

THE GIRL CRUSOES



*** A Distributed Proofreaders US Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: The Girl Crusoes: A Story of the South Seas

Author: Ely, George Herbert

Date of first publication: 1912

Date first posted: November 1, 2011

Date last updated: November 19, 2018

Faded Page ebook#20181163

Produced by Al Haines



"THE GIRLS LOOKED DOWN WITH A SORT OF
AWED CURIOSITY."

[See page 224.]

"THE GIRLS LOOKED DOWN WITH A SORT OF AWED CURIOSITY." [See page 224.](#)

THE GIRL CRUSOES

A STORY OF THE SOUTH SEAS

BY

MRS. HERBERT STRANG

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOUR BY N. TENISON

LONDON
HENRY FROWDE
HODDER AND STOUGHTON
1912

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, U.S.,
AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

CONTENTS

[CHAPTER THE FIRST](#)

TOMMY AND THE OTHERS

[CHAPTER THE SECOND](#)

UNCLE BEN

[CHAPTER THE THIRD](#)

LEAVING HOME

[CHAPTER THE FOURTH](#)

ABOARD THE *ELIZABETH*

[CHAPTER THE FIFTH](#)

A MIDNIGHT WRECK

[CHAPTER THE SIXTH](#)

THE ISLAND BEAUTIFUL

[CHAPTER THE SEVENTH](#)

A LOCAL HABITATION

[CHAPTER THE EIGHTH](#)

THE FISHERS

[CHAPTER THE NINTH](#)

THE LITTLE BROWN FACE

[CHAPTER THE TENTH](#)

ANXIOUS DAYS

[CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH](#)

A TROPICAL STORM

[CHAPTER THE TWELFTH](#)

ALARMS AND DISCOVERIES

[CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH](#)

LOST

[CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH](#)

IN THE PIT

[CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH](#)

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

[CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH](#)

NEW TERRORS

[CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH](#)

THE FOUNDLING

[CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH](#)

ANOTHER BROWN FACE

[CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH](#)

THE SHARK

[CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH](#)

THE PRISONER IN THE CAVE

[CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST](#)

A DESPERATE ADVENTURE

[CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND](#)

FRIENDS IN NEED

[CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD](#)

THE HOME-COMING

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"THE GIRLS LOOKED DOWN WITH A SORT OF AWED
CURIOSITY" (see page 224) *Frontispiece*

"LYING ON A PILE OF CANVAS HUDDLED A LITTLE FIGURE"

"THE THREE TOGETHER DRAGGED THE BOAT UP THE BEACH"

"THERE!" SHE CRIED TRIUMPHANTLY, YET FEARFULLY"

"WITH A FINAL PULL THEY HAULED TOMMY OVER THE BRINK"

"SHE FELT THAT FANGATI COULD NOT REACH HER IN TIME"

CHAPTER I

TOMMY AND THE OTHERS

At noon on a day late in September, the express train from London rested, panting and impatient, for a brief halt at the little countryside station of Poppicombe. The arrival and departure of this train was the event of the day to most of the inhabitants, not only of Poppicombe, but of the surrounding villages. There were quite half-a-dozen people standing on the platform, and the station staff, consisting of two men and a boy, were moving about briskly. One man was busily engaged in handing various newspapers and packages, which had been thrown from the guard's van, to the people who had been awaiting them; the other man, the stationmaster, was exchanging a few words with the guard, at the end of the platform; while the boy porter, looking about disconsolately for some doors to bang, distinguished himself by suddenly slamming the open door of the luggage van, much to the astonishment of the guard. As soon as the train had rumbled away, the young porter seized a newspaper from a pile standing on a trolley, opened it at a particular page, and, after reading a few words, let forth a wild war-whoop. Then, in spite of the glare in the stationmaster's eye, he rushed madly out of the station and looked excitedly up Longhill Avenue. There in the distance he saw, coming slowly towards the station, a young girl of twelve or thirteen years of age, seated upon a sturdy Exmoor pony. Although she sat her mount with the ease that comes only to the born rider, a close observer would have noticed that the slight droop about her slim young shoulders became more pronounced as she neared her destination. She was dressed in black, and her plain wide-brimmed sailor hat was trimmed only with a narrow band of crape.

She rode forward with an eye that seemed to ignore all outward objects, her thin, small-featured face betokening a mood of deep despondency. Her errand had been the same for many days, and day after day she had met with nothing but disappointment. A few weeks ago she had taken the journey at a canter. Now, in spite of her natural high spirits, Tommy, as she was called by her family and friends, held the reins in such a listless fashion that the pony merely sauntered through the Avenue, as though he too shared her depression. Her lack of vigour was perhaps the more noticeable because her thin, wiry body looked framed for energy. There was an unmistakable air of health about the young girlish figure, but Tommy, although she was quite unconscious of it, was suffering from fatigue of the spirit. She had borne up bravely enough at first, but successive daily disappointments had at length proved too much for her.

Now Longhill Avenue does not belie its name. It has a hill, and the hill is long and gently sloping, with rows of tall chestnut-trees on either side. When Tommy had reached the foot of the hill, she suddenly became aware that some one was shouting lustily. She started, and looking up quickly, saw a quaint little figure, dressed in corduroys, with a peaked cap much too large for him, wildly waving a paper, and rushing towards her from the station yard as fast as hobnailed boots allowed. She touched up her pony and was soon within hail of the freckled, rosy-cheeked young porter, whose face was spread abroad with smiles.

"It's all right, miss, her be sound as bacon," he gasped breathlessly. "See then!" he added, and as Tommy came nearer to him he pointed with a grimy thumb to the Shipping Intelligence column of the newspaper which he had snatched from the pile at the station.

Tommy took the paper, and, scanning the paragraph eagerly, read: "The barque Elizabeth, thirty days overdue from Valparaiso, spoken by the liner Kildonan Castle, in the Bay of Biscay; all well."

As she read these few lines, the whole expression of Tommy's face changed. Her dark eyes brightened; a wave of gladness seemed to surge through her as she drew herself erect in the saddle. The smile about the corners of her rather wide but sweet-looking mouth deepened, and even her hair, which had appeared dispirited a few moments ago, now curled itself more tightly about her small dainty head.

"Ah! won't they be glad!" she ejaculated in her clear, brisk voice. "Dan, you're a cherub," she cried, "a perfect cherub; you are indeed, Dan;" and, turning her pony about, was off like the wind.

Dan Whiddon watched her admiringly.

"Her do be mortal pleased," he said to himself, "and her naming me 'cherub' be her way o' saying 'thankee,' I reckon. 'Cherub,' says she. Now what will old Berry be calling I?"

He clumped heavily back to the station.

"Now, you young stunpoll," cried the stationmaster sternly, "what do 'ee mean by rampaging off like that?"

"Miss Tommy's uncle bean't a dead 'un arter all, I reckon," said the boy. "His ship be behind time, that's all, and he'll be coming down-along soon."

Dan's reply was not a particularly lucid one, but as anybody's business was everybody's business in Poppicombe, the station-master had no difficulty in understanding the youth. He warned Dan of the evil effects of not minding one's own business, and crossing the line, entered into a long discussion with his ticket-clerk concerning Miss Tommy and her private affairs.

Meanwhile Tommy was galloping at breakneck speed the four miles which led to her home. About a quarter of a mile from Plum-Tree Farm, where the Westmacott family, Tommy's people, had lived for generations, she espied her sisters standing at the gate leading into the paddock. They had heard the sound of the quick tramp of the pony's hoofs in the distance, and had rushed out to see why Tommy on this particular day was riding so furiously. On catching sight of them she repeated, in her own inimitable way, Dan's method of breaking the good news. She yelled at the top of her voice, and waved the newspaper high above her head. So excited was she that she almost threw the newspaper at her elder sister, and it dropped in a puddle formed by the recent rains. Tommy was off the saddle in a moment, and leaving the pony to find his way to the stable, she picked up the fallen paper, and wiping the dirt from it with her pocket-handkerchief, gave it triumphantly to her tall, dark, handsome sister Elizabeth, whilst Mary, the second girl, drawing nearer to Elizabeth's side, stood quietly waiting.

The three girls bore a certain family likeness to each other, but the differences were almost equally striking. The two eldest were tall and slim, and had the same dark-coloured eyes, but there the resemblance ceased. In character they were as far apart as the poles. Elizabeth, called after her mother, who had died when Tommy was only a few months old, was a capable girl of nineteen years of age, with a magnificent head of rich dark hair, and deep-blue eyes. Her manner was grave and quiet. She had been a mother to the two younger girls ever since she could remember, and responsibility had made her old for her years. Her father, too, had made her his constant companion, and she had been his right hand in managing the farm and keeping the accounts during the years that had preceded his death a few months before. Mary, the second girl, who had just turned fifteen, was as fair as Elizabeth was dark, but with the same deep-coloured starry eyes. She was the most studious of the three, and it was always a great delight to Tommy, when she found her lost in some book of travel or adventure, to awaken her from her dreams by forming a mouthpiece with her hands and shouting in poor Mary's ear, "Hallo! are you there?" But Tommy's winning smile always disarmed Mary's wrath, and, in spite of constant small disagreements, the two were excellent friends.

The youngest girl, Katherine, our friend Tommy, was thin and wiry in build, somewhat short for her years, with small black twinkling eyes, and a little head running over with golden curls. Her chief characteristic so far was an endless capacity for getting into scrapes. A demon of mischief always seemed lurking in the twinkling depths of her merry eyes. Just now they danced with excitement, as she said: "Well, of all the cool customers you must be the coolest, Mary, to stand there waiting, and never to change a hair, or look over the paper in Elizabeth's hand, or anything. Oh dear! Oh dear! what can you be made of? Dear old Uncle Ben is coming home, coming home, coming home!" and catching Mary by the waist, she sang, "Waltz me round, Mary, waltz me round," and twirled her sister round and round until she was completely out of breath.

"Do make her stop it, Bess," besought Mary gaspingly.

"Tommy darling, do try to be a bit sensible," said Elizabeth, with a smile.

"Not I!" said Tommy, "why should be sensible?" as she gave Mary's pigtail a tug.

Elizabeth, recognizing Tommy's mood, and fearing there would be "ructions" presently, tactfully put her arm about her gay-hearted, mischievous small sister, and led the way indoors.

This was not the first time by any means that Elizabeth had acted as peacemaker in the Westmacott family. When she was quite a child, and Tommy a mere baby, she had often been called by Mrs. Pratt, the housekeeper, to see if she could induce "that plaguy young limb" to behave herself. Later on, Elizabeth had, times without number, pleaded with her father not to be so angry, or quite so severe, with his youngest girl, however trying the child might be; and Mr. Westmacott, seeing that Elizabeth thoroughly understood "the imp of mischief," as he called her the day he had been obliged to summon all hands on the farm to rescue her and her pony from a bog, left her more and more to his eldest daughter's care. Then when Tommy was old enough to accompany her sisters to "lessons" at the Vicarage, again Elizabeth had to pour oil on troubled waters, for the vicar, an old friend of her father's, who had undertaken the education of the three girls, and whose word had hitherto been taken as law, often became very irritable when Tommy would argue instead of accepting facts. As Tommy increased in stature, she became, under Elizabeth's wise guidance, more and more amenable to reason, but she never lost her absolute fearlessness and independence.

All the girls had been encouraged by their father to live an open-air life, and Tommy always led the way instinctively whenever they went riding, driving, rowing and fishing. The farmhouse was the old manor house. The huge kitchen, with its deep-seated fireplace and low-raftered oak-beamed ceiling, was now used as a living-room. It had three deep bay windows, each looking across the flower garden on to the moors. The breath of autumn was in the air, but the hollyhocks and gladioli still flaunted their gay colours, as though they refused to own that summer had ended. The garden was Elizabeth's special pride; she loved to keep it an old-fashioned, old-world garden, and had herself planted sweet peas and stocks, and the spiked gillyflower, amongst the lavender bushes and the oleanders. In fact, after her father's death, when Elizabeth had found that his assets were really "nil," owing to a succession of bad crops and the cattle-disease spreading so rapidly among the kine, she had had serious thoughts of trying to take up gardening as a profession, but on talking it over with her sisters they agreed that it would be better to wait until the return of their uncle.

Captain Barton was their mother's only brother. He was a deep-sea captain, and at the time of his brother-in-law's death he was sailing in mid-Pacific. But at the first port the vessel had touched, he had received a letter from his eldest niece, telling him the sad news, and how things were with them, and asking him to come to them as soon as he could. He had answered the letter at once, and in his reply had done his best to hearten them. He had advised Elizabeth to see the landlord, place the facts before him, and ask him if he would allow the rent to be in abeyance until her uncle arrived. The landlord had consented, knowing the family so well, and so one great worry had for a time been taken off Elizabeth's young shoulders. She was not obliged to remove at once, but they all knew that it was impossible to keep on the farm, even had it been paying, and several evenings were passed by the three girls in wondering what they could do so as not to be a burden upon their uncle. Mary had spoken of teaching, but there would be no money to pay for the necessary training, so that idea had to be given up. Tommy had a new idea about every other day as to what she'd do in order to make the family fortune. One day she burnt three of the saucepans, scalded herself rather badly, and made everything around her "sticky," by trying to invent a new kind of jam. Another day she concocted the Westmacott Cure for sick headache, and insisted upon her sisters tasting the "awful mixture," which she assured them was harmless, and was quite annoyed when Elizabeth and Mary advised her not to invent anything else for a few years.

So the days went on, the girls busying themselves about the farm and longing eagerly for the return of the only relation they had in the world. Captain Barton had given them the probable date of his arrival at Plymouth, but when the expected day came and passed without any further news from him, they had all become more and more anxious and alarmed, wondering if his vessel had gone down with all hands and left no trace of her whereabouts. Hence Tommy's excitement and delight, and Elizabeth and Mary's quiet joy, on hearing that their uncle was coming to them at last.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE BEN

During the next three days the girls were restless with excitement. Uncle Ben would, they were sure, send them a telegram as soon as he reached Plymouth, and one or another of them was constantly on the look-out for the messenger from the little village postoffice. They turned out the spare bedroom, and had a grand clean-up; hung fresh curtains, aired mattress and bedclothes, and made things shipshape, as he would say, in anticipation of Uncle Ben's arrival. On the third day the girl at the post-office rode up on her bicycle with the little brown envelope. Tommy flew to meet her, and in another moment was running back to the house crying, "Coming to-morrow! To-morrow!" at the top of her voice.

Of course they drove down to the station next day fully an hour before the train was due. Tommy beguiled the time by weighing her sisters and herself on the station weighing-machine, looked in at the booking-office, ran to the signal-box and asked to be allowed to work the levers, and in other ways acted up to her reputation.

At last the train was signalled. The three girls looked eagerly down the line. Presently the engine rounded the curve nearly half-a-mile away, and as the train rumbled along the straight line towards the station, a red bandana handkerchief was seen vigorously waving at the window of a compartment in the centre.

"There he is!" cried Tommy, dancing with excitement, and waving her handkerchief in return.

"Stand back, miss," called the station-master, as she stepped near the edge of the platform.

"Oh, I shan't hurt your old engine," replied Tommy, who, nevertheless, allowed her sisters to take a hand each until the train came to a standstill. Then she darted towards the compartment from which issued a short, stoutish man, with a jolly, red face, short, close-trimmed beard, and eyes ready to light up with fun at the slightest provocation.

Captain Benjamin Barton was a sailor of the good old-fashioned sort. He had been to sea ever since he was thirteen, when he had run away to Plymouth after an exchange of discourtesies with the classical master at the Grammar School: he never could abide Latin. During nearly fifty years of life at sea he had saved a considerable sum, and had become part owner of his vessel, besides having shares in several others. He still loyally stuck to the sailing ship; the steamship had no attractions for him; and he was never tired of comparing the two, to the great disadvantage of the more modern type. Tommy once said that he reminded her of the 'bus-driver behind whom she had sat when on her only visit to London, who had spoken with the bitterest scorn of the motor omnibus. The captain's twinkling black eyes gleamed with fun when Tommy assured him artlessly that the 'busman was "just such a dear old stick-in-the-mud" as he was. Tommy sprang into his arms as he got out of the railway carriage. He gradually extricated himself from her embrace, and turning to his elder nieces, silently kissed them. In spite of a brave attempt at cheerfulness his eyes were rather dim as he mumbled a word of greeting. He had always been on the best of terms with their father, and, when he was ashore, had been accustomed to make the farm his headquarters. The loss of his brother-in-law had come as a great shock to him; and the remembrance of it, together with the meeting with the three fatherless girls, almost unmanned him for the moment. The red bandana handkerchief came into play again; he blew his nose furiously, declared that railway travelling always gave him a cold, and turning on Dan Whiddon, the small porter, who was staggering under a trunk he had taken from the compartment, he cried—

"Now, young Samson, don't be too rough with that little contraption of mine."

The aggrieved look on Dan's face set them laughing, and the tension was relieved. They passed out of the station, and came to the little farm wagonette. Tommy was usually driver, but as there was only room for one on the driver's seat, and she declared that she was going to sit with Uncle, Elizabeth good-naturedly offered to take the reins. When the Captain, the other girls, and the trunk were packed in behind, it was a tight squeeze, and Dan Whiddon, rejoicing in twopence, surveyed the pony doubtfully.

"You'm better get out and walk up t' hill," he suggested, with the familiarity of an old friend.

"Be off and buy your sweeties, Samson," said the Captain, "or we'll hitch you on as leader." And laughing at his own jest, Uncle Ben squeezed Mary with his right arm, and Tommy with his left, and called to Elizabeth to get under way.

There was little talking on the homeward drive. The younger girls were quite happy nestling against their uncle; and he was thinking of his many former home-comings. But when he entered the bright farm parlour, and saw the spread tea-table, and the blazing fire which Mrs. Pratt had kindled—then his jolly weather-worn face glowed, and he cried, in the same words he had used a score of times before—

"East or west, home is best. How do, Jane?"

"Nicely, thank'ee sir," returned Mrs. Pratt, with a bob, "except for my poor feet."

The girls smiled. They had heard the same question and answer ever since they could remember, when Uncle Ben came home. Tommy meanwhile had removed his hat, Mary had slyly stuffed his red handkerchief into his pocket, and now Elizabeth gently pushed him down into his favourite arm-chair. Mrs. Pratt, who suffered from bunions, and hobbled about, made the tea, while Mary toasted what was in that country place still called a Sally Lunn, and Elizabeth fetched from the dairy, now very bare and forlorn, a pot of cool delicious Devonshire cream. During these preparations Tommy was content to sit at her uncle's feet, resting her head on his knees, and now and again giving his horny hand a squeeze.

It was Tommy, however, who kept things lively at the tea-table.

"Now, Uncle," she would say, "you must have more cream in your tea, or you'll be as nervous as a cat."

"Very well, my dear," was the meek reply. "Afloat I drink it without milk or cream, sea-cows not being tractable animals, you know; but when in Rome, do as the rum 'uns do, eh?"

"That dreadful old pun of yours! You expect us to punish you, don't you now?"

"I'll be Punch to your Judy," returned the Captain, with a hearty laugh, and for some minutes he alternately cracked his simple jokes and devoted himself to his food. "I always say there's nothing in foreign parts to match the cakes and cream of Devonshire," he said, "and you'd know it if you lived on ship's biscuit and salt horse, my girl."

"Where have you been this voyage, Uncle?" asked Mary.

"Peru and Monte Video, and other outlandish parts, my dear. I was held up in the Doldrums, and water was running plaguy short; 'water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink,' as that poetry fellow says. One more voyage, my girls, and then I drop anchor for good."

"We hoped you would stay with us," said Elizabeth.

"Couldn't do it, Bess," he replied. "I can hold a straight course, but I couldn't run a straight furrow for the life of me. No; one more voyage, to the South Pacific Islands this time, and then I'll take a snug little cottage somewhere by the sea, and spend my days whitewashing it, and getting worse-tempered every day, and you shall keep house for me, and smooth me down."

And then Tommy put the usual question—it always came from Tommy.

"What adventures did you have this time, Uncle?"

Uncle Ben rubbed his chin, and assumed an air of deep reflection.

"Adventures! Well, the only one worth speaking about," he said slowly, "was when we were becalmed in latitude 35° South, longitude 152° East, I think it was. By the chart we should have been about a hundred and fifty miles from the nearest land, but one morning Long Jimmy—the tall fellow with one eye, you remember——?"

"Yes," said Tommy; "he helped me down the side last time I saw you off."

"Well, he was look-out at the time, and he sings out, 'Land-ho!' I was on deck in a twinkling, I can tell you; and there, a couple of points on the starboard quarter, was a smallish kind of island, and stretching away behind it a lot of little islands pretty near as far as you could see. The biggest was as large as Mount St. Michael, maybe, and all of a white shiny rock. I made a few remarks about the chart-makers, and was thinking of putting out a boat to examine it, when, bless your eyes! that island began to move, and all the little 'uns after it."

Here he drank half a cup of tea, and the girls waited breathlessly for him to continue.

"Some one set up a cry of sea-serpent," he went on gravely, "and Sunny Pat—the little Irishman, you remember —?"

"Yes, such a funny little man. Go on, Uncle," said Tommy.

"Well, Sunny Pat calls out, 'Begorra, shure 'tis the way of openin' it is!' and sure enough that big island showed a gash right across the middle, that grew wider and wider, and each side of it there was a row of teeth about as long as a church steeple. Jupiter, 'twas a fearsome sight. But Sandy Sam—you remember him, the big red-headed fellow—he's got more presence of mind than any able seaman I ever met. He outs with a big gooseberry—we'd taken a few bushels on board at Greenland—and flings it straight at the monster, knowing that sea-serpents can't abide big gooseberries, being in the same line of business, as you may say. Well——"

Here the story was interrupted, for the girls made a simultaneous rush on the old man. Tommy pummelled him. Mary put her hand over his mouth, and Elizabeth took his half-eaten cake, and declared that he should have no more until he confessed that he had been fibbing.

"You naughty wicked old man," cried Tommy, as he shook with laughter. "Now you shan't have another cup of tea until you've turned out your pockets."

"I give in," said the Captain. "Three to one isn't fair play. I've had enough tea, only let me get my pipe alight and then we'll see."

As long as the girls could remember, their uncle, on his arrival, when his first pipe was lit, had turned out his capacious pockets, in which there was always a present of some kind for every one, besides oddments unaddressed which his nieces appropriated at their fancy. Settled in the arm-chair, with a big calabash pipe in his mouth, he plunged his hand into a pocket, and brought out the red bandana handkerchief.

"That's your flag," cried Tommy. "Be quick!"

"Patience," he replied, producing a tin of tobacco and a knife.

"We'll let you keep them," said Mary. "What next, Uncle?"

"Well, here's a small parcel with somebody's name on it, and it looks uncommon like Mary."

Mary seized the parcel, opened it, and uttered a cry of delight as she unfolded a pretty Indian scarf.

"Oh, you dear!" she cried, giving him a kiss.

He plunged his hand again into his pocket and drew out slowly and with a solemn air that made the girls agog with expectation—a short cutty pipe, at which they cried "Shame!" Then came another small parcel, marked with Elizabeth's name, which proved to contain a tortoiseshell comb with silver mountings. Another dip brought forth a bright round silver case with a long cord hanging from a hole in the side. Tommy pounced on this.

"What is it, Uncle?" she asked.

"It's a contraption for getting a light in a wind, given me by an old friend in Valparaiso," replied the Captain. "'Twas kindly meant, to be sure, but I've never used it, for I've never had any difficulty in lighting my pipe in any wind that ever blew short of a typhoon, and then a man has other things to think about. I'll show you how it's done, and you can keep it against the time when you're an old woman and go round selling things from a caravan: old

women of that sort always smoke."

"The idea!" exclaimed Tommy, but when her uncle had shown her how to obtain a spark by turning a little handle sharply, and how the spark ignited the cord, she took the thing and slipped it into her pocket.

Then at last came the parcel for which Tommy had been eagerly waiting, and she gave a long sigh of pleasure as she drew through her fingers a scarf of exquisite fineness like Mary's.

"You're a darling!" she cried, giving her uncle a tight hug, and at the same time knocking his pipe from his mouth. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said contritely. "Never mind, I'll fill it again for you."

Captain Barton took from his pockets sundry other articles which he divided among the girls, as well as a queer assortment of his personal belongings. When all his pockets were empty, Tommy said—

"Now you can put all that rubbish back; see what a litter it makes!"

"For what you don't want, I return humble and hearty thanks," said the Captain, using a form of words which they had heard from his lips ever since they were babies. "And now if you can think of anything but fal-lals, we'll settle down and have a cosy talk about things. Draw your chairs up to the fire, girls."

CHAPTER III

LEAVING HOME

Uncle Ben listened attentively as Elizabeth gave an account of affairs at the farm. He did not interrupt her, but now and then muttered an ejaculation through a cloud of smoke. Elizabeth was clear-headed, and did not take long to explain the position to her uncle. It was impossible to keep on the farm without capital, and the Captain, though he had a good sum laid by, was not the man to risk his money in a business of which he knew nothing. So the farm must be sold, and it was clear that when everything was settled up, there would be little or nothing left for the girls to live on. They mentioned the ideas they had had of earning their living, and the obstacles in the way; and Captain Barton puffed at his pipe, and pulled his beard, and every now and then stroked Tommy's hair as she leant against his knee.

"Hum!" he grunted, when all had said their say. "There's only one way out of the difficulty that I can see."

He paused impressively, and the girls looked at him with expectation.

"And that is," he went on, weighing each word, "to get you spliced."

"Spliced!" cried Tommy. "Married, you mean? Me married!"

"Well, not you, perhaps—not yet a bit, seeing you are only a little tomboy sort of thing——"

"Thing! how dare you!" cried Tommy, pummelling her uncle's leg.

"I meant a thing of beauty, my dear," said he meekly, "which, as the poet says, is a joy for ever."

"He wouldn't think me a joy for long, I can tell you," returned Tommy. "But, really, it's too ridiculous. Bess, you don't want to get married?"

"Not for a living, certainly," said Elizabeth.

"Of course not," added Mary.

"Well, that's squashed," cried Tommy, "and if you can't think of anything better, Captain Barton—why, you're not married yourself!"

"No, my dear, I've never tried," replied her uncle apologetically. "Well, now, there's that notion I mentioned a while ago—a little cottage by the sea, you know; we four—me and the three Graces, eh?"

"It would be simply awful, Uncle," cried Tommy. "Whatever should we do all day? We should all become perfect cats, and you'd have a simply horrid time. No, if you want us to live with you, you must take a house somewhere where we could work—earn our salt, you know. I'm not going to be a burden to anybody."

"That's a fine spirit, to be sure. Then it must be London, I suppose, Deptford way or Rotherhithe; one of you could keep house for me, and the others could go to classes, and learn teaching or whatever it is you want to do. What do you think of that, now?"

"I should love to keep house for you, Uncle," said Elizabeth.

"And Mary and I would love to do the other thing, wouldn't we, Mary?" cried Tommy. "So it's settled, and you'd better advertise for a house at once, Uncle."

"Steady, my dear. As I told you, I must make one more voyage. I've a heap of things to settle up in various parts, and it'll be at least a year before I'm ready. The question is, what can you do for a year? You can't remain here, and I'm not going to set you up in London without me to look after you."

"Why not? We'd look after each other," said Tommy.

"Couldn't think of it, my dear," said the Captain decisively. "It's a facer, that's the truth."

"I know what!" cried Tommy, suddenly starting up. "Take us with you!"

"What?" gasped her uncle.

"I mean it. Let's all go for a voyage. I'd love to go round the world."

"Nonsense! A parcel of girls in my windjammer with their frills and furbelows—I never heard of such a thing! Ridiculous! Entirely out of the question!"

"Why? I don't see it," persisted Tommy. "Now, Captain Barton, don't be a stick-in-the-mud, but give us reasons."

"My dear, it can't be done," said the Captain emphatically.

"Of course it can't, you haven't got any," said Tommy, wilfully misunderstanding him. "Just like a man!"

"We should really like it, Uncle," said Elizabeth.

"Can't be done, Bess," he repeated.

"But why, Uncle?" asked Mary.

"Because—because—well, for one thing I don't carry a stewardess."

"Oh, you funny old man! Bess could be stewardess. Another reason, please."

"There's no cabin fit for young ladies. It's a hard life on board, and——"

"No reason at all," interrupted Tommy. "We must learn to rough it, now that we've got to make our way in the world. Besides, sea-air is good; it will establish our constitutions, as the doctors say. Say yes, Uncle, there's a dear!"

"Well, well, I'll sleep on it," said the Captain, temporizing. He was really much perplexed and troubled. The suggestion was a preposterous one, to his old-fashioned way of thinking; but he could not find reasons that would convince these very modern nieces of his, and he hoped that they would drop the wild notion before the morning.

But when the girls had gone to bed, and he sat alone, smoking his final pipe, he had to confess to himself that Tommy's proposal was the simplest solution of the difficulty. It would not be an easy matter to find comfortable quarters for the girls, but it was not impossible. Their society would be very pleasant on board; he would love to have them with him: in short, he decided to give way. So the next morning, when they rushed at him as he entered the breakfast-room, with cries of "Uncle dear, do take us," he replied, with a mild reluctance—

"Well, well, you might do worse."

Whereupon Tommy kissed him and hugged him, calling him "Dear old Nunky," and went nearly wild with joy.

"But, mind you," he said warningly, "you mustn't expect much in the way of comfort. The *Elizabeth* isn't the *Lusitania*, you know. She's as tight a little craft as ever sailed the seas, but she wasn't built for first-class passengers. You'll have to manage with a tiny cabin for all three. And I give you fair notice: I keep strict discipline aboard. The slightest insubordination will be punished."

"And how do you punish on board ship?" asked Tommy mischievously.

"First, bread and water for a week. For the second offence, you'll be laid in irons in the hold, where you'll have no company but the rats, and they're uncommon hungry beasts, I can tell you."

"How lovely! Just like the prisoners in wicked barons' castles in the olden times," cried Tommy. "Oh, you dear silly old thing, did you think you would frighten us?" And she gave him a hug that made him cry for mercy.

"Now, girls, to business," he said, when order was restored. "This is Wednesday. I must run up to London tomorrow to see my lawyers, so that if anything happens to me you won't be quite unprovided for. Remember, Bess, they're Wilkins and Short, of Bedford Row. Not that there isn't plenty of life in the old sea-dog yet, and I hope you won't have to see them for many a day. Now, as to clothes; no fal-lals, you know; two serge dresses apiece, and one box for the lot of you. I don't suppose you bargained for that."

"We shouldn't think of bringing *matinée* hats," said Elizabeth, laughing.

"Anything you want to keep, out of the things here, you must pack up. I dare say one of the neighbours will store it for you. I'll arrange about selling the rest. I'll see your landlord to-day. You will only have about a fortnight to get ready, so you'd better begin at once."

"Let's go and see Mrs. Morris," said Mary. "She'll keep our things for us."

"Won't she be surprised!" cried Tommy. "And what fun we shall have!"

The girls found their neighbour, Mrs. Morris, in the midst of her weekly baking. She declared afterwards that the surprise their news gave her nearly "turned" the bread. She readily agreed to store their little stock of personal possessions, but shook her head at the idea of girls wandering in heathen parts, as she put it.

Elizabeth asked her to accompany them to Plymouth and assist them in buying their outfit. This gave great delight to the kind motherly soul. She left her farm but seldom; a trip to Plymouth was a notable event in her life; and when she returned with the girls, after a happy day's shopping, the spirit of adventure had so worked upon her that she cried, "Well, now, I wish I was going too, that I do."

Imagine the bustle and excitement of the next few days! Uncle Ben was in London. In his absence the girls worked hard at their preparations. They got a sewing-maid from the village, and all four worked early and late cutting out and making two sets of blouses, one for ordinary use, and the other for any very hot weather they might encounter on the voyage. Even Tommy, not usually an industrious young person in such matters, did her fair share, though it was a great trial of patience to have to finish the overcasting of all the seams before Elizabeth would lay them aside ready for packing.

Everything was complete before Uncle Ben's return. The girls had finished their outfit and packed it away neatly in their new cabin trunk. Their treasures were also packed ready to be handed into Mrs. Morris's keeping. A few pieces of furniture which Elizabeth could not bear to part with had been warehoused at Plymouth. The remainder, together with the farm stock, was to be sold after their departure. Tommy was very woebegone at the idea of selling her pony, and when Joe Morris offered to keep him for her, and give him his food in exchange for his services (that was his thoughtful and pleasant way of putting it), she hugged the burly farmer and called him a dear old man.

At last Uncle Ben returned. The last arrangements were made, the last adieus said, and one fine day the little party of four drove to the station to take train to Southampton, where the barque *Elizabeth* was refitting. The girls waved their handkerchiefs gaily in response to the parting salutations of the villagers; but they fell very silent when their old friends were out of sight, and the Captain, looking straight before him, heard a sob or two on each side and behind. Like a wise man, he said nothing about the sadness of leaving the old home, but related some of his recent experiences in London.

"I met a fine old friend of mine, a missionary," he said. "He is stationed on one of the South Sea Islands, and hasn't been home for twenty years. A real good sort is Henry Corke. He has only been home a month, and yet he is going out almost at once. There's devotion for you, girls. I asked him if he'd like to come with us, offered him the attractions of refined female society——"

"That was enough to choke him off," interrupted Tommy. "I hate to be called a female."

"Well, perhaps it was a mistake not to say tomboy. Anyhow, Corke was in too much of a hurry to come with us;

prefers one of those dirty clanking steamers. Mighty poor taste, I call it."

By the time they reached the station the girls had thrown off their despondency, and began to glow with excitement as they realized that they were actually entering upon a new life.

CHAPTER IV

ABOARD THE "ELIZABETH"

"Here we are!" cried Captain Barton, as the train ran into the dock station at Southampton. "Now mind you don't get run over."

"The idea!" said Tommy; "we have been here before, Uncle."

"So you have, my dear, but good advice is none the worse for being said twice."

They made their way across the metals, on which locomotives were hauling and pushing heavy goods wagons, and came to the quay where the *Elizabeth* lay taking in cargo. She looked a mere dwarf beside a Castle Liner not far away; but she was bright with the glory of new paint, and Captain Barton gazed at her with an affectionate pride that he would never have felt for a steamship. They went on board. Mr. Purvis, the Scots mate, gave the girls a shy greeting. They smiled at those of the crew whom they recognized, and a look of pained bewilderment settled on the face of one, Sandy Sam, when Tommy asked him if he had any more big gooseberries.

"Never mention the word to him," said the Captain anxiously, as they went below; "he's very sensitive, my dear."

"Ah! you're afraid your stories will be found out, you know you are," replied Tommy. "Oh! what a sweet little cabin."

The Captain had thrown open the door of the cabin which he had prepared for his nieces, next to the saloon. The girls looked in eagerly.

"How very nice!" said Elizabeth.

"I'm glad you like it, my dear," said the Captain. "I did my best, and Purvis was uncommon useful, too."

"A woman couldn't have managed better," said Mary.

"Well, you see, bachelor men like me and Purvis get into the way of making up for what we lose. We nearly forgot the looking-glass, though, not having any particular features ourselves to be proud of."

The cabin was very daintily got up. The woodwork was beautifully polished. There were two bunks on one side, one above the other, and a third on the opposite side, each with a spotless white bed-cover. On one wall hung a looking-glass; and a tiny wash-hand basin of polished zinc was fitted into a little alcove. There were hooks for hanging clothes on the partition. The clear space between the sides was only two or three feet across.

"Where shall we put our trunk?" asked Elizabeth practically.

"In the saloon, my dear," replied her uncle. "We'll fasten it there, to prevent it rolling about if we meet any rough weather."

"We shall have to get up one at a time," said Tommy, with a laugh. "There isn't room for two to do up their hair at once."

"Well, I know nothing about that," said the Captain, rubbing his bald crown. "You mustn't quarrel or fight about who shall be first, or I'll have to clap you in irons."

"Where do you keep your irons?" asked Tommy. "I'd like to see the dreadful things."

The Captain looked so much embarrassed that Tommy divined the truth at once.

"Why, you haven't got any," she cried, dancing. "What a naughty old fibber you are!"

"Well, you see, I pick my crew. Them that aren't English are Scotch or Irish, and very respectable men. But I dare say we can get a set of irons in the town. Come along, we'll go and get something to eat; we're too busy to cook on board. I'll just drop in at one of the marine stores and see if they've got a small size of irons for obstreperous females."

As they walked up the High Street Tommy suddenly cried—

"Look, Bess, isn't that little Dan Whiddon? I wondered why he wasn't at the station to wish us good-bye."

She pointed up the street, where she had seen a small oddly-dressed figure pass under the narrow ancient arch that divides the street into Above and Below Bar. They hurried in that direction, but when they reached the spot the figure had disappeared.

"I think you must have been mistaken," said Mary. "Dan wouldn't come so far from home."

"I dare say. Now, Uncle, where shall we go? I'm famished."

The Captain led them to the Crown Hotel. He confessed that if he had been alone he would have gone to a humbler place near the docks, where he might meet some shipmates.

"But you girls wouldn't like to eat among half-a-dozen sea-dogs smoking shag," he said.

As they ate their luncheon he said that he was disappointed with his cargo. He had hoped to have a full ship for the South American ports, but feared that after all he would have to go out light. Tommy's assurance that his passengers would make up did not appear to convince him.

They slept on board that night, and were very merry at the novel experience of undressing and dressing in such a narrow space. Early next morning the ship was towed out into the harbour. She had hardly made a cable's length, however, when the Captain received a message semaphored from the quay to the effect that his agent had secured enough goods to complete his freight. It would not be ready for shipment for two days. He did not think it worth while to put back into dock, as the extra cargo could be brought out in lighters.

During the next two days the girls were much amused to see their uncle in his little dinghy, which held three at a squeeze, going to and fro between the ship and the shore, propelling himself by means of one oar fixed in a groove at the stern. Nothing would satisfy them until he allowed one of the sailors, usually Sunny Pat, to take them in turn and teach them how to work the little tub in this manner. Finding it very easy Tommy begged the Captain to let her take him ashore, and was delighted when he told her on landing that she would make a skipper in no time. She immediately bought a huge sailor's knife, much to his amusement. Her sisters, not to be outdone, in their turn rowed him ashore, and each also bought a knife.

"You'd be terrible folk in a mutiny," said the Captain, laughing. "I really must see about getting those irons."

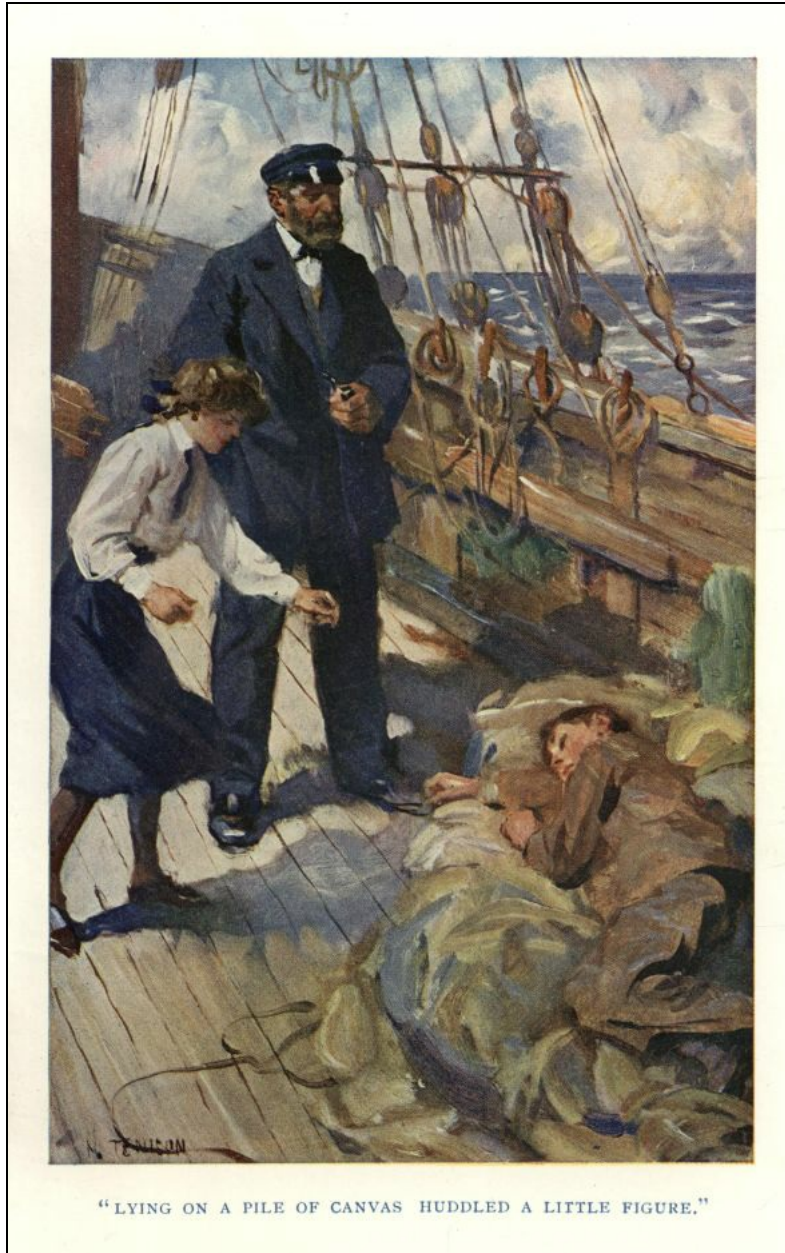
But when the vessel's hold was filled from the lighters, and the cargo was complete, there were no irons among the equipment. The *Elizabeth* was towed down Southampton Water; then, the wind being fair, the courses were set, and she was soon sailing merrily down Channel. The girls were in the highest spirits. It was a glorious day. The sea glistened in the sunlight, and as the vessel passed through the Solent, with the wooded shores of Hampshire on the right, and the Island on the left, the Captain pointed out to his nieces various landmarks and interesting spots, and gave them a first lesson in navigation. In three or four hours they passed the Needles.

"Now, girls," said the Captain, "my advice is, keep fairly quiet for a little. There's a bit of a swell, and—well, I say no more."

Elizabeth and Mary remained reclining in their deck-chairs, quietly enjoying their novel experiences. But Tommy was as nimble as Ariel on the vessel of the Duke of Milan. She was here, there and everywhere, asking why this and what the other; now exclaiming at a warship that glided silently past, now watching a graceful white-sailed yacht; at one moment standing by the helmsman, then flashing along the deck to ask her uncle for an explanation of something that had caught her attention. The Captain watched her with kindly amusement. He did not repeat his warning. "The lass had better get it over," he thought. Presently his amusement became mixed with a little anxiety as

he saw her growing quieter, and a tinge of green coming into her complexion. At last with a sudden cry of "Oh!" she rushed to the companion and disappeared. The other girls followed her anxiously, and for a time they were seen no more. Thanks to the steadiness of the ship, and the comparative smoothness of the sea, their sufferings were neither violent nor prolonged; but it was a much-subdued Tommy who emerged an hour or two later and meekly put her hand into her uncle's.

The next moment she gave a gasp. Not a yard away, lying on a pile of canvas, huddled a little figure in brown corduroys and clumping boots. It was Dan Whiddon, pale, grimy, with tear-stained eyes, fast asleep.



"LYING ON A PILE OF CANVAS HUDDLED A LITTLE FIGURE."

"LYING ON A PILE OF CANVAS HUDDLED A LITTLE FIGURE."

