TIMELESS CLASSICS

The Swiss Family Robinson

Johann David Wyss



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Shipwrecked and Alone

The storm had gone on for seven days. Our ship was leaking and far off course. We had no idea where we were. The crew was losing heart as the water rushed in on us.

Every man on board tried to think of some way to survive. My spirits sank as I looked at my wife and four young sons. They were overpowered by terror. "Dear children," I said, "we must trust in God. He can save us from this danger." We knelt down, praying together. Our hearts were soothed by the comfort of prayer. The horror of our situation seemed less overwhelming.

Then I suddenly heard someone cry, "Land, land!" In the next moment, the ship slammed into something hard. Dreadful sounds told us that the ship was breaking up. The roaring

waters poured in on all sides. Then the captain shouted, "Lower away the boats! We are lost!" In minutes, the last of the crew pushed off in the rowboats. They must have forgotten about us! As I called to them for help, my voice was drowned out in the deafening howls of the storm.

Looking around, I saw that our position was by no means hopeless. The part of the ship that held our cabin was jammed between two high rocks. Luckily, it was partly raised above the waves. Through clouds of mist and rain, I could see a rocky, rugged coast. I told my frightened family that as soon as the storm ended, we would make our way to the shore. These few words revived the spirits of the boys and gave them confidence that we would be safe. My wife, however, understood our real situation. The danger was by no means over. That night, as the three youngest boys slept, my wife and I kept watch. Fritz, our eldest son at 15, kept watch with us.

The storm finally ended at dawn. Fritz helped me make a kind of boat. We cut four barrels in half. Then we used long strips of wood to bind them together. While we were doing that, my

wife and the other boys did some chores. The animals on the ship needed to be fed. They were frightened and hungry, having been neglected during the storm. The two large dogs in the captain's cabin were thrilled when Jack let them out at last. The following useful animals were also on the ship: a cow, a donkey, two goats, six sheep, a ram, and a fine pig. Then we found that we also had ten hens and two roosters, as well as some ducks, geese, and pigeons.

"These animals are excellent," I said, "but I'm not sure about those big dogs. They'll probably eat more than any of us."

"Oh, Father, they'll be of good use, I'm sure! They'll help us hunt for game when we reach the shore!" Jack exclaimed.

So it was decided that we would take all the animals. Using rollers made from a long mast, we launched our barrel raft. It floated very well. Of course, we had attached it to the ship by a rope. Otherwise, it would have floated away. We took supplies from the ship's stores, including canvas to make a tent. The boys found some carpenter's tools, guns, pistols, powder, bullets, fishing supplies, and an iron pot. We

also salvaged some biscuits and powdered soup mix.

Then we all piled into the barrels. My 8-year-old son Franz, the youngest, sat next to my wife. Fritz sat in the next barrel. The center tubs held our supplies, and Ernest and Jack sat toward the back with me. With some difficulty, we learned how to steer our raft with its oars. We followed our geese and ducks to a small bay where it was safe to land. The dogs, who had already swum to shore, greeted us with loud barking and a wild show of delight.

We quickly set up a tent where we could pass the night. The boys collected moss and grass to spread in the tent for our beds. I made a fireplace with some large flat stones from a nearby brook. Soon we had a pot of water boiling. My wife started to make some soup for her hungry family.

The boys went off to explore the area. Soon Jack came back with a big red lobster. We added it to the pot. But how were we to eat the soup? We had no bowls or spoons! Ernest reported that he'd seen some oysters among the rocks, so he went to get some. I showed the boys how to open oysters. When we placed them on the fire,

the shells opened immediately. After eating the oysters, we used the shells as spoons. We ate our soup right from the pot. Later, we would find some coconuts and use the empty shells as bowls.

Night fell quickly. There was little or no twilight—which meant that we were near the equator. I was grateful for the tent, for the night was as cold as the day was hot. Our roosters woke us at dawn, and we had more soup for breakfast. Then Fritz and I left the fire to explore the island. We each took a gun and a game bag, and I carried a small hatchet. Turk, one of the dogs, came with us. We hoped to find some of the ship's sailors, but we could see no trace of them.

We found that our island was a tropical paradise! It had forests of towering trees and fields of sugar cane. There were rolling hills of grass, leafy green plants, and fragrant flowers. We saw brightly colored birds and playful monkeys. As we sat down under some palm trees to eat our simple lunch, I had a good idea. "Watch, Fritz," I said. "I'm going to put those monkeys to work."

With that, I began throwing stones at the

tree tops. This made the monkeys angry. They began throwing coconuts down at us. Laughing at the success of my plan, Fritz opened up some of the coconuts with the hatchet. We drank the milk, agreeing that it was refreshing, but not very tasty.

Late that afternoon, we headed back to the tent. We carried a sack of coconuts and a large bundle of sugar cane. We also had a collection of plates, bowls, and spoons that we'd made out of gourds. On the way, we had another incident with the monkeys. Turk attacked a female monkey.

"No, Turk!" Fritz called out—but it was too late! Turk had already killed the monkey. His victim was the mother of a tiny little monkey. It had jumped off her back when Turk attacked. At first, the baby monkey hid in the grass, but then it jumped up on Fritz's shoulder. We decided to take the monkey home as a pet. Because our dog had killed its mother, we felt responsible for its welfare.

As we got near our campsite, our dear ones came running to meet us. The boys shouted in delight, "A monkey! *A monkey!* Oh, how

splendid! Where did Fritz find him? What should we feed him? Oh, look at all this sugar cane! Where did you get the coconuts?"

We could neither stop their questions nor get a word in to answer them. Finally, I was able to say a few words. "I'm happy to see you all safe and sound. Sadly, though, we found no trace of our shipmates."

"If it is God's will for us to be alone on this island, let us be content," my wife said. "We should at least be happy that we are all together in safety."

Dinner that night was a feast. We had several fine fish, cooked on a spit over the fire. We also had goose, roasted over a large shell that caught its dripping gravy. In addition, we had cheese, which we'd brought from the ship, along with the last of the soup. "This is not one of our geese," my wife said. "It's a wild bird Ernest killed today."

We sat down for our delicious meal, using our gourds as plates for the first time. We had coconuts for dessert. Fritz laughed as the baby monkey eagerly sucked the corner of a handkerchief he had dipped in coconut milk.

The sun set quickly, and we decided to go to sleep. We weren't asleep for very long, though, when a loud barking woke us. Jackals were coming near, hoping to kill and eat some of our poultry. Turk and Juno, our brave dogs, were surrounded by a dozen or more of the wild creatures. We saw that the dogs had already killed four of the jackals, but the others kept fighting. Fritz and I shot our guns in the air, and the rest ran off.

Turk and Juno chased after them and killed one more. Fritz dragged one of the jackals toward the tent. He wanted to show it to his brothers in the morning. Once more we returned to our beds.

TIMELESS CLASSICS

The Swiss Family Robinson

Just one family survives the shipwreck. Now the father, mother, and their four young sons find themselves stranded on a remote island. What will it take to stay alive? The odds are against them. But the clever, hard-working Robinsons have what it takes to face the ultimate test.

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