

**BROWN
ON RESOLUTION**

BY

C. S. FORESTER

**LONDON
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD**

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CHAPTER I

LEADING SEAMAN ALBERT BROWN lay dying on Resolution. He was huddled in a cleft in the grey-brown lava of which that desolate island is largely composed, on his back with his knees half-drawn up in his fevered delirium. Sometimes he would mumble a few meaningless words and writhe feebly on to his side, only to fall back again a second later. He was dressed in what had once been a sailor's suit of tropical white, but now it was so soiled and stained and draggled, so torn and frayed, as literally to be quite unrecognizable—it was now only a few thin, filthy rags feebly held together. His face was swollen and distorted, as were his hands, being quite covered with hideous lumps as a result of the poisoned bites of a myriad flies—a little cloud of which hung murderously over him as he lay, combining with the shimmering reek of the sun-scorched rock almost to hide him from view.

His feet, too, although a few fragments of what were once shoes still clung to them, were horribly swollen and bruised and cut. They were more like sodden lumps of raw horse-flesh than human feet. Not the cruellest human being on earth could have contemplated those dreadful feet without a throb of pity.

Yet a very cursory inspection of Albert Brown's dying body would be enough to show that he was not dying because of the biting flies, nor even because of the hideous condition of his feet. For the dingy rags on his right shoulder were stained a sinister brown, and when he turned on his side he revealed the fact that those at his back were similarly stained, and a closer look through the tatters of cloth would discover that Brown's right breast was covered with a black, oozing clot of blood like an empty football bladder hanging from a bullet wound over Brown's third rib.

Brown lay at the edge of the central, lifeless portion of the island. Mounting up above him rose the bare lava of the highest point of Resolution, a distorted muddle of naked rock bearing a million million razor edges—razor edges which

readily explained the frightful condition of his feet. Just at Brown's level, stretching along at each side (for Resolution is a hog-backed island bent into a half-moon) began the cactus, ugly, nightmarish plants, like bottle-nosed pokers, clustering together thicker and thicker on the lower slopes, each bearing a formidable armament of spikes which explained the tattered condition of Brown's clothes. Frequently, stretched out in the scanty line of shade cast by the cacti, there lay iguanas—mottled crested lizards—somnolently stupid. Overhead wheeled sea-birds, and occasionally a friendly mocking-bird, strayed up from the lower slopes, would hop close round Brown's dying body and peer at him in seeming sympathy. Down at the water's edge, where the Pacific broke against the lava boulders, there massed a herd of marine iguanas—fantastic creatures which bear only their Latin generic name—industriously gnawing the seaweed on which they live, while round them strayed marvellous scarlet crabs and the other representatives of the amphibious life of this last, almost unknown member of the Galapagos Islands.

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The sky above was of a glaring, metallic blue, in which hung a burnished sun that seemed to be pouring a torrent of molten heat upon the tortured fragment of land beneath it. The sea was of a kindlier blue, and far out near the horizon could be seen a grey line stretching out of sight in both directions, which marked the edge of an ocean current, haunted by sea-birds in hundreds, gathered there to revel in the food, living and dead, which clustered along this strange border.

No trace of human life could be seen around the whole wide horizon, save only for Leading Seaman Albert Brown, huddled in his cleft, and hunger and thirst and fever and loss of blood were soon to make an end even of him, the sole representative of the human race in all this wide expanse; perhaps in years to come some exploring scientist would happen across his bleached bones and would ponder over that broken rib and that smashed shoulder-blade. It is doubtful, though, whether he would explain them.

CHAPTER II

IT all began more than twenty years earlier, with Lieut.-Commander R. E. S. Saville-Samarez, R.N., seated in the train which was carrying him from the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and a not very arduous course of professional study therein, towards London and a not very closely planned week of relaxation therein. He sat in his first-class carriage and looked, now at his newspaper, now out of the window, now up at the carriage roof, now at the lady who was seated demurely in the diametrically opposite corner of the carriage. For the Commander was not much given to prolonged reading, nor to prolonged following of any one train of thought. He thought, as was only natural, of the influence of first-class certificates upon promotion, and from that he passed to the consideration of Seniority versus Selection, and the Zone System, and he wondered

vaguely if he would ever attain the comfortable security and majestic authority of Captain's rank with its consequent inevitable climb upwards to the awesome heights of an Admiral's position. Admirals in one way were mere commonplaces to the Commander, for he came of a long line of naval ancestors, and an uncle of his was an Admiral at that moment, and his grandfather had commanded a ship of the line at Cronstadt during the Crimean War, and *his* grandfather had fought at the Nile and had been an Admiral during the reign of George IV.

