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*Cruising in the Solomons*

“Why not come along now?” said Captain Jansen to us, at Penduffryn, on the island of Guadalcanar.

Charmian and I looked at each other and debated silently for half a minute. Then we nodded our heads simultaneously. It is a way we have of making up our minds to do things; and a very good way it is when one has no temperamental tears to shed over the last tin-of condensed milk when it has capsized. (We are living on tinned goods these days, and since mind is rumoured to be an emanation of matter, our similes are naturally of the packing-house variety.)

“You’d better bring your revolvers along, and a couple of rifles,” said Captain Jansen. “I’ve got five rifles aboard, though the one Mauser is without ammunition. Have you a few rounds to spare?”

We brought our rifles on board, several handfuls of Mauser cartridges, and Wada and Nakata, the Snark’s cook and cabin-boy respectively. Wada and Nakata were in a bit of a funk. To say the least, they were not enthusiastic, though never did Nakata show the white feather in the face of danger. The Solomon Islands had not dealt kindly with them. In the first place, both had suffered from Solomon sores. So had the rest of us (at the time, I was nursing two fresh ones on a diet of corrosive sublimate); but the two Japanese had had more than their share. And the sores are not nice. They may be described as excessively active ulcers. A mosquito bite, a cut, or the slightest abrasion, serves for lodgment of the poison with which the air seems to be filled. Immediately the ulcer commences to eat. It eats in every direction, consuming skin and muscle with astounding rapidity. The pin-point ulcer of the first day is the size of a dime by the second day, and by the end of the week a silver dollar will not cover it.

Worse than the sores, the two Japanese had been afflicted with Solomon Island fever. Each had been down repeatedly with it, and in their weak, convalescent moments they were wont to huddle together on the portion of the Snark that happened to be nearest to faraway Japan, and to gaze yearningly in that direction.

But worst of all, they were now brought on board the Minota for a recruiting cruise along the savage coast of Malaita. Wada, who had the worse funk, was sure that he would never see Japan again, and with bleak, lack-lustre eyes he watched our rifles and ammunition going on board the Minota. He knew about the Minota and her Malaita cruises. He knew that she had been captured six months before on the Malaita coast, that her captain had been chopped to pieces with tomahawks, and that, according to the barbarian sense of equity on that sweet isle, she owed two more heads. Also, a labourer on Penduffryn Plantation, a Malaita boy, had just died of dysentery, and Wada knew that Penduffryn had been put in the debt of Malaita by one more head. Furthermore, in stowing our luggage away in the skipper’s tiny cabin, he saw the axe gashes on the door where the triumphant bushmen had cut their way in. And, finally, the galley stove was without a pipe—said pipe having been part of the loot.

The Minota was a teak-built, Australian yacht, ketch-rigged, long and lean, with a deep fin-keel, and designed for harbour racing rather than for recruiting blacks. When Charmian and I came on board, we found her crowded. Her double boat's crew, including substitutes, was fifteen, and she had a score and more of "return" boys, whose time on the plantations was served and who were bound back to their bush villages. To look at, they were certainly true head-hunting cannibals. Their perforated nostrils were thrust through with bone and wooden bodkins the size of lead-pencils. Numbers of them had punctured the extreme meaty point of the nose, from which protruded, straight out, spikes of turtle-shell or of beads strung on stiff wire. A few had further punctured their noses with rows of holes following the curves of the nostrils from lip to point. Each ear of every man had from two to a dozen holes in it—holes large enough to carry wooden plugs three inches in diameter down to tiny holes in which were carried clay-pipes and similar trifles. In fact, so many holes did they possess that they lacked ornaments to fill them; and when, the following day, as we neared Malaita, we tried out our rifles to see that they were in working order, there was a general scramble for the empty cartridges, which were thrust forthwith into the many aching voids in our passengers' ears.

