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LOST IN THE FOREST:
WANDERING WILL'S
ADVENTURES IN SOUTH
AMERICA

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Adventures in South America

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R. M. Ballantyne

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Wandering Will's

Adventures in South America

Chapter One.

At Sea—An Alarming

Cry and a Rescue

“At sea once more!” said Will Osten in a meditative mood.

Our hero made this remark one night to himself, which was overheard and replied to by his friend, Captain Dall, in a manner that surprised him.

“It’s my opinion, doctor,” said the captain in a low voice, “that this is the last time you or I will ever be at sea, or anywhere else, if our skipper don’t look better after his men, for a more rascally crew I never set eyes on, and, from a word or two I have heard dropped now and then, I feel sure some mischief is in the wind. Come aft with me to a place where we ain’t so likely to be overheard by eavesdroppers, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

Will Osten was so much astonished at his friend’s remark, that

he followed him to the after part of the ship without uttering a word, and there sat down on the taffrail to listen to what he had to communicate.

There was no moon in the clear sky, and the hosts of stars that studded the dark vault overhead did not shed any appreciable light on the waters of the Pacific, on which the *Rover* floated almost motionless. That beautiful and mysterious phosphorescence which sometimes illumines the sea was gleaming in vivid flashes in the vessel's wake, and a glowing trail of it appeared to follow the rudder like a serpent of lambent fire.

It was one of those calm, peaceful nights in which God seems to draw nearer than usual to the souls of His creatures. The only sounds that broke the profound stillness were the pattering of reef-points on the sails as the vessel rose and sank gently on the oily swell; the measured tread of the officer of the watch, and the humming of the man at the wheel, as he stood idly at his post, for the vessel had scarcely steering-way.

“Doctor,” said Captain Dall in a low whisper, taking Will Osten by the button-hole and bending forward until his eyes were close to those of his young friend, “I little thought when I set sail from England that, in a few weeks after, my good ship the *Foam* would come a wreck an’ sink to the bottom of the Pacific before my eyes. Still less did I think that I should be cast on a coral island, have to fight like a naked savage, and be saved at last by missionaries from being roasted and eaten. Yet all this has happened within a few months.”

At any other time Will Osten would have smiled at the solemn manner in which this was said, but there was something in the hour, and also in the tone of his friend's voice, which tended to repress levity and raise a feeling of anxiety in his mind.

"Well, captain," he said, "what has this to do with the present evil that you seem to apprehend?"

"To do with it, lad? nothing—'xcept that it reminds me that we little know what is in store for us. Here are we becalmed—three day's sail from the coral island, where the niggers were so near converting us into cooked victuals, and I wouldn't at this minute give twopence in security for the life of any one on board the *Rover*."

"Why, what mean you?" asked Will, with increasing perplexity. "Some of the crew are bad enough, no doubt, but many of them are evidently good men—what is it that you fear?"

"Fear! why, there's everything to fear," said the captain in a suppressed but excited whisper, drawing still closer to his friend. "I've often sailed in these seas, and I know that while some of the traders sailing between these islands and South America and other parts are decentish enough, others are as great cut-throats as ever deserved to swing at the yard-arm. But that's not the point. I have overheard, of late, some of the rascals plotting to murder the officers and take this ship. But I cannot point 'em out, for though I heard their voices I couldn't see their faces. I think I know who they are, but could not swear to 'em, and it would be worse than useless to denounce them till we have some evidence

to go on. I therefore want you to help me with your advice and assistance, so that we may get up a counterplot to spoil their fun—for I'm quite certain that if we fail to—hark! what's that?"

Will did not answer, but both listened intently to the sound which had interrupted Captain Dall's discourse. It was evident that the officer and men of the watch had also heard it, for they, too, had ceased to walk to and fro, and their figures could be dimly seen in a listening attitude at the gangway.

For several minutes they listened without hearing anything—then a hoarse, guttural shout broke the stillness of the night for a few seconds and died away. The men looked at each other, and some of the more superstitious among them grew pale. Again the cry was repeated, somewhat nearer, and again all was still. Some of the oldest hands in the watch stood transfixed and powerless with terror. They would have faced death in any form manfully, but this mysterious sound unnerved them!

The officer of the watch went down to report it to Captain Blathers, who immediately came on deck. Just as he appeared, the cry was repeated and a slight splash was heard.

