

The Swiss Family Robinson

Abridged and simplified version

Based on the novel by

Johann David Wyss

1812–13



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Chapter 1 Shipwrecked

“How would you like to go on a sailing ship?” I asked my four boys. “There is a ship sailing from a Mediterranean port in a month. The ship is going to Australia.”

My boys were very enthusiastic about the idea, and my wife was in agreement, so we packed up our belongings in Switzerland and travelled to the port in Italy. We boarded the ship and experienced smooth sailing until we approached some islands off the coast of New Guinea, where we were hit by a fierce storm. For six days our ship battled the howling wind and lashing rain, and by the seventh day, it seemed that all hope was lost. We had been blown completely off course, and the captain had no idea where we were. The crew had lost hope and the ship had been badly damaged by the storm. The two masts had broken, the sails were torn and parts of the hull had sprung leaks.

I looked at my terrified family – Fritz who was fifteen, Ernest was thirteen, Jack was ten and Franz was seven. My wife was trying to tell them not to lose hope, but this had no effect. Then suddenly, above the roar of the waves I heard someone shout, “Land ahoy!”. At that instant the ship hit something and people were thrown across the deck. The ship began to break up as it crashed into the rocks. Above the noise I heard the voice of the captain, “Lower the life boats!”

I gathered my family together, but much to my dismay, found that the last lifeboat was being lowered and we had missed our chance. But all was not lost. I noticed that the cabin of the ship had been

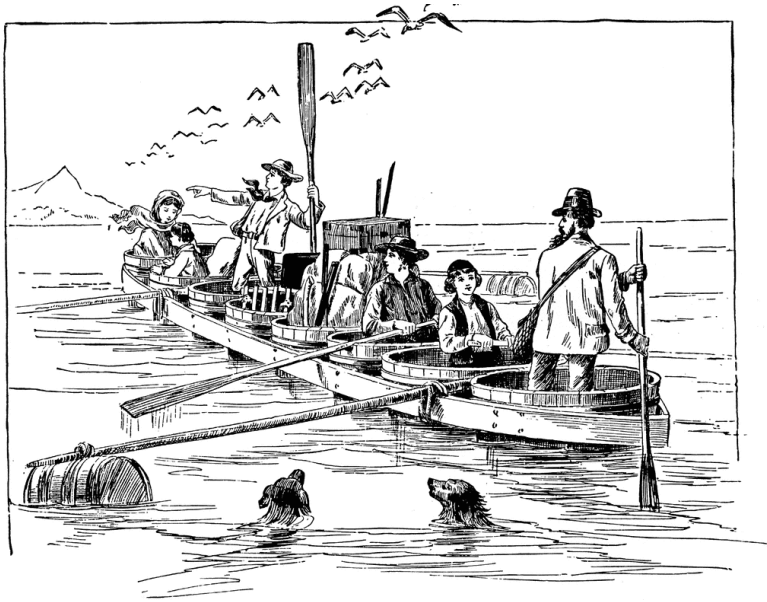
jammed between two rocks and would not sink. My hopes lifted and I returned to the cabin. I could see that the rocks were holding it above water, although the rest of the ship was breaking up and disappearing into the ocean. I quickly gathered my family together and directed them to the safety of the cabin. “Things are not as bad as they seem, boys,” I said. “If this storm subsides, we should be able to make it to land tomorrow.”

We will need all our strength to swim to land tomorrow, so I will see what there is to eat here in the cabin. My wife managed to put a meal together from the ship’s supplies, and soon the boys were asleep. But there was no sleep for my wife or myself. We took turns to keep watch. If the cabin’s timbers became too damaged as the waves pushed the cabin against the rocks, then the whole cabin might go under. But as night passed the sea grew calmer and when the first faint light of dawn appeared, we saw blue sky above us.

“Now all we need to do is to make a raft,” said Ernest. “That would be easier than trying to swim to land. We found some boards from the deck, and a hammer and some nails in the cabin. Franz found some fishing hooks and a fishing line. Two friendly dogs had survived the shipwreck. There were also cages of animals that had survived. There was a cow, a donkey, two goats, some sheep, a pig as well as some chickens, ducks and geese in a crate.

As I searched the wreck of the hold, I found some brandy barrels made of wood and iron hoops. I thought these could be used to make a boat. With hours of work, using Ernest’s planks of wood and the brandy barrels, we made a boat. I fixed long poles across the bow and stern, keeping the barrels together. All this took the whole

day, so we decided to spend another night in the cabin. My wife was able to put a meal together once again and we all slept soundly, ready to start our adventure the next morning.



Chapter 2 The Island

The next morning, we set about gathering all the equipment we could find – tools, fishing line and fishing hooks, canvas from the ship’s sails for a tent, food and water. We loaded the supplies onto our make-shift boat and with great effort, launched it into the calm sea. But there was no room for the animals. What would we do?

