

# THE RANDY

DOROTHY SANDERS

# THE RANDY

*The Story of a Mystery Ship*

BY  
DOROTHY LUCIE SANDERS



## CONTENTS

THE UNKNOWN BAY 1

CASTAWAY 32

CAPTAIN FITZGERALD 61

JOE 78

THE RANDY 91



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE UNKNOWN BAY

JEEM was dead and nothing that the Police Commissioner and my father could say about it could alter that fact. I saw him dead. His sallow face was an unearthly green-grey; his sodden clothes were bunched up round him and his wet hair lay black and dragged over his brow. I saw him lying like that on the rocks up at the bay, and so did Joe and Sven and Ilka though they denied it... denied they even knew me... I pleaded with Joe, the tears in my eyes. I couldn't believe that he would pretend that he didn't know me. It was cruel beyond belief. As I looked up into his kindly, puzzled face in the Commissioner's office I just couldn't bring myself to believe that Joe was doing this. That Joe, who'd spent endless days swimming and fishing and even shooting a little up at the bay, should be looking at me with that strange stare and denying that he'd ever been to the bay... that there'd ever been a ship called the Randy.

...And Joe's commanding officer, speaking in that slow American drawl, testifying that Joe had never been

absent from duty; that during the time I said the sailors had been up at the bay they had, in fact, been at sea.

I couldn't understand it, not any of it. I still can't... But perhaps if I go over it all again, start at the beginning and put every detail down, I may remember something, some little thing, that will help me find the answer...

The story of the mystery ship Randy and of my long quest for her, which finally took me all over the seven seas, began on the shores of the west coast of Australia three or four years ago.

Here there are thousands of miles of sealine edged with flat grey country. It is as lonely as the forgotten places... the places of the earth where prehistoric men may have lived but where only a few have cared to make their dwelling since the beginning of modern times; a dry deserted country with no deep watercourses and few creeks, and those mostly salty or brackish. The sea, that lies green and blue along its shoreline, looks calm and gentle enough but it has moods that, though rare, can be devastating. Along the coast, from Rottnest Island in the south to the far north, you will hear stories of ships wrecked upon the reefs, of crews that disappeared and left no traces of their going.

And yet this seacoast is the home of all my dreams. Here the blueness of heaven is only excelled by the blueness of sea. Near the southern extremities of this coast the white man first settled. Then in the far, blue north he found the greatest treasure of the sea... pearls. And in the exploitation of that treasure came the brown and yellow men so that now the pearling ports have some, if not all, of the glamour of the exotic east.

At least that is how I thought of things when first I came across the Randy.

Four years ago Blackman's Bay was still the limits of seaside settlement in the southern province of the State. When my father built a cottage there he said the beaches were the finest in the world and that some day soon the world would discover them. Penn's Jetty, Benson Beach, North Beach and most northerly of all the settled beaches in this province... Blackman's Bay. Here were wide stretches of fine yellow sand, protected from the rough surge of the Indian Ocean by the straggling reefs that are a fisherman's paradise.

I was only fifteen the day I set out for a long walk along the water's edge. My father and mother had taken us out to the cottage for the summer months and it was a day upon which I felt I could not endure the company of any member of my family. I had been quarrelling

with my parents. That is... as much as a fifteen year old *can* quarrel with his parents. They said they were tired of my day-dreaming, of my pre-occupation with the sea and of my absorption with books. I had not tried to make them understand how I felt about the great sweep of the sea and the strange glittering beaches that I peopled with creatures of my own imagination. I left them to their own occupations and sought the loneliness of the sunlit sands. Here I could imagine bygone kingdoms, perhaps of aboriginals, or even of sea kings and mermaids who knew and loved these long shores with their piles of jumbled rock and their distant white horses. Here I could dream of the ghosts of the Dutch brigands from the shipwrecked "Batavia," and wonder if, after all these three hundred years, they did not still keep a secret tryst with the sea and reefs that had spelled their doom.

I had walked for a long time and gone much further north than I'd been before. Then I came to the bay.

It was a little inward curve of sand between two rocky promontories with tall, thick bush coming right to the edge of the beach.

Out to sea the reef curved in, too, so that the bay was as calm as a land-locked lake.

