

# ROBINSON CRUSOE

Vojtěch Kubašta

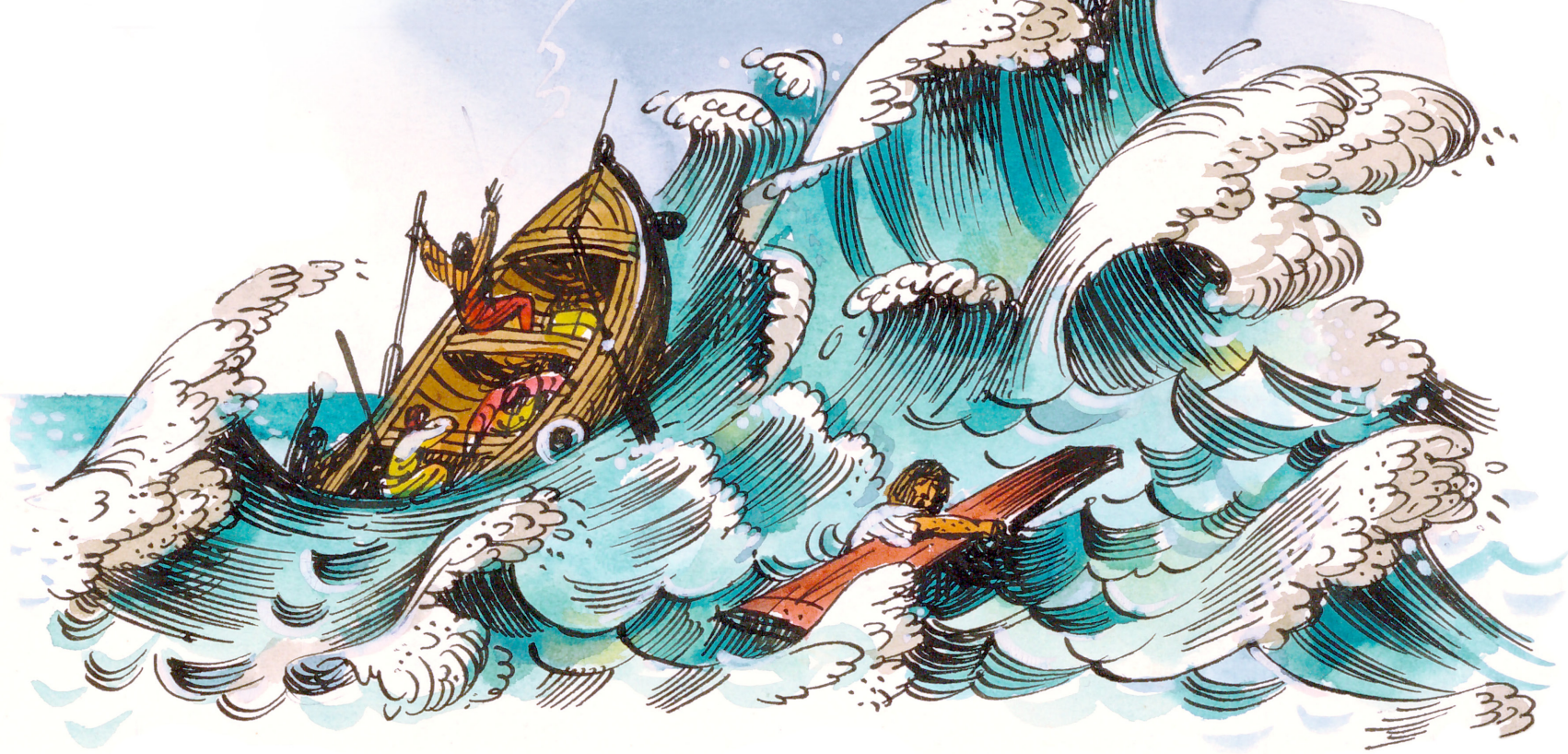
