

Christmas Island
Naked Prey 14
by George Gauthier

Author's Note: This is a tale set in the Indian Ocean in the early XIXth century. It is the fourteenth story in my 'Naked Prey' series for the Historical section of the Nifty Archive, each with different characters. The Naked Prey Series was inspired by the old movie "Naked Prey" (1966) set in Africa starring Cornel Wilde and the movie "Run of the Arrow" set among the Indians of North America. Both movies were inspired by the real life exploit of the mountain man John Colter.

The other stories in the series so far are 'Naked Prey' set in 19th century Africa, 'The Shawnee', set in colonial America, 'Terra Australis', set during the great age of exploration in the South Seas, 'Dangerous Game' set largely in the Caribbean in the mid-seventeenth century, 'White Comanche' set in the American Southwest in the 1830s, 'Fearful Symmetry' about two castaways on the island of Sumatra in the early 18th century, 'Periplus' a tale of a voyage around the Indian Ocean in the late eighteenth century, 'Source of the Nile' set in Roman Egypt and Africa, 'Treasure of Carthage' set in the Mediterranean during the mid 12th century, 'Monsters' set in the Pacific Ocean in the early XIXth century, 'Hispania' set during the fall of Visigothic Spain to the Moors in the early VIIIth century, 'Cast Away' set in the Pacific Ocean during the early XIXth century, and 'Lost Boy' set in the American Southwest in the late XIXth century.

This story contains graphic descriptions of the male human body, of consensual sexual activity between adult males. If any of this would offend a reader, read no further. This is not intended for persons younger than an age where they may freely and legally select their reading matter in whatever jurisdiction applies.

It is entirely fictional, with no resemblance intended to any person living or dead, other than Charles Darwin, Captain Fitzroy, and the proprietor of the Keeling Islands. I make no claim that my portrayal of Clunies-Ross is true to life. Otherwise, the story is reasonably faithful to the history and geography of its setting.

Readers who like this story and others in the 'Naked Prey' series should try my other series of historical novelettes, the 'Daphne Boy' tales. They depict an eternally youthful protagonist and his adventures in exotic climes and times. My other series are the 'Jungle Boy' stories about young actors in Hollywood in the Gay/Authoritarian section, the 'Track and Field' stories in Gay/College and my 'Mer-Boy' stories in Gay/Beginnings. For links to all my stories, look on the list of Prolific Authors on the Archive for George Gauthier.

Comments and feedback welcome.

Chapter 1. Keeling Islands, Indian Ocean, 1836

The blond boy laid his paddle down and slipped over the side of the dugout canoe, his lithe tanned form entering the water with hardly a slash, just the flash of his bare rump. The water of the tropical lagoon was warm but still a relief from the hot sun overhead.

"See, the water comes only up to my chest here, Mr. Darwin. Much of the lagoon of the south atoll is like this, a shallow bottom of sand and mud dotted here and there with coral heads. A good swatch of the southern half of the lagoon is dry sand at low water or flats studded with deep pools. If you step into one, simply swim to the other side. You don't have to worry much about cutting your feet, sir. Though the coral of the reefs proper can be very sharp indeed."

His companion, the naturalist who one day would be famous as the developer of the theory of evolution by natural selection, nodded his thanks.

"Yes, young Axel. I understand that, but I think I will stick with my sandals just the same. It is a lesson I learned the hard way exploring coral reefs and islands in two oceans besides this one. Anyway I don't have the thick calluses you developed from going barefoot all your life. Nor do I swim so effortlessly as you do. The way you glide through the water, you might be a dolphin or a sea-sprite."

The boy grinned at the compliment, turning onto his back and floating as he waited for the young naturalist to join him. The two young men were exploring the reefs and islets of the Keeling Islands in the Indian Ocean. The Danish boy was naked. The English naturalist stripped down to knee length drawers and sandals topped by a broad straw hat to protect his fair skin from the sun. He busied himself gathering samples from the bottom with a sponge rake.

"Gosh Mr. Darwin, what an adventure it must be to sail all around the world, visiting no less than three oceans, charting the seas, finding all manner of strange creatures on land and sea. Did you ever had to fight off cannibals or head hunters or the fierce Indian tribes of South America?"

The twenty-seven year old naturalist smiled at the naive enthusiasm of his temporary assistant. Axel Knorr was a personable Danish boy a decade younger than the Englishman. He was normally in the service of John Clunies-Ross, the biggest copra planter in the Keeling Islands. The Scotsman had lent him to Darwin as a local guide. Darwin's vessel, HMS Beagle, had stopped there on its round the world voyage of discovery. While the ship took soundings all around the atoll, Darwin himself gathered biological and geological specimens with Axel's help.

The atoll of the South Keeling Islands is comprised of some two dozen islands lying in an incomplete circle some five miles or so in diameter (8 km), though the total land area was only about 7 square miles (18 km²), about forty percent more than today. It lies in the tropical Indian Ocean about twelve degrees south of the Equator.

In deeper waters, Axel paddled the canoe aft while Darwin knelt in the bow and scrutinized the sea bed through a glass bottomed bucket. If the naturalist spotted something interesting, he sent the boy down after it. Although swim fins had not been invented yet, Axel was equipped with goggles to let him see clearly underwater. A weight helped him sink to the bottom effortlessly. Then his slender legs propelled his lissom body through the deep waters to the specimen. The boy could dive easily enough to sixty feet or so (10 m). Axel had a knife strapped to his left arm and used either a sponge rake or a fish spear to collect the samples into a string collecting bag. Afterwards, kneeling in the boat, his bronzed body bent in a bow, he recovered the diving weight by the rope attached to it, pulling it up to the surface hand over hand.

The boy loved spending time in that underwater realm. An alien world it might be, but the boy felt a home in the sea. He loved to swim, to feel the water slide past his bare body, to revel in his mastery of this alien element. He had learned to swim at such an early age he had no memory of it. It was as natural to him as walking. Swimming in that blue world was like taking to the skies except that he was flying through liquid space. Like a bird, he could move at will in all three dimensions or hover effortlessly, much like a hawk circling in an updraft. Axel could explore forests and meadows of seaweed, undersea caves, and holes and crannies in reefs.

The underwater world was full of natural wonders. There were corals shaped like the human brain and others like the antlers of a stag. Some resembled large leaves and were flexible enough to bend back and forth with the movement of the ocean swell. All manner of brilliantly marked fish swam in these waters. Some were fat and round and slow; others long and lean and quick. Some nibbled on the coral itself, others grazed on seaweed, while various toothy denizens hunted the rest. Then there were the strangely shaped octopi and starfish and spiny urchins plus the colorful creatures called sea anemones after the common flower but these were animals with stinging tentacles.

At one point he stopped suddenly and jack knifed, doing a surface dive which briefly flashed his tanned rump as he plunged to the bottom of the harbor, returning with a brittle star, a starfish with long, thin, flexible arms.

"Good lad" Darwin complimented him on his fine specimen. It was a lucky day when the naturalist acquired the services of this youth for his exploration of the atoll. Upon the expedition's arrival the proprietor Clunies-Ross had invited Captain Fitzroy of the Beagle as well as his naturalist, a member of the English gentry to dinner.

"You set a fine table, sir. Two plump chickens prepared for only the three of us." Darwin observed.

The proprietor shrugged.

