

Goldfrap John Henry

The Ocean Wireless Boys on the Pacific



John Goldfrap

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Boys on the Pacific**

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The Ocean Wireless Boys on the Pacific

CHAPTER I. – ON THE BROAD PACIFIC

Twenty days out from San Francisco in the vast, heaving desert of the sea, twenty days of storm, sunshine and calm, the *Sea Gypsy*, the great white yacht of Jacob Jukes, head of the big Atlantic and Pacific Shipping Combine, was making her way lazily through the dreamy South Seas. The vessel was capable of great speed, being known as one of the fastest craft of her kind. But she was bound on a mission which might take a long time to consummate, and economy of coal, which was piled even on her decks, to re-enforce the supply in the bunkers, was necessary.

What this mission was remained, so far, a mystery to every one on board except Mr. Jukes himself, the iron-jawed and impenetrable organizer of the expedition. Up to this time he had shown no inclination to unburden himself of his secret, and although the craft was equipped with powerful wireless of the most modern type, the yacht had received no messages, nor had she sent any, under orders from Mr. Jukes.

On this particular evening Jack Ready leaned against the door of the wireless-room, a converted deck cabin, and covertly watched the heavy-shouldered, bull-necked form of the millionaire shipping man as the latter gazed over the rail across the vacant waters at the gorgeous sunset.

It was a true pageant of the heavens, such as is only to be seen in the Southern ocean. Great cloud-masses rose in wondrous forms, like glorified castle walls and turrets, glowing with purple and gold and red. Jack found himself following Mr. Jukes' gaze. Although such spectacles had been almost nightly ones since they had steamed into the tropics, there was something wild and sinister about the present one that thrilled him.

Captain Septimus Sparhawk, the brown, gaunt captain of the yacht, whose thin face was decorated by two little dabs of grayish whiskers forward of each ear, passed by.

"Nothing to do but to look at the sky, eh?" he asked Jack, as a suspicion of a smile crept over his face.

"That's about all, sir," rejoined Jack, with a laugh. "I expect to see spiders spinning webs on my instruments every day. I haven't touched the key since we sailed."

The captain shook his head. He was an old and loyal employee of the shipping man, and not much given to words. But, apparently, now he felt called upon to express himself.

"It's a queer business, lad," he said, "and it may get queerer still before we find out what it's all about. I'm as much in the dark as you or the cabin boy. But right now that sunset worries me more than anything else."

"You're on the look-out for a storm?" asked Jack, noting a sudden look of anxiety in the captain's pale blue eyes, surrounded by a network of tiny wrinkles, due to long gazing into salty gales.

"Worse than that, Ready," was the rejoinder. "This is the hurricane season in these parts and the glass, – I've just taken a squint at it, – is dropping as if it never meant to stop."

"If I could use the wireless –" began Jack.

"We could probably get a weather reading from some other ship," interrupted the captain, starting off, "but as it is, we might as well not have it on board at all. The thing's got me stumped."

He carried himself off on his long, thin legs but paused to speak to Mr. Jukes. The ship-owner, although Jack could not hear what was said, appeared to be agitated somewhat by the captain's words, for he began puffing rapidly at his after-dinner cigar, sending out smoke like the exhaust of a locomotive funnel, a sure sign, as Jack had observed, that he was disturbed.

"I'll make all snug, sir," the boy heard the captain say, as he turned away, "and then we will be prepared for whatever happens."

"Very well, Sparhawk," answered Mr. Jukes, in a somewhat louder voice than he had used hitherto, "and be sure to see to it that the deck load of coal is secured safely. They tell me the bunkers are running low."

As has been stated, the *Sea Gypsy's* decks were piled high fore and aft with coal, kept in place by wooden bulkheads, which did not add to the appearance of the ship and encumbered progress from bow to stern. Only amidships, where the cabins were situated, was the deck clear. As the captain ascended the bridge he turned and gave an order to a petty officer and presently the crew could be seen at work lashing big tarpaulins down over the coal which was so important to keep the *Sea Gypsy* moving on her mysterious mission.

The news that the coal supply was running low in the bunkers was a surprise to Jack. He made for Billy Raynor's cabin where the young chief engineer of the yacht was writing up his "log."

"Yes, it's right," he rejoined to Jack's question, "the loss of that deck load would be a serious matter. We're a good many hundred miles from land and will have to tap the supply before long."

"Billy, what on earth do you suppose is the object of this voyage?" demanded Jack abruptly.

"Blessed if I know, but I'm well satisfied with my promotion and job," declared Raynor. "Cruising these wonderful seas in a yacht that's a beauty, even if her decks are all littered up like a cattle boat's, just about suits me."

"That's all right, you've got something to do," complained Jack. "But look at my case. I have to polish up my instruments every day to keep them from getting rusty."

"Serves you right for not stopping ashore and enjoying yourself," chuckled Raynor teasingly. "Since you sold that 'Universal Detector' of yours to the government you could surely afford to."

"Just as if I could kick my heels on shore doing nothing," was Jack's indignant reply, "but it does seem as if it's about time we knew something of what this voyage is for."

"Maybe it's just a pleasure cruise to allow Mr. Jukes to get away from his business troubles," hazarded Raynor.

Jack shook his head in decided negative.

"There's more in it than that," he declared positively. "Mr. Jukes is first of all a man of business. He wouldn't come skylarking across the Pacific for three weeks if he was just out for a cruise. He'd go where he could keep in touch with the market and Wall Street."

"That's so," Raynor was compelled to agree. "Well, I suppose when he gets ready to spill some information he'll do it. In the meantime my job just suits me. But what made you ask about the deck coal?"

"Because Captain Sparhawk says we're in for a bad blow, maybe a hurricane."

Raynor's usually cheerful face became suddenly serious.

"When did he say that?" he asked.

"Just now. They're putting tarpaulins over it now. If we dropped it, we'd be in a bad fix, eh, Billy?"

"We'd have about coal enough left for two or three days," rejoined Raynor.

"And after that – ?"

"It would be a case of 'merrily we drift along.'"

The door gave a sudden sharp slam. A puff of wind, sweeping suddenly over the hitherto breathless sea, had banged it shut.

Jack jumped up and swung it quickly open again.

"Here she comes," he cried excitedly.

At the same instant the *Sea Gypsy* gave a sidelong lurch that sent both lads helter-skelter across the cabin. Outside came a sudden bawling of voices and a distant, disquieting roar that grew louder every second.