“Why not make swimming belts for them,” said Fritz.

“An excellent idea,” I said, and we at once set to work making canvas belts from ship’s sails.

Once made, we tied the first belt around the belly of a sheep and pushed the frightened animal into the water. The sheep sank at first but then came up again. We then tied belts around the other animals, except for the chickens which we loaded into a brandy barrel covered with wire netting and floated it behind our boat. We released the ducks and geese and they flew to shore.

Then we all boarded our boat, each of us sitting in our own brandy barrel, (except little Fritz who shared one with his mother). The older boys took up the oars and I shoved the boat away from the side of the wreck. The strong tide carried us away. The two dogs, whose names were Turk and Juno, jumped into the water and swam behind us. The tide was carrying us towards jagged rocks, but thankfully we saw an opening where a small stream flowed into the sea. I steered towards it and soon we found ourselves in a small bay where the water was calm and shallow, with a gently sloping beach. All of the animals made it to shore. We untied their swimming belts and let them graze on the green grass on the island. We released the chickens and began unloading our supplies.

After we erected our tent, I sent the boys off to find moss to make beds, while I built a fire place from large stones. I gathered some twigs and lit a fire. I was just getting the iron cooking pot from the raft when I heard a shout from Jack as if he was in danger. I grabbed an axe and ran towards the rocks on the beach. There he was, crying loudly, as a large lobster had his foot in its powerful jaws and would not let go. I grabbed the lobster by its back, which caused it

to give up its hold. "You have managed to catch us a delicious dinner!" I laughed. I carried the lobster back to the camp and dropped it into the pot of boiling water. Ernest had found some oysters, so we feasted on a delicious meal of seafood.

Fritz and I started to find storage places for the things we had brought with us. Ernest had gone off to the other side of the island, to see what was there. He came back with a wonderful report of a beautiful green landscape. The beach there was covered with all kinds of casks and boxes that had washed up from the wreck.

"I think we should go and collect these things before the tide takes them out again," he said. "These could be useful." I agreed and with Turk following, the three boys and I set off to the place that Ernest had discovered. There were hundreds of boxes, crates and casks floating in the water. There were also timber beams from the ship. We worked through the rest of the afternoon pulling these items to shore. Now the question was, "how would we transport these items to our camp site?"

"We will make carts," I told the boys, so that the cow and the donkey can pull them. But it will be dark soon so we will leave this until tomorrow."

Chapter 3 More Discoveries

Immediately after breakfast the next morning, we went back to the beach where we had collected the boxes and other materials from the ship. With a saw I cut round cross-sections of a tree to make wheels. Using the wheels and pieces of wood I made a cart. Taking

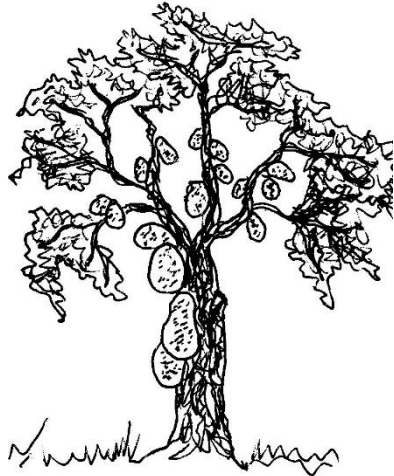
strips of canvas that had washed up from the ship's sails, I made a harness and hitched the cow to the cart. We then loaded the materials into the cart, and also loaded more on the back of the donkey, who we called Grizzle. With the help of the cow and Grizzle, we took the materials back to our camp site. This went on for several days, until the job was finally done. We then decided to take a rest day to explore the island. With Fritz and Ernest, and Turk the dog, I set off. My two younger boys stayed at camp with the other dog, Juno.

I had hoped to see survivors from the ship. We walked for several miles along the beach but unfortunately there was no sign of people or lifeboats. They all must have been swept out to sea. This made me sad, as did the realization that we were here alone on the island. Perhaps some passing ship would see us and rescue us.

As we walked across the island, we found ourselves in the middle of some very thick reeds. I cut one with my knife which I carried in case we met a poisonous snake. As I cut the reed I noticed some liquid dripping from it. I tasted it and found it very sweet. I realised that we were in a forest of sugar cane! I cut some more to take back to camp.



A little further we came across a field of small plants. Ernest dug one of the plants out of the ground. What a surprise to find that they were potatoes! We gathered as many as we could. The next unusual plant we came across was a calabash tree, which had things called gourds growing out of its trunk. I cut off some gourds with my knife. "These will make perfect bowls and cups for us," I said.