"A single bird has only two of everything at best. With two birds, neither host nor guests have to pretend to prefer a drumstick to a breast or white meat to dark. Nothing will go to waste in any event. Cook will use our leftovers for the staff tomorrow, either in a tasty stew or a pastry covered pot pie."

"You indulge them, I think." the captain said.

"No more than necessary to keep them healthy, content, and loyal. I cite you this boy here who not only raised the chickens but also killed and plucked them too. Rather than envy his betters this fine cuisine, Axel himself will partake of these birds."

The proprietor kept a simple establishment, so the young Danish lad had been pressed into service as the waiter for the evening. His stunning appearance did not go unremarked by the visitors. Instead of European dress, he merely wore a length of cloth around his narrow hips and went barefoot.

Called a lungi the garment was simply a rectangular piece of fabric about the span of a man's arms across and perhaps half that wide wrapped low around his hips and secured with a pretzel knot. Its original dark blue had faded to a not unpleasant lighter shade that complimented the Danish youth's tawny skin tones and blond hair. Though it would normally reach to his knees, he always shortened it to mid thigh, hiking the upper part over the top.

"You said he was Danish, not British at all." Darwin inquired.

Clunie-Ross explained that Axel was the orphan son of one of his overseers. He had been born and raised in Travancore in Danish India. The British had temporarily seized Danish colonial possessions in India during the Napoleonic hegemony in Europe. With general peace in Europe and the restoration of her colonies to Denmark, the two countries were on friendly terms.

"I have kept the boy on as a general helper, the least I could do for a good man who died in my service. Axel earns his keep alright. He runs messages for me along the island paths or takes them in his canoe across the lagoon to the West Island, the only other inhabited island of the atoll besides Home Island here. And he keeps up the kitchen garden for the main house and fishes for the table. I am sure you would agree that he is quite decorative as well. He is rather like a living classical sculpture, don't you think?"

Indeed Axel was a real beauty. Three months short of seventeen, Axel was a preternaturally comely lad, short for his age and slender, his fawn-like physique graced with a wiry musculature, toned and taut from hard work. Indeed his small hands were thickly callused. He was pretty as a girl with delicate features, a straight nose, pouty lips, high cheekbones, and large green eyes with a blond thatch on top. He stood only 163 centimeters (five feet four) tall and weighed barely 50 kilos (110 pounds). Only the marked definition of his muscular development hinted that he was past his growth spurt. He carried so little body fat that his flat belly showed a tracery of downward pointing veins just under the skin. The beat of his heart was visible on the left side of his smooth chest. He was sleek and smooth and deeply tanned, his wiry physique a vision of youthful male pulchritude.

"He is perhaps rather too pretty for his own good." Captain Fitzroy ventured. "Aboard ship we would have endless trouble with sailors who would seek his favors or try to force him to their will. Regardless of the Laws of War and the potential for punishment of such irregular attachments, such things happen among men isolated at sea. I am sure you take my meaning sir."

"Indeed, I do. I am confident that the boy is yet a virgin to either man or woman. You understand that opportunities for sexual congress are severely limited here. There is no native population at all. These islands were completely uninhabited till two decades old. Then that dreadful man Hare brought slaves in from the Cape of Good Hope and the Malay Islands, almost all of them males. They soon ran away from him and came to work on my plantation for fair wages. I have always found free labor to be more productive than forced workers. And men who are paid for their work never rise up in slave insurrections. That makes it much easier to sleep at night."

The proprietor paid his workforce in a currency of his own minting, the Cocos rupee, which was redeemable only in his company store. Yes that was exploitative but he offered a much better deal for his workers than slavery, and he had started to do so more than a decade before the British

Empire abolished slavery in 1833. He was clearly a man ahead of his time.

"And does the boy always go around more like that, more than three quarters naked, in ... what did you call it ... a lungi?"

"Actually his lungi is only for formal occasions like this. Normally the boy goes about starkers, like a young savage, whether he is working the garden, fishing in his canoe, or carrying messages. I imagine most of the inhabitants of these islands have never seen him in anything but a state of nature. He rather prefers it too. Don't you Axel?"

"Oh yes sir. I don't understand why I should bother to wear anything at all in this tropical climate, especially with no women about. As you know, I grew up in India where all of us young children ran around naked. I have kept that habit during my eight years on these islands. I hardly ever bother with the lungi, just when I am asked, like this evening. Living on this island is like being in the Garden of Eden, the state of nature, as you said. Why should I not go about as God made me? I really don't know why some consider that sinful. Is our form not modeled on His?"

"Besides, I like the freedom of running around in just my skin. I like to feel the wind touching me everywhere, cooling me off, carrying my sweat away. I also like to feel the warmth of the sun on my back and ass too. I admit I like to show off. I hope that doesn't mark me as a particularly vain boy. Anyway, clothing would just get in the way when I run or swim or dive or it would get dirty when I work in the garden or smelly from when I fish. And this way, I never have to do the laundry."

The boy's tinkling laughter made the dinner party smile at his charming naivete and innocence.

"Well then," the young naturalist observed, "perhaps we should see this young specimen in his typical plumage. If you please Axel."

At a nod from the proprietor, the boy shrugged and slipped off his lungi, turning slowly around so the visitors could get a good look at his back and bum. Darwin signaled the boy to walk back and forth and to lift his arms. They all observed the delicious play of his muscles as the boy turned or raised his arms to display his physique. His flat squared off buttocks dimpled fetchingly as he moved across the room. From his tiny red nipples to a deeply indented navel, to narrow hips framing a surprisingly ample manhood for one so slight in build, Axel was real beauty. His skin was deeply and evenly bronzed from years of exposure to the tropical sun. He had no hair on his body, lacking even the usual wisps under his arms or at the fork of his legs, a condition probably related to his failure to reach full height. His complexion was flawless, probably for the same reason. It made him look several years younger and incredibly fresh and innocent despite his fully formed manhood.

"I suppose it is his youth and slenderness that lets him tolerate this tropical heat so well. He has only a thin sheen of sweat on his tawny hide while we gentlemen, are dripping." Captain Fitzroy observed.

"That is true of all tropical peoples including whites raised here. If the boy is sitting relaxed in the shade he hardly sweats at all and in temperatures that would leave our clothing soaked."

Modern science eventually explained that persons born in the tropics metabolized brown fat at a slower rate than persons born in cooler climes regardless of ethnicity. The adaptation lasted a lifetime as long as it got started during the first two years of life. Otherwise it was impossible to acquire.

"No doubt it helps that the boy is usually entirely nude."

"I assure you Mr. Darwin, that shameless as the boy may be running around stark naked all the time, he would make you a good local guide. He is intelligent and conscientious. I am sure I can spare him from his normal duties. Besides, I know he would jump at the chance. He wants to talk with you anyway," the man added. "The boy is an incessant chatterbox with an insatiable curiosity. I think you will find that it is all part of his charm."

That was how Axel came to be in Charles Darwin's service in the Keeling Islands. They hit it off really well from the start, each respecting the other's realm of expertise. The boy had endless

questions about the natural sciences and geography, and world history for his well-educated and well-travelled visitor. Axel could read and write well enough, but the proprietor's personal library was quite limited. He had read all the books there he cared to read, skipping the Congregationalist devotional works. For his part, Darwin delighted in having an intelligent and hardworking student cum assistant, not to mention a competent guide around the hard to navigate lagoon. Without the boy, he likely would have run onto coral heads or been left stranded on the sands at low water. He let Axel look through some of his own books from the Beagle, including Lyell's revolutionary work, *Principles of Geology*, which was a revelation to the lad, opening his mind to what geologists call deep time.

