ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE ISLAND QUEEN

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
Dethroned by Fire and Water—A Tale of the Southern Hemisphere. The Open Boat

Early one morning, in the year 18 hundred and something, the great Southern Ocean was in one of its calmest moods, insomuch that the cloudlets in the blue vault above were reflected with almost perfect fidelity in the blue hemisphere below, and it was barely possible to discern the dividing-line between water and sky.

The only objects within the circle of the horizon that presented the appearance of solidity were an albatross sailing in the air, and a little boat floating on the sea.

The boat rested on its own reflected image, almost motionless, save when a slight undulation of the water caused the lower edge of its reflection to break off in oily patches; but there was no dip of oars at its sides, no rowers on its thwarts, no guiding hand at the helm.

Evidently the albatross regarded the boat with curiosity not unmixed with suspicion, for it sailed in wide circles round it, with outstretched neck, head turned on one side, and an eye bent inquiringly downward. By slow degrees the circles diminished, until the giant bird floated almost directly over the boat. Then, apparently, it saw more than enough to satisfy its curiosity, for, uttering a hoarse cry, it swooped aside, and, with a flap of its mighty wings, made off towards the horizon, where it finally disappeared.

The flap and the cry seemed, however, to have put life into the little boat, for a human head rose slowly above the gunwale. It was that of a youth, of about twenty years of age, apparently in the last stage of exhaustion. He looked round slowly, with a dazed expression, like one who only half awakes from sleep. Drawing his hand across his brow, and gazing wistfully on the calm sea, he rose on his knees with difficulty, and rested his arms on a thwart, while he turned his gaze with a look of intense anxiety on the countenance of a young girl who lay in the bottom of the boat close beside him, asleep or dead.

“It looks like death,” murmured the youth, as he bent over the pale face, his expression betraying sudden alarm; “and it must—it must come to this soon; yet I cannot bear the thought. O God, spare her!”

It seemed as if the prayer were answered at once, for a fluttering sigh escaped from the girl’s bloodless lips, but she did not awake.

“Ah! sleep on, dear sister,” said the youth, “it is all the comfort that is left to you now. Oh for food! How often I have wasted it; thought lightly of it; grumbled because it was not quite to my taste! What would I not give for a little of it now—a very little!”

He turned his head away from the sleeping girl, and a wolfish glare seemed to shoot from his eyes as they rested on something which lay in the stern of the boat.

There were other human beings in that boat besides the youth and his sister—some still living, some dead, for they had been many days on short allowance, and the last four days in a state of absolute starvation—all, save Pauline Rigonda and her little brother Otto, whose fair curly head rested on his sister’s arm.

During the last two nights, when all was still, and the starving sailors were slumbering, or attempting to slumber, Dominick Rigonda—the youth whom we have just introduced to the reader

—had placed a small quantity of broken biscuit in the hands of his sister and little brother, with a stern though whispered command to eat it secretly and in silence.

Obediently they ate, or rather devoured, their small portion, wondering where their brother had found it. Perchance they might have relished it less if they had known that Dominick had saved it off his own too scant allowance when he saw that the little store in the boat was drawing to an end—saved it in the hope of being able to prolong the lives of Pauline and Otto.

This reserve, however, had been also exhausted, and it seemed as if the last ray of hope had vanished from Dominick's breast, on the calm morning on which our tale opens.

As we have said, the youth glared at something lying in the stern of the boat. It was a tarpaulin, which covered a human form. Dominick knew that it was a dead body—that of the cabin-boy, who had died during the night with his head resting on Dominick's arm. The two men who lay sleeping in the bow knew nothing of his death, and they were so weak from exhaustion at the time the boy died that Dominick had thought it unnecessary to rouse them. The poor boy's emaciated frame could lie till morning, he thought, and then the sleepers would assist him to put it gently into the sea.

But when morning came, the pangs of hunger assailed the self-denying youth with terrible power, and a horrible thought occurred to him. He opened a large clasp-knife, and, creeping towards the body, removed the tarpaulin. A faint smile rested on the dead lips—the same smile that had moved them when Dominick promised to carry the boy's last loving message to his mother if he should survive.

He dropped the knife with a convulsive shudder, and turned his eyes on his sleeping sister and brother. Then he thought, as he picked up the knife again, how small an amount of food would suffice to keep these two alive for a few days longer, and surely a sail *must* come in sight at last; they had waited for it, expectingly, so long!

Suddenly the youth flung the knife away from him with violence, and endeavoured with all his might to lift the body of the boy. In the days of his strength he could have raised it with one hand. Now he strove and energised for many minutes before he succeeded in raising it to the gunwale. At last, with a mighty effort, he thrust it overboard, and it fell into the sea with a heavy plunge.

The noise aroused the two men in the bow, who raised themselves feebly. It was to them an all too familiar sound. Day by day they had heard it, as one and another of their comrades had been committed to the deep. One of the men managed to stand up, but as he swayed about and gazed at Dominick inquiringly, he lost his balance, and, being too weak to recover himself, fell over the side. He reappeared for a moment with outstretched arms and hands clutching towards the boat. Then he sank, to be seen no more. The other man, who had been his intimate friend and messmate, made a frantic effort to save him. His failure to do so seemed to be more than the poor fellow could bear, for he sprang up with the wild laugh and the sudden strength of a maniac, and leaped into the sea.

Dominick could do nothing to prevent this. While staring at the little patch of foam where the two men had gone down, he was startled by the sound of his sister's voice.

"Are they *all* gone, brother?" she asked, in a low, horrified tone.

"All—all, sister. Only you, and Otto, and I left. How soundly the poor boy sleeps!"

"I wish it might please God to let him die thus," said Pauline, with a weary sigh that told eloquently of hope deferred.

"Your wish may be granted," returned Dominick, "for the dear boy seems to be sinking. It can scarcely, I think, be natural sleep that prevented the shout of that poor fellow from arousing him. But lie down again, Pauline; sleep may do you a little good if you can obtain it, and I will watch."

"And pray," suggested the poor girl, as she lay down again, languidly.

"Yes, I will pray. Surely a sail must appear soon!"

Dominick Rigonda was strong in youthful hope even in that hour of sorest trial, but he was not strong in faith. He prayed, however, and found his faith strengthened in the act, for he looked up immediately after with a feeling amounting almost to certainty, that the long-expected and wished-for

sail would greet his eyes. But no sail was visible in all the unbroken circle of his horizon. Still the faith which had prompted the eager gaze did not quite evaporate. After the first shock of disappointment at his prayer not being answered according to its tenor, his assurance that God would yet send relief returned in some degree, and he was not altogether disappointed, though the answer came at last in a way that he did not expect.

After sitting in a half-sleeping condition for some time, he aroused himself, and crept with considerable difficulty to the bow to procure the blanket which had covered the two men who had just perished. A corner of the blanket had caught on the end of one of the floor-planks. In disengaging it Dominick chanced to raise the plank which was loose, and observed something like a bundle lying underneath. Curiosity prompted him to examine it. He found that it was wrapped in canvas, and carefully tied with cord. Opening it he discovered to his surprise and intense joy that it contained some ship's biscuit, a piece of boiled pork, and a flask of water.

Only those who have been suddenly presented with food and drink while starving can appreciate the feelings that filled the heart of the poor youth with laughter and thanksgiving; but his joy was not selfish, for the prospect of immediate personal relief had but a secondary place in his thoughts.

Hastening with the inestimable treasure to the place where his brother and sister lay, he carefully spread it out on a piece of sailcloth, and cut a few thin slices of the pork before arousing them.

"Awake, sister, and eat!" he said at last, gently shaking Pauline by the shoulder.

"O Dominick!" she exclaimed, raising herself, and gazing eagerly at the food. "I was dreaming of this when you awoke me!"

"That's odd, now," said little Otto, who had also been aroused, "for I was dreaming of eating! And I am so hung—"

He got no further, for, having clutched a handful of biscuit, he suddenly stopped the way of utterance.

