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A THREE MAN BREEZE

BY CAPTAIN HENRY P. HARRISON

Castaways as the result of a submarine earthquake—The peculiar craft which picked them up and the extraordinary fashion in which they are made to work their passage.

MORE years ago than I care to remember, I was mate of a Salam brig called the *Arethusa*. We were on a trading voyage in the South Pacific, and one morning I came on deck to find the brig totally becalmed about two hundred miles to the eastward of the Pearl Islands.

Now generally speaking it is seldom so calm even in tropic seas but that the under swell, which is really the ocean's heart throb, is not felt to a greater or less extent. And, as seafarers will tell you, the dead calm suddenly following a heavy gale is of far more discomfort than the gale itself for this reason.

Without a breath of wind to steady her, the vessel is rolled and pitched and tossed by the long smooth swells in the most exasperating manner.

But on this occasion no mill pond could have been smoother than was the surface of the sea. As I stood staring over the taffrail my sunburned, bearded face looked upward at me as though reflected from a great mirror.

Hot? I could not bear my hand on the wood work, much less on the brass guard rail. The pitchy deck planks were like hot iron; the sun blazed down from an unclouded sky till the Stirling air seemed to quiver like the rising heat from a blast furnace.

Curiously, the one least affected by the heat was our second officer, a young fellow from New England, Joe Raymond by name.

But Raymond's was one of those happy go lucky natures that can adapt themselves to almost any circumstances. Though a comparatively young man, his life had been a strange one, he having been a wanderer all over the navigable globe, since at the tender age of twelve he ran away to sea.

"There's nothing so bad that it mightn't be worse." was his favorite saying under the most adverse circumstances.

"Pretty warm, Mr. Harrison; but I've seen It warmer by at least ten degrees on the equator," he said cheerfully.

I growled something to the effect that I didn't want to see it any hotter. Captain Parks, who had been down for a look at the barometer, said likewise.

"Hark! Is that thunder?" he suddenly exclaimed.

A low, inarticulate rumble echoed sullenly over the oily expanse, yet there was not the sign of a cloud in the steely sky. No, it could not be thunder.

Again came the mysterious rumble, louder and nearer. It was attended by a strange quivering or vibration of the oily surface, which, communicating itself to the brig's hull, caused her to tremble in every timber.

"A submarine earthquake," said Captain Parks, concisely.

As we stood half awe struck a strange phenomenon suddenly presented itself to our astonished gaze. Against the horizon line, which a moment before had

been an unbroken level, appeared a lofty elevation, as though a high island of great length had suddenly risen from the bottom of the sea. But a second look showed only too plainly that this remarkable appearance was a vast bulk of water coming down upon us with terrific speed.

"A tidal wave, set in motion by the submarine earthquake," exclaimed Captain Parks, as, fully alive to the threatened danger, which no human skill or power could avert, we stared blankly in each other's faces.

For the brig, not being under steerage way, was slowly drifting round in a sort of irregular circle. Should the wave strike her broadside to——

"Into the starboard rigging, and hang on for your lives!" roared the captain, as the Lascar crew, with wild yells, ran to the rail as though to throw themselves over the side.

I saw Captain Parks spring for the main rigging, even as he gave the command. Raymond and I made a simultaneous rush in the same direction.

But we were too late. There was a great upheaval, and the doomed brig, caught broadside to, was swept upward and rolled over like a cork.

I remember being submerged under tons of green seas, and rising gasping to the surface, which was strewn with broken debris from the vessel's deck.

This I noticed first, and then I saw for a brief moment what I felt sure was the keel of the capsized brig, dotted with four or five black specks that I knew were men clinging to it, on the crest of the receding wave, which was sweeping steadily on to the westward.

"Bad job, Mr. Harrison," said a voice not far distant, and turning my head as I struck out I saw Raymond sitting astride the brig's foretopsail yard, which, with part of the sail and gear attached, had been torn from the shattered mast by the terrible force of the sea.

"I should say it was bad," I responded, as, having myself reached the spar, I freed my eyes and month of salt water and looked wonderingly at the speaker, hardly knowing whether to admire or be vexed at his coolness.

"Well, it might be worse," he replied, but I could by no means take the same philosophical view.

A hundred and fifty miles at least from land, in danger from starvation, thirst and sharks, and out of the track of sailing vessels, it occurred to me that we were about as bad off as we could be.

But I said nothing, and so for the rest of the scorching day we clung to the spar, conversing at brief intervals and straining our eyes across the smooth waters in vain search of the sail which neither of us was hopeful of seeing.

A little after noon a coming breeze was indicated by a faint black line close down against the edge of the eastern horizon. And against the dark line was a white object, which seeming to keep pace with the approaching breath of the northeast monsoon, took the definite shape of a single small sail heading almost directly for us.

"A flying proa!" I exclaimed as it came onward with inconceivable velocity.

And this indeed it was, though differing from those peculiar to the Ladrone and Friendly Islands. These latter, I may say in passing, are double enders, with the mast and lateen sail amidships. Instead of "wearing ship," the helmsman simply moves to the opposite side of the proa with his long paddle, retrims the sail, and is already headed in the opposite direction.

