

THE CASTAWAY SCOUTS

By

Geoff O'Callaghan

THE CASTAWAY SCOUTS

In Memory of Steven and Jessie who died
before their time.

THE CASTAWAY SCOUTS

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THE CASTAWAY SCOUTS

Chapter One

Camping in Paradise

“Now this is scouting, the way I like it,” Aaron Thompson said, as he sipped a tropical punch from a long frosted glass topped with a rim of coloured sugar and a slice of Jamaican lime.

He lay back on the white plastic banana lounge while his mother applied sun screen generously over his legs and stomach.

“Roll over,” she said, and did his back. “There. All covered. Keep your Speedos on. They cover the one part of your bod that you don’t want skin cancer on.”

“Mum!” Aaron said.

She slapped him firmly on his backside and walked off to do the other kids. Aaron rolled back and looked at the flat waves on the beach. It was designated ‘kid-safe’ so the boys of kestrel patrol were enjoying themselves in the shallow water.

“Falcon, Tell Tyson to stop ducking me!” Brett shouted. He was the smallest boy in the troop, which led to being at something of a disadvantage.

Falcon screamed at Tyson. “I don’t want any bullying, Tyson,” Aarons mum, Wendy, called in a loud voice.

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“I’m not really bullying him, Falcon. Just teaching him how to swim underwater.” Tyson called back.

Beyond the sand bar, the waves were pounding in , and many of the resort’s clients were enjoying the surf. A large tropical depression – somewhere out towards Fiji was stirring up the gentle waters of the Pacific.

Cody Watson wandered down from the kiosk with a large double chocolate ice-cream cone that was rapidly melting over his right hand. He licked it quickly, but it seemed a losing battle. “How’s the patrol leader?” he asked.

“All right. I guess we’d better get the kids in so we can dress for tea. Mum – I mean Falcon – wants us to look like a real scout patrol in front of all the guests. “

“We are supposed to be on a scout camp,” Cody said. “Even if we don’t have tents and camp fires.”

“That was last century, bozo. Get used to the twenty-first.” Aaron said in an affected ‘posh’ voice. “No naked fires are permitted on the island lest they burn the resort down, and our plastic tents are fine for the back yard, but not for real camping.. They are not strong enough. “

With child safety legislation, written risk management strategies, Insurance requirements, and public liability, much of the fun had gone

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from scouting. Fortunately, Aaron's father was a dentist, and Cody's was a Q.C., so the boys could afford the activity. It wasn't so much that they would ever learn anything useful, so much as that the possibility of getting a 'Queen's Scout' badge would look good on their C.V.'s when they applied for jobs in the diplomatic service or the military.

Aaron was keen on the idea of going into the army, not as a grunt, but as an officer.

"The military is fine, if you want it Aaron. You'll go to officers' training school, and join a decent regiment." His father had once said when they were discussing his future.

"Do we ever fight anyone, Dad?"

"Good heaven's no. Last thing the Government wants is body-bags coming home. The Yanks do that, and then they have to leave whatever war they're fighting when the press starts to count the corpses. Standoff missiles are the way to go, lad."

"Bomb 'em back to the stone age?"

"That's the stuff, son."

"Are you serious?" Aaron asked, grinning. His dad was a great leg-puller.

"No," Philip said, ruffling his son's hair.

When their scout leaders resigned, the troop had nearly failed, but a couple of parents volunteered

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to keep things going , for as long as their sons and daughters were members. Scout leaders used to be easy to get, but men became distinctly disinterested. Most leaders now were women, usually mums. So Aaron's mum fitted right in.

It only cost \$1400 per boy for the seven day camp. Not all the boys could afford it, but those who could were welcome, and they managed to make up a patrol of seven for the excursion. They named themselves 'Kestrel Patrol' after their former scout leader and chose Aaron and Cody as the Patrol leaders, because they were the oldest. They chose the Barrier Reef Island resort, Beluga Cove for their trip because they got a discount. A – because they were scouts, and B – because there were 10 in the party. That happened because Remy was allowed to come. Strictly speaking, he was a cub, or Warrigal. As they were camping out indoors, he was permitted to come along. Besides, Dad was busy, and he couldn't be left at home alone.

So they were: 'Falcon' - Aaron's mum, scout leader , 'Night Owl' Steven's mum, assistant scout leader, Remy, Aaron's little brother, 10 years old, Aaron (14), Cody (14), Steven (14), Bryce(13), Darryl(13), Tyson



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(12), and Brett (12). They arrived at the resort by ferry and settled in quickly. Falcon was very pleased with the deportment of her young charges. They looked very smart walking down the gangplank to the wharf in their uniforms and back-packs.

As aviation scouts, the boys wore navy-blue uniforms in traditional style. Long sleeved ‘pullover’ shirts with double breasted pockets and half placket fronts, navy blue pants, usually jeans, black leather belts and shoes, long sox, a blue kepi cap and their scout scarf jet black with a silver and black corded edge.

Much of their previous activities had involved launching rockets and learning about aircraft, but the rockets were given up because the activity was seen as being ‘risky’ although the boys knew it was safer than riding their bikes to school.

So here they were, ‘camping’ at a fairly luxurious beach resort, playing computer games, relaxing in the kiddies pool during the day, and watching ‘G’ rated videos at night.

It was all rather tame, really, especially as Falcon took her risk management document seriously. It caused some conflict, when the older boys wanted to watch “Saw II” from the video rental shop.

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“There is no way I’m letting any of you boys watch anything like that!” his mother said. “I could get sued. “

“Nobody’s going to tell on you,” Aaron protested.

“What part of ‘NO’ don’t you understand, young man?” She asked, “The N or the O.”

It was the end of the argument, and the boys settled down to watch “Atlantis” by the Walt Disney channel. To make it worse, as far as the boys were concerned, it was animated.

“Mum, it’s a cartoon,” Aaron protested.

“Well you’ve seen all the kids’ films ever made,” she said. “They don’t make children’s films, because nobody watches them. I’ll let you watch “Spiderman” tomorrow night. It’s not really a children’s film, but it’s pretty harmless.”

“After the film’s over, can we do a lantern stalk?” Cody asked.

“I think so, as long as you stay on the beach. Night Owl can supervise it.”

The boys walked off, apparently satisfied, but she caught Cody’s comment as they left.

“Your mother treats the troop as if it’s a fucking pre-school,” he complained.

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“Yes. It was better when Kestrel was running it, but he was getting old. Had to retire some time, I guess. “

“Remember when he said that scout tests had come to colouring in stencils?” Cody said.

“Yes.”

“Well guess what – the badge leader wanted us to pass outdoor cooking with a questionnaire about food safety. “

“On stencils? - go on. You’re pulling my leg.”

“True, God.”

Kestrel had been a leader of the old style – who took his scouting seriously. The boys had to pass their tenderfoot tests, and do their second class tests properly. Cody and Aaron had to do axemanship, fire lighting, camp craft, and first aid among other things, but they had managed to get their first class badges. Aaron wasn’t sure if he could do Scouting as well as Cadets, but he tried to do both, as well as soccer in the winter and cricket in Summer. That didn’t include schoolwork, of course, but he’d always been on top of that. His mother said it was ‘good genes’ which was her way of saying his parents were pretty smart, so they expected him to do well in the brains stakes.

Wendy was a practical mum in other ways, and Aaron was proud of the fact that she had a side-

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board full of athletic cups that she had earned when she was a kid.

The night game went well, and nobody got so much as a scratch. Aaron and Steven guarded the lantern, and called out the names of any boy they found approaching it too closely. Darryl finally hoisted it above his head. When they went to see how he'd done it, he was wet.

"Did you swim out in the dark?" Night Owl demanded crossly.

"Nobody was guarding the sea approach," he exclaimed.

"It's the most dangerous thing you could possibly do. Don't you realise that sharks eat at night. "

"They don't come into shallow water," Darryl said.

"Falcon doesn't want any of you watching horror films, but I think I'll suggest "Jaws" for tomorrow night – as a safety film," she said.

"Better than that other juvenile crap," Cody said in a low mutter.

"Maybe we could scout out the guests," Tyson said. "Must be someone tokeing."

"You dare!" Night Owl said.

"Gotcha, Night Owl," Tyson said, laughing. "Sandy, Sandy, Night Owl."

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“Why do you let them get a rise out of you?” Wendy asked as they were getting ready for sleep.

“The trick is, to let them think they are getting a rise out of you. It’s a boy thing.” Sandra said. “You can’t be serious with boys all the time.”

The next morning, the weather was stinking hot. Not a breeze stirred the trees. The surf was high, and the sand barrier between the ‘safe’ kiddies pool and the pacific ocean had been scoured by the huge breakers that were thudding against the shore-line.

“There’ll be no swimming today,” Falcon said as she addressed the boys at morning parade. “The resort life-guards have closed the beach.”

“It’s a bit early for a cyclone, but this one is developing into something nasty. A lot of the guests are thinking about leaving.” Night Owl added. “The return ferry is booked out.”

“What’s the cyclone’s name?” Brett asked.

“Cedric, I think,” Night Owl said. “There’s a weather station on the island, with radar and everything, so we can see the storm on the internet.”

“Cool,” Bryce said.

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“Why not hike up to it and have a look?” Cody asked. “The radar station, I mean – not the cyclone.

“There is a four wheel drive track, but it’s two thousand feet up. Do you really want to hike that far?” Falcon asked.

“Well it gives us something to do. It should be an all day hike. We can take cut lunches and water bottles. I don’t think anyone wants to swim in that surf,” Aaron said.

Falcon thought about it. The camp was something of a let-down to the boys. She knew that her concerns on safety had dampened things a lot, but it wasn’t her fault. Scouting was being choked to death by government regulations. There simply wasn’t room for the old activities. Flying foxes had to be inspected by licensed riggers, First Aid could no longer be taught as a scouting activity – it had to be done by ‘qualified’ instructors at regular courses that could cost up to \$75 per person, which was a big ask - just to put a badge on the sleeve. As far as she knew, however, scouts were allowed to hike. A hike is when you travel somewhere by walking, she reasoned. Walking has not yet been prohibited on the grounds of safety.

“I’ll ask the resort manager if we can get cut lunches,” she said.

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A couple of hours later, she wasn't sure that she'd made the right decision. The road went uphill most of the time, but it was densely overgrown, and sometimes went downhill as much as it had gone up. A four wheel drive vehicle would be hard put to do the journey. She was worried that it would be dark when they descended, and she hadn't thought about bringing flash-lights. When they finally reached the remote controlled weather station at one o'clock, they found it was securely fenced in behind strong wire and a locked gate. Nevertheless, there was a parking area that served as a good lookout over the surrounding islands, and the view was magnificent. Below them was the resort, its landing strip, and the ferry bouncing about on the sea as it wended its lively way back to the mainland.

Clouds began to build up. They weren't storm clouds, but small puffball cirrus that marched towards the horizon in a gigantic spiral.

"I want to get a photo," Falcon said, getting the boys into a group.

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“The bastard’s coming this way,” Night Owl said

“How do you know?” Falcon asked.

“I’ve seen this cloud pattern before,” she replied. “It’s part of the spiral. The outer edges are tiny cirrus clouds like these.”

“Doesn’t mean it’s coming here,” Falcon said. “Please, God. No cyclone,” she said.

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Night closed in when they were close to the resort. The hike had gone well, and everyone was looking forward to having tea in the dining room. However, in the darkness, Night Owl had a fall, and twisted her ankle. The accident was minor, but it made them very late, and the dining room was closed. However, the manager had realised they weren't late on purpose, and did his best to



make them comfortable when they returned.

“I’ve got some frozen packs we can microwave for everybody,” he said. Your ankle needs an ice-pack,” he said to Night Owl. Now - can I tell you the bad news?”

“What’s that? Falcon asked.

“Cedric’s turned into a category four storm, and is expected to reach level five by tomorrow morning. We are in its direct path. There may be a storm surge, and we’re evacuating the resort by aircraft. Boats are out of the question.

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Tomorrow will be windy, but fine. Your flight costs are funded by disaster relief, so you won't have to put your hands in your pockets for the fares. Sorry to cut your vacation short, but your booking is covered by insurance. We do have a policy attached."

"They'll be disappointed."

"Can't be helped. Blame climate change." He said lightly. "We have a seven seater Piper Navajo that can carry your party back to the mainland. If one of the boys sits in front with the pilot, we can squeeze the little fellow in – seeing it's an emergency. Otherwise, someone will have to stay behind. It's a gazetted emergency, so we can carry one more."

"Can one of us go with them?" Sandra asked.

"No, sorry. This is the best I can do. If an adult goes in the Piper, there's be three for the other plane, but only two seats. Look, it's the best I can do."

"The boys have priority," Falcon said. My husband will meet their plane when it lands. Sandra's foot is pretty sore. It may be more than a sprain, so I'll travel back with her."

They decided to leave their luggage at the resort, to be on forwarded later. The prospect of flying back to the mainland was quite exciting. Falcon and Night Owl took the King Air which was booked solidly, with only two seats left.