At the time we tried out our rifles we put up our barbed wire railings. The Minota, crown-decked, without any house, and with a rail six inches high, was too accessible to boarders. So brass stanchions were screwed into the rail and a double row of barbed wire stretched around her from stem to stern and back again. Which was all very well as a protection from savages, but it was mighty uncomfortable to those on board when the Minota took to jumping and plunging in a sea-way. When one dislikes sliding down upon the lee-rail barbed wire, and when he dares not catch hold of the weather-rail barbed wire to save himself from sliding, and when, with these various disinclinations, he finds himself on a smooth flush-deck that is heeled over at an angle of forty-five degrees, some of the delights of Solomon Islands cruising may be comprehended. Also, it must be remembered, the penalty of a fall into the barbed wire is more than the mere scratches, for each scratch is practically certain to become a venomous ulcer. That caution will not save one from the wire was evidenced one fine morning when we were running along the Malaita coast with the breeze on our quarter. The wind was fresh, and a tidy sea was making. A black boy was at the wheel. Captain Jansen, Mr. Jacobsen (the mate), Charmian, and I had just sat down on deck to breakfast. Three unusually large seas caught us. The boy at the wheel lost his head. Three times the Minota was swept. The breakfast was rushed over the lee-rail. The knives and forks went through the scuppers; a boy aft went clean overboard and was dragged back; and our doughty skipper lay half inboard and half out, jammed in the barbed wire. After that, for the rest of the cruise, our joint use of the several remaining eating utensils was a splendid example of primitive communism. On the Eugenie, however, it was even worse, for we had but one teaspoon among four of us—but the Eugenie is another story.

Our first port was Su'u on the west coast of Malaita. The Solomon Islands are on the fringe of things. It is difficult enough sailing on dark nights through reef-spiked channels and across erratic currents where there are no lights to guide (from northwest to southeast the Solomons extend across a thousand miles of sea, and on all the thousands of miles of coasts there is not one lighthouse); but the difficulty is seriously enhanced by the fact that the land itself is not correctly charted. Su'u is an example. On the Admiralty chart of Malaita the coast at this point runs a straight, unbroken line. Yet across this straight, unbroken line the Minota sailed in twenty fathoms of water. Where the land was alleged to be, was a deep indentation. Into this we sailed, the mangroves closing about us, till we dropped anchor in a mirrored pond. Captain Jansen did not like the anchorage. It was the first time he had been there, and Su'u had a bad

reputation. There was no wind with which to get away in case of attack, while the crew could be bushwhacked to a man if they attempted to tow out in the whale-boat. It was a pretty trap, if trouble blew up.

“Suppose the Minota went ashore—what would you do?” I asked.

“She’s not going ashore,” was Captain Jansen’s answer.

“But just in case she did?” I insisted. He considered for a moment and shifted his glance from the mate buckling on a revolver to the boat’s crew climbing into the whale-boat each man with a rifle.

“We’d get into the whale-boat, and get out of here as fast as God’d let us,” came the skipper’s delayed reply.

He explained at length that no white man was sure of his Malaita crew in a tight place; that the bushmen looked upon all wrecks as their personal property; that the bushmen possessed plenty of Snider rifles; and that he had on board a dozen “return” boys for Su’u who were certain to join in with their friends and relatives ashore when it came to looting the Minota.

The first work of the whale-boat was to take the “return” boys and their trade-boxes ashore. Thus one danger was removed. While this was being done, a canoe came alongside manned by three naked savages. And when I say naked, I mean naked. Not one vestige of clothing did they have on, unless nose-rings, ear-plugs, and shell armllets be accounted clothing. The head man in the canoe was an old chief, one-eyed, reputed to be friendly, and so dirty that a boat-scraper would have lost its edge on him. His mission was to warn the skipper against allowing any of his people to go ashore. The old fellow repeated the warning again that night.

In vain did the whale-boat ply about the shores of the bay in quest of recruits. The bush was full of armed natives; all willing enough to talk with the recruiter, but not one would engage to sign on for three years’ plantation labour at six pounds per year. Yet they were anxious enough to get our people ashore. On the second day they raised a smoke on the beach at the head of the bay. This being the customary signal of men desiring to recruit, the boat was sent. But nothing resulted. No one recruited, nor were any of our men lured ashore. A little later we caught glimpses of a number of armed natives moving about on the beach.

