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WENDY

THE SHARK AND THE RAY: From the Sky Pilot's Log, 2CH Broadcast

The lugger *Iolanthe* stood close inshore as we examined the coral reef for a passage into the still water between the reef and the island. So clear was the water that we could see the bottom quite clearly. Presently the boy at the bow signalled to me; I swung over the tiller and the lugger, with a final plunge in the surf, slid into the passage and gained the placid waters inside the reef. The boy pushed the dinghy over the side and I took my place in the stern and Dan pulled for the shore.

A white man came down to meet us. He seemed strangely out of place in such a setting, yet he was not unexpected, for it was to see him that we had come to the island. He was not an old man, but his hair, faded by sun and rain, at first glance appeared to be grey; it was not until we were quite close that I realised he was well under thirty years of age. He had an open face and clear eyes but his mouth was weak, and I began to believe some of the things I had heard about him. He greeted me quietly, without much enthusiasm, yet I knew he was glad to see me.

"Hullo, Smithy," he said. "The skipper of the *Noosa* said you would be along one of these days."

"Well, here I am! How's the turtle shell and trepang business going?"

"Not too bad. I'm getting enough to pay my tucker bill, but not enough to make a fortune. It might be worse."

"I've got some mail," I told him. "I know what that means to an isolated man, so I won't hold out on you. There are only three letters, but plenty of papers and magazines in the lugger. I'll leave them with you."

"Thanks. You won't mind if I open the letters, will you? It's three months since the last mail. Sit down in the shade of the coco-nuts. I won't be a minute."

I watched the expression on Peter's face as he read his mail. The first letter he merely skimmed through; the second he read slowly, and once or twice there was a pained expression in his eyes; the third letter he held for a few moments before opening it and I saw him glance round the island and hesitate, as if reluctant to open it.

He read slowly and carefully, breaking off every few moments and looking about him as if to reassure himself that he was still on his little tropic isle. When he finished reading he tucked the letter carefully into its envelope and sat still and stared out to sea for so long that I thought he had forgotten me.

"Peter! Everything all right at home?" I asked.

"Eh, what's that? Oh, yes, everything's all right at home—I suppose. When will you be coming past this way again?"

"If any mail comes for you I will drop it from the aeroplane when I'm on my way to Groote Eylandt; but I can't land on this island. It might be six months or more before I come this way again in the lugger. Look here, Peter, why not come back with me this trip? There's nothing to keep you here, nothing at all."

"No, I'm stopping here. Thanks all the same. I—I can never go back to the city."

"That's nonsense. You're only a young man; you can't bury yourself up here like a native!"

"You don't understand. If you knew the story and you were me you'd do the same—at least I think you would."

"I do know the story," I told him. "Your mother wrote to me. She wants you to go home."

"Did she—did she tell you *why* I came away?"

"She hinted at it. I could read a lot more between the lines. You came up here to get away from the drink; wasn't that it?"

"That was it—mostly. Did—my mother tell you I had been in jail?"

"No; but I heard that from others. I didn't know if it was true or not. One hears a lot of rumours in this country."

"It was true. That's why I can't go back—ever."

"Whatever you might have done has nothing to do with your going back now. You can't run away from life. Why not face up to it and go back and live it down?"

"I—I killed a man. Did you know that?"

"No. Somehow you don't look like a murderer to me!"

"They called it manslaughter. I—I was drunk at the time—and I ran over him with a car. I don't remember anything about it. They — they told me about it when—when I came round."

"It was a most unfortunate accident. But that is no reason for you to waste the rest of your life here. Come back with me and face the music. Oh, I know you've paid the penalty as far as the law is concerned; but come back and face the world and start all over again."

"No. No, I couldn't do that. Something like—like what happened before might happen again. If I get drunk I go mad, I can't help myself."

"Well, cut out the drink. You've managed very well without it the last six months."

