PETER & Co.

MARY·GRANT·BRUCE

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THE POPULAR GIFT BOOKS

OF

MARY GRANT BRUCE

"These books should find a place amongst English stories; they bring a touch of something strange and yet akin to their readers here, and may help to awaken new interests."—*The Times.*

A LITTLE BUSH MAID
MATES AT BILLABONG
NORAH OF BILLABONG
FROM BILLABONG TO LONDON
JIM AND WALLY
CAPTAIN JIM
DICK LESTER OF KURRAJONG
BACK TO BILLABONG
BILLABONG'S DAUGHTER
THE HOUSES OF THE EAGLE
THE TOWER ROOMS
BILLABONG ADVENTURERS
GOLDEN FIDDLES
THE HAPPY TRAVELLER
BILL OF BILLABONG
ROAD TO ADVENTURE
BILLABONG'S LUCK
SEAHAWK
WINGS ABOVE BILLABONG
CIRCUS RING
BILLABONG GOLD
TOLD BY PETER
SON OF BILLABONG
PETER & CO.

"Koona stood upright in the bow . . . Yeppi pointing eagerly."
(Page 136.)

Peter & Co.] [*Frontispiece*

PETER & CO.

BY

MARY GRANT BRUCE

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CHAPTER I

PETER SPEAKS

I USED to be frightfully keen on having adventures—when I'd never had any. But my first really big one ended up with a smashed head and a broken leg; and for a good time after that I felt that adventures weren't all they were cracked up to be. They are exciting while they are happening, but you can pay a bit too much for them. My payments went on for a long while, and before they were finished I had made up my mind that never again would I go in for anything but a quiet life, with nothing more exciting than just riding after cattle in the holidays. Which only goes to show that one should never make up one's mind about anything, because things happen just the same.

My smash-up came just at the end of the Christmas holidays, so I missed a whole term at school. I could stand being without lessons quite easily; but I might have been captain of the Second Eleven that term, with any luck. To know you have missed a thing like that doesn't make lying in bed any pleasanter. Still . . . grousing, even inside one's mind, only helps you to feel worse, so I tried to forget it by thinking a lot about football and winter games, because I never doubted I would be all right in the winter term.

All my people were jolly good over helping me to forget things that bothered me. I used to feel I was nearly helping to run our place with Dad, he told me so much about the cattle and all the station affairs; just as if I was grown-up. Mother was simply full of dodges for keeping me from getting broody, and so were my sister Binkie and Miss Tarrant, who is her governess, but not at all like one. Miss Tarrant actually worked me up to writing a book about my adventures,[1] and now I believe I have got the book habit, because here I'm at it again. But it is rather fun to write down things that happen to you, and anyhow, nobody except Binkie and me will ever see my books. Oh, and Clem, of course.

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[1] *Told by Peter* (Mary Grant Bruce).

Clem Hardy is English, but he and his father have lived near Weeroona—that's our place—for years. Their house is shut up now, though, because Mr.

Hardy had to have an operation, and the doctors are keeping him in a sort of rest-home in the hills until he is quite strong again. So of course Mother and Dad made Clem come to live with us. That suited me down to the ground, for I haven't any friend as good as Clem. It was good for Clem, too; he'd had a lot of worry and responsibility, too much for any boy, what with his father's illness and being very poor. And on top of all that, he had been through all my adventures, and it was rather a miracle he hadn't been killed. We don't much like thinking about that time now, and we've made up our minds not to talk about it.

Everyone reckoned Clem and I would be fit as fiddles by the time the next holidays were over, and quite ready to go off together to school in Sydney. But things didn't pan out so well as that. My old leg was still giving me trouble; nothing very bad, but it was a bit stiff, and it ached like fury sometimes. The doctor said I'd better go, if only because I could get massage in Sydney; but he put his foot down on the idea of my playing games, which to my mind made it quite silly to go to school at all. And poor old Clem was even worse. He has never been frightfully strong, and all he had gone through had told on him. He took to sleeping badly and hardly eating enough for a self-respecting tom-tit. Mother was pretty worried about him. So at last she and Dad decided that he had better stay at Weeroona that term, having a quiet open-air life and doing a few lessons with Miss Tarrant, who is really frightfully brainy in spite of making a joke of most things, including us.

Well, that didn't make it any jollier for me to go back to school like a lame duck, and I went off with a dismal feeling that the bottom had fallen out of everything. School was even worse than I'd expected. At ordinary times I endure lessons as best I can, knowing that games are ahead, and anyone who feels as I do can imagine what it meant to know I couldn't do anything worth doing, like football or gym, or running. I could only limp round and watch other people. And if you have always gone in for games, and then all of a sudden you can't, you're awfully lonely. All your pals are hard at it, and no matter how decent they are they can't come and just flop about on a seat, as I had to do. I guessed that lots of them went out of their way to be extra decent to me, but it didn't seem to help much. I know I was like a bear with a sore head when anyone sympathized with me, and I simply couldn't stick it when people were patient with me—and even polite. I'd know quite well they would have liked to let me have all that was coming to me for being a bear, and I'd wish they would let themselves go. But of course nobody would, just because I was a crock.

And I was scared about my leg. That was the worst part—to feel that I'd lost my nerve and didn't dare take chances with it. I kept thinking, what if it's

always going to be like this, or even get worse; and I'd wonder if there was something about it that the doctor and my people at home hadn't told me. I wondered *that* so hard that I'd dream about it at night and wake up sweating. Anyone who knew Dad and Mother could have told me I was a young idiot, of course. I suppose it was just that I'd had a pretty tough time and wasn't really fit in other ways.

Twice a week I went to a masseur, and gosh, how I loathed that man! He was long and thin and greasy-looking, and he had a voice to match. He called me "little man," and he talked to me as if I was six years old, never guessing how greatly I longed to punch his silly head. He asked fool questions about the people at school—"your playmates" he called them. All the time he was pommelling and kneading my leg he talked, until I hated the sound of his oily voice; just as I hated the very way he touched me. I never felt he was going to do me a bit of good; and he didn't, either.

Well, at the end of a month I wasn't fit to speak to, and I knew it. Of course I never let on what I was feeling in my letters home. Mother had had quite enough worry about me as it was. I tried to keep anything I wrote merry and bright, but I couldn't make the letters very long. A good many of them I tore up and had to start again. That didn't matter; goodness knows I had plenty of time those days to write letters.

There's a corner in the garden of our House where the afternoon sun comes even in winter, with bushes round it that make a good wind-break. Sometimes when I was fed up with seeing games being played by people with two good legs I used to go there and lie on a rug on the grass with a book. I must have read every thriller in the House library in that corner, but I don't remember a bit of any of them. Well, one afternoon I was there. A letter from Binkie had come by that morning's post. I took it out and read it again. Binkie is not much on spelling, but she generally tells me the sort of things I want to hear. There's always something about my red setter Bran, and about Roona, my black mare; she's the only person who rides Roona when I'm not able to.

DEAR PETER,

We are all well and I hope you are in the pink, or getting there. We liked awfully the picture you drew of the man massadging you. He looks a bit of a blot, I think, but I suppose he knows his job. Does it hurt?

Things are going on here just the same as ushual. Clem and Tarry and I helped Dad to shift the new lot of bullocks off the flats yesterday because the river is nearly running a banker and if we get any more rain there will probibly be a flud. I rode Roona, and she

was as fresh as paint and full of beans. She did nothing but pig-root for the first five minutes after I got on her, but she setled down when we got near the cattle. Tarry rode Brenda and she went over her head beautifully when she, I mean Brenda, put her foot in a rabbit-hole, and came down on her nose. There was no dammige done, only to Tarry's temper, and of course we haven't finished ragging her about it yet. You could draw the picture of it for Tarry if you liked I am sure she would pryze it.

Clem is looking rarther better and he eats a bit more. I think he does not have so many bad dreams, but we do not ask him. He is anoyed because Tarry made a stern rule that when we three go out together we are only to talk French which cramps his stile a good deal. So she altered the rule to be that we can talk english after we turn homewards, and we now notis that Clem sugests going home much sooner than he used to, only then he goes by a much more roundabout way. So the way home is much longer than the way out. Tarry says this is called strattijy. One day he surprised us very much by yelling out quite fluently "*C'est un sapin!*" and going off at a gallop, though we could not see why he wanted to chase a pine-tree, and no pine-tree was visable. But it turned out that he had only meant *lapin*, which is a rabbit. He did not deseave the dogs and they caught the rabbit all right.

I am writing with my feet on Bran, who lies under the schoolroom table any time he can. He sends you a lick, and so do all the rest of us, yours,

BINKIE.

. . . . .

I read that letter through twice, and it made me see Weeroona again, and all the jolly times we used to have; and that I couldn't have now. I wondered if I'd have nerve enough to ride Roona again on one of those days when she was so full of spirit she just had to pig-root. It was no good thinking of that, so I started reading. Somehow the book seemed duller than usual. In fact, I had chucked reading it altogether, and I was lying face downwards, just thinking, when I heard a step near me. At first I kept still, thinking it was one of the other fellows; and I didn't want to talk to anybody. Then a voice I knew said, "Hullo, young Forsyth!"—and I twisted round in a hurry.

It was Mr. Garfield, and he is a man we have liked awfully ever since we first met him, which was when he crashed in a 'plane in a paddock beside

Binkie and Clem and me and killed two cows. (They were old scrags of cows anyhow, and better dead.) He had been mixed up in our adventures, and all the time I was ill he was terribly good to me, often flying down to Weeroona just to see me: and even when my leg was at its worst he could always make me laugh. He had had to go on a trip to Central Australia just before I came back to school, and I had missed him awfully. It was great to see him again. I was so astonished I could only sit on my rug and stare at him for a minute. He looked at me pretty hard, too.

"Don't get up—can I have a corner of rug?" he said. So he sat down and asked how my leg was, and then he seemed to forget all about it. I forgot it myself, yarning to him. He told me all about his trip, which had been pretty exciting in spots, between his car getting bogged in sandhills, and trouble with camels, and a spot of bother with rather hostile blacks: and then we yarned about the family at Weeroona and Clem and Mr. Hardy; he had questions to ask about every person he'd met in our district. It was a ripping talk, one that I'd been sort of aching for. It wasn't until near the end of his visit that he got back to the subject of my leg and how much I was able to do with it. I told him about my hated masseur, and I believe I let myself go a bit. For the first time he looked grave.

"I don't believe he'll do you much good if you feel that way about him," he said. "Massage is a queer thing; it means a lot if you feel in sympathy with the chap who's pounding you. When do you go to him again?"

I said, "Thursday, worse luck; and I wouldn't feel in sympathy with him if I went to him for a hundred years. He's just a long, greasy worm. You wouldn't like him a bit better than I do, Mr. Garfield."

"Well, do your best to stand him on Thursday," he said. "Because I want you on Saturday. Remember we made a date once that we'd paint Sydney red one day when you went back to school?"

I hadn't forgotten that date. We'd made it the first day I ever met him, when he was still a bit groggy from having crashed his 'plane, and I . . . well, I had two good legs then. I'd often thought of how we'd keep it, if he hadn't forgotten all about it. Only, I was so different now; I couldn't see how he'd want to go about with a crock. And the thought of how different I was just beat me, and I couldn't bear it. I twisted round again with my face in my arms because I didn't want him to look at me.

He didn't say anything for a bit. I expect he was giving me time to get hold of myself. But he is the kind of person who doesn't need to say anything: you just feel understandingness in his silence. Somehow, I didn't feel ashamed, even though I'd acted like a kid. I felt he knew I was scared blue about my leg,

and I didn't care. And presently he spoke just as if he was talking to himself.

He said, "It's fairly easy to stand being crocked when one is a cot-case. In hospital, or at home among one's people, with everyone doing things to help. Not so easy when one's the only crock among a few hundred active youngsters. It's the contrast that hurts. Makes one feel it's going to last for ever. But it doesn't, you know, Peter. Been through it myself, after the War: I reckoned I'd never be sound again, and I went pretty deep down. And it was all unnecessary torment, though it was real enough while it lasted. I was too tough to stay a crock. And so are you, Peter: a darned sight too tough."

"I thought I was . . . once," I said, sort of choking.

"You can keep on thinking it," he said. "Think it all the time, and never let your thought waver. It helps patience to grow. And there mightn't be the need for so much patience, at that. I have ideas buzzing in my head, and they will continue to buzz until I meet you on Saturday. Then we'll buzz round together. If it's fine we'll take the speed-boat out, and if it isn't—well, we'll do something else. Ten o'clock too early for you?"

"Not much!" I said—and I found I could turn round and look at him, for the very idea of a speed-boat seemed to make me better. "Where?"

"I'll be here at ten with the car. It's all right about leave—I saw the Head and fixed it up with him before I came round here. He's an old friend of mine. Come along to the gate with me. You were on crutches last time we met; I want to see how you get along under your own steam."

So I went to the gate with him, trying hard not to limp much; and he watched me just as if he was looking at a horse's action, not just sympathizing.

"Pretty good effort, I think—considering what a smash it was," he said. "Keep the confidence going, old chap, and try to restrain yourself from damaging that masseur of yours on Thursday—the poor fellow may not have you much longer. Ten sharp on Saturday—cheerio!"

I went back to the House feeling as if a sea-breeze had come along suddenly and blown away the black clouds that had been settling round me. There was a sort of excitement instead, and a new hope. I'd have been more excited still if I'd known that Mr. Garfield got his 'plane out that very evening and flew down to Weeroona.

CHAPTER II

WATTY

I DID my best to remember what Mr. Garfield had said about feeling in sympathy with the masseur when I went to him on Thursday; but it was no good. He was in one of his playful moods, making silly jokes all the time and laughing at them himself, and it was all I could do to follow the last part of Mr. Garfield's advice—to refrain from damaging him. I went off feeling that if I could keep my temper with that man twice a week until the end of term I should be more of a saint than anyone suspected.

But I'd stopped worrying about him when Saturday morning came and it was time to meet Mr. Garfield. It was a gorgeous morning, blue sky and hardly any wind; I reckoned it would be all right for the speed-boat. He was there on the stroke of ten in his big Daimler. It is an open car, and there was heaps of room for my leg to stretch out: and he'd brought a little cushion that just fitted into my back where it was wanted most.

"Temporary expedient," he said, tucking it in behind me. "I remember being glad enough of a cushion myself when they were patching up my remains after the War. You'll be chucking it away long before I did."

Mr. Garfield never talks much about the War, except to tell us funny things that happened. He has plenty of that sort of yarn. But Dad knew he had managed to enlist when he was well under enlisting age, and he had gone right through until the last few months, when he got blown up by a shell. Then he had had an awful time. It rather cheered me up to realize that he knew just what he was talking about when it came to accidents. If he hadn't minded using a cushion, then I needn't—and there was no doubt it was a comfort. I knew well enough how many bits of me could ache after sitting for a few hours at my desk every day in school.

We got out into the country as quickly as we could and had a ripping run, stopping at a wayside place for a cup of coffee. You hardly knew that car was moving when the spedo. said sixty. I could have gone on all day, it was so lovely to be among trees and paddocks again. But Mr. Garfield said he had an appointment at twelve, so we turned back. When we were getting near Artamon he said, "How did the Thursday appointment go?"

"Oh, same as usual," I told him. "Honest, Mr. Garfield, I don't think that chap's doing me a scrap of good. But I've got to stick to him, I suppose."

"Well, I'm inclined to think you needn't," he said—and my heart seemed to give a huge leap and come back with a thud. "Fact is, Peter, I'd heard one or two things about that fellow that I didn't like: and after I saw you on Tuesday I picked up one or two more. He's the fashion, and of course the country doctors don't hear everything about a man. I prefer someone a bit less fashionable and a bit more genuine."

"Do you really mean I won't have to go back to him?" I asked, greatly excited. "What would Dad and Mother say?"

"Well, the fact is, I've seen your people," he said. "I had nothing much to do, so I hopped down the other evening and paid them a call. I told them what I thought about your oily friend, and they were very horrified. Peter, you young ass, why don't you tell them a bit more in your letters? They hadn't an idea you weren't happy about going to him."

"Well, I can't start grousing in letters, can I?" I said, a bit hotly. "It would only worry them for nothing. And of course I knew I might be making a mistake. Goodness knows *I'm* no judge of a masseur."

"Perhaps not," he said. "Anyhow, there's one thing about which no mistake is going to be made, and that's your leg. So your people have left you in my hands, and I'm going to take you to the man who made a good job of me after the doctors had told me I'd never walk again. Cheerful people, doctors, but now and then they bark up the wrong tree. They didn't know old Watty Morgan—Watty doesn't hang out a shingle in Macquarie Street. But he's a healer all right, and what he doesn't know about bones isn't worth knowing."

"And I don't have to go to the other fellow on Monday?"

"You do not—nor any other day. And you're going to Watty Morgan now, if you don't mind sparing him a bit of your Saturday. He's arranged to be ready for you at twelve."

I didn't care for the idea too much, because it seemed a pity to spoil a perfectly good day; and as I'd never enjoyed my other visits to a masseur I didn't expect to enjoy this one. But of course I could only say it was O.K. by me and hope privately that the new man wouldn't leave me feeling as cheap as the old one always did. I did want to be in as decent form as I could for going in the speed-boat. Anyhow, I hadn't much time to think, for presently we turned down a side-street in North Sydney and pulled up in front of a cottage.

It was the rummest contrast to the swagger rooms the other masseur had in town. The cottage was very small, with ferns hanging all over the verandah. There was a very tidy garden with heaps of flowers, and the path up to the door was paved with white pebbles and edged with big shells. In one window I could see a splendid model of a sailing-ship. There was no sign of any brass

plate—no name anywhere at all to show that a masseur worked there. I said as much to Mr. Garfield, and he grinned.

"Oh, Watty isn't that kind," he said. "The doctors would probably howl at me for taking you to anyone so unprofessional. He's just an old sailor with a queer gift. But don't you worry on that account—he knows his job."

The door opened as we went up the path and an old man came to meet us. I'd never seen anyone like him. Not tall, but immensely broad; his hair very white, and his face as brown as an old saddle. He was clean-shaven, with blue eyes under fierce white bushy eyebrows. I got to know Watty's face very well later on when he worked over me, and it was a good face to have close, after the oily one I'd had all that term. There are precious few faces that you'd be able to stand near you for half an hour, but old Watty's was one of them.

"Well, you've brought the boy, Major," he said—and that surprised me, for Mr. Garfield had never let on that he'd been an officer. He shook hands with me, looking straight into my eyes. It was a very friendly look. "Come along in, and we'll give him an overhaul."

I was hoping we would go into the room where the ship was, and so we did. I edged over to have a look at her. She was a model of the *Cutty Sark*—beautifully done, with every sail and every bit of rigging complete. I'd have liked to examine her for a long time. Old Watty said, "Care for ships, bo'? I can tell ye lots of yarns about that one. A lovely ship she was—better than that mad contraption o' the Major's that he calls a speed-boat." He twinkled at me. "What d'ye think y'rself, eh?"

"She's prettier, all right," I said. "Only I'm going out in the speed-boat this afternoon, so I'm not going to run her down."

The old chap chuckled.

"Got to keep on the right side o' the skipper, eh, bo'? He's had me out in her a few times, and thankful I was to get ashore alive. I've lain out on the main upper t'gallant yard in a Cape Horn squall and not been as frightened as I was in that tearing steam-kettle of his. An' now he'll take up our time explaining carefully to me that she isn't a steam-kettle, if I give him a chance with his technicalities, so we'll just have a look at that leg o' yours instead."

"Well, I'll go and smoke a pipe on the verandah till I'm wanted," said Mr. Garfield.

I was glad he went out. Because suddenly I began to get deadly scared. I don't know how it was, but I had a feeling that the old man was terribly wise, and that he'd know as soon as he looked at it why my leg didn't get better; and perhaps he would have to tell me that it never would be much good to me again. All the fears I'd been trying for weeks and weeks to smother rushed up

over me, and my hands began to shake so that I could hardly get my braces undone. It was bad enough to have a stranger there to see what a complete fool I was, without Mr. Garfield seeing it.

Old Watty didn't seem to notice anything. Only he steadied me with his arm while I got out of my trousers, and then he just picked me up like a baby and put me on his leather-covered table. "No sense in putting any strain on it, bo'," he said, as if he was apologizing for lifting me. I hadn't minded it—there was a sort of comforting feeling in the way he did it. Then he looked hard at my leg for nearly a minute, I suppose, but it felt like ten. I stared at his face, wondering what he was thinking, what he saw: and I began to shake all over. I couldn't stop myself. He looked at my face then. I was chewing my under-lip, and my throat felt all stiff. It is pretty hard to write it all down, but I can't explain Watty unless I do. Not that anyone could really explain Watty Morgan, though.

He came nearer and patted my shoulder. "Easy, bo', easy," he said. "Don't hold y'rself in—let y'rself go slack. I can't do anything for ye unless ye relax. Been holding y'rself in too long, I reckon—your mind's hurtin' more than your leg." And he went and stood behind me at the head of the table and began to stroke my forehead with both hands, slow, quiet movements. "Shut y'r eyes for a minute and let every muscle in y'r body go flop. Just as if you were too tired to hold out any longer."

Well, I felt like that suddenly. I just went limp all over. And the hands went on stroking, and the queerest feeling of peace came over me, and it seemed to flow from his hands. I can't explain it, even to myself. All the misery and fear I'd been bottling up seemed drawn out of me, and it wasn't only peace that flowed in, but strength, too. I believe I'd have gone fast asleep in a few minutes—I'd forgotten all about my leg. But the hands stopped presently, and he came round and smiled at me.

"That's better. Keep slack now, and don't worry about anything: I'll take over the worries for a bit. I'll warn ye if I have to hurt ye—but I know 'twasn't the fear of a bit of pain was the trouble."

I was glad in a vague sort of way that he understood that, but I didn't seem to care what he did to me now, because the peaceful feeling was still there. He began to feel my leg, inch by inch, as if he was exploring it with his fingers. There was hardly any pain, even when he was feeling round the break. He took a long while over it, going back over some parts; now and then he would pause for a moment, keeping up a gentle pressure. I watched his face, and though it doesn't sound sense, it seemed as if he was actually *listening* with his fingers.

Then he made me do a lot of movements with the leg while he felt it. That

hurt a bit; nothing to speak of, only the peaceful feeling began to die away and I got anxious again. He seemed to know that at once. “Easy, bo’,” he said, under his breath, and his hands went more quickly and firmly. I got the idea that he had suddenly found something he’d been looking for. And then he stood back and looked at me, and his eyes twinkled.

“Been a long time, haven’t I, but I’ve got it, bo’,” he said. “It’ll take a bit of handling, but that’s neither here nor there. The one thing you can hang on to is that when I’ve finished with ye there’ll not be a pin to choose between those two legs of yours—one’ll be as good as the other.”

Well, I blubbed like a kid. I couldn’t help it; it just had to come. I never thought for one second of doubting him—I *knew*; and if I hadn’t howled I believe I’d have simply burst with the great wave of relief that swept through me. You have to know what it feels like to believe you’re going to be a cripple to understand.

Old Watty understood all right. He just patted my shoulder and said, “That’s no shame to ye—do y’good, bo’. I’ll go and tell the Major.” And he went out quickly, and I heard his voice on the verandah, and I think I heard Mr. Garfield say, “Thank God.” But he’d never let me see he was one bit anxious.

Watty came back presently, and he told me I’d have to come to him twice a week for a while. He said he couldn’t begin the real treatment until he’d got my leg obedient. I didn’t understand it, but he said that I’d worried until all the muscles and things were tense and stiff, and he’d got to work that out of them. That’s as near as I can put it, and I suppose any doctor would laugh at the idea; but I bet Watty knew what he was talking about.

“We’ll have a few minutes now to show ye what I mean,” he said. “There’ll be no pain this time; just let y’rself go limp, so as there’ll be no resistance.”

What he did then was just magic. He drew his hands down each side of my leg, but he never touched it. Over and over again he brought his hands down in long sweeping movements, an inch or so from the skin, and at the end of each sweep he flicked his fingers as if he was flicking away something bad. The leg was pretty sore and stiff from handling, but the pain simply drained out of it. He worked like that for five minutes. Then he stood back and said, “Now get down and walk about.”

I wouldn’t have known it was my old leg. It felt cool and light, and there was scarcely any pain at all. I walked round the room, almost afraid to believe it—and then I *ran*. Only a few strides, but I just *had* to feel I could run again. Watty caught hold of my arm to stop me, but he was laughing.

“Easy, bo’. You’ll run all right, but give it time.”

“But what did you do to it?” I yelled. “You never touched it.”

“Ah, that’s more than I can tell you, bo’.” He was grave all of a sudden. “That’s healing, but if ye ask me to explain it I don’t know any more than ye do y’rself. It’s a power right enough, but it’s not mine. ’Twas an old woman in Scotland showed me I could use it, but she couldn’t tell me where it came from, nor how it works. Better leave it at that. And if I was you I’d put my pants on.”

“But is it going to last?” I asked him, not caring at the moment if I ever put on trousers again.

“It ought to last most of to-day. You may wake up to-morrow aching as usual, but it won’t feel as bad now, because you’ll know it’s only a matter of time until y’r a well man. There’s handling to be done to that leg to get at the root of the trouble o’ course, but the handling’ll be easier because of the healing treatment. An’ each day we’ll finish up with that, an’ the effect’ll last longer.”

I got into my things slowly, feeling utterly bewildered. Watty went to a sink in the corner and washed his hands under the tap. When I was ready he said:

“Remember one thing, bo’; you an’ I have got to work as a team. It’s y’r mind I want working—cut out all the worrying thoughts an’ try to feel all over that you’re getting better. *Tell* your leg it’s getting better: over an’ over again, ’specially when you’re in bed. An’ practise going slack an’ limp before y’ do it: no use doing it with your teeth clenched as if ye were bullying the thing. An’ if it seems just foolishness to ye, well . . . think how foolish ye’d have thought anyone who’d told you yesterday that an old sailor-man could help ye by stroking the air round y’r leg. But ye know now that there’s something in it.”

“By Jove, I do!” I said. “Only I can’t understand a thing about it. It’s like magic in fairy-tales.”

“An’ there may be more in fairy-tales than meets the eye—an’ more magic goin’ in the world than most people think. Keep an open mind, bo’, an’ never get too wise to believe in simple things.” He grinned at me: I expect he knew there was mighty little chance of me ever getting too much wisdom.

Mr. Garfield was beaming all over when we went out to him. We said good-bye to Watty, and then we buzzed into Sydney and had a late lunch at his club. That would have been rather thrilling for me on an ordinary day, for I had never been in a men’s club before, and there were lots of interesting people there who all seemed to know Mr. Garfield. But to-day my head was too full of

what Watty had done to me: I couldn't think of anything else. And I was simply aching to ask Mr. Garfield about it.

He made it a bit clearer when we were having coffee in a quiet room after lunch, though he said straight out that nobody could really explain it.

"Some people call it a form of magnetism," he said. "I suppose that here and there one comes across a person who is extra-highly charged with magnetic force. We've all got a bit of it, you know. I expect you noticed when you were ill that there were certain people you preferred to touch you—people whose touch had a sort of easing in it."

"Dad, every time," I said. "I always hoped he'd be there when I had to be shifted about. But I thought that was just because he's so strong."

"Partly that. And he'd be caring to help you, too—tremendously. But very likely that would be part of magnetism. It's one of these queer indefinite things you can't put a name to. Watty calls it 'the power,' and he always sticks to it that he's nothing but a sort of channel for it. I've never met anyone like Watty, but I've seen a man in Ireland who had an amazing power of healing animals by touch. I've seen bleeding stop under his touch—bad bleeding, too."

"But, Mr. Garfield, Watty *didn't* touch me when he made me better. That's what got me beaten," I said.

"Well," he said slowly, "some people believe we don't end with our skins: that we've got a sort of magnetic area round us, something you can't see, but it's part of you all the same."

I thought over that for a moment, and light dawned on me.

"Gosh, that's like what Mother calls 'hot-boy-after football,' isn't it?" I said. "If you're in the changing-room with a lot of chaps after a hard match you know all about that—it's there all right, only you can't see it."

Mr. Garfield gave a hoot of laughter and choked over his coffee.

"Well, I wouldn't say it was the same thing," he said when he had recovered. "But if it gives you something to go upon in trying to understand the magnetic area, then stick to it, Peter, old man. I'll admit that I'm glad of any help myself in understanding it, though I believe it's there. Let's get down to the Harbour—a speed-boat is less strain on my brain."

So we went down, and the boat was beyond my wildest dreams. There was nothing on the water that afternoon that could touch her. We took her into all the bays, and we went round the flagship and the destroyers slowly, because I'd never had a chance of seeing them at such close quarters. They carry fighting 'planes, and we had the luck to see one take off just as we got near. There were lots of sailors in view, looking over the side. I said I supposed they

were thinking about war; everybody was constantly talking of the chances of war coming. But Mr. Garfield said it was much more likely they were thinking of the girls they'd leave behind them.

Then we ran out into the open water and as hard as we could go, nearly to Manly, dodging ferry-boats and people who were out fishing, and flashing across the bow of a big tramp steamer coming in. But we slowed up when we got near the Admiral's pinnace going over to the flagship, for Mr. Garfield said it is not wise to give an admiral the wash of a speed-boat. So we passed her at a polite speed and then he opened the throttle again and shot down to the Bridge.

I'd never been under the Bridge before in a small boat, and it did look huge, towering over us. A train was going across it, the roar sounding deafening, and there was a solid stream of cars making for the north. We went on and cruised round the wharves, looking at the shipping from everywhere in the world: French and German and American and Italian, and a big ship in from the Dutch East Indies. I don't remember half of them, but it was rather a thrill to see them all and to imagine where they'd been. And I liked looking at the men we could see aboard them, foreigners of ever so many different nations. Lots of them waved to us in a friendly way and shouted greetings.

"They all look good sorts," I said.

"Of course they are," Mr. Garfield answered. "And to think people go on making wars! Isn't it rot, Peter!" He looked up at a huge German ship. "I wonder how often she'll be here again."

"She won't be, if there's another war," I said.

"No. And I wouldn't mind betting she's prepared to cut and run at short notice if things get more threatening. Too many of them got caught in harbour last time: they don't mean to chance it again if they can help it. Oh, well—don't let's spoil a good afternoon by thinking about war. It may never come, anyhow."

CHAPTER III

CARRYING ON

MR. GARFIELD let me run the boat for a while when we left the wharves and went exploring up the western end of the harbour. But he wouldn't let me take her at any speed, because he said that unfortunately he was already too well known to the water police, and if they caught him with a person of my age in control he would probably be shot at dawn. So we went quietly, and I loved every minute of it. I had never handled anything but launches before, big family ones. It was a revelation to me to see how the *Watersprite* answered to every touch—like riding a thoroughbred after you've been used to a cart-horse. I resolved that I would not tell Dad this, for he thinks our *Albatross* is the best launch ever built, and he scorns and despises speed-boats.

Mr. Garfield took the wheel again when we came back to the Bridge, and we had one more spin right round the Harbour. There was a little breeze now, and the water was rather choppy. We seemed to skim over the surface of the waves, barely touching them, throwing great sheets of spray from the bow as we raced ahead: sometimes we met a slightly bigger wave at the wrong moment, and then we became rather damp. But it was a gorgeous feeling—almost like flying, and yet with more excitement than flying. So far as my experience goes, at any rate, but then it hasn't gone very far. I asked Mr. Garfield, and he grinned in a queer way and said it depended entirely on what you happened to be doing in the 'plane. I expect he was remembering the War.

We were both very hungry when we landed, so we drove back to town and had a huge meal at a restaurant in George Street. I realized as I was finishing my last ice that I hadn't eaten such a meal since before my smash. Mr. Garfield looked pleased when I told him so, and asked how my leg was feeling. I'd hardly thought about it all the afternoon. It was starting to ache a little—nothing to what it usually was, but just enough to remind me that I had a leg.

"Well, would it stand a cinema?" he asked. "There's a pretty good film at the Plaza, I hear."

I said in a hurry, yes, he could bet it would. I hadn't seen a show since the Christmas hols, and I'd taken it for granted that I'd be going back to school when we'd finished tea. But this had not been Mr. Garfield's idea at all. So we went. It was a ripping film, and there was a Mickey Mouse cartoon that made us both rock with laughter. We came out feeling ready for more food, and after

that he drove me to school. At least, we ended at school, but we went miles and miles out of our way in going there, right out into the country again. There was a full moon, and everything looked wonderful: we went along slowly, just yarning. No one can yarn better than Mr. Garfield: he is just full of queer stories. At the last we pulled up in a quiet place and he began to talk about my leg.

I don't know how he managed it, but somehow he got out of me all about the beastly time I had had with it, and how deadly scared I had been that I was going to be a cripple for keeps. And how my temper had got simply foul, so that I felt I hated everybody. He just listened and asked a question now and then, and nodded. It was rather a relief to tell him, once I got started, because I'd had to bottle up everything from my own people, and you do get so sick of feeling bottled up. And I knew he understood.

"I'm glad you told me, old chap," he said when I'd finished—and I hadn't spared myself. "Nobody can keep all that shut up inside him without paying for it: it's always better to get it off your chest. Now you listen to me. I want you to realize that it's all perfectly natural, and not to waste time by bothering your head about it. We're none of us quite normal when pain and fear get hold of us. Fear is a deadly thing. I know all about it, Peter: I've been through the mill myself, and there were times when I felt like a terrified kid—and I was older than you, by a long way. But I found myself again, thanks to old Watty Morgan; and so will you."

"I thought you'd think I was an awful rotter," I mumbled.

"It would be the pot calling the kettle black if I did. Sheer waste of time, too, Peter; and to go on worrying about what's past only shows you haven't beaten fear yet. I can guess the sort of thing Watty has been saying to you; carry on with his advice, and never look back. And we'll make the next holidays the best ever. More plans are buzzing in my head—I'll let you into them when the swarm settles."

I went back to school feeling on top of the world. Mr. Denison—he's our House Master—met me in the corridor and said, "Hullo, Forsyth—you look very fit," and he is a dreamy sort of man, a frightful swot at maths, but renowned for never noticing anything. All the people in my dorm were asleep. I got undressed with as little row as possible, and when I was in bed I made myself go slack all over and started telling my leg it was getting better, like Watty had said.

It's not so easy as it sounds. Before I knew where I was every muscle in my body had gone tight again, and I was saying, "You're getting better—you're getting better," with my teeth clenched as if I was trying to knock

somebody out. And the boy in the next bed woke up and growled, “What on earth’s the matter, Forsyth?—are you having a blooming nightmare?” So I unclenched myself, and went to sleep without knowing I was going.

. . . . .

I worked very hard at that business until I realized that one doesn’t need to work hard at all, but just to go limp and feel peaceful and talk to a leg just as one would talk to a scared puppy. And it certainly paid. It made me feel better right away to think that I had part of the job to do myself, not just screwing myself up all the time to stand being lame and to hide being afraid. Of course I didn’t really believe at first that I could do the leg any good, but whether I believed it or not, I had promised Watty to do it, so I just carried on as an experiment. It was like acting a part at first, trying to feel it was real. After a bit I didn’t need to act—I knew it was helping. I felt different all over, and the wish to bite people’s heads off had quite departed. This must have been a great relief to the fellows in my dorm, but they never said anything.

It was splendid fun going to Watty. That man had been all over the world, mostly in sailing-ships; he had been shipwrecked five times, and some of the fights he’d had with Chinese pirates were simply hair-raising. He knew the South Sea Islands and all the sea inside the Barrier Reef: there was a big glass-fronted cupboard in his front room full of gorgeous coral and every sort of shell I’d ever heard of, and lots that I hadn’t; and sea-snakes and queer fish in bottles of spirit. All his cottage was full of curios he’d picked up in different countries, and he could spin yarns about them all. I used to get there as quickly as I could after school so that I could look at them, and hear him talk. I learned such a lot about the sea from Watty that there were times when I wondered if being a sailor wouldn’t be even better than helping Dad to run the station when I left school. However, you can’t have horses and Hereford cattle at sea, so I decided that I’d have to stick to the land.

Watty never talked when he was working at my leg. Every bit of him was concentrated on it from the moment I was on the table; I soon learned not to say a word. I liked watching him; those keen old eyes of his looked as if they were seeing right inside the leg. He always wore a low-cut sleeveless singlet, and his chest and arms were wonderfully tattooed. Each arm had a sort of dragon-headed snake winding round it, with a fierce red and blue head near the wrist, and there were more dragons twining and coiling on his chest. It was beautiful work: I never got tired of looking at it. And when he was handling me and his great muscles moved and rippled, so did the dragons. You’d have sworn they were alive.

When my treatment was over we used to go out to his kitchen and have a cup of tea. That was some kitchen: Watty called it the galley, and it was like Watty himself and everything in his house—as clean as a new pin. It was a tiny room, really like a ship's galley; there was a certain place for each pot and pan, and they were all polished like silver. We'd brew tea and eat ship's biscuits with cheese and lots of butter, and Watty would yarn about his adventures. I asked him there where he'd got his tattooing done.

"Oh, that was in Burma, bo'," he said. "Silly thing to spend money on, of course: but when we were young we reckoned we weren't real sailor-men until we'd got a bit of tattooing. Most of us had ships, an' a good few had their girls' names branded on 'em—*that's* foolish, if you like, 'cause once you're tattooed it's there for life, an' how's a young chap to know he's goin' to find his girl waitin' for him at the end of a long voyage? An' if she was, he mightn't be so keen on her himself by that time. An' if a poor sailor marries a girl called Jenny an' she finds 'Alice' tattooed over his heart there's apt to be trouble." He chuckled. "I knew a native in Rangoon that made no end of money altering tattooed names. Clever, he was. A pal of mine had 'Mabel' on his chest, that he was desperate anxious to get rid of, an' this native worked it all into the body of a dolphin. But it cost him a month's pay, poor chap!"

"How do they do it, Watty?" I asked. "Does it hurt much?"

Watty said, "It looks the simplest thing ever ye saw, bo', but I'd hate to try it on anyone myself. I got mine done one time when my ship was lying in the Rangoon River, loading rice. The bosun put me on to a real artist, Maung Thit was the nearest I can get to his name. Queer little chap—he didn't seem to have joints like a white man's. He'd make me lie on the floor, an' he'd squat on his heels beside me an' hold my arm down with his toes. You try doing that with a pal, an' see how easy you find it!"

"Did he jab a needle into you, or what?"

"A needle, d'ye say, bo'?" Watty screwed up his face. "Bunches of 'em was what he used. He had a little brass tube about ten inches long; there's a heavy plug of lead in one end, and into the other he sticks a plug holding needles: two needles for fine lines, more for broad ones. He'd a whole lot of those needle plugs laid out, just like those different instruments of torture a dentist has to stick into his drill. An' he'd little pots of paint, red and blue an' green, that he dipped the needles into. An' there he squats beside you, jabbing in the business end, an' the weight of the lead plug drives it home."

"It doesn't sound much fun," I said.

"It's not," said Watty grimly. "Not that I'd say it was severe, but it's a nasty, nagging little pain, and . . . well, you get tired of it. An' if he gets on a

nerve he gives you a jab that 'ud make you jump—if you didn't know that jumping 'ud only drive it deeper. So you keep on lying still, wondering why you were such a fool as to let him start on you at all."

I asked if the tattooer painted the design on him first. Watty shook his head.

"Some do, but my old Maung Thit was an artist. He never drew a line on me. Didn't want any design—he was just painting a picture with needles. He couldn't do it all in one go, of course. The time varies—some victims can't stand as much as others. It took him more than a week to decorate me, a bit every night. It wasn't too good goin' on loading rice every day; the place swells up a bit an' gets pretty sore."

"Doesn't the paint poison you?"

"They're too careful for that. Everything's very clean: they only use vegetable dyes, an' they're mighty particular. What they do to customers like us is only a circumstance to their own tattooing. Every Burmese man is tattooed in a solid pattern from his waist to his knees—looks like a pair of shorts. An' on his chest he has all sorts of queer designs done in red. Talismans they are—charms against poison or wounds or devils. I don't know how it works against the devils an' things, but there's one thing it beats, an' that's rheumatism—our bosun was stiff with the rheumatics, an' he reckoned he'd have to give up the sea. Old Maung Thit told him that a big tattooing would cure him. Bosun didn't believe him, but being fair desperate, he was willing to try anything once. So he let Maung Thit do him solid, the Burmese way, an' long before it was done he wished very hearty that he'd just stuck to his own aches an' pains."

"But did they go away?" I asked.

"You bet they did, bo'. Bosun never had another twinge o' rheumatics as long as I knew him. Counter-irritation I suppose: I've heard you can cure rheumatics by letting bees sting you, an' I expect that's much the same thing. Anyhow, there was Bosun, tattooed shorts an' talismans an' all, for the rest of his days." Watty grinned. "I don't know how he got on about devils an' wounds, but the talismans didn't save him from poison—he got a rare old go of ptomaine on the voyage home, along of a bad tin of sardines."

I said, "Perhaps it wasn't that sort of poisoning that old Maung Thit reckoned on."

"I don't expect it was, bo'," said Watty. "More like poisoned arrows and snake-bite an' such: those ideas go back thousands of years, an' they'd never be allowing for tinned fish. But Bosun was pretty sour over it—once his rheumatics went he believed he was safe for the whole issue. Anyhow, it's just

another example that there's more ways of healing than the doctors know about. But don't you go carrying that idea too far, bo'—you call in a good doctor quick an' lively if ever you get anything really wrong with you."

"I'll jolly well call in *you* if it's a crocked leg," I said in a hurry, and old Watty looked rather pleased.

