CHAPTER 7

We took nothing with us when we thought we would have to see, so there was much excitement as we packed our baskets.

Nanko strode up and down outside the houses, urging us to hurry.

'The wind grows strong,' he shouted. ‘The ship will leave you.'

I filled two baskets with the things I wished to take. Three fine needles of whalebone, an awl for making holes, a good stone knife for scraping hides, two cooking pots, and a small box made from a shell with many ear-rings in it.

Ulape had two boxes of ear-rings, for she was vainer than I, and when she put them into her baskets, she drew a thin mark with blue clay across her nose and cheekbones. The mark meant that she was unmarried.

'The ship leaves,' shouted Nanko.

'If it goes,' Ulape shouted back, ‘it will come again after the storm.'

My sister was in love with Nanko; but she laughed at him.

'Other men will come to the island,' she said. 'They will be far more handsome and brave than those who leave.'

'You are all women of such ugliness that they will be afraid and soon go away.

The wind blew in fierce gusts as we left the village, stinging our faces with sand. Ramo hopped along far in front with one of our baskets, but before long he ran hack to say that he had forgotten his fishing spear. Nanko was standing on the cliff motioning us to hurry, so I refused to let him go back for it.

The ship was anchored outside the cove and Nanko said that it could not come closer to the shore because of the high waves.

They were beating against the rocks with the sound of thunder. The shore as far as I could see was rimmed with foam.

Two boats were pulled up on the beach. Beside them stood four white men and as we came down the trail, one of the men beckoned us to walk faster. He spoke to us in a language which we could not understand.

The men of our tribe, except Nanko and Chief Matasaip, were already on the ship. My brother Ramo was there too, Nanko said. He had run on ahead after I had told him that he could not go back to the village for his spear. Nanko said that he had jumped into the first boat that left the cove.

Matasaip divided the women into two groups. Then the boats were pushed into the water, and while they bobbed about we scrambled into them as best we could.

The cove was partly sheltered from the wind, but as soon as we went through the passage between the rocks and into the sea, great waves struck us. There was much confusion. Spray hew, the white men shouted at each other. The boat pitched so wildly that in one breath you could see the ship and in the next breath it had gone. Yet we came to it at last and somehow were able to climb on to the deck.

The ship was large, many times the size of our biggest canoes. It had two tall masts and between them stood a young man with blue eyes and a black beard. He was the chieftain of the white men, for he began to shout orders which they quickly obeyed. Sails rose on the tall masts and two of the men began to pull on the rope that held the anchor.

I called to my brother, knowing that he was very curious and therefore would be in the way of the men who were working. The wind drowned my voice and he did not answer. The deck was so crowded that it was hard to move, but I went from one end of it to the other, calling his name. Still there was no answer. No one had seen him.

At last I found Nanko.

I was overcome with fear. ‘Where is my brother?' I cried.

He repeated what he had told me on the beach, but as he spoke Ulape who stood beside him pointed towards the island. I looked out across the deck and the sea. There, running along the cliff, the fishing spear held over his head, was Ramo.

The sails had filled and the ship was now moving slowly away. Everyone was looking towards the cliff, even the white men. I ran to one of them and pointed, but he shook his head and turned from me. The ship began to move faster. Against my will, I screamed.

Chief Matasaip grasped my arm.

'We cannot wait for Ramo,' he said. 'If we' do, the ship will be driven on the rocks.'

'We must!' I shouted. 'We must!'

'The ship will come back for him on another day, Matasaip said. 'He will be safe. There is food for him to eat and water to

drink and places to sleep.

'No,' I cried.

Matasaip's face was like stone. He was not listening. I cried out once more, but my voice was lost in the howling wind.

People gathered around me, saying again what Matasaip had said, yet I was not comforted by their words.

Ramo had disappeared from the cliff and I knew that he was now running along the trail that led to the beach.

The ship began to circle the kelp bed and I thought surely that it was going to return to the shore. I held my breath, waiting. Then slowly its direction changed. It pointed towards the east. At that moment I walked across the deck and, though many hands tried to hold me back, flung myself into the sea.

A wave passed over my head and I went down and down until I thought I would never behold the day again. The ship was far away when I rose. Only the sails showed through the spray. I was still clutching the basket that held all of my things, but it was very heavy and I realized that I could not swim with it in my arms. Letting it sink, I started off towards the shore.

