

A FEMININE CRUSOE.

Alone on a Dreary Desert Island for
Eighteen Years.

From the San Francisco Chronicle.

The romance of "Robinson Crusoe," woven so ingeniously by the imaginative De Foe from the slender thread of fact afforded by the narrative of Alexander Selkirk, who for over four years was sole human inhabitant of the lonely island of Juan Fernandez, possesses a perennial interest. It appeals to the sympathies of the reader, and by the fascination of its style almost persuades him to accept it as veritable history. The story which we are about to relate, though true in every particular, possesses a remarkable similarity in many of its incidents to the tale told by De Foe, and affords another illustration of the adage that "truth is stranger than fiction." In the spring of 1835 the schooner *Peor es Nada*, built at Monterey, was chartered by Lewis T. Burton and Isaac J. Sparks for an otter-hunting expedition from Santa Barbara to the coast of Lower California. The schooner sailed in May, but the trip not proving so successful as was anticipated, she returned as far north as San Pedro, where she remained at anchor during a portion of the month of August of the same year. It being known that the small island of San Nicholas, situated about seventy miles southwest of San Pedro and a little further southeast from Santa Barbara, was inhabited by a number of Indians, the *Peor es Nada* was despatched to remove them to the main land. Nineteen men, women and children were taken on board the schooner, which was preparing to depart, when one of the Indian mothers discovered that two of her offspring had been forgotten and left on the island. With true maternal devotion she sprang into the water and swam to the shore in search of the missing children, one of which was three years of age and the other an infant unable to walk. Her hurried search was unavailing, and, abandoning all hope of finding the babes, she returned to the beach just in time to see the schooner sailing away with all her friends on board. She called frantically for some one to take her to the vessel, but received no reply but the one sad word, *man yana* (to morrow), which never after ceased to ring in her ear and was repeated on her dying bed.

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The schooner never went back to the island, which was not again visited until 1851, when George Nidever, another hunter, stopped there for a few days. He was not previously aware that the place was inhabited, but on this occasion he became convinced that such was the case. He noticed three small circular inclosures about 200 yards from the beach and about a mile apart. They were about six feet in diameter, and made of brush, the walls five feet high, with a small opening on one side. Near these openings were sticks of drift wood stuck in the ground in the form of a tripod, supporting dried seal blubber. These inclosures appeared to be simply wind breaks, affording no protection from the rain. He also saw a mysterious footprint, and judged it to be that of a woman from its small size and arched centre. An approaching storm obliged Nidever's vessel to leave the island without allowing him to pursue his investigations any further.

Mr. Nidever having seen many otter on his first trip to the island, made a second during the winter of 1852, and being requested by the Mission Fathers of Santa Barbara, he and a party determined to make a careful hunt for the supposed lone inhabitant of the island. Within half a mile of the head of the island they discovered a basket in the crotch of a bush or small tree, covered with a seal skin, and containing a dress made of shags' skins—a sea fowl common in that section—carefully folded up, and several square pieces of skins similar to those of which the dress was made; also, a rope made of seal sinews, abalone shell fish-hooks, bone needles, etc. As it was late, and time for them to return to their boat for the night, Mr. Nidever scattered the contents of the basket on the ground, so that upon his return he could judge of the presence or absence of the owner by finding them gathered up or remaining as he left them. The following four or more days were spent in otter hunting, and before the search for the Indian woman was renewed a southeast gale compelled them to seek a more hospital harbor at the island of San Miguel.

A third expedition, made to the island in 1853, by Nidever, Charles Brown and four Indians from the Santa Barbara Mission, was more successful. On the day after landing, Mr. Brown discovered the object of their search at a distance, and cautiously approaching in an opposite direction from the remainder of the party, etc.

discovered the object of their search at a distance, and cautiously approaching in an opposite direction from the remainder of the party, got quite close to her without being observed. She was in one of her pens or wind breaks, clothed in a garment made of the skins of the shag, without sleeves, low-necked, and, as observed when standing up, extending almost to the ankles. She was sitting cross-legged, skinning seal blubber with a rude knife made of a piece of hoop iron driven into a piece of wood. There was no covering on her head excepting a thick mass of matted hair of a yellowish brown color, due to the exposure to the sun and air. The hair was short, looking as though the free ends had rotted off. She would occasionally raise her hand and shade her eyes and look toward the other men on a sandy plain near the beach, whom she evidently saw. The balance of the party were now signaled in order that she might be captured if she attempted to escape. To the surprise of all she made no attempt to get away, but greeted each one as they approached with a bow and a smile, and chattered all the time in a dialect none of them understood, although the Indians accompanying Mr. Nidever were acquainted with several Indian dialects. She was talking apparently to herself from the time Mr. Brown approached in hearing distance until she was made aware of his presence. The expression of her face was pleasing, her features were regular, and her complexion much fairer and her form more symmetrical than that of the Indian women on the main land; and she is believed to have belonged to a different and superior race. By signs and other means of communication she was made aware that they wanted her to accompany them, and without any apparent hesitation she made ready to follow. In their course to where the schooner lay at anchor they found a beautiful spring of water issuing from the bank above the beach, under a shelving rock. The cracks or fissures in this rock were stuck full of bones, and there were other evidences of an encampment of the lone inhabitant of the island. These bones were used for nourishment obtained by sucking; they were dried and resucked many times, showing that occasionally she was put upon short rations, but at the time of her discovery appeared to have an abundance, such as it was. She retained all her teeth, but they were worn low, supposed to be due to her chewing tough and solid articles of food. Her age appeared to be about fifty years. Mr. Brown made her a skirt of ticking, with which, and a sailor's cotton shirt and a black necktie, her dress was complete.

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A severe storm arose, and embarking with their Island Queen, the men soon found themselves at sea in a storm. She made signs that she could stop the storm, and obtaining permission she knelt on the deck facing the quarter whence the wind came and commenced muttering something supposed to be a prayer. She soon got up, but continued the prayer at intervals during the day, apparently without fear, and when the wind began to abate she turned to her fellow-voyagers, and with a smile made signs that her prayers had been answered. She was taken to the house of Mr. Nidever, in Santa Barbara, where she became the centre of attraction.

The Mission Fathers took a great interest in her, sending to Los Angeles and other places, hoping to find some one who could converse with her, but failed. Even the Pepimaros Indians, who were said to have had an acquaintance with the Indians on the island, could not understand her. Two offers, one of \$1,000, for the privilege of taking her to San Francisco, were refused by Mr. Nidever. When found she was in excellent physical condition, strong and active; but the eating of fruit and vegetables brought on a sickness, which, in connection with an injury to the spine received by falling from a porch, terminated her life four weeks later, or seven weeks from the time she landed. Her dress of shag skins, basket and trinkets were given to Father Gonzalez, of the Mission, who, it is said, sent them to Rome. Messrs. Nidever and Brown are still living, and it is on their authority that the foregoing strange narrative is given to the readers of the *Chronicle*.
