LOUIS
DE ROUGEMONT

# THE ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMONT

**Louis de Rougemont**

# The Adventures of Louis de Rougemont

EAN 8596547370154

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

# Table of Contents

# CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

Early life—Leaving home—I meet Jensen—I go pearling—Daily routine—Submarine beauties—A fortune in pearls—Seized by an octopus—Shark-killing extraordinary—Trading with the natives—Impending trouble—Preparing for the attack—Baffling the savages.

I was born in or near Paris, in the year 1844. My father was a fairly prosperous man of business—a general merchant, to be precise, who dealt largely in shoes; but when I was about ten years old, my mother, in consequence of certain domestic differences, took me to live with her at Montreux, and other places in Switzerland, where I was educated. I visited many of the towns near Montreux, including Lausanne, Geneva, Neufchatel, &c. The whole of the time I was at school I mixed extensively with English boys on account of their language and sports, both of which attracted me.

Boys soon begin to display their bent, and mine, curiously enough, was in the direction of geology. I was constantly bringing home pieces of stone and minerals picked up in the streets and on the mountains, and asking questions about their origin and history. My dear mother encouraged me in this, and later on I frequently went to Freiburg, in the Black Forest, to get a practical insight into smelting. When I was about nineteen, however, a message arrived from my father, directing me to return to France and report myself as a conscript; but against this my mother resolutely set her face. I fancy my father wanted me to take

up the army as a career, but in deference to my mother's wishes I remained with her in Switzerland for some time longer. She and I had many talks about my future, and she at length advised me to take a trip to the East, and see what the experience of travel would do for me. Neither of us had any definite project in view, but at length my mother gave me about 7000 francs and I set out for Cairo, intending eventually to visit and make myself acquainted with the French possessions in the Far East. My idea was to visit such places as Tonkin, Cochin-China, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, &c. My mother was of the opinion that if I saw a bit of the world in this way I would be more inclined to settle down at home with her at the end of my wanderings. The primary cause of my going away was a little love episode. Whilst at Montreux I fell in love with a charming young lady at a boarding-school near my home. She was the daughter of some high personage in the court of Russia—but exactly what position he held I cannot say. My mother was quite charmed with the young lady and viewed our attachment with delight. But when my father heard of the matter he raised a decided objection to it, and ordered me to return to France and join the army. He had, as I have previously intimated, made his own plans for my future, even to the point of deciding upon a future wife for me, as is customary in France; but I resolutely declined to conform to his wishes in this respect, and my mother quite sided with me. I never quite knew how he got to hear of my love affair, but I conclude that my mother must have mentioned it to him. I only stayed a few days in the wonderful metropolis of Egypt; its noises, its cosmopolitanism, its crowds—these, and many

other considerations, drove me from the city, and I set out for Singapore.

I had not been many days in that place when, chancing to make inquiries at a store kept by a Mr. Shakespeare, I was casually introduced to a Dutch pearl-fisher named Peter Jensen. Although I describe him as a Dutch pearler I am somewhat uncertain as to his exact nationality. I am under the impression that he told me he came from Copenhagen, but in those days the phrase “Dutchman” had a very wide application. If a man hailed from Holland, Sweden, Norway, or any neighbouring country, he was always referred to as a Dutchman. This was in 1863. We grew quite friendly, Jensen and I, and he told me he had a small forty-ton schooner at Batavia, in which sturdy little craft he used to go on his pearling expeditions.

“I am now,” he said, “about to organise a trip to some untouched pearling grounds off the south of New Guinea, but have not sufficient capital to defray the preliminary expenses.”

This hint I took, and I offered to join him. He once agreed, and we commenced our preparations without delay—in Batavia. Now when a pearler engaged a crew of native divers there in those days, he had to deposit beforehand with the Dutch Government a certain sum for each man entering his service, this money being a guarantee that the man would get his wages. Well, I placed all the money that I had with me at Captain Jensen’s disposal, provided he gave me a share in the venture we were about to undertake. “We will not,” he said to me in Singapore, “draw up an agreement here, but will do so at Batavia,” and forthwith we

