be twelve o’clock in ten minutes.”

“Everything correct,” said Halcott, when they had finished, “as written down by me. Here we are on the very spot where the Island of Misfortune should be, and—the island is gone!”

There was a gentle breeze blowing, and the sky was clear, save here and there a few fleecy clouds lying low on a hazy horizon.

Nothing in sight! nor had there been for days and days; for the isle they were in search of lies far out of the track of outward or homeward-bound ships.

“Below there!”

It was a shout from one of the new hands, who was stationed at the fore-topgallant cross-trees.

“Hallo, Wilson!” cried Tandy running forward. “Here we are!”

“Something I can’t make out on the lee bow, sir.”

“Well, shall I come up and bring a bigger glass?”

“One minute, sir!”

“It’s a steamer, I believe,” he hailed now; “but I can’t just raise her hull, only just the long trail of smoke along the horizon.”

Tandy was beside the man in a few minutes’ time. “This will raise it,” he said, “if I can focus aright. Why!” he cried next minute, “that is no steamer, Tom Wilson, but the smoke from a volcanic mountain or hill.”

Down went Tandy quickly now.

“Had your island of gold a chimney to it?” he said, laughing. He could afford to laugh, for he felt convinced this was the island and none other. “There wasn’t a coal mine or a factory of any kind on it, was there? If not, we will soon be in sight of the land of gold. Volcanic, Halcott—volcanic!”

“Keep her away a point or two,” he said to the man at the wheel.

“There were hills on the Island of Misfortune, but no signs of a volcano.”

“Not then; but in this mystery of an ocean, Halcott, we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth.

“Let me see,” he continued, glancing at the cardboard map; “we are on the east side of the island, or we will be soon. Why, we ought soon to reach your Treachery Bay. Ominous name, though, Halcott; we must change it.”

Nearer and nearer to the land sailed the Sea Flower. The hills came in sight; then dark, wild cliffs o’ertopped with green, with a few waving palm-trees and a fringe of banana here and there; and all between as blue a sea as ever sun shone on.

“It is strangely like my island,” said Halcott; “but that hill, far to the west yonder, from which the smoke is rising, I cannot recognise.”

“It may not have been there before.”

“True,” said Halcott. But still he looked puzzled.

Then, after bearing round to the north side of the island, past the mouth of a dark gully, and past a rocky promontory, the land all at once began to recede. In other words, they had opened out the bay.

“But all the land in yonder used to be burned forest, Tandy.”

Tandy quietly handed him the glass.

The forest he now looked upon was not composed of living trees, but of skeletons, their weird shapes now covered entirely by a wealth of trailing parasites and flowery climbing plants.

“I am satisfied now, and I think we may drop nearer shore, and let go the anchor.”

In an hour's time the Sea Flower lay within two hundred yards of the beach.

This position was by no means a safe one were a heavy storm to blow from either the north or the west. There would be nothing for it then but to get up anchor and put out to sea, or probably lie to under the shelter of rocks and cliffs to the southward of the island.

The bay itself was a somewhat curious one. The dark blue which was its colour showed that it was deep, and the depth continued till within seventy yards of the shore, when it rapidly shoaled, ending in a snow-white semicircle of coral sands. Then at the head of the bay, only on the east side, stretching seawards to that bold promontory, was a line of high, black, beetling cliffs, the home of those wheeling sea-birds. These cliffs were of solid rock of an igneous formation chiefly, but marked here and there with veins of what appeared to be quartz. They were, moreover, indented with many a cave: some of these, it was found out afterwards, were floored with stalagmites, while huge icicle-like stalactites depended from their roofs.

Rising to the height of at least eight hundred feet above these cliffs was one solitary conical hill, green-wooded almost to its summit.

The western side of the bay, and, indeed, all this end of the island, was low, and fringed with green to the water's edge; but southwards, if one turned his eye, a range of high hills was to be seen, adding materially to the beauty of the landscape.

The whole island—which was probably not more than sixteen miles in length, by from eight to nine in width—was divided by the river mentioned in Captain Halcott's narrative into highlands and lowlands.

The day was far advanced when the Sea Flower dropped anchor in this lovely bay, and it was determined therefore not to attempt a landing that night. Halcott considered it rather an ominous sign that no savages were visible, and that not a single outrigger boat was drawn up on the beach.

Experience teaches fools, and it teaches savages also. Just a little inland from the head of the bay the cover was very dense indeed; and though, even with the aid of their glasses, neither Halcott nor Tandy could discover a sign of human life, still, for all they could tell to the contrary, that green entanglement of bush might be peopled by wild men who knew the Sea Flower all too well, and would not dare to venture forth.

The wind went down with the sun, and for a time scarce a sound was to be heard. The stars were very bright, and seemed very near, the Southern Cross sparkling like a diamond pendant in the sky.

By-and-by a yellow glare shone above the shoulder of the adjacent hill, and a great round moon uprose and sailed up the firmament as clear and bright as a pearl.

It was just after this that strange noises began to be heard coming from the woods apparently. They were intermittent, however. There would be a chorus of plaintive cries and shrieks, dying away into a low, murmuring moan, which caused Nelda, who was on deck, to shiver with fear and cling close to her brother's arm.

"What on earth can it be?" said Tandy. "Can the place be haunted?"

"Haunted by birds of prey, doubtless. These are not the cries that savages utter, even during an orgie. But, strangely enough—whatever your experience may be, Tandy—I have seldom found birds of prey on the inhabited islands of the South Pacific."

"Nor I," said Tandy. "Look yonder!" he added, pointing to a balloon-shaped cloud of smoke that hovered over a distant hill-top, lit up every now and then by just such gleams of light as one sees at night penetrating the smoke from some village blacksmith's forge. But yonder was Vulcan's forge, and Jupiter was his chief employer.

"Yes, Tandy, that is the volcano. But I can assure you there was no such fire-mountain, as savages say, when I was here last."

“To-morrow,” said the mate, “will, I trust, make every thing more plain to us.”

“To-morrow? Yes, I trust so, too,” said Halcott, musingly. “Shall we go below and talk a little?”

“I confess, my friend,” Halcott continued, after he had lit his pipe and smoked some time in silence—“I confess, Tandy, that I don’t quite like the look of that hill. Have you ever experienced the effects of a volcanic eruption in any of these islands?”

“I have not had that pleasure, if pleasure it be,” replied the mate.

“Pleasure, Tandy! I do not know of anything more hideous, more awful, in this world.

“When I say ‘any of these islands,’ I refer to any one of the whole vast colony of them that stud the South Pacific, and hundreds of these have never yet been visited by white men.

“Years ago,” he continued, “I was first mate of the Sky-Raker, as bonnie a brig as you could have clapped eyes upon. It afterwards foundered with all hands in a gale off the coast of Australia. When I trod her decks, second in command, I was a bold young fellow of twenty, or thereabouts; and I may tell you at once we were engaged in the Queensland black labour trade. And black, indeed, and bloody, too, it might often be called.

“We used to go cruising to the nor’ard and east, visiting islands here and islands there, to engage hands for working in the far interior. We arranged to pay every man well who would volunteer to go with us, and to land them again back home on their own islands, if they did wish to return.

“On these expeditions we invariably employed ‘call-crows.’”

“What may a ‘call-crow’ be, Halcott?”

“Well, you know what gamblers mean on shore by a ‘call-bird’ or ‘decoy-duck.’ Your ‘call-crow’ is the same, only he is a black who has lived and laboured in Queensland, who can talk ‘island,’ who can spin a good yarn in an off-hand way, and tell as many lies as a recruiting-sergeant.

“These are the lures.

“No matter how unfriendly the blackamoors among whom we may land may be, our ‘call-rooks’ nearly always make peace. Then bartering begins, and after a few days we get volunteers enough.”

“But they do attack you at times, these natives?”

“That’s so, Tandy; and I believe I was a braver man in those days than I am now, else I’d hardly have cared to make myself a target for poisoned arrows, or poisoned spears, so coolly as I used to do then.”

Nelda, who had come quietly down the companion-way with her brother, seated herself as closely to Captain Halcott as she could. She dearly loved a story, especially one of thrilling adventure.

“Go on, cap’n,” she said, eagerly. “Never mind me. ‘Poisoned spears,’—that is the prompt-word.”

“These black fellows were not of great height, Tandy,” resumed Halcott.

“Savages,” said Nelda. “Please say savages.”

“Well, dear, savages I suppose I must call them. They were almost naked, and many of the elder warriors were tattooed on cheeks, chest, and arms. All had bushy heads of hair, and were armed with bows and arrows, spears and clubs, and tomahawks.

“But,” he added, “it was generally with the natives of those islands from which we had already obtained volunteers that we had the greatest trouble. The ship I used to sail in, Tandy, was as honest as it is possible for such a ship to be, and I never saw natives ill-treated by any of our crew, though more than once we had to fight in self-defence. The reason was this. Many ships that had agreed to bring the blacks back home, broke their promise, which, perhaps, they had never intended to keep. When they returned to the islands, therefore, to obtain more recruits, bloodshed was almost certain to ensue. If one white man was killed, then the revenge taken was fearful. At a safe distance the whites would bring their rifles and guns to bear upon the poor savages, and the slaughter would be too dreadful to contemplate. If the unhappy wretches took shelter in their woods or jungles, these would be set on fire, till at last a hundred or more of them would fling their arms away, hold up the palms of their hands in token of submission, or as an appeal for mercy, and huddle together in a corner like fowls, and just as helpless. The whites could then pick and choose volunteers as they pleased, and it is needless to tell you there was nothing given in exchange.

“Our trouble took place when we returned to an island, having found it impossible to bring the natives we had taken off back with us. This they looked upon as cheating, and they would rush to arms, compelling us to fire upon them in self-defence.

“Well, we were constantly on the search for new islands. The natives on these might threaten us for a time, but the ‘call-crows’ soon pacified them. The beads and presents we distributed, coupled with the glowing accounts of life in Queensland which the ‘crows’ gave these poor heathen, did all the rest, and we soon had a cargo.”

“And this species of trade was, or is, called black-birding, I think,” said Tandy.

“It was, and is now, *sub rosa*.

“But I was going to tell you of a volcanic eruption. Before I do so, however, I propose that we order the main-brace to be spliced. For this is an auspicious night, you know, and I have not heard a jovial song on board the *Sea Flower* for many and many a day.

“Janeira!”

“Yes, sah. I’s not fah away, sah.”

And Janeira entered, smiling as usual, and as daintily dressed as a stage waiting-maid.

“Pass the word for Fitz, Janeira, like a good girl.”

“Oh, he’s neah too, sah. At you’ service, sah!”

Fitz had been in the pantry eating plum-duff, or whatever else came handy. The pantry was a favourite resort with Lord Fitzmantle, and Janeira never failed to put after-dinner tit-bits away in a corner for his especial delectation.

“Now, Jane, you shall draw some rum, and, Fitz, you must take it for’ard. Here is the key, Jane; and, Fitz, just tell them for’ard to drink the healths of those aft, and sing as much as they choose to-night.”

“Far away then, Tandy and Nelda,” said Halcott, resuming his narrative, “to the west of this island, farther away almost than the imagination can grasp, so solitary and wide is this great ocean, there used to be a small island called Saint Queeba. Who first found it out, or named it, I cannot tell you, Tandy, but I believe our own brig was the first that ever visited it in a black-birding expedition.

“The population seemed to be about three thousand, and of these we took away at least one hundred and fifty. The poor creatures appeared to have no fear of white men, and so we concealed our revolvers and entered into friendly intercourse with them.

“The island was a long way from any other, and this probably accounted for its never having been black-birded before.

“We returned from Australia almost immediately again after landing our recruits, and I for one felt sure the natives would welcome us.

“So we brought extra-showy cloth and the brightest beads we could procure.

“They did welcome us, and we soon had about half a cargo of real volunteers.

“We were only waiting for others to come from the interior; for the wind was fair just then, and we were all anxious to proceed to sea.

“The very evening before the arrival of the blacks, however, the wind went suddenly down, although, strangely enough, at a great altitude we could see scores of small black clouds scurrying across the sky. Finally, some of these circled round and round, and combined to form a dark blue canopy that gradually lowered itself towards the island.

“Soon the sun went down, a blood-red ball in the west, and darkness quickly followed. It was just then that we observed a fitful gleam arise from the one and only mountain the island possessed. Over this a ball of cloud had hung all day long, but we had taken little notice of it.

“‘I’ve never seen the like of that before, mate,’ said the skipper to me, pointing at the slowly descending pall of cumulus.

“‘Nor I either, captain,’ I replied.

“I couldn’t keep my eyes off it, do what I would, for dark though the night was that strange cloud was darker. It seemed now to be sending downwards from its centre a whirling tail, or pillar, which the gleams that began to rise higher and higher from the developing volcano lit up, and tongues of fire appeared to touch.

“‘It’s going to be a storm of some kind, Halcott,’ said my skipper. ‘Oh, for a puff of wind, for, Heaven help us, lad! we are far too near the shore.’

“‘I have it,’ he cried next minute. ‘Lower the boats and heave up the anchor.’

“I never saw men work more willingly in my life before. Even the blacks we had on board lent a hand, and no sooner was the anchor apeak than away went the boats, and the ship moved slowly out to sea.

“We had got about three knots off-shore, when, happening to look back, I saw a sight which I shall remember to my dying day.

“The black and awful whirling cloud had burst. If one ton of water came down like an avalanche, a million must have fallen, with a deafening roar like a thousand thunders.

“It seemed as if heaven and earth had gone to war and the first terrific shot had been fired.

“For a time the mountain was entirely enveloped in darkness; then up through this blackness rose high, high into the air a huge pillar of steam. This continued to rise for over an hour, with incessant thunder and lightning around the base of the hill. Rain, almost boiling hot, fell on our decks, and hissed and spluttered on the still water around the ship, compelling us to fly below or seek the shelter of tarpaulins.

“This ceased at last, and now we could see that the volcanic fire had gained the mastery; for the flames, with huge pieces of stones and rocks, were hurled five hundred feet at least into the starry sky.

“For many hours the thunderings and the lightnings over that devoted island and around the hill were such, Tandy, as I pray God I may never see or hear again. There were earthquakes, too; that was evident enough from the strange commotion in the water around us, and this was communicated to the ship. The best sailors on our brig could scarcely stand, far less walk. Towards morning it had partially cleared, although the lightning still continued to play, fork and sheet, above the base of the volcanic hill. We could now see streams of molten lava pouring down the mountain’s side, green, crimson, and violet.

“Very lovely indeed they were. But ah! then I knew the fate of those unhappy inhabitants was to be a terrible one. It would be a choice of deaths, for in less than half an hour the isle was one vast conflagration. We saw but little more of it even next day, for the lava was now pouring into the sea and a cloud of steam enveloped the scene of tragedy.

“Our decks were covered with dust and scoriae, and this fell steadily all that day.

“We had managed by means of the boats to work off and away fully fifteen miles. This was undoubtedly our salvation; for presently we were struck by a terrible tornado, and it required all our skill to keep out of the vortex.

