



SHIPWRECKED ON A CORAL REEF
DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS CONCERNING OUR MARINERS IN
AUSTRALIA IN 1875

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Front page illustration: photo by J. Petkovic © 2021, votive painting (fragment) from Her Lady of Mercy Church Museum, Dubrovnik. Inscription mentions Pelješac vessel *Meotide*, and Christmas Day 1854.

I

1. FROM CARDIFF TO THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

One day in July 1875, the barque *Stefano* left its moorings at Cardiff and sailed away on a four-month voyage to Hong Kong, unaware of what the sea, the wind, and the destiny had in store for it. Loaded with English coal, stocked and ready for every kind of weather, it departed on its long journey.

The owner of this sailing ship was our own Nikola Bačić, from Dubrovnik, who spared no expense when outfitting his vessel. The *Stefano* was indeed one of the most modern sailing ships, 160 feet long with a carrying capacity of 868 tons, fast, dignified, and strong.

The weather was delightful, and the *Stefano* was sailing at a speed of 9 - 9.5 knots. With all its sails unfurled, it resembled some great white bird that descended upon the open water to see itself reflected in it. Some crew members had sailed this route before. Their forgotten experiences were revived and retold to the younger friends, for whom this was their first journey. Once on the high seas, there was little sign of life except for the multitude of dolphins that followed the ship and with their quick and playful movements entertained the young sailors, who in turn fell in love with their endearing displays and held them as faithful friends. Only he, who knows how small and lonely it feels in this vast expanse of water, can understand and appreciate the joy that every appearance of life on the ocean can bring.

On leaving the Azores and Madeira Islands behind and heading west of the Canary Islands, the *Stefano* flew past to the magnificent peak of Tenerife, with its grey head penetrating the clouds and jutting high above the sea. A period of balmy trade winds followed and gave the young sailors unprecedented spectacle. Myriads of flying fish splashed on the sea surface, hitting the sides of the ship or falling on the deck.

Favourable, strong winds drove *Stefano* onwards. It raced past the Cape Verde Islands, and soon the Equator was crossed. This event was celebrated according to the old maritime custom. A jar was thrown from the ship's deck, and inside it was a sheet containing the information about the ship and its crew. It may still be floating on sea currents today. Often such jars float for decades, even centuries, carrying news from long-lost ships.

Crossing the Equator and stepping into the Brazilian current, the *Stefano* soon crossed the Tropic of Capricorn. Unfurling their sails and with the north-western wind behind it, the *Stefano* sailed onwards towards Cape of Good Hope.

Along the way, the *Stefano* passed a Spanish sailing ship bound for Montevideo. The signals were exchanged with the ship's name and expressions of best wishes.

The dazzling Southern Cross became the *Stefano*'s new guide, as the constellation of the southern hemisphere replaced the northern star constellations. This stary ceiling seemed much brighter to the eye and much closer to earth than the one in the northern hemisphere.

Young and carefree sailors spent their time performing various allocated tasks. They did so in harmony and solidarity that grew out of their mutual love of the sea, their youth, and their shared hardihood.

The men spent their free time catching fish, using discarded food as bait. The captain did not object to these activities, and the cook Mato did not complain about having to prepare a good home recipe of “brudet” <fish stew>.

As the ship got closer to the Cape of Good Hope, the wind grew stronger and stronger, raising furious, foaming waves. The captain issued an order to hold the ship away from the coast. The wind speed kept increasing. The crew lowered almost all their sails. The sound of the roaring waves and the whistling of the wind made it impossible to hear even the closest friend.

The ship rose, driven high by the waves, and then it descended, as if from the top of a hill, downwards towards the depths, only to rise again trembling, squeaking, and moaning. The waves washed and covered the deck like raging demons seizing everything in their path and dragging it to depths. People tied themselves with ropes to stay in the places where they were needed. Crossing the deck was impossible. One had to wait for the right moment when the ship was in the correct position and then use the rope tied tautly from the stern to the ship’s bow to cross to the other side. The sharp and experienced eye of captain Vlaho judged the height, direction, and wave power. He gave orders with a strong, reassuring voice to the helmsman who, tied to his wheel, managed with abrupt and quick movements to avoid the blows of the powerful waves. The ship’s fate and its entire crew depended on these two men’s quick-thinking skills, speed, and experience. One clumsy and reckless movement could send them all to the abyss. In this unequal struggle between a small walnut shell of the ship and the raging ocean, the *Stefano* skilfully avoided the blows of its enemy.

When the ship rushed into the trough of the wave and the bow plunged into the water all the way to the first mast, the young and inexperienced sailors thought this was their last hour. The waves roared, threatened, foamed, and toyed with the small vessel, never allowing the men to catch their breath, to pause, or to rest. In their thoughts, the young men recalled their homeland, the sunny Dalmatian towns, and villages, and silently they bid farewell to their family and friends.

The land-bound people can’t imagine this struggle with the sea. Battlefield, assault, man-to-man combat, these are all minuscule compared to Man’s struggle with the ocean. To survive and be able to describe this experience is wondrous and magnificent.

The *Stefano* was moving at 3 to 4 knots of speed and was about 300 miles away from land. An outline of some English ship sailing in the same direction appeared in the light mist and then disappeared from the view again.

The storm lasted eight days. Its rage slowly dissipated, and by 9 September, it had completely died down. After the superhuman exertion, sleepless nights, and hunger, the exhausted mariners gave a sigh of relief. The fear of the younger men melted away. This difficult initiation brought them even closer to their older and more experienced companions, who had been through many such ordeals and storms before. These companions found the sea to be the sole purpose for their existence, and for them, the sea had become both the dearest friend and the fiercest enemy.

With all its sails unfurled, the *Stefano* sailed gracefully towards the Island of St. Paul.

2. FROM THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE TO THE COAST OF AUSTRALIA

After they had rested, the crew began to repair the damage inflicted by the storm on the ship. Even the slightest little thing did not escape Grga's experienced eye. Everything had to be restored to its designated place. Each rope and there were hundreds of them, of various thicknesses and length, had their place, and Grga knew it. He knew its purpose as well as the purpose of each piece of ship's equipment. He knew the ship like the palm of his hand. Men like Grga, who could not read or write, oversaw the outfitting of new ships, not forgetting the slightest rope, frog¹, or a wedge. Under Grga's supervision, the *Stefano* was soon in perfect working order again.

Cutting the water at 10 knots, the *Stefano* was getting nearer to its destination. The persistent clear sky heralded the arrival of spring.

The guards changed every four hours. The busiest men on the vessel were the helmsman and the officer on guard. The off-duty sailors would gather on deck to wash laundry, mend clothes, and converse with one another.

-“What are you discussing in such a lively fashion?” - asked the officer Karlo Costa. The crew greatly appreciated him for his considerate and fraternal demeanour.

- “These young ones,” replied the older sailor Thomas Dediol, “talk about their homes, homeland, families, and their fiancées. Some curious people ask how the Chinese look. Imagine, Jurić asking if Chinese are cannibals!”

Patting Jurić on the shoulder and laughing cheerfully, the officer said to him: - “We are still a long way from home. We're only just on our way to China. I've been there once before, and I am still alive, Jurić! You don't have to fear Chinese. They are wonderful people, more enlightened than we Europeans. I became acquainted with one of their educated countrymen, who spoke good English. He told me he had been to Europe once and could not but marvel at our customs. After descending from the ship to the shore, he was greeted, he told me, by some grim, unkind men, with girded sabres. They shuffled all his luggage to determine if he was carrying a weapon!”

The conversation continued in this fashion. Each sailor added some thoughts or experiences and, in this way, complemented the figure of a Chinese man.

Time in the conversation had passed quickly, and the change of crew was about to take place. Captain Costa got up from his seat to leave, punctuating his departure with a jocular dare: “So, who among you young men <*momci*> is afraid of storms?”

- “I am,” cadet Bačić readily replied.

- “I can see we have a real hero here!” teased the oldest helmsman Sretko Bučić . “You have no idea how lucky you are to be sailing on a new barque. Our sails are new, as are our masts. They can survive the most severe of storms. And what would you have done, young man, on an older vessel if you saw the wind rip and tear away the sails, snap the masts, and the ship is full of water? The crew had to pump water day and night without a break until they fell with exhaustion. You are yet to learn what a seaman has to live through and endure on a sea voyage!”

- "I believe you, even if it is unbelievable," Bačić replied. "But Captain," he continued by addressing Captain Karlo <Costa> "why is it that in school we were never told about our mariners? Our newspapers do not write about them".

- "You ask for a reason? The land-bound writers and journalists are not interested in lives and misfortunes of our mariners. They listen to our stories with disbelief. We sailors do not know how to write what we feel, when we sit on the porch in the cool of the house, when we converse among ourselves, old and exhausted. We believe one another and understand one another. Our children believe us. They retell our memories that recall the courage of their fathers, grandfathers, and compatriots. Perhaps a worthy pen will arise that will tell the world of the unspoken and unseen events and the heroism of our mariners."

- Bačić could no longer hide his secret: "Captain, I have recorded everything that has happened on our ship from the day of our departure. I will continue to do so if you allow it. I would never want to forget my first voyage and my first storm."

The bell rang for the new crew to take their place, and Captain Karlo hurried off to take his place on the watch. The conversation among the seamen continued. Every one of them wanted their young mate to record their own story.

- "My father drowned somewhere near the coast of England. I was eight years old" said Božidar Vulović. "Of the entire crew, only two died: my father and another person from the Island of Lošinj."

- "How could that have happened? Tell me about it, Božidar!"