set sail for that place. Before leaving Singapore, however, Jensen bought some nautical instruments he could not get at Batavia—including compasses, quadrant, chronometer, &c. Strange to say, he did not tell me that his ship was named the *Veielland* until we had arrived at Batavia. Here the contract was duly drawn up, and the vessel fitted out for the voyage. I fancy this was the first time Jensen had embarked on a pearling expedition on a craft of the size of the *Veielland*, his previous trips having been undertaken on much smaller vessels, say of about ten tons. Although the fitting out of the ship was left entirely in his hands, I insisted upon having a supply of certain stores for myself put aboard —things he would never have thought about. These included such luxuries as tinned and compressed vegetables, condensed milk, &c. Jensen did not even think of ship's biscuits until I called his attention to the oversight. He demurred at first about buying them, but I told him I would not go until we had the biscuits aboard. Jensen was a very bluff, enigmatic sort of fellow, as I afterwards found out. He was of a sullen, morose nature, and I could never get much out of him about his past. He would not speak about himself under any circumstances, and at no time of our acquaintance was he any sort of a sociable companion. He was very hard upon the sailors under him, and was much addicted to the use of strong language. I admit that I was an absolute "muff" in those days, and Jensen was quick to grasp the fact. He was very fond of schnapps, whilst I hated the smell of the stuff. Moreover, he was a great smoker, and here again our tastes differed.

Our preparations in Batavia complete, we next went over to the islands of the Dutch Archipelago, and engaged forty experienced Malay divers to accompany us. Jensen was very particular in selecting the men, each being required to demonstrate his capabilities before us. The way he tested them prior to actually engaging them was to make each dive after a bright tin object thrown into so many fathoms of water. Altogether he spent several weeks choosing his crew. He had engaged a couple of Malays at Batavia to help in the work of navigating the ship, but besides being sailors these men were also good divers. The majority of the other Malays were only useful as divers, and took no part in the working of the ship. A native *serang*, or “boss,” was appointed as chief, or foreman, over the Malays, and he was permitted to take with him his wife and her maid. This “serang” had to be a first-class diver himself, and had also to be acquainted with the manoeuvring of a small boat. He was also required to have a smattering of navigation generally. Above all, he had to be able to assert authority over the other divers; and in all these respects our serang was thoroughly proficient.

I may here explain that shortly after leaving Batavia the captain had the ship repainted a greyish-white colour all over. I never troubled to look for her name, but one day I saw Jensen painting the word *Veielland* on her. There was a totally different name on the lifeboat, but I cannot remember it. What Jensen’s motive was in sailing the ship under another name I never understood; certainly it was a very suspicious circumstance. Perhaps the ship as originally named had a bad name, and if such were the case—mind you, I don’t say that it had—the Malays could never have

been induced to go aboard. Once out at sea, however, they would be absolutely at the mercy of the captain, and he could treat them just as he pleased. The first thing they did before coming aboard was to look at the name for themselves. No doubt they knew the reputation of every pearler. Jensen did on one occasion exercise his authority to the extent of transferring some of his own Malay divers to another ship when we were out at sea.

At last everything was ready, and when we sailed for the pearling grounds, our crew numbered forty-four all told, not including a fine dog that belonged to the captain. This dog, which played so important—nay, so vitally important—a part in my strange afterlife, was given to Jensen at Batavia by a Captain Cadell, a well-known Australian seaman, who had gained some notoriety by navigating the Murray River for the first time. Cadell, who was a great friend of Jensen, was himself a pearler. But he met with a sad end. He was in a pearling expedition in the neighbourhood of Thursday Island, and among his crew were some of the very Australian Blacks who in after years proved so friendly to me. Cadell treated these men very badly, keeping them at work long after the time for their return home had expired, and one day they mutinied and murdered him whilst he was asleep. The black fellow who called himself “Captain Jack Davies,” of whom I shall have more to say hereafter, was amongst the crew at the time. I obtained this information in Sydney from Captain Tucker, a well-known Torres Straits pearler. Bruno, Jensen’s dog, was something of a greyhound in build, only that his hind-quarters were heavier.