"Some one in distress," cried Captain Blathers promptly; "a crew for the starboard quarter-boat to pick him up. Stand by to lower. Be smart, lads!"

These words, heartily uttered, put superstitious fears to flight at once. The men threw off their jackets; the boat was lowered, and in a few minutes was pulling about and searching in all directions. Our hero was one of the first to leap into her, and

he pulled the bow oar. For some time they rowed about in vain. The night was intensely dark, and the cry was not repeated, so that they had nothing to guide them in their movements. A lantern was fixed in the ship half way up the mizzen rigging, but the lantern in the boat was concealed until the moment when it should be required, because it is easier for men to distinguish surrounding objects in comparative darkness than when a light is glaring near them. Presently Will Osten saw a dark object like a small canoe right ahead of the boat.

“Back water—all!” he shouted.

The men obeyed, but it was too late; the boat struck the object and overturned it. Will saw something like a human form roll into the water and heard a gurgling cry. Without a moment's hesitation he leaped overboard, head foremost, and catching hold of the object, brought it to the surface. He remembered at that moment having heard of a fact which is worth stating here. The best way to save a drowning man is to approach him from behind, seize him under the armpits, and, then, getting on your back, draw him partly on to your breast and swim *on your back* to the shore, or to a place of safety. Thought is quicker than the lightning flash. Will could not, of course, carry out this plan fully, nevertheless the memory of it served him in good stead, for, the instant he caught the drowning man by the hair, he kept him at arm's length, and thus avoided his death-clutch until he could grasp him under the armpits *from behind*, and thus render him powerless. He then rose and drew him gently upon his breast, at

the same time striking out with his feet and shouting—

“Bear a hand, lads—I’ve got him!”

A loud “hurrah!” burst from the men in the boat, and was re-echoed vehemently from the ship. They had overshot the spot only by a few yards. Instantly they pulled round: two strokes brought them to the spot where Will was swimming, and in another moment our hero and the rescued man were hauled into the boat. The men gave vent to another loud and prolonged cheer, which was again replied to from the ship.

The boat was soon alongside, and the rescued man, who proved to be a man of colour in a very emaciated and exhausted condition, was hoisted on board. His story was soon told. He was not a native of the islands, but had been living on one of them, and had gone off to fish in a canoe, when a gale sprang up and blew him out to sea. Four days and nights had he been exposed to the storm in his frail bark, without food or water, and was on the point of perishing when the ship chanced to pass near him. The utterance of the cry which had attracted attention was almost the last effort of which he was capable. He spoke a little broken English, having learnt it while serving on board of an English trading vessel. His name, he said, was Bunco, and a fine powerful-looking fellow he was, despite the sad condition to which he had been reduced. His shoulders, and indeed most parts of his body, were blistered by the continual washing of the sea over him, and when he was lifted on board his skin was icy cold. Had he not been a man of iron mould, he must certainly

have perished. The poor fellow was at once taken into the cabin and carefully attended to. He was first bathed in fresh water, then rolled in blankets, and a tumbler of hot wine and water administered, which greatly revived him, and soon caused him to fall into a sound sleep.

Whether it was that this incident softened the hearts of the seamen for a time, or that their plans were not yet ripe for execution, we cannot tell, but certain it is that nothing whatever occurred to justify Captain Dall's suspicions for several weeks after that.

Chapter Two.

Describes a Mutiny, and shows that the Best of Friends may part sooner than they expect

“A wilful man will have his way.” That this is a true proverb is almost universally admitted; indeed, there is reason to believe that it is equally true of women as of men; nevertheless, Captain Blathers did not believe it although he was himself a living illustration of its truth. He laughed at Captain Dall when that worthy warned him of the mutinous intentions of his crew, and when several weeks had passed away without any signs of disaffection appearing, he rallied him a good deal about what he styled his suspicious disposition, and refused to take any steps to guard against surprise. The consequence was, that when the storm did break, he was utterly unprepared to meet it.

Griffin, the second mate, was the leader of the conspiracy, but so ably did he act his villainous part, that no one suspected him. He was a tall, powerful, swarthy man, with a handsome but forbidding countenance.

One evening a little before sunset, while the captain was sitting at tea with those who usually messed in the cabin, Griffin looked down the skylight and reported “a sail on the weather bow.”

