Also by Joan Druett

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The Sailing Circle (with Mary Anne Wallace)
Captain’s Daughter, Coasterman’s Wife
“She Was a Sister Sailor” (editor)
Petticoat Whalers
Fulbright in New Zealand
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Abigail
A Promise of Gold

Murder at the Brian Boru

ISLAND of THE LOST

Shipwrecked at the Edge of the World
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First Edition
For Roberta McIntyre,  
whose early encouragement  
could not have been  
more well timed.

It has seldom fallen to our lot as journalists to record a more remarkable instance of escape from the perils of shipwreck, and subsequent providential deliverance from the privations of a desolate island, after two years’ sojourn, than that we have now to furnish.

—Southland News, July 29, 1865

The man who has experienced shipwreck shudders even at a calm sea.

—Ovid
ONE A Sturdy Vessel
TWO Open Sea
THREE The Islands
FOUR Wrecked
FIVE Shelter
SIX Prey
SEVEN The Cabin
EIGHT Democracy
NINE Routine
TEN Dire Necessity
ELEVEN The Jaws of Hell
TWELVE Privation
THIRTEEN The Hunt
FOURTEEN Equinox
FIFTEEN Summer
SIXTEEN Raynal’s Forge
SEVENTEEN Boats
EIGHTEEN Escape
NINETEEN Deliverance
TWENTY A Sentiment of Humanity
TWENTY-ONE Rescue
TWENTY-TWO Reunion
TWENTY-THREE Answers
It was October 1863, early springtime in Sydney, Australia. The sun was bright, but a chilly wind whisked up the broad surface of the harbor, dashing reflections to pieces. Distant waves rushed against islands and rocky beaches, tossing up sprays of seabirds that cried out a raucous challenge as they circled the tall masts of ships. Wood-burning steam ferries chugged across the harbor from the terminus on Circular Quay, their whistles competing with the nearer rattle of the many horse-drawn trams in the city.

Close by, brigs, ketches, and schooners were tied up to quays, discharging sugarcane, coffee, tropical fruits, and coal, and loading ore and locally made machinery. Because of all this activity, the two men who searched the docks were forced to step around piles of sacks and stacks of barrels, and dodge stevedores who were bent low under heavy loads as they hurried in and out of the gaping doors of pitch-roofed warehouses. The cold wind whistled in the passages and alleys, bringing a smell of soot, dust, and eucalyptus trees, and the two men had their collars turned up, and their cold hands thrust deeply into their pockets. Still, however, they doggedly trudged from wharf to wharf, their eyes moving assessingly from one moored vessel to another.

Though as weatherbeaten as seamen, it was obvious that these two had come in from town. Both were well-groomed, handsome men, wearing city clothes; their good hats were set squarely on their heads, and their boots were decently shined. While they were about the same age, in their early thirties, the dark spade beard of the taller one was peppered with gray, in contrast to the slighter man’s luxuriant moustache and whiskers, which were glossy brown beneath a strongly hooked nose. When they talked, it was evident that this latter fellow was French, because of his marked accent, while the taller man’s voice held a burr that betrayed his northern England origins. However, they spoke seldom, because they had conferred already, and knew exactly what they wanted.

Everywhere there were notices nailed to walls, doors, bowsprits, and masts, announcing departures, advertising for men, or putting craft up for sale. It was these last that the men inspected, but so far without success, because it was so hard to find a vessel that met their specifications. They were hunting for a schooner that was small enough to be handled by four seamen, but strongly built as well. She had to be
cheap, because they had not much funding for the ambitious venture they planned, but it was essential that she be sound. They intended to sail one thousand, five hundred miles sou’sou’east of Australia, as far as the Antarctic convergence, where immense billows rise up before the hurtling winds of latitude fifty, lifting taller than the highest mast before crashing down on ice-sheathed decks. Then they would turn their course to sail six hundred miles northeast and find an anchorage at tempest-swept Campbell Island. Naturally, then, they were most particular about the ship they had in mind.