As you may suppose, my knowledge of seamanship was very limited indeed, but Jensen interested himself in me, so that I soon began to pick up a good deal of useful knowledge. He taught me how to take the sun, I using his old instruments; but I could never grasp the taking of the lunars. On our voyage out I had no duties to perform on board, but I found much to interest myself in the beautiful tropical islands among which we threaded our way; and I took quite a childish delight in everything I saw. It was really a grand time for me. I constantly wrote home to my mother, the last letter I forwarded to her being from Koopang. Occasionally we landed on one of the islands to buy fresh provisions, in the shape of fowls, pigs, fruit, &c. We then set sail for the coast of New Guinea. The voyage thence was accomplished without the slightest hitch, the divers spending most of their time in singing and playing like little children,—all in the best of good spirits. Their favourite form of amusement was to sit round a large fire, either telling stories of the girls they had left behind, or singing love melodies. When the weather was at all cold, they would make a fire in a rather shallow tub, the sides of which were lined with a layer of sand. They were a wonderfully light-hearted lot of fellows, and I greatly enjoyed listening to their chants and yarns. I was more often with them than in Jensen’s company, and it did not take me long to pick up bits of their language.

The *Veielland* only drew between seven feet and eight feet of water, so that we were able to venture very close in-shore whenever it was necessary. At length, about a month after starting, we reached a likely spot where the captain

thought that the precious shells might be found; here we anchored, and the divers quickly got to work. I ought to have mentioned that we carried a large whale-boat, and about half-a-dozen frail little “shell” boats for the use of the divers.

The comings and goings of the various pearling expeditions were of course regulated by the weather and the state of the tide. The captain himself went out first of all in the whale-boat, and from it prospected for shells at the bottom of the crystal sea. The water was marvellously transparent, and leaning over the side of the boat, Jensen peered eagerly into his sea-telescope, which is simply a metal cylinder with a lens of ordinary glass at the bottom. Some of the sea-telescopes would even be without this lens, being simply a metal cylinder open at both ends. Although they did not bring the objects looked at nearer the vision, yet they enabled the prospector to see below the ruffled surface of the water.

The big whale-boat was followed at a respectful distance by the flotilla of smaller boats, each containing from four to six Malays. When Jensen discerned a likely spot through his peculiar telescope, he gave the signal for a halt, and before you could realise what was going to happen, the native divers had tumbled out of their boats, and were *swimming* in a weird way down to the bottom of the translucent sea. As a rule, one man was left in each little boat to follow the movements of the divers as they returned to the surface. Not only did these divers wear no mechanical “dress,” but they used no stimulants or palliatives of any kind to aid them in their work. All they carried was a small sheath-knife

hung from the waist by a piece of string. The water for the most part was only two or three fathoms deep, but sometimes it would be as much as eight fathoms,—which was the greatest depth to which the men cared to go. When he reached the bottom, the diver would grope about for shells, and generally return to the surface with a couple, held in his left hand and hugged against his breast; the right hand was kept free and directed his movements in swimming. Each diver seldom remained under water more than one minute, and on coming to the surface he would take a “spell” of perhaps a quarter of an hour before going down again.

As fast as each man brought his shells into the boat, they were put into a separate little pile, which was respected absolutely, and always recognised as belonging to its owner. The bed of the sea at these pearling grounds is usually coral, with innumerable holes of different depths and sizes dotted all over it. It was in these recesses that the best shells were mostly found.

The marine vegetation down in these seas was always of extreme beauty; there were stately “trees” that waved backwards and forwards, as though under the influence of a gentle breeze; there were high, luxuriant grasses, and innumerable plants of endless variety and colour. The coral rocks, too, were of gorgeous hues—yellow, blue, red, and white; but a peculiar thing was that the moment you brought a piece of this rock up to the surface, the lovely colour it possessed whilst in the water gradually faded away. Some of the coral I saw had curious little shoots hanging

from its numerous projections bearing a striking resemblance to bluebells.

The illusion of a submarine forest was further heightened by the droves of gaily-coloured fish that flitted in and out among the branches. Perhaps the most beautiful of all were the little dolphins. The diving expeditions went away from the ship with the ebb tide, and returned with the flow. Sometimes their search would take them long distances away, and on one occasion they were working fully ten miles from the *Veielland*. When the water suddenly became rough, rendering the divers unable to paddle their own little skiffs back to the ship, they made their way to the whale-boat, clambered aboard, and returned in her, trailing their own craft at the stern. The boats, however, were not always brought back to the ship at night; as a rule they were buoyed near the pearling beds, whilst the divers returned to their quarters aboard. I might here explain that the sleeping accommodation for the Malays was both ample and comfortable. A large room in which the casks of fresh water were stored was set apart for their use. These casks were turned on end and a deck of planks placed over them, on which the Malays laid their sleeping mats and little wooden pillows. They ranged themselves twenty a side. But you may be asking, what was *I* doing during these pearling expeditions? Well, I was intrusted with the important duty of receiving the shells from the men, and crediting each with the number he delivered. Thus I was nearly always left alone on the ship—save for the dog; because even the two Malay women frequently went out diving, and they were credited for work done precisely as the men were.