The captain immediately rose and went on deck. The moment he appeared he was seized by Griffin. Captain Blathers was an active and powerful man, and very passionate. He clenched his fist and struck the second mate a blow on the chest, which caused him to stagger back, but, before he could repeat it, two sailors seized him from behind and held him fast. The noise of the scuffle at once brought up the first mate, who was followed by Will Osten, Captain Dall, and others, all of whom were seized by the crew and secured as they successively made their appearance.

Resistance was of course offered by each, but in vain, for the thing was promptly and thoroughly carried out. Four strong men stood at the head of the companion with ropes ready to secure their prisoners, while the greater part of the crew stood close by armed with pistols and cutlasses.

“It is of no use resisting, Captain Blathers,” said Griffin, when the former was pinioned; “you see we are quite prepared, and thoroughly in earnest.”

The captain looked round, and a glance sufficed to convince him that this was true. Not a friendly eye met his, because those of the crew who were suspected of being favourable to him, or who could not be safely relied on, had been seized by another party of mutineers at the same time that those in the cabin were captured, and among them were three friends of our hero—Mr Cupples the mate, Muggins, and Larry O’Hale, seamen belonging to the lost *Foam* to which Captain Dall had referred while conversing with Will.

For a few seconds Captain Blathers' face blazed with wrath, and he seemed about to make a desperate attempt to break his bonds, but by a strong effort he restrained himself.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked at length, in a deep, husky voice.

"To take possession of this ship," replied the second mate, with a slightly sarcastic smile. "These men have taken a fancy to lead a free, roving life, and to make me their captain, and I am inclined to fall in with their fancy, and to relieve you of the command."

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed the captain, "say rather that you have misled the men, and that—"

He checked himself, and then said sternly, "And pray what do you intend to do with *me*?"

"I shall allow you a boat and provisions, Captain Blathers, for the use of yourself and your friends, and then bid you farewell. You see we are mercifully inclined, and have no desire to shed your blood. Ho! there—lower one of the quarter boats."

This order was obeyed with promptitude. Some provisions were thrown into the boat, and the captain was cast loose and ordered to get into it. He turned to make a last appeal to the crew, but Griffin presented a pistol at his head and ordered him peremptorily to get into the boat. It is probable that he would have made another effort, had not two of the men forced him over the side. Seeing this, Will Osten was so indignant and so anxious to quit the ship, that he stepped forward with alacrity to

follow him.

“No, no, my fine young fellow,” said Griffin, thrusting him back, “we want your help as a doctor a little longer. It may be that you are not inclined to serve us, but we can find a way of compelling you if you’re not. Come, Mr Dall, be good enough to go next.”

When Captain Dall’s hands were loosed, he shook his fist in the second mate’s face, and said, “Rascal, you’ll swing for this yet; mark my words, you’ll swing for it.” Having relieved his feelings thus, he went over the side.

While this was going on, Larry O’Hale, Muggins, and Mr Cupples, with several others, were brought to the gangway. Griffin addressed these before ordering them into the boat.

“My lads,” he said, “I have no objection to your remaining aboard, if you choose to take part with us.”

“I, for one, will have nothing to do with ’e,” said Mr Cupples sternly.

“Then you may go,” said Griffin, with a sneer. Muggins, who, to use one of his own phrases, looked “as sulky as a bear with a broken head,” made no reply, but Larry O’Hale exclaimed, “Sure, then, what better can I do than take part with yees? It’s a heavenly raigin o’ the arth this, an good company. Put me down on the books, Captin’ Griffin, dear. I’d niver desert ye in your troubles,—be no mains.”

There was a slight laugh at this, and Larry was graciously cast loose, and permitted to remain. Both Will Osten and Muggins

gazed at him, however, in amazement, for they had supposed that their comrade would rather have taken his chance in the captain's boat. Suddenly an intelligent gleam shot athwart the rough visage of Muggins, and he said—

“Of course I'll remain too. It would be madness for an old salt like me to go paddlin' about the ocean in a cockleshell of a boat when he has the chance of sailin' in a good ship. Put me down too, captin'. I'm game for anything a'most, from pitch an' toss to manslaughter.”

