

**ROBERT
MICHAEL
BALLANTYNE**

MARTIN RATTLER

Robert Michael Ballantyne

Martin Rattler

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R. M. Ballantyne

Martin Rattler

Chapter One

The Hero and his Only Relative

Martin Rattler was a very bad boy. At least his aunt, Mrs Dorothy Grumbit, said so; and certainly she ought to have known, if anybody should, for Martin lived with her, and was, as she herself expressed it, “the bane of her existence; the very torment of her life.” No doubt of it whatever, according to Aunt Dorothy Grumbit’s showing, Martin Rattler was “a remarkably bad boy.”

It is a curious fact, however, that, although most of the people in the village of Ashford seemed to agree with Mrs Grumbit in her opinion of Martin, there were very few of them who did not smile cheerfully on the child when they met him, and say, “Good day, lad!” as heartily as if they thought him the best boy in the place. No one seemed to bear Martin Rattler ill-will, notwithstanding his alleged badness. Men laughed when they said he was a bad boy, as if they did not quite believe their own assertion. The vicar, an old whiteheaded man, with a kind, hearty countenance, said that the child was full of mischief, full of mischief; but he would improve as he grew older, he was quite certain of that. And the vicar was a good judge; for he had five boys of his own, besides three other boys, the sons of a distant relative, who boarded with him; and he had lived forty years in a parish overflowing with boys, and he was particularly fond of boys in general. Not so the doctor, a puffy little man with a terrific frown, who hated boys, especially little ones, with a very powerful hatred. The doctor said that Martin was a scamp.

And yet Martin had not the appearance of a scamp. He had fat rosy cheeks, a round rosy mouth, a straight delicately-formed nose, a firm massive chin, and a broad forehead. But the latter was seldom visible, owing to the thickly-clustering fair curls that overhung it. When asleep Martin’s face was the perfection of gentle innocence. But the instant he opened his dark-brown eyes, a thousand dimples and wrinkles played over his visage, chiefly at the corners of his mouth and round his eyes; as if the spirit of fun and the spirit of mischief had got entire possession of the boy, and were determined to make the most of him. When deeply interested in anything, Martin was as grave and serious as a philosopher.

Aunt Dorothy Grumbit had a turned-up nose,—a very much turned-up nose; so much so, indeed, that it presented a front view of the nostrils! It was an aggravating nose, too, for the old lady’s spectacles refused to rest on any part of it except the extreme point. Mrs Grumbit invariably placed them on the right part of her nose, and they as invariably slid down the curved slope until they were brought up by the little hillock at the end. There they condescended to repose in peace.

Mrs Grumbit was mild, and gentle, and little, and thin, and old,—perhaps seventy-five; but no one knew her age for certain, not even herself. She wore an old-fashioned, high-crowned cap, and a gown of bed-curtain chintz, with flowers on it the size of a saucer. It was a curious gown, and very cheap, for Mrs Grumbit was poor. No one knew the extent of her poverty, any more than they did her age; but she herself knew it, and felt it deeply,—never so deeply, perhaps, as when her orphan nephew Martin grew old enough to be put to school, and she had not wherewithal to send him. But love is quick-witted and resolute. A residence of six years in Germany had taught her to knit stockings at a rate that cannot be described, neither conceived unless seen. She knitted two dozen pairs. The vicar took one dozen, the doctor took the other. The fact soon became known. Shops were not numerous in the village in those days; and the wares they supplied were only second rate. Orders came pouring in,

Mrs Grumbit's knitting wires clicked, and her little old hands wagged with incomprehensible rapidity and unflagging regularity,—and Martin Rattler was sent to school.

While occupied with her knitting, she sat in a high-backed chair in a very small deep window, through which the sun streamed nearly the whole day; and out of which there was the most charming imaginable view of the gardens and orchards of the villagers, with a little dancing brook in the midst, and the green fields of the farmers beyond, studded with sheep and cattle and knolls of woodland, and bounded in the far distance by the bright blue sea. It was a lovely scene, such an one as causes the eye to brighten and the heart to melt as we gaze upon it, and think, perchance, of its Creator.

Yes, it was a scene worth looking at; but Mrs Grumbit never looked at it, for the simple reason that she could not have seen it if she had. Half way across her own little parlour was the extent of her natural vision. By the aid of spectacles and a steady concentrated effort, she could see the fireplace at the other end of the room; and the portrait of her deceased husband, who had been a sea-captain; and the white kitten that usually sat on the rug before the fire. To be sure, she saw them very indistinctly. The picture was a hazy blue patch, which was the captain's coat; with a white patch down the middle of it, which was his waistcoat; and a yellow ball on the top of it, which was his head. It was rather an indistinct and generalised view, no doubt; but she *saw* it, and that was a great comfort.

Chapter Two In Disgrace

Fire was the cause of Martin's getting into disgrace at school for the first time; and this is how it happened.

"Go and poke the fire, Martin Rattler," said the schoolmaster, "and put on a bit of coal, and see that you don't send the sparks flying about the floor."

Martin sprang with alacrity to obey; for he was standing up with the class at the time, and was glad of the temporary relaxation. He stirred the fire with great care, and put on several pieces of coal very slowly, and rearranged them two or three times; after which he stirred the fire a little more, and examined it carefully to see that it was all right; but he did not seem quite satisfied, and was proceeding to re-adjust the coals when Bob Croaker, one of the big boys, who was a bullying, ill-tempered fellow, and had a spite against Martin, called out—

"Please, sir, Rattler's playin' at the fire."

"Come back to your place, sir!" cried the master, sternly.

Martin returned in haste, and resumed his position in the class. As he did so he observed that his fore-finger was covered with soot. Immediately a smile of glee overspread his features; and, while the master was busy with one of the boys, he drew his black finger gently down the forehead and nose of the boy next to him.

"What part of the earth was peopled by the descendants of Adam?" cried the master, pointing to the dux.

"Shem!" shrieked a small boy near the foot of the class.

"Silence!" thundered the master, with a frown that caused the small boy to quake down to the points of his toes.

"Asia!" answered dux.

"Next?"

"Turkey!"

"Next, next, next? Hallo! John Ward," cried the master, starting up in anger from his seat, "what do you mean by that, sir?"

"What, sir?" said John Ward, tremulously, while a suppressed titter ran round the class.

"Your face, sir! Who blacked your face, eh?"

"I—I—don't know," said the boy, drawing his sleeve across his face, which had the effect of covering it with sooty streaks.

An uncontrollable shout of laughter burst from the whole school, which was instantly followed by a silence so awful and profound that a pin might have been heard to fall.

"Martin Rattler, you did that! I know you did,—I see the marks on your fingers. Come here, sir! Now tell me; did you do it?"

Martin Rattler never told falsehoods. His old aunt had laboured to impress upon him from infancy that to lie was to commit a sin which is abhorred by God and scorned by man; and her teaching had not been in vain. The child would have suffered any punishment rather than have told a deliberate lie. He looked straight in the master's face and said, "Yes, sir, I did it."

"Very well, go to your seat, and remain in school during the play-hour."

With a heavy heart Martin obeyed; and soon after the school was dismissed.

"I say, Rattler," whispered Bob Croaker as he passed, "I'm going to teach your white kitten to swim just now. Won't you come and see it?"

The malicious laugh with which the boy accompanied this remark convinced Martin that he intended to put his threat in execution. For a moment he thought of rushing out after him to protect

his pet kitten; but a glance at the stern brow of the master, as he sat at his desk reading, restrained him; so, crushing down his feelings of mingled fear and anger, he endeavoured to while away the time by watching the boys as they played in the fields before the windows of the school.

Chapter Three

The Great Fight

“Martin!” said the schoolmaster, in a severe tone, looking up from the book with which he was engaged, “don’t look out at the window, sir; turn your back to it.”

“Please, sir, I can’t help it,” replied the boy, trembling with eagerness as he stared across the fields.

“Turn your back on it, I say!” reiterated the master in a loud tone, at the same time striking the desk violently with his cane.

“Oh, sir, let me out! There’s Bob Croaker with my kitten. He’s going to drown it. I know he is; he said he would; and if he does aunty will die, for she loves it next to me; and I must save it, and—and, if you *don’t* let me out—you’ll be a murderer!”

At this concluding burst, Martin sprang forward and stood before his master with clenched fists and a face blazing with excitement. The schoolmaster’s gaze of astonishment gradually gave place to a dark frown strangely mingled with a smile, and, when the boy concluded, he said quietly—

“You may go.”