"Men, it's all the fault of poverty and misery. The storm threw the ship onto a protruding rock near the shore. The sailors cut the mast and propped one end across to the shore. This is how they saved themselves, taking only what they had on them. You must know that the shipowners do not worry much about sailors when the ship is lost. Their only concern is to dispatch the men home again² What do they care that the shipwrecked men need to return to seafaring! As if it is easy for poor men to outfit themselves with clothes and other attire again? My father felt uneasy. He was tormented by the thought that all his miserable possessions would be lost with the ship: waterproof boots and a coat from Marseilles. How would he get these again? He and a mate of his decided to return to the ship on the mast again to save from the ship's hold all that could be saved. Their companions on the shore watched with apprehension as the two waited for the right moment to return to the ship. No one tried to stop them. They nearly succeeded had it not been for the ferocious waves that drew the ship to the water's depth. Men, is it humane, that no one compensates the sailor for his loss, that no one thinks of his poor widow and orphans? "

- "In our village, there is not one family that the sea has not wrapped in black", added Thomas Dediol, "either the father or the son ... And people still try to persuade you to get married! Well, brothers, why would you get married only to leave your wife and children at the mercy or malice of strangers? I have passed thirty and do not intend to marry. Before my eyes, I always see my poor mother. She married at the age of twenty. My father lived with her for less than a month and then went to sea. He left her with an elderly and odd mother-in-law and father-in-law. She had to raise chickens, pigs, and sheep because the household was untenable without these. Seamen need woollen socks, under-shirts, and covering. With us, sheep do not go to pastures. It is necessary to go to the field and cut grass and collect hay for the winter. It is

necessary to go to the forest, that was distant some hours of walking, and then bring a heavy load of holy for sheep and for the fireplace. The newlywed bride had to do all of this, and instead of being greeted with “Good Morning” she is greeted by her father-in-law with the question, “Have you fed the animals?”

The father-in-law demands that even the smallest plot of land be cultivated, and the bride and the mother-in-law, if they are able, had to dig the fields, plant, and grow. Not an hour of rest and peace. Even in the evening, there was wool to spin, knit, mend, while their eyes were heavy with fatigue, and the bruised hard hands could barely hold the needle.

II

Every second year the man returns home. Each of his visits means another child ... There were six of us, six heavy burdens on the back of one mother. I always remember those terrible nights when the <cold northerly wind> *bura* raged outside, or the south wind roared. Mother would go upstairs, and instead of going to sleep, she would stare long into the black night and cry while praying.

The poor thing thought that the storm was raging across all seas and that my father at that moment was in mortal danger. How could she be calm? Every day black news came to the village and enveloped the little houses of sailors with sorrow.

Despite all of this, our men continue to marry, and our girls continue to be married. There is no more pitiable creature than an unmarried woman in a poor seaside house. Even so, widows do not starve to death. With the help of the locals, they somehow bring up their orphans. And when the boys turn twelve or thirteen, they leave for the “call of the wind” as we did ...”

“Stop it! Enough of misery and trouble,” Jurić interjected. “It’s not like that everywhere. As soon as I save a little, I’ll go home and get married. Not everyone goes to the sea here in Oskorušno. People there cultivate the land and don’t leave it to women. Enough of your grief! It’s time to break up.

The *Stefano*, in the meantime, flew like a proud swan across the vast Indian Ocean. In 25 days, it had crossed the distance from Cape of Good Hope to the Island of St. Paul,³ but due to the thick fog at this locality, it was not possible to make observations with a sextant nor regulate the chronometer.

At the beginning of October, it was determined from the map that the *Stefano* was approaching the Australian coast. It was now necessary to carry out the observations that were missed when passing the Island of St. Paul. This was necessary as the captain decided to enter the Pacific Ocean through the Ombai Strait and sail through the southern part of the Philippine Islands. On 26 October, at noon, the crew of the *Stefano* saw the Australian coast. The *Stefano* then headed northwest to stay away from the shore and to avoid its insidious coral reefs.

The guards took turns in the pre-established order. The *Stefano* was now sailing, carried by a slightly stronger wind. The sailors on guard were vigilantly watching the ship’s progress. Shortly before midnight, hungry and tired, Officer Osojnak went down to the ship’s small

saloon cabin to have a drink of black coffee. With a cup of coffee and a good cigarette, he stayed in conversation with Jurić. The cabin was unusually quiet; the roar of the wind and the creaking of the masts barely reached them, but the danger lay in ambush, silent and insidious.

When the clock struck half past two after midnight, the officer made his way slowly to the deck, putting out a burnt cigarette. At that moment, a violent quake shook the vessel and threw him on a pile of ropes. With the sudden halt the ship began to shiver like a man in pre-death convulsions. White waves, which from a distance looked like soft, combed wool, hid sharp coral reefs beneath them. Like the horns of a raging bull, they sank into the hips of the proud ship, which leaned now to one side now to the other until countless ropes trembled. The fluttering of the sails heightened the anxiety, and the feeling that the ship was in extreme danger took over the crew, who rushed to the deck worried and stunned and hurried to carry out the captain's orders. They unfurled all the sails and pulled them to the wind, hoping that the wind would extract the ship out of its predicament, but all the efforts of the crew were in vain. The coral reef held its prey tightly.

"To the pumps!" was the captain's new order, but the pumps no longer worked. The wind, however, grew stronger, and the storm waves were pounding against the ship with ever greater ferocity. The *Stefano* was shaking, thrashing its hull against the rock. It was obvious that the ship would fail and that the catastrophe could no longer be avoided or remedied. Men understood and felt their predicament because, despite all their efforts, the ship kept filling up with water, creaking, breaking, and slowly sinking.

"To the boats!" A cry rang out. At such a moment, one cannot think about whether there will be time and opportunities to lash the pulleys, raise the boats and lower them over the guard rails into the sea. At such a time, men jump into boats without asking if the boat can survive the raging sea, which at any moment can swallow both the boat and the people in it forever. Without losing his composure, the brave Perančić climbed the mast and secured the pulleys on the rigging so that the boat could be lowered with them.

While the lifeboat was still secured, the sailors quickly placed some food, water barrels, and clothing. The weakest and youngest members of the crew were the first to board the lifeboat. But except for Henry, a young Englishman, no one else managed to get into it. The boat had just started to be winched when a huge wave flooded the deck, took the lifeboat only to slam it against the ship's railing. The wreckage, and Henry's body, was scattered by the waves before his startled and helpless comrades. The mass of water carried with it everything that was not attached. Huge waves also took Perančić as he descended the mast. No more commands were heard. Individuals fought the waves as best they could. They tied themselves to the poles, masts, railings, waiting anxiously, if and when the next wave would bring them the fate of Groiss and Perančić.

Helping himself to a wooden ladder, Antončić threw himself into the sea with it, followed by Captain Kosta and Cadet Bačić. Furious waves toyed with them, as with straw. Only one of them, Bačić, manages to resist their rage and return to the ship again. Clinging desperately to the ship, which lay on its side, he saw a huge hill of water rolling towards him, as if foaming at the mouth. But this time, the wave brought him salvation. Lifting him to its top, the rolling hill of water carried him so high that he managed to grab a piece of iron protruding from the hull of the ship.

The reappearance of Bačić, who was considered lost, raised new hopes and gave courage to his comrades. Taking advantage of an opportune moment, the remaining sailors lowered the small boat. After loading it with some food and some nautical instruments, they quickly launched themselves from the ship. Before departing, they threw some remaining food and equipment into the water, hoping that the sea would wash it all ashore. On this occasion, the big waves caught the small, fragile boat in a swirl and capsized it as before. Only two hands reappeared again to seize the overturned boat. Bačić did not hear the last cry of his comrades Miloslavić and Osojnak, he did not see their struggle with the raging ocean, nor their hands, reaching out for help before they disappeared into the depths. Two brave hearts of two young men vanished forever in the vortex of unmerciful ocean waves.⁴

Through the roar of the wind and the noise of the waves, Bačić thought he heard a voice, but exhausted from the long struggle, he did not have the strength to climb on the back of the boat, let alone come to anyone's aid. The voice kept getting closer, and as in a dream, Bačić became aware that someone else was trying to reach the boat. It was Dediol. He was wearing a lifeboat that helped him resist the force of the waves. Gathering some strength, the two decided to upright the boat. When their efforts succeeded, they climbed into the boat, which was constantly filling with water. It was impossible to empty the water - they didn't have anything to do with it. Rowing with hands and with an effort to maintain balance, they endeavoured to reach the land. The waves upturned the boat a few times along the way, but they managed to upright it again. A sudden onslaught of waves dealt the boat a fatal blow, slamming it against the reef and tearing its bottom.

Holding on to the wreckage of their boat, the men did not abandon the effort to reach the shore. The sea was still rolling huge waves. Thick black clouds began to lighten and disperse, driven by a strong wind. Soon the sky was almost clear, and the glow of the Morning Star gave new strength to the exhausted men. Their goal was close. The dark outlines of the land rose from the sea of foam. At that moment, the men realized their ship had been sailing in the wrong direction and that it was by no means 75 miles west of the coast as the crew on the Stefano had thought. They were nearing total exhaustion from the constant swimming and the struggle to stay afloat. All efforts to move the tired and stifled limbs were now in vain. Their arms and legs were motionless. They were almost certain that death would find them there, within reach of the shore, but the sudden appearance of a white object, which to the shipwrecked looked like the sail of a ship, gave them renewed hope of salvation. At their call for help, the object came closer and closer until they could make out it was Captain Costa who lay on a whiteboard up to his waist in the sea. The unfortunate men lost hope that help was coming, but the joy of finding one living friend was great. This sad wreckage was now getting closer and closer to the mainland. It was carrying three still living shipwreck survivors, whose only thought, and desire were to reach the mainland as soon as possible, to lie down and stretch out on a firm and dry ground, and never let go of it again.

Could they think of anything else? Not once did they think of their wrecked ship nor the comrades who were still on it. These men remained on the sinking ship until the masts began to break when the risk of being drawn into the depths of the ocean became all too evident. As soon as it was light, the crew hurriedly left the sinking wreckage. They mounted small rafts, pieces of beams and soon disappeared from each other's sight. The rough sea made it difficult to stick together as a group or even follow one another.