Outside of these rare glimpses, there was no telling how many might be lurking in the bush. There was no penetrating that primeval jungle with the eye. In the afternoon, Captain Jansen, Charmian, and I went dynamiting fish. Each one of the boat’s crew carried a Lee-Enfield. “Johnny,” the native recruiter, had a Winchester beside him at the steering sweep. We rowed in close to a portion of the shore that looked deserted. Here the boat was turned around and backed in; in case of attack, the boat would be ready to dash away. In all the time I was on Malaita I never saw a boat land bow on. In fact, the recruiting vessels use two boats—one to go in on the beach, armed, of course, and the other to lie off several hundred feet and “cover” the first boat. The Minota, however, being a small vessel, did not carry a covering boat.

We were close in to the shore and working in closer, stern-first, when a school of fish was sighted. The fuse was ignited and the stick of dynamite thrown. With the explosion, the surface of the water was broken by the flash of leaping fish. At the same instant the woods broke into life. A score of naked savages, armed with bows and arrows, spears, and Sniders, burst out upon the shore. At the same moment our boat’s crew, lifted their rifles. And thus the opposing parties faced each other, while our extra boys dived over after the stunned fish.

Three fruitless days were spent at Su’u. The Minota got no recruits from the bush, and the bushmen got no heads from the Minota. In fact, the only one who got anything was Wade, and his was a nice dose of fever. We towed out with the whale-boat, and ran along the coast to Langa

Langa, a large village of salt-water people, built with prodigious labour on a lagoon sand-bank—literally BUILT up, an artificial island reared as a refuge from the blood-thirsty bushmen. Here, also, on the shore side of the lagoon, was Binu, the place where the Minota was captured half a year previously and her captain killed by the bushmen. As we sailed in through the narrow entrance, a canoe came alongside with the news that the man-of-war had just left that morning after having burned three villages, killed some thirty pigs, and drowned a baby. This was the Cambrian, Captain Lewes commanding. He and I had first met in Korea during the Japanese-Russian War, and we had been crossing each other's trail ever since without ever a meeting. The day the Snark sailed into Suva, in the Fijis, we made out the Cambrian going out. At Vila, in the New Hebrides, we missed each other by one day. We passed each other in the night-time off the island of Santo. And the day the Cambrian arrived at Tulagi, we sailed from Penduffryn, a dozen miles away. And here at Langa Langa we had missed by several hours.

The Cambrian had come to punish the murderers of the Minota's captain, but what she had succeeded in doing we did not learn until later in the day, when a Mr. Abbot, a missionary, came alongside in his whale-boat. The villages had been burned and the pigs killed. But the natives had escaped personal harm. The murderers had not been captured, though the Minota's flag and other of her gear had been recovered. The drowning of the baby had come about through a misunderstanding. Chief Johnny, of Binu, had declined to guide the landing party into the bush, nor could any of his men be induced to perform that office. Whereupon Captain Lewes, righteously indignant, had told Chief Johnny that he deserved to have his village burned. Johnny's beche de mer English did not include the word "deserve." So his understanding of it was that his village was to be burned anyway. The immediate stampede of the inhabitants was so hurried that the baby was dropped into the water. In the meantime Chief Johnny hastened to Mr. Abbot. Into his hand he put fourteen sovereigns and requested him to go on board the Cambrian and buy Captain Lewes off. Johnny's village was not burned. Nor did Captain Lewes get the fourteen sovereigns, for I saw them later in Johnny's possession when he boarded the Minota. The excuse Johnny gave me for not guiding the landing party was a big boil which he proudly revealed. His real reason, however, and a perfectly valid one, though he did not state it, was fear of revenge on the part of the bushmen. Had he, or any of his men, guided the marines, he could have looked for bloody reprisals as soon as the Cambrian weighed anchor.

