

Chapter III
Of the Author's Second Voyage, and his Shipwreck
on an Unknown Coast

I found the opportunity to join a Portuguese vessel that was to go to the East Indies in the company of three other vessels. The man in command was named Dom Pedro. It was only carrying twenty cannons, but the crew consisted of a hundred and forty-seven men, among whom there were numerous Frenchmen, all of whom understood the Portuguese language. Everything being ready, we set sail on the fifth of June 1644, in very favorable weather.

The first misfortune that befell us was in the person of our captain. He was, in fact, a man of consummate experience, but he was brutal and debauched. On the tenth day after our departure, when he had, as usual, taken a strong dose of eau-de-vie, he lost his temper with one of the sailors, to such an extent that he wanted to pass from threats to blows. The mariner, who was inconstant, started laughing and fled. Irritated, Dom Pedro pursued him with a crowbar in his hand, swearing that he was going to break his neck. While they were running after one another, our officer tripped, and after a few pirouettes, fell so heavily against the capstan that he broke his left arm three inches above the elbow.

With that, I was summoned; I examined the injury and found that the bone had snapped completely. After mature deliberation I decided that it was absolutely necessary to resort to the saw. In spite of all that I was capable of saying to the patient there was no means of persuading him to undergo that operation, and he swore that he would rather die than resort to such an unpleasant extremity. It was necessary for me to agree, reluctantly, to treat him as he wished, but what I had anticipated transpired two days later. The wound became inflamed, gangrene set in, and my patient died five days after his fall.

The crew was extremely alarmed by that loss, which seemed to us to be a bad omen; it was necessary, however, to reconcile ourselves to it. Honors were rendered to his body; then it was buried at sea to the sound of a canon.

We continued, however, to make good progress; small storms blew up from time to time, but nothing dangerous. The greatest misfortune that overtook us was that we were separated from the other vessels, with which we had no further contact.

Having reached Ascension Island, we perceived that our water supplies were badly polluted, so it was decided that we would call in at Saint Helena, fearing that the number of our invalids, which was considerable, would be further augmented if we deferred landfall until we reached the Cape of Good Hope.

When we could already see the island in the distance, however, and were congratulating one another, we saw a waterspout, which appeared to us to have the girth of a large barrel, within cannon-shot of our ship. Having only seen the phenomenon in paintings and read about it in the accounts of voyagers, I studied it with all the application of which I was capable, and concluded that it must be an effect of an agitated region of air driven vehemently in the vast extent of our atmosphere, which had just encountered another kind of turbulence moving in the opposite direction, resulting in a downward rotatory movement, thus forming a cylinder, which elongates instantly as soon as it touches the surface of the water. The sea being then subjected to high pressure outside that location, it follows necessarily that, as we see in the matter of pumps, syringes and suckers, the matter corresponding to the center of the column rises up.

That happens rapidly and forcefully enough to lift up large fish. We were all astonished to see the sky, serene as it had been, swiftly covered with thick clouds, which obscured the air in a trice. The wind commenced blowing horribly, the sea was stirred up, the waves swelled, and one might have thought that nature was angry, threatening to drown us all. The sailors were in great haste to furl the sails as soon as possible, with the sole exception of the bourcet pacifier; and, having changed course, we pitched and rolled for a long time. In the meantime, the vessel was carried away with such violence that it was necessary to renounce the mainsail again for fear of being driven on to some deadly reef.

I cannot bring myself to describe here in detail, following the journal that I kept of it, everything that happened to us during that frightful tempest, which lasted twenty-two days; that would require several sheets of paper, and would cause the reader nothing but compassion and sadness. It was not only the few women and children we had aboard who uttered howls capable of melting hearts of stone; the majority of the men were gripped by fear to the depths of the soul.

Not a day passed without suffering at least one death. We lost our pilot and the bosun; only the ship's captain—the former first mate—remained who was capable of steering the vessel well, and he too was quite ill. During that cruel storm we were constrained to throw into the sea, at various times, a dozen of our cannons, and everything that we could of the cargo; we also lost the majority of our anchors and we drifted for a long time at the mercy of winds and currents, without knowing any longer where we were going if it was not the ocean bed.