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“I’m sure the boys will be fine traveling together,” Wendy said reassuringly to Sandra. “They’ve promised to be on their best behaviour. They are scouts, after all. ‘Scouts honour’ and all that.”

It was with considerable reluctance that they chose to split the group into two parties, Eight boys would be in one plane, and the two leaders in the other. The cyclone had not come close, as yet, and the flight would only take an hour or so. Surely nothing could go wrong in such a short time. The leaders told the boys to dress warmly in their uniform shirts windcheaters, and jeans, in case it got cold. They wore their navy-blue wind cheaters as well.

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Chapter Two

Marooned somewhere

The storm that struck their aircraft out of the sky seemed to come from nowhere. The cyclone had not only grown in intensity, but had become much wider than anyone had predicted.

“I hope you all have your belts tight, because it could get a little rough,” the pilot had shouted back to the boys. Ahead was a very black line of clouds that had formed in front of them – seemingly out of nowhere.

“What’s caused that,” Aaron asked. “It’s happened so quickly.”

“Cold air from the top of the storm. It’s fallen down and made a wave – sort of like a breaker on the beach. I’m going to try to go under it rather than through it.”

Cody said later that it felt as if the hand of God had dropped out of the sky and played with them. The aircraft held together, but spun around wildly, first going one way, and then the other. He remembered the pilot shouting “Pan! Pan! Pan!” into the microphone. He always thought they would call “Mayday”.

The plane righted itself, but there was no directional control. Remy started screaming in

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panic. “Shut the kid up!” the pilot shouted. Tyson held him in a firm grip and tried to calm him, which was hard, because he thought he was about to scream, too.

“Where are we?” Aaron asked.

“No idea, Kid. The storm’s got us and is wheeling us in towards the core.”

“Can’t we fly out of it?”

“No chance. We’d get torn to pieces. Best thing is to go with the flow.”

Lightning flashed around them, and it was hard to tell if they were upright, or upside down. The little airplane did its best, but it was heavy going. Suddenly, there was a break in the cloud, and an island was visible below.

“We’re flying backwards,” the pilot said. This air stream is faster than the plane. I’m going to try to drop down. “

“Won’t we stall?” Aaron said.

“Depends on our height,” the pilot shouted.

Because they were flying into the wind, the aircraft dropped down towards the trees as if it was falling vertically. At the last moment, the plane dropped nose down and fell towards the trees. The pilot managed to pull the nose up for an instant, and there was a terrific noise as they crashed. Aaron was sure everyone was dead.

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The wind outside was so powerful, they could hardly hear anything, but the sound of wind rushing everywhere. Cody, in the rear, was able to open the side door. The boys tumbled out of the wreckage to the ground a few feet below them. In the front seat, Aaron looked aghast at the pilot who was sitting still, with a tree branch through his torso. The man was obviously dead. He had never seen a dead person before. He knew he was dead. There was something about him that said his spirit was no longer within him. It was a ghastly wound, yet, somehow, Aaron wasn't frightened. So this is death, he thought. Then he managed to undo his seat belt and wriggle through the side window to join the others.

“Find some shelter” Cody screamed above the noise of the wind.

As if to emphasize his point, a huge tree next to them was torn out of the ground and hurtled away. The wreckage of the plane lifted into the sky and vanished. Branches snapped off trees and flew through the air as unguided missiles. Rain pelted them with its stinging force. There was a gully filled with rushing water. Bryce pointed to it and jumped in, not caring about the torrent that was flooding down the slope. The boys quickly joined him and pulled their heads between their knees, curled up like wet blue balls as nature did its worst around them. Aaron reached for Remy

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and held on to him. Lightning flashed and thumped around them in the wrecked forest. The trees had lost their leaves, and the large trees had been blown away. The very ground was being sucked up and pelted over them, blasting trees that lost their bark in the scourging, driving storm.

Aaron did his best to comfort his little brother, who was wailing openly in the face of total terror. He managed to look at the other boys, and saw – with more than a little shock, that each one of them was crying. He started to sing the first thing that came into his head, shouting it out as if to overcome the gigantic storm:

“Nobody likes me. Everybody hates me .
I’m gunna eat some worrrrrms.
long thin slimey ones short fat juicy ones,
itsy bitsy teeny weenie worrrrrms.

”first you get the bucket,
then you get the shovel.
Oh how they wiggle and squirrrm
long thin slimey ones, short fat juicy ones -
itsy bitsy teeny weenie worrrrrms”

There was a giggling sound from Remy and he joined in. Quickly, the other boys stopped fearing the storm. It wasn’t very comfortable, but they weren’t dead yet, so they sang. There wasn’t very

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much else they could do. God was doing his worst, and they were giving him the cub salute. Despite the elements, they began to feel much more cheerful.

Silence.

Silence and devastation.

The rain-forest was stripped. Every tree had toppled, been torn from the ground, or stood stripped naked, devoid of all its leaves. The ground was littered with smashed undergrowth. Where there had been forested mountains, there was now bare earth and rock, with multiple land slides as soil that had been held in place by vegetation crumbled down the mountain side.

Rain fell in bucket loads, and the boys were soaked, covered with mud and bits of leaves. They made their way down to the beach and stood amidst the tangle of trees being tossed about by the surf. Tyson took his shirt off and stood watching the rain and the waves. The boys stripped naked and placed their clothes on the branches of a fallen tree. They walked along the sand where the waves were breaking in a shallow swirl. Then they jumped into the water and washed themselves. They got their uniforms and

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washed them in the salty water, then dried them over the dead trees branches.

“Pippies!” Remy shouted. He dug frantically into the sand and brought up a bi-valve a few centimeters long. His sharp fingernails opened it, and he sucked the small shellfish clean. Quickly, the other boys had joined him in their harvest. It wasn’t a satisfying meal, by a long shot, but at least there was food to be found.

“We should look in the rock pools,” Bryce said. “There could be things worth eating in them.”

“Don’t touch any blue-ringed octopussies,” Remy said, importantly.

“And watch out for cone fish and small jellyfish,” Aaron said.

The rain gradually stopped, and the boys decided to return to where they had hung out their clothing. They had walked a long way along the beach, and the sun belted down on their unprotected bodies. By the time they had returned to their clothes, they were beginning to glow a slight pink.

“We might have sunburn,” Cody said. “In fact, my back is stinging, so we probably will be a bit burnt by tomorrow morning.”

“We don’t have any sunscreen, so we’ll have to keep our clothes on most of the time,” Aaron

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suggested. They may be hot, to wear, but they protect the skin.

His mother was paranoid about skin cancer, and had a one liter jar of sun cream at home. One reason she had chosen the navy blue work shirts as uniforms for the boys was that they were solar protective. “They have a 30+ solar rating,” she had told them.

“But they’re hot,” Aaron had said. “Couldn’t we have white?”

“White fabric admits ultra violet and infra red to the skin. Your body gets hotter if you wear it. If you’re wet, it offers no protection whatsoever. White feels cooler because it isn’t blocking infra red and your skin is being heated up.”

“So we wear clothes that feel hot and we aren’t?” Aaron had said.

“Exactly. Navy blue cotton is the best fabric to wear on hot days. It isn’t the most comfortable, but it is protective. Closed fronted shirts keep you cooler than open fronted shirts. It’s got a lot to do with airflow and ventilation.”

“But at school we learnt that white is cooler to wear,” Aaron argued.

“Superficial science,” his mother said. “The most dangerous kind.”

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When they reached the tree that they had used as a clothes line, they found everything had dried. Their clothes were still slightly muddy. Their shoes were damp, but they figured they would dry out if they wore them. They walked along the beach, not re-tracing their steps, but heading North to where a headland of rocks jutted out into the sea.

Water from the hills trickled down in a stream that cut its way through the sand. It was fresh, and they drank their fill. "At least we won't die from thirst," Tyson said. "How do we get around that?" he asked, pointing to the huge barrier of rocks that stood a couple of hundred feet high.

"Probably the best way is to go over the hill," Cody said. They trudged inland again, and found it difficult to force their way through the storm blasted undergrowth. A lot of their time was spent crouching down on hands and knees, going under the wreckage, rather than trying to push their way through.

"It's lucky we're kids," Cody said.

They pushed and struggled their way upwards. At the top of the hill, the next valley was revealed. It was totally different. The storm had blasted across the high land, and the valley had been largely protected. The trees were slightly blasted, and there was some damage, but not nearly as much as on the windward side. It was

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with relief that they walked through thigh deep grass growing under the thinned crown of Eucalypts.

Darren and Cody led the way. They realised they were actually on a path or track, where the ground, hardened by the past passage of feet, did not permit grass to grow.

“Cow pad?” Cody asked.

“I don’t think they’ve got cows on Pacific Islands,” Aaron said. “Might be wild pigs.”

“Dangerous?”

“Possibly. A male boar can get right up you.”

“Hey guys, if a big pig attacks, get up the closest tree.” Cody shouted back along the line.

“Shut up, idiot. Last thing I want is scared kids. Remy’s back there.”

“Sorry.”

They walked on in silence for a while.

“Reckon we should hold a patrol council,” Aaron said.

“Why?” Cody asked. “I thought scouts was finished when the plane crashed.”

“If we need to survive, we’ve got to get organised – that’s why.” Aaron said. He remembered what kestrel had said about the value

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of the scout patrol. It could do things as an organised group that an individual, or a group of individuals, couldn't do. "We know about scouting. It's supposed to be going bush, camping out, having fun and surviving. This is the real thing. Can't you see it?"

"OK. I guess you're right." Cody said. "If we stick together as a real scout patrol, we might survive and get rescued. I mean, nobody knows where we are, but they'll look for us for a couple of days, won't they?"

"That's why we have to organise. We need a fire." He turned to the boys trailing behind them. "We're going to hold a meeting. Over by that log. Make a flattener and see there are no snakes hanging about."

The boys flattened the grass, and sat on the ground. Cody sat on the log, and Aaron stood in front of them.

"If we're going to get rescued, we need to organise ourselves. We can't just go wandering about hoping someone will find us. I don't know where we are, and I don't think any of you know."

"I do," Tyson said.

"Where are we then?"

"We're here," he said.

The boys laughed.

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“No fooling about. This is serious,” Cody said. “It isn’t a joking matter. We could all die here.”

It took the wind out of their sails, being told bluntly like that.

“I don’t want to die,” Remy wailed, upset.

“Shut up, you little sook!” Tyson said roughly.

“Give him a break,” Bryce said. “He’s only little. With everything that’s happened, I think he might have P.M.T.”

“Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome,” Steven said.

“Yeah. P.T.S.S. not P.M.T. That’s what girls get.” Brett said.

“Shut up all of you! You have to listen!” Aaron said. “This isn’t like school, or scouts. It’s serious. You can’t fool about.”

He kept quiet for a moment to let it sink in. They were subdued, listening.

“We have to get a fire lit on top of one of the hills, and we have to keep it lit.”

“But we don’t have any matches. How can we get a fire lit?” Tyson asked.

“Details later,” Aaron said. “We have to make a shelter. It’s going to rain again, maybe this afternoon. If we get wet all the time, we’ll all get sick. We need to cut some branches and make a big cubby-house type of shelter.”

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“What about writing “HELP” on the beach,” Bryce said. “With big rocks.”

“They’re right,” Cody said quietly. “Real scouts always carried matches with them, and sheath knives. We aren’t allowed to have them because we might smoke or stab each other. What you see, is what you’ve got. Eight wet boys in a jungle.”

“There’s a banana tree over there,” Remy said. “I can see it.”

The meeting broke up immediately as the boys raced towards the banana tree Remy had spotted. There were many trees, deep in a ravine where they were sheltered from the storm. A lot of trees on the top of the ravine were destroyed, but the fruit was lying on the ground.

“Don’t gorge on them,” Cody warned. “Eat too many all at once, and you’ll get sick.”

“This must have been a banana plantation,” Bryce said.

“Or a native farm,” Steven added. “Look about and see what else is around here.”

“There used to be a hut here,” Tyson said, pointing to a slab of cement and the remains of a wall that had been eaten away by termites or had slumped without maintenance.

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“Look at the hill,” Darryl said. “An old mine. Hey, maybe it holds gold or something.”

“Careful, it doesn’t look safe,” Cody warned.

“It was covered in. The rain made a landslide and washed the entrance clean, and it isn’t a mine. It’s a tunnel of some sort. It was buried on purpose – look,” Steven said. “It’s bricked up.”

The boys stood in front of the bricked up entrance to the tunnel, wondering what its purpose was, and why it had been buried. Tyson found an iron bar amidst the rubbish from the ruins of the old house. He handed it to Aaron. “I’m not sure we should open it,” he said. “It might be dangerous – that’s probably why they bricked it up.”

“It’s not very well bricked up,” Bryce said. “Look – the brick work is cracked up the top. You can lever it there.”

