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THE HOT SWAMP

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# R. M. Ballantyne

## The Hot Swamp

### Chapter One

#### A Romance of Old Albion Opens with Leave-Taking

Nearly two thousand seven hundred years ago—or somewhere about eight hundred years B.C.—there dwelt a Phoenician sea-captain in one of the eastern sea-ports of Greece—known at that period, or soon after, as Hellas.

This captain was solid, square, bronzed, bluff, and resolute, as all sea-captains are—or ought to be—whether ancient or modern. He owned, as well as commanded, one of those curious vessels with one mast and a mighty square-sail, fifty oars or so, double-banked, a dragon's tail in the stern and a horse's head at the prow, in which the Phoenicians of old and other mariners were wont to drive an extensive and lucrative trade in the Mediterranean; sometimes pushing their adventurous keels beyond the Pillars of Hercules, visiting the distant Cassiterides or Tin Isles, and Albion, and even penetrating northward into the Baltic, in search of tin, amber, gold, and what not.

One morning this captain, whose name was Arkal, sauntered up from the harbour to his hut, which stood on a conspicuous eminence overlooking the bay. His hands were not thrust into his pockets, because he had no pockets to put them into—the simple tunic of the period being destitute of such appendages. Indeed, the coarse linen tunic referred to constituted the chief part of his costume, the only other portions being a pair of rude shoes on his feet, a red fez or tarbouche on his bushy brown locks, and yards of something wound round his lower limbs to protect them from thorns on shore, as well as from the rasping of cordage and cargo at sea.

At the door of his hut stood his pretty little Greek wife, with a solid, square, bluff, and resolute, but not yet bronzed, baby in her arms.

“Well, Penelope, I'm off,” said the captain. At least he used words to that effect, as he enveloped wife and baby in a huge embrace.

Of course he spoke in a dialect of ancient Greek, of which we render a free translation.

The leave-taking was of the briefest, for just then a loud halloo from his mate, or second in command, apprised the captain that all was ready to set sail. But neither Penelope nor her husband were anxious souls or addicted to the melting mood. The square baby was rather more given to such conditions. In emulation of the mate it set up a sudden howl which sent its father away laughing to the harbour.

“No sign of the young men,” remarked the mate, as his superior came within hail.

“It is ever the way with these half-fledged boys who think themselves men while their faces are yet hairless,” growled the captain, casting a glance at his unfailing chronometer, the rising sun. “They have no more regard for the movements of that ball of fire than if it was set in the sky merely to shine and keep them warm, and had no reference whatever to time. If this youth from Albion does not appear soon, I shall set sail without him, prince though he be, and leave him to try his hand at swimming to the Cassiterides. His comrade and friend, Dromas, assured me they would not keep us waiting; but he is no better than the rest of them—a shouting, singing, smooth-faced, six-foot set they are, who think they inherit the combined wisdom of all their grandfathers but none of their weaknesses; reckless fear-nothings, fit only for war and the Olympic games!”

“Nevertheless, we could not do well without them,” returned the mate, glancing significantly at the ship's crew, a large proportion of which was composed of these same stalwart fear-nothings

of whom his leader spoke so contemptuously; “at least they would make a fine show at these games, and our ventures at sea would not prosper so well if we had not such to help us.”

“True, true, and I would not speak slightingly of them, but they do try one’s patience; here is the wind failing, and we all ready to hoist sail,” returned the captain with another growl, a glance at the sky, and a frown at his vessel, everything about which betokened readiness for instant departure. The crew—partly composed of slaves—were seated at the oars; the fighting men and seamen were all on board arranging their shields round the vessel’s sides, and the great sail was cast loose ready to hoist as soon as the mouth of the harbour should be cleared.

Just then a band of young men issued from the town, and the captain’s good humour was restored as they hurried towards him. They seemed to be much excited, and talked in loud tones as they advanced, their manners and costumes indicating that they belonged to the upper ranks of society.

One of the band, a fair youth, towered, like Saul, head and shoulders above his fellows. Another, of dark complexion, handsome features, and elegant, active frame, hurried forward to salute the captain.

“I fear we have kept you waiting,” he said with a pleasant expression that disarmed reproof.

“I will not deny that, Dromas,” answered the captain, “but you have not detained me long. Nevertheless, I was on the point of sailing without your friend, for the winds and waves respect no one.”

“But you are neither a wind nor a wave,” remarked the youth.

“True, but I am the humble friend of both,” retorted the captain, “and am bound to accommodate myself to them. I suppose this is the prince you spoke of,” he added, turning to the towering youth already referred to, with the air of a man who had as little—or as much—regard for a prince as a peasant.

“Yes, Captain Arkal, this is Prince Bladud. Let me present him to you.”

As the prince and the seaman joined hands the latter looked up from an altitude of five feet six and squared his broad shoulders with the air of a man ready to defy all creation, and anxious rather than otherwise to do so. The prince, on the other hand, looked down from an eminence of six feet seven, and bent his head with a modest grace and a genial smile that indicated a desire to be on good terms, if possible, with the world at large.

Although almost equal as to physical strength, the inequality of the two men in height rendered their experience in those rude warlike times very dissimilar, for, whereas the sailor was often compelled to give proof of his strength to tall unbelievers, the prince very seldom had occasion to do so. Hence, partly, their difference in manner, the one being somewhat pugnacious and the other conciliatory, while both were in reality good-natured, peace-loving men.

No two men, however, could have been more unlike in outward aspect. The prince was, if we may say so, built on the Gothic model—fair, blue-eyed, bulky of limb, huge, muscular, massive, with a soft beard and moustache—for he had not yet seen twenty-four summers—and hair that fell like rippling gold on his shoulders. Captain Arkal, on the contrary, was dark, with a thick reddish beard, luxuriant brown hair, piercing black eyes, and limbs that were hardened as well as darkened by thirty years of constant exposure to elemental and other warfare.

“I hope that I may be of some use to you,” said the prince, “though I profess not to know more of seamanship than I acquired during my voyage hither, and as that voyage occurred six years ago, it may be that I have lost the little I had learned. But if pirates should assail us, perhaps I may do you some service.”

“Little fear I have of that,” returned the captain with an approving nod. “Now, bid your comrades farewell and get on board, for the wind is failing fast, and it behoves us to get well forward on our voyage before night.”

It was evident that the leave-taking which ensued was not merely formal, for the youths from whom Bladud was parting had been his companions in study for six years, as well as his competitors in all the manly games of the period, and as he excelled them all in most things—especially in athletics—some looked up to the young prince from Albion as a sort of demi-god, while others to whom he had been helpful in many ways regarded him with the warmest affection.

“Come here aside with me; I must have a few last words with you alone,” said Bladud, taking young Dromas by the arm and leading him aside.

The prince’s other friends made no objection to this evidence of preference, for Dromas had shared the same apartment with him while in Athens, and engaged in similar studies with Bladud for several years; had travelled with him in the East, and sailed over the sea in his company, even as far as Egypt, besides having been second to him in most of the games practised by the young men. Indeed, at the high jump he equalled, and at the short race had even excelled him.

“Dromas,” said the prince impressively— “Come, now, my old friend and comrade,” interrupted the Greek youth lightly, “don’t put on such a long face. I foresee that you are about to give me a lecture, and I don’t want the tone of remonstrance to be the last that I shall hear. I know that I’m a wild, good-for-nothing fellow, and can guess all you would say to me. Let us rather talk of your speedy return to Hellas, for, to tell you the truth, I feel as if the loss of you would leave me like a poor man who has been crippled in the wars. I shall be a mere shadow till you return.”

There was a slight tremor in the voice, which showed that much of the gaiety of the young man was forced.

“Nay, I have no mind to give you a lecture,” returned Bladud, “I only ask you to grant me two requests.”

“Granted, before mentioned, for you have ever been a reasonable creature, Bladud, and I trust you to retain your character on the present occasion.”

“Well, then, my first request is that you will often remember the many talks that you and I have had about the gods, and the future life, and the perplexing conditions in which we now live.”

“Remember them,” exclaimed Dromas with animation, “my difficulty would be to forget them! The questions which you have propounded and attempted to answer—for I do not admit that you have been quite successful in the attempt—have started up and rung in my ears at all kinds of unseasonable times. They haunt me often in my dreams—though, to say truth, I dream but little, save when good fellowship has led me to run supper into breakfast—they worry me during my studies, which, you know, are frequent though not prolonged; they come between me and the worthy rhapsodist when he is in the middle of the most interesting—or least wearisome—passage of the poem, and they even intrude on me at the games. The very last race I ran was lost, only by a few inches, because our recent talk on the future of cats caused a touch of internal laughter which checked my pace at the most critical moment. You may rest assured that I cannot avoid granting your first request. What is your second?”

“That you promise to visit me in my home in Albion. You know that it will be impossible for me ever again to re-visit these shores, where I have been so happy. My father, if he forgives my running away from him, will expect me to help him in the management of his affairs. But you have nothing particular to detain you here—”

“You forget—the old woman,” interrupted Dromas gravely.

“What old woman?” asked Bladud in surprise.

“My mother!” returned his friend.

The prince looked a little confused and hastened to apologise. Dromas’ mother was one of those unfortunate people who existed in the olden time as well as in modern days, though perhaps not so numerously. She was a confirmed invalid, who rarely quitted her house, and was seldom seen by any one save her most intimate friends, so that she was apt to be forgotten—out of sight out of mind, then as now.

“Forgive me, Dromas—,” began Bladud, but his friend interrupted him.

“I cannot forgive when I have nothing to forgive! Say no more about that. But, now I come to consider of it, I grant your second request conditionally. If my mother agrees to accompany me to Albion, you may expect to see me some day or other—perhaps a year or two hence. You see, since my father and brother were slain in the last fight with our neighbours, I am the only one left to comfort her, so I cannot forsake her.”

“Then this will be our final parting,” returned Bladud, sadly, “for your mother will never consent to leave home.”

“I don’t know that,” returned Dromas with a laugh. “The dear old soul is intensely adventurous, like myself, and I do believe would venture on a voyage to the Cassiterides, if the fancy were strong upon her. You have no idea how powerfully I can work upon her feelings. I won’t say that I can make much impression on her intellect. Indeed, I have reason to know that she does not believe in intellect except as an unavoidable doorway leading into the feelings. The fact is, I tried her the other day with the future of cats, and do you know, instead of treating that subject with the gravity it merits, she laughed in my face and called me names—not exactly bad names, such as the gods might object to—but names that were not creditable to the intelligence of her first-born. Now,” continued Dromas with increasing gravity, “when I paint to her the beauty of your native land; the splendour of your father’s court; the kindness of your mother, and the exceeding beauty of your sister—fair like yourself, blue-eyed, tall—you said she was tall, I think?”

“Yes—rather tall.”

“Of course not *quite* so tall as yourself, say six feet or so, with a slight, feminine beard—no? you shake your head; well, smooth-faced and rosy, immense breadth of shoulders—ah! I have often pictured to myself that sister of yours—”

“Hilloa!” shouted Captain Arkal in a nautical tone that might almost have been styled modern British in its character.

It was an opportune interruption, for Dromas had been running on with his jesting remarks for the sole purpose of crushing down the feelings that almost unmanned him.

With few but fervently uttered words the final farewells were at last spoken. The oars were dipped; the vessel shot from the land, swept out upon the blue waves of the Aegean, the sail was hoisted, and thus began the long voyage to the almost unknown islands of the far North-West.

## Chapter Two

### Temporary Delay through Elements and Pirates

But it is not our purpose to inflict the entire log of that voyage on our reader, adventurous though the voyage was. Matter of much greater importance claims our regard. Still it would be unjust to our voyagers to pass it over in absolute silence.