Finally, by virtue of a particular bounty, God decided that the twenty-third day would be as mild as the others had been cruel, and we ran aground off a shore that was completely unknown to us. After having calculated the height of the sun at midday, examined the clocks and corrected the estimate so far as was possible, we found that we were in the region of the sixtieth degree of longitude and the forty-fourth of austral latitude—which is to say, about a thousand or twelve hundred leagues from Saint Helena.¹

As the largest of our launches had been carried away by the waves, which had passed over us a thousand times, we were very glad to have conserved the smaller one. It was immediately put to sea, and after having given thanks to God for having spared our lives, we began to unload the best clothing and everything else that would be most necessary to us on land.

We made use of a few paltry sails to make two tends. Other cut tree branches, with which they constructed huts, where the remains of the crew, which consisted of ninety-five individuals, were lodged.

There were about forty of us who were as well as circumstance permitted. One party was left in charge of the ship, the other went foraging. Never had firearms, powder and lead been more useful to us. There was game of all sorts in abundance, among others large birds heavier than guinea-fowl, which were plump and very succulent. Nor was there any shortage of fish, because we had a good provision of nets, hooks and other instruments appropriate to fishing. Turtles were scarce there, but they were large and good. We captured a few, which must have weighed between four and five hundred pounds, which gave us all sufficient to eat. The flesh appeared to us to be excellent, and the fat surpassed in delicacy the moist precious foodstuffs in the world; we made use of it for all purposes: for sauces, on bread, for burning, and generally for everything for which it might be needed. We also found a river two hours away, in an easterly direction, which furnished us with good fresh water.

These refreshments notwithstanding, two more of our men died, but the others did not take long to recover. Meanwhile, our vessel was finally unloaded, and it was observed that she was afloat, with the consequence that we towed her to the aforementioned river. As soon as she was ashore, the carpenters examined her very closely, but they found that there was no apparent hope of returning her to a state in which we could use her to continue our journey. It was, therefore, resolved with common accord that we would dismantle her completely and build a smaller vessel, with which we could reach Africa.

The captain wanted us all to take turns at that work, but we persuaded him that we were not all equally adept to the task, and that it was necessary for someone to provide and cook the food necessary for the maintenance of so many people, so ten people were set aside for that. The nine who were assigned to it with me were skillful; one party became, so to speak, hunters by profession and the other fishermen. As can easily be imagined, we did not have a great deal of trouble, in a country like that, in finding enough for our company to eat.

Those agreeable occupations, in which another might have taken great pleasure, only charmed me for a few days; I soon wearied of the *métier*. The desire I conceived to penetrate into a country where it appeared to me that no one had ever been before caused me to make the resolution to abandon my

¹ This location is not very far from that of the Falkland Islands, where the first recorded landing, by the English captain John Strong, was in 1690.

comrades, but I did not want to accomplish that reckless design alone. The two crewmen who appeared to me to be the most resolute, to whom I communicated it, were delighted by my proposition. They confessed to me that they had each had the same thought independently, but had not dared to confide it to anyone else. Thus, the affair was concluded with an oath not to reveal the secret, and, having all promised sincere mutual amity and fidelity, we went to bed, with a view to setting off as soon as possible.

Chapter IV
The Author leaves the rest of the Company with only two comrades
and penetrates with them into the unknown land.
The obstacles he encounters en route, etc.

The next morning, the twenty-fourth of September 1644, on the eleventh day after our arrival, we each seized a good hatchet, which we put in our belt, a rifle, and everything we thought necessary for an enterprise of that nature. Without seeming to be doing anything, at first, we went into the woods, drew away from the others, and advanced with long strides toward the south-south-west.

We covered at least four leagues before talking about taking a rest. La Forêt—that was the name of one of my comrades, the other being named Du Puis—saw a grouse a hundred paces away and killed it; while he plucked it, Du Puis and I cut brushwood and made a fire under a tree. To one of the branches of which I attached a stout piece of string, and then attached our fowl to it, which was soon roasted in that fashion. We dined lavishly; only water was lacking, and we had to put that off until later.

