John of Sydney Cove

Doris Chadwick

JOHN OF SYDNEY COVE

DORIS CHADWICK

COVER AND MAP BY
GLORIS SMITH YOUNG

To

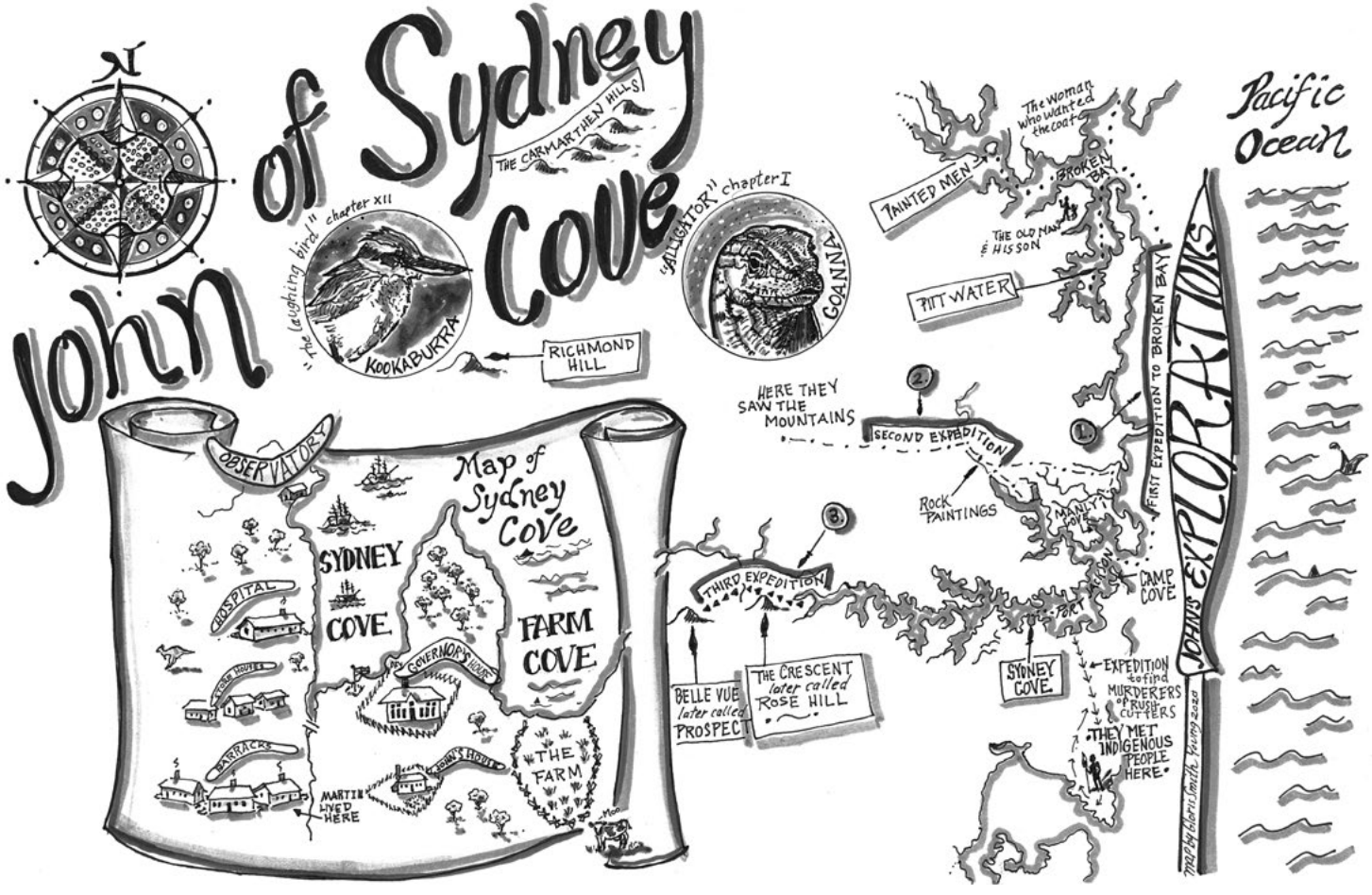
All Australian Families

Mother, Father and Children

and to

One in Particular

Kylie and Roddie, Benison and John


John of Sydney Cove
THE CARMARTHEN HILLS
"the laughing bird" chapter XII
KOOKABURRA
"ALLIGATOR" chapter I
GOANNA
RICHMOND HILL
Map of Sydney Cove
OBSERVATORY
SYDNEY COVE
FARM COVE
HOSPITAL
GOVERNOR'S HOUSE
STORE HOUSES
BARRACKS
JOHN'S HOUSE
MARTIN LIVED HERE
THE FARM
HERE THEY SAW THE MOUNTAINS
SECOND EXPEDITION
ROCK PAINTINGS
THIRD EXPEDITION
BELLE VUE later called PROSPECT
THE CRESCENT later called ROSE HILL
TAINTED MEN
The Woman who wanted the coat
BROKEN BAY
THE OLD MAN & HISSON
PITT WATER
FIRST EXPEDITION TO BROKEN BAY
MANLY COVE
CAMP COVE
SYDNEY COVE
EXPEDITION to find MURDERERS of RUSH CUTTERS
THEY MET INDIGENOUS PEOPLE HERE
JOHN'S EXPLORATIONS
Pacific Ocean
Map by Libris Smith, Sydney 2020

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE ALLIGATOR

IT was Chips, the carpenter of the *Sirius*, who, a few days after John and Martin had landed at Sydney Cove, suggested that the boys should help him build the hut.

'Here, you two,' he called, as he saw them scampering through the undergrowth with Gyp, John's dog, at their heels, 'how about helping me to put up this kitchen for Mamma?'

Kitchen! It was a novel idea. All through the morning they had been watching the convicts at work on little wattle-and-daub huts, and they had been itching to have a try themselves.

'See! I've got all the posts up. You weave the twigs so, and daub them with clay. Poor Sue and Mamma! A dull time they're having out there on the *Sirius*, just waiting to come ashore.'

John rolled up his sleeves. He too had felt sorry for his sister, Sue, day after day, watching from the ship's deck all the exciting things that were happening round the Cove.

'Yes,' said Papa, hurrying up from the spot nearby where his men were pitching a marquee. 'That's a splendid idea. Mamma will be pleased.'

There were plenty of branches on the ground, for the convicts had left the trees where they had been felled, and it was difficult indeed to walk without stepping over one.

'It'll be fun,' John whispered to his friend, Martin, 'like making a cubby. Let's try for a while.'