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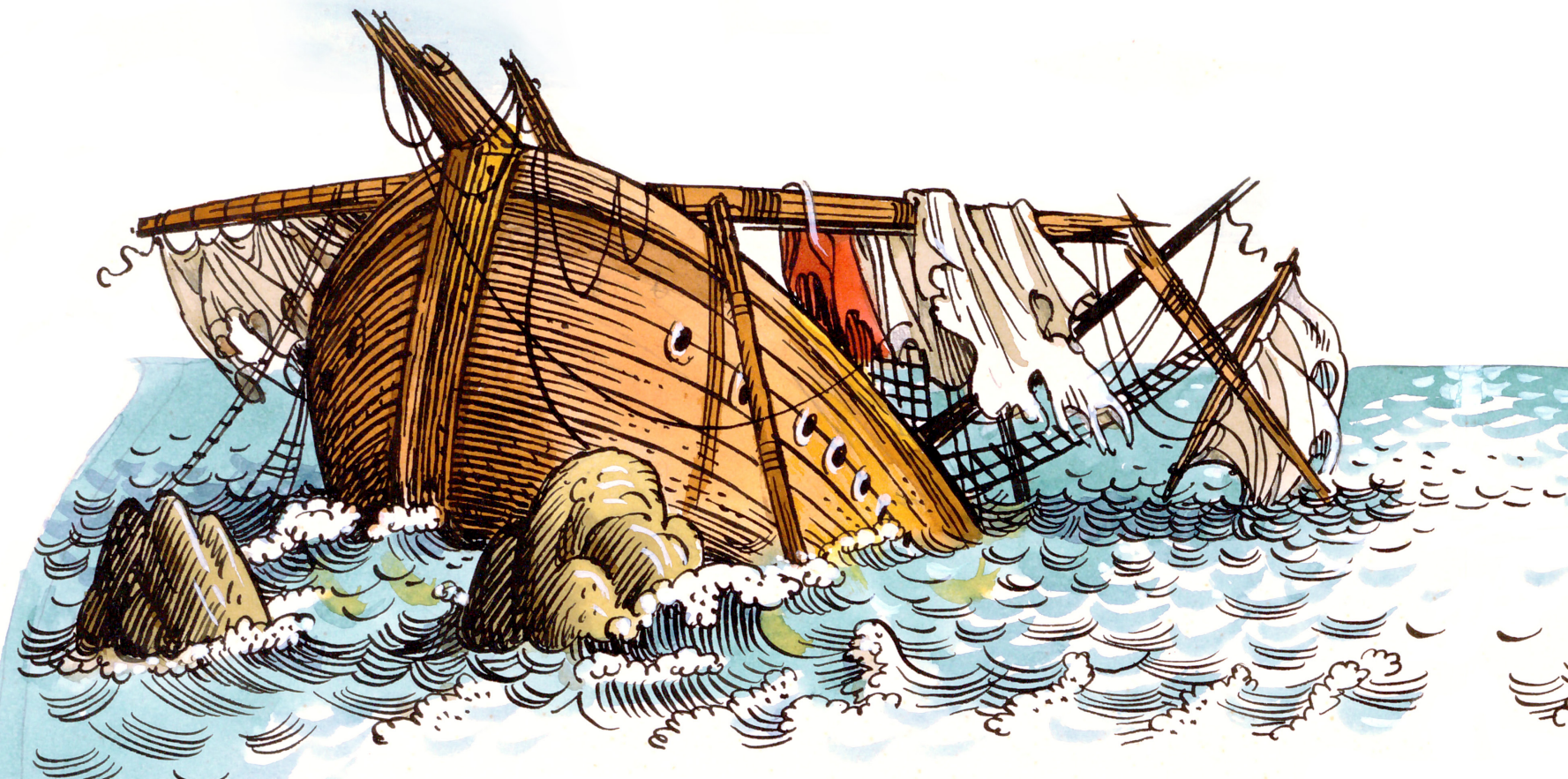