If I had no shells to open whilst the divers were absent, I filled in my time by sewing sails, which Jensen himself would cut to the required shape—and reading, &c. My library consisted of only five books—a copy of the Bible, and a four-volume medical work in English by Bell, which I had purchased at Singapore. I made quite a study of the contents of this work, and acquired much valuable information, which I was able to put to good use in after years, more particularly during my sojourn amongst the Blacks. Bruno generally sat by my side on deck when I was alone,—in fact he was nearly always with me. He took to me more than to Jensen from the first. Jensen rarely tried to bully me, though of course I was now very much in his power, as he emphatically illustrated one day. A Malay diver had very much annoyed him, and in his fury he picked up a heavy broom with a stick fully four feet long, and felled the poor fellow senseless to the deck with it. I was shocked at such awful brutality, and ventured to protest against it. “Captain,” I said, “don’t do anything like that again whilst I am aboard.” Turning round in a great passion he ordered me to keep my own counsel, otherwise he would have me put in irons. But for all that Jensen never again let his temper get the better of him to such an extent in my presence. He was always very gruff in his manner, and looked upon me as the “darndest fool he had ever met.”

These divers, by the way, never seemed to trouble about the value of the treasure they were constantly bringing to the surface. They thought themselves well paid if they were given plenty of rice and fish, turtles’ eggs and fowls, in addition to such luxuries as spices, coffee, and

“Brummagem” jewellery, of a kind which is too well known to need description. At the same time it must be admitted that in addition to their wages, which were paid them when they were discharged from the ship, the Malays had practically no opportunity of being dishonest, even though they might have been inclined that way. They never came into actual contact with the pearls; they were rewarded according to the number of shells brought to the surface, and not the value of the pearls they might contain. All the shells were opened by me. A healthy spirit of rivalry was maintained among the divers, and the man who had the best record of shells each week was rewarded with an extra allowance of rum or tobacco; a choice of some article of jewellery, or anything else he fancied from among the stock we had on board. A bottle of chutney or pickles was considered a specially valuable delicacy. No money was ever given to the divers as wages whilst at sea, remuneration in kind being always given instead. Each expedition would be absent perhaps six hours, and on its return each diver generally had between twenty and forty shells to hand over to me. These I arranged in long rows on the deck, and allowed them to remain there all night. Next day I cleaned them by scraping off the coral from the shells, and then opened them with an ordinary dinner-knife. Of course, every oyster did not produce a pearl; in fact, I have opened as many as a hundred consecutive shells without finding a single pearl. The gems are hidden away in the fleshy part of the oyster, and have to be removed by pressure of the thumb. The empty shells are then thrown in a heap on one side, and afterwards carefully stowed away in the hold, as

they constitute a valuable cargo in themselves, being worth—at that time, at any rate (1864)—from £200 to £250, and even £350 a ton. All the pearls I found I placed in a walnut jewel-case, measuring about fourteen inches by eight inches by six inches. The value of the treasure increased day by day, until it amounted to many thousands of pounds; but of this more hereafter. I did not know much of the value of pearls then—how could I, having had no previous experience?

Captain Jensen, however, assured me at the end of the season that we had something like £50,000 worth of pearls aboard, to say nothing about the value of the shells, of which we had about thirty tons. It must be clearly understood that this is Captain Jensen's estimate—I am utterly unable to give one. The oysters themselves we found very poor eating, and no one on board cared about them. Some of the shells contained one pearl, others two, three, and even four. One magnificent specimen I came across produced no fewer than a dozen fine pearls, but that of course was very exceptional. The largest gem I ever found was shaped just like a big cube, more than an inch square. It was, however, comparatively worthless. Actually the finest specimen that passed through my hands was about the size of a pigeon's egg, and of exquisite colour and shape. Some of the pearls were of a beautiful rose colour, others yellow; but most were pure white.

The greatest enemy the divers had to fear in those waters was the dreaded octopus, whose presence occasioned far greater panic than the appearance of a mere shark.