"How good of you, Dom!" said Pauline, eating with as much relish, though not with such voracity, as her little brother, "Where did you get this?"

"No matter; eat and be thankful," said Dominick curtly, for he was himself eating with wolfish haste by that time. He restrained himself, however, after a few minutes.

"Hold! We must not indulge too freely. It will hurt us after fasting so long. Besides, this supply is very small, and must be made to last as long as possible. No, my boy, you must eat no more at this time, but you may drink a little."

About a table-spoonful of water was measured out to each, and then the remainder of the food was carefully wrapped up and put away.

"Do you think that this supply was hidden by one of the poor fellows who left us this morning?" asked Pauline.

"I think so; and no doubt his motive was a good one. You know he was very fond of his messmate. I should think he saved up his allowance to help him; but, whatever the motive, it has proved a blessing to us—"

He ceased speaking, for both sister and little brother had drooped their weary heads, and were again in a heavy slumber. Dominick himself felt intensely the desire to follow their example, but he resisted it, feeling that it was his duty to watch for the long-expected sail that never appeared. At first his efforts were successful, but by degrees the tendency to sleep became so overpowering that his struggles were unavailing. Sense of duty and every other motive gave way before it; his head finally dropped forward, and, with a heavy sigh of contentment, he followed his brother and sister to the land of Nod.

Profound, prolonged, and refreshing was that sweet slumber, after the first good meal these poor castaways had eaten for many days. The weather fortunately continued bright and warm, so that they did not suffer so much from exposure as on previous days, and the gentle rocking of the boat tended to deepen and prolong their repose.

Thus they floated peacefully during the greater part of that day—the one solitary speck on the surface of the great ocean, for the albatross seemed to have finally forsaken them.

Towards noon a light westerly breeze sprang up. It was not sufficient to raise a sea or disturb the sleepers, but, in conjunction with ocean currents, it drifted them to the south-east at a considerable rate, so that in the evening, without the aid of oar or sail, they were far from the spot upon the sea where we introduced them to the reader.

At last Dominick awoke with a long-drawn sigh, and, raising his head, looked over the side of the boat. An exclamation of surprise and joy broke from him, for there, like a speck, where something like a heavy bank of clouds rested on the horizon, was the long-expected sail.

His first impulse was to awaken the sleepers, but he checked himself. He would look more carefully. His eyes might be deceiving him, and the disappointment if he should be mistaken would be overwhelming. He would spare them that. Rising to his feet he shaded his eyes with one hand, and gazed long and earnestly.

The longer he looked, however, and the more he rubbed his eyes, the more convinced was he that a vessel was really in sight.

"Pauline," he said at length, with suppressed emotion, as he gently shook her arm, "see, God *has* answered our prayers: a vessel is in sight!"

The poor girl raised herself quickly, with an exclamation of thankfulness, and gazed intently in the direction pointed out.

"It is, surely it is a ship," she said, "but—but—don't you think there is something curious about its appearance?"

"I have indeed been puzzled during the last few minutes," replied Dominick. "It seems as if there were something strange under her, and her position, too, is rather odd.—Ho! Otto, rouse up, my boy, and look at the vessel coming to save us. Your eyes are sharp! Say, d'you see anything strange about her?"

Thus appealed to, Otto, who felt greatly refreshed by his good meal and long sleep, sat up and also gazed at the vessel in question.

"No, Dom," he said at length; "I don't see much the matter with her, except that she leans over on one side a good deal, and there's something black under and around her."

"Can it be a squall that has struck her?" said Pauline. "Squalls, you know, make ships lie over very much at times, and cause the sea round them to look very dark."

"It may be so," returned Dominick doubtfully. "But we shall soon see, for a squall won't take very long to bring her down to us."

They watched the approaching vessel with intense eagerness, but did not again speak for a considerable time. Anxiety and doubt kept them silent. There was the danger that the vessel might fail to observe them, and as their oars had been washed away they had no means of hoisting a flag of distress. Then there was the unaccountable something about the vessel's appearance which puzzled and filled them with uncertainty. At last they drew so near that Dominick became all too well aware of what it was, and a sinking of the heart kept him still silent for a time.

"Brother," said Pauline at last in a sad voice, as she turned her dark eyes on Dominick, "I fear it is only a wreck."

"You are right," he replied gloomily; "a wreck on a barren shore, too. Not a scrap of vegetation on it, as far as I can see—a mere sandbank. Currents are carrying us towards it, and have led us to fancy that the vessel was moving."

He spoke with bitterness, for the disappointment was very great, and physical weakness had rendered him less able to bear it than he might otherwise have been.

"Don't get grumpy, Dom," said Otto, with a slightly humorous look that was peculiar to him—a look which had not lighted up his eyes for many days past.

"I *won't* get grumpy," returned Dominick with sudden energy, patting the boy's head. "It is quite clear that a good feed and a long rest were all you required to set up your plucky little spirit again."

"Dom," said Pauline, who had been looking intently at the wreck, "is there not something like a line of white close to the wreck?"

"Ay, there is," replied Dominick, his countenance again becoming grave; "it is a line of breakers, through which it will be very difficult to steer our little boat."

"Steer, Dom," exclaimed Otto, with a look of surprise; "how can you talk of steering at all, without oar or helm?"

"I must make one of the floor-planks do for both," returned Dominick.

"I say," continued the boy, "I'm horribly hungry. Mayn't I have just a bite or two more?"

"Stay, I'm thinking," replied the other.

"Think fast then, please, for the wolf inside of me is howling."

The result of Dominick's thinking was that he resolved to consume as much of their stock of provisions as possible in one meal, in order to secure all the strength that was available by such means, and thus fit them for the coming struggle with the surf. "For," said he, "if we get capsized far from the shore, we have no chance of reaching it by swimming in our present weak condition. Our only plan is to get up all the strength we can by means of food. So here goes!"

He untied the bundle as he spoke, and spread the contents on his knees. Otto—who was, indeed, a plucky little fellow, and either did not realise or did not fear the danger that lay before him—commenced to eat with almost jovial avidity. Indeed, all three showed that they had benefited greatly by what they had already eaten, and now, for the first time during many days, consumed what they considered a full and satisfactory meal, while they drifted slowly but steadily towards the land.

As they neared it, the heavy mass on the horizon, which they had taken for a bank of clouds, became more distinct. A light haze cleared away and showed it to be an island, to which the sandbank formed a barrier reef; but any interest that might have been aroused by this discovery was absorbed by present anxiety, for the white and gleaming surf warned them that a serious and critical moment in their lives was fast approaching. Pauline was awed into silence, and even Otto's countenance became gradually solemnised.

Chapter Two.
Wrecked on a Reef

The coral reefs, which in various shapes and sizes stud the Southern seas, are sometimes rendered almost unapproachable by the immense waves which fall upon them. Even in the calmest weather these huge breakers may be seen falling with prolonged roar on the beach. The lightest undulation on the sea, which might almost escape observation away from land, takes the form of a grand, quiet billow as it draws near to an islet or reef, and finally, coming majestically on, like a wall of rolling crystal, breaks the silence suddenly by its thunderous fall, and gives to the sands a temporary fringe of pure white foam.

To ride in on the crest of one such roller on a piece of board and leap upon the shore, is a feat peculiar to South Sea islanders, who are trained to the water from earliest infancy. To do the same thing in a small boat, without oars, without strength, without experience, almost without courage, is a feat that no South Sea islander would attempt, and the necessity for performing which might cause the hair of any islander's head to stand on end.

That Dominick Rigonda's hair did not stand on end, as he sat there with pale cheeks and compressed lips, was probably due to the fact that he had thrust his straw hat tightly down on his brows.

