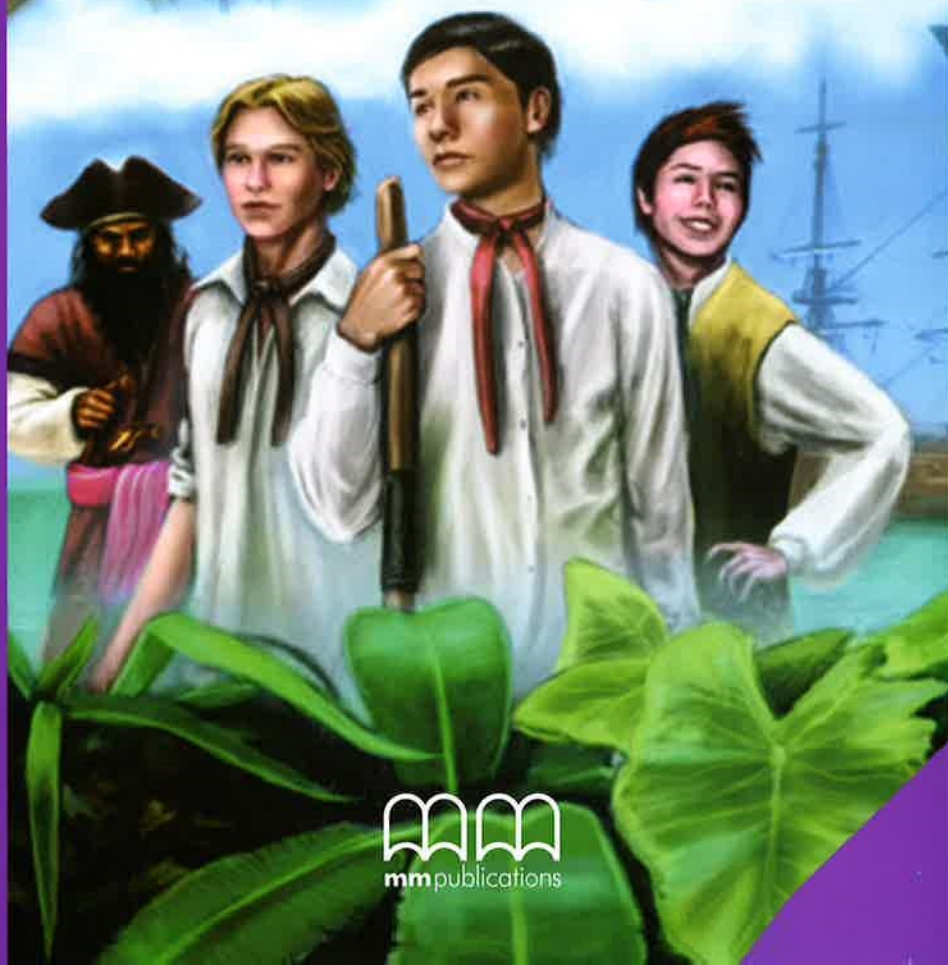


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The Coral Island

Adapted by H.Q. Mitchell



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CHAPTER 1

I WAS BORN INTO A FAMILY OF ADVENTURERS – MY FATHER, grandfather and great-grandfather were all sea captains who devoted their lives to exploring faraway places. It's no surprise then that I spent most of my childhood dreaming about exotic destinations and thrilling adventures on the open sea.

When I was old enough, I persuaded my father to allow me to join the crew of a cargo ship. I learnt a great deal about life on board a ship during that time, and I also had the opportunity to visit a number of seaports around my native England. My name is Ralph and my fellow crew members nicknamed me 'Ralph Rover'. A rover is a traveller, a person who can never stay in one place for too long. I quite liked the name, and I never saw a reason to change it.

I met a number of sailors during my travels and I spent many evenings listening to them talk about their experiences in foreign lands. I was particularly interested in the stories I heard about the Coral Islands of the Pacific Ocean. The sailors described the spectacular natural beauty of these islands to me in detail: they told me all about the coconut palms and exotic fruits; the warm climate and plenty of sunshine; the crystal clear waters and soft, sandy beaches. They also mentioned the tribes of natives who lived on many of these islands, some of whom were particularly savage and violent.