“While it was still raging around us, an explosion away on our port quarter, where the island would be just then, seemed to rend the whole earth in pieces. Many of our crew were struck deaf, and remained so for days. Our ship shook, Tandy, fore and aft, quivering like a dying rat. She seemed to have no more stability in her then than an old orange box.

“An immense wave, such as I had never seen before, rose in the sea and swept on towards us. The marvel is that it did not swamp us.

“As it was we were carried sky-high, and our masts cracked as if they were about to go by the board. Smaller waves followed, and the gale that brought up the rear drove us far away from the scene of the terrible tragedy before the sun rose, redder than ever I had seen it before, for it was shining through the dust and débris of that broken up island.

“I left the trade soon after this, Tandy. I was tired and sick of black-birding.

“But in my own ship, two years after this, I visited the spot. The island was gone; but for more than a mile in circumference the sea was strangely rippled, and gases were constantly escaping that we were glad enough to work to windward of.

“But listen! our good little crew is singing. Well, there is something like hope in that—and in the sweet notes of Tom Wilson’s violin. He’s a good man that, Tandy, but he has a history, else I’m a Hottentot.

“Well, just one look at the sky, and then I’ll turn in, my friend. We don’t know what may be in store for us to-morrow.”

And away up the companion-way went Captain Halcott.

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Chapter Two.

“I See a Beach of Coral Sand, Dark Figures Moving to and fro.”

Next morning broke bright and fair. Not a cloud in all the heaven’s blue; not a ripple on the water, just a gentle swell that broke in long lines of snow-white foam on the crescent shore—a gentle swell with sea-birds afloat on it. Ah! what would the ocean be to a sailor were there no birds. The sea-gulls are the last to leave him, long after all other friends are gone, and the land, like a pale blue cloud far away on the horizon, is fading from his view.

“Adieu! adieu! away! away?” they shriek or sing, and as the shades of evening are merging into darkness they disappear. But these same birds are the first to welcome the mariner back, and even should there be no land in sight, or should clouds envelop it, the sight of a single gull flying tack and half-tack around the ship sends a thrill of hope and joy to the sailor’s heart. On the deep, lone sea, too, Jack has ay a friend, should it be but in the stormy petrel, the frigate-bird, or that marvellous eagle of the ocean, the albatross itself.

Those birds floating here around the Sea Flower so quietly on the swell of the sea looked as happy as they were pure and lovely. No whiteness, hardly even snow itself, could rival the whiteness of their chests, while under them their pink legs and feet looked like little twigs of coral.

The morning was warm, the sun was bright; they were moving gently with the tide, careless, happy. As he stood there gazing seawards and astern—for the ship had swung to the outgoing tide—Halcott could not help envying them.

“Ah!” he said half aloud, “you are at home, sweet birds; never a care to look forward to, contentment in your breasts, beauty all around you.”

Then his thoughts went somehow wandering homewards to his beautiful house, his house with a tower to it, and his lovely gardens. They would not be neglected though. It was autumn here. It would be spring time in England, with its buds, its tender green leaves, its early flowers, and its music of birds. Then he thought of his dog. Fain would he have brought him to sea. The honest collie had placed his muzzle in his master’s hand

on that last sad evening of parting, and glanced with loving, pleading eyes up into his face.

“Take me,” he seemed to say, “and take her.”

Her was Doris. His—Halcott’s—own Doris; the lovely girl for whom he had risked so much, for whom he would lay down his life; the girl that would be his own fair bride, he told himself, if ever he returned. Ah! those weary “ifs!”

But he had looked into the dog’s bonnie brown eyes.

“Friend,” he had said, “you will stay with Doris. You will never leave her side till I come back. You will watch her for me.”

And he remembered now how Doris had at that moment thrown herself into his arms, and strained him to her breast in a fit of convulsive weeping.

And this had been the parting.

“What, Halcott,” cried Tandy’s cheerful voice, “up already! and—and—why, Halcott, old man, there is moisture in your eyes!”

“I—I was thinking of home, and—well, I was thinking of my dog.”

“And your Doris. Heigho! I have no Doris, no beautiful face to welcome me home. But look yonder,” he added, taking Halcott’s arm.

Little Nelda stood at the top of the companion-way, the sunlight playing on her yellow hair, one hand held up to screen her face, delicate, pink, yet so shyly sweet, and her blue eyes brimful of happiness.

Just one look she gave, then, with arms outstretched, rushed gleefully towards her father. Next moment she was poised upon his shoulder, and Tandy had forgotten that there was any such thing as danger or sorrow in the world.

The two men walked and talked together now for quite an hour. Indeed, there was very much to talk about, for although they had made the island at last, they had no idea as yet how they should set about looking for the gold which they were certain existed there.

They had not made up their minds as to what they should do, when Janeira rang the bell for breakfast, and with Fitz was seen staggering aft with the covered dish.

“Jane, you look happier than ever this morning. What is the matter? Has some beautiful bird brought you a letter from home?”

“De bootiful bird, sah, is Lawd Fitzmantle, and see, sah, dat is de letter from home.”

She lifted the dish cover as she spoke. Beautiful broiled fish caught only that morning over the stern, but oh, the delicious odour would have revived the heart of a dying epicure!

“Babs is going to be very good to-day,” said Tandy to his little daughter after breakfast.

“Better than ever, daddy?”

“Yes, much, because I’m going on shore with Captain Halcott here and two men.”

“And me?”

“No, not to-day, dear. We’re going to climb that high hill and look all round us, and perhaps put up a flag; and Ransey will let you look through a spyglass to see us, and we’ll wave our hands to you. Now will you be better than usual?”

“Ye-es, I think I’ll try. And oh, I’ll make the Admiral look through the spyglass too, and when you see him looking through, you must wave your hand and fire your gun. Then we’ll all—all be happy and nicer than anything in the whole world.”

It was not without a feeling of misgiving that Halcott and Tandy left the boat that had taken them on shore, and took their way cautiously towards the bush. There was hard work before them and the two sturdy fellows, Chips and Tom Wilson, whom they had brought with them—hard work to penetrate through the jungle and to effect an ascent of the hill they had already named the Observatory—hard work and danger combined.

The crew of the boat stood gun in hand until they saw the party safe into the bush, then, more easy in their minds now, rowed slowly back to the ship. For if savages had been hiding under cover, the attack would have been made just as the party was stepping on shore.

The exploring party kept to the extreme edge of the bush after penetrating and searching hither and thither for a time, but neither track nor trail of savages could they find. But they came across several little pathways that led here and there through the jungle, and at first they could not make out what these were. They learned before long, however; for

Bob, who had gone on ahead a little way, came suddenly and excitedly rushing out from a thicket. In his mouth he held something that Tandy imagined was a rat, but the shrieking and yelling behind the dog soon undeceived him, and, lo! there now rushed into the open a beautiful little boar and a sow. The former flashed his tusks in the sunlight. He wanted the baby back. It was his, his, he said, and his wife's. He felt full of fight, and big enough to wage war against the whole world for that baby.

Tandy made Bob drop it, which he did, and it ran squealing back to its mother. The boar, or king pig, said he accepted the apology, and would now withdraw his forces. And he accordingly did so by scuttling off again into the bush. These wild dwarf-pigs and a species of rock-rabbit were, they found afterwards, about the only animals of any size the island contained.

After this trifling adventure they fought their way through a terrible entanglement of bush, till they reached the foot of the hill.

The men had brought saws and axes with them, and were thus enabled by cutting here and whacking there to make a tolerably good road. When they reached the hill they found themselves in a woodland of beautiful trees. Walking was now easy enough, and in about an hour's time they reached the summit of the hill and sat down to luncheon.

Eager eyes were watching their progress from the ship, for the upper part of this mount was covered only with stunted grass and beautiful heaths, among which they noticed many a charmingly-coloured lizard—green with crimson markings, or pale blue and orange—but they saw no snakes.

Tandy turned his glass now upon the barque, and there sure enough was Nelda with the Admiral by her side. He waved his coat, and twice he fired his gun. From the hill on which they stood the view was lovely beyond compare. They could see well into the highland part of the island, with its rolling woods, on which the fingers of autumn had already traced beauty tints; its bosky glens; its rugged rocks and hills; its streaks of silvery streams; the lake lying down yonder in the hollow, with something like a floating garden in its centre; and afar off the vast expanse of ocean.

Look which way they would, that sea was all before them, only dotted here and there far to the northward with islands much smaller than the one on which they stood.

High up on the top of the volcanic hill a white cloud was resting, and its dark sides were seamed with many a waving line, the channels down which lava must have run during some recent eruption.

“Ha!” said Halcott presently, “now I can understand the mystery of the burned forest. At first, when we landed here, we believed that the black-birders had been ahead of us; but no, Tandy, no, it was nothing but the lava that fired the forest.”

But strangely enough, however, not a sign of human life was anywhere visible.

Was there any way of accounting for this? “What is your theory, Halcott?” said Tandy. Halcott was lying on the green turf, fanning himself with his broad hat.

But he now lit his pipe. Like most sailors, he was capable of calmer and more concentrated thought when smoking.

“Tandy,” he said slowly, after a few whiffs of the too seductive weed—“Tandy, we have luck on our side. Those blackamoors have fled helter-skelter at the first signs of the eruption. Nothing in the world strikes greater terror to the mind of the ordinary savage—and precious ordinary most of them are—than a sudden convulsion of nature.”

Another whiff or two.

“What think you, men,” he said, looking round him, “came up with the fire and the smoke from the throat of that volcanic hill?”

“Stones and ashes,” ventured Chips.

“Stones and ashes? Yes, no doubt, but demons as well—so the dusky rascals who inhabited this island would believe—demons with fire-fierce eyes, tusks for teeth, and blood-red lolling tongues; only the kind of demons that at home nurses try to frighten children with, but more dreadful to those natives than either falling stones or boiling rain.

“That is it, Tandy; they have fled. Heaven grant they may not come back. But if they do, we must try to give them a warm reception, unless they are extra civil. Meanwhile, I think that old Vulcan, at his forge in yonder hill, has not let out his fires. They are merely banked, and he is ready to get up steam at a moment’s notice.

“Why, Tandy, what see you?”

The mate of the Sea Flower was lying flat on the green hill-top, with his telescope resting on Bob’s back.

“I see—I—see,” he said, without taking his eye from the glass, “a little island far away, a level island it is.”

“Yes. Go on.”

“I see a beach of coral sand, dark canoes like tree-trunks are lying here and there, and I see dark figures moving to and fro, and many more around a fire. The beach is banked behind by waving plantain or banana-trees, and cocoa palms are nodding in the air.”

“Then,” said Halcott, “I was right, and those savages you see, Tandy, are the natives of this Island of Gold—for we shall call it the Isle of Misfortune never again—the very natives, Tandy, who fled from this place when Vulcan’s thunders began to shake the earth.”

Slowly homewards now they took their way, and just as the sun was westering stood once more upon the coral beach. The boat was speedily sent for them, and they were not sorry to find themselves once more on board.

Fine weather continued, with scarcely ever a breath of wind, for a whole week. But this could not always be so. The ocean that stretches from the shores of South America far across to New Zealand and Australia is Pacific by name, but not always pacific by nature, and terrible indeed are the gales and circular storms that sometimes sweep over its surface.

So, knowing this, Halcott and Tandy determined to seek, if possible, a safer anchorage or harbour.

It was with this view that they extended their explorations, and made little boat excursions round the rocky coast. These last Nelda, much to her joy, was permitted to join. Looking over the boat’s gunwale, far down into the depths of the clear, transparent water, she could see marine gardens more lovely than any she had ever dreamt of.

“Oh,” she cried, “look, daddy, look! That is fairyland. Oh, I should like to go down and see a mermaids’ ball.”

After rounding the promontory, with its bold, bluff cliffs frowning darkly over the deep, they came to the entrance to the river.

This river was fed by springs that rose far inland, and so wide was it at its mouth that the mariners hoped it would make a most excellent shelter and harbour for the Sea Flower. Alas, greatly to their disappointment, they found it barred across.

And no other spot could be found around the island coast.

By paying out the anchors; however, which, getting a firm hold of the coralline bottom, were almost bound to hold, Halcott believed the Sea Flower could weather almost any storm.

In this he was sadly mistaken, as the sequel will show.

It was determined now to penetrate into the highland part of the isle itself, and make their first grand plunge for gold. If this could be found in sufficient quantities, their stay on the island need be but very brief.

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Chapter Three.

“We Shall Always be Brothers Now—Always, Always.”

“Just there, Tandy,” said Halcott, as the two stood together a day or two after on the brink of a rocky chasm, at the bottom of which the river swept slowly along, dark and deep, because confined by the wet and perpendicular rocks—“just there it was where my friend, my almost brother, plunged over. He had torn up the bridge, as I told you, to save us from the black men’s axes, and so doing sacrificed his life. Ah, James! poor James!

“See,” he added, “the bridge has never yet been repaired.”

Then they went slowly and sadly away, for Tandy felt sorry indeed to witness the grief of his companion.

“How he must have loved him!” he thought. But he remained silent. Grief is sometimes far too deep for sympathy.

They saw many little pigs to-day and rabbits also, as well as a species of pole-cat. But having still plenty of provisions on board they did not hamper themselves by making a bag.

Higher up the stream now they went, and after a time found a place that could be easily forded, the river meandering through a green and pleasant valley, studded here and there with fragrant shrubs and carpeted with wild flowers.

Monster butterflies darted from bloom to bloom—as big as painted fans they were, and radiantly beautiful; but still more beautiful were the many birds seen here and there, especially the kingfishers. So tame were these that they scarce moved even when the travellers came within a yard of them. Asleep you might have believed them to be till one after another, with a half-suppressed scream of excitement, they left their perches to dive into a pool, so quickly too that they looked like tiny strips of rainbow.

Dinner was partaken of by the side of the stream, and after a time they crossed the ford.

The country was rough and rolling and well-wooded, though few of the birds that flitted from bough to bough had any song; they made love in silence.

The beauty of the colours is doubtless granted them for sake of the preservation of species, for there are lizards large enough here to prey upon them, did the birds not resemble the flowers. Their want of song, too, is a provision of nature for the same purpose.

They found the country through which they passed on their way to the lake so covered with jungle, here and there, that they had to climb hills to save themselves from being lost, having brought no compass with them.

“Ha! yonder is the lake,” cried Halcott; “and now we shall see the place where my dear girl and her mother were imprisoned; and, Tandy,” he added, “we may find gold.”

Close here, by the green banks of the little lake, and in a grove, much to their astonishment, they found a canoe.

To all appearance it had been recently used, for there were the marks of feet on the grass, and in the canoe—a black dug-out—were a native tomahawk, a kind of spear or trident, and fishing-hooks of bone, most curiously formed, and evidently only recently used.

“Look to your guns now, lads,” said Halcott, “and keep out of sight; that island is inhabited.”

Just at that moment, as if in proof of what he said, a slight wreath of smoke came curling up through the foliage of a large-leaved banana grove on the tiny island.

A council of war was immediately held. The question to be debated was: should two of their number enter the canoe and row boldly off to the grass hut, the top of which could be seen peeping grey over the green of the trees?

This had been Tom Wilson’s proposition. He and Chips, he said, would run the risk. There could not be many savages on the island. With revolvers in their hands they need not fear to advance under cover of the rifles of Captain Halcott and Mr Tandy.