The water was a mysterious translucent green and



as I waded through it and swam in it, my eyes were fascinated by the beauties of the sandy bottom, the secret fastnesses of miniature merman kingdoms. I resolved then that I would come secretly to the bay every day... only in future I would bring something to eat and some fresh water in a bottle.

On the third day Jeem came to my bay.

I had had my swim and was lying half dozing in the sun when I heard a whistle. I looked up, and there about thirty yards away was Jeem, standing just outside the belt of trees and idly throwing pieces of cuttle shell at the water's edge. He was about fourteen or fifteen and even at that distance, I could see his olive skin and realize that his eyes were dark, perhaps black.

"Hallo there," I called, pulling myself up to a sitting position. Jeem walked over to me and I could see at once that I was going to like him enormously and not mind his being on my beach a bit. Sure enough he had black eyes, glowing like coals in a thin, sallow face. His hair was a bit too long, and looked as if he'd been cutting it himself. I remembered afterwards that he was pretty shabby altogether. His trousers were too long—down to his knees in fact—and his shirt was a faded blue dungaree with more than one tear in evidence. But these things didn't seem to matter beside

his fine and friendly face. It was the finest face I'd ever seen on a boy, strong and clean, and I knew at once that he was rare enough not to think a fellow's fancies about the beach peculiar.

"Where'd you come from?" he asked.

"Back there." I nodded my head in the direction of Blackman's Bay. "D'ye mind my being here?" I asked, and I remembered that afterwards I thought that was a funny question for me to ask. But, somehow, I suddenly felt that this was his beach after all, and that he had lived there a long time.

"No," he said, squatting down in the sand beside me. "It's lonely here sometimes." He spoke with a queer accent. It sounded to me as if it might be Dutch. Not that I'd ever known anyone from Holland, but for some strange reason I associated it with Jeem. That is, until I looked at his feet. The structure of his face and body was fine and narrow, but his feet didn't fit in. They were broad and flat, and the texture of the skin was dark beyond sunburning. They were the kind of feet we used to call blackfella's feet at school, and I immediately thought that Jeem might have aboriginal blood in him. I didn't mind that. I liked it. That's what made him different: made him look and sound as if he belonged here, where white men seldom came.

“Where do you live?” I asked.

“In there,” he said, looking in the direction of the bush.

“Are your people there?” I asked him. “Have you got a holiday cottage? What do you do for water?”

“Oh, there’s water if you know where to look for it,” he said. He looked at me with his dark, friendly eyes. “My family have been using a little stream there for over a hundred years.”

“A hundred years!” I said incredulously. “Nobody lives for a hundred years.”

“Silly ass,” he said without anger. “My father’s father, in his time. That’s what I mean.” He paused a moment. “They’re all gone now. I’m the last of them.”

“Do you mean you live alone?” I asked, with mixed envy and disbelief.

“Well, for the time being, anyway,” he said a little sadly. “When the folks down there... ” and he nodded his head to the south, “find out, they’ll come hunting for me and that’ll be the end of all my peace and happiness.”

“But what do you live on?” I asked excitedly.

“Live on! Good heavens, there’s fish, and kangaroo and I’ve got a yam patch back there. Why we’ve never lived on anything else for a hundred years.” This sounded

a bit tall to me, but it also sounded happy and exciting and I decided not to ask any more questions just yet.

“Do you want to go fishing on the reef?” Jeem asked. (That was the way he pronounced his name and I liked it.)

“Do I what!” I said. “Just lead the way.”

And Jeem did. First of all he showed me a miniature cave in the northerly end of the rock spit where he had fishing tackle hidden. There were some lines made of twine and some unbelievably ancient hooks. “Picked up by my father long ago,” said Jeem. But more interesting than these, were some spears with stone heads which Jeem said his father had made and which were his sole weapon before he found the fishing lines. Then we began to follow the direction of the rock promontory out to sea, stepping high in the shallow water and sometimes leaping from rock to rock. It must have taken us nearly half an hour to work our way out to the reef by that path of shallow waters and jutting rocks, but at last we were seated high on the weed strewn jags of the reef.

“We’ve two hours before the tide comes in,” said Jeem. “The water doesn’t cover the reef entirely, but we’d have to swim home.”

“Have you ever had to do it?” I asked him.