After the strenuous battle, which lasted eighteen hours without a break, the exhausted sailors reached the shore at dusk. Without a word, they helped each other, falling and stumbling with fatigue. Antončić arrived completely naked. His comrades took off some of their own wet and torn clothes and handed them to him. Their weary eyes kept closing. The cold penetrated to the very bones. With great effort, they dug a ditch in the warm sand. With their bare hands, they lay down into it and buried themselves with sand. In a deep sleep, which brought refreshment and peace to their miserable and emaciated bodies, they forgot all their troubles. Their happiness in reaching the mainland was so great that they did not even think what awaited them on that deserted sandy shore without food and water. None of them knew where they were. Captain Costa guessed they were somewhere in north-western Australia.⁵

The rest in the warm sand restored their strength. Reunited on the morning of 28 October, their first thoughts were to search the coast for more crew members.

Jurić's injured leg did not allow him to walk, so they left him at the place where they had spent the night. Half a mile to the north, they saw the body in the sand. It was Brajević, lying unconscious, eyes closed. Discovering that he was still breathing, his comrades hurriedly set to work helping him regain his consciousness, which they soon succeeded in doing.

“It's you, brothers!” whispered the poor man, opening his heavy eyelids, but could not move from exhaustion. Happy to have found one of their shipwrecked mates, they carried him in their arms to where Jurić lay, and then they set off along the shore, hoping to find some food. Hope did not fail them: the sea brought a considerable amount of food in buckets and bottles. They found flour, oil, fat, wine, beans, and other things. Dragging this precious treasure to dry land, they quickly opened a bottle of wine and refreshed themselves with a good drop while dividing the other things they found. At the very moment when they set off for their camp, they sighted among the wreckage of the *Stefano* washed ashore by the waves, another comrade. He lay there motionless but was alive. It was Vulović. They gave him wine and encouraged him by saying they were now saved. As he could neither get up nor walk, they left him to rest and then set about collecting crabs, which were crawling on the sand. It was their first meal after more than 40 hours, and these raw crabs tasted like the finest treat. Wandering further, they found two more barrels of wine, and soon after, the greatest treasure they could imagine and want - a barrel full of water.

III

A step away from the shoreline, amidst pieces of wreckage, lay the corpse of Radović still holding to a wooden board. Death probably cut him down right there at the shore, thus saving him from the terrible torments of slow death, to which his surviving comrades were later subjected. At that moment, they were still rejoicing in life, and the untimely death of their dead friend moved them painfully.

They laid him in a ditch, dug in the sand. Depressed and silent, they left the place, each thinking of their dead friend. Afterward, they returned to Vulović again and took him to the “camp”. There they set to work building a shelter from the wreckage of the unfortunate “Stefano.”

Having no tools, they just arranged boards against one another to at least protect themselves from the wind and moisture.

The night was quiet. The wind had almost completely stopped blowing, and the sea had calmed down. At dawn, they were awakened by the blazing tropical sun, which, as it approached noon, began to burn the deserted sandy beach mercilessly. The heat became more and more unbearable, with no trees or caves nearby where the men could take shelter. It became imperative to arrange some protection and build some shelter. During the night, wreckage from the ship was washed ashore near their resting place. From the wreckage, they drew out what they needed. Someone dragged a mast with sails, and while searching, they found parts of the boat, parts of the cabin, a broken table, ladders, boxes, broken parts of the hull. They also found the captain's sextant and letters from the shipowner addressed to the captain. But the richest treasure of that day was the boatswain's chest. It contained two coats, shirts, a box of needles and thread, two planes, and about 18 meters of cloth.

Delighted by this discovery, the shipwrecked men diligently set about building their dwelling. Having neither any nails nor tools, they tied parts of the hut with ropes. While some men set to work on the erection of the hut, others went to work to prepare hot food for them.

In the boatswain's chest, they found a small tin box with gunpowder in it. Captain Costa tried to set it alight with a sextant lens. Some twigs and dry leaves were quickly collected, and the shipwrecked men waited impatiently for the fire to light. They all tried in turn, and when all attempts to light the fire failed, Bačić too jumped in to try. The gunpowder did light up, followed by an explosion because they put more gunpowder than was needed. The lens flew away in pieces, and the flames set Bačić's clothes alight.

"Fire! Fire!" cried the starving sailors, not noticing their friend was in trouble. His right arm was burnt. Only later, when the first excitement passed, did they jump in to help him. From their supplies, they brought oil and a piece of linen and bandaged his burn.

Now Mato, the cook, had his hands full. Kneading the dough, he placed it in a can, which they found on the shore. The baked dough had the smell and taste of oil paint, which used to be in the can. There was some sand in it, also, but with a piece of salty meat, it was a sweet meal to the tired and hungry shipwrecked men. They tried to ration their supplies because no one knew how much longer they had to endure in that deserted land? Will anyone come to their aid, or will they slowly starve to death when they run out of their meagre food supplies? These troubled thoughts swarmed around their heads and made bitter their little meal for many of them.

They all knew that their kinfolks at home were eagerly awaiting news from Hong Kong, which would not reach them. No one in the world knew their fate, and it was uncertain if anyone would ever find out and come looking for them?

"Ah, if only you knew what weighs on my heart!" - Vulović sighed.

"As it does with all of us, my friend," Dediol declared.

"Don't despair, comrades!" Captain Costa encouraged them. "I assure you we will be saved. I think I know where we are. There is likely to be some settlement of white people somewhere

on this coast, north or south. We will go on a reconnaissance. For now, you need to keep the fire going. We must not let it go out.

We will set up a guard - as on the ship. There will be a shift every four hours. We don't have a clock, but I'll teach you how to follow the stars. In the beginning, it will be hard, but you'll soon get used to it. Who will be on guard first?

"I'll do it tonight," Zanetović offered.

"And I'll go after you," Jurić added, "as in any case, I cannot sleep from my aches."

"Please wake me when your guard duty is done - I will be third!" Bačić pleaded, always ready to contribute.

* * *

The morning sun woke the shipwrecked men, and they hurried to prepare breakfast. There was an abundance of wood; pieces of the *Stefano*, dried up by the bright sun, happily crackled and blazed away. In the container emptied of the salted meat, they cooked a few handfuls of beans mixed with flour. Refreshed by this first meal, the mariners went looking around to see if they could find any tracks or signs of human settlement. Some of them settled on the reef to fish, with hooks found in the boatswain's chest.

The days passed in constant search and the hope of rescue. They continually looked to the sea for signs of a saving sail. They took turns to guard the fire. The food containers were getting empty, and the water in the barrel was disappearing. The bread was baked on embers, hard and miserable.

On the last day of October, Kosta and Bačić were guarding the fire while waiting for their friend Bučić, who had just gone to get some water. Unaware of anything, loaded with buckets that were banging and rattling, Bučić walked next to Dediol, who was about to take over the guarding of the water barrel. Deep in conversation, they did not immediately notice the strange-looking group of people coming towards them. About fifty natives were now so close to them that they didn't know what to do. It was no longer possible to escape. The thought flashed through their minds: cannibals! Terrible people from sailor stories and imagination were now approaching their camp! There was nowhere for them to hide, and the long spears of the natives gleamed menacingly in the sunlight.

Suddenly, Jurić appeared in their midst as he was collecting crabs for bait nearby. Encouraging each other, they headed for the barrel of water to save it. But the natives had already reached the barrel. It appeared as if they had never seen one before, for they now stood beside it — and watched it in astonishment, looking at it from all sides. They seemed to think it was a toy and started rolling it along the shore. The barrel rolled, bouncing and bouncing on the rocks with the happy merriment of the natives. This shook the frightened sailors. The thought that the natives might break the barrel and spill the water dispelled their fears. The men approached the natives and tried to explain what was in the barrel and how much they needed it. They used all the languages and all the signs they knew. The natives did come to understand the signs. They abandoned the game with the barrel and headed south, in the direction where Costa and Bačić were sitting by the fire guarding it.

When he first saw this strange procession, the frightened Bačić quickly hid in the hut. Costa, in contrast, went to meet the visitors calmly and confidently. Smiling, without fear, he approached them and began to speak all the languages he knew. He tried to explain the misfortune of the *Stefano* and the dire circumstances of its crew, but all that these nomadic people understood was that the white men were hungry, so they offered Kosta some of their food. All his attempts to find out their location on the Australian coast were in vain. The natives did not understand what he wanted.

One little native suddenly called out. He sighted something among the reefs and was soon twisting a small piece of colourful paper in his hand. Costa approaching him and quickly realized that it was a piece of a map of the northwest coast of Australia. His eyes lit up with joy. Unable to speak, he just looked at his comrades, who came to him. He surmised that the map to salvation was in his hand.

In his estimate, the Gascoyne River was about 100 miles south of where they were located. He speculated that on the river shores, there was likely to be a settlement of Europeans. He did not think about the distance they would have to cover, nor did he consider the inaccuracy of his assumptions.

“Don’t despair, brothers!” He shouted to his companions. “Salvation is near. We only need to cover eighty miles, and we will be saved. That is no more than eight or ten days of travel!”⁶

“Saved! Saved! Let’s go now!” Cried the enraptured castaways, and there was no end to their joy. They spent the rest of the day preparing and planning for the long journey, seeing already in their playful imagination the vast river and many sailing ships coming to meet them to take them to Perth, and thence to their native land. All the pain and suffering they had endured no longer existed - in the memory of those men. Everything seemed to have become a distant past. Their thoughts flew to the future, conjuring up images of life in their homeland.

In the evening, the natives headed inland singing their tunes. Our men followed them for some time until they were lost in a northerly direction. Following the fortunate encounter with this harmless native tribe, the shipwrecked men came across a large quantity of red-black sweet bean, which served as their main food.