CHAPTER II. – THE OCEAN IN A RAGE

Directly they recovered their sea legs, both lads made for the cabin door. A wonderful but alarming spectacle met their eyes. The sunset had been blotted out as if by magic. In its place was a ragged, inky-black cloud curtain that was being swept across the sky as if invisible, titanic hands were swiftly pulling it.

The sea immediately about them was heaving wildly in great swells that tumbled the *Sea Gypsy*, rendered less stable by her top-heavy load, from side to side. Far off, under the rushing black cloud, the forefront of which was almost over them by this time, was a jagged line of white.

Mr. Booth, the second mate, bundled up in oilskins, ran past the boys on his way to the bridge. “Better get under cover,” he advised as he passed. “This is going to be a hummer.”

But, fascinated by the majestic sight, both boys stood still, clutching the rail and bracing themselves for the shock they felt was coming, for both had guessed that the jagged white line in the distance was a giant wave. Like a cliff of water it grew as it swept toward them, accompanied by a howling of the wind that sounded like a witches’ carnival. So swift was its advance that the boys had hardly time to run toward the cabin when it broke upon them.

The *Sea Gypsy* heeled like a ship that had been struck a mortal blow. For one instant she hung balanced as if she was about to capsize. The door of the cabin in which the boys had taken refuge was ripped from its hinges by the terrific force of the impact as if it had been matchwood.

The next moment both lads were struggling for their lives in a surging, sweeping smother of water that filled the cabin to the roof. Jack felt himself clutched by the hands of his chum. Fighting to keep himself above water, Jack saw that Raynor had been hurled against some object and been wounded. There was a jagged cut in his forehead.

He had hardly noticed this, when the *Sea Gypsy* staggered back to an even keel. As she did so the water swept out of the cabin like a millrace, carrying both boys helplessly with it.

Jack felt Raynor torn from his arms, and the next thing he realized he was struggling for his life in the waves that reared and roared above the floundering yacht.

A month before the events we are describing took place, Jack Ready, the young wireless operator of the *Sea Gypsy*, and his inseparable chum, Billy Raynor, had been summoned to Mr. Jukes’ New York office and told that they were detached from duty on the big *Columbia*, the crack liner of the Jukes’ ships, and ordered to pack their things forthwith and meet the ship-owner at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco within a week. Neither had demurred, supposing some interest of the ship-owners called for their presence there. But, much to their bewilderment, they had each been handed a substantial check by Mr. Jukes on his arrival in the western metropolis, told to outfit themselves for a long voyage, and nothing more. Two days later the *Sea Gypsy* cleared the harbor.

The acquaintance of Jack and Mr. Jukes had its beginning in certain events which took place near Jack’s quaint home, which he shared with an eccentric uncle on an old schooner in the Erie Basin in New York. The rescue by Jack of Mr. Jukes’ little daughter, and the result on his affairs, were fully detailed in the first volume of this series, which was called “The Ocean Wireless Boys on the Atlantic.” This is not the place to re-tell all the exciting adventures that befell Jack and young Raynor, who was third engineer on the steamer to which Jack was assigned, in fulfillment of his ambition to be a “wireless man.”

Nor can we do more here than to hint at the contents of the second volume. This was called “The Ocean Wireless Boys and the Lost Liner,” and set forth the fate of the *Tropic Queen*. In this book we found Jack and his inseparable chum steadily progressing in their chosen professions, and also met several other characters, all of whom had an important bearing on the events of the boys’ lives. Mr. Jukes took formal recognition of the part Jack played in the disaster that overtook the *Tropic Queen*, and inwardly resolved that his heroism and devotion to duty had made him a lad worth watching.

Still a third volume followed, describing the boys' further adventures. In the "Ocean Wireless Boys of the Iceberg Patrol," much interesting information about the manner in which the ocean lanes are guarded from the white menace of the north, was given. The boys shared in many thrilling adventures also, and ended by discovering something that an expedition, at the head of which was Jack's Uncle Toby, had almost lost through the tricks of a band of hard characters.

The fourth book setting forth their doings was called "The Ocean Wireless Boys and the Naval Code." Captain Simms of the U. S. N., after devising a novel code for the use of this government, through the machinations of a band of daring rascals, found himself robbed of it. Wireless played a big part in the recovery of the documents in the long run, Jack acquitting himself to the delight of the naval officials and the government by his work in this connection. Some of the miscreants, whose tricks Jack had helped to frustrate, were sent to prison but others got free. These latter the boys, though they little suspected it, were destined to meet again.

CHAPTER III. – A LONG NIGHT

Blinded, choked and with a red mist before his eyes, and in his ears the roar of waters, Jack fought the undertow of the retreat of the giant wave with all his strength. All at once he felt some heavy object hurled against him.

The force of the collision almost knocked what little breath remained in his body out of his lungs. Instinctively he reached out for whatever it was that had struck him.

It was a human body.

The boy had hardly realized this before he found himself flung, panting and gasping, down upon the deck. Thanks to the stays of the foremost of the *Sea Gypsy's* two masts, against which the retreating wave had pitched him, he had not been drawn overboard. Instead, as the pressure of water relaxed, it had dropped him and the mute burden he had clasped, to the deck.

For a few minutes Jack lay there panting, too much exhausted to exert a muscle or limb. The unconscious form hurtled against him by the swirling waters lay at his side. It was too dark for Jack to see then who it was, or if life remained in the motionless figure. By-and-by, as his strength came back, he got to his feet and dragged the limp form to a cabin. It proved to be the one which the great wave had swept from Jack so unceremoniously. Luckily, although the seas were thundering mountains high about the laboring yacht, none like that first terrific comber assailed her.

Steadying himself on the rocking floor with much difficulty, Jack fumbled for the electric switch. He found it at last and let on a flood of light. The radiance shed itself on a pale face with a deeply slashed forehead that lay at the boy's feet.

"It's Billy," choked the boy. He got on his knees by Raynor's unconscious form and gently raised his chum's head. It fell back limply. A blood-chilling thought surged through Jack and he grew as white as the lad he held.

He put his hand hastily over Raynor's heart and a great wave of relief went through him. His chum's heart was beating, although feebly. It was not too late to save him. It was a hard task for Jack to stagger across that bounding, reeling floor, carrying the limp and unconscious Raynor, but at last he managed to accomplish it, and deposited the injured young engineer in the bunk that occupied one side of the latter's cabin. Then he washed and dressed the injury as best he could.

