

SKY PILOT NEWS

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LEFT TO RIGHT: VANESSA, ELIZABETH, LYNN, RITA, JENNY, LOUISE (seated).

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.

In this still water we looked down on living gardens of coral and sea weed, peopled by innum-

erable creatures of vivid colour. Only those who have seen living coral can imagine the beauty of coral gardens. The bleached specimen of coral so often displayed in museums, beautiful though they may be, are only skeletons. Here was the living polyp in his natural home. For a moment I admired a rainbow coloured garden; then the anchor rattled noisily into the water and, as if by magic, most of the beauty had disappeared; the polyps had withdrawn into their cup-like homes leaving only dingy brown lumps on the rock.

We waited and our patience was rewarded by seeing the polyps come out of seclusion and again was the colour spread before our eyes. These were the staghorn corals; as if planted like flowers in separate beds, we saw colonies of blue, heliotrope, lavender, purple, red, pink, green, brown, yellow and every conceivable colour in between. I could have spent hours admiring the beauty, but the boy pushed the dinghy over the side and at the sudden splash the colours again disappeared. I took my place in the stern of the dinghy 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 one he read slowly, and once or twice there was a pained expression in his eyes; the third letter he held for a few moments without 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 black-fellow!"

"You don't understand. If you knew the story and if 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 — 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 for 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-belief 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's 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 notice 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 that 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 to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

LOST LETTERS: Sometimes, but not often, we learn of letters addressed to us going astray. We suggest that all letters be addressed to "Marella Mission Farm, Box 29, Post Office, Castle Hill." Postal Notes and Money Orders should be made payable to "Marella Mission Farm" at CASTLE HILL Post Office. We are always short staffed and sometimes there is a little delay in answering letters; but if a reply has not been received within 14 days we would be glad if you will let us know.

VOLUNTARY WORKERS: Much valuable assistance has been given to us by voluntary workers during the past weeks. It is not possible to mention all our voluntary workers by name

as there are over 100 of these including those helping at our Sale of Work. However there are some individuals and groups that should be mentioned. We have already spoken of the splendid work done by the Lions Club of Baulkham Hills. This Club finished work on its section of the children's quarters and handed it over to us ready for use. Five rooms, however, remained to be renovated. Men of the Toc H have stepped into the gap and are undertaking the renovation of some of these rooms. Their work is greatly appreciated and when completed will be a distinct asset to us.

A group of Scout Leaders, organised by Mr. Kennedy, has already done a great deal of work building, road making and other essential jobs. We are expecting them back in November to complete much that they have so ably begun; in fact we have so much lined up for them to do on their next visit that we are afraid of breaking their hearts!

When our leaflets have to be folded and prepared for posting we always call on a group of volunteers from Holroyd Methodist Church headed by Mr. and Mrs. Locke. Their valuable assistance enables us to complete the task of wrapping over 2000 copies of the Sky Pilot News in the shortest possible time.

We are now able to enjoy a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables from our garden thanks to the efforts of Mr. L. Maher and his sons. Mr. Maher has taken over this work in a wonderful way. He even bought a small rotary hoe to assist with the cultivation. Done entirely at his own expense (he even supplies the seeds) the garden is a credit to his untiring efforts and it is a great asset to us. It is difficult to imagine a more practical way of supporting this work for the dark children. Mr. Maher also conducts the Plant Stall at our Sale of Work, almost entirely stocked with his own plants and shrubs.

The Aboriginal Children's Advancement Committee has worked hard for us. They provided a new washing machine, a lot of new sheets and pillow cases besides plastic plates, mugs, cases of fruit and many other articles. We appreciate all they have done and are doing for us.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Brooks held a barbecue at their home in aid of this work and raised £126 which was brought out to the Mission Farm to assist in our work. This was a splendid effort and the results are astonishing.

The Lions Club have also arranged for an honorary barber to call regularly at the Mission Farm to cut the children's hair. This will be a great boon to Mrs. Langford-Smith who previously had to attend to all this.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS: We are often asked to name the most useful gifts for the children. Actually a gift of money is the most useful as then it is possible for us to purchase just what a child needs most at the moment. As far as personal gifts are concerned we usually have sufficient toys but the following articles are always appreciated: exercise and botany books for school; toilet articles such as combs, brushes, tooth brushes, soap, tooth paste, bobby pins; socks, singlets, pants (also large size plastic pants), white shoe cleaner, hair ribbons, tennis shoes, sizes 10 to 4. Gifts of tinned food, groceries and fresh fruit are especially appreciated.

PARTIES: The children are well catered for at this time of the year with regard to parties and no free Saturdays are available. It is hardly necessary to state that we do not have parties on Sundays. Friends who want to bring out gifts for the children should contact us well in advance so that we may be sure the children are here.

HOLIDAYS: The children will be going away for their holidays from Saturday, 29th December, 1962 till Saturday, 19th January, 1963. Following the practice of other years they will be staying in the homes of various friends. The Mission Farm will be closed down for this period from 29th December to 19th January; most of our staff will be away on their own holidays; it is specially asked that visitors do not call during that period.

SUPPORT: January is always a lean month for this Mission financially. Even while the children are away most of our current expenses have to be met and we ask specially that you remember us in your prayers and with your gifts. We are deeply grateful for the splendid support we have received during this year. It has been most encouraging and it has enabled us to progress steadily in our work for the dark children. Most people make a special effort for missions at Christmas time and we appreciate this; at the same time please do not forget us in January. We are only your agents and our progress depends on your constant support throughout the whole of the year.