As the boat drew nearer to the reef, both Pauline and Otto had risen, in the strength of their hearty meal, and were now seated on the thwarts of the boat. Their brother had selected the thickest floor-plank, and cut it roughly into the form of an oar with a clasp-knife. He now sat with it over the stern, sculling gently—very gently, however, for he reserved the little strength that remained to him for the critical moment.

The undulations of the sea, which had rocked them hitherto so softly, had by that time assumed a decided form and force, so that the boat rose on the oily back of each billow that passed under it, and slid back into a watery hollow, to be relifted by each successive wave.

"You look very anxious," said Pauline, clasping her hands on her knee, and gazing earnestly in her brother's face.

"I cannot help it," returned Dominick, curtly.

"Is our danger then so great?"

Dominick only half admitted that it was. He did not wish to alarm her, and tried to smile as he said that the struggle would be brief—it would soon be over.

"But tell me, where lies the danger?" persisted Pauline. "I do not quite see it."

"'Where ignorance is bliss,' dear, 'tis folly to be wise,'" returned Dominick, with an unsuccessful effort to look more at ease.

"Nay, brother, but I am not ignorant that danger exists—only ignorant as to the amount and nature of it. Surely there cannot be much risk in pushing our boat through that white foam that lines the shore with so soft a fringe."

"I should think not," broke in the pert and inexperienced Otto; "why, Pina," (thus he abridged his sister's name), "there's as much danger, I should think, in pushing through a tub of soap-suds."

"Come, Dom," returned the girl, "explain it to me; for if you don't point out where the danger really lies, if you leave me in this state of partial ignorance, I shall be filled with alarm instead of bliss from this moment till we reach the shore."

"Well, well, sister," said Dominick, when thus urged; "if you must have it, I will explain."

He went on to show that when the boat came near the shore the waves would grasp it, instead of letting it slip back; would carry it swiftly in on their crests, so that the great difficulty in such a case

would be to keep the boat's head pointing to the land, and if he failed to do so, they would infallibly be overturned and have to swim ashore.

"Well, that would be unpleasant, Dom," said the ignorant, as well as innocent, Pauline, "but it would not matter much, for we can all swim—thanks to you for insisting on teaching us long ago."

"We will try our best," said Dominick, who thereupon relapsed into silence, wisely resolving to let his sister retain all the "bliss" of "ignorance" that was possible under the circumstances.

Indeed, there was not much more time for conversation, for the power of the waves was beginning to be felt by the little craft, and the clumsy oar did not act with as much precision or force as was desirable, while Dominick's weakness rendered the steering difficult. Pauline now began to realise the danger somewhat more clearly from experience, and even Otto showed symptoms of surprise that amounted very nearly to alarm, as the boat at one point made a sudden rush on a wave-top as if it meant to try a race with it, and then as suddenly slipped back into the hollow behind, as if it had been disheartened, feeling that there was no chance.

At last they reached the point of greatest danger. The huge waves, as we have said, commenced out at sea in long, gentle undulations. Nearer the shore they advanced in the shape of glassy walls, one after another, like successive lines of indomitable infantry in time of war. Further in, the tops of these waves began to gurgle and foam, and gather real, instead of seeming, motion, as they rushed towards their fall. It was here that the boat showed symptoms of becoming unmanageable.

"Why, the water's beginning to boil!" exclaimed Otto, in some anxiety.

"Hold on, boy, and keep quiet," said his brother.

As he spoke, the water gurgled up, so that it seemed as if about to pour inboard all round. At the same time the boat made a rush shoreward as if suddenly endowed with life. Dominick struggled manfully to keep the stern to the sea. He succeeded, but in another moment the boat slipped back. It had not been fairly caught, and the wave passed on to fall with a roar like thunder a hundred yards or so ahead.

"The next will do it," said Dominick, with an anxious glance behind, where a crystal wall was coming grandly on—unnaturally high, it seemed to them, owing to their position in the hollow.

No need to tell Otto now to hold on! No need to explain difficulty or danger to Pauline! As her brother stood at the oar, quivering as much from weakness as exertion, she understood it all. But she was brave, and she could swim. This latter fact lent her additional confidence. Best of all, she had faith in God, and her spirit was calmed, for, whether life or death lay before her, she knew that her soul was "safe."

As Dominick had prophesied, the next wave took them fairly in its grasp. For a few moments the water hissed and gurgled round them. The steersman seemed to lose control for a second or two, but quickly recovered. Then there was a bound, as if the boat had been shot from a catapult, and the billow fell. A tremendous roar, tumultuous foam all round, increasing speed! The land appeared to be rushing at them, when Dominick's oar snapped suddenly, and he went overboard. A shriek from Pauline and a shout from Otto rose high above the din of raging water, as the boat broached-to and hurled its remaining occupants into the sea.

Even in that trying moment Dominick did not lose presence of mind. He could swim and dive like a water-rat. Pushing towards his brother and sister, who were heading bravely for the shore, he shouted, "Dig your fingers and toes deep into the sand, and hold on for life, if—" (he corrected himself) "*when* you gain the beach."

It was well they were forewarned, and that they were constitutionally obedient. A few minutes later, and they were all swept up high on the beach in a wilderness of foam. The return of that wilderness was like the rushing of a millrace. Sand, stones, sticks, and seaweed went back with it in dire confusion. Prone on their knees, with fingers and toes fixed, and heads down, the brothers and sister met the rush. It was almost too much for them. A moment more, and strength as well as breath would have failed; but the danger passed, and Dominick sprang to his feet.

"Up, up! and run!" he shouted, as he caught Pauline round the waist and dragged her on. Otto needed no help. They were barely in time. The succeeding wave roared after them as if maddened at having lost its prey, and the foaming water was up with them, and almost round their knees, ere its fury was quite spent.

"Safe!" exclaimed Dominick.

"Thank God!" murmured Pauline, as she sank exhausted on the sand.

Otto, who had never seen his sister in such a state before, ran to her, and, kneeling down, anxiously seized one of her hands.

"Never fear, lad," said his brother in reassuring tones, "she'll soon come round. Lend a hand to lift her."

They bore the fainting girl up the beach, and laid her on a grassy spot under a bush. And now Dominick was glad to find that he had been mistaken in supposing that the coral reef was a mere sandbank, destitute of vegetation. Indeed, before landing, he had observed that there were a few trees on the highest part of it. He now perceived that there was quite a little grove of cocoa-nut palms, with a thicket of underwood around them, which, if not extensive, was at all events comparatively dense. He pointed out the fact to Otto, who was chafing his sister's hands.

"Ay," responded Otto, "and the island on the other side must be a goodish big one, for I got a glimpse of it through the trees as we came rushing in on that monstrous wave."

In a short time Pauline recovered, and Dominick returned to the water's edge with Otto.

"Our first care must be," he said, "to save our little boat if we can, for it is the only means we have of escaping from this island."

"Escaping!" repeated Otto, in surprise. "I don't want to escape from it, Dom."

"Indeed! why not?"

"Why, because I've dreamed about being cast on a desolate island hundreds of times, and I've read about Robinson Crusoe, and all the other Crusoes, and I've longed to be cast on one, and now I am cast on one, so I don't want to escape. It'll be the greatest fun in the world. I only hope I won't wake up, as usual, to find that it's all a dream!"

Dominick laughed (not scornfully, by any means) at the boy's enthusiasm; nevertheless he had strong sympathy with him, for the period had not passed so long ago when he himself entertained a very vivid impression of the romance of such a situation, and he did not trouble his mind about the stern realities.

"I sincerely hope it may come up to your expectations, Otto, my boy; nevertheless we must secure the boat for fishing purposes, even though we don't try to escape in it."

"For fishing! why, we have neither hooks nor lines."

"True, lad; but we have got fingers and brains. It strikes me that we shall have occasion to use all our powers and possessions if we are not to starve here, for the reef seems to have very little vegetation on it, and there is sure to be a lagoon of water on the other side, separating it from the island beyond."

"I wonder if there is fresh water on the reef," said Otto, with a very sudden look of solemnity and pursing of the mouth.