At the very commencement of it, there occurred one of those incidents to which all voyagers are more or less subject. A gale arose the very evening of the day on which they left port, which all but swamped the little vessel, and the violence of the wind was so great that their huge sail was split from top to bottom. In spite of the darkness and the confusion that ensued, Captain Arkal, by his prompt action and skilful management, saved the vessel from immediate destruction. Fortunately the gale did not last long, and, during the calm that followed, the rent was repaired and the sail re-set.

Then occurred another incident that threatened to cut short the voyage even more disastrously than by swamping.

The sea over which they steered swarmed with pirates at the time we write of, as it continued to swarm during many centuries after. Merchantmen, fully aware of the fact, were in those days also men of war. They went forth on their voyages fully armed with sword, javelin, and shield, as well as with the simple artillery of the period—bows and arrows, slings and stones.

On the afternoon of the day that followed the gale, the vessel—which her captain and owner had named the *Penelope* in honour of his wife—was running before a light breeze, along the coast of one of the islands with which that sea is studded.

Bladud and some of the crew were listening at the time to an account given by a small seaman named Maikar, of a recent adventure on the sea, when a galley about as large as their own was seen to shoot suddenly from the mouth of a cavern in the cliffs in which it had lain concealed. It was double-banked and full of armed men, and was rowed in such a way as to cut in advance of the *Penelope*. The vigour with which the oars were plied, and the rapidity with which the sail was run up, left no doubt as to the nature of the craft or the intentions of those who manned it.

“The rascals!” growled Arkal with a dark frown, “I more than half expected to find them here.”

“Pirates, I suppose?” said Bladud.

“Ay—and not much chance of escaping them. Give another haul on the sail-rope, mate, and pull, men, pull, if you would save your liberty—for these brutes have no mercy.”

The sail was tightened up a few inches, and the vessel was put more directly before the wind. The way in which the slaves bent to the oars showed that the poor fellows fully understood the situation.

For a few minutes Captain Arkal watched the result in stern silence. Then, with an unwonted look and tone of bitterness, he said in a low voice—

“No—I thought as much. She sails faster than we do. Now, friend Bladud, you shall presently have a chance of proving whether your royal blood is better than that of other men.”

To this remark the prince made no other reply than by a good-natured smile as he took up the bronze helmet which lay beside his sword on the thwart and placed it on his head.

Captain Arkal regarded him with a sort of grim satisfaction as he followed up the action by buckling on his sword.

The sword in question was noteworthy. It was a single-handed weapon of iron, made in Egypt, to suit the size and strength of its owner, and was large enough to have served as a two-handed sword for most men.

“You can throw a javelin, no doubt?” asked the captain, as he watched the young man’s leisurely preparations for the expected combat.

“Yes, I have practised throwing the spear a good deal—both in peace and war.”

“Good. I have got one here that will suit you. It belonged to my grandfather, who was a stout man, and made powerful play with it during a neighbouring tribe’s raid—when I was a baby—to the discomfort, I have been told, and surprise of his foes. I always keep it by me for luck, and have myself used it on occasion, though I prefer a lighter one for ordinary use. Here it is—a pretty weapon,” he continued, drawing a javelin of gigantic proportions from under the gunwale and handing it to Bladud. “But we must proceed with caution in this matter. Take off your helmet at present, and try to look frightened if you can.”

“I fear me that will be difficult, captain.”

“Not in the least. Look here, nothing is easier when you get used to it.”

As he spoke Arkal caused his stern visage to relax into a look of such amiable sheepishness that Bladud could not repress a sudden laugh which recalled and intensified the captain’s fierce expression instantly.

“Learn to subdue yourself, young man,” he muttered sternly. “If these pirates hear laughter, do you think they can be made to believe we are afraid of them?”

“Forgive me, captain; if you had seen your own face, you would have joined in the laugh. I will be more careful. But how do you mean to proceed, and what do you wish me to do?”

Captain Arkal, who was restored to good-humour by this compliment to his power of expression, as well as by the modesty with which the prince received his rebuke, explained his intentions—in low, earnest tones, however, for they were by that time drawing near to the piratical craft.

Having got well ahead of the *Penelope*, it had backed its sail and lay still, awaiting her coming up.

“Creep to the bow, Bladud, with your helmet off, and show as little of your bulk as may be. Show only your head above the bulwarks, and look as miserable as I did just now—more so if you can. Take your sword, javelin, and shield with you. I need say no more to a man of war. Use them when you see your opportunity.”

Bladud received his orders in silence, and obeyed them with that unquestioning and unhesitating promptitude which is one of the surest evidences of fitness to command. Meanwhile the mate, who was accustomed to his captain’s habits, and needed no instructions, had caused the sailors to lay their shields and swords out of sight at their feet, so that they might approach the pirates in the character of simple traders who were completely cowed by the appearance of the foe. To increase this aspect of fear, the sail was lowered as they drew near, and the oars were used to complete the distance that yet intervened between the two vessels.

This humble and submissive approach did not, however, throw the pirates quite off their guard. They stood to their arms and prepared to spring on board their victim when close enough. As the pirate vessel lay motionless on the water she presented her broadside to the trader. The captain took care to steer so that this relative position should be maintained. The pirate chief, a huge man in rude armour, with a breast-plate of thick bull-hide and a shield of the same on his left arm, gave orders to pull the oars on one side of his vessel so that the two might be brought alongside.

They were about fifty yards apart at the moment. Before the order could be carried into effect, however, Arkal uttered a low hiss. Instantly the double banks of oars bent almost to the breaking point, and the *Penelope* leaped forward like a sentient creature. Each man seized sword and shield and sprang up, and Bladud, forgetting both helmet and shield in the hurry of the moment, poised the mighty javelin which had so astonished its owner’s enemies in days gone by, and in another moment hurled it shrieking through the air. It flew straight as a thunderbolt at the pirate chief; pierced through shield and breastplate, and came out at his back, sending him headlong into the arms of his horrified crew.

The whole incident was so sudden that the pirates had scarcely time to recover from their surprise when the bow of the *Penelope* crashed into the side of their vessel and stove it in, for the trader, like some of the war-vessels of the period, was provided with a ram for this very purpose.

As the *Penelope* recoiled from the shock, a yell of rage burst from the pirates, and a volley of javelins and stones followed, but, owing to the confusion resulting from the shock, these were ill-directed, and such of them as found their mark were caught on the shields. Before another discharge could be made, the pirate vessel heeled over and sank, leaving her crew of miscreants struggling in the sea. Some of them—being, strange to say, unable to swim—were drowned. Others were killed in the water, while a few, taking their swords in their teeth, swam to the trader and made desperate attempts to climb on board. Of course they failed, and in a few minutes nothing remained of the pirate vessel to tell of the tragedy that had been enacted, except an oar or two and a few spars left floating on the sea.

“Would that all the sea-robbers in these parts could be as easily and thoroughly disposed of,” remarked the captain, as he gave orders to re-hoist the sail. “Ho! Bladud, my worthy prince, come aft here. What detains you?”

But Bladud did not answer to the call. A stone from the enemy had fallen on his defenceless head and knocked him down insensible.

Four of the men now raised him up. As they did so, one of the men—the small seaman, Maikar—was found underneath him in a state of semi-consciousness. While they carried Bladud aft, the little sailor began to gasp and sneeze.

“Not killed, I see,” remarked the mate, looking into his face with some anxiety.

“No, not quite,” sighed Maikar, drawing a long breath, and raising himself on one elbow, with a slightly dazed look, “but I never was so nearly burst in all my life. If an ox had fallen on me he could not have squeezed me flatter. Do, two of you, squeeze me the other way, to open me out a little; there’s no room in me left to breathe—scarcely room to think.”

“Oh! your battles are not yet over, I see,” said the mate, going off to the stern of the vessel, where he found Bladud just recovering consciousness and smiling at the remarks of the captain, who busied himself in stanching the wound, just over his frontal bone, from which blood was flowing freely.

“H’m! this comes of sheer recklessness. I told you to take off your helmet, but I did not tell you to keep it off. Man, you launched that javelin well!—better than I could have done it myself. Indeed, I doubt if my old grandfather could have done it with such telling effect—straight through and through. I saw full a hand-breadth come out at the villain’s back. What say you, mate? Little Maikar wounded?”

“No, not wounded, but nearly burst, as he says himself; and no wonder, for Bladud fell upon him.”

“Didn’t I tell you, mate,” said the captain, looking up with a grin, “that nothing will kill little Maikar? Go to, man, you pretend to be a judge of men; yet you grumbled at me for engaging him as one of our crew. Do you feel better now, prince?”

“Ay, greatly better, thank you,” replied Bladud, putting his hand gently on the bandages with which the captain had skilfully bound his head.

“That is well. I think, now, that food will do you service. What say you?”

“Nay, with your leave, I prefer sleep,” said the prince, stretching himself out on the deck. “A little rest will suffice, for my head is noted for its thickness, and my brain for its solidity—at least so my good father was wont to say; and I’ve always had great respect for his opinion.”

“Ah, save when it ran counter to your own,” suggested Arkal; “and especially that time when you ran away from home and came out here in the long ship of my trading friend.”

“I have regretted that many a time since then, and I am now returning home to offer submission.”

“D’you think that he’ll forgive you?”

“I am sure he will, for he is a kind man; and I know he loves me, though he has never said so.”

“I should like to know that father of yours. I like your description of him—so stern of face, yet so kind of heart, and with such an unchangeable will when he sees what is right. But what *is* right, and what is wrong?”

“Ay—what is—who can tell? Some people believe that the gods make their will known to man through the Delphic Oracle.”

“Boh!” exclaimed the captain with a look of supreme contempt.

The turn of thought silenced both speakers for a time; and when Captain Arkal turned to resume the conversation, he found that his friend was sound asleep.

## Chapter Three

### On the Voyage

Weather has always been, and, we suppose, always will be, capricious. Its uncertainty of character—in the Levant, as in the Atlantic, in days of old as now, was always the same—smiling to-day; frowning to-morrow; playful as a lamb one day; raging like a lion the next.

After the rough handling experienced by the *Penelope* at the beginning of her voyage, rude Boreas kindly retired, and spicy breezes from Africa rippled the sea with just sufficient force to intensify its heavenly blue, and fill out the great square-sail so that there was no occasion to ply the oars. One dark, starlight but moonless night, a time of quiet talk prevailed from stem to stern of the vessel as the grizzled mariners spun long yarns of their prowess and experiences on the deep, for the benefit of awe-stricken and youthful shipmates whose careers were only commencing.

“You’ve heard, no doubt, of the great sea-serpent?” observed little Maikar, who had speedily recovered from the flattening to which Bladud had subjected him, and was busy enlivening a knot of young fellows in the bow of the ship.

“Of course we have!” cried one; “father used to tell me about it when I was but a small boy. He never saw it himself, though he had been to the Tin Isles and Albion more than once; but he said he had met with men who had spoken with shipmates who had heard of it from men who had seen it only a few days before, and who described it exactly.”

“Ah!” remarked another, “but I have met a man who had seen it himself on his first voyage, when he was quite a youth; and he said it had a bull’s head and horns, with a dreadful long body all over scales, and something like an ass’s tail at the end.”

“Pooh!—nonsense!” exclaimed little Maikar, twirling his thumbs, for smoking had not been introduced into the world at that period—and thumb-twirling would seem to have served the ancient world for leisurely pastime quite as well, if not better—at least we are led to infer so from the fact that Herodotus makes no mention of anything like a vague, mysterious sensation of unsatisfied desire to fill the mouth with smoke in those early ages, which he would certainly have done had the taste for smoke been a natural craving, and thumb-twirling an unsatisfactory occupation. This absolute silence of the “Father of History,” we think, almost proves our point. “Nonsense!” repeated little Maikar. “The youth of the man who told you about the serpent accounts for his wild description, for youth is prone to strange imaginings and—”

“It seems to me,” interrupted a grave man, who twirled his thumbs in that slow, deliberate way in which a contemplative man smokes—“it seems to me that there’s no more truth about the great sea-serpent than there is about the golden fleece. I don’t believe in either of them.”