It didn’t take much to tear the top bricks loose, and the boys rapidly demolished the rest of the barrier. The stark concrete walls of the tunnel took them by surprise. It looked very solid, as if it was built to last.

“It reminds me of a railway tunnel.” Remy said. “Round at the top.”

“Doesn’t look dangerous to me,” Cody said. “I reckon we can explore it at any rate. Up to the

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dark part. We might find ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ inside it. You’d like that, Remy,”

“I’m ten years old - give me a break,” Remy said.

Cautiously, they entered and looked around. Store rooms were located on either side of the central aisle, which had an arched ceiling. The rooms were empty, but one at the end had a door closed by an old padlock. They set to work, demolishing the lock with brute force. Finally it gave, and they had the door open. It didn’t hold pirate’s treasure, or gold, but there were shelves and shelves of old army stores. Most of the stuff was packed in cardboard boxes that had reached their use-by date. The contents, however, were well preserved. Two sets of shelves contained books, diaries, and documents. There was a piece of wood with the words, “Dept. of Defence” and another which said, “Tropical Research Unit”.

“Be careful not to disturb anything, until we’ve checked it out,” Cody said. “It could be radioactive or something.”

“Army clothes,” Bryce exclaimed, showing Aaron a cellophane bag containing an old army shirt. It was in excellent condition. “There are army trousers here, and belts, boots, socks, everything we could ever want. Tea chests full of them.”

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“And I’ve found some lanterns,” Tyson said. Some have fuel in them. Smells like kero.”

“It would be. I’ll bet they’re kerosene lamps,” Cody said.

“Spot on, boy genius,” Steven said. Now all we need is something to light them with.

Would these be any use?” Remy asked, opening a carton of small metal boxes with rough stippling on the base. He opened one of the boxes. “They look like matches, but I’ve never seen anything like them before.”

“What’s the label say?” Steve asked.

“Waxies. They look funny. Like tiny matches on candles.”

“Weather-proofed matches,” Cody said. We have fire, boys. Fire.”

They poured kero from some of the lanterns filling one to the top. Cody lit the wick and let the glass fall gently into place.

“Light. If we can find more kero, we’ll have a decent light.” Aaron said, looking about. “And I think we’ve found a home that we can stay in. A den for Kestrel Patrol.”

“Three cheers for Kestrel Patrol!” Cody shouted. “Hip-hip,”

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“Ray!” they shouted. Twice more they did the cheer, and Aaron hugged Cody around the shoulders.

“Looks like we’ve got a home,” he said. “We won’t get wet at night.”

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Chapter Three

The Search

From Commander Birch's point of view at search and rescue, the news was all bad. The search had been fruitless, and no trace of the boys existed. They had vanished into the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. Because it was a scout group, he had given the matter some priority, but fifty people had died during the cyclone, and the missing plane and the boys would soon become one more set of statistics. Of course, the parents were upset, but there was nothing he could do about that. Their grief was only natural in the circumstances. Wendy and Sandra had to endure a lot of criticism because they decided to evacuate the boys. The press was scathing in its attack on them. "Scout Leaders Send Boys to their Deaths" was the headline. Their husbands, Phillip and James stood by them bravely, and eventually the papers lost interest in them. The cyclone had devastated the Banana crop, sending tropical fruit prices soaring, and increasing inflation. Personal misery was buried in the rising interest rates that the banks were charging.

They even used Google Earth to search for uninhabited Pacific Islands, but large islands usually had people living on them. The one that

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the boys were on was not well photographed, and appeared as a faint blur at 10 miles of altitude. It was remote and of no particular importance, so it was skipped over by satellites and remained a vague blur. During the war, it had been used as a research station, but the Government didn't want any particular attention drawn to it, so it was even omitted from admiralty maps. As far as the public was concerned, it did not exist.

Eventually they were given official word that search efforts to find the boys had ceased, and it was officially declared that they had been lost at sea. They had a memorial service, and many scouts attended, but the troop could not be saved. It went into recess, which meant that it existed on paper, but was non operational.

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Chapter Four

Island Life

Back on the island, the boys made themselves at home in the tunnel complex. They named their new home “Kestrel Camp”. Aaron and Cody found it hard to get the younger boys to do much work, until they locked the food into one of the rooms. They were all suffering from sunburn, but Brett found that a squashed rotting banana felt cool on their sore reddened skin, so they used the bad ones as a salve to treat sunburn. Within a few days, their skin started peeling off in strips. Steven began a food fight with the bananas. Aaron punched him in the stomach, knocking him down, and with Cody’s help Steven was thrown into one of the rooms with the bolt secured, and he was left to cool off overnight. He yelled and shouted, banging on the door to be let out, but the older boys sat outside so that nobody else would try to release him. In the morning, at parade, they made him apologise for his behaviour.

“We don’t know how long the food is going to last,” Aaron told the boys. “We must never waste it.”

“You didn’t need to punch him,” Darryl said. “Or lock him up.”

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“He didn’t need to be stupid,” Cody replied. “If we don’t work together, we’ll all die here. We don’t have much food. There isn’t any meat. We found one drum of kerosene for the lights. No using matches to fool around. Who was the idiot who lit a whole box?”

“I did,” Tyson admitted.

“And what are you going to do if we run out of them?” Aaron continued. “Look after your clothes. Everyone can have two army shirts and two pairs of army pants. They’re a bit big for Brett and Remy, but they are tough. We don’t have any underdaks. There are belts, boots, and we’ve found some cane knives and bayonets. There are some tools in the lower store room, axes and shovels. We can use them to dig the garden.”

“We have to have a plan,” Cody said. First thing is to get the garden going so we can have food. Everyone has to help. There are some mango trees, banana trees, pineapples, and yams. I think there were coconut trees on the beach, so we can grow coconuts if we find any. Some of you will have to go hunting to see if you can find any pigs or something. “

“Who made the two of youse the boss?” Darryl asked.

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“I’m the Patrol Leader, and Cody’s the Secunder. If you don’t like it, you can sit in the store room until you do.”

“We should vote on it,” Darryl said.

“No voting. It just causes arguments.” Aaron said. “We’ll talk about things on parade and at meetings, then Cody and me will decide what to do,” Aaron said.



The army clothing was cooler to wear than their navy blue scout uniforms. Steven said it was because the shirts and trousers were bigger, and

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roomier. The trousers had buttons on the fly, instead of zippers, and they had two cloth straps that ran through each other to buckles on their hips. The webbing belts were useful, too. They could clip water bottles and knives onto them. The scout uniforms were designed to be closer fitting. In the tropical heat they chafed and caused heat rash. Before long, all the boys were wearing khaki. They found some wire to make a clothes line, and decided to make Wednesdays their washing day. Brett had counted the days carefully, since the crash, and they made up a calendar that they chalked onto the tunnel wall with soft white rock. It wasn't chalk, but it did the job.

They called the first room on the Right as they entered the tunnel, "The Office" because it had some steel filing cabinets along one wall. Aaron decided not to force the locks, because he didn't want them broken. They moved a wooden desk into the room, and some chairs. It became the patrol meeting room. At night, they slept on steel cots they had found in a lower store-room. They moved them into the empty room opposite the office. It had an air vent in the ceiling, so it wasn't stuffy. It became the 'dormitory'. Steven and Bryce wanted to sleep on their own.

"There are plenty of empty rooms," Steven said.

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“That could cause us to split up,” Brett said. Aaron and Cody let the boys vote on it, and they decided that everyone would share the same room. “We have to stick together,” Brett said, “Or we’ll break up like ‘Lord of the Flies’.

“What’s that?” Bryce asked.

“It’s a book,” Tyson said. “And a DVD.”

“Oh. I can’t read,” Bryce said.

“In grade eight, and you can’t read?” Tyson asked.

“So what? Lots of the boys can’t read. The teachers don’t care. Reading is for girls.” Bryce protested.

One of the jobs they made up, was to count everything they found in the tunnel. “That way, if we want something, we know where to find it,” Brett said. “And then, we don’t need to make a mess searching for stuff. We look it up, and it tells us where it is.”

“I think that’s a good idea,” Cody said. “We have to look after everything. I went into the store room the other day, and it’s just a mess – like our rooms at home. I was looking for matches, but couldn’t find any.”

“Steven and Darryl can tidy it up,” Aaron said.

“Why us?” Daryl said.

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“I’ll help you. It’s important. That’s why I’ve given you the job.”

“You sound like my teacher,” Darryl grumbled.

“Sometimes I feel like your teacher – must feel when teaching you,” Aaron said.

“It’s not fun any more,” Bryce said. It’s work, work, work all the time.

Aaron knew he wasn’t ready to deal with the patrol. He had a fallen log a little way up the hill, away from the tunnel. He liked to go to it, sit on it, and think. He wanted to do the right thing, but the boys were becoming rebellious. Darryl was always criticizing him. Some of his ideas seemed right, like voting on things, but if everyone did the popular things, there could be real problems in the future. What if they wanted to spend all day swimming, instead of doing essential work? And he had belted Steven. He’d been a real ‘dick head’ throwing bananas about. The bananas would be rotten, soon, anyway. He couldn’t stop that happening. But was he right punching him? He knew it wasn’t right, but he’d been angry when he saw what the boy was doing to their food. Then there was the incident with the matches. Tyson had lit a whole box of them. Did he think match boxes grew on trees?

“Can I join you,” Cody said. He sat down anyway, and looked at Aaron with concern. “We

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need to have a break,” he said. “The patrol has worked hard. Things are never going to be perfect.”

“Yeah. We should go to the beach and have some fun.” Aaron said mechanically.

“You all right?”

“No,” Aaron said. Tears dropped onto his cheeks. He turned his back on Cody.

“Hey, it’s all right. We’re still alive. Nobody’s been hurt. We get to eat every day.”

“I don’t know what’s going to happen to us. I miss Mum. She must think I’m dead or something. It’s too much. There’s too much to do. I don’t know what to do.”

“You don’t have to do it all on your own?” Cody said. I’m Seconder. It’s my job to help you. We need to run things properly – like a real scout patrol, not just a mob of kids.”

“You make it sound so easy,” Aaron said, pulling his shirt up and wiping his eyes on it.

“It’s not going to be easy, but we have to try. Both of us.” He said, putting his arm around Aaron’s shoulder and hugging him. “Right, mate?”

Aaron nodded. “Yeah.” They sat quietly together for a while. It was good having a friend who’d support you. They could have had a fight over leadership, but Cody wasn’t like that. After

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a while, Aaron felt better. “ We’d better be going back.”

They were surprised to find that the boys had taken it on themselves to sweep out their dormitory, the office, and the tunnel. There was dust everywhere, but a pile of house dirt was deposited at the door, ready to be taken away. The new banana plants were sticking up bravely where they had planted them, and the pineapple tops had taken root in lines.

“I want everybody on parade,” Aaron announced. Line up. Cody’s going to be Patrol leader, and Steven will be seconder. I’m going to be Troop leader.”

“Who voted . . .” Darryl started, but was cut short by Cody.

“Because that’s the way it is, Shrimp! Shut your mouth and tuck your shirt in neatly.”

“Our shirts always hang out,” Brett said.

“Not any more they don’t,” Aaron said. “It makes you look sloppy, and if you look sloppy, you are sloppy. Sloppy people stuff up. They don’t do things right. We can’t afford that. From now on, we do everything the Scout way. No more slacking. On Friday nights, we wear our Blue uniform and have a proper scout meeting. The rest of the time, we’ll wear the khaki uniform

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- properly. You all have to learn proper scouting, so we'll have lessons on things. Morning is for working, and afternoons are for school – scout school.

“I hate school,” Bryce said. “I’ve spent all my life getting out of it, and you want to start school here. It sucks!”

“We’ll teach you how to read,” Cody said.

“And what are we going to read here?” Bryce demanded.

“There’s a box of military manuals in the store room. ‘Training for Lance Corporals’, Then there’s ‘Training for Corporals’ and even ‘training for sergeants. ‘Drill for Warrant officers’ Care and use of the .303 lee Enfield rifle’, and ‘Field Recipes’.”

Bryce closed his eyes and gave an exaggerated swallow. “I’m going to become a Sergeant,” he said, with heavy sarcasm. “Oh, joy - Joy joy joy joy joy.”

“Kestrel patrol, Alert!” Cody shouted. The boys snapped to attention. “Left turn!” they turned. “We need to get scout staves, so today we’ll cut some saplings and trim them up. A staff should be as high as your eyebrows. You’ll need to take the bark off, smooth it with beach sand, and we’ll find a way to polish them. This afternoon, we’ll go to the beach for swimming and games. “

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“What will we wear to go swimming?” Remy asked.

“Keep your clothes dry,” Aaron said with a laugh. “Use your imagination, shrimp.”

“I hate it when you call me that,” Remy said.

They got sunburn again. This time, it wasn't so bad – their skin was toughening from exposure, and they were turning a healthy brown. Aaron noticed that all the boys were getting thinner. Their ribs were clearly visible, where as before, they all had a layer of healthy fat. They had plenty of bananas, so the weight loss was a bit of a mystery. Perhaps it was because they were working hard.