We had lots of yarns like that, sitting in the galley after my treatments. Sometimes we sat in the back garden—it was just as well kept as the front, and there were ripping chairs Watty had made out of old barrels. But generally it was too cold. It was a bad winter, easterly gales nearly all the time, and Sydney can be chilly enough then for anything. As a rule I never give a hoot about bad weather, but that's easy enough when you can keep going hard all the time, playing games and all that: I found it was very different when I had to go slow. And even though my leg was steadily getting better Watty wouldn't let me take any chances with it. I had to watch out all the time for fear of a rick or a stumble.

You can bet I watched out, but it didn't suit the rest of me. I kept getting colds, things I never used to have, and often I felt as stupid as a boiled owl with them, and my work in school wasn't anything to write home about. Watty could always make me feel better with his queer healing—I used to wish I could go to him every day. Those afternoons with him were the best of the whole week: I did look forward to them. And quite often when we were sitting in the galley Mr. Garfield would walk in and have tea with us and join in the talk. I could stay later when he came, because he always drove me back to school.

Then a day came when Watty said after he'd worked over me a bit, "I'm very pleased with this old leg o' yours, bo'—so pleased that I'm going to hurt ye a bit. It won't be too bad, an' it'll be over in a jiffy—hang on to the table."

That was all, and I had hardly time to grip the edges of the table and what pluck I had, before his hands were hard round my leg and he gave it a queer wrench. It hurt all right; I believe I'd have yelled if he hadn't warned me. Something gave inside the leg: nothing much, but whatever it was, it satisfied Watty. He stood back, looking down at me with his eyes dancing.

"That's what I've been after all the time, bo'—but I had to get the leg to a certain point before I tried it. An' it came off easier than I'd hoped. Mightn't have been so easy if you hadn't worked with me all the time. The Major's was a worse job, but you had youth on your side. Well, now—two more visits, just to soothe everything down, an' then you can say good-bye to old Watty."

"But I don't want to!" I exclaimed. "I say, can't I come to see you apart from treatments?"

He looked pleased at that.

“Sure ye can bo’. There’ll always be a cup of tea going, an’ a yarn in the galley after working hours. An’ don’t forget you’ve promised me an invitation to the sports at that school of yours—I’ll be there to see ye run. Not that I hold much with school just now for ye at all; if I had the say, I’d have ye running wild this winter, not sitting at a desk. But then, I’m only an old sailor-man, an’ no great shakes on edication. Lie back, now, and we’ll finish up before we put on the kettle.”

I’d never felt such power as there was that time in Watty’s hands when he did the sweeping movements—it was like electric currents running down me. Perhaps it was because he was feeling extra happy at having brought off what he wanted. And when I got off the table I knew something big had been done, for a dragging sort of feeling that had always bothered me had completely gone out of my leg. We went into the galley, and I opened my eyes at the sight of the table. There was a white cloth on it, a thing Watty and I never had usually; and besides the tin of biscuits and the butter and cheese there was a whopping great fruit-cake with almonds all over the top.

“I say, you are going it, Watty!” I remarked.

“I am that,” he said, chuckling. “Ever seen a cake like that before, bo’?”

“Well, I have, at home,” I admitted. “Mother and Miss Tarrant make ’em like that—it’s the only sort of cake Dad thinks worth eating.”

Watty chuckled more deeply as he put on the kettle.

“I reckoned ye’d know the brand. Came this morning, that did, in a great little hamper from a place called Weeroona——”

“Mother sent it——?” I yelled.

“She did—an’ there was a roast fowl in that hamper, an’ home-made jam an’ pickles an’ all the corners filled up with fruit—yes, an’ a bottle of something that I’d reckon your dad put in. An’ a letter I’ll not forget, ’cause when she wrote it your mother didn’t know for certain I could cure your leg. But she wrote as if she did, bless her heart. Well, I’ll have something to tell her to-night when I write back. So I put a cloth on, bo’, just to be respectful to the cake. An’ I telephoned to the Major, an’ if he’s not here soon he ought to be: I was pretty sure I’d have good news for him this evening. He’s a good friend to have, is the Major, eh, bo’?”

“He’s all that,” I said. “I’ll never forget how he’s stuck to me ever since I was hurt.”

“An’ to me,” said Watty. “Lots of men would have given me a cheque an’ forgotten all about me, once they were out of my hands. Not him: I’m a well-

off man this day because of all the people he's sent to me, but that's not what I think of most—it's the way he's come to see me an' been my friend. You'd hardly believe the nights we've sat talking here, or at his flat, an' the times we've had in his boats. Though I tell him I could sometimes wish he hadn't talked so much about me—I'd have easier week-ends if half the footballers round Sydney didn't fill up the place getting cured of all that comes to them in Saturday matches!"

"By jove, do they really, Watty?" I said, greatly interested. "Tell me about them."

"They're a mixed lot," he said. "Nice boys, when they get to know you. They started making hay of the house an' garden at first, while they were waiting their turns, an' whatever I said didn't make any difference you'd notice. An' I couldn't use violence to them, what with each of 'em having some sort of a strain or rick, an' me being fond of football. So I got me an umpire's whistle; an' next Saturday night when two gay lads started playin' catches with a bit of my best coral, I blew my whistle. An' then I sat down an' filled my pipe."

I yelled with laughter at the dreamy way he said it. "What happened, Watty?"

"Well, the boy on the table sang out, 'Hey, what are you getting at? You haven't finished with me!' An' that was true, for I'd hardly begun. An' they all gathered round, for it's wonderful what an effect an umpire's whistle has on them. They fired about fifty questions at me, but I never answered one of 'em until I'd lit my pipe an' had it well going. So then I told 'em, very peaceable an' friendly, that whenever any of 'em got above himself I'd blow my whistle; an' whenever I blew my whistle I'd sit down an' have a quiet pipe before I went on workin'. An' I smoked that pipe right through while they argued an' pleaded with me, an' their Saturday night slipping away. Meek as lambs they've been ever since—you'd be surprised. Nice boys, but a little headstrong with an old man like me—until they sized me up. But they sent me a turkey last Christmas."

"Gosh, I wish I'd seen them!" I said. "What about new ones, Watty? Do they have to learn the whistle?"

"It's only been used that once, bo'. They passed the word round. There was one evening when a new one got playing the fool, but the rest of 'em were on to him like the pack after the ball. Regular Sunday-school class they are, now." He filled the tea-pot. "There's the Major coming up the path, I believe."

Mr. Garfield came in, hurrying.

"I was afraid I was late and you two might have eaten all the biscuits," he

said. He stared at the table. “Hullo, Watty! is it a party?”

“Just us three,” Watty said placidly. “But it’s a party all right, Major, what with a cake from Weeroona an’ the best news yet. I’ve got that leg where I wanted it—this chap won’t need me after next week.”

I’ll always remember how Mr. Garfield looked then. He thumped me on the back, and Watty too, and we shook hands all round; and then we had an enormous tea. I went back to school hardly able to believe my luck.

The worst part was saying good-bye to Watty after my last treatment. The leg felt as good as the other by that time, but I liked old Watty so much that I could have put up with a few more aches to have more visits to him. But I hadn’t time to feel blue about it for long, because three days after that I got a letter from Binkie that sent me just sky-high.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT BINKIE TOLD

I HAD just come in from watching an inter-school football match when I got Binkie's letter. It was a raw cold day, and even huddled up in an overcoat and muffler—things I hate wearing, anyhow—I couldn't keep warm. And the other side beat us hollow, which didn't do much to improve matters. I was sneezing as I went upstairs; and of course I had to run into Matron.

"Getting another cold, are you, Forsyth?" She said it in a resigned way. "Come to my room when you've got your coat off, and I'll give you a dose of medicine." She sighed. "Not that I suppose it will stop it."

Matron is regarded as one of those glum people who always look out for the worst and make you feel a sort of criminal if you've anything wrong with you. Until this term she'd never had a chance of giving me any medicine at all, so she had made up for lost time by pouring doses into me at any odd moment. I knew it was no good arguing with her, so I took the beastly stuff and went downstairs wishing it wasn't so long until the end of Term. Even though my leg was better, I was out of everything, and people still kept telling me to be careful with it. They flatly refused to let me do gym. or kick a ball, and as far as I could see, that was going to be the way until the holidays. I felt sick of everything.

Davies, who is in my form, came bolting upstairs as I came down.

"There's a letter in the rack for you, old man," he said as he passed me.

I put on a spurt, because my letters are generally from home. This was in Binkie's writing, and I took it into the library to read it in peace. It said:

> DEAR PETER,
>
> Mother was going to write to you, but an unexpected gang of callers have come, so she told me to write instead because there is exsiting knews, and she does not want it to miss to-day's post.
>
> Mother has been getting letters from Mr. Garfield and one from your Watty Morgan, and they each say the same sort of thing about you. They say you are a bit under the wether, even if your leg is better. I think they have a lot of sense, because they said straight out that school wasn't much good to you this winter, and Mr. Garfield said why not give him a chance of getting into the sun again, because

the climat this year is realy not worth calling a climat at all, being only east winds and rain, mixed up with everybody talking about War coming. And he said you have had a long time of worry yourself, Mrs. Forsyth, and a change would do you no harm, and I don't suppose it would hurt Binkie. And Watty said it would be good for that leg of his to have plenty of sea-bathing because there is nothing like swimming, why not take him where the water is warm.

So all this and a lot more that they said set Dad and Mother thinking, speshally Dad, because Mother has been looking a bit queer lately herself, and she has been worrying about you. And Mr. Garfield sent them a whole lot of pamphlets and things about the Barrier Reef islands, where it appears to always be warm even in winter.

And at this point my hair began to stand straight up all over my head, because I felt what was coming; and of all the places I've ever wanted to see the Barrier Reef is easily first. But I could hardly believe it until I read on:

And we all studdied them. Mr. Garfield knows a man named Mr. Burgess, who has an island and a wife, and they run this Island, and lots of tourists go there. It is called Kongai Island, and it seems a lovely one. Well, the end of it is, they made up their minds, Dad and Mother, I mean, and we are all going there, right off. Dad will write to the school to tell them. Peter, I am nearly bursting, so it is hard to write carmly, and I expect you will be bursting, too, by now, and so is Tarry, though she is carm in front of Dad and Mother, but not with me and Clem. We are to sail in a ship called the *Kalara*, which leaves Sydney next Tuesday. That is only six days now, and it will be five when you get this. We are going down in the car on Sunday and colect you early on Monday morning, because of buying clothes and things.

Clem is going round in a kind of daze, because it seems that to go to the Barrier Reef has always been his secret ambishun, and now it is coming off. Tarry has given up any idea of teaching us, until we go. She says it was always an up-hill job, and now it is just a wash-out. But if you had seen Tarry waltzing round the schoolroom table after she heard the glad knews you would say there wasn't much to choose between us.

Mail's going, so good-bye from

BINKS.

. . . . .

Well, I just sat and stared at the letter and tried to realize all it meant. I don't know how many times I read it; and I counted up the days over and over, Friday—Saturday—Sunday—Monday—*Tuesday*. Only one more day of school work—I wondered how I'd ever get through it if my head went on whirling as it was whirling now. I'd never been on a real ship; I'd never been out of New South Wales except for a launch trip up the coast, and though that trip had included a good deal I wasn't keen on remembering, I had just loved being on the sea. And now, instead of slogging on as best I could until the end of term, here were all my wildest dreams coming true.

I had a longing to see Mr. Garfield and Watty and tell them what I thought of them for bringing it off, only I knew I wouldn't get leave. This was what Mr. Garfield must have meant when he said his head was buzzing with plans—I'd often wondered what they were, only of course I couldn't ask him. Anyhow, I had never dreamed of anything happening before the holidays—how could I?

The bell went for tea, but I didn't hear it. I might have sat on there indefinitely, only a fellow who was reading in the far corner got up and went out. He stopped, though, in the doorway, and said, "The bell's gone, Forsyth—I say, you haven't had bad news or anything, have you?"

I said, "No, I'm only going to the Barrier Reef."

I must have sounded a bit dotty, but he just thought I was joking. He said, "Well, you'd better have tea on your way, or Mr. Denison will have something to say about it." So I came out of my daze and we made tracks for the dining-room. I told him on the way that it was really true, and that I was actually going next Tuesday, and he passed round the word. The other fellows were simply green with envy. Two of them had been to Kongai Island, and they said it was the best of all and that I was dead lucky to be going there: and they told yarns about the fishing that sounded like fairy-tales. One boy said, "You'll look funny if war breaks out while you're there—you might have to stay on the island the whole time it lasts." I felt I could bear that quite well, though he drew unpleasant pictures of us having nothing but fish to eat.

Anyhow, food didn't seem to mean anything to me then. I drank three cups of tea, but I couldn't eat a bit: and of course they ragged me about feeling sea-sick already. I went into evening prep, wondering how on earth I was going to keep my mind on Latin prose. But I didn't have to worry long, because just as I was chewing the end of my pen hopelessly there came a message that I was wanted in the drawing-room. And there I found Mr. Garfield!

He pumped my hand and said, "Well, how does going to sea suit you?—I

can see you've heard the news." I told him it was all his doing, and I tried to thank him, but he wouldn't be thanked. "You needn't think it's all on your account, old chap," he said. "All those people of yours at Weeroona could do with a change. Last summer was a scorcher, and it's years since your father and mother were off the place. I've been using you as a lever to uproot the whole bunch, and now I've done it—and I'm as pleased as Punch."

He looked it, too—he was grinning like a boy. And he had another shock waiting for me.

"Your father telephoned to me this morning and asked me to see to your berths on the ship, so that's all done," he said. "I suggested to him that this week-end at school might be a little long for you, Peter, and possibly you'd find it rather hard to work. Simply consideration on my part for the poor wretches who have to teach you, of course. So, knowing the Head and I were friends, he left it to me to fix up. Very reasonable man, the Head: he saw at once that you'd only be a disturbing element in the school, talking of reefs and sharks and things. Done any of that already?"

I said, "No, the other chaps are doing it for me at the rate of knots. I don't seem able to think of anything yet, except to count the days till Tuesday. My head's all spinning."

"I don't wonder," said he. "They seem to be revolving in circles at Weeroona—I had a remarkable note from Binkie. Well, I think you had better come and sizzle down at my flat; and the Head agrees. It will be a bit quiet for you, but that won't hurt you. Like to come?"

"*Would* I?" I gasped. "You don't mean—now?"

"Now as ever is," he said. "Cut along and get your pyjamas and oddments. I'll have a talk to your House Master while you're doing it. No need to hurry. We'll come out again and get the rest of your things on Saturday—not that you'll want a whole heap for the island."

I was cramming my things into my week-end suit-case when who should blow in, to my horror, but Matron. She blew up, too, for a moment—she actually thought I was running away from school. As if anyone who was doing that would hamper himself with a suit-case! However, I explained matters, and she cooled down. Do you know, I'd never imagined how decent that stern woman could be! She said, "Well, I'm very glad, Forsyth, because school really isn't much good to you this term. I hope you'll have a splendid time and come back fit for cricket and everything." Then she became matron-ish again, only in a sensible way; she pointed out that the suit I was wearing had seen better days and wouldn't look too well in Mr. Garfield's flat, and that the pyjamas I'd packed had been worn for nearly a week. She didn't make me

change, but she packed my good things for me, talking like a human being while she did it, and she put in things I'd clean forgotten, such as handkerchiefs. She said, "Are you all right for money? I could fix you up if you're short." And of course I was short, so I borrowed five shillings from her, and she assured me it didn't matter if I didn't pay it back before next term. Well, it just shows how you can get an entirely wrong notion of people. I felt rather a worm when I remembered having spoken of her as a cross old hag. We shook hands quite affectionately, and she called out, "Good luck and a good time!" as I went off.

Mr. Denison was just as decent. I didn't have to do any explaining to him; he seemed to think it quite natural that I should be clearing out. Probably he was relieved, because I'm not much use to the House except at games, and games were off the map for me. We made a little polite conversation for a couple of minutes, and then Mr. Garfield said we must go.

In the car he said, "Now go slack, old chap." So I just slumped in my seat and felt blissful, and neither of us said another word for an hour. He drove slowly, and I don't know where we went: quiet roads all the time. I was nearly asleep when the car stopped in front of his garage. It was at the foot of a big block of flats. We put the car away and went up in a lift to the top floor.

I'd always thought flats were just little collections of rooms, but his wasn't like that. We went into a square hall where there were stacks of all sorts of native weapons on the walls over low bookcases full of books. Gorgeous brass and copper things gleamed on top of the bookshelves. The first room was a dining-room, and it opened into a very big one that was on the corner of the building, so that its long windows looked out on two sides. More books and curios were there, and just the right sort of easy chairs and couches for a man's room, and lots of flowers. Mr. Garfield's own room was almost like an office, with a huge desk with a telephone on it—there was another telephone in the hall. He didn't use that room for sleeping; there was a wide sleep-out with two beds on it that by day looked just like couches. And there was a spare-room and a very posh bathroom fitted up with all kinds of showers and gadgets. I found out next day that he had a kitchen, too. His housekeeper, Mrs. Wilson, had a room somewhere across the corridor from his front door.

She was a nice old thing with grey hair and wrinkles, but very twinkly eyes. Mr. Garfield told me she had been his nurse when he was a baby, and he thought the world of her. She always called him "Master Hubert," which at first sounded a bit queer to me, as I'd always thought of him as quite old, pretty nearly forty. I knew that, because he'd been in the Great War. She had supper ready for us: the sandwiches were so good that I was sorry I still wasn't hungry.

Mr. Garfield asked me would I rather sleep in the spare-room or on the sleep-out, and of course I chose the sleep-out. It was wonderful there. There was no moon, but that only showed up the lights better. We looked right across the Harbour; all the northern side was thick with lights, with the moving head-lamps of cars and trams flashing among them. Down below us was the glow from the warships, reflected in the water; there must have been a party on the flagship, for she was picked out with lamps from stem to stern. There were riding-lights of steamers and yachts at anchor, and the ferry-boats darting backwards and forwards looked like great jewelled beetles coming and going from Circular Quay. On the west the lights of the Bridge gleamed in long lines. There can't be anything lovelier than Sydney Harbour at night.

I hung over the edge of the balcony looking at it until Mr. Garfield made me go to bed. It was ages before I could go to sleep, but I didn't have to toss about as usual and feel anyhow: it was restful. I had the long beam of the South Head lighthouse to look at—and to think how I'd be sailing out between the Heads in five days.

CHAPTER V

FREEDOM

WHEN I woke up in the morning Mr. Garfield's bed was empty. I looked at my watch, and to my horror saw that it was nearly nine o'clock. I dashed to the bathroom, but on the way I met Mrs. Wilson. She had a big glass of orange-juice.

"Drink that before you have your bath, Master Peter," she said. "There's no hurry. Master Hubert's gone."

"Gone!" I gasped. "I say, why didn't he wake me?"

"That was a thing he was very careful not to do," she said, laughing at me. "He was that keen to have you sleep on, he went about on tiptoe, like a mother with a new baby. Don't you worry. Your breakfast'll be ready when you are."

"But look at all the bother I'm giving you!" I said, feeling very horrified.

"Now, what bother?" she said. "It's a treat for me to have someone young about the flat. And Master Hubert couldn't take you with him this morning, and he wanted you to have a lazy time. Nothing matters here, so long as Master Hubert gets what he wants. He told me to tell you to do whatever you liked. There's the radiogram, and lots of books. And if you're thinking of going out, he thought there might be a chance you'd need money, coming away so sudden, so he's left some on your dressing-table."

Well, I reckoned that Mr. Garfield was something special as a host. It was queer to feel that I practically owned the flat, but even better to know that I hadn't to dash round and go into school. I went for a walk after breakfast, taking the road down to the water, where I sat on a jetty and made friends with a couple of fishermen. Then I went home and got the radio going—it was a super one—and I found a John Buchan I hadn't read, and curled up on a couch with it. Everything was good and peaceful. Mrs. Wilson fussed over me at lunch, trying to make me eat more. "You're that thin I can nearly see through you," she said sadly: "I'd put some flesh on your bones if I had you here for a month!" We nearly had a fight afterwards because I took a hand in the washing-up, but I was firm over that. It was raining by the time the job was done—we were a good while over it, because Mrs. Wilson got talking about Mr. Garfield when he was a boy. So she lit the fire, and I got back to the couch and my book; and the next thing I knew, it was four o'clock, and Mr. Garfield

was there, sitting in an armchair smoking. I'd slept for two hours.

Gosh, I felt ashamed of myself. I'd never done anything like that before, even when I was ill—the pain of the leg used to keep waking me up then. But Mr. Garfield looked quite pleased.

"Just what I wanted to see you doing," he said. "I'm rather keen to have you go on board next Tuesday able to enjoy the trip from the start. And you will, too, Peter. A really slack week-end's my prescription, with no time-tables to keep and no need to talk unless you feel like it. But we might go out presently and pick up your things from school: I can tell Matron what you'll need. Got a suit-case there, by the way?"

I told him no, I'd only my big trunk: and he said, "That won't do: anyone arriving with large trunks at the island is definitely unpopular. I can lend you something smaller. And I've asked Watty to spend the evening with us, so we'll call for him afterwards. I thought you'd like that."

"By Jove, yes!" I said: "I've been wanting badly to see Watty, only I didn't like to go out when he wasn't expecting me."

"The week-ends are a busy time for him, but he's agreed to dodge out this evening," Mr. Garfield said. "There will probably be quite a number of annoyed footballers there to-night hoping to get their muscles loosened up for to-morrow, but Watty's going to chance that. He'll have silently stolen away. Better get your coat, Peter—it's pretty cold."

So it was, though it had stopped raining. There was a keen wind, and the streets were glistening with wet; everybody was hurrying along muffled up, as if they were anxious to get under cover. It didn't seem possible that in a few days I'd be sailing north and finding sunshine. At school we found that Matron had all my things laid out, which was jolly good of her. Mr. Garfield went through them quickly.

"You'll want a decent suit on the ship for the evenings—otherwise only sports kit," he told me. "On the island, people live in shirts and shorts; you put on a coat in the evening, if you're fussy. Your blazer will do for that. No khaki shorts? Well, we'll have to get those, and some khaki shirts—it may be hard to get any washing done. Two pairs of sand-shoes—you'll need an old pair for wading."

"Wade in sand-shoes!" I exclaimed. "What on earth for?"

"Because it's not safe to wade barefooted, my son. Coral makes nasty wounds, hard to heal; and nobody takes any chances with stone-fish."

"What are they?" I asked.

"Beastly things—the ugliest brutes you ever saw, and very hard to spot. In

fact, very few white men can spot them, even in a shallow pool, though natives can always see them. Dirty-brown things with a hideous square sort of head. They bury themselves in the sand, only their eyes showing: and if you tread on one he erects a nasty little outfit of spines, each spine carrying poison. Quite a lot of people have died from standing on one. But they're not very plentiful, and you're safe enough in shoes."

"But you don't mean to say we've even got to bathe with shoes on?" I asked.

"No—you'll be bathing in safe water, well inside the island reef. They don't come in there. It's anywhere near a reef you have to be extra careful. There are queer things wherever coral is, and don't you let Binkie and Clem forget it. Even old hands take no risk. It's the cock-sure people who think they know everything who ask for trouble. Well, I think we've got all you need out of this lot—we'll buy the other oddments to-morrow." He snapped the locks of the suit-case. "Now we'll go and collect Watty."

Watty was waiting for us on his verandah, looking very spruce in a dark blue suit. He had a parcel that he pitched into the car before he got in; it wasn't very big, but it sounded heavy. We went home as fast as we could travel, and it was just great to see Mr. Garfield handle that big car in the Sydney traffic—it's bad enough in those narrow streets at any time, but in the six-o'clock rush it was hair-raising at times, with taxi-drivers going like demons and everybody taking chances.

Old Watty sat very still, but once or twice I felt him stiffen—we were all in the front seat. When we got out he said, "Well, there's some that think going to sea's a dangerous life, an' there's times I've been nervous myself; but I'd rather handle a ship in a West Indian hurricane than tackle yon bit of navigation, Major!" And Mr. Garfield grinned and said he ought to see the driving in Paris.

After dinner we settled down round the fire, and Watty brought in his parcel and opened it.

"You'll be doing some deep-sea fishing up North, bo'," he said: "an' when a man goes fishing he wants his own tackle, an' he wants to know it won't let him down. So I've brought along some of the gear you'll need."

There were four lines, not coarse, but wonderfully strong, beautifully wound on wooden frames—real sailor's work; and a mixed lot of hooks of different sizes, and wire traces and a tin box of strong gut. And there were a lot of sinkers, the heaviest I'd ever seen; round ones, with a hole for putting a line through. I puzzled a bit over those, but Watty explained.

"A light sinker's no good to ye up there," he said. "You fish deep, an'

there's often such a current it's mighty hard to keep a sinker on the bottom. An' I know what 'tis on an island—you find you haven't a sinker, an' someone grabs a job-lot of old iron bolts or such-like and ties 'em on together—just a bunch of lumps, an' the next thing ye know ye're caught hard an' fast in the coral, an' there's nothing for it but to cut the line. An' no shop anywhere to buy new lines. But those sinkers won't hold in the coral—they'll always slip out if you do get caught."

"You *are* a brick, Watty," I said. "If I don't catch fish with this gear I ought to be ashamed of myself." "You'll catch 'em all right, bo'," Watty said. "I only planned hand-lines, that being what I'm best at. But the Major flies a bit higher than I do. Where's your part of the outfit, Major?"

Mr. Garfield went out and came back with a rod in a canvas cover.

"That's about your size and weight, I think, Peter," he said. He took it out and put it together. I didn't know much about rods then, but I knew at the first glance that it was a beauty: stronger than anything I'd ever owned, split cane, with agate rings and the latest and best thing in reels. And there was one for Clem, too. I just didn't know how to thank them both. But they aren't the sort of people who want a whole lot of thanks—they knew how I felt.

That was a ripping evening. They never once made me feel that I was only a kid, even though they are men who have been all over the world and done all sorts of things. Not that I had cheek enough to put my oar in much while they talked—but they treated me as one of themselves, not letting me feel out of it. Some grown-ups talk right over your head, and you know they're just putting up with you and will be jolly glad when it's your bedtime. Mr. Garfield and Watty didn't. Bedtime was never even mentioned.

I told them what some of the fellows at school had said about our being caught on the island if war broke out, and perhaps stuck there; and I asked what they thought about it. They said they didn't believe we'd have any difficulty. Watty had his doubts about war coming at all.

"Too much newspaper talk, if you ask me," he said. "If old Hitler had wanted to fight us he had his chance last September, instead of patching up things at Munich. We weren't ready then, an' he knew it; now we're getting ready every day, an' once the British Navy's ready he won't want to bump into it."

"Well, it isn't only Germany we've got to think of," said Mr. Garfield. "How about Japan?"

"Aye, trouble's more likely from that quarter, to my way of thinking," Watty said. "Mind you, I've always believed that Japan wouldn't go for Australia first—she'd try for the Dutch East Indies. Once she'd got 'em she'd

be all set for tackling Australia in comfort, as you might say: an' mighty little comfort there'd be for us about it."

"Mighty little," agreed Mr. Garfield.

"Well, if they made me boss of the Defence Department—which as far as I can see there's not much chance they will," said Watty, grinning, "it isn't big battleships I'd be planning. But I'd have a chain of defence right along the north coast—destroyers an' fast little torpedo-boats an' mine-layers. A mosquito fleet. An' air bases linking up with 'em. Then we could talk, Major."

"And that would all lead to settlements of people on the north," said Mr. Garfield. "It will have to come some day—the sooner it does, the safer for Australia. It could be done, Watty."

"It could ha' been done years ago, if they'd only tackled it. 'No money!' they say. But they'll find money for war fast enough if it does come: we'll all pay the piper then. An' there's the Japs to-day going just as far as they dare against white people in Tientsin—stripping men an' insulting women. Only that they've got their hands pretty full with China, we'd have 'em down here quick an' lively, if war did come—taking the Dutch on the way."

They smoked in silence for a couple of minutes.

"But even supposing war did come, you folks on the island wouldn't have to worry, bo'," said Watty. "There'd be warning enough: the island's got wireless. I expect a lot of the coastal steamers 'ud be commandeered right off by the Government, but Burgess 'ud get you across to the mainland in a launch if necessary. An' they'd only commandeer the best ships—they'd have to leave the small ones and the old ones to carry on the coast trade. So you needn't go looking for adventure that way."

I was half-sorry, because I'd thought it would be rather fun to be kept on the island. Even if we had to live on fish, there wouldn't be school, and it would all be pretty exciting. But I didn't say so, in case it sounded sort of young.

"I don't expect they'll meet anything more dangerous than stone-fish, Watty," Mr. Garfield said. "I've been warning Peter about them."

"Nasty brutes they are," said Watty. "I saw a man stung by one of 'em; his leg swelled up like it was a bolster, an' the pain he suffered had him crying like a child. We filled him up with rum—it was all we had—an' a storm came up an' we couldn't get him to the mainland to a doctor. So we carried on with the rum. It cured him, but he was a sick man for days. He'd have died all right if it hadn't been for the rum. An' he never drank another drop after that, as long as he lived. The very smell of drink made him think of stone-fish. So perhaps it was a good thing. Only he didn't live very long, on account of not

dodging a car quick enough in Brisbane."

"Could a doctor have cured him when the stone-fish got him?" I asked.

"Might—a good deal depends on whether the one that's stung has healthy blood. But a chap from one of the islands told me a new thing the other day, an' it's worth remembering: if anyone's stung, roast an onion, cut it in half, an' clap it on the place."

"And eat the other half?" asked Mr. Garfield scornfully. "I think that's a bit of a yarn, Watty."

"Well, an' so did I. But he told me a young doctor had heard of it an' said he was game to try it out. An' this doc. actually got some native boys to catch a stone-fish, an' he let it sting him. The onion worked all right."

"If that's so," said Mr. Garfield, "I withdraw and apologize. A man who did that ought to have the V.C."

"I reckon so," Watty agreed. "He had half an hour's agony over it anyhow, and a good old burn on his leg afterwards, from the hot onion. Not that he noticed it at the time—the pain was so bad he never felt the onion burn him. They say you could dip a stung leg in boiling water an' the owner wouldn't feel it. But there's not enough stone-fish to worry about, if people take care; hundreds of tourists go to the Reef every year an' never even hear of one. Sun-burn's more likely to trouble you, Peter."

"Oh, I never burn," I said. "I only get browner and browner."

They looked at each other and grinned.

"That's what they all say, poor innocents!" said Watty.

"But true as life I don't," I said, a bit hotly. "I've never been sun-burnt—not even in the hottest summer."

Mr. Garfield said, "But you don't know the tropical sun, together with the tropical sea, old chap. That mixture can cook even a hardened sinner like me. It's across the shoulders you get it, and even worse down the backs of your legs. You go wading about on the island reef at low tide, in and out of pools more than knee-deep: and then you bend over to watch clams and coral-fish and things, with the sun beating down on your wet legs. Very enthralling: you never even dream of sun-burn, even when you begin to sting gently. But that night you know all about it, and the next day you're a nice pillar-box red, especially behind the knees—even if you've the luck not to blister. That means no more fun for days—and you can only sleep lying on your face, which takes years to learn."

"Gosh!" I said. "Did that really happen to you?"

"It did—and to lots of other hardy men. That's why I'm able to describe it

so feelingly. And it would happen to you very quickly this year because you've been leading such a refined life. But you can dodge it—paint yourself with picric acid over every inch of skin that's likely to be exposed. It turns you a lovely yellow, but it's worth it. And even then you'd better be very careful until your skin toughens a bit. You don't need to fuss, but it's a pity to spoil your first week—as so many do." He laughed a little. "I was one of those who said, 'Oh, I never burn!' "

"Right-oh," I said; I was only half convinced, only I knew he must know what he was talking about, "Any other horrors?"

"I don't think so. Oh, you might as well remember not to be too free with a green tree-ant's nest. You'll see lots of them in the trees. They build them by joining leaves together at their edges to make cells, and sometimes they get so enthusiastic that they go on building until the thing is as big as a football. And an inquisitive tourist comes across one and starts investigating it with a stick; and the ants pile out in hundreds and drop on him—and can they bite! I've seen some really interesting things happen that way, but fortunately they happened to other people."

Watty gave one of his deep chuckles.

"That's the pleasantest way of learning things, only we don't always have the luck to manage it that way," he said. "Most of what I know came to me by way of kicks and a rope's-end. You don't like 'em, but you learn very thorough."

I said, "You two know so much about the Reef district I think it's an awful pity you're not coming with us. Couldn't you manage it? It would be gorgeous fun if you were there."

They looked at each other, and Watty shook his head.

"No chance for *me*, bo'. What would those poor footballers of mine do without me in the season?"

"I would say, 'Let the footballers rip,' if I saw a chance of going myself," Mr. Garfield said. "Only I'm afraid there's none. July is going to be a pretty busy month for me. No, Peter, old chap—it can't be done. But you won't need us—you'll have the crowd, and there won't be a dull moment. Anyhow, Watty, we must have a big welcome party when Peter and Co. come back, eh?"

"Too right we will," said Watty.

CHAPTER VI

WE SAIL NORTH

THE family reached Sydney on Sunday night. Mr. Garfield and I were waiting for them at the hotel. It was simply great to see them again, and there was quite a scene when they all piled into the lounge. Mother took a good long look at me—I'd gone pelting across the lounge to meet her—and the first thing she said was, "Peter . . . oh, Peter, I want to see your Watty and thank him." Her voice was shaking, and only just loud enough for me to hear.

I said, "You'll do that all right—he's coming in to-morrow evening." And we hugged each other hard, and didn't care two hoots if all Sydney saw us.

Binkie was seething with excitement. Her mop of curly dark-red hair was untidier than I'd ever seen it, and that is saying something; and she couldn't keep still for two minutes. Clem was as quiet as usual, but I know Clem very well, and I knew that under the surface he was excited, too. Clem is English, so it is difficult for him to show what he feels, even if he wanted to, which I do not think anyone English ever does. But when you understand Clem you wouldn't want him any different; and in the various adventures we have had together I always got excited enough for us both.

We sat in the big smoking-room after the family had been fed. There was so much to talk about that it was hard to get down to business arrangements, and Binkie was terribly anxious that she should have time enough to go to the Zoo. Binkie hates towns and loves animals, and her opinion of Sydney is that it is just a place built round the Zoo. So we finally fixed it up that her necessary shopping should be finished before lunch next day, and then Mr. Garfield would become responsible for us three; and Mother and Miss Tarrant could dive into shops and be lost. Dad said he had any amount to do, and would greatly prefer to do it on his own, unhampered by a family.

Mr. Garfield said, "Seeing the size of your family at present, Forsyth, you won't mind if I reduce it a bit, will you? Peter is staying with me until Tuesday, of course, and we think it would just complete our bachelor establishment if Clem came out, too."

It was the first I'd heard of the idea, but of course I didn't let on about that. I was just terribly pleased. Because, even though Clem knows we all like him and try to make him feel like one of us, there must be times when he is a bit lonely and remembers he doesn't really belong to the family. I know I would

myself. And here was Mr. Garfield going out of his way to show him he wanted him.

Clem flushed up with pleasure, in spite of being English. Dad said, “If you can stand having two of them, Garfield, we’ll try to bear it.”

And Clem said, “It’s jolly good of you, sir—sure I won’t be in the way?”

Mr. Garfield grinned at that. “I’m really needing you, old chap,” he said, “to take the strain of Peter off me. He’s a horrible responsibility, but you can help to keep him in order.”

“I . . . wonder,” said Miss Tarrant softly. “Anyhow, Binkie, we’ll have a peaceful morning, whatever happens after that.”

“Peaceful!—when it’s getting *clothes*!” said Binkie with disgust.

“Oh, but the right sort of clothes—shorts and shirts and bathing-suits. It won’t be nearly so painful as it might be,” Miss Tarrant told her. “What about your things, Clem?”

“I’ll see to that,” said Mr. Garfield. “Peter’s shopping is done, Mrs. Forsyth, so don’t worry about him.”

And Mother smiled at him, and said, “I don’t feel as if anything could ever worry me again—now.” She glanced at my leg. “Come up to my room for a few minutes before you go, Peter.”

Binkie started to come, too, but Mr. Garfield said quickly, “Binks, let’s go up in the lift and see the view of the Harbour from the flat roof—it’s rather good.”

And Binks said, “Golly, is there a flat roof—come on, Tarry!”—and they all went.

Mother and I had a talk for a bit, and then Dad came in, and we had some more, all three of us sitting on the bed. We wanted that. Then we went down and found Binkie beginning to look sleepy. Dad said, “This has been a pretty long day: I suggest that you three bachelors take yourselves off, and even if you don’t, I’m going to bed.” So we took the hint and said good night, Binkie remarking that a flat roof on a mid-winter night wasn’t her idea of fun.

We found next morning that Mr. Garfield had something else up his sleeve. I was in Clem’s room, hearing all about Weeroona, when he came in—still in his pyjamas.

“Clem,” he said, “it’s only an hour’s drive to that place in the hills where your father is. Would you like to run up and see him before you sail to foreign parts?”

“*Would* I!” was all Clem could get out.

“Well, I rang the hospital last night, and they said it would be very good for him to see you. So we’ll get away as soon as we can after breakfast—and you’d better both get a move on. Gossiping old women——!” he added—and just got ahead of me to the bathroom.

That was a wonderful drive up to the hills. It was very cold, but sunny, and the bush was all sorts of colours once we got away from Sydney. Not much traffic was going our way, and Mr. Garfield fairly let the car rip; it seemed no time before we got to the end of our journey. He and I didn’t go in with Clem. We sat in the car and read the newspapers for a bit, and then we prowled about the grounds.

We came on a little bungalow affair with a glassed-in verandah, where a patient was lying. He was a boy about my age, or a little older, and he didn’t look very sick: he had a bright colour. But he did look rather lonely. He said “Good morning” in a friendly way, so we sat on his verandah and yarned to him—after he had assured Mr. Garfield that no fierce nurse was likely to throw us out. Mr. Garfield did most of the yarning, because it rather shook me when the boy mentioned in a casual sort of way that he’s been in bed more than two years, and had no idea when he would ever be out of bed. After that, it didn’t seem decent to tell him anything about going to an island, so Mr. Garfield kept to stories about Central Australia and things that had happened on some of his expeditions. They made the boy laugh a good bit. He was looking very cheerful when at last I heard Clem whistling our secret whistle, and we had to go.

Clem said, “I’ve been looking for you everywhere. Father wants to see you two, and the nurse says it’s all right.”

Mr. Hardy’s bed was on a balcony with a tremendous view of the hills. You could see a waterfall coming down at one place like a streak of glass among the trees. He was quite brown; fitter than I’d thought he could look, and very keen about our trip. I think it had bucked him a lot to see Clem. The nurse had given us a hint not to stay long, so presently Mr. Garfield said good-bye and we shot back to Sydney even faster than we had come: in good time to snatch Binkie from the horrors of shopping and take her to the Zoo. Not that the horrors had been so bad. In fact, Binkie was rather excited about it, because they’d bought her two pairs of slacks: and we reckoned it would be difficult ever to make Binks put on a frock again.

Mr. Garfield’s sitting-room at the flat is big, but we pretty well filled it up that night. Watty was the star exhibit: they all liked him awfully, and I was only sorry they couldn’t see his tattooing—that would have been a real thrill for Binks. He and Mother and Dad had a long talk by themselves on the sleep-out. When they came back Mr. Garfield got Watty to sing sea-chanties and we

all joined in the choruses—when we knew them; but Watty had some we had never heard of. That ended in a great sing-song, with Miss Tarrant at the piano, and Mrs. Wilson had arranged something out of the way in suppers. It was as good an evening as I'd ever had.

Next day was pretty busy, fixing up final odds and ends. We went down to the wharf fairly early in the afternoon, as Mother said she had a rooted objection to unpacking in a ship that might be rolling, with herself and all her belongings sliding about the cabin: she wanted everything fixed up before we left port. Binkie and I thought that was a very good idea, because we were both mad keen to go all over the ship. But Mother was firm that we should unpack first, having visions of being obliged to do it for us herself, otherwise.

It's terribly exciting to go on a ship for the first time. The wharf was very busy, cranes swinging masses of things into the holds, taxies and cars coming and going, and the usual people standing round to watch the loading and frequently being yelled at to get out of the way. We passed through a great dim shed half full of barrels and boxes, and went up the gangway. There was a little delay about being shown to our cabins, because we had arrived at a time when stewards go off duty after lunch and try to forget the existence of passengers. But Clem is wise about ships, and we knew the number of the cabin he and I were sharing, so we grabbed our suit-cases and went off to look for it.

We found it easily enough, but to our disgust we realized we weren't going to have it to ourselves. We had known that this might happen, because Mr. Garfield had got us the very last cabins left on the ship, and ours had to be a three-berth one—but of course we had hoped nobody would take the odd berth. However, there was our cabin-mate busily unpacking, and we just had to make the best of it.

He looked round quickly when we paused in the doorway. I didn't suppose he was any gladder to see us than we were to see him, but to my surprise he suddenly smiled in a pleased way.

"You coming in here?" he asked. "Good—you're not so big as I feared you might be. Three large men would be rather crowded in this cabin, eh? And there will not be three of us trying to shave at the same time—how fortunate, especially if we get rough weather."

He was a thick-set man, somewhere about thirty, I should think, and not bad-looking, with a clipped moustache, and he held himself very straight. On the whole, we reckoned we might have drawn a worse fellow-traveller. And he certainly seemed inclined to be civil. We mumbled something or other that we hoped sounded polite, and dumped our things inside, wondering how to arrange living in a cabin with a stranger.