“Don’t you? Well, all I can say is,” returned the little man, gazing fixedly in the grave comrade’s face, “that I saw the great sea-serpent with my own eyes!”

“No! did you?” exclaimed the group, drawing their heads closer together with looks of expectancy.

“Ay, that did I, mates; but you mustn’t expect wild descriptions about monsters with bulls’ horns and asses’ tails from me. I like truth, and the truth is, that the brute was so far away at the time we saw it, that not a man of us could tell exactly what it was like, and when we tried the description, we were all so different, that we gave it up; but we were all agreed on this point, that it certainly *was* the serpent.”

The listeners seemed rather disappointed at this meagre account and sudden conclusion of what had bidden fair to become a stirring tale of the sea; but Maikar re-aroused their expectations by stating his firm belief that it was all nonsense about there being only one sea-serpent.

“Why, how could there be only one?” he demanded, ceasing to twirl, in order that he might clench his fist and smite his knee with emphasis. “Haven’t you got a grandfather?” he asked, turning suddenly to the grave man.

“Certainly, I’ve got two of them if you come to that,” he answered, taken rather aback by the brusque and apparently irrelevant nature of the question.

“Just so—two of them,” repeated the little man, “and don’t you think it likely that the sea serpent must have had two grandfathers also?”

“Undoubtedly—and two grandmothers as well. Perhaps he’s got them yet,” replied the grave man with a contemplative look over the side, where the rippling sea gleamed with phosphoric brilliancy.

“Exactly so,” continued Maikar in an eager tone, “and of course these also must have had two grandfathers besides a mother each, and it is more than likely that the great sea-serpent himself is the father of a large family.”

“Which implies a wife,” suggested one of the seamen.

“Not necessarily,” objected an elderly seaman, who had once been to the lands lying far to the north of Albion, and had acquired something of that tendency to object to everything at all times which is said to characterise the people of the far North. “Not necessarily,” he repeated, “for the serpent may be a bachelor with no family at all.”

There was a short laugh at this, and an illogical man of the group made some irrelevant observation which led the conversation into a totally different channel, and relegated the great sea-serpent, for the time being, to oblivion!

While the men were thus engaged philosophising in the bow, Bladud and the captain were chatting in subdued voices in the stern.

“It is impossible,” said the latter, in reply to a remark made by the former, “it is impossible for me to visit your father’s court this year, though it would please me much to do so, but my cargo is intended for the south-western Cassiterides. To get round to the river on the banks of which your home stands would oblige me to run far towards the cold regions, into waters which I have not yet visited—though I know them pretty well by hearsay. On another voyage I may accomplish it, but not on this one.”

“I am sorry for that, Arkal, because things that are put off to another time are often put off altogether. But the men of the Tin Isles often visit my father’s town in their boats with copper and tin, and there are tracks through the forest which horses can traverse. Could you not visit us overland? It would not be a journey of many weeks, and your trusty mate might look after the ship in your absence. Besides, the diggers may not have enough of the metal ready to fill your ship, so you may be idle a long time. What say you?”

Captain Arkal frowned, as was his wont when considering a knotty question, and shook his head.

“I doubt if I should be wise to venture so much,” he said; “moreover, we are not yet at the end of our voyage. It is of little use troubling one’s-self about the end of anything while we are only at the beginning.”

“Nevertheless,” rejoined Bladud, “to consider the possible end while yet at the beginning, seems not unreasonable, though, undoubtedly, we may never reach the end. Many a fair ship sets sail and never returns.”

“Ay, that is true, as I know to my cost,” returned the captain, “for this is not my first venture. A long time ago I loaded a ship about the size of this one, and sent her under command of one of my best friends to the Euxine sea for gold. I now think that that old story about Jason and his ship *Argo* sailing in search of the golden fleece was running too strong in my youthful brain. Besides that, of course I had heard the report that there is much gold in that direction, and my hopes were strong,

for you know all the world runs after gold. Anyhow, my ship sailed and I never saw her or my friend again. Since then I have contented myself with copper and tin.”

A slight increase in the wind at that moment caused the captain to dismiss his golden and other memories, and look inquiringly to windward.

“A squall, methinks?” said Bladud.

“No, only a puff,” replied his friend, ordering the steersman to alter the course a little.

The squall or puff was only strong enough to cause the *Penelope* to make a graceful bow to the controlling element and cleave the sparkling water with her prow so swiftly that she left a gleaming wake as of lambent fire astern. It was short-lived, however, and was followed by a calm which obliged little Maikar and his comrades to cease their story-telling and ply their fifty oars. Thus the pace was kept going, though not quite so swiftly as if they were running before a stiff breeze.

“The gods are propitious,” said the captain; “we are going to have a prosperous voyage.”

“How many gods are propitious?” asked Bladud.

“That is a question much too deep for me to answer.”

“But not too deep to think of—is it?”

“Of what use would be my thinking?” returned the captain, lightly. “I leave such matters to the learned.”

“Now, mate,” he added, turning to his subordinate, “I’m going to rest a while. See that you keep an open eye for squalls and pirates. Both are apt to come down on you when you least expect them.”

But neither squalls nor pirates were destined to interfere with the *Penelope* during the greater part of that voyage. Day after day the skies were clear, the sea comparatively smooth, and the winds favourable. Sometimes they put ashore, when the weather became stormy and circumstances were favourable. On such occasions they lighted camp-fires under the trees, the ruddy light of which glowed with a grand effect on the picturesque sailors as they sat, stood, or reclined around them.

At other times they were obliged to keep more in the open sea, and occasionally met with traders like themselves returning home, with whom, of course, they were glad to fraternise for a time and exchange views.

Once only did they meet with anything like a piratical vessel, but as that happened to be late in the evening, they managed, by plying the oars vigorously, and under the shade of night, to escape a second encounter with those robbers of the sea.

Thus, in course of time, the length of the great inland sea was traversed, the southern coast of what is now known as France was reached, and the captain’s prophecy with regard to a prosperous voyage was thus far fulfilled.

## Chapter Four

### The Storm and Wreck

It was near daybreak on the morning of a night of unclouded splendour when the mate of the *Penelope* aroused his chief with the information that appearances to windward betokened a change of some sort in the weather.

“If there is a change at all it must be for the worse,” said Arkal, raising himself on one elbow, rubbing his eyes, yawning, and then casting a glance over the side where the rippling foam told that the wind was increasing. Raising his eyes to the windward horizon, he threw aside the sheepskin blanket that covered him and rose up quickly.

“There is indeed a change coming. Rouse the men and reduce the sail, mate. Bestir you! The squalls are sudden here.”

The orders were obeyed with promptitude. In a few minutes the sail was reduced to its smallest size, and all loose articles about the vessel were made fast.

“You expect a gale, captain?” asked Bladud, who was aroused by the noise of the preparations.

“Ay—or something like one. When a cloud like that rises up on the horizon there is usually something more than a puff coming. You had better keep well under the lee of the bulwarks when it strikes us.”

Bladud’s nautical experience had already taught him what to expect and how to act in the circumstance that threatened. Standing close to the side of the ship, he laid hold of a stanchion and looked out to windward, as most of the crew were by that time doing. Captain Arkal himself took the helm.

The increasing daylight showed them that the bank of cloud was spreading quickly over the sky towards the zenith, while a soft hissing sound told of the approaching wind. Soon the blackness on the sea intensified, and white gleams as of flashing light showed where the waves were torn into foam by the rushing wind.

With a warning to “hold on fast!” the captain turned the vessel’s head so as to meet the blast. So fierce was it that it cut off the crests of the wavelets, blowing the sea almost flat for a time, and producing what is known as a white squall. The sail was kept fluttering until the fury of the onset was over, then the wind was allowed to fill it; the *Penelope* bent down until the sea began to bubble over the lee bulwarks, and in a few moments more she was springing over the fast rising waves like a nautical racehorse.

Every moment the gale increased, obliging the mariners to show but a corner of the sail. Even this had at last to be taken in, and, during the whole of that dismal day and of the black night which followed, the *Penelope* drove helplessly before the wind under a bare pole. Fortunately the gale was favourable, so that they were enabled to lay their course, but it required all the skill and seamanship of Captain Arkal to prevent their being pooped and swamped by the waves that rolled hissing after them as if hungering mightily to swallow them up.

To have the right man in the right place at such times of imminent danger is all-important, not only to the safety of the craft, but to the peace of mind of those whose lives are in jeopardy. All on board the little vessel during that hurricane felt much comforted by the knowledge that their captain was in the right place. Although a “square man,” he had by no means been fitted into a round hole! Knowing this, Prince Bladud felt no anxiety as to the management of the craft, and gave himself up to contemplate the grandeur of the storm, for the howling blast, creaking spars, and bursts of rattling thunder, rendered conversation out of the question.

During a slight lull, however, Bladud asked the question whether the captain knew on what part of the coast they were running.

“Not exactly,” he replied, “we have been running so long in darkness that I can only guess. If it holds on much longer like this I shall have to put her head to wind and wait for more light. It may be that we have been driven too far to the left, and there are islands hereabouts that we must keep well clear of. I would that we had put into some bay for shelter before this befell us. Ho! mate.”

“Ay, captain.”

“See that you put our sharpest pair of eyes in the bow, and let a second pair watch the first, lest the owner of them should go to sleep.”

“Little Maikar is there, sir,” shouted the mate, “and I am watching him myself.”

“We shall do well with Maikar in the bow, for he sees like a weasel, and is trustworthy,” muttered the captain as he glanced uneasily over the stern, where the hungry waves were still hissing tumultuously after them, as if rendered furious by the delayed meal.

At daybreak on the second day the gale moderated a little, and they were enabled once more to show a corner of their sail, and to encourage the hope that the worst was over. But a fresh outburst, of greater fury than before, soon dashed these hopes, and obliged the captain to throw overboard all the spare spars and some of the heaviest part of the cargo. Still the gale increased, and the impatient waves began to lip over the poop occasionally as if unable to refrain from tasting!

“More cargo must go,” muttered the captain, with a gloomy frown. Being resolute, he gave orders to that effect.

Presently the order was given to take soundings. When this was done it was found that they were in twenty fathoms water. On taking another cast, the depth reported was fifteen fathoms.

There were no charts covered with soundings to guide the mariner in those days, but it did not require much experience to convince a seaman that land was probably too near, with such a sudden change from twenty to fifteen fathoms. Arkal was, however, not unprepared for it, and quickly gave orders to stand by to let go the anchors. At that moment the voice of little Maikar was heard shouting, in stentorian tones, “Land ahead!”

The captain replied with a sharp “let go!” and four anchors were promptly dropped from the stern. At the same moment he placed the helm fair amidships, and made it fast with rudder-bands. As the stern of the *Penelope* was formed like the bow, a sharp cut-water was by this means instantly presented to the sea, thus avoiding the necessity and danger incurred by modern ships, in similar circumstances, of anchoring by the head and swinging round.

The hungry waves hissed tumultuously on, but were cleft and passed under the ship disappointed, for there was still enough of water beneath to permit of her tossing to and fro and rising to them like a duck, as she strained and tugged at the anchors.

Just as these operations had been performed, the mists of darkness seemed to lift a little and revealed a wild rocky line of coast, against which the waves were breaking madly.

“Now all hope is over; pray to your gods, men,” said the mate, whose courage was not quite equal to his position.

“There are no gods!” growled the captain bitterly, for he saw that he was now a ruined man, even though he should escape with life.

“There is *one* God,” said Bladud quietly, “and He does all things well.”

As he spoke, the captain, whose eyes had not ceased to look searchingly along the coast, observed something like a bay a short way to the left of the place where they lay.