“Lots of times,” he said. “Could you?”

“I’d give it a good fling,” I said with conviction. And as I can swim pretty well, I don’t think I was boasting. Then we settled down to the business of fishing. We were pretty lucky, and I suppose that made us feel more friendly still towards each other. Perhaps that is why Jeem told me his secret...

“Nobody knows where we get our water from,” he said mysteriously. “Many people have come here hunting for our water hole, but no one has ever found it,” and he led me a little way along the reef to where a particularly large cluster of rocks rose up out of the water in circular fashion. In the centre of the pool formed by the rocks, the water was fresh.

“An underground spring,” Jeem said. “And it comes out here.” I could hardly believe my eyes, but the water was pure and fresh, as I can show anyone to this day.

“Do you always have to come out to the reef for your water?” I asked.

“No,” said Jeem. “My grandfather discovered this water first, and took a direct line with that crop of rocks you can see over there,” and he pointed to the southern promontory. “Just where those rocks meet the sea is another spring,” he said. “You have to put your cup into the sea to catch the fresh water. That’s why no one else has ever found it.”

Too soon the daytime fled by, and I had to think about going home. Jeem showed me many more strange and exciting things about the reef, and afterwards, when we'd waded back and had another swim, he fetched me water from the stream that came out just below the beach level.

I was late home that day, but I never said a word about the bay or Jeem. That was all part of my own private world; I thought and dreamed about it by night, and each day I set out for the bay and a day of glorious sunlit pleasure.

"Where'd you go all day?" Mother asked. "It isn't natural for a boy to go off by himself all the time."

"I'm not by myself," I replied at length. "There's another boy I go swimming with up at the beach."

"What's that?" said Dad. "Someone camping on the beach? There aren't any cottages from here on."

"That's what everyone thinks," I replied. "This chap lives up there. He's never lived anywhere else in his life."

"There isn't any water up there," said Dad in a contrary tone.

"Yes, there is," I said.

"There's a water hole the half-blooded tribe used to use," said Mother, for once on my side. "They say that no one has ever found it."

“That’s only legend,” said my father. “You know what fishermen’s tales are.”

I nursed my secret knowledge of Jeem’s springs and let my family put what construction they liked on my mysterious companion, so long as they didn’t stop my going to the bay. And though they often talked of stopping me, they never did.

About ten days after Jeem and I first met, we were lying sunbaking in the dunes, when three American sailors turned the corner of the southern promontory and sauntered along the bay.

“Cripes,” said Jeem. “What’s these?”

“Americans,” I said. “Haven’t you seen Americans before?”

I watched them through half-closed sleepy eyes as they came towards us. I wondered what had brought American sailors so far north. Then as they came closer, I suddenly realised that I’d seen these three sailors before. One day my brother and I had gone down to Benson Beach for a surfing carnival, and there were a lot of Americans about. These three men had been sitting together a little apart from the crowd and after a while we struck up a conversation with them. I remembered the one called Joe particularly, because he seemed to be the leader of the three. He had a face so

full of life, with dancing, blue eyes that seemed to snap with laughter, and when he smiled, you saw a perfect set of white teeth. Joe was not quite as tall as the other two... Sven and Ilka, they were called, and I think they must have been of Nordic extraction. They were big and fair with light blue eyes, and though they, too, were full of laughter, they hadn't got Joe's charm or Joe's knack of spinning yarns that were thrilling and realistic. We asked them what boat they came from, and Joe told us that they were submarine men, but that they really belonged to the Randy. The Randy acted as a supply ship to the submarine, and it was of the Randy that Joe always spoke. They laughed a lot when they told us about her... it was almost as if the boat was a live thing to them, and as if so much that they had had to do with her had been gay and adventurous and lively. We wanted to know everything about her and Joe said... "Say, don't you kids know there's a war on?" I remember telling him that as we were only kids, we could hardly be spies and I couldn't see what harm it would be to tell us a bit about her.

Well, that started them off. The Randy was not only a supply ship but a pirate, they told us. Her job was "pirating" for Japanese and German supply ships in the Indian Ocean and they told us some of the jobs she had done, some of the fierce encounters they'd had. I know



my hair was fairly standing on end some of the time. And Sven and Ilka laughed at everything Joe said. Their teeth flashed and they threw sand balls at one another to punctuate their delight in the exploits of their ship. I could have listened to Joe all night.