“Poisoned arrows,” said Halcott, shaking his head, “speed swiftly from a bush. Spears, too, fly fast, and the touch of either means death!

“No, my good fellows, we must think of some other plan. I cannot afford to have you slain. If one or two savages would but appear, we could make signs of peace, or hold them up with our rifles.”

From his position at this moment Halcott alone commanded a view of the islet, which was barely seventy yards away. The three others were sitting on the edge of the canoe.

“Oh!”

This was a sudden exclamation of half-frightened surprise, and when Tandy looked up, behold! there stood Halcott in a position which seemed to indicate a sudden attack of catalepsy. Halcott’s shoulders were shrugged, his clenched fists held somewhat in advance, his head bent forward, eyes staring, brows lowered, and lips parted.

Halcott was a brave man, and Tandy right well knew it. The sight of a score of spear-armed savages could not have affected him thus; he might be face to face with a tiger or a python, yet feel no fear.

Thinking his friend was about to fall, Tandy sprang up and seized his arm.

Halcott recovered almost at once, and a smile stole over his bold, handsome, sailor face.

But he spoke not. He could not just then. He only pointed over the bush towards the island, and Tandy looked in the same direction.

Slowly from out the plantain thicket tottered, rather than walked, the tall figure of a white man. His long hair flowed unkempt over his shoulders; he was clothed in rags, and leaned upon a long, strong spear.

He stood there for a moment on a patch of greensward, and, shading his eyes from the sunlight, gazed across the lake, and as if listening.

Then he knelt just there, with his right hand still clutching the spear, as if engaged in prayer.

And Tandy knew then without being told that the man kneeling yonder on the patch of greensward was the long-lost James Malone himself. But no one moved, no one spoke, until at last the Crusoe staggered to his feet. This he did with difficulty, moving as one does who has aged before his time with illness or sorrow, or with both combined.

James had turned to go, when, with a happy cry, Halcott sprang out from his hiding-place, dragging with him the small canoe and her paddles.

“Ship ahoy! James! James!” he shouted, “your prayers are heard. I’m here—your old shipmate, Halcott. You are saved!”

The captain sprang into the canoe as he spoke, and soon shoved her off.

They could see now, in a bright glint of sunshine, that James’s hair was long and had a silvery sheen. He gazed once more across, but shook his head. It was evident he would not credit his senses. Then he turned round and moved slowly and painfully back into the bush.

Tandy had not attempted to go with Halcott, though the canoe could easily have held two.

“That meeting,” he said to himself, “will be a sacred one. I shall not dare to intrude.”

It was quite a long time after he reached the island and disappeared in the grove before anything more was seen of Halcott.

Tandy had thrown himself on the beach in a careless attitude, just as he used to lounge on summer days on the poop of the Merry Maiden while slowly moving along the canal, and smoking now as he used to smoke then—smoking and thinking.

But see, Halcott is coming at last. He is leading James by the hand and helping him towards the boat, and in a few minutes’ time both are over and standing on the bank of the lake.

“Tandy, this is James. But you know the strange story, and this is the strangest part of all.”

Tandy took the hand that was offered to him. How cold and thin it felt!

“God sent you here,” said James slowly, and speaking apparently with some difficulty. “His name be praised. It was for this happy meeting I was kept living on and on, though I did not know it. It has been a weary, terrible time. It is ended now, I trust.” Here a happy smile spread over his sadly-worn face, and once more he extended his hand to Halcott. “Heaven bless you, friend—nay, brother!”

“Yes, James, and we shall always be brothers now—always, always.”

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Chapter Four.

Prisoner among Savages—Shipwreck.

Not a word about gold was spoken that night. To Halcott had been restored that which is better far than much fine gold—the friendship of a true and honest heart.

For many days James Malone was far too weak to talk much, and he told them his story only by slow degrees as he reclined on the couch in the Sea Flower's cabin, as often as not with little Nelda seated on a camp-stool beside him, her little hand in his. She had quite taken to James, and the child's gentle voice and winning manners appeared to soothe him.

His story was one of suffering, it is true, but of suffering nobly borne.

Hope had flown away at last, however. He found himself too ill to find his own living. At the very time Halcott spied him, he had come forth expecting to look his last at sun and sky, just to pray, and then creep back into the cooler gloom of his hut to die.

How he had been saved from the savages, in the first instance, is soon told. He had leaped, after he had seen every one safely over the bridge, into the deep pool with the intention of swimming down stream, hoping thus to avoid the natives, and, gaining the beach, make his way along the coast or across the promontory to join his friends on the other side.

He had got almost a mile on, and was feeling somewhat exhausted, when the river suddenly narrowed again, and before he could do anything to help himself, he was caught in the rapids and hurried along at a fearful rate.

Sick and giddy, at last, and stunned by repeated blows received by contact with stones or boulders, he suddenly lost consciousness.

"Darkness, dearie," he said, as if addressing Nelda only, "darkness came over me all at once, and many and many a day after that I lived to wonder why it had not been the darkness of death.

“When I recovered consciousness—when I got a little better, I mean, dearie—and opened my eyes, I found myself lying in a clearing of the forest, pained, and bruised, and bleeding.

“Pained I well might be, for feet and hands were tightly bound with a species of willow. But I was alone. I thanked God for that. I had no idea how long I had lain there, but it was night, and the stars that brightly shone above me were, for a time, my only companions. They gave me hope—oh, not for this world, but for the next. I felt my time would soon come, and that, baulked in their designs on the ladies, the savages would torture and sacrifice me. In spite of my sores and sufferings, some influence seemed to steal down from those holy stars to calm me, and I fell fast asleep once more. It could not have been for long, though. I had a rude awakening. All around me, but some distance off, was a circle of dusky warriors, spear-armed. I could see their eyes and teeth gleaming white in the starlight, as they danced exultingly round and round me, brandishing their weapons and uttering their wild yells, their savage battle-cries.

“But every now and then the circle would be suddenly narrowed, as a dozen or more of the fiercest and most demon-like rushed upon me with levelled spears, and it was then I thought my time had come. But the bitterness of death was past, and now, as if mad myself, I defied them, laughed at them, spat at them. My voice sounded far-off. I could hardly believe it was my own.

“But, as if by magic, suddenly every warrior disappeared, and into the clearing stalked a savage taller than any I had yet seen. His spear was like a weaver’s beam, as says the Bible. With hair adorned with feathers, with face, chest, and arms disfigured by tattooing—the scars in many places hardly yet healed—with awful mouth, and gleaming, vindictive eyes, he looked indeed a fearsome figure.

“At each side of him marched three men carrying torches, and close behind two savages bearing a litter, or rude hammock, of branches. On to this I was roughly lifted, and borne away through the dark woods.

“But whither? I hardly dared guess at the answer to that question. To death, I felt certain—death by torture and the stake. The chief would yet, he doubtless believed, have ‘white blood’ to drink, and that blood should be mine.

“It was to the small lake island, however, on which you found me, that I was carried, more dead than alive, and here I was to be kept a prisoner until the full of another moon.

“I need not tell you how I gradually ingratiated myself into favour, first with the medicine-man, and afterwards with the king himself, whom I taught much that was of use to him in the arts of peace, till he came to consider me far more useful alive than dead. Nor am I willing to speak before this dear child of the awful rites, the mummeries, and fearful human sacrifices that my eyes have witnessed. The wonder is, that instead of living on as I did—though life has been in reality but a living death—I did not become insane, and wander raving through the woods and forests.

“But the savages have been driven from the island at last, terrorised by the demons of the burning mountain, and I do not think that they are likely to return during the few weeks we shall be here.

“They fled in their canoes precipitately on the first signs of eruption. The boats were terribly overcrowded, and although they lightened them by throwing women and children overboard to the sharks, at least three great war-canoes were sunk before my eyes.

“It was a fearful sight! May no one here ever live to have such experiences as I have passed through.”

As soon as he could bear to listen to it, Halcott told James all his own story and that of the Sea Flower since she left the shores of England.

“Like myself,” said James, “you have been mercifully preserved.

“As to gold,” he continued, “I am fully aware that the medicine-man had many utensils of the purest beaten gold. They were used for sacrificial purposes; and, at one time, when the king and his warriors returned from utterly wiping out the inhabitants of an island to the north of this, and brought with them a crowd of prisoners, these golden utensils were filled over and over again with the blood of the victims, and drunk by the excited warriors. After this I never troubled myself about gold in any shape or form; but just before the exodus, I believe these vessels were hurriedly buried on the little island. If not, they have been thrown into the lake.”

“Is it in your power to tell us, James, where these vessels of gold were made, or where the gold was obtained?”

“They were fashioned, dear brother, by the spear-makers, with chisels and hammers of hard wood and stone.

“Even the medicine-man himself knew nothing of the value of the metal. It was easy to work, that was all, else iron itself would have been preferred. You ask me whence the gold was obtained. I can only inform you that the secret lay and lies with the magician himself, and that the mine is a cave at the foot of the burning mountain, probably now entirely filled up with lava. Once, and once only, was I permitted to accompany this awful wretch to the grove near which this cave is situated. I was not allowed to go further. Here I waited for a whole hour, during which time I now and then heard muffled shrieks and yells of pain and agony that made me shudder.”

“What could these have been, think you, James?”

“Can you not guess? At least, you may, when I tell you that a poor boy was forced to enter the cave with the medicine-man, but never again saw the light of day.

“I had learned by this time to talk the language of these savages, and all the information I received, when I questioned the monster, was that the demons of the fiery hill had to be propitiated.

“But he brought back with him two huge nuggets that I could see were gold.

“This was the price, he told me, that he had been paid for the kee-wääee. (youth).

“I never saw those nuggets again, but believe they were fashioned into spear-heads for the king.”

While Halcott and James were talking quietly down below, Tandy was walking the deck with considerable uneasiness. There was a strange appearance far away in the north that he did not like. No banks of clouds were rising, only just a curious black, or rather purple, haze. It had been so very clear all round up till an hour ago, that danger would have been the last thing Tandy would have thought about.

He looked towards the distant island through his glass at three o'clock, and it was then visible; but now, though the dog-watch had only just begun, it was wiped out, swallowed up in the mysterious haze.

But when a bigger wave than usual rolled in, and others and others followed, and when the surface became wrinkled here and there with cat's-paws, he hesitated no longer.

“All hands on deck!” he shouted, stamping loudly on the planks to arouse those below. “Hands loosen sail! Man the winch, lads! It must be up anchors, and off!”

There was wind enough shortly to work to windward till they were quite clear of the bay, then they kept the barque away on the starboard tack, until well clear of the island.

They now worked northwards as far as possible, till the wind got too strong, when they were obliged to lie to, almost under bare poles.

Neither Tandy, Halcott, nor James could remember having encountered so terrible a storm before. No one thought of turning in that night, for, being so short-handed, every man was needed on deck.

About midnight this fearful gale was evidently at its worst. The sea was then making a clean breach over the ship from fore to aft. The darkness was intense; hardly any light was there at all from the sky, save now and then a bright gleam of lightning that lit up mast, rigging, and shrouds, and the pale faces of the men as they clung in desperation to bulwark or stay.

Each lightning flash was followed by a peal of thunder that sounded high above even the incessant roaring of the wind.

Surely it was every one for himself now, and God for all who put their trust in Him.

It was probably about five bells in the middle-watch, the hatches being firmly battened down, when Ransey Tansey crept under the tarpaulin that covered the after companion, and lowered himself down as well as the terrible motion of the ship permitted him. He staggered into the saloon.

A light was burning in his father's state-room, the light of a candle hung in gimbals.

Towards the door he groped his way, hoping against hope that he would find his little sister asleep and well.

"O Jane, are you here?" he said; "so glad."

Janeira rose as he entered, clinging to the edge of the upper bunk in the endeavour to steady herself.

"Iss, I'se heah, sah. Been praying heah all de night to de good Lawd to deliber us. Been one big night ob feah, sah. But de sweet child, she go to sleep at last."

"Did she cry much?"

“No; she much too flighten’d to weep.”

Ransey bent low over his sister, and felt relieved when certain that she was breathing and alive, for she slept almost like one in a trance.

Ransey had long since become “sea-fast,” as sailors call it. No waves, however rough, could affect him, no ship’s motion however erratic.

But just at that moment his head suddenly swam; he felt, as he afterwards expressed it, that he was being lifted into the clouds; next moment a crash came that extinguished the light and hurled him to the deck.

For a moment he felt stunned and unable to move; and now, high above the shrieking of the storm-wind, came the sound of falling and breaking timber, and Ransey knew the ship was doomed.

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Chapter Five.

Fortifying the Encampment.

The sound was that of falling masts. A sailor of less experience than Ransey could have told that.

The barque had been dashed stern-foremost upon the rocks. She had been lifted by one of those mighty waves, or “bores,” that during a storm like this sometimes rise to the height of fifty feet or more, and hurrying onwards sweep over islands, and pass, leaving in their wake only death and destruction.

After the masts had gone clean by the board, there were loud grating noises for a short time, then the motion of the ship ceased—and ceased for ever and ay.

Nelda’s voice, calling for her father, brought the boy to himself.

“I’m here, dear,” he sang out. “It is all right; I’ll go and get a light; lie still.”

“Oh, don’t leave me. Tell me, tell me,” wept the wee lass, “is the ship at the bottom? And are we all drowned?”

Luckily, Janeira now managed to strike a light, and poor Nelda’s mind was calm once more.

Bob had slept on the sofa cushions all throughout this dreadful night; but Ransey was now very much astonished, indeed, to see the stately ’Ral walk solemnly in at the door, and gently lower his head and long neck over Nelda, that she might scratch his chin.

“Oh, you dear, droll ’Rallie,” cried the child, smiling through her tears, “and so you’re not drowned?”

But no one could tell where the ’Ral had spent the night.

Under the influence of great terror, the Admiral was in the habit of “trussing” himself, as the sailors called it—that is, he close-reefed his long neck till his head was on a level with his wings, and his long bill lying downwards along his crop. Then he drew up his thighs,

and lowered himself down over his legs. He was a comical sight thus trussed, and seemed sitting on his tail, and no taller than a barn-door fowl. It was convenient for him, however, for he could thus stow himself away into any corner, and be in nobody's way.

Daylight came at last, and it was now found that the Sea Flower had been lifted by the mighty wave, and after being dashed into a gully in the barrier of rocks that stretched along the eastern side of Treachery Bay, had been left there high and dry.

The marvel is that, although several of the hands had been more or less shaken and bruised, no one was killed.

The position of the wrecked barque was indeed a strange one. Luckily for her the sea had risen when the tide was highest, so that she now lay on an even keel upon the shelf of rocks, twenty feet above the bay at low water.

The monster wave seemed to have made a clean breach of the lowland part of the island, and gone surging in through the dead forest, smashing thousands of the blackened trees to the ground, and quite denuding all that were left of their beautiful drapery of foliage, climbing flowers, and floral parasites.

At each side of the gully the black rocks towered like walls above the hulk, but landwards, a green bank, of easy ascent, sloped up to the well-wooded table-land above.