They found it more engrossing than they had thought. The walls grew like magic under their nimble fingers, and to be splashing about in the mud made them feel like very small boys again playing at a game.

Besides, it was for Mamma. 'Now see that you work hard, and get all things ready for us,' she had called, when at sunrise John had left the *Sirius* to come ashore. 'Remember, Sue and I are waiting.'

Through the heavy hot air came the chip-chop of the axe, the warning shout as a great tree fell in a smother of dust and leaves, the faint rat-tat of the drums, and now and again the wild cackling of that strange brown bird that sat on the branches and seemed to mock them.

'Aye, it's a queer bird,' Chips said. 'John, he wouldn't believe it was a bird when he first heard it laughing. Thought it was a ghost, didn't ye, lad?'

John nodded and went on with his daubing.

But Martin could not resist gazing round. 'Look, there it is again,' he cried, and all three stopped to watch the bird as it solemnly eyed them and burst into wild fits of laughter.

'Aye, 'tis queer all right, but there are many queer things in this country of New South Wales, and I guess it'll take us a long, long time to find them all out. Every day there'll be something new. And lucky boys like you will be in the thick of it all.'

The walls were waist high when Cookie arrived with a grin.

'What! A-doing a bit o' work, eh? Well, well, I'd never ha' thought it. The Commodore, he said to me, "Make some soup, Cook, and set your pot down by the beach for them that wants it." Thinks o' everything, does the Commodore. Well, it's ready, boys. D'ye want some?'

He stood for a moment and admired their work, then threw out a remark that made them stop and stare. 'They've seen an alligator by the stream.'

John dropped a pellet of mud from his hand. 'You mean one of those scaly things that opens its mouth and snaps at you like that?'

'Aye, and it will snap at ye if ye don't mind. Lie like logs in the water, they do, and if ye step on them it's all up wi' ye. Eight feet long, they say it be.'

Perhaps it was the thought of the broth, or perhaps the news of the alligator that made the boys follow Cookie quickly down the slope to the beach.

The old fellow was laughing softly. ''Tis funny,' he said to John, 'that ye can't get away from cookhouses. Galley, it be on the ship, and now a kitchen for Mamma. D'ye remember?'