When I turned fifteen, I decided that the time had come to travel to the Pacific. My father said I was too young for such a long trip, but I managed to convince him to let me join the crew of a merchant ship called the *Arrow*. Within a few short weeks, I was on my way to the Coral Islands. I was sad to leave my parents and my home, but I was also very excited about the adventures that lay ahead.

I made two friends on board the *Arrow*; their names were Jack Martin and Peterkin Gay. Jack was a tall, strong, young man of eighteen, who was well-educated and fearless, and Peterkin was a funny, fun-loving fourteen-year-old boy who always made the crew laugh.

For the most part, our journey was peaceful; we encountered some rough weather when we reached Cape Horn, the southern tip of America, but we managed to move on without much difficulty.



A few weeks later, we were sailing on the deep waters of the Pacific Ocean. We finally arrived at the Coral Islands, and I'll never forget the moment when one of those beautiful islands came into view. The stunning white beaches and emerald green palm trees took my breath away – my friends and I were certain we'd found paradise.

One night, soon after we'd entered the tropics, a typhoon started. Fierce winds and huge waves beat our ship for almost a week and during that time nearly everything was swept off the deck, except for one small boat. On the sixth day of the storm, we noticed an island ahead of us. The island was surrounded by a coral reef which protected it from the violent waves. The lagoon – the stretch of water inside the reef – was surprisingly calm. We tried to steer the ship through a narrow gap in the reef, but a powerful wave destroyed our rudder, leaving us at the mercy of the storm.

Our only hope was to lower the boat into the water and row ashore, but the boat was too small to carry us all to safety, so my friends and I came up with another plan.

"The ship is going to hit the reef!" shouted Jack above the roar of the storm. "When it does, the three of us will hold on to an oar and jump into the lagoon. Hopefully we'll end up on the shore."

Just then, an enormous wave came crashing onto the deck. The ship struck the coral reef, and the entire crew was thrown into the ocean. Jack, Peterkin and I grabbed hold of an oar and dived into the water. I must have lost consciousness, because the last thing I remember was the frantic cries of the sailors as the ship was being swallowed up by the sea.



CHAPTER 2

WHEN I WOKE UP, I WAS LYING ON THE SAND WITH Peterkin and Jack beside me. I had a deep cut on my forehead and Peterkin was trying to stop the bleeding with a handkerchief.

"Are you all right, Ralph?" asked Jack as he looked on anxiously.

"Yes," I murmured. I touched the cut on my forehead. It hurt. "What happened?" I asked.

"You hit your head on the oar when we jumped into the water. You were unconscious. Luckily, we managed to pull you to shore," said Jack.

"What about the captain and the crew?" I asked as I tried to sit up. "Are they all right?"

Jack shrugged. "I don't know. When the ship hit the reef, the men were thrown into the water. They managed to climb into the boat, but the winds carried them away from the island. The storm passed a short while ago. I really do hope the crew managed to save themselves."

"Those poor souls," I said with a sigh. "And what happened to the ship?"

"The ship sank, unfortunately," said Jack.

Jack stopped speaking and we all fell silent. It was at that moment that I realised our situation: we'd been shipwrecked on a remote island in the Pacific with no food and very little chance of rescue. How would we ever survive?

"This is terrible!" I exclaimed. "This is the end!"

"Perhaps not," said Peterkin with a voice full of hope. "Think about it, lads: we have a beautiful island all to ourselves. We can start a brand new life here... We can be kings!"

Jack sighed. "How can we possibly live on this island, Peterkin? We don't even have any tools, not even a knife."

"We do have a knife," said Peterkin as he pulled a small penknife from his pocket. It had only one blade, which was broken.

"I suppose that's better than nothing," said Jack. "What else do we have?"

We searched our pockets for other items of value and found the