I could barely see the two rocks that guarded the entrance to Coral Cove, but I was not fearful. Many times I had swum farther than this, although not in a storm.

I kept thinking over and over as I swam how I would punish Ramo when I reached the shore, yet when I felt the sand under my feet and saw him standing at the edge of the waves, holding his fishing spear and looking so forlorn, I forgot all those things I planned to do. Instead I fell to my knees and put my arms around him.

The ship had disappeared.

'When will it come back?' Ramo asked. There were tears in his eyes.

'Soon,' I said

The only thing that made me angry was that my beautiful skirt of yucca fibres, which I had worked on so long and carefully, was ruined.

CHAPTER 8

The wind blew strong as we climbed the trail, covering the mesa with sand that sifted around our legs and shut out the sky. Since it was not possible to find our way back, we took shelter among some rocks. We stayed there until night fell. Then the wind lessened and the moon came out and by its light we reached the village.

The huts looked like ghosts in the cold light. As we neared them I heard a strange sound like that of running feet. I thought that it was a sound made by the wind, but when we came closer I saw dozens of wild dogs scurrying around through the huts. They ran from us, snarling as they went.

The pack must have slunk into the village soon after we left, for it had gorged itself upon the abalone we had not taken. It had gone everywhere searching out food, and Ramo and I had to look hard to find enough for our supper. While we ate beside a small fire I could hear the dogs on the hill not far away, and through the night their howls came to me on the wind. But when the sun rose and I went out of the hut, the pack trotted off towards its lair which was at the north side of the island, in a large cave.

That day we spent gathering food. The wind blew and the waves crashed against the shore so that we could not go out on the rocks. I gathered gull eggs on the cliff and Ramo speared a string of small fish in one of the tide pools. He brought them home, walking proudly with the string over his back. He felt that in this way he had made up for the trouble he had caused.

With the seeds I had gathered in a ravine, we had a plentiful meal, although I had to cook it on a hat rock. My bowls were at the bottom of the sea. The wild dogs came again that night. Drawn by the scent of fish, they sat on the hill, barking and growling at each other. I could see the light from the fire shining in their eyes. At dawn they left.

The ocean was calm on this day and we were able to hunt abalone among the rocks. From seaweed we wove a rough basket which we filled before the sun was overhead. On the way home, carrying the abalone between us, Ramo and I stopped on the cliff. The air was dear and we could look far out to sea in the direction the ship had gone.

'Will it come back today?' Ramo asked.

'It may,' I answered him, though I did not think so. ‘More likely it will come after many suns, for the country where it has gone is far off.'

Ramo looked up at me. His black eyes shone.

'I do not care if the ship never comes,' he said.

'Why do you say this?' I asked him.

Ramo thought, making a hole in the earth with the point of his spear.

'Why !' I asked again.

'Because I like it here with you,' he said. ‘It is more him than when the others were here. Tomorrow I am going to where the canoes are hidden and bring one back to Coral Cove. We will use it to fish in and to go looking around the island.'

'They are too heavy for you to put into the water.

'You Will see.'

Ramo threw out his chest. Around his neck was a string of sea-elephant teeth which someone had left behind. it was much too large for him and the teeth were broken, but they rattled as he thrust the spear down between us.

'You forget that I am the son of Chowig,' he said.

'I do not forget,' I answered. ‘But you are a small son. Someday you will be tall and strong and then you will be able to handle a big canoe.'

'I am the son of Chowig,' he said again, and as he spoke his eyes suddenly grew large. ‘I am his son and since he is dead I have taken his place. I am now Chief of Ghalas-at. All my wishes must be obeyed.'

'But first you must become a man. As is the custom, therefore, I will have to whip you with a switch of nettles and then tie you to a red-ant hill.'

Ramo grew pale. He had seen the rites of manhood given in our vibe and remembered them. Quickly I said, ‘Since there are no men to give the rites, per- haps you will not have to undergo the nettles and the ants, Chief Ramo.

'I do not know if this name suits me,' he said, smiling. He tossed his spear at a passing gull. 'I will think of something better.