“It looks like a sandy bay,” he said.

“It *is* a sandy bay,” exclaimed the anxious mate; “let us up anchors and run into it.”

“Have an easy mind and keep your advice till asked for,” returned the captain with a look of scorn. “If we are destined to escape, we *shall* escape without making haste. If we are doomed to die, nothing can save us, and it is more manly to die in a leisurely way than in a hurry. When we can see clearly we shall know better how to act.”

Although this manner of submitting to the inevitable did not quite suit the mate, he felt constrained to repress his impatience, while the coolness of the captain had a quieting effect on some of the men who were inclined to give way to panic. The sight of Bladud—as he sat there leaning on the hilt of his sword with an expression of what appeared to be serene contentment—had also a quieting effect on the men.

When the increasing light showed that the sandy bay was a spot that might possibly be reached in safety, orders were given to cut the cables, loose the rudder-bands and hoist the sail. For a few minutes the vessel ran swiftly towards the bay, but before reaching the shore she struck with violence. The fore part of the *Penelope* stuck fast immovably, and then, at last, the ravenous waves attained their longed-for meal. They burst over the stern, swept the decks, tore up the fastenings, revelled among the tackling and began tumultuously to break up the ship.

“Launch the skiff,” shouted the captain, hastening to lend a hand in the operation.

The men were not slow to obey, and when it touched the water they swarmed into it, so that, being overloaded, it upset and left its occupants struggling in the water. A number of the men who could swim, immediately jumped overboard and tried to right the skiff, but they failed, and, in the effort to do so, broke the rope that held it. Some clung to it. Others turned and swam for the shore.

A good many of the men, however, still remained in the wreck, which was fast breaking up. To these the captain turned.

“Now, men,” he said, “those of you who can swim would do well to take to the water at once, for it is clear that we shall not have a plank left to stand on soon. Come, mate, show them an example.”

The man, though not very courageous, as his pale face betrayed, happened to be a good swimmer, and at once leaped into the sea. He was followed by all who could swim. Those who could not, were encouraged to make the attempt with planks and oars to aid them. As for Bladud, he busied himself like the captain in giving heart to the non-swimmers and showing them how best to use their floats.

The last of the men to leave was little Maikar.

He stood at the bow with his arms crossed on his chest and a look of melancholy interest on his countenance.

“What! not gone yet?” exclaimed the captain, turning to him.

“I cannot swim,” said the man.

“But neither can these,” returned the captain, pointing to the men who had left last.

“My father used to say,” rejoined Maikar, as if murmuring to himself, “that I was born to be drowned, and I’m inclined to think he was right.”

“Surely you are not afraid,” said Arkal.

“Afraid!” exclaimed Maikar, with a sarcastic laugh. “No, captain, but I’m sorry to part with you, because you’ve been a good captain to me.”

“An’ I bear no ill-will to you, Bladud, though you *did* squeeze most of the life out of me once. Farewell, both.”

As he spoke the little man seized an oar, leaped overboard, and, after some trouble in steadying himself and pointing the oar in the right direction, struck out for the shore.

It was a long way off, and often, while this scene was being enacted, was heard the bubbling cry of men whose powers were failing them. Some were carried by currents against a point to the westward and, apparently, dashed against the rocks. Others sank before half the distance had been traversed.

Bladud and the captain looked at each other when Maikar had left them.

“Can you swim?” asked the captain. “Like a duck,” returned the prince, “and I can help you if required.”

“I swim like a fish,” returned the captain, “but it is hard to part from my *Penelope*! She has never failed me till now, and as this venture contains all my goods, I am a ruined man.”

“But your life still remains,” said the prince. “Be of good cheer, captain. A stout man can make his fortune more than once. Come, let us go.”

A loud cry from Maikar at that moment hastened their deliberations.

“Are you going to cumber yourself with your weapons?” asked Arkal, as they were about to spring from the side, observing that his friend took up his sword and shield.

“Ay—that am I. It is not a small matter that will part my good sword and me.”

Both men sprang overboard at the same moment, and made for the spot where little Maikar was still giving vent to bubbling yells and struggling with his oar.

Bladud was soon alongside of him, and, seizing his hair, raised him out of the water.

“Got the cramp,” he shouted.

“Keep still, then, and do what I tell ye,” said the prince, in a tone of stern command.

He caught the poor man under the armpits with both hands, turned on his back and drew him on to his chest. Swimming thus on his back, with Captain Arkal leading so as to keep them in the right direction, the three were ultimately cast, in a rather exhausted condition, on the shore of the little bay.

## Chapter Five

### After the Wreck

It was on the southern shore of what is now known as France that our hero and his comrades in misfortune were cast.

At the time we write of, we need hardly say, the land was nameless. Even her old Roman name of Gaul had not yet been given to her, for Rome itself had not been founded. The fair land was a vast wilderness, known only—and but slightly—to the adventurous mariners of the east, who, with the spirit of Columbus, had pushed their discoveries and trade far beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

Of course the land was a vast solitude, inhabited, sparsely, by a few of those wandering tribes which had been driven westward—by conquest or by that desire for adventure which has characterised the human race, we suppose, ever since Adam and Eve began to explore the regions beyond Eden. Like the great wilderness lying to the north of Canada at the present time, it was also the home of innumerable wild animals which afforded to its uncivilised inhabitants both food and clothing.

Captain Arkal was the only one of the three survivors of the wreck who had seen that coast before or knew anything about it, for, when Bladud had entered the Mediterranean many years before, he had passed too far to the southward to see the northern land.

As they staggered up the beach to a place where the thundering waves sent only their spray, Bladud looked round with some anxiety.

“Surely,” he said, “some of the crew must have escaped. It can hardly be that we three are the only survivors out of so many.”

The party halted and looked back at the seething waves from which they had just escaped.

“It would be foul shame to us,” said the captain, “if we did not try to lend a helping hand to our comrades; but we shall find none of them here. I observed when they started that, in spite of my warning, they made straight for the land, instead of keeping well to windward to avoid being swept round that point of rock to the west. I led you in the right direction, and that is why we alone are here. If any of the others have been saved, they must be on the other side of that point.”

While he was speaking, the captain had hurried into the woods, intending to cross the neck of land which separated them from the bay beyond the point referred to.

Their strength returned as they ran, for their intense desire to render aid to those of their late comrades who might stand in need of it seemed to serve them in the stead of rest.

“Come, quick!” cried little Maikar, whose catlike activity and strength enabled him to outrun his more bulky companions. “We may be too late; and some of them can’t swim—I know.”

They reached the crest of a ridge a few minutes later, and, halting, looked at each other in dismay, for the bay beyond the point was full of great rocks and boulders, among which the waves rushed with such fury that they spouted in jets into the air, and covered the sea with foam.

“No living soul can have landed there,” said the captain, in a tone that showed clearly he had given up all hope.

“But some may have been swept round the next point,” suggested Maikar eagerly, commencing to run forward as he spoke.

Bladud followed at once, and so did the captain, but it was evident that he regarded any further effort as useless.

It proved a longer and more toilsome march than they had expected to pass beyond the second point, and when at last it was reached, there was not a speck at all resembling a human being to be seen on the coast, in all its length of many miles.

“No hope,” murmured Bladud.

“None,” returned the captain.

Little Maikar did not speak, but the expression of his countenance showed that he was of the same opinion.

“Now,” resumed the captain, after a brief silence, “if we would not starve we must go straight back, and see whether any provisions have been washed ashore.”

They did not, however, return to the spot where they had landed, for they knew that the same current which had carried their hapless comrades to the westward must have borne the remains of the wreck in the same direction. Descending, therefore, to the foam-covered bay before referred to, they searched its margin carefully, but for some time found nothing—not even a scrap of wreck.

At last, just as they were about to give up in despair, and turn to some other method of obtaining food, they observed a portion of the wreck that had been driven high up on the beach into a cleft of rock. Running eagerly towards it, they found that it was only a plank.

Bladud and the captain looked at it for a moment or two in silence, and Maikar gave vent to a groan of disappointment.

“Never mind,” said the prince, lifting the plank and laying it on his shoulder, in the quiet thoughtful way that was peculiar to him, “it will serve to make a fire and keep us warm.”

“But we need not to be kept warm, for the weather is fine and hot,” said Maikar, with a rueful expression. “Moreover, we need food, and we cannot eat a plank!”

The prince did not reply, but led the way towards a neighbouring cliff.

“Don’t you think we had better make our fire in the woods, Bladud?” asked the captain.

“That would oblige one of us to watch in case natives or wolves should attack us, and none of us are in a fit state to watch. We must sleep.”

“But I can’t sleep without first eating,” said Maikar in a remonstrative tone. “Should we not go to the woods first and try to catch something?”

“Can you on foot run down the hare, the deer, the bear, the wild-boar, or even the rabbit?”

“Not I. My legs are swift enough, though short, but they are not equal to that.”

“Well, then, as we have neither bow nor shaft, and my good sword would be of little use against such game, why waste our time and strength in the woods?”

“But we might find honey,” suggested Maikar.

“And if we did not find honey, what then?”

“Berries,” answered the little man.

“Berries are not nearly ripe yet.”

“True, I forgot that.”

“Say you did not know it, man,” interposed the captain with a laugh; “never be ashamed of confessing ignorance in regard to things that you’re not bound to know. Lead on, Bladud, we will follow. You know more of woodcraft than either of us. If it were the sea we had to do battle with I would claim to lead. On land, being only a babe, I freely resign the helm to one who knows how to steer.”

Agreeing to this arrangement, Bladud led his companions up the steep face of a cliff until a projecting ledge was reached, which was just wide enough to form a camping-ground with a perpendicular cliff at the back, and with its other sides so precipitous as to render the approach of enemies—whether two or four-legged—exceedingly difficult. By piling a few stones at the head of the path by which it was reached, they rendered it impossible for any one to approach without awakening the sleepers.

Bladud then, using his sword as a hatchet, chipped off some pieces of the plank, and directed his companions to cut away the wet parts of these and reduce the dry parts to shavings.

They obeyed this order in silence, and wonderingly, for a fire seemed useless, their encampment being well sheltered from the wind, and, as we have said, the weather was warm. By means of a cord, a rude bow, and a drill made of a piece of dry wood, their leader soon procured fire, and, in a few minutes, a bright flame illumined their persons and the cliff behind them.

As the shades of evening were falling by that time, the aspect of things was much improved by the change.

“Now, comrades,” said the prince, undoing the breast of his tunic, and drawing from either side a flat mass of dark substance that resembled old dried cow-hide, “we shall have supper, and then—to rest.”

“Dried meat!” exclaimed little Maikar, his eyes—and indeed his whole visage—blazing with delighted surprise.

“Right. Maikar. I knew that you would be hungry when we got ashore, so I caught up two pieces of meat and stuffed them into my breast just as we were leaving—one for Arkal and me; the other for you. It may not be quite enough, perhaps, but will do, I hope, to keep you quiet till morning.”

“Nay, I shall content me with my fair share, if I may claim a share at all of what I had no hand in procuring. It was wise of you to do this. How came you to think of it?”

“To say truth, I can lay claim to neither wisdom nor forethought,” answered the prince, dividing the food into equal portions. “The meat chanced to be lying close to my hand as I was about to leap into the sea. Had I seen it sooner, I would have advised all to take some in the same way. There, now, set to and cook it. For myself, I feel so sleepy that I’m half inclined to eat it raw.”

The jerked or dried meat which had been thus opportunely brought away, may be said to have been half cooked in the drying process, and indeed, was sometimes eaten in its dried condition, when it was inconvenient to cook it. In a few minutes, therefore, the supper was ready, and, in a few minutes more, it was disposed of—for strong jaws, sound teeth and good appetite make short work of victuals.