As an illustration of conditions in the Solomons, Johnny's business on board was to turn over, for a tobacco consideration, the sprit, mainsail, and jib of a whale-boat. Later in the day, a Chief Billy came on board and turned over, for a tobacco consideration, the mast and boom. This gear belonged to a whale-boat which Captain Jansen had recovered the previous trip of the Minota. The whale-boat belonged to Meringe Plantation on the island of Ysabel. Eleven contract labourers, Malaita men and bushmen at that, had decided to run away. Being bushmen, they knew nothing of salt water nor of the way of a boat in the sea. So they persuaded two natives of San Cristoval, salt-water men, to run away with them. It served the San Cristoval men right. They should have known better. When they had safely navigated the stolen boat to Malaita, they had their heads hacked off for their pains. It was this boat and gear that Captain Jansen had recovered.

Not for nothing have I journeyed all the way to the Solomons. At last I have seen Charmian's proud spirit humbled and her imperious queendom of femininity dragged in the dust. It happened at Langa Langa, ashore, on the manufactured island which one cannot see for the houses. Here, surrounded by hundreds of unblushing naked men, women, and children, we wandered about and saw the sights. We had our revolvers strapped on, and the boat's crew, fully

armed, lay at the oars, stern in; but the lesson of the man-of-war was too recent for us to apprehend trouble. We walked about everywhere and saw everything until at last we approached a large tree trunk that served as a bridge across a shallow estuary. The blacks formed a wall in front of us and refused to let us pass. We wanted to know why we were stopped. The blacks said we could go on. We misunderstood, and started. Explanations became more definite. Captain Jansen and I, being men, could go on. But no Mary was allowed to wade around that bridge, much less cross it. "Mary" is beche de mer for woman. Charmian was a Mary. To her the bridge was tambo, which is the native for taboo. Ah, how my chest expanded! At last my manhood was vindicated. In truth I belonged to the lordly sex. Charmian could traipse along at our heels, but we were MEN, and we could go right over that bridge while she would have to go around by whale-boat.

Now I should not care to be misunderstood by what follows; but it is a matter of common knowledge in the Solomons that attacks of fever are often brought on by shock. Inside half an hour after Charmian had been refused the right of way, she was being rushed aboard the Minota, packed in blankets, and dosed with quinine. I don't know what kind of shock had happened to Wada and Nakata, but at any rate they were down with fever as well. The Solomons might be healthfuller.

Also, during the attack of fever, Charmian developed a Solomon sore. It was the last straw. Every one on the Snark had been afflicted except her. I had thought that I was going to lose my foot at the ankle by one exceptionally malignant boring ulcer. Henry and Tehei, the Tahitian sailors, had had numbers of them. Wada had been able to count his by the score. Nakata had had single ones three inches in length. Martin had been quite certain that necrosis of his shinbone had set in from the roots of the amazing colony he elected to cultivate in that locality. But Charmian had escaped. Out of her long immunity had been bred contempt for the rest of us. Her ego was flattered to such an extent that one day she shyly informed me that it was all a matter of pureness of blood. Since all the rest of us cultivated the sores, and since she did not—well, anyway, hers was the size of a silver dollar, and the pureness of her blood enabled her to cure it after several weeks of strenuous nursing. She pins her faith to corrosive sublimate. Martin swears by iodoform. Henry uses lime-juice undiluted. And I believe that when corrosive sublimate is slow in taking hold, alternate dressings of peroxide of hydrogen are just the thing. There are white men in the Solomons who stake all upon boracic acid, and others who are prejudiced in favour of lysol. I also have the weakness of a panacea. It is California. I defy any man to get a Solomon Island sore in California.

