

### The Fearsome Island

bing his flanks and the other spots where my foot had dwelt.

So was that accursed castle wiped from off the face of this earth, and thus were Satan, the black cat, and Thomas Snoad, my fellow-adventurer, avenged fully and to the hilt.

### Chapter VI

THERE was a feeling of triumph in my heart as once more we journeyed to the sea-shore, to embark on our good ship and set sail across the green waters. Manfully we pushed our barrows before us, I singing brave songs as I strode, and, though our loads were weightier than they had ever been before, our two carriages seemed wondrous light and easy of guidance.

Hope is a wondrous well, and I had drunk deep of its waters, a rare medicine, that, after these many days of fear and terror, was bringing my manhood back to me and implanting new courage in my heart. Our ship stood ready, and carefully we stowed away

### The Fearsome Island

our provisions and the spoils of the Dark Chamber. The next two days we went a-hunting, slaying whatever beast or fowl came in our way, so that we might have fresh meat in plenty. Many gourds we filled with fresh water from a stream, and, on the third day, we resolved that we would hoist our sail at sunrise on the following morning and then away.

The last eve I paid a visit of farewell to the great bronze idol. The thirteen diamond stones sparkled as never they had sparkled before, and, as I gazed, a huge desire seized on me and grew so strong that I, feeling that with the new ship had come new strength and power, swore loudly and with many oaths that the jewels should be mine.

In the morning when all was ready and we had only to push off from the shore to be free and beyond the reach of the evil and the magic that lurked within this bewitched island, I helped

### The Fearsome Island

Esau to float our ship and instructed him to get out the oars and row close along the shore till he was opposite the spot where stood the brazen idol, making sign to him that I would join him at that place, swimming straight out from the shore onto our vessel.

He set off without misgiving of any kind, while I, walking rapidly, was presently face to face with the great figure and the glistening stones. So that I might have the more courage I talked wildly in the idol's brazen face, with strange grimaces and much mockery, saying, "Thou art a false god and the jewels be not thine," beside other things unwise to recall. Also did I roll my tongue at the dumb figure and I spat with scorn on the sand at its feet. For in the night-time, as I lay awake, I had thought of a plan whereby I might reach the necklet, and now I approached the great idol with a rope that I made fast about its waist,

### The Fearsome Island

using great caution and keeping well without the reach of the brazen arms. I had thought that I might approach the idol from behind, using to that end the half of my rope that hung from the hips to the ground beside me, for, by aid of the rope, I could reach the figure's middle, from thence I could easily climb to the brazen shoulders, and then the gems would be mine.

At first I tried to ascend the rope with my hands, dragging my body after me; but the idol was at too great a height from the ground, and I had not sufficient strength to reach its waist, where I would have obtained a foothold. I attempted this manner of reaching the necklace till I was well nigh fit to drop from exhaustion, and then, this having failed, another plan came to me. I would use my feet, steadying myself by the rope and thus climb, step by step, to the idol's waist, much as children, holding their father's

### The Fearsome Island

hands, climb from his knee to his thigh and then upward over his body to his shoulders. Once more I attempted to ascend the huge figure, but the polished bronze was all smooth and slippery as is winter ice, so that my feet could get no foothold and moved as if they had been greased with fat, and after every few steps I had to begin afresh. Seven times I fell, hanging by the rope in mid-air and swinging to and fro without control of my body. At the seventh fall I was mad with rage and fury, for I am of a hot temper, and, losing hold of my rope furiously did I run round to the face of the great figure, crying, "Idol, thou art a false god, and I, Silas Fordred, fear thee not, nay, nor an hundred of thy breed!" and much more of a like nature. With that I climbed in a mad heat onto the great knee, still calling out aloud my defiance, from thence I onto the loins, and, as my hand

### The Fearsome Island

pressed on the outstanding breast, I heard a noise as of metal grinding against metal and the brazen arms quivered, while, in that self-same moment, I loosed my hold and fell heavily to earth, and over my head I heard the clash of the great arms as they met the body—'twas as the striking of a bell. I lay on the sea-shore, stunned and dazed from my fall, and then the ground beside me shook and there was a noise as of thunder that is near. For some moments I was without sense or understanding, and when my mind once more became live and active and I had rubbed my eyes, wondering the while whether I was on earth and alive or dead and in the realms beyond, there came back to me the clash of the giant arms and the memory of how I had striven to wrest the necklet from the brazen throat.