They gathered Pippies and roasted them on their fire. They were more tasty when cooked, and the boys tucked in. Remy caught some prawns cavorting in a rock pool. After swimming, they put their clothes back on and hiked up the hill. Steven took the front, and they cleared a path. There was a large flat area, where a granite rock had created a sort of platform. They gazed across the sea, noting the flat horizon.

“There's nothing out there,” Cody said. “It goes on forever.”

“It might go as far as America,” Brett said.

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“No, that’s in the Northern hemisphere. It goes to South America.” Tyson said.

“We should get a fire going. A passing ship might see it.” Darryl said.

“I can’t see any passing ships,” Steven said, “But I think you’re right. We could put a shirt up – to make a flag, so they know we’re here.”

“And we should put “Help” on the beach,” Tyson said.

They set to work, gathering kindling. They built a magnificent cone of firewood a couple of metres high. There was so much dead wood about that it was easy to get sticks. Brett crawled into the cone of firewood and lit a waxie to the kindling. Soon, there was a decent fire on the headland.

“That should get us rescued in no time,” Remy said.

“If any rescuers are out there,” Aaron said. He tied a shirt, using the long sleeves so it flew as a flag. It flapped bravely from the top of a long sapling that they trimmed to make a flag pole.

“Lucky we’ve got boxes and boxes of shirts,” Darryl said.

“We can use them for other things, if we have to,” Aaron said defensively. He was glad to be shirtless, and flaunted his muscles which were growing long, taught, and corded, but that night,

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as he rolled about in discomfort, he realised that the sun could take its toll of anyone so foolish as to get too much of it. Remy patted rotten banana over it, and the cool black jelly took the sting out of the sunburn.

“Thank you, Remington. You’d make a good doctor,” Aaron said.

“I’m glad you’re my brother,” Remy said, sitting on his lap and leaning back on him.

Aaron put his arms around him. “Did you have a good day?”

“Yes. Especially the swimming and the prawns. Can we go again tomorrow?”

“We have to work tomorrow. We have to build a fence, so we can keep pigs when we find them.”

“I don’t think they’re pigs. I think they’re goats. Their tracks look like goats. They’re the same as the goats at Uncle Fred’s farm.”

“Tracks?”

“Sure. I should have showed you today, but I didn’t think you’d care.”

“Oh, yes. We’ care,” Aaron said, rolling his eyes in exasperation. “Can you show us the tracks tomorrow?”

“All right,” Remy said. “Don’t put your shirt on yet – you’ll get it all sticky.”

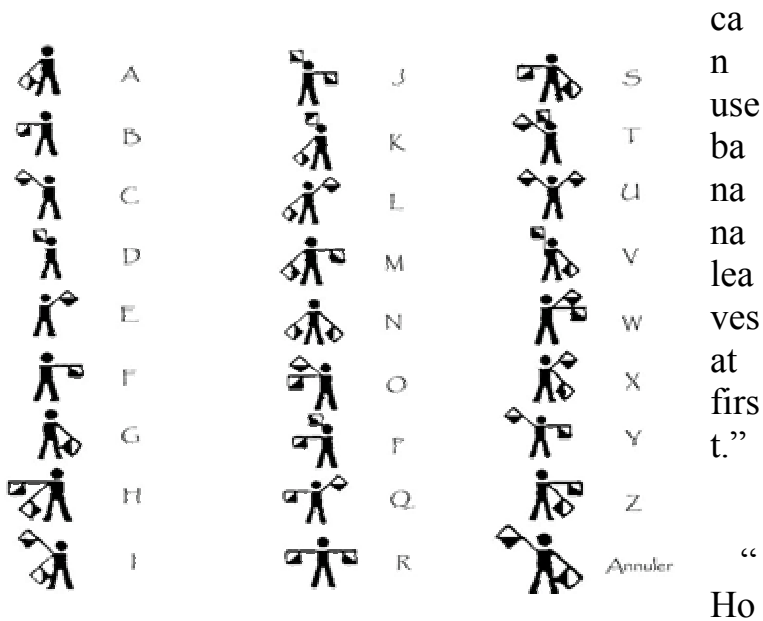
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Nest day, They held ‘school’ in one of the spare rooms. One wall became their blackboard. Aaron and Cody managed to put a large mural showing the semaphore alphabet.

There were enough chairs for the boys to sit on, and the room was quite large, so it was comfortable.

Cody gave the first lesson, on ‘semaphore’:

This is the semaphore alphabet,” Cody said. We don’t have radio here, so this is the easiest way to communicate. It fits our situation. If we can see each other. We don’t have flags, but we



How can we make flags?” Steven asked.

“We can cut up a few shirts from the store room,” Aaron said, “And we can dye the flags

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with colors from the forest. Brett has a bright idea. Brett?”

Brett stood up in his place. “I think we could use it like text messages. We could say , ’I.C.U.’ for ‘I see you’ and that will make it easier, and I think the best way to learn it, is to learn to say words, not letters – at first. Then we can fill in the letters we don’t know later. ‘K’ looks like ‘K’ so that’s easy. “ He demonstrated ‘OK’ which only moved one hand.

“That’s good thinking,” Aaron said. “ We should work in pairs, too.”

“Do we know any knots?” Darryl asked. Apart from the tenderfoot ones.

“Yes,” Cody said. “There are ropes in the basement. They look old, but they’re good enough to learn lashings and things.”

”Right, school’s over for the afternoon. We’ll parade at the end of lessons and dismiss properly.”

“Why?” Tyson asked.

“Because we’re scouts, that’s why.” Steven said. “We’re living really well, for castaways. We have food, good beds, a timetable, and we get things done properly.”

“Sorry I asked,” Tyson said.

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“You’re allowed to ask anything,” Aaron said. “No question is stupid. Don’t expect I’ll always have the answers, but Steven is right. We’re doing pretty well. While we keep scout discipline, we’ll survive. We can’t be slack like we were at home. Mum and Dad were always about to clean up after us, but here, we have to clear up our own mess, or live in it.”

“And if we live in a mess, we’ll lose things, have accidents, and get sick. We don’t have doctors to fix us up.” Steven said.

Cody was surprised by Steven. He’d always been the difficult one – stirring up trouble, and joking when jokes were in the way, but lately, he’d supported them as leaders. He was glad they’d made him Seconder. It gave him responsibility.

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The boys set out to explore the island as thoroughly as they could. It was a valuable activity, because they often found things that could be useful to the. Some sprouting coconuts were brought back to their camp and placed in a neat row, with the hope that they would grow into trees and produce coconuts, wood, and leaf panels.

Brett discovered very small pawpaw plants that had sprouted from a wrecked fruit. The boys carefully dug them out of the ground and

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transplanted them into the garden. A few older trees that had been broken by the cyclonic winds were showing signs of re-growth. One had started to sprout branches. They noted the area as a suitable place for food later on. There was a flowing creek that dropped into a large hole which was suitable for swimming. There was a concrete seat and a barbecue, complete with a rusty plate.

“People used to come here for picnics and things,” Brett said. “And they weren’t islanders. This was built by the army.”

Trees around it were sprouting fresh green leaves, and the jungle was re-generating. The boys began making tracks by clearing paths of branches and fallen logs. They found that there were many existing paths, but they hadn’t seen them because they were littered with the branches of trees that had been torn down in the cyclone.

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They didn’t find the goats. The goats found them.

“Something’s been at the banana plants!” Tyson exclaimed. He’d gone down to work at the patch, only to discover a near disaster. A dozen goats were happily munching out on their food supply. The boys quickly chased them away.

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“What are we going to do,” Cody asked Aaron. “They must be hungry, and we’ve got the only food on the island.”

“We’re going to have to fence the gardens off, so they can’t get in,” Aaron said. “And someone’s got to stand watch until we get the fences built. That means every night.”

Fence building became a priority. They chopped into the trees that had fallen during the cyclone and began stockpiling logs and rails. It was heavy work, and the boys were soon exhausted, but they kept on working. There was no time for school or parades. Holes had to be dug, posts laid in, rails put up and secured with wire that they found, and then they had to test the fence for strength. They found the best way was to cut the logs with the axes. It was hot work, and the boys cut their trousers down to shorts. Fairly soon, their standard dress was the shorts and boots. They became bronzed by the sun, and their muscles stood out like whip-cords on their bony bodies. They had all lost a lot of weight.

Cody realised that, in spite of having food, it wasn’t really enough. They were starving slowly. The younger boys looked the worst – like skeletons, and they got puffed easily.

Many of the goats were rounded up and yarded. They slaughtered one for food. A sharp bayonet was used to cut its throat. Cody put the blade

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through the neck just in front of its spine and pulled it forward, cutting its jugular veins, carotid arteries, and its throat. It slumped to the ground, and blood flowed out freely for a couple of minutes. They lay it on its back and made a cut from its chest to its groin, then removed the intestines. Then they butchered it as well as they could, and buried the offal in a pit.

“Don’t pig out on it. We haven’t had meat for ages,” Bryce said. “We should try to figure out a way to keep it, but without a refrigerator, it’s all going to go off.”

Darryl said, “If we could dry it out, we could keep it – you know, like Jerky.”

“We could salt it, if we had salt.” Steven said. “We could try to get sea water and evaporate it, but the first rain squall to come along would put paid to that. I guess we’ll have to evaporate sea water on a fire.”

They decided to try smoking the meat. They made a smoke house using poles and the rubble from the ruined house. It wasn’t very big, but they hung the meat on wires and lit a smoky fire using logs they had cut from the dead undergrowth litter.

“We’ll have to see if it works. Does anyone know how long meat has to be smoked?”

They had no idea, so they decided to let it burn for a day, and then have a look at the result.

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Bryce thought that he'd try drying some of the meat around a fire. He'd cut it into strips and place them onto rocks where the heat would gradually turn them into hard jerky. He knew that the meat would have to be dry enough to crack when bent.

They never managed to get enough salt to process meat, but they managed to boil sea water down to a thick brine, which evaporated into crystals they could use on food. Feeding the goats wasn't much of a problem. The animals became quite tame, and the boys fed them grass in their pens, so they let them go to forage, and they returned at night on a regular basis.

Everything they did was trial and error. They tried milking goats, but got nothing for their labour, except a rather cranky nanny goat who tried to butt anyone coming close to her. It was only when one of the nanny goats became pregnant and gave birth to a doe, that they realised that goats produced milk for their young, and that was the best time to milk them.

“”We need some sort of frame to lift them up on. We can put them on a table, but someone's got to hold them.” Tyson said.

They made a set of milking stalls about waist high. The goats were tethered and milking was done from behind for easy access. For the first time in ages, the boys were able to have real milk.

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It tasted sharp, but they got used to it. The goats made life a lot more comfortable, they had meat, milk, and their garden was beginning to show promise of producing a reasonable crop of fruit. Small bunches of bananas were appearing, and the pineapple plants were producing cricket-ball sized pineapples on their tops. Even the pawpaws were promising.

Aaron noticed that the boys had fattened up. They had lost their skeleton look - their rib bones were no longer protruding. They could work longer and harder. Their days of starvation seemed over for the present, but they had to develop ways of preserving food for times when things were scarce.

Darryl found a new use for the fibre around the coconuts. He teased it out, rubbing it clear of rubbish. Then he rolled it carefully to make a long cord. He doubled it up, and twisted the two strands, producing a two metre long rope. He was very proud of it, and showed the patrol during their formal parade. Soon, everyone was at work producing lengths of rope. It was strong, and it stretched, so they were able to use it to make a lot of things like camp tables.

The patrol was no longer in survival mode. They had created a small village with food, shelter, and a set of daily routines that kept them busy.

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Sunday was free time. Mostly they went to the beach or to the water-hole. They played and swam, or had races and wrestling contests.

Monday was set aside to repair things. There were always small maintenance tasks to do. Sometimes the fence needed repair, or the tracks would have to be cleared. The jungle was returning with a vengeance. Where the cyclone had stripped much of the vegetation, the trees were recovering and had to be kept back from the garden.

Tuesdays were spent getting water from the pool, where they collected it in galvanized buckets that the army had left in the tunnel..

They made a path to the small waterfall and held the bucket under until it was full, then took it back to camp. Gardening was done, usually weeding and tidying, and they finished any tasks that hadn't been completed on Monday. In the afternoon, they had a full-dress scout parade in their khaki



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uniforms. There was a planning meeting, and they tried to learn a new skill, such as fire lighting, meat curing, rope making, knotting, and drill. They didn't really need to do drill, but it was an activity that kept them busy, and they enjoyed doing it properly.

