A DELL BOOK
DELL
195

Errol Flynn

BEAM ENDS

WITH MAP ON BACK COVER

A DELL ADVENTURE

Persons this *Story* is about—

ERROL FLYNN,

youthful adventurer, has spent two solid years prospecting in the interior of New Guinea with a few Kanakas as his only companions, and is ready to invest his savings in any kind of fun that presents itself.

TRELAWNY ADAMS,

a shy, retiring young man, is a graduate engineer with no bridges to build and plenty of time to spend not building them. His Cambridge accent and distinguished manner win him the sobriquet of the "Dook."

REX,

another friend of Flynn's, is as lusty and boisterous as the Dook is modest and reserved. He is witness to the fact that Errol, after having looked too long upon the wine when it was red, bought the *Sirocco* to serve as a "memento" of the glorious party held on her deck.

CHARLIE,

a young Englishman from the Isle of Man, is the one real sailor of the four. Short and stocky, he wears his hair cropped like a convict's and speaks as solemnly as a judge.

JOHNSON,

a newspaper reporter, is a giant of a man with rugged, battered features His clothes may have seen better days with their previous owner, but he buys a clean collar once a week whether he needs it or not.

BRODY,

Johnson's roommate and fellow journalist, is a dandy—small, dapper, and fastidious. When he is in his cups, his manner toward strangers becomes insulting and offensive.

FORSYTHE,

whose crooked exploits are legion, fits the conception of the modern buccaneer. Tall, lithely built, with a handsome, scarred face, he has been in and out of dozens of jails.

LUCY WILSON,

a girl of the islands, has the kind of wild beauty that takes your breath away. Without make-up of any sort, she looks like some pagan virgin of ancient times—the legendary lotus flower, waiting to be plucked.

What this *Story* is about—

Errol Flynn, swashbuckling hero of movieland, tells the story of an hilarious episode of his youth—when, after making a lucky strike in the New Guinea gold fields, he embarks, with three companions, upon a crack-brained, three-thousand-mile voyage up the inner passage of the Great Barrier Reef in an ancient forty-four-foot cutter. On the way, there are fights, large and small, professional and purely amateur—for the simple joy of combat; there are frolics, as when a male virgin is decoyed into a house of joy under the delusion that he is entering a Turkish bath; there are breathless moments at the gaming-table and prodigious feats of drinking; there are scenes of tropical love-making, both lusty and tender.

Following a lengthy bout of continuous wassail in Sydney, Australia, Flynn awakes, somewhat surprised to find himself the owner of the yacht, *Sirocco*. His friend, Rex, enlightens him: he purchased the boat at the height of a party held on the *Sirocco's* deck, assuring the astonished owner that nothing less would serve as a suitable souvenir of such a night. Unable to get rid of the boat, Flynn and his three pals beat their way out of the harbor, bound for any point in New Guinea.

A voyage that should take seven weeks actually encompasses as many months, as the little group of whilom navigators encounter storm and calm, sharks and smugglers, gamblers and cane cutters, painted ladies and island maidens—until at last the *Sirocco* piles up on a reef at journey's end. If there is anything that might happen to these four that doesn't happen, it is because that particular thing is neither exciting nor amusing. And the whole yarn is told with a gusto that is typical of one of the screen's brightest stars.

AN HILARIOUS STORY OF ADVENTURE

BEAM ENDS

By ERROL FLYNN

Author of "Showdown," etc.

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Beam Ends

Errol Flynn says:

The *Sirocco* was a long, slender splinter of a boat, and over fifty years old when, in a moment of aberration, I bought her, and with three companions proposed to sail out of Sydney Harbor to the South Seas. Forty-four feet at the water line, cutter rigged, she was never intended to sail outside the smooth waters of the harbor. We set out for New Guinea, three thousand miles away, having no clear idea of why we were going there beyond the fact that it was one of the few corners of the earth's surface unexplored and savage today, and seemed to promise adventure.

After seven months we got there, surprising ourselves more than anyone, for the only truly remarkable thing about our seamanship was our appalling lack of it. If I took sextant and "shot the sun," my calculation of our position would, as often as not, locate the ship anywhere from the South Pole to the middle of the Sahara Desert. When Trelawny took a sight, we were sometimes more fortunate, and at least had a chance of finding ourselves afloat on an ocean; being a very determined fellow, he would never put down his pencil until he did get us on an ocean.

Doubtless there is a Providence, some special planetary influence, for the express purpose of protecting youth from the consequences of its own folly. I can think of no other reason why I am now able to write the story of our voyage.

Beam Ends

Chapter One

My Own Yacht

"Throw it down on top of the bastard!"

The third mate glared down on me where I lay in the coal bunker. "That ought to bring him round," he added sardonically.

He was right. It brought me round. A barrel load of fine coal hurtling down on top of you from a height of ten feet will either bring you round or take you out. Momentarily debating the wisdom of lying there as if nothing at all had happened, a second and somewhat heavier load immediately solved all doubts about that line of action.

Spitting out a mouthful of black dust, I climbed unsteadily up the hatch and advanced on the mate. That gentleman, waiting dispassionately until the right moment, planted his fist solidly between my eyes. The next thing I knew Trelawny was standing by my side, saying, "Drink this, old man."

That, however, was next morning.

Some weeks previously I had arrived in Sydney, Australia, from New Guinea with a very definite purpose in view. Anyone who has spent two long years or more out of all contact with civilization will know all about this purpose. The only requirement is money. If you have that you begin living like a prince of the blood. You fling yourself into debauchery and hedonism with wild abandon. You wallow and revel in the

delights of high living for just as long as your constitution and money hold out. Prospecting in the interior of New Guinea with a few Kanaka boys as your sole companions for two solid years, without once seeing your own kind or speaking your own language, gives you a pretty sound constitution to start the revelry. So, when I finally dug out enough gold to give my creditors the cold stare, I set out for the gold-field town of Salamua, six days' march through the bush. Here I had to wait another week before the little inter-island copra freighter came along.

It was a big moment.

The captain's wife was the first white woman I had seen for two years. She was fair, fat, and fifty, with no teeth of her own to speak of, but to me she seemed the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. My eyes stuck out so far that the captain could have knocked them off with a stick. Two weeks later we arrived in Sydney. From the moment the little steamer berthed, so resolutely did I set about the business of making wassail that, like everything inspired by fierce determination, my efforts were crowned with success, and in two months, both constitution and money gave out almost simultaneously. It was a pretty piece of work and I felt quite happy about it.

When, however, the tumult and the shouting had died down and I came out of the sanitarium, my satisfaction was somewhat marred by a slight miscalculation. I found I had overlooked the little matter of my return fare to Rabaul. In fact, I had neglected to retain even a week's rent.

Now this should not have been such a serious matter. I had friends in Sydney and others in the Islands to

whom a cable of two words, *Broke, Flynn,* would probably have met with an immediate response. But here there was another obstacle. I disliked (how the whimsical inhibitions of youth amuse us!), I disliked borrowing money. Quaint? Yes, but there it was. So I began looking for a job.

It was in these unhappy circumstances that I met Trelawny Adams. Trelawny was a shy, retiring youth with whom I had been at school in Ireland. He had just graduated from Cambridge University, an engineer with the ability, in theory, to build you any sort of bridge you wanted. An aunt had bequeathed him an estate in Tasmania and he had been two months in Sydney trying to collect it. There were so many legal difficulties, however, that at the moment he was in much the same circumstances as myself, broke and jobless. He had, it is true, offered to build the Australians some bridges, but I gathered this had not met with any hysterical enthusiasm.

It is a long story how and why we came to ship on board the *S. S. Baltimore* with the notion of working our way back to Liverpool. In my case, it was a sudden attack of nostalgia brought on when Trelawny reminisced about Ireland, told me family news and how much worse conditions were—as conditions always are in Ireland. He spoke of horses, of green Irish fields under clover with such fluency that I could almost smell the rain and mist of a good hunt morning. But the effect of the first four hours' duty in the *Baltimore* stokehold stifled every desire I had to see the old home again—and nearly stifled me.

From the moment we set foot on board, the third mate took a deep-rooted dislike to the two of us. He

was in charge of the stokehold and possibly thought we had signed on for the experience or the fun of the thing. Anyhow, he knew us for greenhorns and decided instantly that if anyone was going to have fun it wouldn't be us. It was summer, and the temperature in the stokehold registered around 115. In this heat the effect of shoveling coal for four hours on unaccustomed muscles can well be imagined. The mere recollection of it makes me rise and mix a Scotch and soda.

Although slight and wiry, and considerably smaller in build, Trelawny stood up under it better than I did. His thick-lensed spectacles were his greatest hindrance. They had an annoying habit of clouding over with the heat and sweat, so that most of the time Trelawny was forced to work under rather aquarium-like conditions. But apart from this, and the constant persecutions of the third mate, there were times when we nearly enjoyed it. We got along very well with the crew. They were a tough bunch, but after they got over their first suspicions that we were "plants" of the shipping company, we found them good company. Trelawny they nicknamed the "Dook," due probably to his Cambridge accent and distinguished manner, which labeled him immediately "a bloody gent."

It was the third mate, however, who continued to make life difficult for us.

On the fourth day the *Baltimore* put in at Adelaide, South Australia. The Dook and I had meanwhile decided that this was no mode of travel. It would be six more weeks before the *Baltimore* reached Liverpool and we felt that one more night might kill us.

When I went to the captain and asked him for a few days' pay, that gentleman was amused. "Nave," he said,

"that's wot you are son, nave, Gorblimey! If I was to start handin' out pay in port, I wouldn't have no crew left."

The luggage problem is usually one of the worst worries of leaving a ship. What little I had represented my worldly wealth and I was anxious to keep it. But the business of getting a bag ashore unnoticed under the eyes of the mate and the captain was no simple matter. So the Dook and I planned to go ashore with the rest of the firemen off watch, and come back for our bags later when there would be fewer people about. Unfortunately, we played the roles of firemen on shore leave only too well, and when we returned to the ship it was in true firemen fashion—roaring drunk. It was also unfortunate that when we staggered up the gangplank the third mate should be standing on the lower bridge in full sight. He was superintending some deck hands who were moving coal dust in wheelbarrows from the center bunker to another. He saw us immediately. "Hi!" he shouted. "I need you. Get hold of a barrow and get to work. Lively! Step on it, you lazy sons of bitches!"

Next New Year's Eve, or sometime when you're really drunk, get hold of a wheelbarrow and try running along a ship's deck with it. Don't be surprised if the barrow suddenly acquires an independence of its own and you find yourself going in any direction but the one you're steering for. The ship's railing saved me several times as I ran staggering along the deck with the mate bawling behind me for more speed at the top of his lungs. The fourth trip was disastrous. My barrow took the bit between its teeth and hit the hatch-coaming with a bang. I described a parabola over the top of it

and landed face downward in the coal, ten feet below. If it had been anything but coal dust I would never have been able to testify to the truth of that old saying about a drunken man never killing himself. From a great distance, I seemed to hear voices. *Now,* I thought, *I will have peace at last. I have only to lie here quietly and kind hands will lift me up and put me gently to bed.*

That is what *I* thought.

"Throw it down on top of the bastard; that'll bring him 'round." However, I have already mentioned that. Also the manner, anything but gentle, in which the mate put me to bed.

The *Baltimore* sailed and we sailed with it. It was another five days before she reached Albany in western Australia, and this time we did not bother about luggage. I would have liked to meet that third mate under more favorable circumstances, more sober ones anyway. But when the *Baltimore* left Albany, the Dook and I were already entrained on the Transcontinental Express. Not having observed the formality of paying our fare we were in no case to question our destination, but we hoped we were headed in the direction of Sydney.

This is no account of the journey across the Australian continent, although there were enough incidents and accidents to make it one. I have kindly recollections of a little desert township and a barmaid whose tender heart, touched when we were thrown off the train in front of her father's pub, caused her to give generously of all she had to offer, including her father's beer and beef. Of her father I cannot speak so well. He tried to shoot me one night. A fifty-mile hike of

blazing hot desert was entailed before we caught another train. After a month of "jumping the rattler," getting thrown off regularly and eating irregularly, we at length arrived, foot-sore and weary, in Sydney. We were glad to be back again, but our condition was little better. Jobs were scarce, and there were no riots or loud clamor to secure our services. The nearest approach to a steady job came when I was employed as a bottle smeller in a soft drink factory. This as the name suggests, consists of smelling bottles. You sit down in front of a pile of empty bottles as high as a room and smell them to find out if any foreign substance or liquid has been put into any of them. The ones that smell of turpentine, kerosene, or anything of the sort, you put on the left. The ones that don't smell, you put on the right. Without a bottle smeller the factory foreman would never know which bottles needed washing before being refilled with the soft drink. At the end of my first day's smelling, I had a black ring around my nose like a prize bull and could no longer distinguish any sort of odor. I quit. Bottle smelling as a profession may yet attract the smart young college man, but for me I felt it held no future.

Then one day the luck changed. I walked into the bar at Usher's Hotel and became suddenly rich—not in wisdom or experience or anything valuable like that, but in hard, solid cash. Usher's is the famous Sydney hotel where foregather all the men from the South Sea Islands. Bend a leg on the bar foot-rail and you will hear many strange and wonderful stories. What is more, a lot of them are true. I know, because I have told some true ones myself. You will hear of encounters with unknown tribes of savage head-hunters,

of close shaves by ambush in the New Guinea jungles, of good gold prospects found in the mountains of Solomon Islands, perhaps the gold mentioned by Hakluyt in his *Travels* centuries ago. You will hear how So-and-So's canoe capsized in the vast crocodile-infested Sepik River, of which no man knows the source. Many have died searching for the gold that is hidden there, died by the spear or Blackwater fever. They will speak of these things casually, as of everyday happenings, in that strange hybrid language, unintelligible to strangers, which is the pidgin English of the South Seas, a mixture of French, German, Malay, Chinese, and several native tongues.

The barmaids in Usher's are like familiar landmarks to the man from the Islands. He knows them, if not personally, then by repute. Yolande, she of the billowing bosoms by the bar pump, owns a claim in Morobe, pegged for her by an admirer. She expects to get rich from it some day and retire. Alice will even grubstake you to follow up a leader you may have struck in savage Aitape. She has never been anywhere near the Islands, but she knows there's gold in Aitape if only the hostile tribes don't make a pincushion of you first. They can tell you all the gossip of the Islands, too. How, for instance, that unpleasant female, Lady Turray, the governor's wife, stopped old Shark-Eye Bill Parks in the street one day and sternly reproved him for keeping numerous native wives. They then repeat with gusto the picturesque reply of old Shark-Eye, placing special emphasis on points involving the couch, as to where *his* preference would lie if comparisons were to be drawn between dark wives and governors' ladies.

They know, too, the amazing and ingenious manner

in which Dusty Miller got back the gold nugget his pet cassowary had swallowed, by giving the bird a dose of salts and having his native boy follow it around all day with a dish. They could, but they won't, whisper to you something of underground diplomatic relations between the countries interested in Island possessions. They are merry girls by nature, and prefer to tell you the latest joke.

It was Alice who told me of my luck. She had heard that an English Company was interested in a claim of mine on the New Guinea gold fields. The claim was worthless in itself but lying between two large leases belonging to the company, it interfered with some development. That same afternoon I sold it for $5,000. The sudden transition from poverty to affluence was intoxicating—in every sense of the word. I wanted to cut the Dook in on a large share, but he would not hear of it. I wish he had, for a couple of weeks later I awoke clear-headed one morning, and taking a census, found myself the possessor of a yacht and about a thousand dollars. It will always be something of a mystery to me how I came to acquire the yacht *Sirocco*. The Dook could shed no light on it. He denied having been with me at the time. However, a friend named Rex helped to clear the matter up when he said he had been one of the guests at a party I had apparently given on board. He had, he said, tried to stop my giving the owner the check, but I was insistent that nothing less than the yacht itself would serve me for a souvenir of the party.

Being only too well aware of this unruly passion of mine for mementos, I hurried round to the bank hoping against hope. But it was too late. The check had been

cashed.

With Rex and the Dook, I went to see my pleasure yacht. My recollections of her were dim and I wanted to refresh my memory. She was a cutter, about forty-four feet long and so narrow in the beam that you could lie across her. On stepping aboard, the first thing to strike my eye was a brass plate on the tiller post bearing the date 1881. Most yachts are considered ancient at twenty. Mine, I thought grimly, would only be the grandfather of them all.

Depressed by this added blow, I sat down on the deck and wondered how I could cut my loss. She was too big to ship aboard any of the little island steamers to New Guinea and would be no use when I got her there. She had no cargo space and seemed to have a six- or seven-foot draft—far too deep for the reef-studded Island waters. With the money paid for this ridiculous craft, I had cherished plans to outfit an expedition to a place in New Guinea where I had once found good gold prospects. If I sold her now, the most I could expect would be about a third of the price I had paid.

"Well, Admiral," said Rex, breaking in on these gloomy reflections, "where do we go from here?"

"You can open up a pore and go to hell," I told him. "Never mind about my movements."

Ungracious, perhaps, but the affair had soured me.

"I bet she can sail!" said the Dook. "She's got lovely lines." He was standing out on the bowsprit looking aft and we joined him. She looked her best from there. Long, low, and raking, built to slip through the water like a greyhound. I think it was at that moment I began to be conscious of that quality which every ship possesses in some degree, a sort of friendly personality

which can grow into one of those absurd but deep affections.

I began to visualize her as she would look with full sail bent in a fair wind and a bone in her teeth. The Dook was right. With those sleek lines she *would* sail, and handle well, too.

"Why not sail her to New Guinea?" I murmured half aloud to myself. "It would be a wonderful trip."

Rex smote his knee. "Right, by God!" he exclaimed. "I always wanted to see the Islands. When do we leave? Tomorrow? Day after? I'm ready any time."

"By Jove, so am I!" said the Dook.

"Wait a minute, you crazy nuts!" I said. "New Guinea is three thousand miles from here and this boat will probably sink the minute she gets outside Sydney harbor. And who in hell asked you to come anyway?"

"I'm going home to pack a bag right now," said Rex, ignoring the irrelevancy. "See you later!" He jumped ashore and ran up the landing.

The Dook and I looked at each other. He smiled. "Damn good idea, don't you think? I'd better make a list of charts we'll need—navigation of this coast is awful if you don't know it. And we ought to have a chronometer and sextant, *of course.*" He looked around. "How about putting in a steering wheel instead of that tiller? She'll handle easier, you know. Then renew all the running gear and buy a complete spare set of sails in case these are blown out. Yes, we're going to need quite a lot of things."

"Perhaps we might get a few provisions, too," I suggested sarcastically. "Money is no object. You know—a few tins of caviar and so on. And what do you think of the engine? Let's throw it out and get a

new one, eh?"

"That's quite a good idea," agreed the Dook, "and we should take along guns and ammunition and fishing tackle. Then we'll need an outboard motor for the dinghy. As a matter of fact, I think we might as well have a new dinghy. This one is rather old and—some new—"

"Ah, what the hell?" I said. "Why tie yourself down to mere details? What do you say we get a new ship altogether?"

The Dook shook his head. "I wouldn't," he advised firmly. "I think she's a topping little ship. As a matter of fact," he confided shyly, "I'm extraordinarily fond of her already. Aren't you? You should be!"

I looked at him sharply, dismissed a quick suspicion, and gave up. Some Englishmen are like that.

The Dook came of a seafaring family. His great-grandfather had founded the famous Green Line of clippers, long since defunct of course, but well sung in the last century's legends of the sea. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Dook numbered among other accomplishments the theoretical ability to navigate and a profound knowledge of ships and the sea, also theoretical. In fact, there was very little he didn't know in theory and this had long been a hobby of his. He could tell you instantly the record day's log of the *Shenandoah* or the *Cutty Sark,* the date it was made, and other details of the voyages of famous old sailing ships.

I also had a certain acquaintance with the sea. For a year I had been captain and half owner of a schooner in the South Seas, making a precarious livelihood by freighting copra, fishing for beche-de-mer, the ugly sea-

slug so valued by the Chinese epicure, Trochus shell, and occasionally a few pearls. One day, however, my ship ran up on a reef and, being uninsured, put me out of business. But during that time I had acquired a practical knowledge of sailing, although knowing next to nothing of the mysteries of navigation, which, with a native crew and pilot, is an unnecessary accomplishment for inter-island work. Rex could distinguish one end of the ship from the other, but ask him to name them and there you had him. We were badly equipped for such a journey as this, three thousand miles of treacherous sea and coastal line in an old, forty-four foot harbor yacht.

So Charlie joined the crew.

He was a young Englishman from the Isle of Man, who had just been sacked from a sheep station in the back country. Hardly surprising, this, for Manxmen are sailors, not goatherds. The sea is in their blood, bred there by the generations of ancestors who made British naval history. Charlie was short and stocky, wore his hair cropped like a convict and spoke like a judge. In fact his whole attitude was judicial and solemn. If he asked you to pass the salt you immediately wanted to get counsel's advice first. He wandered aboard one day, introduced himself, and said he had once been a half owner of the *Sirocco*. He and his partner had been forced by lack of funds to sell her to the shipyard where I bought her. Added coincidence, they also had planned to sail her to the South Seas.

He seemed a nice sort so I asked him if he would care to come along with us. He pondered weightily over the matter and then gave judgment to the effect that he would be glad to.

By the time we were ready to sail, a new semi-Diesel engine, fishing tackle, guns, provisions, and so on, left me with only about five pounds on which to make a three-thousand-mile journey. None of the others had any money either. Funds to cover mishaps? No one cared! The spirit of adventure had us in a firm grasp.

The Press was interested in us, too. One paper even ran an editorial asking why, with so many sunken hulks already lying along the coast, a menace to shipping, we had even been given sailing-papers? The inference was plain and not very encouraging.

We made about four attempts to leave, but each time something went wrong. The first time we were met by such a fierce gale blowing outside the harbor that we had to put about and come back. We waited a couple of days and tried again, but this time something happened to the engine. On another occasion we found we had forgotten to fill the water tanks. Finally our friends stopped coming down to see us off. Rex had said tearful good-bys to his family so often that even his mother was beginning to treat the thing lightly. "Good-by, my darling boy, good-by. Take good care of yourself now. Good-by. I suppose you'll be home for a game of bridge tonight?"

When at last we sailed, it was in the dead of night, unsung and without farewells.

Chapter Two

Almost Foundered

The voyage nearly ended with the first leg of the journey. We were making for Port Stephens, a couple of hundred miles north.

Embarrassed by all those abortive leave-takings, my one and only desire had been to get to sea, but now, as I stood in the forepeak and watched the countless lights of Sydney slip by, I wondered if we would ever see them again.

Three thousand miles to go....

Under full sail and engine the little ship surged to the first swell of the open sea beyond, her sharp bows slicing the water into long dark ripples.

"Good-by, Sydney, good-by. Life goes on. A million souls revolve about those myriad lights. See you again? We take it all too seriously—what's one life here or there? Not so long ago a scattered campfire of a wandering native tribe on this coast would have meant double guard duty on a passing ship. But look at the lights now! I wonder— God damn it!"

I was soaked to the skin as the ship suddenly dived into the first large head swell. Another came on top of it, and we went under that one, too.

All attempts to make some hot coffee were hopeless. No sooner was the kerosene stove lit than a sea would come over and buckets of water pour through the leaking forward hatch to put it out. Besides, you had to hold the pot on the stove. If you left it for a second

it would be on the floor. Holding the pot on the stove meant staying in the galley and staying in the galley meant being horribly seasick. Even on deck still meant being horribly seasick, but the galley seemed to hold a soul-destroying variety of its own. Rex was the only one who still fought against it.

With an affected nonchalance he was making desultory jokes, but his face was turning green and his jokes becoming more and more ghastly.

There were ominous crashes from below at every plunge. She pitched and heaved and rolled and tossed, and the seas came green over the deck. Then suddenly all was calm. We had taken about five minutes to pass through Sydney Heads. The conflicting crosscurrents and heavy swell make an unexpected maelstrom which gives a small boat a quick but severe trouncing. The surprise of the thing left us soaked and slightly dazed. The galley was a shambles. All the crockery was smashed and a lot of water had come through the forward hatch. Outside the harbor there was a steady wind blowing hard with a rising sea. We bucked into it, the *Sirocco* making heavy weather.

Soon after we had the satisfaction of seeing Rex lying in the scuppers with the water pouring round—washing any remaining jokes right out of him.

The day seemed very long. Toward evening the wind had become biting cold and was blowing a young gale. All I asked of life, now, was that it might change or drop and let us get on to Port Stephens, for whose shelter and calm I longed passionately. But it held on and so did the seas, and the *Sirocco* continued to give her imitation of a porpoise going through them.

Late that second night the engine suddenly began to

miss fire. How I cursed the folly that had led me to take an interest in the thing. Being the only one who knew its little tricks, I had now to go down and tinker with it. That dog box of an engine room had an atmosphere like Dante's inferno. Every few seconds a lurch would send me either flat against the side of the ship or on top of the extremely hot engine.

It refused to respond to either curses or wrenchings. One of the cylinders had become choked with carbon. With hatred I stared at it in the murky gloom. In addition to the reek of hot oil fumes, I began to imagine a smell of burning flesh, due, I thought bitterly, to the number of times I had been thrown on top of the engine.

Then I caught sight of the bilge.

The water in it was level with the floor!

I hurriedly poked my head through a door and saw the water splashing about on the cabin floor, rushing backward and forward to the motion of the ship. She was leaking! I shouted to someone on deck to come down but couldn't make myself heard above the noise of the engine and the weather outside. Scrambling up the greasy companionway to the deck, I found the others huddled up in the wheelhouse, drawn and haggard from sickness and lack of sleep.

"Hey!" I shouted again. "We've sprung a leak! You get on the pump, Charlie, quick!"

For an hour we pumped in ten-minute spells without making any appreciable difference in the water. The pump was a hand-plunge type and intermittently ceased to work because of the continuous shifting of the water from side to side as the ship rolled.

We continued to pump incessantly all that foul night.

We had to. With a few tons of water in her, the *Sirocco* lurched, rolled, and staggered up into the head wind as heavily as a sodden log. At dawn I was seriously considering turning in toward the distant, dim shore and trusting to luck to find some shelter on that bleak and stormy coast. One glance at the chart showed that it was utterly impossible. We appeared to have made no headway at all during the night and could still see the headland of Point Stephens faintly ahead, seemingly as far off as ever. Then at last the wind changed, a few points to the east.

But it was enough.

We hoisted the mainsail and the *Sirocco* got way on, driving into the seas now and shaking the water from her like a whale coming up after a dive. She plunged ahead, cleaving her sharp bow through the white-capped waves like a knife. By midday we were off the Point, making a good five knots. An hour later the anchor was dropped close to the small jetty in Port Stephens.

The ship had over two feet of water in her. That was about the nearest we came actually to foundering at sea. Taking a tin of biscuits with us, we rowed ashore and fell asleep instantly in an empty shed on the jetty. It smelled badly of lobsters and fish, but no one noticed that—not until the next morning anyway.

Chapter Three

Loser's Duty

Next morning, after a good hot breakfast, we began the job of cleaning ship, pumping the water out of books, clothes, papers which had all been reduced to a sodden mass of oily pulp by the flooding bilge water. While we were thus occupied, Rex made a sortie into the small fishing village, cast an expert eye about and returned to report a deplorable lack of daughters among the fisherfolk. He advocated immediate departure and to hell with the engine. But it took a couple of days to get shipshape once more and, after scraping the carbon out of the engine, we hove up anchor and set sail for Coff's Harbor, halfway to Brisbane.

With a fresh, fair wind blowing from the southeast, the *Sirocco* fairly flew up the coast. She bowled along in great style, the following seas catching up every so often and shooting her along on their crests. It made little difference to her speed when the engine was shut off and, with no sound except the swish and hiss of the water along her side and the occasional flutter of a sail, we felt that keen ecstasy of sailing a hard-driving vessel. The blue seas came gurgling under her counter, her bows went down, she dipped her bowsprit into the water, and then rushed along on the wave's crest with a white bursting foam on both sides.

Once we came upon two whales, spouting lazily in the sun. They fluked in surprise and dived as the ship swished between them.

Then in the late afternoon the wind began to rise, with dark clouds rapidly overtaking us from the south, threatening a strong blow and probably rain. At six we had logged ninety-eight miles in twelve hours, magnificent sailing for a vessel of the *Sirocco's* size.

Charlie brewed some curious-tasting cocoa, explaining carefully that the taste was probably due to his having put the cocoa in the saucepan without first removing the dregs of last night's Irish stew.

We drank it and tried to like it.

By nine o'clock the storm was overtaking us and seas were breaking over the counter on the deck. Once a shackle swinging loose at the end of a rope walloped Rex on the side of the head and nearly laid him out. Short-handed and in the dark, it was a hard job to reef her down, but we finally managed it, and found her much easier to steer. She was being driven too hard and was making heavy weather with a tendency to broach on broadside. Charlie's cocoa had made us all horribly seasick again. When it rained in buckets, without the wind's easing up, our misery was complete. She had a different motion this time, like continually going down in a fast elevator on a full stomach. We were soon beyond caring. There is nothing so utterly demoralizing as hearty, belly-retching seasickness.

At midnight the Dook sighted a flashing light which he recognized from the chart as South Solitary Island, off Coff's Harbor. If I had just come out from a tomb I couldn't have been happier to see a light.

The entrance to Coff's Harbor is narrow and tricky, necessitating careful negotiation between a rocky headland and a small island at the mouth, and even more careful steering in. You have to keep two red leading

lights directly in line. If you once let them get out of line, even slightly, you finish upon the rocks.

We rounded the island and began to search anxiously for the first red leading light which would mean turning in toward the harbor.