The sun was strong in my eyes and I raised my head trying to discover the

### The Fearsome Island

exact nature of what had befallen, and behold, at my side lay one half of the bronze idol, that was broken across the middle and in two parts, as were Thomas Snoad and the skeletons that lay about and around it. The lower half of the figure was still seated, rigid and meaningless; the upper part had fallen onto the earth beside me, and on its neck glistened and shone the thirteen great diamonds. Slowly it dawned upon me what had befallen, and I explained the reason of the severed body thus: the brazen arms had found no body to break their force, and they had closed with all their might and weight on the brass body of the idol's self, and had sundered it as they had sundered the flesh and bones of poor Thomas Snoad, my friend.

Now I rose to my feet and tore the necklet from the brazen throat that lay all helpless at my side, and the stones were set in fine gold, and close at hand

### The Fearsome Island

they were even larger and brighter than they had seemed when sparkling up on high above my head.

Gleefully I put the jewels into my pouch, where were also the fangs that I had broke from the jaw of the Hag of the Turret, and then a great fear seized on me; for, though I am a man, pious and a believer in the one and only God and His Son Jesus and the Virgin Mary, yet still did I dread that the idol might seek to avenge what I had caused to befall, and quick and straight, without halting, yet ever and anon looking backward over my shoulder to see whether or not I was pursued, I ran as fast as my legs could bear me to the water's edge and spied for my ship and Esau, who was rowing her close in shore. They were near at hand, and, with a cry of joy, I plunged into the surf, first feeling at my pouch to see that the diamonds were secure within; then I turned hastily to the

### The Fearsome Island

land, a new wave of dread surging through my body. Esau marked the swiftness with which I struck out from the shore, and I swam like one possessed, for, following me with the speed of the wind was the sable figure of the turret, he whose image I had destroyed with a hammer—the vile Sorcerer himself. At last I clambered over the side of the ship, and without a word I sprang in a cold sweat of fear and despair to the rope that would hoist our sail, and when Esau knew that I was tugging for the dear life, he, too, came over and worked beside me, though with a surprised look in his face as if he wondered as to the cause of this excessive fear and haste.

“Look, look!” I cried, “he follows us!” and I pointed to the shore, and Esau looked and shook his head. “There is nothing, you say?” and I, too, turned my eyes landward, yet all I could see was the flat foreshore with

### The Fearsome Island

the sundered idol and the woods and foliage beyond. Only when we were far from land, with the sea spreading white under our keel, did I regain my composure and throw off the fear that had seized upon me as I escaped with my booty.

Esau had all the while gazed at me in wonder and with some joy, for he had marked the broken god, yet had he not understood what actual occurrences had taken place during my absence that forenoon. With much making of signs I told him all that was possible, and when I held the great gems before his eyes he blinked and smiled, dazzled by their exceeding beauty and joyful to think that I had overcome the dread figure that guarded those shores.

That night, with sail hoist over our heads, we were far out to sea, and the land of strange witchcrafts and fearsome spells was nowheres to be seen,

### The Fearsome Island

while all around us stretched and sighed the great waters.

Yet one more mystery came to pass ere we were quit of the Sorcerer's coast wherein we had fared so evilly, and this time we were fortune's favourites and the new spell worked us a service.

