

Crusoes of the Frozen North eBook

Crusoes of the Frozen North by William Gordon Stables

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[Illustration: *They found Tom at the lake-side, standing over A huge dead bear.*]

The Crusoes Of The Frozen North

From the Well-known Story by Dr. Gordon Stables

CHAPTER I

"I'm sure of one thing," said Aralia to her little sister Pansy, as they sat together one lovely summer afternoon on the garden seat, and gazed away and away far over the North Sea. "I'm quite sure of one thing. Nobody ever could have so good an uncle as our uncle. Now, could anybody, Pansy?"

"Oh no!" answered Pansy, shaking her pretty head. Pansy was hardly eight years old, and always agreed with her older sister, who was nearly eleven.

"How I wish he were home again from his old ship," sighed Aralia, "and Tom with him!"

"Well, Ara, we can sit here hours and hours every day and watch the sea, can't we?"

"Yes, and we shall easily know the ship. As she goes by, shell set all her flags a-flying, and, if Father isn't at home, Mother will send up our great red flag on the garden pole. Oh dear! I could nearly cry for joy to think of it!"

"And me too!" said Pansy.

"And me too!" Veevee seemed to say, as he gave a short bark, and, jumping down from the seat, ran round the garden, looking like a fluffy white ball.



The sea was very blue, only patched with green wherever a cloud-shadow fell on it. Down beneath the cliff on which the cottage stood, the waves broke lazily in long white lines of foam. On the sea itself were vessels of almost every kind, from the little fishing craft with brown sails to great ships sailing away to distant lands.

Aralia knew what class of vessel each was by its rig; her best of uncles had taught her. And well could she use the spy-glass too, which she now held to her right eye. It had been hard at first to keep the left closed, but she could manage it now quite easily without asking Pansy to clap a hand over it.

Soon she began to talk in little gasps:

“Oh, Pansy—I think—Oh, I’m nearly sure—yes—yes—it must be! it *is* Uncle’s ship! I can see the flags all a-flying—Hurrah! Come and look!”

[Illustration]

Pansy sat on her sister’s knee and peeped through the glass. Then both the children started up and waved their arms in the air at the far-off ship. They were just about to rush off to tell Mother, when their cousin Frank came up. He was a lad of about thirteen or fourteen, but he was so tall and manly that he looked older.

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Frank came into the garden with a rush and a run when he heard the girls call out. A fishing basket was slung over his back, from which the tails of fish stuck out, showing what good sport he had had.

"Hillo, Ara! Hillo, Pansy! What are you dancing and 'hoo-laying' about? Been stung by a wasp, my little Pansy Blossom?"

"Oh, Frank," cried the elder girl, "look through the glass! Uncle's coming! Look at the ship, and all the flags."

The boy was almost as excited now as the girls themselves, and presently they were all running in a string through the pretty garden towards the cottage with the news, Veevee bringing up the rear and barking bravely.

* * * * *

Rat-tat-tat at the door next afternoon, and little Pansy ran to open it, expecting to see the postman, but the knocking was only a bit of Tom's fun. Frank had left for Hull the evening before to meet him, and here was Tom the sailor, tall and bonny and dark. Pansy jumped into his arms like a baby, Aralia rushed to meet him, and his mother came out, though a little more slowly. When the bustle was all over, and Tom had answered nearly a hundred questions, they all went in to tea.

"Yes, Aralia, Uncle is coming up from Hull with Father and Cousin Frank, and we shall stop here three whole days before we go back to clear ship and pay off"

"And," added Tom, "Uncle has something so strange and nice to tell you!"

"What is it, Tom?" said his two sisters, both in a breath as it were.

"I can't, won't, and sha'n't tell you, girls," cried Tom, laughing, "because that would spoil the fun when Uncle comes."

So all, even Veevee, who would not get off Tom's knees for a minute, had to be as patient as they could. But the time passed so quickly, listening to all this hearty young sailor had to tell of his voyage to the far north, that before anyone was aware it was nearly seven o'clock.

And now down jumps Veevee and runs towards the door, barking aloud as if he were a very big dog.

"They're coming! They're coming! Veevee knows!" And coming they were indeed.

Tom had had a hearty welcome when he arrived, but when this best of uncles at last managed to sit down on the sofa: "Shiver my timbers, sister," he said to Mrs. Dunlop, "if

it isn't worth while going all the way to the back of the North Pole just to get such a welcome home as this."

Jack Staysail was a sailor every inch of him. He had roughed it so much in the Greenland seas, and been out in so many storms, that his face was as red as a boiled beet; but his eyes were as full of fun and merriment as a boy's.

"We're not all here yet," he said. "I have asked my friend, Professor Peterkin, the Swede, to come in to-night with his mastiff." When their uncle mentioned the mastiff, Aralia and Pansy began to tremble for Veevee, but Tom only laughed.

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“Why,” he said, “although Briton—that’s his name—is big enough to tackle a bear, he wouldn’t injure a mouse.”

It was nearly nine o’clock when the professor arrived. Briton marched in first, and a bigger and more noble-looking fellow was never seen. Veevee said he couldn’t stand another dog in the place. So he started up, barking loudly, and offering to fight the mastiff to the death on the spot. But Briton stepped gingerly over the little dog, and went and lay quietly down on the rug.

Then in bustled the professor himself, very droll, very small, clean-shaven, merry-eyed, and with as much hair on his great head as would have stuffed a cushion. He bowed and smiled to all, patted the children, and at last sat down to supper.

All made a very hearty supper, though it was long past the children’s bed-time. Only Uncle didn’t come home every night, you know.

When they had finished, Briton had a huge dish of scraps; Veevee sat watching him eat, and the children were very much surprised to see Briton shove one of the biggest and best morsels towards him. The tiny dog picked up the titbit and wagged his tail. After he had eaten it, he went and lay down beside Briton on the hearth-rug.

The “something nice” that Uncle had to tell was soon told now. Captain Staysail cleared his throat before he began: “Ahem! Oh, you’re all waiting, are you, to hear what I’ve got to say? Well, then—ahem!—Professor Peterkin—”

“Pete—Pete—Pete—Pete!” cried the droll, wee man, stopping him, and one would have thought he was calling a dog. “I’m not going to be called Professor, and I won’t Peterkin. Just Pete, as I was on board ship, as I am to everybody, and must be to you.

“But just look here, Staysail, you’re a sailor, and you can’t make a speech. Let me speak.” And speak he did without waiting for a reply.

“It’s all in a nutshell, dear Mr. and Mrs. Dunlop, and I’ll tell you in two or three sentences what your worthy sailor-brother would have kept you up all night to hear. Now listen! Briton, you lie down! Good again! Now I, Dan Peterkin, am a man who has been used to study hard, and think hard. You follow me so far? Good again!

“Well, there is one thing has taken me years to work out, and that is, where in this world gold and coal are to be found. And I’ve done it. I can go right to the spots. One of them lies on an island right away up in the Frozen North. And we’re going there. Your brother, Mrs. Dunlop, is going to take me.

“Well, we may have some hardships. Paff! What do we care? We shall win such wealth as has never been seen before. You follow still? Good again! Well, I go to a town in the north last spring, when the seal ships are all there, and I look for an honest

face. I find Staysail. I say to him: 'You give me a passage to Greenland, my friend.' He say: 'What for I give you passage?' I smile. I take him by one button, and pull him all the way into a private room of the hotel. Briton follows. We all dine well—we all come out smiling—Briton too. And now, my friends, all is arranged. We sail away and away and away next spring for the seas of ice and the islands of gold.

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"That is all. You have followed me? Good again!" And once more the professor sat down, and the big arm-chair seemed to swallow him up.

* * * * *

Ara and Pansy lay awake a long time that night thinking of what Pete had said. But the next day they went about their duties as usual. They did not go to school, as they had a governess, of whom they were both very fond. Nearly half their day would be spent out-of-doors with her and Veevee. In spring and summer they would gather flowers inland, but what they liked best was to play about on the sands, to go out boating with an old seaman they knew, or climb the rocks and get into very steep and giddy places.

[Illustration]

Poor Frank Dunlop was an orphan, and was now the adopted son of Ara's father. As for Tom, who was a year or two older, his father had wanted him to go into business at home in England, but nothing would satisfy the lad but going to sea, so he had been sent to rough it with his uncle in the stormy seas of the Frozen North. The cruise now ended was his second, and Tom wasn't tired of the sea yet.