We ran down the lagoon from Langa Langa, between mangrove swamps, through passages scarcely wider than the Minota, and past the reef villages of Kaloka and Auki. Like the founders of Venice, these salt-water men were originally refugees from the mainland. Too weak to hold their own in the bush, survivors of village massacres, they fled to the sand-banks of the lagoon. These sand-banks they built up into islands. They were compelled to seek their provender from the sea, and in time they became salt-water men. They learned the ways of the fish and the shellfish, and they invented hooks and lines, nets and fish-traps. They developed canoe-bodies. Unable to walk about, spending all their time in the canoes, they became thick-armed and broad-shouldered, with narrow waists and frail spindly legs. Controlling the sea-coast, they became wealthy, trade with the interior passing largely through their hands. But perpetual enmity exists between them and the bushmen. Practically their only truces are on market-days, which occur at stated intervals, usually twice a week. The bushwomen and the salt-water women do the bartering. Back in the bush, a hundred yards away, fully armed, lurk the bushmen, while

to seaward, in the canoes, are the salt-water men. There are very rare instances of the market-day truces being broken. The bushmen like their fish too well, while the salt-water men have an organic craving for the vegetables they cannot grow on their crowded islets.

Thirty miles from Langa Langa brought us to the passage between Bassakanna Island and the mainland. Here, at nightfall, the wind left us, and all night, with the whale-boat towing ahead and the crew on board sweating at the sweeps, we strove to win through. But the tide was against us. At midnight, midway in the passage, we came up with the *Eugenie*, a big recruiting schooner, towing with two whale-boats. Her skipper, Captain Keller, a sturdy young German of twenty-two, came on board for a "gam," and the latest news of Malaita was swapped back and forth. He had been in luck, having gathered in twenty recruits at the village of Fiu. While lying there, one of the customary courageous killings had taken place. The murdered boy was what is called a salt-water bushman—that is, a salt-water man who is half bushman and who lives by the sea but does not live on an islet. Three bushmen came down to this man where he was working in his garden. They behaved in friendly fashion, and after a time suggested kai-kai. Kai-kai means food. He built a fire and started to boil some taro. While bending over the pot, one of the bushmen shot him through the head. He fell into the flames, whereupon they thrust a spear through his stomach, turned it around, and broke it off.

"My word," said Captain Keller, "I don't want ever to be shot with a Snider. Spread! You could drive a horse and carriage through that hole in his head."

Another recent courageous killing I heard of on Malaita was that of an old man. A bush chief had died a natural death. Now the bushmen don't believe in natural deaths. No one was ever known to die a natural death. The only way to die is by bullet, tomahawk, or spear thrust. When a man dies in any other way, it is a clear case of having been charmed to death. When the bush chief died naturally, his tribe placed the guilt on a certain family. Since it did not matter which one of the family was killed, they selected this old man who lived by himself. This would make it easy. Furthermore, he possessed no Snider. Also, he was blind. The old fellow got an inkling of what was coming and laid in a large supply of arrows. Three brave warriors, each with a Snider, came down upon him in the night time. All night they fought valiantly with him. Whenever they moved in the bush and made a noise or a rustle, he discharged an arrow in that direction. In the morning, when his last arrow was gone, the three heroes crept up to him and blew his brains out.

Morning found us still vainly toiling through the passage. At last, in despair, we turned tail, ran out to sea, and sailed clear round Bassakanna to our objective, Malu. The anchorage at Malu was very good, but it lay between the shore and an ugly reef, and while easy to enter, it was difficult to leave. The direction of the southeast trade necessitated a beat to windward; the point of the reef was widespread and shallow; while a current bore down at all times upon the point.

Mr. Caulfeild, the missionary at Malu, arrived in his whale-boat from a trip down the coast. A slender, delicate man he was, enthusiastic in his work, level-headed and practical, a true twentieth-century soldier of the Lord. When he came down to this station on Malaita, as he said, he agreed to come for six months. He further agreed that if he were alive at the end of that time, he would continue on. Six years had passed and he was still continuing on. Nevertheless he was justified in his doubt as to living longer than six months. Three missionaries had preceded him on Malaita, and in less than that time two had died of fever and the third had gone home a wreck.

"What murder are you talking about?" he asked suddenly, in the midst of a confused conversation with Captain Jansen.

Captain Jansen explained.

“Oh, that’s not the one I have reference to,” quoth Mr. Caulfeild. “That’s old already. It happened two weeks ago.”

