

CHAPTER

Five

I GUESS IT WAS TOWARD NOON on the third day aboard the raft that Timothy said tensely, "I 'ear a motah."

"A motah?"

"Ssssh."

I listened. Yes, there was a far-off engine sound coming in faintly above the slap of the sea. Then I could hear Timothy moving around. "'Tis an aircraft," he said.

My heart began to pound. *They were looking for*

us. I felt around, then crawled from beneath the shelter to look toward the sound. But I could see nothing.

I heard the hinges on the trap door creak. Timothy said quietly, as though afraid to chase the sound away, "It knowin' what we doin' 'ere by seein' smoke, I do believe."

He ripped down one of the triangle legs, and I heard cloth tearing. Soon he said, "We made d'torch, young bahss. D'mahn up dere be seein' d'smoke all right, all right."

The faint drone of the aircraft seemed closer now. In a moment, I smelled cloth burning and knew he was holding the wrapped piece of wood toward the sky.

He shouted, "Look downg 'ere."

But already the drone seemed to be fading.

Timothy yelled, "I see it, I see it! Way to port!"

I tried to make my eyes cut through the darkness. "Is he coming our way?"

"Don' know, don' know, young bahss," Timothy replied anxiously.

I said, "I can't hear it now." There was nothing in the air but the sea sounds.

Timothy shouted, "Look downg 'ere! Dere is a raff wit a lil' blin' boy, an' old mahn, an' Stew Cat. Look downg 'ere, I tell you."

The drone could not be heard. Just the slap of the water and the sound of the light wind making our shelter flap.

We were alone again on the ocean.

After a moment of silence, I heard the sizzle of the water as Timothy doused the torch. He sighed deeply, "I be ready next time for true. Let d'torch dry, den I be ready."

Soon he sat down beside me. "'Tis a good ting not to harass d'soul ovah dis. We are edgin' into d'aircraft track, same as d'ship dey run."

I said nothing but put my head down on my knees.

"Do not be dishearten, young bahss. Today, we will be foun', to be true."

But the long, hot day was passing without sight of anything. I knew Timothy was constantly scanning the sea. It was all so calm now that the raft didn't even seem to be drifting. Once, I crawled over to the edge to touch the warm water and felt Timothy right behind me.

He said, "Careful, young bahss. D'sharks always hungry, always waitin' for d'mahn to fall ovah-board."

Drawing back from the edge, I asked, "Are there many here?"

"Yes, many 'ere. But long as we 'ave our raff, they do not meliss us."

Standing on the sea wall at Willemstad, sometimes I'd seen their fins in the water. I'd also seen them on the dock at the Ruyterkade market, their mouths open and those sharp teeth grinning.

I went back under the shelter, spending a long

time rubbing Stew Cat. He purred and pushed himself along my body. I was glad that I had seen him and had seen Timothy before going blind. I thought how awful it would have been to awaken on the raft and not know what they looked like.

Timothy must have been standing over us, for he said, "D'cot not good luck." After a moment he added, "But to cause d'death of a cot is verree bad luck."

"I don't think Stew Cat is bad luck," I said. "I'm glad he is here with us."

Timothy did not answer, but turned back, I guess, to watch the sea again. I could imagine those blood-shot eyes, set in that massive, scarred black face, sweeping over the sea.

"Tell me what's out there, Timothy," I said. It was very important to know that now. I wanted to know everything that was out there.

He laughed. "Jus' miles o' blue wattah, miles o' blue wattah."

"Nothing else?"

He realized what I meant. "Oh, to be sure, young bahss, I see a feesh jump way fo'ward. Dat mean large feesh chase 'im. Den awhile back, a turtle pass us port side, but too far out to reach 'im back. . . ."

His eyes were becoming mine. "What's in the sky, Timothy?"

"In d'sky?" He searched it. "No clouds, young

bahss, jus' blue like 'twas yestiddy. But now an' den, I see a petrel. While ago, a booby . . ."

I laughed for the first time all day. It was a funny name for a bird. "A booby?"