"But when I meet the other fellows I used to know I—I might be tempted to have one drink. That'd be enough to start me off again; I'm sure it would. I can't leave it alone once I start. The only safe way is never to go back where I can get drink."

"I think you're being rather silly," I told him. "Some men can take a drink and leave it at that. Evidently you can't. The only safe way is for you to cut it out altogether. But the longer you stay here, afraid to trust yourself, the worse it will be for you. You'll not only waste your life, but you'll learn to despise yourself and it will affect your character in other ways. You're living in a make-believe world; it's not real. Men have tried before to run away from all temptation but it can't be done. Sooner or later you'll have to go back to the city and have character enough to refuse that first drink."

"But that's what scares me. I might do it for a month, or a year, but then, maybe, I'd slip again. I couldn't face it; not again! If you could have seen that Court with all those faces looking at me and hating me—oh, it was awful!"

"Your mother wants you back; she told me so in her letter. What about your father? Have you heard from him?"

"Yes, I've just had a letter from Dad. He—he says the same as Mum."

"I don't want to be inquisitive, but that third letter was in a woman's handwriting. Has that anything to do with your decision?"

"No . . . yes . . . I'm not sure. It was from my fiancée—I mean the girl I was engaged to."

"Doesn't she want you to go back?"

"Yes; but you see it was her brother that I killed."

"It is certainly very complicated. But if she wants you to go back why not do so?"

"I—I don't know what to do. I feel I can't face them all after—after what has happened."

Peter was silent and we both looked out to sea. Two hundred yards from the beach the dorsal fin of a shark cut the clear water of the bay. Suddenly there was a mighty splash and a ray or devil fish leapt clear of the water and fell back with a resounding splash. The shark was in pursuit. We forgot our discussion and raced down to the beach to watch.

Again and again the devil ray leapt out of the water, rising eight or ten feet each time in a vain attempt to elude the dreaded enemy. Again and again the shark attacked and each time the ray rose from the water a fraction of a second before the shark struck.

The shark was obviously trying to drive the

ray into deeper water, but with desperate cunning the ray made for the shallows. Once the shark ripped a piece clean out of the "wing" of the ray and the water was stained red. But now the ray was in shallow water which became muddy and discoloured until we could barely make out the form of the ray as it slid so close to the beach that it was barely covered by water. Here the shark could not go, and after cruising about for a long time it eventually made out to sea. Peter sighed with relief.

"I'm glad it got away," he said. "Somehow I can understand how it must have felt when the shark was after it. It's a terrible thing to be chased and caught—and locked up."

"The shark wouldn't be content with locking it up—unless you mean on the inside of the shark's stomach!"

"You know what I mean all right. Life can be terribly cruel. I hope the ray stays there till all danger is past."

We watched for an hour or more; then with scarcely a movement of the wings the ray glided back into deep water and was lost to view.

"I'll bet that ray has learned its lesson," Peter remarked. "It'll keep clear of sharks in future."

"Yes, Peter; but you noticed it stayed in shallow water only until the immediate danger had passed, then it went back into the danger zone of the deep water. It would have starved to death if it had stayed in shallow water. We can learn a lesson from nature. You can run away and be sheltered from danger for a brief period, but not all the time. Sooner or later you have to go back into the daily fight with the world. You are afraid you will not have strength enough to keep away from temptation and you are right. But God does not expect us to survive by our own strength. Go back, Peter, to the world you left; put your faith in God through Christ, and He will see that you don't go under. Now, what about it?"

"Everyone will be against me, after what's happened."

"No, they won't. You'll find plenty of friends to help you. In any case, if you have God with you there is no need to fear anything. St. Paul tells us in the 10th chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

SALE OF WORK: The 25th Anniversary Rally and Sale of Work was held on 27th October in showery weather; however, there was a good crowd and the day was an outstanding success.

