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SOLVEI

By S. LOFGREN

(Continued)

The island itself seemed to be high, mountainous and inaccessible from the south side which they now approached, with the exception of a few palms and bushes. There was nothing green on the island and the summit was gray and ragged and looked as if it would be impossible to ascend it.

Simpson once more told that it was easy to land on the north side, where there was a lagoon with a palm-fringed reef. He could not tell, however, whether the water was deep enough for them to sail into the lagoon. But near the lagoon there was an opening in the outer coral-reef, through which they could enter into smoother water and anchor. They followed the eastern side of the island, keeping at a safe distance from the coral-reef, which rose to within a few feet beneath the surface.

Soon the north side of the island came within sight. It was wooded with the exception of the highest summit which appeared to be just as gray and inaccessible as the south and east sides. The north side differed from the other sides in having a long, low bar of sand, on which a row of palms were growing. This sand-bar measured a few feet in height and consisted of white coral-sand. It encircled a calm surface of water, the lagoon, which Simpson had mentioned.

But there was no sign of human beings or young human habitation. Neither friend nor foe welcomed them. The island appeared to be entirely uninhabited and desolate, and if people had ever lived on it, they had left no mark, visible from the sea. It was possible, however, that the young family was living on the west side of the island. But as they now were on a safe anchorage, Silver decided to drop anchor and set out the skiff.

Simpson and Waida went ashore with the Captain. They rowed right into the lagoon and landed on a swampy spot where a small creek from the mountain entered the lagoon. Near the landing-place they found an almost overgrown path. They followed it and came to an abandoned cabin, built of ship-timber and wood from trees, felled on the island, and covered with old sails, palm-leaves and boards, taken from a wrecked ship.

There was no doubt whatever that shipwrecked people had been living here. Everything had probably once been comfortable and well arranged. But now it was dilapidated and decayed and judging from the appearance, great confusion must have prevailed when the inmates left the house for the shelves and benches were smashed, and all the furniture and kitchen utensils had been removed. The inmates had apparently left in a great hurry. As Silver thought more and more about it, he made an anxious remark to Simpson about the condition of the home.

"It is possible, even probable that some one has been here and looted the house either before or after they left," replied Simpson.

"The cursed black rables found them, I suppose, just after Winter had been here; how is it possible to be other than hostile to such bandits, pirates, murderers and cannibals?"

"You are truly in the right in that, Captain," said Simpson, "the white man in these regions must be, if not hostile, at least perpetually on his guard against the natives, for they are born murderers. To them it is as natural to burn, butcher and eat a fellow-being, as it is for a giant tiger to kill other animals, man included, and eat them. The whole crew on the vessel, on which I visited this island have probably long ago devoured and the same lot would surely have befallen me, had you not rescued me, Captain."

"It is horrible to think of it, and I shudder at the thought that my own son perhaps has perished in like manner, for I am also almost convinced that he is the one that has spent several years here. And he has, maybe all the time been ignorant of the impending danger. It

seems strange to me that we cannot, among all the rubbish left here, find anything to show where the ship-timber has come from, and who has been living here. The timber, of course, belongs to some vessel that has drifted ashore on the island. The name of the ship has been painted on the life-boats, water-barrels, life-belts and many other things, but here is nothing showing its name."

"We may perhaps find something in the shed behind the house," answered Simpson and he went towards the back of the house. Silver followed him to the place specified, and there too, everything had been ransacked and every useful or valuable object removed.

When they were ready to leave the shed, Silver noticed that a board six or seven feet in length that was resting on a rafter was elegantly carved on both ends and gilded. He climbed up on a bench and took down the board which was wrapped in canvas except at the ends. It was with a beating heart that Silver removed the thick, hard, gray cloth. In less than a minute he would know if this had been the home of his son. Although hardened in many hot battles and many violent storms, the strong man trembled when he turned over the last piece of the old canvas. — That is was one of the name-boards of a wrecked ship Silver knew, and he was extremely anxious to see the name. Still, for some inexplicable reason, he hardly dared to look at the gilded board with the raised letters which were so big that he could feel them with his fingers and consequently read the name with closed eyes, if he so desired.