The first day of November dawned quietly and cheerful. The sea surface was calm, with only an occasional light wave washing over the reef and bubbling softly. The shipwreck men got up at dawn and happily began preparing for the trip. They dug deep ditches in the sand and buried all that was not need on their journey. Everything needed for the trip was prepared: wine, bottles of water, flour, beans, and meat. They could not carry enough water with them but were hoping to come across a spring. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, they set off on a journey into the unknown, hoping to catch some fish, crabs, and shellfish along the way.

Leaving their shelter brought them no sadness. Everyone was impatient to reach their destination as soon as possible. No one looked back at the remains of the *Stefano*’s cabin, which sheltered them and with the door on which Costa on departure had engraved the names of all the dead and surviving members of the ship’s crew. The fire, which had been carefully guarded until then, was now extinguished. The empty camp was abandoned.

They moved slowly inland with their legs wrapped in bandages made of sailcloth to protect them from insect bites, sharp rocks, and thorny bushes. They were lured by the green area

ahead, which from a distance looked as if it was covered with tall green grass. The closer they got to that green space, the stronger their desire for shade grew, as the blazing tropical sun and scorching sandy soil exhausted their strength. After a long walk, they found no desired shade or soft grass. Disappointed, they came across a thicket full of thorns and thistles, which hindered their progress. Sharp and thick thorns wounded his legs and arms and tore the last remains of worn-out clothes.

The heat was becoming unbearable. The men unfurled the only sheet they had and carried it over their heads like a huge parasol, but the tropical sun still scorched through it. Wearing this sheet made many of them tired, and the wounds on their legs burned severely. With all that, they continued on their way.

Fatigue and unbearable heat increased their thirst, and when, in addition to all their suffering, the water supply came to an end, they began to waver. Only the hope that they might come across some source of water kept them going. They now tried to consume as little as possible of their supplies.

They never lost sight of the sea so that from time to time, they could go down to the shore to satisfy their hunger with crabs and shells.

Captain Costa, who usually encouraged and persuaded his comrades on this journey, collapsed from physical exhaustion haunted by the thought that all their efforts were in vain. No longer able to move his bloody, swollen legs, he threw himself on the ground and decided not to move anymore. The thought that he was leading his comrades to death and not salvation deprived him of all strength and the will to struggle further. But seeing the faces of his discouraged comrades, who carefully bent down to look at him and help him, he tried to give them strength again and lift their spirits.

“Don’t despair that I can’t go forward. I’m going to die here, but you have to keep going. Help each other. I am only one, and there are many of you. Bačiću, comrade, if you or any of you are saved and see our homeland and homes again, don’t forget - I implore you - to call upon my mother and Amalia. Tell them that when I died, I thought of them and died with their names on my lips.”

Captain Costa’s determined voice did not tremble, but his words were full of sadness and longing. His comrades’ eyes filled with tears. Bačić, Costa’s closest friend, was the first to recover and decisively declared:

“No, you will not be left alone to die abandoned by us. Please gather strength and get up! Let’s move on. Maybe salvation is not far away. If you can’t go, I’m strong. I’ll carry you on my back.”

IV

“We will all help,” the other men pledged, wiping away tears from moist eyes with their bruised and calloused hands.

After a rest and encouraged by their sincere companionship, devotion, and sacrifice, Costa rose on his swollen, trembling legs. Carrying him on the way more than supporting him, the small party set off, surrendering to the captain's guidance. The farther they went, the more convinced Costa became that their wanderings were in vain and that they would never reach their desired destination. The fear that everyone would perish miserably on this arduous journey under the searing and relentless rays of the tropical sun constantly spoiled his mood. He hid this fear deep in his thoughts so as not to upset and discourage his companions again. Maybe, he thought, some of them will succeed in saving themselves, although he couldn't convince himself who or how it could happen.

After several days of torturous wandering, the wounded and tired travellers reached Cape Anderson⁷, and on 7 November, they crossed the Tropic of Capricorn. With great difficulty, they struggled onwards. Continually someone would lag behind to rest and gather strength, barely able to drag his wounded legs, while others would pause to wait for him. Crossing only a few meters from the cape, they were forced to stop again. Bučić, Vulović, and Jurić were no longer able to move forward. All efforts of others to get them back on their feet were unsuccessful, and they did not know what to do: leave the three comrades and go in search of water, which may not be far away, or for everyone to stay there, and risk deaths from starvation and thirst. Deciding on the former, they left their helpless friends with some water, wine, and beans, previously received from the natives.

Retaining only a small amount of water and flour, they continued on their way. Stumbling and crawling through sharp and thorny bushes, they tracked all day and the next night until hungry and exhausted they sat down in some cave. Water was nowhere to be found. There was no grass to eat, no beans, no roots. Their energies were exhausted to the point that they could no longer carry even the few kilograms of flour they still had left. They were forced to bury it in the ground. Dediol dug a deep pit with his hands and buried their small, broken barrel in it. Filling in the sand on the top, he marked the spot with a couple of dry twigs, so they could later find their hiding place. At dawn the next day, they continued with their journey. There was no water anywhere. The supplies were getting closer to the end. Finding a cave nearby, they entered it and stretched out in the much-coveted shade, crushed by fatigue and hunger.⁸

The hope of salvation completely abandoned them. Hunger and thirst threw them into hopeless despair. They had already reconciled themselves to death in that shady shelter when the slight rustling of the bushes caught their attention. They held their breath, awaiting something to happen. At the very entrance to the cave, two tall, armed natives appeared in front of them as if arising from the ground. The sharp spears and the rugged appearance of these figures did not frighten the shipwrecked men. Their sufferings and misfortune were so great that even the nearness of death could not make it worse. Death might even bring them relief. Detached, motionless, they watched the Aboriginal men move, expecting their attack, but they, it seemed, had no hostile intentions. Instead, they gently approached the white men, looking at them in a friendly manner. Peering everywhere, as if searching or investigating, they constantly muttered something in their intricate language, showing each other empty bottles and containers. They seemed to realize that these poor whites needed help. Their exhausted, pale faces with swollen eyes and mouths dry with thirst begged them silently for a drop of water. Judging by the waving of hands and shouts, the natives wanted to explain something to them.

Observing them carefully, the shipwrecked men finally understood.

“Follow us! They spoke. Encouraged by their friendly attitude, the men went with them.

After climbing a hill, they reached a narrow-trodden path, which led them into a valley overgrown with soft and lush grass. There were flowers and water here. After wandering through the hot sandy desert, full of sharp stones and thorny plants, this was a vision of paradise, a miraculous dream. And when, not far from here, the natives stopped at a branch-covered opening in the ground and began to dig up the sand, which was getting wetter the deeper they dug it, the thirsty and extenuated men felt the proximity of water. At a depth of some five feet, a stream of clear, cold water appeared. The water was there at their feet. They felt like going go mad with joy. They drank to their heart's content. Thinking that perhaps this was just a dream, they dipped their bruised hands into it and sipped from their clasped palms. They then hurried to fill their empty bottles and cans to return as soon as possible to their helpless comrades they had left in the sand.

Indigenous nomadic tribes of the Australian mainland, on their constant wanderings from end to end, have revealed the secret of their desert. If you dig deeper in the sand, drinking water is often found. Narrow-trodden paths lead to such springs. One such spring had now saved our shipwrecked men. Now, these half-naked, primitive people were trying to explain to Dediol and others that they would like to get some of their flour. They were persistent and could not be denied. A good turn had to be returned, even if the sacrifice risked death by starvation.

After received the white powder, the natives hurried into the bushes. In a few minutes, they came back with a handful of dried twigs. Breaking off two sticks of wood, one of them started rubbing them together. To everyone's surprise, sparks soon ignited the dry leaves, and the flame played among the dried, crackling twigs. Finding a hollowed-out stone, the natives hurriedly set out to mix the dough. Pouring some water and flour into the hollow of the stone, they easily mixed the dough and then placed it on the embers. In a short while, they skilfully took it out of their "stove". It was really well done. To the astonishment of the shipwrecked men, the natives walked to Captain Costa and, with outstretched hands, offered the bread while indicating in signs that he should take it. No one expected this, and their gracious gesture deeply moved the shipwrecked men. These primitive people, as yet untouched by civilization, shamed these "cultured" whites with their selfless nobility.

Costa accepted the bread and thanked them for it with signs. Cutting the bread into as many pieces as were present, he offered these first to natives and then to his comrades. A small but warm meal of bread with plenty of fresh water was pleasing to our famished travellers. The natives looked at the faces of our men with satisfaction, just like small children when they peek into the faces of their elders to read on them an expression of satisfaction or praise for the work done.

On departure, they explained something for some time, gesturing with their hands, perhaps describing the direction in which they would go. Our men accompanied them for a few steps before deciding to go to the aid of the remaining three stragglers. Bačić was assigned to go and look for the flour, which Dediol had previously hidden. Two men were to stay near the water and wait for others to return.

Although *convinced* of the goodness and nobility of the natives, Bačić set out on his way with himself following in the footsteps of two native men. Seeing him, they smiled and exclaimed, "*Bulava, bulava?*"

Bačić knew that they were calling for the flour and repeated the same word to assure them that he, too, was looking for it and had no other intentions. He felt at fault with two of them in front of him as if by sneaking behind them, he wanted to deceive them. Accordingly, he stepped in front of them and led them to the “*bulava*”, intending to give them a portion. But turning around, he was startled when he discovered that the natives had disappeared. Frightened by this sudden disappearance, he rushed headlong towards his destination so that he could quickly return to his comrades when he almost ran into three wild giants armed with spears. Not knowing what to do, he threw himself on his knees out of fear and cried out for mercy. But the astonished giants slowly retreated from him, unable to understand what the strange white man wanted. Recovering himself, Bačić went on to look for the barrel. With trembling hands, he dug up the sand. The barrel was there, in its place, but - empty! Sad and worried, he went back. The sea was calm. There, among the reefs, a native was moving, now crawling, now running. He fixed his gaze on a point and moved carefully towards it, stepping into the sea, and pointing his spear. Not long after, a turtle fluttered in his big hands. Only then did the native person notice Bačić and, with a confused laugh, hid his catch.