But the craft on board of which

Raymond and myself were taken twenty minutes from the time when we had first sighted her, was of different construction in some respects. And as few if any of my readers may have seen one of the kind, I may be pardoned if I give the description somewhat in detail.

From measurements afterward made I should say that the proa was twenty three feet long, and had exactly *fourteen inches* of beam, with a depth of six inches when loaded.

Hollowed from a log of *tamassi* wood, itself almost as buoyant as cork, this proa had a wedge like bow and a square stern, with a long slanting overhang.

The mast and a sprit, which really combined the sprit and boom, were both of stout bamboo, while the "lug" sail, rather wider on the head than its foot, was woven of a stout fibrous grass.

But the peculiar feature—the one in which lay the principal secret of the proa's speed—was the outrigger, a heavy ironwood log, sharpened at both ends to offer as little resistance as possible to the water, hung at right angles with the hull.

When we first took our places in the proa, whose master was a lithe, olive hued native, wearing a "billycock" hat, a waist cloth and a pair of faded red silk stockings, the breeze was comparatively light, and the weight of the outrigger alone served to keep the craft on a tolerably even keel while the wind was well on the quarter.

The motion was most exhilarating. I could compare it to nothing but an ice boat, so smooth and evenly did the quaint craft slip over the sea, which was beginning to run in short, even swells.

The port watch, who stood well forward on the lookout, took no part whatever in the conversation. His eyes were steadfastly fixed on the horizon ahead, where I fancied I could see a faint hazy loom indicative of land.

The breeze grew steadily stronger, and as the proa's rate of sailing increased I climbed up on the foot of the after arm of the outrigger, where, clasping the mast with one arm, I began enjoying the novelty of the situation.

"Sails like a yacht now, eh, Harrison?" called Raymond, leaning involuntarily to windward as the frail craft, whose gunwale was not a foot from the frothing seas, kept "heeling" more and more, despite the counterbalance of the heavy outrigger.

"S'pose bime by we soon hab 'three man' breeze you see 'em sail," again remarked the starboard watch, and I began to think he might, after all, be a colored man of truth and veracity.

"Wonder what a 'three man' breeze is?" asked Raymond, as he glanced over his shoulder at the narrow ribbon of foam streaming after the broad bladed paddle wielded by the muscular helmsman.

"Perhaps when it blows so hard that it takes three to steer," I suggested rather foolishly. But it was not long before I saw my mistake.

For presently the port watch sang out something in his native tongue that I knew by his accompanying gestures meant "Land ho!" And obedient to a rapid order from the helmsman, the starboard watch flattened in the main sheet, thereby causing the proa to lie over at an alarming angle.

Then, at another order from the man at the oar, the port watch ran out on one arm of the outrigger like a monkey, and to my great astonishment, dropped down in a squatting position on the pointed log, where he clung with both hands to some withes of twisted bark.

"Sails like a steamer now!" shouted Raymond, who had witnesses this procedure with quite as much surprise as myself.

"This only 'one man' breeze," said the starboard watch—"you wait lilly bit more." And then the full significance of the expression broke in on my mind.

A "two man breeze" would in all probability send the starboard watch out on the outrigger. And what if it blew a "three man breeze?"

I glanced at Raymond, who, evidently having the same thought in his mind, returned the look with one of quizzical drollery.

"Wonder if we'll have to draw lots to see which of us is to act as shifting ballast?" he bawled, as a stronger puff of wind nearly sent the proa on her beam ends.

Before I had a chance to reply, the tall helmsman called out something to the starboard watch, which I naturally interpreted as an order for him to join the port watch. But it wasn't. Touching Raymond on the shoulder he pointed to the outrigger, and said in tones of unmistakable import:

"*You* go 'long of oder man—dot way you work your passage!"

I was mean enough to laugh at the expression on poor Raymond's face, as, after vainly expostulating, he cautiously crawled out and took his place at the end of the outrigger, which was oftener under than on top of the water.

My mirth was short lived. The buoyant craft was now fairly flying, and as a stronger puff of wind nearly capsized us, the starboard watch imperatively ordered me to take my place beside the other two.

Entreaty to be excused was as useless as resistance could have been, and a moment or two later found me hanging for dear life to the after end of the outrigger, which I am positive was dashing through the seas at the rate of full twenty knots an hour.

Raymond almost forgot his own deplorable situation in grim enjoyment of mine. At every forward jump of the proa we were almost submerged, and a dozen times I was nearly swept away.

"How do you like this for a new sensation?" I shouted to Raymond just before we reached a tremendous line of breakers at the mouth of the river which empties into a little bay on the east side of the island.

"It might be worse—and I'm afraid it's going to be!" he roared, pointing to the great combers directly ahead. But luckily for us the breeze lessened and the drenched and shivering ballast was allowed to shift itself inboard.

We found shelter with a Scotch carpenter who had been wrecked on the island ten years before, and made it his home, till we were taken off by a native trading vessel and transferred to the American schooner *Jane Adams*. But I have it to remember that under very unpleasant circumstances I have sailed at the rate of twenty knots an hour in a "three man breeze."