Trelawny spotted it just when I thought we must have missed it entirely. I took the wheel and hove her head up into the wind while the others stood by in readiness to take sail off her. As soon as the helm was put up we knew the sort of sea that had been following all day. Rex, sitting straddle-legged across the bowsprit, trying to get a gasket on the jib, went under the first wave and was completely lost to sight! Luckily, he clung on like grim death and wasn't washed off. The jib, however, was torn to shreds by the force of the wind and sea. Somehow, in the pitch dark, we took the mainsail in, or rather it took us in. It came down with a rush and covered the entire deck and the crew as well. The night became even blacker as we struggled frantically to free ourselves, expecting to hit the rocks blindly at any moment. During that time the little *Sirocco* did everything but stand on her bowsprit. As it was, just as we freed ourselves, a tremendous wave caught her beam on, crashing on deck with such force that I thought the main hatch cover was sure to be smashed in. Fortunately it held, and I jumped for the wheel and once again headed her in for the entrance. With the sea shoving us along much faster than we wanted to go, we ran wildly for the narrow harbor mouth. So far only the one leading light had been picked up and the other was not to be seen at all.

I went down below to keep the engine in full reverse in an effort to give the others time to find the

second light. With only the one lead spotted I expected at any moment to feel the sudden lurch and crash as we piled up on the jagged rocks of the breakwater. Stuffed into a tiny engine compartment under such circumstances is enough to give the strongest a bad case of claustrophobia. It seemed an eternity before we saw the other leading light. It had been hidden directly behind the first one all along! They were a long way off but instead of being on the waterfront as we expected, they were set far back inland and we were almost ashore before we knew it.

Charlie saw the beach just ahead and bellowed down the companionway, "Go astern! Astern, you fool!"

"I'm going astern!" I bellowed back.

But then I didn't give a damn. I waited for the crash with bitter calm. But slowly she backed off, the engine for once going madly instead of stopping. It was a narrow shave. We were practically on top of the line of breakers before they could be seen in the darkness. We let go anchor without having the least idea of our position, beyond the fact that it was an exceptionally bad one. We pitched and heaved there all night, exposed to the wind and sea.

In the morning I was surprised to find the *Sirocco* lying right in the center of the fairway, only a few yards from the wharf. About to move off, we found the log line had been caught in the propeller when going astern in the night. It was hopelessly entangled and would have to be cut loose.

Trelawny lost the poker hand which decided all unpleasant duties, and dived down in an attempt to free it, but the rope was jammed so tightly around the propeller shaft that he was unable to stay under water long

enough to make much of an impression on it. With a miserable one pair, I was next, and went into the chilly water. But I, too, was forced to retire after hacking a bit off. To make matters worse, I also got a nasty bump on the head from the pitching counter. Rex was a very fine swimmer, so he armed himself with a razor and managed to clear the remainder away.

He was still in the water when a fisherman ran out to the wharf and shouted, waving wildly, "Hey, a fourteen-foot shark was caught there yesterday, and we saw another right under you this morning!"

Rex heard. I have never seen anyone move faster. As though lifted from the water by a powerful magnet, he was high and dry on the deck almost before the man had finished speaking.

We were four days at Coff's Harbor waiting for the weather to break. The harbor is a death trap in the Southeast. It is fully exposed to the full fury of the sea and when it begins to blow, the larger ships always put out to sea rather than face the gale inside and the risk of being blown on the rocky shore. There are many wrecked hulks on the rocks of this part of the Australian coast. Small vessels have to creep up close to the breakwater and there try to find a little shelter. For thirty-six hours we lay to with two anchors out and the engine running as a stand-by in case the cables parted. Most of the time was spent trying to contrive a means of making the wretched forward hatch water-tight by nailing pieces of rubber round the coaming. The *Sirocco* plunged so deeply in any head sea that, in spite of every effort, the weight of water continually coming over let in gallons. In the galley it was like trying to cook a meal in a shower bath.

Chapter Four

Limb of the Law

At last the weather broke. On a fine sunny day we left Coff's Harbor, hoping never to see the place again. A fair wind was blowing from the southeast and the *Sirocco* scudded along at seven knots as steadily and with as little motion as if tied up alongside a wharf. If the wind held we hoped to make Brisbane the following day. Beyond Brisbane there lay the sheltered waters of the Great Barrier Reef with its beautiful and exciting prospects. There we could cruise along with small islands offering shelter every few miles and without fear of being caught by sudden gales. We had to choose our weather carefully. The *Sirocco* was far too small and unseaworthy to take chances.

It was a beautiful cloudless day, the sea calm with a slight following swell. We ran through countless schools of flying fish. Disturbed, suddenly they flew all around the ship, many of them landing on deck. We cooked a few but they made bad eating. Lying in the warm sun aft, lazily watching a towline over the stern, Rex was suddenly galvanized into action when the line shot out at a tangent and a huge fish leaped from the water astern. He tried to haul in on the line, but the fish was too heavy and Charlie had to lend a hand. They heaved lustily, but the weight of the fish at the speed we were making under full sail was still too much.

"Pull! Pull!" I shouted. "My God, you fellows

couldn't pull a gorilla off your sister. Here, give me that line!"

I grabbed it just as the fish made his strongest run. A few seconds later I came up spluttering, twenty yards astern of the *Sirocco*. It was fully ten minutes before they circled around and came head up into the wind to pick me up. During that ten minutes I aged several years, momentarily expecting a shark to start in on one of my legs. They hauled me on board much chastened. Strangely enough we were still fast to our fish and soon had him thrashing alongside. Rex slipped a noose, fastened to one of the back stays, over his tail and we hoisted aboard an enormous kingfish. He stretched full across the *Sirocco* and must have weighed a hundred and fifty pounds. Rex was delighted about the whole thing and speculated at length about the probable fate of any sister of mine.

I have never seen so many porpoises all at once. No sooner had one large school left us, frisking around the bows playfully, than another would come tearing along to dive from side to side of the ship, corkscrewing on their backs under and over with marvelous precision.

There was a harpoon on board and Rex went forward to try to harpoon one. The Dook saw him.

"You're not going to kill a porpoise, are you?" he asked in horror.

"Why not?" said Rex cheerfully.

"Good God, man, it's bad luck! Terribly bad luck."

"Sure," agreed Rex. "Bad luck for the porpoise."

"No, bad luck for the ship. You can't do it—something's certain to happen." The Dook said that to kill a porpoise was as bad as killing an albatross and reminded Rex of the *Ancient Mariner*. He took his old

sailing-ship superstitions very seriously and was very much in earnest.

Rex took nothing seriously, least of all the Dook, and was determined to try his skill with the harpoon. He waited for an opportunity and then plunged his harpoon into a large one, killing it instantly. At that precise moment there was a rattle and bang aft and the engine almost stopped. We looked at each other. The potency of the Dook's prophecy seemed a bit sudden even for a porpoise. I ran below and found one of the cylinders cracked and the oil pump broken. It meant we would have to put into the nearest port and find out the extent of the damage, which looked considerable. The Dook felt satisfied and vindicated and went around with a next-time-you'll-listen-to-me expression.

Even without the engine the ship was still making good speed and was riding comfortably. When the sun went down in the evening, the wind eased a little but still kept the sails full. This was the first pleasant night we had spent at sea. We were able to leave the hatches open and sleep below in the cabin without being half suffocated with oil fumes. But it was such a perfect night, so warm and starlit, that I took my bunk on deck and for an hour or so watched the moon drift across the sky. I had just fallen asleep when the ship suddenly broached, and the crest of a swell came rolling right over the ship and soaked my bunk and me thoroughly. Only half awake, I jumped up, convinced we must be sinking. My first thought was for a life belt. I looked around and then suddenly realized that everything was strangely peaceful for a sinking vessel. The stars were shining; there was a pleasant light breeze and not much sea.

"What happened?" I shouted to Rex, who was on watch, steering.

"Happened?" he repeated innocently. "Do you mean that little wave?"

"No, I mean that goddam big wave! Look at my bunk! It nearly washed me overboard."

"Oh, that one. Well, I must have dozed off and let her get beam on. Sorry."

He swore it was an accident, so I had to let it drop, although not very well satisfied in my own mind.

With the engine practically out of commission, there was little chance of our making Brisbane. It could only be run for a few minutes at a time—otherwise it became red hot. A glance at the chart showed that the Richmond River, about eighty miles below Brisbane, was the most likely place to have it repaired. The *Sailing Directions* stated that the bar over the river was very dangerous at times and that the passage was narrow but had plenty of water on it. I had never seen a bar and had no idea what it was like. When, at daybreak next morning, the Dook pointed ashore and said he thought that must be the bar, I could scarcely believe it. Three enormous lines of raging breakers lay ahead, bursting in mountainous foam. There was supposed to be a passage somewhere through them but the lines of surf looked uniformly unbroken. With consternation we crowded around the *Sailing Directions*, hoping there was some mistake. There was no mistake. We were supposed to sail through those breakers.

"What's that signal on the flagpole ashore?" asked Charlie anxiously.

The Dook trained his glasses on it. "A black ball," he said. "Where's the code book?"

We looked it up. *Black ball,* it read. *Do not attempt entrance. Bar dangerous.*

"We've got to go in," I said. "We can't go on to Brisbane with a busted engine. We'd better heave to and signal to the pilot to come out."

"What about the pilot's fee?" asked Rex.

"We'll owe it to him," I said.

The Dook hoisted his signals and we waited for an hour for the pilot to come out. Our signal pennants were a little larger than pocket handkerchiefs, so even if that gentleman had possessed the high-powered telescope necessary to decipher them, it is improbable he could have got over the bar in that surf.

"We'll have to go in without him, that's all," I said. "The engine should take us that far. See if you can pick up the other leading beacon, Dook. I can only see one."

We started up the engine and went in closer but could not find the other beacon. The Dook said that if we trailed a length of grass rope out astern it would stop us broaching to. As usual, he had read of this old trick of the days when sailing ships had to cross bars, and it was lucky he had. All hatches were tightly battened down and lashed. The *Sirocco* crept slowly up toward a spot in the line that seemed to have a slightly smaller surf. Still there was only one beacon in sight to guide us, but it was too late to turn back. We were in the swell of the bar and had to trust in prayer that the other would come in view in time to show us the channel.

It was a tense moment when we reached the first line of breakers. Luckily it was a smaller one than usual and just then, through the sea glasses, Charlie picked up

the second beacon far over on the port side. I gave her full speed ahead and the Dook swung the ship over to get the two beacons in line. He barely managed to straighten her up when the second breaker caught us and flung the ship onward in a mad rush, with her stern high out of the water, bow down and rudder useless, the rope astern saving us from making the swerving broach that capsizes ships, small and large.

In the middle of that maelstrom of colossal breakers, the steering gear broke! The Dook promptly let go the useless wheel and jumped to the short stump of tiller aft. Using all his strength to bring her stern on to the surf, he undoubtedly saved us from crashing head-on to the breakwater on the port side.

There were seven lines of breakers on the bar that day, the middle ones much larger than the others. By great good luck, only one came aboard. It was a big one. It swept over the deck into the wheelhouse and submerged everything, filling the Dook's long sea boots right to the brim. Intent on the arduous business of steering with a short stump of tiller about eight inches long, and knowing we might be overwhelmed at any moment, the Dook yelled frantically to Charlie to come and pull them off. Even in those tense moments it was a comical sight, a caricature scene very clear in my memory, to see Trelawny sitting braced on the deck, in running water, peering ahead intently through thick spectacles obscured by salt water (the Dook's spectacles always clouded over in moments of stress!), clutching the tiller in both hands, his left leg stuck up in the air with Charlie heaving mightily at the water-logged sea boot.

With what relief we sailed into the calm water of

the Richmond River! It was the merest fluke that we ever crossed that bar with such a break on it. Fool's luck, according to the pilot who was waiting on the wharf to inform us of this fact among others of a more personal nature.

"You damn fools!" he shouted, as we were coming alongside. "What the hell do you mean by disregarding my stand-off signal? I'm going to report you to Brisbane. What do you think I'm here for? A blasted ornament?"

"Hardly, with a pan like yours," answered Rex, always impatient of criticism.

"Shut up," I hissed. "Don't irritate the man. Hop down and get the whisky out."

His anger somewhat assuaged by a couple of swift whiskies, the pilot mellowed sufficiently to admit that he would have been sorry to see our corpses wrung out as we deserved. He said that when he saw us begin to cross the bar he had immediately ordered the lifeboat launched, ready to put out to us. With several others, he had stood on shore alternately cursing and praying for us, as time and again our forty-five-foot mast was almost lost to sight in the yawning trough of the breakers. They had never expected us to come through it. Fools, he concluded, were like drunks—just plain lucky.

"Dunno what you were worried about," said Rex. "That bit of a bar! Good God! I could have swum across it and back again."

The pilot flushed deeply. He obviously took a personal pride in his bar. He rose to his feet and, being a very tall man, bumped his head resoundingly on the skylight. Looking hard at Rex, he seemed to be on the

point of making some very caustic remarks, but I hastily interrupted by inviting him to breakfast.

"No," he said slowly. "But what about you and—" he indicated Rex and hesitated, searching for a fitting epithet "—and Christ, here, coming along to my place and having something with me—or maybe he'd rather try walking on the surf!"

The pilot was a bachelor and had a roomy bungalow near the river mouth. We breakfasted with him, and then enjoyed a hot bath. The Dook took the first bath and left an evil-looking scum, oily and disagreeable, in a thick dark line round the sides of the tub. The same greasy residue became detached from all of us in turn, but it made us feel human again.

That day was devoted to some really serious drinking. After the pilot had displayed the tattooing on his body, depicting several full-rigged ships he had sailed in, and a number of great-bosomed females who, he said, had loved him passionately in the past, he suggested we proceed up to the township. By this time the pilot would have swum across the bar himself on a bet, but instead, to the rousing strains of *Blow the Man Down,* we made an impressive entrance into Banalla township. Here, on the corner of the main street, we next obliged with *Shenandoah,* and were gratified to note the evident appreciation of the inhabitants, collected about us in silent wonder. *Shenandoah* was encored so enthusiastically by all that we once more obliged, giving intense feeling to the sad and beautiful melody. It was a great hit, and we ceased only when the pilot's voice developed a rather lugubrious habit of jumping from a mellow baritone to a high treble and back again. Anyway, the town policeman arrived, and

his expression denoted an unmusical soul, but being the one and only representative of Law and Order, his manner was deprecating when he suggested that we were disturbing the peace. The pilot, however, now our blood-and-whisky brother, would have none of that.

"Whoosh peache?" he demanded. "Who the—hell wants peace anyway?"

It was a nice point and stumped the constable.

"I dunno," he muttered, looking around puzzled.

"Then shut up or sing," interrupted the pilot. "*Johnnie's Gone to Hilo.* Come on, let's go!"

The policeman, with admirable tact, said that nothing would please him better if, as a favor to him, we would shift into the nearest pub to sing it. The suggestion met with general approval and there, between drinks, Frank, the policeman, was at length prevailed upon to sing a few solos and joined us in rum and sextets far into the night, until his voice, at first excellent, became like all the others, hoarse, thick, and querulous. Then Rex gave the unexpurgated lines of some unknown bush poet of humorous but lurid mind, chanted with the characteristic gestures of the Australian sheepman of the outback.

They were talkin' of their shearing,
Down in Jerry Hogan's bar.
He was a small and weedy man,
Like big-guns mostly are.

He told them how he'd rung the sheds
Along the Queensland side,
Till he got on the nerves of Hogan,
Who had a little pride.

"You're a dirty, lying bastard!"
Said Hogan plain and blunt.
"You little lousebound faker,
You was never in the front!"

Then up spoke Big Bill Jackson,
Who smelt of camel dung,
And hailed from the wild Monaro,
Where the women eat their young.

Said he, "Don't quarrel, boys,
There's beer here for the crowd.
Just sit down quiet and peaceful-like
And voice yer tallies loud."

(For Jackson had no tallies,
No big scores to detail;
Only dreams of beery revels
Along the camel trail.)

So Hogan took the tale up,
Of wild and ridgy cuts,
How he didn't give a hoot for pizzle,
Or a yard or two of guts.

How he broke up Hungry Mawson,
Way back in Eighty-two,
And sheared three hundred sheep that day,
Then raped Hungry's daughter, Lou.

Again the weedy man broke in,
And tried to get in front,
But Hogan muttered and settled down,
"You weedy little runt.

"You shear mudbank wethers!
God strike me dead—not yet!
You couldn't dag a Hogget,
You mother's baby pet."

Then Jackson begged a hearing
Of wild Monaro tales,
And, as a man from those parts,
A hearing never fails.

'Twas of lusty nights—Black Velvet,
And was soon keenly felt,
As each man smacked his lower lip,
And tightened up his belt.

But Hogan feared what might ensue,
So he put the mob to flight.
There ain't no fairies thereabouts
But one might come in sight.

The township of Banalla could have been ransacked with impunity that night, for Frank, sole limb of the law, was in a horrible condition at four o'clock in the morning. His early boisterous spirits had given way to gloom, leaving him a mere wreck of the stalwart young cop who had sung *Sonny Boy* at midnight.

I awoke next morning to see the unfamiliar countenance of one who slept wheezily on the *Sirocco's* cabin floor, a youthful fisherman named George who had joined us at some indefinite period during the night. Next to him lay Frank, using as a pillow a parcel containing three lobsters. They were immediately turned over to Charlie to convert into a curry for breakfast

and George and Frank invited to share it.

After breakfast Rex touched upon a subject which had been causing us all some concern. "I want to borrow some dough," he said. "Anyone got any?"

When we stopped laughing, we admitted we had, a little.

"I've got a pound," I said, "which I wouldn't let anywhere near you even if I didn't have plans for it. It's going to cost all of that to get the engine fixed. Then we've got to get some food because we may be here some time waiting for spare parts to come from Sydney. How we eat I don't know. We might try and get a job of some sort for a few days. Any jobs around here, George?"

"None," answered George. "I've tried. But listen 'ere. Why don't yer go out kingfishing? It's the good season now and kingfish is bringin' threepence to fourpence a pound. This hooker oughter be good fer fishin'."

"That's an idea," I said. "Only thing is we haven't any fishing gear, and we can't afford to buy any."

"Well," said George, "I got the gear and what's more I got the hixperience too. You put in the hooker and I'll put in the gear and the hixperience an' gimme a fourth share. What say?"

The fishing expedition was successful.

We set out next morning and trolled with stout lines, baited with pieces of red rag, at about four knots. Only two small fish were landed during the day, but toward evening we could not haul them in quick enough. George certainly had "hixperience" and seemed to know exactly where most fish were to be caught. I doubt if we would have landed half as many as we

did without his expert knowledge of gaffing.

It is a simple matter to haul a large fish alongside a boat, but not so easy when it comes to getting him on the deck, for the kingfish is a splendid fighter and battles to the last.

The weather was fine and calm, so we remained out all that night and the next day fishing, and then sailed back at dusk in fine style with a fresh breeze on the quarter and over half a ton of splendid kingfish packed on large ice blocks in the cabin and galley.

George sold the fish, realizing threepence a pound, thus putting the *Sirocco's* crew in pocket eleven pounds sterling. The Dook landed the best catch, a fish weighing 78 pounds. A powerful smell of fish lingered in the cabin for weeks after this expedition, but we got so used to it we soon couldn't tell it from the oil fumes.

Banalla is a pretty little town. Behind it and along both banks of the Richmond River, the "rolling downs" stretch out in the best pastoral country in Australia.

Rex was living on the fat of the land. Having no scruples of any sort, he had immediately set out to cultivate a haughty blond barmaid at the Royal Seaview Hotel and had succeeded so well she would have given him the place if she had owned it. In a patronizing manner he brought us a leg of lamb from the hotel kitchen, but we were so hungry we forebore to hit him over the head with it.

We had a stroke of luck one day. Charlie and Trelawny had taken all the dirty and mildewed clothes down to an adjacent creek to wash them. They spent the whole day at this unaccustomed exercise, because they had the two lowest poker hands and never did learn not to trust Rex when he dealt. Rex and I

lounged on a sunny bank near by, enjoying that deep, full satisfaction which comes from watching other men sweat at toil. They finished the job at dusk and the heap of washing was spread out to dry on the wharf a few yards away from the *Sirocco*. In the morning it had all disappeared. We were never able to afford any new clothes and so for the remainder of the *Sirocco's* wanderings the race was to the swift. It was a case of "first dressed best dressed." On several occasions one or other of the crew had to eschew public appearance while his trousers adorned a shipmate.

I have omitted to mention that while safely anchored in Richmond River, vessels up and down the coast were keeping a lookout for our bodies. We were reported lost at sea. Having set sail for Brisbane, when we failed to show up there the harbor authorities had posted us missing. They knew that if we had called at any intermediate port it would have been reported immediately in the shipping news. The fact that we were not so reported was due to the pilot, congenial fellow, having forgotten all about it in the festivities of our arrival.

We were two weeks in the Richmond River waiting for a favorable opportunity to get out over the bar again, and chose a time at the full spring tides. Expecting another bad buffeting, the prospect of heading into those breakers had filled us with nervous gloom. It was soon dissipated, however, when we discovered that the bar had merely a large swell running instead of the shattering curlers we anticipated. Moody things, bars. We crossed over easily, turning northward once more with lively anticipation for whatever lay ahead.

Chapter Five

The Turkish Bath

The journey from Richmond River to Brisbane was so good that I don't remember many details of it. The engine gave no trouble. The sea was calm. The weather fine and warm. No one was sick and the *Sirocco,* before a slight breeze on the starboard quarter, flew along with a bone in her teeth.

Off Cape Moreton we anchored near a little survey steamer. There were some exciting moments going aboard her in the tidal swell. The crew were good fellows and had been anchored in this one spot for a week. They suggested a game of poker to pass the time until we proceeded on our way to Brisbane, but we had to admit we had no money.

"Well, what *have* you got?" they asked. "Got any clothes? Or food?"

We confessed to some of both and sat around a sea chest in the fo'castle. As it was a gentleman's game, Rex suggested that the deal remain with him until three aces showed. They never did until it was nearly time for us to be getting back. We bade them farewell and rowed back to the *Sirocco* to count the spoils. Four large hams, six bottles of pickles, three rounds of roast beef, a box of carpenter's tools, several woolen sweaters, and a badly needed alarm clock. We were gypped on this last, however. It had no works.

Crossing Moreton Bay at night, we came very close to sudden disaster by narrowly escaping being run down

and cut in two by a large steamer at the entrance to the Brisbane River.

It was a pitch-black night and the Dook and I were on the middle watch. At about six bells we saw the lights of a steamer coming up astern and accordingly hung a hurricane lamp on one of the backstays to draw her attention to the fact that we happened to be there. The steamer apparently didn't see it, for she hung right on her course. We put the helm over to starboard and as we did so the steamer changed onto the same course. We immediately swung over to the port side but couldn't go too far as the channel was not very wide and we were horrified to see the steamer swing back again as though she was intent on deliberately running us down. She came on and on until she was looming like a great black shadow right on top of us. I had actually called Rex and Charlie from below, ready to go over the side.

Suddenly the big hulk saw us and swung back again, barely in time. In another ten seconds her sharp steel bow would certainly have cut through us. With set faces we watched her speed by in a phosphorescent foam of water, and but for the loud throb of powerful engines we could have spoken to the officer on the bridge looking down on us. The Dook leaped to his feet in rage and in a most sulphurous burst of abuse, of which we had no idea he was even capable, he howled up what he thought of the officer, his ship, his owners, and the obscure circumstances of his birth. The officer waved back in friendly greeting. The Dook's tirade was, of course, drowned in the noise of the engines and the officer no doubt thought he was being given the courtesies of ships that pass in the night.

Singularly enough, I afterward met the captain of that steamer and told him how near we had come to reporting the matter to the Harbor Board, and having the officer on watch severely reprimanded for keeping such a bad lookout almost in harbor. The captain said he remembered the occasion well, and the scare it had given the chief officer, who had apparently been asleep on watch.

It is forty miles from the mouth of the river to the city, all against a strong current and it was dark before we made fast to someone's nicely painted yacht mooring.

With more optimism than judgment, I had calculated on a week getting from Sydney to Brisbane. It had taken us a month.

Personally I felt as though we had already sailed halfway round the world instead of about six hundred miles. But we were enjoying it, particularly when we had enough to eat, and decided to stay a week or so in Brisbane to have the engine thoroughly overhauled.

Brisbane is an uncomfortable city in the summer. The heat is stifling but even on the hottest day the citizens go about dressed in somber, heavy, black clothes which gives one the impression of suddenly being in the midst of an undertaker's convention. If, however, the stranger ventures to don tropical garb in keeping with the climate, he instantly becomes an object of great curiosity. The natives will stare at him in astonishment and are even apt to follow him around.

The Dook found in the heat a long-desired opportunity to wear his new khaki pith helmet, purchased in Sydney, and gave it an airing in the city. But apparently the unusual headgear excited the citizens to such

an extent that finally a bunch of urchins collected at his heels and followed him along the street shouting, "Shot any tigers today, Mister?" "Hey, Mister, where's yer helephunt? Did 'e bolt on yer?" "Gawdstruth! 'E's come out without 'is gun." "Look at 'is 'at, will yer?" He returned to the ship in great confusion, and with the topee wrapped up in a brown paper parcel.

The Dook was painfully shy at the best of times, shy enough with his own sex but with women it was positively acute. Not that he was effeminate in any way. On the contrary, he had every manly quality. But he must have led a very sheltered sort of existence as a student at Cambridge because the mere thought of having to speak to a girl, even if only on an impersonal business matter, was sufficient to fill him with alarm. The idea of any more intimate relation threw him instantly into a panic. This, of course, was a continual source of keen delight to Rex. He never lost an opportunity to bait the Dook with shocking remarks, just to marvel anew at their effect on that sensitive youth.

He always began by looking hard at the Dook and clicking his tongue sympathetically.

Trelawny would look back at him coldly, realizing with secret apprehension that he was about to be baited.

"You're not the sort of man to let your bastards starve," Rex would say at length after a long scrutiny. "I don't suppose you've even got any."

The idea of such a thing was absurdly beyond all the realms of probability, but Rex's tones would be congratulatory, as though complimenting the Dook on his powers of restraint.

"No, I haven't. You're a confounded idiot, Rex. Shut up!"

"He hasn't!" Rex would repeat in an awed voice. "Good God, he hasn't!"

The implication of vast inexperience would sting the Dook to an exasperated retort.

"No, luckily I don't happen to be a promiscuous animal like you."

"Amazing!" Rex would continue in a whisper. "Astounding! A male virgin, by God! Amazing! Something must be done about it."

He did something about it one day. The Dook had been saying for a long time how much he would like a Turkish bath, so Rex volunteered to take him to an establishment he said he knew of in Brisbane.

The Dook was all eagerness and just before they set out, Rex took me aside.

"Listen," he said, "this is going to be funny. You'd better come along too. I've just told some girls in a brothel that we've got a male virgin on board and they said there's no such thing. They want to meet him. I told them the Dook thinks he's coming to a Turkish bath and so they're all set to give him one!"

Rex led us down side streets and alleyways, the Dook periodically remarking that it seemed a curious part of the town for a Turkish bath establishment. Australian Turkish baths were not like those in England, Rex assured him. Here the exteriors were never much to look at; on the contrary, they were generally pretty awful. But once you got inside they weren't so bad.

At length we arrived at a dingy place, the entrance of which was a sort of brick archway like an open railway tunnel. Inside were two rows of cane lounge chairs ranged along both walls. These were occupied by the *filles de joie,* a most diverse collection of garru-

lous harpies. They stopped chattering as we approached and eyed us with coy invitation. The Dook halted and looked at them with apprehension.

"It's all right. Just the bath attendants—for women," said Rex casually.

"Coming in, dearies?" asked one Junoesque blonde in a hearty, booming voice that reverberated in the tunnel.

Rex was standing slightly in the rear and out of the corner of my eye I saw him nod and point at the Dook's back. The blonde suddenly remembered. She looked at the Dook with a new interest—the sort of look a naturalist would give a live dinosaur.

"Ah, yes," she said slowly and wonderingly. "Come this way, gents. I'll show you to the baths. My name's Rose," she added with an arch note from force of habit creeping into her voice.

We followed her, Trelawny ill at ease, but suspecting nothing, down the two lines of ogling femininity, up a flight of stairs, and into a room bare of all furniture except for one chair and a bed.

"Here we are," she said. "Just wait while I call the gents' attendant." She left us and Trelawny looked round the frowsy room.

"Curious sort of place," he remarked. "I wonder where the baths are."

"Who's going to have the first bath?" asked Rex.

"I'll have one last," I said carelessly.

"You'd better go first then, Dook," said Rex, giving me a meaning glance and nodding toward the door.

"Yes, all right," agreed Trelawny.

"Then you'd better start getting your duds off," Rex advised. "These bath attendants like you to be

stripped, ready for your massage. I'll go down and hurry them up." He clumped downstairs noisily while Trelawny proceeded to remove his clothes and lay them on the chair.

I smoked a cigarette and kept his mind occupied by a meaningless discourse on the different varieties of Turkish bath. There was the English Turkish bath, an austere, gloomy sort of business, taking place in a chamber with a dim, religious light. It cleansed the body but depressed the mind. In Japan, on the other hand, the bath had a spirit of carnival about it. An air of *joie de vivre* and playful festivity maintained by the pretty attendants, who aimed at uplifting you spiritually as well as physically. I called one to mind who had given me a solid whack with a large back-scrubber for getting her wrong. No doubt in Turkey, the land of origin—

The Dook pricked his ears up. "Do you mean to say you let women bathe you?!"

A knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," I said.

"It's Rose here," said that lady in her hearty voice.

"Oh, come in, Rose," I interrupted.

There was a sort of muffled sob from the Dook as he leaped for his trousers.

Rose appeared in the doorway with Rex and four smiling girls. They all trooped in.

"Hullo," she said brightly. "Do you know what? The gents' attendants have got the day off! So we've come to give you a bath instead. Won't that be nice? Ah, you boys! I know—" She broke off suddenly. "Lor! Look at him!"