It was what they call a Bibby cabin; two berths, one above the other, on one side, a single berth on the other, and a short alley-way running down to the port-hole. We knew which our berths were—the single, and the lower of the two opposite it: we'd tossed up to see which of us should have the single, and Clem had won. This meant that the third man would have to sleep above me, and I didn't feel a bit keen on that prospect. I don't know if Clem guessed what was in my mind. But after we had settled with the stranger which drawers and wardrobe hooks we'd have, Clem said to him:

"Do you care where you sleep? Mine's the single berth, but I'd just as soon have the top one, if that's all the same to you."

"Sure you don't mind?" He looked rather relieved. "Well, it would certainly be better for the fellow in the lower bunk; I'll be coming to bed fairly late, and I should probably disturb him by climbing up. We'll make it so, then." He smiled at us. "My name is Patten, by the way; I'm only going as far as Townsville on the ship. Then I'm off on a fishing-cruise."

We were delighted to hear this, because we were going as far as Cairns before we turned south again for Kongai Island; and we knew that with any luck we ought to have the cabin to ourselves after leaving Townsville. We wished him luck about fishing and told him our names; and then he took himself off, remarking that he had done all the unpacking he wanted.

"Jolly nuisance, but he might have been worse," Clem said, getting to work on his suit-case. "Father and I had to share a cabin with a perfect beast once: he used to come to bed drunk nearly every night, and he was nearly as bad when he was sober. This chap looks clean, anyhow. I don't suppose he'll bother us much."

"Well, you needn't have given him your berth, anyhow," I said. "You know you like the single."

"Only if we had the cabin to ourselves: I really don't care a hoot. Much nicer to keep him on one side," said Clem. "Tell you what, Peter—let's get up early every morning, before he wakes. Then we'll hardly bump into him at all."

I said that was a good scheme: and just then Binkie came barging in, full of excitement, and we had to tell her that she couldn't do any more barging into that cabin until we shook off Mr. Patten at Townsville. Binkie was rather indignant.

"Jolly rough on you two," she said. "Me, too: I thought I could use your cabin as a bolt-hole sometimes, if I wanted to get out of Tarry's way."

"Well, you can't," I said. "Just as well for us, I expect. What's Number Twenty-six like?"

"Oh, ripping! Not like this one—we've got two port-holes, one looking out to sea and one facing the front."

"Bow," said Clem firmly.

"Bow?" said Binks, looking puzzled. "What on earth for? I won't, anyhow."

We yelled with laughter, and Binkie stared at us for a moment and then laughed too.

"My mistake," she admitted. "I'm too excited to remember parts of a ship. I say, are you going to be long?—I do want to go and explore. Tarry's turned me out, because I was putting the wrong things everywhere. I'll help you, if you like, and then you'll be quicker."

We said we wouldn't risk it, but if she liked she could sit on Mr. Patten's bunk until we'd finished, only she'd have to make herself scarce if he came back.

"Good-oh!" said Binkie, and plumped down on it. "It's really rather luck for you to have this man in with you—it means that now Mother can't come and give your unpacking the once-over. So you needn't waste any time."

That idea hadn't struck us, but we saw the force of it at once and heaved things into the drawers recklessly. It was really quite a short job under those circumstances, with no strain on anybody. Then we plunged off on a voyage of discovery—beginning by looking up Mother in her cabin, to see if she needed any help. But she said she thought it possible that she might get on better without us.

There are bigger coastal steamers than the *Kalara*, but we said from the start, and lots of other travellers have told us the same thing, that she is the best of the lot. We began our tour down in the dining-saloon, where there were lots of little tables and a few large ones. There was a big man there in a sort of uniform—Binkie thought he was the Captain, but Clem said he was the Chief Steward, so I asked him where we were going to sit. He said rather curtly, "Oh, you'll have to find that out later on—I'm too busy now"; and then he stopped and looked at us in a different way and asked our name. When I said "Forsyth" he became altogether different. He said, "Oh, you're Mr. Garfield's friends—he told me you were coming. Six of you, he said. You'll be at that big round table over there, and I hope you'll all like the ship." And he showed us the Captain's table, and then, forgetting that he was busy, he took us over the kitchens and pantries—they had the biggest refrigerators I'd ever seen. The Second Steward came along, and we got to know him, too. Those were very useful friendships to have made from the start, and we were very glad of them all the time we were on board.

After that we went nearly all over the ship until we knew our way about her pretty thoroughly. It was just like a big rabbit-warren until you got used to it. The lounges and smoking-rooms were nearly empty, and most of the cabins were shut—we had a look into a few that weren't to see if they were nicer than ours. We learned all the different points from which we could reach our cabins, too, because Clem said that is very useful if you get sea-sick. The boat-deck was the best place, we thought; there was plenty of open space up there, and you could see all round. We looked with great longing at the bridge, and wondered if we'd ever be allowed on it, past the stern notice that said passengers were to keep off. It didn't seem likely.

Then we had a stroke of luck. There was a budgerigar in a cage hanging outside the officers' quarters, and Binkie began whistling to it, and making friends. In a moment out came an officer, looking rather fierce until he found we were not annoying the bird—then he became quite friendly. He actually asked us into his cabin after a few minutes: a very swagger one, with easy chairs and a radio, and lots of pictures and curios. I wondered awfully who he was, but I wasn't game to ask. However, Binkie is never hampered that way—she asked him straight out what the bands on his cuffs meant, and he admitted that he was the Chief Engineer.

That made Clem and me speechless. We just stood and looked at him, wishing we had as much nerve as Binkie over some things, but quite unable to do anything about it. He glanced at us, and his eyes twinkled. Then he said, "You two look as if you were going to burst—before that happens, would you care to come down some morning and look over the engine-room?"

Binkie said, "O-oh, wouldn't they! That's the very thing we've been wanting most of all. How did you know?" And he laughed, and asked her did she think we were the first boys he had ever met on a ship, and would she come, too? So then we got our tongues back and managed to thank him, and he told us to meet him next morning. "If you're feeling up to it, that is," he added. "If you don't appear . . . well, I'll just put it down to natural causes, and we'll wait till the sea goes down."

Binkie assured him that we didn't even dream of being sea-sick, and he said that was wise, because the reality was bad enough without dreaming about it. "But you look a tough gang," he added. "I shouldn't wonder if you all showed up to-morrow." Then he said he had to go on duty, and would we all mind clearing out? We took that as a hint that he'd had enough of us, and cleared.

"This is a gorgeous ship!" said Binkie, as we went below. "Next thing we know, the Captain will be asking us to tea!"

Clem said that he believed captains were practically invisible on sailing-days, being totally surrounded by owners and agents and other troublesome people. We didn't bother about that, because we found that cars were being loaded, and it was thrilling to watch them being swung into the air high above us and dropped gently on the lower deck. We were glued to this spectacle when suddenly Mr. Garfield came along.

"Hullo, you people!" he said. "I've been hunting for you. Come down to tea."

Mother and Miss Tarrant were there already, with the Chief Steward hovering over them in a fatherly way, and the table steward bringing more and more cakes, and seeming very distressed because nobody was hungry. Even Binkie only ate three, which shows you how excited she was. The saloon was full of tea-parties; we couldn't tell who were passengers and who were just friends. People kept coming in with great bunches of flowers and telling the hurrying stewards to put them in vases at once. There was no sign of Dad, and he hadn't turned up when we went on deck afterwards. By that time the decks were packed with new arrivals; down below, stewards were battling through the crowd in the alley-ways, shouldering luggage, and each cabin seemed to be having a party, with everyone talking at the same time.

I looked into ours to see if any invaders were nosing about it. But the only invader was Mr. Patten, who was lying on his bunk reading. He looked round quickly as I came in.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "Don't mind me: this is the best place until the howling mob goes ashore. Then the ship becomes a real ship again."

I left him to his book and went back to the others. All the loading was finished and the covers were being put on the hatches. The first bell went for visitors to go ashore, but nobody took much notice of it. Mother was beginning to wonder where Dad was. But Dad never hurries; presently we saw him coming slowly along the wharf, taller than nearly any man there, and just as unconcerned as if he were tailing after cattle on Weeroona. I whistled to him: he glanced up and picked us out at once, but it was a few minutes before he could get through the crowd to us.

The second signal went. Visitors began to drift along towards the gangways. Down on the wharf hawkers were shouting, "Streamers! Streamers for your friends!"

Mr. Garfield said, "Well, I won't wait for the final scrimmage: good-bye, everybody, and good luck. Peter, you're to come back looking like a Sandow, or Watty and I will want to know the reason why."

I said, "I'm feeling nearly a Sandow already. But you'd better come up to

the island and make sure. That would make everything just about right."

It wasn't too good to see him going. He'd been such a brick to me; I had a sudden memory of how utterly rotten I'd felt until that first day he had come to see me at school, and then how different everything had been ever since. I couldn't see why he should have taken so much trouble about me; and when I had tried to thank him that morning he had stopped me before I could get out more than a dozen words. I wished I could do something really useful for him, but there didn't seem any possible way, being only a boy.

At all events, he was gone now. We leaned over the rail and watched him running down the gangway. He turned at the foot and waved his hat to us; then he slipped through the crowd and went with his quick stride through the wharf shed.

The final bells broke out, and stewards began shouting, "All visitors ashore!" There were good-byes all over the deck and the gangways became thick with people going off, causing a lot of trouble to a few passengers arriving at the last minute and struggling to get on board. Nearly all the departing visitors bought streamers, and some bought half a dozen: the little rolls came whizzing through the air as they flung them up to friends on board, who caught them with cries of triumph or wailed dismally when they fell short. Most of them landed safely, though; we pulled out from the wharf with a regular canopy of coloured strips of paper gradually lengthening between us and the shore, everybody trying to make their streamers the last to snap. A girl near me was holding six: Dad said she looked as if she were driving an awkward team to handle.

The last one gave, and we were well away from land. It was nearly dark as the *Kalara* came slowly up to the Bridge; looking up at the light on her topmast it didn't seem possible that she could pass under it, even when we reminded ourselves that far bigger ships did it easily. We slid below it, hearing its traffic roaring overhead: out beyond were the Harbour lights and the hurrying ferries that looked tiny beside us, and the South Head beam winking to guide us to the open sea. I remembered how I'd watched it from the sleep-out five nights ago. Even now I didn't feel really certain yet that the whole thing wasn't a dream.

CHAPTER VII

INTO SUNSHINE

WE ALL turned in early that night. The sea wasn't exactly rough, but enough to make the ship pitch a bit, and it was too cold to be on deck. The drawing-room felt strange. We hadn't settled down yet, and the passengers from Melbourne were sizing up the newcomers; and we were trying to size up everybody else, feeling rather like new boys at school. Miss Tarrant and Binkie slipped away pretty soon, saying they couldn't keep their eyes open any longer.

"Come along," said Clem to me. "We can read in bed if we're not sleepy."

But we didn't read long. It was still too thrilling to be at sea—we couldn't be bothered with mere books. We switched out our bunk-head lights and lay talking for a while until Clem dropped off to sleep. I stayed awake for a long time, listening to the queer creakings a ship makes at night, the throb of the screw, and the swish of the sea outside the port-hole. A keen wind drove through it and up the alley-way: I snuggled down into my blankets, hoping Mr. Patten liked fresh air enough to leave the port open when he came to bed. But I expect I was asleep long before he turned in.

I woke in broad daylight, quite unable for a minute to realize where I was. Then I saw Clem's leg coming down past me from above, feeling in a helpless way for a footing. This seemed too good a chance to lose, so I seized the leg and pulled. There was a slight struggle, ending in Clem's landing on the floor more quickly than he had expected to. He twisted round with surprising swiftness as he landed, and removed all my blankets. Up to this time we had completely forgotten the existence of Mr. Patten.

So we were rather horrified when the humped form on the other bunk turned over; and we feared that the movement showed a little impatience. We couldn't see his head, because he seemed to like sleeping with it under the bed-clothes; all we hoped at the moment was that he would keep it there. To get out of the cabin seemed our wisest move, as we were both spluttering with laughter. We unhooked the door as softly as possible and went to look for a bath.

The bath steward approved of us, anyhow. He said, "Good on you two for bein' early—there'll be an un'oly rush for baths later on." Watty had told me to have all the hot sea-baths I could, so I had a huge one, followed by a cold

shower that sent me back to the cabin tingling all over. I sneaked in quietly.

Clem was at the entrance of the alley-way, just dancing with excitement. He beckoned to me and ran down to the port-hole; I was after him like a shot. He made room for me as I reached him, pointing to the sea.

I stuck my head out. We were not far from land: a long beach topped by scrub-covered hummocks was plainly in view. But there was something else—right in front of me, quite close to the ship, were two big whales!

I was staggered, for I'd never seen whales close up before. They were rolling about without taking the slightest notice of the ship; their great black bodies curved above the water, glistening in the sunshine. One wasn't as big as the other—I think they must have been a mother and calf. Sometimes they would shoot ahead until we lost sight of them, but in a moment we would catch them up again and find them playing. Then they decided it was time to go. Down went their heads and up came the great fluked tails, hitting the water as they dived with a tremendous splash. And that was the last we saw of them.

Clem said, "I was scared stiff they'd go before you came along. Gosh, wasn't it luck! Let's buzz up on deck and see if they're still in sight."

We flung our clothes on and got out as quickly as we could, but there was no sign of our visitors. The queer thing was that never again during the voyage did we see any whales so near the ship. We saw lots a long way off, but those two were just a special exhibit turned on for our benefit. It certainly was luck for two new-chums—and all the others were green with envy when we told them about it.

We saw at once that none of the unpleasant prophecies that had been hurled at us about sea-sickness were likely to come true. It was a grey morning, nippy enough to make us want to keep moving, but the sea had gone down during the night; the *Kalara* wasn't even pitching. Sailors were busy washing the deck, so we went up on the boat-deck, where a man was marking out places for tennis and quoits. We did a hard walk, six times round, to keep ourselves warm. As we passed the Chief Engineer's cabin on the last round, he put out his head.

"You two must be trying to put up a record," he said. "And I thought you'd be in your bunks, wailing for the steward! Come in and have an apple."

That seemed a good idea, so we went in. He was cleaning out his bird-cage and the budgerigar was flying about the cabin, taking an occasional rest on top of the wardrobe. He said it had only flown outside once, and then it was so scared by finding itself alone near the sea that it was delighted to come back. Ever since then, it wouldn't go out of sight of the cage. He finished the job, and whistled; it fluttered down and perched on his finger for a moment before

popping into its home.

"Queer little chap, but he's great company," said the Chief. "Talks well, too, when he's in the humour. Well, how did you get on last night? Pitching too much for you?"

We said no, we'd liked it; and he told us we were lucky, because they had had a really rough trip round from Melbourne, and most of the passengers had been either in their bunks or else huddled heaps of misery in deck-chairs: and he asked where we were going, and how it was we were not at school like any ordinary sufferers of our age. We hoped he hadn't forgotten about showing us the engine-room, because he seemed interested about every other subject except engines. He was still talking when the bugle went for breakfast.

"Off you go!" he said. "I'll meet you here at half-past ten."

Outside we met Binkie, looking very pleased with herself in slacks, and more like a boy than ever. It is one of Binkie's great trials that she was not born a boy, and though Mother and Miss Tarrant assure her that in time she will get over this, she knows she never will. Clem and I remember that we once knew we wanted to be engine-drivers, and that now we have other ideas; but it would not be wise to use this as an argument to Binkie. So she has her mop of hair cut as short as Mother will let her—only that's not short enough to please Binks—and she dresses like a boy as far as possible. Anything in the nature of a frilly frock reduces her to utter despair. Mother knows better than to get one for her now. Once a well-meaning aunt sent her a pale pink silk one, and she was practically speechless over it until it occurred to her to go and clean her saddle and bridle when she was made to wear it. After that it wasn't very much use as a frock.

Anyhow, Binkie has a good deal of sense. She isn't just an imitation of a boy: she never shirks a bit of tough work, and she uses her head over it, too. On a horse she is as good as anyone I know, and very handy after cattle. Nothing can scare Binks. Also, she can cook very well. Mother was able to make her keen over that by telling her all the best chefs were men.

We have always done everything together, and after Clem came to live near Weeroona and we got to be friends he just fitted in with Binks and me like another brother. Mother and Dad were very glad about Clem, because he was English and his manners were polite (especially in the drawing-room), and they thought he would be a good influence for two wild and untamed Australians like us. But the way Binks and I look at it is that Clem has become just as good as an Australian, and that suits us down to the ground.

I said that nothing could scare Binkie, but her first meal on board very nearly did. You get a menu-card that seems half a mile in length, with a great

number of new and exciting foods on it, and the steward waits patiently while you study the details and try to balance up your appetite against them. Binkie got redder and redder as she studied hers; she said afterwards that she could feel the steward getting more and more restive and that he was breathing heavily down the back of her neck. However, she stuck it out and managed to eat a huge breakfast. The saloon was almost full; we took stock of the other passengers and felt there were quite a lot who looked jolly, though scarcely any people of our age—which was natural, as it was term-time. Mr. Patten was at a table not far from ours. He nodded to us, and afterwards he came up to us on deck and asked to be introduced all round, saying that as he was in our cabin he felt he ought to know our people. To our relief, he said nothing about being waked early in the morning. We left him talking to them when we slipped away to keep our appointment with the Chief: and on our return, after a marvellous hour down below, we found them all playing deck-quoits, so he seemed to have dug himself in pretty well.

That was a peaceful day. Some people might have called it dull, because it was grey and cold, and there was nothing particular to look at; but we were all a bit tired after our rushed week-end, and it was just what we wanted. And I'll always remember it as a special day, because I played the first game I'd played for six months. It was deck-tennis, Binkie and I against Miss Tarrant and Clem. I wondered a little how my leg would stand it; for the first few minutes I went pretty gingerly. And then I knew it was going to do anything I asked it, and I didn't try to spare it any more. My word, it was wonderful to feel I was sound again! They beat us, but not by much, and even so, it was just about the best game of my life, I was so happy. And the others were just as pleased. We hunted for Mother and Dad, to tell them, and Dad ordered drinks all round by way of celebrating.

Next morning we found ourselves in still water, with the ship moving slowly up the Brisbane River. None of us had ever seen such a river: wide and beautiful, with great bends that showed us new things all the way. New trees—mangoes and weeping figs and lots more; houses perched high above the ground on stilts; gardens flaming with bright masses of flowers that were strange to us. We suddenly realized that we were getting near the tropics. And there was sunshine, warmer than anything we'd felt for months, shining down on the towers of the big city looming ahead.

This is not a book about cities, so I am not going to write of all the things we saw in and round Brisbane. I don't suppose we saw a quarter of what we might have seen, though we went pretty hard for two days. Dad has lots of friends there, and they did their best for us with cars and launches, taking us out into the country and up the river. We all loved the place, and we mean to

go back there some day and spend weeks. But this time all that lay ahead was calling to us; Brisbane was just the gateway to something very much more exciting. None of us felt sorry when we were aboard the *Kalara* again sailing north towards the real adventure. Clem and I called it that—without the slightest idea that we were going to have rather more adventure than we'd ever expected.

Life on a coastal cruise is curious. During the run up to Brisbane we hadn't got to know any of the passengers well: there was only one clear day, and we still felt a bit strange. Somehow, it was quite different after leaving Brisbane. We had slept on board each night while we were there, meeting others who did the same, and in the city itself we would often run against a *Kalara* passenger and exchange smiles. Once the voyage began again we seemed to know everyone; whether we knew their names or not didn't matter at all. People would come up and begin to talk, comparing notes about Brisbane excursions, and presently someone would suggest a game of deck-tennis or bull-board, and you'd end up by being quite matey. Every evening there was some sort of fun going; games and singing and dancing. Or a lot of us would sit on rugs and cushions on the deck and just spin yarns—which I liked better than anything. By the time we got up to Townsville we were almost like a big family.

The sunshine seemed to help everything along. Day after day it grew warmer; every morning people appeared in less and less clothing and bigger and bigger hats. It was like taking a dive out of mid-winter into gorgeous summer. Clem and Binkie and I lived in thin shirts and shorts, trying to get as brown as we could before we got to Kongai Island. Each day the sea became a deeper blue, gleaming with light. And the sunsets were simply wonderful; all the western sky a long stretch of crimson and gold and scarlet, and the sea reflecting it. I am no good at describing things—but I think of those sunsets yet.

The Captain was rather awe-inspiring until you came to know him. He was very tall, nearly as tall as Dad, and his face was stern until he smiled. He ran the *Kalara* like a warship, with everything spick and span and all her paint and brass-work shining. Not like some coastal ships, Dad said. When he was in white uniform you'd have thought it was pressed three times a day. Boat-drill on the *Kalara* was a very thorough business. Dad knew ships on which people wouldn't bother to turn up for it, and where women who did turn up refused to put on their life-belts because they said it would disarrange their hair: and they got away with it. On the *Kalara* you fell in at your proper station, with your life-belt on, and if every tape wasn't properly fixed you were told off and made to learn how to do it. Then the inspecting officer came along with his list and checked up on everybody: if a passenger had shirked, he got a pretty sharp

summons to explain his absence, and was told he'd be fined heavily if it happened again. This led to great meekness on boat-drill days. But we all knew it was sense, because it's rather late to learn how to put on a life-belt after an accident has happened.

We three looked at the Captain from afar with great respect, before we actually met him. When we did meet him the encounter was quite unexpected and painful. Clem and I had got up very early that day; Binkie had done the same, and we found her on the boat-deck. It was empty except for ourselves; we were all feeling pretty good, with the sea-air and the sunshine, and our morning walk became rather a rag—though we ragged silently, as far as possible, in case the Chief Engineer was still asleep. Clem was chasing Binkie and me: we dodged behind a deck-house, then suddenly nipped back round the corner, hoping to catch Clem unawares. But most unfortunately the person we caught was the Captain.

He came out of a doorway quickly as I got near it, and then things happened like an earthquake. At the first glimpse of him I tried to dodge, but I slipped and landed on all fours just in front of him. There was no dignity in the way the Captain took a header over me. He crashed into Binkie, and they went down in a heap together.

The Captain picked up Binkie, and I picked up myself and the Captain's cap, which had skated under a boat. It seemed the only thing I could do, but I doubted if it was enough to save me from being put in irons or whatever it is Captains do to offenders. I tried to say something suitable, but there really isn't anything suitable for a Captain you've just sent spinning. Anyhow, for a moment he was too busy seeing if he'd hurt Binkie to notice me. I looked at Binkie and saw, to my horror, that she was choking with laughter. For a moment I was annoyed, because if she had pretended she was a nice little girl with a few bruises it might have softened him—then I began to laugh myself, for there is something about Binkie's laughter that simply makes you join in. I tried to stop myself, but I just spluttered. From sounds behind the deck-house I gathered that Clem was spluttering, too.

I thought, well, that has put the lid on everything; and between the agony of trying to suppress my insane laughter and anxiety as to the immediate future I was nearly helpless. And then I became aware that someone else was laughing. It was the Captain. He gave a deep chuckle, and fairly shook. So we all did the same.

When he could speak, the Captain said, "It's Peter and Co., isn't it? The Chief told me what I might expect when I met you, but I didn't think the impact would be so severe. My cap, please. Where's the rest of the Co.?"

I gave him his cap, and Clem came round the corner, very red and choky. We managed to apologize, but he said, “Don’t trouble: I brought it on myself. But you needn’t tell the ship about it, for the sake of discipline. Binkie, are you sure you have no major injuries?”

Binks said, “No, but what about you?”

“Mine are probably major, but I shall conceal them,” said the Captain. “Just now I’m lost in relief that none of the crew saw my downfall—if any of them had been about I should have had to change my ship. Well, I’ll retire to my cabin and lick my wounds, when I find them. We shall meet again in happier circumstances.”

“Oh, that couldn’t be!” said Binkie earnestly—and she began to giggle again. The Captain looked at her with his mouth twitching, and said, “Take her away, boys: I don’t think the poor thing’s responsible.”

“She’s not,” said the Chief Engineer, suddenly appearing in the doorway. “Tell me, did anyone see you from the bridge?”

“Most fortunately, no,” said the Captain. “That was my first thought as I picked myself up, but they weren’t in sight.”

“A pity,” said the Chief. “I wouldn’t have missed it for a farm myself. Thank you. Peter.” He disappeared again.

“He *would* have to be there,” said the Captain bitterly. He patted Binks on the head and went off.

So that was the beginning of our acquaintance with the Captain, and of course we never told a soul. We were frightfully polite when we met him next time—it was on the lower deck, and Mother introduced us to him one by one. We all looked down our noses and said, “How do you do?” That afternoon his steward came with an invitation for all six of us to go to tea in his cabin, and he gave us a great time. And later on, he had us on the bridge while we were going through the Whitsunday Passage and showed us the chart-room and the wireless cabin, and how the steering worked, I wouldn’t recommend anyone on general principles to make acquaintance with a captain by crashing methods, but in our case it certainly seemed to pan out well.

Clem and I had no trouble with Mr. Patten in our cabin, and I don’t think he had much with us. Keeping different hours for getting up and going to bed made it easy enough not to get in each other’s way; we met now and then when dressing for dinner, but our dressing was a quick matter, and we gave him the looking-glass all to himself. He used it, too: he was very particular about his appearance. Once I caught sight of a bit of tattooing on his arm, so I asked him if he’d had it done in Burma. He said “No” rather shortly, and didn’t say anything more. I had a feeling for a moment that I’d put my foot into it, but

it passed off: he was quite jolly after that.

I woke up late one night, hours after we'd gone to bed. The cabin-light was out, but there was a glow from the bunk lamp over Mr. Patten's head opposite my berth. His little curtain was partly drawn; through it I could see dimly that he was sitting up in bed. He was reading letters, I thought—I heard the soft crackling of paper. Presently he laid down one so that its edge was beyond the curtain; the light fell on it and I saw that it was some kind of map. Then I sneezed unexpectedly. His hand shot out and the map disappeared.

In the morning he said, "Did I keep you awake last night, Peter? I'm sorry if I did. I was studying out my fishing-cruise among the islands—one never seems to get time for that sort of thing during the day."

I said, no, I'd only waked up for a minute and seen his light, but nothing could keep me awake aboard the *Kalara*. That was true, for Clem and I had quite lost our bad habits about unpleasant dreams and lying awake. The sea had cured all that; we slept like logs from the time we turned in. I wondered a little why he'd snatched back his map so quickly when I sneezed, but I forgot all about it. It was none of my business, anyhow.

At Townsville there was rather a rush in the early morning. Everyone was going for a day tour to Magnetic Island, and we wanted to be in the first launch: Dad mustered his party very soon after breakfast, and we got away. That was another day of new things; our first glimpse of real live coral growing under water; our first tropical island, with coco-nut palms everywhere. Best of all, our first bathe. There's a grand bathing-place—a little bay, made shark-proof by a steel fence, with dressing sheds near the sand and shelving rocks that were perfect for baking ourselves when we came out of the water. We lay there and soaked in the sun. It didn't seem possible that only a week before we'd been shivering in Sydney.

When we got back to our ship that night there was a note from Mr. Patten saying good-bye. He said he'd been sorry to miss us in the morning and he'd enjoyed sharing a cabin with us; and he wished us all luck. We thought it very decent of him to write. However, Clem and I were overjoyed to find that no other intruder was coming into our cabin, and we spent no time in regretting the loss of Mr. Patten.

CHAPTER VIII

AMONG THE BLACKS

"GOING ashore on Palm Island, Mrs. Forsyth?" asked the Captain, coming up to where we were sitting on the fore-deck one morning. Binkie and Clem and I were sprawled out on the hatch. The steward had just been round with ice-creams, and we were regretfully licking our spoons for the last time.

"We go ashore everywhere," said Mother firmly. "We are thoroughly good tourists. If I have moments when I think a deck-chair on an empty ship might be tempting, I suppress them."

"Mother—you *couldn't* miss places like that!" put in Binkie anxiously.

"That's just it," she said. "I always find I can't. I came for a rest-cure, but I seem to have spent this voyage always on my feet. It's all your fault, Captain Greer; when you are not dropping us off at ports and islands you take us among such lovely places that I can't bear not to see them. If I collapse into a deck-chair someone says, 'Oh, *look* at that lovely island!' and I realize that all I can see is a strip of sky, so I rise hastily."

"I'm terribly sorry," the Captain said, looking penitent. "What can I do about it?"

"Don't let her deceive you, Captain," said Dad lazily. "She won't keep still. Who was it went leaping from port to starboard like a hare yesterday, just because she heard there were porpoises about?"

"Yes, but I like porpoises, and I never see any at Weeroona," said Mother.

"We might try some in the lagoon," offered Dad. "But you're just as keen on whales and flying-fish and sea-eagles. And sunsets and moon-rises. Now I save myself all that trouble. I find a couple of sensible men in the smoking-room and we talk about cattle."

"Listen to him, Binkie!" said the Captain. "He might as well have stayed on his old Weeroona, mightn't he?" The Captain was always pulling Binkie's leg about animals, because she is so keen on them. "Think of a man giving his mind to cattle, when he might be concentrating on porpoises!"

Binkie rose to that at once. She rolled over on the hatch and glared at him.

"Well, I think they're the only sensible things," she said. "Just you come to Weeroona—you won't think much of your old porpoises when you see a big

mob of Herefords—and some decent horses!"

"I never do think deeply about porpoises," admitted the Captain. "But Herefords and horses! Why, they're all alike, Binkie—once you've seen one, you've seen the lot. Not a pin to choose between them."

Binkie looked at him with great interest, and her eyes twinkled.

"Why, that's just like ships, isn't it?" she said softly.

For once the Captain hadn't an answer. We all burst out laughing and he looked at her helplessly and said, "You win. If I could maroon you on a reef, I would. This very minute. Well, Mrs. Forsyth, to go back to where we were before—or were we really anywhere?—I suppose you'll go ashore this afternoon?"

"Is it interesting?" Mother asked.

"Most people think so. I'm not very keen on blacks in a settlement myself. Of course they're well treated: properly fed and clothed, and given a certain amount of the right kind of work. But it's an unnatural life for them, poor wretches."

"They have criminals there, don't they?" put in Binkie.

"Yes, plenty. One might scalp you if you began arguing with him," said the Captain with a note of hope in his voice. "But what's a criminal? A blackfellow doesn't recognize crime from our standpoint. He sees a bullock in the scrub, and he's hungry, so he spears it; or a pal steals his best boomerang or his second-best wife, so he knocks him on the head with a waddy. All very right and proper from the blackfellow point of view; he's only doing his duty as a decent member of his tribe. Then along comes a policeman, and he finds himself handcuffed first, in jail next, and lastly on a settlement. I don't believe that half his time he knows what all the fuss is about. Of course, he learns that on the island; but by that time it's too late: he can't go back."

"Don't they ever let them go back?" asked Binkie quickly.

"So far as I know, they don't. He mightn't get a welcome if he did, and anyhow he'd be more agin' the Government than ever. The idea is that it costs a good deal to bring him to Palm Island, so he might as well stay there, learning to wear clothes and sing hymns and be a good boy. And he does it after a fashion; but it's going against blackfellow nature."

"But look here, Captain," said Dad, "what are people to do with them? If spearing cattle and murdering each other were allowed to go on, how would it end?"

"Hard to say," admitted the Captain. "They have to be taught to let white men's cattle alone, but I'd try to leave them to settle their own affairs. I'd like

to give them a big tract of country where they could lead natural lives without too much interference, except in the way of help if game ran short."

"And then you'd get constant warfare, and the warlike tribes would wipe out the peaceful ones," Dad said. "You can't mix them with safety, I've been told."

"That's so, I believe. Oh, it's one of those problems that are easy enough to solve on paper—mighty hard when you come to actual conditions. But I never feel that the settlements solve it, in spite of all the hard work the white people there put in over it—and nobody can say too much for them. They do their level best; never spare themselves. And the Government's done its best to make it a place where the blacks can be happy and well cared for. The criminals don't live at the main village, by the way. They're some distance down the coast, in another camp."

"Then there won't be any criminals where we land?" Binkie said regretfully.

"Only Peter and Co.," said the Captain—and went off.

The *Kalara* dropped anchor in Challenger Bay after lunch, and we went ashore. We were landed far out on a mud flat where a single-plank jetty ran for a very long distance to the beach. Our party was in the stern of the launch, the last to get out, so we were able to watch how the passengers took that jetty. Some, of course, went along it without thinking, but a good many made heavy weather of it; and occasionally there were refined shrieks and less refined exclamations when the plank sagged a little, swaying under the weight, and the pools of water beneath it seemed very close.

Not that there should have been any danger of falling in. The blacks were streaming down from the village to meet us; all along the jetty were young men on the sand, ready with a hand at any moment to steady a visitor who felt shaky. But it wasn't every visitor who seemed willing to grab hold of the black hands. Quite a number were city people who had never seen an abo. at close quarters and were a bit shy of them. One very fat woman who put aside the help had a painful moment, because in looking at the blackfellow in a rather alarmed way she made a false step, swayed, screamed, and was only saved from falling off by the quickness of the would-be helper. He took her weight much as if she were a bale of wool, and she clasped him round the neck; and both were much embarrassed before he got her feet firmly on the plank. And there was a man who strode on in a lordly fashion, looking at the island more than the jetty. He put one foot down where there wasn't any plank, overbalanced, and a pool below received him with a tremendous splash. We felt that we learned a good deal by being last out of the launch.

Hosts of piccaninnies met us on the beach. They were all dressed in ordinary clothes, bare-legged, of course. The girls wore bits of bright ribbon wherever they could stick them on. I saw Miss Tarrant gazing in a horrified way at one girl about twelve whose frizzy hair was set into tight waves, each wave held down by rows of hairdressers' clip pins. She looked like an ironmongery exhibit.

"And the dreadful part of it is," said Miss Tarrant, as we moved on, "that she's terribly pleased with herself, and probably all the other nice little kinky-haired girls envy her like mad. This place is altogether too civilized for me, Peter!"

It *was* civilized. Big hills rose behind the settlement; all the lower ground round the bay was laid out in regular streets, with good bungalows for the white people. Everywhere were rows of palms and mango-trees and papaws, and the bungalow gardens blazed with crotons and other tropical shrubs. The church we saw was a big well-built one, mostly done by native labour; there was a great cross on the wall made of pearl-shell, but the thing that struck us most was the lectern—carved by an abo. out of hard red wood, the Bible held by an eagle. The eagle was roughly carved, but there was life in every line of it. All sorts of tiny cottages housed the blacks—some hardwood, but most were built of plaited coco-nut leaves and thatched in native fashion. Some had rather jolly little gardens round them.

Not a soul seemed to be in the huts. Everyone was out to see the visitors and to stare at the *Kalara* lying in the bay. It's a big day for Palm Island when a steamer calls. The white people had a tea-house going for us, and along the main street was a regular market: rows of stalls with native women selling the things they make—baskets and mats and shells, queer jewellery made of pearl-shell and coral, as well as great piles of coco-nuts and papaws. The men took no notice of the stalls except where native weapons were being sold: boomerangs, shields, spears and spear-throwers and different kinds of waddies. Then you could be sure that an old blackfellow would be squatting near, keeping a sharp eye on everything the lubras sold.

"Good things, too," Dad said, when Clem and I made a bee-line for the weapons. He picked up a spear-thrower and examined it. "Look at the workmanship in this womerah, Clem."

It was nearly three feet long; a flat, thin piece of wood, dark red, tapering to a point where there was a short stick lashed on at a curious angle, notched to catch the butt of the spear. At the other end was a handle—a big shell, very well fastened to the wood with some sort of fibre, over which was a smooth coating of native gum.

"That's worth having," Dad said. "Not like the cheap imitation stuff you see in the curio shops in the cities—junk made out of any bit of the wrong sort of wood."

"And trimmed with poker-work!" said Miss Tarrant disgustedly. "Poker-work—for a warrior! I often wonder how many English and American tourists take those horrors home and proudly display them to their friends as aboriginal art."

"Millions," said Dad. "I suppose they hang them on the ancestral walls. Well, what would you like, boys? Anything here appeal to you?"

We made it clear that a lot of things did. Binkie got a boomerang and a waddy, and Clem and I voted for womerahs and bundles of spears. The spears were very light, made of strong reeds or light sticks with a long sharp head of heavy hardwood lashed to them. We bought plenty, because we reckoned we should probably lose a good many when we did battle in the Weeroona paddocks.

"And if I catch you battling in a paddock where there are cattle, there will be trouble," said Dad thoughtfully.

We went along to an open space where a crowd was gathering. Nearly all the men of the settlement were there. They were taller than the blacks we knew in the south; most of them slenderly built, with very small hands. Some of the younger bucks were quite good-looking, though nearly all the old ones were pretty hideous. All had deep-set, mysterious-looking eyes under very heavy brows. I wondered awfully what they thought of the white people who looked at them as if they were curiosities; and if they ever thought of the days when their tribes owned Australia. Some of them looked as if they did. I should think that having free blankets and free food wouldn't make up for not being free men.

Still, the majority looked cheerful enough. They had arranged a sort of corroboree for us; presently a number came along got up in scarlet lava-lavas; faces, bodies and legs painted with white stripes and red ochre, and weapons daubed in the same way. The crowd formed a ring, and they did a lot of action dances. All had some meaning, such as wallaby-hunting, with two dancers squatting and leaping like wallabies, and the others stalking and finally spearing them. We wished we knew the meaning of some of the others, but we couldn't catch on to them all. But what we did admire was their marvellous control of their muscles; no matter what their feet were doing in some dances you wouldn't see even a ripple on the body muscles or a flicker of their heads.

Then two had a match to see which could first strip the outer husk of a dry coco-nut with his teeth. Most people want a hammer and chisel to get that

woody husk off a nut, but these chaps bit into it as if it were pulp, and the inch-and-a half thick stuff came off in great chunks. They must have had marvellous teeth, to say nothing of wonderful gripping power in their jaws. It was less than a minute before the big nuts were bare.

"I should be sorry for any dentist who tried to make a living on Palm Island!" remarked Mother.

The men made fire next, with rubbing-sticks—one fellow had his tinder blazing within thirty seconds. Clem and I sighed, remembering how often we had tried to do it. All we had ever got out of it was blistered palms, with never even as much as a hint of smoke.

Then there was a show of boomerang-throwing, better than any we had ever seen. One old chap did a stunt that was new even to Dad. He made his boomerang go up, round and round in a circle, and then it rose higher and actually circled again. Then it came back and dropped at his feet. That brought down the house, as far as the *Kalara* visitors were concerned; everybody clapped and cheered, and the old fellow did it again with a flick as careless as if he were flicking away a fly. I'd love to know how he managed it.

The last show was spear-throwing. First they showed us how high they could send them—some of the spears went so far into the sky you would have believed they'd gone for good. After that they threw at a thin banana stem stuck in the earth about sixty yards away. The spears went dead straight and level for about a dozen yards: then they rose in the air much higher and came down in a curve on the mark. That stem was only about two inches thick, but some of them sent their spears quivering into it, and not one missed it by more than a few inches.

"It makes one think," said Miss Tarrant. "Fancy seeing about a hundred of those men, all meaning business, charging us. And I am so *much* thicker than a banana stem!"

"You'd be like a pin-cushion, Tarry," said Binks unfeelingly.

The best thing of all came last. Two men fought a duel, with an old man as umpire. I would not have cared to have that umpire's job. He crouched down between the two fighters, a little to one side, springing here and there to watch the flight of a spear—often they seemed much too close to him to be pleasant. Each fighter threw in turn; the spear whizzed like lightning at the other fellow, and he would turn it aside with his womerah as it reached him. It was the quickest bit of work anyone could think of. That was at first, when they were about twenty-five yards apart; but after a bit they began to close in on each other, and never did a pretence look more like the real thing. They came stealthily, crouching down, watching each other's eyes: and in that ghastly

war-paint their set faces and fierce eyes looked murderous. I think we all felt a bit jumpy: it seemed as if the skin of civilization was so thin that it might crack at any moment.

They didn't come straight: they stalked each other, and sometimes a man would give a sudden leap to one side, flinging his spear as he did so. It always went clear to the mark, and the other fellow never failed to parry it; then in a second, his own spear would be fitted to the womerah and he would be attacking in his turn. The umpire had to be pretty agile to keep out of the way—and all the time that old chap was giving them points mentally and keeping tally of the scores. It ended when a spearsman, very close now and looking thoroughly savage, sent his spear low down at the other's body. All the throws had been high before this; it looked horribly dangerous, because we didn't see how it could be parried. A gasp went round.

The other fighter knew all about it. They weren't more than a dozen yards apart when the spear flashed at him—but in that split second he dropped on his knees, his womerah came up, and the spear, flicked daintily, sailed high over his head and into a tree. The umpire signalled, and all the friends of the winner yelled themselves hoarse, while the loser stalked off, looking as if he'd murder anyone who came near him. We heard afterwards that the fighters do really work themselves up to absolute fury, and they've been known to go to some quiet place after the show and fight all over again. In such cases I should think there would be no skin of civilization at all, but possibly a funeral to end up with.

The crowd broke up, the blacks chattering excitedly among themselves. We found an old, old man sitting on a bench: Dad tried to talk to him, but he didn't seem to know any English at all, though he smiled in a vague way. Binkie collected a few small piccaninnies and grouped them round him for a photograph—it wasn't too easy, for they were all as active as grasshoppers, and one little girl insisted on keeping her mouth wide open. Not, as Binkie said, that she looked any uglier that way, because that wasn't possible. When the camera clicked they scattered and ran with yells of laughter. But the old man sat still, looking straight ahead. He was wizen and shrunken, with snow-white hair, and his hands were just knotted claws: but he must have been a big man once, fierce-eyed and strong. A warrior, I should think. I did wonder what his thoughts were.