Wednesdays were set aside for washing and mending clothes, attending to personal kits, tidying their lockers, and restful activities in the afternoon. Tyson and Brett had found some clay and were trying to make pots and cups. It took them a long time to learn that the pots had to be completely dry before they were fired. They found they could use a hot jungle fire to make them hard, but their pots often broke, and they didn't hold water, which leaked through them. Thursdays were spent on heavy work, cutting logs for fences and rails. They cleared a lot of the dirt in front of the tunnel and made the entrance more attractive by cleaning the large concrete pad that they discovered had been laid in front of it. It used to be a roadway, and they soon found that they could clean the dirt off it and make the path clearer.

Friday was set aside for schooling – all day. They started off with parade, and Aaron or Cody inspected them. They didn't have a flag to salute, so they left that out. For Remy's sake, they had a 'Grand Howl'. It wasn't really a scout thing, but Aaron or Cody would play the part of Akela, and

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nobody minded doing it. Remy was getting bigger. His cub uniform wouldn't fit him any more, and he was just about big enough to fit into the khaki army uniforms comfortably. They found a box of SY sized shirts. "Small Youth", Aaron had declared. And there were trousers 26" waist. They had to cut a webbing belt and re-fit the brass for it, but he looked good in it.

Saturday was set aside for completing anything that hadn't been done during the week. In the afternoon they had their "Weekly Meeting". Aaron insisted they all sit around the table in uniform and do things properly. He'd opened the cupboards in the office and found boxes of foolscap paper with spring clip holders, and some H.B. pencils. There were bottles of ink, with steel nibs, but the boys found them messy, clumsy, and irritating with having to keep dipping the nibs into the ink bottles. Cody took the notes, and Steven helped him as 'Scribe'. They started by standing up and making the Scout Promise. Then one of them would recite the Scout Law. They would sit, and each of them had to give a report on what had been done.

Brett was in charge of the goats. Tyson was in charge of the garden. Steven was in charge of the signal fire which they kept burning. Darryl was in charge of the Tunnel and tidiness. Bryce was quartermaster in charge of stores. At first, tools had been left out, and the mess caused problems.

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They had lost an axe for a week, because it got covered up with a pile of leaves. It didn't take them long to realise they had to be efficient. Cody was in charge of 'constructing' which meant he had to plan things like goat yards, milking stalls, and trap yards where they could force wild goats into pens. Aaron was in charge of everything.

At night, they sat around the camp fire that burned outside the tunnel. They did scout skits, and made some new ones up. They drank watered down milk, if there was enough, and talked about home. One Saturday night, Daryl dressed up as an islander with a coconut leaf skirt, bangles around his wrists, and a head-band. It was a great activity, and the boys spent a lot of time making and improving their island costumes. They even had an island dance evening. They made up a song to sing to "Pearly Shells" and it sounded good:

"We are here, in the morning.
We are here every night,
We are here all the daytime ,
When the sky is blue and the sun is bright.

Little waves, on the seashore.
Little fishes in the sea,

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Coconuts in the palm trees

There is no place like here I'd rather be.

Cody's best idea was to build a fish trap. They had to find a suitable place for it, and decided to use the mouth of the islands creek. They got long thin stakes and pushed them deeply into the sand about four inches apart, making a very large fence. As the tide rose, the fence was covered, but when the tide receded, any large fish were trapped, unable to escape. It was a good idea, but strong surf could wreck the fence, and it always had to be repaired. They managed to catch a lot of fish that way, but they had to be careful. Tyson got a very painful sting when he tried to lift a small fish that flicked in his hand and got him with a barb.

It was their first medical emergency. The boys carried him back to the cave on a stretcher they



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improvised using two unused sticks and two shirts. He lay quietly on a bed they set up in their 'Sick Bay' in an unused room. There was no doubt that he was in great pain.

"What can we do, the barb is still in him," Cody asked.

"We'll have to dig it out," Aaron said. "Get a sharp bayonet, and we'll need some boiling water to sterilize it."

"We'll have to wash our hands and everything," Cody said. They got a stick covered with some fabric from one of the trousers they had shortened. Tyson bit on it, and the boys held him down. He tried to scream, but they took no notice of him. After a couple of moments of probing, Aaron removed the small coloured barb. They covered his hand with a thick pad and a roller bandage made from a puttee, and placed his arm in a St. John's Sling. He bled a bit, but the wound closed over and gradually healed.

"I hope we don't have any more accidents," Tyson had said, leaning back against the wall.

He was sick for a couple of days, but gradually improved.

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This incident led Bryce to search the stores carefully, until he found a first aid kit in a rusting box. It had very little that they could use for anything, but there was a bottle of 'tincture of iodine' which he thought would be very useful. He placed it in a drawer in the office desk.

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Chapter Five

Overnight Camping

“We spend a lot of time getting wood for the signal fire. Generally, we make sure it’s lit, piled with wood, and then we leave it alone. Not that anyone ever seems to come to this part of the ocean, anyway. We must be off the shipping lanes, and no aircraft fly over here,” Aaron said at their Saturday meeting. “We need to set up a permanent camp near the fire, so we can keep it going, especially at night.”

The other day when we went up there,” Steven said, “It was alight, but hardly any smoke was coming off it. We need a lot of green leaves and stuff.”

“That’s why, Cody and I want to have a camp up there next week to work on the fire. We need to build a shelter so if it rains, it doesn’t go out. It has to be big. It will take a long time to build it.”

The boys decided they’d build three huts nearby, with logs and woven walls. The roof of each would be made using coconut leaves, mated like baskets to form panels.

“We could build something fairly permanent, and maybe we could put up a flag on a pole, so

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anyone would see it.” Steven said. “One or two of us could stay there just in case.”

It was decided that they’d move up to the fire signal area for a week. They had a lot to plan. “Who’s looking after the goats?” Brett asked.

“Goats are your responsibility. You decide,” Aaron said.

They made sure the gardens were secure, and released the goats to forage in the jungle. Most of the animals followed them to the site of the signal fire. They named the spot, Signal Hill. So far they’d named places on the island, “Kestrel Camp” where they lived in the tunnel, “Happy Beach” where they fished, swam, surfed and played, “Barbie pool” where they could get fresh water and swim. Now, “Signal Hill” was added to their list.

At the end of the week, they’d erected three sturdy huts, and placed the signal fire onto a table of logs, insulated from the fire by a thick layer of mud and sand. This hardened as the fire was used, and the signal fire was protected by a solid roof with a chimney vent in the centre to allow smoke to rise. Their flagpole was decorated by the back of an army shirt with the word “HELP” written on it using natural dyes and ink from the army stores. They decided to take turns minding the fire. Two boys at a time in rotation would sit with it and care for it. There was no need for

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anyone to be on the hill during daylight hours., so whoever was on 'fire duty' would leave early in the morning to be back at Kestrel for breakfast.

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Darryl and Tyson discovered the pigs. Actually, the Sow was drinking at the water hole at Barbie pool with her litter of piglets. She seemed to think the pool was hers, and took exception to the boys' presence. From where they sat in the branches of the nearest tree with climbable branches, the two boys discussed the possibility of establishing a sty.

"I think pigs take too much food for the little meat you get," Tyson said. "It's not worth keeping them." He swung his foot down, and the sow gave a threatening grunt and rushed at the tree.

"And they're bad tempered things," Darryl said. She thinks she owns the place.

"But the thought of one of those turning on a spit is making my mouth run with juice."

"I'd let it grow a bit," Darryl said, watching with relief as the mother took her brood back into the forest. Tentatively, he dropped to the ground and looked about. "All clear," he said.

"What took you so long," Cody asked when they finally turned up at Kestrel with two buckets of water. "Decided to go swimming?"

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“No. We were getting a lesson in natural science. The wild-life got interesting.” Tyson said.

“We got ‘treed’ by a pig,” Darryl added. Actually, it was a big sow with six piglets.” Darryl told him. “That means there’s a boar on the island, and probably other pigs.”

They talked about them during the nightly meeting.

“We’ve been here six months, and we haven’t spotted them,” Aaron said. “By the way, it’s Steven’s birthday tomorrow. We should have a party.”

“How old are you, Steven?” Remy asked.

“Fifteen. I haven’t thought about birthdays. When is yours, Aaron?”

“Mine was a month back, but we were too busy to notice it. I decided it wasn’t – appropriate.”

“The pigs must have a place to hide,” Bryce said, changing the subject. “We’ve been on the Island all this time, and they’ve hidden from us. That means they go somewhere. I think it might be a cave.”

“How will we find a cave?” Remy asked. “I know,” he said, brightening up, “We’ll look for bats in the evening. They’ve got to fly out of it.”

“A bit of bad news,” Cody said. “The battery of my watch is flat. We have no time piece now.”

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“We’ve never really relied on time,” Aaron said, “So it probably won’t matter much. We could make up a sundial. Steven, you’re in charge of making things. Get a committee together and work out how we’re going to tell the time and make a sundial. That should keep everyone busy for at least a month.”

“What if we get rescued before then?” Remy asked.

Everyone looked at him. Aaron put his hand on his shoulder and looked him in the eyes. “If that happens, Remy, we can give the sundial project a miss.” He gave him a brotherly hug. “Keep thinking, kid. Be positive. Think ‘rescue’.”

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After the meeting, Bryce and Steven took a lantern and went up to Signal Hill for the night. “Have you noticed how those two are always getting together every night?” Cody asked Aaron quietly.

“Should it bother us?” Aaron asked.

“There aren’t any girls. What if we never get rescued? We could all be old men here.”

“We shouldn’t worry about things we can’t do anything about,” Aaron said. He laughed for a moment and looked at Cody. “Want to share light-house duty with me tomorrow night?”

“Remy would come.” Cody said.

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“For alls sake, he’s my little brother. “

“He’s getting too old to sleep in bed with you.”

“He’s just lonely. What are you, the Vatican?”

“Like the marines say – ‘Don’t look, don’t know, don’t care. There’s always light-house duty,” Cody said, dropping the subject.

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They set a watch for bats leaving or returning to their cave. A cloud of them ventured out every evening as the sun was setting, and it didn’t take the boys long to find where they were roosting. They carried fire-sharpened spears with them for protection, and they found where the pigs were – in a small sheltered cove below the bat caves. Sure enough, the pigs were co-habiting with them, and after an afternoon of observation, they decided to leave the pigs alone, knowing they could always return and hunt one down if they needed to have extra meat.

Steven was in favour of killing a piglet – just to see what they were like as food. However, the boys voted against it, telling him he was free to go down alone and get one if he dared, and they asked him what sort of memorial service he would like to have. What finally decided the issue was that the old boar detected their scent and became very aggressive. The boys took one look at the huge tusker and decided that ham wasn’t on the menu that day. For Steven, it was a

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very satisfying birthday. The boys had given him symbolic presents – a bracelet made of braided grass, some shells, a staff carved from a local tree, and bananas wrapped in a banana leaf. Somehow, he always thought that these were the very best presents he had ever received, things his friends had made for him.

That night, they made a mud cake and planted burning sticks in it, representing candles. They all went out, but he blew on them anyway, and they sang several ‘birthday’ anthems, including the monkey version. Everyone decided it was most satisfactory, including Steven, and that was the important thing.

Later that night, as Aaron and Cody sat quietly on the log by the fire, Aaron was looking sad and thoughtful. “I missed out on my birthday,” he said wistfully. “I wonder what they were thinking about at home. We aren’t there. They could be divorced by now.”

“I sometimes think the same thing.” Cody admitted. They should have felt happy, but they were thoroughly miserable. Cody put his arms across Aaron’s shoulder, and they both cried for a while, holding themselves together in the fires dying ember light.

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The presence of pigs was too much of an attraction for the boys to leave well enough alone.

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They decided the best way to hunt them, was to build a trap yard and funnel them through a narrow killing zone. They only needed one to satisfy their growing hunger for a little ham. They needed thick logs to make their fences. Pigs are immensely strong animals. The goat proof fencing would be no barrier to a fully grown boar or sow. Steven decided that a funnel shaped line of fencing would force them to go through a narrow crush, where a solid log with a spear point attached, could be let loose to swing down and impale the pig. Then it was only a matter of cutting its throat and killing it in as humane a manner as possible. They used this method when they needed a goat. Nobody was sure of a pig's anatomy. They had very thick necks, and it wasn't sure if an army bayonet was really long enough to cut its throat.

Finally, they decided to use brute force. A bayonet was firmly embedded into a log about forty centimeters thick, which could swing on a rope so it penetrated the pig in the side. Once impaled, and not going anywhere, the pig could be safely stabbed through the chest or from the front, into its heart and lungs.

They set about getting a large enough log. It was cut with an axe and trimmed off. They spent a lot of time de-barking it, smoothing it down, and trimming it to a good two metre length. Next came the problem of supporting it so it would

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swing true. They found it needed to be tethered at each end so it made the base of a triangle with two ropes for the sides. Then they had to hoist it up. They were building a fire to heat a bar they could use to burn a hole in at one end. All was going well, when one of the side ropes snapped. The log fell, catching Remy by surprise. It was so heavy it dropped vertically, smashing his forearm onto a large rock.