No second bidding was needed. The door flew open with a bang; and the gravel of the playground, spurned right and left, dashed against the window panes as Martin flew across it. The paling that fenced it off from the fields beyond was low, but too high for a jump. Never a boy in all the school had crossed that paling at a spring, without laying his hands upon it; but Martin did. We do not mean to say that he did anything superhuman; but he rushed at it like a charge of cavalry, sprang from the ground like a deer, kicked away the top bar, tumbled completely over, landed on his head, and rolled down the slope on the other side as fast as he could have run down,—perhaps faster.

It would have required sharper eyes than yours or mine to have observed how Martin got on his legs again, but he did it in a twinkling, and was half across the field almost before you could wink, and panting on the heels of Bob Croaker. Bob saw him coming and instantly started off at a hard run, followed by the whole school. A few minutes brought them to the banks of the stream, where Bob Croaker halted, and, turning round, held the white kitten up by the nape of the neck.

“O spare it! spare it, Bob!—don’t do it—please don’t, don’t do it!” gasped Martin, as he strove in vain to run faster.

“There you go!” shouted Bob, with a coarse laugh, sending the kitten high into the air, whence it fell with a loud splash into the water.

It was a dreadful shock to feline nerves, no doubt, but that white kitten was no ordinary animal. Its little heart beat bravely when it rose to the surface, and, before its young master came up, it had regained the bank. But, alas! what a change! It went into the stream a fat, round, comfortable ball of eider-down. It came out a scraggy blotch of white paint, with its black eyes glaring like two great glass beads! No sooner did it crawl out of the water than Bob Croaker seized it, and whirled it round his head, amid suppressed cries of “Shame!” intending to throw it in again; but at that instant Martin Rattler seized Bob by the collar of his coat with both hands, and, letting himself drop suddenly, dragged the cruel boy to the ground, while the kitten crept humbly away and hid itself in a thick tuft of grass.

A moment sufficed to enable Bob Croaker, who was nearly twice Martin’s weight, to free himself from the grasp of his panting antagonist, whom he threw on his back, and doubled his fist, intending to strike Martin on the face; but a general rush of the boys prevented this.

“Shame, shame, fair-play!” cried several; “don’t hit him when he’s down!”

“Then let him rise up and come on!” cried Bob, fiercely, as he sprang up and released Martin.

“Ay, that’s fair. Now then, Martin, remember the kitten!”

“Strike men of your own size!” cried several of the bigger boys, as they interposed to prevent Martin from rushing into the unequal contest.

“So I will,” cried Bob Croaker, glaring round with passion. “Come on any of you that likes. I don’t care a button for the biggest of you.”

No one accepted this challenge, for Bob was the oldest and the strongest boy in the school, although, as is usually the case with bullies, by no means the bravest.

Seeing that no one intended to fight with him, and that a crowd of boys strove to hold Martin Rattler back, while they assured him that he had not the smallest chance in the world, Bob turned towards the kitten, which was quietly and busily employed in licking itself dry and said, “Now Martin, you coward, I’ll give it another swim for your impudence.”

“Stop, stop!” cried Martin, earnestly. “Bob Croaker, I would rather do anything than fight. I would give you everything I have to save my kitten; but if you won’t spare it unless I fight, I’ll do it. If you throw it in before you fight me, you’re the greatest coward that ever walked. Just give me five minutes to breathe and a drink of water, and I’ll fight you as long as I can stand.”

Bob looked at his little foe in surprise. “Well, that’s fair. I’m you’re man; but if you don’t lick me I’ll drown the kitten, that’s all.” Having said this, he quietly divested himself of his jacket and neckcloth, while several boys assisted Martin to do the same, and brought him a draught of water in the crown of one of their caps. In five minutes all was ready, and the two boys stood face to face and foot to foot, with their fists doubled and revolving, and a ring of boys around them.

Just at this critical moment the kitten, having found the process of licking itself dry more fatiguing than it had expected, gave vent to a faint mew of distress. It was all that was wanting to set Martin’s indignant heart into a blaze of inexpressible fury. Bob Croaker’s visage instantly received a shower of sharp, stinging blows, that had the double effect of taking that youth by surprise and throwing him down upon the green sward. But Martin could not hope to do this a second time. Bob now knew the vigour of his assailant, and braced himself warily to the combat, commencing operations by giving Martin a tremendous blow on the point of his nose, and another on the chest. These had the effect of tempering Martin’s rage with a salutary degree of caution, and of eliciting from the spectators sundry cries of warning on the one hand, and admiration on the other, while the young champions revolved warily round each other, and panted vehemently.

The battle that was fought that day was one of a thousand. It created as great a sensation in the village school as did the battle of Waterloo in England. It was a notable fight; such as had not taken place within the memory of the oldest boy in the village, and from which, in after years, events of juvenile history were dated,—especially pugilistic events, of which, when a good one came off it used to be said that, “such a battle had not taken place since the year of the Great Fight.” Bob Croaker was a noted fighter, Martin Rattler was, up to this date, an untried hero. Although fond of rough play and boisterous mischief, he had an unconquerable aversion to *earnest* fighting, and very rarely indeed returned home with a black eye,—much to the satisfaction of Aunt Dorothy Grumbit, who objected to all fighting from principle, and frequently asserted, in gentle tones, that there should be no soldiers or sailors (fighting sailors, she meant) at all, but that people ought all to settle everything the best way they could without fighting, and live peaceably with one another, as the Bible told them to do. They would be far happier and better off, she was sure of that; and if everybody was of her way of thinking, there would be neither swords, nor guns, nor pistols, nor squibs, nor anything else at all! Dear old lady. It would indeed be a blessing if her principles could be carried out in this warring and jarring world. But as this is rather difficult, what we ought to be careful about is, that we never fight except in a good cause and with a clear conscience.

It was well for Martin Rattler, on that great day, that the formation of the ground favoured him. The spot on which the fight took place was uneven, and covered with little hillocks and hollows, over which Bob Croaker stumbled, and into which he fell,—being a clumsy boy on his legs—and did himself considerable damage; while Martin, who was firmly knit and active as a kitten, scarcely

ever fell, or, if he did, sprang up again like an India-rubber ball. Fair-play was embedded deep in the centre of Martin's heart, so that he scorned to hit his adversary when he was down or in the act of rising; but the thought of the fate that awaited the white kitten if he were conquered, acted like lightning in his veins, and scarcely had Bob time to double his fists after a fall, when he was knocked back again into the hollow, out of which he had risen. There were no *rounds* in this fight; no pausing to recover breath. Martin's anger rose with every blow, whether given or received; and although he was knocked down flat four or five times, he rose again, and without a second's delay rushed headlong at his enemy. Feeling that he was too little and light to make much impression on Bob Croaker by means of mere blows, he endeavoured as much as possible to throw his weight against him at each assault; but Bob stood his ground well, and after a time seemed even to be recovering strength a little.

Suddenly he made a rush at Martin, and, dealing him a successful blow on the forehead, knocked him down; at the same time he himself tripped over a molehill and fell upon his face. Both were on their legs in an instant. Martin grew desperate. The white, kitten swimming for its life seemed to rise before him, and new energy was infused into his frame. He retreated a step or two, and then darted forward like an arrow from a bow. Uttering a loud cry, he sprang completely in the air and plunged—head and fists together, as if he were taking a dive—into Bob Croaker's bosom! The effect was tremendous. Bob went down like a shock of grain before the sickle; and having, in their prolonged movements, approached close to the brink of the stream, both he and Martin went with a sounding splash into the deep pool and disappeared. It was but for a moment, however. Martin's head emerged first, with eyes and mouth distended to the utmost. Instantly, on finding bottom, he turned to deal his opponent another blow; but it was not needed. When Bob Croaker's head rose to the surface there was no motion in the features, and the eyes were closed. The intended blow was changed into a friendly grasp; and, exerting himself to the utmost, Martin dragged his insensible school fellow to the bank, where, in a few minutes, he recovered sufficiently to declare in a sulky tone that he would fight no more!

"Bob Croaker," said Martin, holding out his hand, "I'm sorry we've had to fight. I wouldn't have done it, but to save my kitten. You compelled me to do it, you know that. Come, let's be friends again."

Bob made no reply, but slowly and with some difficulty put on his vest and jacket.

"I'm sure," continued Martin, "there's no reason in bearing me ill-will. I've done nothing unfair, and I'm very sorry we've had to fight. Won't you shake hands?"