"There's a young Samson for you!" said the Captain, noticing Tommy's look of amazement. "A young rascal of a stowaway. Long Jimmy heard a tapping in the forehold a while ago, and when the men opened up—a nuisance when all the cargo was nattily stowed—there was this young reprobate, half dead with hunger and fright. You've a deal to answer for, Tommy."

"Why, what have I done?" asked the girl.

"Well, you and your sisters seem to have spoiled the young scamp. When they brought him up from below he whimpered out that the young ladies had been kind to him, and he didn't like carrying luggage and cleaning railway lamps, and when he heard that you were coming to sea he wanted his mother to get me to take him as a cabin-boy. She boxed his ears. But he found out when you were leaving, and hid in a goods wagon that reached Southampton a little before we did, and watched his opportunity to slip on board when the barque was lying at the quay-side. That's all I got out of him; and the motion served him as it serves most landmen, and he dropped asleep just where you see him there. I'll have something to say to him when he wakes."

"Poor little fellow!" said Tommy. "You won't be hard on him, Uncle?"

The Captain grunted. Perhaps he remembered that fifty years before he had himself run away to sea.

"A rascally young stowaway," he muttered. "I can't put him ashore, as I shan't touch at any port this side of Buenos Ayres. And his mother crying her eyes out, I'll be bound. And I'll have to spend several shillings on a cable to tell her he's safe. A pretty thing for a man with three nieces."

"I'll pay for the cable, Uncle."

"What! has she damaged the cable?" asked Mary innocently, coming up at this moment.

Captain Barton shook with laughter.

"Oh, you bookworms!" he said, when he had command of his breath. "Take a look at the cable, Mary, and see if you think Tommy, for all her mischievousness, could do it much damage. No, 'tis another kind of cable we were speaking of—all along of young Samson there. What would you do with a stowaway, Bess?" he asked of his eldest niece, who had just joined the others.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "you were right after all, Tommy. What a little sweep he looks!"

At this moment Dan stirred, opened his eyes, and when he saw the girls smiled sheepishly.

"Now, young Samson, stand up and listen to me," said the Captain severely. "Lay a hold of that stay there if you can't stand steady. You come sneaking aboard this vessel, ruining my cargo, expecting to fill yourself with my victuals, and all for what? Because you didn't like cleaning lamps and carrying luggage. What's that for a reason? There's worse than that aboard ship, I can tell you. If I did my duty, I should have you lashed to the mast and dosed with the cat. And your poor mother crying her eyes out, and the police dragging the ponds, and the Government sending detectives to all parts, and wiring to all the recruiting sergeants, spending hundreds of pounds of the country's money all for a discontented young shaver not four feet high. Now just you run along to Mr. Purvis and ask him to forgive you. He's very strict is Mr. Purvis, much stricter than I am; and then ask Sandy Sam very politely to fling a few buckets of water over you and scrub you with holystone; and after that go to Cook and ask him if he can spare a biscuit and a can of soup; and then I'll see if I can find some clothes that will fit you, and we'll make a man of you, and an A.B. in time."

The Captain's tone grew less stern and more genial as he went along, and when he had finished Dan smiled cheerfully, gave Tommy an extra smile, and went aft to obey orders.

The run down Channel was very pleasant to the girls. They showed the keenest interest in the ship and the doings of the sailors. These rough, good-tempered fellows were flattered by the attentions of their passengers, and never tired of answering their questions. It was not long before all three were able to tie all kinds of sailors' knots, splice ropes, and do other simple things of the kind. They knew the names of the sails and the yards, and Tommy in particular never tired of airing her nautical vocabulary.

Even the ship's cook became their willing slave. Elizabeth took him in hand, and he meekly received her instructions, with great advantage to his bill of fare. Captain Barton declared that it was a good job he was retiring, for this unwonted luxury was killing his seaman's qualities.

The evenings were spent in the little deck cabin, where they played at draughts with the Captain and mate, or listened to the yarns they spun. Mary had brought her mandoline, and on fine evenings they would get up a concert, the sailors singing their chanties and dancing the hornpipe. The Captain hunted up some ancient grass hammocks, and when the weather was quite calm the sailors rigged these up on deck for the girls. Some of the crew taught them how to make hammocks, using string instead of grass, and they often amused themselves by weaving string bags and baskets.

As for Dan Whiddon, he soon became the pet of the ship. He was a good-tempered little fellow, willing to oblige anybody. He was kept always busy, and it was not long before he found that the life of a sailor was a good deal harder even than that of a porter at a wayside station.

"But I likes it, I do," he said once to Tommy, "better'n cleaning lamps and such."

"You get no tips, Dan," she replied.

"What's tips!" he said. "I never had no good of 'em, miss. Mother took them all except a penny now and then for sweets, and the Captain he gives me sweets for nothing, he do, and so I save, don't I, miss?"

The weather held fair almost without interruption, and the girls became so well seasoned that an occasional gale did not distress them. As they approached the tropics the heat became rather trying, and then they brought out of their trunk sundry light blouses at which their uncle cocked an eye.

"Rank disobedience!" he said sternly. "I said serge."

"Don't they look nice, Uncle?" said Tommy mischievously, "and we made them ourselves. You can't object to that, my dear man, and we shall wash them ourselves, so there's no laundry bill for you to pay. In fact, you haven't a leg to stand on, so you had better say at once they look sweet and save time. Don't you think so, Mr. Purvis?"

"Weel," said the Scotsman cautiously, "I wouldna say but what they are suitable to the climate, but they're terrible gay like."

"Oh, you should see Bess's evening frock. It's perfectly lovely—chiffon, with pink insertion; it suits her dark hair splendidly."

"There, Tommy, that'll do," said the Captain; "such talk isn't suitable aboard this vessel. You're unruly minxes, and what I'll do with you in London I don't know."

"You'll soon get used to it, Uncle dear, and I really wouldn't worry if I were you. We'll keep you straight."

"A happy girl, Purvis," said the Captain, when they were alone.

"Ou, ay, she is that."

They spent a couple of days in Buenos Ayres while Captain Barton was unloading part of his cargo and settling his affairs. When they left, a certain young electrical engineer asked to be allowed to call on them when he returned to England, and looked very crestfallen when Elizabeth told him that they had no address. They were almost disappointed when they rounded the terrible Cape Horn without encountering a storm. After a short stay at Valparaiso, the Captain set his course direct for the Pacific Islands. Interested as the girls had been hitherto, they became intensely excited now. Mary knew a great deal about Captain Cook and other early navigators, and all the girls had read a volume of Stevenson's on the South Seas, which their uncle had brought home once in a colonial edition. The romance of this quarter of the globe had captured their imagination, and they looked eagerly forward to seeing the strange men and women, the gorgeous scenery, the many novel things which their reading and their uncle's stories had led them to expect.

CHAPTER V

A MIDNIGHT WRECK

"Well, now, I'm real glad I brought you girls with me," said Captain Barton, as they sat on deck one evening. "Many's the time I've felt a bit lonesome at night between sunset and turning in, but you do help to pass the time away."

"Pastimes, are we?" said Tommy, with affected indignation. "Toys! Dolls! I won't be called a doll."

"Very well, my dear, you shan't," replied her uncle, slipping one arm round her waist, and the other round Mary's. Elizabeth sat on her deck-chair opposite them, knitting the second of a pair of socks. "But, now," continued the Captain, "you'd better be turning in. 'Tis latish, and sleep, you know, 'it is a precious thing, beloved from pole to pole'; and if you don't get your full eight hours you'll be neither useful nor ornamental, Miss Tommy."

"Oh, Uncle! It's such a lovely night," pleaded Tommy, leaning back on his arm, and looking up into the brilliant sky—a sky such as is seen in the South Pacific, and nowhere else in the world.

Here a heavy figure approached the group from forward.

"Glass is dropping fast, sir," said Mr. Purvis.

Elizabeth's needles ceased clicking.

"That means a storm, doesn't it, Uncle?" she said.

"A bit of a blow, maybe," said the Captain. "Now, girls, off with you. I'll just make things snug. You go below, and sleep through it, and you'll come up fresh as paint in the morning."

Tommy grumbled a little, declaring that a storm was impossible with such a clear sky and no wind; but she went below with her sisters, and soon all three were fast asleep in their snug little cabin.

It was perhaps two hours later when Elizabeth awoke suddenly. There were strange noises overhead, and the ship was rolling and pitching with a violence new to her. Every now and then she heard a hoarse shout, and a scurry of feet on deck. The little appointments of the cabin rattled, and presently, as the vessel gave a particularly heavy lurch, the glass water-bottle slipped from its rack, and fell with a crash to the floor.

"What is it?" cried Tommy, sitting straight up in her bunk.

"The sea is rather rough," said Elizabeth quietly, "and has sent the water-bottle spinning."

"It woke me with a start," said Tommy. "My heart is thumping like anything. Is there any danger?"

"Not with Uncle on board," said Mary from the bunk below. "Let's go to sleep again."

They lay down, but to sleep was impossible. Every moment the movements of the vessel became more violent, and they heard great booming noises as the waves broke over the deck. The roar and shriek of the wind was mingled with the creaking of blocks and the shouts of men.

"I can't stand it any longer," said Tommy suddenly. "I'm going up to see. Come along, girls." She sprang out of her bunk and had to clutch the side to prevent herself from being thrown down. The other girls followed her, and she laughed as they staggered and clasped each other.

"What fun!" she said. "We haven't had a real storm before. See who'll be dressed first. You two needn't do up your hair."

Dressing was a difficult matter; but, helping one another, they managed to get their things on at last and,

holding hands, staggered out of the cabin to the companionway between it and the saloon. Tommy was the first to climb the ladder, but when she came to the top she gave a cry of dismay.

"The hatch is on!" she called. "Uncle has battened us down, mean old thing!"

She beat on the hatch with her fist, and called shrilly for her uncle; but the sounds were smothered by the greater noises above, and by and by she desisted, and tottered disconsolately down the steps. "Let's go into the saloon," she said. "There's more room there than in the cabin. You don't think there's any danger?" she added, as the light of the swinging lamp fell on Elizabeth's pale face.

"I don't know; I hope not," replied Elizabeth.

"It's a shame to batten us down," said Tommy indignantly. "I'd rather be on deck and know the worst."

The three girls went into the saloon, and sat huddled together on a sofa, which was fixed firmly to the wall. They found that only by keeping a tight grip on the sofa, and each other, could they save themselves from being dashed across the room. Moment by moment the storm increased in fury. Now and again there was a tremendous shock, under which the *Elizabeth* quivered in every plank, and sometimes a sharp report as of woodwork wrenched away.

The girls were now thoroughly scared. Pressed close together they shivered as they heard these ominous noises. None of them spoke, but Tommy gave a little gasp whenever a more than usually heavy sea struck the vessel, and Mary gulped down a lump that would keep rising in her throat.

Hours passed. Presently the movements of the vessel became less violent, and at last Tommy gave a cry of delight as she heard the battens being struck away from the hatch, and her uncle's voice as he descended the ladder.

"Ah! There you are, my dears," he said cheerily, as he entered the saloon. "I guessed these little tantrums would have wakened you."

"Is the storm over, Uncle?" asked Elizabeth.

"Pretty near. He's giving a last kick or two. We're very tired and hungry on deck, and you girls can make us some coffee; I know you'd like to make yourselves useful. Cook can't be spared at this minute or I wouldn't ask you."

"Of course we will," said Tommy, springing up.

"Is there much damage done, Uncle?" asked Mary.

"Damage! Why, bless you, you can't fight without getting a bruise or two, even if you win. The craft's had a bit of knocking about, I won't deny, but what could you expect? Now make the coffee, there's good lassies, and knock at the hatch when it's ready."

"You are not going to batten us down again?" cried Tommy.

"Well, you see, we don't want everything slopped about below, do we? The coffee wouldn't be worth drinking if a sea washed into it just as you were bringing it up. Make it strong, mind, and plenty of sugar."

Captain Barton left them. He had not thought it necessary to say that the cook, who couldn't be spared to make the coffee, was working hard at the pumps. Nor that the vessel had lost its foremast, which in its fall had carried away the boats on the leeward side. While the ship was staggering under this blow a heavy sea had struck her and stove in the boats on the weather side. Nor did the Captain mention that the storm had driven him many leagues out of his course, and that he was desperately anxious lest he should have come within the region of the coral reefs. Until daybreak he had no means of ascertaining his whereabouts, and he concealed from his nieces the anxiety with which he awaited the dawn.

He had paid his brief visit below merely to reassure the girls. They at once set about making the coffee—no

easy task, for though the wind had abated there was still a heavy sea. At last it was ready, and Tommy mounted the companion-way, carrying a canful. It was some time before her hammering on the hatch attracted attention, and when it was lifted the can was taken from her by her uncle, who said "Thank'ee, my lass. Now go down again and have some breakfast; it will be light in an hour or two."

"Can't we come up, Uncle?"

"Not yet, my dear; we must tidy up first, you know."

"Can't we help?" persisted Tommy.

But there was no answer. Captain Barton had clapped on the hatch.

"Poor little lassies!" he said to himself.

The girls drank some coffee, and ate some biscuits, waiting impatiently for their release. It was no longer difficult to keep their seats; the howling of the wind had ceased, and the noise above gradually diminished, and the vessel steadied. But now they were conscious of a sound that they had not heard before. It was like the clanking of a steam-engine.

"I wonder what it is!" cried Tommy, springing up. "Oh, I do so wish Uncle would let us go up. There's no danger now, surely."

But the Captain still remained above. The clanking sound continued, and slight noises were heard occasionally. The weather became still calmer, and the girls, when they had finished their simple breakfast, began to doze. Never since they left Southampton had their sleep been broken, and they would have returned to their bunks had it not been so near morning. So they cuddled up together on the sofa, Elizabeth in the middle and the other girls with their arms about her.

All at once there was a sudden jolt that set the tin cups flying from the table, and made the girls spring up in alarm. They were aware of a strange, rasping, scraping sound. Clutching one another, their startled faces asked a mute question, to which, inexperienced as they were, their instinct supplied a clear answer. The ship had struck.

There were loud shouts from above, a renewal of the scurrying on deck, then silence. A minute or two after the girls heard the hatch removed, and their uncle hurried down. Even in the dim light of the smoky oil lamp they saw how pale and haggard he looked. They were too much frightened to speak.

"Girls," he said quietly, "put on your macintoshes and anything warm you have, and come on deck at once. Don't wait for anything else."

He was gone. The very calmness of his tone, the absence of his wonted jocularly, struck them with a chill feeling of dread. Silently, with pale faces, the girls fetched wraps and macintoshes from their cabin and hurriedly mounted the companion. When they reached the wet and slippery deck a terrible spectacle lay before them in the light of the crescent moon, shining fitfully out through the scudding clouds. The foremast had snapped off at the height of a man. The deck was strewn with broken spars and a litter of torn sails and shattered rigging. On the lee side the davits were twisted and bent, and the boats had disappeared. On the weather side, the boats still swung on the ropes, but were so battered that it was impossible to hope that they were seaworthy. Three or four men were loosing the lashings that secured the little dinghy, others were bringing up provisions from the cook's galley. The monotonous *clank, clank* of the pumps told how the rest were engaged.

Close to the dinghy stood little Dan Whiddon, the cabin-boy, shivering with cold and fear.

"Show a leg, now!" cried the Captain to the men who were busy with the dinghy. He turned to the girls, who stood near the companion, huddled in speechless terror. "You must get into the dinghy, my dears," he said gravely; "we have struck a reef. You can scull her, keep her going gently and look out for a passing ship. Don't be alarmed. The sea is smooth, you see. We will make a raft and come after you as soon as we can. My poor old ship is done for."

"Oh! we can't leave you, Uncle," said Elizabeth, with quivering lips.

"No, we won't," cried Tommy, springing forward and clasping his arm.

"Now, my dears," replied the Captain with forced cheerfulness, "you promised to obey orders, you know. We can't save the ship. Water is pouring into her; the one chance is to get you safely afloat while we make a raft. You must go for my sake. There must be land hereabouts; you'll see it when the sun gets up, and I lay you won't be ashore an hour before we join you. Come along now, all's ready."

The Captain's firmness showed that further remonstrance was vain. He led them to the side where the dinghy had been lowered. Elizabeth was helped into it, and as she turned away, after embracing her uncle, she heard the first mate say—

"D'ye think there's room for young Dan, sir? He's no use to us."

The Captain hesitated for a moment. Three was a full complement for the little boat, and even the boy's light extra weight might be a source of danger. Mary, as she kissed her uncle, heard the boatswain growl—

"You may as well drown the lot; the dinghy can't take more than three nohow."

Then Tommy flung herself into her uncle's arms, and sobbed a good-bye.

"Now, my little lass," said he, "bear up. Brave's the word. There's One above will look after you. Good-bye? Nonsense! I'll see you soon, never fear. Now, steady—there you go—now, where's that boy?"

But Dan Whiddon, hearing the pessimistic boatswain's words, had slipped away in the darkness.

The Captain called him, but he did not reappear.

"Well, perhaps it's as well," said the Captain. "Now, girls, don't tire yourselves out; lay by till daylight. God bless you!"

Elizabeth silently took the sculls, the other two crouched in the bottom of the boat, which drew slowly away from the ill-fated ship. After a little Tommy sprang up.

"Stop rowing, Bess," she cried. "It's no use going on in the dark. Keep close to the ship, so that we can see Uncle when he puts off on the raft."

Elizabeth rested on her oars. There was reason in what Tommy had said. For a time the girls could see the trembling masts of the ship in the moonlight, and dark figures moving about the deck; but presently the moon was obscured; some minutes passed before it again emerged from the clouds; and then, when the girls looked for the *Elizabeth*, there was not a trace of her to be seen.

The two younger girls were now sitting up in the boat, facing their sister. They looked with wild eyes into the darkness. The same terrible thought oppressed them all: had the barque gone down already? Had there been time for the construction of a raft? They dared not speak, lest their spoken fears should overwhelm them. Elizabeth sculled now in this direction, now in that, in the hope that it was merely distance that had removed the ship from sight. Now and again she rested on her oars and listened; but there was no sound in the breathless stillness, and she dipped her oars again; inaction was unbearable. So the three miserable girls waited for the dawn.

It came at last with almost startling suddenness. At one moment all the sky was indigo with gleaming spots; the next, the myriad spangles had disappeared, and the blue was covered with a curtain of grey. But daybreak did not bring with it the expected relief from suspense—a light mist hung upon the surface of the sea—a tantalizing filmy screen which the eye could not penetrate. The boat floated idly; again the girls eagerly strained their ears for sounds of voices, or creaking tackle, or working oars; but they heard nothing except the slow rippling of the sea against the side of the dinghy.

"Pull, Bess," cried Tommy frantically. "We can't have come far. Row about; we must find the ship."

Elizabeth, though hope was dead within her, rowed this way and that, but everywhere was the encircling mist; there was no sign of vessel, raft or land.

"We had better wait until the sun is up," she said at last. "It will scatter the mist, and then we can at least see our way."

The air was growing warmer, with a damp clammy heat; but the girls shivered as they sat silent in the gently rocking boat. The grey mist turned to a golden dust, and presently the sun burst through, putting the thinning vapour to flight. Now the girls eagerly scanned the horizon as it widened, but neither hull nor sail stood out of the immense tract of blue. Tommy rose in the boat, to see if she could then descry any dark patch upon the surface which might be a raft; but there was nothing. Her lips quivered as the meaning of this vast blankness forced itself upon her mind. For a few moments she stood with her back to her sisters; then turning suddenly, she said, with a laugh that was not very different from a sob—

"'There were three sailors of Bristol City.' I say, how should I do for the part of Little Billee?"

This sudden touch of comedy relieved the tension, as Tommy intended. The other girls smiled feebly, and Tommy, saying to herself, "I must talk, talk, or we shall all go mad," went on—

"Could I have a swim, do you think?" She flung off her macintosh. "It's getting hot."

"Oh, you mustn't think of it," said Mary; "these waters are full of sharks."

"Well, then, let's have another breakfast. What have they given us?"

While Elizabeth was examining the provisions placed in the boat Tommy leant over the side and dashed handfuls of water over her face.

"There! Now I feel better," she said. "What is there, Bess?"

There were tins of biscuits, sardines, and condensed milk, a bottle of coffee extract, three tin cups, a spirit lamp, a small tin kettle, a tea-caddy half full, a small box of sugar, a large plum cake, some boiled bacon, and two gallon jars containing water.

"I am not hungry at present," said Elizabeth.

"Neither am I, but one must do something," said Tommy; "a cup of water and a slice of cake for me."

They all took a draught of water, but only Tommy made any pretence of eating.

"Now, Bess," said Tommy as she gulped down her crumbs of cake, "we'll take turns to row. Uncle——" Her voice broke; she cleared her throat and continued—"Uncle said there must be land somewhere near, and he'll think us awful slackers if he gets there first."

"We can't tell which way to go," said Mary.

"Of course we can't, but we must choose a direction and stick to it, or we shall go round in a circle like a dog chasing its tail.

'O' a' the airts the wind can blaw
I dearly lo'e the West.'

Let's make for the west, and take our chance."

This suggestion was adopted. Elizabeth admired her small sister's pluck in being so determinedly cheerful. They turned their faces to the sun, and for some time rowed steadily westward, each girl taking a spell at the oars. But as the day grew older the heat became intolerable and exertion painful, so they decided to rest until the evening. None of them any longer expected to see the raft, though none confessed it; all they hoped for was to find land. They were

very much cramped in the little boat, but none grumbled about the discomforts. By and by it occurred to Elizabeth to rig up their macintoshes as a sort of awning, supporting it on the oars and the boat-hook, and this sheltered them from the worst effects of the sun. They made another spare meal in the afternoon, and when the sun was between south and west they resumed their rowing. So far there had not been a sign of land; but Uncle Ben had certainly said that the ship had struck on a reef, and where there were reefs dry land could hardly be far away. This hope buoyed them up through the hot day.

The sun went down below the horizon with the suddenness general in the Southern Ocean. Once more darkness was upon them. With the return of night came a sense of forlornness and desolation of spirit. They fell silent, each brooding on the sad fate which had overtaken their uncle and them. The night was cold; enveloped in their wraps and macintoshes they huddled together for warmth, letting the boat drift at the mercy of the sea. Their broken sleep on the previous night, and their exertions and anxieties during the day, had told upon them, and after some hours the two younger girls fell asleep. Elizabeth dared not surrender herself to slumber. Who could tell what might happen? As the eldest, she felt a motherly responsibility for the others, though she had to confess to herself how utterly helpless she was if danger came. She sat with her elbows on her knees, thinking, brooding. Everything had happened so suddenly that she was only just beginning to realize the immensity of the disaster. A cockle-shell of a boat, that would capsize if the sea were the least bit rough; the wide ocean all around; three girls, healthy enough, but not inured to hardship; the possibility of drifting for days or weeks, never touching land or coming within the track of a ship; food dwindling day by day; the horrors of thirst: these dreadful images flashed in turn upon Elizabeth's mental vision and made her shudder.

"Why didn't we stay with Uncle?" she thought; and then the remembrance of the dear old man, and their happy days on board, and her conviction that the vessel had gone down before the raft could be made, smote Elizabeth's heart with grief, and for the first time the tears rolled down her cheeks, unchecked.

She wept till her head ached, and she felt dazed. At last, utterly worn out, she dozed into an uneasy and fitful sleep, still supporting her head on her hands. She woke every few minutes, blamed herself for not keeping a better watch, then slumbered again. She was startled into wakefulness by the rays of the early morning sun. Lifting herself stiffly, and carefully, so as not to disturb the two girls at her feet, she looked around, and was alarmed as she caught sight of a ring of white within a few hundred yards of the starboard side of the boat. At the first glance she recognized the foam of breakers dashing over a reef.

"Girls!" she cried, "wake up! Quick!" She released herself from them, seized the sculls, and pulled energetically away from the threatened danger. Tommy threw off her macintosh and stood up in the boat.

"Land!" she cried. "Look, Mary, beyond the breakers there. Woods! Oh! I could scream for joy."

"Look out for a landing-place," said Elizabeth, as she rowed slowly parallel with the reef.

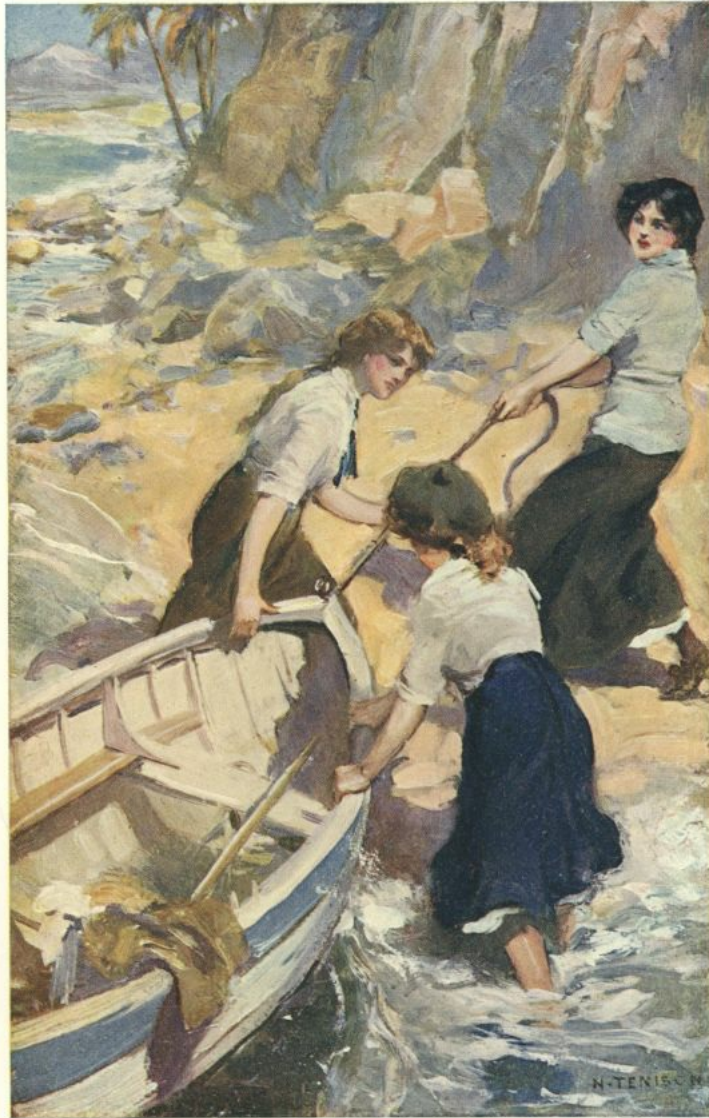
"What if there are savages?" murmured Mary.

"Oh, we'll soothe their savage breasts," cried Tommy confidently. "I don't care if there are so long as my feet are on dry land again. Can you see the raft?"

There was no sign of a raft; nothing was in sight but the foam-swept reef, the cliffs, and the dark background of woods behind.

A pull of half-a-mile brought the dinghy clear of the breakers, and the girls saw the sea dashing up the face of the high weather-worn cliffs. There appeared to be no beach, no possible landing-place. Mary, the bookworm of the family, began to fear that the land was only one of those precipitous crags of which she had read, inaccessible from the sea. But in a few minutes they discerned to their joy a gap in the cliffs, and a sandy cove that promised an easy landing-place.

To this Elizabeth turned the dinghy's head. A shark glided by as they neared the shore, but was almost unnoticed in their excitement. Tommy gave a cheer as the boat grated on the sand. In a moment she was out; her sisters followed more deliberately; then the three together, exerting all their strength, dragged the boat toilsomely up the beach.



"THE THREE TOGETHER DRAGGED THE BOAT
UP THE BEACH."

"THE THREE TOGETHER DRAGGED THE BOAT UP THE BEACH."

CHAPTER VI

THE ISLAND BEAUTIFUL

Hot and panting from their exertions, the girls threw themselves down on the sand, and for a time remembered nothing but their escape from what had seemed certain death. But presently Tommy sprang up, and, shading her eyes against the sun's fierce glare, looked long and anxiously seaward. An irregular white line marked the reef, but beyond that the ocean stretched out into the distance, without a spot upon its glistening surface. Her sisters joined her, and, with their arms clasped about each other, they searched the horizon for the raft and Uncle Ben. None of them spoke: each was afraid to utter her foreboding thought.

Then they turned and gazed at the green woodland that rose almost from the brink of the sea. It was a perfect day, and the land to which they had come might well be a paradise of the South Seas such as they had read about. But they were too anxious to be aware of its beauties. Mary caught Elizabeth by the arm.

"Are there people?" she said in a whisper.

"Savages, perhaps cannibals?" said Tommy, with a shiver.

They stood holding each other, afraid to stir. Elizabeth for a moment had a wild notion of dragging the boat down again, and putting to sea in the hope of meeting Uncle Ben; dread of the unknown had possession of her. But she recognized that so to act would be foolish, and crushing down her fears, she said quietly—

"I think we had better look about a little; perhaps Uncle has already landed."

Hope springs up easily in young minds.

"Of course," said Tommy valiantly. "Who's afraid! I—no, you go first, Bess, as you're the biggest. I know; you take an oar, and Mary another, and I'll take the boat-hook."

Thus armed, after making the boat secure, they took their way up the strand, through a gap in the wooded cliffs that seemed to have been carved out in some past time by a stream. They walked slowly and timidly, as if half expecting to find a savage lurking behind every bush or tree. But as they went on, and found no wild islanders to molest them, they began to be more aware of the beauty of their surroundings. On either hand there was a riot of splendid vegetation. Strange plants and trees, some bearing brilliant flowers, others tempting fruits, grew in magnificent profusion, and birds gorgeous in colour flitted from tree to tree.

Here were feathery palms, there a cluster of small trees like hazels; all about, the ground was carpeted with masses of convolvulus and creeping plants innumerable, and the air was heavy with mingled scents.

"What a lovely place!" said Mary.

"Not to us," said Tommy. "We might as well be in a desert. Oh, what's that? I saw something move."

She pointed to the right hand, and for a moment the girls held their breath. Then they laughed, but very nervously; the something was nothing but a little animal, of what kind they knew not, that scuttled away into the woodland.

They went on again, becoming less timid the farther they advanced, for there was no sight or sound to alarm them. They began to talk more freely, but always in low tones.

"I suppose it *is* an island," said Tommy.

"It must be," replied Mary. "There is no other land until you get to Australia, and that's thousands of miles away."

"Then what shall we do if we don't find Uncle?"

The question recalled to them all that had happened, and again they felt the bitterness of misery and despair.

"We must keep up our spirits," said Elizabeth, trying to speak cheerfully. "At any rate we shan't starve if these fruits are good to eat."

"I don't see any breadfruit," said Mary.

"Well, it looks as if we are to be Crusoes," said Tommy, "only Crusoe was alone. Goodness! I couldn't bear to be alone. I should go mad. Do you think Uncle will find us, Bess?"

"I hope and trust he will, dear. We are safe; why shouldn't he be? Don't let's look on the black side of things. Shall we go back to the boat and eat some of the food we brought? It won't keep like the fruits. Then we had better rest; I'm sure you are worn out; we can look round again presently, when the sun isn't so hot."

They returned to the boat, and made a meal of some biscuit and cold bacon, carving the bacon somewhat clumsily with their jackknives, remembering how their uncle had laughed at them for buying such manlike implements.

"I'm terribly thirsty," said Tommy. "I wonder if the water in the stream there is good to drink!"

She pointed to a brook that meandered down to the shore from amid the woodland above, purling musically, and flashing like silver in the sunlight.

"There's not much fear of that," said Mary. "I'll get some while you cut me another slice of bacon."

The water was delightfully fresh and cool, proving that there was a spring somewhere in the interior.

Having made a heartier meal than any of them expected to make, they lay down under the shade of a large tree, and talked until they fell asleep from sheer fatigue. The air was much cooler when they awoke. At Mary's suggestion they climbed to the highest point of the cliffs, from which they could command a wide prospect over the sea. When they reached the summit, they scanned the surface, now as smooth as a lake, for signs of boat or raft; but nothing was in sight, except far away several dusky spots which Mary at once declared must be other islands.

"Very likely we drifted past them in the night," said Elizabeth. "Look at that mass of floating seaweed just beyond the reef; you see there is quite a strong current."

"If we went as fast as that in the dinghy, we must have come miles from where the wreck happened," said Tommy. "And Uncle won't know; he'll never find us."

At this the shadow of their misfortune once more descended on them, and they turned away from each other to hide their distress. Then Tommy swung round and cried—

"I won't be a baby! Bess, if you see any sign of waterworks again, smack me. What's the good of crying? Let's go exploring; that'll help to keep off the blues."

But in spite of their brave attempts, they veered between hopefulness and despondency all the rest of the day. They roamed here and there, not really going very far, for they still felt safer within easy distance of their boat. More than once they returned to the cliff to search the horizon longingly for any sign of ship or boat, but always in vain.

In the course of their wandering they came upon some trees bearing fruit about which they had no doubt.

"Bananas!" cried Tommy, with excitement. "How jolly! and look at the clusters on the ground. We've only to pick them up."

Several clusters had fallen from the trees, and lay ripening where they fell. The girls ate some of the fruit, taking note of the position of the trees, so that they might come to them again.

Then they strolled on, keeping close to the shore, and stopping every few minutes to gaze yearningly over the sea for the raft they longed to behold. Turning their backs on this disappointing horizon, they let their eyes range over the island, their minds confused between admiration and wondering awe. The ground rose in a succession of irregular terraces, covered with vegetation in every imaginable shade of green. In the distance the prospect terminated in a ridge, above which hovered a light mass of opalescent cloud. What forms of life were stirring amid that dark woodland? What lay beyond that curtain of rose pink and pearl? The girls were awed by the mystery of things, as if subject to an enchanter's spell.

"What's the time?" asked Tommy, presently, bringing them back to the commonplace. Both Mary and Elizabeth had watches pinned upon their dresses, but on looking at them they found that each told a different hour, and both had stopped.

"I forgot to wind mine up," said Elizabeth.

"So did I," said Mary.

"It must be getting late," said Tommy. "Look at the sun."

It was clear from its position that night was at hand. And then Tommy asked a question that brought back all their uneasiness.

"Where are we to sleep?"

"I have thought of that all day," said Elizabeth.

"Then it's clear you are the statesman of the family," said Tommy. "I couldn't have thought about it all day without telling you, and you haven't said a word. It didn't occur to me until a moment ago."

"There are no wild beasts in the South Sea Islands—at least, I've never heard of any," said Mary.

"That's one comfort," said Tommy, "and we've seen no savages or anything else to alarm us. Now if we were boys—scouts or something, used to campaigning in the open—we shouldn't care a pin, but I feel dreadfully shaky. What are we to do?"

"We must face it," said Elizabeth quietly. "I think myself we had better stay in the boat."

"How awful! think of last night," said Tommy dolefully.

"Perhaps there would be a storm and we should be upset, or blown out to sea," said Mary.

"Oh, I didn't mean to launch the boat," said Elizabeth. "That would be too risky. We'll leave it on the beach."

"It's only a bit better than being in the open," said Mary. "I know, why not make a fire to scare off intruders? I've read about that being done."

"That's quite brilliant," said Tommy. "And it will be a beacon too; perhaps Uncle will see it. Let's go back at once and get ready for supper and bed."

Elizabeth was glad of any activity that would keep them from thinking of their troubles. They returned to the beach. First they collected a number of stones, which they piled up to make a rough fire-place. Then they gathered a large quantity of twigs and dry grass from the edge of the forest, and finding several small trees which had been uprooted by storms, they lugged these down to their fire-place. Then the self-lighter which Tommy had received from her uncle came in handy, and by the time it was dark they had a bright pleasant fire that was very cheering.

They ate more of their biscuit and bacon, with plum cake for sweets and bananas as dessert; then, having heaped some fuel on the fire, they crept into the boat and arranged themselves as comfortably as possible.

Tommy was soon asleep, but the elder girls lay awake for a long time, clasping each other, and talking in

murmurs so as not to disturb their sister.

"Mary dear," said Elizabeth, "we must look at the worst side and face it for Tommy's sake, you know."

"Yes, I know. She's not really very strong, is she? Though she has such spirit."

"No, she'll be all right so long as she doesn't get wretched, so we won't say a word to depress her. We ought to be thankful that we are safe so far. I'm afraid to think of what has happened to Uncle; but supposing—supposing he is—lost, we shall have to do as well as we can until we are seen from a passing ship."

"Suppose we never are!"

"We won't suppose that. Think of the many castaways who have been picked up in time. By the look of it we shall find food here, and I rather fancy the island must be uninhabited, or we should have seen some signs of people."

"We haven't been all over it yet."

"No, of course we can't be sure. If we do come across people we must try and make friends with them. Aren't there some islands called the Friendly Islands because the people were quite decent?"

"Yes. Some of the islanders in these parts are gentle and peaceable. But I'm dreadfully afraid of savages."

"So am I, but we won't think of them. What a lovely night it is! So still and peaceful! and we're just three insignificant dots in all this great beautiful universe."

They mused in silence, and by and by fell asleep. Dawn found them very cramped and stiff. The fire was out, and as they shivered in the cool morning air they felt something of the previous day's despondency. But Elizabeth, with determined cheerfulness, called to her sisters that it was breakfast-time. They made themselves some coffee, using the extract sparingly to eke it out as long as possible, and after bathing their faces in the water at the brook, ate their simple breakfast and then made their way to the top of the cliff to search the ocean once more for a sign of help.

The sea was even calmer than it had been yesterday, and as the mist rolled off its surface they were able to scan countless miles of space.

There were the same dark distant shapes, purple in the early sunlight, and they felt a wondering curiosity about them; but there was no sail or funnel that betokened a ship. First one and then another discovered a speck on the skyline, and they debated whether it was or was not a boat; but after gazing until their eyes were tired they came to the conclusion that there was no immediate hope of rescue.

"We ought to raise a flag of distress," said Mary, "which might be seen if a ship comes near; but we haven't anything big enough."

"Oh, yes, we have!" said Tommy. "If we tie our silk scarves together they will make a fine flag."

"But we haven't a flagstaff," said Elizabeth.

"There's a lovely one," said Mary, pointing to a tall slender tree that stood a little apart from the nearest clump of woodland, like a sentinel thrown out seaward. "Can you climb that, Tommy?"

"Rather! Father didn't like my climbing, but if I hadn't where should we be now?"

Elizabeth knotted the three scarves together. Then Tommy ran to the tree and climbed nimbly almost to the top, the others watching her breathlessly. Soon the flag of red and white was fluttering in the light morning breeze.

"It'll be torn to shreds by the first storm," said Tommy when she descended. "Let's hope it will be seen before a storm comes."

They spent the day much as they had spent the first one on the island; sitting on the beach, now and again visiting the cliff to take another look across the sea, gathering bananas from the little plantation and wandering for a short distance along the shore.

"What shall we do when all the bananas are gone?" asked Tommy, as they ate their dinner. "The food we have in the boat won't last a week."

"We shall have to go exploring," said Mary. "I can't believe that these bananas are the only eatable fruits, and no doubt there are more bananas somewhere."

They looked up once more at the distant mysterious ridge.

"I don't know how you feel," said Tommy, "but I'm rather scared of going far from the beach. Who knows what we should find among those trees?"

"We might go a little farther than we did yesterday," suggested Elizabeth.

"Come along, then," said Tommy. "Oh, gracious! What's that?"

She pointed towards the ridge. The other girls looked, but saw nothing.

"What is it?" asked Mary.

"I saw a large beast cross over that bare spot," replied Tommy.

"I think you must have fancied it," said Mary.

"Rubbish! I tell you I saw it."

"But there aren't any large beasts in these islands," said Mary.

"How do you know? You think you know everything," said Tommy sharply, "just because you've read a few books. I tell you I *did* see it."

"It couldn't have been a large animal, all the same," persisted Mary.

"You're an idiot," cried Tommy.

Elizabeth saw it was time to intervene. The girls' nerves were a little on edge.

"I dare say you are both right," she said tranquilly. "Tommy evidently saw something, and though there are no large native animals, Mary, perhaps it's an imported one. We can't tell but that there are people over there, and they might have anything, you know."

"Of course they might," said Tommy triumphantly. "It might be an elephant or anything."

And so the little storm blew over, but it made Elizabeth very thoughtful. As she lay awake that night, she resolved that something must be done to occupy their thoughts. "It will never do to idle away our time, as we've been doing," she said to herself, "or there'll be constant bickerings, and we shall all get slack and mopish. Oh, dear!"

And she did not sleep before she had made a plan.

CHAPTER VII

A LOCAL HABITATION

"Now, my dears," said Elizabeth as they sat at breakfast next morning, "I've got an idea."

"Hurrah!" cried Tommy. "What is it, Bess?"

"It's just this. We must act as if we were going to stay on this island for ever."

Tommy gasped, and a look of dismay came into her eyes.

"Don't you think we'll be rescued, then?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't give up hope. We may be seen from a ship any day, or Uncle may come for us; but we can't depend on it. Plenty of men and boys have been shipwrecked like us on a lonely island, and have managed to shift for themselves. Why shouldn't we? We're used to outdoor work: at least, *I* am, and it would be an odd thing if we couldn't manage to make ourselves comfortable on an island like this, with half our work already done for us."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary.

"Why, if you're right about there being plenty of fruit—and I don't see why you shouldn't be—we shan't have to grow our food, and that's the chief thing. So we shall have more time for other things. The first thing is to see just what we've got. Here's mine."

She turned out her pocket, and displayed two handkerchiefs, a thimble, a small whistle and her jack-knife.

"That's not a great deal," she said, smiling. "Now, Mary."

"There's my knife, and a hanky, and my little pen-knife, and hurrah! my housewife."

And as she suddenly remembered that on the night before the storm she had been mending her uncle's clothes, the recollection almost moved her to tears.

"I've got the most," said Tommy, with a laugh. "Look here—scissors, hanky, some bits of string, my match-box, jack-knife, picture postcard of an aeroplane—wish we had an aeroplane!—and——"

She had unfolded a much-worn scrap of paper; now she folded it again and replaced it in her pocket.

"What is it?" asked Elizabeth.

"It's only that stupid old receipt for butterscotch: no good to us here."

They all smiled.

"Well, we can't boast of much in the way of personal possessions," said Elizabeth; "but we have the boat, two oars, a boat-hook, the painter, a few cups and things, my string bag, that's a lucky find—and our macintoshes. More than Crusoe had."

"Not so much, Bess," said Mary. "You don't remember. I always think Crusoe was jolly lucky."

"I dare say you are right. Well, we've taken stock. That's one good thing done. Now what do you say to building a hut?"

"What! With scissors and knives?" asked Mary.

"You'll see. We ought to try, I think. The weather is lovely now, but I shouldn't care about sleeping in the boat

in a rainstorm, even under a macintosh. And you know how it rains in these tropical parts."

"It'll be great fun," said Tommy, "but I don't see how it's to be done."

"We'll have to cut down some saplings with our jack-knives. I don't quite see myself what we shall do next, but that will be a start, anyway, and I dare say ideas will come as we go along."

"That doesn't sound much like an architect," said Tommy, "but let's try. It will give us something to do and keep us from getting catty."

Elizabeth smiled as she saw her intentions thus realized.

"We must choose our site," she said. "Surveying, don't they call it?"

"All settlements are made near running water," said Mary, "so it ought to be near the stream."