The Dook was crouching down behind the chair

with a look of frozen horror on his face.

Rose advanced a few steps with a pleasant smile. "Come on, dearie," she said. "You ready?"

The Dook clutched his trousers closer. All power of speech had left him, but there was an eloquent deep red flush working slowly upward from his ankles.

"Oh, well," I said casually. "Come on, Rex. Let him have his bath."

"Go to it, girls," said Rex, waving his hand. As we shut the door behind us speech returned to the Dook with a rush.

"Don't!" he shouted hoarsely. "Don't go, you swines! I'll never forgive you for this!"

We opened the door and looked in again. "You said you wanted a Turkish bath," said Rex with affected surprise.

"I'm not going to have a bath," said Trelawny in a thick voice, watching Rose like an animal at bay.

Rose guffawed. "Come on now, don't be shy," she reproved him. "That's silly. Let's go and get him, kids."

They stepped forward and a final wave of panic took hold of the Dook. One thing he knew—those women would never bathe him! Grabbing frantically at his clothes, he dived for the door, flung it open and shot down the stairs in a wild flurry of whirling pants. Halfway down he paused to try and struggle into them, but a shout from Rose in full cry behind drove him on. Through the alleyway of startled harpies he sped, out into the street, and the safety of the great open spaces lay ahead. Rex and I followed, picking up garments.

Luckily, the street was almost deserted. Only a few people stood rooted to their tracks in amazement as the

pantsless Dook shot by like a comet. In the distance we saw him disappear into an open doorway. It was a grocer's shop and although we were too late to see what transpired between him and the grocer, I feel there must have been a certain constraint about the proceedings. It is doubtless unnerving when a strange young man, clad only in spectacles, gallops into your shop and begins pulling on his trousers behind the cheese. The Dook was so upset by the affair that after we declined his offer to fight the two of us, singly or together, he retired into a lofty silence which lasted two or three days.

Opposite our mooring, the Brisbane Ladies' Rowing Club had their boat shed. With his unequaled nerve, Rex went over there one day and appointed himself club trainer. We would see him seated comfortably on the stern of the skiff being rowed all over the river by four sweating girls. The first day he took over, he invited his crew to tea on the *Sirocco* and I could see he already had them drilled like a troupe of performing seals. The skiff came alongside and they clambered on deck singly at a sharp word of command from Rasputin. Rowing is no sport for ladies wanting to preserve their figures. Each one of the girls could have earned a living in a sideshow. They had great difficulty getting down the companionway into the cabin and, once there, quite overflowed it. They said rowing kept them wonderfully fit, which seemed true enough if you use the term loosely, for together they must have scaled about half a ton.

Rex invited the smallest, an ethereal little thing of some two hundred pounds who rowed "bow," to go with him to a picture show. He came back late that

night and in silence began to apply iodine to several large blue abrasions on his body.

We watched him interestedly. "Get run over?" I asked.

"No," he answered shortly.

"I see. Just tried a bit of gorilla stuff on Bow, eh?"

Rex replaced the stopper in the bottle and put it back in the medicine chest, He felt the back of his head tenderly. "You may not believe this," he said. "That woman threw me five yards through the air!"

It seemed quite an impressive feat, and we said so.

"Fifteen feet if it was an inch," he continued grimly. "That's what this rowing does for them! I tell you, I landed on my rump on a chair and it broke under me."

"The chair or the rump?" asked the Dook, intrigued and wanting to get the facts straight.

"Then she said nothing like that had ever happened to her before and socked me right on the chin! Nothing like *that* had ever happened to me before. It nearly laid me out cold. Then she sat down and began to laugh to beat blazes."

"But why?" asked the Dook, way behind.

"Perverted sense of humor—she thought it was funny."

We thought so too. We were still laughing when he put the cabin light out and got gingerly into his bunk. There was quite a long silence, then suddenly the Dook began to chuckle in the dark.

"You're a most amusing fellow, Rex," said he. "Obviously your methods with women are quite primitive. You should start taking a course of Turkish baths to build up your physique."

Rex said something in the language of the day.

Chapter Six

Show Week in Bundaberg

The Dook had received an advance from his lawyers in Sydney on his estate and this he insisted on placing at the ship's disposal. Not that anyone tried to prevent him. We were much too hungry. He also bought a new jib, to replace the one blown out off Coff's Harbor. We had to wait several days to have it made.

The time passed pleasantly enough. Rex was still head man over at the Ladies' Rowing Club in spite of his fracas with Bow. On the contrary, he said it had heightened his prestige there. True enough, probably; lady rowers rarely seem to find sufficient material for the writing of memoirs.

I spent twenty-four hours taking the engine down and did the job so thoroughly that it took me forty-eight to get it together again. Finally we chose a fine day and sailed. A hundred miles north we came to a large island, Great Sandy. There was a choice of two routes here. One was to go around the island, three times as far, with the chance of a heavy blow and sea, or else take a narrow passage between the island and the mainland. We chose the latter although it was more dangerous, having a bar at the entrance and only eight feet of water in the channel at high tide. Thanks to a fine bit of navigation on the part of the Dook, we crossed the tortuous and tricky channel over the bar in fine style. The breakers were nothing compared to the Richmond River Bar, but there was a treacherous

crosscurrent running diagonally to our course which kept swinging us broadside on.

The Dook had bought some patent metal decoy fish in Brisbane, for trolling, but these had such expressions of cold censure on their features that they must have abashed all the fish, for we had been trolling for the last twenty-four hours without results. I had just thrown them away and reverted to the piece of red rag when, right in the middle of the bar, a fish struck heavily.

There was much confusion. On these dangerous occasions all hands had definite positions to stand by ready for any emergency.

Rex left his, seized the line, and began to haul in.

The fish made a run and the line tangled in the steering gear. There was a furious outburst from the Dook, concentrating at the wheel, as the ship swung around and ran her nose heavily onto a sand bank. The next second a large comber broke full on deck and rolled her completely over on her bilges. The shock flung Charlie over the side and he disappeared in the surf, which was luckily shallow enough for him to wade and swim back. He hauled himself on board by the bow chains. The ship started to slew around with her bow still fast in the sand. It was an ugly moment. Providentially the following wave straightened her up and washed her off the bank while we were still struggling to close the hatches, and the Dook had her headed back into the channel before another sea could catch us.

As once before, we were still fast to our fish. By the time we were over the bar he was downed and we soon had him gaffed on deck, a fine twenty pound trevally.

The scenery was beautiful on the waters behind this

island. Little sheltered inlets, their gently rolling banks matted with gorgeous wild flowers in full bloom sent forth gusts of perfume and offered a constant speculation as to their extent and content. To the left, on the mainland, the country was flat, divided by intersecting waterways, little running streams thickly sown with bright-green water lilies.

In the late afternoon we were off the Mary River and the chart showing there was a small township just inside the mouth, I decided to anchor there for the night. On entering the river, however, we found the town had disappeared! There was no sign of human habitation, let alone a town. Mystified, we sailed up- and downstream looking for it, though fully aware that entire towns do not suddenly up and take a walk. The chart even showed the names of the streets marked in the place it should have been. Never having placed any more reliance on the Dook's navigation than my own, I thought we might be in the wrong river. But another look at the chart proved this was impossible. The only other river in the vicinity, the Burnett, lay many miles to the north and was quite thickly populated.

So we slept at anchor off that absurd town and at dusk the following day had made Bundaberg, in the Burnett River. Here the mystery of the missing town was explained. It had once been the proposed site for a new town and somewhat prematurely had been marked in detail on all charts and *Sailing Directions*. That was as near as it ever came to civic glory.

It was show week in Bundaberg, and the town was in the annual throes of excitement over the carnival. Tall, bearded sheepmen from the western districts, in

wide-brimmed hats and elastic side boots, rode through the streets on fine-looking horses. Others, with faces scorched by the sun to the color of walnut, strolled about with the stiff gait of men unaccustomed to being out of the saddle, or else gathered in circles, crouched down on their haunches, discussing the coming rodeo events.

Large posters and placards decorated every shop window, announcing that the Tallest Man in the World had arrived in town, as had also the Fattest Lady and "Zimmo" the Limbless Wonder. The Chinese Giant was there too. Other posters said that Ned Wirth of Coonabarabran, the best rider in the world, had undertaken to remain on the back of Curly Bell's famous horse, the Devil, for three minutes, contrary to Curly's assertion on the same poster that no one in the world could do that. Each man, it continued, had bet heavily on the result and everyone was urged to turn up and see the battle. Forty rounds of boxing afterward was to be an added attraction.

We decided to see Ned in action although the price of admission at two shillings each nearly deterred us. But it was worth it. You will never see finer horsemanship than in one of these small rodeos in an "outback" North Queensland town. Curly Bell, the owner of the show, was attired in accordance with the best traditions. He wore a tremendous wide-brimmed hat with a decorative snakeskin band round it and from beneath this his very long curly hair flowed nearly down to his shoulders. His trousers were tucked into a pair of red concertina riding-boots from which a large pair of solid silver spurs protruded like a fighting cock's. A flamboyantly colored bandanna handkerchief round his neck

completed the ensemble, giving him a wild but dandified air. Curly was a character. His method of showmanship had earned him wide popularity with the patrons. It was his habit, while making his announcement from the center of the ring, to take several thousand people into his confidence and make them feel a part of the show. With a lively showman's patter and stimulating repartee, he managed to hold his own with these formidable gentry.

A horse would be led into the ring and, taking a deep breath, the rotund Curly would begin his disclosure in sonorous tones.

"Here we are, ladies and gentlemen—"

From several points round the ring: "Yah! Get—! We're no bloody gentlemen."

Curly, grinning widely and bowing: "Sorry, mates, my mistake, I couldn't see 'oo yer were with the sun in me eyes. Now, what about this horse? He's not my horse—never seen him in my life before but the bloke that owns him says he can buck. Lively-lookin' bit o' flesh, eh? You think so? Well, I don't. Not that I know anything about him, mind you; never seen him in my life before, but I don't think he'll last. The cow looks to me like he's a bit short in the wind. Still I'm ready to take a chance on him and I got five pounds 'ere to say no bloke here can stick him for five minutes. There y'ar—a pound a minute! I bar Charlie Smith and Bill Jones only. I know they *can* ride him and I'm no bloody benevolent society. Come on now, gents, any one of you ride him for five minutes with a hand surcingle and no bridle—then go and take five pounds from me. Who'll take him? What! Nobody? Gawdstruth, there's not a pound o' guts among the lot of yer.

'Ello! 'Oos this? S'help me if it ain't Bert! Come on in, Bert."

Bert, a lank and sheepish youth, would then clamber into the ring and stand twisting his hat, looking at the ground. Curly would greet him affectionately and inform the audience in a loud whisper from behind his hand, "His pa and me was pals fer twenty years. Then I took his ma out one night so we ain't pals no more!"

Bert would then be helped on to the blindfold horse standing in the center of the ring and take a firm grip of the handles on the surcingle. A rope would be passed over the horse's flank and underneath his belly, with a man holding the other end of it to jerk it if necessary to make him commence bucking. Curly would then clamber out of the ring holding a watch in his hand and call, "Time," the signal for the two men holding the horse suddenly to pull the bandage away from its eyes and leap for safety through the ring fence.

Sometimes the horse stood still, trembling with fear. Then the rider sat immobile too, hoping that his horse would refuse to buck and he would win the bet by merely sitting there until time was up. But that rarely happened; Curly saw to that. He would signal his man and usually one flick of the rope under its belly would be enough to electrify the horse with frantic, mad efforts to dislodge its rider. It would tear round the ring in a series of bone-shaking bounds and twisting bucks, screaming and grunting at each buck, while the rider clung on like grim death to the two hand grips on the surcingle. Once the surcingle broke and the rider was flung high into the air, to fall with a sickening

thud on the top rail of the ring. Miraculously he was unhurt and picked himself up with a sheepish grin.

Ned Wirth won the big bet. Although it was very obviously a put-up job between the two of them and he and Curly pretended to cherish a bitter hatred for each other, it was the best event of the evening.

Curly's horse, the Devil, was aptly named. He was a big, rawboned black, supposed to have killed a man. By the evil roll of his eyes and flattened ears, the tale seemed credible.

Ned Wirth, although nature had never intended him for the part, was got up like the Mexican villain in an old Hollywood western. His color scheme was a most sinister black, from sombrero to boots, and he was trying hard to twist his simple face into a nasty sneer.

A hush descended on the thrilled spectators as he clambered into the ring and dramatically informed Curly in surly tones that he would ride the Devil to a standstill. Curly at first registered surprised incredulity. He walked over to him and examined him from head to foot in an offensive manner. Then his expression softened to one of downright pity.

"So you're Ned Wirth, eh? And you want to ride the Devil. Well, well!" He nodded a few times. "Who's going to lift you on his back?" he inquired insultingly.

Ned was equal to the occasion, although he probably would not have been without rehearsal. "I don't want no help to ride that clothes horse of yours. It's time you sold him to a milk run—he's old enough. Bring him out and I'll bet you now in yer own ring I'll ride him dead. Dead!" he added, almost with a hiss.

Curly glowered at him in appropriate well-feigned

rage. "What'll you bet you'll ride the Devil to a standstill?" he shot back. Without waiting for a reply, he turned to the breathlessly intent crowd and confided in them.

"He wants to ride the Devil! Can you beat it?" he asked. "Well, if he's sick of life I'm going to let him, and I'm going to bet him," turning to the contemptuous Ned, "I'm going to bet him—the Devil against his fifty pounds! If he rides the Devil he can have him and use him on his milk run. If he don't ride him, he pays me fifty quid. Are you on?"

Ned promptly accepted the challenge and began to make elaborate preparations hardly justified by his previous disparaging attitude. He had leather bands strapped on both wrists and then pulled heavy leather gloves over his hands. He hitched up his trousers and pulled his hat over his eyes. Then as a last minute precaution, he sagaciously removed his false teeth and handed them to a friend. He was ready for the fray.

It was a truly wonderful display of horsemanship. As soon as the bandage was snatched away from his eyes the Devil seemed to go mad.

Dashing straight at the fence he tried to crush Ned's leg against it, but the wily Ned was ready for that and leaning forward he gave the horse a hard blow over the head with his gloved hand. The Devil screamed and then began to go through his whole repertoire of cunning tricks. Rushing up to the fence as though he intended to collide with it, he would try to destroy his rider's nerve, and consequently loosen his hold by the thought of the imminent collision. Then he would swerve away at the last moment. When that failed he pivoted round in bounding circles, suddenly and sur-

prisingly wheeling about in the opposite direction.

Ned was one jump ahead of him all the time, and whatever may have been his private sensation, he managed to seem slightly bored. This ennui quickly disappeared, however, when the Devil tried to roll on him. He leaped clear of the horse's back in a second, still retaining hold of the surcingle and, as the Devil rolled on the ground, Ned suddenly heeled him viciously with his spur. It was cruel but had the right effect. The Devil jumped up screaming. Ned was on his back again instantly. Another and another wild squealing rush around the ring until at long last the Devil stood still in the center of the ring with drooping head and heaving sides. Ned cautiously slid from his back, patted him, and, to the cheers of the crowd, stalked over to Curly.

The equivocal Curly had of course been expecting no other result, but he slapped Ned heartily on the back like any good sport and congratulated him amid applause. "I never knew you could ride like that, son. The Devil is yours to take away."

It was a good show, but my illusions were somewhat shattered when the spectators seated next to me shouted, "Whateryer going to call 'im next year, Curly?" I learned that the Devil had been won like this for the last four years, merely undergoing the formality of an annual paint job and a change of name. Last year he had been the Snake and the year before the Man-killer.

The forty rounds of boxing lacked in quality what they supplied in quantity. But if the exponents were not scientific they all seemed consumed with a keen desire to inflict as much damage as possible in the shortest space of time. Several young men stepped into the ring and offered to take on anyone of their own weight.

Actually they were third-rate pugs engaged by Curly for the occasion to ensure some competition. He would hold up a boxing glove and offer three pounds to anyone in the crowd who could beat the challenger and one pound if able to stay three rounds. Several bouts took place and once or twice Curly paid out, probably getting the money back after the show. A tough-looking citizen was introduced as Jack Cowper, the heavyweight champion of the Western Districts, and Curly announced he would pay five pounds to anyone who could stay in the ring with him for three rounds.

Rex sat up and nudged me in the ribs. "It's a cinch!" he whispered urgently. "Money from home! Take him on, Skipper. Think what we could do with five pounds!"

I stared at him. "You're mad," I said coldly. "Take him on yourself."

"I would if I was his weight. And you're a boxer. Think of that cash! I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll second you!"

In spite of this added inducement I still managed to restrain myself. But as there were no takers and the offer was repeated, I began to think about it. Five pounds was wealth at the time. My only pair of shoes let water in through the soles, food was scarce, and we needed some oil for the engine. So I climbed into the ring.

Curly was surprised and suspicious. He probably suspected I might be some professional fighter out for a bit of easy money, but then he must have decided I did not look like one for he smiled and offered me a dirty pair of shorts. When I declined these in the toughest

and most contemptuous manner I could manage at the time, his suspicions were instantly aroused again and he went into a whispered conference with Cowper. That gentleman gave me a nasty look, spat on the ground, and nodded. The ring was cleared and time called. My opponent advanced, as I thought to observe the ancient boxing tradition of shaking a man's hand before trying to knock his head off.

Instead, he knocked me flat on the ground with a right-hand swing as unexpected as it was sudden. I stayed on the ground to the count of seven, groggily conscious of having been foully wronged, and somehow managed to last out the round.

Rex helped me to my corner and, under the impression he was reviving me, began to slap a wet towel over my face, accomplishing little except to prevent my breathing.

Encouraged by the hisses and boos of the crowd, I was lusting for bloody revenge at the call of time. Cowper jumped right across the ring. I missed his chin, but the lacing of my glove tore a gash over his eye that bled copiously.

When you know the crowd is with you, it helps. I tore into him with everything but the kitchen stove. Up against ten pounds in weight, a bitter sense of injustice, and a badly cut eye, Cowper must have decided that I looked like lasting the distance, so he retired at the end of the second round to attend to his eye.

Everyone seemed pleased except Curly. Rex collected the five pounds on my behalf and stood fingering them as I washed a couple of cuts.

"Nice work," he said. "Nice work. Didn't I tell you it was a cinch? I suppose you wouldn't mind lending

me a couple of pounds out of this?"

I said that by God I would mind. "I shed blood for that money. All you did was to try to smother me. Hand it over. I might let you look at it later—from a distance."

We spent a pleasant week at Bundaberg. My hopes of leaving at the end of four days were crushed when Rex fell for the barmaid in the Ocean Front Hotel. There was no alternative but to sit down and hope for his speedy success, for there was by now an unwritten but firmly established law aboard the *Sirocco* that all affairs of this sort must be given priority over everything and full opportunity to mature, an arrangement which suited all except the chaste Dook. There was another understanding about a man's right to have the ship to himself on stated occasions, but one night Rex kept all of us hanging about on a cold and miserable wharf for three hours, in the rain, so it was ruled out.

We were also in sad financial straits again. Repairs to the prow of the dinghy, badly crushed one day between the *Sirocco* and a wharf when coming alongside, had reduced our capital to a few shillings. We fished in the river but caught nothing and began to be very hungry. Not owning one, Charlie suggested that one of the two wrist watches on board be pawned. I lost the first poker hand and surrendered my watch, refusing to admit, however, that the loss of the hand made me liable to do the pawning as well. Charlie got the job. He took the watch over to a small grocer's shop opposite the wharf and asked for credit, offering the watch as security. The storekeeper gave him the credit but refused to take the watch, saying that we could pay him back whenever convenient. Charlie claimed this as a

nice tribute to his honest face but Rex said he had always known the watch was no good and it was a lousy trick to take advantage of the man.

That night, as we ate sparingly of bread and jam, a knock came on the hatch above our heads. I went up and was astonished to see three small children carrying enormous trays. "Mother sent this over for you," said one of them.

We took the trays down below and uncovered the sort of feast we had all been dreaming of during many a long trick at the wheel—roast beef, green vegetables, meat pies, jam tarts, and a great gooseberry pie, with a large jug of fresh cream.

During the days that followed, while we were waiting for a remittance from Sydney, she regularly sent her children to the ship loaded with prodigious trays of luscious home cooking. Why she did this I never knew, but I will never forget her kindness. She obviously took great pains doing up the trays, but with every one she explained, in case our pride should be hurt, that she had cooked too much for the family and didn't want to see food wasted. She needn't have worried. An empty belly knows no pride. Or is it just an army that moves on one? I've forgotten. Anyhow, the day before we left Bundaberg, the annual regatta was held and we were honored by an invitation from the mayor to act as flagship. Accordingly, we ran up on the halyards the entire alphabet of signal pennants and every flag and ensign we could find. Rex even ran up a few shirts to complete the picture, but we made him take them down. Looking very gay, we took up a position in the middle of the river.

As the *Sirocco* was to be the finishing post for the

races, the three judges and five members of the committee had come on board, bringing their respective families in such large numbers that we were all packed like sardines. This had its merits, however, for each family brought large picnic hampers of food which lasted us nearly a week afterward.

The regatta was enlivened by one thrilling incident. An extremely stout matron was capsized with her two children when about to go ashore in the dinghy. Heedless of Charlie's warning to tread only in the center of the keel, she stepped on the gunwale, and the dinghy promptly turned over. An immense bubble formed under her skirts as she floundered down—at a lively pace. Fortunately she floated. One of the children could swim, too. Charlie fished the other out with the boathook. The soaked mother's gratitude was quite touching, although she didn't seem to appreciate Rex's offer of a pair of his underpants to go home in.

Chapter Seven

MUDBANKS AHOY!

EN ROUTE TO GLADSTONE, our next port of call, we at last began to observe the first signs of the approaching Great Barrier Reef. At low water, away over on the starboard hand, the surf could be heard and seen, breaking in a rumbling foam on several patches of exposed reef near Breaksea Spit. As we proceeded, running fair before a light zephyr of a southeaster with topsail set and all sails drawn taut like drums, small tropical islands showed up for brief intervals on the starboard horizon and quickly dropped astern out of sight again. There was no following swell and the *Sirocco,* lying slightly over to port, flew along steadily with hardly a movement to tell that she was at sea.

Soon our course took us out of sight of land, so the Dook announced he would take a sight to check our position. At noon, therefore, I called the time from the chronometer while he took sextant and shot the sun. He then filled three large pages of foolscap with calculations and made the alarming discovery that the *Sirocco* was at that moment sailing somewhere among the trees on the slopes of Mount Murchison, a hundred miles inland from the coast.

Gladstone is a small fishing town with an excellent harbor and a fine pastoral setting beyond. A large meat-packing house brings in the overseas vessels for cargoes home to England. The town is chiefly remarkable for its unique lighthouse keeper who, contrary to

all precedent, is a woman, affectionately and widely known as the Captain. She is old and bent and incredibly wrinkled, and has as fine a command of sulphurous language as her father, a shellback skipper of a wool-clipper in the eighties, must have once possessed. She wears an enormous pair of gum sea boots, drinks vast quantities of whisky and beer, or when she can't get that, methylated spirits. She emphasizes her conversation with lusty seaside oaths, and some say that she can spit in a seagull's eye at twenty yards in a strong wind. The town is rightly proud of her.

From Gladstone we intended to try "The Narrows" passage through to Rockhampton, where we wanted to call, as Rex had once been there and described it and its ladies attractively.

The *Sailing Directions* described the Narrows as a shallow waterway running between Curtis Island and the mainland, with a large rise and fall of tide and only six feet of water on it at high tide. Ordinarily, of course, the *Sirocco,* drawing nearly seven feet, could not have attempted it. Some local fishermen, however, assured us that vessels of an even deeper draft had used it successfully and there was no reason why the *Sirocco* shouldn't, provided we went through on the top of the tide.

There now remained the problem of replenishing the ship's stores without money. The sight of a flock of fat sheep grazing in a paddock just outside the town boundary solved it immediately.

That night the Dook, victim of a pair of fives, crept forth into the night with Charlie, queen high. A very strong pep talk was necessary to overcome the Dook's scruples. He seemed to think that a man had some sort

of right to keep five or ten thousand sheep while four men looked hungrily at them over a fence.

An hour later they returned, covered with gore and carrying the corpse of a sheep murdered in cold blood. We skinned and cooked it and sailed with the tide. The Dook's conscience so importuned him about the matter, however, that he eventually sent the owner, of whose name he had taken careful note, a check to the value of one sheep.

The Narrows passage was like a river, being only about thirty yards from bank to bank at the widest part. We entered it next morning on a rising tide, sounding as we went with a long bamboo pole marked in feet. The tides in the Narrows are phenomenal. Instead of flooding at one end of the passage and ebbing out at the other in the ordinary way, the rising water comes in from both ends at once. The two incoming tides meet halfway and at the ebb leave the greater part of the passage quite dry at low tide. We left in time to arrive halfway at noon, when the tide would be slack and at its highest, but our calculations were put out when the ship stuck on a mudbank early and had to wait two hours to get off. We were therefore that much later getting to the middle and shallowest part of the passage. Sounding our way carefully in an effort to find a deeper channel, we stuck again, hard and fast this time, on another mudbank.

We all went below to play poker. Nothing could be done except fasten a line from the top of the mast to a mangrove tree ashore to keep the ship in an upright position when the tide fell lower. With her extreme narrowness, I was afraid that if she keeled over the rising tide would cause her to fill with water before she

could lift to it. Four hours later, at dusk, it began to rain, and a curious noise brought me on deck. I found a mob of cattle gathered alongside examining the *Sirocco* with, no doubt, a certain bovine surprise, for the only evidence in sight to support the supposition that the *Sirocco* was a seagoing craft was a thin trickle of water, like a gutter, twenty yards away! When the tide began to rise it was strange to see the water approaching from opposite directions, to meet in a bubbling foam of disturbed mud. It must have been a somewhat similar tidal phenomenon that occurred in Biblical times in the Red Sea and was much appreciated by the Children of Israel.

It was midnight before we were afloat again. Two attempts to proceed with the aid of an electric torch both ended on a mudbank. Standing on my rights as master and owner, I sent Charlie and Rex wading through thick mud up to their thighs, with smothered curses in the dark, to make a line fast from the masthead to a mangrove tree ashore.

Daylight found the *Sirocco* again hard and fast, a bare two miles farther on than she had been sixteen hours earlier. By the time we reached Port Alma at the end of the Narrows, the ship had been stuck on at least five more mudbanks and the engine was giving trouble.

Port Alma, we found, was merely one large wharf in charge of an individual who combined the duties of postmaster, mayor, savings banker, telegraph operator, and stevedore, and who is no doubt the obstetrician too. Apart from the wharf, there were only a few little huts for the families of wharfhands employed by the large meat works in Rockhampton.

We had intended to anchor there, but the surround-

ings were so drab and dreary, most unlike any other place on the lovely coast of Australia, that I decided to push on to Rockhampton, another forty miles up the Fitzroy River.

Chapter Eight

Riotous Behavior

On arriving at Rockhampton, my first action was to despatch an acidulous telegram to the Sydney agent for our engine. It had never ceased to give continuous trouble since its installation and I demanded service. His reply stated that he would send a man to Rockhampton in a fortnight to inspect it. We waited the two weeks but it was three by the time he arrived.

During our enforced stay in that pleasant town of forty thousand souls, the *Sirocco* achieved much unsought notoriety. The entire responsibility for this is to be laid at the door of two journalists on the staff of the *Rockhampton Graphic,* Messrs. Johnson and Brody, two of the strangest characters who ever disgraced a barroom when they should have been working. The fact of their being inseparable companions, of the same profession, on the staff of the same small newspaper in the same small town, engenders doubt in my mind about the infallibility of the law of averages; such queer customers can only, I feel sure, exist in the ratio of one in every several millions. Yet here were two, occurring together in a remote part of Australia. Incidentally they are parted now; one is in South America and the other in jail.

I first met Johnson when he came aboard to interview us on behalf of his paper. I was in my bunk with malaria at the time and can only surmise that when the astonishing apparition that was Johnson appeared before me

he must have raised my already high temperature, for the fever developed into an unusually severe attack next day. He was tremendous, a giant, yet, like many large men, extremely agile. At one stage of his extraordinary career he had been a professional boxer. In consequence his features laid no claim to symmetry. They were rugged and battered, and the left side twisted into an evil leer. His clothes had probably seen better days with their previous owner than with Johnson. He hid their incredible shabbiness under a voluminuos rainproof overcoat, worn indoors and out, irrespective of all weather conditions, hot or cold, rain or shine. With socks he dispensed entirely, and he bought a clean collar regularly once a week whether he needed it or not. The old one he threw away, thus economizing on his laundry bill which he wouldn't, in any case, have paid. Mostly he slept in full marching order without even removing his boots. Then the wisdom of wearing no socks became apparent, for the soles of his boots were worn through. Naturally, he stank—a repellent stale odor never entirely absent and sometimes quite overpowering. But as he was a very extraordinary person in other ways, one became reconciled to these peculiarities.

He shared quarters at the Gresham Hotel with a friend named Brody. There were thirty-two hotels in Rockhampton, but as the mere thought of paying a hotel bill would have been extremely repugnant to either of them, they were now down to their last two or three hotels. This room-sharing arrangement, Johnson later explained with unsuspected delicacy, was purely out of consideration for their honorary hosts, who would not be out of pocket so much as if two separate

rooms were provided. What would happen when the remaining two or three hotels were used up, neither of them knew, although Johnson said that once previously in a town with far fewer hotels he had been reduced to the expedient of buying a tent on credit and pitching it on the town boundary.

Brody was the very antithesis of Johnson. He was small, dapper, and fastidious—a dandy. Seen together they were like a great shaggy mastiff and a diminutive, sleek fox terrier. The analogy was more manifest when they had been drinking. With the smaller animal's aggressive insolence, secure in his knowledge of the protection afforded by the presence of a larger comrade, Brody's manner toward strangers became intolerably insulting and offensive, often embroiling them both in violence.