At the Public Meeting the Bible Reading and Prayer was taken by the Rev. David Toro, Minister in Charge of the Baptist Church at Kellyville. The children, who sang several numbers, had been prepared by Mrs. Margaret Langford-Smith; they were accompanied by Mr. Ken Hodkin on the accordion and by Mrs. Margaret Langford-Smith and Miss Sue Coward on the guitars. These numbers came over the public address system very well.

Following is a list of the Stall takings:

	\$		\$
Boat Rides	11.13	Friends of	
Children's	217.10	Marella	189.99
Fancy Work &		Jewellery	131.99
Baby Wear	124.90	Parkfield	430.63
Jams & Pickles	39.81	Pies	119.80
Jumble	651.00	Plants	79.53
Paulian	23.64	Produce	483.21
Plain Work	126.00	Second Hand	
Pony Rides	5.40	Toys	43.16
Refreshments	161.75	Stamps	74.06
Soft Drinks &		Vandykes	232.29
Ice cream	136.66	Youth	
Sweets	53.56	Fellowship	551.73
White Elephant	162.64	Blue Mts.	
Books	60.37	Auxiliary	150.00
Christmas Cards		Donations by	
(Profit)	17.65	Mail	199.53
		Donations	942.14

This gives a total of \$5419.67 less expenses of \$673.24, which leaves a net profit of \$4746.43. This is \$144.48 better than the May 1973 Sale, which was a record, so this is an all-time record for any Sale we have ever held. In view of the showery weather, this is most remarkable and we have much cause to praise God for His goodness. Owing to rising prices and the cost of living our General Fund was sadly depleted, and this will be a great help to us.

Messrs. Ken Nash and Ivan Hinton were able to put more corrugated iron to the tops of the stalls and this was a great improvement on the calico flies used previously. Mr. Nash also had the vegetable garden and the grounds looking very well; many of our own grown vegetables were sold on the Produce Stall.

It was pleasing to see several of our old children were able to return for the Sale. Amongst them were Christine and Sharon and David.

FARM WORK: We had a splendid crop of oats this year and we were looking forward to having sufficient hay to see us through next winter; then came the rain, day after day, week after week. The oats was affected by leaf rust, which seriously reduced its value. We could not

cut it when it was quite ready because of the rush of preparing for the Sale of Work; and when we did cut it after the Sale we had further heavy rain when attempting to cure it. It was a disappointment, but other farmers, who depended on their crops for a living, suffered worse than we did.

CHRISTMAS CARDS: All the coloured Christmas cards have been sold; however, we have plenty of black and white cards depicting one of our boys, George, which are available in size 6" x 4" on art paper at 7 cents each, with envelopes, plus postage, or one dozen for \$1.00 (postage paid).

CHILDREN'S HOLIDAYS: The children will be going away for their holidays, as in other years, staying in the homes of various friends. The holidays commence on Boxing Day and last for three weeks and three days. This year we have a lot of children to place. We have had a number of offers to take children but as this goes to the printer there are still some children unplaced. We do not want any child to miss out on a holiday and so we would be grateful to hear from other friends who would be willing to take an Aboriginal child for this period. Some friends are afraid that they could not arrange many outings or such entertainment for the children; but just to be in another home and to be on their own instead of being one of twenty-eight others is a change in itself.

THE DARK CHILDREN: The children at Marella all receive pocket money according to age, and the High School children are given a generous amount of pocket money from the Government. We have a little shop on the Mission Farm and the children are able to buy soft drinks, ice cream, sweets, etc., when the shop is opened to them, usually once a week. They are gradually learning the value of money but as yet they have little idea of it. One boy of seventeen wanted to buy a Holden motor car! But some of the older ones do save up their money and buy quite expensive items such as guitars, small radio sets and other articles. (These are those who receive extra money from the Government.)

But in their ordinary purchases they are very like sheep. One child, for instance, might spend a long time making up his mind before finally settling on the purchase of a lime soft drink. Then one by one the other children spend a long time making up their minds and finally decide on a lime soft drink—and so we run out of this particular item.