On board the Beagle the Danish lad drew stares. There he was, a tawny skinned blond boy parading stark naked across the deck and into the cabin, as eyes hungrily devoured him, drinking in his beauty of face and form. Some men looked at him with frank lust on their faces. With his blond hair grown down to his shoulders, his delicate -- even elfin features, deep tan, and his smooth hairless physique, the boy was stunning in his physical beauty, like an angel only anatomically correct in every way, a fully functional male. He seemed utterly unconcerned about his perpetual nudity. So what if everyone got a good at his tush when he bent over to haul equipment from the hold. What was so important about clothing anyway? What did he have to hide, pretty boy that he was, after a lifetime of nudity?

Inwardly Axel was gratified that he had a fresh audience instead of the same old faces he had grown up with. When he reported for duty, he stood at attention, chest and hips forward, belly flat, his buttocks taut and tight, the deep cleavage emphasized by his stance, and threw Darwin a jaunty salute, even though, as a civilian member of the expedition, the young naturalist did not warrant one. As far as Axel was concerned, the salute was a sign of his respect for the man, rather than for his rank.

Axel that knew his blatant display of his nude body was nothing less than wickedness, raw temptation for sailors cooped up aboard ship for too many weeks. He probably should be spanked for his presumption or even switched, but he couldn't help it. He so very much liked to show off his sexy body. What cock proud lad would turn down the chance to strut his stuff like that? Especially when there was suddenly a ship full of young males who might appreciate him. Not that he quite knew what form that appreciation might take. The boy, after all, was a virgin.

Axel enjoyed diving from the fore deck of ship or cannon-balling from the rigging into the Boat Channel, a deep water inlet on the lagoon side of Home Island where visiting ships dropped anchor. Then he swarmed back up a rope hung over the side for another dive, water running off his bare body, hair plastered to his head. His bronzed skin was dotted with droplets of sea water, glistening with refracted sunlight like tiny diamonds. One of the younger hands showed the boy proper diving form, how to enter the water cleanly, head first, even from the high rigging. They looked like a couple of kids larking about. For Darwin's sake, the captain indulged the boy in what seemed like innocent fun.

For the naturalist, the boy's trim physique drew the appreciation any man might have for the fine lines of a healthy young colt or deer. Who would not admire the slender limbs, bright eyes, noble carriage, strong shoulders, and round withers. Browned and gracile, the Danish boy had everything a Renaissance artist could ever have wished for in a model including a handsome set of genitals. And yes the naturalist might have put his hands to the boy's body, helping him into the canoe or patting him on the shoulder or even hugging him in delight when they found some biological treasure but entirely without lascivious intent.

There was never anything improper between them, man and boy, though the lad went around entirely nude full-time in the man's company. However the boy disported himself, displaying his beauty of face and form, he never inspired lust in the heart of young Englishman. For all his originality and independence of thought in his scientific life, in his personal life the young Darwin was almost painfully proper and conventional in his attitudes towards sex. He simply was not interested in the boy that way.

The work of the Beagle in the Keeling Islands was important to Darwin's major contribution to geology. The soundings taken combined with Darwin's samples, led Darwin to his hypothesis, later confirmed, that coral atolls originate as normal fringing reefs around volcanic islands. As the

magma below cools or recedes, or the loosely consolidated ash and lava slump into the sea, the islands themselves sink slowly. Meanwhile the growth of the coral reefs upward towards the light at the surface keeps pace with the subsidence though getting farther and farther from the receding shoreline of the island. In time the summit of the sunken island forms the bottom of a shallow lagoon surrounded by a nearly circular string of low coral islands and reefs.

After the Beagle's departure, Axel returned to his regular duties but with his intellectual horizons vastly wider. He told the proprietor that he did not want to spend the rest of his life on these isolated islands, carrying messages and gardening. Not that he had anything against such honest work. The proprietor resolved to help the boy find a career worthy of his intelligence and energy, even if it meant he would have to wear a pair of pants.

In the meanwhile, it pleased the proprietor to see the lad nevertheless throw himself back into his gardening. He might be found there almost any morning kneeling on the ground, brown cheeks resting on bare feet, genitals dangling between slender hairless thighs, his lithe torso bent over, ribs and spinal bumps prominent as, trowel in hand, he worked at his humble task firm muscles playing under the skin. He looked so alive, a fine specimen of the human animal. When the man called out a greeting, the boy would turn to look with those green eyes of his, the color of growing things, and flash a dazzling smile from his open and honest face.

Chapter 2. Coming of Age

"Ware below!" Axel called out as he cut several coconuts free from the cluster of palm leaves at the top of the tree and let them fall to the sand with a heavy thud.

"Damnation! Avast boy. Are you trying to crack my skull open?"

Surprised, Axel looked down to see a young man on the ground, nursing a sore shoulder. The nude climber slid down the trunk of the palm to the beach below.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"See for yourself, boy."

The youth wore only cut-off seaman's trousers slung very low on his hips, baring almost his entire torso, so it was easy to see that a large bruise was forming on his shoulder where the heavy fruit had struck him in its descent.

"Are you daft, boy, to drop coconuts on your betters' heads without warning?"

"Now look, I am sorry I did not delay long enough but I did shout a warning before I let the coconuts drop. And what is with this "boy" stuff, anyway. You can't be twenty years old while I am seventeen myself!" Axel replied hotly.

"Really, boy? I'd say you cannot be more than fifteen, if I am to judge from appearances. Here you are a bare assed runt without a hair anywhere on his body, not even down there. And still running around stark naked like a child, a boy, whereas I am a man grown. I will have you know that I turned nineteen last month, and I go about in proper trousers."

Actually though he had four inches (10 cm) on Axel and maybe fifteen pounds (7 kg), the newcomer was very young looking himself. He had a boyish build, more like a colt in his case than a fawn like Axel, and a cute Irish face. Sky blue eyes looked out of a lightly freckled face topped by a thatch of red hair.

"Proper trousers? Those shorts of yours don't reach half way to your knees. They are much too big for your flat waist and narrow hips and look rather likely to slide right off your skinny ass. Look, maybe I was in the wrong there, getting careless with the coconuts, but that was an accident, and I am sorry for it. But I did not intentionally give offense the way you have been doing, my red headed friend. I think you went over the line, belittling me that way."

"If anyone has belittled you, boy, it was Mother Nature herself!" the seaman retorted with a barking

laugh.

That did it. Though not combative, Axel did not suffer fools gladly or allow himself to be mocked. He had after all apologized for his carelessness and given the man a chance to apologize in turn. How dare this fellow continue to belittle him in that fashion.

With a pang of regret that this was a white boy of about his age who might have become a friend, Axel threw an inexpert punch at the red head's chin. The older youth let it slip past his shoulder and punched Axel hard in the solar plexus. The smaller boy went down on to his knees and haunches, the wind knocked out of him, gasping for breath. He could hardly hold back tears of shame at how easily he had been bested by a single punch.

Suddenly the other youth knelt beside him, holding him gently by the shoulders, murmuring words of regret.

