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NED DARROW;
OR,
THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS.
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CHAPTER XVIII.
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ON THE ISLAND.

BEHIND the delighted voyagers the dark and frowning cliffs cast deep shadows on the waters. Before them, like an oasis in the desert, was presented a picture that was paradise like in its rare magnificence.

A wealth of forests, dells, and plains spread before them. A little stream flowed bubbling to the ocean, rolling over golden sands. Luxuriant trees reached wide with dense foliage, while flowers of bewildering loveliness of hue bespangled the ground on every side.

Enchanted by the prospect, the occupants of the boat suspended their oars, and breathlessly allowed it to drift on the shining beach of this new fairy-land.

Even Professor Ballentine forgot his cares, his anxiety over the thought of anguished parents at home, in suspense for the fate of their sons. There could not but be plenty in such a land as this. No halcyon dream of an earthly Eden could demand a fairer spot for existence.

Birds of gaudy plumage flitted from tree to tree, strange animals sped through the undergrowth. To the south was visible the barrier of cliffs, but beyond that, far as the eye could reach, extended a flowery garden, gently undulating and marked by what appeared to be a vast inland lake some distance in shore.

There could be no doubt now but that they had been wrecked on an island, for, at the far horizon point, they seemed to see the ocean beyond. There was no evidence of human habitation, and the shore showed no trace of harbourage for ships.

For half an hour Ned and his companions wandered over the spot where they had landed. A brook clear as crystal murmured down to the sea and wound in and out toward the centre of the island.

One discovered a curious bird, another some rare fruit, another a species of Brazil nuts, and still another

some gorgeous tropical flower. When they at last returned to the beach Ned startled them with a quick question—

“Why, where’s the Professor?”

Where, indeed? for he certainly was not in sight. They scanned the landscape, but there was no trace of him.

Ned ran down the beach and looked in and out among the rocks near the headland.

A murmur of dismay parted his lips as he glanced down. Behind a slippery rock lay Professor Ballentine.

“What’s the matter, Professor?” inquired Ned, solicitously.

“I slipped and fell, and have either sprained or broken my ankle. In fact, both feet are almost useless at present.”

They tried to lift him, but the Professor suffered so much from the effort that they were forced to let him sink back on the sand.

“He can’t stay on the damp beach here,” remarked Ned to his companions. “He’s growing weak with the pain, too, and needs attention. I have a plan. Come, Ernest! Ralph! Dick!”

Ned proceeded to the life boat, and taking two of the oars, carried them toward a thicket. He cut some long, thick boughs from a tree and tied them with rope to the oars. Then they covered these with some rushes they found near the river.

“It makes a comfortable stretcher for the Professor, boys,” he said. “Now let us select a camping spot.”

They found a point where ample shade and shelter was afforded by some large trees, and lifting the ambulance returned to the beach.

They had some difficulty in moving Professor Ballentine to the stretcher, for he was almost helpless, but at last they succeeded, and a dozen willing hands seized the oars, and carefully proceeded under Ned’s directions.

The old tutor smiled his thanks as they deposited him under the trees. Upon examination of his ankles he decided that they were only severely sprained and swollen, and that with proper attention he would be able to be around in a few days.

Their dinner, consisting of shell-fish, that day had several additions. Ned had found a vine resembling the sweet potato, and had dug up several large vegetables resembling that esculent in shape and taste. They were