"You may well ask that. I hope there is. We will go and settle the point the moment we have secured the boat, if—"

He stopped, for he saw at that moment that the sea had taken good care to secure the boat to itself as a plaything. Having dashed it into small pieces, it was by that time busily engaged in tossing these about among the foam, now hurling the splinters high upon the shore, anon sending up long watery tongues to lick them back, and then casting them under the incoming rollers, to be further reduced into what is usually styled matchwood.

There was a small bay close at hand, where the sandy beach was strewn with rocks, in which the sea appeared to play this game with unusual vigour. It was a sort of hospital for marine incurables, into which the sea cast its broken toys when tired of smashing them up, and left them there to rot.

Regarding this spot with a thoughtful look, Dominick remarked that the wreck which lay on the rocks off the tail of the island was by no means the first that had taken place there.

"And won't be the last, I fancy," said Otto.

"Probably not. Indeed, from the appearance of this bay, and the fact that an ocean current drifted us towards the spot, I should think that the island is a particularly dangerous one for vessels. But come, we'll go see how Pina gets on, and then proceed to examine our new home."

Returning to the place where Pauline had been left, they found the poor girl wringing the water out of her dress. The news of the fate of the little boat did not seem to affect her much, she did not fully appreciate the loss, and was more taken up with the idea of thankfulness for deliverance from death.

"May I not go with you?" she asked, on hearing that her brothers were going to search for water.

"Certainly. I thought you might perhaps prefer to rest, and dry your clothes in the sun," replied Dominick.

"Walking will dry them better," said Pina. "Besides, I have quite recovered."

"You're a plucky little woman," said Otto, as they set off. "Isn't it nice to be here all by ourselves, on a real uninhabited island, quite fit for Robinson himself? Who knows but we may find Friday in the bushes!"

"Wouldn't that spoil it as an uninhabited isle?"

"A little, but not much."

"The thicket is too small to contain anything with life, I fear," said Dominick, whose anxiety as to food and drink prevented his sympathising much with the small-talk of the other two. "Luckily the weather is warm," he added, "and we won't require better shelter at present than the bushes afford, unless a storm comes.—Ho what have we here?—a path!"

They had reached the entrance to the thicket, and discovered what appeared to be an opening into it, made apparently by the hand of man.

"Nothing more likely," said Pauline. "If so many wrecks have taken place here—as you seem to think—some of the crews must have landed, and perhaps lived here."

"Ay, and died here," returned Dominick, in a grave, low tone, as he pointed to a skeleton lying on a spot which had once been cleared of bushes, but so long ago that the vegetation had partially grown up again. The man whose bleached bones lay before them had evidently perished many years before. On examination, nothing was found to afford any information about him, but when they had advanced a dozen yards further they came upon six little mounds, which showed that a party—probably a wrecked crew—had sojourned there for a time, and finally perished: so far their story was clear enough. One by one they must have sunk, until the last man had lain down to die and remain unburied.

Pushing past these sad evidences of former suffering, and feeling that the same fate might await themselves, they came to a sight which tended slightly to restore their spirits. It was a pool of water of considerable size, whether a spring or a rain-pool they could not tell. Neither did they care at that time, for the sudden feeling of relieved anxiety was so great, that they ran forward, as if under one impulse, and, lying down on their breasts, took a long refreshing draught. So powerful was the influence of this refreshment and discovery on their spirits that they became totally regardless and forgetful for the moment about food—all the more that, having so recently had a good meal, they were not hungry.

"I was sure we would find water," said Otto, as they continued to explore the thicket, "and I've no doubt that we shall find yams and plantains and breadfruits, and—aren't these the sort of things that grow wild on coral islands, Dom?"

"Yes, but I fear not on such a little scrap of reef as this. However, we shall not be quite destitute, for there are cocoa-nuts, you see—though not many of them. Come, our prospects are brightening, and as the sun is beginning to sink, we will look out for a suitable camping-ground."

"As far away from the skeleton, please, as possible," said Otto.

"Surely you don't suppose it can hurt you?" said Pauline.

"N–no, of course not, but it would be unpleasant to have it for a bedfellow, you know; so, the further away from it the better."

As he spoke they emerged from the thicket, at the end opposite to the spot where they had entered, and had their spirits again powerfully cheered by coming suddenly into a blaze of sunshine, for the bright orb of day was descending at that side of the islet, and his red, resplendent rays were glowing on the reef and on the palm-trees.

They also came in full view of the islet beyond, which, they now perceived, was of considerable size, and covered with vegetation, but, as Dominick had suspected, separated completely from the reef or outer isle on which they stood by a deep lagoon.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Pauline.

"As I feared," muttered Dominick, "and no means of reaching it."

"Pooh! Didn't Robinson Crusoe make rafts?" said Otto; "at least if he didn't, somebody else did, and anyhow *we* can."

"Come, let us continue our walk," said Dominick. "You don't fully appreciate the loss of our boat Otto. Don't you see that, even if we do build a raft, it will at best be a clumsy thing to manage, and heavy to pull, slow to sail, and bad to steer, and if we should chance to be on it when a stiff breeze springs up from the land, we should probably be driven out to sea and lost—or separated, if Pina should chance to have been left on shore at the time."

"What a fellow you are, Dom, for supposing chances and difficulties, and fancying they cannot be overcome," returned Otto, with the pert self-sufficiency that characterised him. "For my part I rather enjoy difficulties, because of the fun of overcoming them. Don't you see, we three can make quite sure of never being separated by never going out on our raft except together, so that we shall always enjoy ourselves unitedly, or perish in company. Then we can easily get over the difficulty of being blown out to sea, by never going on the sea at all, but confining ourselves entirely to the lagoon, which is large enough for any reasonable man, and may be larger than we think, for we can't see the whole of it from where we stand. Then, as to sailing and rowing slowly, we can overcome these difficulties by not being in a hurry,—taking things easy, you know."

To this Dominick replied that there was one difficulty which his little brother, with all his wisdom and capacity, would never overcome.

"And what may that be?" demanded Otto.

"The difficulty of being unable to talk common-sense."

"True, Dom, true, that is a great difficulty," retorted the boy, with deep humility of aspect, "for a man's conversation is greatly affected by the company he keeps, and with *you* as my only male companion, I have not much to hope for in the way of example. But even that may be got the better of by holding intercourse chiefly with Pina."

"But what if I refuse to talk?" said Pauline, with a laugh.

"Then will you be all the more able to listen, sister mine, which is the most common-sense thing that you can do, except when brother Dom speaks," said the incorrigible boy.

They had seated themselves on a bank while thus conversing, and from their position could see over a considerable portion of the lagoon. Suddenly Dominick pointed to an object a long way off, which was half concealed by the shadow of an island.

"Does it not look like a canoe?" he asked eagerly.

"Can't make it out at all," said Otto, shading his eyes with his hand.

"The sun on the water dazzles one so," observed Pauline, "that it is difficult to look steadily."

In a few moments the object which had drawn their attention sailed out from under the shade of the island, and, breaking up into fragments, rose into the air, proving itself to be a flock of large aquatic birds which had been swimming in a line.

"Things are not what they seem," observed Pauline, rising and following her brothers through a little thicket.

"What a pity!" exclaimed Otto; "I was in hopes it was a canoeful of savages. It would be such fun to have a real Friday to be our servant."

"More likely that our Friday would kill, cook, and eat us if he could," said Dominick, to the surprise of Otto, who gave it as his opinion that savages never ate men, and asked if his brother really believed that they did.

"Indeed I do. We have it recorded by all the best authorities that South Sea islanders are given to this horrible practice. There can be no doubt about it whatever, and the less we see of these fellows in our present defenceless state the better."

"How little," said Pauline, "our dear father thought when he wrote for us to go out to him in his ship, that we should be cast on an unknown island, and the ship itself go to the bottom!"