We had apparently been following the fair, for once again our arrival coincided with the annual show and carnival. Rockhampton was in festive mood. The uninitiated stranger in a Queensland town during show time can be excused for undergoing some confusion. He arrives, say, a few days before the show and observes a quiet, peaceable little place calmly going about the uneventful business of everyday life. Suddenly, two days before the show opens, the town begins to hum like a hive of bees preparing to swarm.

There is something in the air.

The old man who sits smoking a clay pipe outside his grocery shop blossoms forth like a butterfly that morning. He is a changed man. Gone are the patched trousers, singlet, and slippers which constitute his business clothes. Now he affects a straw hat with parrot's gaudy feathers stuck rakishly in the band, and pale-

yellow boots gleam fanatically. His horny neck, which has not known the yoke of a tie since this time last year, is now adorned with a cravat of dazzling and brilliant hue. The gay, riotous spirit of carnival gets right in among him and for a week there is no holding him.

They are good, solid folk, the local burghers, people of estimable habits, diligence, and sobriety. But when the show hits town, look out! They get drunk, noisily and aggresively drunk. They gamble, talk loudly and assertively, and spend much more than they can afford —buying drinks for the young ladies of the touring theatrical companies. Their wives scream loud reproaches which, if heard, will earn them a punch on the nose. It's whoopee! let's go!—and they go!

Then, as suddenly and inexplicably as it began, the festivity ceases. The circus departs for pastures new, the next town north, followed by Curly Bell and entourage, merry-go-rounds, boxing troupes, the Human Monstrosity, the Fattest Lady, the Tallest Man, racehorse vans, caravans containing side-show artists, the wandering minstrels of the road, and all others of the ilk.

The town shakes its head and wishes it hadn't. Citizens go home to sleep on beds instead of on or under pool tables. Business goes on as usual. The annual wild fling has been turned on and off like a tap.

The Gresham Hotel, where Johnson and Brody precariously lodged, had also attracted the patronage of Zimmo, the Legless Wonder, Lars Olsen, the Tallest Man in the World, besides two popular theatrical companies, the *Married to the Wrong Man* company and the *How Girls Are Led to Ruin* company.

Zimmo had lost both legs in the war. His means of locomotion was a novel roller-skate contraption. Seated

on this and propelling himself by shoving on the footpath with his hands encased in leather gloves, he scooted about the streets with great judgment.

His act was to do wonderful things, such as smoking cigarettes and eating apples under water in a glass tank. I only saw his performance on what must have been an off day, for the previous night Johnson, Brody, Rex, and myself had been among his guests at a lively party. Our host had consumed enormous quantities of beer and we had put him to bed. I was surprised he even tried to do his act the next day. He managed to smoke the cigarette under the water, smile, blow his nose with a handkerchief, and a few other tricks all to schedule. But when he came to eat the apple, something went wrong. A large bubble floated to the surface and I saw Zimmo struggling to regain control under the water. But it was no use; another and larger convoy of bubbles rose. Zimmo shot swiftly after them and was violently sick on the surface. They fished him out as the curtain rang down and he was presumably put back to bed. Some members of the audience demanded a refund at the box office, although they were never likely to get better value for their money.

Zimmo and Lars Olsen, the Tallest Man in the World, were great pals—the friendship of one artist for another after years of acquaintance in many cities of the world. Seen together, they were a weird sight. Zimmo's head was exactly on a level with Lars Olsen's knees.

While "on tour," life held little pleasure for Lars. The nature of his profession forced him to remain hidden from the public gaze in his hotel room, where he led a miserable existence of inactive confinement, only relieved by furtive sallies outside for exercise, always

in the dead of night when there were few people about. To go abroad in the light of day would be to offer his wares gratuitously to the public, who would otherwise have paid sixpence each for the privilege. Under the circumstances, it was hardly surprising that Lars's congenital good nature sometimes became soured by this anchoretic mode of life. One day it led to a serious breach in his relationship with Zimmo.

They were having a furtive drink in the hotel bar and Lars became inordinately personal about Zimmo's figure. It resembled, to Lars's way of thinking, nothing so much as a "skating beer barrel." This fanciful designation so neatly described Zimmo's rotundity that he resented it keenly. He retorted sharply. So did Lars. Zimmo was seated on the bar counter, a position he always took to compensate for his lack of stature, and making him about level with Lars's navel. Suddenly, he reached up and seized Lars by the throat, taking the giant completely by surprise. Lars stumbled about the room making frantic efforts to loosen the strangling grip, but Zimmo was extraordinarily powerful and hung on tenaciously, resisting all attempts to dislodge him. Lars was about nine feet high, but his strength was not proportionate to his build. Zimmo was certainly stronger and the giant began to go blue in the face and gasp for breath.

I am always loath to interfere in a good fight, but Lars seemed to be in such distress that I called to Rex to help me stop it. We jumped in and seized the two of them, but although I tugged and heaved at Zimmo, I could not break his deadly grip. Finally, when it looked as though the Tallest Man in the World might at any moment be succeeded by the Second Tallest, I

had to dig my fingers into his mastoid nerves to make him let go. It required the concerted efforts of the entire hotel staff to support Lars upstairs.

We saw Johnson and Brody every day. Like true vagabonds, neither one nor the other had the vaguest notion where he would sleep at night. They often slept aboard the *Sirocco,* but in Johnson's case our pleasure in his company was somewhat restrained on account of the horrible smell he brought with him. I sometimes considered starting up the engine just to let in some oil fumes. We all spent a great deal of time at the show grounds. As powerful journalists, Messrs. Johnson and Brody were able to go free everywhere. A favorable review in the local paper meant much to the various showmen and in consequence we lived in the beams of their reflected glory and went free, too, most of the time.

Brody was an irrepressible liar, entirely without scruples, and was a born poseur, so he made an excellent journalist and would probably have been a great success as a Hollywood movie producer. He lived in an imaginative world where quite ordinary events became dramatic incidents and he never called a spade a spade if there was any chance of convincing someone it was a rare antique or an heirloom in his family. He always introduced me with the title "Captain" before my name and while this was quite gratifying, I was at a loss to understand why important people were always wanting to show me horses. It became clear when, on meeting the mayor one day, I heard Brody add in a whisper, "Grenadier Guards, you know—out here to buy ten thousand mounts for the British Army."

At this time our financial position had never been

worse. Being seen in the company of Johnson and Brody had probably ruined our credit, anyway, or maybe it was just that the storekeepers were wary during show time. When everything pawnable had gone, we were reduced to eating the only food left aboard—a tin of hard ship's biscuits. We dined with Johnson and Brody once at their hotel, but before we could accept another invitation the long expected blow fell and they were thrown out. Friday might once have been a day of rejoicing for our friends, but now they rarely caught a glimpse of their pay envelope—it was mortgaged months ahead and they were generally given an allowance from under many court orders.

One particular Friday Johnson somehow got his salary intact. It was a big event and he invited me to go with him to the show to write up a feature and at the same time celebrate. But when I called at the newspaper office no one had seen him except the cashier and he only in a brief flash in handing over the pay envelope.

Brody was there, however, and I mentioned the appointment with Johnson.

"Drunk, of course," he said unhesitatingly. "I'd better look for him. Care to come?"

We visited most of his favorite haunts without success, and finally deciding that life was too short to spend more of it in this fruitless quest, we dropped in for a quick drink at the nearest bar.

At a hotel in the less reputable quarter of the town, in which, Brody said, he and Johnson had once lived, we heard a sudden loud uproar commence in an upstairs room. We listened.

"You get out of here, you big misfit," said a hoarse woman's voice. "And get out quick before I throw

you out. Try to get into bed with me, would you? Get out! Quick!"

There was much scraping of furniture overhead and then Johnson's voice saying something unintelligible.

Brody started for the scene of action and I followed, wondering what manner of woman it was who proposed to throw Johnson's two hundred pounds out of a room. We peered in and saw a vivid and arresting tableau. Hands on tremendous hips, her eyes blazing with outraged womanhood, the Fattest Girl in the World confronted Johnson, who sat swaying on the edge of the bed. Arrayed in a red kimono, she was breathing heavily.

"No offense given and none taken, 'sure you," Johnson was explaining obscurely.

The Fattest Girl sneered. She turned to us. "Is he your friend?" she asked.

"In a way, yes," answered Brody cautiously.

"What way?" she demanded. "It doesn't matter to me what way; anyway, I don't stand for any smart alecks getting into bed with me. If he's not out of here in two ups, I'll bat him over the head with a water jug, so you better take him."

"Certainly," said Brody aloofly. "Has he been here long?"

"Came in when I was having a bath. Says he thought it was his room—you can't tell me that, the dirty rat! What if my husband came in and found him asleep on my bed? I wanna tell you he'd knock hell out of this big galoot and me too. You get him out of here as quick as you like before I start on him myself, the drunken cow!"

Johnson started. "Who's drunk? S'damn lie—I'm

clean-living athlete," he protested thickly. "Man's never drunk when he can move. An' I can move!" he added triumphantly.

In an effort to demonstrate, he stood up and promptly fell over a towel rack which broke under the strain.

The Fattest Girl's vituperations rose to a high crescendo.

Brody and I helped him up with difficulty.

"That's right, smash the bloody place up, you pack of drunks!" she stormed, sweepingly including Brody and me with a woman's complete disregard for justice.

With difficulty we supported the sagging Johnson toward the door. At that moment it opened and a short, weedy little man stood calmly surveying the scene.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired mildly.

"Sam!" cried the Fattest Girl. "Thank God you've come! These three drunken brutes broke in here and I can't get rid of them. They're breaking up all the furniture and everything. Oh, Sam dear, throw them out."

I marveled. Could this be the redoubtable husband who was supposed to beat hell out of his wife, the Fattest Girl in the World, and Johnson? If so, his appearance much belied him. A little over five feet in height, he looked anything but a tosser-out. That he should possess his wife's confidence to the extent that she believed him capable of violently ejecting three men, each almost double his size, showed something of the bliss matrimony might well hold for all of us.

Sam seemed conscious of the irony of his position. He smiled composedly but showed little intention of starting anything. "Would you care to join me in a drink?" he inquired pleasantly in a cultured tone. Tact,

apparently, was his line, diplomacy.

"Indeed, we would be delighted," replied Brody, instantly reacting to his manner and not to be outdone by it. "I wonder if we might first put my friend to bed? We shall return in a moment."

Johnson was deposited on a bed in someone else's room. Brody went through his pockets and extracted a bundle of notes. "I'd better take charge of his money," he said, counting it. "He might be robbed while he's asleep. We'll have to go out to the show and do his write-up for him. Let's go down and have that drink with Sam the Terrible first. My God, what a woman!"

The Fattest Girl's husband was a delightful little man with charming manners and a whimsical sense of humor. He was obviously widely traveled and well educated. How he, a man of manifest culture and sophistication, came to be joined in such incongruous matrimony with his ridiculous wife can only be one of those inexplicable enigmas of show life.

"My wife is of a nervous temperament," he explained, smiling, "and inclined to exaggerate a small upset. My name is Samuel Sparks, by the way. Is your friend in bed?"

Brody, the grand seigneur, dismissed the affair with a gesture. "My friend will apologize in the morning for his unwarranted intrusion," he declared. "Thanks, I'll have a whisky—limejuice—bitters—soda. Er— I'm Brody, on the *Graphic* here. And may I present Captain Flynn, Irish Guards? Do you expect to be long in Rockhampton?"

Samuel Sparks hesitated. "That rather depends on the police," he replied. "They appear to regard me

with some disfavor because of the gambling game called *Above and Below* that I have introduced into Queensland. The game, of course, is perfectly fair, and combines the elements of chance with a high degree of skill. Roll up, ladies and gentleman, and try—er—excuse me. No, I don't think they will allow me to remain here much longer; in fact, only a few minutes ago I was reliably informed that the chief was dissatisfied with his percentage of my profits, and, as I'm not prepared to increase the *douceur*—er—ahem," he smiled brightly, "bribe, I may have to move on at any moment. But—er—I trust you will not use this information in your paper?"

Brody scoffed at the notion of betraying such a confidence. "Certainly not," he replied, adding reflectively, "the editors wouldn't publish it anyway."

Samuel Sparks sighed. "A pity," he remarked. "A little publicity of that sort would do the fellow a world of good, too. Well, now, if you gentlemen will excuse me, I must go. I am losing large sums of money every minute. Not at my game, of course, but because my croupier is robbing me as quickly as he can during my absence. One allows for that in the overhead, of course, but I am a great believer in economy at every point."

"If you're going out to the showground we may as well come with you," said Brody.

"Delighted," murmured Samuel Sparks. "You should try my game, gentlemen. I am quite sure it will amuse you."

"Well, that's that. There goes my last pound note and I'm broke. Or rather, poor old Johnson's last and

he's broke," Brody corrected himself.

We watched Samuel Sparks rake in the money that was lying on the red and white squares of a checkered table and pay out various sums to the blue squares. At one end of the table there was a box divided up into small pigeonholes marked red, white, and blue. The idea was that a person standing at the other end of the table endeavored to pitch a tiny wooden ball into the colored pigeonhole in which he was interested. It looked simple, but wasn't. Brody had found this out to his cost—or, to be accurate, Johnson's cost. Samuel Sparks had spoken truly when he described his game as one requiring a high degree of skill, but I wondered if Johnson would be amused.

We pushed our way out of the crowd surrounding Samuel and his table and walked over to the open air bar.

"Ten thousand virgins!" exclaimed Brody gloomily. "This is horrible! Not a penny until next Friday and it's only Friday now!" He searched his pockets. "Two shillings left out of the wreck. We'll have a drink anyway. Under the circumstances, can we, ethically speaking, drink Johnson's health?"

It was a nice point. "Well, under the circumstances, I should say yes. In fact, it seems the very least we can do."

"Then here's wishing him wealth and happiness," exclaimed Brody with dignity. He was now the ruined gambler, heroically bearing up under his loss like a gentleman.

Shortly after, I separated from Brody while he went to interview various show officials and committee members. We met again toward dusk by appointment and

I was surprised at the change that had taken place in him. Gone was the dark cloud of despondency which, a short hour previously, had hovered above him. He might now have been the ruined gambler who has just learned they had only been playing for fun. He radiated pleasure and looked as though he had never heard of *Above and Below*. I wondered what had wrought the change. Accompanying him was a rotund little man in a checked suit.

Brody introduced us. "I'd like you to meet Mr. Jimmie Herman," he announced cheerfully. "You know all about Jimmie, don't you? He's opening up here tomorrow and he's got Kid Lozetti in his troupe. Some boy, this Kid. He'll wake the town up."

It happened that I knew all about Jimmie Herman. His name was by way of being a household word in Australian sporting circles, and the fame of his boxing troupe was known all over the continent. He was reputed to have made a fortune out of his showmanship and ability to work up public interest in a quite ordinary fight to fever pitch. I had heard of Kid Lozetti, too, a notorious mulatto bruiser, part Italian, and with an evil police-court reputation.

"I must go," said Brody brusquely. "Got an appointment. You and Jimmie can talk over the matter together. See you later."

"Seems busy," I nodded after him, to open the conversation.

Mr. Herman took me by the hand and shook it heartily. "I'm glad to know you," he said. "I've just fixed up with the printers to have the fight announced for tomorrow night. You better come along with me and meet the Kid this evening. Good bloke, the Kid.

You'll like him."

"Thanks," I said. "I'd like to meet him. Who is he going to fight?"

Mr. Herman closed one eye in a prolonged wink. He chuckled. "He'll find out, eh?" he inquired ambiguously.

"You bet he will," I rejoined jocularly, but at a loss to interpret the hidden significance of his words. "What time does the fight start?"

Mr. Herman suddenly dropped his light manner and became serious. He got down to business. "Now listen, son. You turn up at half-past seven and stay in the crowd outside the tent. When you see me give you the nod come up on the platform. Be smoking a cigarette and take yer hat off and have yer hair brushed nice with plenty of grease on it. I want you to look different, see? That gets the crowd. I know you're the heavy champ of the British Army and I've advertised you as that. But I don't want you to look it, see? I want you to look a pretty boy and then the mob gets interested and wants to see the slaughter. I want you to make the first round a good one, plenty blood about and willing, see? Bustle the Kid about, see? Then in the second the Kid comes back and knocks you with a right to the jaw and you take the count for eight. You get up, come back at him again and he knocks you again, proper this time, and you stay down. Get me? Brody says you'd want a tenner. All right, son, you make it a good go and I'll give it to yer. I'm a fair man, see?"

So that explained Brody's sinister cheerfulness! I was to provide Mr. Herman's patrons with relaxation by taking a hammering at the hands of the Kid. For ten pounds! While the Kid, in Mr. Herman's words,

'knocked me again, proper,' and I stayed down! Wasn't likely! I hardly thought so. Not while there remained aboard the *Sirocco* that tin of ship's biscuits, unfit for human consumption though they were. But it was such a quaint conceit that I smiled.

Mr. Herman interpreted this as a sign of assent. "Good," he said. "That's fine. Now you come to my hotel tomorrow morning and meet the Kid. You'll like the Kid."

I felt sorry for the man. He was so confident.

"Did Brody tell you I'm champion heavyweight of the British Army?" I asked kindly.

"That's right."

"No, it's not. Brody's a stupid liar."

"You're not!" Only for a brief moment was Mr. Herman nonplussed. "H'mmm. Oh, well, what the hell? The mob won't ask to see your certificate and you—"

"And as for fighting Kid Lozetti, you're crazy. Brody's mad even to try to arrange a thing like that without letting me know anything about it. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you can definitely count me right out of any fight."

Having placed myself so definitely on record, it would be reasonable to suppose the incident closed. As far as I was concerned, it was. But how fortune doth banter us! Unfriendly planetary influences were driving in another direction.

When Brody and I arrived back at the hotel, Mr. Jacks, the owner, was standing in the hallway idly examining his favorite picture, *Quatre Bras*.

"Ha!" he greeted us. "Johnson was looking for you. He says he's been robbed of all his money while

he was asleep—had it pinched out of his trousers pocket."

"That's quite all right," said Brody. "I took it to look after for him."

Mr. Jacks nodded. "Yes, he was afraid of that. He said if you had, it would be worse than being robbed. That way he did stand a slight chance of getting it back, but—"

"Is he upstairs?" interrupted Brody frigidly.

He was. He had his head under a tap. When he heard us coming, he looked round. "Where's my money, you rat?"

Brody thought for a moment. "Old man," he said, "I invested it for you, but as it turned out—"

Johnson nodded philosophically and sighed. "Oh, well, thanks for looking after it. Luckily something made me put a few shillings in a drawer. Something psychic. We'd better go over to Greek Joe's and repair the tissues—I'm hungry."

Outwardly carrying on the business of a restaurant, Greek Joe's was in reality a gambling-room for that eminent Australian game, *Two Up*. A hilarious party was in progress in the dining-room when we arrived. Four flashily dressed men and an equal number of girls were singing a song about a "highbrow lady" and eating lobsters.

The little Greek waiter wore a worried expression as he led us to a table, and not without cause, as immediately transpired. A small round object flew past Brody and struck Johnson on the forehead as he was on the point of sitting down. It was a salt cellar and a hearty burst of laughter from the party of merry-makers applauded somebody's marksmanship.

Subconsciously we come to formulate fixed ideas of the reactions of our acquaintances to certain circumstances. Their failure to behave in the manner expected invariably causes a shock of surprise. A metal salt cellar, suddenly and violently impinging on the forehead for no apparent reason, is apt to inspire resentment in the mildest individual, particularly when it provokes a burst of girlish mirth at his expense.

Johnson, I supposed, would be mad and would not trouble to hide it. I confidently stood by to see a bit of action. Instead, it was the contradictory element in him that came to the fore. He smiled, although I noticed he had gone a little pale.

The restaurant became suddenly very quiet as he rose and walked over to the party at the table. He stood looking at them silently.

"What's your trouble, Big Boy?" asked one of the men.

"I want to know who threw that," said Johnson.

No one answered and the silence in the still room became oppressive.

Suddenly one of the girls giggled, a high-pitched laugh with a nervous note in it. It relieved the tension that had kept everyone rigid, waiting for something to happen.

"Sorry, it slipped clean out of my hand before I could stop it," she cried.

Johnson looked down on her. He was grimly calm. "If I thought it was you," said he slowly, "I'd turn you over and spank your fanny."

One of the men scraped his chair back along the floor. "Shut up that talk," he told Johnson. "If you want to know who—"

"Wait a minute!" The brusque interruption came from one of the other men. He rose leisurely, walked round the table, and faced Johnson. He was tall, about Johnson's height, but built on finer lines. Graceful and lithe in all his movements, with a dark olive complexion and fine teeth, he was very handsome in a vicious sort of way. He pitched away the stump of a cigarette and leaned against the back of a chair.

"Supposing it was me threw that, brother," he smiled. "What would you do about it?"

"Was it you?"

"Yeah. What are you going to do about it?"

"This!" A quick, barely perceptible movement of his head saved Johnson's right from connecting with his jaw. Even so, with two hundred pounds behind it, the blow must have shaken him. He crashed back against the wall.

The girls screamed. Brody laughed. I applauded. The little Greek waiter stood clasping his hands, repeating in agonized tones, "O Christu! Please, please, O Christu! O Christu!" It was an interesting beginning.

Many people object to brawls, particularly of the crude and violent variety. Personally, I will run a mile to see one. True, should my neutral status be in any doubt and personal participation threaten, I will retreat as swiftly to about the same distance. There seemed no danger of this now, however, so I settled down to enjoy the fun.

Rattled by his impact against the wall, the man shook his head and glared at Johnson in a blazing fury. Then suddenly he jumped forward and lashed out with a left hook. Johnson half blocked it, but it was a wonderful

punch and he rocked on his feet.

"Get to him, Kid! Hit 'im in the guts!" shouted the girls.

"Into him, Johnson!" we yelled.

"O, Christu, please!" moaned the waiter.

Then Johnson took a hard one on the chin and the thing happened and all thoughts of peace fled from my mind.

As Johnson stood momentarily dazed, a heavy glass sauce decanter flew through the air and crashed full in his face! He staggered back, streaming with blood, and at that moment the other sprang after him and crashed his fist full into that lacerated, bleeding face!

Undoubtedly, the idea is to win at all costs in a street brawl. Any ethical considerations of fair play are only a handicap. But that last blow was sheer brutality. Johnson was already falling, finished and blind with blood, when it was struck. Forgetting all about my cherished role of spectator, or of peaceful prudence, I was into the fray with one burning desire—to avenge Johnson. Every rule went by the board. I hit with everything I had and was on top of him the moment he reached the ground. We rolled over together and I felt the wonderful exuberance of clutching his windpipe in both hands and shaking—a marvelous feeling of satisfaction that quickly changed to dim detachment as something hard hit me on the back of the head.

I awoke next morning and immediately wished I hadn't. A conical protuberance on the back of my head throbbed painfully. Brody was talking to someone with extreme indignation. "A horrible miscarriage of justice!" he was saying. "An outrage. The mayor will hear of this."

One glance round the unfamiliar yet unmistakable surroundings, and I knew where we were. Remarking, "Okay, pal, lemme know what he says," Brody's acquaintance departed and we were left alone. He told me that Kid Lozetti and his friends were at that moment in the adjoining cell. Apparently the Greek waiter had telephoned the police, saying that, O Christu, bloody murder was being committed on the premises. We had all been arrested, and poor Johnson was carted off to a hospital.

The conviction was riotous behavior, and there were some offensive remarks from the bench to the effect that not only were seemingly educated men embroiled in a street brawl, but, on the evidence, appeared to have begun it. A fine of four pounds each was inflicted, which needless to say, we were unable to pay.

"In that case, seven days," said the Magistrate.

The Dook arrived as we were being marched off to the cell and caused a mild sensation and some laughter in court by offering his personal note of hand for the amount.

Thus incarcerated, Brody and I languished for two days before I raised the money to pay our fines. Brody had made himself so objectionable during the two days that the jailers must have been happy to see the last of us. He sang at the top of his voice at all hours of the night, ceased when he heard someone coming, and then said it was I who had made the disturbance. He refused to deliver his food plates and would leave about a square inch of meat on every one and defy the warder to remove the plates and deprive him of food. He also complained about the service, saying that his shoes were never cleaned in the morning.

Chapter Nine

Sudden Departure

An agreeable surprise awaited me at the bank. Before leaving New Guinea, I had deposited a parcel of gold dust weighing abouty thirty ounces at the bank there and had been advanced what was estimated to be nearly the full value in cash. Investigating every conceivable means of raising some money in Rockhampton, I had remembered it and sent for any small amount that might remain to my credit in New Guinea. Expecting two or three pounds at most, I could hardy believe it when thirty pounds arrived. It was a joyful moment, and when the very next day a further fifty pounds came from Ireland as a birthday gift from my father, our troubles seemed never to have existed.

That anyone could own thirty pounds and be blithely unconscious of the fact convinced the bank manager that he was dealing with a man of some substance. He invited me to lunch on the strength of his conviction, an offer which I hastened to accept, having learned aboard the *Sirocco* that no matter how fair the future may seem, one should never deliberately forego a meal at another's expense. However, I mentioned that a friend would be expecting me back on board, at which the manager, after a moment's hesitation, said that he would be delighted to have him come along too.

So all four of us went and enjoyed the manager's discomfiture and the first square meal after a long and miserable fast.

The eighty pounds seemed a fortune large enough to ensure the *Sirocco's* reaching New Guinea in comfort, without the continual anxiety of wondering where the next meal was coming from—if it *was* coming. The future looked bright. So bright, in fact, that we felt sure the next few days in Rockhampton would be more than passing pleasant.

The agent arrived about this time from Sydney and overhauled the engine. To test it, we invited the entire cast of that drama of thwarted passion entitled *Married to the Wrong Man* for a picnic upon the river.

I understand the engine behaved exceptionally well.

Johnson, much bandaged and patched, came out of the hospital sooner than was expected. A small dinner, consisting mostly of wine and women, was given in his honor. And it was to be our farewell too, for we intended to leave Rockhampton in a few days.

During those next few days we all lived like princes, feasting richly and drinking deeply, until at last departure could be delayed no longer and the Dook flew the Blue Peter at the masthead. I had developed a system calculated to give Samuel Sparks a headache, and as much money as we spent in riotous living, I invariably retrieved from him the same night at his game called *Above and Below* in the back room of Greek Joe's, where he was now running a firmly established table. The night before we sailed I went off with Johnson to have a final joust at Sam, not wishing to be hard on the man, of course, but reminding myself that self-preservation is the first law of life.

It was a horrible debacle. By ten o'clock, hoist on my own petard, I was losing forty pounds. An hour

later matters were worse.

At midnight I had six pounds left out of the wreck. Should I pocket it, bow to the inevitable, and bid Samuel a bitter goodnight? Or shoot the last arrow desperately? I hesitated. O potent mankind! On with it, of course! Plank the lot on the red, passionate symbol of destruction.

"All bets are closed, gentlemen. The game is now on," said Samuel Sparks.

Plop! The little wooden ball balanced on the edge, hung there for a moment as though undecided, then rolled into a pigeonhole—the red pigeonhole.

Ha! Ha! On deck again! I watched Samuel Sparks rake in the losses and prepare to pay out. One or two more wins like that and Samuel would find I was still a man to be reckoned with—before the night was done I would yet have him crying for mercy. The hell with my system! The thing was playing for Samuel.

"Leave everything alone! Stay where you are!" a voice rapped out suddenly.

"Pinched, by God!" breathed Johnson behind me.

Everyone rushed for the windows. One man scrambled halfway through and then climbed self-consciously back again, followed by a khaki-clad policeman who stepped into the room and closed the window behind him. We all looked around hurriedly for a means of escape, but all the exits were barred.

"Get into that far corner, please."

Everyone obeyed—everyone, that is, except Samuel Sparks. He stood making notes in a little book of the money which lay on the table. It was plain, very plain, he did not trust our visitors. He had apparently

been raided on other occasions.

"This is the last straw," I whispered to Johnson gloomily. "They have to come barging in just when I've begun to make a fortune. How about those bets on the table? They'll confiscate all the cash lying about, won't they?"

Johnson nodded.

"My God, then I won't have a penny left to pay the fine! What do you think the option will be this time? Two weeks? A month?"

Again Johnson nodded. He seemed preoccupied with his own problems.

Two of the police were searching everyone in a businesslike manner; they had already found two revolvers, and an evil-looking knife was taken from an Italian cane cutter. We were all lined up in a row.

Samuel Sparks, I could see, was inwardly raging. His urbanity had in no way deserted him, but he wore it like a mask. Within him, beneath his polished manner, there smoldered a fire of cold fury. Obviously it was a double cross and the raid was a surprise when it shouldn't have been. Every now and then his eyes glinted with a dangerous light. Perhaps the awe in which his colossal wife held him was not as comical as it had seemed.

"It seems unfortunate," he remarked to me, "that most of that money should go into the pockets of the police."

I wondered dejectedly what the others would say about all this. Probably nothing, but they would think a lot. True, the money had been my own, and on the surface I had every right to lose it any way I wanted. But since the beginning we had shared and shared

alike in everything. The money was really community property, and I felt a pang of conscience for having gambled it away when we needed it most. I had not even bought ship's stores. If, as seemed highly possible, I went to jail for a month, by the time I came out the *Sirocco* would probably have been seized for debt. The more I thought about it the more I cursed myself for a prize idiot. After having got this far, the trip might have to be abandoned and our hopes of reaching New Guinea destroyed.

Suddenly Johnson nudged me. "Listen!" he whispered urgently. "I know the sergeant here—he's a friend of mine. Did him a good turn once. You do what I tell you—exactly, and don't hesitate. I'm going to ask him to take you and me to the station by ourselves. When I give you the word, go for your life and don't stop before you get to New Guinea. Get out of Rockhampton immediately. You needn't worry about me. The sergeant's a good bloke and he hasn't forgotten what I once did for him. Understand?"