We took as many gourds as we could carry, and we agreed to bring the cart back to get more gourds and potatoes. On the way back we noticed that some coconuts that had fallen from the trees. I cut one open with my

knife, but the flesh inside was hard and dry. "We need some young coconuts from the top of the trees," I said. "They will be full of coconut milk. But I don't know how we can get them."

Just then a troupe of monkeys came along, chattering in the tree tops. Ernest picked up a pebble and threw at them. In defence, one of the monkeys started pulling coconuts from the treetops and throwing them down at us. We picked them up from the ground and added them to our cargo. Then suddenly more monkeys came to defend the first group. Turk barked wildly, which frightened the monkeys. They quickly ran away, but in the hurry, a little monkey dropped from its mother's back. Fritz picked up the monkey and

asked whether he could keep it. I agreed, and we continued on to our camp. When we arrived, little Franz was very excited to see the monkey and we decided that the monkey should be his pet. The tiny animal climbed up on his shoulders and put his arms around Franz's neck.



Mother had the fire going and cooked a delicious meal, of not only roast potatoes, but also wild pigeon that Jack had shot with his bow and arrow. There was even some cheese from the ship's supplies to go with the potatoes. We were thankful to God for the food that had been provided so plentifully.

Chapter 4 Revisiting the Wreck

While we had been away on the other side of the island, Mother, Franz and Jack had also done some exploring. They had found a grove of enormous trees. The huge trunks had support roots coming out from the base of the trees. Seeing there were still two hours of daylight left, I agreed that the whole family should go and see it. We were amazed at these extraordinary trees, which I identified as fig-bearing mangroves.

“I wonder if we could build a house up high in one of these enormous trees,” said mother. “We would be completely safe from wild animals, and we would be protected from any high tides that may come during storms at sea.”

We all thought that this was an excellent idea. The boys wanted to start building tomorrow, but I cautioned them that first we must get all the supplies off the wreck while the weather is still calm. If a storm gets up, we would lose the remains of the ship and everything on it. “Once that is done, we can start building the treehouse,” I agreed.

At dawn the next morning we made plans to revisit the wreck to get more supplies. Leaving Mother and little Franz behind, the three older boys and I set off in the boat we had made from planks and barrels. We made our way to the wreck that was still held firmly between the jagged rocks.

There were more planks and barrels on the ship, so we used these to make a raft. Now we had two vessels to carry supplies. We

gathered everything we could – doors, window frames, bolts, locks and furniture. When the raft and our boat were fully loaded, we rowed to the little bay where we had landed at first, unloaded and went back for some more. It took the whole week to gather everything we needed from the ship. We found many useful things - boxes of plates, cups, knives, forks, spoons and cooking utensils. We also found working tools such as spades and axes. We found several barrels of gunpowder, muskets and pistols. We salvaged all the remaining food we could find. There was ham, cheese, potted meat and corn.

The last thing we found, of great value, was a small one-masted sailing boat called a sloop. It was packaged concisely as a kit that you had to put together. This would be very useful to make short trips along the coast. The problem was, we needed a large workshop to put it together. Using the axes we broke down some of the walls inside the ship’s cabin to make a large room. We set about putting the sloop together and she was ready to sail. We had a little trouble in launching her, pushing her off the side of the ship. But by sunset we hoisted the sail and Jack and Ernest sailed her into our little cove. Fritz and I followed in our home-made barrel boat.

Chapter 5 The Tree House

We had been on the island for several months now, living in our tent in the cove where we had first landed. Once we had finished storing everything we had retrieved from the wreck, I announced that it is time to start building the tree house.

The boys were very excited and my wife was also very enthusiastic at the thought of having a shelter with more space! We loaded wood and tools on to the cart which was pulled by the donkey, and set out for the mangrove trees. We chose one with large branches that spread out above us. The problem was getting the heavy planks of wood up the tall tree. First, we made a strong ladder from rope. I pulled the ladder up into the tree by means of a line that I had managed to get over a high branch using a bow and arrow. The boys all wanted to be first to climb the ladder. Ernest went first, followed by Franz who was as agile as a monkey. I made a pulley which Ernest tied to the cord hanging beside the ladder. Using the pulley, we would now be able to hoist up the timber we needed to make the house.