They followed with their eyes the course of the bright little stream as it flowed out of the woodland down to the shore. There was no suitable spot for the hut near at hand, and to find one involved going farther than they had yet ventured to go. But having now a definite object in view they found themselves a little more courageous, and springing up they set off along the bank of the stream towards the higher ground. They walked cautiously and in silence, looking about them with wide-open eyes, ready to flee at the slightest alarming sight or sound. Suddenly Tommy said in a whisper—

"Here! this is the very place."

She indicated a grassy knoll some ten or twelve feet above the bed of the stream. The girls stopped at its edge and looked at it. On the inland side it was fringed with a row of small trees; seaward the view was uninterrupted.

"It looks nice," said Mary. "Let's measure it."

Elizabeth, being the tallest, stepped the grassy plot from end to end and from side to side.

"I make it about twenty feet by sixteen," she said, "just about the size of our dining-room at home. I think it will do splendidly. There's water close at hand; there are plenty of saplings in the woods beyond; and the hillside will protect us from storms, unless they come from the sea."

"And what a lovely outlook it has!" said Mary, turning towards the sea. "We couldn't have a nicer place."

"Then we will fix on it," said Elizabeth. "Now who's to be architect?"

"Oh, you, Bess!" said Tommy; "we're no good at that."

"I'm afraid I'm not either," said Elizabeth, laughing. "But I suppose we ought to put up some posts for the walls, and weave rushes and things between them. Anyway, the first thing is to cut down some stout saplings that will be strong enough."

"Well, there are plenty in the woods; quite close too," said Tommy.

"But how can we cut them down?" asked Mary; "we haven't axes or saws."

"We have our knives, though," said Tommy. "Come on, let's begin."

They went into the wood, where the trees at the edge were not at all dense, and selected several saplings of about the same height and thickness. Then each dropped on her knees before one of the saplings, scratched a circular line on the bark and began to hack away at this with the knife. For some time nothing was heard but the slight sounds made by the knives; each girl worked hard as though engaged in a competition. But presently Tommy straightened her back, and uttered a sort of sighing grunt.

"How are you getting on?" asked Elizabeth, without desisting from her task.

"All right," cried Tommy, stooping and setting to work furiously. "They shan't beat me," she said to herself.

But in a few minutes Mary gave a plaintive little exclamation, dropped her knife, and rubbed her right hand with her left.

"You're *soon* tired," said Tommy, working harder than ever.

"I think my tree must be a specially tough one," said Mary. "I don't seem to make much impression, and my wrist does ache so."

"Take a rest, dear," said Elizabeth. "Shouldn't we get on better if two worked at the same tree while the other rested? We could take it in turns. When we have cut down the first, we shall have something to show for our work."

"A good idea!" said Tommy, springing up and running to Elizabeth's tree. "You take first spell off, Mary."

The two girls worked at the trunk from opposite sides. The air was growing hotter and hotter, the insects became very troublesome, and as time went on and the incisions they had made in the sappy wood were still very shallow, both felt very much discouraged.

"We shall never get through the wretched thing," said Tommy in disgust. "Can't we snap it off, Bess?"

"I'm afraid that would only splinter it," said Elizabeth. "It is a bother. What troubles me most is that our knives will be hopelessly blunted if it takes so long to cut one tree. Still, we must peg away. You rest now, Tommy, and let Mary try again."

Tommy got up with relief, and strolled a few yards away while her sisters continued the work. In a few minutes she came running back.

"What idiots we are!" she cried. "Stop work, you two. We needn't break our backs or our wrists at all. Come and look."

She led them to the edge of the grassy knoll, and pointed to three small trees standing within a few feet of each other about the same distance apart, and forming the corners of a sort of triangle.

"There!" she said. "Don't you see? There's half our work done for us. Those three trees can be the corner posts of our hut, and we can use the branches to make a roof."

Quite excited at her discovery, she pointed out that two of the trees had each thrown out a branch about seven feet from the ground, and the third had a branch a little higher. These overhanging branches protected one side of the triangle, and Tommy suggested that they could be employed as a framework upon which they might spread mats woven from the grasses on the bank of the stream.

"It would take a terrible time to weave the mats," said Mary dubiously.

"Not so long as to cut down the trees," replied Tommy, "and not nearly so hard work. What do you say, Bess?"

"It's a capital idea, but I can't weave."

"Oh, we'll soon teach you that," said Tommy. "You didn't go to a kindergarten like Mary and me; but it's not very different from the string work you did on board. Come along; let's make a start."

They went hopefully to the bank of the stream, but when they tried to cut down the rushes, they found that their knives were already blunt. As the day was now very hot, and they were hungry and tired, they resolved to have an early dinner, then rest for a while, and later on sharpen their knives on stones at the beach and try again.

By the evening they had cut a large quantity of grasses, which they placed in a heap to be weaved next day. They decided again to sleep in the boat, and returned to it just before sunset by way of the clump of banana-trees, carrying their supper with them.

"We have made a good start," said Elizabeth cheerfully, as they sat munching bananas in the boat.

"Yes, but I tell you what," said Tommy, "I'm getting tired of bananas."

"Already!" said Mary, smiling. "Don't you remember how you said once at home you'd love to live in a banana plantation, where you could pick as many as you liked?"

"And you told me the story of a greedy boy who loved cake, and dreamt that he was in the middle of a big one, and had to eat his way out. I was a silly kid then. Anyway, I'm sick of bananas now, and people say it's bad to have no change of diet."

"But what can we do?" said Elizabeth. "We haven't seen anything else."

"Except birds," said Mary. "Pigeon-pie is rather nice."

"We might snare some," said Tommy, "or fish—what about fish? They'd be easiest to catch, I expect. I've got some string, and we can easily find something that'll do for a rod."

"And a bent pin for a hook," said Mary.

"Now just listen to that!" said Tommy. "Anybody would think we were going fishing for sticklebacks. No fish worth cooking would ever let himself be hooked by a bent pin. We'll find something better than that."

"We'll see what we can do to-morrow," said Elizabeth. "We've never done any sea-fishing, and fishing in the river at home won't help us much, I fancy. Still, we can try, and I'd like a little fish for a change. You both look awfully tired, so let's go to sleep now; we shall have plenty to do in the morning."

And Elizabeth, as she laid herself down that night, felt happy in the success of her plan. "If we can only keep busy," she said to herself, "all will be well. But I do hope it won't be for long."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FISHERS

Up with the sun next morning, the girls began the day by bathing in a little secluded pool, where there was no danger of being interrupted by a shark. Immediately after breakfast they set off to the site of their hut, looked cautiously around to make sure that no one had been there, and began to weave the grasses they had prepared the day before. Elizabeth was at first rather slow, but the others worked quickly, and by dinner-time they had each finished a mat several feet square.

"You two have quite outstripped me," said Elizabeth as they returned to the boat. "I'll go on with my mat after dinner, while you see what you can do to make some fishing-tackle."

"Right!" cried Tommy; "you shall have fish for supper, if you're good."

They dined on bananas and coffee, ruefully noticing that the tin of condensed milk was nearly empty. Then Mary and Tommy went up the stream to a place where they had seen a clump of canes, which would furnish any number of fishing-rods. They selected one about six feet long, and after a good deal of trouble, the wood being tough, cut it down. Tommy brought out of her pocket two or three pieces of string of unequal length and thickness, and knotted them together.

"There's our line," she said, "and it's lucky there's no one here to laugh at it."

"How can we fasten it on to the rod?" asked Mary.

"Tie it, of course."

Tommy proceeded to tie the string to the thinner end of the rod.

"Oh, bother!" she said, "the cane's so smooth the string slips down every time. This won't do."

"Let's make a hole in the rod, and put the string through it," suggested Mary.

"The cane is sure to split if we try to bore a hole with a knife," said Tommy. "I know! There's a sort of spike in my knife. We'll make it red-hot, and then I dare say we can bore a clean hole."

They ran back to their little camp on the beach, where Elizabeth was still at work on her mat.

"How are you getting on?" asked Mary.

"Faster now," replied Elizabeth. "I shall beat you both soon."

They told her what they had done, and Tommy thrust the spike into the fire, which they never allowed to go out. Meanwhile, Mary hunted for something that would serve as a hook. She gave a cry of delight when she discovered a strong safety-pin; and Tommy having by this time bored a hole neatly through the cane, they very soon had their rough-and-ready fishing-tackle complete. It only remained to bait the hook. They found plenty of small shellfish clinging fast to the rocks on the shore, and they prised these up with their knives, and provided themselves with a number of the little molluscs. Thus equipped, they went along the shore in search of a spot that promised success. They were both excited—and Elizabeth was so much interested in the experiment that she laid down her mat and followed her sisters. After a little time they came to an irregular line of rocks running from the base of the cliffs towards the reef on which they had nearly struck on approaching the island. They had already observed that some of the rocks always stood above water, while others were sometimes submerged. These latter were easily distinguishable by the seaweed and the limpets with which they were covered. At the present moment the tide was going down, and the girls thought that they would have a good chance of catching some of the fish that had probably come up with the tide.

Accordingly, they made their way for some distance along the rocky barrier. The sea was pretty calm, owing to the protection of the reef; but every now and then there was a dash of spray over the rocks at the farthest end. Choosing a rock that was lashed by broken water on the seaward side, and had a deep calm pool on the landward side, they determined to try their luck.

"I can see hundreds of fish darting about," said Mary, peering into the pool as Tommy baited the hook.

"The more the merrier," said Tommy. "Look out, Bess, I don't want to hook you, dear."

The other girls gave Tommy a wide berth as she cast her hook, then came to her side and waited for the expected catch. She had not put on a float, declaring that any fish worth catching would soon make itself felt. But as she drew the line towards her she had no sense of weight or resistance; the hook came up with the bait untouched.

"They don't fancy it, apparently," said Tommy. "I'll have another try. Look out!" Again she cast the line, and again drew it in.

"I declare, the little wretches are nibbling the bait off under our very noses," she cried, as the hook passed through the clear water of the pool. "How disgusting!"

"Poor little things! why shouldn't they enjoy themselves?" said Mary.

"Oh! if you're going to talk like that, I've done," said Tommy, flinging down the rod impatiently.

Elizabeth picked it up.

"Let me try," she said.

She baited the hook again, but had no more success than her sister.

"It is exasperating," she said. "I'm surprised the fish here are so clever."

"You'd better have tried a bent pin as I suggested," said Mary. "You'd have caught some of those little chaps swarming there. The safety-pin is too big for them."

"Who wants little skinny things?" said Tommy. "I'd like a haddock or a cod. Let me try again, Bess."

Once more the hook was baited and let down. Again it was surrounded by a swarm of eager nibblers, and Tommy was on the point of drawing it back in disgust when suddenly the crowd of little fish parted and scattered in all directions, darting off like streaks of light. The girls held their breath as they saw a "whopper," as Tommy called it, come slowly towards the bait. It seemed to smell at it, moving round with flicks of its tail. Then it opened its mouth—and Tommy felt a tug on the line.

"Got him!" she cried triumphantly. "A monster, too."

The other girls watched her as she drew it in. She wasted no time in playing it, but simply hauled it up towards the rock. Bess stooped, and while Mary held her to prevent her from stumbling into the sea, she slipped her hands underneath the fish and jerked it out of the water.

"He's not such a monster after all," said Mary. "How deceptive the water is!"

The fish, indeed, was no bigger than a good-sized haddock.

"It is big enough to make us a good supper," said Elizabeth, "and I don't think we should try to catch any more now. They won't keep in this climate. Tommy can catch some every day if she likes."

"All right," said Tommy. "But, I say, I can't wait till supper-time. The look of the fish gives me an appetite. I vote we have it for tea. You're cook, Bess. I'll finish your mat while you're getting the fish ready."

This was agreed upon, and they returned to the camp. The two younger girls resumed the weaving, while

Elizabeth, using a flat stone as a kitchen table, set about cleaning the fish in a very housewifely manner.

All at once Mary dropped her hands and cried "Oh!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tommy.

"Suppose the fish is poisonous! Some are, you know."

"Goodness, yes! What can we do? We haven't a taster, like some old kings I've read about."

"Don't worry," said Elizabeth tranquilly. "We must have a change of food, and there's bound to be a little risk in trying new things. We'll cook it, and I'll eat a little. We shall soon know if there's any harm in it."

"Oh, no, Bess," said Mary. "Why should you take the risk?"

"Somebody must, and I'm the eldest—and the toughest, I expect, so that if it does make me ill I shall get over it sooner than you."

"And I did so want a snack!" sighed Tommy. "You won't eat much, will you, Bess? We couldn't spare you, you know."

"I'll be careful," said Elizabeth, with a smile. "It looks very tempting, doesn't it?"

"Don't, Bess; you make my mouth water," said Tommy. "How are you going to fry it?"

"I thought of boiling it in the kettle."

"I wouldn't do that," said Mary. "I don't care for fishy tea. It would take ages to get the taste out of the kettle."

"But I don't see how we can fry it without a frying-pan."

"Bake it," said Tommy. "Let's make an oven. I'll show you."

She ran to the beach and collected a number of stones, which she brought back and arranged in the shape of a small circle. Outside this she placed a second circle, and filled the space between the two with dried grasses, brushwood and twigs.

"Now, Bess," she said, "but a portion of the fish in the inner circle. Then we'll set light to the fuel, and cover it all over with stones, and the fish will bake in no time."

"But it will be smoky," protested Mary.

"Not if we wrap it in leaves. Let's try, at any rate; if it doesn't succeed we shan't have spoiled much."

The fish was wrapped in leaves as Tommy suggested, and placed on a stone in the midst of the small circle. Then, having pressed the fuel firmly together so that it should not burn away too quickly, Elizabeth kindled it from the fire, and covered it with stones, leaving a few spaces for the passage of air. They were so much interested in their experiment that they sat idly about the novel oven, waiting until the fish should be cooked. Every now and again Tommy would lift off one of the stones to see how the cooking was proceeding.

"The leaves are turning brown," she would say delightedly. "And what a lovely smell!"

After about a quarter of an hour they removed the stones and the wrappings, and Elizabeth declared the fish was done.

"It doesn't look so nice as if we'd had egg and bread-crumbs," she said, "but we must do without those luxuries."

She tasted a small portion.

"Very nice," she said, "in spite of no salt or pepper."

"Don't eat too much," said Mary anxiously.

"I must give it a fair trial. Make the tea, Tommy, will you? A cup of tea will qualify the poison if there is any."

"What a nerve you've got!" said Tommy admiringly.

Soon all were drinking tea, and the younger girls munched bananas, while Elizabeth ate a few small pieces of the baked fish. They watched her with anxiety mingled with envy.

"Really, you mustn't eat any more," said Tommy at last. "Now rest against the side of the boat." She placed a shawl behind her sister's head, and covered her feet with her macintosh.

"Any one would think I was an invalid," said Elizabeth, laughing.

"It's nothing to laugh at," said Mary severely. "You may be very ill by and by."

"Meanwhile put the rest of the fish where the flies and insects can't get at it," said Elizabeth. "There's a nice little hollow in that rock over there. Cover it with leaves."

This done, they sat one on each side of Elizabeth, propping their chins on their hands, and gazing at her with mournful interest.

"This is *too* absurd," said Elizabeth, after a few minutes. "Let us get on with our hut. I can't stand being stared at like this. Come along, girls. We must cut down some more canes to make walls; I'll show you what I mean."

They went up-stream to the clump of canes, and, selecting some of the longest, proceeded to hack them down with their knives—no easy task, for the longest canes were also the thickest. But after a little trouble they got three or four that Elizabeth thought would answer her purpose, and took them to the site chosen for the hut. Here they laid the canes across the projecting branches of the three trees, binding them firmly in place with strong tendrils of a creeping plant. After an hour's work all the canes were in position, forming a kind of framework for the roof.

"Now all we have to do is to cover this with matting, and our roof is finished," said Elizabeth. "We shall have to get some more canes to stretch matting on for the walls, and as we have used up nearly all the grasses we collected, we had better go at once to get some more ready for to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried Mary. "I'd forgotten! Do you feel quite well, Bess?"

"As well as possible."

"How long is it since you ate the fish?" asked Tommy.

"More than two hours—long enough for the poison to act, I'm sure. So we may make up our minds that the fish is perfectly wholesome, and there's baked fish for supper for all of us to-night."

"Hurray!" said Tommy, beginning to dance. "Let's go and get the grasses; by the time we have got enough to make our mats it will be supper-time. Oh! I am so glad you are not ill, Bess."

They spent an hour or two in gathering grasses, and returned to their little camp shortly before sunset, in order to cook their supper before dark. Tommy ran to the hole in the rock where the fish had been left. A cry of dismay startled her sisters.

"What is it?" they cried, turning towards her.

"It's gone, every bit of it; oh, who has stolen it?"

She looked round with alarm in her eyes, and the other girls also glanced about them with consternation and anxiety. Was it possible that some one had been spying on them?

"I *did* see somebody that day," said Tommy in a whisper.

"But who would want to steal a bit of fish?" said Elizabeth, with practical common-sense. "If there are natives here, they could fish for themselves, I'm sure."

"There aren't any cats in these parts, are there, Mary?" asked Tommy.

"I never read of them. But—good gracious!" she cried suddenly, "there are the bones!"

She had looked a little farther into the hole than Tommy had done, and there lay the skeleton of the fish picked clean of every bit of flesh.

"I know what it is," she said. "It's a land-crab's hole, and the wretch smelt the fish, I suppose, and came out for a feast while we were busy."

"The mean thing!" cried Tommy. "And we shan't have any fish for supper after all. I'll serve him out."

She ran to the boat and brought back the boat-hook, with which she poked vigorously in the hole. In a few minutes a large crab came scuttling out, at the sight of which she picked up her skirt and ran away, not liking the look of his formidable nippers.

They supped as usual on bananas and tea, resolving to choose a safer larder when next they kept fish for a future meal.

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE BROWN FACE

"I say, my hair is in a terrible tangle," said Mary next morning, after they had bathed. "I wish we had a comb."

In the haste of their dressing, the last night on the *Elizabeth*, they had done up their hair anyhow, forgetting all about their combs.

"What do the South Sea natives do, Mary?" asked Elizabeth.

"I fancy I've read that they build up their hair into a sort of huge turban, with grease and things."

"Horrid!" said Tommy. "I vote we cut our hair short like a boy's; you've got a pair of scissors in your housewife, Mary. Then it won't bother any of us."

"I don't think that would be wise," said Elizabeth; "we might get sunstroke. As it is we are protected a little. I'm going to let my hair down. Perhaps we might make a comb out of a bit of wood."

"A long fiddling job that will be," said Tommy. "I'm going to catch a fish for breakfast, and if it's like the one I caught yesterday, take out the backbone and use that for a comb."

"That's rather an original idea," said Elizabeth. "Won't our hair smell fishy, though?"

"Not if we wash the bone and then dry it in the sun, I should think. Anyway, we can try."

The girls went off together to the rocks from which they had fished on the previous day. The first fish they hooked was of a different kind from the one whose wholesomeness they had proved, and Tommy threw it back into the sea, saying that she could not wait while another experiment was being tried. After a time she landed one of the right sort, and this, when baked, made a capital breakfast for them all. No biscuit remained, and Tommy sighed for bread and butter; but they enjoyed the change of fare. They washed the skeleton as Tommy had suggested, and set it to dry in the sun. Then they resumed their weaving. Elizabeth made some rough measurements, and found that a great deal more matting was required than they anticipated, so that several days must pass before they could begin the actual building of the hut.

Mary and Elizabeth had both set their watches by the sun, and so were able to tell with reasonable accuracy the time of day. But they had not kept count of the days as they passed, and now Elizabeth suggested that they should each morning cut a notch in one of the trees to serve as a calendar.

That night they tested the comb of fishbone. Mary's hair was the finest, and she managed to comb out its tangles fairly well; but when Elizabeth tried to do the same with her thicker and stronger locks, several of the bones snapped off, and it was clear that a new comb of this sort would be needed every day. She reverted, therefore, to her idea of trying to make a wooden comb; and during the next few days, Mary, who had had some practice in fretwork at home, worked with her knife at a thin fragment of wood.

It was a difficult task. She found herself quite unable to make the teeth equal in size, or equal in distance from each other. But she persevered, and on the third evening after starting the work she showed the comb to her sisters.

"Well, it's half-way between a curry-comb and a garden rake," said Tommy, with a laugh. "But I dare say it's better than fish-bones. Let me have first go on my thatch."

She began to operate upon her hair, a little yell every now and then proclaiming that the teeth had "caught." But all the girls voted that it was better than nothing, and they used it in turn every morning and night.

When there were six notches on the tree, Elizabeth said that she thought there was enough matting to complete the walls of the hut, so they carried their handiwork up to the knoll. Tommy climbed into the trees, and fastened the

upper edges of several mats to the overhanging boughs, while the other girls stuck a double row of canes into the ground, one inside and the other outside the matting, to keep it steady. The various strips of matting had to be sewn together, and at these places an extra long cane was introduced, to which the mats were fastened by means of thin flexible tendrils. A day's work sufficed to complete three walls; the fourth side, facing the sea, was left open.

It now only remained to complete the roof. Next day the girls added other canes to those which they had already laid across the branches, until they formed a close lattice-work. This they covered with matting, and then deliberated whether to finish it off with thatch. As children they had often helped the thatchers at the farm, so that they would not find any difficulty in the work; but they guessed that in so warm a climate thatch would harbour insect pests of all kinds, and they did not feel comfortable at the thought of having such house-mates.

"Still, I think we must chance it," said Mary. "There's one thing to be said, and that is, that the whole contrivance is so slight and simple that we can make it all over again if necessary."

"That's all very well," said Tommy, "but we aren't spiders, and I shall be pretty mad if there's all this work to do again. I'd rather do something fresh."

"We haven't found much else to occupy us so far," said Elizabeth. "Anyway, we won't ask you to do the repairs, Tommy, if you don't like it."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," said Tommy at once; "I'll do my fair share, but I know I shall get a bit ratty if a silly old storm knocks our nice hut to pieces."

The thatching occupied two more days, and then the girls looked with a great deal of pleasure on their neat little hut.

"But we haven't done yet," said Elizabeth. "The thatch will protect us from any ordinary rain, but we're still liable to be swamped by water running down the hill behind. We had better scrape out a trench all round, to carry the water down to the shore."

This proved the hardest part of the work. They had no tools except their knives and the boat-hook, and with these to cut a trench deep enough to be effective was very trying to their patience. Such continuous plodding work did not suit Tommy's restless, active temperament at all, and she would constantly jump up and run off to the beach, or to the edge of the wood. At such times Mary was inclined to be impatient and reproachful, but Elizabeth said that they mustn't expect too much from Tommy.

"She's very young, you know, and it's really wonderful how her spirits have kept up so well. She's more nervy than we are, Mary, and I am always afraid she will break down."

So neither she nor Mary said anything to Tommy about her fitfulness, and Tommy herself always came back repentant after these little absences, and worked away hard until the next fit of restlessness overtook her.

To give her a change from scraping away at the trench, Elizabeth suggested that she should make a mat curtain for the open side of the hut.

"We don't want a door," she said, "but a curtain will be useful at night. Leave a little space between it and the roof for ventilation. We can fasten the two lower corners to the canes."

Tommy set about this task willingly, and had the curtain fixed by the time the trench was finished. The hut was now complete so far as its exterior was concerned; it had taken more than a fortnight altogether. What they had now to consider was the internal fittings. Tommy laughed when this was mentioned.

"We can't get a bedroom suite, even on the hire system," she said. "I suppose you'd call it a bed-sitting-room, wouldn't you?"

"Let's call it 'Our Flat,'" suggested Mary.

"The best flat that ever was," said Tommy. "No botherations from unpleasant neighbours—at least, I hope not."

"We certainly shan't have a tiresome piano going next door," said Elizabeth. "I think 'Our Flat' is a very good name. What a pity we haven't a table and pen, ink and paper!—then Mary could write a diary of our doings."

"With moral reflections," added Tommy. "'To-day our youngest sister refused to wash up; how sad to see such a selfish spirit in one so young!' That's the sort of thing, isn't it, Mary?"

"I shouldn't write anything of the sort," said Mary indignantly. "You haven't refused to wash up, and if you did, do you think I should tell it?"

"My dear, you are perfectly killing," said Tommy. "Do you think you'd get your old diary published? No one would read it if you did."

"We're talking nonsense, aren't we?" said Elizabeth. "There's no chance of any of us writing a diary. Let's be practical. The only furniture we can supply ourselves with is—beds."

"More weaving?" cried Tommy. "Oh, I am so sick of it, Bess. Can't we sleep on the ground?"

"I don't think we'd better; we might get rheumatism, though to be sure the ground seems dry enough at present. But I own that weaving mats day after day is rather tiring, so shall we leave it for the present, and still sleep in the boat? What do you say to doing a little more exploration?"

"Yes, why not?" said Tommy eagerly. "We haven't seen a soul—since I saw that figure move along the top of the ridge, at any rate; and I dare say that was an animal of some kind. I don't think there are any people here at all."

"There may be some on the other side of the ridge," said Mary.

"Well, if there are, they must be a very unenterprising lot," said Tommy. "Let's follow up the stream to its source. I've never seen the source of a river, and that'll be geography, won't it? Besides, our bananas will soon be all gone, and we ought to look for some more; we can't live on nothing but fish."

"Very well; we will do as you say," said Elizabeth. "It's very hot to-day, so we'll cover our heads with leaves; it's just as well to take precautions."

Shortly afterwards they set out, carrying the oars and the boat-hook as weapons of defence. Although they had gained confidence from never having seen any human being, as soon as they had walked beyond the limit of their previous excursions they felt something of the old timidity, and spoke only in whispers.

"Our flag is still flying," said Tommy, as they came to a spot whence they could see the tree she had climbed on their first day on the island. "Evidently no one has seen it or thought it worth noticing."

"That's a consolation in one way," said Elizabeth. "These South Sea Islanders have canoes, haven't they, Mary? We haven't seen any, which is a negative proof that our island isn't inhabited; but if any people from another island happened to have come this way, they would almost certainly have noticed our flag, and perhaps come to see what it meant."

They were following the course of the stream. It zigzagged about a good deal, at first through a fairly thick belt of woodland, then through a comparatively clear space of a few hundred yards, then into woodland again, always narrowing. They were still some distance below the crest of the ridge when they came to a small swamp, beyond which there was no stream.

"This must be the source," said Mary.

"How disappointing!" said Tommy. "I wanted to see a nice little spring, with beautiful clear water bubbling up. This swamp is simply horrid."

"There must be a spring somewhere in the swamp," said Elizabeth, smiling. "But it isn't worth while to hunt for it, even if we could find it. The stream is certainly prettier lower down. Let's go on; we are not very far from the top, and we might be able to get a good view from there—see the whole of the island and the sea beyond."

"I feel quite like a discoverer," said Mary. "Can't you imagine how Drake must have felt when he first caught sight of the Pacific?"

"You romantic old dear!" cried Tommy. "I don't care a bit what Drake felt; all I hope is we shan't wish we hadn't come."

They went on quietly, feeling a little nervous. The ground here was bare except for a few shrubs, and they drew their breath more quickly as they mounted the slope. At last they reached the top. One and all gave a sigh of disappointment. Directly in front of them, to the north, was a second ridge higher than the one on which they stood. But on every other side there was a fine view. To the south the land fell away rapidly towards the sea, of which they caught a glimpse over the tree-tops nearly a mile away. To the west, the direction from which they had come, the sea was much farther off. To the east there was a gradual slope downwards into a country for the most part densely wooded, but here and there showing traces of clearings natural or otherwise. The greatest extent of land seemed to be to the north-east, where the sea was much farther remote than it was on the west. None of the girls had any experience in judging distances, but they saw that the island was longer than it was broad, and that the greatest length was from north-west to south-east.

"Shall we go to the farther ridge?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes, let's," said Tommy. "There isn't a sign of a living creature; the island is just ours."

A thick belt of woodland separated the two ridges at the point where they stood, so they moved somewhat to the right to search for a more open way. All at once they came to a halt. A little in front of them was a pole, carrying what appeared to be the remains of a small flag. About fifty paces beyond it was another exactly similar; and then they saw that there were five or six altogether, extending along the crest of the ridge, all the same distance apart.

"I think we had better go back," said Mary, looking a trifle scared. "There are people after all."

Her sisters were equally disturbed at the sight of poles evidently erected by human agency. There was nobody to be seen, and from the appearance of the poles they were not attended to; the flags on them were the merest rags of coloured cloth. But the girls were not inclined to face any more discoveries. The bare possibility that there were savages on the island made them shiver. They paused for a few moments at the spot where they first caught sight of the poles, and then turned, intending to make their way in the direction of home.

Just then, however, Tommy caught sight of some bananas clustering thick a little way down the slope on the eastern side.

"I'm hungry," she said. "Those look bigger than what we have had. Couldn't we go and fetch a few?"

The clump of trees lay on the slope below the line of poles, a good distance away from them.

"It's rather silly to be scared so easily," said Elizabeth. "There isn't a sign of anybody; I think we might venture. We must find a new supply."

They moved quickly down towards the trees, listening, peering about them, ready to fly at the least alarm. But when they came to the trees they felt that they had the reward of courage, for there, within a short distance of them, was a sight that made them gasp with surprise and delight. Beside the stumpy, long-leaved banana-trees, there were other trees glittering with green and yellow fruit and with white blossom. The laden boughs bent down invitingly, and beneath them the golden globes of fallen fruit glowed amid the grass.

"Oranges, I declare!" exclaimed Mary.

"How lovely!" cried Tommy, forgetting all her fears, and running forward to pick an orange from the ground.

Her sisters followed more leisurely, but before they reached her Tommy suddenly uttered a cry of terror. The orange she had taken fell from her hand. The other girls ran to her side and found her pale with fright.

"There!" she said, pointing towards a clump of hibiscus.

"What is it, dear?" asked Elizabeth.

"In the bushes—a little brown face!" whispered Tommy, with trembling lips.

CHAPTER X

ANXIOUS DAYS

For a moment, under the shock of the startling piece of news, Elizabeth was tempted to seize her sisters by the hand and run. Tommy was so practical and unimaginative a young person that she could hardly have been altogether mistaken, and a "little brown face," if face it was, must belong to a native. But Elizabeth thought quickly, and even while her heart was galloping with nervous excitement, she made up her mind that to run away now was not the right course. A show of bravery was much more likely to serve them. If there really was a native in hiding, he would certainly have seen them, and to run or slink away now would merely provoke pursuit, in which the fugitives would be at a great disadvantage. Summoning all her courage, therefore, Elizabeth advanced towards the bush to which Tommy had pointed.

"Don't go, Bess," implored Tommy in an agitated whisper, and Mary, as pale as a sheet, put an arm about the younger girl.

Elizabeth went straight on, looking carefully around.

"Is this it?" she asked quietly, turning towards her sisters, now several yards distant.

Tommy merely nodded; Mary murmured, "How *could* she do it?"

Elizabeth peered into the bush. There was no little brown face now, nor, though she went to and fro amongst the trees beyond, could she see any one, brown or white, lurking. She listened as the thought struck her that it might have been a monkey, and she had heard monkeys screaming and chattering in the Zoological Gardens in London; but there was no sound, not even the twitter or squawk of a bird.

Brave as she was in outward mien, Elizabeth, after a few minutes' search, returned with hasty step to her sisters.

"My silly heart!" she said, with a faint smile, placing her hand to her side. "I couldn't see anything. Tommy; don't you think you may have imagined it?"

"Just as you did before," added Mary.

"I didn't!" cried Tommy. "Why won't you believe me? I *did* see a brown face; I am sure I did."

"It is very strange," said Elizabeth. "We were here only a few seconds after you cried out; there wasn't much time for any one to get away."

"You are both horrible," said Tommy, her lips quivering. "Any one would think I was a fool. I'll prove that I was right, whatever happens."

With the courage of indignation she pulled Elizabeth towards the clump of bushes, and began to examine the soft mossy carpet.

"There!" she cried triumphantly, yet fearfully, pointing presently to a mark on the ground. Elizabeth stooped and made out two or three faint impressions of a foot smaller even than Tommy's. And then Tommy's fear returned in full force. With a little cry she dragged Elizabeth from the spot, and since nothing is so catching as fear even Elizabeth's courage gave way, and soon all three girls were running as hard as they could run towards the stream, and did not halt until they came to the boat.



"'THERE!' SHE CRIED TRIUMPHANTLY, YET FEARFULLY."

"THERE! SHE CRIED TRIUMPHANTLY, YET FEARFULLY."

"Oh, dear, how ashamed I am!" panted Elizabeth, as they threw themselves down on the sand to rest.

"You were very brave," said Mary. "I couldn't have gone into those bushes for anything."

"Perhaps they were marks of a monkey's feet," said Elizabeth. "How silly I was not to examine them more closely."

"They weren't," said Tommy. "I saw them quite plainly. They were feet just like yours and mine, only tiny, wee things."

"I wonder if the people here are dwarfs," said Mary. "There must be people. That's certain now."

"If they are dwarfs they must be more afraid of us than we are of them," said Elizabeth.

"Impossible!" said Tommy. "I was never in such a fright in my life. Oh!"

"What is it?" asked Elizabeth, with an anxious look around.

"The oranges! we haven't got any, and I shall be afraid to go there again."

"That's a pity," said Elizabeth; "they looked so nice. Perhaps we can find some in another part of the island."

"I won't look for any," said Tommy. "I won't stir from this place—at least not farther than to the bananas, and they're nearly all gone. What if the savages come and attack us?"

"Some of them have poisoned arrows," said Mary, quaking.

"Really, I think we are crying before we are hurt," said Elizabeth. "We haven't been molested so far, and surely that proves that whatever people there are, they are not very terrible."

"I know I shan't sleep a wink to-night," said Tommy.

"Hadn't we better launch the boat and spend the night on the sea?" said Mary. "They might attack us in the darkness."

"We'll drag it down a little nearer the sea," replied Elizabeth, "and we can take turns to keep watch, if you like; but I'm sure we oughtn't to show the white feather. The best thing we can do is to forget all about it."

"It's easy to say, but I know I shan't forget it as long as I live," cried Tommy. "And we were so jolly; it's all spoilt."

"Well, we *must* eat," said Elizabeth, afraid of a breakdown. "Let us cook some fish, and be as comfortable as we can."

They spent the rest of that day in a state of nervousness, and although Elizabeth tried to get the others to begin weaving their mat beds for the hut, they had no heart for the work. When darkness fell, they drew the boat down to the very verge of high water, and lay in it, but not to sleep. They had arranged that each should take a turn at keeping watch, but the result was that all were wakeful, and except for a few minutes' uneasy dozing, none of them had any rest.

"This will never do," thought Elizabeth as it drew towards morning. "We shall all be worn out if we don't get our proper sleep. I do hope the natives will come to us to-morrow so that we can make friends with them."

They all looked very weary and washed-out when daylight came. There was no fish left, and Tommy seemed disinclined to try to catch any, or to go to the banana-trees for food.

"Come, girls, this really won't do," said Elizabeth briskly. "Make some tea, Tommy, while Mary and I go and get a fish."

"There's only enough for about a cup each," said Tommy, looking dolefully into the caddy.

"We shan't get any more by wishing for it," said Elizabeth, "so we'll use it all up and then try to make a sort of cider out of bananas. It will be a change."

"There are hardly any bananas left, either," said Tommy.

"Then we'll go prowling in search of more as soon as we really come to the last of them. Come along, Mary."

"Don't go out of sight, will you?" said Tommy, as they moved away.

"Of course not, we shan't be long."

"I wish we had a change of things, Bess," said Mary, as they hastened towards their fishing rock. "Never in my

life have I worn my underwear so long; it's horrid."

"Why shouldn't we have a washing-day?" said Elizabeth. "It will be a novelty, and give us something to do and think about. Rather fun too, with no soap. How can we manage?"

"I've read somewhere that the women in the East wash their clothes by beating them in a running stream with stones," said Mary. "The stream and the stones are handy; we might try that plan."

"Don't the stones knock holes in them?"

"They use flat, round stones, without sharp edges, I think. It will be rather fun to try, anyway. I hope the savages won't come, Bess."

"Do you know, I'm not at all sure that it wasn't the footprint of a monkey or some other animal. It was so very small. I'm not going to think about it. We'd better go on in our ordinary way without troubling; only for Tommy's sake we won't go far from home, for some days at any rate."

They returned with two excellent fish. Elizabeth at once told Tommy of their idea of a washing-day, and, as she hoped, the young girl was so much amused at the novelty of it, that she forgot her alarms for a time. After breakfast they took off their things and donned their dressing-gowns, as Tommy called their macintoshes; and having gathered each a smooth, round stone, laid their linen in the stream at a place where it ran over level rock, and began merrily to pound away. When they had given the clothes a thorough good drubbing, as Tommy worded it, they laid them on the grass in the sun, and within an hour they were quite dry.

"My word! don't they look nice?" cried Tommy in delight. "Old Jane—poor old thing—never got them white at home, did she? We must have a weekly wash, girls; it's great fun."

"There's another thing we might try," said Elizabeth. "I haven't got used to eating fish without salt, yet. Couldn't we make some by evaporation?"

"How would you do that?" asked Tommy.

"Put some sea-water in our cups, and let it evaporate. It would soon do so in this heat, and leave the salt at the bottom."

"H'm! it sounds all right," said Tommy, "but I doubt whether we should get enough salt to put on a bird's tail. Let's try."

They half filled their three cups from the sea, and put them in the full glare of the sun. Every now and then Tommy ran to them to see how they were getting on, every time becoming more sceptical of success. There was still a good deal of water in the cups at nightfall; but, as Mary said, that didn't matter much, as they had used up all their tea, none of them liking coffee at night; so they left the cups as they were, to evaporate the rest of the water next day. When the cups were at last dry there was no appreciable sediment, and Tommy with great scorn pronounced the experiment a failure.

"The cups don't hold enough," said Mary. "What we want is a large shallow pan, and as we haven't got one, I'm afraid you'll have to go without salt, Bess."

But a day or two after, Elizabeth discovered a wide shallow depression in a rock a little distance above high-water mark.

"This will do for a pan," she said. "We'll fill it with sea-water with our cups, and keep on filling it up as the water evaporates. Then we'll see, my dears."

They followed this plan for several days, and at last were able to collect a fair quantity of salt.

"It isn't table salt, to be sure," said Elizabeth, looking at the dirty-grey powder, "but it is certainly salt enough for anything, and this quantity will last for a week at least."

"We are getting quite clever," said Mary. "I dare say we shall be able to make quite a lot of things by and by."

During these days they had seen no more signs of inhabitants, and their nervousness partially wore off. They were still careful, however, not to stray far beyond the immediate neighbourhood of their camp, and slept every night in the boat, which they left close to the brink of the sea. They devoted a good deal of time to weaving grass mats for the floor of their hut, but had not as yet plucked up courage to spend a night in it. With the boat as a refuge they felt a certain sense of security, though they admitted, when they talked about it, that it would not really be of any great service if they were attacked; for they could only escape by embarking, and then to drift on the sea out of reach of food was a terrible fate to look forward to.

One day, when Mary had been out to gather bananas, she came back with the news that she had gathered the very last one, so that they were faced with the immediate necessity of finding another food supply.

"We must take our courage in both hands," said Elizabeth, "and revisit the land of plenty beyond the ridge."

"Don't let's go near the orange-trees," said Tommy anxiously. "Couldn't we try a little to the left? There will surely be some fruit of some sort in other parts."

"I don't see why not," said Mary. "I don't want to go there again, either, in case you were right."

"Of course I was right," declared Tommy. "You aren't going to make out again that I can't believe my own eyes!"

"We'll try another direction," said Elizabeth, anxious to keep the peace. "Let us go northward along the shore. We have never really explored the coast of our island yet."

Accordingly, after breakfast, they set out. There was a long stretch of beach strewn with boulders which had apparently fallen from the cliffs. These rose higher as they proceeded, and jutted out to within twenty or thirty feet of high-water mark. By and by they reached a point where the huge rocky obstacles made further progress impossible. Retracing their steps, they clambered with some difficulty up the face of the cliff, and at last gained the high land above.

All this time they moved very cautiously, careful to make no more noise than they could help, and always on the look-out for danger. But the silence was broken only by the chatter of birds, the warbling of a blackbird now and then, and the harsh screaming of the parrots in the woods, that extended almost to the verge of the cliffs.

"I should like to catch and tame one of those beauties," said Tommy. "Perhaps I might teach him to talk, and that would be a change, wouldn't it?"

"I am sorry we bore you," said Mary. "Wouldn't it be better to find your savage and teach him how to keep up an amiable conversation?"

"Don't be sarcastic; it doesn't suit you," said Tommy cuttingly, and again Elizabeth had to intervene.

"We came out to look for food," she said smoothly, "and I think we had better not think of anything else."

Mary and Tommy separated, and went off at a little distance by themselves, looking among the trees and shrubs for fruits or berries that might seem edible. For a time none of the girls saw anything that appeared promising, but presently Mary called out quite excitedly—

"Here, Bess, I'm sure this is the breadfruit tree. Come and look."

Then, frightened by the sound of her own voice, she suddenly became aware of her indiscretion, and ran fleetly to join Elizabeth.

"You idiot!" said Tommy in a fierce whisper, as she came up with the others.

They stood listening for a while, wondering whether Mary's exclamation had attracted the attention of some

inhabitant. But, reassured by the absence of any sign of danger, they hastened to inspect the trees upon which Mary had lighted. Elizabeth noticed that Tommy, who would have died rather than apologize, had slipped her hand into Mary's in token of regret for her sharp speech.

They found themselves in the midst of a little grove of trees, about the size of small oaks, but with much sparser foliage. Peeping out from among the long, indented leaves were several large round fruits with a crinkly rind.

"I know they are breadfruit," said Mary gleefully. "Don't you remember the pictures in that book of Captain Cook's voyages?"

"Let's peel one and see how it tastes," said Tommy.

"You wouldn't like it better than raw dough," said Mary. "It has to be cooked first."

"Bother! You know I don't like cooked fruit. It isn't a fruit at all if you can't eat it raw; it's a vegetable."

Elizabeth smiled at this ingenuous distinction.

"Let us take one each and go and try them," she suggested. "If they are really anything like bread we shall enjoy them, I know."

Laden with the fruits, they returned to their camp.

"Pity the place is so far from home," said Mary. "We must have come more than a mile, I should think."

"If we are satisfied with our bread we might come again and gather a good load that will last some time," said Elizabeth.

When they reached home they lost no time in stripping off the thin rind of one of the fruits, and found beneath it a white doughy substance something like new bread. Tommy could not forbear tasting it, in spite of what Mary had said.

"What horrid, nasty stuff!" she exclaimed, making a wry face. "It's like—what is it like? Taste it, Bess."

Elizabeth pinched off a very small piece and ate it.

"It seems to me like sweetened flour with a smack of artichokes," she said. "I hope it is better cooked; scrape it all out, Mary, while I get the oven ready."

When the pulp was scraped out, Mary kneaded it into a flat cake and cut it into three equal portions. Elizabeth put them into the stone oven, and in about twenty minutes took them out, slightly browned, and smelling somewhat of new bread. Allowing them to cool, the girls each nibbled a little.

"Not half bad," said Tommy. "I suppose we'll get used to it, and like it better. I never liked carrots when I was a child, and I do now. If we only had some butter! Why aren't there any cocoanuts here, I wonder? They have milk, haven't they? If we had some we might make some butter out of the cream."

At this the other girls laughed outright.

"I'm afraid we shouldn't get much cream out of cocoanuts," said Elizabeth. "The milk is a sickly kind of juice, isn't it, Mary?"