Frank went back to school, and appeared no more at the cottage until Christmas came round. Then not only Uncle, but Pete and Briton came to spend a whole fortnight with the Dunlop family, and to make their final plans for the spring. And I should say that no fortnight seemed to pass so quickly to the children as did the two weeks when their visitors stayed with them.

At last, one day in early spring, there left Hull on a trial trip one of the handsomest little steamers, and, for her size, one of the strongest that ever put to sea from that port. She was Captain Staysail's new ship, the *Valhalla*. Everything on board, both on deck and between decks, and in the saloon, was as clean and beautiful as if she had been a royal yacht. The decks were as white as ivory, the polished wood shone in the sun, and the brass-work looked like gold. The saloon itself, with its curtains, its mirrors, tables pillars, and piano, was really fit for a fairy princess to live in. Everything had been prepared under the eye of Professor Peterkin himself, so everything was perfect in its way.

Pansy, who was on board, and had been peeping in some of the rooms, said to Aralia at last: "Oh, Aralia, what a dear little doll's house of a cabin; I should like to live in it always!"

Neither of the children was sea-sick when the *Valhalla* went out under steam, and they had such fun with the sailors and the two dogs that they were quite sorry when the ship once more steamed into port.

And didn't everybody sleep soundly that night in the hotel! I should say so!

CHAPTER II

The merry month of May had hardly begun when the brave *Valhalla* steamed away on her perilous cruise to the far and icy north.

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Frank, with his two little cousins, had begged leave to go to Hull in order to see the very, very last of the beautiful ship and that best of uncles, Captain Staysail. Leave had been given by their parents, because “Wherever Frank is,” said Mr. Dunlop, “the children are sure to be safe.”

There had been a good deal of stir and bustle on the very last evening, and many visitors had been to the *Valhalla*, for somehow word had gone out that Professor Peterkin, the great Swedish traveller, was off to find the North Pole!

And all believed that he would find it. Some of the sailors even went so far as to say that he would bring it back with him rigged up as a mast of his ship!

But by the time eight bells had rung out all was quiet. The hands had turned in, and only Tom and two men were left on watch.

“Go forward,” said Tom, “and have a cup of coffee and a smoke, and I’ll see to the safety of the ship here at the gangway.”

The men took the young officer at his word, and it was not very long ere their smoke was finished, and they, too, were fast asleep. Had any other eyes than Tom’s been watching the shore, about half an hour afterwards, they must have noticed that something very strange was taking place.

Dark figures could be seen drawing near with stealthy footsteps to the farther end of the gangway. Then they stopped as if in fear and dread. But Tom whistled a long, low whistle, and three figures, muffled in oil-skins, stole along the gangway and stepped silently on deck.

Then Tom sprang a small bull’s-eye lantern, and let its light shine right in front of him, so that no one meeting him could have told who or what was stealing up behind. In the same quiet way he led the little party down a ladder to the deck below, and then beneath hammocks filled with sleeping sailors, and along a passage, until he came to a door, which he carefully unlocked, and soon afterwards locked again.

[Illustration]

* * * * *

By midnight next night the *Valhalla* was far out at sea, bearing to the north, for Captain Staysail did not mean to touch at any of the English or Scotch ports on this voyage.

The weather at first was very beautiful, and so it remained, with a calm sea and hardly a breath of wind, until nearly sunset of the second day. Then clouds began to bank up, dark and threatening, and the glass—so Webb, the first mate, reported to the captain—was going tumbling down.

"We are going to have a blow, sir," he said, "and it's coming up sharp behind us. I reckon, sir, we'll have a ten-knotter afore the middle watch is called!"

"Well, then, have the fires banked, Mr. Webb, as soon as the wind is strong enough to get way on her. I wouldn't set too much sail, and if it does come a gale, I'd ease her right away. You know what she can do, Mate."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

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“Well, I think that’s all.”

But the mate didn’t move.

“Anything else, Mr. Webb?”

“There is something else, sir,” said the mate rather sheepishly.

“Well, out with it. Why, you look as if you’d seen a ghost!”

“Well, sir, there is a ghost, or demon, or something aboard of this very ship, and some of the crew are in a state next door to mutiny about it.”

“What on earth do you mean, Mr. Webb?”

The tall, handsome, fair-haired Webb leaned over the table and spoke to Staysail almost in a whisper.

“It’s the little professor they all blame, sir; and there are four of them who swear the ship is haunted—that he keeps evil spirits under lock and key for’ard—”

“But—but—Mr. Webb—Evil spirits under lock and key! Do you mean bad rum? And who is he?”

“Hush, sir! don’t talk so loud. He’s walking the deck now. It’s the professor I mean, sir. As to the evil spirits, I’ve heard them myself—mutter, mutter, squeak, squeak, squeak! Ugh! it is awful, sir—awful!”

And the mate shuddered as he spoke.

Now, Staysail was always a good laugh, but at this tale he fairly yelled with laughter until everything jingled in the cabin, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

The mate never moved a muscle.

“That awful fore-cabin, sir!” he said. “It’s in there, and Broomberg, the Finlander, declares that if you don’t land him and his mates at Bergen they’ll seize the ship and sail for Aberdeen.”

“But why on earth don’t you open the fore-cabin?”

“Oh, that’s where it is, sir! The key is lost, or else the professor has it.”

“Hark!”

A squall at that moment struck the ship and heeled her over. It blew with tremendous force for a time, and at last settled down to a steady gale. But in less than an hour the captain's orders were carried out, and the good ship *Valhalla* was speeding before the wind at a good rate with very little sail on her.

The storm increased towards midnight, and at that dark hour the *Valhalla* had to lie to under almost bare poles. So busy had all hands been kept that there was very little time to think of ghosts or evil spirits, and now that the crew had a chance of turning in, it is needless to say that sleep was the first thing to be considered.

But fresh trouble came with the new day. The wind had gone down, and the sea as well, and the *Valhalla* was now bowling along on a pretty even keel, for the breeze was well astern.

Webb, the mate, and Tom both slept in bunks in the same cabin. Just as the steward was laying breakfast, Webb popped his head out from his cabin curtains.

"Hillo, steward!"

"Good-morning, sah!" said Jake Brown, who, strange as it may seem, was a tall and important-looking black man, with hair as white as snow.

"Have you seen Master Tom? He hasn't been here all night. I slept too sound to take much notice."

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"Sakes alive, no!" cried burly Jake. "I run and search de ship plenty quick." And away he went.

Webb was dressed and leaving his cabin when Jake returned. But neither high nor low, fore nor aft, could Tom be found, nor had he been seen since the main-topsail had carried away just before midnight.

The captain was now roused and the terrible news reported.

"Poor Tom! poor Tom! Washed overboard without a doubt!" he said.

Tom had been a great favourite on board, and the news caused a general gloom all over the ship.

But Broomberg and his mates received the news in another way.

"It is von unlucky ship," cried the former, "and did not those below hear the shrieking of the ghosts when the waves and wind were highest? Come we to the captain at once, men. I will not sail in a haunted ship. No, no."

Some minutes before eight bells rang out in the morning air, the captain on the quarter-deck, with Mr. Webb and the professor, were engaged in angry talk with Broomberg and his fellows.

"Return to your duty, men," the captain said. "I will make enquiries into the matter. As for you, Broomberg, hand over that knife you are fingering, and consider yourself under arrest."

"I will not," shouted the fellow. "See!"

He made a wild rush aft, holding the glittering blade high in air, and seized the professor by the neck.

But help from an unexpected quarter was at hand, and next moment Broomberg was sprawling on his back with Briton's great paws on his chest.

Mutiny and ghosts and storm were at once forgotten. The men cheered wildly, Broomberg's knife was snatched from his hand, and he himself bound hand and foot, while everybody crowded round to shake hands with the little professor, or to pat the noble dog who had saved his life.

But suddenly joy was changed to terror, for shriek after shriek could be heard forward, and in a few seconds' time the cook rushed helter-skelter up on deck, almost pale with fright, followed by the men of the watch below.



“The ghosts!” somebody shouted.

The captain stood as if stupefied, the little professor’s eyes were as big as watch-glasses, and the mate had to catch hold of a back-stay to prevent himself from falling.

The whole crew now took to the rigging, and the only marvel is that some of them did not slip overboard and make food for the sharks.