When Bačić arrived at the new camp of his companions, the sun was already setting. It was getting dark, following short equatorial dusk. After consuming some sea snails and shells that Costa had collected along the shore, the men dug up their sand beds and lay down to rest. The soft, warm sand was softer and warmer to them than the most beautiful quilt. And while the younger ones were fast asleep and dreaming, their older comrades could not sleep. Black and heavy thoughts tormented their exhausted bodies and drove them away from a rejuvenating sleep.

During this time, the three men who exhausted remained in the sand set out at night in the direction they hoped would take them to their comrades. The men walked all night and the next morning, and just as their strength was beginning to fail them, strange shouting and commotion drew their attention. A group of about 50 natives was walking towards them.

Addressing them calmly, the men drew attention to their dire condition and signalled what they needed. The natives picked the men up from the ground and gave them water; after waiting for them to rest for a while, they invited them to come along. On reaching a nearby hill, they sat down and lit a fire by rubbing dry twigs. Quite soon, a hearty meal of baked fish was ready. After eating to the brim, the invigorated sailors again remembered where they were going. They were now afraid of losing their comrades. Using all possible signs, they tried to explain to the native men what was troubling them. Jurić showed them the footprints in the sand and demonstrated what they were looking for by following their trail. The prints in the sand were clear, and some natives immediately began to follow them. Jurić and his two friends tracked along with the other natives <until they reached an > open meadow. Here remains of a recent feast were still quite visible, suggesting it to be a meeting place of the native tribes. That meadow was surrounded by a forest, with a steep crater of an extinct volcano rising in the middle. On its eastern side, bordered by tall, lush grass, a running brook was murmuring along.

The meeting must have been pre-arranged because another group of about 80 men, women, and children shortly appeared. Armed, stout, and grim natives shouted incomprehensible words.

“Brothers!” cried someone from that terrifying gathering, and a tanned man ran towards them. Not having time to think whether it was a dream or reality, their arms were hugging - Perančić. Yes, indeed, the living and healthy Perančić, their friend, whom they thought was lying at the

bottom of the sea. He was again with them, hugging them as if in some madness, from too much happiness and joy.

“When I was trying to hitch the lifeboat, a huge wave hit me and took me with it,” Perančić told them excitedly as he had everyone eating each one of his words. ‘The boat had shattered into pieces, but at the last moment, I reached for a piece of wreckage and desperately clung to it. The waves carried me all night and the next morning. It was not until the following evening, exhausted and half-frozen, that I reached the shore. I don’t know where that was, but I think I was a full 10 miles away from you. I took refuge in a cave along the coast and stayed in it for two days without a drop of water or a crumb of food. I just lay and nibbled on the roots of some grass, which was growing in front of the cave. It wasn’t until the third day that I decided to go in search of water. On my wanderings, I came across these native people. You can imagine my fear when I saw their overgrown, dark heads and their spears. But their eyes were calm and gentle.

These good people not only did not attack me but took me to their camp and fed me. Assuming that I was the only survivor, I joined this tribe hoping for some future developments and eventual rescue.

Dear brothers, I am so happy to see you again, and I want to see the others as soon as possible. It still seems to me that this is not real and that I am dreaming. For days, I have been living this unusual life as a dumb friend of the native people. Let’s go as fast as we can!”

After leaving his rescuers and thanking them for their great generosity, Perančić and his comrades headed to the seashore, where they were to wait for others. They barely covered a hundred steps when they came across Dediol and Antončić. These two were in search of their helpless comrades, whom they had left behind in the desert. When they did not find them in the place where they had left them, they thought that something had happened to them.

Seeing their “resurrected” friend made everyone in the camp happy, so the conversation and recollection of the shared suffering lasted well into the night.

V

The conversation among the shipwrecked men became more and more focused. The main theme was almost always the same: what to start and where to go. The next day, sitting in the shade, they touched once more on this burning issue because it was clear to them that they could not stay by the water all the time and that their main goal was to get to the first port. The conviction that the port was not far away gave them strength and determination.

A native couple approached them with inaudible footsteps. The man had a spear, and the woman wore a wooden bowl carved in the shape of a basket on her head. Approaching the shipwrecked, they laid their things on the ground and began to rub their hands. Everyone thought that this was a greeting of some kind.

“*Be voteri*” - they both said, but even Bačić, who was proud of his knowledge of the native language, could not understand them. But as the natives came closer to the sea, it became clear

to the shipwrecked what those words meant. The two were looking for something in the sand. The man dug up a couple of turtle eggs, broke their shells, and made scrambled eggs out of them. His wife added some more herbs and offered them to strangers. In the meantime, her husband was busy with other tasks. He sat down on a rock, laying his spear at his feet, and was carefully peering in all directions. Suddenly he jumped, grabbing his spear, and with quick steps, walked into the sea. Sitting in the shade of the bushes, our men noticed that he had caught something. At the tip of his spear was a beautiful salmon weighing about 5 kilograms. The man danced triumphantly and proudly offered the fish to Bačić, who gratefully shook his hand. But to his great surprise and astonishment, the native abruptly snatched the fish back from his hand.

With a simple stone knife, the native cut off the fish's head which he kept to himself. He then returned the rest of the fish to the surprised Bačić and they all headed for a small hill, where they had left their supply of water and fire. Their dark-skinned companion collected a handful of wood along the way, which he now placed on the fire. Putting the fish's head on a thin twig and roasting it a little, he shared that small meal with his wife while observing our travellers being sweetly nourished by his gift.

Using signs, he then asked to be allowed to take some water from the spring. He filled men's utensils first and only then his wooden bowl. In the end, the couple cheerfully bid goodbye to our shipwrecked men, probably feeling pleased that he had done a good deed. Afterwards, the young Bačić, who liked to "philosophize", thought much about the native tribes, whose representatives they met while on this journey. He remembered their nobility and selflessness and soon concluded that these dark-skinned, simple, and timid natives were most benevolent, sincere, and sensitive.

At dawn on 10 November, the rested travellers resumed their journey toward the imagined river with settlements of white people on its banks. Taking a lot of water with them, they left their little shelter and, full of hope, set off again. To avoid the long and winding curvatures of the coast, they directed themselves over the hill, despite the impassability of such tracks, overgrown with sharp, thorny bushes. Along the way, they found a lot of food, such as ferns, berries, and various other herbs. Yet our travellers were reluctant to go deeper into the woods out of fear of losing their way and often went down to the sea to collect crabs and shells along the shore. They had no more fires. The crabs they caught were eaten raw.

The days passed without much change. They had calculated to have traversed almost half of their journey, and in that hope and belief, they supported each other. One evening, when reaching the top of a hill, they saw the mouth of a river. They cheered with joy, believing that it was finally their much-desired river.

In joyful excitement, they approached their target, convinced that salvation waited ahead. The disappointment was great when they realized that the river was only a product of imagination and of great desire. It turned out to be only a deep arm of the sea.

Recovering to some extent, the extenuated men had to bypass this new obstacle. Hungry, tired, and bloody, they found it difficult to drag along their swollen legs. The shells and crabs were so small now that they could go no longer satisfy their hunger. They were forced to go deeper into the interior of the country. From the ground, they plucked roots of some ferns, which they chewed long and hard.

After crossing Cape Cuvier and the 24th degree of latitude, they were hoping to determine their approximate location, but this proved impossible. As far as the eye could see, there was only the desert and the sea before them. Endless desolation was all they could see.

Despite rationing, their water supply had dwindled. They now moved forward without a word, preoccupied with the same thought. The fear of death brought uneasiness to their hearts. They were afraid to look each other in the eye so as not to show their feeling of fear and horror. Dediol finally broke the heavy silence:

“Men, let’s go back to the water stream! We don’t know where we’re going. We will never get to that river. We will wander like this until we all die of thirst and hunger. Let’s go back!”

Costa, Bačić, and Bučić opposed his proposal, proving that the return is just as difficult and hopeless as the way forward. However, as most wanted to return, the sad procession headed back to the water source.

Resting in the shade, our shipwrecked people spent a couple of happy days. They found a nice cave along the coast, in which they took shelter from the scorching sun, night humidity, and cold. But life had become difficult. There was no food. Tens of meters around the cave, all shells and crustaceans were gone. A new home had to be found. They soon located a place and settled on the meadow, where they first saw Perančić. Here they settled on a daily routine aiming to survive as long as possible until some help arrived. Some took care of their water supply, others collected shells and sea animals, and others took to digging up roots. The hardest to endure was the absence of fire. They used broken dry twigs, as shown by the natives, but all in vain. Nothing worked. They still had gunpowder, so they tried using it, but without success. Finding a piece of iron on the shore, Perančić finally managed to produce a spark. They then placed some beans in a small pot, as they saw the native people do it. Perančić stood by the fire, diligently mixing the food. When the beans were cooked, he grabbed the pot from the fire and began to eat greedily, not inviting or waiting for others, and leaving them not a grain. His comrades were astonished but did not object to him. They went to the shore and looked for crabs.

The same event was repeated every day from then on. Perančić not only ate greedily but also collected every crumb of food and carried it into the forest to hide it from his friends. He soon stopped talking. His gaze wandered somewhere in the distance, and a strange smile flickered on his lips. His expressionless face and blurred eyes revealed a terrible truth to his comrades: Perančić had gone mad!

This misfortune was followed by others. In December, tropical storms began. Furious waves hit the reef and carried away everything within reach. The shallows’ fish had now retreated to the depths, so the men had to abandon fishing. There were no more shells or crabs. The men now had to go further inland. Roots and various beans now became their only food. This was the only way they could sustain themselves but were becoming weaker each day. Their eyes continually kept searching the open sea in the hope of seeing a sail. But all was in vain: salvation was nowhere to be found.