CHAPTER IX

KONGAI ISLAND

UP THE Queensland coast we steamed into the tropics, forgetting that there had ever been such a thing as winter. Cairns was our point farthest north; we stayed there four days, seeing all the things we had heard about—sugar-cane rippling in great stretches of bronze and green; pineapple plantations; jungles where giant Kauri pines towered over wild masses of scrub filled with ferns and orchids. There were blue crater-lakes over which we floated, seeing the forest round them reflected so clearly in their depths that their glittering leaves looked like drowned sunlight far below us. Once our little boat drifted near a jutting bit of the bank where a great brown and yellow python lay coiled, basking in the sun. It watched us with little beady eyes, not troubling itself to move.

We saw butterflies as big as birds—and birds that looked like butterflies. We swam in the lower stretches of the Barren River, so calm that we could hardly believe that farther up we had even seen its falls plunging nearly eight hundred feet into a rocky gorge. We travelled the road that climbs to the highlands above Cairns, wriggling like a snake up and up—six hundred and twelve bends in twelve miles, and new wonderlands showing at each bend. And we promised ourselves that we'd come back, to stay very much longer; not only because Queensland was new and beautiful country, but because we thought that Queenslanders were the very kindest people we'd ever met. Wherever we went it was the same—people went out of their way to do us good turns and made us welcome. I believe that if we had been able to accept all the invitations given us by perfect strangers we'd have stayed there for months. But in Queensland people don't seem to know the word "stranger." They make you into friends straight off.

Four days seemed not nearly enough. But the *Kalara* wouldn't wait; we turned south again to Townsville, with Kongai Island beginning to loom excitingly in our minds. It was the next afternoon that Miss Tarrant came along to add to our excitements.

"I have just learned a very remarkable fact," she said solemnly.

We grunted in a questioning manner, the way you do when somebody makes that sort of remark. It was very hot; we were half asleep in deck-chairs. Facts did not seem to interest any of us very much. Miss Tarrant sat down.

“Yes, you may all grunt,” she said. “But you will wake up when I tell you what it is. Did it ever occur to the members of this expedition to ask at what time we leave the ship for Kongai Island?”

“Usual time, I suppose,” said Dad, yawning.

“But there isn’t a usual time—for islands,” she said. “They just happen when they like, and the ship drops you off, and they catch you. Kongai happens at a most peculiar time—somewhere about three o’clock in the morning!”

We came to life as one man.

“Tarry, you’re joking!” exclaimed Mother.

“I couldn’t joke on a subject like that, Mrs. Forsyth. It’s too solemn. The second officer has just told me. He seemed to think it a very ordinary time. Sailors don’t care!”

“Why did nobody ever warn me!” groaned Dad. “I’ll have something to say to Garfield—he planned this cruise. Do you think there’s any chance that the second officer was being playful?”

“I hoped so—but I asked the Chief Steward. He’s never playful. Quite true, he said. He added by way of soothing me that someone would call us and give us sandwiches.”

“Sandwiches at three o’clock in the morning!” uttered Mother. “I can’t imagine anything I should like less.”

“There will be coffee with them,” Miss Tarrant told her comfortingly. “And lots of stewards to help us, poor things—I wonder how they enjoy it. It’s all very simple, they tell me. We are called; we rise blithely——”

“Did you say *blithely*?” demanded Dad.

“Certainly I did. We dress; Mr. Forsyth shaves with care—I hope. We swallow coffee and sandwiches. Then we wait. The *Kalara* arrives at a certain spot in the ocean, known only to the Captain. Then we drift. We drift until a small light shows far away, and we go on drifting until the small light turns into a small launch. The small launch hooks on to the *Kalara*, and at this point we hope there is only a small swell on the ocean. Did you say anything, Mrs. Forsyth?”

“I moaned faintly,” said Mother. “Go on.”

“The gangway is now lowered to the launch. Incoming passengers returning from Kongai ascend—you will observe that we also shall be incoming passengers some bright morning later on—at three a.m.! Stewards hop up and down the gangway with mounds of luggage. Finally Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth and party descend in state and are scooped aboard the launch by strong

men. Cries of farewell rend the air; doubtless very pleasing to sleeping passengers. And off we go."

"It's cruelty to animals," said Dad heavily.

Binkie said, "I think it'll be simply gorgeous!"

. . . . .

Well, it happened just like that. We had a very cheerful last evening on the *Kalara*, with people farewelling us and making plans to meet again in Sydney. The Captain paid us a special visit; he said he declined to sit up to see us go, but he would listen to our thuds as we fell into the launch. Even the stewards went out of their way to say good-bye. We were feeling really sorry to go. Before we started, the voyage only seemed a sort of introduction to the real thing—the island. But we had loved the *Kalara*, and she was such a happy ship that we hated leaving her. Anyhow, we promised we'd come back on her when we had to go home.

The launch from Kongai brought a lot of people. They came up our gangway, all as brown as an old saddle, carrying fishing-rods and parcels of coral; then they hung over the rail calling good-byes to the launch and saying they would be back again next year. That sounded cheerful to us; Kongai, we felt, must be all right. We were the only passengers getting off. It was quite easy: the ship had strong lights trained on the gangway, and there was hardly any swell. We found ourselves standing on the after-deck, the launch hands casting off quickly. Then we were heading away from the towering side of the *Kalara* and all her friendly lights, and scudding into the dark.

A few minutes after we started, a man came aft and introduced himself to us. He was Mr. Burgess, who runs the island; he said he'd heard a good deal about us from Mr. Garfield, and he hoped we would like Kongai. We talked for a few minutes and then he went back to take the wheel. He suggested that we might like to go into the cabin, but we liked being on deck better. It was a wonderful night: no moon, but the sky fairly blazed with stars and they seemed very close to us, like diamonds set in black velvet. Every few minutes a shooting-star flashed across the sky. We could see nothing of land for awhile; then a humped shape began to take form with pin-points of light in two places. It was an hour before we slowed down.

Ahead of us was another launch lying at anchor a little way from the shore. We anchored near her, and a black boy slipped into a flat-bottomed dinghy we had towed astern and brought it alongside. Mr. Burgess came along with a deck-hand: we all piled into the dinghy.

"She's pretty wet with dew, I'm afraid, Mrs. Forsyth," Mr. Burgess said—

and she certainly was. “However, it’s only a few minutes’ pull. The tide’s not high enough to get you on to the beach—we’ll carry the ladies. I suppose the gentlemen won’t mind wading.”

We said of course not, and began to get our shoes and socks off. Binkie said under her breath to me, “I won’t be carried!” and started getting ready to wade. But she wasn’t quick enough: in a moment the dinghy grounded, and before Binks could realize what was happening to her she was picked up by the black boy, just like a parcel, and carried ashore. And was Binkie annoyed!

It was a queer home-coming. We couldn’t see a thing, except the dim shape of a building some distance away. It was cold, too; we put on our shoes, all of us shivering in the wind as we stood waiting while the luggage was brought ashore. Then our host came back with a big torch.

He took us along a path where broken coral crumbled under our feet. Presently we arrived at a little bungalow with two rooms opening on to a verandah. Clem and I had a tiny bungalow to ourselves a bit farther on. Mr. Burgess switched on the lights, yawning as he did so, and went off. We learned later that he hadn’t been to bed all night—so there was plenty of reason for him to yawn.

We didn’t think we should be able to go to sleep again, though we were glad enough to roll into bed. It was strange to miss the familiar throb of the *Kalara’s* screw, and to hear the sound of waves on the beach and the wind blowing through the trees close to our hut. But we didn’t hear them for long. We fell asleep all of a sudden, and the next thing I knew was full daylight, and a grinning black boy beside my bed with cups of tea.

“Mornin’,” he said. “Slep’ well? Breakfas’ in half-hour.”

We were glad of that tea. Through the open door, as we drank it, we could see a thin belt of trees and palms, and beyond them the beach and the sparkling blue of the bay. That bay fairly shouted to us to come and swim. We found our bathing-trunks, scrambled into them and dashed out.

But we didn’t dash far. The path from our bungalow was all crushed coral, and we found in the first three strides that coral, even when crushed, has points sharp enough to check anyone with bare feet. We went back for sand-shoes, and as we sat on the verandah to put them on we saw Binkie and Miss Tarrant doing exactly what we had done; which was comforting.

There were several people bathing, but not very near us, and we kept to ourselves that first morning. From the sea we could see the lie of the island: steep and rocky inland, covered with bush, and sloping gently to the shore. A big mess-house with wide verandahs all round stood opposite the anchored launches, a jumble of store-houses and sheds behind it. All through the scrub

and along the beach were bungalows like our own, each with its little verandah and a tank to catch rain-water. The whole place looked jolly and home-like: and the sea was lovely, not very warm as yet, but with a wonderful tingle in it. Dad and Mother joined us in a moment, and they liked it as much as we did. Then there was a scurry to get dressed in time for breakfast.

Mrs. Burgess came to meet us as we went over to the mess-house. She was much younger than we'd expected her to be, but I suppose island landladies are different. Anyhow, she wasn't in the least like a landlady, judging by some I'd known. She had a merry face, and she wore a white shirt and blue shorts and carried herself like a boy. Nothing ever seemed a trouble to her, all the time we were there; and I don't believe there was anything she couldn't do, from cooking a dinner to catching a devil-fish. She made us feel at home at once; we didn't have the "new boy" feeling, even when we went into the big dining-room for the first time.

A few people were there, and Mrs. Burgess introduced us. But introductions aren't really wanted on an island: everyone talks to everyone else, and you pick up names or you don't, but it doesn't matter at all. It's quite different to being on the mainland. There's no dressing-up; nobody cares what other people look like, so nearly everyone is comfortable in shorts or slacks. A few older women wore dresses, and they looked quite peculiar. Mother wore one the first morning because she wasn't brave enough to come out in slacks for the first time. But she got into them after breakfast, and we were all so pleased with the way they suited her that she never put on a dress again except at night. But if anyone had told Mother at Weeroona that she would do that, she would simply have thought they were raving mad. Which shows you what an island can do to you—a tropical one, anyhow.

"What's the programme here?" Dad asked a man after breakfast.

"Depends on what you feel like. If people want to stay on shore there's plenty of island to explore—either on the flat or standing on edge. Good climbing, but you need to be careful. There's tennis and billiards for those who want 'em. And you can go out to the reef at low tide—enough to see there to keep you busy for days. Marine life and all that. I don't worry about those things myself."

"What's your game?" asked Dad, lighting his pipe.

"Fishing. And what fishing! There's nothing Burgess doesn't know about it—he's been in these parts all his life. Red Emperor and whacking great mackerel and coral trout and schnapper and trevalli—that's only a few of what we get here. Rod or line, it's all the same—you never know what you'll hook. And apart from fishing, there's cruising among the islands; you could go to a

different place every day for a month, and never get tired of it. I tell you," said the man solemnly, "you begin to come alive here, even if you're half-dead to begin with. Not that you look that way," he hastened to add.

It was all true, we found. He hadn't exaggerated a bit: I don't believe we could have got tired of Kongai if we had stayed there for months. That first day we took things easily, swimming and sun-bathing, and exploring part of the island. There was a wide lagoon in front of the beach where the houses stood. More than half a mile out a great coral reef shut in the lagoon—we could see how the water darkened over the wide band of the reef, and as the tide ran out bits of it began to show out of the water. Beyond our bay was a high rocky point with a rough track over it; at low tide we found we could get round the point on a stony beach where pandanus palms with orchids growing on them struggled for an existence among the rocks, and great masses of dead coral were washed up everywhere. From the point we could see ever so many islands, big and little, all uninhabited except by sea-birds, because none of them had any water-supply.

It was impossible to walk all round Kongai. For a good part of the way on the side opposite the settlement steep cliffs ran down sheer to the sea. There was heavy bush on top of the cliffs, and a thick tangle of undergrowth with great hoop-pines standing high above the mat of green. Mr. Burgess had a few sheep for killing that roamed up there, and there were goats, too: I heard that goats had been put on several islands long ago, in case shipwrecked sailors needed food. Though how the shipwrecked sailors would ever have killed the goats wasn't clear, for they were as wild as hawks, and nobody could get near them. The sheep were not much tamer—when Mr. Burgess wanted one he had to shoot it, and it was a hard job to get the carcase down to the flat, for all the hill-sides were covered with loose rocks, half-hidden in long grass, and you had to watch every step.

But Koona and Yeppi used to go up them like hares. They were Mr. Burgess's two native boys; Torres Strait islanders, fine upstanding fellows—a far better type than any of the mainland blacks. They were mission trained and could speak English a little: Koona could write a few words, and he was very proud of it. All the Torres Strait men are good sailors; this pair had been on pearling luggers from boyhood. Koona was a good deal older than Yeppi, so he was always the boss; it was funny to see him patronizing Yeppi and telling him all the things he'd teach him when he was old enough. Yeppi used to grin and say nothing. We reckoned he knew nearly as much as Koona about most things. Both were devoted to Mrs. Burgess and she had no trouble about getting the weekly washing done—the boys did it.

That afternoon Mr. Burgess took a party of us round to the other side of the

island to see a coral pool. It was pretty rough at first; several of the passengers were beginning to look green before we swung round the point and came into calm water, sheltered by the cliffs. High above us we could see a sea-eagle's nest, a great heap of sticks, with one of the eagles circling above it; a little farther on a lot of ravens were chasing a pair of scared ospreys. We were towing two dinghies, and when we came to a little bay we anchored, and four people got into each.

We drifted slowly over the bay. The water was a more beautiful blue than anything we had ever seen, and presently we realized why. The whole bay was a mass of growing coral, in some places only a foot from the surface; and most of it was deep sky-blue. Leaning over we could make out the different forms of the coral: some "stag-horn," with long pointed branches, some fluted, some like great mushrooms. The water was clear as crystal, but there was enough ripple to cloud the view. Then Mr. Burgess passed along a big box, glass-bottomed, and we held it just below the surface and looked through.

It was like magic. Everything was suddenly clear, and we saw a thousand things we hadn't imagined: hundreds of different corals of every kind, big and little; delicate as lace, many of them, and taking forms like vases and fans and animals. Most were blue, but among the blue were white and pink and yellow and green and lilac; and there were clumps of coloured sea-anemones waving their tentacles in the water.

And we saw fish—but what fish! Some over a foot long, but most of them tiny things less than two inches, with the queerest shapes and the wildest colours; swimming about quietly, or darting in and out of the coral as if they were playing hide-and-seek. The boat drifted along, every moment taking us over something new; and we all felt we never wanted to stop looking. It was just the most amazing sea-garden—and I believe that if a mermaid had swum into sight and sat down on a big mushroom coral not one of us would have been surprised. We were past being surprised at anything.

We went home slowly. Getting near the Kongai reef, with the water shallowing, I suddenly saw a huge fish. I caught Mr. Burgess's arm and pointed to it. It was over six feet long, and tremendously bulky, with a mouth that looked big enough to swallow me. I'd have hated to find myself swimming near it. It was just poking round in an aimless way, but when the shadow of the launch came near it, it went off like a shot.

"Blue groper," said Mr. Burgess. "Common as frogs in a swamp up here, but we don't often catch them, they're so heavy. That fellow would weigh every bit of three hundred pounds, but we've caught bigger ones. Trouble is, if you get a groper you've generally got to tow him in; too big to lift into the boat. And then, ten to one a shark scents him, and comes along for a meal. I've

known a shark charge in again and again, biting off an enormous chunk each time, until there was nothing left but the groper's head with the hook in it. When it gets to that point you might as well sling the great ugly head at him and make a clean job of it."

We found that getting ashore at Kongai was a matter that varied with the tide. On a full tide the big launch could run in so far that people could make a jump from the bow to dry sand. Otherwise we had to get into the dinghy and be rowed as far as it could go. When it grounded, everybody rolled up their slacks, unless they were lucky enough to be in shorts, and went overboard, generally into water about knee-deep, but there was always a chance that you'd come across a hole and go deeper. Sometimes we had a full ten minutes' walk in water. It was a queer feeling to get out into the dark sea at dusk, seeing a great stretch of it ahead, with the settlement lights glimmering across it. But when we had been in for a moment we could see every object on the sand, the water was so clear; and so we could dodge oddments like star-fish as big as dinner-plates, or lumps of coral, or slowly-moving sting-rays. We used to hear a lot about sting-rays, but I only once met one when I was wading: a big flat fish, with a body about eighteen inches across and a tail nearly a yard long. I gave that unpleasant tail a wide berth, you can be sure.

Koona and Yeppi gave us a special performance that evening. Everyone was sitting in the mess-room after dinner when Mr. Burgess brought them in. During the day they wore any old clothes, or just bathing-togs; but now they were very smart in clean white vests and scarlet lava-lavas, with white and red bands tied round their heads and ankles. They held clusters of big black beans, which rattled as they moved. Each looked a bit sheepish.

A space was cleared at the end of the long room, and Mr. Burgess squatted on the floor with a native drum across his knees.

"Now then, boys," he said. "Any dance you like. Fast or slow?"

The boys took some time to decide that. They whispered together, Koona suggesting things to Yeppi, and Yeppi shaking his head. Finally they came to an agreement and Koona told Mr. Burgess, "Slow."

Then they came to life. They straightened their shoulders; the sheepish look disappeared altogether. They began to dance, chanting in their own language. What the dances meant we couldn't guess, but Mrs. Burgess said each one had a meaning. They pranced and twirled and postured in perfect time, the beans keeping up a continual rattling, their eyes gleaming in their black faces. The tap-tap-tap of the drum beat in time with them. There was great use of their feet in stamping—and it was wonderful to feel the power of that stamping. Each boy brought his bare foot down at the same moment, and

the floor rang with the sound. Sometimes they gave Mr. Burgess the signal to go faster, and then the pounding of the feet seemed to echo inside one's head.

I couldn't help thinking what that dancing would be like done in native surroundings—back on the Torres Strait island they came from, and in the old days before the missions came. It would be in the open air with moonlight coming through the coco-nut palms; with fires casting flickers on the black bodies, and a ring of dark on-lookers, the fires shining on their eye-balls. And instead of two, a hundred men, dancing to a dozen drums; getting mad with excitement as the drummers worked themselves up to fury; and the chant growing wilder and wilder, and the hundred feet coming down like one foot, on hard earth.

I was seeing it so clearly that when the drum suddenly stopped I felt dazed. Koona and Yeppi had finished; they stood straight, looking at us, and everybody clapped them.

"Good boys!" said Mr. Burgess. "Now give us some songs."

They sat down on the floor at once and began to sing: queer dreamy songs, sung in high thin voices. Most of them were native, but a few had been taught them by the missionaries, and they were a mixture of their own language and English. One was what Koona called "a good-bye song: w'at you sing w'en you leave you' own country, an' you sad." It had more tune than any of their other songs—at least, tune as we understand it. We liked it so much that we made them sing it over and over, until we could join in the chorus:

Farewell, farewell, my Faderlan'
In T'siah, in T'siah by the sea,
Farewell, farewell, my Faderlan'
In T'siah, in T'siah by the sea.
Na-ni, na-ni, san por yan, por yan,
Na-ni, na-ni, san por yan, por yan,
Na-a-ni, na-a-ni, san por yan, por ya-a-a-n
In T'siah, in T'siah by the sea.

CHAPTER X

ON THE REEF

A FEW days later the house seemed rather empty, for Mr. Burgess took a big party of men away in the launch on a two-days' fishing-trip. They went with much excitement, loaded with fishing-gear and rugs and food-baskets, promising to bring back enough to feed the island for a week: and the wives that some of them left behind them settled down happily under the trees with knitting, and told each other how pleasant it was to look forward to two days' peace and quiet.

"But they'll be dull enough after a day of it," Mrs. Burgess told Mother. "I shan't let them be too quiet. Suppose we all have an early lunch and go out to the reef?"

Mother said that was exactly what we wanted to do.

"We need to start early, because of going out with the tide," Mrs. Burgess explained. "I mean, we like to follow the tide out: if we wait until it's dead low we get so little time on the reef, for once it turns, it fairly races in. I don't like people going out there without someone who is accustomed to its little ways: the reef fascinates nearly everybody, and it's easy to go on examining pools and forget what the tide is doing." She smiled at me. "Peter, are you and Binkie and Clem rash people?"

I said, "No, we're a timid lot. We've given up having adventures—they don't pay."

"What a relief!" she said. "I had an idea you might be a little hard to handle as a team. You must tell me some time what made you so old and wise, and then I might be able to believe you. I think I'll get you to keep an eye on Mr. Frith, because he fancies he knows everything in the world, and really he doesn't."

"He's the one with glasses and the Hitler moustache, isn't he?" I asked.

"Yes. English, and doesn't think too much of Australia. He's given us quite a lot of advice about improving the island—Dick says he wants us to have a band-stand and a promenade, and a neat little row of bathing-boxes. Do you know, he's the only visitor here who grumbles about having to wade to and from the launch? And quite elderly people do it cheerfully."

I'd noticed that. Even two or three old ladies had hopped into the water

yesterday and taken it as a joke, just part of island life.

"What does he think you ought to do?" Clem asked. "Try the Canute stunt, and boss the tides?"

"He hasn't suggested that, exactly, but he does say we ought to build a long pier out into the bay. And perhaps we ought, but it would cost about a million—and probably wash away in the stormy season."

"I should tell him to boil his head," said Binkie in her refined way.

"We've often wanted to," agreed Mrs. Burgess. "He's been here nearly a fortnight, and sometimes it has seemed very long. However, he goes away to-morrow to catch the next ship to England from Sydney, and we shan't be sorry. That's the only reason I'm allowing myself to talk about him—and because I really should be glad if you three would let me know this afternoon if he doesn't turn back when I give the word. I have to keep my eyes in a good many places at once when a number of people go out."

We promised, hoping we wouldn't forget all about him. Already we had become rather bored with Mr. Frith. He was one of those people who always has to tell the world how to do things better; only the day before, he had watched us swimming, and when we came out he had given us a lot of advice about improving our style. We'd have welcomed advice from some of the men staying on Kongai, but not from Mr. Frith: and I'm afraid we had let him see it. Since then he had avoided us, much to our relief.

"I'm blessed if I'm going to tail after him to-day," Binkie said, when Mrs. Burgess had gone into the house. "The silly ass can look after himself."

"He'd be very annoyed if you suggested that he couldn't," remarked Miss Tarrant. "But it's only a matter of shouting to him if necessary—why worry?" So we went to bathe and forgot Mr. Frith's existence.

Some of the visitors had been to the reef, and decided to stay at home that afternoon, but there were about a dozen beside ourselves who started out after lunch. We walked along the beach for about a mile before we had to take to the water. The tide was going out; we waded knee-deep at first, picking our way among the dead coral. The sand was fairly crawling with black sea-slugs, huge fellows up to twenty inches long—not a bit nice to step on, either from their point of view or ours. Now and then we came on great clumps of sea-urchins covering yards of space: their spines must have measured about ten inches. Mrs. Hallam warned us to watch out that we didn't get any of those spines into us, as they made nasty wounds.

We rounded a point and there before us was the open sea, with the reef showing well above the water. It looked like a wide grey plain, dotted with big black coral nigger-heads and all sorts of formations of dead slimy-looking

coral. The tide was running out fast now; we were on dry sand before we got to the reef. The sun was blazing down, drying every rock, and black oyster-catchers and reef-herons were strutting here and there, picking up a meal.

One needed to watch one's step on the reef. The dead coral was uneven and often slippery with wet seaweed: or there might be brittle places that looked all right until trodden on. Binkie said when told this, "What does it matter if one *does* come a cropper?" and Mrs. Burgess laughed.

"Very little to anyone but yourself, but it's apt to spoil your fun if you have to go about with bandaged legs. You can't neglect coral scratches," she said. "Though Mr. Frith would certainly be scornful if I told him so." That was enough for Binkie. She became careful, rather than chance being like Mr. Frith.

On the reef dead and living coral is all mixed together; not the wonderful tree-like coral we had seen under water on our first day at the island, but just as interesting because we could examine it more closely and see the different styles of building. And the colours were lovely, growing out of the brownish-grey surface of the reef. Shells of all kinds lay everywhere with the living creatures in them—cowries, hermit-crabs, clams, spiders, trochus; all sorts of crabs were scuttling about. They didn't seem at all afraid of us. I suppose the reef creatures don't get time to be afraid of two-legged people, because the tide so soon comes back and drives them away.

Best of all were the pools. They were everywhere, big and little; we walked in water nearly as much as on dry rock. But there were many pools several feet deep, where the coloured corals grew thickly and the water was so clear that you could see everything on the sandy bottom. Red and green and brown seaweeds grew there, and in and out of them darted tiny transparent fish of the maddest colours and shapes. It would take a year to describe them; we hardly saw two alike, and not one of them was an ordinary fish. "Fairies turned into fish," Miss Tarrant said, and they really were like that. And there were sea-anemones, huge ones, like beds of flowers on the rock, their tentacles swaying in the water. No pool was like another, and they were all wonderful.

It was a great advantage to be on the reef with Mrs. Burgess. She knew everything about it; we'd have missed lots of things if she hadn't been there. We should never have thought of turning over any of the flat slabs of coral that lay about in all directions. Mrs. Burgess levered one over, and showed us how each one covered a regular museum of shells and little live things, lurking underneath. We had always heard that coral was built up by tiny insects, but she laughed when we spoke of them.

"Yes, you'll find that in lots of story-books," she said. "And outside story-

books, too: it takes a lot to convince some people that they're not insects at all. They're polyps, a kind of sea-anemone: any number of kinds, and each builds a different coral. Some are so small you can hardly see them, but they're all sizes up to two inches high and as much across. You can hardly tell the big ones from a sea-anemone, only they are even more beautiful."

Binkie said, "And how does a pol . . . polypus . . ."

"Polyp," said Mrs. Burgess patiently.

"Well, polyp, then. How does he know he is one, and not an anemone?"

"Ask me another!" said Mrs. Burgess. "Perhaps his mother tells him when he is very young. So then he starts to build a Barrier Reef."

"But how does he do it?"

"Well, it's a stationary job. He sits still and collects lime and silica and builds them into a sort of foundation under and round him. Then he multiplies; and by that time he calls it a day, and dies."

"I wouldn't blame him," said Clem.

"No—it must be rather a job of work. Then the young ones carry on, building on top of poor father's tombstone. And after a million years or so you get a Barrier Reef. Quite simple. Look, here's a Lima!"

We said, "What's he?" and crowded round her. She had tilted a slab of rock over; there was a tiny pool under it, in which lay a flat pinkish thing with double shells like a mussel, with a kind of fringe, bright scarlet, showing between the two shells.

"That's the only swimming bivalve in the world," she said. "You watch him."

She picked the Lima up and put him in a bigger pool, a shallow one. He came to life at once. His scarlet fringe shot out, showing that it was made of long tentacles; using them as oars he swam as hard as he could across the pool until he found a stone he could get under.

"Gosh!" said one of the men. "I say, let me get that fellow with my movie-camera. He's a real curiosity."

Mrs. Burgess waited until he had the camera focused. We stood well back. Then she fished out the Lima and set him going again; and all would have been well if Mr. Frith hadn't arrived at that moment and stood with his shadow right across the pool. The owner of the camera shouted, and then said a few things under his breath about his wasted film; and Mr. Frith said, "My dear sir, have I not as much right to look in a pool as you have?"—which made everyone long to duck him. A nice old lady that everyone liked said firmly, "Stand aside, young man," and took Mr. Frith by the arm; he was so astonished that he went

meekly. The Lima was given a third run, and the movie-man got his picture.

Mr. Frith said, “I should think a thing like that was scarcely worth taking. So insignificant!”

The man with the camera, whose name was Nicholson, looked him up and down, and didn’t say anything. The old lady remarked loftily, “But you do not know that Mr. Nicholson’s collection of moving pictures of the Reef life is famous. Be careful not to get in the way again.”

Mr. Frith looked daggers at her, but he seemed unable to find any suitable reply: she was rather a terrifying old lady when she liked. So he turned away and wandered off on his own, and she said to Mr. Nicholson, “An annoying young man: I think you were very restrained.”

“I mightn’t have been if you ladies hadn’t been here,” he said with a grin. “That’s the third time he’s got in the way of my camera. Oh, well, he’s going to-morrow, and what’s the good of having a row with him? But he is a prize ass, isn’t he?”

“I can put up with anyone who is merely an ass,” she said thoughtfully. “But not with an ass who is so superior. And it pains me that you Australians may judge English people by him, because I am English, too.”

“Yes, we knew that.” Mr. Nicholson looked at her with a twinkle. “So *you* needn’t worry about our getting the wrong idea of England, Mrs. Brydon. We know better.”

Mrs. Burgess smiled to herself. She was hunting under a stone for the Lima; when she found him she picked him up gently. Directly he felt her fingers he closed up, drawing in his outfit of slender red oars.

“You see, he can’t pack them quite away,” she told us. “A little fringe always sticks out. Now we’ll put him back in his own home.”

“Wouldn’t he be as happy in this pool?” I asked. “It’s a bigger one.”

“Yes, but he may not be bothering about size. His home was under a slab of coral, and if we move him from it we may be upsetting all his domestic arrangements. For all we know, his mate is weeping for him somewhere in a corner. So we’ll take him home.”

Mrs. Burgess was like that. Whenever she lifted a slab of rock, to look at the queer things under it, she put it back carefully, just as it had been before. I used to tumble them over and leave them—as most people do—until she asked me to replace them.

“You see, we try very hard to preserve all the Reef life,” she said. “That slab is a regular city of refuge for all the little creatures that have crept under it. They would try to find another home, but birds or crabs might get them first.”

"Yes, but look at all the millions of things there are!" I said. "You wouldn't think a few mattered."

She said, "Do you know, Peter, some of the islands and reefs up here have been completely ruined by the people—tourists—who come picking up things? And they don't really want them: ninety per cent would be thrown away. There's a Government order now forbidding anyone to take shells or specimens from a reef, but the order came too late in several cases. Dick and I love this place, and we want to keep it exactly as Nature made it. She knows more about her job than we do." She glanced across the rocks. "And there's a perfectly good tourist cheerfully filling a bag with specimens! I'll have to go tell her it's agin' the law. Pity me, Peter!" She hurried off.

I began to see that it wasn't all jam to run an island, as I watched Mrs. Burgess explaining things to the collecting woman. She must have been very tactful about it: in a minute the bag was being emptied, and they went off together. Mrs. Burgess never spent more time with one person than with another; that was a thing that was dawning on us. Like the Captain on the *Kalara*, she gave a bit of herself to everybody, so that no one felt left out. This must need a lot of brain-power; I felt glad that running a station was more likely to be my job. Bullocks are only too glad if you leave them alone.

Binkie and Clem called to me. They were bending over a lot of clams of the kind that burrow into smooth coral with their upper part just showing. Sometimes their shells are tightly closed, but often they open a bit, putting out on each side a fold of the fleshy mantle that lies inside. The edges of the shells are wavy, so the mantle has wavy edges, too: and what you see is a double band of stuff exactly like velvet, sometimes plain, sometimes with a perfectly regular pattern in another colour.

They had found a splendid lot scattered over a smooth plateau of rock. The smallest was about six inches long, but most of them were well over a foot. There was a deep chocolate-brown fellow spotted with gold, and several a vivid green; and some were purple with a pattern of yellow zigzags, and some every shade of blue, dark and light, the loveliest blues you could imagine. Several were brilliant orange, striped with black—they looked like strips of tiger-skin. There were no washy colours: all were deep and rich and glowing.

"My goodness, I wish they could come out!" Binks cried. "Just fancy being able to see the whole thing instead of this little bit."

"The whole thing mightn't be as good," Clem said, prodding a blue and gold monster gently with his finger. The clam resented this by shooting up a little jet of water, and promptly closed up. "Very likely their lips are coloured like this so as to attract things they can eat. What a rummy life it must be,

sitting in one little hole in a rock for ever! I suppose they like it, or they wouldn't make the hole."

"What happens if the wrong sort of food gets in, I wonder?"

"I believe they can pitch it out. They must have awfully strong muscles, to work the shells as they do—to say nothing of doing the burrowing. Well, they beat anything I ever saw!" ended Clem.

"But then, everything on this reef does!" Binks said.

We wandered off, taking a line of our own, because we found that if other people were ahead things had become scared and got out of the way. Clams, in particular, would shut up if a shadow fell on them. But there was plenty of room for everyone on that great stretch of reef. You could have roamed there for days without getting tired of it—though your legs might have got weary, for it was fairly rough going. But always there seemed some new thing to look at; you went on and on, never thinking about time.

Mrs. Burgess did, however. After awhile we heard her call. She was standing on a big ball of brain-coral—the sort that has markings all over it just like an animal's brain—looking tall and slim in her blue shorts. She waved her sun-helmet to us, and I went over.

"Time to turn for home, Peter," she said. "Will you and the Co. pass the word round? There's no hurry, but we ought to be heading back."

I sang out to Mr. Nicholson, who was with Mrs. Brydon, and he relayed the message to some other people. Dad and Mother and Miss Tarrant were already moving in the right direction. We three went round, calling out until everyone had heard. We didn't forget Mr. Frith: he was pretty far out, so we kept an eye on him until he started. In a few minutes all the people scattered over the reef were strolling towards the inner edge; a slow business, because of stopping every now and then to look at something interesting. Mrs. Burgess stayed on her hump of coral until nearly all had passed her.

One woman who was by herself was limping slightly. Mrs. Burgess jumped down and went to her.

"Are you hurt, Miss Smith?"

"Oh, nothing much," Miss Smith said. "I fell, and grazed my knee a little. It's really nothing, Mrs. Burgess."

"Enough to make you limp, though," remarked Mrs. Burgess. "Take my arm, and I'll see that you don't slip."

They went on slowly, Mrs. Burgess giving all her attention to finding as smooth a way as possible—not that that's saying much where a reef is concerned. We kept level with them for a little while and then drew ahead,

thinking we might as well catch up with Mother and Dad. In fact, Binkie had almost reached them, having suddenly decided to put on the pace while we were studying sea-slugs, when we heard Mrs. Burgess calling again. She and Miss Smith were some distance behind us now. We turned towards them.

Mrs. Burgess was looking annoyed.

"Boys, that stupid Mr. Frith is still out there," she said, nodding towards the reef. "Would you mind going back and shouting to him to come at once?"

"Why, we saw the silly blighter start for home," Clem said. "What on earth does he think he's doing? All right, Mrs. Burgess—we'll fetch him."

Back we went, wishing we were old enough to tell Mr. Frith what we thought of him. There was no reason for any particular hurry, of course, but it was only ordinary civility for people to do what Mrs. Burgess told them. And Mr. Frith was such a wooden-headed sort of man that we could quite understand that Mrs. Burgess wasn't willing to leave him alone on the reef. If he had chosen to go out alone he could have done what he liked—but not when she was in charge of the party he was in.

He was a good way from us. We yelled out to him several times, but beyond waving a languid hand he took no notice of our yells. So we were fairly hot under the collar when we got up to him.

"Hi!" I sang out. "Mrs. Burgess says you're to come at once."

I suppose that was the wrong tone to use with him, because he looked quite indignant.

"Did you come all this way to tell me that, my boy?" he said unpleasantly. "You might have spared yourself the trouble. I shall come when I see fit."

That "my boy" made me hotter than I had been before, but I had to remember Mrs. Burgess, so I tried to keep my temper.

"Do you know how fast the tide comes in when it starts?" I asked.

"I've never troubled to calculate," he drawled at me. "But I don't need any teaching from boys who have only been here a few days. May I suggest that you run along home?"

Clem said, "May I suggest that you look behind you?" And his voice was just as drawling and unpleasant as Mr. Frith's.

We all looked. The outer edge of the reef was not so very far away; as we stared, a wave rolled in lazily and broke in foam that ran swirling over the coral. Some wading reef-herons rose and flapped inland before it.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Frith under his breath. He didn't speak to us, but he didn't waste time, either. He went past us at the rate of knots.

We followed, greatly amused. It had been rather soothing to see how completely his dignity had fallen from him. Far ahead we saw Mrs. Burgess standing with Miss Smith, looking back: we knew she would feel that she needn't worry, once she had seen him start. So we waved cheerfully, and she went on again towards the point. Most of the crowd were already out of sight round it.

"Bless the little man!" said Clem, looking at the hurrying figure of Mr. Frith. "He must be afraid of getting his beautiful English shorts wet. And he will, too. Peter, before he gets home, I should think, because he'll certainly fall into a pool if he tries to get over this ground at high speed."

"Would he go easy if we sang out and advised him to?" I wondered.

"I don't think he'd do anything at all that we suggested. We're mud in Mr. Frith's eyes." He looked back. "I shouldn't be surprised if we were all a trifle wet before long: the tide runs into the bay very fast, and it will be deep near the point."

"I could do with a swim," I said. "And Frithy must be all right in the water, judging by the swimming lecture he gave us. It would be rather fun to see him reach home dripping, with all the crowd lined up to watch."

"Gosh, you're going to see him dripping right enough!" exclaimed Clem. "Look at that!"

But I was already looking. We saw Mr. Frith stumble, recover himself, and then slide on a patch of seaweed. This time he did not recover himself. He slid on, and a pool received him with a splash that echoed back to us.

It was too funny not to laugh, and we fairly howled with laughter; but we ran, all the same, because we were anxious. A pool with branching coral in it might easily damage a man pretty badly. So we ran with care, not wishing to share Mr. Frith's fate, whatever that might have been.

CHAPTER XI

MR. FRITH HAS TROUBLE

BEFORE we reached the pool into which Mr. Frith had disappeared we were relieved to see his head coming over the side. His body followed the head, but there seemed some difficulty about the legs; two or three times he struggled to climb out, and then slipped back. We couldn't watch closely, for all our attention was needed by the rough going of the coral we were running over: it was so bad that we wondered that Mr. Frith had managed to keep on his feet as long as he did. And we wondered very much what we were going to find when we arrived at the pool.

What we did find was a very angry and a very frightened man. He was standing on coral, holding on to the rock edge. The pool was deep; he was dripping, and there was a cut across his forehead and sundry scratches on his face. His sun-helmet floated peacefully in the water.

"Get me out of here—quick!" he ordered.

It wasn't too easy. There was nothing on which he could get a foot to help himself, and it seemed quite likely that in hauling him up we might be dragged in ourselves, which wouldn't have made matters better for any of us. And we knew well that we had no time to lose. We lay down, hooking our feet round spikes of coral as well as we could; each of us got hold of one of his hands.

"You've got to spring as hard as you can when we give the word," Clem told him firmly. "And if you don't get up high enough, we'll drop you!"

That galvanized Mr. Frith. When the word came—"Now!"—he fairly shot up. We hauled, working ourselves backward: bit by bit he came over the edge. There was a rending sound as a sharp bit of coral tore his shirt; a howl from Mr. Frith mingling with it, because he had nothing on under the shirt and he got slightly torn, too. But he came. In a moment he was lying flat on the rock. We were all panting.

Clem and I jumped up and pulled Mr. Frith to his feet. He seemed so dizzy that we made him sit down on a niggerhead. But he wasn't too dizzy to give another order.

"Get my hat!"

"If you think either of us are going in there after your hat, you can think again," I said angrily. "There's no time to worry about hats—we've got to get

a move on, and pretty quick, too."

"I—I don't think I can," he said. "I've had a terrible fall."

His voice was shaking. We looked back. The waves were breaking right over the edge of the reef now, and though the wide stretch of coral looked much the same as before, we knew how the water was snaking in among the rocks. It made us quite pitiless.

"We don't care what you've had," Clem exclaimed—"you'll have worse in a few minutes if you don't pull yourself together. Get up, you fool—we'll help you. Come along!"

We grabbed his arms and hauled him to his feet. He cried out, "Oh—my ankle!" and we had to let him flop back on the niggerhead while we felt it, desperately afraid we might feel a broken bone. But there wasn't anything broken: we made him wriggle it, so we knew it could not be more than a sprain. And neither of us had any idea of being drowned because of a sprained ankle. Especially Mr. Frith's.

So we got him on his feet again without any more talking and pulled him along, letting him lean on my shoulder. It was tough work. The reef isn't easy walking for one person alone, able to dodge among the rocks and pools; for three abreast it was horribly difficult. He would hardly help himself at all; he kept groaning and grunting, and sometimes his weight on my shoulder nearly brought me down. We had to talk roughly to him to get him to make efforts. Stumbling and slipping, we got along somehow.

But the water got along, too. We could hear it coming after us, splashing into the pools, and before long there were runnels catching us up, making progress even harder. One thing, however—they had the effect of scaring Mr. Frith. He fairly yelped when the first little wave washed over his feet, and after that there was no need to tell him to hurry.

We breathed more freely when at last we were off the reef. But things weren't easy even then. The sand that had been dry when we crossed it before was now more than knee-deep in water, the tide running in fiercely. We pulled our man along as hard as we could, making a bee-line for the point: and a hard struggle we had to reach it. Long before we got there we were swimming, and then Mr. Frith just had to look after himself, for Clem and I couldn't do any more for him. And I don't know that we would have reached it, because we were properly winded, only we heard shouts, and we knew that help was coming.

That gave us encouragement that sent us along a bit more. And then suddenly there were men all round us; Dad was holding me, and Mr. Nicholson had Clem, and some others got hold of Mr. Frith. They brought us

in; we landed under our own steam, but Mr. Frith had to be carried up the beach. He was crying like a baby—perhaps because he'd swallowed a good deal of water, for presently he was very sick. In fact, there was no dignity at all left in Mr. Frith.

Mrs. Burgess was there, very white and quiet. Luckily Mother and Binkie didn't know anything about it, being well ahead before Mrs. Burgess had got worried about us. She had sent Mr. Nicholson to bring some of the men back, and, as it happened, Dad had already turned back to see where we were. I am glad he did, because it was frightfully comforting to be grabbed by him just as I was sinking.