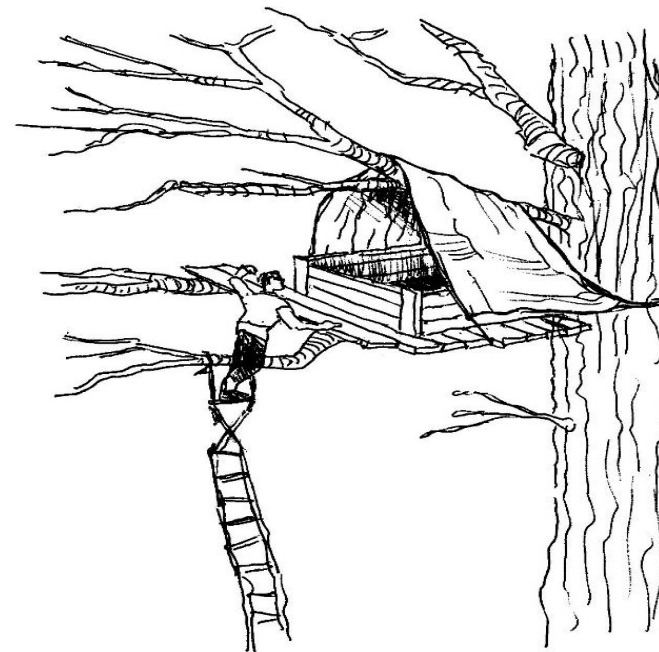
As we hoisted up the planks, we made a platform which became a solid timber floor. Around this floor we built walls on three sides and then threw sailcloth over the branches to make a roof. Then we hauled up our bedding and hammocks which we hung from the branches. After a day of hard work our treehouse was ready to be lived in, although there was still much to be done.

We ate supper on the ground as usual. It was the Sabbath, so I decided that we should have a service of thanksgiving for our safety and provision. I read from the Bible the story of the talents, and for a sermon, I spoke about a king who sent several of his citizens to a new land with seeds and equipment. The king asked the people to produce crops. Later, he sent ships to bring them back home. The people who worked their land and produced harvests, got to live in the king's castle after they returned. The people who were idle and

didn't produce crops got to work in the mines when they returned. I explained that God is the king and the people sent by the king to the new land are those who are rewarded for being diligent, using what they have to do good.

After supper we all climbed up the ladder to spend the night in our new house. Mother was the last to climb the ladder, with nervousness and great caution. Once we were all safely up in the tree house, I pulled up the rope ladder. Now we were really safe!

The next morning, we awoke and climbed down the ladder again.



Chapter 6 The Bees

Mother was not sure about climbing the ladder so often to get to our tree house. She wondered if there could be another way of getting there. I had the idea of building a staircase. This would be impossible to do on the outside, but maybe it could be done inside the trunk if it were hollow, or partly hollow. The day before, little Franz had noticed some bees coming out of a hole in the trunk. When he poked at the hole a bee came out and stung him on the face.



“If the trunk is hollow enough to contain a swarm of bees, then the hollow might extend upwards for a distance,” I suggested.

Jack sprung up immediately to test my theory. The other boys followed and soon they were

jumping about tapping the trunk to see how far the cavity extended. The boys were so set on the task that they forgot about the bees, which soon came swarming out of the hollow and gave the boys several stings. With difficulty we got rid of the angry bees, using sack bags to shoo them away, but at dusk they returned. Once back in their home, we plugged their hole with wet clay so the bees could not escape. Then I made a small hole into which I inserted a tobacco pipe. I filled it with tobacco, and once lit, I blew on one end and the smoke filled the bees’ cavity. I did this several times, until we could hear no more buzzing from the bees. We opened up the

clay hole and were able to scoop out the bees, that were now stupefied from the smoke. We got rid of the bees and helped ourselves to the bees’ wax and the delicious honey inside the trunk.

After many days hard labour, we built our staircase inside the trunk, upwards and upwards. After the stairway was completed, we set about enlarging the house itself. We built permanent walls and a roof of wood to replace the sailcloth. We built two additional rooms – one bedroom for the boys and one for my wife and myself. Once our home was complete, Fritz announced that we must give the house a name. Seeing it was mother’s idea to build the treehouse, she was given the honour of naming it. She called it “Falconhurst” because our home was as high as a falcon’s nest.

Chapter 7 The Lost Donkey

It was time to restock our supply of fresh fruit. I had seen some fruit trees on our previous trip to the other side of the island, not far from the fields of sugar cane. The three older boys and I took the cart with Grizzle the donkey, loaded on some empty barrels to contain the fruit, and some equipment to camp overnight. Once we arrived at the spot, I unhitched the donkey and with the boys’ help, started to build a rough hut out of branches. While doing this, the donkey ran away. As hard as we tried, we could not catch him.

The next morning, I set out again with Jack to find the donkey. We followed the donkey’s tracks, which led us to a large plain where buffaloes were grazing. We had the dogs with us, Turk and Juno, who made a nuisance of themselves by frightening the buffaloes. Fearing a stampede, I fired my gun and the buffaloes took off in the

other direction. That is, all but one young one, which seemed too stunned to move. Fritz wanted to take it back with us, suggesting that he could tame it. I found a rope which we tied around the buffalo's necks and hitched it behind the cart.

