Swiss Family Robinson

By Johann David Wyss

Abridged

Acknowledgment

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This version has been adapted and simplified with the assistance of ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI, to make the story more accessible to modern readers while preserving the spirit of the original work.

Swiss Family Robinson

Chapter 1

For days, we had been battered by a terrible storm. Six nights came and went, each one bringing chaos and fear, and every new day only brought more trouble as the storm grew worse. By the seventh day, we had lost all hope.

We were completely off course and had no idea where we were. The crew was discouraged and worn out from working nonstop. The masts had been torn away, leaks had sprung up everywhere, and water was pouring in faster than we could handle.

Instead of shouting curses, the sailors were now crying out desperately to God for mercy, making all kinds of wild and often ridiculous promises about what they would do if they survived. Each man took turns praying for his soul and frantically trying to come up with a way to save himself.

My heart sank as I looked at my family in the middle of all this chaos. Our four young sons were frozen with fear. “My dear children,” I said, “if it’s God’s will, He can save us from this terrible danger. If not, we must trust Him and face whatever comes, knowing that even in death, we’ll be together again forever in a happier place. Death isn’t so frightening when it doesn’t separate those who love one another.”

Hearing this, Elizabeth wiped her tears and lifted her head, showing bravery that gave me strength. She held our boys close and began to comfort them with gentle, loving words. I was proud of her courage, though my heart ached as I watched my family.

We all knelt together, taking turns to pray. Fritz, especially, prayed earnestly for the safety of his parents and brothers, completely forgetting about himself. Our hearts felt a little lighter as we found comfort in the simple, trusting act of prayer, and the terror of our situation didn’t seem quite so overwhelming. “Surely,” I thought, “God will hear us and come to our aid!”

Suddenly, above the crashing waves, someone shouted, “Land! Land!” At that very moment, the ship slammed into something with such a violent jolt that we were all thrown to the deck. The ship shuddered and groaned as if it would break apart instantly, and the roaring sea began to flood in from every side.

Above the chaos, the captain’s voice rang out: “Lower the boats! We’re doomed!”

“Doomed” I cried, the word piercing my heart like a knife. But when I saw the fear in my children’s faces, I pulled myself together and said as cheerfully as I could, “Stay strong, my boys! We’re still afloat, and land isn’t far. Let’s do everything we can to reach it. Remember, God helps those who help themselves! Stay with your mother while I go on deck to see what needs to be done.” With that, I left them and climbed up.

The moment I reached the deck, a wave knocked me flat, followed by another, and then another, before I managed to steady myself. The ship was breaking apart

everywhere, with a gaping hole in one side of the hull.

Meanwhile, the crew, forgetting all about the passengers, scrambled into the lifeboats. The last man in each boat cut the ropes, sending them into the sea without a second thought.

I was filled with horror as I watched through the foam and spray—the last lifeboat was leaving the ship. The final sailor leapt into it and pushed off, ignoring my desperate cries and pleas to let us share their slim chance of survival. My voice was lost in the roar of the storm, and even if the crew had wanted to come back, it would have been impossible. The waves towered like mountains, making a return unthinkable.

Looking around in despair, I slowly realized our situation wasn't completely hopeless. The stern of the ship, where our cabin was located, had become wedged between two large rocks. It was lifted partly above the waves, while the front of the ship was being torn to pieces.. Through the mist and rain, as gaps appeared in the swirling clouds, I could see a rugged, rocky coastline in the distance. Though it looked harsh and forbidding, it gave me hope—a sign that we might still be saved.

Still, the weight of our isolation and abandonment pressed heavily on me as I returned to my family. Forcing a smile, I said, "Take heart, my dear ones! Though our poor ship will never sail again, it's lodged in a way that keeps our cabin above water. If the wind and waves calm by morning, I see no reason why we can't make it safely to shore."

My words had an immediate effect on the children, lifting their spirits. They had a habit of trusting my assurances, and now they treated our slim chance of escape as a sure thing. They even began to feel relief from the constant pitching and rolling of the ship.

Elizabeth, however, saw past my calm face and noticed I was worried. I gently told her how serious our situation really was, worried about how she might take it. But she stayed brave and kept her faith in God without hesitation. Her strength inspired me and gave me new determination.

"We need to find some food and have a good supper," she said. "We can't afford to grow weak from hunger—we'll need all our strength tomorrow."

Night fell quickly, and the storm continued to rage. Every so often, we were startled by loud crashes as the ship sustained further damage. We couldn't help but think of the lifeboats and fear that they, along with everyone aboard them, must have been swallowed by the wild, foaming waves.

We sat down to eat. The children enjoyed the meal and soon went to bed, falling asleep quickly. Fritz, who was old enough to understand the real danger we were in, stayed up to keep watch with us. After a long silence, he said, "Father, don't you think we could make swimming belts for Mother and the boys? With those, we might all be able to get to shore. You and I can swim already."

"That's an excellent idea," I replied. "Let's work on something right away, just in case

anything happens during the night."

We immediately searched for materials we could use and found some empty flasks and tin canisters, which we tied together in pairs to make floats strong enough to keep someone afloat. Elizabeth and our younger sons wore them gladly. I also packed a small bundle of essentials—matches, tinder, knives, and cord—so we'd have some supplies if the ship broke apart during the night.

Fritz and his brothers fell asleep quickly, but Elizabeth and I stayed awake, listening anxiously for any signs the wreck might collapse.

At last, dawn arrived, and to our relief, the storm was calming. The sky brightened with the colors of sunrise. I woke the boys, and we gathered on the damaged deck. For the first time, they realized we were alone.

"Papa, where is everyone?" they cried. "Did the sailors take the boats and leave us? What will we do now?"

"My dear children," I said, "we mustn't lose hope. Even though the sailors left us, God hasn't abandoned us. Let's trust Him and work together. Does anyone have ideas?"

"The sea will calm soon," said Fritz, "so we could swim to shore."

"But we can't all swim!" Ernest argued. "Why not build a raft so we can get there safely?"

"It will be difficult, but you're right," I said. "We need a plan. Let's start by finding anything useful."

With that, we began searching the ship. I focused on gathering provisions and fresh water, while the rest of the family scattered. Elizabeth, together with Franz, went to care for the neglected animals. Fritz checked the arms chest, Ernest searched for tools, and Jack headed to the captain's cabin.

To his surprise, two large dogs leapt out as soon as he opened the door. Overjoyed to be free, they knocked Jack flat, leaving him startled but unharmed.

But Jack wasn't one to stay scared for long. He quickly got up, and the dogs, as if apologizing, licked his face and hands enthusiastically. Grinning, Jack grabbed the larger dog by the ears, climbed onto its back, and, to my surprise and amusement, rode it like a horse as he approached me at the hatchway.

I couldn't help laughing at the sight and praised his bravery, though I reminded him to be cautious—hungry animals could sometimes be unpredictable.

When we regrouped in the cabin, everyone proudly shared what they had found. Fritz displayed two guns, a shot belt, powder flasks, and plenty of bullets. Ernest brought a cap full of nails, a pair of large scissors, an axe, and a hammer, with chisels, pincers, and augers sticking out of his pockets. Little Franz eagerly opened a box to reveal small, sharp fishhooks, much to the amusement of his brothers.

“Well done, Franz!” I said. “These hooks might end up being the most valuable find of all—they could save our lives by helping us catch food. Fritz and Ernest, your contributions are excellent as well.”

“Will you praise me too?” asked Elizabeth with a smile. “I haven’t brought supplies, but I do have good news. Some of the animals are still alive! There’s a donkey, two goats, six sheep, a ram, a cow, and a big sow that’s about to have piglets. I managed to feed them just in time, and I even milked the goats—though I’m not sure how we’ll keep the milk fresh.”

“These are all great finds,” I said. “But my friend Jack here has brought me two enormous, hungry dogs who’ll probably eat more than the rest of us combined.”

“Oh, Papa! They’ll be useful!” Jack protested. “They can help us hunt when we reach the shore!”

“That’s true, Jack—if we do make it to shore,” I replied. “But honestly, I’m not sure how we’re going to manage that.”

“Why don’t we each get into a big tub and float there?” Jack suggested. “I’ve done it loads of times on the pond at home!”

“Good idea, Jack. Ernest, bring your tools—hammers, nails, saws, and augers—and then go find any tubs you can!” I instructed.

Soon, we found four large casks floating among debris in the waterlogged hold. They were made of solid wood and secured with iron hoops. After some effort, we fished them out and brought them to the lower deck, just barely above water. These casks were exactly what I needed.

I got to work sawing them in half. It was tough going, and we were all glad to take a break with some goat’s milk, wine, and biscuits.

Eventually, I had eight tubs lined up near the water’s edge, ready for use. Next, I attached the tubs to a long plank for a base, bending the ends to form a keel. I nailed two more planks along the sides, securing everything tightly. The result was a narrow boat divided into eight compartments, which I was confident would float.

When we tried to launch the boat, however, we hit a snag—it was so heavy that even with all of us pushing, it wouldn’t budge.

“I need a lever!” I exclaimed. “Fritz, grab the capstan bar!”

Fritz fetched it, and with the lever, I lifted the front of the boat while my sons slid a roller underneath. Using this, we finally managed to get the boat ready to move.

"How is it, Father," asked Ernest, "that with just that tool, you can do more than all of us together?"

I quickly explained the principle of Archimedes' lever, mentioning how he claimed he could move the world if he had a fixed point to work from. I promised we’d discuss mechanics in more detail once we were safely on land.

Next, I tied a long rope to the stern of the boat and secured the other end to a sturdy beam. With additional rollers placed underneath, we began pushing again. This time, it worked! The boat slid swiftly into the water, and if the rope hadn't been tied securely, it might have drifted beyond our reach.

The boys were eager to jump in immediately, but the boat tipped dangerously to one side, making it unsafe. We added some heavy items to balance it, and slowly it righted itself. Overjoyed, the boys began squabbling over who would get to sit in the tubs first.

However, I noticed the boat was still not stable enough for safety. To fix this, I added outriggers by nailing long poles across the front and back of the boat, attaching empty brandy casks at the ends. This addition made the boat much steadier.

Once it looked secure, I climbed aboard to test it. Turning the boat towards the most open side of the wreck, I cut away debris to clear an exit path. Meanwhile, the boys brought oars so we'd be ready to row.

Unfortunately, it was too late in the day to begin our journey, so we had to wait until morning. Spending another night on the wreck wasn't ideal, but we had no other choice. Resigned, we sat down to enjoy a proper supper, having eaten only a few biscuits and some wine during the day while working.

That night, we got ready for bed feeling far better than we had the day before. Still, I kept in mind the possibility of another storm and made sure everyone wore their float belts again, just in case.

Soon after, we settled into our hammocks. Peaceful sleep gave us the rest we needed to face the challenges ahead.

We woke early, for those with hope or worry rarely sleep deeply. After kneeling together in prayer, I said, "Now, my dear ones, with God's help, we are about to escape. Let's make sure the animals we must leave behind are well fed and have enough fodder. In a few days, we may be able to come back and save them too. After that, gather anything else you can think of that might be useful for us."

The boys eagerly followed my instructions, and from the many items they collected, I chose a few essentials: canvas for a tent, a chest of carpenter's tools, guns, pistols, powder, shot, and bullets, fishing rods and tackle, an iron pot, portable soup, and a case of biscuits. These replaced the ballast I had thrown in the day before, but there were so many supplies that we had to leave some behind for a future trip.

With a heartfelt prayer for God's blessing, we prepared to take our seats, each in our own tub. Just then, the roosters began crowing, and the chickens clucked, almost as if they were scolding us for leaving them behind.

"Why shouldn't the chickens come with us?" I said. "If we can't find food for them, they can be food for us!" So, ten hens and a couple of roosters were placed in one of the tubs and covered with wire netting to keep them safe.

The ducks and geese were set free and immediately swam into the water, while the pigeons, happy to be able to fly, headed straight for the shore. Elizabeth, who was

managing everything for me, made us wait a little longer before she finally came over carrying a bag as big as a pillow.

"This is my contribution," Elizabeth said, tossing the bag to little Franz. At first, I thought it was meant to cushion him or keep him steady during the journey.

Once everything was ready, we cast off and moved away from the wreck. Elizabeth sat in the first compartment of the boat with Franz, my sweet-tempered little boy, nearly six years old, beside her. Then came Fritz, a handsome and spirited 14-year-old. The two middle tubs held our precious supplies, followed by our bold and carefree Jack, who was 10. Finally, Ernest, my 12-year-old second son, intelligent and well-informed but sometimes a bit lazy, took his place. I, the anxious and loving father, stood at the stern, carefully steering the raft toward land.

The older boys took the oars, and everyone wore a float belt, keeping something useful nearby in case someone fell into the water. The tide was coming in, which made rowing easier for the boys.

We cleared the wreck and glided into the open sea. We had left the two mastiffs, Turk and Juno, on the wreck because of their size, fearing their extra weight would make the boat unstable. But when they saw us leaving, they howled pitifully and leapt into the sea. I felt sorry for them, as the land seemed so far away, and I doubted they'd make it. However, they paddled tirelessly, sometimes resting their front paws on the outriggers to stay afloat, and managed to keep up.

Our journey was long and uneventful, but as approached the shore, it appeared to be barren and rocky. Floating around us were many casks, boxes, and bales of goods. Fritz and I managed to secure a couple of hogsheads, towing them alongside the boat. With the possibility of hunger ahead, it was vital to salvage anything that might hold supplies.

As we continued, the landscape began to change. We noticed green grass and trees growing between and beyond the cliffs. Fritz pointed out many tall palms, and Ernest eagerly hoped they were coconut trees, excited at the thought of drinking the refreshing milk.

"I regret not bringing the captain's telescope," I said with some frustration.

"Oh, look here, father!" cried Jack, pulling a small telescope out of his pocket with pride and delight.

Using the telescope, I saw that the coast to the left looked much more inviting, though a strong current was carrying us directly toward the jagged rocks. Then I noticed an opening where a stream flowed into the sea and saw our geese and ducks swimming toward it. Steering the boat into the creek, we soon found ourselves in a small bay with calm, shallow water. The ground gently sloped from the banks to the cliffs, which receded inland, leaving a small plain where it was easy for us to land.

Everyone eagerly jumped out of the boat. The dogs had already scrambled ashore and greeted us with loud barking and excited jumps. The chickens, geese, and

ducks added to the commotion, along with the cries of flamingos and penguins, whose territory we had intruded upon.

Once everyone was safely on dry land, we knelt to give thanks for our safe arrival and, with full hearts, entrusted ourselves to God's care for the challenges ahead. Then we got to work unloading, feeling fortunate and rich with the provisions we had salvaged.

We let the poultry roam free to forage for themselves and began looking for a suitable spot to set up a tent for the night. We quickly found one, driving a long spar into a hole in the rock and supporting the other end with a pole planted firmly in the ground. Over this frame, we stretched the sailcloth we had brought with us. We secured it with pegs, used heavy chests and boxes to weigh down the edges, and added hooks to seal the entrance at night.

Once the tent was ready, the boys gathered moss and grass to serve as bedding, while I built a fireplace near the nearby stream, using large flat stones to encircle it. Dry twigs and seaweed caught fire easily, and I filled the iron pot with water. Elizabeth began cooking, with little Franz enthusiastically trying to help.

He watched her carefully and, mistaking her actions, asked, "What's papa going to make next? Is that glue for his carpentry?"

"This is soup for your dinner, my child," Elizabeth replied, smiling. "Do you think it looks like glue?"

"Indeed I do!" Franz exclaimed. "And I don't think I'd like glue soup! Why don't you use some beef or mutton, Mama?"

"Where would I find it, dear?" she said. "We're far from a butcher's shop! These cakes, though, are made from the juice of good meat boiled into a stiff jelly. People take them on long voyages, where they can't have fresh meat. It makes a fine soup, even if it doesn't look like much at first."

Meanwhile, Fritz, armed with a loaded gun, set off along the rough coast to explore what lay beyond the stream. Ernest, less eager for tiring walks, meandered down to the beach, while Jack climbed among the rocks, searching for shellfish.

I wanted to retrieve the two casks floating beside the boat, but the steep bank where we had landed made it impossible to haul them up. I set off to find a more accessible spot when I was suddenly startled by Jack's frantic shouts for help. I sensed his urgency, and gripping a hatchet, I ran toward him as fast as I could.

Jack stood screaming in a deep pool, and as I approached, I saw that a huge lobster had caught his leg in its powerful claw. Poor Jack was in a terrible fright; kick as he would, the lobster still clung on. I waded into the water, and seizing the lobster firmly by the back, managed to make it loosen its hold, and carried it safely to land.

Jack, having now recovered from his ordeal, and anxious to take such a prize to his mother, caught the lobster in both hands, but instantly received such a severe blow from its tail, that he flung it down, and angrily hit the creature with a large stone.

Jack, now holding up the lobster again, ran excitedly toward the tent. "Mother, mother! Look, a lobster! A lobster, Ernest! Franz, come see! Be careful—it might pinch you! Where's Fritz?"

Everyone gathered around Jack and his catch, marveling at its unusual size. Ernest, eager, suggested that Elizabeth should immediately make lobster soup by adding it to the pot she was already cooking.

She, however, politely declined to try such an experiment, explaining that she preferred to cook one dish at a time. Noticing that the site of Jack's adventure seemed like a good spot to bring my casks ashore, I returned there and managed to haul them onto the beach. Once they were upright, I left them for the time being.

When I got back, I brought up Jack's lobster again and told him he would have the "offending" claw all to himself once it was cooked. I congratulated him on being the first to find something useful.

"As for that," said Ernest, "I found something good to eat too, just like Jack. I just couldn’t get to them without getting my feet wet."

"Ha!" scoffed Jack. "I know what he saw—just some gross mussels! I saw them too. Who would eat that rubbish? Lobster for me!"

“I believe them to be oysters, not mussels,' returned Ernest calmly. "They were stuck to the rocks, so I am sure they are oysters."

"Ernest, would you mind collecting a few oysters for our next meal?"

"I can bring some salt at the same time," Ernest replied. "I noticed a lot of it in the crevices of the rocks. It tasted very clean and pure, so I figured it must have formed from seawater evaporating in the sun."

"Quite possibly," I said, "but if you had brought back a bag of that salt instead of just speculating about where it came from, it would have been far more helpful. Go fetch some right away."

Sure enough, it turned out to be salt, though so impure that it seemed useless until Elizabeth dissolved and strained it, making it fit for the soup.

"Why not just use seawater?" Jack asked.

“Because,’ Ernest replied, ‘seawater is not just salty; it’s bitter as well. Try tasting it for yourself.”

"Now,' said Elizabeth, tasting the soup with the stick with which she had been stirring it, "dinner is ready, but where can Fritz be?' she continued, a little anxiously. “And how are we to eat our soup when he does come?' she continued. `We have neither plates nor spoons. Why did we not remember to bring some from the ship?”

"Because, my dear, one cannot think of everything at once. We shall be fortunate if we do not find even more things we have forgotten."

"But we can scarcely lift the boiling pot to our mouths," she said.

I had to agree. We all stared at the pot. Finally, the silence was broken as we all burst into laughter at our foolishness in forgetting that spoons and forks were essential.

"Oh, for a few coconut shells!" sighed Ernest.
"Oh, for a set of plates and silver spoons!" I replied with a smile.
"Actually, oyster shells would work," Ernest suggested after a moment of thought.

"Good idea! Off you go, boys—fetch some oysters and clean out a few shells. And no complaining about spoons without handles or greasy fingers while scooping soup!"

Jack darted off, wading knee-deep into the water to detach oysters. Ernest followed more slowly and, still hesitant to get his feet wet, stood at the pool's edge, collecting the oysters Jack tossed into his handkerchief. As he did, he picked up a large mussel shell for his own use and slipped it into his pocket.

When they returned with a good haul, we heard a shout from Fritz in the distance. He appeared with his hands behind his back and a disappointed look on his face.

"Empty-handed?" I asked.
"Really!" I added. "Never mind, better luck next time."

"Oh, Fritz!" his brothers cried, noticing something behind him. "A piglet! A little piglet! Where did you get it? How did you catch it? Let us see!"

Fritz's eyes sparkled as he revealed his prize. He then told us he'd gone to the other side of the stream. "It's completely different over there," he said. "It's really beautiful, and the shore, which gently slopes down to the sea, is covered with all kinds of useful things from the wreck."

"Let's go collect them," Fritz said. "And, Father, why don't we return to the wreck and bring some of the animals? Think of how valuable the cow would be to us, and what a shame it would be to lose her. Let's get her ashore, and we can move across the stream where she'll have good grazing, and we'll be in the shade instead of on this barren land. And, Father, I really wish—"

"Hold on, hold on, Fritz" I interrupted. "All in good time. Tomorrow and the day after will bring their own tasks. But tell me, did you see any signs of our shipmates?"

`Not a sign of them, either on land or sea, living or dead,' he replied.

`But the pig,' said Jack, `where did you get it?'

"It was one of several," said Fritz, "which I found on the shore, along with some very interesting little animals that hopped rather than walked. Every now and then, they would sit on their hind legs and rub their snouts with their front paws. If I hadn't been worried about losing everything, I would have tried to catch one alive—they seemed so tame. But this one was easier to catch."

Meanwhile, Ernest had been carefully examining the animal.

"This isn’t a pig," he said. "And except for its bristly skin, it doesn’t really look like one. Look, its teeth aren't like a pig's—they're more like those of a squirrel. In fact," he added, glancing at Fritz, "your pig' is actually an agouti."

"Good heavens," said Fritz, "listen to the great professor lecturing! He's going to prove a pig isn’t a pig!"

"You don’t have to be so quick to laugh at your brother," I said. "He’s quite right. I know the agouti from descriptions and pictures, and there's little doubt this is one. The little animal makes its nest under tree roots and feeds on fruit. Its meat is white but dry, with no fat, but has a slightly unpleasant flavour.

While we were talking, Jack had been unsuccessfully trying to open an oyster with his large knife. "Here's an easier way," I said, placing an oyster on the fire, and it immediately opened.

"Now," I continued, "who wants to try this treat?" At first, everyone hesitated to eat them, as they looked so unappealing. Jack, however, squeezed his eyes shut and made a face like he was about to take medicine, then quickly swallowed one down. We followed his lead, each doing so more out of necessity for a spoon than any hope of developing a taste for oysters.

Our spoons were ready, and we gathered around the pot, scooping out the soup, though not without a few burned fingers. Ernest then pulled out the large shell he had kept for himself, filled it with soup, and set it aside to cool, smiling at his foresight.

"You should think of others and not just yourself," I remarked. "Are you really so much better than your brothers? Your cool soup will be perfect for the dogs, my boy. Take it to them, and then come back and eat like the rest of us."

Ernest winced, but quietly took his shell and placed it in front of the hungry dogs, who quickly devoured it. He then returned, and after waiting for the soup to cool a bit more, we all happily resumed our meal.

As we were eating, we suddenly realized that the dogs, not satisfied with their share of soup, had spotted the agouti and were quickly devouring it. The boys began shouting, and Fritz first threw a stone at the dogs before grabbing his gun and rushing to save the animal from their jaws. Before I could stop him, he struck one of the dogs with such force that it bent his gun. The poor animals ran off howling, followed by a barrage of stones from Fritz, who yelled at them so fiercely that, had I not intervened, he likely would have hurt them.

I followed him and, as soon as he would listen, pointed out how disgraceful and wrong his outburst had been. "You’ve hurt the dogs, if not actually wounded them," I said, "you've upset and scared your mother, and you've ruined your gun, which could have been so useful."

Though Fritz's temper flared easily, it never lasted long. He quickly calmed down and immediately apologized to Elizabeth, expressing his regret for his actions.

By now, the sun was setting, and the poultry, which had been wandering some distance away, gathered around us and began picking up the crumbs of biscuits that had fallen during our meal. Elizabeth then pulled out handfuls of oats, peas, and other grains from her bag and began feeding the poultry.

The pigeons flew up to crevices in the rocks, the fowls perched themselves on our tent pole, and the ducks and geese waddled off, cackling and quacking, to the marshy edge of the river. We, too, were ready to rest. After loading our guns and offering our prayers to God, thanking Him for His many mercies, we entrusted ourselves to His protective care. As the last ray of light faded, we closed our tent and lay down to sleep.

The children noticed how quickly night had fallen, for there had been little or no twilight. This made me realize we must be close to the equator, where twilight is brief. Twilight happens because of the refraction of the sun's rays—the more angled the rays, the longer the light lasts. But when the rays are more direct, their light fades quickly, bringing sudden darkness.

Chapter 2

Without our tent, the cold night would have been difficult, but exhaustion helped us sleep well. The last sound I heard was our rooster crowing at the moon, and at dawn, his call woke me again. I quietly spoke with Elizabeth about our plans—we needed to search for our former companions and explore the land's resources. After breakfast, Fritz and I would set out while she stayed with the younger boys.

"Wake up, boys!" I called. "Help your mother with breakfast."

Elizabeth smiled. "Well, we can at least boil more soup."

"And don't forget Jack's lobster," I reminded. Jack proudly revealed it, safely hidden in a rock crevice from the dogs. "Good thinking," I praised. "It's lucky it's so big—we'll take some on our trip."

At the mention of an expedition, the boys cheered. I calmed them, explaining only Fritz and I would go, with one dog for company while the other stayed to guard them. Fritz prepared the guns, but blushed when he saw his was damaged. I let him struggle for a bit before offering him another.

Tying Flora proved difficult—she and Turk still feared Fritz after a previous scolding. Regretful, he asked for biscuits to make peace with them. Flora soon forgave him, but Turk hesitated until Jack handed him a piece of lobster.

Once armed and packed with food and water, we were ready. Fritz and I followed the stream, crossing a waterfall using large rocks. As we moved inland, rustling in the grass startled us. Fritz aimed his gun, but wisely held fire—it was just Turk, likely sent after us by Elizabeth. I praised Fritz for his self-control.

Reaching the shore, we scanned the sand for any sign of our shipmates but found none.

"Why even look for them?" Fritz asked. "They abandoned us!"

"We shouldn’t repay evil with evil," I said. "They might need help, and they could assist in building shelter."

"But what about the animals on the ship?" Fritz argued.

"Saving lives is more important," I explained. "The sea is calm, so the animals are safe for now. We must focus on what matters most."

As we talked, we continued on until we reached a pleasant grove that stretched down to the water’s edge. We paused to rest beneath a large tree, near a small stream that murmured over its pebbly bed, flowing toward the vast ocean before us.

A thousand brightly colored birds flew overhead, chirping merrily, and Fritz and I looked up in admiration. Suddenly, Fritz jumped up. "A monkey!" he exclaimed. "I’m almost certain I saw a monkey."

He dashed around the tree but tripped over a small, round object, which he handed to me. "This is a round bird’s nest," he said.

"You might be right," I replied with a laugh, "but don’t assume every round, hairy thing is a bird’s nest. This is a coconut. Don’t you remember reading about its fibrous covering over a hard shell, surrounded by a bulky green hull? The outer hull of this one has decayed, exposing the fibers. Let’s crack it open, and you’ll see the nut inside."

After some effort, we split it open, but to our disappointment, the kernel was dry and inedible.

"Hey," said Fritz, "I always thought a coconut was full of delicious sweet liquid, like almond milk."

"It is when young and fresh," I explained. "As it ripens, the milk turns to gel, then solidifies into the kernel you see here. Eventually, it dries out. However, when it falls onto the right soil, the germ inside swells, breaks through the shell, and takes root, growing into a new tree."

"I don’t understand," said Fritz, "how the germ gets through this thick shell. It’s not like an almond or hazelnut that already has a split down the middle."

"Nature provides for everything," I said, picking up the broken pieces. "Look here—see these three round holes near the stalk? That’s where the germ breaks through. Now, let’s see if we can find a better coconut."

Since coconuts ripen before falling, it took some effort to find one that wasn’t dried out. The one we found was a bit oily and rancid, but too hungry to be picky, we ate what we could and decided to delay our midday meal, saving our provisions.

We continued through a dense thicket of woody vines, cutting our way with hatchets, and soon emerged onto the seashore again. The forest stretched inland, and before us stood several unique-looking trees.

"Oh, look at those trees, Father!" Fritz pointed. "What are those strange bumps on the trunks?"

We approached for a closer look, and I recognized them as calabash trees. Their fruit grows directly on the stems, forming a type of gourd. "People craft these into bowls, spoons, and bottles—even for cooking."

"Oh, but that's impossible," Fritz replied. "The rind would burn if placed over a fire."

"When the gourd is halved and emptied, it's filled with water, along with fish or meat. Then, red-hot stones are added to bring it to a boil, cooking the food without damaging the rind."

"That's clever—so simple too! I might've thought of it if I'd tried," Fritz mused.

"People said the same about Columbus when he made an egg stand upright. Now, let's prepare some gourds to take home."

Fritz attempted to cut a gourd, but his knife slipped, leaving a jagged edge. Frustrated, he tossed it down. "Ugh! What a pain! I thought it'd be easy, but I ruined it."

"Hold on," I said. "You're rushing. Those pieces aren't wasted—why not make a spoon while I shape a dish?"

I pulled a string from my pocket, tied it tightly around one end of a gourd, and tapped it with my knife. As the string dug into the shell, I tightened it further and pulled hard—the gourd split cleanly.

"That's genius!" Fritz exclaimed. "How did you think of that?"

"It's a trick I read about."

"It works! This makes a perfect soup bowl—and even a plate," Fritz said, inspecting the pieces. "But what about making a bottle?"

"That's easier," I explained. "Cut a small hole, scoop out the inside, and shake in pebbles until it's cleaned out."

"Sounds more like a barrel than a bottle," Fritz pointed out.

"You're right," I admitted. "For a proper bottle shape, you must shape it while it grows. By tying a band around the young fruit, only certain parts will swell…"

I filled the gourds with sand and left them to dry, marking the spot for our return.

"Are the bottle-shaped gourds I've seen in Europe trained like that?" Fritz asked.

"No, they're a different species—that's their natural shape."

For three hours, we pushed forward, scanning both sides for any trace of our companions. We climbed a rocky headland, hoping for a better vantage point. The

ascent was manageable, and from the summit, we gazed across a vast bay edged with golden sands. Two hazy headlands framed a shimmering expanse of rippling water.

The inland view was equally breathtaking, yet Fritz and I couldn't shake a growing sense of loneliness in the vast solitude before us.

"Cheer up, Fritz," I said after a moment. "Remember, we chose this settler's life when we left our homeland. We didn't expect to be completely alone, it's true—but does it really matter if there are fewer people around? With God's help, let's make the best of it and be grateful we weren't stranded on some desolate, barren island. But come on, the heat is becoming unbearable. Let's find some shade before we roast alive."

We headed down the hill toward a cluster of palm trees we spotted nearby. To get there, we had to push through a thick patch of reeds—not exactly an easy or pleasant task. On top of the struggle to make our way through, I worried with every step about stepping on a venomous snake.

Sending Turk ahead to scout the way, I decided to cut one of the reeds, thinking it might be a more useful defense against a snake than my gun. Not long after picking it up, I noticed a sticky juice oozing from one end. Curious, I tasted it and was thrilled to find it sweet and delicious. That's when I realized—we were walking through a patch of sugarcane.

Hoping Fritz would make the same discovery, I suggested he cut a cane for protection. He did so, and as he tapped the ground with it, the reed split, covering his hand in the sticky juice. Curious, he touched it lightly with his tongue. Realizing it was sweet, he tried it again, more confidently this time. Suddenly, he turned to me, his face lit up with excitement.

"Father, it's sugarcane! Sugarcane! Taste it—oh, it's delicious! Let's take a bunch home for mother," he exclaimed, eagerly sucking on the cane.

"Easy now," I said with a chuckle. "Take a breath and remember—moderation in all things. Cut some to take back if you like, but only as much as you can carry."

Ignoring my advice, Fritz cut over a dozen of the largest canes he could find. Stripping off their leaves, he tucked them under his arm, determined to bring them along.

We pushed our way through the dense thicket of sugarcane and finally reached the cluster of palm trees. Just as we arrived, a troop of monkeys that had been playing in the branches leapt into action. Chattering and grimacing, they scrambled to the treetops before we could get a good look at them.

Fritz, annoyed by their antics, raised his gun, ready to shoot one of the mischievous creatures.

"Wait!" I called out. "Don't harm them unnecessarily. A live monkey up there is far more useful to us than a dozen dead ones down here, as I'll show you."

I picked up a handful of small stones and tossed them into the trees. The stones didn’t come close to the monkeys, but their instinct to mimic kicked in. They grabbed the nearest coconuts and flung them down at us in a frenzy.

Fritz laughed in delight at my trick and eagerly gathered up some of the fallen coconuts. Using my knife, I pierced holes in them, and we drank the milk inside. While the flavor wasn’t exactly pleasant, it was refreshing and quenched our thirst. What we enjoyed most was the creamy layer clinging to the shells, which we scraped off and ate with spoons.