How could John forget? There was that day long ago at Portsmouth, when he had just boarded the *Sirius* with Papa and Mamma and Sue to come to this faraway land of New South Wales, and had found the gnarled old cook in the galley.

'Aye, and ye were frightened o' me,' the old man said, reading his thoughts. 'But I gave ye a cookie, and won your heart, eh?'

John nodded dumbly. He was thinking of those other days in the galley of the *Supply* when he had been cabin boy to the Commodore, sailing from the Cape to Botany Bay.

And now it was all over. Cookie would go to sea again, but he and Martin would have to stay at Sydney Cove. He did not like the idea of being parted from Cookie.

'I wish you would come and cook for Mamma in the kitchen,' he said.

'Nay, nay, lad. I be a sailor. How could I cook in a mud kitchen, eh? I that be used to a rolling ship, and the wind a-whistling through the shrouds, and the water a-swilling over the side to my feet?' He ladled out the broth, and gave each a biscuit, toasting hot. 'Held them over the fire,' he explained. 'Knew ye didn't like weevils.'

Martin and John threw themselves on the grass and munched.

'Do you know, Martin, it is only a week since we first came here?'

'Yes, and you jumped ashore and brought water from the stream for the Commodore to drink, and he named this place Sydney Cove.'

'And I thought I saw a black boy—the one I gave the red ribbon to at Camp Cove. Funny, we haven't seen him since!'

They looked around and could scarcely believe that it was the same place. Out in the Cove, where before only the sunlight had sparkled on the blue water, the eleven ships of the fleet lay at anchor. And on the shore, where on that day they had stepped almost from the boats into the wood, the logs lay thickly on the undergrowth, and men were hauling them away to clear the ground; while over on the west side, where the flag had been raised so bravely, boats were landing stores, and convicts were dragging them along the beaten track to the parade ground. There was even a new note on the east point, for the black coats of the animals that had been brought from the Cape showed now and then between the trees.

'The poor things must be glad to be on land,' John said, remembering how they had been swum ashore from the ship only the day before.

'Aye,' Cookie interrupted from the pot, 'and those convicts, too. Eight long weary months they were aboard the ships.'

Both boys knew how wearisome those eight months had been.

'Remember, it be them that brought us here,' Cookie went on.

'If those folks in high places in England had not wanted to be rid o' them, you and me and those redcoats yonder would not ha' been this day at Sydney Cove.'

John threw the last of his biscuit to Gyp, lying at his feet. 'I'm not going back to the hut,' he said suddenly. 'I've had enough for today.'

'What are you going to do?' Martin asked, and emptied his mug with a gulp.

'Just have a look round.'

Martin knew instantly that John was going to look for the alligator. 'Then let's hurry,' he said, getting up. 'There's sure to be a storm.'

Each night those storms came, with clouds black and lowering, lightning that zig-zagged fiercely across the darkened sky, and thunder that rumbled and clapped and rolled across the heavens.

But there was so much to see that they found themselves loitering on the way.

Halfway up the slope a house was being erected.

'For the Commodore,' John told Martin. 'It came out in the *Sirius* from England. I heard him telling Mamma that it was made of canvas, and had been brought out in pieces.'

And around it some men were making a garden.

'Why,' he cried, 'they're planting the trees we brought from Rio and the Cape! Oh, Martin, don't you remember the oranges and the bananas and the strawberries? As soon as Papa has a garden I am going to plant mine too.'

At the top of the hill they met the Commodore.

'Well, and what have you been doing, lads?' he asked.

'Building a mud kitchen for Mamma, sir,' John chirped. 'Did you hear that someone had seen an alligator?'

'An alligator?'

'You know, sir, one of those things that snaps at you like that,' cracking his fingers. 'Eight feet long, sir.'

'Ah!'

'Yes, sir, and we're going to look for it.'

The Commodore frowned. 'Then see you don't go without bounds,' he reminded them. 'If you do, I shall be very angry. We are far too busy to send out search parties looking for lost boys. Besides, there are black men out there who may spear you. Now mind what I say.'

'We'll remember,' John promised, but Martin knew that John might forget if he once got on the trail of the alligator.

At the stream that flowed into the head of the Cove a tree had been thrown across to form a bridge.

'I'll race you across,' Martin cried, and ran forward, trying to balance on the rounded trunk.