As speedily as possible the main part of the wreckage was cleared away. This consisted of a terrible entanglement of ropes and rigging. But the spars were sawn up into lengths that could be easily moved, and so, in a few hours' time, the unfortunate Sea Flower was simply a dismantled hulk.

When the work was finally accomplished, the men were permitted to go below, to cook breakfast, and sleep if they had a mind to.

But not till prayers were said, and thanks, fervent and heartfelt, offered up to the God who, although He had seen fit to wreck the ship, had so mercifully spared the lives of all.

Strange, indeed, was now the position of these shipwrecked mariners, and it was difficult for Halcott, Tandy, and James Malone to review it with even forced calmness.

The three men walked up together to the table-land to hold a council, taking no one with them.

The storm had gone down almost as quickly as it had arisen, and sea and sky were blue and beautiful once again.

Said James, as they all sat smoking there,—

“Brother Halcott, my first words are these—and I’m an older man than either of you—We must not despair!”

“We must not despair!” repeated both his shipmates.

But they did not smile, and their voices sounded almost hollow, or as if they came up out of a phonograph.

James laid his hand on his friend’s knee.

“Our prospects are bad, I allow,” he said, “the future looks dark and drear. We are far, far beyond the ordinary track of ships; ships seldom, if ever, come this way, unless driven out of their course by stress of weather. I think, then, brother, that we may dismiss from our minds, as useless, all hope from that direction. But dangers loom ahead that we must not, dare not, try to minimise. We are here with but limited supplies of food and ammunition, and these can hardly last for ever. The nearest land is hundreds and hundreds of miles away, the wild, inhospitable shores of Northern Patagonia. We are but eleven all told, excluding the boys Ransey and Fitz, the dear child, and Janeira—eleven working hands. Could we expect or dare, as a last resource, to reach the far-off land in two open boats? Did we attempt this, we should have to reckon, at the outset, upon opposition from the wild natives of that north island; then on the dangers of the elements during this long, forlorn cruise. Worst of all, if not an-hungered, we might perish from thirst. Tandy, you would go mad were you to see the anxious, fevered face and dry, parched lips of your child upturned to the sky, weak and weary, and praying for the drop of water you could not find to give her.”

“Hush, James, hush!” cried Tandy; “sooner far we should all die where we are.”

“I do not mention these matters to worry you, men, but that, knowing our dangers, we may be prepared to face them.

“Then,” he continued, “there is the king of this island and his warriors to be thought about. Fools, indeed, were we did we not reckon on these, for they constitute the danger that presses most, now that we are wrecked—the danger, probably, first to be faced.”

“You think, then, they will return?”

James Malone pointed to the far-off volcanic hill, which was once more belching forth smoke.

“They will return,” he said, “when yonder cloud rests no longer on the mountain top.

“Yes, brother, it might be possible to make friends of them. But I doubt it. Treachery is written on every lineament of their black and fearsome faces. I should never, never trust them.

“And now, men,” he continued, after a thoughtful pause, “I have painted our situation in its darkest colours. Let us see, then, where the light comes in. The light and the hope.”

As he spoke he took from his bosom a little Bible and those big horn “specs” that Halcott mentioned in his story. These last he mounted on his nose, and turning over the leaves read solemnly as follows:—

““God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

““Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

““The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered his voice, the earth melted.

““The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Amen!’

“In these words,” said James closing the book, “and in many such promises, do I place my hope and confidence. God heard my prayers before, gentlemen. He will hear ours now. I think our deliverance will come about in some strange way. Just let us trust.”

But James Malone’s religion was of a very practical kind. “Trust in God, and keep your powder dry,” are words that have been attributed to Cromwell. They are to the point.

“Fortuna favet fortibus,” (fortune favours the brave), you know, reader; and it is wrong to expect God to help us to do that which He has given us the power to do for ourselves.

“And now, gentlemen,” said James, rising to his feet, “let us work.”

“The first thing to be considered, then,” said Halcott, “is, I think you will agree with me, James, our defence.”

“That is so,” said James quietly. “The savages will come sooner or later, I fear, and it is but little likely they will come prepared to shake us by the hand and make friends with us. Even if they did, I should be prepared to fight them, for you never know what might happen.”

“Right, James, right. We may be thankful anyhow that as yet we are all spared and well. Now, you just have the hands lay aft, and tell them, brother, in your convincing way, how matters stand. Speak to them as you spoke to us.”

James answered never a word, but went straight down the green declivity and boarded the vessel. He did not ask the men to come to the quarterdeck—James was non-demonstrative in all his methods. He would have no “laying aft” business. This was too much man-of-war fashion for him, so he simply went forward to the forecastle and beckoned the few hands around him.

A minute or two after this Halcott and Tandy, still lying at ease on the brow of the embankment, heard a lusty cheer. From their position they could command a view of the deck, and now, on looking down, behold! the brave little crew were taking off their jackets and tightening their waist-belts, and a mere tyro could have told that that meant business.

Halcott got up now; he plucked a pinch of moss, and after plugging his pipe therewith he placed it carefully away in his jacket pocket.

That meant business also.

“Come, Tandy,” he said, and both descended.

The position, it must be admitted, was one which it would be rather difficult for so small a garrison to defend successfully.

The vessel, as I have already said, had been dashed stern on to the rocks and into the gully, and the jibboom hung over a black, slippery precipice that descended sheer down into the sea. This cliff, however, was not so slippery but that it might afford foothold for naked savages. It must be included, therefore, in the plan of defence.

But from the cliffs that rose on each side of the ship an enemy could attack her, and the deck below would then be quite at the mercy of their poisoned spears and their clouds of arrows, while the bank astern which sloped upwards to the table-land could easily be rushed by a determined foe.

An outer line of defence was therefore imperative; in fact this would be of as much service to these Crusoes as the Channel Fleet is to the British Islands.

This part of the work was therefore the first to be commenced, and merrily indeed the men set to work. They began by clearing away the bush all round the gully where the Sea Flower lay, to the extent of forty yards, being determined to leave not a single shrub behind which a savage might conceal himself. Everything cut down was hauled to the top of the cliff and trundled into the sea. To have lit a fire and burned it would have invited the attention of the natives on that far-off island, and a visit of curiosity on their part would have ended disastrously for the shipwrecked party.

It took days to clear the bush away, and not only the men but the officers as well bore a hand and slaved away right cheerfully.

No one was left on board except Ransey Tansey himself, the nigger boy, and Janeira. Nelda insisted on going on shore with the working party, the marvellous crane flew down from the hulk, and Bob was always lowered gently over the side. These three were the superintendents, as Halcott called them; they had nothing to do but play about, it is true, but their very happiness inspired the men and made the work more easy. The other three—those left on board—had work to do, for on them devolved the duty of preparing the meals for all hands; and in this duty they never failed.

Well, the jungle was cleared at last, and this clearance, it was determined, should be extended and made double the width at least.

And now began the hard labour and toil of erecting the stockade, and in this strength was of very great importance. But it was not everything. The wooden wall must be built on scientific principles, so that a volley could be fired on an enemy attacking from any direction.

The building of this fortification, with its strong-barred gate, took our Crusoes quite a month. No one can marvel at this, if they bear in mind that the trees had to be cut down in the woods, and dragged all the way to the cliff before they could be fashioned and put into place; that the rain sometimes put a stop to work entirely, so heavy and incessant was it; and, moreover, that the men suffered a good deal from the bites of poisonous and loathsome insects, such as centipedes and scorpions. The wounds made by either of these had to be cauterised at once, else serious results would have followed.

At last the palisade and gate were finished, loopholed, and plentifully studded with sharp nails and spikes outside.

After this the little garrison breathed more freely. There was much to be done yet, however, before they could sleep in security.

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Chapter Six.

An Awful Secret of the Sea.

Having finished the first line of defence, attention was turned to the inner works.

How best could the Crusoes repel boarders if the palisade were carried, and a rush made down the embankment with the view of attacking the ship?

It was some time before this question could be answered with any degree of satisfaction.

I think that the plan finally adopted was the best under the circumstances.

During such an attack, not only would the defenders have to do all they could to stop a rush down the sloping bank, but protect themselves also from the spears that would be hurled at them from the cliffs above.

An inner palisade was therefore erected, not so strong as the other; and right over the after part of the quarterdeck, and round a portion of its bulwarks, a shed was erected, under which the men could work their rifles and the great gun with comparative safety.

If the outer line should be broken through, the savages would no doubt attack in their fullest force, and a gun loaded with grape-shot would play awful havoc in their ranks; and boiling water from the donkey engine would in all probability suggest to the enemy the advisability of a quick retreat.

Nevertheless, the outlook, even should they be thus repelled, would be a black one, and a state of siege could only have one sad ending.

But let me not be "too previous," as humourists say.

So quickly does time slip away when a person is busy that when, one morning at breakfast, James Malone said quietly, "Men, we have been here for just two months to-day," Halcott could scarcely credit it.

But a reference to the log, which was still most carefully kept, revealed the truth of what James had said.

Two months! Yes; and as yet the weather and the work had prevented them from penetrating inland in search of nature's hidden treasures.

But the rain ceased at last; and though clouds still hung around, and mists often obscured the sea for days at a time, the glorious spring time had come again, and the island was soon a veritable land of flowers.

The first visit inland was made to the Lake of the Lonely Isle, as it was called. But a bridge had to be built over the chasm, to replace that torn up by the hands of brave James Malone. This was easily formed of trees, with a rail at each side, and this bridge shortened the distance to the little lake by several miles.

The working party carried picks and spades and axes, for it was determined to thoroughly overhaul the island in search of the utensils used by the priests during their awful human sacrifices.

The isle was a very small one, but, nevertheless, it took three whole days to thoroughly search it. And every evening they returned to the ship unsuccessful, but certainly not disheartened.

Halcott told his brave fellows that if more gold were found than simply enough to pay the expenses of the voyage, not including the loss of the ship, for that was insured, they would have a good percentage thereof, and something handsome to take home to wives and sweethearts. So, although they knew in their hearts that they might never live to get home, they worked as willingly and as merrily as British sailors ever did "for England, home, and beauty," as the dear old song has it.

I may as well mention here, and be done with it, that Lord Fitzmantle, the nigger boy, very much to his delight, was appointed signalman-in-chief to the forces. Observatory Hill was not a difficult climb for Fitz, and here a flag-staff had been erected. An ensign hoisted on this point could be seen not only over all the island but over a considerable portion of the sea as well. But Fitz received strict orders not to hoist it unless he saw a passing ship.

Bob was allowed to accompany the boy every day. Dinner was therefore carried for two, and Fitz, who could read well, never went without a book.

One day, while James and Halcott were wandering, somewhat aimlessly it must be confessed, in a wood not far from the lake, they came upon a clearing, in the midst of

which stood a solitary, strange, weird-looking dead tree. It was a tree of considerable dimensions, and one side of it was much charred by fire.

“It was just here,” said James quietly, pointing to the spot, “where I should have been burned, had not Providence mercifully intervened to save my somewhat worthless life.”

Both walked slowly toward that tree, and acting like a man in deep thought, Halcott carelessly kicked it.

It may sound like a sentence read out of a fairy book when I say that a little door in that part of the tree suddenly flew open inwards; but it is nevertheless true.

“The treasure must be hidden here!” said Halcott. He was just about to plunge his hand into the hole when James restrained him.

“Stay, for Heaven’s sake, stay!” he cried excitedly. “The treasure, brother, may be there. I never thought of this before; but,” he added, “if the treasure is there, something else is there also, and we have that to deal with first.”

As he spoke, he took from his pocket a small piece of flint and some touch-paper. Then he gathered a handful of withered grass, struck fire with the back of his knife against the flint—James was very old-fashioned—placed the smoking paper in the grass, shook it, and soon had it in fire.

Then he thrust this into the hole, and ran quickly back a few yards.

“Keep well away,” he cried to his companion.

Next minute the head and neck of a huge crimson snake was protruded—hissing.

James fired at once.

It was an ugly sight to see that headless serpent wriggling and leaping on the clearing.

“That,” said James, as he seized it by the tail and flung it far into the bush, “was the chief medicine-man’s familiar. There are no snakes on the island, so where he procured it was always a mystery to me. But its possession gave the man great power over even the king himself, all believing it to be an evil spirit. And no wonder, for this ‘red devil,’ as the natives called it, although the medicine-man could handle it safely enough, was often permitted to bite a boy or a girl in the king’s presence, and the child invariably died in convulsions.”

“Horrible!” said Halcott. “Was there only one?”

“There was only one, and—it will never bite again.”

They walked back now towards the lake, and soon returned in company with Chips and Wilson armed with axes.

It was hard work, and an hour of it, too, cutting through that tree; but it fell with a crash at last—“carried away close by the board,” as Halcott phrased it.

“Now, men,” said James, “search among the débris in the hollow stump and see what you can find.”

James and Halcott stood quietly by leaning on their rifles.

But they laughed with very joy as the men pulled out bowl after bowl of beaten gold, to the number of seven in all. These were far from artistic, but they were large and heavy.

Inside they were black with blood.

Chips stood up and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“My eye and Betty Martin! Captain Halcott, here’s a go. Why, we’ll be all as rich as water-cresses.”

And he joyfully tossed his hat in the air, and kicked it up again as it descended.

Chips was a queer chap.

But having now relieved his feelings, the search was proceeded with.

And when it was all over, and nothing further to be found, the inventory of the treasure now exposed to view, every article of purest gold, was as follows:—

A. Seven bowls, weighing about twelve pounds each.

B. Thirty-five spear-heads, solid and very heavy.

C. Fifteen gold daggers, similar to that brought away from the island by Doris herself.

D. Fifteen larger and curiously shaped knives.

E. One hundred or more fish-hooks.

F. Nineteen nuggets of gold of various sizes—one immense nugget weighed 149 pounds!

(The largest nugget ever found weighed over 180 pounds. It was dug up, I believe, at Ballarat.—G.S.)

No wonder these two men were excited.

“I say, sir,” said Chips, “I guess you’ll splice the main-brace to-night.”

“That we will with pleasure,” replied Halcott.

“And,” cried Tom Wilson, “I’ll fiddle as I’ve never fiddled before. I’ll make all hands laugh one minute, and I’ll have them all crying the next.”

Poor Wilson! It was noted that this man never touched rum himself, but invariably gave his share to another.

The main-brace was spliced that night, and that, too, twice over. It happened to be Saturday night.

It could not be called Saturday-night-at-sea, but it was Saturday night on board a ship; and despite the fact that the vessel was but a wreck and a hulk, it was spent in the good old fashion.

An awning was always kept spread over the fore part of the ship, and it was under this that the crew smoked and yarned in the evenings.

To-night the officers had gone forward to hear Tom Wilson play.

He did make them laugh. I do not know that his pathetic pieces caused many tears to flow, beautifully executed though they were, but late in the evening—and ten o’clock was considered late on board the hulk—when Halcott asked for a favourite air of his, Tom hesitated for a moment, then took up the violin.

There was a beauty of expression and sadness about Tom’s interpretation of this beautiful melody that held everybody spell-bound; but when at last the poor fellow laid

his instrument on the table, and with bent head burst into tears, the astonishment of every one there was great indeed.

Jack, however, is ever in sympathy with sorrow, and Chips, rough old Chips, got up and went round behind Tom Wilson.