After this tasty treat, the lobster we had been carrying seemed far less appealing. We tossed it to Turk, who devoured it gratefully, though he quickly turned his attention to gnawing on the ends of the sugarcane and begging for a taste of coconut.

I slung two coconuts over my shoulder, tying their stalks together, while Fritz hoisted his bundle of sugarcane. We set off for home, but it wasn’t long before Fritz began to struggle with the weight of his load. He shifted the canes from one shoulder to the other, carried them under his arm for a while, and finally stopped with an exasperated sigh.

"I had no idea a few reeds could be this heavy," he groaned. "I really feel for the poor workers who have to carry loads of these all day. But I’ll be glad when Mother and my brothers get to try them."

"Don’t worry, my boy," I said. "Patience and perseverance! Remember Aesop’s story about the breadbasket—how heavy it felt at the start of the journey, but how light by the end? Let’s each take a new staff and tie your bundle crosswise to your gun."

We quickly improvised this method and set off again. After a while, Fritz noticed that I was occasionally sucking on the end of my cane.

"That’s a clever trick, Father!" he exclaimed. "I’ll try it too."

He began sucking on his cane enthusiastically but couldn’t get a single drop of juice. "What’s going on?" he asked. "Why isn’t it working for me?"

"Think about it," I said with a smile. "You’re just as clever as I am—you can figure out why it’s not working if you put your mind to it."

"Oh, of course," he said, "it's like trying to suck marrow from a marrow bone, without making a hole at the other end."

"Exactly," I explained. "You’re creating a vacuum in your mouth and the end of the cane, expecting the air to push the liquid through, but it can’t flow past the solid joints."

Fritz quickly mastered the art of sucking sugarcane, learning by trial and error that he needed to cut fresh openings at each joint to access the juice. He was excited about teaching his brothers this new skill and couldn’t wait to see Ernest’s reaction to the coconut milk he had stored in his flask.

"By the way," I added, "you didn't need to carry that coconut milk all this way. It's likely to turn into vinegar before we even get home. The heat will make it ferment soon after being drawn."

"Vinegar? That would be awful!" Fritz exclaimed. He immediately swung his flask off his shoulder and pulled out the cork. With a loud pop, the contents fizzed and foamed like champagne.

"See what I mean?" I said, laughing as Fritz eagerly took a sip.

"You were wrong, Father!" he cried. "This isn't vinegar—it's delicious! You must try some!"

"Careful, Fritz," I cautioned "It might taste wonderful, but if you overindulge, it'll go straight to your head."

We both enjoyed the refreshing drink, which reinvigorated us and made the rest of our journey to retrieve the gourd dishes seem much shorter. When we arrived, we found them dry, lightweight, and easy to carry.

As we passed through the grove where we had eaten breakfast, Turk suddenly bolted ahead, charging furiously into a troop of monkeys playing on the grass. Taken completely by surprise, the monkeys scattered, but Turk, now ravenous, managed to catch one. Before we could intervene, he had seized it and was tearing it apart.

To our dismay, the unfortunate victim was a mother monkey. Clinging to her back had been a tiny baby, whose weight had hindered her flight. The little one crouched in the grass, trembling with fear as it witnessed the heartbreaking demise of its mother.

Fritz, horrified by Turk's actions, rushed forward, abandoning his bundle and even losing his hat in his haste. Unfortunately, he was too late to save the mother monkey. What happened next, however, was both touching and comical. The baby monkey, seeing Fritz as its only refuge, leapt onto his shoulders and clung tightly to his curly hair. No matter how Fritz tried to pry it off, the tiny creature refused to budge.

He did everything he could to dislodge the little monkey, screaming and thrashing about as he tried to shake or pull the creature off. However, it was no use; the baby only clung tighter to his neck, pulling his hair and making the most comical grimaces.

I laughed so hard at the absurd scene. Finally, I managed to compose myself enough to say, "It seems this little fellow, having lost its mother, is determined to adopt you, Fritz. Perhaps he sees in you the air of a caring father."

"Or more likely," Fritz replied, "he's figured out that I'm too soft-hearted to hurt an animal that's thrown itself on my mercy. But, Father, he's pulling my hair so hard—I'd really appreciate it if you could try again to get him off!"

Finally, I managed to free Fritz from the little monkey, gently coaxing it with a piece of biscuit and slowly untangling its tiny, nimble hands from his hair. Fritz stared at the baby ape in my arms, no bigger than a kitten, and his eyes lit up with curiosity.

"What a cute little thing!" he said. "Can I keep him, Father? I'm sure coconut milk will

be enough until we get the cow and goats from the wreck. If he survives, he could be really useful to us. Monkeys seem to know which fruits are safe to eat and which aren't."

"Well," I said, "if you want him, the little orphan is yours. You tried hard to save his mother, so now it's your responsibility to raise him. But remember, if you don't train him well, his instincts might become a problem instead of a help."

Meanwhile, Turk was enjoying the unfortunate mother monkey as his meal. Fritz wanted to drive him away from the feast, but I couldn't bring myself to deny him, especially considering how hungry Turk must be. I reminded Fritz that if Turk remained hungry, he could become dangerous to us. We didn't think it necessary to wait until he finished, so we prepared to continue our journey, chatting as we walked.

"Let me remind you," I said, "that in our situation, it would be risky to teach the dogs not to defend themselves by attacking unknown animals. You'll see that Turk will soon consider your little monkey part of the family, but we mustn't discourage his instinct to fight wild beasts. Remember, dogs have been given to man by Heaven as his protectors and allies, just like horses. A man on horseback, with a good pack of dogs, need not fear any wild animal—neither lions nor hyenas."

Fritz pondered this for a moment before replying, "I'm glad we have these two animals. It's just a shame the horses died on the voyage, leaving us with only the donkey."

"Let's be careful not to underestimate our donkey," I cautioned. "I wish he were already safely on land. Luckily, he's strong and big, so we can train him to serve us as the horse would. With good care, and the excellent pasture here, he may improve and become a valuable companion."

The tiny ape perched comfortably on Fritz's shoulder as we walked, carrying sugar canes. Soon, Turk caught up with us, licking his chops contentedly. Though he ignored the monkey, the little creature scrambled into Fritz's arms in fear. To free himself, Fritz secured the monkey onto Turk's back with a cord, quipping, "Having killed his mother, Mr. Turk, you shall now carry the baby." Though neither seemed pleased at first, the monkey eventually sat astride Turk like a dignified rider.

As we neared the stream, Juno's loud barks announced our arrival. Startled, the monkey wriggled free and clung to Fritz's shoulder. Turk, recognizing home, bolted ahead, barking excitedly. Our family rushed to greet us, their excitement growing when they spotted the monkey.

Their eager questions tumbled out—about the monkey, our bundle of sticks, and the coconuts. We explained our discoveries as they helped carry our supplies. Ernest, realizing the "useless sticks" were sugar canes, eagerly learned how to extract their sweet juice.

Arriving at camp, we found a feast in the making—fish roasting, a goose turning over the fire, and a pot of fragrant soup. Elizabeth reassured me that the bird wasn't one of our own, but a wild one Ernest had caught. He proudly described how he had mistaken it for a penguin. Meanwhile, Fritz discovered his prized wine had turned to

vinegar, but Elizabeth saw its value in cooking.

After dinner, I sawed coconuts in half, creating bowls for the monkey to drink from. As night fell, we settled in, but our rest was short-lived—our dogs' fierce barking signaled danger. Rushing out with our guns, we found them battling a pack of jackals. With our help, Turk and Juno drove them off, killing several of them.

The next morning, Fritz set up a jackal he had saved to surprise his brothers, sparking a debate over whether it was a fox, wolf, or jackal. The monkey, terrified at the sight, burrowed into the tent.

Breakfast was sparse—hard biscuits and cheese—until Ernest revealed a barrel of butter, transforming our meal. While tending to the dogs' battle wounds, Elizabeth used butter as a soothing salve. Inspired, Jack proposed making spiked collars for their protection.

With preparations made, Fritz and I set off for the wreck, leaving behind signals for emergency communication. As we rowed toward the ship, a favorable current carried us along. Once aboard, the livestock greeted us eagerly, and we tended to them before exploring the wreck for more supplies.

Fritz took his monkey to a goat, and the little creature eagerly nursed while chattering with delight. With it cared for, we had a hearty meal.

"We have a lot to do," I said. "Where should we start?"

"Let's rig up a mast and sail," Fritz suggested. "The current that carried us out won't help us back, but the wind could."

I was surprised but agreed. Using a strong wooden pole, we secured a mast, hoisted a sail from the ship's boat, and added a rudder for better steering. Fritz even insisted on a red streamer for decoration.

By then, it was too late to return. We signaled our plan to stay the night and replaced the ballast stones with supplies: powder, weapons, tools, food, hammocks, and farming equipment. The boat sat low in the water, but remained stable in the calm sea.

That night, a fire onshore reassured us. We lit lanterns and fired two shots in response. The ship felt unsafe, so we slept in the boat. Though I worried about my family, morning came peacefully. Scanning the shore, I saw Elizabeth wave our flag, lifting my spirits.

"Now that we've seen your mother, let's save some animals," I told Fritz.

"What if we made a raft?" he asked.

I doubted we could manage large animals that way. "We need another plan."

"Swimming belts—like the ones you made for the children!" Fritz suggested.

It was a brilliant idea. We wrapped the animals in linen with corks and empty tins for

buoyancy. The donkey and cow needed extra support, so we strapped empty casks under their bellies. One by one, we launched them into the water. The pig fought fiercely, but once in, it swam ahead of the others.

We tied cords with floats to each animal and set sail, pulling them toward shore. While relaxing, Fritz suddenly shouted—he had spotted a shark. Aiming carefully, he fired, striking its pale belly. Blood clouded the water, and the shark disappeared.

“Well done, Fritz,” I said.

As we reached land, we freed the animals. Elizabeth and our sons came running, delighted by our success. Elizabeth admired the flotation devices.

“Credit goes to Fritz,” I said. “He even saved a sheep from a shark.”

Jack, meanwhile, had crafted a belt from Fritz’s jackal hide, complete with pistols and a knife. He had also made spiked collars for the dogs.

“That hide stinks, Jack,” Fritz complained.

“It’s your rotting jackal, not my belt,” Jack retorted.

“Enough,” I said. “Dispose of the carcass.”

The boys dragged it away while we finished unloading the boat. Returning to camp, I asked for a ham, and Elizabeth teased Ernest about “conjuring” some eggs.

“Turtle eggs!” I exclaimed.

“That’s a story for later,” she said.

That evening, we feasted on soup, omelets, ham, cheese, and wine at a makeshift table draped with a damask cloth. As we ate, I recounted our adventure, eager to hear what had happened in my absence.

Chapter 3

"Early this morning,” said Elizabeth, “I woke up with relief to see your signal indicating that all was well. I quickly signaled back, and while the boys were still sound asleep, I began thinking of ways to improve our situation.

"'We can’t keep living on this exposed, rocky shore,' I thought to myself. 'The sun beats down relentlessly all day, and this flimsy tent offers little relief—if anything, it’s hotter inside than out. Why shouldn’t the boys and I do our part to improve things, just like you and Fritz? Surely, we can accomplish something useful.”

"'If we could move to a shady, pleasant spot in the woods or groves you and Fritz explored, where there seemed to be so many wonderful things, our health and spirits would improve immensely. There must be a suitable shelter there, and I’m determined to find it.”

"By the time the boys were up, I noticed Jack quietly busying himself near the spot where Fritz had left the jackal. Curiously, I watched as he used his knife to cut two long, narrow strips of the jackal's skin. He carefully cleaned and scraped the strips, then grabbed a handful of large nails from his pocket and stuck them through the skin with the points facing outward. Next, he cut strips of canvas sailcloth twice as wide as the skin, folded them over, and placed them on the raw side of the skin to cover the nail heads.

"At that point, Jack came over to me and politely asked if I could stitch the canvas and damp skin together for him. I gave him the needles and thread, insisting he try it himself. However, when I saw how determinedly and good-naturedly he struggled with the task using his clumsy fingers, I took pity on him. Overcoming my disgust, I finished stitching the lined dog collars he had so cleverly designed.

Not stopping there, Jack asked me to do the same for a belt he had made out of the skin. I suggested he think of a way to prevent the leather from shrinking. Although Ernest teased Jack a bit about his creations, he proposed a sensible solution: Jack should stretch the skin flat, nail it to a board, and leave it to dry in the sun. Jack followed his advice right away.

"My plan for a journey was met with enthusiasm by my young companions. We quickly got to work on preparations: gathering weapons and provisions. The two older boys carried guns, while I was to carry the water flask and a small hatchet."

After organizing everything as best we could at the tent, we set off toward the stream, with the dogs trotting alongside us. Turk, who had gone with you on your first expedition, seemed to understand our intentions immediately and confidently took the lead, guiding us along the same route."

After filling our water jug, we crossed the stream and climbed to the hilltop you had described, where we were rewarded with a breathtaking view. I was filled with a sense of hope and optimism—a feeling I hadn't experienced in a long time. In the distance, a charming little wood caught my attention, and we decided to make our way there.

However, the dense, tall grass growing higher than the boys' heads soon made progress nearly impossible. Exhausted, we turned toward the open beach on our left and followed it until we reached a point closer to the woods. Leaving the shoreline, we pushed inland again, but soon found ourselves battling through more of the thick reeds.

Suddenly, a loud rustling startled us. A huge bird, strong and powerful, burst out of the grass and took flight. Both boys tried to aim their guns, but the bird was out of range before they could even steady themselves.

"Oh no, what a shame!" Ernest exclaimed. "If I had my lighter gun and the bird hadn't flown off so fast, I would've taken it down easily!"

"Of course," I teased. "You'd be an excellent hunter—if only your targets always gave you plenty of time to prepare."

"But I didn’t expect anything to leap up right at our feet like that!" he protested.

"A good hunter," I reminded him, "has to be ready for surprises. Wild birds and animals won’t send you a notice before they take off or run away."

"What kind of bird was it, anyway?" Jack asked.

"It must have been an eagle," little Franz declared confidently. "It was so big!"

"As if every big bird has to be an eagle," Ernest replied with a smirk.

"Let’s at least see where it was sitting," I said.

Jack darted toward the spot, but before he could reach it, a second bird—larger and louder than the first—suddenly shot into the sky with a deafening rush.

The boys froze in shock, staring after it, while I couldn’t help but laugh. "Well," I teased, "you two are quite the expert hunters! At this rate, my pantry will stay empty for a long while!"

At this, Ernest blushed and looked like he might cry, while Jack, ever the comedian, pulled off his cap, made an exaggerated bow, and called after the fleeing bird, “Farewell for now, sir! I look forward to our next meeting!”

As we searched the ground carefully, we found a rough nest made from dry grass. It was empty, but nearby we spotted broken eggshells and guessed that the young birds had already hatched and scattered into the surrounding grass. Sure enough, we could see the blades of grass moving slightly in the distance as the little birds darted through it.

“Now, Franz,” said Ernest, “think about it—how could that bird possibly have been an eagle? Eagles don’t build nests on the ground, and their young can’t run around right after hatching. That’s unique to ground-nesting birds, like those in the gallinaceous group. Based on the white belly and dull reddish wing feathers I noticed, I believe these birds are bustards. The fine, moustache-like feathers over the beak of the largest bird are a distinctive feature of the Great Bustard.”

“Well,” I said, smiling, “your eyes were certainly observant, even if your hands were hesitant with the gun. And perhaps it’s for the best that we didn’t plunge the bustard family into mourning.”

As we chatted, we reached a beautiful grove of trees. Birds flitted and sang among the high branches, but I discouraged the boys from shooting any of the cheerful little creatures. We were too busy marveling at the sheer magnificence of the trees. Words cannot do justice to their size—you really have to see them to believe it. What we thought was a forest turned out to be a cluster of only about a dozen trees. Yet the roots of these trees formed strong arches and supports around the trunks, lifting them high into the air in a way that made each tree look like it was standing on stilts.

Jack, ever curious, climbed one of the raised roots with some twine to measure the trunk. He reported that it was about eighteen yards in circumference! Although we didn’t find any fruit, the trees had dense foliage that created a cool, shady canopy.

Beneath them, the ground was soft, covered in green grass, and completely free of thorns or underbrush. It was a perfect oasis, and we thoroughly enjoyed our midday meal in this natural paradise, a welcome reprieve from the blazing heat of our journey.

The dogs joined us later, having lingered on the beach. To my surprise, they lay down and went to sleep without begging for food, as they usually did during meals.

The longer we stayed in this enchanting place, the more it captivated me. I couldn't imagine a more perfect spot for a home. If we could find a way to live up in the branches of these grand trees, I would feel completely safe and content. Convinced that we wouldn't find a better place, I decided we should stop searching and head back to the beach. I wanted to see if any useful items from the wreck had washed ashore that we could take with us.

"Before starting, Jack persuaded me to sit quietly a little longer, and finish making his belt and the spike-collars for the dogs, for you must know that Jack had actually been carrying the board on which these were stretched all this time, so that they should get the full benefit of the sun.

As the belts had dried completely, I finished them without difficulty. Jack proudly fastened his belt, tucked in his pistols, and strutted about with an air of self-importance. Meanwhile, Ernest busied himself fitting the collars onto the dogs.

When we reached the shore, we discovered it was scattered with various items of apparent value, though most were far too heavy for us to carry. We managed to roll a few casks beyond the high-water mark and drag a couple of chests further up the beach. While we worked, the dogs busied themselves near the rocks, peering into crevices and pools. Every so often, they would lunge forward, seizing and quickly devouring something.

"They're eating crabs," Jack observed. "No wonder they haven't seemed very hungry lately."

Sure enough, the dogs were catching the small green crabs that swarmed in the water. Despite this, their appetite didn't appear entirely satisfied.

A little later, as we were preparing to head inland toward the ford, we noticed Juno digging in the sand and uncovering round objects that she devoured enthusiastically.

Curious, Ernest went to investigate. In his usual calm manner, he announced, "Juno has found turtle eggs."

"Well, then, we'll share in the find!" I exclaimed.

Juno, however, was not eager to share and protested as we gently moved her aside. We managed to collect about two dozen eggs and stowed them in our provision bags. While gathering the eggs, we caught sight of a sail merrily approaching the shore beyond the cliffs.

"That must be our raft!" Ernest declared.

We hurried to the stream, crossed it using the stepping stones, and finally arrived at the landing place, where we reunited with you.

"I hope you approve of our exploring party's efforts," Elizabeth said with a smile. "Tomorrow, perhaps you'll pack everything up and take us to live in my magnificent trees!"

"Ah, so that's your grand idea of safety and comfort, is it?" I teased. "Perched in a tree, who knows how many feet in the air, roosting like birds? If we only had wings or a hot air balloon, I might consider it a great plan!"

"Mock me all you like," she replied, undeterred. "It's not as absurd as you make it sound. Up there, we'd be safe from jackals and other nighttime prowlers. Back home in Switzerland, I remember seeing a charming treehouse built in a lime tree, complete with a sturdy floor and a staircase leading up to it. Why couldn't we create something similar here, where we could sleep soundly at night?"

"I'll think it over, my dear," I replied thoughtfully. "Perhaps there's merit to your idea after all. For now, though, let's offer our thanks for the day's blessings and entrust ourselves to God's protection as we settle in for the night."

Beneath the shelter of our tent, we all slept soundly, like marmots, until daybreak. When Elizabeth and I woke, we discussed our next steps.

Referring to the task she had suggested the evening before, I pointed out that undertaking it would present many challenges, so we needed to carefully consider it.

"First of all," I said, "I'm reluctant to leave a place that is secure as it is - surrounded by high cliffs on all sides, with only a narrow passage to the ford. From here, it's so easy to reach the ship and bring back all its valuable cargo. Why don't we stay here for the time being, until we've brought everything we possibly can from the ship?"

"I agree to some extent, William," she replied. "But you don't understand how unbearable the heat is among these rocks. It's almost intolerable for me to stay here all day while you and Fritz are out at sea or in the cool, shaded woods, where you can find refreshing fruits and pleasant views."

"As for the ship's cargo, so much has already washed ashore. I'd rather give up the rest than continue to worry about it. I dread the thought of venturing again on the unpredictable sea."

"I see your point," I said. "What if we move to your chosen place, and use this rocky stronghold as a storehouse or retreat in case of danger? I could make it even more secure by blasting parts of the rock with gunpowder. But first, we'd need to build a bridge to move everything across."

"I'll be parched to death before we can finish a bridge!" Elizabeth exclaimed. "Why not just carry our things on our backs and wade across, like we did before? The cow and the donkey could carry a lot."

"They'll have to, no matter how we move," I said. "But we'll need bags and baskets. If you focus on gathering those, I'll start on the bridge. It'll be useful not just once, but

regularly—during floods, or in case something happens."

"Alright," Elizabeth said, "I'll go along with your plan. But please get started right away—I'm eager to leave. The idea of making a safe place here among the cliffs sounds good. And I'll be relieved to see the gunpowder stored safely when we leave—it's far too dangerous to keep it so close to where we live."

"Gunpowder is both the most dangerous and the most useful thing we have," I replied. "That's why we must handle it with care. Eventually, I'll carve out a place in

By this morning's discussion, we had resolved the important matter of our move and outlined the work for the day. When the children heard of the plan, their excitement was overwhelming. They immediately began referring to it as our "journey to the Promised Land," and they only wished that we could skip the "wasted" time of bridge-building and begin the journey right away.

Everyone was eager to have breakfast so that work could start immediately. The cow and goats were milked, and after a satisfying meal of biscuits boiled in milk, I made preparations to head to the wreck to collect planks for the bridge we planned to build.

Ernest and Fritz accompanied me, and we were soon caught in the current, swiftly carried out to sea. Fritz was steering, and no sooner had we passed beyond the islet at the entrance of the bay and come into view of the seaward beach than we were astonished by the sight of a vast number of sea-birds—gulls and others—that rose like a cloud into the air, startled by our approach, and deafening us with their wild, screeching cries.

Fritz immediately grabbed his gun, eager to take a shot at them, but I held him back. I was intrigued by the reason for such a large gathering of birds, so I set the sail and steered towards the island, taking advantage of the fresh breeze from the sea.

The sail and flying pennant caught Ernest's attention, while Fritz kept his eyes fixed on the sandy shore, where the birds were beginning to settle again.

"Aha, now I see what they're after!" Fritz exclaimed. "They've got a huge monster of a fish there! They're having a proper feast! Let's get a closer look, father!"

Though we couldn't get very close in the boat, we managed to land a short distance away from the scene. After securing the raft by tying it to a large stone, we cautiously approached the gathering.

It turned out to be a massive fish, and the birds were ravenously feeding on its flesh. It was fascinating to watch the birds exhibit all sorts of behaviors—ferocity, greed, envy, and gluttony—among themselves.

"I'm sure there was nothing on this beach when we passed by yesterday, father," Fritz remarked. "It's strange to see this creature here."

"Why, Fritz!" Ernest said. "It must be the shark! Your shark, you know! I think I can see where you hit him in the head."

"You're right, Ernest," I said. "Though I think you're letting your imagination get the

better of you in trying to find the gunshot wounds amidst all the pecking and tearing from the birds. Look at those terrifying jaws beneath that strange, protruding snout. See all those rows of deadly teeth? Thank God we were delivered from them! Let's see if we can get some of the shark's skin. It's very rough, and when it dries, it could work like a file."

Ernest, armed with the ramrod from his gun, charged into the crowd of birds, striking right and left. He quickly killed several of them, and the rest scattered in flight. Meanwhile, Fritz used his knife to cut away broad strips of the shark's skin, and we made our way back to the boat.

Noticing with satisfaction that the shore was littered with the planks we needed, I immediately began gathering them. With these, we formed a makeshift raft to tow behind our boat and set off for home, sparing ourselves the need to revisit the wreck for supplies.

As we sailed along, pleased with our good fortune, Fritz followed my instructions to nail part of the shark's skin flat on boards to dry in the sun, while stretching another portion over the rounded mast.

"Will that work, Father?" he asked. "Won't it just dry all bent and crooked?"

"That's exactly what I want," I explained. "Once hardened, it will make beautiful shagreen, useful for polishing and smoothing wood."

"Shagreen?" Ernest asked. "I thought that was made from donkey hides."

"You're correct," I said. "The best shagreen comes from Turkey, Persia, and Tartary, made from horse or donkey skins. The rough texture is created artificially—when the skin is freshly flayed and soft, grains of corn are pressed into it. As the skin dries, the grains are removed, leaving a permanent roughness. There's also a type made in France from the hide of a creature called the angel fish."

"Angel fish!" exclaimed Fritz. "What a strange name for something 'hideous.'"

"There are bad angels as well as good ones," Ernest quipped dryly. "It's best to let people decide for themselves which is which."

By this time, we reached the shore. Lowering the sail, we secured the boat and raft to the bank. All was quiet, with no one in sight. Together, we let out a loud, cheery call, which was eventually answered by shrill voices. Elizabeth and our two younger sons came running from behind the high rocks, each carrying a small bundle in a handkerchief. Little Franz triumphantly waved a landing net over his head.

Surprised to see us back so soon, they eagerly asked what had happened. Once we explained, they revealed the contents of their bundles: an impressive catch of crawfish. The moment they were placed on the ground, the creatures began scattering in every direction, triggering laughter and chaos as the boys raced to recapture them.

"Well, Father, haven't we done well today?" Jack cried. "Have you ever seen crawfish this big? Look at their claws! I think we've caught at least two hundred of

them!”

“Let me guess,” I said with a grin, “you were the one who discovered this fine bounty, Jack?”

“No! Imagine young Franz being the lucky one!” Jack replied. “While Mother was busy, he and I wandered to the stream to scout for a good spot for the bridge. Franz was busy picking up pebbles and bits of alabaster—some because they were pretty, others to use for striking sparks in the dark, and a few he swore were ‘gold.’

“Then suddenly he shouted, ‘Jack! Jack! Come and look at the crabs on Fritz’s jackal!’ You remember we tossed the jackal’s carcass there? Sure enough, it was absolutely crawling with these creatures. Aren’t you glad we found them, Father? Do you think they’ll be good to eat?”

“Very good indeed, my boy,” I replied. “And we should be grateful that our needs are provided for, day by day.”

While Elizabeth prepared the crawfish for cooking, each of us recounted the day’s adventures. Then Fritz, Ernest, and I set about unloading our gathered planks from the raft. Even this seemingly straightforward task required careful planning. I devised makeshift rope harnesses for the cow and donkey, using them to haul each board from the water’s edge to the streambank, one at a time.

Jack eagerly led me to the spot he had chosen for the bridge. I agreed it was a good choice—the banks were relatively close together, steep, and nearly equal in height.

“How will we know if the planks are long enough to reach across?” I asked aloud. “A surveyor’s table would come in handy right now.”

“What about a ball of string, Father?” suggested Ernest. “Tie one end to a stone, throw it across, and then measure the length when we pull it back.”

Taking Ernest’s advice, we quickly determined the distance across was eighteen feet. Allowing an additional three feet on either side for support, I calculated we’d need planks at least twenty-four feet long.

The next challenge was figuring out how to lay the planks across the gap. Unable to decide immediately, we postponed the discussion until after dinner, which Elizabeth had just called us to.

As we rested, Elizabeth proudly displayed her latest handiwork—two large canvas bags for the donkey. Lacking a proper needle, she had ingeniously used a nail to punch holes for the stitching.

Eager to get back to work, I soon hit upon a plan to position the planks across the stream. Thankfully, trees stood close to the water on both sides. Tying a rope near one end of a beam, I slung it loosely around a tree on our side. Then, attaching a longer rope to the other end, I crossed the stream by stepping on broken rocks and stones. Using a pulley and block, I secured the rope to a sturdy branch on the opposite tree and brought the end of the rope back to our starting point.

With the setup complete, I harnessed the donkey and cow to the rope and gently urged them forward. To everyone's excitement, the plank began to move. It rose, turned, and slowly swung over the water, tracing an arc until it rested firmly on the opposite bank.

"Look, the bridge is done!" cried Fritz and Jack, rushing to test it. They dashed across the narrow plank with triumphant shouts.

From there, completing the bridge became much easier. A second and third plank were swung into place and secured at both ends to the trees and ground. Shorter boards were then nailed side by side across the beams to create a solid walkway.

When we finished, the boys declared the bridge complete, and we all admired the sturdy crossing we had built together.

The children were bursting with excitement. They raced back and forth across the bridge, cheering and laughing, their energy contagious. Even I couldn't help but share in their triumphant joy.

Once the thrill of completing the bridge wore off, our fatigue hit us. We were more than ready to return to the tent for some food and rest.

The next morning, during breakfast, I gave the boys a little pep talk.

"We're about to move camp," I said, "and I need you all to stay focused and cautious. Even though this place is starting to feel familiar, we're still in unknown territory, and surprises—some of them dangerous—could pop up at any time. Stick together, follow instructions, and no wandering off. Jack, no running into side paths. Ernest, no lagging behind to study the scenery. Now, let's get moving!"

Everyone got to work. Fritz and Jack packed provisions while Ernest handled the tools and utensils. Elizabeth, as always, had her priorities. She insisted Franz ride the donkey, the poultry had to come along, and of course, her indispensable "magic bag" couldn't be left behind.

The boys had a chaotic time rounding up the chickens. There was a lot of chasing, flapping, and laughter, but not much success until Elizabeth stepped in. With a handful of grain, she lured the birds into the tent, calmly shut the entrance, and caught them with ease. Once tied together, the birds were placed on the cow's back.

Our cow, ever patient, stood chewing her cud as more and more items were loaded onto her. Even the noisy chickens didn't faze her. I rigged up a makeshift cover for them using half-hoops and sailcloth, turning the cow into a kind of mobile chicken coop.

Franz was perched comfortably on the donkey, surrounded by bags and bundles. His curly head rested against the magic bag, which was nestled at the very top of the pile. After securing the tent and surrounding it with chests and barrels, we were finally ready to leave.

Fritz and Elizabeth led the way, with Franz on the donkey and the cow carrying her cargo following close behind. Jack managed the goats, one of which had an unusual

passenger—Knips, the monkey, who clung to his foster-mother's back, much to her frustration. Ernest herded the sheep, and I brought up the rear, keeping an eye on everyone.

Our two dogs darted back and forth, their enthusiasm adding to the lively atmosphere. Spirits were high as we set out, ready to embrace whatever lay ahead in our adventure.

"This feels a lot like those pastoral communities I've read about," said Ernest as we made our way, "where people live simply, moving from place to place without ever really settling down."

"It's true," I replied. "Throughout history, many cultures have thrived with a nomadic way of life, moving in harmony with the seasons and their needs. They often have animals like camels or horses to carry their loads, making their journeys faster and easier than ours with these slow but steady companions."

I glanced back at our procession and smiled. "Still, I have a feeling your mother and I might be content with just this one adventure. After all, she has her heart set on the treehouse we're planning to build. I hope she'll find it as cozy as she imagines!"

With pride, I introduced my Elizabeth to our new bridge. She praised my efforts, and I basked in her appreciation before leading the family across in a grand procession. To my surprise, we were joined on the other side by our stubborn old sow, who had initially refused to come with us. Realizing she'd been left behind, she followed on her own, grunting and squealing her displeasure at being ignored.

Soon, we had to veer down toward the seashore. The thick grass inland was slowing us down and tempting the animals to stray. Thanks to our watchful dogs, we managed to keep everyone in line. Once on the sandy beach, our progress improved.

That is, until the dogs suddenly darted into the nearby brush, barking furiously. Moments later, their barks turned to yelps of pain. Alarmed, I hurried toward them, noticing how my sons reacted in their unique ways. Fritz cocked his gun and moved forward cautiously. Ernest hesitated but prepared to fire, while Jack rushed in after Fritz without even bothering to unsling his weapon.

Before I could reach them, Jack's voice rang out, excited and triumphant. "Father! Come quick! It's a giant porcupine—a massive one!"

Sure enough, the dogs were circling a large porcupine, clearly learning the hard way to keep their distance. The creature rattled its quills menacingly, bristling whenever the dogs got too close. The poor animals were already nursing painful wounds from their failed attempts to attack.

As we observed the scene, Jack stepped forward with his pocket pistol and, to our surprise, shot the porcupine cleanly. To ensure it was no longer a threat, he gave it two solid whacks on the head with a stick, then burst out with boyish glee. "Mother's going to love this! It's a prize catch—and edible too! Father says so!"

Dragging the creature by its neck using his handkerchief, Jack raced ahead to show

off his trophy to his mother.

“Hello, Mother! Look at this beast! I shot it myself! You should’ve seen how it scared the dogs—and the noise its spines made!” he exclaimed, bursting with excitement.

Ernest knelt to inspect the porcupine closely, noting its sharp incisors, its small ears, and its unusual feet. “It’s fascinating,” he said. “I’ve read about a related species called the tuft-tailed porcupine. It has flat quills and a tail ending in a curious tuft like strips of parchment. It seems less dangerous than this one, though.”