Remy screamed. Darryl said it was loud enough for the scream to be heard in Australia. He thrashed about on the ground as they removed the log and the rock. The damage was obvious. His left Ulna and Radius were not only broken, but crushed badly. A few minutes later, shock set in, and Remy lay quietly on the ground while Steven and Bryce fashioned a scout stretcher from two of their shirts and two poles. Carefully, they carried him back to Kestrel Camp.

Tyson and Brett ran ahead to prepare Aaron and Cody for the bad news. They were waiting when the stretcher bearers arrived. A room had been set aside as 'sick bay' and they had a wooden table ready, covered by blankets folded lengthwise and a pillow. It was easy to place the boy directly on the table. There was a tourniquet around his upper arm, and Aaron ordered them to release it. Blood pulsed out of the brachial artery, so the boys replaced it fairly quickly.

"We'll have to set it," Cody said.

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“How? Aaron asked looking at the shattered limb. “It’s not going to set – it’s hanging by torn muscle. And skin. There’s nothing to set.”

They decided to do nothing for a while, and allow the limb to be splinted and rested alongside Remy’s body. The bleeding was controlled, but they didn’t want to loosen the tourniquet too much. They had no pain killers. Remy lay there moaning, while Aaron sponged his head and face with cool water.

“Am I going to die?” Remy asked.

“No, it’s just a broken arm. It should heal,” Aaron lied. It wasn’t a scouting thing to do, but he didn’t want the boy worrying. Or becoming shocked more.

They cut his shirt off him and removed the stretcher slowly so he wasn’t in pain. Then they covered him with extra blankets and raised his legs. He was encouraged to drink water.

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Chapter Six

The Operation

Aaron brought his metal cot into sickbay and slept with Remy overnight. It was hot, and he stayed awake to sponge Remy's face and cool him down. He was becoming hot, as if he had a fever. The next morning, as Aaron examined the wound, he noticed a peculiar sweet smell and noticed with horror, that Remy's forearm was going black. The flesh below the break was dead, and red fingers of infection radiated upwards towards the boy's elbow.

The next day, it became very obvious. Remy was in fever, rambling, but with times of lucidity when he could talk. They fed him a tea of mashed bananas.

"It's gangrene," Cody said. "How could it happen so fast?"

"This is the tropics," Bryce said. "I don't think his lower arm was getting any blood, anyway. You can tell by the look of it, it's dead. The skin's shiny, swelling up, going black, and it stinks."

They were talking outside of the tunnel mouth so Remy couldn't hear them. "He's going to die, isn't he?" Aaron said softly.

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“That’s the picture I’m getting,” Cody said quietly. Aaron looked at him, shocked at his Secunder’s grasp at reality.

“For God’s sake – he’s my brother. He can’t die.”

“You could always amputate it,” Brett said.

“You mean ‘Amputate’, don’t you?” Tyson corrected.

”Whatever,” Brett said flatly.

“I’ll do it,” Cody said. “Do you remember in that film “Master and Commander” – you know, where the doctor cut the boy’s arm off.”

“That was a film, stupid.” Bryce said.

“The thing was, they made him bite on a stick with rag wrapped around it, and they were real quick. He didn’t muck about, that doctor.” Cody replied, ignoring Bryce’s objections.

“We could use an axe,” Tyson said.

“That would shatter the bone and make a real mess,” Steven said. “The quickest way would be to cut through the elbow joint. We’d have to pull the skin back, so it would flow back over the end of the bone and seal off as a stump.”

“You a doctor or something?” Bryce said. “He’d bleed to death through the artery. It’s a big one. I know, because my older brother cut his, and it made him bleed like a pig. I think it’s

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called the ‘Brachial’ artery. Least, that’s what the doctor said. They did micro surgery and sewed it back together.”

“We don’t have any way to do that,” Aaron commented. “But we don’t have to sew it back or anything, we just have to seal it up. Can anyone sew?”

“And while you’re doing all this, Remy’s just going to lie there quietly?” Bryce threw in casually. “It’s a bloody sure thing if it was me, you’d have to tie me down to do it.”

“We can tie him down. We have enough ropes, and there’s enough of us to hold him, even when he screams and struggles.” Aaron said. “By the way, is anyone with the casualty?”

“We have to ask him,” Cody said. “We can’t lie to him and take his arm off – just like that.”

“He’ll probably say ‘no’, and then what?” Bryce asked.

“If he says ‘no’, we won’t do it.” Cody said. “We’ll plan his funeral instead.”

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Remy was awake when they told him the bad news. He didn’t shout out or go hysterical. He merely looked up and said, “A lot of the pain is just a dull ache, now. I can see what’s happening. I’m not stupid.”

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“If we don’t take it off, you’ll probably die.” Aaron said. “No, you will die. Your fever will get worse, you’ll go crazy with fever, and you’ll die.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“So we can take it off?” Cody asked.

“Yes. I’m not scared. Will you do it?”

“Aaron and I will do it. You haven’t had breakfast?”

“No. Why?”

“You will probably want to vomit. We’ll get ready now. You’ll have to be tied down and we’ve got a lot of things to boil up. We’ll use the iodine. It’s old, but I don’t think iodine goes off. It’s an element.”

The boys washed everything down using water with a few drops of the precious brown liquid in it. They tied Remy’s ankles together with a sheer lashing, bringing the rope under the table and tying it around his chest. His Right arm was tied to his side at the elbow and the wrist, so he couldn’t move it. They propped his head up on pillows.

“I’ve got an idea,” Bryce said. “You know that knot we use to whip a rope?”

“Yes,” Aaron said.

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“What if we whip the end of the artery to the end of the bone in a slip-whip. The ends of the cotton hang out, and when it’s all healed up, you pull on them, and it all comes off.”

“Fine, but we can’t use cotton. Too much chance of infection.

“Our scout shirts – the navy blue ones – are sewn with polyester thread. It’s a type of nylon.”

“See if you can get a long piece and boil it up with the bayonet and the scissors,” Cody said. “And by the way, thanks, Bryce. You can think positive when you try.”

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Cody and Aaron operated while the other boys helped. There wasn’t much for them to do, but they were needed for some things. Each boy had washed his hands until they shone pink, and their fingernails were gleaming. They used a solution of iodine to dip their hands into, and Remy’s arm was painted bright yellow. Tyson controlled the tourniquet. Bryce and Steven pulled the skin on Remy’s arm upwards towards the shoulder, and Cody cut around the arm with deft surety. He pulled the skin and muscle up past the elbow joint, and cut through it. The dead arm fell off, and it was allowed to fall away. Nobody wanted to touch it with their sterile hands. Remy screamed and bit down hard on his rag-cushioned stick, nearly biting through the cloth padding.

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“Tyson, let the tourniquet loose,” Aaron said. They identified the artery, which was covered with a lot of muscle. “Tighten it,” Cody said. He carefully cut it loose from the surrounding muscle and placed the end alongside the bone.

Bryce wrapped the boiled polyester thread several turns around the artery and bone, pulling a loop of thread through the loop on top of the whipping knot. It was a very firm tie.

“Now let the tourniquet loose again,” Aaron said. There was no bleeding. The tie held.

Steven and Bryce allowed the skin to flow back down over the end of the bone. They padded the end of the stump with a sterile cloth bandage, and bandaged the upper arm firmly, but not too tightly with sterile puttees. The operation was over. There wasn't much more they could do, but comfort Remy, who whimpered and looked up at them with a white, haunted face.

A couple of hours later, the boy was sleeping fitfully, but his temperature had dropped, and color was returning to his face. Aaron and Cody looked at him tenderly.

“You know, Cody, I think we did it,” Aaron said. “If he improves over the next few days, we'll know for sure.”

They buried Remy's forearm in a deep hole, and covered the place with a rock to mark the spot.

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Remy was up and about within a few days. It took a few weeks for the stump to heal over properly, but by keeping it clean with boiled dressings, they were able to stop any infection. It was, in fact, their fussiness over cleanliness that saved Remy's life. In due time, the orlon thread worked its way out of the wound, and it was obvious that the artery had sealed properly.

They found a way to kill pigs without using the log and bayonet. They laid a path with slanted spikes and concealed it under palm fronds, then drove the wild pig forward. It didn't see the spikes, but jumped over the palm fronds. Stuck fast on the impaling spikes, it was easy to dispatch with a sharpened spear. Once they had their first pig, they cut it open and found where its heart and lungs were. From then on, they had no trouble with hunting them.

So it was, that as the dry season came upon them, that they enjoyed a first class barbecue, with pork on the menu.

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They had a meeting to prepare for the dry season. Food had to be prepared for storage, and the daily rations worked out. They found that, if they boiled bananas for a couple of minutes, they could be dried as strips without going mouldy.

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“I’ll be in charge of drying food,” Brett said.
“Remy can help me.”

“With only one arm?” Steven asked.

“He’s got to make himself useful somehow.
It’s light work,” Brett said.

“I want to do it,” Remy said.

“OK,” Aaron agreed. “Remy has to play his
part. We can’t coddle him. Just make sure he’s
careful.”

Mangos, pineapples, and tropical berries could
be dried the same way. Goat meat could be dried
— first on the fire, then in the sun. Birds had to be
kept away, as the meat enticed them to try to steal
from the lines. Dry meat was easy to re-
constitute, or could be munched dry as jerky.

Some meat, especially pork, was best kept by
smoking. They had built a proper smoke house,
after experimenting with several types of design.
The pottery kiln was functioning, but they didn’t
know how to treat raw clay to pottery standard, so
the local creek clay was used, and it was often
brittle when fired, as it lacked powdered flint.

“We could be making the fire too hot for the
kiln,” Steven said. “Maybe we should fire things
slower and longer.”

“That’s a good idea. Experiment and find out
what works best,” Bryce agreed.

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There were huge gaps in their knowledge, but they made do. One thing the kiln could do, was make bricks, and they started making a permanent scout hut on flat land near the creek. They didn't build down by the beach, because they reasoned that a big cyclone could bring in a storm surge and flood all their work. Besides, the beach had become their playground, and they didn't want it destroyed by 'development' as Steven called it when they built something.

The bricks were designed to fit into each other, as they could only mortar them with mud. It wasn't the strongest structure they could make, but the wall they experimented on set firm within a week, as the dried mud held everything tightly.

"The other thing we have to think about is disasters like bush fire or something," Cody said. "A big one could kill all the pigs and goats and destroy the garden. Then how would we be for food?"

Not very good," Tyson agreed. "We should make a plan. What about a fire break, and a safe place for the animals?"

"A fire break will be a lot of work, but we'll have to make one between the garden and the forest. I think we could cut down the trees, clear the undergrowth and rubbish, and then let the goats feed on it until it is down flat. "

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“We could plant yams there,” Darryl added. “We’ve been getting a few good ones – the pigs were digging them up, and we found that’s what they were hunting for.”

Aaron summed up, “So we make the fire-break a priority, plant yams in the ground, let the goats in to eat the yam plants, and try to protect the garden from bush fires.”

“You know what I mean,” Darryl said. “Of course we fence the yams off from the goats.”

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They had set themselves a lot of work to do, but Aaron reckoned that if the boys were busy, they wouldn’t have time to dwell on their situation. They hadn’t seen any boats, and the only planes they spotted were tiny silver dots trailing vapour trails across the stratosphere. After Remy’s accident, Bryce made sure everything was checked for safety.

The boys had to wear their boots, whether they liked it or not. With a cloudless sky, the chances of getting sunburn were still strong, although the boys all had healthy tans from playing on the beach. He designated older clothes as “work dress” and they had to wear long shirts and pants that were old and used. They used their scout caps as headwear, for the army stores didn’t include felt army hats.

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When the boys were tired of working, they went for a swim or hiked around the island. They discovered that the water in the pool at Barbecue Pond flowed down a stream that turned into a sizeable creek. By the time it reached the coastal plain, it had spread out to form a wide stream of fresh water. It was a couple of miles away from their valley, but they made a good track to the place, for the ground was flat, and they could play games like cricket or basketball with bats they made from tree branches, and a ball made of pigskin, stitched around a wad of grass.

They played a lot, but most of their time was spent working. They found they really had no choice in the matter. If they stopped working, things didn't get done, and they all suffered eventually. It was not that they had to make new things, so much as that old things, like fences, needed constant repair. It was no good moaning about it, either. Moaning didn't get jobs done, and everyone felt depressed if things didn't go right.

One afternoon, a month after the dry season had started, they had an unexpected storm. It began with a cloud build up in the West, but by two o'clock, the sky was boiling with cumulus clouds, and they could hear thunder. They stopped what they were doing and returned to the shelter of the tunnel.

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The sky put on a fantastic lightshow, and there was an orchestra of thunder which cracked around, echoing from the hills. Rain fell in torrents. It lasted until dark, and then it stopped. The stars came out and shone like diamonds, revealing the Milky Way in all its glory. With no street lighting, or artificial lighting of any sort, the night skies were brilliant. A few hours later, the moon rose, bathing the forest with a dim grey light.

The seat outside the tunnel was dry, so the boys sat in a group to watch their island in the night lighting.