All at once, the gray-bearded man spied a likely candidate. He stopped and pointed it out to the other, and then their steps quickened as they approached the vessel. Together, they eagerly read the notice tacked to the post where she was moored. Her name, they found, was *Grafton*. They stood back and studied her, assessing her lines and rigging, and watching the way her short, broad hull rocked heavily in the glossy harbor water. A two-masted craft, she was a topsail schooner, having one square sail set across the upper part of the foremast, and sails that ran fore and aft in the rest of the rigging. This helped make her easy for a small crew to handle, meeting the first of their specifications. What made her particularly attractive, however, were her sturdy build and her workmanlike, seaworthy air.

Again they studied the notice. According to the text, the *Grafton* had freighted coal from Newcastle, New South Wales, to Sydney, and was capable of carrying about seventy-five tons in her hold. It pleased them that she had been a coal carrier. In the tradition of Captain Cook’s *Endeavour*, which had also been a collier, she was designed to carry heavy cargoes through gales and wicked seas. She was a little more expensive than they might have wished, but for the adventure the two men had in mind the schooner *Grafton* looked ideal. They turned and went in search of the agent.

*Neither of the men* was a stranger to adventure. The Frenchman, François Raynal, had spent the past eleven years prospecting in the goldfields of New South Wales and Victoria, until he had had to give it up because of poor health. First, he had suffered severe bouts of the two diseases that ravaged the Australian goldfields, dysentery and ophthalmia. Though he’d cured the dysentery with a glassful of brandy mixed with pepper, the ophthalmia had involved nine days of blindness so painful and terrifying that a friend had taken his guns away from him, fearing that he would commit suicide. Then he had suffered a near-fatal accident when a tunnel had collapsed on him. No bones were broken, but there had been so much internal
damage that back in February he’d been forced to come to Sydney to seek treatment from one of the 118 medicos who practiced here at the time. Now, eight months later, the doctor had pronounced that he was cured, but, while he was free to go back to seeking his fortune, François Raynal was determined not to try the goldfields again.

The taller man, Thomas Musgrave, was a master mariner with the reputation of being a steady captain and a gifted navigator. Fifteen years ago, at the age of sixteen, he had started sailing the Liverpool-Australia route, rising rapidly through the ranks until he was given command. Sometime in 1857, probably because he had an uncle who had successfully set up a drapery business in the city, he had made the decision to settle in Sydney. After finding a house, he had sent for his wife and their children, and for a while he had captained ships on the Australia–New Zealand run. Then his luck had run out, along with his job. Like Raynal, he was ready for another stab at making a fortune. Together, they were pursuing a wild venture that had been proposed by two men they both thought they knew well.

One of these instigators was Musgrave’s uncle, and the other was Uncle Musgrave’s partner in the drapery business, a Frenchman by the name of Charles Sarpy, one of Raynal’s old acquaintances. According to what these two clothiers had told them, there was a rich mine of argentiferous tin on remote Campbell Island, which had not been located yet but was definitely there for the finding. On and on they had gossiped and persuaded, their information and arguments so intoxicating that it wasn’t until much later that Raynal—who had been a prospector for the past decade and an engineer before that, and so definitely should have known better—realized that he should have thought much more deeply before going along with the plan.

Mostly made up of volcanic rock torn and dissected by glaciers, Campbell Island was indeed a possible source of mineral ore, but even if the party found this argentiferous tin, they would have to cope not just with the harsh remoteness of the locality, but with an unremittingly hostile climate, too. Both Raynal and Captain Musgrave must have been aware that the constant, bitter winds that burst out of the mountainous interior of the island were notorious. Not only were the primitive charts full of warnings about the dangers of anchoring at Campbell Island, but there were many old sealers in Sydney who knew the Subantarctic well. However, as Raynal ruefully ruminated in the grim months to come, they had both been seduced by the magic term argentiferous, which means “silver-bearing.” Because of that one
enticing word, they had agreed to go along with a scheme that more sensible men would have turned down without hesitation.

At once, they set to the task of adapting the Grafton for the job. The first priority was to prepare her for the terrific seas she would be breasting by adding to the weight in her hull, so that she would sit as securely as possible in the water. As Musgrave found, she had already been ballasted with about fifteen tons of old iron to keep her steady when her hold was empty on her return trips to Newcastle for more coal. This was not quite enough weight for what he had in mind, but putting in more was a problem, because above the old iron was a solid, immovable deck, which formed the floor of the hold. He purchased ten tons of sandstone blocks, but the stevedores were forced to pile them on top of this floor, where they were not as stable as the shipmaster would have liked.