Despite the porcupine’s quills causing some minor injuries as we transported it, the excitement of the day left everyone in high spirits.

"Jack, weren't you afraid the porcupine might shoot its quills at you like darts?" I asked.

"Of course not," he replied confidently. "I know that's just a myth!"

"A myth, is it?" I said with a grin. "Then perhaps you should look at your mother, who's busy pulling several quills out of each of the dogs!"

“Those quills stuck into the dogs during their attack," explained Jack. "The shorter quills seem barely attached to its skin, while the longer ones just bent aside when Juno pressed against them."

"You’re absolutely right, my boy," I said. "The old tale about porcupines shooting their quills is just a myth. Now, shall we leave this prickly prize of yours behind, or do you want to take it with us?"

"Oh, please, Father, let’s take it!" Jack exclaimed. "It’s good to eat!"

Smiling at his enthusiasm, and willing to humor him, I wrapped the porcupine in several layers of cloth to protect us from its quills and added it to the donkey's load.

We resumed our journey with few interruptions until we reached the site of our new home. The towering trees and serene surroundings lived up to the vivid descriptions I had heard, and Elizabeth seemed pleased when I declared that if we could build a dwelling in the branches, it would be both a safe and idyllic home.

After unloading the donkey and cow, we tied their forelegs loosely to keep them from wandering and did the same with the sheep and goats. The doves and poultry were set free, and we sat on the soft grass to rest and discuss our plans for the evening.

Fritz soon wandered off but returned shortly after, holding up a tiger-cat by its hind legs, clearly proud of his catch.

"Well done, Fritz!" I praised. "Our chickens would have been in danger tonight if not for your sharp aim. Let’s hope it didn’t have a mate nearby. You’ll need to stay alert."

"Isn’t it strange," remarked Ernest, "that such dangerous animals even exist?"

"The ways of the Creator often surpass our understanding," I replied. "What may

seem harmful to us serves a purpose in the grand design. Animals preying on one another keeps nature in balance. And consider how the furs of creatures like wild cats, arctic foxes, and bears provide essential warmth in regions where no other clothing would suffice."

`The skin of the seal, or sea dog, is also valuable,' said Ernest.

"It is," I replied, "and in its natural habitat, that creature preys on fish much like dogs once hunted other animals before humans domesticated them. But tell us, Fritz, how did you manage to catch it?"

"I noticed movement in the branches," Fritz began, "so I quietly circled the tree with my gun. When I saw it was a wild cat, I took my shot and brought it down. It was badly injured but tried to climb the tree in a rage. Luckily, I had my pistol loaded and managed to finish it off. Father, what kind of cat is it?"

"It’s fortunate the animal didn’t leap at you instead of trying to escape," I said. "This is a member of the tiger-cat family—fierce predators often found in tropical regions. Judging by its size and markings, I believe it’s a margay. These animals can be deadly threats to poultry, sheep, and goats, so I’m glad you’ve dealt with it before it caused harm."

`May I have the beautiful skin, father? And will you tell me what will be the best use to make of it?'

`I advise you to skin the animal very carefully, and of the handsome black and yellow tail, make a hunting-belt for yourself. The paws—let me see—why, I fancy the paws might be made famous cases for knife, fork and spoon, and look well hanging from the belt. The skin of the body you had better preserve until you find some suitable use for it.'

`Oh, father, what a splendid plan!' cried Jack. `Do tell me some good use for my porcupine.'

`I think its feet may make cases also; at least, you may try. The quills, I am sure, may be used for packing needles, and for tipping arrows, and I should try to make defensive armour for the dogs out of the rest. They may fall in with foes more dangerous than any we have yet seen.'

`To be sure, father, the very thing!' shouted Jack in high glee. `I have seen pictures of boar-hunts, in which the dogs were protected by a sort of leather coat of mail. That will be grand!'

After giving this advice, I got no peace until I had shown my boys how to act upon it, and in a short time each had his prize fastened up by the hind legs, and carefully slitting the skin, was stripping it from the carcase.

Ernest, meanwhile, was fetching large flat stones in order to form a fire-place, while Franz gathered sticks, as his mother was anxious to prepare some food.

`What sort of tree do you suppose this to be, father?' inquired Ernest, seeing me examining that under which we were encamping. `Is not the leaf something like a

walnut?'

`There is a resemblance, but in my opinion these gigantic trees must be mangroves or wild figs. I have heard their enormous height described, and also the peculiarity of the arching roots supporting the main trunk raised above the soil.'

Just then little Franz came up with a large bundle of sticks, and his mouth full of something he was eating with evident satisfaction.

`Oh, mother!' cried he, `this is so good! So delicious!'

`Greedy little boy!' exclaimed she in a fright. `What have you got there? Don't swallow it, whatever you do. Very likely it is poisonous! Spit it all out this minute!' And his anxious mother quickly extracted from the rosy little mouth the remains of a small fig.

`Where did you find this?' said I.

`There are thousands lying among the grass yonder,' replied the little boy. `They taste very nice. I thought poison was nasty. Do you think they will hurt me? The pigeons and the hens are gobbling them up with all their might and main, papa!'

"I don’t think you need to worry, my dear," I said. "These trees appear to be the fig-bearing mangrove of the Antilles. But Franz, remember, never eat anything without showing it to me first, no matter how tempting it seems."

"If birds and monkeys eat a fruit, it’s usually safe for us too," I added, addressing the other boys. Taking the hint, they persuaded Franz to hand over the figs he had in his pocket and ran to offer them to Knips, who was busily watching the skinning of the tiger-cat and porcupine, chattering away as though giving his opinion on the process.

"Here you go, Knips! A fig for you!" Jack said, holding one out to the little creature.

Knips eagerly accepted it, turning it over and sniffing it before popping it into his mouth with an exaggerated look of delight. His comical expression made the boys burst into laughter and cheer, shouting, "Bravo, Knips! You really know how to pick the good stuff, don’t you? Hurrah!"

Satisfied that the figs were safe, Elizabeth resumed her preparations for dinner. The tiger-cat’s meat was given to the dogs, while part of the porcupine was set to boil, with the rest reserved for roasting.

Meanwhile, I busied myself making needles for Elizabeth by using a red-hot nail to pierce holes in the ends of porcupine quills. Soon, I had a tidy assortment of various sizes, which delighted her. I also began brainstorming how to make proper harnesses for our animals, though I couldn’t start on that yet with so many more immediate needs to address.

We examined the trees in the area and chose one that seemed most suitable for building a shelter. Its branches spread out high above, and I instructed the boys to try throwing sticks or stones over one of the strong boughs so we could pull a rope across to construct a ladder. Unfortunately, this method didn’t work, so I started

considering alternative plans.

In the meantime, I took Jack and Fritz to a nearby brook and showed them how to soak the animal skins in the water to soften them, using stones to keep them submerged.

After dinner, I focused on setting up our sleeping quarters. Using the tree's arching roots as support, I hung our hammocks and covered them with sailcloth to create a temporary shelter that would protect us from nighttime dampness and insects.

While Elizabeth began working on harnesses for the cow and donkey, whose strength I planned to use the next day for lifting beams into the tree, I headed to the beach with Fritz and Ernest. We were searching for wood suitable for constructing our new home and lightweight rods to build a ladder. However, our initial search turned up only rough driftwood—completely unusable for our purposes.

unfit for our purpose. Ernest at length pointed out a quantity of bamboos half buried in the sand. These were exactly what I wanted, and stripping them of their leaves I cut them into lengths of about five feet each; these I bound in bundles to carry to the tree, and then began to look about for some slight reeds to serve as arrows.

Not far off, I spotted what I needed in a small thicket. We approached cautiously, wary of any wild animals or venomous snakes that might be lurking there. Juno, as usual, darted ahead. Her sudden movement startled a flock of flamingos that had been quietly feeding, and they rose into the air in a burst of color. Fritz quickly took aim and fired, bringing down two of the birds, while the rest of the flock soared away in perfect formation. Their feathers shifted mesmerizingly between shades of rosy pink and snowy white as they flew, depending on whether their wings or breasts caught the light.

One of the fallen birds was already dead, but the other was only slightly injured, its wing grazed. It tried to escape across the swampy ground. I attempted to follow but soon realized the marsh was too treacherous to cross. Juno, however, pursued the bird, caught it, and brought it back to my feet. Fritz and Ernest were thrilled with our prize.

"What a stunning bird!" they exclaimed. "Is it badly hurt? Let's tame it and keep it with the other fowls!"

"This one's feathers are even more brilliant than the other's," Fritz noted.

"That's because it's fully grown," explained Ernest. "The younger ones take a few years to reach their full beauty. Look at its long, powerful legs—they're like a stork's. And those webbed feet let it swim faster than a goose. Flamingos are perfectly adapted to life on land, in the air, or in water."

"Well," said Fritz with a grin, "let's take the dead one to Mother and see if it can conquer a new element: fire. If it's as young and tender as you say, it should make a delicious roast!"

Fritz and Ernest carried the flamingos and the bamboos back to the tree while I stayed to cut some reeds. I chose mature reeds that had already flowered, as they

would be sturdier. I also selected a few of the tallest canes I could find to help measure the height of the tree. After bundling them together, I returned to the family.

"Do you really plan to keep this big, hungry bird Fritz brought?" Elizabeth asked skeptically. "Remember, food is still scarce, and it's another mouth to feed."

"Don't worry," I reassured her. "Flamingos don't eat grain like the chickens. It'll be happy catching insects, fish, and little crabs on its own. Let me tend to its wound."

I gently cleaned and treated the injured wing with a mixture of wine and butter, then bandaged it carefully. Next, I took the bird to the stream, tied it to a stake with a long cord, and left it to fend for itself. Within a few days, the wound healed, and the flamingo, softened by our kindness, began to grow tame.

While I was busy, my sons tried to measure the height of the lowest tree branch. They had tied together the long reeds I had brought, but despite their efforts, the branch remained out of reach. Even if the reeds had been ten times their length, it would still have been impossible to touch it!

“Hey, boys,” I said when I saw what they were doing, “that's not how to go about it. Geometry makes tasks like this so much simpler! If it can help measure the height of the tallest mountains, it can certainly tell us how high that branch is.”

With that, I measured a specific distance from the base of the tree and marked it. Using a rod of known length and some imaginary lines, I calculated the angle from the ground to the branch. Once my calculations were complete, I announced to the astonished younger children, “That branch is thirty feet above the ground—that's where we'll build our new home.” I wanted to confirm the height so I could make a ladder of the right length.

I asked Fritz to gather all the cord we had while the others rolled the twine into a ball. Sitting down with the reeds, I quickly made six arrows and feathered them using the plumage from the flamingo. Next, I crafted a bow by bending a strong piece of bamboo and stringing it tightly. The boys were thrilled and begged to take the first shot.

“Not so fast,” I said. “This isn't for fun, nor is it a weapon—the arrows don't have points.” Turning to Elizabeth, I added, “Elizabeth, could you pull a ball of strong thread from your amazing bag?”

“Of course,” she replied, reaching deep into the bag. “I'm pretty sure a ball of thread was one of the first things I packed,” she said, pulling out exactly what I needed.

“Now, watch closely,” I said to the boys, attaching one end of the thread to an arrow. I aimed carefully at a large branch above us and let the arrow fly. It sailed up and over the branch, pulling the thread along with it, before falling neatly back to the ground. “Step one accomplished!” I said. “Now, let's make a rope ladder!”

Fritz found two coils of cord, each about forty feet long. We laid them side by side on the ground. Fritz then cut the bamboos into two-foot lengths for ladder rungs. As he passed them to me, I threaded them through knots I had prepared in the ropes, while Jack secured each rung with nails driven into the ends.

When the ladder was finished, we hoisted it over the branch using another rope and secured its lower end to the ground with stakes. Everything was ready for the climb.

The boys had been watching intently, and each of them wanted to go first.

“Jack gets the honor,” I decided. “He’s the lightest, so up you go—and don’t break your neck!”

Jack, agile as a monkey, climbed the ladder quickly and reached the top.

“Three cheers for our new nest!” he shouted, waving his cap. “Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah for our amazing treehouse! Fritz, come on up—it’s going to be the best house ever!”

His brother was soon by his side, and with a hammer and nails secured the ladder yet more securely. I followed with an axe, and took a survey of the tree. It was admirably suited to our purpose; the branches were very strong and so closely interwoven that no beams would be required to form a flooring, but when some of the boughs were lopped and cleared away, a few planks would be quite sufficient.

I called for the pulley, which Elizabeth attached to the cord hanging beside the ladder. Once it was secure, I hauled it up and fastened it to a sturdy branch above me. This would allow us to lift heavy beams the next day. The boys, eager but in the way, were sent down while I made further preparations to ensure everything was ready for the morning.

The moon had risen, casting a bright glow over the landscape. By its light, I continued working until exhaustion forced me to stop. When I finally climbed down, I was surprised to find the boys were no longer on the ground. A brief moment of worry passed when I heard their voices singing an evening hymn from the treetop. Instead of descending, they had climbed higher, enchanted by the moonlit view.

When they finally rejoined us, Elizabeth proudly showed off her work: two complete sets of harnesses. I praised her craftsmanship, and we sat down to a well-earned supper. Spread out on a cloth on the grass were a roast shoulder of porcupine, a savory bowl of soup made from the same meat, cheese, butter, and biscuits—a feast after our long day.

Once we’d eaten, we gathered our livestock, while the pigeons and fowls settled in the nearby trees or perched on the ladder’s steps. We built a large fire to ward off wild animals and prepared for the night. The children, thrilled by the novelty of their hammocks, quickly fell asleep.

Sleep didn’t come as easily for me. Anxious thoughts about our future crowded my mind. As the fire burned low, I got up to add more wood, then climbed back into my hammock. It wasn’t until near dawn that I finally drifted off.

The next morning, we were up early and set to work. Elizabeth milked the goats and cow, while the boys and I fed the animals. Then, we headed to the beach to gather more wood for our treehouse. For the larger beams, we harnessed the cow and the donkey, while the rest we carried or dragged ourselves.

Fritz and I climbed back into the tree to continue the work from the night before. We

cut away unnecessary branches, leaving some about six feet above the floor to hang hammocks, and others higher up to hold the roof. Elizabeth tied planks to the rope running through the pulley, and Fritz and I hauled them up.

We arranged the planks side by side to create a solid, level floor. Around this platform, we built a protective wall of planks, and for the roof, we draped sailcloth over the higher branches, securing it firmly with nails. Our treehouse was now enclosed on three sides, with the massive trunk forming the back wall. The front was left open to let in the refreshing sea breeze.

Our new home was starting to take shape—a safe and comfortable shelter high above the ground.

We then hauled up our hammocks and bedding and slung them from the branches we had left for that purpose. A few hours of daylight still remaining, we cleared the floor from leaves and chips, and then descended to fashion a table and a few benches from the remainder of the wood. After working like slaves all day, Fritz and I flung ourselves on the grass, while Elizabeth arranged supper on the table we had made.

"Come on," Elizabeth said at last, "try some flamingo stew and tell me what you think. Ernest insisted it would be better stewed than roasted, so I followed his advice."

We laughed at the idea of Ernest taking on the role of a culinary expert and sat down to eat. The chickens gathered around us, pecking at crumbs, while our tame flamingo joined in. Meanwhile, Master Knips, ever the entertainer, darted back and forth, chattering and mimicking our gestures as if he were part of the conversation.

To Elizabeth’s delight, the sow appeared not long after, and she gave it the leftover milk from the day's supply, hoping this would encourage it to return every evening.

"In this heat, the extra milk goes sour by morning anyway," she pointed out.

"You're absolutely right," I agreed. "But we should find a way to put it to use. Next time Fritz and I go back to the wreck, we’ll bring a churn along with the other supplies we need."

At the mention of the wreck, Elizabeth shuddered. "Do you really have to go back there? You don’t know how worried I get every time you’re away."

"I'm afraid we must," I replied gently, "but not for a few days yet. Now, it’s getting late. It’s time for us—and the chickens—to settle in for the night."

We lit the watchfires and left the dogs on guard below. The boys scrambled up the ladder eagerly, while their mother followed more cautiously. Although the treehouse had been her idea, she was understandably nervous about being so far off the ground. Once she was safely inside, I hoisted little Franz onto my back and climbed up after them.

At the top, I untied the ladder’s lower end from the ground and pulled it up behind us, leaving us fully secured in our treetop home. For the first time, we were all together

in our new shelter. A sense of safety washed over me, greater than any I'd felt since we first arrived on this island.

We gathered for our evening prayer, thanking God for our progress and protection. Then, with the cool night breeze filtering through the open side of the treehouse, we settled into our hammocks and drifted off to sleep, confident and secure in our lofty retreat.

Chapter 4

The next morning, everyone woke up early. The kids buzzed around the tree like a group of excited monkeys.

"What are we doing today, Dad?" they asked eagerly.

"Today, we're resting," I said with a smile.

"Resting?" Jack exclaimed. "Why? What for?"

"Because it's the seventh day," I explained. "Remember the rule: 'Six days you work, but on the seventh, you rest.' Today is Sunday."

"Sunday? Oh, awesome!" Jack said. "No work for me then! But I'll still shoot my bow, climb the tree, and have loads of fun!"

"That's not exactly resting, Jack," I said. "Remember, Sunday is about more than avoiding work—it's a special day for worship and reflection."

"But there's no church here," Franz pointed out. "No pastor, no organ, no pews. What are we supposed to do?"

I gestured to the great tree overhead. "This leafy canopy is more beautiful than any building. We'll worship here, in nature. Now come on, let's set up breakfast under its shade."

The kids climbed down the ladder one by one, and I turned to Elizabeth. "Elizabeth, let's dedicate this morning to worship and teaching. I'll share a parable to give the kids something meaningful to think about. But since we don't have our usual Sunday activities, I'll let them enjoy some quiet play later in the day. Maybe we can all take a walk in the evening when it's cooler."

Elizabeth nodded. "That sounds perfect."

After breakfast, we gathered beneath the tree on the soft grass. In the dappled shade, we sang a few hymns, offered prayers, and prepared to begin our lesson.

"I'll tell you a story instead of giving a sermon," I said.

"Yes!" Franz cheered. "I love the parables in the Bible. Can you read us more from the Bible too, Dad? I miss that."

I paused, feeling a pang of guilt. "You're right, Franz. I've been so focused on

providing for us, I've neglected the most important thing—the Bread of Life. I'll look for a Bible next time I visit the wreck. I'm sure we can find one there."

Before I could say more, Elizabeth smiled and reached into her bag. From it, she pulled out a well-loved Bible and handed it to me.

"Thank you," I said, touched by her thoughtfulness. I opened it and read a passage aloud before beginning my parable.

"Imagine a great king," I began, "who ruled a magnificent kingdom filled with light and love. Within his kingdom was a barren island, desolate and unfruitful. The king, out of his great care, poured his resources into transforming it. The island flourished, becoming a beautiful home for a group of settlers. These settlers were not just there to cultivate the land—they were also tasked with nurturing love and loyalty to their king in their hearts..."

And so, the story unfolded beneath the wide branches of the tree, with the children listening intently, their imaginations carrying them into the heart of the tale.

While the colony remained united, it thrived, and its members lived fulfilling and virtuous lives.

It's surprising to think that such a harmonious community, led by a compassionate leader, could ever fall into rebellion and discord, but that's exactly what happened. Pride and disobedience brought hardship and suffering. The colony's once-bright future was overshadowed, their efforts proved fruitless, and a complete separation from their homeland seemed inevitable.

Yet, a message of forgiveness arrived—a chance for redemption. Those who humbly accepted the pardon and aligned their lives with the will of their Great Leader, now revealed as even more gracious and loving, were promised deliverance. They were offered hope of one day leaving behind the ruins of their rebellion for a life of lasting beauty, peace, and joy.

After sharing this story, I explained its meaning in simple, direct terms, ensuring the children understood the lessons it held. We ended with a short prayer, asking for guidance and blessings, and then everyone moved on to their own tasks.

I got to work crafting arrows, using porcupine quills for their tips. Franz came to me, excitedly asking if I could make him a small bow and arrow. Fritz needed my advice on how to turn the tiger-cat skin into useful cases. Jack joined in, helping with the arrows by attaching sharp spines to the reeds with thread. Before long, he realized glue would make them more secure.

"Maybe we can use Mama's soup—it's sticky enough!" Franz suggested with enthusiasm.

Jack laughed. "No way, little goose! Let's find some proper glue in the toolbox instead."

"Jack's right," I said with a smile. "But, Jack, don't tease your brother. Some of the best ideas start with suggestions that seem simple at first."

While we worked, a loud gunshot startled us. Moments later, two small birds fell to the ground near us. Looking up, we saw Ernest perched in a tree, grinning with excitement.

“Well done! That was a great shot, wasn’t it?” he called as he climbed down to show us his catch: a thrush and an ortolan, a small dove prized for its incredible flavor.

The figs on the trees had just started ripening, so we guessed more birds would soon come to feed. We decided to wait until larger flocks arrived. By then, we could prepare and preserve them by partially cooking the birds and storing them in casks with melted lard or butter. This way, we’d have a delicious food supply to enjoy during the rainy season.

By this time, Jack had crafted a decent supply of arrows and was busily practising his archery skills. I completed the bow and arrows for Franz, thinking I could finally have a moment of rest. But no—Franz soon decided he needed a quiver to complete his set, and I was tasked with creating that too.

It wasn’t too difficult, though. I stripped a piece of bark from a small tree, added a flat piece for the bottom, and attached a string for carrying. Once it was ready, we strapped it over his shoulders, and Franz eagerly filled it with arrows.

As Franz dashed off with his new gear, his mother chuckled and said, “He looks like a little Cupid, ready to win hearts with his arrows!”

Not long after, we were called to dinner, a summons we all happily obeyed.

During the meal, I engaged the boys by suggesting we name the different locations we had explored along the coast.

“It’s becoming cumbersome to explain everything,” I said. “Instead of saying ‘the little island where we found the dead shark’ or ‘the stream where we built the bridge,’ let’s give these places proper names. It will make us feel more at home, like people do in settled lands. Let’s start with the bay where we first landed—what shall we call it?”

“Oyster Bay!” suggested Fritz.

“No, no—Lobster Bay!” shouted Jack, laughing. “To remember the one that tried to bite my leg!”

Their mother chimed in, “How about *Safety Bay*, in gratitude for our safe arrival?”

Everyone agreed, and the name was decided.

We quickly named other spots: our first campsite became *Tentholm*, the small island in the bay was dubbed *Shark Island*, and the reedy marsh was christened *Flamingo Marsh*. Naming our leafy hideout proved more challenging, but after much deliberation, we decided on *Falconhurst*. Other locations were labeled just as thoughtfully: the hill we first climbed became *Prospect Hill*, the rocky point where we searched for our ship’s crew became *Cape Disappointment*, and the stream near our landing site was named *Jackal River*.

That afternoon, the boys returned to their projects. Fritz finished his cases, and Jack asked for my help with his idea to make a protective vest for Turk using the porcupine skin. After thoroughly cleaning it, we shaped it to fit Turk's body. Once we attached strings and allowed it to dry, Turk was equipped with a sturdy, spiked coat of armor. He looked quite comical, but the design was both defensive and intimidating.

Juno, our other dog, wanted nothing to do with him in his new outfit and made a point of keeping her distance. We laughed, realizing that any predator Turk encountered would likely do the same. Inspired by Jack's creativity, I fashioned a helmet from the leftover porcupine skin, which delighted him to no end.

As the evening approached, we took a peaceful stroll through the glades near our home. Later, we ended the day with a heartfelt prayer and a hymn of praise, retreating to our beds with content and grateful hearts.

The next morning, I suggested an expedition to Tentholm, proposing we take a different route this time. We set out from Falconhurst well-armed: I and my three elder sons carried guns and game bags, while little Franz proudly wielded his bow and quiver full of arrows. Our party must have made a peculiar sight—Fritz with his belt of margay skin, and Jack with his eccentric porcupine helmet, looked every bit like young adventurers straight out of a storybook.

Elizabeth, the only unarmed member of our group, walked beside me carrying a jar to collect butter from Tentholm. Leading the way were Turk, clad in his fearsome porcupine armor, and Juno, who wisely kept a safe distance from her intimidating companion.

Master Knips, our mischievous monkey, initially intended to ride on Turk as usual. However, upon noticing Turk's new, spiky attire, he hesitated, gingerly poking him with one paw before deciding that this particular steed was no longer suitable. With a comical grimace and a loud chatter, he bounded toward Juno, leapt onto her back, and settled in as if it had been his plan all along.

The flamingo, now something of a pet, decided to join us on our journey. For a while, it meandered alongside the children, following one and then another as they explored the woods. Eventually, tiring of their erratic wanderings, the bird abandoned them and took up a more dignified pace beside me.

The morning air was cool as we followed the stream's path. The boys raced ahead, eagerly scanning the surroundings for new discoveries. Suddenly, I heard an excited shout and saw Ernest sprinting back toward me, his brothers close on his heels. In his hand, he triumphantly held up a plant, his face alight with excitement.

"Potatoes, Father! Potatoes!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes," added Jack, "there are acres and acres of them!"

Taking the plant from Ernest, I examined it closely. The unmistakable flower, leaves, and light green bulbous roots left no doubt.

"Ernest, you've made an incredible discovery," I said, my voice full of gratitude. "With

potatoes, we'll never face hunger."

"Come see for yourself!" urged Jack. "There are thousands of them!"

We hurried to the spot, where an expansive field of potato plants stretched out before us—a treasure trove of sustenance.

"Well," said Jack with a grin, "it wasn't exactly hard to find such a big field."

"Perhaps not," Ernest replied with a sly smile, "but I'm not sure you would have realized it was a potato field!"

"Maybe not," said Jack with a grin, "but you're welcome to the glory of discovering them. I'll claim the honor of being the first to gather a good supply." With that, he began digging up plants with his hands and knife, quickly filling his game bag with the roots. Knips, ever the imitator, eagerly followed suit. Using his little paws with surprising skill, the monkey scratched at the earth and soon had a pile of potatoes beside him.

We were so thrilled with our find and so eager to stock up that we didn't stop digging until every bag, pouch, and pocket was overflowing. Some of the boys wanted to head straight back to Falconhurst to cook and taste our new treasure, but I insisted we continue our journey, even though we were now heavily laden.

"How can we ever thank the Giver of all these blessings enough?" I asked aloud.

"We can say, 'Thank You, Lord, for all Your goodness and mercy. Bless us for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen,'" suggested Franz.

"That's a start," Fritz replied, "but it's not enough. Would it be right to just say 'thanks' to Father and Mother without showing our gratitude by loving them and doing what pleases them?"

"You're absolutely right, Fritz," I said. "Franz's prayer was good, but he should also have asked for grace to obey God and follow His will in everything."

As we talked, we reached the head of the stream, where the water tumbled from the rocks above in a stunning, sparkling cascade. Crossing over, we entered a thick patch of tall grass and reeds, pushing our way through with some difficulty. Beyond lay a breathtaking landscape, rich with tropical vegetation. Towering palms stood amid lush ferns, while brilliant flowers, creeping vines, and fragrant plants like jasmine, vanilla, and the regal pineapple filled the air with their sweet perfume.

The boys were ecstatic at the sight of the pineapples and eagerly began gathering the fruit, only to be reminded by their mother to show restraint. "Remember," she said, "we don't have a doctor here, so if you overindulge and get sick, you'll have to treat yourselves!"

Her warning did little to temper their enthusiasm. They soon enlisted Knips, who scrambled off in search of the ripest and juiciest pineapples.

While they were busy, I wandered among the other shrubs and plants, and my

attention was drawn to one I recognized from descriptions I'd read: the karatas plant.

"Come here, boys," I called. "This plant is far more valuable than your pineapples. Look at its long, pointed leaves and striking red flower. This is the karatas. Its fibers make excellent thread, its leaves can be crushed to create a healing salve, and its pith is perfect for starting fires or even as fish bait."

"Suppose, Ernest," I continued, "you were stranded here with no matches or tools to make fire. How would you do it?"

"I'd rub two sticks together, like the local people do," he replied confidently.

"Go ahead and try that sometime," I said with a chuckle. "But be sure to set aside an entire day because it'll likely be nightfall before you succeed. Let me show you an easier method."

I snapped a dry twig from the karatas plant, peeled away its bark to expose the pith, and placed it on a stone. Then, striking two pebbles together over it, I produced a spark that ignited the pith almost instantly.

The boys watched in awe, impressed by the plant's usefulness. "Now that's something worth remembering," Fritz remarked, nodding thoughtfully.

The boys were thrilled with the fire-starting demonstration. To show another use for the karatas plant, I drew some threads from its leaves and handed them to Elizabeth, who accepted them with interest.

Fritz, however, wasn't as impressed by the surrounding vegetation. "What's the point of all these spiky plants?" he asked, brushing against a thorny tree. "They seem designed just to annoy us! Look at this nasty little tree, for instance."

"That," I replied, "is an Indian fig tree. It thrives on dry, rocky ground because it gets much of its nourishment from the air. Its juice has medicinal uses, and its fruit is both nutritious and tasty."

Hearing about a new treat, Jack darted over to the tree to collect some fruit. But his enthusiasm quickly turned to frustration as the sharp thorns made gathering them impossible. With scratched hands and a disappointed expression, he returned empty-handed.

"Let me show you how to handle these," I said. After carefully removing the thorns from Jack's hands, I fashioned a sharp wooden skewer, used it to pierce a fig, and twisted the fruit free from the branch. Still holding it on the skewer, I sliced it open with my knife. The boys followed my example and soon enjoyed the sweet, juicy figs.

As he ate, Ernest examined his fig with a curious eye. "What are these tiny red bugs on the fruit?" he asked. "They're clinging to it, and I can't seem to brush them off. Could they be cochineal?"

I took the fig and inspected it. "You're absolutely right, Ernest," I said. "These are

cochineal insects. They're highly valuable in Europe, used to create a vibrant scarlet dye. Unfortunately, they're not much use to us unless one of you fancies dyeing your clothes bright red."

"No thanks," Jack replied, laughing. "But we should definitely collect some to sell when we get back home. For now, let's look for something more useful."

This sparked an onslaught of questions from the boys about every plant and shrub we passed. At last, I had to slow their enthusiasm. "Enough, boys! Even the best botanist would struggle to identify many of these plants. I can only tell you about the few I recognize from books or descriptions. The rest will have to remain mysteries for now."

Eventually, we arrived at Tentholm, where everything was just as we had left it. We immediately got to work. Elizabeth opened the butter cask and filled her jar, Fritz checked on the ammunition, and Jack and Ernest ran down to the beach to round up the geese and ducks.

Capturing the birds proved harder than expected. Having been left to roam freely for so long, they were wary and refused to come ashore. After several failed attempts, Ernest came up with a clever solution.

He tied pieces of cheese to long strings and tossed them into the water as bait. The hungry ducks couldn't resist, eagerly grabbing at the cheese. With some skillful maneuvering, Ernest managed to draw the birds closer and onto the shore, where they were finally caught.

While Jack and Ernest were busy catching and tying the rebellious birds by their feet, the rest of us gathered a fresh supply of salt, which we packed onto Turk's back after first relieving him of his makeshift armor. The birds were fastened to our game bags, and making sure the door of our tent was securely closed, we started home along the shoreline. The walk was cheerful and pleasant, and soon we reached our woodland home.

Once there, I released the birds, clipped their wings to keep them from wandering off, and set them up near the stream. After a delicious supper of potatoes, milk, and butter, we climbed into our treehouse and settled in for the night.

The next morning, recalling the abundance of driftwood we had seen on the beach the evening before, I decided it was time to collect some. My plan was to use the wood to construct a sledge that would make hauling supplies from Tentholm less of a burden. I woke up early and got Ernest to join me, hoping to help him work on his habit of being a bit lazy.

After some stretching and groaning, he got up willingly, pleased at the idea of a quiet expedition while the others slept. We brought along the donkey, who pulled a large, broad bough I thought would come in handy for transporting the load.

As we strolled along the beach, I teased Ernest about his early start. "I suppose you're feeling sorry for yourself, leaving your cozy hammock and warm dreams at this hour?"

“Please don’t make fun of me, Father!” he said with a smile. “I’m determined to overcome my laziness. I’m glad to be here with you. I had thought about shooting more ortolans this morning, but there’s plenty of time for that later. I’m sure the others will try their hand at it, though I doubt they’ll have much success.”

“And why’s that?” I asked, curious about his reasoning.

“Well,” he explained, “they probably won’t know which shot to use at first. Plus, they’ll most likely aim straight up at the birds. The height and density of the branches will make it difficult for them to hit anything.”

Ernest," I said, "you definitely have a talent for noticing details and thinking things through logically, and that's a great strength. But remember, there are times in life when quick action is needed. You should try to build the ability to act decisively and stay calm in emergencies. It’s an important skill, and even if it doesn’t come easily to you, you can improve with practice.