It was here at Malu that I atoned for all the exulting and gloating I had been guilty of over the Solomon sore Charmian had collected at Langa Langa. Mr. Caulfeild was indirectly responsible for my atonement. He presented us with a chicken, which I pursued into the bush with a rifle. My intention was to clip off its head. I succeeded, but in doing so fell over a log and barked my shin. Result: three Solomon sores. This made five all together that were adorning my person. Also, Captain Jansen and Nakata had caught gari-gari. Literally translated, gari-gari is scratch-scratch. But translation was not necessary for the rest of us. The skipper’s and Nakata’s gymnastics served as a translation without words.

(No, the Solomon Islands are not as healthy as they might be. I am writing this article on the island of Ysabel, where we have taken the Snark to careen and clean her cooper. I got over my last attack of fever this morning, and I have had only one free day between attacks. Charmian’s are two weeks apart. Wada is a wreck from fever. Last night he showed all the symptoms of coming down with pneumonia. Henry, a strapping giant of a Tahitian, just up from his last dose of fever, is dragging around the deck like a last year’s crab-apple. Both he and Tehei have accumulated a praiseworthy display of Solomon sores. Also, they have caught a new form of gari-gari, a sort of vegetable poisoning like poison oak or poison ivy. But they are not unique in this. A number of days ago Charmian, Martin, and I went pigeon-shooting on a small island, and we have had a foretaste of eternal torment ever since. Also, on that small island, Martin cut the soles of his feet to ribbons on the coral whilst chasing a shark—at least, so he says, but from the glimpse I caught of him I thought it was the other way about. The coral-cuts have all become Solomon sores. Before my last fever I knocked the skin off my knuckles while heaving on a line, and I now have three fresh sores. And poor Nakata! For three weeks he has been unable to sit down. He sat down yesterday for the first time, and managed to stay down for fifteen minutes. He says cheerfully that he expects to be cured of his gari-gari in another month. Furthermore, his gari-gari, from too enthusiastic scratch-scratching, has furnished footholds for countless Solomon sores. Still furthermore, he has just come down with his seventh attack of fever. If I were king, the worst punishment I could inflict on my enemies would be to banish them to the Solomons. On second thought, king or no king, I don’t think I’d have the heart to do it.)

Recruiting plantation labourers on a small, narrow yacht, built for harbour sailing, is not any too nice. The decks swarm with recruits and their families. The main cabin is packed with them. At night they sleep there. The only entrance to our tiny cabin is through the main cabin, and we jam our way through them or walk over them. Nor is this nice. One and all, they are afflicted with every form of malignant skin disease. Some have ringworm, others have bukua. This latter is caused by a vegetable parasite that invades the skin and eats it away. The itching is intolerable. The afflicted ones scratch until the air is filled with fine dry flakes. Then there are yaws and many other skin ulcerations. Men come aboard with Solomon sores in their feet so large that they can walk only on their toes, or with holes in their legs so terrible that a fist could be thrust in to the bone. Blood-poisoning is very frequent, and Captain Jansen, with sheath-knife and sail needle, operates lavishly on one and all. No matter how desperate the situation, after opening and cleansing, he claps on a poultice of sea-biscuit soaked in water. Whenever we see a particularly horrible case, we retire to a corner and deluge our own sores with corrosive sublimate. And so we live and eat and sleep on the Minota, taking our chance and “pretending it is good.”

At Suava, another artificial island, I had a second crow over Charmian. A big fella marster belong Suava (which means the high chief of Suava) came on board. But first he sent an emissary to Captain Jansen for a fathom of calico with which to cover his royal nakedness. Meanwhile he lingered in the canoe alongside. The regal dirt on his chest I swear was half an inch thick, while it was a good wager that the underneath layers were anywhere from ten to twenty years of age. He sent his emissary on board again, who explained that the big fella marster belong Suava was condescendingly willing enough to shake hands with Captain Jansen and me and cadge a stick or so of trade tobacco, but that nevertheless his high-born soul was still at so lofty an altitude that it could not sink itself to such a depth of degradation as to shake hands with a mere female woman. Poor Charmian! Since her Malaita experiences she has become a changed woman. Her meekness and humbleness are appallingly becoming, and I should not be surprised, when we return to civilization and stroll along a sidewalk, to see her take her station, with bowed head, a yard in the rear.