“Look, look!—oh, look, sir!” shouted the mate with a cry like one in a nightmare; and the next moment he fainted and fell on the top of Broomberg the mutineer.

CHAPTER III

Two little girls, one little boy, and one little dog, all as black as chimney-sweeps, the girls with their arms in the air, now came wildly racing aft.

Tom himself, come back to life, was standing on the capstan waving his cap in the air, and cheering and laughing like a mad thing.

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Aralia and Pansy reached the quarter-deck before anyone could say “knife”, and, black as they were, sprang right into Captain Staysail’s arms, hugging him and kissing him.

“What!—what!—what!—” He tried to get out a sentence, but failed.

“Oh, I was so frightened, Unky dear, but I is so happy now!” cried Pansy.

“Bless my soul and body,” cried Staysail at last, “how did all this happen?”

[Illustration]

Then he went forward a few paces, the little ones clinging to him all the time, and Veevee racing round the deck like a live muff.

“Tom, you young rascal, jump down here at once. This is all your work. Now, give a full account of it, sir.”

“Oh, I do hope, Uncle, you’ll forgive me, but Frank and little Pansy and Aralia did want to come with us so much, that—that—!”

“That you took them as stowaways, eh?”

“I’m afraid that’s it, sir.”

The captain pretended to be awfully angry, and said he would put about and land the lot at Aberdeen.

“In the meantime, go below, children, and get yourselves washed; the steward will see to you. Steward!”

“Ay, ay, sir, I’s e heah, sah.”

“Let Miss Aralia and Pansy have that spare cabin near mine. I’ll talk to you afterwards, Tom.”

Tom hung his head in sorrow—so it seemed,—but it really was to hide a smile.

He got near enough to his sisters to say: “Keep up your pecker, Pansy, for there won’t be any Aberdeen about it.”

In the spare cabin stood a big box that nobody had noticed before. Tom had smuggled it on board, and it contained his sisters’ best things, and a full rig-out for them for the Arctic regions.

Sly old Tom!

He now stole into their cabin and gave them their clothes, and when Staysail came down to dinner at twelve, with his spy-glass under his arm, no wonder he cried: "Hillo! Hillo!"

For here were the three children, all mirth and smiles, seated beside Pete, and Tom, with head bowed down, waiting to take his seat.

"Hillo! Hillo! But what will your father and mother think, my dears?"

"Oh," cried Tom, "we made that all right! Father gave his consent, and he'll easily manage Mother."

"Steward!" shouted the captain, and Jake came running. "Put the other half-leaf in the table to-night, and lay covers for three more, for these young ragamuffins must mess with us in future."

There was no more word about ghosts now, and the kind professor forgave the Finlander. He was set free and sent to duty, and now for weeks and weeks there wasn't a much happier vessel afloat than the brave ship *Valhalla* bound for the Frozen North.

The two dogs became great friends, but, strangely enough, both disliked Broomberg, and kept out of his way whenever they could. Once, indeed, when the man bent down to stroke Veevee, Briton stood guard over his little friend and growled.

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“Hands off!” the mastiff seemed to say, “hands off till we know more about you!”

* * * * *

Of course Uncle was chief favourite with the children, but all the three of them came to like the little professor very much indeed. He was with them nearly all day long. Tom was usually very busy; so, too, was Uncle Staysail; and though it must not be thought that Pete was an idle man, for he had much to study, still he always found time to romp and play with Aralia, Pansy, and the two dogs.

Though the weather grew colder for a time, it was all one long, long summer's day. For in the Arctic regions the sun never sets for at least three months, but just goes round and round, blazing high in the south at mid-day, and lower in the north at midnight. Indeed, in these seas, if you were not to look at the clock, you could not really tell whether it was night or day.

Every evening now the little party gathered round the large stove, on which a copper urn of coffee was always gently simmering. Then the professor told his strangest stories, with perhaps Pansy on his knee, and Aralia lying on the hearth-rug with the dogs. Most of his yarns were about the Frozen North, its dangers and perils, its joys and pleasures.

“And shall we see all these strange sights?” Pansy used to ask.

“Yes, dear, and many more than these, because I mean to give you a treat if you are good and don't get your fingers frozen.”

One day great lumps of white snow-clad ice came floating by, and that same evening the crow's-nest was hoisted high, high up at the very top of the main-mast. The crow's-nest was like a big barrel with a lid at the bottom, Pansy said, and Tom, or the mate, used to climb and crawl through the bottom, and stand, spy-glass in hand, and look all about them.

“Oh,” cried Pansy one day, “shouldn't I like to get up just once! Wouldn't you, Ara?”

“But we could never climb up,” sighed her sister.

The clever professor heard them, and lo and behold! the very next day he had a kind of easy-chair ready for them to go up in. He himself sat down in it with the children, and up they were hoisted, up and up. It was so fearsome that the girls shut their eyes and clung to Pete, but when they did open them what a sight they saw!

They were not far off the main pack, and as far as the eye could see was one vast field of snow-covered ice. Their eyes were dazzled in looking at it.



They were not in the crow's-nest, but close beside it, and Pete made them look through the spy-glass. This was wonderful, for away yonder to the north, and near to the edge of the pack, where the sea looked as black as ink, they could see four great ships, with their crews on the ice, shooting seals and dragging skins. But in two hours' time the *Valhalla* herself got north as far as these ships, and was stopped.

Neither of the girls felt cold, for they wore great mits and hoods, and were altogether as snug as mice.

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Then a boat was lowered, and when they looked down they could see Tom himself get in with shooting-clothes on and a great rifle in his hand. He waved his cap to them, and Pansy cried: "Hoo-lay!" The boat pulled away and soon touched the ice; Tom sprang nimbly on shore, and before long he could be seen only as a little black dot on that dazzling plain of snow. Then he was observed to stop and kneel down while some huge monster, yellowish-white in colour, came rushing towards him.

Aralia must have the glass now.

"Oh, the bear! the bear!" she cried in grief. "It is going to kill Tom. Oh! oh! oh! my brother Tom!"

"Let me see! let me see!" screamed Pansy.

"Look now!" said Aralia with a smile. "Isn't Tom brave?"

Tom was indeed. For Pansy could now see the monster lying dead, and Tom leaning on his gun, and once more waving his cap. Then men came up and skinned the bear, and dragged the head and hide and paws to the ship.

[Illustration]

Tom was a splendid shot, and this was his first bear. When he came aboard, his sisters met him with pleasure, although with tears in their eyes, for he had run a great risk.

A day or two after this, when still farther north, the children had had their first run upon the ice. It was all so strange, and the ice was so white, that they felt very giddy for a time. But the professor held Pansy, and Tom walked by Aralia.

The whole ice-pack seemed one vast plain, like a bleak moorland in winter, only with little hillocks of ice here and there called hummocks, for the flat pieces of ice were all frozen hard together, and Ara wondered where "Greenland's icy mountains" had all got to.

There were no bears about to-day, and no seals, only the sea-birds that went wheeling and screaming about them in thousands. When they got back to the ship it was dinner-time, and both were snow-blind. The black steward carried them down and seated them at table, but it was quite half an hour before they could see.

Although the ship was now kept well away from the ice-pack, they could often see vessels far in through frozen ice, but busy, busy at their terrible work. Sometimes Tom and the mate would have a boat lowered, and would set off bear-hunting. One day Tom brought home a young seal. It was such a beauty, with soft eyes and long, warm, fluffy hair. It was so small that even Pansy could carry it a little way in her arms.



“Oh, do let us have it for a pet!” cried Aralia, and her uncle consented. So they called the seal “Flossy”, and warmed frozen milk for it—great stores of which had been taken on board,—and fed it with a spoon, and soon the wee thing knew Pansy, and used to crawl and waddle after her.

The dogs didn’t know what to make of Flossy at first, and Briton used to roll it all round the deck with his big nose; but Flossy rather liked this. But one day, when Briton tried to lift it up by the tail, it struck him a slap with its flipper that could be heard from stem to stern.

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"Take that," Flossy seemed to say, "and leave my tail alone!"

The vessel was now kept farther to the east, and every day they passed between great patches of ice, big pieces of which kept striking the ship with such a noise that when anyone wanted to be heard he had to shout aloud.