It was great fun. They turned and ran back and back again.

Neither of them noticed Midshipman Dan until he hailed them. 'Hey, you two, out of the way! That bridge does not belong to you.'

With a dash they were over. 'Dan,' John cried, 'oh, Dan, they've found an alligator by the stream. Eight feet long!'

'Yes,' said Martin, 'and we are going to look for it.'

But Dan was not impressed. 'Alligator? I don't believe it,' and he was most emphatic. 'Off you go, and if you find one, we'll have alligator stew for supper, but somehow I don't think you will.'

They made their way along the western bank, pausing now to watch a party of convicts setting up a blacksmiths forge, and farther on another party building a saw-pit.

'Have you seen the alligator?' they asked.

But the men merely laughed, and thumbed towards the head of the stream.

Everywhere the trees were falling, and the little houses of wattle-and-daub going up.

'The Commodore will have streets laid out by and by,' John said. 'He thinks this is going to be a big town someday.'

Martin was amused at the thought. As far as he could see there was certainly no idea of a plan at the moment. People were building where they liked, and many were not working at all, but just frittering away their time.

The rat-tat of the drums floated down from the parade ground.

'Have you seen the alligator?' they cried to Martin's father, a sergeant of marines, and some of his men driving sheep and pigs into a pen at the foot of a tree.

And they, too, laughed and thumbed the way upstream.

But search where they would, and as far as they dared, the boys could find no trace of the alligator.

'Then we'll have to look for the hopping animal,' John decided. 'You

know, Martin, we haven't seen any kangaroos for days, and we still have to find out how we can catch one for the Commodore's soup.'

Suddenly Martin stopped. 'We had better not go beyond the patrols. Remember what the Commodore said?' He clutched John's arm. 'There's a man over there, bobbing up and down among the trees, and he's black.'

They waited until the figure came into view again, and then laughed.

'You silly, it's only Surgeon White,' and they both raced towards him.

'Well and what are you doing so far from the shore?' he demanded.

'Looking for the alligator,' John replied pertly.

'Alligator!' Surgeon White was more emphatic than Dan. 'You'll find no alligator in the stream. See, gather some plants for me—wild celery, spinach and parsley. I have so many sick that I must find them greens or they'll die.' He held out the plants so that the boys could identify them.

It was a new task. They ran hither and thither searching among the undergrowth.

'Here's one,' cried Martin.

'And here's another,' called John.

Neither knew how they got beyond the patrols. One second they were within sight of Surgeon White, and the next they had lost him in the maze of trees and shrubs.

'I can't see him,' said Martin, 'and I can't see any soldiers. We must have come beyond bounds. What shall we do?'

'Go back,' John replied, but for all that he ran on to pick another plant.

He had turned and was racing back when the wild thundering fell upon his ears.

'What can it be?' whispered Martin.

'Black men on horses,' John suggested hoarsely. 'Quick, let us hide.'

He pulled Martin down behind a clump of bushes. But he was scarcely there than he was up again. 'It's hopping animals,' he cried, and he almost shrieked he was so excited. 'Kangaroos! Look! Dozens of them!'

And both stood speechless as one after another, or in twos or threes or fours, the animals bounded past, big ones and little ones, greys and reds, ears cocked, noses twitching danger.

With a yelp Gyp leapt forward in pursuit.

'Did you see that old fellow, Martin?' John said. 'He must have taken fifteen feet in his stride. Cookie was right when he said we'd never be able to catch one of those hopping animals.'

Martin agreed, as Gyp returned, tail between his legs. 'You'd need greyhounds to catch them,' he decided.

'So you would.' John all of a sudden became confidential. 'You know, Martin, the Commodore gave orders at Portsmouth for dogs to be removed from the ships—all except Gyp—but Cookie always said that when we got to this place all the dogs on the fleet would be there, black, brown and brindle. I believe I saw a greyhound stalking about this morning, didn't you?'

'Of course you did,' and Martin laughed. 'It came on our ship.'

'Then we'll be able to go chasing the kangaroos with the greyhound, and the Commodore'll get his hopping-tail soup that we have promised him.'

But Martin was not listening. There was a frown between his brows, and he was looking round again. 'John, do you think someone is watching us?'

'No, why.'

'Just because I felt as if eyes were boring into my back.'