By that time the night had set in; the gale was moderating; the stars had come out, and there seemed every prospect of a speedy and favourable change in the weather. With darkness came the wolves and other creatures of the night, both furred and feathered. Against the former the party was protected by the steep ascent and the barricade, but the latter kept swooping down out of darkness, ever and anon, glaring at them for a moment with round inquiring eyes and sweeping off, as if affrighted, in unearthly silence.

Little heed was paid to these sights and sounds, however, by our adventurers, who were filled with sadness at the loss of their ship and comrades.

They spoke but little during the meal, and, after partially drying themselves, lay down with their feet towards the fire, and almost instantly fell asleep. Being trained to a hardy life, they did not feel the want of couch or covering, and healthy exhaustion prevented dreams from disturbing their repose.

Gradually the fire died down; the howling of the wolves ceased; the night-birds betook them to their haunts, and no sound was heard in or around the camp except the soft breathing of the sleepers and the booming of the distant waves.

## Chapter Six

### First Anxieties and Troubles

The day that followed the wreck was well advanced before the sleepers awakened.

Their first thoughts were those of thankfulness for having escaped with life. Then arose feelings of loneliness and sorrow at the sad fate of the crew of the *Penelope*, for though it was just possible that some of their comrades had reached the shore on the beach that extended to the westward, such an event was not very probable. Still the bare hope of this induced them to rise in haste. After a hurried breakfast on the remnants of the previous night's supper, they proceeded along the coast for several miles, carefully searching the shores of every bay.

About noon they halted. A few scraps of the dried meat still remained, and on these they dined, sitting on a grassy slope, while they consulted as to their future proceedings.

"What is now to be done?" asked the captain of Bladud, after they had been seated in silence for some minutes.

"I would rather hear your opinion first," returned his friend. "You must still continue to act as captain, for it is fitting that age should sit at the helm, while I will act the part of guide and forester, seeing that I am somewhat accustomed to woodcraft."

"And the remainder of our band," said little Maikar, wiping his mouth after finishing the last morsel, "will sit in judgment on your deliberations."

"Be it so," returned Bladud. "Wisdom, it is said, lies in small compass, so we should find it in you."

Captain Arkal, whose knitted brows and downcast eyes showed that his thoughts were busy, looked up suddenly.

"It is not likely," he said, "that any ships will come near this coast, for the gale has driven us far out of the usual track of trading ships, and there are no towns here, large or small, that I know of. It would be useless, therefore, to remain where we are in the hope of being picked up by a passing vessel. To walk back to our home in the east is next to impossible, for it is not only far distant, but there lie between us and Hellas far-reaching gulfs and bays, besides great mountain ranges, which have never yet been crossed, for their tops are in the clouds and covered, summer and winter, with eternal snow."

"Then no hope remains to us," said Maikar, with a sigh, "except to join ourselves to the wild people of the land—if there be any people at all in it—and live and die like savages."

"Patience, Maikar, I have not yet finished."

"Besides," interpolated Bladud, "a wise judge never delivers an opinion until he has heard both sides of a question."

"Now, from my knowledge of the lie of coast-lands, I feel sure that the Isles of the Cassiterides must lie there," continued the captain, pointing westward, "and if we travel diligently, it is not unlikely that we shall come down upon the coast of this land almost opposite to them. There we may find, or perhaps make, a boat in which we could cross over—for the sea at that part is narrow, and the white cliffs of the land will be easily distinguished. Once there, I have no doubt that we shall find a ship belonging to one of my countrymen which will take Maikar and me back to our homes, while you, prince, will doubtless be able to return to your father's court on foot."

It will be seen from this speech that the Phoenician captain included the southern shore of England in his idea of the Cassiterides. His notion of the direction in which the islands lay, however, was somewhat incorrect, being founded partly on experience, but partly also on a misconception prevalent at the time that the islands referred to lay only a little way to the north of Spain.

"Your plan seems to me a good one," said Bladud, after some thought, "but I cannot help thinking that you are not quite right in your notion as to the direction of the tin islands. When I left

Albion, I kept a careful note of our daily runs—being somewhat curious on such points—and it is my opinion that they lie *there*.”

He pointed almost due north. The captain smiled and shook his head. Bladud looked at Maikar, who also smiled and shook his head.

“If you want my opinion,” said the little man, gravely, “it is that when two great, good and wise men differ so widely, it is more than likely the truth lies somewhere between them. In *my* judgment, therefore, the Cassiterides lie yonder.”

He pointed with an air of confidence in a north-west direction.

“It does seem to me,” said Bladud, “that Maikar is right, for as you and I seem to be equally confident in our views, captain, a middle course may be the safest. However, if you decide otherwise, I of course submit.”

“Nay,” returned the captain, “I will not abuse the power you have given me. Let us decide the matter by lot.”

“Ay, let us draw lots,” echoed Maikar, “and so shove the matter off our shoulders on to the shoulders of chance.”

“There is, there can be, no such thing as chance,” said Bladud in a soliloquising tone. “However, let it be as you wish. I recognise the justice of two voices overriding one.”

Lots were drawn accordingly, and the longest fell to the little seaman. Without further discussion, therefore, the course suggested by him was adopted.

“And now, comrades,” said the prince, rising and drawing his knife—which, like his sword, had been procured in Egypt, and was of white metal—“we must set to work to make bows and arrows, for animals are not wont to walk up to man and request to be killed and cooked, and it won’t be long before Maikar is shouting for food.”

“Sorry am I that the good javelin of my grandfather went down in the carcase of the pirate chief,” remarked the captain, also rising, “for it seems to me by the way you handled it, Bladud, that you could have killed deer with it as well as men.”

“I have killed deer with such before now, truly, but the arrow is handier and surer.”

“Ay, in a sure hand, with a good eye to direct it,” returned Arkal, “but I make no pretence to either. A ship, indeed, I can manage to hit—when I am cool, which is not often the case in a fight—and if there are men in it, my shafts are not quite thrown away, but as to deer, boars, and birds, I can make nothing of them. If I mistake not, Maikar is not much better than myself with the bow.”

“I am worse,” observed the little man quietly.

“Well then,” said Bladud, with a laugh, “you must make me hunter to the party.”

While conversing thus they had entered the forest, and soon found trees suitable to their purpose, from which they cut boughs,—using their swords as hatchets.

We have already shown that the prince had brought his sword, shield, and knife on shore with him. Captain Arkal and Maikar had also saved their swords and knives, these having been attached to their girdles at the time they leaped from the wreck. They were somewhat inferior weapons to those worn by Bladud, being made of bronze. The swords of the seamen, unlike that of the prince, were short and double-edged, shaped somewhat like those used long afterwards by the Romans, and they made up in weight for what they lacked in sharpness.

It did not take many hours for the party, under the direction of the prince, to form three strong and serviceable bows, with several arrows, the latter being feathered with dropped plumes, and shod with flint, according to the fashion of the times. Bowstrings had to be made at first out of the tough fibrous roots of a tree, split into threads and plaited together.

“Of course they are not so good as deer-sinews for the purpose,” remarked Bladud, stringing one of the bows and fitting an arrow to it, “but we must be content until we kill a deer or some other animal. Perhaps we shall have an opportunity soon.”

The remark seemed to have been prophetic, for, as the last word passed his lips, a fawn trotted out of a glade right in front of the party and stood as if paralysed with surprise. The captain and Maikar were reduced to much the same condition, for they made no attempt to use their bows.

“Ho!—” exclaimed the former, but he got no further, for at the moment Bladud’s bow twanged, and an arrow quivered in the breast of the fawn, which fell dead without a struggle.

“Well done!” exclaimed the captain heartily. “If such luck always attends you, prince, we shall fare well on our journey.”

“It was not altogether luck,” returned the other. “See you that spot on the bark of yonder tree—about the size of Maikar’s mouth as it now gapes in astonishment?”

“I see it, clear enough—just over the—”

He stopped abruptly, for while he was yet speaking an arrow quivered in the centre of the spot referred to.

After that the captain talked no more about “luck,” and Maikar, shutting his mouth with a snap, as if he felt that no words could do justice to his feelings, sprang up and hastened to commence the operation of flaying and cutting up the fawn.

Having thus provided themselves with food, they spent the rest of the day in preparing it for the journey by drying it in the sun; in making tough and serviceable bowstrings out of the sinews of the fawn, fitting on arrow-heads and feathers, and otherwise arranging for a prolonged march through a country which was entirely unknown to them, both as to its character and its inhabitants.

“It comes into my head,” said the captain, “that Maikar and I must provide ourselves with shields and spears of some sort, for if the people of the land are warlike, we may have to defend ourselves.”

“That is as you say,” returned the prince, rising as he spoke and going towards a long straight bough of a neighbouring tree, on which he had fixed a critical gaze.

With one sweep of his heavy sword he severed it from the stem and returned to his companions.

“Have you taken an ill-will at that tree, or were you only testing the strength of your arm?” asked Maikar.

“Neither, my friend; but I must have a javelin to make my equipment complete, and I would advise you and the captain to provide yourselves with like weapons, for we may meet with four-footed as well as two-legged foes in these parts. I will show you how to point the things with flint.”

“That is well said,” returned the seaman, rising and going into the woods in search of a suitable branch, followed by the captain.

It was late that night before the weapons were shaped and pointed with flint and all ready for a start on the following morning—the only thing wanting to complete their armament being a couple of shields.

“We are sure to meet with a wild boar or a bull before long, or it may be a bear,” said Maikar, “and the hides of any of these will serve our purpose well.”

“That is, if we use them well,” remarked the captain.

“No one said otherwise,” retorted Maikar. “Some people are so full of wise thoughts that they blurt them out, without reason, apparently to get rid of them.”

“Just so, Maikar, therefore blurt out no more, but hold thy tongue and go to sleep. Good-night.”

## Chapter Seven

### Converse and Adventures by the Way

Day was just beginning to break in the east when the prince raised his head from the bundle of leaves that had formed his pillow, and looked sleepily around him.

His companions lay still, sound asleep and sprawling, in all the *abandon* characteristic of the heroes of antiquity.

Some of these characteristics were wonderfully similar to those of modern heroes. For instance, the captain lay flat on his back with his mouth wide open, and a musical solo proceeding from his nose; while Maikar lay on his side with his knees doubled up, his arms extended at full length in front of him, and his hands tightly clasped as if, while pleading with some one for mercy, he was suddenly petrified and had fallen over on his side.

Rising softly, Bladud took up his bow and quiver, and, buckling on his sword, left the encampment without disturbing the sleepers. He had not proceeded more than a mile when he startled several wild turkeys or birds of that species from their rest. One of these he instantly brought down. Following them up he soon shot another, and returned to camp, where he found his comrades as he had left them—the musical nose being if anything more emphatic than before.

Although naturally a grave man, Bladud was by no means destitute of a sense of humour, or disinclined on occasion to perpetrate a practical joke. After contemplating the sleepers for a moment he retired a few paces and concealed himself in the long grass, from which position he pitched one of the huge birds into the air, so that it fell on the captain's upturned visage. The snore changed at once into a yell of alarm, as the mariner sprang up and grasped his sword, which, of course, lay handy beside him.

Electrified by the yell, Maikar also leaped to his feet, sword in hand.

"What d'y'e mean by that?" cried the captain, turning on him fiercely.

"What mean *you* by it?" replied Maikar with equal ferocity.

He had barely uttered the words, when the second turkey hit him full in the face and tumbled him over the ashes of the fortunately extinguished fire.

"Come, come!" interposed the prince, stepping forward with a deprecating smile; "there should be no quarrelling among friends, especially at the beginning of a long journey. See, I have fetched your breakfast for you. Instead of tumbling on the fire and putting it out, Maikar, I think it would be wiser to see if there is a spark left and blow it into a flame. Quick! I am hungry."

It need hardly be said that these orders were received with a laugh and a prompt obedience on the part of the little man.