When we reached the beach, we quickly got to work. I selected pieces of driftwood suitable for the sledge and loaded them onto the broad leafy branch. With a bit of help, the donkey pulled the load steadily homeward. On our way back, we discovered a small chest buried in the sand. Curious, I dug it out and added it to our haul before we returned to Falconhurst.

As we approached Falconhurst, we heard the boys enthusiastically firing at the birds. They came running to meet us, their curiosity piqued by the chest we had brought. While they eagerly opened it, I turned to Elizabeth and apologized for our “absence without leave.” After enduring her gentle reproach, I explained my plan for a sledge. She was delighted, already imagining it loaded with her large barrel of butter and easily transported from Tentholm to Falconhurst.

The chest turned out to belong to a sailor and contained little more than a collection of damp clothing soaked by seawater.

Over breakfast, the boys proudly displayed several dozen birds they had shot and enthusiastically recounted their tales of triumphs and mishaps with the guns. Ernest had been right in predicting their early mistakes, but their accuracy was improving with practice. They seemed eager to continue their hunting until their mother intervened.

She pointed out that they had already provided more birds than she could use and suggested we find a way to catch them without wasting so much powder and shot. I agreed wholeheartedly and instructed the boys to set aside their guns for now. The younger ones eagerly began crafting snares from the long threads of the karatas plant, using a simple technique I taught them. Meanwhile, Fritz and Ernest helped me construct the sledge.

As we worked, a sudden commotion erupted among the fowls. The cocks crowed loudly, and the hens flapped and clucked in alarm. We rushed to investigate, suspecting a fox or wildcat had infiltrated the area. Ernest, however, noticed Master Knips slinking away suspiciously and decided to follow him. Sure enough, he caught the mischievous monkey in the act of eating a freshly laid egg, which he had stolen

and hidden in the grass.

Ernest found several more eggs stashed nearby, much to Elizabeth's delight, as the hens had not provided us with any eggs until now. She declared that Knips would henceforth be confined every morning until the eggs were safely collected.

Later, as Jack was setting snares among the branches, he discovered a pair of our pigeons building a nest in the tree. Since increasing our stock of pigeons was important, I warned the boys not to shoot near the tree while the pigeons were nesting. I also reminded them that the snares were intended only for wild fig-eaters.

Although the boys were intrigued by the snares, they weren't thrilled about conserving ammunition. It was clear they had been discussing their frustration because little Franz soon approached me with an idea he thought was ingenious.

"Papa," he said earnestly, "why don't we plant some powder and shot? That would be so much more useful than planting grain for the fowls."

His brothers burst into laughter, and I struggled to keep a straight face myself at his earnest suggestion.

"Come on, Ernest," I said, "now that we've had our fun, explain to Franz what gunpowder really is."

"Gunpowder isn't a seed at all, Franz," Ernest explained. "It's made by mixing charcoal, sulphur, and saltpeter together. So, you see, it can't be planted like corn—any more than shot can be planted like peas or beans."

While the conversation continued, I focused on finishing the sledge. To shape it properly with upturned ends at the front, I used curved pieces of wood from the bow of the ship. These formed the sides of the sledge, and I joined them with short bars for strength. Once the donkey's harness ropes were attached to the raised front points, the sledge was complete and ready for use.

When I finally looked up from my work, I noticed that Elizabeth and the younger boys had been busy plucking over two dozen wild birds. They were preparing them for roasting, skewered neatly on a long sword blade from one of the ship's officers.

It seemed excessive to cook so many birds at once, but Elizabeth explained her reasoning. She planned to preserve the half-cooked birds in butter, using the cask I was about to fetch for her. Amused by her efficiency, I promised to retrieve the cask immediately after dinner. In the meantime, she decided to make the most of our absence by washing a large pile of clothes and suggested we establish a routine for regular baths for the boys.

Early that afternoon, Ernest and I set out. Fritz gave us each a small pouch made of margay skin to carry at our belts. We harnessed the cow and the donkey to the sledge, and with Juno trotting alongside, we cheerfully headed toward Tentholm along the sandy shore.

The journey was uneventful, and upon arrival, we unharnessed the animals and began loading the sledge. Along with the butter cask, we added a powder chest, a

barrel of cheese, some tools, shot, and Turk’s armor, which we’d left behind during a previous visit.

We were so focused on our work that we didn’t notice the cow and the donkey wandering off. By the time we finished loading, the animals had crossed the bridge in search of better pasture. I sent Ernest to retrieve them while I went to explore the far end of the bay.

The bay ended in steep cliffs that jutted into the deep water, creating a wall of rock that was completely inaccessible. Between the cliffs and me lay swampy ground covered with tall reeds. I decided to cut a large bundle of these reeds to take back with me.

When I returned, it took some time to locate Ernest. I finally found him sprawled out near the tent, fast asleep. Meanwhile, the cow and donkey were once again making their way toward the bridge, grazing happily as they went.

"Get up, Ernest, you lazy fellow!" I called out, annoyed. "Why aren't you paying attention? Look at the animals—they’re heading back toward the river!"

"Don’t worry, Father," he replied calmly. "I’ve taken a couple of boards off the bridge. They can’t cross the gap."

I couldn’t help but laugh at his clever solution to avoid more work, though I reminded him that it wasn’t right to waste time sleeping when there were tasks to be done. I then asked him to collect some salt, which we needed at home, while I went for a quick swim.

After my refreshing dip, I returned, only to find Ernest missing again. I wondered if he was still gathering salt or if he’d found another spot to finish his nap. Just as I was beginning to get annoyed, I heard him shouting, "Father! Father! I’ve caught a fish! It’s huge—I can barely hold on! The line’s about to snap!"

I rushed toward the sound of his voice and found him lying in the grass on a small strip of land near the mouth of the stream. He was gripping a fishing rod with all his strength as the line strained under the weight of a massive fish, thrashing and pulling desperately to free itself from the hook.

I quickly took the rod from him and let the fish have more line, gradually leading it into shallow water. Ernest rushed in with his hatchet and finished it off. It turned out to be a salmon weighing a full fifteen pounds. I was thrilled at the thought of bringing such a valuable catch back to the others.

This is fantastic, Ernest!" I exclaimed. "You’ve definitely proven you’re not lazy this time! Let’s get this amazing salmon onto the sledge. I’ll clean and pack it properly to keep it fresh for the trip. While I do that, why don’t you go take a quick swim in the sea?

Once everything was taken care of, we harnessed our animals to the fully loaded sledge, replaced the boards on the bridge, and set off for home. This time, we decided to take an inland route.

As we passed the edge of a grassy thicket, Juno suddenly darted away from us, plunging into the bushes and barking fiercely. Moments later, she flushed out the most unusual creature I had ever seen. It bounded along in huge, flying leaps, as though it were sitting while it moved. It covered the ground astonishingly fast.

I raised my gun and fired, but missed as the animal zipped past. Ernest, who had been following behind me, stayed calm and observed the creature's movements carefully. Noticing that Juno seemed confused and that the animal had stopped to crouch in the grass, he crept closer, took aim, and fired. His shot was true, and the animal fell dead.

We walked over to inspect the extraordinary creature. It was unlike anything I'd ever encountered. It was about the size of a sheep, with a head shaped like a mouse, mouse-colored fur, and long ears like a hare. Its tail was thick and striped, resembling a tiger's. Its forepaws were small and squirrel-like, as if underdeveloped, while its hind legs were enormous—so long that when it stood upright, it seemed to be on stilts.

For a while, we stood in silent amazement, marveling at its peculiar features. I couldn't recall ever seeing or hearing of such an animal.

"Well, Father," Ernest finally said, breaking the silence, "this must be one of the strangest creatures in existence. I'm glad I managed to bring it down. Just imagine the looks on everyone's faces when we take it home!"

"You've certainly had a fortunate day, Ernest," I agreed. "But I'm still baffled about what this animal could be. Let's examine its teeth—that might give us a clue about its classification. Perhaps we can figure out its name that way."

"I see four sharp incisor teeth, Father—two on the top and two on the bottom, like a squirrel's," Ernest observed.

"Ah, then it's a rodent. What rodents can you name, Ernest?"

"Well, there's the mouse, the marmot, the squirrel, the hare, the beaver, and the jerboa—"

"The jerboa!" I interrupted, suddenly excited. "The jerboa! That's it—this creature resembles a jerboa, though it's much larger. It must be a kangaroo! Kangaroos belong to a group of animals with a pouch or purse under their bodies, where their young can hide. They were first discovered in New Holland by the great Captain Cook. Congratulations, Ernest, on being the first to bring a specimen to our little New Switzerland!" I added with a laugh, inventing the name on the spot.

The kangaroo was added to our already heavy sledge, and we resumed our slow journey home. It was late by the time we reached Falconhurst, but we were greeted with the usual warm welcome. All eyes were on the sledge, filled to the brim with an impressive haul. At the same time, we couldn't help staring at the bizarre outfits worn by the children who came to meet us.

One boy was dressed in a long nightshirt cinched with a belt, practical in the front but dragging dramatically behind like a ghost's tail. Another wore an enormous pair of

trousers, hoisted so high that each leg flared out comically like a bell clapper. The third had squeezed himself into a pea jacket that reached his ankles, making him look like a walking suitcase.

Amid much laughter, Elizabeth explained that she had spent the day washing clothes. While waiting for them to dry, the boys had entertained themselves by rummaging through the sailor's chest and dressing up in whatever they could find. They had kept the outfits on to surprise us. While we were thoroughly amused, the sight also made me regret how few of our own belongings we'd been able to save from the wreck. The children had little more than a single change of clothing each.

Turning our attention to the day's bounty, we showed off our finds one by one. The enormous salmon impressed everyone, but the kangaroo truly stole the show, drawing gasps of surprise and excitement.

Only Fritz seemed less than thrilled. His expression betrayed his dissatisfaction, and I could tell he was envious of Ernest's success. Upset that such a remarkable prize had been claimed by his younger brother's gun, Fritz tried to dismiss the kangaroo as unimportant. However, I could see him wrestling with his jealousy. After some time, he managed to compose himself, his good humor returning as he joined in the lively conversation.

"What an amazing day you've had!" Fritz said eventually, walking over to me. "It'll be my turn to go with you next, right, Father? There's nothing to hunt around here, and honestly, it's been kind of boring."

"Even so, you've been doing your part, my boy," I replied. "You were entrusted with looking after the family, and a young man of good character doesn't rely on constant excitement for happiness."

As the evening drew near, we hurried to finish up the day's tasks—preparing the kangaroo, part of it for immediate use and the rest for salting. The animals were fed, and we made sure they had plenty of salt. Our own supper of broiled salmon and potatoes was enjoyed with hearty appetites. Afterward, we retired to bed with thankful hearts, ready for a deep and well-earned sleep.

Chapter 5

The next morning, while breakfast was being prepared, I worked on carefully preserving the kangaroo's beautiful skin, wanting to keep it intact. Once that was done, Fritz finished getting everything ready for our trip to the wreck. I called for Ernest and Jack to give them some parting instructions, but they had vanished right after breakfast. Their mother guessed they might have gone to fetch potatoes since we needed some, but I wasn't pleased that they left without permission. I asked her to scold them when they returned, though knowing they had taken Turk along reassured me that they were likely safe. Still, it was with some hesitation that I left Elizabeth and little Franz behind, cheering her with promises of returning soon with valuable supplies from the wreck.

As we made steady progress toward the wreck, we crossed the bridge at Jackal River. Suddenly, to our surprise, Jack and Ernest jumped out from a hiding spot,

laughing and clearly thrilled by how much they startled us. It was obvious they thought they could now join us on the trip to the wreck.

I quickly put an end to that idea, though I couldn’t stay mad at the two mischievous boys for their playful prank, especially since I had a message I needed to send back to Elizabeth. I told them they had to hurry home to ease her worries, but since they were already this far, they could collect some salt before heading back. I also asked them to explain to their mother that we would likely stay on the wreck overnight to finish building a raft, which would allow us to bring back larger supplies. I had intended to tell her this earlier but had hesitated, knowing how much she would dislike the idea. Now, thanks to the boys, I had the chance to send word.

“Goodbye, boys! Take care of yourselves! We’re off!” Fritz called out as I joined him in the tub-boat. We shoved off, letting the current carry us swiftly out of the bay. Before long, we were safely moored alongside the wreck. Climbing up its broken sides, we stood on what remained of the deck and immediately started planning. My goal was to build a raft strong enough to carry heavy, oversized items that our small boat couldn’t manage.

A number of empty water-casks seemed just what was required for a foundation: we closed them tightly, pushed them overboard, and arranging twelve of them side by side in rows of three, we firmly secured them together by means of spars, and then proceeded to lay a good substantial floor of planks, which was defended by a low bulwark. In this way we soon had a first-rate raft, exactly suited to our purpose.

It would have been impossible to return to land that same evening, for we were thoroughly fatigued by our labours, and had eaten only the light refreshment we had brought in our wallets, scarcely desisting a moment from our work.

Rejoicing that we were not expected home, we now made an excellent supper from the ship's provisions, and then rested for the night on spring mattresses, a perfect luxury to us, after our hard and narrow hammocks.

Next morning we actively set about loading the raft and boat: first carrying off the entire contents of our own cabins; and, passing on to the captain's room, we removed the furniture, as well as the doors and window-frames, with their bolts, bars and locks. We next took the officers' chests, and those belonging to the carpenter and gunsmith; the contents of these latter we had to remove in portions, as their weight was far beyond our strength.

One large chest was filled with an assortment of fancy goods, and reminded us of a jeweller's shop, so glittering was the display of gold and silver watches, snuff-boxes, buckles, studs, chains, rings and all manner of trinkets; these, and a box of money, drew our attention for a time; but more useful to us at present was a case of common knives and forks, which I was glad to find, as more suited to us than the smart silver ones we had previously taken on shore.

To my delight we found, most carefully packed, a number of young fruit trees; and we read on the tickets attached to them the names, so pleasant to European ears, of the apple, pear, chestnut, orange, almond, peach, apricot, plum, cherry and vine.

The cargo, which had been destined for the supply of a distant colony, proved, in fact, a rich and almost inexhaustible treasure to us. Ironmongery, plumber's tools, lead, paint, grind-stones, cart wheels, and all that was necessary for the work of a smith's forge, spades and plough-shares, sacks of maize, peas, oats, and wheat, a hand-mill, and also the parts of a saw-mill so carefully numbered that, were we strong enough, it would be easy to put it up, had been stowed away.

So bewildered were we by the wealth around us that for some time we were at a loss as to what to remove to the raft. It would be impossible to take everything; yet the first storm would complete the destruction of the ship, and we would lose all we left behind.

Selecting several essential items, including grain and fruit trees, we steadily loaded the raft. We also brought along fishing lines, reels, cordage, and a couple of harpoons, as well as a mariner's compass. Remembering our shark encounter, Fritz placed the harpoons within easy reach, grinning as he mimicked a whaler preparing to strike. By early afternoon, both the raft and the tub-boat were heavily loaded, and we were ready to head back to shore.

The journey began with some nervousness, as towing the raft added a risk of capsizing. However, the sea was calm, and the wind was in our favor, allowing us to hoist the sail. Our progress was smooth and encouraging.

After a while, Fritz, gazing out at the water, asked for the telescope. He had spotted something unusual floating in the distance. Handing the telescope back to me, he eagerly urged me to take a look. Through the lens, I identified a turtle, peacefully asleep on the water, entirely unaware of our approach.

“Father, steer towards it!” Fritz exclaimed excitedly. I adjusted our course to bring us closer so he could get a better look. Little did I realize what he had in mind.

With his back to me and the sail blocking my view, I couldn’t see what he was doing. Suddenly, the boat jolted, and I felt the unmistakable pull of a line rapidly unwinding from a reel. Before I could even call out, another sharp tug followed, and I realized, to my alarm, that the boat was being swiftly dragged through the water!

`Fritz, what are you about?' cried I. `You are sending us to the bottom.'

`I have him, hurrah! I have him safe!' he shouted, in excitement. To my amazement, I discovered that he really had struck the tortoise with a harpoon; a rope was attached to it, and the creature was running away with us.

Lowering the sail and seizing my hatchet, I hastened forward, in order to cut the line, and cast adrift at once turtle and harpoon.

`Father! Do wait!' pleaded the boy. `There is no danger just yet! I promise to cut the line myself the instant it is necessary! Let us catch this turtle if we possibly can.'

"My dear boy," I said, "this turtle might turn out to be a very costly prize if it ends up tipping all our goods into the sea—or worse, drowning us! Please be careful! I'll give you a few minutes, but if there’s any danger, you must cut the line immediately."

The turtle began heading for the open sea, so I quickly hoisted the sail again. Feeling the resistance, the creature turned back toward the shore, pulling us along at great speed. The part of the coast it was aiming for was further left of our usual landing spot, where the beach sloped gently into the water. With a sharp jolt, we grounded some distance from the shore, thankfully without capsizing.

The turtle, clearly exhausted after acting as our unwilling tugboat, was slowing down. It tried to reach the beach, but I leapt into the water and waded up to it. Using my axe, I dispatched the poor creature, though it continued to struggle fiercely even after I severed its head.

As we weren't far from Falconhurst, Fritz, overjoyed, fired his gun and shouted loudly to announce our arrival. While we were securing the boats and hauling the turtle ashore, the rest of the family came rushing to meet us. They were thrilled by the sight of the massive turtle and our well-laden boat and raft. Elizabeth, however, was most relieved to see us safely back, as she had been uneasy about our overnight absence and horrified to hear about the chase with the turtle.

Eager to unload some of our goods before nightfall, the boys ran off to fetch the sledge. Meanwhile, lacking an anchor, I secured the boats by tying them to some heavy iron blocks we had brought back. Together, we managed to heave the enormous turtle onto the sledge—it was shockingly heavy. Combined with the sapling fruit trees, it was more than enough to fill the sledge to capacity.

We made our way home, laughing and chatting about all the adventures of the day. Once we arrived, the first task was to prepare some of the turtle meat for supper. Elizabeth thought this would take a lot of time and effort, but I flipped the turtle onto its back, broke part of the lower shell with my hatchet, and quickly cut away a portion of the meat from the breast. I instructed her to cook it, shell and all, with just a little salt.

"Let me remove this horrible green fat first," said Elizabeth, wrinkling her nose. "It's all over the meat—no one would want to eat something so revolting!"

"Don't touch the fat!" I exclaimed. "That's the best part! It's what chefs prize the most. If there's too much, trim some off for the dogs, and we can use the rest as lard."

Fritz chimed in excitedly, "What about the shell? It's so big! I'd like to make it into a water trough to keep near the brook. It could always be full of clear water and be super useful."

"Great idea," I said. "We'll need a stable base for it. If we can find some clay, that will work perfectly."

Jack jumped in, grinning. "I found a huge lump of clay earlier under that tree root!"

"Good work, Jack!" I said. "When did you discover it?"

"Jack found a clay bed by the river this morning," explained his mother. "He came back covered in it! I had to scrape him down and wash him thoroughly."

"Well, I can tell you I only found it because I slipped and fell into it," Jack admitted

sheepishly.

"That doesn't surprise me," his mother replied, chuckling. "Although, from the way you bragged earlier, anyone would think you'd been on a grand expedition to uncover it."

Ernest, who had been waiting patiently, spoke up. "Speaking of discoveries, I brought back some roots I found earlier. They're starting to dry out now. They look like radishes, but the plant was more like a bush. I haven't tried them because I wasn't sure if they were safe, even though the sow was devouring them."

"That was smart, Ernest," I said. "Pigs often eat things that aren't safe for humans. Let me take a look. How did you come across them?"

"I was walking in the woods and saw the sow digging under a bush and eating something eagerly. When I chased her off, I found these roots and thought they might be worth bringing back."

I examined the roots closely and exclaimed, "Ernest, you may have made an incredible discovery! These could be manioc roots. If they are, we've struck gold! In the West Indies, they make cassava bread from them, and if we can prepare flour from these roots, we'll have a dependable food supply, even if we lose everything else. But we'll need to be very careful when processing them. The juice must be fully removed, or the flour could be dangerous—even poisonous."

"If we can collect enough roots, we'll try making bread. I think I know how to go about it," I said.

Since there was still time for another trip with the sledge, I set out with the older boys, leaving Franz with his mother. We were all looking forward to the grand supper waiting for us at home—after all, our day had been far from easy.

"Father," said Fritz as we walked along, "I've been thinking about my turtle. Isn't its shell valuable? Don't people make beautiful combs, boxes, and fancy things from tortoiseshell? If so, maybe it's a waste to use it for a water trough."

"Fritz," I replied, "your turtle is only good for eating. Its shell is not the type used for ornaments. The species prized for its shell is not fit for food. Tortoiseshell becomes valuable when exposed to heat, which makes the outer layer peel off, revealing a beautifully marked, semi-transparent surface that can be polished to a high shine."

When we reached the raft, we quickly loaded the sledge with another haul—chests, four cartwheels, the hand mill, and various smaller items—and wasted no time heading back to Falconhurst.

Supper proved to be the real highlight of the evening. The turtle meat was delicious and gave us the strength to haul the mattresses from the ship up to our sleeping quarters. Exhausted but satisfied, we all enjoyed a refreshing night's sleep.

Early the next morning, I slipped out of bed quietly to visit the beach. I was worried

about the safety of our boats on the open shore. The dogs bounded over to greet me as soon as I descended the ladder, the cocks crowed and flapped their wings, and two playful kids frolicked nearby. Everything was full of life and energy—except for the donkey, who seemed entirely uninterested in starting the day. This was unfortunate, as I needed his help.

I woke him up from his morning dreams and got him ready to pull the sledge. The cow, since she hadn't been milked yet, got to rest a bit longer. Leaving her dozing, the rest of us headed out.

I was worried about the boats, but they were safe. Since I was in a hurry to get back, I only loaded a few things from the boats. The donkey didn't mind—it happily trotted home with the light load. We were both eager for breakfast.

When I reached the tree, it was completely silent. No one was around, even though it was broad daylight. Elizabeth was startled when I made a loud noise to wake everyone up. She looked at the clock and gasped.

"How did we oversleep like this?" she said. "It must be these mattresses—they're so comfortable, but maybe *too* relaxing. Look, the children are still sound asleep!"

The boys finally climbed down from the tree, yawning and rubbing their eyes. Ernest, as usual, was the last one to come down.

"Come on, boys," I said. "This won't do! Now, prayers and breakfast," I continued, "and then we get to work. I need to unload our cargo before the tide comes in and takes the boats away."

With a lot of effort, we got the job done, and I went back to the boat with Fritz once it was afloat. The others headed home, but Jack begged to stay with me, so I let him join.

Originally, I just planned to move the boats to Safety Bay, but the calm sea and good weather convinced me to make one more trip to the wreck. It took longer than expected, so we just checked the cargo, grabbed a few smaller items, and caught the evening breeze back.

Jack had a great time searching the hold. Soon, I heard him coming with a loud clatter, proudly wheeling a barrow he'd found—perfect for carrying potatoes, he said.

Fritz followed with even bigger news. He'd found what seemed to be all the parts for a pinnace, complete with rigging, fittings, and even small brass cannons. It was an amazing discovery! But I also realized it would take a lot of hard work to assemble it into a seaworthy boat.

For the present, we had barely time to get something to eat and hurry into the boat, where were collected our new acquisitions, namely, a copper boiler, iron plates, tobacco-graters, two grindstones, a small barrel of powder, and another of flints, two wheelbarrows besides Jack's, which he kept under his own especial care.

While we were away, Elizabeth had been hard at work. She'd collected potatoes and manioc root. I complimented her, and little Franz piped up, "Wait till you see the corn,

melons, pumpkins, and cucumbers we're growing!"

"Franz!" she cried. "You gave away my surprise! I wanted to surprise your father when the plants were ready."

"Ah, don't worry," I said. "I'm thrilled to hear about it! But where did you get the seeds?"

"From my magic bag, of course," she teased. "Every time I dug up potatoes, I planted seeds and more potatoes in their place."

We can bake flat cakes or scones on the iron plates. Let me show you."

I spread a sailcloth on the ground, called the boys over, and handed everyone a grater and some washed manioc roots. We all started grating, laughing at each other's funny poses and exaggerated movements. The flour didn't look very appetizing—it resembled wet sawdust—but I explained, "Cassava bread is popular in parts of the New World. The roots come in three types: one ripens quickly, another takes a bit longer, and the third takes two years but is safe to eat raw. The first two are poisonous if eaten raw, but the flour is excellent once we squeeze out the toxic sap."

"Why do we need to squeeze it, Father?" Ernest asked.

"The sap contains the poison," I explained. "Once it's removed, the dry pulp is safe and nourishing. But I won't eat anything until we've tested it on the fowls and the ape first."

When we finished grating, the roots were reduced to a damp powder. We filled the canvas bag, tied it tightly, and tried to squeeze the moisture out. But it was clear we'd need some kind of press to get the job done.

A strong straight beam was made flat on one side, smooth planks were laid across two of the lower roots of our tree; on these we placed the sack, above the sack another plank, and over that the long beam; one end was passed under a root near the sack, the other projected far forward. We then attached the heaviest weights we could think of, such as an anvil, iron bars, and masses of lead. The consequent pressure on the bag was enormous, and the sap flowed from it to the ground.

I took out a couple of handfuls of flour, and with a stick loosened and stirred the remainder, which I intended should again be pressed. While an iron plate placed over a good fire was getting hot, I mixed the meal with water and a little salt, kneaded it well, and formed a thick cake. I laid it on the hot plate and when one side became a nice yellow brown colour, I turned it. It smelt so delicious,

The next morning, the bread-baking again commenced in earnest. A large fire was kindled, the plates heated, the meal made into cakes, each of the boys busily preparing his own, and watching the baking most eagerly. Mistakes occurred, of course, some of the bread was burnt, some not done enough; but a pile of nice tempting cakes was soon ready. Washed down with plenty of milk, the cakes made a delicious breakfast.

Chapter 6

Now that I knew how to get food for my family, I started thinking about the shipwreck again and all the valuable things still inside. Most of all, I wanted to retrieve the pinnace (the small boat used for transporting goods) that was still onboard the wreck. I knew I would need help, so I tried to convince Elizabeth to let me take all the boys except Franz.

She didn't like the idea but finally agreed—only after I promised never to stay on the ship overnight. I wasn't happy about this rule, and neither was she, but we had to accept it.

The boys were excited to go together. They happily carried bags of food filled with cassava bread and potatoes.

We reached Safety Bay without any trouble and first checked on the geese and ducks living in the marsh. After feeding them and making sure they were healthy, we put on our cork belts, climbed into the small tub-boat, and set off toward the wreck, pulling the raft behind us.

Once on board, I told the boys to gather anything useful and load the raft for our trip back. Then we carefully examined the small boat I wanted so badly.

I quickly realized getting it out would be very difficult. It was stuck in a tight space at the far end of the ship, making it impossible to put together there. But at the same time, the parts were so heavy that moving them one by one seemed just as impossible.

I sent the boys away to amuse themselves by rummaging out anything they liked to carry away, and sat down quietly to consider the matter.

As my eyes adjusted to the dim light filtering through small cracks in the walls, I saw how neatly the small boat was arranged. Each part was carefully numbered, so if I had enough time and space, I believed I could put it together successfully.

"Room! We need room to work, boys!" I called out as my sons gathered around, eager to hear my plan. They trusted me completely and never doubted that the boat would be ours.

"Bring axes! Let's break down this wall and clear some space!"

We all got to work, but even by evening, we had barely made progress through the thick wood. It became clear that freeing the boat would take a huge amount of effort and patience. The elegant little craft was trapped inside the massive wreck, like a fossil buried in rock.

As the sun set, we hurried to prepare for our trip back. We weren't looking forward to the long walk home when, to our surprise, we found Elizabeth and little Franz waiting for us at Tentholm. She had decided to move there while we worked on the ship.

"This way, you'll be closer to your work, and I won't have to lose sight of you!" she said with a warm smile.

"You are a clever and thoughtful wife!" I said, delighted by her idea. "Now we'll work even harder so you can return to Falconhurst soon."

"Look what we brought you, Mother!" Fritz called excitedly. He and his brothers proudly showed off two small casks of butter, three of flour, and supplies of corn, rice, and other much-needed food.

From then on, our days were filled with hard work. First, we cleared space around the boat, then we carefully pieced it together. Every morning, we set off early and returned at night, bringing back supplies from the wreck each time.

At last, after an enormous effort, the boat was fully assembled. It was ready to be launched—but still trapped behind thick wooden walls too strong for us to break.

It felt as if the boat had woken from a long sleep, eager to glide into the open sea. I couldn't bear to think that, after all our work, we might fail. I was nearly in despair when suddenly, an idea struck me. If I could pull it off, it would free the boat without any more hard labor or wasted time.

Without telling anyone my plan, I took a large iron mortar, filled it with gunpowder, and secured a thick block of oak on top. I made a hole for a fuse and carefully placed the device so that when it exploded, it would blow open the side of the ship where the small boat was trapped.

To keep the blast under control, I fastened the mortar with chains. Then, acting as if nothing was unusual, I told the boys we were going ashore earlier than usual. As they got into the boat, I lit the fuse—designed to burn for a while before reaching the gunpowder—and hurried after them with a pounding heart.

Once ashore, we brought the raft close in and began unloading it. I left the other boat in the water, ready to set off at a moment's notice. No one noticed my nervousness as I listened intently, waiting for the explosion.

Then—it happened! A bright flash, a deafening boom, and a huge cloud of smoke filled the air.

Elizabeth and children, shocked by the noise, turned to the sea in alarm. Then, looking at me for answers, Elizabeth hesitantly suggested, "Maybe you left a light burning near the gunpowder, and it caused an explosion?"

"That's possible," I answered calmly. "We did have a fire below while sealing the boat's seams. I'll go check right away. Who wants to come?"

The boys didn't need to be asked twice—they jumped into the boat eagerly. I quickly whispered a few words of reassurance to Elizabeth and then joined them, rowing toward the wreck faster than ever before.

At first, everything looked the same on the side where we usually boarded. But as we rowed around to the other side, an astonishing sight awaited us. A massive hole had been torn open, the decks and railings were shattered, and pieces of wreckage floated everywhere. The section where the small boat had been trapped was now completely exposed.

And there she was—our beautiful pinnace, sitting unharmed in her resting place!

While the boys stared in shock at the destruction, I cheered with excitement, “Hurrah! She is ours! The lovely pinnace is free! We’ll be able to launch her easily now.”

The boys looked at me, then suddenly understood.

"You planned this all along, didn’t you?" they cried. "That machine we helped you make—it was for this!"

Laughing, they eagerly followed me into the wreck. To my great relief, everything was just as I had hoped. The boat was untouched by the explosion, and my daring plan had worked perfectly.

The boys were fascinated by the blast’s effects, and I took the chance to explain how the device—called a petard—worked and how it should be handled properly.

Now, launching the boat would be simple. I had already placed rollers under her keel, so with the help of levers and pulleys, we could finally move her toward the water.

A rope was attached by which to regulate the speed of the descent, and then, all hands putting their shoulders to the work, the pinnace began to slide from the stocks, and finally slipped gently and steadily into the water, where she floated as if conscious it was her native element; while we, wild with excitement, cheered and waved enthusiastically.

We didn’t stay long after securing our new boat in a safe spot. Then, we returned to Tentholm and explained the explosion by saying that since one side of the ship was now blown open, we could easily get the rest of its supplies in just a few more days.

During those days, we worked hard to prepare the boat. We set up the sails, rigging, and even mounted two small brass cannons. The moment the boys saw the boat armed with real guns, they became full of excitement. They couldn’t stop talking about defending against enemies, fighting off fleets of canoes, and winning great battles.

I reminded them that, no matter how brave they felt, we should hope and pray that we never actually have to fight anyone.

Finally, the pinnace was ready to sail. Elizabeth still had no idea about our surprise, so I let the boys, who had kept the secret well, fire the cannons as we entered the bay.

We untied the boat from the wreck, raised the sail, and began our first voyage. The pinnace moved smoothly across the water. I steered, while Ernest and Jack stood ready at the cannons. Then Fritz gave the command:

"Fire!"

Boom! Boom! The sound of the cannons echoed loudly through the cliffs. We

cheered loudly as well.

On the shore, Elizabeth and little Franz ran forward, clearly startled and unsure what was happening. But when they recognized us, they waved excitedly and rushed to meet us.

With careful maneuvering, we brought the boat close to the bank. Fritz helped his mother climb aboard. She was out of breath from excitement and called out:

"You amazing, terrible, wonderful people! Should I scold you or praise you? You scared me half to death! Seeing a beautiful ship suddenly sailing in was shocking enough, but when I heard the cannons, I was terrified! If I hadn't recognized your voices, I might have run away with Franz and never looked back!"

Then, after we reassured her, she looked around in amazement.