Now the board was lying there, clean and shining, and "Fortuna" flashed against him in faultless letters. Without uttering a word the strong man seated himself on a bench, lost in contemplation. For years he had been hunting for this place; it was the unknown goal of his travels. Now he had reached it, but too late. The one he was seeking was not there, and everything appeared to him as mysterious and inexplicable as on the day he had left the land of the snowy North, to search some desolate shore under the scorching sun of the tropics for the wrecked ship, with which his son had disappeared.

Here was the place, but it was deserted, silent and dead as a grave-yard. And an unknown voice said that the son had built the cabin and lived here for several years. But what now had become of him, was a riddle indeed. The island was so small, and this was the only spot adapted to serve as a human habitation. All the other sides descended abruptly to the water. It seemed useless to search them. But before he left this ground which now appeared sacred to him, he would invade every inch of the ground to see if possibly any light could be shed upon this mysterious disappearance.

Had Simpson not said that the young couple were perfectly contented with their life on the island? Then they could not have left it without cause. What could be the cause? And what had become of them? Silver asked himself, but could not answer the question.

After sitting there pondering and gazing at the board as if it were a tomb stone over the son, Silver arose and set out to see where Simpson and Waida had gone. They seemed to be investigating other parts of the island. As Silver came out to the cleared land in front of the house, Waida met him, carrying a painted tin can, about one foot square. He had found it lying in a thicket near the house and believing that it contained biscuits, he had removed the lid. But all it contained was, he said, a couple of small hand-written books. — They had probably been considered of no value and thrown away with the empty biscuit-cans. Waida took of the lid, handed the two books to the Captain, and showed him that there was nothing else in the can. Then he went away to continue the investigations of the place. Silver found the two books to be ordinary notebooks, bound in light leather. Wondering what they might contain, he opened one of them and recognized Karl's handwriting.

Unconsciously the father lifted the book to his lips, while his eyes were filled

with tears. To be able to read, he had to wipe his eyes, as the letters appeared blurred. Before he began reading, he turned over the leaves here and there, in an attempt to allay his feelings. He noticed that one of the books was

filled with writing, while the other had only a few unwritten pages. One of the books was marked as number I and then as the Captain was deep in thought, he began to read.

(To be continued)

MOR

Om minner man forglemme, med vissret jeg det vet, at jeg kan aldri glemme min første kjærlighet.

Den gang da jeg var liten, kun nogle tommer lang, et instinkt var min viten og tiden gikk sin gang.

Mens jeg lå der og spændte og kjendte ei forbud, slett ingen ting jeg mente, det vet den gode Gud.

Mor elsket frem mitt barnesmil, og lærte mig min prat; med villig hånd hun lavet til mitt første måltid mat.

Hun strikket mine strømper og sydde mig min stakk. "Gå nu min lille stympet omkring med ryggen rak."

Hun lærte mig min ABC, men ikke eventyr; de lærer han nok, skal du se, snart av en fremmed fyr.

Og mange ting jeg hørte om skrømt og stygge troll, der prinsesser bortførte og holdt dem i sin vold.

Det gjorde mig så bange jeg vaklet på min fot; men moders vuggesange gav mig fornyet mot.

Da solen bakom lien gav himlen aftenglød, var trygghet kun på stien heu til min moders skjød.

Da tok hun mig på fanget og vugget mig i ro, og alle troid tok spranget til glenselens mørke bo. Christian J. Bergum.

Man får ikke alltid fullgodt arbeide, enda man gjør det selv.

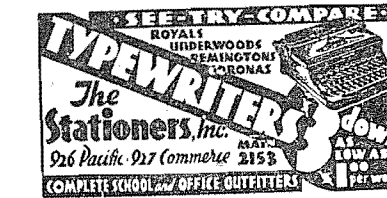
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