Bob was silent.

"Come, some, Bob!" cried several of the bigger boys, "don't be sulky, man; shake hands and be friends. Martin has licked you this time, and you'll lick him next time, no doubt, and that's all about it."

"Arrah, then, ye're out there, intirely. Bob Croaker'll niver lick Martin Rattler though he wos to live to the age of the great M'Thuselah!" said a deep-toned voice close to the spot where the fight had taken place.

All eyes were instantly turned in the direction whence it proceeded, and the boys now became aware, for the first time, that the combat had been witnessed by a sailor, who, with a smile of approval beaming on his good-humoured countenance, sat under the shade of a neighbouring tree smoking a pipe of that excessive shortness and blackness that seems to be peculiarly beloved by Irishmen in the humbler ranks of life. The man was very, tall and broad-shouldered, and carried himself with a free-and-easy swagger, as he rose and approached the group of boys.

"He'll niver bate ye, Martin, avic, as long as there's two timbers of ye houldin' together." The seaman patted Martin on the head as he spoke; and, turning to Bob Croaker, continued:

"Ye ought to be proud, ye spalpeen, o' bein' wopped by sich a young hero as this. Come here and shake hands with him: d'ye hear? Troth an' it's besmearin' ye with too much honour that same. There, that'll do. Don't say ye're sorry now, for it's lies ye'd be tellin' if ye did. Come along, Martin, an I'll converse with ye as ye go home. Ye'll be a man yet, as sure as my name is Barney O'Flannagan."

Martin took the white kitten in his arms and thrust its wet little body into his equally wet bosom, where the warmth began soon to exercise a soothing influence on the kitten's depressed spirits, so that, ere long, it began to purr. He then walked with the sailor towards the village, with his face black and blue, and swelled, and covered with blood, while Bob Croaker and his companions returned to the school.

The distance to Martin's residence was not great, but it was sufficient to enable the voluble Irishman to recount a series of the most wonderful adventures and stories of foreign lands; that set Martin's heart on fire with desire to go to sea; a desire which was by no means new to him, and which recurred violently every time he paid a visit to the small sea-port of Bilton, which lay about five miles to the southward of his native village. Moreover, Barney suggested that it was time Martin should be doing for himself (he was now ten years old), and said that if he would join his ship, he could get him a berth, for he was much in want of an active lad to help him with the coppers. But Martin Rattler sighed deeply, and said that, although his heart was set upon going to sea, he did not see how it was to be managed, for his aunt would not let him go.

Before they separated, however, it was arranged that Martin should pay the sailor's ship a visit, when he would hear a good deal more about foreign lands; and that, in the meantime, he should make another attempt to induce Aunt Dorothy Grumbit to give her consent to his going to sea.

Chapter Four

A Lesson to all Stocking-Knitters— Martin's Prospects begin to open up

In the small sea-port of Bilton, before mentioned, there dwelt an old and wealthy merchant and ship-owner, who devoted a small portion of his time to business, and a very large portion of it to what is usually termed "doing good." This old gentleman was short, and stout, and rosy, and bald, and active, and sharp as a needle.

In the short time that Mr Arthur Jollyboy devoted to business, he accomplished as much as most men do in the course of a long day. There was not a benevolent society in the town, of which Arthur Jollyboy, Esquire, of the Old Hulk (as he styled his cottage), was not a member, director, secretary, and treasurer, all in one, and all at once! If it had been possible for man be ubiquitous, Mr Jollyboy would have been so naturally; or, if not naturally, he would have made himself so by force of will. Yet he made no talk about it. His step was quiet, though quick; and his voice was gentle, though rapid; and he was chiefly famous for *talking* little and *doing* much.

Some time after the opening of our tale, Mr Jollyboy had received information of Mrs Grumbit's stocking movement. That same afternoon he put on his broad-brimmed white hat and, walking out to the village in which she lived, called upon the vicar, who was a particular and intimate friend of his. Having ascertained from the vicar that Mrs Grumbit would not accept of charity, he said abruptly,—“And why not—is she too proud?”

“By no means,” replied the vicar. “She says that she would think shame to take money from friends as long as she can work, because every penny that she would thus get would be so much less to go to the helpless poor; of whom, she says, with much truth, there are enough and to spare. And I quite agree with her as regards her principle; but it does not apply fully to her, for she cannot work so as to procure a sufficient livelihood without injury to her health.”

“Is she clever?” inquired Mr Jollyboy.

“Why, no, not particularly. In fact, she does not often exert her reasoning faculties, except in the common-place matters of ordinary and every-day routine.”

“Then she's cleverer than most people,” said Mr Jollyboy, shortly. “Is she obstinate?”

“No, not in the least,” returned the vicar with a puzzled smile.

“Ah, well, good-bye, good-bye; that's all I want to know.”

Mr Jollyboy rose, and, hurrying through the village, tapped at the cottage door, and was soon closeted with Mrs Dorothy Grumbit. In the course of half an hour, Mr Jollyboy drew from Mrs Grumbit as much about her private affairs as he could, without appearing rude. But he found the old lady very close and sensitive on that point. Not so, however, when he got her upon the subject of her nephew. She had enough, and more than enough, to say about him. It is true she began by remarking, sadly, that he was a very bad boy; but, as she continued to talk about him, she somehow or other gave her visitor the impression that he was a very *good* boy! They had a wonderfully long and confidential talk about Martin, during which Mr Jollyboy struck Mrs Grumbit nearly dumb with horror by stating positively that he would do for the boy,—he would send him to sea! Then, seeing that he had hit the wrongest possible nail on the head, he said that he would make the lad a clerk in his office, where he would be sure to rise to a place of trust; whereat Mrs Grumbit danced, if we may so speak, into herself for joy.

“And now, ma'am, about these stockings. I want two thousand pairs as soon as I can get them!”

“Sir?” said Mrs Grumbit.

“Of course, not for my own use, ma'am; nor for the use of my family, for I have no family; and if I had, that would be an unnecessarily large supply. The fact is, Mrs Grumbit, I am a merchant and

I send very large supplies of home-made articles to foreign lands, and two thousand pairs of socks are a mere driblet. Of course I do not expect you to make them all for me, but I wish you to make as many pairs as you can.”

“I shall be very happy—” began Mrs Grumbit.

“But, Mrs Grumbit, there is a peculiar formation which I require in my socks that will give you extra trouble, I fear; but I must have it, whatever the additional expense may be. What is your charge for the pair you are now making?”

“Three shillings,” said Mrs Grumbit.

“Ah! very good. Now, take up the wires if you please, ma’am, and do what I tell you. Now, drop that stitch,—good; and take up this one,—capital; and pull this one across that way,—so; and that one across this way,—exactly. Now, what is the result?”

The result was a complicated knot; and Mrs Grumbit, after staring a few seconds at the old gentleman in surprise, said so, and begged to know what use it was of.

“Oh, never mind, never mind. We merchants have strange fancies, and foreigners have curious tastes now and then. Please to make all my socks with a hitch like that in them all round, just above the ankle. It will form an ornamental ring. I’m sorry to put you to the trouble, but of course I pay extra for fancy-work. Will six shillings a-pair do for these?”

“My dear sir,” said Mrs Grumbit, “it is no additional—”

“Well, well, never mind,” said Mr Jollyboy. “Two thousand pairs, remember, as soon as possible,—close knitted, plain stitch, rather coarse worsted; and don’t forget the hitch, Mrs Grumbit, don’t forget the hitch.”

Ah! reader, there are many Mrs Grumbits in this world, requiring *hitches* to be made in their stockings!

At this moment the door burst open. Mrs Dorothy Grumbit uttered a piercing scream, Mr Jollyboy dropped his spectacles and sat down on his hat and Martin Rattler stood before them with the white kitten in his arms.

For a few seconds there was a dead silence, while an expression of puzzled disappointment passed over Mr Jollyboy’s ruddy countenance. At last he said—

“Is this, madam, the nephew who, you told me a little ago, is not addicted to fighting?”

“Yes,” answered the old lady faintly, and covering her eyes with her hands, “that is Martin.”

“If my aunt told you that, sir, she told you the truth,” said Martin, setting down the blood-stained white kitten, which forthwith began to stretch its limbs and lick itself dry. “I don’t ever fight if I can help it but I couldn’t help it to-day.”