The professor was very busy now, taking soundings almost every day, and doing all kinds of clever work that even Tom, smart as he was, couldn't understand. But in the evenings he still played with the children, or amused them by showing them, through magnifying-glasses, some of the wonderful things he had brought up from the bottom of the ocean.

It was all very strange and beautiful, and the children were enchanted. But their greatest treat was when he brought some little glass tanks containing forms of animal life they had never seen before, and were never tired of watching. Only Professor Pete didn't—because he said he couldn't—bring them out every night.

CHAPTER IV

On and on sailed the beautiful *Valhalla*. East and west, but always north, went she.

Peterkin was on a voyage of discovery, and one of his chief objects seemed to be to keep clear of the ice, which had grown very heavy indeed.

It was a delightful holiday for the children as yet, but for the professor a time of harder work than many know anything about at all. It was really wonderful how this busy little man found time to play with the children, with Flossy and with the dogs, or even to play his fiddle. But this, he would have told you, was his way of taking exercise; and he told Pansy that if it were not for her he didn't think he should ever be able to find the island of gold he was in search of.

Do not think, though, it was all and always plain sailing. There were dangers of many kinds. Sometimes storms would suddenly rise and blow for a day or two at a stretch. At such times the sun was hidden, and the cold became intense. The waves that broke on board were turned into ice, covering the decks and bows, and giving to the ship a wondrous appearance.

One evening, after a gale like this had blown over, the stowaways, who had not dared to show face all day, were told to come up on deck.

What a sight! Why, the *Valhalla* was like a ghost-ship. The decks were white, and the bulwarks too. Every rope and stay seemed made of frosted silver, while great icicles hung everywhere around.

It was very dark this evening, so that the children at first could hardly see anything. But Pete soon had them all hoisted up on to the bridge.

And now he turned on the electric and coloured lights—crimson, blue, and orange. Then, what a sight was there! It was one that caused Pansy and Aralia quite to forget the beauty of a pantomime they had seen the winter before.

They stood spell-bound, and would not have been a bit surprised if all the deck had suddenly been crowded with fairies, with silver wands, garlands of flowers, and wings of pearly gauze. But the only fairies were the sailors, and every one of these looked like a very old man, because heads and beards were white with frost and snow, and little icicles hung round their hats.

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The children dreamt of it all again that night; but lo! when they went on deck next morning, before breakfast, to have a romp and a run with the dogs and Flossy, everything was changed.

And what a change!

The sun was now shining brightly, with not a cloud in the blue sky. Icebergs lay far astern; all around was a calm blue sea, with one great whale half-asleep on its surface, wild birds more beautiful than any they had ever seen before sailing around, and, more wonderful than anything else, the *Valhalla* was safe at anchor in front of a pretty island, patched with the greens, reds, and browns of lovely flowers.

“Behold!” cried Peterkin, as he lifted Pansy up. “Behold, my child, the land of gold and coals!”

Pansy’s reply was to the point.

“Very pretty, very pretty,” she said; “but, ’Fessor Pete, I wants to see the gold—not the nasty coals.”

This very forenoon Peterkin started off in the biggest boat to “spy out the land”, as he called it Tom and the three little stowaways were allowed to come too. To them it was going to be a kind of picnic, and the steward sent with them a huge basket, filled with enough good things to last the whole crew for a week. As there was no wind, the men had to row all the way.

“Oh,” cried Pansy, “I hope dear Flossy won’t swim away!”

Yes, they had taken Flossy with them as well as the dogs.

The water was deep and dark quite close to the beautiful shore, and the girls could not help marvelling at the monsters of jelly-fish they saw far down in its depths. Their bodies were as great as sunshades, and of the same shape, and the legs they jerked out from under were spangled with stars of blue and red. Once a huge shark swam up to the boat, leered at them with his sly and evil eyes, then, turning on his back, showed a mouth that could have swallowed them all. Poor Pansy drew nearer to the professor with a cry of horror.

They found a little bay at last, and landed for a meal.

“I don’t think there is anything that can hurt you here,” said Peterkin, “and, if you like, you can run about and gather flowers while I cruise round the coast for an hour. There, I will leave you all the rugs, the bear-skin, and the basket too.”

They were delighted.

So off they set, Veevee and Briton bounding and barking in front, and Flossy waddling behind. Tom had his rifle and plenty of cartridges, but there was really nothing to shoot but the lovely gulls, and the boy was not so cruel as to touch one of these.

So they wandered on and on and upwards, until they came to a level spot all one lovely carpet of small wild flowers. Poppies of many colours grew here, mosses, yellow stone-crop, and grasses of every hue, but they agreed not to pick any until they should be returning. Still higher they went up the mountain-side, when suddenly little Pansy exclaimed: "Look, Tom! look, Ara! the sea is all fled away!"

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[Illustration]

Tom stared behind him and stood aghast.

A huge wall of fog or white mist had quite covered the ocean and even the shore, shutting them out from view, and was now slowly advancing towards them. But that was not the worst, for a low, moaning wind came on before it, and flakes of snow began to fall.

It was easy for Tom to say: "Let us get back at once to the beach, the boat must be there already." They had come miles from the bay. Before they could walk half the distance back, the snow-fog had swallowed them, and it was no wonder that they lost their way, and became cold and faint and dizzy.

Both Aralia and Pansy began to cry now, and at last sank down among the dry snow, unable to move another yard.

Tom was a boy of great courage. He thought for a little, and then he said: "Frank, if you can carry Pansy I'm sure I can manage Ara; and we will try to find shelter somewhere till the storm is blown over."

So on again in this way they struggled, till, more dead than alive, they found, by good luck, the welcome shelter of a cave. The cave was by no means large, but they were surprised to find it so warm. The first thing, however, that Tom did was to walk all round the inside, rifle in hand. Tom had not been two years at sea for nothing. Meanwhile, where was Flossy, and where was Briton?

Tom whistled again and again, till he said he had nearly whistled the whites of his eyes out, but never a dog replied.

Something else had begun to whistle also, and that was the wind, and although Tom made several attempts to leave the cave, to have a look at the weather as he called it, he found it impossible to stand. Hours and hours passed away like this, and the tempest seemed only to increase in force.

They were all very hungry now, and so Tom shared out some biscuits he had brought with him, and after they had swallowed a little snow they all sat down to talk.

"I fear," said Tom, "we'll have to stay here all night. It will be good fun, won't it, girls?"

He knew it was anything but fun himself, but he spoke in that way to keep up the children's courage.

When Aralia said, "Yes," so did Pansy, but both looked very quiet.



Soon after this, to their great joy, in bounded Briton himself, and close behind him waddled Floss. It was clear to all that he had been helping Flossy along, for Flossy was still little more than a puppy; but, poor wee beauty, how glad she was to see them all again!

She crawled up to Pansy, and lay down on her back to be scratched, which was always Flossy's way of showing she was pleased.

Well, after they had all talked till they were tired, Tom said: "Now, girls, just you lie down to sleep. Frank, here is my ticker." He gave his cousin his watch as he spoke. "You have to do sentry for three hours. Then wake me up and I'll let you lie down. See, I'll put my rifle and belt, with fifty cartridges in it, beside you. Mind, that is only for show, because you're too little a boy to touch guns. Anybody want a little more snow? No? Very well."

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So the girls curled up with Veevee and Floss, and Tom lay near. But Briton seemed to say: "No, I won't sleep; I'll lie and watch with Frank."

Frank was not sorry to have the dog beside him for it was terrible to feel all alone in such a dismal place.

Well, the night wore slowly on—one, two, three, four hours—and Frank was just looking at the rifle, and pretending to aim at something in the falling snow, when, all at once, Briton uttered a low warning growl and sprang to his feet.

Next moment a great shambling bear was right in the mouth of the cave. He gave a roar that seemed to shake the whole island.

Whether the boy took aim or not, I never could tell, but he certainly fired the rifle, and down dropped Bruin dead, and lay in the snow with his great tongue hanging out, a marvellous sight to see.

The noise in the cave was fearful, but as soon as the girls had stopped screaming, Frank told what had happened.

"I tell you what it is, girls," he said more than once, "there wasn't the least bit of bravery about it. I just held out the gun, and off it went."

"Oh, but you were brave!" said Aralia; "and if you hadn't killed the awful monster, we should all be dead now."

"No, no," cried Tom, "it was only Flossy that the bear wanted! He just wanted a bit of seal for supper."

"Wowff!" barked Briton.