I didn't. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to take a chance and so are you. It might come off—worth trying anyway. If it fails you won't be worse off than you are now—much. But do exactly as I say."

My turn came and I submitted to the searching process. The two policemen passed on to Johnson.

"Tell Ryan I want to speak to him, will you? By himself," I heard him ask quietly.

"Sure, always like to oblige the press," grinned one. "But it won't do you any good. This pinch is on the level. You're all going up—press included."

The sergeant, a tall, bald man with a gray mustache,

came over. "Too bad, Ray," he said immediately, in a low tone. "No chance of giving you the miss. The Chief's running this show himself."

Johnson thought for a moment. "H'mm, that's tough. I know you'd do it if you could, Tom. But listen, do this instead. I don't want me and my friend to go along with all the crowd. Leave us till last, will you?"

"Sure, I can fix that. No trouble at all. What's the idea?"

Johnson smiled slightly and winked. "My friend here's an archbishop incognito. He's out on the loose, and he doesn't want this to get back to the Pope." He lowered his voice. "Got something to tell you, Tom. A hot tip!"

"Yeah?" said the sergeant. "What?"

Johnson beckoned him closer. "Want to make some dough?" he whispered.

As Samuel Sparks could testify, no policeman is immune to an offer of this sort. True, having but recently paid heavily to ensure their absence and now faced with another and larger payment because of their presence, Samuel would be a biased witness. But that is neither here nor there. As the carload of victims drove off, the sergeant became all ears. "What do you know, Ray? What's doing?"

"How about a drink?" countered Johnson.

The sergeant shook his head. "Can't be done. The car will be back for me soon. What do you know?"

"Well, there's a big—" Johnson hesitated, looking at me doubtfully. "Have to see you alone, Tom. How about in here?" he said, nodding toward the door of an adjoining room.

"Right," said the sergeant. He started for the door, then stopped and looked at me doubtfully. "You wait here," he said.

Johnson held the door open. The other man walked in. The door closed and I heard the lock turn. There was a short murmur from inside, then suddenly Johnson shouted, "Go for your life! I'll keep him here. Good-by and good luck! See you in New Guinea one day!"

The sounds from within grew loud and angry.

"Good-by, Ray!" I shouted. "Thanks!"

"Clear out!" he shouted back. "Now take it easy, Tom—"

I dived for the door, pulled it open, and suddenly caught sight of the confiscated money lying on the table. I hesitated—but only for a second. The police might need that money as badly as we did—if so, they were going to do without mine. I jumped to the table, grabbed a roll of bills about the size my own had been, and then made for the stairs, taking them three and four at a time. At the bottom I heard a police whistle blow. The street was clear and I began to run. At the corner I barely averted a head-on collision with a policeman running from the opposite direction. He seized me by the arm immediately.

"Come on," he said, pulling me along.

"What's this?" I asked indignantly.

"You'll find out," he said. "Come on."

We went along a few more steps and then I stopped suddenly. "My God, look at that!" I said, pointing up.

He looked. I put my leg out and pushed hard. He was still looking when he hit the ground.

Then I ran again and stopped only when I jumped, completely exhausted, onto the deck of the *Sirocco*. Rex poked his head out and peered at me in the dark.

"Quick! Start up the engine!" I gasped. There're fighting thousands of police on my trail. We're leaving tonight—now, this minute!"

Rex peered closer. "You drunk?" he asked suspiciously.

"Drunk be damned! Start the engine! Get the others up—we're leaving right away."

Rex disappeared. "Turn out, you blokes," I heard him say. "Skipper's drunk and he wants to leave."

Thus, under something of a cloud, we left Rockhampton. I heard no word of poor old high-smelling Johnson until about a year later. I read one day that he had gone to prison for having some part in the theft of a race horse.

Chapter Ten

Island Lotus

The following day a land breeze, fragrant with the scent of flowers and budding trees, hardly strong enough to disturb the clear blue water lying placid as a lake, blew offshore to the ship with the first gleamings of dawn. In the night we had made good way under power and sail and now stood off Port Clinton. Later on in the morning the breeze freshened, changing over to the southeast, and with topsail set and no sea to break her way, the *Sirocco* scudded along at eight knots.

It was a beautiful day. Naked, we lay about the deck in the warm sun, enjoying the little showers of spray that fell on our bodies and watching the seagulls wheeling overhead above the ship. Those lines of Masefield's came back to me:

I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sails shaking,
And a gray mist on the sea's face, and the gray dawn breaking.

I must go down to the sea again, for the call of the running tide
Is a clear call, and a strong call that may not be denied,

And all I ask is a windy day and the white clouds flying,
And the brown spume and the white spray, and the seagulls crying.

I must go down to the sea again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gulls' way and whales' way where the wind's like a whetted knife.
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover,
And a quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

There's more beauty in the poetical sense of the lines than the practical. When the wheel kicks I curse it, and the mere notion of "a quiet sleep and a sweet dream" on board the *Sirocco* makes me smile wryly. I am no "born sailor" type who, as bodily discomfort increases, becomes proportionately louder in expressions of delight for the sea. When I am soaked to the skin and bone by "wind like a whetted knife" my only thought is to get dry again as quickly as possible. When "the gray dawn breaks on the sea's face" my first instinct is to get a cup of hot coffee into me, while should any "laughing fellow rover" try to tell me a merry yarn before the gray dawn, he had better watch out—I will let out a loud cry and more than likely throw him over the side.

For a fair-weather sailor like myself, this day was perfect—a clear sky, a warm sun, and no sea. As we passed Pine Island, rising like a green pyramid out of the sea, I spied some coconut palms on its shores, the first sign of the tropics, and knew that soon the

Sirocco would be threading her way among the maze of coral islands of the Great Barrier Reef, that unique natural heritage of Australia, an exciting prospect from all I had read and heard.

In the late afternoon the anchor was let go over a coral reef in five fathoms of crystal-clear water in the lee of Percy Island, fifty yards from a white, sandy beach with a fringe of graceful coconut trees running along the edge. While we stowed all gear and got things shipshape, Charlie prepared a meal.

We ate on deck, watching the setting sun paint the horizon and sky a dazzling mass of color over the sea. The warm evening, the sound of tiny waves rippling along the beach, the grove of coconuts rising suddenly to green grass-covered hills, looking in the peculiar bronze light of sunset like old tapestries, all formed an unforgettably beautiful scene, and the warm land breeze completed almost the perfection of environment. A little later, when the moon rose, we fell asleep on deck beneath the stars, wrapped in the deep, satisfying slumber that comes from complete weariness.

Next morning we rowed ashore in the dinghy and drank the milk of many green coconuts for breakfast, taking a dozen back on board for future use. In the inviting blue waters near the beach we dived and swam, keeping a careful lookout for sharks. Rex had seen one cruising around the ship in the early morning. By climbing to the masthead, we could see great schools of fish some distance away. Despising the alternative of canned sausages or beans, I prepared a plug of dynamite to provide a more appetizing meal. I had had plenty of experience at this sort of thing, so I warned the others we would have to dive in and retrieve the fish quickly

because fish killed with dynamite sink almost immediately in deep water. Moreover, I knew from experience that sharks, with uncanny sagacity, seem to know instinctively that the explosion of dynamite means a free meal. Even though they can never have had experience of dynamite before, they will come rushing to the spot immediately a plug has exploded, to be in at the feast.

How they know has yet to be explained. Once in New Guinea, lying at anchor in a trading cutter, a Kanaka boy called my attention to a number of long dark shapes passing swiftly beneath the boat, all going in one direction. "They hear dynamite somewhere," he told me. Sure enough, I learned a few hours later that a white trader had been dynamiting fish about five miles away!

I once saw a funny thing happen with a plug of dynamite. A Japanese, dynamiting fish to supply food for the native laborers of a large plantation, came along in his launch one day and dropped anchor alongside my boat. He was furious with rage. A large shark, he said, had been following him about from place to place all day long, waiting for him to dynamite, then swallowing his best fish. He had shot it twice with a shotgun with no more effect on the accursed devil than to make him avoid approaching too near the boat. Its tenacity was beginning to frighten his native divers and they were refusing to dive while it was about. He asked me to come aboard his boat and help him slay it by guile. When a school of fish is dynamited and they float to the surface, a shark will circle around eating the fish which are floating farthest away from the boat. The little Jap hoped to trap his enemy by tying a

lighted plug to a fish and throwing it as far out on the water as he could. By exploding another plug near by, the shark would come along and swallow the only fish to be seen—the one with the plug of dynamite attached to it.

I lit the first plug and threw it into the water where it went off with a dull bang, causing the surrounding water to surge up from the bottom. Then the Jap lit the fuse and flung the fish with plug attached as far out as he could. It began to sink slowly. We waited. Soon a huge black dorsal fin appeared on the surface some distance from the launch. The little Jap danced on the deck with rage and damned his enemy in a torrent of high-pitched Japanese oaths. This, he explained to me afterward, was merely a demonstration to lull the shark into a false sense of security; otherwise, had he kept quiet, a devil would assuredly have warned the shark that something was afoot and he would then have made off. He knew sharks—they were the cunning friends of all the devils.

This particular shark soon spotted the highly indigestible bait. He nosed around several times, and we watched him through the clear water lazily turn on his side and swallow it. He then dived deeper and swam slowly about looking for more. Although he was below the water, his course was clearly indicated by the thin wisp of smoke rising to the surface from the lighted fuse. Then, no doubt, an unusual sensation in his inside must have told him that all was not well. His languid stroll underneath the launch ceased. With a violent flick of his tail he began to go through a number of strange contortions and acrobatics, plainly visible in the clear water under the launch. Probably the burning

tar of the fuse scorched his stomach. Whatever it was, he seemed to be taken with a violent desire to outswim it. He shot to the surface so violently that his momentum carried him out of the water several feet, giving a good demonstration of the tremendous strength of these brutes. He fell back into the water with a great splash and made for the open sea. He didn't get far, however. Suddenly there was a loud report and his black shape was blown to pieces. A few minutes latter half a dozen smaller pals were making the most of his demise with cannibalistic gusto, and the little Jap resumed operations.

But, back to the *Sirocco,* a well-placed plug in the middle of a school of garfish half filled our dinghy by the time the first shark arrived. So we gave him the field to himself, and rowing ashore, cooked fifty or more in coconut milk—a delicious and appetizing dish which I had learned from natives in the South Seas. At one end of the beach we found the rocks covered with oysters, and at low tide, armed with spanners, chisels, and other tools, we sat around and chipped off a couple of bags full. I made a good meal on about five or six dozen. Rex put his own tally down at the round hundred.

There was no need to wear any clothes. With a careful eye for sharks, we swam and dived from the rocks and then lay dozing in the sun at the water's edge all afternoon, occasionally plunging in when the sun's rays became too hot for comfort. However, we had all been nut-brown for some time, so no one felt any ill results from the sun-baking. For the last few weeks we had all been going about more or less naked—making concessions to civilization by wearing a pair of

shorts or a loincloth in port. We tried to sleep on the beach that night, but at dusk hordes of bloodthirsty sandflies arrived, and in spite of a large fire made to discourage them we were forced to return to the ship.

Next day we explored the island, climbing the scrub-covered heights and rocky promontories of little secret bays and inlets. It was uninhabited except for a large herd of extremely agile goats, running wild on the island. Charlie shot one with a revolver, and later on, by astute organization, we managed to surround a young kid and capture him. He was taken aboard and christened Percy, but he immediately developed a passionate dislike for the ship and promptly dived overboard. He was recaptured with some difficulty and tied up to the masthead. For several nights, until he realized he was among friends, the stillness of the sea resounded to Percy's ear-splitting lamentations.

The Dook had lived in South Africa as a child. We weakly permitted him to make what he called "biltong" out of the other goat. I gather that biltong is meat cured by drying in the sun. But something must have gone wrong with the Dook's process. He hung the meat in long thin strips all about the rigging and watched over it like a mother, until it began to give off a foul odor. Even then he insisted it would turn out all right, but after the second day, unable to endure the strain any longer, I ordered him to cut it down and throw it overboard. With a good deal of reluctance he did so, still convinced he had biltong instead of the prevailing opinion that they were so many large dead worms. If that was biltong, then I hope South Africans are confined to an exclusive diet of it. They deserve to be for thinking of it.

None of us wanted to leave Percy Island. It is one of the loveliest islands I have ever seen. It was fascinating to study the swarming marine life left in the little reef pools at low tide. I never tired of swimming over the reef with a pair of pearl-diving goggles, examining the brilliantly colored marine growths and the many strange shimmering fish.

It is so difficult to describe the wonder of the Great Barrier Reef that only the fact that it is comparatively unknown outside of Australia leads me to attempt it. The name itself must give the impression that it is a long complete structure something like the Great Wall of China rising out of the sea. Actually, it is composed of an infinite variety, an endless maze of reefs and large and small islands and atolls which form one gigantic rampart of coral structures more than a thousand miles in length! In width it is anything from a tiny piece of coral to one hundred and fifty miles of limestone reef.

The building of the Pyramids by vast armies of slaves is dwarfed into insignificance by this amazing work of countless billions of microscopic insects known to scientists as coral polyps. As the bed of the ocean sank lower throughout the ages, these tiny beings, in an effort to keep their homes on the level of the warmer waters, built the Great Barrier Reef. As time went by, parts of it turned into wooded, mountainous islands, with silver and gold coral strands and fringing reefs, whispering palms, and iridescent seas, all of them surpassingly lovely and peaceful.

Percy Island was only the first of many reef islands we found with a blazing beauty, blue and green lagoons and submerged coral gardens that beggar description. In fact, the wonders of the Great Barrier must be seen

to be realized—the exotic glory of the outer reef laid bare by the falling tide; lovely submarine flowers that live by the murder of tiny fish; birds of all colors in millions, from the small green honey birds that chirrup in the trees to the myriad battalions of mutton birds that darken the sky as they go out to catch fish that are every color under the sun. The number and variety of the denizens of the rocks and pools are far beyond the compass of any book. From the tiniest things, so small a microscope is necessary to distinguish their lines, to the sixteen-foot tiger shark and, even more dreaded by skin divers, the five-hundred-pound groper, all have their own personal appearance, distinct characteristics, and method of earning a living. If you stoop to pick up a lovely shell on the beach out will scramble a hermit crab, clad in flaming-red armor, who will scuttle away for his life. Nature having omitted to provide him with a shell, the hermit crab takes the discarded home of someone else; he tries it out and, if it fits him comfortably, he moves in. When he grows too big for it, he moves out and into a larger house as quickly as a movie star.

Turtles abounded everywhere. It was the egg-laying season and we would find the females in the early morning ponderously waddling back to the water after having spent the night laying a clutch of two hundred or more round white eggs like golf balls. Turtle riding is a lot of fun. Long ago the statement of de Rougement, in his chronicles, that the coastal waters of Australia were inhabited by great turtles half the size of a ship's boat, on the backs of which the aborigines rode for sport, was hailed with laughter as the journalism of a sensationalist.

But we had many a race. You get on the female's back and hold her at front and rear. She puts down her head and starts for the waters of the lagoon. On the beach the going is easy, but once your mount enters the water, it is a different matter. At first you find you have to let go and rise to the surface as soon as she dives, but after a while you learn the knack of holding your steed's head up in a certain way so that she is unable to dive, and then comes the real fun of turtle riding. The excited animals swim about the surface of the lagoon clumsily trying to unseat you and you can steer in any direction you wish.

After several days of this idyllic existence we pushed on to Cumberland Island, the commencement of the beautiful Whitsunday Island group. We usually anchored every night in the Reef, and as the many hidden and uncharted reefs made navigation difficult even during the day, we had to feel our way along with the utmost caution, for to have run up on a sharp coral niggerhead would have ripped out the ship's bottom like a can being opened.

In these dangerous waters the Dook showed his mettle as a navigator. He sweated nearly as much over his charts as I did over the engine and steered us safely through the reefs with only one or two keel scrapings.

Few people have the good fortune to pass leisurely through a couple of hundred miles over which the Whitsundays extend, for a traveler on one of the coastal vessels misses the greater part of them during the night. Moreover, you cannot drop in, anchor, and spend as long as you like if a gleaming white beach or a coral-fringed lagoon looks alluring.

There are so many islands, most of them so inacces-

sible, the channels so intricate and varied, that we were enchanted by the feeling each gave of a new, unexplored world lying in virgin solitude. Time, money, the necessity to hasten on our journey while the southeast trades still blew, and all other cares were forgotten as we lost ourselves in the delights of the Whitsundays.

It would be hard to surpass these islands for beauty and variety anywhere in the world. On some, tall conifer-clad peaks rose to heights of two thousand feet or more and dropped sheer into still blue water. Ashore, lush coconut groves merged into patches of tropical scrub. From the high peaks above, little sparkling streams of crystal-clear water came splashing merrily down through the undergrowth, their reaches teeming with fish.

Occasionally we passed over coral reefs, visible through eight or ten fathoms of pellucid water. Where the reefs had less water covering them, many more hues than you see in a peacock's tail gleamed and shone from the depths. While the *Sirocco* threaded her way through narrow passages, we lay for hours on the deck gazing in quiet rapture at the little island pyramids that rose from the sea. Farther out, stretching as far as the eye could see, a long booming line of cottony-white breakers marked the outer wall of the Great Barrier Reef, unique natural wonder of the world.

The southeast trades, blowing steadily, made sailing a delight in these waters. We soon came to Dent Island and the ship was hove to while Charlie and I went ashore to try to obtain some much needed tobacco from the lighthouse keeper. There were only two men on the island. The life task of these individuals was to keep their light burning night and day. At six-

month intervals the lighthouse tender would call at the island with supplies, making the one exciting incident in the monotonous routine of their lives. There being no anchorage off Dent Island, our arrival was something of a sensation. Their first question, even before greetings had been exchanged, was to inquire if we could spare them a little tobacco, as the supply ship was overdue and they had been without a smoke for two weeks.

Even before we reached their quarters, it was apparent there was a strong hostility between these two hermits. With that ironical perversity of human nature, as though their dreary loneliness were not enough, they hated each other bitterly and we soon discovered that no unnecessary word ever passed between them. They had been living like that for two years, and the situation was so strained that we got under way again as soon as possible. The course some distance northward of Dent Island was safe and well charted, with none of those outcrops of living coral that make most parts of the barrier waters such a nightmare to navigators.

In the morning the anchor was let go off a large low-lying island which was inhabited. As we were rowing ashore, several white children stood on the beach watching us. As soon as we hailed them they suddenly fled with every sign of terror. We beached the dinghy and walked up to the house, several hundred yards away. A handsome, sunburned woman greeted us shyly, introducing herself as Mrs. Wilson, and invited us inside to have tea. Every now and then I caught sight of several pairs of eyes closely examining us from hidden vantage points. Then there entered, at her mother's

bidding, a girl whose wild beauty took my breath away. She stood with hands clasped and eyes downcast, apparently in an agony of shyness. She was introduced as Lucy, the eldest daughter of the family. As she sat down demurely I saw she was even more beautiful at close quarters. She had no make-up of any sort, but intense excitement had given her cheeks a wonderful glow and, dressed only in a white frock, without shoes or stockings, she looked like some pagan virgin of ancient times. Rex was looking at her in a trance, with eyes popping, so I gave him a kick under the table that lifted him a foot out of his chair.

"Lay off, Casanova!" I hissed.

The other children, a younger girl and two wild-looking brothers, came in and greeted us warily, prepared for instant flight at any unexpected move on our part. The entire family wore such a wild and scared air that I couldn't help commenting on it to Mrs. Wilson. She told me the children had never been off the island in their lives! And she herself had come to the island after her marriage at the age of seventeen, and had never left it since! Her husband was a shell fisherman who voyaged far afield, and he would often be away from home for months at a time. During these absences, she and the children fished for Trochus shell and bêche-de-mer on the many coral reefs near the island.

But I was smitten hard by Lucy and I decided instantly that the island and its inhabitants would have to be looked into, no matter how long it might take. So I made a quick trip back to the ship for a shave, to be somewhat dashed when I got back and Lucy said she liked the look of me better with whiskers. Her

shyness soon wore off and I was amazed that in the present day there could exist such complete isolation from the outside world. At twenty she was completely ignorant of the most elementary concerns of civilization. Her knowledge of motor cars and airplanes was confined to the pages of old and faded illustrated magazines, which she was barely able to read. Consequently she was very easy to entertain and there were none of the difficulties of steering the conversation into those channels at which every man ultimately aims with a lovely girl. I found it was easy to be a big hit merely by telling her about the theaters and great buildings, race courses and their great crowds, and other dubious attractions, to have her wide-eyed in wonderment. For my part, I found it extraordinarily gratifying to have all my pronouncements greeted with the respectful attention they deserve.

Days passed and I knew the legendary lotus flower grew on that island and was waiting to be plucked. Lucy and I went for long walks along the beach in the moonlight. Without words, she sang softly and danced in the light shed by its beams, danced as she must often have done alone to express something in her wild little soul, the untutored dance of a pagan or a sprite—wild, yet exquisite.

Then one day we went to where a shimmering mountain stream emptied in a cool, clear rock pool and we swam in it. Unashamed and laughing she flung her clothes from her and plunged in. For her there was no question of modesty—she just knew nothing of such things. I stood on the bank, tortured, knowing that it was no use—knowing how childlike innocence disarms and that for me there could be no plucking of

the lotus.

So we went to say good-by to the Wilsons. But it was not so easy as that. Lucy announced that she was sailing with us. "No," I said, "you're not," and knowing something of her determined spirit, refused to allow her aboard even to say a final good-by. Undeterred by such a trivial obstacle, she promptly swam out to the ship, clambered aboard, and sat down in the wheelhouse, saying that from there she would not budge until we sailed. Exasperated, we held council in the cabin.

"Well, she's your girl," said Charlie judicially.

"Be a help; how are we going to get her off?" I implored.

"Let's ask her again. You try, Dook. She might listen to you."

"No," said the Dook with utter finality.

"Let's all ask her, then."

We did, unsuccessfully.

"God, after the way I battled with my conscience," I said, returning to the cabin.

Rex laughed loudly and cynically. "Theirs was a love on a higher plane," he chanted, "and then sex reared its ugly head—boom!"

"You louse! Lucky for her she didn't fall into your hands!"

"Ah, nuts! You mean you tried to seduce her and couldn't. You've probably got the wrong technique. You took a goat on board, why don't you let the little slut come too? What's a girl more or—"

I knew him, I liked him, but I couldn't help it. Up came the gorge and my right went out before I could stop it.

Immediately I was more than sorry. He was my

friend. I wished I hadn't done it, but there it was. I was ready for anything—but not what happened.

Rex looked up from the floor ruefully, holding his chin. "Holy cow! What caused that?" he inquired.

"Well—you know damn well that kid's not cheap. Can't you take anything seriously?"

"My friend," said he, hopefully, "a sock on the chin makes me take anything seriously—"

"Er—if you fellows," broke in Charlie, "have now stopped brawling, what are we going to do with Lucy?"

"I am willing to co-operate in any way possible," said Rex. "Count on that, gentlemen. And anyway, we can't possibly have a girl on board with the Dook. Let's get organized."

So we went into the wheelhouse again.

"Er—come now, Lucy," said Rex. "Will you go ashore like a good girl?"

"If you come near me," said Lucy calculatingly, "I'll swat you in the eye."

"All right, grab her!" I said, resigned to anything.

She fought like a wildcat.

Rex caught a right squarely in the eye when he tried to pinion her arms. We fell back.

"Ever get socked by a goat?" I gasped. "What's the difference?"

Finally I managed to throw a blanket over her head. We closed in and the day was won. Cursing and well tied up, she was carefully deposited on the beach. Only then did she give way to tears. As she sobbed like a little child, we shifted about and felt horribly brutal. Even Rex was uncomfortable.

"Good-by, Lucy," I said as softly as I could.

"Please take me, oh please," she begged through her tears.

When we were rowing back to the *Sirocco,* the pathos of the situation struck us all at once—four doleful and hefty men in a dinghy rowing away as though pursued by devils instead of one little spitfire of a girl, lying trussed up like a fowl on the beach.

"Good-by, Lucy. . . ."

Chapter Eleven

Heavy Seas

Extract from the Dook's private log:

July 19th

6:00 a.m. *Hove up anchor and proceeded under power.*

7:20 a.m. *Streamed log. Weather fine, clear. Moderate S.E.ly breeze. All sail made.*

11:15 a.m. *Cleared northern extremity Whitsunday passage.*

1:00 p.m. *Skipper down with bad dose malaria. Ship making good way.*

3:00 p.m. *Skipper's fever bad. Putting in to Bowen for medical aid.*

5:15 p.m. *Made fast to Bowen jetty. Doctor absent; no medical assistance available.*

7:00 p.m. *Cast off and proceeded under power. All sail made to freshening S.E.ly wind. Sea rising. Ship running easily.*

9:00 p.m. *Glass falling. Bad weather approaching from S.E. Wind rising. Sea rising. Mainsail reefed and hatches fastened. Dinghy secured extra lashings.*

9:30 p.m. *Jibstay parted. Danger of losing mast through slack forestay. Canvas taken in and jury stay rigged. Jib and forestays set taut. Heavy driving prevents conning ship. Wind and sea heavy. Pump manned.*

10:00 p.m. *Mainsail taken in; ship running under fore canvas only; continually shipping heavy seas. Starboard shrouds reinforced. Pumping. Cabin floor awash.*

11:00 p.m. *Wind veers five points to the eastward. Rain temporarily lifting shows Cape Upstart abeam. Wind and sea heavy. Ship making heavy weather under fore canvas. Shipping seas. Pumping.*

12:00 *Midnight—Wind squally. Still pumping. Skipper worse—temperature 104°.*

July 20th

3:00 a.m. *Rain ceased. Course altered to 345 degrees. Sea heavy but wind slightly moderated. Attempted to hoist mainsail double reefed but ship straining. Decks awash and still proceeding under fore canvas. Pumping.*

4:45 a.m. *Cape Cleveland abeam. Passed* Ormiston *outward bound, making heavy weather. Wind squally. Pumping.*

8:00 a.m. *Entered Townsville channel. Sail lowered and ship proceeding under power.*

9:00 a.m. *Made fast to Townsville S. jetty. Sent for Doctor.*

In these precise terms Trelawny records a time of anxiety and misery, particularly for me lying racked with fever under closed hatches in the suffocating and damp cabin, half expecting the ship to crash on top of a reef at any moment and not caring much if she did.

At one time during the night I was just getting nicely off to sleep when suddenly it seemed that someone threw our heaviest anchor at me from a distance of several yards. It turned out to be Percy, the goat, very

cold and wet, who had taken a flying leap from the floor and landed in the pit of my stomach.

"Poor little devil," said Charlie. "Rex found him on his berth a while ago hardly able to move; didn't you, Rex?"

"He found out he was able to move," said Rex. "I think it was borne upon him by my boot. You'd better watch out, Skipper, I just saw him in the galley eating some bad fish. He might decide to take it out on you."

So Percy was tied to the mast on deck.

It was another creditable feat of navigation on the Dook's part to have brought the *Sirocco* safely through those reef-studded waters in the pitch darkness of night and driving rain. Actually we had been running before an approaching storm and were fortunate to reach the safety of a harbor before it broke with full force. We afterward read in a newspaper that the *Ormiston,* a large passenger vessel, suffered some damage to her deck fittings and boats that same day.

The Dook makes no mention of the wonderful front shown by Percy, the goat, fastened to the mast forward. It is true that soon after he was tied up on deck, several distressed bleats were forced from him as sea after sea crashed on the deck and submerged him. I was too sick with fever and the others too occupied with the weather to worry how Percy might be faring. Thereafter he preserved a most heroic silence, punctuated at intervals by a strange sound—a sort of stifled sigh that finished in a hiccough. In the morning, the explanation of these sounds was all too apparent. Due to constant immersion under the heavy seas, Percy was lying on the deck nearly drowned. He revived after a quarter of an hour of resuscitation measures and a stiff shot of whisky,

and was soon after able to take a little nourishment in the form of ship's biscuit. It was some time before he could stand up though, but this may have been due as much to the whisky as to the hardships of the night.

I was ordered into hospital and remained there for three days until the fever left me.

Chapter Twelve

Fan-Tan Frolic

A SUBTROPICAL CLIMATE, delightful situation, and good harbor give Townsville the most beautiful surroundings of any town on the Australian coast. The town itself is well planned, with long avenues of tropical palms and shrubs running down the center of the main street, giving a distinctly bright and pleasing air to the business section.

Overlooking the bay on the outskirts of the town, a great shaggy bluff rises like a fortress sheer into the sky. Inside the river mouth a number of launches and small ketches lay at moorings, the latter mainly engaged in the bêche-de-mer and Trochus-shell fishing industry on the Barrier Reef.

One black-hulled lugger of about fifty tons had just arrived from the pearling grounds of Thursday Island in the Torres Straits. She had a Japanese skipper and mate, with a polyglot collection of Malays, Javanese, and jet-black Torres Straits Islanders for crew. I loved the look of this little pearler and the impression she gave of seaworthiness and speed, with her low raking lines, long counter, and tall spars. She put to sea soon after and we were treated to a wonderful exhibition of skill and seamanship as she got under way. The colored crew handled her like a racing cutter and, as she maneuvered under sail in the narrow river mouth, her bowsprit was at times within a bare two feet of the embankment wall before she was put about on the

other tack. Those Torres Straits Islanders cannot be beaten as sailors. They need to be good in cyclone latitudes.

