

## CHAPTER II

### THE ROCKY ISLE

For another week or more I remained upon the Blanche waiting till my full strength returned, also because Kari said I must do so. When I asked him why, he replied for the reason that he wished news of my coming to spread far and wide throughout the land from one tribe to another, which it would do with great swiftness, flying, as he put it, like a bird. Meanwhile, every day I sat upon the poop in the armour for an hour or more, and both these people and others from afar came to look at me, bringing me presents in such quantity that we knew not what to do with them. Indeed, they built an altar and sacrificed wild creatures to me, and birds, burning them with fire. Both those that I had seen and the other folk from a long way off made this offering.

At last one night, when, having eaten, Kari and I were seated together in the moonshine before we slept, I turned on him suddenly, hoping thus to surprise the truth out of his secret heart, and said:

"What is your plan, Kari? For, know, I weary of this life."

"I was waiting for the Master to ask that question," he replied with his gentle smile. (Again, I give not the very words he spoke in his bad English, but the substance of them.) "Now will the Master be pleased to listen? As I have told the Master, I believe that the gods, his God and

my God, have brought me back to that part of the world which is unknown to the Master, where I was born. I believed this from the first hour that my eyes opened on it after our swoon, for I knew the trees and the flowers and the smell of the earth, and saw that the stars in the heavens stood where I used to see them. When I went ashore and mingled with the natives, I discovered that this belief was right, since I could understand something of their talk and they could understand something of mine. Moreover, among them was a man who came from far away, who said

that he had seen me in past years, wandering like one mad, only that this man whom he had seen wore the image of a certain god about his neck, whose name was too high for him to mention. Then I opened my robe and showed him that which I wear about my neck, and he fell down and worshipped it, crying out that I was the very man."

"If so, it is marvellous," I said. "But what shall we do?"

"The Master can do one of two things. He can stop here, where these simple people will make him their king and give him wives and all that he desires, and so live out his life, since of return to the land whence he came there is no hope."

"And if there were I would not go," I interrupted.

"Or," went on Kari, "he can try to travel to my country. But that is very far away. Something of the journey which I made when I was mad

comes back and tells me that it is very, very far away. First, yonder mountains must be crossed till another sea is reached, which is no great journey, though rough. Then the coast of that sea must be followed southward, for I know not how far, but, as I think, for months or years of journeying, till at length the country of my people is reached. Moreover, that journeying is hard and terrible, since the road runs through forests and deserts where dwell savage tribes and huge snakes and wild beasts, like those planted on the flag of your country, and where famine and sicknesses are common. Therefore my counsel to the Master is that he should leave it unattempted."

Now I thought awhile, and asked what he meant to do if I took this counsel of his. To which he replied:

"I shall wait here awhile till I see the Master made a king among these people and established in his rule. Then I shall start on that journey alone, hoping that what I could do when I was mad I shall be able to do again when I am not mad."

"I thought it," I said. "But tell me, Kari, if we were to make this journey and perchance live to reach your people, how would they welcome us?"

"I do not know, Master; but I think that of the master they would make a god, as will all the other people of this country. Perhaps, too, they will sacrifice this god that his strength and beauty may enter into

them. As for me, some of them will try to kill me and others will cling to me. Who will conquer I do not know, and to me it matters little. I go to take my own and to be avenged, and if in seeking vengeance I die--well, I die in honour."

"I understand," I said. "And now, Kari, let us start as soon as possible before I become as mad from staring at those trees and flowers and those big-eyed natives, that you say would make me a king, as you tell me you were when you left your country. Whether we shall ever find that country I cannot say. But at least we shall have done our best and, if we fail, shall perish seeking, as in this way or in that it is the lot of all brave men to do."

"The Master has spoken," said Kari, even more quietly than usual, though as he spoke I saw his dark eyes flash and a trembling as of joy run down his body. "Knowing all, he has made his choice, and whatever happens, being what it is, he will not blame me. Yet because the Master has thus chosen, I say this--that if we reach my country, and if, perchance, I become a king there, even more than before I shall be the Master's servant."

"That is easy to promise now, Kari, but it will be time to talk of it when we do reach your land," I said, laughing, and asked him when we were to start.

He replied not yet awhile, as he must make plans, and that in the

meantime I must walk upon the shore so that my legs might grow strong again. So there every day I walked in the cool of the morning and in the evening, not going out of sight of the wreck. I went armed and carrying my big bow, but saw no one, since the natives had been warned that I should walk and must not be looked upon while I did so. Therefore, even when I passed through one of their villages of huts built of mud and thatched with leaves, it seemed to be deserted.