So Muggins was added to the ship's company, and poor Mr Cupples went over the side with a face almost as long as his thin body, because of what he deemed the depravity and desertion of his old shipmates. Several of the ship's crew, who refused to join, also went into the boat, which was then cast loose, and dropped rapidly astern.

The whole of this exciting scene passed so quickly, that it was only when the boat was far away, like a speck on the sea, that Will Osten realised the fact that he had actually said farewell, perhaps for ever, to his late comrades. But he had not much time given him for reflection, for the new captain, after changing the course of the ship, and making a few arrangements to suit the altered state of affairs, ordered him to go forward and do duty as a common seaman, telling him that he did not intend to have any land-lubbers or idlers aboard, and that he would be called to do doctor's work when his services should be required.

That night our hero contrived to hold a whispering interview,

in a dark corner of the forecandle, with his friends Larry O'Hale and Muggins. He found that the former had resolved to join the crew in order to be near himself; that Muggins had joined, because of his desire to share the fortunes of Larry; and that both had made up their minds to effect their escape on the first favourable opportunity.

"Now, ye see, boys," said Larry, "this is how it is—"

"Don't open your bread-basket hatch so wide," growled Muggins, "else you'll be overheard—that's wot it is."

"This is how it is," repeated Larry, "not bein' fish, nor gulls, nor say sarpints, we haven't the ghost of a chance of gettin' away from this ship till we're close to land, an' even then we wont have much chance if it's suspected that we want to escape. What then?—why, let us from this hour agree to give each other the cowl'd shoulder, and go at our work as if we liked it."

"You're right, Larry," said Will. "If they see us much together, they'll naturally suspect that we are plotting, so—"

At this point a voice growled from an adjacent hammock—

"Avast spinnin' yarns there, will 'e!"

"Ay, it's that sea-cook, Larry O'Hale," cried Muggins aloud; "he was always over fond o' talking."

Larry, who at the first sound had slipped away to his hammock, shouted from under the blankets, "Ye spalpeen, it's no more me than yersilf; sure I'd have been draimin' of ould Ireland if ye—hadn't—(snore) me grandmother—(yawn) or the pig—"

A prolonged snore terminated this sentence, and Muggins

turned into his hammock, while Will Osten rose, with a quiet laugh, and went on deck.

One morning, some weeks after the conversation just related, our hero was leaning over the bulwarks near the fore-chains, watching the play of the clear waves as the ship glided quietly but swiftly through them before a light breeze. Will was in a meditative frame of mind, and had stood there gazing dreamily down for nearly half an hour, when his elbow was touched by the man named Bunco, who had long before recovered from his exposure in the canoe.

Will was a little surprised, for he had not had much intercourse with the man, and could not comprehend the confidential and peculiar look and tone with which he now addressed him.

“Mister Os’en,” he said, in a low voice, after a few preliminary words, “you be tink of escape?”

Will was startled: “Why do you think so?” he asked, in some alarm.

“Ha!” said the man, with a broad grin, “me keep eyes in head—me doos—not in pocket. Ho! ho! Yis, me see an’ hear berry well Muggins go too if hims can—and Larry O’Hale, ho yis. Now, me go too!”

“You too?”

“Yis. You save me life; me know dis here part ob the univarse,—bin bornded an’ riz here. Not far off from de land to-day. You let me go too, an’ me show you how you kin do—”

At this point Bunco was interrupted by a shout of “Land ho!”

from the look-out at the masthead.

“Where away?” cried Griffin.

“On the lee-bow, sir.”

Instantly all eyes and glasses were turned in the direction indicated, where, in a short time, a blue line, like a low cloud, was faintly seen on the far-off horizon.

Chapter Three.

Describes a Tremendous but Bloodless Fight

Proverbial philosophy tells us—and every one must have learned from personal experience—that “there is many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip.” Heroes in every rank of life are peculiarly liable to such slips, and *our* hero was no exception to the rule.

Finding that the vessel in which he sailed was now little, if at all, better than a pirate, he had fondly hoped that he should make his escape on the first point of South America at which they touched. Land was at last in sight. Hope was high in the breast of Will Osten, and expressive glances passed between him and his friends in captivity, when, alas! the land turned out to be a small island, so low that they could see right across it, and so scantily covered with vegetation that human beings evidently deemed it unworthy of being possessed.

“There’s niver a sowl upon it,” remarked Larry O’Hale, in a tone of chagrin.