**A** passion can take a person a long way. Mine delivered me to an expanse of ocean so vast, it appeared infinite. I had always longed to be a sailor who travelled on great ships from one end of the world to the other, getting to know foreign climes along the way and never staying anywhere longer than necessary. I imagined myself soaking up the scents of each place I visited before heading off to the next far-flung destination. My father, a successful merchant, had different plans for my future, however. Wishing for me to follow in his footsteps, he forced me to learn his trade, my poor performance and dislike of it notwithstanding. Though moved by my plight, my mother did not stand against my father. How I objected, resisted and protested! I had the soul of an adventurer—I would not spend my days at a desk loaded with bills and accounts! As my father brooked no argument, I took the matter into my own hands. One dark, cloudy night when the moon was waning, I gathered a few necessities in a bundle and ran to a ship which was to leave at daybreak

for the shores of far-flung Africa. Goodbye, London! Goodbye, dear parents! My euphoria at the thought of the adventure ahead of me was so great that I didn't even turn for one last look. I would be home again in a month, after all...

The first days of the voyage went smoothly; the sea was calm, the sails were ruffled by a light breeze, squawking gulls circled overhead, and flying fish leapt from the deep. Had I blindly obeyed my father, I would have missed all this maritime beauty. On the fifth day, however, the sky and the sea darkened ominously. As the thunder began to roll, the playful, gentle ripples gave way to giant waves hungry for all in their wake. That included our ship, which was tossed this way and that, powerless against the raging water. Panic broke out on board. Screams, groans and cries for help were lost amid the clatter of thunder. We were battered by waves till the game ceased to amuse them, at which point they pounced on the ship and threw it against a cliff. With a tremendous crack, our beloved