The gloomy, cloudy sky oppressed them even more, increasing their sorrow and anxiety. The distant rumble of thunder and the flashes of lightning were now coming ever closer. The wind grew stronger and soon developed into a hurricane, carrying everything in its path. Heavy drops

of rain poured out in the streams as if they intended to submerge the whole earth. Among the loud rumbling, Jurić's voice could be heard:

“Let's run to the cave!”

However, the cave was far away. The darkness was so thick that a finger could not be seen in front of the eye. The wind was constantly getting stronger. Exhausted by hunger, the men fell and crawled, hiding wherever they could, in hollows and under bushes. Only Jurić and Dediol reached the cave and fell asleep.

When the storm subsided at dawn, the other men reached the cave with great difficulty and were could barely stand on their feet. After they had gathered, they noticed that two men were not among them: Vulović and Perančić did not return. Worried about their friends, Dediol and Jurić went to look for them. Not far from the cave's entrance, on the rocks, lay the body of the dead Perančić. His skull was shattered. In his severe illness and terrible fear, he must have fled from the storm and hit his head on the rock. After digging his grave in the sand, Jurić and Dediol laid him in it and buried him.

“You see,” said Dediol, “you may condemn me now, but I envy him. Death was good to him - it saved him from further torments and whatever awaits us tomorrow. It seems to me that we will depart one by one, parting slowly ... horribly ... Who knows if our people in our homeland still think of us? Who knows if they are still hoping for our return?”

As soon as these two returned to the cave, the storm began to rage again. The rain poured down all day as if from a bucket, even though the next morning. As soon as it stopped, the men went to find Vulović. As he was nowhere near, his comrades began to doubt that he was still alive, for if he were still alive, he surely would have reached the cave already. However, they did not entirely lose hope. As soon as the sky cleared, they crossed the meadow, near the spring, erected a shelter from the branches, and set out again to gather roots and plants. Nearby, they discovered another cave, quite spacious and sheltered. Having made comfortable beds of grass, they settled into it, and in that sad setting, they welcomed the New Year 1876.

Their daily duty now was to stock up on food and bandage the most severe wounds. They tore a large sheet, which Cap. Costa had saved and made bandages out of it. Bučić and Antončić transferred the fire to this new abode, and the guards for the fire took turns, as before.

The water was carried according to a set schedule and mostly in the early dawn to avoid the heat of the day. It was also necessary to conserve their strength because they were becoming exhausted from hunger, and the beans were becoming less plentiful.

One day, when they went into the bushes searching for the beans, they suddenly felt a strong smell of death. Exploring the area to see where the odor was coming from, they discovered the body of their friend Vulović. They dug up a bier to bury the poor, already decomposing body of their friend.

Deeply shaken, they headed back towards the camp. Gloomy thoughts gripped their hearts. Who's next? Will death cut them all down to the last? Will none of them ever see their homeland?

A new blow was waiting for them in the camp: they found Captain Costa lying unconscious. Gathering around him, they tried to help him. Slowly but surely, his life was dimming. He was tormented by the thought that to infuse the men with courage he deliberately deceived them and that the blame for their suffering was entirely his. In his restless dreams, he saw their tortured eyes fixed on his own, fully confident he will bring them salvation. They looked at him as their father, leader, and saviour, unaware that he was just as helpless and broken as they were. He felt the nearness of death - if only it would happen as soon as possible!

His comrades did not know what to do. He needed strength, but they had nothing to invigorate him. Then it suddenly occurred to them that they had buried all the excess food and wine they could not carry at the first shelter by the shore before they left it. Wrapping their bloody legs, Lovrinović and Brajević immediately set off.

By blind luck, they struck upon a well-trodden path and believed it would lead them to their destination. And indeed, after many hours of strenuous walking, they saw the ruins of their shelter in the distance - the shattered cabin of the *Stefano*. Happily, they set to work. Hurriedly they dug up the sand and soon saw barrels and boxes. Pulling them out of the pit, they cried out in despair. They were empty! Someone discovered them and emptied them.

Desperate and confused, they came back, bent over with fatigue and sadness. Without a word, they sat down by their captain's bed. The comrades understood them. The expression on their faces told them everything.

However, it was getting harder for Costa. His emaciated body was writhing from severe intestinal pain. No one had the strength to comfort him. Silent, they followed his ordeal. There was no help.

Suddenly the dying man flinched and cried out: Food. . . give. . . Men! Bačić had a handful of berries in his hat, which he had gathered moments before. Leaning over to him, he handed them to him in the palm of his hand. The dying man brought these to his mouth wildly and greedily but abruptly shrank away. He no longer had the strength even to swallow. With muddy eyes, he looked at the sad comrades around him. Tears streamed down his withered cheeks. He did not feel sorry for himself. He knew there was no salvation for him. He lamented to his comrades for leading them on with the hope of salvation and exposing them to greater suffering than they would have suffered had they remained on the shipwrecked shore. And then, gathering some strength, he said in a low, broken voice:

“Bačić, I'm going. . . Forgive me, brothers ...” Closing his eyes, he lay there peacefully, breathing easily. His comrades straightened him and made his bed more comfortable. Then they slipped quietly outside, leaving him to rest.

Not long after, Lovrinović approached the patient's bed. He lay motionless, his eyes open. Lovrinović asked him how he was feeling, but leaning over him, he saw his open, glassy eyes. He ran outside and called his comrades.

“He is dead, he is dead!” Whispering, they all gathered around their dead captain. He finally sailed into that peaceful harbor, where there are no more storms, no more suffering, no more despair.

VI

SHOCKED by the captain's death, the men sat silently and helplessly at the spring. Their dull, immobile state was interrupted only by heightened despair, pangs of hunger, or an occasional visit by groups of natives, who would give them some food and then leave them to their numbness again. What to do or where to go? They had resigned to wait for death. Nothing was going to help them, and they knew it. They decided to go to the cave to again lie down by the fire, but Antončić, Bučić, and Lovrinović could not go with them: their bruised limbs were in great pain, which tore at their whole body. The others did not have the strength to carry them. Everyone thought only of their own life and how to prolong it as long as possible. They decided to head back to the cave leaving the three dying men behind.

The next day it was even harder for the sick men. Their comrades brought them food, encouraged them, and calmed them down while trying hard to keep themselves on their feet and overcome their own feebleness. Shortly two more succumbed: Brajević and Dediol. Terrible cramps in their stomachs and pains in their limbs crushed them as well, leaving only two able-bodied: Bačić and Jurić. Their youthfulness (the first was 17 and the second 20) helped them survive. They took turns visiting their dying comrades: one would carry food and water while the other sat in the cave, guarding the fire and recuperating his strength.

Day by day, things were getting harder for their comrades. Cruel deaths were imminent. Lovrinović tried his best to summon his friend Jurić, but the cave was far away. His subdued, dying voice could not reach it. The next morning, they found him dead. And so, one by one, these shipwrecked men died. Only Dediol still lay in the cave.

The young men dragged him there with great difficulty so that they did not have to walk to him. His sad eyes, full of pain and suffering, begged for help. Bačić and Jurić watched over him as if they wanted to save his life with their eyes. But his hour also struck.

"Why didn't the sea swallow me right away? Ah, my children . . ." Dediol's head fell sideways. His two suffering companions squatted in the corner, motionless and stunned. The next day they did not have the strength to move. They lay at the feet of the dead man and waited for their own deaths. For two days, they had nothing to eat. There was nothing left in the cave. Only a bottle, half filled with water. It was necessary to bring the water at least, but who could do it? Bačić was thirsty. He crawled toward where the water was stored. Jurić noticed him and begged him not to drink it all to the bottom. Bačić promised him that he would get some more as soon as he was refreshed and - he drank everything, down to the last drop, and lay down on the floor again.

"Jurić, I can't move. I can't. My legs betray me."

Enraged by Bačić's action, Jurić angrily threw himself at him and started biting and hitting him, but exhausted and extenuated, they both collapsed on the floor next to each other. Immobile and almost unconscious, they lay in the cave for at least another two days. They could never remember how long it took before they suddenly found themselves outside, surrounded by native people, running around them and waving their arms as if calling on their divinities for help.

They could not move. Their legs and arms were numb. It was as if they had woken from a heavy and long sleep full of horror and death. They could not tell if it was all a dream or a reality. Did all of their comrades really perish? Is Dediol, their old and dear friend Thomas, really under that pile of stones and sand? They did not know who buried his poor body. Maybe they did - but couldn't remember it.

They did not have the strength to think further and surrendered themselves entirely to the care of the native people, who carried them on their back whenever they set out on their continual wanderings. They cared for the shipwrecked men as if they were their own children, offering them the best pieces of food, and often competed among themselves as to who would best assist them. Soon the two young men recovered sufficiently to be able to walk alone but were not yet strong enough to endure arduous and long journeys. Usually, the native people divided into two groups when travelling: the men went forward, and the women, carrying children and supplies of water and food, moved more slowly behind them. The extenuated young men joined the group of women, yet the hike was still difficult and strenuous. In their thoughts, they constantly decried the merciless fate, which allowed death to cut down their comrades.

After arriving at a large plain, where a group of men was already waiting for them, the new arrivals lit fires, set up small camps, and stayed there for a whole week. Here the young men began to return to health again. They began to notice the habits and customs of the native people and participate in the work themselves. They collected various herbs, caught fish, and brought water throughout the day, and only in the evening could they sit by the fire and eat — once in 24 hours.

Each family had its own fire for the preparation of food. Their main food was fish caught by men. Either nothing was eaten with it or was consumed with the “bread” prepared by women. They would gather some oblong beans from the bush, similar to lentils, which were dried in the sun, and when dried, they would be grounded and crumbled into powder. The powder was then mixed with water and baked on embers like bread. These small puffs were delicious, even without salt, and the natives always made sure that their two guests were well served. The native women were not as caring or generous. They often brought some date-like fruit from the forest but without a pit. They baked it for a long time and only then shared it - a few pieces each. The fruit was sweet and tasty but could not be eaten raw, probably because it was poisonous. Bačić especially liked it, and he continually tried to find out where it grew. However, his attempt angered the women. They attacked him with their fists and fingernails, and the poor creature fled ignominiously accompanied by the roaring laughter of the native men.