“Come, matie,” he said, patting him gently on the shoulder. “What is it, old heart? Music been too much for you? Eh? Come, come, don’t give way.”

Tom Wilson threw back his head and lifted his face now.

“Thank you, Chips; thank you, lad, and bless you. Nay, nay, I will not tell you to-night the reason of my stupid tears. I’m not the man to sadden a Saturday night. Come, lads, clear the decks. I’ll play you the grandest hornpipe you ever listened to.”

And play he did. Every note, every tone was thrilling. A dance was soon got up, and never before, not even in a man-of-war, did men foot the deck more merrily than those shipwrecked Crusoes did now.

But the queerest group there was just amidships, where Janeira herself and Fitz—all white eyes and flashing teeth—were madly tripping it on the light fantastic toe; while little Nelda and that droll old crane danced a fandango, that caused all hands, including even Tom himself, to shout with laughter when they beheld it.

The very solemnity of the crane as he curved his neck, hopped, and pirouetted, was the funniest part of the performance.

But next day all hands knew Tom’s pathetic story.

“That air I played,” he told them, “was my little daughter Fanny’s favourite. Fanny is dead. Georgie too. He was my boy. I was rich once, but drink ruined me, and—oh, may God forgive me!—led indirectly to the graveyard gate, where wife and children all lie buried!”

Two long months more had gone by, during which the exploring party had been busy enough almost every day at the distant hill, prospecting, excavating here and there, and searching in every likely nook for the cave of gold.

But all in vain.

During all the time they had now been on the island—more than six months—never a ship had been seen, nor had any boat or canoe ventured near the place.

“Surely, surely,” they thought, “some day some ship will find us out and rescue us.”

One day as they were returning earlier in the afternoon than usual, for it was very hot, and they were all somewhat weary and disheartened, they went suddenly almost delirious with joy to see, on looking towards the hill-top, that the ensign was hoisted upside down on the pole, and little Fitz dancing wildly round it, and pointing seaward.

Tired though they all were, there was no talk now of returning to the wreck. But straight to the hill they went instead.

To their infinite joy, when they reached the top at last, they could see a brig, with all available sail set, standing in for the island.

I say all available sail, for her fore-topmast was gone, she was cruelly punished about the bulwarks, and had evidently been blown out of her course during the gale that had raged with considerable violence a few days before.

Every heart beat high now with hope and joy, and as the vessel drew nearer and nearer, they shook hands with each other, and with tears in their eyes some even talked of their far-off cottage homes in England.

Nearer and nearer!

A flag was flying at her stern, but to what country she belonged could not yet be made out. But they could now, by aid of the glass, see the hands moving about the deck, and some leaning over the bows pointing towards the island.

But, “Oh, cruel! cruel!” cried the poor men, and grief took the place of joy, when the vessel altered its course and went slowly away on the other tack.

So great was the revulsion of feeling now that some of the Crusoes threw themselves on the ground in an agony of grief and disappointment.

They watched the ship sail away and away, hoping against hope that she might even yet return.

They watched until the stars shone out and darkness brooded over the deep, and then a strange thing happened: a great gleam of light was seen on the distant horizon, and above it clouds of rolling smoke through which tongues and jets of flame were flashing.

The brig was on fire and burning fiercely!

Her very masts and rigging were seen for a time, darkling through the blaze.

No one thought of leaving the hill now; they would see the last of that mysterious ship.

Yes, and the last came within an hour.

An immense fountain of fire rose high into the air, lighting the sea up in one broad crimson bar from horizon to shore—then darkness.

Nothing more.

Nor were any signs of that unfortunate brig seen next day. No boat floated towards the island, nor was a single spar ever picked up along the beach.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of the Crusoes as they went slowly homeward through the jungle, guided by Fitz and Bob.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.” That was all the remark that James Malone made.

And the mystery of that unhappy brig none can ever unravel.

To the end of time it must remain one of the awful secrets of the sea.

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Chapter Seven.

Strange Adventures in a Crystalline Cave.

Ten months more, and not another ship was seen.

It was now two years and over since the beautiful barque Sea Flower had sailed away from Southampton. Not a very long time, it may be said. No; and yet it seemed a century to look back upon, so many strange events and adventures had been crowded into those four-and-twenty months, and so much sorrow and suffering too.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.”

Ah! the hearts of all were sad and sick enough by this time.

“Some day, some day a ship will come!”

Every one fore and aft was weary with repeating these words.

They went not now so often to the foot of Fire Hill, as the volcano had come to be called, in search of the buried cave.

A buried cave it doubtless was, covered entirely by the flow of lava from the crater, and lost, it would seem, for ever.

But whole days would be spent in rambling about in search of the only kind of game the lonely island afforded, those small black pigs and the rock-rabbits, or in fishing by stream or at sea.

When I say “at sea,” it must not be imagined that they fished in Treachery Bay. No; for to have done so would doubtless have invited the attention of the savages, and they might have paid the island a visit that would have been very little relished. Natives of those South Pacific islands have keen eyesight.

But the dinghy boat had been hauled right across the island and launched in a little bay there. A cave was found, and this formed a capital boat-house, for it rose so high behind that the tide could not reach it.

The time had come when fishing was very necessary indeed, for well “found” though the Sea Flower had been, especially with all kinds of tinned provisions and biscuits, these had been nearly all consumed, and for some months back the Crusoes had depended for their support almost entirely on rod and gun. I say almost advisedly; for many kinds of vegetables and roots grew wild in this lonely island, not to mention fruits, the most wholesome and delicious that any one could desire.

Ah, reader, do not imagine that because you have eaten bananas, or even guavas, which you have purchased in this country, that you can form a perfect idea of the flavour and lusciousness of those fruits when gathered from the trees in their native wilds. Moreover, there are fruits in the woods of the Pacific islands so tender that they could not be carried by sea, nor kept for even a day in the tropics; and these are the best of all. So that on Misfortune Island there was no danger of starvation, unless indeed the Crusoes should have the misfortune to be surrounded by the savages and placed in a state of siege.

It was against such an eventuality that the last of the tinned meats was so carefully reserved: and the last of the coals too, because these latter would be needed for the donkey engine, to make steam to be condensed and used as drinking water.

Three times a week, at least in good weather, did a little band set out for the fishing cove, and this consisted of Ransey Tansey himself, Nelda, and little Fitz, to say nothing of Bob.

Now the cove was quite six miles away. Six miles going and six coming back would have been too long a journey for Nelda; but as the child liked to accompany the boys, and they were delighted to have her company, the two lads consulted together and concluded they must carry her at least half the way.

This was a capital plan for Nelda, and quite romantic, for the *modus portandi* was a grass hammock suspended from a long bamboo pole, one end resting on Ransey’s shoulder, the other on Fitz’s.

Nelda would be talking or singing all the way. But on the return journey she got down more often, because she never went back without a basket well filled with fruit and flowers.

Bob used to trot on in front always. This he deemed it his duty to do. Was he not a guard?

On rare occasions the Admiral also formed part of the expedition, but he preferred not going to sea in that wobbly boat.

When invited to embark, he would simply look at Babs or Ransey with one wise red eye, and say, "No, thank you, dear. A sea life doesn't quite suit my constitution; and if it is all the same to you, I'll just hop about the beach here until you all return."

It did not take a very long time for the children, as I may still call them, to find all the fish they could conveniently carry. Then they returned to the beach, entered the cave, and cooked their dinner.

They invariably started to go back two or three hours before sunset.

About this cave there was a kind of mystery to the imaginative mind of little Nelda, and she peopled the gloom and darkness far beyond with all sorts of strange beings.

But when one day Ransey Tansey proposed exploring it, she evinced very much reluctance to going herself.

"I'm afraid," she said; "the giants might catch me and kill me."

Fitz laughed, and Ransey assured her that the cave was not inhabited by even a single giant. It was all imagination.

"There might be snakes," she persisted, "or awful alligators."

Fitz laughed again, and Nelda felt more assured.

"You see me go, sah!" he said; "Is'e not afraid. Ha, ha! it take one much big giant and plenty big 'gator to flighten dis chile."

He ran out of the cave now, but soon came back carrying a heap of withered grass and foliage.

Then he snatched up a burning brand.

"Now!" he cried, "dis chile done go to 'vestigate."

Fitz was fond of exploiting a big word, although he never succeeded in pronouncing much more than three-quarters of it.

Presently the brave little lad disappeared, for the darkness had swallowed him up.

The cave at its other end turned to the right and then to the left, so that although Fitz lit his fire it could not be seen by those left behind.

Ransey and Nelda were becoming quite uneasy about him, when suddenly his voice was heard in the dark distance, coming nearer and nearer every moment, till he once more stood in the broad glare of day at the main entrance to the cave.

“So glad you’ve come back, Fitz,” cried Ransey, “for we had almost given you up; we thought the ’gators had swallowed you.”

Nelda, too, was glad, and so was honest Bob. He ran round and round him, barking.

The echo of the far interior took up the sound and gave back “wowff” for “wowff,” much to the dog’s astonishment. He made quite sure that another dog was hiding away in the darkness somewhere, and promised himself the infinite pleasure of shaking him out of his skin some day.

But the story of exploration that Fitz had to tell was indeed a wonderful one.

He had found an interior cave, and when he lit his fire, the sight of it, he declared to Ransey, was far more beautiful than Paradise. All around him, he said, was a mass of icicles, but all of crystal, and on the floor were hundreds and hundreds of great crystal candles.

“I not can splain (explain) propah,” he said. “Too much foh one leetle niggah boy to splain, but all about me dat cave sparkle and shine wid diamonds, rubies, and rainbows.”

So before they got home that night they made up their minds to explore the marvellous cave in company.

Nothing was said to any one else about their intention; only when they set out some days after this to go to the cave as usual, Ransey Tansey took with him several blue, red, and white lights. He determined in his own mind that this stalactite cave should be turned into a kind of fairy palace for once in a way.

He also carried a small bull’s-eye lantern, so that when lights went out they should not be plunged into darkness altogether.

They had been rather longer than usual in starting on this particular morning, and as the day was very beautiful, and the trees and flowers, butterflies and birds, all looking bright and gay, they must have lingered long on the road. At all events, it was quite one o'clock before they arrived at the cove, reached the cave, and launched their boat.

The fish, moreover, seemed to-day anxious to be caught, and excellent sport was enjoyed.

It only wanted two hours to sunset when they regained the mouth of the cave.

There would be moonlight to guide them home, however, even if they should be half an hour late.

Yes, and it was a full moon too. Mark this, reader, for with each full moon comes a spring tide!

I have no words to convey to any one the glorious sight they beheld when they at last entered the stalactite cave and lit their fire of wood and grass. Fitz had described it well—crystal icicles all around hanging from the vaulted roof, and raised high above the snow-white floor; walls of crystal, and strange, weird statues of a kind of marble.

They sat there in silent admiration until the fire began to burn low; then Ransey Tansey lit up the cave, first with a dazzling white light, then with blue, and finally with crimson.

And this ended the show, but it was one that Nelda would dream about for weeks to come.

How long they had stayed in this wondrous cave they could not tell, but, lo! to their dismay, when they reached the place where they had drawn up the boat, it was gone, and the waves were lapping up far inside. The dinghy had been floated away, and they were thus imprisoned for the night.

The moon, too, had gone down, for in these seas it neither rises nor sets at the same time it does in Britain.

Little Nelda was afraid to spend the night near to the dark water. Some awful beast, she said, might come out and drag her in, so back they went to the crystal cave. Alas! it had lost its charm now.

What a lonesome, weary time it was, and they dared not leave before daylight!

The fearless boy Fitz, after many, many hours had passed, went away, like a bird from the ark, to see if the waters were yet assuaged. He brought back word that the sun was rising, but that the water was still high.

The truth is, they had all slept without knowing it, and during this time the tide had gone back and once more risen, or, in other words, it had ebbled and flowed.

The anxiety of Tandy and the others on board the hulk may be better imagined than described when night fell and the wanderers did not return. For a time they expected them every minute, for the moon was still shining bright and clear in the west and tipping the waves with silver.

Tandy set out by himself at last, hoping to meet the little party. He walked for fully two miles along the track by which they most often came. Again and again he shouted and listened, but no answering shout came back to his, though he could hear now and then the dreary cry of a night-bird as it flew low over the woods in the gauzy glamour that the moon was shedding over everything.

But the moon itself would shortly sink, and so, uncertain what to do next, he returned, hoping against hope that the children might have reached the hulk before him.

What a long, dreary night it was! No one slept much. Of this I am sure, for the lost ones were friends both fore and aft.

But the greatest sorrow was to come, for, lo! when next morning at daybreak they reached the cave, the first thing that caught their eyes was the dinghy—beached, but bottom uppermost. Fishing gear and the oars were also picked up; but, of course, there was no sign of the children.

With grief, poor Tandy almost took leave of his senses, and it was indeed a pitiable sight to see him wandering aimlessly to and fro upon the coral beach, casting many a hopeless glance seawards.

Good, indeed, would it have been for him had tears come to his relief. But these were denied him. Even the consolations that honest James Malone poured into his ears were unheeded; perhaps they were hardly even heard.

“Death comes to all sooner or later. We do wrong to repine. Ah, my dear Tandy, God Himself knows what is best for us, and our sorrows here will all be joys in the land where you and I must be ere long.”

Well-meant platitudes, doubtless, but they brought no comfort to the anguished heart of the poor father.

It was noticed by one of the men that the strange bird Admiral, who had accompanied the search party, seemed plunged in grief himself. He walked about the beach, but ate nothing. He perched upon the keel of the upset boat, and over and over again he turned his long neck downwards, and wonderingly gazed upon the fishing gear and oars.

Then he disappeared.

We must now return to the cave where we left our smaller heroes.

Ransey Tansey's greatest grief was in thinking about his father. It would be quite a long time yet before the tide ebbed sufficiently to permit them to leave the cave and scramble along the beach to the top of the cove. Well, there was nothing for it but to wait. But this waiting had a curious ending.

They had returned to the stalactite cave, and Ransey had once more lit his lamp, when suddenly, far at the other end, they heard something that made poor Nelda quake with fear and cling to her brother's arm.

"Oh, it is a ghost!" she cried—"an old woman's ghost!"

I cannot otherwise describe the sound than as a weary kind of half sigh, half moan, on a loud falsetto key.

No wonder Nelda thought it emanated from some old lady's ghost; though what an old lady's ghost could possibly be doing down here, it would have been difficult indeed to guess.

Bob took another view of the matter. He barked loudly and lustily, and rushed forward. It was no angry bark, however.

Next minute he came running back, and when Ransey Tansey turned the light on him he could see by the commotion among the long, rough hair which covered his rump that the fag-end of a tail he possessed was being violently but joyfully agitated.

"Come on," he seemed to say; "follow me. You will be surprised!"

Without fear now, the children followed the dog, and, lo! not far off, standing solemnly in a kind of crystalline pulpit, was the Admiral himself. No wonder they were all astonished, or that the bird himself seemed pleased. But off the crane hopped now, the dog and the children too following, and there, not thirty yards from the place where they had been all night, was a landward opening into the cave.

It was surrounded with bush, and how the Admiral had found it must ever remain a mystery.