"Here, sit up straight, kid. It will help you breathe easier. Look, I am really sorry I hit you just now, catching you with that sucker punch. It was all my fault, provoking you that way. But I have something of a temper. It runs in the family, but like a squall at sea it soon blows over. I can never stay mad for long, especially not with a nice looking kid like you. Can we just, well, start over, blondie? I think we might become friends. Look, what do I call you? My name is Brendan, Brendan Doyle. I am Irish, if you hadn't guessed."

"Uh, that's OK with me, I guess. My name is Axel, Axel Knorr. I am Danish." They shook hands firmly, if a little warily.

"Aren't you rather far from Denmark, Axel?"

Axel explained that he had never been to Denmark itself, having been born in southern India in the Danish crown colony of Travancore. Soon the boys were chatting away companionably, their earlier discord forgiven if not quite forgotten. They half knelt, half sat side by side, their bare legs and flanks touching.

With his blond hair, large green eyes, straight nose and well defined jaw line, Axel's face had the supernal beauty of a young angel you might see in a stained glass window in a church, though who ever depicted a picture of an angel with a fully formed manhood. Yes he was short, but the boy's compact physique was quite muscular, trim and taut, with fine definition. The effect was rather lovely in fact.

Brendan could hardly keep his hands off Axel. The boy was so young, so beautiful, so close, and so very naked. Axel even smelled good: of sweat, and salt, and good clean boy. No wonder Brendan's comforting hand had slid down from Axel's shoulder along his spine and down to the boy's fine round rump where Brendan's fingers were exploring the boy's cleavage. Brendan's other hand slipped from his shoulder to finger the boy's nipples and to stroke his chest the ridges of his belly, and his inner thighs. Axel didn't seem to mind the exploratory touching, either. He actually sidled closer, putting his arm around Brendan's waist, so their bodies pressed together and laid his head on Brendan's shoulder.

"This feels very nice Brendan, sitting here together, feeling the warmth of your body. I know you won't mind my putting my arm around you, holding you close. No, don't stop what you are doing with your hands. I have never had hands on me like this. It feels good. It is making me tingly all over. If you want to touch me, to play with my body, go ahead. You have my permission to touch me anywhere, even in my secret places."

Brendan availed himself of the privilege, even daring to run a finger around the boy's nether whorl the along the perineum. He grasped the boy's ballsac, weighing him and rolling his balls back and forth. Axel gulped as the older youth took his cock in his hand and played with the foreskin, pulling it back, running his thumb around the flange of the glans. He had said the man could touch him anywhere, and it certainly made the boy feel all tingly. Never before had a man's touch brought such satisfaction.

All well and good, Axel thought, that his own charms were so totally on display and at Brendan's

disposal, but what about the Irish lad himself? If only he could get Brendan out of his trousers for a good look at him.

"You know, Brendan, the best thing for that sore shoulder is some easy exercise. Why don't we go into the water for a swim?"

Brendan nodded and slipped out of his trousers. Although his tan was lighter than Axel's, it was just as even, without pasty white areas on his body. Also his groin was just as smooth as the Danish boy's. Axel raised an interrogative eyebrow.

"All right." Brendan said, somewhat defensively. "So I like to shuck off aboard ship and go about bare ass, but I do put on a pair of pants ashore. And I shave my pubes for the sake of hygiene, so I won't collect any critters down there or in my pits."

The boys raced into the sea and soon were cavorting in the manner of boys down the ages, splashing each other, laughing, grappling, competing to see who could swim faster on the surface or farther underwater. Much the better swimmer anyway, and with Brendan having to take it easy on his sore shoulder, Axel had no difficulty winning those contests. That helped restore his injured pride.

They finally splashed onto the shore and lay back on the sand tired from their swim. They talked for quite a while, Brendan's hand resting on and sometimes squeezing Axel's nearer thigh. Abruptly Brendan raised up on one elbow and looked hard at the lovely lad stretched out so enticingly next to him. He reached a hand out and stroked the boy's chest and the corrugations of his ribs and abs, letting it lie on his belly, his thumb toying idly with the boy's navel. Axel accepted these ministrations willingly, murmuring contentedly as the young man's hands touched him virtually everywhere.

"Uh, Axel, don't take this the wrong way, but do you have any idea how truly beautiful you are? You are so much prettier than any girl I ever saw. This firm young body of yours would make a sculptor drool with envy. Those old time Greeks and Romans liked to put up statues of athletic boys, nudes just like you."

"You don't look so bad yourself, Brendan. The ancients would likely drool over you too. I don't mind admitting that I am close to doing the same myself. Not that I would really know how to take it further than a kiss. The fact is that I have never been with anyone, man or woman. That does make me feel like I am still fourteen, but I really am seventeen, as of five days ago anyway, just as I told you."

"And still a complete virgin?".

The Danish boy reddened and nodded, too embarrassed to speak further.

"Given how few opportunities you have had around here, that is not surprising. Axel, would you let me make love to you, to teach you about male love? I am sure you would like it. I know I would. You are the sexiest creature I ever encountered."

The blond boy's nervous nod indicated his assent.

Brendan had them gather some palm leaves for a bed which they laid out in the shade.

The older youth took the boy in his arms, stroking his chest and belly, rubbing his tiny red nipples, nibbling his ear, drawing in his scent through his nostrils, cooing and soothing the boy but letting him feel the strength in his arms. He pulled the boy to his chest and kissed him, first just on the lips, later thrusting his tongue into Axel's mouth to get his taste. Hesitantly at first, but with growing ardor, Axel responded, kissing, stroking, whimpering a little as he felt Brendan's upright manhood press against his belly and encounter his own rigid member. The youth felt rather overmatched in that department.

Brendan reached lower, grasping Axel's member, using his thumb to spread the pre-cum leaking from the piss slit over the head of his cock. He gently stroked Axel's erection which was nothing to be ashamed of really. For a boy with such a slight build, Axel's genitals were more than adequate, the

ballsac hairless and pulled tight to the fork of the legs. His shaft was tumescent, painfully erect, purpled, and throbbing with the beat of his heart. The boy's breathing speeded up. He felt lightheaded, flushed and incredibly hot despite the cool of the sea breeze playing over their skin.

Brendan was intoxicated. This island boy was so small and beautiful, a delicate blossom, his slender physique utterly alluring, tanned, trim, wiry, with a well corrugated front and a fine round rump in back. And complaisant too, readily following Brendan's lead as he explored his wondrous body. How lucky Brenda felt to have encountered Axel. It had been worth nearly getting brained by a falling coconut.

Brendan showed Axel how a man can use his tongue and lips to pleasure another man's cock. Axel had never imagined that anything could feel so good. He body felt on fire as Brendan surrounded his rigid manhood with the warmth and wetness of his oral cavity. Axel hoped the youth would not bite him there in his excitement. He felt terribly naughty at the flutter of a man's tongue on the head of his cock, the tip poking into the tiny slit at the end then circling the flange of the glans. Brendan's lips closed around the head of the cock and pulled and sucked. Axel moaned inarticulately, turning his head left and right as the red headed youth inducted him into the age old fraternity of males pleasuring their own kind, using tongue and fingers to stimulate the sweet spot just under the helmet of the glans, ultimately bringing him to a shuddering blinding orgasm. When the boy came in his mouth, Brendan swallowed all of his gism then kissed him hard, letting him share the taste of his own male essence. The boy thought this so very exciting and sexy; he hugged Brendan and sighed with delight.