Nothing much happened at Suava. Bichu, the native cook, deserted. The Minota dragged anchor. It blew heavy squalls of wind and rain. The mate, Mr. Jacobsen, and Wada were prostrated with fever. Our Solomon sores increased and multiplied. And the cockroaches on board held a combined Fourth of July and Coronation Parade. They selected midnight for the time, and our tiny cabin for the place. They were from two to three inches long; there were hundreds of them, and they walked all over us. When we attempted to pursue them, they left solid footing, rose up in the air, and fluttered about like humming-birds. They were much larger than ours on the Snark. But ours are young yet, and haven't had a chance to grow. Also, the Snark has centipedes, big ones, six inches long. We kill them occasionally, usually in Charmian's bunk. I've been bitten twice by them, both times foully, while I was asleep. But poor Martin had worse luck. After being sick in bed for three weeks, the first day he sat up he sat down on one. Sometimes I think they are the wisest who never go to Carcassonne.

Later on we returned to Malu, picked up seven recruits, hove up anchor, and started to beat out the treacherous entrance. The wind was chopping about, the current upon the ugly point of reef setting strong. Just as we were on the verge of clearing it and gaining open sea, the wind broke off four points. The Minota attempted to go about, but missed stays. Two of her anchors had been lost at Tulagi. Her one remaining anchor was let go. Chain was let out to give it a hold on the coral. Her fin keel struck bottom, and her main topmast lurched and shivered as if about to come down upon our heads. She fetched up on the slack of the anchors at the moment a big comber smashed her shoreward. The chain parted. It was our only anchor. The Minota swung around on her heel and drove headlong into the breakers.

Bedlam reigned. All the recruits below, bushmen and afraid of the sea, dashed panic-stricken on deck and got in everybody's way. At the same time the boat's crew made a rush for the rifles. They knew what going ashore on Malaita meant—one hand for the ship and the other hand to fight off the natives. What they held on with I don't know, and they needed to hold on as the Minota lifted, rolled, and pounded on the coral. The bushmen clung in the rigging, too witless to watch out for the topmast. The whale-boat was run out with a tow-line endeavouring in a puny way to prevent the Minota from being flung farther in toward the reef, while Captain Jansen and the mate, the latter pallid and weak with fever, were resurrecting a scrap-anchor from out the ballast and rigging up a stock for it. Mr. Caulfeild, with his mission boys, arrived in his whale-boat to help.

When the Minota first struck, there was not a canoe in sight; but like vultures circling down out of the blue, canoes began to arrive from every quarter. The boat's crew, with rifles at

the ready, kept them lined up a hundred feet away with a promise of death if they ventured nearer. And there they clung, a hundred feet away, black and ominous, crowded with men, holding their canoes with their paddles on the perilous edge of the breaking surf. In the meantime the bushmen were flocking down from the hills armed with spears, Sniders, arrows, and clubs, until the beach was massed with them. To complicate matters, at least ten of our recruits had been enlisted from the very bushmen ashore who were waiting hungrily for the loot of the tobacco and trade goods and all that we had on board.

The Minota was honestly built, which is the first essential for any boat that is pounding on a reef. Some idea of what she endured may be gained from the fact that in the first twenty-four hours she parted two anchor-chains and eight hawsers. Our boat's crew was kept busy diving for the anchors and bending new lines. There were times when she parted the chains reinforced with hawsers. And yet she held together. Tree trunks were brought from ashore and worked under her to save her keel and bilges, but the trunks were gnawed and splintered and the ropes that held them frayed to fragments, and still she pounded and held together. But we were luckier than the Ivanhoe, a big recruiting schooner, which had gone ashore on Malaita several months previously and been promptly rushed by the natives. The captain and crew succeeded in getting away in the whale-boats, and the bushmen and salt-water men looted her clean of everything portable.