While filling our water tanks, an accident happened that might easily have had disastrous consequences. I was alone on board at the time, the others having gone into the town. The local council had given us permission to use the wharf hose, a tremendous pipe about two hundred feet in length used for supplying water to large steamers. I inserted the nozzle through the deck plate into our sixty-gallon tank and shouted to the man in charge at the other end to turn on the tap slowly. He must have turned the tap full on, for a great torrent came gushing through under tremendous pressure at the rate of hundreds of gallons a minute. The tank was filled in no time and the water began to overflow into the cabin. I shouted to the attendant to shut the tap quickly, but there was no answer.

He had calmly walked away out of sight!

It was some distance to the tap, so I struggled with the nozzle to try to pull it out of the tank. But somehow it had jammed fast in the deck plate and I couldn't pull it free. I had to climb up the shrouds to get on the wharf, then race along and turn the tap off myself. In my haste I turned it the wrong way first, so that when I finally had everything under control, the *Sirocco* was half filled, with two or three tons of water inside. The engine was submerged, only a small portion of the top being visible above water, and sodden masses of clothes, books, shoes, and bunks were floating about in the cabin. We were more or less used to the cabin being awash but even so several days' hard work were necessary to get things shipshape again.

Also by this time our movements were once more hampered by the usual chronic lack of money.

Rex conceived the brilliant notion of running our craft for hire, taking parties of tourists over to Magnetic Island, a holiday resort about five miles out from Townsville, with superb swimming beaches and other attractions, so named by Captain Cook, "because he perceived that the compass did not traverse well when he was near it." There was already a service of passenger launches plying back and forth between the island and the mainland, but we hoped to compete with these by running the *Sirocco* alongside passenger steamers and inviting the tourists to step aboard. So the Dook painted an alluring legend in red on a large placard. It was something to this effect:

MAGNETIC ISLAND
The Wonder Spot of the North. Don't miss it!
Tropical Beaches, Shaded Walks, Sheltered Coves.
Beautiful Flora and Fauna.
See this Exotic Paradise in Comfort and Leisure on
Board the yacht Sirocco—
Return Fare: 10/-

Some discussion arose as to the wisdom of inserting the phrase "Flora and Fauna," Rex maintaining it sounded like the names of a couple of barmaids or something, and the men tourists might get the wrong idea. They were left in, however, as a possible added inducement and the venture was highly successful and profitable at the start. We ran alongside the *Orungal* soon after she came in, and immediately secured twelve passengers. Had there been sufficient space on the *Sirocco*, there would have been no difficulty in getting fifty

more. A fresh southeasterly breeze on the beam took us over to the island in fine style, and all our passengers were greatly thrilled, with the sole exception of one stout lady who was violently seasick. After an enjoyable day spent at Magnetic Island, we returned under power to the *Orungal.* Our patrons were loud in their expressions of satisfaction with the outing and lavish in their praise of the *Sirocco,* again excepting the seasick lady, who was now far too sick to speak.

Meanwhile our launch-service rivals had been busy putting us out of business and had lodged a complaint with the harbor master that we were carrying passengers without a license, a very serious offense. He contented himself with warning us and so this source of revenue dried up before it had properly begun to flow—luckily not before we were in pocket to the tune of six pounds.

In reaching Townsville, we had completed nearly half the journey. It was five months since we had left Sydney on a voyage planned for two months. As it had already taken so long, we were now quite reckless of time and so long as the food supply held out, we saw no necessity for trying to break our record of the longest time taken by any ship to get this far.

Cairns was to be the next port of call, to pick up two drums of a special fuel oil ordered from Sydney. Here we had some slight difficulty persuading the agent to hand them over to us. He had some impractical notion about our paying cash for them, quite out of the question in our circumstances, but I finally persuaded him to charge them to our account. Not that we had one, of course, but that was a chance the agent had to take.

Charlie left the ship here to take a northbound

launch to visit a friend named Forsythe, his onetime partner in ownership of the *Sirocco,* who was living on Hinchinbrook Island a few miles north. By arrangement, we were to call and pick him up on our way through the Hinchinbrook Passage to Cairns.

Leaving Townsville, we dropped anchor the same night in the lee of Hinchinbrook Island, and the following morning entered the Passage.

Inside it was as beautiful as the journey through the Whitsundays. The passage was narrower and deeper, however, and at times we might almost have been passing by some of the smaller fjords of Norway. The bows sliced into glasslike water lying placid as a mirror. The echoed throb of the engine resounded with a muffled boom from the steep green hills on both sides. Sitting out on the bowsprit and looking down into the sheltered water ahead, the clear reflections of the ship and the many emeraldlike islets, thick with tropical fruit trees and palms, nestling about larger islands, made this passage a veritable paradise.

In the afternoon we hove to in a small bay at the far end of the main island. Charlie and Forsythe came out in a dinghy to meet us and lead the way to an anchorage.

I had long wanted to meet this Forsythe. His exploits and his name were almost legendary in New Guinea and this in a land where every man is something of a buccaneer himself. He had been in jail and out so many times that it was hard to keep track of him. His first claim to fame—or ill-fame—was when he was captain of a schooner in the days when part of New Guinea was a German colony. His schooner had been chartered by a party of anthropologists and scientists for a six months' cruise along the coast. En route

to the mainland they passed a small, isolated island where Forsythe told them there were many rare native relics of the stone age. The scientists could hardly wait for the anchor to drop. Almost drooling at the mouth, the entire party rushed ashore and disappeared into the bush in full cry.

Returning probably at dusk, and laden, it is to be hoped, with ancient relics, they found no trace of either Forsythe or schooner. That gentleman had set sail for a remote part of Dutch New Guinea where, on the scientists' cash and stores, he set up in business as ship-owner and trader. I think he went to jail for this, but how or when the anthropological party got off the island I never heard.

I once crossed his path myself. While I was prospecting near the border of Dutch New Guinea, a very hot and angry district officer, with a large party of native police, made my camp at dusk one evening, holding a warrant for Forsythe's arrest on a charge of shooting birds of paradise—a penal offense. Every time he got near Forsythe by making long forced marches at night, Forsythe would just slip over the border into Dutch territory and practically make faces at him. Then he would go a little farther inland and set his Kanakas shooting again. This had been going on for weeks and the district officer was nearly insane.

When I returned to the coast some weeks later, a comical sequel to this man-hunt was causing some amusement among the traders. It seems that just as the district officer was on the point of abandoning the case in despair, Forsythe had calmly walked into his camp and said that, as all his carriers had deserted in the night and left him without food or ammunition, he was

surrendering himself. The elated district officer immediately sent his police and carriers to confiscate Forsythe's gear, including hundreds of bird-of-paradise skins, and carry it the three days' march to the coast. Once on the coast, having solved, free of charge, a difficult transport problem, Forsythe promptly set sail in the district officer's launch for Dutch New Guinea, and by the time the fuming district officer reached the nearest government station to report the outrage, the first sight that greeted his eyes was the government launch riding at anchor in the harbor! Forsythe had sent it back in charge of a native, after safely landing himself and bird-of-paradise skins at Merauke.

This happened just prior to 1926, when the bottom fell out of the bird-of-paradise trade. Merauke in Dutch New Guinea was the center of a thriving market in the beautiful skins, which sometimes fetched as much as five pounds a skin. Today, of course, women no longer wear bird-of-paradise feathers in their hats, so skins can be bought for a couple of shillings anywhere in New Guinea.

When Australia took over the mandate of German New Guinea, an ordinance was made protecting the birds of paradise, although just over the border in Dutch New Guinea no such law was in effect, and an excellent market offered. Almost the entire white population of New Guinea went in for smuggling and Forsythe was one of many who made small fortunes out of it.

Forsythe befitted the conception of your modern buccaneer. He was tall, lithely built, and the deep scar of a war wound running down one side of his cheek detracted in no way from an exceedingly handsome face. Having spent several years at Eton and Oxford,

as well as the reformatory, his manner was cultured and pleasant. Over a pot of coffee in the rough shack he was living in I gathered he had plans for another foray somewhere in Dutch New Guinea, for he showed us a boat he was building which, when completed, he proposed sailing up there. The design of this boat was distinctly novel. He said he was combining in it the main features of a speedboat with utility, sailing qualities, and seaworthiness—a quite impractical idea which somehow sounded feasible enough when explained by Forsythe. I asked him what he intended to do with the boat when he eventually got her to Dutch New Guinea. He said he hadn't begun to think of that yet—something would turn up. From the design of his boat and one or two vague remarks, I formed the opinion he was going to try his hand at running opium from Java to Northern Australia, a flourishing business in those waters with a higher margin of profit than rum-running ever had in America.

Timing our arrival at Cairns for daylight the following morning, we left Forsythe's anchorage at midnight. Charlie and I spent the intervening hours in fishing over the stern. The bay teemed with fish of every shape and size, and we were busy pulling them up as fast as the lines could be thrown back into the water. A shark or some other large fish kept snapping at the hooked fish just before it could be pulled out of the water, and often the lines would come aboard with only a fish's head left. To put an end to this the Dook brought his automatic pistol on deck, and lowering a newly caught fish into the water I pulled it rapidly to the surface again. The trap succeeded almost immediately. There was a sudden phosphorescent flurry of

the water as the raider made a rush at the decoy fish. Hurriedly I pulled in the line and as a long dark shape glided up near the surface, the Dook reached down and gave it to him at point-blank range. I don't know if the shot killed the shark, but in any event we lost no more fish.

After a council had been held to decide the fate of Percy the goat, he was sent ashore to be left with Forsythe. No one could face the idea of killing him after having been shipmates with him so long, even though he was a great nuisance and we needed meat.

At midnight we sailed slowly out of the bay, steering by the beam of a powerful torch and with Forsythe piloting us to the mouth of the passage. Wishing us luck, he jumped into his dinghy and was instantly swallowed up in the dark astern as the *Sirocco* silently slipped forward, heeling over slightly to a gentle breeze blowing from the southeast.

I often wonder what became of him, what happened on his last piratical expedition, and how many times he has been in jail since. It is a pity to see a man living out of his century—he belonged rightly with Drake or Morgan in the days of the Spanish Main.

Not that the Great Barrier Reef is without its romance. I have seen many relics of old-time voyagers taken from the reef. Coins, too, Spanish ones at that, have also been found, for the early navigators of Spain played a large part in pioneer exploration of Australian seas. There was Luis de Torres, who gave his name to the Straits between New Guinea and Australia and who was probably the first man to see the new continent.

Still following the Queensland coast, we were now heading northwest, with the southeast trades blowing

dead astern. The mainsheet was out to its fullest extent, the knot at the end fast in the block, while the headsails forward flapped uselessly on the stays. But the *Sirocco* loved a stern wind and making better than eight knots we turned the long lines of beacons marking the narrow channel, into the lovely little harbor of Cairns.

We tied up to the main pier and soon had the usual bunch of wharf loafers collected, watching our every movement. This was one of the disadvantages of lying alongside a wharf as against the inconvenience of anchoring out in the stream, which necessitated constant rowing ashore. We had about as much privacy as the proverbial goldfish. They stood around, peering into the wheelhouse, the galley, and every corner of the ship. Occasionally girls came down too, and while in various stages of undress, I have often looked up to find myself being examined with keen interest through the cabin skylights above. Once, led to believe by a persistent itchiness that I was host to a certain species of small crustacean, I was trying to verify the suspicion, when a giggle from aloft announced I wasn't the only one having a good look. And this at a moment when the capture of a large specimen had just confirmed my worst fears.

The population of Cairns has a large Chinese and Italian element, in addition to a polychromatic sprinkling of all the other races under the sun, confined to a quarter in the outskirts of the town. There, masquerading as business premises, are to be found large numbers of fan-tan joints to satisfy the cravings of those inveterate gamblers, the Chinese.

One night in a back room of one of these shops,

ostensibly devoted to the sale of market-garden produce, I saw one of the finest "all-in" brawls it has ever been my privilege to witness. I was one of a crowd of onlookers watching a game of fan-tan. Seated on one side of a large table, the Chinese croupiers and owners of the joint were laying the bets, while the punters, who stood in groups opposite, consisted mainly of a party of cane cutters who had just arrived in town from the north for a good carousal on the proceeds of the season's work.

Fan-tan is a simple game, a straight-out gamble that requires no skill. A handful of beans are taken at random and placed under a metal cover on the table. Bets are then laid on four little squares bearing the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, certain odds being given on certain numbers. The croupier lifts the metal cover and begins to extract the beans four at a time until there are either one, two, three, or four beans left on the table. Those who have bet on the correct number remaining win, while the house collects the rest. It is a very fair game and, as I have said, calls for no skill.

Skill, in fact, is one thing the house will not stand for. One hefty cane cutter was trying to introduce it into his game. Several times I watched him place a crumpled-up one-pound note on the square bearing the number 4, which was a four-to-one chance in his favor. When he lost, as he did each time, he would reach over and take the crumpled note back and pay the croupier with another, one from his pocket. When the croupier remonstrated, he replied that the note was his lucky one and he didn't want to lose it. The Chinaman's suspicions were aroused. When he lost the fourth time and reached out to take the note back, the croupier

suddenly seized his wrist, snatched the note, straightened it out, and disclosed another note concealed inside —a five-pound note.

That is the sort of skill the house objects to. Had he won, he would have received twenty-four pounds—six pounds at four to one. This system only cost him one pound each time he lost.

The Chinese looked at him viciously, and said something indistinguishable in a low voice. Whatever it was, the cane cutter took loud exception—unwisely, I thought, under the circumstances. There is a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to take action and a time to depart peaceably about one's business. As he had been caught redhanded, I supposed he would adopt the latter course.

But apparently that is not the way of a North Queensland cane cutter. He was a big man, powerfully built, and why he chose suddenly to let loose a backhanded sweep of his long arm and knock the Chinese flying out of his chair I don't know. Almost simultaneously a stool crashed down on the cane cutter's head, laying him out flat on the ground.

The battle was on. An indescribable uproar commenced. Chairs flew across the room, either splintering against the wall or knocking someone down. Fists thudded. Tables overturned. Boots impinged on faces and heads cracked under the impact of beer bottles.

It was cane cutters versus Chinese. Every moment more and more belligerents joined in the scrap, for no good reason other than that it was anyone's fight. Chinamen rushed about shouting and squealing in their high-pitched voices. In the middle of the room Chinese, cane cutters, Malays, half-castes, dark-skinned Italians,

and all the other multi-hued nationalities were mixed up in a confused and struggling mass, amid the tumult and babel of shouted curses and imprecations in unknown tongues. After a while the thing assumed an impersonal aspect. A man recognized an enemy simply because he happened to be nearest to him or of a different color.

From a vantage point in a far corner of the room, suddenly I saw a near-by Chinese bend down to break the neck off a bottle and glance around, clutching the jagged portion firmly in his hand. Reflecting hurriedly that he could quite easily mistake me for a cane cutter in the heat of battle, I lost no time in moving still farther from the strife, and edged out into the street.

Just then a carload of police arrived on the scene and laid on heavily and indiscriminately with their truncheons, so indiscriminately that I congratulated myself fervently on having moved off when I did.

The next day we were forced to find another anchorage. We had just begun to fill the water tanks when a twenty-thousand-ton overseas vessel steamed in, wanting to tie up to the main pier where we had berthed on arrival, unable to find open moorings in the narrow river.

Shipping agents, water police, and wharf hands shouted and yelled at us to clear out, but I was damned if I was going to move before the tanks were full. The steamer's siren screamed and hooted and the captain danced on his bridge, yelling through his megaphone and trying to keep steerage way on his ship. We were within our rights in filling the tanks and knew it, so we sat there calmly and took our time. Only when the job was quite finished did we all four line up on the

deck, make a deep obeisance to the steamer, and cast off. We then moved upstream quite a distance from the town, which was most inconvenient, as it meant a long pull to the shore.

One morning the Dook went ashore early and forgot all about returning the dinghy. We others, marooned on board, would have to swim ashore to get it. As the river was full of sharks and gropers, one did no unnecessary bluffing.

Rex lost—a singular and unprecedented outcome seeing that he had dealt. He took a knife in his teeth, dived in and sprinted for the shore while we encouraged him with cries of "Shark! Look out! Look out!"

Trying to find a more convenient berth, we moved downstream once more and finally hauled alongside a smart little cabin cruiser tied up to a jetty. This gave us a stepping-way to the shore at high tide, but unfortunately when it fell with our deep draft we were sticking hard and fast in the mud. And worse still the little launch was jammed hard against the jetty. When the owner, a dapper, well-educated Chinese, came down and saw the situation of his boat, he was at first inclined to be difficult. I pointed out she would soon be floating on an even keel when the tide rose and invited him on board for a drink. Needless to say, the lazaret was as bare as a baboon's bottom, so first warning the others with a hard look against accepting a drink when I offered it, I produced the bottle of brandy from the medicine chest. Our visitor introduced himself under the picturesque name of Gabriel Aloysius Achun and seemed keenly interested in the *Sirocco*. He asked numerous questions about our journey from Sydney which, as it was obvious he knew very little about the

sea, we answered with pardonable exaggerations.

Next day he invited us to dinner at his house, a roomy bungalow built on six-foot piles (as are almost all the houses in Northern Queensland, to guard the timbers against the ravages of termites) and furnished in a tasteful mixture of Oriental and European. He was apparently a very prosperous general agent for the many Chinese on the sugar plantations and tobacco farms inland.

The meal was an excellent one in the Chinese fashion, and as we were leaving Achun mysteriously drew me aside and whispered he would like to talk to me alone. I agreed to call at his office the next morning.

"Wonder what's on his mind," said Rex as we trudged along back to the wharf through the dark streets of a miniature Chinatown. "Funny, wanting to talk to you alone. What do you think he wants?"

"Simple," I said. "Naturally the company of stiffs like you would make him a little sick, but being well bred he didn't like to show it. The man probably wants some intelligent conversation with me alone, that's all."

"They'll tell that one in China a century from now," said Rex. "I don't like the look of him personally."

Chapter Thirteen

Double-Crossed

We clinked glasses.

"Then here's good luck, Mr. Flynn, and I'm very pleased to find a man I know I can trust."

"Good luck," I replied. "Now let's get the proposition straight from the beginning, shall we?"

"As I told you," said Achun, "I can't use my own boat because the customs watch her too closely. As soon as we untie a rope they know all about it a few minutes later. With you it's different. You can go anywhere you like. Well, if we leave here at night and go over to Green Island, which is about five miles away, no one will know where the *Sirocco* has gone, and they won't miss me. We'll anchor there for the night and in the morning go out into the main channel and wait until the *Taiping* comes. At a signal from me a package will be dropped overboard. We merely pick it up and wait at Green Island until it gets dark again. Then we can come back to Cairns and a car will be waiting for me. That is all. There is very little risk and I pay you fifty pounds for the job."

"Yes, it sounds all right, but I wouldn't say there was no risk. I think it's two years you get for running opium—that's quite a risk to take for fifty pounds. In fact, it's too big a one. Make it seventy-five and we'll do it."

"No, I cannot pay that much. But I would like to meet you and if you will accept an extra ten pounds

for yourself it would perhaps suit you better personally and we would say nothing about it."

"It doesn't matter who you hand the money to, Achun," I told him. "What comes on our ship belongs to all of us. However, that's got nothing to do with this business. I'll take the job for sixty pounds—half paid in advance."

We were to leave the same night.

"But listen, Dook, we're not asking you to smoke the stuff, are we? We're not asking you to eat it, either, are we? Now don't be unreasonable. We need that cash and need it badly. On that we'll get to New Guinea for sure."

The four of us were seated around an extremely smoky hurricane lamp in the cabin and, as usual, were having trouble with the Dook's conscience, and were trying to show him the light of reason. He was conducting his argument on lines of abstract morality, always frivolous and highly irritating to those concerned with the practical side of life, and I was fast losing patience with his stubborn opposition to the scheme.

"I know all that," he replied for the fourth or fifth time, very red in the face, "and I know we need the money. But I just don't like the idea of it, that's all. I don't like to think we're going to be the means of bringing this rotten stuff into the country. Once people get the habit they just go on and on until they end without any soul, shriveled and yellow and hopeless and —and all that. Well, it seems pretty rotten, don't you think?" The Dook finished a flow of speech which, for him, was almost lyrical.

"Well, Dook," I said, "sorry if we've dragged you into this business against your will. You don't suppose we exactly relish the idea of doing it, do you? The point is that the stuff is going to come into the country whether we bring it in or not—we've got a chance to pick up sixty pounds—I'm not going to turn it down. Admittedly, it's not a cheerful thought to know that we'll get landed in the cooler if we're caught. I might have known it would scare the life out of you. You'd better stay ashore and sleep the night in a hotel. The real trouble with you is you're yellow. Achun—"

For a brief second I thought the mast had suddenly come unshipped and fallen right across my face. It was merely the Dook's fist, however. Apart from a loud buzzing noise in my ears there was complete silence in the cabin.

"I know you can give me a licking any time," I next heard the Dook saying, "but I'm not going to allow you to say a swinish thing like that. I'm sorry I hit you when you weren't expecting it, but we can go out on the wharf and finish it there if you like."

My head was beginning to clear and I saw the Dook standing with his hands on the table looking at me with a white, set face, but before I had time to speak there was a slight sound overhead and Achun slipped quietly down the companionway.

"Everything ready, Mr. Flynn?" he asked quickly. "I don't think anyone could have seen me come down, but I would like to get away as soon as possible. Can we leave immediately?"

"Yes," I said. "There's a fairly big sea outside, but it's only five miles to Green Island, so it won't take

long. Charlie, you make things fast down below here. And, Rex, you and the Dook go up and get the sail covers off—that is, if the Dook's coming. Stow all the loose gear and get the galley hatch cover battened down. Hoist the dinghy on deck and lash it down hard—we'll take a few seas aboard on the way over."

A dense black night as we passed out of the shelter of the river mouth. The wind caught us and the *Sirocco* lay hard over on her beam, riding steadily and fast in spite of the seas which buffeted her weather side and kept the deck awash. I had the wheel, steering by compass, while Charlie kept a sharp lookout in the bows for a sight of the island.

Occasionally I rubbed my chin reflectively and tenderly. My remark, it is true, had been intended to rile the Dook, but the rude form of his reply had been as unexpected as it was painful. But I liked him for it. Dear old Dook! No bones about that wallop on the chin! Must protect his honor and all that sort of thing against base insinuations. Suddenly a sardonic chuckle broke in on these reflections.

"A sitting shot, perhaps," remarked Rex with calculated cheerfulness, "but I can't remember ever having seen a prettier one. Smack on the chin! Looked great from where I was."

"Think so?" I asked coldly.

"Yes, sir! It had the proper sound, too. Just like mud thrown up against a wall."

"Is that so? Well, I trust you won't be wounded if I tell you to get the hell out of this wheelhouse while I'm steering. We can postpone a discussion about the noise mud makes on a wall until some other time. Meanwhile, scram! If you had half his guts you'd be

all right. Get that port anchor ready and take great care of yourself."

"H'mmm," said Rex. "Sore, eh? Well, you asked for it. Dare say the old Dook's got more guts than any of us, if it came to that." He leisurely donned an oilskin and climbed out of the wheelhouse.

Hit the mark there, I thought. The Dook *had.* We might laugh at him for his public-school notions of "cricket," his Britishness, his unadaptability, simplicity, and so on, but when it came to a test, his courage would never be questioned. That almost perverse incapacity to alter his conceptions of principles or morals would make him act instantly and unthinkingly where others less sure would hesitate. I began to remember a number of little episodes, nothing much in themselves, perhaps, when he had quietly and unobtrusively shown his loyalty and confidence in me. How, for instance, he had once wanted to mortgage his property in Tasmania to get us out of an awkward hole in Brisbane. The more I reflected, the more uncomfortably conscious I became that I should never have said a thing like that. Yellow! No—a "bloody gent" is never yellow. Even though I would far sooner have had six punches on the chin, I decided I would have to apologize. Moreover, if the Dook's objection to opium running was so deeply rooted, then I would give the whole thing up and go back to Cairns. I had only to take into account a few of the things he had done for me in the past to realize that the return would be a pretty inadequate one. We would make money some other way.

"Oh, hullo!" I said. The Dook was standing almost by my side. I looked down at the compass again quickly. "Well, what the hell do you want?"

The Dook gulped. "Well, I— You see, I thought—" He gulped again and stopped. There was a nervous silence for a couple of minutes.

"Well, have you gone dumb or were you going to say something?" I asked. "As a matter of fact, I wanted to tell you something myself. I'm sor—"

"I came down to say I was sorry, that's all," said the Dook.

How I hate moments like that! I studied the compass intently. It is not often I am completely lost for words. "Thanks, that's all right," I contrived.

"Well, thanks."

"What for?"

"Well, I hit you sitting down, you know, and I think you've been pretty decent about it."

"You do, eh? Well, I think you're a most hopeless idiot, Dook. You'd have been pretty silly to ask me to stand up first. I asked for it and you handed it to me. Right—there's no more to be said. Yes, there is —I was a liar to say I thought you were scared. I know damn well you weren't. Anyway, this trip is off —I've decided it's not worth the risk for the money. We'll anchor over at Green Island and go back to Cairns in the morning."

"You know, I've been thinking we ought to go on with it," said the Dook.

"You what? What's got into you?"

"Well, I've been thinking it over in the meantime and with that money we could pay for the oil and spare sail and a lot of other things we got in Brisbane and didn't pay for. And I could pay for that sheep I shot, too. And we'd still have enough left to get us the rest of the way to New Guinea."

We looked at each other.

"I think you're an old liar, Dook. Shall we carry on or not? I leave it to you."

"Yes. Shall we shake hands now?"

Another of those moments.

"What's the matter? Can't you see me? Or do you have to feel for me? Well, anyway, put it there."

We shook and there was more in that clasp than either of us could have expressed in a year.

Next morning found us all up on deck scanning the horizon for a sight of the *Taiping*. After about three hours' wait, during which Rex caught some fish for breakfast, Charlie, in the crosstrees, sighted her away to the north through his glasses. We immediately heaved up the anchor and were soon motoring out of the bay to meet her.

Achun, very excited and nervous by this time, produced a green pennant which he asked to have flown at the masthead, the arranged signal to the *Taiping*. Soon we came up close enough to be able to distinguish several of the crew leaning over the starboard rail and as she passed us by doing a good sixteen knots, they waved and shouted to us.

"Shall I stop or turn around?" I asked Achun as we got the last wave of her wash.

"No, no. Don't turn yet," he said anxiously. "Too many people watching. Go slow. We must not turn until she is nearly out of sight."

We watched the *Taiping* get smaller and smaller in the distance and eventually sink from sight until all that remained to mark her passing was a thin spiral of smoke on the horizon and a faint but clear wake leading to it

over the water.

"Now will you turn and follow behind," said Achun. "We must look out for a wooden box like a fruit case."

"Hard over, Dook! Follow her wake," I shouted.

For an hour we diligently searched the sea but saw nothing that even looked like a fruit case. Achun was beginning to get very despondent. Rex's remark that the crew had probably smoked it all up on the way down from China did not restore him to cheerfulness.

Suddenly there came a shout from Charlie up aloft. He was gesticulating with a pair of binoculars. "There it is! Ahead—over to port."

We followed the direction in which he pointed. Floating a few hundred yards away was a wooden case. We headed for it and soon Rex and I were hauling it on board.

"But there is no rope underneath," said Achun. "Or has it broken? The opium must hang in the water by a rope underneath this case. Quick, open it and see if there is some message inside. No, this is not the case. It should be filled with cork also."

We pried it open with an ax and peered eagerly within. But there was no cork inside. Instead, at the bottom, lay three potatoes. Nothing more. And they were not spruce, immaculate potatoes, but tired, weary-looking vegetables which had obviously been drowned a long time.

We tossed the case back into the water and looked at each other. Then with one accord we looked around and over the sea once more, but there was nothing to be seen except water.

"This is bad, very bad," Achun said dejectedly. "There must be some trouble on board, I think, and my

friends are afraid to drop it. We will go on a little farther, but I do not think it will be much use."

"Yes, all right. Go ahead slow, Dook," I said. "Bad luck, Achun. But you'll probably get a double consignment on the next boat to make up for it. Anyway, you should be able to afford to miss one boat."

Achun looked at me quickly and away again, shaking his head. "No," he said. "There is not a large profit in this business, you know, not as much as you would think. Of course you will not expect me to pay you the other thirty pounds under these circumstances. As we have—"

"What?" I interrupted. "Did I hear you say that I wouldn't expect you to pay me the thirty pounds you owe me on our contract? I'm surprised at you, Achun! We've fulfilled our part of the contract. At least we haven't yet, but when we take you back to Cairns and land you, the other thirty pounds becomes due. The fact that you haven't brought the opium back with you is your bad luck, not ours."

"But no, Mr. Flynn. The contract was that you were to pick up the opium and bring it back to Cairns. Well, we have no opium, so you cannot expect to be paid. I have already paid you thirty pounds but I will not ask for that to be returned. Keep that for your trouble."

"I see. Well, that's really nice of you not to ask for it back. I appreciate it. I suppose you know what the chances were of your getting it if you *had* asked? About a million-to-one shot, I should say. Now listen, Achun. We're wasting our breath talking about this. I've told you that you owe us thirty pounds when you land at Cairns. Land, I said. We'll take you back to

Cairns, but you don't step off this boat until you pass over that thirty. Savvy? Now you just think it over quietly. We won't talk about it any more."

I went below and put the kettle on to boil. Charlie was already there and I began to relate the conversation to him. In the middle of it Rex leaned over the hatch above our heads.

"Hey, Skipper," he said, "we've just passed another case over to starboard."

"Then steer for it, you idiot! Here, let me out of this!" I said, pushing Charlie aside and scrambling up through the hatch.

"Where is it?"

"There you are—straight ahead now."

"That's it!" cried Achun excitedly. "I am sure that's it!"

He must have been able to smell the opium or something, for as we lifted the case aboard there, sure enough, was a rope attached to it underneath. We hauled up on this and brought on deck a square muntz-metal box, soldered around the edges and carefully made watertight. We all examined it. It was marked in red letters, *Please leave as found. Current and tide-testing apparatus. Property of Admiralty.* I reflected that the Navy Department would probably be surprised to learn that the contents of their "tide-testing apparatus" would probably realize as much as a thousand pounds when sold among the Chinese population of North Queensland.