"Did you really build all this yourselves?" she asked. "What a lovely little yacht! I wouldn't even be afraid to sail in it myself."

After she had admired the boat and praised all our hard work, she smiled and said, "Now, you must come with me and see how little Franz and I have spent our time while you were away!"

We eagerly followed Elizabeth up the river to a lush garden with neat rows of plants and pathways.

Smiling, she said, "We don't celebrate with cannon fire like you, but soon, I'll need fire—to cook all the wonderful meals these crops will provide! I've planted lettuce, cabbages, beans, and peas, along with potatoes, cassava, and young fruit trees. To shade the European vegetables from the heat, I planted maize around them. What do you think?"

"It's brilliant!" I said. "But the sun is setting—let's return to the tent for supper."

That evening, we reflected on our hard work, and I reminded my sons that true happiness comes from helping others.

The next morning, Elizabeth asked me to check the young fruit trees at Falconhurst. "I've watered them and covered their roots but haven't planted them properly."

"You've already done more than I expected," I replied. "I'll go after we unload the raft."

On land, we enjoyed the change of pace. The boys quickly organized our supplies, and our properly anchored pinnace made the harbor look far better than before.

One evening, I asked the boys to show me their skills in running, jumping, wrestling, and climbing. I told them they needed to keep practicing these things to grow strong and be able to protect themselves from danger or escape if needed.

"A person must feel strong and capable to be truly brave," I said. "I want my sons to be strong in both body and mind." Little Franz looked up at me curiously, so I

explained, "That means being brave enough to do what is right and hate what is wrong, as well as being strong enough to work, hunt, and provide for themselves and others—and, if necessary, to fight."

The next day, the boys were eager to continue practicing, so I encouraged them by saying I would make them a new type of weapon. But they had to promise not to stop practicing with their bows and arrows. I wasn't worried about them forgetting to use their guns!

I took a long rope and tied a lead bullet to each end. The boys immediately started asking questions about what it was for.

"This is a small version of a lasso," I explained. "In South America, people like the Mexicans and Patagonians use a much longer version of this to hunt animals. Instead of bullets, they tie stones to the ends. They swing one end over their heads and then throw it at an animal. If they want to capture it alive, they aim so that the rope wraps around the animal's legs or neck, stopping it in its tracks."

"That sounds amazing, Father! Can you try it now? Look—there's the donkey! Catch the donkey!"

I wasn't sure how well I could do it, so I said no to using a live target. Instead, I agreed to try hitting the stump of a tree nearby. To my surprise, I did better than I expected—the rope wrapped tightly around the stump, just as I had described. The boys were so excited that they all begged for their own lassos right away.

Since they were easy to make, I quickly gave each boy one, and they spent the rest of the day practicing. Fritz, being the strongest and fastest, learned the quickest and soon became quite skilled.

That night, the weather began to change. Early the next morning, I noticed that a strong wind was picking up. From the top of our treehouse, I could see the sea becoming wild and rough.

It was with no small satisfaction that I thought of our hard-won pinnace, safely moored in the harbour, and recollected that there was nothing to call us to the wreck for the next few days.

I didn't spend all my time focused on my sons and their games. Elizabeth had many things to show me, needing my approval, advice, or help.

She had caught a good number of wild pigeons, partly cooked them, and preserved them in lard. She showed me a small barrel filled with them.

Next, she showed me the nests of our tame pigeons. But what worried her most was our little fruit trees. They had been forgotten and were so dry and wilted that if we didn't plant them soon, she feared they would die.

We immediately started this important work, planning to take a trip to Calabash Wood afterward to make a large supply of containers and utensils of all kinds.

Everyone was excited about the trip, so we worked hard to plant the orchard,

finishing by evening. Then, we made all the necessary preparations for an early departure the next day. Elizabeth and Franz were joining us, so packing their things took some time. We planned a grand family outing, bringing along our pets and helpers!

By sunrise, we were up and ready to go. The sledge, loaded with ammunition and food baskets, was pulled by the donkey and would be used to carry home the gourds we crafted and any other useful items we found.

Leading the way was Turk, proudly wearing his protective coat. Behind him came the boys, carrying their guns and game bags. Elizabeth and I followed, while Juno, looking rather unhappy, trotted behind. Poor Juno had to carry Master Knips, who refused to be left behind!

I brought two guns—one for hunting and another for protection against wild animals.

We quickly crossed Flamingo Marsh and entered a beautiful, fertile landscape. It was new to Elizabeth and two of the boys, and they were amazed by the stunning view.

Suddenly, Fritz and Jack ran into the bushes. A loud bark was followed by a gunshot, and a large bird fell to the ground. But instead of staying down, it got up and ran at full speed! Our dog chased it, and Fritz ran after them. Juno, eager to help, suddenly changed direction, throwing Knips off her back as she tried to block the bird's escape.

Juno grabbed one of its wings, but the bird, a magnificent bustard, fought back fiercely with its strong legs and sharp claws. Fritz and the dogs struggled to control it. I quickly ran over and threw a large handkerchief over it, finally managing to tie up its legs and wings.

Proud of our catch, we carried the bird back to the rest of the group, who had been resting on the sand.

"What have you got?"

"What did Fritz shoot?" the boys asked excitedly as they jumped up.

"A bustard! Oh, that's amazing!"

"I'm sure this is the one we missed that day, don't you remember, Mother? Ha ha! Old fellow, you won't escape this time!" said Jack.

"I think this is a female bustard, the mother bird," said Ernest.

"Oh, poor thing!" Elizabeth exclaimed with concern. "It's probably the same one, and I remember she had little chicks. Now they'll be left alone and helpless. Should we let her go?"

"My dear, kind-hearted wife, that was weeks ago!" I replied. "By now, those little birds are strong and independent. Besides, this one is injured, and we should try to heal her. If we succeed, she'll be a great addition to our poultry yard. If not, you can roast her for dinner."

We continued on our way and soon reached Monkey Grove, the place where Fritz had his adventure and became the guardian of the orphan monkey. While he entertained us with a lively retelling of the event, Ernest stood apart under a tall coconut palm, admiring its height and the beautiful crown of leaves. The cluster of coconuts hanging below caught his attention. I quietly approached and heard him sigh, saying:

"It’s so high! I wish one would fall down."

As if by magic, a large coconut suddenly dropped at his feet! Startled, he jumped back and looked up—just as another one came crashing down.

"This is just like the fairy tale of the wishing-cap!" Ernest exclaimed. "My wish comes true the moment I say it!"

"I think the ‘fairy’ here isn’t granting wishes but trying to chase us away," I said. "There’s probably an angry old ape up there!"

We examined the coconuts, wondering if they had fallen naturally, but they weren’t even fully ripe. Curious, we all gathered around the tree, staring up.

"Hey! I see something!" Fritz suddenly shouted. "Oh, what a hideous creature! It’s flat, round, as big as a plate, and has terrible claws! It’s coming down the tree!"

At that, little Franz hid behind his mother, Ernest looked around for a safe place to run, and Jack gripped his gun, ready to react. All eyes focused on the tree trunk as a large land crab slowly made its way down.

As it got closer, Jack bravely struck at it, but the crab suddenly dropped to the ground and, with its giant claws open, scuttled toward him. Jack let out a yell and ran!

We all burst into laughter, making him stop and turn back. Determined, he put down everything he was carrying, took off his jacket, and held it wide in both hands. Then, with a sudden move, he threw it over the crab, wrapped it up tightly, and started pounding it with all his might!

For a moment, I could do nothing but laugh. Then, running to Jack with my hatchet, I struck several sharp blows on his bundle. We carefully unwrapped it and found the land-crab inside—completely dead.

"What an ugly creature!" Jack exclaimed. "If it hadn’t looked so scary, I wouldn’t have hit it so hard. I wasn’t scared at all! But what is it called?"

"This is a land-crab," I explained. "There are many kinds, and I believe this one is called a coconut crab. It climbs trees to get coconuts and has to work hard to break them open. You had a smart idea, Jack, using your jacket to catch it. Some of these crabs are fierce fighters and very fast. If you hadn’t acted quickly, it might have been too strong for you. Now, let’s take it and the coconuts back to the sledge and continue on our way."

Moving forward became difficult. The thick woods forced us to stop often to cut away

tangled branches and vines. Ernest, who was walking behind us, suddenly called me back. He had made an important discovery—clear, cool water was flowing from the stalks of a vine. I recognized it as the *liane rouge*, a plant known in America for providing water to thirsty travelers.

"Just imagine, Mother!" Ernest said, showing her the plant. "If someone were lost in a huge forest for days, this could be a lifesaver."

"But are you sure it's safe to drink?" she asked.

I assured her it was, and I told the boys to cut enough for everyone, including our animals. They eagerly got to work, making small air holes in the stalks, just like with sugar canes, to let the water flow freely.

After pushing through the undergrowth a little longer, we finally reached open ground. In the distance, we could see the calabash trees. As we got closer, everyone was fascinated by their strange shapes and large, gourd-like fruits. Soon, we were all busy among the trees, cutting and carving the gourds into dishes, bowls, cups, jars, and plates—each person shaping their own creations according to their skill and imagination.

Since we planned to have lunch there, Fritz and Jack took charge of building a fire. They were eager to try cooking the crab by heating stones red-hot and placing it inside a hollow gourd, Meanwhile Elizabeth, fed the hungry animals, unharnessed the donkey to let it graze, and gave coconut milk to the little monkey, who had been kept in a covered basket to prevent it from getting lost in the forest.

In all the excitement, we had completely forgotten about the wounded bustard. It was suffering from heat and thirst, but thanks to Elizabeth's care, it soon recovered. She tied it to a tree and let it move around.

Just as the fire was starting, we realized we had run out of water. The boys quickly suggested searching for a spring, and I agreed to go with them. Ernest wanted to come too, and since we weren't going far, I saw no harm in leaving Elizabeth and Franz behind for a short while.

Not long after we started exploring, Ernest, who was leading the way, suddenly turned around with a look of terror.

"A wild boar! A huge wild boar, Father! Come quickly!" he shouted.

Sure enough, I heard loud snorting and rustling as a large animal moved through the dense undergrowth.

"After him, boys! Call the dogs! Get ready to fire!" I cried, rushing forward as we pushed through the bushes toward the spot where Ernest had seen the beast.

The ground was dug up, and some potatoes were scattered around, showing that we had interrupted the animal's midday meal. Ernest and Jack were more interested in collecting the potatoes than chasing after the creature. Only Fritz and I followed the dogs, who were eagerly charging ahead. From the sounds we heard, it was clear they had cornered the boar not far away.

We rushed toward the commotion, guided by fierce barking, snarling, and loud grunting. When we arrived, we saw our two mastiffs, one on each side of a large, well-fed pig, gripping its ears tightly. But instead of putting up a fierce fight, the animal seemed to be pleading for our help rather than planning an escape.

In an instant, we realized the truth—the captured pig was not a wild boar but our own runaway sow! After all the excitement, the discovery was almost disappointing. For a moment, we felt annoyed, but then the absurdity of the situation hit us, and we burst into laughter. Calling off the dogs, we set the old sow free from her undignified position.

The sound of our laughter echoed through the forest, bringing Ernest and Jack running over, still holding their potatoes.

“Much help you two would have been if we actually needed backup,” Fritz teased as they recognized the sow.

“Well,” Jack replied with a grin, “Ernest and I had a feeling it was going to be her. And just look at all these fine potatoes we found!”

We all joked about the mix-up, but our attention quickly shifted when Ernest pointed out some apple-like fruit growing on nearby bushes and scattered on the ground.

The sow, recovering from her ordeal, was happily munching on the fruit. Fritz worried it might be the poisonous manchineel tree, which I had once warned them about, but after carefully examining it, I felt it was safe to eat. We gathered a good amount, hoping that if both the sow and the monkey enjoyed it, we might too.

Despite our finds, we still hadn’t come across any water, and our growing thirst made us anxious to locate some before heading back.

Jack took the lead as we moved toward a large rock rising above the thickets. Suddenly, he shouted in alarm:

“A crocodile! Father! A crocodile!”

“Nonsense, boy! A crocodile—here? In this dry forest, where we can’t even find a sip of water?”

But as I stepped forward to see what had startled him, I realized his mistake wasn’t so silly after all. There, lying in the undergrowth, was a massive iguana—one of the largest lizards I had ever seen, and truly a fearsome-looking creature.

I was relieved to tell Jack that this strange animal was completely harmless. In fact, its meat was considered a delicacy. If we could catch it, we’d have a valuable prize to take back with us.

As I neared the lizard, I began to whistle a sweet yet lively tune, making the melody more distinct as I drew closer. The creature stirred, listening, raising its head slightly as if trying to discover the source of the sound.

Once I was near enough, I gently stroked and tickled it with the switch, continuing to

whistle the most charming tunes I could think of. The lizard, appearing to enjoy the sensation, stretched its limbs and lazily swayed its tail.

Then, seizing the opportunity, I swiftly cast the noose over its head and tightened the cord. Placing my foot on its body, I prepared to dispatch it in the most effective way—by piercing the nostril, nearly the only vulnerable spot on this remarkable reptile.

At that moment, the lizard, in a furious attempt to escape, lashed its tail wildly. Jack, standing too close, received such a forceful blow that he tumbled over like a rolling nine-pin.

Seeing the creature's open jaws lined with sharp teeth, the boys panicked. They grabbed sticks, ready to beat it to death, but I stopped them.

Then, with a firm thrust of my rod into its nostril, the blood flowed, and the lizard soon lay still.

The boys looked at me as though I had performed some kind of magic trick. They had never heard of this animal, nor the method I had used, which was common in the West Indies. Their admiration made me smile.

Now came the real challenge—how to carry such an unwieldy burden. I disliked the idea of killing any creature and leaving it behind, so without hesitation, I hoisted the heavy lizard onto my back and started walking.

As we neared the Calabash Wood, we heard the anxious voices of Elizabeth and Franz calling for us. Our long absence had clearly worried them. We shouted back, reassuring them, and as we emerged from the trees, they sighed in relief—though the sight of the fearsome creature slung across my back startled them considerably!

As we neared the Calabash Wood, we heard the anxious voices of Elizabeth and Franz calling for us. Our long absence had clearly worried them. We shouted back joyfully, reassuring them, and as we emerged from the trees, they sighed in relief—though the sight of the fearsome creature slung across my back startled them considerably!

There was so much to tell and so much to see that, for a time, hunger and thirst were completely forgotten. No one even thought of the water we had originally set out to find—until Master Knips, having slyly helped himself to some of our newly discovered apples, was caught munching away and enjoying them immensely.

This, of course, immediately gave the boys a strong desire to try them as well. Since the bustard also pecked at them without hesitation, I felt confident they were safe. After tasting the fruit myself, I concluded that it was guava, a plant from the West Indies—an exciting discovery for us.

Though refreshing, the guava only seemed to sharpen our appetites rather than satisfy them, so we eagerly turned to the provisions we had brought from home, abandoning our earlier plan to cook something fresh.

Realizing it was high time to head back, we decided not to burden ourselves by

dragging the sledge and its heavy load home that evening. Instead, we left it behind, intending to return for it the next day. The donkey was already well-laden, carrying both the iguana and the bustard. Poor little Franz, exhausted from the day's adventures, searched in vain for an empty spot on its back.

Our journey home took us through a grand forest of towering oak trees, their branches stretching high above us. The ground beneath was scattered with countless acorns, and we gathered a handful as we walked.

At last, before night fully set in, we reached Falconhurst safely. Supper was a welcome sight, and we gratefully replenished our energy with a hearty meal of broiled iguana, potatoes, and roasted acorns—which, to our delight, tasted very much like chestnuts.

Chapter 7

The first task of the following day was to return to Calabash Wood to fetch the sledge loaded with the dishes, bowls, and baskets we had made.

Fritz accompanied me while the other boys remained with Elizabeth. My plan was to explore beyond the chain of rocky hills, and I thought it best to keep our party small for this particular expedition.

As we passed through the grove of evergreen oaks, we spotted our old sow happily feasting on acorns. She seemed none the worse for the fright we had given her the day before—if anything, she appeared almost friendly toward us, as if she considered us her rescuers from the jaws of the fierce dogs.

The grove was alive with birds, flitting among the branches, undisturbed by our quiet passage. That was, until Fritz fired his gun and brought down a striking blue jay along with two vibrant parakeets—one a brilliant scarlet and the other a dazzling mix of green and gold.

Just as Fritz was reloading, an unexpected noise reached our ears. It was a dull, rhythmic thumping, like the muffled beat of a distant drum.

Moving with the utmost caution, we crept forward, keeping ourselves hidden among low bushes, thick grass, and creeping vines. At last, we reached a small clearing—and there, standing atop a fallen log, was a magnificent bird.

It was about the size of a cock, its plumage a rich chestnut brown, mottled with dark brown and gray. On its shoulders were striking tufts of velvety black feathers, shimmering with a glossy green sheen. The bird moved with a strange, stately air—ruffling its wings, raising its tail and neck feathers, and strutting in a series of elaborate turns.

A small gathering of similar birds, though lacking his ruffled adornments, stood around the log, watching his performance with apparent admiration.

Then, in a dramatic flourish, the bird spread its tail wide like a fan, stiffened its wings, and began beating them in short, rapid strokes. The rhythm grew faster and faster until the sound deepened into a low rumble, like distant thunder. The whirring of its

wings created a blur, surrounding the bird in a shimmering haze.

This was the drumming noise that had alarmed us, amplified, I suspected, by the hollow, decayed stump on which the remarkable display was taking place.

I watched in fascination, utterly absorbed by the rare and beautiful sight. But then—a sudden shot rang out behind me.

The performance ended in an instant. My over-eager son had turned the captivating spectacle into an unfortunate and unnecessary tragedy. The once-proud drummer collapsed lifeless from its perch, while the startled audience of birds scattered in all directions.

I turned to Fritz, deeply annoyed by his impatience. He had fired without my consent, and the loss of such a splendid creature seemed wasteful. However, upon closer examination, I confirmed that it was a fine specimen of the ruffed grouse. Resigned, we placed it on the donkey, which stood waiting patiently nearby, and resumed our journey.

Reaching the spot where we had left the sledge, we found it just as we had left it. Since it was still early in the day, I decided to press on with my plan to explore the rocky cliffs and hills that stretched along the coastline. My goal was to find an opening that might lead into the interior of the land—or else confirm that we were entirely enclosed and isolated on this part of the coast.

Leaving Calabash Wood behind, we moved across fertile ground covered in, potatoes, and unfamiliar plants. Small, clear streamlets meandered through the landscape, nourishing the lush vegetation. The view was open and inviting, with no immediate obstacles to our progress.

Before long, we came across an unusual bush, laden with clusters of small white berries. When plucked, they felt waxy and left a sticky residue on our fingers. I recognized the plant at once as *Myrica cerifera*, the wax myrtle. Delighted by the discovery, I explained to Fritz that these berries could be melted down and strained to produce wax for making candles. This would certainly pleaseElizabeth, who disliked having to stop her work and retire for the night as soon as the sun set.

Although the greenish wax from these berries would be more brittle than beeswax, it would still burn well and emit a pleasant fragrance. With the donkey to help carry our load, we quickly gathered enough berries to fill one of the large canvas bags and then continued our journey.

Soon after, we stumbled upon yet another natural wonder—one that left us staring in amazement.

Before us stood a solitary tree, its branches woven into a massive, communal dwelling for an entire colony of small brown birds, about the size of yellowhammers. Their nests clustered tightly together around the trunk and limbs, forming a compact village beneath a thick thatched roof made from grass, straw, and fibers. This ingenious structure protected them from both the heavy rains and the scorching sun.

There were numerous openings along the irregular sides of the clustered dwellings, making the nests resemble different rooms within a communal house. Small twigs and branches jutted out here and there from the structure, serving as perches for young birds and lookout posts for the others. The entire setup bore a striking resemblance to a massive bath sponge.

The feathered inhabitants swarmed in and out in their thousands, filling the air with movement and sound. Among them, we noticed many strikingly beautiful little parrots, which, in some cases, seemed to be battling the rightful owners for a share of the nests.

Eager to investigate further, Fritz—an excellent climber—scaled the tree, hoping to retrieve a young bird if he could find one. He carefully reached into several holes, but they were all empty. Finally, as he extended his hand into a deeper cavity, he received an unexpected shock.

Something inside seized his finger with a sharp, powerful bite. With a startled cry, he yanked his hand back and shook it furiously to dull the pain. Undeterred, he reached in again, this time more determined, and firmly grasped the culprit. Despite its fierce protests and piercing cries, he pulled the creature from its hiding place, stuffed it into his pocket, buttoned up his coat, and hurriedly slid down the tree.

But his escape did not go unnoticed. A furious flock of the captive's relatives burst from their holes, screeching wildly as they swooped at him, pecking in outrage.

Once safely on the ground, Fritz proudly revealed his prize—not one of the true nest owners, the sociable grosbeaks, but a stunning little green parrot. Delighted, he immediately decided he would tame it and teach it to speak. For the time being, however, the indignant prisoner was returned to confinement in his pocket.

As we continued on our way, we talked about the fascinating bird colony we had just witnessed. Their cooperative nature, their instinct to work together for the common good—it all seemed quite remarkable.

"Examples of this kind of communal effort," I remarked, "are not uncommon in the animal kingdom. Beavers, for instance, construct elaborate lodges and live together in well-organized communities. Among insects, bees, wasps, and ants are well-known social builders. Even beneath the ocean, tiny coral insects create vast reefs through patience and collective labor."

"I've often watched ants at work," said Fritz. "It's fascinating to see how they organize their tasks and go about the business of their colony."

"Have you noticed how carefully they handle their eggs?" I asked, testing his knowledge. "They carry them into the warmth of the sun to help them hatch."

"Ah! But those aren't actually eggs," Fritz corrected me. "They're the pupae—the chrysalises of the ant larvae, which hatch from real eggs. People call them ants' eggs, but that's not technically correct."

"Quite right, my boy!" I said, pleased with his understanding. "Well, if you've observed so much about ants, have you ever noticed…"

"If you find the little ants of your native country so fascinating, imagine how amazed you would be to witness the astonishing feats of the vast ant tribes in foreign lands.

"Some of these ants construct towering mounds, four to six feet high and equally broad, with walls so solid that they withstand both scorching sun and torrential rain. Inside, these nests are marvels of architecture, divided into well-organized streets, galleries, vaults, and nurseries. In fact, an abandoned mound—after some interior modifications—could be used as a baking oven.

"Ants are not the most pleasant of creatures. They secrete sticky moisture, emit an unpleasant odor, and consume any edible thing in their path. While our own country's ants cause little trouble, the large ants of foreign lands can be incredibly destructive, their raids difficult to stop. Fortunately, nature has provided them with enemies to keep their numbers in check—birds, other insects, and even four-footed creatures that prey upon them.

"One of their greatest foes is the ant-eater, or tamanoir, of South America. This strange creature grows six to seven feet long, covered in coarse, shaggy hair that droops over its hindquarters like a heavy plume. Its head is long and narrow, almost unnatural in appearance, with no teeth at all. Instead, it wields a peculiar tongue—thin, long, and sticky, much like a writhing red earthworm. With its immensely strong, curved claws, the ant-eater tears into the hardened walls of ant mounds, scattering the panicked colony. Then, thrusting out its sticky tongue, it twists and flicks it among the swarming insects. Helplessly, they adhere to this terrible weapon and are swiftly drawn back into the creature's waiting, toothless jaws.

"The little ant-eater, by contrast, measures only about twenty-one inches in length. It has a more natural-looking head and a fine coat of silky fur. Unlike its larger relative, it prefers to live in trees."

I was pleased to find my memory serving me so well on this subject, as it seemed to fascinate Fritz and kept us engaged in conversation as we traveled onward.

Before long, we reached a grove of tall trees with broad, thick leaves. Intrigued, we stopped to examine them. The trees bore round, fig-like fruit, packed with tiny seeds and tasting sour and harsh.

Fritz then noticed a gummy resin oozing from cracks in the bark, which immediately reminded him of his boyhood pastime—collecting gum from cherry trees at home. Excited, he set about scraping off as much as he could.

A few minutes later, he rejoined me, attempting to soften the collected gum in his hands. However, unlike the gum he remembered, this substance did not become pliable. Frustrated, he was about to toss it away when he suddenly realized something remarkable—it could stretch! And when he released it, it snapped right back to its original shape.

"Oh, father, only look! This gum is quite elastic! Can it possibly be india-rubber?"

"What!" I cried. "Let me see it! That would be a valuable discovery indeed! And I do

believe you are perfectly right!"

"Why would it be so very valuable, father?" Fritz inquired. "I have only seen it used for rubbing out pencil marks."

"India-rubber," I replied, "or, more properly, caoutchouc, is a milky, resinous juice that flows from certain trees in considerable quantities when the stem is purposely tapped.

"These trees are native to the South American countries of Brazil, Guiana, and Cayenne. The people who first obtained it used it to form bottles by smearing earthen flasks with repeated coatings of the gum while it was fresh from the trees. Once the layers hardened and became sufficiently thick, they broke the mold, shook out the fragments, and hung the bottles in the smoke to make them firmer and darker in color.

Soon after this discovery, we reached the coconut wood and saw the bay stretching before us, along with the great promontory we had named Cape Disappointment, which had always marked the farthest extent of our previous excursions.

As we passed through the wood, I noticed a smaller variety of palm that had previously escaped my attention among its towering companions. One of these had been broken by the wind, exposing a pith with a distinct, mealy appearance. A sudden realization struck me—I was convinced this was the world-renowned sago palm.

Among the pith, I spotted some fat worms or maggots and immediately recalled hearing about them before. These creatures thrived on the sago and were considered a delicacy in the West Indies.

Curious, I decided to put this claim to the test. Kindling a small fire, I sprinkled salt on half a dozen of the plump larvae, skewered them on a wooden spit, and set them to roast.

Before long, rich fat began to drip from them, releasing an aroma so enticing that any hesitation I had about eating worms vanished. Placing one, like a pat of butter, atop a baked potato, I boldly took a bite. To my surprise, the taste was so pleasant that I helped myself to several more.

Fritz, initially hesitant, eventually summoned the courage to join me, and we both agreed that this novel addition made a savory complement to our meal of baked potatoes.

Once we were ready to continue our journey, we found the direct route blocked by an impenetrable thicket. Rather than forcing our way through, we decided to turn aside and head toward the sugarcane field near Cape Disappointment.

Upon reaching it, we couldn't resist cutting a generous bundle of sugar canes. Our donkey, already laden with the bag of wax berries, now carried this additional sweet cargo as we resumed our expedition.

On reaching the sledge in Calabash Wood, we took everything off the donkey and

placed it on the sledge. Our patient donkey calmly pulled the load, just as he had carried it on his back before. The trip home was uneventful and by evening, we arrived at Falconhurst where a delicious dinner was waiting for us.

The next morning, all the boys woke up talking about one thing—candles! They were so excited about making them that they wouldn’t stop talking about it, even during breakfast. As soon as we finished eating, they wanted to start right away.

First, we picked the berries and put them in a large metal pan over the fire. As the berries heated up, a sweet-smelling green wax rose to the top. We carefully scooped the wax into another pot and kept melting more berries until we had enough wax.Then, I took the wicks Elizabeth had made and dipped each one into the melted wax. Fritz hung them on a bush to dry. The first layer of wax was thin, but after dipping them several times, the candles became thicker and stronger. Once we ran out of wax, we hung the candles in a cool, shady place to harden.

That night, for the first time, Falconhurst was brightly lit for three whole hours after sunset! We were all so happy with our homemade candles.

"You are so clever!" Elizabeth said. "Now, if only you could figure out how to make butter! Every day, I watch good cream go bad because I don’t know what to do with it.”

I thought for a moment. "I might have an idea," I said. I took the gourd, one of those I had previously prepared, with a small hole at one end and well hollowed-out and cleaned; this I partially filled with cream and then corked up the hole tightly.

`Here, boys," I said, "you can keep working while I build a cart to replace our sledge." I gave them their instructions and then got to work.

They set up four posts in the ground and tied a square piece of sailcloth to them using four cords at the corners. In this swinging cradle, they placed the gourd filled with cream. Then, each boy took a side and rolled it back and forth for half an hour.

"Now," I said, "take the gourd to Elizabeth—with my compliments."

She was delighted to find a lump of fresh butter.

With my son's help, we finished the sturdy cart, which proved useful for harvesting.

We then transplanted our fruit trees, arranging them in rows to form a shady path from Falconhurst to Family Bridge, with a proper road leading to Tentholm.

We planted the vines round the arched roots of our great mangrove, and the rest of the trees in suitable spots; some near Falconhurst, and others away over Jackal river, to adorn Tentholm. Tentholm had been the subject of serious thoughts to me for some time past, and I now turned all my attention thither. It was not my ambition to make it beautiful, but to form of it a safe place of refuge in a case of emergency.

My first task was to plant a thick, prickly hedge to protect us from wild animals and any possible threats. To strengthen our defenses, we also fortified the bridge and set up two cannons from the wreck on nearby hills.

For six weeks, we worked hard but happily, pausing each Sunday to rest and give thanks for our safety. The boys grew stronger through daily tasks and physical activities like running, climbing, and swimming. However, their clothes became worn and ragged, so I decided to return to the wreck for supplies.

Taking three of the boys, I sailed to the ship, which was still holding together but slowly falling apart. We gathered everything useful—chests, cloth, tools, barrels of pitch, weapons, and furniture—until nothing of value remained.

Before leaving for the last time, I set two barrels of gunpowder inside the ship to destroy it. I also tied empty casks to a large copper cauldron, hoping it would float. That evening, as we watched from shore, a bright explosion lit up the sky, and our faithful ship was gone. Though we knew it was necessary, we couldn't help but feel like we had lost an old friend.

By morning, our sadness had faded, replaced by excitement as we found valuable wood and supplies washed ashore. The cauldron had floated as planned, and we safely stored our gunpowder beneath it among the rocks.

Since only Fritz and I had explored Cape Disappointment before, Elizabeth and the younger boys pleaded to come along. I agreed, and the next morning, we set off with our cart, drawn by the cow and donkey. We carried everything needed for several days—our tent, food, plenty of ammunition, and various tools—ready to collect fruits and useful materials along the way.

It was a lovely morning, and we reached the wax trees, and there we stopped so that we could gather a sack or two of the berries to renew our stock of candles. We picked the berries and stored them amongst the bushes, marking the spot so we could find them on our return.

"Now for the caoutchouc tree!" I said. "Time to make waterproof boots and leggings for you, Ernest."

We quickly got to work, cutting the bark and placing containers to collect the sap. Then, moving on through the palm wood, we reached a beautiful plain. On one side stretched a vast field of sugarcane, on the other, a dense thicket of bamboos and palms. Ahead, the calm, glistening sea stretched to the horizon.

"How beautiful!" Jack exclaimed. "Let's stay here forever instead of living at Falconhurst. That would be fun!"

"Maybe," I replied, "but imagine a tiger lurking in that thicket, waiting to pounce at night. I'd rather stick to our safe treehouse or Tentholm."

Still, it was a convenient spot, so we decided to make camp. "Let's stop here for now," I said. "Pitch the tent!"

Our beasts were quickly unyoked, the tent arranged, a large fire lit, supper prepared, and we dispersed in various directions, some to cut bamboos, and some to collect sugar-cane. We then returned; and, as supper was still not quite ready and the boys were hungry, they decided to obtain some coconuts. This time, however, no assistance was to be had from either monkeys or land-crabs, and they gazed up with

longing eyes at the fruit above them.

"We can climb!" said Fritz. "Up you go, boys!"

Jack and Fritz each grabbed a smooth, slippery tree trunk and tried to climb. They struggled hard but kept sliding back down before making much progress.

"Here, you young athletes," I said, holding up sharkskin buskins I had prepared. "I expected this problem and have a solution." I tied the buskins to their legs, and this time, using a rope looped around the tree, they climbed to the top with ease.

It was late when our donkey suddenly brayed, kicked up his heels, and bolted into the bamboo thicket. We sent the dogs after him, but they returned without a trace. With night falling, we had to abandon the search.

Worried about what had startled him, I built a large fire and told everyone to sleep with their weapons close.

At dawn, the donkey was still missing, so I set out with Jack to find him, following his hoofprints. After an hour, the trail disappeared into the tracks of a larger herd.

Jack urged me to keep going, hoping to spot the herd from higher ground. We pushed through dense brush and marshy swamps until we reached a vast plain. In the distance, a herd grazed.

Believing our donkey might be among them, I decided to circle through a bamboo marsh for a closer look.

The bamboos were huge, many of them over thirty feet in height; and, as we made our way through them, I remembered an account of the giant cane of South America, which is greatly prized by the Indians on account of its extreme usefulness; the reeds themselves make masts for their canoes, while each joint will form a cask or box.