"Yes; I had some once, long ago, when Father took me to the fair at Exeter. He knocked down the cocoanut at one of the shies. I didn't like the milk at all."

"We must eat our bread without butter," said Elizabeth. "I do hope, though, that we shall find more bananas, for I'm sure I shall soon get tired of the breadfruit. We must try another part of the island another day."

CHAPTER XI

A TROPICAL STORM

Two or three days passed without incident. The elder girls in their heart of hearts were becoming convinced that the footprints must have been those of an animal; but Tommy had shown herself so touchy on that point that they never told her what they thought. With the return of their confidence they began to think that they were punishing themselves by neglecting to use the hut, and one night they ventured to sleep in it for the first time, lying on their grass mats, with pillows of grass and dried leaves. They found their new quarters so much more easy and comfortable that they decided to use the boat no more as a bedchamber, and thought they had been silly in not deserting it before.

The hut was delightfully cool both by day and night. In the daytime they always lifted the awning facing the sea; at night they let it down at first, getting ventilation by the space beneath the roof; but as they became accustomed to their bedroom they left the opening uncovered at night also. Before turning in they would sit cross-legged just within the hut, gazing, most often in silence, over the wide expanse of sea, watching the stars as they came into the darkening sky, and thinking of their uncle and the friends at home. Uncle Ben was scarcely ever mentioned among them now. They could not bear to think that the dear old man was at the bottom of the sea, that could show such a smooth and smiling face, and yet behave like a treacherous, cruel monster. They scarcely ever dared to think of the future, for though they seldom missed a visit to the cliffs, from which they could look far over the sea, and though their flag was still flying from the tree, they had almost lost hope of being rescued, and could only live from day to day, killing thought by various little activities.

One day, for instance, Elizabeth suggested that as their hut was built and furnished, and they had little to do except fish and prepare their food, they might make themselves some new hats. The idea was eagerly taken up by the others. Each girl worked in her own way, plaiting lengths of thin grass, and Mary hit on a brilliant notion of making brims out of the large leaves from a kind of dwarf palm that grew plentifully in the neighbourhood. They fastened these together, and then to the grass crowns, by threading them in and out with the very fine tendrils of a creeper. When the hats were finished the girls had what Tommy called a mutual admiration meeting, and felt very proud of their Dolly Vardens.

A few days after the discovery of the breadfruit, they made a lengthy excursion along the southern shore. Here the woods were a good deal denser than in other parts, which was one reason why they had hesitated to explore them. But the cliffs were much less lofty than those on the north, and the girls easily climbed them, and penetrated for a short distance into the fringing woods.

They discovered several trees of kinds they had not seen before. There was one in particular that interested them by its fantastic shape; it was so odd-looking that Tommy dubbed it the clown of the forest; the real name, of which they were ignorant, was the pandanus. But the special reward of this expedition was the discovery of a thick plantation of bananas and oranges, quite equal to those they had seen on the dreaded eastern side of the ridge. They rushed upon the oranges that bestrewed the ground, devoured several, and filled their pockets with them. What with fish—they were expert fishers by this time—the breadfruit, and this fresh storehouse, they felt no more anxiety about food, and if only they could have lost their fear of possible wild neighbours they would have had nothing to trouble the serenity of their healthy life. But none of them was as yet ready to tempt fate again by crossing the ridge, and Elizabeth at any rate knew that while the greater part of the island was shut to them, they could never be quite easy in mind. She felt that the uncertainty was even harder to bear than knowledge would have been.

One day their peaceful existence was rudely disturbed, not by man, but by nature. The island was visited by a storm of quite extraordinary violence. The air had been for some time very oppressive, and the girls, feeling incapable of any exertion, were resting in the hut, when there came a sudden hot blast of wind straight in from the sea. They looked out. Vast lurid clouds were piling up; in a few seconds, it seemed, the sky became black, and huge waves broke over the reef, sending up mountains of spray. The wind tore through the woods, increasing every moment in fury. One terrible blast ripped the slight hut to fragments, and the girls had no sooner extricated themselves from the heap of tattered mats and broken canes that covered them, than a flood of rain poured upon them. They rushed away to the lee-side of a hillock, trying in vain to find shelter from the storm, and cowering in

terror as they heard peals of thunder, and then a tremendous crash as the tempest uprooted some great tree and dashed it to the ground.

Mary was always terror-stricken in a thunderstorm, and she clung half-fainting to Elizabeth, who clasped her close in a motherly embrace. Tommy, on the other hand, was perfectly fearless. She gazed at the boiling sea, and watched the lightning with a sort of fascinated admiration. She was almost sorry when the storm blew itself out after two hours of fury, and the sky cleared as rapidly as it had darkened.

"How lovely!" she said, dripping wet as she was. "Poor old Mary!"

Mary, indeed, was quite overcome, and it was some time before she was able to walk away. The tempest had left ruin in its track.

"The boat!" cried Elizabeth, suddenly remembering the little vessel, which, though it had been drawn up higher than when they slept in it, she feared might have been washed away. "We must leave you for a little, Mary. Walk about if you can, and let the sun dry your things."

Then she raced down to the shore with Tommy, and was horrified to discover that the boat had disappeared. The girls scanned the sea, which was still rough, but there was not a sign of it. They ran along the beach northward, hoping that the boat might have been cast up, and were rejoiced to find it about a quarter of a mile away, bottom upwards on a spit of sand. It was some distance from the sea, which, though it had evidently come much higher than usual, had now receded to within a little of high-water mark. The girls managed to right the boat, only to find, of course, that the oars were missing.

"How silly we were not to bring the oars into the hut along with the boat-hook!" cried Elizabeth. "The boat is perfectly useless without the oars, and we can't make new ones."

"Perhaps the tide will wash them up," said Tommy. "Help me up this rock, Bess; I'll see if they are in sight."

Mounted on the rock she scanned the surface, and after a time saw something bobbing up and down about a hundred yards out, and some way to the south of where she stood.

"There it is, I believe," she cried. "The sea is getting calmer now; shall I swim out for it?"

"You mustn't think of it," said Elizabeth. "I dare say the sea is full of sharks. I saw a fin yesterday when we were fishing."

"And you didn't tell me! I should love to see a real live shark."

Elizabeth smiled inwardly at this.

"But we must get the oar somehow, Bess. One would be better than nothing. And quickly, too. See, the tide is running out fast. And if the oar gets into the current that flows past the reef, it is good-bye for ever."

"I don't see how we can. We haven't a paddle of any kind. The boat-hook's no good. Wait, though; I wonder if we could get a branch of a tree. Stay here and keep the oar in sight while I run and look."

She ran up the cliff-side, which was covered with vegetation. The small trees had withstood the storm better than the large ones. Some were cracked and broken, but others had merely bent to the blast, while the ground was strewn with the more massive trunks, and with innumerable small branches and twigs. In a little while she came to a tree that had two boughs forming a fork, in shape like a boy's catapult. Catching hold of this, and straining upon it, Elizabeth managed to break it off; it had occurred to her that the fork might form the skeleton of a paddle. But time was too precious for her to attempt to make it by herself alone, so she ran with it to Mary.

"Quick, Mary," she cried. "Pull yourself together. We have found the boat, but the oars are gone, and one is floating out to sea. Help me to make a paddle, so that we can go after it. Get some creepers and some leaves as quickly as you can. I'll show you what I mean."

There was no lack of material close at hand, and they were soon busily at work making a sort of criss-cross lattice-work upon the fork, which they notched at intervals with their knives, to give holding to the tendrils. Having rapidly made their framework, they laid the leaves on it, and bound these on with more creepers. Before they had finished it as Elizabeth would have liked, they heard Tommy's shrill voice calling—

"Quick, Bess, the oar's going out fast."

Elizabeth jumped up, carrying the odd-looking paddle, which Tommy said was like a lacrosse stick. The oar was now out of sight, though Tommy could point to the spot where she saw it last. They launched the boat, and using the paddle as a stern-oar, Tommy employed all the skill she had gained by paddling the dinghy to and from the shore at Southampton. The paddle was a very poor thing; it bent a good deal, and some of the tendrils became loose, and hung about it like the string of an old cricket bat. But there was no time to stop and repair it, or the oar, which they now saw clearly, would drift past the reef and utterly beyond reach.

Elizabeth began to grow a little anxious in case they should find themselves adrift by and by with nothing better than the makeshift paddle, which would certainly not last more than a very short time. That would be a calamity indeed, for they might be carried far out to sea, and there was Mary alone on the island. But Tommy was working so energetically that the distance between the boat and the oar was fast lessening, and Elizabeth, raising herself in her seat, suddenly caught sight of the second oar not far beyond the first.

"Let me take your place, Tommy," she said. "You must be tired."

"Not a bit. Besides, we'll lose time if we change, and perhaps upset. Stay where you are, Bess; I'll get that oar in a minute, and then we'll soon have the other one."

A few more strokes brought the boat within reach of the oar, and Elizabeth, bending over, drew it up. Then Tommy left the stern and both sat on the thwarts, pulling towards the second oar, which they overtook in a few seconds.

"We'll keep the paddle as a memento," said Elizabeth. "But look! What a terrible distance we are from the shore! Mary will be half frantic."

"It's lucky that we are inside the reef," said Tommy. "Already I can feel the current quite strong. We shall have to pull hard to get out of it!"

By this time Tommy was rather tired, but she would not give in. It was a long pull back, and at first it seemed impossible to draw the boat out of the current that was rapidly bearing it northward. But having now two good oars, they succeeded presently in getting back into calmer water. Then, turning the boat's head southward, they rowed more gently along the shore, and at last reached their own little harbour, where Mary was awaiting them.

"I *am* thankful you have got back safely," she cried. "When I saw you going so far I nearly went mad for fear you couldn't return."

"We must take care it never happens again," said Elizabeth. "We'll drag the boat up much higher this time, and if we tie the painter to a rock, or to a tree if there's one near enough, we needn't be anxious, and we'll certainly keep the oars in the hut."

"My dears, we haven't a hut," said Tommy. "We be three poor mariners—vagabonds, homeless, ragged and tanned. Who was that old king who sat himself down in a lonely mood to think, and watched a spider spin its web over and over again, and thought he couldn't let a spider beat him and at last beat all his enemies? Oh, dear, that's made me out of breath. Robert Bruce, wasn't it, Mary?"

"Yes; Mrs. Hemans wrote the poem. 'Bruce and the Spider,' it's called."

"I don't care who wrote it, only we've got to spin our web again. Oh, 'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly. 'Please 'm, where's the parlour?' says the fly. There, I'm a lunatic, but I feel so jolly at having caught those runaway oars. I say, are you dry? I am. That's one advantage of living in a tropical climate; if you get soaked you don't have to shiver while your things are dried at the fire. 'Homeless, ragged and tanned, who so contented as

I?" she sang, and Elizabeth, noticing the high spirits of her wild young sister, hoped that there wouldn't be a reaction, and that Tommy was not going to be ill.

CHAPTER XII

ALARMS AND DISCOVERIES

Contemplating the ruins of the hut they had built up with so much care, the girls felt a very natural chagrin. You have seen a child who has erected a fine house of bricks fly into a rage when the structure topples by its own weight, or at least look utterly woebegone, and leave the scattered bricks lying where they fell. Elizabeth Westmacott and her sisters felt very much the same disinclination to begin again. The site was a picture of disorder. Portions of the matting had been blown right away; other portions in shreds and tatters had found resting-places among the foliage of the surrounding trees and shrubs. Some of the canes of the roof dangled from the boughs, others littered the ground amid a tangle of creepers and leafage. No one could have supposed that only a few hours before the same place had been a model of neatness.

"It will take an age to tidy up," grumbled Tommy. "Is it worth while to bother about a hut again?"

"I don't like being without a roof over our heads," replied Elizabeth; "but we won't start yet if you don't feel inclined. Let us go and take a look round."

"We shall want some breadfruit for dinner," said Mary, "so we had better go that way. I dare say we shall find all we need on the ground."

They set off towards the breadfruit-trees. Everywhere there were signs of the violence of the storm, but they were surprised and interested to notice that the worst havoc had been wrought in almost a straight line across the island from south-west to north-east.

It was as though some huge giant had gone steadily forward wielding a monstrous scythe. The tornado had cut a clean path through the forest, leaving scarcely a tree standing over a wide space. Where there had been close, unbroken woodland was now a bare avenue, interrupted by the trunks of trees that had been thrown this way and that. Impressed as the girls had been with the fury of the tornado during the time of their exposure to it, its devastating power was brought home to them now much more strongly. They looked with awe upon its ravages.

"How thankful we ought to be that we were not in its direct path!" said Elizabeth. "A little more to right or left and we should have had trees crashing down upon us; we might have all been killed."

"It is a dreadful place," said Tommy, subdued and thoughtful. "Oh, Bess, shall we never be found and taken away?"

"We must hope on, dear. It will never do to get downhearted. While we are all well and strong we need not mind so very much, and a ship is sure to come this way some time or other."

"But it might pass us," said Mary. "I am sure our flag is blown away. Shall we go and see?"

"Hadn't we better fetch our breadfruit first, now we are in this direction?"

"Of course. We shall have to light another fire, too; ours is sure to be out."

They went on, and on arriving at the breadfruit plantation found, as they had expected, that the ground was littered with fruit, which was already being devoured by land-crabs, insects and birds. They picked up several that were in good condition, and retraced their steps towards the shore.

As they were passing through the fringe of woodland, Tommy stopped suddenly, and went down on her knees.

"Oh, do look!" she cried. "Here's a nest on the ground, and the dearest little white parrot you ever saw. Poor little thing! I think it has lost its mother."

The girls stooped to look at it, and Tommy put her hand into the nest. The tiny bird rustled in alarm, opening its

beak to let out a plaintive cry; but it was too young to use its wings, and Tommy took it up and held it gently.

"Its little heart is beating frantically," she said. "Let us take it back with us and try to rear it. You know I wanted one."

"Do you think we can rear it?" said Mary.

"It will starve if we leave it," replied Tommy. "I shall love to try."

The others agreed that there was no harm in trying, so Tommy carried it carefully back with her, now and then stroking the ruffled feathers. When they got to their camp she laid the bird on a bed of grass, peeled one of the breadfruits, and held a few crumbs of the pulp in the palm of her hand just below the parrot's beak. But it was too young, or perhaps too frightened, even to feed itself, and it would have fared ill had not its captor been a country girl and known how to deal with such an emergency. She had seen young birds fed by hand, and she at once cut a thin stick and sharpened its end, upon which she stuck a little bit of breadfruit. Then holding the bird in her left hand, she waited until it opened its beak to cry, and quickly slipped the food in. The little bird swallowed it greedily, much to Tommy's delight, and she went on feeding it until Elizabeth suggested that she would kill it with excess.

"The poor thing was hungry," said Tommy. "It's not nearly so much alarmed now. I shall keep it for a pet."

"You'll have to clip its wings, then," said Mary, "or it is sure to fly away as soon as it is strong enough."

"You do it, Mary. Be very gentle, won't you?"

"There's no need yet, perhaps," suggested Elizabeth. "Do it in a day or two when it has got over its fright. It would be just as well to put it in the boat while we are busy. You must take care not to overfeed it, Tommy."

After dinner they went first to the flag-staff. Not a shred of their scarves was left. As they had no material for making another flag, except their handkerchiefs, which they did not care to part with, and their wraps, which they could not spare, they had to give up for the moment any idea of erecting a signal. Then they hastened in the opposite direction, southward, to fetch bananas and oranges for the other meals of the day. A grave disappointment awaited them. There was plenty of fruit on the ground, but the trees themselves, standing in the direct path of the storm, had all been uprooted or broken off, so that when they had used their present supply they could obtain no more at this spot. It would be necessary to go once more in search of food, for they found the breadfruit too insipid to form their only vegetable diet. They knew the district between their camp and the ruined plantation; nothing edible was to be had there. The only other place where they knew that fruit existed was to the east, beyond the ridge; and even now they could not make up their minds to revisit the scene of their scare.

Next day, however, when Tommy had fed her bird and Mary had clipped its wings, and they had spent an hour or so tidying up the site of the hut preparatory to rebuilding, they set off again in a southerly direction, having resolved to extend their exploration within easy distance of the shore. Crossing the broad path of uprooted trees, flattened grass, and torn undergrowth, they found as they proceeded that the ridge hemmed them in, closer and closer to the sea. This was partly due to the curving of the shore, and partly to the diagonal lie of the rising ground. Little foothills of the ridge extended downwards towards the coast, forming ridges in miniature, cut here and there by streamlets.

On such expeditions Tommy almost always led the way, for her restless and active temperament was impatient of the sedater going of her sisters. But she never went far ahead, and every few minutes, as if alarmed at her own daring, she would run back and keep with the others for a time. She was thus a few yards in advance when, as she mounted a hillock, she came in sight of a number of trees clustering almost at the edge of the sea, and uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Oh, do look here!" she cried. "I believe we have come to some cocoanut palms. You remember we saw some at Valparaiso."

The others ran to join her, and Mary at once declared that she was right. There was no mistaking the tall, smooth stems with their feathery crowns. They all rushed forward eagerly. Thanks to the storm, there were several huge nuts strewn the ground around each of the trees. Tommy, who was first on the scene, picked up one of them

and turned it over in her hands in a puzzled way.

"Is it a cocoanut after all?" she said. "It's not a bit like those I have seen in shops."

"It's a cocoanut right enough," replied Mary. "But you've got to strip off the outer husk before you come to the nut itself."

Tommy whipped out her knife and began to cut away the coarse, fibrous covering. It was very tough, and she soon declared that it would never come off unless the others helped her. So they all knelt on the ground with the nut in the middle, and employed their knives energetically, until at last the husk was removed. The shell inside was ivory-white, very different from the old brown nuts they had been used to see in England. Being quite brittle, a small piece was easily cut off the top, and they saw the inside full of a pale, milky liquid.

"You first, Tommy," said Elizabeth. "You saw the trees first."

Tommy took a sip of the liquid.

"Delicious!" she said. "I don't think I ever tasted anything so nice."

She drank more, and, handing the nut to Mary, continued—

"It's sweet, Bess, and sour too, something like lemonade, only not like it. It's like—oh, I don't know what it's like; just itself, I suppose. Don't drink it all, Mary."

Elizabeth, when her turn came, pronounced it a very refreshing drink, and they were all delighted at so welcome an addition to their larder. They collected as many nuts as they could carry, and, returning to their camp, stored them in the boat. In the course of the next few days they went several times to the same place, until they had brought back all the nuts that lay on the ground. It was fortunate that so many had been thrown down, for they did not see how they could have obtained them otherwise. Even Tommy, the climber of the family, confessed that she would have been beaten by the smooth, straight stem of the cocoanut palm. Mary had a dim recollection of reading that the natives had a way of climbing the trees by means of a rope, but she could not remember the details of the method, and in any case, Tommy could hardly have used it successfully without a good deal of practice.

Once more relieved from anxiety about food, the girls devoted themselves industriously to the reconstruction of their hut. Their former practice made their task easier. In a few days the new house was finished, and they were especially glad of its shelter at night, instead of the cramping narrowness of the boat.

Days had lengthened into weeks. The notches on their calendar trunk told them how time was flying—a sad reminder in many ways. With so little to do they felt the hours hang heavily on their hands, though Tommy's parrot gave them a little amusement and interest. The bird had become quite used to its mistress, and had learnt to take its food from her hand. Its voice, not of very charming quality, as all confessed, grew stronger, and it became accustomed to give a quaint little scream whenever Tommy approached. She would set it on her finger and talk to it, using the same word over and over again, in the hope that it would by and by pick up a phrase or two. But although it became perfectly tame, it could never be induced to substitute civilized words for its natural scream and squawk.

"You little silly-billy!" cried Tommy one day, after an hour's patient instruction. "What's the good of you for a pet? There! Perch on my shoulder, and don't make such an idiotic noise, for goodness' sake."

Tommy at last gave up the attempt in despair; but she became very fond of the bird, and declared that when they were rescued she would certainly take it home with her.

It was wonderful how the hope of rescue never died. When each day ended without the sight of the longed-for vessel, they would say, "Never mind, perhaps it will come to-morrow." And when to-morrow had the same disappointment, there was still to-morrow. So they lived from day to day, veering from hope to despondency, and from despondency to hope again.

They had almost forgotten Tommy's fright. Surely, they thought, they must have seen some one by this time if the island was inhabited. Yet there was the same misgiving, the same disinclination to cross the ridge. Elizabeth

laughed at herself, and more than once said she really must break through her reluctance. But it ended there. Her heart failed her when it came to the point.

Easy though their life was, it had its discomforts. The breadfruit gave out, and having found no more oranges or bananas, they grew very tired of a diet of fish and cocoanuts. They had seen other fruits, and shrubs bearing berries that looked very enticing, but the fear of poison deterred them from trying anything that they did not know.

The want of a change of clothes, too, was a trouble to them, and their boots had become unwearable. They had often been soaked in sea-water, and then, drying in the sun, had cracked and become worse than useless. They got into the habit of going barefoot, except when they set out for a long walk. In the hut, and when walking on the grass, they were comfortable enough, but on rough ground they suffered a good deal at first. In course of time, however, helped by frequent soaking in sea-water, their feet became hardened, and they felt no inconvenience in going about unshod.

They had more than once noticed some very small bees, hardly larger than houseflies, flitting among the flowers. One day Elizabeth suggested that they should try to find out whether these Polynesian bees made honey, and if so, where it was. Tommy hailed the suggestion, and started at once to track the bees to their nests. For a long time she had no success. Only after many days did she, almost by accident, light upon a bees'-nest in a hole in the trunk of a tree. Informing her sisters of the discovery, she proposed that they should smoke the bees out.

They kindled a small fire at the base of the tree, immediately beneath the hole. When they thought they had allowed plenty of time for the smoke to stupefy the bees, they put on their macintoshes, pulling the hoods well down over their heads, and prepared to rifle the hole. It was so small that a hand could scarcely pass through it, and Mary suggested that they should enlarge it, so that they might see what they were doing. Accordingly they stripped off the bark round the hole, until it was much more capacious. Unluckily, the inrush of fresh air appeared to revive the little inhabitants, which darted out with fierce buzzings, putting the robbers to utter rout. They ran off with their heads down, waving their arms wildly to beat off the furious insects. Tommy got off scot free, but Elizabeth and Mary were stung slightly, and but for the smoking, which had not been wholly ineffectual, the bees would probably have hurt them severely.

"We won't be beaten by a parcel of silly bees," said Tommy, as they went home. "You aren't much hurt, are you?"

"I feel a burning spot in my cheek," said Elizabeth.

"And one of my fingers is swelling," added Mary.

"As we haven't any ointment, or anything, you'll just have to get well by yourselves," remarked Tommy. "You'll have another try, won't you?"

"Oh, yes! We'll give them a larger dose next time," said Elizabeth. "I think we ought to have some reward for our enterprise."

A day or two afterwards they visited the hole again. By means of a larger fire, fed with leaves that gave off a very pungent smoke, they managed to stupefy the bees thoroughly. When they examined the hole they were surprised to find, not large combs, as in an English hive, but a collection of bags of brown wax, about the size of a walnut, united in a regular mass.

"Fancy bees having foreign ways!" said Tommy. "I should have thought that bees were the same all the world over."

"I don't see why bees shouldn't be different, like people," said Mary. "They're very intelligent."

The others laughed at this curious reason for differences of habit. The honey, they found, was more fluid than they were accustomed to in England, and in taste and smell it was slightly scented. They took a good quantity home with them, but it did not go very well with fish, and even with cocoanuts it was a doubtful joy.

"If we only had some breadfruit, or even bananas, we should like it better," said Mary.

"We can only get those by going across the ridge again," said Elizabeth. "Shall we venture?"

"I won't," said Tommy decidedly. "I'm not going to be scared out of my wits for anybody."

"I'll go with you, Bess," said Mary, after a little hesitation. "It really is silly to be afraid of nothing."

But, as it turned out, the first of the three to brave the peril was, after all, Tommy herself.

CHAPTER XIII

LOST

That night, for the first time in their residence on the island, the girls were awakened by a patter of rain. Only once before had rain fallen, and that was during the tornado. Now the sound of it upon the thatch of the hut was very slight, but the girls slept so lightly that a whisper was almost enough to disturb them.

"I hope we are not in for another smash up," said Elizabeth, finding that her sisters were both awake.

"There's no wind at present," returned Mary. "Rain alone won't hurt us. I expect it's the rainy season beginning, and we shall have weeks of it."

"How disgusting!" exclaimed Tommy. "I always hated having to stay indoors, and it will be worse than ever here, with no cosy fire and nice story-book. What's the time, Bess?"

She leant over towards Elizabeth, who lay next to her, and showed a light with her match-lighter. Elizabeth looked at her watch, which she never forgot to wind.

"It's about four o'clock," she said.

"Time for another snooze before daylight," said Tommy, snuggling down again into her wraps. In a minute or two she was fast asleep.

The other girls remained wide awake, and talked quietly together.

"I wish we knew our whereabouts better," said Elizabeth. "If we only knew what those islands are that we have seen in the distance, we might perhaps row to one of them and find friends."

"Yes; of course there are missionaries," said Mary. "Don't you remember Uncle Ben told us of a friend of his who was returning to his station? What was his name, Bess?"

"I forget. We can't venture across the sea, can we?"

"Oh, no! There are thousands of islands, and I believe some have never been visited by white people at all. We might land among cannibals!"

"We are certainly better off here. I can't believe there are any people on this island, in spite of Tommy, or why haven't we seen something of them? We'll go to the ridge after breakfast, as we said, and settle the matter once for all."

"Supposing there *are* people?" said Mary.

"As I said before, I think we ought to try and make friends with them, and if they seem inclined to be unfriendly, perhaps we could make them afraid of us. Tommy's match-lighter would startle them, wouldn't it?"

"It might, but I don't like to think of having to rely on that sort of thing for our safety. They would soon find out our real weakness, and then—— Oh! I do hope we shall not see anybody. We should be so much more uncomfortable."

"Tommy's birthday is somewhere about now. We can't be quite sure of the date, because we didn't begin to cut notches at once; but we should be right within a day or two. The present she would like best would be some oranges from beyond the ridge, and certain news that the island is uninhabited."

"How strange it seems to hope that there are no human beings near us! Do you know, Bess, I think the people of these islands must be very melancholy."

"Why should you think that? I have always supposed them to be a happy, light-hearted folk, with not a care in the world."

"But they have nothing to do. Their food grows for them without work, and they don't need many clothes. They've no books to read, no amusements——"

"How do you know that?"

"Well, what amusements can they have? Isn't it only civilized people who play games?"

"I don't know. I seem to remember that even savages gamble, if that is amusement; it wouldn't be to me if I lost."

"Then you're no sport, Bess," said Tommy, who had awakened and caught the last few words. "It's the excitement they like, whether they win or lose. I should be a dreadful gambler, I know, if I had the chance."

"Then I hope you will never have it, dear," said Elizabeth. "It is an unhealthy excitement, I am sure. We were talking about your birthday, Tommy. It might be yesterday, to-day, or to-morrow, but you are fourteen. We'll wish you many happy returns now."

"Oh, I wish you hadn't reminded me," cried Tommy. "Think of being fifteen and sixteen, and twenty, and getting old on this island! I don't want to grow old at all, and it would be dreadful here. I'd be a scullery maid, or a beggar girl—anything in England, rather than stay here. Shall we ever get away?"

And Tommy nestled to Elizabeth's side, and as she lay encompassed by her elder sister's arms she prayed with all her heart that God would send help to them soon.

When dawn broke and they got up, it was a dreary world upon which they looked. Sea and earth were covered with a clinging mist. A drizzle was falling. Everything was sodden and forlorn. The fire was out, and there were no dry sticks for re-lighting it. They had to content themselves with a breakfast of cocoanuts, and then they sat inside the hut, too much depressed in spirit to go out, or do anything but watch the rain.

Presently the drizzle became a downpour, which, went on for an hour or two, then suddenly ceased, the sun bursting through the leaden sky. They took advantage of this to gather a quantity of twigs, which they carried into the hut to dry there. Elizabeth had just suggested that Mary and she should start on their expedition to the ridge, when a sharp shower drove them again to shelter. So it went on all day—heavy showers that lasted for a few minutes alternating with brief, bright intervals.

There was no doubt that the rainy season had begun. The girls were practically confined to the hut for many days in succession, only sallying forth to catch fish, which they cooked at a new stove built nearer the hut. The showers were sometimes light, sometimes very heavy, and at last the rain began to drip through the thatched roof, and the girls had to sit in their macintoshes. Though the sun appeared every now and then, it did not shine long enough to dry the ground before another downpour soaked it. They all became very low-spirited, and could not find any occupation to pass away the time, for even weaving was impossible with the sodden grass.

Their troubles came to a climax one day when Mary complained of a racking headache. Feeling her hot brow, Elizabeth feared she had taken a fever, no doubt owing to the exhalation from the damp earth working on a lowered system. She and Tommy felt much concern, which became real alarm when they found Mary rapidly becoming worse. She could not eat, and lay on her mat bed covered with the macintoshes and wraps of the other girls, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright and glassy. Towards evening, when Elizabeth had left the hut to fetch water for the night, and Tommy sat by the invalid, she was startled to hear Mary talking in a very strange way.

"No milk to-day—there's something wrong with Dapple—Jane, Uncle Ben's coming to-morrow. Don't forget the——" Then her voice died away into an indistinguishable muttering. Presently Tommy caught more phrases: "Oh, no, no! They'll eat us: don't let Tommy go. Bess! Bess! they're coming after me!—Dan will carry the luggage, Uncle!"

So she raved on, in her delirium babbling about the farm, the ship, her friends, a word every now and again

showing how much the fear of cannibals had occupied the background of her mind. Tommy was terrified. She had never seen any one delirious except her father just before he died, and she was smitten with an agonizing fear that Mary would not recover.

"Oh, Bess, she's out of her mind!" she cried piteously, as Elizabeth returned. "What shall we do?"

Elizabeth went quickly to the bed, dipped a handkerchief in the water she had brought, and laid it on Mary's fevered head.

"We must sit up with her to-night," she said. "Don't give way, Tommy dear. She will soon be better. The fever came on so suddenly that I am sure it is one of those sharp attacks that don't last long. But it will leave her very weak, and we must be very careful of her. I do so wish we had some oranges; the juice is so cooling."

But it was too late to think of looking for oranges, and they had to be satisfied with water and cocoanut milk, which they gave Mary in sips. All night long they remained at her side, watching her with distress as her teeth chattered as if with cold, and then next moment she tossed about on her little mat bed, and flung the macintoshes off as if she could not bear the heat. Elizabeth tried to induce Tommy to lie down for a little, but the young girl refused, saying that she could not rest until she knew that Mary was better.

"I will get some oranges to-morrow," said Elizabeth. "I am sure they will do her good."

Towards morning Mary dropped off to sleep, and then Tommy was persuaded to lie down. The sun had risen when she awoke to find Elizabeth still watching over her sleeping sister.

"I'll just run down to the stream and bathe my face," said Elizabeth. "She is still asleep. Give her a little water if she wakes; I shan't be long. Luckily, it's a fine morning."

She returned in a few minutes.

"Now you run down and wash, Tommy," she said; "it'll freshen you. I've put in some fish to bake for breakfast."

Tommy rose and left the hut. During Elizabeth's absence she had strung herself up to a great resolution. Mary must have oranges, but the one to fetch them should not be Elizabeth. She was so calm and steady and capable that she would do far better to stay and look after Mary. "I can be best spared," thought Tommy, "but I know Bess won't let me go if I propose it. I shall just do it without telling her. It won't take long to scamper to the orange grove and back again."

She had not forgotten her former fright; but she told herself that perhaps she might get to the oranges without being observed, and she was ready to do anything for Mary, of whom she was very fond, though they sparred sometimes. So, after bathing her face in the stream, she went to the stove and scratched on the sand in front of it with her knife the words, "Gone to the orange grove." Then, without waiting, for fear her courage failed, she ran swiftly along the bank of the stream, munching a piece of cocoanut as she went.

In the hut Mary had awakened perfectly sensible, and wondering why she felt so weak. Elizabeth bathed her face and hands, smoothed her hair, and having tried to make her a little more comfortable, gave her a drink of cocoanut milk.

"What's the matter with me, Bess?" she asked.

"You've had a touch of fever. You'll soon be all right again. I'm going to get you some oranges presently. You will enjoy them."

"Yes, I shall. Have I been ill long? I feel as weak as anything."

"Only one night, dear. We shall have to feed you up. You ought to have beef tea or chicken broth, of course; but we shall have to do the best we can. I think we must try to snare a bird of some sort."

"Where's Tommy?"

"Just run down to wash. I dare say she'll bring back the fish with her. I put some to bake. You could eat a little, couldn't you?"

"I'll try, but I don't feel much like eating. I want to go to sleep again."

And, indeed, in a few minutes she was sleeping. "The very best thing she could do," said Elizabeth to herself.

A quarter of an hour passed and Tommy had not returned. "I wonder why she is lagging," thought Elizabeth. She went to the entrance of the hut and looked down towards the shore. The trees hid the stove from her, and she did not call out for fear of waking Mary. She went back into the hut and sat down; but after five minutes, when there was still no Tommy, her vague wonder grew into a slight feeling of alarm. Seeing that Mary was still asleep, she went out again, and ran swiftly down towards the stove, glancing to the left with a half expectation of discovering Tommy fishing on the rocks. But Tommy was not in sight, and Elizabeth soon learnt why, as her eye caught the scribble on the sand.

"How plucky!" she thought. "But the child will be terrified before she gets there; I had better fetch her back."

But with a moment's reflection she saw that she could not expect to catch Tommy before she reached the top of the ridge. If there was any danger Tommy would have run into it by the time she could be overtaken. Mary was so weak that Elizabeth did not care to leave her for long; but she ran some distance up the stream, as far as the broad, bare avenue made by the storm, and then was on the point of giving a shrill call when she checked herself. The sound might cause the very harm she wished to avoid. Perturbed, and somewhat vexed as well, she hastened back, feeling that at present Mary must be her chief care. She reflected that, after all, though they had been now more than two months on the island, they had never met any other person, and had no real reason to think it was inhabited. Surely if the object Tommy had seen was actually a human being, they would by this time have had other evidence of his existence. Thus reassuring herself, she hurried back, took out of the oven the fish that was already over-baked, and regained the hut. To her great relief Mary was still fast asleep. Elizabeth dreaded the effect upon her if she suspected that anything had happened to Tommy.

As she ate her breakfast, reserving some of the fish for Tommy, she felt decidedly annoyed at the young girl's escapade. Tommy ought to have mentioned what she intended, thought Elizabeth. But Tommy had been from her earliest years impulsive and heedless, so that her present disobedience—for so Elizabeth had come to regard it, forgetting that no instructions had been given—was quite apiece with former instances. Then Elizabeth made amends to Tommy in her heart. "She has been very good all this time," she thought. "I do wish she would come back."

But the hours dragged by, and still Tommy had not appeared. Mary awoke, and looking round the hut, inquired again for Tommy.

"She has run up to get some oranges," said Elizabeth, as calmly as she could, though she felt very troubled.

"Tommy has?" said Mary, in surprise. "Gone alone to where she saw the face? Oh, you shouldn't have let her, Bess."

"I wouldn't have, only I did not know. She scrawled on the sand to say that she had gone. I suppose she thought I would make a better nurse than she."

"She's a dear, brave girl," said Mary, "and I shall like the oranges all the better."

Elizabeth got her to eat a little fish, cold as it now was, and presently she dropped off to sleep again. It was past dinner-time; the sun was very hot, and Elizabeth, thoroughly alarmed at Tommy's protracted absence, wondered if, after her trying night, she had been overcome by the heat, and was, perhaps, lying helpless somewhere. She felt that she must try to find her; so, slipping out of the hut, she ran as fast as her feet would carry her up through the woods, never pausing until she had crossed the ridge and come to the orange grove. She had looked about her as she ran, and, now regardless of consequences, had called Tommy several times, but she saw neither her nor any living person, and there was no answer to her calls.

At the grove there were oranges and bananas scattered here and there on the ground, so that Tommy's absence

could not be due to any difficulty in obtaining what she came for. And then Elizabeth's heart stood still as she noticed at one spot, a strange collection of objects. There were four or five oranges on the ground close together, and with them Tommy's knife, the little stick she had fed her parrot with, a piece of hair-ribbon, and a wedge of cocoanut. What had happened? These objects were obviously the contents of Tommy's pocket; why had she placed them there, and where was she? Had she been startled? Had some natives come stealthily upon her, and seized her? Would they not at least have taken the knife at the same time?

Elizabeth felt a shiver of fear, along with utter bewilderment. But she crushed down her uneasy imaginings and, placing Tommy's belongings in her pocket, began to search among the trees, shouting from time to time, no matter who might hear her. Suddenly her eye was caught by the flutter of a small coloured object at some distance among the bushes. With a thrill of hope she hastened towards it, but long before she reached it, she realized that her hope was vain; the object was only a bit of tattered cloth attached to one of the line of poles they had seen on their former visit. Retracing her steps to the orange grove, she went in and out among the trees, shouting Tommy's name again and again. Her distress at Tommy's disappearance was coupled with anxiety about Mary. It was now a considerable time since she had left the hut, and she felt that, with Mary so weak and helpless, she could not stay to search any longer. Thrusting a few oranges into her pocket for the invalid, she hastened back, conscious that she herself was weak and shaky. The long, anxious search in the fierce sunlight, following a sleepless night, had been almost too much for her strength.

She tried to enter the hut unconcernedly, with a dim hope that Tommy might have returned before her. Mary was awake.

"Why did you leave me?" she said, in the querulous tone of an invalid, her eyes filling with tears. "I've called and called for you and Tommy, but you wouldn't come. I am so miserable."

"Here are some oranges, dear," said Elizabeth gently. "I will squeeze the juice into a cup for you. It will do you good."

"Thank you so much. I'm a wretched bad patient, Bess dear, but I got it into my silly head that you had deserted me. Ridiculous, wasn't it? This is delicious. It was kind of Tommy to get them for me. Where is she?"

Elizabeth was in a quandary. Mary seemed a little better; her querulousness was a good sign; but it would not further her recovery to tell her that Tommy was missing. On the other hand, Elizabeth herself was so much distressed that she would have liked to pour out her troubles to a sympathetic ear. But she thought it best to keep the bad news to herself for the present, and said—

"She must have quite recovered her courage, and gone roaming. You are getting on, aren't you, dear?"

"Yes, only rather weak still. But these oranges are delicious. I feel much refreshed. Don't sit up with me to-night, Bess; I am sure I shall be all right, and you mustn't wear yourself out. Put some oranges near me, so that I can get one in the night without disturbing you."

She soon fell asleep again, and did not awaken until it was quite dark. She was careful not to disturb her sister, and so did not become aware until the morning that Tommy had not returned. Elizabeth had spent a sleepless night, and felt quite worn out when day broke. Mary was quick to notice her distress, of which she knew she could not be the cause, since she was so much better.

"You are hiding something, Bess. Tell me; has something happened to Tommy?"

Elizabeth, on the verge of a breakdown, was glad to pour out the whole story.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me before!" cried Mary. "You must go at once and look for her again. There is really nothing the matter with me now. Do, please, go, Bess. It is awful to think of what may have happened."

Hastily getting Mary a little food, Elizabeth set out for the orange grove, and searched it and the neighbourhood through and through, calling Tommy's name until she was hoarse. Once in response to her shouts, she thought she heard a faint cry, and hurried in the direction from which she supposed it to have come.

At that moment she felt that she would have welcomed the appearance of a native; the sight of any human face would have been a comfort. But her search was still fruitless; neither Tommy nor any one else appeared; and Elizabeth thought she must have been mistaken. The birds were trilling and chattering in the woods, and among so many sounds it was easy to deceive oneself.

At length, when she had been several hours absent, she felt that she must return in case Mary should be wondering whether she too had disappeared. She could hardly drag herself home. At the entrance of the hut she found Mary looking anxiously towards the ridge.

"You shouldn't have got up," she said. "Oh, Mary, I can't find her, and I am so tired."

For a moment it looked as if she would break down utterly, but she controlled herself, and in response to Mary's entreaty, lay down to rest. Fatigue even overcame her distress of mind, and for an hour or two she slept heavily. Then she awoke with a start, and declared that she must go and search again. Swallowing a little food, she set off, and thoroughly hunted over a wider area than before, not returning until the evening.

"It's no good," she said, despairing. "Poor Tommy's gone."

"Don't say so," said Mary. "You haven't seen any one, have you?"

"Nobody."

"Then she may only be lost. You know how venturesome she is, and having found no one to be afraid of perhaps she has gone right over the island, and sprained her ankle or something. Have a good sleep, Bess. Tomorrow we'll both go. I'm sure I shall be strong enough."

Next morning, after a breakfast of bananas and oranges—for there was, of course, no fish—the girls set off together. Mary, although a little "tottery," as she said, was able to walk slowly, and she declared it was much better for her to go too, than to remain at home wondering what was happening. Elizabeth had to support her, and she stopped for frequent rests; but they came at length to the orange grove.

"Now, I'll stay here," she said, "in the shade of the trees, while you go round and round; and if you don't find her here, go right over the ridge and cooee every few seconds. I won't stir until you come back."

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE PIT

When Tommy left the hut she ran with all the fleetness of her young legs up towards the ridge. All the way she said to herself, "I won't be afraid, I won't, I won't," keeping up her courage also with the thought of the surprise she would give her sisters when she returned laden with fruit.

The morning was somewhat misty, but the mist was not so thick as to hide the general features of the country. As before, she followed the course of the stream, and when she came to the swamp she turned to the right, and continued as nearly as possible in a straight line with the crest. Arriving at the top, she stopped for a few moments rather puzzled. The appearance of the country was unfamiliar; the spot she had reached was certainly not the place to which she, with her sisters, had come on the former excursion. It was clear that she had wandered somewhat from the proper route.

She went on, the very difficulty in which she found herself helping to strengthen her determination. There were trees on all sides, but for some time she discovered none that were bearing oranges. At length, however, as the mist lifted, she perceived some golden spots among the foliage, and ran towards them. She hoped that this was not the orange grove in which she had been so much frightened, and a return of her nervousness made her quicken her pace and gather, in a kind of frantic haste, a number of oranges that bespattered the ground.

In order to turn her journey to the utmost advantage she meant to fill her pocket with oranges and take as many as possible in her hands as well. But remembering that her pocket was usually full of all sorts of odds and ends, she knelt down to empty it and throw away what was useless, so as to have more room for the oranges. She had just laid on the ground her knife and a few oddments when, throwing in spite of herself a nervous glance around, she noticed a slight movement in the bushes on her right—the direction in which she had come. She could not help looking again, and then she sprang to her feet transfixed with terror. There was the same little brown face peering out from among the background of foliage. For a few seconds the two pairs of eyes remained staring at each other; then, scarcely knowing what she did, but in an instinctive movement of defence, Tommy waved her arms towards the bush.

The face instantly disappeared, but Tommy in her agitation forgot her errand, forgot the things she had placed beside her, and took to her heels, flying in a blind panic from the spot. She did not even stay to make sure she was going in the right direction; she had quite lost command of herself, and regardless of thorns and creepers that tore her skirts and tripped her steps, she plunged through the undergrowth. Every sound seemed to her excited imagination to be made by pursuers following upon her track. Suddenly the earth gave way beneath her, she felt herself sinking, sinking. "Bess! Bess!" she screamed, and then she knew no more.