“Maybe not,” said Griffin, who overheard the observation; “but there’s plenty of *bodies* on it if not souls, and, as we are short of provisions, I intend to lay-to, and give you a chance of seeing them. Get ready to go ashore; I’m not afraid of you *wandering*

too far!”

Griffin wound up this speech with a low chuckle and a leer, which sent a chill to the heart not only of Will Osten but of Larry and Muggins also, for it convinced them that their new master had guessed their intention, and that he would, of course, take every precaution to prevent its being carried out. After the first depression of spirits, consequent on this discovery, the three friends became more than ever determined to outwit their enemy, and resolved to act, in the meantime, with perfect submission and prompt obedience—as they had hitherto done. Of course, each reserved in his own mind the right of rebellion if Griffin should require them to do any criminal act, and they hoped fervently that they should not fall in with any vessel that might prove a temptation to their new captain.

A few minutes after this, the order was given to lower one of the boats, and a crew jumped into her, among whom were Larry and Muggins. Will Osten asked permission to go, and Griffin granted his request with a grin that was the reverse of amiable.

“Musha! what sort o’ bodies did the captin’ main?” said Larry, when they had pulled beyond earshot of the ship.

“Ha, paddy,” replied one of the men, “they’re pleasant fat bodies—amusin’ to catch and much thought of by aldermen;—turtles no less.”

“Ah! then, it’s jokin’ ye are.”

“Not I. I never joke.”

“Turthles is it—green fat an’ all?”

“Ay, an’ shells too.”

“Sure it’s for the coppers they’re wanted.”

“Just so, Larry, an’ if you’ll ship your oar an’ jump out wi’ the painter, we’ll haul the boat up an’ show you how to catch ’em.”

As the sailor spoke, the boat’s keel grated on the sand, and the Irishman sprang over the side, followed by his comrades, who regarded the expedition in the light of a “good spree.”

The party had to wait some time, however, for the anticipated sport. It was near sunset when they landed, but turtles are not always ready to deliver themselves up, even though the honour of being eaten by London aldermen sometimes awaits them! It is usually night before the creatures come out of the sea to enjoy a snooze on the beach. The men did not remain idle, however. They dragged the boat a considerable distance from the water, and then turned it keel up, supporting one gunwale on several forked sticks, so that a convenient shelter was provided. This look-out house was still further improved by having a soft carpet of leaves and grass spread beneath it.

When these preparations had been made, those men, who had never seen turtle-turning performed, were instructed in their duties by an experienced hand. The process being simple, the explanation was short and easy.

“You see, lads,” said the instructor, leaning against the boat and stuffing down the glowing tobacco in his pipe with the point of his (apparently) fireproof little finger—“You see, lads, this is ’ow it is. All that you’ve got for to do is to keep parfitly still till

the turtles comes out o' the sea, d'ye see?—then, as the Dook o' Wellin'ton said at Waterloo—Up boys an' at 'em! W'en, ov coorse, each man fixes his eyes on the turtle nearest him, runs out, ketches him by the rim of his shell an' turns him slap over on his back—d'ye understand?"

"Clear as ditch wather," said Larry.

"Humph!" said Muggins.

"Well, then, boys," continued the old salt with the fireproof little finger, "ye'd better go an' count the sand or the stars (when they comes out), for there won't be nothin' to do for an hour to come."

Having delivered himself thus, he refilled his pipe and lay down to enjoy it under the boat, while the others followed his example, or sauntered along the shore, or wandered among the bushes, until the time for action should arrive.

Will Osten and his two friends availed themselves of the opportunity to retire and hold an earnest consultation as to their future prospects and plans. As this was the first time they had enjoyed a chance of conversing without the fear of being overheard, they made the most of it, and numerous were the projects which were proposed and rejected in eager earnest tones—at least on the part of Larry and Will. As for Muggins, although always earnest he was never eager. Tremendous indeed must have been the influence which could rouse him into a state of visible excitement! During the discussion the other two grew so warm that they forgot all about time and turtles, and would certainly

have prolonged their talk for another hour had not one of the men appeared, telling them to clap a stopper on their potato-traps and return to the boat, as the sport was going to begin.