I was delighted, for I had little doubt that the bamboos we were among were of the same species. I explained this to Jack, and as we discussed the possibility of cutting one down and carrying a portion of it home, we reached the border of the marsh, and emerged upon the plain.

We suddenly came face to face with a herd of buffaloes. They stared at us but didn’t move. Jack wanted to shoot, but I stopped him. "Back to the thicket," I said, "and hold the dogs!"

As we retreated, the dogs broke free and attacked a buffalo calf. At once, the herd bellowed, pawed the ground, and charged. The leader was almost upon us before I could raise my gun. I fired my pistol instead, and he dropped dead at my feet. The rest of the herd halted, sniffed the air, and then bolted across the plain.

Meanwhile, the dogs struggled to bring the calf down. Not wanting to shoot it, I hesitated, but Jack quickly had an idea. He threw his lasso, catching the calf's legs and toppling it. We tied it securely and, after piercing its nose for a lead rope, set it on its feet. Overwhelmed, it followed us without resistance.

I cut some meat from the buffalo, packed it in salt, and left the rest for the dogs. As we ate, vultures and crows swarmed the carcass, but despite the dogs' efforts to chase them away, they kept returning. Jack wanted to shoot them, but I told him it wouldn't help.

Satisfied, we decided to stop searching for the donkey and head back to camp. On the way, I cut a small bamboo reed—its thick joints would make great storage barrels, and the thinner ones could serve as candle molds. Meanwhile, our captured buffalo followed obediently, even carrying some of our supplies on its back.

As we crossed a rocky streambed, Juno suddenly rushed toward a crevice, only to stop short when a large jackal appeared. The dogs attacked and quickly overpowered it. Suspecting that her young were nearby, Jack was eager to investigate. Though I hesitated, we peered into the dark cave and spotted the cubs. Jack crawled inside with the dogs and emerged with a single golden-furred pup, the only one he could save before the dogs finished the rest. While Jack would have happily taken the whole litter home, I felt one jackal—along with our new buffalo—was more than enough.

Before leaving, I noticed a dwarf palm nearby, perfect for strengthening our hedge at Tentholm. I made a note to return for some young plants. By the time we reached camp, it was late, and our family was eagerly awaiting our return.

The children were thrilled with the new animals and quickly forgot about the lost donkey. Jack eagerly answered their many questions, giving an exaggerated account of the buffalo fight. I had to step in and tell the true version of events.

As we sat down to supper—much appreciated after our long day—Elizabeth and the others shared their own adventures. Ernest had discovered a sago-palm and, after much effort, managed to cut it down. Franz and his mother had gathered a huge pile of firewood, enough to last our entire stay. Fritz had gone hunting and brought back plenty of game.

However, while they were busy, a troop of apes had raided the camp. They tore through everything—eating provisions, spilling milk, scattering potatoes, and knocking over pots and pans. Even the fence had been partially destroyed. However, the boys had worked hard to clean up, and by the time we returned, there was no sign of the chaos. We wouldn't have guessed what had happened as we enjoyed our well-earned meal.

Once everything was settled again, Fritz explored the shore near Cape Disappointment and found a young eagle. Ernest identified it as a Malabar or Indian eagle, and I suggested trying to train it like a falcon.

"Listen, boys," I said. "You're collecting a lot of pets. Each of you must take care of your own. If I find one neglected, I'll set it free. Understand?"

Elizabeth looked relieved, and the boys agreed. That night, I dried the buffalo meat over a smoky fire, secured the animals, and we all slept soundly.

At dawn, we prepared to return to Falconhurst. Ernest reminded me about the sago

palm he had worked hard to cut down. He also suggested splitting the trunk to make long water troughs for carrying water to Tentholm. I agreed it was a great idea.

With our tools, we sawed off the top of the palm and used wedges and mallets to split it in two. We scooped out the pith, leaving some at the ends to create troughs. Then, I showed the boys how to knead the sago dough. Even little Franz joined in. Elizabeth spread the mixture in the sun to dry.

By evening, we loaded our cart with sago, coconuts, and other supplies, ready for an early departure. At sunrise, we packed up and set off. The cow couldn't pull the heavy load alone, so we trained the young buffalo to help. After some effort, he pulled the cart well.

Since we had the trough hanging under the cart, we avoided dense thickets. Ernest and Jack went to check our candleberry and caoutchouc supplies. Suddenly, a terrible noise broke out—dogs barking, boys shouting. Fearing they were in danger, I ran to help.

When I arrived, I found a hilarious scene—Jack and Ernest dancing and cheering around our old sow, who lay in the grass surrounded by a new litter of piglets. Her alarming squeals had turned into happy grunts.

Though I didn't join their celebration, I was pleased and returned to the cart for biscuits and potatoes for the mother pig. Meanwhile, the boys fetched the sack of candleberries and caoutchouc. Since we couldn't take the sow with us, we left her with her piglets and continued to Falconhurst.

Our animals were happy to see us but wary of the new pets—especially Fritz's eagle. To test its behavior, Fritz tied it to the fig tree and uncovered its eyes. The bird immediately attacked and killed the parrot. Furious, Fritz was about to kill it when Ernest stopped him.

"It's just following its instincts," Ernest said. "Let me tame it."

Fritz hesitated but agreed, asking Ernest how to do it. Ernest suggested blowing tobacco smoke around the eagle's head to calm it. Though skeptical, Fritz tried it. As the smoke circled, the eagle slowly became dazed and stopped struggling.

"Brilliant!" Fritz said, putting the hood back on the bird. "Knips is yours, Ernest."

Chapter 8

The next morning, the boys and I loaded our cart with bamboo and went to support the young fruit trees. We left the buffalo behind so his nose wound could heal.

We arrived just in time—many trees had fallen, others were leaning, and only a few stood tall. We propped them up with bamboo and tied them with strong fibers.

As we worked, Franz asked, "Are these wild or tame trees?"

Jack joked, "They're wild! We have to tie them up so they don't run away!"

I explained, "They are cultivated trees, not wild ones. In Europe, fruit trees don’t grow well unless they are grafted." I told them how grafting allows good fruit to grow on different trees, and how many fruit trees in Europe originally came from warmer countries.

As we finished, Fritz asked if all the trees would grow. I assured him they would, as we were in a tropical climate. I listed different trees and where they came from—lemons from Spain, figs from Chios, peaches from Persia, and grapes from ancient times.

Back home at Falconhurst, we ate hungrily. Elizabeth then asked if we could build proper stairs instead of climbing a ladder to our treehouse. I thought it might be possible if the trunk was hollow.

Jack, eager as always, climbed up to check. But he disturbed a swarm of bees! They attacked, stinging the boys. We calmed them with cold earth and planned our next move.

That night, when the bees returned to their hive, Fritz and I sealed the tree holes with wet clay. In the morning, I used a pipe and tobacco smoke to make the bees sleepy. Once they were calm, we carefully moved them into a new hive and collected their honey and wax.

The bees were safely removed from the tree, but I wasn’t sure if they would stay in the new hive or try to return to their old home. To prevent this, I burned some tobacco inside the tree trunk to fill it with smoke.

It was a good idea—when the bees woke up, they flew back to the tree, buzzing in confusion. After circling between the hive and the trunk, they finally settled in the hive and left the tree to us.

That evening, we opened the cask of honeycomb. We separated the honey, poured it into jars, then boiled the leftover comb in water. Pressing it through a cloth, we collected more honey and stored it. The remaining wax was saved for making candles.

The next morning, we began work on the treehouse. First, we cut an opening at the base to fit a door from the captain’s cabin. Clearing out the rotten wood inside took time, but soon, the trunk was hollow, like a giant funnel open to the sky.

Next, we built a staircase. A strong tree sapling in the center served as the main support. We cut notches into it and the trunk to hold the wooden steps, which we made from planks salvaged from the wreck. As we built upward, we added windows for light and air.

Once we reached the top of the central pole, we extended it and continued the spiral staircase until we reached the level of the nest above.

To make the ascent of the stairs perfectly easy we ran a hand-rail on either side, one round the centre pillar, and the other following the curve of the trunk.

This task took us a whole month, and by then, we were so used to having a project that we started thinking about what to do next.

Meanwhile, we kept up with daily tasks. Our goats and sheep had new babies, so we tied small bells from the wreck around their necks to keep track of them. Juno had a litter of puppies, but we kept only two. To comfort her (and perhaps make his own life easier), Jack placed his jackal with the puppies, and to his delight, Juno accepted it.

Our other animals were also progressing well. The buffalo, once difficult, was now tame and carried loads instead of the donkey. To get him used to a rider, we first had our monkey, Knips, sit on his back, then eventually Fritz.

Fritz also trained his eagle by placing food on the buffalo's horns or the back of the bustard, teaching it to hunt. Soon, it could catch birds midair on command, though we kept it away from our poultry.

Ernest trained Knips to be useful by making a small basket for him to carry. The monkey learned to climb trees and bring down coconuts. Jack had less success with his jackal, Fangs, who refused to give up his prey, but Jack was determined to train him.

These tasks gave us breaks from the hard work of building the staircase. I also worked on improving our candles since the first batch didn't burn well. Elizabeth asked me to find a better wick than the cotton strips we had used before.

To make smooth, well-shaped candles, I decided to use bamboo molds. At first, I planned to pour the wax in and slide the candles out when cooled, but this didn't work. Instead, I split the molds lengthwise, greased them, and bound them tightly before pouring in the wax.

The next challenge was wicks. Since Elizabeth wouldn't let us use cotton ties or handkerchiefs, I tried thin strips of a flammable tree, while she used fibers from the karata tree. We tested both. Our wax mixture—half beeswax, half candleberry wax—was poured into the molds. When night fell, we lit them. The cotton wicks were still the best, but my wooden splint wicks burned brighter than Elizabeth's flickering fiber wicks.

Next I made waterproof boots by molding rubber layers over sand-filled socks. Once thick enough, I removed the clay mold, attached buffalo-hide soles, and coated them with rubber. The boots worked so well that the whole family wanted a pair.

One problem at Falconhurst was the lack of water nearby, so we built a pipeline from the river, using a dam to raise the water level. The water flowed through pipes into a turtle shell near our home, with an outlet draining through a hole Fritz had made. This made daily tasks much easier, and we inaugurated it by washing a sack of potatoes.

One morning, as we worked on our staircase, a terrifying roar echoed through the trees. Was it a lion? A gorilla? A hyena? We armed ourselves, sent the dogs to

guard the animals, and took position. The sound grew closer—then suddenly stopped. I crept down with Fritz to investigate.

Then we heard it again—only this time, Fritz burst into laughter. "Hee-haw, hee-haw!" It was our donkey, braying loudly. But behind him was another animal—a slimmer, more elegant wild donkey.

Recognizing it as an onager, I whispered to Fritz, "Fetch a rope, quickly and quietly!" While he ran back, I prepared a bamboo tool to help catch it. Fritz soon returned with the rope, along with some oats and salt. We set a noose and lured our donkey forward with food. Seeing its companion eating without fear, the onager hesitated, then cautiously stepped closer.

In an instant, Fritz's skillful throw sent the noose flying around the onager's neck. She leaped back in alarm, pulling the cord tight, and collapsed to the ground, half-choked. I rushed forward, loosened the rope, and replaced it with a halter. Using my bamboo pincers, I secured her between two trees and left her to recover.

As she regained her strength, the family gathered to admire the stunning creature. She glared at us with fiery eyes, kicking wildly and snorting in defiance. But the ropes held firm, and after a while, she settled down, trembling with exhaustion. I then led her to our tree's roots, which served as our stable, tying her beside our donkey to prevent her escape.

The next morning, she was just as wild. Looking at her proud, untamed spirit, I doubted whether she could ever be domesticated. We tried every method to calm her, but she resisted fiercely. At last, when hunger had weakened her, I attempted to mount her. I shackled her feet and fitted her with the strongest bridle, but she still fought against me. As a final resort, I adopted a method used by American Indians—harsh, yet proven effective.

Seizing the moment, I leaped onto her back and bit through the tip of her ear. She kicked and bucked wildly, but then, as if in shock, she froze, trembling. From that moment, her resistance was broken. Soon, even the children could ride her, and I felt immense pride watching my youngest son guide the once-untamable creature with ease.

Meanwhile, our growing poultry yard reminded me that we needed sturdy shelters before the rainy season arrived. Elizabeth was delighted with her new chicks—forty in all. To protect our animals, we built a large roof over the tree's vaulted roots using tightly bound bamboo canes, reinforced with clay and moss. A tar and lime-water coating made it waterproof. Below, we divided the space into compartments for stables, a poultry yard, storage, and even a kitchen and dining hall. With our winter quarters complete, we worked tirelessly to stockpile supplies.

One evening, while gathering potatoes, I decided we should also collect acorns. I sent Elizabeth and the younger boys home with the cart while Fritz, Ernest, and I headed toward Acorn Wood. Fritz rode his onager, and Ernest carried his little pet, Knips.

As we gathered acorns, Knips suddenly darted into a bush, making an odd chattering noise. Ernest followed and shouted, “Come quickly! I’ve caught two birds and their eggs—ruffed grouse!”

We rushed over to find Ernest holding two struggling birds while using his foot to keep Knips from stealing their eggs. We tied the birds’ legs and carefully placed the eggs in Ernest’s hat, covering them with moss to keep them warm. Back home, Elizabeth skillfully coaxed the mother bird to accept the eggs again, and soon, we were rewarded with fifteen healthy Canadian chicks.

Franz, meanwhile, was thrilled with the long, broad leaves Ernest had gathered near the nest, using them for imaginary sword fights. But when he tired of that, he cut them into strips and braided a whip for Lightfoot, our onager.

The leaves’ strength intrigued me, so I examined them more closely. Their fibers were silky and durable. A realization struck me—this was New Zealand flax! Excited, I shared the discovery with Elizabeth.

“Bring me the leaves!” she exclaimed. “We won’t be wearing rags anymore. Just make me a spindle, and soon, you’ll have shirts, stockings, and trousers—all homemade!”

Amused by her enthusiasm, we sent Fritz and Ernest galloping off to fetch more. Soon, they returned with bundles of flax, depositing them proudly at Elizabeth’s feet.

“Perfect!” she declared. “Now, we must rett, card, spin, and weave it. Then, with needle and thread, I’ll make whatever clothes we need.”

We decided that Flamingo Marsh would be the best place to rett the flax. The next morning, we set out with the cart loaded high, Franz and Knips sitting cheerfully atop the bundles, while the rest of us followed with spades and hatchets.

I described to my boys as we went along the process of retting, and explained to them how steeping the flax leaves destroys the useless membrane, while the strong fibres remain.

As we worked on preparing beds for the flax and carefully laying it in place, we came across several flamingo nests. These structures, crafted from glutinous clay, were remarkably sturdy—resistant to both toppling and washing away. Each nest was shaped like a blunted cone, with its narrow end embedded in the ground and a broad platform at the top to hold the eggs. The mother flamingo would sit on the nest with her long legs dangling into the water on either side until her chicks hatched and were ready to swim.

We left the flax to steep for two weeks, then removed it, dried it under the sun, and stored it at Falconhurst for future use.

Every day, we loaded our cart with provisions to transport to our winter quarters. We gathered manioc, potatoes, coconuts, sweet acorns, and sugarcanes in large quantities, for the rumbling thunder, darkening skies, and sharp showers warned us that time was running short. Once our crops were sown, our animals sheltered, and our provisions stocked, the rain finally arrived in full force.

Remaining in our tree nest proved impossible. Dampness crept into every corner, forcing us to retreat into the trunk of the tree, where we stored the household items most vulnerable to moisture. The space quickly became cramped—animals and provisions below, while our beds and furniture crowded us above. Over time, through patience and careful rearranging, we carved out enough room to work and sleep. Slowly, we also grew accustomed to the constant sounds of the animals and the ever-present scent of the stables.

The fire we occasionally lit inside added another challenge. The smoke was unpleasant, but even that became bearable with time.

To free up space during the day, we let the captured animals that could fend for themselves roam outside, bringing them back under the sheltering roots at night. This routine meant that Fritz and I ventured out every evening, and every evening we returned drenched. Elizabeth, fearing these daily soakings would harm our health, devised a clever solution. She crafted waterproof suits by brushing several layers of caoutchouc over sturdy shirts, attaching hoods, and pairing them with duck trousers. Once completed, these outfits allowed us to endure even the heaviest downpours without suffering from the cold.

Despite our efforts to stay occupied, the long weeks of confinement dragged on. Our mornings were spent tending to the animals, while the boys entertained themselves with their pets and assisted me in making carding combs and a spindle for their mother. I fashioned the combs by arranging nails head-down on a strip of tin about an inch wide, securing them in place with solder, then folding the tin around them for reinforcement.

Evenings brought a different kind of routine. Under the soft glow of wax candles, I recorded our daily experiences in a journal. Elizabeth busied herself with her needlework, while Ernest sketched the birds, animals, and flowers he had encountered over the months. Meanwhile, Fritz and Jack took turns teaching little Franz how to read.

Week after week passed. The rain continued without pause, trapping us inside. The ceaseless downpour drummed above us, and a deep gloom settled over the landscape, making our imprisonment feel all the more endless.

Chapter 9

The strong winds finally stopped, the sun shone through the clouds, and the rain ended—spring had arrived. We felt great joy as we stepped outside, breathing in the fresh air, listening to the birds, and seeing our crops growing well.

Our first task was fixing our nest, which had been damaged by the storm. After repairing it, I helped Elizabeth start working with flax. I built a drying oven, a spinning wheel, and a reel so she and Franz could begin spinning thread.

Fritz and I then visited Tentholm, fearing the storm had ruined our supplies. Indeed, the tent had collapsed, food was soaked, and some gunpowder was destroyed. We

dried what we could in the sun. Our pinnace was safe, but our tub-boat was wrecked. Seeing the damage, I decided we needed stronger winter quarters. Fritz suggested digging a cave in the rock. It seemed like a huge task, but we started anyway.

After days of hard work, Jack suddenly shouted—his crowbar had broken through the rock! We discovered a hidden cavern, but when I tried to enter, I nearly fainted from the stale air. To make it safe, we set off rockets inside, stirring up the air and revealing a stunning sight—a vast crystal cave. The walls sparkled like diamonds, and the floor was dry. When I tasted the crystals, I realized it was a rock-salt cave, giving us an endless supply of salt.

Excited, we decided to make the cave our winter home. We cut windows into the rock, installed a door, and divided it into rooms—a living area, kitchen, workshop, stable, and storage space. We also built a proper chimney to avoid smoke issues.

During our trips to Tentholm, we discovered many turtles nesting on the shore. By flipping them onto their backs and tying them to stakes, we could keep fresh meat for weeks. We also found plenty of crabs, lobsters, and mussels.

One morning, we saw a strange sight at sea—a shimmering, rolling mass of water, with birds diving and shrieking above it. As it moved closer, we realized it was a huge shoal of herrings!

As soon as I mentioned the herring-bank, everyone bombarded me with questions.

“A herring-bank is a massive group of herrings swimming together,” I explained. “They form a huge moving mass, chased by big fish from below and birds from above. To escape, they swim to shallow waters where large fish can't follow—but humans still catch them by the millions.”

We quickly set up our fishery. Jack and Fritz scooped herrings from the water and tossed them ashore. We cleaned and salted them, layering them in barrels for storage. The next day, seals arrived, drawn by the fish scraps. Though not good for eating, we hunted some for their skins and fat, using the oil for lamps and soap.

While working, I noticed a type of gypsum in the salt, which I tested for making plaster. It worked well, so I sealed some herring barrels with it. We also built a smokehouse, stringing up fish to preserve them.

A month later, another large shoal of fish arrived—sturgeon, salmon, and trout. Jack eagerly shot an arrow into one, but it almost dragged him into the water! We managed to pull it ashore, and soon everyone joined the fishing frenzy.

Fritz harpooned a huge sturgeon, but it was too heavy to move. Elizabeth suggested using our buffalo, Storm, to haul it ashore. Once we had enough fish, we prepared them in different ways—salting, drying, and even making caviar from the sturgeon roe.

From the sturgeon’s bladders, I made isinglass, a clear material that could work as glass for our windows.

Meanwhile, our crops grew exceptionally well. Elizabeth had secretly sown seeds, and now we had wheat, barley, and peas sprouting everywhere. But birds were stealing our harvest! Fritz unleashed his eagle to catch a grouse, while Jack sent his jackal after quails. Both returned victorious.

At Falconhurst, Elizabeth treated us to a refreshing drink—corn stalk juice mixed with sugarcane. It was the perfect end to a busy season.

The next day, we prepared for a journey to set up a new farm away from Falconhurst. Our animals had grown too numerous, and we needed more space and food for them.

We loaded our large cart with a dozen fowls, four young pigs, two pairs of sheep, two pairs of goats, and three grouse—a cock and two hens. To pull the cart, we harnessed the buffalo, cow, and ass. Fritz led the way on his onager, and we took a new path through the woods and tall grasses toward Cape Disappointment.

After a long and tiring walk, we finally left the forest and stepped onto a vast plain covered in white flakes.

“Snow! Snow!” Franz shouted excitedly. “Mother, come play snowballs with me!”

It did look like snow, but Fritz quickly realized it was cotton. We gathered as much as we could and continued our journey.

We soon reached a beautiful hill with grass, shady trees, and a clear brook. It was the perfect spot for our new farm. We set up camp, and while Elizabeth prepared supper, Fritz and I began building a shed. We found a group of trees in a neat rectangle and used them as posts. With beams, bark, and creepers, we made a sturdy house with stalls for animals, perches for birds, and a small room for ourselves.

While collecting firewood, we discovered useful trees—the fir tree, which gives tar and turpentine, and the terebinth, which produces fragrant gum. Our goats also found cinnamon bark!

As we worked, we realized our food supplies were running low. I sent Jack and Fritz to fetch more while Ernest and I explored the area. We discovered a marsh full of wild rice and shot two grouse, which Fangs, our jackal, retrieved for us. Knips, our monkey, led us to delicious wild strawberries, which we gathered before moving on.

At the edge of a lovely lake, we saw elegant black swans gliding across the water. Their beauty was too precious to disturb, but Juno, our dog, had other ideas. She suddenly jumped in and pulled out a strange little creature—about the size of an otter, with webbed feet, small eyes, and a bill like a duck. It was unlike anything we had ever seen.

This peculiar creature amused us so much that we laughed heartily, though we were puzzled about its identity. Since we had no better name for it, we dubbed it the "Beast with a Bill." Ernest, eager to preserve it as a curiosity, volunteered to carry it back so we could have it stuffed.

After this, we returned to the farm, expecting Fritz and Jack to arrive soon with supplies. Sure enough, within a quarter of an hour, they rode in at a brisk pace and gave a detailed account of their mission. I was pleased to see they had carried out their orders intelligently, following my intentions in spirit rather than simply to the letter.

The next morning, after ensuring the animals at our new farm—now named *Woodlands*—were well provided for, we set out once more. Not long after entering a dense wood, we encountered a horde of apes, which immediately began pelting us with fir-cones and shrieking angrily. Their attack was so furious that we had to fire a couple of shots into the air to scatter them.

Fritz picked up some of their discarded cones and showed them to me. I recognized them as belonging to the stone-pine.

"Gather as many of these as you can, boys," I said. "The kernels taste like almonds and yield an excellent oil when pressed. These will be useful to us."

Continuing on, we climbed a hill that promised a fine view, and we were not disappointed. The landscape stretched before us in breathtaking beauty. The location was so appealing that I decided we should establish another settlement there, one we could visit from time to time. After some discussion, we set to work constructing a cottage similar to the one at *Woodlands*. Our prior experience allowed us to build it swiftly, and in a few days, it was complete. Ernest chose the name *Prospect Hill* for our new outpost.

My main purpose for this expedition was to find a suitable tree to fashion a canoe. Up until now, I had not found any that seemed appropriate. However, after much searching in the surrounding woods, I finally discovered two magnificent trees with smooth, flexible bark—resembling that of the birch.

We chose a tall, straight specimen and used our rope ladder to ascend. Fritz cut a circle around the trunk high up, while I did the same near the base. Then, we removed a narrow vertical strip to allow tools to be inserted. Carefully, we loosened the bark and managed to peel it away in one intact piece, as it was moist and pliable.

Laying the bark flat, we set to work shaping it into a boat. I cut long triangular sections from each end and overlapped the sloping edges, securing them with pegs and glue to form pointed tips. This process widened the middle too much, so we bound it with ropes to restore the proper shape and left it to dry in the sun.

At this stage, I needed more tools to complete the canoe, so I sent Fritz and Jack back to fetch the sledge, which now had wheels repurposed from gun carriages. While they were away, I found naturally curved wood that would serve as ribs to reinforce the boat’s sides.

The boys returned with the sledge, and after a night's rest, we loaded the canoe and all our supplies onto it. The return journey was arduous, especially through the dense woods. At one point, we passed a bamboo swamp where I cut a fine mast for our boat. Later, we reached a narrow defile in a rocky ridge, where a small torrent cascaded into a larger stream. Seeing an opportunity, we decided to fortify this

passage against wild animals.

We built a sturdy earth wall across the gorge and planted it thickly with prickly pear, Indian-fig, and thorny bushes, creating an almost impenetrable barrier. For our own use, we left a narrow winding path, well concealed by branches. To further secure the area, we constructed a light drawbridge over the stream. This natural stronghold would serve as a defensive retreat should we ever need one.

The fortification took two days to complete, after which we resumed our journey, stopping at Falconhurst for a well-earned rest before finally reaching Tentholm, utterly exhausted.

Recovering from our exertions, we then turned our full attention to finishing the canoe. Using the skills I had acquired in shipbuilding, we added a mast, sails, and paddles. For an extra precaution, I devised what I believed to be an ingenious addition: two large air-tight bags made from tarred and pitched dogfish skins. These floats were securely fastened to either side of the boat, ensuring it could neither capsize nor sink, regardless of the load.

At this point, I must mention something I omitted earlier. During the rainy season, our cow gave birth to a bull-calf. Knowing that managing a full-grown bull could become difficult, I pierced its nose early on and inserted a short stick, to be replaced with a ring later. The question arose—who would take charge of training him?

Fritz suggested training him as a defensive fighter, like the famed Hottentot war bulls that protected their herds against predators. Their fierce bulls could rally the herd, defend against lions, and even serve as vanguards in battle. However, I preferred a gentler approach.

Jack was already occupied with his buffalo and hunting jackal. Ernest had his monkey, while Fritz was content with his onager. Their mother, of course, claimed the old grey donkey. That left only little Franz.

"Would you like to care for him?" I asked.

Franz's face lit up. "Oh yes, Father! You once told me about Milo, the strong man who carried a calf every day until he could lift a full-grown ox! If I take care of this little fellow and train him well, maybe one day I'll be able to ride him!"

Amused by his enthusiasm and his interpretation of the story of Milo of Crotona, I agreed. "Very well, Franz, the calf is yours. Train him well, and we shall see about riding him one day. But remember, he will be a great bull long before you are nearly a man."

"What shall I call him?" Franz wondered aloud. "Listen to the noise he makes—kind of a low grumble. How about *Grumble*?"

"Grumble will do famously," I agreed.

"Grumble, Grumble," Franz chanted excitedly. "Oh, it beats your buffalo's name, Jack!"

We decided on names for our new puppies—Bruno and Fawn—settling an important household matter.

For two months, we worked hard on our salt-cave home, building walls to create rooms and stalls for our animals before the rainy season. We smoothed the floors with clay and gravel, then I made a rough carpet by soaking sailcloth in glue, adding wool and hair, and beating it flat. It became a decent floor covering for our sitting room.

One morning, I realized that the next day marked a full year since our shipwreck. Grateful for our survival, I decided we should celebrate with a Thanksgiving Day. At supper, I announced my plan, surprising everyone. The boys were excited and suggested marking time like Robinson Crusoe, by carving notches into a stick.

That night, the boys whispered about my “mysterious” plans. But to my surprise, they had their own! The next morning, I awoke to the sound of cannon fire. Fritz and Jack had set off a loud salute to start the day. Though startled at first, we forgave them when we saw their good intentions.

After a quiet morning of reflection and reading Psalms, we prepared for an afternoon of fun. The boys were thrilled when I announced a tournament of athletic contests, including shooting, running, climbing, and swimming.

The shooting contest started with a wooden kangaroo target. Fritz hit the head twice, Ernest hit the body once, and Jack—by sheer luck—shot off its ears, making everyone laugh. We then tested their aim with pistols and moving targets, followed by an archery contest, where even young Franz did well.

Next came the race to Falconhurst. Fritz and Jack sprinted ahead, while Ernest took a steadier pace. But before we expected anyone back, Jack suddenly appeared—riding his buffalo, with the donkey and onager galloping behind him! He admitted he had no chance of winning on foot, so he grabbed his mount instead. Shortly after, Ernest arrived, winning the race by two minutes.

For the climbing contest, Jack outshone his brothers, scaling trees like a monkey. With special shark-skin shoes, he climbed even the tallest palms with ease.

During the riding competition, Fritz and Jack showed great skill, but little Franz surprised us all. He led out Grumble, a young bull-calf, with a saddle and bridle he had prepared. With confidence, he performed tricks, making the bull walk, trot, and even gallop.

The final event was a swimming race. Fritz swam with effortless skill, Ernest struggled with too much effort, Jack was too reckless, and Franz showed promise for the future.

As the day ended, we returned home, where Elizabeth had prepared a prize-giving ceremony.

We found Elizabeth seated proudly, with the prizes arranged beside her. The boys marched in, pretending to play instruments like a band. They bowed before her, just like knights at a tournament, waiting for their rewards. She handed them out with words of praise and encouragement.

Fritz, overjoyed, won a double-barreled rifle and a fine hunting knife for his shooting and swimming skills. Ernest, the fastest runner, received a gold watch. Jack, the best climber and rider, got silver-plated spurs and a riding whip, which thrilled him. Little Franz, as the bull-trainer, received stirrups and a strong whip made of rhinoceros hide.

When the ceremony seemed over, I surprised Elizabeth with a beautiful workbox filled with everything she might need for sewing. She was delighted. The boys were so excited that they insisted on firing another round of gunpowder to end the day with a grand salute. Only then could we finally sit down for supper, have our evening prayer, and rest after our joyful celebration.

A few days later, I remembered that it was the season when large flocks of ortolans and wild pigeons arrived at Falconhurst to eat the ripe figs. Since last year’s preserved birds had been useful, I didn’t want to miss the chance to collect more. We put aside our building work and hurried to our treehouse, where we found the birds already feasting.

To save ammunition, I decided to make a sticky bird-lime, as I had read about people doing on the Palm Islands. They used fresh caoutchouc (natural rubber) mixed with oil to trap birds—even large ones like peacocks and turkeys. Excited for an adventure, Fritz and Jack galloped off on Storm and Lightfoot to gather caoutchouc. They also took calabashes to collect it. Meanwhile, we needed more containers, so we planned a trip to the Gourd-tree wood. Luckily, Elizabeth reminded me that she had planted gourds near the potato field.

To our delight, the plants were thriving, and we quickly gathered gourds and pumpkins of all sizes. Back home, we worked on making dishes, bowls, flasks, and spoons—better than ever before.

When Fritz and Jack returned, they brought more than just caoutchouc. Fritz had shot a crane, and they had caught what they called a "marmot," though I thought it looked more like a badger. They also gathered aniseed, turpentine, wax berries for candles, and a strange root they called the "monkey plant."

Curious, I asked why they named it that. Fritz explained that they had seen monkeys digging up and eating the roots in a hilarious way—yanking them with their teeth and flipping head over heels! They decided to try the roots themselves and found them delicious. I suspected the plant might be Chinese ginseng, a valuable root known for its health benefits. In China, it was so prized that only the emperor controlled its harvest.

Then Fritz described a troubling sight at Woodlands. The place was a mess—mud everywhere, fowls panicked, sheep and goats scattered, and furniture thrown around. The culprits were monkeys! They had likely squeezed inside through a small opening, unlocked the shutters, and wreaked havoc before heading back to the

woods for their feast of "ginseng."

While at Woodlands, Fritz and Jack spotted a massive flock of birds flying in formation. They were cranes, soaring high before suddenly descending to feast on the rice fields. The boys tried to approach quietly, but the cranes had guards who gave the alarm, and the whole flock took off in a rush.

Not wanting to miss a chance, Fritz released his trained eagle. The eagle soared up, then dove down like an arrow, catching one crane. The others fled in a panic. When Fritz reached the spot, the crane was already dead, but his eagle was unharmed and earned a small pigeon as a reward.

After gathering turpentine and a bag of rice, the boys returned home. At supper, we tasted the new root and found it delicious when boiled or stewed. However, if it truly was ginseng, we knew we should use it carefully, as it was a powerful tonic. We decided to transplant some of both roots into our kitchen garden.

Chapter 10

The next morning, we woke up early and got to work using a sticky mixture of oil and turpentine to catch birds. The boys brought sticks, which I covered with the glue and placed in the trees where the pigeons gathered. There were far more birds than last year, filling the branches. As they landed, they got stuck, and the more they struggled, the worse it became. Eventually, they fell to the ground, and we collected them before resetting the traps.