Then it was Axel's turn to apply his lesson, though not with Brendan lying down as he had. Instead, Brendan stood on his feet leaning back onto the trunk of a palm tree. He loomed over the smaller lad, Brendan a tower of strength and masculinity, the blond boy went to his knees, small and submissive. It felt so natural to him, to gaze up worshipfully at his new lover. The boy readily accepted his subordinate role as one ordained by his youth, his inexperience, and his small hairless physique, so much less manly than the older youth's.

Brendan found himself responding to the Danish boy's goodness and innocence, breaking him in very gently and carefully, not simply fucking his face like the experienced lads had been with, but holding himself back, restraining his own excitement, letting the inexperienced boy proceed at his own pace. Tentatively at first, Axel was soon pleasuring Brendan in turn, slurping, and licking, and sucking, careful with his teeth, as he had been warned. He so very much wanted to please Brendan, happy and grateful for his initiation in male love.

Axel wasn't so good at swallowing cock that first time; willing though he was, his gag reflex left him choking, mouth watering, spit drooling out the sides. Brendan did not mind. No point trying to force himself deeper. That would be selfish of him. This boy was willing, even eager. His clumsiness would pass soon enough with practice. He just needed time to accustom himself to a fleshy invader down his throat, to learn to deep throat a cock, timing his breathing with Brendan's withdrawal as he pumped in and out of the moist channel that gripped his manhood.

That first afternoon, Brendan introduced Axel to the pleasures of sucking cock, but spared the boy's ass for the next night. He knew from personal experience that a virgin boy's first penetration could be scary and painful -- even humiliating and dirty and shameful. He never wanted Axel to be ashamed of anything they did together or afraid that Brendan would hurt him. No, he would never play rough with this gentle and trusting lad nor let any one else do it either. Brendan didn't quite realize it but he was already falling in love with Axel.

The next afternoon Brendan stripped excitedly, practically dancing with impatience. Axel also knew this was the moment he and Brendan would really become lovers. He had prepared, thoroughly voiding himself beforehand. For this tryst, Brendan wanted to take the boy face to face. That way, it would be two people in love making love, not just two horny bodies locked in physical pleasure. He kissed the lad, starting on his forehead then cheeks and then lips. His hands roamed all over Axel's lithe form from his firm pectorals, down his ribs and to his sharp hipbones. He put the boy on his back with his heels in the air holding his knees high and knelt between the boy's slender legs.

While they kissed again, the older youth's large virile member slid along Axel's belly and into his cleavage, poking, prodding, playing with the anal ring, teasing him before the actual fuck. Brendan

fingered the small hole, tugging with his thumbs at the crinkly ring, pushing in, lubricating the orifice with a bit of coconut oil, preparing him for his first ever penetration.

Axel felt Brendans's manhood stretch his anal ring as the head push through the first ring then the next. It hurt at first as the head of the shaft slid inside, but Brendan paused to give Axel time to adjust to his girth. With a nod from Axel to proceed he slid in a bit further. Brendan was gratified that the boy's tiny orifice with its crinkly folds, could readily accept his rather sizeable cock. At a pace set by the boy himself, he gradually slipped it into the velvet glove up to the hilt, earning a blissful sigh from his partner as their groins ground against together.

Brendan was pleased not only for himself but because he had brought so much pleasure to a boy who had till then been denied any release for his natural longings. As Brendan started pumping, they fell into a rhythm, Axel raising his rump to meet the descending shaft as it penetrated his ass, inexpertly using his internal muscles to squeeze the invading penis. It went on for some time, both males wanting to prolong it, their bodies slippery with sweat. They climaxed together, Axel's seed shot out as a loose string from the cock to his face, a white streak on face and chest and belly. The boy could feel Brendans' warm wetness spurting into him, forever ending his virginity.

Afterwards they lay together, bellies pasted together by sweat and cum, the older youth's cock still in the boy, softening now. Their pulses slowed, their breathing growing more even as they enjoyed the afterglow of lovemaking. Axel smiled giddily at his lover, making Brendan happy that the boy had not suddenly been overcome with guilt and shame, as some boys do. Brendan reached up to brush stray strands of blond hair from the boy's exquisite features, his thumb traced the arch of Axel's eyebrow, his knuckles brushed a smooth cheek that had never seen a razor nor had any need to. This was a rare beauty caught in the full flower of his youth. They kissed sweetly then lay together quietly, gathering their strength for the next round.

Their third afternoon together the boys were going at it with so much enthusiasm they did not hear the proprietor's approach. Not too surprisingly. The man was walking around barefoot as was his wont.

"Oops. What the Hell! Sorry lads. I did not mean to break in on you like this."

Axel looked up from where he was astride Brendan's hips, energetically bouncing himself up and down on the man's cock. He glanced down at his own rigid cock, which Brendan had been frigging and turned bright red. He tried to speak but, in his consternation, he could only stammer incoherently.

"Uh, er, um, uh."

"Now, now, don't get all in a state young Axel. I can see how things stand with the pair of you, and no, I am neither shocked nor really surprised. It had to happen some day. And no I am not mad that you have slacked off your duties a bit these last couple of days, though I did wonder where you had gone off to."

"If anyone is to blame, it is I," asserted Brendan, getting to his feet. "I seduced the lad. He is innocent of any wrongdoing. I admit that at first I sought my own pleasure, but now I can honestly say that I am in love with him."

"And I with Brendan!" Axel declared loyally.

"Then I am happy for the both of you. Axel, I know you have wanted to leave the island, to take up some profession. We will talk more of this tomorrow morning in my office. You should be there too, Brendan."

Chapter 3. The Island

Two weeks later, Axel and Brendan sailed the cutter Petrel from the Keeling Islands on a mission to reconnoiter Christmas Island for the proprietor. Clunie-Ross had hired Brendan away from the East India Company and given him command of the single masted craft. They were to chart the island and note its resources such as timber and guano and the potential for cultivation.

Christmas Island lay at nearly the same latitude as the Cocos Islands but some six hundred miles to the east (975 km). Despite being reconnoitered more than a century earlier and added to nautical charts, no one had really landed there because of fringing reefs and intimidating cliffs all around its shores. It was quite unlike the Keeling Islands atoll, which was a string of low lying coral islands and islets, no more than five meters above sea level. Christmas island was a single solid block of rock, the flat summit of a submarine mountain made up mostly of basalt, reflecting its volcanic origins, though most of its surface was coral limestone.

The island is usually described as a four sided figure with hollowed sides, 19 kilometers by 15 (12 by 9 miles). Its shape is rather like the profile of a dog facing east and looking upwards. So Northeast Point might be its upturned nose, Medwin Point, in the extreme south, its front claws, Jones Point the rear ones, and Northwest Point the tip of the tail. The total land area is 135 square kilometres or 52 square miles with a long coastline, of some 140 kilometers (86 mi). Beyond the steep cliffs were terraces and a central plateau mostly given over to tropical rainforest. Its highest point was nearly three hundred meters (a thousand feet) above the level of the sea.

For the boys this was the first great adventure of their lives. Axel had never been away from the Keeling Islands in his eight years there. For Brendan, this was a sailor's dream, an independent command, even if a very small one. They were gratified that the proprietor had put his confidence in two basically untried boys. Axel's job was to help with the navigation and to keep the expedition's records of what they found. They set out well equipped with charts, food, water, ropes, nets and fishing lines, tools, machetes, and shotguns.