The next day, the donkey returned with wild donkey as a mate. So we returned home with more than just fruit. We now had a buffalo and an extra donkey to add to our livestock.



Chapter 8 The Wet Season

To save further trips into the centre of the island to gather fruit, we decided to plant our own fruit trees. In searching for small fruit trees to plant we discovered an unusual tree with sticky sap oozing from it. "This is an India Rubber tree!" I announced. "The South Americans, who first discovered it, would smear the sap over their clay jars which acted as moulds. Then when the sap was dry, they would break the clay jar and take away the pottery, leaving a rubber watertight container.

The skies grumbled as the rainy season was approaching. This was our signal to get prepared. The animals would need shelter and our food stores would need to be kept dry. We built a shelter for the animals, and day after day we carried stores to our food shelter. I went looking for more India Rubber trees and collected the sticky sap. Once I had collected enough, I filled a pair of socks with sand, and covered the socks with the sap. Once it had dried, I removed the socks and sand, and I now had a pair of waterproof boots!

When the rains came, we found it impossible to stay in our treetop nest so we had to retreat to the trunk. With our provisions in the store room below, it was a tight squeeze. When we ventured out, we got soaked to the skin. My wife was worried that we would catch cold, so she was able to make some waterproof suits with hoods, out of oil cloth.

These were tedious months of being indoors. The boys drew pictures of plants and animals. I wrote my journal of all our events. My wife sewed and the older boys taught little Franz to read.

Week after week the incessant rain battered down on us. We felt like prisoners in the constant gloom. Then at last the winds subsided, the rain ceased and the sun shone through the clouds. Spring had come. We could now spend time outdoors, with thousands of happy birds singing to us.

As we inspected our stores we found that much had been damaged by the rain. We decided that in preparation for the next wet season we could excavate an existing cave, digging into the rock to expand it. That is what we did over the next months. It was hard work chipping away at the rock with a crowbar. But one day the crowbar suddenly pushed into a cavity. The crowbar went right through the rock. We continued breaking away the rock until there was a hole big enough for us to walk through. I stepped into the opening and was hit by a sudden rush of bad-smelling gas that made me feel dizzy. I stepped back and shouted to the boys to step away. When I recovered, I explained to them the danger of entering places where stagnant air has been stored for a long time. "Without constantly being renewed, air can become poisonous," I said. "The safest way to purify the air is with a fire, which uses up the air to stay alight."

We threw bundles of hay into the cavity and set it alight. It burned brightly for a while and then the flame went out. Now the air was purified. We examined the walls of the cave which were glistening with minerals that looked like diamonds. We returned to Falconhurst with the good news that next wet season we would have a dry home to live in.

We worked hard over the next months, establishing our cave home, which we gave the name "Rockburg". When we moved just before

the next rainy season, we found that this home was a far better shelter than the tree house. The cave was large enough for us to have a workroom, a library, a dry storage area for seeds and food supplies, and shelter for our livestock.



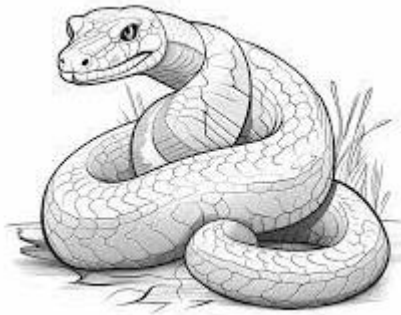
Chapter 9 The Boa Constrictor

One day, while seated with my wife and Fritz beneath the shade of the verandah at Rockburg, Fritz suddenly got up, took a step forward, and with a fixed gaze exclaimed, "I see something very strange in the distance, Father! What in the world can it be? First it seems to be like coils on the ground, then it rises up as it were a little mast, then it sinks again, and the coils move along. It is coming towards our bridge. (We had built a drawbridge across the river, to prevent wild animals coming into our area at night. It could be pulled up each evening.)

My wife took alarm at this description, and calling the other boys, retreated into the cave, where I told them to close up the entrances, and keep watch with firearms at the upper windows. These were

openings we had made in the rock at a higher level, reached from within by steps.

Fritz remained by me while I examined the object through my spy-glass.



“It is, as I feared, an enormous serpent!” I cried. “It’s coming directly this way, and we are in danger, for it will certainly cross the bridge.”

“Should we attack it, father?” asked the brave boy.

“Only with the greatest caution,”

I said. “It’s a very dangerous animal that suffocates its victims by strangling them, and then swallows them whole. Thank God we are at Rockburg, where we can keep in safe retreat, while we watch for an opportunity to destroy this frightful beast. Go up to your mother now, and help her prepare the firearms. I will join you directly, but I must keep a watch on the monster’s movements.”