Timothy was quite serious. "Dis booby I saw was a blue face, mebbe nestin' out o' Serranilla Bank, mebbe not. Dey be feedin' on d'flyin' feesh. I true watchin' d'birds 'cause dey tell us we verree close to d'shore."

"How does a booby look, Timothy?"

"Nothin' much," he replied. "Tail like our chocolade, sharp beak, mos' white on 'is body."

I tried to picture it, wondering if I'd ever see a bird again.

CHAPTER

Six

IN THE EARLY MORNING (I knew it was early because the air was still cool and there was dampness on the boards of the raft), I heard Timothy shout, "I see an islan', true."

In wild excitement, I stumbled up and fell overboard.

I went under the water, yelling for him, then came up, gasping. I heard a splash and knew he was in the water too.

Something slapped up against my leg, and I

thought it was Timothy. I knew how to swim, but didn't know which way to go. So I was treading water. Then I heard Timothy's frightened roar, "Sharks," and he was thrashing about near me.

He grabbed my hair with one hand and used his other arm to drag me back toward the raft. I had turned on my face and was trying to hold my breath. Then I felt my body being thrown, and I was back on the boards of the raft, gasping for air. I knew that Timothy was still in the water because I could hear splashing and cursing.

The raft tilted down suddenly on one side. Timothy was back aboard. Panting, he bent over me. He yelled, "Damn fool mahn! I tol' you 'bout d'shark!"

I knew Timothy was in a rage. I could hear his heavy breathing and knew he was staring at me. "Shark all 'round us, all d'time," he roared.

I said, "I'm sorry."

Timothy said, "On dis raff, you crawl, young bahss. You 'ear me?"

I nodded. His voice was thick with anger, but in a moment, after he took several deep breaths, he asked, "You all right, young bahss?"

I guess he sat down beside me to rest. His breathing was still heavy. Finally, he said, "Mahn die quick out dere."

We'd both forgotten about the island. I said, "Timothy, you saw an island!"

He laughed. "Yes, d'islan'! Dere 'tis. . . ."

I said, "Where?"

Timothy answered scornfully, "Dere, look, mahn, look . . ."

Angrily, I said to him, "I can't see." He kept forgetting that.

His voice was low when he said, "Yes, young bahss. Dat be true! In all dis harassment wid d'shark, I did forget."

Then I felt his hands on my shoulders. He twisted them. "Dat direction, young bahss."

Straining to look where he had me pointed, I asked, "Are there any people on it?"

"'Tis a verree smahl islan', outrageous low."

I repeated, "Are there any people on it?" I thought they could contact my father and then send for help.

Timothy answered honestly, "No, young bahss. No people. People not be libin' on d'islan' dat 'as no wattah."

No people. No water. No food. No phones. It was not any better than the raft. In fact, it might be worse. "How far away are we?"

"'Bout two mile," Timothy said.

"Maybe we should stay on the raft. A schooner will see us, or an airplane."

Timothy said positively, "No, we bettah off on lan'. An' we driftin' dat way. D'tide be runnin' wid us." His voice was happy. He wanted to be off the sea.

I was certain my father had planes and ships out

looking for us. I said, "Timothy, the Navy is searching for us. I know."

Timothy did not answer me. He just said, "'Tis a pretty ting, to be sure. I see a white beach, an' behin' dat, low sea-grape bushes; den on d'hill, some palm. Mebbe twenty, thirty palm."

I was sure he couldn't even see that far.

I said, "Timothy, wouldn't it be better if we stayed on the raft and found a big island with people on it?"

He ignored me. He said, "Bidin' d'night, I saw surf washin' white ovah banks off to port, but did not awaken you, young bahss. But knew we be gettin' near d'cays. . . ."

I said, "I don't want to go on that island."

I don't think there was anyone on earth as stubborn as old Timothy. There was steel in his voice when he answered, "We be goin' on dat islan', young bahss. Dat be true."

But he knew how I felt now, because he added, "From dis islan', we will get help. Be true, I swear. . . ."