

top of which was overhung by a fringe of small, wind-twisted cedars and bay bushes.

At the back of the cliff the land fell away in a gradual slope to the level of the sea on the northern shore; a field closely cropped by a flock of nibbling sheep, a grove of pine and cedar, the garden-patch, the 'house place' with the bleaching-green behind the cottage, and in front of the house a grassy slope to the beach and the landing—this was Lonely Isle.

This beach extended about three-quarters around the islet, but under the cliff were only broken rocks, among which the waves tumbled with a monotonous roar, with which blended the shrill cries of the sea-fowl that circled in screaming flocks about the face of the cliff. Thousands of their nests filled the hollows and crevices, and tunnelled the clay banks that had settled in gullies near the summit.

In one of these gullies a landslip had carried away the vegetation, laying bare rock surfaces, in crannies of which the petrels and guillemots had established a colony.

This was in plain sight from the top of the chasm, to the great exasperation of the young naturalist, who often stood on the higher ground and looked longingly down to where, but a stone's throw away, yet quite out of range, were exposed treasures that would have made a priceless picture.

'It would be foolish to try it, and I won't think any more about it,' he would say to himself and turn away, only to return the next day, gaze at the inaccessible nests, and plan how they might be taken.

'I'm sure I could go down at the end of a rope. I could get Orlando to hold the other end with a turn around this tree,' he said, at last, and started for the beach to seek the boy. But Orlando and his father had gone out with their nets.

'What difference does it make after all?' said Duncan. 'I can do it just as well alone, with the rope tied to the tree. Well, here's luck! A rope asking to be used!' and he picked up one that lay coiled on the dock.

Going back to the cliff, he tied his rope securely to the cedar-tree, then fastened the other end about his body, and began slowly and very cautiously to work his way down the short slope that lay between him and the ledge where the coveted nests were placed.

He had calculated carefully the length of rope that would bring him within reach of the nests, but would not admit of his approaching too near the verge of the precipice. The distance was so short that there seemed very little risk in traversing it.

As he crept toward the ledge, the birds that were on the nests flew off, screaming in distress to find their stronghold invaded, circling about him so fearlessly that their wings brushed his face.

Eagerly he reached out toward the end of a jutting ledge for a place to stand.

At the farther end of a narrow fissure he spied the ragged nest of a petrel, its one egg cream white and perfect in form. 'I must get that into the picture!' he exclaimed, and reached out a little farther. It was just too far, and he strained at the rope. At the same instant he was startled to feel the rope suddenly lengthen. His weight was thrown on his right foot, which broke through into a petrel's burrow. This new strain caused the rope to

relax again, and, looking up, he was horrified to see that two strands of the rope had parted.

The rope that had seemed to offer itself so opportunely to aid in his adventure was an old one, discarded that morning by Captain Jenks, who had replaced it by a new painter in the boat. Its partially rotted fibre had been easily frayed on the edge of a stone over which Duncan had dragged it back and forth in his movements down the slope. A slight strain or added weight might sever the part that still held. He could not climb up to the point he had left without the aid of the rope, yet to drag upon it would surely part it.

He thought for a moment of dropping down, digging his fingers into the soil and crawling up the gully. But he knew now that the ground beneath his feet was honeycombed with petrels' burrows, and that to break through the surface again would probably dislodge the whole mass and carry him with it over the edge of the cliff.

He grew dizzy at the thought and swayed slightly; as he did so, with his eyes fixed on the rope, he saw the frayed ends uncoil from around the strands that held, causing it to lengthen yet a little more. With his left hand he clutched a cedar bush that grew close beside him, and steadied himself to think. What should he do? What could he do?

Below he heard the roar of the waves, and dared not look over his shoulder to see how near he was to the crumbling brink. Above was a stretch of pasture, where only the grazing sheep could hear his cry for help; yet his only chance lay in that direction. He would try calling.

He raised a shout: 'Help! help!' A sheep that had been nibbling the grass close to the edge, startled by the sudden sound, leaped in the air, so that he saw its head for an instant against the sky. Then it bounded away, its feet loosening some small clods that rolled down the slope.