Fritz left me unwillingly, while I continued to watch the serpent, which was of gigantic size, and already much too near the bridge to think about running out to pull it up. I thought about how easy it would be for the reptile to pass through our walls. The reptile advanced with writhing movements, from time to time rearing its head to the height of about fifteen feet, (4 metres), and slowly turning its head about, as though on the look-out for prey.

As it crossed the bridge, with a slow, suspicious motion, I withdrew, and hastily rejoined my family, who were preparing to barricade the openings like a fortress. After barricading everything below, we retreated to the upper quarters and waited with beating hearts.

It turned in different directions, coiling and uncoiling, and frequently rearing its head, now in front of the cave. Suddenly, one after another the boys fired, and even their mother discharged her gun. The shots had no effect, except to startle the monster, whose movements became even faster. Fritz and I also fired with steadier aim, but with the same result. But then the monster passed on with a gliding motion, entering the reedy marsh, and entirely disappeared.

A wonderful weight seemed lifted from our hearts, while we all eagerly discussed the ordeal, and the appearance of the serpent. I had recognized it as the boa constrictor. It was a large specimen, more than thirty feet, (9 metres) in length. I gave instructions that no one should leave the house for any reason whatsoever without my permission.

For three whole days we were kept in suspense and fear, not daring to come out more than a few hundred steps from the door, although during all that time the boa constrictor showed no sign of its presence.

In fact, we might have been led to believe that the boa had passed across the swamp, and found its way up the cliff walls and beyond, had not it not been for the restless behaviour of our geese and ducks. That was a sign that told us that the boa constrictor still lurked in the thicket of reeds which was normally the nightly resting place of the

geese and ducks. They had swum about anxiously, and with much clapping of wings and disturbed cackling, showing their uneasiness. Finally, they took flight across the harbour, and took up their quarters on Shark's Island.

For three days we were shut up with our animals in the unnatural light of the cave, enduring constant anxiety. Our situation was critical because we had no great stock of provisions, nor fodder for the animals. So, on the evening of the third day, I decided to set the animals free by sending them, under the guidance of Fritz, across the river at the ford, (the shallow crossing).

He was to ride his buffalo, Lightfoot, and the animals were to be fastened together until safely over the river. Next morning we began to prepare for this by tying them in a line, and while doing so, my wife opened the door, and old Grizzle the donkey suddenly broke away from the halter, jumped around, then bolting out, galloping full speed, straight for the marsh.

In vain we called him by name. Fritz would even have rushed after him, had not I held him back. In another moment the donkey was close to the moor, and with a cold shudder of horror, we watched the snake rear itself from its lair. The fiery eyes glanced around, the dark deadly jaws opened widely, the forked tongue darted greedily forth—poor Grizzle's fate was sealed.

Becoming aware on a sudden of his danger, he stopped short, spread out all four legs, and gave a most piteous and discordant bray. Swift and straight as a fencer's thrust, the destroyer was upon him, wound

itself around him, entangled, enfolded, compressed him, all the while cunningly avoiding the convulsive kicks of the agonized animal.

A cry of horror arose from the boys.

"Shoot the snake, father! Oh, shoot it—do save poor Grizzle!"

"My children, it is impossible!" I cried. "Our old friend is lost to us forever! I have hopes, however, that when the snake is gorged with its prey, we may be able to attack it with some chance of success."

"But the horrible wretch is never going to swallow him all at once, father?" cried Jack. "That will be too shocking!"

"Boa constrictors have no teeth, but only fangs, therefore they cannot chew their food, and must swallow it whole. But although the idea is startling, it is not really more shocking than the tearing and shedding of blood which occurs when lions and tigers seize their prey."

"But," said Franz, "how can the snake separate the flesh from the bones without teeth? And is this kind of snake poisonous?"

"No, dear child," I said, "It's not poisonous - only very strong and ferocious. And it has no need to tear the flesh from the bones. It swallows its victim, skin, hair and all, and digests everything in its stomach."

"It seems utterly impossible that the broad ribs, the strong legs, hoofs and all, should go down that throat," exclaimed Fritz.

"The way this monster deals with its victim, is to tightly curl itself around the victim, crushing everything into a shapeless mass. It will

then begin to gorge the prey, and slowly but surely it will disappear down that distended belly!”

My wife, with little Franz, found the scene all too horrible, and hurried into the cave, trembling and distressed. The rest of us were fixated on the scene, and we could not move from the spot. The process lasted from seven in the morning until noon. When the donkey’s body was entirely swallowed, the serpent lay stiff, distorted, and apparently insensible along the edge of the marsh.

I felt that now or never was the moment for attack! Calling my sons, I left our retreat. I approached the outstretched serpent with rapid steps, carrying my gun. Fritz followed me closely.