One item they left behind was clothing. Axel had challenged Brendan to make the entire journey naked. The proprietor had rolled up his eyes at that, but had not countermanded their decision. After all, it was a sort of honeymoon trip for the two lusty lads. So they set off, Brendan at the tiller for the first stage. With no place to stop, they would sail directly for the island, a trip of about five or six days depending on the winds.

The boys felt very naughty, sailing off without a scrap of cloth to cover their loins. Who knows what ships they might encounter or where they might land, planned or not. How many strangers might they have to disport themselves before in a state of nature. At least Christmas Island itself was uninhabited.

For whatever reason the same seagoing peoples who had populated the East Indies and even settled far off Madagascar from Borneo had left various island groups in the Indian Ocean in a pristine state. Yet crowded Java, the most populous island in the world today, lay less than three hundred miles north of Christmas Island. Presumably the lack of any anchorage or harbor explained why their destination had no natives but what of the other island groups.

No one had ever settled the Keeling Islands, Christmas Island, the Chagos Archipelago, the Agalega Islands, and others. There, if nowhere else, the empire builders had some justification for declaring these to be 'terra nullius', Latin for 'land belonging to no one', and seizing the islands for themselves. There was no native populations with competing claims that had to be overawed, killed off, or dispossessed.

The little expedition reached the island in six days. Their first circumnavigation showed no place to land. They would need to anchor in a sheltered bay or cove. Instead, all they found were wide bights open to the sea and guarded by inshore reefs and high cliffs. Even in a calm, ocean swells made close approach dangerous as the waves crashed into the cliffs. As the island was the top of an undersea mountain, it did no good at all to drop anchor. The bottom fell away vertiginously.

The only low point lay in the east at the tip of a small peninsula. It offered a landing place of sorts but no anchorage and no easy way up the cliffs to the plateau. Finally, quite by accident, they stumbled upon what was later called Flying Fish Cove, a small sheltered anchorage, and one not easy to spot from the sea. The boys set up camp in what would later be called The Settlement. Christmas Island now had a population of two.

The first order of business was to ensure the safety of their little craft. They drew the Petrel completely out of the water, high up on the coral strand using ropes and pulleys and dragging it over rollers cut from the abundant trees. That would keep their little ship out of the reach of

storm waves. Then they built a small shelter framed with tree branches with comfortable beds with hollows scooped out of the sand for their shoulders and hips, lined with palm fronds and grasses. They neither needed nor wanted any covering for their bodies. On this island they would live and love as nature had made them.

Fifty two square miles might not sound like much, but the island was a huge area for just the two of them to reconnoiter on foot. They could leave their camp unguarded easily enough with no one else on the island. The main danger was some accident would leave one of them unable to walk or unconscious. So the boys resolved to keep together at all times. That way one boy could help the other.

The explorers soon found that the island offered considerable resources heretofore untouched by the hand of man. The forests would provide hardwoods. There were some two dozen species of trees. Ferns, orchids and vines grew in the humid atmosphere beneath the canopy. Also valuable were the huge deposits of phosphate, the result of the deposit of guano by sea and land birds over millions of years. Some areas were suitable for cultivation of the palm tree. Land crabs in super abundance would provide meat for man and for his hogs. Luckily the annual migration of these creatures took place in another section of the island. Maybe the plumage of the many species of birds had commercial value too. So many species were unique to this isolated island. The youths knew the proprietor would be pleased with their reports and the samples they had collected.

With sensible precautions, the days passed pleasantly. The island was a fine place for two young lovers in the first bloom of their relationship. They could stop whatever they were doing and make love anywhere, at the spur of the moment. It might just be a long kiss with their bodies pressed together. More than once Brendan simply bent Axel over the trunk of a fallen tree or had him brace his arms on a rock while Brendan fucked him. Sometimes Axel took the initiative, climbing onto a tree branch about head high off the ground and demanding oral service from Brendan, though the blond boy did lose his grip one time and went ass over teakettle onto the long grass below. Whoever was walking in front might get his ass slapped or even switched.

Brendan loved to follow behind Axel as he walked in the forest, arms swinging naturally, his buttocks clenching and relaxing as he stepped along. More than once Brendan couldn't help himself, dragging the blond boy into the bushes for a quick shag. Sometimes they made a game of it, Axel taking off to protect his virtue, Brendan in hot pursuit. The boy's blond mane made it easy to track the youth even in the densest foliage, though just as often it was his giggling that gave him away. Sooner or later, the older youth would corner his prey, perhaps at the edge of a cliff. There Axel stood, his back to the sea, trembling with the fatigue of his flight. His lithe brown body and the tracery of veins on his slender arms and legs reminded Brenda of a deer or better yet a fawn. Lovely creatures those, fawns and Axels both.

Axel liked to swarm up vines to the high branches of trees and look out over the sea. On two occasions he saw a native junk or dhow on the horizon, but it never approached the forbidding shores of Christmas Island. The island had an evil reputation. Boats had been driven onto its shores and wrecked with the loss of all hands. Even if a shipwrecked seaman could swim to shore, he could not climb the steep cliffs that ringed the island. The only two places to that gave access inland were the cove and the low point.

The youths had the whole island to themselves. It was effectively theirs, and theirs alone, if it was anyone's, no matter what country had some spurious legal claim to it. One day they climbed to the top of the highest elevation, later called Murray Hill, and shouted their challenge at the top of their lungs. There they were, Axel Knorr and Brendan Doyle, Kings of the Mountain. All they surveyed was their realm. What boy would not have thrilled to such an experience?

They were on their own. There was no one to tell them not to go here or there or not to do this or that or to get on with this or that task. There were no bosses, no property lines, no money, no wealth except the natural kind. They were free from social conventions. Didn't they go about day after day in a state of nature, wearing nothing but a deep tan and a sheen of sweat, their fine young bodies exposed to the elements? For two youngsters in love it was a time of magic, sitting close in their shelter in the evening, the moonlight creating a broad white path on the surface of the sea, the splashes of fish making the waters shimmer with phosphorescence.

Sometimes the boys put flowers in their hair or wove them into a garland or a crown. Axel looked

striking in his crown of blue orchids and green stems and leaves. Brendan was smashing in his crown of white and green. They felt at one with nature, walking through the pristine landscape like any other creature of the forest. True they had tools and weapons with them, but that mattered little. Two slender nude boys were hardly an intrusion of modern civilization. And at night, after their ablutions, they would press the blossoms on their erogenous zones, transferring the wonderful scents to their skin, to heighten their experience of sexual congress. It never seemed unmanly to the boys that they carried the scent of flowers in their hair or on their bodies. Why should not fair nature lend her honest bouquet to their lovemaking?

Too bad the pair of humans were the only large land mammals on Christmas Island. It would be nice if the island held small deer or monkeys or wildcats or otters -- cute animals like that. Nothing too big of course or dangerous to man. They knew that the larger islands of Sumatra and Java had tigers and bears and rhinos and wild dogs in the back country. Christmas Island was far too small to support a population of large terrestrial carnivores. There were no snakes either and insects were not much of a bother with the steady winds and breezes characteristic of an ocean island.

One of the best things about the island was the fine waterfall that drained down the eastern cliffs. A natural fresh water shower, it was the best place to scrub up and rinse off. The boys were fastidious about their personal hygiene. Besides, they wanted to smell good for each other. The boys blazed a trail along the shore to the waterfall and beyond, to that low eastern point they had found during their circumnavigation. Too bad the sea bottom there fell away so quickly. That left no way for men to build a stone breakwater to create a sheltered harbor.