But he did not think long about Admirals, for he felt oddly restless and fidgety, and he wished that the lady was not in his carriage so that he could put his feet up on the opposite seat and smoke. He glanced across at her, and found, to his surprise, that she was contemplating him in a manner difficult to describe—detached yet friendly; certainly not in the way a lady ought to look at a man (even if it is granted she might look at all) with whom she was alone in a railway carriage in the year of our Lord 1893. The Commander was quite

startled; he looked away, but his eyes strayed back, stealthily and shyly, as soon as he was sure her gaze was averted. No, she was not at all *that* sort—no one could be with that placid, calm look, almost like a nun's. But she was a fine woman, for all that, with her stylish sailor hat on the top of her head with a feather at the back, and her smart costume with its leg-of-mutton sleeves and her white collar, and the toe of one neat shoe just showing beneath her skirt as she sat. A fine upstanding figure of a woman, in fact, trim-waisted and corseted with correct severity. As he looked, she turned and met his gaze again, and he flushed with shy embarrassment down his sunburnt neck and hurriedly looked out of the window. But once again his eyes stole back again, inevitably. And she was smiling at him.

Agatha Brown's father was a Nonconformist greengrocer; but, as his Nonconformist friends would hurriedly explain when speaking of him, a greengrocer in a very large line of business. His big shop at Lewisham employed a dozen assistants, and he had two other shops besides, at Woolwich and Deptford, and the wealthy

residents of the big houses of Blackheath always came to him for such delicacies as asparagus and early strawberries. He even handled a little wholesale trade, and long ago he had climbed high enough to leave off living over his shop and to take instead a substantial house beside Greenwich Park and furnish it in the best manner of the 1880's. Here he lived with his three sons and his daughter (his eldest child) who managed the house in the efficient and spacious manner possible in that era. His wife was dead and much regretted, but, thanks to Agatha's domestic efficiency, not much missed in the economic sphere.

That morning at breakfast Agatha had not felt any premonition of what was going to be the most marvellous day of her life. She had risen at her usual hour of 6.30, and had helped one maid with the breakfast while the other looked to the fires. She had poured out tea for Will and Harry and sat at table with them while they hurried through breakfast, and had closed her eyes and clasped her hands devoutly when Dad, having come back with George in the trap from market, read prayers what time

the other two stood impatiently waiting to get off to their business of managing the Woolwich and Deptford shops. Then Dad, too, ate his breakfast, and it was then that Agatha had the first inkling that it was time something happened to her. Dad of course read his newspaper, and of course being preoccupied with that he could not attend properly to his table manners. With the newspaper propped up against the marmalade jar he would bring his mouth down to his fork rather than his fork up to his mouth, and he would open the latter alarmingly (which was quite unpleasant when, as was usual, he had not quite swallowed the preceding mouthful) and thrust the fork home and snap down his big moustache upon it in the way he always did, which Agatha found on this particular morning to be positively distressing. He drank his tea, too, noisily, through his moustache, and although Agatha had listened to the performance daily for twenty-nine years somehow she found it unusually distasteful. She found herself telling herself that it was time she had a change, and realizing on the instant that although she was that very

day going for five days' stay with a bosom friend at Ealing that amount of change would not suffice her. Her first reaction was to promise herself a dose of senna that evening (senna was Agatha's prescription for all the ills flesh is heir to) and her second, amazingly, was to consider senna inadequate. Only slightly introspective though she was, Agatha found herself surprised at being in such an odd frame of mind.

Then when Dad had taken his departure Agatha had busied herself with the stupendous task of leaving everything in the house prepared for her five days' absence. She went round and paid the tradesmen's books. She instructed the cook very positively as to all the menus to come; she enjoined upon the housemaid the necessity to turn out the drawing-room on Tuesday and the dining-room on Wednesday, and Mr. Brown's bedroom and Mr. George's bedroom on Thursday and Mr. Harry's bedroom and Mr. Will's bedroom on Friday. She did her share of the morning's work; she lunched, as was her habit, excessively lightly, and when the afternoon came round she made herself ready for departure. At four o'clock she left

the house with her little suit-case. She felt light-hearted and care-free; the tingle of her clean starched underlinen was pleasant to her; she was free of the house and all its troubles for five whole days; but all the same she did not want to spend five days at the home of Adeline Burton at Ealing. The old great friendship between Agatha and Adeline had of course cooled a little with the coming of maturity and with the migration of the Burton family to Ealing, and the Burton household was very like the Brown household, when all was said and done. But, still, Agatha felt strangely light-hearted as she walked to the station; she hummed a little song; and then she found herself in the same carriage as Lieut.-Commander R. E. S. Saville-Samarez.