Jack, somewhat timidly, came several paces behind, while Ernest, after a little hesitation, remained where he was.

The monster’s body was stiff and motionless, which made its fiery eyes and writhing tail look more fearful.

We fired together, and both balls entered the skull. The light of its eye was extinguished, and now the only movement was in the tail. Advancing closer, we fired our pistols directly into its head, and the boa constrictor lay dead.

“What’s to be done with him now?” asked Jack.

“Let us get him stuffed,” said Fritz, “and set him up in our museum in the library, amongst our shells and corals.”

“No, I have another idea,” said Ernest. Why don’t we bury the serpent, and make an epitaph for old Grizzle” ...

‘Beneath this stone lay poor Grizzle’s bones

A faithful ass he was, and loved by all.

His master’s voice he disobeyed

And thereby came his terrible fall.

A monstrous serpent, springing from the moor

Seized him, crushed him and swallowed him whole

Though we mourn for our poor old ass’s soul

We are grateful that he thereby saved the lives

Of all the human beings on this shore

A father, mother, and their children four.’

“Hurrah for the epitaph! Well done, Ernest!” resounded on all sides, and taking out a large red pencil I used for marking wood, the lines of poetry were inscribed on a great flat stone, being, as I told Ernest, the very best poetry that had ever been written on our coast. We then had dinner, and afterwards went to work, burying the serpent.

Chapter 10 Thanksgiving

I had kept a diary since arriving on the island. As I read through my notes, I found that we had now been living on the island for one year. We had first lived in a tent on the rocky shore. We now owned a treetop home as well a cave home. Our farm was flourishing and our flocks of animals were increasing. We had everything we needed for living a comfortable life.

The buffalo that we had brought back from the plain was now tame, and Fritz was riding it like a horse. On another occasion the boys had surprised a flock of ostriches, and Ernest had succeeded in bring home a young male bird. Like the buffalo, it quickly became tame. As it grew it became a strong fast runner, although it never attempted to run away. It enjoyed staying around the campsite



where there were bits of food that he could help himself to. Ernest had an idea. Seeing the ostrich was big, strong and a fast runner, he thought about making a saddle and bridle for the bird and ride on his back. Soon Ernest was riding the ostrich, whose name was Hurricane. So Fritz had his buffalo, Ernest had Hurricane, Jack could

ride on the cow and Franz could ride on the young bull calf. We had all the requirements for running some races.

We marked our one-year anniversary as a Thanksgiving Day. After giving thanks to God for His provision and protection, we celebrated it with a sports day. We started with foot races, which Jack won. Then came the 'horse race' which the ostrich easily won. Then came the swimming and diving contests at the beach.

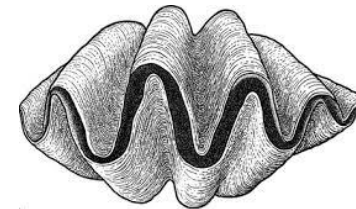
While at the beach, Ernest came running excitedly back to my wife and I who were sitting on the sand. "Father," he exclaimed, out of breath, "I have just seen the biggest clam in the world, in the sea! It is bigger than two washtubs!"

"What you have seen, Ernest," I replied, "is a tridacna. It's a giant clam that lives in tropical waters. It's not safe to go near it. Divers have been known to have their foot caught when the clam closed its shell on them."

"We could capture it," said Ernest. So, with my help we took our small sailboat to the spot where Ernest had seen the clam. We took a rope and I dropped the rope into the open clam. It immediately closed its shells on the rope, so we were able to pull it up into the boat.

We cooked the clam on the fire that night. It opened its shell revealing pink flesh which was delicious to eat. When we had removed the meat, we washed the two halves of the shell and used one for storing drinking water, and the other for washing. Both shells were lined with a beautiful coating of mother-of-pearl.

So our life continued. We were never idle. There was always work to do.



Chapter 11 The Pelican

We were happy living on our island, even though no rescue boat had come our way. We had enlarged the tree house and made a second home in the cave for the rainy season. We knew when to plant crops and we tended to our herds of animals. We were never short of food or clothing. The fruit trees were thriving and so was our vegetable garden. Franz and Jack made a decision to build a watch tower from which we could look out for ships that might be passing. They hauled up the ship's canon into the watch tower, as well as plenty of gun powder for firing the canon. If a ship did pass, they could fire the canon to get the attention of the ship's captain. They fired the canon on a regular basis, in case there was a ship far out to sea, and also just to make sure it was still working.