Ten minutes after this poor Tandy was clasping his children to his breast.

Innocent wee Babs was patting his cheek, and saying, “Never mind, daddy—never mind, dear daddy.” Childish consolation certainly, but, oh, so sweet! No wonder his pent-up feelings were relieved by tears at last.

The crane allayed his feelings by dancing a pas de joie on the coral sand. Bob gave vent to his by rushing about and barking at everything and everybody, but especially at the boat, which he seemed to regard as the innocent cause of all the trouble.

“Wowff—wowff—wow! Why did it run away anyhow?”

That is what Bob wanted to know.

But the tide had ebbed sufficiently to permit of a visit to the cave of delight, as Ransey called it.

James and Tandy, with Ransey and Fitz, embarked, the others remaining on shore.

Both men were as much delighted and astonished at what they saw as the children themselves had been. A large quantity of withered branches and foliage had been taken in the boat, to make a fire in the crystalline cave.

“But oh, father,” said Ransey, “you should have seen it last night when we lit it up with crimson light!”

“We’ll come again, lad,” replied his father.

They then made their way to the outer opening, and back once more to the inner, where they had left the boat.

It was noticed that James Malone was somewhat silent all the way back to the wreck. And so he continued during breakfast. After this he slowly arose. "Brother," he said, laying his hand on Halcott's shoulder, "I have something strange to tell you. Come to the cliff-top, and you too, Tandy, and bring your pipes."

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Chapter Eight.

Entombed Alive.

It was a very lovely day now. The sea all round towards the eastern side of the island was deep and blue; but the waters to the west were here and there more shallow, so that the ocean here was patched with splendid colouring—tints of opal, tender green, and crimson were set off by the deep dark-brown of a rocky bottom, whereon masses of seaweed waved with the ebb or the flow of the tide.

There was not a breath of wind to-day, not a whisper in the woodlands; scarce a sound was to be heard, save the drowsy hum of the waves as they broke far below on the beach of snow-white sand, or the occasional screaming of the sea-birds sailing round and round the beetling crags where their nests were.

In very joy they seemed to scream to-day. Happy birds! There was no one to molest them on this far-off beautiful isle of the ocean. No gun was ever levelled at them, not a pebble ever thrown even by Fitz; and so tame were they that they often ran about the cliff-top, or even alighted on the ship itself.

But slowly indeed to-day does James Malone walk towards the cliff. Out through the inner, out through the great outer gate; for he will not feel comfortable until he is clear of the encampment, and seated near to the very brink of that great wall of rocks.

“Gentlemen,” he said, when at last he had filled and lit his pipe with all the coolness of a North American Indian—“gentlemen, hitherto all our efforts to find the gold mine have been in vain, but mere chance has revealed to us the secret that has been hidden from us so long—”

“James,” said Tandy, excitedly, “you don’t mean to say—”

“But,” interrupted James, “I do mean to say it, Tandy. Halcott there knows that I seldom make an assertion till I have well-considered the matter on all sides.”

“You never do, brother.”

“That cave, gentlemen, which in so strange a way the children have found, is a gold mine—the gold mine!

“The land entrance I can now remember, although it is somewhat changed. Show me the map of the island, brother.”

Halcott spread it out before him.

He pointed out Fire Hill, then drew his finger along until it rested on the spot where the cave was.

“The fault has been all mine, gentlemen; I alone led you astray, for appearances deceived me. But it is not yet too late.

“And so you see, Tandy, that, after all, Providence has changed our mourning into joy. I do not now despair of anything. God moves in a mysterious way, brothers, and you may rest assured we shall yet return in peace to enjoy the fruits of our labours in the land of our birth.”

Halcott was silent; so too was Tandy for a time.

Need I tell you what they were thinking about? If they could but return with enough gold to give them an independence, how pleasant would be their prospects for the future!

Well, this world is not all sorrow, and it is only right we should enjoy it. I think I can honestly go further, reader, and say it is a sin not to make the best of the beautiful world we live in, a sin to look always at the darkest side when clouds surround us. Let us not believe in the pessimism of Burns when he wrote his dirge “Man was made to mourn,” a verse or two of which run as follows:—

“Look not alone on youthful prime,
Or manhood’s active might;
Man then is useful to his kind,
Supported is his right:
But see him on the edge of life,
With cares and sorrows worn;
Then age and want—oh! ill-matched pair!—
Show man was made to mourn.

“A few seem favourites of fate,

In pleasure's lap carest;
Yet think not all the rich and great
Are likewise truly blest.
But, oh! what crowds in every land
Are wretched and forlorn!
Through weary life this lesson learn—
that man was made to mourn.”

Tandy had risen to his feet, and was looking somewhat anxiously towards Observatory Hill.

The seaman who took day and day about with Fitz in watching was at this moment signalling.

“He wants us to come up,” said Tandy.

“Who knows,” said James, with far more cheerfulness in his voice than usual—“who knows but that our deliverance is already at hand? The man may have seen a ship!”

Halcott and Tandy, about an hour after this, stood beside the man on the brow of the hill, with their glasses turned towards the far-off island.

They could see the beach with far greater clearness than usual to-day.

It was crowded with savages running to and fro, into the bush and out of it, in a state apparently of great excitement.

At this distance they resembled nothing more than a hive of bees about to swarm.

Independent of innumerable dug-outs drawn up here and there were no less than five huge war-canoes.

Tandy turned away with a slight sigh.

“Just as the cup of joy,” he said, “was being held to our lips, ill-fortune seems to have snatched it away.”

“Heigho!” sighed Halcott, “how I envy honest James for the hopefulness that he never appears to lose, even in the very darkest hours, the hours of what we should call despair.

“But look,” he continued, pointing towards Fire Hill. “Not a cloud to be seen!”

“The volcano is dead!” said Tandy, with knitted brows; “and now, indeed, we shall have to fight.”

Halcott took Tandy’s hand, while he looked calmly into his face.

“My friend,” he said, “we have come through many and many a danger side by side, and here we are alive and well to tell it. If fighting it must be with these savages, neither you nor I shall be afraid to face them. But we may succeed in making peace.”

“Ah, Halcott, I fear their friendship even more than their enmity. But for my dear boy and my little girl, I should care for neither.”

And now all haste back to the camp was made.

All hands were summoned, and the case laid plainly before them.

The story of the cave was told to them also, and it did Halcott’s heart good to hear the ringing cheer with which their words were received.

The next thing Halcott ordered was a survey of stores. Alas! this did not take long; and afterwards the defences were most carefully inspected.

On the whole, the outlook was a hopeful one, even if the savages did come in force and place the strange little encampment in a state of siege. Their provisions and even their ammunition would last for three weeks at least.

And—and then?

Ah! no one thought of an answer to that question. They meant to do their best, and trust in Providence for everything else.

But the expected arrival of these warlike natives was not going to prevent them from finding gold, if gold there were in the Medicine-man’s Cave, as it was now named.

So early next morning the discovery party had reached the landward opening. They were provided with lamps to light and hang, with tools, and with provisions for the day.

At the mouth of the cave Fitz was stationed with glass in hand, to watch for a signal to be given from Observatory Hill, in case the boats should start from the distant island.

The lamps were lit at the entrance to the cave, which was gloomy enough in all conscience.

“Surely,” cried Tom Wilson, when they reached the interior and saw the great stalactites, the candles and icicles of glass, and the walls all shining with “rubies and rainbows,”—“surely this is the cave of Aladdin. Ah, it is diamonds as well as gold we ought to be able to collect here, mates!”

And now hours were spent in a fruitless search for the mine. Even the floor of the seaward cave was dug up and its walls tapped, but all in vain.

It was not until they were preparing to leave, that, chancing to hear Bob whining and scraping not ten yards from the outer entrance, Halcott turned his attention in that direction.

A ghastly sight met their gaze! For here lay a pile of human bones half covered with dust, and half buried in the débris that had fallen from the roof.

And near this awful heap, but above it, was a hole about five feet high, and wide enough to admit two men at a time.

The excitement now was intense, but for a time all stood spell-bound with horror.

“Here,” said James, slowly, “is the spot where that fiend, the medicine-man, murdered the boys as an offering to the great fire-fiend. Now we shall find the gold. Come, follow me, men!”

He took a lamp from Tom Wilson’s hand as he spoke, and boldly entered the cave.

It was far from an inviting place where they now stood.

What did that signify to those determined gold-seekers? For hardly had they dug two feet down ere they were rewarded by finding one large, rough nugget of pure gold and several small ones.

They forgot all about the savages now, and nothing could exceed the eagerness with which the men laboured. But fatigue, at last, overcame them, and they were obliged to retire, carrying with them more of the precious ore than many an Australian digger has found during a whole lifetime.

It was very dark as they made their way through the bush; but Fitz was an excellent guide, so they got back in time for supper.

A very happy evening this was, fore and aft, and Tom Wilson seemed the gayest of the gay. The poor fellow had sinned and fallen, it is true, but surely God had already forgiven him. Tom believed so, and it was this belief, he told James more than once, that made him forget his sorrow.

“I’ll meet my wife and children on the other shore,” he said once, with a sad smile, “and they’ll forgive me too.”

In a week’s time the gold fever was at its height. And no wonder, for in whatever direction they dug nuggets were found in this marvellous cave.

The fortune of every man there was made.

But would the gold be of any use to them?

One day, about a fortnight after the wonderful discovery, something very startling occurred. Almost every hour while digging they had heard strange sounds, like the rumbling of heavy artillery along a rough road, with now and then a loud but muffled report, as of a great gun fired in the distance.

No wonder James had remarked that the heathen minds of the savages believed that a great fire-fiend dwelt deep down here, and must be propitiated with human sacrifice.

But on this particular day, after a terrible report, the earth shook and quivered, great masses of soil fell crashing down here and there, and the lamps were all extinguished.

The noise died away like the muttering of a thunderstorm in the far distance.

“Keep quiet and cool, men; we are all right. We can relight the lamps.” It was Halcott who spoke.

Yes, and so they quickly did; but judge of their horror when, on making their way to what had been the entrance to the cave, they found no exit there!

Then the terrible truth revealed itself to them—they were entombed alive!

At first the horror of the situation rendered them speechless.

Was it the heat of internal fires, or was it terror—I know not which—that made the perspiration stand in great beads on their now pale faces?

“What is to be done?” cried one of the men.

“Never despair, lad!”—and Halcott’s manly voice was heard once more—“never despair!”

His voice sounded hollow, however—hollow, and far away.

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Chapter Nine.

“On Swept the War-Canoes towards the Coral Beach.”

“It was just here, was it not,” said Halcott, “where the entrance was? Keep up your hearts, boys, we shall soon dig ourselves clear.”

Cheered by his voice, every one set himself bravely to the task before him.

But a whole hour went by, and they were now nearly exhausted.

One or more had thrown themselves on the ground panting.

The heat increased every minute, and the atmosphere became stifling. The thirst, too, was almost unendurable.

Even James himself was yielding at last to despair, and already the lights were burning more dimly.

But hark! the sound of the dog barking. His voice seemed ever so far away, but every heart was cheered by it.

Again, lads, again! Up with your spades; one more effort.

The men sprang up from the floor of the cave and went to work now with a will.

Nearer and nearer the dog’s anxious barking sounded every minute.

At last, with a joyous cry, Bob burst through, and with him came a welcome rush of pure air.

They were saved!

Is it any wonder that when they found themselves once more out in the jungle, with flowers and foliage all around them and the breath of heaven fanning their faces, James Malone proposed a prayer of thankfulness?

They rose from their knees at last.

“We have been taught a lesson,” said this honest fellow; “our ambition was far too overweening. Our lust for gold all but found us a grave.”

They had arrived early at camp, so Tandy and Halcott determined to make another visit to Observatory Hill, for the man had once more signalled.

Extra activity was apparent among the savages in the northern island. It was evident enough now that they would not long delay their coming.

The sun set, and soon afterwards darkness fell, but still the man lingered on the hill-top.

And now they could see a great fire spring up, just a little way from the water’s edge, and soon the savages were observed dancing wildly around it in three or four great circles.

It was evident that some horrible orgie was taking place, and they might easily presume that the medicine-man was busy enough, and that a human sacrifice was being offered up to appease the fiends of war, in which those benighted beings so firmly believed.

Next day, and just after breakfast, on looking towards the hill-top, behold the red British ensign afloat on the flag-pole!

Shortly after this the signalman himself ran in.

“They are coming!” he cried; “they are coming!”

“And their strength?” asked Halcott calmly.

“Five great war-canoes, and each one of them contains at least thirty armed warriors.”

“And there may be more to follow. Humph! Well, we shall have to reckon with between two and three hundred at least. What about making overtures of peace to them, brother James?”

Now brother James, as has already been said, was a very practical kind of a Christian.

“Well,” he said, slowly and thoughtfully, “I think, Charlie Halcott, that in this case our duty lies straight and clear before us, and we’ve got to go for it. We shall just be content to make war first, and leave the peace to follow.”

Every man heard him, and the hearty British cheer they gave was re-echoed even from the hill itself.

It was agreed by all, however, that to fight these savages in the open would be but to court death and destruction to all hands.

Other tactics must be adopted. The enemy would no doubt land on the beach, and so the big gun was dragged towards the cliff-top. Here they would make their first stand, and, if possible, sink some of the war-canoes before they had a chance to land.

In savage warfare cover is considered of very great importance. It was determined, therefore, to deprive the invaders of this at any cost, so heaps of withered branches and foliage were collected and placed here and there all around the bay and close to the edge of the wood; and not only there, but on the table-land itself, between the encampment and Observatory Hill.

One of the most active young men was told off to fire those heaps, beginning at the farther side of the bay. His signal to do so would be a rifle, not the gun, fired from the top of the cliff.

In less than three hours' time the great war-canoes were quite in view, slowly approaching the land. They were still ten miles away, however, and it was evident to every one that they meant to time themselves so as to land on the beach at Treachery Bay about an hour after sunset.

Another hour went slowly by. Through the glasses now a good view could be had of the cannibal warriors. One and all were painted in a manner that was as hideous as it was grotesque. In the first boat, standing erect in the bows, with a huge spear in his hand, the head of which was evidently of gold, for it glittered yellow in the sun's rays, was a stalwart savage, whom James Malone at once pronounced to be the king. Beside him squatted two deformed and horrible-looking savages, and they also were far too well-known to James. They were the king's chief medicine-men.

At the bow of each war-canoë, stuck on a pole, was a ghastly human head, no doubt those of prisoners taken in battles fought with tribes living on other islands. There was no doubt, therefore, that their intentions in visiting the Crusoes were evil and not good, and that James Malone's advice to fight first and make peace afterwards was wise, and the only one to be pursued.

At sunset they were within two miles of the land, and lying-to, ready to make a dash as soon as darkness fell.

The gun belonging to the Sea Flower was a small breechloader of good pattern, and could carry a shell quite as far as the boats.

It was trained upon them, and great was the terror of the king when in the air, right above his head, the shell burst with a terrible roar.

They put about and rowed further off at once.

And now, after a short twilight, the night descended quickly over land and sea.

It was very still and starry, and in a very short time the thumping and noise of the oars told those on watch that the boats were rapidly approaching. And now the rifle was fired.