Still, in the end the bow did not come amiss, for one evening, hearing a little noise in a big tree under which I was about to pass that reminded me of the purring of a cat, I looked up and saw a great beast of the tiger sort lying on the bough of the tree and watching me. Then I drew the bow and sent an arrow through that beast, piercing it from side to side, and down it came roaring and writhing, and biting at the arrow till it died.

After this I returned to the ship and told Kari what had happened. He said it was fortunate I had killed the beast, which was of a very fierce kind, and if I had not seen it, would have leapt on me as I passed under the tree. Also he sent natives to skin it who when they saw that it was pierced through and through by the arrow, were amazed and thought me an even greater god than before, their own bows being but feeble and their arrows tipped with bone.

Three days after the killing of this beast we started on our journey into a land unknown. For a long while before Kari and I had been engaged in collecting all the knives we could find in the ship, also arrows, nails, axes, tools of carpentering, clothes, and I know not what else besides, which goods we tied up in bundles wrapped in sailcloth, each bundle weighing from thirty to forty pounds, to serve as presents to natives or to trade away with them. When I asked who would carry them, Kari answered that I should see. This I did at dawn on the following morning when there arrived upon the shore a great number of men, quite a hundred indeed, who brought with them two litters made of light wood jointed like reeds, only harder, in which Kari said he and I were to be carried. Among these men he parcelled out the loads which they were to bear upon their heads, and then said that it was time for us to start in the litters.

So we started, but first I went down into a cabin and kneeling on my knees, thanked God for having brought me safe so far, and prayed Him and St. Hubert to protect me on my further wanderings, and if I died, to receive my soul. This done I left the ship and while the natives bowed themselves about me, entered my litter, which was comfortable enough, having grass mats to lie on and other mats for curtains, very finely woven, so that they would turn even the heaviest rain.

Then away we went, eight men bearing the pole to which each litter was slung on their shoulders, while others carried the bundles upon their heads. Our road ran through forest uphill, and on the crest of the first

hill I descended from the litter and looked back.

There in the creek below lay the wreck of the *Blanche*, now but a small black blot showing against the water, and beyond it the great sea over which we had travelled. Yonder broken hulk was the last link which bound me to my distant home thousands of miles across the ocean, that home, which my heart told me I should never see again, for how could I win back from a land that no white foot had ever trod?

On the deck of this ship *Blanche* herself had stood and smiled and talked, for once we visited it together shortly before our marriage, and I remembered how I had kissed her in its cabin. Now *Blanche* was dead by her own hand and I, the great London merchant, was an outcast among savages in a country of which I did not even know the name, where everything was new and different. And there the ship with her rich cargo, after bearing us so bravely through weeks of tempest, must lie until she rotted in the sun and rain and never again would my eyes behold her. Oh! then it was that a sense of all my misery and loneliness gripped my heart as it had not done before since I rode away after killing *Deleroy* with the sword *Wave-Flame*, and I wondered why I had been born, and almost hoped that soon I might die and go to seek the reason.

Back into the litter I crept and there hid my face and wept like a child. Truly I, the prosperous merchant of London town who might have lived to become its mayor and magistrate and win nobility, was now an outcast adventurer of the humblest. Well, so God had decreed, and there

was no more to say.

That night we encamped upon a hilltop past which rushed a river in the vale below and were troubled with heat and insects that hummed and bit, for to these as yet I was not accustomed, and ate of the food that we had brought with us, dried flesh and corn.

Next morning with the light we started on again, up and down mountains and through more forests, following the course of the river and the shores of a lake. So it went on until on the third evening from high land we saw the sea beneath us, a different sea from that which we had left, for it seemed that we had been crossing an isthmus, not so wide but that if any had the skill, a canal might be cut across it joining those two great seas.

Now it was that our real travels began, for here, after staring at the stars and brooding apart for a long while, Kari turned southwards. With this I had nothing to do who did not greatly care which way he turned. Nor did he speak to me of the matter, except to say that his god and such memory as remained to him through his time of madness told him that the land of his people lay towards the south, though very far away.

So southwards we went, following paths through the forests with the ocean on our right hand. After a week of this wearisome marching we came to another tribe of natives of whose talk those with us could understand enough to tell them our story. Indeed the rumour that a white god



had appeared in the land out of the sea had already reached them, and therefore they were prepared to worship me. Here our people left us, saying that they dared not go further from their own country.