"Now I'll have to get help," said the boy to himself. "The captain's got a medicine chest and bandages, but we have no doctor. I'll go and find the skipper."

Out upon the dripping decks, over which a wave crest would every now and then curl, with a roar like that of a waterfall, Jack once more emerged. Clawing at hand-holds and desperately clinging on now and then when a wave threatened to tear loose his grip, he wormed his way forward. As he reached the bridge deck, he heard a thunderous roar forward, and the *Sea Gypsy*, as if she had been freed of a burden, made a sudden plunge skyward, with her bow pointing almost straight at the obscured heavens.

"There goes the fore-deck load of coal," thought Jack, as he made his way to where, in the lee of the pilot house some obscure figures stood huddled. Ten minutes later he and the gaunt form of Captain Sparhawk were bending over Raynor, as he lay white and still, in his bunk. With rough skill the captain dressed the wound.

"It's a wonder that Mr. Jukes wouldn't have brought a doctor along," he muttered. "He's carrying a rapid-fire gun, so why not sawbones, too?"

"Where is Mr. Jukes?" demanded Jack suddenly.

"In his cabin, I guess. I haven't seen him since this ocean tantrum broke out."

"The – the rapid-fire gun you spoke about?" asked Jack.

The other looked at him in some confusion.

"Confound my habit of talking to myself," he exclaimed. "Did you hear that?"

“I couldn’t help it,” apologised Jack. “Are we going to fight any one?”

“You must ask Mr. Jukes that,” answered the captain, non-committally. “It’s up to him to tell what he wants to. All I know is that there is one on board. Maybe he brought it along to shoot clay pigeons with. Maybe not. I don’t know.”

“Well,” he added, “I’ve got to get for’ard again. I guess our young ship-mate will do now. He had a nasty crack though. Both of you are lucky you’re not in Davy Jones’ locker.”

All through the rest of that tempestuous night Jack sat by his chum, dozing off at times and then waking with a start to hear the uproar of the hurricane as they struggled through it. The dawn showed a troubled sea, leaping at the yacht as though to engulf her. The wind almost flattened Jack against the deck house as, Raynor having sunk into a deep sleep after an interval of consciousness, the young wireless man set out to see what chance there was for breakfast.

The companionway to the dining saloon on the deck below was in the after part of the ship. As he was about to descend an unusually big wave lifted the *Sea Gypsy* dizzily skyward, and then rushed her downward. There was a heave and a crash from the stern and Jack saw the after deck load of coal vanish like a black avalanche, to be swallowed up in the maw of the sea.

“Worse, and more of it,” he muttered, as some of the crew who had narrowly escaped being overwhelmed, set up a shout; “this will be bad news to give poor old Billy.”

CHAPTER IV. – THE DERELICT

Two days later the hurricane had blown itself out. The storm-stressed crew were set to work putting things to rights and the yacht put on more of her normal appearance. But she had been sadly battered for all that. Two boats were stove in, ventilators smashed and stanchions bent and twisted by the fury of the waves.

The flat, oily sea that succeeded the wild turmoil of the hurricane, heaved gently without a ripple as Jack and Raynor, the latter recovered but still wearing a bandage round his head, stood looking over the rail into the glassy waters.

So transparent was the ocean that, under them, they could see great fish swimming about slowly and lazily, as if life held no hurry for them. Now and then a great shark glided by, nosing about the ship for scraps. His sharp, triangular dorsal fin stuck from his back like a blue steel knife cutting the surface and glistening like a thing of metal. About these great tigers of the deep, two smaller fish usually hovered. These were pilot fish, the strange sea-creatures that invariably accompany sharks, and are supposed by sailors to pilot them to their prey.

Then there were queer-looking “gonies,” with their flat heads winging their way above the water and every now and then dropping, with a scream and a splash, in a group of a dozen to fight furiously over some drifting morsel. After these tussles they appeared to “run” over the water to give their heavy, awkward bodies a good start upward. Then, having attained a certain height, down they would flop again, like weights shooting through the air, hitting the water with a heavy splash and sliding, with a white wake behind them, for some feet.

Schools of nautilus, too, gave them something to look at as the delicate little creatures, with their thin, membranous sails set, drifted by under the gentle breeze that hardly ruffled the water.

“Doesn’t look much as if this ocean could ever have kicked up the ructions it did, eh, Billy?” remarked Jack, after a long silence.

“It does not,” replied Raynor, with a rueful grin, “but I owe it this crack on the head.”

“And the loss of that coal,” chimed in Jack. “No wonder you look glum, old fellow. We’ll never make port on what’s below.”

“Not a chance of it,” was the rejoinder, “about all we can do is to use the sails if the worst comes to the worst.”

“Well, as we don’t appear to have any port in view, and nothing to do but to keep on drifting about like another Flying Dutchman, I don’t see that it much matters where we fetch up,” commented Jack, with some irritation.

It was at that instant that there came an interruption. The voice of the sea-man at the look-out forward broke the spell.

“Steamer, ho!” he shouted.

“Where away?” came a hoarse voice from the bridge, that of Mr. Jolliffe, the first officer.

“Three p’int on the starbo’d bow.”

“Let’s go forward and have a look,” suggested Jack. “You’re not on watch for some time yet.”

“I’m with you,” agreed Raynor. “Anything for variety’s sake. Wonder what ship it is?”

“Too far off to make out yet,” said Jack, as, far off, they could just about see, by straining their eyes, a small dark speck on the distant horizon.

“I don’t see any smoke,” said Raynor. “Perhaps it’s a sailing ship after all.”

“We’ll know before long,” was Jack’s reply.

During an interval in which the *Sea Gypsy* drew steadily toward the craft that had, by this time, excited the attention of all on board, the boys saw Mr. Jukes emerge from his cabin and take his place on the bridge beside Captain Sparhawk. That bronzed mariner handed the millionaire his glasses and Mr. Jukes’ rather fat, pallid face took on an unwonted hue of excitement as he handed them back.

The boys standing on the main deck just below the bridge heard the owner of the yacht putting sharp questions. He showed more animation than he had at any time during the voyage. The sight of the other craft appeared to affect him curiously.

“She’s a schooner, Sparhawk.”

“Undoubtedly, sir.”

“But although she has her canvas set she is making no way.”