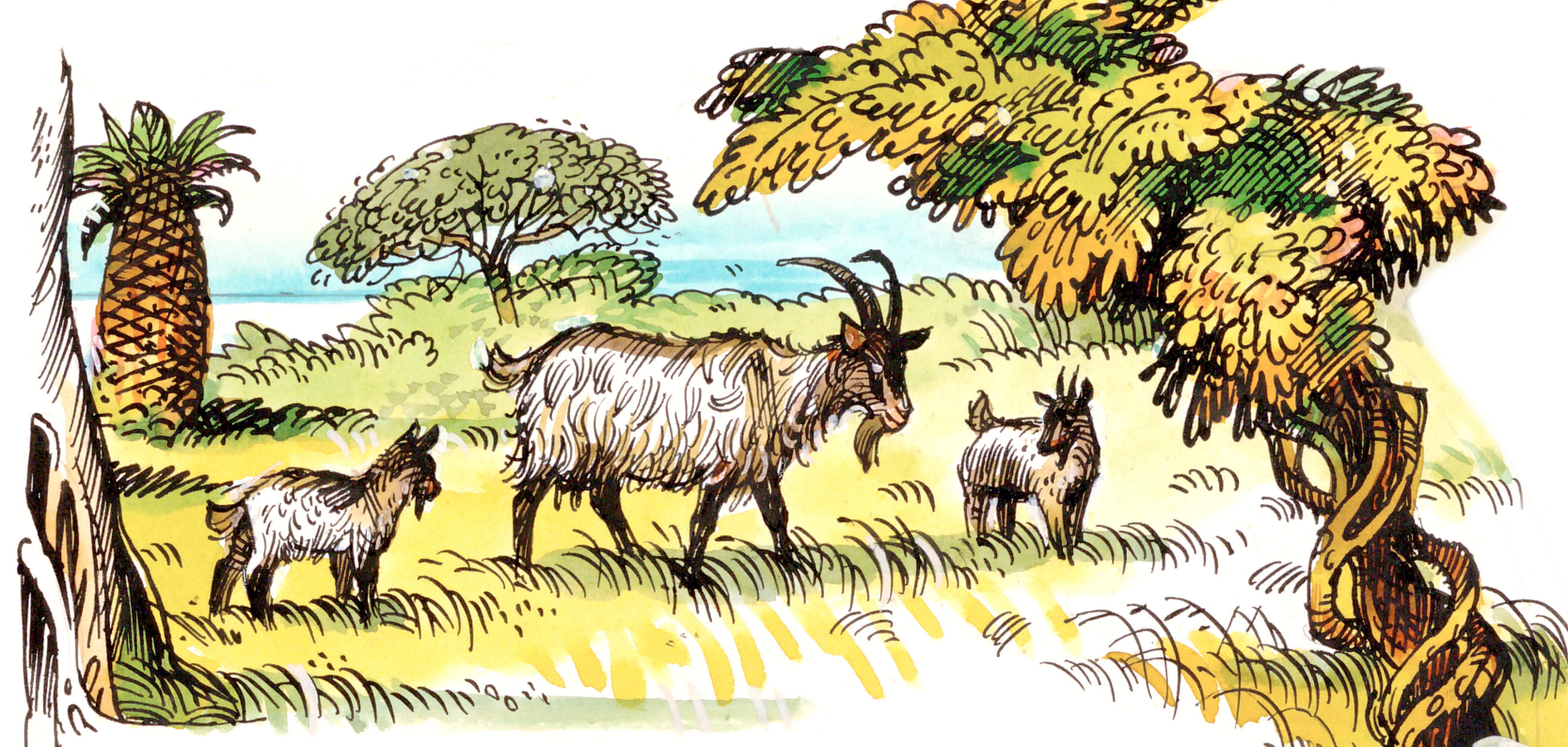
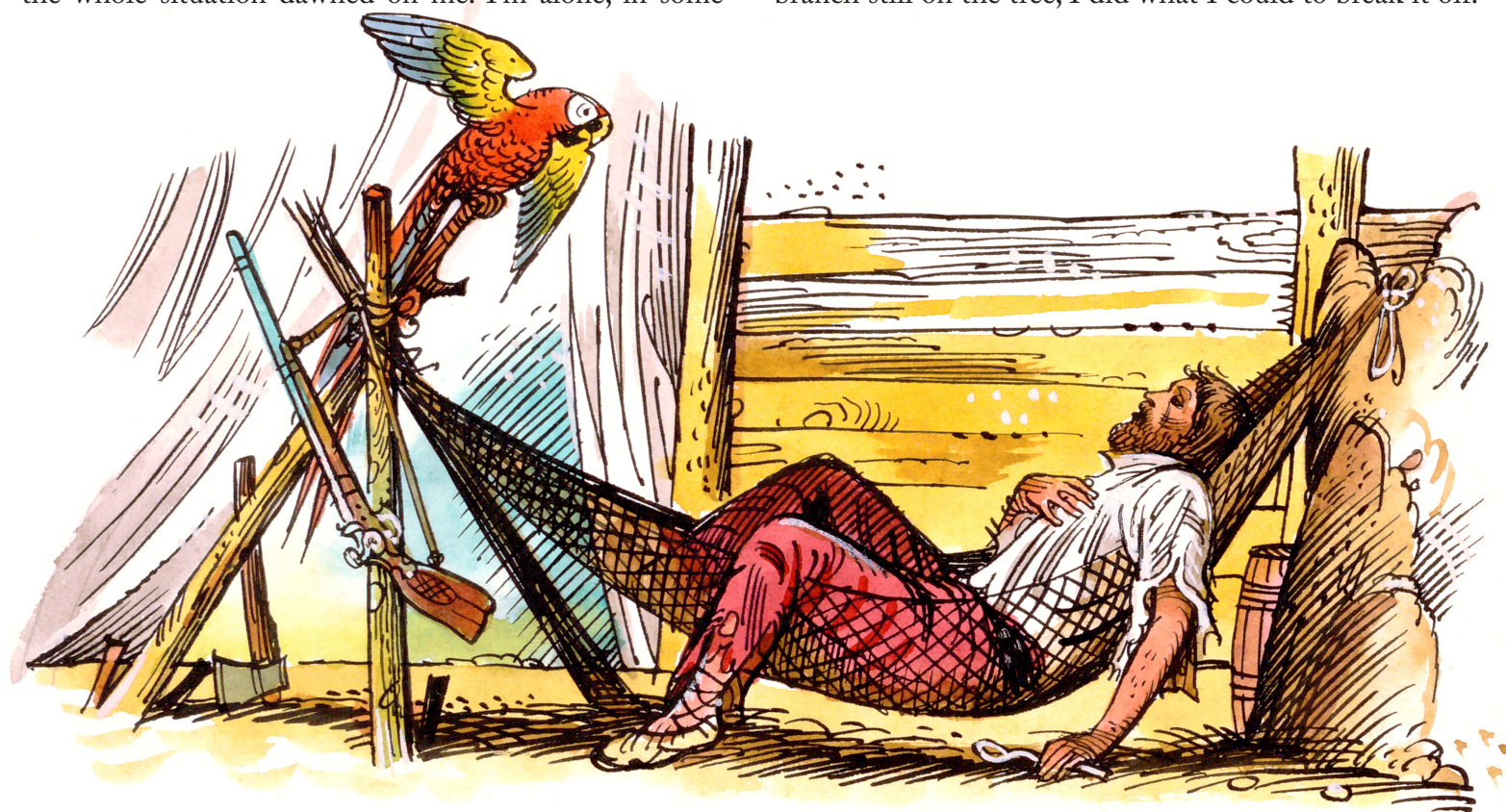