And now here were the same three sailors miles from Benson Beach, walking up the sandy stretch of our bay.

“Joe!” I cried excitedly as I jumped up and ran down to meet them.

“Why, if it isn’t Ginge himself,” said Joe. Everyone called me that because of my red hair, but I didn’t mind it coming from Joe. “And what are you doing here, and who’s your buddy this time?” went on Joe.

I told him quickly about Jeem, and the bay and then in turn I asked him the question that was uppermost in my mind.

“What are you doing here?” I said.

The three sailors exchanged glances and then as of one accord threw themselves down on the sand.

“We might as well tell the kid,” said Joe to the others. “He’s O.K.”

Sven and Ilka both said “Okay,” and then Joe told me that they were A.W.O.L. They’d got mixed up with some New Zealanders down at the port, and had missed their sub, and the Randy.

“Now,” said Joe. “If we’d reported to the U.S. Navy as we are supposed to do, we’d have been put in barracks till the Randy and her pal came to port again, and then once aboard we’d be up for as much time as if we’d been loose all the while. So we might as well be free and make a good time of it. Do you see?”

Somehow I was a bit shocked that they were A.W.O.L., and my face must have showed it, for Joe suddenly reached forward and cuffed my head in a friendly way.

“Aw, it’s okay, kid,” he said. “Every sailor misses a boat sometime or other in his career. Could I help it if a Kiwi clouted me unconscious and Sven and Ilka stayed around to help me? Anyhow, if we did report to headquarters, we could be shipped away in any old tramp. You wouldn’t have us miss the Randy, would you?”

That seemed reasonable to me, and put things right, and once again Joe leaped back to his own special place in my estimation.

“Tell me and Jeem some more about the Randy,” I cried eagerly.

“Okay, okay. But what about something to eat? We are fair famished.”

Jeem and I looked at one another in dismay. There was nothing in the tucker bag.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Jeem. “I’ll go out to the

reef and spear some fish and maybe bring in a cray or two. You get that old kerosene tin full of fresh water and start a fire going.”

I was all for making the fire the way Jeem had shown me with a twirling fire-stick but the Americans got in first by producing a box of matches.

“Slow,” Joe drawled, looking at my fire-stick. “Very slow. I believe in the modern way of fire making.” And in a few seconds he had a good blaze under the tin.

It didn't seem long (though Joe said it was a heck of a time), before Jeem was back, and half a dozen crays were turning pink in the tin, and some big sea mullet were smouldering in the ashes. The sailors had a quick swim in the sea while the fish were cooking, and after we had all eaten our fill, we lay chatting and half dozing in the sand while the afternoon wore on.

It was decided that Joe and Sven and Ilka should camp in the bush for the time being, and for an hour we had a fine time building them a bush humpy in Australian style. Jeem didn't offer to take them home, so no one suggested it, but they couldn't have been better off anyway. They seemed snug and set for the night when I left for my long trek home, but I promised to be back long before midday, loaded, I hoped, with some of my mother's stores secretly removed from the kitchen.

That was the first of many wonderful days. We swam and fished and even tried a little futile shooting with a revolver that Ilka carried, but we didn't hit anything. In fact, Ilka had better luck with the knife which he could use as effectively as Jeem could use the stone headed spears. Sven, too, could whittle any shape out of a bit of cuttle shell or a small piece of wood. But of the three, Joe was the best. Not that Sven and Ilka weren't wonderful comrades. They were, but to my mind they were not to be compared with Joe.

And the yarns Joe could tell!

When we grew tired of fishing or swimming, we would lie in the sand, and he would tell us about the Randy. She had tramped the northwest seas, he said, for many years before the war, and then she was called into service. I lay many an hour and listened to him enraptured, and only when the sun sank level with the ocean and everything—heaven and earth—was blood red with the rays of the setting sun, would I sadly drag myself away from them and dawdle the long way home.

After a while my father and mother began to worry, and wanted me to stay at home.

“There's something wrong with the boy,” they'd say.

“A boy shouldn't go off on his own like that; he's getting thin; his eyes are strained; he looks wretched.”