“That appears to be correct. But there is little wind. Odd though that she doesn’t signal us.”

Mr. Jukes snatched up the glasses again from the shelf where he had laid them down.

“Blessed if I can make out a soul on board her, Sparhawk,” he exclaimed presently. “Here, try what you can do.”

He handed the binoculars over to the master of the *Sea Gypsy*. Captain Sparhawk took a prolonged observation. When he, in turn, laid the glasses down his thin, mahogany-hued face bore a puzzled look.

“It’s queer, sir, but I don’t seem to be able to make out a living soul either.”

“A derelict, perhaps?”

“Possibly,” assented the captain, and no more was said as, with all eyes fixed on the strange schooner, the *Sea Gypsy* drew nearer. The boys could now make out every detail of the other craft. She was a trig-looking schooner, painted black, with a flush deck except for her after house and a small structure astern of the fore-mast. Her canvas was set but it flapped idly in the light breeze as she swung to and fro on the Pacific swells. No guiding hand could be seen at her wheel. Not a soul was visible on her deserted decks.

There is no more melancholy sight than a sea derelict, the aimless prey of winds and currents, drifting sometimes for years over the trackless wastes of the ocean. The boys felt something of this as all doubt as to human occupancy of the schooner vanished.

“Deserted, I reckon,” hazarded Jack. “Although her canvas appears perfect, her hull sound and —”

He broke off sharply. From the abandoned ship there had suddenly come a sound which, under the circumstances, was particularly depressing and even startling.

It was the measured tolling of a bell, like a funeral knell.

CHAPTER V. – THE “CENTURION.”

“Hark!” cried Raynor, as the two boys exchanged glances.

“I have it,” exclaimed Jack the next instant. “That’s only the tolling of the ship’s bell as the schooner rolls on the sea.”

“My, it gave me a jump though,” admitted Raynor. “Hullo, they are slowing down. Must be going to board her.”

“Evidently,” agreed Jack, as the *Sea Gypsy*’s propeller revolved more and more slowly.

Captain Sparhawk descended from the bridge. The ponderous form of Mr. Jukes followed him. The millionaire’s face bore a look of strange excitement.

“Of course that can’t be the schooner,” the boys heard him say to the captain, “but still I can’t pass it unsearched.”

His eye fell on the boys.

“Lads, we are going to board that schooner and try to find out something about her,” he said. “Do you want to go along?”

These were the first words the boys had had with their employer in some days. Of course both jumped at the chance, and before many minutes passed, one of the yacht’s remaining boats was being sent over the sea at a fast clip toward the derelict. Close inspection showed the schooner’s condition not to be as good as it had seemed at a distance. Her paint was blistered and the oakum calking was spewing out of her sun-dried seams like Spanish moss on an aged tree. Her sails were mildewed and torn in many places and her ropes bleached and frayed. Mingling now with the incessant, melancholy tolling of the bell, came the monotonous creak of her booms and gaffs as they swung rhythmically to and fro.

No name appeared on her bow, although blurred tracings of white paint showed that one had once been inscribed there. But there was a yellow-painted figurehead; a stern, Roman-nosed bust of a man, apparently intended for an emperor or a warrior.

“We’ll row round the stern and take a look at her name,” decided Captain Sparhawk. “We’ll have to climb aboard from the other side anyway. There is no means of scrambling up from this.”

The boat was turned and rowed under the graceful stern of the derelict. On it, in bold, raised letters, surrounded by a fanciful design, stood out, in fading colors, the lost craft’s name.

“*Centurion*, San Francisco,” read out Jack, with an odd thrill. There was a sudden exclamation from Mr. Jukes, who had not yet been able to make out more than the first few letters.

“What’s that?” he exclaimed, in a voice so sharp and tense that the boys turned and stared at him, as did the boat’s crew and Captain Sparhawk.

Jack repeated his answer and, to his astonishment, Mr. Jukes, the iron-jawed, self-possessed business man, who had never shown signs of possessing any more emotion than a stone, suddenly sunk his head in his hands with a groan.

“Too late after all,” they heard him mutter unsteadily. But when he again raised his face, although it was ashy pale, he appeared to have mastered himself.

“Well, we’ve reached the end of our journey, Sparhawk,” he remarked in a voice that he rendered steady by an apparent effort. “Let us go on board, however, and see if we can find some trace of the unfortunates of the *Centurion*.”

The captain looked as if he would have liked to ask a great many questions, but something in Mr. Jukes’ face rendered him silent. He gave the necessary orders and the boat was pulled round to the other side of the schooner. Here they were glad to find some dilapidated ropes dangling which afforded a means of getting on board. Two sailors, after first testing their weight-bearing qualities, scrambled up them like monkeys, and, under the captain’s orders, went hunting for a Jacob’s ladder

which would support Mr. Jukes' ponderous weight. One was found and lowered, and soon all stood on the silent decks which for so long had not echoed the footsteps of a human being.

"Away forward and muzzle that bell, some of you," ordered the captain briskly. "The sound of the thing gets on my nerves."

"Send them all forward," supplemented Mr. Jukes. "Tell them to search the forecastle, anything to keep them busy. We will examine the cabins and officers' quarters."

"Are we to accompany you, sir?" asked Jack hesitatingly.

For a fraction of a second the millionaire seemed plunged in thought. Then he arrived at one of his characteristic quick decisions.

"Why not?" he asked, half to himself it seemed. "Later I shall have something to say to all of you. You have wondered at the object of this cruise, no doubt?"

Captain Sparhawk nodded gravely.

"I have guessed you had some great end to serve in it, Mr. Jukes," he said.

"An end which has now been reached, I fear," said the millionaire solemnly. "But come, let us proceed with our examination."

CHAPTER VI. – A MYSTERY OF THE SEAS

At first glance Jack saw that the main cabin of the *Centurion* was fitted up with a luxuriousness not common to mere trading schooners. A silver hanging lamp of elaborate design, silk curtains at the stern ports, book-cases filled with handsomely bound volumes and the thick carpets on the floor, clearly indicated that whoever had occupied it had been above the class of the rough and ready South Sea trader.

In one corner stood a desk as handsome in its appointments as the rest of the furniture. But it had been roughly dealt with. The front had been smashed in, drawers pulled out and papers and documents scattered about all over the cabin floor. The door to a sleeping cabin leading off the main apartment was open. Within was the same disorder. Even mattresses had been ripped open in a hunt for something, the nature of which the boys could not guess.