ship flipped over, sending us all to the bottom of the sea. As I swam for my life – an impossible task in my stormy surroundings – the thought flashed through my mind that my first voyage would also be my last. My strength was soon used up: my arms and legs were useless with fatigue, and saltwater flooded my nose and mouth with such intensity that I struggled to catch my breath. By the time a large branch appeared within my grasp, my end was surely near. Mercifully, this branch was strong enough to keep me afloat. What happened next, I couldn't say. Just before I lost consciousness, I imagined my mother's weeping face. Then there was nothing but silence and peace. I came round to find myself lying on a sandy shore, with the sun beating down on my back. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Small, tranquil waves washed against my feet. From the bottom of my heart I thanked God for saving me from a fate as fish-food on the ocean floor, and I wept tears of gratitude and happiness. Then the tragedy of the whole situation dawned on me. I'm alone, in some

deserted, nameless place, and no one knows that I'm here. I have nothing to eat or drink. With all this in mind, I flew into a panic and began to berate God for having left me to die of hunger and thirst rather than granting me a painless death. He had sent me into a battle that was already lost... But no. No. I, Robinson Crusoe, a young man with the bold heart of an adventurer, refused to surrender so easily. My strength returned in a rush. I stood up and gazed out to sea. Maybe I would have an idea. And so I did. Our ship had stores of food and drinking water to last several days. If I could get out to it, I could take all these supplies for myself. What could be simpler? My mood soared. Then it fell when I realized I had no way of reaching the ship. If I were to swim out, how would I return to shore loaded with supplies? Then it occurred to me that I could build a raft. What a great idea! I darted this way and that gathering fallen branches, and when I spied a good branch still on the tree, I did what I could to break it off.