We had all kept in good health, having plenty of fresh air, sunshine, good food and exercise. The boys had grown into fine strong and handsome men. Fritz, the eldest was now twenty-five. Franz, the youngest, was now a lively lad of seventeen. But time, which was bringing our sons to manhood, was also carrying their parents onwards to old age. I would sometimes have anxious and gloomy thoughts about their future, should they be left alone on the island after my wife and I pass away. On such occasions I would not tell my family about my depressing thoughts, but turning in prayer to the Almighty Father, lay my troubles before Him, with never-failing renewal of strength and hope.

One of our projects during the wet season had been to build a canoe. Now Fritz would often go off by himself in the canoe,

exploring the coast, looking for any signs of life in places we had not explored before. One day Fritz saw a pelican on the beach. As he went up to the Pelican it seemed to be tame. The pelican waded



onto the sea and started swimming. Fritz decided to follow it in his kayak. The pelican led him to a calm bay previously unknown to us. To his amazement he saw a column of smoke rising from this small island. He paddled towards the shore and to his great surprise, was met by a slim figure. At first, he thought it was a young

sailor, but then realized it was a girl dressed in the only clothing available to her – the uniform of a naval officer. She shook Fritz's hand and said her name was Jenny Montrose. She had been stranded on the island for three years. Like us, she had been shipwrecked and stranded on an island. She had built a hut to live in, and had salvaged items that had washed up on shore, including the naval uniform that she was wearing. She had learned to fend for herself, having been taught survival skills by her father. She learned which plants were edible, how to build a shelter, and had made snares to trap birds for food. Franz was very impressed with her survival skills. She had tamed a pelican to fly off and come back to her. The pelican had brought about her rescue.



Jenny had been shipwrecked three years ago. Her mother had died when she was three years old so as a child she had to accompany her father in his work as an English naval officer. They were stationed in India, but when her father was posted to another country, Jenny was unable to take the naval ship at the time. She had to take civilian ship instead so was separated from her father for the voyage. The civilian ship was caught in a storm and smashed against rocks. Jenny battled the raging sea and was finally washed up on the island, but there were no other survivors. She had lived alone on the island for three years.

Fritz invited her to come back with him to meet us all. We were very surprised when Fritz arrived with a stranger, but so happy to have a new family member! My wife and the boys prepared a special meal to welcome her.

Chapter 12 The New Switzerland

It was almost ten years to the day. We were sitting around enjoying the cool of the evening, when we heard Jack fire the canon as usual. But to our utter amazement we heard three canon shots fire back! The boys jumped up and down excitedly. But darkness was falling. I instructed Jack to fire the canon every hour, so that whoever was out there would know we were still here.

Of course, none of us could sleep. We were down at the beach again as soon as the sun came up the next morning. To our utter astonishment, the first light of dawn revealed a large ship with an English flag flapping from its mast, sailing towards out bay. We got our small yacht and went out to meet the ship.

The ship dropped anchor and the captain welcomed us aboard. We told him our story and invited him to come back to Falconhurst to have dinner with us. He accepted our invitation and also an invitation to stay with us for the night. My wife and I had long conversations into the night, sharing our stories.

It turned out that Jenny Montrose was the reason the ship came by. Her father knew that the ship she was travelling on was destroyed in the storm. He hoped that she was able to survive the shipwreck and find a way to live in the islands. He had been sending search parties to the area for three years, but with no success until now. He was able to do this because he was an important military leader.

After our discussions we knew that we had to make an important decision. Did we want to return to Europe and leave the beautiful

home that we have created? It was clear that my wife and I did not want to leave, but the boys might be keen for a new life and new adventure. We decided that we would ask them if they wanted to go. We thought that when back in Europe, they could send other people to come and join us on our island. This would become a colony of new immigrants, and we would call it “New Switzerland.”

The next morning, we asked the boys what they wanted to do. Fritz and Franz decided to go back to further their education. But Ernest and Jack did not want to leave. It would soon be time to harvest the crops and their hearts were here on the island.

The captain promised that our island would duly be given a place on the mapping charts of the world, and a ship would stop by at intervals bringing immigrants and supplies.

In a long conversation with my sons, I spoke about future responsibilities of their life, in all its varied aspects, of duty towards God, their fellow men, and themselves, pointing out the temptations to which their different characters were likely to experience. I encouraged them to hold fast to the faith in which they had been brought up.

Then two days later we said fond goodbyes to Jenny, and with much sadness, said goodbye to Fritz and Franz. Fritz and Jenny now had a strong romantic attachment. I gave them my blessing for their engagement, and they were later married.

On the evening before our separation, I gave to Fritz the journal in which, ever since the shipwreck, I had chronicled the events of our life, desiring that the story might be printed and published. “It was

written, as you well know,” I said, “for the instruction and amusement of my children, but it is very possible that it may be useful to other young people.”

From afar I sent my greetings to my home country, dear old Switzerland.