Mr. Jukes hastily rummaged through the contents of the desk, selecting some papers, casting aside others as worthless, and gathered up on his hands and knees those on the floor. Then every cabin was searched and in each the millionaire took a few papers, but the look of anxiety on his face did not change, and the boys judged he had not found what he was in search of.

“Not a solitary clue,” he exclaimed with a heavy sigh as, dust-covered and perspiring from his exertions, he sank down at the long dining table in the main cabin. For a time he appeared lost in thought and the others stood about silently. To Jack it was almost awe-inspiring, to see this over-mastering man of affairs, who bullied whole corporations into his way of thinking, sitting there in the cabin of the derelict schooner utterly at a loss, and apparently defeated. At length Mr. Jukes spoke. His first words were a surprise:

“I suppose you all have heard of my brother, Jerushah Jukes?” he asked.

“The traveler and explorer?” asked Captain Sparhawk. “I guess every one in America knows of him, Mr. Jukes.”

Paying no attention to the captain’s reply, the millionaire went on.

“The papers reported some months ago that he had set out for Central Africa.”

“I read the account,” said Jack, “but – ”

Mr. Jukes waved his hand. The boy fell into an abashed silence; in a second the millionaire had changed once more from a crushed, defeated human being into Jacob Jukes, millionaire and king of commerce.

“He did not go to Africa,” he said. “Instead, his destination was the South Pacific. He chartered this schooner, the *Centurion*, and the last I heard of him was when he set sail from San Francisco. If no news of him was received within a certain time I promised him to come in search of him. You see,” he added with a simplicity new from him, “he was my younger brother and I promised my mother on her death-bed always to look after him.”

There was a pause. In the silence of the long-deserted cabin they could hear the dismal creak of the neglected rudder and the bang-banging of the swinging spars above.

“We were poor then, miserably poor, and my mother never lived to see the rise of our fortunes, for as I advanced in business I helped my brother up, too. But his bent was not for finance. He had a streak of the adventurous in him. But I put it to paying purpose. I seldom lose on any venture.” Unconsciously as it seemed, the hard vein in Jacob Jukes had cropped out again. “I decided to put my brother on a paying basis. The results were good. Concessions in South America, gold mines in Alaska, and certain South African enterprises were put through, largely through his instrumentality.

“And now, to get down to the present time. The *Centurion* was chartered to obtain for Mrs. Jukes, who has a craze for expensive and rare jewelry, the ‘Tear of the Sea,’ the most famous pearl of the South Seas. I had obtained information of its whereabouts in the Pomoutou Archipelago through means which are not important to relate here. I thought that an expedition to purchase the ‘Tear of

the Sea' and, incidentally, other pearls, would be a good investment and keep my brother, who was getting restless, in occupation.

"In the meantime, however, a dishonest employee managed to get wind of what was about to take place and furnished the information to a firm of European jewelers with agents in New York and all over the world. From that moment, I rushed through the *Centurion's* expedition with all possible speed, for I knew the conditions of competition in the Pacific. There is little more law among pearl traders than there is north of fifty-three. My brother knew this as well as I did and realised the necessity for haste. Moreover, we knew that the European firm was anxious to obtain, for a royal customer, the very pearl that I was after. In addition, this firm was known as one of the most unscrupulous in gaining its ends, and maintained, in the South Pacific, a system of spies and bullies which brought most of the pearl hunters' prizes into their hands. Ugly stories have been told of their methods of gaining their ends – and – and I am afraid the fate of the *Centurion* will have to be added to the black list."

"There is nothing in the papers to show what happened to your brother, sir?" asked Captain Sparhawk presently.

"Nothing. They are merely formal documents, ship's papers, clearance bills and so forth. There is no memorandum relating to the pearl in any way."

Captain Sparhawk knitted his brows. For a minute he appeared lost in deep thought.

"Do you mind telling us the name of that firm, sir?" he asked at last.

"There is nothing we can prove against them," said the millionaire. "They work without their hands showing in any of their ugly transactions. Their name, however, is F – & Freres."

"Of Amsterdam?" queried the captain.

"The same. They have practically a monopoly of the pearl trade of Europe."

"I know that, sir," said the captain, clenching his hands. "They tried to work their tricks on a ship-mate of mine who went a-pearl trading. But, sir, to change the subject, did you ever hear of 'Bully' Broom?"

The millionaire shook his head.

"I have; and have good cause to remember him," said the captain. "But none of that at this time. Sir," he continued earnestly, "your brother may be as safe and sound as we are. He may have the pearl. But if neither of these things have happened, Bully Broom is the man to look for if we have to hunt him all over the Pacific. I've sailed these seas and know that 'Bully' Broom did F – & Co.'s dirty work for them. He calls himself a trader, but, like lots of others doing business under that name in these waters, 'Pirate' would be a sight better name for him."

"And you think that this man 'Bully' Broom, as you call him, has something to do with this mysterious disappearance of my brother?" asked Mr. Jukes, who had listened with deep attention, willing to hear of any clue, however slight.

"I ain't dead sure," said the captain, "but it's my impression that if the firm you spoke of was after this 'Tear of the Sea,' then 'Bully' Broom knows where Jerushah Jukes is," and he brought his lean, gnarled fist down with a thump on the table.

The old ginger came back into Mr. Jukes' eyes, the wonted crisp authority into his voice as he snapped out:

"That being the case, we'll find 'Bully' Broom."

"No matter where we have to go?" asked Captain Sparhawk, raising his eyebrows.

"We'll scour the whole Pacific if necessary. But nobody of the *Sea Gypsy's* crew need accompany her against his will. All I ask is that they remain till we can touch at some civilised port, such as Papeiti or Honolulu and ship a man in his place. Do you boys wish to stick?"

"To the finish," came from Jack, and Raynor, standing beside him, nodded his assent.

As for Captain Sparhawk, he simply reached out one of his brown hands toward the millionaire, who clasped it, and said:

“I’m with you till the bottom drops out of the ship.”

“Thank you, Sparhawk. It’s what I expected of you all,” said Mr. Jukes quietly, but his voice shook.

Thus, in the desolated cabin of the derelict *Centurion*, there was ratified a bargain that was to lead the boys into strange seas and stranger adventures.