We set out again, and found a hollow in which there was a pool, which was not very clear, to tell the truth, but seemed excellent to us. We filled our flasks, but did not have to use it, for a league and a half further on we found a stream that contained the most beautiful water I had ever seen in my life. It was about two feet deep, and cut directly across the route that we had decided to take, with the aid of a little solar quadrant that I had in my pocket, and which was a great help to us.

Having no bridge or any other commodity, we took our shoes off and waded across the rivulet, which we left with regret after having drunk our fill and made provision for the future. We found no trace of humans or large animals; there was nothing anywhere in the eight or ten leagues that we had covered before sunset but sand, heather and forest. Finally, we made camp at the foot of a mound where the bushes were so thick that we would be sheltered from the wind as if under a tent. We finished eating what we had conserved from our midday meal, and went to bed as best we could.

When we awoke the next morning, we were surprised to see that the whole sky was covered and that we were threatened with heavy rain. We thought it appropriate to hollow out a shelter in the little hill, which was sufficiently steep at the place where we were, in order to protect ourselves from the weather. In fact, it did not take long, with the aid of our hatchets instead of spades, to prepare a small lodgment. The rain did not begin to fall until about eleven o'clock, however, so we had time to spare to massacre a few quail and other small birds, mostly unfamiliar to us, which would supply us with enough to eat for a week; there was an innumerable multitude there, and the majority allowed themselves to be felled almost without moving from their place, which caused us to conjecture that the place could not be inhabited.

In the end, we were constrained to remain in that place for four days, which seemed to us to be longer than four weeks spent elsewhere. We were recompensed subsequently, however, since we enjoyed more than a month of continual good weather thereafter.

After emerging from our refuge, we began to discover high mountains. For fear of not finding enough to sustain us, we laid in a supply of meat for several days. We were not mistaken in our conjecture; one might have thought it a veritable Greenland, so dry and arid was it, and in many places there was no grass, no bushes and nothing else that might give pasture to the smallest animal. We came across very few of them; even the birds became scarce—from which it is easy to judge that we passed our time rather badly. If we has not come into little valleys from time to time, filled with trees laden with a few paltry fruits, and water with which to slake out thirst, our lives would have been in danger.

On the evening of the ninth day of our march, we arrived in a low-lying region where a little torrent was visible about a quarter of a league away, descending from a crag into a hollow, from which it then discharged into a marsh, which formed a semicircle and extended across the valley as far as the eye could see. The banks that enclosed the beautiful water were high but not very steep, which made us think that it was not as swollen as in another season of the year. I approached with the intension of going down to it, but when I was only a few paces away, I was astonished to find the ground beneath my feet suddenly lacking. I sank into it to my armpits.

My comrades, seeing that I was stuck there, burst out laughing and came to my aid. At the same time, ten or twelve large birds about the size of geese with beaks as broad and long as a hand, launched themselves into the air, sounding the alarm with a quacking that was their natural sound, and which must have been audible at a long distance.

Before we could count to a hundred the sky was black with the creatures. That extraordinary multitude, combined with the furious racket they were making, frightened us; we had absolutely no idea what to think, especially when some of the company, screeching like the damned, plunged vertically toward our heads, as if they wanted to dismember us. Although we fired a few shots at them, bringing several of them down, they continued just the same. When we saw, however, that they did not want to do us any harm, and were even beginning to beat a retreat, we went down the slope in order to refresh ourselves.

Du Puis ascertained that the place where I had sunk was a nest to which a number of the birds had retired; beside it there was another, and then a third, approximately ten or twelve feet apart. The openings of these subterranean dwellings were oval in form, the smallest diameter being about a foot. Being the smallest of the three of us, I searched the third; I found the place to be about the size of a small bedroom, more than eight feet square and at least three high. There were fifteen nests around the perimeter, built of small leafy branches cemented with clay in the form of a rounded basket. Each nest contained six speckled eggs as large as a fist. In the middle of the lair there was a trough much larger than the nests, filled with a substance divided up into little round balls, some larger than others. I imagined at first that it was their excrement, but, curiosity having led me to lift a little to my mouth, I found that it tasted excellent, surpassing our best macaroons, to which it bore some resemblance.