John laughed. 'You're just thinking it,' he said. Then Gyp growled, and even John began to wonder if it were not time to go back. 'Let's find the stream,' he suggested. 'It will be over there, because the trees are greener.'

They were almost in sight of it when Martin turned to gaze round again. 'I am sure someone is watching us,' he said.

But there was no-one in sight.

It was just as they were about to go on that Martin saw the strange creature basking on the log.

'There it is,' he said, breathlessly pointing.

'What?'

'The alligator.'

'Where?'

'Over there.'

John gazed at it curiously. It lay stretched in the sun, its beady eyes lazily opening and shutting, its black and yellow skin, with the gay bands on the tail, merging in colour with the tawny paper-bark log on which it was resting.

'That can't be it,' he said. 'It couldn't snap at you like that, as Cookie said. Its mouth is too small.'

He blinked and the animal blinked back.

'Let's kill it,' he suggested, and ran for a stick.

But Gyp was too quick for them. He yelped and made a dash for the log. When they looked again the creature had disappeared, and Gyp was gazing sheepishly up a tree.

'Why, it's one!' said John, mystified. 'Did you see where it went?'

'Yes, up there,' and Martin pointed to the branch of the tree, where the animal lay lazily shutting and opening its eyes at them.

'Then it can't be an alligator,' John decided. 'Alligators don't live in trees; they live in water. Do you think we could climb up and get it?'

They were gazing at the trunk, and John had already taken off his shoes, when something whizzed through the air and made him draw back.

Instantly there was a thud beside them.

'What's that?' Martin cried in alarm.

'The alligator! See, Martin, it has fallen from the tree,' and John rushed forward with his stick to crush out the life ofthe squirming creature on the ground. 'Back, back, Gyp,' he ordered, as he turned and held the reptile up by the tail. 'We've killed it, Martin. Oh, what will they say?'

'No, we didn't, John. You don't think it fell off the tree, do you?'

John paused, puzzled. 'What happened?'

'This,' and Martin picked up a crooked stick from the grass. 'It came whizzing through the air and knocked the alligator from the branch.'

'Then it was thrown by a black man,' whispered John, gazing round. 'You were right, Martin. There were people staring from the trees.'

'Yes,' said Martin, 'the boy with the red ribbon.'

'You saw him?'

'I thought I did. Just as you were going to climb the tree. Over there.' But only the leaves rustled in the place to which he pointed.

Or they did rustle too much? Even as they watched, a pair of laughing eyes and a tousled head appeared above a clump of bushes, and in an instant was gone.

'There he is! There he is!' they both cried, following with their eyes his slim form as it passed among the trees.

'He has a V scar on his chest. Oh, Martin, didn't you see?' For with a last glance the boy turned and faced them with the bright sunlight on his black skin.

And then the whole background seemed to be peopled with black shapes.

'There are dozens of them. We'd better go back,' John urged all of a sudden. 'The Commodore said they might spear us.' And as the thought flashed through his mind, 'That's why the kangaroos went thudding past. The black men were chasing them. Quick, hurry, Martin.'

CHAPTER II
THE STORM

PROUDLY the boys carried their prize along the bank of the stream. 'See, we've killed the alligator,' they cried to the convicts felling trees; to Surgeon White, standing beside his hospital tents; to Dan waiting at the water's edge.

'Alligator!' Midshipman Dan threw back his head and burst into laughter. 'That's not an alligator. It's an over-grown lizard.'

But Surgeon White was interested. 'It's an iguana,' he said. 'Climbs trees probably,' and he did not notice John look at Martin and wink.

Dan was still chuckling. 'Never mind,' he said. 'Iguana stew will be as good as any other. Come on, you two. I'll take you back to the *Sirius*. Martin had better come for supper. We'll tell his mother as we pass by the *Friendship*.'

'See, we've killed the alligator,' they cried to the Commodore on the quarter-deck; to Sue, running away as they pointed the head of the hideous thing at her; to Cookie, now back in the galley.

He stood with arms akimbo and stared. 'Alligator, eh? My, and it be nearly three feet long! Let's get the skin off, and I'll have it in the pot in no time.'

They watched as his sharp knife cut open the belly of the reptile, and his clever fingers pulled the skin from the flesh.

'Ah,' he grunted, 'white meat! Maybe it'll taste like rabbit or even fish.'

It was then that John put his hand in his pocket. 'The plants, Martin,' he cried excitedly, as he pulled them out. 'I forgot to give them to Surgeon White.'