Captain Musgrave couldn’t do anything about it, so he turned to the task of provisioning the schooner for a voyage that was expected to last four months at the most, this being just a first, prospecting expedition. Twenty casks were stacked in the hold and filled with fresh water, and then he purchased and loaded about three hundred pounds of ship’s bread (large round crackers of water and flour that were baked so hard they defied the teeth), two barrels of salt pork, about twenty gallons of molasses, a barrel of salt beef, two hundred pounds of ordinary flour, a few small cartons of sugar and butter, a bag of dried beans and peas, ten pounds of coffee and tea in tin boxes, and a couple of barrels of potatoes. Spare canvas, rope, and spars were also carried for running repairs if necessary.

It was then that the consortium ran short of funds. When Captain Musgrave went to the clothiers to ask for money to buy anchor chain, his uncle and Sarpy quibbled at the cost. Though they reluctantly produced some cash, it was only enough to provide sixty fathoms of chain—thirty fathoms (one hundred eighty feet) for each of the two anchors, and not very good chain at that. Anchoring the schooner close to a rocky shore would be courting disaster, because anchors can drag when the hull is pushed by wind and tide. However, Musgrave was unwilling to complain, knowing that he could be fired and replaced, particularly after the Grafton passed the port surveyor’s inspection with fifteen fathoms of chain—just ninety feet!—on her “best bower” anchor.

So, instead of backing out of an arrangement that looked increasingly dubious, he, with Raynal, turned to the job of finding and hiring two seamen and a cook. It wasn’t
difficult, because of the constant stream of disappointed gold miners trickling into town, many of them sailors. First to go on the crew list was a twenty-year-old Englishman, George Harris, an amiable fellow who had plenty of sailing experience. Then they found a taciturn twenty-eight-year-old Norwegian with the Scotch name of Alexander Maclaren, who briefly informed them that he was generally called “Alick,” and produced evidence of a very good seafaring record.

Once Alick had signed the ship’s articles, Captain Musgrave had enough men to carry out the actual sailing of the schooner, because both he and Raynal would take a watch. However, he still needed a cook, and so a fifth was added to the remarkable mix. The recruit they chose was a Portuguese from the Azores who claimed that his name was Brown. However, it didn’t take long at all for Musgrave to find that this was completely untrue, the real name being Henry Forgès. This indicated that the Azorean had run away from his last ship, but that did not worry Musgrave at all. He was used to shipping hands under false names, and he didn’t expect to sail to any place where Forgès would be tempted to desert.

More notable was the new cook’s appearance, which was ugly in the extreme, as some kind of leprosy had eaten off his nose. Intrigued by this, Raynal inquired about his past, asking many questions, which the Azorean answered readily. He had first been shipped ten years ago, he said, at the age of thirteen; the master of an American whaleship had called at his island in need of a cabin boy, and he had grabbed the chance to see the world. At the time, he had been quite good-looking, but on a later voyage, he had fallen ill with the disfiguring disease. His shipmates had been so revolted by his appearance and so afraid of catching it themselves, he said, that he had begged his captain to put him on shore at the Samoan Islands. Luckily, the natives nursed him to health. In fact, as he went on to describe, they had made quite a pet of him, and had been so upset when he swam out to a passing ship that they had chased after him with axes, clubs, and spears. If the ship had not hastily lowered a boat, he might have been killed, but instead he escaped, while the natives roared in savage frustration. Quite a tale, as Raynal, very entertained, readily allowed.

Once Forgès had signed the ship’s paper with a cross, the complement was full—five men, encompassing four nationalities and four languages, all with very different natures. Norwegian Alick, though obviously competent, was reticent to the point of curtness, while the English able seaman, George, was much more forthcoming, and Henry, the Azorean cook, was positively garrulous. Captain
Musgrave was already showing signs of habitual melancholy, but it was the naturally sunny François Raynal who was suddenly afflicted with a sense of dread, which led him to take a couple of belated precautions.