My comrades, who had the same desire as I had to discover novelties, had each descended into a similar lair, where they found things disposed in the same fashion as I have described. The only difference consisted in the number of nests, which was more considerable in some than others because they were not the same size. We understood that there were so many of the birds because they multiplied so copiously, and there was no one to destroy them.

Scarcely was our first surprise over than another subject caused us one that was infinitely more considerable. It was one of those caverns that we found a hundred paces away. It had an entrance that it was impossible for the birds to have made: three large stones a foot in diameter placed in the soil beside one another, formed a threshold, and the two uprights, four feet long, tapering at the top, were formed of large stones weighing more than a hundred pounds each. Other stones were arranged one on top of another inside, sealing it entirely.

Those productions of the human hand caused us to hesitate as to whether we wanted to be there or not. We would certainly have liked to see animals of our own species, but we feared not being treated very well. In that uncomfortable uncertainty, we nevertheless drew closer, but calling out, and making sufficient noise to be heard by anyone who was inside.

La Forêt, weary of all the grimaces, told us to stay outside, hatchets in hand, while he forced the obstacles and went through the entrance, with the intention of going in to see what was behind them. He carried it through, but when he was inside he found that it was too dark for him to be able to see anything. What he told us when he came out was that a man could stand upright inside, and that the apartment was habitable; he had even felt a bench of sorts at the back.

With that we ran to discharge our wrath on the first trees that we had left in passing a short distance away; we cut as much wood as we could carry and built a fire with it in front of our cave; then all three of us returned to the task in order that we would have a provision adequate to last us through the night.

When the fire was well alight we went into our bedroom, which was twice as large as the others. It was properly paved with selected stones, and there was indeed a bank of grass all around it, but the most formidable object, which we saw at the same time as the bank, which was to the left, the side most sheltered from the wind, was the carcass of a human being, skeletal in form from head to toe. Above it there was a kind of slate, fairly smooth and sunk into the terrace, on which was engraved, in large Greek letters:

Oh Lord, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have pity on us.

I shall not amuse myself here by listing our various conjectures, and the different sentiments that we had on that subject, since they are easily imaginable.

The hunger that we were feeling, however, made us take two of the birds that we had killed and pass them over the flame in order to burn off the plumage instead of flaying them, as we had done so frequently, because we reckoned the skin to be one of the best morsels—in which we were not at all mistaken, since, having gutted and washed them, we put them under the embers, where they were swiftly roasted. We had had so little to eat all day that we left almost nothing but the bones. The birds were fat, succulent and very tasty.

After having supped well we bedded down as best we could, leaving the dead man where he was, without touching him, because we wanted to examine him more closely the following day.

It was not yet broad daylight when our impertinent birds recommenced their din; some were emerging from their holes, others returning to them, and with so much noise that it was impossible for us to sleep any longer, although we would have liked to do so. We waited for the sun to arrive, however, before getting up.

Our presence did not alarm the fowls at all; they all worked at their tasks as if they were being paid a wage to do it. We saw some of them emerging with beaks full of earth, which they had doubtless excavated from the most irregular parts of their hollows, in order to make them larger or neater. Some of those arriving were coming to furnish materials appropriate to build their nests, but most of them were carrying the fragments of cracknel that I had found so tasty the previous evening.

We climbed the slope in order to see where they were obtaining that food. As soon as we had raised our eyes we perceived, within musket-range, on a little rise, three objects of the same girth and height. We moved toward them in order to see what they were, and found that, in fact, they were three truncated cones about eight feet high, five in diameter at the base and about three at the summit, constructed in a very orderly manner with stones neatly arranged one atop another.

The mere sight of three monuments, so rare in a deserted region, did not content us, and we set about demolishing one of them. When we had removed about a foot and a half's thickness of the uppermost stones, however, we uncovered the skull of a human being. After that, the bones of the shoulders appeared, and then the arms: in brief, the entire carcass, all the way down to the feet. We could have done as much for the others, but we contented ourselves with uncovering the head of the cadaver that was under the second, since it was probable that there was another under the third.