"Wiff!" barked Veevee, as much as to say: "No bear shall touch Flossy while we are alive."

But nobody thought of sleeping any more, and as they were all very hungry, Tom served out more snow.

CHAPTER V

The tempest howled for many hours more. Then at last it grew almost calm, and the sun shone out on the pure white snow.

"I know what to do now," said Tom. "Let us find our way to the beach. The boat may be there, you know."

But long before they reached the shore they beheld a wondrous sight, for as far as the eye could reach there was no water to be seen, only huge icebergs covered with dazzling snow, all gently moving up and down with the swelling waves beneath. The noise made by these great bergs as they ground their sides together was deafening.

But there were no signs of the boat, and no ship was to be seen. The *Valhalla* had either been crushed to atoms or been driven out to sea. Tom clung to the last hope, and even told his sisters that she was sure to return for them soon. He would not get downhearted.

"This is a queer business, Frank," he said with a light laugh, which had no sound of fun in it however; "but we must do the best we can till they come back. Eh, Frank?"

"Yes, of course."

But Pansy was clinging to Aralia, quietly crying.

"Well, Frank, we must live in the cave for a little, and so we had better get everything in, and be as jolly as we can."

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[Illustration]

When they had got everything up to the cave, which took a long time, everybody had a good breakfast. There was really enough food to last a week, and it was lucky there were several boxes of sardines, for Floss would take nothing else.

“It’s going to be a big, big picnic,” said Frank, and the girls began to laugh. “We’re going to have lots of fun.”

Frank and Tom could climb like monkeys, and in about an hour’s time they had put all the food high up in a hole in the rock out of the reach of bears or foxes.

By twelve o’clock, when the sun was as high as it could get, the snow had disappeared, and once more there was a soft, warm breeze blowing, and beauty everywhere.

Two days flew by and nothing happened, only at night they could hear foxes barking in the distance. They never attack people singly, as bears do, but they are dangerous in packs, as Tom one day found out to his cost.

The food was getting low, and Tom thought it was time to do something. They had found strange fruits like strawberries growing, and also some sort of roots that tasted like nuts; but unless they could get some fish poor Flossy would die.

So Tom started off all alone on a voyage of discovery. Frank stayed in the cave with the girls, and they promised to be very good.

The morning was very calm, and so still that Tom could hear Pansy calling to him “not to be long” when he was quite a mile up the mountain-side. Why he took this course he could never tell, but, when he crossed the top, marvellous indeed was the view that lay before his eyes.

Uncle Staysail used to tell him that the natives of the north say there is an open sea somewhere near the Pole, with many islands in it, and trees, and flowers, and birds.

And now, behold! such a sea lay right down in the round valley yonder at his feet. It was not really a sea, but a lovely round lake, and right in the middle was a large green island.

Tom rubbed his eyes and gazed and gazed, and then rubbed his eyes and gazed again.

“Was it all a dream?” he wondered.

No, there was no dream about it. It took Tom some hours to explore this lake. He walked round it and found that at the far side a ridge of rocks, very narrow, led right out to the island. He crossed this natural bridge and found himself in a perfect paradise.

Flowers and fruit everywhere, and beautiful wild birds the like of which he had never seen before. There were rabbits, too, and very tame they were, for they followed him about, and seemed to wonder what he was and where on earth he came from.

Tom knocked one on the head, though he was not cruel, and with this slung over his shoulder, and his pockets full of nuts, he started to walk back.

But I suppose that walking round in a circle had confused him. Anyhow he walked miles out of his way, and lost himself. He sat down on a big stone at last, and wondered what he should do. He was tired and hungry, so he ate a handful of nuts. And then he began to nod.

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"I'll just have five minutes of a nap," he said, "and then get on again."

So down he lay. But his five minutes lasted for an hour, and still the lad lay fast asleep.

A large gray fox stole up and smelt the rabbit.

"That'll just suit me," said he to himself. "I'll go and call my brothers and sisters, and we'll kill this two-legged creature and steal his rabbit."

"Yap-yap-yap!" barked the fox, and soon he had a whole pack round him. But just as they were getting near to Tom, he awoke and sat up. Bang went his rifle at once, as he saw his danger. One fox fell dead, but the others came on with a rush, and there was soon a lively fight. Tom laid about him with the butt end of his rifle, and, being a strong young fellow, dead and dying foxes were soon lying all round him.

The rest of the pack drew back a little way, only to come on again, yelping and yelling more than ever. Poor Tom's wrists were dripping with blood, for he had been bitten in many places. He thought it was all over now, yet he meant to fight to the last.

But help was at hand, for the next moment Briton bounded into the centre of the spiteful pack, and the savage beasts fled in every direction.

What a happy meeting that was! The mastiff led Tom back over the hills, and in an hour's time he was safe and sound at the cave.

Pansy wept with delight, and Aralia bound up Tom's wrists. He made very light of the bites, however.

There were many pieces of old black wood in the cave, so Frank collected them and lit a fire; and when it was quite clear, the rabbit was roasted, and everybody made a splendid dinner.

Then Tom told them all he had seen; and, after a night's rest, they all started off the next morning for the lake and the island, taking the skins and rugs with them. They reached the long ridge of rocks and crossed over. Then, indeed, were the girls surprised and delighted. What a lot they would have to tell Father and Mother when they got home again!

Tom sighed. He feared in his own mind that they would never, never see their home any more.

When Flossie saw the lake she made a spring towards it and dived below the surface. They could see her darting about beneath, and soon up she came, looking as pleased as Punch, with a fine, great fish in her mouth. She laid it gently at Pansy's feet, and dived in again.

“I’ll be happy here,” she seemed to say, as she brought another fish, “and we need never be hungry any more.”

After Tom had well explored the island, he told Frank they must build a fort. He had found the very spot for it, too, on a little hill. This was about a hundred feet high, and the top was hollow, like a cup, with only one opening into it. In fact, the top of the hill was part of the crater of an extinct volcano, and was shaped like the letter G, the doorway being only a gap in the rocks, through which no bear could squeeze.

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Inside, the walls were twenty feet high all round, all bare rock; but the floor was covered with grass, and moss, and wild flowers.

Aralia and Pansy were wild with delight, and Pansy said she would now be able to sleep without ugly dreams.

Veevee would be her bed-fellow, and Floss would curl up with Sissie, and big Briton could sleep at the entrance.

So it was all arranged.

But as there could be no telling how long they might have to remain here, and as rain would be sure to fall, even if snow did not, Tom and Frank began to build a hut inside Fort Fairyland, as they called their strange abode.

[Illustration]

Now each boy had—like all Greenland sailors—not only a large, many-bladed knife, with a saw in it, but a huge broad dagger in a leathern belt round his waist. So they did not want for tools.

They found the best wood for what they wanted growing close by the lake, in the shape of straight and strong willows. There were plenty of leaves, and grasses, and heath also.

It would be rather a long job, but they set to work with a will, and in three days' time they had dragged everything they wanted up to Fort Fairyland. The building of the hut was fine fun. At first it was only meant to be a kind of shelter on poles, but, as they had so much time upon their hands, they agreed to build real walls, and leave space for a door and a window. In little more than a week they had the framework all up, and the roof all made. It was thatched first with broad leaves, and then with grass. And, mind you a short ladder had to be made first to permit them to do the thatching. When this was finished, all the sides were filled in with willow branches, except door and window. Never a hole was left in it, for Aralia and Pansy collected heaps and heaps of dried moss, and the boys worked this in to fill up the gaps.

And when all was finished, and wicker seats made, it did look a cosy little hut indeed.

But all the cooking was done out-of-doors. There were no sauce-pans to clean, nor knives nor forks. The plates were broad leaves, and for knives and forks the castaways used pointed sticks.

It really wasn't bad fun at all being Crusoes in such a place as this.

But—dear me! there is always a “but” about everything—how was it all to end?

And where was the *Valhalla*?

Except for these two questions, which would keep on running through Tom's and Frank's minds, they could have been quite contented—well, for a time at all events.

CHAPTER VI

In their rambles through this little Arctic fairy land, Tom noticed that the squirrels were now busy every day running away to their holes with nuts and leaves. Of course they might have young ones to feed, he thought; but surely it was something more than this which made them act thus.