With a great deal of energy, and a revival of much of his former indignation, when he spoke of the kitten’s sufferings, Martin recounted all the circumstances of the fight; during the recital of which Mrs Dorothy Grumbit took his hand in hers and patted it, gazing the while into his swelled visage, and weeping plentifully, but very silently. When he had finished, Mr Jollyboy shook hands with him, and said he was a trump, at the same time recommending him to go and wash his face. Then he whispered a few words in Mrs Grumbit’s ear, which seemed to give that excellent lady much pleasure; after which he endeavoured to straighten his crushed hat; in which attempt he failed, took his leave, promised to call again very soon, and went back to the Old Hulk—chuckling.

Chapter Five

Martin, being Willing to go to Sea, goes to Sea against his Will

Four years rolled away, casting chequered light and shadow over the little village of Ashford in their silent passage,—whitening the forelocks of the aged, and strengthening the muscles of the young. Death, too, touched a hearth here and there, and carried desolation to a home; for four years cannot wing their flight without enforcing on us the lesson—which we are so often taught and yet take so long to learn—that this is not our rest,—that here we have no abiding city. Did we but ponder this lesson more frequently and earnestly, instead of making us sad, it would nerve our hearts and hands to fight and work more diligently,—to work in the cause of our Redeemer,—the only cause that is worth the life-long energy of immortal beings,—the great cause that includes all others; and it would teach us to remember that our little day of opportunity will soon be spent and that the night is at hand in which no man can work.

Four years rolled away, and during this time Martin, having failed to obtain his aunt's consent to his going to sea, continued at school, doing his best to curb the roving spirit that strove within him. Martin was not particularly bright at the dead languages; to the rules of grammar he entertained a rooted aversion; and at history he was inclined to yawn, except when it happened to touch upon the names and deeds of such men as Vasco di Gama and Columbus. But in geography he was perfect; and in arithmetic and book-keeping he was quite a proficient, to the delight of Mrs Dorothy Grumbit whose household books he summed up; and to the satisfaction of his fast friend, Mr Arthur Jollyboy, whose ledgers he was—in that old gentleman's secret resolves—destined to keep.

Martin was now fourteen, broad and strong, and tall for his age. He was the idol of the school,—dashing, daring, reckless, and good-natured. There was almost nothing that he would not attempt and there were very few things that he could not do. He never fought however—from principle; and his strength and size often saved him from the necessity. But he often prevented other boys from fighting, except when he thought there was good reason for it; then he stood by and saw fair-play. There was a strange mixture of philosophical gravity, too, in Martin. As he grew older he became more enthusiastic and less boisterous.

Bob Croaker was still at the school, and was, from prudential motives, a fast friend of Martin. But he bore him a secret grudge, for he could not forget the great fight.

One day Bob took Martin by the arm, and said, "I say, Rattler, come with me to Bilton, and have some fun among the shipping."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," said Martin. "I'm just in the mood for a ramble, and I'm not expected home till bed-time."

In little more than an hour the two boys were wandering about the dock-yards of the sea-port town, and deeply engaged in examining the complicated rigging of the ships. While thus occupied, the clanking of a windlass and the merry, "Yo heave O! and away she goes," of the sailors, attracted their attention.

"Hallo! there goes the Firefly, bound for the South Seas," cried Bob Croaker; "come, let's see her start. I say, Martin, isn't your friend, Barney O'Flannagan, on board?"

"Yes, he is. He tries to get me to go out every voyage, and I wish I could. Come quickly; I want to say good-bye to him before he starts."

"Why don't you run away, Rattler?" inquired Bob, as they hurried round the docks to where the vessel was warping out.

"Because I don't need to. My aunt has given me leave to go if I like; but she says it would break her heart if I do; and I would rather be screwed down to a desk for ever than do that, Bob Croaker."

The vessel, upon the deck of which the two boys now leaped, was a large, heavy-built barque. Her sails were hanging loose, and the captain was giving orders to the men, who had their attention divided between their duties on board and their mothers, wives, and sisters, who still lingered to take a last farewell.

“Now, then, those who don’t want to go to sea had better go ashore,” roared the captain.

There was an immediate rush to the side.

“I say, Martin,” whispered Barney, as he hurried past, “jump down below for’ard; you can go out o’ the harbour mouth with us and get ashore in one o’ the shore-boats alongside. They’ll not cast off till we’re well out. I want to speak to you—”

“Man the fore-top-sail halyards,” shouted the first mate.

“Ay ay, sir-r-r,” and the men sprang to obey. Just then the ship touched on the bar at the mouth of the harbour, and in another moment she was aground.

“There, now, she’s hard and fast!” roared the captain, as he stormed about the deck in a paroxysm of rage. But man’s rage could avail nothing. They had missed the passage by a few feet, and now they had to wait the fall and rise again of the tide ere they could hope to get off.

In the confusion that followed, Bob Croaker suggested that Martin and he should take one of the punts, or small boats which hovered round the vessel, and put out to sea, where they might spend the day pleasantly in rowing and fishing.

“Capital!” exclaimed Martin. “Let’s go at once. Yonder’s a little fellow who will let us have his punt for a few pence. I know him. Hallo, Tom!”

“Ay, ay,” squeaked a boy who was so small that he could scarcely lift the oar, light though it was, with which he sculled his punt cleverly along.

“Shove alongside, like a good fellow; we want your boat for a little to row out a bit.”

“It’s a-blowin’ too hard,” squeaked the small boy, as he ranged alongside. “I’m afeared you’ll be blown out.”

“Nonsense!” cried Bob Croaker, grasping the rope which the boy threw to him. “Jump on board, younker; we don’t want you to help us, and you’re too heavy for ballast. Slip down the side, Martin, and get in while I hold on to the rope. All right? now I’ll follow. Here, shrimp, hold the rope till I’m in, and then cast off. Look alive!”

As Bob spoke, he handed the rope to the little boy; but, in doing so, let it accidentally slip out of his hand.

“Catch hold o’ the main chains, Martin,—quick!”

But Martin was too late. The current that swept out of the harbour whirled the light punt away from the ship’s side, and carried it out seaward. Martin instantly sprang to the oar, and turned the boat’s head round. He was a stout and expert rower, and would soon have regained the ship; but the wind increased at the moment, and blew in a squall off shore, which carried him further out despite his utmost efforts. Seeing that all further attempts were useless, Martin stood up and waved his hand to Bob Croaker, shouting as he did so, “Never mind, Bob, I’ll make for the South Point. Run round and meet me, and we’ll row back together.”

The South Point was a low cape of land which stretched a considerable distance out to sea, about three miles to the southward of Bilton harbour. It formed a large bay, across which, in ordinary weather, a small boat might be rowed in safety. Martin Rattler was well-known at the sea-port as a strong and fearless boy, so that no apprehension was entertained for his safety by those who saw him blown away. Bob Croaker immediately started for the Point on foot a distance of about four miles by land; and the crew of the Firefly were so busied with their stranded vessel that they took no notice of the doings of the boys.

But the weather now became more and more stormy. Thick clouds gathered on the horizon. The wind began to blow with steady violence, and shifted a couple of points to the southward; so that Martin found it impossible to keep straight for the Point. Still he worked perseveringly at his

single oar, and sculled rapidly over the sea; but, as he approached the Point he soon perceived that no effort of which he was capable could enable him to gain it. But Martin's heart was stout. He strove with all the energy of hope, until the Point was passed; and then, turning the head of his little boat towards it, he strove with all the energy of despair, until he fell down exhausted. The wind and tide swept him rapidly out to sea; and when his terrified comrade reached the Point the little boat was but a speck on the seaward horizon.

Well was it then for Martin Rattler that a friendly heart beat for him on board the Firefly. Bob Croaker carried the news to the town; but no one was found daring enough to risk his life out in a boat on that stormy evening. The little punt had been long out of sight ere the news reached them, and the wind had increased to a gale. But Barney O'Flannagan questioned Bob Croaker closely, and took particular note of the point of the compass at which Martin had disappeared; and when the Firefly at length got under weigh, he climbed to the fore-top cross-trees, and stood there scanning the horizon with an anxious eye.

It was getting dark, and a feeling of despair began to creep over the seaman's heart as he gazed round the wide expanse of water, on which nothing was to be seen except the white foam that crested the rising billows.

"Starboard, hard!" he shouted suddenly.

"Starboard it is!" replied the man at the wheel, with prompt obedience.

In another moment Barney slid down the back-stay and stood on the deck, while the ship rounded to and narrowly missed striking a small boat that floated keel up on the water. There was no cry from the boat; and it might have been passed as a mere wreck, had not the lynx eye of Barney noticed a dark object clinging to it.