Cookie grabbed them delightedly. 'Wild parsley, and spinach, and celery, just enough to make the stew tasty.'

Its fragrant smell had already begun to fill the galley, when the

old man turned to them again, and spat forth a question that neither of them had expected.

'Now, tell me, how did ye catch yon alligator? Not by yourselves, eh? Ye with bare hands, and a slippery, sliddery thing like that?' And he stared at them so knowingly that they realised it was of no use to keep the secret.

'Ah!' he smiled, when they had finished. 'Then it was a black man who threw this stick?'

'Yes, we think it was the black boy with the red ribbon. He knocked the iguana off the tree for us. See!'

Martin fingered the crooked stick lovingly. Ever since John had found one in the black men's hut at Botany Bay he had longed to have one, and now his wish had come true.

The meat of the iguana was delicious. Even Sue, who had sworn that she would never eat horrid things like snakes, asked for a second helping.

And Lieutenant Dawes, who looked in late, because he had been to Botany Bay with Lieutenant King to visit Monsieur de la Perouse, said it was the best dish he had eaten since he left Capetown.

'What have you been doing besides hunting alligators?' he asked the boys.

'Building a mud kitchen for Mamma,' John told him proudly.

'A kitchen!' exclaimed Mamma. 'You didn't tell me that before. What is it like?'

And John went into a detailed description of the manner in which the twigs were woven and the mud daubed on to them.

'But you won't have to cook in it much,' he told her airily, because he could see that she was not impressed. 'Papa is getting you one of the convict women as a cook, and you and Sue will be living and sleeping in the marquee.'

'And what about Martin's mother? Is she to have a mud kitchen?'

'No,' Martin replied. 'We're going to live in a marquee on the parade ground. Mamma says we'll get our food from the soldiers' mess.'

Dan had been listening. 'I can see you two will have to work out a system of flags to talk to one another from a distance,' he said. 'Red flag, "Martin, come over here"; blue flag, "I'll meet you down by the stream".'

John looked at Martin, and both with their eyes thanked Dan for the suggestion.

'Oh, Dan,' John exclaimed, 'that would be fine! Will you give us some flags from the locker?'

Overhead the thunder ripped and clapped and rumbled and tumbled across the sky. Then the rain came in a patter, a tattoo, in a steady drumming.

'It's worse than ever,' Mamma said. 'Papa is in charge of the guard on shore tonight—I hope he doesn't get wet. Martin, you will have to stay here.'

That was just what the boys had been wishing would happen.

'You can sleep in Sue's hammock,' John told Martin, 'because Papa won't be back, and Sue can go with Mamma.'

For a long time they lay awake listening to the storm.

'I wonder what is happening to the kitchen?' Martin said all of a sudden.

John sat up in his hammock and almost fell out. 'The kitchen!' he repeated. He had forgotten the kitchen. 'Oh, Martin, it will be all washed away!'

And he lay back again and thought of the convicts, hiding in the boles of the trees, in their miserable huts, and under flimsy pieces of old dockyard canvas. How would they fare?

Then, because he did not care to dwell on their plight, he thought again of the alligator, and of what Chips had said, 'Every day there'll be something new. And lucky boys like you will be in the thick of it all.'

The iguana had certainly been new, and so was this storm. Never before had he known lightning that seemed to rip the heavens apart and send the thunder tumbling about his ears.

'I bet it will rain tomorrow,' Martin murmured gloomily, 'and then they won't let us go ashore.'

But dawn brought a sky clear and cloudless.

It also brought news of disaster. 'A tree was struck, and the lightning ran down it and killed a pig and five of Major Ross's sheep,' Papa told them when he came aboard.

'The ones we saw yesterday,' John said to Martin, and they raced off to tell Cookie.

He received the news with dismay. 'Now ye needn't get so excited

about it,' he reproved. 'Six sheep and one pig! And there be only sixty sheep in the whole o this land. 'Tis a calamity, that's what it be,' and he went about preparing the pease porridge for breakfast.

Both boys were fidgety at the table.

'Whatever is the matter with you?' Mamma complained irritably.

'We want to get ashore early this morning,' John told her. 'We have to finish your kitchen.'

'But it is Sunday. You really should not work on Sunday.'

For a moment he was at a loss to think of an excuse. It came to him in a flash, something that he had heard the day before. 'Mr Johnson is holding service under the big tree. Don't you think we had better go to church?'