“*Prgnari Kominini*” - “Women are belligerent,” the native men shouted at him, warning him never to try to do such a thing again.

At the head of the fire sat the family elder who distributed the food first to the men, who would then pass their surpluses over their shoulders to women who sat behind them. The women fed the children only with their own leftovers. If after the whole “feast”, there was any fish or other catch left, the women prepared it for tomorrow's meal, saying:

“*Tumorning balialgo*” - “You'll eat tomorrow.”

After dinner, the natives would dig pits in the sand, which, together with the “pillow” of green branches, protected them from the wind and also provided a hollow for their huge bellies. They

slept on their bellies and covered themselves with sand. Every night before going to bed, they would gather around the fire, strike their weapons, and with strange movements of the body and hand, shouted the same song all the time:

Paur paur gutari
Pahur cerima
Mali guigura.

The whole ceremony would last almost an hour, and then everything would be quiet, and all would fall asleep. Bačić tried in vain to find out the meaning of the rite but failed. He was even unable to find out the meaning of the words, although he already understood a lot. In particular, he noticed that the natives used some words that most likely were of the English language. “*Tumorning*” could only have come from the English “tomorrow morning”, and “*tatruga*”, as they called their delicacy, the turtle, most likely came from the same source. Bačić was buoyed by his reflections and confided his hope and joy to Jurić – the natives certainly had contact with white people. Couldn’t we also get to a white settlement one day?

The tribe was on the move. According to Bačić’s calculation, the date was 3 February 1876, the day of Dubrovnik’s patron. The women prepared their children, and the wooden vessels filled with water. Without water, the natives did not move anywhere. Only women took care of the water, beginning from the age of twelve. Their procession loaded with wooden vessels for water followed the men, who were already well advanced. The men caught fish along the way, cleared the path, and chose where to camp at night. They would light fires and prepare the fish they caught but would not even taste it until their families arrived at the camp.

And this is how they moved from one place to another. The daily food supply varied from poor to abundant and was always divided into equal parts. The greatest joy for the tribe was to come across an area full of turtles. These native men were masters in catching these. While the big turtles lay quietly sunbathing along the shore, the men would jump in, grab them by the neck and pull them out on the sand. The turtles twitched and wriggled, but the strong hands of the natives did not let them go. The necks were stretched, plucking the intestines and ravenously chewed and swallowed – all of it raw. After alleviated their hunger, they would light a fire, lay a turtle on it, cover it with embers. When the turtle was half-baked, they would break it up into pieces and bake these again while incessantly and impatiently checking to see if they were ready to be eaten.

Turtle eggs were considered to be their greatest delicacy. From experience, they knew where to find the turtle nests but kept it a secret. They did not want to entrust this knowledge to Bačić or Jurić and laughed at their efforts to uncover the nests while constantly teasing and misdirecting them. The natives did not share eggs with their wives either, as there was a rule that this rare and much-valued food should be eaten immediately and only by those who found it.

Walking along the sea one day, the natives noticed a small canoe in the water and hurriedly jumped in to drag it to the shore. Reaching this hollowed-out stump, they mounted it deftly and rowed it to the shore, shouting:

“*Majabulo! Majabulo!*”

They waved to the young men and invited them to join them. Bačić and Jurić did try to get into the canoe, but their efforts were in vain. The canoe swayed and overturned, accompanied by eruptions of merry laughter from the natives on the shore. The two young native men Bengo and Jimmy tried to help by demonstrating how it is done, but again without success. Deftly perched in the canoe, the two native men went off hunting for turtles.

“*Minar donki nagoru,*” shouted the natives, waving their arms merrily and jumping around Bačić. “*Minara, minara*” they shouted even when they were back in the green valley full of springs of clear water. Bačić and Jurić looked overwhelmed, not understanding why the natives were so happy. And the screams, cheers, and tapping of bare feet did not stop. Suddenly a crowd of natives descended from a nearby hill. Their cries grew louder. Laughter erupted and echoed throughout the valley. The natives patted each other on the back, hit one another with joy, and talked loudly about something to their compatriots while beating on their arms and legs. In these conversations, they often pointed to their two white guests as if talking about their fate. The newcomer’s women, listening to the story, looked at them sadly and sighed:

"*Kaciuga moro, kaciuga moro.*"

“*Minara denki bolu!*” The men sang, “*Minara denki bolu.*” The young men went with them, letting them pull their arms and pat them on the back. Arriving at the shore, they had something to see! On the waterline lay the lifeboat from the *Stefano* turned to its side. The same lifeboat that Bačić was on when the waves carried him to the shore. The bottom of the boat was punctured, and oars lay in the sand. The natives were happy to see the joy in the eyes of their protégés.

“*Minara denki bolu*” they still sang convincingly, as if to say: “You’ll be sailing the boat again soon.”

Until then, everyone in the camp was busy. Large turtles were baked for the evening feast. A happy meeting was going to be celebrated.

The feast lasted until late into the night. The newcomers, it seemed, liked the young men. They competed with the host tribe to provide them with more favours and to better serve them.

“*Denki! Denki!*”⁹ They offered roasted meat and invited the men to sit by their fire or to lie down next to them. When everything was calm and the last songs and shouts had completely subsided, the young men remained awake. The damaged lifeboat from the *Stefano* reminded them of the pleasant days spent on the ship, of their great expectations, of the horrors and death on the night of the storm, and of the horrible deaths of their comrades.

The following days passed in rejoicing and feasting with the natives. The newcomers wanted to show the two young men their skills and abilities, which brought new surprises to them every day.

One evening the natives became greatly excited. They prepared torches, and for an hour, were constantly looking at the sea and then at the sky. When the night fell, they lit torches, walked down to the sea, and began swimming while holding the torches high in their hands, which shone like stars. Soon the expedition returned, dragging many turtles and long, snake-like fish. From the shore, they were greeted by loud merriment and celebration of women and elderly

natives. Not long after, the tribes began to part. The newcomers insisted and begged Bačić to join them with his friend:

“*Butur vaj*” - “Come with us,” they urged, but the young men were hesitant. They thought their benefactors would disapprove. In the end, however, they agreed. The new acquaintances were smarter and more skilful, knew the area better, and always had enough food. Also, their names, such as *Jimmy*, *Jackie*, and the like, gave our boys hope that one day they would meet the English, from whom the natives had learned all these words.

Gently bidding farewell to their old friends, the shipwrecked men set out. The long walk through the rocky country was strenuous and too fast for the young men. They were not yet accustomed to walking barefoot for so long, and they looked forward to the hour when the natives would stop to catch fish. This was the only time the shipwrecked men could sit down and rest their bloodied feet. One day, Jurić couldn’t take it anymore. The wounds on his legs hurt too much. He collapsed and called out to Bačić, who was already well behind him. Hearing his moaning, *Jackie*, one of the natives, ran forward and called Bačić. The whole group stopped and carefully gathered around Jurić. Further travel was delayed until he fully recovered.

VII

I will never forget the attention, love, and care I received from these native people - Bačić told Jurić. “Who knows, if we had joined them earlier, many of our comrades might still be alive now. Remember, Jurić, as I remember! We will talk to the cultured white people about the humanity and love of the uncultured natives.”

In a few days, the whole group returned to the plain, where they first met the young, shipwrecked men but did not find the families of their old acquaintances. The lifeboat was gone as well. It was as if they had all disappeared from this world. But suddenly, like ghosts, they emerged from the bushes, furiously shouting and whirling boomerangs, as if an evil rage had seized them, or as if they wanted to show the white boys that they too could be belligerent and hostile. The young men did not know what to do. Unarmed, they were not allowed to approach and calm things down. Nor could they see a reason for their rage, yelling, and fighting. In the end, the women also got involved with this mayhem crowd when trying to separate the “enemy armies”. After much screaming and scratching, they finally succeeded.

The next day everything was peaceful again. Both sides forgot about yesterday’s enmity as if nothing had happened. Some headed north, while others remained on the plain. The tribe, which Bačić and Jurić traveled with, continued with their journey. Bačić was interested in knowing where they were going in such a hurry and why.

“*Buhura vagaj*,” they replied when he asked them about it. But what is *Buhura*, Bačić wondered. Isn’t it North West Cape? That would have to be somewhere in the direction of their movement.

“*Vangi Buhura?*” “Where is *Buhura?*” He asked further.

“*Parue.*” “Very far,” was the reply, and the men hurried on.

On the way, the wanderers reached the place where the *Stefano* men had built their first shelter. The natives began to rummage among pieces of wreckage to find something. At the spot where the remains of their hut once stood, they found a bucket of rotten potatoes and an empty wine barrel. Bačić searched the entire area, but the only reward for all his efforts was a small wrap with needles and thread for mending sails. Still, that wrap was most welcome. Bačić sat down and started mending the remnants of his torn shirt. Less than a second later, a crowd of bushy women gathered around him. Shouting, "*Niril, niril,*" they tried to steal his treasure.

Bačić defended himself and hid the needles, not understanding what those women would want with them, as they have nothing to sew. All natives were as naked as a finger. But the old Dubrovnik merchant spirit quickly awoke in Bačić.

"I will give them to you," he said, "but you will give me food whenever we are hungry." The women agreed, and their men laughed with pleasure after seeing Bačić outwitting them. The native women were, in fact, very stingy. The food they collected was prepared for themselves and their children. Bačić and Jurić never got anything from their hands. During this time, the two natives were quietly squatting on a reef and staring at the sea.