The scene of the departure was strange, since every one of them came and rubbed his forehead in the dust before me and then went away, walking backwards and bowing. Still their going did not make a great difference to us, since the new tribe was much as the old one, though if anything, rather less clothed and more dirty. Also it accepted me as a god without question and gave us all the food we needed. Moreover, when we left their land men were provided to carry the litters and the loads.

Thus, then, passing from tribe to tribe, we travelled on southward, ever southwards, finding always that the rumour of the coming of "the god" had gone before us. So gentle were all these people, that not once did we meet with any who tried to harm us or to steal our goods, or who refused us the best of what they had. Our adventures, it is true, were many. Thus, twice we came to tribes that were at war with other tribes, though on my appearance they laid down their arms, at any rate, for a time, and bore our litters forward.

Again, sometimes we met tribes who were cannibals and then we suffered much from want of meat, since we dared not touch their food unless it were grain. In the town of the first of these cannibal people, being moved with fury, I killed a man whom I found about to murder a child and eat her, sweeping off his head with my sword. For this deed I expected

that they would murder us, but they did not. They only shrugged their shoulders and saying that a god can do as he pleases, took away the slain man and ate him.

Sometimes our road ran through terrible forests where the great trees shut out the light of day, and a path must be hacked through the undergrowth. Sometimes it was haunted by tigers or tree lions such as I have spoken of, against which we must watch continuously, especially at night, keeping the brutes off by means of fires. Sometimes we were forced to wade great rivers, or worse still, to walk over them on swaying bridges made of cables of twisted reeds that until I grew accustomed to them caused my head to swim, though never did I permit myself to show fear before the natives. Again, once we came to swampy lands that were full of snakes which terrified me much, especially after I had seen some natives whom they bit, die within a few minutes.

Other snakes there were also, as thick as a man's body, and four or five paces in length, which lived in trees and killed their food by coiling round it and pressing it to death. These snakes, it was said, would take men in this fashion, though I never saw one of them do so. At any rate, they were terrible to look on, and reminded me of their forefather through whose mouth Satan talked with Mother Eve in the Garden of Eden, and thus brought us all to woe.

Once, too, on the bank of a great river, I saw such a snake that at the sight of it my knees knocked together. By St. Hubert, the beast was

sixty feet or more in length; its head was of the bigness of a barrel, and its skin was of all the colours of the rainbow. Moreover, it seemed to hold me with its eyes, for till it slipped away into the river I could not move a foot.

Month after month we travelled thus, covering a matter of perhaps five miles a day, since sometimes the country was open and we crossed it with speed. Yet although our dangers were so many, strangely enough, during all this time, even in that heat neither of us fell sick, as I think because of the herb which Kari carried in his bag, that I found was named Coca, whereof we obtained more as we went and ate from time to time. Nor did we ever really suffer from starvation, since when we were hungry we took more of this herb which supported us until we could find food. These mercies I set down to the good offices of St. Hubert watching from Heaven over me, his poor namesake and godson, though perhaps the skill and courage of Kari which provided against everything had something to do with them.

At length, in the ninth month of our travelling, as Kari reckoned it by means of knots which he tied on pieces of native string, for I had long lost count of time, we came to the borders of a great desert that the natives said stretched southwards for a hundred leagues and more and was without water. Moreover, to the east of this desert rose a chain of mountains bordered by precipices up which no man could climb. Here, therefore, it seemed as though our journey must end, since Kari had no knowledge of how he crossed or went round this desert in his madness of

bygone years, if indeed he ever travelled that road at all, a matter of which I was not certain.

For a week or more we remained among the tribe that lived in a beautiful watered valley upon the borders of this desert, wondering what we should do. For my part I was by now so tired of travelling upon an endless quest that I should have been glad to stay among that tribe, a very gentle and friendly people, who like all the rest believed me to be a god, and make my home there till I died. But this was not Kari's mind, which was set fiercely upon winning back to his own country that he believed to lie towards the south.

Day by day we sat there regaining our strength upon the good food of that valley, and staring first at the desert to the south, then at the precipices on our left hand, and lastly at the ocean upon our right. Now this people, I should say, drew their wealth from the sea as well as from the land, since they were great fishermen and went out upon it in rude boats or rafts made of a wooden frame to which were lashed blown-up skins and bundles of dried reeds. Upon these boats, frail as they seemed, such as further south were called balsas, they made considerable journeys to distant islands where they caught vast quantities of fish, some of which they used to manure their land. Moreover, besides the oars, they rigged a square cotton sail upon the balsas which enabled them to run before the wind without labour, steering the craft by means of a paddle at the stern.