He knew immediately that Mamma was won. 'Yes, I would like you to go to church,' she said, 'but you must tell Martin's mother, as you pass the *Friendship*, where he has gone.'

They were over the side before she could change her mind.

'Poor Sue!' John said, as he watched his sister wave her hand. 'We must get that kitchen finished today, Martin. It's time Mamma and Sue went ashore.'

CHAPTER III

A MUD KITCHEN FOR MAMMA

THEY found Chips scratching his head and contemplating the ruin that had once been meant to be a hut.

'Break your heart,' he wailed, 'these storms that come of a night. Never give the mud time to dry hard.' Even the boys were disheartened, and threw themselves down on a log.

'Why don't you use wood, Chips?' John suggested. 'That's what Robinson Crusoe would have used. He had a stockade, and a ladder to go over into it.'

'Too green and sappy,' Chips replied. 'It would warp in no time. Besides, we must get the hut up quickly.'

Martin was watching a line of ants creeping to a mound, which by poking with a stick he had already found to be a nest.

'Then why can't we build it like the ants?' he said.

Chips brightened up at once. 'Now that's an idea. Indian folk build them. I've seen them myself in America.' He began to bustle about. 'You boys drag away all the twigs we put up yesterday, while I go back to the ship for some boards. Be quick.'

By the time he came back only the posts and rafters remained.

'Now dig a little trench, where the walls are to be,' he directed, and when they had done so, 'We'll put up the boards so, one on each side of the poles, and fill the space between with clay. See! I'll dig the clay and prepare it while you pack it down tight. It'll be more fun than chasing alligators. And when the clay between the boards is hard, we'll take the boards away, and the hut will have a wall.'

They were getting along splendidly, when John remembered that he had been sent ashore to go to church.

'Mamma said so,' he told Chips.

'Well, if your Mamma said so, you must obey her; but perhaps

you'll come back after you've had a bite to eat with Cookie on the beach, and help me.'

Mr Johnson was already waiting under the great tree on the waterfront. And the convicts had gathered, begrimed and bedraggled, in smocks and coats and shifts, that still hung damply from their shoulders.

Then with a beating of drums and shrilling of fifes the marines came marching from the parade ground, red coats trim and dry, white trousers spotless and buttons shining.

'They had tents to sleep in,' John thought rather ruefully.

He and Martin stood on the outer ring. 'So that we can slip away, if he preaches too long,' they had agreed.

But they had not reckoned with Papa. They found him close by, in charge of his men, with Martin's father as his sergeant near at hand. Both were watching from the corner of their eyes all the time.

The singing was weak and thin at first, but grew in volume as the old hymn tunes rang out. There was no doubt about it, those convicts liked to sing, whether it was their own rollicking city ballads, or the familiar hymns that perhaps brought back memories of their childhood in faraway England.

'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?' Mr Johnson had given out his text, and was about to begin his sermon.

John lazily gazed around and remembered that other day long ago at Rio, when Mr Johnson had christened Martin's little brother, and how a child, Jenny, had crept up amongst the congregation and tugged at Sue's doll. He had not thought of the little girl for months, though occasionally Sue had babbled about her and the lost doll, Betsy, which she had so generously given her.

'How is Jenny?' he whispered to Martin, remembering that Jenny and her convict mother were on the *Friendship*.

'Oh, she's all right!' Martin replied. 'She still has the doll.'

Turning his head John looked out over the Cove. A boat was being slowly rowed towards the water's edge. He took no notice of it until he heard a squeal and saw a bright bonnet in the bow. Then he looked more closely. Why, it was Dan with Mamma and Sue! He forgot Papa's eye was upon him, forgot that Parson Johnson was in the middle of his sermon. With a half cry he made for the shore, and Martin was at his heels.

'Mamma,' he cried, as Sue shouted and waved her hand.

But Mamma was making signs for him to go back. 'We are not coming ashore,' she said as softly as she could. 'Dan has brought us in to listen to church from the water.'

John and Martin went slowly back to the fringe of the crowd, but they made sure to choose a spot where they could easily mingle with the congregation and not be seen by Papa. It was not long before they had edged away amongst the trees.

'Mr Johnson must be nearly finished,' Martin said, and so he was, for they heard the last hymn as they made for the beach.

Cookie was there with his soup-pot and salt pork and freshly baked bread.