"Little indeed, and as little did poor mother dream of such a fate," returned Dominick, "when she let us all go so readily, on the understanding that we should give father no rest until we had got him to give up business, quit Java for ever, and return home."

"Dear old mother!" said Pauline, "I wish—oh! I wish so much that we had not left her, even though it was to be for only a few months. She must be *so* lonely, with no one to talk to—"

"You forget Pina."

"Forget—what?"

"The cat," returned Otto, unable to repress a smile, which rose in spite of the ready tear that dimmed his eye at the mere mention of his mother. "You know the cat is her great resource—a sort of safety-valve. Sometimes, when I've been listening to her, lying on the rug at her feet half asleep, I've heard her talk to that cat as if it really was a human being, and tell it all about her little affairs and daily troubles and worries in quite a confidential tone. I've taken it into my head that that's mother's way of thinking aloud—she thinks at the cat, for company: and to do the brute justice, it does its best to accommodate her. I've seen it sit and stare at her by the half-hour at a time, and give a little purr or a meaiow now and then as if it wanted to speak. I'm quite sure it thinks, and wonders no doubt what idle, useless work it is to click knitting-needles together by the hour."

"Dear me, Otto," said Pauline, with a laugh, "I had no idea that you could think so much about anything."

"Think!" exclaimed the boy, indignantly; "d'you suppose that it's only stern-browed, long-legged fellows like Dom there who can think? Why, I think, and think, sometimes, to such an extent that I nearly think myself inside out! But, Pina, you don't know half as much about motherkin as I do, for when *you* are with her she usually forgets *herself*, I can see, and talks only about the things that interest *you*; whereas, when there's nobody present but *me*, she counts me for nothing, and lets me do pretty much what I like—because no doubt she thinks I'll do that whether she lets me or not—but she's wrong, for I love her far more than she thinks; and then it's when I'm quiet and she forgets me, I fancy, or thinks I'm asleep, that she comes out strong at the cat."

"Darling mother!" said Pauline, musingly. "I can see her now, in my mind, with her neat black cap and smooth braided hair, and gold spectacles, as plain as if she were sitting before me."

"I'm sorry to destroy the vision, Pina, on my own account as well as yours," observed Dominick, "but it behoves us now to look for a night's lodging, for the sun is sinking fast, and it would not be pleasant to lie down on the bare ground shelterless, fine though the climate is. Come, we will return to the place where we landed, and search for a cave or a bit of overhanging rock."

The best sleeping-place that they had up to that time discovered was undoubtedly the grove in which they had found the graves of the shipwrecked crew, but, as Otto truly remarked, it would

probably result in uncomfortable dreams if they were to go to sleep in a burying-ground, alongside of a skeleton.

Accordingly they returned to the beach, and sought for some time among the *débris* of the boat for anything useful that might have been washed up, but found nothing. Then they went along-shore in the direction of the wreck which had raised their hopes so high that day when first seen, but nothing suitable was discovered until they rounded a low point of rocks, when Pauline came to a sudden pause.

"Look! a golden cave!" she exclaimed, pointing eagerly to a grassy spot which was canopied by feathery palms, and half enclosed by coral rocks, where was a cavern into which the sinking sun streamed at the moment with wonderful intensity.

Their home for that night obviously lay before them, but when they entered it and sat down, their destitution became sadly apparent. No beds to spread, no food to prepare, nothing whatever to do but lie down and sleep.

"No matter, we're neither hungry nor thirsty," said Dominick, with an air of somewhat forced gaiety, "and our clothes are getting dry. Come, sister, you must be weary. Lie down at the inner side of the cave, and Otto and I, like faithful knights, will guard the entrance. I—I wish," he added, in a graver tone, and with some hesitation, "that we had a Bible, that we might read a verse or two before lying down."

"I can help you in that," said his sister, eagerly. "I have a fair memory, you know, and can repeat a good many verses."

Pauline repeated the twenty-third Psalm in a low, sweet voice. When she had finished, a sudden impulse induced Dominick, who had never prayed aloud before, to utter a brief but fervent prayer and thanksgiving. Then the three lay down in the cave, and in five minutes were sound asleep.

Thus appropriately did these castaways begin their sojourn on a spot which was destined to be their home for a long time to come.

Chapter Three.
Explorations and Discoveries

As the sun had bathed the golden cave when our castaways went to sleep, so it flooded their simple dwelling when they awoke.

"Then," exclaims the intelligent reader, "the sun must have risen in the west!"

By no means, good reader. Whatever man in his wisdom, or weakness, may do or say, the great luminaries of day and night hold on the even tenor of their way unchanged. But youth is a wonderful compound of strength, hope, vitality, carelessness, and free-and-easy oblivion, and, in the unconscious exercise of the last capacity, Pauline and her brothers had slept as they lay down, without the slightest motion, all through that night, all through the gorgeous sunrise of the following morning, all through the fervid noontide and the declining day, until the setting sun again turned their resting-place into a cave of gold.

The effect upon their eyelids was such that they winked, and awoke with a mighty yawn. We speak advisedly. There were not three separate awakenings and three distinct yawns; no, the rousing of one caused the rousing of the others in succession so rapidly that the yawns, commencing with Pauline's treble, were prolonged, through Otto's tenor down to Dominick's bass, in one stupendous monotone or slide, which the last yawner terminated in a groan of contentment. Nature, during the past few days, had been doubly defrauded, and she, having now partially repaid herself, allowed her captives to go free with restored vigour. There was, however, enough of the debt still unpaid to induce a desire in the captives to return of their own accord to the prison-house of Oblivion, but the desire was frustrated by Otto, who, sitting up suddenly and blinking at the sun with owlish gravity, exclaimed—

"Well, I never! We've only slept five minutes!"

"The sun hasn't set *yet*!"

Dominick, replying with a powerful stretch and another yawn, also raised himself on one elbow and gazed solemnly in front of him. A gleam of intelligence suddenly crossed his countenance.

"Why, boy, when we went to sleep the sun was what you may call six feet above the horizon; now it is twelve feet if it is an inch, so that if it be still setting, it must be setting upwards—a phenomenon of which the records of astronomical research make no mention."

"But it *is* setting?" retorted Otto, with a puzzled look, "for I never heard of your astronomical searchers saying that they'd ever seen the sun rise in the same place where it sets."

"True, Otto, and the conclusion I am forced to is that we have slept right on from sunset to sunset."

"So, then, we've lost a day," murmured Pauline, who in an attitude of helpless repose, had been winking with a languid expression at the luminous subject of discussion.

"Good morning, Pina," said Dominick.

"Good evening, you mean," interrupted his brother. "Well, good evening. It matters little which; how have you slept?"

"Soundly—oh, so soundly that I don't want to move."

"Well, then, don't move; I'll rise and get you some breakfast."

"Supper," interposed Otto.

"Supper be it; it matters not.—But don't say we've lost a day, sister mine. As regards time, indeed, we have; but in strength I feel that I have gained a week or more."

"Does any one know," said Otto, gazing with a perplexed expression at the sky—for he had lain back again with his hands under his head—"does any one know what day it was when we landed?"

"Thursday, I think," said Dominick.

"Oh no," exclaimed Pauline; "surely it was Wednesday or Tuesday; but the anxiety and confusion during the wreck, and our terrible sufferings afterwards in the little boat, have quite confused my mind on that point."

"Well, now, here's a pretty state of things," continued Otto, sleepily; "we've lost one day, an' we don't agree about three others, and Dom says he's gained a week! how are we ever to find out when Sunday comes, I should like to know? There's a puzzler—a reg'lar—puzzl'—puz—"

A soft snore told that "tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," had again taken the little fellow captive, and prolonged silence on the part of the other two proved them to have gone into similar captivity. Nature had not recovered her debt in full. She was in an exacting mood, and held them fast during the whole of another night. Then she set them finally free at sunrise on the following day, when the soft yellow light streamed on surrounding land and sea, converting their sleeping-place into a silver cave by contrast.