While we were there I observed that on the springing up of a wind from the north, although it was of no great strength, the balsas all came to shore and were drawn up out of reach of the waves. When I inquired why through Kari, the answer given was because the fishing season was over, since that wind from the north would blow for a long time without changing and those who went out in it upon the sea might be driven southwards to return no more. They stated, indeed, that often this had happened to venturesome men who had vanished away and been lost.

"If you wish to travel south, there is a way of doing so," I said to Kari.

At the time he made no answer, but on the following day asked me suddenly if I dared attempt such a journey.

"Why not?" I answered. "It is as easy to die in the water as on land and I weary of journeying through endless swamps and forests or of crossing torrents and climbing mountain ridges."

The end of it was that for a knife and a few nails Kari purchased the largest balsa that these people had, provisioning it with as much dried fish, corn and water in earthenware jars as it would carry together with ourselves, and such of our remaining goods as we wished to take with us. Then we announced that I, the god who had come out of the sea, desired to return into the sea with himself, my servant.

So on a certain fine morning when the wind was blowing steadily but not too strongly from the north, we embarked upon that balsa while the simple savages made obeisance with wonder in their eyes, hoisted the square canvas, and sailed away upon what I suppose was one of the maddest voyages ever made by man.

Although it was so clumsy the balsa moved through the water at a good rate, covering quite two leagues the hour, I should say, before that strong and steady wind. Soon the village that we had left vanished; then the mountains behind it grew dim and in time vanished also, and there remained nothing but the great wilderness upon our left and the vast sea around. Steering clear of the land so as to avoid sunken rocks, we sailed on all that day and all the night that followed, and when the light came again perceived that we were running past a coastline that was backed by high mountains on some of which lay snow. By the second evening these mountains had become tremendous, and between them I saw valleys down which ran streams of water.

Thus we went on for three days and nights, the wind from the north blowing all the while and the balsa taking no hurt, by the end of which time I reckon that we had travelled as far along the coast as we had done in six months when we journeyed over land, at which I rejoiced. Kari rejoiced also, because he said that the shape and greatness of the mountains we were passing reminded him of those of his own country, to which he believed that we were drawing near.

On the fourth morning, however, our troubles began, since the friendly wind from the north grew steadily stronger, till at length it rose to a gale. Soon our little rag of canvas was torn away, but still we rushed on before the following seas at a very great speed.

Now I thought of trying to make the land, but found that we could not do so with the oars, because of the current that set out towards the ocean against which it was impossible to urge our clumsy craft. Therefore we must content ourselves with trying to keep her head straight with the steering oar, but even then we were often whirled round and round.

About two hours after noon the sky clouded over, and there burst upon us a great thunder-storm with torrents of rain; also the wind grew stronger and stronger.

Now we could no longer steer or do anything except lie flat upon the bottom of the balsa, gripping the cords with which it was tied together, to save ourselves from being washed overboard, since often the foaming crests of the waves broke upon us. Indeed, it was marvellous that this frail craft should hang together at all, but owing to the lightness of the reeds and the blown-up skins that were tied in them, still she floated and, whirling round and round, sped upon her southward path. Yet I knew that this could not endure for very long, and committed my soul to God as well as I was able in my half-drowned state, wishing that my miseries were ended.

The darkness came down, but still the thunder roared and the lightning blazed, and by the flare of it I caught sight of snow-capped mountains far away upon the coast, also of Kari clinging to the reeds of the balsa at my side, and from time to time kissing the golden image of Pachacamac which hung about his neck. Presently he set his lips against my ear and shouted:

"Be bold! Our gods are still with us in storm."

"Yes," I answered, "and soon we shall be with our gods--in peace."

After this I heard no more of him, and fell to thinking with such wits as were left to me of how many perils we had passed since we saw the shores of Thames, and that it seemed sad that all should have been for nothing, since it would have been better to die at the beginning than now at the end, after so much misery. Then the glare of the lightning shone upon the handle of the sword Wave-Flame, which was still strapped about me, and I remembered the rune written upon it which my mother had rendered to me upon the morning of the fight against the Frenchmen. How did it run?

He who lifts Wave-Flame on high  
In love shall live and in battle die.  
Storm-tossed o'er wide seas shall roam  
And in strange lands shall make his home.  
Conquering, conquered shall he be



And far away shall sleep with me.

It fitted well, though of the love I had known little and that most unhappy, and the battle in which I must die was one with water. Also, I had conquered nothing who myself was conquered by Fate. In short, the thing could be read two ways, like all prophecies, and only one line of it was true beyond a doubt--namely, that Wave-Flame and I should sleep together.