"Lower away a boat, lads," cried the Irishman, springing overboard; and the words had scarcely passed his lips when the water closed over his head.

The Firefly was hove to, a boat was lowered and rowed towards Barney, whose strong voice guided his shipmates towards him. In less than a quarter of an hour the bold sailor and his young friend Martin Rattler were safe on board, and the ship's head was again turned out to sea.

It was full half an hour before Martin was restored to consciousness in the fore-castle, to which his deliverer had conveyed him.

"Musha, lad, but ye're booked for the blue wather now, an' no mistake!" said Barney, looking with an expression of deep sympathy at the poor boy, who sat staring before him quite speechless. "The captin 'll not let ye out o' this ship till ye git to the gould coast, or some sich place. He couldn't turn back av he wanted iver so much; but he doesn't want to, for he needs a smart lad like you, an' he'll keep you now, for sartin."

Barney sat down by Martin's side and stroked his fair curls, as he sought in his own quaint fashion to console him. But in vain.

Martin grew quite desperate as he thought of the misery into which poor Aunt Dorothy Grumbit would be plunged, on learning that he had been swept out to sea in a little boat, and drowned, as she would naturally suppose. In his frenzy he entreated and implored the captain to send him back in the boat and even threatened to knock out his brains with a handspike if he did not; but the captain smiled and told him that it was his own fault. He had no business to be putting to sea in a small boat in rough weather, and he might be thankful he wasn't drowned. He wouldn't turn back now for fifty pounds twice told.

At length Martin became convinced that all hope of returning home was gone. He went quietly below, threw himself into one of the sailor's berths, turned his face to the wall, and wept long and bitterly.

Chapter Six

The Voyage, a Pirate, Chase, Wreck, and Escape

Time reconciles a man to almost anything. In the course of time Martin Rattler became reconciled to his fate, and went about the ordinary duties of a cabin-boy on board the Firefly just as if he had been appointed to that office in the ordinary way,—with the consent of the owners and by the advice of his friends. The captain, Skinflint by name, and as surly an old fellow as ever walked a quarter-deck, agreed to pay him wages, “if he behaved well.” The steward, under whose immediate authority he was placed, turned out to be a hearty, good-natured young fellow, and was very kind to him. But Martin’s great friend was Barney O’Flannagan, the cook, with whom he spent many an hour in the night watches, talking over plans, and prospects, and retrospects, and foreign lands.

As Martin had no clothes except those on his back, which fortunately happened to be new and good, Barney gave him a couple of blue-striped shirts, and made him a jacket, pantaloons, and slippers of canvass; and, what was of much greater importance, taught him how to make and mend the same for himself.

“Ye see, Martin, lad,” he said, while thus employed one day, many weeks after leaving port, “it’s a great thing, intirely, to be able to help yerself. For my part I niver travel without my work-box in my pocket.”

“Your work-box!” said Martin, laughing.

“Jist so. An’ it consists of wan sailmaker’s needle, a ball o’ twine, and a clasp-knife. Set me down with these before a roll o’ canvass and I’ll make ye a’most anything.”

“You seem to have a turn for everything, Barney,” said Martin. “How came you to be a cook?”

“That’s more nor I can tell ye, lad. As far as I remimber, I began with murphies, when I was two foot high, in my father’s cabin in ould Ireland. But that was on my own account intirely, and not as a purfession; and a sorrowful time I had of it too, for I was for iver burnin’ my fingers promiskiously, and fallin’ into the fire ivery day more or less—”

“Stand by to hoist top-gallant-sails,” shouted the captain. “How’s her head?”

“South and by east sir,” answered the man at the wheel.

“Keep her away two points. Look alive lads. Hand me the glass, Martin.”

The ship was close hauled when these abrupt orders were given, battling in the teeth of a stiff breeze, off the coast of South America. About this time, several piratical vessels had succeeded in cutting off a number of merchantmen near the coast of Brazil. They had not only taken the valuable parts of their cargoes, but had murdered the crews under circumstances of great cruelty; and ships trading to these regions were, consequently, exceedingly careful to avoid all suspicious craft as much as possible. It was, therefore, with some anxiety that the men watched the captain’s face as he examined the strange sail through the telescope.

“A Spanish schooner,” muttered the captain, as he shut up the glass with a bang. “I won’t trust her. Up with the royals and rig out stun’-sails, Mr Wilson, (to the mate). Let her fall away, keep her head nor’-west, d’you hear?”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“Let go the lee braces and square the yards. Look sharp, now, lads. If that blackguard gets hold of us ye’ll have to walk the plank, every man of ye.”

In a few minutes the ship’s course was completely altered; a cloud of canvass spread out from the yards, and the Firefly bounded on her course like a fresh race-horse. But it soon became evident that the heavy barque was no match for the schooner, which crowded sail and bore down at a rate that bade fair to overhaul them in a few hours. The chase continued till evening, when suddenly the look-out at the mast-head shouted, “Land, ho!”

“Where away?” cried the captain.

“Right ahead,” sang out the man.

“I’ll run her ashore sooner than be taken,” muttered the captain, with an angry scowl at the schooner, which was now almost within range on the weather quarter, with the dreaded black flag flying at her peak. In a few minutes breakers were descried ahead.

“D’ye see anything like a passage?” shouted the captain.

“Yes, sir; two points on the weather bow.”

At this moment a white cloud burst from the schooner’s bow, and a shot, evidently from a heavy gun, came ricocheting over the sea. It was well aimed, for it cut right through the barque’s main-mast, just below the yard, and brought the main-top-mast, with all the yards, sails, and gearing above it, down upon the deck. The weight of the wreck, also, carried away the fore-top-mast and, in a single instant, the Firefly was completely disabled.

“Lower away the boats,” cried the captain; “look alive, now; we’ll give them the slip yet. It’ll be dark in two minutes.”

The captain was right. In tropical regions there is little or no twilight. Night succeeds day almost instantaneously. Before the boats were lowered, and the men embarked, it was becoming quite dark. The schooner observed the movement however, and, as she did not dare to venture through the reef in the dark, her boats were also lowered and the chase was recommenced.

The reef was passed in safety, and now a hard struggle took place, for the shore was still far-distant. As it chanced to be cloudy weather the darkness became intense, and progress could only be guessed at by the sound of the oars; but these soon told too plainly that the boats of the schooner were overtaking those of the barque.

“Pull with a will, lads,” cried the captain; “we can’t be more than half a mile from shore; give way, my hearties.”

“Surely, captain, we can fight them, we’ve most of us got pistols and cutlasses,” said one of the men in a sulky tone.

“Fight them!” cried the captain, “they’re four times our number, and every man armed to the teeth. If ye don’t fancy walking the plank or dancing on nothing at the yardarm, ye’d better pull away and hold your jaw.”

By this time they could just see the schooner’s boats in the dim light, about half-musket range astern.

“Back you’ oars,” shouted a stern voice in broken English, “or I blow you out de watter in one oder moment—black-yards!”

This order was enforced by a musket shot which whizzed over the boat within an inch of the captain’s head. The men ceased rowing and the boats of the pirate ranged close up.

“Now then, Martin,” whispered Barney O’Flanagan, who sat at the bow oar, “I’m goin’ to swim ashore; jist you slip arter me as quiet as ye can.”

“But the sharks!” suggested Martin.

“Bad luck to them,” said Barney as he slipped over the side, “they’re welcome to me. I’ll take my chance. They’ll find me mortial tough, anyhow. Come along, lad, look sharp!”

Without a moment’s hesitation Martin slid over the gunwale into the sea, and, just as the pirate boats grappled with those of the barque, he and Barney found themselves gliding as silently as otters towards the shore. So quietly had the manoeuvre been accomplished, that the men in their own boat were ignorant of their absence. In a few minutes they were beyond the chance of detection.

“Keep close to me, lad,” whispered the Irishman. “If we separate in the darkness we’ll niver foregather again. Catch hould o’ my shoulder if ye get blowed, and splutter as much as ye like. They can’t hear us now, and it’ll help to frighten the sharks.”

“All right,” replied Martin; “I can swim like a cork in such warm water as this. Just go a little slower and I’ll do famously.”

Thus encouraging each other, and keeping close together, lest they should get separated in the thick darkness of the night, the two friends struck out bravely for the shore.