'And how are ye getting on with the kitchen?' he inquired.

'We've taken it down,' they told him, 'and are building one of clay.'

'Aye, I thought it wouldn't last,' the old man remarked. 'Course I be only a sailor, not a carpenter like Chips, but if it had been me now, I'd have used that palm sort o' tree, and not twigs. That palm with the tassel o' yellow flowers. Easy to cut down, easy to wattle and easy to daub. Mark my words, lads, that's what they'll be a-using 'fore long.'

They took Chips's share fo the food back to the hut.

'Cookie says we ought to have used the cabbage palm for our hut,' John told him.

Chips munched his bread and pondered. 'He may be right,' he said at length. 'Soft wood like that wouldn't warp, but it would soon rot. Never mind, we'll finish our clay hut. It'll be a natty little place. See, I have the frames of the windows ready, and the fireplace laid out. You boys will be able to use the cabbage palm for a cubby for Sue.'

'A cubby house,' repeated both at the same time. It was an enchanting thought. A hut where they could retire to work out their schemes and amuse themselves on wet days, a hut where Sue could play at housekeeping with her dolls when they were out hunting the hopping animal and the iguana, and all the other strange creatures that now lay hiding in the woods.

But for the moment they knew they had to finish the kitchen for Mamma. All day they worked, and the next morning, until they could do no more, for the walls were beyond their reach.

'I'll get the Commodore to detail some convicts to help you, Chips,' Papa said when he came to inspect what they had done.

The boys were not quite sure of the convicts at first. They had been happy with Chips alone, and did not quite trust these strangers. After all, the men were convicts, and had been sent to this country because they had done wrong.

'It might have only been for stealing a loaf or a shilling,' John whispered to Martin, as if to allay their fears.

But as the day wore on they found themselves talking to the men in much the same way as they might have done to Cookie, or Chips or even Dan.

There was Pete, the happy-go-lucky, the man with a whistle and a smile, who moved his arms lazily and packed the clay lightly, then turned again to smile at the boys with a merry twinkle and a wink that seemed to say that what was not done that day could be done the next.

There was quiet Jim Ruse, who methodically, doggedly, packed the clay and trimmed it neatly, scarcely raising his head from the work.

There was Daley, the schemer, who worked only when Chips was watching, and hid behind the walls as they grew in height, to hide his idleness.

There was Caesar, the negro, who rolled his white eyeballs and lunged at them with his great frame, pretending to frighten them until they learnt to laugh at his antics.

There was sly Corbett, whose shifty eyes were never still. Even Chips kept his eye on Corbett.

'What are you going to put on the roof of the hut?' Papa asked Chips on the third day.

'Excuse me, sir,' said James Ruse, looking up for once from his work, 'there be some rushes round in a bay not far from here that would make a good thatch.'

'Yes, yes,' cried the boys together, 'we know the bay. We went there with the Commodore the first time we came here. Dan will take us in the long-boat, Papa.'

Dan did take them. It was fun squelching about by the foreshores of the bay, cutting the rushes, with Caesar alongside to pop up and roll his eyes at them, and make imaginary lunges with his knife.

Every now and then they would stop and stare at the shore, just

in case a kangaroo should flash past, or a black man burst from the trees shouting his cry of 'Warra, warra, warra!'

'See, I have brought some trinkets, and a red ribbon,' John said, spilling them from his pocket, 'to entice the black men to us.'

There was no need for the trinkets, no need either for the marine who sat in the boat with his gun cocked while the rushes were being gathered.

When they got back they found Chips busily at work on a table and chairs. He had taken the trunks of young saplings and made three-legged stools; he had dug holes in the earthen floor for poles on which he had laid slabs for a table; and beside it, on each side, had likewise fixed long forms.

John was fascinated. 'Now we'll know how to furnish our cubby,' he said to Martin, and both were eager to begin there and then.

But Chips had other work for them. 'Wattle some twigs for the windows,' he told them, and they went about it with alacrity, glad that the work was almost done.

By sunset Chips looked back at it with satisfaction. 'There now,' he said, 'it can rain cats and dogs tonight.'

And so it did.

Out on the *Sirius* John slept content. The clay was dry, the roof thatched, the table and stools waiting, and the next day Mamma and Sue would be going ashore.

And not only Mamma and Sue, but also the convict women. That day the women had been issued with new clothes. In the morning at six o'clock the boats would begin to take them to the landing-place.