Clem and I had got into dry things and were lying down in our bungalow when Mrs. Burgess came in. There was nothing wrong with us, and we'd had two cups of tea each, but we felt a bit lazy. We had told Dad how everything happened, and she had got the story from him.

"Don't get up," she said, as we began to move. She sat down on the end of my bed. "I'm terribly sorry you boys have had all this—if I had dreamed it could happen I would never have let you go back without me."

We said that was all nonsense, and how could she have dreamed that Mr. Frith would lose his silly head and dive into a pool? Then we began to laugh, because the memory of Mr. Frith—and his hat—in the pool was really very funny now that there was no need to worry about anything. We described it to her, and got her laughing too.

"Well, you can make a joke of it," she said presently, "but that nasty little man did his best to drown you both. And there's nothing much wrong with him; a few cuts and bruises, and his ankle is only a little swollen."

"Then he's just yellow!" said Clem indignantly. "To hear him groaning you'd have thought he had broken bones all over him!"

"But he *is* yellow," she said. "I've never seen anyone so sorry for himself as he is. He's in bed now, tucked up with a hot-water bottle, and just before I left him he asked me for a thermometer, saying he knew he had a temperature. I told him we didn't keep such things—which isn't quite true, but why disturb his belief in his temperature? He hasn't made any enquiries about you two, the little toad!"

"He won't," I assured her. "We weren't a bit nice to him. Simply brutal at times. I don't think Mr. Frith has been called so many bad names in all his life."

"It's rather comforting to think you had the chance," she said. "Well, I'm not going to talk to you about what you've done for us, only Dick and I won't forget it. We have never had a serious accident on Kongai, but there would

have been one to-day but for you two——”

“Mrs. Burgess,” said Clem very earnestly, “would you please bring us a thermometer? We have two temperatures coming on.”

She looked at us with her eyes twinkling, and we lay back, trying hard to appear feeble.

“All right. I won’t say any more, in your present state. See you later.” She went, but just as we had unfeebled ourselves her head appeared at the window.

“I’ll send you over the same dinner that Mr. Frith is to have. Weak arrowroot. He doesn’t know it yet, but you two may as well have the pleasure of anticipation!” Then she fled.

We had talked things over with Dad and arranged that nobody but ourselves and Mrs. Burgess need be told all that had happened. Dad was keen on that, because the island had a great reputation for safety, and if people had any sort of a story to tell it would become exaggerated, and newspapers might get hold of it. And that was the last thing any of us wanted. So the other visitors were merely told that Mr. Frith had had a fall on the reef and we had been delayed because of it.

We turned up to dinner in good time. Small bowls of some sticky white stuff were placed before Clem and me, the waitress wearing a broad grin as she put them down. We took flowers out of the vases and stuck them into our bowls, and sent them back to Mrs. Burgess with our compliments: then we sat back and waited for our soup. It came all right.

Mr. Frith didn’t appear again until it was time for him to leave next day. None of us saw him go. Mrs. Burgess reported that he had been very silent and glum, and had limped heavily down to the launch that took him to the mainland. He left a stiff little message of thanks to Clem and me. We didn’t think he would be likely to talk much about his adventure after he got away, though Dad said he would probably make a great story of it when he went back to England, with himself as the hero. I don’t suppose it mattered if he did—England had other things to think of by the time Mr. Frith got there.

The fishing party returned in great spirits, all the men looking regular bandits, for nobody had shaved on the launch, and between a three-days’ growth of beard and being tanned nearly black with the sun their appearance was striking enough. Not that anyone cared for that; we were more interested in the fish they had brought home. It made a wonderful exhibit, strung up to trees and piled on a table behind the house, and all the cameras were busy taking photographs of the catch and the fishermen. Spanish mackerel five feet long; bonito, trevalli, sweet-lip, red cod; coral trout—pink fellows, spotted with bright blue; and fish they called “Government Bream” because they have

a great scarlet broad-arrow on their pink sides. Best of all were the Red Emperors: one weighed twenty pounds, and his deep glowing scarlet seemed to light up all the rest of the heap. They were all very big fish: island people don't seem to consider anything worth catching unless it's over ten pounds.

The sight of that catch, to say nothing of all the stories the cruising party told of the bigger ones that had got away, gave everyone fishing fever. We went out day after day. On a fishing morning the first job for visitors who cared to take a hand was catching bait. There was a long net, something like a tennis-net, only longer, with corks fastened along one edge and weights on the other; we used to go out in bathing-togs, carrying one end of the net out as far as it would go, and then turn in a wide circle and wade back to shore, people all along the sides trying to hold the net upright. Always there would be lots of fish in it weighing about a pound; the job was to keep them there, for they would charge the net like mad things, taking flying leaps over the edge. Shouting and splashing could check them sometimes, and we always gave them plenty of both, but the majority used to get away. Not that it mattered—we had only to go out again and get more.

Most people on our launch-expeditions fished with hand-lines, but a few had rods. Clem and I found that the rods Mr. Garfield had given us were perfect; not too long, and very light and strong. We used to catch as many as anyone there. Watty's sinkers were a joy. Other people were constantly getting sinkers fast in coral and losing them—and their lines with them—but Watty's patents always slipped free. I wrote to him and to Mr. Garfield now and then, telling them all we were doing, and enclosing snapshots of our best catches; and always ending up, "Why don't you come up here too?" They never answered that definitely. But I somehow had the idea that they were thinking of it.

Mrs. Burgess came along one evening when her husband was on the verandah with us. She said, "Dick, when are you going to get that dugong you promised me?"

"What is a dugong?" asked Mrs. Brydon.

"A sea-cow—rather like a porpoise to look at, though that really isn't a good description. I hope we shall be able to show you one, Mrs. Brydon. It's a mammal, quite harmless—feeds on sea-grass under water. We really don't like killing one, but a dugong is a good stand-by for us in the stormy season, when the launch can't go to the mainland for meat."

"Oh—you eat it?" Mrs. Brydon said.

"Some people think it's as good as steak, but I like my steak tender. It really is good when we pickle it, and we always have some salted down about

this time. Then we get a big supply of oil from its fat. The natives swear by dugong oil for every purpose. Koona and Yeppi would drink pints of it—if they got the chance."

"Well, we might try for one to-morrow, if you can spare the boys," Mr. Burgess said. "We could fit it in with doing some fishing."

The launch was pretty crowded next day, everybody wanting to see the hunt. Koona and Yeppi were in bathing-togs, and Koona carried a long spear and wouldn't let anyone touch it. They were very excited; island work was all very well, but to-day they were getting back to a bit of the real native life they loved, and their eyes were dancing.

"They know they're superior to the white men to-day," Mr. Burgess said. "It's pretty work to watch: I hope we'll have the luck to strike dugong."

Mother said, "What happens when you do?"

"Oh, the boys go off in the dinghy first, with someone to row. Koona stands in the bow with the spear, with Yeppi ready when he strikes. When that happens the head of the spear is released from the shaft, with plenty of rope tied to the head, and fastened at the other end to the bow of the dinghy. And then the fun begins, for the dugong goes off towing the lot. And can he tow! I've known one run for miles before he tired. Mr. Nicholson will have the best of the fun, as he's going to row them: he's a good man in a boat."

Binkie came tearing along the deck at that moment, breathless with excitement.

"Mother!" she said, "can I go in the dinghy with Mr. Nicholson! He says I can, if you'll let me. Oh, do say yes! I can go, can't I, Dad?"

Mother and Dad were rather taken aback. They looked doubtfully at Mr. Burgess. He laughed.

"It's quite safe, Mrs. Forsyth. I wouldn't let anyone go who couldn't swim, but Binkie's like a fish in the water. Not that it's in the least likely that she'll be in the water; but if the unexpected happened she'd have three good men to look after her. And we shall be close by in the launch. It would be rather an experience for her."

"Mr. Burgess, I do think you're splendid!" said Binks fervently. "Mother—*do* let me!"

"Yes, do, Mrs. Forsyth," said Mr. Nicholson, arriving on the scene. He and Binkie had become great friends. "I'll guarantee to look after her, even if I have to scrap my movie-camera to do it."

"Devotion couldn't go further than that," remarked Dad. "Well—what do you say, Helen?"

“Of course, when you ask that question, I know I can only say one thing,” said Mother, laughing—and Binkie gave a whoop of joy. “But do be steady, Binks, dear, and don’t get too excited.”

Binkie vowed that she would be as steady as a rock, but we had our doubts. Still, we felt that Mr. Nicholson would, if necessary, stun her with an oar rather than run any risk of losing his precious camera, so we felt it was all right. We ran a long way before we came under the lee of Whitsunday Island, and then Mr. Burgess slowed down and ordered out the boat.

“There’s a mud bottom hereabouts, and plenty of dugong grass growing on it,” he told us. “We generally get one here.”

Binkie scrambled into the dinghy looking as if she owned the earth. There were very few men who didn’t envy her, I believe; Clem and I would have felt green if it had been anybody else but Binks. She sat astern with Mr. Nicholson at the oars. Koona stood upright in the bow, gripping his spear, looking like a black statue; behind him crouched Yeppi, ready for action. They rowed slowly, making as little sound as possible with the oars.

We five got up into the bow of the launch watching the sea for the first sight of a dugong’s head. We couldn’t see a sign of anything for a long time. The sea was very calm, without a ripple. Now and then the dinghy changed course: once we saw Yeppi pointing eagerly, but nothing came of it. Time went by: Mr. Burgess was beginning to think it wasn’t a dugong day. But never for an instant did Koona change his position—straight as an arrow he stood in the bow, the sunlight catching the spear-head as the dinghy moved.

“I don’t know how that black beggar keeps it up!” a man said.

“Look!” cried Mr. Burgess suddenly.

We didn’t see the dugong’s head break water. All we saw was the sudden flash of the spear and Koona’s dark body following as though he were part of the shaft, in a flying dive to drive home the barbed head with his own weight. Binkie told us afterwards that it was wonderful to see him twist in the water and throw himself aside to miss the swoop of the dugong’s tail as it shot to the bottom; and then he was back in the boat before the line had run out. The rope went taut, and the dinghy quivered from stem to stern. Then it turned into a speed-boat.

We could see that happen. One moment the dinghy was scarcely moving on the sea; the next it was a tearing streak of black, throwing the water on each side of the bow in white waves of foam. Mr. Nicholson slipped back into the stern, ready to steer with a paddle, Binkie close beside him; in the bow crouched Koona and Yeppi—Koona with a knife to cut the line if anything went wrong. The engine of the launch started suddenly, and we went after

them.

The dugong ran for miles. Sometimes he altered his course, the dinghy slewing round sharply; now and then his body showed above the water for a moment. We were fairly close when he came up for the last time. He went down again, but this time the two black boys went, too, Yeppi taking a heavy rope with a noose at the end. In the clear water Binkie could see them plainly; Koona standing on the sand below, grabbing the dugong's body, while Yeppi slipped the noose over its forked tail. The boys shot to the surface and were back in the boat like a flash; in a moment the dugong showed, rolling wildly about, and almost done.

Then it was quickly over. We ran up beside them: Mr. Nicholson and Binkie jumped aboard the launch. Mr. Burgess was standing ready with a rifle. The shot rang out, and the dugong sank slowly until it was a dead weight on the rope.

The boys made the body fast to the stern with the dinghy, and the launch went at top speed for the nearest island. There was not a minute to lose; the dugong's blood made a long stain on the water, and if sharks were about we shouldn't have landed much dugong. We ran into a little bay and the boys towed the prize into water too shallow for sharks, and anchored it.

Binkie was crimson with excitement. She tried to tell us all the details, but she could hardly get out any words clearly. As for Koona and Yeppi, they just sat and grinned from ear to ear, and Koona polished his spear-head lovingly.

We went fishing, but it was tame work after what we had seen, and the fish weren't biting well. So we landed and explored the island. We came to a place where there was only clear scrub with no undergrowth: only saplings and huge hoop-pines, with long twisted vines climbing up them and hanging from the branches. The ground was curiously clear of the rubbish one finds in bush: scarcely a stick or a dead leaf could be seen.

"Queer place," Miss Tarrant said. "It looks as if a housemaid swept it every morning."

"I'll show you what the housemaids do," said Mr. Burgess. "Come with me."

We felt mystified. He led us on and on, always over the same tidy-looking ground, until we came to a clear space among the trees, on the side of a little slope. There we saw an enormous heap of rubbish: sticks, earth, leaves, all piled against the slope and nearly fifteen feet high. We got up on it: it was quite solid enough to bear our weight.

"What on earth is it?" we asked all together.

"Malice-birds' nest," Mr. Burgess said. "They're mound-builders. I've

seen them working sometimes. They gather up everything they can find, green or dry, and make bundles, pushing them into a heap. This heap is about twenty years old: they add to it every year. Good housemaids, aren't they?"

"But it doesn't look like a nest," protested Binkie.

"I'm blessed if it isn't more like a labour-saving device for the hen-bird. But how the first mallee-hen learned to use it beats me. What happens is that under rain and sun the whole mount starts fermenting until it's a regular hot-bed. Then the hen burrows into it and lays one big egg: never more than one. She covers it up and goes away. And that's all the mallee-hen knows of motherhood, because she never even sees her own chick. All mallee-chicks are orphans from the start."

"But what hatches the egg?"

"The heat of the mound. Several hens lay in it—you might call it a sort of community baby-welfare centre. The chicks hatch, and at once start to scratch their way out of the burrow: once they're out they scoot down the mound and off into the scrub. Able to look after themselves from the jump."

"If only human babies could do that!" said Dad feelingly.

"Well, I think it's a beastly sell for the hen," was Binkie's verdict. "I know jolly well that if I was a mother mallee-hen I'd at least hide behind a tree and see what my child looked like!"

"But you wouldn't know your own child," objected Clem. "And if all the hens did that, there would be some horrible fights, because each of them would claim the best-looking chick!"

Binkie saw that this was likely, but she was rather bothered about the hen, all the same. We took a different way back to the beach and came to a place where the air was thick with great blue butterflies, dancing in the sunlight that came through the trees. Mr. Burgess tossed a stone into the bush; the butterflies rose in dense clouds, almost filling the air. I think Mother and Miss Tarrant liked that better than anything we saw throughout our travels.

On the beach, when everybody had mustered, we made a big fire, and boiled the billy for supper. We had brought food in the launch, and we were all as hungry as hunters. It was a case of every man for himself; you cut bread and made toast, and then you wandered round and put cold meat or cheese or jam on it. Then you ate it, and made a fresh piece. This went on until there was no more food, and then we yarned round the camp-fire until the sand-flies came up in clouds and drove us off.

It was rather a hard job to get the dugong aboard the launch. It took about a dozen men hauling on ropes, for he was about nine feet long and weighed something like a quarter of a ton. An ugly thing he was, seen at close quarters;

light-brown in colour, his thick hide seamed with great scars from coral-scrapes. He had heavy flippers and a forked tail, and a queer little head with piggy eyes. His nostrils had funny little round plates of skin over them—Mr. Burgess said they lift up when he blows, like a lid. Nobody cared to be near him on the after-deck, so we went up on top and left it to him.

I'll never forget that journey home. The moon was up, and the stars blazing: there was a rippling track of moonlight across the sea. We chugged along at about six knots, close to the wooded heights of island after island, and sometimes great bare rock-cliffs where we could see the dim mouths of caves. Somebody started singing, a man with a splendid voice: he sang song after song, with everyone joining in the choruses. Then we made Koona and Yeppi sing, and I think their queer sad native songs sounded better than any of ours in that setting of moonlight and island and sea. We ran in on a full tide to the beach where Mrs. Burgess was waiting for us, sitting on the sand: she had heard us long before she could see the lights of the launch, because we were all singing the chorus of the one native song we knew, with Koona and Yeppi tapping on the deck for an accompaniment:

Na-a-ni, na-a-ni, san por yan, por ya-a-a-n,
In T'siah, in T'siah by the sea.

"We hauled, working ourselves backward: bit by bit Mr. Frith came over the edge."

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CHAPTER XII

THE *BONITO*

"I'M THINKING of getting a boat," said Dad.

We all looked astonished, for that was about the last thing we should have dreamed of, seeing that our life for weeks had been spent more in boats than out of them. It had been a great time. We were all tanned to walnut colour, and as fit as we could be; no one ever mentioned the fact that I had once had a crocked leg. I had tried that leg pretty hard among the islands, but Watty's healing had been thorough. Never once had it given me even a twinge.

"A boat?" asked Mother vaguely.

"Yes. This business of fishing in a launch with about thirty people doesn't appeal to me. Not room enough for anyone my size. Even if I tie my legs in knots, somebody is sure to fall over them. And with lines out from bow to stern it's a constant business of getting foul of somebody else's line, spending ages in disentangling them."

"Yes," said Mother. She was never very keen on fishing, and for some time she had ceased to go out in the launch. As she said, it was delightful to be ashore, and why sit in a launch when you might lie on a coral beach under a palm-tree? Especially when you could roll gently into the sea whenever you felt like a bathe. She had been doing these things, with the result that she looked nearly as young as Miss Tarrant.

"Well, that's how I feel about it," said Dad. "And I should like to see more of this district than can be seen in a big launch like Burgess's. He's extraordinarily good in the way he runs us round, but the *Sunshine* draws too much water for some of the places where I'd like to poke about."

Mother said, "So it just boils down to the fact that you want to be independent. And of course you have all your arrangements made already, or you wouldn't come to consult the family. Where is the boat, dear?" She smiled up at him.

Dad grinned. "Trust you to know!" he said. "Well, I've practically got the boat. I consulted Burgess, and he quite saw my point. He knows a man on the mainland who has a handy little launch with a good engine. Says he'll always hire it out to a careful man, and I can rely on its being in first-class order. I saw that launch one day when we were fishing—Burgess pointed her out to me. A

fellow from Cairns had her, but he's gone home now. She's just what we want."

"And when will you get her?"

"The *Sunshine* is going over to-morrow for mails and stores, so I think I'll go too. If this launch is available I'll bring her back."

Binkie and I said with one voice, "Can I come?" and Clem looked as if he would like to say the same thing but wasn't sure if he ought to.

"Yes, if you want to—you too, Clem? That's all right, then," Dad said.

So we went over in the morning. The *Sunshine* was exactly what was wanted for a tourist launch, but she wasn't fast; it took us three hours to reach the little coastal town on the mainland. We came back in much quicker time, feeling proud and independent in our own ship. She was a little beauty, comfortable and fast, and very easy to handle. Clem and I had done a good deal of steering in the *Sunshine*—Mr. Burgess had taught us a lot about handling a boat in the island waters. But the *Sunshine* was an elephant compared to the *Bonito*. We loved her from the moment we saw her, and she improved on acquaintance right through.

Having the *Bonito* made a tremendous difference to us. The *Sunshine* hardly ever got away on a trip before ten or eleven in the morning; Mr. Burgess and the men had lots to do; and then, a big number of passengers takes some mustering. Someone was always remembering at the last moment that a knitting-bag or a hand-line or a pet pipe had been left behind, and trekking back to a bungalow to fetch it. That couldn't be helped, and nobody really minded: we were a very free-and-easy crowd on Kongai.

All the same, it was great to be able to slip away whenever we wanted to, without any fuss or delay. Mrs. Burgess gave us packages of food as early as we liked, and the *Bonito* was very well supplied with things for picnic meals. She had a tiny cabin with a collapsible table, and along each wall a long seat that let down on hinges and could be used to sleep on if necessary. There was a funny little galley just big enough to stand in; it had a metal shelf with a couple of spirit lamps, and under that a cupboard holding plates and cups and a few cooking things. The whole outfit was a miracle of contrivance in using a small space. Not that we troubled to cook there. We did cook chops or fish sometimes, but it was more fun to land on an island and make a fire ashore.

It was great luck for us that Mr. Burgess had already given us a lot of instructions. Because you may think you know all about a launch and its engine—Dad had taught me that for years—but when it comes to voyaging among coral reefs it's a different matter. Coral may be very near the surface in what looks like perfectly innocent water to a new chum; but if you go over it at

high speed it's the easiest thing in the world to rip out a bottom plank: and there you are, and the sharks always waiting for you. All that stretch inside the Great Barrier Reef is studded with islands, little and big, and with rocks that have wrecked dozens of vessels. Mr. Burgess had shown us how to recognize the changes of colour in the water that spell danger or safety, and the swirls and eddies indicating sunken rocks or awkward currents. I knew already that when he told me anything he expected me to remember it, and that he might spring an awkward question on me at any time, so I listened pretty hard.

I used to love standing beside him when he was bringing the big *Sunshine* across the Kongai reef at half-tide. Until I learned something, all the water looked the same to me; there seemed no reason why we should not run straight across. But though he would be chatting all the time, apparently taking no notice of anything, the wheel would always be moving a little; our course would be a regular zigzag. It was like a man walking in the dark through thick bush, following confidently a path that his feet knew.

"Practice," he said, when I said something to him about it. "And keeping an eye always on the water. Remember, Peter, I've been about these parts all my life. But if you boys are interested I can teach you a good deal. I'll show you my charts if you like."

He had a great collection of those: we'd studied them off and on, but when we got the *Bonito* we dug in at them really hard—and Dad, too. They covered all the sea inside the Barrier, showing all the rocks and currents and even the tiniest islands.

"Amazing amount of detail," Dad remarked one evening when we were poring over them. "They're Admiralty Survey work, I suppose, Burgess?"

"Some of them," he answered. "But the best are Japanese."

Dad looked up in surprise. "You don't say so!"

"True enough. Many of the steamers coming down from the North use only Japanese charts. No people on earth know as much about the bottom of these seas as the Japs do. It's all done by their pearling luggers, of course. Cute chaps on those luggers, I can tell you."

Mr. Nicholson said, "I've heard that half the unwashed, coolie-looking hands on Jap luggers are really naval officers: trained divers and survey men. My brother is on a destroyer, and he had a yarn with some of them once. They talked pidgin-English: nobody could have guessed from their appearance that they were anything but what they seemed to be. But Jim set a little trap for one, and he fell into it: I forget what it was, but the answer he got could only have been given by a naval officer."

"Was your brother in uniform?" Mr. Burgess asked.

"Not he!" said Mr. Nicholson, with a grin. "He was on a fishing-trip with a few other fellows, all of them pretty dirty and unshaven. Jim was careful to speak in a voice that matched his looks. They found that lugger at anchor in a bay, so they visited her to ask if they could spare them some water—which they didn't need, of course. The Japs were very friendly; asked them on board and showed them some good pearl-shell. But there was no pearling ground within miles of that bay, and they didn't mention why they were there."

"I expect they thought a fishing party wouldn't notice a little detail like that," Dad said.

"No: Jim told them that he and his crowd worked at a sugar-mill. The leading Jap tried to pump him about a few things, but he didn't get much. Jim is a wily old bird, with the gift of being able to look like the village idiot. It's been very useful to him more than once."

"Why would they be in that bay?" Clem asked.

Mr. Nicholson shrugged his shoulders.

"Why wouldn't they? It's been their game for years to find out every detail about our coastal area. I wouldn't mind betting that Jap officers know every deep-sea anchorage for battleships along here; every channel; every place where submarines could work or submerge. Quite easy for them. We don't hide anything, or put any snags in their way. We fairly ask for it."

"But we aren't at war with them," a girl said.

"No. But we might be, some day, and the Jap has sense enough to plan for that 'might be.' And the day may not be so far away, either; if Germany really gets going, the Japs may take a chance against us. They're showing their teeth plainly enough in Tientsin now."

The talk moved to Germany, as all grown-up talks did that July. Clem and I hated war conversations. We didn't know much about it, but then it seemed to us that most of the grown-ups knew very little more than we did. So we just kept on hoping it would all fizzle out, or at least wait until we were old enough to fight: it was depressing to know that couldn't be for years. And we got out of the way whenever we could if war rumours were being discussed. We slipped off that time and studied charts instead.

All that study came in very useful when we had the *Bonito*. We knew pretty well where we could go, and where it was safe to put on speed. All the same, Dad was very careful; he didn't take risks himself, and he saw that we didn't. After a week he knew we were all right, and then he left nearly all the steering and boat-work to us. Binkie became pretty good at it, too.

We used to start early in the morning, plenty of food on board, water-beakers filled, bait stowed away in a basket in a cool place. Before breakfast

Clem and I would have made the boat clean and ship-shape and overhauled the engine; Dad coming down just as we'd finished, like a wary old captain, to run his eagle eye over everything. Not that he didn't trust us, but . . . well, he might wonder if we'd got up early enough to remember all the oddments.

There were always new places to visit. We would go slowly until we had cleared the reef, leaving Kongai far behind us; then we could put on speed, running down a wide stretch of open water between the scattered islands that studded the deep blue of the sea. Whales and porpoises might be playing in the sunshine on the surface, or a school of tuna, huge striped fellows they call "kingies," leaping high out of the water as they raced after a shoal of little fish: sometimes the dark fin of a shark cruising in search of prey. That was the beaten track where the bigger vessels went; we would leave it, dodging among reefs and little islands, sneaking through channels, chugging up long, narrow inlets that ran into mysterious places, dark between towering scrub-covered hills. Binkie said those places were full of black-fellows' ghosts, and that she would hate to be there at night.

There was one inlet where blacks had left their traces. One side was ordinary, the steep heights of an island, dense with jungle to the very edge of the water; but on the other was barren-looking ground sloping down to a jumble of rocks: sandstone, weathered into the queerest formations. There were rocks that looked like men: others like tables, flat tops standing on a central leg; others like huts or animals; and any number of shallow caves were hollowed out.

The curious part was the colouring. All the crust of the rocks was black or a very dark brown. But wherever the stone had been scooped out by the action of the weather the inside part of the cavities showed ivory-white; and all the rock at the water's edge had been worn to whiteness by the tides. And inside a long shallow depression were big designs made by blacks long ago, coloured bright red—a canoe and two men. Nobody knew what tribe had made them, and wind and weather throughout the years had never changed them.

Sometimes Dad would be towed astern in the dinghy, trolling for mackerel—he got some enormous ones, and there was nobody to fall over his legs or tangle up his lines. There was wild excitement if he shouted that he was into a fish: we had to slow down, judging the speed of the launch so that he could play it. A seven-foot mackerel takes some handling; there were some breathless moments before one was safely in the dinghy.

Clem was at the wheel one day. Dad was in the dinghy and I was trolling, too, from one side. Dad shouted suddenly, and simultaneously with his voice his reel fairly screamed as the line tore out. The launch slowed: I reeled in as hard as I could in case the fish doubled back and got foul of my line. We

gathered in the stern, watching.

The fish was something out of the common in size and strength. It fought like a demon, with wild rushes; once it made a bee-line dead astern, never checking, until Dad began to glance at the reel anxiously, wondering how much line he had left. There couldn't have been more than a few yards when the fish slackened pace under the strain, giving him a chance to reel in. Dad sang out to me.

"Can you get into the dinghy, Peter? I'll need someone to gaff this fellow, by the weight of him." I hauled the dinghy back very carefully until it was close enough; Miss Tarrant and Binkie hung on to the painter to keep it steady while I hopped in. I crouched on the middle thwart, holding the gaff ready. The fish was fighting again, making wild runs; once it leaped almost out of the water, and we all cried out, for we had never seen one so big. It was lucky that Dad's bait was the one it had chosen, for my rod wouldn't have held it for two minutes. Mr. Burgess had told us that he had once caught a Spanish mackerel weighing over a hundred pounds—we began to wonder if this fellow was its mate.

The fight lasted until Dad's arms were aching, but at last the fish began to make slower and shorter runs and we knew that it was getting done. Slowly Dad reeled in, drawing it back to the boat—now and then the reel would whirr again as the mackerel made its final struggles. Then we saw it turn on its back with no more fight left. Dad said, "Be ready, Peter."

I was ready, but a bit scared, for I had never before tried to gaff so big a fish, and I was dreading that I'd make a mistake. It's so easy for a hook to slip out of a fish's mouth when the line goes slack, if the man with the gaff makes a misstroke—I'd seen it happen lots of times. I thought I could hardly bear it if this monster got away at the last minute through my doing my job badly.

Dad backed slowly, pulling the fish alongside to give me room to strike. We saw the whole length of it for a minute, and I knew I would just have to strike and hang on, for I could never have lifted it into the boat—its weight would have been more likely to pull me into the water. I braced my muscles, lifting the gaff.

But I never got a chance to strike. There came a rush through the water, a glimpse of a black fin, and a mighty swirl; then a huge white body showing with a mouth gleaming with row upon row of great fangs. Snap! and half the mackerel disappeared into that cavern of a mouth, the shark diving as it swallowed. The dinghy rocked violently; Dad went down in a heap as the wave made by the attacker poured over the side. I was flung backwards.

Dad was up in a second, feeling for his knife. We knew the shark would

come back for his second bite, and we had no wish to be there when he came. Miss Tarrant and Binkie had sprung to the rope and were hauling the water-logged dinghy up to the launch. I grabbed the rod that Dad had dropped. We heard a little cry from Mother—the black fin was there again, the shark charging in. Then Dad got his knife open and cut the line; the launch drew us ahead as the remainder of the mackerel sank. We saw the long grey shadow in the water below us as the shark swerved to follow it down.

"May it choke him!" uttered Dad.

We scrambled aboard the launch, very wet and rather shaken; and Dad extremely angry at the loss of the biggest fish he was ever likely to catch. But Mother was too relieved to see us still alive to have any sympathy for him on account of the mackerel.

I was just going back into the dinghy to bail it out—it as nearly half full of water—when Binkie caught my arm.

"You wait!" she said. "Look—he's coming back again."

So he was. We had often seen sharks before, but never one as daring as this fellow. He came quite close to us, cruising along in the hope of another meal. We could see his whole length sometimes, a little below the surface. It gave one rather a creepy feeling.

Miss Tarrant said, "It must be very annoying to him to see so much good food looking at him. Could you spare him a sandwich, Binkie, just to keep his mind off you?"

"I'd like to spare him something that would hurt him!" growled Binkie. She was looking a bit green, though very fierce—those few moments when we were in the dinghy hadn't been pleasant for the people in the launch. "Do you think the old brute is going to keep us company all day?"

"That's what they do with a sailing-ship when it's becalmed," Dad said. "Dozens of them, I've heard, nosing along beside the drifting ship—just watching and hoping. They say it gets on the men's nerves."

"One wouldn't wonder at that," said Miss Tarrant. "To think of drifting day after day in blazing heat, waiting for a breeze that didn't come; nothing to do but look over the side at loathsome things like that. Nerves would get rather frayed in any case, and the sharks would be the finishing touch."

"The men had a way of dealing with one now and then in the old sailing-days," said Dad. "They may do it now, for all I know, though some skippers wouldn't allow it. They used to boil a pumpkin until it was half cooked and throw it over the side. A shark would wolf it down whole in one gulp before he realized that it was hot. Then the boiling pumpkin would begin to tell, and the shark died with a great deal of fuss—after which his mates would eat him.

Cruel, of course, but you can understand men being worked up to it."

"I can, anyhow," said Binkie firmly. "I wish we had a pumpkin now!" There is nothing soft about Binkie. She glared at the shark. "Can't you shoot him, Dad?"

"Well, I might try," Dad agreed. "Bring me the rifle, Peter, will you?"

But it isn't too easy to get a shark when it's moving well under the water, and when the man with the rifle is on a moving launch. Dad tried a couple of shots, and we thought one went home, but we couldn't be sure. It was only a small rifle, and unless hit in a vital spot a bullet wouldn't make much impression on all that mass of shark. Mother didn't like it much.

"You may only annoy him," she said. "I believe he just thinks you're tickling him, and I don't think it's fun to be so close to an annoyed shark. Let's move on somewhere else and leave him to it."

So we did, though feeling a bit sore at having to admit defeat. But a shark isn't a thing you can argue with unless you're a professional shark-killer. They have special gear, and a good man thinks nothing of catching a big shark single-handed.

"Some day," Dad said slowly, as we put on speed and left his enemy behind, "when I get tired of raising cattle——"

Everybody laughed. Mother said, "Is that likely to be soon, Tom?"

"It might be immediately, if I thought I could catch that shark," said Dad. "I was going to say that I'd start a shark industry. There's money in it, if it was done properly, but at the moment all I can think about is my lovely mackerel—and revenge. If that shark could be brought into my factory I'd know that he was being made into fish-meal and fertilizer and cod-liver-oil; and I would gloat. And the Chinese would pay me large sums for his fins for soup, and shoe manufacturers would pay more large sums for his hide; another reason for gloating."

"Yes, and you'd get your hook back too, Dad!" said Binkie eagerly.

"So I would," said Dad with a grin. "What a mind you've got, Binks! You can have his teeth as a necklace for that bright idea—when we catch him! Meanwhile, I think I'm getting hungry. What about landing for lunch?"

We dropped anchor in a little bay under the lee of a rocky cape that jutted far out. It was a good place for scrambling: after lunch, while Mother rested, we climbed up it. Before we reached the top there was a ledge where the rocks overhung a clear stretch of water. Looking down, we could see eight or ten big turtles at the bottom, feeding on sea-grass. Now and then one would suddenly shoot up to the surface with a lot of splashing and bubbling and swim about.

Clem dropped a stone on the back of one; up went its tail and it dived down among its friends in a hurry. But it didn't seem to have told them there was anything to worry about. They went on gliding here and there, eating as they moved.

"Just like a herd of old cows," Binkie said. "Look at them rubbing their shells together—oh, and there's a baby one!"

We hung over as far as we could, watching them. They were as peaceful and happy as possible: you would have thought they never dreamed of any danger being near. But in those seas danger is really never far off. Suddenly one lifted its head. What wireless message passed among them we couldn't imagine, but the next second they were paddling furiously towards an opening between two rocks. They darted through it and scattered among a jumble of other rocks, trying to hide.

We saw the reason why in a moment. Down below us, a little to our right, came a grey shadow flickering through the water like a hound running slowly on the trail. Binkie always vowed that it was our enemy of the morning; we thought that was rather stretching probability, but it was enough for us that it was a shark. Dad jumped up and seized the biggest boulder in sight and crashed it down. It caught the shark over the eye, and he swerved violently, lashing with his tail. We followed up with every rock we could lay hands on; some hit him, and though others missed, he must have been very angry at the bombardment, judging by his movements. He shot off into deep water, and I don't suppose the turtles had any more cause for anxiety that time.

"Well, that was some satisfaction, at any rate," said Dad happily. He peered down into the water. "That first rock caught him well and truly—he was bleeding. I trust he'll do his marauding in future with only one eye. That should cramp his style."

We tried to find the turtles, but they were probably far away by that time. So we went on over the promontory and along the beach until a big square headland blocked our view.

"Too steep to climb," Dad said. "Have you people had enough? I think we might as well turn back."

Binkie said, "Oh, let's see what is on the other side of it. We could get round by the rocks, I believe."

"Well, we'll see. Not if it takes too long, though; Mother may be wondering what has become of us," Dad said.

It was not bad going; the stones at the foot of the headland were fairly smooth, and we could pick our way between them instead of having to climb over. Ahead of us we saw another point, showing that we were coming on a

little bay well protected on both north and south. But we could not see it until we came round the corner of the big headland.

Then we pulled up in surprise. In the bay a fishing lugger lay at anchor. There was no one visible on her decks: her dinghy was drawn up on the beach. Close to it her crew had gathered round something that lay on the sand.

"I knew I would just have to strike and hang on."
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CHAPTER XIII

THE HAWKSBILL

FOR A moment we thought that the object lying on the sand was a man. Dad said, “Hullo, what’s wrong, I wonder!” and went forward quickly, with us at his heels.

The men turned as they heard our feet on the rocks. They were Japanese, rough-looking little yellow-brown men in blue dungarees; but they seemed very pleased with themselves, and they were chattering like monkeys. In the most friendly fashion they smiled at us, pointing to the thing on the beach.

It was a turtle, a big hawksbill one. We gathered from as much of their broken English as we could understand that they had had a tremendous fight to catch it. One of their divers had seen it from the lugger and had gone in after it —they pointed him out proudly, patting him on the back. He had tackled it in the usual way, swimming over it and getting his hands under its flippers. But the hawksbill is stronger and more of a fighter than any other turtle; even though the diver stuck to it and several of the others had gone to his help they could hardly land it. They had got ropes round it at last and dragged it to the beach.

We wished we had seen that fight. The Japs pointed and gesticulated, telling the story as much with their hands as with their tongues. The only one who didn’t seem excited was the diver, who stood a little apart, looking gravely at the turtle. It lay on its back, still entangled in the ropes; even though it couldn’t turn over, it was still dangerous and full of fight, its head moving from side to side and its vicious-looking beak snapping. The men were very careful not to go within reach of that beak.

It was not the first time we had seen the lugger. There were a good many of them about, fishing for trochus shell; we had passed several on our trips in the *Sunshine*, and this particular one had put in at Kongai for water. Some of the crew recognized us. “You Kongai people,” they said. “You b’long Burgess.” They wanted to know if Mr. Burgess was somewhere about, so that they could show him the hawksbill, and they seemed disappointed when we told them he wasn’t. It was a real prize to them; not only that the shell of the hawksbill is valuable as tortoise-shell, but they were very short of food. There would be a great feast of turtle and rice on the lugger that night.

They were very obliging little chaps. They brought the paddles from the

dinghy and levered the turtle partly over, so that we could have a good look at its shell, keeping a strain on the rope in case it tried any tricks. Their captain grinned as they let it fall back and he tossed the rope aside. “Not wishing more fight,” he said. “Velly much ’nuff all-leady fight with that one. Cut him up now, yes?”

We took that as a hint that they would be just as glad if we moved on, so we said good-bye and thanked them. Dad gave the Captain a packet of cigarettes, and they all beamed with pleasure.

“Well—good luck!” Dad said. He took a step forward, not seeing that a loop of the rope had fallen near his foot. His toe caught in it and he stumbled forward, recovering himself with an effort as the Captain leaped to pull him back. It was not quite quick enough. The hawksbill’s neck shot out, and the beak snapped on Dad’s instep.

Clem was beside Dad. He acted like lightning: as the turtle made its thrust he sprang forward, putting all his strength into a flying kick on the side of the ugly head. That was the one thing which saved Dad from a really bad injury, for instead of gripping and hanging on, the hawksbill only got in a glancing blow; and the next second the Captain of the lugger had dragged him out of reach. Blood was pouring from two deep wounds on his foot.

The Japs were really distressed. They gathered round Dad, exclaiming and chattering; their captain went down on his knees and wanted to tie up the foot with a dreadful-looking piece of rag that he produced from the pocket of his trousers. Miss Tarrant cried out at that in horror. She took Dad’s handkerchief and soaked it in sea-water, making as good a job as she could of bandaging it. Dad, who had said very little, tried his weight on the foot. He looked doubtful.

“You’re not to walk back to the launch, Mr. Forsyth,” Miss Tarrant said firmly. “It’s too rough a climb; you might only make the bleeding worse.”

“Dashed nuisance, but I suppose I’d better not,” said Dad. He limped to a rock and sat down. “Will you boys go and bring the *Bonito* round to this bay? Don’t alarm Mother in any way; it’s really nothing to make a fuss about.”

We wished we felt sure of that as we legged it back to the launch as hard as we could go. It had looked pretty bad, and we had an idea that there might be risk of some unpleasant infection in a turtle’s bite. Not that we knew anything about it, of course, but the thought would keep coming, the way dismal ideas do when you’re worried. And at the best, it meant no bathing for Dad for a while, and not half so much fun generally. We wished to goodness that we had never gone round that old headland.

Nearing the launch, we slowed down so that we should not scare Mother by arriving in a hurry. But she knew at once that something was wrong. She

was sitting in the shade with her back against a rock, reading; and she took one look at us, and said quickly, “Is anyone hurt, Peter?” But when we told her, of course she didn’t fuss at all; Mother never does. She just said, “Don’t worry; he’s far too healthy to be hurt much by anything like that. But we’ll get him home as quickly as we can.”

We ran the *Bonito* round to the Japs’ bay, anchoring as near the shore as we could. I rowed the dinghy in, but my only passengers were Miss Tarrant and Binkie, for the Jap captain wouldn’t let Dad use his foot at all. He and another man made a chair of their hands and carried him out through the water—they were a good deal more than knee-deep before they got to our launch, and as they’re very little men, Dad said later that he’d felt the sea most uncomfortably near. The launch headed for home, leaving them standing there, still talking.

Dad had always teased Mother because she had insisted on taking a first-aid box out with us every day. As we told him that afternoon, the joke was now on him, because he was the first of us to need it. We boiled some water, and he was swabbed and disinfected. Mother screwed up her face when she saw the wounds—and Dad screwed up his when she poured iodine into them. But he was able to eat plenty at afternoon tea, and he smoked his pipe all the way home, sitting on cushions on the deck, so we felt more cheerful about him.

Binkie was pretty silent. She sat thinking deeply, and I wondered if it was because she thought it was through her that we had gone as far as the Japs’ bay and run into calamity. So I sat down beside her and asked her was she worrying about Dad, hoping to buck her up. But she looked at me in surprise and said, “No, you silly old owl—I was only thinking what a pity it was the Japs wouldn’t cut up the turtle when I was there, because it would have been so interesting!” So I realized—not for the first time—that it is never safe to guess at what Binkie has in her mind.

We were all a little bothered over the problem of getting Dad up the beach at Kongai. The tide was nearly full, so that we knew we could run the *Bonito* right in, but the coral sand is very fine and Mother knew it would probably work through his bandages into the wounds. And Dad is by no means an easy man to manage; we felt in our bones that he would insist on walking right through it—and then through the dirtier, but equally fine, sand up to the path leading to his bungalow. But we need not have troubled, for luck sent us Koona and Yeppi.