Jack found a special pigeon that looked different. Realizing it was from our own European breed, I carefully cleaned it and placed it in a cage. We caught several more, ensuring we would have pigeons for food in the future.

That evening, we went to a nearby forest, carrying torches, long sticks, and sacks. As darkness fell, we lit the torches, revealing countless birds roosting in the trees. Blinded by the light, they panicked and fell, allowing us to gather them easily. After filling our sacks, we returned home. The next day, we spent all our time preparing the birds for cooking.

Later, we planned a trip to Woodlands to stop the monkeys from raiding our farm again. We brought strong bird-lime, stakes, string, and bait. Setting up camp near the abandoned cottage, we created a trap—a sticky maze of strings and stakes with food to lure the monkeys.

At dawn, we heard the loud arrival of a huge troop of monkeys. They rushed in, grabbing food and climbing on the roof. But soon, they got stuck in the glue—on their paws, fur, and even faces. Some tried to help each other and got tangled together. One unlucky monkey got his head stuck in a gourd, blindly stumbling around.

As panic spread, we released the dogs, and a wild battle followed. By the end, over forty monkeys lay dead. Feeling sad about the destruction, we quickly cleaned up

the mess, buried the monkeys, and restored order to the farm. Finally, we gathered our scattered animals and hoped for peace at last.

While we were working, we kept hearing something heavy falling from a tree. When we checked, we found three beautiful birds stuck to the limed sticks we had placed. Two were Blue Molucca pigeons, and the third was a Nicobar pigeon with shiny green and blue feathers. I decided to tame them and make them the first residents of a new pigeon house near our cave.

Back at Falconhurst, we prepared to build the pigeon house at Tentholm. We carved a large space into the rock, added perches and nests, and built a wooden front with small openings for the birds to come and go. Once it was ready, I used a trick pigeon dealers use—I mixed clay, aniseed, and salt to attract more birds. I also made aniseed oil and rubbed it around the entrance to spread the scent.

After a few days, the pigeons were settled in, and early one morning, I let them fly free. At first, they stayed close, but soon, the three blue pigeons suddenly took off toward Falconhurst. We feared they were gone for good.

The next day, however, Jack came running excitedly—one of the blue pigeons had returned, and it had brought a wild mate! Soon after, the second blue pigeon arrived with a mate of its own. We watched happily as they settled into their new home, knowing that soon, our pigeon family would grow.

The third and most handsome pigeon was the last to return. Perhaps he had trouble finding a mate as beautiful as himself. The boys expected his return and called the pair “Mr. and Mrs. Nicobar.”

One evening, Franz and his mother went to gather food, but Franz ran back excitedly, urging us to come quickly. Rushing outside, we saw the Nicobar pigeon had indeed returned—with a lovely mate! Encouraged by the other birds, they soon settled in and started building nests.

While watching them, I noticed a soft, grey moss among their nesting materials. I realized it was similar to one used in the West Indies for stuffing mattresses. Elizabeth was thrilled, imagining cushions, pillows, and more if we gathered enough.

The pigeons also led us to a new discovery—nutmegs! We planted them in our orchard, hopeful they would grow.

Not long after, Jack got himself into trouble. He had gone alone to collect reeds for basket-making but ended up stuck in a swamp, covered in mud and slime. He struggled to get out but eventually used a bundle of reeds for support. His loyal dog, Fangs, helped by barking loudly and finally dragging him to safety when Jack grabbed his tail.

Despite the mishap, Jack brought back fine reeds, which I decided to use for a special project—a loom for Elizabeth, who knew how to weave. The boys helped cut pieces without knowing their purpose, joking about my “giant toothpicks.” When I finally revealed the loom, Elizabeth was overjoyed, and the children loved watching

her “play” it.

Around the same time, our onager gave birth to a strong little foal, which we named Swift, hoping to train him for riding.

Preparing for the rainy season, I built an aqueduct to bring fresh water close to our cave. Using bamboo pipes and a large cask as a reservoir, I made fetching water much easier. Elizabeth was so pleased, she joked that it was as wonderful as a grand fountain.

As the storms grew stronger, we hurried to store food—potatoes, rice, fruit, and grains—filling every sack, barrel, and container we could find. We even dismantled our raft to use its tubs for storage.

With twelve weeks of bad weather ahead, we moved some animals into the salt cave with us. The boys rode to Falconhurst often to check on things. To improve our cave’s lighting, I built a tall bamboo pole reaching the ceiling, where Jack installed a pulley. We used it to hoist a ship’s lantern, filling the cave with much-needed light.

Now, settled indoors for the season, we prepared for the long weeks ahead.

We spent several days setting up our home. Ernest and Franz arranged the library, Jack and his mother organized the sitting room and kitchen, while Fritz and I handled the workshop, setting up tools and a forge.

Even after the main tasks, there was always more to do—shelves, tables, cupboards, and endless small improvements. Keeping busy kept our minds and bodies strong, and our rocky home transformed. A wide porch with a bamboo verandah made it more comfortable.

The library was a treasure trove of books—history, science, fiction, maps, and globes. We decided to study languages: German and French for all, English and Dutch for the older boys, Latin for Ernest, Spanish for Jack, and Malay for me. Our home soon buzzed with different languages, making learning fun.

We explored unopened crates, finding furniture, clocks, and even a music box, turning our cave home—now named Rockburg—into a palace. The rainy season passed quickly, and when the storms cleared, we eagerly set out on an adventure.

Fritz spotted something near Flamingo Marsh. Through the telescope, it looked like an overturned boat, but upon closer inspection, it was a beached whale. We planned to return later to extract oil but spent the morning collecting beautiful shells and coral.

As we rowed back, Jack asked about coral, and I explained its importance in nature and trade. The trip inspired us to start a natural history museum. Back home, Elizabeth and Franz wanted to join the whale expedition. We packed supplies and prepared barrels to collect as much oil as possible, ready for another adventure.

Knives, hatchets, and the boys' climbing buskins, were put on board, and we set forth, the labour of the oar being greater than ever, now that our freight was so much

increased.

The sea being calm, and the tide suiting better, we found it easy to land close to the whale; my first care was to place the boat, as well as the casks, in perfect security, after which we proceeded to a close inspection of our prize.

Its enormous size quite startled Elizabeth and little boy; the length being from sixty to sixty-five feet, and the girth between thirty and forty, while the weight could not have been less than 50,000 lbs.

The color was a uniform velvety black, and the enormous head about one-third of the length of the entire hulk, the eyes quite small, not much larger than those of an ox, and the ears almost undiscernable.

The jaw opened very far back, and was nearly sixteen feet in length, the most curious part of its structure being the remarkable substance known as whalebone, masses of which appeared all along the jaws, solid at the base, and splitting into a sort of fringe at the extremity. This arrangement is for the purpose of aiding the whale in procuring its food, and separating it from the water.

The whale's tongue was huge, soft, and full of oil, but its throat was surprisingly small—only about two inches wide.

Fritz was amazed. "How does it eat?" he asked.

I explained, "Whales don’t chew. They swim through schools of tiny sea creatures with their mouths open, scooping them up. Then, they push out the water through their baleen plates, trapping the food inside to swallow later. Whales breathe through blowholes on top of their heads, and when they exhale, they spray water and air high into the sky."

Then it was time to get to work. Fritz and Jack climbed onto the slippery whale to cut out its baleen, while Ernest cut slabs of blubber, and Elizabeth and Franz helped pack it into barrels.

Soon, flocks of hungry birds surrounded us, screeching and diving for scraps. We tried to shoo them away, but they kept coming. Elizabeth gathered a few dead ones for their feathers.

Before leaving, I cut off a thick strip of whale skin, knowing it could be useful for making ropes and harnesses. I also took part of the gums, where the baleen was rooted, since I had read that it was considered a delicacy. The boys thought the tongue might be tasty too, but I was more interested in the oil it contained.

We loaded our boat and rushed home to wash off the stink.

At dawn, we returned for a final, messier task—harvesting the whale’s intestines. I planned to use the largest ones as oil storage. The boys worked hard without complaint, though later they wondered why I even wanted them.

"In places without wood for barrels or hemp for ropes, people use whale intestines for containers and sinews for thread," I explained.

After a long, filthy day, we were relieved to head home, clean up, and enjoy a well-earned rest.

Chapter 11

The next morning, we got up at sunrise to finish the messy job. First, we built a rough stand to press the blubber, letting the best oil drip into containers. Then, we boiled the blubber over a fire and strained it to get clean oil, which we stored away. The awful smell made the work unpleasant, especially for Elizabeth, but she stayed cheerful. She suggested using the new island as a place for oil-making, safe from animals. We all agreed but decided to wait until the whale carcass had decayed.

Later, I worked on a rowing machine for our boat, using an iron bar and paddles. It worked surprisingly well, and when Fritz and I tested it, the family cheered. We planned a trip the next day to Cape Disappointment and Prospect Hill.

Setting off in the boat, we enjoyed the smooth sea and lovely scenery. We collected coconuts and young plants before reaching our small farm, where the animals had forgotten us and were afraid. The boys had to catch and tie the goats before milking them, and Elizabeth easily gathered chickens.

For lunch, we tried whale's tongue, but it tasted terrible, so we fed it to our dog, Fangs. Luckily, we had plenty of other food, and fresh coconuts and goat's milk put everyone in a good mood.

Before heading home, I wanted to explore beyond Cape Disappointment, but hidden reefs forced us to turn back. On Whale Island, we planted sugar cane, but the boys got distracted looking for shells. Suddenly, Jack shouted that he had found a huge skeleton, which he thought was a mammoth. It turned out to be the whale's remains.

At the same time, Ernest found a giant turtle trying to escape into the sea. We managed to flip it over and decided to take it back. I tied it to a floating barrel, and as it swam, it pulled our boat along. The boys found this hilarious, comparing me to Neptune in his sea chariot.

Once home, we used the turtle's shell for a water trough and salted its meat for future meals. I wanted to start farming before the rainy season, but our animals weren't trained to plow, so I worked on a loom instead. Using isinglass for windows and making harnesses for the animals, we kept busy.

As herring and other fish arrived, we made the most of the fishing season. Meanwhile, the boys wanted another hunting trip, but first, we needed baskets. After some practice, we made a large one with handles. This gave Fritz an idea—why not make a comfortable seat for their mother?

Excited, the boys attached a basket to our bull and buffalo and took turns riding in it. At first, it was smooth, but soon they picked up speed, making the basket shake wildly. Poor Ernest, who was riding inside, yelled for them to stop, but his brothers laughed and kept going, having a great time.

We couldn't help but laugh—the scene was so silly! But Ernest got angry at his brothers. They argued, and a fight almost broke out. I stepped in, reminding them that jokes taken too far can cause real problems. They calmed down, and Ernest even helped unharness the animals, giving them some salt and barley as a reward. He joked that they needed more practice carrying the palanquin.

Later, I sat with Elizabeth and Fritz under the verandah, making wicker baskets and chatting. Suddenly, Fritz stood up and stared into the distance.

"Father, I see something strange!" he said. "It looks like a coiled rope, but then it rises like a mast and moves again!"

Elizabeth grew frightened. She gathered the other boys and took them inside the cave, locking the entrances and preparing their guns. Fritz and I stayed outside. I used my spyglass and gasped.

"It's an enormous snake!" I cried. "It’s heading straight for the bridge!"

"Can we fight it, Father?" Fritz asked bravely.

"Only if we’re very careful," I warned. "It’s too big and strong. We’ll stay safe inside and wait for the right moment to attack."

Fritz hurried inside to help prepare the guns while I watched the snake slither closer. It was huge, lifting its head high and scanning for prey. As it crossed the bridge, I ran inside to join my family. We hid at the upper windows, hearts pounding, as the snake moved uncertainly in front of the cave.

Suddenly, unable to hold back, the boys fired their guns— even their mother shot! But the bullets didn’t harm it. Fritz and I aimed more carefully, but the snake kept moving, slipping into the marsh and disappearing.

We all sighed in relief. It had been a terrifying moment, but we were safe. I recognized it as a giant boa constrictor—over thirty feet long! We shuddered at the thought but were grateful it was gone... for now.

I told the children that in South America, this giant snake is called "Boaguacu." The name "boa constrictor" comes from how it kills by squeezing its prey.

The snake’s presence made me very uneasy, so I ordered everyone to stay inside. For three days, we hardly left the house, afraid the boa was still hiding in the reeds. Our geese and ducks were restless, confirming our fears. Eventually, they flew to Shark’s Island for safety.

We couldn't stay trapped forever, but attacking the snake in the swamp was too dangerous. The situation changed because of our donkey, Grizzle. On the third day, while preparing to move our animals across the river, Grizzle broke free, ran straight into the marsh—and into the boa's jaws.

The snake struck with lightning speed, coiling around poor Grizzle, squeezing him

tighter and tighter. We watched in horror as the donkey was crushed and swallowed whole—a process that took several hours. Elizabeth and Franz fled the awful sight, but the rest of us watched, knowing this was our chance to kill the boa.

As soon as it finished swallowing, the snake lay still, too full to move. This was our moment. With our guns ready, Fritz and I crept closer and fired at its head. The bullets hit their mark, but the snake still twitched. We shot again. At last, it was dead.

Jack, wanting some glory, fired a final shot—only to be knocked over by the snake's twitching tail!

Elizabeth, relieved, joined us. We thanked God for our victory. Fritz suggested stuffing the snake as a trophy, while Franz asked if people ate snakes. I explained that some, like rattlesnakes, are safe to eat and even make a good soup.

As we rested, I told the boys about snake-charmers in India, who handle deadly cobras, and about rattlesnakes, which warn with a rattle before they strike. I also explained how venom works and that some plants can help treat snakebites.

With the boa dead, our home was safe again.

In India, Ceylon, and parts of Africa, people use a "snake-stone" to treat cobra bites. This small black stone sticks to the wound, absorbing venom, and falls off when the danger has passed.

"I hope we never talk about snakes again!" I said. "But first, Ernest, can you write an epitaph for poor Grizzle?"

Ernest thought and then recited:

"Here lies Grizzle, loyal and brave,
Lost to a serpent, yet our lives he saved."

We cheered, carved his words into a stone, and buried Grizzle. Afterward, we dragged the giant snake away from Rockburg, skinned it, and displayed it in our museum with a sign:

NO DONKEYS ALLOWED

The joke made us all laugh!

Chapter 12

Though the danger seemed over, I feared more snakes. We carefully explored the swamp and found no other threats, but we discovered a beautiful cave with clear water and white clay—perfect for washing clothes.

Inside the cave, Fritz and I found sparkling rocks. He thought they were salt, but I believed they were rock crystal. Fritz broke a piece, dulling its shine in the process.

Suddenly, Jack ran up, panicked—he thought we'd disappeared! Ernest, nearby, was proudly showing off a "serpent" he had shot. It turned out to be a large eel, and we had it for dinner that night.

Still uneasy, we planned a longer trip. We packed supplies and rode in a cart pulled by our oxen, accompanied by our dogs and jackal. Along the way, we checked Falconhurst and Woodlands, where everything was peaceful.

The next day, Franz and I explored the lake. He was eager to shoot something and spotted a strange bird making a deep booming sound. I explained it was a bittern, a bird that makes a sound like an ox.

Suddenly, Franz shot something—but not the bird! It was a capybara, a large water-loving animal. He was thrilled to have found a "new creature." Carrying it home was difficult, but Bruno, our dog, helped by carrying it on his back.

Back at camp, Ernest surprised us with a pile of dead rats. He had discovered their underground nests and, with the help of Knips, our monkey, fought off a swarm of them. Their skins would make excellent caps.

That evening, Jack and Fritz returned with eggs and two wild birds. We also found some strange green apples. To test if they were safe, we let Knips try one first. He happily munched away, so we all joined in!

We set out again to search for any sign of the boa constrictor. In the sugar-cane fields, our dogs suddenly started barking. A herd of peccaries—wild pigs—burst from the thicket. We shot several and quickly removed their scent glands, which would otherwise ruin the meat.

At our camp, we built a smokehouse to cure the meat. Meanwhile, the boys wanted to try an island-style roast. They dug a pit, heated stones, and buried a stuffed pig wrapped in leaves. Hours later, we uncovered it, revealing perfectly roasted meat. Even Mother, usually skeptical of our cooking, approved!

During our time here, we gathered useful materials, including giant bamboo—strong and perfect for making containers, pipes, and even rafts. Though we found no trace of the snake, we gained many valuable supplies for our home.

We set up camp in a wooded area near the rocky pass, making sure it was safe from dangerous animals. The only creatures we found were wild cats, which quickly ran away. After a hot and tiring day, we rested until evening, then pitched our tent and prepared for the next day’s journey beyond the pass.

Early in the morning, I left with my three eldest sons and most of our dogs, while Elizabeth and our youngest, Franz, stayed at camp. We expected the pass to be blocked by thorny bushes, but it had been broken down—likely by a giant snake or a herd of peccaries. Seeing the damage, we decided to reinforce the barricade later.

Once through the pass, we saw rolling hills, green valleys, and a vast plain stretching toward distant mountains. Crossing a river, we filled our flasks, which turned out to be a good idea as the land soon became dry and desert-like. The boys grumbled about the harsh landscape, but I encouraged them to look forward to the mountains

ahead.

We rested under a rock and ate, when suddenly our monkey, Knips, ran off, followed by the dogs. The boys later found him at a small water pool, which we were happy to discover. Meanwhile, Fritz spotted something in the distance—at first, he thought they were horsemen, but through the spyglass, I identified them as ostriches.

Excited, we planned a way to catch one. As the birds got closer, we stayed hidden, but the dogs couldn't contain their excitement and charged at them. The startled ostriches ran off, but we released Fritz's trained eagle, which swiftly brought down the large male.

The boys were amazed by the ostrich's size, and Fritz wished we could have captured it alive. Ernest asked what ostriches eat in the desert, and I explained that they survive on wild melons, grasses, and grains. Just then, Jack started waving excitedly—he had found something!

The boy ran towards us, shouting, "Eggs, Father! Ostrich eggs! A huge nest full—come quickly!"

We rushed over and found more than twenty large eggs. They were too heavy to carry all at once, so we marked the spot to find it later. Each egg weighed about three pounds, making them hard to carry. To help, I tied two eggs to a flexible stick and placed it over Jack's shoulder like a milkmaid's yoke.

As we walked, we reached a marshy area with footprints of buffaloes, antelopes, and wild horses, but no sign of snakes. We stopped for a rest when Jack's pet, Fangs, dug something from the mud. At first, Jack thought it was a root, but when I washed it, we saw it was a tiny tortoise!

Moving on, we entered a beautiful green valley, which we named Glen Verdant. Herds of animals grazed in the distance but ran off when our dogs got too close. Following the valley's twists and turns, we realized we had returned near Jackal Cave, where we once found Fangs as a cub.

Suddenly, Ernest ran ahead but soon came back, pale and terrified. "A bear, Father! A bear is chasing me!" he cried. As he clung to me in fear, I reassured him, then prepared for battle. Two enormous bears emerged, and Fritz and I fired at them. Though wounded, the bears fought back fiercely, but our dogs kept them distracted. Finally, we shot again at close range, killing them both.

Relieved, we examined the bears and decided to skin them for rugs. It was getting late, so we dragged their bodies into the cave for safekeeping and hid the ostrich eggs in the sand.

Back at our tent, Elizabeth told us about her day. She and Franz had found white clay for pottery, built a hearth, and gathered materials for our shelter. In the morning, I tested the clay by firing some in the coals—it was excellent but needed adjustments

to bake properly.

Returning to the bears' cave, Fritz spotted a group of wild turkeys gathered around the entrance, but one large bird kept chasing them away. Suddenly, a huge shadow passed overhead—Fritz fired, and an enormous condor crashed onto the rocks, its wings stretching over eleven feet!

Inside the cave, we found the bears' bodies mostly untouched, just their tongues and eyes eaten by scavengers. We skinned them, cut the meat into hams, and saved the fat for cooking. The remains were left for birds and insects, which cleaned the bones for our collection.

While working, I discovered a climbing plant with spicy-smelling leaves and small fruit—wild pepper! It was a wonderful find, perfect for seasoning our meals.

The boys gathered plenty of pepper berries. The red ones were soaked in saltwater, then washed, rubbed, and dried in the sun until they turned white. The green ones only needed sun-drying for a few days. This gave us enough black and white pepper to last a long time. I also took young pepper plants to grow at Rockburg and other settlements, along with some bean-like roots.

While smoking the bear meat, we kept busy preparing to stuff the condor and vulture. The boys grew restless, so I allowed them to take a short trip alone. Fritz, as the eldest, was in charge, while Ernest chose to stay with us. Even little Franz was eager to go, so I let him join.

I wanted my sons to be independent, knowing they might one day need to fend for themselves. They were well-armed, mounted on their cattle, and accompanied by two dogs. With my blessing, they set off.

Back at camp, we stayed occupied. Elizabeth tended the smoking meat, Ernest carved decorative ostrich egg cups, and I explored the cave. I discovered walls of talc mixed with asbestos and mica. Splitting a large block, I found clear sheets—perfect for window panes. Elizabeth was thrilled, as she had long missed having real windows.

Chapter 13

As evening came, the smell of cooking bear paws filled the air. We sat around the fire, waiting for our young explorers to return.

At last, we heard hoofbeats, and the boys rode into camp at a fast trot, cheering as they arrived. They jumped off their horses, freed the animals, and excitedly showed us what they had found. Franz and Jack each carried a young antelope tied on their backs, while Fritz had a strange-looking bag that seemed to hold something alive.

"Father, hunting is amazing!" Jack shouted. "Storm and Grumble ran so fast, and we caught these little antelopes easily!"

"Yes, and Fritz found two Angora rabbits," Franz added. "Oh, and a clever bird led us to a bees' nest full of honey!"

"The most important thing," Fritz interrupted, "is that we drove a whole herd of antelopes into our land. They are now ours to hunt or tame!"

I praised them for their efforts but reminded them that the best thing was that they returned safely. Then, they eagerly told their adventure.

They had ridden through the valley at full speed, slowing down only when they spotted two herds of animals grazing near a stream. Instead of hunting, they decided to drive the larger herd into our land. With the help of their dogs, they guided the antelopes through the Gap. To stop them from escaping, they hung a line with feathers and cloth, which danced in the wind. Fritz had read that Hottentots used this trick to keep antelopes from running away.

I congratulated them but warned that the rabbits could quickly become a problem. Fritz suggested keeping them on Whale Island, where they wouldn’t bother us. His eagle had caught them for him—one as a reward, and two still alive.

Jack then shared his adventure. While hunting, he and the dogs chased the little antelopes until they were too tired to run. Just as they were celebrating, a cuckoo bird distracted them by making noises and leading them far from their path. Franz thought it was a magical bird, but Fritz realized it was showing them the way to honey. Excited, Jack threw some lit matches into the bees' nest, hoping to collect honey easily. Instead, the bees swarmed and stung him all over. He ran back to camp, yelling for his mother to help.

After supper, which included delicious bear paws, we lit our watch-fire and went to sleep.

The next day, we set out on another trip, visiting the euphorbia trees to collect poisonous gum. I explained that it could be used to keep insects away from animal skins or even to poison troublesome apes.

As we rode, four ostriches suddenly ran past. Fritz released his trained eagle, which attacked the leader, slowing it down. Jack quickly threw his lasso, catching the bird. However, it fought back fiercely, kicking with great force. To calm it, I covered its head with my coat. Once it was blind, it stopped struggling, and we secured it between our horses to take home.

When we reached camp, Elizabeth was shocked. "Do we really need another animal to feed?" she asked.

Jack proudly claimed the ostrich as his own, saying he would train it as his new riding animal. The next day, we set off for home. Along the way, we built a stronger fence to keep the antelopes inside our land and gathered more supplies, including seeds and clay for making pottery.

That night, we rested at Woodlands. In the morning, we checked on our farm animals. Our pigs, goats, and chickens had multiplied, and the antelopes we had captured seemed happy in their new home. Eager to return, we packed up and

continued our journey to Rockburg.

At the farm, we fixed the animals' stalls to protect them from wild animals and made our shelter more comfortable. Once everything was ready, we rested and then traveled back to Rockburg the next morning.

By midday, we were home. We aired out the house, settled the animals, and unpacked our supplies. I focused on the ostrich, tying it between two bamboo posts. Then, I set up a warm stove to try hatching the eggs we had brought.

The next morning, Fritz and I took the boat to Whale Island to release the Angora rabbits, then to Shark Island to set free the small antelopes. Afterward, we hurried back to cure the bear skins and store our provisions. On the way, we met Jack carrying a huge eel, which he and Ernest had caught. It made a delicious meal.

At home, I planted vanilla, pepper, and other climbing plants around the verandah for shade. I also built hen coops to protect our chicks from Knips and Fangs, whose curiosity might lead to trouble. Ernest’s rat-skins smelled so bad that we had to hang them outside, and Jack kept pretending to faint whenever he passed by.

We spent two days working on the house and then turned to our crops, planting wheat, barley, and maize. It was hard work, and we truly understood the saying, "By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your bread."

Meanwhile, I tried taming the ostrich. At first, he refused food, but Elizabeth fed him maize flour balls, and he finally ate. Over a month, he became obedient, and I designed a special bridle using blinkers to control his direction. Soon, Jack was racing between Rockburg and Falconhurst on the swift bird, which he named Hurricane.

Our crops were growing well, and Fritz was thrilled to find three baby ostriches hatched. Sadly, they didn’t survive. I then worked on the bear skins, using honey-water to tan them. This gave me an idea to make a sweet drink like mead, which Elizabeth loved.

With winter approaching, I tackled smaller projects. The boys wanted hats, so I made a red felt cap from rat-skins and rubber, which Elizabeth decorated for Franz. Everyone wanted one, so I asked them to catch water rats for more material.

I also tried making porcelain, shaping dishes and cups from pipe-clay and talc. Though some cracked, I finally produced a simple tea set. It wasn’t perfect, but when filled with fresh fruit and warm tea, it made our meals feel special.

Chapter 14

Just as I finished my pottery, dark clouds filled the sky, bringing heavy storms and marking the start of the rainy season. We had to stay indoors, and despite our spacious home and many activities, time dragged on. Even occasional rides in the rain did little to lift our spirits.

Noticing this, Fritz suggested we build a canoe—something light and fast for exploring the water. Everyone was excited except for Elizabeth, who worried about safety. I reassured her that our canoe would be strong and well-made, inspired by the Greenland kayak.

Using whalebone and bamboo, we built the frame and covered it with seal skin, making it completely waterproof. The finished canoe was so light it could be lifted with one hand and glided effortlessly on the water. Fritz was eager to try it, but his mother insisted on making him a special floating vest in case of accidents. The vest, made of rubber-lined fabric, could be inflated with air to keep him afloat.

Once the rain cleared, Fritz tested the vest by paddling across the bay. His brothers laughed at his odd outfit but soon wanted their own. While on Shark Island, we checked on the antelopes we had sheltered and collected seashells and seaweed. Elizabeth mysteriously dried some leaves from the seaweed, refusing to reveal her purpose.

Days later, after a long expedition, we returned home to find Elizabeth offering a delicious jelly. To our surprise, it was made from the seaweed leaves. She had learned the recipe in Cape Town—soaking the leaves for a week, then boiling them with orange juice, citron, and sugar. Delighted, we decided to collect more.

On another trip, we checked on our crops and saw the rapid growth of our plants. We also found a fresh spring and signs of thriving wildlife. However, on Whale Island, rabbits had damaged many trees, so we built protective hedges. I also collected whale bones, hoping to use them for a crushing machine.

One day, I discovered that pigs had ruined our cassava field. I tracked them down and shot two, bringing them home for supper. Meanwhile, the boys returned from a hunting trip, loaded with game—including birds, a kangaroo, and a monkey. Jack, who had been riding his ostrich at full speed, excitedly asked me to make him a mask with glass eyes to protect him from the wind. I told him he could make it himself!

As we enjoyed a meal of roast pig, Fritz shared stories of their trip. The boys had set traps near Woodlands, catching musk-rats, beaver rats, and even a platypus. Jack proudly showed off a kangaroo he had chased on horseback.

Fritz brought back cinnamon, sweet-apple cuttings, and a special thistle used for making wool. We planned to prepare everything the next day but ended with evening prayers.

Skinning the animals was tough, so I used a syringe from the ship’s supplies to pump air under the skin, making it much easier. The boys were amazed, and we finished in two days.

Next, we needed wooden blocks for a crushing machine, so we cut down a tree. After three days of hard work, we had all the materials.

Meanwhile, our chickens returned from the fields full, showing that our grain was ready to harvest. Elizabeth worried about the extra work, but we quickly reaped it,

threshed it with animals, and let the wind winnow it. The harvest was plentiful, much more than we had planted.

During fishing season, we pickled herring and hunted seals for their useful skins. I planned to use them to waterproof our small canoe. With these tasks done, we were ready for the next adventure.

Chapter 15

The day finally came for Fritz to test his small canoe. Dressed in a special outfit, he squeezed into the boat, puffing himself up until he looked quite funny. Everyone laughed, even his mother, who had designed the outfit.

I prepared another boat in case he needed help. Fritz launched his canoe and glided over the water, paddling quickly, turning sharply, and even tipping sideways without sinking. Feeling confident, he entered the strong current of the Jackal River and was carried out to sea.

Worried, I jumped into the boat with Ernest and Jack to chase after him. Elizabeth anxiously urged us to go faster. We finally spotted a puff of smoke in the distance—Fritz's signal. We fired a shot in response and soon heard his cheerful call.

When we reached him, Fritz excitedly showed us a young walrus he had harpooned. I was shocked but relieved he was safe. He explained that the current had pulled him too far, and when he saw a herd of walruses, he couldn't resist hunting one. After a chase, he harpooned it twice, and it finally died near the rocks. To be safe, he had also fired his pistol before getting close.

I warned him about the dangers of walruses, but I was grateful he was unharmed. The animal was too heavy to move, so Fritz asked to take the head with its large, white tusks. Jack was excited about mounting it on the canoe, while Ernest joked about the smell. Fritz promised to clean and dry it properly.

As we worked, Fritz suggested adding a hunting knife, hatchet, and a compass to his canoe for future trips. I agreed.

With the task done, I offered to take Fritz and his canoe in our boat, but he insisted on paddling back alone to surprise his mother. He sped off across the water just as dark clouds gathered.

A powerful storm struck, and Fritz was out of sight. Huge waves crashed over our boat, so we strapped ourselves in to avoid being washed overboard. A fierce storm struck, with heavy rain, strong winds, and lightning flashing across the sky. Our boat was tossed by the waves, but it stayed afloat. My biggest fear was for Fritz, who had gone ahead alone. I feared the worst and prayed for his safety.

When we reached the bay, we were overjoyed to find Fritz safe with his mother, praying for our return. Reunited, we gave thanks and dried off at home, sharing stories of the storm. The walrus head was carefully cleaned and mounted on Fritz's

canoe, making it look impressive.

The storm had damaged crops, broken our bridge, and filled the streams with water. While repairing things, we found red berries that smelled like cloves. After tasting them (and spitting them out in disgust), we realized they were indeed cloves—useful for cooking.

Fishing season brought plenty of salmon, sturgeon, and herring. Jack suggested tying live fish in the bay to keep them fresh, but we had to explain why that wouldn’t work!

After weeks of routine work, the boys grew restless. Fritz suggested a trip to gather bamboo and clay. I agreed, so Fritz, Jack, and Franz set off while Ernest stayed to help build a sugar mill.

Before leaving, Fritz made pemmican—dried and pounded bear meat—for the journey. Jack secretly packed some pigeons in case the pemmican wasn’t tasty.

The boys left in high spirits, riding off with the dogs following. That evening, as we rested, Ernest hinted he might have news soon. Just then, a pigeon arrived at our dovecote. Ernest checked and returned with a small note. “News, father! The latest by pigeon post!”

"Well done, boys! What a great idea!" I said, taking the note and reading:

"Dear Parents and Ernest,
A hyena killed a ram and two lambs. The dogs attacked it, and Franz shot it. It's dead and skinned. The pemmican isn't great, but we're fine.
Love, Fritz."

"What an exciting letter!" I laughed. "When's the next message, Ernest?"

"Tonight, I hope," he replied. Their mother, however, sighed, preferring to hear everything only once they were safely home.

The boys had quite the adventure. As they reached Woodlands, they heard strange laughter. The oxen panicked, the dogs growled, and Jack’s ostrich bolted. Franz crept forward and spotted a huge hyena spinning and jumping around a dead lamb, making eerie laughing sounds. He waited for the right moment, then fired both barrels, wounding it. Fritz arrived just in time to help, and with the dogs' help, they finished off the beast.