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Creeping all alone one morning through the bushes, as quietly as a mouse, Tom came upon a sight which taught him a useful lesson. For high up in the trunk of an old tree was a big round hole with a squirrel's tail hanging out. Presently up ran another squirrel, carrying a great mouthful of leaves and clay.

The new-comer made a slight noise, when out came No. 1 and took the bundle from No. 2, which then darted off for more.

"Ho! ho!" said Tom to himself, "they seem to be storing up food for winter. Heigho! I thought it would always be summer in this fairyland. But thank you, Master Squirrel, I shall go and do the same." So off went Tom to tell Frank and the girls what he had seen the squirrels doing.

"As there is no sign of the ship coming back for us, children," he said somewhat seriously, "and we may have to spend the winter here, I think, you know, we ought to be making ready for it."

"So do I," said Pansy, looking very wise. "We want food, and we want wood and all, doesn't we, Tom?"

"It won't be very, very cold in this island," said her brother, "because we have the warm-water lake all round us. But perhaps the squirrels know best."

So now began a very busy season indeed, for everybody went nut-gathering.

Tom opened up a squirrel's store, and a pretty noise the little creature made about it. But he did not rob it; he only wanted to learn a lesson.

He noticed that the nuts it had collected were a little green on one side, so these must be the best. Then he looked at the leaves and clay that were packed over them, and thought he would get some just the same.

This going a-nutting in fairyland was real fine fun, and to have heard their merry voices, talking and laughing and singing, with every now and then Briton's great bass "Wowff!" and Veevee's shrill "Wiff!" no one would have taken them for castaways and Crusoes.

Nutting made everyone so hungry too!

Rabbits were very plentiful on the island. The boys caught them by means of snares made of a kind of tough creeper. And bonny Flossy caught as many fish as would have kept a large family alive.

Tom seldom used his rifle, though he always carried it. The cartridges were too precious to waste.

Another thing which these Crusoes had to be very careful to do was never to let the fire go out. It was easily kept in by placing a kind of mossy peat among the hot ashes and covering it quite over.

* * * * *

So they collected an immense quantity of nuts, and these were placed in holes found in the rocks, and covered right up with the same sort of cement as the squirrels used. The roots that served them instead of bread every day, and which were cooked by placing them for a short time in the hot ashes, they also collected and stored. So when the harvest was all over, Tom told Frank and his sisters that they needn't be afraid to spend their Christmas in this beautiful island.

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"Oh, but, Tom," said Pansy, "we'll all be home long, long before Christmas, won't we?"

Poor child! She was beginning to long for her mother's cosy cottage on the cliff, and for the fires that in the long winter evenings always burned so brightly in the parlour grate.

"Now, about light for the long Arctic winter night, which will soon be here?"

This was the question that Tom put to Frank just after sunset one beautiful evening as the snow on the tops of the highest mountains was changed to a rose tint in the sun's parting rays.

"It is a very serious question, you know," he added.

"Very serious," said Pansy, who heard him, shaking her wise, wee head.

Sitting by the camp fire there, with its lights and shadows chasing each other over her face and through her sunny hair, Pansy looked a very beautiful child indeed.

For some time they had all been sitting round the fire, watching the curling smoke and the dancing flames, everyone intent on his or her own thoughts. Aralia had been wondering what they were all doing at home, and if her father and mother were anxious about her and Pansy. It was such a long, long time—hundreds of years it seemed—since they had sailed away; so many strange things had happened since that day. Pansy was a little maiden who took the world very easily, and enjoyed each day and hour as it passed. Her thoughts were hardly worth a penny. Frank was not unlike Pansy, and took things as they came, and if they were not nice, just let them slide. The mastiff was asleep, so was Veevee, and both seemed to be dreaming, and talking in their dreams. But Flossy's eyes were very wide open now. She was really wondering if she could catch another fish to-night. Flossy had lately taken to waddling away towards evening for a swim in the warm lake, and never came back without something in her mouth.

So nobody was surprised when they missed her from the fire, only, as she stayed rather longer to-night than usual, and as the long twilight would soon end, Tom took up his rifle and went off all by himself to look for her.

"Oh, dear!" cried Pansy, as the sound of a shot startled everyone in the fort. "Tom's gone and killed something!"

"Let's run and see," said Frank. Veevee and Briton had already rushed off.

They found Tom at the lake-side, standing over a huge dead bear, with Flossy near him.

"That bear," said Tom, laughing, "was keeping poor Floss in the lake; but he won't do so again. Isn't he a fine one?"

“Yes,” cried Frank; “he is indeed.”

“And now, children,” said Tom, when he was once more seated in front of the camp fire, “the question of lights is settled for good. Frank and I are going to make candles out of that bear’s tallow.”

“Yes, Pansy, we are. Oh, we shouldn’t be half Crusoes if we couldn’t make candles!”

So the boys arranged to start work the very next morning at sunrise.

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"But first let us have a look through this beautiful isle of the sea, while the girls are asleep. There may be more bears. Briton, you must stay and watch. Veevee, you may come."

Though Veevee searched every bush and grove, no bear was found. The one Tom had so cleverly killed must have crossed to the island alone by the bridge of rocks.

So, after breakfast, the boys built their fire. With big blocks of lava they made a sort of stove, and on top of this was placed a large cup-like stone, which they had chanced to find. Into this they put the tallow to melt. In the meantime Tom pulled a quantity of thick rushes, and set Frank and the girls to peel them, while the dogs looked on as if wondering what it was all about.

[Illustration]

"It's something to eat, I suppose," said Briton, looking very wise.

"A sort of soup of some kind from the smell of it, I should think," was Veevee's remark.

The long threads of white pith were about as thick as a penholder, and these were to form the wicks. When dried they were tied two and two by one end.

Then between two uprights Tom placed a long willow rod, with three dozen strong thorns stuck in it about two inches apart, to serve as hooks.

By this time the tallow was melted and all was ready.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Tom, "you shall see how candles were built in the Royal Navy when Uncle was a boy." He rolled up his sleeves, and, picking up a double wick, dipped it in the pan, and then hung it on the first peg for the tallow to set. He did the same with all the rest, and by the time he had the thirty-sixth wick hung up, No. 1 was ready to be taken down and dipped again. So on he went all along the row, till he had dipped them a dozen times at least, when, lo! and behold! they were thick and beautiful candles, each one strong enough to give the light of half a dozen ordinary ship's candles.

He worked for two days, and made about a hundred in all, so there was no fear of their having to sit in the dark.

Next night, while the moon was shining low over the snow-clad hills, the whole camp was alarmed by the fierce barking of Briton. The mastiff was "wowffing", Veevee was "wiffing", and Flossy was moaning and wagging her tail in the air. Though it was long past midnight, Briton wanted to be off out and kill something or somebody he had heard, and Veevee would also go on the war-path for fear Briton might get hurt.



Almost immediately after came the most tremendous yelling the Crusoes had ever heard, and it was clear that a whole pack of foxes had invaded the island, and if Briton and Veevee had been allowed to go out, they would both have been torn to pieces. The awful din lasted for hours, with a sound now and then of fighting.

Then it stopped, and all was still.

Everybody went quietly off to sleep again, but next day, when they went to the lake-side, behold not a trace of the bear was to be seen. The beasts had eaten all the flesh, and carried away the bones and skin.

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"Now, what if these wild dogs return some night," said Tom to Frank, "and attack the camp. Although no bear could squeeze in here, these half-bred wolves might, and tear us all in pieces.

"Don't frighten a fellow, Tom," said Frank. "But I say, old man, we must puzzle our heads once again and make a gate."

"Well, that's good!" cried Tom, laughing; "why, there is only one head between the two of us, and that belongs to me, Master Frank; and don't you forget it."

"Well, well, you may have it, only for goodness' sake make good use of it!"

The cup-like top of the hill in which our Crusoes were living had but one entrance, as I have before told you, and the path leading to it was very steep, and made up of large stones and lumps of lava.

"It would be a good thing," Tom said, "to get a lot of these inside. They would come in very handy to throw at an enemy, eh?"

"That they would," said Frank.

Well, it took them three whole days to make and fix up a gate, which they could raise or lower before the entrance by means of ropes made out of long trailing weeds, or creepers.

Then, after they had carried about a hundred big stones inside, they began to feel happier and safer.

CHAPTER VII

One morning, a month or two after this, the Crusoes awoke to find that the sun rose that day for the last time, and, until spring should return, they would see his golden beams no more.