When she regained consciousness she found herself in semi-darkness. For a moment she was simply bewildered; she was half smothered with twigs, leaves and earth; then she remembered all that had happened and sprang to her feet. But an excruciating pain in her left ankle caused her to fall back, and the agony was so intense that she remained for some time in a half-fainting condition. Presently she recovered. A second attempt to rise gave her such a twinge that she knew her ankle was seriously sprained; to move without help was impossible.

Her fear of the little brown face was overcome by a still greater anxiety. Where was she? She looked about her. Some distance above her head, considerably higher than the rooms at the farm, was a wide opening. She must have fallen into a pit. But it seemed to her a strange pit, for, her eyes becoming accustomed to the dimness, she saw that the floor upon which she lay was much broader than the opening at the top.

An insect touching her hand made her jump: and with a feeling of horror she wondered if the pit was infested with noxious creatures that would sting her to death. She shouted, frantically, again and again, but her voice only seemed to be thrown back at her; and when she remembered how far off her sisters were, she realized that her cries, if they were heard above, could bring only the savages from whom she had fled.

For a time she cowered among the trash, overwhelmed with despair. Then, when she was calm enough to think,

it was only to recognize more fully the seriousness of her plight. Her sisters could never guess what had become of her. If they took alarm at her absence, and Elizabeth came in search of her, it was quite likely that she would never discover the spot. Perhaps even she might be captured by the natives, for the sight of the little brown face had convinced Tommy that beyond the ridge the island was overrun with cannibals. It was nothing to her that they had never appeared on her side of the island; she told herself that they had simply waited until they could catch one girl alone. Nor did it seem to her ridiculous that a tribe of bloodthirsty savages should be so timorous as to refrain from openly attacking three defenceless girls.

The dreadful thought occurred to her, "Am I to die in this prison?" The prospect of such a fate made her shiver. She felt that even to fall into the hands of cannibals was preferable to a lingering death in this pit, and again she raised her voice in wild cries for help, repeating them until she was exhausted. For some time she remained in a state of stupor: but when she was able to collect herself she wondered whether, in spite of her injured foot, she could, by any exertion of her own, escape. She crept on hands and knees to the side of the pit; but even if she had been able to use her foot she saw that she could never climb up those sloping walls.

Glancing round, however, she saw that in the wall to her right there was an opening yawning black. She crawled to it, and peered in. It was so dark that she could see nothing beyond a yard. But she felt a faint hope that it might be a passage leading somehow to the level ground. Recollecting her automatic match-box, which, fortunately, she kept attached to her belt, she threw its small flickering light on the scene. She saw now that she was indeed at the entrance of a tunnel. It could not be a short one if it led to the outer air, for there was no glimmer of light from its black depths. But it was worth trying; so, the light, small as it was, giving her a sense of security, she began to creep slowly along the dark passage, every now and again wincing as a pang shot through her injured foot.

It was a strange tunnel; not rounded and of regular shape like the railway tunnels at home, but varying in width and height. In some places the roof was beyond the range of Tommy's feeble light; at others it came so low that she could not have stood upright. The floor was uneven, the walls were rugged, a recess here, a protuberance there. Clearly it had not been cut by the hands of men, but must be attributed to a freak of nature.

To Tommy, crawling inch by inch along the ground, it seemed that the tunnel would never end. How long it was, how many minutes or hours this painful progress continued, she was quite unable to guess. At last, with a cry of gladness, she saw a faint gleam of light beyond, and tried to advance more quickly, so as to gain liberty and fresh air. The light came through an aperture in the wall that appeared to be the end of the passage. It was high above the ground, and Tommy, standing on one foot, was just able to look through it. She thought that if she could only manage to heave herself up to it, the aperture was just wide enough to let her body through.

But first of all she must make sure that it led to safety. It was not full daylight outside; beyond the wall there appeared to be, not open space, but another confined chamber. Supposing she climbed up and got through, how far would she have to drop to reach the ground on the other side? and what if she should find herself only in another place from which escape would be no easier than from the pit?

To stand on one foot was fatiguing, and Tommy had to sit down and rest for a little. She had now recovered from her panic, and was ready to bend all her young wits upon the problem of escape. Presently a means occurred to her of discovering at least whether it would be safe for her to make an attempt to clamber through the aperture. She felt along the floor for a piece of rock, and standing up again, dropped it over the ledge. In an instant there came a faint thud, and immediately afterwards a great whirring and screaming. She was quick to infer that the ground was at some depth below the opening, and that the falling rock had disturbed a colony of birds of some kind. "Can I be at the top of a cliff?" she thought.

Plainly it was impossible to escape in this direction. The dashing of her hope almost made Tommy weep. She had done no good; indeed had only wasted time. There was nothing for it but to crawl back to the pit; and as she wearily crept through the passage despair seized upon her heart; she felt the choking sensation of helpless misery.

Her terror was even deepened when, on getting back to the pit, she found that it was now quite dark. Through the opening she could see the stars overhead, but there was no pleasure in watching them as she had many times watched them from the hut. She crouched upon the leaves, scarcely able to bear the throbbing pain in her foot; and when presently she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, it was with a prayer on her lips: "God help me, and let me see my sisters again."

Pain and thirst awakened her several times before dawn. A slight shower fell during the night, and by catching the raindrops in her outspread palm she was able to moisten her parched lips. She also wetted her handkerchief and bound it about her inflamed ankle, thus easing the pain a little. When it was quite light overhead she began to shout again, her voice sounding very cracked and hoarse. Soon she had to give up even this; her tongue and the roof of her mouth were so dry that she could not utter a word. Then she lost all hope, and lying down sobbed herself to sleep.

When she awoke it was again dark. Her foot was much less painful, but she felt more hungry and thirsty than ever before in her life. If only she had filled her pocket with oranges before she saw that little brown face! Again the idea came to her of attempting to climb the side of the pit by cutting steps in the earth; but on feeling in her pocket she remembered that she had dropped her knife on the ground. Hobbling across the pit she felt along the walls, only to find, as before, that their slope made it quite impossible to clamber up. Then feeling that starvation must be her doom, she sank back and lay in a state of dreamy somnolence.

All at once she was startled into wakefulness by a faint sound somewhere above her. She sprang up. Sunlight was streaming through the opening; the sound came again. It was some one calling. Tommy tried to shout in answer, but the feeble croak that was all she could utter dismayed her. With help at hand, she might not be heard! The call above was now quite clear. It was coming nearer. She heard her own name. But the more she tried to call the less she seemed able to make a sound. The voice above began to recede. Then with a last desperate effort she did manage to produce a hoarse cry that she could scarcely believe came from her own throat, so strange it was. It seemed to have used up all the little strength she had left, and she fell exhausted to the ground, believing that the last chance of rescue had now utterly vanished.

CHAPTER XV

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Some little time after Elizabeth had left her, Mary fancied that she caught a faint cry. She shouted to her sister, who was out of sight, but whose voice she heard calling at intervals. The feeble sound seemed to have come from a patch of woodland not a great distance from the track which Elizabeth had taken. But as the wind was blowing from that quarter, Mary realized that although she could hear Elizabeth it was probably impossible for Elizabeth to hear her. She felt very tired after her long walk, and doubted whether she could go far without her sister's sustaining arm; but the thought that Elizabeth might wander out of reach while Tommy was in danger near at hand gave her an artificial strength. She rose from the ground and tottered in the direction from which the cry had appeared to come. Every now and then she stopped, listening for a repetition of the sound; but she heard nothing except the rustle of the wind and Elizabeth's shouts, growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

In a few moments she had passed beyond the orange grove, and felt that she was in danger of losing her way. Even Elizabeth's voice soon ceased to guide her. She stumbled along, shouting every few steps, with no other result than to disturb the birds in the trees. Becoming alarmed at the possibility of being lost and her strength failing, she was on the point of trying to find her way back, and gave one last call, when she was electrified by hearing a strange hoarse sound apparently coming from some distance to the left. It was little like a human voice; yet it was not the cry of a bird, and Mary hurried with uneven steps towards it.

The ground rose steeply, leading up to the ridge far to the left. But with the new strength lent by excitement Mary was not conscious of the slope. She came to a number of straggling bushes edged by an irregular circle of small trees. Here she looked eagerly around her, peering through the bushes and between the trunks of the trees, listening for that strange cry to be repeated.

There was no sound, but as her eyes travelled over the circuit she noticed what seemed to be a small landslip in the bank. Following this downward, her glance discovered a hole in the ground several feet wide. Moved by a sudden impulse, and the instinctive feeling that here was the explanation of Tommy's disappearance, she stumbled forward, hardly conscious of her trembling limbs. Throwing herself flat on the ground at the edge of the hole, she gazed into the pit beneath. It was some moments before her eyes became used to the half-light; but then she saw something white; she distinguished it as part of an object huddled on the ground immediately beneath the opening; and she knew that Tommy was found.

But an agonizing fear seized her. Was Tommy dead? She called down in a low voice. There was no answer. She called again and still again, her tones growing louder as she became more alarmed. At length, after what seemed an age of suspense, her strained gaze noticed a slight movement in the figure below, and a faint whisper came up to her. "Thank God!" her heart cried out, and she eagerly called to Tommy, saying that she would soon be safe. But Tommy made no reply; she had relapsed into unconsciousness.

Mary was at her wits' end what to do. It was clear that Tommy was helpless. A pang shot through Mary's heart as she remembered that the girl had been without food for two days and two nights. The hole was so deep that even if Tommy had been conscious Mary could not have helped her, at the utmost stretch of her arms, to get out. Elizabeth was beyond hearing: she might return to the orange grove: what would she do if she found Mary missing? Mary dared not leave the neighbourhood of the pit now that Tommy was found: but she wanted to run after Elizabeth and bring her to the spot.

While she was still undecided she heard Elizabeth's voice in the far distance. She shouted in reply, though she still felt that against the wind her voice could not be heard. But in a few moments she was gladdened to know from the growing loudness of the shouts that Elizabeth was returning. There was a chance that as she drew nearer she would hear a shrill call, so Mary every few moments formed a trumpet with her hands, and let forth a prolonged "Cooee!" Presently she knew by the tone of Elizabeth's call that her voice had been heard; but, so confusing are sounds amid woods and thickets, it was a long time before Elizabeth discovered where she was, and came hurrying through the trees.

"Have you found her?" she asked eagerly.

"She is down there," replied Mary, pointing to the mouth of the pit. "Oh, Bess, I'm afraid she is very much hurt, perhaps dying!"

Elizabeth, with an exclamation of dismay, threw herself down and peered into the hole.

"Tommy! Tommy dear!" she called.

But there was no answer. Elizabeth measured with her eye the depth of the pit; she felt tempted to spring down and see if Tommy were alive or dead.

"Will you stay here while I run back and get the painter?" she asked. At that moment neither of the girls thought of savages: fear for Tommy had banished every other fear.

"It will take so long," murmured Mary. "You would be gone an hour at least, and——"

"I know a way," Elizabeth interrupted; "we'll make a rope of creepers. It won't take us long."

She darted off into the forest. In building the hut she had become expert in selecting strong tendrils for binding their lattice-work, and in a few moments she had cut, among the dense undergrowth, a considerable quantity of tough material with which she hurried back to the pit. The two girls at once set to work with nimble fingers plaiting the tendrils together.

"She must be famished, and dead with thirst," said Mary. "If we could only give her some water."

"There's a little brook not far away," said Elizabeth. "When we have done the rope we'll make a cup of leaves, and I'll fetch some water. Then you must let me down into the pit."

"I could never do it," said Mary, "I am not strong enough."

"Not by yourself, but I'll fasten one end of the rope to that tree you see there; then we'll pass it round that little one near us, and you will be strong enough to pay it out. That's the only way."

They worked very quickly, and finished a long, stout rope in little more time than the journey home would have taken. While Mary made several cups from the large spreading leaves of a plant like rhubarb, Elizabeth wound one end of the rope tightly about the tree trunk she had pointed out. In the other end she made a loop to cling to.

"The rope is not long enough," said Mary.

"Not to reach the bottom, but that doesn't matter. I can drop a few feet. When you have let me down, run down that slope, Mary, and you'll find the brook a little way to the right. Bring two of the leaves filled with water, and let them down by the rope. Pierce a hole in each side of the cups near the top, and pass the rope through: you'll see how to do it. Now take the rope firmly. I'll slip over the edge, and when I give the word let it run out gently around the tree."

Pale with anxiety and weakness, Mary took up her position at the tree. She made a determined effort to obey Elizabeth's instructions. Inch by inch the rope slipped through her hands, at last so fast that she held her breath in terror lest Elizabeth should be dashed to the ground. The rope was stretched to its extreme tension; then it suddenly relaxed; and next moment she heard the welcome cry from the pit: "I'm safe. Now for the water."

Gathering herself together, Mary sped off to the brook, carrying the two leaf cups. Eagerness to help lent her strength. She returned with them brimming, drew up the rope, and unfastened the loop at the end. Then passing two of the strands through the holes made in the cup, she let it down slowly into the pit. Some of the water was spilled in the descent; but Elizabeth said that enough was left for the moment.

"How is she?" asked Mary, dreading to hear that Tommy was past help.

"She is unconscious, but breathing," said Elizabeth. "I'll give her some water."

For some little time Mary heard no more. Elizabeth bathed Tommy's head and moistened her lips. At length the young girl gave a long sigh and moan.

"I'm here, dear," said Elizabeth gently. "Mary is above. You are safe now."

"The face!" moaned Tommy, her mind leaping back over all that had happened since she had seen those eyes staring at her.

"Hush!" said Elizabeth, stroking her head. "There is nothing to harm you. Drink a little water; we must see about getting you out of this pit, you know."

Tommy drank eagerly, holding Elizabeth's hands in a tight clasp.

"We are getting on famously," Elizabeth called to reassure Mary.

Tommy lay still, taking a sip of water every now and again, too weak to move or to speak. Meanwhile Elizabeth was beating her brain for some means of getting her to the surface. It was clear that Tommy for some time would be unable to do anything for herself. Lightly built though she was, her dead weight was far more than Elizabeth could hope to sustain, hanging on to the rope, and with no one but Mary to assist from above. The rope was too short by several feet; the first necessity was to lengthen it. Presently, therefore, when Tommy was more recovered, Elizabeth asked Mary to cut some more creepers and throw them down. Now her practice in splicing on board her uncle's ship was very useful. She quickly added three or four feet to the rope's length.

"Tommy dear, I'm going to leave you for a little," she said. "You are quite safe now. I'm going to arrange about lifting you out of this horrid place. You must be hungry, poor thing. I'll get a few oranges; you can reach them if we throw them down, can't you? and bananas too; they're more substantial. By the time I am ready to lift you out you'll be heaps stronger."

"Mary won't go?" said Tommy quiveringly.

"No, she'll stay with you. You can hear her when she speaks to you: but don't try to talk yourself; just eat the fruit I shall give you and get strong."

She then told Mary to come to the edge of the pit and be ready to help her.

"But take care you don't overbalance," she said. "It mustn't be a case of three girls in a pit."

Tired as Elizabeth had been, the joy of discovering Tommy alive had braced her, and she felt equal to any exertion. But she had not had Tommy's practice in tree-climbing, nor in clambering up the rigging on the barque; and when she clasped the rope and tried to draw herself up she slipped down again and again. For a time she felt baffled, but a means of overcoming the difficulty occurred to her.

"Pull up the rope, Mary," she said, "and make knots in it about two feet apart. I shall be able to manage it then, I think."

When the knots were made she tried again. It was a terrible strain on her wrists, and she got no assistance for her feet from the shelving sides of the pit. But the knots gave a firm hold, and she managed to climb hand over hand to the edge, where, with Mary's help, she heaved herself on to the level ground.

"Do rest," said Mary, noticing the signs of strain on her sister's face.

"I am not a bit tired. Look, Mary, I want you to plait another rope. I'll get the stuff for you."

She hastened into the undergrowth, and returned with her arms full of creepers.

"Now I'm going to get Tommy some food, and then run back to the hut. I'll be as quick as I can. Talk to her

while I am away to keep her spirits up."

Soon she was flinging an armful of bananas and oranges, one by one, into the pit.

"There's a feast for you," she said cheerfully. "Now in about an hour you'll be released. Eat slowly, that's the rule after fasting, isn't it?"

"You are a dear," said Mary, hugging her. "What should we have done without you?"

"My dear girl, without me you wouldn't have been here at all, we all came together. Good-bye for an hour."

She flitted off as lightly as a bird, overflowing with happiness. Reaching the hut she took up the longest of the mat beds, her own, and without waiting for a moment to rest, hurried back to her sister, announcing herself from a distance by a cheerful cooe.

"All well?" she said.

"Tommy has been telling me all about it," said Mary. "She saw the little brown face again."

"Bother the little brown face!" said Elizabeth. "Really, I should like to smack it. Tommy's well enough to talk, is she?"

"Yes, but she has sprained her ankle."

"Poor girl! it will be hoppety-hop when we get her up, then. Now see how we'll manage it. You've finished that rope? We'll make a cradle of my bed."

She made two holes at each end of the mat large enough for the ropes to pass through. In this way she formed a rough cradle upon which Tommy could be drawn up, for the girl's weight would keep it steady if the ropes were placed far enough apart. The cradle was soon ready for lowering.

"Can you manage to get on to it yourself, Tommy?" asked Elizabeth, "or shall I come down again and help you?"

"I can manage," answered Tommy. "I am ever so much better. Are you sure it's strong enough?"

"Certain, I'd trust myself on it. All you will have to do will be to clutch a rope at each end and hold tight. Call out when you are ready."

She and Mary then each took the end of a rope and passed it round a tree, the two trees being not quite so far apart as the length of the mat. Tommy gave the word. They began to haul. The trees relieved them of all strain, and making a succession of short pulls, with rests in between, they drew the cradle inch by inch to the surface. Elizabeth was afraid that Mary's strength might give way, or that Tommy would lose her grip of the ropes; but neither of these mishaps occurred, and with a final pull they hauled Tommy and cradle over the brink of the pit.



"WITH A FINAL PULL THEY HAULED TOMMY
OVER THE BRINK."

"WITH A FINAL PULL THEY HAULED TOMMY OVER THE BRINK."

And then overwrought nerves gave way. Elizabeth ran to Tommy, clasped her in her arms, and burst into tears. A little later, when all three girls were sitting together weeping in sympathy, Elizabeth exclaimed—

"Well, we are a lot of babies. We ought to be shouting for joy. I'm quite ashamed of myself."

"I'm not," said Mary stoutly. "I think it's a blessing we can cry a little. It eases the nerves. Boys never cry, and what's the result? They get as crabby as two sticks."

"How am I to get you two poor invalids home?" said Elizabeth. "You have done wonders, Mary, but you would be utterly done up if you tried to walk back. And Tommy certainly can't walk. We shall have to stay here for the night; fortunately, it is fine."

"Oh, no, we *must* get home, Bess," said Tommy earnestly. "I could not bear to stay here after seeing that face."

"But there can't be anything to harm us," persisted Elizabeth. "I have walked round and round, miles altogether, and haven't seen a single sign of people. You are quite sure it was a human face? Mayn't it have been a monkey or an owl?"

"No, I am sure of it. You never saw such eyes, they seemed to burn like fire."

"But didn't you see a body, too?"

"No, just a face. That was what frightened me so; just a face that seemed all eyes."

Elizabeth saw that Tommy had been too much scared to take real notice of anything, and decided that for the sake of her peace of mind it would be better to make an attempt to reach home.

"Very well, then, it's a case of pick-a-back. I'll carry you. Mary must get along as well as she can. It will take us an age, but we can rest on the way."

They started, Mary carrying Elizabeth's mat, and Elizabeth carrying Tommy. Slowly and with many halts they made their way down, reaching the hut about their usual tea-time. The two elder girls had taken precautions to fill their pockets with fruit as they skirted the orange grove. They had no other fruit in the hut except cocoanuts, and Elizabeth was too worn out to think of catching fish. They satisfied themselves with a meal of fruit.

Tommy was delighted with the behaviour of her parrot, Billy. Overjoyed at the return of its mistress, it hopped upon her shoulder, cocking its head and uttering cries loud but by no means sweet.

"A welcome home, Tommy," said Elizabeth, smiling. "We can't gush, Mary and I, but we are more glad than we can say, dear, and Billy says it for us as well as he can."

Then, after Tommy's ankle had been bathed and bound up, they threw themselves on their simple couches, and, all their present anxieties set at rest, slept heavily until the sun woke them to another day.

CHAPTER XVI

NEW TERRORS

A few days' rest, and a steady improvement in the weather, restored the invalids to their former health. The daily round went on as before—fishing, gathering fruit, ascending the cliff to take their customary look over the sea. They often talked of the face Tommy had seen. It was more mysterious than ever. Elizabeth, while her sisters were still confined to the hut, made a visit by herself to the orange grove, and determined if she saw the face to discover once for all to whom it belonged. But though she looked in every tree and bush and scoured the neighbourhood thoroughly, she never once caught sight of the face with the two burning eyes. Once she heard a rustling amongst the bushes and dashed towards the sound, but there was nothing to be seen, and she returned thoroughly baffled.

One morning when Elizabeth was preparing breakfast she heard Mary, who had gone to the look-out, shouting in great excitement. The two other girls rushed to join her, and saw far away in the offing a three-masted ship under full sail. The breeze was light, and the vessel appeared to be moving very slowly. Mary had already waved her handkerchief: the others did the same, but they soon realized that the ship was too far away for their signals to be noticed.

"Let's go after her in the boat," suggested Tommy. "They might see that moving on the water."

As there seemed just a possibility of thus attracting attention, they ran down to the beach and launched the boat. Elizabeth, being the strongest, took the sculls and pulled as hard as she could towards the opening in the reef; while Tommy steered, and Mary from time to time rose in her place and waved her handkerchief. By the time they came into the open sea the ship was almost opposite to them, sailing due west. There was no sign that they had been observed; she held steadily to her course. They shouted; Tommy put her fingers to her lips and gave a shrill whistle, an accomplishment which some of her friends at home had condemned as unladylike. But the ship stood on her way. The girls' hearts sank as they saw the distance between it and them gradually widen; and Elizabeth, who had been pulling gallantly for half-an-hour or more, at last collapsed on her oars.

They were all too much upset to speak. To have seen a vessel at last, after so many weeks of waiting, and then to be passed by, was a terrible disappointment to them. They were distressed not merely at the loss of the chance of immediate rescue, but at the staggering thought that the same thing might happen again. It was evident that the island lay out of the usual track; no vessel could ever have a reason for visiting it; and lacking the power of making effective signals they might remain there for years and years without any one ever being aware of their existence.

The light boat rocked to the long Pacific swell, and the girls battled with their tears. They strained their eyes after the dwindling vessel, hoping against hope that even yet she might change her course and come back to them. But when there was nothing but a speck on the horizon, Elizabeth, her face full of despair, took up the sculls again and began to pull slowly in silence towards home.

As the boat's head turned they were aghast to find how far distant they were from the island. The high cliffs seemed little more than a low bank: clearly they were miles away. Elizabeth, knowing that her sculling powers could not wholly account for the great distance, suddenly remembered the current. From the time the boat passed the reef it had been subject to the full strength of the ocean stream that swept the shore. They would have to row back against it, and with the sun mounting higher, and no food or water on board, they realized that they must look forward to hours of discomfort, if not actual danger.

The boat made little headway against the current, and Elizabeth had worked so hard that now she was scarcely able to move the sculls.

"Tommy, can you take my place for a little while?" she said. "I will row again after a rest."

They exchanged places, stooping low and moving very carefully. The boat lost many yards while the exchange was being made. Tommy had quite recovered her strength, and was able to take a long spell at the sculls. But progress was very slow. Elizabeth steered with the idea of getting under the shelter of the island. She noticed by and by that Tommy was tiring, and proposed to take the sculls again; but Mary pleaded to be allowed to share in the

work. Thus relieving one another, they crept gradually towards the island, not daring to cease sculling altogether, and yet finding it more and more exhausting as the day grew hotter.

By almost imperceptible degrees the cliffs heightened and objects upon them became more distinct. The girl who was steering at the time encouraged the sculler by mentioning each new landmark as it became distinguishable. Recognizing that it would be hours before they could attain their own little harbour, Elizabeth decided to make for the nearest point of the shore in the hope of finding another landing-place. At last they began to benefit by the shelter of the island, and their progress became more rapid. But when, after exertions that had tried them all severely, they came out of the current into comparatively still water near the shore, they had to row for some distance before, in a cutting between the cliffs, they discovered a broad, sandy beach on which it was possible to land. Here they pulled the boat a few yards up the sand, and then hurried along the chine in search of fresh water to assuage their burning thirst.

Within a short distance of the beach the chine was covered with vegetation, among which they saw several cocoa-nut palms. To these they hastened in the hope of finding some nuts upon the ground. But there were none. Tommy looked longingly up into the trees, but it was impossible to climb them, and the girls hurried on again, expecting to find somewhere a rill trickling from the high ground to the sea.

When they had gone some distance the trees thinned, and they saw, some hundreds of yards in front of them, a sheer wall of rock, rising to a considerable height and dotted here and there with scrub.

"Do you know, I believe that's the end of the ridge," said Elizabeth, who had a shrewder eye than the others for country, and had a better notion as to the part of the island to which they had come.

"I don't care," cried Tommy; "*that's* what I want." She pointed to a sparkling waterfall that plunged over a ledge a good way to their left. They ran eagerly towards it, scrambling over impediments, and soon came to the stream which the waterfall fed. Then they threw themselves down, and gulped large draughts of the cold water. After resting for a while on the grassy bank, Elizabeth looked at her watch.

"It is past two," she said; "what a time we have been!"

"Without breakfast or dinner," said Tommy dolefully, "and no chance of supper either, as far as I can see, if we have to row back."

"Perhaps we had better walk it," suggested Elizabeth; "I've had enough rowing for one day."

"Can we find the way?" asked Mary.

"If we are near the end of the ridge, as I think we are," replied Elizabeth, "we can't go far wrong. It takes us half-an-hour or more from the ridge home, and I shouldn't think it would take us long to reach a place that we recognize."

"You mean the orange grove," said Tommy; "I won't go past it, I absolutely won't."

"Well, dear, I dare say we can go round about," said Elizabeth placably, "though I'm so tired and hungry, and I am sure you are too, that the shorter our walk the better. Let us rest a little longer until it's not quite so hot. But we mustn't stay too long, in case I am mistaken and we find ourselves lost in the dark."

About half-an-hour later they rose to make their way homeward. Elizabeth had resolved to follow up the stream until they reached the waterfall, then to strike to the left, skirting the precipice. She expected to come to the thick belt of woodland of which the orange grove was a part. Tommy did not go ahead as her custom was. Since her fright she had been a more sedate and sober Tommy.

They had gone but a short distance upstream though a fringe of trees, when all at once they halted and started back. The trees suddenly came to an end, and a few yards in front of them stood a tiny structure, which, ignorant as they were, they knew for a native hut. It was conical in shape, made apparently of grass and thatch, with a small opening only high enough to crawl through. It was placed at the foot of a slope, and the space before it had evidently been cleared by hand, for there were stumps of trees here and there.

The three girls, struck with consternation, slipped back within the shelter of the trees. Tommy clung to Elizabeth's hand. Here was confirmation of her story. It said much for her restraint, or perhaps for the renewal of her fears, that she did not turn upon Mary with a whispered "I told you so."

Elizabeth had determined if she should see a native to show a bold front and try to make friends with him. Now, though Tommy on one side and Mary on the other were pulling her back, she stood her ground, whispering, "Wait: perhaps it is deserted." But she had scarcely uttered the words when, from among the trees on the other side of the stream, about two hundred yards away, they caught sight of a native approaching. They were only aware that it was the figure of a man: all Elizabeth's bold resolutions evaporated. Without waiting to take in any details of the stranger's appearance they fled noiselessly among the trees, swerving to the left of the course they had intended to follow.

They ran until they were out of breath, glancing round fearfully every now and again. Had they been seen? Would the savage pursue them? There was no sign of pursuit, and when breathlessness forced them to walk, they stepped out quickly, not daring to speak.

They were in a part of the island utterly unfamiliar to them. Elizabeth had quite lost her bearings. The vegetation was very thick; even where it was not actual forest there were bushes in clumps, large tangled masses of creepers, and briars which, as they forced their way through, tore their clothes and scratched their hands and faces. They stumbled over obstacles at almost every step. Here and there the ground rose steeply, and the haste of their ascent made them pant for breath.

After a time Elizabeth, always quickest to recover her self-possession, began to reproach herself for giving way so easily to panic.

"What an idiot I was!" she said in a whisper. "The idea of running from a solitary creature!"

"But he was a cannibal!" said Mary.

"How do we know that? Was he the owner of your little brown face, Tommy?"

"Yes—no—I don't know," murmured Tommy. "I don't think so."

"I ought to have waited," continued Elizabeth. "We might at least have seen whether he was young or old. Why, for all we know he is a white man, cast away like ourselves."

"He had no coat on, I saw that," said Mary.

"He may be a native hermit, then. There are such people among the savages, I suppose."

"But there may be hundreds," said Tommy.

"Living in one little hut? Nonsense!"

"There may be other huts, we can't tell," said Mary. "The savage may have been coming from one of the others."

"That's true! It is more likely that the man has companions, I admit. Well, if I can't pluck up courage to go among them, we must simply take care to keep on our side of the island, and that means starvation in time. But where are we? The sun is getting low: it will be dark soon. Let us run again."

They found themselves soon entering another patch of forest, and began to be seriously alarmed at the prospect of being overtaken by night before they reached home.

Elizabeth thought it best to keep straight on, for by so doing they must come in time to the shore. But it is difficult to judge direction in the forest, and when darkness descended upon them while they were still among the trees, Elizabeth was forced to the conclusion that they had been wandering round and round all the time.

"It's of no use, girls," she said; "we can never find our way in the dark. We shall have to stay here for the night."

They had been without food all day. Utterly worn out by hunger, exertion and alarm, they huddled together at the foot of a tree and fell into an uneasy sleep. Several times during the night they were disturbed by slight noises in the brushwood around them, or in the trees overhead. But nothing happened to alarm them, and when dawn glimmered through the trees they rose, a haggard and sorry trio, and set off once more to find a way home.

Only a few minutes' walk uphill brought them to the ridge, from which they could see the orange grove. They were so desperately hungry and thirsty that they were ready to face all hazards for the sake of some fruit. They hurried to the grove, snatched up a few oranges and bananas, and devoured them as they continued on their homeward way.

When they reached their hut, their feeling of security was alloyed by the distressing thought that they had lost their boat. The savages, whose settlement was near the cove at which they had landed, and who probably appropriated the fruits of the cocoa-nut palms there, would certainly discover the boat drawn up on the beach. The girls had always regarded it as a last refuge; they could always use it to row out to any ship that came reasonably near, if they failed to attract the attention of those on board in any other way. They felt that its disappearance very likely doomed them to a lifelong imprisonment on the island, and their hearts were heavy as lead. Not being without imagination, they had often in their secret thoughts looked into the future, and seen themselves growing older, falling ill, one or the other of them dying; and the possibility of being the last survivor, shut up in this ocean prison-house without human companionship, filled each of them with terror.

With the morning common-sense asserted itself.

"We shall be perfect ninnies if we don't try to get back our boat," said Elizabeth. "I've been thinking a good deal in the night, and the more I think the more convinced I am that there can't be many natives on the island. Why should they keep to themselves so? Why don't they ever come to this part? If only I could cease being a coward for five minutes I'd brave them. Anyhow we ought to walk back to the place we landed at yesterday and bring our boat away. It mayn't have been discovered yet."

"But suppose it has been discovered?" said Mary.

"They'd probably leave it on the shore. If we walk over there this evening and get there about dark, we might steal it away. It's our own property."

"I don't want to go near the place," said Tommy. "Besides, we might lose our way."

"Not if we walk over the cliffs," replied Elizabeth. "We have never tried that. The woods are thick, but we might find the walk easier than we think. At any rate, it would be shorter than going all round by the ridge. You see, Tommy, we need not go near the hut at all. Don't come if you feel nervous. Mary and I can row the boat back."

"No, I won't be left. If you go I go too. If we don't see the boat where we left it, you won't go any farther, will you?"

"I won't if it is not in sight," said Elizabeth, "but if it is anywhere within reach it would be silly not to try to get it. We want some fish badly. Let's go fishing this morning, and rest all the afternoon, so as to be fresh for our walk."

So it was arranged, but the plan had to be modified. While Tommy and Mary were fishing from the rocks, it occurred to Elizabeth to climb to the cliff top and see if the way she suggested was practicable. She was disappointed. Not only was the forest dense, and the undergrowth an almost impenetrable mass of thorny thicket, but the ground was much broken by fissures and small crevasses, so that, instead of being easier than the route across the island, this way promised to be longer and much more troublesome.

When she returned to her sisters she found them cheerful over a finer catch than usual. Taking advantage of their high spirits she told them the result of her expedition, and employed all her persuasiveness to induce them to attempt the route by the ridge. She overcame Tommy's reluctance, and then tactfully dropped the subject, hoping that the young girl's courage would not ooze away before it was time to start.

About four o'clock, after making a good meal, they set off, Tommy exacting a promise that Elizabeth would turn back at the least sign of danger. They walked quickly until they had crossed the ridge; then, avoiding the orange grove, they struck off more directly to the east, moving more slowly, and with many a cautious glance around.

"We ought to come above the waterfall by and by," said Elizabeth in a whisper.

Her sense of locality had not deceived her. In a few minutes they heard the musical plashing of the water. Keeping this sound on their right, they went on, guessing that the native hut must be at some distance below them, nearer the sea. As they went on, in silence, they came suddenly to what appeared to be the opening of a large cave in the face of the cliff. They shrank back, wondering if this was a dwelling of some of the inhabitants; but taking courage from the perfect stillness they ventured to pass the opening and continued their descent towards the sea.

Presently, round a bend of the cliff, they saw the native hut, nestling at the foot of the rocky precipice, two or three hundred yards away. The sun was very near its setting, and its last rays being intercepted by the high ground in the centre of the island, the light was already dim at the point at which they had arrived. To gain the cove they would have to descend a little lower and then cross through a clump of trees. As they approached this, Tommy, whose keen eyes were restlessly searching the neighbourhood, declared that she had caught sight of a small figure flitting among the trees beyond the hut. They all halted and gazed anxiously towards the spot she pointed out; but no form, human or otherwise, was now to be seen. There was the hut just as they had seen it before, but no person was visible, nor even the smoke of a fire.

Fearing that it would be quite dark before they reached the cove they hurried on. The remaining distance was greater than Elizabeth had supposed, and the clump of trees more extensive. As they passed through this, the hut now being hidden from sight, they were more circumspect than ever. At last they reached the end of it, and halting for another look round, they hastened on towards the sandy beach where they had left the boat.

It was not many minutes before they saw, with a pang of disappointment, that the boat was certainly not where it had been.

"Let's go back," whispered Tommy; "you know you promised."

"But there is no danger yet, child," replied Elizabeth somewhat impatiently. "We might at least see if it is anywhere about."

She went on in advance of the others, and almost shouted for joy when she caught sight of the boat drawn up in a snug little recess. She beckoned the girls to join her, and as they came up, pointed with some excitement to a small native canoe that lay a few feet beyond their own boat. Tommy gave a startled gasp.

"There are savages," she whispered; "oh, do let us go. I know we shall be caught."

"We won't go without the boat," said Elizabeth fiercely. "Quick! It's bound to make a scraping sound as we drag it down; but it's very near the water, and before any one can reach us from the hut we shall be afloat."

With nervous energy they drew the boat down to the water, sprang into it, and, in a state of fearful joy, Elizabeth began to pull from the shore.

"Steer close in, Tommy," she said, "or we shall be in the current. There's only half-an-hour of daylight left, but if I pull hard we shall be home almost as soon as it is dark. Mind the rocks."

Mary, the only unoccupied member of the party, kept her eyes fixed on the shore.

"I see some one," she called suddenly; "there, just by those cocoa-nuts."

Tommy turned quickly. In the gathering dusk she was unable at first to see the object to which Mary pointed; but presently she distinguished, peeping round the stem of a palm not fifty yards away, a little brown face surmounted by a mop of very black hair.

"There it is," she cried, "the same that I saw before. Pull hard, Bess; they'll be after us in their canoe."

Elizabeth suspected that the native craft would be much speedier than their own little tub, and, fearful of pursuit, plied her sculls lustily. As the boat drew away, the head moved; a shoulder appeared; then a complete body, which came slowly down to the edge of the shore.

"I believe it's a girl!" exclaimed Mary.

But in the fading light it was impossible to see distinctly, and they had no temptation to delay, even though Mary's exclamation had aroused their curiosity. The figure was soon completely out of sight. Tommy had to keep all her attention fixed on the task of steering, for they had never rowed along this part of the shore, which was much broken by projecting rocks.

"Are you sure it was not the man we saw before?" asked Elizabeth.

"I don't think it was," said Mary. "It seemed smaller. I wonder if it was a girl?"

"We are making surprising discoveries," said Elizabeth. "No one is chasing us, at any rate. Can we have been scared all this time by a girl?"

Tommy said nothing. The figure had appeared to be about her own height. Was it possible that the little brown face which had so much frightened her, and which she had seen with horror in her dreams, belonged to a young girl like herself? She felt a strange longing to know.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FOUNDLING

The improvement in the weather was only temporary, and for several days the girls were kept at home by the heavy rains. They talked a good deal about their discovery. There appeared to be at least two natives on the island; how many more they were unable to guess. Having themselves been seen, they felt that they could no longer owe their safety to the ignorance of the inhabitants; but the bad weather might discourage any attempt to seek them out. Whether they would escape attack when the rain ceased was a problem that caused much anxiety.

Early one morning a hurricane swept over the island, not so devastating as its predecessor, but violent enough to make them fear for the safety of their hut. This time, however, the wind blew from a different quarter, and the girls' frail dwelling, being sheltered by the high ground behind, escaped damage. The storm lasted a few hours, and was then succeeded by a day of brilliant sunshine. The girls took advantage of this to replenish their larder. While Tommy and Elizabeth were fishing, Mary posted herself as sentry to give the alarm if the natives appeared. They feared that the precaution would avail them little if they were really attacked, for they had no means of defence; but it might at least give them time to escape for the moment by launching the boat. They were undisturbed, however: and when the day closed they rejoiced in one more respite.

Next morning Tommy, on going down to the beach, was surprised to see a canoe, apparently empty, drifting past the reef. It flashed upon her that this might be the canoe they had seen up the coast, and that it had been washed away, like their own boat, by the recent storm.

She ran up to the hut to tell her sisters what she had seen, and all three hurried down to the shore.

"Let's row out and catch it," cried Tommy excitedly. "I should love to learn to paddle a native canoe, and I dare say in time we could make it go along faster than our own dinghy."

"You want to capture an enemy's ship," said Elizabeth, with a smile. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't. But we'll take some food and water this time. After our last adventure I don't care about voyaging without provisions."

Tommy ran back to the hut for some fruit and cold fish, while Mary filled their water-pots at the stream. Having placed them in the boat they rowed out towards the reef. By the time they were afloat the canoe had drifted out into the main current, and was being carried rapidly away. The sea was calm, and Elizabeth's vigorous strokes brought the boat in twenty minutes or so within a few yards of the canoe.

Suddenly Mary, who had been keeping a look-out in the boat, uttered a startled exclamation.

"Bess, I believe there's some one lying in it."

Elizabeth at once lay on her oars.

"Row back!" whispered Tommy. "It's one of the savages. He's hiding to decoy us, or something."

Elizabeth's common-sense asserted itself.

"That's not likely," she said. "How would he suppose that we should row out? and we couldn't get away now if we tried if he has a paddle. If he hasn't he can't do us much harm. Now's the best chance we have of making friends."

"Don't, Bess!" whispered Tommy anxiously, as Elizabeth dipped the oars again.

But Elizabeth was firm, and with a few strokes brought the boat alongside the canoe. Not a sound had come from it.

"It's a girl!" exclaimed Mary, now that she could see more clearly the bottom of the canoe.

Tommy gave a gasp. Was she to behold the owner of the little brown face at last? Elizabeth no longer hesitated. She drew close to the canoe, shipped oars, and laid a hand on the side.

The girls looked down with a sort of awed curiosity. In the bottom of the boat lay a native girl—a brown-skinned pretty little creature, with a string of what looked like teeth around her neck, and a yellow kerchief about her waist. She was perfectly still; her eyes were closed.

"She's dead!" whispered Tommy, whose eyes were dilated with excitement.

Elizabeth leant over and placed her hand under the child's breast.

"No, she is alive," she said, "but her heart is beating very faintly. Some water, Mary—quick!"

It was impossible, placed as she was, to pour any water into the girl's mouth; but Elizabeth sprinkled a little on her head. After a time the girl stirred, opened her eyes and moved her lips, but no sound came from them, and in a moment her eyelids again drooped.

"She's absolutely done," said Elizabeth. "We'll tow the canoe home. Tommy, fasten the painter. The poor child's very bad."

The boat's head was turned, and Elizabeth rowed as hard as she could against the current. Fortunately, they had not come very far beyond the gap in the reef. When the boat reached the still water it travelled much faster, and within an hour of leaving they regained the shore. During this time Tommy had thrown an occasional glance over her shoulder at the prostrate girl. Once she caught the child's eyes fixed upon her, and felt a thrill as she recognized them; they were the same as she had seen peering at her out of the bush. She felt no fear now, but a longing to help the little stranger and know more about her.

When they had landed and drawn the boat up, they lifted the girl and carried her among them to the hut. Her eyes opened during the journey, and she shivered; but she did not speak or struggle, and indeed hung so limply in their arms that they feared she was past help.

"On my bed, please," said Tommy, when they reached the hut.

They laid her gently down, and Elizabeth poured a little cocoa-nut milk between her lips. She now gave signs of animation, swallowed the juice greedily, and looked with the eyes of a timid fawn from one to another of the three girls. Presently she murmured a few words; her voice was plaintive and pleading.

"Don't be frightened," said Elizabeth soothingly.

The words seemed to startle the child. She tried to rise, but was too weak to move.

"She must have been adrift a long time to be in this terrible state," said Elizabeth. "I wonder how it happened?"

"Poor thing," murmured Tommy. "What a sweet little face she has!"

"Hush!" said Elizabeth, "our voices frighten her. Of course she doesn't understand what we say. I think you had better leave her to me for a little while. I'll feed her, and she'll see by and by that we mean her no harm."

Tommy's face wore for an instant a look of defiance, but she got the better of her inclination to rebel, and with Mary left the hut. Elizabeth remained with the little stranger, feeding her at frequent intervals, bathing her head, occasionally murmuring a word of encouragement. Her gentleness was effective. Presently the look of fright vanished from the brown girl's eyes—large, liquid eyes that Elizabeth found wonderfully attractive. Once she timidly stroked Elizabeth's strong firm hand, and at last, with a faint smile, she dropped off to sleep.

"She's asleep," said Elizabeth, quietly going forth to join her sisters. "What an extraordinary thing to happen!"

"Look here, Bess," said Tommy fiercely, "if you think you're going to keep her to yourself you are jolly well mistaken. I saw her first; you wouldn't believe me; and now I'm going to look after her, so there!"

"Instead of the parrot?" Mary could not help saying.

Elizabeth frowned at her.

"Very well, dear," she said pleasantly. "She's a little younger than you, I should think, but I dare say she will like you to mother her. But what will happen? Won't her friends come and look for her?"