They were mending a net on the beach, and as soon as we were near them they ran to pull the launch well in. Mother leaned over the side and spoke to Koona. He gave a quick look at Dad, nodded his head violently.

"Me fix 'im, Missus." He beckoned to Yeppi and whispered to him.

So when Dad put his leg over the rail to get out, steadying himself by a stanchion, he found that in some mysterious way Koona was possessing himself of both his legs, while Yeppi lifted him forward. It was a little confusing for Dad. He said wrathfully, "What on earth are you boys playing at?"—and clutched Koona by the neck. That was all Koona wanted; in a moment he was carrying Dad pick-a-back up the beach, with no more effort than if he'd been a piccaninny: nor did he pause, in spite of Dad's varied remarks, until he had landed him on his bed in the bungalow.

"That was beautifully done," remarked Miss Tarrant, when she could speak for laughing. "But after all, what is Mr. Forsyth to boys who can handle a dugong!"

Dad was determined at first to treat his injury as not worth thinking about, just as he would have done at home. But Mr. Burgess was very firm about it. He came over to examine it when he brought the *Sunshine* party home, and gave Mother some advice about treatment; then he spoke straight to Dad.

"You can't fool with that foot, Mr. Forsyth. It will heal all right, given a proper chance, but all the same, they're nasty wounds, with a good deal of laceration. Get sand into them, and they'll give you a lot of trouble—and this sand is the very mischief for seeping through things."

"Good lord, man, do you think I'm going to lie up like an invalid for a couple of scratches?" roared Dad angrily. "If I get a cut I take no notice of it—it heals while I'm looking at it——"

"Yes, you can do that at home, I expect," said Mr. Burgess. "Not in the tropics, though. Men who have been here for years get case-hardened, but anyone coming from the south has to watch out for germs. You needn't be an invalid, but you'll have to keep away from sand; and bathing is off for you, because sea-water would keep it soft. Sorry, but I'm responsible here, and I can't take risks."

Dad cooled down a bit.

"Oh, well, I suppose I'll have to knuckle under," he said resignedly. "I expect it will be healed in a few days."

"More like a fortnight, I'm afraid. But you can be out on the verandahs or on a rug on the grass: I'd like you not to use the foot more than you can help. We'll do our best to keep you from being bored. There's the wireless—and plenty of books. And you'll find people wanting to help to make the time pass. People are pretty decent when anyone has had a stroke of bad luck. And I can tell you, Mr. Forsyth, your luck hasn't been too bad. If that hawksbill had got a better hold than he did, we'd be on our way to the mainland now to take you to

a doctor."

"And the hawksbill would, too, if it hadn't been for Clem," said Dad. "That kick of yours was the quickest thing I ever saw, old chap."

Clem looked at him, and then looked away, flushing up. I knew just how glad he was he'd been able to land that kick for Dad.

"Wish I'd been a shade quicker," he muttered.

"You did jolly well," said Dad. "Oh, well, Burgess, if I was such a fool as to stumble into the mouth of a turtle at my age, I suppose I've got to take my medicine. After all, a fortnight isn't much compared to what old Peter had this year. I'll try not to be more of a nuisance than I can help."

Mr. Burgess laughed as he got up.

"You needn't worry about that. I expect all the girls will be wanting to hold your hand. Koona or Yeppi will always be ready to do anything for you, and if there's anything you'd like that we can get you, you've only to tell us."

"Give me a chair, a book, and my pipe, and I won't worry anybody," said Dad.

They certainly did their best to make things easy for him. A lounge with plenty of cushions was put on his verandah before breakfast next morning; another on the verandah of the mess-house when he was able to go over there. The path from the bungalow was swept and watered to keep it free from sand. One of the black boys seemed always to be working where Dad could call him easily. As for the other guests, they laid themselves out to entertain him. They brought him books and papers; every time a cruising party came home a procession would stray over to the bungalow, to sit on his verandah and tell him about their day. "Give me Queenslanders for kindness!" said Dad. "They're a great crowd!"

Dad had been so meek with Mr. Burgess that we gasped whenever we thought of it, but he wasn't meek with us over one thing. He let us know exactly what he wanted us to do.

"I'm not going to have your fun spoiled because I'm obliged to be a crock," he said. "You're to go out just as usual; I can get anything I need done for me, and I don't want to see you hanging about here. You've come here to have a good time; go and have it!"

Miss Tarrant giggled disrespectfully. She said:

"You make me think of a Melbourne mother I saw once in an excursion train with her small boy. They were both hot and tired, and when at last the boy howled, she shook him. 'I've brought you 'ere to enjoy yourself, 'Erbert, an' just you go on an' enjoy yourself or I'll break your neck!' she said."

"Sensible mother," said Dad, grinning. "Consider yourself addressed as 'Erbert. But I mean what I say, all of you. You boys are all right with the launch; I know you won't run any fool risks. Carry on as usual, and leave me to lick my wounds."

"*Could* you, Dad?" asked Binkie with great interest. "Do try while we're here, and I'll get my camera!"

Dad said, "I don't get much respect from anyone, but I'll be even with you. If you stay at home to look after me, I'll give you something to look after. I'll walk down the beach and paddle!"

"Only over my dead body," said Mother firmly. "Run along, all you four: I'll see that he does as he's told."

"You won't," he said. "You're to go out, Helen."

"No," said Mother; "I am not. I have gone hundreds of miles in launches, and only myself knows how I enjoy firm ground. You needn't think I shall sit by your side and fan you—I'll avoid you like the plague if you prefer it that way. But for the present I am going to enjoy a nice sea-side holiday by the side of the sea, not on it."

We left them arguing, because Mother gave me the sort of glance that shows you she would like you to be somewhere else. When we came back from bathing she was sitting in a deck-chair on the verandah, and Dad was on the lounge: both looked absolutely peaceful and happy, and neither glanced up from reading. So we took the *Bonito* out and ran down to the bay where the Japs had been, because we hoped to have a good look at the hawksbill's shell; we had seen only one edge of it the day before when the turtle was still in residence. But the little bay was empty and silent; the lugger had gone.

We went out nearly every day after Dad's accident. There was no sense in staying ashore; every part of Kongai was familiar to us by this time, so that it had become ordinary. You can only feel adventurous on an island you don't know. Kongai was now just a home, a jolly place to return to in the evening; plenty of friendly people to give us a welcome, to exchange notes over the day's happenings. There would be games after dinner, ending up with a sing-song round the piano; Tarry was in great demand there, because she can play anything you ever heard of. And often there would be interesting people talking. Quite a lot of the men staying on Kongai were returned soldiers, and when old Diggers get yarning you just sit quiet and listen, hoping they will go on for hours. Only we never liked the radio being turned on for the late news, which always meant more and more threatenings of war. Then the Diggers were likely to look gloomy, and sometimes they would wander out of the mess-room and down to the beach, where they would sit talking among

themselves.

Mother said that our going away every day was really a good thing for Dad. It gave him something fresh to look forward to each evening. As soon as we landed we would go up to see him, to show him our catch of fish and to tell him all the things we had seen. If we had been hanging round all day he would probably have grown very tired of us.

But he didn't really need entertaining. He took his time of inaction quite cheerfully; I don't think he was ever dull. Mrs. Burgess kept him well supplied with books, and Mother played backgammon and piquet with him when he felt like it. The wounds gave a little trouble for a few days, becoming rather inflamed; Mrs. Burgess is nearly as good as a doctor and she watched them very closely, and kept the patient on a low diet, which he disliked very much. Then they began to clear up, giving no more anxiety, but the complete healing was rather a slow business.

Binkie said to me one day when we were fishing from the stern, "I suppose I'm a horrid little beast, but you know, Peter, I do enjoy being out on our own!"

I was about to agree with her on principle about being a horrid little beast, when it suddenly struck me to wonder if I was any better. We are all really good pals with Mother and Dad—I mean, we consult each other about nearly everything, and they would be surprised if we were always painfully respectful to them. They say "Don't" about very few things, and if we have the bad luck to get into a row, it may be unpleasant while it lasts, but it's never spoken of again once it's over. There are no backwashes of rows in our family. This sort of thing makes you want to be pretty decent with your parents.

All the same, though we had loved being out with them in the *Bonito*, there was something extra jolly in being quite independent of grown-ups. Very naturally, when Dad was there he ran the show; and we wouldn't have liked it otherwise. He gave orders and we jumped to them—quite willingly. Mother hardly ever gives orders, but we knew the sort of thing she wanted, so it was done. And we had had a really good time, with no wish to alter anything. It would have gone on like that until we went home if Dad had not met the hawksbill turtle at the wrong moment.

I wondered, thinking it over, just what it was that made us like being on our own. It couldn't be that we minded being under command, for after all, the orders that Dad gave were always about things we wanted to do. Binkie gave me the right idea when she spoke again.

"Don't you agree?" she asked. "I bet you do, Peter. Of course we have ripping times when Dad and Mother are here, but what I mean is that it's

simply gorgeous not to be looked after."

I saw it then at once. Our people don't fuss; they think it's natural if we take an occasional chance with a bit of risky climbing or anything of that kind, and they say nothing when we ride half-broken young horses and have an occasional spill. But there's the feeling that the parental eye is on you, more or less. They want to know what you're going to do, and they look up in a relieved way when you come back from doing it. Dad, too, is apt to want to know if you've done it properly. I can see, of course, that this can't possibly be helped, and I should do just the same if I ever had a son and daughter of my own, only Clem and I have made up our minds never to marry anybody.

So I admitted to Binks that I saw what she meant, and that I felt like it also. Tarry, of course, never counted as a grown-up, once lessons were over at Weeroona. Outside Binkie's schoolroom she became in some ways younger than any of us, because she didn't know half as much about out-door life as we did, and was well aware of it. We had had great fun teaching her those matters —those lessons ended any idea of treating her respectfully, though we had to admit that she had more pluck in her little body than most full-sized men. But she was just one of ourselves, and she had choked with laughter because one of the guests at Kongai had said to Mother, "How nice it is for you to be able to send the children out with the governess—you must feel so safe about them!" Mother had repeated that to us, and we had all hooted—Dad and Mother, too.

It was part of the free-and-easiness of the island that we'd all stopped saying "Miss Tarrant." Binkie had christened her "Tarry" after her first week at Weerona, but Mother used to feel the rest of us ought not to say it—though it often slipped out. But on Kongai this somehow seemed silly; and now she got no formality from any of us. Tarry liked it much better that way. She couldn't be a formal person. She's little and dark, with the most twinkling eyes imaginable; they are slightly different in colour, and in her most informal moments Binks used to call them piebald, which could never be done with an ordinary governess. But her piebald eyes only seem to make her nicer-looking, somehow. Of course, we never bothered about whether she was pretty or not, but we had an idea Mr. Garfield did.

"I was thinking of another thing," Binkie began. "Do you think we could possibly——"

She broke off with a yell, because her fishing-line was nearly jerked out of her fingers. We had fished for a good while without a bite, so it took her by surprise. This was a good one; we thought he must be pretty big, judging by the way he fought. However, Binks skull-dragged him in after a few minutes, but when she caught her first glimpse of him below the surface she gave another yell.

“Peter, I’ve caught a jeweller’s shop, I think!”

He certainly looked like it. Through the water we could see him darting wildly backwards and forwards a shooting mass of colours that changed as we watched. Binkie fairly shook with anxiety for fear she would lose him in his struggles, but he was well hooked. She lifted him over the rail and dumped him on the deck. Clem and Tarry were already there, drawn by the confused exclamations that flow from Binks when she is playing a fish.

“What on earth is he?” gasped Binkie, staring at the capture. “I’ve never seen anything like him.”

“I know—he’s a parrot fish,” said Clem. “Mr. Burgess showed me a picture of one.”

“Jolly good name for him,” Binks agreed. “Just look how his colours change when he moves. He’s like a dark opal!”

He certainly had wonderful colouring. Vivid green at first, and then sky-blue, shading off to the colours you see in a fuchsia—red and purple and a glorious dark blue, mixed like the breast-feathers of a peacock, and with the same gorgeous sheen. Even his teeth weren’t ordinary—they stuck out a good deal and they were bright blue. Wet and shining with sea-water, he was the loveliest fish we had seen, and even when we took him home hours later he was still beautiful.

“It seems a shame to kill him,” Tarry said.

Binkie didn’t see it that way. She knocked him on the head quickly and scientifically, the way Dad has always taught us, and stowed him in a cool place. I think she was afraid that Tarry wanted him returned to the water—and not for worlds would Binks have missed taking home that exhibit. Clem and Tarry went back to their lines. Binkie put a new bait on her hook and flung it far out, waiting until the sinker touched bottom. Then she went back to the place where she had been interrupted.

“I was thinking, Peter. You know that island where we landed the day Dad got hurt?”

“ ’M,” I said.

“Well, I think that’s a pretty good island, and we’ve only seen a little bit of it. It’s got nice bush, and better rocks than most of the islands, so far as I could see: and I do like those little bays and headlands.”

She paused, and I said, “Well, what about it?” I knew she was leading up to something, but it never pays to hurry Binkie.

“I’ve always wanted to adopt an island,” she said. “I don’t mean like a sort of orphan, you know . . . but, well, just to feel it belonged to me in a way.

That’s the one I’d like to adopt. Only you can’t adopt a place by just going and landing on it.”

I said, “But you do. That’s the way explorers manage it. They land and stick up a Union Jack, and then it’s adopted into the British Empire.”

“Oh, bother the old British Empire!” she said unpatriotically. “Anyhow, I suppose this one belongs to it already. But I want to adopt it for ourselves. Peter—do you think Dad and Mother would let us go and camp on it?”

CHAPTER XIV

OUR ISLAND

"GO AND camp on an island!" I said in astonishment.

"I don't suppose they'd think it a good idea at all, Binks. I don't think much of it myself."

Binkie's face fell.

"Why, I thought you would love it," she said, looking at me as if I had suddenly turned into a stranger. "You always do like adventure-ish things."

"I've had all the adventures I want on islands," I said. That wasn't really true, but I had a sudden memory of another island where more things had happened to me than I cared about.

"But that wasn't the island's fault." Binkie sounded as if she were defending islands in general. "You wouldn't hate all horses because one had bucked you off, would you?"

I didn't answer for a moment. I was looking out astern . . . remembering things. Then I felt her eyes on me steadily.

"Peter," she said suddenly, "it's all right. Don't bother about it, old chap—it was just a silly idea of mine. I don't suppose I'd care for it a bit when I got there. There'd be sand-flies and mosquitoes and things . . . and I expect I'd be scared at night——"

That was so funny that I burst out laughing, because it is generally believed in our family that if necessary Binkie would go after tigers on foot. Nobody has ever yet seen her scared of anything. But I stopped laughing when I saw the poor kid's lips were trembling. That in itself was astonishing enough where Binks was concerned—and I knew very well that it wasn't on account of her island.

"I don't care," she said gruffly. "But I do hate to see you look like you did then. You do it pretty often when you're by yourself. W-wish you wouldn't, Peter . . . your leg's all right now, and nothing else matters."

I felt a perfect brute, of course. The one thing was to get her cheered up again. I'd never had the slightest idea that she had kept more than half an eye on me.

"Don't you be a silly old goat," I told her. "I'm as right as rain. And of

course we'll go and camp if you'd like to. It'll be a lark anyhow, though there won't be any adventures about it."

"I won't," she said doggedly. "You can't fool me, Peter. I won't go near the blessed place."

I knew I'd taken the wrong track with her, and it would be better to speak straight out.

"Look here," I said, "you spoke about being chucked off a horse. Well, you know as well as I do, if that happens there's only one thing to do—get on him and ride him again. You would be the first to say so, and I've seen you do it lots of times."

"That's different."

"It's exactly the same. I've got to . . . well, sort of ride again, only it's camping instead. I'd be a fool to let any old memories keep me from doing it. If we four go and camp it'll just make it all right—and for Clem, too. We'll be taking the right four this time."

Binkie's face cleared, though she still looked a bit doubtful.

"Do you truly think so, Peter, old chap? Honest?"

"Cross-me-heart-an'-wish-I-may-die. Best thing possible. And we'll have no end of fun out of it. Why, on that other island Clem and I used to say how ripping it would be to get you and Tarry there. We made all sorts of plans about it. So now we'll bring off those plans on a Barrier Reef island. If we're let," I added, suddenly remembering that the parents might have something to say.

"I believe they'll let us," said Binkie, becoming cheerful again. "Why shouldn't they? They know nothing can go wrong with us. Let's see what Tarry and Clem think."

The others jumped at the idea. Tarry had never in her life camped out, so she was mad keen about it at once. We sat in the stern and forgot fishing while we planned all the details, with some heated words about who would do the cooking. When we had settled everything I had become as keen as anyone else, and we felt we couldn't wait a moment longer than we had to before finding out if Mother and Dad would agree. So we hauled up the anchor and made tracks for Kongai.

The parents were somewhat astonished at our little plan, and not too willing at first. Dad said, "Why on earth you kids can't be content with what you've got already——" and then pulled up, probably remembering that he used to be a boy himself. Mother looked from one to another of us and said, "Oh, well . . ." And of course we all said that we wouldn't go a yard if they

didn't really want us to, and that we really didn't care.

Mrs. Burgess happened along at that moment and Dad put the matter up to her. She took it as the most natural thing possible.

"Why not?" she said. "You let them go out all day; what difference would a few nights make? Lots of people go camping from here. Do you propose to stay away long, Peter? In that case, I shall at once halve my order for beef!"

"That's a nasty one," I told her. "It's your fault if Kongai has given me an appetite. Anyway, we're not sure yet if we're going at all."

Tarry said softly, "I would take great care of them, Mrs. Forsyth. You can feel so safe if they go out in charge of the governess!"

Dad chuckled to himself.

"Look at her!" he said. "Not much bigger than Binkie, but I believe she'd knock all of them out if necessary! Well, I suppose it's all right if you think so, Mrs. Burgess; they're a fairly steady crowd, all things considered. Don't dare to get any scratches on the *Bonito*, or there will be trouble, Peter."

"I won't," I promised. "All right with you, Mother?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "But don't stay away long, children—which includes you, Tarry! I'm not sure that you're not the wildest of them all since you came to Kongai. How about staying three nights and then running home to see us? You could go back again if you felt you hadn't had enough."

We agreed on that, and Mrs. Burgess discussed the things we should want to take. Our first question was about tents, but she was all against our using them.

"We have tents, of course, but they would only be a nuisance," she said. "It isn't worth it for so short a time; and the chief thing is that you would probably be eaten alive. We're fairly free here, but most of the island beaches are thick with sand-flies at night. Camp in the *Bonito*; you could be quite comfortable there with a few cushions, and if you anchor a little way out the sand-flies shouldn't trouble you."

Binkie looked rather disappointed, because she had never slept in a tent, and she was looking forward to it. Mrs. Burgess cheered her by saying that if that was all she wanted she could have a tent on Kongai whenever she liked.

"Though I think it's an overrated pastime," she remarked. "Stuffy things, tents, and the ceiling is so near you. But it's yours when you want it, Binkie. Who is the captain of this expedition, if any? You, Peter?"

I said no, and the others said yes, all at the same moment.

"That leaves me where I was, doesn't it?" she said. "Well, as it's your father's boat, I'll appoint you captain so far as we're concerned. You're

responsible for fires. Never light a fire anywhere but on the beach, well away from the bush, and promise that you'll put it out with water when you've done with it. One of our visitors left a smouldering log once, and it burned out half an island. We're still sore over that."

I promised. There wasn't any need, because we have been well broken-in about fires. However, there wasn't any point about saying so, though I could see Dad's eyes twinkling.

She might have been one of us in the way she entered into our planning, suggesting lots of things we might never have thought of. Everything was easy, she assured us, and we might as well go next day; the weather was perfect, and the barometer steady. I believe she actually sat up and baked that night, judging by the enormous fruit-cake we found in our tucker-box: it was perfectly fresh, and so good that it never had a chance to become stale. Mr. Burgess was just as interested about our expedition as she was—and even more urgent in warning us about fires.

Our island was well off the beaten track for most vessels, and too far from Kongai for the *Sunshine* to visit it unless she happened to be out on a two or three days' cruise—and even then there was no reason to go there more than to any other island. Less, perhaps, for it was steeper than many others, and it had no fresh water. On the western shore were the little bays we had seen already; a bigger bay lay beyond them, ending in a high rocky headland. That shore held the only good coral beaches. It was a pity there was no water-supply, for those bays made splendid anchorages, with good protection from bad weather.

Binkie did not agree when I said this.

"Jolly good thing, if you ask me," she returned. "If there was water it would be overrun with campers, and then we shouldn't have it to ourselves."

But it was never likely that the whole island could be overrun, for it was much too steep. Just behind the beaches the ground began to rise fairly sharply to a high central ridge. It was all covered with bush, much of it tall timber, and all along the crest of the ridge was a forest of hoop-pines. Great boulders and smaller stones made climbing it a tough job. The ridge fell sharply to the east. On that side the bush was different; fewer big trees, but a mass of thick vegetation: it was much damper on that side, and everywhere were ferns and palms and orchids, and sometimes lawyer-vine—which has the worst hooked thorns we had ever seen. We asked Mr. Burgess once why it was called lawyer-vine, and he said it was because once it got hold of you it never let you go.

On that first day we went right round the island before landing. The northern coast was all cliffs that fell steeply to the sea, their faces weathered

into queer shapes. Sunken rocks lay at the base: we gave them a wide berth before swinging round to examine the eastern shore. It was rough and stony, a narrow beach at the foot of a scrub-covered hill: nowhere was there an inviting place to land. We ran along slowly, studying it, and agreed that it was the worst part of our territory.

The south coast was better, and it held a surprise. Rocks and pandanus palms at first; and then, to our astonishment, we came to the mouth of an inlet. It ran north-east, far up into the heart of the island, a long stretch of gleaming water: wide at first, then narrowing gradually. Towards the end it bent towards the east, where the land closed in upon it as if it felt that it had let it come far enough.

"By Jove, that looks good!" Clem said. "Say we go up it, Peter."

"Well, you get into the bow and watch out for rocks, then," I said. "I'll go dead slow."

They all kept a close watch as we crawled up it. Not a rock was to be seen, and a sinker thrown overboard on a line showed a good depth everywhere until the water narrowed. It was still fairly light, for the sun was almost directly overhead, but we could see how dark that end would be later in the afternoon. The frowning crest of the ridge towered above us on our left, to the right the hills were lower, scattered timber growing on them. We went on as long as there was deep enough water for the *Bonito*, about fifty yards from the end.

Seen from there the place looked dark and mysterious. What beach there was showed nothing but mud and stones. That went back for a little way and then the scrub was a dense wall: we couldn't see a dozen yards into it, so thick was the tangle of vines and creepers.

"This must be the tradesmen's entrance," Clem said.

"It looks to me as if it were peopled by pythons, alligators and horned toads," Tarry said. "Ugh! I don't like it. Doesn't it make you feel as if it had been here in silence since the beginning of time!"

I felt like that, too. I hadn't seen anything so utterly silent and still. Even our voices seemed all wrong there—as if the place would be relieved when we went away and left it to its gloom.

Binkie, however, had no feelings of that kind. She said cheerfully, "More likely it's echoed with howls and yells when the old blacks had a fight between two tribes. They'd be in canoes, of course, or dug-outs or something, with spears and waddies flying everywhere. All of them in red and white war-paint, like those fellows on Palm Island."

"And the slaughter somethink 'orrible," put in Clem. "Bodies floating just where we are now—shoals of 'em. And ber-lud streaking the water; and the

sharks——”

“You little beasts!” said Tarry. “Minds like sinks, haven’t they, Peter? And just when you and I were coming all over soulful! Take us away before they get any worse.”

We turned and went back into the sunlight. I wasn’t sorry to turn my back on that grim corner. All the same, I made up my mind that it would be a good thing to climb across the island and see what it looked like from the land, because I don’t believe in thinking unpleasant things about a place you’re going to stay on, if it can be helped. I didn’t know how glad I was going to be of that inlet later on.

Out in the open sea we chugged on for some time before we came to the beach where we had landed with Dad and Mother. There were plenty of rocks all along; we kept well out, getting their positions into our minds in case we should happen to be coming in after dark any time. Not that we meant to do that—we had promised always to anchor by sundown. Only you never know what may happen to cause delay, and I was dead sure I wasn’t going to take the *Bonito* home with a scratch on her paint.

We had a look at the three bays before we decided to use the middle one for our anchorage—the one where the Japs had landed with the hawksbill. They were all good, but it had the best shelter in case of a storm blowing up; the rocky headlands jutted far out on either side of it. We lay outside it for awhile and fished, with a view to the enormous meals we intended to eat later on. The fishing was poor at first, but after half an hour we began to get bites, and soon had all we needed. Then a school of small sharks came along, and after that we got nothing into the boat, for the sharks snapped each fish as it was pulled up.

“Beastly things!” said Binkie angrily. “I don’t know why sharks were ever invented. I suppose we’ll have to be jolly careful about bathing, even in the bay here.”

“I shall be the stern governess over *that*,” Tarry remarked. “Shallow water for us all, my children, especially me.”

“Well, let’s go and try it now,” Clem suggested. “I’m sick of feeding sharks with good fish, and I’m getting all hot and sticky.”

Everybody was feeling the same, so we made for the bay and anchored in a snug spot not far from the northern headland. There we made a find, for as we rowed shorewards in the dinghy we came to a place below the headland where low rocks almost enclosed a big pool. It was deep enough to dive in, and we could bathe there without the slightest risk of sharks. The water was pale green, clear as crystal: standing on a rock before diving in we could see every

inch of the clean sandy bottom, where tiny mullet darted about and bright red star-fish crawled. Tarry looked at it and sighed with relief. She said:

"That pool lets me out of being a governess as long as this expedition lasts. I'll race you in, boys."

She did, too. We had got into bathing-kit before leaving the *Bonito*: as she spoke she slipped over the stern of the dinghy and with a few strokes reached the nearest rock. Binkie followed her, needless to say, leaving Clem and me with the dinghy to look after. When we reached the pool a few moments later they were floating happily on their backs in the middle, but we saw to it that they did not float happily for long.

"Beasts!" remarked Tarry, when she could speak for spluttering—we had dived beneath them and caught each by an ankle, so that we could take them down to look for star-fish. It was unexpected, and they had swallowed a good deal of water. "Even if I'm no longer a governess I have a feeling that I ought to preserve at least a *little* dignity!"

"Oh, why?" asked Clem gently. He put a hand on her head and pressed her firmly under the surface. But you do not catch Tarry napping twice. She twisted under him, and where she got a grip I do not know, but Clem immediately disappeared into the depths. And while I was watching with great interest I suddenly found Binkie on my head, so I went, too. In fact, we all went, and a dog-fight took place within the pool that must have scared away every shark within half a mile.

After that we felt much better. We made a fire on the beach and cooked fish, eating so much that for a long while we felt equal to nothing but lying flat and grilling gently, rolling into the shade of a rock when we grew too hot. Even in winter we had found that we couldn't run risks with the Queensland midday sun, no matter how deeply tanned we were. Often we had blessed Mr. Garfield's tip about painting ourselves with picric acid when we first came to Kongai—we had looked peculiar, but that was better than catching the sun as many people had done. They were those scornful ones who said nothing could affect them. We had seen them out on the reef, the backs of their legs getting redder and redder, especially behind the knees, where everybody is soft: and next day they wouldn't be in shorts—slacks would cover their blisters, and they would move with careful dignity. Unfeeling old stagers among the guests used to watch for suppressed yelps of pain when, in sitting down to the table, the edge of a chair would catch a sufferer behind the knees. And the yelps were not always suppressed, either!

We didn't do much that first afternoon, for lunch had been a very late meal. I think all of us were enjoying the feeling of being independent, knowing

that it didn't matter whether we made plans or not, and that nobody was going to say, "Time to go home now." All the time in the world seemed to be ours that day. No other boat came near us, for we were far out of the way of ordinary cruising vessels. The island was the loneliest place we had been on, yet it didn't seem the least bit lonely to us. It felt friendly—as if we had unexpectedly found a new home.

When the afternoon grew cooler we began to feel more energy, so we roamed along the shore exploring all the bays and the rocks that jutted out between them. From the northern cliffs we could see the queerest mirage; five or six small islands were in sight, and they seemed to be floating in the air, quite high over the deep blue of the sea. We had seen something like it from the *Kalara* on the voyage up, but it hadn't seemed so real as it was that afternoon. We sat down on the cliffs, watching it.

"I believe it's true," said Binkie, staring at the islands. "Probably they're all made of pumice-stone—there's lots of it on the beach—and they've broken away from their moorings and floated up. I wonder where they'll land."

"They might not land at all," Tarry said. "If they struck the right air-current of course they would float on indefinitely. How queer for the people living on them, if there happened to be any!"

"And to think it might happen to us at any moment," Binks suggested. "There can't be any reason for our island to stay put, if the others have gone sailing in the air!"

"I think that's exactly what our island has done," Clem said. "We haven't realized it yet, of course, but we shall as soon as a wind catches it. Then the pace will increase, and probably it will tilt over most unpleasantly, and we'll all be sea-sick."

"My hat, won't Dad be annoyed about the *Bonito*!" cried Binkie. "He'll have to pay the owner for her!"

"No, he won't, silly. They'll send an expedition from Kongai to search for us, and all they'll find will be the *Bonito*, peacefully at anchor. The dinghy, of course, will be still on the beach, up in the air, so they won't find that."

"But look here," I suggested, "I'm not so sure about the *Bonito*. She's in the bay now, isn't she?"

"So far as I know," Clem answered cautiously. "I haven't seen her since we soared into space."

"Well, but once our island's in the air there won't be any bay for her to be in. So what?"

"Why, she'll be in the open sea then," said Binkie. "All the easier for them

to find her."

"She'll have to be found by a diver, though. Now that we've gone, the sea will have rushed in to fill up the hole, and the *Bonito* will be miles under it—still anchored peacefully."

"And octopuses and crabs and devil-fish living in her," said Tarry. "I can't bear it!"

A loud scream broke out in the scrub behind us, and we all jumped. I believe that for a second we thought something really had gone wrong with the island. Tarry was on her feet in one movement. We held our breath. Then there came a harsh squeak, swelling up again into a screech and finishing in a succession of quick gurgles—and we burst out laughing.

"A blithering mallee-fowl!" Clem said disgustedly. "Two of them, I should think. Gosh, that scared me!"

"I say!" Binkie exclaimed, jumping up, "they must be very near here. We've never heard them so loud before. Let's go and find them."

We forgot all about floating islands immediately. Very quietly we made our way into the scrub, trying not to let a dry stick crack under our feet—a hard job, when all the ground was scattered with rubbish. It was no wonder the Kongai people had warned us; a fire would have gone through that bush like a racehorse. Presently we came on swept-up earth, and in a few minutes we found the mound—an even bigger one than Mr. Burgess had shown us. But there was no sign of the mallee-fowls: only a scuttling in the scrub that sounded as if they didn't like the look of us.

"Bother the old things!" Binkie said disgustedly. "I'm all scratched, and I think there's a beetle down my back. Is anyone hungry?"

"I could peck a little," Clem said. "How about getting some oysters?"

We went down to the rocks in much quicker time than we had come up. There were plenty of oysters there, big black-lipped ones, easy to gather by knocking them off the rocks with a heavy stone; we filled our hats with them and carried them back to our bay. Binkie and Tarry rowed out to the *Bonito* for the things we needed while Clem and I lit a fire and collected large flat stones, arranging them in a ring round the coals.

I don't think there is anything better than an oyster supper in the island fashion. You put your oysters on the hot stones, and having cut long green sticks with prongs you make toast. By the time the toast is buttered, the oysters are ready; they announce the fact by kindly opening their shells, saving you all the trouble. You then slide a hot oyster upon the hot toast, and eat it: after which you only stop when you begin to feel it may not be wise to go on.

“I never can tell,” said Clem, “if they’re best when just hot enough to open, or when they’re really well grilled. And goodness knows I’ve tried enough experiments!” He sighed. “I wish there were more experiments left. Or do I?”

“I should think you do not,” Tarry said firmly. “I don’t know how many dozen we’ve eaten, but I have an uneasy feeling——”

“Oh, Tarry dear, have you?” Binks asked anxiously. “I was a bit afraid when you began on that last lot——”

“I don’t mean what you mean at all,” Tarry interrupted with dignity. “I am perfectly well, thank you. My uneasy feeling is merely that your confiding parents would have a fit if they could have seen this orgy.”

“But what a mercy they can’t!” said Clem cheerfully. “So why worry? The worry may come later, but they won’t know about that, either. Have some cake, Tarry?”

“Could I?—I mean, should I?” she said. “Well, I’ll chance it.”

We all chanced it: and we drank the billy dry, so that we had to make another brewing of tea. There was no need to wash up that night; as Binks remarked, if we left everything on the beach the ants would clean all for us by the morning.

“Yes,” said Tarry. “If I were a good governess I should have to insist on everything being left tidy. But then—thank goodness!—I am not.”

“I wish you’d stop talking silly rot about being a governess,” Binks said. “It’s a beastly word, anyhow—and not in the very least like you, Tarry.” She lay back on the beach with a great sigh of contentment. “Oh, aren’t we having a good time! I wish we could stay here for weeks and weeks.”

We all did, just then. We yarned round the dying fire until there was nothing left of it; then, suddenly realizing that we were sleepy, we rowed out to the *Bonito*. Nobody cared to sleep in the cabin: each of us piled cushions on the deck wherever we felt like it, added a rug to the cushions, and went to bed. The launch swung gently to the tide; we could hear the sound of the night breeze in the hoop-pines, and the calling of night-owls and curlews. But none of us heard anything for long.

CHAPTER XV

WE CLIMB A HILL

"WHAT are you thinking about, Peter?" Tarry asked. "You look rather solemn."

It was after breakfast next morning. We had cleared up everything, watered the fire into black ash, and stowed the tucker-box in the dinghy to be taken aboard the launch: after which we meant to cross the ridge to the inlet on the other side of the island. A couple of water-bottles with carrying slings were filled and the girls had made some sandwiches, for we had no idea how long the trip would take.

"I'm not solemn," I answered. "But I'm thinking about the *Bonito*. I'm not sure that I care about leaving her where she is."

"Think she might have callers?" Clem asked.

"Well, it's a possibility. Of course this is a very out-of-the-way place, but you never can tell what boat might happen along. We've seen one lugger here ourselves."

"But she only came because of the turtle," said Binkie.

"She must have been pretty close in before she saw that turtle. But I'm really thinking more of fishing cruises from the mainland. I've heard there are all sorts of men on some of them: they might think it worth while to overhaul a launch left in a conspicuous place with nobody about. I think I'll run her into the smallest bay and anchor her behind those rocks that jut out a bit—there's a little nook there that would just fit her, and she couldn't be seen from the sea at all. You'd have to be almost on top of her before you spotted her."

The Co. agreed that it was a good notion, so Clem and I took the *Bonito* into her little dock in the next bay, leaving the dinghy near her. I was easier in my mind then, for I couldn't help feeling pretty responsible, having been made captain. We went round the shore, to join the others and started up the hill.

That was the stiffest climb we had done—the hill on Kongai was nothing to it. It was a good thing that our back and leg muscles had toughened by all we had done since we came up north. The great trees towered above us, linked with trailing vines, often as thick as my thumb, and sending down other trailers to find roots in the earth. We saw how quickly they did root; in some place we came to a regular curtain of them, side by side, so firmly planted now that it

was impossible to get through them. Everywhere were boulders, big and little; when we put our feet on a thick mat of dead leaves we had to make sure a loose rock was not under it. We dodged nettle-trees and thorny scrub and climbed over fallen trunks, taking good care that we didn't put our hands down on scorpions or centipedes, or on the red-spotted black spiders whose bite can paralyse a man.

Snakes did not trouble us, fortunately. We caught sight of a little whip-snake a couple of feet long, and a bright green fellow, rather longer: both seemed far more afraid of us than we were of them. We had heard they were non-venomous, so we let them go. There are pythons on some of the islands, and we had hoped to come across one, but saw no sign. The largest beast we saw was a three-foot iguana—he scuttled from almost under Tarry's feet, startling her to an alarmed yell, then went up a tree at top speed. From a fork high above he turned to look down at us, his long head comically on one side. We told Tarry it was clear that he didn't like her face.

"I don't wonder," she said, mopping it. "I'm certain it's the hottest face he has ever seen on this hill. Let's call a halt for a few minutes, shall we?

"You've said it," agreed Clem, subsiding on the nearest log. "Gosh, isn't it hot!"

It certainly was. We were all glad of a spell; for a little while we sat without speaking, looking about us. Climbing up, we had been too busy to watch for anything outside our own line. But within a moment of being motionless and silent we became aware of the birds.

On Kongai the bigger birds had it all their own way: flights of cockatoos, occasional sky-blue kingfishers, scarlet parrots, ravens and pheasants and pigeons. A blue-winged kookaburra came there, smaller than our southern one, and with only an echo of its laugh. All over Kongai were the black and white currawongs; their harsh shrieks began very early in the morning and lasted all day. We couldn't help liking them, for they were handsome fellows, but they were death on small birds. We scarcely ever saw a small bird there all through our stay.

But here, on the side of the hill, the bush was alive with little birds—Binkie saw the first, a tiny honey-eater, fluttering like a butterfly about a mass of blossoming creeper, thrusting his long curved bill into one flower after another. He didn't look much larger than some of the butterflies we had seen in Queensland; a gorgeous scarlet and blackfellow, with a chestnut waistcoat. We saw other honey-eaters, golden-backed and red-throated, brown and yellow striped, and some whose breasts were a mixture of scarlet and blue; and glossy green and black fly-catchers, and grey and yellow whistlers. There were wee

scrub-wrens, some violet and blue-black and buff, and some that made up for being dull in colour by having crimson eyes and pink bills and feet. We didn't know the names of half the birds we saw, but that didn't matter; we kept quiet as mice, watching them as they played about in the bushes. You could see that nobody had ever made them afraid. And the air was full of their soft whistling and chirping.

Binkie put her hand on my knee, pointing. Out on a limb hopped a tiny sun-bird, mostly yellow, but his neck and chest a gleaming steel-blue. Another followed him in a moment; they flitted lower, the sun catching that wonderful blue and making it seem alive. I don't think they were four inches long. They hung head downwards from a twig as if they wanted to show us the creamy-white side of their tail-feathers; then they flashed off into a clump of flowers, their long beaks, curved and needle-pointed, getting to work almost as they touched them. You couldn't say they landed—they were so light that they didn't seem to need anything to hold them. Then a dead stick cracked overhead, and they were gone—just two vanishing streaks of gold and blue.

"Well," said Tarry, as we started up-hill again, "I've seen fairy fish and fairy coral, and now I've seen fairy birds. Don't let anyone ever again talk to me about not believing in fairies!"

It was a hard pull up to the crest of the ridge, but our second wind had come with our rest, and we managed it in rather less time than we had expected. All the same, we were panting and very hot; glad to camp under a tree and feel the breeze that had been shut off from us while we were in the scrub. On the ridge there was scarcely any undergrowth. The long rows of hoop-pines stood like sentinels right along it from north to south, wide circles of deep-green boughs above us, tapering to a point at the top. To the west we looked across mile after mile of sea, dotted with islands; beyond them the dim blue line of the mainland hills.

The air was shimmering with heat. The nearer islands, humps of green and bronze trees, seemed to move in it. On their rocks the waves broke in clouds of misty spray; the long stretches of open sea were streaked with great patches of green and purple and pale blue. We had never seen the sea from such a height, or dreamed that it could show so many colours. Far away, a steamer moved slowly southward, a grey shadow trailing an immensely long plume of smoke—the only dark patch in that blaze of colour and light.

"Poor wretches in that ship!" said Binkie. "To think they're going down south into winter—away from all this!"

"But how nice to think we aren't!" Tarry said, unfeelingly. "And may we have a little water now, Peter, before we die of thirst?"

We were all thirsty enough, though we'd forgotten it in looking at the view. One of our water-bottles had to be kept for the return journey; we rationed out the other carefully, and it didn't go nearly as far as we should have liked. Still, we felt able to eat our sandwiches afterwards—they were rather in a mash from having been carried in the heat, but nobody objected to that. We camped for half an hour before starting downwards.

On that side the going was very different. The slope was less steep, and we had not so many huge trees and boulders to skirt, or fallen logs to climb over. On the other hand, we had denser undergrowth, and there were rock faces, slippery with mosses and ferns, that had to be navigated carefully. The trails of lawyer-vine were the worst; we dodged them wherever we could, for if once their hooked thorns got a grip into one's clothes there was nothing for it but to stop and cut the vine away. Clem and I had our knives out almost at once for that job.

"Tell you what," Clem said in a minute, "let's cut this stuff out pretty thoroughly when it gets in our way. Then we can come back by the same track, and it won't be half so hard."

We did that, everyone helping; while we did the knife-work Binkie and Tarry pulled the cut trails, often yards long, aside into the scrub. It didn't take long, working as a team, for a good many stretches of the hill were free from the pest. So far as the rock-faces would let us, we took a straight line down, making the way as short as possible. I did a tremendous slide once, beginning on a sloping rock and continuing downwards, gathering momentum as I went, until a pandanus palm luckily came in my way. I don't know when I ever clutched anything more lovingly. The others, of course, yelled with laughter.

"That's the only time we've really needed lawyer-vine; and there wasn't any," Binkie remarked. "It would have held you beautifully, Peter."