These loathsome monsters—call them squids, or devil-fish, or what you will—would sometimes come and throw their horrible tentacles over the side of the frail craft from which the divers were working, and actually fasten on to the men themselves, dragging them out into the water. At other times octopuses have been known to attack the divers down below, and hold them relentlessly under water until life was extinct. One of our own men had a terribly narrow escape from one of these fearful creatures. I must explain, however, that occasionally when the divers returned from pearl-fishing, they used to rope all their little skiffs together and let them lie astern of the schooner. Well, one night the wind rose and rain fell heavily, with the result that next morning all the little boats were found more or less water-logged. Some of the Malays were told off to go and bale them out. Whilst they were at work one of the men saw a mysterious-looking black object in the sea, which so attracted his curiosity that he dived overboard to find out what it was. He had barely reached the water, however, when an immense octopus rose into view, and at once made for the terrified man, who instantly saw his danger, and with great presence of mind promptly turned and scrambled back into the boat.

The terrible creature was after him, however, and to the horror of the onlookers it extended its great flexible tentacles, enveloped the entire boat, man and all, and then dragged the whole down into the clear depths. The diver’s horrified comrades rushed to his assistance, and an attempt was made to kill the octopus with a harpoon, but without success. Several of his more resourceful companions then dived into the water with a big net made of stout twine,

which they took right underneath the octopus, entangling the creature and its still living prey. The next step was to drag up both man and octopus into the whale-boat, and this done, the unfortunate Malay was at length seized by his legs, and dragged by sheer force out of the frightful embrace, more dead than alive, as you may suppose. However, we soon revived him by putting him into a very hot bath, the water being at such a temperature as actually to blister his skin. It is most remarkable that the man was not altogether drowned, as he had been held under water by the tentacles of the octopus for rather more than two minutes. But, like all the Malays of our party, this man carried a knife, which he used to very good purpose on the monster's body when first it dragged him under the water. These repeated stabs caused the creature to keep rolling about on the surface, and the unhappy man was in this way enabled to get an occasional breath of air; otherwise he must infallibly have been drowned. It was a horrible-looking creature, with a slimy body, and a hideous cavity of a mouth. It is the tentacles of the creature that are so dreaded, on account of the immense sucking power which they possess.

After this incident the divers always took a tomahawk with them on their expeditions, in order to lop off the tentacles of any octopus that might try to attack them in the boats. And, by the way, we saw many extraordinary creatures during our cruise. I myself had a serious fright one day whilst indulging in a swim.

We had anchored in about five fathoms, and as I was proceeding leisurely away from the vessel at a slow breast

stroke, a monstrous fish, fully twenty feet long, with an enormous hairy head and fierce, fantastic moustaches, suddenly reared up out of the water, high into the air. I must say that the sight absolutely unmanned me for the moment, and when this extraordinary creature opened his enormous mouth in my direction, I gave myself up for lost. It did not molest me, however, and I got back to the ship safely, but it was some little time before I recovered from the terrible fright.

Occasionally too we were troubled with sharks, but the Malays did not appear to be very much afraid of them. Their great dread was the ground shark, which lay motionless at the bottom of the sea, and gave no indication of his presence. The result was that occasionally the divers would sink down to their work quite unknowingly almost by the side of one of these fearful creatures, and in such cases the diver rarely escaped without injury of some kind. With regard to the ordinary shark, however, our divers actually sought them. Their method of capturing them was almost incredible in its simplicity and daring. Three or four of our divers would go out in a boat and allow themselves to drift into a big school of sharks. Then one man, possessed of more nerve than the rest, would bend over the side and smartly prick the first one he came across with a spear taken out for the purpose. The moment he had succeeded in this the other occupants of the boat would commence yelling and howling at the top of their voices, at the same time beating the water with their paddles, in order to frighten away the sharks. This invariably succeeded, but, amazing to relate, the shark that had been pricked always

came back alone a few minutes later to see what it was that had pricked him. Care has to be taken not to inflict a very severe wound, because the moment the other sharks taste the blood of a wounded companion, they will immediately turn upon him and eat him. When the inquisitive shark is seen coming in the direction of the boat, the Malay who has accosted him in this way quietly jumps overboard, armed only with his small knife and a short stick of hard wood, exactly like a butcher’s skewer, about five inches in length, and pointed at each end.