First, he went to Sarpy and Uncle Musgrave, and asked them to make a solemn promise to send out a search party if the schooner did not get back within four months of departure. When they objected on the grounds of cost, he told them to report the missing schooner to the government of New South Wales. Undoubtedly, the administration would dispatch one of the men-of-war attached to the station, or at least post a message to all the ships in the area. It was a sensible safeguard, he argued. The five men were about to venture onto one of the most dangerous seas on the globe, and on top of that, the charts were vague and sketchy. As he went on to say, “it was of no use disguising from ourselves the fact that we should be exposed to several hazards, and especially to the risk of shipwreck.”

It was his second decision—to take along a double-barreled rifle that had served him well on the Australian goldfields, plus a couple of pounds of gunpowder, a dozen pounds of lead for making bullets, and some percussion caps—that turned out to be the crucial one. At the time, it was only on a whim, because Raynal had originally intended to leave the gun in Sydney. Just before he left his boardinghouse, though, he’d had the sudden thought that he might have a chance to amuse himself shooting ducks.

“Little did I think,” he wrote later, “how useful this weapon and these munitions were hereafter to prove.” In the long, dark season ahead, that gun was to save all their lives.
Captain Musgrave ordered the anchors hove on the morning of November 12, 1863, despite the fact that it was wet and gloomy, and the tide was on the flood. A spiteful wind whistled from the sou’ou’east, but soon the Grafton was under a full press of sail and heading out to the harbor entrance, breasting the sea doggedly while the pilot barked commands. Then at last she was out of the great bay and under the high rocks of the cliffs, and the tall stone echoed with the shouts of the sailors and the snapping of bellying canvas. Round the Grafton came, backing her sails to come to a standstill and let the pilot go. Over the side he clambered, and dropped securely in the boat that had followed them out. With a last shout—“God speed you, gentlemen, and take care!”—he was gone, and the voyage was fairly commenced.

Standing out to the open sea was marked by two omens. First, the Grafton was almost immediately hit by an unexpected squall from the icy south. This swiftly moderated, but it was a timely warning of what lay ahead. Then, at midnight on November 14, when the wind had completely died and the black water shone like silk, the sky was filled with a shower of meteors that continued till dawn. As Raynal wrote, it was a splendid sight—but the barometer was falling, and it was a grim augury too.

At dawn next day it was still a dead calm. A light air might last a few minutes, the sails would fill, and the ship might sail about half a mile before the sails flapped, sagged, and then hung limp. At the start of the afternoon watch thunderheads gathered, turning the western horizon into a boiling mass of purple-black billows, which progressed slowly and ominously over the sky. At night, torn clouds raced across the face of the moon.

The hurricane grew gradually, taking the next two days to build up to full force. At dusk on November 18 the sky became pitch-black except for a band of phosphorescence on the horizon that delineated a ragged, heavy sea. “The clouds, which are very low, sweep over us with dizzy swiftness,” wrote Raynal, using the present tense to convey the dramatic impact of the scene. “Every moment they are furrowed by vivid lightnings. The rain—icy rain—lashes and smites us. At intervals the thunder mingles its formidable voice in a thousand ominous sounds.”
At eleven o’clock that night Raynal took over the tiller from the Norwegian seaman, Alick Maclaren, who had been steering. Dazzled by the constant lightning flashes, he could scarcely distinguish the compass in the binnacle, but somehow he managed to hold her onto her course. The ship was pitching and plunging as everything aloft strained and shuddered—and then, just as a deafening crack of thunder crashed out, Raynal was thrown headlong by a sudden squall.

He landed sprawling on the deck, losing his grip of the tiller. The rudder slapped free, and the schooner fell off her course, coming side-on to the force of the waves. A huge breaker reared up as high as the foremast and then crashed viciously down, smashing part of the bulwarks and tipping the hull far over. Crashing noises echoed from below as the ten tons of loose sandstone ballast slid in one mass. Suddenly the Grafton fell onto her side, while all men on board held their breaths in terrified suspense. They waited, waited, for her to drop back onto an even keel, but instead she stayed on her starboard side, thumping as she hit the foaming waves. Her deck was slanted too steeply for men to walk on, and the heavy planking of the hull creaked deafeningly, while the strained masts and rigging whined in protest.