I rubbed my numerous scratches and advised her to try for herself how it felt to be caught at high speed by anything furnished with three curved hooks to the inch: and almost immediately she did get caught, and it took us some time to release her. A bit whipped under the back of her hat; we had to cut away some hair to get that out, and Binkie's remarks were fluent about our methods. I tried to console her by telling her how much worse it would have been if she had been going at high speed, but it didn't seem to have much effect. What she said then became rather personal, and even less polite.

We got her out in time, somewhat the worse for wear and tear, and pushed on down-hill until we came out at last on the muddy flat beach we had seen the day before. It certainly looked a better place, seen from this end. The water of the narrow part of the inlet was dark enough, but we looked beyond it to where

the sunlight lay as it widened. A little breeze blew up it, good to feel after the steaming heat of the thick vegetation we had come through. We sat down on big stones and watched fish jumping in the quiet water.

"I believe this inlet would be a good place to fish," Clem said. "We might try it some time."

"I don't care much where we catch fish," said Binkie. "We can do that anywhere. But oh, how I'd love to have a bathe! I need one frightfully."

"Not a hope," I told her. "Too much mud where it's shallow, and too many sharks where it's deep."

Binks said, "Oh, I know—but isn't it maddening to look at water and not be able to get into it—when you're as hot as I am." She jumped up. "Let's go and see what it's like round the end."

But we didn't go far in that direction. It was low tide, but there were deep channels in the mud that made walking unpleasant, and nothing to see but mangroves standing high out of it on their queer bunches of roots like grey stilts. Crabs were scuttling about them—all the mud flat was covered with crab-tracks. We decided that there were no points in going farther.

"We can see what the other side of the inlet looks like—it's not a bit interesting," Tarry said. "I vote for going back. There will be a bottle of water on top of the hill—rather more than luke-warm, and not much of it, but still, water."

"And at the bottom there'll be much water, and cold—and I'll be in it ten seconds after we get there!" said Clem. "And tea afterwards. Come on, everybody."

We were thankful for Clem's idea of cutting away lawyer-vine when we were panting up the hill, on the way back. Our track was easy enough to follow, thanks to the amount of stuff we had broken in coming down: but even so, it was difficult climbing and intensely hot. It would have been far harder to deal with the lawyer-vine on an upward slope. There were places where we had to take to our hands and knees to climb over smooth slabs of rocks, finding it very hard to get a purchase anywhere. However, a track never seems so long when you go over it for the second time, and we were all in pretty good form when we reached the crest.

"By Jove, it's good to be out of that steamy stuff!" uttered Clem, lending a hand to haul Tarry up the last pinch. She had gone as well as any of us; as for Binkie, she has a way of apparently floating over obstacles, which is very discouraging to anyone plugging along behind her.

"Lovely!" Tarry said, taking deep breaths. "My poor old knee-joints—they're petrified or ossified or something. Binkie, it's my fixed belief that in

some previous existence you were a mountain goat."

Binkie seemed to think it likely. She said, "Oh, it's easy. It's only a matter of bending your knees and putting your feet down in the right way."

"Sounds so simple when you say it quickly." Tarry looked as if no light on the subject had reached her. "And my knees will never bend again, I'm certain."

"Well, just you make them," returned Binks. " 'Specially down-hill. You keep them bent all the time, and then you go twice as easily. I know it's true, 'cause Mr. Garfield told me—he says all native hill-men do it."

"And were you lightly bending at the knees when you leaped into that lawyer-vine?" Clem enquired gently.

That led to reprisals, and after they had picked themselves up and Clem had gone some distance down the hill to retrieve Binkie's hat, which had departed early in the battle, we drank our luke-warm water and decided that if we didn't want to get stiff, the sooner we went on, the better. So we tackled the descent, and I do not mind admitting that we tried Mr. Garfield's tip about bending our knees, and found it worked. But Mr. Garfield's tips generally do.

It was wonderful to come out of the scrub on to the beach. The sea was perfectly still, the tide beginning to come in, washing over the outer rocks. We went round to where the *Bonito* lay; some gulls flew away from her fore-deck when we came in sight, but otherwise nothing seemed to have been near her. We piled into her, and the girls dived into the cabin for their bathing-togs while I ran her round to our bay. In five minutes we were all in the pool. I don't think the sea ever felt so good. We dived and swam until we were breathless, then just floated on our backs until we felt ready to dive again. The water was almost warm, as soft as silk; we could have stayed in it for hours only that we began to realize how hungry we were. So we made tea, and ate large quantities of whatever food came handy.

"What I like about camping on our own," said Binkie, "is that nobody cares how one mixes one's foods. Grown-ups might think that cheese and herrings in tomato sauce and chocolate wafers and pickles didn't blend well, but we know better. They do." She took a large bite out of her third slice of Mrs. Burgess's cake.

"Top-hole," said Clem. "Pickles, please."

I said, "You get all sorts of new effects when you mix unusual things—I mean, ordinary things that you might never have thought of mixing. We had tinned fruit-salad once at a midnight supper at school, and I had to eat my whack out of a sardine-tin. It went all right."

Tarry made a face. "Ugh!" she said. "Did you wash the oil out of the tin

first?”

“Not much! The wash-room’s a good way from our dorm.—if you think, Tarry, that anyone is going to risk being caught splashing there at twelve o’clock at night, you’d better think again.”

“But why would he wash it, anyhow?” asked Clem. And there seemed no answer to that.

The sun dropped lower as we lay on the beach, too lazy to do anything energetic, just talking or not talking. The long rays came slanting into our eyes, so we moved farther back until we were near the stretch of rough grass that led into the scrub. A few low trees grew there—a kind of tree we didn’t know, rather like an apple-tree. They gave good shade on hot days; we often had camped under them on other islands.

Binkie settled down comfortably in a new position, but in a moment she moved away rather hastily.

“Anything biting you, Binks?” Clem asked.

“No, but it might happen at any moment if I stayed where I was. There’s a trek of green ants just there,” said Binkie. “I’d just as soon they didn’t trek over me.”

“Too right you wouldn’t,” agreed Clem. “A pity you noticed them—it would have been so interesting for us!”

“Sez you!” Binks pitched a shell at him scornfully. Then she turned and lay on her elbow, watching the ants.

Those little green fellows always interested us. We often saw their nests in the trees—there were plenty on Kongai, the queerest, most ingenious things, ranging in size from about as big as one’s fist to monsters larger than a water-melon. Deserted nests sometimes came loose and blew about the beaches; if you pulled one to pieces you could see how they were built up of long leaves, joined at their edges by a kind of cement. Mr. Garfield had warned me in Sydney against trying to examine an occupied one, a very lucky warning for us, for anyone might be tempted to do it—and a lioness defending its cubs can’t give any points to a green ant if its nest is interfered with.

We used to wish that we could see one in working order, for the inside of those nests must be a marvellous system of house-keeping. The leaves form long irregular cells, one built upon another; some for workers, some nurseries for babies, some food-cells. An ant-honey-comb, Binkie called it; only on a rough-and-ready plan, without the perfect regularity of a bees’ comb. We had had the luck to watch one being built once; the workers line up along two leaves, holding their edges together. Then you would think they couldn’t get any farther; but along came other workers, carrying baby ants in the pupa

stage. The next operation seemed like a miracle. The big ants hold the babies along the edges, squeezing them gently; and the babies obediently exude a sort of thick juice which flows along a bit of the edge and sets hard like glue joining the two leaves perfectly. As soon as a baby is thoroughly milked, the carrier runs off with it to a nursery, dumps it in its cot to develop more juice, and comes back with another.

The ants on the leaves never move until the cement has set properly. Then they unlock their grip, and get hold of another leaf, pulling it over until its edge touches the cell they are working at and can be cemented down. If a leaf is beyond reach two or more ants make a chain, swinging out until the one at the end can grip it and begin to pull it down. And so the nest keeps on growing until that particular colony of ants has as much room as it needs.

What puzzled us was how the thing begins, because some babies must be produced first or there wouldn't be any cement for nest-building, yet we couldn't imagine babies being produced except in a nest. It seemed rather like the old question of which came first, the hen or the egg? Binkie, however, declined to be puzzled.

"Quite simple," she said. "The old ants must just camp out, like lots of other Australians do while their house is being built. The babies come along, so they see they've got to have something better than a camp."

We had a feeling that this explanation didn't cover all the ground, but unfortunately we had nothing better to offer, so we had to let it go at that.

Another thing we couldn't fathom was why the ants were so different in their moods. They seemed to spend a lot of time on the ground, usually marching in a long thin column, apparently going somewhere in a great hurry; it was impossible to find out their purpose as a rule, so we had to conclude that they were route-marching to harden their muscles. We would see a battalion on the march down the beach, where there couldn't be anything for an ant to do, or to eat: and if we followed the column it would turn back again after a while and head for the scrub, never getting anywhere, so that we would grow tired of expecting them to arrive at something. Or we would find the long line going up and down trees, along fallen logs, or over the rough going in the bush; it scattered them out of any sort of formation, but their general direction was always the same.

That was ordinary enough, but why were they sometimes bad-tempered and sometimes quite peaceful? Sitting on the sand we might suddenly find ants crawling over us, taking us in their stride with no more concern than if we had been logs or rocks. They were very light green in colour, thin little things that we scarcely noticed unless one came right in view—not more than three-

quarters of an inch long, moving so lightly that even on a bare arm or leg we might not feel them. When we brushed them away, they never resented it—on those days. But sometimes, for no reason that we could find out, they were just as likely to be thoroughly bad-tempered, and the least thing would send them on the war-path.

They must be able to signal to each other in some fashion of their own, because it would happen all at once. Every single ant would suddenly get to work, and you'd realize in a second how many unsuspected ones had been walking over you. And could they bite! It was like red-hot gramophone needles being jabbed into you, and the effect of a bite would last for days with most people, leaving angry red swellings that itched furiously. It might happen when you were walking in the bush; you would find your legs suddenly attacked, ants rushing up you in an angry horde. Or they might drop down on you from a tree, even if you had not dreamed of so much as looking at their nest.

Then, when they bit they were thorough over it. They would get on their forelegs and fairly plunge their heads at you, getting such a grip with their jaws that when you tried to brush them away their hind part often broke off, leaving the head sticking in the victim. It was quite a job to get the heads out sometimes, and the victim didn't enjoy the process.

So it was no wonder that Binkie rolled aside in a hurry when she found she was intruding upon a line of march. But this regiment was a peaceful one. Not an ant turned aside to look at her. They carried on to the little rise where the grass began, heading towards one of the trees.

"Taking home the evening news," said Clem. "There's a whacking great nest in that tree. I nearly leaned my fishing-rod against it yesterday, only I saw it just in time."

"Lucky for you," Tarry said.

"Oh, it wouldn't have touched the nest—that's farther in the tree. But even the shaking might have annoyed those touchy little beggars. You never can tell what will disturb their sweet tempers, and we don't want them on the rampage round this beach."

"It would mean moving to the next bay if that happened," Binkie remarked. "And talking about moving, don't you people think we ought to think about going out after fish. Because we didn't have any lunch to speak of, so we'll need a really decent supper to-night."

"Angel," murmured Tarry. "I seem to remember you ate fairly well at tea!"

"That was just a snack!" said Binkie with scorn. "Come along—I'm fed up with keeping still."

We went out north of the island, anchoring about a mile off-shore. The sea was very still; that or the hot day made the fish lazy, and it took us some time to catch enough for supper and breakfast. To-morrow would be a scorcher, I thought, looking at the sun: it was slanting through a rift in masses of purple clouds, sending a red glow below them that was reflected in the western sea. I hoped a storm wouldn't come up to drive us all into the tiny cabin on the *Bonito* that night. But the clouds drifted away leaving the sky all rose-colour and gold, with the jagged hump of an island black against it.

There were lots of porpoises about, not far from us, and a whale or two blowing a long way out to the north-east. I was watching them, hoping one would throw itself out of the water, when I saw one farther away, that I took to be a whale of an unusually light colour. Pretty big, too; a good length of it showed for a moment in the long swell of the waves. It was only a glimpse, and I saw nothing more except a faint blow of spray, much less than a whale generally makes.

"Did you see that one?" asked Binkie at my elbow. She has very quick sight—I can't see nearly as far as she can. "Peter, I believe it was a white whale—you know, like Moby Dick."

"My word, that would be something to tell them about on Kongai!" I said. "I do hope he'll come up again."

But though we watched until our eyes ached there was no further sign of the white whale. The others had gone too, so we supposed they had all made off into the open. And the sun had nearly set, so we hauled up the anchor and went full speed back to the island.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT WE SAW

I WOKE up first next morning. The others were all curled up in their blankets, dead to the world. I glanced at my watch and saw that it was too early to wake them. But I felt restless, so I rolled off my cushions and went softly for'ard.

There had been a mist in the night. The deck was still damp in places where the sun had not touched it; I made a mental note that our blankets would have to be aired. Ashore, the mist still lay on top of the ridge, long wisps of it curling in and out among the hoop-pines. There were terns and oyster-catchers busy on the rocks and scarlet-legged gulls strutting daintily on the sand. From the scrub came a steady wave of bird-song; all the birds were singing and calling, far more loudly than they do later in the day. I liked being alone there, listening to them. It was one of those mornings when it feels extra good to be alive.

Still, I wasn't sorry when presently I heard a yawn and a sound of wriggling, and Binkie came along, rubbing her eyes, with her hair in a wild mop, mostly standing erect.

"Gorgeous morning!" she said, under her breath. "Oh, Peter, aren't you sorry we've only one more night!"

"Yes, rather. But it won't be bad to get back to Kongai, either."

"Oh, I know it won't. All the same, I do love being just by ourselves, and camping like this. I'll simply hate sleeping in an ordinary bed and keeping regular hours. And putting on a frock in the evening. You boys do have all the best of it!"

I rather agreed with her about that, especially when I thought of the frocks, but it was no use rubbing it in. So I suggested doing physical jerks, and we did a lot. Binkie ended by bending down twelve times in rapid succession to touch the deck with her knuckles, but on the last swoop she went too far and nearly turned a somersault, landing against a bucket. The bucket spun along the deck with a clatter, landing against Tarry, and both Tarry and Clem woke in some confusion as to what had happened.

When all was calm again and it had been discovered that no part of Binkie was skinned, we sat on the rail in our pyjamas eating oranges and deciding

what to do with our day.

"Not the sea for me, if nobody minds," said Tarry. "I can have the sea any time, but it's not so often that I can feel I own a whole quarter of an island. To-day I stay ashore, merely using the sea for swimming in at intervals."

"Me, too," Binkie said. "I want to go right along the northern cliffs."

"You won't get much out of that," I told her. "It looks as if the scrub came nearly to their edge all the way. And there's not a single place where we could get down them."

"I don't care," she said. "I just want to feel I've been there. You'll come, won't you, Peter?"

"Oh, I'll come all right. You planned this show, Binks, so you ought to be escorted all round the old island if you want it," I said. "It has certainly been a great show, hasn't it, chaps?"

"Do you include me in that word?" demanded Tarry. "*Me?*"

"Please, teacher!" I said meekly.

"Little horror!" she said. "I like the other better. And it has been a great show, Binks. I've felt the years dropping from me steadily—I'm rising thirteen now, I think!"

Clem said, "Well, you talk as if it was in the past, and we've a day and a half yet. Who knows what we're going to come across in that time?—bushrangers and Chinese pirates, for all we can tell. Anyhow, I vote against doing anything too hard and heavy to-day. Yesterday we raced up and down mountains like hares——"

"Now, it didn't strike me once that I was like a hare yesterday," put in Tarry. "I felt more like a yak!"

"Yaks we were, I think," admitted Clem. "At all events, to-day I want to amble round quietly and take my time over it. I do like poking about these queer places and seeing things. Places without lawyer-vines, for choice."

"All right," Binkie agreed. "That suits me. We won't do a single thing to-day in a hurry."

Later on we were to remember that remark of Binkie's with some astonishment, but at the moment it seemed a first-rate idea, and we set ourselves to carry it out. We loafed on deck for a good while, because the sunshine felt so comfortable and there were a good many oranges. We bathed at great length because the water was just right for bathing, with more nip in it than we knew we should get in the hotter part of the day. We took ages over breakfast because we were ragging a good deal and one or two minor accidents happened to the frying-pan. We certainly cleaned up camp thoroughly, but as

Tarry was careful to explain, that was not done from any idea of being good campers, but because it's so unpleasant to come back to dirty plates and things. By that time we found that we were ready for another bathe, and as we were still in our bathing-kit, it was simple to have it. So, all things considered it was fairly late when at last we put the *Bonito* to bed in her little corner in the next bay, and were ready to start.

"Lunch, if any, will be late," remarked Tarry as we set off. "But that's the beauty of living the simple life—you eat when you feel like it, and the clock doesn't exist for you."

Binkie said with her usual frankness that her tummy was her clock and would tell her when it was time to turn back; and that it was the only clock that she could really depend on.

"Wouldn't it be queer," said Clem, "if all our personal clocks struck at different hours? We'd be dropping out of the march one by one, streaking back through the scrub to the tucker-box."

"And much good it would do any of you unless I happened to be the first," I said. "Because the tucker-box is in the cabin of the *Bonito*, and the key of the cabin is in a place known to no living soul but me."

"Let's sit on him and search him," suggested Binks.

"You'd search a good while. Think I carry a key in the scrub with nothing but the pocket of my shorts to put it in?"

"How awful it would be if you rolled over the cliff!" said Clem in an alarmed tone.

"Do be very careful to-day, Peter," begged Tarry. "Think of us slowly starving if you disappeared among the sharks and took your precious secret with you! We couldn't bear it."

"You'd starve all right," I said viciously. "The key of the engine is planted with the other key, so you couldn't even get away on the *Bonito*. I suppose a search-party would come sooner or later from Kongai, but you'd be mighty hungry before it reached you."

"There'd be oysters," suggested Binkie hopefully.

"They give you fits if you eat them with nothing to back them up. The search-party would find you all writhing in agony on the beach."

"Nasty mind, hasn't he?" Clem said. "The only thing is to hang on to him in a body if he goes near the edge of a cliff. Well, for once he knows what a lot we think of him!"

We were all in such good spirits that morning that we couldn't help fooling all the time. Everything made a joke—silly, I suppose, but you know what it is

some days when you feel extra fit and happy, and you just can't be sensible. We made our way right along the top of the cliffs. The scrub was not so thick there as I had expected. Often there was clear walking, though rough enough to make us go carefully, with big pot-holes in the rocks. We carried on without a rest until we came to the farthest point north-east, where dense bush began. Then we sat down and inspected a sea that apparently held nothing whatever to look at—only dancing blue waves swinging in the long swell from the Great Barrier Reef. But that was good enough for us just then.

We sat there until we began to realize that it might be as well to think about lunch, since lunch was still in the sea, waiting for us to catch it. So we went slowly back on our track, now and then pausing to fling a bit of rock from the cliff, trying to hit some point that jutted out of the water. I had just managed to score a hit when Binkie sang out to me.

"Peter! Look, there's that white whale again!"

We all looked. Far out we could see it, a dull grey hump that moved slowly. Now and then it disappeared in the trough of a wave, but in a moment it would show again. There was no sign of any other whales.

"Could it be a cruising shark?" Tarry asked.

"I've never seen one as big—or showing so far out of the water," Clem said. We strained our eyes, hoping it would come nearer. Suddenly Binkie burst out excitedly.

"Peter, that's not a whale! I do believe it's a submarine!"

"Oh, bosh!" I said. "Submarines here!—why you're silly, Binks."

"I'm not!" She pointed at the thing. "You watch—it's rising higher out of the water. No whale ever had a hump like that. *Look* at it, can't you? It's getting bigger every second!"

We couldn't see what she meant for a little, but I remembered that none of us have Binkie's length of sight. She can see flying birds that simply don't exist for me. We cupped our eyes with our hands, shutting out everything except the grey shape. And it grew bigger. Very slowly it rose, inch by inch it seemed, until we could see its great length on either side of the hump we had spotted at first, most of the length being for'ard. There was no doubt about it—it was a submarine, all right.

"Gosh!" I uttered. "Can it be a German? But we aren't at war."

Tarry spoke, and her voice was grave. "Boys, we have no submarines, have we?"

"Not one," I said. "That's what Mr. Garfield and Watty are mad about—they're always saying we ought to have them."

“Then what can it be but a German?” she said. “War is very near, I believe; it might quite well be that the Germans would have some of their U-boats down this way to be ready, if things do come to the worst.”

“But they couldn’t, Tarry! Submarines have to have some kind of parent-ship, for repairs and re-fuelling. Germans couldn’t amble up the Brisbane River and ask for petrol!”

“Oh, how do we know what arrangements they can make?” she said impatiently. “They’re clever enough, and thorough enough, to manage anything. I heard in Sydney that the police are already watching German spies. Mr. Garfield told me some have been caught already, and he said there were two or three very dangerous men that they are trying to track down. And they may have Australians in their pay, for all we know.”

“Australians!” cried Binkie indignantly—“I bet they haven’t!”

“Money will do a terrible lot, Binks dear, and we just don’t know,” Tarry said. “But because we know so little, we can’t take any chances. Peter, we must get back to Kongai as fast as we can to tell Mr. Burgess what we’ve seen.”

I’d had a wild idea of getting the *Bonito* and racing out to see the submarine at close quarters, but of course, I realized that she was right.

“O.K., Tarry,” I said. “Only I wish we knew where she’s making for—there would be more to report if we knew that.”

“That’s true,” she said. “Well, listen—suppose we watch from the cliffs while you get the launch? Run her up to the end of the third bay and we can join you there. That will give us more than twenty minutes longer to watch her.”

“Right!” I said. “I’ll coo-ee when I get to where I want to pick you up.”

I went off as fast as I dared on the uneven rocks. A thin belt of scrub was just ahead and I swerved to go through it, knowing it would be easier going. Just as I reached it I heard feet padding behind me, and I glanced over my shoulder. To my surprise, there was Binkie.

“What’s the good of your coming?” I sang out to her. “I can get the boat on my own.”

She put on a spurt and drew level with me.

“I just felt like coming,” she said. “I can go as fast as you over this ground.”

It seemed a bit silly to me, but I didn’t waste breath in talking. We dodged through the scrub, coming out in view of the headland at the end of the eastern beach. And then we checked for a moment in astonishment.

Right on top of the rocks stood a man. He was looking out to sea in the direction of the submarine—we were now too far inland to see it. As we stopped he turned away and began to climb down the side of the rock that led to the beach.

"Someone else has spotted it, so we may not have to take the news to Kongai after all," I said. "I hope so, anyhow. Come along, Binks—let's get down to the beach and make sure."

I wondered what launch the stranger was from, as we dodged through the bush. A fishing party from the mainland would be best of all—they could go over full speed to tell the police, or get to any private telephone. I hadn't any wish to lose our last night on the *Bonito*. Then I realized that our own course would be to go to the mainland, supposing this man couldn't for any reason. There would be no sense in wasting time by taking the news to Kongai. I liked that idea better, because we should still be an expedition and could do whatever we liked once we had made our report. I wondered, too, if the police would believe us, and how we could manage to convince them. Tarry, I knew, would be very useful there.

We had taken as short a cut as we could, avoiding thick scrub. It brought us out just behind our beach: and the first thing we saw as we came out of the trees in sight of the sea was a lugger. I thought at first that she was the one we had seen before, but I realized quickly that she was much larger. She lay well off-shore, anchored within the two headlands. A big dinghy was pulled up on the sand, a man standing by it.

A little way up the beach was a knot of men talking earnestly. Japs, I reckoned, of the ordinary type we had come across on the luggers fishing for bêche-de-mer and trochus shell. But there was a white man with them. I couldn't see his face under his sun-helmet; he was in khaki shirt and shorts, the only man in the group not wearing dungarees. He seemed to be laying down the law about something, though we were too far away to hear his voice.

We had stopped short in the surprise of seeing them there, but in a moment we went on; I'd known as soon as I saw the lugger that it was still our job to report the submarine to the authorities. We jogged down the grass slope and out on the sand.

The group swung round as they heard our feet, the white man staring at us in utter amazement. And Binkie and I stared back, just as astonished as he was. For who should he be but my late cabin-mate on the *Kalara*—Mr. Patten!

CHAPTER XVII

DANGER

BINKIE was the first to recover herself from the unexpectedness of coming across Mr. Patten in the very last place we'd have thought of seeing him. In fact, we had never expected to meet him again, and it would not have troubled us if we hadn't. All the same, we were not sorry to see a white man we knew, especially as we were bursting with news.

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Patten. "Well, of all the——!" He broke off, coming forward quickly and holding out his hand.

"Oh, Mr. Patten!" panted Binks, "we've seen a submarine!"

"Never!" he uttered. "Where?"

"Over there—north-east." She pointed over her shoulder. "A big one!"

"I'll believe it when I see it," said Mr. Patten, laughing. "We don't grow them in these seas, Binkie."

"It's there all right," I said. "You could see it if you went up to the headland. Is that one of your men who was up there just now? He'll be able to tell you."

"One of these fellows went for a stroll, but he's not back yet," he said. "I'll ask him when he comes. But honest, Peter, it couldn't possibly be a submarine. I only wish we had some knocking about—a great mistake that we haven't, I consider, though I'm told I know nothing about it."

"But it's a *German* U-boat, we think!" cried Binkie. "What else could it be?"

"A whale, or I'll eat my hat," said Mr. Patten with a broad grin. "You youngsters are letting your imaginations run away with you. I've mistaken whales for all sorts of things myself while I've been fishing with these Japs. I've had a great time too, Peter—something right off the beaten track. You and Clem would have enjoyed it. No frills, and lots of fish; and the Japs are really good little fellows to be with. I've picked up quite a lot of their language already."

Binkie was not in the least interested in any talk about fishing. She said:

"Here's your man coming! Just you ask him what he saw from the point!"

The man we had seen was coming quickly along the beach. Mr. Patten

obediently turned and sang out to him in Japanese. He looked puzzled for a moment, then shook his head, grinning, as he answered.

"He says he saw a whale—a big one," Mr. Patten translated. "What did I tell you? So far as submarines are concerned, there ain't no such a creature—in Australian waters!"

"But I tell you we *saw* it!" I argued. "We were watching it for ever so long."

"Well, I'd hate to shake your faith," said Mr. Patten, "I'm sure you think you did—I'm not suspecting you of trying to pull my leg, though I seem to remember you and Clem did so pretty successfully once or twice on the *Kalara*."

We had, too, and I couldn't help smiling when I thought of the times we had managed it. He was smiling, too—he had taken it in very good part when it happened.

"No, truly, I'm not, Mr. Patten," I said. "This is really dinkum: I wouldn't fool about a thing like a submarine. We'd bet everything we own that it was one."

"Well, that Jap has been after bêche-de-mer in these parts for years," he said. "He's got eyes like a hawk, and there's nothing about the sea that he doesn't know. I can't help thinking that if he says it was a whale it must have been one. Anyhow, if there's the slightest possibility of a submarine being about it's sure to be spotted before long by somebody or other. We'll keep a sharp look-out from the lugger. If we spot one I'll send you two a long and humble apology for doubting you. Is your father with you, by the way? You're not on your own, are you?"

Binkie said, "No, Dad's over on Kongai. We're on the loose——"

The Jap we had seen on the headland came up as she spoke and said something to Mr. Patten. He listened to him and turned back to us.

"Kano says it was a white whale. We saw one out near the Barrier last week—a huge fellow. Very possibly it was the same one."

I don't know how it was, but I was suddenly conscious of something queer. The Jap sailors were standing a little apart, looking rather amused. They didn't try to join in our conversation; I'd taken it for granted that they didn't know any more English than the men on the other lugger. But I caught the eye of one man, and I got the idea that he did know what we were talking about. All in a moment I felt a sort of tension in the air: nothing I could put into words, but enough to make my heart go a bit quicker. I wished we hadn't run into Mr. Patten—and even more than that, I wished Binkie was somewhere else.

“On the loose, are you?” Mr. Patten was saying: I realized I had missed his first words in the sudden rush of uneasiness that had come over me. “What times you youngsters have! Are they coming to pick you up here?”

Binkie answered him before I could speak.

“No, we’ve got a little launch,” she said. “And we’re just dead certain that was a submarine, Mr. Patten; I don’t care what that man thinks. Why don’t you go up on the headland and look for yourself?”

“I might,” he said. “Though I think I’d rather go on fishing. We only came ashore to see if we could find fresh water here.”

My suspicions became doubly strong when he said that. It was a slip: if the man he called Kano had known those parts for years he would have known quite well that there was no fresh water on our island. All the luggers knew where to put in for water. I decided to get away as quickly as I could.

“Oh, well, we’d better be moving, Binkie,” I said. “It’s time we got the boat.”

“Going fishing?” Mr. Patten said. He looked closely at me.

“No,” said Binkie bluntly. “We’re going as hard as we can travel to tell Mr. Burgess about that submarine!”

“I think not, my young friends!” said Kano softly.

All at once the men were round us. I got in front of Binkie and tried to hit one who was catching at her wrist—and I heard her cry out angrily and swung round in time to see her land a beautiful kick on the shin of another Jap. I did some kicking myself, but of course it didn’t amount to much: we hadn’t a chance. They didn’t try to hurt us, but naturally they were by no means gentle. In about two minutes our hands were tied behind us—the Jap near the dinghy came running up with bits of rope. We stood there, men gripping our arms, feeling most utter fools. I admit I was frightened, but more than that, I was furiously angry. And there was no doubt as to how Binkie felt.

“You beasts!” she shouted. She tried to kick again: the Japs tightened their grip and I saw her press her lips together.

“Keep still, Binks,” I said. “What on earth’s their game, Mr. Patten?”

He hadn’t taken any hand in securing us. He stood a little apart, looking at us in a puzzled sort of way.

“You two happen to be a confounded nuisance,” he said. “I’m hanged if I know what to do with you. My friends here would know fast enough . . . but . . .” He stopped, frowning heavily.

“We’re not interfering with you,” I said hotly. “You’ve no right to touch us —and I didn’t think any white man would let a girl be hurt——”

“Oh, keep your tongue quiet, you young fool!” he broke in. “You’re interfering with us by merely being alive at the moment!” He thought again.

“Look here,” he said. “If we let you go, will you give your word of honour—both of you—to say nothing to anybody about thinking you saw a submarine?”

“*No!*” said Binkie and I, together. I suppose we were a bit mad to say it. It certainly wasn’t that we were being young heroes—it was because we were too blind with rage to say anything else. And you can’t realize, even when you’re suddenly captured as we had been, that you’re in pretty bad danger.

“Think again,” said Mr. Patten. “I’m not asking you to tell lies; only to forget——”

Kano interrupted him.

“That will not do,” he said. “They would not keep any promise. Such talk is childish—we take no risks like that. Come with me.” He glanced at the men beside us. “Hold them fast,” he said curtly—I think it was for our benefit that he said it in English. Then he and Mr. Patten walked away to the other end of the beach.

“Peter—what on earth——!” said Binkie. Her voice was shaking.

“I don’t know,” was all I could say. “Don’t talk, old girl—I believe they all know English. Keep your pecker up.”

It must have been more than five minutes that we stood there, looking at them. They were talking earnestly in low voices; Mr. Patten seemed to be arguing about something. Kano said very little, but his face was like flint. It gave me the shivers to look at it. The other men, all but the two who were holding us, sat down on the sand, talking and laughing among themselves.

Then the two came back to us, and I know I found it pretty hard to keep my head up and face them. I felt like nothing on earth to think that I’d got Binkie into this. But Binks stared at them as if they were something with a bad smell.

“Kano will go over to the lugger and consult with his captain,” Mr. Patten told us. “The Captain may decide that you will take a trip on the lugger with us; I don’t know. But if he comes back with Kano I should advise you to have sense enough to do as you’re told. I warn you, I can’t do anything for you if you don’t.”

We didn’t say anything. My throat felt stiff, and I think Binkie must have felt the same, for there was something deadly in the way Kano looked at us. He gave an order, and our guards marched us up to the trees on the grass slope, taking us pretty far back near the scrub. I suppose it was in case any launch came along and they could hurry us out of sight in a moment. They made each

of us sit down under a tree, tying us to the trunks by passing round them the ends of the ropes that held our wrists. Then Kano gave a crisp order, and all the men except one ran the dinghy out into the water. Kano got into it; they pulled away, leaving us in charge of Mr. Patten and the Jap.

It was a long pull out to the lugger. She lay well outside the bay—I wondered if it was so that the submarine could see her. The men pulled swiftly and quietly, and no sound of talking came from the dinghy. I looked at Binkie. Our trees were only a few yards apart, and we could have talked, but not with the Jap pacing up and down near us. I asked her were her arms hurting much—I know mine were—and she just wrinkled up her nose and said, "Oh, a bit."

Then I tried talking to Mr. Patten. That was no use; when I asked him questions, he would not answer, except by telling me again that we'd only be safe if we obeyed orders. I lost my temper and told him what I thought of him, and Binkie added a few details. He looked at us without any change of expression.

"If you raise your voices like that I shall have to tell Mura to gag you," he said coldly. "Kano wanted to gag you before he went off, and it will probably be done as soon as he comes back. Keep quiet, you young idiots—can't you realize you're in danger?" He snapped the last words at us angrily. Then, as if he meant to give us no further chance of talking, he turned his back on us. He sat down under a tree near the edge of the grass and watched the lugger.

We were surprised to see that her anchor was being hauled up: the clank of her windlass came softly to us across the water. She moved away slowly, her sails flapping until the breeze filled them. In a moment she was out of sight beyond the point. Binkie said in a low voice, "Whatever are they doing?" but of course I could only shake my head. Mr. Patten and the sailor took no notice of her going. Evidently it didn't surprise them.

I thought it over and suddenly I understood. We had imagined that they were chiefly concerned with us; that the problem of how to silence us was all that took Kano out to the lugger. Of course it wasn't that! Kano had to get back to report what he had seen from the headland, and his captain had some action to take as soon as he heard it. I couldn't imagine what it was, of course; perhaps to get some signal from the submarine or to pick up a buoy she might have left for them, giving instructions. I didn't believe they would have a meeting in broad daylight. Anyhow, whatever it might be, it was the really important thing for them, and we were only two inconvenient young intruders who could be dealt with later on.

I think it was that sudden conviction that we were just nothing beside their own deadly purpose that sent my heart into my shoes. Mere flies, to be brushed

away when they had time, I thought; and even if it meant a respite before we faced them again, that wasn't much comfort, for the strain on our wrists and arms was growing worse every minute. Binkie was looking pretty bad already. I decided to make an appeal to Mr. Patten.

"Look here, Mr. Patten," I called out, "can't we be tied up with our hands in front of us? You can see plainly enough that we can't get away. There's no use in starting to torture us yet."

He got up and came over to look at us.

"It might be a very sound thing to keep you as you are," he said. "Half an hour of this would be likely to make you see sense. Oh, well . . . I don't suppose it will make much difference when the Captain comes ashore."

I wondered what that captain was like. I didn't think he could be worse than Kano looked, but evidently Kano was only second in command. The prospect of meeting the Captain was not too cheerful. But it was a wonderful relief to get our wrists free. Under Mr. Patten's directions Mura untied them and lashed us to our trees, arms and all, with a cunning little turn round each arm in case we tried to wriggle out, but giving the rope just enough play to enable us to chafe our wrists. And they needed it.

Mr. Patten returned to the shade of his tree, sitting down with his hands clasped round his knees so that we had only a view of his humped back. He had taken off his sun-helmet: I looked at the round back of his head and longed to be able to heave a rock at it. Mura strolled about on the grass, taking no notice of us. He was a heavy-faced young fellow, looking both stupid and bad-tempered: he'd been one of those who had gripped my arms at the start, and that arm was aching yet.

Suddenly I remembered Tarry and Clem—and it says something for what we'd gone through that it was the first time they had come into my mind. What would they be doing? Unless the submarine was acting in some exciting way they would long ago have given up waiting for my coo-ee and gone down to the nearest beach to look for us coming in the *Bonito*. I began to sweat all over in the sudden fear that they would return to our bay to see what was keeping us.

If they did that, they would have no chance whatever of rescuing us—they would only fall into the trap that held Binkie and me. Clem is a little older than I am, but he isn't nearly as strong; Mura could easily handle him and Tarry single-handed, to say nothing of having Mr. Patten to back him. But Clem has brains, far more than I have, and I hoped wildly that he would have found out that something was wrong: that he and Tarry would lie low until they had a chance of getting away in the *Bonito* and racing for help. That gave me a ray of

hope. Also, I thought, if Clem and Tarry get away to tell about the submarine, that lets Binkie and me out—we could give our promise to say nothing. I blessed the interruption that had prevented Binks from saying they were on the island with us.

As if he guessed something of what was in my mind, Mr. Patten unexpectedly shot a question at me over his shoulder.

"Where's your boat?"

"Oh, in a cove somewhere round the other side," I answered in a hurry, for fear Binks would get ahead of me in replying. He didn't ask anything more, and I breathed more freely. Thank goodness I had stowed the *Bonito* away where she couldn't be seen from the open.

And then with a rush of sickening disappointment, I remembered the key of the engine.

Nobody but myself knew where it was. I never hid it in the bay where we left the *Bonito*, just in case someone came prowling round. It was in this bay, hidden in a rock cleft near our bathing-pool, just above high-water mark. Not a hundred yards from me, and it might as well have been a hundred miles! Clem and Tarry could never find it: they'd never even think of looking for it outside the *Bonito's* bay. They were trapped on the island until someone from Kongai came to look for us. I called myself all the names I could think of for having been such an idiot as not to let a second person know my hiding-place.

Everything was hopeless; not a channel that wasn't blocked. If the Japs took us away in the lugger, I didn't believe they would let us go: it would be so much easier and safer for them to dump us overboard in a place where the sharks would end the inconvenience for them. Unpleasant pictures of that dumping began to race through my mind—I could imagine Mura taking part in it with great enjoyment. I shut my eyes tightly so that I couldn't see his evil face.

The very faintest whistle from Binkie came to me presently: only a thread of sound, but it made me look at her. She was sitting erect, her eyes fixed on something ahead of her: Mura, whose aimless wanderings round had taken him under the tree where Mr. Patten sat. But he was not interested in Mr. Patten's back view. He was looking into the branches, puzzled by something he saw—the big tree-ants' nest about ten feet up.

Evidently he had never seen one before. He studied the queer green football from several angles, as if he thought it was some curious kind of fruit. Then he decided that it would be interesting to examine it more closely. He turned aside—we dropped our eyes in a hurry lest he should see that we were looking at him—and hunted round until he found a long thin stick. It was dry

and stiff: the very thing for his purpose. We held our breath as he strolled back to the tree.

CHAPTER XVIII

OVER THE RIDGE

BINKIE and I had trouble enough on our hands, but we almost forgot it as the Jap began his study of green ants at close quarters. We shot a look at each other—Binkie's eyes were dancing. But we knew we must be very careful, and again we slumped down, trying to look as if being tied to trees was all we had to think about.

There was nothing rough about his methods; possibly he didn't want to disturb Mr. Patten. We noted with a joy beyond all describing that the nest was not far from Mr. Patten's seat below the tree. His back never moved: whatever rustling Mura made as he worked the long stick upwards was not enough to interrupt his thoughts. Certainly that man must have had a fair weight on his mind just then. I have since wondered if any of his thoughts went in the direction of Mother and Dad—they had been pretty decent to him on the *Kalara*.

A bough got in Mura's way, so he changed his position; the move brought him a little nearer Mr. Patten. He had a clear run now, and he poked the nest enquiringly here and there with the point of the stick, looking upward as if he expected it to fall. We could see it trembling and swaying through the thin leaves of the little tree, and no doubt the ants were beginning to muster. But their bodies, thin and almost a transparent green, would not show against the green of the nest. If Mura had happened to look round just then, he would have seen his two prisoners nearly bursting.

The nest did not fall, of course; the ants know their business when they build. Mura got a bit impatient. He poked harder. The point pierced a leaf and went deep into the nest. Mura waggled it backwards and forwards, making a long open gash. The bough swayed backwards and forwards, and I should think it acted as a perfect sprinkler.

Even from where we sat we could see the ants falling in a shower. They fell on Mura's upturned face, and on the large section of him left uncovered by his sleeveless vest. The swinging bough cast them over Mr. Patten, whose shirt was well open at the neck. And wherever they fell they got to work at once. A green ant only mildly annoyed is a thing to be avoided, but a green ant whose nest has been stormed is simply a demon.

Nobody who hadn't been roughly handled, threatened, and tied up like

dogs to await something worse could appreciate as we did the simultaneous howl of astonished agony that broke from those two men. Mura staggered back, tripped, and fell heavily, rolling over and over in his efforts to get away. Mr. Patten shot up like a rocket, stamping, beating at himself—and not realizing in the least that where he was the ants were still falling on him from the nest. And neither realized for a couple of minutes that you can't beat off green ants—that the furious little jaws hung on even in death. They danced madly on the grass, writhing in their efforts to get rid of their attackers—yells of pain mingling with curses. The ants bit on; hundreds of red-hot needles boring in steadily all over them. Finally the same idea struck both sufferers—they turned and bolted down the beach, wading out until they could fling themselves under the water.

We had forgotten we were prisoners. We sat and yelled with laughter until we ached so much that we could only gasp. But the laughter died within us as we looked towards the sea. The lugger was coming back.

I had a moment of utter misery—it seemed all the worse because I had been able to laugh. There was the enemy, sailing towards the bay relentlessly; and we were so completely in their power. I was helpless to do a single thing to save Binks. I hated the very thought of their brutal hands touching her. Nothing but a miracle could help us now.

And the miracle happened.