I watched him stride off to get the spear, a little boy with thin arms and legs like sticks, wearing a big string of sea-elephant teeth. Now that he had become Chief of Ghalas-at, I would have even more trouble with him, but I wanted to run after him

and take him in my arms.

'I have thought of a name,' he said when he came back.

'What is it?' I asked solemnly.

"I am Chief Tanyositlopai.'

'That is a very long name and hard to say.

'You will soon learn.' Chief Tanyositlopai said. I had no thought of letting Chief Tanyositlopai go alone to the place where the canoes were hidden, but the next morning when I awoke I found that Ramo was not in the hut. He was not outside either, and I knew then that he had got up in the dark and left by himself.

I was frightened. I thought of all that might befall him. He had climbed down the kelp rope once before, but he would have trouble pushing even the smallest of the canoes off the rocks. And if he did get one afloat without hurting himself, would he be able to paddle around the sandpits where the tides ran fast !

Thinking of these dangers, I started off to overtake him.

I had not gone far along the trail before I began to wonder if I should not let him go to the cliff by himself. There was no way of telling when the ship would come back for us. Until it did, we were alone upon the island. Ramo therefore would have to be- come a man sooner than if we were not alone, since I would need his help in many ways.

Suddenly I turned around and took the trail to- wards Coral Cove. If Ramo could put the canoe in the water and get through the tides that raced around the sandpits, he would reach the harbour when the sun was tall in the sky. I would be waiting on the beach, for what was the fun of a voyage if no one were there to greet him !

I put Ramo out of my mind as I searched the rocks for mussels. I thought of the food we would need to gather and how best to protect it from the wild dogs when we were not in the village. I thought also of the ship. I tried to remember what Matasaip had said to me. For the first time I began to wonder if the ship would ever return. I wondered about this as I pried the shells off the rocks, and I would stop and look fearfully at the empty sea that stretched away farther than my eyes could reach.

The sun moved higher. There was no sign of Ramo. I began to feel uneasy. The basket was filled and I carried it up to the

mesa.

From here I looked down on the harbour and farther on along the coast to the spit that thrust out like a fishhook into the ocean. I could see the small waves sliding up the sand and beyond them a curving line of foam where the currents raced.

I waited on the mesa until the sun was overhead. Then I hurried back to the village, hoping that Ramo might have come back while I was gone. The hut was empty.

Quickly I dug a hole for the shellfish, rolled a heavy stone over the opening to protect them from the wild dogs, and started off towards the south part of the island.

Two nails led there, one on each side of a long sand dune. Ramo was not on the trail I was travelling and, thinking that he might be coming back out of sight along the other one, I called to him as I ran. I heard no answer. But I did hear, far off, the barking of dogs.

The barking grew louder as I came closer to the cliff. It would die away and after a short silence start up again. The sound came from the opposite side of the dunes, and leaving the trail I climbed upward through the sand to its top.

A short distance beyond the dune, near the cliff, I saw the pack of wild dogs. There were many of them and they were moving around in a circle.

In the middle of the circle was Ramo. He was lying on his back, and had a deep wound in his throat. He lay very still.

When I picked him up I knew that he was dead. There were other wounds on his body from the teeth of the wild dogs. He had been dead a long time and from his footsteps on the earth I could see that he had never reached the cliff.

Two dogs lay on the ground not far from him, and in the side of one of them was his broken spear.

I carried Ramo back to the village, reaching it when the sun was far down. The dogs followed me all the way, but when I had laid him down in the hut, and came out with a club in my hand, they trotted off to a low hill. A big grey dog with long curling hair and yellow eyes was their leader and he went last.

It was growing dark, but I followed them up the hill. Slowly they retreated in front of me, not making a sound. I followed them across two hills and a small valley to a third hill whose face was a ledge of rock. At one end of the ledge was a cave.

One by one the dogs went into it.

The mouth of the cave was too wide and high to fill with rocks. I gathered brush and made a fire, thinking that I would push it back into the cave. Through the night I would feed it and push it farther and farther back. But there was not enough brush for this.

When the moon rose I left the cave and went off through the valley and over the three hills to my home.

All night I sat there with the body of my brother and did not sleep. I vowed that someday I would go back and kill the wild dogs in the cave. I would kill all of them. I thought of how I would do it, but mostly I thought of Ramo, my brother.