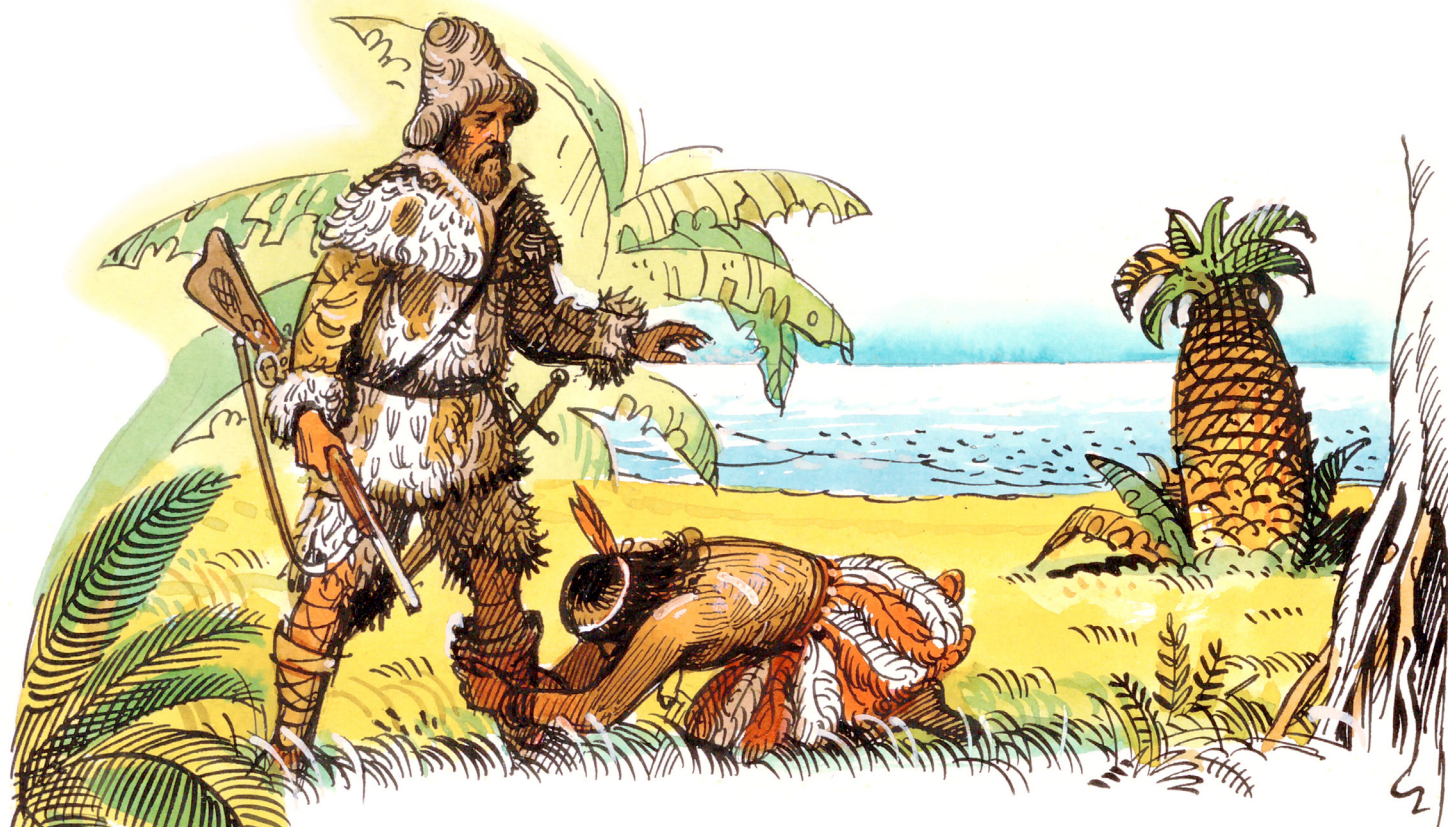
The sea helped me in my labours, by washing ashore several planks and slats of wood from the shipwreck. I tore my underwear and coat into strips, using these to tie the parts of my raft together. A long branch would serve as an oar. Work on the raft took me all day; I completed it at sunset. As I watched the blood-red disc go down, I was comforted by the thought that I would make my way to the ship early the next morning. Provided, of course, that I survived the night. For another urgent question had occurred to me. Where would I sleep to keep myself from falling prey to the wild beasts which surely lived on the island? Fortunately, the answer was not long in coming. I would sleep in a forked treetop, as the crafty monkeys did! It took a while to find the kind of tree I needed, and then some time to settle myself in its branches. By then, it was so dark that the only light came from the moon and stars. Although I was exhausted by the day's labours, I can't say that I rested that night. I almost rolled out of my nest several times. Besides, the cries of creatures of the

night that sounded all around me were uncondusive to deep sleep. I was on my feet in the early hours, waiting impatiently for daybreak. As soon as the sun appeared, I would embark on my expedition to the wreck. I didn't have much time: what was left of the ship would soon be swallowed by the sea, depriving me of the chance to get things for my survival.

I boarded my raft as soon as the dawn came. The water was so calm and peaceful that I reached the ship with ease. After a careful search, I came away with all I could use in my new home – food, drink, tools, weapons. Last but not least, I took the dog Spot. I had discovered the poor creature under the fallen boom, shaking with fear. So I was alone no longer: I had a pal. Was my discovery of this hairy chap a sign that my adventure would end well? I was inclined to believe that it was, but maybe the sun had gone to my head. Whatever, I was alive, and I was travelling on a raft fully loaded with supplies that would keep me that way, plus I now had a pal who was barking







loudly and wagging his tail, as if to tell me that everything was going to be all right.