It seemed like one, at all events. Quick steps behind us: Clem's voice, in an urgent whisper—"Be ready to hop it!" Clem's knife sawing at Binkie's rope until it fell from the tree; Tarry helping to haul her to her feet and hurry her into the scrub, her arms still tied. I stared blankly, almost afraid to believe it was true. Clem darted over to my tree, panting as he attacked my rope. It was a stronger one than Binkie's; the time seemed an age while I watched the sea, dreading to see Mr. Patten and Mura coming back.

They did not come. They were fully occupied; repeated plunges had shown them that the ants' heads would only come out when man-handled, and they were standing waist-deep, picking them out as best they could, stamping in the water as they picked. We could not hear what they were saying to each other, but their voices were loud and angry and full of pain. Neither had noticed the lugger—she was still some distance out.

"Got it!" said Clem with a grunt of relief. "Hang on to me, old chap!"

He lugged me up, and we dived for shelter. The others were crouching behind some bushes. Tarry had succeeded in getting Binkie's arms free and was rubbing them. We bolted in beside them. Clem said, as he worked at my rope:

"Can we get to the *Bonito*, Peter, do you think?"

"Not a hope," I said. "The wretched key is planted close to where they are."

"Then all we can do is to put as much distance between us and them as we can," he said calmly. Clem is never rattled in times of stress. "They may not have time to hunt us down. Anyway, we'll hope they haven't. Are they coming yet?"

"No," said Tarry. "Still scratching. I'll tell you when they move."

"This blessed rope!" said he, between his teeth. "I'm glad the brute who tied it has got a few hundred ant-bites! Binks, are you all right? Not hurt much?"

"I'm O.K.," said Binks briefly. "Can I help, Clem?"

"No—it's coming—ah-h, there it goes! Now, cut along everybody. Better make up-hill for a bit, I think."

We went as hard as we could. Binkie and I were a bit groggy at first, I don't know why, but we picked up pretty soon. We were some distance up the hill before we heard shouts from the beach. There was a note of dismay in the cries: it set us all chuckling as we climbed on.

"Bad show, when you find your birds flown!" remarked Clem. "Wonder how much use they are at tracking? If they can't hit our trail they won't have the ghost of an idea which way we've gone."

"We'll carry on, anyhow," I said.

I was trying to think out what they would do, as I dodged through the scrub. Would they wait to tell the people on the lugger that we had got away, so that all hands could join in hunting us down? Or would they make a dash after us just as they were, trusting to luck in overhauling us? I believed they would not wait. I didn't think Mr. Patten would want to face the Captain with the news of our escape.

Could we deal with them, if they caught us, now that we were four to two? But two were girls, and Clem and I only schoolboys. I had known on the *Kalara* that Mr. Patten was as hard as nails, and Mura looked a tough specimen. If we could meet them singly it might be different, though one or two of us might be laid out. And that would mean we should all be captured, because we couldn't leave whoever was hurt. No—I reckoned our only plan was to hide—perhaps until darkness gave us a chance of making a dash for the *Bonito*. I was pretty certain I could find the key in the dark.

But there was wonderful comfort in being four instead of two, and to have old Clem's calm face to glance at now and then. Wonderful to feel that there

were others to help me to look after Binkie—who would certainly have scorned the idea of being looked after. I had felt so horribly responsible—and so helpless. Now, Tarry kept close to her, like a mother-hen with a chick that had nearly been lost, and when she met my eye she smiled at me cheerfully, as if to say Binkie was her job. Even though there was plenty of danger yet I didn't believe anything could be as bad as that time on the beach.

Binkie began to look as if a spell would do her no harm, so we lay down in a hollow on the hill behind a shelf of rock and listened, holding our breath, in case the hunters were on our trail. In a moment we could hear them, far below us and a good deal to the right. Evidently they were trying not to make much noise, but a stick snapped now and then, and twice we heard one of them call out—though we couldn't tell whether he was calling to the other fellow or had merely taken a header over a boulder and spoken on the spur of the moment. Men suffering as they must have been with ant-bites might allow themselves a little unguarded speech.

"They can't come on us unawares here," Clem whispered. "We might as well have a rest. We can all watch in different directions."

While we watched he told us under his breath what had happened after we left them on the cliff. Binkie and I were dying to hear how they had managed to be behind us in the nick of time. Tarry listened for the enemy while he gave us the story.

"It was quite simple," he said. "We waited for your coo-ee; the submarine lay there, and at last we got sick of watching her. So we went to meet you, and all we saw was the lugger lying outside—no sign of the *Bonito*. We reckoned she had sent a boat ashore, and that must be why you two hadn't turned up. We took to the edge of the scrub until we got near our beach, and just as we were about to hop gaily into the open we heard your voice, Peter. You were calling some unseen person names Tarry and I fairly shuddered to hear!"

"That would be when I was telling old Patten what I thought of him," I said. "One of my few cheerful moments."

"I wouldn't say you sounded cheerful," said Clem thoughtfully. "More like murderous. And then to our horror, dear little Binkie added her little lot!"

"Go on, you old fathead!" said Binks, giggling.

"Well, it seemed no place for us, so we ducked back until we could creep in behind you to a spot where we could see through the scrub. And did we creep!—I rattled a stone once, and Tarry looked as if she'd like to break my head with it. But we got a good view at last, and there we crouched down to watch the proceedings. My hat, you could have knocked me over with a feather when I saw Patten! We were frightfully puzzled to know what was

going on at first. It seemed idiotic to think he was the man you were abusing."

"I can hardly take it in yet," I said.

"But what's it all about, Peter? Are the Japs hostile? And is Patten in with them?" he asked. "I suppose it's a Jap lugger?"

"Yes——" I began, but Binkie cut in quickly:

"Well, they're not all Japs, Peter. Quite a lot of those men were speaking German!"

Binkie knows a bit of German, and I don't know two words, so I looked at her with mingled respect and astonishment.

"You're sure, Binks?"

"Of course I am. That time when they caught hold of us first and we were trying to put up a fight, two or three let out German words. And afterwards, among themselves, I couldn't make out what they talked about, but I know German when I hear it. So I looked very hard at them and I could see that several weren't Japs."

"I wish I knew a bit more," Clem said plaintively. "Do tell me what happened from the very start."

So I told him, making it as short as I could. His face became graver and graver as he listened.

"Well, it's clear the lugger is working with the submarine," he said. "I suppose it's a sort of Jap-German Axis—ready to act here if war breaks out. By Jove, Peter, it must mean that war is fairly certain! And that swine Patten is in with them. Gosh, I wish I was big enough to tackle him! One can't blame Japs and Germans—but he's just a measly traitor. It looks as if we're too dangerous to them to be let loose—I'm afraid they'll scour the island for us. Peter, did they find the *Bonito*?"

"Not so far," I said. "But I don't see how they can miss her when they're all scrambling round. Only I'll bet they won't find the keys."

"Well, we may get to her after dark, with any luck. And luck has stood to us so far." Suddenly he began to laugh softly.

"Peter, did you ever see anything so absolutely gorgeous as that green ant attack! Tarry and I nearly died of choked laughter. It was just about too good to be true."

"And all the same, the most natural thing in the world," I said. "One of those nests simply asks to be poked—if you don't happen to know it's high explosive."

"Thank goodness your Jap pal didn't know it. Binks, we'll take on

listening, if you'll tell Tarry all about things. She must be aching to hear."

We went a few yards down the hill together while the girls talked. All sounds had died away now and we could form no idea of where the enemy was hunting. I grew a little uneasy after awhile: it was too quiet.

"Clem," I said, "I vote we get up to the ridge. It's farther to come back to the *Bonito*, but I can't help feeling they may climb up there themselves, and we'd be caught between them and the crew of the lugger. On the ridge we can at least see what's coming."

"Right," he said. "I believe we'd be safer there. One thing, if they did get to the ridge we could go down to the inlet and work our way round by the coast. There are heaps of places where we could lie low until night."

But I was jumpy as we climbed the hill cautiously, stopping to listen now and then. There certainly was a lot of island to hide in, but we had a lot of men against us. Everything seemed to depend on our being able to keep out of sight until dark. If we could do that we had a chance to get the launch; and if that failed, we still had a chance if we could remain hidden, for I knew Mr. Burgess would turn up in the *Sunshine* if we didn't get home next day. But that would mean a long time without food and water: there was no water anywhere except in the *Bonito's* beakers. Already we were hungry and thirsty—what would we be by next day?

But there was no use in dwelling on that; and as it happened, I had not much time to dwell on anything more; for when we were nearly up to the ridge we heard a shout. We whirled round. They were below us, not far away, and to our left—they must have made a cast back along the hillside in the hope of hitting our track. Mr. Patten was well in front of Mura. He shouted to him again, and they put on speed, trying to catch us before we got to the ridge.

We beat them to it, but not by much. I could see by the way they moved that we could not hope to keep ahead for long—not ahead of Mr. Patten, anyhow. Mura was clumsier, and we might have managed to shake him off, if once he lost sight of us; but Mr. Patten ran like an athlete, judging the ground and dodging stumps and boulders with sickening ease. I reckoned a few hundred yards would finish it. But as we shot across the clearer ground of the ridge, keeping close together, Tarry panted out:

"Keep to the track we cut yesterday. Can you find it, boys?"

I knew the great hoop-pine under which we'd camped; it was close by and I made for it. Below it we dived into the thick mass of green—I glanced back as we came to it. To my relief, they were not in sight, though I could hear Mr. Patten's feet pounding on the ridge. The bushes closed in behind us, leaving nothing to show where we had entered them.

That was a brilliant idea of Tarry's. If we had gone straight on, the next patch of lawyer-vine would have held us, and they would have caught us without the slightest trouble. As it was, it held the enemy. We heard Mr. Patten swearing some yards to one side, and we knew exactly what was happening—he was finding out that lawyer-vine is not a thing even an athlete can dash through. Then a moment later we heard both furious voices and knew they were suffering together. It could not have been pleasant, on top of ant-bites. If we hadn't felt so desperate we might have laughed to think of all the grief that had come that day to Mura and Mr. Patten.

But we were beyond laughing. We knew the game was nearly up; they were strong men, much faster than we were, and the sailor would certainly have a knife to hack his way through. No plan would come into my head except to go straight on and give them as much trouble as we could.

I led the way, Clem running behind the girls. Not that there was much running—although we went down that hill at a pace we wouldn't have believed possible the day before. We scrambled and slipped, clawed our way over rock-faces, and occasionally rolled when we lost our footing: and every time I saw a trail of half-dead lawyer-vine that we had drawn aside yesterday I blessed Clem for making us do it. Those dying lengths of hooked thorns blazed our track for us. I could only hope the enemy would not come across them and profit by them as well.

Then we heard them nearer, and it seemed to us that they must have found the track. We went on desperately. I knew Tarry and Binks must be tiring; my own muscles were aching with the strain of the rough going. It couldn't last long now.

The water of the inlet showed not far below us. Again we seemed to have forged well ahead of the pursuit; no sounds came to us as we flung ourselves down the last few yards of the hill and raced out on the muddy beach. Then we halted suddenly, struck dumb.

On a big boulder not far away a man was sitting, his back to us. A short man, with immensely wide shoulders. He turned as he heard us, his face suddenly breaking into a broad smile. It was Watty Morgan.

" 'Half an hour of this would be likely to make you see sense.' "
Peter & Co.] [*Page 217*

CHAPTER XIX

SECRET SERVICE

"WHY, it's Peter and Co.!" said Watty, beaming on us all. "Seem in a hurry, bo', too!"

"Watty!" I gasped, "there are men after us!"

"That so, bo'? Who?"

"A Jap—and a white man who's worse than a Jap. And there's a lugger full of their pals across the island——"

"You girls run," said Watty with great calmness. "You'll find the Major in a launch round the bend. Tell him he's wanted."

Tarry and Binks were off like a shot. I didn't think they had so much speed left in them. But the very sight of Watty, solid and unruffled, had put new life into us all. I didn't even wonder how he came to be there, and Mr. Garfield: it was enough to see him and to hear his quiet old voice.

"Are they close?" he asked.

"Pretty near—they may have got caught in the thorns——"

"Well, we'll take up a strategic position," said Watty. "I'd like to see them before they see us."

He trotted across to the foot of the hill, Clem and I at his heels. We took cover behind a clump of bushes under an overhanging rock.

"Are they armed, bo'?" asked Watty softly.

"I don't think so. I don't believe the Jap would be—he's a sailor. He'll have a knife, though."

"Anyhow, they've both been in the sea, so whatever they have in the way of a revolver will have been soaked," panted Clem. "Would that make any ——"

He broke off. There was a crashing in the scrub beyond us, and Mr. Patten burst out upon the beach. He took a quick glance round, saw our foot-prints in the mud, and followed them, racing towards the water. I felt Watty stiffen beside me.

"Boys," he said, "I want that man. An' he can run faster than I can. Let him see you—I'll be on hand to back up."

We hadn't any thought of questioning him. We dodged out in front of the bushes and went a few yards down the beach. Mr. Patten caught sight of us almost at once. He whirled round and came tearing up to us, slackening when he saw that we weren't trying to run away.

Then it was really funny to see his face as he realized that it was not Binkie beside me, but Clem. He didn't take it in at first, for they wore exactly the same kit of shirts and shorts: then he pulled up and stood gaping for a moment.

"You . . . !" he uttered. "How many more of you young friends are there?"

"That's our business," Clem said. "You're sorry I'm not a girl to be tied up, aren't you, you cur!"

"You'll be all tied up soon enough!" snarled Mr. Patten viciously.

He was a curious sight. His shirt hung in ribbons, and his shorts weren't much better. All over him wherever skin was visible, he was covered with ant-bites—some of the green heads were still sticking in the inflamed spots. He glanced impatiently towards the scrub as if he expected to see Mura arriving, but there was no appearance of the Jap yet.

"Well," he said, "will you come quietly, or give any more trouble? I warn you, you can't get away. There are plenty of men to hunt you down, all of you—and they won't be gentle if they have to do it."

"And of course you would be so gentle, wouldn't you?" I said. "I'd sooner be caught by a decent Jap than by a low-down traitor, any day!"

He sprang at me, hitting out. I had time to dodge, and as I jumped aside I saw his face suddenly change. There was blank fear on it; he forgot me altogether, staring at the old man who had come into view, moving quietly from the bushes. Then Watty leaped at him. They wrestled furiously for a minute before Watty had him in a ju-jitsu grip, his right arm locked.

"I'll break your arm if you struggle," Watty told him calmly. "An' if that man of yours shows up, send him back—or I'll break it without any more warning. An' you know well I can do it, Brauer!"

We looked up at him, startled. Watty grinned at us.

"We're old acquaintances, Herr Brauer an' me, lads. Keep your eyes on those bushes in case his mate pops out. But we'll have the Major here in a minute."

Almost as he spoke we saw Mura. He came out of the scrub some distance away, jumping from a rock and landing on the beach with a thud. One look round, and he was running towards us. I saw the struggle on Mr. Patten's face; then he set his lips together, keeping silence. Watty's grip tightened. Clem and I felt sick, waiting to hear the bone snap.

But Mura solved the problem. He stopped dead, staring at the group who waited for him; and as he did so, we heard the sound of an engine, and round the curve of the inlet swept a grey launch with Binkie at the wheel and Mr. Garfield standing in the bow ready to drop the anchor. Mura did not hesitate. He took to his heels, and the scrub swallowed him up.

"I won't say I'm sorry," remarked Watty. "You had pluck, Brauer. Off with you to the Major, lads, an' bring me an end or two of rope. An' he may be glad to see you if you tell him who I've got here!"

We raced down to the water. The dinghy was coming in, Mr. Garfield pulling like mad. He didn't greet us at all. All he said as he reached us was, "Peter—who's that man Watty has collared?" He spoke sharply, and his face looked very anxious.

I said, "Well, we thought his name was Patten, but Watty says it's Brauer. Watty reckons you'll be pleased."

"Pleased!" he said. "*Pleased!*" The change in his face was wonderful—he looked almost like a boy. "If you knew what it means to hear that!" He raised his voice. "Want any help, Watty?"

"Not me—barring a length of rope," called Watty cheerfully. He was coming down to us, bringing his prisoner, still holding him in a tight grip. "Quick with it, Major; we may have more visitors any minute. The sooner we're away from here the safer we'll be."

They tied Mr. Patten's wrists very carefully, and we all piled into the dinghy and pulled out to the launch, where Binkie and Tarry were waiting for us anxiously. Even when he was tied Watty didn't leave Mr. Patten for a second: he sat beside him in the stern, holding his arm. I wondered why, because he was past doing any more harm. He looked dreadful, his swollen face set in hard lines; and he never spoke a word. You would have said he looked like a man for whom everything in the world had suddenly ended.

Clem and I steadied the dinghy while they got him aboard the launch. Mr. Garfield went first and stood waiting, his hands ready to help him over the rail. For a moment Mr. Patten sat still, as if refusing to move; then he gave a little shrug and went meekly enough. Watty heaved him up, passing him on to Mr. Garfield.

The instant his feet were on the deck he twisted away, wrenched himself free, and made a rush across to the other side. Mr. Garfield was after him with a bound. He flung himself on him just as he was pitching head-first over the rail, grabbed his legs and dragged him back. They rolled on the deck together. Then Watty was on the scene: together they got him to his feet. They were all panting.

“You might as well have let me go,” Mr. Patten muttered. “It would have been quicker.”

“It’s not our business to see you drown,” said Mr. Garfield shortly.

They took him into the cabin. When Clem and I went on board after making the dinghy fast to the stern, Tarry and Binks had got the anchor up and Mr. Garfield had the engine running. Watty was making sure the prisoner tried no more tricks. Mr. Garfield called us to him.

“I’ve got to get this fellow to the mainland,” he said. “The girls haven’t had time to give me more than a few details—I gather there’s a lugger on the other side of the island, full of unpleasant people. Do you know if she has an engine?”

We said we hadn’t an idea; we had only seen her under sail. He frowned a little.

“I’d like to have had a look at her,” he said. “But I can’t risk going too close; if she had Brauer on board there are probably guns as well. Can’t be helped. We’ll give the island a wide berth once we get out of the inlet. Keep your eyes skinned in case there’s any chance of her coming to meet us—you’d better get for’ard and watch.”

He didn’t seem like our Mr. Garfield at all; he was a soldier again, his face set and stern as he rapped out his questions and orders. And we liked it, because we were beginning to understand that he had some pretty big responsibility, and we felt as if we were part of his show. We ran for’ard, passing the word to Tarry and Binks to watch also.

My heart was thumping a bit as we crept cautiously out of the inlet—we should have been beautifully trapped if the lugger had been there in time to block us. We hung over the bow as far as we could, watching.

There was no sign of her. We sang out “All clear!” and the launch gathered way as we reached the open sea. Standing well out from the land, we raced westward until we could see the coast with our three bays. The lugger was there, still at anchor. Men were in her dinghy, pulling towards the shore. We edged round a little, and Mr. Garfield gave me the wheel while he studied her deeply through his field-glasses.

He came back presently, looking more satisfied as he snapped the glasses into their case.

“I’ll know her again,” he said. He looked at us, and for the first time he smiled.

“You poor youngsters—you all look about done up,” he said. “Sorry, Miss Tarrant, but you don’t seem any older than the rest of them—and just as tired.”

“And as hungry an’ thirsty, I’ll be bound, Major,” said Watty’s voice from the neighbourhood of the cabin. “I’ve got the kettle on!”

“Those are lovely words!” said Tarry. She sat down, and we three slumped on the deck, suddenly realizing that there wasn’t a bit of us without an ache—but nothing mattered now.

“Well, I want the whole story,” said Mr. Garfield. “Carry on, Peter, old man—every detail, please.”

So I told him, with the others putting in bits here and there, while we ran swiftly westward. Watty came along presently with tea; we drank two cups each before we felt able to eat—and then we finished every crumb of food they had on board, only regretting there wasn’t more. Neither Mr. Garfield nor Watty made many comments, though they questioned us closely about the people on the lugger, and Binkie had to write down every German word she had caught when they were ashore. As some of those words had been uttered in the heat of the fight, one by the man she had kicked on the shin, Mr. Garfield smiled slightly over them.

“I suppose it’s my spelling,” Binks said, rather aggrieved at his smile. “Well, that’s rocky enough even in English, so what can you expect in German? What’s the meaning of them, anyhow?” But Mr. Garfield said that didn’t matter, and would she please describe the men who had spoken German while her impressions were still fresh.

It was interesting to watch how they asked their questions, getting at every little detail. Each of us had to draw—separately—what we had seen of the submarine, and they studied the rough sketches keenly. They didn’t waste time in any sympathy for Binks and me over our being captured—indeed, we gathered with some surprise that they actually thought it had been an excellent thing from their point of view. But when we told them about the green ants, the atmosphere of a police-court enquiry disappeared altogether. They simply howled with laughter.

“I wondered what on earth was the matter with Brauer,” Mr. Garfield said. “Lord, what a moment for you two kids!” But we said that the real moment was when we felt Clem’s knife working at our ropes.

“Well, that’s that,” Mr. Garfield said at last, pocketing his note-book—he had made notes all the time. “Nothing more you can think of?”

“No,” I said. “And I do think you might tell us now how you and Watty came to be there, because we’ll burst soon if we don’t know. And about Mr. Patten.”

“All very simple,” he said. “I’ll have to let you into some secrets, but I think you have a right to be told. And I know they’ll go no further.”

We had known ever since we met him that Mr. Garfield was a man with a lot of unusual interests, because he so often disappeared nearly off the map, going here and there into out-of-the-way places. His home was in Sydney, but he didn't see it for long periods: he would have gone off, generally alone in his 'plane, to North Queensland, or Central Australia, or the North-West. He was always vague about where he went; we never knew exactly, and of course we didn't ask questions. And he seemed to know London and parts of Europe just as well as he knew Australia.

He knew people, too. We gathered from the stories he used to tell us that he seemed to have friends wherever he went. When I had been with him in Sydney, walking in the streets, or at his club, there were always men stopping to speak to him, and down by the Harbour it was just the same—only a different sort of men. He was very quiet in his manner, and never talked about his private affairs, but we felt they were more interesting than most people's.

Now he told us that there was a lot of anxiety in Australia about German spies and Secret Service men. Some had been for a long time living in Australia, and many were thought to have come out as refugees from Europe; and the authorities were quietly hunting them down whenever they could get on their track. War, he said, was very near; nobody knew what Japan was going to do, but she was linked up with Germany, and they might very well act together. And whatever they did was likely to be pretty bad for us.

Mr. Garfield was one of the hunters—practically a Secret Service man himself, working quietly under the surface, with all sorts of men getting him information. Watty Morgan was one of them: between them they had helped to mop up several of the spies who were now under lock and key where they couldn't do any more damage. They had succeeded, for one thing, in smashing up a plot to wreck a very important steel works. "All due to Watty," said Mr. Garfield. "What that man doesn't know . . . !" Watty looked at him and smiled as if he might have added something to the statement.

Nothing was ever made public, of course, for all their success depended on secrecy. "You never know who our men are," Mr. Garfield said. "Anyone may be on the job: a shopwalker in a big drapery store, a doctor, a dustman, a hand on a ferry-boat or a coastal ship. Or a fool of a racing yachtsman like me—or a ruffianly old healer in a back street." He grinned at Watty again. "But every one of us must know how to use his eyes and ears and to keep his tongue quiet."

Sometimes one of the hunters would fall into a trap and never be heard of again. That was all in the job; they knew they were up against men who would stop at nothing, men with brains and courage or they wouldn't have been sent out as spies. They lived a life of ceaseless watching, but now and then they

didn't watch quite closely enough. That had happened with a friend of Mr. Garfield's. He had been sent out to hunt down a specially dangerous man, one who had baffled them for a long time—and on this occasion the spy won again. The body of Mr. Garfield's friend had been found floating in the harbour.

Then Mr. Garfield had seen red, and he and Watty had vowed to get him. Again and again they were on his trail, only to lose him. They could get evidence of what he was doing, but always he slipped through their fingers.

"And so often I was near him, and didn't know it until too late," he said. "But never so near as once, when I was quite unsuspicious. Lord, if I had only known, that day when I was aboard the *Kalara* saying good-bye to you! Because he got out of Sydney on the *Kalara*—booked in the name of Patten!"

"*Gosh!*" gasped Clem and I together. "And in our cabin!"

"I found that out later. We had checked the passenger-list, but he got a berth at the last moment. He beat us at Townsville; apparently he started on a fishing-cruise, but in reality he landed at some coastal village and went inland. We picked up his trail weeks later at Mackay, thanks to a pal of Watty's. And then another hint came that he had been seen—or a man like him—with a fisherman who owned a small launch. So I hauled Watty away from his footballers and other sufferers and we came up to these parts. I had to have Watty, partly because he's rather useful in a tough place, and partly because he knew Brauer by sight, and I didn't. He and Brauer had met in Singapore—and I gather that Brauer doesn't like Watty a little bit!"

"No," said Watty happily. "He tried to get me with a knuckle-duster, and I had to pitch him into the harbour."

"Well, we've been cruising south of this, and last night we went to Kongai. I thought Burgess might have some information that would help; he's not one of us, but there's precious little in these waters that escapes his notice. Also, we thought it would be rather jolly to have a look at you all. We had a great evening with Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth, but we were slightly disgusted to find that Peter and Co. were away. So we got the position of your island and ran down there this morning to see you. There was no sign of you or your boat; we supposed you must have gone off for a run—perhaps fishing."

"We seem to have dodged you pretty well," Tarry said. "We must have been somewhere along the cliffs when you came."

"Easy enough to miss you," he said. "It surprises me more that we saw nothing of the lugger. Of course, she may have been sheltering behind any of those little islands. We ran down to the south and came on the inlet, so we explored it and had lunch there. Then I thought I might as well get a few fish

myself, as we expected to be out to-night on the watch. Watty felt more like staying ashore for a quiet smoke, so I left him to it."

"Watty . . . if you hadn't!" said Tarry softly.

"Aye." He nodded his old head. "These things don't happen by chance, my dear. Something told me to stay ashore."

Nobody spoke for a minute. I was thinking of how different everything would have been if we had made our last desperate run out on a beach that held no help.

"Well, that's all," Mr. Garfield said. "I've told you everything, and you can understand why Brauer preferred to drown himself rather than fall into our hands. But there's something you four must promise—you have bumped into Secret Service work, and you must consider yourself part of it now. Not a word to a soul on Kongai, or anywhere else, about seeing a submarine or getting into trouble on the island. Nothing about Watty and me. Because one of the biggest parts of our job is to keep the enemy guessing, and we don't speak of our successes any more than we speak of our failures."

We promised, of course. It was exciting to think that we were in the job with them. Clem and Binkie and I kept our eyes out for German spies for months after that, suspecting all sorts of harmless-looking people, but without any luck.

"What will you do now?" Tarry asked.

"Turn Brauer over to the police as quickly as I can, and get into communication with the authorities in Sydney. You see, we have more than Brauer—we've valuable information as well, and they'll have to act on it. It has been a great day for Watty and me: it may prove to have been a pretty big thing for Australia. So, even if you've all had a tough time——"

"Gosh, it was worth it!" said Binkie fervently.

CHAPTER XX

HOMEWARD BOUND

OUR LUCK held that afternoon; for as we raced towards the mainland we saw a steamer coming south.

"That's the very thing I was hoping to see," said Mr. Garfield. "She's a god-send; she'll get me to Brisbane quickly, complete with prisoner. I wasn't in the least keen about landing Brauer at some little fishing-village, with everyone staring. Now I can hand him over to the police in Brisbane. Also, which is more important than anything, I can wireless to Sydney from her. See if you can rummage out anything to signal with, Watty."

All that Watty could find was a couple of grubby towels, but he wig-wagged lustily with them from the roof of the cabin as we got near the steamer. She slowed down; we ran alongside, and the Captain, looking over the rail and apparently rather annoyed, agreed to take on a couple of passengers. The gangway descended slowly; Mr. Garfield ran up it and drew the Captain aside.

It was funny to see how the Captain's impatient face changed. From where we rocked in the trough of the waves far below, we could see only their heads, but the face under the white cap suddenly, beamed with satisfaction. We heard him give an order to an officer, and in a moment Mr. Garfield came down to the launch, followed by a couple of sailors.

"I've told him we've got someone whom the police want badly," he said. "That's as much as it's good for him to know. Now the passengers are going to get the thrill of their lives!"

The rails above us were thick with people, craning their necks to see, as Mr. Patten, his arms tied, was brought out of the cabin and handed over to the sailors. Watty said a warning word to them; they took no chances with the prisoner as they helped him up the gangway, Watty following closely. The little procession disappeared at the top between a double line of stewards who kept the excited passengers back.

"So long, all of you," Mr. Garfield said. "Watty will take you back to Kongai and pick me up when I can come north again."

"Then you're coming back?" Binkie exclaimed. "Oh, good business! I was afraid you wouldn't!"

"You bet I'm coming back! Why, I haven't as much as said 'good day' to

any of you yet. And I haven't said 'thank you' either—but that can wait. Take care of yourself, Binks, and be merciful to any poor wretch of a Jap who comes near you and an ant's nest!" He shook hands with us all—I could feel the grip he gave me for ten minutes. Then he ran up the gangway. Watty came down; we pushed off from the ship and headed for Kongai.

It was after dark when we landed, so that nobody saw us arrive in a strange launch—which was as well for the peace of mind of Dad and Mother. As it was, Dad was pretty worried about the fate of the *Bonito*, though when he heard our story—Mr. Garfield had said we might tell them and Mr. Burgess—he remarked that even if he had to pay for her she would be cheap, in exchange for Mr. Patten—I mean Herr Brauer, but we always forgot to call him that.

We went back to our island next day in the grey launch, because she was much faster than the *Sunshine* in case speed should be necessary if the enemy happened to be there still. They had gone, however; no doubt Mura had given the alarm and they had made off at once.

All the same, we landed carefully, taking every precaution, and Watty and Mr. Burgess carried revolvers. The *Bonito* was quite safe; they may have been on board, but no damage had been done. Binkie went to see if the green ants had tried to repair their nest, but she was sorry that she did, for a still-enraged ant met her and registered its annoyance on her leg before she knew it was there.

That very day things began to happen which showed Mr. Garfield had been pretty quick in wirelessing to Sydney. Big Avro-Anson bombers droned up and down over the sea between the mainland and the Barrier Reef, keeping up a constant patrol; one swooped low over the launches as we were running back to Kongai, inspecting us. We waved to them, feeling almost patronizing in the knowledge that we knew more about what they were hunting than they did. It gives you a marvellous feeling of superiority to be able to think that way towards a big bomber. Destroyers joined in the patrol, their long grey hulls cutting through the waves at high speed, quartering the wide stretch of sea.

There was one very excited day when a destroyer came into the Kongai bay and dropped anchor. A boat came ashore with an invitation for our party and Watty to visit her, and off we went in the launch. In the Captain's cabin we went through just such an examination as Mr. Garfield had given us; telling everything we could about our brush with the enemy. But we didn't have to draw sketches of the submarine again. Much to our astonishment those very sketches of ours were on the Captain's table!

They gave us a wonderful time after our cross-questioning was finished. We had tea with them, and then they showed us all over the ship and explained

the working of the guns and torpedo-tubes, and the depth-charge apparatus. They said we should have medals, but as nobody was at all likely to give us any they presented us solemnly with cap-ribbons with the destroyer's name on them. I think we'd rather have those than any old medals.

We were not the only people to see the submarine. The blacks on Palm Island saw her, and were wild with excitement: reports went in from other islands, and from men who had been on a fishing cruise near the Barrier. Everybody was watching for her all the time, and we heard that on the mainland the air was simply alive with rumours.

Then, quite suddenly, it seemed, the aeroplanes and the destroyers went home. It seemed quite dull without them. More rumours sprang up, of course; tales of battles and sinkings, and the submarines grew in number—there were yarns of a regular fleet of them. And then the authorities issued a statement that the whole thing was a rumour, and nothing more—which annoyed us very much, since we knew better.

But Mr. Garfield advised us not to talk about it. He came up to Kongai in the last week of August, looking very grave: everybody knew that war was coming quickly though we hoped all the time that something would happen to prevent it. We had thought he would be able to tell us all about what had happened, but he couldn't.

"Plenty of talk about, naturally," he said, "but nobody knows anything. Remember, we were not at war when you saw—what you saw. We are not at war yet."

"It's pretty like war when submarines and German spies come crawling round!" said Binkie hotly.

"Yes, Binks, pretty like it—but not war officially. Some official action could have been taken if the lugger had been found, because of the attack on you and Peter. But she has never been caught. As well, perhaps, because there would only have been the word of two youngsters against that of a crowd of men. I doubt if anything could have been done to them, and you two would have had a lot of unpleasant publicity."

"I didn't care so much about the lugger," Binks said glumly. "But I did want to hear that the submarine had been sunk!"

"Well, who knows anything? She may have been just cruising here on a look-see, not meaning any harm," he said. "She hasn't shown up again—who knows that she hasn't struck a sunken rock? This is a most unhealthy sea for submarines, since the sea-floor has far more coral than clean sand. No submarine that submerges on tree-coral is likely to bob up again. Think of that, Binks, and hope for the best!"

He had a twinkle in his eye. I have often wondered what that twinkle meant, but I knew I'd never find out. But I believe he knew something he couldn't tell.

Binkie was cheered by the vision of the submarine spiked on tree-coral, but not quite satisfied about something else.

"But look here!" she said. "If it wasn't war, and nothing could be done to the beasts, why did the bombers and destroyers career up and down like mad?"

"Think of the exercise for them!" said Mr. Garfield. "They must get so dull in harbours and hangars and things! I expect it was a regular picnic for them." And he wouldn't say another word about it.

* * * * *

I suppose it wasn't possible for Binks and me ever quite to forget that day on the island; but we nearly forgot it during that last week before war was declared. It was very seldom that letters or newspapers came to Kongai: there was only the radio to keep us in touch with the world outside. We carried on as usual, bathing, fishing, going out in the launch: but always there were people talking together in knots, the Diggers from the last war going back to memories of things we were too young to remember, their wives looking more strained and anxious every day—never going far from them. We three had got over being bored by war talk: somehow, we seemed to have grown up a bit in those days of suspense. Perhaps it was because war had already shown us something of what it could mean—even to kids.

The radio gave news every few hours. As those times drew near they seemed to act like a magnet, drawing everyone to listen. People would come out of their bungalows for the half-past seven relay every morning; you would see them straying across the grass under the trees; late-comers, sometimes in dressing-gowns and pyjamas, running to be there in time; others coming up from the beach in wet bathing-suits, to stand on the verandah, dripping sea-water, while the quiet English voice spoke from the other side of the world.

There was a relay towards the end of dinner each night. For some reason the radio was always more difficult to hear at that time: one had to get close to it. There used to be an increase of pace at the tables in the long mess-room, everyone hurrying to finish eating. Then would come the pause in the programme which showed that in a moment the notes of "The British Grenadiers" would ring out; chairs would rasp back on the boards, and people would cluster round the radio, sitting on the floor in half-circles to hear better.

A good many of the Diggers and their wives went away; some belonged to militia units, others wanted to be on the spot to volunteer if they were needed.

Some people left because they were afraid of difficulty in getting back to the mainland; there was much talk of submarine mine-laying, to sink our coastal ships, but Mr. Garfield assured us we needn't worry about that. So we were there on the day when everyone gathered round the radio, knowing what was coming. That day "The British Grenadiers" seemed to have suddenly a new meaning: it ceased, and the deep voice came that told us we were at war. Everyone was sitting on the floor until the voice ended. Then came the first notes of "God Save The King," and in a second people were on their feet, standing to attention, and singing.

* * * * *

Mr. Garfield and Watty went away in their launch that day, hurrying back to whatever work waited for them. They knew there would be plenty. We stayed on until the time came to meet the steamer on which our passages were booked. We wished she could be the *Kalara*, but there was no hope of that; the *Kalara* had been commandeered for Government work as soon as war was declared. Indeed there didn't seem to be real certainty that any ship would be left for ordinary passengers, and we could get no definite news on the island about being picked up.

"Anyhow," said Mr. Burgess, "she's due to come along at three o'clock in the morning as usual. The only thing we can do is to be there."

It was curious to go out in the darkness, not knowing whether we should find a ship to pick us up or have to return meekly to Kongai. There were a dozen others leaving, besides our party: we spent our last evening round the piano in a farewell sing-song, ending with a special supper. It was midnight when we said good-bye to Mrs. Burgess and went down the beach for the last time.

The *Sunshine* lay some distance out. Koona and Yeppi took us out to her in relays in the dinghy; we scrambled aboard, colliding with the heaped luggage that nearly filled her after-deck, and went up on the roof of the cabin. The moonlight showed the familiar points as we slipped past them and the launch felt its way over the reef: the long curve of the bay behind us, running out to a point where the sea-eagles nested; the little island where we used to find sea-birds' nests, the rocks from which we had often fished. Island after island, dark masses of scrub with hoop-pines towering above them; and then we were in more open water, running down to the sea-lane where the big ships come and go.

But would our ship come? We reached our waiting-place by two o'clock, in case she happened to be early, and dropped anchor. Nothing happened: no

far-off light showed to tell us she was on her usual course. Three o'clock came and was gone. People were huddled in the cabin, trying to sleep; Binkie rolled herself in a rug near me and was soon breathing deeply. In the stern, Koona and Yeppi were curled up among the luggage, snoring steadily.

Mr. Burgess came along to where Clem and I sat on the cabin roof.

"You boys ought to turn in somewhere. I'll find you a rug."

We said we weren't sleepy. He nodded, not trying to persuade us.

"Well, come along to the fore-deck," he said. "I've got to keep a look-out, and we can talk there."

We followed him down. He went away for a moment and came back with a rug.

"Put this over you: it gets cold near the dawn." He squatted down beside us, and began to talk, his eyes roving constantly to the quarter from which the steamer should come.

That was a good talk: Clem and I will always be glad we had that night in the open. Neither of us said much. But he told us of his life as a small boy, knocking about with boats and learning to know the sea: and stories of big storms, when it seemed highly unlikely that his sailing-boat would ever come through, and of shark-fishing and pearl-diving, and narrow shaves with crocodiles in the swampy river-mouths on the mainland. His low voice went on and on, and we never wanted him to stop. But I suppose that at last it put us to sleep; for we woke in the dawn to find ourselves carefully covered with the rug, and Mr. Burgess gone.

All the east was rose-colour, the sun coming up like a ball of gold. People were straggling out of the cabin, looking untidy and crumpled, their hair standing out all ways, and rubbing their eyes: some of them very cross because the steamer hadn't come. There was something to soothe them, however; presently a heavenly smell arose and Mr. Burgess came out of the little galley carrying a tray with great piles of hot buttered toast. Koona followed him with cups of tea, wearing his usual cheerful grin.

"Cries of joy now echo from the castaways," remarked Tarry. She took a large piece. "Peter, did you ever see bad tempers simmer down so quickly? Not that you can blame them, poor things—some of them are due back at offices. I wonder if there's any chance now of the old steamer coming?"

"I don't care much if she doesn't," said Binkie. "It would mean going back to Kongai—and Kongai's good enough for me!"

"But we'd only have to go to the mainland by launch and get a train," said Clem. "That wouldn't be a whole heap of fun."

“She may come yet.” Mr. Burgess came up with the tea-pot. “Toast good, Binkie?”

“Lovely!” said Binkie. “It would be quite perfect if you’d only got some hot oysters with it!”

“*Well* . . . !” gasped Mr. Burgess. “Is it you I singed my fingers for?” He gazed at her with pain, and passed on.

We held a general council after we had finished. Some wanted to give up any hope of the steamer and return to Kongai and a hot breakfast. Those whose offices expected them heatedly opposed any such thing. Mr. Burgess decided the matter.

“We’ll wait awhile,” he said. “Every time-table is upset nowadays, though why the war should affect a coastal steamer is beyond me. I wouldn’t be captain of one of those ships these times for a farm—I believe even the rudder is tied up with red tape, and they can’t call their souls their own. Tell you what—we’ll run on for a bit; we’ll meet her sooner if she’s really coming.”

It was something to hear the engine again, and to be moving through the water. People settled down more or less contentedly. And presently everyone came to life with a jerk as Yeppi shouted, “Smoke, boss!”

The smoke was only a faint smudge on the horizon, but Mr. Burgess nodded. “That’s her all right,” he said, and put on speed. The smudge deepened; soon we saw the faint outline of a ship. Quickly she grew in size; we were seen from her bridge, and her siren gave us a long wail of greeting.

“Is that a welcome?” asked someone.

“It is not,” said Mr. Burgess. “It’s to tell me that her captain doesn’t intend to be kept waiting, bless his heart!”

We ran close in as the steamer’s engines stopped. The gangway was already being lowered, and stewards stood ready to race down it for the luggage. It was nearly eight o’clock: a few passengers, early risers, watched us, interrupting their morning march round the deck. Mr. Burgess was shaking hands all round as we clustered near the gangway, saying “Good-bye!”

Then we were hanging over the rail of the steamer, and the launch was heading away, Mr. Burgess waving his cap and Koona and Yeppi waving too, in the stern, and calling “Come back to Kongai.” They broke into the song they had taught us, and we all took it up in a chorus that brought startled heads to every cabin window along the deck:

Na-a-ni, na-a-ni, san por yan, por ya-a-a-n,
In T’siah, in T’siah by the sea.

The steamer gathered way, sending out a long smudge of black smoke

across the sky. It drifted downwards, blotting out the *Sunshine* for a moment; then it thinned, and through it we could see the little launch running steadily to the east—back to Kongai.

"Back to Kongai!" said a tall Digger. "And war ahead! I wonder will we ever see Kongai again?"

"Too right we will!" said his wife stoutly.

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Peter & Co.* by Mary Grant Bruce]