After tending to their injured dogs, they skinned the hyena and sent a pigeon home with news. The next day, they explored Wood Lake, marking safe paths with bamboo poles. They caught three black swans and a heron, using Fritz’s eagle to capture it.

While exploring, they were startled by a large animal snorting through the reeds—it was a tapir! It disappeared before they could react. Later, they found cranes and captured some using a clever birdlime trick.

They lived comfortably at Woodlands, feasting on peccary ham, cassava bread, fruit, and baked potatoes. The pemmican, however, was a failure—even the dogs barely

touched it!

Their next stop was Prospect Hill. As they entered a pine forest, mischievous monkeys bombarded them with pinecones. After scaring them off with gunshots, they reached the cottage—only to find it ruined by apes. Determined to prevent further destruction, Fritz set a trap using poisoned food placed high in the trees.

That night, the peaceful silence was shattered by eerie cries from the forest—snarling, howling, and distant roars. Jackals howled, the dogs barked, and even lions and elephants seemed to join in. It was a night they would never forget.

We tried to sleep, hoping to forget the frightening noises of the forest. But soon, horrible cries filled the night—the poisoned monkeys were suffering. Our dogs barked endlessly, and none of us slept until morning.

When we finally rose, we found the ground covered in dead monkeys and baboons. It was a terrible sight. I regretted using the poison. We quickly buried some bodies and threw the rest into the sea before leaving for the Gap.

That evening, a pigeon arrived at Rockburg with a worrying message:

"The barricade at the Gap is broken. Everything is destroyed up to the sugar fields. Huge footprints everywhere. The hut is in ruins. We are safe, but we need you, Father!"

Without delay, I saddled Swift and rode off in the moonlight, instructing Ernest to bring his mother and supplies at dawn. The boys were relieved when I arrived earlier than expected.

By morning, I inspected the damage. The barricade was destroyed, trees stripped bare, and the sugar-cane fields ruined. Massive footprints confirmed an elephant invasion. Judging by the number of tracks, a whole herd had passed through. Fortunately, the tracks led away, meaning the elephants had moved on.

That night, we sat by a large fire, discussing ways to protect our land. The boys eagerly shared their adventures, and we stayed up, more interested in talking than sleeping.

The next day, Elizabeth and Ernest arrived. She was relieved the boys were safe and did not seem too concerned about the ruined fields. We got to work immediately, spending a month rebuilding the barricade, making it stronger than before to keep elephants out.

Since our small tent was not suitable for a long stay, we built a treehouse. Using four sturdy trees that formed a square, we constructed a raised platform about twenty feet high. The walls were made of cane, and the roof was covered with bark to keep out rain. A simple wooden plank with steps served as a staircase, and we built sheds below for our animals. To add charm, we decorated the roof in a style inspired by Chinese and Japanese designs. It was a cool, comfortable, and picturesque home.

The birds the boys had collected seemed to thrive in their new shelter. Even the black swans and cranes soon became tame. Exploring the area, Fritz discovered bananas and cacao beans. The bananas were mushy and unappealing, but Elizabeth insisted on planting them, hoping they could be made into preserves. She was also excited about the cacao, imagining homemade chocolate in the future.

Before we left for Rockburg, Fritz made another trip upriver in his canoe, bringing back banana plants and cacao fruit. He also carried a mysterious wet bag, which he kept hidden. When he returned, he excitedly showed us a beautiful bird with rich purple feathers, green wings, and bright red markings. We identified it as a Sultan cock, and it quickly became one of our cherished pets.

During his journey, Fritz had ventured far into the wilderness. He described seeing vast forests filled with colorful birds, towering trees, and large animals. He had encountered a herd of elephants grazing peacefully and even spotted jaguars on the riverbanks. However, the most frightening moment came when a hippopotamus suddenly surfaced near his canoe, snorting loudly. Fritz wisely paddled away as fast as he could.

After hearing his stories, we packed our things and prepared to leave. Fritz, eager to explore the coast, decided to return to Rockburg by sea, paddling his canoe around Cape Disappointment. He collected plants along the way, including capers and what we suspected to be a tea plant.

Meanwhile, Jack carried his wet bag carefully, refusing to reveal its contents. Upon reaching Rockburg, he finally opened it to reveal two enormous African bullfrogs. Their loud croaking had given away his secret. Although at first startled, we found them fascinating and released them into the swamp.

Once settled back at Rockburg, we focused on our growing collection of animals. The black swans, cranes, and the Sultan cock adapted well to their new home. Our old bustards remained the tamest, always gathering at mealtimes.

One evening, a deep, roaring sound echoed from the swamp. The dogs barked, and we jumped up in alarm, but Fritz simply smiled. Jack, embarrassed, admitted that the bullfrogs were responsible for the noise. The family laughed as he reluctantly returned them to their habitat.

Soon after, we moved back to Falconhurst to repair and improve our summer home. We strengthened the terrace, added shade, and made the space more comfortable.

Fritz had long wanted to build a watchtower on Shark Island. After two months of hard work, we completed it, raising a flagpole to signal any approaching visitors or threats. To celebrate, we hoisted a white flag and fired six rounds from our newly mounted cannon.

Chapter 16

King David once said, *"We spend our years as a tale that is told."* These words

stayed with me as I looked back on ten years of our life, recorded in my journal.

Time passed quickly, one year after another. Thinking about the past made me a little sad, but I was also very grateful. My family had been safe and happy for so long, and my sons had grown into strong, capable young men. I hoped that young people reading our story would see how a peaceful, hardworking, and loving family life helps build strong character.

I have already told many stories about our time in *New Switzerland*, as we called our home. I do not want to repeat too many details about our hunting trips, inventions, or discoveries. But before I finish, I will share some final memories.

Our homes, *Rockburg* and *Falconhurst*, had become more comfortable and beautiful. At Rockburg, we added fountains, gardens, and trellises covered in flowering vines. Shark Island, once bare, was now full of palm trees. The swamp had been drained and turned into a lake, home to swans, geese, ducks, and other birds, including bright flamingos and elegant cranes. Even Jack's pet frogs, *Grace* and *Beauty*, had grown as big as small rabbits and would come when called!

Among the trees, our old ostrich, *Hurry*, walked with his usual serious air, as if he ruled over everything. Pigeons filled the dovecotes, cooing softly, and our farm at *Woodlands* gave us plenty of food. Elizabeth's dairy was so full of milk and cheese that she could barely manage it all!

My sons still enjoyed naming our animals. We had a white cow called *Blanche* and a loud-voiced bull named *Stentor*. Two fast young onagers were called *Arrow* and *Dart*, and Jack's pet jackal, a descendant of *Fangs*, was named *Coco*—he claimed that names with "o" were easiest to call out!

We had all stayed in good health, though Elizabeth sometimes had mild fevers, and the boys had their fair share of small accidents. They had grown into fine young men. *Fritz* was 24, strong and adventurous. *Ernest*, 22, was tall, clever, and thoughtful. *Jack*, 20, was fast and agile. *Franz*, the youngest at 17, was smart and full of energy. They were all kind, respectful, and devoted to their family.

Even after so many years in isolation, I always believed that one day we would return to the world. But as my children grew into adults, Elizabeth and I were growing older. I sometimes worried about their future if we were no longer with them. In those moments, I prayed, finding strength and hope.

The boys often went on long expeditions without telling us. Whenever they returned, full of excitement, I could never stay angry. One day, Fritz had been gone for hours, and as evening fell, we realized his kayak was missing—he must have gone to sea…

Worried about Fritz, I went with Ernest and Jack to *Shark Island* to watch for him from the tower. We raised our signal flag and loaded the gun. As the sun set, we finally spotted a small black speck on the water. Looking through the telescope, we saw it was Fritz!

His kayak was moving slowly, dragging a large sack and carrying a heavy load. We

fired the cannon to let him know we had seen him and rushed back to meet him at the harbor.

"Welcome back, Fritz! Where have you been, and what have you brought?" I called.

"I've made discoveries as well as collected treasure," he replied. *"You'll want to hear all about it. Let's unload first, and then I'll tell you everything."*

Once everyone was gathered, Fritz began: *"I should apologize for leaving without telling you, Father. But I've always wanted to explore further along the coast, past where I killed the walrus. So, I prepared my kayak with supplies, a compass, weapons, and fishing gear. I also brought *Pounce*, my eagle, and I'll always take him with me from now on.

"This morning was perfect—calm sea, gentle breeze. I couldn't resist. I left quietly and let the current carry me. As I passed the spot where our old wreck lies beneath the waves, I saw its scattered remains—cannons, ironwork, and more—through the clear water.

"Continuing on, I passed towering cliffs full of seabirds and rocky shores crowded with seals, sea-bears, and walruses. It was terrifying to be so close to these massive creatures, and I hurried past as quickly as I could.

"After more than an hour, I reached a tall rocky cape stretching into the sea. Right in front of me, I saw a giant archway leading into a huge cave. I paddled inside. The walls were covered in tiny nests, built by small swallows. These nests were unlike any I had seen before—gelatinous and strange, almost like coral or sponge. I gathered some in my fishing net and brought them back."

"You've found edible bird's nests!" I said. *"The Chinese trade these for high prices. The newest and whitest ones are worth their weight in silver!"*

"In Java and other places, people risk their lives to collect these bird nests. Every year, over 50,000 pounds of them are gathered, worth more than £200,000. When soaked in water, they soften and swell, and people make a strengthening soup from them."

"Maybe you should try cooking them, Mother!" I suggested.

"I don't like the look of them," she admitted, *"but I'll try to see if they turn to jelly. Though cooking bird nests is certainly not something I've done before!"*

Jack laughed. *"I want to taste them too! But I can't stop imagining my mouth full of feathers!"*

Fritz examined the nests. *"I wonder where the swallows find this jelly-like substance?"*

"No one knows for sure," I said. *"Some believe the birds collect it, while others think they produce it from special glands."*

Fritz continued his story:

"After collecting the nests, I followed the cave passage and found myself in a quiet bay, almost like a lake. The water was crystal clear, and I saw large shellfish—maybe oysters—attached to rocks. I pulled some up with my boat hook, left them on the beach, and went back for more. When I returned, the sun had made them open up. I cut one open and was shocked to find small, shiny pearls inside! I gathered them in a box."

The boys were amazed. *"Show us, Fritz! They are so beautiful!"*

"You've found real treasure!" I exclaimed. *"These pearls might be valuable if we ever return to civilization. We must visit this bay again!"*

Fritz named it *Pearl Bay* and described how he explored more of the coast. He tried to pass through a reef but had to wait because of the strong tide. While resting, he noticed thousands of seabirds, from gulls to giant albatrosses.

"They didn't like me being there and circled overhead, screaming. I swung my boat hook at them in frustration, and by accident, I hit an albatross, knocking it into the water."

When he finally returned home, he had one more surprising secret to share with me:

"Father, something strange happened with that albatross. I pulled it onto my canoe and noticed a piece of cloth tied around its leg. I unwrapped it and found English words: 'Save an unfortunate Englishwoman from the smoking rock!'"

Fritz was shocked. *"Was this real? Is someone stranded nearby?"*

He quickly wrote a message: *"Do not despair! Help is near!"* and tied it to the bird's leg before reviving it. The albatross drank some water, then suddenly took flight, disappearing toward the west.

"Father, do you think my note will reach her? Can I find and save her?" Fritz asked eagerly.

I was deeply interested but cautious. *"You were right to tell me privately. We must not tell the others yet. This message might be old, and the person may no longer be alive. 'Smoking rock' likely means a volcano, and there are none nearby."*

But Fritz remained hopeful. He believed the message was recent and that the smoke could come from something other than a volcano. He was determined to search for her.

We decided he should go, but first, he needed to modify his canoe to carry two people and extra supplies. Although impatient, he saw the wisdom in preparing properly.

Meanwhile, the younger boys were busy opening oysters, thrilled each time they found a pearl.

"Father, can we start a pearl fishery?" they asked. *"We could build a hut and collect pearls every day!"*

Their excitement grew as we prepared for a journey to *Pearl Bay*, but Fritz had a secret mission of his own—to find and rescue the mysterious Englishwoman.

One day, when everyone was together, I spoke seriously.

"Fritz is now old enough to be independent. From now on, he can make his own decisions, especially about his trips. We won't worry if he stays away longer than expected. I trust his good sense and love for us, and I know he won't cause us unnecessary worry."

Fritz looked grateful. His mother hugged him and said, "God bless you, my boy!"

While I worked on tools to collect oysters, Fritz modified his canoe to add an extra seat. His brothers assumed he planned to take one of them along, and he let them believe it. They kept busy making useful items and waited patiently.

At last, the day came. We said goodbye to Elizabeth and Franz, then set off on the yacht. Fritz and Jack led the way in the canoe, proud to be the "pilots."

We safely navigated past Walrus Island into calm waters. The sea was so still that we spotted delicate paper-nautilus shells floating. We collected a few and named the place "Nautilus Creek."

Further along, we passed a rocky cape, naming it "Cape Pug-Nose." Then we saw a towering headland. Instead of going around it, Fritz led us through a stunning natural archway into Pearl Bay. The rock formations looked like a grand cathedral, so we named it "Cape Minster."

As we approached the cave entrance, swallows flew out in a cloud, then returned to their nests on the walls. We collected some nests, leaving those with eggs or chicks.

The tide helped us glide smoothly through the cave, and soon, we emerged into the bright and beautiful Pearl Bay. Small islands dotted the waters, making the scenery even more breathtaking.

We explored the coastline, looking for a good landing spot near the oyster beds. We found one by a clear stream. As night fell, we lit a watch-fire, ate quickly, and left the dogs and Coco the jackal onshore while we slept on the yacht.

Although the coast was unknown to us, I wasn't too worried about wild animals. However, I was glad to have our little monkey, Mercury, onboard. He was sure to make noise if anything alarming happened.

Fritz tied up his canoe and joined us. The night passed peacefully, except for jackals howling, which Coco eagerly answered.

At dawn, after a quick breakfast, we started working at the oyster beds. In two days, we collected a massive pile of shells. I covered them with seaweed to later burn into alkali, which we would use to extract pearls.

Each evening, we hunted for food. On our last day, we planned a longer exploration. Ernest and his dog Floss went ahead, with Jack and Coco following. Fritz and I were still loading tools onto the yacht when we suddenly heard gunshots and a loud cry.

Our other dogs dashed toward the sound, and Fritz let Pounce, our bird of prey, fly ahead. Grabbing his rifle, he ran after them. More shots rang out, followed by a triumphant cheer. Soon, I saw Jack limping back, supported by his brothers.

"I'm sore all over!" Jack groaned.

He had bad bruises. "What happened?" I asked.

"A huge wild boar attacked us!" Ernest explained. "Floss chased it, and Coco bit it from behind, but the boar knocked Coco away. Jack got angry and fired a bad shot. The boar turned on him, and he ran, but tripped and fell. He screamed for help, and the dogs attacked just in time. Fritz arrived and shot the boar with his pistol."

Jack was lucky to escape with only bruises. While walking back, Ernest found strange, smelly roots. I examined them. "These are truffles! Very valuable mushrooms."

We finished dinner and returned to the yacht. Suddenly, a deep, terrifying roar echoed from the forest. Another roar answered from the distance. We froze.

Fritz grabbed his rifle. "Get on the yacht, light the fire, and have the guns ready. I'm going to check!"

We obeyed. As we watched from the boat, all our animals—dogs, Coco, and Mercury—raced toward the fire. Mercury, afraid to swim, chattered anxiously on the shore.

Fritz had vanished into the darkness, off to discover the source of the terrible sound.

The dogs sat by the fire, ears up, occasionally barking or howling. The distant roaring grew louder, and I guessed that leopards or panthers had caught the scent of the boar's carcass.

Suddenly, a large lion sprang from the bushes and approached the fire. He was bigger than any I had seen before. The dogs backed away as the lion sat like a cat, eyeing both them and the hanging boar meat. He paced slowly, growling, and occasionally went to drink from the brook before returning.

Then, his posture changed—he crouched, tail twitching, eyes locked on us. I wasn't sure whether to shoot or flee when a rifle cracked through the night.

"That's Fritz!" we cried. The lion let out a terrible roar, then collapsed, dead.

"We're safe!" I shouted. I stepped ashore, greeted by the uneasy dogs, who kept looking toward the dark woods. Suddenly, a lioness leaped into the firelight. She circled hesitantly before finding her fallen mate. She touched him, sniffed his wounds, then let out a mix of grief, rage, and a vow for revenge.

Another shot rang out, injuring her paw. The dogs, emboldened, attacked as I fired again, wounding her further. A brutal fight followed. The lioness, though hurt, fought fiercely. The dogs barked and lunged, and the night filled with their cries and roars.

Brave old Juno led the attack, but the lioness struck her with a powerful blow, ending her life. Just then, Fritz appeared. With the lioness weakened, we got close enough to finish her with a hunting knife.

We called Ernest and Jack from the yacht. They had been terrified by the noise but were relieved to see us safe—until they learned of Juno's death. We wrapped her body in canvas, planning to bury her at Rockburg the next day.

Tired and sorrowful, we finally slept, bringing all the dogs on board. In the morning, we skinned the lion and lioness before setting sail. As we left Pearl Bay, Fritz guided us through the reef, then suddenly turned his canoe in another direction.

"Goodbye, my son," I whispered.

"See you soon, Father!" he replied with a knowing smile.

As he disappeared behind a point I later named Cape Farewell, we continued home. By evening, we arrived safely in Safety Bay.

Chapter 17

Elizabeth and Franz were happy to see us return safely but were shocked by our adventure. Elizabeth shuddered at the story of the lion attack and worried over Jack, who still looked pale. Franz teared up when he heard about Juno's death and made sure she was buried near home. Ernest wrote an epitaph for her grave:

JUNO
A true servant,
A faithful friend,
A dog dear to all,
Who bravely fought for her master.

The boar's meat and truffles delighted Elizabeth, who promised delicious meals. The boar's head, however, went to Ernest's museum as promised. The lion skins were sent to be tanned.

Days passed, but Fritz did not return. Growing worried, we decided to search for him by boat. The fresh air and bright sun lifted our spirits, but soon, we spotted a dark shape beneath the water. Thinking it was a rock, I quickly turned the boat—only to see it disappear!

Suddenly, a huge black mass rose from the sea—a sperm whale! It sprayed water high into the air and then, seemingly angered by our boat, swam towards us. Knowing the danger, Jack and I fired our guns. The whale thrashed violently, then swam toward shallow water, bleeding. We followed and fired again, and after a fierce struggle, it lay still—dead.

Just as we prepared to celebrate, Franz spotted a canoe in the distance. A tall, muscular man paddled it, then hid behind a rock. Fear struck me—was this a native tribe? Could they have captured Fritz?

We raised a white flag and called out in peace, but the man did not respond. Instead, he paddled toward us. Suddenly, Franz gasped, “That’s Fritz’s kayak! Look at the walrus head on it!”

Ernest calmly picked up the speaking trumpet and called, “Fritz, ahoy! Welcome back!”

At once, I recognized him—Fritz, disguised with dark stains on his skin! He climbed aboard, and we hugged him joyfully. He explained that he had heard our gunshots and feared pirates, so he disguised himself and approached carefully.

When we told him about the whale, he smiled. “I know the perfect place to anchor—an island full of surprises.” After washing off his disguise, he led us to a beautiful island in the bay.

Now that Fritz's journey had clearly been a success, I finally told Elizabeth his secret plan. As I expected, she was shocked and emotional at the idea of meeting another person—especially a woman.

"Why didn’t you tell me earlier?" she asked.

"I didn’t want to get your hopes up," I replied. "But now, thanks to Fritz, we know for sure!"

The boys were curious about the secrecy but didn’t have to wait long. As soon as we anchored, they rushed ashore with us following in silence.

We soon arrived at a small hut with a fire burning outside. Fritz disappeared inside and returned with a young, handsome stranger—dressed as an English naval officer.

"This is Edward Montrose," Fritz said. "Will you welcome him as a friend and brother?"

"Of course!" I said, shaking the young man’s hand. Elizabeth embraced him warmly, and even the dogs seemed to like him. But I quickly realized the truth—this "Edward" was actually a young woman in disguise!

Wanting to keep her secret for now, Elizabeth promised to find her proper clothes. Meanwhile, the boys brought supplies from the yacht, and we enjoyed a cheerful meal together. "Edward" laughed and talked happily, quickly fitting in with our family. By the time supper ended, the boys were thrilled to have a new companion and toasted his—rather, her—health with our homemade mead.

Later, as we sat around the fire, Jack turned to Fritz. "Alright, time to explain! Did you set off just to find him, or was it a lucky meeting?"

Fritz hesitated, then began his story:

"Do you remember when I shot an albatross the other day? No one but Father knew what happened to it. But that bird led me to the shipwrecked stranger—and even carried back my reply!

"After preparing my canoe for two people, I set off with Pounce, my eagle. I paddled for hours, then moved closer to shore as a storm approached. Luckily, I found a sheltered bay just in time. The storm raged all night, and I had to sleep in my canoe.

"The next morning, I set out again, searching for any sign of life. As I paddled, I saw strange birds in the trees. They had giant, colorful beaks and tossed pepper berries into the air before catching them. I believe they were toucans—right, Ernest?"

Ernest nodded without interrupting.

"After many hours, night fell, and I found another small cove to rest in. The next morning, as I was roasting a parrot for breakfast, I heard a rustling behind me.

"I turned and saw an enormous tiger, ready to pounce! My gun was on the ground, too far to grab in time.

"Pounce, my eagle, saw the danger and attacked! He flapped his wings and struck the tiger with his beak, buying me just enough time. I grabbed my gun and fired—hitting the beast right in the heart. It leapt once and then fell dead at my feet!"

Fritz's voice trembled as he spoke:

"The tiger was dead—but so was my brave bird, Pounce. The beast had struck him down with one blow. Heartbroken, I buried my loyal companion and quickly left, paddling away in my kayak.

Doubt filled my mind. What if the albatross had flown too far? What if I was looking in the wrong place? But then—I saw it.

Ahead, a calm bay appeared, and on a rocky reef, a column of smoke curled into the sky. My heart raced. Someone was there!

I paddled as fast as I could and climbed onto the rock where the fire burned. Just as I was about to call out, I saw a slender figure moving toward me. I stepped forward and, in English, said, 'Welcome, fair stranger! God has heard your call, and I have come to help.'

The figure rushed toward me—Edward Montrose.

Or so I thought.

The boys interrupted my story with shouts of surprise. Ernest, always observant, calmly said, 'We can stop pretending now. We know Edward is really a girl.'

Although embarrassed at the secret being revealed, I laughed and joined in the cheers for our new sister, Jenny Montrose.

Jenny took my hands and, in French, said, ‘I waited so long after sending the albatross. Thank God you are here!’

She led me to the shore, where she had built a sturdy hut with a hidden sleeping place in the trees. Her skills amazed me—she had made weapons, tools, fishing gear, and even trained a cormorant to hunt for her.

Three years ago, Jenny’s ship was wrecked in a storm. She was the only survivor. Washed ashore, she learned to fend for herself, keeping a beacon fire burning in hopes of rescue. She even tied messages to birds, hoping someone would find them.

That night, we shared a meal, and she told me about her past. She was the daughter of a British officer in India, raised with both elegance and a love for adventure. She had been sailing to England when the storm changed everything.

The next morning, we packed her things into my kayak and left her island behind. We would have reached home that evening, but an accident forced us to stop here. When I heard your gunshots, I feared pirates and disguised myself to investigate. But I was overjoyed to find it was you."

The next morning, after breakfast, we prepared to return home. But before we left, Fritz reminded me about the whale. Though cutting it up again wasn’t appealing, we didn’t want to waste the valuable spermaceti. We set off for the sandbank.

As we neared, our dogs ran ahead, barking furiously. We arrived to find them fighting wolves and jackals over the carcass. A few gunshots sent the wild animals running, but to our shock, Jack’s pet jackal, Coco, dashed after them and disappeared into the forest.

It was too dangerous to follow, so we continued our work. Fritz opened the whale’s skull, and we collected as much spermaceti as we could carry. Then, we returned to the island, where Elizabeth and Jenny had prepared a wonderful meal.

Hearing about Coco, Jenny reassured Jack. "Tamed animals don’t fit in with the wild ones," she said. "If you search tomorrow, I bet he’ll be eager to return."

At sunrise, Jack and Jenny set off in a canoe with food to lure Coco back. After calling for him, they soon spotted him creeping toward them, looking miserable—his fur was dirty, and his ears torn. He had tried to join the wild jackals, but they had rejected him. Jack forgave him at once, and Coco gladly rejoined the dogs.

After breakfast, we set sail. The sea was calm, and the journey peaceful. We stopped at Shark Island, where Jenny admired our watchtower and fortifications before continuing to Rockburg. As we neared, a salute of twelve gunshots greeted us—Ernest insisted on adding a thirteenth for good luck.

Arriving at Rockburg, Jenny was amazed by our gardens and orchards, but her biggest surprise was our home—a villa with a broad balcony, fountains, and climbing flowers. Inside, a feast awaited. The table was beautifully set with fine china, fresh fruit, roasted meats, and jugs of mead. Jenny, now dressed in a proper gown, was deeply touched by the warm welcome.

Fritz and Jack served the meal, joking that the "servants" had run away. Afterward, they excitedly showed Jenny around Rockburg—our home, stables, gardens, and boat houses—until Elizabeth stopped them, worried she'd be exhausted.

The next day, we set off early for Falconhurst, bringing tools and supplies for repairs. Jack, refusing to let Jenny and Elizabeth walk the whole way, rode ahead to fetch horses. Soon, he returned, driving a lively herd toward us. Jenny quickly chose Dart, the fastest and most spirited horse.

The work at Falconhurst kept us busy for a week, but Jenny's cheerful presence made the time enjoyable. When repairs were done, we stayed a bit longer, gathering poultry, acorns for the pigs, and materials for winter crafts.

Heavy rains soon arrived, forcing us back to Rockburg. Yet, with Jenny among us, the gloomy season felt shorter and happier than ever. She quickly picked up our language, and Fritz spoke English so well that she joked he could pass as an Englishman. Before winter ended, she was fluent in German too.

Chapter 18

During the long winter evenings, the boys and Jenny took turns telling stories while we worked on crafts in our cozy study. Despite being trapped by the rain, it was a happy time. When the sun finally returned, it felt strange to step outside again and feel the fresh air.

Life quickly returned to normal. The boys worked in the fields and gardens, while their mother and sister looked after the house and poultry. Our various settlements—Falconhurst, Woodlands, Prospect Hill, and the islands—needed attention. Jack and Franz were in charge of the island battery, where they spent the day fixing the flagstaff, cleaning the guns, and testing them by firing at a floating barrel. Their shot hit the target, and they cheered.

Suddenly, three distant gunshots echoed across the water. We froze. Had the boys fired again? No! They were already rushing back to shore, just as startled as we were. Could it be a European ship? Or pirates? Were the strangers friends or enemies?

Night fell, and we kept watch, but a fierce storm soon took over. For two days, the sea was wild. On the third day, when the storm passed, we fired our guns again. This time, an answer came from the distance—someone was still out there!

Fritz and I decided to investigate. Armed and cautious, we paddled along the cliffs. At last, we spotted a brig-of-war anchored in a sheltered cove, flying the English flag. Soldiers and tents were on shore. But why was an English warship here? Could they be mutineers? Pirates?

Through the spyglass, Fritz saw the captain and recognized him as truly English. Everything on the ship was orderly, easing my fears. We hurried home to share the news, and everyone agreed to wait until morning before approaching the ship.

That night, we prepared for our visit. Our yacht was cleaned, our best clothes laid out, and fresh fruit gathered as a gift. At dawn, we set sail. As we rounded the cape, the English crew stared in shock at our little yacht appearing from nowhere.

Fritz and I rowed to the brig, where the captain greeted us warmly. He was stunned to learn that we had lived on this land for years and even more surprised to hear about Miss Montrose.

Gripping Fritz's hand, he said, "Thank you! We came here searching for her. Her father, Colonel Montrose, never gave up hope of finding her. Survivors from her wrecked ship, the *Dorcas*, reached Sydney, and their story led me here."

Fritz humbly accepted the captain's thanks, and soon, the captain asked to meet Elizabeth and Miss Montrose.

"If it's allowed for the whole crew to leave the ship at once, I'll send a boat for the rest of your group," the captain said.

An officer was sent to fetch them, and soon Jenny, her mother, and the three boys joined us on board. The captain and his officers welcomed them warmly and treated us all with great kindness.

During lunch, the captain told us about a sick man, Mr. Wolston, who had sailed from Sydney with his wife and daughters. Sadly, the sea voyage hadn't helped his health, and the recent storm had made things worse. He needed rest on land.

That afternoon, we visited the family in their tents by the shore. Mr. Wolston looked happier in the fresh air, and we enjoyed their company so much that we stayed until evening. Since it was too late to return home, the captain offered tents for the boys to sleep in.

That night, Elizabeth and I had a serious talk. Should we return to Europe just because the chance had come? Neither of us wanted to say it first, but we soon realized we both felt the same—we loved our peaceful island and wanted to stay. Elizabeth only asked that at least two of our sons stay with us. The other two could return to Europe and help send good settlers to build a strong colony.

The next morning, we invited Captain Littlestone and the Wolstons to visit Rockburg, hoping the change would help Mr. Wolston's health. Fritz and Jack rushed ahead in a canoe to prepare, while the others followed on the ship and yacht.

As they arrived, our guests were amazed by the sight of Rockburg. Their surprise grew when our battery fired an eleven-gun salute, and the English flag waved proudly in the wind. Mr. Wolston looked happier already. He was carefully brought ashore and settled in my room with his wife nearby to care for him.

Rockburg was buzzing with excitement as our guests explored. It was hard to even gather them for dinner! After the meal, they continued roaming until, at last, they settled down for supper. Mr. Wolston, feeling better, joined us and shared his wish to stay. He suggested that he, his wife, and their eldest daughter remain on the island,

while the younger daughter went to her brother in Cape Town. If they decided to stay permanently, his son would also join us.

We were thrilled by this idea, as we had already decided to make New Switzerland our home. The whole company cheered, raising their glasses in a joyful toast:

"New Switzerland forever!"

Then Jenny playfully asked, "Doesn’t anyone want to cheer for those leaving?"

Fritz immediately lifted his glass. "Three cheers for England and Jenny’s father!" The room echoed with cheers.

Finally, we made our decisions. Fritz would return to England with Jenny to reunite her with her father. Ernest chose to stay with us and help build our colony. Jack, always the adventurer, decided to stay as well, joking that European schools might capture him. Franz, however, wanted to study in Europe, eager for new challenges.

And so, with our futures decided, we looked ahead with hope, ready to embrace the next chapter of our lives.

Fritz might return one day, but it would be good if one of us stayed in Europe for good. Since I am the youngest, I could adapt more easily. Still, my father will decide for me," said Franz.

"You may go, my son," I replied. "May God bless all our plans. Wherever you live a good and useful life, that is your home. Now, we just need to see if Captain Littlestone can help make this happen."

All eyes turned to the captain. After a brief pause, he spoke.

"My orders were to find shipwreck survivors. I have found two groups. Some wish to stay, while others wish to leave. Everything has worked out perfectly, as if guided by fate. I will gladly take those who need passage to England. If New Switzerland grows into a strong and happy colony, it will be the perfect ending to this story. Three cheers for New Switzerland!"

That night, emotions ran high. Many felt they were stepping into a new future. I, too, felt relief—one of my biggest worries had been solved.

The next days were full of preparations for those leaving. Captain Littlestone could not wait long, so we worked quickly. We packed everything that could make their journey comfortable and help them settle in England. I gave them pearls, corals, furs, and spices—enough to start a good business. I also entrusted them with personal belongings of the late captain of our wrecked ship, hoping they could return them to his family.

We stocked the Unicorn with fresh food as a thank-you to Captain Littlestone for his kindness. Before they left, I had a serious talk with my sons about their responsibilities in life. I reminded them to stay true to their values and resist

temptations.

Fritz had already told me of his love for Jenny, which was obvious. I advised him to speak to her father as soon as he arrived in England and ask for his blessing. His mother and I both gladly gave ours, though parting with Jenny was difficult.

On our last evening together, I gave Fritz my journal, in which I had recorded our lives since the shipwreck. "I wrote this for my children," I said, "but perhaps it will help other young people too. It may show them the value of hard work, knowledge, and the joy of living in harmony with family."

As night fell, I watched over my family one last time before our farewell.

"Goodbye, Europe," I thought. "Goodbye, dear Switzerland. May New Switzerland also grow strong, happy, and free!"

After being shipwrecked on a remote tropical island, a Swiss family must use their ingenuity and teamwork to survive in the wild. They build shelter, find food, and tame animals while exploring the island’s many wonders and dangers. As they adapt to their new life, they face challenges that test their resilience and strength as a family. But when unexpected visitors arrive, they must decide what their future will hold—will they stay in their island paradise or seek a way back to civilization?