She liked him, at first sight, and at first sight she knew him for what he was, a naval officer of the best brand of British stupidity. She liked his good clothes and his smooth cheeks (Agatha, as she regarded these last, felt a revulsion of feeling against the fashionable hairiness of 1893) and the way he blushed when she caught him looking at her. She knew he would speak

to her soon, and she knew she would answer him.

Agatha's smile set the coping-stone on Samarez's unsettledness. He positively jumped in his seat. Automatically his hands fluttered to his pockets.

"Mind if I smoke?" he asked hoarsely.

"Not at all," said Agatha. "I should like it."

That, of course, was at least four words more than any lady ought to have said. Samarez feverishly pulled out his silver cigarette-case and match-box, lit a cigarette with fingers which were nearly trembling, and drew a lungful of smoke deep into himself in an unthinking effort after self-control.

Agatha was still smiling at him, the placid, innocent smile one would expect to see on the face of a nun or a mother. Samarez simply had to go on talking to her, and the Englishman's invariable opening topic came to his lips like an inspiration.

"Beastly weather," he said, with a nod through the carriage window, where February sunshine fought a losing battle against February gloom.

"I rather like it, somehow," said Agatha. She would have liked any weather at the moment. "Of course you find it very different from the tropics," she went on, to Samarez's amazement. How on earth could she tell he had been to the tropics?

"Er—yes," he said. "Beastly hot there, sometimes."

"China Station?" she asked. Agatha's knowledge of the Navy was only what might be expected of a secluded young woman of the middle class of 1893, but she had heard the blessed words "China Station" somewhere and they drifted into her mind now and were seized upon gratefully.

"Yes," said Samarez, more amazed than ever, "that was last commission."

The China Station was a pleasant source of conversation. Thanks to the exaltation of her mood, Agatha was able to talk—or rather to induce Samarez to talk—without displaying any annoying ignorance, and by the blessing of Providence they chatted really amicably for a few minutes. Samarez's heart warmed to this charming woman, so refined, so friendly

without being cheap, with such a musical contralto voice and such a ready laugh. Stations came and stations went unheeded, and Samarez was quite surprised when he peered out of the window and saw that they had reached London Bridge—London Bridge on a dark, damp, February evening. With a little chill of disappointment he realized that in a few minutes he would have to separate from this friend. He deemed himself fortunate even that she was travelling on to Charing Cross.

Friends at the moment were scarce. Samarez had a week's leave on his hands, and he was almost at a loss as to how to employ it. He had had in mind dinner at the Junior Rag, possibly an encounter with an acquaintance, and a seat at a musical comedy afterwards. But he had done that for several evenings already, previous to his course at Greenwich, and the prospect bored him, nearly unborable as he was. On the China Station, stifling under the awnings, the most delectable spot on earth had appeared to be the dining-room of the Junior Army and Navy Club, but now it did not seem half so attractive.

And, above all, Agatha Brown was a woman, well fleshed and desirable to the eye of 1893. Women did not count for much in Samarez's life; marriage, of course, was unthinkable to a man of his sturdy devotion to his profession, and his contact with other women had been slight and nearly forgotten. But—but the urge was there, unadmitted but overwhelming. Samarez at present had nothing more in his mind than companionship. He wanted to talk to a woman—to this woman, now that he had made the first impossible plunge. He wanted neither men's talk nor solitude. He would have been scared by his intensity of emotion had he had a moment in which to realize it—but he had not. They had rattled through Waterloo Junction, and were rumbling on to Charing Cross railway bridge. Through the window he could see the wide, grey river, and the lights of Charing Cross Station were close at hand. Agatha glanced up at her suit-case on the rack, in evident mental preparation for departure. Samarez stood up in the swaying carriage; his hands flapped with embarrassment.

“L—look here,” he said, “we don't want

to say good-bye yet. Oh, we don't. Let's—let's come and have dinner somewhere."

He stood holding to the luggage rack, appalled by his realization that he had definitely committed himself, that he was guilty (if the lady chose to find him so) of an ungentlemanly action. His innocent eyes pleaded for him. And Agatha's eyes softened; he was so like an artless little boy begging for more cake. She felt motherly and not a bit daring as she said yes.

Once out of the train Samarez, despite his stupefied elation, displayed all the orderly logic of deed of the disciplined man of action. Agatha's suit-case and his own leather kit-bag were ticketed-in at the cloak-room, a cab was summoned, and with a flash of brilliance he recalled the name of the one restaurant which in those bleak days was suitable for ladies and at the same time was tolerant of morning dress. The cab-horse's hoofs clattered across the station courtyard and out into the Strand, and they sat side by side as the lamps went by.

Pleasant it was, and each was conscious of a comforting warmth from the other. Each