I have spoken before of the three handles that are of solid silver and like to those on a door, that you may see for yourselves on the strange barque. Though now you may turn and wrench these handles and naught befalls, yet, when on the third day of our voyage—and I have sworn it—I turned the middle handle out of mere curiosity, straightway did the ship proceed with speed some ten times greater than before, as though stirred and pressed forward by some strange miracle, like unto one of those that are told of in the Holy Book. Like an arrow it clove the waters and the spray danced joyfully at its flanks, while the sweet, cool wind

### The Fearsome Island

played on our faces and made the blood under our cheeks quick and flush with motion. Again I turned the handle, and then the ship moved as it had moved before with but a single sail. Another handle was a rudder that steered marvellous sure, so that when both spells were at work we progressed with great ease and swiftness. For seven days and seven nights we shot forward like a sea-bird, although our sail lay idle aboard; then we dropped down to a dead stillness, drifting idly as the waters listed, and, though I turned the handles all manner of ways the ship went none the faster. The magic that had given us wings had ceased, and we rehoist our sail and went onward at a more natural speed. All the time our eyes were turned to the north and to the south and eastwards and westwards, seeking for a ship or a land where there were men, so that we might be informed as to what strange seas we were sailing,

### The Fearsome Island

and in what direction lay the good port of Hythe and England, my own native land.

Though we had left the Fearsome Island and all its witchcrafts behind us, yet were our hardships in no ways ended; indeed, when I think aright, meseems that they were but just begun, for, what are sudden death and dangers quick and violent compared to the slow tortures of hunger and thirst! Looking backward in the enforced leisure of our aimless sailing, and I had many a long hour wherein to think of what was past, I discovered that, for all my self-commiseration, there was a certain pleasurable excitement mingled with the fears and dangers I had encountered during my sojourn on the witchcraft land that I had quitted. From one hour to another I had been lost in wonder and thought, not knowing what the next might bring forth, and, together with

### The Fearsome Island

this insecurity, there was a certain secret blessing that I had not hitherto recognized; for, had I not learned to know and to believe in myself, and had I not been tried and tempted as are few men; and was I not the stronger and the manlier for all these wrestlings? I had issued unharmed from countless dangers, and, for much of my present safety and security, I had but to thank my own ready wit and courage; and, on the day when Esau and myself set out on our homeward voyage, I felt more of a man, aye, a man strong and of a clear brain, than ever I had felt before—or since either, for that matter—and it seemed that, in spite of the many anxious and troubled days and nights that I had lately undergone, still had I much to be grateful for.

Yet there was a far stronger and a more wearisome test of courage and manhood before me than any I had

### The Fearsome Island

undergone, and, though 'twas of a less entertaining nature, yet, nevertheless, was its mark deeper and more lasting than all my struggles against witchcraft and black sorcery.

The first days of our voyage were idly spent; I had much to think on, and Esau was content to watch me and prepare our food. Above our heads were blue skies, and I have ever observed that when the heavens are without cloud the heart of man doth also beat serene and joyful. On our setting out I had made Esau wear a suit of blue cloth that I had taken express from the castle, for I knew that as we sailed the airs would grow colder and he would feel the lack of garments. He wore this costume for the first two days of our voyage, and, though I could see that it irked him, he made no sign of disapproval. On the morning of the third day he was hairy and naked as before, and, when



### The Fearsome Island

I questioned him, he pointed to the waters, and I could not but smile, so like an idle child was he with his excuses and shamelessness. We had fair weather for the first two weeks of our voyage, and though this be a long time when passed on the open sea and with but a single companion and he devoid of reasonable speech, yet, the whole while was I of a stout heart and exceeding cheery. All these days we had spied neither sail nor land, though from morn till eve we kept an eager watch, and through the night we looked hard for light and a beacon. I had taught Esau that seamanship which was needful for the safe conduct of our ship, and he was greatly content to serve me, though marvelling greatly at the vast expanse of ocean that seemed to have no ending. By-and-by the warm airs through which we had passed grew cooler, and overhead the blue of the sky took on a paler

### The Fearsome Island

hue. The sea too grew more boisterous, and Esau, the hairy man, that was no sailor, was sick and greatly troubled. He lay quite still in the cabin with his two hands pressed to his middle, and the big tears ran down the sides of his face and he made moan and groaned, so that I who listened was sore moved and pitiful. After awhile the cold airs took hold of him and he lay below and coughed till my heart grew heavy within me. For some days we encountered stormy weather, after which came a great calm, and for more than a week we lay quite still, while our sail hung idle on the mast. By now we had lost all count of time and I was sore perplexed and doubtful, wondering with some misgiving as to how this voyage would end. Yet another misfortune was in store for us, for the provisions that we had aboard grew less and less, and day for day we ate but half our fill and