"Yes—there is fire," he said, blowing with tremendous energy until flame was produced. "And, do you know, there is something within me that has a loud voice, but only utters one word—'Food! food! food!' There, now, you may get the birds ready, for the fire will be ready for them in two winks."

There was no occasion, however, to give this advice to his friends, for already the birds had been plucked, split open at the breast, laid flat, and their interiors scraped out in a summary manner. The plucking was not, indeed, all that could be wished, but what fingers failed to do a singe in the flames accomplished to the perfect satisfaction of men who were in no way particular. Sharp-pointed sticks were then thrust through the expanded carcasses, and they were stuck up in front of the blaze to roast.

Underdone meat is an abomination to some, a luxury to others—reminding one of that very ancient proverb, "Tastes differ." We cannot say whether on this occasion the uniformity of action in our heroes was the result of taste or haste, but certain it is that before the fowls were only half-roasted on one side, they were turned over so as to let the fire get at the other, and breakfast was begun while the meat was yet frightfully underdone.

Thereafter the three men arose, like giants refreshed—if we may say so, for Maikar was indeed mentally, though not physically, a giant—buckled on their swords, slung bows and quivers on their backs, along with the turkey remains, and took up shields and javelins. Having laid their course by the stars the night before, they set out on their journey through the unknown wilderness.

The part of the country through which they passed at the beginning of the march was broken and diversified by hill and dale; in some places clothed with forests, in others covered with grass, on which many wild animals were seen browsing. These, however, were remarkably timid, and fled at the first sign of the approaching travellers, so that it was impossible to get within bow-shot of them.

“From this I judge that they are much hunted,” said Bladud, halting on a ridge to note the wild flight, of a herd of deer which had just caught eight of them.

“If so, we are likely to fall in with the hunters before long, I fear,” remarked the captain.

“Why do you fear?” asked Maikar.

“Because they may be numerous and savage, and may take a fancy to make slaves of us, and as we number only three we could not resist their fancy without losing our lives.”

“That would be a pity,” returned Maikar, “for we have only one life to lose.”

“No; we have three lives to lose amongst us,” objected the captain.

“Which makes one each, does it not?” retorted the seaman.

“True, Maikar, and we must lose them all, and more if we had them, rather than become slaves.”

“You are right, captain. We never, *never* shall be slaves,” said Bladud.

They say that history repeats itself. Perhaps sentiment does the same. At all events, the British prince gave utterance that day to a well-known sentiment, which has been embalmed in modern song and shouted by many a Briton with tremendous enthusiasm—though not absolute truth.

“Captain Arkal,” said the little seaman, as they jogged quietly down the sunny slope of a hill, at the bottom of which was a marsh full of rushes, “how do you manage to find your way through such a tangled country as this?”

“By observing the stars,” answered the captain.

“But I have observed the stars since I was a little boy,” objected Maikar, “and I see nothing but a wild confusion of shining points. How can these guide you? Besides, there are no stars in the daytime.”

“True, Maikar; but we have the sun during the day.”

Maikar shook his head perplexedly.

“Listen,” said the captain, “and I will try to enlighten your dark mind; but don’t object else you’ll never understand. All stars are not alike—d’ye understand that?”

“Any fool could understand that!”

“Well, then, of course *you* can understand it. Now, you have noticed, no doubt, that some stars are in groups, which groups may alter their position with regard to other groups, but which never change with regard to each other.”

“Each other,” repeated Maikar, checking off each statement with a nod and a wave of his javelin.

“Well,” continued the captain, “there’s one group of stars—about six—plainly to be seen on most fine nights, two stars of which are always pretty much in a line with a little star a short way in front of them—d’ye see?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that star shows exactly where the cold regions lie—over *there* (extending his arm and pointing), and of course if you know that the cold regions lie *there*, you know that the hot regions must lie at your back—*there*, and it follows that the Pillars of Hercules lie *there* (pointing west), and home lies somewhere about *there* (pointing eastward).”

“Stop!” cried Maikar in great perplexity—for although a seaman he was densely ignorant. “Hot regions, *there*, cold, *there*, home and the Pillars, *there*, and *there*, and *there* (thrusting his arms out in all directions). I’ve no more idea of where you’ve got me to now than—than—”

“Oh, never mind,” interrupted the captain, “it doesn’t matter, as you are not our guide. But, ho! look! look! down in the hollow there—among the rushes. What’s that?”

“A boar!” said Bladud, in a low whisper, as he unslung his bow. “Come, now, it will take all our united force to slay that brute, for, if I have not lost my power of judging such game, I’m pretty sure that he’s a very big old boar with formidable tusks.”

While the prince was speaking, his comrades had also prepared their weapons, and looked to their guide for directions.

These were hastily but clearly given. As the boar was evidently asleep in his lair, it was arranged that the three friends should stalk him, as the broken ground was specially favourable for such a mode of attack.

“We will advance together,” said Bladud, “with our bows ready. I will lead; you follow close. When we get within range you will do as you see me do, and be sure that you aim at the brute’s side—not at his head. Send your arrows with all the force you can. Then drop the bows and get your javelins ready.”

With eager looks the captain and little sailor nodded assent. They were much excited, having often heard tales of boar-hunting, though neither of them had ever taken part in that work.

A few minutes’ walk brought them to the edge of the rushes, where they had a fair view of the monstrous animal as it lay fully extended on its side, and not more than thirty yards distant.

“Take him just behind the fore-leg,” whispered Bladud, as he drew his bow. His companions followed his example. Two of the bows twanged simultaneously, but the third—that of Maikar—was pulled with such vigour that it broke with a crash that would have awakened the sleepest of wild boars, had there been nothing else to arouse him. As it was, other things helped to quicken his sensibilities. Bladud’s unfailing arrow went indeed straight for the heart, but a strong rib caught and checked its progress. The captain’s shaft, probably by good luck, entered deep into the creature’s flank not far from the tail.

To say that the forest was instantly filled with ear-splitting shrieks is to express the result but feebly. We might put it as a sort of indefinite question in the rule of three, thus—if an ordinary civilised pig with injured feelings can yell as we all know how, what must have been the explosion of a wild-boar of the eighth century B.C., in circumstances such as we have described? Railway whistles of the nineteenth century, intermittently explosive, is the only possible answer to the question, and that is but an approximation to the truth.

For one instant the infuriated creature paused to look for its assailants. Catching sight of them as they were fitting arrows to their bows, it gave vent to a prolonged locomotive-express yell, and charged. Bladud’s arrow hit it fair between the eyes, but stuck in the impenetrable skull. The shaft of the captain missed, and the javelin of Maikar went wildly wide of the mark.

By order of Bladud the three had separated a few yards from each other. Even in its rage the monster was perplexed by this, for it evidently perceived the impossibility of attacking three foes at the same moment. Which to go for was the question. Like an experienced warrior it went for the “little one.”

Maikar had drawn his last weapon—the short sword of bronze—and, like a brave man as he was, “prepared to receive boarely.” Another instant and the enemy was upon him. More than that, it was over him, for, trusting to his agility—for which he was famed—he tried to leap to one side, intending to make a vigorous thrust at the same moment. In doing so his foot slipped; he fell flat on his side, and the boar, tripping over him, just missed ripping him with its fearful tusks. It fell, with a bursting squeak, beyond.

To leap up and turn was the work of an instant for the boar, and would have been the same for the man if he had not been partially stunned by the fall. As it was, the captain, who was nearest, proved equal to the emergency, for, using his javelin as a spear, he plunged it into the boar's side. But that side was tougher than he had expected. The spear was broken by a sharp twist as the animal turned on its new foe, who now stood disarmed and at its mercy. Bladud's ponderous sword, however, flashed in the air at that moment, and fell on the creature's neck with a force that would have made Hercules envious if he had been there. Deep into the brawn it cut, through muscle, fat, and spine, almost slicing the head from the trunk, and putting a sudden stop to the last yell when it reached the windpipe. The boar rolled head over heels like a shot hare, almost overturning Bladud as it wrenched the sword from his hand, and swept the captain off his legs, carrying him along with it in a confusion of blood and bristles.

It was truly a terrific encounter, and as the prince stood observing the effect of his blow, he would probably have burst into a fit of laughter, had he not been somewhat solemnised by Captain Arkal's fearful appearance, as he arose ensanguined, but uninjured, from the ground.

## Chapter Eight

### Discovery and Flight

Being now provided with material for making shields, they resolved to spend a day in camp. This was all the more necessary, that the shoes or sandals which they had worn at sea were not well suited for the rough travelling which they had now to undertake.

Accordingly they selected a spot on the brow of a hill from which the surrounding country could be seen in nearly all directions. But they were careful also to see that several bushes shielded themselves from view, for it was a matter of uncertainty whether or where natives might make their appearance.

Here, bathed in glorious sunshine, with a lovely prospect of land and water, tangled wood and flowery plains, to gladden their eyes, and the savoury smell of pork chops and turkey to tickle their nostrils, they spent two days in manufacturing the various necessary articles. Captain Arkal provided himself with a new javelin.

Maikar made another bow, and both fabricated tough round shields with double plies of the boar's hide. Out of the same substance Bladud made a pair of shoes for each of them.

"The sandals you wear at home," he said, "are not so good as those used by us in Albion. They don't cover the feet sufficiently, and they expose the toes too much. Yet our sandals are easily and quickly made. Look here—I will show you."

His companions paused in their labour and looked on, while the prince took up an oblong piece of boar-hide, over a foot in length and six inches broad, which had been soaking in water till it had become quite soft and limp. Placing one of his feet on this he drew the pattern of it on the skin with a pointed stick. Around this pattern, and about a couple of inches from it, he bored a row of holes an inch or so apart. Through these holes he rove a thong of hide, and then rounded away the corners of the piece.

"There," said he, placing his foot in the centre of it and drawing the thong, "my sandal is ready."

The tightening of the thong drew up the edges of the shoe until they overlapped and entirely encased his foot.

"Good," said the captain, "but that kind of sandal is not new to me. I've seen it before, not only in your country, but in other lands."

"Indeed? Well, after all, it is so simple, and so likely to hit the minds of thoughtful men, that I doubt not it is used wherever travelling is bad or weather cold. We shall need such sandals in this land, for there is, no doubt, great variety of country, also of weather, and many thorns."

While our travellers were thus labouring and commenting on their work, unseen eyes were gazing at them with profound interest and curiosity.

A boy, or youth just emerging from the state of boyhood, lay low in a neighbouring thicket with his head just elevated sufficiently above the grass to enable his black eyes to peer over it. He was what we of the nineteenth century term a savage. That is to say, he was unkempt, unwashed, and almost naked—but not uneducated, though books had nothing to do with his training.

The prince chanced to look round, and saw the black eyes instantly, but being, as we have said, an adept in woodcraft—including savage warfare—he did not permit the slightest evidence of recognition to escape him. He continued his gaze in the same direction, allowing his eyes slowly to ascend, as if he were looking through the tree-tops at the sky. Then turning his head quietly round he resumed his work and whistled—for whistling had been invented even before that time.

"Comrades," he said, after a few minutes, "don't look up from your work, but listen. We are watched. You go on with your occupations as if all was right, and leave me to deal with the watcher."

His comrades took the hint at once and went quietly on with their labours, while the prince arose, stretched himself, as if weary of his work. After a few minutes of looking about him, as though undecided what to do next, he sauntered into the bush at the side of their encampment opposite to that where the watcher lay.

The moment he got out of range of the boy's eyes, however, his careless air vanished, and he sped through the underwood with the quietness and something of the gait of a panther—stooping low and avoiding to tread on dead twigs. Making a wide circle, he came round behind the spot where the watcher was hid. But, trained though he had been in the art of savage warfare, the boy was equal to him. From the first he had observed in Bladud's acting the absence of that "touch of nature which makes the whole world kin," and kept a bright look-out to his rear as well as in his front, so that when Bladud, despite his care, trod on a dry stick the boy heard it. Next moment he was off, and a moment after that he was seen bounding down the hill like a wild-cat.