At least they managed to make friends with the locals, a pod of dolphins. It was a lucky day for both species.

The sound of noisy splashing out to sea caught their attention. It looked like a dolphin was tangled up in a tattered fisherman's net. Lost overboard who knew where or when, wooden floats must have held it on the surface till it finally drifted into the path of a pod of dolphins. Now the boys did not have their boat with them. That was beached on the north side of the island, but navigators have always had a soft spot in their hearts for the dolphin, a creature that always seems to be smiling. So they dove into the sea and swam out toward the trapped animal to see what they could do to help.

Its pod mates circled warily, but then recognized that the two nude boys were not their natural enemies. Neither sharks or orcas they, but some of the strange and usually harmless two tails they had encountered before. Most native fishermen considered it unlucky to land a dolphin and usually freed them if they got entangled in their nets. The animals were smart enough to realize the humans were trying to help them. So the dolphins swam alongside the boys and nudged them gently. One swam between Brendan's legs and pushed up beneath.

"I think they want us to hold on so we can reach their friend faster," Brendan ventured.

With a nod first Axel and then Brendan grabbed the dorsal fin of the nearest dolphin. It was just as Brendan had guessed. The dolphins saw the young lads as allies rather than as either a threat or prey. With the slender boys in tow the dolphins rushed out to sea. Upon arrival, Axel could see that the entangled dolphin was utterly exhausted from its efforts to keep its head above water, much less escape. It would soon drown without help for dolphins are mammals, not fish. They have lungs, not gills, and breathe air. The boys' knives made short work of the net. Even after the animal was freed the boys cut all the floats loose so the net would sink to the bottom, dragged down by the stone weights at its bottom. It would present no further danger to dolphins.

Two dolphins supported the exhausted survivor, one to each side under its side flippers, as the rest of the pod circled them and the boys with evident joy, vocalizing with their characteristic clicks. Some of the creatures jumped right out of the sea. Others slapped the surface with their flukes. Another squirted spray over the boys from his blow hole. The boys treaded water, big grins on their faces, stroking the grey hides of their new found friends.

Intelligent creatures, the animals knew that their human allies, the two tails, could not stay out at sea with them indefinitely, so with a nudge they got the boys to hold on once again and carried them back to chest deep water. There the pod gathered close as if trying to capture their scent or taste or to memorize the sonic picture of their bodies. Several hard beaks even poked at their

groins, evidently for the stronger scent there. Axel grabbed himself protectively. The boys patted the dolphins' heads. Axel even put his arms around the barrel torso of one of them. They they waved goodbye, finally clambering out of the sea, big smiles on their faces. The pod swam slowly out to sea, keeping pace with the animal the boys had rescued.

There are few times in your life when you can go to bed completely satisfied with what you did that day. For Axel and Brendan, this was one of them. They knew in their hearts that saving that trapped dolphin was the right thing to do, the moral thing. The perpetually smiling creatures were at least as intelligent as a dog and maybe more so. They never harmed human beings, and everyone had heard tales of how they had helped drowning mariners reach shore. (Pliny the Elder tells such a story.) Anyway, for whatever reason, sailors felt about dolphins the way children feel about the spotted beetles called ladybugs. They were viewed as friends. The boys did not make love that night, preferring to simply hold each other close, watching the stars and listening to the surf till their eyes closed and they slept the sleep of the just.

Chapter 4. Peril

The boys gathered fruits and fished to supplement their supply of preserved foods, some of which had to be kept for the return trip. The island offered several kinds of game: land crabs and game birds. The cliffs sheltered the nests of innumerable sea birds. With the ropes they had brought with them, it was not hard for one of the boys to slide down and gather a few eggs for their dinner. The nesting areas had to be approached from above. Except for the area around their landing cove and the low point in the east the shoreline was inaccessible. A few other areas along the shore looked attainable but there was nothing to bring the boys there, merely a sea level shelf along a windswept and wave swept coastline hemmed in by inshore reefs with the sea bottom falling off into the ocean depths for thousands of feet.

They had managed to lay out that trail that snaked along the coast from their cove for several miles, around the northeast tip of the island south past the waterfall to the low peninsula on the east shore. The boys showered there twice a week or bathed in pools near camp. They also liked to continue on the the low point to throw fish they had netted to their friends, the dolphins who patrolled those waters. The dolphins could sometimes snatch a fish out of mid air.

Axel was in the lead one day when he suddenly turned his ankle on a loose stone and slid down the cliff sixty feet, bouncing hard on his right shoulder on the inshore reef before splashing into the sea. The boy's skin was scratched and cut by his slide down the rocks and the sharp coral of the reef. So Axel was in a bad way with a sprained ankle and with his right arm bent awkwardly from a dislocated shoulder. He was in pain, bloody and bruised, floating offshore beyond the reef.

As the tide carried Axel out to sea, Brendan scrambled down the steep slope to the water's edge, but he did not have a rope with him that he could throw to Axel to reel him in. The injured boy was being carried out to sea by the outgoing tide, unable to swim well enough to counter the tidal current. Worse was the approach of two large sharks, nearly three times as long as the boy was tall and ten times his mass. The predators had been attracted by the commotion and the scent of blood from Axel's cuts and scrapes. Sharks have an excellent sense of smell, good hearing, and a lateral line that senses vibrations in the water, such as those created by the movements of wounded fish. All these senses drew the pair of Great Whites to the scene.

Brendan watched horrified. The sharks were too far off to engage from shore even if he had had one of their shotguns with them. He wasn't sure they could have done much damage to the monsters anyway. The only weapon he had with him was a machete. Not much good against the tough skins of sharks and surely no match for the fearsome armament in their jaws, never mind the mismatch in size. Brendan was heartsick at the thought that his friend and lover might be torn apart by the hunters of the sea, torn apart and eaten, his flesh the only value sharks could place on a human being, so much red meat.

How cruel the world could be. Brendan raged at the fate that threatened to separate him forever from the boy he loved. For his part, Axel could see that Brendan could never reach him before the circling sharks did. All Brendan would do would be to provide them with a second victim.

"No, Brendan, don't do it. Don't fling your self into the sea. Stay on shore, stay safe. I am lost.

You cannot save me. Save yourself. There is nothing you can do for me.

"Noooo!" the red head called out in anguish, preparing to dive into the water anyway and somehow rescue Axel or to share his fate.

Brendan was heartsick at the way the sharks seemed to play with Axel, circling him, sliding past and nudging him without biting him. They knew the boy was theirs, a helpless victim, so much naked prey for their maws, just another kind of sea mammal for them to tear apart and consume. So they played with him as a cat might with a mouse. For his part Axel could only beat ineffectually on the head of the shark with his left fist, half expecting the predator to bite his arm right off. He was terrified, indeed had pissed himself, wondering hysterically whether his urine might act as a shark repellent.

The poor lad was terrified and angry both. Here he was only seventeen years old. He had seen so little of life, so little that a long life might offer. He so desperately wanted to live. His fear nearly prompted him to call out for help anyway, to beg Brendan to jump in and save him. Anything but a lonely death as the sharks tore him apart. It was his love for Brendan kept him from making a vain appeal that would result in his lover's death too. Instead he screwed up his courage and called out once again.