But there was a bright and beautiful twilight every mid-day for two weeks longer. Then they knew that the long, dreary Arctic night had come in earnest. For about a month the Crusoes had been eating very heartily every day and were getting quite fat. It was the same with the animals.

Flossy had long ago lost her puppy coat, and was now a bonny whitish-yellow seal, not very large, and with a black saddle on her back. But Flossy got drowsy too, and if the boys had not stirred her up every day, and sent her off to catch fish, I believe she would have slept nearly all the time.

Even the boys felt sleepy, though they could not tell why. Said Tom one day to Frank as they sat playing draughts on a rough board, with nuts for men: "Frank, old man, by this time all the bears will have gone into winter quarters. They won't come out much until the sun returns."

"Fancy," cried Aralia, clapping her hands, "Fancy all of us sleeping all night long—three months, didn't you say, Tom? Wouldn't it be nice? And if Uncle Staysail should come in to wake us in the morning! 'Get up,' he would say, 'are you going to sleep all day?'"

They all laughed at the idea, but it was not carried out. Besides the candles, which they only burned at supper and after, they had torches made of wood which they could burn at any time. Moreover, there was the light of the camp fire, which they kept always burning, for they had laid in a vast store of peat and wood.

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Tom was time-keeper. He had a little log-book in which he had been careful to note down day and date every morning, and, like a good lad, he never forgot to wind his watch. He made a really first-class Crusoe.

But they were all good. And what a grand guard Briton was! If ever he heard the slightest sound of bird or rabbit down amongst the trees or bushes beneath them, he gave a low growl. One night he sprang to his feet and barked very loudly and angrily.

The Crusoes were awake at once.

And no wonder, for terrible noises, like distant thunder, were heard just beneath their feet. They were startled still more when explosion after explosion took place, both in the air and in the earth, while the ground was shaken under them.

It was a curious, giddy movement, and made them all feel rather sick.

Then the thunder-storm burst in earnest, with rain and hail in torrents, and the whole island seemed to be on fire with the lightning.

Tom had to take Pansy in his arms to soothe her, for she shook and trembled like a little bird. But in two hours it was all over, and the stars were shining as bright and large and near as before.

* * * * *

Sometimes the moon shone with a stronger light than it ever does in this country. It seemed so close to them, too, that Pansy used to say it was only just resting on the snowy hill-top.

On moonlit days the children were always abroad in the forest or by the lake-side watching Flossy catching fish. She dived and swam far more quickly than an eel.

It is terribly dreary to want the sun, but after a month one gets used to it. Besides, one knows that bright and beautiful days are on ahead. Older people might have felt very weary, but none of our Crusoes lost heart.

I have not told you yet of the Aurora Borealis, which was best seen on dark, starry nights. It was not in the north only, but all around them, great bright fringes of coloured lights—chiefly green, crimson, or pink. How they danced and flickered, to be sure! Such dazzling beauty no pen could describe, and I will not attempt it.

Well, Christmas-day came at last, and how glad they all were to be still spared alive and in comfort!

Tom meant to make the most of it. But, of course, there was no turkey or goose to roast. Instead, they had a splendid great rabbit stuffed with nuts, and roasted roots to eat with it.

They had no crackers either, but Tom and Frank got an immense pile of dry wood, and heaped it in the middle of the rocky bridge that led to the mainland, and early in the day or night—whichever you like to call it—they set it alight.

[Illustration]

Now, probably this pile saved some of their lives. It had been placed there about five days before Christmas, and a huge bear, who had the nightmare I suppose, came yawning out of his cave and down the mountain-side.

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He had shambled along to about the centre of the bridge, then lain down among the wood and gone off to sleep.

He slept so soundly that he did not hear the boys crossing over to set the bonfire ablaze.

But when the smoke and crackling flames got towards him he started up and began to trot off, coughing and roaring till all the hills sent back the sound.

So awful was the echo that the boys were for a time almost terror-stricken. They thought that about a score of bears had left their snow-caves and were swarming down the hill.

Tom fired his rifle, but missed. Veevee wanted to follow up.

“Only just let me get at him,” cried the little rascal, “and I’ll tear him limb from limb!”

Anyhow that was a fine fire, and it lit up the lake and the woods all about, while the numerous sparks that rose and fell in the air were like golden rain.

After the fire began to fade and to die they all returned to their Christmas dinner in the hut.

No fewer than four candles were lighted to-night, one in each corner of the room. Oh, Tom meant to do everything in first-class form, I can tell you!

And I feel pretty certain that even at home in Merrie England no one that evening ate more heartily or made a better dinner than our Crusoes, all alone though they were in the far-off Frozen North.

After supper they all came round the fire, and the dogs went off to sleep, perchance to dream; but the children kept very wide awake indeed. And Tom told lots of droll, funny stories, and everybody sang songs. After this, all the talk was about home and the delightful time they were sure to have in one year’s time, when Christmas came round again once more.

Then came sleep, and when Tom looked at his watch—next morning let me call it—it was very nearly twelve o’clock!

* * * * *

Although it now wanted but a fortnight, according to Tom’s reckoning, of the first sunrise, it was still as dark as ever, and but for the moon and stars and glorious Aurora, life about this time would have been very tame and dreary indeed.

Yet, owing to the clearness of the air and the purity of everything around them, the children never once lost heart. In fact they were as merry as sky-larks, and often made the island resound with song and mirth and laughter.

And the dogs, as well as Flossy, were merrier still. They barked and laughed as only dogs can, and chased each other round and round in great circles, often disappearing for ten minutes at a time, and springing out and rolling Flossy over and over when she least expected them.

Flossy was gay enough, although she couldn't run, and often leapt fully six feet high, turning over and over in the air before she came down again.

And when she did manage to entice the dogs into the water, it was her turn to show them her skill; and indeed her feats in the water were marvellous. Anyhow, she used quite to astonish the dogs. They were all very well in the woods, but couldn't match Flossy in the water, and there was no use trying it.

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CHAPTER VIII

The long mid-day twilights came first, uncertain and gray to begin with, but getting brighter and more lovely as time went on. It was as if Nature were trying her hand in painting the sky to give the great king of day a glorious welcome.

But one day the snow on the mountain peaks changed to a bright red, while above floated just one streak of crimson cloud; higher up, the stars shone in a strange, green light, and all the horizon was of the richest orange colour.

"Oh, surely," cried Pansy, "the sun will rise to-day!"

But the red faded from the mountain-top, the little cloud turned brown, then gray, then black, and it was night once more.

"No, little sister," said Tom kindly; "but the sun will rise to-morrow."

All went to bed early that night, and were up very early in the morning. In fact, breakfast was finished before the stars had begun to pale in the west. Then came twilight itself, and, long though it was, its intense beauty was the best reward for the waiting, watching little Crusoes.

Every heart was beating quickly, and Pansy was standing on brave Tom's shoulder, just to be "nearer the sky", she said.

All were silent.

The sun came at last, and with such a silvery sheen, too, that the children were dazzled.

This was best, for they could not thus see the tears that slowly trickled down each other's faces.

"Look! look! look!" was all Pansy could say.

"Oh, isn't it splendid!" said Tom, as soon as he could speak.

"Uncle is sure to come now," said Aralia firmly.

"I'll go and fish," Flossy seemed to say as she sprang three times her length in the air, and turned head over heels like the clown in a circus.

"Come on, Veevee," cried the mastiff, "come for a run in the sunshine." And off they set.

But the day soon ended, for the sun quickly disappeared. Yet the Crusoes had seen it, and that was joy enough for once.



And now the days began to lengthen out, but at the same time earthquakes and thunder-storms became more and more frequent. The lake felt hot again, and the water tossed about so much at times, that even Flossy was afraid to venture in to catch the fish she could not live without.

There was a most terrible earthquake-storm about two weeks after the first sunrise.

Even Tom himself was frightened this time, for the thunderings and lightnings and explosions were awful, and lasted for three long days. It was pitch dark all the time, and the rain came down in sheets.

To make matters worse, smoke of a strange red colour was seen on the hills. It looked as if it came from rents in the mountain-sides, and there was a smell like burning sulphur in the air.

But this season of terror ended at last; the stars shone out, there was a fine display of northern lights, and, soon after, the sun rose. A stiff breeze sprang up, and all the clouds and vapours were blown away, the last thing seen being a rainbow in the east.