Chapter Seven

Martin and Barney get lost in a Great Forest, where they see Strange and Terrible Things

On gaining the beach, the first thing that Barney did, after shaking himself like a huge Newfoundland dog, was to ascertain that his pistol and cutlass were safe; for, although the former could be of no use in its present condition, still, as he sagaciously remarked, “it was a good thing to have, for they might chance to git powder wan day or other, and the flint would make fire, anyhow.” Fortunately the weather was extremely warm; so they were enabled to take off and wring their clothes without much inconvenience, except that in a short time a few adventurous mosquitoes—probably sea-faring ones—came down out of the woods and attacked their bare bodies so vigorously that they were fain to hurry on their clothes again before they were quite dry.

The clouds began to clear away soon after they landed, and the brilliant light of the southern constellations revealed to them dimly the appearance of the coast. It was a low sandy beach skirting the sea and extending back for about a quarter of a mile in the form of a grassy plain, dotted here and there with scrubby under-wood. Beyond this was a dark line of forest. The light was not sufficient to enable them to ascertain the appearance of the interior. Barney and Martin now cast about in their minds how they were to spend the night.

“Ye see,” said the Irishman, “it’s of no use goin’ to look for houses, because there’s maybe none at all on this coast; an’ there’s no sayin’ but we may fall in with savages—for them parts swarms with them; so we’d better go into the woods an’—”

Barney was interrupted here by a low howl, which proceeded from the woods referred to, and was most unlike any cry they had ever heard before.

“Och but I’ll think better of it. P’raps it’ll be as well *not* to go into the woods, but to camp where we are.”

“I think so too,” said Martin, searching about for small twigs and drift-wood with which to make a fire. “There is no saying what sort of wild beasts may be in the forest, so we had better wait till daylight.”

A fire was quickly lighted by means of the pistol-flint and a little dry grass, which, when well bruised and put into the pan, caught a spark after one or two attempts, and was soon blown into a flame. But no wood large enough to keep the fire burning for any length of time could be found; so Barney said he would go up to the forest and fetch some. “I’ll lave my shoes and socks, Martin, to dry at the fire. See ye don’t let them burn.”

Traversing the meadow with hasty strides, the bold sailor quickly reached the edge of the forest where he began to lop off several dead branches from the trees with his cutlass. While thus engaged, the howl which had formerly startled him was repeated. “Av I only knowed what ye was,” muttered Barney in a serious tone, “it would be some sort o’ comfort.”

A loud cry of a different kind here interrupted his soliloquy, and soon after the first cry was repeated louder than before.

Clenching his teeth and knitting his brows the perplexed Irishman resumed his work with a desperate resolve not to be again interrupted. But he had miscalculated the strength of his nerves. Albeit as brave a man as ever stepped, when his enemy was before him, Barney was, nevertheless, strongly imbued with superstitious feelings; and the conflict between his physical courage and his mental cowardice produced a species of wild exasperation, which, he often asserted, was very hard to bear. Scarcely had he resumed his work when a bat of enormous size brushed past his nose so noiselessly that it seemed more like a phantom than a reality. Barney had never seen anything of the

sort before, and a cold perspiration broke out upon him, when he fancied it might be a ghost. Again the bat swept past close to his eyes.

“Musha, but I’ll kill ye, ghost or no ghost,” he ejaculated, gazing all round into the gloomy depths of the woods with his cutlass uplifted. Instead of flying again in front of him, as he had expected, the bat flew with a whirring noise past his ear. Down came the cutlass with a sudden thwack, cutting deep into the trunk of a small tree, which trembled under the shock and sent a shower of nuts of a large size down upon the sailor’s head. Startled as he was, he sprang backward with a wild cry; then, half ashamed of his groundless fears, he collected the wood he had cut, threw it hastily on his shoulder and went with a quick step out of the woods. In doing so he put his foot upon the head of a small snake, which wriggled up round his ankle and leg. If there was anything on earth that Barney abhorred and dreaded it was a snake. No sooner did he feel its cold form writhing under his foot, than he uttered a tremendous yell of terror, dropped his bundle of sticks, and fled precipitately to the beach, where he did not halt till he found himself knee-deep in the sea.

“Och, Martin, boy,” gasped the affrighted sailor, “it’s my belafe that all the evil spirits on arth live in yonder wood; indeed I do.”

“Nonsense, Barney,” said Martin, laughing; “there are no such things as ghosts; at any rate, I’m resolved to face them, for if we don’t get some sticks the fire will go out and leave us very comfortless. Come, I’ll go up with you.”

“Put on yer shoes then, avic, for the sarpints are no ghosts, anyhow, and I’m tould they’re pisonous sometimes.”

They soon found the bundle of dry sticks that Barney had thrown down, and returning with it to the beach, they speedily kindled a roaring fire, which made them feel quite cheerful. True, they had nothing to eat; but having had a good dinner on board the barque late that afternoon, they were not much in want of food. While they sat thus on the sand of the sea-shore, spreading their hands before the blaze and talking over their strange position, a low rumbling of distant thunder was heard. Barney’s countenance instantly fell.

“What’s the matter, Barney?” inquired Martin, as he observed his companion gaze anxiously up at the sky.

“Och, it’s comin’, sure enough.”

“And what though it does come?” returned Martin; “we can creep under one of these thick bushes till the shower is past.”

“Did ye iver see a thunder-storm in the tropics?” inquired Barney.

“No, never,” replied Martin.

“Then if ye don’t want to feel and see it both at wance, come with me as quick as iver ye can.”

Barney started up as he spoke, stuck his cutlass and pistol into his belt and set off towards the woods at a sharp run, followed closely by his wondering companion.

Their haste was by no means unnecessary. Great black clouds rushed up towards the zenith from all points of the compass, and, just as they reached the woods, darkness so thick that it might almost be felt overspread the scene. Then there was a flash of lightning so vivid that it seemed as if a bright day had been created and extinguished in a moment leaving the darkness ten times more oppressive. It was followed instantaneously by a crash and a prolonged rattle, that sounded as if a universe of solid worlds were rushing into contact overhead and bursting into atoms.

The flash was so far useful to the fugitives, that it enabled them to observe a many-stemmed tree with dense and heavy foliage, under which they darted. They were just in time, and had scarcely seated themselves among its branches when the rain came down in a way, not only that Martin had never seen, but that he had never conceived of before. It fell, as it were, in broad heavy sheets, and its sound was a loud, continuous roar.

The wind soon after burst upon the forest and added to the hideous shriek of elements. The trees bent before it; the rain was whirled and dashed about in water-spouts; and huge limbs were

rent from some of the larger trees with a crash like thunder, and swept far away into the forest. The very earth trembled and seemed terrified at the dreadful conflict going on above. It seemed to the two friends as if the end of the world were come; and they could do nothing but cower among the branches of the tree and watch the storm in silence; while they felt, in a way they had never before experienced, how utterly helpless they were, and unable to foresee, or avert, the many dangers by which they were surrounded, and how absolutely dependent they were on God for protection.

For several hours the storm continued. Then it ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and the bright stars again shone down upon a peaceful scene.

When it was over, Martin and his comrade descended the tree and endeavoured to find their way back to the beach. But this was no easy matter. The haste with which they had run into the woods, and the confusion of the storm, had made them uncertain in which direction it lay; and the more they tried to get out, the deeper they penetrated into the forest. At length, wearied with fruitless wandering and stumbling about in the dark, they resolved to spend the night where they were. Coming to a place which was more open than usual, and where they could see a portion of the starry sky overhead, they sat down on a dry spot under the shelter of a spreading tree, and, leaning their backs against the trunk, very soon fell sound asleep.

Chapter Eight

An Enchanting Land—An Uncomfortable Bed and a Queer Breakfast—Many Surprises and a Few Frights, together with a Notable Discovery

“I’ve woked in paradise!”

Such was the exclamation that aroused Martin Rattler on the morning after his landing on the coast of South America. It was uttered by Barney O’Flannagan, who lay at full length on his back, his head propped up by a root of the tree, under which they had slept, and his eyes staring right before him with an expression of concentrated amazement. When Martin opened his eyes, he too was struck dumb with surprise. And well might they gaze with astonishment; for the last ray of departing daylight on the night before had flickered over the open sea, and now the first gleam of returning sunshine revealed to them the magnificent forests of Brazil.