The man floats stationary on the surface of the sea, and, naturally, the shark makes for him. As the creature rolls over to bite, the wily Malay glides out of his way with a few deft strokes of the left hand, whilst with the right he deliberately plants the pointed skewer in an upright position between the open jaws of the expectant monster. The result is simple, but surprising. The shark is, of course, unable to close its mouth, and the water just rushes down his throat and chokes him, in consequence of the gills being forced back so tightly as to prevent the escape of water through them in the natural way. Needless to remark, it requires the greatest possible coolness and nerve to kill a shark in this way, but the Malays look upon it as a favourite recreation and an exciting sport. When the monster is dead its slayer dexterously climbs on to its back, and then, digging his knife into the shark’s head to serve as a support and means of balance, the conqueror is towed back to the ship astride his victim by means of a rope hauled by his companions in their boats.

After many adventures and much luck in the way of getting pearls, our food and water supply began to give out. This induced Captain Jensen to make for the New Guinea main in order to replenish his stores. We soon reached a likely spot on the coast, and obtained all that we wanted from the natives by means of barter.

We gave them tomahawks, knives, hoop-iron, beads, turtles, and bright-coloured cloth. Indeed, so friendly did our intercourse become that parties of our divers often went ashore and joined the Papuans in their sports and games. On one of these occasions I came across a curious animal that bore a striking resemblance to a kangaroo, and yet was not more than two feet high. It could climb trees like an opossum and was of the marsupial family. The pigeons, too, which were very plentiful in these parts, were as large as a big fowl. The headman, or chief, took quite an interest in me, and never seemed tired of conversing with me, and pointing out the beauties of the country. He even showed me a certain boundary which he advised us not to pass, as the natives beyond were not under his control. One day, however, a party of our Malays, accompanied by myself, imprudently ventured into the forbidden country, and soon came to a native village, at which we halted. The people here were suspicious of us from the first, and when one of my men indiscreetly offended a native, half the village rose against us, and we had to beat a retreat. We were making the best of our way to the coast again, when the friendly chief came and met us. He interceded with the indignant tribesmen on our behalf, and succeeded in pacifying them. On reaching the ship, which was anchored within a mile of

the coast, Jensen complained to me ominously that he was getting fairly swamped with natives, who persisted in coming on board with fruit and vegetables for barter. He said he was getting quite nervous about the crowds that swarmed over the vessel, the natives going up and down as though they had a perfect right to do so.

“I don’t like it,” said the captain, “and shall have to put my foot down.”

Next morning, when the usual batch of native canoes came alongside, we declined to allow a single man on board. While we were explaining this to them, our friend the chief himself arrived, accompanied by half-a-dozen notables, most of whom I knew, together with the now friendly dignitary whose wrath we had aroused the previous day. They were all full of dignity and anticipation. Captain Jensen, however, was obdurate, and refused permission to any one to come aboard. That was enough for the chiefs. They went away in high dudgeon, followed immediately by all the other canoes and their occupants. When all had disappeared, a curious stillness came over the ship, the sea, and the tropical coast, and a strange sense of impending danger seemed to oppress all of us. We knew that we had offended the natives, and as we could not see a single one of them on the beach, it was pretty evident that they were brooding over their grievance. We might have weighed anchor and made for the open sea, only unfortunately there was a perfect calm, and our sails, which were set in readiness for a hasty departure, hung limp and motionless. Suddenly, as we stood looking out anxiously over the side in the direction of the shore, we were amazed to see at least

twenty fully-equipped war-canoes, each carrying from thirty to forty warriors, rounding the headland, some little distance away, and making straight for our ship. Now my shrewd Dutch partner had anticipated a possible attack, and had accordingly armed all the Malays with tomahawks, in readiness for any attempt that might be made to board the schooner. We had also taken off the hatches, and made a sort of fortification with them round the wheel.

Jensen and I armed ourselves with guns, loaded our little cannon, and prepared to make a desperate fight for our lives against the overwhelming odds. In spite of the danger of our position, I could not help being struck with the magnificence of the spectacle presented by the great fleet of boats now fast advancing towards us. The warriors had all assumed their fighting decorations, with white stripes painted round their dusky bodies to strike terror into the beholder. Their head-dress consisted of many-coloured feathers projecting from the hair, which they had matted and caused to stand bolt upright from the head. Each boat had a prow about three feet high, surmounted by a grotesquely carved figure-head. The war-canoes were propelled by twelve men, paddling on either side. When the first came within hailing distance I called out and made signs that they were not to advance unless their intentions were peaceful. By way of reply, they merely brandished their bows and arrows at us. There was no mistaking their mission.