»*Janina! Janina! Janina!*» They shouted at once. And all the women and men abandoned whatever they were doing and rushed towards the sea. The silence was grave. Bačić asked what was happening but did not receive an answer and had to remain silent, waiting for the event itself to provide an answer. He soon noticed what the cause of the silence was. A huge fish was swimming along the shore with almost half its body out of the water. It was the so-called "Dugong" from the East Indian Ocean that feeds on seagrass and is found along this coast. The natives were ready: armed with batons, spears, stones, they were only waiting for the right moment. A small, primitive net made of thin rope also stood in preparation. Suddenly, forty or so bodies crashed into the sea. They caught the fish with the net and began a fierce fight. They grabbed it with their hands and beat it everywhere. Often the fish dived into the depths and dragged the men with it, but they were good swimmers and divers and did not let go. At last, the gigantic fish was subdued, and the loud cries of women and children accompanied the hunters and the fish to the fire. Dissecting the fish, they pulled out its liver and intestines and ate it all raw. Later on, they baked it - and the feast lasted three nights with much singing and dancing.

Tracking further with this native tribe, one afternoon Bačić walked alongside an old woman. She was carrying a piece of sail on her back, which she found along the shore, while Bačić was thoughtfully searching the far-away horizon. Suddenly it seemed to him that a ship was approaching from a distance - a ship! He frantically seized the canvas from the old woman and started waving it while calling out to Jurić. The natives ran around him, and everyone was peering into the distance. Their sharp eyes saw better than Bačić - an upturned boat was floating towards them, brought here by the sea from who knows where. Everyone was sad that Bačić was disappointed again, and they tried to comfort and reassure him with all possible signs:

"*Minara denki nakarn*" - "You will see the ship."

After resting in that place, the tribe moved onward and before dusk they reached the peninsula that the natives called *Bundagio*. Close to the shore, they found a source of drinking water covered with a barrel, and the natives explained:

"*Nula vak bala Karkara vila baba*"

“Here, as in *Karkara*, is a well dug up by white people.”

Not far from the well, Jurić found a pile of wreckage, consisting of ship parts, devices, empty bottles, various tools, and even a board with an inscription “Terry Queen.” [] It was probably the name of a vessel. He asked the natives what the name meant, and they explained to him that the English had asked them to collect the wreckage. Igrana, one of the natives, told him, pointing to the pile and impatiently gesturing:

“*Minara Chali gogoj, Pulimandu vagaj, kuila bachalgo kuiga, turagi bachalgo, tie bachalgo, kakonagi bachalgo.*”

“Soon, you will go to *Pulimandur*, and you will eat sugar, eat rice, eat tea and cocoa.”

But Jurić did not understand. He couldn’t understand the connection between the wreckage heap and his departure. As the two struggled to communicate, the others ran to a small hill, shouting to each other:

“*Jani bala jurogaja!*” - “The ship is approaching!”

The elder quickly cut some twigs and lit a huge fire. The young men stared in vain in all directions but could see nothing. Only a little later, they did again see the sail of a cutter sailing towards them. Crazy with joy and excitement, they hugged their dark-skinned friends, constantly rubbing their eyes to glaring in the distance, at times barely believing that finally, they were seeing a real ship. The ship - after so many months! But as if it were just an illusion, the white sail of the ship suddenly disappeared. It disappeared as if it had never existed. Perhaps it went into some cove without them even noticing it in their joy. The native people, their sensitive, tender friends, looked at them sadly and patted them on the shoulders, trying to comfort them with every possible word of their poor vocabulary:

“*Minara Chali dagi Pulimandur*¹⁰ *vagaj. Mana Chali gogai Cicin vagaj.*”

“You will soon see *Charli* <*Taki*> and travel to Fremantle. You’ll soon see *Charli* and go to Tientsin.”

But the young men were overwhelmed by the pain of disappointment, so they ignored “*Chali*” and “*Cicin*”. They had no idea that this “*Chali*” will play an important role in their destiny!

An unpleasant accident snapped them out of that sad state. One of the women silently approached Jurić and poured all the water from his water bottle into her bowl. Jurić noticed her when she was already retreating. In anger, and not having time to think about the consequences, he mercilessly struck her with a stick. The woman began to scream and moan, bending on the ground.

Why this madness, brother? We are both done now!” Bačić reprimanded him, while the natives sharply scolded the woman and contemptuously pushed her with their feet.

The burning desire to see some kind of a ship finally bore fruit. Early the next morning, a sail appeared on the horizon. A ship of about three tons was shortly seen. Its crew consisted of about thirty natives, who landed their cargo on the shore - an abundance and variety of food, tobacco, and clothing. The newcomers were greeted with loud cheers. The women pulled out

the clothes, and looked at them from all sides wondering what their actual use was. The newcomers cheerfully greeted the young white men and invited them to join the boat to a small island, some 8 miles away. Bačić and Jurić readily responded to their call. It had been a while since they had seen or sailed on a boat. On this voyage, they caught about thirty turtles, a multitude of birds, and turtle eggs. On the way back, they were swept by a strong wind. Bačić and Jurić boldly and cheerfully took the sailing ropes in their hands, and soon the boat was cutting through the waves at a speed that frightened the natives. They were not yet skilled at sailing, and the skills of the two white youths aroused great admiration in them.

The merry and sumptuous feast that evening was interrupted by a sudden storm. The boat broke away from the shore and hit a rock. In the morning, there was general sadness over this. But one of the new natives recalled Jurić's resourcefulness and skill yesterday, so now he began to press him to fix their boat. Everyone else joined his pleas, and Jurić, not knowing what to do, fled into the woods and hid there. The natives could not believe that he did not know and could not do the repairs. They could not understand that repairing a boat could not be done without tools, without nails and a hammer, so what could Jurić do but hide. He didn't show up until the evening meal.

The tribe was getting ready for sleep. Some were already lying in their beds of sand. Bačić went to meet Jurić and stopped by the old native *Bengo*, who was busy preparing his nets. Looking up at the horizon to see what the weather would be like tomorrow, *Bengo* pricked up his ears and kept looking for a long time. He then called Bačić and, pointing to the open sea, shouted cheerfully to him:

"Tank bala! Chali koming! Chali koming!" - "Chali is coming! Chali is coming!"

The children jumped out of their beds first, and then everyone else. Jurić also appeared, rubbing his sleepy eyes. The cutter looked very impressive and well equipped. The natives waved and shouted, lit a fire, and tried in every possible way to attract the attention of the ship's crew. The ship disappeared behind the cape in an instant, but the natives said:

"Minara gogaj. Minara Chali gogaj nula." - "The ship will return. *Chali* will definitely come back here."

"Mira gogaj" - "He won't come back," Bačić replied sadly and was ready to cry because of the new disappointment. But the ship did reappear. The wind was unfavourable to it, and it had to veer - that was the cause of its disappearance.

The lifeboat was lowered from the ship. Bačić was mad with joy, and Jurić still couldn't believe his sleepy eyes. The natives tore the loose hat from his head and began to wave with it. There were two white and two dark-skinned men in the boat. The whites held revolvers in their hands, but as soon as they saw the whites among the natives on the shore, they put away their revolvers and hurried to land. Shaking hands warmly with the young men, they interrogated them in English how they landed among the natives on that desolate shore, but the young men, overcome by joy, could not utter a word. The natives, on the other hand, danced merrily and hugged the young men full of happiness. White men were moved by the selflessness of the natives. After the first excitement had passed, an Englishman ordered his crew to unload sacks of flour and sugar for the natives and transport the shipwrecked men to the cutter. In particular, he ordered that the young men not be given anything to eat except bread and water because anything else could harm them.

They were greeted very warmly onboard — the master of the ship, Capt. Charles Tuckey, *Chali* to the natives, and his officer showed them almost paternal care. The young men promised to follow all the captain's instructions, and though they were tired and hungry, they agreed to sleep outside on the deck for the first few days until they got used to it and to eat only small meals of food.

Soon the cutter was heading for Fremantle, so that in a few days, Bačić and Jurić would again be “civilized white people”: dressed, washed, combed, trimmed, and fed.

After landing at Shark's Bay, Captain Tuckey sent a message to Fremantle about the shipwreck of the *Stefano*, announcing that two surviving members of the “Stefano's” crew were on board his ship “Hassy” <Jessie>.

A pleasant surprise awaited our young men in Fremantle: our emigrant countrymen were waiting for them on the shore and kissed them warmly. They took care of their clothing needs and sent a cablegram to their families, announcing their rescue.

After declining the kind offer of Captain Tuckey to remain on his ship and thanking him for his great kindness, the young men spent a few days in Fremantle as guests of the Cap. Vuković, one of our emigrants.

Before returning to their homeland, the young men asked Cap. Vuković, to take them once more to North West Cape on the Fleming Peninsula, where they left their black benefactors, to embrace them for the last time.

The happy meeting with the natives on this occasion is something that the young men will never forget. Their small, humble gifts were received by these good people with indescribable gratitude and joy.

In August 1876. Bačić and Jurić sailed from Fremantle with a nice sum of money gifted to them by the citizens on departure. The young men were deeply moved by this caring gesture and that of Captain Vuković in particular.

After a full year of painful wandering, the shipwrecked men arrived in their homeland.

Their difficult experiences and the sufferings they endured were retold and preserved for a long time in the memory of old sailors. Now, almost 7 years after the shipwreck, they appear for the first time in our press, according to Bačić's original records. <77 years? From October 1875 till early 1953>

(End)

Notes

1. Frog - ship's name for the pulley.
2. These were the prevailing conditions for seafaring at that time
3. At the Island of St Paula, magnetic observations are made, and chronometers are regulated.
4. With these words, Captain Bačić later remembered his comrades in his notes on the shipwreck.
5. Their actual position was about $22^{\circ} 48'$ south of the equator and $113^{\circ} 37'$ east of Greenwich, near Cape Cloates.
6. In a direct line, the shipwrecked men were over 150 miles from the Gascoyne River.
7. Approximately dates and positions were established later by Cap. Bačić.
8. Bačić later established that the cave was located at Cape Farquhar.
9. Likely distorted English word "take it".
10. <?>