Squall after squall, driving wind and blinding rain, smote the Minota, while a heavier sea was making. The Eugenie lay at anchor five miles to windward, but she was behind a point of land and could not know of our mishap. At Captain Jansen's suggestion, I wrote a note to Captain Keller, asking him to bring extra anchors and gear to our aid. But not a canoe could be persuaded to carry the letter. I offered half a case of tobacco, but the blacks grinned and held their canoes bow-on to the breaking seas. A half a case of tobacco was worth three pounds. In two hours, even against the strong wind and sea, a man could have carried the letter and received in payment what he would have laboured half a year for on a plantation. I managed to get into a canoe and paddle out to where Mr. Caulfeild was running an anchor with his whale-boat. My idea was that he would have more influence over the natives. He called the canoes up to him, and a score of them clustered around and heard the offer of half a case of tobacco. No one spoke.

"I know what you think," the missionary called out to them. "You think plenty tobacco on the schooner and you're going to get it. I tell you plenty rifles on schooner. You no get tobacco, you get bullets."

At last, one man, alone in a small canoe, took the letter and started. Waiting for relief, work went on steadily on the Minota. Her water-tanks were emptied, and spars, sails, and ballast started shoreward. There were lively times on board when the Minota rolled one bilge down and then the other, a score of men leaping for life and legs as the trade-boxes, booms, and eighty-pound pigs of iron ballast rushed across from rail to rail and back again. The poor pretty harbour yacht! Her decks and running rigging were a raffle. Down below everything was disrupted. The cabin floor had been torn up to get at the ballast, and rusty bilge-water swashed and splashed. A bushel of limes, in a mess of flour and water, charged about like so many sticky dumplings escaped from a half-cooked stew. In the inner cabin, Nakata kept guard over our rifles and ammunition.

Three hours from the time our messenger started, a whale-boat, pressing along under a huge spread of canvas, broke through the thick of a shrieking squall to windward. It was Captain Keller, wet with rain and spray, a revolver in belt, his boat's crew fully armed, anchors and

hawsers heaped high amidships, coming as fast as wind could drive—the white man, the inevitable white man, coming to a white man's rescue.

The vulture line of canoes that had waited so long broke and disappeared as quickly as it had formed. The corpse was not dead after all. We now had three whale-boats, two plying steadily between the vessel and shore, the other kept busy running out anchors, rebending parted hawsers, and recovering the lost anchors. Later in the afternoon, after a consultation, in which we took into consideration that a number of our boat's crew, as well as ten of the recruits, belonged to this place, we disarmed the boat's crew. This, incidentally, gave them both hands free to work for the vessel. The rifles were put in the charge of five of Mr. Caulfeild's mission boys. And down below in the wreck of the cabin the missionary and his converts prayed to God to save the Minota. It was an impressive scene! the unarmed man of God praying with cloudless faith, his savage followers leaning on their rifles and mumbling amens. The cabin walls reeled about them. The vessel lifted and smashed upon the coral with every sea. From on deck came the shouts of men heaving and toiling, praying, in another fashion, with purposeful will and strength of arm.

That night Mr. Caulfeild brought off a warning. One of our recruits had a price on his head of fifty fathoms of shell-money and forty pigs. Baffled in their desire to capture the vessel, the bushmen decided to get the head of the man. When killing begins, there is no telling where it will end, so Captain Jansen armed a whale-boat and rowed in to the edge of the beach. Ugi, one of his boat's crew, stood up and orated for him. Ugi was excited. Captain Jansen's warning that any canoe sighted that night would be pumped full of lead, Ugi turned into a bellicose declaration of war, which wound up with a peroration somewhat to the following effect: "You kill my captain, I drink his blood and die with him!"

The bushmen contented themselves with burning an unoccupied mission house, and sneaked back to the bush. The next day the Eugenie sailed in and dropped anchor. Three days and two nights the Minota pounded on the reef; but she held together, and the shell of her was pulled off at last and anchored in smooth water. There we said good-bye to her and all on board, and sailed away on the Eugenie, bound for Florida Island.