"And if they do, and find we have treated her kindly, they'll just love us," said Tommy.

The other girls were amazed at Tommy's complete change of attitude. Her fearfulness seemed to have been quite swallowed up in another emotion. The discovery that the native of whom she had been so needlessly frightened was a girl more helpless than herself filled her with a kind of rapture. She stepped softly into the hut, and seeing that the child was still asleep, placed a peeled orange beside her mat, where it must be seen as soon as she awoke.

"I wonder if we ought to go to the native hut and try to explain to her people that the girl is safe," said Elizabeth, as they sat on the grass eating their dinner.

"Certainly not," said Tommy decisively. "I dare say they were cruel to her, and the poor thing was glad to get away."

"What an imagination you have!" said Elizabeth, smiling. "For all you know, her mother may be broken-hearted."

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, she's too weak to go home, and we shall soon see if she wants to. I'll talk to her by and by, and I know she'll be quite pleased to stay with us."

Remembering Tommy's ill-success with the parrot, the elder girls were amused at her confident belief that she would make the child talk, and understand what she said. Indeed, when, later in the day, the girl awoke, and Tommy went to attend to her, the first attempt at opening communications was a complete failure. By way of putting the little patient at her ease, Tommy grinned at her, patted her head, nodded, pointed to herself and said "Me Tommy," with the result that the child shrank away from her as if scared. When she realized that she had nothing to fear, she gazed upon the white girl with wide-open eyes and the same wondering look as may be seen on the face of a child watching a conjurer.

The ravenous way in which she ate the food given to her confirmed the girls' belief that she was half-starved. She rapidly gained strength, and it became clear that her weakness was due to hunger and not to illness. She began to talk, pouring out her words in liquid tones that fell pleasantly on the English ears. When she saw how puzzled the girls were she laughed; then, with a sober look of reflection, pointed to herself and said "Me Tommee" so drolly that the girls screamed with laughter.

Just before sunset, when the girls came into the hut for the night, they sat eating their supper and talking about their dusky guest. She knew by instinct that she was the subject of their conversation, and looked timidly from one to another, watching their lips, her features reflecting every expression on their faces.

Tommy gave her some baked fish for supper, and then prepared to "tuck her up," as she said, with her own wraps; but the girl rejected the covering and coiled herself up like a dog.

Next morning she got up and followed them when they went down to the shore for their usual bath. She seemed to be astonished at the whiteness of their skin, and amused them very much by scrubbing herself with sand, to see if she could make her brown body resemble theirs. She watched every detail of their toilet with intense interest, and when she saw them comb their hair she held out her hand for the comb.

"Don't give it to her, Tommy," said Mary, looking with distaste at the girl's greasy mop.

"Rubbish!" said Tommy. "We can wash it afterwards."

But even Tommy regretted her generosity when, after being vigorously tugged through the thick matted hair,

the comb was restored to her with several of its teeth missing.

"My word!" she exclaimed. "Fancy breaking wooden teeth! My poor old pony's mane was nothing to her thatch."

After breakfast the girl followed them about like a dog. They noticed that she looked about her eagerly, as though searching for some recognizable landmark. But she evinced no desire to leave them, and indeed soon became tired; her strength was not yet equal to much exertion. The girls all sat on the grass with the child in the midst.

"Let's try to find out her name," suggested Mary.

"Let me try," said Tommy. Pointing to Elizabeth, she said "Bess," repeating the name several times. Then she touched Mary, pronouncing her name, and lastly herself.

"Me Tommee," said the girl, laughing delightedly.

"Tommy," said her instructor, "not 'me,' just Tommy."

"Me Tommee," repeated the girl; then after a moment pointed to Mary, saying "Mailee," and to Elizabeth, calling her "Bess," with a long sibilant.

"Now you," said Tommy, pointing to the girl herself.

She at once recognized what was required and said, "Fangati."

"What a pretty name!" said Elizabeth.

"I wonder how she spells it," remarked Mary.

At this Tommy shrieked.

"She doesn't spell at all, you goose!" she said; "of course she never learnt her letters."

And then the laugh was on Mary's side, for Fangati, as if thoroughly enjoying the fun, touched Tommy's hand, saying "Me Tommee," over and over again.

"You'll be 'Me Tommee' always now," said Elizabeth. "You should have used correct English, my dear."

"I don't care," said Tommy philosophically. "Anyhow, she can't say Mary. Try again, Fangati," she added, pointing to her sister.

"Mailee," cried the child, showing her teeth in a pretty smile. "Bess, Mailee, Me Tommee."

To make quite sure that they had her name correctly, Tommy walked to a little distance until she was out of sight among the trees, and then called "Fangati!" in her shrill treble. The girl instantly jumped to her feet, and ran after her.

"Well done," said Tommy, patting her. "You are a perfect dear, and I'm going to be very fond of you."

CHAPTER XVIII

ANOTHER BROWN FACE

The girls were much surprised that Fangati seemed perfectly content to remain with them, and showed no disposition to return to her friends. At first they put this down to lack of strength, thinking that the child had the prudence not to attempt to cross the island until there was no risk of breaking down. But in a few days, when Fangati was as vigorous and lively as a healthy young animal, this explanation was no longer tenable.

They were almost equally surprised that, so far as they could tell, no search had been made for her. For some days they kept pretty close to the neighbourhood of the hut, in some fear that their possession of Fangati might turn to their disadvantage if the natives discovered her. To be suspected of kidnapping her might bring down upon them the wrath of her friends. But when everything went on as before, they lost their timidity, and made longer and longer excursions from the hut.

Fangati accompanied them everywhere. They had taught her a few words, and could make her understand by signs or otherwise what they wanted her to do. Their life was so simple that there were few ways in which she could help them. She laughed when she saw their manner of fishing, but did not offer to show them the native method. She was content with things as they were.

One day when she had gone with them into the woodland to fetch food, she gathered a number of large yellowish-green fruits which they girls had often looked at longingly but which they had never ventured to eat for fear of poison. She handed the fruit to them, and made signs to them to eat. Seeing their hesitation, she dug her strong teeth into the hard rind, quickly pulled it off, and showing the juicy pulp, bright yellow in colour, began to suck it with enjoyment. At this the girls followed her example.

"It is delicious," cried Tommy, the juice dripping from her lips. "What donkeys we were not to try it before! The bother is, there isn't enough of it; there's a monstrous big stone in the middle. I wonder what it is?"

The fruit was the mango, which they had known hitherto only in the bottles of chutney which their uncle had brought from India. Their pleasure at the discovery of a new fruit impelled Fangati to make further additions to their menu. As they passed through the woodland on their way home, she stopped among some creepers trailing along the ground, seized a stick, and began to dig with it. The girls watched her curiously. After a little she turned up some tubers that looked something like potatoes, and lifted them, chattering incomprehensibly, and pointing to her mouth.

"I believe they are yams," said Mary; "they are very good to eat."

"Then we'll boil some for dinner," said Elizabeth. "What a useful little thing Fangati is turning out!"

They took home a few of the roots, and came back in the afternoon with the boat-hook, with which, however, they dug up the roots no faster than Fangati with the stick.

Another day, when they went for cocoanuts and failed to find any on the ground, Fangati pointed to some nuts clustering among the foliage fifty feet above the ground, and made signs to them to climb up for them. They shook their heads, whereupon she laughed, ran to one of the trees, clasped her hands about the slender stem, and began, as it seemed to the girls, to walk up it. They held their breath as she nimbly mounted, and were not easy in mind until, after throwing down several nuts, she slid to the ground again, laughing with glee.

"Her backbone must be made of india-rubber," declared Tommy. "I must try that way."

"No, I won't allow it," said Elizabeth firmly. "It's not worth while to risk a broken back. Fangati can get us all we want."

Fangati introduced them to several other edible plants, of which they never learnt the English names. The greater variety of food was very acceptable, and though their health had been good, except for Mary's touch of fever, they all declared that they felt better than ever since Fangati came. No doubt they owed as much to their new interest

in life as to their change of food.

They had not of late walked to the ridge. But one day when the oranges near them had given out, they decided to make an excursion to the orange grove where Tommy had first seen Fangati. When they came near the crest a sudden change in Fangati's demeanour astonished them. Hitherto she had been as merry as possible, finding cause for laughter in everything. But all at once she stopped dead, gave a cry, uttered the word "tapu," and fled away with every sign of terror.

The girls were amazed at her alarm, and looked about for some explanation of it, half expecting to see some hideous savage approaching with uplifted club. But all that was in sight were the unvarying features of the landscape, and the row of posts with their rags of pennants.

They hurried after Fangati, and tried with the little stock of native words she had taught them, and the few English words she had learnt, to elicit the explanation of her terror. She explained fluently enough, but the only word they caught, because of its constant repetition, was "tapu."

"That's the same as taboo, I think," said Mary. "It means something sacred, but I can't make out what could be sacred there. It's so strange, too, because we were quite near the orange grove, and she was not frightened then—unless she was frightened of you, Tommy."

"I dare say she was," said Tommy; "we were both frightened, but we are good friends now, aren't we, Fangati?"

"Me Tommee plend," said the girl.

"Are we going back without any oranges?" asked Elizabeth.

"Why should we?" exclaimed Tommy. "Come along, Fangati."

She led the way towards the ridge again, but Fangati stood and waved her arms, crying "tapu" again and again.

"Evidently she won't cross the ridge," said Elizabeth; "but we can get to the orange grove by going round. Perhaps she will come with us then."

Striking off at an angle with the ridge, they found that Fangati accompanied them willingly. She soon recovered her wonted high spirits. They made their way through the undergrowth, and presently came to an open glade, beyond which lay the orange grove.

Here they were again surprised to see signs of great excitement in Fangati's face. The girl stood still for a few moments, looking about her eagerly; then, uttering a little cry, she darted away, and in a second or two was lost to view.

"Now what's that mean?" cried Mary.

"There's only one explanation," said Elizabeth. "She recognizes the place as being near her home, and she has run away to her friends."

"Oh! what idiots we are!" cried Tommy. "This was the last place we should have brought her to. Now we've lost her!"

"Well, dear," said Elizabeth, "I have often wondered whether we were right in keeping her. She belongs to her own people, you know, and not to us."

"But she didn't want to leave us. And they don't care a dump about her, or they'd have come for her long before this. I'm sure she was much happier with us than with nasty savages."

"Yet she has left us now," remarked Mary. "They can't be dreadfully horrid to her."

"Couldn't you fetch her back, Bess?" asked Tommy.

"I shouldn't much care about it," replied Elizabeth. "After all, we don't know what trouble we might be running into. Perhaps she will come back to us herself."

After taking some oranges they returned to their own side of the island by way of the ridge. Tommy was disconsolate. All the sisters had become fond of Fangati, but there was a special tie between her and Tommy, and she was more often with Tommy than with the others.

For the next two days they talked about little else than Fangati's defection. They walked up to the orange grove, in the hope that she would reappear, but returned without a sight of the little brown face they had learned to love. Her departure had left a strange blank; they felt that something had gone out of their life. Until then they had not realized how much she had added to their happiness.

On the third morning after breakfast they were "washing-up" outside the hut—so they called the clearing away of banana skins, fish bones, and pieces of shell—when they suddenly caught sight of two figures moving among the trees some little distance away. They sprang to their feet in alarm. A second glance told them that the figures were those of natives; and, struck with the idea, that the savages were stealthily approaching to attack them, they began to run up-stream toward a patch of thick undergrowth where they could hide.

But they had only taken a few paces when there was a shrill cry of "Me Tommee!" They halted hesitatingly, to see Fangati flying towards them, and her companion standing still at the edge of the woodland.

When Fangati was within a few yards, Tommy, able to restrain herself no longer, rushed forward and clasped the brown girl in her arms, kissing her again and again. Fangati laughed; she laughed at everything; then, hand in hand with Tommy, ran to the other girls, chattering excitedly. She pointed to the solitary native, who had not moved, smiled, patted her own head, threw herself down and clasped Elizabeth's feet, ran a little way, and then came back looking behind her.

"I think she wants to know if she may bring this other one," said Mary.

"And she wants to make us understand that we shan't be harmed," said Tommy. "Let her go, Bess."

"We gain nothing by refusing, so she may as well," said Elizabeth.

She waved her hands toward the second native, and Fangati, who had been watching her wistfully, bounded off with a gay laugh.

The girls awaited her return with mixed feelings. They were glad to see Fangati again, but they did not much desire the acquaintance of a strange native. They did not yet know whether it was a man or woman. This doubt, however, was resolved in a few minutes. Scanning the approaching couple anxiously, they saw that Fangati's companion was a grey, shrunken old man, apparently feeble, for he moved slowly and leant on the girl for support.

"I believe it's the man we saw at the native hut," said Mary.

"Not much to be afraid of, after all," said Tommy. "He looks hardly strong enough to kill a fly."

"How shall we speak to him?" said Elizabeth.

"It will be rather a pantomime," rejoined Tommy. "Be very grave and dignified, Bess. Impress him with your importance, Queen Bess, monarch of all she surveys."

"Don't be ridiculous, Tommy," said Elizabeth, feeling it was no time for jesting. The old man certainly looked harmless enough, but she was by no means easy in mind.

After what seemed a long time, Fangati led the man up to the girls.

"Bess, Mailee, Me Tommee," she said, pointing to each in turn.

The old man made a salutation, and the girls looked at him with interest. His face and every visible part of his

body was hideously tattooed, his thin bare legs looking as if they were covered with indigo-blue stockings. A stick was thrust cross-wise through his mop of grizzled hair. Certainly he was not a prepossessing object.

The girls were wondering what they ought to do, when they were surprised to hear the man address them.

"I speak Inglis," he said; "I Maku. Good-day all-same velly much."

Tommy turned aside so that her smile should not irritate or offend.

Elizabeth, with admirable composure, said—

"How do you do, Mr. Maku! Fangati is your granddaughter, I suppose?"

It was at once clear that Maku's English was not very abundant. The word grand-daughter puzzled him. He looked at Fangati dully; then his eyes suddenly brightened.

"Fangati, he my son chile," he said. "He velly good chile. He get plenty piecee me eat. To-morrow he go; I velly solly, eh! eh! I cly."

Elizabeth in her turn was puzzled, and it was Mary who first saw the old man's meaning.

"He says that Fangati got him plenty to eat, but disappeared one day, and he was very sorry, and cried."

"No wonder, poor old man!" cried Tommy. "He looks half-starved. There's no one else living in their hut, then?"

"Have you wife, children, friends?" asked Elizabeth.

The old man shook his head.

"Wife he dead long-timey. Chil'en big long way." He waved his arm to indicate distance. "Plen: ah! mikinaly he plen; he all-same gone away; eh! eh! all-same dead."

From this Mary made out that he had a missionary friend who had gone away and might now be dead.

A few more questions satisfied the girls that, as far as he knew, there were no more natives on the island except himself and his granddaughter. Intensely relieved on this score, they were ready to be hospitable, and to Fangati's delight, invited the man to come towards their hut and talk to them.

Seated on the ground in front of the hut with the girls in the entrance, the old man related a story of which they understood little at the time. It was some few days before Mary, thinking over what he had said, and puzzling about it, arrived at something like a coherent narrative. Even then she was only partially successful. What he had tried to explain in his scanty English was as follows.

He had been chief of a small island a day's paddling to the eastward. It was remote from the usual trade-tracks, and for this reason had remained longer in heathendom and cannibalism than most of the Pacific Islands. But a white missionary had at last come and taken up his abode on the island, by whose skill in medicine, earnest teaching, and noble character, Maku and some of his sons had been won over.

There were certain soothsayers among the people, who hated the new teacher when they found their influence with the chief gone. Working on the superstitions of the islanders, they secretly stirred up a revolt. But for the quickness of Fangati he would have been attacked and killed. She discovered what was going on, informed her grandfather, and persuaded him to put to sea by night in a canoe, with the intention of paddling to an island to the southward, where Maku would find friends. Forced out of their course by wind and current, they were nearly exhausted when by good fortune they found themselves on the shore of this island. They landed, erected a hut, and had since lived there, not caring to risk another voyage, and finding abundance of food.

Maku could not say how long he had been on the island, nor were the girls able to discover whether his arrival

had preceded or succeeded theirs. He told them that one day Fangati, who had been to gather fruit, reported that she had seen white people. Though he thought she must be mistaken, he bade her run away at once if she saw any one again, white or brown. He did not like white people. Since they came to the Pacific the brown people had not been happy. They had been forced to work; some had been taken from their own islands and carried away to toil on distant plantations; new diseases had been brought among them. He had one friend among the white people—the "mikinaly"; he was a good man and did good things. He had taught Maku English.

True, Fangati had said that the strangers she had seen were women; but Maku could not believe that white women could have come to this island without white men. And he was desperately afraid of being betrayed to the ill-disposed mystery men among his own people; for before he had been long on the island he discovered that it was the scene of certain ceremonies conducted by these mystery men. At long intervals, before he became a Christian, he had himself accompanied his people in solemn expeditions to the island. The accession of a new chief was celebrated with special rites; years and years before, in his heathen days, his own accession had been marked by a great cannibal feast. He was much afraid that white people might sell him to his revolted tribesmen, who would make him a victim.

When Fangati disappeared he was convinced that she had been captured by the white people, and he would never see her again. He missed her very much, for, being old and infirm, he depended almost entirely on her for his food. But when she suddenly returned and told him how she had been carried out to sea while fishing, and how the white women had rescued her and treated her kindly, he felt that he must make his presence known to them, and especially warn them of their danger.

At this Elizabeth asked anxiously what danger was likely to assail them. The man hesitated. Now that it had come to the point he seemed to be unwilling to say more. But at length he explained that the spot at which they had landed was the usual landing-place of his people when they came to visit the island, and all the ground between it and the ridge was tapu. He struggled with his imperfect English in trying to make clear to the girls what that meant. They understood at last that their side of the island was sacred; its grounds were only to be trodden when the people came to hold their ceremonies, and anybody trespassing upon it would incur the wrath of the mystery men, and bring down upon themselves a terrible punishment. The forbidden ground was marked off from the rest of the island by a line of poles set upon the ridge. Maku confessed that he himself felt very uneasy at having violated the tapu; and Elizabeth, questioning him, found that beneath his recently assumed Christianity there lay a deep stratum of superstition. When the "mikinaly" was with him tapu had no horrors for him; but the missionary had left his island some time before the rising took place, and with the removal of his influence the chief had relapsed to some extent into the superstitions of his early manhood.

The girls were not at first much alarmed at what he told them. But when he added that his people would certainly choose another chief in his place, and come to the island for the usual inaugural ceremonies, the thought of being discovered by the savages at such a time filled them with dread. Their hut lay in the direct path of the procession to the ridge; it could not escape detection, and they trembled at the idea of falling into the hands of people who might be worked up to religious frenzy by their mystery men. To violate the tapu would be bad enough for a brown man; it would be worse for white people.

Maku made a suggestion. Let them dismantle the hut, he said, destroy all traces of their occupation, and remove to the other side of the island, where at least they would not have to reckon with the anger of the mystery men at finding them on forbidden ground. The girls discussed the suggestion earnestly, and decided to follow his advice. It gave them a pang to pull down the little home to which they had become accustomed: but they lost no time in setting about it, carrying the material down to the boat. Meanwhile, the old man and Fangati scattered the stones of their oven, and tried to obliterate the signs of habitation. Maku shook his head when he saw the bleached grass on what had been the floor of the hut. Even in this land of quick growth it must take some time before so tell-tale an evidence was done away.

It was decided that Elizabeth and Mary should row the boat round to Maku's landing-place with the canoe in tow, while Tommy walked with the old man across the island. The chief did not follow the long route up the stream by which the girls had reached the ridge, but took a more slanting course through a wild and rugged region which they had never explored. As they were crossing the ridge he pointed out to Tommy in the distance the entrance to the great cave in which the ceremonies of his tribe were conducted. Tommy shivered; the thought of wild men engaged in mysterious rites terrified her imagination. Choosing a steep path that wound down the eastern side of the

ridge, Maku led the two young girls to the open space near the waterfall, and in a few minutes reached his hut. He and Fangati at once began to rig up near by a temporary shelter for the English girls, and it was almost finished by the time Elizabeth and Mary arrived.

The girls were provided by their new friends with an excellent meal of fish, breadfruit and other fruits, some of which were strange to them. Immediately afterwards, Maku and his granddaughter set to work to build them a hut in the native fashion. Elizabeth doubted whether they would like a house which must be inevitably close and stuffy with a doorway only high enough to crawl through. Their own hut had been fresh and breezy. But it seemed better to let the natives have their way. They would build much faster than the English girls; and if strange natives should make their appearance in this part of the island, they would not be rendered suspicious as they might be if they saw a hut so different from what they were accustomed to.

The girls slept in their temporary shelter that night. They had lost their fear of savage neighbours, but this had been replaced by a new fear of possible visitors from beyond. Tommy had asked Maku during their walk whether there was any chance of a ship coming to the island.

"No ship," he answered. "No come this side. Melican ship come one time, my place; mikinaly come in Melican ship; all-same, no mo'e."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHARK

The change of circumstances pleased every one except Billy the parrot. He had never taken kindly to Fangati, but had always ruffled his feathers and squawked angrily when he saw her with Tommy. The girls laughed at these manifestations of jealousy. But when Billy was removed from his home, and found that his mistress's attentions were shared by still another person, he became sulky. He would sit on a rock, or the bough of a tree, blinking his bead-like eyes and maintaining a sullen and reproachful silence.

Tommy was so much taken up with Fangati that it is to be feared she somewhat neglected her old favourite, as was perfectly natural under the circumstances. When Fangati and her grandfather had finished the new hut, which occupied them only two days, the young girls were constantly together. Tommy, now that her fear of cannibal neighbours was removed, became again the active, light-hearted, adventurous girl she had ever been. She roamed all over the island with Fangati, not even excepting the region of the tapu, for she found that the native girl was ready to go in any direction, provided she did not catch sight of the posts on the ridge. They discovered in company other plantations of wholesome fruits, of kinds which Tommy already knew, and of others which were strange to her. Fangati showed her how to fish in the native way with a spear of sharpened wood. At first Tommy was sceptical about this, declaring that with the line and hook she would catch more fish than Fangati with the spear. But she soon found that she was quite wrong. Leaning over the edge of a rock, with her keen eyes fixed on the water, Fangati would plunge her spear rapidly, and scarcely ever failed to bring up a fish as large as Tommy caught, and much more quickly. Tommy tried to imitate her, and was exceedingly proud when, after dozens of fruitless attempts, she succeeded in spearing her first fish.

In the course of one of their early rambles the girls came to the pit into which Tommy had fallen. Fangati was much interested in this, having never seen it before, and she ran to fetch her grandfather to the spot. The girls asked him what was the purpose of the pit, and he thought at first that it had been dug as a storehouse for breadfruit. But when Tommy told him about the tunnel through which she had crawled, and of the hole in the wall at the farther end, he looked puzzled and declared that he would go down and see for himself. It did not take long to construct a serviceable ladder with stout canes bound together with creepers, and the whole party descended into the pit and followed Tommy through the tunnel.

Arriving at the end, Maku looked curiously over the ledge. He explained to the girls that the dim-lit space beyond was the cave in which the mystic ceremonies of his people were conducted. The reason of the existence of the pit was now plain to him. There was a tradition among his tribe that one of his predecessor chiefs had shown an extraordinary knowledge of some of the secret performances of the mystery men at which he had not been present.

"I unastan," said Maku. "He find hole; he look; oh! he say, dis fine place fo' me. All-same he makee way dis side; makee pit; come 'long, listen, look see; eh, eh; he know all-same too much."

His explanation was not very clear, but after a time the girls understood that the former chief, having accidentally discovered the tunnel opening to the cave, had dug the pit so that he could approach it from the inland direction, and had thus provided himself with a means of eavesdropping. Apparently he had covered the pit with a light lattice-work—as the breadfruit pit was usually covered—and this in the course of years had become overgrown with vegetation, so that nobody could have suspected the hole beneath.

On returning to the surface they pulled up the ladder and laid it among the trees near by. More than once during the succeeding days Tommy and Fangati amused themselves by descending into the pit and chasing each other in the darkness of the tunnel. They invented other amusements. Tommy ran races with Fangati, played at hide-and-seek in the woods, practised shying at cocoa-nuts. All the girls had swimming competitions in the cove at low tide, and though the English girls became very expert, they were no match for Fangati, who dived and gambolled in the water as though in her native element.

In constant companionship with Fangati, they learnt in course of time many native words, and she on her side picked up a smattering of English. They were thus able to communicate with her freely. She amused them by her

mispronunciations. The letter r was a stumbling-block. "Run" was always "lun"; "bekfas leady," she would say; and she adopted from her grandfather the expression "all-same," which she used frequently and in odd connections.

"I lun all-same kick, Me Tommee," she would say, when Tommy had beaten her in a race; or if, in a game of hide-and-seek, it was Mary's turn to hide, "Mailee all-same hidee-sik," was her way of putting it.

One day, having had no success at their usual fishing-place at the mouth of the cove, Fangati proposed that she and Tommy should go to a spot about half-a-mile up the coast, where she had sometimes caught fish before the girls came. Elizabeth had laid no restrictions on Tommy as regards her fishing excursions, except that she had asked her not to go out of sight of their little harbour. Remembering how Fangati had been carried out to sea, she wished to guard against any repetition of that mishap.

The spot to which Fangati pointed was beyond the usual limit. It was not, however, far distant from the shore, and Fangati had been much farther out when her canoe was caught by the current. Elizabeth had gone with Mary into the interior to gather breadfruit, so that it was impossible to consult her; and Tommy, anxious to have some fish for dinner by the time her sisters returned, agreed to try the new place.

They reached it in the canoe, Tommy paddling. It was a large flat rock a few hundred yards from the shore, with a deep pool on its inner side. There they had great success, in the course of half-an-hour spearing enough fish for several meals. Thoroughly satisfied, they had just turned their canoe towards home when Tommy caught sight of a large shape moving rapidly beneath the surface of the water.

"Oh! what's that?" she cried.

Almost before the words were out of her mouth the canoe quivered under a terrific shock. Then it was rocked violently to and fro, so violently that the sea came over the gunwale and the girls had to throw themselves on to the opposite side to prevent the slight craft from overturning. As they did this there was a sudden sharp sound as of something snapping. Instantly the canoe turned over, and the girls found themselves in the sea.

Fangati laughed.

"All-same jolly fun," she said.

Tommy was not so much amused. Being able to swim she did not mind the sudden bath; but all the fish were gone; the morning's work was thrown away.

Fangati quickly righted the canoe, and having clambered into it, helped Tommy to regain her place. There was, of course, a quantity of water at the bottom of the little vessel.

"What was it?" exclaimed Tommy, shaking the water from her head. "Was it a shark?"

Fangati looked about her. In a moment she pointed to a strange object, something like the end of a saw, projecting from the bottom of the canoe. Tommy had never seen such a thing before. Stooping down, she pulled at it. It was loosely fixed, and came away in her hand. Instantly there was an inrush of water.

"No, no, silly Billy," cried Fangati, using an expression she had heard Tommy apply to the parrot.

She snatched the broken sword of the sword-fish from Tommy's hand, and tried to replace it. But though she succeeded in wedging it into the wood, it failed to stop the hole entirely. Without loss of time she seized her paddle and started for the shore, about a quarter of a mile distant. But the canoe had shipped a considerable quantity of water, and this was being continually increased by the inflow through the leak. It sunk lower and lower, and every minute answered less readily to Fangati's paddle. It soon became clear to the girls that the canoe must sink long before they reached the shore. They could easily gain the land by swimming, but the canoe could not be recovered if it sank.

Between them and the shore a rock stood just above the surface. It was only about a hundred yards away, and Fangati, exerting all her strength, drove the canoe towards it, and reached it in the nick of time. In another few seconds the canoe must have foundered.

There was not much room on the rock. Tommy scrambled on to it, while Fangati, slipping over into the sea, prepared to help Tommy drag the canoe up, so that they might tilt the water out of it, and try to stop the leak with a handkerchief, or a part of Tommy's skirt.

They had just begun to tilt the canoe when Tommy caught sight of a small dark object on the surface of the sea about thirty or forty yards away. It was the fin of a shark.

"Fangati, quick!" she called, holding out her hands to help the girl clamber on to the rock.

Fangati's back was towards the shark and she did not understand what the peril was. But the note of terror in Tommy's voice alarmed her. She let go her hold of the canoe, gained the edge of the rock in two strokes, and with Tommy's help scrambled up just as the shark glided past into the deep water beyond.

"Eh! Eh!" exclaimed Fangati, when she saw the reason of Tommy's fright. "I no afraid, what fo' afraid of he? You see, all-same."

She was about to dive into the sea and swim after the canoe, which was already drifting away, but Tommy caught her and held her fast. "No, no, you mustn't," she cried anxiously.

"Boat lun kick," cried Fangati in excitement.

The canoe, relieved of the girls' weight, would no doubt float longer than if they had still been in it, but Tommy realized that it must soon sink.

"Never mind," she cried. "Better lose the canoe than lose you."

Fangati stood beside her for some time, but Tommy soon became aware of a double danger. The tide was rising. Every moment the ripples washed a little farther over the rock: by and by this would be completely submerged and they would have to swim to the shore. The thought of this necessity filled Tommy with terror. The shark had disappeared only for a moment. She could now see it again, circling about the rock, as if it knew that it had only to bide its time and the girls would fall an easy prey. As soon as there was sufficient depth of water on the rock they would be absolutely defenceless against the monster's hungry jaws.

Clinging to Fangati, Tommy called aloud for help; then, glancing shorewards, recognized that there was little chance of her voice being heard through the belt of woodland that separated her from the camp.

The sea now thinly covered the rock. The canoe was rocking on the tide several yards away; the fin of the shark could still be seen as it wheeled around. Fangati, as well aware of the danger as Tommy, could remain inactive no longer.

"Knife!" she cried eagerly, pointing to Tommy's pocket.

"What are you going to do?" asked Tommy.

"You see. Kick! kick!" said the girl.

"Don't leave me," pleaded Tommy, handing her the knife.

Fangati looked around as if in search of something. Suddenly she snatched Tommy's handkerchief, which was tucked into her belt, and dived off the rock. When she disappeared Tommy saw the handkerchief floating. In a moment the shark rushed silently through the water, attracted by the splash. As it came beneath the handkerchief, which Fangati had dropped as a decoy, she came up beneath it and plunged the knife deep into its side. Then she dived again and disappeared.

The shark, thrashing the water into foam, dashed about in zigzag fashion. Tommy watched it fascinated, fearing that it might have struck Fangati. But in a moment she heard the girl's merry laugh behind her. Fangati came up on the farther side of the rock, on to which she clambered, splashing through the water to Tommy's side. The girls watched the gradually weakening movements of the monster, until at length with a final heave it sank to the bottom.

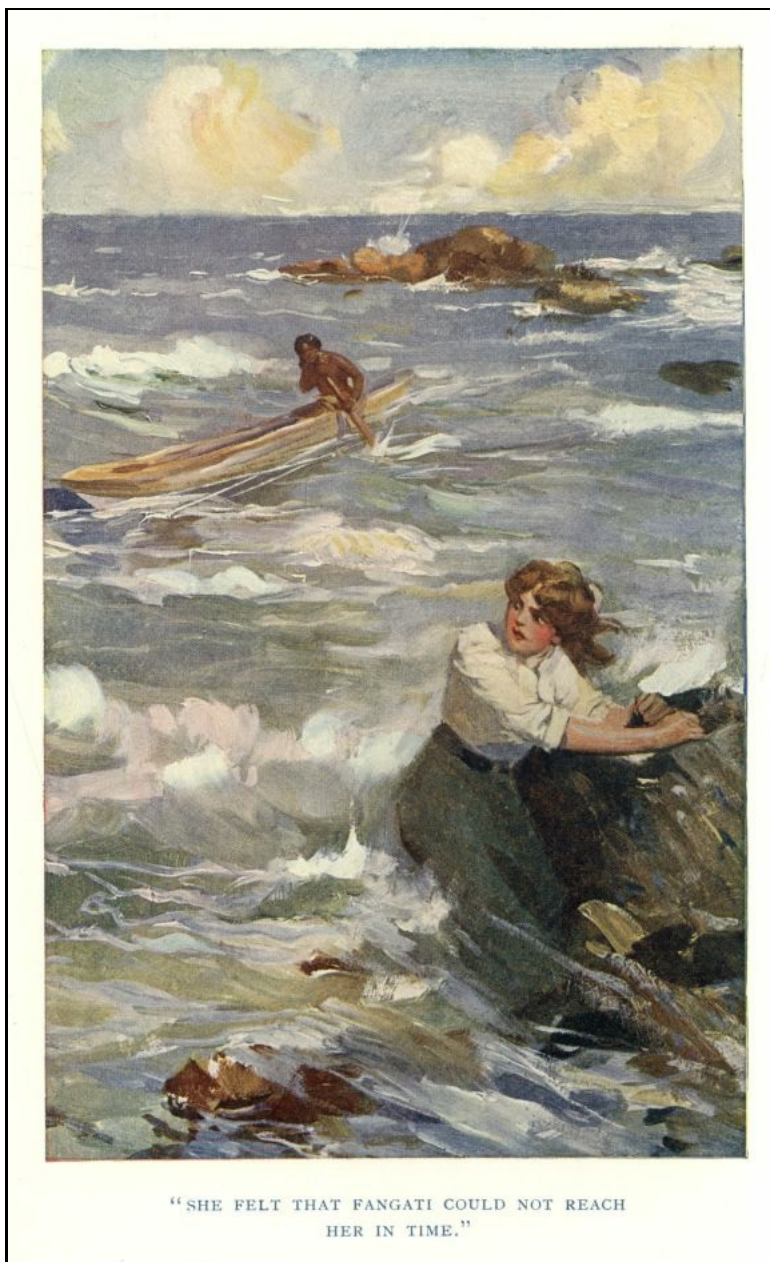
"S'im! S'im!" cried Fangati, pointing to the shore.

"Oh, I couldn't," said Tommy, clinging to the girl.

The possibility of there being other sharks between her and the shore unnerved her. Yet if she remained on this rock she must be washed off presently by the fast-rising tide. She was in a terrible state of anxiety, aware that she could not keep her footing long, yet unable to face the risk of being caught by a shark. Fangati seemed to guess at her state of mind. Disengaging herself from Tommy's grasp, without waiting for objections, she slipped off the rock and swam rapidly after the canoe, which was drifting farther and farther down the coast. Tommy watched her anxiously. Would she reach the canoe safely? Could she return with it in time?

The water was now up to Tommy's waist; she could hardly keep her footing as the tide surged over the rock. The gap between the little black head and the canoe was steadily diminishing. Tommy gave a gasp of relief as she saw that Fangati had overtaken the little craft. But what was she doing? She had swum beyond it. In a moment Tommy saw the explanation: the paddle had drifted beyond the canoe, and the swimmer had to recover it first. Fangati caught the paddle, turned about, and swimming back to the canoe, climbed over its side.

Tommy was seized with a sickening fear that help would come too late. The waves were tumbling over the rock with increasing force: her feet were lifted: she had the presence of mind to tread water, but was all the time in a state of nervous terror, expecting a shark to come up and snatch her in its horrid jaws. She felt that Fangati in the water-logged canoe could not reach her in time. Again she screamed for help.



"SHE FELT THAT FANGATI COULD NOT REACH
HER IN TIME."

"SHE FELT THAT FANGATI COULD NOT REACH HER IN TIME."

There came an answer from behind her. Turning her head, scarcely able to keep afloat, she saw Elizabeth in the dinghy sculling towards her. She swam frantically to meet her: to regain a foothold on the rock was now impossible. Elizabeth, glancing over her shoulder, called a cheery word, and pulled so as to meet her sister. A few more strokes brought them together. Elizabeth shipped oars, but found that she could not lift Tommy into the dinghy without assistance. Luckily Fangati was close at hand in the canoe, now so full of water as to be on the point of sinking. When she arrived Tommy was got into the boat, and lay down exhausted. Elizabeth pulled her rapidly to land, while Fangati, disdaining sharks, leapt into the sea, and swam, pushing the canoe in front of her.

Tommy was very contrite when Elizabeth lifted her on to dry land. "I won't do it again, Bess," she murmured, clinging to her sister. "I oughtn't to have gone so far. I was nearly drowned."

"Never mind, dear," said Elizabeth. "It's all right now. I was a little anxious when I got back and found you still away, and I'm so glad I came to look for you. Do you know, when I caught sight of Fangati and couldn't see you I

had a most horrible fear. What happened? Why didn't you swim ashore?"

Tommy told her the whole story. Elizabeth forbore to reproach her. She saw that the young girl had suffered a terrible fright, and it would not be necessary to enforce the lesson. She gave Fangati warm praise for what she had done, and Tommy's fondness for the native girl was deepened by this adventure they had shared.

CHAPTER XX

THE PRISONER IN THE CAVE

Since their change of residence the girls had used a fresh look-out station. The precipice which they had noticed when they first caught sight of Maku's hut was very lofty, and from its summit a more extensive outlook could be obtained than any they had yet enjoyed. Its face was unscalable; but Fangati had discovered a means of reaching its top from the rear. The way was steep and arduous, but the girls made light of it. Every day one of them climbed to the summit, and cast a searching glance over the sea; but for weeks in succession they saw no vessel, large or small.

One afternoon, however, Mary was startled on reaching the summit to see in the distance a small fleet of native canoes approaching the island. She ran down the hillside at full speed with the news. Maku instantly sent Fangati up to examine the vessels, and when by and by she declared that they were canoes from her own island the old man shook with fright.

The visit was what he had long expected and dreaded. His people were coming with their new chief to perform the usual ceremonies in the cave. He knew that if he were discovered he could expect no mercy; the mystery men would seize upon him, and their followers, inflamed with religious frenzy and palm wine, would tear him to pieces.

The younger girls were beside themselves with terror. But Elizabeth rose to the occasion. She saw that Maku, with a kind of fatalism, was disposed to await his destiny without stirring a hand to avert it; but a possible means of escape at once occurred to her. The canoes were still some distance out at sea. The usual landing-place was near the girls' old settlement on the other side of the island. It would probably be dark before the savages landed, so that twelve or more hours might elapse before the danger became pressing. In that time it would be possible to demolish the huts, obliterate the most tell-tale traces of habitation, and convey enough food to the pit to last them until the unwelcome visitors had completed their rites and taken their departure. The existence of the pit was unknown to them, and though it was impossible to cover it, there was a chance that, if the savages should light upon it, they would imagine it to be an old breadfruit pit, as Maku had done, and never suspect that it communicated with the cave.

She explained her plan rapidly to the others. Maku was inclined to do nothing, but the girls were feverishly ready to attempt any means of escape. Elizabeth sent Fangati to the top of the cliff to watch the canoes, bidding her be careful to keep out of sight. Then with her sisters she set to work to tear down their light hut and cast its materials into the stream. This would carry them to the sea, and as the current flowed away from the landing-place they would soon drift beyond observation. Before long the energy of the girls galvanized Maku into activity. He demolished his hut in the same way.

They then destroyed their fire-places, covered up the blackened earth with sand, and threw into the stream all the litter that betokened occupation. It was impossible to remove all traces; the vegetation around the little settlement was trampled, and nothing but time could undo that.

"What about the boat and canoe?" said Tommy.

"We must drag them up among the trees and hope that they will not be discovered," replied Elizabeth. "Luckily, there are no fruit-trees in that clump by the shore, so there's nothing to take the savages there."

The boats were soon hidden among the undergrowth. Then they collected their little belongings, kettle, cups, fishing-line and spears, and all the food they had at hand. They made their mat-beds into hammocks by stringing them at the corners with creepers, and filled these with all they wished to carry away. By this time it was nearly dark. Fangati, flying down the hillside, reported that the canoes had entered the lagoon by the gap in the reef and had now passed from sight. It was clear that they were making for the usual landing-place. Maku said that the people would camp for the night on the shore, next day roam the island in search of food, and in the evening hold a great feast in the cave.

Having made all their preparations, they set off towards the pit laden with the hammocks.

"Oh, we can't take Billy," said Elizabeth, noticing that the parrot was perched on Tommy's shoulder. "His screaming would ruin us."

Tommy was distressed at the thought of leaving her old pet behind, but there was clearly no help for it. The bird's wings being clipped it could not fend for itself very well, and Tommy decided to carry it down to the boat and leave it there with enough food for several days. She kissed it on parting, fearing that she might never see it again.

They found their ladder where they had left it among the trees. After letting down the hammocks they descended one by one, removed the ladder, and retreated towards the entrance of the tunnel. Their passage had left traces on the ground above, which must betray them if the keen-eyed savages came that way; but there was nothing to bring them in that direction; and the girls hoped that the pit would be a secure hiding-place during the three days the savages might be expected to spend on the island.

The fruits they had brought with them would supply them with food and drink for several days. The lack of water, which might have otherwise distressed them, was partially made up by the juice of oranges and cocoa-nuts.

They found the atmosphere of the pit close and unpleasant, but Elizabeth reflected that if nothing happened to alarm them they might climb up at dead of night and get a little fresh air while the savages were sleeping.

The girls had little sleep during the first night. Every few minutes they would wake and listen, wondering if by some unlucky chance their hiding-place had been discovered. They were still more uneasy when day broke. What were the savages doing? Fangati offered to climb up and spy upon them, but Elizabeth would not permit this. While they all remained in the pit they were safe; if the savages should catch sight of any one, they would, almost certainly, never rest until they had discovered the whereabouts of the inhabitants.

The hours of daylight dragged slowly away. The girls scarcely dared to speak. Several times Fangati stole along to the end of the tunnel to see if the savages had yet entered the cave; but there was no sign of them until the afternoon was far advanced. Then the girl ran back to report that there was a great noise below. She had been much too frightened to stay any longer; but Maku now said that he would go and learn who the people were.

He was absent so long that the girls began to be alarmed, and were thinking of going in search of him, when they heard the light rustle of his footsteps. On rejoining them he groaned heavily.

"What is the matter?" asked Elizabeth anxiously.

The old chief groaned again. He did not reply to Elizabeth, but spoke in a low tone rapidly to Fangati. The girls had picked up a good many native words, but their knowledge of the language was not sufficient for them to understand this conversation. From Maku's groans and Fangati's exclamations of distress they gathered that the chief had made some disagreeable discovery, and Elizabeth at length insisted on his telling her what troubled him.

The girls were horrified when they heard what he had to say. The cave was full of his own people. Among them he had seen, by the light of their torches of cocoa-nut husks, the new chief, a young man who was high in favour with the mystery men and had led the revolt against himself. But what had distressed him was the sight of a prisoner lying bound against the wall of the cave. It was a white man, and Maku was almost sure it was the "mikinaly." The mystery men could only have one object in bringing a white missionary to the scene of their dreadful orgies: he was to be offered up as a sacrifice to their heathen deities.

At this terrible news the girls' blood ran cold. Dreadful as the horrors of cannibalism had been to their imagination, the knowledge that the reality would soon be enacted so near at hand was overpowering. The thought of any human creature being tortured and killed in cold blood was agony to them; and that the victim should be a white man, a fellow-countryman, within reach of them, and yet beyond their help, caused them to shrink and quiver as with actual physical pain.

For some time they sat in silence, clasping their arms about each other.

Every now and again the old man uttered a groan. They could not see one another in the darkness, and Tommy's match-lighter was exhausted, so that they could not obtain a light; but the girls were conscious by a sort of electric sympathy that Maku and even gay-hearted little Fangati were scarcely less affected than themselves.