It was now quite evident that we should have to make a fight for it, and the natives were coming to the attack in such numbers as easily to overwhelm us if they once got on

board. Our position was rendered still more awkward by the fact that all round the ship ropes were hanging down to the water, up which our divers used to climb on their return from the day's pearling. These ropes were attached to a sort of hawser running round the outside bulwarks of the ship. We had not even time to haul these up, and the enemy would certainly have found them very useful for boarding purposes had they been allowed to get near enough. It was therefore very necessary that some decisive step should be taken at once. While we were debating what was best to be done, we were suddenly greeted by a shower of arrows from the leading war-canoe. Without waiting any longer I fired at the leader, who was standing in the prow, and bowled him over. The bullet went right through his body, and then bored a hole low down in the side of the canoe. The amazement of the warriors on hearing the report and seeing the mysterious damage done is quite beyond description; and before they could recover from their astonishment, Jensen sent a charge of grape-shot right into their midst, which shattered several of the canoes and caused a general halt in the advance.

Again I made signs to them not to come nearer, and they seemed undecided what to do. Jabbering consultations were held, but while they were thus hesitating ten more canoes swung round the headland, and their appearance seemed to give the advance-guard fresh courage.

Once more they made for our ship, but I was ready for them with the little cannon we had on board; it had been reloaded with grape after the first discharge. With a roar the gun belched forth a second deadly hail against the

advancing savages, and the effect was to demoralise them completely. One of the canoes was shattered to pieces, and nearly all the men in it more or less seriously wounded; whilst the occupants of several other canoes received injuries.

Quite a panic now ensued, and the fleet of canoes got inextricably mixed. Several showers of arrows, however, descended on our deck, and some of them penetrated the sails, but no one was injured. The natives were too much afraid to advance any farther, and as a wind had now sprung up we deemed it time to make a dash for liberty. We therefore quietly slipped our anchor and, heading the ship for the open sea, glided swiftly past the enemy’s fleet, whose gaily decked, though sorely bewildered, warriors greeted us with a Parthian flight of arrows as we raced by. In another half-hour we were well out to sea, and able to breathe freely once more.

# CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

The three black pearls—The fatal morning—Jensen and his flotilla drift away—Alone on the ship—“Oil on the troubled waters”—A substitute for a rudder—Smoke signals—The whirlpool—The savages attack—I escape from the blacks—A strange monster—The *Veielland* strikes a reef—Stone deaf through the big wave—I leap into the sea—How Bruno helped me ashore—The dreary island—My raft—A horrible discovery.

This adventure made our Malay crew very anxious to leave these regions. They had not forgotten the octopus incident either, and they now appointed their serang to wait upon the captain—a kind of “one-man” deputation—to persuade him, if possible, to sail for fresh fishing-grounds. At first Jensen tried to persuade them to remain in the same latitudes, which is not to be wondered at, seeing the harvest he had secured; but they would not listen to this, and at last he was compelled to direct his ship towards some other quarter. Where he took us to I cannot say, but in the course of another week we dropped anchor in some practically unexplored pearling grounds, and got to work once more. Our luck was still with us, and we continued increasing every day the value of our already substantial treasure. In these new grounds we found a particularly small shell very rich in pearls, which required no diving for at all. They were secured by means of a trawl or scoop dragged from the stern of the lifeboat; and when the tide was low the men

jumped into the shallow water and picked them up at their ease.

One morning, as I was opening the shells as usual, out from one dropped three magnificent black pearls. I gazed at them, fascinated—why, I know not. Ah! those terrible three black pearls; would to God they had never been found! When I showed them to the captain he became very excited, and said that, as they were worth nearly all the others put together, it would be well worth our while trying to find more like them. Now, this meant stopping at sea longer than was either customary or advisable. The pearling season was practically at an end, and the yearly cyclonic changes were actually due, but the captain had got the "pearl fever" very badly and flatly refused to leave. Already we had made an enormous haul, and in addition to the stock in my charge Jensen had rows of pickle bottles full of pearls in his cabin, which he would sit and gloat over for hours like a miser with his gold. He kept on saying that there *must* be more of these black pearls to be obtained; the three we had found could not possibly be isolated specimens and so on. Accordingly, we kept our divers at work day after day as usual. Of course, I did not know much about the awful dangers to which we were exposing ourselves by remaining out in such uncertain seas when the cyclones were due; and I did not, I confess, see any great reason why we should *not* continue pearling. I was inexperienced, you see.