While we were reflecting on all that with a kind of admiration, I discovered characters around the third cone, made of little stones about the size of a pigeon's egg, arranged in the soil. I took them for the letters in the Hebrew alphabet, named, in the following order: Koph, Vau, Lamed, He, Teth, Lamed, Koph, Pe, Gimel, Vau, Beth, Thau, Sajin, Koph, Mem, Lamed, Alep, Sajin, Samech and Reseh, but not accompanied by dots or any other marks that might facilitate reading them. I made every effort to decipher their significance, and have thought about it a thousand times since, but have never succeeded in getting to the end, in such a way that I could grasp the meaning.²

There was something similar around the other two monuments, but I did not take the trouble to uncover the stones, on top of which we had dropped others, because I did not think it worth the trouble. All appearances suggested that it had been a very long time since four unfortunates, like ourselves, having wandered around without finding any place apparently better than this one, had stopped here and hollowed out a cavern in the same fashion as the birds of which I had spoken, or perhaps appropriate one of their nests, and had died there one after another—firstly those who were under the monuments, and then the last one, on the bench, where we had found him, and whose clothing and flesh had been consumed by time, so thoroughly that not the slightest relic of them remained.

What confirmed that thought further was that not far away, there were a great many straight trees, like rushes, whose branches were all arranged in tiers, the first of which commenced four feet from the ground, by my measurement; there were twelve of them, each as thick as an arm and seven feet long. In

² A conundrum is evidently being presented to the reader here, but it is not easy to solve, not knowing whether the solution is likely to be in Hebrew, French or some other language.

the second tier, three feet higher up, there were eleven, six feet long. In the third, two and a half feet beyond that, I only counted ten, even shorter than the preceding ones; in the fourth, at a proportionate distance, nine, and then eight, even, six, five, four and three—after which came the summit of the tree, in the form of an acorn the size of an egg.

All the branches of those pyramidal trees were like as many ostrich plumes—which is to say that they were garnished with thin leaves like the filaments of two pinions. From one end to the other, and all around the extremity of that down, there was a border as thick as a writing quill, and above each row of branches a ring surrounding the tree, the first one thicker than a finger but becoming smaller as they approached the top. Both of them were composed of the excellent foodstuff of which the big birds seemed so fond, and which he believed to have served our poor pilgrims as bread.

Instead of simply tasting the bread, as I had done the previous evening, we threw ourselves upon it, my comrades and I, like poverty upon society; and it was the prerogative of the most skillful to climb up to the places where some still remained—for many had been stripped. Finally, we ate so many that we were full up, and found it so toothsome that Du Puis was already talking about building a tabernacle and dying there, like the good people testifying by their bones had done. During the time that we were conversing, however, we were also gripped by such a great drowsiness that we could hardly lift our feet to take a step.

I was the first to let myself fall to the ground; the others followed suit a moment later. Not one of us lost our judgment; our limbs alone were numbed, although even our tongues had difficulty serving us for proffer speech. We remained in that state for two hours before going to sleep; the slumber lasted until midday.

Du Puis, who was the first to wake up, found his right hand resting on something that appeared to be naked, smooth and about as thick as a thigh. He thought at first that he had rolled over in his sleep on top of one of us, but as he recovered his senses, and having opened his eyes in search of clarification, he was gripped by a mortal terror on seeing between him and La Forêt a snake more than twenty-five feet long. He became even more paralyzed in his limbs than before, unable either to move or to speak. However, the snake abandoned the place, coiled round one of the nearby trees, and set off after the cracknels in its turn.

With that, my friend recovered his courage, pushed me, and, having woken me up, showed me that frightful monster. Although I still felt debilitated, I got up instantly, and started running away as fast as I could. Du Puis imitated me, and in response to our cries, La Forêt did not take long to do likewise. We were delighted that the monster had not swallowed us, and that fear contributed in no small measure to persuade us to decamp as soon as possible.

It took us all night, however, to recover.