CHAPTER VII. – AN OLD ENEMY ODDLY MET

The lads stood on the stern deck of the *Sea Gypsy*, gazing behind them. On the horizon hovered a tall, black column of smoke. It marked the last resting place of the *Centurion*, for Mr. Jukes, after ransacking the cabin of everything associated with his brother, had decided to burn the derelict, which, if she had drifted into the paths of navigation, might have proved a dangerous menace.

“Well, Billy, the mystery is solved at last,” said Jack.

“Yes, and in a way I’d never have guessed in a thousand years. Mr. Jukes must be very fond of his brother. It’s a new side of his character to me.”

“Same here,” agreed Jack. “While he has always been just and kind, I thought him a regular man of business, with ice-water instead of red blood in his veins, and his heart in his enterprises only.”

“Just goes to show that you are liable to run up against a streak of sentiment when you least expect it,” said Raynor.

“I see now why an embargo was put on the wireless,” said Jack presently.

“I can’t figure it out. I should have thought he would have used it to try and locate the *Centurion*.”

“I guess he figured that if he did so, some ship might pick up the message and it would reach the ears of that Amsterdam firm and they would find out about this expedition in search of Jerushah Jukes.”

“Perhaps that’s it. But there’s one thing sure and certain, Jack.”

“And that is – ?”

“That we can’t do much without coal.”

“Jove, that’s true; I’d forgotten that. What rotten luck! Where is the nearest coaling place?”

“Papeiti, in Tahiti, I reckon.”

“How close are we to that port now?”

“Well, to-day’s reckoning puts us in Latitude 29 degrees, 49 minutes.”

“I’ll have to look at the map, but that makes it quite a run.” The second mate came bustling up to Raynor.

“The skipper and Mr. Jukes want to see you in the captain’s cabin,” he said.

“Do you know what about?” asked Raynor.

“Coal, I think. How much have you got to keep those old tea-kettles of yours chugging?”

“Precious little since your gang on deck let that deck-load be washed overboard,” grinned Raynor, as he hurried off.

The consultation lasted a long time. But at length Raynor returned with the news that, for as long as possible, full speed was to be made with the coal in hand, and that then canvas would be spread, for the *Sea Gypsy* was schooner rigged and in addition carried a big square sail on her foremast.

For two days good time was made, but when Raynor, with a rueful face, announced that only a few shovelfuls more coal remained in the bunkers, they were still many weary sea-miles from their destination. However, sailors are proverbially inclined to make the best of things. The *Sea Gypsy*’s canvas was bent, and under a spanking breeze they glided, at a fair speed, over the sparkling waters, while in the engine room the fires were drawn and the engines grew cold.

But a steam vessel, while she will behave fairly well under canvas, is not designed for sail and makes an astonishing amount of what sailors call “lee-way,” that is, the wind, if it blows a’beam, constantly drives her side-ways, or crab-fashion, of a direct course, so that for every mile she makes in a forward direction a considerable amount of lee-way has to be deducted. For this reason all hands looked forward to a long and tedious voyage before the highlands of Tahiti were sighted.

Now that there was no doubt as to the fate of the *Centurion*, and no danger of her being captured, the *Sea Gypsy*’s wireless was set to work again. But they were traveling a lonely tract of the Pacific, and no answer came to Jack’s messages, nor did he “listen in” on any outside conversations.

Captain Sparhawk was in hopes of encountering an English, French or German cruiser, for all those nations keep war craft in these Pacific waters to watch out for pearl pirates and other law-breakers, but the wireless failed to pick any up, although Jack worked it assiduously.

For two days the favoring breeze that was helping the crippled *Sea Gypsy* along held. Then there fell a flat calm, and the glass began to drop ominously. Captain Sparhawk went about with a grave face. Jack gathered from a few remarks the reserved seaman had let fall, that he expected another hurricane. Situated as she was, the *Sea Gypsy's* predicament would be a serious one if such a tornado as the one she had safely weathered were to strike her now. The sailors stood about in little knots discussing the situation and casting anxious glances at the horizon. Mr. Jukes and the captain and officers spent long hours on the bridge in careful consultation.

Before the sun set, the question as to whether or no the *Sea Gypsy* was in for a second fight with the elements was definitely settled. Thunder and lightning deafened and blinded the voyagers. Rain descended as only tropical rain can, flooding the decks and blinding the look-outs and the officers on the bridge. The *Sea Gypsy's* canvas was reduced, only enough being kept on to keep her from literally rolling her hull under the towering water mountains.

The crew clawed their way about the decks by holding fast to life-lines which Captain Sparhawk had ordered stretched when the storm broke. Raynor, coming on deck to report that all was well below, met Jack on his way back to the lower regions of the ship.

"Well, old fellow, this is a corker and no mistake," he observed, raising his voice in order to make it audible above the frantic battle noises of the storm.

"It's the worst yet," Jack agreed.

"And it will be worse than ever before it gets better, according to the way Captain Sparhawk put it when I reported to him," said the young engineer.

"Hullo, what's that?" exclaimed Jack suddenly.

"We hit something," shouted Raynor. "Look at the watch running forward."

"Storm or no storm, I'm going forward to see what's up," ejaculated Jack, and, followed by Raynor, he hurried toward the bow where several of the oil-skin coated crew were already clustered.

CHAPTER VIII. – “LAND, HO!”

It was a fight every inch of the way, but at last they reached the bow and found the sailors bending over the recumbent form of a youth.

“What has happened? What did we strike?” asked Jack of one of the sailors.

“Struck a small boat,” was the reply. “How it ever lived in this sea is a wonder. This fellow was in it.”

“Is he all right?”

“No; about half dead,” rejoined the third mate. “Carry him aft, men, and put him in one of the spare cabins. With care he may pull through. I’m going to notify the captain,” and he hurried off.

Several men picked up the form of the rescued one. Jack suddenly saw his face, pale as death, with his wet hair hanging over his forehead.

“Great guns, Billy!” he gasped.

“What is it? What’s the matter? Do you know him?” queried Raynor.

“Know him? I should say so. So do you. It’s Harvey Thurman.”

“Impossible.”

“Not at all. Take a look at him yourself.”

“By George, you are right. What a strange happening,” declared Raynor, after taking one glance at the youth the crew were bearing off.

“What in the world can he be doing in this part of the ocean in a small boat?” wondered Jack.

“I’ve no idea. We’ll have to wait till he comes to, if he ever does. I remember hearing now that he had got a job on a Pacific steamer. Perhaps it had been wrecked and he was a castaway.”