The prince, knowing the danger of letting the boy escape and carry information to his friends, dashed after him at full speed—and the rate of his running may be estimated when it is remembered that many a time he had defeated men who had been victors at the Olympic games. But the young savage was nearly his match. Feeling, however, that he was being slowly yet surely overtaken, the boy doubled like a hare and made for a ridge that lay on his left. By that time the chase was in full view of the two men in camp, who rose and craned their necks in some excitement to watch it.

"He's after something," said the captain.

"A boy!" said Maikar.

"Ay, and running him down, hand over hand."

"There seems to be no one else in sight, so we don't need to go to his help."

"If he needs our help he'll come for it," returned the captain with a laugh, "and it will puzzle the swiftest runner in the land to beat his long legs. See, he's close on the lad now."

"True," responded the other, with a sigh of disappointment, "but we shan't see the end of it, for the boy will be over the ridge and out of sight before he is caught."

Maikar was right. Even while he spoke the youthful savage gained the summit, where his slim, agile figure was clearly depicted against the sky. Bladud was running at full speed, not a hundred yards behind him, yet, to the amazement of the spectators, the boy suddenly stopped, turned round, and waved his hand with a shout of defiance. Next moment he was over the ridge and gone. A few seconds later the prince was seen to halt at the same point, but instead of continuing the pursuit, he remained immovable for a few minutes gazing in front of him. Then he returned toward the encampment with a somewhat dejected air.

"No wonder you look surprised," he said, on arriving. "The other side of that ridge is a sheer precipice, down which I might have gone if I had possessed wings. There was no track visible anywhere, but of course there must have been a well-concealed one somewhere, for soon after I reached the top I saw the young wild-cat running over the plain far below. On coming to the edge of a long stretch of forest, he stopped and capered about like a monkey. I could see, even at that distance, that he was making faces at me by way of saying farewell. Then he entered the woods, and that was the end of him."

"I wish it was the end of him," observed the captain, with something like a growl—for his voice was very deep, and he had a tendency to mutter when disturbed in temper. "The monkey will be sure to run home and tell what he's seen, and so bring all his tribe about our ears."

"Ay, not only his tribe," remarked Maikar, "but his uncles, brothers, fathers, nephews, and all his kin to the latest walkable generation."

"Are your weapons ready?" asked Bladud, taking up his sword and putting on his helmet.

"All ready," answered the captain, beginning to collect things—"I have just finished two head-pieces out of the boar-hide for myself and Maikar, which will turn an arrow or a sword-cut, unless delivered by a strong arm. Don't you think them handsome?"

“They are suitable, at any rate,” said Maikar, “for they are as ugly as our faces.”

“Come, then, we must make haste, for wild men are not slow to act,” rejoined Bladud. “By good fortune our way does not lie in the direction the boy took. We shall get as far away from them as possible, and travel during the night.”

In a few minutes the little party—by that time fully equipped for the chase or war—were hurrying down the hillside in the direction of the setting sun. It was growing late in the evening, and as they reached the bottom, they had to cross a meadow which was rather swampy, so that their feet sank in some parts over the ankles.

“I say, guide,” observed Maikar, who, like his nautical commander, had small respect for rank, and addressed the prince by what he deemed an appropriate title, “it has just come into my head that we are leaving a tremendous trail behind us. We seafaring men are not used to trouble our heads on that score, for our ships leave no track on the waves, but it is not so on the land. Won’t these naked fellows follow us up and kill us, mayhap, when we’re asleep?”

“Doubtless they will try,” answered Bladud, “but we land-faring men are in the habit of troubling our heads on that score, and guarding against it. Do you see yonder stream, or, rather, the line of bushes that mark its course?”

“Ay, plainly.”

“Well, when we reach that, you shall see and understand without explanation.”

On reaching the stream referred to, they found that it was a small, shallow one, with a sluggish current, for the plain through which it flowed was almost flat.

“You see,” said Bladud, pausing on the brink, “that it flows towards the sea in the direction we have come from. Now step into the water and follow me down stream.”

“Down?” exclaimed the captain in surprise, and with some hesitation. “We don’t want to return to the sea whence we have just come, do we?”

“Captain Arkal,” returned Bladud, sternly, “when you give orders on board ship, do you expect to have them questioned, or obeyed?”

“Lead on, guide,” returned the captain, stepping promptly into the water.

For about a quarter of a mile the prince led his followers in silence and with much care, for it was growing very dark. Presently they came to a place where the banks were swampy and the stream deep. Here their guide landed and continued to walk a short distance down the bank, ordering his followers to conceal their track as much as possible, by closing the long grass over each footprint. The result, even to the unpractised eyes of the seamen, did not seem satisfactory, but their leader made no comment. After proceeding about fifty yards further, he re-entered the stream and continued the descent for about a mile. Then he stopped abruptly, and, turning round, said, “Now, comrades, we will land for a moment, then re-enter the stream and ascend.”

The astonishment of Captain Arkal was so great, that he was again on the point of asking an explanation, for it seemed to him that wandering down the bed of a stream for the mere purpose of turning and wandering up it, when haste was urgent, could only be accounted for on the supposition that the prince had gone mad. Remembering his previous rebuff, however, he kept silence.

On reaching the swampy part of the bank their leader did not land, but held straight on, though the water reached nearly to their armpits. They were somewhat cooled, but not disagreeably so, for the night was warm.

In course of time they reached the spot where they had first entered the stream. Passing it, without landing, they held on their course for a considerable distance, until they came to a place where the stream was not more than ankle-deep. Here Bladud paused a few moments and turned to his companions.

“Now, captain,” he said, with a smile that may be said to have been almost audible though not visible, “do you understand my proceedings?”

“Not quite, though, to say truth, I begin to think you are not just so mad as you seemed at first.”

“Don’t you see,” continued the prince, “that when we first came to the stream, I entered it so that our footprints on the bank would show clearly that we had gone downwards. This will show our pursuers, when they arrive here, that, though we are wise enough to take to the water because it leaves no footprints, we are not experienced enough to be careful as to concealing the direction we have taken. When they reach the swampy bank and deep water, they will be led to think we did not like getting wet, and the effort made to cover our footprints, will make them think that we are very ignorant woodsmen. Then, with much confidence, they will continue to follow down stream, looking on the banks now and then for our footprints, until they begin to wonder whether we intend to make a highroad of the river all the way to the sea. After that they will become perplexed, astonished, suspicious as to our stupidity, and will scurry round in all directions, or hold a council, and, finally they will try up stream; but it will be too late, for by that time we shall be far away on our road towards the setting sun.”

“Good!” ejaculated Maikar, when this explanation was finished.

“Good!” echoed the captain, with an approving nod. “You understand your business, I see. Shove out your oars. We follow.”

Without further remark Bladud continued his progress up stream. It was necessarily slow at first, but as night advanced the moon rose, in her first quarter, and shed a feeble but sufficient light on their watery path.

At last they came to a place where the leader’s sharp eye observed signs of the presence of man. Stopping short and listening intently, they heard subdued voices not far from the spot where they stood.

“Stay where you are,” whispered Bladud. “Don’t move. I’ll return immediately.”

He entered the bushes cautiously and disappeared. Standing there without moving, and in profound silence, under the dark shadow of an overhanging bush, it is no wonder that the captain and his comrade began to think the time very long, yet it was only a few minutes after he had left them that their guide returned.

“Only a single family,” he whispered—“three men, two women, and four children. We have nothing to fear, but we must pass on in silence.”

The discovery of those natives obliged them to continue the march up the bed of the stream much longer than they had intended, and the night was far advanced before they thought it prudent to leave the water and pursue the journey on dry land.

Fortunately the country was open and comparatively free from underwood, so that they made progress much more rapidly; nevertheless, it was not thought safe to take rest until they had placed many a mile between them and the natives, who, it was thought probable, would be started in pursuit of them by the youth to whom Bladud had given chase.

Much wearied, and almost falling asleep while they advanced, the travellers halted at last in a dense thicket, and there, lying down without food or fire, they were soon buried in profound repose.

## Chapter Nine

### Homecoming

It is beyond the scope of this tale to describe minutely all that befell our adventurers on their long, fatiguing, and dangerous march through ancient Gaul, which land at that time had neither name nor history.

Suffice it to say that, after numerous adventures with savage beasts, and scarcely less savage men, and many hair-breadth escapes and thrilling incidents by flood and field, they at last found themselves on the shores of that narrow channel which separated the northern coast of Gaul from the white cliffs of Old Albion. They were guided thereto, as we have said, by the Pole-star, which shone in our sky in those days with its wonted brilliancy, though, probably, astronomers had not yet given to it a local habitation in their systems or a distinctive name.

Of course their passage through the land had been attended with great variety of fortune, good and bad. In some parts they met with natives who received them hospitably and sent them on their way rejoicing. Elsewhere they found banditti, fortunately in small bands, with whom they had to fight, and once they were seized and imprisoned by a tribe of inhospitable savages, from whom they escaped, as it were, by the skin of their teeth.

In all these vicissitudes the gigantic frame and the mild, kindly looks of Bladud went far to conciliate the uncertain, attract the friendly, and alarm the savage, for it is a curious fact, explain it how we may, that the union of immense physical power with childlike sweetness of countenance, has a wonderful influence in cowering angry spirits. It may be that strong, angry, blustering men are capable only of understanding each other. When they meet with strong men with womanlike tenderness they are puzzled, and puzzlement, we think, goes a long way to shake the nerves even of the brave. At all events it is well known that a sudden burst of wrath from one whose state of temper is usually serene, exerts a surprising and powerful effect on average mankind.

Whatever be the truth as to these things, it is certain that nearly every one who looked up at the face of Bladud liked him, and more than once when his ponderous sword sprang from its sheath, and his blue eyes flashed, and his fair face flushed, and his magnificent teeth went together with a snap, he has been known to cause a dozen men to turn and flee rather than encounter the shock of his onset.

Little Maikar, who was himself as brave as a lion, nearly lost his life on one occasion, because he was so taken up and charmed with the sight of one of Bladud's rushes, that he utterly forgot what he was about, and would have been crushed by the smite of a savage club, if the captain had not promptly turned aside the blow and struck the club-man down.

"At last!" exclaimed the prince, with a gaze of enthusiasm at the opposite cliffs, "my native land! Well do I love it and well do I know it, for I have stood on this shore and seen it from this very spot when I was quite a boy."

"Indeed! How was that?" asked Arkal.

"I used to be fond of the sea, and was wont to travel far from my father's home to reach it. I made friends with the fishermen, and used to go off with them in their little skiffs. One day a storm arose suddenly, blew us off shore, and, when we were yet a long distance from this coast, overturned our skiff. What became of my companions I know not. Probably they were drowned, for I never more saw them; but I swam ashore, where I think I should have died of exhaustion if I had not been picked up by an old fisherman of this land, who carried me to his hut and took care of me. With the old man I remained several months, for the fishermen on the two sides of the channel had been quarrelling at the time, and the old man did not dare to venture across. I did not care much, for I enjoyed playing with his grandson, and soon learned their language. After a time the quarrelling ceased, and the old man landed me on my own side."

“That is interesting. I only wish the old fisherman was here now with his skiff, for there is no village in sight and no skiff to be seen, so how we are to get over I cannot tell,—swimming being impossible and wings out of the question.”

“Ay, except in the case of fish and birds,” observed Maikar.

“True, and as we are neither fish nor birds,” rejoined the captain, “what is to be done?”

“We must find a skiff,” said the prince.

“Good, but where?”