The moon had risen and commenced her course through a sky which was so clear that the planets shone like resplendent jewels, and the distant stars like diamond dust. Not a breath of air ruffled the surface of the sea; nevertheless, its slumbering energies were indicated by the waves on the outlying coral reef, which, approaching one by one, slowly and solemnly, fell with what can only be called a quiet roar, hissed gently for a moment on the sand, and then passed with a sigh into absolute silence.

“Don’t it seem as if the sea wor sleepin’,” whispered one of the men, while they all lay watching under the boat.

“Ay, an’ snorin’ too,” answered another.

“Whisht!” exclaimed a third, “if old Neptune hears ye, he’ll wake up an’ change his tune.”

“Och, sure he’s woke up already,” whispered Larry, pointing with great excitement to a dark object which at that moment appeared to emerge from the sea.

“Mum’s the word, boys,” whispered the old salt who had charge of the party; “the critters are comin’, an’ England expec’s every man for to do his dooty, as old Nelson said.”

In the course of a few minutes several more dark objects emerged from the sea, and waddled with a kind of sigh or low grunt slowly up the beach, where they lay, evidently intending to have a nap! With breathless but eager interest, the sailors

lay perfectly still, until fifteen of the dark objects were on the sands, and sufficient time was allowed them to fall into their first nap. Then the word "Turn" was given, and, leaping up, each man rushed swiftly but silently upon his prey! The turtles were pounced upon so suddenly that almost before they were wide awake they were caught; a bursting cheer followed, and instantly ten splendid animals were turned over on their backs, in which position, being unable to turn again, they lay flapping their flippers violently.

"That's the way to go it," shouted one of the men who, after turning his turtle, dashed after one of the other five which were now hastening back to the sea, with laborious but slow haste. His comrades followed suit instantly with a wild cheer. Now, to the uninitiated, this was the only moment of danger in that bloodless fight.

Being aware of his incapacity for swift flight, the turtle, when in the act of running away from danger, makes use of each flipper alternately in dashing the sand to an incredible height behind and around him, to the endangering of the pursuer's eyes, if he be not particularly careful. Sometimes incautious men have their eyes so filled with sand in this way that it almost blinds them for a time, and severe inflammation is occasionally the result.

The old salt—Peter Grant by name, but better known among his shipmates as Old Peter—was well aware of this habit of the turtle; but, having a spice of mischief in him, he said nothing about it. The consequences were severe on some of the men,

particularly on Muggins. Our sedate friend was the only one who failed to turn a turtle at the first rush. He had tripped over a stone at starting, and when he gathered himself up and ran to the scene of action, the turtles were in full retreat. Burning with indignation at his bad fortune, he resolved to redeem his character; and, with this end in view, made a desperate rush at a particularly large turtle, which appeared almost too fat for its own shell. It chanced that Larry O'Hale, having already turned two, also set his affections on this turtle, and made a rush at it; seeing which Muggins slyly ran behind him, tripped up his heels, and passed on.

“Have a care,” cried Will Osten, laughing, “he’ll bite!”

“Bad luck to yez!” shouted Larry, leaping up, and following hard on Muggins’ heels.

Just then the turtle began to use his flippers in desperation. Sand flew in all directions. The pursuers, nothing daunted though surprised, partially closed their eyes, bent down their heads, and advanced. Larry opened his mouth to shout—a shower of sand filled it. He opened his eyes in astonishment—another shower shut them both up, causing him to howl while he coughed and spluttered. But Muggins pressed on valorously.

One often reads, in the history of war, of brave and reckless heroes who go through “storms of shot and shell” almost scathless, while others are falling like autumn leaves around them. Something similar happened on the present occasion. While Larry and several of the other men were left behind,

pitifully and tenderly picking the sand out of their eyes, the bold Muggins—covered with sand from head to foot, but still not mortally wounded—advanced singlehanded against the foe—rushed at the turtle; tripped over it; rose again; quailed for a second before the tremendous fire; burst through it, and, finally, catching the big creature by the rim, turned him on his back, and uttered a roar rather than a cheer of triumph.

This was the last capture made that night. Immediately after their victory the men returned to the boat, where they kindled an immense bonfire and prepared to spend the night, leaving the turtles to kick helplessly on their backs till the morning light should enable them to load the boat and return with their prizes to the ship. Meanwhile pipes were loaded and lit, and Doctor Will, as Old Peter called him, looked after the wounded.