“Possibly,” agreed Jack. “I’m glad we saved him, although he has made a lot of trouble for us in the past.”

As readers of “The Ocean Wireless Boys and the Naval Code” will recall, it was Harvey Thurman who was assistant wireless man on the *Columbia* and whose dislike of Jack and Billy resulted in his joining their enemies in an effort to discredit them. After the stolen code was recovered, Thurman was not, like the rest engaged in the rascally business, sent to prison, but was allowed to go free at the boys’ behest, as they believed he had been badly influenced more than anything else.

“So you know him?” said Captain Sparhawk, as they all stood in the cabin to which Thurman had been taken and restoratives were administered to the unfortunate youth.

“Indeed we do,” said both boys, and they told the captain something of their experiences.

“He is not a desirable character then?” said the captain.

“I wouldn’t say that,” said Jack. “We thought he was influenced by bad companions. But at any rate he had no liking for us. Is he going to get better?”

“I think so. See, he is opening his eyes.”

Thurman’s face, under the influence of the restoratives, had become suffused by a faint flush of color. He looked wildly about him. As his gaze rested first on Jack and then on Raynor he looked like a sleeper newly awakened from a night-mare.

“Gracious, am I dreaming?” he gasped.

“No, my lad,” said the captain, “but you had a close call from going into a sleep from which you never would have awakened.”

“But Ready and Raynor! What are they doing here?”

“Oh, we’re solid enough. Nothing ghostly about us,” Jack assured him, extending his hand. “Congratulations on your narrow escape from death, and – and we’ll let bygones be bygones.”

“I never meant to be really bad,” said Thurman weakly.

“Say no more about it,” advised Billy. “But tell us how you came to be adrift in such a fearful storm in that dinky little boat.”

“Better let him eat some soup first,” said the captain, taking a steaming bowl from the steward, from whom he had ordered it for the relief of the castaway, “he’s half starved.”

The way in which Thurman gulped down the grateful food showed that this statement was no exaggeration.

“That’s the first food I’ve had in two days,” he declared. “You see, when the *Galilee*, that was the schooner I was on board of, sank in the storm some days ago, I escaped in the boat. We launched two altogether, but I guess the other one was lost.”

“Begin at the beginning,” suggested Jack.

“All right then. It was this way, Ready: After my – er – my little trouble with you I came west. I got a job as assistant wireless man at a lonely station on one of the Caroline Islands. But I couldn’t stand the life and resigned. No regular steamers touch there, so I got passage on the *Galilee*, a little trading schooner for Papeiti. She sprang a leak and sank, and there was only a loaf of bread and a few cans of meat in the boat when I shoved off from the sinking hulk. It was all I had time to put in. What happened after that till you bumped into me and saved me is like a bad dream. I guess I was crazy most of the time. I never expected to be saved, and – and I guess it has been a good lesson to me.”

“If it has made you resolve to reform, it will not have been wasted,” said Jack. And he then told Thurman something about themselves. Captain Sparhawk promised that as soon as Thurman was stronger he would find a job for him, for the boys’ old enemy was penniless, having left his wallet behind him in his haste at fleeing from the sinking schooner.

All that night the tempest raged with unabated fury. At times it seemed as if the yacht must go to pieces, so sadly was she wrenched and buffeted by the giant combers. There was little sleep for any on board that night and the day broke wildly on a worried, harried-looking crew. Shortly before noon the foresail tore away from the bolt ropes, and split with a noise like the explosion of a cannon. This accident was almost immediately followed by a shout from the lookout.

“Land, ho!”

This cry, ordinarily one hailed with delight by sailors, was not thus received on the *Sea Gypsy*. Captain Sparhawk had been unable to get an observation during the days of storm, and what with this, and the heavy lee drift made by the yacht, he had no idea of his whereabouts.

At the shout all hands clambered to points of vantage to see what islands they could be approaching. As the *Sea Gypsy* rose dizzily on the top of a great wave Jack saw, with a flash of alarm, that they were headed straight for a large island dotted with tropical verdure and tall, wind-bent palms about which rocks bristled menacingly like hungry fangs awaiting to penetrate the *Sea Gypsy*’s stout hull.

CHAPTER IX. – THROUGH HIDDEN DANGERS

Critical moments followed. Captain Sparhawk navigated the *Sea Gypsy* among the rocks with marvelous seamanship. Time and again a shout of dismay went up from the sailors as the yacht almost grazed some huge black rock or scraped a coral reef. But the passage was negotiated with safety, and finally the sea-battered yacht lay snug and safe in the lee of the island and all hands drew a long breath of relief.

“Let go the anchor,” came the command, and the cable roared out of the hawser holes with a savage shout, as if of joy, at the ship’s delivery.

“Where under the sun are we?” asked Mr. Jukes of Captain Sparhawk, as soon as these maneuvers had been completed.

“I have no more idea than you, sir,” was the reply. “But it looks to me as if this island must be one of the Pamatous.”

“One of the pearl islands?” asked the millionaire.

“The very same. But I cannot be sure. Islands are sown pretty thickly in this part of the Pacific.”

“Are the Pamatou people cannibals?” asked Jack.

“I don’t think so,” said the captain, “but before I send a boat ashore I am going to deal out arms to the landing party. We want to run no risks. I shall also put a guard on the ship, for these savages are great thieves and they might see a chance for some piratical tricks in our dilemma.”

“The machine gun will come in handy then,” said Mr. Jukes.

“Yes, indeed, sir. I’ll give orders to have it mounted at once in a conspicuous place so if any of the gentry ashore have any rascally designs they can see we’re ready for them with a dose of cold lead.”

Jack, after some difficulty, secured permission for himself and Raynor to go ashore with the landing party. Mr. Jukes, who remained on board, was unwilling that they take the risk of a hostile attack, but at last he yielded, and the boys, in high glee, buckled on cartridge belts and selected rifles from the ship’s armory.

“Keep the rifles in the bottom of the boat,” ordered the captain, as they shoved off, “and don’t use them unless you absolutely have to.”

Although the place where they lay was sheltered, the storm was still howling and shrieking above the island and the sea ran rather high. The inclement weather, no doubt, explained why no natives had so far been seen.