Sackbut, the young sailor, had been provided with a can of petroleum and matches, and hardly had the sound of the rifle ceased to reverberate from the rocks ere those on the cliff saw the first fire lighted. Running from heap to heap he quickly set fire to them one by one. Up on to the table-land he came next, and so in less than twenty minutes the whole of this part of the island presented a barrier of rolling fire towards the sea.

The fire lit up the whole bay until it was as bright almost as if the sun were shining on it. But the savages were not to be deterred or denied, and so on swept the great war-canoes towards the coral beach.

Yet, although they succeeded at last in effecting a landing, they had paid dear for their daring.

Seven rifles played incessantly on them, and the howls and yells that rose every now and then on the night air told that the firing was not in vain.

Only a few shots were fired from the gun, there being no time, but a shell crashed into the very midst of one of the war-canoes, and the destruction must have been terrible. She sank at once, and probably not more than ten out of the thirty succeeded in swimming ashore.

The sharks had scented the battle from afar, and were soon on the field enjoying a horrid feast.

With that bursting shell the war might be said to have commenced in earnest, and it was to be a war à outrance, knife to knife, and to the death.

The yelling of the savages now, and their frantic gestures as they rushed in mass to the shelter of the rocks, mingling with the crackling and roaring of the flames and the frightened screams of myriads of sea-gulls, was fearful—a noise and din that it would be difficult indeed to describe.

All haste was now made to get the gun inside the first line of defence, load it with canister, and place it where it would be most handy.

And nothing more could be done now until the savages should once more put in an appearance. So Tandy hurried on board, a sadly anxious man indeed. His anxiety was, of course, centred in his little daughter.

Janeira was the first to meet him.

“Miss Nelda?” he said quickly; “where is she, and how is she, Jane?”

“Oh,” replied Jane, “she cry plenty at fuss, sah, cry and dance, but now she done go to bed, sah; come, sah, come.”

And down below she ran.

Poor Nelda! There she lay in her bunk, pale and frightened-looking.

No tears now though; only smiles and caresses for her father. She had one arm round Bob, who was stretched out beside the child, as if to guard her from threatened danger.

But strange and earnest were the questions she had to ask.

Were the savages all killed, and shot, and drowned? Would they come back again? Would Ransey, and Bob, and the 'Rallie, and poor daddie be killed and roasted if the awful men came with their spears and knives, and their bows and arrows?

Tandy did all he could to assure her, and if in doing so he had to equivocate a little, surely he would be forgiven.

As they were still talking, in at the door stalked the Admiral himself. He looked more solemn than any one had ever seen him before. Poor fellow! he too had received a terrible fright, and I suppose he felt that he would never, never care to dance again.

The child called to him, and he came to the bunk-side at once, and lowering his long, beautiful neck, laid his beak across her neck. This was 'Rallie's way of showing affection.

Then he went slowly and sadly away to the other end of the cabin, and "trussed" himself in a corner.

Tandy stopped for two whole hours with Nelda. She promised to be very good, and not to cry, even if the bad men did come back again.

Then she fell soundly asleep, holding her father's finger.

He kissed her now and quietly left the cabin, and Janeira herself slipped in and took the camp-stool Tandy had just vacated.

The fire was by this time a long distance away, only the trees that had not been destroyed stood at one moment like black spectres in the starlight, but like rugged pillars of crimson and gold when a puff of wind swept through the woods.

Waiting and watching! Ah, what a weary thing it is! Hours and hours passed by, and if the men of this little garrison slept at all, it was on the bare ground, and with only their elbows for pillows.

But not until far on in the morning watch did the enemy show signs of activity, or give a single token of their presence.

The fire was now too far back for the crackling of the flames to be heard, though its red glare and the cloud of rolling smoke that obscured the sky told that it was still blazing fiercely. The sea-birds had gone to rest once more in the rocks, and everything around the encampment was as silent as the grave. A dread silence—a stillness like that which precedes the outbreaking of some fearful storm!

And all too soon the storm burst.

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Chapter Ten.

“An Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth.”

With a yell that once more scared the sea-birds, and sent them screaming in terror across the waves, a yell that seemed to awaken the echoes in every rock and hill from end to end of the island, the savages sprang to their feet, and rushing towards the palisade, made their first fearful onset.

Not twenty yards away were they when they had given voice. So quickly, too, did they rush across the intervening ground, that scarce was there time to fire a rifle volley, far less to train the gun upon the spear-armed mass, before it was close alongside and had surrounded the stockade.

In their hundreds, these fearsome savages attempted to scale it; but their bodies were frightfully torn with the spikes, and cries of pain now mingled with those of anger. The defenders ran from one part of the stockade to another, firing from the loopholes; and so densely massed together was the foe that every bullet must have found a billet. In spite of all this, several managed to get over, but were immediately shot down with revolvers, or cut down with sword or cutlass.

Small though the loopholes were, spears were several times thrust through, and as each of them was poisoned, a single scratch would have resulted in the agonised death of the receiver.

Dark enough it was, and with nothing now but the stars to direct their aim, yet the little band fought well and determinedly, and at last the foe retired, leaving scores of their dead behind—drew off, dragging the wounded away.

At that black mass, just as it was nearing the woods, and while the rifles still played upon it, the breechloader, grape-loaded, was trained and fired.

So close together were the natives that the carnage must have been terrible.

But twice again ere morning they attacked the fort, receiving the same treatment, and being obliged at last to withdraw.

When morning broke, the defenders were completely wearied out, and so the little garrison, after two sentries were set, lay down to snatch a few hours' much needed rest. There was no fear of the attack being renewed before sunset, for darkness seemed best to suit the tactics of these sable warriors.

In the afternoon of this first day of siege a sally was made from the great gate, and seven men stood ready with their rifles, while four began to remove the dead. Each was dragged to the edge of the cliff and thrown over into the sea. When all were cleared away the gate was once more shut and barred. But though the burial must have been witnessed, no rush was made by the savages to attack them. The afternoon was spent in taking pot-shots at every figure that could be seen in the burned bush.

The next attack was made at midnight, and in a manner quite as determined as the first.

One of the Sea Flower's men was killed by a spear. It had been thrust with tremendous force through a loophole, and pierced the poor fellow's brain.

Tandy himself had a narrow escape. He was about to fire, but, stumbling, fell, and next moment a poisoned arrow whizzed past and over him. There was surely a Providence in this, for only fools believe in blind chance.

With the exception of the death of poor Ross, who was an able seaman, there was no other casualty that night.

The savages withdrew, but when, next day, the men of the Sea Flower sallied forth to remove the enemy's dead, which they succeeded in doing, it was noticed that many of the spike-nails had, during the fight, been removed. These, however, were easily replaced by others, and many more were added.

There was no attack this evening. The savages had determined to endeavour once more to propitiate their "fiend of war," and an immense fire could be seen burning at midnight in the centre of their camp, not more than half a mile from the stockade. The big gun was trained upon this, and a shell planted right in the centre of the dusky mob seemed to work great destruction, and quickly put an end to the orgie.

The terrible siege was kept up for three whole weeks, and, harassed beyond measure with the constant night attacks, affairs were becoming very desperate indeed, and the little garrison was already almost worn out. Day after day it was becoming more apparent to all that utter annihilation was merely a question of time.

A council of war was held now, at which every man was present, and various proposals were made, but few indeed were feasible.

The number of the defenders was so small, compared to the hundreds of armed savages opposed to them, that a “sally in force,” as Tom Wilson who proposed this called it, was out of the question.

To attempt to make peace would only be to give themselves away. The savage king would be ready enough to promise anything, but in a few weeks afterwards not one of the poor Crusoes would be left alive.

Should they get the largest boat ready, provision her, and put to sea? Surely the ocean itself would be less cruel at its very wildest than those bloodthirsty savages.

The question had been put by Tandy himself. He was hoping against hope; he was like a drowning man clutching at straws. For himself he had no thought. He was brave almost to a fault, and, like any other brave man, was willing to die, sword in hand, fighting the foe.

“And where can man die better,
Than in facing fearful odds?”

But his children, especially innocent wee Nelda—ah! that was what softened that heart of his.

“My dear Tandy,” said Halcott, “the idea of being once more away out on yonder beautiful and peaceful ocean, even if only in an open boat, is one that commends itself to us all, but, alas, it would in this case be but a choice of death. Even if we should succeed in eluding the savages and escaping, which I believe would be almost impossible, we could never reach the mainland.”

So the council ended, and the little garrison remained precisely as before.

It was evident to all, however, that the end could not be far distant, for not only provisions, but ammunition itself, would soon give out. All hands saving Nelda were therefore put on short allowance. Coals were carefully saved, no more being used than was necessary to make steam to be condensed and used as drinking water; and not an unnecessary shot was to be fired.

But now there came a lull which lasted for three whole days and nights. Two things were evident enough: first, that the enemy were making some change in their mode of warfare; secondly, that the final struggle would soon take place—and indeed, as regards that, many of the men within the little encampment would have preferred to rush forth, cutlass in hand, and finish the fighting at once.

Most of the country was devastated by the fire that had been kindled, with the exception of a patch away south and east at the foot of Observatory Hill, on which the proud ensign was still floating, as if to give the besieged some hope and comfort.

But one day this patch of jungle, like the famous Birnam Wood, seemed to be slowly advancing towards the camp.

Tandy was gazing at it, and looking somewhat puzzled, when Halcott came up.

“That is more of their fiendish tactics,” he said; “and the scheme, I fear, will be only too successful. You see,” he added, “they are piling up heaps of branches; these will defy our rifle bullets, and unfortunately we have no shells left to fire them. Gradually these heaps will be advanced, and under cover of them they will make their next and, I fear, final attack, and it will be made by day.”

Halcott was right, and in a few days’ time the savages were within a hundred yards of the palisade. They no doubt meant to advance as near to it as possible during the hours of darkness, and with might and main attack at sunrise.

It was midnight when the movement on the part of the besiegers began, and the cover was then slowly advanced. A gentle breeze had begun to blow away from the camp, and the night was moonless and dark.

Presently a hand was laid on Halcott’s shoulder. He had been lying near the outer stockade quietly talking with James; while Tandy was in the ship’s state-room keeping his little girl company. The poor child was sadly uneasy to-night, and the father was trying his best to comfort her.

“What! you here, Lord Fitzmantle?” said Halcott.

“I’se heah, sah.”

It was probably well he said so, for excepting his flashing teeth and rolling eyes, there wasn’t much else of him to be seen.

“And you’re pretty nearly naked, aren’t you?”

“I’se neahly altogedder naked, sah. I’se got noddings much on, sah, but my skin. I go on one ’spedition (expedition) all same’s Dabid of old go out to meet de giant Goliah. Dabid hab sling and stone though; Fitz hab no sling, on’y one box ob matches. You open dat gate, sah, and I go crawl, crawl, all same’s one snake, and soon makee one big fire to wahn de hides ob dose black niggahs.”

“Brave and generous little fellow!” cried Halcott, shaking the boy’s hand. “But I fear to risk your life.”

“You no feah foh me, sah, all I do. I jes’ done gone do foh de sake ob dat pooh deah chile Babs.

“Good-night, ge’men. You soon see big fire, and you heah de niggahs fizz. Suppose dey killee me, dey no can kill de soul. Dis chile findee his way to Hebben all the same, plenty quick.”

They let the little lad out.

Whether the acute ears of the savages had heard the bolts drawn or not will never be known. Certain it is, however, that Fitz was discovered and wounded. But wounded as he was, he had the determination to light the pile.

The savages threw themselves at it, and tore at the burning branches, but this only helped to scatter the flames about.

Fitz crawled back, just in time to die inside the stockade.

“I go to Hebben now,” he said faintly to James, who was kneeling beside him holding his hand. “I’se dun my duty I fink—heah below. I see my pooh old mudder to-night—she—she—”

He said no more, and never spoke again. The noble little fellow had indeed done his duty, and doubtless would receive his reward.

James Malone was like a wild man now.

“Brother Halcott,” he cried, “summon all hands to arras, and let us sally forth and give these fiends a lesson. They have done to death this noble little fellow. Come, Halcott, come. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth!”

He waved his sword aloft as he spoke.

So sudden and determined was the sally now made by ten resolute men that, taken thus unexpectedly, the savages became at once unmanned and demoralised.

The men of the Sea Flower advanced in a semicircle, and well spread out. After the first volley, the blacks threw a few spears wildly into the darkness, for the terrible conflagration blinded their eyes; but, huddled together as they were, they made an excellent target for the riflemen.

Volley after volley was poured into their midst with terrible effect, increasing their confusion every minute.

“Lay aft here now, lads!” shouted James. “Down with your guns! Charge with cutlass and revolver. Hurrah!”

High above the demoniacal shrieks of the savages and the roaring of the flames rose that wild British cheer. Next moment the revolvers poured upon the foe a rain of death.

Again a cheer. Sword and cutlass flashed in the firelight. Right and left, left and right, the men struck out, and blood flowed like water.

Towering above all was James himself, with flashing eyes and red-stained blade, his long hair streaming behind in the breeze that fanned the flames.

Short but fearful was that onslaught. In the eyes of the terror-stricken savages every man must have seemed a multitude. And no wonder. It was death or victory for the poor Crusoes; and never before did soldier on battlefield, or sailor on slippery battle-deck, fight with greater fury than they did now.

But, lo! James has seen the king himself, with his golden-headed spear, which he tries in vain to poise, so crushed and crowded is he in the midst of his mob of warriors.

“It is I,” shouts James, in the native tongue, “I, whose blood you would have drunk. Drink it now if you dare!”

Nothing can withstand him, and soon he has fought his way towards the chief, and next moment the savage throws up his arms and falls dead where he stands.

As if moved now but by a single thought, the enemy, with a howl of terror, go rushing away and disappear in the darkness. The victors are left alone with the dead!

But, alas! the victory has cost them more than one precious life.

Here, stark and stiff, lies the brave young fellow Sackbut, who had fired the bush on the first landing of the savages.

And not far off poor Tom Wilson himself.

At first they can hardly believe that Tom is dead. He is raised partly on his elbow, and his eyes are fixed on a portrait he has taken from his bosom. Tandy, who found him, had seen that picture before. It was that of his wife.

Ah, well, he had sinned, he had suffered, but his sorrows were all past now.

Another man is wounded—honest Chips himself.

Is this all? Ah, no, for James himself, as he turns to leave the scene of carnage, leans suddenly on his sword, his face looks ghastly pale in the firelight, and Halcott springs forward only in time to prevent him from falling.

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Chapter Eleven.

Death of James.

The morning of the victory was a sad enough one in the camp of the Crusoes.

The enemy was routed, the king was slain. For a time, at least, there would be a cessation of strife. For how long no one troubled himself to consider; sorrow seemed everywhere, on board and in the camp around.

Poor James lay on a mattress on deck. Perhaps he was the only man that smiled or seemed happy. He knew, and Halcott knew too, that he could not last for many days, so grievously was he wounded.

Halcott, I need not say, was constant in his attendance on him, and so too was little Nelda.