“This is beautiful,” Bryce said. “I could stay here forever.”

Steven put his arm over Bryce’s shoulder. “I’d stay with you,” he said.

“We might have to,” Aaron said, cradling Remy in front of him. “What do you think, Remy?”

“If I can pass axemanship, I might stay,” he said.

“With one arm?” Bryce asked.

“There was a boy on TV who had one arm, and he was a champion axe man,” Tyson said.

“I’ve been thinking,” Cody said. “This is a beautiful island. It has a river, lovely beaches, and would be a terrific place to live. “

“So?” Aaron asked.

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“Where the hell are the Real Estate agents? I mean, is this place so remote that nobody knows where it is? Where are the satellite photos? What was the army doing here?”

“You’re scaring me,” Brett said. “Change the subject.”

“Well, I don’t think it was used for nuclear tests,” Aaron replied. “But they might have been trying something else. What if it was poison gas, or something that contaminated the place? We wouldn’t know about it.”

“The goats and pigs look just fine,” Bryce said.

“Besides, the army has returned,” Tyson said. “Just look at us, khaki from head to foot. If we don’t look like the army, I don’t know what does.”

They laughed.

“What about some Scout songs,” Cody suggested.

They soon had a cheerful campfire going, and drank banana smoothies with goats milk for supper. The smoothies were a bit lumpy, but castaways can’t have everything.

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Chapter Seven

The Tsunami

Tyson and Brett caught a large reef fish in the fish trap they had built. It made a change from their normal fare of goat or pork, and the boys decided to improve the trap by adding more stakes so smaller fish could be caught. The trap was built in the form of a letter J with a large hook at the bottom, pushing far into the sea. It could only be improved at low tide. Their technique was to drive stakes deeply into the sand, and support these with large rocks that they carried down in a cart they had built. The trap was effective, but it needed a lot of maintenance, even when they improved it by putting netting they had woven on the seaward end. They used coconut string to make the cord for the nets, and it didn't rot, but the pounding of the waves was relentless, and over time, holes appeared that had to be repaired.

On one of their forays to the trap, they stopped to take a break, as they were carrying heavy stakes that were thick, long, and heavy. They sat resting, as it was a long walk. There was a sudden commotion in the trees, and the sea birds and parrots flew up in alarm. There was an uneasy silence. It felt as if a tribe of ghosts had just walked over them. The hair on the back of

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their necks seemed to stick up, as if they were being stroked by some invisible hand. The ground beneath them lurched, then a few moments later, there was a roaring noise and the ground trembled.

“What the hell,” Aaron shouted. “It’s an earthquake. A big one.”

The trembling subsided, and the boys, who had lurched to their feet in surprise, laughed.

“I guess it happens sometimes.” Bryce chuckled. “We are in the pacific, after all. “

“Don’t they have volcanoes?” Brett asked.

“Volcanic islands to the North,” Cody said. “Come on, guys, that low tide won’t last for ever.”

The water was ebbing slowly as they walked into the fish trap. They reached the area where they were going to thicken the stakes. The tide was moving out so fast, Brett got swept of his feet. The water receded, but then Cody noticed the outer reef rocks were visible. “The tide’s never gone out that far before,” he said. “I can see Coral out there.”

“That earthquake!” Aaron shouted. “Tsunami coming. Run!” he shouted, pointing towards the higher hills at the headland of the beach. “Get up as high as you can!”

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The boys were used to obeying emergency orders. They dropped everything and began running for the beach. Cody turned around to look behind them. “Don’t look back, keep running!” he shouted.

They reached the tree line and headed up the path into the low hills that bounded the shore. There was a deafening noise behind them as the water rose, crashing through the palm trees. “Remy, climb onto my back,” Aaron said. Remy reached up with his Right hand around his big brother’s neck and wrapped his legs around his waist. Aaron stood up and ran with him. Water splashed around their legs. It was getting higher and higher.

Cody and Bryce took shelter in a tree that had lower branches. As Aaron passed beneath them, they reached down and pulled Remy upwards to safety. Aaron slipped and the water flowed over him, pushing him further up the path. He struggled against it, and finally wrapped his arms around a tree and shinned upwards.

The water stopped moving uphill, and sucked out with a terrible screeching sound.

“Name off,” Cody shouted.

The names came one by one as the boys called their names out. Remy, Bryce, Steven, Cody, Brett, Aaron, Tyson. . .

They were one short. Darryl was missing.

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“Darryl, Darryl!” They shouted. There was no reply. They were thinking of returning to the beach to search, when there was another terrible sound from the sea. It was a second wave, not quite as strong as the first. They watched it roll in, tumbling trees and the debris from the cyclone towing all out to sea as it flowed back.

“Will there be any more?” Cody asked.

“We’ll have to wait. We can’t go down there yet,” Aaron decided.

Half an hour later, they formed a skirmish line from the beach to the point where the wave crested. They walked up and down the beach from headland to headland, scouring the undergrowth for any sign of their missing companion. The search area was a mess of broken vegetation and twisted trees, but they kept looking, kept calling out, kept hoping.

That night, back at Kestrel Camp, the boys sat silently, eating little and saying nothing. They went to bed early, determined to make a fresh search the next day.

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“We have to face it, he’s gone,” Bryce said. “If he got swept out to sea, he’d have no hope.”

“He was my best friend,” Tyson sobbed. “I loved him. He was like my brother.”

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They turned their backs on each other and went their separate ways, crying silently and alone, in the way boys grieve. There was no body to bury, no funeral to hold, no memorial to any special place, merely a gaping hole in their ranks that could not be filled.

The tasks of survival had to go on, regardless of the loss of Darryl. The fish trap had stood the test of the gigantic wave, but was full of debris. It had to be cleared, or it would not function. They spent the next few days carrying branches and logs out of it, placing them where the sea would take them out on the tide. Tyson was used to having Darryl as his work partner, but Brett took on the roll of the missing boy, helping Tyson with the heavier logs.

The shoreline was a mess of branches and debris. The task of clearing it was so great that they didn't even try. The beach where they had played so happily was now strewn with dead branches sticking out above the sand, and rotting lines of dead leaves that ebbed and flowed with the tide. Gradually, over the coming weeks the sand would be trapped by the vegetation, and the shoreline would move further out, as sand dunes began to build up.

Back at kestrel camp, their earlier work to preserve food was paying off. The bananas had stopped fruiting, but the new trees were maturing, promising a good crop into the next year. There

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were no more mangoes, and the pineapples had not matured. They decided not to kill any more goats, lest they run out of goat meat. Pigs, however, were plentiful, and they speared one to butcher into smoked ham, jerky, and barbecue.

Steven and Bryce were on light-house duty. They managed to put plenty of wood onto the fire, and stoked it to a good blaze, then settled down to sleep beneath the blankets in one of the huts.

“We could have been killed,” Bryce said as they sat together, propped up against the wall. “I think Tsunamis kill the smallest – the children. That’s nature – the death of the smallest and least fit.”

“He wasn’t the smallest. Remy is. Brett is the smallest scout.”

“We pulled him into the tree. Aaron nearly got swept away. He was loaded down with Remy. I reckon it would have got him if it could. He couldn’t swim with one arm.”

“I’m going out for a piss.”

“Me, too.”

They left the small hut and walked to the edge of the rocks, looking down the cliff to the sea breaking below. As they turned around, the glint of a distant fire caught their attention. It was on the hill at the very end of the mountain. It

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flickered, very small, but noticeable in the black night.

“That didn’t start by lightning,” Steven said. “It’s a signal.”

They ran down the path towards kestrel camp, nearly falling over in their haste.

“A signal! It’s a signal fire!” they shouted, waking all the boys in the tunnel dormitory.

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It was dangerous walking to the end of the island in the dark, but they fashioned torches of cloth and leaves, dipped in pig fat and tied on staves so they could see where they were going. It took until daybreak to reach the hilltop. Darryl was lying curled up on a bed of leaves and dead grass. He looked very much the worse for wear. His right leg was stretched out and tied with splints. He woke when they prodded him, and he looked up at them vaguely and grinned.

“I was getting hungry,” he said. “Wasn’t sure if I’d eat the pigs, or they’d eat me.”

“We thought you were dead,” Tyson said.

“So did I,” Darryl said, lying back and closing his eyes. “Leg’s busted. I managed to crawl up here.”

“How did you light the fire?” Steven asked.

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“I’m a scout stupid. I rubbed two cubs together.” He laughed.

“We’ve got some jerky, and fruit leather,” Brett said, handing the boy some strips of dried food. “Better eat a little, and we’ll rest for a while. Came up here at a rush, we did. Lucky we didn’t break any legs getting here.”

“That was some wave, wasn’t it?” Darryl asked.

“Sure was,” Aaron agreed.

The sun was up, and it promised to be a hot day. They made a stretcher out of the staves and two shirts. They took turns carrying him. It felt like an honour to be bringing back their lost comrade, so nobody minded. Even Remy took a turn, using his Right hand. It took them the rest of the day to get back to Kestrel Camp, but they took their time. Darryl slept most of the way.

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They set Darryl’s leg by pulling it and lifting it in traction so it would heal naturally. He had to lie on the sick bay bed, and not move much. Cody reckoned it was the fibula, so not as bad as if the tibia had fractured. They made sure the rope was not too tight. His leg was splinted and they used puttees as roller bandages to keep it firm and straight. Tyson acted as his “Home Nurse” and became skilled in using a metal bowl as a bedpan. They made a wooden frame so Darryl could sit up in bed. They got him spinning string from

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coconut fibre to keep him busy, and he used it to make a fishing net that they could use to get prawns from the beach.

Routine was important. Cody said it would keep them from going crazy. It had changed over time. They now had morning parade in full khaki army uniform, with staves to use for drill. They marched up and down the central aisle of the tunnel, did about turns, left and right turns, salutes with hands and staves, and on each side of the tunnel they had used earth colors to paint a troop flag and an Australian Flag. They didn't have blue, so they used white made from clay instead. The stars were painted in using red clay. The Union Jack in the corner wasn't true to color, but it was true to spirit, and that was what mattered.

After parade, they had breakfast – boiled yam, jerky, fruit leather, and boiled water that had been allowed to cool. Then they went to class. Schooling was important, because it helped them to think. Aaron and Cody took the lessons. Aaron taught them Algebra and Geometry, and set them arithmetical problems. Cody made them read the training manuals they had found. Military Tactics was different, but they knew a lot about the army as it existed in the 1950s. They wrote on the concrete floor with clay sticks that they had dried in the sun. At the end of the lesson, they cleaned the floor with leaves and water.

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For lunch, they had boiled yam, jerky, fruit leather, and boiled water that had been allowed to cool. If there was pork or fish, they had that as well. The diet didn't seem to harm them. They were strong, physically fit, lean but not thin, and were growing taller.

Darryl had recovered somewhat, and was able to move about on crutches that they fashioned from wooden branches. They used two long poles, each with a 'Y' at the top, cut to the right length, and he got about quite well. He wasn't spared jobs to do. Being busy was essential. Nobody was allowed to get morbid or depressed.

"If you're feeling miserable, you aren't busy enough," Aaron said.

The tactic worked. Every afternoon they did scouting skills, semaphore, flashing Morse code, knots, building structures with rope and poles, repairing fences, improving things they had made, and practising observation skills with the birds and animals. They didn't know the names of the plants, animals, or birds, so they made up their own.

Late afternoons were spent relaxing. Normally, they would go to the beach to play, but it was still littered with broken debris. They cleared a strip of sand in front of the path leading upwards. Darryl had discarded his crutches, and was starting to run about with the others. On Cody's

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advice, he ‘took it easy’ to allow his leg to heal completely.

In the evenings, they held another dress parade. On Friday, they tried at first to wear their blue uniforms, but they were getting too small, so they finally decided to keep to the khaki army shirts and trousers. The beauty of these were that they had a very large supply of them in the “Q” store and weren’t likely to run out.

Night was a campfire, and sing-song. Sometimes they held an island dance, with their island costumes. To change things around, they’d sometimes build a camp fire on the beach and dance naked around it like warriors, waving spears and shouting war cries. When the moon was full, they’d play battle games on the beach, trying to tag each other. Charcoal from the fire was used as war paint, and they used clay to whiten their bodies.

On Sunday mornings, they made sure they were clean and wore their uniforms to ‘Church Parade’. They said “The Lord’s Prayer” recited the scout promise, and the law. The duty boy had to give a talk on scouting.

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It was Darryl’s turn to give a talk. Everyone had to ‘shut up and listen’.