Achun carried it below, clasped preciously to his bosom like a mother with child.

"All right, hard over, Dook! Back to Green Island. We'll drop anchor there till tonight."

Once again we were seated around the cabin table.

"I'll see you. What have you got?" asked Trelawny.

"Can you beat Lord Nelson?" countered Rex.

"What do you mean, Lord Nelson?" asked Trelawny, still a neophyte at poker.

"Here's the Lord—three aces. One arm, one eye, one—er—navel. You can't beat that. Put down sixty-four to me, will you, Scorer?"

It had not been a successful evening. The only stranger on board, Achun, had won six pounds. It is true I also had won, but only in theory. All winnings among the *Sirocco's* crew were theoretical. Frozen assets, as it were. After a game of poker all winnings and losses were jotted down in a ledger and carried forward to the next game. The idea being that the losers would pay up in some remote future period when they might have the money. The Dook, for example, had a debit of nearly two hundred pounds and Charlie was running him a close second. Rex was about square, which left me a handsome winner. In theory, that is, for nobody took the thing seriously except possibly myself and that only in a forlorn sort of way. The only time money passed hands was on the arrival of a stranger on board. When he retired a winner, taking solid cash off the ship instead of leaving it, it was a blow which fell hard upon all of us. On this occasion, however, Achun would be asked to deduct his winnings from the thirty pounds he owed us.

Our little ship's clock struck eight bells.

"Midnight," I said. "Well, we can be getting back to Cairns now. Come on, swabs! On deck!"

The wind had dropped to a light breeze, and the

moon was shining when we passed out of the little bay which had been our anchorage at Green Island. Soon we had picked up the leading lights of Cairns harbor and were following them up the river slowly with a muffler over the exhaust. Anchoring well upstream, the dinghy was dropped over the side to allow Achun to go ashore with his precious package. This he did, after Rex and Charlie had first gone on a reconnoitering expedition and returned, reporting all clear.

"Good night, Mr. Flynn, and thank you very much. I will come down in the morning with the money. Good night, everyone!"

"Good night, Achun, good night," we called cheerfully. "See you in the morning."

But we didn't. We never saw him again.

All the following day we waited patiently for Achun. When in the evening he still had not appeared, we began to suspect the worst. Rex was then sent along to his house in the Chinese quarter. He returned with the information that confirmed our fears of betrayal. Achun's house was as silent as the grave and none of his neighbors had any inkling as to his whereabouts. Gloom settled down like a tangible thing on the *Sirocco*. We badly needed the money and after the risk we had taken to earn it, it seemed worse to be double-crossed.

Rex summed up the situation in his usual irritating look-the-facts-in-the-face manner. "He's given us the slip and we can't do a thing about it. We can hardly sue him for the money—there might be a certain amount of bias from the bench, seeing that we're opium runners ourselves. And we can't take it out of his hide because we can't find him. You'd better write

that thirty off to bad debts, Skipper."

"Bad debts be damned! That's no bad debt—not yet anyway. He may have given us the slip, but he won't get away with it. We won't leave here without getting something out of it, somehow."

"Yes, but how?"

"How the hell do I know now? I haven't thought of it yet, but we will! The little yellow double-crossing bastard! I was an idiot to let him off the boat. But how was I to know he'd double-cross us after we'd found his dope for him? Anyway, we'll wait a few days—say four days—and see if he comes back."

"They will also tell this one in the Chinese classics," said Rex.

With nothing better to do in the meantime, Rex and I decided to visit Mareeba, a town several hundred miles from the coast where a friend of mine was struggling with a tobacco farm. The next morning we boarded the antiquated train that would take us near there. While the North Queensland railways are probably even quainter than the conceits of Rube Goldberg, they unfortunately possess none of those ingenious contrivances for comfort which Mr. Goldberg would provide. Sleepers, of course, are unknown, although the train takes four days and nights to reach the end of the line. The seats are hard and uncomfortable and to go to bed you merely throw your blanket on the floor. If you have no blanket, you throw yourself on the floor.

Our compartment was empty save for ourselves and one other young man, who preserved a stony silence throughout the journey, and had a trick of suddenly disappearing whenever we neared a station. He would

emerge, wiping his face with a red spotted handkerchief, from under the seat after the station master had been in to examine the tickets. The farther inland we progressed, the more wretched did the stations along the line become, until at length they were no more than tin shacks with a name board nailed up outside.

Once during the night the train pulled up, but when I looked out there was not even a tin shack in sight. I saw the fireman get down from his engine and fill his billy can from an old oil drum which was apparently attached to a well. I wondered why, if he wanted to make some tea, he didn't take his water from the boiler. It could have been no dirtier and had the advantage of being already hot.

Toward morning we had left the desert behind and had climbed to the tablelands and the healthy atmosphere of a two-thousand-foot altitude. Here the country was fertile and beautiful. We began to pass through great fields of sugar cane, broad splashes of lush green, divided by numerous irrigating waterways covered with water lilies of pale yellow, orange, and ivory. A little later we could see the heavy dew glistening on the sugar cane, turning the fronds into long swords of gleaming silver. Shortly after we arrived at Mareeba—journey's end for us—with stiff and creaking joints, we went straight to the one and only hotel for breakfast and possibly a bath. After this we planned to borrow a couple of horses to call on my friend, who lived about two hours' ride distant. The hard seats and harder jolting we had endured for the last twenty-six hours in the train had made every bone in our bodies ache and so we lay down to take a short sleep before starting out. We were awakened by the fat Italian wife of

the proprietor, and I was mildly surprised to find we had apparently only slept a few minutes, for it was still early morning.

"You better get up quick," she wheezed. "Train is come and leaving in ten minutes."

She meant, I found, the return train to the coast. We had slept the clock round and now had only a few minutes to catch the only train returning in the next two days. Packing, luckily, took no time as our suitcases had not even been opened, so a hurried dash to the station brought us there just in time to see the train laboring up the incline to the station. There was a large crowd gathered. On inquiry, we found they were going down to the coast for the annual race meeting. The approaching train looked quite inadequate to accommodate so many people.

It was. When the train pulled into the station we were dismayed to find it already full to capacity—twice as full, in fact, as any train I have ever seen. Now it was a case of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. In the general rush an early training in football tactics stood me in good stead and, trampling men underfoot, we managed to wedge ourselves into one of the bursting compartments.

It was like the Black Hole of Calcutta—hot as an oven, and the smell of sweating humanity was quite indescribable. Once having pushed inside, my main desire was to push out again as quickly as possible. But a tremor like an earthquake and a noise like the screaming of lost souls in limbo indicated that the train had started. Numerous small, but exceedingly active, children now began to use me as a ladder to climb onto, across, and over their prodigiously fat and sweaty

mothers. With what was meant to be an engaging smile at their cuteness, I plucked them off firmly and tried to settle down.

With the mercury registering 114 degrees, the heat in the car was incredible, and an almost sadistic touch was added by a large thermometer stuck up on the compartment wall showing it. Squatting on our suitcases, we tried not to think of the thirty-hour journey ahead. Every now and then one of the children would be sick on the floor. It never seemed to occur to any of them to put their heads out of the window. On the contrary, I watched one fat boy who had been leaning out of the window for the last half hour actually withdraw his head, look at his mother with an agonized expression for a second, and then be sick on her lap. The mother screamed at him, but the cute little lad was now feeling better and had his head out of the window once more, so her words were lost on him.

I have passed some unpleasant nights in my time. I have shivered with cold in a city park more than once, with only a few newspapers to protect my hide from the elements, and have slept in many a bug-ridden doss house. But for genuine misery none can compare with that night on the train returning to Cairns.

Rex and I watched the sun rise over the plains the next morning. The majesty of the scene did not stir us. What *did* stir us, however, was the thought that we would still be on the train at sunset.

The sanitary arrangements were sadly inadequate. You undertook a hazardous journey, picking your way down the center of the carriage while the train did its best to catch you off balance and fling you on top of the sardine-packed people trying to sleep on the floor

before you reached the one tiny little closet at the end. The women, after one abortive attempt, seldom tried the trip again. They just waited, with great patience, until the train stopped at a station. Sometimes in the carriage a child would crawl up and speak to its mother. She would nod fondly, reach for her suitcase in the rack above, and extract from it an enamel bedroom utensil which she would then place on the floor. The child would be seated upon it while the mother, whistling helpfully, would wait a reasonable time and then take stern measures should the child show any inclination to take its ease and dillydally unnecessarily. The mother would then empty the utensil out of the nearest window and put it carefully back in the suitcase.

At first, such intimate domestic scenes seemed a little shocking. After the novelty wore off I found I could watch the whole thing quite dispassionately, without even a vulgar display of interest. I toyed with the fancy of borrowing a similar utensil and holding Rex over it, whistling to him the while. The whimsy grew on me and I turned to recount it, but found him examining a package of very hard ham sandwiches which had curled almost double in the heat. Without enthusiasm he took a bite at one, at which precise moment a small boy chose to be violently ill over his feet. Rex began to wrap the sandwiches up again with studied care and put them in his pocket. Then he swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and went pale. The small boy leaning out of the window found himself shoved roughly aside as Rex took his place and gave his all. A few minutes later he withdrew his head, very pale and wan, and said, "There's a cattle truck a few carriages back with a roof on it. Would you care to

lunch with me, there?"

"Why, thank you," I said. "Yes. Shall we wait for the next stop or get out here?"

The cattle truck was small but well ventilated, and although occupied by half a dozen young steers, infinitely more attractive than the carriage. We climbed in and drove the steers down to one end while we cleared a spot for ourselves at the other and settled down. In such style, hours later, we arrived back in Cairns. Charlie came up smiling to meet us on the wharf when we got down to the ship, but quickly stepped back a pace.

"God, you stink!" he observed feelingly. "Did you walk back through the sewer, or what?"

We told him to shut up and bring us some clean clothes and soap—a lot of soap. Then we took the dinghy and rowed up river to a quiet backwater. Charlie kept a lookout for crocodiles while we enjoyed the full sensual luxury of a bath, the first for many days.

That night after dinner we lay on our bunks and discussed the matter of our bad debt with Achun. Prompt action was called for. It was no use waiting around in Cairns for him. We had to be getting along and now it seemed unlikely he would come back while we were still there. Anyway, I had a scheme whereby we might recover. This was no time for scruples and one dirty trick must be met with another.

Ever since Rockhampton our dinghy had leaked like a sieve after the bad bumping given to it there on the rocks. Achun's smart launch, looked after by a crew of two Chinamen, was lying tied up only a few yards away. With it was a beautiful little clinker-built dinghy which we had sometimes seen skimming over

the water with an outboard motor attached. This dinghy I proposed to steal, confiscate, or forcibly commandeer.

"Great!" said Rex. "She's a beauty—made of New Zealand Kauri. When do we start?"

"But what about the two Chinamen on board?" asked Charlie.

"I'll tell you. We get stores on board right away and all ready to up anchor. When it's dark the Dook will row Rex and myself ashore, leave us there, and row our dinghy back to the *Sirocco* and tie it up under our counter where the Chinamen can't see it. Then we'll hail Achun's launch and ask to be brought over to the *Sirocco* as our dinghy has broken away and floated downstream. One of them, maybe both, will come and get us and bring us over here. Once here we ask them to be good boys and just row themselves back in our dinghy as we have decided to keep theirs."

"What if they show fight?" asked the Dook.

"We show some too! What the hell do you think? I want that dinghy and I'm going to have it. Achun owes us thirty pounds and he's tried to gyp us. Right? His dinghy is worth a bit more than that, so we come out the best side of the deal, which is only right and proper as we have the trouble of collecting it. We leave him our dinghy as a handsome gesture. But he can't do anything about it. We're at sea on our way to Cooktown and he can't complain to the police either here or there. Probably there aren't any police in Cooktown, anyway, so let's get busy. Anyone against it?"

No one was, so we got stores aboard and waited for dark.

Schemes such as this seldom go according to plan, but this one worked like a charm. Rex and I were rowed over to the *Sirocco* by the two Chinamen. Once aboard, I broke the bad news and waited for their reaction. They. hesitated and looked at each other. Then they tried to do what I had expected—a sudden rush for the dinghy. Rex was ready with a line on it. He jerked it away from them. At the same moment I gave the first one a hard shove and Charlie and the Dook did the same for the other. When two very surprised and spluttering Chinamen next appeared, I pushed our old dinghy toward them and they began trying to clamber into it without upsetting it. All this happened so quickly that the tide had carried them fifty yards downstream before they picked up the oars and got the dinghy under control. By that time the *Sirocco's* engine was kicking over and the anchor broken loose.

"All right, let her go!" I called.

Around swung the bow and we were headed out. They screamed abuse at us in Chinese as we passed. We waved and yelled back cheerful things.

Chapter Fourteen

Island Tragedy

We were making for Cooktown, one hundred miles farther north, although after last night's exploit we didn't relish the idea of putting in there at all. It was the last port of call on the Australian coast before the severe test of the voyage across the Coral Sea to New Guinea. We would have to stop to take aboard provisions, water, and general supplies and try to put the *Sirocco* in her best shape to meet any of the dread cyclones for which the Coral Sea is notorious.

On the way, we called in at Restoration Island out of pure curiosity. I wanted to see the island which had once been the salvation of Bligh and his men of the *Bounty* a month after they had been turned adrift in their twenty-three-foot boat near Tahiti. Hearing at midnight the roar of the Great Barrier, Bligh found a lagoon channel next morning and landed safely on the island which he named for the double reason that he arrived there on the anniversary of the restoration of Charles II and that it restored him and his crew to health and strength. They made a fire with a magnifying glass and were gathering fresh fruit, sea birds, oysters, and clams when they were alarmed by a horde of savages gathering on the mainland opposite. Putting out to sea once more they reached Timor a week later in the last stages of exhaustion and starvation.

The island has a high hill with forest to the water's edge and one beautiful sheltered sandy beach, without

doubt the one on which Bligh and his starving men landed.

We swam in the lagoon and then lay on the beach trying to recapture in imagination what had been the feeling of those men as they saw the aborigines in all their war paint, shouting and waving their spears only a short distance away, and the dread misgivings in each heart as they launched their tiny boat once more and sailed off to what must have seemed certain death.

We left Restoration in the late afternoon, in time to reach Cooktown early next morning. As we stood in the tropical harbor entrance I wondered whether Achun, more incensed at the loss of his dinghy than a fear of consequences revolving around his own head, had notified the authorities, and the town police would be waiting inside to receive us. If so, I had already determined to turn around and put out to sea and give them a run for it rather than be held up indefinitely. Cautiously, therefore, with Rex and me scanning the waterside with sea glasses, we drew in, relieved to see nobody in sight. Under sail, we crept quietly in and tied up in the lee of a large broken-down pier which hid us entirely from the town.

Almost immediately we had a number of curious visitors, rather more welcome than the usual type, however. In prodigious numbers goats ambled onto the pier and stared down at us. It was a sure sign from above. Meat was scarce and had obviously been sent to us by heaven in our need.

With unerring aim Charlie swung a lasso. A fine young billy thudded with a loud and startled bleat onto the deck. He was tied up, spirited below into the galley, and the door shut on him.

Soon after, a large rooster, followed by his harem, also strolled down, sent, doubtless, by a kind Providence bent on being bountiful. Soon he was being lured close to the edge of the pier with pieces of bread, while Charlie, a maestro at this sort of thing, was at the same time creeping up close under it, clutching a stout piece of wood. He rose suddenly with a sweeping blow meant to knock them into the water where they would be easy prey. But these were not ordinary fowls. As Charlie rose, they rose too—into the air with the greatest of ease and off they flew like so many quail.

It was doubly unfortunate that the local sergeant of police should have chosen this particular moment to put in his appearance, in time to see these amazing fowls practically circling overhead. All except the rooster, however. He had borne the brunt of the assault and was groggily treading water a few yards distant. Rex fished him out hurriedly with the boat hook and put him back on the wharf with a reproving gesture as much as to imply that he shouldn't go falling in like that again. The sergeant was not deceived. He had seen the entire proceedings and was looking down at the dripping bird at his feet.

"No gun?" was his first ominous question.

Charlie launched forth into a faltering explanation that we were by no means hunting but the fowls had driven him temporarily insane with their infernal clucking or something of the sort and in trying to drive them away with a piece of wood he had somehow hit the rooster. The sergeant listened with a sardonic expression. As Charlie was finishing lamely, there came suddenly from the bowels of the ship a weird muffled cry, like a call from another world. The sergeant

started visibly. Thinking quickly, Rex began to yodel, taking what he hoped was the same note as that which had issued from below. It was a horrible noise but it threw the sergeant off the track.

"What was that?" he asked uncertainly.

"What?" I asked blandly.

He decided he must have been mistaken.

"Where are you from?"

"Sydney."

This impressed him. He came closer, and the tension relaxed a little.

"From Sydney, eh? Well! That's some trip in a boat of that size. Say, that's not the—the *Sirocco?* That's it. I read about you in the papers. Well! So you got here, eh? Let me see, you're going up to the Islands, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said. "New Guinea. Climb down and come aboard."

"Thanks, but I can't right now. Got to be getting back, but I'd like to later. I'm the harbor master here too, so I'll take a look at your papers then."

"Fine! I'll have them ready," I said, taking a deep breath.

The sergeant paused. "By the way, these fowls belong to me. I'll send my boy down with a couple for you."

He started away, but our sighs of relief were cut short as another of those sad cries came floating up from below. The sergeant turned and came back. Rex was already yodeling again on a high note and the sergeant watched him for a while with interest.

"Not bad," he observed approvingly. "By the way I was going to tell you—I'm also the mayor of this town and one thing I'd like to get rid of around here

is the goats. There's so many of 'em, they're a damn nuisance, so if you want a few hundred just help yourselves. You'll be doing me a favor." He nodded cheerfully and walked away. Rex stopped yodeling. We heard nothing of the Achun affair.

The sergeant, mayor, harbor master of Cooktown turned out to be one of the best, and a fine drinking man to boot, as every able-bodied man is in that section. Without any local difficulties, we settled down to a few days' steady drinking. I think Cooktown must hold the record of being the most bepubbed little town in the world. There are fifty-nine licensed drinking houses to cater to the needs of a town population of about three hundred. A swift calculation will therefore disclose that every five men, women, or children can always rely on having one for their own exclusive use—a fair average anywhere, I fancy. There is, of course, a snag, because the majority of these taverns are just dilapidated remnants of the days when Cooktown was a rip-roaring mining center.

Like any town that has been dying for twenty years, there is a depressing atmosphere about it. Great, deserted stone mansions, once the banks and trading centers of a large and thriving community, are falling down in the main street, and everything, even the population, seems to be in the same state of decay. Everything, that is, except the goats. They flourish exceedingly and wander in large herds in and out of the once palatial buildings. As the mayor remarked, they are Cooktown's curse. They don't seem to belong to anyone and nobody cares a hoot what they do. Along the coast, Cooktown is nowadays always referred to as Goat-town—not in Cooktown, of course. There is prob-

ably still some lingering spark of civic pride.

For the next couple of days we worked hard to get the *Sirocco* in shape for the Coral Sea crossing, calking the decks and topsides, resplicing the running gear, getting sea anchors ready until she was as seaworthy as she would ever be.

I wrote a letter home. It started off cheerfully enough. Not exactly meant to be a letter of farewell preceding my departure from this world, it soon became so sad and melancholy that I was quite affected by it myself. Gallant, by God, that's what he was, gallant. I could hear the folks saying, *Died with a smile on his lips.*

So I tore it up and contented myself by saying that as Christmas was getting near, I could use a bit of cash.

But the outlook was serious enough.

Sailing up the coast, there had only been one or two instances when we had been in real danger from the elements. Or at least none of us had ever really been conscious of it. But this lengthy journey across the open sea in one of the most dangerous latitudes of the world was another matter. If we did have the bad luck to meet a cyclone, and this was the cyclone season, we knew we would have very little chance of weathering it. Even a mild one would mean the end of us. The Dook, of course, had his usual theoretical idea of what you did if you ran into one—something about sailing right bang into its center and heaving to. It might have been good seamanship, but it made damn bad sense, and when we wanted to know how he proposed to find its center, he couldn't tell us, even after a three hours' study of textbooks. No, we knew we simply had to trust to blind luck. If we met a cyclone —too bad. Meanwhile we set about diminishing the

odds by getting our craft in her finest trim.

At four the next morning the alarm rang and sent a shiver of anticipation down my spine. We tumbled out in the dark and on deck found a fresh southeasterly blowing. A good sign this, and soon we had it aft of the beam, heeling us over, heading for Cook's Passage sixty miles away, the opening to the Great Barrier Reef through which that prince of navigators, Captain Cook, sailed his gallant little *Endeavor* nearly two hundred years ago. We could see the passage in the distance with lines of heavy combers breaking on both sides of the reef, just as Cook must have seen it with great relief in 1770.

Cook's ship had stuck hard and fast on Endeavor Reef, which we had passed on the way to Cooktown. The disaster was a terrible one for Cook. The ship's hull was pierced by the coral and leaked badly, and the natives were waiting on the mainland to butcher the ship's company. Everything heavy, including all the guns, was thrown overboard to lighten her, and the crew began their twenty-four hour task of *fothering*—drawing a sail underneath her keel and over the opening in her hull until the leak was under control. Fortunately she floated and the crippled ship was sailed across to where Cooktown now stands and there made seaworthy.

Then Cook tried to find a passage to the open sea again. With anxiety and care he crept out, seeing the reefs all around him, until at last he saw a clear opening. He sailed through, but his relief at gaining freedom was shortlived. They were becalmed and the swell carried the ship closer and closer to the reef. *The ship rose on a Breaker prodigiously high,* wrote

Cook, *so that between us and destruction was only a dismal Valley the breadth of one wave. All the dangers we had escaped were little in comparison of being thrown upon this reef, where the Ship must be dashed to pieces in a Moment.* Then, at the last dreadful instant, *a Small Air of Wind sprung up* and pulled them from the jaws of death.

Approaching the outer Barrier, the southeasterly had freshened so much with a fast-rising sea that we decided to anchor at Lizard Island, only a few miles from Cook's passage and wait for the weather to improve. Lizard Island was charted as about three square miles in area and uninhabited, but as we headed into a likely-looking anchorage, I saw through the glasses three figures behaving in a very strange manner, running quickly along the beach. We rowed ashore and were met at the water's edge by a tall, heavily bearded, gaunt-looking man. His two companions had disappeared into the bush.

"Thank God you've come at last!" he shouted, wading out to his waist to grasp the dinghy. "Give me the milk, quick!"

"Milk?" I asked blankly.

"Yes, the fresh milk! Don't say you haven't brought it! That was the one thing I wanted above all."

My first thought was that he was crazy, a theory which wasn't so far wrong. No wonder, for after we had cleared up the matter of identity, he told us a story, in a few disjointed sentences, of such black tragedy that the only surprising thing was his mind hadn't snapped long before. His name, he said, was Schultz. Some time ago he, his wife, and three men had pooled their

slender resources and formed a little syndicate to come to Lizard Island and fish for such marketable commodities as bêche-de-mer, Trochus shell, and tortoise shell. Most of their capital had gone to purchase a forty-foot auxiliary cutter to maintain communication with the mainland, take in their shell for sale, and bring back provisions. Three months ago, one of the men had taken the cutter and set out for Cooktown. This trip, however, was rather more important than usual, for he was to make arrangements for Mrs. Schultz to be received in the hospital for her confinement.

But he never returned. A week passed, two weeks, and those left on the island were running very short of food. Still no sign of the cutter. Nor any ships for that matter. Cook's Passage is rarely used now and Lizard Island is far off the route of all shipping.

A whole month went by. They were starving. Mrs. Schultz had her baby, a girl, without assistance of any kind there on the island. But starvation had taken its toll and she had no milk to feed it. As the days passed, Schultz watched her going slowly mad. The baby lived for three weeks. When finally the little mite gave up the uneven battle for life, the poor mother's last remaining thread of reason broke. She tried every means to kill herself and became dangerously homicidal. Schultz and his two companions had to keep an unceasing day and night watch, not only to protect her from herself, but to guard themselves as well. At last, after three terrible months of near starvation—they could only catch an occasional fish from the sea, for the most of the fishing gear had been on board the cutter—they had somehow flagged a fishing-ketch. It had departed posthaste for aid only the day

before we arrived. I asked him why he hadn't gone in with it and he replied that his wife could only have been taken aboard by force and as she was so weak by this time, he was afraid a struggle might kill her.

The poor fellow was in a pitiful condition himself. We at once brought ashore everything fresh we had on board and took it to their camp. Mrs. Schultz was sitting in the shade of a tree with her hands tied. The poor woman had a look on her face such as I never want to see again. We prepared some hot soup, which the men drank ravenously, but she clawed like an animal at everyone who came near her. Later that afternoon the custom boat from Cooktown arrived with a doctor on board who took over the care of this tragic little group.

What happened to the man who left in their cutter I do not know. It is inconceivable he could have stolen it in cold blood, knowing the condition of Mrs. Schultz. He may have been wrecked and drowned, or perhaps blown northward to York Peninsula and killed by the treacherous and fierce aborigines.

With spirits depressed at the sadness there, we left the island early the following morning. A month later, there was to be another and much closer tragedy —a tragedy which has been one of the real sorrows of my life.

Chapter Fifteen

Across the Coral Sea

As we left Lizard Island, from my position high up in the crosstrees I could follow the breaking combers on the Great Barrier Reef, stretching away north and south as far as the eye could see, *the large waves,* as Captain Cook said, *of the vast Ocean meeting with so sudden a resistance making a most Terrible Surf breaking Mountain High—*

Ahead, a rolling swell was coming in through the passage leading to the Coral Sea, a great blue expanse stretching away to nothingness in the distance.

As I looked down at the tiny little splinter of a boat below me, I wondered when we would see land again —if we were lucky enough *to* see it.

Then a school of porpoises adopted the ship for a few minutes' sport and led her out through the historic little passage, playing around our bows, under, out, and under again, then away to some other game.

Outside, the seas were short and angry. With all the hatches battened hard down, we plowed through them under full sail.

By night we had logged good time in spite of the seas. Provided she had sailing wind, the *Sirocco* was never troubled by a hard sea; we were the ones who were troubled—she just dived through the waves like a porpoise and if anyone had to go on deck he was soaked to the skin immediately.

The waves were mounting all the time and as the

hours went by I didn't at all like the look of the sky. The sun was no longer to be seen and black clouds were racing up from the northeast. Then a bilge sounding disclosed the alarming fact that we were making water faster than we should have been. It was even beginning to seep through the cabin floor, making the ship very sluggish and necessitating a watch of hard pumping. After that she handled a little more easily. By this time it was well on into the night and we were all feeling pretty miserable. I had crawled through the engine room to the cabin to lie down, but with all the hatches closed hard down, it was, as usual, filled with sickly oil fumes from the engine.

There was also another and stronger odor mingling with the smell of oil. The entire cabin reeked so badly anyway that I didn't take the trouble to investigate its cause. On the contrary, I got up on deck again as quick as I could. To open the main hatch even a few inches was quite impossible. Each time it was attempted, a sea would come over and soak our bunks below until everything was so wet we couldn't have slept there anyway, even without the smell.

All through the night we pumped steadily. It was back-breaking but necessary, for the old ship was beginning for the first time to show signs of her age. The continual working and loosening of her timbers was now letting the water in through every crevice, the topsides, the counter, and worst of all, the deck. This had opened up so alarmingly that we all knew she could not stand up to much more pounding.

That night and the succeeding ones, the four of us were huddled together like sheep in the tiny wheelhouse aft. It was the only fairly dry spot on board,

and if we managed to snatch an hour's uninterrupted sleep, we were lucky. Every now and then some part of the running-gear or a halyard would snap. Then the two off watch would have to get out to splice it up. Once the main backstay wore through. While it was being repaired we trembled in fear that the mast might go. No one went on deck without a rope made fast around his middle.

Gray and disconsolate dawn broke, with the wind but slightly moderated and a heavy sea still running—making the ship behave like a submarine.

Since leaving Lizard Island we had had only some biscuits to eat and were feeling the need of something hot. My face was covered with a thick layer of hardened salt and my mouth tasted ghastly. Charlie and Rex went below and managed to get the stove warm enough to make some hot chocolate, a noble feat, for by this time the strong smell I had noticed the previous day was quite overwhelming, and made the cabin and galley uninhabitable for more than a few minutes at a time. One would hold the pot while the other came up to be sick, and every few minutes a sea would force its way through the forward hatch and put the stove out. We drank the cocoa scalding hot and immediately life assumed a lighter and more cheerful aspect.

By late morning it was blowing half a gale with seas running so high that we were shipping every second one green. The ship was leaking so badly now that our situation was critical. Water was pouring in through the counter like a faucet. It looked as though the old ship might go to pieces any minute, although all possible sail had been eased off to relieve the strain on her timbers. I realized that with her hard driving

into those great seas with the wind blowing as it was we could not possibly keep on our present course. Sooner or later one would crash on deck and smash in the main hatch cover which would settle us there and then.

There was only one thing to do and we did it. I eased her right off and let her run before the gale to blow us where it would. The main sheets screamed as Rex let them go through the blocks and the Dook swung the wheel hard aport. At once, with wind and seas abaft, she rode with comparative ease, driving in a great welter of foam before the storm.

We had only the vaguest notion of our position. With the ship standing on beam ends as she had been, it had been quite impossible to take an observation. The Dook worked out a position by dead reckoning and log, but at best it could only be mere guesswork. All next day the gale blew so hard I did not dare attempt to work into the direction of New Guinea. Even now she was still leaking badly and the constant pumping had us worn down. With no food except biscuits and a few apples—we had left practically everything on board with poor Schultz on Lizard Island—I was feeling so weak that my half-hour turn at the bilge pump left me ready to drop. It was the same with all of us.