“On the other side of yon bluff cape,” replied Bladud. “It was there that my friend the old fisherman lived. Mayhap he may live there still.”

Pushing on along shore they passed the bold cape referred to, and there, sure enough, they found the old man’s hut, and the old man himself was seated on a boulder outside enjoying the sunshine.

Great was his surprise on seeing the three strangers approach, but greater was his joy on learning that the biggest of the three was the boy whom he had succoured many years before.

After the first greetings were over, Bladud asked if he and his friends could be taken across in a skiff.

The old man shook his head.

“All that I possess,” he said, “you are welcome to, but my skiff is not here, and if it was I am too old to manage it now. My son, your old companion, has had it away these two days, and I don’t expect him home till to-morrow. But you can rest in my poor hut till he comes.”

As there seemed nothing better to be done, the travellers agreed to this. Next day the son arrived, but was so changed in appearance, that Bladud would not have recognised his old playmate had not his father called him by name.

The skiff, although primitive and rude in its construction, was comparatively large, and a considerable advance on the dug-outs, or wooden canoes, and the skin coracles of the period. It had a square or lug-sail, and was steered by a rudder.

“My son is a strange man,” remarked the old fisherman, as the party sauntered down to the shore, up which the skiff had been dragged. “He invented that skiff as well as made it, and the curious little thing behind that steers it.”

“Able and strange men seem to work their minds in the same way,” returned Bladud; “for the thing is not altogether new. I have seen something very like it in the East; and, to my mind, it is a great improvement on the long oar when the boat is driven through the water, but it is of no use at all when there is no motion.”

“No; neither is it of use when one wishes to sweep round in a hurry,” observed the captain, when this was translated to him. “If it had not been for my steering-oar bringing you sharp round when we were attacking the pirate, you would hardly have managed to spit the chief as you did, strong though you be.”

It was found that the new style of skiff was a good sailer, for, although the wind was light, her lug-sail carried her over to the coast of Albion in about four hours.

“There has been some bad feeling of late between the men from the islands and the men of our side—there often is,” said the young fisherman, who steered. “I am not sure that it will be safe to land here.”

“If that be so, hold on close along the shore in the direction of the setting sun,” returned Bladud, “and land us after nightfall. I know the whole country well, and can easily guide my comrades through the woods to my father’s town on the great river.”

The young fisherman did not reply for a few seconds. He seemed in doubt as to this proposal.

“There has been war lately,” he said, “between your father and the southern tribes, and it may be dangerous for so small a party to traverse the lands of the enemy. I would gladly go and help you, but what could one arm more do to aid you against a host? Besides, my father is dependent on me now for food. I may not forsake the old one who has fed and guarded me since I was a little boy.”

“Concern yourself not about that, friend,” replied the prince. “We need no help. During many days we have travelled safely enough through the great woods of the interior, and have held our own against all foes.”

“Without doubt we are well able to take care of ourselves,” remarked the captain, “though it is but fair to admit that we have had some trouble in doing so.”

“Ay, and some starvation, too,” added Maikar; “but having come safe over the mainland, we are not afraid to face the dangers of the isles, young man.”

“I said not that you were afraid,” rejoined the fisherman, with something of dignified reproof in his manner; “but it is not disgraceful for brave men to act with caution.”

“Well said, my old comrade!” exclaimed Bladud; “and so we shall be pleased if you will land us here. But your speech leads me to understand that you have had news of my father’s doings lately. Is the old man well?”

“Ay, King Hudibras is well, and as fond of fighting as ever, besides being well able for it. I am not sure that he would be pleased if he heard you call him the ‘old man.’”

“Indeed? Yet nearly fifty winters have passed over his head, and that is somewhat old for a warrior. And my mother and sister—have you heard of them?”

“Excellently well, I believe. At least, so I have been told by the Hebrew merchant who came over sea with one of the Phoenician ships, and wanders over the whole land with his pack of golden ornaments—which so take the fancy of the women, indeed of the men also. How the fellow escapes being robbed on his journeys is more than I can tell. It is said that he travels by night and sleeps in caves during the day. Some people even think that he is in league with evil spirits. I doubt that; but he told me the other day, when I met him on our side of the channel, that your sister is about to be married to a neighbouring chief—I forget his name—Gunrig, I think—with whom your father wishes to be on friendly terms.”

“Married!” exclaimed Bladud, with a troubled look.

“Ay, and it is said she does not like the match.”

“Does my mother approve of it?”

“I think not, though the Hebrew did not seem to feel quite sure on that point. But your father seems resolved on it, and you know he is not easily turned from his purpose when determined to have his way. He is more difficult to move than a woman in that matter.”

“Come, friend,” said Bladud gravely, “don’t be too free in your remarks on my father.”

“And don’t be too hard on the women-folk,” added the captain, with a grim smile, “they are not all alike. At least there is one that I know of in the East, whose spirit is like that of the lamb, and her voice like the notes of the songbird.”

Maikar looked as if he were on the point of adding something to the conversation, but his thoughts seemed too deep for utterance, for he only sighed.

“Land us in yon creek,” said Bladud promptly. “It seems that I have not returned home a moment too soon. There, under the cliff—so.”

The skiff ran alongside of a ledge of rock as he spoke, and next moment the prince leaped upon the shores of his native land.

With a brief farewell to his old playmate, he turned, led his companions up the neighbouring cliff, and, plunging into the forest, set off at a pace which betrayed the urgency of his desire to reach home.

Although they travelled almost night and day, it took them the better part of two weeks to reach the river, on the banks of which King Hudibras’ chief town was built. They arrived at the eastern bank without mishap, and found that people were crowding over from the western side to attend some display or fête which was obviously going on there. Mingling with the crowd they went to the river’s edge, where numerous wooden canoes and coracles were busily engaged in ferrying the people over.

Approaching a man, whose apparel betokened him one of the poorer class, Bladud addressed him—

“Can you tell me, friend, what is going on here to-day?”

“Truly you must be a stranger if you know not, for every one—far and near—has heard of the wedding of our king’s pretty daughter.”

“Is she, then, married?” asked the prince, scarcely able to conceal his anxiety.

“Not yet, but she is to be married to-morrow—if no champion comes to claim her.”

“How? What mean you?”

“I mean what I say. Gunrig, the great chief whom she is to wed, is a proud and a stout man. Many chiefs have been courting the fair princess, and, in his pride of heart and strength, Gunrig has challenged any one to fight him in single combat, promising that the bride shall be given to the conqueror.”

“And does my—does the king agree to such a base proposal?”

“Well, he objected to it at first, but Gunrig is such a dangerous enemy, and his tribe so powerful, that the king has given in at last. Besides, he knows that the chief is so strong and big, and so well able to use his weapons, that none of the other chiefs are likely to venture a trial with him, or, if they do, they are sure to get the worst of it.”

“You don’t seem to like this Gunrig, I think.”

“No. I hate him. Everybody hates him; he is such a proud brute, but what can *we* do? when the king commands, all must obey. If I was as big and stout as you are,” added the man with a steady gaze at the prince, “I’d go at this fellow and win the fair princess myself.”

“Perchance I may have a try,” returned Bladud with a light laugh. “Does the princess hate him? and the queen?”

“Ay, worse than poison.”

“Come, let us go and see the sport,” said the prince to his companions, as he hurried away from the river. “You know our language well enough, I think, captain, to understand what has been said?”

“Ay, the most of it; and there is no doubt you are much wanted at this feast.”

In a few minutes our travellers arrived at the suburbs of the little town, which was embosomed among trees and green fields.

As hundreds of people had come in from all the country round, and some of them were Phoenician mariners from ships then in port, our three adventurers might not have attracted much attention, had it not been for the towering height, stalwart frame, and noble bearing of Bladud. As it was, people commented on them, bestowing looks of admiration particularly on the prince, but they did not address or molest them in any way—supposing, of course, that they had come from a distance to see the show; though many wondered that such a strapping fellow as the tall one could have come to the land without having been heard of.

“Perhaps he has only just arrived in one of the ships,” was the sagacious remark of one.

“But the ships have been here a long time, and we have seen all their crews,” was the comment of another.

On arriving at the scene of festivities, they found that an immense assemblage encircled the arena, in which a number of young men were competing in athletic sports. The captain and Maikar gently elbowed their way to the front, where they could see what was going on.

“I will remain in the back row where I can see well enough,” said Bladud. “Keep a look-out for me when you feel lost. I don’t mean to make myself known just yet.”

## Chapter Ten

### The Sports

At the further end of the ground enclosed for the sports, a slightly raised platform had been prepared for the king and his household. The royal party ascended it soon after the travellers arrived, but the distance was too great to permit of faces being distinguished. Bladud could easily perceive, however, the tall form of his father, and the graceful figure of his mother, as they took their places, closely followed by the chief warriors. These, however, did not bring their women—that privilege being reserved for the household of the king only. Close behind the king and queen walked the young Princess Hafrydda. She was not only graceful, but beautiful, being very fair like her mother, with light-blue eyes like those of her brother Bladud; she had peach-bloom cheeks, and a brow of snow, save where her cap failed to protect it from the sun.

After the princess, and shrinking behind her as if to escape the gaze of the courtiers, or rather warriors, who crowded the platform, came a girl of about nineteen summers, the companion of Hafrydda. Branwen was a complete contrast to her friend in complexion. She was the daughter of a famous northern chief, and was quite as beautiful as the princess, while her jet-black eyes and curly brown hair gave more of force and character to features which were delicately moulded.

There was reason for poor Branwen's desire to escape observation, for the proud Gunrig was paying her attentions which were far too pointed and familiar in one who was about to marry the king's daughter. Indeed, it was whispered that he had changed his mind since he had seen Branwen, and would have even resigned the princess in her favour, if he had dared to offer such an affront to the king.

Hudibras himself was the last to ascend the platform. He was a fine-looking, portly man, with a great shock of black hair, a long beard, and limbs so well proportioned that he did not seem taller than other men until he stood beside them. He was a worthy sire of such a son as Bladud, though three inches shorter.

There was a sort of barbaric splendour in the costumes of both men and women, combined with some degree of graceful simplicity. The king was clothed in a softly-dressed deer-skin jacket, over which he wore a wolf-skin with the hair outside. A tunic of purple cotton, brought by Phoenician ships from the far East, covered him as far down as the knees, which were bare, while his lower limbs were swathed in strips of scarlet cloth. Leather sandals, resembling those made by Bladud while in Gaul, protected his feet. No crown or other token of royalty rested on his brow, but over his dark and grizzled locks he wore a species of leather skull-cap which, being exceeding tough, served the purpose of a helmet. On his breast was a profusion of ornaments in the form of beads and bosses of gold and tin, the former of which had been brought from the East, the latter from the mines of his native land. A bronze sword with an ivory sheath, inlaid with gold, hung at his left side, and a knife of the same material at his right. Altogether King Hudibras, being broad and strong in proportion to his height, presented a very regal appearance indeed, and bore himself with becoming dignity. He had married the daughter of a Norse Jarl; and his two children, Bladud and Hafrydda, had taken after their gentle mother in complexion and disposition, though they were not altogether destitute of a sub-current of their father's passionate nature.

The nobles, or rather warriors—for ability to fight constituted nobility in those days—were clothed in garments which, with sundry modifications, resembled those of the king. As for the women of the court, their costumes were what may be styled flowing, and therefore graceful, though difficult to describe. Like their lords, they were profusely ornamented with precious metals and bands and loops of coloured cloth. Hafrydda and her companion Branwen allowed their hair to fall, after the manner of the times, in unrestrained freedom over their shoulders—that of the former resembling a

cataract of rippling gold, while that of the latter was a wavy mass of auburn. Both girls wore wild flowers among their tresses. Of course the queen had rolled up her slightly grey hair in the simple knot at the back of the head, which is more becoming to age, and she wore no ornament of any kind on her head.

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