The girl would sit for hours beside him, sometimes reading childish stories to him, which she felt certain, in her own mind, would help to make him better. Or she would gently pat his weather-beaten face, saying, as she did so, "Poor uncle James! poor dear uncle! Never mind! never mind!"

The dead were tenderly wrapped in hammocks which were heavily loaded. Theirs would be a sailor's grave. Halcott himself read the beautiful words of the English Church service, the few that were now left of the brave crew of the Sea Flower kneeling bareheaded beside the bodies of their late comrades; more than one was weeping.

"We commit their bodies to the deep,
And their souls to Him who gave them."

Their shipmates just patted the hammocks, before they let them slide, in a way that was very pathetic; then down, one by one, over the cliff they dropped—

"To lie where pearls lie deep."

When Halcott returned one day from the cliff-top, some time after this sad funeral, there was a shade of greater uneasiness than usual on his face.

James was quick to note it.

“They are coming again?” he said quietly.

“You have guessed aright,” said Halcott. “And they are using the same tactics—coming up under cover of brushwood. There is no Fitz now to fire the heap, and our strength is terribly reduced.”

“Be of good cheer, Halcott—be of good cheer; it is God Himself who giveth the victory. But death cometh sooner or later to all.”

“Amen!” said Halcott; “and oh, James, I for one am almost tired of life.”

“Say not so, brother, say not so, ’tis sinful.”

How terrible is war, reader! The accounts that we read of this scourge, in papers or in books, seldom show it up in its true colours. We are told only of its glory—its tinsel show of glory. But that glory is but the gilded shell that hides the hideous kernel, consisting of sorrow, misery, murder, and rapine.

I am not poor Tandy’s judge, and shall not pretend to say whether the resolve he now made was right or wrong.

Just under the saloon was the magazine, and when the worst should come to the worst, and the savage foe burst through the outer barrier with yells and howls of victory, his child, he determined, should not be torn from his grasp, to suffer cruelty unspeakable at the hands of the foe. He would fire the magazine!

“My friends,” said Halcott, a morning or two after this, as he stood talking to his garrison of five, “the enemy is advancing in even greater force than on any previous occasion. I have but little more to say to you. Let us bid each other ‘good-bye’ just before the fight begins, and die with our swords in our hands—

“‘Like true-born British sailors.’”

The time came at last—and the enemy too.

It was one of the brightest days the Crusoes had ever witnessed on this Isle of Misfortune. Even from the cliff-top, or over the barricade, the distant islands could be seen, like emeralds afloat between sea and sky. The volcanic mountain—so clear was the air—appeared almost within gunshot of the camp.

For hours and hours there had not been a sound heard anywhere. The monster pile of brushwood, behind which those dusky, fiendish warriors hid, had been advanced to within seventy yards of the palisade, but all was silence there. Even the sea-birds had ceased their screaming. All nature was ominously hushed; the bare and blackened country around the camp lay sweltering in the noon-day heat; and the ensign on Observatory Hill had drooped, till it appeared only as a thin, red line against the upper end of the pole.

No one spoke save in a whisper.

But with a little more excitement than usual, Halcott advanced to the place where Tandy stood, rifle in hand, his pistols in his belt, waiting like the others for the inevitable.

Halcott did not even speak. He simply took his friend by the arm and pointed westward.

A cloud lay like a dark pall on the very summit of Fire Hill.

Tandy knew the meaning of it. He only shook his head, however. “Too late, I fear!” That was all he said. But hardly had the last word been spoken, before a stranger thing than that cloud on the mountain attracted attention.

A huge, smooth, house-high billow was seen gradually approaching the bay from seaward. It gathered strength, and speed too, as it came onwards, and finally it broke on the beach in one long line of curling foam, and with a sound as loud as distant thunder.

Wave after wave succeeded it, though they were neither so high nor so swift; then silence once more prevailed, and the sea was as quiet and still as before.

Not for long though.

For a few minutes’ time every man’s senses seemed to reel, and a giddy, sickly feeling passed through the brain, such as only those who have visited countries like Japan or South America have ever experienced.

It was the first shock of an earthquake!

Peal after peal of strange subterranean thunder accompanied it, and a kind of hot wave spread suddenly over the island, like a breeze blowing over a burning prairie.

The effect of these manifestations on the enemy was marvellous. For a few moments they were dumb and silent with terror; then yells of fear arose, and they fled indiscriminately away towards the sea beach, throwing away bows, arrows, and spears, and even their scanty articles of apparel, in their headlong, hurried flight.

“The fire-fiend! He comes! he comes!”

That was their cry now, and their only cry.

In a marvellously short time they were seen swarming on the beach, and in all haste dragging down and launching their great war-canoes; and in less than twenty minutes’ time they were, to the immense relief of the little garrison, afloat on the now heaving bosom of the deep.

When Halcott ran on board the hulk, I do not think he knew quite what he was doing or saying. He seemed beside himself with joy.

“Oh, live, brother James! live! Do not die and leave us now that our safety is assured. The savages have fled, they will never return. Live, brother, live?”

“Oh, live, poor uncle! live!” cried Nelda; “live for my sake, dear uncle!”

Tandy was the next to rush on board, and his first act was to catch his little daughter up, cover her face with kisses, and press her to his breast.

“And now, Halcott,” he cried at last, “there is just one more shot in the big gun. Come, let us drag her to the cliff. If I can sink but a single boat, I shall be satisfied.”

But the dying man lifted his hand, and Halcott and Tandy both drew near.

“No, brothers, no,” he murmured. “Fire not the gun—the battle is the Lord’s. He alone—hath given us the victory.”

And the men knelt there, with bent heads, as if ashamed of the deed they had been about to commit.

Ah! but the tears were flowing fast from their eyes. Poor James was dead!

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Chapter Twelve.

Leaves from First Mate Tandy's Log.

Like all the other dead, poor James Malone received the honours of a sailor's burial on the very next day.

But, unlike the rest, he was not slipped over the cliff.

On the contrary, Halcott determined he should rest far out in the blue, lone sea, where nothing might disturb his rest until "the crack of doom." The last words were those of Halcott himself.

So the lightest boat was dragged all the way to the beach, and there, with the body sewn up in a hammock and covered with a red flag, it was launched.

There had been no return of the earthquake, but all the previous night flames and smoke had issued from Fire Hill, and no one doubted that an eruption on a vast scale was imminent. There was, however, no danger in leaving little Nelda and her brother alone in the hulk with Janeira and Chips—who was already able to walk—for the savages were far away, indeed, by this time. So Tandy accompanied Halcott, and with them went the others—only five in all.

Not a word was spoken until the boat was beyond the bay and in very deep water.

"Way enough!" cried Halcott. "In oars!"

All sat there with bent, uncovered heads while the captain read the service; but his voice was choked with emotion, and when the shotted hammock took the water with a melancholy boom and disappeared, he closed the book. He could say no more for a time.

As a rule seafarers are not orators, though what they do say is generally to the point.

Halcott sat for fully a minute like one in a trance, gazing silently and reverently at the spot where the body had disappeared.

The bubbles had soon ceased to rise, and there was nothing now to mark the sailor's cemetery. Though—

“He was the loved of all,
Yet none on his low grave might weep.”

“My friends,” said Halcott, “there in peace rests the body of my dearest friend, my adopted brother. I never had a brother save him. How much I loved him none can ever know. The world and the ship will be a deal more lonesome to me now that James has gone. For many and many a long year we sailed the seas together, and weathered many a gale and storm. Sound, sound may he sleep, while wind and waves shall sing his dirge. Unselfish was he to the end, and every inch a sailor. His last word was ‘Victory;’ and well may we now add, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’

“Out oars, men! Give way with a will!”

They reached the shore in safety, and drew up the boat high and dry. But none too soon; for, before they got on board once more, a terrible thunderstorm had come on, with lightning more vivid than any one on the hulk ever remembered.

I have Tandy's log before me as I write, and I do not think I can do better than make a few extracts therefrom.

“The lost Barque, Sea Flower.—On the rocks, in Treachery Bay, Isle of Misfortune, latitude —, longitude —, August 5, 18—. Buried poor James Malone to-day. Halcott terribly cut up. Doesn't seem to be the same man. But we all miss James; he was so gentle, so kind, and true. We miss Fitz also. His merry ways and laughing face made him a favourite with us all. And honest Tom Wilson; we shall never again hear his sweet music. Thank Heaven that, though the thunder is now rolling, the lightning flashing, and a rain that looks like mud falling, I have my darlings both beside me! In the darkest hours I have ever spent in life, I've always had something to comfort me. Yes, God is good.

“The sun is setting. I never saw a sun look so lurid and red before. The thunder continues, but the rain has ceased. There are frequent smart shocks of earthquake.

“August 8.—Two awful days and nights have passed, and still we are all alive. The days have been days of darkness; the ashes and scoriae have been falling constantly, and now lie an inch at least in depth upon our deck. Nights lit up by the flames that spout cloud-

high from the volcano, carrying with them rocks and stones and steam. There is a terribly mephitic vapour over everything. How long this may last Heaven alone can tell.”

“August 12.—Four more fearful days. The eruption continues with unabated horror—the thunderings, the lightnings, the showers of stones and ashes, and the rolling clouds of dust through which, even at midday, the sun glares like a ball of crimson fire.

“Poor Chips is dead; we buried him yesterday. More of us are ill. Halcott himself is depressed, and my wee Nelda cares for nothing save lying languidly on the sofa all day long. The thought that she may die haunts me night and day.”

“August 13.—Almost at the last of our provisions. The biscuit is finished; the very dust has been scraped up and eaten. Not more than a score of tins of soupe en bouille left in the ship, and about one gallon of rum. Served out to-day what remained of the salmon, and gave double allowance of rum to-night.

“Not a green thing seems to be left on the island.”

“August 15.—Feel languid and weary. Went to prayers to-day. All our hopes must now centre in the life to come; we have none for this.”

“August 18.—The strange crane lies trussed in a corner of the saloon. We force him to eat a little, and Bob sits near him and licks his face.

“To-day Bob went off by himself. He was away for hours, and we thought we should never see him again; but in the afternoon he returned, driving before him five little black pigs. Thin and miserable are they, but a godsend nevertheless.

“Lava pouring down the hill-side all night long, shimmering green, red, and orange through the sulphurous haze.”

“August 20.—Men more cheerful to-day. The clouds have cleared away, and we can see the sea, and the sun is less red.

“Halcott and I climbed Observatory Hill. What a scene! The once beautiful island is burnt as it were to a cinder. Trees are scorched; all, all is dead. We could not bear to look at it. But we cut down the flag-pole, and brought away the ensign. They are useless now.

“Who will be the next to die? ‘O Father,’ I cry in my agony, ‘spare my life while my little one lives, that I may minister to her till the last! Then take my boy and me!’”

“August 22.—Four bells in the middle-watch. I awoke an hour ago with a start. Halcott, too, had rushed into the saloon.

“‘Did you hear it?’ he cried wildly.

“Yes, I had heard.

“The unusual sound awoke us all—the sound of a ship blowing off steam in the bay yonder, far beneath us. The sound of anchor chains rattling out, the sound of voices—the voices of brave British sailors!

“‘Halcott! Halcott!’ I cried; ‘we are saved!’

“I’m sure I have been weeping. Nelda is on my knee at this moment while I write, her cheek pressed close to mine. Oh, how good God has been to me! We have fired off guns, and raised our voices in a feeble cheer, and the people have replied.

“It is no dream then.

“Surely I am not mad!

“Oh, will the morning never come? and will the sun never shine again? I—”

The log breaks off abruptly just here, and all that I have further to say was gleaned from Halcott and Tandy themselves.

The steamer, then, that had arrived so opportunely to save the few unhappy survivors of the lost Sea Flower was the trader Borneo. The very first to welcome them when they went on board at early dawn was honest Weathereye himself. He had a hand for Halcott and a hand for Tandy—a heart for both.

“God bless you!” he hastened to say. “Ah! do not tell me your sad story now—no, never a bit of it. The Dun Avon brought your letters, and I could not rest till I came out.

“But run below, Halcott; some one else wants to welcome you. You’ll be surprised—”

Halcott never knew rightly whether he had descended to the saloon on wings or on his feet, or whether he had jumped right down through the skylight.

A minute afterwards, however, Doris was weeping in his arms—ah! such glad, glad tears—and Doris’s mother arose from a couch with a happy smile.

That same day, after taking all that was valuable out of the dear old Sea Flower—and that all included a fortune in gold—the hull was set on fire.

In the evening the steamer left the island, but not before Tandy and Halcott had taken the bearings of the hidden mine.

In that cave lies an immense fortune for some one some day.

Some hard work and digging will be required, however, before the fortune is finally brought to bank, and those who go to seek it must go fully prepared to fight as fiendish a tribe of man-eating savages as ever yet has been faced in the South Pacific Ocean.

Ideal voyages by sea are still to be made, although not in torpedo-boats or in Majesties, and this was one of them.

The Crusoes of the Island of Gold, once fairly afloat on the briny ocean, soon waxed healthy and strong again, and all hands on board the saucy Borneo were just as happy as happy could be.

I must admit, however, that “saucy Borneo” is simply a figure of speech. There wasn’t, really, a trace of sauciness about the dear, old rumble-tumble of a ship. The skipper was about as rough as they make them; so was his mate—and so were all hands, for that matter. But if they were rough, they were right, and just as Dibdin describes a seaman:—

“Though careless and headstrong if danger should press,
And ranked ’mongst the free list of rovers,
He’ll melt into tears at a tale of distress,
And prove the most constant of lovers.

“To rancour unknown, to no passion a slave,
Nor unmanly, nor mean, nor a railer,
He’s gentle as mercy, as fortitude brave—
And this is a true British sailor.”

As before, Bob and Nelda were the pets of the ship; and ’Rallie, who now did the drollest antics any bird ever attempted, kept all hands laughing from binnacle to bowsprit.

Happiness is catching. I gather this from the fact that, after watching Halcott and Doris walking arm-in-arm up and down the quarterdeck one lovely day, with pleasure and love beaming in the eyes of each, bold Captain Weathereye said to himself,—

“How jolly they look! He makes her happy, and she makes him. Blame me if I don’t make somebody happy myself as soon’s I get to port. I’m not so old yet, and neither is Miss Scragley. Ahem!”

Well, the reader can guess how it turned out. Many years have passed since the voyage home of the old Borneo. Doris is Mrs Halcott now. A pleasant home they have, and Tandy often visits there.

Tandy built himself a beautiful house on the very spot where the humble cottage stood; but it isn’t called Hangman’s Hall. Bob is there, and Murrams is there—good Mrs Farrow kept him while our heroes were at sea; and little Nelda—not so little now—is there, too; while, high and dry, in the gibbet-tree still roosts the droll old Admiral.

Ransey Tansey is a man now, and walks his own quarterdeck; but I did hear, only yesterday, that he will soon marry Eedie. There is no Miss Scragley any longer, however. But there is a Mrs Weathereye. Ahem!

Yes; and Weathereye and Tandy are almost inseparables, and many a yarn they spin together over their pipes.

As the canal yonder, with the sunlight glinting on its breast, goes calmly meandering through the woods and meadows green, so gently pass their lives along.

Good-bye, lads! Please, may I come again?

The End

Freeeditorial 