"Brendan! If you ever loved me, stay on shore. Preserve your own life. Do this for me Brendan. Always remember me, Brendan. I love you."

The boy then resigned himself to his awful fate, no longer struggling in the water.

Suddenly nine grey torpedo shapes streaked through the sea, their dorsal fins showing that these were not sharks but bottle nosed dolphins. It was the pod the boys had befriended, rescuing one dolphin from certain death. Now the dolphins were coming to Axel's rescue, on the attack against their natural enemies.

The teeth of a dolphin are of little use against a shark but their hard beaks serve as battering rams. The beak concentrated all the momentum of a dolphin swimming at top speed into a very small area. As Axel and Brendan looked on, enraged dolphins slammed into the sharks from all sides. Their beaks did not penetrate the skin but the impact from their ramming did fearsome internal damage to the sharks, crushing gill ridges, smashing viscera, tearing blood vessels, rupturing the sharks' livers. In pain, battered, confused, and mortally wounded, the sharks limped away to die. Their attack had been so sudden and overwhelming that none of the dolphins was injured. As Axel grabbed with his one good hand, a dolphin gave him a tow to the low point of land just down the coast, the rest of the pod providing an escort.

Brendan raced down the trail reaching the low point soon after Axel did. Axel was still in a lot of a pain with his dislocated shoulder. Brendan laid him out on the shore, put one foot to his chest and grabbed the boy's wrist.

"This will hurt, Axel". The blond boy nodded and braced himself.

"Arrgh" he called out, but the deed was done. One quick jerk and the shoulder joint slid back into place.

"Now if we could only ask our friends to give us a ride to the cove." Brendan mused. But the communications barrier between the species was too high. Instead, with Brendan's help, Axel made his way back to camp on foot. One foot. There his cuts were cleaned and dressed so they would not get infected. Even though this was before the development of the germ theory of disease, everyone knew that wounds should be cleaned to prevent what was called "corruption".

Brendan saw that Axel was looking at him oddly, even given the situation. He asked softly.

"What is it, Axel?"

The boy couldn't look him straight in the face, Instead he looked down at the ground and confessed.

"Oh, I am so ashamed, Brendan. Ashamed of my selfishness and cowardice. When I was floating out there, injured and unarmed, the sharks kept circling, playing with me. I wasn't a human being to them but just another form of prey, naked and helpless. I was so afraid, I went and pissed myself. I'm such a baby!"

"I would have done the same thing, Axel. It was a natural physical reaction, not a moral failing on your part."

"No, Brendan, you don't understand. The worst part is that, in that last moment before the dolphins arrived, I so very much wanted to live that all I could think of was to call out to you, to beg you to jump in and somehow save me. Impossible as it was. I was ready to throw your life away uselessly, coward that I am."

"But you didn't, Axel, you didn't. The fact is that as much as you wanted to call for help which would doom me too, you did just the opposite. You shouted for me to stay on shore, so that I might live. You did that, twice, because you love me. And I love you for that, yes, and for so much more. Courage doesn't mean not being afraid. It means doing the right thing, the selfless thing, when you are afraid."

"You really mean that?"

"Axel, you are the bravest and most selfless boy I ever met. No, make that the bravest and most selfless young man. I love you, you idiot. So come here."

With that he kissed the blond boy tenderly, mindful of his many hurts. Axel melted into his arms, tears rolling down cheeks.

Brendan's heart could hardly contain the love he felt for this beautiful boy in his embrace. Even in mortal danger, Axel had acted to safeguard him, Brendan, rather than look out for himself. Axel would rather have died than have risked Brendan's life in a hopeless cause. Maybe Brendan had first fallen in love with Axel for his pretty face and sexy body and sparky personality. Now he loved him as much for his character, for who he was as a person. Brendan pledged himself to Axel as long as the boy would have him. With any luck, they would be spend their lives together.

Axel slept in Brendan's arms, awakening the next morning much his usual cheery self. A week later, after a hearty supper and with his shoulder, ankle, and cuts healing nicely, Axel leaned back in their shelter and remarked to Brendan.

"You know, I could get used to this, being waited on hand and foot."

"Hand and foot, eh? What do I look like, your lordship, a footman?"

"Actually, with that pretty face of yours, that slim figure, and those wavy red locks down to your shoulders, you look more like a handmaiden, I dare say."

Brendan snorted and threw a handful of wet seaweed at Axel's head

That did it. Soon the boys were wrestling and laughing. Brendan took it easy with Axel, not wanting to aggravate his injuries. The boys rolled in the sand, their sweat making it stick to their bodies. Well that was what the cove was there for, washing off. Daily swimming in the cove had helped Axel recover from his injuries. The water, rather than his ankle, supported his weight.

Within two weeks, the boys resumed their recon of the island's resources. Brendan had wisely chosen not to go off on his own during Axel's convalescence. After all, he might as easily have an accident as Axel. On their map they marked the large deposits of phosphates in two regions of the island, the extent of the forests, the waterfall, the anchorage, and the trail to the low point.

Finally the young lovers shoved off for the return trip to the Keeling Islands. Before heading west, they weathered the NE point of the island and fed the last of the fish they had netted to their dolphin friends. From their arrival by boat, the animals seemed to sense that this was the last time they would see each other and put on an acrobatic show which ended with all of them waving their

flukes in goodbye. Then the two groups of mammals went their separate ways. The next day the boys had one last look at their honeymoon island as the top of the mountain disappeared below the curve of the earth.

The return trip to the Keeling Islands was uneventful except for a squall that gave the boys an invigorating and cleansing fresh water shower. For their arrival, Brendan ran a pennant up the mast of the Petrel, sailing her slowly through the Boat Channel to the Landing Place on Home Island. Their welcome from the proprietor was cordial. He had begun to worry about their safety. Yet here they both were, safe and sound, looking even more tanned and more fit than when they had set out. They had a natural ease with each other now, the two of them, the kind of bond that couples develop, and a new maturity. They had gone out a boys but returned as young men, confident in themselves and in each other. They were invited to dinner, properly dressed in lungis for the occasion. Their report pleased Clunies-Ross immensely, especially the news of the landing place in the cove.

"We'll keep that our little secret boys, a trade secret. One of these days I am going to expand my operations. Christmas Island would be ideal. No native population in the way, no grasping officials, no competition. An evil reputation that keeps everyone away. Rich in phosphates and hard timber. The best part is that only we know that there really is a place to land. Well done."

Axel and Brendan were soon working on a larger ship, Brendan as second mate, Axel as midshipman, carrying copra to the East India Company's plants in southern India for extracting the coconut oil and supplies back to the plantation. Their ship stopped off once at Axel's birthplace, Travancore, so he got to show Brendan where he had spent his childhood. The two young men stayed in the proprietor's employ for six more years before starting their own shipping line. They kept the secret of Christmas Island for the next fifty years, stopping off on occasion to visit what they always thought of as their island.

In time Queen Victoria granted the proprietor's family feudal and property rights over the island in perpetuity. It was the proprietor's grandson in the 1880s who finally exploited the riches of Christmas Island, making a fortune from phosphates. He even built a railroad to ship them from the south of the island to Flying Fish Cove. Before the end of the twentieth century, Australia took over the colony, ending the anachronism of feudal rule and bought out the proprietor's interests. These days both Christmas Island and the Keeling Islands are Australian territories with limited self-government.