Awhile later the lightning shone awesomely, like to the swords of a whole army of destroying angels, so that the sky became alive with fire. In its light for an instant I saw ahead of us great breakers, and beyond them what looked like a dark mass of land. Now we were in them, for the first of those hungry, curling waves got a hold of the balsa and tossed it up dizzily, then flung it down into a deep valley of water. Another came and another, till my senses reeled and went. I cried to St. Hubert, but he was a land saint and could not help me; so I cried to Another greater than he.

My last vision was of myself riding a huge breaker as though it were a horse. Then there came a crash and darkness.

Lo! it seemed to me as though one were calling me back from the depths of sleep. With trouble I opened my eyes only to shut them again because

of the glare of the light. Then after a while I sat up, which gave me pain, for I felt as if I had been beaten all over, and looked once more. Above me shone the sun in a sky of deepest blue; before me was the sea almost calm, while around were rocks and sand, among which crawled great reptiles that I knew for turtles, as I had seen many of them in our wanderings. Moreover, kneeling at my side, with the sword that he had taken from the body of Deleroy still strapped about him, was Kari, who bled from some wound and was almost white with encrusted salt, but otherwise seemed unharmed. I stared at him, unable to open my mouth from amazement, so it was he who spoke the first, saying, in a voice that had a note of triumph in it:

"Did I not tell you that the gods were with us? Where is your faith, O White Man! Look! They have brought me back to the land of which I am Prince."

Now there was that in Kari's tone which in my weak state angered me. Why did he scold me about faith? Why did he address me as "White Man" instead of "Master"? Was it because he had reached a country where he was great and I was nothing? I supposed so, and answered;

"And are these your subjects, O noble Kari?" and I pointed to the crawling turtles. "And is this the rich and wondrous land where gold and silver are as mud?" and I pointed to the barren rocks and sand around.

He smiled at my jest, and answered more humbly:

"Nay, Master, yonder is my land."

Then I looked, following his glance, and saw many leagues way across the water two snowclad peaks rising above a bank of clouds.

"I know those mountains," he went on; "without doubt they are one of the gateways of my land."

"Then we might as well be in London for all the hope we have of passing that gate, Kari. But tell me what has chanced."

"This, I think. A very great wave caught us and threw us right over those rocks on to the shore. Look--there is the balsa," and he pointed to a broken heap of reeds and pierced skins.

With his help I rose and went to it. Now none could know that it had been a boat. Still, the balsa it was and nothing else, and tied in its tangled mass still remained those things which we had brought with us, such as my black bow and armour, though all the jars were broken.

"It has borne us well, but will never bear us again," I said.

"That is so, Master. But if we were in my own country yonder I would set its fragments in a case of gold and place them in the Temple of the Sun

as a memorial."

Then we went to a pool of rainwater that lay in a hollow rock near by, and drank our fill, for we were very thirsty. Also among the ruins of the balsa we found some of the dried fish that was left to us, and having washed it, filled ourselves. After this we limped to the crest of the land behind and perceived that we were on a little island, perhaps two hundred English acres in extent, whereon nothing grew except some coarse grass. This island, however, was the haunt of great numbers of seafowl which nested there, also of the turtles that I have mentioned, and of certain beasts like seals or otters.

"At least we shall not starve," I said, "though in the dry season we may die of thirst."

Now there on that island we remained for four long months. For food we ate the turtles, which we cooked over fires that Kari made by cunningly twirling a pointed piece of driftwood in the hollow of another piece that he filled with the dust of dried grass. Had he lacked that knowledge we must have starved or lived on raw flesh. As it was, we had plenty with this meat and that of birds and their eggs, also of fish that we caught in the pools when the tide was down. From the shells of the turtles, by the help of stones, we built us a kind of hut to keep off the sun and the rain, which in that hot place was sufficient

shelter; also, when the stench was out of them, we used other shells in which to catch rainwater that we stored as best we could against seasons of drought. Lastly, with my big bow which was saved with the armour, I shot sea-otters, and from their pelts we made us garments after rubbing the skins with turtle fat and handling them to make them soft.

Thus, then, we lived from moon to moon upon that desert place, till I thought I should go mad with loneliness and despair, for no help came near us. There were the mountains of the mainland far away, but between them and us stretched leagues of sea that we could not swim, nor had we anything of which to make a boat.

"Here we must remain until we die!" at last I cried in my wretchedness.

"Nay," answered Kari, "our gods are still with us and will save us in their season."

This, indeed, they did in a strange fashion.