There was no languid or yawny awakening on this occasion. Dominick sat up the instant his eyes opened, then sprang to his feet, and ran out of the cave. He was followed immediately by Otto and Pauline, the former declaring with emphasis that he felt himself to be a "new man."

"Yes, Richard's himself again," said Dominick, as he stretched himself with the energy of one who rejoices in his strength. "Now, Pina, we've got a busy day before us. We must find out what our islet contains in the way of food first, for I am ravenously hungry, and then examine its other resources. It is very beautiful. One glance suffices to tell us that. And isn't it pleasant to think that it is all our own?"

"'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,'" said his sister, softly.

The youth's gaiety changed into a deeper and nobler feeling. He looked earnestly at Pauline for a few seconds.

"Right, Pina, right," he said. "To tell you the truth, I was half-ashamed of my feelings that time when I broke into involuntary prayer and thanksgiving. I'm ashamed now of having been ashamed. Come, sister, you shall read the Word of God from memory, and I will pray every morning and evening as long as we shall dwell here together."

That day they wandered about their islet with more of gaiety and light-heartedness than they would have experienced had they neglected, first, to give honour to God, who not only gives us all things richly to enjoy, but also the very capacity for enjoyment.

But no joy of earth is unmingled. The exploration did not result in unmitigated satisfaction, as we shall see.

Their first great object, of course, was breakfast.

"I can't ask you what you'll have, Pina. Our only dish, at least this morning," said Dominick, glancing upwards, "is—"

"Cocoa-nuts," put in Otto.

Otto was rather fond of "putting in" his word, or, as Dominick expressed it, "his oar." He was somewhat pert by nature, and not at that time greatly modified by art.

"Just so, lad," returned his brother; "and as you have a considerable spice of the monkey in you, be good enough to climb up one of these palms, and send down a few nuts."

To do Otto justice, he was quite as obliging as he was pert; but when he stood at the foot of the tall palm-tree and looked up at its thick stem, he hesitated.

"D'you know, Dom," he said, "it seems to me rather easier to talk about than to do?"

"You are not the first who has found that out," returned his brother, with a laugh. "Now, don't you know how the South Sea islanders get up the palm-trees?"

"No; never heard how."

"Why, I thought your great authority Robinson Crusoe had told you that."

"Don't think he ever referred to it. Friday may have known how, but if he did, he kept his knowledge to himself."

"I wish you two would discuss the literature of that subject some other time," said Pauline. "I'm almost sinking for want of food. Do be quick, please."

Thus urged, Dominick at once took off his neckcloth and showed his brother how, by tying his feet together with it at a sufficient distance apart, so as to permit of getting a foot on each side of the tree, the kerchief would catch on the rough bark, and so form a purchase by which he could force himself up step by step, as it were, while grasping the stem with arms and knees.

Otto was an apt scholar in most things, especially in those that required activity of body. He soon climbed the tree, and plucked and threw down half a dozen cocoa-nuts. But when these had been procured, there still remained a difficulty, for the tough outer husk of the nuts, nearly two inches thick, could not easily be cut through with a clasp-knife so as to reach that kernel, or nut, which is ordinarily presented to English eyes in fruit-shops.

"We have no axe, so must adopt the only remaining method," said Dominick.

Laying a nut on a flat rock, he seized a stone about twice the size of his own head, and, heaving it aloft, brought it down with all his force on the nut, which was considerably crushed and broken by the blow. With perseverance and the vigorous use of a clasp-knife he at last reached the interior. Thereafter, on cocoa-nut meat and cocoa-nut milk, with a draught from a pool in the thicket they partook of their first breakfast on the reef.

"Now, our first duty is to bury the skeleton," said Dominick, when the meal was concluded; "our next to examine the land; and our last to visit the wreck. I think we shall be able to do all this in one day."

Like many, perhaps we may say most, of man's estimates, Dominick's calculation was short of the mark, for the reef turned out to be considerably larger than they had at first supposed. It must be remembered that they had, up to that time, seen it only from the low level of the sea, and from that point of view it appeared to be a mere sandbank with a slight elevation in the centre, which was clothed with vegetation. But when the highest point of this elevation was gained, they discovered that it had hidden from their view not only a considerable stretch of low land which lay behind, but an extensive continuation of the lagoon, or salt-water lake, in which lay a multitude of smaller islets of varying shapes, some mere banks of sand, others with patches of vegetation in their centres, and a few with several cocoa-nut palms on them, the nucleus, probably, of future palm groves. A large island formed the background to this lovely picture, and the irregular coral reef guarded the whole from the violence of the ocean. In some places this reef rose to a considerable height above the sea-level. In others, it was so little above it that each falling breaker almost buried it in foam; but everywhere it was a sufficient protection to the lagoon, which lay calm and placid within, encircled by its snowy fringe,—the result of the watery war outside. In one spot there was a deep entrance into this beautiful haven of peace, and that chanced to be close to the golden cave, and was about fifty yards wide. At the extremity of the reef, on the other side of this opening, lay another elevated spot, similar to their own, though smaller, and with only a few palms in the centre of it. From the sea this eminence had appeared to be a continuation of the other, and it was only when they landed that the Rigondas discovered the separation caused by the channel leading into the lagoon.

"Fairyland!" exclaimed Pauline, who could scarcely contain herself with delight at the marvellous scene of beauty that had so unexpectedly burst upon their view.

"Rather a noisy and bustling fairyland too," said Otto, referring to the numerous sea-birds that inquisitively came to look at them, as well as to the other waterfowl that went about from isle to isle on whistling wings.

The boy spoke jestingly, but it was clear from his heaving chest, partially-open mouth, and glittering eyes, that his little heart was stirred to an unwonted depth of emotion.

"Alas! that we have lost our boat," exclaimed Dominick.

To this Otto replied by expressing an earnest wish that he were able to swim as well as a South Sea islander, for in that case he would launch forth and spend the remainder of that day in visiting all the islands.

"Yes; and wouldn't it be charming," responded his brother, "to pay your aquatic visits in such pleasant company as that?"

He pointed to an object, which was visible at no great distance, moving about on the surface of the glassy sea with great activity.

"What creature is that?" asked Pauline.

"It is not a creature, Pina, only part of a creature."

"You don't mean to say it's a shark!" cried Otto, with a frown.

"Indeed it is—the back-fin of one at least—and he must have heard you, for he seems impatient to join you in your little trip to the islands."

"I'll put it off to some future day, Dom. But isn't it a pity that such pretty places should be spoiled by such greedy and cruel monsters?"

"And yet they *must* have been made for some good purpose," suggested Pauline.

"I rather suspect," said Dominick, "that if game and fish only knew who shoot and catch them, and afterwards eat them, they might be inclined to call man greedy and cruel."

"But we can't help that Dom. We must live, you know."

"So says or thinks the shark, no doubt, when he swallows a man."

While the abstruse question, to which the shark had thus given rise, was being further discussed, the explorers returned to the thicket, where they buried the skeleton beside the other graves. A close search was then made for any object that might identify the unfortunates or afford some clue to their history, but nothing of the sort was found.

"Strange," muttered Dominick, on leaving the spot after completing their task. "One would have expected that, with a wrecked ship to fall back upon, they would have left behind them evidences of some sort—implements, or books, or empty beef-casks,—but there is literally nothing."

"Perhaps," suggested Pauline, "the men did not belong to this wreck. They may have landed as we have done out of a small boat, and the vessel we now see may have been driven here after they were dead."

"True, Pina, it may have been so. However, the matter must remain a mystery for the present. Meanwhile we will go and explore the low land behind our reef."

"Isn't it strange, Dom, that we should become landed proprietors in this fashion?" remarked Otto, as they walked along.

"And that, too," added Pauline, "at a time when our hopes were lowest and our case most desperate."