Again Duncan shouted hoarsely, 'Help! help!' The roar of the breakers swallowed up the sound. He raised his voice to a higher pitch and shrieked, 'Help! help!' The sea-birds took up the cry, and his words were undistinguishable from their shrill notes. He was overwhelmed by the solitude of the place, as much as if he had been drifting alone miles out at sea.

Then there flashed through his mind a recollection of how Mrs. Jenks had said that she should know his voice above the dashing of the waves. Would she? He would test it. It was his last hope. He raised his voice, tremblingly at first, but gaining strength as the habit of song took possession of him. He began the hymn that she loved best; then, at the end of the verse, repeated his cry for help.

Mrs. Jenks was spreading Mandy's best white skirt on the grass of the bleaching-green when her ear caught the strains of the hymn, borne faintly on the wind. She straightened and looked round, listening.

'He's not in his chamber and not on the beach. The sound comes from the pasture, but I can't see the boy anywhere,' she thought, with surprise. The strain was ended, and she bent to her work again; then, starting erect, with eyes of terror, she heard the shrill cry that followed the song: 'Help! help!'

'He's on the cliff! Oh, my dear lad!' she cried, and sped away across the pasture.

Duncan had paused after the first cry, listening for any sound indicating that his call had been heard; but the dash of the waves and the screams of the birds were the only sounds he heard. Again he sang, with a despairing thrill in his tones, and had just begun to repeat the cry for help, when a voice from the upland called his name, and the white face of Mrs. Jenks appeared above him.

She wrung her hands in helpless distress when she saw his peril and the impossibility of reaching him; then she cried, 'Hold on a little longer!' and fled across the pasture, repeating over and over again as she ran, 'God keep him steady! God hold the ground under his feet!'

She had undertaken to help him. But how should she do it?

The answer came in a rattle of oars dropped into the boat, the grating of a keel on the beach. Her husband had returned.

'A rope! Bring a rope!' she shouted. 'Duncan's over the cliff!'

Captain Jenks seized the new painter by which he was just about to secure the boat. It was tied fast in the bow, but he freed it with a slash of his knife, and ran, coiling the rope around his arm.

On reaching the verge of the cliff, he found Duncan still clinging to the cedar bush and the rope; but the several strands had untwisted for a distance of more than a foot, and the unsevered portion was strained tight, while the bush was beginning to loose its hold on the thin soil that covered the surface of the rock. So fearful was the boy that the least motion might disturb his insecure footing, that he did not even raise his head when he heard the welcome sound of Captain Jenks's voice above him, saying:

'Hold on a minute longer, sonny, and we'll have you out of that!'

Duncan felt a tremor of the rope he held, but dared not turn his head to see what caused it. Captain Jenks was looping the new rope, which fell against the old one. He took up the coil, and leaning forward, with the coolness and skill of an old fisherman, dropped the loop within reach of Duncan's hand.

Then they watched while he loosed his hold of the cedar bush to grasp the rope and pass it around his body. Then, as the strong hand that held the rope felt the boy's weight drawing on it, the old fisherman breathed a sigh of relief, and his wife ejaculated a fervent 'Thank God!'

With the assistance of the rope, it needed but a few steps to bring the boy to a safe foothold on the firm turf of the upland, where the knees that had held so steady before began to tremble.

'Lean on me, boy,' said Captain Zebedee, fearing he would fall. Duncan leaned against his shoulder and glanced down at the rope that still hung about his waist. Mrs. Jenks's sympathetic eye perceived a look of distress clouding the expression of joy and relief that had shone in his face, and passing her arm around his neck, she asked, anxiously, 'Are you hurt, bad, Duncan?'

No, Duncan was not hurt, nor did he faint; but the enthusiasm of the naturalist, that had deserted him in the time of his peril, was strong within him again, and he answered, 'I'm all right, Mrs. Jenks, but I wish I'd thought to hold to my camera. I have lost the dandiest lot of plates I ever made in all my life!'

'Youngster,' said the old fisherman, seri-