"Will it be to-night?" asked Elizabeth presently, in a whisper.

"No, no," replied Maku; "two days, flee days, den all gone."

This answer only increased the horror of the situation. The victim was to linger through three days anticipating his cruel death. The savages knew not so much mercy as to send him early to his doom.

"He no 'flaid; he all-same good man," murmured Maku.

"I can't stand it," cried Elizabeth, springing up; "I must see for myself. Perhaps something can be done for him."

"Don't, Bess!" exclaimed Tommy, clinging to her. "What can you do? They may see you."

"No, they can't do that. I must go. Perhaps if I screamed at them they would take me for an evil spirit and run away."

"But what then?" said Mary. "You could not go round and release the poor man; you would be seen."

"Yes; it was a foolish idea. But something may suggest itself. Oh, I can't bear to think about the poor man."

"If you go, I go too," said Tommy. "I won't leave you."

The two set off, and felt their way stumblingly through the passage. Presently they were aware of a pungent aromatic smell, that increased as they went on. This was explained when they reached the opening in the wall; looking over stealthily, they saw, sixteen or twenty feet below them, on the floor of the cave, a strange bewildering sight. A ring of dusky men held aloft great flaring torches which gave out a heavy smoke that penetrated into the tunnel. Without the circle there stood a row of drummers beating a rhythmic music on their instruments; within, a crowd of men were leaping in wild gyrations, uttering frenzied yells. In the haze nothing could be seen distinctly; all was a confused whirl. The prisoner was quite invisible.

The dance continued for a long time, the movements becoming ever more violent and fantastic, the cries more frantic, the drumming more swift and vigorous. At last, when the din was at its highest, the drummers gave one tremendous crash and dropped their sticks. The whirling and the yells ceased as by magic; the performers flung themselves fainting on the ground; and there was a great silence. But only for a few minutes. Then the men leapt to their feet again, rushed to the side of the cave, and returned, bringing the food laid there in readiness, and many gourds filled with the fermented sap of palm-trees. The torch-bearers stuck their torches in crannies on the walls, and the whole company gave themselves up to feasting. The girls turned sick as they watched the ravening gluttony of the men, and withdrew their eyes.

"Let us go back," whispered Tommy.

"No, no, wait," said Elizabeth; "I want to know what will happen."

Crouching below the opening, they waited for what seemed hours. The barbarous noise continued, voices were raised in excitement; but presently the uproar diminished, and finally ceased. Glancing down again, they saw the natives lying in all sorts of attitudes. Exhausted by the orgy, drunken with wine, they had fallen into a heavy sleep.

Some of the torches had gone out. Though the illumination was dimmer, the smoke was so much less that objects could more easily be distinguished. Against the wall at the right hand the girls saw what appeared at first to be a large bundle. But in a few moments they recognized the form of a man—an old man with a long white beard.

"It is the missionary!" whispered Elizabeth, clenching her hands in an agony of despair.

CHAPTER XXI

A DESPERATE ADVENTURE

Heroism is a plant of strange growth. It springs up suddenly, mysteriously, in unexpected places. A simple peasant girl, tending her flocks, hears a Voice; and she becomes a warrior, a leader of men, the saviour of her country. A maidservant, after a day of scrubbing floors and washing dishes, is darning stockings in the kitchen when she smells fire, rushes into the bedroom where the children are asleep, and carries them one by one through the flames into safety, at the cost of her own life.

Such opportunities fall to few. The most of us trudge a very unheroic journey through life. The road may be dusty, with ups and downs, dangerous corners and wearisome hills; but we plod along, keeping pretty closely to the highway, and taking great care at the crossings. It is only the odd one here and there who, by what we call the accident of circumstance, or by some compelling adventurousness of spirit, strays into the golden fields of romance, and is transformed into the shining semblance of a hero.

Yet the capacity for heroism may be latent under many a sober coat or homely apron. The town girl who shudders at a cow, the country girl who trembles at the looming of a motor omnibus, may show under the stress of some high emotion, at the call of some great emergency, qualities that match her with Joan of Arc or Alice Ayres.

Elizabeth Westmacott's life had been very simple and uneventful. She had had nothing more difficult to cope with than the ordinary crosses and perplexities of the daily round at the farm. She had never come face to face with mortal peril, or felt any stern demand upon her courage and endurance. But as she returned along the tunnel with her sister a great resolution shaped itself within her mind. A white man was in danger of his life; she would at least try to save him.

She was very quiet when she rejoined the little party in the pit. It was Tommy who, quivering with excitement, related to Mary what she had seen. The younger girls deplored the hapless condition of the old missionary; they wished he could be saved, but they felt the vanity of wishing. Elizabeth sat in silence, thinking hard.

"I must go up and get a breath of air," she said at last.

"I'll come too," said Tommy.

"No, dear, not yet; I want to be alone."

There was something in her tone that set her sister wondering.

"You'll be careful, Bess?" said Mary.

"Yes, I must be careful," was the reply.

Elizabeth climbed up the ladder. She was gone some time; her return was announced by a slight rustling thud upon the ground; something had been thrown into the pit.

"What is that?" asked Tommy. "Are you all right, Bess?"

"Quite right," said Elizabeth as she descended. "It is only a lot of creepers. We are going to make another ladder."

"Another! We don't want another."

"The first isn't long enough or the right sort. I am going to release the poor missionary."

The girls were for the moment speechless with amazement. Then Tommy said—

"You are mad, Bess; it is impossible. Don't talk such absolute rubbish."

"It isn't rubbish, dear. The savages are asleep. We can let down a rope ladder. I will climb down and cut his bonds. He will be safe if we get him into the tunnel."

"Oh, how insane you are! We shan't let you do any such thing."

"You are bound to wake them, Bess," said Mary; "you know how lightly savages sleep. They are just like dogs, and wake at a whisper."

"Not when they have fuddled themselves. I *must* do it, girls. I can't bear to leave the poor old man to his fate without trying to help him. It is possible, and you must help me."

Protest, entreaty, expostulation, were alike vain. Even when Tommy, with an air of triumph, exclaimed, "The hole isn't big enough for you to squeeze through," Elizabeth simply replied, "Then we must make it bigger."

Tommy knew from old experience that her elder sister was rather slow to make up her mind about anything; but when it was made up nothing would turn her. Some people called it firmness, I dare say there was a touch of obstinacy as well. It was evident that Elizabeth was thoroughly determined now, and the younger girls at length desisted from their attempts to dissuade her, and agreed to help.

Leaving Mary to assist Maku and Fangati in constructing a light ladder from the creepers she had gathered, Elizabeth set off with Tommy to return to the cave end of the tunnel. They had their knives with them. On arriving at the hole, they saw that the natives were still asleep, and several of the torches were almost burnt out. The dimmer light favoured their work of enlarging the hole, which, as Tommy had said, was too narrow by several inches for Elizabeth to pass through, still less the rescued prisoner.

When Elizabeth said that the hole must be made bigger, she had no definite knowledge whether it was possible. It was characteristic of her to form a resolution and then bend everything towards its accomplishment. If she had had a favourite motto it would have been "Where there's a will there's a way." Nevertheless, it was with some anxiety that she examined the hole. One side of it was solid rock; it would be a week's work to make any impression on it with their knives. But the other side was of a more friable character. It appeared to be formed of fragments that had settled down, and become compacted by the weight above. A tentative chipping at this with her knife showed Elizabeth that it would not be a difficult matter to scrape away enough to enlarge the hole by more than a foot.

There was danger in the task. Work as carefully as they might, it would be impossible to prevent some of the chips and dust from dropping into the cave. Luckily, none of the sleepers was immediately beneath the hole; and Elizabeth thought that by working carefully, collecting the larger chips and placing them on the floor of the tunnel, they might obviate the risk of awakening the men by the noise of falling stones.

They set to work very quietly, not daring even to whisper to each other. By making boring movements with the points of their knives they brought away a good deal of fine dust, which they took in their hands as far as possible and cast at their feet. Whenever they found that a piece of rock of any considerable size was becoming loosened they ceased work altogether with their knives and worried it out with their fingers. At such times the fall of a certain quantity of dust into the cave could not be avoided, and more than once they stopped, holding their breath as they listened for some signs of disturbance below. But all went well. All that troubled them was the terrible slowness of the work. They were certainly enlarging the hole, but every inch seemed to take an hour. Elizabeth wondered anxiously whether they would have finished before daylight, when it would be too late to go further with her plan.

Thinking of this, her attention strayed for a moment from her work; and before she could do anything to prevent it, a large fragment of rock became detached, and fell with a crash upon the floor of the cave. The girls started back, a cold shiver running through them. They heard voices, but not so loud or excited as they expected. They dared not look out at the hole, in case they were spied from below; but they guessed that only a few of the sleepers had been awakened, and when, after some minutes, the sounds diminished and ceased altogether, they drew breath again.

Apparently the natives had not been alarmed; such falls of rock from the roof of the cave were probably not uncommon. After an interval they resumed their work with renewed courage, not, however, presuming on their immunity, but taking even more care than before. A second fall might not pass so easily.

They continued at the task for hours. The torches in the cave went out one by one. When only one was left alight Elizabeth looked at her watch. It was past four o'clock. The hole seemed to her now wide enough to admit any ordinary man: but clearly it was too late to attempt the more difficult part of her plan. She was tired out. It would take some time to fetch the rope ladder from the pit, and before the prisoner could be released and brought up into the tunnel, daylight might be upon them. Besides, the feasters would have slept off the effect of their orgy, and there would be a perilous risk of their awakening. She thought it best to return to the pit and sleep. If Maku was right, there was still more than thirty hours' respite, and she would need all her strength and composure of mind for the final effort.

The two girls dragged themselves wearily through the tunnel. Half-way they heard footsteps approaching them.

"Who's that?" cried Tommy.

"I'm so glad you are safe," replied Mary. "We have finished the ladder, though it wasn't easy to make it in the dark, and I was getting anxious about you."

"We shall have to put it off until to-night," said Elizabeth. "The hole is large enough now, but it is too late to do any more. We are dead-beat and so terribly thirsty."

They returned to the pit and refreshed themselves with cocoa-nut juice. But this was a poor substitute for water, and when Fangati heard them say how they longed for water to drink, and to bathe their hands and faces, she volunteered to climb up and bring full cups from the stream that ran hard by. There was still an hour of darkness left, so Elizabeth agreed, and the young girl clambered up the ladder, carrying two of their tin cups. She returned very quickly, and made the journey a second time: the girls, after bathing their heads with wet handkerchiefs, lay down and slept the sleep of exhaustion.

It was high noon when they awoke, ravenously hungry. Elizabeth carried the new ladder out into the pit, where there was sufficient light to examine it. Considering that it had been made in darkness it proved a wonderfully successful piece of work, and only needed strengthening here and there.

"How will you fix it at the hole, Bess?" asked Tommy. "There is nothing to fasten it to."

"I had thought of that. The only way is to bind the top end of it to a long cane or stem—too long to pass through the hole. That will do it, I think. I wish we had our boat-hook."

"Suppose it should break?"

"I am sure that the ladder won't break: those creepers are extraordinarily tough, as you know. And half the strain will be borne by the wall, so that the pole ought not to snap. With God's help we shall succeed, dear."

"I am dreadfully afraid, Bess."

"The only thing I'm afraid of is the savages finding this pit. If they should come to it they would certainly notice the newly-trampled ground, and I don't think anything could save us then. But we must hope for the best."

The day passed all too slowly. How they longed for night to come! They could not feel easy in mind until they were sure that their hiding-place was not discovered. Yet the younger girls dreaded the night equally, for though the first part of Elizabeth's plan was safely accomplished, they could not think without horror of their sister descending among the savages. Elizabeth's quiet confidence amazed them. All that disturbed her was the fear that the prisoner might not be spared until nightfall.

Several times during the day she went to the end of the tunnel and looked over into the cave. On one of these occasions the place was empty except for the prisoner, who lay where she had seen him before, motionless. Was he still alive? Had his captors given him food and drink? She felt an intense compassion for the poor man. Would there be time, she wondered, to set him free now, before the savages returned? She blamed herself for not bringing the ladder with her; but reflected that she could not have known that the cave would be deserted. Probably by the time she had fetched the ladder and come back with Maku and some of the others to assist her, the opportunity would have passed.

But she might speak to the prisoner and let him know that an attempt would be made to save him. She looked anxiously towards the mouth of the cave. Nobody was in sight. No sound came from the exterior. She might at least venture to make a sound that would attract the attention of the prisoner and yet not arouse suspicion if it were heard by the natives. Leaning slightly over the ledge, she gave a low whistle. The prisoner did not stir. There was no sign that the sound had been heard, either by him or by another. She whistled again rather more loudly. Still no sign. Taking courage she bent still lower, and called in a low, clear tone—

"White man!"

She could think of no other form of address. Maku had not told her the missionary's name: she had not thought to ask it.

"White man!" she repeated.

The light was dim, but it seemed to her that the prostrate form moved. "White man, do you hear me?" she said, panting, watching the entrance of the cave intently, stretching her ears for the slightest sound.

There came a murmur from below.

"Do you hear me?" she called again.

"Yes," was the answer, in a tone so faint that she could scarcely catch it. "Who speaks?"

"Listen!" said Elizabeth. "Friends are here—English friends. To-night you will be set free. You will have to climb a ladder; do you understand?"

"I hear," said the voice. "God bless you!"

"Hush!" said Elizabeth in a quick whisper: she had seen a shadow pass across the entrance. She withdrew her head. A man entered, followed by others, their arms full of food for the night's feast.

She hurried back to the pit, thrilling with excitement.

"He is alive!" she cried. "I have spoken to him, I told him we would save him to-night."

"Oh, why did you!" said Mary tremulously. "Suppose you can't do it! the poor man will be restless all day. The savages may notice it and be on their guard."

"I am sure I did right," said Elizabeth. "It will be best for him to be prepared. If he were released without warning he might be too much overcome to collect himself, and our chance would be lost. As it is he will know what to expect and be ready to help. Oh, I wish it were dark!"

Knowing how much depended on her calmness and self-possession, Elizabeth tried to sleep, but her nervous excitement made this impossible. She employed herself during the remaining hours of daylight in testing and strengthening the ladder, and especially in ensuring that the loops through which the supporting pole was to pass were strong enough to bear the strain. The pole could not be obtained until the fall of night rendered it safe to issue from the pit. She explained carefully to Maku and Tommy, who were to help her, how they should hold the pole in position across the lower part of the hole, and how, if they found that she had been discovered, they were to draw up the ladder immediately and remain perfectly quiet. At this Tommy's lips trembled: the idea of losing Elizabeth was dreadful. But she determined not to increase the difficulty of her sister's task by any show of agitation, and accepted her instructions without a word.

As for Maku, he had all along said nothing either for or against the scheme. He seemed to have lost all individuality and to move like an automaton at Elizabeth's bidding.

"What is your missionary's name?" she asked him.

He gave a native name which he was unable to translate; the English name he had either forgotten or never

heard.

As soon as the first shades of evening descended, Elizabeth and Fangati climbed out of the pit, and after a little search returned with a stout sapling, which, when a few inches had been snapped off, gave a rod not so long as the breadth of the tunnel at the farther end, but longer than the width of the hole. Having fastened the rope ladder firmly to this, Elizabeth gave it to Maku to carry, and led the way along the tunnel. She had wished Mary to remain with Fangati at the pit, but Mary declared that she could not bear to be left behind wondering in the agony of suspense, so the whole party set off, Elizabeth impressing on them all the need of perfect silence.

They came to the end. The glare, the acrid smoke, the strident voices, proclaimed that the ceremonies had already begun. Elizabeth gave one glance into the cave, and having seen that the prisoner was still in the same position she withdrew her eyes; the bestial conduct of the savages sickened her. Hour after hour passed. The din was hideous. It seemed that the ceremonies on this second night were being prolonged. But presently they came to the same sudden end as before. The drumming and the frenzied chant ceased; instead were heard the sounds of men engaged in riotous feasting. Maku was restless; his faded eyes lit up. Elizabeth remembered that he must have taken part in similar orgies, and felt a nervous dread lest the excitement should communicate itself to him, and he should by some sudden outcry betray his presence. She laid her hand on his shoulder and whispered—

"Remember your friend there."

The old man gave a sigh, and shrank away from the hole, murmuring incomprehensibly in his own tongue.

As on the previous night, the intoxicating liquor drunk by the rioters produced its effect in somnolence. One by one they threw themselves back and fell into swinish slumber. At last there was silence. Several of the torches had gone out and not been replaced. Elizabeth thought her chance of success would be greatest if she waited until only one or two remained alight. She could not wait for absolute darkness, for some light was necessary for her task, and she must act while the sleep of the natives was heaviest.

Now that the critical moment had come she was strangely calm. All nervousness and excitement had vanished; her whole being was possessed by one dominating idea—the rescue of the prisoner. Noiselessly she let down the flexible ladder, which lay close against the wall. Then seeing that Tommy and Maku had grasped the ends of the small pole as she had instructed them, she prepared to clamber through the aperture. At the last moment Mary flung her arms round her neck and kissed her passionately; then she was gone.

She slipped down the ladder very quickly on her bare feet, carrying her open knife. She stood on the floor. The men were for the most part stretched towards the middle of the cave, but one or two lay near the prisoner. Pausing just one moment to look around, she moved quickly along the wall, holding her skirts close about her as she passed the sleepers. She came to the prisoner and stooped. His eyes were open. She dared not cut his bonds with rapid strokes, for fear the snapping should be heard. Gently she sawed the tendrils that were wound round about his whole body, all her senses alert. It seemed ages before the bonds were all loosened and removed.

The prisoner did not stir. Elizabeth beckoned to him, but with his eyes he seemed to try to explain that he was helpless. One of the natives moved uneasily, and for one intolerable moment Elizabeth lost her head. Then she understood: the prisoner's bonds had been so tightly drawn, and he had so long remained in the one position, that his limbs were numbed. Slipping to her knees, she began to chafe his legs. A man at the far end of the cave gave a cough, and a hot wave surged through the girl. At that moment she could have wished the earth to open and swallow her. But once again there was silence, and the terror passed.

In a few minutes the prisoner was able to move his legs. Alternately bending and straightening them, he felt them tingling with the coursing blood. Elizabeth rose, glanced timorously round, and held out her hands to him. He got up, staggered, and would have fallen but for her sustaining arms. There was not enough space for both to pass abreast between the wall and the prostrate natives. Walking backwards, Elizabeth led him slowly towards the waiting ladder. Every step was painful to him, and as he crept feebly on, Elizabeth's heart misgave her; would he have the strength to climb? They came to the foot of the ladder. All the torches were now extinguished save one. Complete darkness would have been welcome if only Elizabeth could have had confidence in the old man's strength. She pointed to the ladder, then upwards towards the gap. The missionary understood. For an instant Elizabeth hesitated. Should she go first, leaving the prisoner to follow, or see him in safety before she mounted herself? A

moment's consideration showed her that she must be the first to climb. Maku and Tommy would need all their strength to keep the pole in position; the missionary was tall and no light weight; he could not scramble through the hole unaided; therefore she must be there to help him. She dared not speak to him, but in dumb show she indicated what he must do. He nodded. Then she gave a slight tug upon the ladder as a sign to those above, and nimbly mounted.

She reached the top, slid through the hole, and looked back. The old man was beginning to climb. With fast-beating heart she watched him, dreading that now, even at the last moment, he might miss his footing and fall back among his mortal enemies. They slept on. Slowly, carefully, the climber drew himself up. To Elizabeth, fixing her eyes on him, it seemed that he would never reach her. The ladder creaked; would the sleepers waken? She looked anxiously towards them; they did not move. Inch by inch he came nearer; he had almost gained the top, when he swayed and for one terrible moment she thought he was lost. But with a great effort he recovered himself; he mounted again; his head was level with the hole. Elizabeth thrust out her arms, gripped his wrists, and drew him into the tunnel, holding him firmly with her strong, supple hands. He was through.

But his shoulders had pressed heavily upon the sides of the hole, and his feet had not touched the floor of the tunnel when several fragments of loosened rock fell and struck the ground with a resounding clatter. There was commotion below. Quick as thought Elizabeth drew up the ladder, leaving Mary to support the old man, whose efforts had exhausted him.

As the ladder came through the hole it caught a fragment of rock that lay on the ledge. Elizabeth dashed forward to prevent this from falling. But it escaped her and fell crashing to the ground at the feet of one of the natives, who was looking up in wonderment at the strange thing crawling as it were into the wall.

A yell proclaimed his discovery. All hope of secrecy was at an end. Instantly the cave was filled with uproar. The sleeping men had leapt to their feet. At first their cries were of amazement and alarm, but one blew the flickering torch into flame, others kindled fresh torches at it, and in the illumination they saw that their prisoner was gone. In his place were the severed bonds, and beside them Elizabeth's open knife, which in her anxious help of the old missionary she had forgotten.

With yells of rage the natives dashed hither and thither, pointing at the gap in the wall, in too great a frenzy of excitement to hit on a means of pursuing the prisoner. One picked up a trade gun and fired, but the uselessness of this must have been apparent to them all. Suddenly, at a word from their chief, six of them darted from the cave into the open. In a few minutes they returned, bringing two straight, young trees which they had uprooted from the loose soil outside. These they set against the wall, and with hideous shouts of anticipated triumph they began to swarm up towards the hole.

CHAPTER XXII

FRIENDS IN NEED

Meanwhile at the moment of discovery the little company in the tunnel was overcome with horror and despair. The strain of the last few minutes had told upon Elizabeth's strength. She trembled in every limb. The others were as though paralysed; and the missionary, bewildered and unstrung, stood helpless, his arms clasped by Mary in a convulsive grip.

The glare of the rekindled torches threw a sudden light upon the end of the tunnel. The report of the shot seemed to shock Elizabeth into renewed energy. "Back to the pit!" she cried. "Mary, go first with the missionary."

He had now recognized Maku, and was lost in amazement. The whole party set off along the tunnel. Elizabeth guessed that the ascent of the wall would offer no difficulties to men practised in climbing cocoa-nut palms, and though she was urging her friends towards the pit she had no hope of ultimate escape.

The light soon failed. They had perforce to move slowly, and Mary warned the missionary that presently when the roof became lower he would have to crawl on hands and knees. She stretched her arms above her head so that she might know when the time for stooping came. The rest followed close behind, Elizabeth bringing up the rear.

The lowest part of the tunnel was about one-third of its length from the gap. As she crawled through this with Tommy immediately in front of her, Elizabeth had a sudden thought which turned despair into hope. The roof was no more than three feet above the floor. If only the narrow space could be blocked, an effective obstacle to pursuit would be set up. Was it possible? This portion of the tunnel was but a few yards in length. As soon as she was able to stand again she called to the rest to halt.

"Have you your knives?" she asked her sisters when they came to her.

"Yes," they both answered.

"Come with me, Mary," she said, taking Tommy's knife from her. "Go on with the others; we will follow soon."

Mary and she returned to the point where the roof sloped, and Elizabeth, slipping to her knees, began to prod at it with the knife. To her great joy a shower of loose shale fell.

"Help me, Mary; work as hard as you can."

They plied their knives energetically. The missionary, anxious to learn what they were about, joined them, and, having no other implement, lifted a piece of hard rock and prodded at the roof with that. Soon a considerable heap of earth and shale was piled up on the floor. But their tools were poor substitutes for pickaxes, and Elizabeth feared that there would not be time to block the tunnel effectively before the savages arrived.

All at once there was a tremendous crash, and the girls started back in alarm, not quickly enough to escape some clods of earth that struck them heavily. The loosening of the under layer of the roof had disturbed the mass above, and there had now fallen upon the floor an immense quantity of debris which completely blocked the tunnel, and could only be removed with long labour.

Elizabeth gave a cry of joy.

"We are saved for the present," she said. "Come!"

They hurried after the others, whom they overtook just as they reached the opening into the pit.

"We can't stay here," said Elizabeth; "they'll know there must be another entrance, and will discover it as soon as it is light. We must get up into the woods and hide."

"The precipice!" said Mary instantly.

"We could hardly get there in the dark," replied Elizabeth; "it's too dangerous. But we must go as near it as possible, and climb to the top when we can see our way."

They wasted no time, but set up the ladder at once and clambered out of the pit. Their haste was such that none thought of taking with them any of their belongings until Elizabeth, at the last moment, remembered that there were no fruit-trees where they were going. She collected all the food that remained and handed it up to her sisters, together with their kettle and tin cups.

To Fangati was given the task of leading the party through the woods. Their destination was a little hollow some distance away on the reverse side of the precipice. It was thickly covered with trees, and would afford shelter for the rest of the night. As soon as they dared they would climb to the summit, a feat which in the darkness would be hazardous in the extreme.

Fangati was an unerring guide, and a quarter of an hour's uphill walk brought them to the wooded hollow. Elizabeth and Mary each took an arm of the missionary to assist him; indeed, Elizabeth felt the need of support herself; her strength was nearly exhausted. Not a word was spoken during the journey. All ears were strained to catch sounds from below. For a time they heard nothing, but presently the cries of the islanders came faintly on the air from afar. These ceased before they reached their shelter, and it seemed that the pursuit was taking another direction.

They sank upon the ground beneath the trees.

"Let us thank God for all His mercies," said the missionary, and in tones little above a whisper, he uttered a few simple words of gratitude and of entreaty for protection during the night.

"I am filled with amazement at my marvellous deliverance," he said to Elizabeth. "I know Maku and Fangati, but who are you, my dear young ladies, and how came you upon this island? Have you nobody else with you? But I am inconsiderate; you must be very weary: doubtless you will tell me all in the morning."

"I am tired," Elizabeth confessed; "but I could not sleep, and the joy of hearing an English voice is greater than I can tell."

There was a sob in her voice. Mary clasped her hand.

"I will tell our story, Bess dear," she said; "lay your head in my lap and rest."

So Mary quietly began to relate the story of their voyage. As she casually mentioned the name of the vessel the missionary interrupted with an exclamation.

"The *Elizabeth*! Was her skipper Captain Barton?"

"Yes," said Mary in surprise. "Did you know Uncle Ben?"

"Know him! He was one of my oldest friends. I met him in London a few days before he sailed; indeed, he offered to bring me back in his own vessel. He mentioned that his nieces were accompanying him. What has happened?"

Mary went on to tell of the wreck, the landing on the island, and the simple outline of their life since.

"Marvellous," said the old man; "and my poor old friend!—you saw nothing of the raft?"

"Nothing. Do you think that there is any chance at all that Uncle Ben was saved?"

"I cannot tell. Strange things happen in the providence of God. I see the hand of God in your presence here; but for that I should not have lived another day. We can but trust that my old friend is safe. He may be on one of these many islands. I hope so."

In answer to a question from Mary he related how he had gone from London to San Francisco, and sailed thence in an American ship for the South Pacific. Having made a tour of the mission-stations, he had only reached his own island a few days ago. He had been met on the shore by the natives with every mark of welcome; the absence of the chief was plausibly explained; but the vessel had no sooner departed than he was seized and tied up. He expected instant death, but had been reserved for sacrifice at the ceremonies in connection with the inauguration of the new chief.

"Did they give you food?" asked Tommy.

"Yes, my dear, or I should never have had the strength to profit by your sister's brave deed. Do you know, when I heard her voice, I thought it had been the voice of an angel, speaking to me as the angel spoke to St. Peter in prison. The remembrance of how the apostle was set free was very cheering as I lay waiting for night. Your sister has indeed been an angel of deliverance. I thank God, who put courage into her heart."

They talked until the light of dawn stole through the trees. Elizabeth had fallen asleep. Without disturbing her the others rose and went to the edge of the clump of woodland, whence a considerable portion of the island was visible. No savages were in sight or hearing. They made a breakfast of fruit, and when Elizabeth awoke, and had eaten, they took their way with many precautions up the steep ascent to the summit of the precipice.

There grew upon it a few palm-trees, which did not afford as good a screen as the clump they had just left. On the other hand it commanded a wider outlook over the sea. They hoped that the savages, failing to discover them, would eventually return to their island. Only when they saw the canoes departing would it be safe to venture down again.

Their situation gave them much anxiety. Their stock of food was small, and they had now another mouth to feed. Already they felt the lack of water. The stream that flowed near the pit and plunged down over the waterfall was too far distant for them to attempt to visit it; and while the savages were on the island the still longer journey to the stream near the site of their original hut was out of the question. They hoped with all their heart that the intruders would soon depart.

But this hope died as the day wore on. From time to time they heard shouts, now distant, now nearer at hand. Clearly the men were searching for them. Once they were greatly alarmed when they caught sight of dusky figures crossing the open ground below their recent settlement, and knew by their shouts and gestures that they had discovered traces of habitation. The natives had indeed already come upon the pit and searched it. By good fortune they had followed the tracks down to the shore instead of up into the higher ground. They scoured the copse in which the boat and canoe had been placed, and on discovering them hastened along the shore in both directions. No doubt it was only the apparent inaccessibility of the precipice that prevented them from suspecting that as the fugitives' place of refuge.

The day passed. The little party lay in the shade of the trees, and kept as still as possible; but they were much distressed by heat and thirst, and at the fall of night the girls felt thoroughly worn out. Mr. Corke, the missionary, arranged that they should sleep through the night, while he and the two natives kept watch.

Elizabeth was very unwilling that this task should be undergone by the old man; but he assured her that he was very tough, and had quite recovered from the effects of confinement, owing to the fortunate circumstance that the islanders had not deprived him of food.

When the next morning broke, and the girls, feeling weak and ill, rose from their hard couches, they were amazed to discover that Mr. Corke was no longer with them.

"Where is he?" asked Elizabeth anxiously.

"He go fetch water," said Maku. "He say mus' have water, so he go down all-same fetch some."

"Why did you let him? Why didn't you wake us?" cried Elizabeth in great distress.

"He say mus' go," persisted the old chief. "He say you do lot fo' he, he do little t'ing fo' you."

Tommy ran to the edge of the plantation to look for the missionary. Her sisters heard her give a low cry, and next moment she came running back to them, her eyes ablaze with excitement.

"A ship! A ship!" she cried.

The startling news was almost overwhelming. For a moment the girls stood as though rooted to the ground, then they rushed forward, following Tommy, who had already darted back towards the edge. Their hearts leapt within them as they saw, far out at sea, a line of black smoke, and beneath it the low hull of a steamer.

"Is she coming this way?" said Mary anxiously.

"Oh, I do hope so," said Elizabeth. "We must make a signal. Let us tie our handkerchiefs together; Fangati can climb one of the trees with it."

In a few moments Fangati had climbed a tall stem, and tied the three knotted handkerchiefs to a branch projecting towards the sea. Then the girls remembered Mr. Corke, whom in their momentary excitement they had forgotten. There was no sound from below; the natives had certainly not yet seen him, or shouts would have announced their delight.

But his continued absence made the girls ache with dread.

They watched the steamer eagerly; the hull was enlarging; it was approaching rapidly; it was heading straight for the island. The signal had apparently been seen. But there was still no sign of the missionary.

When the vessel was about half-a-mile from the shore its motion ceased.

"They are afraid to come closer because of the rocks," said Mary. "Look, they're lowering a boat."

But at this moment their attention was withdrawn from the steamer by startling sounds from below—loud, fierce shouts mingled with the report of fire-arms.

"Oh! I'm afraid they've caught him," exclaimed Elizabeth, clasping her hands in distress.

They ran along the edge of the precipice to a spot where they had a better view of the open ground from the cove to the site of their huts. The din was increasing in volume and fury, but as yet nothing could be seen. Suddenly, from beyond the jutting edge of a crag, they saw the missionary running with all his might, not towards them, but towards the sea. The girls wondered at this, for he could not have caught sight of the steamer, owing to the trees. It dawned on them afterwards that the chivalrous old man, in his care for them, was leading the pursuers away from their hiding-place.

Quivering with apprehension they watched the runner. Presently, less than a hundred yards behind him, a horde of savages burst into view, uttering frantic yells, as they leapt after their expected victim. For some moments he disappeared from the view of the anxious spectators on the precipice, hidden by the intervening trees. Then he emerged again; he was still running at a speed amazing in a man of his years. What would be the end of the race? The pursuers were gaining on him; they were hard at his heels: it seemed impossible that he should not be overtaken.

He was now upon the beach. A few yards of sand separated him from the sea. He stumbled, recovered himself, dashed on again, and to the girls' horror plunged into the water. The terrifying image of hungry sharks rose in their minds. Several of the pursuers halted and levelled their guns at the swimmer, others plunged in after him, evidently determined not to be balked of their prey.

All this time the attention of the girls had been divided between this scene on the shore and the steamer's boat, which was rapidly approaching. They could not tell whether it had been seen either by the pursuers or the fugitive. They watched in breathless excitement. The boat was drawing nearer to the swimmer, but the foremost of the savages was nearer still. Suddenly there was a flash and a puff of smoke from the boat, followed by a report. The brown men stopped: there was a moment's hesitation, then they were seen striking out vigorously for the shore.

"Saved! Saved!" cried Tommy, dancing for joy. "Oh, let's go and meet them, Bess."

"Better wait, dear," said Elizabeth, whose lips were quivering. "Let them drive the savages away first."

In tense excitement they watched the missionary lifted into the boat. It was too far distant as yet for them to distinguish its occupants. As soon as the missionary was aboard the sailors dipped their oars again and pulled lustily for the shore. The girls strained their eyes. The newcomers might be Dutch, French, English, or American; they were white men; the long captivity was ended.

The boat had almost reached the beach. Suddenly Tommy gave a scream, and clutched at Mary's arm.

"It's Uncle Ben! It's Uncle Ben!" she cried.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOME-COMING

Who can describe the happiness of friends long parted when they meet again! As there is a grief too deep for tears, so there is a joy too intense for words to express. Let the reader picture to herself the meeting of uncle and nieces, the sober satisfaction of Mr. Purvis, the ecstasy of little Dan Whiddon, the jolly faces of Long Jimmy, Sunny Pat and the rest.

Uncle Ben's story was a simple and natural one. He had no sooner launched the raft with all his crew on board, than the *Elizabeth* went down with a gurgle and was seen no more. The raft drifted about for days at the mercy of every current, until it was sighted by a merchant brig. The castaways were picked up, but in spite of Captain Barton's entreaties the skipper would not alter his course to search for the girls. He was bound for San Francisco with a perishable cargo, and declared that he could not waste time and money scouring the South Pacific for any females, even were they princesses or queens.

At San Francisco Captain Barton chartered a steamer. He never spoke of the pang this must have cost him. Those who knew the old man guessed how bitterly he felt the necessity, at the close of his career, of thus tacitly admitting the superiority of steam over sails.

The steamer had made for Maku's island, Captain Barton hoping to enlist the services of Mr. Corke and the people in the search for his nieces. Learning on his arrival that Maku had disappeared, and that the missionary had been carried away to the sacred island, he at once started to rescue his friend. He was distressed at the interruption of his primary quest, but when Mr. Corke's whereabouts was a certainty, while his nieces' very existence was doubtful, he felt that the nearer duty must be accomplished first. His delight at being able to rescue the girls, his friend, and the old chief at the same time may be imagined.

His action on the island was summary. On learning the state of affairs, he sent the steamer along the shore to the spot where the native canoes were beached, drove off the infuriated natives with a warning shot from his brass gun, and had the canoes towed out to sea. He said he did not hold with revolutions, and meant to reinstate Maku in his old chieftdom. Since those of his disaffected subjects who had come to the island were the mystery men and their principal supporters, he decided to leave them there with their new chief, having learnt that they would have no difficulty in finding sustenance. He would carry back Maku and Fangati with the missionary to their island, and to ensure that they should not be molested by the revolutionaries he determined to take the canoes in tow, and so leave them without the means of crossing the sea.

The girls left the scene of their adventures without regret. Looking back upon their life there, they acknowledged that it had been on the whole happy, and their terrors seemed trifling now that they were free from them. Tommy did not fail to seek for her parrot, which she found disconsolate in the boat, and which, she declared, spoke to her for the first and last time in its life when she took it up and perched it on her shoulder. She was very reluctant to part with Fangati, and tried to persuade her uncle to take her back to England with them; but the old man assured her that the girl was happier in her own land, and put an end to the subsequent discussion with one of his crusted aphorisms.

There is a little town in Surrey which, though not far from London, preserves a good deal of the charm of the country. Its roads are shaded with unlopped trees; its houses lie amid pleasant gardens; and being away from the main routes it is not devastated by motor cars.

In the front garden of one of the houses rises a tall white mast, complete with yards and halyards. Over the entrance stands the model of a full-rigged barque. In the hall a white parrot spends a placid but noisy existence. These emblems of the nautical life are confined to the front of the house; at the back there is a tennis lawn, a well-kept flower garden, with glass-houses, and an orchard.

Captain Barton was advised to take this house by his lawyer, who wished to let it for a client. A tramp through

Deptford and Rotherhithe soon convinced him that, however well suited those riverside suburbs may have been to seafaring men in the days of Queen Bess, they did not offer much attraction nowadays to a retired mariner with three nieces. And having assured himself that the country town in question had an excellent high school for girls, with a practising school attached, he followed his lawyer's advice—for once in a way, as he said.

Elizabeth keeps house for him, spending a good deal of time in the garden. She is assisted there by Dan Whiddon, who does not grow very fast, although the Captain makes him climb the mast once a day for the sake of stretching his limbs. Mary is learning how to teach, and Tommy is in the fifth form at school, champion in tennis, and a dashing forward in the hockey team. Her first reports made her uncle screw up his mouth, and rub his bald pate, and ask Elizabeth what on earth was to be done with a minx like that. "Has good abilities, but lacks application," he quoted. "Much too talkative. Has lost too many conduct marks this term." Elizabeth begged him to be patient, assuring him that Tommy would turn out quite well in time. And as the same mistresses who penned the above remarks are all wonderfully fond of Tommy, and she is the most popular girl in the school, it is evident that she has at least one most enviable quality, the power of winning friends.

A visitor often comes to the house, at whose appearance Captain Barton retires to his den and grumps and growls over his beloved pipe. The young electrical engineer whom the girls had met in Valparaiso will certainly get on in the world, if dogged persistence has its reward. Though they had then been unable to give him any address, and had held no communication with him since, they had not been settled more than a week before he called. "The impudence of the fellow!" said Captain Barton inwardly, when Elizabeth introduced the visitor. Through the wreaths of smoke from his pipe the worthy Captain sees visions of Elizabeth keeping house for some one else, and the poor man, I fear it must be confessed, is jealous. Tommy looks on with a humorous twinkle in her eye.

"Poor old Nunky!" she thinks. "He's wondering what in the world he'll do when Bess is married, and Mary's away teaching, and he's left to the tender mercies of *Me!*"

But I have watched many girls in my time, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if Tommy—she will have her hair up and be Miss Katherine Westmacott then—develops into a very capable housekeeper. She will certainly be what an old lady friend of mine calls "a bit of sunshine in the home."

Richard Clay & Sons, Ltd., London and Bungay.

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

PUBLISHED BY

HENRY FROWDE AND HODDER & STOUGHTON

THE RED BOOK FOR GIRLS

EDITED BY

Mrs. HERBERT STRANG

A miscellany for girls, containing a large number of complete original stories by popular writers; extracts from great authors; articles and poems. Illustrated with 12 plates in colour by HUGH THOMSON, W. R. S. STOTT, N. M. PRICE, CHARLES PEARS, and other artists, and numerous black and white drawings. 288 pages. Crown 4to, cloth, 3/6; picture boards, cloth back, 2/6; also in full gilt, 5/-.

SOME OF THE CONTENTS

PAULINA'S ADVENTURE. By MARY COWDEN CLARKE.
ABOU CASSEM'S OLD SLIPPERS.
AN IOWA HEROINE. By AMY BARNARD.
ANNE ELIZABETH. By ALICE MASSIE.
CATHERINE DOUGLAS. By CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.
THE LAST STRAW. By ESMEE RHOADES.
MAGGIE RUNS AWAY. By GEORGE ELIOT.
THE DOG AND MAISIE. By MRS. HERBERT STRANG.
ENID'S ADVENTURE. By BESSIE MARCHANT.
THE YOUNG TOY-MAKERS. By MABEL QUILLER-COUCH.
MY MONKEY JACKO. By FRANK BUCKLAND.

Stories by Popular Authors

CHRISTINA GOWANS WHYTE

Uncle Hilary's Nieces

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, gilt edges. 6/-.

Until the death of their father, the course of life of Uncle Hilary's nieces had run smooth; but then the current of misfortune came upon them, carried them, with their mother and brothers, to London, and established them in a fiat. Here, under the guardianship of Uncle Hilary, they enter into the spirit of their new situation; and when it comes to a question of ways and means, prove that they have both courage and resource. Thus Bertha secretly takes a position as stock-keeper to a fashionable dressmaker; Milly tries to write, and has the satisfaction of seeing her name in print; Edward takes up architecture and becomes engrossed in the study of "cupboards and kitchen sinks"; while all the rest contribute as well to the maintenance of the household as to the interest of the story.

"We have seldom read a prettier story than ... 'Uncle Hilary's Nieces.' ... It is a daintily woven plot clothed in a style that has already commended itself to many readers, and is bound to make more friends."—*Daily News*.

The Five Macleods

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, gilt edges. 6/-.

The modern Louisa Alcott! That is the title that critics in England and America have bestowed on Miss Christina Gowans Whyte, whose "Story-Book Girls" they declare to be the best girls' story since "Little Women." Like the Leightons and the Howards, the Macleods are another of those delightful families whose doings, as described by Miss Whyte, make such entertaining reading. Each of the Five Macleods possesses an individuality of her own. Elspeth is the eldest—sixteen, with her hair "very nearly up"—and her lovable nature makes her a favourite with every one; she is followed, in point of age, by the would-be masterful Winifred (otherwise Winks) and the independent Lil; while little Babs and Dorothy bring up the rear.

"Altogether a most charming story for girls,"—*Schoolmaster*.

Nina's Career

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, gilt edges. 6/-.

"Nina's Career" tells delightfully of a large family of girls and boys, children of Sir Christopher Howard. Friends of the Howards are Nina Wentworth, who lives with three aunts, and Gertrude Mannering. Gertrude is conscious of always missing in her life that which makes the lives of the Howards so joyous and full. They may have "careers"; she must go to Court and through the wearying treadmill of the rich girls. The Howards get engaged, marry, go into hospitals, study in art schools; and in the end Gertrude also achieves happiness.

"We have been so badly in need of writers for girls who shall be in sympathy with the modern standard of intelligence, that we are grateful for the advent of Miss Whyte, who has not inaptly been described as the new Miss Alcott."—*Outlook*.

The Story-Book Girls

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges. 6/-.

This story won the £100 prize in the Bookman competition. The Leightons are a charming family. There is Mabel, the beauty, her nature strength and sweetness mingled; and Jean, the downright, blunt, uncompromising; and Elma, the sympathetic, who champions everybody, and has a weakness for long words. And there is Cuthbert, too, the clever brother. Cuthbert is responsible for a good deal, for he saves Adelaide Maud from an accident, and brings the Story-Book Girls into the story. Every girl who reads this book will become acquainted with some of the realest, truest, best people in recent fiction.

"It is not too much to say that Miss Whyte has opened a new era in the history of girls' literature.... The writing, distinguished in itself, is enlivened by an all-pervading sense of humour."—*Manchester Courier*.