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The joy of the Crusoes now knew no bounds. The dogs dashed about, Veevee barked “Wiff!” Briton barked “Wowff!” and Flossy frisked her tail and went off to fish.

The children now set out for a stroll, and saw many curious sights. Close to the lake, in several places, the earth seemed to have been ripped open, and, looking down as they stood hand in hand on the edge, they seemed to be gazing right into the world’s dark depths.

Next day Tom took a long walk alone. He went to the top of one of the highest hills, having left his sisters in charge of Frank and Briton, but taking Veevee and his rifle with him.

Pansy watched him go up and up the mountain, until he was lost to sight.

“Oh,” she cried, as she clapped her hands, “I know where Tom has gone! He has just gone away to bring Uncle and ‘Fessor Pete back again.”

Well, anyhow, Tom had a look at the sea. It spread out as far as the eye could reach, and was covered everywhere with great snow-clad bergs of ice, except just close to the island, where it was clear, but black as ink.

It was nothing more than he expected, but somehow he wished it had been otherwise.

He marched down the other side of the hill for quite a mile, keeping a good look-out, however, lest some huge ice-bear should catch him unawares.

By and by he missed his little four-footed friend, and traced him by his footprints into a cave.

He called aloud, but received no answer. The cave seemed to be a vast one, and he had to feel his way in the dark with his rifle, for fear of falling down some hole.

As he could hear nothing, he thought poor Veevee must be dead, and slowly and sadly turned back.

His foot kicked against something hard when he was near to the entrance, and, stooping down, he picked up what seemed to be a piece of white stone, and put it into the pocket of his jacket.

When he got back home at last, poor Pansy cried very much indeed at the loss of her pet. But when, next morning, she found him curled up at her feet, she thought it must have been all a dream.

How the dog got back was never known, but it is possible he had been wandering all night in that cavern, deep down in the earth, and come out at the lake side of the range of hills.

* * * * *

It was quite a month before Tom crossed the hills again. By this time spring had already come back to Fairy Island. The buds were all out on the trees, and the green leaves on a thousand bushes. Wild flowers were everywhere. The birds, too, had returned, and the sea-gulls had taken up their abode on a great patch of level ground just on the other side of the lake. When anyone went near to their nests, which were in thousands, and so close together that it was difficult to thread one's way through them, the noise and screaming they made was deafening.

Now I don't think that Tom and Frank were cruel, but they had to live, and those great green-speckled eggs made a splendid addition to the larder, so that, what with sunshine and better food, the girls soon got back all the colour they had lost during the long, long night of winter.

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But where was the *Valhalla* and her crew all this time? Would they never, never come?

The Crusoes lived in hope.

Now in spring-time the foxes and bears of the north, that have slept or starved for months, become bold and dangerous through hunger. Bears are always to be feared, but more so at this time of the year than any other.

[Illustration]

One day the prisoners of Fairy Island had been gayer than usual, but at last, tired and happy, they had lain down to rest. It might have been about midnight when they were awakened by a warning growl from Briton. Then, with Veevee, he sprang up and rushed to the gate barking furiously.

Tom sprang to his feet, and snatched up his rifle. He was not left long in doubt as to who the enemy was. The wild wolf-foxes were in force, and the yelping and howling outside was terrible to listen to.

He fired his rifle several times right into the centre of the pack, killing many and wounding more. This only made matters worse. The fierce and hungry beasts dashed themselves at the gate and tried to tear it in pieces.

Stones were hurled at them, but all in vain. Poor Briton was as anxious to get out as they were to get in, and had to be kept back by force.

“Go, quick, Frank,” shouted Tom, “and stir up the fire; heap more peats and wood on, and bring lighted torches as soon as you can. I will guard the gate till you come.”

So there Tom stood opposed to the whole awful crowd, with their glaring eyes, red tongues, and white-flashing teeth, with only a slight gateway between him and death. When he thrust his rifle between the willow bars to take a shot, the beasts bit and tore at it, as if they would have dragged it from his grasp.

Aralia was busy helping Frank, and presently both came running up with lighted fir-torches, which Tom at once flung over the gate, together with pieces of burning peat and wood. These did splendid work, and after a time the terrible pack drew off.

There was no more sleep that night, however, and towards morning the attack began again. The foxes had dragged off their dead and wounded and devoured them. In the gray light of morning they rushed to the gate once more, and the battle raged again in all its fury.

Poor little Pansy was trembling and shaking with fear as she looked up and saw that high up on the walls of the fort those savage, wild animals had taken their stand.



It was a terrible morning, and hope seemed at last to fade, for even brave Tom had grown faint and weary, and could fight but little longer.

CHAPTER IX

“Come along, Professor! Come along, Mate! The children are there somewhere, over in that strange island. Ha! here is a bridge of rocks! Thank goodness for that! And look! here, too, are tracks!”

It was Uncle Staysail who spoke, and behind him was 'Fessor Pete himself, and at least a dozen well-armed sailors.

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"Listen!" cried the captain. "What is that?"

"Wolves, I think," said the professor. "And hark! surely that was a rifle-shot. Pray Heaven we may be in time, Staysail!"

"Hurry up, men! Hurry up!" cried the captain; and the men dashed onwards.

* * * * *

Tom had revived a little, and he and Frank were fighting harder than ever to hold the gate, as bold

"Horatius kept the bridge
In the brave days of old".

But it was already giving way, and the beasts without seemed to know it.

Briton was on his legs ready, and all seemed to be lost, when suddenly a rattling volley of rifle fire was heard from beneath, with shouts of men.

Volley followed volley, and in less time than it takes me to tell it, the wild wolf-foxes were seeking safety in flight.

* * * * *

"Tell us all your story again," said Tom to his uncle, as the children sat round the stove that same evening in the cosy cabin of the *Valhalla*.

They were all washed and clean by this time, and the girls were beautifully dressed.

[Illustration]

"Ah! well, you see," said Uncle as he relit his pipe, "the professor here made a dart for the vessel when the storm came on. He wanted a stronger crew.

"He caught us just in time, for though the gale was a furious one we could steam up to it, and were doing so, when suddenly there was a loud explosion; one of the boilers had burst, and the engines were smashed and useless.

"We were now at the mercy of the sea, the waves, and the icebergs too, and before another day we were blown far away to sea.

"Even then we had hope. But in a week's time we were frozen into the main pack, and there we have had to winter, and it is hardly a week since we got clear by cutting a

canal with our great ice-saws. Oh! it has been a dreary time for us, but must have been more so to you, poor darlings! and well and bravely you have borne it all!

"I am sure," he added, "that even Pansy has grown, and her mother will hardly know her again when we all get home."

"We are going now, aren't we, 'Fessor Pete?" said Pansy, who was sitting on his knee.

"Yes, my dear, yes. It is no use staying here when we have no steam, so the ship is now making for England's sunny shores. And we'll get there in the rosy month of June. Won't it be nice?"

Pansy was jumping with joy.

Aralia clapped her hands and cried: "Just too jolly for anything!"

By and by Aralia sat down to the piano, and Pete brought out his fiddle, and a very happy evening indeed was spent in the *Valhalla*.

The men were keeping it up forward too, around the galley fire, singing songs and spinning yarns, for the ship was "homeward bound".

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“Oh, by the by,” said Tom one day to the professor, “I forgot to tell you that in the cave where poor Veevee got lost I picked up this curious stone!”

The professor put his spectacles on his nose and gazed at it for a moment.

“Why, my dear Tom, this is solid gold, in the centre of a coating of quartz! You’re in luck, lad; and it is just as I said; that is the Island of Gold. We shall return another year, and you will be one of the richest men in the kingdom.”

* * * * *

My story is finished, or almost.

’Fessor Pete and Tom, with Uncle Staysail, to say nothing of the mastiff Briton, are out there in the Frozen North this very summer, and I do hope they will have luck.

But Aralia and Pansy, with sometimes Frank and always Veevee, may be seen any day playing on the sands not far from their mother’s home, and Flossy too.

Flossy is wondrously tame, and spends an hour or two almost every day in the sea, or on the beach, to the great delight of all who see her. But Aralia has a whistle, and no matter how far away in the water this strange pet may be, whenever the call is sounded she comes ploughing back to the beach, and after she has shaken her bonny coat in the sunshine, goes waddling home with her little friend Veevee and the Crusoes of the Frozen North.