Raynal, bruised and drenched, staggered to his feet, struggled along the sloped deck to the stern, and grabbed the tiller again, while Alick clung to a mast. Musgrave clawed his way up the companionway ladder, while the two sailors who were off duty came tumbling and sliding out of the forecastle. With great difficulty Musgrave, Alick, Harry, and George took in sail, while Raynal fought with the tiller, doggedly driving the schooner hard up to windward. Then Musgrave took over, while the Frenchman, with the others, clambered down to the hold, to find everything heaped on the starboard side, which was currently the bottom of the schooner. If the iron ballast had not been held in place by the solid floor, the Grafton would have foundered.

The noise was deafening. Waves crashed just inches from their ears as ten tons of sandstone tumbled and slid with horrid thuds. Raynal and the three sailors struggled to secure recalcitrant blocks, barrels, and bags of wet salt. By the time the schooner had been brought upright on her keel, day was breaking. When they clambered back on deck, they were weak with exhaustion, and Musgrave’s blue and white hands were frozen by the cold to the tiller.

The tempest raged on. They couldn’t set their sails again until November 21, when they also lit the fire in the galley stove. The sky was thick with cloud, and
whales spouted all around them—an ominous sign of another storm to come—but at least it was calm. When Musgrave took an observation at noon, it was to find that the gale had blown them off their course by more than one hundred fifty miles. They didn’t glimpse land until November 30, and then it was through a gathering fog, which soon became so dense that it was impossible to see from one end of the little schooner to the other. Throughout that night they lay to under short sail, waiting for dawn. When the sun finally rose the fog had cleared, but Campbell Island was nowhere to be seen.

Coming about, the schooner resumed her course, approaching their target from the west. As the sun rose high in the pale blue sky, tall rock pillars lifted like sentinels from the sea, twisted and eroded by wind and waves into strange, angry shapes, their crowns surrounded by screaming flocks of frigate birds, and white surf at their feet. Beyond, awe-inspiring cliffs reared as much as one thousand feet, their reddish walls shining black where water streamed, the sea pounding savagely at their base. Narrow terraces were crowded with colonies of mollymawk albatrosses, which soared in masses at times, filling the sky with their outstretched wings. The vegetation in the steeply descending gullies was sparse, thin, and pale brown in color; the few shrubs that had managed to survive the year-round freezing temperatures were hunched, blown flat by the constant bitter winds.

If the westerly wind gusted up, they were on a dangerous lee shore—the Grafton could be blown onto the rocks and reduced to a whirl of wreckage. Musgrave worked the ship around a massive cape and then coasted along the southern side of the island, where a series of six tall peaks rose from precipitous, contorted cliffs, and more rock pillars reared out of the sea. At last, at dawn on December 2, they turned northeast and sailed past great limestone bluffs that were striped with bands of lichen and loud with the cries of birds. Wrote François Raynal: “11 A.M. Dropped anchor in five fathoms water, at the head of the bay.”

They were in Perseverance Harbour, and an unexpectedly pleasant scene lay before them. Dun-colored slopes clothed with tussock and studded with outcrops of white-streaked stone undulated upward to blend with the brown and purple foothills. In the distance, a single pyramid-shaped peak was lighted up by the bright sun that glistened on its closest flank. The weather was warm—so warm that Raynal wondered if the seals that were supposed to be there had been driven away from the beach to find shade. “The sails had scarcely been furled before Musgrave and I went ashore,” he wrote—but they didn’t find any seals in the scrub, either.
The two men started prospecting for the fabled argentiferous tin at dawn the next day. It didn’t take many moments to realize that it was not going to be nearly as easy as Sarpy had promised—after they got into the bush, “more than once we were compelled to lie flat on the ground and crawl under the lianas,” wrote Raynal. However, they managed to get to the pyramidal peak, which they named the Dome. Scrambling to the top, they found a grand view to the west, where there was a big inlet, marked on the chart as Monument Harbour. Descending the western side of the hill, they trekked as far as the top of the cliff that overlooked this harbor, and then stood for a while contemplating a roughly tumbled ocean that stretched almost uninterrupted all the way around the world.

There were no seals to be seen on the beach below, just a couple of sea lions. Throughout the long scramble, there had not been a single trace of tin ore to be glimpsed. All they had gained was a voracious appetite. Musgrave and Raynal lit a fire, boiled a billy, and had breakfast.

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