A NEW ALBUM FOR GIRLS

My Schooldays

In four forms: Velvet Calf, boxed, 8/6 net; Padded Leather, 6/- net; Leather (or Parchment tied with ribbon), 5/- net; Cloth, olive edges, 2/6 net.

An album in which girls can keep a record of their schooldays. In order that the entries may be neat and methodical, certain pages have been allotted to various different subjects, such as Addresses, Friends, Books, Matches, Birthdays, Concerts, Holidays, Theatricals, Presents, Prizes and Certificates, and so on. The album is beautifully decorated throughout.

J. M. WHITFIELD

Tom who was Rachel

A Story of Australian Life. Illustrated in Colour by N. TENISON. Large crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 5/-.

This is a story of Colonial life by an author who is new to English readers. In writing about Australia Miss Whitfield is, in a very literal sense, at home; and no one can read her book without coming to the conclusion that she is equally so in drawing pen portraits of children. Her work possesses all the vigour and freshness that one usually associates with the Colonies, and at the same time preserves the best traditions of Louisa Alcott. In "Tom who was Rachel" the author has described a large family of children living on an up-country station; and the story presents a faithful picture of the everyday life of the bush. Rachel (otherwise Miss Thompson, abbreviated to "Miss Tom," afterwards to "Tom,") is the children's step-sister; and it is her influence for good over the wilder elements in their nature that provides the real motive of a story for which all English boys and girls will feel grateful.

ELSIE J. OXENHAM

Mistress Nanciebel

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 5/-.

This is a story of the Restoration. Nanciebel's father, Sir John Seymour, had so incurred the displeasure of King Charles by his persistent opposition to the threatened war against the Dutch, that he was sent out of the country. Nothing would dissuade Nanciebel from accompanying him, so they sailed away together and were duly landed on a desolate shore, which they afterwards discovered to be a part of Wales. Here, by perseverance and much hard toil, John o' Peace made a new home for his family, in which enterprise he owed not a little to the presence and constant help of Nanciebel, who is the embodiment of youthful optimism and womanly tenderness.

"A charming book for girls."—*Evening Standard*.

WINIFRED M. LETTS

The Quest of The Blue Rose

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 5/-.

After the death of her mother, Sylvia Sherwood has to make her own way in the world as a telegraph clerk. The world she finds herself in is a girls' hostel in a big northern city. For a while she can only see the uncongenial side of her surroundings; but when she has made a friend and found herself a niche, she begins to realize that though the Blue Rose may not be for her finding, there are still wild roses in every hedge. In the end, however, Sylvia, contented at last with her hard-working, humdrum life, finds herself the successful writer of a book of children's poems.

"Miss Letts has written a most entertaining work, which should become very popular. The humour is never forced, and the pathetic scenes are written with true feeling."—*School Guardian*.

Bridget of All Work

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges. 5/-.

The scene of the greater part of this story is laid in Lancashire, and the author has chosen her heroine from among those who know what it is to feel the pinch of want and strive loyally to combat it. There is a charm about Bridget Joy, moving about her kitchen, keeping a light heart under the most depressing surroundings. Girl though she is, it is her arm that encircles and protects those who should in other circumstances have been her guardians, and her brave heart that enables the word Home to retain its sweetness for those who are dependent on her.

"Miss Letts has written a story for which elder girls will be grateful, so simple and winning is it; and we recognize in the author's work a sense of character and ease of style which ought to ensure its popularity."—*Globe*.

MABEL QUILLER-COUCH

The Carroll Girls

Illustrated, 5/-.

The father of the Carroll girls fell into misfortune, and had to go to Canada to make a new start. But he could not take his girls with him, and they were left in charge of their cousin Charlotte, in whose country home they grew up, learning to be patient, industrious, and sympathetic. The author has a dainty and pleasant touch, and describes her characters so lovingly that no girl can read this book without keen interest in Esther's housekeeping and Penelope's music, Angela's poultry-farming, and Poppy's dreams of market-gardening.

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

Teddy: Her Daughter

Illustrated in Colour by N. TENISON. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 3/6.

Many young readers have already made the acquaintance of Teddy in Miss Anna Chapin Ray's previous story, "Teddy: Her Book." The heroine of the present story is Teddy's daughter Betty—a young lady with a strong will and decided opinions of her own. When she is first introduced to us she is staying on a holiday at Quantuck, a secluded seaside retreat; and Miss Ray describes the various members of this small summer community with considerable humour. Among others is Mrs. Van Hicks, a lady of great possessions, but little culture, who seeks to put people under a lasting obligation to her by making friends with them. On hearing that a nephew of this estimable lady is about to arrive at Quantuck, Betty makes up her mind beforehand to dislike him. At first she almost succeeds, for, like herself, Percival has a temper, and can be "thorny" at times. As they come to know each other better, however, a less tempestuous state of things ensues, and eventually they cement a friendship that is destined to carry them far.

Nathalie's Sister

Illustrated in Colour by N. TENISON. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 3/6.

Nobody knows—or cares—much about Nathalie's Sister at the opening of this story. She is, indeed, merely Nathalie's Sister, without a name of her own, shining with a borrowed light. Before the end is reached, however, her many good qualities have received the recognition they deserve, and she is Margaret Arterburn, enjoying the respect and admiration of all her friends. Her temper is none of the best: she has a way of going direct to the point in conversation, and her words have sometimes an unpleasant sting; yet when the time comes, she reveals that she is not lacking in the qualities of gentleness and affection, not to say heroism, which many young readers have already learned to associate with her sister Nathalie.

Nathalie's Chum

Illustrated in Colour by DUDLEY TENNANT. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, olivine edges. 3/6.

This story deals with a chapter in the career of the Arterburn family, and particularly of Nathalie, a vivacious, strong-willed girl of fifteen. After the death of their parents the children were scattered among different relatives, and the story describes the efforts of the eldest son, Harry, to bring them together again. At first there is a good deal of aloofness, owing to the fact that, having been kept apart for so long, the children are practically strangers to each other; but at length Harry takes his sister Nathalie into his confidence and makes her his ally in the management of their small household, while she finds in him the chum of whom she has long felt the need.

"Another of those pleasant stories of American life which Miss Anna Chapin Ray knows so well how to write."—*Birmingham Post*.

Teddy: Her Book

A Story of Sweet Sixteen.

Illustrated in Colour, by ROBERT HOPE. Crown 8vo, decorated cloth cover, olivine edges. 3/6.

"Teddy is a delightful personage; and the story of her friendships, her ambitions, and her successes is thoroughly engrossing."—*World*.

"To read of Teddy is to love her."—*Yorkshire Daily Post*.

Janet: Her Winter in Quebec

Illustrated in Colour by GORDON BROWNE. Crown 8vo, decorated cloth cover, olivine edges. 3/6.

"The whole tone of the story is as bright and healthy as the atmosphere in which these happy months were spent."—*Outlook*.

"The sparkle of a Canadian winter ripples across Anna Chapin Ray's 'Janet.'"—*Lady's Pictorial*.

L. B. WALFORD

A Sage of Sixteen

New Edition. Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges. 3/6.

Elma, the heroine of this story, is called a sage by her wealthy and sophisticated relations in Park Lane, with whom she spends a half-holiday every week, and who regard her as a very wise young person. The rest of her time is passed at a small boarding school, where, as might be supposed, Elma's friends look upon her rather as an ordinary healthy girl than as one possessing unusual wisdom. The story tells of Elma's humble life at school, her occasional excursions into fashionable society; the difficulties she experiences in her endeavour to reconcile the two; and the way in which she eventually wins the hearts of those around her in both walks of life.

L. T. MEADE

The Beauforts

New Edition. Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth. 2/6.

This is one of Mrs. Meade's pleasant stories of girl life. It deals with the fortunes of a family in straitened circumstances, the father of which has a gift for poetry that publishers refuse to recognize. In spite of his many failures, his daughter Patty does not lose faith in her father's genius; she supports him in his trials; and eventually reaps the reward that her constancy has merited.

ANNIE MATHESON

A Day Book for Girls

Containing a quotation for each day of the year, arranged by ANNIE MATHESON, with Colour Illustrations by C. E. BROCK.

Leather, with special emblematic design in gold, 3/6 net; cloth, 2/6 net.

Miss Annie Matheson is herself well known to many as a writer of hymns and poetry of a high order. In "A Day Book for Girls" she has brought together a large number of extracts both in poetry and prose, and so arranged them that they furnish an inspiring and ennobling watchword for each day of the year. Miss Matheson has spared no pains to secure variety and comprehensiveness in her selection of quotations; her list of authors ranges from Marcus Aurelius to Mr. Swinburne, and includes many who are very little known to the general public.

SOME BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

PUBLISHED BY

HENRY FROWDE and HODDER & STOUGHTON

BOOKS FOR BOYS

By HERBERT STRANG

"Boys who read Mr. Strang's works have not merely the advantage of perusing enthralling and wholesome tales, but they are also absorbing sound and trustworthy information of the men and times about which they are reading."—DAILY TELEGRAPH.

Humphrey Bold

Chances and Mischances by Land and Sea.

Illustrated in Colour by W. H. MARGETSON. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 6s.

In this story are recounted the many adventures that befell Mr. Humphrey Bold of Shrewsbury, from the time when, a puny slip of a boy, he was befriended by Joe Punchard, the cooper's apprentice (who nearly shook the life out of his tormentor, Cyrus Vetch, by rolling him down the Wyle Cop in a barrel), to the day when, grown into a sturdy young giant, he sailed into Plymouth Sound as first lieutenant of the Bristol frigate. The intervening chapters teem with exciting incidents, telling of sea-fights with that redoubtable privateer Duguay Trouin; of Humphrey's escape from a French prison; of his voyage to the West Indies and all the perils he encountered there; together with an account of the active service he saw under that grim old English seaman, Admiral Benbow.

Glasgow Herald.—"So felicitous is he in imparting local colour to his narrative that whilst reading it we have found ourselves thinking of Thackeray. This suggests a standard by which very few writers of boys' books will bear being judged. The majority of them are content to provide their young friends with mere reading. Herbert Strang offers them literature."

Rob the Ranger

A Story of the Fight for Canada.

Illustrated in Colour by W. H. MARGETSON, and three Maps. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 6s.

Rob Somers, son of an English settler in New York State, sets out with Lone Pete, a trapper, in pursuit of an Indian raiding party which has destroyed his home and carried off his younger brother. He is captured and taken to Quebec, where he finds his brother in strange circumstances, and escapes with him in the dead of the winter, in company with a little band of stout-hearted New Englanders. They are pursued over snow and ice, and in a log hut beside Lake Champlain maintain a desperate struggle against a larger force of French, Indians, and half-breeds,

ultimately reaching Fort Edward in safety.

Glasgow Herald.—"If there had ever been the least doubt as to Mr. Herbert Strang's pre-eminence as a writer of boys' books, it would be very effectually banished by this latest work of his."

One of Clive's Heroes:

A Story of the Fight for India.

With Illustrations by W. RAINEY, R.I., and Maps. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 6s.

Desmond Burke goes out to India to seek his fortune, and is sold by a false friend of his, one Marmaduke Diggle, to the famous Pirate of Gheria. But he escapes, runs away with one of the Pirate's own vessels, and meets Colonel Clive, whom he assists to capture the Pirate's stronghold. His subsequent adventures on the other side of India—how he saves a valuable cargo of his friend, Mr. Merriman, assists Clive in his fights against Sirajuddaula, and rescues Mr. Merriman's wife and daughter from the clutches of Diggle—are told with great spirit and humour. Mr. Strang lived for several years in India, and tells a great deal about the country, the natives, and their ways of life which he saw with his own eyes.

Athenaeum.—"An absorbing story.... The narrative not only thrills, but also weaves skilfully out of fact and fiction a clear impression of our fierce struggle for India."

Samba

A Story of the Congo.

Illustrated by W. RAINEY, R.I. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

The first work of fiction in which the cause of the hapless Congo native is championed.

Standard.—"It was an excellent idea on the part of Mr. Herbert Strang to write a story about the treatment of the natives in the Congo Free State.... Mr. Strang has a big following among English boys, and anything he chooses to write is sure to receive their appreciative attention."

Journal of Education.—"We are glad that a writer who has already won for himself a reputation for good and vigorous work should have taken up the cause of the rubber slaves of the Congo."

Scotsman.—"Mr. Herbert Strang has written not a few admirable books for boys, but none likely to make a more profound impression than his new story of this year."

The Red Book for Boys.

Edited by HERBERT STRANG.

A miscellany for Boys, containing a large variety of complete stories and articles by well-known writers; episodes and narratives of adventure; poems, etc.

288 pages, with 12 Plates in Colour, and many Illustrations in black and white. Picture boards, cloth back, 2s. 6d.

Some of the Contents.

TRAPPED. By G. A. HENTY.
THE PUNISHMENT OF KHIPIL. By GEORGE MEREDITH.
A MODERN ODYSSEUS. By L. QUILLER-COUCH.
FOREST ADVENTURES. By HERBERT STRANG.
HIS FATHER'S HONOUR. By Captain GILSON.
THE HIGHWAYMAN. By ALFRED NOYES.
OCEAN LINERS, PAST AND PRESENT. By FRANK H. MASON.

Barclay of the Guides:

A Story of the Indian Mutiny.

Illustrated in Colour by H. W. KOEKKOEK. With Maps. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

Of all our Native Indian regiments the Guides have probably the most glorious traditions. They were among the few who remained true to their salt during the trying days of the great Mutiny, vying in gallantry and devotion with our best British regiments. The story tells how James Barclay, after a strange career in Afghanistan, becomes associated with this famous regiment, and though young in years, bears a man's part in the great march to Delhi, the capture of the royal city, and the suppression of the Mutiny.

With Drake On the Spanish Main

Illustrated in Colour by ARCHIBALD WEBB. With Maps. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

A rousing story of adventure by sea and land. The hero, Dennis Hazelrig, is cast ashore on an island in the Spanish Main, the sole survivor of a band of adventurers from Plymouth. He lives for some time with no companion but a spider monkey, but by a series of remarkable incidents he gathers about him a numerous band of escaped slaves and prisoners, English, French and native; captures a Spanish fort; fights a Spanish galleon; meets Francis Drake, and accompanies him in his famous adventures on the Isthmus of Panama; and finally reaches England the possessor of much treasure. The author has, as usual, devoted much pains to characterisation, and every boy will delight in Amos Turnpenny, Tom Copstone, and other bold men of Devon, and in Miranda, the monkey.

School Guardian.—"Another of Mr. Herbert Strang's masterful stories of adventure and romance."

Swift and Sure

The Story of a Hydroplane.

Illustrated in Colour Crown 8vo, cloth. 2s. 6d.

What the aeroplane is to the air the hydroplane promises to be to the sea. This story is a companion volume to "King of the Air" and "Lord of the Seas," a forecast of what may be expected from the progress of mechanical invention in the near future.

Lord of the Seas

A Story of a Submarine.

Illustrated in Colour Crown 8vo, cloth extra. 2s. 6d.

The present day is witnessing a simultaneous attack by scientific investigation on the problems of aerial and submarine locomotion. In his book "King of the Air" Mr. Strang gave us a romance of modern aeronautics. In "Lord of the Seas" we have a companion volume dealing with the marvels of submarine navigation.

King of the Air

or, To Morocco on an Airship.

Illustrated in Colour by W. E. WEBSTER. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, 2s. 6d.

In this story (Mr. Herbert Strang's second half-crown book) the young hero, having a strong turn for mechanical invention, contrives a machine that represents a great advance on what has previously been accomplished in the direction of aerial navigation. He has nearly perfected his invention when a British diplomatist is captured by tribesmen in Morocco, and his assistance is invoked in order to rescue the captive without negotiations that may involve international difficulties. The story tells of the exciting and amusing adventures that befell him and his companions in their perilous mission.

Morning Leader.—"One of the best boys' stories we have ever read."

Jack Hardy:

or, A Hundred Years Ago.

Illustrated by W. RAINEY, R.I. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, 2s. 6d.

The old smuggling days! What visions are called up by the name—of stratagems, and caves, and secret passages, and ding-dong fights between sturdy seamen and dashing King's officers! It is in these brave days of old that Mr. Herbert Strang has laid the scenes of his story "Jack Hardy." Jack is a bold young midddy who, in the course of his duty to the King, falls into all manner of difficulties and dangers: has unpleasant experiences in a French prison, escapes by sheer daring and ingenuity, and turns the tables on his captors in a way that will make every British boy's heart glow.

Athenaeum.—"Herbert Strang is second to-none in graphic power and veracity.... Here is the best of characterisation in bold outline."

HERBERT STRANG'S HISTORICAL SERIES

This new series is quite unique. Its aim is to encourage a taste for history in boys and girls up to fourteen years of age by giving all the important events and movements of a reign or period intermingled with a rousing story of adventure. While the stories are worth reading for their own sakes, they are also worth reading—especially on the eve of an examination—by a boy or girl who in class or in school text-book has worked up the "dry history" of the period. Each volume contains, besides the story, a general summary, a chronological list of important events, and a map. Much care has been devoted to the "get-up" of these books. They contain about 160 pages each, with four beautiful illustrations in full colour. Cloth, 1s. 6d. each.

In the New Forest: A Story of the Reign of William the Conqueror.

Lion Heart: A Story of the Reign of Richard I.

Claud the Archer: A Story of the Reign of Henry V.

One of Rupert's Horse: A Story of the Reign of Charles I.

With the Black Prince: A Story of the Reign of Edward III.

A Mariner of England: A Story of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth.

With Marlborough to Malplaquet: A Story of the Reign of Queen Anne.

Practical Teacher.—"These Stories, which are bright and stirring, are sufficiently simple to be within the grasp of the children, the descriptions of life and manners are accurate, and the history of the period is interwoven in a skilful manner."

By CAPTAIN CHARLES GILSON

The Lost Empire

A Tale of Many Lands.

Illustrated in Colour by CYRUS CUNEO. With Map. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 6s.

To found a great Empire in the East was one of the designs of Napoleon Bonaparte, and he might possibly have carried it out, had not certain events happened, which are related in this story. Amongst these were the Battle of the Nile, and the discovery of Napoleon's plans of campaign, in each of which incidents the hero, Mr. Thomas Nunn, Midshipman, was concerned. He was captured and taken to Paris, and it was here that the plans of campaign fell into his hands; what he did with them forms the material of an exciting story.

Daily News.—"It is a magnificent story, with not an error of phrase or thought in it.... This book is not only relatively good, but absolutely so."

The Lost Column

A Story of the Boxer Rebellion.

Illustrated in Colour by CYRUS CUNEO. With Map. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 6s.

At the outbreak of the great Boxer Rebellion in China, Gerald Wood, the hero of this story, was living with his mother and brother at Milton Towers, just outside Tientsin. When the storm broke and Tientsin was cut off from the rest of the world, the occupants of Milton Towers made a gallant defence, but were compelled by force of numbers to retire into the town. Then Gerald determined to go in quest of the relief column under Admiral Seymour. He carried his life in his hands, and on more than one occasion came within an ace of losing it; but he managed to reach his goal in safety, and was warmly commended by the Admiral on his achievement. The author has found opportunity in this record of stirring events for some excellent characterisation, and, among others, the matter-of-fact James, Mr. Wang, and Mr. Midshipman Tite will be found diverting in the extreme.

Outlook.—"An excellent piece of craftsmanship."

Ladies' Field.—"All the sketches of Chinese character are excellent, and we read the book with delight from the first page to the last."

By WILLIAM J. MARX

For the Admiral.

Illustrated. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, 6s.

The brave Huguenot Admiral Coligny is one of the heroes of French history. Edmond le Blanc, the son of a Huguenot gentleman, undertakes to convey a secret letter of warning to Coligny, and the adventures he meets with on the way lead to his accepting service in the Huguenot army. He shares in the hard fighting that took place in the neighbourhood of La Rochelle, does excellent work in scouting for the Admiral, and is everywhere that danger calls. The story won the £100 prize offered by the Bookman for the best story for boys.

Academy.—"It is much the best book of its kind sent in for review this season, and stands head and shoulders above its rivals."

By DESMOND COKE

The School Across the Road

Illustrated in Colour by H. M. BROCK. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

The incidents of this story arise out of the uniting of two schools—"Warner's" and "Corunna"—under the name of "Winton," a name which the head master fondly hopes will become known far and wide as a great seat of learning. Unfortunately for the head master's ambition, however, the two sets of boys—hitherto rivals and enemies, now schoolfellows—do not take kindly to one another. Warner's men of might are discredited in the new school; Henderson, lately head boy, finds himself a mere nobody; while the inoffensive Dove is exalted and made prefect. The feud drags on until the rival factions have an opportunity of uniting against a common enemy. Then, in the enthusiasm aroused by the overthrow of a neighbouring agricultural college, the bitterness between themselves dies away, and the future of Winton is assured.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph.—"Its literary style is above the average and the various characters are thoroughly well drawn."

The Bending of a Twig

Illustrated in Colour by H. M. BROCK. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

When "The Bending of a Twig" was first published it was hailed by competent critics as the finest school story that had appeared since "Tom Brown." Then, however, it was purely a story about boys; now Mr. Coke has enlarged and partly rewritten it, and made it more attractive to schoolboy readers. It is a vivid picture of life in a modern public school. The hero, Lycidas Marsh, enters Shrewsbury without having previously been to a preparatory school, drawing his ideas of school life from his fertile imagination and a number of school stories he has read. Needless to say, he experiences a rude awakening on commencing his new career, for the life differs vastly from what he had been led to expect. How Lycidas finds his true level in this new world and worthily maintains the Salopian tradition is the theme of this entrancing book.

Outlook.—"Mr. Desmond Coke has given us one of the best accounts of public school life that we possess.... Among books of its kind 'The Bending of a Twig' deserves to become a classic."

The House Prefect

By DESMOND COKE, author of "The Bending of a Twig," etc. Illustrated in Colour by H. M. BROCK. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

This story of the life at Sefton, a great English public school, mainly revolves around the trouble in which Bob Manders, new-made house prefect, finds himself, owing to a former alliance with the two wild spirits whom, in the interests of the house, it is now his chief task to suppress. In particular does the spirited exploit with which it opens—the whitewashing by night of a town statue and the smashing of certain school property—raise itself against him, next term, when he has been set in authority. His two former friends persist in still regarding him as an ally, bound to them by their common secret; and, in a sense, he is attracted to their enterprises, for in becoming prefect he does not cease to be a boy. It is a great duel this, fought in the studies, the dormitories and upon the field.

World.—"Quite one of the books of the season. Mr. Desmond Coke has proved himself a master."

By A. C. CURTIS

The Voyage of the "Sesame"

A Story of the Arctic.

Illustrated in Colour by W. HERBERT HOLLOWAY. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

The three Trevelyan brothers receive from a dying sailor a rough chart indicating the whereabouts of a rich gold-bearing region in the Arctic. They forthwith build a craft, specially adapted to work in the Polar Seas, and set out in quest of the gold. They do not have things all their own way, however, for a rival party of treasure seekers have got wind of the old sailor's El Dorado, and are also on the trail. In the race and fighting that ensue, the brothers come off victorious; and after a voyage fraught with many dangers, the Sesame returns home with the gold on board.

Educational News.—"The building of the stout ship Sesame at Dundee is one of the best things of the kind we have read for many a day."

The Good Sword Belgarde

or, How De Burgh held Dover

Coloured Illustrations by W. H. C. GROOME. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 5s.

This is the story of Arnold Gyffard and John Wottos, pages to Sir Philip Daubeney, in the days when Prince Lewis the Lion invaded England and strove to win it from King John. It tells of their journey to Dover through a country swarming with foreign troops, and of many desperate fights by the way. In one of these Arnold wins from a French knight the good sword Belgarde, which he uses to such good purpose as to make his name feared. Then follows the great siege of Dover, full of exciting incident, when by his gallant defence Hubert de Burgh keeps the key to England out of the Frenchman's grasp.

Birmingham Post.—"Evidently Mr. Curtis is a force to be reckoned with. He writes blithely of gallant deeds; he does not make his heroes preposterously wise or formidable; he has a sense of humour; in fine, he has produced a book of sterling quality."

By GEORGE SURREY

A Northumbrian in Arms

A Story of the Time of Hereward the Wake.

Illustrated in Colour by J. FINNEMORE. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges, 5s.

Garald Ulfsson, companion of Hereward the Wake and conqueror of the Wessex Champion in a great wrestling bout, is outlawed by the influence of a Norman knight, whose enmity he has aroused, and gees north to serve under Earl Siward of Northumbria in the war against Macbeth, the Scottish usurper. He assists in defeating an attack by a band of coast-raiders, takes their ship, and discovering that his father has been slain and his land seized by his enemy, follows him into Wales. He fights with Griffith the Welsh King, kills his enemy in a desperate conflict amidst the hills, and, gaining the friendship of Harold, Earl of Wessex, his outlawry is removed and his lands restored to him.

School Guardian.—"With this story the author has placed himself in the front rank of writers of boys' books."

By FRANK H. MASON

The Book of British Ships

Written and Illustrated by FRANK H. MASON, R.B.A. Crown 8vo, cloth, olive edges, 5s.

The aim of this book is to present, in a form that will readily appeal to boys, a comprehensive account of British shipping, both naval and mercantile, and to trace its development from the earliest times down to the Dreadnoughts and high-speed ocean liners of to-day. All kinds of British ships, from the battleship to the trawler, are dealt with, and the characteristic points of each type of vessel are explained.

British Weekly.—"Mr. Mason has given us one of the best histories of English ships that exist. It is admirably written and full of information."

By Rev. J. R. HOWDEN

Locomotives of the World

Containing 16 Plates in Color, 5s. net.

Many of the most up-to-date types of locomotives used on railways throughout the world are illustrated and described in this volume. The coloured plates have been made from actual photographs, and show the peculiar features of some truly remarkable engines. These peculiarities are fully explained in the text, written by the Rev. J. R. Howden, author of "The Boy's Book of Locomotives," etc.

Daily Graphic.—"An absolutely safe investment for every boy who loves an engine."

Nation.—"The large coloured pictures of the world's engines are just the things in which the young enthusiast delights."

THE ROMANCE SERIES

Crown 8vo, illustrated, 5s. each.

By EDWARD FRASER

The Romance of the King's Navy

"The Romance of the King's Navy" is intended to give boys of to-day an idea of some of the notable events that have happened under the White Ensign within the past few years. There is no other book of the kind in existence. It begins with incidents afloat during the Crimean War, when their grandfathers were boys themselves, and brings the story down to a year ago, with the startling adventure at Spithead of Submarine 84. One chapter tells the exciting story of "How the Navy's V.C.'s have been won," the deeds of the various heroes being brought all together here in one connected narrative for the first time.

Westminster Gazette.—"Mr. Fraser knows his facts well, and has set them out in an extremely interesting and attractive way."

By A. B. TUCKER

The Romance of the King's Army

A companion volume to "The Romance of the King's Navy," telling again in glowing language the most inspiring incidents in the glorious history of our land forces. The charge of the 21st Lancers at Omdurman, the capture of the Dargai heights, the saving of the guns at Maiwand, are a few of the great stories of heroism and devotion that appear in this stirring volume.

By LILIAN QUILLER-COUCH

The Romance of Every Day

Here is a bookful of romance and heroism; true stories of men, women, and children in early centuries and modern times who took the opportunities which came into their everyday lives and found themselves heroes; civilians who, without beat of drum or smoke of battle, without special training or words of encouragement, performed deeds worthy to be written in letters of gold.

Bristol Daily Mercury.—"These stories are bound to encourage and inspire young readers to perform heroic actions."

By E. E. SPEIGHT and R. MORTON NANCE

The Romance of the Merchant Venturers

Britain's Sea Story.

These two books are full of true tales as exciting as any to be found in the story books, and at every few pages there is a fine illustration, in colour or black and white, of one of the stirring incidents described in the text.

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

By **CHRISTINA GOWANS WHYTE**

The Five Macleods

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 6s.

Nina's Career

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 6s.

The modern Louisa Alcott! That is the title that critics in England and America have bestowed on Miss Christina Gowans Whyte, whose "Story-Book Girls" they declare to be the best girls' story since "Little Women." Mrs. E. Nesbit, author of "The Would-be Goods," in likening Miss Whyte to Louisa Alcott, wrote: "This is high praise—but not too high." "Nina's Career" tells delightfully of a large family of girls and boys, children of Sir Christopher Howard, the famous surgeon. Friends of the Howards are Nina Wentworth, who lives with three aunts, and Gertrude Mannering. Gertrude, because she is the daughter of the Mrs. Mannering and grand-daughter of a peer, is conscious of always missing in her life that which makes the lives of the Howards so joyous and full. They may have "careers"; she must go to Court and through the wearying treadmill of the rich girls. The Howards get engaged, marry, go into hospitals, study in art schools; and in the end Gertrude also achieves happiness.

Outlook.—"We have been so badly in need of writers for girls who shall be in sympathy with the modern standard of intelligence, that we are grateful for the advent of Miss Whyte, who has not inaptly been described as the new Miss Alcott."

The Story-Book Girls

By **CHRISTINA GOWANS WHYTE.**

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Cloth elegant, 6s.

This story won the £100 prize in the Bookman competition.

The Leightons are a charming family. There is Mabel, the beauty, her nature strength and sweetness mingled; and Jean, the downright, blunt, uncompromising; and Elma, the sympathetic, who champions everybody, and has a weakness for long words. And there is Cuthbert, too, the clever brother. Cuthbert is responsible for a good deal, for he saves Adelaide Maud from an accident, and brings the Story-Book Girls into the story. Every girl who reads this book will become acquainted with some of the realest, truest, best people in recent fiction.

By WINIFRED M. LETTS

The Quest of the Blue Rose

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olive edges, 5s.

After the death of her mother, Sylvia Sherwood has to make her own way in the world as a telegraph clerk. The world she finds herself in is a girls' hostel in a big northern city. For a while she can only see the uncongenial side of her surroundings; but when she has made a friend and found herself a niche, she begins to realise that though the Blue Rose may not be for her finding, there are still wild roses in every hedge. In the end, however, Sylvia, contented at last with her hard-working, humdrum life, finds herself the successful writer of a book of children's poems.

Daily News.—"It is a successful effort in realism, a book of live human beings that beyond its momentary interest, which is undoubted, will leave a lasting and valuable impression."

By ELSIE J. OXENHAM

Mistress Nanciebel

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olive edges, 5s.

This is a story of the Restoration. Nanciebel's father, Sir John Seymour, had so incurred the displeasure of King Charles by his persistent opposition to the threatened war against the Dutch, that he was sent out of the country. Nothing would dissuade Nanciebel from accompanying him, so they sailed away together and were duly landed on a desolate shore, which they afterwards discovered to be a part of Wales. Here, by perseverance and much hard toil, John o' Peace made a new home for his family, in which enterprise he owed not a little to the presence and constant help of Nanciebel, who is the embodiment of youthful optimism and womanly tenderness.

By E. EVERETT-GREEN

Our Great Undertaking

Illustrated. 5s.

Miss Evelyn Everett-Green is one of the first favourites with girls and boys. This is how she tells about the beginning of "Our Great Undertaking." The children have been asking granny for a story:—"Well, my dears, I will see what I can do. You shall come to me at this time to-morrow night, and I will tell you the story of how, when I was a little girl, we children undertook what seemed to many people at the outset a labour of Hercules, and how we learned from it a number of lessons, which have lasted us through life." The grandmother smiles as the happy children troop off to bed, and in these pages Miss Everett-Green tells us the delightful story that grandmother told next day.

By M. QUILLER-COUCH

The Carroll Girls

Illustrated. 5s.

The father of the Carroll girls fell into misfortune, and had to go to Canada to make a new start. But he could not take his girls with him, and they were left in charge of their cousin Charlotte, in whose country home they grew up, learning to be patient, industrious, and sympathetic. The author has a dainty and pleasant touch, and describes her characters so lovingly that no girl can read this book without keen interest in Esther's housekeeping and Penelope's music, Angela's poultry-farming, and Poppy's dreams of market gardening.

By E. L. HAVERFIELD

Audrey's Awakening

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

As a result of a luxurious and conventional upbringing, Audrey is a girl without ambitions, unsympathetic, and with a reputation for exclusiveness. Therefore, when Paul Forbes becomes her stepbrother, and brings his free-and-easy notions into the Davidsons' old home, there begins to be trouble. Audrey discovers that she has feelings, and the results are not altogether pleasant. She takes a dislike to Paul at the outset; and the young people have to get through deep waters and some exciting times before things come right. Audrey's awakening is thorough, if painful.

Glasgow Herald.—"Very pleasantly written and thoroughly healthy."

The Conquest of Claudia.

Illustrated in Colour by JAMES DURDEN. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

Meta and Claudia Austin are two motherless girls with a much-occupied father. Their upbringing has therefore been left to a kindly governess, whose departure to be married makes the first change in the girls' lives. Having set their hearts upon going to school, they receive a new governess resentfully. Claudia is a person of instincts, and it does not take her long to discover that there is something mysterious about Miss Strongitharm. A clue upon which the children stumble leads to the notion that Miss Strongitharm is a Nihilist in hiding. That in spite of various strange happenings they are quite wrong is to be expected, but there is a genuine mystery about Miss Strongitharm which leads to some unforeseen adventures.

School Guardian.—"A fascinating story of girl life."

Dauntless Patty

Illustrated in Colour by DUDLEY TENNANT. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

The joys and sorrows, friendships and disappointments—all the trifles, in fact, which make the sum of schoolgirl life—are faithfully delineated in this story. Patricia Garnett, an Australian girl, comes over to England to complete her education. She is unconventional and quite unused to English ways, and it is not long before she finds herself the most unpopular girl in the school. Several times she reveals her courage and high spirit, particularly in saving the life of Kathleen Lane, a girl with whom she is on very bad terms. All overtures of peace fail, however, for Patty feels that the other girls have no real liking for her and she refuses to be patronised. Thus, chiefly owing to misunderstanding and careless gossip, the feud is continued to the end of the term; and the climax of the story is reached when, in a cave in the face of a cliff, in imminent danger of being drowned, Patty and Kathleen for the first time understand each other, and lay the foundations of a lifelong friendship.

Schoolmaster.—"A thoroughly faithful and stimulating story of schoolgirl life."

Glasgow Herald.—"The story is well told. Some of the incidents are dramatic, without being unnatural; the interest is well sustained, and altogether the book is one of the best we have read."

By ANNA CHAPIN RAY

Nathalie's Sister.

Illustrated in Colour by N. TENISON. Crown 8vo, cloth, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

Nobody knows—or cares—much about Nathalie's Sister at the opening of this story. She is, indeed, merely Nathalie's Sister, without a name of her own, shining with a borrowed light. Before the end is reached, however, her many good qualities have received the recognition they deserve, and she is Margaret Arterburn, enjoying the respect and admiration of all her friends. Her temper is none of the best: she has a way of going direct to the point in conversation, and her words have sometimes an unpleasant sting; yet when the time comes, she reveals that she is not lacking in the qualities of gentleness and affection, not to say heroism, which many young readers have already learned to associate with her sister Nathalie.

Record.—"Nathalie's Sister' is written in Miss Ray's best style and has all those bright breezy touches which characterise her work."

Nathalie's Chum.

Illustrated in Colour by DUDLEY TENNANT. Crown 8vo; cloth extra, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

By her stories, "Teddy" and "Janet," Miss Anna Chapin Ray has already made English readers familiar with many of the distinctive features of boy and girl life in America. The present story, which is cast in the same mould, deals with a chapter in the career of the Arterburn family, and particularly of Nathalie, a vivacious, strong-willed girl of fifteen. After the death of their parents the children were scattered among different relatives, and the story describes the efforts of the eldest son, Harry, to bring them together again. At first there is a good deal of aloofness owing to the fact that, having been kept apart for so long, the children are practically strangers to each other; but at length Harry takes his sister Nathalie into his confidence and makes her his ally in the management of their small household, while she finds in him the chum of whom she has long felt the need.

Teddy: Her Book

A Story of Sweet Sixteen.

Illustrated in Colour by ROBERT HOPE. Crown 8vo, decorated cloth cover, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

World.—"Teddy is a delightful personage; and the story of her friendships, her ambitions, and her successes is thoroughly engrossing."

Yorkshire Daily Post.—"To read of Teddy is to love her."

Janet: Her ... Winter in Quebec

Illustrated in Colour by GORDON BROWNE. Crown 8vo, decorated cloth cover, olivine edges, 3s. 6d.

Outlook.—"The whole tone of the story is as bright and healthy as the atmosphere in which these happy months were spent."

Lady's Pictorial.—"The sparkle of a Canadian winter ripples across Anna Chapin Ray's 'Janet.'"

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

By **LUCAS MALET**

Little Peter

A Christmas Morality for Children of any Age.

New Edition. Illustrated in Colour by CHARLES E. BROCK. Crown 8vo, cloth elegant, gilt edges, 6s.

This delightful little story introduces to us a family dwelling upon the outskirts of a vast and mysterious pine forest in France. These are Master Lepage, who, as head of the household and a veteran of the wars, lays down the law upon all sorts of questions, domestic and political; his meek, sweet-faced wife Susan; their two sons Anthony and Paul; and Cincinnatus the cat—who holds as many opinions and expresses them as freely as Master Lepage himself; and—little Peter. Little Peter makes friends with John Paqualin, a queer, tall, crook-backed old charcoal-burner, whom the boys of the village call "the grasshopper man," and whom every one else treats with contempt; but this is not surprising, since Little Peter makes friends with every one he meets, and all who read about him will certainly make friends with him.

By CHRISTINA GOWANS WHYTE

The Adventures of Merrywink

Illustrated by M. V. WHEELHOUSE.

Crown 4to, cloth elegant, 6s.

This story won the £100 prize for the best children's story in the Bookman competition. It tells of a pretty little child who was born into Fairyland with a gleaming star in his forehead. When his parents beheld this star they were filled with gladness and fear, and in the night they carried their little Fairy baby, Merrywink, far away and hid him. Why was it necessary to carry Merrywink away so secretly? Because of two old prophecies: the first, that a daughter should be born to the King and Queen of Fairyland; the second that the King should rule over Fairyland until a child appeared with a gleaming star in his forehead. Now, on the very day that Merrywink was born, the long-promised little Princess arrived at the Royal Palace; and the King, who was determined to keep his throne to himself, sent round messages to make sure that the child with the gleaming star had not yet been seen in Fairyland. The story tells us how Merrywink grew up to be brave and strong, and fearless and truthful; how he set out on his travels and met the Princess at court; and all that happened afterwards.

By E. M. JAMESON

The Pendleton Twins

Crown 8vo, olivine edges, Coloured Illustrations, 5s.

A great number of little readers now look forward eagerly to the appearance of further volumes telling of the adventures and misadventures of the Pendletons. This year the family's Christmas holidays furnish material for another bright and amusing story. Their adventures begin the very day they leave home. The train is snowed up and they are many hours delayed. They have a merry Christmas with plenty of fun and presents, and in the middle of the night Bob gives chase to a burglar. Nora, who is very sure-footed, goes off by herself one day and climbs the cliffs, thinking that no one will be any the wiser until her return. But the twins and Dan follow her unseen and are lost in a cave, where they find hidden treasure left by smugglers buried in the ground. Len sprains his ankle and they cannot return. Search parties set out from Cliffe, and spend many hours before the twins are found by Nora, cold and tired and frightened. But the holidays end very happily after all.

Peggy Pendleton's Plan

Illustrated. 5s.

The Pendletons

Illustrated. 5s.

Two further stories dealing with the fortunes of the entertaining Pendleton family.

Schoolmaster.—"Young people will revel in this most interesting and original story. The five young Pendletons are much as other children in a large family, varied in their ideas, quaint in their tastes, and wont to get into mischief at every turn. They are withal devoted to one another and to their home, and although often 'naughty,' are not by any means 'bad.' The interest in the doings of these youngsters is remarkably well sustained, and each chapter seems better than the last. With not a single dull page from start to finish and with twelve charming illustrations, the book makes an ideal reward for either boys or girls."

By AMY LE FEUVRE

Robin's Heritage

Illustrated by GORDON BROWNE. 2s.

Robin, the little hero of Miss Amy Le Feuvre's latest book, is a charming creation. He is certainly one of the most lovable of the boy and girl characters in her books, whose adventures have given delight to so many thousands of little readers.

Christina and the Boys

Illustrated. 2s.

This is a splendid story for boys and girls. All who have read Miss Le Feuvre's other books will want to read this. It is a story of three children; one from England, another from Scotland, the third from Wales. They are all so jolly that it is difficult to say which of the three will be the favourite with young readers.

Roses

Illustrated. 2s.

This story introduces us to Mrs. Fitzherbert, a dear little old lady with snow-white hair, as she moves among the sweet scents and sounds of her rose garden. She lives in a quaint old-fashioned house with casement windows and deep window seats, old oak staircase and panelled rooms. And into the midst of this secluded scene comes Dimple—her real name is Isabella, but she will not allow anybody to call her by that name on any account—whose father, owing to ill-fortune, has had to go abroad. How Dimple wins the hearts of all in her new home is told by Miss Le Feuvre in this little book.

His Big Opportunity

Illustrated. 2s.

The two principal characters in this book are Roy and Dudley—two cousins. Both are anxious to become heroes, and they are constantly on the look-out for an opportunity to do some good. This leads them, one day, to pay a friendly visit to a sick man. They cannot get in by the door, so they clamber in by the window, greatly to the alarm of the invalid, who takes them for house-breakers. The story tells how, when their big opportunity does arrive, they are able to seize it and turn it to account.

Brownie

Illustrated. 2s.

A Cherry Tree

Illustrated. 2s.

Two Tramps

Illustrated. 2s.

The Buried Ring

Illustrated. 2s.

The New Line upon Line.

Revised Edition of "Line upon Line" (containing Parts I and II of the original work), edited by J. E. HODDER WILLIAMS, with a Preface by the BISHOP OF DURHAM. Illustrated in Colour. Leather, 2s. 6d. net; cloth, 1s. 6d. net; picture boards, 1s. net.

The New Peep of Day

Revised Edition of "The Peep of Day," edited by J. E. HODDER WILLIAMS, with a Preface by the BISHOP OF DURHAM. Illustrated in Colour. Leather, 2s. 6d. net; cloth, 1s. 6d. net; picture boards, 1s. net.

These new editions of two well-known children's books retain all the features that made the previous issues so popular, but they have been thoroughly revised with a view to making them more easily understood by the children of to-day.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOKCASE

Edited by E. NESBIT

"The Children's Bookcase" is a new series of dainty illustrated books for little folks which is intended ultimately to include all that is best in children's literature, whether old or new. The series is edited by Mrs. E. Nesbit, author of "The Would-be Goods" and many other well-known books for children; and particular care is given to binding, get-up, and illustrations. The pictures are in full colour.

The Little Duke. By CHARLOTTE M. YONGE.

Sonny Sahib. By SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN (Mrs. EVERARD COTES).

The Water Babies. By CHARLES KINGSLEY.

The Old Nursery Stories, By E. NESBITT.

Cap-o'-Yellow. By AGNES GROZIER HERBERTSON.

Granny's Wonderful Chair. By FRANCES BROWNE.

The volumes in "The Children's Bookcase" are issued in three styles of binding: in paper boards, at 1s. 6d. net; cloth, 2s. 6d. net; and art cloth with photogravure panel, 3s. 6d. net.

Scotsman.—"In point of artistic beauty and general excellence, these volumes, costing only 1s. 6d. each, are a marvellous production."

[The end of The Girl Crusoes: A Story of the South Seas by Ely, George Herbert]