A landing was successfully made in the surf, the men leaping from the boat and dragging her ashore, waist-deep in water. Dense foliage, among which could be seen the huge fronds of the banana, and broad-leaved breadfruit trees grew almost down to the dazzlingly white beach. Further back great palms, laden with cocoanuts, towered majestically above the tropic growth.

“There seems to be no sign of a village here,” said the captain.

“Perhaps it is on the other side of the island,” suggested Jack.

“Well, we’ll tramp along the beach and see what we can find,” decided the man in command of the “expedition.”

Four men were told off to guard the boat, with orders to fire three shots if anything out of the way occurred. The party in search of the village was to signal in the same way if anything untoward happened and they needed help.

“Shall we carry the rifles?” asked Jack.

“Yes; but try to conceal them as much as possible,” counseled the captain.

They set off along the beach, walking briskly, for the sand was firm and hard. Looking back at the anchored yacht, they could see the glitter of the machine-gun with a man stationed beside it. The gun was trained on the shore ready for instant use against any possible attack. After traversing a

short distance they came in sight of what appeared to be a pathway. The condition of it showed that it was much traveled and probably it formed the high road to the village.

Captain Sparhawk decided to follow it. In single file the adventurers advanced along the track which wound in and out, dodging trees and rocks in a manner peculiar to most savage trails whose makers would rather go round an obstacle than clear it out of the way. There was a gloomy sky overhead and the wind boomed dolefully among the palms, making a noise like sheets of rain falling as their big fan-like leaves rustled and scraped against each other.

A hundred rods or so from the coast they found themselves in a ravine which towered up steeply on each side of the track. This canyon appeared to penetrate the centre of the island, the interior of which was hilly.

"I guess the village, if there is one, must be clear round the other side of the island," said Billy Raynor, between bites at a banana he had picked from a bush at the side of the trail. Others of the party were munching on oranges and a fruit the captain called a "custard apple," the latter a large, brown-colored "apple," filled with a yellow paste that looked and tasted like custard.

"There's one thing certain, the high cost of living need never worry these fellows," remarked Jack.

"Not if they're content to be vegetarians," said Billy.

"They don't need to be that," said the captain, "the seas hereabouts teem with fish – and look there!"

There was a rush and a clatter of falling stones just ahead of them as a flock of goats, half-wild creatures, with wonderfully agile legs, leaped up the sides of the canyon and then, at a safe height, stood gazing down at the invaders of the island.

"These South Sea islanders prefer goat's meat to anything except pork," said the captain; "in fact, the cannibals pay the doubtful compliment to human flesh of calling it 'long pig.'"

This mention of cannibalism made the boys feel rather uncomfortable. Although the captain reassured them and they knew that the horrible practice of eating human flesh had all but died out in the South Seas, except in some remote islands, they did not know but the one they were exploring might prove to be one of the latter. It was just as their minds were busy with these disquieting thoughts that Jack gave a sharp exclamation and came to a halt.

The fronds of a banana tree had parted suddenly in front of the lad who was in advance of the party.

Between the green leaves a hideous face, daubed with red and white paint, suddenly glared out at the boy and then, as swiftly, vanished.

CHAPTER X. – CHUMMING WITH SAVAGES

So quickly had this happened that none of the others had seen it. But Jack quickly apprised them of his discovery.

“If the man’s face was painted, would that mean he was on the war-path?” asked Billy rather nervously.

“Not necessarily,” rejoined the captain, “but still, he might be hostile. On feast days the natives paint themselves up and that may have been the reason for his decorations.”

“Ugh! He was hideous enough to stop a clock or scare a locomotive off the track,” exclaimed Jack.

“The village must be near at hand,” said the captain presently. “Let us press on.”

They had reached the end of the ravine now, having crossed almost the entire island. The path widened and others branched off from it. But they stuck to the main thoroughfare and in a few moments came in sight of a native village lying not far back from the shore and amidst a grove of magnificent palms.

The rhythmical throbbing of tom-toms reached their ears and they could see natives dancing in their peculiar swaying manner to the sound of the skin drums. Suddenly the dancing ceased. The natives in a swarm, among them the man with the painted face, descended on the travelers. Many wore flowers in their hair and others added to these decorations by brass rings in their noses and earrings composed of old china door knobs. The men were remarkably handsome and the women pretty.

After the first uncertainty as to their reception, there was no doubt of their friendliness as they pressed about. Several of them could talk English and the captain soon learned that they were indeed on one of the Pamatou group, as he had surmised. The village, which was celebrating a feast day, was one of two on the island occupied by pearl fishers. The natives were civilized; schooners and ships frequently touching there. To the south of them they said were “bad men,” meaning cannibals, and the boys were glad they had not landed on one of them.

Nothing would do but that the white men must sit down and partake of the feast which was just ready. The boys stuffed themselves with roast pork, goat-meat, sweet potatoes, yams, roasted bread-fruit, fish and fruit. They washed this down with cocoanut milk. During the meal, a young Pamatouan attached himself to each of the boys. Each of these lads was about sixteen and wore, like most of the rest, a single white garment, although some of the natives sported trousers, and a few even had shoes – which they carried in their hands!

The two lads, who had thrust their services on Jack and Billy, informed them that they were their friends and would be so all the time the *Sea Gypsy* lay at the island. They waited on the amused boys hand and foot, not letting them do anything. Jack’s acquisition was called Bolabola; Billy’s savage servitor was called, so he said, Anai. Each could speak a little English and they informed the boys that they were “their friends for always.” From the captain the lads learned that this is a common custom among the islanders who value the friendship of a white man highly, and think it an honor and a credit to wait on him. He suggested giving them some little presents. Jack presented Bolabola with a pocket-knife and Billy gave Anai a fountain pen, having nothing else with him. Anai promptly stuck the pen through a big hole bored in the lobe of his ear and capered about delighted with his new ornament.

When it came time to go back to the ship, the friendly natives could not hear of the adventurers trudging back on foot. A great war canoe was launched and paddled by fifty strapping natives, singing musically, and so they were paddled round the island in state. On their arrival at the ship, the boat which had been left under guard was signalled to return, and presents of calico, straw hats, cheap cutlery and glass beads and fish-hooks and lines, – the latter highly prized, – were dealt out from the yacht’s stores. The natives swarmed all over the ship and it was hard to induce them to leave at all.

As for Bolabola and Anai, they refused to go till they had extracted promises from their “friends,” Jack and Billy, to visit them ashore and visit a pearl cave they knew of along the coast.

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