Chapter Four.

In which Another Fight is recorded and an Escape is made, but whether Fortunate or the Reverse Remains to be seen

The supply of fresh meat thus secured was very acceptable to the crew of the *Rover*, and their circumstances were further improved by the addition of a number of fresh cocoa-nuts which were collected on the island by Bunco, that individual being the only one on board who could perform, with ease, the difficult feat of climbing the cocoa-nut palms. After a couple of days spent at this island, the *Rover* weighed anchor and stood away for the coast of South America, which she sighted about two weeks afterwards.

Here, one evening, they were becalmed not far from land, and Griffin ordered a boat to be lowered, with a crew to go ashore. The captain had been in low spirits that day, from what cause was not known, and no one ever found out the reason, but certain it is that he was unusually morose and gruff. He was also rather absent, and did not observe the fact that Larry O'Hale, Muggins, and Will Osten were among the crew of the boat. The mate observed it, however, and having a shrewd suspicion of their

intentions, ordered them to leave it.

“What said you?” asked Griffin of the mate, as he was about to go over the side.

“I was about to change some of the crew,” he replied confidentially. “It would be as well to keep O’Hale and—”

“Oh, never mind,” said Griffin roughly, “let ’em go.”

The mate, of course, stepped back, and Griffin got into the boat, which was soon on its way to the land. On nearing the shore, it was found that a tremendous surf broke upon the beach—owing to its exposure to the long rolling swell of the Pacific. When the boat, which was a small one, entered this surf, it became apparent that the attempt to land was full of danger. Each wave that bore them on its crest for a second and then left them behind was so gigantic that nothing but careful steering could save them from turning broadside on and being rolled over like a cask. Griffin was a skilful steersman, but he evidently was not at that time equal to the occasion. He steered wildly. When they were close to the beach the boat upset. Every man swam towards a place where a small point of land caused a sort of eddy and checked the force of the undertow. They all reached it in a few minutes, with the exception of Griffin, who had found bottom on a sand-bank, and stood, waist deep, laughing, apparently, at the struggles of his comrades.

“You’d better come ashore,” shouted one of the men.

Griffin replied by another laugh, in the midst of which he sank suddenly and disappeared. It might have been a quicksand—it

might have been a shark—no one ever could tell, but the unhappy man had gone to his account—he was never more seen!

The accident had been observed from the ship, and the mate at once lowered a boat and hastened to the rescue. Those on shore observed this, and awaited its approach. Before it was half way from the beach, however, Peter Grant said to his comrades—

“I’ll tell ’e wot it is, boys; seems to me that Providence has given us a chance of gittin’ away from that ship. I never was a pirate, an’ I don’t mean for to become one, so, all who are of my way of thinkin’ come over here.”

Will Osten and his friends were so glad to find that a shipmate had, unknown to them, harboured thoughts of escaping, that they at once leaped to his side, but none of the others followed. They were all determined, reckless men, and had no intention of giving up their wild course. Moreover, they were not prepared to allow their comrades to go off quietly. One of them, in particular, a very savage by nature, as well as a giant, stoutly declared that he not only meant to stick by the ship himself, but would compel the others to do so too, and for this purpose placed himself between them and the woods, which, at that part of the coast, approached close to the sea. Those who took his part joined him, and for a few moments the two parties stood gazing at each other in silence. There was good ground for hesitation on both sides, for, on the one hand, Will Osten and his three friends were resolute and powerful fellows, while, on the other, the giant and his comrades, besides being stout men, were eight in number.

Now, it chanced that our hero had, in early boyhood, learned an art which, we humbly submit, has been unfairly brought into disrepute—we refer to the art of boxing. Good reader, allow us to state that we do not advocate pugilism. We never saw a prize-fight, and have an utter abhorrence of the “ring.” We not only dislike the idea of seeing two men pommel each other’s faces into a jelly, but we think the looking at such a sight tends to demoralise. There is a vast difference, however, between this and the use of “the gloves,” by means of which a man may learn the useful art of “self-defence,” and may, perhaps, in the course of his life, have the happiness of applying his knowledge to the defence of a mother, a sister, or a wife, as well as “self.” If it be objectionable to use the gloves because they represent the fist, then is it equally objectionable to use the foil because it represents the sword? But, pray, forgive this digression. Ten to one, in *your*

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