Yes, well might they gaze and gaze again in boundless admiration; for the tropical sun shone down on a scene of dazzling and luxuriant vegetation, so resplendent that it seemed to them the realisation of a fairy tale. Plants and shrubs and flowers were there, of the most curious and brilliant description, and of which they neither knew the uses nor the names. Majestic trees were there, with foliage of every shape and size and hue; some with stems twenty feet in circumference; others more slender in form, straight and tall; and some twisted in a bunch together and rising upwards like fluted pillars: a few had buttresses, or natural planks, several feet broad, ranged all round their trunks, as if to support them; while many bent gracefully beneath the load of their clustering fruit and heavy foliage. Orange-trees with their ripe fruit shone in the sunbeams like gold. Stately palms rose above the surrounding trees and waved their feathery plumes in the air, and bananas with broad enormous leaves rustled in the breeze and cast a cool shadow on the ground.

Well might they gaze in great surprise; for all these curious and beautiful trees were surrounded by, and entwined in, the embrace of luxuriant and remarkable climbing-plants. The parasitic vanilla with its star-like blossoms crept up their trunks and along their branches, where it hung in graceful festoons, or drooped back again almost to the ground. So rich and numerous were these creepers, that in many cases they killed the strong giants whom they embraced so lovingly. Some of them hung from the tree-tops like stays from the masts of a ship, and many of them mingled their brilliant flowers so closely with the leaves, that the climbing-plants and their supporters could not be distinguished from each other, and it seemed as though the trees themselves had become gigantic flowering shrubs.

Birds, too, were there in myriads,—and such birds! Their feathers were green and gold and scarlet and yellow and blue—fresh and bright and brilliant as the sky beneath which they were nurtured. The great toucan, with a beak nearly as big as his body, flew clumsily from stem to stem. The tiny, delicate humming-birds, scarce larger than bees, fluttered from flower to flower and spray to spray, like points of brilliant green. But they were irritable, passionate little creatures, these lovely things, and quarrelled with each other and fought like very wasps! Enormous butterflies, with wings of deep metallic blue, shot past or hovered in the air like gleams of light; and green paroquets swooped from tree to tree and chattered joyfully over their morning meal.

Well might they gaze with wonder, and smile too with extreme merriment, for monkeys stared at them from between the leaves with expressions of undisguised amazement, and bounded away shrieking and chattering in consternation, swinging from branch to branch with incredible speed, and not scrupling to use each other’s tails to swing by when occasion offered. Some were big and red and ugly,—as ugly as you can possibly imagine, with blue faces and fiercely grinning teeth; others were delicately-formed and sad of countenance, as if they were for ever bewailing the loss of near

and dear relations, and could by no means come at consolation; and some were small and pretty, with faces no bigger than a halfpenny. As a general rule, it seemed to Barney, the smaller the monkey the longer the tail.

Yes, well might they gaze and gaze again in surprise and in excessive admiration; and well might Barney O'Flannagan—under the circumstances, with such sights and sounds around him, and the delightful odours of myrtle trees and orange blossoms and the Cape jessamine stealing up his nostrils—deem himself the tenant of another world, and evince his conviction of the fact in that memorable expression—"I've woked in paradise!"

But Barney began to find "paradise" not quite so comfortable as it ought to be; for when he tried to get up he found his bones pained and stiff from sleeping in damp clothes; and moreover, his face was very much swelled, owing to the myriads of mosquitoes which had supped of it during the night.

"Arrah, then, *won't* ye be done!" he cried, angrily, giving his face a slap that killed at least two or three hundred of his tormentors. But thousands more attacked him instantly, and he soon found out,—what every one finds out sooner or later in hot climates,—that *patience* is one of the best remedies for mosquito bites. He also discovered shortly afterwards that smoke is not a bad remedy, in connection with patience.

"What are we to have for breakfast, Barney!" inquired Martin as he rose and yawned and stretched his limbs.

"Help yersilf to what ye plase," said Barney, with a polite bow, waving his hand round him, as if the forest were his private property and Martin Rattler his honoured guest.

"Well, I vote for oranges," said Martin, going towards a tree which was laden with ripe fruit.

"An' I'll try plums, by way of variety," added his companion.

In a few minutes several kinds of fruit and nuts were gathered and spread at the foot of the tree under which they had reposed. Then Barney proceeded to kindle a fire,—not that he had anything to cook, but he said it looked sociable-like, and the smoke would keep off the flies. The operation, however, was by no means easy. Everything had been soaked by the rain of the previous night, and a bit of dry grass could scarcely be found. At length he procured a little; and by rubbing it in the damp gunpowder which he had extracted from his pistol, and drying it in the sun, he formed a sort of tinder that caught fire after much persevering effort.

Some of the fruits they found to be good,—others bad. The good they ate,—the bad they threw away. After their frugal fare they felt much refreshed, and then began to talk of what they should do.

"We can't live here with parrots and monkeys, you know," said Martin; "we must try to find a village or town of some sort; or get to the coast and then we shall perhaps meet with a ship."

"True, lad," replied Barney, knitting his brows and looking extremely sagacious; "the fact is, since neither of us knows nothing about anything, or the way to any place, my advice is to walk straight for'ard till we come to something."

"So think I," replied Martin; "therefore the sooner we set off the better."

Having no luggage to pack and no arrangements of any kind to make, the two friends rose from their primitive breakfast-table, and walked away straight before them into the forest.

All that day they travelled patiently forward, conversing pleasantly about the various and wonderful trees, and flowers, and animals they met with by the way; but no signs were discovered that indicated the presence of man. Towards evening, however, they fell upon a track or foot-path,—which discovery rejoiced them much; and here, before proceeding further, they sat down to eat a little more fruit which, indeed, they had done several times during the day. They walked nearly thirty miles that day without seeing a human being; but they met with many strange and beautiful birds and beasts,—some of which were of so fierce an aspect that they would have been very glad to have had guns to defend themselves with. Fortunately, however, all the animals seemed to be much more afraid of them than they were of the animals; so they travelled in safety. Several times during the course of the day they saw snakes and serpents, which glided away into the jungle on their approach,

and could not be overtaken, although Barney made repeated darts at them, intending to attack them with his cutlass; which assaults always proved fruitless.

Once they were charged by a herd of peccaries,—a species of pig or wild hog,—from which they escaped by jumping actively to one side; but the peccaries turned and rushed at them again, and it was only by springing up the branches of a neighbouring tree that they escaped their fury. These peccaries are the fiercest and most dauntless animals in the forests of Brazil. They do not know what fear is,—they will rush in the face of anything; and, unlike all other animals, are quite indifferent to the report of fire-arms. Their bodies are covered with long bristles, resembling very much the quills of the porcupine.

As the evening drew on, the birds and beasts and the innumerable insects, that had kept up a perpetual noise during the day, retired to rest; and then the nocturnal animals began to creep out of their holes and go about. Huge vampire-bats, one of which had given Barney such a fright the night before, flew silently past them; and the wild howlings commenced again. They now discovered that one of the most dismal of the howls proceeded from a species of monkey: at which discovery Martin laughed very much, and rallied his companion on being so easily frightened; but Barney gladly joined in the laugh against himself, for, to say truth, he felt quite relieved and light-hearted at discovering that his ghosts were converted into bats and monkeys!

There was one roar, however, which, when they heard it ever and anon, gave them considerable uneasiness.

“D’ye think there’s lions in them parts?” inquired Barney, glancing with an expression of regret at his empty pistol, and laying his hand on the hilt of his cutlass.

“I think not,” replied Martin, in a low tone of voice. “I have read in my school geography that there are tigers of some sort—jaguars, or ounces, I think they are called,—but there are no—”

Martin’s speech was cut short by a terrific roar, which rang through the woods, and the next instant a magnificent jaguar, or South American tiger, bounded on to the track a few yards in advance, and, wheeling round, glared fiercely at the travellers. It seemed, in the uncertain light as if his eyes were two balls of living fire. Though not so large as the royal Bengal tiger of India, this animal was nevertheless of immense size, and had a very ferocious aspect. His roar was so sudden and awful, and his appearance so unexpected, that the blood was sent thrilling back into the hearts of the travellers, who stood rooted to the spot, absolutely unable to move. This was the first large animal of the cat kind that either of them had seen in all the terrible majesty of its wild condition; and, for the first time, Martin and his friend felt that awful sensation of dread that will assail even the bravest heart when a new species of imminent danger is suddenly presented. It is said that no animal can withstand the steady gaze of a human eye; and many travellers in wild countries have proved this to be a fact. On the present occasion our adventurers stared long and steadily at the wild creature before them, from a mingled feeling of surprise and horror. In a few seconds the jaguar showed signs of being disconcerted. It turned its head from side to side slightly, and dropped its eyes, as if to avoid their gaze. Then turning slowly and stealthily round, it sprang with a magnificent bound into the jungle, and disappeared.