Talk, talk, talk! I'd never been happier in my life, though I suppose I was a bit thinner because of the long walk every day to the bay. Nothing they could say would make me stay at home. The Randy had captured my imagination, and Jeem and I were blood brothers. Everything one of us seemed to do or say, the other approved of; while the Americans told us of a life at sea in one of the most daring of all sea-going ships, and of the hectic life ashore in foreign ports, where the fame of the Randy had always spread before her.

The Randy! What magic that name was in my ears! I had never been to sea, never seen a ship at close quarters. But from our summer holiday cottage I had watched many a vessel coming and going through the Roads. Many and many a day, and often in the evening, I had sat upon the sands gazing across the Indian Ocean, dreaming of ships and of a life at sea. It irritated my father almost beyond endurance for he declared that my longings were only those of all boys of my age, and that he would never allow me to be a sailor.

Joe drew us so perfect a picture of the Randy, that I felt that I would know her at once if ever I saw her. Before these holidays I had longed in a nebulous kind of way for a life at sea, but now knew that I would never be happy until I boarded the Randy. My day dreams

all turned upon that point. I thought continuously of how I would search for, and one day find, her.

That is why, on the last day of our holidays, as I set off up the beach I knew, when I saw a ship coming over the horizon and turning into the Roads, that it was the Randy. Joe had said that she would be in any day now, and that then their troubles “would really begin.”

But it was something more than premonition and the fact that she was expected soon, that made me recognise her. As she came inshore I could see that her lines were unusual, and that there was a gallant swift look about her that I'd never seen before in any of the vessels passing along the Roads.

No, it was the Randy, and my heart was filled with a mixed feeling of pride and excitement, and a kind of sadness. The Randy had come to port. Tomorrow we were shifting back to our town house, and there would be only Jeem alone on the bay.

I was suddenly appalled by the thought. If the end of the holidays was a tragedy for me, what would it be for Jeem? He would be absolutely alone on the beach. No American sailors, no Randy, no me. Suddenly the bay lost all its lustre. I saw it empty and forlorn, with Jeem standing alone on its wet sands.

I looked out to sea, and there now seemed something

purposeful and forbidding about the Randy. She was coming to port, and with her the submarine to take Joe and Sven and Ilka away forever.

I rounded the southern promontory and, for a moment, I thought the bay was empty. Then in the distance, I saw the sailors wading on to the shore by the northern rock path from the reefs; they were carrying something between them. Where was Jeem? I started to run across the sands, and as I drew nearer, I could see quite distinctly that it was a body they were carrying. It must be Jeem! It couldn't be anyone else! I saw them stagger over the last few rocks and deposit their burden carefully on a flat rock. Joe bent over it for a minute. He straightened up just as I approached.

"Look out, here's the kid," said Sven. Joe turned quickly.

"Take it easy, kid," he said. "Take it easy."

I pushed him aside, and stared down at Jeem. I had never seen anyone dead, but I knew at once that Jeem was dead. It was the unearthly greyness. Suddenly, the back of my head felt as if it would burst apart. I know I clasped it in a kind of physical and mental torment. Words wouldn't come. I could only stare at Joe.

"Take it easy, take it easy," he kept saying, and I felt his strong hand on my arm. There was nothing

for me to do but stand and stare at his kind, brown face. There were tumult and horror in my mind, and a kind of frenzy. Even when I looked away from Joe to the sea, I could see Jeem's grey face and the black, draggled hair. It was horrible.

"It was out at the reef," Joe was saying. "We never saw it. Just heard him give a cry, and he went over backwards. We never moved... thought he would come up and shake the hair and water out of his eyes... you know the way he used to... but he didn't come up. Sven realised first and he shot in after him. He had to dive twice before he got him... there's a hole as big as your fist in the side of his head.... he didn't drown... he hit a rock..."

I pushed past Joe. I had to see Jeem again... He lay in a strange dumped way, with his clothes all wet and bunched up. And under the left side of his head a pool of blood and water was widening... I turned away and ran across the sand to the edge of the bush. I threw myself on the ground, and sobbed as if my heart and head would burst.

I don't know how long I was there, but in the end, I fell into a kind of doze, a half sleep that robbed me of my senses, yet did not shut out the whirling world.

It was fairly midday by the position of the sun