“If you’re really desperate, you can do almost anything,” Darryl said. “When the tidal wave

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came, I was behind everyone, and it got me and sucked me out with a lot of rubbish. There was a log floating about, and I grabbed onto it. I knew something was wrong with my leg, because it hurt really bad. Then there was a second wave, and it washed me in again, but at the other end of the island. I managed to grab onto a tree, and when the wave went out, there I was – up a tree without any way of getting back, so I got down and used a stick to lean on, and hobbled up the hill. Above the wave level, it was dry. I found some droppings and charcoal, and a couple of rocks. I don't know what animal it was, but I do know that charcoal, dry shit, and grass can be broken down to make a good punk for fire lighting. Well, I didn't have anything else to do, so I made a cone of sticks and branches and started experimenting to get two stones that would make a spark. I got some quartz, and a black rock, and they worked fine. Then I got the punk smoking, and the rest is history. Fire.”

“Fire making would be a good skill to learn,” Cody said. “We might all work on that one.”

They had a few announcements after the ‘sermon’ as they called the talks they gave.

“I'm going to crack down on sloppy uniforms,” Aaron said. “Some of you are going about with your shirts hanging out, and some are pushing their sleeves up instead of folding them properly.

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They should be folded flat around the cuffs so they are neat and tidy above the elbows.”

“You’re joking,” Bryce said. “That’s crap and you know it. Who do you think you are, Hitler or something.”

“I don’t mind if you’ve got a serious point to make, but don’t be stupid.” Steven growled.

“We have to do things properly,” Aaron said. “If we get sloppy, we’ll have accidents. We nearly lost Darryl. I don’t want any more accidents.”

“Next thing, you’ll want us to iron them,” Bryce said.

“You can do that when they’re on the line, nearly dry,” Cody said. “Use your fingers to straighten the pockets, smooth the front placket, and straighten the collar and cuffs.”

“You’re as bad as he is, Number Two.” Steven said. “Do you always have to follow him?”

“All right, drop the subject,” Aaron said. “We’ll talk about it at Patrol Council.”

Cody was feeling very irritated at Steven’s comment. A few words spoken in anger can be devastating. Once spoken, they can never be retracted.

“I might be number two to Aaron, but at least I’m not sleeping with him,” he said.

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Steven launched across the room to tackle Cody. Aaron tried to pull them apart, but Bryce took it as two against one and tackled Aaron. There was a bitter fight, with punches and kicks going in all directions.

“Stop it! Stop it,” Brett screamed.

“Let it go,” Tyson said.

A fight between teenage boys can be every bit as dangerous as a fight between adult men. It settled down, eventually, but the penalty was a broken rib to Aaron, who sat winded on one side of the tunnel, and a sprained wrist to Bryce, who sat holding his hand on the other side of the tunnel. Steven was lying on the floor of the tunnel dazed with concussion, and Cody was nursing a sore jaw with a loose tooth.

“Well done, great leaders,” Brett said acidly. “You’ve done more damage than the tsunami.”

“At church parade, too,” Tyson said.

Bryce helped Steven to his feet, and they walked out of the tunnel to sit separately from the other boys.

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Remy, Tyson, Darryl, and Brett became the peace-makers. They talked about the fight while the others were moping about with their injuries, which were not so much serious, as debilitating. Cody lost his tooth, Aaron wasn’t able to handle

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heavy work, Steven was put into sick bay to rest, and Bryce walked about with his hand in a St. John's Sling. They all looked and felt very sheepish about the whole incident.

"Me and Tyson are best friends," Darryl said.

"Do you hug and kiss each other?" Remy asked.

"Well, we hug each other. We don't kiss or anything." Tyson said. "I don't think we're gay. There's no girls. That's the problem."

For the next week, things slowed down at Kestrel Camp. Bryce and Steven went up to the signal fire and lived in the hut on their own, coming down only for meals. Aaron's ribs healed over the next two weeks, and Cody got used to the fact that his tooth had gone. Black eyes faded, and things returned more or less to normal, but there was still underlying tension. Aaron always helped Remy dress by folding his sleeves up, especially the left one, which helped pad his stump. Remy was growing, and the Humerus bone was pushing against the muscle padding, thinning it and making it tender. Tyson and Darryl deliberately rolled their sleeves, to look like Bryce and Steven. They began to refer to the two factions as "Rollers" and "Folders". Sometimes, Darryl and Tyson camped overnight with Bryce and Steven in the hut they'd built next to the signal fire.

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“Aaron wants to know if the rollers can get a pig,” Remy said. He’d walked up to signal fire to give the message. “And he wants a patrol council to meet tonight. It’s important.”

“How’s your arm, Remy?” Steven asked.

“It’s all right. My bone’s growing – that’s why it gets sore sometimes.”

“Come here and sit down. I’ll have a look at it.”

Remy sat between the bigger boys. Steven looked at the stump carefully. “I think it will be fine,” he said. “The skin’s growing with the bone, so it won’t split or anything. Is Aaron still mad at us?”

“He wasn’t mad with you. He just wanted everything to be right. You shouldn’t fight. It stuffs everything up. Everything was great until you all started arguing.”

“I guess. Does Cody still think we’re poofers?”

“I dunno. You’re gay aren’t you?” Remy asked.

“I suppose so. Does that matter?”

“It shouldn’t matter. It’s your business. There’s no girls here, so I s’pose if you’re going to fall in love with someone, it’s got to be another boy. Tyson and Darryl love each other. They hug but don’t kiss.”

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“I suppose it’s a start,” Bryce said. “Tell Aaron we’ll get a pig, and we’ll be at the patrol Council tonight.”

“Righto,” Remy said, and walked back to Kestrel Camp.

“He’s a good kid, really,” Bryce said. “We should make him a scout. He’s too old to be a cub.”

“It’s time. He’s eleven years old. Do you realise we’ve been on this island for a year?”

“Doesn’t seem possible. Nobody ever comes here. It must be like Dinotopia – you know, that island that nobody could find because it’s in a time warp.”

“Maybe it’s off the beaten track, so it’s not worth developing or anything. There must be thousands of uninhabited pacific Islands. We just happen to be on one of them. “

“come on. We’d better get that pig, or we won’t have pork for tea.” Bryce said, collecting their spears.

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Steven and Bryce had brought a small pig back from their hunt, and it sat sizzling over the fire on a spit, while Remy turned it. Pieces were carved off it, and they ate it with roasted yams and bananas which had come into season.

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They began Patrol Council with a parade. The boys made sure their uniforms were neat and tidy. Everyone wore their sleeves down, except Remy who only had one arm and was allowed to have his sleeve up above his stump. Aaron made a point of folding it neatly. They saluted the flag, and then said the scout promise. Aaron saluted Remy and asked him to come forward.

“We’ve talked about having you move up from cub to scouts. Are you ready to join the patrol and become a member of the world wide brotherhood of scouting?”

“I am,” Remy said, looking about at the only part of the world wide brotherhood he could see.

“Do you promise on your honour that you will obey the Scout Law and the Scout Promise?”

“I swear on my honour that I will always obey the Scout law and promise to be a good and faithful scout.”

Aaron turned to the patrol. “Do you, my scouting brothers, take Remy Thompson as your brother, and fellow scout, treating him in friendship as a companion in scouting from now on?”

“We do.”

“Welcome, Scout Remy Thompson, to Kestrel patrol as a full member of this troop.”

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They held their left hands out, and there was a bit of nervous laughter as he presented each boy with his left arm stump, and they shook it. He saluted and took his place in the patrol. He had joined them in scouting and felt quite grown up.

“I appoint Bryce to be Remy’s mentor, and guide him through the tenderfoot tests,” Aaron said. “The other business of this meeting is to elect a new leader. I’m resigning as T.L. so we need to choose someone else.”

There was a chorus of protest from the boys.

“You can’t resign as T.L. Everyone depends on you to be leader.” Cody said.

“I’m tired of it, and we need someone that everybody can be confident with. I’m sick of making decisions, and it doesn’t help if some people don’t agree with what I say. We had a fight about folding or rolling sleeves and that was plain stupid.”

“We had a fight because Bryce and me are gay,” Steven said. “It’s nobody’s business but ours. We didn’t plan it that way – it just happened.”

“Well, I’m sorry I said anything,” Cody said.

“Call for nominations,” Brett said. “I nominate Cody to be Troop leader.”

“I nominate Brett,” Remy said. “He’s the youngest and smallest of us, but he’s got brains,

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and good ideas. Anyway, he's thirteen now, and old enough to be sensible."

"I second Brett," Tyson said.

"Me, too," Darryl added.

Steven and Bryce had a quick whisper., then Steven said, "Bryce and me want Brett as Troop leader, too. "

"That makes five votes for Brett," Aaron said. "All in favour?"

The boys broke ranks and crowded around the younger boy. He was lifted onto their shoulders and carried around the tunnel. They put him down. "Speech, speech," they clamoured.

They got back in line, Aaron taking a place as one of the ordinary patrol members. Cody and Steven looked at him, then paid attention to Brett.

"First, I want to thank you for giving me the job of being Troop Leader. We've only got one patrol in this troop, but it's a very good one. We do real scouting here. I'm not big enough to push anyone around, so I expect you all to listen to what I say, and work with me. We are all in danger here.

"Anything can happen – cyclone, tidal wave, storm, bush fire. We can never drop our guard. We have to work hard. We have to do things properly. We have to be good scouts. The alternative is, we'll fall apart and die slowly as

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castaways, going one-by-one. We nearly split into two groups over something silly – rollers or folders. That shouldn't happen. And I don't want arguments to start like that. If we're going to survive we have to be neat and tidy and do things properly. This isn't Sydney. If your room is a mess and you can't find something, it doesn't matter at home, but here it does.

“Your life could depend on being able to find something quickly. So while I'm boss of this outfit, you'll wear your sleeves down to prevent sunburn, and tuck your shirts in and look tidy at all times. Sleeves will be folded up neatly to remind you that you're tidy and not scruffy. It might seem silly, but there's a point to it. We've got things organised. We live comfortably. Don't let things fall apart.

“Patrol! Attention! Any other matters, raise your hand.”

Nobody had anything to say, so he dismissed them, “Kestrel patrol, dismiss!”

They all relaxed and some of them went back to finish the food.

“That was a long speech,” Cody said. “Do you still want me to be patrol leader?”

“You didn't resign,” Brett said. “You must think you can still do the job.”

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“Yes. And you didn’t knock the T.L. job back.”

“You wanted it?”

“Suppose.”

“Well they voted me, not you,” Brett said.

“That’s OK.”

“Are we a team?”

“Fine by me.”

“Fine by me, also, number two,” Brett said with a grin.

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At Christmas, they celebrated by decorating a she-oak tree on the beach with ropes interwoven with shells, and other decorations they hung up. They sang Christmas songs and carols, but they’d forgotten many of the words, so they made some up:

The waves they are breaking upon the sea shore

The dolphins are playing at sea.

The sun it is shining and for evermore

I know it is shining on me.

Christmas on the island where all the boys play

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Where Santa can come on his dolphin pulled
sleigh

Through waves he is coming for Christmas is
nigh

We're looking for Santa to come bye and bye.

The waves they are breaking upon the sea shore

The dolphins are playing at sea.

The sun it is shining and for evermore

I know it is shining on me.

One day we'll be rescued, and we will go home

At last we'll be safe and no more will we roam

But meanwhile we'll play on the beach in the
sand

It's Christmas for ever on this our is – land.

The waves they are breaking upon the sea shore

The dolphins are playing at sea.

The sun it is shining and for evermore

I know it is shining on me.

They had made each other presents. Bangles
from plaited grass, necklaces of shells, glazed

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cups from the kiln, fans woven from the end of coconut tree fronds, and wood carvings.

For Christmas dinner, they had roast pork with pineapple and mango sauce served with yams and bananas, mashed together in goats milk to make a yellow fluffy mound. They drank coconut milk, and goats milk. Nobody got ill, so the meal was given the thumbs up as a great success. After a nap, they dressed in their island clothes of grass skirts and war paint and danced. Then they played beach volley ball using a ball they had made from coconut fibre wrapped in goat skin. There was a light surf running, so they stripped off and swam in the evening cool.

That night, they had a “Scouts Own” service to honour the day. It was Brett’s first, and he prepared it carefully.

“We’ve been here a year,” he said. “And we’ve got lot done, but there’s always more to do. There are two things that are important. We have to increase our food supply, and we have to make things so we can work together. That means we have to get over some of the problems we’ve had in getting along with each other. We can’t afford to fall out, and we can’t start fighting over little things, or even big ones. Kestrel showed us the DVD of “Lord of the Flies”. All of us know what happened at the end, they fought each other and it was a big disaster.

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“Lucky for them, the Navy came and rescued them just in time. Well, we don’t have a Navy coming. Nobody has even come close, so we can’t count on it. We’re castaways. Face it. Our problems are our problems, and we have to solve them ourselves. That means we must all work together. It isn’t all bad news, because we’ve done that all year. All we have to do, is keep up the good work. Happy Christmas, everyone.”

“Happy Christmas,” they all called out together.

After lights out, they went to bed in the dormitory. A storm raged outside, but they slept through it. It was still raining when they woke, and it continued to rain all day. The boys took their clothes off and ran about in the downpour, splashing each other from the puddles that formed rapidly on the road.

The wet season had arrived early.

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To Be Continued

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