As I had no wish to spend another night in the treetops, my main task for this new day was to make myself a shelter. No sooner had I built up my strength with food salvaged from the ship than Spot and I set out to explore our new home, on the lookout for a suitable place for a temporary dwelling. As it turned out, the Almighty was watching over me that day, too. I found an overhang in the rock – perfect! And with a source of fresh water nearby, there was no risk of my dying of thirst. I spent the rest of the day cutting down slender trees and building my home with their trunks. With the tools from the ship, I managed the task with ease. A heavy, waterproof ship's tarpaulin made my roof. When my castaway's shelter was ready, I showed it off proudly to Spot. 'This is where we will live, my friend,' I told him. I scratched behind his ears, and he licked my hand in delight. That evening, as I lay down on a bed of twigs and leaves, the dog curled up at my feet, I had to chuckle. Used to all comforts of a well-appointed home, I was now living in a hut fashioned by

my own callused hands. Yet I felt great. What would my mother say? And my stern father? Did I now regret not following in his footsteps? Not at all!

Even so, that night, too, I failed to get any wholesome, invigorating sleep. The local animals were curious about their new neighbours, and Spot—a proper guard dog—barked furiously to drive away unwanted visitors. Lessons learned? Well, I spent the next few days digging earthworks and building a solid log fence around my home. I did this not only because of the wild animals: I remembered the poor captain of our wrecked ship telling us about dangerous cannibals in this part of the world. It was his words – and his expression of fear – that inspired me to make my fence a thing of great impregnability which would not have been out of place around a medieval castle.

Time flew by. In the first half-year of my life as a castaway, I explored every corner of my new, (hopefully) temporary home. I discovered that the island was small enough to walk around in two days. It was home to many different animals, some very tasty, some inedible. Shortly after my supplies from the ship ran out, I caught an enormous bird



whose flesh turned out to be so tough and disgusting that not even Spot would touch it. But I had to keep trying. A man never stops learning. Fortunately, the sea provided me with many oysters, which I simply collected from among the stones on the beach. Now and again, a turtle would offer up its excellent meat. I never went hungry. My diet improved further in the fifth year of my lonely stay, when I succeeded in taming a species of island goat. Before long, I had a whole herd of the creatures, requiring me to extend my home with a large enclosure in which they could run about. The goats provided a steady source of nutritious milk, to say nothing of their meat. I learned to make butter and cheese from the milk. Sadly, I had no fresh bread to go with them. What I wouldn't have given for a piece of ordinary bread! Whenever I found myself missing my carefree days in civilization, I put myself to work to drive away maudlin thoughts. My faithful companion Spot, quite an old dog by now, was joined by a parrot. This cute, colourful, highly inquisitive bird came to us first as a visitor. He understood that we were glad to see him, because we gave him a large serving of juicy

coconut flesh whenever he appeared. Before long, he had settled in with us. He even learned to speak a few phrases. 'Crusoe, you've gone and done it again!' he would squawk, when I hit my finger with a hammer... I was happy to hear a human voice, even though it issued from the beak of a squawking bird flying above my head.

Ten years into my stay I came across human footprints. The sight of them frightened me half to death, for they could mean just one thing – cannibals! And I was their only prey. To escape being roasted and gobbled up, what was I to do? Several nights passed in which I didn't get a wink of sleep. But nothing untoward happened. My calmness returned. I went on with my life as before. I continued to work. I continued to carve marks into a tree near my island home: a short mark for another day gone by, a long one for another week, a still longer one for a month, and the very longest one for a year. I was in the fifteenth year of my stay, in the process of sewing together a new fur coat, when a strange scream rent the air. I grabbed my musket and went to my lookout point, to see where the noise had come from. A large group of cannibals was making merry







## ROBINSON CRUSOE

Young Robinson Crusoe longed to be a sailor. And his wish came true, although his parents wished it otherwise. He set out on a voyage and was shipwrecked. He spent many years alone on a desert island. Do you think he was bored? Of course he wasn't! He had lots of adventures, and he defied death many times. Guess how it all turned out. Better still, read about it! This abridged version of Daniel Defoe's legendary work in a unique rendering by world-famous artist Vojtěch Kubašta encourages you to do just that. Did Crusoe wish he had obeyed his parents and not run away to sea, so sealing his fate as a castaway? You are about to find out...