"'Tis a magnificent estate," said Dominick, "of which we will constitute Pina the Queen, myself the Prime Minister, and Otto the army."

To this Otto objected that, as it was the business of an army to defend the people and keep them in order, there was no use for an army, seeing that there were no people; but Dominick replied that a queen and prime minister formed part of a people, and that an army was required to defend *them*.

"To keep them in order, you should say," retorted Otto, "for that will clearly be my chief duty if I accept the situation. Well, I've no objection, on the whole, to be an army; but, please, remember that in time of peace an army is expected to do no laborious work, and that at all times it is clothed and fed by the State. Now, Queen Pina the First, what would your Majesty wish the army to do?"

"Go forth and subdue the land," replied Pina the First, promptly, with quite a regal sweep of her hand towards the low ground and the lagoon beyond.

"Will your Majesty deign to instruct me how I am to begin?"

The Queen hesitated. She was rather puzzled, as rulers sometimes are when required to tackle details.

"May it please your Majesty," said Dominick, coming to the rescue like a true premier, "it is the chief duty of a prime minister to advise his sovereign. If it be your pleasure, I would recommend that the army should be sent down into yonder clump of reeds to ascertain what revenue is to be derived from the inhabitants thereof in the shape of wildfowl, eggs, etcetera, while I visit the shore of the lagoon to ascertain the prospects of supply, in the form of shellfish, from that quarter. Meanwhile, I would further advise your Majesty to sit down on this coral throne, and enjoy the contemplation of your kingdom till we return."

With a dignified bow and a little laugh Queen Pina assented, and the Prime Minister went off to the shore, while the army defiled towards the marsh.

Left alone, Pina the First soon forgot her royal condition in contemplation of the lovely prospect before her. As she gazed over the sand, and across the lagoon, and out on the gleaming sea, her thoughts assumed the wings of the morning and flew away over the mighty ocean to old England. Sadness filled her heart, and tears her eyes, as she thought of a mild little mother who had, since the departure of her three children, been reduced for companionship to a huge household cat, and who would ere long be wondering why letters were so long of coming from the dear ones who had left her.

Pauline had a vivid imagination and great power of mental abstraction. She summoned up the image of the little mother so successfully that she felt as if she actually saw her knitting her socks, sadly, with her head on one side. She even heard her address the cat (she was accustomed to address the cat when alone), and express a hope that in the course of a month or six weeks more she might expect to have news of the absent ones. And Pauline almost saw the household cat, which occupied its usual place on the table at the old lady's elbow, blink its eyes with sympathy—or indifference, she could not be quite sure which. Then Pauline's wayward thoughts took a sudden flight to the island of Java, in the China seas, where she beheld a bald little old gentleman—a merchant and a shipowner—who was also her father, and who sat reading a newspaper in his office, and was wondering why his good ship *Flying Fish*—which was bringing his children to him besides a quantity of other goods—did not make its appearance, and she plainly saw the look of disappointment as he threw the paper down, exclaiming, "Odd, very odd, but she *must* turn up soon."

Pauline saw nothing more after that for some time, because her eyes were blinded with tears.

Then Queen Pina cheered up again, for she thought that surely a ship would soon pass the island and take them off. As this last thought became more definite (for Pina was very young and hopeful) her eyes dried and permitted her to observe her kingdom more clearly.

The Prime Minister, she observed, was still busy on the shore, and, from his frequently stooping to pick up something, she argued that the affairs of State in that quarter were prospering.

Presently, from the midst of a mass of reeds not far off, there arose a shout, easily recognisable as that of the army, which was followed by cries of a stupendous, yet extremely familiar, kind. Pauline started up in considerable haste, and a moment later beheld the chief authors of the noise burst from the clump of reeds in the form of a large sow and a troop of little pigs.

They were evidently in a state of wild alarm, for, besides squealing with a degree of intensity possible only to pigs, they ran in such furious haste that they stumbled over sticks and stones in reckless confusion, scrambling to their feet again in such a hurry as to ensure repeated falls, and, generally, twirling themselves and their tails in a manner that was consistent with nothing short of raving madness.

Little wonder that those creatures acted thus, for, close on their heels, gasping and glaring, the army burst forth and fell on them—literally fell on one of them, for Otto in his anxiety to catch the hindmost pig, a remarkably small but active animal, tripped over a root just as he was about to lay hold of its little tail, and fell on the top of it with fearful violence. The mechanical pressure, combining with the creature's spiritual efforts, produced a sudden yell that threw the cries of its companions quite into the shade. It might have sufficed to blow Otto into the air. Indeed, it seemed as if some such result actually followed, for, after turning a complete somersault, the boy was on his feet again as

if by magic; but so also was the little pig, which, being thus forcibly separated from its family, turned aside and made for the main thicket. To cut off its retreat, the army made a sudden flank movement, headed the enemy, grasped it by the curly tail, and sought to lift it into his arms, but the curly tail straightened out, and, being exceedingly thin as well as taper, slipped from his hand. Need we say that the little pig came to the ground with a remonstrative squeal? It also rolled over. Otto, unable to check himself, flew past. The pig rose, diverged, and resumed its headlong flight. Otto doubled, came close up again, "stooped to conquer," and was on the point of coming off victorious, when, with a final shriek of mingled rage and joy, the enemy rushed through a hole under a prickly bush, while the discomfited army plunged headlong into the same, and stuck fast.

Meanwhile the rest of the porcine family had found refuge in an almost impenetrable part of the thicket.

"Pork, your Majesty," said Otto, on returning from the field of battle, "may at all events be counted as one of the products of your dominions."

"Truly it would seem so," responded the Queen, with a laugh; "nevertheless there does not appear to be much hope of its forming a source of supply to the royal larder."

"Time will show," said Dominick, coming up at the moment; "and see, here are several kinds of shellfish, which will form a pleasant addition to our fare."

"Ay, and I saw eggs among the reeds," said Otto, "some of which—"

"Not pigs' eggs, surely?" interrupted Dominick.

"They may be so," retorted Otto; "the fact that English pigs don't lay eggs, is no argument against South Sea pigs doing so, if they choose. But, as I was about to say, your Majesty, when the Premier interrupted me—some of these eggs I gathered, and would have presented them as an offering from the army, if I had not fallen and crushed them beyond repair."

In corroboration of what he said, Otto opened his coat pocket and revealed in its depths a mass of yellow substance, and broken shells.

"Horrible!" exclaimed Pauline; "how will you ever get it cleaned?"

"By turning it inside out—thus, most gracious Queen."

He reversed the pocket as he spoke, allowing the yellow compound to drip on the ground, and thereafter wiped it with grass.

"I wouldn't have minded this loss so much," he continued, "if I had not lost that little pig. But I shall know him again when I see him, and you may depend on it that he is destined ere long to be turned into pork chops."

"Well, then, on the strength of that hope we will continue the survey of our possessions," said Dominick, leading the party still further into the low grounds.

For some time the trio wandered about without making any further discoveries of importance until they came to a thicket, somewhat similar to the one near which they had been cast on shore, but much smaller. On entering it they were startled by a loud cackling noise, accompanied by the whirring of wings.

"Sounds marvellously like domestic fowls," said Dominick, as he pushed forward. And such it turned out to be, for, on reaching an open glade in the thicket, they beheld a large flock of hens running on ahead of them, with a splendid cock bringing up the rear, which turned occasionally to cast an indignant look at the intruders.

"That accounts for your eggs, Otto," observed Pauline.

"Yes, and here are more of them," said the boy, pointing to a nest with half a dozen eggs in it, which he immediately proceeded to gather.

"It is quite evident to me," remarked Dominick, as they continued to advance, "that both the pigs and fowls must have been landed from the wreck that lies on the shore, and that, after the death of the poor fellows who escaped the sea, they went wild. Probably they have multiplied, and we may find the land well stocked."

"I hope so. Perhaps we may find some more traces of the shipwrecked crew," suggested Pauline.