The pearl-fishing season, as I afterwards learned, extends from November to May. Well, May came and went, and we were still hard at work, hoping that each day would bring another haul of black pearls to our store of treasure; in this,

however, we were disappointed. And yet the captain became more determined than ever to find some. He continued to take charge of the whale-boat whenever the divers went out to work, and he personally superintended their operations. He knew very well that he had already kept them at work longer than he ought to have done, and it was only by a judicious distribution of more jewellery, pieces of cloth, &c., that he withheld them from openly rebelling against the extended stay. The serang told him that if the men did once go on strike, nothing would induce them to resume work, they would simply sulk, he said; and die out of sheer disappointment and pettishness. So the captain was compelled to treat them more amiably than usual. At the very outside their contract would only be for nine months. Sometimes when he showed signs of being in a cantankerous mood because the haul of shells did not please him, the serang would say to him defiantly, “Come on; take it out of me if you are not satisfied.” But Jensen never accepted the challenge. As the days passed, I thought the weather showed indications of a change; for one thing, the aneroid began jumping about in a very uneasy manner. I called Jensen’s attention to the matter, but he was too much interested in his hunt for black pearls to listen to me.

And now I pass to the fatal day that made me an outcast from civilisation for so many weary years. Early one morning in July 1864, Jensen went off as usual with the whole of his crew, leaving me absolutely alone in charge of the ship. The women had often accompanied the divers on their expeditions, and did so on this occasion, being rather expert at the work, which they looked upon as sport.

Whenever I look back upon the events of that dreadful day, I am filled with astonishment that the captain should have been so mad as to leave the ship at all. Only an hour before he left, a tidal wave broke over the stern, and flooded the cabins with a perfect deluge. Both Jensen and I were down below at the time, and came in for an awful drenching. This in itself was a clear and ominous indication of atmospheric disturbance; but all that poor Jensen did was to have the pumps set to work, and after the cabins were comparatively dry he proceeded once more to the pearl banks that fascinated him so, and on which he probably sleeps to this day. The tide was favourable when he left, and I watched the fleet of little boats following in the wake of the whale-boat, until they were some three miles distant from the ship, when they stopped for preparations to be made for the work of diving. I had no presentiment whatever of the catastrophe that awaited them and me.

A cool, refreshing breeze had been blowing up to his time, but the wind now developed a sudden violence, and the sea was lashed into huge waves that quickly swamped nearly every one of the little cockle-shell boats. Fortunately, they could not sink, and as I watched I saw that the Malays who were thus thrown into the water clung to the sides of the little boats, and made the best of their way to the big craft in charge of Captain Jensen. Every moment the sea became more and more turbulent as the wind quickened to a hurricane. When all the Malays had scrambled into the whale-boat, they attempted to pull back to the ship, but I could see that they were unable to make the slightest

headway against the tremendous sea that was running, although they worked frantically at the oars.

On the contrary, I was horrified to see that they were gradually drifting *away from me*, and being carried farther and farther out across the illimitable sea. I was nearly distracted at the sight, and I racked my brains to devise some means of helping them, but could think of nothing feasible. I thought first of all of trying to slip the anchor and let the ship drift in their direction, but I was by no means sure that she would actually do this. Besides, I reflected, she might strike on some of the insidious coral reefs that abound in those fair but terribly dangerous seas. So I came to the conclusion that it would be better to let her remain where she was—at least, for the time being. Moreover, I felt sure that the captain, with his knowledge of those regions, would know of some island or convenient sandbank, perhaps not very far distant, on which he might run his boat for safety until the storm had passed.

The boats receded farther and farther from view, until, about nine in the morning, I lost sight of them altogether. They had started out soon after sunrise. It then occurred to me that I ought to put the ship into some sort of condition to enable her to weather the storm, which was increasing instead of abating. This was not the first storm I had experienced on board the *Veielland*, so I knew pretty well what to do. First of all, then, I battened down the hatches; this done, I made every movable thing on deck as secure as I possibly could. Fortunately all the sails were furled at the time, so I had no trouble with them. By mid-day it was blowing so hard that I positively could not stand upright, but