That day passed and another. At the point of exhaustion, we struggled through the third night pumping continuously, dimly hearing the thud, smash, and crash of the angry waves and the constant creaking of the working timbers being weakened by every blow of the turbulent seas. Only large and frequent pulls at the rum bottle kept us on our feet.

Morning broke still gray and cloudy and found us looking anxiously out to starboard for a sight of land. A bird flew on board, too weak even to stand on his legs. He looked like some little beach curlew and we tried unsuccessfully to make him eat a biscuit. But he had been so badly injured by the storm that he died soon after.

I knew we should be fetching the southwestern promontory of the Gulf of Papua. I also knew, only too well, that if we missed it, we would be lost. Beyond lay the Arafura Sea and we had no chart of it! Another night of driving before that fierce, howling gale through the blackness, with no knowledge of the reef-studded waters ahead, would mean certain disaster and equally certain death.

Rex and I crawled along the deck, through the swirling, rushing waters that tried to break our grasp on the hatch cover with every fierce onslaught, and searched the horizon for a sight of land. Only the deep blue rollers, white-crested, raging, and whining with the wind, met our gaze. Man against the sea! An old story, but who has been faced with its perils and not known his weakness? Or felt that utter hopelessness and despair against its fury?

"Think there's a chance, Skipper?" Rex's voice came as a whisper, lost in the howling wind. I shook my head. We crawled back to the wheelhouse again. The Dook tried to smile but it was not a good effort. We had reached that semi-lethargic stage of exhaustion when nothing matters much. The storm seemed to have been screaming around us forever, although each hour as it passed seemed an age.

Then, dimly, only a glimpse at first, the land was

sighted far over on the starboard hand. It was salvation. We just pointed at it without even trying to speak. Then began the perilous business of bearing in to reach it. We were too exhausted to pump any longer and a foot of water swirled about the cabin floor. Each time we got beam on, in an attempt to wear ship, the seas would crash over us again and again. Slowly, very slowly, the land grew more distinct as we played touch and run with the gale. We would run before a sea, then quickly swing her nose landward in its trough and try to run before the next sea caught us.

It was late afternoon before we knew for certain we would make the shore before dark. At dusk the anchor was let go off a sandy cove dotted with coconut palms. Exhausted, completely worn out, we dropped to sleep in the wheelhouse there and then. We were not even sure if this land was New Guinea and we didn't care much. It was land—that was enough. We were safe from the storm.

I remember thinking, as I dropped off to sleep, that it would be unfortunate if, after all our trials, a bunch of Papuans were to come out during the night and collect our heads as trophies, as is still their playful little habit in some parts of the vast island.

The morning was well advanced when I roused myself at last and came on deck. The first thing I saw was two large canoes some distance off circling slowly around examining us. We hailed them and they approached within ten yards. There the crews, of men, women, and children, backed water and sat staring at us silently. They made no reply when we spoke to them, but sat with paddles in hand as though ready to fly back whence they had come.

They had great mops of fuzzy dark-brown hair and all were naked except for loin cloths made of what appeared to be the soft bark of a tree. The men were fierce-looking, with long thin pieces of bone about four or five inches in length stuck through their nostrils. I tried them out in the Motuan language, of which I had a smattering, and also in pidgin English, but none of them seemed to understand. After a lot of persuasion and coaxing, they finally brought their canoes alongside and we were soon doing a brisk trade.

Rex sold an old pair of pants for about three dozen green coconuts, a great bunch of bananas, and several large crabs tied up with strips of bark. The crabs were set to boiling while we drank the cool refreshing coconut milk and finished the bananas in no time. With hunger at length appeased, I tried to discover our whereabouts but made no headway until I finally happened to mention Port Moresby.

"Ah! Smor-Smorsby!" said an old gray-headed fellow in the stern of the canoe, pointing to the east.

"Yes, Smor-Smorsby," I said, nodding vigorously, pointing up at the sun and following its course across the sky. "How many days?" He caught the drift and indicated that the sun would cross the sky about ten times.

I took a revolver and we made a short visit to the shore. They seemed friendly enough, but I had heard many tales about deserted ships being found in the Papuan Gulf with their crews in excellent health apart from the fact that their heads were missing. Close to the beach there was a fair-sized village of about fifty thatched dwellings, all built on wooden piles nestling close under a cliff and surrounded by a plantation of

coconut palms. We bought a young pig, arranged for it to be roasted, and decided to anchor off shore while it was being cooked, and get the ship in shape. When the main hatch was slid back, the smell which had been bottled up inside for days rose up in an overpowering cloud that nearly knocked me down. I tied a handkerchief over my nose and went below where I finally located the cause—a bucket of fish in the last stages of decay, which we had dynamited at Lizard Island and forgotten. Subsequently the cabin never entirely ceased to conjure up powerful memories of a fish market on a hot day.

The cabin was a shambles. Pots and plates from the galley, a fair sprinkling of shoes and boots, sweaters, trousers, etc., were floating about in the usual foot of oily bilge water. Reaching into a locker I was suddenly startled to put my hand on something wet and alive. It was the ship's cat, also forgotten in the stress of the past four days. From his appearance and demeanor, he was himself mightily astonished to be still alive. He sat down on deck and blinked at the sun in a dazed way and with a sort of philosophical acceptance allowed a stiff tot of rum to be poured down his throat. This pulled him around in fine shape. Never at the best of times a cat of marked joviality, within two minutes he was lightheartedly trying to jump on top of the wheelhouse. At the first attempt he fell back flat on his ear, dispelling the fallacy about a cat always landing on his feet. Picking himself up with a rather sheepish smile as though to imply that he had only been kidding, he tried again, this time successfully, and sat there waiting for his bun to wear off.

Some small boys in canoes from the village ferried

ashore everything movable on board. Seeing us so worn out, they were sympathetic enough to steal only about half of what they laid hands on.

We spent the days eating and sleeping in the sun. The news of our arrival must have spread rapidly, for tourists flocked in from all sides to have a look at us. Among these came one Inamotu, a cheerful savage who spoke quite good pidgin English. He had a wide grin, a plausible manner, and a full and complete knowledge of everything under the sun. Than himself, he announced at once with becoming modesty, there was no better pilot in the entire world. With these few words he hired himself on the spot and took complete charge of the situation. We found him a great help. We had many articles on board which made good trade: fishhooks, a few odd knives, some wet matches which soon dried out in the sun, and a few old hats. With these, Inamotu was able to buy native foods much cheaper than we could. Naturally he pocketed a small commission of two or three hundred percent, but even at that we found we still saved on the deal. He also put an end to the depredations of the small boys, addressing them with such virtuous indignation about their unprincipled behavior that somehow I lacked the effrontery to demand the return of all the things he had stolen himself.

Chapter Sixteen

TAVAI TRADER

A PLUG OF DYNAMITE was without question the best article of trade with the natives. There was a very beautiful lagoon at one end of the bay, bounded by a circle of reef and always swarming with schools of fish of every sort and size. A plug in the center of the lagoon would bring them up in hundreds, enough to fill several canoes and feed the entire village. In return we received fruit, vegetables, lobsters, and once the offer of a village belle for the night. She was quite unattractive, even to Rex, so we turned her down and got a bag of yams instead. Inamotu liked nothing better than to dynamite and was an old hand at the game. He knew to a split second the exact moment to hurl the spluttering plug into the middle of a school of fish where the explosion would do the most damage. He also knew what the result would be if he should happen to hold the plug half a second too long, as was proved by the time he noticed a picture we had hanging in the cabin of one-armed Lord Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar.

"That man damn fool," he announced with some contempt; "hold dynamite too long, loosim arm."

At the end of three days the storm had nearly blown itself out. It was settling down to a steady southerly now, so we left the village, taking Inamotu as pilot. Again the wind was right on our bow and blew without cessation as we fought our way against it along the coast

toward Port Moresby. We arrived at Tavai, a small trading station which Inamotu said belonged to the one white man within a radius of about one hundred miles. His name, according to Inamotu, was Namo Heria, which translated meant "Good Year," and he was said to be a little eccentric.

This was very true, as we soon found out. As we sailed into Tavai harbor he was on the beach to greet us, having apparently heard of our coming. He was certainly a picturesque-looking individual. About sixty years of age, he wore only a pair of white shorts, with his body as brown as any native's. He had a long flowing mane of snowy-white hair which floated out behind him in the breeze. We introduced ourselves and were invited immediately to his house, a little thatched dwelling situated on a rise, half a mile from the beach and nearly hidden by some large and beautiful Casuarina trees.

Inside was very little furniture, but plenty of animals. A goat was lying in one corner chewing reflectively and didn't bother to move when we sat down near it. There were several dogs and cats, three parrots, and some fowls wandered in and out at will. It quite took me back to Ireland for a moment. The furniture consisted of three or four crude chairs made of unsawn timber and canvas, a stove, and one rickety table. The rest of the room was given over to large piles of books and papers stacked high in every corner. I noted with surprise that there was but one bed, a length of canvas strung between two poles. Immediately on meeting us our host had invited us to stay with him in so grand and lavish a manner that I had imagined all sorts of luxury. Now I wondered how five of us

were going to make out with one bed. We were his first visitors for three months and the old man was so excited at seeing his own kind once more that it was fully an hour before he could speak coherently. Words came tumbling out of him like an avalanche.

Dinner that evening had certain unusual features worth mentioning. The first thing I saw on the dining-table was a long, wicked-looking revolver at our host's right hand. We all saw it, and looked at each other with raised brows, but some inhibition prevented our remarking on it. Goodyear seated himself brusquely and offered up a terse injunction to the Lord to bless the food we were about to consume. There was a note in his voice, a sort of warning tone which seemed to imply that the Lord had better watch out if for any reason the blessing was withheld. He then removed his set of false teeth and dropped them with a splash into a glass of water in front of him on the table, where they gleamed maliciously throughout the meal.

An excellent fish soup was brought in by two attractive native girls wearing grass skirts and naked to the waist, who were shortly introduced as a couple of his wives. The presentation was made with such careless insouciance that I gathered many more must grace his seraglio. He was talking all the time like a man with one hour of life left, telling us of his adventures, travels, and past life in the Solomon Islands and elsewhere. Every now and then he would pause to hurl a brief curse at one of the parrots which kept flying onto the table, and then resume quickly before anyone had a chance to interrupt. Once, however, he broke off in the middle of a sentence and fixed his eye on a spot just above my head. Then he suddenly seized his revolver,

aimed, and pulled the trigger! I thought my last moment had come.

The result, a sharp hissing noise, startled me as much as any loud bang. I jumped up. At the same instant there came from behind me a loud yell of pain, and I swung around in time to see a black shape sprinting across the clearing as if pursued by all the devils in Papua.

Goodyear laughed good-humoredly. "Got him, the dirty thief!" he observed with satisfaction.

We exchanged horrified glances. It seemed a drastic measure to take and I said so.

"Oh," answered Goodyear airily, "it doesn't hurt 'em much. These air pistols don't do much damage, you know. If I didn't have this," he patted the weapon affectionately, "they'd steal every damn thing I've got in my store. I always aim for the backside—if I score a bull's-eye, I win a cigar. Ha, Ha. Then all they've got to do is to go back to their village and dig the slug out."

We resumed our seats gingerly, relieved, however, that bloody murder had not been committed on the premises.

Now the *pièce de résistance* was brought in—by no less a person than the cook himself, six foot three or four of husky black savage.

Goodyear had spoken of it in terms of greatest praise and we were anticipating it eagerly. The cook placed a large iron caldron in the center of the table and stepped back to observe the effect of his art on us.

We were certainly affected. Goodyear lifted the lid and disclosed an extraordinary sight. Surrounded by potatoes and half afloat in a strange dark fluid, possibly

gravy, was the corpse of a wallaby, a small species of kangaroo. Complete with fur, ears, eyes, teeth, etc., it was sitting upright in the dish staring out moodily with a look of deep reproach in the eyes.

In spite of the embalming process it had undergone at the hands of the cook, the *tout ensemble* was horribly lifelike. Strangely moved, and quite unable to meet its gaze, I excused myself and went outside, leaving all except our host rooted to their chairs in horror. I heard the stunned silence behind me suddenly broken by Goodyear booming in his deep cheerful voice, "Shot him myself two days ago. Hope he hasn't gone bad yet. D'you like a leg?"

Chapter Seventeen

Along the New Guinea Coast

Two more weeks we spent fighting our way toward Port Moresby, seeing no change in the aspect of the land but a marked one in the appearance and characteristics of the tribes encountered. Every few miles a completely different language was spoken and mostly the tribes were *bilum*—hereditary enemies of each other. Head-hunting was not the game it had been twenty years before. Once the favorite sport of all New Guinea, the "Govmin" had discouraged it by "hangimup" on the gallows all those who still persisted in it. A little inland, however, it was still fashionable for a man to decorate his front porch with the shrunken skulls of enemies. The last time I went home to Ireland I took one with me, shrunken to the size of my clenched fist, and had quite a lot of fun by suddenly producing it in the local pub and placing it on the bar counter.

Many an Irishman went home stone-cold sober after seeing it.

In the Papuan Gulf, thousands of square miles in area, a great network of water ways, marshes, swamps, and mangroves, live the Goiribaris, who must, I think, be one of the lowest races on earth. While only a day's sail away live the splendid proud men of the Vialalla River.

Subsequently, during a period which has nothing to do with this book, I worked men of both tribes, prospecting in the hinterland of New Guinea, cut off from all civilization among wild and hostile tribes, so I do

not judge these two races on a mere few days' acquaintance.

It is rare indeed to find even the most primitive race of man without some good characteristics, yet I should say the Goiribaris are utterly lacking in any estimable human qualities whatever. They are revoltingly filthy. Their villages are built on mud; as children they play in mud. Their food of sago, snakes, and crabs is derived from the mud and if they do not leave their villages—and few of them do—all their lives they are accustomed to seeing nothing but mud. In consequence, it is perhaps not surprising that they never trouble to remove the caked mud from their bodies. They are well versed in every degenerate sexual practice and treat their women folk much worse than most other primitive tribes. In cultural stands they are little above the beast.

A man regards his wife or daughter solely as a potential money-making proposition, usually in some form of prostitution. He will prostitute the former to anyone with the necessary three sticks of trade tobacco or shell money, while the latter may either be purchased outright by the highest bidder or hired by the week or month. He seems to be totally lacking in any sort of affection for any member of his family.

One custom they have was probably once a fine tribal tradition but has now degenerated into a horrible form of human sacrifice. It is necessary that a young man wishing to acquire adult status shall perform some brave deed. Once, no doubt, he had to go out and kill a wild boar by himself or engage in single combat with an enemy. Today he sees no reason to make it hard for himself and the following is an apt illustration of what

constitutes this brave deed.

The young man will purchase a girl about twelve years old from her father. He gathers around him five or six friends, and the party, armed with spears, stone axes, and clubs, journey into the bush for a week or longer with the girl. No one knows for certain what happens to her there, for she never returns to tell of it. But in one particular instance I know that after several days during which the poor child was subjected to unmentionable barbarities, the stalwart braves formed a circle around her, then at a signal rushed in to hack and batter her to a pulp. She was then cut up into small pieces which were placed in sections of bamboo and cooked and eaten. The hero then returned to his village wearing a bird-of-paradise plume, denoting that he had performed his brave deed and was a man. The really gruesome part of this business lies in the girl's father's having known quite well the purpose for which he had sold his daughter and having a very good idea of the fate in store for her.

As I said, a day's sail away are the Vialalla River men, *bilum* of the Goiribaris, and speaking a completely different language. They are people of the highest moral standards and fine and brave in their spirit. They also have their strange customs, but the one which impressed me most was their method of airing a grievance. A man takes his canoe far up the river, then with his wife sitting in the stern back-watering with a paddle, he stands upright in the bow, allowing the canoe to drift slowly downstream past the various villages along both banks. All the time he proclaims, at the top of his voice, the cause of his upset. Nobody takes any notice until he becomes really personal; then, when he hap-

pens to mention someone by name, that person will go down to the water's edge and the two of them will abuse each other until the aggrieved one's canoe drifts past out of earshot. Occasionally it happens that the man on the bank is cut to the quick by some pointed remark which gets home. In that case he will himself seize a canoe and set out in pursuit. The debate is continued in midstream with paddles, and one or the other is hit over the head. The conversation is generally conducted on the following lines:

Man on the canoe addressing the village: "Mabua of this village is a thief and the son of a thief in a village of thieves. He made a pass at my wife."

From the banks: "Liar! Liar! I would not employ your wife to suckle my pig."

Canoe (heedless of interruption): "His mother committed adultery with a crocodile and Mabua is the result."

Canoe sets out from the bank in furious pursuit, amid loud cries of encouragement from all included in the remarks.

We were making very slow progress along the coast. Port Moresby was still about three days distant, but we were not hurrying as we had very little idea what we were going to do when we got there. I had a vague plan of sailing on around the eastern coast of Papua to the mandated territory, once a German colony, but now controlled by the Australian Government. This was the part of New Guinea that I knew well and I felt we would find opportunity there, either on the newly found gold fields, or by trading, or fishing for bêche-de-mer, all pursuits which offered a wide field for enter-

prise. The first thing, however, was to get to Port Moresby. Sailing along the coast was very pleasant and there was much of interest. We would anchor off a beach or lagoon for a day or more, spend our time swimming, lying in the sun, or fishing.

This southern coast of New Guinea, or Papua, was the most feared by all the navigators of old. Even forty years ago the natives were cannibals and still are in many parts of the interior.

The coast itself is dry and barren-looking near Port Moresby, but farther west there is a much heavier rainfall, and it is luxuriantly tropical. The coastal villages are nearly all built in the water, standing on long coconut-palm piles. This was to prevent surprise raids by the fierce mountain people, who periodically swooped down, killing and plundering everything, then returning laden with spoils and salt—a most prized possession in the mountains, where, of course, it cannot be procured. I have many a time hired all the men from a mountain village to carry my gear in fifty-pound packs for two days through the jungle, and all they asked as payment was a handful of salt each.

All along the coast the female turtles were coming ashore to lay their eggs and so we were never short of good turtle steak. It has a slight fishy taste, but on the whole makes wonderful eating. Early one morning I came across Inamotu sitting with several other natives beside a huge green-backed turtle. They had turned it over on its back, and to my horror I saw that Inamotu had kindled a huge fire on its stomach, while it was still alive and flapping helplessly. Shouting loudly, I rushed forward to the rescue, scattered the fire, and in a great rage, was about to inflict grievous bodily harm

on Inamotu and the others for their cruelty. Realizing, however, that they probably wouldn't know what it was all about, having no idea of either cruelty or kindness, I sent one of the boys on board for my revolver. Inamotu, to my added annoyance, wanted to debate the matter.

"Master," he said earnestly, "this feller turtle, no can kill him. You shot him he no die."

"No?" I said, and pumped three rounds from my .32 into its head. To my astonishment the turtle showed no sign of having noticed anything unusual. It did not even interrupt the slow pendulum-like movement of its head. A little staggered by such unconcern, I gave it three more rounds with the same result; to judge from its blank expression, the thing seemed slightly bored with the whole proceeding.

"Bringim akis!" (*Bring an ax*) I shouted. "Cut off head belong 'im." This was done and the turtle, I thought, was out of its dreadful agony. But when, to my amazement, the headless body continued to breathe through the severed windpipe, as though losing a head was an everyday occurrence, I gave up.

"All right," I told Inamotu, "you win. Go and kill it any way you like."

He remade the fire and then, when the tissue was no longer like leather, cut the flesh around the edge and removed the stomach shell, leaving the inside exposed. It was such an uncanny sight to see the heart still pumping and everything else apparently working to schedule that I knew I had been wasting time trying to kill it with a gun. When I went back several hours later, everything still seemed to be going strong. By this time, however, I was initiated and had come to the

conclusion that a turtle will take his own time about dying. Presumably the turtle, one of the oldest surviving representatives of a prehistoric age, has a nervous system of such slow reflexes as to prolong the death process much longer than ordinary reptiles.

Chapter Eighteen

JOURNEY'S END .

WE WERE NOW only a couple of days from Port Moresby, and it was here, near the village of Bukausip, that tragedy struck and struck hard. Today, long after the events occurred, the details of that ghastly day are as vivid in my mind as if they had happened yesterday.

The ball was started rolling by our old enemy, the wind. As we were lying peacefully anchored in Bukausip Bay, it suddenly came up to blow with the swift fury of a hurricane. Ashore at the time, we had seen it coming, approaching from afar on the horizon and looming up until the whole sky was overcast like one great black cloud. It caught us while we were rowing out to the *Sirocco,* lying a half mile offshore. Rex and I were rowing and it took all our combined strength to prevent our being blown back before we could get a rope fast to the ship. On board, I immediately got the other anchor out and the engine started. It rose so quickly it was on us before we were aware of it—a swift, breath-taking gale with all the sudden striking fury of the tropics. In spite of the twin anchors and the engine full ahead, we were dragging slowly and surely toward the reef. Then the wind seemed to come from all directions at once. The ship began to swing in a circle, slowly at first but soon so fast that the anchor chains were twisted. A cyclone!

"*Cobu!*" shouted Inamotu, "*Cobu! Cobu!*"

We worked like demons trying to clear the twisting

anchor chains. It was useless—they were hopelessly snarled together.

"Get sail on her!"

We jumped to the halyards and managed to set one headsail. Then what I had feared, happened. The twisted chains snapped, one within a few seconds of the other.

We were being driven fast onto the reef.

The engine was useless against the force of the gale, but within a few yards of the jagged coral the jib filled with wind and we swung off to safety. I wish now that we'd piled up on those rocks. The ship would have been lost, but that would have been nothing to what afterward happened.

Again we found ourselves running before a gale—a gale which had not yet reached its full force, but still blew us along under headsails like a paper ship.

Inamotu was at the helm when there came a sudden sharp scrape on the bottom. I rushed to the side, saw the reef, dark and ominous under us, as she struck for the second time—running far up on it as the shock snapped the topmast off like a match and brought the broken spar crashing down on the deck. I knew at once it was the *Sirocco's* death blow. Sickeningly, the bottom was torn out of her as she ground crunching over the reef to lay at length heeled far over with keel showing in the trough of every wave.

"Coral niggerhead!" shouted Rex, "sticking right through her! Half full of water!"

"Get the dinghy into the water!" I yelled back, clambering below to see the great jagged piece of coral protruding through her bilge. Stuffing a revolver and the ship's papers into my pocket, I clawed my way on

deck again. The dinghy had just been slid into the water on the lee side. I saw a great wave take it up then bring it crashing back against the ship's sides to smash in its bow like an egg. It still floated, however, but I knew it would never hold five of us. And we were five or more miles from land!

"Dook, get the ax! I'll cut the mast down, then you, Charlie and Rex take the dinghy. Inamotu and I will try to swim the mast ashore!"

But events did not work out that way. Just then the boat heeled farther over. The great heavy boom swung across the deck—I caught its full impact in the midd. of my back. I only dimly remember hitting the water. I revived, hardly able to move, to find Rex, Charlie, and myself in the dinghy being blown ashore. The oars were lost but Charlie was keeping her stern on to the seas with one of the seats. I looked back but of the *Sirocco* there was no sight; she had either broken up or sunk. I tried to sit up but found myself partially paralyzed on the left side as a result of the blow from the boom.

"The Dook?" I asked.

"The last I saw of him he'd just cut down the mast," said Charlie. "He dived in and helped us haul you into the dinghy. You were unconscious. Then Inamotu pulled him back to the *Sirocco* with a rope and they started cutting down the mast."

We never saw him again.

The dinghy was blown ashore onto a beach and we were lucky enough to find a village near by. I immediately sent for the chief and asked that one of his large sea-going canoes put out to save the two men. The chief shook his head and said that it was impossible in

such a sea. I produced my revolver, shoved it hard into the pit of his stomach, and said the canoe was going in any sort of sea.

But it was no use. All the men of the village tried time and time again to launch it, but each time the sea and wind drove the ten strong paddlers back, until finally the outrigger broke. We tried the only other canoe, but the same thing happened. No canoe could live in such a sea. Fires were lit all along the beach and we watched throughout the night. Before dawn, Inamotu was washed up, drowned. I worked on him for an hour, but the poor fellow was beyond all help.

In the morning the gale had subsided enough to allow the two repaired canoes to be launched and we began a far and wide search until dark forced us to give up and return, hearts heavy with grief.

We never even found his body.

Runners were sent in and a government schooner came out to bring us to Port Moresby. There we were stranded without funds, although there were many people who wanted to help. For my part, I didn't care what happened.

Kindly, lovable old Dook. His death was a tragedy that left me stunned and dazed for a long time. We all felt it deeply. He had been something more than a friend. He was a shipmate, one with whom we had shared life in daily contact for many months, living it dangerously, always happily, sometimes comically, in hardship and hunger, through good times and bad. His was far too fine and decent a spirit to be cut off so young.

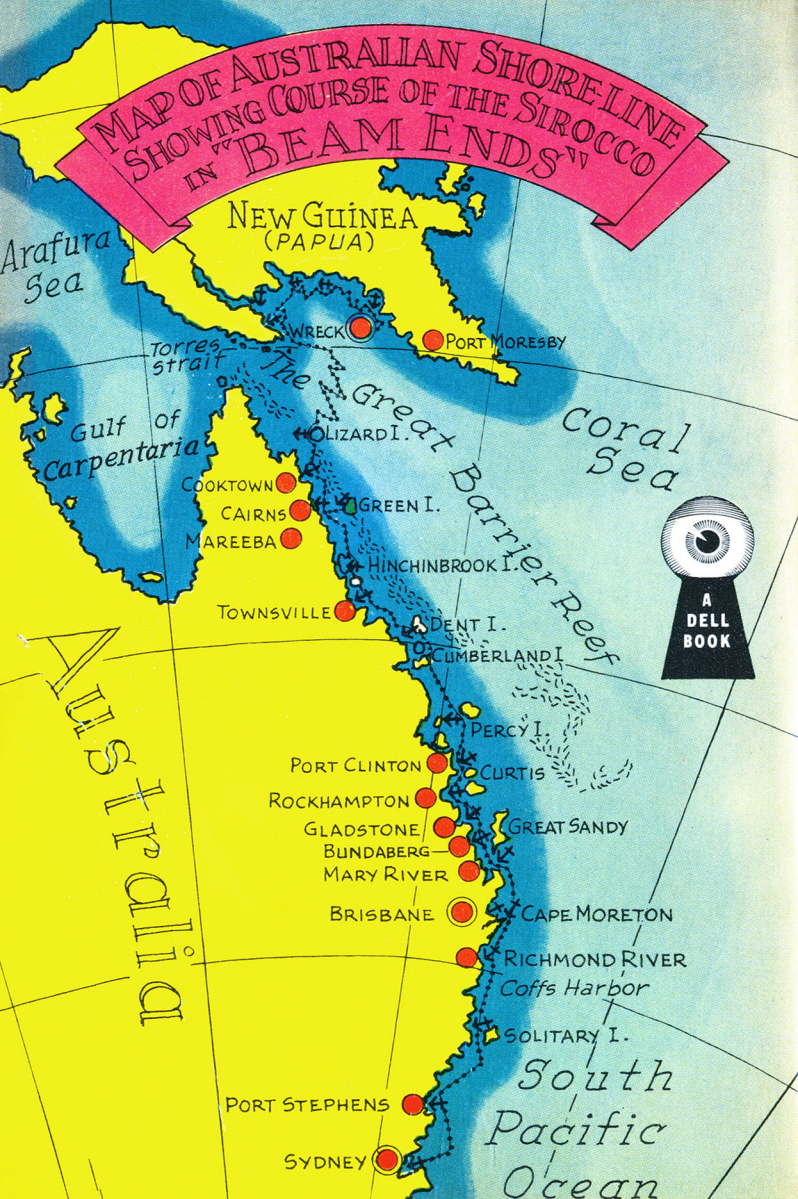
The *Sirocco's* bones and his are scattered over a coral reef in the South Seas, as are the bones of many a fine

ship, but never of a finer man.

In the peace and quiet of port, old sailors spin their yarns, telling tales of the Southern Seas. How once they sailed into the still, blue lagoon, beached their boat on the gleaming sand, and walked beneath the coconut palms and lovely tropic vines to the native village. From the brown-thatched houses came laughing men and women—strong, brown men and handsome girls—who gave them strange and delicious fruits, and who decked them with sweet garlands of flowers.

But always, ever present behind the brightness of this picture there lay a gloomy shadow—the shadow of the coral. To the ancient mariners it was no thing of beauty. It was a horror and a nightmare, worse dreaded than the iceberg or the fog, or any terror of the Northern Seas—a demon against whom neither skill, care, nor knowledge availed, by whom at any instant their ship might be wrecked and themselves cast onto the jagged coral or flung ashore to be slaughtered by the savages.

Today the lure of the beautiful, treacherous coral seas still exact a heavy price from those who seek adventure. We found it so.


MAP OF AUSTRALIAN SHORELINE
SHOWING COURSE OF THE SIROCCO
IN "BEAM ENDS"
NEW GUINEA
(PAPUA)
Arafura Sea
WRECK
PORT MORESBY
Torres Strait
The Great Barrier Reef
Coral Sea
Gulf of Carpentaria
LIZARD I.
COOKTOWN
CAIRNS
GREEN I.
MAREEBA
HINCHINBROOK I.
TOWNSVILLE
DENT I.
CUMBERLAND I.
PERCY I.
PORT CLINTON
CURTIS
ROCKHAMPTON
GLADSTONE
GREAT SANDY
BUNDABERG
MARY RIVER
BRISBANE
CAPE MORETON
RICHMOND RIVER
Coffs Harbor
SOLITARY I.
South Pacific Ocean
PORT STEPHENS
SYDNEY
Australia
A DELL BOOK