Their expectations were not disappointed, for, on returning in the evening from their tour of exploration, they came on a partially cleared place in the thicket beside the golden cave, which had evidently been used as a garden. In the midst of a mass of luxuriant undergrowth, which almost smothered them, vegetables of various kinds were found growing—among others the sweet potato.

Gathering some of these, Otto declared joyfully that he meant to have a royal feast that night, but a difficulty which none of them had thought of had to be faced and overcome before that feast could be enjoyed. It was just as they arrived at the golden cave that this difficulty presented itself to their minds.

"Dom," said Otto, with a solemn look, "how are we to make a fire?"

"By kindling it, of course."

"Yes, but, you stupid Premier, where are we to find a light?"

"To tell you the truth, my boy," returned Dominick, "I never thought of that till this moment, and I can't very well see my way out of the difficulty."

Pauline, to whom the brothers now looked, shook her head. Never before, she said, had she occasion to trouble her brain about a light. When she wanted one in England, all she had to do was to call for one, or strike a match. What was to be done in their present circumstances she had not the smallest conception.

"I'll tell you what," said Otto, after several suggestions had been made and rejected, "this is how we'll do it. We will gather a lot of dry grass and dead sticks and build them up into a pile with logs around it, then Pina will sit down and gaze steadily at the heart of the pile for some minutes with her great, brown, sparkling eyes she should be able to kindle a flame in the heart of almost anything in five minutes—or, say ten, at the outside, eh?"

"I should think," retorted the Queen, "that your fiery spirit or flashing wit might accomplish the feat in a shorter time."

"It seems to me," remarked Dominick, who had been thinking too hard to pay much regard to these pleasantries, "that if we live long here we shall have to begin life over again—not our own lives, exactly, but the world's life. We shall have to invent everything anew for ourselves; discover new methods of performing old familiar work, and, generally, exercise our ingenuity to the uttermost."

"That may be quite true, you philosophic Premier," returned Otto, "but it does not light our fire, or roast that old hen which you brought down with a stone so cleverly to-day. Come, now, let us exercise our ingenuity a little more to the purpose, if possible."

"If we had only some tinder," said Dominick, "we could find flint, I dare say, or some hard kind of stone from which fire could be struck with the back of a clasp-knife, but I have seen nothing like tinder to-day. I've heard that burnt rag makes capital tinder. If so, a bit of Pina's dress might do, but we can't burn it without fire."

For a considerable time the trio sought to devise some means of procuring fire, but without success, and they were at last fain to content themselves with another cold supper of cocoa-nut and water, after which, being rather tired, they went to rest as on the previous night.

Chapter Four.
Difficulties met and overcome

The next day Pauline and her brothers visited the wreck, and here new difficulties met them, for although the vessel lay hard and fast on the rocks, there was a belt of water between it and the main shore, which was not only broad, but deep.

"I can easily swim it," said Dominick, beginning to pull off his coat.

"Dom," said Otto, solemnly, "sharks!"

"That's true, my boy, I won't risk it."

He put his coat on again, and turned to look for some drift-wood with which to make a raft.

"There's sure to be some lying about, you know," he said, "for a wreck could hardly take place without something or other in the way of spars or wreckage being washed ashore."

"But don't you think," suggested Otto, "that the men whose graves we have found may have used it all up?"

Otto was right. Not a scrap of timber or cordage of any kind was to be found after a most diligent search, and they were about to give it up in despair, when Pauline remembered the bay where they had been cast ashore, and which we have described as being filled with wreckage.

In truth, this bay and the reef with its group of islands lay right in the track of one of those great ocean currents which, as the reader probably knows, are caused by the constant circulation of all the waters of the sea between the equator and the poles. This grand and continuous flow is caused by difference of temperature and density in sea-water at different places. At the equator the water is warm, at the poles it is cold. This alone would suffice to cause circulation—somewhat as water circulates in a boiling pot—but other active agents are at work. The Arctic and Antarctic snows freshen the sea-water as well as cool it, while equatorial heat evaporates as well as warms it, and thus leaves a superabundance of salt and lime behind. The grand ocean current thus caused is broken up into smaller streams, and the courses of these are fixed by the conformation of land—just as a river's flow is turned right or left, and sometimes backward in eddies, by the form of its banks and bottom. Trade winds, and the earth's motion on its axis, still further modify the streams, both as to direction and force.

It was one of those currents, then, which flowed past the reef and sometimes cast vessels and wreckage on its shores.

Hastening to the bay, they accordingly found enough of broken spars and planks, to have made half a dozen rafts, twice the size of that required to go off with to the wreck; so to work they went at once with eager enthusiasm.

"Hold on!" shouted Dominick, after a few spars had been collected and dragged up on the sand.

Otto and Pauline paused in their labour, and looked anxiously at their brother, for his face wore a perplexed look.

"We have forgotten that it is impossible to shove a raft of any size, big or little, through these huge breakers, so as to get it round the point, to where the wreck lies."

"Well, then," cried Otto, with the ready assurance of ignorance, "we'll just drag it overland to the wreck, and launch it there."

"But, Otto, you have not taken into consideration the fact that our raft must be so large that, when finished, the dragging of it over rough ground would require three or four horses instead of three human beings."

"Well, then," returned the boy, "we'll make it small, just big enough to carry one person, and then we'll be able to drag it overland, and can go off to the wreck one at a time."

"Now, just think, brainless one," retorted Dominick; "suppose that I were to go off first to the wreck, what then?"

"Why, then *I* would go off next of course, and then Pina would follow, and so we'd all get on board one at a time, and explore it together."

"Yes; but what would you come off on?"

"The raft, to be sure."

"But the raft, I have supposed, is with me at the wreck. It won't go back to the shore of its own accord to fetch you, and we have no ropes with which to haul it to and fro."

"Then there's nothing for it," said Otto, after a few moments' thought, "but to make it big enough for two, or carry over the broken spars and planks piecemeal, and put them together opposite the wreck; so, come along."

This latter plan being adopted, they set to work with energy. To their joy they found not only that a good deal of cordage—somewhat worn, indeed, but still serviceable—was mingled with the wreckage, but that many large protruding bolts and rusty nails formed convenient holdfasts, which facilitated the building up and fastening together of the parts.

At last, after considerable labour, the raft was got ready early in the afternoon, and the brothers, embarking on it with two long poles, pushed off to the wreck while Pauline sat on the shore and watched them.

It was an anxious moment when they drew near enough to observe the vessel more distinctly, for it was just possible that they might find in her hold a supply of food and things they stood so much in need of, while, on the other hand, there was a strong probability that everything had been washed out of her long ago, or that her former crew had taken out all that was worth removing.

"What if we should find casks of biscuits and barrels of pork, to say nothing of tea and sugar, and such like?" murmured the sanguine Otto, as they poled slowly out.

"And what if we should find nothing at all?" said Dominick.

"O Dom!" exclaimed Otto, in a voice so despairing that his companion turned to look at him in surprise. "Look! see! the ship has been on fire! It can only be the mere skeleton that is left."

Dominick turned quickly, and saw that his brother had reason for this remark. They had by that time approached so near to the wreck that the charred condition of part of her bulwarks, and specially of her lower spars, became obvious; and when, a few minutes later, they stood on the deck, the scene that presented itself was one of black desolation. Evidently the ill-fated vessel had been enveloped in flames, for everything on board was charred, and it was almost certain that her crew had run her on the rocks as the only method of escaping, her boats having been totally destroyed, as was apparent from the small portions of them that still hung from the davits.

"Nothing left!" said Otto. "I think that Robinson Crusoe himself would have given way to despair if *his* wreck had been anything like this. I wonder that even this much of it has been left above water after fire had got hold of it."

"Perhaps the hull sank after the first crash on the rocks, and put out the fire," suggested Dominick, "and then subsequent gales may have driven her higher up. Even now her stern lies pretty deep, and everything in her hold has been washed away."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.