### The Fearsome Island

we were athirst from morn to night, never daring to drink largely from our fast emptying gourds. At first when we encountered the dead calm I have spoken of we made some efforts with our oars, but, after awhile, our feebleness of mind and body proved too strong and we were content to drift idly, a prey to all manner of hopeless thoughts. Many a time in those long days did I wish that I had been content to remain on the island, and in Esau's eyes, that were large and reproachful, I saw the same misgiving. Yet now 'twas too late to turn back, and we floated from night to morning with still another comrade to bear us company and keep watch, so that we were three on board the ship, and our names were, Esau and Silas Fordred, and the Evil Conscience of Silas Fordred.

Those days were overlong, and I grew thin and haggard with thought,

### The Fearsome Island

hunger and inaction. In the morning of each new day I would reflect that I had done what I had done, meaning no harm and with all good intent; yet, in the afternoon, when for hours I had gazed on Esau, lying quite still and with a deadly cough in his chest, groaning heavily from sickness and evil nourishment, my conscience smote me, and I felt that I was both a brute and a fool for having bartered dry land and ample meat for this desert of green sea that gave forth nothing. Then I thought that, had we had better fortune, and had we encountered a vessel that had aided us, I would have had no cause for self-reproach. I pondered on these things hour after hour, and my thoughts were but a circle, and in this circle I wandered continually and ever, so that what my brain held was of little use to me and of much harm. Greatly and often did I fear that my reason might desert me, and that some

### The Fearsome Island

day I should be discovered on the open sea, mad and with a vacant gaze, all alone save but for a naked savage, and he nigh dead from hunger, sickness and thirst—a pretty picture, truly, and by no means over-pleasant to dwell with continuously.

I shall write no more of these hardships, suffice to say that I would not endure them over again for all the wealth that is in the universe, and, believe me, there was more real suffering in these long weeks spent hungry and in pain on the empty sea than in all my traffickings with sorcerers and idols of bronze. We had lost count of time and most other things, and every moment I was expecting the ghost of Esau to be given up, when the good ship *Queen Marie* of Plymouth crossed our track and took us aboard. God alone knows how long we had been afloat and how near I had been unto

### The Fearsome Island

death. Esau, that was a naked savage, had less power of endurance than I that can read and write and do wear clothing, for, three days after we were rescued, and though the captain of the *Queen Marie* spared us no care or attention, Esau, the hairy man, died in my arms. He had been greatly ailing when we had encountered the English barque, coughing much and being warm with fever, and there was no strength left in him after the many days he had thirsted and lived on insufficient food. We buried him at sea, and thus, of all the four that had dwelt on the Fearsome Island, I alone survived. The two halves of Thomas Snoad were buried on the sea-shore; Satan, the black cat, died in the Dark Chamber, as I have narrated; Esau, the hairy man, died at sea on board the ship *Queen Marie* from hunger, thirst, and sickness brought on by ex-

### The Fearsome Island

posure to wind and weather, for he was no seaman, but a naked savage of the woods and dry land.

Thus, alone, did I return from the first voyage I had undertaken on my ship *Brave Luck*, that now lies fathoms deep in an unknown sea, with riches and wealth in plenty, yet the price I had paid was a dear one, such as no man dare pay a second time.

The captain of the *Queen Marie* had made my strange barque with the silver handles fast to his own ship, so that I was able to bring it hither, and, thirteen days after our encounter, he landed me at Plymouth, from which port I made my way homeward, after rewarding my rescuers fittingly with thanks and with gold.

Thus did I return once more to Hythe, and, hear ye, I have written the truth and naught but what these

### The Fearsome Island

eyes have seen, and may God and the Virgin save me if I speak untrue.

(Signed) SILAS FORDRED,  
*Master Mariner of Hythe*

Witnessed by  
EVAN the Welshman,  
*Town Clerk.*

*Dated February 3d, 1660.*