Both Martin and Barney heaved a deep sigh of relief.

“What a mercy it did not attack us!” said the former, wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead. “We should have had no chance against such a terrible beast with a cutlass, I fear.”

“True, boy, true,” replied his friend, gravely; “it would have been little better than a penknife in the ribs o’ sich a cratur. I niver thought that it was in the power o’ man or baste to put me in sich a fright; but the longer we live we learn, boy.”

Barney’s disposition to make light of everything was thoroughly subdued by this incident, and he felt none of his usual inclination to regard all that he saw in the Brazilian forests with a comical eye. The danger they had escaped was too real and terrible, and their almost unarmed condition too serious, to be lightly esteemed. For the next hour or two he continued to walk by Martin’s side either

in total silence, or in earnest, grave conversation; but by degrees these feelings wore off, and his buoyant spirits gradually returned.

The country over which they had passed during the day was of a mingled character. At one time they traversed a portion of dark forest heavy and choked up with the dense and gigantic foliage peculiar to those countries that lie near to the equator; then they emerged from this upon what to their eyes seemed most beautiful scenery,—mingled plain and woodland,—where the excessive brilliancy and beauty of the tropical vegetation was brought to perfection by exposure to the light of the blue sky and the warm rays of the sun. In such lovely spots they travelled more slowly and rested more frequently, enjoying to the full the sight of the gaily-coloured birds and insects that fluttered busily around them, and the delicious perfume of the flowers that decked the ground and clambered up the trees. At other times they came to plains, or *campos*, as they are termed, where there were no trees at all, and few shrubs, and where the grass was burned brown and dry by the sun. Over such they hurried as quickly as they could; and fortunately, where they chanced to travel, such places were neither numerous nor extensive, although in some districts of Brazil there are campos hundreds of miles in extent.

A small stream meandered through the forest and enabled them to refresh themselves frequently; which was very fortunate, for the heat, especially towards noon, became extremely intense, and they could not have existed without water. So great, indeed, was the heat about mid-day, that, by mutual consent, they resolved to seek the cool shade of a spreading tree, and try to sleep if possible. At this time they learned, to their surprise, that all animated nature did likewise, and sought repose at noon. God had implanted in the breast of every bird and insect in that mighty forest an instinct which taught it to rest and find refreshment during the excessive heat of mid-day; so that during the space of two or three hours, not a thing with life was seen, and not a sound was heard. Even the troublesome mosquitoes, so active at all other times, day and night were silent now. The change was very great and striking, and difficult for those who have not observed it to comprehend. All the forenoon, screams, and cries, and croaks, and grunts, and whistles, ring out through the woods incessantly; while, if you listen attentively, you hear the low, deep, and never-ending buzz and hum of millions upon millions of insects, that dance in the air and creep on every leaf and blade upon the ground. About noon all this is hushed. The hot rays of the sun beat perpendicularly down upon what seems a vast untenanted solitude, and not a single chirp breaks the death-like stillness of the great forest, with the solitary exception of the metallic note of the uruponga, or bell-bird, which seems to mount guard when all the rest of the world has gone to sleep. As the afternoon approaches they all wake up, refreshed by their siesta, active and lively as fairies, and ready for another spell of work and another deep-toned noisy chorus.

The country through which our adventurers travelled, as evening approached, became gradually more hilly, and their march consequently more toilsome. They were just about to give up all thought of proceeding farther that night, when, on reaching the summit of a little hill, they beheld a bright red light shining at a considerable distance in the valley beyond. With light steps and hearts full of hope they descended the hill and hastened towards it.

Chapter Nine

The Hermit

It was now quite dark, and the whole country seemed alive with fire-flies. These beautiful little insects sat upon the trees and bushes, spangling them as with living diamonds, and flew about in the air like little wandering stars. Barney had seen them before, in the West Indies, but Martin had only heard of them; and his delight and amazement at their extreme brilliancy were very great. Although he was naturally anxious to reach the light in the valley, in the hope that it might prove to proceed from some cottage, he could not refrain from stopping once or twice to catch these lovely creatures; and when he succeeded in doing so, and placed one on the palm of his hand, the light emitted from it was more brilliant than that of a small taper, and much more beautiful, for it was of a bluish colour, and very intense,—more like the light reflected from a jewel than a flame of fire. He could have read a book by means of it quite easily.

In half an hour they drew near to the light, which they found proceeded from the window of a small cottage or hut.

“Whist, Martin,” whispered Barney, as they approached the hut on tiptoe; “there may be savages into it, an’ there’s no sayin’ what sort o’ cratur’s they are in them parts.”

When about fifty yards distant, they could see through the open window into the room where the light burned; and what they beheld there was well calculated to fill them with surprise. On a rude wooden chair, at a rough unpainted table, a man was seated, with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes fixed intently on a book. Owing to the distance, and the few leaves and branches that intervened between them and the hut, they could not observe him very distinctly. But it was evident that he was a large and strong man, a little past the prime of life. The hair of his head and beard was black and bushy, and streaked with silver-grey. His face was massive, and of a dark olive complexion, with an expression of sadness on it strangely mingled with stern gravity. His broad shoulders—and, indeed, his whole person—were enveloped in the coarse folds of a long gown or robe, gathered in at the waist with a broad band of leather.

The room in which he sat—or rather the hut, for there was but one room in it—was destitute of all furniture, except that already mentioned, besides one or two roughly-formed stools; but the walls were completely covered with strange-looking implements and trophies of the chase; and in a corner lay a confused pile of books, some of which were, from their appearance, extremely ancient. All this the benighted wanderers observed as they continued to approach cautiously on tiptoe. So cautious did they become as they drew near, and came within the light of the lamp, that Barney at length attempted to step over his own shadow for fear of making a noise; and, in doing so, tripped and fell with considerable noise through a hedge of prickly shrubs that encircled the strange man’s dwelling.

The hermit—for such he appeared to be—betrayed no symptom of surprise or fear at the sudden sound; but rising quietly, though quickly, from his seat took down a musket that hung on the wall, and, stepping to the open door, demanded sternly, in the Portuguese language, “Who goes there?”

“Arrah, then, if ye’d help a fellow-cratur to rise, instead o’ talkin’ gibberish like that, it would be more to your credit!” exclaimed the Irishman, as he scrambled to his feet and presented himself, along with Martin, at the hermit’s door.

A peculiar smile lighted up the man’s features as he retreated into the hut and invited the strangers to enter.

“Come in,” said he, in good English, although with a slightly foreign accent. “I am most happy to see you. You are English. I know the voice and the language very well. Lived among them once, but long time past now—very long. Have not seen one of you for many years.”

With many such speeches, and much expression of good-will, the hospitable hermit invited Martin and his companion to sit down at his rude table, on which he quickly spread several plates of ripe and dried fruits, a few cakes, and a jar of excellent honey, with a stone bottle of cool water. When they were busily engaged with these viands, he began to make inquiries as to where his visitors had come from.

“We’ve comed from the sae,” replied Barney, as he devoted himself to a magnificent pine-apple. “Och but yer victuals is mighty good, Mister—what’s yer name?—’ticklerly to them that’s a’most starvin’.”

“The fact is,” said Martin, “our ship has been taken by pirates, and we two swam ashore, and lost ourselves in the woods; and now we have stumbled upon your dwelling, friend, which is a great comfort.”

“Hoigh, an’ that’s true,” sighed Barney, as he finished the last slice of the pine-apple.

They now explained to their entertainer all the circumstances attending the capture of the Firefly, and their subsequent adventures and vicissitudes in the forest; all of which Barney detailed in a most graphic manner, and to all of which their new friend listened with grave attention and unbroken silence. When they had concluded he said,—“Very good. You have seen much in very short time. Perhaps you shall see more by-and-by. For the present you will go to rest, for you must be fatigued. I will *think* to-night,—to-morrow I will *speak*.”

“An’, if I may make so bould,” said Barney, glancing with a somewhat rueful expression round the hard earthen floor of the hut, “whereabouts may I take the liberty o’ sleepin’?”

The hermit replied by going to a corner, whence, from beneath a heap of rubbish, he dragged two hammocks, curiously wrought in a sort of light net-work. These he slung across the hut at one end, from wall to wall, and, throwing a sheet or coverlet into each, he turned with a smile to his visitors,—“Behold your beds! I wish you a very good sleep,—adios!”

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